

## M. Slaying 171

Chapter 171: A Token of Gratitude from Xu Ziyang

"Red Jade Flower Branch."

"Spirit Snake in Immortal Herb."

"Seven Veins Flower."

"Frosty Cloudleaf."

"..."

Chu Liang and Lin Bei carefully searched the valley for a while, harvesting the matured spirit plants. When they felt satisfied, they started getting ready to leave.

"Let's sell these precious materials at the Hall of Alchemy when we get back, and we'll split the earnings fifty-fifty," Chu Liang suggested.

"Oh, that's really not necessary," Lin Bei scratched his head, saying, "You did most of the work this time; I hardly did anything."

"But if it weren't for you leading me to this valley, I wouldn't have even gotten the Sword-Leaf Dark Sunflower," Chu Liang said with a smile. "Don't be courteous with me."

"Hehehe," Lin Bei chuckled heartily. "When we go back, I'll lend you all my privately stored art books[1]."

"Uh... no need for that," Chu Liang smiled, politely declining.

Chu Liang was worried that if he had read those books owned by Lin Bei, he would end up writing a journal on sexual abstinence.

After confirming that they hadn't missed anything, the two mounted the Golden-Furred Hou and left.

Although many spirit plants were present in the valley, they all required several decades to several hundred years to mature. Typically, having one such treasure of nature in a valley was already considered a rare occurrence.

Yet, so many matured spirit plants existed in this land on the Black Whale Mountain, which was very unusual.

Chu Liang couldn't determine the exact value of these treasures of nature, but he was certain the profit would be substantial. Moreover, rare and extraordinary items were usually considered priceless. If he had sold them outside to the Taotie Pavilion instead of the Hall of Alchemy, he would have earned double or even more.

However, smart disciples of Mount Shu wouldn't have done such a thing.

If individuals had been motivated solely by greed for higher prices and allowed resources to leave the Mount Shu Sect, this practice would have become widespread. In the long run, members of the sect would have faced significant challenges in obtaining any resources.

That was the order of the Mount Shu Sect.

The human race possessed a significant advantage over the demon race in that human society had already established a well-functioning order, including convenient resource circulation.

Chu Liang and Lin Bei stumbled upon matured treasures of nature. While they might not have an immediate need for them, there was no reason to delay the harvest. They also didn't have to stay and guard the treasures, as there was no threat of others attempting to seize them.

Because of the existence of the market, they could trade these treasures of nature and exchange them for the resources they needed. This way, everyone could obtain what they desired.

The human race's long-standing dominance over other species was firmly rooted in this foundational structure.

Order had been established with the intention of benefiting everyone.

Individuals like those from the diabolical sects, who engaged in burning, killing, looting, and various other nefarious activities for the sake of profit, might indeed benefit in the short term. However, in the long run, once the foundational order was disrupted and everyone no longer abided by it, the pursuit of personal gain would ultimately result in mutual harm for all.

Therefore, maintaining order was also essential.

Under the vast expanse of clouds, Chu Liang and Lin Bei returned to Mount Shu in the afternoon.

...

When Chu Liang arrived at the Silver Sword Peak, he didn't rush to sell the treasures of nature. Instead, he prepared to open his reward first.

The koi had been bored on her own. When she saw the return of the Golden-Furred Hou, she was really happy.

Immediately, she bounced over and patted its large head.

With the koi here, Chu Liang felt a bit more at ease.

He immediately closed his eyes and focused his mind, allowing his divine consciousness to enter the White Pagoda.

Inside the space within the pagoda, two large-headed dolls sat side by side. One of them had its eyes closed, while the other had been diligently working for days, emitting magnificent smoke and mist, creating an otherworldly scene.

The sight of this made Chu Liang worried. Has this thing been performing the circulation of qi a bit too fast? Does it need a rest? He thought to himself.

He reached out and touched the large head of the doll. Feeling no sign of heat, he became more reassured.

He stepped before the iron cage and pressed refine.

Boom!

Radiance flashed, and three thin strands of white light floated out.

So small?

For a moment, Chu Liang felt puzzled.

[Golden Hair Strand: Able to transform into an identical clone for three hours. The clone has no autonomous ability and can be used for various scenarios, including daily life and combat. However, some special scenarios are not permitted as they might result in damage.]

A clone lasting for three hours?

At first glance, Chu Liang was somewhat excited. Isn't this the same as being able to use the immortal art External Manifestation three times?

But upon second thought, he realized it was different.

Those who mastered the immortal art External Manifestation had the ability to split and control two bodies simultaneously, effectively doubling their strength. However, without training in the corresponding divine art, Chu Liang couldn't control both his body and the clone simultaneously. If he used the clone, it would be equivalent to transferring his divine consciousness from the main body to the clone.

This was essentially switching bodies.

In certain situations, such as exploring dangerous terrain, this could be useful. However, in combat, it wasn't as powerful as the immortal art External Manifestation.

No matter what, this was a good reward.

He stowed away the three strands of golden hair and opened his eyes. He was about to head to the Hall of Alchemy to sell the precious materials when he noticed a sword light suddenly descending to the ground.

A figure appeared before him.

The individual boasted straight eyebrows reminiscent of the elegance of a finely crafted sword and stood tall and straight. With starry eyes and an intense gaze, he exuded unparalleled sharpness.

"Senior Brother Xu?" Chu Liang seemed a bit cautious.

The leading figure of the Jade Sword Peak suddenly appeared in the territory of the Silver Sword Peak. Chu Liang's immediate reaction was to wonder if this visit harbored any intentions of causing trouble.

Although Chu Liang himself held the position of the eldest senior brother of the Silver Sword Peak, there was a difference between him and an actual eldest senior brother.

"I heard from Lin Bei that you came back so I came to see you right away," Xu Ziyang said expressionlessly.

This marked the first occasion Chu Liang engaged in a direct one-on-one conversation with Xu Ziyang. While the latter didn't initiate any overtly imposing actions, the pressure conveyed through each gaze was truly awe-inspiring.

That feeling was like... he was too sharp!

He was like an extraordinary sword without a sheath, quietly hanging in front. Even though this sword had yet to inflict any injuries, there was still a worry about being accidentally grazed by its edge.

Despite the feeling of apprehension, Chu Liang still maintained a non-submissive demeanor as he asked, "Senior Brother Xu, do you have something to discuss with me?"

"I came to thank you," Xu Ziyang replied.

Hah? Chu Liang was somewhat surprised by this statement. Do the people from Jade Sword Peak all express gratitude with a debt-collector face?

"Thanks to your guidance last time, I went back and ingested pills that can boost my vitality, qi, and spirit. Finally, I touched the threshold of the Perfect Qi Circulation," Xu Ziyang continued.

I see. Upon hearing this, Chu Liang felt a sense of relief.

He smiled and replied, "Senior Brother Xu, your achievements are a result of your exceptional talent. However, achieving the state of Perfect Qi Circulation through this method comes with a high cost and is not suitable for regular cultivation. It doesn't offer much long-term benefit, so there's no need for excessive gratitude."

Xu Ziyang explained, "It's not advisable to cultivate this way regularly. However, in crucial situations, it is acceptable to rely on pills to achieve the desired effect."

"Indeed." Chu Liang nodded.

"And so, I was wondering how I should show my gratitude," Xu Ziyang said.

"Hehe. Senior Brother Xu, you are being too courteous." Chu Liang waved his hand and said, "As a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, it is my duty to share the insights I gained during cultivation. Senior Sister Jiang is really the person you should thank."

"You are really the person I should thank." Xu Ziyang stared at Chu Liang as he said, "I heard that you will start your Core Formation process soon and that you are probably going to try your luck in the Immortals' Marsh. I can be your guardian."

Ah? Chu Liang once again felt surprised.

In the tradition of the Mount Shu Sect, before disciples went through the Core Formation process, they would typically venture to the Immortals' Marsh, hoping that the goddess of luck would bless them with a chance to find the Celestial Herb of Ascension. Since there were usually multiple disciples forming their cores at around the same time, they would often team up for the journey.

However, the Immortals' Marsh was filled with dangers. Usually, a fifth-realm disciple would serve as the guardian and leader of the team during such expeditions.

Is Xu Ziyang saying this because he has already reached the fifth realm? Chu Liang thought to himself. This seemed a bit unbelievable. If that were true, why bother with competing at the Mount Shu Summit? They should just hand him the award.

"I also have another question," Xu Ziyang asked when he noticed that Chu Liang was lost in thought.

"What question?" Chu Liang snapped back to attention.

Xu Ziyang, displaying an unusual hint of embarrassment, hesitated for a moment before finally asking, "I wanted to know, do you have a girl you like?"

Chu Liang: "?"

Chapter 172: Is It Okay To Say That?

Xu Ziyang definitely wasn't asking out of personal interest.

It all began when he last emerged from closed-door cultivation. He'd broken through to the fifth realm, placing him above his peers. However, when he shared the news with his younger sister, Xu Ziqing, she wasn't as thrilled as he had imagined.

In the days that followed, Xu Ziyang noticed that his younger sister was depressed. He asked her what was wrong, but she wouldn't answer him. So, Xu Ziyang immediately sought out Fang Ting.

Before going into closed-door cultivation, Xu Ziyang had asked Fang Ting to look after his younger sister. However, when he emerged, his younger sister was unhappy, so he went to Fang Ting for answers.

Fang Ting was evasive about it, hemming and hawing as he surmised Xu Ziqing had probably run into some love problems during their mission at Southern Bastion Mountain.

Xu Ziyang instantly became enraged. Love problems... Is it Lu Ren or Lin Bei? Neither of them seems like a good guy.

At that moment, Xu Ziyang touched the hilt of his sword, which he carried on his back. He had the urge to cut something down.

Fang Ting hurriedly said it wasn't either of the two that Xu Ziyang suspected and that Xu Ziqing had probably fallen for the kid from Silver Sword Peak. He then gave a brief recount of what had happened during their mission.

After hearing that, Xu Ziyang finally felt at ease.

Xu Ziqing had only encountered Chu Liang that one time, so even if she did fall for him, her feelings for him wouldn't be that deep. In any case, as disciples of the Jade Sword Peak, it would be best for them to maintain a distance from the disciples of Silver Sword Peak. Xu Ziyang decided then that he wouldn't interfere in this matter.

Xu Ziyang didn't know everything that had happened between Xu Ziqing and Chu Liang. Nevertheless, it was true that Xu Ziqing shouldn't have deep feelings for Chu Liang, as they'd only met a few times. What she felt toward him had probably been a mere crush, so it wasn't that she was heartbroken.

The real reason she had gotten upset was that Chu Liang had ignored her displays of affection. After they returned from Southern Bastion Mountain, she had attempted to show some goodwill to Chu Liang, only to be ruthlessly rejected.

Ever since she was a child, Xu Ziqing had been adored as everyone's beloved junior sister at Jade Sword Peak. Then when she got older, all of the men she encountered had always been eagerly attentive to her. Getting rejected for the first time made her question her existence.

It had been a mere crush initially, so even if Chu Liang had responded positively, it wouldn't necessarily have led to a romantic relationship. However, this rejection left Xu Ziqing so upset that she had trouble sleeping.

Many days passed by, and the young lady was finally in a better mood. However, Jiang Yuebai's lecture two days ago pulled Chu Liang into the limelight. This stirred up Xu Ziqing's feelings again and made Xu Ziyang realize how outstanding Chu Liang was.

Consequently, Xu Ziyang couldn't help but ponder about the possibility of his young sister getting together with Chu Liang.



He's Di Nufeng's disciple... and he comes from a family that's of a lower status than ours, but he is handsome, talented, and intelligent. He might not be a bad match.

He's Di Nufeng's disciple... yet he has managed to develop such a refined demeanor, indicating that he is a principled and incorruptible person. He truly is worthy of consideration.

He's Di Nufeng's disciple... yet he has managed to make such swift progress in cultivation, to the extent that he's already nearing the Golden Core Realm at such a young age. He can definitely be considered a genius.

With these thoughts in mind, Xu Ziyang expressed his gratitude to Chu Liang just so he could use it as an excuse to ask Chu Liang whether there was a girl he liked. If Chu Liang said there wasn't one, then Xu Ziyang intended to have Chu Liang date Xu Ziqing.

This was what Xu Ziyang was like; he always did things in a straightforward manner.

Chu Liang was stunned by Xu Ziyang's question.

Well, aren't you bold?

Chu Liang smiled awkwardly, keeping silent for a moment.

Then he said, "I haven't really thought about that."

Even if I did like someone, I wouldn't tell you. We're not close.

"I'll take that as a no." Xu Ziyang nodded upon hearing his desired response. "In that case, you could try dating my younger sister. She has a good impression of you. But... you need to mind your manners."

He just had to add that last part.

Huh? Chu Liang thought. He suddenly realized, He wants me to be his brother-in-law?

This was truly unexpected.

Lin Bei had warned Chu Liang before that Xu Ziyang had emerged from closed-door cultivation and might come looking for them because of his younger sister. However, Chu Liang hadn't expected Xu Ziyang to be this forward.

