

M. Slaying 211

Chapter 211: The Vendor

Misty Waters City had a curfew. Once the night fell, people were not allowed to walk about freely in the streets and markets. The only exception was Chunlai[1] Lane. The whole lane was filled with brothels and other similar establishments, so it was known as a red-light district.

Speaking of which, it appeared that every city had its own red-light district, and Chu Liang had visited the red-light district of every city he'd been to, which was rather odd...

"I have transcended such vulgar interests. You don't have to look at me with that expression," Chu Liang said helplessly.

Lin Bei and Shang Ziliang had been looking at Chu Liang with a very amazed expression ever since he inquired about the location of the red-light district and made his way there. It was an expression that seemed to say... I didn't expect that you, with your prim and proper appearance, would be this sort of person.

"Ah, true, true." Shang Ziliang nodded repeatedly. "We may be visiting brothels, but we must do so with a critical eye."

Lin Bei nodded as well and chimed in, "That's right. The whole street here is filled with pitiful poverty-stricken women that don't have enough clothes to cover their bodies. What's wrong with us spending money to help them?!"

"..." Chu Liang was rendered speechless for a moment.

Then he quickly said, "We're here on official business, so put away your lecherous faces."

After that, Chu Liang entered the largest brothel.

There were very few people out at night due to the recent bizarre incidents of people being found dead with their hearts gouged out. Consequently, the brothel was quite empty of customers. So, when the beautiful young women standing by the brothel's entrance saw the three young men, they greeted the men warmly and welcomed them inside.

Chu Liang hurriedly waved his hand to refuse their services. He instead found a table and ordered a fruit platter and some snacks. The three of them just sat at the table for the time being.

Once things got quiet at the table, Lin Bei said, "You're the one who speaks the most virtuously, yet you were the one who entered the fastest. I usually hesitate before going to a brothel, afraid of being seen by someone I know. But you don't seem bothered by that at all."

"It's my first time at a brothel. My father never lets me come to places like this." Shang Ziliang's eyes were bright with excitement as he looked around. "Big Bro, I'll follow you for the rest of my life!"

"Let's not talk about that for now." Chu Liang lowered his voice and beckoned his two companions to lean toward him. "I'm here to investigate a diabolical cultivator."

"Oh, you don't need to pretend. It's just us here after all," Lin Bei commented with a smirk.

"I went through all the casefiles this afternoon, and I found that although the victims had been found in various parts of the city, all of them had been killed at around midnight. Misty Waters City is under curfew at this time, so it's unusual for people to be wandering outside," Chu Liang explained. "Those that roam around outside alone at that time of night are most likely people of a certain class."

Lin Bei immediately added, "Literati! Men of culture!"

Chu Liang continued, "That's right. Moreover, the brothels here charge extra for overnight stays, but most people wouldn't need to stay here for such a long time..."

"If it were me, I definitely wouldn't die since I'd stay here until dawn," Lin Bei muttered.

"Me too," Shang Ziliang chimed in quickly.

"Haaa..." Chu Liang let out a soft sigh, interrupting their digression.

Shang Ziliang promptly resumed his previous train of thought and asked, "So, does that mean they go home at night?"

"Yes. There are soldiers patrolling during curfew, but experienced literati can usually evade them. Earlier, I asked the soldiers guarding the city gates about it. Even if the literati get caught, they'll just get let off with a fine as long as they haven't committed a crime," Chu Liang said. "This makes the literati perfect targets for the diabolical cultivator."

"That damn diabolical cultivator!" Lin Bei exclaimed angrily, showing a deep sense of empathy for the literati.

"He's targeting literati that are on their way home, so he definitely won't be surveying the whole city looking for them. That's why the red-light district must be his starting point," Chu Liang said quietly. "He may even be doing the same thing as us, waiting here until nightfall."

Hearing that, Lin Bei and Shang Ziliang suddenly tensed up, and their breathing became heavy.

...

Li Si was standing in the middle of the street at his stall, selling beef offal. He tended to the boiling pot of the offal in front of him.

Li Si was short, thin, and seemingly weak. Passersby paid no attention to him. Nor did they notice the murderous glint in his eyes.

Business was unexpectedly good today. There were fewer people visiting the red-light district, but the number of vendors that dared to set up stalls had also decreased drastically, so Li Si's stall was the only one in the area.

No one could have imagined that such a seemingly honest and hardworking street vendor would turn actually be a heart-gouging fiend that had killed seven people.

Even Li Si himself couldn't have imagined it.

For the past thirty years, Li Si had lived a simple life. He had a small house that wasn't very sturdy, and he lived in it with his rough and ferocious wife. Every evening, he would push a cart into the city and sell snacks in the red-light district. Then he would hurry home at dawn and sleep during the daytime.

His heart had remained unmoved even as he watched extravagant customers visit the brothels every day. Li Si had felt that he was living in a totally different world from the finely dressed noblemen and the beautifully dressed women, who looked like blossoming flowers swaying in the breeze. They had been so close yet so far.

Li Si's feelings had stayed the same until one day ten years ago.

That day, a thunderstorm ran rampant in the sky, which had turned black like ink. On his way home, Li Si pushed his little cart into a cave to seek shelter from the storm. However, he accidentally fell into a large river.

It wasn't the first time he had sought shelter in this cave, but he hadn't known there was such a dark and cold river in it. Li Si was swept along by the currents of the river, and when he was finally able to climb ashore, he found himself in a strange place.

It was dark, cold, and empty. Bones were scattered everywhere, making it seem like the netherworld.

This was where Li Si found a book, which surprisingly contained information on cultivation. It was for a cultivation technique! Moreover, the technique didn't require the cultivator to have a high level of aptitude for cultivating; anyone could use this technique.

Li Si couldn't believe that he was this lucky. Was the heavens trying to save this insignificant life of his?

However, the cultivation technique was an extremely evil one. The first step was to kill a person.

Li Si's heart pounded as he read the book. He realized that this was probably the rumored diabolical cultivation technique. He couldn't let anyone else find out about it.

When Li Si stopped reading and raised his head, he realized that the thunderstorm had ceased. Furthermore, there was no sign of a river anywhere. He was in a graveyard on a barren mountain.

Everything else had changed, but the book was still in his hands.

When Li Si returned home, his wife hit and scolded him for losing the cart. Li Si was enraged, and a viciousness rose from the depths of his heart. He killed his wife straightaway, using her as a stepping stone for his cultivation.

Thus, Li Si embarked on the path of cultivation. The diabolical cultivation technique allowed him to advance very quickly. Furthermore, he didn't need to acquire any resources to advance; he just needed to keep murdering more people. During this process, Li Si's mind became increasingly twisted.

Li Si had rarely ever gotten angry during the last few decades. Yet, had been filled with hatred ever since he began cultivating this diabolical technique. He hated his ugly wife, high-ranking officials, literati, beautiful women, his low status... However, this hatred might not have been caused by the technique; it might have stemmed from the seed of hatred that had already been growing in his mind. Li Si hadn't even realized that he hated these bright and beautiful people so immensely.

Now, he had power as well as fury.

It had taken him ten years to get to the Core Formation stage. During those ten years, he had killed continuously, taking the lives of many. He'd committed all those murders in the village beside the city and left long intervals between the murders. That had allowed him to escape getting caught despite all those mysterious deaths. In fact, his existence hadn't even been discovered yet.

Li Si derived a great sense of pleasure from committing this ongoing massacre.

Nevertheless, the massacre did arouse some suspicion. Many people moved away from the village where Li Si resided, and those who remained didn't dare venture out alone.

Li Si needed to kill more people to form his core, so he decided to choose his victims from the city, targeting the people he had always loathed.

He had managed to stay undiscovered by being careful and discreet with his murders. Nonetheless, without a storage enchanted tool, the best Li Si could do was preserve the hearts he had extracted like he preserved pork. They couldn't be kept for very long before they went bad.

Li Si needed to speed things up. He still needed to kill two more people—just two more and he would have an opportunity to form his core. Then he would be able to leave Misty Waters City and venture into the world.

His gaze turned dark and icy as he stared straight ahead at two people. One was a wealthy big-bellied man, and the other was his servant, who wore green clothes and a small hat. The servant was driving a carriage, taking his master out of the red-light district.

Li Si thought, Once I'm done with these two, I can stop.

Chapter 212: I admit that I was somewhat disrespectful (I)

"Hey, you three. Even though our business isn't great today, this isn't a hangout spot. You've been here a while now, not ordering drinks or requesting for the ladies. Are you treating this place like a teahouse?"

The middle-aged woman, wearing heavy makeup, approached them with a look of dissatisfaction. She was likely the parlor manager.

The three young men were dressed nicely, giving the impression that they were from wealthy families. However, they had been sitting here for quite some time without ordering any drinks or requesting the company of girls.

They didn't seem like paying customers at all, so the parlor manager approached them with the intention of urging them to leave.

In a brothel like this, idle guests were not welcomed. It was only because business was slow today that they had tolerated their presence for so long.

"You don't like that we aren't spending any money, right?" Chu Liang lifted his gaze, looking at her calmly.

And he then spoke slowly, enunciating each word: "Bring us a fruit platter."

Pfft.

Upon hearing this, Lin Bei and Shang Ziliang couldn't help but smile awkwardly.

"Bro! The fruit platter is the cheapest item on the menu. Yet, you're ordering it with such arrogance and aloofness."

Shang Ziliang whispered, "Big Bro, why don't we request the company of a few good girls, or at least order some drinks and snacks? My treat."

Despite having his sword coins deducted, he remained a second-generation rich kid with plenty of gold and silver.

Chu Liang was about to say something when he felt the Crimson Executioner within the White Pagoda starting to vibrate.

His relaxed gaze instantly sharpened as he glanced toward the door.

A carriage was slowly passing by outside, trailed by a vendor pushing a cart home. The vendor looked inconspicuous. Both the carriage and the cart passed in front of the brothel in succession.

How could a mere vendor exude the blood-stained aura capable of stirring the Crimson Executioner?

It wasn't easy to provoke the Crimson Executioner's wrath. Chu Liang had estimated earlier that it would take at least twenty or more innocent lives to accumulate the necessary blood-stained aura to incite it.

