

Immortal 461

Chapter 461: No Way Out

It was clear to the remaining embroidered envoys just how grave the situation was. They exchanged glances, and each of them saw the same unwavering determination in their companions' eyes. They quickly said to Huang Huihong, "Commander Huang, take the criminals with you and run! We'll bring up the rear!"

Huang Huihong frowned, but offered no other objection. He nodded his head with a grave expression. He couldn't say anything right now, and could only gesture with his eyes. Brothers, take care!

Every single embroidered envoy had undergone cruel training. They no longer cared about their own individual lives. They valued the fulfilment of the emperor's mission above all else.

That was why none of the remaining members of the Embroidered Envoy showed the slightest bit of hesitation, and neither did Huang Huihong. He leapt into action to carry out the plan immediately.

He tossed all of the captives into the covered carriage. Taking the reins, he drove away at a reckless speed.

The dark elves immediately tried to give chase, but they were blocked off by the three embroidered envoys who had stayed behind.

Even though the dark elves had the greater fighting strength, every member of the Embroidered Envoy was an expert who had undergone strict training. They had already resolved to make this patch of ground their final resting place. Without the fear of death to hold them back, it was difficult for the dark elves to break through their defenses right away.

The dark elf leader looked at the dragon race elder in anger. "Why didn't you stop them?!"

The old elder dragon said indifferently, "I am only in charge of dealing with the Embroidered Envoy's imperial edict. I've already completed this task—the rest is up to you."

With that, he turned and left. Even though his gait was slow, it only took a few steps for his figure to vanish into the depths of the forest.

The dark elf leader had an awful expression on his face, but he didn't dare provoke that elder. He tamped down on his rage and charged at the three embroidered envoys.

The three embroidered envoys were heavily outnumbered. The fact that they had lasted until now was a miracle in itself. Their bodies were already drenched in blood.

The dark elf leader released a cold snort. He dashed forward, leaving an afterimage behind while his real body became transparent. Bright slashes flashed all around him. When he reappeared, the three embroidered envoys were covered in mortal wounds, blood gushing out of their bodies. Their corpses crashed heavily to the ground.

"After them!" The dark elf Leader didn't bother to give the corpses a second look. He led his subordinates in the direction that Huang Huihong had disappeared, beginning a relentless pursuit.

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Meanwhile, inside of that speeding carriage, Zu An couldn't resist opening the carriage door to offer up a snide remark. "You guys really need to do something about how slow your imperial edict ceremony is. Why do you need so many fancy rituals and flowery words? Aren't you suffering the consequences of that now?"

Huang Huihong gritted his teeth, but could not reply.

You have successfully trolled Huang Huihong for 444 Rage points!

He was already furious that he wasn't able to use his ultimate attack against an opponent that he should have been able to defeat. Zu An's words only fueled his anger further.

Sang Hong stepped in. "You can't blame Commander Huang for this. His Majesty was probably the one who devised this ceremony."

Zu An replied, "Oh, that makes sense. The emperor must really love to show off. I would order my subordinates to do all that nonsense as well, if I cared that much about looking good. I guess he didn't consider that it would end up becoming a burden for his men."

Huang Huihong felt himself growing more irate by the second.

Sang Hong frowned. "Please speak cautiously. Talking about His Majesty behind his back is disrespectful, and a major crime."

"There's no way the emperor can hear me anyway." Zu An didn't seem to mind. "He might be the world's number one expert or whatever, but he's still far from being omniscient and omnipotent. Otherwise, he could've just interfered personally and killed those dark elves. Those Embroidered Envoy members wouldn't have had to die."

Huang Huihong did not take kindly to the mention of his subordinates' death, but again, he could not reply.

Sang Qiang snorted. "You know nothing about respect. His Majesty obviously has his own considerations when he makes his decisions. Someone of your level cannot even begin to fathom the depth of his thoughts."

Zu An chuckled. "From young master Sang's tone, it seems like you know exactly what His Majesty was thinking. Please enlighten us!"

Sang Qian's face turned red. "I already said that His Majesty's considerations are his own. How could I dare to guess his sacred thoughts?"

"Tsk." Zu An's face was full of contempt. "You pretend like you know everything, yet you can't say a single useful thing when it matters. People like that absolutely disgust me. You guys mindlessly worship the rich and powerful, and think that every fart coming out of their ass is a deliberate action taken after deep reflection."

“You!” Being criticized like this in front of his own wife made Sang Qian furious. He stood up in rage, about to fight Zu An to the death.

You have successfully trolled Sang Qian for 999 Rage points!

Unfortunately—or perhaps otherwise—he was stopped by his father. “Enough. Think about the situation we are in! Stop causing trouble. Commander Huang, we are in a moment of crisis. Do you still have no intention of undoing our seals so that we can lend you a helping hand?”

Huang Huihong’s face was red, and his expression flickered rapidly. He was clearly experiencing an intense internal conflict.

He was obviously aware that Sang Hong would be of great help, given his cultivation level. However, once he unsealed them, the heavens only knew whether they would really help out, or if they would just make a run for it! He wouldn’t be able to control anything at that point.

It was one thing if the Sang clan members took off on their own, but he wouldn’t be able to stop them if they took Zu An with them.

Considering the enmity between Zu An and Sang Qian, which had only built up along the way, they might even kill Zu An as soon as he undid their seals. That would truly be the worst outcome.

Just then, a glimmering streak of black lanced towards them, and Huang Huihong quickly dodged to the side. Even though he avoided being struck in a vital area, blood still gushed out from his shoulder.

A trace of black energy seeped outward from his wound—that arrow was poisoned.

Huang Huihong quickly fished out a bottle of medicine to suppress the effects of the poison. He had come from the capital, after all, so he wasn’t lacking in supplies.

Eight dark elves swiftly surrounded them. They had clearly learned their lesson from the last encounter. Each occupied a different position, cutting off all chances of escape.

The Dark Elf leader snorted coldly. “Run, why don’t you? Let’s see where you can run to now.”

Huang Huihong’s eyes smoldered with anger. The appearance of these dark elves meant that his three compatriots were already dead.

Zu An looked around him, puzzled. “Hm? Where did that dragon elder go?”

Sang Hong replied, “Members of the dragon race are usually uninterested in the affairs of the world. I believe they do not wish to become too deeply involved.”

“Ah, so they’re just hypocrites,” Zu An concluded. “If that’s the case, can’t Huang Huihong use the imperial edict as much as he wants, since he’s not here?”

Sang Hong smiled bitterly and said, “It’s not so easy. He is still afflicted by that elder dragon’s silencing Soulspeak. It’ll be at least another two hours before the effects wear off. That’s enough time for us to die eight hundred times over.”

“Oh,” Zu An said. He had a pensive look on his face. So, the Soulspeak skill can be used in this way. Doesn’t that mean I don’t have to fear Soulspeak or the Embroidered Envoy’s imperial edict anymore...?

Sang Hong examined Zu An curiously. "Why don't you seem flustered at all?"

"What?" Zu An was momentarily confused.

Sang Hong continued, "I've been watching you carefully all this time, yet I haven't seen any trace of fear in your expression. Putting Huang Huihong aside for a moment, even I, an old man who has lived out most of my life and has absolute confidence in my own willpower, feel alarmed. However, I don't sense even a speck of nervousness from you."

Zheng Dan, Sang Qian, and even Huang Huihong studied him curiously when they heard this.

Zu An laughed. "This is known as having the temperament of a protagonist, okay? Even mountains can crumble, yet I will always remain unfazed! Sorry, but this isn't something you guys can learn."

Sang Hong and the rest of them stared at him, mouths slightly ajar.

The dark elves clearly didn't want to waste any more time. Their leader ordered in a low voice, "Kill everyone apart from Zu An... Oh. Keep that woman alive as well."

Zheng Dan was beautiful, especially in her stunning bridal dress. Even these dark elves were tempted.

A beautiful girl like that would surely be fun to play with. Once they'd had enough of her, they could sell her off for a tidy sum.

Even though Zheng Dan didn't know what they were thinking, their gazes made her feel incredibly uncomfortable, and she leaned against Zu An subconsciously. Being at his side made her feel slightly more at ease.

Even though her movements were slight, they didn't escape Sang Hong's attention. His brows drew together in a frown.

Sang Qian remained silent. I'm masquerading as Zu An right now, so I shouldn't be in danger of dying. It seems like Zheng Dan will survive as well. All I need to do is wait for little sis to save us. Then again, is little sis strong enough to beat these dark elves...?

Huang Huihong knew that they were in critical danger, and was just about to undo Sang Hong's seal, when suddenly, a sweet and flirtatious and female voice came from above. "I didn't expect it to be so lively over here."

Chapter 462: The Solitary Eight

Huang Huihong froze when he heard the voice. He decided to see how this situation would play out first.

Zu An's heart skipped a beat. The voice was extremely familiar. Is this really who I think it is?

Sang Qian was already so excited that he had rushed to the window. He gazed at the slowly descending figure above. "Lady Qiu! It really is the glamorous Lady Qiu!"

Her eyelashes were simple and elegant, framing misty and beautiful eyes. Her soft and moist lips seemed as though they had been kissed by sparkling dewdrops, drawing in all who laid eyes on them.

A faint smile rested on her lips. When her expression changed ever so slightly, men around her began to breathe more quickly. Who else could this be but Qiu Honglei?

When Brightmoon City's Immortal Abode lost her, their reputation had plummeted. Back then, Sang Qian had been incredibly pissed off. He thought that he would never be able to meet her again. Unexpectedly, they had crossed paths today!

The heavens are truly kind to me!

The eyes of the dark elves also grew wide, gleaming with awe. All of them were staring at her. How could there be such a beautiful woman in this world? Their first thoughts were that they had to take her to bed.

Dark Elves were very much different from their peace-loving elven counterparts. They reveled in slaughter and they didn't hide their desires.

