

GREAT SAGE 461

Chapter 461 - The Past is Difficult to Forget

Fu Qingjin, if it weren't for you, why would I have drunken, drunken...

Who's Fu Qingjin? What did I drink?

Clatter!

"Fuck this sh*t!" Li Qingshan finished off all the tea. He smashed the teapot on the ground, tossed the willow branch aside, and strode off towards the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

"Fu Qingjin, get your ass out here!"

Even though I have no idea who you are!

.....

They had requested all Foundation Establishment cultivators to attend the meeting in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain this time, but it clearly was not the case.

In the academy, within a residence of the school of Painting.

Dismissing all his uniformed disciples, Chu Shidao propped himself up on the bed and stood up. He arrived beside the window and gazed at the brilliant spring scenery outside. The glistening water flickered between the willow leaves.

His eyes began to glisten too. I really don't want to die!

Having cultivated his entire life, his reason and the thing he pursued was still about a single word, longevity, because if he lived, there would be hope, and everything before him right now would be his.

He forced himself to turn away. He took out a painting from his bosom carefully and unfurled it slowly.

The person in the painting currently stared at him with her pitch-black, inky eyes. Her cyan dress and her rouge lips had been painted by him in the past, stroke by stroke, but looking at it again, she no longer resembled the her of the past anymore.

"A'Yan, I'm hungry."

As soon as Chu Shidao said that, a gust of fragrance hit his face. It was not the fragrance of rouge, but the fragrance of ink.

"You always shove me into your bosom. You're going to dry out the pigments."

A woman emerged from the painting and snatched the scroll from Chu Shidao's hand, hanging it up on a wall properly.

As if she had failed to notice the aura of death gradually growing heavier on Chu Shidao's face, she touched her skin in the mirror and made her way to the kitchen at the back without even asking what he wanted to eat. A while later, the smell of fire and smoke arrived, followed by the smell of food.

Chu Shidao leaned against the table and sat down. He took out a gamboge jug of alcohol and set it on the table. Without much hesitation, he opened the lid and tipped in the golden fluid he had obtained from Ru Xin.

Before long, A'Yan served up the dishes. Chu Shidao took a bite. "It's salty."

"If you don't want to eat it, then don't eat it," A'Yan said in exasperation.

The alcohol was poured into two cups. With a gentle clink in their hands, they each drank the alcohol and remained silent.

There was not any awkwardness from the silence. Having spent over a century together, they had already said everything that they wanted to say to one another. Their eyes just had to meet, and they felt no need to speak anymore.

"Are you hiding something from me?" A'Yan stared at Chu Shidao with some suspicion. Today, there was something obscured in his eyes, which she struggled to read.

"What can I hide from you?" Chu Shidao lifted up the cup again with a smile.

Before long, the jug of alcohol was emptied.

"This alcohol is so strange. Why do I feel tipsy?" A'Yan propped up her forehead. Her head felt rather heavy.

"I feel a little tipsy too." Chu Shidao smiled. The matters of the past rose up like smoke, like dust, before all dispersing. Dispersing with it was the final shred of life that remained in him.

With a gentle clank, the cups and dishes on the table jolted together. Chu Shidao leaned on the table, without moving at all. He had passed away all of a sudden.

With a clatter, A'Yan stood up abruptly and pushed back her chair. "Hmm? W- who are you?"

Before her sorrow could even fill her, it had turned into confusion. The harder she thought, the harder she tried to grasp at something, the more it would all just turn into wisps of clouds in her hands.

Her face heated up for some reason. She touched her cheek. It was already moist. Tears flowed endlessly.

The spring scenery outside the window seemed even more brilliant.

.....

Just as everyone's attention was drawn away by the moon demon in the Watermirror disc, Ru Xin paid no attention to the arrival of this terrifying daemon at all. Instead, she asked in concern, "Are you fine?"

When Li Qingshan faced Fu Qingjin, he seemed extremely calm, but Ru Xin could sense his nervousness. This had nothing to do with her sharp wit. Li Qingshan's acting had been flawless.

Perhaps they had achieved a tacit understanding? Ru Xin snorted in contempt. What benefit would come from achieving a tacit understanding with him? But at the same time, she could not help but worry for him too. She immediately thought of the existence of Water of Oblivion.

She had never drunk the Water of Oblivion before. Instead, she had found a few regular people. Enticed by a great sum of money, no one would be interested in their memories. As a matter of fact, they had never even imagined they would actually possess something worth so much silver. As a result, they sold it without the slightest hesitation.

The effects seemed decent. Her Water of Oblivion was obviously nowhere near as potent as granny Meng's Soup of Forgetfulness, which could wash away everything in a person's memory. Otherwise, she would have never offered it to Li Qingshan.

Its effects were basically the opposite to the Water of Recollection. The Water of Recollection allowed the consumer to remember whatever they wanted to remember, while the Water of Oblivion made the consumer forget whatever they wanted to remember. During the refinement process, she had referred to the formula for the Water of Recollection and chosen many medicines with opposite effects before tweaking it further.

It was exactly because of this that ensured she would remain the same as before while removing her memories of Chu Shidao painting her.

The xiezhi divine beast was known for being able to discern lies, but it could only rely on a person's conscience to see through lies. If the very mind itself had forgotten, even the xiezhi was unable to distinguish anything.

"I seem fine, don't I?" Li Qingshan stared at Ru Xin. There was not even a hint of unfamiliarity in his eyes.

"You still remember me?" Ru Xin said in surprise. He should be forgetting whatever he recalled right now.

"No matter how I forget, I won't be able to forget you!" Li Qingshan shook his head, as if he was resisting the effects of the Water of Oblivion desperately, wanting to carve the woman before him into his head so that he could never forget her.

Ru Xin's heart began to thump, while her cheeks became slightly flushed.

"You still owe me a lot of pills!"

However, Li Qingshan's next words left Ru Xin slightly stunned. Smiling like she always did, she said, "Didn't you give up the remaining pills for the Water of Oblivion?"

"Since when!?"

"Oh my, you've forgotten."

"You better stop trying to trick me! How can I forget? Give me some Water of Recollection. That's the cure!"

Li Qingshan extended his hand. Although it was unable to fool the mystical powers of the xiezhi, controlling his thoughts and suppressing the power of the Water of Oblivion was not particularly difficult with the spirit turtle.

But with that, his head felt rather sluggish, so he asked the person behind it all for the cure.

Ru Xin frowned. "If you're so capable, why don't you just recall it?"

Li Qingshan was slightly surprised. "You're angry?"

"Huh?" Ru Xin returned to her senses, but she discovered that she did feel a little peeved.

Li Qingshan smiled mischievously. "Looks like I really do need to discuss this with Qiongzhi."

"Discuss what?"

"It's nothing strange for a man to have multiple wives and concubines, right?" Li Qingshan snickered. Back then, he had been quite ambitious in this respect. Thinking about how even a bastard Chu Tian could swagger around with multiple women in his embrace, he did not seem to find he was asking for too much.

This thought sprang up and grew like weeds. When he looked at Ru Xin again, he looked at her slightly differently.

The two of them had been communicating secretly the entire time, just in case someone noticed something was amiss. They had both been staring ahead, communicating from the corner of their eyes.

However, when she heard that, Ru Xin turned over, smiled sweetly, and riled up her spiritual qi, bellowing into Li Qingshan's ears thunderously, "You better keep fucking dreaming!"

"I've won!" Li Qingshan smiled silently. His lips moved, purposefully mouthing that.

Whenever they were together, they constantly joked with one another, such that they would claim victory whenever the other lost their calm. As for how serious these jokes would become, even Li Qingshan himself was unable to put his thumb over it.

However, he would always have a very easy time when he was with Ru Xin. Ru Xin did not probe into the fact that he needed to drink the Water of Oblivion to fool Fu Qingjin, but she must have learnt some secrets about him, such as how he had seen the Soaring Dragon Elder, or even the fact that the Soaring Dragon Elder's sumeru ring was on him.

However, he was not worried at all, placing a strange form of trust in her. Seeing how Ru Xin was still grumpy, Li Qingshan smiled. "If you want to keep the pills, then keep them! It's not like there's a lot left. It's just a bottle of medicinal water. It's nowhere near enough for me to forget about you. It's not like you're granny Meng!"

Who knew what Ru Xin felt when she heard that. Suddenly, she returned to her senses. It's not like I'm granny Meng... Seems like the Water of Oblivion isn't particularly effective on cultivators. Surely master Chu will be fine, right? She's just a painting after all.

.....

"Master!"

Having sensed the disappearance of Chu Shidao's aura, the disciples of the school of Painting could no longer care about the rules anymore. They barged into the residence and cried out before all shedding tears endlessly. They sobbed painfully.

They then saw their “mistress” standing in front of the dining table at a complete loss. Her face was covered with tears, but she did not seem particularly sad. She seemed extremely confused. As a result, they all felt extremely displeased. Master has lost his mind. Is a painting like this really worth his entire lifetime of efforts?

No one paid any attention to her either. The group of people carefully laid Chu Shidao on the bed and draped a white cloth over him, carrying him off to the main hall for now. They wanted to wait until his direct disciple Chu Danqing returned before making any decisions.

Her hand remained outstretched in the air, with no one around her anymore, but she had no idea what to do. She felt like she had returned to a century ago, when she had first been painted.

Painted!

She suddenly turned around and gazed at the blank canvas on the wall. She stared at the corner of the canvas, at the faded, dark-red seal. She read the two words “Chu Shidao” again and again.

Within a bamboo loft, a young man frowned. Although he was very displeased with this clumsy piece of work he had created, he still stamped his seal into the corner enthusiastically.

That was their first meeting.

Time flowed past like water, and her memories that had dispersed like dust, like smoke, gathered together once more. The first time she spoke with him, the first time she cooked for him, the first time she argued with him, as she had purposefully destroyed a newly-painted beauty of his. Who told him to stare at it like he was head over heels?

A gentle smile gradually appeared in her eyes. A century passed in a hurry, like she had lived through it all once again. She suddenly smiled. “How... can I forget?” Then she cursed, “You old thing, you sure are bored enough.”

As she spoke and cursed, she walked into the blank canvas.

A disciple returned to collect Chu Shidao’s clothes and items, planning to wash up Chu Shidao and change him into new clothes once Chu Danqing returned, only to discover that “she” was no longer there anymore.

Looking around, he saw the painting on the wall. The beauty was no different from before, smiling gently, except her smile gradually blurred.

The disciple rubbed his eyes forcefully, doubting his eyes.

The beauty in the painting gradually melted away, turning into pigments of rouge and cyan and bleeding from the canvas.

In the blink of an eye, all the colours bled away, only leaving behind a blank canvas. A spring breeze entered the residence, rustling up the canvas. All that remained was the dark red seal in the corner, the same as before.

Chapter 462 - Arranging the Battle

“A daemon!” “Run!” “Daemons are coming!”

Among the screams, people scattered in all directions chaotically. The busy streets immediately became extremely desolated.

All that was left was a child, around eight or nine, sitting in the centre of the street, bawling out loudly. Countless pairs of eyes looked over from the two sides of the streets, through cracks in doors and windows. All of them trembled in fright. As they watched the daemon approach the child, they all felt like the child was done for.

As they imagined the horrific sight that was about to unfold, many of them could not help but close their eyes.

In the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, the cultivators saw this through the Watermirror disc too. It was already too late for them to save him.

The child raised his head and saw the figure strolling over. He became stunned from fear before erupting in tears. Normally, his mother said daemons would eat him whenever he was mischievous, so his fear for daemons had been deeply ingrained within him since young. Only a single thought remained in his head, I’m really going to be eaten!

“Kiddo, you’re blocking the great Northmoon’s path! Why don’t you piss off?” Li Qingshan bared his teeth. The child quivered before scampering off to the side of the street. Hearing a resonant laughter from behind, he could not help but look back, but the figure had already travelled away. His scarlet hair drifted about, like a flickering bundle of fire.

Daemons did not seem as terrifying as his mother described them to be.

In the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, the Foundation Establishment cultivators were all mildly surprised. He had actually done nothing? It must have been because regular people were like ants in his eyes, so he was reluctant to stoop to their level! However, if he was so reluctant to stoop to their level, why did he speak to him instead?

Their fear of the moon demon was deeply ingrained because the moon demon had killed a large number of Foundation Establishment cultivators, making him the existence that threatened them the most.

Liu Zhangqing was relieved. As it seemed, the moon demon had no plans on slaughtering the city. With further thought, he recalled that the moon demon had never been like the rock demon or the blood demon, who liked to massacre people. As a matter of fact, he had never even caused any problems for the Academy of the Hundred Schools, not even the slightest inconvenience.

Wang Pushi also recalled how he only killed the Lone Grave Elder and the Golden Pheasant Elder on the Green Vine mountain back then, letting the disciples of the Green Vine mountain escape with their lives intact. He was not a daemon that killed blindly.

In other words, he has been specially targeting Fu Qingjin and the Daemon Suppression alliance with everything he has done. This is clearly just for counter-attacking and revenge!

The people of the academy all thought of this, and suddenly, the moon demon no longer seemed so despicable anymore. If the Daemon Suppression alliance had not been so aggressive, the situation would have never deteriorated to its current state.