"Something's wrong," Chu Liang whispered. "Lin Bei, come with me quietly."

"Shang, stay here and keep an eye on the surroundings in the red-light district," Chu Liang said in a low voice before immediately rising to his feet and heading outside.

Upon hearing these words, Shang Ziliang suddenly snapped to attention, sitting up straight.

It was Lin Bei who patted him on his shoulder, reassuring him, "Don't worry. Even if the sky falls, Chu Liang and I will hold it up. Just keep calm and pay attention to the surroundings."

He exuded the demeanor of a protective older brother.

Chu Liang stepped outside and followed the vendor closely.

As he felt worried that the vendor might catch on, he avoided using his divine sense to observe and refrained from staring for too long. Instead, he walked casually, occasionally glancing in the vendor's direction.

Some cultivators were highly sensitive to being observed through divine senses. If someone spied on them for too long without them knowing, they would eventually be aware of it.

After some time, Chu Liang noticed that the vendor was indeed following the carriage. Upon realization, Chu Liang shifted his focus away from the vendor and began to follow the carriage.

Meanwhile, Lin Bei followed Chu Liang from a distance. He was ready to provide support whenever needed, awaiting only a signal from Chu Liang.

The carriage continued out of the red-light district and turned onto quieter streets. Eventually, they were enveloped by silence, with no one else in sight. The vendor disappeared as well..

However, Chu Liang, who had been trailing them all along, knew that the vendor was lurking in the darkness, waiting for the opportune moment to strike.

He was eighty or ninety percent sure that this vendor was a cultivator from the diabolical sect.

Chu Liang had no intention of waiting any longer. Even if the vendor wasn't the actual heart-extracting murderer, he was definitely up to no good. Fighting him here wouldn't alert anyone in the red-light district.

Almost at the same moment he decided to make his move, the vendor also made a move!

Like a black arrow, he lunged out of the darkness and swiftly leaped onto the carriage, his movements light as if he were a large gecko clinging to the top.

He was very careful, revealing only a hint of foundational qi fluctuations, barely detectable by anyone.

If it weren't for Chu Liang spotting him, the two people on the carriage would have been dead today!

As the vendor was about to strike, Chu Liang's attack shot out from the darkness.

Swoosh—

A silent streak of green light traced an unpredictable path and landed behind the target.

Sizzle—

It was the Razor Leaf!

Of all Chu Liang's divine skills, this one was the most covert and ideal for launching a surprise attack.

The reason he didn't use the Crimson Executioner to take the life of the vendor immediately was because its power was too great. Not only could it have killed the diabolical cultivator, but it could have also harmed the civilians nearby. Additionally, there was a high probability that the force would damage the items this vendor carried.

Moreover, when conditions permitted, capturing alive was a better choice than direct killing, as it allowed for a better understanding of the situation.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

The vendor who had just been crouching on the carriage let out a miserable cry as he was deeply slashed from behind. Only then did he notice Chu Liang's figure behind him and attempted to flee by flipping over!

At this point, he didn't care about revealing fluctuations of his foundational qi as he leaped up and attempted to escape by flying away!

Obviously, Chu Liang couldn't let him get away. He called the Razor Leaf back only to hurl it away again.

Suddenly, the Razor Leaf transformed into a ferocious green snake in mid-air!

He activated the movement-restricting inscription!

Hiss~

The green snake opened its enormous mouth, its fangs biting into the vendor's neck. Blood spurted out! If he hadn't blocked the attack with his arms, that bite would have surely bitten off his head!

But now, he found himself trapped between the jaws of the green snake, unable to move at all.

Chu Liang dashed to his side. Upon sensing the vendor's aura, he knew that the vendor was indeed at the peak of the third realm.

This vendor was clearly the serial killer!

He was an unconventional cultivator who wasn't considered strong, making him an easy target for Chu Liang even at his current level.

But even as an unconventional cultivator, he possessed the ability to easily slaughter mortals. What would this world become if it lost its protectors? It was simply unimaginable.

...

Yang Yuhu sat on a pavilion facing the street, releasing white spots of light from his hand. They drifted and spread throughout the city as he sat quietly, deeply immersed in his sensing.

This was the Mirage Flutterbug, a type of insect native to Penglai's territory. This Mirage Flutterbug could sense every subtle fluctuation of foundational qi.

During the day, Yang Yuhu visited all the crime scenes, capturing traces of the culprit's foundational qi. If the culprit were to use their divine skill, regardless of how subtle the fluctuation of their foundational qi, Yang Yuhu would be able to sense it.

He sat quietly on the pavilion, calm and composed. When the moon reached its zenith, he suddenly opened his eyes!

There it is!

His figure flickered, like a white light, and in an instant, he had already crossed half the city!

He was as swift as lightning!

Despite moving swiftly, when he arrived, all he saw was Chu Liang restraining the diabolical cultivator with the Razor Leaf, which was in the form of a green snake.

What?

Yang Yuhu was taken aback and filled with suspicion. How did this disciple from Mount Shu arrive faster than him?

How did he do it?

The shock only lasted for a moment when another change suddenly occurred.

A shadowy figure swept by like a gust of wind, arriving next to the vendor.

With a quick strike of their palm, they pushed the green snake back, carried the vendor, and swiftly departed!

Chapter 213: I admit that I was somewhat disrespectful (II)

Someone came to rescue the vendor!

"Who is it?" Chu Liang shouted.

He quickly stowed away the green leaf enchanted tool and went after the shadowy figure.

Once more, moving with the swiftness of a gust of wind, the shadowy figure turned and unleashed several black starlights. Immediately, Chu Liang opened the green leaf umbrella and successfully deflected all of the attacks.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The black starlights exploded in the air, morphing into a sudden shower of black blood. Upon hitting the ground, they emitted a distinct hissing sound. As they struck the wall, they left behind minuscule black holes.

The horse, left unshielded, was splattered, causing it to instantly go into a frenzy, galloping forward uncontrollably.

In the next moment, bloody wounds filled with pus began to form all over half of its body and it died!

Such vicious methods!

Could this person be a high-level member of the Soul Destroyer Sect, coming to rescue their disciple?

Chu Liang had no time to put the green leaf umbrella away as he swiftly pursued the shadowy figure!

Yang Yuhu followed suit, chasing after the gust of black wind straight into the sky, leaving a trailing white afterimage.

Both of them knew that if they had allowed this diabolical cultivator to escape, innocent civilians were bound to suffer! They needed to keep this diabolical cultivator inside the Misty Waters City!

The cultivation level of the shadowy figure was higher. However, as long as they could maintain this pursuit, they would buy enough time for the city supervisor and the powerful soldiers from outside the city to arrive and provide support.

The wind howled, and in the blink of an eye, three beams of light flew out of the city.

Lin Bei attempted to catch up, but right from the start, he fell behind by about a hundred zhang.

He then paused for a moment and stopped. He simply turned around and headed towards the city supervisor's office.

Considering that the city supervisor would have already sensed the fluctuations of foundational qi in the city and would be heading towards the fluctuation of qi, Lin Bei decided that he would head back and be the guide.

By doing so, they would at least save some time.

...

Whoosh! Whoosh!

The black wind howled as it rushed out of the city.

Yang Yuhu embodying the white light followed closely, while Chu Liang's sword aura continuously trailed behind.

In the blink of an eye, all of them had moved a hundred li.

When the shadowy figure, moving with the swiftness of the wind, realized they couldn't shake off their pursuers and that the men of Misty Waters City would soon arrive, they turned back and hovered in mid-air.

This gust of black wind was really a middle-aged man with a broad face and some beard. His gaze looked cold and sinister. As soon as he stopped, he raised his hand!

Yang Yuhu was swiftly chasing, but he quickly stopped in his tracks, making a sharp sound in the air.

Swoosh—

The middle-aged man lifted the vendor with his left hand and conjured a bone pike out of thin air, which he hurled towards Yang Yuhu with his right hand.

The spear approached in an instant, creating this sonic boom. Yet, Yang Yuhu remained fearless in the face of danger. With hands forming seals, a stream of qi surged out from behind him, abruptly transforming into a dense fog tiger head. With jaws wide open, it engulfed the bone pike!

Screech!

The tiger head swallowed the spear with a screeching sound. It wasn't at a disadvantage at all!

There was something extraordinary about this fog. Instead of dissipating after swallowing the spear, it materialized into something harder than gold or iron. It actually displayed the immense strength of a true dragon and tiger.

"Immortal Fog of Mirage Mountain! You are from the Penglai Supreme Sect!" exclaimed the middle-aged man.

But in this brief pause, Chu Liang's sword energy had already arrived.

Upon seeing this, the middle-aged man grimaced. He realized that unless he dealt with these two individuals, he would not be able to escape today. He couldn't care less about which immortal sects these disciples belonged to! He simply knew that he must act decisively!

His right hand trembled, and the veins on his wrist ruptured, causing a splatter of bloody mist.

"Roar—"

A black dragon emerged from the bloody mist and charged forward, smashing the white tiger immortal mist with a single strike!

Boom—

Yang Yuhu, sensing the danger, swiftly dropped to the ground, evading the black dragon's subsequent attack. However, hundreds of bone spears immediately shot up from beneath his feet!

The bone spears gleamed with a white-golden light so bright that it seemed as though the edges were imbued with invincibility.

"Hah!" Yang Yuhu shouted, his fingers swiftly forming a series of hand seals. Suddenly, two black vines shot out from under his feet, wrapping around his body and forming an armor of vines.

Clang clang clang—

The sharp bones stabbed against the vine armor but were blocked from penetrating deeper. Yet, the heavy impact still caused Yang Yuhu's qi and blood to surge violently.

Just then, the black dragon above his head transformed, bursting into flames and morphing into a dark green fire dragon!

Boom—

While the vine armor was impervious to sharpness, it was particularly vulnerable to fire. The middle-aged man's cultivation level surpassed that of Yang Yuhu, and his divine abilities were equally formidable. It was evident that he intended to exploit this vulnerability by using the fire dragon to break through Yang Yuhu's vine armor!

In the brief span of a finger snap, both sides had already engaged in several rounds of divine techniques. At the critical moment when Yang Yuhu was in imminent danger, Chu Liang sprang into action!