The eyes of the few female dark elves sparkled jealously. This woman exuded a natural aura of seduction. She had definitely toyed with her fair share of men.

"Get out of here, Lady Qiu! It's dangerous!" Sang Qian snapped out of his daze. This place was so dangerous! A beautiful girl like Qiu Honglei showing up here was the same as a lamb stumbling into a tiger's den!

Zu An rolled his eyes. How stupid are you? Even if you don't know Qiu Honglei's real identity, you should've seen her fly down from the sky, right? How can she possibly be an ordinary person?

Sang Hong also snorted, a frown appearing on his face. His son's display really was too disappointing.

Qiu Honglei replied with a smile. "Thank you for your concern, young master Sang."

At the same time, she noticed Zu An in his groom's outfit, next to Zheng Dan in her bridal dress, looking for all the world like newlyweds. She was slightly startled, clearly unsure of what was going on.

Wasn't Zheng Dan the Sang clan's daughter-in-law? Why did Sang Hong and Sang Qian look completely okay with this? Did their clan have some weird fetish?

The dark elves came to a sudden realization. "So, they swapped their identities, and we almost fell for it! Everyone, be careful! Capture the one in the groom's outfit alive! He is the real Zu An."

Someone said, "What if that woman is colluding with them to purposely mislead us?"

The dark elf leader was stunned. This was quite a real possibility! He thus said, "Capture both of them, then. Kill that embroidered envoy and the old man."

Qiu Honglei sighed. "Should you really be counting your chickens before they hatch? Aren't you all being a little too arrogant?"

The dark elf leader greedily scanned her body with his roving eyes. "There's no need for you to panic, woman. Once we finish what we need to do, we'll definitely take good care of you."

Qiu Honglei's cultivation seemed impressive, but they didn't seem bothered at all.

Qiu Honglei shook her head. “Wasn’t it General Lu’s army that forced these people away from their group? Aren’t you all trying to reap the fruits of others’ labors?”

The dark elves were all shocked. “You’re Lu Sanyuan’s subordinate!”

“What?!” Sang Qian felt as if his soul had left his body. He never would have expected this beautiful woman to be a part of the renegade faction!

In contrast, Zheng Dan felt a certain admiration for Qiu Honglei. After all, she used to be one of Brightmoon City’s two biggest gang bosses herself, so she felt a connection to Qiu Honglei. If Qiu Honglei had been just a courtesan queen, Zheng Dan might have felt contempt for her instead.

“Unfortunately, the heroic Lu Sanyuan has made a critical miscalculation today by only sending a weak little girl like you! All he has done is present us with another bed-warmer.” The dark elves all roared with laughter.

“Who said I was alone?” Qiu Honglei smiled. She clapped her hands lightly, and eight figures slowly walked out from different directions.

They were a mixed group, each one either tall, short, slim, or large. There were even some women among them.

When the dark elf leader noticed their distinctive traits and their dressing, he grew frightened. “The Devil Sect’s Solitary Eight!”

One of them—a fatty—chuckled. “How surprising! Even you assassins who hide in the dark know of us.”

The dark elf’s expression immediately grew awful.

“What the heck is this Solitary Eight?” Zu An asked Sang Hong.

“They are the high-ranking members of the Devil Sect, representing the eight elemental powers—metal, wood, water, fire, earth, wind, lightning, and ice,” Sang Hong replied, his voice grave. “I didn’t count on the Devil Sect cooperating with the rebel army so early on... No, from the current situation, the two groups might have already been allied with each other for some time.”

Qiu Honglei turned around and gave him a smile. “An intelligent person like Lord Sang should understand that smart people don’t always live long.”

Sang Hong didn’t seem to mind. “Given how things look right now, I don’t think I have long to live anyway.”

The dark elves chose this moment to make their move. They drew their bows and fired at the Solitary Eight. The entire process of nocking the arrow, drawing the bow, and loosing it was performed in one fluid and almost-instantaneous motion.

Every single bow erupted with blue light. There was clearly a series of formations at work here. No wonder they were able to fire arrows with such devastating power!

These dark elves seemed to maintain some sort of subconscious connection to each other. Almost none of them uttered any sounds, yet they had all attacked at the same time. The arrows seemed to cross the distance between them and their targets in a flash, each arrow homing in on a vital spot.

Zu An was stupefied. These dark elves really were top-notch assassins! He might not be able to react in time if he was the one being shot at.

The members of the Solitary Eight didn't expect the attacks to be so swift and disciplined either. The arrows had reached their bodies even before they could think of dodging.

"So, it seems like there's nothing special to the Solitary Eight of the Devil Sect after all!" The dark elf leader sneered. Just as he was about to say something else, however, his face froze. Their arrows hadn't impaled the bodies of their targets, but had struck a transparent layer around them and stuck fast.

The bodies of the Solitary Eight each flowed with a different-colored light, every single one producing transparent shields of their respective element. The gleaming black arrows fired by the Dark Elves had been stopped by these protective layers.

Light pulsed across the shields, and the arrows fell to the ground one after another.

Zu An was watching all of this closely. The red ball of light should be the defensive shield of the fire element. The transparent one belongs to the water element, the purple one to the lighting element, and the gold one to the metal element... Hmm, that one probably belongs to the wood element... It's actually a pretty nice shade of green...

Shocked by this development, the dark elves drew their thin swords and stormed forward.

Every one of them left behind an afterimage in their original location. Their bodies grew transparent, and they attacked the Solitary Eight continuously, from all directions.

They were incredibly fast, and transparent as well, their true forms only appearing in the instant they clashed with the defensive barriers. Their attacks came from all directions, and the battle was a truly dazzling sight to behold.

They weren't focused on a single target each, but switched targets depending on which attacks seemed most effective. They clearly were first-rate assassins, with their own strategies and well-drilled tactics.

Even from all the way inside the carriage, Zu An could feel the vicious killing intent swirling around the battlefield. Several leaves fluttered into the vicinity of the battlefield, only to be instantly cut to pieces by the killing intent alone.

He wondered what would happen if he himself was caught up in the whirlwind of attacks these dark elves had unleashed.

No matter how hard he racked his brain, it seemed death was inevitable. He would only have a chance of survival if he fled ahead of time to avoid being encircled.

However, the Solitary Eight of the Devil Sect seemed surprisingly calm and collected. They stood still without dodging, facing the attacks head on.

The defensive barriers around them flickered but didn't break, no matter how ferociously those dark elves attacked.

Zu An's eyes grew wide. "Aren't they basically invincible with those barriers?"

Chapter 463: Counters and Synergies

Zu An watched as the battle continued. It didn't matter how stunning and intricate the dark elves' attacks were—the Solitary Eight remained completely unfazed under their protective layers, completely unaffected by the onslaught.

Those dark elves continued their vicious attacks, yet their defenses seemed to take no damage. On the contrary, the Solitary Eight were free to employ their respective elements to counterattack at will. Soon, the dark elves' formation fell apart.

Sang Hong said in a serious tone, "Everything has a natural counter—nothing is invincible. For example, if the elemental shields of the Solitary Eight were subject to an attack from an opposing element that countered it, that attack would be much more effective."

Zu An recalled several lectures on this theory back at the academy. Water counters fire, fire counters metal, metal counters wood, wood counters earth, earth counters water. Apart from this, wood also counters wind, while earth counters lightning, fire counters ice...

These elements didn't only have opposing interactions. There were many with synergistic properties. When used together, they could produce a much greater power than a single element alone could.

It was almost as if Sang Hong's words had sparked something in the dark elves. They changed their strategy, and began to attack the targets they were stronger against.

In a few moments, the Solitary Eight also began to falter. The elemental armor of the wood element cultivator was the first to be penetrated, and soon, several others had their defenses fail as well. Even Qiu Honglei had to step in to help them out.

Despite this sudden chaos, the Devil Sect slowly regained the upper hand. They were all experts in their respective fields, after all. Even without their protective shields, they still possessed immense strength.

However, their aura of invincibility had been shattered.

Zu An suddenly understood why the academy stressed that cultivators of the sixth rank and higher easily plowed through those of lower rank.

Sixth rank cultivators would have awakened their respective elemental armors. In most cases, this elemental armor could only be broken by an element that countered it. A lower-ranked cultivator could never go up against someone like that if his attacks could not pierce his opponent's defenses no matter how hard he tried.

Even if one was lucky enough to wield an element that countered that sixth rank cultivator's, one would only be able to break through their elemental armor. Their ki density and cultivation rank would still be higher than one's own, resulting in a loss still.

Only at the sixth rank could one slowly whittle down their opponent's elemental armor, given the similar levels of cultivation and ki density. Then, it would become a contest of cultivation difference and practical strength.

Another thought occurred to Zu An. "Wouldn't you be able to counter many cultivators if you could simultaneously awaken multiple elements?"

The protagonists of those web novels he'd read were all skilled in every element. Wielding two elements wasn't considered special at all.

Sang Qian's mocking voice sounded before Sang Hong could reply. "I guess you can't expect a nobody from the slums to possess even the most basic knowledge. You only know how to let your fantasies run wild! Different elements can have intense reactions when in contact with each other. If you aren't careful, they will clash. How can anyone awaken multiple elements at the same time?"

Zu An couldn't be bothered with him. He put his arm around Zheng Dan's soft waist. "Honey, come here and give me a hug."

They were in front of so many people right now! Zheng Dan's face turned entirely red. She pushed him away, and even hit him a few times with her fist.

Sang Qian was furious. This was preposterous! You dare tease my wife in front of my face?

You have successfully trolled Sang Qian for 1024 Rage points!

He was just about to lose it when Zu An pointed out his and Zheng Dan's outfits. "You have to be careful of our identities right now! What's wrong with me hugging my own wife?"

Sang Qian felt his breath catch as he remembered their prior arrangement. To everyone who was looking, he was Zu An.

