

M. Slaying 181

Chapter 181: Whale-Riding Immortal

Gazing at the moon overhead, Chu Liang found himself on a small island in a desolate sea. He felt somewhat bewildered.

Just moments ago, he was still at the Immortals' Marsh in the Southern Regions.

He had mistakenly entered a crystal palace in the belly of a giant lantern fish and cunningly obtained a stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension.

In the blink of an eye, Chu Liang quickly flew out of the fish belly as it twisted and turned, with seawater surging,

Splash—

However, he emerged from the fish's mouth and passed through the deep, quiet water surface. As he ascended into the sky, the scene before him left him feeling dumbfounded.

He had somehow arrived above a vast expanse of sea that stretched endlessly!

The bright moon hung high above.

In the distance was an island with rugged and strange rocks. On the edge of the island, sat a man, wearing a conical bamboo hat and a fluttering robe, who was fishing.

He held in his hand a pure white wooden fishing rod, with a golden thread of fishing line. The material of the line seemed ethereal and luminous, unlike ordinary items.

His catch was none other than the giant lantern fish.

The towering waves parted, creating enormous splashes in the sea as the massive fish was reeled up into the air. The fishing rod and line bore the weight effortlessly, and with a slight lift of his hands, the man reeled the fish up with ease.

He pulled the massive fish to the edge of the island, its body half on shore and half submerged in the water, struggling with its dying breath.

The man stood up and leapt forward, pressing down with one foot on the fish that was several stories tall, leaving it with no room to move.

"Come out!" He called, putting away his fishing rod.

After a moment, the little girl crawled out with a tensed expression, leaping onto the island. She fixed her pitch-black eyes on the man.

She looked a bit fierce and a bit bewildered.

"A child indeed..." The man muttered and landed gracefully in front of the little girl.

The little girl remained cautious, but as the man approached, she started to lower her guard. In the end, the man was able to rub her head.

"This feels really strange..." The man chuckled self-deprecatingly. "Anyway, it's fortunate that I caught you before you caused a huge disaster. It's not too late. Let's make sure that we don't interfere with each other's plans."

The little girl couldn't understand his words, but when she caught a whiff of the man's scent, she settled down.

Chu Liang felt confused watching the scene unfold, but he didn't need to understand. Clearly, the man before him was not someone he knew or would associate with. He turned around, intending to slip away quietly.

"Hey, young man." The man suddenly called him, and said, "Are you leaving just like that?"

"Hehe," Chu Liang turned back and replied with a smile, "I wouldn't dare to disturb a senior who is busy."

The man looked up at him, revealing his face under the bamboo hat. His handsome face was like a sculpture marked by the traces of time, with a circle of stubble. A scar ran from his eyebrow to his cheek on his right eye.

"Which immortal sect are you from?" the man asked.

"I am from the Mount Shu Sect," Chu Liang answered truthfully.

Chu Liang had no idea of this man's intention, but there was no need for Chu Liang to hide anything. Besides, judging from the man's aura, he didn't seem like a villain.

"Mount Shu?" The man blinked, his expression subtly changing.

Upon sensing this, Chu Liang's pupils dilated slightly. What's wrong with Mount Shu? He wondered.

"Do you know Jiang Yuebai?" the man suddenly asked.

"Well..." Chu Liang pondered for a moment and then replied with a smile, "Which disciple on Mount Shu doesn't know Senior Sister Jiang? She is the pride of Mount Shu."

"What is her current cultivation level?" the man asked again.

"Probably at the peak of the fourth realm? Even if I am wrong, I shouldn't be too far off," Chu Liang answered.

Then, the man retrieved a porcelain bottle from his robe and tossed it to Chu Liang. He said, "Deliver this to her for me."

Chu Liang caught it and asked with hesitation, "What is this?"

"Don't worry, it's something useful for her," said the man while waving his hand. "I'm counting on you. I'll let you go your way; I need to deal with this little troublemaker now."

"Senior..." Chu Liang inquired, "Should I mention who it's from?"

This simple question made the man's shoulders stiffen. After a pause, he replied, "Just say it's from the Whale-Riding Immortal."

"Alright," Chu Liang nodded and turned away, flying towards the distant northern sky.

Chu Liang guessed that the nearest sea to the Immortals' Marsh was probably the South Sea. It was already incredible that the Lantern Fish was able to travel to the South Sea within such a short time. If they traveled to other seas, he would have thought that the fish used a technique similar to the Divine Teleportation Technique.

Shortly after he took off, he heard a rumbling sound behind him, resembling the roar of a tsunami.

Feeling curious, Chu Liang turned his head and glanced behind him.

Under the cover of the night, the once tranquil sea suddenly stirred with waves over ten meters high, as the island began moving rapidly!

He couldn't help but think of the title of Whale-Riding Immortal.

Could this island be a gigantic whale?

...

The distance from the South Sea to Mount Shu was still quite far. By the time Chu Liang returned to Silver Sword Peak, the day had already dawned. Instead of heading to his room immediately, he went to see his teacher.

Di Nufeng was still in a drunken slumber when Chu Liang's arrival woke her up. She immediately opened her eyes and asked, "Weren't you going to find the Celestial Herb of Ascension? How are you back so soon?"

"Your disciple has indeed obtained the Celestial Herb of Ascension," Chu Liang replied truthfully. "However, there were some unexpected events that happened during my trip that I need to tell you about."

The little girl, the Heavenly Origin Tomb, and the origin of the Celestial Herb of Ascension were all matters beyond his power to handle. He couldn't hide these matters from the higher-ups of the sect, as they might convey crucial information.

"You've got the Celestial Herb of Ascension!" Di Nufeng's face lit up with joy. She instantly sobered up as she exclaimed, "It's been many years since someone from Mount Shu found it. Truly, you're my disciple!"

"It's all thanks to my teacher's guidance," Chu Liang replied with a smile.

If you were a bit more reliable, I would have formed my core long ago and would have then missed out on these opportunities today. Chu Liang thought to himself. As he thought of things from this perspective, he realized that he indeed owed gratitude to Di Nufeng.

"Hehe." Di Nufeng shamelessly chuckled and said, "While my guidance is crucial, you still put in a bit of effort yourself. What unexpected incidents did you encounter? Tell me about it."

Chu Liang proceeded to tell Di Nufeng all the stories.

"Wow." Di Nufeng exclaimed. After listening, she scratched her head and said, "The Heavenly Origin Tomb created the Celestial Herb of Ascension... and that strange little girl, it does seem like a big deal. I don't have a deep understanding of the details, but I'll inform the sect leader later."

"Alright, I'll take my leave now."

Since Chu Liang had reported the matter, anything beyond that was the concern of the elders; he had no further reason to worry about it.

"You should go back and rest soon," Di Nufeng advised.

After Chu Liang left, Di Nufeng gazed out at the sky for a moment before returning to her rest.

But not long after, her peaceful dream was disturbed by two unexpected guests. She sat up and went outside to find Wang Xuanling and his disciple, Xu Ziyang, standing there.

Upon seeing her old rival, her expression turned to one of displeasure. Old grudges mixed with morning grumpiness were all visible on her face.

"What's the matter?" Di Nufeng asked restlessly.

Faced with her rudeness, Wang Xuanling surprisingly didn't retort but pursed his lips and waved his sleeve. "Ziyang, it's your turn."

Xu Ziyang took a step forward, mustered his courage, and began speaking, "Senior Aunt Di Nufeng, when we were on our way to the Immortals' Marsh, we unfortunately encountered the birth of the Cataclysmic Ba, and a disaster ensued at the Immortals' Marsh. Junior Brother Chu Liang got caught in an accident while trying to protect fellow disciples..."

"Ah, I see," Di Nufeng nodded in understanding.

As Chu Liang had already briefed her on these matters just now, she didn't show much reaction.

"Haizz..." Wang Xuanling sighed and said, "Since you've also received the news, let me be straightforward. Accidents happened, and no one wished for them. My disciple has tried his best to search, but the Immortals' Marsh is in a complete mess, and he sustained serious injuries while searching within it. After I arrived, we spent the night searching together until daybreak. You... let's not dwell on this matter with him. If you have any grievances, direct them at me. Today, I bow my head on behalf of my disciple. Di Nufeng, I'm sorry!"

The fact that Wang Xuanling bowed was indeed a display of helplessness.

If Di Nufeng wasn't appeased quickly enough, who knew what commotion she might cause? The Cataclysmic Ba that was still in the Immortals' Marsh had yet to be found, and the members of the Divine Nine were still searching there. If she caused a scene, it would bring humiliation to the Mount Shu Sect.

Despite their longstanding rivalry, Wang Xuanling apologized to her, considering the grief she must be experiencing over the potential loss of her disciple. For the first time in years, he bowed his head to someone.

Upon hearing his words, Di Nufeng, who was still half-asleep, finally snapped fully awake. It turned out that these two were unaware that Chu Liang had already returned, and they thought that her disciple had died in the Immortals' Marsh.

As Di Nufeng thought back to the stories Chu Liang told her, she realized the reason why the members of the Divine Nine hadn't located him. After all, he had entered the sea through an underground waterway.

Di Nufeng exaggeratedly widened her mouth and exclaimed, "What?!"

"My dear disciple! The exceptional student I nurtured with countless efforts, lost in the Immortals' Marsh just like that? Heavens! I was hoping to rely on this disciple to care for me in my old age, yet today I must bid farewell to my own disciple! Oh Heavens! Why are you so unkind to a delicate woman like myself, blessed with both beauty and intelligence? Oh Great Earth! At least reveal to me the location of my disciple's resting place, let not his body remain in a foreign land! Ah..."

She cried loudly and it was as though her emotional pain was physically tearing her apart. Her palpable sadness moved everyone listening to tears.

In the end, Wang Xuanling couldn't hold back and said, "Don't cry anymore... Cultivators like us live our lives fighting demons and upholding justice; life and death are not such rare matters. Your disciple is gone, how can your constant grief change anything?"

Di Nufeng's complexion immediately returned to normal as she interjected, "You have to at least give me some compensation money."

Wang Xuanling and his disciple fell silent for a moment, shocked by the rapid change in attitude.

"My only disciple, the one I raised to support me in my old age, is gone. You have to provide for me now!" Seeing no immediate reaction, Di Nufeng pouted and lamented, "Oh Heavens..."

"Okay, okay!" Wang Xuanling hastily waved his hand, asking, "How much do you want?"

"I've raised my good disciple for so many years. I think I should get at least twenty thousand sword coins, right?" Di Nufeng said, her tone suddenly changing.

"Twenty thousand..." Wang Xuanling took in a sharp breath.

Despite being the head of various peaks and having access to abundant resources, Wang Xuanling also had the largest number of disciples. Even though he raised them all frugally, the total expenses were still substantial. Among the peak masters of Mount Shu, he often found himself with the least amount of money, though Di Nufeng was an exception to this comparison.

"That's not considered expensive at all in today's world. The Hou outside my house costs over ten thousand..." Seeing Wang Xuanling's hesitation, Di Nufeng lamented once more, "Chu Liang, oh Chu Liang..."

"Huh?" Chu Liang, who happened to be outside the door, heard her call and quickly stepped in.

"Teacher, you called for me?"

Chapter 182: The Lesser Yin

Chu Liang naturally came here for a reason.

After a short rest back home, he still had a lot of things on his mind, so he got up again.

Firstly, he sent a flying-crane message to Senior Sister Jiang, but he hasn't received a reply yet.

Next was the matter of Core Formation. He needed to refine a pill, and he had already prepared the materials for the Core Formation, including two top-grade materials for the high-tier Golden Core and a stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension needed for the ultimate-tier Golden Core.

Despite making all the preparations, he realized that he lacked a cultivation technique for the fourth realm. This technique should also outline the specific methods to execute core formation.

This realization struck him only at the last moment.

The foundational cultivation manuals of the Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique for each realm weren't given to disciples beforehand. Typically, the next manual would be given when the disciple had attained the next cultivation realm.

This manuals were free and every peak master possessed them. However, Chu Liang had forgotten to ask his teacher for the next manual, which was why he had gone back.

But then, he heard Di Nufeng crying his name, as if she was in mourning. And so, he quickly stepped inside to see what was happening.

As soon as he entered, Wang Xuanling and Xu Ziyang were shocked. Thankfully, they were cultivators who could distinguish between a person and a ghost with just a glance. If not, they would have thought that he was a ghost visiting home.

"Are you alright?" Wang Xuanling was the first to react.

Although Chu Liang was injured, his injuries were significantly less severe than Xu Ziyang's. His injuries were not a major concern.

Xu Ziyang asked, "Junior Brother Chu Liang, when did you leave the Immortals' Marsh?"

Di Nufeng's cries stopped suddenly.

The atmosphere became a bit awkward. Sensing that something was amiss, Chu Liang quickly explained, "Senior Uncle Wang, Master! Senior Brother Xu! Some accidents occurred, and I have just stepped foot onto Mount Shu!"

"Just now?" Wang Xuanling cast a glance at Di Nufeng and immediately knew what had happened.

Chu Liang must have returned a while ago.

Otherwise, why would Di Nufeng be so calm? She was trying to scam them using Chu Liang! Truly shameless!

