

Disciples 531

Chapter 531: Mysterious Elite

Upon hearing this, Yu Zhenghai's eyes brightened. He hastily said, "If that's truly him, I want to meet him! Wise brother, I'll be back!" As soon as he finished speaking, he prepared to fly out of the flying chariot.

Si Wuya quickly grabbed Yu Zhenghai's arm before he said, "Eldest Senior Brother, we should prioritize the bigger picture here."

At this moment, the Nether Sect was about to completely conquer Yu Province. They had the upper hand. Although their momentum was akin to running a hot knife through butter, there were many elites hiding inside the Divine Capital. Nobody could say when an elite would suddenly show up. When that time comes, without an Eight-leaf cultivator such as Yu Zhenghai taking charge, the tides of the battle could be reversed. The eight great generals of the Divine Capital and the elites who lived in the Divine Capital were no pushovers. With Yu Zhenghai here, they could rest assured.

Yu Zhenghai sighed helplessly. "What a shame... Hua Chongyang."

"Yes, sect master."

"Go and help this friend of ours. If it's possible, I'd like to have a drink with him. We'll drink to our hearts' content at that time!" Yu Zhenghai said.

"Yes, sect master." Hua Chongyang leaped off the flying chariot and moved at lightning speed. He did not hesitate and summoned his Seven-leaf avatar.

Upon seeing Hua Chongyang's avatar, the garrison cultivators were scared out of their wits. They hurriedly scrambled away. Little did they know, they were not Hua Chongyang's target.

Hua Chongyang moved toward the southern city gate. In just a few breaths, his Seven-leaf avatar charged into the roiling Primal Qi airwave.

Yu Shangrong saw the Seven-leaf avatar charging toward him from the corners of his eyes. He shook his head and murmured, "Boring." Then, he intentionally slowed down the speed of his energy swords.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Xiao Shan's ferocious energy landed on him.

Yu Shangrong reeled back.

"Senior!" Hua Chongyang cried out despite himself. He was being extremely respectful by addressing Yu Shangrong as senior. Although he was a Seven-leaf Nascent Divinity realm cultivator, he did not dare to act impudently in front of a Five-leaf cultivator who had severed his lotus. At this moment, he had not seen Yu Shangrong's face yet.

Yu Shangrong rode on the momentum as he retreated. His avatar faded away as he flew toward the forest outside the city.

Hua Chongyang shouted, "Open!" His Seven-leaf avatar grew to its biggest size at once. It dispersed the storm of Primal Qi before it shrank in size again.

Hua Chongyang looked down. Xiao Shan who was currently falling to the ground had already been dealt with. He joined his palms together and made several hand signs as he said, "The Taixu Academy's Xiao Shan? You refuse to walk on heaven's path but chose to rush to hell instead? Looks like the lesson Senior Ji taught you isn't enough!"

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Several palm seals shot out and landed on Xiao Shan's chest.

Boom!

Xiao Shan crashed onto the ground.

Hua Chongyang did not even look at Xiao Shan as he sped toward the forest south of the city. In just a blink of an eye, he had entered the forest.

The surroundings were silent. Apart from faint Primal Qi lingering in the air, there was no trace of the senior.

"He's fast," Hua Chongyang muttered to himself as he recalled his avatar. He looked at the forest before him and hesitated. In the end, he did not proceed further into the forest. He cupped his fists together and projected his voice, "My sect master admires you, senior. He sent me here to invite you to our quarters to have a chat with him. Will you accept the invitation, senior?"

The forest was as quiet as ever. There was no reply.

Hua Chongyang knew his place. An elite who managed to re-cultivate to the Five-leaf stage after severing his lotus would not be a weakling. It would be futile even if he gave chase. After a while, he said, "Your sword skills are amazing, senior. It's on par with the Evil Sky Pavilion's Mister Second, if not better. It's a shame that I'm not fortunate enough to meet you. I'll be taking my leave now." When he finished speaking, he left at a blinding speed.

The forest was as silent as ever.

A moment later, Hua Chongyang returned to the area and searched for a moment while hovering in midair.

"He's gone?" Hua Chongyang sighed helplessly. He turned around and flew toward Yu Province City.

Behind a huge tree in the silent forest below, Yu Shangrong carried his Longevity Sword and murmured, "Crude acting skills and boring tricks."

Then, he pressed his chest to stabilize the chaotic flow of Primal Qi inside his dantian's sea of Qi. A Five-leaf cultivator was only a Five-leaf cultivator, after all. Against the Seven-leaf Xiao Shan, it was shocking enough that he managed to break Xiao Shan's dantian's sea of Qi and escape with his life intact. Perhaps, he was used to being an Eight-leaf cultivator, he had gone slightly overboard this time.

Yu Shangrong gripped his Longevity Sword tightly and smiled faintly. "There's no need to rush. I'll return to the peak soon enough."

...

After returning to the flying chariot, Hua Chongyang bowed at Yu Zhenghai and said, "Sect master, I couldn't catch up with him. That mysterious elite... is too fast."

Yu Zhenghai said, clearly displeased, "Chongyang... You've been slacking off lately. Have I not been treating you well?"

Hua Chongyang fell to one knee and said, "I dare not! I... am useless."

Si Wuya said, "Eldest Senior Brother, you can't blame Brother Chongyang for this. How can an elite who has recultivated to the Five-leaf stage be easily caught?"

Yu Zhenghai nodded. "You have a point, wise brother."

Hua Chongyang felt frustrated as well. He felt as though he was experiencing bad luck that was accumulated from eight lifetimes. It was one thing for him to fail his mission at the heaven worship platform, but he even brought Senior Ji to their branch, resulting in his sect master being beaten. Additionally, it was slightly unacceptable that he was not able to catch up to a Five-leaf cultivator.

Yu Zhenghai helped Hua Chongyang up and said, "You've worked hard."

Hua Chongyang was moved. He said immediately, "I'll do better."

At this moment, Si Wuya pointed at the city and said, "We're at the General's Mansion. Eldest Senior Brother... It all depends on you now."

The others looked down at the General's Mansion instinctively.

The Nether Sect members had already surrounded the General's Mansion.

Based on Si Wuya's calculations, Ji Qingqing should have shown up on the battlefield a while ago. However, up until now, she had not made an appearance.

Soon after, Yu Hong, the Green Azure Hall's Second Seat, rose into the air. He bowed and said, "The General's Mansion is empty, sect master."

"There's no one inside?" Yu Zhenghai frowned slightly.

Si Wuya pondered on this for a moment before he said, "They're rather tactful. It's no wonder our progress has been smooth. Ji Qingqing has given up on Yu Province early on and fled during the night."

Yu Zhenghai was invigorated upon hearing this.

The Nether Sect members on the flying chariot bowed.

"Congratulations on conquering Yu Province, sect master."

...

Early next morning. Inside the Purple Bamboo Forest north of Yu Province.

Ji Qingqing, one of the eight great generals, sat in a stately manner among the bamboo.

Her four deputies kept watch around her.

“General, Yu Province has fallen.”

“I see.” Ji Qingqing raised the waterskin to her mouth and drank. Then, she slowly rose to her feet. She looked in Yu Province’s direction. There did not seem to be any strong emotions on her face.

“It’s getting late. Should we make a move, General?”

“There’s no rush. Let’s wait for a while more,” Ji Qingqing replied.

“Wait?” Her four deputy generals were puzzled. Since they had given up on Yu Province, why were they not leaving?

“Fleeing the battlefield is a crime worthy of the death penalty... General, there’s something that I don’t understand.”

“It’s only meaningless resistance,” Ji Qingqing said.

At this moment, a green-robed swordsman wielded his sword as he slowly walked toward them from the northern edge of the Purple Bamboo Forest.

The four deputy generals’ faces fell. They immediately drew closer to Ji Qingqing and unsheathed their swords.

Ji Qingqing glanced at the green-robed swordsman and said, “Stand down.”

“General?”

“I know what I’m doing,” Ji Qingqing said.

The four of them retreated behind her.

Ji Qingqing faced the green-robed swordsman from a distance. “You’re here?”

“I made a promise with someone. I can’t possibly go back on my words.” The green-robed swordsman smiled faintly.

Ji Qingqing said, “I kept my promise to you... I hope you’ll hold up your end of the bargain.”

Yu Shangrong said, “What I say, I’ll do. What I do, I’ll carry through. Since you left Yu Province, you’re no longer on my list.”

Upon hearing this, the four deputies figured out the identity of the green-robed swordsman. Recently, there was a sword path elite who had been imitating the Evil Sky Pavilion’s Mister Second in Yu Province City by making a hit list. Ji Qingqing and her right deputies were all on the list. Her remaining four deputies had difficulty eating and sleeping in peace because of this. They did not expect the green-robed swordsman to be that mysterious elite!

“Do you know why I promised you that I’d leave Yu Province?” Ji Qingqing asked with a smile.

“I’d like to hear it.”

“Because your every move, the way you go about doing things, the style of your speech and movements, resemble someone I admire deeply,” Ji Qingqing said bluntly.

“...”

Ji Qingqing glanced at him and continued to say, “Perhaps, you think that someone like me, who’s used on the battlefield, has a heart of stone and won’t be easily moved. That isn’t the truth... He’s the only man who’s worthy of Ji Qingqing. He’s the only one who fits my image of a man. However, he’s from the Evil Sky Pavilion, and we’re an ill fit... Your expression seems unnatural. Are you looking down on me?”

Under normal circumstances, it was considered inappropriate for a woman to publicly talk about the man she admired.

Chapter 532: Everyone’s Sprouting Leaves

Yu Shangrong remained silent.

Ji Qingqing said, “Forget it. You won’t understand even if I tell you about it.”

Yu Shangrong only smiled faintly in response to her words.

“If it weren’t for him, do you think I’d leave Yu Province so easily? Don’t think I listened to you and left just because you resemble him. Yu Zhenghai is his Eldest Senior Brother, after all. If I kill Yu Zhenghai, he would hate me for life.”

“...” Ever since Yu Shangrong challenged the elites from the various paths with his sword, he had gained a strong following of admirers. His fan base consisted of Eight-leaf elites to common civilians of all gender and age. However, those who had seen his face were few and far in between. Those who were worthy of facing him in a battle usually did not live to tell the tale.

“Alright, I’ve said enough. I should get going now,” Ji Qingqing said.

“Wait,” Yu Shangrong said.

“What?” Ji Qingqing asked.

“You seem to have great taste in men. Because of that, I’ll give you one piece of advice.” Yu Shangrong paused for a beat before he pointed to one of the deputy generals on Ji Qingqing’s left with his scabbard and said, “Kill him.”

The deputy general trembled and took a step back.

Ji Qingqing frowned. She did not know what Yu Shangrong meant.

“Since you’re fleeing from the battlefield, the people around you should only be your trusted subordinates... In any case, that’s just my suggestion. It’s up to you to kill him or not.” Yu Shangrong smiled faintly.

In other words, this person next to Ji Qingqing was a mole?

Ji Qingqing looked at the indifferent expression on Yu Shangrong’s face and the deputy general who had been by her side for many years. Logically, she should trust her subordinate. However, for some

unknown reason, she felt the green-robed swordsman standing before her was more trustworthy at this moment.

Zhou Huai, the deputy general bowed at once. "General, don't listen to his lies! The sun and the moon can attest to my unwavering loyalty!"