Fu Qingjin said in thought, "Northmoon, oh Northmoon. You really are different from regular daemons!"

Qiu Haitang's pink lips curled up slightly, with the same comfort as seeing an acquaintance of the past again. She had not been wrong. Behind his terrifying infamy was a simple and passionate heart, which made him seem approachable. She actually could not help but worry for him as she watched him enter the belly of the beast.

Ru Xin found the moon demon's confusion expression rather familiar. Looking at Li Qingshan beside her, her eyebrows furrowed slightly. She was stern.

The effects of the Water of Oblivion gradually faded away, so his mirror clone had obviously returned to his senses at the same time too.

A clone from the Watermirror's Image was a reflection of his main body. No matter what Li Qingshan's main body went through, it would be reflected in his clone.

Raising his head, the Parlour of Clouds and Rain had already arrived before him.

Li Qingshan smacked his forehead and thought, "I've already gotten out of the situation, so why'd I still make my clone come here?"

He wanted to turn around and leave, but it was already too late. He currently stood at a crossroad, and figures emerged from the streets in all directions. On the towering structures in the surroundings, resentful gazes landed on him one by one.

Basically all the Foundation Establishment cultivators of the Clear River prefecture were there, trapping him in an encirclement.

Li Qingshan was obviously among them too. He stared at the moon demon coldly without the slightest hint of fear, as if he was ready to call out, "Die, moon demon!" at any time and rush over for a battle to the death with this daemon who had shaken up the entire prefecture.

Facing almost a hundred cultivators alone, the moon demon was fearless. A murderous aura rushed into the air, circling above the city, which made everyone tense up.

The formation activated. A barrier of light enveloped the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, protecting the Qi Practitioners in there. The light twisted the colours of the sky, enveloping the entire city.

The Qi Practitioners in the parlour all eased up, and some of the Qi Practitioners even became excited, standing by the window and bellowing through the formation, "The moon demon has already become a sitting duck! He's dead for sure!" "Kill this daemon! For revenge!"

However, most of the Qi Practitioners just stared at this terrifying daemon of the legends silently, "So this is the moon demon!" They looked down on the Qi Practitioners who bellowed out, "Why don't you go out and yell at him?"

The Foundation Establishment cultivators all furrowed their eyebrows in thought. Why had the moon demon come? Where were the night roamers? They all believed the moon demon was not stupid enough to throw himself into the enemy's net, but little did they know it was all because the moon demon had a little too much to drink, even though he had not drunk alcohol!

"Hahahahahaha!" Mad laughter filled the sky. Li Qingshan placed his hands on his waist and swayed back and forth from laughter. Even his molars were visible.

This was a small mistake on his behalf, but he would be losing a clone at most. It would be nothing.

There were many ingenious clone techniques in the world. Their clones would be extremely flexible and could share the main body's strength, but the main body would often be affected when the clone was injured, or the clone might even develop self-consciousness and break away from the main body.

However, there was no need for Li Qingshan to worry at all with the Watermirror's Image. Even if the flower in the mirror or the moon in the water shattered, the actual flower or moon would be completely unaffected.

If the flower did not move and the moon stayed put, the mirror image would not change either. It was a little troublesome when it came to control, but after reaching the fourth layer of the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression and developing an intricate mind, this problem had basically been dealt with.

Not only did the laughter shut up the bellowing Qi Practitioners, but even the Foundation Establishment cultivators became more afraid to move recklessly. If he did not have something to rely on, the moon demon would have never behaved like this.

Ru Xin stood near Li Qingshan and bore a serious expression on her face for once, but she asked him secretly, "Does this moon demon have issues?"

You're the one with issues! Your whole family has issues!

Li Qingshan raised an eyebrow and said seriously, "That's something women can't understand. The moon demon possesses a wild, brutal aura of valiance. Even enemies can not help but be impressed!"

"Really? I don't feel it at all!" Ru Xin rubbed her chin before studying the moon demon again. Li Qingshan's face heated up slightly.

The moon demon's laughter came to a sudden halt. He said sternly, "Fu Qingjin, I'm bold enough to come, yet you're not bold enough to meet with me?"

When all the Foundation Establishment cultivators appeared, Fu Qingjin had instead vanished.

With a flash of green light, Fu Qingjin appeared behind the moon demon, standing sideways. "You're just a clone, so are you worth meeting? Northmoon, if you have something you want to say, go on ahead!"

Li Qingshan did not look back at Fu Qingjin. He thought very hard just what he was supposed to say. Surely he could not say, I'm just passing by. I don't actually have any matters here, so you do you.

Ru Xin's scornful voice rang out in his ears again, "What valiance? If I had a clone, I'd be bold enough to do the same." Li Qingshan became so infuriated that he was tempted to directly transform, capture this bastard, and give her a thorough spanking.

He thought of something. Perhaps this is a chance!

The moon demon said, "Fu Qingjin, I've heard since a long time ago that you want to fight me to the death. I've waited all this time, but what? You've fallen silent. Turns out you're just scheming and coming up with traps with this group of people, leaving me with nothing better to do."

"Where's your main body? I can clash with you right now." Fu Qingjin pressed against his sword. His gaze was sharp, no longer possessing even a hint of laziness, like a drawn sword.

"Are you looking for a chaotic battle? As well as massacring the weaker people on your side? That's completely tasteless. I only want to kill you. I only want to destroy your Daemon Suppression alliance!"

It's true! Liu Zhangqing thought, Only if all demons were as reasonable as this moon demon.

The moon demon said, "The fifth of the fifth month, the Boundless mountains, just you and me, a battle to the death!"

Everyone looked at one another. A great battle was clearly on the brink of erupting, yet the moon demon had instead sent over his clone to arrange a battle. The timing was a little too strange.

"What about this battle?" Fu Qingjin stroked his hilt gently, contemplating what Northmoon was trying to say.

"We won't participate, just in case it undermines the atmosphere of the deathmatch."

Li Qingshan finally expressed his true intentions, which was to avoid this battle!

Because he had to participate in the battle under the identity of "Li Qingshan", "Northmoon" would not be able to participate. Although he could fool everybody with his clone, he would give himself away as soon as he began fighting. He definitely would not be Fu Qingjin's opponent.

The circumstances were very disadvantageous to him, so he came up with this idea. He used the prearranged battle to prevent Fu Qingjin from fighting, and he would also have a reason that could appease the Spider Queen. It was basically perfect.

"What about your clone?" Fu Qingjin studied him.

"My clone obviously won't participate in this battle either."

"Very good! I agree!" Fu Qingjin said decisively, but he had already come up with his own plans inside.

The threat that Northmoon posed was tremendous. Not only did it come from his own strength, but it also came from the night roamers he led. Without Northmoon as a commander, it was very likely for the night roamers to remain in a state of disunity, which would benefit them greatly. It might even have a direct influence over the outcome of this battle.

After reaching this agreement, Fu Qingjin was extremely magnanimous. He made Liu Zhangqing open the formation and let the moon demon's clone leave.

Li Qingshan snickered. Actually, I'm still participating in this battle!

"Fellow Fu, this isn't a scheme by the daemons, right?"

The cultivators returned to the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, and Liu Zhangqing asked in worry.

"Please use the Technique of Aura Observation to watch over any movements across the entire prefecture, sir Liu. I will keep watch in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. I'll enter battle the moment he appears."

Fu Qingjin pondered to himself. He could not fight, but he could give a few talismans and pills to the cultivators of the Daemon Suppression alliance he trusted. The items all came from the Sword Collection palace, so they were extremely powerful. They would definitely be able to deal a heavy blow to the daemons.

Li Qingshan's clone returned to his dwelling underground. The matriarchs had all been gathered already, ready to set off at any time.

"The humans have already learnt about the Spider Queen's orders. They're currently making preparations in Clear River city. This battle probably won't be as easy as last time."

Li Qingshan's words left everyone surprised. Before they had even digested this information, he continued, "I won't be participating in this battle! You will do as Ye Liusu orders! Her orders are my orders!"

Chapter 463 - The Son of Heaven's Aura Observation, the Battle Begins

"Master!?"

Ye Liusu and the others were all confused. They were on the brink of battle, so how could he not participate as the force they relied on the most?

"I've agreed to a battle with Fu Qingjin. We're fighting on the fifth of the fifth month. Before this, I won't partake in any battles in order to condition myself. Fu Qingjin will do the same. You'll have to rely on yourselves for this battle. The spoils you receive will obviously all go to you."

Only then did everyone understand the reason. They were filled with both joy and worry as they became uncertain as for how to react.

Large-scale, open conflict was different from ambushes and assassinations. Facing human cultivators in a direct confrontation obviously came with extremely great risk. However, the benefits they would receive from each human cultivator they killed was just as tempting.

After telling them that, Li Qingshan turned his back on the night roamers and returned to his dwelling, only to see Milliped curled up on the stone bed. Winter had clearly passed already, yet this guy was still hibernating. He was having the time of his life by sleeping every day.

Li Qingshan's tense mind eased up. He smiled. "Even if you cultivate for another few centuries, it won't make a difference if you continue like this. No wonder you're so simple." He patted Milliped's tough carapace on his head as he thought to himself, I have to find a suitable daemon core for you this time.

Before long, Ye Liusu and Ye Liubo arrived together. Li Qingshan asked, “You’re done discussing?”

“Yes. We’re still going to focus on attacking spiritual stone mines. Killing regular people and becoming enemies with the Great Xia empire brings no benefit at all.”

“As long as you understand that.” Li Qingshan smiled. He did not want to run into his subordinates on the battlefield either.

“However, I’m just afraid they won’t submit to me.” A sliver of worry appeared on Ye Liusu’s delicate face. She paled in comparison to them when it came to both strength and seniority. If he were present, then even the matriarchs would not act up, but if he were not there, it would be difficult to say.

“That’ll be up to you then.”

Li Qingshan was indifferent. The only people he was somewhat attached to among the night roamers were the two standing right before him, or more accurately, it was just Ye Liubo alone.

Ye Liusu was a very impressive subordinate, but her loyalty to him would never surpass her loyalty to her ideals. As a matter of fact, Li Qingshan even suspected her to be Fu Qingjin’s informer.

Among all the night roamers, she was probably the one who had the most contact with human cultivators, and she possessed such a good understanding about the news above ground. However, without any proper evidence and without suffering from any actual evidence, Li Qingshan could not be bothered with looking into this.

If Ye Liusu died, Li Qingshan would feel pity and a little sadness, but he would not be too sorrowful. He would just be losing a capable subordinate. However, Ye Liubo was different.

“Liubo, if you don’t want to go, you can just stay back!” Li Qingshan looked at Ye Liubo, and his gaze became much softer.

Both Ye Liubo’s strength and brains were nowhere close to her elder sister’s, but her loyalty towards him was unmatched. She had even tried sacrificing herself for him in the past. As a result, he spoiled her very much. Even if he would be questioned, he would still want her to remain somewhere safe.

“Thank you, master, but I want to lend my elder sister a hand.” Ye Liubo was extremely touched, but after a moment of hesitation, that was still what she decided on.

“As you wish, but do be careful. Take these talismans to protect yourself. They aren’t for fighting, so don’t use them without good reason.” Li Qingshan took out a few scarlet talismans and handed them to Ye Liubo.

“Master,” Ye Liubo murmured before directly throwing herself into Li Qingshan’s arms.

“Liusu, take good care of her.” Li Qingshan patted Ye Liubo’s plump bottom.

“I will.” Ye Liusu replied. She actually felt slightly envious of this affection he showed, and she even felt a hint of jealousy that she refused to admit.

With the Spider Queen’s order, the cold, desolate underground seemed to become the churning lava. It gradually began to rise up and surge.

Under Bloodshadow and Dragonsnail's lead, basically every daemon joined in on this operation. They were prepared for a massacre above ground.

At the same time, in Clear River city.

The moon demon had paid a visit, but the meeting still came to a proper end.

The first order they issued together was not directed towards daemons. Instead, it was directed to the handful of clans and sects that had not even joined the alliance. Some of these Foundation Establishment cultivators had constantly been maneuvering around between the two sides, remaining uninvolved with the entire matter.

"These orders cannot be disobeyed. You have one day to report to the prefectural city, or your sects and clans will be destroyed! The world will no longer tolerate your existence!"

The machines of war assembled by all the cultivators in the Clear River prefecture sprang alive, ready to enter battle.

Liu Zhangqing returned to his government office. He washed up and changed his clothes, changing out of the confucian robes he often wore into his robes as an official that he rarely wore. He took out his official's seal bestowed to him by the empire.

On a large square in front of the office, the mohist disciples busied about, taking out various machines and constructing a tower as quickly as possible.

When Liu Zhangqing emerged from his office, the tower had already reached over three hundred meters tall, plunging into the clouds. Raising his head and looking up, it seemed to tilt, as if it could collapse at any time.

He took in a deep breath and made his way towards the tower. Step by step, he climbed to the platform on the very top. The entire prefectural city sat below his feet as a group of birds flew past him.

Liu Zhangqing cast his gaze to a place even further away. The Divine Talisman of Great Virtue within him suddenly shone with resplendent light. He seemed to become a burning torch as his eyes suddenly erupted with light.

The landscape vanished, turning into blurry mist. The city below his feet vanished, turning into wisp-like smoke and rising straight up into the air like a beacon.