"Yeah. How did you come back? Tell everyone what happened!" Di Nufeng hastily said, "I was so worried about you!"

"Ah..." Chu Liang continued, "I need to report this to my teacher. Since Senior Uncle Wang is here, let's discuss it together."

With that, he recounted the series of events he had just explained to Di Nufeng. Throughout the entire process, Di Nufeng pretended as if she were hearing it for the first time and gave more exaggerated responses. She would occasionally respond with "Hmm," "Ah," "Oh," "Impressive," and so on.

Hearing about these events actually alleviated the anger that Wang Xuanling had just felt.

"Heavenly Origin Tomb... Jiang Kui?" Wang Xuanling pondered upon hearing this name, "A surnamed Jiang cultivator at the Heavenly Origin Realm, the eighth realm of cultivation. He must be from the Jiang Family, one of the three major aristocratic families. There probably aren't many that share the same name as him. If we go back and check the records of the past ten thousand years, we should be able to find the life story of this senior Jiang Kui.

"I don't understand why he claimed responsibility for all the Ba in the marsh. His act of using his body to nourish the Celestial Herb of Ascension to help nurture talented cultivators is a commendable deed. Thanks to his contribution, we have many successful cultivators who have formed the ultimate-tier Golden Cores."

"Indeed." Chu Liang nodded.

"But that little girl is really strange. Maybe she is the Cataclysmic Ba in the Immortals' Marsh!" Wang Xuanling said. He pondered again and remarked, "So they didn't find her because she escaped through the underground waterways directly to the South Sea."

When they sealed the Immortals' Marsh with the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, that giant fish might have already escaped.

Normally, when the Cataclysmic Ba leaves the Immortals' Marsh, natural disasters that were world-shattering would often happen. One would just have to search in the specific areas where calamities would occur. It was usually very challenging for them to hide their tracks. And so, the members of the immortal sects in the Divine Nine assumed that the Cataclysmic Ba was still in the Immortals' Marsh.

"As for that Whale-Riding Immortal, we don't know who he is," Wang Xuanling concluded. "I just hope he isn't using the power of the Cataclysmic Ba to cause trouble in the mortal realm."

Chu Liang did not mention that the Whale-Riding Immortal had entrusted him with items for Senior Sister Jiang. Even though this information would have helped identify the immortal's identity, Chu Liang had no intention of sharing it without discussing with Senior Sister Jiang first. After all, compared to Wang Xuanling and Xu Ziyang, his relation with Senior Sister Jiang was much closer.

After contemplating all these matters, Wang Xuanling looked deeply at Chu Liang.

"I heard that you had a chance to escape but chose to stay behind to rescue fellow disciples. It might have been luck that granted you this Celestial Herb of Ascension, but it's also a reward for your righteousness and courage. Focus on cultivation and your future will be limitless," Wang Xuanling sincerely praised. Then, he glanced at Di Nufeng, adding, "Don't learn from your Teacher."

"Hey!" Di Nufeng glared and scolded. "You old man! Bad-mouthing me in front of everyone? Do you think I won't get mad about it?"

"Humph." Wang Xuanling brushed his sleeves. He then turned to the left and said to Xu Ziyang, "Let's go!"

Wang Xuanling and his disciple then departed the Silver Sword Peak.

"Haaizzz..." Di Nufeng sighed with regret as she remarked, "My twenty thousand sword coins flew away just like that."

Chu Liang chuckled.

He really needed to learn from his teacher on how to be more shameless.

...

After obtaining the Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique: The Book of Golden Core, Chu Liang went to the Hall of Alchemy to see Senior Sister Chen.

He remembered how Senior Sister Chen had promised to refine the pill for him at no cost.

As expected, Chen Su was not at the Hall of Alchemy. Since she had just returned from the Immortals' Marsh, she probably hadn't been able to attend to her tasks at the Hall of Alchemy.

The attendant at the Hall of Alchemy promptly sent a flying-crane message to notify Chen Su that someone was looking for her. Soon after, Chen Su hurriedly arrived. The sight of Chu Liang filled her with a mix of surprise and joy.

"Junior Brother Chu! You're safe! That's fantastic!" Chen Su exclaimed with a smile. "I heard that the Immortals' Marsh became chaotic due to the emergence of the Cataclysmic Ba. The Divine Nine have been called to action to resolve this issue. We were worried about your safety!"

"I was lucky and nothing happened to me. In fact, this disaster blessed me with a stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension," Chu Liang said with a smile.

"What? You even found a stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension!" Chen Su's eyes lit up. She then said, "You sacrificed yourself to save your fellow sect members. If there was a stalk of Celestial Herb of Ascension, you should have been the one to take it."

"I came here to ask Senior Sister Chen to refine a pill for me," Chu Liang stated in a straightforward manner after the brief conversation.

"No problem!" Chen Su said.

Chu Liang then took out all the materials he had prepared.

"Nethersea Golden Lotus?" Chen Su stared at the treasure of nature in shock.

She then said, "This is far too extravagant for core formation... Do you plan to form the Heavenly Golden Core of Lesser Yin?"

"Yes," Chu Liang answered.

He intended to form this golden core during his first core formation and give this Golden Core to the puppet. As for himself, it would be better to cultivate the Golden Core of Lesser Yang.

"It is... very rare for guys to cultivate the Golden Core of Lesser Yin," Chen Su smiled and said, "Aren't you worried about any side effects?"

"Side effects?" Chu Liang asked, "What side effects could there be?"

"When this pill is turned into your inner core, it will become part of your body. The characteristic of this Golden Core will influence your body." Chen Su said, "For guys that cultivate the Golden Core of Lesser Yin, their personality might become more reserved, calm, and even somewhat gentle."

"Hmm..." Chu Liang pondered for a moment.

The Golden Core will be implanted in the puppet, so it probably won't affect me. By then, I will have two Golden Cores. Even if there is a side effect, it should be neutralized, so it shouldn't be a big deal.

Chen Su stared at him in silence. She then said, "Of course, you may have acquired this Nethersea Golden Lotus by accident and felt too lazy to search for other treasures of nature. If you don't mind the potential side effects, it is doable. After all, this Golden Core of Lesser Yin isn't a Golden Core of Greater Yin. The effects shouldn't be too outrageous."

"There's a Golden Core of Greater Yin?" Chu Liang stared at her, surprised. He had never heard of this.

"Of course there is, and the Golden Cores of Greater Yin and Greater Yang are the ultimate types with the strongest effects," Chen Su explained. "But we at the Mount Shu Sect have long eliminated these two types of Golden Cores."

"Why?" Chu Liang asked.

"Because these two types of Golden Cores have a significant impact on the human body," Chen Su explained. "Even if a woman cultivates the Golden Core of Greater Yin, she will gradually follow the path of melancholy and become cold and emotionless. If a man cultivates it, it's even more terrifying; he will gradually become more feminine. The Golden Core of Greater Yang, on the other hand, has the opposite effect, making people restless and aggressive, leading to a path of desire and

destruction. The Greater-Yin Cult, which stands out among the Divine Nine, specializes in cultivating the Golden Core of Greater Yin, so they have always kept a distance from other sects."

I see...

Chu Liang now understood why there were no Golden Cores of Greater Yin or Greater Yang; evidently, the side effects were too severe that they decided to ban the formation of such cores on Mount Shu.

After a moment of contemplation, he said, "Senior Sister Chen, please refine the Golden Pill of Lesser Yin for me."

"Alright." Seeing that Chu Liang still insisted on forming this core, Chen Su stopped saying anything and began preparing for the refinement of the pill.

The refinement of pills was considered the simplest in alchemy techniques, as it only required the aggregation of medicinal power. After all, upon consumption, they still needed to completely break it down and undergo a process of re-aggregation.

When Chen Su stared at the materials provided by Chu Liang, she suddenly felt her hands tremble.

The Nethersea Golden Lotus, as a material for Core Formation, was already extremely expensive. Moreover, there was also a stalk of Celestial Herb of Ascension, typically used to refine ultimate-grade Golden Pills. How many alchemy students at Mount Shu Sect have ever gotten the chance to refine pills with a stalk of Celestial Herb of Ascension?

Typically, when refining such a pill, a disciple at the Core Formation stage would oversee it. This is because the process is usually short, and it helps prevent any materials from being stolen. Seeing Chen Su nervous, Chu Liang reassured her, "Senior Sister Chen, don't overthink this. I have prepared two sets of the same Core Formation materials. Even if there's a mistake, it will be okay."

Chen Su replied, "Even if you've prepared all the materials, if the process fails, how will you get another Celestial Herb of Ascension?"

Upon hearing this, Chu Liang suddenly recalled something.

Right. What happened to the seed of the Celestial Herb of Ascension that I planted?

Chapter 183: You're My Real Brother Now

If someone wanted to advance from the Spiritual Awareness Realm to the Golden Core Realm and in turn break through the Mortal Gate to the Earthly Gate, they needed a Golden Pill to use as the foundation for cultivating a Golden Core.

The method for concocting a Golden Pill involved using alchemical ingredients that were compatible with the cultivator's Core Formation method. They were necessary for concocting a pill rich with spiritual energy. The cultivator would then consume the Golden Pill, allowing the spiritual fire in their Sea of Qi to break the pill down and spread the pill powder inside their Dantian. This would aid in the formation of a Golden Core.

Chen Su set up the alchemical furnace and prepared to concoct a Golden Pill for Chu Liang.

Her furnace wasn't particularly large, and it had flowers and birds painted on it in colors of green and red. This furnace was devoid of the fiery vibe that was normally associated with furnaces. Instead, it looked elegant and beautiful. It was obvious from a glance that it belonged to a woman.

Chen Su then placed four blocks of Divine Fire Gel under the furnace. This gel could sustain various kinds of divine fire efficiently and economically. It was the type of fuel that alchemists used the most often.

This was Chu Liang's first time observing the concoction process, so he made use of the opportunity to study it. After all, it would be best if he could master alchemical techniques and concoct his own pills in the future.

Chen Su habitually arranged several materials on the side and then placed a golden plate used specifically for concocting the Golden Pills on the rack inside the furnace. After that, she lit the Five-Spirit Divine Fire under the furnace. The Five-Spirit Divine Fire wasn't the divine fire that produced the highest temperatures, but it was the most stable, which made it the best choice for concocting a Golden Pill.

The five-colored divine flames burst to life, illuminating the green and red paintings on the furnace. With the radiance of the divine light, the flowers were blooming, and the birds were flying. The paintings on the furnace seemed to come alive like the projections of a revolving shadow puppet lamp.

As the roaring fire heated the furnace, Chen Su entered a state of deep concentration and deftly prepared the ingredients. When the furnace reached the optimal temperature, she placed the ingredients into the furnace one by one.

Chen Su drew her qi to her hands and constantly changed the positioning of the ingredients so that they gained the right exposure to the heat. As she did that, she gradually rolled the ingredients into a ball. When everything seemed about right, she closed the furnace lid.

"Phew..." Chen Su let out a sigh and wiped the sweat off her forehead. "Just one last step to go."

With a flick of her fingers, the fire under the furnace suddenly doubled in size. The baking process had finally begun.

After waiting for precisely fifteen minutes, Chen Su killed the fire. The furnace that had been illuminated by vibrantly colored lights instantly went dark and fell silent once more.

"Is it done?" Chu Liang asked, standing up immediately in great anticipation.

"Please wait a moment." Chen Su raised her hand, gesturing for Chu Liang to hold his horses. "Let it absorb the heat a while longer."

Chu Liang nodded. "Mm."

He didn't understand how to concoct pills, but he had cooked rice before, so he thought it made sense to wait.

A while later, Chen Su lifted the lid of the furnace, and the fragrance of the pill filled the air. The sound of fanfare^[1] was playing in Chu Liang's mind as he looked at the Golden Pill. It was the size of a longan^[2] and gleaming with multicolored light.

"So, this is the ultimate-grade Golden Pill?!" Chen Su cried out in surprise and wonder. "This is my first time concocting such an ultimate-grade Golden Pill... and it will probably be the last time."

She took out a brocade box, placed the Golden Pill inside it, and handed it to Chu Liang.

"With the Celestial Herb of Ascension as one of the ingredients, this Golden Pill has a very high level of stability, which means you will have an extremely high chance of successfully forming a Golden Core. Junior Brother Chu, congratulations in advance for forming a rare ultimate-tier Golden Core!"

It made sense that having the Celestial Herb of Ascension as one of the ingredients increased the success rate of Core Formation. After all, the usual success rate was very low, and the Celestial Herb of Ascension was such a rare ingredient that any cultivator attempting to form a Golden Core with an ultimate-grade Golden Pill would likely be able to attempt it only once in their life. So, if the rate of success didn't increase even with the Celestial Herb of Ascension as an ingredient, that meant the feat of successfully forming an ultimate-tier Golden Core was probably one that only occurred once every few thousand years.

"If I manage to succeed, it will be thanks to your superb alchemical skills, Senior Sister Chu," Chu Liang replied with a smile.

As Chu Liang was leaving Chen Su's alchemy lab, he saw a tall man in a white robe walking toward him. The man looked pretty ordinary with no remarkable facial features.

