

Chapter 521 - The Lord of Thunder and the God of Water

Li Qingshan immediately raised his eyebrows. Just who was out of their minds and bold enough to come make trouble in his territory?

The curtain of night was heavy. Enveloped in dark clouds, the sound of thunder boomed constantly as the world flickered.

A familiar figure stood in the sky criss-crossed with lightning. His shabby priest robes ruffled despite the absence of wind, and electricity crackled on him as if a god of lightning had come down to the mortal realm.

Was that not Zhou Tong?

This old daoist priest has already undergone the heavenly tribulation! Li Qingshan thought. He looked at the sky again and discovered that Zhou Tong was not alone. A Soaring Dragon ship docked in the sea of clouds.

Standing on the deck were the various school leaders with Liu Zhangqing at the front.

Huge cannons erupted with streaks of light, barraging against the formation and making it flicker. It was on the verge of shattering.

During the time Li Qingshan refined the Watermirror disc, Zhou Tong had refined his Lightning Slaughter wooden sword again and finally taken the step, condensing a "Divine Lightning pearl", which was the so-called Golden Core realm.

After resting up slightly, the first thing he did was come for revenge.

Seeing how they had a Golden Core cultivator at the lead now, the Academy of the Hundred Schools riled up in confidence too. They brought out the Soaring Dragon ship that the school of Mohism had spent many years building to provide assistance.

Liu Zhangqing's face flickered due to the lightning. He also wanted to take back his Watermirror disc, so he glanced down at the Moon Court dwelling urgently, but after some consideration, he said to Juechenzi on the side.

"Juechenzi, looks like the moon demon really isn't here. You should convince your master to hold back a little once he gets through the formation so that he doesn't cause wanton massacre."

The war had died down after so much difficulty, but even when the moon demon possessed the upper hand in the past, he had never hunted them down. If Zhou Tong wanted to vent, then so be it, but if this would lead to war again, then he would rather go without the Watermirror disc.

It was exactly because of this that they had remained on the sidelines. Otherwise, if they used the Dragon's Roar with the main cannon on the Soaring Dragon ship, the Moon Court dwelling would have been destroyed a long time ago.

Hua Chengzan said, "Yeah. Even if the moon demon comes, all we need him to do is hand over the Watermirror disc and have him leave Moon- Clear Court lake."

Juechenzi was troubled. "About this... master is having quite the time right now..."

"You don't need to tell me that. I obviously know. I want to force out the moon demon so that he can fight me again. When that happens, none of you are permitted to interfere. This old priest will beat him until he begs for mercy. If he hands over the Watermirror disc obediently and leaves Moon Court lake, so what if I spare his life?"

Zhou Tong's voice boomed out like thunder, reaching the Soaring Dragon ship. He had a violent temper, but he kept a clear record of his debts. He also knew the moon demon had held back before, so he obviously refused to stoop even lower than a daemon.

"Ox-nose, those are some big words! Just whose life do you plan on sparing?"

A violent bellow erupted from the lake, drowning out the wind and thunder in the air. Li Qingshan stood with his arms behind his back, gazing at the sky. His scarlet hair drifted in the wind, blazing like fire.

Zhou Tong's eyes lit up, and he pointed the Lightning Slaughter sword at Li Qingshan. He bellowed out thunderously, "Wretched daemon, you've finally found the courage to come out. Are you bold enough to face me in battle?"

The lightning gathered together on Zhou Tong, making him blaze and flicker. He seemed like a sun conjured from lightning, continuing to absorb electricity from the cloud layer and becoming larger and larger such that it became visible even from five hundred kilometers away, possessing terrifying destructive power.

Li Qingshan laughed aloud. "I think you just don't want to keep that stupid sword of yours anymore! You've brought it to me for roasting chicken!"

Their voices were grand and resounding, echoing through the surroundings like a conversation between two gods.

Li Qingshan hit a sore spot with that. Zhou Tong's expression changed. "Alright, wretched daemon. Looks like you won't feel despair until you face death."

"Alright, old priest. Looks like you won't give up until you see roast chicken. I can see you've reached Golden Core, but so what? Rain, clouds, thunder, and lightning, disperse!"

Suddenly, Li Qingshan extended his hands and pulled them apart like he had grabbed something.

A rip abruptly appeared in the dark clouds that spanned the sky. Like the slowly-unfolding curtains of a stage, they revealed the sky full of stars and the crescent moon.

Moonlight enveloped the Soaring Dragon ship. All the cultivators were stunned, and their faces had become pale-white from the moonlight.

This power was basically beyond belief. It was not something a Daemon General could possess. It almost resembled how Gu Yanying had carved out a battlefield in the sky back then.

Hua Chengzan said, "That might be the power of a water god. The moon demon might not have undergone the heavenly tribulation, but he's become stronger too. This battle probably won't be easy."

However, the other cultivators were rather convinced. No matter how powerful the moon demon was, he was only a Daemon General. How could he be the opponent of a Golden Core cultivator?

Zhou Tong immediately lost his geographical advantage, unable to absorb the power of lightning from the clouds anymore. His expression became stern. He pointed out and channeled with the Lightning Slaughter sword in his hand.

The lightning that resembled a scorching sun, illuminating the surrounding region, suddenly flashed, turning the world white.

By the time everyone recovered, all that remained in their vision was the trace of a jagged bolt of lightning. Who could dodge something that moved so fast?

A huge hole had appeared on the surface of Moon Court lake, stretching over a hundred meters across. Not only had the lake water evaporated, but even the rock below had melted. Who could contend with such power?

However, Li Qingshan managed to dodge in the moment the bolt of lightning fell. He unfurled his wings of wind and turned into a scarlet streak of light, piercing into the sky.

Lightning blazed and crackled. Even the cultivators on the Soaring Dragon ship struggled to keep their eyes open.

No matter how fast the moon demon was, he could not be faster than lightning. No one could escape an attack like that. And, a casual strike from the current Zhou Tong was stronger than all of his full-powered attacks that summoned the heavenly lightning in the past. He only needed a single strike to decide the battle. This was the great power of a Golden Core cultivator!

However, they discovered very soon that they were wrong! The moon demon's figure flew freely between the lightning, turning, darting about, and soaring. He was like a divine bird that clashed with lightning, yet not a single bolt of lightning was actually able to hit him.

Zhou Tong was surprised as well. "That's impossible!"

Li Qingshan opened his eyes. The flashing trajectories of lightning appeared in them, but these flashed had not been left behind after the lightning had struck. Instead, they came from before the lightning erupted. Otherwise, even with the wings of wind's speed, he would still seem slow if he tried competing with lightning.

It was possible to say that if the opponent dodged the moment Zhou Tong struck, they were basically too late already.

In the past, in order to unleash lightning with enough power, Zhou Tong had to perform a series of ritualistic daoist gestures and go to quite some lengths, which gave the opponent time to dodge beforehand.

Now, a casual strike of his possessed startling power, and it would be endless. This was what made lightning terrifying. As someone who practised the Divine Heaven Method of Lightning Wielding, Zhou Tong did indeed have the strength to strut around proudly.

Although he had only just undergone the second tribulation, he could probably look down on all early Golden Core cultivators already. When it came to a real battle to the death, even some mid Golden Core cultivators would not necessarily be his opponent.

However, Li Qingshan used the power of the spirit turtle to peer into that moment of the future. In the blink of an eye, he approached Zhou Tong. No matter how powerful a cultivator's techniques were, their feeble bodies were still their greatest weakness.

"Be careful, senior Zhou!"

"Hmph, I've been waiting for this!" Zhou Tong suddenly slammed his hand against the scorching sun of lightning before him.

Boom!

In that moment, countless bolts of lightning were released like a wild dance of silver snakes, weaving into a net of electricity together with an unbelievably loud clap of thunder.

Even the cultivators on the Soaring Dragon ship high in the sky felt their ears buzz, becoming mildly stunned.

Although they clearly knew Zhou Tong stood on their side, they could not help but become overwhelmed with shock and horror. The interwoven net of electricity was a zone of death. If they fell in there, no matter how many Foundation Establishment cultivators there were, there would only be death for everyone.

Li Qingshan had already responded a moment earlier. However, even though he could see the trajectories of the lightning, he was unable to dodge in the dense net of electricity. Originally, he planned on unleashing the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell to block forcefully, but he suddenly thought of something and waved his hand.

Pieces of the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell assembled into a huge mirror. He unleashed two abilities of the spirit turtle simultaneously.

The violent lightning landed on the mirror, and most of it was reflected.

Li Qingshan stood behind the mirror, completely unscathed. He thought, The effectiveness of this move seems to be limited in close combat, but it seems to be quite effective against techniques, particularly against the flashing lightning from Zhou Tong.

Zhou Tong's eyes widened immediately. Having undergone the second heavenly tribulation, not only did he condense a Divine Lightning pearl, but the Lightning Slaughter sword had become even more powerful after being further forged in the heavenly tribulation, yet his attacks had actually been blocked so easily.

It had not been easy at all for Li Qingshan. Although the reflection seemed to triumph over Zhou Tong's lightning, it took a great toll on his mind to maintain the mirror. His daemon qi plummeted as well.

Normally, he would consider retreating, but he was right above Moon Court lake, so there was no need for him to fear a consumption of daemon qi at all. Taking advantage of Zhou Tong's shock, he flew much closer.

He extended his hand when he was still thirty meters away from Zhou Tong. His arm suddenly swelled up and lengthened, turning into a huge, pitch-black limb that loomed over Zhou Tong's head.

Zhou Tong erupted with lightning, and Li Qingshan felt like he had been electrocuted. There was severe pain, followed by a feeling of numbness that spread through his body. His movements slowed down, but he gritted his teeth and continued to reach down.

A bolt of lightning flew through his fingertips. Zhou Tong's figure changed drastically as the lightning weaved together into the figure of the Lord of Thunder, holding a mallet in one hand and a chisel in the other. He had finally unleashed the ultimate move he had never managed to use in the past that he could now use at will. It was much clearer too, almost tangible.

Zhou Tong roared out furiously, "With the hellish might of gods, the Lord of Thunder strikes the daemon!"

Boom!

The Lord of Thunder struck his mallet against his chisel, and a bolt of lightning shot out, shining with a vague violet colour.

Li Qingshan knew he was unable to reflect this ultimate move. With a flap of his wings of wind, he dodged beforehand, but the trajectory of the lightning suddenly changed, piercing through the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell viciously and striking his body.

Li Qingshan shuddered all over. He actually lost control over his body at that moment. The wings of wind shattered as he directly fell towards Moon Court lake.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

How could Zhou Tong let such a fantastic opportunity slip by? He unfurled a pair of lightning wings and took off in pursuit. The Lord of Thunder constantly struck the chisel of lightning in his hand as bolts of violet lightning landed on Li Qingshan again and again.

The lightning would rip apart the daemon qi Li Qingshan had just gathered, and his body had become completely numb from the electricity. He entered a state where he was unable to put up any resistance.

Clashing with a Golden Core cultivator really is very dangerous! It's also so unpredictable. Just the slightest carelessness might cost me my life.

The Water God Seal in Li Qingshan's body produced ripples of light, which reached the edge of Moon Court lake in the blink of an eye.

The peaceful lake water suddenly began to bubble.

Swoosh!

A streak of water rose up from the centre of the lake like an upside down waterfall, directly charging into the sky and turning into a colossal hand that swung towards Zhou Tong.

Chapter 522 - The Broken Sword, the Pill, and the Choice

The intense battle over Moon Court lake had alarmed all the settlements in its surroundings.

In particular, the fishermen who lived on their boats suddenly felt like they were in free fall. They darted into their cabins in fear and surprise, only to see the surface of the lake had suddenly fallen by a feet. A colossal hand composed of water reached into the air from the centre of the lake.

“Grandfather lake god is angry!”

Shock and fear was written across all of their faces. Someone bellowed out with that and everyone dropped to their knees, constantly lowering their heads.

On a small, stone bridge near the shore, a person stood alone as his green student’s robes drifted in the air.

Fu Qingjin pressed his hand against his sword and stared ahead. “Northmoon, have you already become like this?”

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A few months ago, deep into autumn, on Benevolence island, by the Lake of Dragons and Snakes.

A lonely figure held a broken sword, sitting on the shore alone. There was no Green Ruins Illusion, nor was there a dangling thread.

“Why’s this Fu Qingjin acting like he’s lost his wits!?” Hua Chenglu arrived on Benevolence island to check on a Hawkwolf guard who had been injured during a mission. She spotted Fu Qingjin’s figure from afar.

Yu Zijian said, “Shh, Chenglu, be quieter. Don’t let him hear you.”

The conversation reached his ears clearly, but he behaved like he had not heard it at all. He stared at the severed edge of the Green Ruins sword. What had been severed was not just the edge, but all connections with the outside world.

The Daemon Suppression alliance had already become a matter of the past. Gradually, no one visited him anymore.

The Sword Collection palace neither punished him nor called him back. He only received two distant words from his master. “Take care.” It was two simple words, yet it left him stumped no matter how hard he thought about it.

His wounds had recovered a long time ago, but he had no idea where to go, so he simply stayed here. He remained in this foreign land like a lone soul.

“You don’t have a line, so how are you going to fish?”

The sound of footsteps grew closer and a voice rang. It was Yu Zijian. Fu Qingjin did not turn around, nor did he answer her.

In the past, he had once believed fate bound him to this young girl because of the Green Ruins sword. Now that the sword was broken, the tie no longer existed. No matter how he looked at her, she was merely a regular woman. Perhaps she really did have the talent to inherit the Violet Clouds sword, but what did that have to do with him?