He employed no flashy divine techniques. With a simple lift of his hand, he unleashed a Talismanic Sword Seal of five wind characters and five lightning characters! However, he used the Crimson Executioner!

Rumble~

The blood-stained aura emanating from the middle-aged man was even stronger than that of the diabolical cultivator at the third realm, intensifying the rage of the Crimson Executioner even more fiercely.

"Roar—"

The ten-character talismanic seal, unleashed at random, intertwined, giving rise to a violent storm of sword qi that swept through the surroundings.

The middle-aged man was shocked beyond measure at the sight, utterly bewildered as to how a disciple who seemed to be only at the beginning stage of the fourth realm could unleash such a powerful sword strike!

Whose disciple was this?

In the moment of life or death, with no time to ponder further, the whites of his eyes turned bloodshot, reddening with intensity. With a loud shout, he exclaimed, "Ahhhh!"

Boom—

The storm of sword qi instantly engulfed his figure, finally subsiding after a long while.

Simultaneously, the fire dragon and bone spears he had summoned disappeared. Yang Yuhu broke free and landed, but he didn't relax; instead, he looked up and shouted to Chu Liang, "Be careful! It's the Sacrificial Substitute!"

Hearing this, Chu Liang was just about to be on guard when a roaring sound came from above.

Suddenly, the sky darkened, as if a giant, overturned pot had slammed down on them!

Boom—

This was the immortal art known as the Sacrificial Substitute.

It could have been cast in moments of crisis, causing other living beings to die in one's place. However, those living beings had to have been previously prepared through ritual sacrifice. Those who practiced the Sacrificial Substitute must have carried several substitutes with them.

Chu Liang had used the Crimson Executioner sword so many times, but this was the first time someone had escaped.

But thinking back to when he had used the Crimson Executioner sword to kill experts at the fifth and sixth realms across borders before, he had mostly succeeded by catching them off guard with sudden attacks.

When cultivators of this level were on guard during a fight, even if your sword qi was powerful, the attack might never hit the target.

...

Snap.

In the darkness, a speck of white light sparked to life, casting illumination across the entire space.

If one were to look from outside, they would see a black iron alms bowl, the size of a house, overturned on the ground, trapping both Chu Liang and Yang Yuhu underneath.

The middle-aged man, likely startled by the power unleashed by Chu Liang's Crimson Executioner, feared a direct confrontation. In his apprehension, he abandoned his enchanted artifact and fled.

He fled, but ended up trapping both of them under a massive alms bowl.

Chu Liang stared at Yang Yuhu, uncertain of what to say.

Yang Yuhu stared at Chu Liang and felt really awkward.

Due to Di Nufeng, he had spoken words of hostility toward the disciples of Mount Shu. However, Chu Liang's intervention in the earlier fight, freeing him from the predicament, made him reconsider his previous stance.

In addition, the power that his sword unleashed was too terrifying.

If the diabolical cultivator hadn't mastered the immortal art Sacrificial Substitute, he would not have escaped the fate of being instantly killed.

Was this truly the power that a cultivator at the beginning stage of the Golden Core Realm could display?

It was utterly beyond belief.

As Yang Yuhu reflected on the words he had said, he couldn't help but feel embarrassed.

He even wondered if his elder brother, whom he had always looked up to as a god, could unleash a sword qi of this level when he was at the same age as Chu Liang.

After a prolonged silence, it was Yang Yuhu who finally spoke up.

He hesitated for a moment before speaking slowly, "I admit that I was somewhat disrespectful..."

Chapter 214: Keep it Up! Little Maggot!

Chu Liang and Yang Yuhu found themselves trapped within the dim, enclosed space.

An awkward tension hung heavy in the air.

When Yang Yuhu suddenly broke the silence, Chu Liang chose not to pursue the matter further. He chuckled softly and remarked, "No harm done."

Those who had encountered Di Nufeng couldn't be blamed for holding a negative impression of Mount Shu's disciples.

"If it weren't for your help, I would have been in trouble." Yang Yuhu said.

As the core disciple of the Penglai Supreme Sect, he wouldn't have been instantly killed by that fire dragon.

However, he would have no choice but to use some of his life-saving trump cards, which would be rather troublesome.

Thankfully, Chu Liang saved him from the predicament.

Chu Liang smiled and said, "We are all here to eradicate evil and uphold justice. It is our duty."

They stayed there for a while. When their qi had been restored, they stood up and started scrutinizing this black iron alms bowl.

Yang Yuhu drew his sword and thrust forward, causing the sword to radiate brightly. Yet, there was not even a scratch on the iron wall.

"It's really hard," he said with a frown.

Chu Liang thrust his sword to the ground to test if it was possible for him to dig out from below. Nevertheless, it was useless.

Clang! The Dustless Sword only managed to scratch the surface of the ground.

The black iron alms bowl had likely entrapped them beneath its surface through the enchanted formation of suppression carved upon it, ensuring that its effects would be triggered wherever the alms bowl was pressed. Naturally, it wouldn't allow any possible escape routes. Any area underground would be influenced by these formation inscriptions, making it extremely hard to escape.

"It looks like we will need to wait for someone to rescue us." Yang Yuhu said, "The city supervisor and his men should arrive soon."

"Haven't you noticed the lack of ventilation here?" Chu Liang asked.

Upon realizing the issue, Yang Yuhu started panicking.

Only cultivators who had reached the seventh realm of cultivation could have the ability to create their own world, which meant that for cultivators below the level of seventh realm, they still needed breathe air to live.

Even if they could use some breath-holding divine skill, they would need to have stored enough air before they held their breath.

Normally, the amount of air that cultivators need to breathe would not be less than that of ordinary people, and it might even be several times more as cultivators' breaths were longer and more powerful, with a greater volume in each breath.

If Chu Liang were to fully activate his Golden Core, he would have easily inhaled all the air in this space with one gulp!

How much longer could they both breathe in such a small space?

Two hours? Or a mere one hour...

In addition, the strongest cultivator in the Misty Waters City was at the fifth realm and it remained uncertain as to whether they could flip this alms bowl over.

It was at this moment that they realized they were in the midst of a life-threatening crisis.

Yang Yuhu had just thought of it, but Chu Liang had noticed the problem long ago.

Even so, he remained calm.

"Do you have any ideas?" Yang Yuhu couldn't help but ask.

"Not yet," Chu Liang replied.

Then why are you so calm... Yang Yuhu thought to himself.

Yang Yuhu pondered for a moment when he suddenly said, "I have an idea."

"Oh?" Chu Liang glanced over at Yang Yuhu.

"I can use the immortal art Roaming the World to go back to Penglai and ask the elder of my sect to save us."

"That sounds great." Chu Liang nodded.

However, Yang Yuhu started hesitating.

This was because his body would be left defenseless here while he was performing Roaming the World.

Although Chu Liang had no reason to do anything to him, but...what if? After all, they were mere acquaintances who had met by chance. Could he really trust Chu Liang?

But these thoughts only lasted for a moment before he cast them aside.

This was their only means of survival. If not, would he passively wait here with Chu Liang, doing nothing?

In the end, Yang Yuhu decided to trust this disciple of Mount Shu Sect.

He sat cross-legged and started forming seals with both his hands. His soul instantly left his body in the form of an apparition and returned to the Penglai Supreme Sect in the East Sea.

...

Chu Liang gazed at Yang Yuhu, whose divine consciousness had ascended outside his body. He couldn't help but feel a surge of emotion as he pondered, Oh, how I wish I could master immortal arts as well.

If I had mastered the Dimension Compression immortal art, I would have been able to teleport away instead of enduring this suffering here.

The diabolical cultivator earlier had also relied on the immortal art Sacrificial Substitute to escape the fate of receiving that fatal attack.

I must study hard when I get back.

With its strong foundation, the Mount Shu Sect ranked top in the world of immortality cultivators for the amount of immortal arts saved in the sect.

Since he had ample resources at his disposal, there was no reason not to spend more time studying this.

Chu Liang lifted his hand and touched the iron wall on his side. Aside from being extremely hard, this wall displayed no other properties. There was only one enchanted formation of suppression carved on the alms bowl.

However, this enchanted formation was rather effective.

Eh?

He touched the surface twice and suddenly recalled something.

Inside the space of the White Pagoda, the little maggot with its very hard head was still hibernating. If he were to use it, would it be able to drill through this iron wall?

As Chu Liang thought of this, he stretched his hand out and summoned the little maggot.

Scratch.

Sitting on Chu Liang's palm, the little maggot stretched its body and shook its milk-white head. It seemed to have slept too much, appearing rather hazy.

Chu Liang stared at it for a long time. For some reason, he found this tiny creature slightly adorable.

The little maggot could burrow through anything, be it earth or sky, with ease. Yet, it remained remarkably well-behaved as it nestled in Chu Liang's palm, never attempting to drill through his palm.

Chu Liang couldn't help but wonder if this little maggot had already regarded him as its mom.

Chu Liang placed it gently on the iron wall of this huge alms bowl and softly uttered, "It's mealtime."

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

The little maggot wriggled in place for a moment, then promptly started to lower its head, its body undulating.

In the blink of an eye, half of its body had vanished into the iron wall, making the process seem as effortless as drilling through tofu.

It was just as I had expected!

The little maggot lived up to Chu Liang's expectations.

Furthermore, it appeared quite excited, its tiny body wriggling eagerly as it impatiently burrowed deeper, while golden threads flowed out in strands from its behind.

During this process of eating and excreting, its body also slowly grew larger.

It appeared that its size only increased when consuming materials imbued with spiritual energy.

It would have pained Chu Liang to feed it materials infused with spiritual energy if those materials belonged to him, which was why he had the little maggot hibernate for such a long time.

But this time, he would not only be able to feed his spirit pet but also free both him and Yang Yuhu from being trapped. It was truly killing two birds with one stone.

Go on, little maggot, keep eating!

...

To the east of Misty Waters City, beyond Black Whale Mountain, lay the vast ocean.

In the deeper regions of the East Sea lay the three islands of Penglai. Shrouded in mist and clouds, these islands were collectively regarded as the most blessed land in the mortal realm.

The Penglai Islands contained abundant spiritual qi, and the vast expanse of land gave birth to numerous treasures of nature that supported a large number of cultivators.