The beacon of smoke became smaller and smaller. Liu Zhangqing felt like his soul was rising towards the endless sky. Even more beacons of smoke rose up in the horizon, appearing in his view. They were of various different colours and sizes, but none of them were as large as the beacon of smoke that Clear River city had become.

Finally, Liu Zhangqing spotted thousands of beacons, forming a rough outline of the entire prefecture.

Every single beacon represented a city, village, or settlement where humans gathered.

The Fortune Viewing technique was a secret technique that had existed since ancient times. Not only was it a technique for sensing and investigation, but it also had an element of divination. It could see the fortunes of people, and it had almost become a lost technique to this day.

What Liu Zhangqing used was not this Fortune Viewing technique, or he would have never been able to see all fifteen hundred kilometers of the Clear River prefecture. Instead, he used the renowned “Son of Heaven’s Technique of Aura Observation”.

When the founding emperor founded the Great Xia empire, becoming revered as the son of heaven and leading humanity to prosperity, he was also tasked with the responsibility of governing his citizens. However, with the nine provinces stretching several hundred thousand kilometers in all directions, governance was anything but easy, so he created this “Son of Heaven’s Technique of Aura Observation”. He could see far as long as he had a high vantage point, allowing him to see the situation of the nine provinces.

The “aura” referred to the aura of the living, which was also the aura of humanity.

If the many nobles and lords allowed kind heartedness and justice to spread, if they administered and governed harmoniously, then humanity would prosper, and this “aura” would strengthen, which was what they wanted.

If they mismanaged their citizens and led them to poverty, then this “aura” would decline as a result. The son of heaven would then summon his subjects from their various lands to reprimand and punish them.

With Liu Zhangqing’s identity, he would obviously never claim to be the son of heaven. He could not even call it the “Lord’s Technique of Aura Observation.” It was only a “Prefect’s Technique of Aura Observation”.

However, only Liu Zhangqing who had been recognised as the prefect by the empire could use this technique, and all he could do was observe the prefecture. However, it followed the same principle as the “Son of Heaven’s Technique of Aura Observation”.

He had no need to visit the various lands to check on the various district magistrates. All he had to do was perform a single, routine aura observation every year from the prefectural city, and he would be able to punish or reward the district magistrates accordingly.

Liu Zhangqing cast his gaze out and could not help but sigh. The “aura” for basically everywhere was in decline. Resentment was surging with the aura of many places directly vanishing, which represented it was no longer occupied by humans.

If it were not for the war, the Marquis of Ruyi only needed a single glance from a vantage point, and he would dismiss him from the position of prefect immediately.

He dismissed his thoughts and focused on observing the movements across the entire prefecture. He would be able to make a timely response no matter which city the daemons attacked.

After who knew how long, a beacon of smoke in the south-east direction shuddered and began to weaken. With each sliver that vanished, it represented the deaths of countless lives. The smoke was filled with a sensation of fear too.

Liu Zhangqing had familiarised himself with the human geography of the Clear River prefecture a long time ago. He immediately said, “Great Gold pass has daemons attacking!” Before he had even finished, a beacon of smoke in the north rapidly began to decline.

Before long, several dozen beacons began to tremble, covering all directions of the prefecture.

There was a saying that the wrath of the son of heaven could dye a thousand kilometers scarlet. The Spider Queen's order could not be defied. She was not joking when she said she wanted a hundred cities slaughtered.

Liu Zhangqing's heart sank. He reported a string of location names without stopping.

"Han Tieyi, Hua Chengzan, venture to Great Gold pass. Once you arrive, immediately report back on the daemons. If they're weak, kill them. If they're strong, retreat. Do not become entangled in battle."

Under the tall tower, Han Anjun also issued a string of orders, and Foundation Establishment cultivators rose up, rushing off in all directions. Regardless of their reputation, they could only serve as chess pieces now.

The people in the city had all locked their doors and windows.

On the square, the Qi Practitioners circled around the tower a few times outside, watching this unfold in shock. At a time like this, they did not even have the right to be used as chess pieces. However, as the flames of war spread, no one would be able to remain uninvolved.

The situations seemed severe, but it was just a probing process right now. They would mobilise their troops properly after understanding the direction of attack of the daemons.

In the beginning, Han Anjun would go into some detail with the instructions, but towards the end, he would only say a name and a location.

"Li Qingshan, Nine Rivers city." When he mentioned Li Qingshan's name, Han Anjun paused slightly and stared at him deeply.

Li Qingshan said nothing. He drew the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility and rode off on it, concealing himself.

It had finally begun.

.....

Near dusk in the wilderness that had been dyed red by the setting sun, a lonely antelope grazed on the grass with its head lowered below a small hill.

Perhaps because it was late spring, the delicious taste of the grass made it drop its guard. It had completely failed to notice a pair of orangey-yellow eyes staring at it from a bush nearby. Under the descending night, the eyes shone with a green glow.

The panther lowered itself even further to the ground, approaching the antelope silently. The antelope seemed to sense something and raised its head, but it was already too late. The panther's powerful body pounced out from the bush with lightning speed, landing on the antelope. Its canines plunged into its neck, making it take its last breath.

Just as the panther enjoyed the delicious food it had caught, there was a rumble, and even the ground shook slightly, followed by another rumble. It was getting closer. The panther sensed danger, but it was reluctant to abandon the prey it had just caught.

The setting sun near the horizon turned the hill into a glowing outline. Suddenly, a huge shadow passed over the hill, which shrouded out the setting sun and crushed the panther to pieces like a mountain.

Chapter 464 - The Chaos of War

Regardless of the angle, the black shadow was shaped like a huge egg, except with four limbs poking out, draping down from its colossal body. The surface of the egg was smooth and tough, as if it had been carefully polished. It seemed more like metal or rock than flesh and blood.

Only the connectors of the four limbs seemed slightly more organic, but they still resembled huge pipes woven together. Under the sunlight, it was even possible to make out the flow of fluids through them, except who knew whether it was blood or not.

It did not possess a distinct head. Two tiny specks of light shone coldly like its eyes. Overall, it seemed huge, but not clumsy. It was like a moving fortress, an extremely imposing sight to behold.

The rumbles came from its heavy footsteps. Stepping over the corpse of the panther, it continued towards the end of the wilderness. A lonely city stood there.

On the ground, a strange, uneven rock suddenly trembled. The surface of the rock split open, revealing a crystalline structure inside that turned into a huge eyeball the size of a cartwheel. It swiveled around and locked onto the huge egg monster that strode over.

The huge egg monster crossed over it without sensing anything at all.

A large crack appeared in the ground. It was a huge, gaping mouth filled with teeth. A colossal body erupted from the earth. It was a single-horned lizard over thirty meters long, which lunged towards the huge egg monster while spitting out with venomous fluid.

The huge egg monster raised its right arm and targeted the lizard with great accuracy with its palm, releasing a beam of light as thick as a water bucket. However, as it was close to its body, the egg monster was unable to adjust its arm to the most optimal angle.

The one-horned lizard twisted with great dexterity and brushed past the stream of light. Its toothy mouth bit down viciously on the huge egg monster's arm. It shook its head forcefully and ripped off the entire arm.

Dark red fluid sprayed far and wide. As if it could not feel pain, the huge egg monster punched the lizard's head with its left arm.

The two monsters engaged in a violent battle in the wilderness. There was no concept of good or evil. It was just a clash of primitive power.

The huge egg monster's eyes constantly flickered, but it did not produce a single roar or growl. It was like a tireless machine of war, but the disadvantage that came from losing an arm constantly grew. It gradually began to show signs of weakness.

The venomous fluid covered its entire body, eating away the surface and exposing the interior. There were no organs, but rapidly revolving gears and mechanisms.

The bulging chest was something akin to a compartment. Hao Pingyang sat in there with his eyes completely bloodshot. He bellowed out mindlessly, "Die!"

He was piloting this huge egg monster in battle. This was a newly-invented puppet of the school of Mohism. Combined with the methods of corpse refinement, it possessed power at Foundation Establishment, but it could operate independently like regular puppets.

Among the traditional puppet techniques of mohism, there were Foundation Establishment puppets, or even Golden Core and legendary Soul Nascence puppets. However, the corresponding strength was required to control these puppets. At the very least, they were beyond what Qi Practitioners could control.

However, these new models could be controlled by Qi Practitioners. Hao Pingyang basically played the role of the puppet's brain. He had come here for a mission, to slaughter daemons, but he never thought he would run into trouble right from the beginning and be ambushed by a daemon.

The lizard Daemon General pressed the puppet against the ground and sensed Hao Pingyang's existence. Its sharp claws constantly dug into the compartment, sending sparks and wooden shrapnel flying. Among the painful screeching, there was a hiss.

The lizard Daemon General ripped open the compartment, about to feast to its heart's content. The taste of human cultivators was just something else.

Hao Pingyang hugged the Yellow Dragon's Cannon of Devouring Light. With a furious roar, he launched a streak of light right into the lizard Daemon General's open mouth.

The lizard Daemon General's fragile mouth was injured, but it was not a particularly large wound. It only made it even more furious and vicious, biting towards Hao Pingyang.

A rancid smell rushed into his face. Hao Pingyang knew it was probably over for him here.

Suddenly, the lizard Daemon General seemed to sense something. It abandoned Hao Pingyang, and its two bulging eyes swiveled around, locking onto a region of space. A sword as black as ink suddenly flew over.

The lizard Daemon General sensed the danger the ink sword posed. A terrifying sword intent locked onto it and drew closer with lightning speed. At such a short range, it was unable to dodge.

It rapidly shrank and began to move faster, avoiding the ink sword with lightning speed and lunging towards the space. The person who launched the sneak attack was right there!

The Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility swept through the air in a semi-circular fashion, almost completely invisible. As if it had grasped the lizard Daemon General's movements, it slashed into its back with great precision. A sharp sword qi as terrifying as the ink sword then emerged.

The lizard Daemon General produced a horrific howl, and it was reduced to two pieces. However, it was not along its waist, but near its tail, as if the attack had not landed on its back at all.

This was its innate ability. No matter where it was injured, it could transfer it all to its tail, and as a lizard, it could regrow its tail. Sensing danger, it turned around and dove underground without the slightest hesitation. From the side, a strand of sword qi pierced its bulging eye and right through its head.

The ink sword that had flown over earlier had changed directions unknowingly.

Li Qingshan appeared. This Daemon General was truly crafty. If he had not refined the entire Cursive Sword Calligraphy and could not control the sword qi as he wished, it basically would have escaped.

If he did not possess these two strands of sword qi, it would be anything but easy for him to kill Daemon Generals with his cultivation at early Foundation Establishment if he could not transform either.

The Arts of the Boundless Ocean was an impressive cultivation method, but it lacked the power to kill in a single stroke. Even if he gained the upper hand and forced the Daemon General into dire straits, it only needed to blow up its daemon core, and all his efforts would still end up being in vain.

Li Qingshan stowed away the entire lizard into his hundred treasures pouch and went out of his way to inspect the daemon core. He was overjoyed. The daemon core had a poisonous affinity. He had finally found a daemon core that Milliped could use.

“Qingshan!” Hao Pingyang crawled out from the puppet in surprise and joy. He was in a rather horrible shape having just escaped death.

“Long time no see.” Li Qingshan looked back and smiled.

The two of them talked for a while in the remains of the puppet. Only then did Hao Pingyang learn that Li Qingshan had not appeared here out of coincidence. Instead, he had been sent to assist him.

These new puppet models had only been introduced to battle recently, so no one was particularly confident in them. Their performance in actual battle was indeed worse than regular Foundation Establishment puppets.

This was not the first time Li Qingshan had done something like this either.

The setting sun gradually sank below the horizon. The stars above the wilderness seemed particularly resplendent.

“Let’s go. I’ll accompany you back to the academy...” Before Li Qingshan had even finished, the jade tablet on his waist flashed. Unlike the Scarlet Wolf tablet, it was an item for communication allocated to every single cultivator.

Han Anjun’s cold voice rang out from there. “Li Qingshan, what’s the situation?”

“I killed a Daemon General. The puppet has been damaged, but Hao Pingyang’s fine.”

“Go to the banks of Fangting river a hundred and fifty kilometers south-west to provide assistance.” Han Anjun did not praise him at all, directly issuing an order.

“Alright, I’ll go soon.”

“Not soon, immediately!”

Li Qingshan shrugged helplessly. Hao Pingyang said, "You better go! I need to fix this up!"

"I'll take you drinking once I get back!"

Hao Pingyang watched as Li Qingshan vanished. The various pieces of news regarding him filled his head. Apart from gratitude, he felt deep admiration too.

"That's the fifth Daemon General he's killed, right?"

Over half a month had already passed since the battle began. After the initial probing, the flames of war blazed, reaching everywhere.

Even Li Qingshan was surprised by the number of daemons hiding underground. They raided the various cities and towns, leaving everything in ruins wherever they passed by. The Spider Queen's order to massacre a hundred cities had already been completed, as even if Foundation Establishment cultivators came to stop them, the consequences of battle were still enough to destroy entire cities.

No one could afford to watch out for regular people during an intense battle of life and death. However, the battle did not end with that. It only became even more intense. In just a dozen or so days, the number of dead Foundation Establishment cultivators had already reached double digits.