Yu Zijian remembered how she was like in the past and let out a faint sigh, but her gaze had never been so calm and distant before. She asked a question, "Is this sword really that important to you?"

Fu Qingjin remained as silent as a rock.

"Zijian, let's go!"

"Coming!" Yu Zijian turned around and answered. Then she said to Fu Qingjin, "Someone had once told me that dilemmas will always exist in the world, and we always have to make choices. Nothing is perfect."

It was a simple word of advice, but it shot through Fu Qingjin's head like inspiration. The hand that held his sword trembled slightly. Only after Yu Zijian had left did he mutter with a voice that only he could hear.

"Nothing is perfect. All glory will be reduced to ruins at the end of the day!"

His master's voice rang out beside his ear again.

"Qingjin, do you know about the origins of this Green Ruins sword? Our Sword Collection palace had a senior who was originally the monarch of a kingdom. Of course, Great Xia did not exist back then. The nine provinces were still littered with various kingdoms. In order to deal with the threat of an enemy kingdom, he went out in search of help, accidentally entering an immortal's dwelling and obtaining an immortal's legacy. He was utterly overjoyed, but by the time he left the dwelling, he discovered several decades had already passed."

"His family and friends had all passed away, and his kingdom had already fallen to the opposing kingdom a long time ago. He wanted revenge, only to discover that the opposing kingdom had been destroyed in the chaos of war a long time ago too. He was filled with endless melancholy and merged this with the sword. That is the sword intent that the Green Ruins sword possesses. Endless prosperity will all be reduced to ruins one day, covered and hidden away by green moss..."

Fu Qingjin lifted up the Green Ruins sword and said gently, "Even you aren't able to be an exception?"

The next day, Fu Qingjin left the academy. He passed by every single city that had been destroyed during the war, imagining their former glory. He seemed to have washed off the dust obscuring his eyes. The entire world had become different.

Day by day, the Green Ruins sword remained broken like before, but slivers of green light merged into it.

This time, it was not the sighs of the senior from the ancient times, nor was it the sighs of past masters of the Green Ruins sword. Instead, it was Fu Qingjin's own comprehension.

After visiting who knew how many cities, he finally understood the Green Ruins sword was not actually broken. In that moment, the Green Ruins sword suddenly erupted with an unprecedented glow, and before he knew it, he was standing in the Green Ruins Illusion again.

A figure stood under the collapsed palace walls in the distance. He turned around and smiled faintly.

He was a rather dignified man. His appearance was very unfamiliar, but his expression was extremely familiar. His aloofness and melancholy had once appeared on his own face countless times.

Fu Qingjin smiled as well. He smiled very brightly, like before he had picked up the Green Ruins sword.

From then onwards, one of the Ten Renowned Swords of the Sword Collection palace became a broken sword.

Having retrieved the Lightning Slaughter sword after so much difficulty, Zhou Tong was cultivating in peace in his dwelling, preparing for his breakthrough to Golden Core. Suddenly, he felt someone touch the formation, and he frowned, stepping out of his dwelling.

“It’s you?”

Zhou Tong had been slightly angry already. Seeing the visitor, he became very angry. “Fu Qingjin, what brings you here?”

Fu Qingjin opened his hand. A violet pill rested in there.

Zhou Tong’s anger vanished. “That’s an Origin Spirit pill!”

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Faced with the incoming hand, Zhou Tong snorted in disdain. With a wave of the Lightning Slaughter sword, he turned into a bolt of lightning and passed through the palm. He moved no slower than Li Qingshan’s wings of wind.

In that moment, an electrical current spread through the water from inside out, lighting up the huge hand. It collapsed loudly like a landslide.

This ox-nose sure is difficult to deal with after the tribulation.

Li Qingshan stabilised himself, and with a shudder, he dispersed the violet electricity. He exhaled deeply and gazed at Zhou Tong in the sky who resembled a god of thunder.

Their gazes clashed and sparks seemed to fly.

With a streak of lightning, Zhou Tong rushed down. The figure of the Lord of Thunder did not seem to be able to keep up with his speed. It fell behind and revealed Zhou Tong’s figure. Electricity crackled around the Lightning Slaughter sword, making the wooden sword of unimpressive appearance glow with blinding light.

Li Qingshan stood on a water dragon and ascended bravely. He clenched his fist firmly as the power of tremors constantly gathered without being released. A ring of black cracks condensed as if he could rip through the space there.

His ear suddenly twitched, and he swung his hand to the side.

The two of them rushed past one another. The lightning shot through in a straight line while the water dragon shattered.

A fist-sized hole appeared in Li Qingshan's chest. He turned around and bellowed, "Again!"

Zhou Tong turned around. He was unscathed, but he was anything but calm. "Why!?"

"Why what? Stop wasting time, you bastard!"

On the Soaring Dragon ship, Liu Zhangqing said in confusion, "What's wrong with senior Zhou?"

"Look at the surroundings of the lake. The moon demon was distracted earlier." Hua Chengzan also experienced indescribable surprise, as well as a hint of admiration.

"Nothing seems to have happened at all, so why would he be distract-" Liu Zhangqing followed Hua Chengzan's hand and gazed into the distance. He was unable to see anything strange, but his heart suddenly shuddered, and he understood what had happened.

When the lightning dispersed the colossal hand of water and caused it to collapse, it had created a huge pit in the lake, kicking up massive waves several dozen meters in height that spread out in all directions. More accurately, they were no longer merely waves, but tsunamis that would only appear in seas.

Fu Qingjin's figure vanished from the small stone bridge, standing on a pier by the shore. He gripped his sword, ready to cut down the incoming waves, only to see the waves collapse for no reason. Only then did he lower the Green Ruins sword and gaze into the horizon.

Among the mortals' cheers of gratitude for the lake god, Fu Qingjin's expression became rather dazed for a moment.

The settlements on the shore should have been reduced to a mess, but they were perfectly fine instead. Clearly, the moon demon had split his focus to stop the waves during the clash, which allowed Zhou Tong to pierce him with his sword.

On the Soaring Dragon ship, everyone realised this fact. They looked at one another and had no idea what to say.

"Why did you receive my attack when you could have dodged it?"

Without a doubt, Zhou Tong had noticed it much more clearly than everyone else. He did not become complacent at all. In the past when he clashed with Bloodshadow, he had killed an entire city of people with a bolt of lightning. It did bring him some slight discomfort, but under the righteous cause of purging daemons, he felt no shame or regret at all.

But now, he was fighting for the sake of his personal grievance, yet Li Qingshan was instead willing to receive an attack from him in exchange for saving countless lives. Their identities seemed to have reversed. The concept of "purging daemons and demons" no longer seemed so righteous anymore.

"Because I'm willing. Cut the bullsh*t, let's go again. You can just treat that as giving you a handicap!"

In the moment earlier, Li Qingshan heard countless calls and cries. Faced with the incoming wave, some people called out something along the lines of, "Save us, grandfather lake god!" There were also crying from children and women. As a result, he used the Water God Seal with a single thought and dispersed the wave.

He was no saint. If this really were a battle where his life could be determined by a single moment, he would have never cared about the fates of mortals. However, if he could save several hundred thousand lives at the cost of receiving a strike, the choice was as clear as day. He did not feel like he had done anything good.

"Forget it. You've received a strike from me, so our grievances are settled with that!"

There was nothing else Zhou Tong could say. Suddenly, he let out a deep sigh and turned into a bolt of lightning, flying off on his sword. He arrived on the Soaring Dragon ship. "Sir Liu, this battle is pointless. I will find a way to make it up to you regarding the Watermirror disc."

If they continued fighting and Li Qingshan had to receive more injuries for the sake of the people near the shore, he really could not afford to embarrass himself like that. Speaking of which, it was not like he was the Marquis of Ruyi. So what if the moon demon had occupied this region of water to cultivate in? What did that have to do with him? Having reached Golden Core, he had already leapt out of the game of chess. There was no need for him to behave like how others wanted him to behave anymore. As for those who stood at the very top, it was not like regular people knew what they wanted anyway.

"As you wish, senior."

Liu Zhangqing clasped his hands before issuing an order. The Soaring Dragon ship turned around and flew off towards the academy. Basically everyone let out a sigh of relief. The strength Li Qingshan had demonstrated was simply too shocking. He could basically contend with Golden Core cultivators, and with a geographic advantage, even Zhou Tong might not necessarily be able to defeat him. This would be for the best for everyone.

From this day onwards, there were no longer any cultivators in the Clear River prefecture who were stupid enough to declare war against the moon demon anymore.

"What a strange one!"

Li Qingshan rubbed his chin. With a surge of daemon qi, the wound on his chest recovered rapidly. It was absolutely nothing compared to his battle with Lolth.

Suddenly, he detected a familiar aura. He looked over, and his gaze became extremely hostile, spotting the green figure on the pier immediately.

"Fu Qingjin!"

Chapter 523 - The Game Ends

The wings of wind lifted him high into the air. The fierce wind carved out long trajectories over the surface of the lake. Li Qingshan arrived before Fu Qingjin in the blink of an eye, kicking up a colossal wave.

Fu Qingjin squinted his eyes. The splashing water dispersed as Li Qingshan's figure with drifting scarlet hair appeared.

Everyone on the Soaring Dragon ship watched on from afar.

"Isn't that Fu Qingjin?"

"With how powerful the moon demon is, regular Foundation Establishment cultivators aren't his opponent at all."

"It'll be troublesome if a disciple of the Sword Collection palace dies here."

"I've waited quite some time for you!" Li Qingshan sneered and strode over, throwing a punch.

Fu Qingjin did not dodge. He only said two words flatly, and the fist stopped before his face. The fierce wind blew away his black hair.

"I've lost."

"What did you say?"

Li Qingshan raised his eyebrows in great surprise. Only after closely studying Fu Qingjin did he notice how he had changed. Although his appearance and attire were still mostly the same, he seemed like a different person in Li Qingshan's eyes.

The change in his bearing could not be described with words, but if a description was absolutely necessary, then his condescension had vanished, and his constantly-sighing gaze had become clear and certain.

"I'm not your opponent. You've won this game of chess."

When Li Qingshan dispersed the colossal wave, Fu Qingjin knew he had lost, and not simply in terms of strength.

"What the hell are the two of you doing? I only casually spared the lives of a few mortals, didn't I? Do you really have to overreact like this?"

Li Qingshan pulled back his fist. He could not help but experience a feeling of, "I haven't even shown you my true strength, and you've already been defeated."

"How hilarious. Even a daemon can show benevolence. What have all my actions of the past been in comparison then?"

Fu Qingjin said in a self-deprecating manner. Upon breaking free from the influence of the Green Ruins sword and looking back at everything he had done, he found it all ridiculous. He was like a child under the influence of adults, forcefully trying to imitate the mature tone of adults, yet losing his most-important shred of innocence.

Suddenly, there was a wild gust of wind, and Fu Qingjin returned to his senses. A fist had already landed heavily on his face, sending him spinning. He smashed through several walls before finally coming to a stop.

“I don’t know what you’re saying, but I do feel much better.”

Li Qingshan clasped his fist, turned around, and made his way back to Moon Court lake.

Fu Qingjin laid in the fragmented brick and tiles in a bad shape and gazed at the night sky filled with stars. He said softly, “Thank you!”

Li Qingshan stopped. When Fu Qingjin finished, he turned into a scarlet smear and swept over.

“No need to thank me!”

With a boom, Li Qingshan stomped down on Fu Qingjin’s chest, immediately creating a great pit. Rock fragments flew everywhere.

Fu Qingjin coughed up a mouthful of blood and stared into Li Qingshan’s eyes. He raised his right hand and pointed at the sky. “Northmoon, your trouble is coming.”

“I don’t need you to tell me!”

Li Qingshan obviously understood. When one side admitted defeat, that was the end of the chess game.

There would not be any more rules that prevented powerful cultivators from interfering. By refining bodies of water, he must have crossed the bottom line of certain people. They would never simply leave the matter be.

When he possessed an absolute advantage, he did not make use of it to hunt down everyone; instead, he dragged out the game of chess and earned himself more room to develop.

Now that Zhou Tong had given up and Fu Qingjin had admitted defeat, there was no point in continuing with this game of chess.

Li Qingshan’s face became stern. “Then I might as well kill you and eliminate any future problems!”

“And what benefit would that bring you?”

Fu Qingjin smiled. He personally believed he was not the moon demon’s opponent, but after comprehending the true intent behind the Green Ruins sword, he was not without some life-saving measures. And, he obviously had made ample preparations given how he was bold enough to come to Moon Court lake.

There was a flash of lightning in the sky, followed by booming thunder. Zhou Tong said, “Moon demon, release him!”

“You...”

Li Qingshan looked at Zhou Tong before looking at Fu Qingjin. He sank into his thoughts. Zhou Tong had a fiery temper, and he never had a good impression of Fu Qingjin, so why would he specially rush over to save him now?

Looking at Zhou Tong’s expression, he was not completely willing either. There was a hint of reluctance.

Fu Qingjin said, “Senior Zhou has already agreed to become a guest elder of our Sword Collection palace.”

Becoming a guest elder of the Sword Collection palace brought extremely great benefits, and they basically had no responsibilities either. Even the master of the Sword Collection palace could not order them around without good reason. They only had to promise a single thing, which was to provide assistance when the Sword Collection palace faced devastating peril. However, as a large sect of sword cultivators with such deep foundations, the Sword Collection palace probably would not encounter something like that even in the next few millennia.