Back in ancient times, indigenous people living on various islands in the East Sea also discovered this place. Over time, more and more people started settling here.

Among these indigenous people, there were also cultivators. However, their cultivation practices were diverse and lacked a systematic approach.

During the chaotic era when the demon god wreaked havoc, a group of cultivators from the continent of the nine provinces sailed eastward to seek refuge. These cultivators discovered the mystical three islands of Penglai as well as the indigenous cultivators who resided there.

The indigenous cultivators welcomed them warmly, eager to learn powerful divine skills and techniques from the cultivators from the continent of the nine provinces.

Using some minor divine techniques and enchanted tools, the cultivators from the continent of the nine provinces managed to trade for highly valuable treasures of nature from the indigenous people.

They also grew fond of this land, deciding to stay and live here, integrating with the indigenous cultivators.

These cultivators from the continent of the nine provinces were small in number, but they were strong and ambitious.

Under the guise of teaching divine techniques and skills, they gathered everyone together and formed a huge sect called Penglai.

Penglai was divided into the Penglai Supreme Sect and the Penglai Secondary Sect.

The Supreme Sect held great power, residing atop the Mirage Tower Mountain, monopolizing the most privileged access to resources. The members of the Penglai Secondary Sect remained scattered across the territories of the three islands below Mirage Tower Mountain, under the command of the Supreme Sect.

The Penglai Supreme Sect was essentially dominated by cultivators from the nine provinces, while the numerous indigenous cultivators were mostly relegated to the Penglai Secondary Sect, losing their leadership over the three islands of Penglai.

During this period, some members of the Penglai Secondary Sect became aware of the situation and sought to unite all the indigenous cultivators to banish these outsiders, hoping to restore their idyllic way of life. However, at this point, the Penglai Supreme Sect had wielded enough power and ruthlessly dealt with the group of dissenters.

Since then, the fate of the supreme and secondary sects of Penglai were determined.

Several thousand years had gone by and only the Penglai Supreme Sect became known to the world.

Many people who inherited the legacy of the Penglai Secondary Sect were putting in their utmost effort to cultivate, hoping to stand out one day and earn a place to join the Penglai Supreme Sect.

Amidst the misty clouds, Mirage Tower Mountain stood tall and aloof, appearing both real and illusory. On its immensely towering and expansive peaks, countless splendid pavilions and palaces resembled a heavenly realm on earth.

Yang Yuhu's apparition appeared before a grand hall and he called out, "Esteemed teacher, save me!"

"Hmm?" A daoist with yellow whiskers in the grand hall opened his eyes.

From a young age, his hair had been different from others, appearing golden in color. And so, he called himself Daoist Huang Long[1]. He was also a respected elder of the Penglai Supreme Sect.

When he saw Yang Yuhu's apparition rushing over, Daoist Huang Long abruptly stood up and asked in a concerned tone, "What's wrong?"

"I was hunting diabolical cultivators in the Misty Waters City when a powerful cultivator appeared and trapped me in an enchanted tool. I will die of suffocation in 1 hour and 45 minutes!"

When the Daoist Huang Long heard this, his expression grew grim. With a wave of his sleeve, he asked, "Misty Waters City?"

He flipped his hand and held Yang Yuhu's apparition in his palm. Then, he leaped up and his body instantly transformed into a golden light!

He used the immortal art known as the Golden Path!

Of all the divine skills and techniques known in the world, the Golden Path was undoubtedly the best in terms of flying speed!

In comparison to the Golden Path, the immortal art Dimension Compression, which was basically teleportation, could only allow teleportation within a short distance. It couldn't be used continuously for long distances.

There were other divine techniques and teleportation skills that could achieve the same function as the Golden Path, enabling users to traverse vast expanses such as mountains and seas. However, they often required a preset guide for navigation, making them inferior to Golden Path.

Whoosh!

When the golden light flashed, Daoist Huang Long had already crossed the vast sea and arrived outside of the Misty Waters.

Daoist Huang Long then revealed his true form. With Yang Yuhu's guidance, he moved again and found the location outside the city.

He scanned the location with his divine sense and muttered in confusion, "What black iron alms bowl?"

"It's there!" Yang Yuhu pointed in a direction when he suddenly uttered, "Eh?"

Daoist Huang Long landed gracefully beside Yang Yuhu's apparition. Surveying the desolate wilderness, he spotted Yang Yuhu's body seated nearby, guarded by a handsome young man with clear distinct features and dressed in brocade.

As Yang Yuhu's divine consciousness returned to his body, he opened his eyes.

Chu Liang immediately smiled and said, "Brother Yang, you are awake."

When Chu Liang saw Daoist Huang land on the ground, he stood up to greet the elder, offering a bow.

Yang Yuhu asked in confusion, "Where is that black iron alms bowl?"

Chu Liang looked up as he responded, "Ah?"

Chapter 215: Evolution!

Yang Yuhu had used the Immortal Art: Roaming the World to return to Penglai, and Daoist Huang Long had hurried over to the East Sea using his Golden Path. All of that had happened in a mere moment; the tiny maggot couldn't possibly have finished eating the massive black iron alms bowl in such a short time.

Earlier, the little maggot dug into the alms bowl and ate at a maddening pace. As the little maggot expelled golden threads, its size grew increasingly larger. The larger the maggot got, the faster it ate... and the faster it ate, the larger it became.

Once the moment was over, the tiny maggot had grown into a white wormlike creature the size of Chu Liang's palm!

Chu Liang could finally get a proper look at the creature now that it had grown a lot larger. It turned out that the creature wasn't actually a maggot. The creature had several pairs of short golden legs and a golden mouth, and its plump body had distinct sections.

Rather than a maggot, the creature was more like a silkworm, especially since it could expel threads... from its rear end.

The white and golden silkworm had eaten a large chunk of the iron, leaving a dip in the smooth interior surface of the alms bowl. That meant the engraved enchanted formation was damaged, and the suppression effect was lifted.

The owner of the enchanted tool had already left, so the alms bowl was now an ownerless damaged enchanted tool.

Chu Liang injected his foundational qi into the enchanted tool, having "reluctantly"[1] decided to keep it.

The enchanted formation was damaged and no longer usable; it would definitely be difficult to repair. Nevertheless, the alms bowl was excellent as feed for the little silkworm.

Just as Chu Liang put away the damaged black iron alms bowl and the little silkworm, he noticed a beam of golden light flying over the horizon. Daoist Huang Long had arrived with Yang Yuhu.

This was when Yang Yuhu asked about the alms bowl.

Hearing Yang Yuhu's inquiry, Chu Liang let out an "Ah."

His mind raced for a moment.

Then Chu Liang replied simply, "I managed to break the enchanted tool. With its enchanted formation inscription damaged, it can't suppress anyone anymore, so I stored it away."

He had the alms bowl appear briefly on his hand. Then he stored it away again.

Yang Yuhu once again felt astonished. "What?"

He had felt just how hard and dense that alms bowl was. It was so solid that it might not get damaged even if he were to use his sword and strike it with full force. Chu Liang was only at the beginning stage of the Golden Core Realm, so how could he possibly...

However, Yang Yuhu recalled Chu Liang's shockingly powerful sword strike that had almost ended the life of the diabolical cultivator. It seemed that it was possible that Chu Liang might actually be telling the truth.

How terrifying! Yang Yuhu thought. He certainly isn't an ordinary boy!

While Yang Yuhu was amazed by Chu Liang, his teacher, Daoist Huang Long, was rather displeased.

Yang Yuhu, if you're truly in a life-threatening crisis, I, as your teacher, am more than willing to use my Golden Path to rush over and rescue you. However, a disciple who is clearly at the beginning stage of the Golden Core Realm managed to break free. You, on the other hand, couldn't do it. Instead, all you knew how to do was run back to the sect and ask to be rescued...

Daoist Huang Long shot a dark look at Yang Yuhu.

He thought, It seems my disciple is rather weak...?

Daoist Huang Long had been at a critical stage of his understanding of his Dao. For a seventh-realm Eminent One like him, missing a moment of enlightenment could mean having to spend several more years cultivating. Yet, he'd disregarded that and rushed over to save his disciple... only to find his disciple had been in no danger at all. It was only natural that Daoist Huang Long felt quite displeased.

Of course, if Chu Liang knew about that, he'd probably find it strange... and think, Oh, so even cultivators at the seventh realm need to spend time understanding the Dao?

It seems this teacher is rather weak...?

Yang Yuhu immediately sensed Daoist Huang Long's glare. Nevertheless, he didn't know how to explain the situation to his teacher. It was true that he was at the later stage of the Golden Core Realm, which meant his cultivation level was higher than Chu Liang's. However, it was also true that the prowess of Chu Liang's terrifying sword qi greatly surpassed the level of the Golden Core Realm.

Consequently, Yang Yuhu could only look at his teacher with a pitiful expression, unable to voice his misery.

He felt so wronged.

...

Seeing as Daoist Huang Long was already here, he followed his disciple and Chu Liang to Misty Waters City's government office.

On the way there, they ran into Du Ce and his troops. Du Ce's group had rushed over with Lin Bei and Shang Ziliang.

It turned out that after Du Ce's group left the city, they were intercepted by a group of diabolical cultivators and engaged in a battle with them. Ultimately, Du Ce's group killed three of the diabolical cultivators and captured one alive. However, the captured diabolical cultivator committed suicide by self-detonation, causing a huge disturbance to the area.

Du Ce's group had no idea that those diabolical cultivators had exchanged their lives just to delay the Misty Waters City's soldiers, giving the middle-aged man time to flee.

Upon hearing what had happened, Chu Liang furrowed his brows in pensively.

Du Ce was extremely courteous to Daoist Huang Long. He escorted Daoist Huang Long the whole way to the government office, where he then respectfully offered the seat of honor to the Daoist.

As a fifth-realm Confucian cultivator, Du Ce was indeed far inferior to Daoist Huang Long, a seventh-realm Eminent One who possessed real power in the Penglai Supreme Sect. It didn't even need to be said as to whether any members of the imperial court were supporting Daoist Huang Long. Even the regent in the capital of Yu had to be respectful toward Daoist Huang Long.

Daoist Huang Long didn't bother with courtesies and sat in the seat of honor.