Chu Liang didn't recognize the man and was about to simply walk past him. However, Chu Liang noticed that the man's pupils suddenly contracted. He seemed greatly shocked by the sight of Chu Liang.

Nevertheless, the man didn't say anything and immediately concealed his emotions.

Chen Su, who was seeing Chu Liang off, called out from behind him, "Senior Brother Lu."

"Mm," the man uttered.

He nodded in acknowledgment and went on his way.

Chu Liang furrowed his brows in thought.

He turned back to Chen Su and asked quietly, "Senior Sister Chen, who was that senior brother?"

Chen Su explained, "He's Senior Brother Lu Xun, the Alchemy Master's ninth disciple. He holds a high position in the Hall of Alchemy."

"Oh..."

Chu Liang glanced once more at the receding figure before exiting the Hall of Alchemy.

...

Just as Chu Liang arrived at the square of the Heaven-Reaching Peak, he heard a surprised shout ring out behind him.

"Big Bro!"

Turning around, Chu Liang saw Shang Ziliang and his two lackeys. They had just walked out of the Hall of Weapons and happened to see Chu Liang.

With wide eyes, Shang Ziliang ran over extremely excitedly. However, it was obvious that his back was still weak... His upper body leaned forward eagerly as he ran, while his lower body lagged behind.

On the way to Chu Liang, Shang Ziliang kept shouting, "Big Bro! It's great that you're okay! Big Bro!"

"Hmm?"

Chu Liang was puzzled and remained that way until Shang Ziliang grabbed his hand. That was when Chu Liang confirmed that Shang Ziliang had indeed been calling out to him.

"Senior Brother Shang, what did you call me?"

"Big Bro!" Shang Ziliang's eyes were brimming with tears. "If you hadn't chosen to stay behind in the Immortals' Marsh and use your life-saving kick to get me onto the Golden-Winged Falcon, I might have died there! You are my savior. From now on, you are my big bro! Xu Ziqing is my sister-in-law! I won't compete with you anymore..."

"Eh, eh, eh?"

Chu Liang quickly raised his hand to stop Shang Ziliang.

Man, this guy's behaving more and more out of line.

Thankfully, Xu Ziyang wasn't nearby, or there would be no way for Chu Liang to explain this.

"Senior Brother Shang, there's no need for that at all," Chu Liang said, hurriedly breaking free from Shang Ziliang's grasp. "I saved you purely because we're fellow disciples of the Mount Shu Sect. Moreover, I had ways to survive, so there's no need for you to be this thankful to me. In such a dangerous situation, if our places were switched, I believe you wouldn't just stand by—"

"I would," Shang Ziliang interjected with a nod.

"..."

Chu Liang's explanation came to an abrupt end, leaving him at a loss as to what to say next.

"I used to see you as my enemy. I wanted to compete with you for Junior Sister Ziqing's affections, so much so that I even hatched petty schemes to harm you..." Shang Ziliang spoke emotionally with tears in his eyes. "When you kicked me that day, I thought for a moment that you were venting your anger at me, but then I realized you were saving me..."

So, that's what happened.

Chu Liang finally realized that Shang Ziliang had seen him as a romantic rival and schemed against him.

Nevertheless, it's no surprise that Chu Liang hadn't noticed. After all, each time Shang Ziliang hatched one of his petty schemes, he'd always ended up hurting himself instead of Chu Liang.

The first time had allowed Chu Liang to meet Jiang Yuebai, and the second time had allowed Chu Liang and Di Nufeng to extort a huge amount of money from Shang Ziliang's peak master... Shang Ziliang's obstacles for Chu Liang ended up being like acts of kindness.

Seeing Shang Ziliang weep with tears as he repented, Chu Liang thought that he should've kicked Shang Ziliang harder. He felt regretful that his kick hadn't left Shang Ziliang crippled.

After Shang Ziliang finished speaking, Chu Liang said, "There's one thing I want to make clear. I'm not close with Junior Sister Xu Ziqing. You can say whatever you want about me, but don't tarnish a girl's reputation."

"Really?" Shang Ziliang asked as he raised his head back up, his teary eyes shining brightly.

"Absolutely," Chu Liang affirmed.

"Big Bro, from now on, you're my real big bro!" Shang Ziliang exclaimed seriously. "And Junior Sister Ziqing will be your younger sister-in-law!"

You're thinking too much... Chu Liang chuckled awkwardly.

Shang Ziliang waved to his two lackeys and said, "From now on, I'm your boss, and my big bro is your big boss! Got it?"

Both lackeys called out, "Big Boss!"

Chu Liang hurriedly waved his hand to stop them. "No, no, no..."

This is seriously getting out of hand.

Chu Liang said, "Senior Brother Shang, there's really no need for you to be so courteous to me. Let's just stick to being fellow disciples."

"Let's just do what we want. You can call me Senior Brother, and I'll call you Big Bro," Shang Ziliang insisted.

Chu Liang couldn't be bothered arguing with Shang Ziliang anymore. He just said some half-hearted words and left swiftly, returning to Silver Sword Peak.

Upon his return, Chu Liang found Xu Ziyang waiting for him on the small hillside of his home.

"Senior Brother Xu?" Chu Liang called out.

"This morning, I had to leave with my teacher, so there's something I didn't get to tell you," Xu Ziyang told Chu Liang. "I have your sixth-realm Battle Soul."

He offered a jade pot to Chu Liang.

Unexpectedly, Xu Ziyang had taken Old Fei with him. Chu Liang had pretty much forgotten about that Battle Soul.

Chu Liang hurriedly took the pot and said, "Thank you, Senior Brother Xu."

Xu Ziyang shook his head. "No need to thank me."

Then he added, "Your Battle Soul is quite rebellious. He kept trying to persuade me to take him in. He said he wants to serve me and doesn't want me to return this jade pot to you."

"Haha," Chu Liang laughed, unsurprised by Fei Qi's behavior.

If Old Fei's ashes weighed 10 jin, then 9.8 jin of the ashes was rebellious.

It's not surprising at all that Old Fei wants to run away from me. After all, before the incident at the Immortals' Marsh, Old Fei pretty much worked for free all this time he's been with me. However, at least he put in some proper effort this time. Without him, I might not have had the courage to save anyone.

"Did he say you had to light three sticks of Soul Ambrosia Incense to summon him?" Chu Liang asked Xu Ziyang.

"Three?" Xu Ziyang shook his head. "He told me to light two sticks of Soul Ambrosia Incense each time."

"Huh?"

Chu Liang frowned. He suddenly felt angry.

Chapter 184: Not a Problem! I have more!

Chu Liang hadn't received a reply from Jiang Yuebai's flying crane and it was hard for him to reach out first.

If she's not replying, it must mean that she has other matters to attend to. She would surely respond when she has the time... Chu Liang thought to himself.

The most pressing matter at hand, aside from the items for Senior Sister Jiang, was the Celestial Herb of Ascension planted outside. He planned to take a look and then begin the process of Core Formation upon his return.

As Chu Liang rushed all the way to the cave, his heart pounded with a mixture of anticipation and unease. When he learned of how the Celestial Herb of Ascension came into existence while he was at the Immortals' Marsh, he didn't have high hopes that the seed that he planted here would sprout into something.

But what if?

As he entered the cave, the first thing that met his gaze was the barren earth.

Haaa. Chu Liang sighed to himself. There was indeed nothing.

Wait a minute?

Suddenly, he turned his glances and realized that something was amiss.

As he approached, he saw that the area where the bones were buried was no longer a flat surface. Instead, there was a small pit in the ground and the seeds inside were nowhere to be found.

A thief? That's impossible!

Chu Liang stood up abruptly and immediately started scanning the surroundings with his divine sense.

He then soared out and circled around in the cave. Finally, under a large tree, he discovered a small seedling.

The leaves of the seedling had golden patterns. The patterns looked like the veins in a human body...

It was clearly a stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension!

How dare this little thing try to escape!

Previously, Chu Liang had sprinkled a large amount of Herbal Wood Spirit Powder. With ample spiritual energy and suitable conditions, the plant's leaves, stems, and outer areas would swiftly receive the nourishment they needed.

The spiritual energy was the only aspect that proved most challenging to replenish through external means.

And the golden skeleton had managed to provide the spiritual energy needed.

The seedling of the Celestial Herb of Ascension had most likely absorbed enough spiritual energy.

Upon sensing human aura, it uprooted itself from its original planting spot and started moving towards the location where the human aura was the strongest.

Thankfully, Chu Liang had discovered this early.

If he had arrived later, this seedling could have wandered off to who knows where.

What did it mean to have two Celestial Herbs of Ascension? It meant that he would be able to form two Golden Cores! Two ultimate-tier Golden Cores!

Even as Chu Liang gazed upon this harvest, which would send thrills through anyone who beheld it, he looked very calm.

He first took out a red string and gently tied this seedling to a large tree on the side.

He then sprinkled another packet of Herbal Wood Spirit Powder to nourish this seedling even more.

He then waited for around two hours. During this time, Chu Liang studied the process of Core Formation meticulously, waiting patiently until the seedling grew into a mature Celestial Herb of Ascension.

He then plucked this Celestial Herb of Ascension and brought it back to the Silver Sword Peak.

...

"Golden-Furred Hou! Stand guard at the door! Don't let anyone disturb me until I leave the cabin on my own accord. Got it?"

Chu Liang arranged for the Big Head to stand guard at the door before he started his first-ever attempt at Core Formation.

He followed the instructions outlined in the manual Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique: The Book of Golden Core.

First, he examined the pill carefully, analyzing it for a while before gulping it down.

Immediately, he sensed an intense surge of spiritual energy flooding his stomach.

Instantly, it felt as though he was choking from overeating.

"Uh..." He burped out a turbid breath. Without hesitation, he formed a finger seal and began practicing the Qi-Circulation Technique. It felt as though a gust of wind had stirred up the Sea of Qi within his body, igniting a spiritual fire within him.

The spiritual fire consumed the pill, boiling the immense amount of spiritual energy it contained.

As the pill vaporized and entered the Sea of Qi, which had previously felt somewhat empty, it suddenly swelled and expanded.

His Sea of Qi was filled to the maximum capacity!

Even though he had read many guides beforehand, Chu Liang couldn't have imagined that the surge of spiritual energy from the pill would be so immense after it started vaporizing! If he were unprepared and tried to withstand it abruptly, there was even a possibility that his Sea of Qi could burst open!

Chu Liang had no idea that high-tier, mid-tier, and low-tier Golden Cores contained different amounts of spiritual energy.

As for the ultimate-tier Golden Core, it contained the most spiritual energy.

Regardless, he had no choice but to continue refining this pill with the spiritual fire within his Sea of Qi. At the same time, he was using his foundational qi to exert pressure from all sides, constantly compressing this pill.

This process was extremely painful. After all, everything was happening within the Sea of Qi in the Dantian, which could be considered the weakest spot of a cultivator.

Both the burning of the spiritual fire and the collision of foundational qi would cause intense pain.

Beads of sweat the size of beans quickly dripped down.

The surge of spiritual energy was so immense that Chu Liang's reaction was extremely intense. If one were to get close enough, they would hear the crackling sound of the storm coming from within his Sea of Qi.

By relying on his strong willpower, Chu Liang forcefully practiced the Qi-Circulation Technique, which continuously replenished the spiritual fire in his Sea of Qi. He gritted his teeth and endured for who knew how long.

When the sunlight peeking through the windows turned into a golden hue, Chu Liang finally relaxed his furrowed brows.

As he scanned the Sea of Qi with his divine sense, he saw that the Sea of Qi had expanded into a limitless space.

Only then did it truly deserve to be called a sea!

In the center of the Sea of Qi, there was a floating area radiating golden light. Upon closer look, one would see a white and golden sphere suspended within the area.

It was only today that the Dantian truly deserved its name [1]

The core was formed!

Despite the pain, the overall process went smoothly, perhaps thanks to the Celestial Herb of Ascension, which stabilized the surge of spiritual energy and significantly reduced the difficulty of Core Formation.

As the Golden Core spun, waves rose from the flat ground!

Immediately, a massive vortex immediately came to life, instantly engulfing the entire Sea of Qi! It was cold and chilling!

Rumble—

With each rotation of the golden core, the foundational qi stirred up was immensely powerful. The difference compared to before was like heaven and earth.

From now on, even a casual swing of his sword would unleash sword qi several times more powerful.

Could this be the power of the ultimate-tier Golden Core? Chu Liang wondered. Suddenly, he opened his eyes.

Is this the feeling of being at the fourth realm? The feeling of being the only supreme one in the world? He thought to himself.

Bam!

Suddenly, a Big Head at the fifth realm poked through the window with eyes brimming with infinite pleading.

The Golden-Furred Hou had been safeguarding the door for a long time so it must be hungry.

Chu Liang had just reached the fourth realm and was no longer feeling that ambitious. He waved his hand and said, "Go eat. I don't need you here anymore."

"Bark—"

The Golden-Furred Hou barked happily twice, then turned around and leaped away in excitement[2].

Chu Liang didn't stand up because his mission had not ended.

...

Once again, his divine sense entered into the White Pagoda.

Now sat peacefully there was the Golden-Core Puppet, which had never started working since he acquired it.

Chu Liang stepped forward.