Promptly waving off the possibility of the relationship, Chu Liang said with a smile, "Senior Brother Xu, don't joke around. What qualifications do I have to date her? Besides, I'm devoted to revitalizing Mount Shu and pursuing the Great Dao. I have no time for romance."

Eh? Xu Ziyang felt like he'd heard that before. Isn't this what I said to my teacher after I came out from my closed-door cultivation? The response he gave me was...

Xu Ziyang told Chu Liang, "My teacher was the same. He spent his whole life revitalizing Shu Mountain, pursuing the Great Dao, and had no interest in romance. And now, he's old... Do you know how much he regrets it?!"

Chu Liang was astonished. "Eh??"

If what Xu Ziyang said gets out, the Mount Shu Sect might just make the headlines in the Uncommon Tales of the Martial World again. "The head disciple of Mount Shu Sect's Jade Sword Peak reveals an explosive secret... 'Esteemed Teacher has great regrets about living his whole life as a bachelor...' The grand peak master is an old tree yearning for springtime..."[1]

Is it okay for him to say all that?

...

After managing to brush Xu Ziyang off with a few words, Chu Liang let out a sigh of relief. Then he tidied up his things and hurried over to the Hall of Alchemy on Heaven-Reaching Peak.

Red Jade Flower Branch, Spirit Snake in Immortal Herb, Seven Veins Flower, Frosty Cloudleaf—these were all extremely high-grade spirit plants and were normally difficult to acquire. Yet, Chu Liang had presented so many of them at the same time. The attendants in charge of handling treasures of nature were stunned by this sight.

They couldn't imagine how a third-realm disciple could have acquired so many spirit plants. It had to have been due to an extraordinary stroke of luck.

Chu Liang just smiled mysteriously without explaining anything.

In the end, he sold the four treasures of nature for a little over ten thousand sword coins in total. With that many sword coins, he could easily buy another Golden-Furred Hou and still have plenty of sword coins remaining.

Even so, he'd actually sold the spirit plants at a very low price. If he'd sold them at Taotie Pavilion, the selling price would easily be double or triple that of what the Hall of Alchemy offered.

Nevertheless, that was just how it was with immortal sects. Likewise, if Chu Liang were to buy the ingredients he needed for forming his golden cores at Taotie Pavilion, the prices would likely be several times higher than if he were to buy them from his sect. In other words, there was no point fussing over the difference in selling price.

After making a small fortune, Chu Liang went straight to the Hall of Weapons and sought out Wen Yulong.

"Senior Brother Chu, you're back so soon. It seems everything must have gone smoothly on your trip. You're not far from reaching the Golden Core Realm," Wen Yulong said, greeting Chu Liang with a grin.

Chu Liang quickly rejected the flattery. "Oh, I dare not speak such bold words before the fact."

He sat down, took out the damaged Green Leaf, and handed it to Wen Yulong.

"Oh, dear..." Wen Yulong frowned deeply as soon as he saw the Green Leaf. "Why do you always let it get so damaged whenever you leave the mountain? And..."

He examined it for a moment and then asked, "Why is it damaged on the inside this time?"

"It got struck by lightning," Chu Liang answered, smiling embarrassedly.

He then told Wen Yulong about what had happened and how the Green Leaf had gotten damaged.

Wen Yulong had a heartbroken expression. "How could you use a defensive enchanted tool like that... But I have to say that I'm impressed. This enchanted tool I made is indeed amazing; it could even heavily injure a fourth-realm demonic beast."

"Indeed," Chu Liang agreed.

"Just leave this with me. The enchanted formation inscriptions inside the leaf are severely damaged. It'll be hard to repair it completely without suitable materials," Wen Yulong said. "I guess we'll just have to leave it to fate as to what I can find. Regardless, it's going to be a really big repair job."

"Will the repair take a really long time?" Chu Liang asked.

Wen Yulong explained, "Of course. The inside of an enchanted tool is different from the outside. Internal damage is very difficult to repair."

Chu Liang had asked that question because he was concerned about his upcoming trip to the Immortals' Marsh. If the Green Leaf had to be left with Wen Yulong for a long time, that meant Chu Liang wouldn't be able to take the Green Leaf with him on the trip.

However, if the Green Leaf can't be repaired, I won't be able to use it anyway. In any case, I'm just going to the Immortals' Marsh to try my luck. There might not even be any battles.

Upon thinking that, Chu Liang felt at ease.

He urged, "Go ahead and look for the materials. Use the best ones. Don't worry about the cost."

Chu Liang was pretty close with Wen Yulong now and knew that Wen Yulong didn't care much that much about how much money Chu Liang had. So, Chu Liang didn't need to worry about whether he was revealing too much.

"Oh?" Wen Yulong grinned. "It sounds like you reaped great profits during your trip."

Chu Liang briefly told Wen Yulong about the mystical valley of Black Whale Mountain, as there was no need for him to hide this from Wen Yulong. After all, the mature spirit plants in the valley had already been harvested, and a spirit plant needed at least a few decades to mature. There wouldn't be any spirit plants that Wen Yulong could take any time soon.

Moreover, Wen Yulong didn't care about that anyway. He didn't even ask for the specific location of the valley.

Instead, he pondered for a moment and said, "In that case, the legend about Black Whale Mountain might be true."

"Legend?" Chu Liang asked, "You mean the Black Devil Whale?"

"Yes," Wen Yulong said. "Logically, a valley shouldn't have such strong spiritual energy to produce so many treasures of nature simultaneously. Unless... there's an unimaginably powerful existence buried there, which caused the valley's ecosystem to change and allow it to produce and nurture more spirit plants. The plants that grow in front of an Eminent One's tomb are all treasures of nature."

"I see."

Chu Liang pondered about it for a moment and thought it made sense. After all, he had seen the skeleton of what seemed to be a seventh-realm cultivator, which caused a colony of bees to evolve.

If the legendary Black Devil Whale truly existed, it had to have a cultivation level above the seventh realm. Otherwise, the spiritual energy of the corpse in the valley wouldn't be able to continue nourishing the valley and letting it produce spirit plants even after so many years.

Perhaps there was some law of the world regarding the conservation of spiritual energy and the like. After all, cultivators worked really hard to gather spiritual energy from the world and contain it inside their bodies. It made sense for there to be a law that made it so that when cultivators died, the spiritual energy they had accumulated would return to the world, instead of just disappearing into thin air.

Chu Liang had buried the skeleton of that Eminent One he'd found in the cave. Did that mean spirit plants would eventually emerge by that grave too? That seemed very unlikely, seeing as just the spiritual energy of the corpse wouldn't be enough. There had to be seeds for plants to sprout from.

Wait a minute... What if I plant some seeds there? Chu Liang thought, his heart racing a little in excitement. Planting some seeds at a burial mound... Hmm... Is it even okay to do that?

Chapter 173: Senior, Please.

"Do you have seeds of spirit plants?"

After saying goodbye to Wen Yulong, Chu Liang promptly returned to the Hall of Alchemy to inquire information on spirit plant seeds.

The Mount Shu Sect maintained its own garden of spirit plants, so there were naturally seeds of various treasures of nature available. However, very few disciples regularly purchased these seeds. Therefore, when the attendant heard Chu Liang's request, he was slightly surprised.

"I have a small garden, and I'd like to try planting some seeds to see if they would sprout," Chu Liang said with an innocent and sincere smile.

The true intention behind seeking these seeds remained a secret, so he had to adopt a subtle approach.

The attendant stared at Chu Liang as though he was watching a daydreamer on a stroll.

"Junior brother, if you really need them, we do have some seeds. The price might be expensive though," said the attendant.

In this context, "expensive" was relative to the potential outcome of obtaining nothing.

In reality, the spirit plant seeds that he showed Chu Liang were all priced at less than one hundred sword coins.

After all, in the cultivation world, very few people would purchase and sell spirit plant seeds. After all, even if one had seeds, they wouldn't be able to guarantee that the seeds would sprout and grow. It was true that one seed would eventually produce many seeds, but even a top-tier sect would not be able to nurture every seed successfully.

Occasionally, some overly ambitious disciples of Mount Shu would ask about these seeds and attempt to grow spirit plants themselves. However, more often than not, the outcome would be disappointment.

"This is Taiyang Grass, and this is..." The attendant began to introduce them to Chu Liang.

Chu Liang raised his hand and interrupted in a straightforward manner. "Senior brother, you don't have to explain the plants to me. Just show me the most expensive one."

"Heh." The attendant smiled and said, "That would be the seed of the Celestial Herb of Ascension."

"Celestial Herb of Ascension?" Chu Liang asked, "Mount Shu possesses such seeds?"

"The seniors of the Mount Shu Sect retrieved a Celestial Herb of Ascension in the past, and we kept two seeds from it. One of the senior elders from the Hall of Alchemy attempted to plant one, but despite their efforts, it never sprouted. The reason remains a mystery. The other seed is still here," the attendant explained, gesturing towards the large, milky-white seed.

"I will take this one then. How much is it?" Chu Liang asked.

Since he was trying to make a dream come true, he might as well dream big. Growing the Celestial Herb of Ascension would bring him much more value than any other treasures of nature.

"If you want it, you can have it for one hundred sword coins," the attendant offered.

"Okay." Chu Liang readily paid.

"If you aren't able to grow it, you can bring it back, and we'll repurchase it for twenty sword coins. It's the seed of a rare spirit plant so it holds significant collection value," the attendant added.

"..." Chu Liang was momentarily speechless.

Alright. Shady merchants.

After leaving the Hall of Alchemy, Chu Liang immediately rushed all the way and arrived at the cave where the golden skeleton was once buried. When he realized that there were no apparent changes nearby, he felt relieved.

"Senior, forgive my disrespect," Chu Liang muttered.

He arrived at the spot where he had previously buried the bones, bowed respectfully, and then dug around to confirm that the golden skeleton was still there.

He then carefully buried the seed of the Celestial Herb of Ascension among the ribs of the skeleton, covering it with soil and watering it meticulously. Additionally, he sprinkled Herbal Wood Spirit Powder, ensuring every element for its growth was provided.

After that was done, he stood up and started praying.

"Senior, if you can assist me in cultivating this seed into a stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension, I am willing to make offerings of incense to you every year. I won't expect this help for free.

"Senior, I am counting on you!"

...

The following day, Chu Liang received a message from the Hall of Weapons, informing him that the team bound for the Immortals' Marsh had been assembled. He was asked to confirm his readiness to depart. Without the option to wait for the Green Leaf enchanted tool to be repaired, Chu Liang promptly replied.

Shortly after, another message came back, directing him to promptly proceed to the Hall of Weapons for assembly.

The response came quite quickly.

Chu Liang didn't require much preparation, so he headed to the Hall of Weapons without any trouble.

A venture into the Immortals' Marsh was a ritual every disciple of the Mount Shu Sect undertook during the Core Formation stage. However, the discovery of the Celestial Herb of Ascension had



been a rare occurrence over thousands of years. Many considered it a matter of luck and held little hope of finding the plant.

It's unfortunate that the Immortals' Marsh poses dangers, and I can't bring the koi with me. Otherwise, the likelihood of encountering the Celestial Herb of Ascension would be higher.

When Chu Liang arrived at the Hall of Weapons, he spotted Xu Ziyang, dressed sharply and displaying a cold, indifferent expression. He stood there with an upright posture and emitted an imposing aura. Whenever other disciples passed by, they would stare at him.

That was the case for some people. Even in the darkest night, they would shine like fireflies.

Jiang Yuebai and Xu Ziyang exemplified that trait. In this moment, Chu Liang harbored a fervent wish to one day become an outstanding figure like them.

"Senior Brother Xu," Chu Liang nodded in acknowledgment.

"Hmm." Xu Ziyang nodded slightly.

So indifferent. Chu Liang muttered inwardly, wondering if it was because he had rejected Xu Ziyang's request to become his brother-in-law.

As Chu Liang exchanged greetings with Xu Ziyang, he was unsure of what to say.

But then, a cheerful voice interrupted. "Senior Brother Xu!"

A tall, fair-skinned woman in simple attire hurried over from the square. She wore a flowing fringe dress over beige trousers, her hair tied up in a high ponytail, with a few strands delicately framing her forehead. With her fair complexion, soft facial features, and captivating eyes, she exuded a natural allure.

"Hmm." Xu Ziyang nodded softly.

Upon witnessing his indifferent and aloof attitude towards the beautiful girl, Chu Liang felt that Xu Ziyang's behavior exemplified a sense of fairness.

This dude clearly treats everyone with this aloof attitude.

Upon realizing that this girl was a member of the group, Chu Liang politely greeted and introduced himself, "Hello, Senior Sister. I'm Chu Liang from Silver Sword Peak."

The woman appeared to be older than him, possibly even older than Xu Ziyang. It would be correct to refer to her as Senior Sister.

"Haha, Junior Brother Chu," the girl said with a gentle smile. "I know you. You stood out during the lecture meeting hosted by Jiang Jiang. I don't think there's any disciple of Mount Shu at the third realm of cultivation who is more impressive than you."