Even Li Qingshan was endangered many times. There was even once when he faced life-threatening danger. The Daemon General was not as powerful as the rock demon or the blood demon, but that was only because it lacked a special bloodline. It still possessed startling strength, not an opponent that an early Foundation Establishment cultivator could stop. If it were not for his greatest trump card of actually possessing the body of a daemon, he would have been heavily injured even if he survived somehow.

However, as he rushed around, he had benefited quite a lot too. He killed a total of three Daemon Generals. Combined with the two other Daemon Generals he had killed earlier, his kill count had reached a startling five.

Apart from the water element daemon core he had used up, he now possessed four daemon cores, as well as countless more from regular daemons he had killed.

His contribution in the Hawkwolf Guard had reached an extremely tremendous sum too. At the same time, the academy and the Daemon Suppression alliance had offered up a great number of resources to raise morale, earning him an extra share of rewards.

Apart from that, he had earned a few names for himself, with some along the lines of "Invisible Sword Li Qingshan" or "Sea Tiger Li Qingshan".

Li Qingshan rushed to the banks of Fangting river and heard the sound of music instruments from afar, crossing through the reeds that stretched as far as the eye could see and rippling through the warm, night breeze of midsummer.

There was an estate on the banks of the river. The sound came from there.

The eyes of daemonic beasts twinkled like stars outside, constantly drawing closer and constantly forcing back the invisible music.

A few disciples of the school of Music sat in a circle within a pavilion at the back of the estate and wielded various musical instruments, like they were performing and not fighting. They were indeed not skilled at battle. Although they could force back the daemonic beasts, they were unable to deal any life-threatening blows, yet their true qi continued to gradually diminish. Fear filled their faces.

They suddenly heard a squeal, which frightened a disciple into snapping the string on her zither. Among her fear and confusion, she discovered that the daemonic beasts had begun to scatter, collapsing on the ground bloodily.

Li Qingshan killed the leading daemon in a single stroke before finishing off the remaining daemonic beasts one by one without much effort. He arrived before the pavilion.

“Are you fine?”

“You’re Li Qingshan!”

Most of the disciples of the school of Music were female, and the ones here were not exceptions to that. They did not possess supreme beauty, but their appearances were still delicate with exceptional bearings. They all thanked Li Qingshan as they looked at him favourably. One of them even boldly expressed she was willing to fill in for the space Han Qiongzhi had left behind and comfort Li Qingshan’s lonely soul.

Li Qingshan understood that this was not just gratitude and admiration from being saved. Otherwise, these proud beauties of the school of Music would have never been so liberal. Instead, they wanted to find someone powerful they could rely on considering how precarious the war was right now.

He only smiled, without making a reply. He sat down in the pavilion to recover his exhausted spiritual qi and energy.

Before long, the jade tablet on his waist lit up once again.

Chapter 465 - Dragonsnail Plans an Ambush, Zhou Tong goes Daemon Slaying

But this time, Han Anjun did not give him a new mission, summoning him back instead.

Li Qingshan smiled. “You’re finally going to let your son-in-law get some rest?”

When the disciples of the school of Music heard how he would be returning to Clear River city, they all faltered. They did not possess the same amount of strength as Li Qingshan, but correspondingly, they did not carry a responsibility as great as his either. They would basically return and rest up after every mission.

However, there was still quite a distance to cover if they wanted to return to Clear River city. The situation right now was turbulent with the flames of war reaching everywhere. It was very easy for them to run into surprise attacks from daemons again, so they wanted Li Qingshan to accompany them.

However, if he took them along with him, it would definitely waste some of his time. As Li Qingshan made a name for himself, he became known for his aloofness and pride as well. It was rumored that he always moved alone and disliked human contact. It all seemed true now.

If they asked him and were rejected, it would be embarrassing.

“I’m going back to Clear River city. Do you want to come with me?” Li Qingshan read their thoughts. He did not mind wasting a bit of time.

The disciples were overjoyed. They thanked him constantly and did not find him as unreasonable as he was supposed to be.

They were all humans after all!

White clouds filled the surroundings, lifting up Li Qingshan and the disciples of the school of Music into the air gradually. With a hum, it took off with a long tail of clouds behind.

“There’s probably no one in the entire academy who can match senior brother’s Cloud Riding technique and Mist Wielding technique, right?”

“Senior brother is a rare genius that only appears once a century in our Clear River prefecture. Despite all those who earned the titles of geniuses during the entrance examination, senior brother was still the first one to reach Foundation Establishment.”

The cloud crossed over a chain of mountains and threw it behind. The disciples all sang praises from the bottom of their hearts. Apart from the fact that this was what they believed, they were obviously trying to suck up to him too. Actually, they had all spent a longer time in the academy than Li Qingshan, so technically they were his senior sisters.

Even if they could not obtain any realistic benefits, developing a good relationship with someone like him was still good. When the weak received the strong, most of them did it with this same thought in mind. Even though they would often emerge with nothing, as long as this sliver of hope existed, they would never become tired.

Li Qingshan smiled. Just when he wanted to say something, he felt a wave of uneasiness.

The dark land flashed with golden light that pierced the cloud.

.....

This was a prosperous, ancient city. Although it was nowhere close to the prefectural city in terms of prosperity, it was surrounded by a few mines in the mountains. They relied on the mountains and dug into the mountains, but the people were well-off.

The lanterns in the city lit up as soon as the sky darkened.

Because of daemons running amok, a lot of people had already vanished from the streets, only leaving behind a night watchman striking a gong on the streets as he called out lazily, “The weather’s dry, so be careful with fire!”

The night watchman paused. Using the moonlight, he saw a figure walking over from afar, obscured by the thin, night mist. He squinted his eyes, wanting to take a closer look.

Somehow, the figure arrived right in his face instantly. A pair of eyes shone with blood-red light on his handsome, healthy face. A pair of fangs extended from his lips, and he sucked hard.

With a spurt, the night watchman’s chest suddenly bulged before exploding with bright red blood.

With a clang, the gong struck the ground. The night watchman collapsed on the ground and twitched, having been reduced to a pale, cold corpse already. Not a single droplet of blood remained in him anymore.

Bloodshadow licked his lips and continued along the street. His gaze passed through the thin mist and walls, seeing the humanoid figures that radiated with vitality inside the houses on the side of the street.

His mouth expanded to an exaggerated size, which twisted his entire face. He sucked in large mouthfuls and fresh blood emerged from behind the walls and flowed violently into his mouth.

At the end of the street, a powerful ball of vitality attracted his attention. He looked over and saw a slovenly daoist priest in faded, shabby robes carrying a gourd of alcohol in one hand and a burnt stick in the other.

“Wretched daemon, I’ve waited for you for quite some time now!”

Zhou Tong took a sip of alcohol and raised the stick in his hand.

A bolt of lightning twisted and turned like a dragon, piercing the night mist and striking Bloodshadow instantly.

.....

The cloud was ripped to pieces, but there was not a single person on there. Two cloud ribbons flew out from Li Qingshan’s hand and wrapped around the disciples from the school of Music, surging into the air.

Golden light shimmered on the ground. There was a huge hedgehog daemon covered in glistening quills. Every single quill was the size of a spear, reaching towards the sky.

Li Qingshan used the Wave Treading Form and constantly climbed upwards like he was climbing up cloud steps. He wanted to escape the range of attack first and lead the music disciples somewhere safe before killing the hedgehog.

A thin veil of clouds obscured the shining moon in the sky, making it hazy.

Li Qingshan burst through the clouds, climbing above it. The hedgehog daemon’s quills would basically run out of power at this altitude, but before he could even catch his breath, he saw a hunch-backed old man sitting on the clouds, speaking extremely slowly.

“Are you the cultivator who killed three of my Daemon Generals recently?”

Dragonsnail!

Li Qingshan’s heart sank. Among the three daemons, the one he feared the most was still the unfathomable Dragonsnail, and even daemons as unruly as Bloodshadow and Strongboulder seemed to recognise this too.

Li Qingshan’s clone underground had already entered secluded cultivation, preparing for his battle with Fu Qingjin. He had reported this to the Spider Queen. While the Spider Queen was displeased, she had

no objections seeing how he managed to keep a powerful opponent away from the battle. But when that happened, Dragonsnail requested that he assume control over all the daemons in his territory.

Li Qingshan originally disagreed, but the Spider Queen had already made up her mind, so it was difficult for him to object. As it turned out, not only had Dragonsnail incorporated Strongboulder's subordinates into his own, but he had even taken Bloodshadow's subordinates too. He was basically ruling over the daemons in the Spider Queen's place.

Looks like my performance recently has made me stand out too much, attracting the attention of this old daemon to specially set up an ambush here for me. This old daemon is extremely shrewd and meticulous. He's much more difficult to deal with than Strongboulder or Bloodshadow. If I were alone, then it would be easy, but I'd probably struggle to keep these Qi Practitioners safe.

Li Qingshan said without overreacting, "So what if I am?"

"Then you better remain here for good!"

Dragonsnail's speech suddenly became much faster, no longer with the same frustratingly slow pace. His overall speed increased too, arriving before Li Qingshan in a flash. His shrivelled hand reached towards Li Qingshan's throat.

So fast! He's actually even faster than Bloodshadow!

Li Qingshan's body responded faster than his mind and parried with his sword. Dragonsnail seemed to miss the almost transparent Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility, continuing to extend his hand over.

Li Qingshan beamed with joy inside. The sharp edge of the sword cut through Dragonsnail's hand easily, splitting his shriveled arm into two. The sword qi in his dantian erupted with it.

A sinister light flashed through Dragonsnail's rather blank eyes. His arm that had been split open rapidly swelled and parted, like the huge mouth of a monster. With thousands of sticky threads, it bit towards Li Qingshan's neck.

Li Qingshan had already fulfilled his objective, so he pulled back his sword to withdraw. The Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility was covered in a layer of sticky fluid that ate away the glow on the sword. He channeled his spiritual qi into the spiritual artifact in a hurry to wash off the sticky fluid, but the sword had already become much more dim. Even the sword itself had become clearly visible now.

Dragonsnail had basically let him land that strike. The sword qi in his dantian was fatal to regular Daemon Generals, but he did not have the slightest confidence in it when it came to Dragonsnail.

Sure enough, Dragonsnail only paused slightly before continuing like normal. He did not even force out the sword qi like what Strongboulder would do.

"Let me down! Let me down! I want to go home!"

At this moment, one of the music disciples began to scream and cry like a child, struggling as hard as she could. She was the one who tried to take it one step further with Li Qingshan. The constant threat of danger finally made her snap. Not everyone's minds were as tough as Li Qingshan's.

“Don’t be afraid. We’ll definitely be fine.” “Believe in senior brother!” “You bitch, shut your mouth, you hear me?!”

The other music disciples were afraid she would actually fall down, so they all spoke up to comfort her, even scolding her.

When their voices reached Li Qingshan, they spoke with startling speed, like a tape on fast forward. It was almost unintelligible. He furrowed his brows and seemed to understand something.

Swish, swish, swish, swish! A few streaks of golden light shot towards him, so fast that even Li Qingshan almost failed to react in time. Without even looking back, he swung his sword and knocked away the quills flying towards his back, but the screaming behind him suddenly stopped. A quill had directly pierced her head, killing her on the spot. A bloody hole appeared on her clean, smooth forehead.

The comforting stopped too. A bloody hole had appeared on each of the other music disciples too, reducing them to corpses in the blink of an eye, still held up by the cloud ribbons.

Their eyes were wide open, almost struggling to believe that this would be their fate. Originally, they wanted to depend on Li Qingshan for some safety, but they never thought they would die because of him.

The cloud ribbons dispersed, and they fell towards the ground, gradually becoming smaller and vanishing through the clouds. Their clothes ruffled like fallen petals.

Li Qingshan had no time to lament. He finally understood. Dragonsnail had not become faster, but he had become slower. Not only had he become slower, but the response of his brain and the rate at which he circulated spiritual qi had slowed down too. However, he actually had no idea when he had fallen for this!

He stared at Dragonsnail before him. What a strange and terrifying innate ability!

Behind Li Qingshan among the clouds, the hedgehog daemon shuddered, and over a hundred streaks of golden light shot over like rain. There was nowhere to dodge. It was much slower than Li Qingshan, but it just happened to be unavoidable.

.....

Why would Bloodshadow be afraid of a mere bolt of lightning after having faced a heavenly tribulation?

Just you wait until I suck you dry and see what your blood tastes like!

Bloodshadow sneered inside. He took a step forward, bathing in the sparks. His face gradually became charred, overwhelmed with a hint of fear. He stared at the stick in Zhou Tong’s hand. “What is that?”

It did not vanish after a flash like regular lightning. Instead, it lingered in Bloodshadow’s body, wreaking havoc recklessly. Every tiny spark could pierce his entire body and vaporise a part of his blood. Even his blood-red daemon core was wrapped in lightning, which made him shiver inside.

“As the Lord commands, may the Lord of Thunder and Mother of Lightning cast the divine lightning to slay the daemons!”

Zhou Tong was stern. He did not waste a single word and performed a series of ritualistic daoist gestures. His shabby robes danced about as he wielded the stick like he was wielding a supreme sword, plunging it right into the sky.