Ji Qingqing frowned. Her energy surged from her body as she looked at Zhou Huai. She asked in a deep voice, "Zhou Huai... the Divine Capital are strangely privy to my movements. Did you leak the information to them?"

"General!"

"Give me a reason to believe you..."

There were many things in the world that could not be explained. Let alone a woman had spent much of her time on a battlefield, even spouses who lived together for decades would have trust issues if the tiniest hint of an affair reached their ears.

Swoosh!

Without a second word, Zhou Huai turned around and ran. Things might have turned out differently if he remained calm. Alas, as soon as he fled, it was as good as admitting his crimes.

Ji Qingqing shook her head with disappointment. She raised two fingers. Her sword was already unsheathed.

Dozens of energy swords formed a ring that converged before herself.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Zhou Huai was about to summon his avatar when the energy swords swept over him, piercing his chest! He did not even have a chance to defend himself. Soon enough, he dropped to the ground.

Ji Qingqing turned around. With an indifferent expression on her face, she cupped her fists together and said to Yu Shangrong, "Thank you for the advice."

"It's nothing," Yu Shangrong replied.

Ji Qingqing took a liking to his polite and gentle manner so she asked, "I'm not sure that I've gotten your name."

Yu Shangrong turned around. He pushed away from the ground lightly and leaped into the Purple Bamboo Forest. He projected his voice to her before vanishing in a blink of an eye. "My name's not worth mentioning. Take care."

"General?" A deputy general behind her bowed and said, "If I'm not mistaken... t-that person is the Evil Sky Pavilion's Yu Shangrong."

Ji Qingqing's eyes widened immediately. She hurriedly followed in Yu Shangrong's footsteps and searched the area. Alas, Yu Shangrong was nowhere to be found.

Although Yu Shangrong had promised to spare her life, Ji Qingqing knew it was not because he liked her. Whether it was Prince of Qi's daughter, Qin Ruobing, Ji Qingqing, one of the eight great generals, or any of his beautiful admirers, Yu Shangrong had never placed them in his eyes. This was how it was, and this was how it would always be.

...

Half a month later.

All five cities of Yu Province were under the Nether Sect's control.

At this moment, the major cultivation sects of Great Yan were in a period of absolute recuperation. Everyone was recultivating in earnest after severing their lotuses.

Under the double threat of the Evil Sky Pavilion and the Nether Sect, the cultivators from various sects refrained from taking part in the war.

...

A month later, Qing Province fell.

Three months later, Yang Province fell.

Currently, the Nether Sect had conquered seven provinces.

At the same time, the general public was sprouting leaves during their re-cultivation at an increasing speed.

...

Inside the southern pavilion, the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Mingshi Yin furtively climbed up a branch. He looked at Duanmu Sheng who was silently cultivating at the edge of the cliff.

"Third Senior Brother, from this day on, you're my hero. You've severed your lotus, and I have nothing but respect for you." Mingshi Yin gave Duanmu Sheng a thumbs-up.

After their master began to cultivate in seclusion, Duanmu Sheng decided to sever his lotus and recultivate. Moreover, he had personally severed his lotus.

"Old Fourth, get down here."

"Just say what you want to say... I don't have to go down," Mingshi Yin said.

Duanmu Sheng shook his head with a sigh and said, "Why aren't you severing your lotus?"

"Why should I? That's only needed by someone who's attempting the Nine-leaf stage... I'm not planning to become a Nine-leaf cultivator," Mingshi Yin replied, "There are many who can't even reach the Eight-leaf stage their whole lives, and yet, they're severing their lotuses just because the others are doing it. They're crazy."

Duanmu Sheng scratched his head. Mingshi Yin's words sounded reasonable. If one could not even reach the Eight-leaf stage, it was meaningless to sever the lotus, what was the point of severing one's lotus to attempt to reach the Nine-leaf stage? Becoming a Six or Seven-leaf cultivator was difficult enough as it was, let alone an Eight-leaf cultivator. They could have easily become core elders of most sects. However, the more he thought about it, the more he felt that something was off. He looked at Mingshi Yin and asked, "Old Fourth, are you making fun of me?"

"No, no, no, I'm not! I'm complimenting you, Third Senior Brother! You can surely reach the Nine-leaf stage!" Mingshi Yin said.

Duanmu Sheng agreed with Mingshi Yin's words. He looked forward to becoming a Nine-leaf cultivator. Then, he asked, "Why isn't Ninth Junior Sister severing her lotus?"

Mingshi Yin spread his arms. "The little ancestor doesn't want to. Who would dare to bother her about it?"

That was true.

"In any case, there might not necessarily be a disadvantage to sever the lotus after you've reached the Eight-leaf stage. The four elders are already on their way to sprouting the fourth leaf."

Duanmu Sheng was shocked when he heard this. He asked, "So soon?"

Mingshi Yin shook his head and said, "Not really. When I wrote to Seventh Junior Brother three months ago to notify him about Conch being our new Little Junior Sister, Seventh Junior Brother sent me a reply... Guess what he said."

When Duanmu Sheng heard this, he frowned at once. "Just tell me everything you know. It's annoying when you leave me hanging."

"Seventh Junior Brother said there's a sword path elite who has already recultivated to the Five-leaf stage," Mingshi Yin said.

"..." Duanmu Sheng was utterly shocked.

"That man must've been an Eight-leaf elite before he severed his lotus. It's shocking that he managed to recultivate so quickly. In my opinion, he must have sprouted another leave during these three months. After all, it's much faster to sprout leaves when you're recultivating compared to when you're first cultivating to sprout leaves. I don't think the other sects are slow as well." Mingshi Yin leaned on a tree trunk. He glanced out of the corner of his eyes. "Eh? Where are you going, Third Senior Brother?"

"I'm going to cultivate under the waterfall. Don't disturb me if there's nothing important." Duanmu Sheng leaped in the air and vanished.

...

Meanwhile, at a door of an unknown and dark hidden chamber in the Imperial city, the Divine Capital.

"Greetings, grandfather. I'm Liu Zhi." His voice sounded distant and deep.

However, the door of the hidden chamber did not open.

“The Imperial city is under threat! I sincerely request an audience, grandfather!”

A brief moment after Liu Zhi said this, the stone door made a noise before it slowly opened.

Creak!

Liu Zhi was delighted. He lifted his robes slightly and carefully stepped into the room.

The hidden chamber was huge. It seemed to be another world of its own. There was everything inside the hidden chamber, including tomes, ancient booklets, handbooks on cultivation, cultivation methods of the various sects, and an arsenal of weapons.

An old man dressed in long robes sat languidly above a dais; he was the only one in the chamber. The only source of light shone on him.

“Grandfather.” Liu Zhi kneeled respectfully.

The hidden chamber was extremely quiet.

Liu Zhi dared not speak recklessly.

After some time, the old man finally opened his eyes.

“The world thinks that I’ve passed, and I no longer have anything to do with the affairs of the world. You’re quite bold to do this.”

This old man was Liu Ge, Emperor Yong Shou. He was Emperor Yong Qing’s father who had passed away!

Liu Zhi remained kneeling as he said in a trembling voice, “It’s not my intention to disturb you, but... the empire is in chaos at this moment. The Evil Sky Pavilion’s first disciple, Yu Zhenghai, is rampaging through the lands and committing all sorts of crimes.”

“Where’s Liu Gu?”

“Father... Although he’s an Eight-leaf cultivator, there’s nothing he can do against the Nether Sect!” Liu Zhi said.

Liu Ge frowned slightly. Then, he said with a sigh, “I’m no better than your father. Besides, I’m only a bag of old bones.”

Chapter 533: Praying for World Peace

Liu Zhi, the Crown Prince, bent his body and said in a trembling voice, “B-but y-you’re the only one I can turn to now, grandfather. If you don’t do anything, we’ll be overthrown!” As he spoke, hot tears trickled down his face to the floor like little pearls.

Having lived for a long time, Liu Ge easily saw through Liu Zhe. He said, “You can ask your father for help.”

The Imperial family had its own rules. Since Liu Ge had retired and news of his passing had already been announced, how would the Imperial family regain the people’s trust if he were to show himself?

Liu Zhi's voice broke slightly as he said, "Father has been in seclusion and has no time to deal with this."

Liu Ge appeared confused. He said, "I heard he's already at the Eight-leaf stage a long time ago. Why does he need to cultivate in seclusion?"

"Father's attempting the Nine-leaf stage," Liu Zhi replied.

Liu Ge frowned slightly when he heard the words 'Nine-leaf'. His eyes flashed as a wave of rage surged in his heart.

Bam!

Liu Ge slammed his hand down, and a corner of a stone table fell off.

Liu Zhi was so frightened that he shuddered and kowtowed at once. "Please calm down, grandfather! Calm down!"

"I've said many times that no one from the Imperial family is to attempt the Nine-leaf stage... Liu Gu, that impudent fool! Summon him here." Liu Ge's face was ghastly pale from rage.

Liu Zhi did not expect his grandfather to be this infuriated. He was feeling less confident with every passing minute. However, at this point, he had no choice but to plow on. "Grandfather... you've been in this hidden chamber for too long; there are many things you're not privy to about the outside world. The cultivation world has already been turned upside down... There's already a Nine-leaf cultivator in the cultivation world!"

Liu Ge frowned again. He looked at Liu Zhi and said, shocked, "Stand up and speak."

"Understood." Liu Zhi rose to his feet in a respectful manner. Then, he walked to Liu Ge's side and stood there obediently.

"Have you seen it?" Liu Ge asked.

"I haven't... but the information is genuine. The seven great sects laid siege on the Evil Sky Pavilion, but they were wiped out by Old Villain Ji who's at the Nine-leaf stage. Every cultivator in the world knows this," Liu Zhi said in a low voice.

"The Evil Sky Pavilion's Ji Tiandao?" Shock flashed in the depths of Liu Ge's eyes.

"Yes," Liu Zhi said in a small voice.

Liu Ge did not seem too surprised. Instead, he sighed heavily and said, "How can it be him?" His voice was tinged with slight remorse and confusion.

"You know him, grandfather?"

"Know him? We go way back. You can even call us old acquaintances," Liu Ge replied, "Alas, the paths we seek are different. He's dedicated to cultivation while I'm dedicated to the empire. Hence, we parted ways. I didn't expect that he truly became a Nine-leaf cultivator after all these years."

Liu Zhi complained out loud, "Not only did Old Villain Ji become a Nine-leaf cultivator, but the cultivation world has also changed."

“Changed?”

“Allow me to explain in detail.” Then, Liu Zhi recounted how Old Villain Ji wiped out the seven great sects with his Nine-leaf powers, the cultivation theory of severing one’s lotus, and the recent events of the cultivation world to Liu Ge, Emperor Yong Shou.

Liu Ge’s eyes widened when he heard this. Toward the latter parts of the narration, he could no longer hold it in. He waved his arm and cursed. “That’s too much! Who proposed the cultivation method of severing one’s lotus?”

Liu Zhi replied slowly, “It originated from some information posts. Then, it was spread further. When it’s known that someone has survived the ordeal, more and more people followed suit. Father... father has... severed his lotus and is currently recultivating.” His voice faltered toward the end of his sentence, and his voice was barely audible.