"I dare not claim such praise," Chu Liang quickly responded modestly.

"I'm Chen Su from the Spirit Horn Peak," the girl continued. "I am also an alchemy student at the Hall of Alchemy. If you have all the materials ready, I can help you refine the Golden Pill for free."

"Thank you so much, Senior Sister Chen!" Chu Liang said with a smile.

The process of Core Formation involved transforming the Golden Pill into the Golden Core. The first step was to refine these prepared materials into a pill.

While the refinement of pills wasn't too difficult, those unfamiliar with the art of alchemy would not be able to do it. And so, many sought the assistance of the Hall of Alchemy for refining.

While they were chatting, another voice from behind caught their attention. "Senior Brother Xu!"

Everyone turned back and saw a skinny man in scholarly attire walking briskly toward them.

He greeted Xu Ziyang while apologizing for being late, "Senior Brother Xu, sorry for my tardiness. Senior Sister, excuse me. This..."

When he saw Chu Liang, he froze.

Chu Liang also found him quite familiar.

This person appeared to be Shang Ziliang, the son of Shang Shuwen, the peak master of Cloud Horizon Peak.

Chu Liang had a brief encounter with him before. Given the somewhat strained relationship with Shang Shuwen, it was indeed an awkward situation.

Upon careful consideration, Chu Liang realized that among the current three other members of the team, two were raised by individuals who harbored animosity towards his teacher.

Shang Ziliang had a very deep impression of Chu Liang.

He had previously attempted to plot against Chu Liang, but each scheme backfired, resulting in Chu Liang gaining something while he himself suffered setbacks.

After being blackmailed by Di Nufeng, Shang Shuwen soon discovered that his son had been the mastermind behind the schemes against Chu Liang. Out of anger, he punished Shang Ziliang by grounding him.

Shang Ziliang was only released due to the upcoming expedition to find the Celestial Herb of Ascension. Unexpectedly, he found himself on the same team as Chu Liang.

As a result of being grounded, he missed the lecture event and had no knowledge of Chu Liang's performance. All he knew was that the first time he met Chu Liang, Chu Liang's cultivation was only at the beginning stage of the Spiritual Awareness Realm.

It hasn't even been that long.

He's able to form his core? Is something wrong? No, did I get the wrong date? Has a day in the cave turned into a thousand years in the mortal world? Shang Ziliang was bewildered.

Meanwhile, Xu Ziyang completely ignored his greeting. He turned away and coldly said, "Let's go." He didn't even respond.

Xu Ziyang walked to the edge of the square and let out a sharp whistle.

A sharp cry sounded as a massive golden falcon, with its entire body glowing, descended.

Whoosh—

As it landed, it created this gust of wind that made it almost difficult for people to stand steadily.

It was a Golden-Winged Falcon at the fifth realm of cultivation.

Legend had it that Xu Ziyang's mount was a creature that would evolve into the Majestic Golden-Winged Falcon upon reaching the seventh realm.

He took the lead in mounting the golden falcon, and the other three followed suit. Then, with a swift sound akin to an arrow leaving the bowstring, they shot out, prompting everyone to quickly grab onto the falcon's feathers.

The speed was incredible. After a while, they gradually adapted to this super speed.

"Now that we're all settled, let's get one thing straight. Our destination is the Immortals' Marsh, and we're on the hunt for the elusive Celestial Herb of Ascension. Keep in mind, don't set your expectations too high, or you might end up disappointed. Treat this as a learning experience, and you'll avoid any disappointments.

"According to legend, the Immortals' Marsh was created through the blood spilled in a fierce battle between the heavenly immortals and the evil gods of the mortal world. They say the Celestial Herb of Ascension appears only upon the death of an immortal.

"Although this might sound a bit dramatic, it underscores the rarity of the herb. It's no exaggeration to say it only appears once a century. Moreover, our sect is not the only one in need of this material for the formation of the ultimate-tier Golden Core. Even if we find the herb, we'll likely have to fight with disciples from other sects."

It was only when discussing important matters that Xu Ziyang would become more talkative.

"Of course, the key is to watch out for yourselves," he stressed. "Stick close to me and avoid straying too far. The Immortals' Marsh presents not only good opportunities but also..." He paused, then added, "Ba." [1]

#### Chapter 174: I Need to Do Well

Back in that dim room, the shadowy figure was sitting at his desk. Standing beside him was a masked man carrying two blades on his back.

"Did you succeed?" the shadowy figure asked.

"Yes," Dual Wielder answered.

"Are you sure that Chu Liang is dead?"

"Of course."

"Then why did he appear on Heaven-Reaching Peak this morning?"

Dual Wielder was startled by the shadowy figure's question. "What?"

"That disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, Chu Liang—he returned to Mount Shu safe and sound. He'd even gathered materials for Core Formation, but he's totally unscathed." The shadowy figure's words carried an undertone of anger. "Who exactly did you kill?"

The shadowy figure held a managerial role in the organization and was responsible for liaising with these assassins. When Dual Wielder said he had killed Chu Liang, the shadowy figure had believed him and reported that to their boss.

However, this morning, their mole in the Mount Shu Sect had suddenly informed the shadowy figure that Chu Liang had reappeared on Heaven-Reaching Peak, seemingly unharmed. Chu Liang's limbs moved as nimbly as ever, and his face looked the same. He appeared to be healthy both in the mind and body. It seemed like he hadn't been attacked at all, let alone killed.

"How is that possible...?" Dual Wielder said doubtfully. "I used the assassination skill Shadow Slash and split him in half. He didn't even have the chance to retaliate... It can't be fake."

"Did you confirm the body?" the shadowy figure asked.

"I..." Dual Wielder began to reply. His voice faltered, and he paused for a moment. Then he said, "The Golden-Furred Hou rushed over very quickly; I didn't have time to check the body properly. But how could someone at the third realm be revived after being cut in half? Unless... the person I killed wasn't him...?"

"Regardless of the reason, he's still alive," the shadowy figure stated. "The problem is that I've already reported to the boss that you killed him. If any news about this Chu Liang gets out in the future, won't the boss think we lied? You know what he's like."

There was a flicker of fear in Dual Wielder's eyes.

He immediately said, "I'll go kill him again!"

"That's what I meant," the shadowy figure replied coldly. "The boss went to the Western Regions to deal with some business. You better resolve this issue before he returns. I'm definitely not taking the blame for this failure."

"Mm," Dual Wielder uttered in response.

The shadowy figure picked up a brush from the desk, dipped it in ink, and drew a bird on the white paper. Then he flicked he made a hand seal.

The paper suddenly burst into flames, and when the fire had consumed all of the paper, there was not a speck of ash remaining. In its place was a vivid and lifelike black crow. It circled in the air briefly before landing on Dual Wielder's shoulder.

"He should be heading to the Immortals' Marsh to find the Celestial Herb of Ascension right now. Just follow the crow for the exact location," the shadowy figure instructed.

This crow wasn't as powerful an ability as the Thousand-Li Locator; it could only allow him to speak remotely. However, he would use Heavenly Sight and Hearing to monitor the target's location and relay it to the operative through the crow.

"The Immortals' Marsh..." Dual Wielder muttered in a tone filled with malice. "If I don't kill him this time, you can have my head when I get back."

...

"It's huge."

As three disciples at the Spiritual Awareness Realm flew over the Immortals' Marsh, they couldn't help but marvel at how vast it was.

According to legend, the Immortals' Marsh had been a seemingly endless lake in ancient times. It had been so vast that it had numerous islands and had been known as the largest lake in the world.

However, over time, the world experienced many changes, and the lake was no exception. The water level of the lake gradually decreased, revealing landmasses in many parts of the lake. What had once been islands turned into mountain peaks.

At present, the Immortals' Marsh was a chain of hundreds of interconnected lakes of all sizes sprawled over an area spanning hundreds of li. If the Celestial Herb of Ascension were to appear here, it would be found growing along the shores of these lakes.

For cultivators seeking the Celestial Herb of Ascension, they had to walk carefully along the lakesides, searching through the places where the herb might be growing. They might overlook the herb if they just did a cursory scan with their divine sense from overhead. Moreover, they might attract the Ba in the lakes.

There was a special type of supernatural being known as jiangshi[1]. Ghosts were typically resentful spirits that had lost their physical bodies, but jiangshi were the opposite. They were physical bodies devoid of a soul, animated purely by their resentment-filled qi.

Among the jiangshi, the more mystical ones were called Ba. Generally, only the corpses of cultivators could become Ba. The spiritual energy the corpses contained made them very powerful jiangshi, so much so that they evolved into Ba.

The Ba in the Immortals' Marsh had at one point run rampant, leading to disastrous consequences. Even the weakest Iron Ba in the marsh possessed the power of a third-realm cultivator. After

feeding on the blood and qi of living humans, the Ba could gradually evolve from the Iron tier to Copper, Silver, and Gold tiers.

The strongest Gold Ba had the strength of a sixth-realm cultivator, but Gold Ba were extremely rare. Therefore, the Mount Shu Sect usually only dispatched a fifth-realm disciple to protect the other disciples from the Ba in the marsh.

A tier above the Gold Ba was the Cataclysmic Ba, which had power equivalent to a seventh-realm Eminent One. There were a few kinds of Cataclysmic Ba: the Drought Ba, which would make a thousand li of lands barren; the Flood Ba, which would turn land into marshes wherever it went; and the Snow Ba, which would make the weather bitterly cold and icy for six months... These Cataclysmic Ba appeared once every one thousand years, but each time they emerged from the Immortals' Marsh, they would take a large number of lives, making them a huge problem.

It was even said that after a Cataclysmic Ba had taken enough lives, it could grow into an Immortal Ba or a Divine Ba, equivalent in power to an eighth-realm or ninth-realm cultivator respectively. However, such formidable Ba had never been recorded as having appeared in history; it was just a legend.

Over two hundred years ago, the Yu Dynasty experienced a terrible disaster that was brought on by a Cataclysmic Ba. Filled with sorrow, the Yu Dynasty made a firm decision to unite the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten to exterminate the increasingly rampant Ba in the Immortals' Marsh.

However, the first round of slaying produced a mediocre result. The lakes were interconnected through underwater passages, so the Ba could escape by going into the water. Unless there was a powerful spell that could envelop the Immortals' Marsh entirely and slay all of the Ba simultaneously, it would be impossible to exterminate all of them.

An alternative solution was to stop new Ba from forming. Ba were formed from the corpses of cultivators, so it was possible to prevent new Ba from forming if people stopped entering the Immortals' Marsh.

Nevertheless, it was extremely difficult to ensure that. The Immortals' Marsh was filled with spiritual energy, so there were many treasures of nature that cultivators were willing to risk their lives to acquire.

One of them was the Celestial Herb of Ascension. It was a spirit plant that only grew in the Immortals' Marsh.



Thus, it was simply impossible to completely seal off the vast Immortals' Marsh, so the authorities just let things be.

After landing in the Immortals' Marsh, Xu Ziyang said, "You three should spread out a bit and work your way from west to east, but don't move too quickly. The Golden-Winged Falcon will be watching from above. It will immediately give a warning if a Ba appears. If you're faced with a Ba that you can't handle, do your best to protect yourself and drag things out. I'll rush over to you immediately.

"The odds of finding the Celestial Herb of Ascension are very low, but whoever manages to get their hands on it first owns it. You are not to fight over this."

Sticking together was the safest thing to do when navigating through treacherous terrain. However, everyone was here to find the Celestial Herb of Ascension, so if they were to spot it simultaneously, they would inevitably fight over who would take possession of it. Thus, Xu Ziyang had them spread out a bit. This was a lesson he'd learned from experience, having been a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect for many years.

Chen Su smiled and said, "I'll just follow you, Senior Brother Xu. Feels safer this way."

On the way to the Immortals' Marsh, Chu Liang had noticed that Chen Su was a total fanatic for Xu Ziyang. It seemed like her purpose for joining this trip wasn't to find the Celestial Herb of Ascension but to get closer to Xu Ziyang.

In fact, Shang Ziliang was hoping to do the same. He had deliberately joined the trip so that he could build a bond with Xu Ziyang. If Shang Ziliang could gain the approval of his potential future brother-in-law, wouldn't things fall into place for him with Xu Ziqing?

Yet, when Shang Ziliang arrived at the Hall of Weapons before leaving for the trip earlier, he saw Chu Liang there. Putting himself in Chu Liang's shoes, Shang Ziliang thought that Chu Liang had likely joined the trip with the same intention.

He must have come to impress Xu Ziyang too! Shang Ziliang thought.

His resentment for Chu Liang resurfaced with a new surge of animosity.

With Xu Ziyang around, Shang Ziliang didn't dare to scheme against Chu Liang anymore... especially after suffering so many defeats in the past. Nevertheless, he still burned with a competitive spirit.

His gaze burned with the raging flames of war as he vowed inwardly, I must outshine that guy. I need to let my future brother-in-law see how brilliant I am!