Boom!

The divine lightning descended from above, linking heaven and earth and illuminating a range of five hundred kilometers.

Chapter 466 - Avoiding Ties of Karma, Regular People are No Different From Ants

Li Qingshan would have been fine if the golden rain was all that he faced, but with how shrewd Dragonsnail was, why would he ever give him that kind of opportunity? Dragonsnail lunged over without the slightest hesitation.

They wanted to squeeze out the last shred of life in him with this pincer attack.

Li Qingshan's mind calmed down, like a grand ocean that was completely flat.

In that instant, he seemed to witness the trajectory of every single quill, but this feeling only remained for a single moment. The Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility in his right hand had swung towards the incoming rain of quills already. The blade of the sword flashed with the reflected silver moonlight.

At the same time, he sent a palm strike towards the incoming Dragonsnail, unleashing the Rising Tide Form and the Parting Clouds Form in a single breath. His true qi moved like the tide, layering and cascading in his palm strike, but it did not erupt. Only during the moment before Dragonsnail was about to reach him did it turn into a cloud-parting tsunami.

If it were some other time, his sword techniques might have been useful. If he faced regular Daemon Generals, this palm strike of his should have done the job.

However, he currently faced an ambush from a powerful commanding officer of the daemons. Dragonsnail had only brought a single Daemon General with him to ambush Li Qingshan, which only demonstrated his confidence in succeeding.

With a cling and a clang, Li Qingshan's sword that was slightly slower only managed to knock away the two quills flying towards his head. His chest, belly, arms, and legs were struck at the same time, leading to seven or eight bloody holes running right through his body. One of these holes just happened to pierce the location of his heart.

With a bang, Dragonsnail confronted Li Qingshan's palm strike scornfully. With his unbelievably great power and extremely tremendous daemon qi, he directly smashed through the tsunami, launching Li Qingshan away as he spurted with blood.

Just like the disciples of the school of Music, Li Qingshan fell out of the sky.

Dragonsnail was extremely confident that he had already shattered Li Qingshan's organs with that palm strike of his. Not to mention, his heart, a vital point, had been injured too. Death was certain for him.

But just in case, he nodded towards the hedgehog Daemon General. The hedgehog Daemon General rushed towards Li Qingshan eagerly, ready to enjoy the delicious taste of human cultivators.

Li Qingshan's eyes suddenly lit up. Before everyone had noticed it, he was already holding a scarlet talisman between his fingers. It burst into flames and turned into ashes as light wrapped around Li Qingshan.

The hedgehog daemon missed. In the blink of an eye, Li Qingshan had already been transported to five kilometers away, leaving behind a twinkling trail of light in the night sky.

Fortunately, I have this Escape talisman, or that old bastard would have gotten me good!

Li Qingshan could sense the circulation of his spiritual qi return to normal. No matter what Dragonsnail's innate ability was, he clearly could not cover such a large range. He immediately unleashed the Wave Treading Form without the slightest hesitation, flying off into the distance.

Escape talismans were relatively precious among the various types of talismans available. Even their weakest versions could be scarlet talismans. Using one when facing imminent death was like gaining a new lease on life.

Having used an Escape talisman of the lowest quality, Li Qingshan could only escape to five kilometers away, and he did not know any escape techniques, which made it highly restrictive. He could only move five kilometers once he used it, not an inch more or less. He could only escape to somewhere within his view, and there could not be any obstacles in between.

These various restrictions made the Escape talisman almost useless. Not only was he unable to use it in a closed region, five kilometers was not far at all either for someone at his cultivation. He could cross that distance in a single breath.

It would be particularly restrictive in a situation like earlier. If he tried to use it right off the bat, he would probably be interrupted the moment he took it out. Even if he managed to use it, he would probably be startlingly slow under Dragonsnail's strange ability, allowing Dragonsnail to respond in time.

He's so heavily injured, so how can he still move around freely? Dragonsnail's expression changed. A hint of anger flashed through his eyes as he directly pursued Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan eased up. Dragonsnail was not fast. Let alone Bloodshadow, he was not even as fast as Strongboulder, but he was still a bit faster than Li Qingshan. The distance between them rapidly decreased.

There's no need for me to catch up to him. I just need to be close enough for my ability to reach him. Dragonsnail squinted his eyes. His ability expanded like a great net, extending towards the fleeing Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan had thought of that too, so how could he just let Dragonsnail succeed? He unfurled the Cursive Sword Calligraphy and launched another ink sword before using several techniques together. He cast down a water curtain before summoning a cloud giant, blocking Dragonsnail's path, and in the end, he stuck a Tailwind talisman to himself.

Dragonsnail swallowed the ink sword in a single gulp, smashed the water curtain with a single palm strike, and directly pierced the cloud giant. He only slowed down slightly three times. His speed was virtually unaffected.

But when he spotted Li Qingshan again, he had already ridden off into the distance on a swift gale, widening the distance between them again.

Dragonsnail slowed down and gave up on the pursuit.

Clear River city was not particularly far away anymore. Having reached this point, the ambush had basically failed already. Continuing his pursuit would instead be a bad idea.

Dragonsnail's aura travelled away before vanishing. Li Qingshan descended from the sky, sat down, and began meditating to recover his spiritual qi.

The holes through his body had mostly recovered by now, only leaving behind faint marks. His heart began to thump once more too. With his powerful life force, many vital points were no longer vital points to him. All he had to do was protect his head.

I'm still not strong enough. If I directly transformed and killed this bastard, would it still be so troublesome?

No, if I were stronger, I'll just go and conquer Lolth. Wouldn't I have even more freedom if I were a Daemon Commander?

Raising his head and looking into the distance, the glowing Clear river city was right ahead. At this moment, the sky in the distance flashed, followed by the muffled sound of thunder a very long time after.

What loud thunder. The thunder is probably from almost five hundred kilometers away. That's definitely not regular lightning. Probably even my Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell would not be able to block it easily.

Li Qingshan lamented inside. There were countless powerful masters in the world, and this was just the measly Clear River prefecture, restricted to Foundation Establishment cultivators.

If this game of chess ended and the war spread, Daemon Commanders and Daemon Kings would be running amok with Golden Core and Soul Nascence cultivators everywhere. His cultivation at Daemon General would be nothing anymore. Running into any one of them would be enough to end his life. Just Wen Zhengming from Pine Sough academy alone was a great issue.

Having faced the dangers tonight, he desired an increase in strength and cultivation even more. He had to break through to the fourth layer of the ox demon and tiger demon as soon as possible.

Changing into a new set of clothes, he strode off towards Clear River city.

.....

The burnt stick in the slovenly daoist priest Zhou Tong's hand was obviously no ordinary stick. Instead, it was a true arcane artifact.

During his travels in the past, he encountered an ancient cycad that had almost become a daemon. It had been struck by lightning, only leaving behind a tiny piece. After several decades of refinement, he forged it into an arcane artifact and named it "Lightning Slaughter". It was extremely powerful.

Zhou Tong practised the Divine Heaven Method of Lightning Wielding. When he powered Lightning Slaughter with that, the destructive power was so great that even other arcane artifacts would pale in comparison. His unruliness might have been due to the cultivation method's influence, but he had what it took to back up this unruliness.

The region where Bloodshadow originally stood had turned into a great pit of several hundred meters wide, reaching the structures on the sides.

From the destruction alone, it did not seem particularly extraordinary. Li Qingshan could achieve something like that easily. However, unlike other techniques, the power of lightning normally could not destroy rock or soil, yet the bolt of lightning had directly vaporised several hundred tonnes of rock. The pit glistened under the moonlight, having crystallised under the heat.

"What a coward!" Zhou Tong snorted. The bastard had managed to escape.

In the final moments, Bloodshadow raised his cloak, which turned into a blood-red barrier that blocked the bolt of lightning. It earned him a moment, which he used to escape.

If they actually clashed, who knew what the outcome would be. Bloodshadow's ability to control blood posed a huge threat to cultivators. Originally, he could have used that opportunity to approach Zhou Tong, but Bloodshadow refused to take on even the slightest of risks. He directly fled instead.

It made Zhou Tong furious, but there was nothing he could do. He was known as the greatest in the Clear River prefecture, but he was slightly slower than Bloodshadow.

Zhou Tong shot off on his sword, throwing the pitch-black city behind him. However, he could not help but glance backwards and let out a gentle sigh before leaving resolutely.

All of the firelight in the city had been put out.

In a study room, all of the vases and porcelain had shattered, scattered across the ground. A scholar collapsed on his table. Just earlier, he was studying under lantern light, but now, there was not a shred of life left in him. Blood gradually soaked his books. He bled from his orifices. He had been directly killed off by the shockwave.

Not a single living creature remained in the city, whether they were male or female, young or old, reptilian, insect, or mammalian.

Some of them died to Bloodshadow. Most of them died to Zhou Tong's bolt of lightning.

Against an opponent like Bloodshadow, Zhou Tong was afraid to hold back, nor could he afford to hold back. If he had to think about the fates of regular people when he struck, holding back his full strength, the one who would die would be him.

As for Bloodshadow, he would still be able to slaughter cities, and he would continue to do so. As a result, this was the only choice Zhou Tong had. There was nothing else he could do.

Even though he refused to admit that, reality was like cold steel. Regular people were no different from ants.

It was just a clash between immortals, a disaster for regular people.

.....

In Clear River city, the meeting in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain had ended a long time ago, but the Parlour of Clouds and Rain had been transformed into the headquarters of the human cultivators. It manifested their determination to protect the several million lives within the city.

“Qingshan, that’s another one!” “That’s fantastic, senior!” “Sir, you truly are amazing!”

Cultivators moved around in the parlour in a bustling, noisy manner. When they saw Li Qingshan return, they all bowed and greeted him.

The news of another Daemon General dying at Li Qingshan’s hands had already become known. He was treated like a hero.

Recently, he had been running around in the Clear River prefecture, saving the lives of countless cultivators and establishing many good ties of friendship. However, he only nodded slightly in response, without making any other gestures back. It made him seem rather arrogant in the eyes of some.

Actually, it was just because Li Qingshan was reluctant to establish any more ties with others and meddle with karma. Although he had only randomly learnt these terms from the scriptures that Xiao An read, he actually found it to be rather reasonable and logical now. Since he understood the path he had to take, it would be better if he had fewer friends and acquaintances, just in case they died and caused him grief.

Arriving on the top floor, the leaders of the schools of Confucianism, Legalism, the Military, and so on were all present, as well as Fu Qingjin and a few Foundation Establishment cultivators he was unfamiliar with. They all crowded around a large mental map of the Clear River prefecture, as if they were discussing something.

They were all too busy to greet Li Qingshan. Liu Zhangqing waved his hand at him, making him wait before lowering his head again and pointing at a location on the map. “I’ve just received news that senior Zhou Tong has failed to kill Bloodshadow. He should be responding very soon. This is already the twelfth city. If it were not for the fact that the blood demon has to absorb and refine his blood, the destruction might be even greater.”

Chapter 467 - A Dangerous Mission

Hua Chengzan said in thought, “Several Foundation Establishment cultivators have fallen in battle against him too, with countless Qi Practitioners dying at his hands. With his ability to control blood, it becomes extremely dangerous once you’re in close proximity to him, even though we have senior Ma’s divination and can roughly determine a few locations. We wanted to set up ambushes for him, but never did we expect him to be so vigilant. If we don’t concentrate our power, it’ll be very difficult to kill him.”

Li Qingshan listened along silently. He must have been recalled this time because of the blood demon. He too had heard about the various deeds Bloodshadow had done. Ever since the large-scale war began, Bloodshadow had become the greatest threat to human cultivators.

Bloodshadow’s strength was equivalent to the peak of Foundation Establishment. Apart from the slovenly daoist priest and a handful of other people, most Foundation Establishment cultivators were

not his opponents. And, if they lacked any life-saving measures, running into him alone would basically be a death sentence. It would be difficult to escape before his unmatched speed.

Perhaps Li Qingshan's luck had just been fantastic, or Bloodshadow was simply too lucky, as they actually had not run into each other at all in the past month.

The fifteen hundred kilometers of the Clear River prefecture was not exactly large, but it was not exactly small either.

Listening in, Li Qingshan managed to work out roughly what had happened. They had first made the leader of the school of Yin-yang, Ma Buyi, calculate which cities Bloodshadow could potentially attack before setting up ambushes there, but it ended in failure.

Wang Pushi frowned and asked, "Old Ma, could you narrow it down to a single city? If we set up a trap then, we'll definitely be able to kill this scourge for good!"

Everyone's gazes landed on Ma Buyi, some eager. Just as the saying "A foresight of three days could lead to wealth of millennials" implied, if they knew about the opponent's movements beforehand, any person could become an unmatched general in battle.

Liu Zhangqing watched over the entire situation with the Son of Heaven's Technique of Aura Observation, but all he grasped was the present. Ma Buyi's divination could connect with the future.

Ma Buyi was dressed the same as before. He wore a set of coarse clothing and a long hat, standing with his arms behind his back. Hearing that, he let out a long sigh and smiled helplessly.

"You sure have made it difficult for me. The matters of the world have always been mysterious and unpredictable. Moreover, I'll have to predict what the blood daemon, such a powerful daemon, is doing, so how am I supposed to achieve that? This has already exceeded the capacity of Foundation Establishment cultivators like me."