Coupled with an extremely precious Origin Spirit pill thrown into the deal, Zhou Tong had no reason to turn this down. The Sword Collection palace was not receiving the short end of the stick either. If Zhou Tong ascended in the future or fell in battle, the Lightning Slaughter sword that possessed extremely great potential would definitely be left behind on Sword Collection peak. Perhaps it might enter the ranks of the Ten Renowned Swords in the future.

Their further objective was so that the successor of the Violet Clouds sword, Yu Zijian, could formally join the Sword Collection palace. Having reached this step on the chessboard, Fu Qingjin had admitted defeat, but the Sword Collection palace had not lost.

Li Qingshan furrowed his brows before loosening them again. He had also obtained everything he wanted from this game of chess. He obtained a region of water that he could treat as a foundation, he had pushed all three transformations of the ox, tiger, and turtle to the fourth layer, and he had also found a way to gain a grasp over the Phoenix's Scripture of Nirvāṇa.

"With how you've said it, I really am tempted to try it!"

Li Qingshan sneered viciously. His right foot suddenly turned into a hoof, and he stomped down hard. His daemon qi surged, turning into pulses of tremors.

Fu Qingjin's body emitted rings of green light, enveloping Li Qingshan's hoof and covering it in a layer of green moss. He felt his strength, daemon qi, and shockwaves all disperse.

Clang!

The Green Ruins sword exited its sheathe as half a broken sword, sweeping past Li Qingshan gently. The bladeless sword left behind a layer of green moss on Li Qingshan's chest, and the feeling of powerlessness immediately seeped in.

Li Qingshan snorted coldly. He opened his mouth and spat out a gust of wind that collided against the protective green light over Fu Qingjin. Sure enough, it was rapidly dispersed and worn away, while his breath was endless. In the blink of an eye, the green light had visibly thinned.

No matter how deep Fu Qingjin's comprehension of the Green Ruins sword was, no matter how profoundly powerful the Green Ruins sword was, none of it was able to change his reality of being a Foundation Establishment cultivator. It was impossible for him to outlast Li Qingshan who had Moon Court lake as a support.

There was a bolt of lightning and the Lightning Slaughter sword shot past with a flash, severing the breath.

Scarlet hair drifted around, green light streak about, and lightning flickered on the pier. The three of them clashed, but all of them were holding back. Otherwise, just a few half-minded techniques and abilities would be enough to reduce the small city by the lake to a pile of rubble.

But a short while later, a streak of green light seemed to shoot away with the lightning following close behind, vanishing into the horizon in the blink of an eye.

Li Qingshan did not chase after them. After a moment of consideration, he turned around and dove into Moon Court lake.

Returning to his dwelling, Ye Liusu, Ye Liubo, and the night roamers immediately rushed over to him. Li Qingshan comforted them all before arriving in the small lake on the island, picking up the Watermirror disc, and peering at the image in the mirror.

He could vaguely sense that danger was currently approaching. He needed to increase his strength as quickly as possible, and only then would he be able to keep this water dwelling, no, continue to expand his territory.

Perhaps he should return and investigate exactly how the Ruyi commandery had responded and whether they would send any people over to cause trouble. If the Ruyi commandery did respond, then they would definitely require his cooperation as the Scarlet Hawk commander.

Knowing thyself and knowing thy enemy makes you undefeatable in battle.

But upon further consideration, Li Qingshan did not rush back in a hurry. That would be too much of a coincidence otherwise. Even if the Ruyi commandery were to respond, it would not be that quickly!

Thinking like that, Li Qingshan sat down again in the lake, taking out the Water God Seal.

The regions of water could provide him with endless water spiritual qi, but they still required time to generate it sliver by sliver. After his difficult battle against Lolth, the water spiritual qi in the regions had already become much thinner.

If he poured all of the remaining water spiritual qi into his daemon core, it would be nowhere near enough. It would only be stupid. Daemon cultivation had always consumed massive amounts of spiritual qi, not to mention he practised something as powerful as the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine.

The power of the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine would become greater the further his cultivation advanced, but the difficulty of cultivation would increase too. Breaking through to the fifth layer of the spirit turtle definitely could not be achieved overnight.

And without any suitable pills, his daemon cultivation was destined to slow down for a period of time. With that being the case, he would be better off cultivating in a different direction.

Li Qingshan placed his attention on his sea of qi. The spiritual qi in there was much more abundant than when he first established his foundation.

He had basically practised the Arts of the Boundless Ocean for two years now. Although he never placed much focus on it, he had never stopped practising it either.

Even though he would use the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression to enter a meditative state whenever he entered secluded cultivation, he would still divert some focus to this cultivation method. Actually, the amount of time and effort he had spent on his human cultivation was no less than regular cultivators, and the effects could be described as much better.

However, going from early Foundation Establishment to mid Foundation Establishment could not be achieved so easily. It required talent, it required resources, and it required comprehension. With the three combined, even spending a decade on the breakthrough was nothing surprising.

This opportunity just happened to be available for Li Qingshan.

The Arts of the Boundless Ocean had always placed a relatively higher requirement on the cultivator's talent, but probably even the creator of the cultivation method had never imagined a person's talent in the future would be so high.

After reaching the fourth layer of the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression, Li Qingshan's body possessed the aura of the spirit turtle's bloodline. His talent for water cultivation was so high that even many water exotic beasts paled in comparison. Using it for the Arts of the Boundless Ocean was essentially overkill.

Talent was not an issue!

Li Qingshan brought his hands together and pressed the Water God Seal against his belly. The Water God Seal that had always been both tangible and ethereal merged with the sea of qi, constantly gathering water spiritual qi.

The remaining water spiritual qi in the regions of water was inadequate for the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression, but it was more than adequate for the Arts of the Boundless Ocean.

Compared to daemon cultivation, human cultivation had always consumed far fewer resources, not to mention he was not making a major breakthrough either, and he had two years of cultivation as a foundation.

Resources were a small issue too!

The last part was comprehension.

This was probably a great problem to all cultivators. So-called bottlenecks were often caused by this one word.

For example, Hua Chengzan had been considered a genius of his generation too, and he had the supply of resources from his clan, yet just because of love, he was stuck at the tenth layer of Qi Practitioner for many years, unable to break through. In the end, he had almost gone to painstaking lengths before barely reaching Foundation Establishment. That was more than enough to demonstrate the importance of the word "comprehension".

Chapter 524 - Mid Foundation Establishment

If cultivation was about fetching water, then talent would be equivalent to the water bucket. A larger water bucket would obviously lead to fewer trips. The resources would be the water. If the water could not fill the bucket, then it would be a waste of talent.

All of these efforts would be for the final objective of pouring the water into the water tank. Insufficient comprehension was equivalent to an incomplete tank. No matter how much water was fetched, it would all be pointless.

The matter of comprehension had nothing to do with intelligence, but an ability to understand. If they could comprehend it, then they would comprehend it. If they could not, then they could not. It would be useless even if someone explained it to them till their jaws ached.

Li Qingshan's ability to understand obviously could not be regarded as impressive. At the very least, there was no way for him to compare with Xiao An. However, comprehension was also about luck. He had his own luck, which was this vast Moon Court lake. As the god of Moon Court lake, he could naturally comprehend the feeling of the "boundless ocean" to a certain degree.

And that was enough.

Talent, resources, and comprehension were all present, establishing a foundation. However, the Arts of the Boundless Ocean had another issue. It was a rare cultivation method that focused on both qi and the body. If the body was not tempered, it would be very difficult to use Ocean Wielding or unleash the true power of the Arts of the Boundless Ocean.

Li Qingshan's body had already been tempered to the realm of Daemon Generals, so this was obviously not something he had to worry about. He cycled through the Arts of the Boundless Ocean again and again as the spiritual qi in his sea of qi increased bit by bit until it was full.

His sea of consciousness had also begun rippling indefinitely. After who knew how long, a rumble resonated through his head.

Li Qingshan had finally reached the fifth layer of the Arts of the Boundless Ocean, reaching mid Foundation Establishment. He opened his eyes and felt his soul sense become clearer and more sensitive, and the spiritual qi in his body had become more and more vast.

"It's time I went back and took a look."

Li Qingshan called Xiao An and used the Invisibility technique, returning to the Chain mountains silently.

Large flakes of snow drifted down freely, coating the Chain mountains in a silver glow.

Right in front of the Qing Xiao dwelling was another perilous mountain. A figure sat with her legs crossed on a protruding face of the mountain. Yu Zijian was covered in snow, but her eyes were as determined as always.

The news that Zhou Tong had become a guest elder of the Sword Collection palace had spread through the academy. There were many disciples of the school of Daoism, but Zhou Tong only took her with him.

Juechenzi had to remain behind as the leader of the school of Daoism, and even if regular disciples wanted to follow along, the Sword Collection palace might not necessarily want them. As a result, she became someone that everyone envied. Not only did she have a powerful Golden Core cultivator as a master, but she could even directly join one of the powerful sects of the Green province. Heaven seemed to favour her as she climbed to the very top in a single step.

However, she did not leave with Zhou Tong happily and immediately for the Sword Collection palace. Instead, she left the academy and arrived before the entrance of the Qing Xiao dwelling. She did not knock on the door either. She simply sat there, and before she knew it, five days had already passed.

Countless rumors ran amok, but she was completely unconcerned.

She wanted to wait, to wait for him to emerge, to wait for an answer!

Fu Qingjin urged her to go to the Sword Collection palace as soon as possible; she turned him down. Hua Chenglu wanted to accompany her and wait here; she chased her away. Zhou Tong simply let her be, in absolutely no hurry at all.

“Zijian, what are you doing here?”

The formation twisted, and the door to the dwelling opened loudly. Li Qingshan stepped out of the dwelling and asked in surprise. He knew the matter of Yu Zijian accompanying Zhou Tong to the Sword Collection palace had already been set in stone, and he had no intention of obstructing it either. This was her luck, or perhaps, fate.

Seeing Li Qingshan, Yu Zijian’s heart quivered, and she stood up slightly. With a flash of white light, the snow on her melted away, turning into curling wisps of white smoke. She cut right to the chase. “May I ask if you’re Niu Juxia or not?”

“Of course not!”

Li Qingshan let out a sigh inside. Before he knew it, the klutzy, kind-hearted girl had also developed such a determined gaze, but his answer was extremely firm.

In the current day and age, there was no longer a need for Niu Juxia to exist. He would be better off existing as a memory in her head!

Yu Zijian smiled complacently. She smiled like a little fox that had managed to steal a chicken. It was slightly clear, yet also slightly relieved.

It made Li Qingshan think about when he first met her several years ago. He frowned. Have I given myself away? My acting should have been flawless!

When Yu Zijian lifted her right hand from behind her back, Li Qingshan immediately understood. The xiezhi’s horn shone in her hand.

“You liar!”

Li Qingshan rubbed his nose, lowered his head, and smiled bitterly. The lie he had upheld for all these years had been seen through. It really was quite embarrassing.

Yu Zijian’s gaze trembled. She suddenly rushed up and gave Li Qingshan a hug. “I’m going to be leaving. No matter who you are, no matter what you’ve done, I believe you’re a good person!”

Li Qingshan was touched. Her thoughts had ceased to be as simple as the past a long time ago. Through his identity of “Niu Juxia”, she could deduce far, far too many things, but she did not mention it, nor did she ask about it.

“Go. Go do what you want to do and go be the person you want to be. Don’t be afraid of pain and don’t be afraid of sacrifice. As long as you make it high enough and far enough, there will be a day when we can meet again!”

Li Qingshan patted her back before pushing her away gently.

“Yeah, definitely!”

Yu Zijian backed away and glanced at Li Qingshan deeply again before turning around and taking off, vanishing into the snow.

Li Qingshan felt slightly melancholic. He laughed at himself for that and turned around, returning to the dwelling. He rubbed Xiao An’s head. “We have to prepare to set off too. I wonder whether Qiongzhi has succeeded with establishing a foundation.”

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“Greetings, commander!”

“Commander, you’ve returned.”

Li Qingshan arrived in the office of the Hawkwolf Guard in Clear River city. All the Hawkwolf guards he came across along the way bowed towards him. Their gazes were rather surprised at first before becoming replaced by shock.

Only after Li Qingshan had walked past did they discuss quietly, “I haven’t mistaken it, have I? That aura’s... mid Foundation Establishment!?”

“That’s right, it can’t be wrong. I think so too!”

“Just how long has it been since he established a foundation!?”

“Looks like commander is also the type to hide his talent!”

If there were still people who were dissatisfied with his irresponsibility and tardiness, then this cultivation speed was enough for everyone to shut up before becoming completely convinced.

What were “cultivators”? The emphasis was placed on the word “cultivation”. As long as they could advance at an ungodly rate, then nothing else mattered anymore.

Li Qingshan arrived upstairs and saw Hua Chenglu standing beside the floor-to-ceiling windows in low spirits. He could not help himself as his eyes lit up. Hua Chenglu had truly inherited the fantastic bloodline of the Hua family. As she stood there, she looked quite like a saddened beauty. He approached her and smiled. “Girl, what are you thinking about? Where’s your elder brother?”

“Commander... you’ve already reached mid Foundation Establishment!” Hua Chenglu turned around and was also surprised.

“You sure have ended up pretty, girlie!”

“What girlie? And pretty, really?” Hua Chenglu curled her lip, objecting to how Li Qingshan described her. Li Qingshan might have been a Foundation Establishment cultivator already, but he did not behave arrogantly at all. She was happy to accept him as a good friend too.

“Don’t forget, I come from the country. It’s a pity I already have your elder sister Han. Otherwise, I’d buy some betrothal gifts and go to the Hua family to ask for your hand in marriage.”