While Shang Ziliang was thinking that...

Xu Ziyang turned back and said coldly, "Are you coming or not?"

It turned out that Chu Liang had taken off on his own. Chen Su had followed Xu Ziyang, and the pair had already walked ahead several dozen zhang. Shang Ziliang was the only one still standing at their starting point, daydreaming with a silly smile. Who knew what obscene things he was thinking about?

Xu Ziyang warned again, "In the Immortals' Marsh, one must remain vigilant at all times. You may find yourself in mortal danger at any moment!"

Upon hearing Xu Ziyang's words, Shang Ziliang snapped out of his daydream and quickly jogged to catch up, nodding repeatedly. "Ah, yes, yes, understood!"

Seeing Chen Su's and Shang Ziliang's behavior, Chu Liang was bewildered.

Could it be that I'm the only one in this group who is earnestly searching for the Celestial Herb of Ascension?

#### Chapter 175: I Said the Wind Here Is Quite Strong

The Golden-Winged Falcon circled high in the sky, appearing as a mere inconspicuous black dot to the naked eye. However, through its keen eyes, it could clearly discern the subtle movements of every blade of grass and grain of sand, far surpassing the range covered by a cultivator's spiritual awareness.

Under its protection, the group advanced briskly.

Of course, there was no need to meticulously search every inch of the riverbank; the Celestial Herb of Ascension had certain characteristics. For example, some spirit plants wouldn't coexist with

surrounding vegetation and would monopolize all the spiritual energy in a specific area for their own growth.

The Celestial Herb of Ascension, on the other hand, thrived in the presence of all plants, making the surroundings lush.

Therefore, the sparse areas didn't require close inspection; they only needed to carefully examine every densely forested area and grassy field they passed.

Chu Liang and the other two groups were about a hundred zhang away from each other, meticulously scanning the area with their divine sense.

However, Chu Liang harbored some doubts. They weren't walking particularly slowly. Nevertheless, at this rate, even if they had several days, let alone a few dozen days, they would not have enough time to search the entire Immortals' Marsh.

"Isn't this really inefficient?" He thought to himself. "Even if a stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension really exist, they might not have noticed it. Hadn't the seniors of Mount Shu come up with a more efficient method over the years?"

As he pondered, a sharp cry suddenly echoed from the sky!

"Caw—"

A Ba appeared?

Chu Liang immediately became vigilant!

After a brief search, he realized that the Ba was not heading towards him but rather in the direction of Shang Ziliang!

"Haha..." Shang Ziliang was secretly delighted at this moment.

As he swept through the edge of the thicket, causing the leaves to rustle lightly, a dark shadow suddenly leaped down from above. Though Shang Ziliang was briefly startled, he quickly regained his composure.

"Isn't this the opportunity I've been hoping for?" Shang Ziliang mused. "It came without any effort, just as the saying goes—pivotal occurrences happen when one least expects them."

An Iron Ba emerged from the thicket. Its entire body had a layer of skin resembling raw iron, with tattered clothes hanging on its frame. Its hair was disheveled, and its face so distorted that its features were indiscernible.

"Rawrrr—"

The remains of a cultivator who had been buried here for an unknown number of years eventually transformed into this creature, the very one now roaring fiercely and charging towards Shang Ziliang.

The creature known as Ba sought the scent of blood as this trait was ingrained in its nature.

Shang Ziliang swiftly dodged, evading the first attack. With his sword in hand, he shouted, "You malevolent creature! It is your unlucky day to be crossing paths with Shang Ziliang of Mount Shu today!"

After making that declaration, he swung his sword horizontally and formed a finger seal. In that instant, a surge of white light erupted!

Swish—

"Rawrr!" The Iron Ba, fearless of death, saw only the sweet temptation before it. Without hesitation, it lunged again with astonishing speed!

Shang Ziliang thrust his sword into the chest of the Iron Ba. However, as his sword qi reached the Iron Ba's chest, it couldn't pierce through the skin. Consequently, Shang Ziliang was gradually pushed back!

So tough! Shang Ziliang thought to himself.

The two primary characteristics of a Ba were its incredible speed and an extremely hard body. It was both swift and resilient, making it extremely challenging for a cultivator of the same realm to break through its defense.

As the Iron Ba drew closer to Shang Ziliang, he formed another finger seal with his left hand and commanded, "Back off!"

The tip of the sword turned, and the surging sword qi suddenly transformed into a gentle breeze. Although the sharpness diminished, this gentle force increased significantly. As the gentle breeze moved with the sword, it left a white mark on the Iron Ba's body. Simultaneously, the Ba was pushed three zhang away!

This wasn't a sword seal of Mount Shu but a Confucian Scholar Sword Seal from the Dao of Confucianism. It was a legacy technique passed down exclusively by the Cloud Horizon Peak of Mount Shu.

"Sword Binding!" Shang Ziliang hurled his long sword, shouting swiftly. Instantly, the long sword transformed into hundreds of sword lights. It was the Hundred Swords Seal!

The hundred swords spun, weaving together into several long, dragon-like bindings, swiftly entwined the Iron Ba while rotating simultaneously!

Crackle!

In an instant, the Iron Ba seemed ensnared by numerous white pythons, while harsh sounds of metals colliding echoed throughout the area, giving the impression that the creature was being sliced and ground.

"Rawwrrr—"

It seemed to sense a hint of pain, a sensation it likely hadn't felt for a long time. The clothing on its body shredded, and numerous tiny wounds appeared all over. If its skin weren't tougher than iron, it would have been torn to pieces in an instant!

In this dangerous moment, it also unleashed power several times its usual strength, seizing the sword bindings with its palms and fiercely yanking them!

Thud! Snap! Thud! Snap!

It forcefully tore apart the shining sword bindings!

"Hah—" The Iron Ba let out a deep, muffled sound as it tore apart yet another two sword bindings, dispersing the entwining sword lights.

The scattered sword light coalesced once more into a flying sword, spinning as it returned to Shang Ziliang.

In this moment, Shang Ziliang remained calm and composed, raising both hands to activate a glowing mirror.

This was the enchanted tool his dad had given him to bring along for protection on this journey—the Yang Mirror of Righteousness.

He had intended to save this for later use. However, the ongoing struggle with this Iron Ba had already become too challenging. Therefore, Shang Ziliang activated this enchanted tool.

A beam of sunlight refracted through the bronze mirror, instantly striking the Iron Ba. Immediately, countless hissing sounds echoed as smoke billowed!

"Rawrrr—" The Iron Ba suffered a heavy blow, tumbling to the ground and emitting painful roars.

The Yang Mirror of Righteousness could harness the essence of sunlight. For ordinary people, being targeted by the light reflected through this mirror would only feel burning hot. However, creatures of Yin nature would instantly incinerate!

Seeing the Iron Ba tumbling in agony, Shang Ziliang immediately thrust his finger forward, unleashing another flying sword!

Snap!

This sword finally severed the head of the Iron Ba, leaving it motionless. Without its head, the Ba could no longer move, which meant that it was definitely dead.

Phew. Shang Ziliang heaved a sigh of relief.

Shang Ziliang stowed the Yang Mirror of Righteousness and the flying sword away. Then, he flashed a confident smile, convinced that his potential brother-in-law had witnessed how decisively he took down the Iron Ba!

With a leap, he arrived in front of Xu Ziyang. He was just about to boast of his achievement as he smiled and said, "Senior Brother Xu, my performance in the fight was..."

Before he could finish his sentence, the Golden-Winged Falcon in the sky emitted another cry.

"Caw—"

Another Ba?

This time, the cry was even higher in pitch!

Xu Ziyang's gaze sharpened. The creature that had appeared earlier was an Iron Ba, the kind that disciples at the pinnacle of the third realm could handle easily. Thus, he had no intention of taking action.

But judging from the tone of this cry, the creature that just appeared was a Copper Ba!

Danger! Xu Ziyang thought.

The same word popped up in Chu Liang's mind.

Chu Liang initially observed the intense fight between Shang Ziliang and the Iron Ba, contemplating the creature's weaknesses as he watched. As the fight concluded, he was about to turn around and continue moving forward.

Without warning, a figure shot out from the grass on one side, moving as swiftly as lightning!

Chu Liang instinctively summoned the green leaf into the form of a zongzi, but then he realized that the green leaf enchanted tool wasn't by his side. Without any choice, he activated the Hundred Swords Seal!

The hundred swords formed a protective circle around him, becoming his shield.

Through the gaps in the swordlights, he clearly saw the figure rushing towards him. It had a black-bronze hue, hollow eye sockets, and was draped in tattered Daoist robes.

A Copper Ba!

With a whoosh, it closed in and swung a fist!

Bang!

The circular shield formed by the hundred sword lights instantly shattered. The swords could not block the attack at all.

With the strength of the Copper Ba being more than ten times greater than that of the Iron Ba, how could Chu Liang's Hundred Swords Seal withstand it?

But all Chu Liang needed was this slight delay, as at that very moment, he summoned another sword—the Dustless Sword!

The symbols of Decisive Clouds circulated on the Dustless Sword. In the blink of an eye, three talismanic characters were drawn and unleashed, accompanied by the radiance of three colors!

Ice! Fire! Thunder!

It was a grand spectacle!

"Rawwrr—"



As the sword lights approached, the Copper Ba roared in anger!

Boom!

A violent explosion echoed by the lakeside, accompanied by the brief illumination of lightning and flames.

When the Dustless Sword appeared behind the Copper Ba, its massive body was already frozen in place, with its entire body covered in ice and a gaping black hole in its chest...

The ice and fire shattered its defense while the art of thunder eradicated the evil!

This was the Triple Talismanic Sword of Ice, Fire, and Thunder!

It was an instant kill!

The Dustless Sword, crafted by one of the best swordsmiths in the world, unleashed such power that it even surprised Xu Ziyang.

The destructive force was so powerful!

As the sword pierced through the Copper Ba, Xu Ziyang couldn't help but wonder if he could accomplish such a feat.

"What is my cultivation level? What is Chu Liang's cultivation level?" Xu Ziyang muttered inwardly. "Does this mean that when Chu Liang reaches the same cultivation level as me, his attack power will be significantly greater than mine?"

Whoosh!

As the sword light retraced, Chu Liang stowed the Dustless Sword away in a calm and composed manner.

He didn't find his performance earlier surprising.

Despite being a cultivator at the third realm, he had mastered a type of sword technique in the Dao of Talismans that far surpassed what an ordinary cultivator of that realm could grasp.

Moreover, the flying sword he wielded wasn't the typical weapon used by a cultivator at the third realm; it could easily be ranked as a top weapon in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures! With the enhancement of the Perfect Qi Circulation, his foundational qi was also significantly stronger than that of an ordinary third realm cultivator.

The combination of these three factors made what seemed to be an explosively powerful sword strike feel effortless and natural to him.

Xu Ziyang looked pensive as he reflected on the details of the sword attack that Chu Liang had unleashed.

On the other hand, Chen Su's jaw dropped, and she couldn't conceal her shock.

Shang Ziliang wore an ashen expression and felt a sense of hopelessness. He couldn't help but remember that he had initially dismissed Chu Liang's cultivation as insignificant. Yet, within a short period, Chu Liang had surpassed him by far.

Without the aid of the Yang Mirror of Righteousness, Shang Ziliang would have struggled to defeat the Iron Ba. However, Chu Liang effortlessly killed the more formidable Copper Ba with a single strike. The thought of this difference filled Shang Ziliang with apprehension.

He remained silent for a moment.

When Xu Ziyang turned around and stared at Shang Ziliang, asking, "What did you say earlier?"

"Hehe..." Shang Ziliang scratched his head and chuckled awkwardly as he said, "I said the wind here is quite strong..."

Chapter 176: I Haven't Climbed Aboard Yet!

It was night time and the four disciples of Mount Shu sat around the bonfire.

With a serious expression, Xu Ziyang said, "There's something strange about what happened today. Usually, we only see ordinary Iron Ba on the outskirts of the Immortals' Marsh. You would only encounter Copper Ba, Silver Ba, and Gold Ba as you venture deeper into the Immortals' Marsh. You don't normally see other types of Ba in this region."

"But today..." Shang Ziliang was puzzled.

"Right. We encountered both a Copper Ba and an Iron Ba at the same time today. This rarely happens." Xu Ziyang frowned and said, "In the past, such occurrences usually only happened during the emergence of the Cataclysmic Ba. When a Cataclysmic Ba was born, a large number of fierce Ba would migrate to the outskirts and move beyond the Immortals' Marsh. This would be the first calamity that signaled the birth of a Cataclysmic Ba."

A Cataclysmic Ba was no ordinary creature.

The Cataclysmic Ba possessed the strength of a seventh-realm cultivator.

The sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten seldom had many experts at the seventh realm. Powerful individuals across the world—regardless of their sect affiliation or whether they were demons, devils, or evil entities—would still be subjected to certain rules upon reaching this level of cultivation.

Regardless of whether they were evil or righteous, they had to follow some kind of rule.