He then said, "Misty Waters City is located in the flourishing Eastern Regions. There have always been very few signs of diabolical cultivators here, so where exactly did those people come from? They dared to act so arrogantly!"

"The Soul Destroyer Sect," Du Ce answered. He paused and then added, "The perpetrator that committed the string of murders and dug out his victims' hearts—he's probably a disciple of the Soul Destroyer Sect. As for the powerful cultivator who took him away, it's probably Chen Wuyin,

the current sect leader of the Soul Destroyer Sect and a major criminal wanted by the imperial court. Aside from him, there's no one else who could mobilize that many diabolical cultivators."

Despite being heavily suppressed for many years, the Soul Destroyer Sect tenaciously continued to exist. Nevertheless, it was no longer what it used to be.

Its current sect leader, Chen Wuyin, was only at the fifth realm of cultivation, and he was the only fifth-realm cultivator in the sect. Despite that, he was clearly much stronger than the fifth-realm diabolical cultivators of the Dark King Sect that Chu Liang had killed at the Southern Bastion Mountain.

As cultivators advanced through the realms, the potential gap in between cultivators of the same realm would continue to widen.

This wasn't a difficult concept. For example, if the widest gap that could exist between two cultivators at the Spiritual Awareness Realm were to be quantified, it would be the difference between 11 and 19. For the Golden Core Realm, it would be the difference between 101 and 199, and for the Realm of the Five Elements, it would be the difference between 1001 and 1999.

Daoist Huang Long snorted coldly. "They're just the dregs of a diabolical sect, still struggling to exist even on the verge of death. Yet, they dare to behave so arrogantly as if they're something to be feared!"

At this moment, Chu Liang stood up and said, "Esteemed senior, I think there's something strange about this."

"Hmm?" Du Ce shifted his gaze to Chu Liang and nodded. "Go on."

On the way to the government office, Lin Bei had already told Du Ce about how Chu Liang had swiftly discovered the murderer in the red-light district. It made Du Ce look at this outstandingly quick-witted disciple of the Mount Shu Sect with newfound respect.

Now, seeing that Chu Liang had something to say, Du Ce gave Chu Liang the floor, showing that he respected Chu Liang's opinion.

Chu Liang said, "That diabolical cultivator who got rescued was only at the pinnacle of the third realm, and his foundational qi was quite heterogenous... But those cultivators from the Soul

Destroyer Sect that you killed—there were only four of them, and one of them had even been at the Golden Core Realm. It doesn't seem very likely that they would go to such lengths if all they wanted to do was rescue a member of their sect."

This was a very simple reason. Abandoning four strong people to rescue one weaker person just wasn't something any rational person would do.

"Eh?"

"City Supervisor Du uttered, surprised by Chu Liang's train of thought. Then City Supervisor Du said, "So, the rescued diabolical cultivator might be an important figure in the Soul Destroyer Sect..."

"It's possible, but it's unlikely," Chu Liang replied. "I fought with him briefly... Although he's completely inferior to me in terms of power, he didn't even use any divine skills or enchanted tools. The flow of his qi was a total mess. He's essentially... an unorthodox cultivator."

The diabolical cultivator in question hadn't seemed like a cultivator who had been taught by a teacher in a sect. In fact, even if he were a genuine diabolical cultivator, he wouldn't have needed to do the atrocious acts he'd committed in Misty Waters City.

The actual Soul Destroyer Sect that Chen Wuyin led had long had since developed a system that allowed its members to grow even under the attacks from various righteous sects that were trying to kill them.

"Hmm," Du Ce murmured. He pondered for a moment, furrowing his brows. "There are indeed some points of suspicion. Let's do a detailed investigation tomorrow before drawing a conclusion."

...

A clap of thunder rumbled from the sky as heavy rain poured down. It was midsummer, but this was the rainy season in the Southeast Regions.

Not far from the city, there were several people taking shelter in a dilapidated temple.

A flash of lightning illuminated the person standing with his body facing the temple doors and his head tilted up as he looked at the sky. It was the middle-aged man who had escaped from the Crimson Executioner.

He was the current sect leader of the Soul Destroyer Sect, Chen Wuyin.

On the altar behind Chen Wuyin, the street vendor was lying on a woven bamboo mat with his eyes closed. There was a terrifyingly deep wound in his neck; his flesh was badly mangled.

Two disciples of the Soul Destroyer Sect were beside the street vendor, sweating profusely as they tried to save him.

"Sect Leader!" one of the two disciples appeared very distressed. "This man is severely injured. It will be very difficult to save him!"

"That's right!" the other disciple agreed. "With the circulation of his qi and blood severed, even immortals wouldn't be able to save him!"

Chu Liang had hit the street vendor with a movement-restricting attack[2]. One could say that the street vendor was pretty lucky, considering that he hadn't suffocated to death on the spot.

Moreover, Chen Wuyin had later carried the vendor as he fought and fled, constantly jolting the vendor for quite a while. It was no surprise that he was beyond recovery.

"In that case, let's just give him a drug to give him a final moment of lucidity before dying! We must make him speak!" Chen Wuyin's expression turned dark and icy. "If he doesn't speak, kill him and extract his soul. Have his soul speak instead!"

There was another flash of lightning, followed by a clap of thunder. Chen Wuyin's sinister expression was illuminated for all to see.

...

Seven hundred years ago, the world was in a chaotic state.

The Soul Destroyer Sect once made a resurgence with a sect leader known as the Elder Reaper. The Soul Destroyer Sect thrived under his leadership for some time, taking advantage of those chaotic times when people behaved like animals to spread their influence.

Nevertheless, when the Yu Dynasty was established and peace was returned to the world, sects like the Soul Destroyer Sect were met with destruction. Several powerful figures of the righteous path worked together to hunt down the Elder Reaper, and he ultimately died near the East Sea.

However, there was reliable information that the Elder Reaper hadn't died at the hands of the righteous cultivators. Instead, he'd disappeared after sustaining severe injuries. At that time, he'd carried with him the most important treasures and the cultivation legacy of the Soul Destroyer Sect. The sect lost all of them together with the Elder Reaper.

...

So, when news emerged of the Soul Destroyer Sect causing trouble in Misty Waters City, Chen Wuyin had immediately figured it out. The person causing trouble in Misty Waters City had probably acquired the sect's cultivation legacy from the Elder Reaper's resting place!

Chen Wuyin had then promptly led his subordinates and killed their way to Misty Waters City. Like the righteous cultivators, Chen Wuyin had been closely monitoring news about the perpetrator of the murders, waiting for him to reappear.

Unfortunately, he had been one step behind Chu Liang...

Chen Wuyin let out a deep bellow, "Our Soul Destroyer Sect was already weak, and now we've lost four of our brothers just so that we could bring this man back with us. I will never give up until we can extract the location of where the Elder Reaper is buried!"

Chapter 216: Only Half Left?

The heavy rain continued until noon on the second day before finally stopping.

Chu Liang followed the officials from the city government office to a village outside the city.

Groups of villagers gathered around a thatched cottage, blocked by officials from the government office, discussing animatedly.

"I can't believe it. Li Si was such an honest and straightforward person. Who would have thought he'd be a diabolical cultivator? My goodness..." remarked one villager.

"Back in the day, he said his wife ran off with someone else. I even felt sorry for him for a while, but it turns out he killed her and buried her in their backyard..." another villager added.

"And that's not all. Look at all the skeletons they dug up. Who knows how many people he's killed over the years... All those people who went missing in the mountains around the village, they probably fell victim to him..." a third villager chimed in.

"How did such a decent person fall into the path of the dark side?" wondered another.

"Truly terrifying," murmured someone else.

"..."

Chu Liang stood among the crowd and listened to the discussions, forming a rough impression of Li Si.

Li Si was an honest vendor, barely noticeable on ordinary days. He would push his cart into the city to sell goods in the evening and return home at dawn. Since his wife's death, no one cared about his whereabouts.

He was almost living in plain sight yet unnoticed by anyone.

His entire life trajectory could be clearly outlined. Perhaps he stumbled upon some diabolical cultivation technique by chance and practiced it accordingly, but he couldn't possibly be a hidden disciple of a diabolical sect for many years.

Why would the actual Soul Destroyer Sect, which had remained hidden for many years, invest so much effort in abducting him?

Chu Liang stepped forward, while Lin Bei stood nearby, clicking his tongue in disapproval. "We've unearthed more than thirty sets of bones in total, but it might not be all the victims of his crimes. To ascend to the third realm, a diabolical cultivator would have to take so many lives. This sect is damned!"

"But do you know that this cultivation method did not originate from a diabolical sect?" Shang Ziliang interjected.

"Oh?" Chu Liang really had no idea.

"During the chaotic era when the demon god wreaked havoc and demons invaded, countless people in the land of the nine provinces were being defeated. The human cultivators couldn't fight back against the power of the demon race. It was not until the founding father of the Soul Destroyer Sect stepped forward and created this cultivation method," Shang Ziliang explained. "This cultivation method doesn't require a huge amount of resources. You just need enough humans to sacrifice. It enabled them to quickly train powerful cultivators who could join the battle."

"Is that so?" Chu Liang was shocked.

"I read it in the secret Confucian teachings hid away by my father, so it must be true," said Shang Ziliang. "After the great calamity passed, those who continued to practice this technique were immediately killed. And the founding father of the Soul Destroyer Sect, who had been hailed as a hero by humans initially, was then labeled as a devil and executed. Since then, the Soul Destroyer Sect became a diabolical sect."

"Haih," sighed Chu Liang.

The search here was reaching completion.

Aside from some ancient-looking books in Li Si's house, there were no other items that seemed to belong to a cultivator. He could be considered really broke even among cultivators of unconventional paths.

Chu Liang took a stroll to a hillside. He then took out the little silkworm and placed it on the leaf of a huge tree, curious to see if it would eat leaves.

The little silkworm gradually woke up, shaking its head and wiggling.

Suddenly, it turned its big head, plopped onto the ground, and started crawling in a certain direction.

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

Its pace wasn't sluggish, but it was undeniably cuter when it moved forward without its legs visible.

But it was the first time it wasn't burrowing into the ground but instead moving steadily in one direction. Chu Liang glanced at it and decided not to stop the little silkworm, but rather to follow its path.