Hua Chenglu’s face reddened. “Commander, you shouldn’t talk nonsense. Did you know that elder sister Han has already reached Foundation Establishment?”

“What! Where is she right now?”

Li Qingshan beamed with joy even though he had never worried for Han Qiongzhi’s safety. Foundation Establishment was as the cultivation realm suggested. It was only building a foundation for future cultivation, so normally, it should not have been too dangerous, not to mention she had someone as powerful as Han Anguo watching over her. However, hearing her succeed still brought him relief. One less thing weighed on his mind now.

“She’s still in the Ruyi commandery. She’s remaining there to serve as a white wolf under commander Gu. Her post is even higher than yours now.”

“That’s good!” Li Qingshan nodded before suddenly turning around and leaving.

“Where are you going, commander?”

“To the Ruyi commandery, of course,” Li Qingshan said like it was common sense. In the past, she was in secluded cultivation, and he was unable to leave the Clear River prefecture. Now that nothing was stopping him, he obviously had to go and reunite with her.

“Hold on. Qingshan, you’ve emerged! Sure enough, you’ve made quite the progress yet again!”

Hua Chengzan also sensed Li Qingshan’s aura. He came out to take a look and could not help but experience a certain helplessness of, “I’ll just become depressed if I compare myself with you”. From the moment he had met Li Qingshan, he had never stopped advancing forward. If this continued, Golden Core would be nothing difficult at all for him.

Li Qingshan smiled. “I just got lucky, that’s all. I can see you’re close too.”

Hua Chengzan had always been a genius, and he had succeeded with Foundation Establishment a few years before Li Qingshan. In the past, he had been stuck as a Qi Practitioner for many years due to love, but it did give him an extremely firm foundation. He was close to breaking through soon too.

“Luck has never been a factor in cultivation. Though, you did miss another good show.”

“Really? Tell me about it.” Li Qingshan feigned interest.

Hua Chengzan told him about everything that had happened in the Clear River prefecture during the time he spent in secluded cultivation one by one.

“I think it’d be better to see fewer of these ‘good shows’. I didn’t expect the moon demon to become so powerful already. If he goes crazy, there’ll be quite the danger. I definitely won’t be loitering around

near Moon Court lake before I reach Golden Core. Alright, I'm going to go. I'll have to trouble vice commander Hua to continue with your efforts."

Li Qingshan patted Hua Chengzan's shoulder and was about to leave.

"Wait, there's something else..."

Before Hua Chengzan could finish, a cold bellow rang out from the window, "To think such a timid and overcautious person would be worthy of becoming a Scarlet Hawk commander!"

When Li Qingshan first heard the voice, he had yet to sense the existence of an aura, but as soon as he had heard a few words, a small, thin, and tremendous figure had already appeared before him.

The small and thin was referring to his size. The tremendous was referring to his aura.

"Who are you? State your name!"

Li Qingshan shouted out, but he recognised this person with a single glance. He was slightly surprised. Wen Zhengming of Pine Sough academy! He's come so quickly! Looks like he's in a hurry to avenge his disciple. I really can't leave even for a moment!

However, Li Qingshan had already clashed with a Daemon Commander like Lolth and a Golden Core cultivator like Zhou Tong, so he was not exactly afraid of this Wen Zhengming right now. He thought to himself, It's not like I know this bastard. If I kill him, then I kill him. He should end up dropping some good loot.

Wen Zhengming completely ignored Li Qingshan. Hua Chengzan shot a glance at Li Qingshan and bowed politely. "I'm Hua Chengzan. Greetings, senior. May I ask where the other three seniors are?"

Li Qingshan bowed as well, but his heart lurched, Other three?! Seniors?!

In other words, it was not one person making trouble for him this time, but four. Four Golden Core cultivators.

What an occasion!

Chapter 525 - Seeing Qiongzhi Again

Hua Chengzan said in a hurry, "Qingshan, this is head scholar Wen of Pine Sough academy!"

"They will be here when they arrive. Give me all the information on that wretched daemon."

Li Qingshan could not help but praise, How meticulous!

Four Golden Core cultivators would be facing a single Daemon General. He was outnumbering the weaker opponent by four-to-one, yet he still wanted to closely study any information regarding the opponent. He showed no conceit or arrogance at all. An attitude like this in itself was already rather terrifying.

It would be fine if he did nothing, but once he struck, it would be certain death.

Hua Chengzan said, "Please come with me, senior!"

Before Wen Zhengming left, he lectured Li Qingshan again, "You must live up to the responsibilities of your position. Since you're a Scarlet Hawk commander, how can you only think for yourself and neglect the greater good of the world around you? You are to blame for daemons running amok!"

Li Qingshan said, "The matters of the world will obviously have people of the world to handle them. Now that the war has finally come to a close after so much difficulty, the common people require peace and contentment to rebuild their homes. If it weren't for the sake of your disciple's revenge, why would you have lowered yourself to such a level in the first place, senior? I just wonder how many people by the shore of Moon Court lake will suffer once the battle begins."

"You are not worth my attention, boy. As long as daemons remain, the world will struggle to find peace. How can you only focus on what goes on before you?" Wen Zhengming said furiously.

Li Qingshan smiled. "Well said, senior. It's just a pity that the lowly words of this junior carry little weight and my cultivation is low. Even if I go to Moon Court lake, I'll only be seeking my own doom. Since senior has such a thorough understanding of the greater good, please do go dragon slaying in Ink Sea. I'm more than willing to follow along."

He was basically implying, You're just harassing the moon demon, a mere Daemon General, yet you still claim you're purging daemons for the greater good? If you really come across an opponent you can't defeat, won't you piss off like everyone else? If you're bold enough to risk your life with the Dragon King of Ink Sea, I'm bold enough to accompany you!

Though, once we get to a critical moment, I'll definitely have to call out, Sir dragon king, don't shoot! I'm one of you!

Wen Zhengming became even more furious. To think a mere Foundation Establishment cultivator was bold enough to speak to him like that! He held back his anger and snorted coldly, leaving in a huff.

Li Qingshan originally wanted to follow along and take a look so that he could learn a little more about what was happening. This was a matter of life and death, as well as a matter of his so-called pride. However, upon further thought, he decided against it. Whether he knew a little more about the situation or not, it was all the same.

No matter how they attacked him, Li Qingshan only had a single response, which was to unleash the spirit turtle's special characteristic of patience and forbearance. With a "Spirit Turtle Holes up in its Shell", he would cope with anything they threw at him with the same response!

With his current strength, dealing with a Golden Core cultivator was still rather difficult. Dealing with four basically guaranteed defeat. He would not even necessarily be able to escape even if he wanted to. A battle where defeat was certain was obviously pointless.

Hua Chenglu whispered, "Commander, you don't even know him? Senior Wen is one of the four grandmasters of confucianism in our Ruyi commandery."

The four grandmasters of confucianism!

Li Qingshan's heart skipped a beat. The alias did ring a bell. "May I ask who the four are?"

Hua Chenglu explained it to him. As it turned out, Wen Zhengming was actually the weakest among the four grandmasters of Confucianism. He was only an early Golden Core cultivator, while the other three were all at mid Golden Core.

"I never thought his highness the marquis would actually send the four of them together. It's certain death for the moon demon this time."

The Ruyi Commandery was only a commandery, but the actual area it covered was even larger than all of China. They were truly worthy of the title of "grandmaster".

Not necessarily, Li Qingshan thought. He said to Hua Chenglu, "Alright, I understand. I'll be taking my leave first. If you plan on returning to the academy, I can accompany you."

"Commander, this is something major to our Clear River prefecture, so how can you just leave?"

Li Qingshan laid out his hands. "I'm a measly Foundation Establishment cultivator. What right do I have to become involved in something so big? The sky has to rain and brides have to get married. What am I supposed to do?"

Hua Chenglu burst out laughing. "What brides have to get married... Oh right, commander, if you want to see elder sister Han, there is a way!"

"Oh? What way?"

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"To think the Hawkwolf Guard has a place like this." Li Qingshan stood in a room covered in inscriptions.

Hua Chenglu said, "This is our reporting room. It's been specially established for contacting the White Wolf guards in the commandery city when we need to."

The various rooms in the Hawkwolf Guard served different purposes. During the hand-over last time, Li Qingshan had only gained a rough understanding of a few relatively important rooms. He had only glanced past the other places. He did not know about how Wang Pushi had once reported to Gu Yanying with Chu Danqing about the existence of "Northmoon".

"I see."

"Commander, have a good conversation with sister Han. I'll be taking my leave." Hua Chenglu told Li Qingshan where to put in the spiritual stones before leaving.

The inscriptions lit up, and the figure of an envoy in black appeared in the room. He said politely, "Sir, what are your orders?"

Li Qingshan took in a deep breath. He had actually become slightly nervous. "Let me see Han Qiongzhi."

Before long, a figure appeared before Li Qingshan, but she was not Han Qiongzhi.

Gu Yanying said leisurely, "Little bro Qingshan, long time no see! How have you been?"

“Commander Gu!” Li Qingshan was taken aback. This was the woman he had once fallen in love with at first sight. Even though she was only an illusion right now, she no longer seemed so unreachable. He replied with a smile, “I’m still living in good health!”

“Probably neither of us thought there would be a day when we can meet with our current identities back then outside Qingyang city!”

Gu Yanying sighed slightly. Originally, she found Li Qingshan slightly special at most, but never did she think he could grow to such a level and grow so quickly. Under his identity of a Daemon General, he had actually managed to clash with a Golden Core cultivator and force the Sword Collection palace into temporarily stopping their investigation of the Soaring Dragon Elder’s death.

“Yeah. I really didn’t think of that.” Li Qingshan sighed too. “Oh right, is Qiongzhi in the Ruyi commandery, commander Gu? Could you get her to see me?”

“Are you really that sick of talking with me?” Gu Yanying said with a faint smile.

“Hey, of course not. If commander Gu doesn’t mind, I’m more than willing to talk with you for three whole days and nights.”

“Great scholar Wen is with you, right?”

“Yeah.”

“You best remind him that with regards to this rising star of the Daemon race, ‘that one’ in Ink Sea won’t just sit on the sidelines and allow them to do whatever they want with him, such as executing him.”

Li Qingshan was taken aback before remembering, So I also have an organisation, and I’m some rising star of the Daemon race too!

Without a doubt, the one who had been the most dazzling in this game of chess was him. He had directly influenced the progress of the war, even clashing with Zhou Tong at the end. Although it never developed into a proper battle, it still brought everyone great shock.

The chess piece that even left the chess player slightly surprised obviously attracted attention from everywhere.

As a result, the Marquis of Ruyi unleashed the “four grandmasters” right off the bat and scattered many backup plans across the board just to kill this genius of the daemons.

However, as Gu Yanying had said, would the Dragon King of Ink Sea really allow them to do this?

Li Qingshan suddenly came to a realisation. He no longer felt the situation was as bad anymore. He had never thought of this because he had fallen out with his superior, clashing who knew how many times in bed and out. He had never depended on Lolth assisting him.

However, from a different perspective, what went on between him and Lolth was merely internal conflict. Once human cultivators attacked, she clearly understood the principle of being in the same boat. As it seemed, he should contact her again. At most, he would offer up his handsome body again.

And that “sir Golden Cicada” in the magma underground—he should have been a prominent figure among the Daemon race too.

Once he got back, he had to properly investigate that fellow’s identity and origins. In the world of cultivation, “nameless masters” never existed. The stronger a figure was, the deeper their trace throughout history would be.

As Li Qingshan pondered, Gu Yanying smiled and vanished. Before long, a familiar figure appeared before Li Qingshan.

“Qingshan!” Han Qiongzhi’s voice trembled slightly. As she said that, her eyes became slightly teary.

“Qiongzhi!” Li Qingshan took a step forward, wanting to pull her into his arms, but his hands passed through her figure and only then did he remember it was all an illusion. He smiled self-deprecatingly. His nose tingled slightly too.

How long had it been? Four years? Five?

Even to cultivators, this was not a short time. He had countless things he wanted to say, but he actually had no idea how to start right now. All he could do was stare at her silently.

Suddenly, Li Qingshan smiled. “Have you prepared the dowry?”

“Not even a cent!” Han Qiongzhi bit her lip. She wanted to cry, and she wanted to laugh right now. He still remembered their engagement.

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“This is all the information on the moon demon. His body is tough, probably close to the level of Daemon Commanders already. Coupled with the support from the god seal, the quantity of his daemon qi and his recovery rate probably even exceeds that of Daemon Commanders.”

“And, he doesn’t seem to possess two innate abilities like regular Daemon Generals. It’s possible that he has more than four, or even five. In particular, the wings of wind on his back allow him to fly with unparalleled speed.

Hua Chengzan retrieved all the information on the moon demon and also gave a rough explanation and analysis, outlining Li Qingshan’s powers, strengths, and weaknesses.

Wen Zhengming only nodded along, listening extremely carefully. Only when Hua Chengzan was done did he ask, “What about his character?”

“Hmm?”

“You’ve had a lot of contact with him. What is his character like? Is he prudent or conceited, crafty or courageous? As mentioned in the arts of war, attacking cities is inferior; attacking the heart is superior.”

Not only did Wen Zhengming want to understand Li Qingshan’s strength, but he also wanted to understand his character so that he could come up with some strategies that corresponded to his personality. He was as serious as when he studied. His grievances from his dead disciple failed to influence his judgement at all.

Hua Chengzan said, "That would be difficult to say. Sometimes, he does seem extremely conceited, but that is often when he has the strength to back it up. He's not exactly crafty, but he's not someone who would fall for tricks easily."