The flames of rage in Liu Ge’s heart grew hotter. However, he was no longer the emperor who had control of the heavens and earth. Time was cruel. How was he supposed to intimidate the others with his old bones? The rules and decrees he had once established were disregarded. In the end, he sighed heavily and asked, “Are there any strange happenings in the cultivation world?”

“Strange happenings?” Liu Zhi was puzzled.

“Do you know why I’ve decreed that nobody is to attempt the Nine-leaf stage?” Liu Ge, Emperor Yong Shou, asked in a gruff voice.

Liu Zhi shook his head.

Liu Ge looked at Liu Zhi’s puzzled expression and shook his head. “Forget it... All you have to do is tell me if there are other changes.”

The theory of severing one’s lotus, the appearance of a Nine-leaf cultivator, and the crisis of the Imperial family, were these not changes?

Liu Zhi shook his head again.

Liu Ge spoke earnestly, “I was fortunate enough to be enlightened by a mysterious elite many years ago and reached the Eight-leaf stage. Then, I brought peace to the lands. To think that... someone else has taken that step, after all.”

Liu Zhi was further puzzled by this statement. “Grandfather, I don’t understand. Can that mysterious elite be trusted?”

Liu Ge looked at him. With a gruff voice, he said, “Impudent!.”

“I’ve spoken out of turn, but I can’t help but wonder... It’s said that the Nine-leaf stage will bring forth disasters, but Old Villain Ji is already at the Nine-leaf stage. Yet, there haven’t been any disasters so far!”

The path of the heavens was a cycle. The heavens must have their reasons to list the Nine-leaf stage as taboo. If humans wanted to encroach upon the forbidden, they would have to pay the price.

Liu Ge shifted his gaze away from his grandson and said, "I'll judge whether the Nine-leaf stage is true myself."

Liu Zhi was delighted to hear this. "Grandfather, are you emerging from this mountain?"

Liu Ge moved his arm and slid off the dais. Like any other old man, his movements seemed rigid and slow. After descending from the dais, one could see his slightly-hunched back. He asked, "Who are the eight great generals of this time?"

Liu Zhi counted. "General Xuan Jingyun of the northern gate garrison, General Wang Yue of the southern gate garrison, General Han Yuyuan of the eastern gate garrison... but General Han has lost his life at the Obedient Villa and is currently replaced by the Daoist elite, General Ji Qingqing. There's also General Xiang Lie of the western gate garrison whom we, unfortunately, lost in the battle of Liang Province. His position is currently vacant. We have General Ma Luping of the southeastern gate garrison, General Gu Yiran of the northeastern gate garrison, and General Su Sheng of the northwestern gate garrison. Finally, there was General Wen Shu of the southwestern gate garrison, but he died while reinforcing the troops at Jing Province."

When he heard these names, Liu Ge said, "Han Yuyuan likes to play petty tricks. I'm not surprised that he ended up like that. Wen Shu and Xiang Lie had always been steady and mature, how did they die?"

"The Evil Sky Pavilion's seventh disciple, Si Wuya, is skilled in scheming. He's a cunning and despicable person. He had been a grand tutor, an official with a meteoric rise in the palace once. Yong Ning takes his side. This man has founded the Darknet that has an extensive information network. It's even possible that he has sources planted around me. Generals Xiang and Wen fell prey to his schemes and lost their lives."

Liu Ge shook his head and said, "I've underestimated him slightly. He has truly recruited many talented disciples." Then, he stepped forward and said, "In that case, have Su Sheng and Gu Yiran accompany me."

When Liu Zhi heard this, he bowed hastily. "I'll see to it at once!"

When Liu Zhi left the hidden chamber, Liu Ge glanced at the dusty box in a corner and muttered to himself, "I pray that peace will descend on the world and that everything's just a dream."

...

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

Lu Zhou was surrounded by a sea of mystical runes. He was seemingly unconscious, unaware of his surroundings. He did not know how much time had passed, but he did not want the state he was in to come to an end. This immersive feeling was like being in a deep sleep.

The runes surfaced in his mind. Slowly, the runes shifted and morphed into scripts that formed this sentence: The first step is to connect Qi before connecting the mind and finally connecting the spirit. Enlightenment comes after all are connected, and the path toward the throne will be shown.

To gain the power to hear everything so that we can hear voices in all realms at will.

Lu Zhou's consciousness stirred slightly. He had seen these words when he first opened the Human Scroll. Why would they appear in the Earth Scroll as well? He was puzzled.

At this moment, he vaguely heard someone's voice.

"Little Junior Sister, this is how you do it... Like this... Yes..."

...

Outside the great hall.

Zhu Honggong was patiently showing Conch how to condense Qi into energy.

"The bigger the energy sword, the more Primal Qi and control you need. You've just started cultivating, we'll focus on the basics for now. Once you have enough Primal Qi and you're in the Sense Condensing realm, you'll be able to form a purer energy sword."

Chapter 534: Who Taught You That, Terrifying Conch?

"Oh." Conch seemed to only vaguely understand what he meant.

She had been cultivating the breathing technique that Lu Zhou gave her during the past three months. She was forming Primal Qi and expanding her dantian's sea of Qi. These basic cultivation exercises were inevitably bland. When she saw her seniors unleashing various energy seals every day, she could not help but feel envious.

"Let's start small; the size of your finger. Follow my instructions: Calm your breath, focus your mind, guide your Primal Qi along the Extraordinary Eight Meridians, and release them from your finger into energy."

Zhu Honggong was instructing her seriously. At the same time, an energy sword materialized above his palm. It was only the size of his finger as it hovered there silently.

"You're amazing, Eighth Senior Brother," Conch said as she applauded Zhu Honggong.

A proud expression appeared on Zhu Honggong's face. He said, "This is nothing... With better control, you'll be able to form purer, larger, and more energy swords... Be patient. It won't be a problem so long as you're willing to spend some time on it."

"Is this how you do it?"

Whizz!

A finger-sized energy sword hovered above Conch's fair palm. It seemed more translucent than Zhu Honggong's.

"Uh..." Zhu Honggong was stunned. He could not believe his eyes. He rubbed his eyes and focused his gaze again. It was a genuinely bright energy sword. Faint red radiance swirled around the energy sword.

"Eighth Senior Brother?" Conch said softly.

"Oh, oh, oh... Yes, that's what you can do once you reduce the size enough."

Zhu Honggong focused his mind and raised his hand. A palm-sized energy sword hovered above his palm. Surely, he could show his prestige as a senior brother with an energy sword of this size, right?

"Is this it?" Conch spread her palm again. A palm-sized energy sword appeared.

Zhu Honggong. "???"

'She's so powerful?'

Who should he turn to? 'No, no, I must soften her edges.'

As he looked at Conch's pure and innocent face, Zhu Honggong decided to try something more difficult. He had to establish his superiority as a senior brother, after all. "Condensing energy is only at the beginner's level. I think that you're initiated enough to form a palm-sized energy sword... To be honest, energy swords aren't my forte. That's more of Second Senior Brother's specialty. He can instantly form 100 energy swords. The Sword Saint, Luo Shisan, can form 13 substantial energy swords."

"What about you, Eighth Senior Brother?" Conch looked at Zhu Honggong expectantly. Then, she added, "I want to see."

"..." Zhu Honggong cleared his throat and calmed his spirit. Then, he said, "I'm more skilled in energy fists." After he said this, he raised his hands. The Tear Stain Boxing Gloves covered his hands, and he punched the air. A fist-shaped energy shot out.

Bam!

It struck a tree. A dent could be seen on the tree's trunk.

"Do you want to learn this?" Zhu Honggong looked at Conch. A hint of delight could be heard in his voice.

Conch who was initially interested shook her head when she saw the huge fists that were in no way aesthetically pleasing. "No."

"What do you want to learn, then? I'll teach you," Zhu Honggong said.

"Energy swords."

Zhu Honggong was rendered briefly speechless. Then, he said, "Energy swords are fine. I might not be skilled in them, but I think it's more than enough for me to teach you."

He put his boxing gloves away. He focused his breathing and mind. Three energy swords materialized above his palm. Although they were not huge, it was an easy feat for a Nascent Divinity realm elite.

Conch spread her palm and asked, "Like this?"

Three energy swords appeared above her palm.

"..." Zhu Honggong's eyes widened. He felt stifled.

Ordinary cultivators would need years to reach the Sense Condensing realm from the Mystic Enlightening realm. They would have needed two to three years of training to produce energy swords like these. Yet, she managed this in three months?

He looked at the three energy swords. 'Stay calm! Hold the fort!'

This time, he did all he could. Within a few meters of himself, palm-sized energy swords filled the air. They were arranged neatly, and they shone brightly.

"What do you think, Little Junior Sister?"

Indeed, Conch could not achieve this level of energy condensation. However, she seemed to like such gorgeous displays. Hence, she applauded him and said, "Again, Eighth Senior Brother. More, more!"

"..."

'More, what?'

He was not skilled in this to begin with. It was taking a lot out of him to maintain them for long.

Zhu Honggong clenched his fist. The energy swords faded away. "Master is more skilled in these messy and flashy energy sword skills. I can't do it."

...

Inside the hidden chamber, the sentences that reached Lu Zhou's ears were usually in pieces. However, this particular statement clearly entered his ears.

Lu Zhou instinctively rebuked Zhu Honggong, "Nonsense! Are you asking for a beating?"

A faint blue light shrouded the soundwave as it traveled out of the hidden chamber and reached the outside of the great hall in just an instance.

To Zhu Honggong, it was as shocking as seeing a bolt of lightning when the sky was blue. He trembled inwardly.

Thud!

Zhu Honggong fell to his knees as he said, "I was wrong, master! I'll slap myself!"

He did not hesitate as he slapped himself twice on the cheeks.

"Disciplined Zhu Honggong. Reward: 200 merit points."

Conch appeared shocked as she looked in the direction of the hidden chamber. She bowed. "Master."

There was no reply from the hidden chamber. Everything was as silent as it had been.

Zhu Honggong looked up, making a mental note to himself. 'Master is too powerful. It's as though he's omnipresent. How did he hear that? I should stay far away from now.'

He got up and looked at Conch meaningfully. "Let's go to the back of the mountain."

"Back of the mountain?"

"It's quiet there and suitable for cultivation... You've only managed to form three palm-sized energy swords. That's far from enough. I'll teach you how to form the fourth one."

"Fourth one?" Conch scratched her head and spread her palm again.

Whizz!

As her Primal Qi surged, energy swords appeared on her palm.

There were four of them, no more, no less...

"..." Zhu Honggong's expression turned stiff. He was at a loss as to what to say. He snapped back to his senses after Conch clenched her fist and the energy swords scattered.

Conch said, "Eighth Senior Brother, I want to learn how to make as many energy swords as you did."

"..." Zhu Honggong seemed to be put in a tight spot. He turned around and left.

"Eighth Senior Brother, how can I make bigger energy swords?"

"N-next time..."

"Eighth Senior Brother, I want to learn. Eight Senior Brother, don't run! How can I make an energy sword as huge as a large tree?"

Zhu Honggong picked up the pace.

Conch gave chase.

After they vanished, Mingshi Yin poked his head out from behind a nearby tree. He had dark circles around his eyes. He patted his chest and sighed in relief. "Finally, I don't have to teach that little ancestor anymore..."