The little silkworm was picking up speed, its wriggling movement conveying a sense of anticipation.

It was clearly in a rush!

Where exactly do you want to go?

...

The path ahead gradually became rugged, winding downwards, passing through a crevice in the mountain valley and revealing a huge underground cavern below. It appeared to be a landslide caused by heavy rain, eventually exposing an underground hollow.

Surprisingly, there was a huge, swiftly flowing river into the cavern!

The water of this river felt extremely cold, emanating a bone-chilling qi, seemingly carrying a hint of eeriness.

Except for the section exposed on the surface, the entire river flowed in the underground cavern. The little silkworm wasted no time in burrowing down, turning along the riverbank and crawling along.

Chu Liang had just been worried if it would dive deep into the water, but now he heaved a sigh of relief; it seemed the tiny silkworm had no intention of swimming.

They then turned into an underground cavern. Thankfully, the ceiling of the cavern was high enough and Chu Liang, despite having no foothold, could still manage to move forward while hovering in the air.

The little silkworm crawled along the wall for what felt like an eternity. The gloomy river ahead had shifted its course, leaving behind a vast, empty riverbank. They were already so deep underground that he had no idea of their depth.

This is...

Chu Liang formed a Bright Light Seal with his right hand, illuminating the path ahead. In the faint glow, he could discern only a dark stone residence, its features obscured by layers of mud and sand. The door frame and plaque were barely visible, completely blocked off by the accumulated debris.

It seemed this place was once an underwater residence, hidden beneath the murky depths of the river, now unveiled by the shifting currents. Water had seeped inside, leaving behind traces of its intrusion. Decayed and broken cups, books, and other items lay scattered outside the residence.

There was a strong smell of death.

Could it be that this is the residence of some lost cultivators, and the little silkworm has sensed valuable items in this place?

Can this tiny creature really search for treasures?

Chu Liang's confusion didn't last long, as the silkworm decisively burrowed into the sealed gate crafted from mud and sand.

Swoosh—

Chu Liang certainly couldn't use his head to burrow through; instead, he wielded the Dustless Sword, cutting open a path with its radiant sword qi.

Upon stepping through the entrance, a sharp whistling sound echoed. Beneath his feet, the mud concealed a swamp, from which dozens of bone spears suddenly emerged!

Thanks to Chu Liang's quick reflexes, he swiftly propped up a green leaf umbrella, holding it downward to block the onslaught of bone spears with a clang.

It was evident that this enchanted formation had been hastily arranged, and over the years, its power had likely diminished significantly; otherwise, it wouldn't have been so straightforward.

After traversing the swamp and enduring several broken formations along a corridor, Chu Liang finally arrived at a spacious cave dwelling partially buried in mud. Everything, including a set of skeletal remains partially concealed by the earth, lay hidden.

Suddenly, Chu Liang felt the Crimson Executioner vibrating in the expansive space of the White Pagoda.

Chu Liang furrowed his brows.

It was the first time the Crimson Executioner felt agitated over a corpse.

What heinous crime had this individual committed during their lifetime to provoke the Crimson Executioner's urge to whip this corpse?

The individual to whom these skeletal remains once belonged must have had a high cultivation level. Yet, the residual spiritual essence within the remaining bones was far from intact.

In fact, his corpse was highly fragmented, with only about half of the body remaining... or even less.

It appeared that the injuries sustained in life were of an unimaginable magnitude.

With just this minuscule amount of spiritual energy left, it was likely impossible to use such a corpse to cultivate any valuable treasures of nature.

When this thought crossed his mind, Chu Liang was terrified by the fact that he was even thinking about such things.

His immediate reaction upon seeing the corpse of an Eminent One was to consider its potential for cultivation of plants...

Behind the corpse stood some shelves displaying various books and scrolls, but most of them had already decayed beyond recognition, with only a few remaining intact. There didn't appear to be any visible treasures among them.

The only item of interest was a bronze cauldron placed on the table, emitting a faint divine light. It appeared to be a powerful enchanted tool.

Chu Liang's gaze wasn't as quick as the silkworm's short legs; he had just noticed the bronze cauldron when the tiny silkworm's head popped out from the surface of the cauldron. It had already chewed a path out.

Good lord... Chu Liang felt so much pain.

We don't even know the level of this enchanted tool and you are already eating it?

Nevertheless, this item had indeed been discovered by the silkworm itself. Chu Liang didn't fight with it for the cauldron.

Compared to the joy of finding an enchanted tool, he was even more pleasantly surprised that the silkworm was really capable of finding treasures.

If he trained this silkworm, wouldn't he potentially amass a fortune in the future?

So while the silkworm was busy eating, Chu Liang searched around and set his sights on a certain finger of the corpse.

This finger was markedly different from the others, appearing rather shiny.

You have a golden finger too? Chu Liang thought to himself.

Chu Liang approached with a smile and confirmed that it was indeed a bone with mystical abilities.

Considering the individual's evil past, Chu Liang wasn't courteous in his actions. With a snap, he broke the finger off.

He took the phalange in his hand and examined it for a while.

Then, he tried to infuse it with foundational qi.

Rumble—

The wall behind the corpse suddenly moved!

This peculiar phalange is a key? Chu Liang thought to himself.

Chu Liang entered the space revealed by the moving wall and found only a small area. Inside, there lay a golden skull, likely a refined enchanted tool.

Within the skull's mouth, there rested a scroll made of sheepskin scroll.

"Hmm?" Chu Liang murmured, a hint of suspicion creeping into his voice. This skull looks familiar...

But since Chu Liang was uncertain of what the skull represented, he did not want to act rashly.

As he hesitated, Chu Liang heard a clanging sound from outside, accompanied by shouts.

Something happened? He thought to himself.

Hastily, Chu Liang grabbed the silkworm, which was munching away happily, and darted into the narrow space. As he rotated the distal section of the phalange, the wall sealed shut.

In just a short moment, the silkworm had grown a couple of sizes larger again. Whether it was due to the spiritual energy contained within the cauldron or its own astonishing growth rate, Chu Liang wasn't certain.

...

Not long after, a somewhat familiar voice sounded from outside, "So this is the burial ground of the Elder Reaper! Finally found it!"

It was the diabolical cultivator from last night!

The current leader of the Soul Destroyer Sect!

From the sounds of the disorderly footsteps, there should be a few underlings trailing behind him.

Chu Liang's heart skipped a beat. He held his breath, fearing that his qi might give him away.

Even with the Crimson Executioner boosting his power, he wasn't certain he could defeat such an opponent. It was best to wait and observe for a while.

After a pause, the leader of the Soul Destroyer Sect laughed again and said, "It looks just like the drawing in the manual! This is the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno! For the past several thousands of years, this has remained the most treasured possession of my Soul Destroyer Sect. The Elder Reaper of our sect lost it here! Today, I've found it again! I can only refine the Great Pill of Mortal Sacrifice! Hehehe..."

A clang then sounded, indicating that he had most likely grabbed that bronze cauldron and held it up.

But then, his laughter abruptly ceased.

Immediately, a voice tinged with confusion followed. "Huh? Why is it only half?"

Chapter 217: Don't Panic, Lass.

Chen Wuyin stared at the cauldron in his hand, deep in thought.

Hmm... What went wrong?

The Soul Destroyer Sect practiced a unique cultivation method that involved the use of human lives as resources. As one progressed further in their cultivation, the demand for human lives naturally increased.

To break through to the sixth realm, countless lives must be sacrificed. Their blood and flesh must be placed into the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno for the refinement of the Great Pill of Souls.

However, ever since the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno disappeared with the Elder Reaper, the Soul Destroyer Sect hasn't had a single sixth-realm cultivator for many years.

But he has found the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno today.

The size, inscriptions, and material were all identical to the treasure recorded in the sect's compendium. The only difference was that in the compendium, the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno was depicted as complete.

But here, the cauldron in his hand showed only half of it.

Could the other half be hidden somewhere? Chen Wuyin thought to himself. This gap doesn't seem like it can be pieced together... It's more like something gnawed on it.

After a long silence, he finally uttered a word: "Search!"

"Sect Leader, what do we search for?" The two disciples behind him were momentarily confused.

"Of course, we search for the other half of the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno! How can we refine the pill with only half?" Chen Wuyin exclaimed angrily.

"Yes!" The two disciples immediately began searching vigorously.

However, the phalange on the corpse had already been taken by Chu Liang, so even if they searched thoroughly, they would find nothing.

Even within the secret room, Chu Liang could hear the commotion outside. He was really hoping that they would soon feel discouraged and leave, preferably leaving without taking the remaining half of the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno...

If the little silkworm can't finish eating, he could even pack up the leftovers.

Unfortunately, Chen Wuyin seemed to have no intention of giving up.

Not only that, but he also noticed the wall!

The residence had remained hidden underwater for many years, resulting in layers of mud covering the surrounding walls. However, only one particular wall had large patches of mud fall off due to the opening of the secret room door just now.

"Why is this wall so clean?" Chen Wuyin's eyes showed suspicion. He paused before adding, "Break it open and take a look!"

In the secret room, Chu Liang felt his heart in his throat as he listened to the conversation unfolding outside.

If he were to directly confront them, he wasn't sure if he could escape. Chen Wuyin had once encountered the Crimson Executioner, and facing him head-on would only make things more difficult. Aside from the Crimson Executioner, Chu Liang only had Old Fei to rely on.

Last time in the Immortals' Marsh, he had called out Old Fei and asked him to engage at his full strength. When Chu Liang summoned him back into the vase, he had to spend several hundred sword coins to buy spirit plants for replenishing the qi of death and to help Old Fei recuperate to his normal state.

Every time Old Fei engaged in a fight, it was like burning money.

However, if it was a critical moment, Chu Liang naturally wouldn't hesitate to call him out.

Just as he held his breath nervously, another commotion erupted from outside.

Successive triggers of the enchanted formation at the entrance of the residence echoed, accompanied by laughter reminiscent of silver bells.

The two Soul Destroyer Sect disciples, who were about to break the wall, were drawn to the laughter behind them and turned to look.

Whoosh—

A gust of fragrant wind swept through the residence.