"Then with his personality and strength in mind, what kind of strategy do you think will guarantee his death, commander Hua?"

Wen Zhengming demonstrated only modesty. None of it was an act as he asked for guidance from Hua Chengzan who was only an early Foundation Establishment cultivator with great seriousness.

"With senior's learnedness and ability, this junior dares not demonstrate his incompetence." Hua Chengzan took a step back and bowed.

"Even among any three people, I can learn something from at least one of them. I am but a bookworm. I am not skilled in the arts and stratagem of war. I've heard how commander Hua is highly resourceful, so please do give me guidance."

Wen Zhengming brought his hands together and his huge sleeves fluttered in the air, performing a great, formal, confucian bow of seeking knowledge to Hua Chengzan. He was filled with sincerity.

A Golden Core cultivator bowing to a Foundation Establishment cultivator was like a person walking along before suddenly bowing to an ant. If it were not the fact that he was a confucian, if it were not for the fact that reputation no longer meant anything to him, even a Golden Core cultivator with the best temperament in the world would not do something like that.

"You treat me with too much regard, senior!"

Flattered, Hua Chengzan returned the bow in a hurry. He thought to himself, Northmoon, oh Northmoon, you're really in trouble this time! If I had an opponent like this, I wouldn't even be able to eat or sleep in peace.

Chapter 526 - Ten Millennia is Too Short

Li Qingshan and Han Qiongzhi told each other everything they wanted to say and agreed on a time to meet again. Only then did Li Qingshan leave the room reluctantly. A smile remained on his face.

At the same time, Wen Zhengming left the Hawkwolf Guard, taking off into the air.

A cloud hovered in the sky above Clear River city. If someone were bored enough to stare at it for a long time, they would discover it was different from regular clouds. It did not drift with the wind.

Wen Zhengming passed through the cloud. A huge Soaring Dragon ship was docked in the cloud.

Shuffling about on the deck were all confucian disciples in the robes of scholars. Just the Foundation Establishment cultivators among them amounted to over a dozen, yet none of them engaged in any idle chit chat.

All of their gazes were focused on the three men dressed as confucian scholars on the nose of the ship, standing in the wind. When they saw Wen Zhengming arrive, a talented scholar in white clothes called out loudly, "Junior brother Wen, how was the investigation?"

“Don’t worry, senior brothers. I already have a plan in mind. This time, we can settle both the commandery governor’s task and Shancheng’s revenge.”

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“Golden Cicada? I think I’ve heard it somewhere. It sounds rather familiar.”

Ru Xin fiddled with her hair and sank into her thoughts, but no matter how serious her expression was, she always seemed like she was joking around slightly.

She currently stood before a medicine cabinet. The tall cabinet behind her and the drawers of various sizes were completely soaked in a heavy medicinal fragrance, forming a bitter and refreshing smell.

As she thought, she controlled a medicinal pot, carefully brewing something. She would wave her hand from time to time and a drawer would open with a few medicinal items flying out.

Li Qingshan stared at her dazed expression and also became slightly dazed.

Ru Xin returned to her senses. As if she had just noticed Li Qingshan, she said, “What brought you here?”

Li Qingshan shot a vicious glance at her. “I- Hurry up and think!”

Ru Xin smiled. “If I’ve guessed correctly, you’re asking about a daemon, right?”

“Possibly.”

“That’s roughly a yes then. I didn’t think, I didn’t think...”

“Hurry up and tell me!”

Ru Xin laid out her hand and curled her finger. Only after offering up a sum of spiritual stones as the fee for the information did she smile. “Have you heard about the Seventy-two Daemon Kings before?”

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At the same time, in the underground of endless darkness, eight eyes flickered with light, radiating with a heavy and dangerous aura.

A black figure drew closer unscrupulously, even richer in colour than the darkness.

“Mo Yu, why have you come?” Lolth’s voice rang out in the darkness.

“I’ve come to assist you under the dragon king’s orders,” a deathly voice said.

“I don’t need it!”

Lolth was rather surprised. As the most trusted Daemon Commander under the Dragon King of Ink Sea, Mo Yu’s relationship with the Dragon King of Ink Sea was like one of disciple and master, son and father. He was equivalent to the “crown prince” of the daemons across the entire Green province. His cultivation had already reached the peak of Daemon Commander. Even facing three or five regular Golden Core cultivators alone was no issue for him.

However, it was exactly because of his esteemed status and great strength that he barely showed himself to others anymore. Most of the time, he remained in Ink sea, cultivating arduously. He would never intervene unless it truly reached a point when it mattered. The Dragon King of Ink Sea was not lacking any subordinates either, so sending him over was rather strange.

“You have a daemon called Northmoon as a subordinate. He seems to be very impressive. Tell him to come see me.”

.....

“Sir, are you the envoy of the dragon king?”

Li Qingshan studied Mo Yu. His appearance was nothing unusual, just deathly pale. He was draped in pitch-black feathers, which seemed like the rich, dark, night, radiating with a heavy feeling of ill omen. The ominous feeling was so heavy that even the spirit turtle would respond, warning Li Qingshan to keep his distance.

However, the powerful aura he gave off was enough for Li Qingshan to confirm he was a powerful support.

“You were the one who killed Dragonsnail,” Mo Yu said emotionlessly. He was clearly asking a question, but his voice was completely flat. He sounded like he was reading an obituary.

“Yes!”

Li Qingshan frowned. He scanned past Mo Yu and glanced at Lolth in the cavern. That was a terrifying spider that could make a person jerk awake from a nightmare before frightening them to death again.

“How dare you break the rule that forbids daemons from killing one another.”

“He wanted to kill me. I can’t just sit by and let him do so!”

“If it weren’t for the king’s orders, I would kill you right now.” He spoke with the same flat, stiff tone as if he was stating a fact. He radiated with a great confidence of, “If I want to kill you, then that’s your fate.”

Before an existence who stood at the peak of Daemon Commander, a Daemon General, even a rising star among the Daemon race who possessed great talent, was absolutely nothing.

“You’re welcome to try it!” Li Qingshan laughed instead of losing his temper.

“You want me to try it.” Apart from the moment at the beginning when their eyes met, Mo Yu never looked at Li Qingshan again. Now, he turned around, and his dark, hollow eyes stared straight at Li Qingshan.

In that moment, Li Qingshan could also sense the trembling aura of death, but it only left him even more unconvinced. He sneered.

He could sense that for some reason, this powerful reinforcement from Ink Sea demonstrated great prejudice and hostility towards him. Even his sheet-white, emotionless face was unable to hide it.

Li Qingshan met his eyes. “Yes.”

“You really are accustomed to talking wildly. Looks like you’re very confident, and you don’t need my assistance.”

“I don’t need anyone’s assistance,” Li Qingshan said proudly. Since it was obvious Mo Yu did not take a liking to him, he would not warm up to him and try to please him either. He would not seek help from him.

Mo Yu smiled. The corner of his lips curled up at first before stretching to a startling width. It was like an eerie smile painted on a mask. The ominous feeling grew heavier. He stared at Li Qingshan and spoke like he was making a declaration.

“You will die.”

The black feathers suddenly expanded, and he vanished. Only a clump of darkness that twisted and collapsed like a dark hole sucked Mo Yu away, distorting, shrinking, and vanishing.

Li Qingshan originally planned on relying on this relationship, but now all that was left was a bad taste in his mouth like he had just eaten a fly. He no longer considered forging an alliance with Lolth either, leaving immediately.

He refused to believe that he, Li Qingshan, would not be able to survive without the Dragon King of Ink Sea! Having grown up in loneliness, he would never consider placing all his faith in any person.

“Do you know why Mo Yu is so hostile to you?” Lolth walked out of the cavern and turned back into human form. She smiled bewitchingly as she felt very delighted inside. She wore a poison suit, but it was clearly much coarser compared to the one she wore during her battle with Li Qingshan.

“It’s obviously because of the wonderful words you put in for me.”

“No. Since you’ve gained sir Golden Cicada’s recognition, I can’t be bothered dealing with you like that.” Lolth’s hips swayed from side to side as she approached Li Qingshan, wrapping her arms around his neck.

“I think you just find it humiliating!” Li Qingshan smiled as he suddenly wrapped his arms around her waist. Embracing such a delicate and seductive body should have been something that brought great comfort, but the parts of him that touched her immediately grew numb from the poison. The feeling began to spread.

However, she clearly had not had enough time to further refine it, so the venom was not particularly potent.

Lolth’s expression stiffened. Li Qingshan had hit the spot. In order to deal with a Daemon General under her command, a Daemon Commander like her even had to work with someone else, and the tables were still turned against her in the end. To her, this was truly a deep disgrace.

She touched Li Qingshan’s face and said venomously, “I will personally kill you. If Mo Yu becomes involved, then I won’t even be able to get a hand in this before you disintegrate.”

“And why’s that?” Li Qingshan was curious. He had never met Mo Yu before, so there should have been no grievances between them at all.

“Have you forgotten about what you said when you fought Fu Qingjin?”

“What I said?” Li Qingshan was taken aback. He recalled everything that happened that day and suddenly came to an understanding. “You mean Gu Yanying?”

Lolth smiled again. “Don’t you know Mo Yu’s identity? The Dragon King of Ink Sea spends most of his time in secluded cultivation. He’s basically the dragon king’s spokesperson, ruling over the daemons of the Green province in his place. If he says you’ll die, you won’t be able to live. If that’s the case, you might as well die to my hands. I can even let you have some fun again.”

“Even with his cultivation and identity, he still plays these games of fighting over a woman’s favour?”

Li Qingshan frowned. It was no wonder Mo Yu said he was accustomed to talking wildly. His confession to Gu Yanying basically came off as wild words of lusting after a woman he was not worthy of in the eyes of others.

He was not a romantic like Hua Chengzan, nor was he determined to obtain Gu Yanying. But at a time like this, it did rile up his fighting spirit. If I do end up winning over Gu Yanying some day, I’d like to see just what kind of expression this arrogant Mo Yu will have.

As it seemed, these games of fighting over a woman’s favour had nothing to do with identity or strength. As a matter of fact, it did not even have anything to do with lust and feelings under certain circumstances. It was purely a masculine instinct.

“Who do you think you are? Do you really think you’re worthy enough of contending for a woman’s favour against him? He just casually “took care” of you, and you couldn’t even withstand it.” Seeing Li Qingshan in dire straits, Lolth felt great joy too.

“He’s merely a slightly larger fly, that’s all. I’ll swat him to death sooner or later!” Li Qingshan broke away from Lolth and directly set off for the surface.

“Then you’ll be swatted to death by the dragon king!”

“The dragon king? If I were fated to be as useless as him, I might as well die right now!” Li Qingshan suddenly looked back.

Lolth was stunned. She was not loyal to the Dragon King of Ink Sea from the bottom of her heart, but she still felt respect towards this prominent figure of the Daemon race, the ruler of the daemons in the Green province.

Perhaps some cultivators hated the Dragon King of Ink Sea to the very core, but probably never had anyone connected him to the word “useless”. However, Li Qingshan showed absolutely no intention to scorn or insult him from his expression. Instead, he was extremely serious, or even somewhat solemn.

He was speaking from the bottom of his heart!

The Great Xia empire had been established several millennia ago and that was also when the Dragon King of Ink Sea became the ruling Daemon King of a region. Coupled with the process of regular daemons cultivating to Daemon King, his age probably approached ten millennia already.

Yet, the time the black ox had given Li Qingshan was just ten millennia!

As Golden Cicada had said, the nine provinces were like a well. There was an infinitely vast world up above and even further up was beyond the Nine Heavens.

If he spent ten millennia only to become a Daemon King, it would mean he completely failed. He would not have even completed half the journey. He would have let down all the trust brother ox had placed in him. He would only be a useless piece of trash. Even if he died, there would be no regret.

Ten millennia is too short. All I can do is seize every moment!

Loth came to a vague understanding of why the Golden Cicada Spirit King treated him with special respect.

Chapter 527 - Just Let Them Be

The thick clouds shifted northward, sprinkling everywhere they passed by with snow.

Heavy snow drifted across Moon Court lake.

“Moon demon, are you bold enough to face me in battle?”

A tremendous voice descended from above, rolling like thunder as it kicked up great waves.

Wen Zhengming’s long robes ruffled in the wind and snow. It was very difficult to believe that a voice like that could come from such a skinny and small chest unless one witnessed it in person.

He scanned the surface of the lake attentively and thought through his plan again. He would be responsible for issuing a challenge at the beginning and drawing the moon demon out of the lake before showing weakness and retreating in defeat, fleeing for his life through the air. In the end, his three senior brothers would join the battle, and the four of them would work together and cast the Sword Formation of the Four Seasons. The moon demon would then be done for, with only death as his escape.

The plan did not sound particularly complicated. It was just provoking and agitating the enemy, misleading the enemy with a false impression of weakness, faking a hurried retreat, before unleashing an encirclement of ambushes. They were all common strategies the school of the Military used.

However, plans were not necessarily better the more complicated they were. The more complicated a plan was, the more that could go wrong. The crux of the issue was still about who used it and what kind of opponent they were using it against.

The various matters of the past indicated the moon demon would always strike back viciously against challenges. He should have been the same this time. Once he began fighting, he would be stepping into a trap!

But a while later, heavy snow continued to drift across the lake, yet Northmoon was nowhere to be seen.

Wen Zhengming came up with an idea and arrived outside the central island. The island was shrouded in heavy mist that was as thick as milk. It was impossible to make out the island.

Don't tell me he just happens to not be in Moon Court lake? These night roamers are all his subordinates. If I attack there, I'll definitely be able to force him out.