He pressed the Golden-Core Puppet on the head with one hand. With a flicker of his divine intent, a gleam of light suddenly radiated! The Golden-Core Puppet immediately shimmered with golden veins all over its body, connecting with him seamlessly.

In that instant, Chu Liang also grasped the technique of transferring the Golden Core. A brilliant platinum light followed the veins' connection, gradually shifting from Chu Liang's body into the Golden-Core Puppet's body.

Bang!

As the Golden Core entered into the Puppet's stomach, its eyes suddenly opened!

Chu Liang's facial features appeared on the big doll head.

Boom!

With the Golden Core as its foundation, it began to practice the Qi-Circulation Technique, and qi coursed through all the meridians in his body.

The circulation of qi started, and it was incredibly fast.

On the other hand, Chu Liang lost the sense of fulfillment brought by the Golden Core.

However, in the next moment, he felt an inexplicable connection with the Golden-Core Puppet.

He felt his body being inundated with an abundance of energy, greatly contributing to the progress of his cultivation.

Before his Sea of Qi was filled to its maximum capacity, his foundational qi would continue to increase.

If it stopped, it would signify the period of breakthrough into another realm, marking the start of the next cultivation level.

As for the Qi-Circulation Puppet, it continued working very hard as wisps of smoke billowed from it. However, compared to the fourth-realm puppet that was powered by the Golden Core, the third-realm Qi-Circulation Puppet was like an outdated model.

Even though the Qi-Circulation Puppet executed a third-realm technique and achieved Perfect Qi Circulation, it remained inferior to a puppet powered by the ultimate-tier Golden Core and practiced a fourth-realm technique.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang was a person of conscience and empathy. Even as the senior employees aged, he wouldn't dismiss them... As long as the older employees could endure working without any rest for twelve hours, they would remain just as valuable as the younger ones[3].

The Qi-Circulation Puppet only needed three Qi-Gathering Pills. The new one required three Spirit Concentration Pills...

And so, the dedication of the senior employee surpassed that of the newcomer by a significant margin.

The next time he feeds the Golden-Core Puppet the Spirit Concentration Pills, he should do it without the Qi-Circulation Puppet seeing...

He should keep their salary confidential so that the Qi-Circulation Puppet won't feel unfairly treated[4]

As Chu Liang watched the two large-headed dolls working vigorously and felt the continuous growth of his Sea of Qi, he felt a sense of fulfillment.

"Keep up the good work! And I will find you both a wife next year." he muttered.

...

In the evening, Chu Liang once again arrived at the Hall of Alchemy.

"Junior Brother Chu?" Chen Su stared at him in confusion, "Why aren't you practicing Core Formation? What brings you here to see me again?"

"I did," Chu Liang said with a smile.

"You..." Chen Su assessed Chu Liang for a moment and was about to comment that he still emitted the aura of someone at the pinnacle of the Spiritual Awareness Realm.

But then, she suddenly realized a possible reason and asked, "Did you fail? You..."

"Indeed," Chu Liang smiled as he shook his head. "Unfortunately, I failed. I came to ask you to refine another pill for me."

"I..." Chen Su immediately looked bewildered.

Although she wasn't the one practicing Core Formation, the pill that failed to become a Golden Core had been refined with the Celestial Herb of Ascension, which they had found after countless hardships...

The more she thought about it, the more she felt like crying.

Even with the Celestial Herb of Ascension that could stabilize spiritual energy, he still failed the practice of Core Formation.

Chen Su almost blurted out "Idiot."

But she knew that Chu Liang must be feeling devastated at this moment and likely forcing a smile.

It was difficult for Chen Su to blame him or say anything harsh.

However, as she put herself in Chu Liang's shoes, she couldn't help but feel sad and remorseful.

After taking some time to compose herself, she clenched her teeth and remarked, "What a waste of those materials."

Chu Liang replied calmly, "It's fine. I have more."

He carefully retrieved the second set of pill refinement materials and continued, "But I only have one Sword-Leaf Dark Sunflower left, so I can only refine the Heavenly Golden Core of Lesser Yang."

"Golden Core of Lesser Yang would suit you better...but..."

Chen Su gazed at the array of items before her. It had been the Nethersea Golden Lotus last time, and now it was the Sword-Leaf Dark Sunflower...

She couldn't help but feel bewildered. All the materials required for his formation of a high-tier golden core were incredibly lavish. They were valuable enough for a cultivator at the Realm of the Five Elements to level up twice.

As a third-realm disciple, where did he acquire such materials? Chen Su wondered.

She paused for a second, then sighed and said, "It's a pity that despite having such excellent materials, you'd still only be able to form a high-tier Golden Core. The Celestial Herb of Ascension is something that can only be found through luck and cannot be sought after."

Immediately, she saw Chu Liang take out a familiar-looking plant.

He then said in a casual manner, "Not a problem. I have more."

Chapter 185: Strong Endurance

"Useless."

"Idiot."

"What's the point of having you!"

"..."

Within the quiet chamber, a shadowy figure and a figure in white sat facing each other. Below them, the Dual Wielder stood with a bewildered expression, only to be greeted by a stream of insults from the shadowy figure.

"What...did I do wrong?" the Dual Wielder asked in puzzlement.

"You tell him what happened!" snapped the shadowy figure at the white-clad figure.

"I saw Chu Liang at Mount Shu again. Not only was he completely unharmed, but he also acquired a stalk of the Celestial Herb of Ascension. He went to the Hall of Alchemy and refined it into a Golden Pill for the formation of the ultimate-tier Golden Core. Sooner or later, he will become an influential presence," said the person in white with a grim expression.

"Even after several attempts, you failed to kill that cultivator who is only at the Spirit Awareness Realm. And you dare call yourself an assassin?" The shadowy figure continued to rebuke, "I will report this matter truthfully to our boss, and we will see what he has to say about it."

"How is that even possible..." The Dual Wielder's eyes were filled with disbelief as he said, "I killed him with my own hands. I even turned him into minced meat. You saw it with your own eyes!"

"Don't throw me under the bus[1]. I have only sent a crow as my eyes and ears. I didn't know what actually happened," the shadowy figure exclaimed, waving his sleeves to shirk any responsibility.

"That's not what you said then!" The Dual Wielder said angrily. "You said that you would take my surname if he didn't die!"

"What is your name?" the shadowy figure asked calmly.

"Lu Sha," the Dual Wielder answered.

"What is my name?" the shadowy figure asked.

"Lu Tong?" the Dual Wielder answered again.

"So what was the point of taking what I said seriously?" the shadowy figure shook his head and said, "Say no more. I will report everything as it is to the boss. I will not exaggerate your uselessness. However, the boss will surely be unhappy with the multiple failed attempts of the assassination of the Mount Shu Sect's core disciple. Someone is bound to bear responsibility later."

The white-clad individual, who hadn't been participating in this argument, immediately felt targeted as he hurriedly sat up and said, "I only failed once."

"Don't worry," the shadowy figure placed his hand reassuringly on the white-clad guy. "You've been undercover on Mount Shu for decades. You have worked hard and achieved many things. The boss hasn't even had a chance to reward you, so how could he punish you?"

"Give me another chance!" pleaded the Dual Wielder. "As long as he leaves Mount Shu Sect again, I'll go kill him first thing. This time, I'll bring along an artifact for collecting souls. If I don't chop him to pieces until his soul disperses, I won't be back!"

The shadowy figure stared at him for a while before he said, "Alright. I will try to give you another chance."

"Our boss has been busy on Evil Demon Mountain with some errands. He will be meeting up with the Eldest Disciple of Thunderbolt Stronghold. He will return, but I won't report this until he does. You'd better hope that Chu Liang will leave Mount Shu before his return."

The Dual Wielder gritted his teeth and stared at the white-clad individual as he pleaded, "Can you think of a solution?"

The white-clad individual paused, deep in contemplation, before stating, "I will help you this once."

"Thank you," said the Dual Wielder, his voice low and seething with anger. "Let me see if he truly cannot be killed..."

"This time, it's either his death or mine!"

...

"Caw—"

A sharp, piercing sound accompanied by the tearing of air as a hazy figure suddenly swept across the top of the ten-thousand-foot-high mountain which looked nothing more than a half-moon.

After the fleeting appearance, a slender figure seemed to materialize out of thin air in the valley of wilderness.

This was a tall man with a dark complexion, limbs elongated like those of an ape, and a face that appeared markedly different from that of ordinary people at first glance.

He strode through the verdant valleys until, after a moment, he came upon a newly constructed pavilion. Inside the pavilion sat a middle-aged man dressed as a scholar, boasting a broad forehead, a clean-shaven white face, and an air of composed demeanor.

The middle-aged man was making tea in the pavilion. Upon noticing the tall and thin man approaching, he chuckled and said loudly, "You must be Du Wuhen, the first prodigy of Thunderbolt Stronghold? You are truly a remarkable individual, as expected of the pride of the Thunderbolt Stronghold."

With a cautious expression, Du Wuhen inquired, "Lu Chengchou?"

"Young Hero Du, you can call me the Master of Mountain Haters or Mr. Lu." The middle-aged man smiled and extended his arm as he gestured for Du Wuhen to take a seat.

"Mr. Lu." Du Wuhen nodded slightly and sat down opposite him.

"I know that Young Hero Du is wholeheartedly dedicated to revitalizing the Thunderbolt Stronghold. And now, a great opportunity has presented itself. I wonder if you are willing to collaborate with us?" Lu Chengchou asked in a gentle tone.

"Mr. Lu, you haven't explained your background yet. I don't know if you represent the righteous or evil forces so how can I work with you?" Du Wuhen asked.

In response, Lu Chengchou posed a counter question, "Is it truly important whether I represent the righteous or evil? What matters is that the Thunderbolt Stronghold currently holds a prominent position among the Terrestrial Ten. Yet, if the Thunderbolt Stronghold aims to advance further and be ranked in the Divine Nine, there are only nine spots available. By assisting me in this small endeavor, there exists a chance to displace Mount Shu from the Divine Nine. Isn't this your ultimate desire?"

"You must be joking. The Mount Shu Sect and our Thunderbolt Stronghold are both righteous sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. There's no reason for us to sabotage each other?" Du Wuhen said as he shook his head.

"You don't have to lie. Before coming here, I investigated the members of the Thunderbolt Stronghold thoroughly. Among the core disciples of Thunderbolt Stronghold, only you are capable of great things, which is why I chose you for this conversation."

Lu Chengchou leaned slightly forward, lowering his voice, "When the diabolical sect, the Monstrous Beast Sect, was destroyed by the Celestial Pivot Pavilion years ago, all their assets fell into the hands of the Thunderbolt Stronghold. The rapid development of Thunderbolt Stronghold in the past hundred years owes much to the benefits from this part of the inheritance. I know that there is a Beast Taming Manual for ancient ferocious beasts. You only need to give me the chapter on Taowu[2], and you don't need to know anything else."

"Whatever happens afterward, whether it's righteous or evil, has nothing to do with you, and no one in the world will know that you leaked it. If the Mount Shu Sect suspects the Thunderbolt Stronghold in the future, you can easily push the blame to a diabolical sect."

Du Wuhen remained silent, only furrowing his brows in contemplation.

Lu Chengchou pressed on, "You are the disciple most likely to inherit Thunderbolt Stronghold in this generation. If the sect can progress further under the leadership of the Lord of the Stronghold in this era, then in the future, you will helm a sect ranked in the Divine Nine! Young Hero Du, you will stand as one of the most influential figures in the world by then."

Du Wuhen paused for a moment and said, "How can I be sure that you will only use it to attack the Mount Shu Sect?"

Upon hearing Du Wuhen's words, a subtle smile formed on Lu Chengchou's lips.

The chirping of a cicada startled the birds halfway up the mountain.

...

"There you go."

It hadn't been long since she completed the first refinement. Chen Su would never have imagined that the second opportunity would arise so swiftly.

And it was for the same person.

"Senior Sister Chen, thank you," Chu Liang expressed his gratitude repeatedly as he accepted the freshly refined pill for the ultimate-tier Golden Core of Lesser-Yang.

"If you truly wish to express your gratitude, strive to achieve Core Formation," Chen Su couldn't help but remark. "Don't break my heart."

"I will try my best this time," Chu Liang said with a smile.

Observing Chen Su in such evident distress and pain, Chu Liang felt a pang of guilt, yet he couldn't find the words to explain himself.

If he mentioned anything about himself having another Golden Core, there would be inherent risks involved. If it wasn't absolutely necessary, it was wiser to keep such matters concealed.

Upon returning to the wooden cabin on the Silver Sword Peak, he closed the door behind him.

He had practiced Core Formation once in the morning and he would be doing it again in the afternoon.

As the saying goes: Practice makes perfect.

Chu Liang's control over his foundational qi and other skills surpassed that of others at his level of cultivation.

With the aid of the Celestial Herb of Ascension, the second process of Core Formation proceeded smoothly and culminated in success.

This time, the duration was considerably shorter. After experiencing some discomfort, another golden-red wheel appeared above his Sea of Qi, shining like the sun upon the sea.

With two Golden Cores coexisting, the disparity was palpable.

The foundational qi generated by these two different Golden Cores carried noticeably different sensations.