Throughout these three months, the seniors had been taking turns to teach Conch. In the beginning, everyone was eager to take on the role of a teacher. However, with the passage of time, they realized that Conch was not merely talented, she was sharp, loved to learn, and was persistent about reaching perfection. She loved to get to the bottom of things, no matter what the topic was. She would not rest until she mastered what she wanted to learn. As this went on, even Duanmu Sheng and Zhao Yue were tormented by this. Even someone as slippery as Mingshi Yin could not escape Conch's persistence.

Mingshi Yin stretched his limbs and yawned as he said to himself, "Let's take a nap."

As soon as Mingshi Yin finished speaking, Conch's voice reached his ears. "Fourth Senior Brother, can you continue to teach me? I want to learn how to make a lot of energy swords."

Thud!

Mingshi Yin's chest tightened. He cursed silently as he fell off the branch.

At this very moment, a female disciple hurried down the mountain. When she saw Mingshi Yin and Conch before the great hall, she bowed and said, "Greetings, Mister Fourth, Miss Tenth."

Mingshi Yin struck the ground with a single palm. He did two flips in the air as he stood and calmly asked, "What's with the urgency?"

"Someone's requesting an audience at the foot of the mountain."

Chapter 535: The Person with the Highest Position

Mingshi Yin was puzzled. After receiving their master's orders, the Evil Sky Pavilion's disciples remained on the mountain.

After the barriers of the Taixu Academy and the Hengqu Branch were broken, the major sects chose to recuperate.

Why would someone knock on the Evil Sky Pavilion's doors at this moment?

"Little Junior Sister, cultivate on your own for now. I have something to attend to," Mingshi Yin said.

"Oh." Conch turned around and left obediently.

Mingshi Yin looked at the female cultivator and said, "I'll go and have a look." Feeling bored, he swiftly made his way down the mountain.

At the foot of the mountain, Mingshi Yin saw a eunuch in palace attire standing outside the barrier. The eunuch was none other than the Empress Dowager's personal eunuch, Li Yunzhao.

"Mister Fourth, it's been quite a while since we last met. I offer you my greetings," Li Yunzhao said.

"It's you?" Mingshi Yin was puzzled. He said, "You're really bold to come here."

Li Yunzhao pulled a long face and sighed as he said, "I didn't want to come either. However, I had to come due to my master's orders."

"Just get on with it. I don't have the time to talk at length with you," Mingshi Yin said.

Li Yunzhao asked, "May I meet the pavilion master?"

"No."

"..." Li Yunzhao steeled himself and shamelessly said, "I have an urgent matter to discuss. It's only in the pavilion master's presence that..."

When Mingshi Yin saw that Li Yunzha still had not revealed the main reason for his visit, he turned around and walked back into the barrier. 'He's just going on and on. I have better things to do.'

"Wait, wait!" Li Yunzhao cried out anxiously, "The Retired Emperor wants to meet the pavilion master!"

The Retired Emperor?

'Didn't that old man kick the bucket years ago?' Mingshi Yin turned around suddenly and moved swiftly. He let out a burst of energy as he attacked Li Yunzhao.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

Li Yunzhao did not expect Mingshi Yin to suddenly attack him. He raised his hands to defend himself. Golden palm seals burst forth from his hands as he parried Mingshi Yin's blows. He retreated as he said, "Mister Fourth, you've misunderstood me! The Retired Emperor is alive all along. The palace had no choice but to announce his passing before this..."

Bam!

Their final palm strikes collided. Then, they each took three steps back.

Li Yunzhao was slightly shocked. He was an elite from the internal palace, after all. He was a first-rate Seven-leaf cultivator by the Empress Dowager's side. And yet, he was pushed back three steps by Mingshi Yin.

Mingshi Yin steadied his footing, begrudgingly admiring how powerful this cursed eunuch was. He asked, "Emperor Yong Shou is still alive?"

"Yes," Li Yunzhao hastily explained. "Your master has a good relationship with the Retired Emperor. Now that he's advanced in age, he wishes to meet the pavilion master before his departure from this life."

"My master isn't available." It was the truth.

Li Yunzhao's expression froze for a moment before he said, "The Retired Emperor has said that he'll personally visit if the pavilion master is agreeable to it."

Mingshi Yin was stunned. Then, he said, "I told you my master isn't available. Can't you understand human speech?"

Li Yunzhao felt helpless as well. He looked to the sides. When he saw that there was nobody else, he beckoned Mingshi Yin over.

Mingshi Yin understood Li Yunzhao's gesture and walked over.

Li Yunzhao moved closer and whispered into Mingshi Yin's ears.

Mingshi Yin's expression changed slightly when he heard Li Yunzhao's words. He asked skeptically, "Really?"

"Yes," Li Yunzhao replied with a bow, "I'm close to the Empress Dowager. I'm only telling you this because of past favors. Just act as though you didn't hear that, Mister Fourth."

"You're quite tactful," Mingshi Yin said.

"I've said what I have to say. What happens next has nothing to do with me. Mister Fourth, I have another request," Li Yunzhao said.

"What is it?"

"Please strike me with your palm. It's easier for me to explain myself when I return," Li Yunzhao replied.

Mingshi Yin scratched his head and said, "That won't do. I'm a reasonable man, just like my master. I can't hit someone without due reason."

"Please do it, Mister Fourth. The Retired Emperor is personally invested in this matter. I have no choice but to do this." Li Yunzhao pleaded.

"No, no, no..." Mingshi Yin waved his hands. "I'm not that kind of person. I can't help you with this. If it were a friend who goes by the surname Ri, he might be able to help you."

Li Yunzhao appeared morose as he bowed and said, "That's fine. You're truly a righteous man, Mister Fourth. There's no need to trouble your friend with the surname Ri. His strikes won't mean anything."

You're a person from the Evil Sky Pavilion, Mister Fourth, and you should not associate yourself with a petty man like him. That's all I have to say. Farewell."

"Wait."

Li Yunzhao stopped. He turned around in confusion.

Bam!

Mingshi Yin punched Li Yunzhao at a close distance.

Li Yunzhao reeled back and rolled on the ground. "Ow, my face!"

"I suddenly feel that I should help you... Does it hurt?" Mingshi Yin put his fist down.

Li Yunzhao did not expect Mingshi Yin to strike without warning. 'You could've helped me without going overboard... Ow...'

Mingshi Yin no longer looked at Li Yunzhao. He hummed a ditty as he flew back to the Evil Sky Pavilion.

When Mingshi Yin returned to the Evil Sky Pavilion, he began to fret.

Liu Ge, the former Emperor of Great Yan, wanted to visit the Evil Sky Pavilion! His visit coincided with the Nether Sect acting against the Imperial family. What good could come out of this visit?

After pondering on it for a moment, Mingshi Yin decided to consult his master. After all, the person with the highest position in Great Yan was acquainted with his master. After making sure no one was around, he made his way to the hidden chamber. Soon enough, he arrived outside the hidden chamber."Greetings, master."

There was no reply nor sounds of movements in the hidden chamber.

Despite feeling uneasy, Mingshi Yin raised his voice slightly as he said again, "Greetings, master."

Once bitten, twice shy. He remained kneeling on the floor as he waited for a reply. He dared not get close to the hidden chamber's door.

There was still no reply from the other side of the door.

Mingshi Yin shook his head and sighed. 'I should think of something myself... I must resist the urge. Hold it together! I shouldn't try and peek through the gap.' Then, he turned around and left immediately.

...

Inside the hidden chamber.

Lu Zhou's consciousness was in a muddled state. After reprimanding Zhu Honggong, he was once again immersed in the state and had closed off his senses. Naturally, he did not hear Mingshi Yin's voice.

...

Three days passed.

In the morning, the sun rose from the east at the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Meanwhile, a small, gray flying chariot departed from the Divine Capital toward the Evil Sky Pavilion.

On the flying chariot, two of the Imperial guard's eight great generals, Gu Yiran and Su Sheng, were standing respectfully behind Emperor Yong Shou.

The two of them were former subordinates of Emperor Yong Shou. They had trouble calming their emotions when they looked at Liu Ge who was surprisingly alive.

"Are you afraid?" Liu Ge glanced at them.

The two of them bowed. "We're just slightly moved."

Liu Ge looked at the rising sun in the east.

The flying chariot sailed smoothly through the clouds.

"The two of you once stood by my side as I launched a campaign to conquer the lands. The 10,000 tribes submitted to me. Many years have passed since then, you two... have grown old as well." Liu Ge sighed.

Gu Yiran and Su Sheng's hairs were fairly white now.

Time was cruel.

"It's the natural cycle of life to grow old," Su Sheng finally replied.

As he looked at his former subordinates, Liu Ge nodded slightly and said, "You've done well by supporting Gu'er all these years."

"That's what we're supposed to do. So long as we can defend Great Yan, we'd climb a mountain of blades or cross a sea of flames," Su Sheng said.

Liu Ge studied the duo for a moment before he suddenly asked, "Have the two of you ever considered severing your lotuses to attempt the Nine-leaf stage?"

Upon hearing this, the duo fell to their knees immediately. Sweat could be seen glistening on their faces. It seemed like Liu Ge was privy to the current affairs of the world since he was asking about their lotuses.

"I have always been loyal. The sun and moon can attest to that!"

"The Nether Sect is wreaking havoc across the nine provinces. I can't stand by and do nothing!"

They dared not go against the decree of the former emperor without due cause.

Liu Ge nodded, pleased. He said, "Stand up and speak."

The two of them stood up.

"I wanted to meet Gu'er... but since he's cultivating in seclusion, I decided to have you two accompany me on this trip." Liu Ge had abdicated the throne, after all. The Imperial guards no longer belonged to him.

Su Sheng said, "You only need to order us, Your Majesty."

“Alright.”

“Clear the way to the Evil Sky Pavilion.”

“...” Su Sheng and Gu Yiran were shocked. Their backs were instantly drenched in sweat and an ominous feeling swelled in their hearts.

...

At noon, the flying chariot finally landed at the foot of Golden Court Mountain.

“Y-your Majesty, we’re here.” Su Sheng glanced at Golden Court Mountain and gulped.

“Are you nervous?” Liu Ge noticed the two generals’ uncomfortable expressions.

To be honest, Gu Yiran and Su Sheng were already regretting this. They did not expect the former emperor’s destination to be the Evil Sky Pavilion’s Golden Court Mountain. This was the most untouchable place in the cultivation world at the moment! However, since they had declared their loyalties and made their vows, they had no choice but to soldier on.

“I’m not nervous, just worried.”

“There’s no need to worry... I’m old friends with Ji Tiandao. I’m only here to reminisce about the past,” Liu Ge said.

The Imperial bodyguards leaped off the flying chariot. They carried several boxes and placed them outside the barrier.

At this moment, a figure flew down from the mountain. The figure hovered in the air and asked, “Are you His Majesty, Emperor Yong Shou?”

Liu Ge looked up at the person in the air and asked in return, “You recognize me?”

“It’s just a guess. I’ve been waiting for you. I’m not used to kneeling, and I’m sure you don’t mind,” Mingshi Yin said.

“It’s alright,” Liu Ge said magnanimously.

“My master has been in seclusion for three months. I’m afraid he can’t meet you now, Your Majesty,” Mingshi Yin said bluntly.

Chapter 536: Our Elites are as Numerous as the Clouds. Are You Afraid Now?