When they looked up again, they saw a young woman in a red dress with a tightly cinched waist appear in the chamber. She had black hair that flowed like a waterfall and skin as white as snow. With the bright red dress contrasting her skin, she exuded an irresistible charm.

She hovered in mid-air, seemingly finding the mud beneath her feet too dirty.

"Sect Leader Chen, quite a skill you have. Within only a few days, you managed to find the burial ground of the Elder Reaper. I am surprised," the lady in the red dress said with a charming smile.

"And who are you?" Chen Wuyin replied in a grim tone.

The arrival of this woman was strange, and the reason he didn't immediately take action was because her aura was faintly superior to his own.

"I am Yi Qiushui from the Dark King Sect."

The lady in the red dress didn't hide a single thing. With a smile on her face, she boldly announced her identity and her sect.

"Enchantress Yi? One of the Four Enchantresses from the Scarlet-Robe Hall?" Chen Wuyin immediately recalled.

Within the Dark King Sect, there existed the Left and Right Guardians, alongside the infamous Four Halls of Darkness. Among these, the Scarlet-Robe Hall was governed by four disciples, collectively known as the Four Enchantresses. Among them, Yi Qiushui held the lowest rank.

Chen Wuyin, despite leading a diabolical sect, had never crossed paths with Yi Qiushui before.

In the secret room, Chu Liang couldn't shake the feeling that this female cultivator from the Dark King Sect wasn't entirely diabolical. Typically, those deeply entrenched in such sects would have their qi suffused with blood. Yet the Crimson Executioner showed no reaction toward the lady who had just arrived.

It was only feeling agitated toward the corpse buried in this residence and Chen Wuyin.

"It is I," The lady named Yi Qiushui stared at Chen Wuyin as she replied. "There is something that the Elder Reaper has that my teacher wants. And so, I have been commanded to follow you. I hope you don't find offense in that."

"The Scarlet-Robe Hall is interested in the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno?" Chen Wuyin shrugged and raised his hands as he continued, "Well, I dare not refuse... However, I can only offer you half of it, as I don't know where the other half went..."

"Heh. Why would my teacher want the cauldron that is used to cook human flesh?" Yi Qiushui shook her head as she replied.

"The Elder Reaper is an ancestor within our sect. How can I not know of any other valuable items he possessed?" Chen Wuyin asked, feeling puzzled.

"It's nothing particularly valuable. It just has some connection with the Dark King Sect. Since you have found the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno, why don't you simply leave and allow me some time to search this place?" Yi Qiushui asked.

"Sure," Chen Wuyin readily agreed. "Whatever the Scarlet-Robe Hall wants, you may take it. We only hope that in the future, as fellow diabolical cultivators, you will support our Soul Destroyer Sect."

"No problem!" Yi Qiushui readily agreed.

"Let's go." Chen Wuyin, accompanied by his two subordinates, strode toward the entrance of the residence.

Yi Qiushui stood aside, bidding them farewell.

With a swift hand gesture and a sudden movement, Chen Wuyin unleashed an attack resembling a black dragon from his sleeve. The attack, its aura tinged with blood, viciously lunged towards Yi Qiushui!

The opponent Chen Wuyin faced was neither dumb nor naive. Even before he made a move, Yi Qiushui had already launched herself towards him, leaving behind a red afterimage.

Bang! Bang!

The two completed their first exchange of attacks!

Yi Qiushui had come here in search of the valuable item. Ever since Chen Wuyin entered Misty Waters City, she had kept her eyes on him. Driven by her eagerness for success, she had no intention of letting him leave easily.

She had followed closely so that Chen Wuyin wouldn't leave her sight. It wasn't a matter of testing him. If he claimed there were no valuable items, could that really be true? Regardless of its truth, Yi Qiushui had to kill him before verifying it.

Since the beginning, her intentions had been clear. She would kill him and steal the treasures. Both had to be done.

And Chen Wuyin's urge to kill was even stronger.

If Yi Qiushui had never mentioned another valuable item, he would have simply searched the place and left with half of the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno. But upon learning of other valuable items, it became impossible for him to simply give up and leave.

The treasure coveted by the Scarlet-Robe Hall must not be some ordinary item. It might be even more valuable than the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno! If he could kill Yi Qiushui, Chen Wuyin would be willing to dig up the entire place if necessary to find the item!

The two individuals from the diabolical sects harbored sinister intentions. As if engaging in a prearranged duel, they both launched their attacks at the first opportunity!

Both attempted to ambush each other, effectively nullifying their efforts.

It was an open and straightforward collision!

Although the residence was spacious, it was still too narrow for the fight between these two individuals!

A resounding bang and clash echoed through the room as shards of red light scattered everywhere, and cracks appeared on the walls of the residence.

Instead of helping their sect leader, the two disciples of the Soul Destroyer Sect tried to leave. However, when Yi Qiushui clenched her fist in mid-air, the two disciples suddenly froze in place.

Then came two muffled sounds. Crunch, crunch.

Blood fog exploded from their bodies, causing them to wither and dry up, resembling dried grass as the blood drained from their bodies. From the blood fog emerged a ghostly claw that lunged toward Chen Wuyin.

Chen Wuyin clenched his fist and summoned his white bone spear. Gripping it firmly, he pressed it against the center of the ghost claw palm. The moment their weapons made contact, a glaring green ghostly flame erupted!

Boom!

It was another explosion!

The walls around them, including the wall to the secret room, collapsed.

The Elder Reaper had likely escaped in a hurry and hadn't constructed this underwater residence sturdy enough. Even this secret room, though somewhat concealed, couldn't withstand such a powerful impact and collapsed in an instant.

Amidst the flickering sparks of the collapsing walls, a sword qi reminiscent of a dragon whistled past Yi Qiushui, heading straight for Chen Wuyin! It caught him off guard!

This sword again! Chen Wuyin thought to himself.

Chen Wuyin, having narrowly escaped the previous sword attack, felt a surge of fear as he faced it again. Before he could even process his thoughts, he instinctively attempted to use the immortal art, Sacrificial Substitute!

But just as he was about to act, he suddenly felt his blood flow stagnate throughout his body, as if something were obstructing the circulation of his qi and blood.

It was the Blood-Controlling Technique from the Scarlet-Robe Hall!

Chen Wuyin immediately realized the reason. Yi Qiushui had cast this technique on him to disrupt his normal state. With his cultivation level, this type of technique would only make him feel uncomfortable and hinder the smooth activation of his divine skills.

However, at this critical moment of life or death, even a slight delay in the circulation of qi could determine his fate.

Boom!

This terrifying sword qi engulfed Chen Wuyin directly, mercilessly crushing his entire form into dust, leaving nothing behind for a long time.

This sword also startled Yi Qiushui, sending shivers down her spine.

With a face full of shock and doubt, she turned back and saw a mysterious figure in a black robe retracting the sword light. The figure slowly emerged from behind the crumbling wall, speaking with a hoarse and elderly voice.

"Don't panic, lass. I won't kill you."

Chapter 218: Esteemed Senior Dugu

Chu Liang had panicked a little when Yi Qiushui first arrived.

Even though another powerful diabolical cultivator had joined the scene, the Crimson Executioner could only deal with Chen Wuyin, not Yi Qiushui.

Once Chu Liang exposed his presence, he would inevitably become the primary target for the two diabolical cultivators. Regardless of any grudges they had with each other, they would definitely first kill off the righteous cultivator that walked out of the secret chamber.

So, when the two diabolical cultivators started fighting, Chu Liang breathed a sigh of relief and hoped they would both end up injured. Nevertheless, that wasn't because he wished to be like an old fisherman getting the catch after waiting patiently, reaping the benefits after the two diabolical cultivators had fought it out. Chu Liang just wanted to escape unharmed.

Yet, before either of them got hurt, the wall unexpectedly started to crumble. Once that wall collapsed... Chu Liang would no longer be able to hide.

He promptly decided that he had to fight his way out!

Chu Liang flipped his hand over and stored away the golden human skull containing the ancient sheepskin scroll. Then he consumed an Essence-Concealing Pill and put on his Aura-Concealing Robe.

Just before the wall collapsed completely, he charged out with his sword, poised to attack!

Chen Wuyin, right?

The sect leader of the Soul Destroyer Sect, right?

The immortal art Sacrificial Substitute, right?

Once the Crimson Executioner has locked onto you, you'd better prepare to repent for your crimes. Just because you haven't been served retribution doesn't mean you'll never get it. It's simply because the right time for it had yet to arrive!

With Yi Qiushui's assistance, Chu Liang killed Chen Wuyin swiftly with a formidable strike that was like the wrath of Heaven.

When the smoke cleared, Chu Liang and Yi Qiushui were the only ones still standing. A brief silence fell over them.

Chu Liang was extremely fearful of Enchantress Yi. The Crimson Executioner showed no interest in her, so summoning Old Fei[1] was the only way he could possibly be a match for her.

However, just like how Chu Liang was fearful of Yi Qiushui, Yi Qiushui was in great awe of Chu Liang. That terrifying sword strike earlier... If it had landed on her instead, she might have met a swift demise. Who was this black-robed person whose flow of qi remained a mystery?

After a moment of hesitation, Chu Liang spoke up first. "Don't panic, lass. I won't kill you."

He gained the advantage by taking the first move and setting the flow of the conversation.

Yi Qiushui glanced at the wall behind her and noticed there was a secret chamber behind that crumbling wall.

Has this black-robed person been in there all this time, watching us?

Yi Qiushui said softly, "I did not know you were here, esteemed senior. Apologies for my mistake."

"No worries," Chu Liang replied, deliberately lowering his pitch. "What happened here must stay a secret. I should have eliminated both of you, but I know your teacher, so I only took action against that one. You should leave quickly before I change my mind."

Upon hearing that, Yi Qiushui immediately wanted to turn and leave this dangerous place.

Nevertheless, she gave it some thought and ultimately said, "I'm grateful for your mercy, esteemed senior! Since you know my teacher, may I ask what your name is? I will tell my teacher about you. I'm sure she will want to express her gratitude to you, esteemed senior."

"You've seen that sword strike of mine, yet you don't recognize who I am?" Chu Liang asked, feeling rather baffled.

"I've only been cultivating for thirty-odd years, and I haven't experienced much of the martial world... Please forgive me, esteemed senior," Yi Qiushui said hurriedly with her head bowed.