The Golden Core of Lesser Yin exuded a cold and icy aura, operating with sharpness and swiftness. The foundational qi it generated surged forth like razor-sharp blades.

On the other hand, the Golden Core of Lesser Yang emitted a sensation of heat and passion and the vortex circulating in the Sea of Qi gleamed brightly like the sun.

The foundational qi of lesser yin originated from the large-headed doll, while that of lesser yang originated from the Sea of Qi in Chu Liang's Dantian. The two sources of foundational qi eventually converged into a single location. Initially, there were intense collisions, and they seemed incompatible, like water and fire.

After a moment of contemplation, Chu Liang attempted to gather the two sources of foundational qi and circulate them through the meridians of his entire body. He channeled the two sources simultaneously, employing the state of the Eight Trigrams Yin-Yang Fish, until gradually, they merged into one.

Only then did the collisions between the two sources of foundational qi cease.

However, he also observed that there was internal consumption during the merging process of the two sources of foundational qi, resulting in an effect that was less than the sum of its parts.

Nonetheless, it was notably greater than either source alone.

Chu Liang deduced that the reason for this was because he hadn't yet discovered an effective method to combine the foundational qi of lesser yin and the foundational qi of lesser yang. These two should ideally have a complementary merging technique.

Such a method has existed since ancient times, typically referred to as "Dual Cultivation."

Chu Liang fell into deep contemplation and decided that he would head to the Hall of Conservation and acquire a Dual Cultivation technique.

This way, he could then try merging the foundational qi of lesser yin and lesser yang with the Dual Cultivation techniques.

Perhaps he would become the first man in the Realm of Immortal Cultivation to successfully practice Dual Cultivation alone.

With both Golden Cores coexisting and activated together, and with the puppet performing Perfect Circulation, the foundational qi emanating from these three sources surged forth like the waves of a river, eventually converging into Chu Liang's Sea of Qi.

Usually, cultivators who have broken through from the third realm to the fourth realm would take about five to seven days to fill up their Sea of Qi to its maximum capacity.

It had only been a day, yet Chu Liang's Sea of Qi was already approaching saturation.

For the majority of the time it took to saturate his Sea of Qi, he hadn't even formed the second Golden Core.

This speed was terrifying.

It implied that if someone else were expending foundational qi at the same rate as Chu Liang during a fight, Chu Liang's recovery speed would be a dozen times faster or even more!

I can freely employ powerful techniques that consume a significant amount of foundational qi to attack you. Naturally, you can do the same. However, after several rounds, you'll find yourself facing the embarrassing situation of qi depletion.

As for me, my source of foundational qi is inexhaustible!

Even without considering this, the sheer power of his divine skills would surpass that of others at the same cultivation level as him. In a true match among peers, he would be akin to a crafty player employing underhanded tactics.

He would be a man of strong stamina and high endurance.

My balls are not only stronger than yours. I have even more balls than you! What can you compete with?[3]

The two Golden Cores were akin to the sun and moon. After successfully forming both cores, Chu Liang practiced the Qi-Circulation Technique for a while.

He then hastened to the hill behind Silver Sword Peak as he impatiently wielded the Dustless Sword.

He first waved his hand, releasing a surge of foundational qi.

Huff—

A crescent-shaped white sword qi shot out in an instant, sweeping past and nearly slicing off half of the mountain wall!

This seemingly ordinary sword strike proved to be more powerful than the previous sword techniques.

The sensation of immense power made Chu Liang's eyes light up, and he immediately attempted to unleash his strongest attack.

Metal, wood, water, fire, earth, wind, thunder, lightning...

With a flick of his finger, he inscribed the eight talismanic script characters with the Dustless Sword, sending them streaking across the sky above his head before fiercely flying forward!

Having stepped into the Golden Core Realm, he could now unleash eight talismanic script characters with a single strike!

Boom!

With the ferocity of a dragon, a chaotic-colored sword qi crashed down with a thunderous roar, soaring through the air like a waterfall!

Half of the hill appeared to be swept by a real dragon!

Before Chu Liang could even sheathe his sword, a surprised voice came from behind him: "Such a strong sword qi."

Without turning back, he immediately recognized the voice and smiled slightly as he called out, "Senior Sister Jiang?"

Chapter 186: The Jiang Family's Matters

"So, this is the power of an ultimate-tier Golden Core?"

Under the soft moonlight, Jiang Yuebai was dressed in a beautiful white silk dress that was embroidered with flowers and bound at the waist. With her sleeves fluttering in the breeze, her tall and slender figure looked like an immortal descending from the night sky as she landed behind Chu Liang.

Jiang Yuebai had just emerged from closed-door cultivation when she received a message from Chu Liang saying that he had something urgent to talk to her about. She'd immediately rushed over to find Chu Liang and happened to see him testing his sword behind a hill.

That was when she witnessed the power of Chu Liang's strike with her own eyes. She realized that it was far superior to the prowess of her sword qi when she first reached the Golden Core Realm.

Jiang Yuebai and Chu Liang were at the same realm and had the same divine abilities. The only difference was that Chu Liang had the ultimate-tier Golden Core. It was surprising how much of a difference it made.

She'd always known that ultimate-tier Golden Cores were powerful, she didn't expect them to be this formidable.

Chu Liang grinned. "Hehe."

To be precise, this was the power of two ultimate-tier Golden Cores... he added inwardly.

Chu Liang asked, "Senior Sister Jiang, did you just emerge from closed-door cultivation?"

"Yes." Jiang Yuebai nodded. "I came over after seeing your message."

"I suppose you've made another breakthrough in your cultivation?"

Senior Sister Jiang was already at the pinnacle of the fourth realm before. Could she be at the fifth realm now?

"Not yet," Jiang Yuebai answered, denying Chu Liang's assumption. "Tomorrow is the day when they announce the assignment for the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony. I need to sign up in person, so I had to emerge from closed-door cultivation."

"The Mountain God Memorial Ceremony?" Chu Liang uttered.

He blanked out for a moment and then realized that day had indeed arrived.

The Mountain God Memorial Ceremony was an event that the Mount Shu Sect hosted in commemoration of Mount Shu's Mountain God. The sect would usually hold it three months before each Mount Shu Summit and pick a treasure for the disciples to team up and locate.

The treasure would be hidden somewhere on Mount Shu, and disciples would search for it in groups of five. The aim of this activity was to let the disciples deepen their attachment to and understanding of Mount Shu. The winners of the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony would be announced at the Mount Shu Summit. It was essentially a fun event for the disciples.

The moment news of the upcoming Mount Shu Summit got out, the sect's disciples had already started looking for team members. However, Chu Liang hadn't heard anything about it because disciples usually prioritized selecting teammates from the disciples that belonged to their peaks.

Only those who couldn't find teammates due to their peak lacking in numbers would seek teammates from other peaks. So, it was natural that no one had come looking for Chu Liang to join their team.

Jiang Yuebai noticed Chu Liang's expression and immediately realized what situation he was in.

She explained, "I have no interest in this kind of boring game, especially since it hampers my cultivation. But my teacher warned that I need to strike a balance between work and rest, so she arranged for me to join the event with a few disciples from my peak. I probably won't contribute much to their search."

"Senior Sister Jiang, you're so devoted to cultivating. You truly are a role model for us all," Chu Liang remarked with a laugh.

"Sure, sure. What's the urgent matter that you wanted to discuss with me?" Jiang Yuebai asked, casually changing the subject.

Interacting with emotionally intelligent people was indeed the most comfortable experience. There would never be any awkwardness.

Chu Liang took out the bottle and handed it to Jiang Yuebai.

He said, "Someone asked me to give this to you."

"This is..." Jiang Yuebai opened the bottle and inspected its contents. She felt a little bewildered. "The gallbladder of a Pure Gold Dragon-Snake?"

Chu Liang had, of course, already checked the content of the bottle before giving it to Jiang Yuebai. It wasn't because he wanted to pry into what secrets lay inside; it was out of caution in case someone was trying to harm Jiang Yuebai. When Chu Liang was at the Hall of Alchemy, he had someone take a look at what was inside the bottle. He hadn't mentioned its origin; he'd only said that he wanted to have it appraised. That was how he found out what was inside it.

The gallbladder of a Pure Gold Dragon-Snake was a gold-attribute panacea of a very high grade. Given Jiang Yuebai's circumstances, the gifter's intention was probably for Jiang Yuebai to use the panacea as an aid in breaking through to the fifth realm.

The Pure Gold Dragon-Snake was an extremely powerful spirit beast, and hunting it down was no easy feat. Considering Jiang Yuebai's capabilities, she would have no problem acquiring the treasures of nature she needed to help break through to the fifth realm, but it was very unlikely that she would be able to obtain a treasure of this caliber.

Using the gallbladder of a Pure Gold Dragon-Snake to reach the fifth realm was equivalent to Chu Liang using the Dark Sea Golden Lotus to reach the Golden Core Realm. Both cases were considered excessive, so much so that it would be a waste of those ingredients.

"Who asked you to give this to me?" Jiang Yuebai asked.

Chu Liang answered, "It was the Whale-Riding Immortal."

...

A moment later, Chu Liang recounted what he'd experienced that day when he met the Whale-Riding Immortal once more.

After hearing the whole story, Jiang Yuebai was in a daze as she became lost in her thoughts. She normally had bright and clear eyes that looked like limpid autumn waters, but she now appeared misty-eyed.

After a long while, Jiang Yuebai muttered, "Is it him?"

"Senior Sister Jiang, are you okay?" Chu Liang asked concernedly.

Jiang Yuebai shook her head. Her shoulders trembled slightly. She wrapped her hands around her elbows and gazed up at the moon.

Chu Liang didn't disturb her.

After a while, Jiang Yuebai spoke again. "There are very few people on Mount Shu who know the details of my past."

Chu Liang's perked up with interest. "Hm?"

"I possess the Transcendent Spirit, so many people have speculated that I'm from the Jiang Family. But the truth is, I've been at Mount Shu since my birth; I grew up here. I've never even seen my parents before.

"My teacher said that my father's name is Jiang Tiankuo. He was a prominent figure in the Jiang Family many years ago.

"As for my mother, she emerged from that incredibly mysterious and ancient Divine Ruins. They fell in love and had me.

"But after I was born, my mother returned to the Divine Ruins. Instead of leaving me with the Jiang Family, my father placed me in the care of Mount Shu's Azure Falling Peak. He then embarked on a journey to find my mother, but there has been no news about him ever since.

"The only news that surfaced was that shortly after my father embarked on his journey, the legendary Divine Ruins Monastery took action and wiped out the Jiang Family."

After the first few sentences, everything else was new to Chu Liang.

Like many disciples in the Mount Shu Sect, Chu Liang believed that the Jiang Family had been wiped out except for one survivor, a child who had become an orphan. The Mount Shu Sect had then taken that orphan into their care.

Thinking about it now... how could a child have survived when her entire family was annihilated?

It turned out that Jiang Yuebai had been sent to Mount Shu right after birth.

As for the Divine Ruins... Chu Liang knew from legends that cultivators at the Profound Realm, the ninth and highest realm of cultivation, would go there when their long lives approached their end, never to return.

Chu Liang had tried learning more about the Divine Ruins Monastery after hearing about it from Jiang Yuebai previously. However, there wasn't much about this sect in the Mount Shu Sect's records.

He did occasionally find some small mentions about it that indicated the sect was a Daoist monastery that had occupied the Divine Ruins for many years. Aside from that, there were no other details.

If what Jiang Yuebai said was true, then the Divine Ruins Monastery was likely a terrifyingly powerful sect.

The three major immortal-cultivation families had been passing down their legacies since ancient times. The Xia Family had become and was still the imperial family.

As for the Jiang Family, they had been an incredibly powerful family, capable of standing on equal footing with the Xia Family. Yet, they had been annihilated with no signs forewarning of such a tragic event, nor had there been any traces left behind. Even the top immortal sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten might not have been able to do such a thing so easily.

Whenever the Jiang Family was mentioned in the cultivation world, everyone knew that it no longer existed. However, no one could explain how it had been wiped out.

Chu Liang then realized who the Whale-Riding Immortal could be.

Could he be Senior Sister Jiang's father, Jiang Tiankuo?

This...

Did I accidentally meet Senior Sister Jiang's father?

How embarrassing... No, rather than that, it's just unbelievable.

Chu Liang carefully recalled whether he'd shown any impoliteness to the Whale-Riding Immortal.

It seems like I didn't.

Fate is truly inexplicable.

"From what you said, it sounds like the crystal palace in the Immortals' Marsh could be related to the Jiang Family. And if that's truly the case, then aside from me... he's the only one who could be a surviving member of the Jiang Family," Jiang Yuebai said.

There was a glimmering radiance in her eyes; they were shimmering so brightly that it was hard to tell if she was feeling hopeful for a reunion or a chance to act on her resentment.

Chu Liang hesitated for a moment before saying, "Senior Sister Jiang, I don't know much about these things, so I can't give you any advice. However, no matter what happens, you still have us... Your fellow disciples on Mount Shu like you a lot. Mount Shu is your home, and that will never change."

Jiang Yuebai gazed at Chu Liang with a gentle smile. "Thank you."

"You don't need to be so polite with me..." Chu Liang replied with a smile, waving off Jiang Yuebai's expression of gratitude.