These two groups of monsters had clearly come for Zu An. Everyone unrelated would definitely be killed. It was probably better to remain as Zu An for a while longer.

Survival was the most important thing, after all! He could endure anything else for now. Let's see who laughs last...

The one thing that worried him was that Qiu Honglei had recognized him. He didn't know if any of the dark elves had also recognized his real identity.

Despite this, the rage within him began to boil with greater ferocity as he watched Zu An lazily bring Zheng Dan into his embrace.

You have successfully trolled Sang Qian for 516... 516... 516...

Sang Hong said with a cough, "The world is vast. It is not completely impossible for someone who wields two elements to exist. This humble one, however, still has much to experience. I have not met anyone like this yet."

If even the old man was saying this, then it seemed to Zu An that the chances of awakening two elements didn't seem too likely. Sang Hong was already an eighth rank cultivator, after all, and even held an important position in the capital, which meant that he had surely seen a lot of things in his time.

If he could become a master of all elements like those protagonists in the other web novels, he could kill any enemy he ran into in this world.

However, Zu An felt his heart sink as soon as this thought appeared in his head. Forget about being proficient in multiple elements. I didn't even awaken a single element after reaching the fifth rank...

The situation on the battlefield took a sudden turn. With a cute laugh, Qiu Honglei produced a lantern that glowed with yellow light and tossed it into the sky. That lantern rose on its own. Although it seemed as though it might be extinguished by the wind, the entire battlefield was bathed in its radiance instead.

The weak yellow light looked warm, yet all of the dark elves immediately felt chills run through their bodies.

A jolt of shock ran through their minds. They were suddenly unable to conceal themselves thoroughly once surrounded by this yellow light! In the yellow light, several blurry figures could just be seen. Even though they weren't completely clear, this was more than enough for a powerful cultivator.

Even more appalling to the dark elves was that the lantern seemed to be able to restrict their movements! Their strongest attribute was their speed, yet when exposed to this yellow light, they felt as if they were moving through a swamp. Their movement speed was greatly reduced.

The Solitary Eight used this chance to launch a fierce, concerted attack. In the blink of an eye, a dark elf was blasted into smithereens by lightning, while another was frozen into an ice sculpture and smashed to pieces by a powerful fist, all without staining the battlefield with a single drop of blood. A third victim let out a pathetic cry as he was burned alive. Everyone in the carriage shuddered when they heard that blood-curdling scream.

"This lantern..." Sang Hong stared at the lantern in the sky, a pensive look on his face.

Zheng Dan wore a complicated expression. She had been paying close attention to Qiu Honglei the entire time, and had deduced that the courtesan's cultivation was about on par with her own. With that lantern, there was almost no way for her to win.

Sang Qian was shocked. He just couldn't picture how a beautiful and delicate courtesan queen was able to possess such power. She was able to restrict so many dark elves all by herself! These dark elves were all at least at the sixth rank—one of them was strong enough to kill him!

The dark elf leader suddenly took out a bow. The bow looked rather strange, and was entirely dark green in color. An arrow flew straight at that lantern.

The arrows they had fired before were all pitch-black in color, but this arrow glimmered with a layer of blue-green light. It moved through the air even more quickly than the previous arrows! The instant after it had been fired, the arrow had already reached the lantern, which was still floating in midair.

The lantern shuddered. A burst of sparks erupted from it, followed by an ear-splitting grinding noise, almost as if the lantern was groaning.

The light from the lantern grew dim. It could no longer float in midair, and dropped out of the sky.

Qiu Honglei coughed out a mouthful of blood. The lantern was clearly linked to her own life force, and the attack had dealt her a serious blow as well.

One after the other, the dark elves recovered their strength, breaking free from the lantern's control.

The dark elf leader took aim and fired at the heavily wounded Qiu Honglei. His companions had died because of her just now, so he felt no mercy at all.

Chapter 464: What Did You Eat to Get so Big?

Qiu Honglei was already seriously wounded after that arrow had struck her lantern. How could she possibly stop this arrow?

Zu An felt his heart stop beating, and his body subconsciously straightened. In that instant, the earth element cultivator from the Solitary Eight appeared in front of her, reaching down towards the ground with his hand and making a digging motion. A large chunk of the earth was lifted upwards to form a massive earthen wall.

However, even though that earthen wall was thick, the arrow still flew right through it.

Faced with the power of this arrow, the earthen might as well have been made out of papier-mâché.

The earth element cultivator had already predicted that this would happen, and immediately summoned an earthen elemental armor which glowed yellowish-brown.

The arrow crashed against the translucent armor, and began to spin rapidly, releasing a shrill grinding sound as it began to bore into the armor.

In moments, the armor had crumbled, breaking apart into several pieces.

However, the arrow's force was spent as well. The earth element cultivator managed to catch it between his palms.

Even so, the arrow still forced his hands backwards, only stopping an inch from his chest. It was easy to imagine just how terrifying this arrow was.

Sang Hong sighed. "It looks like Qiu Honglei isn't a lowly member of the Devil Sect. Even one of the Solitary Eight willingly stepped in to block that arrow for her."

Zu An smiled and said, "I think it's also because Lady Qiu is so pretty that the men can't help but want to protect her. After all, it wasn't a female member of the Eight who blocked it."

Sang Hong gave him a strange look.

This kid always has a weird way of looking at things that is different from everyone else... but I guess he's not entirely wrong.

Sang Qian snorted coldly. "Only someone like you would make such a base comment. Your head is filled with this stuff about guys and girls all day long."

Zu An rolled his eyes. “You’re speaking as if you’re not the same. Who was the first one to rush out and greet Qiu Honglei earlier?”

Sang Qian’s face heated up. He felt a little guilty. He probably would’ve saved Qiu Honglei too, if he’d had the chance.

The Solitary Eight here were worried that the dark elf leader would fire another arrow, and they all rushed to attack him. However, some dark elves had already moved to stop them.

The dark elf leader drew another arrow and prepared to attack again. The members of the Devil Sect grew nervous, and crowded around Qiu Honglei.

She was considered the saint of the sect, and in terms of status, she was second only to the sect master! They would all meet a horrible end if something were to happen to her.

Unexpectedly, the dark elf leader chose not to aim at Qiu Honglei, but changed targets instead, firing the arrow straight at the carriage.

The cultivations of everyone inside the carriage had been sealed, making them no different from ordinary people. Given the power that this arrow had displayed earlier, there was absolutely no chance of survival.

They had been given two tasks: they would capture Zu An alive if they could, but if not, they were not to let him fall into anyone else’s hands.

When they held the advantage earlier, it would have been easy enough to extract the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra from Zu An. Unfortunately, now that a few of their compatriots had died, and the advantage had swung in the Devil Sect’s favor, it seemed unlikely that they would be able to seize Zu An from them even if they continued fighting. Since they couldn’t capture him, they would erase him from the face of the earth.

Qiu Honglei turned pale when she saw that arrow streak towards the carriage. She wanted to save Zu An, but she was too far away, and her serious injuries had rendered her completely powerless anyway.

Zu An’s eyes narrowed as well. He grabbed Zheng Dan. He couldn’t care less if their relationship was exposed right now.

Huang Huihong suddenly erupted with power. His Soul-reaping Chains flew outwards to intercept the arrow, wrapping around it almost instantly.

The fact that his sight was good enough to allow him to entangle that fast-moving arrow with such accuracy was truly impressive.

However, the arrow’s power would not be so easily contained. With a shrill grinding noise, the Soul-reaping Chains were blown to pieces.

The fragments of the chains shot into Huang Huihong’s body. It was as if a car had rammed straight into him. Blood gushed out from his mouth. He fell to the ground, watching helplessly as the arrow continued on towards the carriage.

Suddenly, black flames surged all around, forming a wall of flames in front of the carriage and blocking the swiftly-moving arrow.

The arrow still carried ferocious power, spinning at an impossibly high rate in an effort to drill through the wall of flames. However, these black flames were clearly special. Strands of flames wrapped around the arrow, encasing it layer upon layer, clearly causing the arrow to melt.

“What kind of flames are these? They’re so powerful!” The eyes of everyone on the battlefield widened in shock, especially the flame cultivator from the Devil Sect. He knew that the fire that he wielded had no chance of melting that arrow. The level of this flame was definitely far above his own!

A beautiful figure landed in front of the carriage. Her skintight outfit only served to further emphasize her enchanting figure.

All eyes couldn’t help but wander towards her chest.

Zu An had a strange expression on his face. Big Manman, your body is a unique work of art, and easily recognizable. Is there even any point in hiding your face?

Is this girl always at the gym or something? Even if you hate dresses, wear some loose fitting black clothes... why do you always have to wear this skintight stuff?

Pei Mianman turned around. She grabbed Zu An subconsciously, wanting to take him away with her, but she suddenly realized that the one she had grabbed was Sang Qian. Stunned, she looked off to the side and saw the real Zu An in a groom’s outfit and Zheng Dan in her bridal dress, their arms wrapped around each other. Her face sunk, and she sniffed lightly. “I thought that you were having a hard time, but it seems like you’re enjoying yourself.”

“So it’s her,” Qiu Honglei muttered to herself. She had fought against this woman back in Brightmoon City. Aside from Zu An, she was probably the one person here who knew her best.

Her mind started to wander back to their earlier fight, but her eyes subconsciously drifted over to the woman’s chest. She bit her lip. What the heck did this girl eat to get that big?

She was actually quite proud of her figure. Compared to Pei Mianman, however, she was clearly lacking in the chest department.

“Kill Zu An!” The dark elf leader ordered, his face pale. He put away the bow. Firing those arrows had taken quite a toll on his body, and he wouldn’t be able to loose another arrow for some time.

At his order, the other dark elves moved as one, charging murderously towards the carriage.