Wen Zhengming pressed his hand against the hilt of his sword and became slightly more cautious. He passed through the thick mist slowly, but he did not sense any attacks, nor did he run into any obstructing formations. He made it onto the island as easy as that.

The scenery there was the same as before. The buildings rising and falling constantly, but there was not a single shadow to be seen, nor was there any aura. The entire place had been evacuated already.

Wen Zhengming never expected to run into something like this. After a moment of consideration, he informed his three senior brothers. Another three figures descended from above, kicking a few piles of accumulated snow into the air. After seeing the situation on the island, they also frowned.

"Junior brother Wen, what is this all about?"

Wen Zhengming said, "Looks like the moon demon is no longer here, and he's evacuated all the otherfolk."

"No, he definitely won't just abandon his position as a water god. The Water God Seal cannot leave the region of water for too long. He's definitely still in Moon Court lake. He probably caught wind of us, which was why he hid beforehand. We can't be careless. It's very likely for Ink Sea to send other wretched daemons to support him."

"The plan is already useless. All we can do is take on a little more risk and search for him in the water!"

"If the four of us work together, what danger will there be unless the Dragon King of Ink Sea personally intervenes?" the talented scholar in white said proudly, "As long as he doesn't flee the moment he sees us, we have a seventy percent chance at killing him on the spot."

A mere obstruction of water posed no obstacle to the four of them at all. They were about to dive into Moon Court lake and carry out their search.

"Hold on, someone is spying on us!"

The scholar in white's expression changed. He had the highest cultivation, vaguely serving as the leader of the four.

The other three sensed it too. Wen Zhengming said, "It must be Northmoon, that wretched daemon. Can we locate him?"

The scholar in white closed his eyes before shaking his head gently a while later. He sensed that the entire shoreline was spying on them. They were unable to accurately determine the moon demon's location.

All of this was clearly reflected in the Watermirror disc.

Li Qingshan sat with his legs crossed and the Watermirror disc placed over his knees. He currently resided deep underground, within a twisted river that branched from the main flow.

The place was extremely well-hidden, but to Golden Core cultivators, they could still find him with their senses of auras even if he were hidden beneath the earth.

However, Li Qingshan's body did not give off even the slightest aura. He had merged with the flowing water.

He seemed to have become a spirit turtle, diving to the depths of the seas. No one could find him and all the disputes of the world had nothing to do with him. He only waited for the passage of time, for the seas to be replaced with land.

Li Qingshan had practised the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression for many years now, but this was the first time he had behaved in accordance with the spirit turtle's nature. He came to a slight comprehension.

The strongest aspect of the spirit turtle was not for battles against others, but pursuing good fortune and avoiding calamities.

Originally, he had been troubled over failing to come up with a way to deal with the combined attack of the four grandmasters, but now, he suddenly discovered that by taking a step back, the world was his. No matter how powerful the four grandmasters were, it would be useless if they could not find him. At the end of the day, they were the ones wasting time, not him.

Realising that, his aura became more and more obscure, basically ungraspable.

Even if someone with a higher cultivation stood right before him, they would struggle to sense his existence once they closed their eyes. Even if they used their soul sense, it would only glide past him and overlook him.

As a result, their first search was destined to end in failure.

Around dusk, they met up on the island again. Their complexions were rather ugly.

Moon Court lake was already so vast and the moon demon had dug out countless rivers and branches, with most of them leading to the complicated underground. Yet, they were unable to sense even a hint of daemon qi, so they were afraid to let any affluent slip by.

Even after spending an entire day, the four of them had yet to search through all the water. With such a wide region, finding the moon demon was as difficult as finding a needle in the ocean.

Moon Court lake was obviously not as large as the ocean, but the issue was the moon demon would not stay put like a needle either. He would not wait for them to come find him. Clearly, as long as they approached where he was hiding, he would immediately change his position.

As a result, even if they went over the place like a fine-toothed comb, it would all be useless.

And, in the water, their soul senses were already suppressed. If they ventured underground, they would have to deal with the influence of the underground magnetic field too, shrinking their searching range to something extremely small.

"If this continues, we'll probably never find where the moon demon is."

“The wretched daemon truly is despicable!”

Wen Zhengming’s face was completely sunken. Originally, he had come with complete confidence to purge daemons and avenge his disciple, but he actually ended up with nothing.

After that, the tip of the scholar in white’s ears twitched. He heard the unnatural flow of water near the shore in the south-western direction. He rushed over in a flash while the other three followed closely behind.

The surface of the lake for that region had suddenly become as flat as a mirror. A series of words appeared.

“You four big dumbos, you want to harass the weak and the outnumbered. If you have the balls, come at me one at a time. Watch as your grandfather Northmoon, skins you alive!”

Wen Zhengming conveyed secretly, “Senior brother, can you use this as a lead to find the moon demon?”

The scholar in white shook his head. Having become a water god, the moon demon had virtually merged with Moon Court lake. He could control the water here like it was his limb. With the statement alone, it was far too difficult to find where he was.

He came up with an idea. “Alright. Moon demon, I’ll come alone then. Let’s see what you can do to me! Junior brothers, please leave for now. I’ll try the moon demon alone!”

Wen Zhengming and the other two exchanged glances. If it were their senior brother, then preventing the moon demon from escaping for a moment or two was nothing difficult at all. By then, they could rush back and provide assistance. That way, they would still be able to kill the moon demon.

The scholar in white dove into the water again. An arrow floated before him to indicate the direction. He beamed with joy inside. The moon demon was conceited and battle-hungry. Sure enough, he was unable to help himself, wanting to clash with them. This was his greatest weakness.

He followed the arrow and arrived before a cavern. Another line of words appeared.

“Are you really alone?”

The scholar in white said proudly, “Of course. Just me alone is enough to kill you.”

The words dispersed with a ripple, turning into three words, “This way please.”

Under the guidance of the water arrow, the scholar in white constantly ventured deeper underground. As he advanced through the twisting and turning underground river, he was amazed by the complexity of the underground geography. If the moon demon had not revealed an opening himself, finding him truly would be difficult.

After travelling for a while, he suddenly sensed that something was amiss. He recalled the path he had already travelled.

Aren’t I going in circles?

At this moment, another line of words appeared in the water, “Are you certain you’re alone?”

The scholar in white gritted his teeth. "Feel free to check for yourself. What, are you afraid?"

"Then come!"

The scholar in white continued on his way until he approached the end of an underground river. An extremely spacious cavern appeared before him.

He contacted his three junior brothers, telling them to prepare themselves as he called out loudly, "Moon demon, I'm here!"

As he said that, he barged into the cavern. He blanked out. There was absolutely no one there, only a huge word that stretched several meters across, "Idiot!"

The scholar in white had basically spent two hours only to receive a single-word evaluation like that. No matter how shrewd he was, no matter how cultured he was, he still found it rather unbearable. With a palm strike, he shattered the word "idiot".

"Cowardly daemon!"

The water flowed rapidly and turned into another three words.

"Hahaha!"

Li Qingshan had not placed all of his focus onto Moon Court lake. Instead, he split some of his focus to spy on the four grandmasters, or use his clone to toy around with them.

His original body had already returned to the Chain mountains by now, contemplating how to merge with the power in the phoenix feather.

As the four grandmasters whittled away their time and found absolutely nothing, he was seizing every moment to cultivate in an attempt to become stronger.

He had drained the spiritual qi of the water regions with the Water God Seal recently, so now was perfect for giving them time to recover.

Li Qingshan had already grown accustomed to the ox demon's resolve and the tiger demon's endless fighting. Retreating to avoid conflict and hiding away had originally been actions he would take when he had no other choice, but only now did he discover the spirit turtle's approach; as it turned out, it had quite the wisdom behind it.

Strong like the wind? Just let them be. I will be like the mountain they blow on. Insolent like the moon? Just let them be. I will be like the river they shine on.

Over the next few days, the four grandmasters used various different methods in an attempt to find Li Qingshan, but it all ended in failure. They even tried using the weakest out of the four, Wen Zhengming, as bait to lure Li Qingshan into fighting.

Li Qingshan obviously ignored them. He placed all of his attention on the phoenix feather.

Three days later, the four grandmasters retreated. Even Wen Zhengming who was eager for revenge did not remain behind.

Golden Core cultivators had lengthy lifespans, but they could not be wasted away like this.

If they ran around wildly in the water like headless flies, then they really would be no different from idiots.

Chapter 528 - I Found It

Before the four grandmasters had left, they destroyed all the structures on the Moon Court dwelling. They said it was to prevent the moon demon from leaving behind any foundations, but they could not help but treat it as venting.

The corner of Li Qingshan's lips curled up. Their behaviour meant they had completely lost their patience.

This only proved the four grandmaster's so-called assault of certain death and the so-called "You will die" said by Mo Yu was a joke.

Buildings could be rebuilt if they were destroyed. That was nothing.

The four grandmasters returned to the Soaring Dragon ship. Suddenly, they looked back and saw a line of colossal words floating on the surface of the lake, "If you think you're so capable, why don't you level Moon Court lake too?"

Anger surged in the scholar in white's heart. His face reddened. "Let's go. Moon demon, we won't just let this end like this!"

Though, it would be rude to not reciprocate! You've made a mess out of my home today, wanting to kill me. If the opportunity ever presents itself in the future, I'll definitely pay a visit to your places too. I'll visit places like Pine Sough academy. By then, don't blame me if I kill anyone I see.

Li Qingshan returned to his senses. His gaze landed on the phoenix feather before him again.

The phoenix feather hovered in the air, sometimes drifting up and sometimes drooping down, leaving behind a trajectory of scarlet fire.

After spending several days, he could already control the phoenix feather freely, but he was rather stumped about what to do next. Was he supposed to stick the feather in himself and he would be a phoenix? Surely not!

Xiao An stood up gracefully and her seaweed-like hair draped down.

Seeing how Li Qingshan had arrived at an impasse, she suddenly walked over, grabbing one of Li Qingshan's fingers with her small hand and holding the phoenix feather gently between two fingers. She stabbed down, right into the tip of Li Qingshan's finger. Blood oozed out before the phoenix feather immediately absorbed it, like a quill absorbing ink. Blood filled up the hollow shaft of the phoenix feather, spreading to every single barb and making them even brighter in colour.

But at the same time, a power poured into the wound, and the injury recovered immediately. The feather automatically activated its healing properties.

"This..." Li Qingshan suddenly felt his IQ was rather insufficient.

Xiao An grinned before returning to one side. It obviously had not been a wild guess. When Li Qingshan studied the phoenix feather, she read through large quantities of relevant material.

Li Qingshan scooped up Xiao An and kissed her forehead heavily. "I really don't know what I'd do without you!"

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At the same time, the four grandmasters returned to the commandery city of Ruyi. They reported to the Marquis of Ruyi in the governor's estate.

As they waited in the guest room, they looked at one another and all felt rather dishevelled.

Before long, the Marquis of Ruyi strode over to receive them. He bowed first. "I've made you wait. So how were the results of the battle?"

A hint of awkwardness and shame appeared on their faces as they felt even more furious inside.

Their visit to the Clear River prefecture this time was like clenching their fists firmly only to punch thin air. Despite all of their abilities, there had been no opportunity for them to use it, being mocked by that wretched daemon instead.

However, they obviously could not mention that. The scholar in white clasped his hands. "Sir, the wretched daemon is far too crafty. He hid himself and concealed all of his aura. We were unable to find him."

The Marquis of Ruyi blamed himself. "It's because of my insufficient preparations that you've gone to such tremendous efforts. You are hardly to blame. I will send people for fellow Feng right now."

The scholar in white eased up and smiled. "As long as fellow Feng divines for us, there'll be nowhere for the wretched daemon to escape to or hide."

This so-called "fellow Feng" was called Feng Buquan. He was Ma Buyi's master and the most prominent figure of the school of Yin-yang throughout the entire commandery. Anything he said would always come true, and his word was basically prophetic. He was rather renowned throughout the entire Green province for his divination.

With the Marquis of Ruyi's great power and influence, a streak of light flew over from the horizon before long, landing in the courtyard outside the guest room.

His eyes drooped and his mouth was slanted, hunch-backed and extremely disfigured. One of his eyes was even a muddy grey as if it was blind. He stood there in a twisted posture, eyeing everyone with his single eye. He said in a hoarse, unpleasant voice, "Marquis, why have you summoned me?"

He seemed extremely rude, even if he had no intentions to be rude.

The scholar in white frowned slightly and felt slightly uncomfortable. If it were not for the aura he radiated with, no one would have connected him to a Golden Core cultivator.

The scholar in white lamented slightly inside, This fellow Feng had been such a handsome figure in the past. Just because one of his divinations failed and he suffered a backlash from the heavenly secrets, he ended up like this. The arts of divination are truly far too dangerous.

The Marquis of Ruyi only showed more respect. He explained everything to Feng Buquan.

Cultivators skilled in divination had always been extremely rare, and those who could reach Golden Core were basically mythological existences. In the past, Feng Buquan had been a figure who could enter and leave the provincial lord's estate as he pleased. Although he had fallen in status now, he was still not someone the Marquis of Ruyi dared to neglect.

Feng Buquan said, "Now that's easy. I'm willing to venture to the Clear River prefecture with the grandmasters!"

The Marquis of Ruyi smiled. "That would be for the best. Once you kill this wretched daemon, you'll have many thanks from me."

When Feng Buquan heard "many thanks", his body trembled uncontrollably, and he smiled stiffly.

The four Golden Core cultivators immediately became five.

As the marquis of the region, his family had governed the Ruyi commandery for several millennia. The ties and connections he had reached every corner of the commandery.