"Actually, I've been investigating matters related to the Divine Ruins during the past few years. But I couldn't find out much," Jiang Yuebai said. "My teacher said it's an inauspicious place and that misfortune will befall those who get too close. But my mother came from there, and my father vanished there. And I... I was born unlucky. I can't escape misfortune."

"I must find out the truth," she concluded softly, so much so that it was more like she was talking to herself.

As Chu Liang looked at Jiang Yuebai's figure in the night breeze, he noticed her determined gaze. It was as if there was a fire blazing inside her.

Perhaps this was the real Jiang Yuebai—gentle and cold on the outside but as firm and steady as a rock on the inside.

...

The night passed by filled with sweet dreams.

The next morning, Chu Liang got up, washed up, and tidied up his place.

Then he heard someone shouting outside, "My best bro, are you awake? I have something important to discuss with you."

That booming voice full of energy—Chu Liang could tell straight away that it was Lin Bei.

Chu Liang opened the door and asked, "What's the matter? Why did you come running over so early in the morning?"

"Heheheh!" Lin Bei laughed loudly. "Did you know that today is the day when the first puzzle for the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony is announced?"

"Hmm? Yeah, what about it?" Chu Liang asked.

Lin Bei answered, "I've come to ask you to team up with me."

Chapter 187: Welcome to the Team

"Teaming up with me?" Chu Liang stared at him with a strange expression. He then asked, "Do you not have friends on the Jade Sword Peak?"

Jade Sword Peak has over a hundred disciples. With Lin Bei's personality, he shouldn't be someone who has no friends.

Logically speaking, no matter what, he wouldn't have to resort to finding team members on Jade Sword Peak.

"Hehehe!" Lin Bei chuckled and said, "You are my best buddy."

"Tell me the truth." Chu Liang said.

"Sigh. Don't mention it," Lin Bei sighed and continued, "Everyone on the Jade Sword Peak knows that I have a good relationship with you. Whenever I ask anyone to team up with me, they get worried that I might be a spy from the Silver Sword Peak."

"..."

By the end of the day, I am the cause of this? Chu Liang thought about it and agreed.

After all, the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony differed from regular missions. It served as a competition among the disciples of various peaks, essentially acting as the appetizer for the Mount Shu Summit.

During the treasure hunt of the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony, extensive exploration and decryption will be required. It would be really important to gather information during this time. Actions such as gathering information through other teams or even having spies were common occurrences during every Mountain God Memorial Ceremony.

The Jade Sword Peak and the Silver Sword Peak were arch rivals, and Lin Bei was quite talkative. If he inadvertently leaked any information to Chu Liang that led to the failure of the team, it would have been disastrous.

"Actually, they're not only targeting the Silver Sword Peak. The teams on my peak are on high alert against spies. Every team is worried about spies from another team. They don't even trust anyone in the peak," Lin Bei says.

"The Jade Sword Peak isn't united," Chu Liang commented emotionally.

"In terms of unity, it is true that we are doing worse than the Silver Sword Peak," Lin Bei said.[1]

"Actually, they don't have to worry about you being a spy. If they haven't kicked you out, I won't be able to find even one teammate, let alone gather four other people," Chu Liang shrugged indifferently as he spoke. "The thought of participating in the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony never crossed my mind."

"How can you not participate in such an interesting event?" Lin Bei exclaimed hurriedly. "And the winners of the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony always get very generous rewards, either a large amount of sword coins or an enchanted tool for each person. Such rewards are rare in the Mount Shu Sect!"

"Hmm..." Upon hearing about the lucrative rewards, Chu Liang immediately felt tempted.

"Now that you have returned from the Immortals' Marsh, you should be preparing to form your core, right?" Lin Bei suddenly asked.

"It is done," answered Chu Liang.

"Oh." Upon hearing that Chu Liang had become a cultivator at the Golden Core Realm, Lin Bei wasn't surprised.

He then asked again, "What core did you form?"

"An ultimate-tier Golden Core," answered Chu Liang.

"Oh," Lin Bei responded, unfazed upon hearing that it was an ultimate-tier Golden Core.

Chu Liang, however, was surprised by Lin Bei's reaction. He chuckled and asked, "Why such calm reaction this time?"

"I feel numb to it. You won't surprise me anymore," Lin Bei said as he shook his head.

After being surprised time and time again, he had become immune to Chu Liang's astonishing performances.

"Is that the case?" Chu Liang inquired. "What if I were to tell you I've cultivated two ultimate-tier Golden Cores?"

"Ah?" Lin Bei's mouth dropped open as his composed facade crumbled. "Are you serious?"

"Of course not," Chu Liang replied, a playful grin on his face. "How could one possibly have two cores?"

"Phew..." Lin Bei breathed a sigh of relief. "You scared me. I almost believed you."

Although this matter sounded absurd, Lin Bei would believe it to be true if it were to happen to Chu Liang.

Could there truly be someone in the world with two Golden Cores? Lin Bei wondered.

"Alright, let's get back to business," Chu Liang continued. "With just you and me, we don't have enough members for a team."

The Mount Shu Sect likely aimed to enhance their disciples' teamwork skills through the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony. Without adequate team members, registration was prohibited. Exceptions were only made if all other disciples had already formed teams, a circumstance that left only a few exceptional individuals without partners.

Chu Liang didn't have many acquaintances on Mount Shu.

"What's there to worry about? Each peak couldn't possibly have the exact amount of people for the event. There must be some extras," Lin Bei said with a smile. "In our team, you represent wisdom and courage. With me in the team, our duo already embodies those qualities. We just need to find a few other idiots to fill the empty spaces."

Great. I represent wisdom and courage while the other four are just there to cheer me on, right?

Chu Liang chuckled wryly and asked, "But where can we find the three idiots to fill the empty spaces on the team?"

As soon as Chu Liang said that, he heard a voice calling from outside.

"Big Bro! Are you there?"

...

Previously on the Cloud Horizon Peak...

It had been an early morning.

Shang Ziliang and his lackeys were eating breakfast.

"Boss, they're announcing the topics for the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony today. Are we registering?" Lackey A asked.

"I was grounded for a while and almost missed it," Shang Ziliang said. "Are you asking around for teammates?"

"Mhm," Lackey B muttered softly, then returned his focus to his meal.

"I have contacted two," Lackey A said. "Senior Brother Qian, who is at the Golden Core Realm, and Senior Brother Wang, who is at the pinnacle of the Spiritual Awareness Realm. These two are the strongest ones the Cloud Horizon Peak could find."

"Very good." Shang Ziliang praised and said, "With us three in the team, the team from the Cloud Horizon Peak will be the strongest team. Let's go and challenge the best from the other peaks!"

"Mhm," Lackey B responded and returned his focus on eating.

Lackey A suddenly said worriedly, "But I heard that the Azure Falling Peak formed a team with all cultivators at the Golden Core Realm. Senior Sister Jiang is the leader of that team. I also heard that Senior Brother Xu of the Jade Sword Peak had gathered a team of cultivators at the Golden Core Realm. If we were to compete with them, we won't stand a chance, will we?"

"Hmm..." Shang Ziliang pondered for a moment and said, "But the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony is not solely a competition of cultivation levels. Intelligence plays a crucial role, and I believe we won't fall short in that aspect."

"Mhm," Lackey B responded, then resumed focusing on eating.

"Eh?"

"Lackey A suddenly said, "Yesterday, I heard that Chu Liang..."

"Chu Liang? Should you be calling him by his name?" Shang Ziliang glared.

"Oh. Yesterday, I heard that our big bro has already formed the ultimate-tier Golden Core! He might be at the Golden Core Realm," Lackey A said. "He is the only one on the Silver Sword Peak. Why don't we get him to join the Cloud Horizon Peak's team?"

"What a good idea!" Shang Ziliang nodded emphatically. "With his help, the Cloud Horizon Peak might have a chance to compete with the Azure Falling Peak and the Jade Sword Peak!"

"Mhm." Lackey B responded and continued eating.

Lackey A suddenly lowered his voice and whispered, "Boss, I've been wanting to ask you this all along: are you genuinely considering him as a big brother, or is it some kind of tactic to infiltrate the enemy's camp?"

"It's definitely genuine!" Shang Ziliang declared. "I sabotaged him a couple of times, yet he still saved my life! I owe him."

"And..." A wise gleam flickered in his eyes, "Do you remember how long it took him to progress from the beginning stage of the Spiritual Awareness Realm to the Golden Core realm? Now, he has even formed an ultimate-tier Golden Core. I believe he's no weaker than Xu Ziyang or Jiang Yuebai, the contemporary prodigies! It was incredibly foolish of me to have even thought of opposing him before. I can foresee that he will definitely have a place in the high ranks of the Mount Shu Sect in the future!"

"Mhm," Lackey B responded, then resumed focusing on eating.

"Amazing!" Lackey A exclaimed, clapping his hands in approval. "Indeed, our big bro has already shown remarkable talent, and there aren't many who have recognized it yet. We should follow him early on. When he rises to power in the future, we will rise alongside the dragon!"

"Hehe." Shang Ziliang urged, "Finish up your meal quickly. Once we're done eating, we'll head to the Silver Sword Peak and invite him."

"Mhm." Lackey B wiped his mouth and responded.

"What are we eating?" Lackey A suddenly asked, looking puzzled.

"Eating? Just the food here," Shang Ziliang, feeling bemused by the question, replied.

"Where's the food?" Lackey A looked around, bewildered.

Shang Ziliang glanced down at the table, only to find four or five pristine porcelain plates, with no food in sight.

"Hey, this is weird," he exclaimed as he glared around. "Where's the food?"

Lackey B scratched his head. "Did someone steal the food?"

...

Without bothering to search for more food, Shang Ziliang, accompanied by his two lackeys, swiftly left the room and soared through the air towards Silver Sword Peak.

Hearing the call from outside, Chu Liang stepped out and saw the trio approaching.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Big Bro!" Shang Ziliang stepped forward. "We've come to see you to discuss the team formation for the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony."

"Eh?" Chu Liang lifted his eyes, a hint of surprise crossing his features.

What a coincidence.

He then smiled and asked, "You want to team up with me?"

"Yes." Shang Ziliang said.

"That would be awesome," Chu Liang said, extending his hand. "Welcome aboard! Happy to have you all join my team."

Chapter 188: A Friend of Mine...

On the small hill of Silver Sword Peak...

The first assembly of Chu Liang's team was happening.

Aside from him and the ambitious Lin Bei, there were the three confused ones.

Shang Ziliang remained in a daze, trying to grasp the sudden turn of events. He thought, I am a boss at Cloud Horizon Peak. How did I end up becoming a member of the Silver Sword Peak's team?

For some reason, he felt as though he had been ordained.

I am the son of the peak master of Cloud Horizon Peak. If I, being the leader of my lackeys surrendered, what would the others on Cloud Horizon Peak think of me? Shang Ziliang wondered.

Initially, he thought Chu Liang would be by himself, and all they needed to do was to recruit him. Who would have thought Chu Liang, despite being all alone, would also try to form a team by himself?

"Cough." Chu Liang cleared his throat and said, "Happy to have you all join the team at the Silver Sword Peak. In the upcoming Mountain God Memorial Ceremony, we will be comrades fighting side by side."

"And now, I will appoint myself as the team leader, with Lin Bei as the deputy team leader," Chu Liang said as he pointed at Lin Bei.

Shang Ziliang immediately started protesting, "Big Bro, I am fine with you being the leader, but why does he get to be the deputy team leader?"

Chu Liang explained, "You three outnumber Lin Bei, who is the sole representative from the Jade Sword Peak. Therefore, I granted him a bit more authority."

He pressed his palms together and reassured, "Our team operates on absolute democracy. All decisions will be made by voting."

Shang Ziliang's face lit up at the mention of voting. If they vote, him and his lackeys would hold absolute dominance.

"Each of you three members gets one vote, while Lin Bei gets two," Chu Liang said as he made arrangements.

Hearing this, the three from the Cloud Horizon Peak smiled.

With their combined votes, they could easily overpower Lin Bei. Then they hear Chu Liang continue saying, "I get three hundred and sixty votes."

"Ah?" The three opposite Chu Liang's jaws dropped in astonishment.

"Alright. Meeting adjourned, " Chu Liang stood up and said, "Let's register our team at the Heaven-Reaching Peak."

While they were flying to Heaven-Reaching Peak, they witnessed a stream of people rushing towards the top, where fellow disciples were crowded, waiting to register.

As soon as they landed, they heard a commotion ahead, and the crowd automatically parted to make way.

A fierce figure was revealed.

Xu Ziyang, leading a team from Jade Sword Peak, emerged after completing registration.

Behind him were three cultivators at the Golden Core Realm, which included his sister Xu Ziqing and Fang Ting.

With news of Xu Ziyang reaching the fifth realm spreading, his prestige on Mount Shu soared even higher. In fact, nearby fellow disciples were even afraid to meet his gaze.

Lin Bei quietly turned away, not wanting the disciples from the Jade Sword Peak to see him.

Just then, another shout came from outside.

"Jiang Jiang is here!"

"Senior Sister Jiang!"