However, it was different for the Cataclysmic Ba.

The Cataclysmic Ba came into being for the sake of killing, with its sole purpose being to drain the life force from living beings. This seventh-realm creature was a reckless entity, and just one was enough to cause massive destruction.

Its mere presence would inevitably lead to the slaughter and annihilation of cities and nations—it was only a matter of time!

"But a Cataclysmic Ba already appeared two hundred years ago. Logically speaking, not enough time had passed to nurture a new Cataclysmic Ba," Xu Ziyang said.

Xu Ziyang, as the leader and guardian of the team, bore the responsibility for the safety of the other team members. He had to consider a multitude of factors.

"Maybe it's just a coincidence?" Shang Ziliang asked with a smile, "We haven't encountered another Ba since then, right?"

"Well, let's observe for a while. If there are any signs of Ba escaping to the outskirts, we'll head back immediately," Xu Ziyang stated decisively.

If a Gold Ba had migrated to the outskirts, Xu Ziyang knew he wouldn't be able to handle it.

"But if we want to find the Celestial Herb of Ascension, shouldn't we be exploring the entire Immortals' Marsh?" Chu Liang asked puzzledly.

He had been curious about this since the morning.

"That wouldn't be necessary," replied Chen Su, who was at the side.

She then took the initiative to explain in Xu Ziyang's place. "The Celestial Herb of Ascension is unlike any other treasures of nature. Typically, spirit plants have an innate instinct to avoid harm and thrive in environments away from human activity, developing protective mystical abilities. However, the Celestial Herb of Ascension is entirely different. It is drawn by human aura and tend to move towards humans. There is no need for us to venture deep into the Immortals' Marsh. We just need to circle around the outskirts, and it will come to us."

"The Celestial Herb of Ascension moves? And it actively migrates toward humans?" Shang Ziliang was somewhat surprised. "This is like-"

"Like it exists to be consumed by humans," Chu Liang continued.

"Exactly," Chen Su said, nodding gently. "The Celestial Herb of Ascension nourishes the surrounding plants and is an ingredient for refining the Golden Pill in cultivation. It is the kindest treasure of nature."

"True." Chu Liang agreed.

In that case, it seemed fitting to commend the Celestial Herb of Ascension.

After this brief conversation, Xu Ziyang pointed to the Golden-Winged Falcon beside him and said, "Tonight, I will be guarding the periphery. The three of you can take turns resting, with one person accompanying me during each watch."

"Hehe, I don't need to rest!" Shang Ziliang seized the chance to make an impression. He immediately patted his chest and loudly declared, "Senior Brother Xu, I'll stay up all night and guard with you."

"No." Xu Ziyang shook his head and declined in an indifferent manner.

He then issued a stern warning. "You are all still at the Spiritual Awareness Realm. If you don't take breaks for an extended period, your vitality, qi, and spirit will be depleted. While it might be acceptable on Mount Shu, it is not acceptable in this dangerous place. You must ensure that you are always in peak condition!"

"Yes, yes, yes." Shang Ziliang's attempts at flattery had backfired, causing him to timidly agree.

Despite his unsuccessful attempt at flattery, Shang Ziliang's excellent attitude earned him the privilege of being the first to take on the night watch with Xu Ziyang.

Shang Ziliang couldn't help but feel a bit happy. He was already planning to seize this opportunity to engage in a meaningful conversation with his potential brother-in-law, aiming to subtly showcase his positive qualities and make a favorable impression.

Meanwhile...

The Golden-Winged Falcon crouched low, with its talons slightly extended and its wings slightly spread. Its massive body provided ample space, enough to shelter dozens of people lying down to rest.

With the Golden-Winged Falcon keeping watch, there wasn't much need to be overly cautious. Xu Ziyang had them take turns standing guard, likely for training purposes. Chen Su and Chu Liang

positioned themselves under either side of the wings, while Shang Ziliang and Xu Ziyang sat on opposite ends, remaining vigilant.

While nestled beneath the protective wings of the Golden-Winged Falcon, Chu Liang felt a profound sense of security. At the same time, he pondered the possibility of an entirely new role for spirit beasts. In the days to come, could he too find comfort sleeping beside a Golden-Furred Hou when venturing into the wilderness at night?

As he thought about it, he realized that it would be impossible.

"The Big Head snores really loudly and has such an unpleasant breath. It would be too difficult to fall asleep next to it. Plus, I might get squashed if it rolled over while it was sleeping. This would not be worth it..." Chu Liang muttered to himself.

...

The surroundings were very quiet.

Chu Liang didn't fall asleep right away. He controlled his divine consciousness and entered into the White Pagoda.

While the others weren't paying attention, he decided to open his reward.

In the White Pagoda, smoke and mist poured out from the large-headed doll, nearly filling the space. Across from it, a spectral image of a Copper Ba sat quietly in its cage. Both the doll and the Copper Ba in the cage showcased two very different scenarios, where their joys and sorrows would greatly differ.

Without any hesitation, Chu Liang approached and pressed the "Refine" command.

Boom!

As a light flashed, a thin white radiance drifted out.

[Copper Ba Talisman: Bestows upon the caster the blessing of the Copper Ba, resulting in an equal enhancement of robust physique, formidable strength, and nimble speed. This effect lasts for two hours.]

A Ba Talisman?

Lately, Chu Liang had been earnestly delving into the study of The True Dao of Talisman-Making. His current focus was mastering the writing of the fundamental talismanic characters before moving on to study the more intricate symbols. To his knowledge, there has never been a talisman in the entire cultivation world named after a Ba.

Occasionally, he found himself pondering the origin of these items that the White Pagoda had bestowed him. Could it be that the Pagoda, like himself, doesn't belong to this world?

The purpose of this talisman appeared straightforward: it offered a broad improvement to an individual's strength, speed, and defense, akin to being fully endowed with the capabilities of a Copper Ba. Compared to the Spirit Cat Leaping Talisman that Chu Liang had acquired previously, it could be viewed as a comprehensive upgrade.

A Copper Ba Talisman...

This inevitably led to endless speculation. If he were to slay a Gold Ba in the future, would he get a Gold Ba Talisman? What if he defeated a Cataclysmic Ba...

Just as he was lost in thought, a rustling sound came from a distance. Suddenly, Chu Liang stood up. "Eh?"

Before he could stand up, Xu Ziyang had already soared into the air, shouting, "A Ba!"

The Golden-Winged Falcon stood up and spread its wings. These wings served not only as its means of flight but also as its sharpest weapons. The feathers were nearly indestructible.

Shang Ziliang and Chen Su stood up and assumed a vigilant stance.

Then, they saw several dark shadows swiftly pass by.

They were groups of Copper Ba, Iron Ba, and all sorts of them. The whooshing sound of the rushing wind continued, but instead of attacking the humans, the Ba flew past on both sides.

"Eh?" The three cultivators at the Spiritual Awareness Realm were confused at first. After all, Ba had an innate desire for blood and would usually attack if they were at such close proximity.

When Xu Ziyang saw this, his facial expression immediately changed.

"Only a higher-level Ba can make these Ba ignore their bloodlust!" He immediately shouted, "Something's wrong. Aboard the Golden-Winged Falcon now! We are leaving the Immortals' Marsh!"

Every feather on the Golden-Winged Falcon stood upright, creating the illusion of a dense array of spear-like swords. Its sharp eyes seemed to penetrate the darkness in the distant sky.

It was a clear sign of enemies approaching.

Whoosh!

In the next instant, a golden light streaked towards them!

"It's the Gold Ba! Quickly, get them out of here!" Xu Ziyang barely had time to give any instructions. He shouted loudly and swiftly summoned his flying sword to counter the threat!

A Gold Ba had the strength of a sixth-realm creature.

And it suddenly appeared here!

"Caw!"

The Golden-Winged Falcon quickly followed the command, letting out a long cry. It firmly gripped Chu Liang and Chen Su with its talons as it prepared to take off.



Shang Ziliang was a bit farther away and was desperately trying to catch up.

If the Golden-Winged Falcon took off, it would be impossible for him to catch up. Therefore, the Golden-Winged Falcon remained in place, waiting for Shang Ziliang to climb aboard.

However, in that brief moment of pause, a violent commotion occurred, sending Xu Ziyang's body flying backward.

Boom!

As the golden light approached from afar, Xu Ziyang activated his sword. He raised his hand and executed the Heavenly Sword Seal!

When facing a powerful enemy capable of swiftly killing them, Xu Ziyang had no time to test the waters. His first move had to be the most powerful one!

The Heavenly Sword Seal he used was even stronger than what Jiang Yuebai executed before. After all, he was a fifth-realm cultivator. A huge sword light, longer than ten zhang, charged towards the incoming golden light and collided with it!

A violent explosion erupted, shattering the Heavenly Sword Seal, and Xu Ziyang was sent flying dozens of zhang away!

Meanwhile, Shang Ziliang, who was closer to Xu Ziyang, was caught in the explosion! He rolled several times before coming to a stop.

Whoosh!

However, after just a brief pause, the golden light surged out again, flying towards the Golden-Winged Falcon! Surprisingly, the explosion earlier did not cause any harm.

It seemed to understand that the Golden-Winged Falcon was the only one capable of escaping its pursuit. If it could handle the falcon first, none of these people would escape!

"Golden-Winged Falcon! Fly away!" Xu Ziyang ordered without hesitation.

If he was the only one left, he would still have a chance to escape. However, if the other disciples at the Spiritual Awareness Realm stayed with him, they would just become his burden, and all of them could end up dying together!

The speed and strength of this Gold Ba were beyond imagination. All they could see were its afterimages, and no one could see its figure clearly.

Following Xu Ziyang's command, the Golden-Winged Falcon took off, soaring like an arrow released from the bow and turning into a streak of golden light!

On the ground, Shang Ziliang climbed up and chased wildly, shouting, "Hey! I haven't climbed aboard yet!"

Chapter 177: The Ba Talisman

They were in imminent danger!

Xu Ziyang had ordered the Golden-Winged Falcon to take off immediately because once the Gold Ba got close, it would very likely injure the Golden-Winged Falcon. By then, no one would be able to escape.

That was why whoever could leave now should go. There wasn't a moment to waste. They had to be decisive!

Meanwhile, the abandoned Shang Ziliang fell into despair as he watched the Golden-Winged Falcon take off from just one step ahead of him. In the blink of an eye, the falcon was already leaving him in the dust...

If it were Xu Ziyang who was left behind, he might be able to escape by using his divine skills. Shang Ziliang, on the other hand, could only pray for divine protection.

His father was one of the Mount Shu Sect's peak masters, but the only defensive item his father had given him for the trip was the Yang Mirror of Righteousness. This was not something that could protect him against a sixth-realm Gold Ba!

It was a tradition for the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect to make this trip to the Immortals' Marsh, and fifth-realm disciples had always been more than capable of protecting the disciples they escorted. Who could have imagined that there would be such a sudden turn of events today?

The Golden-Winged Falcon hadn't flown that far yet. It was still close enough for Chu Liang to make out Shang Ziliang grimacing so hard out of anxiety and despair that his molars were visible.

The Gold Ba behind Shang Ziliang was pretty close too, bringing a gust of foul wind with it as it approached.

Chu Liang swiftly made a decision. He turned around and broke free from the talons of the Golden-Winged Falcon, falling with a whoosh.

Then Chu Liang suddenly crossed paths in midair with Shang Ziliang, who was chasing the falcon desperately. There was a clear look of astonishment in Shang Ziliang's eyes.

However, before Shang Ziliang could even figure out what was going on, Chu Liang had already maneuvered himself behind Shang Ziliang and unleashed a spinning kick.

Wham!

With the Power of Ten Tigers, Chu Liang put all of his strength into this kick and ruthlessly struck Shang Ziliang's tailbone!

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaahh!!!" Shang Ziliang screamed.

A distinct crack rang out from his hip area, indicating his bones had been broken.

Yet, thanks to this kick, Shang Ziliang's flying speed increased by several times. He crashed into the talons of the Golden-Winged Falcon a moment later and immediately grabbed onto them with great desperation.

Whoosh.

The Golden-Winged Falcon sped across the night sky, looking like a crescent-shaped light.

Meanwhile, Chu Liang floated down to the ground and exchanged a glance with Xu Ziyang from a distance. In the middle of the two was the Gold Ba, which had stopped in its tracks.

Suddenly, there was a moment of silence. No one could have expected that Chu Liang would switch places with Shang Ziliang at this critical moment, giving him the chance to escape!

Despite that, this wasn't actually a difficult decision for Chu Liang. After all, he had a sixth-realm Battle Soul that he could summon. He just needed to pay the Battle Soul, and he would have the power of a sixth-realm cultivator on his side. With Fei Qi, Chu Liang believed they could be a match for the Gold Ba.

If Shang Ziliang and Xu Ziyang had been left behind instead, it was highly likely that they would have ended up as casualties.