He could basically mobilise all the cultivators of the Academy of the Hundred Schools. He only sent Wen Zhengming and his three senior brothers because of the blood feud between the moon demon and Pine Sough academy. Sending four Golden Core cultivators to kill a single Daemon General could already be regarded as overkill.

If he wanted people, he could find ten Golden Core cultivators if he wanted to. As long as he spoke, even sect masters and elders of those independent sects would have to show some respect to him.

He had never considered personally taking part, nor did he ever doubt a Daemon General would have to die if he wanted him to die.

Wen Zhengming's group arrived above Moon Court lake again. Feng Buquan pulled out a glistening compass from a shabby bag on his waist. The compass was divided into several rings, all engraved with strange glyphs. It began to spin wildly.

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Under Li Qingshan's control, the phoenix feather left behind wound after wound on his body. The wounds seemed to possess two invisible lips, being ripped open on one side yet closing up on the other, without leaving behind a single trace.

The phoenix feather turned into a scarlet streak of light and danced wildly around Li Qingshan, like it was executing him by slow slicing.

However, Li Qingshan's eyes shone brighter and brighter as if he could not feel any pain at all. The phoenix feather shone brighter and brighter too. As it filled up with blood, the power it contained merged with Li Qingshan's body sliver by sliver.

When it used up its final sliver of power, the phoenix feather had become blood-red too.

Xiao An reminded him. "The heart!"

"The Phoenix Undergoes Nirvāṇa Rebirth, with an Undying Heart!"

With a swish, the phoenix feather plunged into Li Qingshan's chest, piercing his skin, flesh, and blood and into his heart.

In that moment, his heart stopped beating and fell silent.

Li Qingshan pushed the Phoenix's Scripture of Nirvāṇa to the limit. In his sea of consciousness, the phoenix raised its head and let out a long cry.

The phoenix feather suddenly began to burn, turning into a ball of fire. The blood-like red was filled with powerful life force.

Burning out, transforming, reborn!

Just like a miniature cycle of nirvāṇa.

Li Qingshan's heart also lit up with red light, shining brighter and brighter, right through his skin until a ball of fiery red was visible. A dancing phoenix could vaguely be made out.

Bang!

Just like the first clap of thunder in early spring, the rivers of ice shattered, and the world awakened again.

Li Qingshan's heart thumped vigorously, transporting the mysterious power in the phoenix feather to every inch of his body through his blood vessels. It scorched like fire.

Li Qingshan could not help but stand up. As the power danced wildly, he raised his head and legs unconsciously, filled with a wondrous sense of beauty. He moved his arms like a phoenix flapping its wings.

His surroundings became filled with dazzling red light, illuminating the entire dwelling.

Only quite a while later did the red light gradually subside. Li Qingshan landed on the ground and clutched his thumping heart as he felt extremely happy.

A powerful life force filled his body. He was now confident that if he fought with Lolth again, he would definitely be able to maintain the upper hand.

With the Phoenix's Scripture of Nirvāṇa, he had finally refined the phoenix feather, now possessing a shred of the phoenix's bloodline. Although he had yet to truly reach the first layer of the Phoenix Transformation, he believed as long as he returned underground and condensed the phoenix's embryo again in the endless sea of fire, he would definitely succeed!

Right when Li Qingshan was about to set off, the spirit turtle's daemon core suddenly responded violently. He immediately understood what was going on. Someone is using divination to calculate my position. Those old coots really aren't going to let me go this easily!

Li Qingshan snorted coldly. He settled his mind and shut his eyes.

Under the eager gaze from four pairs of eyes, the compass spun rapidly.

Feng Buquan's forehead became covered in sweat, but he was unable to find the moon demon's location at all. The target should be in possession of a method to conceal the heavenly secrets!

As the spirit turtle dove into the abyss, no one knew where it was.

However, Feng Buquan refused to give up so easily, as he could sense the sliver of an opening in the target's power, like a ray of light in the darkness.

Li Qingshan frowned. He had suppressed the spirit turtle's power, which allowed him to refine the phoenix feather. As his comprehension of the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression deepened, he had basically limited the spirit turtle's repulsion as much as he could.

Normally, nothing about it felt wrong, but in an intense clash of heavenly secrets, it would show itself. His bloodline raged, and his daemon qi surged.

It was like a pebble in a shoe. It was not fatal, but it did feel horrible.

Xiao An held the Bamboo-Jade Lot of the Cloud Bookcase and touched Li Qingshan's forehead gently with it, practising the Cloud Bookcase of the Seven Lots and immediately patching up the opening.

Li Qingshan opened his eyes and let out a sigh of relief. He smiled.

The compass stopped spinning. Feng Buquan's expression stiffened and his mouth hung agape, completely unaware of the dribbling drool.

The scholar in white asked in a hurry, "Fellow Feng, how's it?"

As if he had been electrocuted, yet also like he had just woken up from a nightmare, Feng Buquan lurched up. He bounded around like a large, strange monkey as he called out madly.

"I've found it! I've found it!"

Wen Zhengming asked, "Fellow Feng, you've found where the wretched daemon is hiding?"

Feng Buquan suddenly grabbed Wen Zhengming by the shoulders. He gripped him so firmly that even Wen Zhengming experienced an ache of pain. He stared at Feng Buquan in shock, only to see a muddy tear roll out of his blind eye, while his good eye was filled with wild joy.

"I want to see her highness the Dark Queen!"

Chapter 529 - Emerging From the Cocoon as a Phoenix (One)

Many years ago, he had also been searching for a person and there had also been many thanks.

The clash of heavenly secrets, the entanglement of ties of gratitude and grievances, was like yesterday, still vivid before his eyes.

The person he was searching for was like a kite hidden within a sea of clouds, with all of their heavenly secrets concealed.

He had managed to grasp a trace after so much difficulty, only for a fierce gust of wind to bombard him.

The string of the kite snapped, hurling into the sky and vanishing for good. Originally, he thought it had already fallen to the ground somewhere, becoming a regret he was unable to forget or correct.

Never did he think that the obscure string would appear before him once again today.

If it were not for these deep ties of fortune, he almost would have forgotten it. It was exactly because of such deep ties that he vehemently believed he had not mistaken it.

This was the will of the heavens!

“Fellow Feng, fellow Feng!”

The scholar in white called out his name several times, and Feng Buquan returned to his senses. He wiped away the tear on his face. Under the amazed gazes of the four grandmasters, he discovered that his twisted spine had straightened out before he knew it.

“With how overjoyed you were, have you discovered the location of the wretched daemon, fellow Feng?” Wen Zhengming asked in confusion. Surely he did not have to cry with joy over something like that.

“The wretched daemon? Oh right, I didn’t. All heavenly secrets that point to him have been shrouded. I can’t predict his location.”

Feng Buquan secretly felt some regret. He should not have lost his composure like that earlier, even calling out “her highness the Dark Queen”. If an observant person heard that, the consequences would be unthinkable.

“I’ve let down the marquis and the heavy responsibility he’s placed on me. I am ashamed to return, so please apologise for me, grandmasters!” He clasped his hands. Although he was as disfigured as before, his straight posture vaguely possessed some of his past gracefulness again.

Feng Buquan drifted away. The four grandmasters looked at one another as they were unsure what had happened with Feng Buquan.

However, they could not return like this and seek help from the Marquis of Ruyi again. They would come off as far too useless. As a result, they began to discuss among themselves.

“The night roamers must have fled underground. Why don’t we go underground and hunt them down so that we force the wretched daemon to show himself?”

“Demons are all heartless. Why would he risk his life for a few night roamers? It probably won’t be that simple.”

The scholar in white said, “That’s fine too. There are quite a lot of daemons in this underground region! The spider daemon Lolth passed down orders to massacre cities. She’s a great threat who’s committed many sins. Even if we can’t kill the moon demon, we can still report back to the commandery governor if we exterminate all the wretched daemons in this region and kill Lolth!”

.....

Under Xiao An's company, Li Qingshan returned to the lake of magma again. The fire spiritual energy was most intense there, which had a very powerful suppressing effect on the spirit turtle's daemon core. It was most suitable for a breakthrough of the Phoenix's Scripture of Nirvāṇa.

The heavy smell of sulfur and the surging, golden-yellow magma formed a never-changing landscape, and the violent fluctuations in the magnetic field were alarming.

If it were not for their past contact, Li Qingshan basically would have never believed that Golden Cicada could remain in a place like this.

The Golden Cicada Spirit King truly lived up to his name!

Li Qingshan waited for a while. No voice rang out in his sea of consciousness, so he nodded at Xiao An and leapt into the magma. He did not use his daemon qi to protect his body. In a place like this, even mobilising his daemon qi had become difficult.

The scorching sensation of the magma against his skin ached slightly, but it was extremely satisfying too.

It made him think of the sensation of a hot shower. At the same time, a power resonated with his bloodline. This was something he had not felt the last time he came here.

Li Qingshan simply spread out his arms and laid on the surface of the lake. His scarlet hair dispersed as the flames swept over like snakes, licking his body.

It swallowed and enveloped his body very soon.

It formed a fire-red cocoon of flames.

The day when he emerged from the cocoon would be the moment when he spread his wings.

.....

Two stone lions crouched before one another. The door was wide open as a few chilly gales whistled by.

A person arrived before the steps and picked up the board by his feet. He rubbed it gently and filled the air with dust, revealing the three words "Proud Sword Manor".

Yu Shukuang glanced inside. After a moment of hesitation, he did not end up entering.

Because there were many caves that led underground around Salt Mountain city, daemons ran amok and heavily destroyed the place.

The prosperous Proud Sword manor of the past had already been reduced to ruins, and the entire Salt Mountain city had been reduced to a ghost city. No one lived here anymore.

Yu Shukuang had come back to visit a grave. He wanted to tell his wife that Zijian had already found a new home. She had gone to the Sword Collection palace to cultivate.

However, when he arrived outside the city, he was shocked. He rushed over to the grave.

The gravestone still stood firmly, but there was a great pit behind the gravestone. The coffin inside had vanished too.

The coffin had already been buried for over a decade. It no longer gave off any smells that could attract the attention of wild beasts or daemons. And, from the traces of digging, it was clearly the handiwork of a human.

Even if it were graverobbers, they would not take the coffin with them. Who would spend so much effort to unearth a person's remains?

Yu Shukuang's face sank heavily. He suddenly remembered someone. Ma Chaoqun!

.....

In a cave, a Daemon General shaped like a lynx pounced forward. With a gust of foul air, it moved with startling speed.

There was a white flash, and the Daemon General had been beheaded. Wen Zhengming grabbed the daemon core casually and stowed it into his hundred treasures pouch.

The four grandmasters could not find Li Qingshan, but finding other daemons was far too easy.

Under the detection of their soul sense, even night roamers who were skilled at concealing their auras and carrying out assassinations were as prominent as fireflies in the darkness.

They immediately kicked up a bloody storm underground. Wherever they passed by, whether it was night roamer or daemon, only the fate of death awaited them. They could not even block a single attack.

After all, Daemon Generals who could challenge those at higher cultivation levels like Li Qingshan were far too rare.

"Sister, our scout has been killed!"

Ye Liubo reported to Ye Liusu in a hurry. Under Li Qingshan's orders, all of the night roamers had retreated underground. They did not know who the four grandmasters were, but they did know the four grandmasters were not people they could stop.

"Continue moving underground!" Ye Liusu ordered resolutely. She took the lead and continued migrating with the night roamers.

The scholar in white suddenly stopped and closed his eyes.

Wen Zhengming asked, "Senior brother Tang, what's wrong?"

The scholar in white opened his eyes. "There's a great group of night roamers below us, around ten kilometers away. None of them have undergone the second heavenly tribulation. They've currently travelling downwards. There's also tremendous daemon qi twenty-five kilometers away on the same level as us. It should belong to that spider daemon."

"Which one do we go for?"

The scholar in white said, "Dealing with the leader first ensures a quick victory. Let's kill the wretched daemon first and then crush the group of night roamers."

.....

Ye Liubo said, "They don't seem to be chasing after us!"

Several tens of thousand night roamers travelled in a hurry through the caves. The winding group meandered like a snake, but they did not produce any noise at all.

"We can't be careless. Continue downwards. With the interference from the underground magnetic field, finding us won't be easy anymore. Afterwards, we'll split up."

"Split up? Won't we just be taken out one by one?"

"The enemy this time cannot be triumphed over through numbers alone. Otherwise, master would have never gotten us to retreat beforehand."

Ye Liubo said with worry, "I wonder how master is doing."

"With what master is capable of, protecting himself won't be an issue. Let's move quickly!"

Whenever they came across a branch in the road, they would split up. The group scattered very quickly until only Ye Liusu and Ye Liubo remained together in the end. The surrounding temperature had already become scorching while the rocks began to glow red.

A droplet of sweat fell to the ground, immediately hissing into a cloud of white mist. Ye Liubo was rather irritated as she cut down the stalagmite in front of her with a swing.

"Damn it! Only if I were a little stronger!"

"Don't say anything more."

Ye Liusu was in a similarly bad mood, but due to her level-headed nature, she did not show it. She had just established a territory on the surface, only to be forced underground again and even deeper underground than before. She had only just united the night roamers under one banner, yet she was forced to personally dismantle them again.

"But master will definitely deal with them!" Ye Liubo said with full confidence.

"Yeah."

Ye Liusu was not particularly optimistic about this. The surface of the Green province belonged to humans. Even Daemon Commanders could not move about freely on the surface. However, since she had chosen to depend on him, all she could do was believe in him.