Everyone was disappointed. They could not devote too many of their forces into scattered ambushes like this, or it would weaken their other fronts and lead to severe losses, especially when they were not absolutely certain they could kill Bloodshadow.

Daemons were all extremely sensitive to danger, and Bloodshadow was extremely vigilant. Perhaps he would turn around and leave the moment he sensed something was wrong. By then, their ambush and arrangements would all go to waste.

The war between humans and daemons was like a wrestling match. They had to carefully utilise every bit of strength they possessed.

For example, Dragonsnail and Zhou Tong could have gone to other places tonight. It would be a death sentence for any opposing Foundation Establishment cultivators or Daemon Generals that ran into them. Yet, they wasted their time on a failed ambush in the end. The losses involved could not be directly estimated.

"But..." Ma Buyi glanced at Li Qingshan on the side and thought of an idea.

"But what?"

“If Xiao An has established a foundation, we should be able to work out a more precise location. Qingshan, how has Xiao An’s cultivation been going? Does she have a chance at breaking through to Foundation Establishment soon?”

As Ma Buyi said that, everyone looked towards Li Qingshan.

“The Xiao An you speak of is that genius of your academy, right? Even if she establishes a foundation, she’ll just be an early Foundation Establishment cultivator. How can she be compared to you? How can we place our hopes on a little girl?”

The sect master of Horned Rhinoceros mountain voiced his objections. He rippled with muscles, standing tall and wide. He seemed like a tower of metal. A bony spike protruded from his forehead like a horn, a manifestation of having reached an extremely profound realm with the Horned Rhinoceros’ Arts of Mountain Splitting. His cultivation had already reached late Foundation Establishment. As he spoke, his voice boomed out. He was extremely imposing.

As he looked towards Li Qingshan, his eyes would always be filled with undisguised scorn. He was a mere junior up on his luck, getting on the good side of the Han family and obtaining a powerful spiritual artifact, which allowed him to kill a few Daemon Generals. That was the only reason why he was highly praised.

A few years ago, Li Qingshan had humiliated Cheng Kaishan by defeating the first senior brother of Horned Rhinoceros mountain in public. Afterwards, Li Qingshan broke through to Foundation Establishment, while the first senior brother remained as a Qi Practitioner. He believed the battle had left behind a permanent shadow in his heart.

He did not hate Li Qingshan to the core, constantly thinking about revenge, but he was unable to take a liking towards him.

The others were very disappointed too. They had thought Ma Buyi had come up with a good idea. Even geniuses needed time to grow. Going from a regular person to a tenth layer Qi Practitioner in just a few years was startling enough, but she was just a Qi Practitioner.

“The Xiao An you speak of has never shown herself. As our disciples bleed on the battlefield, she’s hiding in a safe place. That’s not exactly appropriate, is it?” a madam questioned. She was the Cloud Elder of the Rose Clouds sect.

Li Qingshan frowned. He wanted to retort, but Liu Zhangqing spoke up before he could, “Xiao An has already been accepted as a disciple by the Annihilum Light Chan Master. We are in no position to dispatch her around. If she’s injured, we won’t be able to explain ourselves to the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga. I hope the Cloud Elder can understand.”

“Hmph, it’s not like we’re missing a measly Qi Practitioner anyway.”

Just when an argument was about to break out, Fu Qingjin shot a glance at the Cloud Elder, and she snorted coldly before dropping the matter. If Xiao An actually fell in battle and the Annihilum Light Chan Master came for an explanation, the Rose Clouds sect would not be able to bear the consequences.

Ma Buyi shook his head in an exaggerated manner. “Now this is something you don’t know about. Divination is different from other techniques. It places great emphasis on talent. Xiao An could wield yin,

yang, and the five elements from the moment she began cultivating. Her talent for divination exceeds even mine. After teaching her the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots, I originally wanted to give her some proper guidance, but in the end, she basically comprehended everything I had comprehended over the years in a single afternoon. She basically needs no guidance from me.”

“Even without the Annihilum Light Chan Master of the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga, I still wouldn’t send her on any missions. Her talent definitely should not be used on dealing with a few daemons. Instead, it can be used to influence the entire war. As long as she has the time, she might even be able to influence the entire Green province. At the very least, I’m confident that her divination will exceed mine as long as she breaks through to Foundation Establishment!”

Everyone became hopeful once more with what Ma Buyi said. An extra, powerful practitioner of divination could play a role that even rivaled a peak Foundation Establishment master like Zhou Tong in a war like this.

Li Qingshan said, “Actually, Xiao An has already considered what school leader Ma is thinking. She has been attempting to break through to Foundation Establishment lately. She should have a good chance.”

Li Qingshan was not lying.

After killing Strongboulder, Bloodshadow became Xiao An’s next target, but Bloodshadow constantly moved around. It was impossible for her to search the entire world for him either. As a result, she tried to predict Bloodshadow’s movements with the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots, but a cultivation at Qi Practitioner was just too low. Hence, she wanted to break through to Foundation Establishment with her fleshly body before predicting again. However, she wanted to kill him alone. She never considered working together with these people.

Ma Buyi said, “Please give this True Spirit pill to her for me.”

Liu Zhangqing also said, “I have one on me too. I hope it can assist her so that she can assist us.”

In order to kill this great opponent of theirs, they did not hold back at all with precious True Spirit pills. They were extremely generous. In the blink of an eye, four True Spirit pills had been offered. One of them even came from Fu Qingjin.

“I must thank you all in Xiao An’s place. I’m certain she won’t disappoint you.” Li Qingshan did not hold back, accepting the True Spirit pills. Xiao An is going to be finishing off this great opponent of yours, so she deserves some remuneration!

“Qingshan, actually I’ve recalled you this time to give you a certain mission. This mission is extremely dangerous. You’re free to accept it or turn it down.” Han Anjun frowned gently and seemed slightly troubled.

“You have always issued military orders like they are absolute, never discussing with us when handing down missions, general, so why are you wavering today? Don’t tell me you plan on going easy on Li Qingshan just because he’s your son-in-law?” Cheng Kaishan said unhappily.

Han Anjun only mentioned a single question and that was enough to leave Cheng Kaishan speechless.

“Where is Han Tiewi right now?”

Han Anjun had also sent Han Tiewi to ambush Bloodshadow. The dangers involved in the mission were self-explanatory. He would be sucked dry by the blood demon with even the slightest carelessness. What he implied was, I've never even given special treatment to my own son, let alone a son-in-law.

"I've already killed five Daemon Generals. If I recall correctly, you've only killed two so far, right, sect master Cheng? What are your orders, general? Please be straightforward. I, Li Qingshan, am not a coward!" Li Qingshan understood they were approaching the main topic the moment Han Anjun spoke. He glanced at Cheng Kaishan before clasping his hands.

"I want you to venture underground and investigate Bloodshadow's den!"

Han Anjun knew the ambushes could potentially end in failure, so he made new arrangements beforehand, which was Li Qingshan.

Everyone no longer looked at Han Anjun in the same light. They felt that it was not because he did not show nepotism, but rather he was very displeased with this son-in-law of his, wanting to push Li Qingshan to his death. This mission was not just dangerous. It was basically certain death.

"Han Anjun, I've misspoken. You're a true man!" No matter how unhappy Cheng Kaishan was with Li Qingshan, he could not help but develop some admiration towards Han Anjun. Being tough on others was nothing. What was difficult was being tough on yourself.

"General, I don't think that's appropriate. No one has any idea what the situation underground is like. There's the daemon queen underground too. Qingshan is just an early Foundation Establishment cultivator, so this is no different than sending him off to his death. We should wait until Xiao An breaks through to Foundation Establishment first!" Hua Chengzan tried to dissuade him.

Li Qingshan frowned slightly. Xiao An had also suggested in the past for her to directly venture underground and kill Bloodshadow, but he stopped her. Bloodshadow's den was extremely deep underground and extremely close to Cobweb city. He would never let Xiao An take this risk.

This father-in-law had basically lost his mind. He doesn't even view his son-in-law as a proper person! Sure enough, this Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility didn't come for free!

"I can't place all my hopes on a child. I'm not sending you to kill Bloodshadow. I just want you to use the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility to investigate so that we can prepare for the worst. With risk comes reward. Of course, you're welcome to turn it down."

"I accept, but I might not be able to set off immediately." Li Qingshan casually drew the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility. Not only had the blade dimmed, it was no longer transparent anymore either. He tested it, and the sword could no longer conceal him completely.

Chapter 468 - Only Tomorrow is Worth Looking Forward to, Only Today is Worth Treasuring

"What happened here?" Han Anjun's face sank as he asked sternly.

"I ran into some trouble along the way..." Li Qingshan gave them a rough overview about Dragonsnail's ambush and hid the detail that his heart had been pierced. "... Unfortunately, I was unable to save them. I'd say this Daemon General is even more powerful than the rock demon and blood demon. Please be careful if you run into him in the future, everyone."

After listening to Li Qingshan's story, everyone realised he had not just run into some trouble. Instead, he had almost lost his life out there.

It was rare of him to remain so calm and unfazed, seated on the side, listening along earlier and only explaining this calmly when the matter had been brought up, as if the one in danger was someone else, not him. His composure and bearing truly were startling.

Han Anjun nodded in satisfaction inside, but he also could not help but sigh, Qiongzhi, oh Qiongzhi. You really have an eye for men. This one is anything but mediocre. He is already showing signs of greatness. Even I can't tell what step he will take now. This Li Qingshan is not someone you can control.

Cheng Kaishan snorted and questioned, "If the daemon you described really was that powerful, how did you manage to escape as a cultivator at early Foundation Establishment? What even more powerful than the blood demon and rock demon? You were probably just careless, wanting to shy away from your responsibilities!"

This was what made Dragonsnail terrifying. Actually, quite a few Foundation Establishment cultivators had already died at his hands. He had managed to conduct the war between the entire Daemon race and the humans for so long, yet still remain completely unheard of.

"You're welcome to remain unconvinced." Li Qingshan leaned against the back of the chair and did not argue.

Fu Qingjin said, "Qingshan might be right. According to the news I've received, there is indeed a Daemon General like that underground, known as Dragonsnail. He's the most trusted by the Spider Queen, but there has never been any news of him directly interfering in the past three years. Even his abilities remain a mystery. Today is the first time I've heard anything about it."

"Either he has never struck before, or his attacks have never ended in failure. With Qingshan's description, I think the latter is more likely. Even I find this ability to be rather troublesome."

Hua Chengzan agreed and said, "Recently, a few Foundation Establishment fellows have died extremely strangely. None of them are weak, and they have plenty of life-saving measures. If they ran into regular Daemon Generals, they could always escape even if they were not their opponent. Yet, when they died, Bloodshadow was clearly moving around somewhere else. Looking at it now, they probably all died to Dragonsnail."

Fu Qingjin and Hua Chengzan were reputed for their sharp wit and deep thinking. No one had any more doubts now that the two of them had spoken up. Their faces only grew stern as they carefully wondered what would happen if they ran into Dragonsnail instead.

When they looked at Li Qingshan again, they no longer looked at him in the same light. There were plenty of mid or even late Foundation Establishment cultivators who had been targeted and killed by Dragonsnail, yet only he managed to escape. It probably was not luck alone. Little did they know that if Li Qingshan really were just a regular early Foundation Establishment cultivator, he would be as dead as a corpse right now.

In the end, everyone decided to wait for now and see how Xiao An progressed with her cultivation. If she really lived up to their expectations, it would obviously be for the best.

Han Anjun asked for Li Qingshan to return the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility. He said he would find someone to repair it. As it seemed, he still planned on sending Li Qingshan on that mission if nothing worked out.

Li Qingshan did not mind. The underground that seemed like the gates of hell to other cultivators was absolutely nothing to him. He was not particularly worried whether the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility could be repaired either.

If regular cultivators had a supreme grade spiritual artifact like that damaged, they would be utterly heartbroken, but Li Qingshan had seen his fair share of supreme grade spiritual artifacts already. He even had a few arcane artifacts, so he did not care at all.

Actually, he had become slightly unhappy with the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility a long time ago. The invisibility had only been effective in the beginning. He could even be directly seen through by Daemon Generals with sharper senses.

Moreover, the power of the artifact was a little low. If it were not for the strand of sword qi in his dantian, all he would be capable of would be angering the opponent even if he had surprise on his side. He would not even be able to cause a heavy injury.

Right now, he was more like an assassin—sneaking over, sword qi in the dantian, Cursive Sword Calligraphy. If he used up these three tricks and the opponent was still alive, probably all he could do was flee.

If only he had an arcane artifact sword!

However, arcane artifacts had always been items that arose from luck, not searching. Finding one that was compatible with his element would be even more difficult. Swords were weapons for attacking and killing. Metal element swords appeared the most, while water element ones appeared the least.

He possessed the sect treasure of Bronze Cauldron mountain, the Bronze Cauldron of the Four Cardinal Directions. He could attempt to refine artifacts for himself, but unfortunately, the world was a mess right now. He had absolutely no time to settle down and learn how to forge artifacts.

As a matter of fact, he did not even have the leisure to cultivate. All he could do was make this war end as soon as possible.