Silver Sword Peak did not have a good relationship with either Jade Sword Peak or Cloud Horizon Peak. So, if both Shang Ziliang and Xu Ziyang were to die in the marsh, that just meant Chu Liang would have two fewer enemies at the Mount Shu Summit.

However... even if we have conflicts and even end up fighting, all of that happens within our sect. Once we leave Mount Shu, we're fellow disciples. We're family!

Those petty conflicts among the disciples were insignificant compared to life-and-death situations. As long as he could save his fellow disciples, Chu Liang would choose to take the risk. If he were presented with the choice a thousand times, he would choose to do the same thing every time without hesitating even once.

...

When the Gold Ba realized that it couldn't catch up to the Golden-Winged Falcon, it stopped chasing and hovered in midair.

It wore clothes made of an extraordinary dark gold fabric, which had remained intact even after all the years that had passed since the Ba's human self had died. The Gold Ba had white hair, hollow eye sockets, a shriveled face, and vaguely discernible facial features. Its skin was in a much better state than that of the Copper and Iron Ba. Additionally, it was clear that it still had a consciousness.

The Gold Ba turned toward Xu Ziyang. It was obviously aware that this prey had a higher cultivation level than the other one. As long as it could deal with him, these two living humans would form its meal.

Xu Ziyang stood with his sword in hand, poised to make a move. Sparks seemed to be flying out from his determined gaze. There was an imposing air about him, which showed he didn't have even the slightest sense of inferiority toward the Gold Ba. Unsurprisingly, Xu Ziyang didn't even consider getting Chu Liang's assistance to defeat the Gold Ba; he was resolute on staking everything on this one move.

Meanwhile, Chu Liang could tell he was being ignored, so he took the chance to stealthily back away from the scene.

Then he silently took out a jade bottle and called out, "Old Fei, wake up..."

Whoosh.

A stream of smoke slowly emerged from the jade bottle.

"This is... a Gold Ba from the Immortals' Marsh?" Fei Qi cried out in surprise the moment he appeared. "This is a big job!"

"Don't worry. I'll pay you well," Chu Liang said.

When faced with such a fast opponent, it was necessary to play one's trump card immediately. Waiting even a moment might cause someone to die.

The situation on the battlefield changed with Fei Qi's presence!

Faced with just one fifth-realm cultivator and one third-realm cultivator, the sixth-realm Gold Ba initially had the absolute advantage. It was the hunter. However, when this sixth-realm lingering spirit appeared, the situation was immediately reversed.

Something seemed to shift in the hollow eye sockets of the Gold Ba, and in the next moment, it retreated swiftly, disappearing into the nearby trees.

It ran away?

The Gold Ba seemed to have left, but none of the three people present were fools. They remained vigilant for a while. In fact, they were even more cautious of their surroundings now, afraid that the Gold Ba might catch them off guard with a sudden strike. Nevertheless, they didn't hear any signs of movement even after a long while.

Just as Chu Liang was about to relax, he heard something burst open by his feet... A dark gold hand reached out from the ground and grabbed one of his ankles!

The Gold Ba had fled underground!

The three people were shocked. Naturally, Chu Liang was the most shocked.

The Ba was using a divine ability that it shouldn't have control over... unless it had retained some memories of its past life. That's the only reason why it would be able to use it!

Moreover, the Gold Ba knew that when fighting a group of enemies, it should target their weak link first! And Chu Liang was, of course, the weakest.

There was a loud rumbling in his ears as the Gold Ba dragged him underground. The Gold Ba wanted to take its meal to go!

As the earth rubbed against his skin, Chu Liang felt suffocated and constricted. Before he was pulled under completely, he turned his hand over and tossed the Ba Talisman that he had just obtained into the air.

The Ba Talisman turned into ashes, and his body hardened as all the power of the Copper Ba he'd killed was channeled into him.

The Ba Talisman worked!

With the power of a Copper Ba, the damage that Chu Liang would suffer from having the dense earth rub against him was now reduced by more than half.

A cultivator with a slightly weaker body would not be able to withstand the friction and constricting pressure of being dragged underground. Even if they didn't die from being dragged, they would be seriously injured.

Just a moment later, a huge beam of swordlight penetrated the earth, followed by a sword piercing the Gold Ba! It was Xu Ziyang!

Right after that, a clear voice said, "Thou shalt be restricted within a radius of five zhang."

It was Fei Qi!

With this command, the power of divine law descended inconspicuously, restricting the Gold Ba's range of movement within a radius of five zhang. It only took the Gold Ba a moment to cross the distance of five zhang, so it slammed into what seemed to be an invisible wall soon after!

Wham.

This was the Immortal Art: The Spoken Divine Law! It was one of the classic Confucian immortal arts.

With just one sentence, the Gold Ba was trapped. Xu Ziyang continued to press his swordlight down viciously into the Gold Ba's back, covering it in sword qi!

Nonetheless, the Gold Ba wasn't just going to sit there and wait for death.

The Gold Ba suddenly bellowed, "RAAAAAAAR!"

The earth shook, and the mountains trembled! Cracks opened up in the surrounding earth, and the nearby mountain range shook. It seemed like the Gold Ba wanted to lift the ground itself!

Fei Qi's incorporeal form swayed. It was clear that using the immortal art had consumed a huge amount of his energy! The Confucian immortal art The Spoken Divine Law was not an absolute power; it was more like a tool. If the opposing party were to resist the divine law with explosive

force that the person using the divine law couldn't withstand, then the manifestation of the divine law would be broken.

The Gold Ba's power seemed inexhaustible, but this wasn't the case at all for Fei Qi. He possessed an incorporeal form, so he would die once he exhausted all of his energy! He couldn't suppress this Gold Ba for very long.

Meanwhile, Xu Ziyang's Heavenly Sword Seal barely broke through the Gold Ba's defenses. It managed to pierce a few inches into the Gold Ba's back, but the sword couldn't inflict any serious damage. Instead, it just enraged the Gold Ba further!

In a battle between experts, the speed increased further as the fight got more intense. There were even sparks flying out amid the rapid changes in movement!

Yet, Chu Liang was the most anxious of the three. He wished he could use the Dustless Sword to strike the Gold Ba ruthlessly, but without the support of the Crimson Executioner, Chu Liang wouldn't be able to overcome the wide gap between the third and the sixth realms.

Moreover, the sixth-realm Gold Ba was notoriously tough to fight. A sword might not even be able to scratch the Gold Ba's golden skin, let alone break through its defenses.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang didn't panic. Instead, he stayed calm and let his mind operate at lightning speed, trying to figure out a way to escape. Right then, he noticed there were rumbling sounds ringing out from his left and right as if there was some sort of force flowing somewhere unseen.

Chu Liang gritted his teeth and raised the Dustless Sword! Instead of striking the Gold Ba, he struck the dirt wall on the side.

Wham, wham.

He struck the dirt wall twice with full force, and it suddenly burst open with a bang. There was a rumbling sound like that of thunder, and in the next moment, a huge stream of water gushed out like a water dragon and engulfed Chu Liang and the Gold Ba!

Chu Liang had hedged his bet right!



The underground water network of the Immortals' Marsh consisted of countless intersecting underground rivers. The moment the Gold Ba went berserk, the surrounding dirt walls began to fold under the pressure.

The Gold Ba's bellow had sent vibrations running through all of the water in the Immortals' Marsh and in turn caused the flow of water in the underground water network to become turbulent, much like a kettle boiling over! The hole that Chu Liang had made became an opening to release the water pressure, and the water flooded out with tremendous force!

The Gold Ba was hit! However, it was still under the restraint imposed by Fei Qi's Spoken Divine Law, so it didn't get swept very far.

Chu Liang seized this opportunity to break free from the Gold Ba's grasp! He was swept away by the turbulent stream of water, crashing through a dirt wall on the other side and into an empty space.

His mind went blank. The force of the water sent him flying into the air and then ruthlessly slammed him to the ground. It was as though a giant hand was controlling everything.

It took a long time for things to settle down.

...

When Chu Liang opened his eyes again, he found that he wasn't underwater.

Sunlight streamed in from overhead, and he was surrounded by curved walls like those of a rock cave. Dust danced in the rays of sunlight amid the pin-drop silence.

Where is this place?

Chu Liang looked around and got a shock. He saw a little girl, who appeared to be five or six years old, crouching behind him!

She had long black hair draped over her shoulders and wore oversized red robes. The girl had a fair and delicate face without a single blemish, appearing very young and adorable. She stared at him curiously with her large black eyes that seemed so innocent.

Chu Liang's first reaction was to be cautious. A child in such a strange location couldn't possibly be human!

Yet, when Chu Liang extended his divine sense and examined her carefully, he found that there wasn't the slightest fluctuation in her aura. All she was doing was breathing.

She was just an ordinary little girl! But that was even stranger than if she were a ghost!

Chu Liang couldn't stop himself from asking, "Little girl, why... why are you here? Where are your mom and dad?"

The little girl didn't say a word. She just silently shook her head.

"Then, how about I take you out of here?" Chu Liang asked.

This time, the little girl didn't shake her head. She didn't nod either; she just didn't react at all.

"How strange..." Chu Liang muttered.

He sighed and brought his hand up to his forehead to support it. The series of powerful hits he'd suffered earlier left him feeling dizzy.

After calming down a bit, he pondered about his situation. I was swept here by the turbulent stream of water. It felt like I traveled for just a short distance in a straight line. So, as long as I can get back above ground, it shouldn't be difficult to return to the scene of the battle.

He looked around again, carefully observing the cave. It seemed to have been an underwater cave beneath initially, but the water level had dropped. The underwater cave dried up and became an underground cave with no opening in the rock walls all around; it was instead on the ceiling of the cave.

Right when Chu Liang was looking around for a way to get out, the little girl behind him quietly bared her teeth, revealing a row of beautiful, perfect, white teeth. Among them were two small but rather eye-catching fangs...

## Chapter 178: The Assembly of the Divine Nine

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

In a solitary pavilion behind the Boundless Palace on the Heaven-Reaching Peak hung a large bell without a striker or anyone attending to it.

However, on this day, the bell suddenly rang on its own, its sound echoing through Heaven-Reaching Peak.

"It's the Bell of Celestial Hearing," someone from within the Boundless Palace said. "Three tolls signify a disaster in the mortal realm. Guardian elder, please go and investigate."

"Alright."

At the same time, these three chimes of the bell resonated in Buddhist Cloud Monastery, Penglai Supreme Sect, Great Astral Sect, Endless Sword Sect, Greater-Yin Cult, Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals, Celestial King Sect, and so on.

The Divine Nine all took action!

When the ranking of the Divine Nine was established, the Bell of Celestial Hearing was created. If one sect rang their bell, the sound would reach the eight other sects, and they would all gather immediately.

However, the bell would only ring if a major event affecting all the sects was occurring.

At this moment, three chimes sounded, signaling for Mount Shu to dispatch a guardian elder. If it had rung seven times, it would indicate an assembly of all the sect leaders from the Divine Nine!

The guardian elder was dressed in a fluttering Daoist robe, with a head of jet-black hair tied up. He appeared to be a middle-aged man in his forties or fifties, with clear and sharp eyes, exuding a handsome and refined demeanor.

He didn't move, but instead sat cross-legged on a meditation cushion with his eyes closed. His innate self entered a vast and ethereal realm, the exact location of which was indiscernible.

The immortal aura lingered in this space, resembling the immortal realm.

It was precisely the realm for the gathering of the Divine Nine.

It was quite similar to the interdimensional soul domain within the Soul Subjugator Token. However, this realm looked very different.

There were nine elevated platforms within the space. After just a moment, nine massive figures formed by condensed clouds appeared in this space. They settled into their positions and looked towards the figure at the forefront.

This time, the one who had struck the Bell of Celestial Hearing was an elder from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion. The cloud-like figure vaguely resembled an elderly, frail man.

"The Bell of Celestial Hearing hasn't rung for a hundred years. We've alerted everyone because this matter is truly very urgent," he said clearly, adding, "Our sect master just conducted a divination, foreseeing the fate of the mortal realm. He discovered the imminent presence of a Cataclysmic Ba emerging from the Immortals' Marsh!"

"What?" The bald monk from the Buddhist Cloud Monastery spoke first. "A Cataclysmic Ba at the seventh realm?"

"Didn't something like that already appear two hundred years ago?" asked the guardian elder from Mount Shu Sect.

"Indeed, in the long years gone by, the Cataclysmic Ba would only appear about once every thousand years," the elder from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion continued, "but that doesn't necessarily mean that it would take a thousand years for the Immortals' Marsh to nurture a new one. Or perhaps this was merely a coincidence."

"Once it steps out of the Immortals' Marsh, it will bring forth calamities. It must be killed while it is still in the Immortals' Marsh!" Someone from the Greater-Yin Cult spoke coldly. It appeared to be a tall woman with loose flowing hair.

"Kill it," a middle-aged Daoist from the Penglai Supreme Sect succinctly uttered in a cold manner.