Sang Qian gave a frightened start. He had dressed himself up as Zu An because he wanted to hang onto his life, not lose it! He pointed at Zu An and screamed at the top of his lungs, “I’m not Zu An, he is! Please don’t mistake me for him!”

Zu An stared at him for a moment. In the end, he shook his head and said, “Young master Sang, you’re throwing away whatever is left of your miserable reputation.”

Sang Qian saw the contempt in Zheng Dan's eyes, as well as his father's frown. He knew that his cowardly act was rather shameful, but none of this bothered him right now. Survival was more important than anything else!

Chapter 465: Cash Warrior

The dark elf leader frowned. Even he was beginning to feel confused. Even though the various clues pointed towards the fact that the one in the groom's outfit was Zu An, he was still worried that the enemy might be misleading him.

Furthermore, the one distinguishing feature of Zu An was that he was despicable.

Of course, the one who had just hollered and sold out a comrade seemed to embody this trait perfectly...

He immediately gave the order. "Kill all of them!"

He would rather kill an innocent than let Zu An get away.

Sang Qian, who was still screaming, cut off suddenly with a bewildered frown.

Why aren't these guys acting according to my expectations?

The dark elf assassins had already surrounded the carriage, brandishing their swords.

Pei Mianman sent her black flames flying left and right. She knew that not a single one of these dark elves were ranked below her in terms of cultivation, so she didn't have high hopes of defeating them. She only prayed that she could buy a little more time. She didn't expect that woman to just watch from the side without interfering.

Sure enough, Qiu Honglei quickly called out to her companions as the situation grew more desperate. "Save them!"

The Solitary Eight understood the objective of their mission. The sect master had clearly said that he had to obtain Zu An no matter what. How could they just let the enemy kill him?

The earth element cultivator—who possessed the strongest defense—stayed behind to protect Qiu Honglei, while the others all rushed towards the carriage.

The dark elf leader was exhausted, but he had no choice but to draw his weapons and rejoin the fray.

After all, both sides wanted to achieve their objective as quickly as possible. That was why no one held back. Skills were unleashed one after the other, the combatants fighting recklessly, trading wound after wound.

Zu An observed the battlefield carefully. He was worried for Pei Mianman's safety, because her level of cultivation was, in theory, the lowest of all the fighters. Only her extraordinary black flames allowed her to hold her own against these experts for so long.

Sang Hong sighed. "The youngsters nowadays really are getting stronger and stronger! She is so young, and a woman as well, yet she has already reached the sixth rank! This level of talent truly is rare."

"Sixth rank?" Zu An could tell that he was talking about Pei Mianman. Upon closer inspection, he noticed that there was indeed a layer of elemental armor made of black flame encasing her body, the mark of a sixth rank expert. No wonder she was able to last so long against so many powerful opponents.

It looks like she has been hiding her real strength all this time!

Zu An clicked his tongue. What the heck is with this world? Why are there so many pool sharks? I should probably tone down my bragging a little in the future, or I might end up screwing myself over...

As he was sighing over this, the carriage suddenly jerked. Everyone in the carriage lost their footing and fell, and Zu An dropped straight into Zheng Dan's embrace.

So wonderfully soft!

Unfortunately, he didn't have the time to fully appreciate this right now. He turned around and saw that the seriously-injured Huang Huihong had taken this chance to leap to the front of the carriage, and was driving it deeper into the mountains.

Both the dark elves and the Devil Sect fighters noticed this sudden development. They all wanted to chase after the carriage, but they were tangling with each other and couldn't break free immediately. Pei Mianman wanted to chase after them too, but both sides were stopping her from wriggling away. It was clear that neither side wanted to give her a chance to get her hands on Zu An.

Zu An and the others were inside the carriage that used to belong to Liu Yao. This carriage had been specially remodeled, drawn by fine steeds with extraordinary stamina. The wheels of the carriage had all been engraved with wind element formations, which not only made them light, but increased their speed significantly.

Huang Huihong had relied on these traits to successfully flee the battlefield, and they quickly vanished into the forest.

After going at breakneck speed for a good amount of time, Huang Huihong turned around, and sighed in relief when he saw that no one was chasing them. However, as soon as he relaxed, the last bit of energy that had kept him going leaked out of him. Unable to hold on any further, he fell off the carriage.

Zu An grabbed the reins to stop the carriage. He looked at Huang Huihong, who was lying on the ground nearby, and said, "I honestly can't understand the way you think. Can't you just let those people from the Devil Sect capture me? You can just gather some experts later on and rescue me. That would be so much better, compared to the pitiful state you're in right now."

To be honest, letting either Qiu Honglei or big Manman squirrel him away weren't bad choices. It was better than trying to survive in the wilderness with this dude for company. He knew that dangerous and vicious beasts were lurking around every corner of this wilderness. The bunch of them had their cultivations sealed, and their only cultivator was seriously injured. It would be far too tragic if they ended up as dinner for some vicious beasts.

Huang Huihong stared at him without speaking.

“You’re still mute?” Zu An ridiculed him when he saw his expression. “You embroidered envoys always strut about like you’re hot stuff, acting as though you represent the son of heaven himself and all that nonsense. But look at you now! You were sealed so easily, and your entire group has been practically wiped out. If I were you, I would feel kinda embarrassed.”

Huang Huihong’s eyes grew wider.

You have successfully trolled Huang Huihong for 611 Rage points!

Zu An’s voice grew curious. “By the way, something’s been bothering me. Since the emperor cares about my Phoenix Nirvana Sutra so much, why didn’t he send any real experts? Of the Embroidered Envoy, only you alone are at the sixth rank, while the others were only around the fifth rank. There was that formation thing as well, but who the heck would fight you guys fairly? Weren’t you all so easily wiped out by a simple ambush? Seriously, man.”

Huang Huihong jerked his face to the side. Zu An’s words had clearly gotten to him, and he wasn’t about to pay him any further attention.

A furious voice echoed in the silence. “Zu brat, before you go on and on with your questions, can you get the fuck away from my wife!?”

You have successfully trolled Sang Qian for 666 Rage points!

Sang Qian glared at Zu An. This bastard hadn’t left Zheng Dan’s embrace the entire time, and his head was pressed right up against her chest! He was even rubbing himself against her from time to time... how the hell was he supposed to endure this?

Zu An snorted. “Who are you calling your wife? Miss Zheng never completed the last step of the wedding ceremony with you. Strictly speaking, she is not your wife. Furthermore, I’m the one dressed in the groom’s clothes. I think everyone will agree that we look more like a couple.”

“You...” All this nonsense left Sang Qian on the brink of fainting. He was momentarily at a loss as to how to reply.

You have successfully trolled Sang Qian for 888 Rage points!

Zheng Dan’s skin wasn’t as thick as Zu An’s. She couldn’t bring herself to continue being so intimate with him while so many were watching. She pushed him away, her face red. Zu An didn’t want to keep her in an awkward spot, and used this chance to sit up as well.

Sang Hong coughed. He didn’t really want to keep seeing his son being bullied either. He replied to Zu An’s latest question to change the topic. “Based on my own suspicions, the emperor was most likely a little too careless this time. We had a master and a ninth rank expert accompanying us, as well as the Imperial Guard and Embroidered Envoy equipped with his imperial edict. In theory, this should have been more than enough to deal with most situations. However, he did not expect the temptation of your Phoenix Nirvana Sutra would be so great.”

There was one thing that he left out. The various powers might not have made their moves for the sake of obtaining the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra—they probably just didn’t want the emperor to obtain it.

Zu An rolled his eyes. “You make it sound as though all of them came after me. Weren’t there quite a few assassins who came after you guys as well? Look, I’m willing to bet that this dude coming from over there is here for you.”

Sang Hong froze, and quickly followed his gaze. A figure slowly emerged from the depths of the forest. He was a slovenly-dressed man with a thin sword resting across his shoulders, both his hands casually resting on either side of the blade. The way he walked made him seem wanton and unrestrained.

“Cash Warrior Ding Run? Why are you here?” Sang Hong became serious when he saw this person’s face.[1]

“Cash Warrior?” Zu An was stunned. Why did this name sound familiar?

Sang Hong said gravely, “He is an extremely famous hitman from the underground world, who will accept any hit for money. He will even kill his own friends and family, as long as you have enough money. Everyone calls him Cash Warrior because he charges more than the rest of his peers, and he can raise his fee at any time. However, he possesses an extremely high level of cultivation, and he will always complete his mission, regardless of how difficult it is. Hence, everyone is willing to fork over his higher fee.”

The man stabbed his sword into the ground and clapped lazily. “I didn’t expect Lord Sang to know this humble one so well! I’m beginning to suspect that you never worked for the Ministry of Agriculture at all, but served in the Ministry of Justice instead.”

Sang Qian had heard of this man as well. He had been seething with anger just a second ago, but now, he couldn’t help but shrink back. He was even trembling slightly.

Zu An frowned when he noticed how strangely he was acting. If the usually proud and arrogant Sang Qian was reduced to this, this fellow was most likely going to be a problem.

Sang Hong asked, “Respectfully, I wonder who it is you’ve come to kill? Is it Zu An, or are you here for my son and I?”

The slovenly man’s lips cracked open in a grin, revealing a mouthful of snow-white teeth that didn’t match his outward appearance at all. “Someone forked over a sum for the lives of you and your son, but...”

He paused and looked at Zu An. “I’m quite interested in that fellow as well. I’ll have a proper talk with him after finishing off the two of you. This way, I don’t even have to ask for any extra cash.”

Zu An’s face darkened. A proper talk? Please don’t tell me this dude swings that way...

1. This is a reference to the character Ding Xiu in the 2014 film *Brotherhood of Blades*. When the villain in the film offered him money to kill his younger martial brother, he insisted that the villain increase his offer, since he was being asked to kill someone close to him. Netizens began to jokingly refer to him as “the warrior who asks for extra cash”. That nickname has been shortened to “Cash Warrior” in this translation.