When Li Qingshan returned to the Chain mountains, dawn had not even arrived. The mountains rose and fell in the misty clouds, seeping in the moonlight. It was enough to inspire a feeling of transcendence within people, enough for them to forget about all the fighting and killing.

Li Qingshan could not help but slow down. He glanced at Ru Xin's dwelling from afar before passing through the protective formations, landing at the entrance. Dense spiritual qi immediately surrounded him. After a period of accumulation, the Eight Gates Formation of Golden Locks gradually demonstrated its powers.

Li Qingshan entered the dwelling and spotted Xiao An seated with her legs crossed. Her seaweed-like hair flowed down her back. She was surrounded in flames, currently cultivating.

Li Qingshan did not interrupt her. He took out a jar of spiritual alcohol and casually leaned against the wall, taking a sip. He slowly settled down with that.

On the surface, Xiao An was at the budding age of thirteen or fourteen. Just like the poem “Aged thirteen and o’er, pretty, slender and charming, a bud on treetop, she’s to bloom in early spring”, her appearance that was deemed to be the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty by the Sect of Clouds and Rain had begun to demonstrate its beauty.

She was bare, already possessing the femininity of a young lady. Li Qingshan witnessed her entire enchanting figure.

She obviously did not feel inconvenienced, while Li Qingshan had grown accustomed to it too. There was not the slightest temptation. Instead, he was rather delighted.

He felt like he was watching a shrub, an orchid, thriving and growing under his close care.

Of course, what he fed it was endless amounts of flesh and blood.

Her jade-like skin was almost transparent under the firelight, such that the white bone inside could be made out from time to time.

For one instant, she was a woman of heavenly beauty. In the next instant, she was a terrifying, deathly skeleton.

Even Li Qingshan was able to capture a hint of the buddhist nature and truths it was conveying. He took another sip and smiled. Xiao An’s cultivation had progressed even further.

Through this period of cultivation, Xiao An had finally consolidated her cultivation of the first layer of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. The first thing she did next was not forge more prayer beads or continue with cultivating white bone, but to refine her body again.

White bone was the foundation of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty, but she could not go without great beauty either.

White bone represented death, where all was emptiness. Great beauty represented life, where everything tangible was present.

The former was like the middle of winter, the ice three inches thick and completely desolate, while the latter was like early spring, when everything bloomed and prospered.

Only by combining the two, merging life and death such that she could alternate between them freely, could she truly reach the first layer of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty.

After who knew how long, the flames gradually died down, merging into her body. Her skin seemed flawless, pale like snow and shining with the lustre of jade. It also contained roaring vitality and spiritual energy.

Originally, her power only came from the white bone, and her body was just an illusion. Although it was completely perfect, endowed with extraordinary talent, it was no more powerful than a regular person’s body.

But now, it had merged with the essence from all the flesh and blood, such that her feminine body possessed enough power to rival regular Daemon Generals.

“Qingshan.” Xiao An threw herself into Li Qingshan’s arms like a swallow returning to its nest.

A strange fragrance like sandalwood filled his arms. As he touched the jade-like skin, it felt indescribably fine and soft, such that even precious jade completely paled in comparison. He truly understood what “as fine as jade” meant now.

Li Qingshan rubbed his nose. He suddenly felt rather embarrassed, finally remembering the fact that they were of different genders. He took out a dress and lectured her as he dressed her, “Look, Xiao An, you’re not a child anymore. As a girl, you can’t just let other people see your body. Raise your hand!”

“It’s not like you’re other people,” Xiao An raised her hand and slipped it into the sleeves as she said in confusion.

“I’m no different.” Li Qingshan said sternly.

Xiao An raised her head and looked at Li Qingshan. Her brilliant pupils suddenly flashed, and she smiled, which seemed like flowers blooming. Even Li Qingshan was taken slightly aback.

“What are you smiling for?”

Xiao An smiled gently. She shook her head and said nothing.

“Turn around.” Li Qingshan shook his head helplessly. He had no idea whether it was because most of her immaturity had vanished as her body grew that she seemed to mature overnight, now possessing certain thoughts that even he was unable to guess.

Xiao An turned around obediently and allowed Li Qingshan to tie up her waistband.

“Alright, you’re like a princess now.” Li Qingshan studied in satisfaction.

Princess!

Xiao An’s heart skipped a beat. She found that form of reference to be rather familiar. Some of her lost memories rose up, but she immediately dismissed them to one side.

It had already been several years since Li Qingshan last mentioned he would take her home. She seemed to have forgotten about it completely too.

The matters of yesterday were not worth mentioning. Only tomorrow was worth looking forward to. Only today was worth treasuring.

Li Qingshan took out the True Spirit pills he had obtained from the Parlour and Clouds and Rain and mentioned Ma Buyi’s plan.

Hearing that, Xiao An began cultivating in Li Qingshan’s arms.

Before long, all of the true qi in her body had been converted into spiritual qi. She continued to meditate for a little longer until the seven types of spiritual qi filled her dantian. Only then did she stop and say, “I’m done.”

She had even managed to succeed with the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty, so practising the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots now obviously took no extra effort. It did not pose any difficulty at all.

“Don’t let other Qi Practitioners see you, or you’ll drive them crazy.” Li Qingshan sighed with a smile.

.....

Several days later, in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain.

The upper echelon of the Daemon Suppression alliance and the Academy of the Hundred Schools gathered together once more.

Li Qingshan’s news from the Chain mountains made everyone eager and excited. They discussed among themselves.

“Has she really established a foundation? She’s not even twenty this year!”

“That’s not it. A few years ago, she was still a regular person. Compared to her, we’re all mediocre.”

“Once they’re here, we’ll obviously find out. I’d like to see just how impressive she’s supposed to be!”

A cloud descended from the sky. Li Qingshan and Xiao An arrived together.

Chapter 469 - Divining with All Seven Lots, Great Sword of Heavy Water

With Xiao An’s appearance, the platform on the very top of the parlour immediately fell quiet.

Hua Chengzan’s eyes lit up, slightly amazed.

He had been born with a handsome, flawless face and both Qiu Haitang and Hua Chenglu who he had regular contact with were rare beauties. Even his dream lover was a supreme beauty like Gu Yanying.

Originally, he thought he would never be amazed by beauty again, but now, that was exactly what he felt. Even more to his disbelief, the person that amazed him was a budding young girl around thirteen or fourteen years of age.

Today, Xiao An was not dressed in any special manner, or even rather casual. She had no concept of beauty and ugliness, and a grown man like Li Qingshan would never spend time to dress her. However, none of it impeded her beauty.

She did not have an enchanting smile, only glancing past everyone calmly with her pitch-black eyes. They were like calm, deep pools, unable to reflect anyone. However, that empty expression of hers possessed indescribable, bizarre charm on her face.

Qiongzhi, oh Qiongzhi. You really are in trouble. Hua Chengzan could not help but worry for his good friend.

Whether it’s Gu Yanying beyond reach or Ru Xin within arm’s reach, probably neither of them pose a threat as great as this kid! When Qingshan was still a Qi Practitioner, he went as far as standing up against Qiu Haitang, a Foundation Establishment cultivator, for her sake, willingly offending an entire group of school leaders for her. What about now? What about the future?

Qiu Haitang was standing right behind Hua Chengzan. Although she had already given up on him, they remained as very good friends. She obviously would not miss out on the excitement with everything that was happening today.

After all these years, she saw Xiao An again. Aside from her amazement, she could not help but experience deep pity and envy.

She's already so charming despite being so young. If she practised the cultivation methods of my Sect of Clouds and Rain instead, just who would still be able to withstand her once she grew a little older? If I had her beauty, even little Hua that infatuated, blind lover would probably change his mind!

If it's just the Aspect of Heavenly Fragrance and Beauty, then so be it. What's even more terrifying is her unbelievable cultivation talent. This Li Qingshan's good fortune is basically out of control. That's the only reason why he's managed to find an unbelievable wonder like her.

Qiu Haitang suddenly frowned. Though, is it really good fortune? The disaster of beauty, being able to overthrow kingdoms, isn't all just for say. As the ancient saying goes, 'With the Heavenly Aspect, the world is thrown into chaos' I doubted it a little, but looks like it's actually true now.

"Qingshan, is this Xiao An?"

Fu Qingjin studied Xiao An deeply. She was a teenage Foundation Establishment cultivator, and she had not even begun cultivating from a young age. Only five or six years had passed at most, and she had never received any true, close guidance. She had basically relied on her own comprehension and understanding. Even Fu Qingjin could not help but admit he paled in comparison to this talent.

It was no wonder that the Annihilum Light Chan Master of the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga would travel thousands of kilometers to accept her as a disciple despite how aloof and outstanding he was. He seemed like he was lowering himself and making a fuss out of something, but this was actually a clever move to take. Otherwise, even the Sword Collection palace and Umbral Yin sect would fight over a disciple like her!

In the cultivation world, even ten thousand mediocre people could not rival a single genius. This point was made extremely obvious through this war. They were at Foundation Establishment, yet a single Fu Qingjin was worth more than ten regular Foundation Establishment cultivators.

Li Qingshan said, "Yes. She doesn't really like to talk. Everyone, let's begin!"

"The quiet room has already been prepared. I also want to witness Xiao An's divination with the seven lots." Ma Buyi stepped forward and bowed towards Li Qingshan and Xiao An individually.

"You're far too polite, senior." Li Qingshan lowered his head. "Xiao An, it's fine, right?"

Xiao An nodded and entered the room with Ma Buyi. Everyone else waited outside for the results.

"General, how is it looking with my Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility?"

Li Qingshan found Han Anjun. Although he did not care too much about this sword, it was still a supreme grade spiritual artifact, and one he had obtained through legitimate means.

"It's damaged beyond complete repair."

“Then there’s nothing we can do. Thank you for your efforts, general.”

Li Qingshan had been anticipating this. The stuff that Dragonsnail spat out definitely would not be anything good. If it were a regular spiritual artifact, then it would only become slightly weaker at most with some damage. However, the primary function of the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility was to conceal the user. It would become useless even if it gave away only a small part of the user.

Han Anjun then took out a great, azure sword and only said three words, which was the sword’s name—Heavy Water Sword.

Li Qingshan’s eyes lit up. It was another water element supreme grade spiritual artifact. Clans sure had foundations that ran deep!

It was not an arcane artifact, but not everyone possessed arcane artifacts among Foundation Establishment cultivators. Most of them still used supreme grade spiritual artifacts. Arcane artifacts and spiritual artifacts only differed by a single word in name, but it made all the difference in their effects, power, and quantity. Arcane artifacts could not be obtained easily.

In the past when Li Qingshan led the night roamers and destroyed multiple sects, only Bronze Cauldron mountain and the Vermillion Clothes sect had arcane artifacts. They were all sect treasures, items that represented the legacy of the sect.

Li Qingshan was already much better off than most other people with the Cursive Sword Calligraphy in his possession. He was not greedy either. Finding a water element supreme grade spiritual artifact sword was rare enough. At the very least, he could unleash the power of the sword qi in his dantian with it.

“As it’s a gift from the father-in-law, I must oblige.” Li Qingshan joked before accepting the Heavy Water sword without hesitating. His arms sank the moment the sword entered his hand. The sword was quite hefty.

Li Qingshan beamed inside. The heavier the sword was, the better he could make use of the advantage of his strength, unleashing greater destructive power. It suited his personality more than the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility too. It was even compatible with the Arts of the Boundless Ocean, far more appropriate for him than the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility.

Han Anjun no longer said anything about the way he was referred to, unlike the past when he maintained his opposing stance over this marriage. He had already achieved his objective of making Han Qiongzhi independent, and Li Qingshan’s performance lately had been very outstanding.

Of course, Li Qingshan did not do what Hua Chengzan suggested, which was frequently visiting the Han family. He would never go out of his way for someone to like him. If he handled it badly, it would only worsen their relationship. He stuck with his decision of walking his own path. He just did his best to complete Han Anjun’s military orders.

Even this aspect left Han Anjun very satisfied. The so-called favours and etiquette of the mundane world never worked with him, and he looked down on men who used petty tricks and sucked up to people verbally. At the end of the day, he had admired Li Qingshan very much right from the beginning. He just did not have a high opinion of this relationship, but people had to take responsibility for their choices.

As the patriarch of the Han family, all he had to do was cover his responsibility of “roping him in”. However, his method of roping him in seemed more like a formality.

Li Qingshan moved over to one side and immediately began refining the Heavy Water sword.

At this moment, the door to the quiet room opened again, and Ma Buyi walked out.

“School leader Ma, how was it?” “Have you found anything?”

Ma Buyi waved his hand and said to Hua Chengzan, “Commander Hua, please give me the information on the blood demon.” Then he added, “Xiao An needs it.”

The Hawkwolf Guard had begun gathering all the information they could gather on Bloodshadow since three years ago and undertook analysis. Hua Chengzan had even tried replicating the blood demon’s thought process to predict which cities he would attack next, but he had not been particularly successful.

“If you could find out through analysis, why do we still need divination?” someone asked.

Ma Buyi did not give an explanation. Actually, even he was not too certain about that.