"We will simply do what we did last time. Each sect will dispatch a cultivator at the seventh realm and assemble at the Immortals' Marsh. There's no need to panic. When the Cataclysmic Ba emerges, the whole world will know. It is very hard for it to hide," a hoarse voice sounded. It was an elderly man from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals. Clearly, he had participated in the previous hunt that occurred two hundred years ago.

"Then let's take action," the man from the Great Astral Sect said without hesitation.

The individuals from the Celestial King Sect seemed somewhat gloomy and unsociable. They simply nodded without much expression, indicating that they might not be very cooperative, but they would likely participate in the upcoming actions.

The sword cultivators from the Endless Sword Sect showed no expression whatsoever. They remained silent, standing there like statues formed from clouds.

The old man from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion specifically inquired, "Elder Mo of the Endless Sword Sect, did you hear clearly?"

"Mm," responded the elder with the sword on his back.

If he hadn't responded, it would have been really hard to tell if this person was still present...

"Let us then return and inform our respective sects and start the preparation. We will assemble above the Immortals' Marsh in one hour," the elder from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion said at last.

The cloudlike figures all dispersed instantly.

...

Inside the underground cave in the Immortals' Marsh.

A seemingly naive little girl bared her tiny fangs at Chu Liang, but as she approached, she noticed something odd, sniffing with her nose as if sensing something.

She furrowed her little eyebrows and appeared puzzled.

Chu Liang swiftly turned back to her and reassured, "Don't worry, I'll get you out immediately."

He gently patted the little girl on the head and released a soft sigh.

Who would have thought he'd end up picking up a child? Originally, he was in great danger in the Immortals' Marsh.

And now, without the support of Old Fei, he willingly shouldered this new burden, though he felt somewhat helpless about it.

This child can't speak. She has no idea where her parents were located and she looks a little dumb. Did her parents abandon her here? Chu Liang thought to himself.

This conjecture wasn't entirely impossible. After all, similar situations had occurred in the impoverished areas of the Southern Regions. It was highly possible that a child who hadn't learned to speak by several years of age would have been taken to the boundaries of the Immortals' Marsh and abandoned there.

If that was the case, the little one would be quite pitiful.

I wonder if the fight outside has ended. Chu Liang pondered.

Even when Old Fei and Xu Ziyang worked together to fight the Gold Ba, they still struggled.

On the surface, their strengths seemed comparable, but the Gold Ba possessed a tough and highly defensive body. Their techniques weren't particularly effective against such formidable defense, especially as Old Fei excelled in Confucian and soul cultivation.

Although Xu Ziyang was powerful, the disparity in cultivation levels still created a noticeable gap.

Breaking through the Gold Ba's defenses seemed challenging for these two. As time passed, Old Fei would be at risk of being drained.

Considering all this, winning was far from certain.

Chu Liang hoped that even if they didn't win, they would still manage to escape the Immortals' Marsh safely.

The most challenging part was that there wasn't just one Gold Ba outside, but also countless Silver Ba, Copper Ba, Iron Ba... The Immortals' Marsh was in great turmoil, and the thought of numerous Ba wandering on the outskirts gave him a headache.

How am I going to get out?

Eh. What if I explore outside with a clone first?

Chu Liang suddenly remembered those three golden strands of hair.

"Why not use them now? What better time than this?" he muttered inwardly.

However, utilizing this item required him to concentrate his entire consciousness on the clone. His main body would remain stationary and entirely unaware of the surroundings.

He first needed to ensure that he was in an absolutely safe place. After some consideration, he deemed the current location relatively safe. If there was any danger, it would only be the little girl in front of him.

The little girl gave off the aura of a normal human being. Her presence here was the only odd thing.

If she was capable of disguising and hiding herself from his powerful method of detecting evil entities, then...

Suddenly, Chu Liang raised his hand.

He pointed behind and called out, "What's that over there?"

When the little girl turned to look, a golden brick appeared in his hand seemingly out of thin air. With a gentle whack, he struck the back of the little girl's head.

Whack.

But nothing happened.

The little girl did not reveal her true form nor did she faint.

There was a possibility of the dizziness effect of the Demon-Revealing Brick being triggered. In fact, Chu Liang had reason to suspect that it had occurred every time in the past because he had simply struck with too much force, resulting in only evil entities strong enough to resist the dizziness being safe from this effect.

Chu Liang quickly withdrew his hand and looked around with an innocent expression.

The little girl glanced back at him. With a hint of confusion in her eyes, the little girl rubbed the back of her head.

Chu Liang quickly reached out and massaged the little girl's head. "What's wrong? What's wrong? A stone must have fell and hit you on the head just now. Let me give you a massage. It won't hurt at all."

The confusion in the little girl's eyes deepened. After confirming her identity with the Demon-Revealing Brick, Chu Liang became certain that she wasn't an evil entity.

At this point, he had to ensure the little girl's safe exit from the Immortals' Marsh.

He whispered to the little girl, "I'm going to use an enchanted art to scout the road ahead. Be a good girl and don't wander off. Can you stay here and protect me for a while?"



The little girl continued to gaze at him with an expression that made it unclear whether she understood his words or not.

Chu Liang ignored her. He sat cross-legged on the ground and retrieved a strand of golden hair.

Swoosh—

A golden light flashed as he activated it with his divine intent.

The strand of hair transformed into a humanoid figure identical in height, appearance, temperament, and expression to Chu Liang.

Even those closest to Chu Liang wouldn't be able to tell that something was off.

Chu Liang immediately transferred all his divine intent onto the clone, then swiftly flew out along the opening above the cave.

After he departed, the little girl remained standing there, watching him with a blank expression.

After a while, her small eyebrows furrowed again, and she started getting closer to him.

Baring her tiny fangs, she sniffed along Chu Liang's body, sensing that there was something really strange about this person.

There seemed to be a savory aroma on this person's body, making her want to take a bite... but it was mixed with the foul smell of the Immortals' Marsh, which she found quite repulsive.

In short, the smells on him were both repugnant and fragrant.

For a long time, her instinctive consciousness battled over whether or not to take a bite.

Just as she hesitated, the light from above the cave was suddenly blocked, and a tall figure appeared there.

The figure wore tattered golden clothes and was missing one arm and half of its torso. There was also a hole in the right chest. If it were a human, they would undoubtedly be dead; however, it could still survive because it was a Ba.

It was a powerful Gold Ba.

Indeed, this was the sixth-realm Gold Ba they had briefly fought earlier, the one that escaped from the battle with Xu Ziyang and Fei Qi!

The Gold Ba exuded a gloomy aura and emanated a strong sense of greed and murderous intent. It stared at Chu Liang with its empty eye socket, seeming to convey, "I finally found you."

But then, it sensed another presence.

The little girl lifted her head and gazed up at the formidable Gold Ba.

"Hiss..." She bared her fangs and hissed at the Gold Ba with a hint of fierceness and a slightly childish tone.

Upon seeing this, the Gold Ba trembled. Its entire body quivered. Then, without looking back, it fled, leaving a trail of golden light!

The Gold Ba, which had dared to charge fearlessly at the three cultivators, was actually scared away by the little girl baring her fangs!

After scaring off that foul creature, the little girl turned her head again to look at the thing in front of her that emitted this pleasant yet repugnant smell.

She felt conflicted.

Chapter 179: Heavenly Origin Tomb

"It's a mess in the Immortals' Marsh tonight..." remarked a crow as it gazed down at the groups of Ba below.

Accompanied by a crow, the Dual Wielder flew at a low altitude over the Immortals' Marsh.

"Well, besides the Gold Ba, there's nothing that can cause me trouble. If a big one approaches you, just let me know; it won't affect our mission," said the Dual Wielder.

"If the target gets killed by the Ba, it would save us some effort," remarked the crow.

Because the Immortal Art: Heavenly Sight and Hearing consumed a tremendous amount of energy, the crow only activated this technique after they had entered the Immortals' Marsh. At this moment, the immortal art had just locked onto the target and was guiding them toward it.

"It better not," the Dual Wielder said with a sinister smile. "For the trouble this Chu Liang has brought me, I must personally end his life to vent my anger."

"We're almost there," the crow said. "This time, I'll watch you do it."

As soon as the conversation ended, the Dual Wielder sensed a cautious figure ahead.

Chu Liang crouched down as he moved forward cautiously, carefully navigating the surroundings and attempting to find a safe path. He was constantly witnessing groups of Ba passing by as they fled from the Immortals' Marsh. It reminded him of scenes from the end of the world.

Along this route, he didn't encounter too many powerful Gold Ba or Silver Ba. The number of high-level Ba was obviously smaller.

It seems safe? He thought to himself.

Just as he was pondering, he saw a dark gust of wind swooping in from a distance, carrying a strong killing intent.

Who is it?

Chu Liang had to escape quickly as the clone had no weapons, but the person was quick, catching up to him in the blink of an eye!

Eventually, he caught sight of the gust of black wind. The figure had a fierce gaze, wore a mask, and wielded two blades.

Danger loomed as the Dual Wielder unsheathed his blades, his figure dissolving into remnants of black light, swiftly passing by Chu Liang. Beneath the moonlight, a faint shadow was cleaved in two by the black light.

Swoosh—

At that moment, Chu Liang's body stiffened, swayed, and then collapsed to the ground. His body was cleaved into two. Blood sprayed into the air, and with a heavy thud, the pieces hit the ground.

The Dual Wielder turned around, glancing at the two severed body parts. After a moment of contemplation, as if unsatisfied, he drew his blades again and severed the head from the upper half of the body.

Swoosh—

However, after that cut, he still appeared unsatisfied. Raising his hand again, he pierced the heart.

He paused for a moment, then swung his twin blades, clanging and cutting the body several more times.

"That's enough," the crow perched on his shoulder couldn't help but interject, "We'll have enough meat for dumplings if you keep cutting like that."

"Phew—" The Dual Wielder stopped, took a deep breath, and inquired, "Is he finally dead?"

"Absolutely," the crow asserted, "If he's still alive, I'll take your surname."

The Dual Wielder finally felt satisfied as he transformed into a gust of black wind and flew away.

...

"Argggghhhhhhhhh." Chu Liang exclaimed, his consciousness snapping back to his body that was drenched in cold sweat.

Although it was just a clone, the sensation of being killed felt undeniably real.

He had essentially experienced death!

Who was the masked man?

The ruthless attack indicated a clear target, and the divine blade technique used by the masked man had not directly touched his body, but had severed his shadows, causing his body to split in two.

It was all very strange.

After taking the time to regain composure, he finally shifted his gaze to the little girl in front of him.

As she approached, Chu Liang noticed a peculiar glow in her eyes. It felt oddly familiar, reminiscent of the glow he had seen in Liu Xiaoyu'er's and Big Head's eyes on previous occasions.

"Are you hungry?" Chu Liang asked.

The little girl hesitated for a moment before nodding gently.

I knew it. They are all hungry.

Chu Liang reached into his pocket and retrieved two Dragon Breath Golden Vein Berries.

"Here, have these. It's all I have," he said, offering the berries to the little girl.

She looked at the berries, seeming a bit hesitant.

"They're very tasty," Chu Liang reassured her.

The little girl took the berry and gave it a gentle bite. Her eyes lit up immediately.

The berry tasted exceptionally delicious, delighting her taste buds to the fullest!

In no time, she devoured the whole berry like a little wolf. Chu Liang gave her another, and she quickly gobbled it up.

"Look at how hungry this child is," muttered Chu Liang, feeding her four or five more before stopping. "That's enough for now. Don't eat anymore; we'll get you something good after we leave."

He rose to his feet, taking the little girl's hand, and with a swift motion, they soared out of the cave.

Outside, the vast sky was adorned with twinkling stars, while the moon bathed everything in a soft, gentle glow.

As soon as they stepped outside, all the Ba in the vicinity suddenly vanished, for reasons unknown.

Are they all gone? Despite feeling a little puzzled, Chu Liang didn't dwell on it much. The important thing was that they were safe.

"I'll get you out of here first, and then we can seek help from the local authorities to find your parents," Chu Liang reassured the little girl as he led her away. He muttered to himself, "If we can't find them, I'll take you to Mount Shu..."

But as he contemplated further, Chu Liang realized that taking her to Mount Shu might not be feasible. Mount Shu wasn't a charitable institution; it typically housed orphaned children with cultivation talents.

But a dim-witted child like her...

As they walked along the shore of a lake, the little girl suddenly summoned some unknown strength and broke free from Chu Liang's grasp. With a splash, she leaped into the lake!

The Immortals' Marsh was in such chaos tonight that Chu Liang felt as though the water's surface was boiling. As the little girl jumped in, she was immediately swallowed up by the tumultuous waters.

"Huh?" Chu Liang exclaimed before plunging into the water. As he submerged, he felt the spiritual qi surging around him, like a massive underwater volcano erupting, which explained the unsettled state of the water's surface.

Surprisingly, the little girl could swim with astonishing speed, descending straight down like a fish. Despite his efforts, Chu Liang found himself unable to catch up for a while.

At that moment, he decided that he would learn a water-defying technique upon returning to Mount Shu. Otherwise, regardless of his cultivation strength, he would be at a disadvantage underwater.