Liu Ge calmly said, “You’re the first person bold enough to speak to me in this manner.”

“That’s alright. There will be a second, third, fourth... and many more,” Mingshi Yin said.

“Interesting.” Liu Ge found Mingshi Yin intriguing. “I won’t easily leave if I can’t meet my old friend.”

Mingshi Yin said, “Up to you. It has nothing to do with, and I don’t care.”

“...” Although Liu Ge was Emperor Yong Shou, whose name struck fear in the Other Tribesmen, he had no retort for this.

Su Sheng frowned and said, "His Majesty is only here to reminisce. If we truly come bearing ill intentions, would we bring so few men?"

Mingshi Yin lazily replied, "Who knows..."

Su Sheng cupped his fists and said, "Sir, His Majesty's presence is the greatest respect toward the Evil Sky Pavilion. His Majesty is friends with your master. If the meeting doesn't happen, as His Majesty's official, I can't possibly stand by and do nothing."

Mingshi Yin frowned and said, "What? Is that a threat? Are you going to force your way in?"

"The pavilion master has shocked the lands with his Nine-leaf powers. We won't be so bold as to force our way in..." Su Sheng said. Then, he added, "However, if His Majesty orders me to, I have no choice but to comply with his order."

In other words, these two who came with Liu Ge had already disregarded their lives. They were the kind of people Mingshi Yin least wanted to meet. He shifted his gaze from Su Sheng to Liu Ge. He sensed Liu Ge's faint but deep aura. Liu Ge's bearing was completely different from what he imagined a member of the Imperial family would have. Liu Ge carried an indifferent and otherworldly air about him, as though nothing much mattered to him in this world.

Mingshi Yin muttered under his breath for a moment before he said in a clear voice, "My master has said that he'd be cultivating in seclusion for five months. Before his cultivation is complete, he won't meet anyone."

Liu Ge said, "Then, I'll wait for him in the Evil Sky Pavilion."

"..." Based on his calculations, Mingshi Yin had assumed no one would dare to trespass on the Evil Sky Pavilion as long as he insisted it was on his master's order. However, it seemed like he had misjudged the simplicity of the matter.

At this moment, Liu Ge waved his hand.

The imperial bodyguards behind him stepped forward with boxes in their hands.

Liu Ge approached the barrier.

Su Sheng and Gu Yiran joined their palms together. Several talismans appeared between their palms.

The Confucian school!

Mingshi Yin immediately raised his hand and said, "In that case, follow me."

Su Sheng and Gu Yiran lowered their hands.

An opening appeared on the barrier.

Liu Ge stopped past the barrier with his hands on his back as the others followed behind him.

At this moment, Mingshi Yin's heart was racing. He suddenly recalled that when his Second Senior Brother, Yu Shangrong, first returned to the Evil Sky Pavilion, his master mentioned that Liu Ge, Emperor

Yong Shou, walked on the third kind of sword path. His master had called Liu Ge the Sword of the Emperor.

Gong Yuandu came with his coffin. He was now reduced to ashes and was no longer in this world.

He remembered that Emperor Yong Shou's passing had been announced in the Mausoleum of Swords. He did not expect that to be a fake announcement.

He stopped as he turned around and asked, "My master has said that you're a sword path elite, Your Majesty. He called you the Sword of the Emperor. I wonder if that's true."

Before Liu Ge replied, Su Sheng said, "His Majesty led a campaign against the 10,000 tribes many years ago with his sword skills. Forgive me for being blunt, but even the three Sword Freaks are only children before His Majesty."

"What about my Second Senior Brother, Yu Shangrong?"

"Uh..." Su Sheng did not think he could casually give his appraisal now that Yu Shangrong was brought up. After all, Yu Shangrong was an Eight-leaf sword path elite who lived up to his name. The people called him the Sword Devil. Many Eight-leaf elites had died under his sword. Although they were all Eight-leaf cultivators, their strength differed.

Gu Yiran said, "In that case, the location of the battle will be an important factor, then. If it's in the Divine Capital, His Majesty is invincible."

How shameless! Who could defeat Liu Ge when there was the Ten Terminal Formation in the Divine Capital?

However, Mingshi Yin did not seem to mind their words. He let them say whatever they wanted. He continued leading them to the Evil Sky Pavilion's great hall.

All of a sudden, an ancient voice rang near the great hall.

"Su Sheng? Gu Yiran?"

The duo turned to look at the source of the voice, shocked. They wondered who in the Evil Sky Pavilion had recognized them? They saw an old woman walking toward them with a staff in her hand.

"Elder Zuo?" Su Sheng frowned.

"Su Sheng, mind your words... I've already joined the Evil Sky Pavilion and am an elder of the Evil Sky Pavilion. I'm no longer an elder of the Confucian school," Zuo Yushu said gruffly.

Su Sheng and Gu Yiran exchanged a look. They did not expect the former genius cultivator of the Confucian school to join the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Liu Ge looked at Zuo Yushu and said, "500 years ago, I've heard about you... Zuo Yushu."

Zuo Yushu appraised Liu Ge. She learned about his visit from Mingshi Yin so she was not surprised to see him here. She said, "I didn't know you're still alive, Your Majesty. Please accept my humble greetings."

At this moment, the sound of bickering could be heard inside the great hall.

“Old Pan, among all the Eight-leaf cultivators, you’re one of the few I disapprove.”

That was a harsh statement.

Shortly after, another voice replied, “Who needs your approval? Leng Luo, this is the Evil Sky Pavilion. Can you bear the consequences if you disturbed the pavilion master?”

Liu Ge frowned and muttered, “Leng Luo? The first person on the blacklist 300 years ago?”

Su Sheng said in a hushed voice, “Indeed, it’s him.”

The voices continued to bicker in the great hall...

“Pan Litian, this isn’t the Clarity Sect as well. You can forget about intimidating me. I don’t approve of anyone apart from the pavilion master.”

Liu Ge frowned again. “The greatest elite of the Clarity Sect, Pan Litian?”

Su Sheng said in a hushed voice again, “Indeed, it’s him.”

Liu Ge, “...” Despite his outwardly calm appearance, he was shocked. To think that the Evil Sky Pavilion had such powerful elders. How did Ji Tiandao make them submit?

The bickering had not ended when another voice joined...

“Elders, stop bickering. Please do it for my, Hua Wudao, sake...”

Leng Luo said, “Old Pan, you should learn from him... Hua Wudao is also an Eight-leaf cultivator, and yet, he’s humble and willing to learn.”

“This is how I am. I’ll do whatever I want.”

At this moment, the three elders walked out of the great hall. When they finally saw Liu Ge and the others, the trio did not say anything. They only grunted at each other before parting ways.

Mingshi Yin nodded subtly, satisfied. ‘Nice one, old men!’ He looked at Liu Ge. As expected, a deep frown was etched on Liu Ge’s face at this moment, seemingly stunned. He chuckled inwardly. ‘Elites are as numerous as the clouds in the Evil Sky Pavilion. Are you afraid now?’

Zuo Yushu said, “I need to return to the Formation I’m studying. Forgive me for not keeping you company.” Without waiting for anyone’s reply, she turned around and left.

Whether it was Liu Ge, Emperor Yong Shou, or Su Sheng and Gu Yiran, two of the eight great generals, the four elders treated them as though they were air.

This was the effect Mingshi Yin was aiming for!

Mingshi Yin cleared his throat at this moment and said, “I’m sorry. That’s how the Evil Sky Pavilion’s four elders are. At the Eight-leaf stage, cultivators are easily bored, and all they think about is looking for a worthy opponent. However, Eight-leaf cultivators are too destructive in a fight. Hence, they usually get together to debate. Fighting with words is different from physical fights, after all. It’s inevitable for them to quarrel among themselves. I’m sorry you had to see that, Your Majesty.”

"It's alright." Liu Ge raised his hand. "All I want is to reminisce with my old friend. I won't mind the others."

"Good to hear. This way."

...

Meanwhile, the four elders returned to the southern pavilion.

The quartet was looking in the direction of the Evil Sky Pavilion's great hall at this moment.

"I wonder if that's enough to keep Liu Ge in check," Pan Litian wondered out loud.

"That's our only option. We've severed our lotuses... If we conceal our auras, they won't be able to figure out our actual cultivation bases," Leng Luo said.

Hua Wudao shook his head. "I'm only a Seven-leaf cultivator. I'm afraid I'll be exposed if I pretend to be an Eight-leaf cultivator.

"If we conceal our auras and don't make a move, we're the same as everyone. A pair of eyes and a pair of legs. Relax, no one can tell the difference," Pan Litian said reassuringly.

Zuo Yushu sighed and shook her head. "Liu Ge might be easier to deal with. The Nether Sect's hold over the nine provinces can be used as leverage. However, Su Sheng and Gu Yiran might not be as easy to deal with."

The three old men nodded in agreement.

Pan Litian said, "There's no need to fear. After all, the pavilion master is still around. They won't dare to run amok here."

The Nine-leaf cultivator was obviously the source of their confidence.

...

Inside the great hall.

Mingshi Yin made an inviting gesture. "My master is still cultivating in seclusion. I'll be your host on his behalf."

Liu Ge was in no hurry to take his seat. Instead, he looked around himself. He studied the two pillars, the floor, and the surroundings of the great hall.

Since Liu Ge had not taken a seat, Su Sheng and Gu Yiran did not dare sit down as well. They could only accompany him.

After taking it all in, Liu Ge walked up to a seat and sat down. He asked, "Are the four of them Eight-leaf cultivators?"

Chapter 537: Conch VS An Eight-leaf Cultivator

Mingshi Yin replied without any hesitation, "Of course." He paused for a moment before he continued to say, "Leng Luo was at the top of the blacklist 300 years ago. You should know this better than me,

Your Majesty. I don't think I have to introduce Pan Litian and Zuo Yushu as well since they're both notable figures of their generations. Hua Wudao was an elder of the Yun Sect, but he left the sect because of the chaotic state the sect was in. With nowhere else to go, he had no choice but to stay in the Evil Sky Pavilion..."

"I heard that Yun Tianluo isn't a despicable character. Why would he let Hua Wudao leave? Also, an Eight-leaf elder would've been an honored guest no matter where he went," Liu Ge said.

'This old fox isn't as gullible as I thought he would be.' Mingshi Yin maintained the expression on his face as he said, "Let's not dwell on the details. You're the monarch of the empire, Your Majesty. You can easily find out about these things."

Liu Ge nodded. He looked at Mingshi Yin and said, "I was the monarch. Now, I... am here as an old friend who wishes to reminisce with your master."

Mingshi Yin said, "I've told you, my master is cultivating in seclusion. It'll remain that way for at least another two months. Nobody is supposed to disturb him before that."

At this moment, Su Sheng spoke up. "I heard that Senior Ji has attained the Nine-leaf stage long ago. Why would he still cultivate in seclusion?" The Nine-leaf stage was in a league of its own, invincible. Why would someone at the Nine-leaf stage need to cultivate in seclusion?

Mingshi Yin rolled his eyes at him and replied, "There's no end on the path of cultivation. My master has only recently entered the Nine-leaf stage. It's only natural for him to stabilize his realm... By the way, who are you?"

"Su Sheng, the Great General of the Imperial guard's northwestern gate garrison," Su Sheng said proudly.