Chapter 466: You're Putting Me in a Tight Spot

Sang Hong seemed to have already foreseen all of this. "Who wants us dead?" He asked, his expression still calm.

Ding Run shook his head. "I was praising Lord Sang for knowing the ropes a second ago. Why are you asking such a childish question now? You know the rules in my line of work. How could I possibly leak out any information about my employer?"

Sang Hong said indifferently, "I'll give you some extra cash."

Ding Run stared silently at him.

Zu An almost burst out laughing. He didn't expect the usually serious Sang Hong to be so good at cracking such dry jokes.

"You're really putting me in a tight spot." Ding Run walked around in a circle, scratching his head. He was clearly working through some internal conflicts.

A while later, he asked, "How much extra are we talking about?"

Off to the side, Zheng Dan smiled. This fellow really was worthy of his reputation as a Cash Warrior.

Sang Hong replied, "Ten thousand taels, just for a name."

Ding Run seemed rather unimpressed.

He snorted and said, "You made me think long and hard just for this? Screw your ten thousand taels. Lord Sang really is an honest official. You've worked yourself all the way up to the post of governor, yet you can only offer ten thousand taels when your life is on the line!"

Sang Hong fell silent. He truly was a novice when it came to the art of bribery. Ten thousand taels was his limit.

Sang Qian hurriedly chimed in, "I have money! How about a hundred thousand?"

"A hundred thousand..." Ding Run nodded. "Even though it's a little low, I guess it will be barely enough for a name. The two of you are quite interesting, though. One is upright and honest, and the other seems rather corrupt. Are the two of you starting up a comedy duo?"

Sang Hong's expression fell. He had nothing to say in response.

Sang Qian hurriedly said, "Respectfully, please tell us who is the one that wants us dead."

"Where's the money?" Ding Run picked up his sword and gave him a sidelong glance.

Sang Qian immediately fished out a stack of silver banknotes. "Here, it's right here!"

It has to be mentioned that the Embroidered Envoy did things differently from other law enforcement officials. If it had been any other bailiffs conducting the arrests, they would surely have stripped their prisoners of all their possessions. They wouldn't have even left them with a single copper coin.

The Embroidered Envoy, however, would only check their prisoners for any hidden weapons or dangerous objects. They didn't touch money at all.

Ding Run's eyes lit up when he saw the cash. He reached out his hand, and the stack of bank notes floated over to him as if moved by an invisible hand.

He brought the notes up to his nose and gave it a sniff, and an intoxicated expression appeared on Ding Run's face. "Ah... the smell of silver banknotes. Its fragrance will never fail to move me."

Zu An could only stare at him.

This dude's greed is on a whole new level...

After taking a few more moments to take in their smell, Ding Run put away the cash. "All right, it's time to send you all to the afterlife."

Sang Qian immediately flew into a panic. "You took my money, but you didn't tell us who it was that put that hit on us!"

Ding Run grinned. "I will tell you his name just as you are taking your last breath. That way, I won't be going back on my promise, and nothing unexpected will happen."

Sang Qian and Sang Hong were both speechless.

Zu An was intrigued. Even though this fellow looked boorish, he was a pretty shrewd thinker. Escaping from this man was going to prove difficult.

In Sang Qian's eyes, Ding Run's snow white teeth looked just like the mark of the devil. He cowered in fear.

Sang Hong's voice grew dark. "Do you know the consequences of taking our lives? We are court officials, and criminals as well. Zu An over here is even wanted alive by the emperor himself. If someone finds out that you were the one who killed us, you won't have a chance to spend all that money, no matter how much you make."

Ding Run nodded. "You have indeed pointed out something important. Of course, no one will know that I was the perpetrator if I kill everyone who knows about it."

Just as the words had left his mouth, the blade in his hands flashed with a cold glint. Huang Huihong clutched his neck, his face covered in disbelief. He turned around to look at the carriage, his hand reaching out as if he wanted to grab on to something. However, his life leaked out of him, and his body crashed heavily into the ground.

His blade is incredibly fast!

This was everyone's first reaction. After all, none of them even saw his blade move. There had only been a flash of vicious light, and by the time they looked, his blade was already back in its scabbard, as if it never left in the first place.

Zu An fell silent as he looked at Huang Huihong's corpse. Even though this man had captured him, Zu An still thought of him as someone worthy of respect. He was responsible and diligent, and he didn't have any questionable morals. Up to his final moments, he had still been dedicated to the completion of his mission.

Who would have thought that a man like him would die silently in the wilderness?

Zheng Dan's hand secretly found his. Without a doubt, this hitman was a vicious and merciless killer. There was no chance that he would leave anyone alive.

She was still a young lady, after all. Even though she had experienced many things as the boss of the Whale Gang, staring death in the face was still a frightening experience..

The one consolation she had was that Zu An was by her side. If this really was the end, then at least the journey across the yellow springs of the underworld wouldn't be a lonely one.

Zu An had no intention of accepting this fate. He looked at the approaching Ding Run and said, "I'll give you double whatever the other guy has paid you to buy our freedom."

Compared to Sang Hong's 'honest poverty', he was definitely considered a rich bastard. He still had a few million silver taels on him.

Ding Run chuckled. "Oh? I didn't expect a kid like you to have so much money on you."

Zu An smiled. "I'm really not as noble as Lord Sang over there. I have quite a few methods of making money."

"There have always been rumors floating around regarding the Chu clan's wealth. Now, I finally believe them. You've only spent a few months in the Chu clan, yet you've already accumulated so much. I'll have to go for a stroll around the Chu clan when I have the chance." Ding Run seemed rather moved, but he quickly changed the topic. "I'm honestly quite tempted, but I cannot take your money."

"Why?" Zu An said in surprise. "Aren't you called the Cash Warrior? I'm already doubling their offer. Why wouldn't you accept it? Aren't you advertising one thing but selling something else?"

Ding Run replied, "I have to think long term. Even though earning double the amount of silver from you right now seems like a good deal, if I take a job but don't complete it, who will hire me in the future? I'll be losing big! That's why I cannot take your cash."

Zu An sighed. "It's surprising to find a hitman who is so principled in our society," he said.

"Thank you for your praise. Since I find you quite agreeable, I'll give you a swift and painless death later," Ding Run replied.

Zu An's eyes narrowed. "You hinted that you would interrogate me for the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra earlier. From what you're saying, it seems like there are others who want me dead as well."

"I was just casually throwing it out there. I refuse to believe that there is a technique in this world that can grant eternal life. Cash is more practical. Given our limited lifespan, the best thing one can do is to live the most glamorous life possible." Ding Run chuckled. "Since the two of us seem to be hitting it off, let me tell you something. Someone does want you dead, and that person doesn't want me to reveal their identity either. I don't know why they are so concerned, though."

The expressions of Sang Hong, Sang Qian, and Zheng Dan all flickered when they heard that someone had put out a hit on Zu An as well.

Oddly enough, Zu An himself didn't seem the least bit affected. "Since you're a hit man, can I entrust you with a job?"

"Entrust me with a job?" Ding Run was stunned. "My targets are always either begging for their lives or sobbing bitterly. To meet someone like you who wants to help me in my business is quite the rare sight. Indeed, I am a hit man. If you can afford my rates, then of course you can entrust me with a job."

"That's good to know," Zu An said. "How much do you charge for a hit?"

Ding Run chuckled. "That's hard to say! Different targets have different levels of cultivation and social standing, and the price will obviously be different, according to each individual. Of course, I won't do it for cheap, no matter how shoddy the target is. After all, anyone who is worthy of being my target wouldn't be an easy job."

"I'll trouble you to kill the one who put the hit on me, then," Zu An said.

Ding Run's eyes narrowed. "So that's what you had in mind, kid. I fear that I..."

"I'll give you extra," Zu An continued in a composed manner. "I'll pay you double whatever that person paid to send you after me."

Ding Run hesitated. "You really are putting me in quite the spot here..."

"Triple!" Zu An continued without flinching.

Ding Run's eyes lit up. "Fine! Deal!"

Sang Qian was completely stunned. This kind of bullshit was okay?

As expected, this brat's brain worked quickly! Maybe it's better if I don't antagonize him in the future.

Sigh, I might not even make it beyond today. What's the point in thinking about this now?

Chapter 467: Song of the Struck Blade

Ding Run suddenly fixed Zu An with a stare. "How can I be sure that you have that much money, though? You're about to die too, so I only want whatever money you can cough up right now. Don't tell me to run around looking for your secret stash. I don't want to end up stumbling into any traps."

It was obvious that he'd experienced something like that in the past, which made him much more cautious.

"I have the money, but I will only give it to you later. That way, I can at least live a little longer," Zu An said with a chuckle.

Ding Run shook his head. "Trust me. Sometimes, living for too long might not necessarily be better than passing on immediately."

"I'll still rather remain alive," Zu An replied.

“As you will. I’ll kill them first and leave you for the last.” Ding Run turned towards Sang Hong and the others. “Apologies, Lord Sang.”

Then, with a flicker of radiance, a wave of blade energy cleaved towards the father and son.

Sang Hong suddenly sprung into action. He picked up the iron chain in his hands and moved forward to meet this attack. The chain ground against the other party’s blade, producing a string of sparks.

Despite this, the blade energy still scattered in all directions, hacking the carriage to pieces. The people inside tumbled out.

“You managed to undo your seal?” Ding Run’s hand rested on his sword, as if the blade had never left its scabbard.

Sang Hong looked at the fallen Huang Huihong, and then he said with a sigh, “I have to thank Commander Huang for undoing my seal before his death.”

Ding Run recalled that Huang Huihong had stretched out his hand towards the carriage before his death. Back then, he thought that the dying man was trying to grab something, but he now knew that he was undoing Sang Hong’s seal.

“So all of that blabbering earlier was also to buy time for his recovery?” He gave Zu An an irritated look. He didn’t expect to be played like this today.