After a short while, the little girl slowed down, and Chu Liang hurriedly caught up, intending to grab her.

Before Chu Liang could grab her, he felt a sudden heaviness in his heart as a massive dark shadow crossed his senses.

He glanced upward and beheld a vast, pitch-black mouth looming overhead!

From an aerial perspective, one could discern a colossal, chubby fish adorned with protruding scales, topped by a lantern-like luminous orb suspended above its head. Its immense body spanned several stories in height, with a gaping mouth resembling a dark abyss.

The creature's mouth was filled with sharp, menacing fangs, giving it a demonic appearance.

"Roar!"

With a roar, the mouth instantly engulfed a large expanse of water, then closed. Chu Liang, along with the unusually calm little girl, was forcefully pulled into the strong vortex.

Swallow!

Chu Liang held the little girl in his arms, trying his best to protect her. They tumbled and eventually landed on a soft surface. The water that had been sucked in with them poured down from above like a torrential downpour, making a loud splattering sound.

"You nearly got me killed..." Chu Liang shook his head, intending to give the little girl a piece of his mind, but then he saw the little girl calmly walking forward.

Chu Liang lifted his eyes and saw a crystal-like palace ahead, crafted entirely from lustrous glass, sparkling and translucent. The inside of the fish belly felt like a vast cave, with walls emitting a gentle purple glow, casting a dreamy atmosphere over the palace, making it appear grand and majestic.

There was a crystal palace hidden inside the fish's belly!

Chu Liang was shocked but dared not make a sound. Seeing the little girl walking straight ahead, he couldn't help but follow suit.

The doors of the crystal palace stood wide open, and as Chu Liang stepped inside, he was once again filled with astonishment.

Upon entering, Chu Liang was met with six bodies scattered across the glass-like floor, each lying in different positions. Despite their varied poses, they all shared a golden complexion, emanating immense power.

They were all Gold Ba!

One Ba was enough to cause them considerable distress, yet there were six here. Upon closer inspection, Chu Liang realized that they had been dead for quite some time.

It was unclear how long it took for these dead cultivators to level up into Gold Ba since they became Ba, and likewise uncertain how long these Gold Ba had been dead. Nevertheless, these bodies had been lying around for quite some time.

The little girl remained remarkably calm, her gaze fixed straight ahead as she passed through the corpses of these Gold Ba as though she didn't notice them. Without a glance backward, she reached the inner hall of the crystal palace.

However, upon entering the inner hall, Chu Liang found no glass floor; instead, he stepped onto a spacious and smooth lawn, with a massive stone monument standing proudly in the center.



Ancient characters were carved into the stone monument, and although Chu Liang could only vaguely discern their meaning, he grasped the general message.

The first few prominent characters read: "Tomb of Jiang Kui."

Following the prominent characters, a line of smaller text continued: "I caused all the Ba and calamities in this marsh. I acknowledge my guilt, but with my lifespan nearing its end, I am incapable of rectifying this situation. I vow that my life's cultivation will transform into stalks of Celestial Herb of Ascension after my death, nurturing more talented cultivators who will bring pride to the human race."

Underneath the stone monument stood a leaf, large and ostentatious, with golden veins spreading out like a spider's web. Its shape and appearance were identical to the Celestial Herb of Ascension depicted in the illustration!

Beside the stone monument lay a small crystal coffin. It was already open and the place was a mess.

Without hesitation, Chu Liang immediately fixed his gaze on the Celestial Herb of Ascension!

What one seeks with effort in vain for a long time often comes effortlessly!

Haven't I endured all these hardships for the sake of this very thing?! He thought to himself.

According to the message on the stone monument, it seemed that every stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension here was a manifestation of the spiritual energy of the powerful individual buried here.

The Celestial Herb of Ascension's willingness to approach humans made sense—it was actually drawn by Jiang Kui's vow made during his lifetime! Considering this, the individual lying below was likely a powerful cultivator, possibly of the eighth realm.

There weren't many cultivators at the seventh realm, but they existed nonetheless. Yet, there were no rumors of any Eminent Ones emanating such spiritual energy after death. It was likely that only individuals at the Heavenly Origin Realm possessed the ability to make such a wish before their death.

This was a Heavenly Origin Tomb[1]!

As his excitement surged within him, he watched the little girl calmly walk straight to the herb and pluck it out without hesitation.

She pulled out the stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension and started stuffing it into her mouth!

She wants to eat the Celestial Herb of Ascension raw?! Chu Liang's eyes widened in shock, and he immediately shouted, "Stop!"

Chapter 180: Search!

When Chu Liang let out that impulsive shout, he felt nervous and quite uneasy.

His suspicions about the little girl had been confirmed the moment he saw her swim through the water like a fish. It was clear that she wasn't an ordinary little girl at all.

Moreover, she had returned to this crystal palace inside the fish's belly with such ease and familiarity and then casually pulled out the Celestial Herb of Ascension to eat it raw. Even Yun Chaoxian would be able to tell that the little girl was an extraordinary being, let alone Chu Liang.

Regardless, the herb she was about to eat was the Celestial Herb of Ascension, the spirit plant that was necessary for the formation of an ultimate-tier Golden Core. This was a ray of hope that was seen only once in a hundred years. It was right in front of Chu Liang, yet the little girl was about to eat it like it was lettuce... She didn't even bother dipping it in some sauce first.

The heart of any cultivator would ache upon seeing this sight. It was a pure and utter waste of the treasure of nature.

After hearing Chu Liang's shout, the little girl turned around to face him. She gazed at him strangely with her teeth bared. It was a rather disgruntled expression like that of someone protecting her food from getting stolen.

The little girl cast a sideways glance at the Gold Ba corpses outside and then shot a rather fierce look at Chu Liang, making his heart race in fear. It seemed that the little girl had killed the Gold Ba outside because they had come to steal her food.

Chu Liang immediately put on a friendly smile and waved his hands as if to show he meant no harm. "I want to eat that too. How about we make a trade?"

The little girl stood still as she held onto the Celestial Herb of Ascension.

Chu Liang took out a Golden Vein Berry from his pocket and offered it to the little girl. "You ate this fruit earlier. It's delicious, isn't it? Let's exchange."

The little girl remained motionless.

Even Chu Liang thought that exchanging one Golden Vein Berry for the Celestial Herb of Ascension was rather ridiculous, so he took out another berry.

"How about two berries for one stalk of the herb?" Chu Liang asked gently, patiently trying to persuade the little girl.

The little girl swept her gaze over the two berries, but she didn't do anything else.

"I'll say a number..." Chu Liang took out two large boxes and slammed them onto the ground.

"There are more than twenty berries in total in these two boxes. Is that enough to exchange for one stalk of the herb?"

The little girl finally showed signs of hesitation.

She had eaten this herb many times. It wasn't that delicious, but she noticed that her strength would increase significantly after eating it. As for the fruit, today was her first time eating it. It didn't contain a lot of spiritual energy, but it was delicious... Additionally, some of the berries had a special scent that she found extremely enticing.

However, if she were to say these things to Chu Liang, he would definitely rescind his offer. This was because the Golden Vein Berries only contained dragon breath and qi suffused with blood.

Apart from the vicious beasts that saw dragons as prey, no one else would crave dragon breath. As for the blood-stained qi, the Golden Vein Berries only contained a trace of it. The biggest source of blood-stained qi was, of course, living creatures.

If the little girl were to get addicted to the taste of blood-stained qi, it would likely open a door to disaster...

Seeing the little girl's hesitation, Chu Liang thought there was room for negotiation, so he raised the stakes and took out two more boxes of Golden Vein Berries!

"This is the last of my stock. Take it or leave it! Just tell me, yes or no!" Chu Liang said through gritted his teeth. "These Golden Vein Berries have a sweet taste. They nourish your qi and blood as well as your yin qi and skin. They are essential fruits if you stay at home or go traveling!"

The little girl hesitated for a while.

Then she opened her mouth and attempted to speak. "Ah, mm, ah, mm."

She slowly uttered one word in a stiff tone, "Yes..."

Right then, Chu Liang realized that this little girl wasn't mute; it was just that no one had spoken to her before!

After all, language needed to be learned. Even if she were a genius, she wouldn't know a single word if no one had ever spoken to her.

Could it be that she has been living ever since she was born? Is this her home?

Chu Liang's gaze fell on the small crystal coffin. It was unlikely that an Eminent One at the Heavenly Origin Realm had prepared such a small coffin for themselves... Just thinking about it gave him goosebumps.

Regardless, when the little girl handed over the Celestial Herb of Ascension, he accepted it anyway and left the Golden Vein Berries for her.

Chu Liang said hastily, "It's late. I should head home. I had a great time with you today. Well, goodbye until we meet again."

Then he turned around, wanting to leave quickly.

However, before he could step through the entrance of the crystal palace, he heard a deafening rumble. In an instant, the world around him turned upside down; what was above him switched places with what was below him. He was hit by a torrential rush of water that gushed in from midair!

This water was incredibly salty. It was seawater!

...

In the night sky above the Immortals' Marsh...

An elderly man in long robes was riding a Spotted Golden Deer. He cut a huge slit in the sky, and a cascade of brilliant golden light poured down from it, enveloping the Immortals' Marsh. It looked as if a bowl of gold powder had been overturned, leaving its contents to fall onto the marsh.

At this moment, a wisp of cloud swiftly arrived at the Immortals' Marsh, revealing someone's face that looked like dark waters. This person wore a grave expression that was filled with killing intent. He was Wang Xuanling, the Mount Shu Sect's grand peak master.

Seeing Wang Xuanling arrive, the elder riding the deer cupped his hands together in respect and bowed. "Grand Peak Master Wang, I'm surprised that the Mount Shu Sect sent you here. It seems that your sect gives great importance to the task of exterminating the Cataclysmic Ba."

"Elder Sun," Wang Xuanling greeted, cupping his hands and bowing as well. Then he continued, "It's because my disciple is in the Immortals' Marsh. I am worried about his safety, so I came to see how he's doing."

"Your disciple wouldn't happen to be Xu Ziyang, would it?" Elder Sun asked.

He had guessed it from seeing Wang Xuanling's grim expression. Aside from Xu Ziyang, the famous prodigy of the Mount Shu Sect, Elder Sun didn't think there would be anyone else who could make Wang Xuanling so anxious.

"That's correct," Wang Xuanling answered with a nod.

"I just opened the Vault of Heaven earlier and used my sect's treasure, the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, to contain the Immortals' Marsh and everything within it. So, all of the Ba are trapped here. However, we have yet to find traces of the Cataclysmic Ba. Grand Peak Master Wang, if you're worried about the safety of your disciple, it would be best for you to make haste and search for your disciple personally," Elder Sun advised.

The Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams was the third best legendary artifact in the world, so it couldn't be taken out of Elder Sun's sect, the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals, whenever someone wished to do so. However, Elder Sun was able to use the divine power of the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams by going through the Vault of Heaven.

"I'm intending to do precisely that. When the Eminent Ones from the Divine Nine arrive later, please inform them of my whereabouts, Elder Sun," Wang Xuanling requested.

He left it at that and set off swiftly.

Clouds gathered around Wang Xuanling as he flew through the sky and sent his divine sense sweeping through the Immortals' Marsh, leaving no grain of sand or blade of grass untouched.

For a seventh-realm Eminent One, using their divine sense to scan a specific area like this was almost as effective as using Heavenly Sight and Hearing.

Just a moment later, Wang Xuanling spotted Xu Ziyang by a lake. Wang Xuanling's tense expression finally relaxed a little.

Seeing Wang Xuanling, Xu Ziyang immediately bowed respectfully in greeting. "Esteemed Teacher!"

Xu Ziyang looked rather miserable. His clothes were torn, and there were bloodstains on his cheeks and several large wounds on his body.

"The Immortals' Marsh is in a turbulent state. Since you're well enough to move, why haven't you left?" Wang Xuanling asked with a solemn expression.

He'd spoken sternly, but it was obviously out of concern.

"Esteemed Teacher, I came here to accompany and protect my juniors. However, one of my junior brothers has gone missing, so I'm searching for him," Xu Ziyang answered.

"I see," Wang Xuanling replied and nodded slightly, acknowledging his disciple's sense of responsibility. Then he asked, "Which junior brother?"

"Chu Liang from Silver Sword Peak."

Wang Xuanling looked surprised. "Huh?"

Chu Liang was the only child of Silver Sword Peak—Di Nufeng's sole disciple. When someone had stolen a few sword coins from Chu Liang, Di Nufeng had gone with him to Cloud Horizon Peak and sought revenge for him. This matter was already known all over Mount Shu. There were suspicions that they'd scammed compensation from the peak master of Cloud Horizon Peak, but what was certain was that Di Nufeng was fiercely protective of her disciple.

If Chu Liang were to die...

Wang Xuanling was terrified by the mere thought of it.

He waved his sleeves and uttered without the slightest hesitation, "Search! I'll search with you! We'll search through the night!"