"Oh... I've never heard of you."

"..."

'Why are you reacting as though you know me when you said you've never heard of me?' Su Sheng was rendered momentarily speechless. Then, he asked, "Sir, why is Senior Zuo in the Evil Sky Pavilion?"

Mingshi Yin did not answer Su Sheng directly. He could sense they were wary of Zuo Yushu. It seemed like his plan did not fail. Fear still lingered in his heart when he recalled the scene in the valley where he met Zuo Yushu. If he did not mention master, Zuo Yushu would have killed him. After a beat, he smiled and said, "Elder Zuo has admired my master for a long time... I'm sure you know the rest."

Liu Ge nodded approvingly and said, "When I was first acquainted with Brother Ji back then, indeed, there were many beauties who fawned over him. If Brother Ji's temper had been more agreeable, I... I wouldn't have stood a chance."

"..." Mingshi Yin was truly speechless. Why was this old man so shameless? In the end, he ordered the visitors to be escorted away after he said, "Alright, I've spoken enough. You've entered and seen the Evil Sky Pavilion as well. Now, it's time for you to leave."

Liu Ge slowly rose to his feet as he said, "Since Brother Ji can't meet me now, I'll wait for him. Surely there are rooms in the vast Evil Sky Pavilion to accommodate a bag of old bones like me?"

“You’re staying?” Mingshi Yin was shocked.

“I won’t disturb Brother Ji during these three months,” Liu Ge replied.

“...”

Things had become slightly more complicated with this development. These three visitors were elites. Nobody could guarantee that nothing untoward would not during their stay here. Clearly, they came prepared.

If a conflict were to break out now, the fact that the four elders had severed the lotuses would certainly be exposed. If the trio was allowed to stay, it would only bring unnecessary complications and uncertainties to the Evil Sky Pavilion.

At this moment, Su Sheng said, “The Evil Sky Pavilion’s four elders were restraining their auras earlier so I couldn’t sense any Primal Qi surges. I wonder why is there a need for them to do this since they’re in the Evil Sky Pavilion where there are no outsiders?”

Mingshi Yin was taken aback by Su Sheng’s words. As expected, this plan could not fool these people.

Su Sheng continued to say, “Elder Zuo is a Confucian cultivator. She’s also a rare genius from the Confucian school 500 years ago. The thing she hates the most is to be secretive...”

Although Su Sheng was not blunt with his words, Mingshi Yin could, naturally, infer the hidden meaning behind Su Sheng’s words. He replied with a straight face, “It seems like you know nothing about the Evil Sky Pavilion.”

This statement took Su Sheng by slight surprise.

Indeed. The Evil Sky Pavilion was not like the other places. Logic should not be applied here.

When Su Sheng regained his senses, he cupped his fists together and said, “In that case... I’d like to spar with the elders.”

“...” What a pain in the a*s! Mingshi Yin’s mind went into overdrive immediately. The four elders had already severed their lotuses and were in the process of recultivating. If they were to spar with Su Sheng now, they would surely lose. However, if the elders did not accept Su Sheng’s challenge, it would not look good on the Evil Sky Pavilion. What a conundrum!

While Mingshi Yin was mulling over that matter, Su Sheng said, “I’m genuinely asking for a lesson and have no ulterior motives. Since the elites of the Evil Sky Pavilion are as numerous as the clouds... I’m sure that they won’t mind teaching me a thing or two.”

Su Sheng was advancing without any hesitation. Perhaps, Mingshi Yin’s hesitance had convinced him and Gu Yiran that the Evil Sky Pavilion was hiding something. They were trying to get a feel of the situation under the pretext of sparring and learning. This was a good way to ensure they did not offend the Evil Sky Pavilion.

‘These three old foxes!’

Liu Ge sat at the side without saying a word. It was clear he approved of Su Sheng’s actions.

Mingshi Yin finally said, "There's no need for a sparring session... The Evil Sky Pavilion doesn't have the time to play with you."

At this moment, an elegant melody floated into the hall. The flute's song was refreshing and melodious like the gentle spring breeze blowing on one's face... Although it was not loud, everyone heard it clearly.

Liu Ge was intrigued by the sound. He looked outside the great hall and asked, "There's someone gifted in tune in the Evil Sky Pavilion?"

Mingshi Yin said, "Naturally."

As soon as Mingshi Yin finished speaking, a miniature energy sword flitted into the great hall, aimlessly flying around. Although it was not powerful, its movements were nimble.

Gu Yiran exclaimed in shock, "Controlling Qi and energy with sound... Who's the person outside the hall?"

An idea appeared in Mingshi Yin's mind as he said with an indifferent expression on his face, "She's just controlling Qi with sound. It's not worth mentioning."

Su Sheng and Gu Yiran felt awkward when they heard Mingshi Yin's words. In their opinion, this was an amazing ability. After spending so many years on the battlefield, they knew very well what characters and abilities were more advantageous in a war. Whether it was the Buddhist aerial healing technique, the Bright Mirror, or an attack like the Brahmia Lullaby, they were potent weapons that could be used during wars. The Confucian Formations were also useful. If they were used well, their army would be invincible.

At this moment, the energy sword suddenly shot toward Su Sheng.

Whoosh!

Su Sheng's expression darkened. "Despicable!" He flicked two fingers. Two talismans shot toward the energy sword. The talismans ignited as two script seals devoured the miniature energy sword.

At the same time, a deafening sound resonated in the air.

The flute's song and the peculiar script seals faded away.

Outside the hall, the flute song wafted in the hall again. The flute player seemed unwilling to submit herself as she played her flute again. The tempo of the song was faster now.

Su Sheng laughed and said, "Interesting!" He closed his palms, and several scripts of varying sizes flew in the air and collided with each other.

The ringing sound of the collision mingled with the flute's song.

The flute stopped for a moment. Then, it began playing at a higher key. If it had been a trickling stream before this, it was now a tidal wave.

Su Sheng appeared delighted. "I've never heard about someone skilled in tune among the Evil Sky Pavilion's nine disciples. I'm fortunate enough to witness this for myself today. Although I'm a crude person, I like music very much. I think I've met my match today. Again..."

Su Sheng rose to his feet. His hands were just a blur as he made several hand signs.

If their earlier exchange was just casual, they were serious now.

The surging of Primal Qi and the increase in script seals were in the Nascent Divinity realm.

Su Sheng clearly took this seriously!

Upon seeing this, Mingshi Yin's heart sank. Naturally, he knew who was playing the flute outside. How could that person compare to Su Sheng, one of the Imperial guard's eight great generals!

Dong! Dong! Dong!

The script seals enlarged and sounded like tolling bells when they collided.

As the flute's song dissipated, the soundwave of the collision spread out.

Mingshi Yin released a burst of energy and moved swiftly.

Whizz!

Energy resonated.

A Five-leaf avatar stood inside the Evil Sky Pavilion's great hall. Its power moved to the ceiling of the hall and blocked Su Sheng's soundwave.

All the sounds ceased in just an instant.

Mingshi Yin had to step in. His little junior sister would not have been able to withstand that soundwave.

Su Sheng frowned and asked, "Why are you interfering, sir?"

"This is the Evil Sky Pavilion, not a place where you can do as you please," Mingshi Yin said.

"He's allowed to taunt me, but I'm not allowed to strike back?" Su Sheng could not understand this logic.

Mingshi Yin shook his head helplessly. "I've told you... This isn't a place where you should be staying."

Su Sheng said, "There must always be a beginning and an end to a sparring session." He folded his palms again. Script seals emerged from his body and arranged themselves neatly in a light circle. The light circle resonated in the air, sounding like the Buddhist Brahmic Lullaby.

Mingshi Yin frowned slightly.

At this moment, a deafeningly loud and impatient voice rang from behind the great hall. The soundwave rolled out with a crashing momentum along the walkway. "Impudent!"

Chapter 538: Apologize to the Little Girl

The soundwave seemed different from the sound techniques they had encountered in the past. It was sonorous and powerful, clean and nimble. It caught them off guard.

A frown could be seen on Su Sheng's face as the soundwave landed on its target.

Bam!

Su Sheng grunted as he slid backward. He was an Eight-leaf cultivator, after all. The moment he was attacked by this soundwave, he forcibly stabilized his footing so he would not fall or fly back. However, sometimes, it was not entirely a bad thing to be sent flying back. For example, if he had allowed himself to be sent flying, he could've flipped in the air and minimized the impact from the soundwave. With that, he would only suffer minor scratches. Alas, he chose to withstand the soundwave head-on to remain standing.

Shu Sheng seemed to be frozen as he looked at the back of the wall with a frightened gaze.

Liu Ge, Emperor Yong Shou, and Gu Yiran were shocked.

On the other hand, Mingshi Yin was delighted. He retracted his avatar and bowed in the direction of the hidden chamber. "Greetings, master."

The sounds of footsteps rang in the air. The speed of the footsteps was neither hurried nor slow. Each step was firm and sounded like it came from the distance.

The three visitors knew the Evil Sky Pavilion's master was about to make his appearance, and their eyes were focused in the direction of the sound.

Finally, Lu Zhou appeared before everyone's eyes, sauntering over from behind the great hall with his hands on his back. During the past three months, he had been immersed in his meditative state. He had no access to his senses and consciousness. However, he could still pick up fragments of conversations every once in a while. Sometimes they were clear, and sometimes they were incoherent. Just a few moments ago, he was still blissfully immersed in his meditative state. He had no intention of waking up from that state at all. To his chagrin, he was disturbed by the commotion in the great hall. Although Conch's flute song helped him to concentrate, the noise from the collision of the scripts had jarred him awake.

As soon as Lu Zhou stepped into the great hall, he swept his eyes past the three visitors.

Su Sheng and Gu Yiran stiffened.

When Lu Zhou's eyes finally landed on Emperor Yong Shou, he said, "Liu Ge?"

Liu Ge was shocked. He was rather certain Ji Tiandao would be an old man with a head full of white hair who had lost his mobility. Ji Tiandao should not be any better than Zuo Yushu. How could he not be surprised when he saw Lu Zhou who seemed to be in the pink of health. Ji Tiandao's back was straight and seemed to be in good spirits. His eyes were lively and filled with strength. Even when Ji Tiandao rebuked Su Sheng, his voice was brimming with vitality and explosive strength. Ji Tiandao did not seem to be approaching his great limit at all! Even though Liu Ge was a monarch, when he saw Lu Zhou's appearance, he was still filled with fright in his heart and felt emotional. When he finally remembered he had not met Ji Tiandao for a long time, he hurriedly said, "I... We finally meet, Brother Ji."

"You're not dead?"

Su Sheng took a step forward. How could the Evil Sky Pavilion's master use such an inauspicious word like 'dead' when speaking to the Retired Emperor? Alas, as soon as he stepped forward, he grunted and

spat out a mouthful of fresh blood. 'What a powerful sound technique.' He did not expect to be injured by the soundwave. They did not even engage in a fight, but his internal organs were already injured from a sound technique. Just how powerful was the Evil Sky Pavilion's master? It seemed like the Nine-leaf stage was truly in a league of its own.

Lu Zhou shifted his gaze from Liu Ge to Su Sheng. "You like to bully the weak?"

Su Sheng appeared confused. He bit back the pain from his injured internal organs as he bowed and said, "Senior Ji, we were just sparring. If I have offended you, I'm willing to accept any punishment you mete out."