Sang Hong also favored Zu An with a look of approval. “I didn’t expect you to have realized this. The speed of your reactions leaves even myself in awe.”

After all, Huang Huihong had only had enough time to undo his restrictions alone. That was why no one else should have known what was happening.

“It was just a shot in the dark. Blind luck.” Zu An smiled. He then turned to look at Ding Run. “Whatever the case, our agreement is still in effect. If we really do end up dying, you’ll still help me kill your employer.”

Ding Run sneered. “Quite clever aren’t you? Covering all your bases.”

Joy blossomed across Sang Qian’s face, and he immediately cried out, “Dad, help me undo my seal!”

Surprisingly, however, Sang Hong made no reply. He only continued to stare at Ding Run.

Zu An snorted. “Are you dumb? You’d die if someone on their level even touched you! All of your dad’s attention is on his opponent right now, and he can’t afford to get distracted, yet you’re barking like a stupid dog.”

Sang Qian stared blankly for a moment before he realized what was going on. However, Zu An’s words still angered him. Hmph, just wait until after my dad gets rid of Ding Run. I won’t be done with you until I skin you alive!

You have successfully trolled Sang Qian for 792 Rage points!

Zu An couldn’t care less about him. His attention was completely on the battle.

His initial rage aside, Ding Run remained rather composed. “I heard that Lord Sang was an eighth rank cultivator. Please, teach me a thing or two.”

Sang Hong’s voice had taken on a serious tone. “You are quite famous in your field of work as well. I’ve heard of eighth-ranked cultivators who died at your hand. Another eighth rank cultivator shouldn’t be too much trouble for you to deal with.”

“Whatever the case, you still have eight ranks, which makes you a much tougher target than most. I’ll have to demand a bonus from my employer once I get back.” Ding Run’s sword flew out of its scabbard almost before the last word had left his lips.

He moved so quickly that no one else could see the blade’s trajectory. They could just barely sense a trace of cold light flickering past.

Sang Hong was already fully prepared for the fight. He brandished the broken chains in his hands and moved to meet the attack. The chains and shackles that the Embroidered Envoy used to restrain their prisoners were all made from black steel, which made them quite a decent substitute for a proper weapon.

The two clashed and swapped places. This time, Ding Run didn’t sheath his sword, allowing Zu An and the others to see it clearly.

This sword was much longer and narrower than a normal blade. It was similar to a Japanese katana in his previous world, but was even longer.

It seemed to have a silvery-white finish, but there was a faint tinge of dark red to it as well.

There was no way this dark red color was on the surface. As a swordsman, Ding Run surely maintained his weapon properly.

The dark red color had to have seeped into the blade itself, becoming one with the sword.

Given his occupation, it went without saying what this dark red color signified.

Even though they were a fair distance away from him, the killing intent radiating from the blade made chills run through their bodies, and even their skin seemed to be covered in a fine, prickling feeling.

Zu An’s expression was solemn. This fellow had already turned his killing intent into a tangible substance. Just how many people had he killed to do this?

Sang Qian wore an awful expression as well. He could be considered a powerful cultivator himself, and he had already noticed the two-inch cut across his father’s chest. Even though his father wasn’t truly injured, his father seemed to have been on the losing end of that exchange.

“Your blade truly is fast, your eminence.” Sang Hong stared at Ding Run, a hint of shocked surprise flashing across his eyes. He knew what had happened, even without looking down at his own chest.

Ding Run’s mouth spread open a grin. “This is my bread and butter—how can my blade not be fast? I fear that cultivators like Lord Sang, who live like princes all day, don’t have much actual experience in fighting. You are not a match for me.”

“That might not necessarily be so.” Sang Hong said with an angry huff. This was now a matter of life and death, and he wasn’t about to back down. He grabbed a chain in each hand, and flames surged along the length of them, quickly making them glow red.

The ‘flame whips’ danced in his hands, lashing out at his opponent. His hair and beard flew about wildly as he attacked, lending him an aura of inexplicable power.

Sang Qian clenched his fists tightly, silently cheering his father on.

This was the first time that Zu An was seeing Sang Hong go all out. When he was the governor of Linchuan Commandery, he rarely had to personally make a move. All he had to do was make some small arrangements, and an army of pawns would go forth to do his will.

Only now, when his life and death hung in the balance, did everyone remember that he was also an eighth-ranked expert.

So, he’s a flame element cultivator. Zu An was puzzled. This didn’t match Sang Hong’s personality at all. The man was always composed and collected, only making a move after he was certain of victory. He seemed entirely different from most of the other fire element cultivators, who had explosive personalities.

But then, he realized that Sang Qian also wielded the fire element. It only made sense that father and son would awaken the same element and cultivate similar techniques.

The only thing that he couldn’t figure out was why they had taken Zheng Dan in as a daughter-in-law. She possessed the water element, while they were masters of the fire element. Weren’t they naturally incompatible?

Sang Hong’s fiery red whips thrashed about the battlefield, leaving glowing traces everywhere. They came dangerously close to Ding Run several times, and each time, he just barely avoided them.

Finally, there was one strike that he couldn’t avoid. He raised his sword to block the incoming strike. With a loud bang, his entire body was thrown way back.

Sang Hong didn’t continue his assault, as his barrage of attacks hadn’t done much at all. Continuing that sort of offensive would only needlessly drain his energy.

“Are you done? I guess it’s my turn now.” Ding Run laughed. He raised that sword in front of him, and flicked the blade lightly with his finger.

A clear note rang out. It was definitely a good sword.

No one knew why he had flicked his sword. Was he trying to show it off?

Only Sang Hong’s expression flickered. He quickly dodged to the side, but he was still a little too late. A spray of blood erupted from the long, bloody wound that had been carved on his arm.

If he hadn’t evaded so quickly, his entire arm might have been lopped off.

Invisible sword energy!

None of them were idiots. They realized what this was right away.

Sang Hong's tone was dark. "There were rumors floating around that the young Cash Warrior used to create music by striking his blade[1], but everyone thought that this was only something you did to amuse yourself. I never expected that this would become one of your killing techniques!"

Ding Run smiled. "It is difficult to find a kindred spirit who understands me. I never expected Lord Sang to know me so well! In that case, I'll ask Lord Sang to properly critique this song of mine, called 'Song of the Struck Blade'."

Chapter 468: A Lethal Blade

Ding Run struck his blade again, sending out a crisp note that resonated all around. Sang Hong immediately took to the air.

The moment he leapt up, a groove several meters long was carved out of the ground where he had been standing.

Ding Run struck his blade again. Sang Hong couldn't evade while in midair, so he picked up a nearby tree and pulled it in front of himself. The massive tree was cut apart as though it was made of paper, and was instantly cleaved into two by the invisible blade ki.

The blade ki didn't stop after slicing through the tree, but continued onwards, cleaving towards his body.

However, the streak of invisible blade ki left traces of its movement in the debris left over by the shattered tree.

Sang Hong thrust out the chains in his hands. With a loud crash, the blade ki was forcefully scattered.

Ding Run was unfazed, continuing to strike his sword.

He struck a different part of his sword each time, and each time, a different note rang out, almost as if it were a real musical instrument. The notes flowed together, just like a song.

Compared to the music of other instruments, though, this one was full of killing intent.

Sang Hong had learned his lesson from that first exchange. He swept up the surrounding leaves, grass, branches, and other loose objects with his chains, even sweeping up the surrounding earth. The air around him was littered with debris. The invisible sword ki could now be traced, which made it much easier to deal with.

Only now could Zu An and the others see the trajectory of the sword ki. More often than not, they didn't fly straight out towards Sang Hong, but instead came from behind, from the side, from diagonally below him, and many other unexpected angles.

They had no idea how Ding Run was able to launch such attacks against Sang Hong even though he was clearly standing far away.

The furrows on Sang Hong's brow grew deeper and deeper. Even though he had all manner of methods to evade his opponent's blade ki, he would never seize the advantage this way.

The main issue was that the blade ki came towards him at incredibly tricky angles. A single moment of carelessness, and he would be hit.

If this continued, Sang Hong was worried that he might just be defeated. He tried to close the gap several times to engage his opponent at close quarters and make it difficult for him to launch these blade ki attacks.

Unfortunately, Ding Run continued to back up. In addition, his control over his sword ki was immaculate, and he managed to maintain the distance between the two of them.

Two loud bangs sounded in quick succession. The chains around Sang Hong exploded. They had finally given out after being heated by his flames and suffering repeated blows from the incredibly sharp blade ki.

There was no way Ding Run would give up such a good chance. Five fingers struck the blade in quick succession. Several streaks of sword ki lanced towards Sang Hong's vital areas one after another from different directions.

Without a weapon in hand, Sang Hong could only use his own flesh to protect himself. His situation looked grim.

Sang Hong roared in anger. Suddenly, four blazing wheels appeared around him, spinning and whirling all around him. The five streaks of sword ki that were about to strike him were all blocked by the protective net formed by the spinning flame wheels.

"Windfire Wheels! My dad has activated our clan's best skill!" Sang Qian cried out excitedly.

"Windfire Wheels?" Zu An had an odd expression on his face. Your dad doesn't seem to have any of Nezha's charm...[1]

Sang Hong was already on the move, using the protection offered by his Windfire Wheels to charge straight at Ding Run.

Ding Run sent out several blasts of sword ki in an attempt to stop Sang Hong, but he couldn't break through his opponent's defenses.

Sang Hong closed the distance quickly. He thrust out a hand, and the Windfire Wheels around him came together to form an even larger wheel, which crashed down onto Ding Run.

Ding Run hurriedly raised his long blade to block it, his body shuddering considerably. This blow had clearly dealt a substantial amount of damage.

Sang Hong wasn't about to throw away his advantage, and continued to unleash a flurry of attacks.