The nature of divination was a method of learning information. It did not rely on any deductions or logic. Instead, it directly asked for the answer from fate. It did require some information as a foundation to increase the accuracy of the divination, but overly complicated and detailed information was unnecessary.

In the room, Xiao An sat on a huge mental map of the Clear River prefecture. With a thump, she opened her eyes and saw Ma Buyi pile up a stack of documents as tall as a man in front of her.

“It’s all here.”

Xiao An waved her hand, and the documents all fluttered into the air, arranging themselves neatly in stacks. They almost filled the entire room before beginning to revolve around her.

Without any pattern or form of order, the pages flashed past her, and the information on there entered her eyes clearly, yet she did not seem like she was looking. In the end, she simply shut her eyes.

Ma Buyi could not help but back into a corner. He was clearly the one who taught Xiao An the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots, yet he was at a slight loss on what Xiao An was trying to do now.

At this moment, seven clusters of light lit up around Xiao An, turning into seven lots.

“Divining with all seven lots!” Ma Buyi’s expression changed.

.....

Time passed slowly. Everyone stopped talking and waited in silence. The outcome of the divination directly tied into the lives of the people around them, as well as the future of the Clear River prefecture.

“Done!” There was a whisper that surprised everyone slightly. They all turned around, only to discover it had come from Li Qingshan in a corner. He held a great, azure sword in one hand and seemed completely satisfied. The sunlight and the glow of spiritual qi flowed through the sword beautifully.

Li Qingshan had already refined the Heavy Water sword. Because the Heavy Water sword was ownerless, the refinement process had been easier. All he did was pour in waves of spiritual qi with the Arts of the Boundless Ocean before leaving behind an imprint of his soul sense.

Through the refinement process, he completely understood the functions of the Heavy Water sword. There was actually just a single move, and it was extremely simple and crude.

It was expending large quantities of spiritual qi in one go, making the sword expand to ten times its size to launch a devastating attack. Li Qingshan named it as the Siege Breaking strike.

If the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility was an assassin's sword, then the Heavy Water sword would be a true warrior's sword.

As a matter of fact, this sword was not even suited for artifact control. It was only suited for close combat, which most cultivators disliked. Even Qi Practitioners with water affinity would normally take a more nimble and flexible approach with their sword techniques. They would not use such a large sword.

However, it was perfect for Li Qingshan. He could finally unleash the power of the Arts of the Boundless Ocean. His battle prowess was about to multiply.

"Is she still not done?" Li Qingshan stood up and looked around. He was probably the most relaxed out of all of them.

"Seems like fellow Qingshan is very satisfied with this sword. They probably still need a little more time, so why don't we spar? Just so you can try out the sword." Fu Qingjin's green clothes ruffled as he drifted over.

Chapter 470 - Karma, the Heart of the Sword

"Try out the sword? Sure!" Li Qingshan did not hesitate much at all and agreed to it. "Seeing how fellow Fu has nothing to do too, please give me some guidance."

No one had imagined they would be clashing first when there was still some time until the fifth of the fifth month.

.....

In the room, the seven lots dispersed together, turning into streaks of light. Paper fluttered through the surroundings.

Xiao An casually grabbed a piece with a brush in her other hand. She wrote a few simple words before folding it and handing it to Ma Buyi.

"Don't show it to too many people."

The heavenly secrets could not be divulged, not because there were terrifying consequences once they were divulged, but because it could easily become inaccurate once divulged. If everyone knew the results of the divination and news reached Bloodshadow's ears, he would know about the ambush and the divination obviously would not be accurate.

“Yes.” Ma Buyi opened the piece of paper and took a glance. He could not help himself as disbelief filled his face. A precise time and location was actually written on there.

It had to be mentioned that not only did the results of his divinations only provide a rough location, even the time would be very vague, covering a large period. And, this was already very impressive. Foresight had never been so simple.

Ma Buyi had already stated in the past that Xiao An would definitely be better than him with divination once she reached Foundation Establishment, but in reality, he was wrong. She was not just better than him. She had completely exceeded him.

As he thought about how he had said, “This isn’t something a Foundation Establishment cultivator can achieve.” when Wang Pushi asked him to predict Bloodshadow’s future movements, he basically reddened slightly. As it turned out, it was not beyond the capabilities of Foundation Establishment cultivators. It was just beyond his capabilities.

“Hold on!”

Just as Xiao An was about to leave through the door, Ma Buyi called out and stopped her from behind.

Xiao An stopped, but she did not look back. She waited for him to speak.

“Fellow Xiao An, please relieve me of my confusion. What was all this information for?” Ma Buyi bowed deeply.

“For karma.” The karma Xiao An spoke of was the karma of buddhism. Actions came with consequences.

Apart from relying on her extraordinary talent, she was able to predict Bloodshadow’s future movements so precisely because her method of divination did not just originate from the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots anymore, but the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty.

Buddhism placed great emphasis on karma and predestination. If the disciples of buddhism wanted to cultivate to higher realms, it was basically impossible for them to remain uninvolved with this aspect. “Enlightenment of Predestination” was even designated as a certain realm of cultivation.

The eminent monk of buddhist who became the White Bone Bodhisattva was the best among the best in this respect. If they did not even know about the fate awaiting them, how could they make the claim that they would destroy buddhism?

There was a specialised section for this in the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. It was much more profound than the sections for forging artifacts or refining pills. It was not called the Divination section. Instead, it was directly called the Section of Predestination.

Predestination was fate set in stone. It could not be changed. Even the person who carried out the divination would be bound to their predestined fate.

For example, practitioners of divination like Ma Buyi and the Divining Elder actually only saw the very surface of the river of fate. There, the waves surged without control, filled with unknown and uncontrollable factors.

As for true predestination, it lay in the very depths of this river of fate. It also experienced undercurrents, but it was much more stable compared to the surface. Whoever managed to dive down to there would be able to grasp the future.

Xiao An had only gained a small inkling about this Section of Predestination through the foundation she had set with the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots after consolidating her cultivation at the first layer of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. By following the traces of karma, she could see through the waves of the river of fate and grasp a hint of invariability within the endless variation.

Karma? Only then did Ma Buyi remember Xiao An was actually a disciple of buddhism. However, no one could connect this young lady of unrivalled beauty to the solemnity of buddhism.

As Ma Buyi pondered this, Xiao An had already left through the door.

.....

“Looks like fellow Fu insists on going easy on me?” Li Qingshan studied the surroundings before looking at Fu Qingjin again.

The Clear River prefecture was covered in bodies of water. It had many rivers and lakes. Li Qingshan and Fu Qingjin were currently on a lake near the prefectural city. Here, it would clearly be very beneficial for Li Qingshan to unleash his powers, which was why he mentioned that.

“The landscape here is as beautiful as a painting. It’s a good place to try your sword. I’d like to see the limit of your sword style.” Fu Qingjin smiled gently.

“Then you better keep your eyes open!”

Li Qingshan grabbed the Heavy Water sword on his back and swung it hard. He kicked up a huge wave as he lunged towards Fu Qingjin.

Fu Qingjin wielded his hand like a sword, and the tips of his finger ripped with green light. He swung it down gently, cutting through the huge wave like he was cutting through paper.

The huge wave parted, and a figure appeared. Li Qingshan burst out of the wave and swung down with the Heavy Water sword with enough power to split mountains and rivers.

As if he had been anticipating this. Fu Qingjin ignored the incoming sword and lunged forward. Using his fingers like a sword, he stabbed it straight towards Li Qingshan’s heart.

It was a clash of life and death the moment they began fighting, a battle to the death.

Boom! A huge slash appeared in the calm lake surface, kicking up huge waves of over a dozen meters tall and shaking up the entire lake.

Li Qingshan and Fu Qingjin brushed past one another, standing back-to-back.

“Very good. You have the talent to become a good swordsman.” Fu Qingjin turned around and a strand of hair fell gently.

“Really? What talent?” Li Qingshan looked back and asked. His chest throbbed slightly. If the sword qi on the tip of Fu Qingjin’s finger had pierced another three inches deeper, it would have reached his heart.

“Showing no fear in the face of danger, bold enough to throw your life on the line.”

Fu Qingjin lifted up his fingers and brought them close to his forehead. Rippling with green light, it dyed his forehead and hair green. He swung it conveniently, and it extended into a meter-long stream of light. He arrived with a flash. Before he had even launched an attack, the trail of his sword had already weaved a great net, enveloping Li Qingshan firmly.

Sword intent pierced his forehead, making Li Qingshan’s sea of consciousness ripple. He could not help but feel dispirited and pessimistic. He felt like it was impossible to stop the attack and all attempts of struggle were futile.

Li Qingshan roared out and cut through the sword intent. The Heavy Water sword turned into numerous blurs, like a master of calligraphy wielding a brush valiantly to create a majestic work. It immediately crushed Fu Qingjin’s net.

Before the lake could even settle down, an even larger wave appeared. Under Li Qingshan’s control, it turned into endless strands of sword qi that shot towards Fu Qingjin wave after wave.

“What an exquisite sword style. I think I’ve seen it somewhere before.”

Fu Qingjin was like a single row boat in the raging waves. He rose and fell with the waves, as if he could capsize at any time, yet remaining perfectly fine the entire time as he went with the flow. Only when he had no other place to dodge would he gently slash out with his finger and nullify the danger. He closely observed Li Qingshan’s sword style.

When Fu Qingjin worked with Li Qingshan last time against Strongboulder, he caught a hurried glance of Li Qingshan’s sword style and found it familiar. Today, the sense of familiarity appeared once again.

Li Qingshan and Xiao An’s sword style both originated from the Cursive Sword Calligraphy. Fu Qingjin had once clashed with Xiao An before, so this sense of familiarity was not without reason. He had spent his life learning the sword, so his sensitivity and understanding of the sword even surpassed his memory of people’s faces. As long as he had seen it once, he would keep a record of it and never forget it.

But after observing for a little longer, he was unable to match it up to any of the sword styles in his memories. It was not like this had never happened before. He knew far too many sword styles, and the inherited memories from the Green Ruins sword basically covered everything too. It was just like how it was simply too easy to find two people who looked alike within a sea of people, so it did not attract any suspicion from him.

Although Li Qingshan had comprehended his sword style from the Cursive Sword Calligraphy, his ability to understand and comprehend completely paled in comparison to Xiao An’s.

If Xiao An could comprehend one hundred percent, then he could only comprehend thirty percent, and the sword style would be more straightforward, forceful, and valiant, just like his character. As a result, it became very difficult for Fu Qingjin to connect the two.

The Heavy Water sword missed once again. Li Qingshan raised an eyebrow, and the muscles on his arms rippled. Through brute strength, he forcefully changed the path of the sword, slapping it towards Fu Qingjin.

Resplendent green light appeared on the tips of Fu Qingjin's fingers as they pressed against the flat blade. This was the weakest point of the sword. However, as he knocked away the Heavy Water sword, he also felt his finger ache, as if it had been broken. He was startled inside. What strength!

He was afraid to take it on directly, so he used the force to drift away into the distance.

"Fu Qingjin, you won't even draw your sword. Are you looking down on me?"

Taken away by the battle, Li Qingshan could no longer bother with this fake courtesy. With a clang, he hoisted the Heavy Water sword onto his shoulder and barked in a straightforward manner.

Not only did wielding the sword take great strength, but it depleted his spiritual qi rapidly too, but the Arts of the Boundless Ocean came into effect at a time like this. His depleted spiritual qi would replenish rapidly such that he would always have enough.

"The Green Ruins sword won't be directed towards friends. You wouldn't want a sword you've just obtained to be damaged, right?"

Fu Qingjin stroked the hilt gently and smiled with quite the bearing. He was like a courteous lord purposefully lowering himself to talk heart to heart with the generals and advisors he liked, without any insincerity.

Li Qingshan found it cringeworthy. Who's your friend? In another month's time, I'll cut you down in person.

Fu Qingjin continued, "Your sword style is very impressive, but it seems incomplete. It's rather rigid between moves, which leads to openings."

"Openings or not, it's enough as long as I can kill with it." Li Qingshan could not help but admire and admit that this bastard's sword technique sure was impressive, having surpassed his own. He had actually managed to see through the flaws of his sword style so quickly in battle. He would probably have to suffer a little in this aspect when it came to their battle to the death in the future.

Apart from Fu Qingjin's own talent and hard work, the legacy from the Green Ruins sword played a vital role too. The past masters of the Green Ruins sword were all outstanding figures. They might not remain here in person anymore, but their heart of the sword would forever remain in the sword.

Fu Qingjin said, "Please lend me your sword."

"Take it!" Li Qingshan was surprised by the request before tossing the Heavy Water sword over. I'd like to see what you're planning to do.

The moment Fu Qingjin gripped the hilt, his aura suddenly changed, becoming unruly and beyond control. He swung out with the Heavy Water sword, unleashing a forceful, unruly, and valiant sword style.

Li Qingshan found it rather familiar. "Isn't that my sword style!?"

However, all of the flaws had been fixed, such that it flowed freely from move to move. It became much smoother and more natural, and its power had increased too.

“This sword style doesn’t suit me, so I can’t unleash the limits of its power. All I can do is demonstrate it. I hope it can assist you. We should return.”

In that instant, Fu Qingjin stopped with the sword style and tossed the Heavy Water sword back to Li Qingshan.