"Just sparring?"

At this moment, a petite figure ran into the great hall. She was holding a Lantian Jade Flute as she searched for someone inside the great hall. When she saw her master, she bowed. "Greetings, master."

Lu Zhou glanced at Conch before he returned his gaze to Su Sheng again.

Su Sheng caught a glimpse of Conch and the Lantian Jade Flute in her hand. His hand trembled as he wondered out loud, "The flute master is... her?"

Mingshi Yin said, "Who else could it be? A great Eight-leaf elite bullying a junior who has just entered the Sense Condensing realm. What a great senior!"

Su Sheng felt stifled. His eyes widened in disbelief as he shook his head, "The Sense Condensing realm?" He looked at the pretty and innocent little girl at the side again. Could she be an elite who was deliberately hiding her aura to impersonate a Sense Condensing realm cultivator? He shook his head. 'No, she's too young.' How profound could the cultivation base of a young girl like her be?

Su Sheng immediately felt his cheeks warm up. He was embarrassed. To think that he had sparred with a little girl who had just entered the Sense Condensing realm! There was no excuse. His earlier action was, indeed, shameful and could not be justified. He looked at Lu Zhou awkwardly. However, as soon as his eyes met Lu Zhou's eyes, he shuddered. "S... Senior Ji!"

Lu Zhou's words, 'You like to bully the weak?', echoed in Su Sheng's mind.

Lu Zhou calmly said, "Since you like to spar, I'll fulfill your wish."

"Huh?"

"Take this!" Lu Zhou raised his hand. A blue light shone from between his fingers.

"The Confucian school's Abandon Wisdom!"

Su Sheng and Gu Yiran were both Confucian elites. Naturally, they recognized this technique.

"Brother Ji, have mercy!" Liu Ge frowned deeply.

Lu Zhou was determined to attack; he would not be easily dissuaded. The scripts of Abandon Wisdom hung between his fingers before they shot out...

Su Sheng cried out as he retreated in the air. He joined his palms together with his index fingers touching. It seemed like he was going to cast Abandon Wisdom as well. He was an elite as well, after all. When faced with such a situation, he chose to attack instead of defending. The scripts from Abandon Wisdom appeared around his index fingers. Sadly, they seemed negligible compared to Lu Zhou's scripts that were launched with just one hand. In any case, he felt he was left with no choice but to attack. He leaned forward as energy swirled around his fingers. The scripts formed energy seals before they shot out.

The two Abandon Wisdom's techniques collided.

Boom!

As expected, Su Sheng reeled back. He hastily drew his hand back to his sides. If he had been a moment later, his arms would have been broken by the powerful energy seals.

Lu Zhou's Abandon Wisdom did not disperse; it continued to shoot forward. It landed on Su Sheng's chest, pushing Su Sheng out of the great hall until Su Sheng eventually crashed against the eastern part of the plaza.

Thud!

Su Sheng landed on the ground.

The palm seal grew translucent as it continued on its trajectory upward before it finally faded into thin air.

...

When the Confucian genius, Zuo Yushu, looked up and saw this, she wondered out loud, "Who unleashed Abandon Wisdom? Su Sheng? Gu Yiran?"

The four elders frowned slightly.

Zuo Yushu shook her head and said, "Knowing their abilities, it's impossible for them to unleash the technique with such great strength."

"What about Liu Ge?"

"It's impossible for it to be Liu Ge as well. He's advanced in age and is close to his great limit," Zuo Yushu replied.

The four of them exchanged a look before realization finally dawned on them.

...

In the great hall.

After Lu Zhou had cast the technique, Liu Ge and Gu Yiran looked outside the great hall in shock. Lu Zhou and Su Sheng had used the same technique, Abandon Wisdom, but Lu Zhou's attack had easily crushed Su Sheng!

After a long silence, Liu Ge suppressed the shock in his heart before he said, "Brother Ji, please stay your anger. They're here with me. I'll take responsibility for their mistakes."

Lu Zhou said, "This is only a minor punishment. If it weren't out of consideration for you, I would've reduced him into ashes."

"..."

"Why are you so angry?" Liu Ge asked in confusion.

Liu Zhe frowned slightly as he said in a deep voice, "My disciple has just entered the Sense Condensing realm recently. Do you think I should stand aside and do nothing?"

"..." Liu Ge's heart stirred. After all these years, he did not expect Ji Tiandao to still be so defensive of his people, regardless if they were right or wrong. 'His temper is as fiery as ever.' Despite his thoughts, his expression remained the same. In the end, he said in a loud voice, "Su Sheng, kowtow and apologize to this little girl."

Chapter 539: I Don't Have Time for You

The commanding tone entered the ears of Su Sheng who was outside the great hall. He fought back his surging blood essence as he lay on the ground with a pained expression on his face. This palm strike would render him motionless for a long time. The difference in the palm strike's strength was too great! He was completely powerless. He endured the pain and rose to his feet with great difficulty and entered the Evil Sky Pavilion's great hall...

Liu Ge did not look at Su Sheng.

Faced with this situation, Su Sheng had no choice but to kneel toward Conch.

Upon seeing this, Conch seemed flustered as she moved to the side and hid behind Mingshi Yin to avoid Su Sheng's bow.

Mingshi Yin smiled and said, "Oh, so you're capable of feeling frightened as well, little ancestor?"

"I'm not frightened," Conch said.

"If it were Ninth Junior Sister, she would've given him a kick. You're slightly lacking in bravery," Mingshi Yin said.

In terms of tormenting others, Conch and Little Yuan'er were at the same level. However, Conch seemed less bold compared to Little Yuan'er.

Before Conch could reply, Lu Zhou waved his hand and said, "This is the Evil Sky Pavilion, not the palace. You'd do well not to bring the ways of the palace here."

Liu Ge nodded in agreement and said, "Su Sheng, thank Brother Ji."

Su Sheng shifted to face Lu Zhou and said, "Thank you for holding back, Senior Ji."

Mingshi Yin rolled his eyes and said, "If you had listened to me, it wouldn't have come to this."

"You're right, Mister Fourth." Su Sheng's face flushed red. As the saying went, 'Consider the master before hitting the dog'.

Naturally, that saying did not apply to Lu Zhou. Not only did he not consider Liu Ge when he taught Su Sheng a lesson, but he even ridiculed Liu Ge.

"Brother Ji, why are you so angry?" Liu Ge asked.

"I don't have time for you..." Lu Zhou looked at Conch and beckoned her over.

Conch obediently walked to Lu Zhou's side.

Lu Zhou inspected her pulse and widened his eyes. "Sense Condensing realm?"

"Master, am I in the Sense Condensing realm?"

Although it was slightly unbelievable, the truth was right there before his eyes. Lu Zhou nodded and said, "That's right, you're already in the Sense Condensing realm."

Conch seemed delighted.

Lu Zhou continued to ask, "But, who taught you to control Qi with sound?"

Mingshi Yin said, "Master, I didn't teach her that... It could be Old Eighth." Nothing else mattered apart from shifting the blame away from himself.

"Master, I learned it myself," Conch replied immediately.

Su Sheng. "???"

Gu Yiran. "???"

Su Sheng had initially thought Conch was an elite who concealed her aura. There was no longer any doubt that she was just a beginner! To think, he, a great Eight-leaf cultivator, had insisted on sparring with her. The more he thought about it, the more ashamed he felt.

Lu Zhou reminded her, "Don't rush when you cultivate. You should focus on your cultivation for now. Controlling Qi with sound can come later."

"I understand, master," Conch replied.

Then, Lu Zhou looked at three guests again before his eyes finally settled on Liu Ge. "Old Fourth, bring Conch out of the hall."

"Understood." Mingshi Yin led Conch out of the great hall.

Su Sheng and Gu Yiran exchanged a look. They wondered if they should leave the great hall as well despite the fact that they were great generals of the Imperial guard.

Liu Ge said, "Stay outside."

"Understood." Gu Yiran stood up and gestured at the Imperial bodyguards.

The boxes were left at the sides as they filed out of the great hall.

Soon after, Lu Zhou and Liu Ge were the only ones left alone in the great hall.

"Let's hear it... Why did you come?" Lu Zhou asked.

Liu Ge heaved a long sigh before he said, "Time is a cruel thing. Centuries have passed in just a blink of an eye. I came because there's something I'd like to personally ask you."

Lu Zhou remained silent.

Liu Ge asked without beating around the bush, "Did you truly attain the Nine-leaf stage, Brother Ji?" His gaze was searching as he looked at Lu Zhou after asking the question.

The great hall was silent.

After a moment, Lu Zhou replied with a question, "Why would you ask that?"

"Do you remember that mysterious elite, Brother Ji?" Liu Ge said.

"If you're not going to get to the point, you can leave. I don't have time to waste on you," Lu Zhou said before he rose to his feet.

The system's upgrade would only be completed in two months. Lu Zhou had used some of his extraordinary on the palm strike earlier. He needed time to recover and did not have the luxury of chatting with this person.

"..." Liu Ge was slightly surprised. He said at once, "The mysterious elite rode in a coffin from the northern borders, crossing the lands of the Other Tribes and Great Yan..."

Lu Zhou remembered the Roulian, Lanni, who brought a red coffin to the Evil Sky Pavilion. He stopped moving and placed his hand on his back as he said, "Get to the point."

"The reason why Great Yan's Imperial family remains standing to this day is due to the mysterious elite's help... He had stressed that we're not to attempt the Nine-leaf stage. Otherwise, there would be unthinkable consequences."

Lu Zhou was intrigued. He looked at Liu Ge and asked, "Where's this person now?"

Liu Ge shook his head and said, "He stayed in the Divine Capital once. Then, he left some things there before he left. The Imperial family has been searching for him all these years. Alas, we've never heard from him again."

"You seem to believe in this mysterious elite," Lu Zhou said.

"I never doubted him from the beginning until the end," Liu Ge replied, "The heavens have set this taboo for us humans, and there must be a reason behind this. We'll have to pay the price if we're to violate the taboo. We should cultivate according to the will of the heavens. Isn't 1,000 years enough to satiate the greed of men?"

"I don't think so," Lu Zhou said.

"What's your thought on this, Brother Ji? I'd like to hear it."

“According to you, cultivators should be content with 1,000 years. However, a mortal is considered to have lived a long life if he or she lived to 100 years old. It has never been fair between cultivators and mortals. Doesn’t this mean cultivators have violated the mortals’ taboo?” Lu Zhou said, “Moreover, to cultivate is already going against heaven’s will.”

“Cultivating is going against the will of the heavens?” Liu Ge asked. “That’s only a view held by the minorities.”

“The Confucian school fears the command of the heavens and merely cultivates to better themselves; the Buddhist sects fear karma that could not be avoided; the Daoist sects wish for longevity and to exist alongside the heavens and the earth... Which of these isn’t going against the will of the heavens?” Lu Zhou asked.

“...” Liu Ge was at a loss for words. He had thought about this before. Over the long course of history, many cultivators had their own views about cultivation. There were countless views vying for dominance from the Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist sects, but the end goal remained the same. Three paths were constantly striving to break through from the original restrictions.

Liu Ge said, “It’s only a difference in opinions... You have your own view, Brother Ji, and I have mine.”