Unlike the silent and stressful atmosphere caused by Xu Ziyang, Jiang Yuebai's arrival ignited the entire square, with the crowd boiling with excitement.

After her last lecture, Jiang Yuebai's popularity among disciples had soared. Now, she was not just loved, but even revered by some.

Chu Liang turned his head and noticed a tall, slender figure dressed in flowing robes. The person exuded a cold demeanor and walked forward while fixing her eyes straight ahead.

Accompanied by four formidable cultivators at the Golden Core Realm, the figure walked directly towards them.

Being able to reach the Golden Core realm at their age or just a few years older would typically be deemed remarkable. In slightly smaller sects, they would undoubtedly be regarded as core disciples or even potential leaders.

In the current era of the Mount Shu Sect, there were only a few dozen disciples at the Golden Core Realm or higher.

However, of the disciples at the Golden Core Realm, nine of them were in Xu Ziyang's team and Jiang Yuebai's team.

It was obvious that the Azure Falling Peak and Jade Sword Peak were extremely powerful.

Like a gathering storm, wherever the teams from the two peaks passed, crowds retreated. With each entry and exit, their crossing drew the attention of everyone on the entire square.

Jiang Yuebai and Xu Ziyang's eyes met briefly. They both nodded in acknowledgment without speaking before they continued on their way.

The tension in the air was palpable.

The spectators in the square were all somewhat excited, wishing they could see these two teams fight on the spot! Most disciples had already assumed that the winning team would be either one of them.

Chu Liang was the only one who mumbled, "Don't they need to line up?"

"Eh?" Lin Bei as well as the other three froze.

No one noticed this issue.

Those two teams squared off like a clash between Mars and Earth, or a needle amidst wheat. They were the center of attention.

Yet Chu Liang was here questioning why they weren't queuing up.

...

After registering at Heaven-Reaching Peak, Chu Liang asked them to return first.

As for himself, he conveniently walked into the Hall of Conservation.

The furnishings here seemed unchanged for thousands of years.

Upon entering the corridor, Chu Liang saw Senior Brother Yuan sitting there with his rectangular face.

As usual, he was reading a book.

"Junior Brother Chu." When Yuan Zhou saw him here, he immediately placed his book down.

"Senior Brother Yuan." Chu Liang said, "I am here for a divine art manual. I am wondering if I can find it here."

"What type?" Yuan Zhou asked.

Chu Liang, feeling a little embarrassed, showed an awkward smile.

He then said, "The type that allows two Golden Cores to merge and operate together, complementing each other and mutually helping each other progress in cultivation..."

"Oh." Yuan Zhuo answered, "Dual cultivation?"

"Yes." Chu Liang nodded.

Dual cultivation, as the name suggested, was actually two individuals practicing cultivation together. It was unclear when it became a term specifically used for couples. Nevertheless, Chu Liang still felt really awkward.

In all seriousness, dual cultivation was indeed the deepest form of communication.

The strongest connection between men and women happened when they deeply understood each other without saying much. It was like there was a strong attraction simmering just below the surface.

In dual cultivation, both individuals must open their Dantian and Sea of Qi to each other, allowing both parties to merge into each other's circulation of qi, thereby merging their cultivation together as one.

In this scenario, being open and taking risks were crucial. It was similar to entrusting one's life and everything else to someone. Only with such a trusted individual could one feel comfortable revealing everything.

It was no wonder dual cultivation became a technique that represented Daoist couples.

"You have successfully formed your core, right?" Yuan Zhuo said as he stared at Chu Liang.

"What Golden Cores did you and the other person form?"

"Ah..." Chu Liang said, "I formed the Golden Core of Lesser Yang, while the other person... formed the Golden Core of Lesser Yin."

"This pair of Golden Cores is a good match." Yuan Zhuo said, "Let me think if there are any dual cultivation techniques suitable for the Golden Core of Lesser Yin and Golden Core of Lesser Yang."

"By the way..." Chu Liang continued, "I have another question. Is there a divine technique capable of fatally severing a person at the waist simply by slicing through their shadow?"

Ever since his clone was killed by the masked man in the Immortal's Marsh, he felt lingering fear in his heart.

"Light and shadow share a profound connection with the soul. When it comes to severing shadows and inflicting harm upon the soul, there are at least seven or eight divine techniques capable of accomplishing such feats. However, when it comes to cutting through shadows and hurting the actual body..." Yuan Zhuo looked around thoughtfully, then after a moment, he said, "From what I know, there's only one technique that can do that: the Shadow-Severing Seal: Black Light."

"Senior Brother, thank you for the information," said Chu Liang.

"Let me find a suitable dual cultivation technique. Give me a minute," responded Yuan Zhuo.

With this he stood up and left.

He then walked to the bookshelves in the back and started searching.

While Chu Liang was waiting, a crisp voice suddenly sounded behind him.

"Senior Brother Chu Liang!"

"Hmm?" He turned around and saw a charming figure approaching. "Junior Sister Ziqing?"

"Yes, are you also here looking for martial arts techniques? What a coincidence," Xu Ziqing said sweetly with a smile.

The two hadn't seen each other for many days. Chu Liang smiled and said, "Yes, it's been a while."

"Of course we haven't seen each other. You never come to Jade Sword Peak to hang out with me," Xu Ziqing pouted as she complained.

Chu Liang said with a smile, "I wouldn't dare...to go to the Jade Sword Peak."

"Hmph." The young girl pouted coquettishly. Just as she was about to say something, Yuan Zhuo walked back and interrupted their conversation.

"Junior Brother Chu, here is the dual cultivation technique you requested."

He handed over a book instead of a jade slip. It was no wonder he needed to get it himself. The book looked quite old and worn, with yellowed pages.

Several large characters were written on the cover: Yin and Yang Fusion Technique.

"This technique is the most suitable for dual cultivation of the Lesser Yin and Lesser Yang Golden Cores. It harmonizes yin and yang, connecting one to heaven and earth and benefiting both parties greatly," Yuan Zhuo continued to explain. "However, I must remind you to exercise moderation in the practice of dual cultivation. In the past, countless talented individuals claimed to be practicing dual cultivation. The reality was that they depleted the yang in their kidneys every day, thereby delaying their cultivation progress and becoming mediocre individuals...[1]"

With each sentence he uttered, Xu Ziqing's brows furrowed a bit more and gave Chu Liang an odd look.

"Um..." Chu Liang noticed her stare.

He grinned awkwardly and said, "This is for someone else. Right! A friend of mine..."

Chapter 189: Fire On the Tree Demon Mountain

Chu Liang found himself in a very sticky situation.

Xu Ziqing wasn't a child, so she obviously wouldn't believe Chu Liang's excuse that it was for a friend. She stared at Chu Liang with a judgmental gaze that seemed to say: The friend you're talking about is obviously you!

With Xu Ziqing's eyes focused on him, Chu Liang couldn't come up with a proper excuse, so he just left like a fleeing criminal.

Sigh.

After returning to Silver Sword Peak, Chu Liang calmed down and opened up the book Yin and Yang Fusion Technique.

Before reading the book, he hadn't known this was such an ancient technique. The technique had existed even before the Mount Shu Sect had been established and could be considered one of the oldest dual-cultivation techniques in the mortal realm.

Unlike the cultivation techniques that were developed later, this dual-cultivation technique didn't involve any intricate methods. It only utilized the basics of the Great Dao of Yin and Yang, making this dual-cultivation technique relatively straightforward.

There was one challenging thing though. It seemed that all the qi-circulation routes recorded in the manual had been formed with the base concept that the two parties performing the technique would work together to circulate using the same qi-circulation route.

However, Chu Liang wanted to attempt fusing the foundational qi in the Golden-Core Puppet with the foundational qi in his body. The Golden-Core Puppet could copy the qi-circulation method and cultivate continuously with that, but it could not be expected to act exactly like an actual person and change its qi-circulation route to match Chu Liang's. Chu Liang only had control over his own circulation... so that made things extremely difficult for him.

There were other dual-cultivation techniques that required just one person to circulate their qi, but only that person would benefit. Such techniques were normally referred to as Yin-Taking and Yang-Supplementing Techniques and were practiced only by those following the diabolical path.

Chu Liang had already been caught red-handed purchasing a normal dual-cultivation technique. If he were to get caught buying a Yin-Taking and Yang-Supplementing Technique too, his excellent reputation would likely be ruined forever.

This is tricky.

Nevertheless, as Chu Liang deepened his understanding of the technique, he realized that this was not an unsolvable problem. The Yin and Yang Fusion Technique did not actually require any

alteration of the qi-circulation route. All it required was for one party to connect their circulation route to the other party's. That was why both parties needed to work together.

If that was the case, Chu Liang might be able to control the flow of the foundational qi since the Golden-Core Puppet's foundational qi was actually his.

Chu Liang considered this idea carefully for a while more. Then he let his consciousness sink into the White Pagoda's space.

The two Large-Headed Dolls were sitting side by side. One was shrouded in a haze, while the other was radiating golden light; both were selflessly working hard on Chu Liang's behalf.

Chu Liang sat cross-legged in front of the Golden-Core Puppet and placed his hands on its shoulders. He closed his eyes and focused, channeling his foundational qi into the Golden-Core Puppet according to the method he had just memorized.

Boom!

An explosive rumble reverberated from the Sea of Qi inside his Dantian.

The Golden-Core Puppet's meridians had been duplicated from Chu Liang's body, so Chu Liang was undoubtedly very familiar with them.

He ordered the foundational qi in the puppet to continue circulating. As he'd expected, the foundational qi in the puppet complied without any resistance.

Chu Liang's and the Golden-Core Puppet's Minor Qi-Circulation Routes merged to become a shared Major Qi-Circulation Route. The two kinds of foundational qi—one with the yin attribute and the other with yang—fused. In this fusion state, the two kinds of foundational qi no longer depleted each other; instead, they boosted each other.

With the two complementing ultimate-tier Golden Cores, the pair's cultivation speed skyrocketed, and foundational qi surged wildly into them.

Chu Liang concentrated on this process for more than an hour until he was interrupted by a bit of noise from outside.

"Phew..."

He slowly withdrew his foundational qi from the Golden-Core Puppet, concluding his first dual-cultivation session with one of the Large-Headed Dolls.

Chu Liang had to admit that it had been a wonderful experience. When he opened his eyes, his gaze was much brighter, and he seemed very full of life.

After a while, he stood up and pushed open the window. That's when he found a crane-delivered letter on the table outside.

Chu Liang opened it and read its content. It was from the Sword Exchange Pavilion.

...

"Elder Shen, I've had a lot going on lately. It's been such a long time since I last visited you... Please don't hate me for that," Chu Liang said cheerfully when he arrived at a quiet office in the Sword Exchange Pavilion.

On Chu Liang's first visit to the Sword Exchange Pavilion to take on missions, he had been unfamiliar with how everything worked. Elder Shen had helped Chu Liang out a few times and selected good missions for him.

Since then, Chu Liang had gotten a lot busier, so he hadn't come visit Elder Shen for some time. The letter he'd received earlier had been from Elder Shen.

"At your age, this is the time when you should be putting in full effort and being a go-getter, so it's normal to be busy," Elder Shen voiced with a beaming smile. "I heard that in the short time I've not seen you, you formed a Golden Core. Moreover, it's an ultimate-tier Golden Core! That's truly amazing."

"Hehe, I just got a little lucky," Chu Liang replied.

"I heard about you from someone earlier, and it just so happens that there's a mission that requires a disciple at the Golden Core Realm," Elder Shen said. "So, I thought, why don't I just ask you to do it? You can use it as a chance to test out your Golden Core. If you do well, I'll frequently recommend you to the elders ranked above me."

Chu Liang smiled. "I definitely will not let you down, Elder Shen."

This was a pretty common occurrence. When a disciple that was highly regarded by one of the higher-ups in the sect made a breakthrough in their cultivation, the elder would assign the disciple a mission that would allow them to gain experience. It would also serve as a test of their abilities.

If Chu Liang were to perform well on this mission, he would become one of the first disciples that the Sword Exchange Pavilion considered assigning to important missions.

Most core disciples did not need to go to the Sword Exchange Pavilion to choose missions. Instead, when the sect had some important tasks that needed to be resolved, the Sword Exchange Pavilion would summon a few suitable core disciples to do the job.

This was the case for Jiang Yuebai, Xu Ziyang, and some other disciples at the Golden Core Realm.

It appeared that Elder Shen intended to give more guidance and support to Chu Liang in the future, which was why he assigned a mission to Chu Liang. So, of course, Chu Liang wouldn't say no to that.

Elder Shen handed Chu Liang a mission slip. "Here."

The slip said: A request for help from the Tree Demon Mountain.

"Although the Tree Demon Mountain is inhabited by demons, they're a peaceful bunch, and they have a good relationship with our sect," Elder Shen explained. "Since they've requested we send someone over to help, it must be a rather urgent matter. If you're not busy with anything else right now, you should depart immediately."

"Will do!"

Chu Liang stood up and immediately set off.

Contrary to his actions, Chu Liang had actually wanted to stay put on Mount Shu for a period.

The sudden appearance of that masked assassin in the Immortals' Marsh had left Chu Liang feeling uneasy. He had no idea where the assassin was from or why the assassin had targeted him. Chu Liang should be safe if he stayed on Mount Shu, but if the assassin was targeting him, there was no guarantee there wouldn't be another assassination attempt once he left the mountain.