Ding Run tried to retaliate, but all his efforts were deflected by that massive wheel.

The sky was covered in flames, and Ding Run's body was only faintly discernible within the vicious barrage of attacks. Sang Qian wore a look of excitement. "Wonderful! Dad is really amazing!"

Zu An didn't share his optimism. Right from the first exchange, it was clear that Sang Hong's cultivation was lower than Ding Run's. Sang Hong already brought out his ultimate move—how could Ding Run possibly not have one himself?

Sure enough, a sudden roar pierced the air. Even from a distance, they could feel an immensely powerful pressure.

"What... what is this..." Sang Qian's eyes widened, and he felt his chest grow tight.

On the battlefield, a fierce purple tiger suddenly took form. This tiger wasn't a real creature, but rather, a phantom made from lightning.

Although it was a phantom, sparks shot out in all directions wherever this purple tiger's claws clashed with Sang Hong's Windfire Wheels. It seemed to exist in the space between the material and the immaterial world.

Zu An looked more closely, and noticed that this tiger floated behind Ding Run. This was surely something that he had conjured up.

Is he a wielder of the lightning element?

No wonder his sword was so quick.

Zu An sighed, then realized that his conclusion was wrong. Compared to before, Ding Run's speed seemed to have almost doubled.

He seemed to have completely disappeared from the battlefield. Only a vicious purple tiger remained, roaring and pouncing at Sang Hong. Each time it attacked, sparks and lightning flew, accompanied by thunderous booms. His power was clearly much greater than before as well.

As the battle raged, the vegetation around them was razed to the ground, exposing the earth underneath. Zu An and the others quickly backpedaled to avoid being caught up in the blast waves.

They didn't use this chance to escape, mainly because their cultivations were sealed. They wouldn't get far even if they ran. If Ding Run emerged victorious, it would only be a matter of minutes before he caught up to them.

If Sang Hong won, there wouldn't even be a need to flee.

The best choice was to wait for the result of this battle.

At the moment, however, the scales were tipped in Ding Run's favor. Red flames were rushing into the heavens just a moment ago, but once Ding Run unleashed his power, purple lightning dominated the battlefield.

A huge boom echoed across the area. The purple tiger pounced on Sang Hong's massive wheel of fire, crushing it and breaking it into four separate pieces.

Then, the tiger brandished its claws, swatting the smaller wheels into the distant forest.

The purple tiger pounced on the defenseless Sang Hong.

Sang Hong let out a horrible scream. His body hit the ground like a leaky sandbag. He tried to struggle back to his feet, but his knees buckled, sending him back down. He could just barely support himself off the ground with his arms.

Blood gushed out of his mouth. His chest was visibly caved in, the indentation shaped vaguely like the paw of that purple tiger. There was a deep blade wound on his chest, which barely stopped an inch from his heart.

"I'm impressed by your reactions, Lord Sang. You were actually able to evade my lethal strike at the last second." The giant phantom purple tiger behind Ding Run gradually dissipated as his blade returned to its sheath.

The outcome of the battle was already decided. Even though Sang Hong had dodged the last lethal strike, he no longer had the strength to continue fighting.

Seeing how Sang Hong could barely even move, Ding Run shifted his attention to Zu An and the others. "Perhaps it's better if I deal with you all first. I don't want to see another one of you jump out and tell me that your seal has been undone."

Even though their level of cultivation was not enough to threaten him, the first rule of being a hit man was to limit the number of variables.

He drew his blade, but in that instant, for the first time in his life, he hesitated. He wanted to take care of Sang Qian first, but he suddenly recalled the cleverness Zu An had displayed earlier. This kid had also been way too calm throughout this entire process, which set Ding Run's danger sense tingling.

As such, he changed targets midway, thrusting his sword towards Zu An's throat.

Chapter 469: Cunning Sister-in-law

Zu An felt a jolt of shock run through his body as he saw the blade of the sword thrust in his direction. Fortunately, he was always on guard. Seeing the speed at which his opponent was closing the distance, he didn't dare hesitate, immediately summoning Grandgale to teleport several zhang away.

Ding Run couldn't comprehend what had just happened.

Never in his darkest nightmares did he imagine that he, a top-notch cultivator, would fail to land a blow on someone who should have been, right now, nothing more than an ordinary human.

"Was your seal undone as well?" He was extremely confused. This didn't make sense either! Even if his seal was undone, the intelligence he had stated that he was only around the fourth or fifth rank. Killing cultivators like him should be as easy as slaughtering a chicken—how did this fellow manage to dodge his blow?

The rest of the group shared the same uncertainty. They just couldn't figure out why he could move freely like this, let alone so quickly.

Sang Qian grew even more depressed. He was fully aware that, if the blow had been aimed at him, there was no chance at all that he could have avoided it even if he were at his peak, let alone right now, when his cultivation was sealed.

He never expected Zu An, who he had always looked down on, to accomplish this. A million different feelings warred within his heart.

“What do you think?” Zu An swallowed, seeing the devastation that the sword ki had wrought in the spot that he had just vacated a moment ago. A small tree there had been instantly torn apart. He would have been the one to suffer that fate if he had been even a moment too late.

Fortunately, Grandgale wasn’t affected by his seal. Ding Run, who had no clue about this, said with a cold snort, “There’s no need to guess. I just have to kill you.”

His image flickered, and he sent his blade flying towards Zu An again. Having learned his lesson, he immediately cut off Zu An’s retreat as well. That way, even if Zu An dodged like he did before, this sword ki he had launched in advance would be enough to cleave him in half.

Unexpectedly, Zu An seemed to have read his thoughts! This time, he didn’t use Grandgale to flee backwards, instead blinking a dozen zhang sideways.

Ding Run’s blade struck empty air again. He stood motionless, and began to question life itself.

Zu An wasn’t feeling too great at the moment either. Even though he could use Grandgale consecutively more times than before, there was still a limit. He wouldn’t be able to hold on if this man continued to press the attack.

Ding Run turned around and looked at him. He remarked in a low voice, “To be honest, I’m really impressed. Any youngster who can avoid two strikes from me can definitely be considered a genius. Given enough time, your future accomplishments might even exceed mine. Unfortunately, the heavens are not so kind.”

He did not rush at Zu An again. Instead, he raised his blade and tapped it.

Zu An had just watched this Song of the Struck Blade destroy Sang Hong! Without hesitation, he darted to the side.

However, Ding Run didn’t stop. His finger struck the blade again and again.

This time, Zu An didn’t summon Grandgale. He had already used it three times in succession, and he wanted to save whatever precious uses he had left for crucial moments.

He fell back to using his Sunflower Phantasm instead. Even though he couldn’t use ki to split himself into three, the technique still granted him great evasive abilities.

“Hm?” Ding Run grew more and more bewildered. Zheng Dan, who had seen this before, wasn’t as surprised, but both Sang Hong and Sang Qian were staring wide-eyed.

“This fellow really is a genius!” Sang Hong sighed in amazement. It truly was a pity. If the relationship between Zu An and his son wasn’t so awful, he would have gone all out to rope this kid in.

Sang Qian's heart was dripping with envy. It was truly horrible, seeing someone he used to look down on surpass him by such a wide margin.

Ding Run made an agitated sound. His finger struck his blade at an ever-increasing speed. Blade ki sliced out with even greater frequency, flying towards Zu An from angles that were harder and harder to predict.

Despite all this, there was still a huge gap in cultivation between the two parties, and Zu An's cultivation was also sealed. Therefore, even though Zu An was already a master of his movement technique, there was no way he could evade every single blow.

His movement was just a split second too slow. An invisible streak of sword ki sliced open a gash on his thigh.

This sudden injury caused his subsequent movements to grow momentarily sluggish. Sword ki drew a deep gash across his chest, and a bloody mist burst from his body as another stroke slashed across his lower back.

"Ah!" Zheng Dan cried out in alarm, her face going completely pale. However, with her cultivation sealed, she was helpless to intervene.

Seeing his fiancée show so much concern for another man made Sang Qian bubble with fury.

You have successfully trolled Sang Qian for 999 Rage points!

However, he quickly realized that, once Zu An was dead, he would be next. That was why he couldn't afford to be angry right now.

"Huh?" a strange sense of unease wormed its way into Ding Run's mind. His invisible blades should've sliced through a fourth or fifth rank cultivator with ease. This Zu An kid was supposed to be in pieces right now. How did he only suffer a few deep gashes?

"I thought about playing dead, but I don't think someone like you would let me get away with that." Noticing his opponent's grave expression, Zu An slowly drew himself up from the puddle of blood. What a pity! This hit man is just too careful... I wanted to ambush him with my Poisonous Prick.

Zheng Dan immediately covered her mouth when she saw him rise back to his feet. Her misty eyes were filled with joy and disbelief.

Even Sang Qian had to give this guy some credit. Was he still human? His injuries looked terrible, but he hadn't died yet. His body was exceptionally hardy.

Ding Run looked at Zu An, and a faint hint of praise seeped into his voice. "Your body's sturdiness far exceeds my expectations. Even many high level cultivators can be considered to be far inferior to you."

As a killer, he understood the physical limits of each different cultivation level. Such an understanding was vital to knowing how much force he needed to use to end any individual's life.

Zu An sighed. "I don't know whether I should feel happy or sad after hearing your praise."

Ding Run's mouth cracked open in a grin, revealing his intimidating white teeth again. "You should feel terrible, of course, because I won't be going on easy on you anymore..."

He struck his blade at once, and countless invisible blades swept towards Zu An, each one containing much greater power.

Zu An's expression grew focused. He continuously used the Sunflower Phantasm to evade, randomly sprinkling in one or two uses of Grandgale. Ding Run fired off more than ten shots, yet none of them ended up hitting Zu An.

How is this possible?! The same thought was shared by all. Zu An was clearly seriously injured, so why did he show no signs of weakening? Instead, he seemed to be growing ever stronger!