Lu Zhou stroked his beard and asked, “So, are you going to force your views on me?”

Liu Ge was once again at a loss for words. He studied Lu Zhou for a moment before he asked, “When did you grow so eloquent, Brother Ji?”

Upon hearing this, Lu Zhou slowly rose to his feet and said with an indifferent expression on his face, “It’s time for you to leave.”

Liu Ge continued to say, “I’m only here to confirm if you’re at the Nine-leaf stage, Brother Ji. If you are... Please consider the greater picture and conceal your cultivation base, Brother Ji.”

Lu Zhou turned around and struck with his palm. A shining golden palm seal sailed toward Liu Ge.

Liu Ge crossed his arms and released a burst of Primal Qi from his old body to block the palm seal. “There’s much control in this palm seal. Your cultivation base has indeed improved greatly, Brother Ji.”

Lu Zhou had struck with the power corresponding to his cultivation base that was in the Two-leaf Nascent Divinity realm. Therefore, it was not surprising that Liu Ge was able to block the attack.

Undeterred, Liu Ge continued to say, “If anyone reaches the Nine-leaf stage, there will surely be a great disaster. Please be careful, Brother Ji.”

Lu Zhou found Liu Ge’s amusing. “What disaster? Will the heavens part and the ground sink? Or will the waters of the lakes, rivers, and seas drown the lands?”

“I don’t know what disasters lie beyond as well, but I believe in the mysterious elite...” Liu Ge replied, “There are many things that can’t be explained, but time will tell. Please believe me in regard to this matter, brother Ji.”

Lu Zhou recalled the coffin. He also thought about the diary-like entries in the secret tome that came along with the coffin. The Formation veins on the coffin and the armor the Crown Prince, Liu Zhi, gave

Lin Xin were proof of the mysterious elite's existence. Unfortunately, he was not a real Nine-leaf cultivator and could not verify that.

The shackles of heaven and earth were the great limit of their lifespans. Everything was numbered.

After pondering on this for a moment, Lu Zhou said, "The cultivation world will have the answer in two months." To be honest, he did not know how long it would take for someone to reach the Nine-leaf stage after severing their lotuses. He had casually come up with this answer after taking the cooldown period of the system into consideration. Who could say anything about his answer after the cooldown period was up?

"Two months?"

"The lotus-severing era has arrived... I won't be the only Nine-leaf cultivator," Lu Zhou said.

Liu Ge was taken aback by Lu Zhou's words. If severing one's lotus would help one to attain the Nine-leaf stage, nobody would be able to stop it. Even his son, Liu Gu, was attempting to attain the Nine-leaf stage as well. All things considered, what use was there for him to pester the Evil Sky Pavilion about this?

Chapter 540: Eight-leaf Ye Tianxin

With that thought in mind, Liu Ge said, "Before I came up the mountain, your disciple told me that you're going to cultivate in seclusion for five months. Now that three months have passed, there are two months left... I wonder if it'll be okay for me to visit the Evil Sky Pavilion again in two months?"

An idea appeared in Lu Zhou's mind when he heard Liu Ge's words. 'Although that's in line with what I want, why should I dance to your tune? You're nothing but an emperor who's past his prime...'

"Aren't you going to plead for your son now that you're here?" As soon as Lu Zhou saw Liu Ge, he had assumed that Liu Ge had come to plead on behalf of Liu Gu. After all, the Nether Sect was like the sun at high noon at this moment. The Divine Capital and the Imperial city were both threatened.

Liu Ge shook his head. "I've retired, and I won't meddle with the empire's affairs. Liu Gu is my son while Yu Zhenghai is your first disciple. Just as well. The old will face the old, and we'll let the young ones face each other."

Lu Zhou glanced at the boxes left by the Imperial bodyguards that were sitting behind Liu Ge's feet. Although the veins on the boxes were not clear, he could still tell they were the same as the ones on the armor. His eyes brightened. "Just as well. I'll see you in two months." In other words, he wanted Liu Ge to bring the boxes as well.

The Nine-leaf cultivator who was in the coffin and the diary that was filled with advice had piqued Lu Zhou's curiosity. He did not know where his memory crystal was, and since the crystal contained his memories about the Nine-leaf stage, who knew if Ji Tiandao had dealings with the mysterious elite in the past? How could he let such a clue slip past his fingers?

Unfortunately, the four elders of the Evil Sky Pavilion had severed their lotuses and were re-cultivating. Hence, they could not defeat Su Sheng and Gu Yiran.

Lu Zhou was also meditating on the Earth Scroll. Before he could unlock the next power, his meditation did not seem to add to the Human Scroll's extraordinary power. The other functions of the system were practically locked.

"Alright! I hope you'll keep this promise, Brother Ji," Lu Ge replied.

Lu Zhou said, "Liu Ge, I'll give you a piece of advice."

"What is it, Brother Ji?"

"Don't think too highly of yourself." After saying this, Lu Zhou turned around and said loudly, "See our guests out!"

After that, Mingshi Yin escorted the trio down the mountain. He said, "I told you that my master was cultivating in seclusion and this would be a waste of time."

Lu Ge, Su Sheng, Gu Yiran, and several imperial bodyguards exited the barrier.

"It's not a complete waste. I've already achieved my goal of meeting your master and telling him about my thoughts," Liu Ge said.

Mingshi Yin looked at Liu Ge, speechless. 'He's great at consoling himself!' He did not respond to Liu Ge and flew back to the Evil Sky Pavilion.

Once Mingshi Yin was out of sight, Su Sheng spat out a mouthful of blood. Sweat broke out on his face.

Liu Ge frowned slightly, "Nine-leaf?"

Su Sheng tapped his meridian points and said, "I can't be sure, but that Abandon Wisdom could have destroyed the world."

Gu Yiran asked in confusion, "Why do you suspect he's not a Nine-leaf cultivator, Your Majesty?"

The rumors being spread in the cultivation world said that the Evil Sky Pavilion's Patriarch, Ji Tiandao, was a Nine-leaf cultivator. Liu Ge was the only one who did not believe this.

With his hands on his back, Liu Ge said, "I said the Nine-leaf stage will bring forth disaster... Since there's no disaster as of now, I don't think anyone has attained the Nine-leaf stage."

"A fake Nine-leaf cultivator?" Su Sheng appeared frightened. "But his great limit is already up, and he's still alive! How can we explain that?"

Gu Yiran said, "His Majesty means to say that Old Villain Ji is somewhere between the Eight-leaf and Nine-leaf stage, is that correct?"

Liu Ge smiled meaningfully. "I'll wait for two months... Whether he's real or not, I'll make it clear to the world."

"Your Majesty, are you going to fight a Nine-leaf cultivator?"

Liu Ge waved his hand. The Imperial bodyguards stepped forward.

They did not open the boxes that were brought here.

Su Sheng speculated out loud, "Could it be that there are treasures in there that can detect and destroy a Nine-leaf cultivator?" A shocked expression appeared on his face as he continued to say, "If that's the case, why didn't you do something back then, Your Majesty? Why did Old Villain Ji agree to the two-month timeline instead of three or four months?"

"Su Sheng." Liu Ge suddenly stopped walking.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"You talk too much." Liu Ge's voice was deep.

"Forgive me, Your Majesty!" As he bowed, Su Sheng shuddered slightly. He no longer dared to speak.

Meanwhile, Gu Yiran followed behind them silently.

...

A month passed by in just a blink of an eye.

In the unnamed abyss in the Moonlight Woodlands, a white figure broke the lake's surface and flew into the air.

When the figure was in the sky, a surge of energy dried up the moisture in her hair and on her body.

Ye Tianxin hovered in the air as she looked at Cheng Huang that was lying in the distance. She called out with a smile on her face, "Little Huang!"

Cheng Huang ignored her.

"You're mad? Come on, Little Huang... Protect me."

Cheng Huang looked up. Its huge eyeballs rolled as it looked at Ye Tianxin in the air. As it turned and swept its tail out, it stirred up a gust of wind.

Ye Tianxin had to rise higher in the sky. She said, "You're really petty!"

Whizz!

She summoned her avatar. She looked at the seven shining leaves spinning around her Golden Lotus. In the past, she would never dare to dream of this. She had reached the Seven-leaf stage in half a year and was now attempting the Eight-leaf stage.

She looked down at the mystical lake. Although she did not know why, she was certain there was something special about the lake's water. It contained some unique power that helped her cultivation base to improve by leaps and bounds. She had been cultivating in the lake all this while without taking a single step away from it.

Cheng Huang had watched over her the entire time and did not leave her.

As time went by, Ye Tianxin had grown accustomed to this place. She had also gotten familiar with Cheng Huang.

Cheng Huang looked over when she summoned her avatar again.

Ye Tianxin said with a smile, "Don't blink. Eight-leaf!"

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

Rings of energy descended from the top toward the Golden Lotus. This continued for two hours, but a new leaf did not appear. However, Ye Tianxin was extremely patient and tenacious as she kept at it. Perhaps it was due to her long stay in the abyss, she did not long for the outside world. Hence, she was not in a hurry to reach the Eight-leaf stage.

The energy rings continued to descend.

It was precisely because of her calm disposition that the leaf-sprouting process was smooth.

The Eight-leaf stage was the highest point attainable in the human cultivation world.

After four hours had passed, she heard a crisp sound.

The eighth leaf had finally sprouted on her Golden Lotus. Her avatar increased in size immediately and became 100-foot tall. Her Eight-leaf Golden Lotus shone with a golden light.

Ye Tianxin widened her eyes as she leaped with joy and exclaimed, "Little Huang, I'm an Eight-leaf cultivator now!"

Cheng Huang howled, as though it was congratulating her on her achievement.

Ye Tianxin looked at the eight leaves on her Golden Lotus... Everything seemed like a dream to her.

She blinked her big eyes as she looked at the eight leaves. At the same time, thoughts of returning to the outside world appeared in her mind. It was inevitable that she would think about returning to Great Yan now that she had sufficient strength.

Ye Tianxin flew into her avatar before she rose higher in the sky. In just a blink of an eye, she was 100 meters up in the air. She looked around herself and could not see the end. When she sensed her newly gained power, she could hardly suppress her joy. She cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted.

The soundwave rolled out and caused vicious beasts to take to the air.

Except for a few specific beasts, the Eight-leaf Ye Tianxin no longer feared the vicious beasts. Indeed, her 100-foot avatar deterred many beasts from attacking her.

Ye Tianxin flew in the direction of the cliff wall. She looked up at the space above the abyss.

At this moment, Cheng Huang got up and ran over. When it reached her side, it sat down obediently. Although it was sitting, it was still as tall she was.

Ye Tianxin said, "Little Huang, I'm going to leave the abyss now..."

Cheng Huang glanced at the lake. It neither nodded nor shook its head.

She wondered what it was thinking about. Ye Tianxin speculated out loud, "You want me to attempt the Nine-leaf stage?"

Cheng Huang did not move.

“Are you crazy? It’s not that easy to reach the Nine-leaf stage. I’m happy with being an Eight-leaf cultivator.”

Cheng Huang growled.

Unfortunately, Ye Tianxin could not understand what it was trying to convey.

“Let’s go... Up we go.” Ye Tianxin flew onto Cheng Huang’s broad back.

Cheng Huang pushed with its four paws. Like a fired arrow, it shot through the sea of clouds and mist.