Nevertheless, it was like how the saying went, "Thieves can rob others for a thousand days, but you can't stay at home and guard against them for a thousand days."

Trouble had found its way to Chu Liang, and he couldn't keep avoiding it. All he could do was prepare himself to face it.

After returning to Silver Sword Peak and picking up the Golden-Furred Hou, Chu Liang set off for the Tree Demon Mountain.

...

Despite being a demon clan, the Tree Demon Clan had always been loving and peaceful. They had long life spans, and their good relationship with humans stemmed as far back as the era of the demon gods. Some time after that era, the Tree Demon Clan settled in the Tree Demon Mountain and ceased all relations with the other demon clans. Instead, the Tree Demon Clan got quite close with the nearby Mount Shu Sect.

Chu Liang urged the Hou to speed up, and they arrived at the destination soon after.

The Tree Demon Mountain was vast, with towering mountains and a deep valley. It was filled with verdant pines and ancient trees, presenting a lush, deep green when viewed from above.

However, Chu Liang saw an astonishing scene amid the green mountains. A raging fire was blazing out from the depths of the valley and spreading outward!

Is this the reason the Tree Demon Clan requested for help?

Upon seeing the gravity of the situation, Chu Liang hurriedly pressed the Hou's head down.

At the next moment, they landed at the mouth of the valley like a gust of golden wind. However, all Chu Liang saw around him were trees; there were no people.

What's going on? Where is the legendary Tree Demon Clan?

Chu Liang was not familiar with the Tree Demon Clan, and there were no buildings in the mountains to indicate where the clan members were living. He had no idea where exactly they were situated on the mountain.

As he was contemplating what to do, Chu Liang heard the voice of an old man ask him, "Are you the young hero from the Mount Shu Sect?"

Chu Liang was startled by the voice. He sensed a rise in demonic qi, and figures appeared around him one by one.

The lofty ancient trees surrounding him suddenly emitted a bright radiance and turned into green figures! One, two... In total, two hundred green figures had appeared!

It turned out that the Tree Demon Clan lived in the mountains in their tree form. Chu Liang thought about it and realized that made sense.

The first person that appeared earlier was an old man with the air of a dignified elder and a long fluttering beard. He seemed to have a high cultivation level.

Chu Liang turned to greet him. "I'm Chu Liang, a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect."

"Young hero Chu, thank you for coming," the old man said. "I am an elder of the Tree Demon clan. You may call me Qinghuai[1]."

"Elder Qinghuai," Chu Liang replied, greeting the elder with a bow. Then he asked, "What has happened to the Tree Demon Clan? What is the cause of this wildfire?"

"Haaa..." Elder Qinghuai sighed. He explained, "One day, a ball of fire shot over from the west and suddenly landed on our Tree Demon Mountain. After that, this raging wildfire came into existence. We don't know what happened exactly. We tried to extinguish the fire with spells from a distance, but we couldn't put it out no matter what we did. Several warriors from our clan went further in to investigate, but none of them returned..."

Chu Liang frowned. "Oh?"

"We have powerful people in our clan, but this wildfire limits us severely. In the face of the fire, we become so weak that we may not even be able to use thirty percent of our power. That's why we turned to the Mount Shu Sect for help," Elder Qinghuai continued. "All we need is for you to go further inside and investigate to see what happened. Then we can prepare our next steps. Tree Demon Mountain is where our ancestors lived. If it is destroyed by this fire, we will be homeless!"

"Elder, don't worry," Chu Liang said. "I'll go in right now and investigate."

Chapter 190: If I Said I Was Just Passing By, Would You All Believe Me

For many years, the Tree Demon Clan has been passing on its legacy in this area. They were not a weak clan.

While most Tree Demons were typically between the cultivation levels of the first and third realms, there were also stronger individuals at the fourth and fifth realms.

However, among the five elements, fire was overpowering to wood. The raging fire posed a significant threat to their clan members and they had no choice but to ask for assistance.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang felt hesitant to venture into the forest fire.

None of the Tree Demons who entered the forest had returned. The dangers within the forest were entirely unknown. While he wouldn't have to worry about fire weakening him as it would the Tree Demons, there was still a chance that the entities inside the forest were much stronger.

After a moment of contemplation, Chu Liang decided to use the strand of golden hair.

Such an item was most suitable for exploring unfamiliar and perilous territories.

He asked the Golden-Furred Hou to stand guard beside him as he sat cross-legged on the ground. Then, as he activated the Golden Hair Strand, the clone appeared in the center.

The clone had no enchanted tools; instead, it wore a Flying-Sword Bracelet specially crafted by the Mount Shu Sect. This ensured that even in case of loss, he wouldn't feel any pain.

As for the Golden-Furred Hou, Chu Liang had no intention of bringing it along inside the forest. Instead of having the fifth-realm spirit beast protect his clone, Chu Liang chose to keep it here to safeguard his actual body.

When Elder Qinghuai saw this, he immediately praised, "Wow! What an amazing divine technique! With this clone, you can explore with peace of mind."

Chu Liang instructed, "Please take care of my body. I will be right back."

"Young Hero, please don't worry!" Elder Qinghuai said.

As he raised his hand, countless vines immediately sprang up from all around, quickly intertwining to form a dense cluster resembling a treehouse.

The treehouse shielded both Chu Liang's body and the Golden-Furred Hou beside him from all sides.

"As long as I am alive, no one will touch your body." Elder Qinghuai declared solemnly.

"Thank you." Chu Liang said with a nod.

"Young Hero, there's no need to thank me. You are doing the Tree Demon Clan a huge favor!" Elder Qinghuai exclaimed.

Without saying anything, Chu Liang smiled. Then, he turned around and stepped into the sea of fire.

Flames billowed!

Just as his figure soared to the outer perimeter of the fire scene, he felt an incredibly intense wave of heat rushing toward him. Even without getting close, just the scorching temperature was unbearable for an ordinary person.

These flames were definitely not ordinary!

Chu Liang immediately activated the circulation of his foundational qi to protect his body. Only then could he venture deep into the sea of fire and proceed forward.

Under such intense heat, his foundational qi continuously evaporated, depleting rapidly. For an ordinary cultivator at the Golden Core Realm, they might not have been able to endure for long. Just staying here for a short moment would have depleted most of their foundational qi. If they were to encounter danger, the situation would be very dire.

With the replenishment of two ultimate-tier Golden Cores, Chu Liang could easily restore the foundational qi consumed at this level. He could maintain his peak cultivation to handle any potential dangers that might arise.

This highlighted the significance of recovery speed.

After searching all the way, Chu Liang soon arrived at the depths of the valley. Many charred bodies lay around. Dead wild beasts scattered all around the mountains, their limbs broken and incomplete, indicating that they were not killed by fire.

Chu Liang proceeded cautiously.

The trees in this area lay charred, reduced to mere skeletons of their former selves. Yet, the flames that ravaged them held an ominous aura, stubbornly clinging to rocks, cliffs, and even skeletal remains.

It was no wonder the Tree Demons were so afraid. Ordinary fire might not have caused them much harm. But just the touch of this type of unknown fire would result in death.

Hiss...

Chu Liang was soaring through the air when he suddenly felt a chilling sensation amidst the intense heat, sending a shiver down his spine.

The feeling of imminent danger struck him, and instinctively, he sprang away from his current position. In the blink of an eye, he beheld a colossal fireball hurtling down from above, its descent accompanied by a thunderous boom as it exploded upon impact with the ground.

Boom! Rumble!

It was as if a raging sea of flames rippled outwards in all directions.

Caught in the ferocious shockwave, Chu Liang was flung several zhang away. Despite hastily searching with his divine sense, he found no trace of the enemy's presence.

Chu Liang moved with the momentum of the shockwave propelling him and pretended to collide against the side of a nearby rock wall, falling onto his back.

He closed his eyes and laid perfectly motionless, pretending that he had died.

Chu Liang speculated that since all the bodies he had seen earlier were mutilated, the enemy in hiding might prefer to torture and kill its prey using its teeth. He reasoned that if he were to pretend that he had lost the ability to fight back, it might lure the enemy out of hiding.

As long as it revealed itself, Chu Liang would have achieved his goal. After all, he had ventured into this place solely to investigate what had happened inside. He had no obligation to resolve the matter further.

For a moment, silence engulfed the surroundings, broken only by the loud crackling of the fire.

Suddenly and silently, a flat and elongated head covered in red scales emerged from behind the nearby rock wall. Despite its entire body being engulfed in flames, its crimson-gold vertical pupils radiated a chilling coldness.

Then, the creature's torso undulated out, revealing a pair of grotesque red-flesh wings, fully exposed before Chu Liang.

It was none other than a large winged python covered in red scales! Its massive body stretched over ten zhang long!

"Winged Fire Python!"

Chu Liang recognized it at first glance. It was a Winged Fire Python! An extremely ferocious spirit beast!

According to legends, there was a Winged Fire Python with eight wings, a mystical beast at the eighth realm of cultivation known as the Heavenly Origin Realm. This creature wreaked havoc and caused immense slaughter. If it were to grow another pair of wings, it would ascend to become a snake god at the ninth realm, known as the Profound Realm!

Fortunately, the immortal sects worked together to eliminate this threat.

Although remnants of the Winged Fire Python still existed in the mortal realm, they were unable to thrive. They inhabited the western areas of the Evil Demon Mountain and dared not disrupt the human lands.

How did this Winged Fire Python come here? Although it wasn't fully mature, it was a spirit beast at the fifth realm!

I can't beat it!

Chu Liang immediately made up his mind.

With a clang, his flying sword soared, its sword energy lingering as he himself flew out!

Although he was in the cloned body, he could feel every sensation. With no intention of dying, he promptly took control of his sword and fled!

Hiss...

A trace of coldness flickered in the vertical pupils of the Winged Fire Python as it abruptly spread its pair of flesh wings.

Boom!

The massive creature soared into the air, transforming into a winged dragon in an instant, engulfed in flames, and fiercely pursued Chu Liang!

It wasn't hunting for food. Its cruel and ferocious nature drove it to instinctively rend all living creatures asunder!

Chu Liang focused and manipulated his flying sword to its fullest extent, deftly navigating around the mountain walls twice!

Crash!

The Winged Fire Python persisted in its pursuit until it realized that its body was trapped and coiled around a massive and thick pillar.

Hiss!

Feeling a surge of embarrassment, the Winged Fire Python grew furious. As It struggled violently, its massive body inadvertently crushed the pillar into pieces.

In the meantime, Chu Liang had escaped the sea of fire!

Since Chu Liang had formed the two ultimate-tier Golden Cores, it was his first time manipulating the sword to fly at full speed. All he felt was the rush of wind and sparks, with the constant risk of losing control looming over him!

If it wasn't because of his prior rigorous training in fine control, he might have crashed and fallen off his flying sword.

The speed propelled by the two Golden Cores was terrifyingly fast!

Whoosh!

The sword light disappeared in an instant, returning to the forest where it had just been.

After he landed, he caught his breath and was just about to explain to the Tree Demon Clan what he had discovered inside when he felt another bone-chilling sensation.

Suddenly, he felt this murderous aura!

The Winged Fire Python caught up? It can't be! This was Chu Liang's first thought.

But the attack came several times faster than the Winged Fire Python, and Chu Liang couldn't dodge at all. As he turned around, he saw darkness slashing at him!

Swoosh!

Blood splashed, and his head and body separated, lying in different places.

Where the darkness emanated from revealed the presence of a masked blade wielder with a crow perched on his shoulder.

"If you are not dead yet this time..." the Dual Wielder muttered coldly.

Simultaneously, he raised his hand and summoned a black banner, which he then aggressively planted into the ground.

Bang!

It was the Soul-Suppressing Banner!

If the soul left the body, it would have been caught by this banner and be trapped there.

However, the banner showed no movement even after several moments had passed.

"What's going on?" The Dual Wielder frowned and said, "Why have I never been able to actually kill him? Why?"

"Maybe it's just because you are very unlucky?" A voice nearby sounded. Chu Liang's figure was seen walking over from the other side.

Another one? How many more times do I have to do this? The Dual Wielder thought to himself.

The Dual Wielder glared at Chu Liang, who appeared suddenly. He didn't utter a single word but simply tightened his grip on the blades, exuding a display of murderous aura.

However, at the very next second, his murderous aura vanished.

As the surrounding light flickered and the aura of demons intensified, towering ancient trees began to morph into humanoid forms. One, two, three... more than two hundred members of the Tree Demon clan assumed human shapes.

The Dual Wielder found himself right at the center, surrounded by them.

There were over two hundred pairs of eyes staring at him.

A drop of cold sweat slowly trickled down his forehead.

In his thirty years as an assassin, it was probably the first time he had encountered such a situation.

He had thought he had stealthily killed someone, only to turn around and discover himself suddenly encircled by a multitude of individuals.

It felt really awkward.

However, he was an experienced assassin. At this moment, he displayed no signs of panic. In contrast, when confronted by the gaze of over two hundred pairs of eyes, he spoke a sentence with cold determination.

"If I said I was just passing by, would you all believe me?"