His speed had clearly increased severalfold as well.

Ding Run could no longer maintain his composure, having failed over and over again to deal with this brat.

He increased the rate of his attacks. The danger surrounding Zu An intensified. Many times, the attacks were so close that they sliced off the edges of his clothes.

A shadow dashed out from a nearby cluster of trees, halting at Sang Qian's side, giving him a bottle of medicine, and also undoing his and Zheng Dan's seals. "Big brother, please carry father. Sister-in-law, we should use this chance to get away."

This was Sang Qien. Her choice of timing was excellent. Right then, all of Ding Run's focus was on Zu An.

Zu An cried out when he saw what was happening. "What the heck? Is this how you treat someone who saved your dad and your brother's lives?"

Sang Qien replied with a laugh, "Young master Zu, I'll have to trouble you to help buy us a little more time. Please save them again!"

With that, she took her father, brother, and sister-in-law away.

All of them were powerful cultivators. Given the complexity of the terrain around them, their chances of escape were decent.

Even if Ding Run tried to track them down again, it would take him some time. Their father would have recovered somewhat from his injuries by then, and they might even be able to take him down if all of them worked together.

Of course, all of this hinged on sacrificing Zu An. The lives of her family were most important. Zu An was but a stranger. She felt no remorse in abandoning him.

Sang Qian was overjoyed. Why would he have any objections to this plan? He picked up his father and took off, giving his father the medicine his sister had given him along the way.

Unexpectedly, Zheng Dan pushed Sang Qien's hand away and charged at Ding Run. Gathering the surrounding elemental water within the plants around them, she condensed it into an arrow of water and shot it at him.

Sang Qien was stunned. She looked at her bridal dress, then looked at Zu An in his groom's clothes, and then turned back to face her older brother. "Brother, what is going on between you and sister-in-law?"

Chapter 470: Strangely Embarrassed

Sang Qian stared back at his sister, speechless.

He was completely dumbfounded as well. He had thought that Zu An was the one bullying Zheng Dan all this while, and that she was being forced to do his bidding.

What the hell is going on here? This bastard Zu An has surely resorted to some devilish trick to manipulate her!

Yeah, that's definitely it!

You have successfully trolled Sang Qian for 734 Rage points!

Only Sang Hong shook his head with a sigh. He was well experienced with the ways of the world, and knew exactly what was going on.

Zheng Dan's face turned red. She knew that her actions had completely blown her cover, but giving up the disciplined image that she had groomed over so many years still left her slightly embarrassed, and she tried to justify herself. "He's saved my life before, so I can't just watch him die."

She knew that this reason was rather far-fetched, but she still steeled herself and ran with it anyway. At the very least, it would serve as some sort of explanation to satisfy her fiancé's family.

In the time she took to make her statement, her water arrow had already reached Ding Run. Ding Run snorted, raised his hand, and crushed that arrow between his fingers. The ferocious arrow of water exploded into a spray of harmless water droplets.

Given the huge gap in their cultivations, Zheng Dan's attack was insufficient to break through his defenses.

With a flick of his hand, Ding Run sent the water droplets flying back where they came from. They pelted Zheng Dan's body mercilessly.

She did her best to evade and protect herself, but she was still hit. She threw up a mouthful of blood and collapsed onto the ground.

Ding Run waved his hands in a carefree manner. The leaves fluttering about in the air coalesced into a green arrow, and he fired it straight at Zheng Dan. It flew at her at an incredible speed, and there was no way Zheng Dan would be able to evade it in her wounded state.

The piercing sound of the deadly arrow whistling through the air echoed far into the distance, and it was easy to imagine just how much terrifying power was harnessed by this attack. If the strike landed, Zheng Dan was dead for sure.

Ding Run clearly realized that he had wasted too much time. He had finally lost patience, and decided to end things as quickly as possible.

Sang Qian had a hesitant look on his face. This fiancée of his truly abounded with grace and beauty, especially in her appearance, which was both elegant and reserved. He hadn't yet gotten a taste of her, and so he was clearly reluctant to let anything happen to his gorgeous wife.

If they had been facing any other situation, he would've leapt in like a knight in shining armor. Unfortunately, Ding Run was way too strong, and the difference between their power was way too great. He was clearly no match for him.

The key to being a white knight was to look badass, and not to actually throw away one's own life!

Survival was everything! As long as he survived, he would be able to play with all the pretty women he could ever want to in the future.

That was why, after a moment of hesitation, he shouldered Sang Hong and kept on running.

Zheng Dan didn't seem too upset by her fiancé's reaction. Instead of whining about it, she sighed in relief. She knew that she had let the Sang clan down, but Sang Qian's choice also helped her let this matter go.

Her vision suddenly blurred. A figure appeared in front of her and wrapped her in his arms, blocking the deadly attack with his own broad back.

Zheng Dan's expression immediately turned to horror when she sensed this familiar and gentle embrace. She wrapped her arms around him and screamed, "Ah Zu!"

Blood gushed out of Zu An's mouth, and his body instantly grew limp. This blow had clearly left him with a grievous injury.

If it wasn't for the two-fold tempering of the Primordial Origin Sutra, which had increased his body's hardiness immensely, he would've already died many times over.

Even so, he was at his limit. He forced out a smile. "Look at how cute we look together in our clothes. Even if we go, we'll go together."

Ding Run turned his gaze on the fleeing trio from the Sang clan. He snorted. "Do you think you can escape? Keep dreaming!"

Both Zu An and Zheng Dan were already sure to fall, so he decided to settle matters with these others first, to prevent them from getting away. He didn't want to spend the next few days searching for them.

He wielded the lightning element, so speed was his forte. With a flicker, he appeared in front of Sang Qian.

Sang Qian was horrified. He raised the blade his sister had given him and brought it down.

For all of his faults, he was still a respected cultivator in Brightmoon City. There was no way he was just going to accept this fate.

His blade erupted in golden flames. Now that he was face to face with death, there was nothing to hold back, and this attack packed one hundred and twenty percent of its usual strength.

Ding Run sneered. "You dare show off your skills with a blade before me?"

With a flash of cold light, Sang Qian's sword was hacked into two pieces from the side, and the raging flames were instantly extinguished.

Ding Run's blade didn't stop there, but continued moving towards his neck in a single fluid motion. Sang Qian's full-powered attack had been completely broken, and the recoil had sent his ki into a chaotic frenzy. There was no way for him to react in time.

Ding Run had done this countless times. This was just another number to add to his body count.

His expression was devoid of all emotion, and the surge of focused killing intent made it hard for Sang Qian to even breathe. A chill ran through his entire body. Only one thought remained in his mind.

I'm done for!

At this critical juncture, the half-unconscious Sang Hong, who was still clinging to his back, suddenly opened his eyes and sent a fist flying towards his son's attacker. The speed and power behind this strike was equal to the best that he could throw when he was at his peak. He had clearly been acting the entire time, waiting for just this opportunity.

Ding Run grinned. "Predictable!"

He had seen Sang Qian administer the recovery pill to his father earlier. As a first-rate killer who was famous in the underground world, he relied not only on his terrifying cultivation, but also his incredible prudence.

Caution was absolutely essential in his field. No matter how high one's cultivation was, failing to act with proper caution was sure to get one killed someday.

He had immediately sensed that something was amiss when he saw Sang Hong's condition worsen despite ingesting the medicine. He thus decided to change his strategy, to bait the other party into a trap.

Sang Hong was an eighth rank expert, and the situation would grow difficult to handle if he was allowed to recover his strength. However, if Ding Run timed his attack just so, he could instantly turn the hunter into the hunted, and eliminate his target in the blink of an eye.

Sang Hong's heart sank. In an instant, he recognized that his opponent had seen through his ploy. Unfortunately, however, all his power was concentrated in this one attack. Given his current condition, there was no way for him to launch another blow like this.

He had no choice but to commit to it fully, even though he knew that he had already fallen for his opponent's trap. The only thing that mattered right now was to somehow wound his opponent before he died, to give his children a higher chance of escaping.

Unfortunately, even this final hope was quickly dashed. He could tell from Ding Run's eyes that, by the time Ding Run's blade reached his neck, his fist would still be three inches from landing.

Given his cultivation, even three feet wasn't usually a big deal, let alone three inches. Yet right now, three inches seemed as vast as the distance between heaven and hell.

A sinister smile spread across Ding Run's face. He had already seen the horror and despair in Sang Hong's eyes. As a killer, this was the moment he enjoyed the most, especially when his opponent was a powerful cultivator on the same level as him.

The feeling of ecstasy that overwhelmed him in such a moment was even better than the pleasures of playing around with the best girls in any brothel.

Just as his blow was about to land, a despicable voice suddenly came from beside him. "Whatcha lookin' at?"

Ding Run immediately sensed an irresistible urge rise up within him. He instinctively turned around to glare at that person. "I'm staring at you, shithead!"

It was at this moment, he knew he'd fucked up.

In a battle between powerful cultivators, the line between victory and defeat was infinitesimally thin.

This moment of distraction caused his blade to slow down just a fraction.

Sang Hong's fist, however, did not slow at all, and slammed right into his opponent's chest.

Ding Run's body was blown backwards. "Pffft!" Blood spurted out from his mouth. This was the first time he had been wounded today, and it was definitely a brutal blow.

The full-powered strike of an eighth-ranked cultivator was a terrifying phenomenon. If Ding Run wasn't so powerful, this blow would have sent him straight to hell.

Sang Hong didn't fare much better himself. Even though the momentary distraction to his opponent prevented the blade from slicing right through his throat, it had still opened a wide, deep gash across his shoulder. If it had penetrated just a little deeper, he might have been crippled for life.

The two of them looked at Zu An at the same time.

Zu An had a shy smile on his face. He nestled closer to Zheng Dan and said, "Don't look at me like that. I feel strangely embarrassed..."