There was a great rumble from above. The cave shook violently as soil rained down.

"What's happening?"

"They've probably run into the Spider Queen. Let's continue on our way!"

.....

Li Qingshan curled up like an infant and lay in the huge cocoon of flames, awaiting his birth.

The surging fire spiritual energy condensed into a scarlet-red phoenix's embryo in his body. It was covered in delicate, golden inscriptions, pulsing with light like it was a living creature breathing.

The rhythm of Li Qingshan's heartbeat and breathing gradually synced with it, becoming closely related.

A thought suddenly crossed his head, Why does this feel like being pregnant?

But Li Qingshan soon discovered hatching this embryo was anything but easy. Probably even ten months of pregnancy would be nowhere near enough. It made him frown slightly. It was only the first layer of the Phoenix's Scripture of Nirvāṇa, yet the difficulty had completely surpassed what he originally imagined.

The phoenix's embryo constantly absorbed the fire spiritual energy like it was insatiable. According to the current rate of progress, even spending a year would be regarded as short.

This was not too long to a daemon, but the exact thing he happened to lack the most right now was time.

Suddenly, an extremely familiar voice rang out in his head. "I'll lend you a hand. Get ready!"

In the depths of the magma, Golden Cicada watched this as he gently waved his tiny, tender hand. Great waves were immediately stirred up in the lake of fire as flames that were several meters tall flew towards Li Qingshan as fire snakes.

"Alright, much thanks!"

Li Qingshan was overjoyed. As soon as he said those three words, he could no longer spare the effort to talk anymore. He pushed the Phoenix's Scripture of Nirvāṇa desperately, absorbing, converting, and leading the fire snakes into the phoenix's embryo one by one.

The phoenix's embryo devoured the flames happily, going from a scarlet-red to gold. The inscriptions on the surface became brighter and brighter too.

Li Qingshan was afraid of being careless. Just a single fire snake was enough to incinerate an entire city! If he lost control over even one of them and it erupted in his body, it could heavily injure him.

The fire snakes became more and more concentrated, wild and violent, but they did not exceed the limit of what Li Qingshan could withstand. It basically gave him a true demonstration of what a Daemon King was capable of.

After who knew how long, the lake of fire settled down again and fire snakes stopped flying out. The phoenix's embryo flickered with dazzling light like a miniature sun. It had reached its limit.

Within the scorching flames, Li Qingshan felt like he was about to melt away. Suddenly, he felt his back itch. He pushed his shoulders back and two bones grew from his back, running into the barrier very soon and preventing them from spreading out.

He could not help but twist his body and swing his arms, punching the huge cocoon of flames around him.

With a crack, a fracture appeared in the phoenix's embryo.

Chapter 530 - Emerging From the Cocoon as a Phoenix (Two)

With a great boom, the cocoon of flames exploded.

Circular shockwaves pushed the magma away wave after wave, stirring up roaring fire.

Li Qingshan stood in the sea of fire. Under the red glow, his perfect body seemed like a statue forged from bronze. He kept his eyes closed and his head down as his fire-like hair danced fiercely.

Li Qingshan breathed gently. This moment felt like a new life.

This was the first layer of the Phoenix's Scripture of Nirvāṇa.

"Congratulations on advancing with your cultivation." Golden Cicada's voice rang out in his head.

"Thanks. What else do you need me to do? Please let me know."

"Save Lolth."

"Alright!"

Li Qingshan opened his eyes and magnificent red light flowed through them. A pair of gloriously beautiful wings suddenly unfurled behind him.

They were not wings composed from energy like the wings of wind. Instead, they were real wings, the wings of a phoenix.

Fire swept towards him. He bent over slightly, and the wings furled up too. Streams of wind wrapped around him as he used the wings of wind at the same time. The two powers of wind and fire merged perfectly.

Pushing hard with his feet, there was a thump and the wings suddenly unfurled. He had already soared off into the air, leaving behind a long trail of fire.

Xiao An waved the Blood Sea Banner and followed close behind.

Li Qingshan followed Lolth's aura and penetrated through the layers of soil and rock. When he grew close to her, he concealed all of his aura again, approaching silently.

Suddenly, he frowned. When he used the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression to conceal his aura, the power of the Phoenix Transformation put up a violent struggle. He was unable to hide his aura perfectly.

In his body, the spirit turtle's daemon core had already changed. It had gained a smear of bright-red, attached to the azure daemon core. It constantly shifted about, but only on the surface. It was unable to penetrate any deeper.

According to the standard of humans, the demonic transformations of the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine focused on the body, while the divine transformations focused on qi. As a result, even with his Tiger Demon Transformation and Ox Demon Transformation at the fourth layer, the spirit turtle suppressed them with relative ease, yet it was rather helpless against the first layer of the Phoenix Transformation, leading to an intense rejection.

Although he had managed to succeed with the Phoenix's Scripture of Nirvāṇa after quite some effort, he had not truly reached the state where water and fire merged, let alone the realm when water and fire

supplemented one another. If he continued cultivating the Phoenix Transformation, this rejection would probably become stronger.

However, he had to find a method around this one way or another.

He remembered that a few cultivation methods in the cultivation world were about simultaneously practising water and fire. He would have to properly research the tricks behind this once he returned to the academy.

With the advantage in strength of the fourth layer of the spirit turtle, he forcefully suppressed the phoenix's aura. If he fought against anyone in this state, he would not have become stronger. Instead, he would have become weaker due to the internal exhaustion of his energy.

The rumbling and tremors grew closer and closer. Li Qingshan burst out of the earth and found the place rather familiar. It was the great valley where he had originally clashed with Bloodshadow and Strongboulder.

The four grandmasters each wielded a sword, standing in four corners and assembling a formation, trapping Lolth inside.

Lolth's hair was a mess. She seemed to be in a rather sorry state, but her eyes became calmer and more vicious. She leapt forth, lunging towards the weakest among them, Wen Zhengming. She completely ignored Wen Zhengming's incoming sword, directly reaching towards his shoulder with her claws.

"The fierce cold of winter seals the land in ice."

The leading scholar in white chanted slowly. The sword in his hand danced gracefully as frigid sword qi swept over with snowflakes.

A layer of ice immediately appeared on Lolth's body. She felt a wave of coldness penetrate her bones, completely immobilising her. With a shudder, the ice on her cracked.

The scholar in white thought, This wretched daemon really is a carapaced Daemon Commander after all. Her body truly is tough. If she were a regular Daemon General, she'd be frozen into a block of ice with that strike. She really would be a difficult opponent if I fought alone.

"The sougning wind of autumn turns white due to frost!"

Taking advantage of Lolth's frozen state, Wen Zhengming pulled back with his sword. With a dance of sword qi, Lolth became covered in a layer of white dew as soon as she had shattered the ice. She slowed down once again.

At this moment, the two other grandmasters struck together.

"The bloom of spring brings clear, bright rain." "With the sweltering of summer, the sun blazes like fire."

Drizzle as thin as hair fell continuously and gently, invading every single opening, but it contained extremely sharp sword qi. It could even penetrate Lolth's fine poison suit, even trying to seep into her body through her pores.

Lolth's skin immediately became a silvery-grey. She had unleashed her innate ability and only then did she manage to block this flexible yet deep-reaching attack. However, a ball of scorching fire that seemed like the scarlet sun then hurled towards her from behind. Caught in the sword formation, there was nowhere for her to dodge.

With a great boom, firelight illuminated the valley.

Lolth was swallowed by the fire. The four grandmasters swung their swords together as they faced the fire. Their four swords wove into a net, disappearing into the flames.

The flames subsided, and a great big hole had been burnt in the back of Lolth's poison suit, and her body was covered in slashes. However, with her innate ability of perfect defence, she had managed to forcefully block the attacks.

However, she did use up quite a lot of daemon qi. A visible sign of exhaustion appeared on her face. She had already tried to break out of the encirclement countless times, but every single time ended in failure.

Hidden away, Li Qingshan discovered there was not a lot of damage to the sides of the valley. Logically speaking, a clash between four Golden Core cultivators and a Daemon Commander would be earth-shaking. There would be nothing strange even if the entire valley was destroyed.

The current situation only demonstrated they controlled every bit of their strength to remain in the sword formation, without anything going to waste. Coupled with how Lolth was outnumbered four to one, she would be whittled away to death if this continued.

As it seemed, it was not without reason the Golden Cicada assisted him. He was originally contemplating on killing with a borrowed knife. If the four grandmasters were unable to find him, it was possible for them to venture deeper. By then, crushing them would be no different from playing a game with the Golden Cicada Spirit King's strength.

He never expected Golden Cicada would be reluctant to interfere, but he did help him instead, which basically achieved Li Qingshan's objective anyway.

"Mother of my child, the father of your child has come to save you!"

Li Qingshan secretly snuck his way into the wall near Wen Zhengming. He bellowed out all of a sudden and burst out. Before his voice had even reached Wen Zhengming, he had already arrived behind the latter. The speed he had erupted with in that instant even left him surprised.

I never thought the combination of the phoenix wings and wings of wind would result in such a great effect. In the future, anyone who tries to hunt me down will only be able to suck on the wind I produce!

The figure of the ox demon appeared on Li Qingshan as he butted his horns viciously into Wen Zhengming's chest. Lolth raised an eyebrow, rather surprised, but she did not let this fantastic opportunity slip past. She lunged towards Wen Zhengming again to form a pincer attack with Li Qingshan.

With Wen Zhengming's cultivation at early Golden Core, he was in great danger when a carapaced Daemon Commander and Li Qingshan who was no weaker than the former surrounded him. Even if he

managed to escape with his life intact, the Sword Formation of the Four Seasons would definitely fall apart.

Wen Zhengming beamed with joy instead of becoming alarmed. He called out, "Wretched daemon, you've finally come! Freeze!"

Without even looking back, he flew forwards, raised his sleeved arm, and a paper talisman flew out. It turned into a single word, "Freeze", and Lolth immediately became immobilised.

The three swords arrived with lightning speed. The sword qi turned into threads, wrapping around Li Qingshan. In that moment, he experienced the powerlessness of melting in the spring breeze, the bone-chilling coldness of being frozen in ice, followed by the scorching heat of being incinerated by fire.

The tip of his horns were only a feet away from Wen Zhengming, but it suddenly seemed extremely distant.

"Changing of the Seasons!"

Wen Zhengming struck backwards, uniting with the three other swords.

In that moment, Li Qingshan only felt like sword qi surrounded him in all directions, constantly revolving and changing.

As if the four grandmasters had agreed beforehand, they abandoned Lolth at the same time, shifting their target to Li Qingshan. This was not something that could be achieved with on-the-spot reactions. Instead, they had carried out countless meticulous thoughts, taking all openings into consideration.

The weakest of them, Wen Zhengming, was like bait, luring Li Qingshan into the situation of death.

The scholar in white said, "Moon demon, do you think we didn't consider you'd launch a sneak attack against us? And that we'll be completely unprepared?" Afterwards, he waved his hand. "Junior brothers, use the Sword Qi of the Four Seasons to kill this wretched daemon first!"

The Freezing talisman could only last for a moment at most. The spider daemon would break free very soon. If they allowed the two daemons to work together, it really would become rather troublesome.

However, they possessed absolute confidence that if they used the strongest killing move of the Sword Formation of the Four Seasons, they would be able to kill the moon demon in a single stroke. By then, it would not be too late for them to unleash the sword formation again and kill the spider daemon at leisure.

"Spring Thunder sword!" "Summer Rain sword!" "Autumn Wind sword!" "Winter Snow sword!"

Green, yellow, scarlet, and white. Four strands of sword qi shot into the air together, filling Li Qingshan's field of vision.

Falling deep into the sword formation, Li Qingshan experienced an intense omen of warning.

The Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell only managed to block it for an instant before shattering loudly. The Sword Qi of the Four Seasons constantly revolved and changed, linking together end to end meticulously and assaulting all openings.

Li Qingshan seemed to be thrown into a stone mill, being forcefully ground into dust.

Li Qingshan immediately used the special ability of the Watermirror disc. His mirror clone hidden in the water shattered in that instant, drifting away like dust. Every single strand of daemon qi had been used up.

His flesh and blood spattered everywhere, forcefully ground away into a skeleton that was riddled with thin slashes.

The scholar in white eased up and clasped his hands. "Congratulations on your revenge, junior brother Wen!"

Wen Zhengming let out a smile of relief too. All of this had happened in an instant. By the time Lolth had broken free from the Freezing talisman, the four grandmasters had already assembled the sword formation again.

Seeing this, Lolth was secretly shocked. If they had unleashed this move right from the beginning, she would have never lasted until now. They had saved this killing move for when the moon demon bit the bait, but also to launch a sudden attack when she had used up everything, taking away her opportunity to blow up her daemon core.

Daemons could be crafty, but it was very difficult for them to match the strategies of humans. Most importantly, humans were capable of far too many different things, like talismans, sword formations, and regular formations. It was possible to say that even if the four grandmasters worked together, they were not Lolth's opponent if they only fought with their own strength. It would be a nightmare the moment she managed to get close to them. However, with these various means available to them, they could instead endanger her life.

"Do you think you can kill him just like that?"

Lolth said in disdain when she heard the scholar in white. Only she understood the most how difficult it was to kill him.

Wen Zhengming's heart lurched. The moon demon who should have been dead through and through lunged over. It had taken a great mental toll on them to use the Sword Qi of the Four Seasons, and as the weakest among the four, Wen Zhengming had relaxed slightly due to his "revenge". He was unable to dodge immediately, which allowed Li Qingshan to grab him firmly.

"I've caught you! Mother of my child, get him!"