"Hahahaha!" Chu Liang suddenly burst into laughter. "I don't blame you! I've been living in seclusion in the mountains for decades... People around the world must have long forgotten my name—Sword Devil Dugu Qiubai[2]! What a pity!"

"So, you're Esteemed Senior Dugu!" Yi Qiushui's eyes lit up. "My teacher did indeed mention your name when I was younger!"

"Oh, really?" Chu Liang uttered. Hidden under the shade of his hood, his lip twitched. He asked, "What did she say about me?"

"Uh..." Yi Qiushui stammered, pretending to recall that memory. "It was many years ago, so I can't remember her words clearly. But the gist of it was that she greatly admires your cultivation principles..."

"Ah, that's thoughtful of her," Chu Liang replied, shaking his head with a sigh. He then reminded Yi Qiushui, "It's fine for you to tell your teacher about what happened today. However, you mustn't tell anyone else. Got it?"

"Yes!" Yi Qiushui hurriedly agreed.

"If news of my return were to spread, it would inevitably lead to another bloodbath," Chu Liang muttered. "I shouldn't have let anyone know about my whereabouts..."

Hearing that, Yi Qiushui felt quite afraid and said, "Then I shan't disturb you any longer, esteemed senior. I'll leave first!"

She swiftly transformed into a beam of red light and left the cave dwelling.

Yi Qiushui left at a speed that was ten times faster than the speed she had used to get to there.

Chu Liang wasn't sure if Yi Qiushui was truly gone or if she was still observing him from the shadows. So, he calmly left the underwater residence in large strides.

As Chu Liang walked, he recited, "Heroes of this world that emerge from our generation—they join the martial world with grand ambitions, only to find themselves in a relentless fight with time...[3]"

His sonorous voice was bold and imposing!

...

Meanwhile, Yi Qiushui flew over a province in a beam of rainbow-colored light and arrived at a deep crimson pool.

"Esteemed Teacher! I, your disciple, have returned!" she exclaimed loudly.

After a moment, there was a rumbling sound as bubbles gushed up from the surface of the pool. Green roof tiles and red walls slowly emerged from the water, eventually revealing a pavilion!

Once the large pavilion fully emerged from the pool, it floated steadily on the surface of the water as if the water's surface was solid.

Then a voice called out from inside the pavilion, "Come in."

Hearing that, Yi Qiushui pushed open the door of the pavilion and entered. At the center of the ground floor, a woman dressed in an extremely gorgeous crimson robe was sitting quietly with her hair down. She had her back to Yi Qiushui as she combed her hair and groomed herself in front of a mirror.

The hall was furnished beautifully. However, everything was crimson; it was a dizzying display of red.

Yi Qiushui immediately lowered her head, afraid to look at the mirror.

According to legend, the master of the Dark King Sect's Scarlet-Robe Hall was the incarnation of a malicious ghost. Anyone who even glanced at her would die suddenly in the night!

Before Yi Qiushui could speak, the Scarlet-Robe Hall's master said, "You failed?"

"Your disciple is incompetent! Please punish me, Esteemed Teacher!" Yi Qiushui said, immediately dropping to her knees.

"Don't panic. First, tell me what happened," the Scarlet-Robe Hall's master said leisurely as she continued to comb her hair. "You should have been able to deal with Chen Wuyin. Did something unexpected occur?"

"Yes," Yi Qiushui replied. "After Chen Wuyin opened up Elder Reaper's cave dwelling, I fought with him. However, a mysterious black-robed man suddenly appeared and killed Chen Wuyin with a single sword strike! The man said he should have killed me too, but he spared me because he knows you, Esteemed Teacher."

"He knows me?" the Scarlet-Robe Hall's master uttered.

Her fair wrist suddenly froze. She seemed to have realized something.

The Scarlet-Robe Hall's master said, "I instructed you to seize the the Divine Ruins' scroll because of a certain person... It's quite possible that he took it. He's disappeared for so long. Has he finally reappeared in the mortal realm?"

"Yes!" Yi Qiushui nodded. "That esteemed senior said that his return to the world this time has to be a total secret. The moment news gets out about his return, it will undoubtedly lead to a bloodbath, so it's crucial to keep it a secret."

"Of course. Back then, even the Jiang Family, such a monstrous family..."

The Scarlet-Robe Hall seemed to recall something and trailed off, leaving her sentence incomplete.

Then she sighed and asked, "Did he say anything about me?"

"He said..." Yi Qiushui began. Having sensed the anticipation in her teacher's tone, Yi Qiushui paused for a moment before saying, "He said that you are a thoughtful person, Esteemed Teacher."

"Hehe." The Scarlet-Robe Hall's master smiled sadly. "Of course, I am. I wonder who is the heartless one... Well, anyway, since the scroll is in his hands, it saves me some trouble. But I thought I would have a chance to meet him because of this."

She let out a soft sigh.

Yi Qiushui lowered her gaze.

After a long while of silence, she finally dared to speak up. "Esteemed Teacher, you will surely have the opportunity to meet Esteemed Senior Dugu again."

"Hmm?" The Scarlet-Robe Hall's master was stunned. "Who is Esteemed Senior Dugu?"

"Huh?" Yi Qiushui was confused as well. "Esteemed Teacher, weren't you talking about Sword Devil Dugu Qiubai?"

"Sword Devil? Dugu what? Qiubai? Who dares to have such a provocative name[4]?" The Scarlet-Robe Hall's master stood up. "Just who exactly took the the Divine Ruins' scroll??"

...

"Achoo!"

Chu Liang, who had returned to the office of the Misty Waters City's city supervisor, suddenly sneezed.

Then he rubbed his nose and turned back to face Shang Ziliang and Lin Bei.

Chu Liang said, "There's no way you guys can guess what I just experienced. It was so exciting."

Chapter 219: Drink Til We Are Drunk

Upon returning to Misty Waters City, Chu Liang opted not to mention his encounter in the underwater residence. He simply explained that he had crossed paths with Chen Wuyin again and narrowly escaped by luck.

If news of him killing Chen Wuyin got out, he might become famous. Such an event would undoubtedly warrant a special feature in the Chronicles of the Nine Provinces. However, the moment this news spread, he would never be able to step out of his door. Yi Qiushui, upon realizing she had been deceived so miserably, might seethe with fury and await revenge at the foot of Mount Shu.

It was better to keep a low profile and make a fortune quietly.

The Scarlet-Robe Hall showed no interest in the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno. Hence, Chu Liang speculated that they were searching for the golden skull and the scroll within it.

The golden skull likely served as some kind of seal. Chu Liang dared not attempt to break it but instead intended to return to Mount Shu and seek Wen Yulong's help to unlock it.

As for the remaining half of the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno, Chu Liang had not forgotten to pack it up and take it away. This could serve as nourishment for the little silkworm later.

After consuming half of the Immortal's Cauldron of Inferno, the tiny silkworm appeared shinier, hinting at an imminent breakthrough. This was a metamorphosis that Chu Liang eagerly anticipated.

Due to uncertainty regarding the departure of members of the Soul Destroyer Sect, Misty Waters City remained on high alert for a while. This vigilant status was only lifted after a few days. During this time, disciples of the Mount Shu Sect patrolled at night and leisurely strolled during the day.

Yang Yuhu from Penglai Supreme Sect also stayed in Misty Waters City during this period and interacted with them. He maintained his arrogant attitude towards Lin Bei and Shang Ziliang but was rather friendly towards Chu Liang.

During his free time, Chu Liang had been continuously contemplating the Dimension Compression, and finally gained some insights.

Seven days later, Du Ce announced the end of the vigilance. The disciples from the Penglai Supreme Sect and Mount Shu Sect who had come to support could now return with peace of mind.

On the day before their departure, Yang Yuhu suddenly approached Chu Liang with a jug of wine.

"Brother Yang, what's this for?" Chu Liang asked with a smile. "I never drink."

He was speaking the truth. Not only would he abstain from alcohol, but he also held an aversion towards it. After all, many struggles happened because of alcohol. If Di Nufeng hadn't been an alcoholic, Silver Sword Peak wouldn't have fallen into such a state.

"This is immortals' wine made from Immortality Peaches, a specialty of the Penglai Islands. Drinking a sip can enhance one's comprehension skills for three days, greatly benefiting cultivation and allowing one to be enlightened," said Yang Yuhu.

"Let's go! Today I shall drink with you until we are both drunk!" exclaimed Chu Liang boldly.

"Hehe," chuckled Yang Yuhu.

He pushed the cup over, filled it for Chu Liang, and poured one for himself as well.

"I didn't greet you when you came inside earlier, so I'll punish myself by drinking three cups first," said Chu Liang as he raised his cup and downed it in one gulp. After a single sip, he felt a surge of clarity rushing through his mind and body. His whole being felt lighter, and his thoughts became clearer.

Refreshing.

It was as expected of the immortals' wine. Chu Liang's eyes suddenly lit up with clarity.

"Brother Chu, no rush. We can drink this jug of wine slowly." Yang Yuhu shook his head as he chuckled and said, "I have no intention of bringing this home."

Chu Liang responded with a smile, "Brother Yang, you wouldn't have brought this fine wine here for nothing. What's the matter?"

"Alright. Let's not beat around the bush." Yang Yuhu said, "I want to invite you to join the Penglai Supreme Sect."

"Eh?"

"

His words caught Chu Liang off guard for a moment.

As the current leading immortal sect, the Penglai Supreme Sect has an inclusive atmosphere, welcoming cultivators from all walks of life to join.

Of course, those with mediocre talent and cultivation had to join the Penglai Secondary Sect and wait until they had made outstanding contributions before being promoted to the Supreme Sect. However, there were also some geniuses who could join the Supreme Sect as soon as they entered the sect.

The Penglai Supreme Sect would also extend equal treatment to the geniuses who joined the sect halfway.

Ultimately, the Penglai Supreme Sect just had better resources.

The never-ending source of treasures from the three islands of Penglai gave them the confidence to attract talents from the nine provinces.

However, Chu Liang never expected to be invited by Yang Yuhu. "Brother Yang, what do you mean?" He was slightly confused.

"To be honest, I have seen a few geniuses in the sects ranked in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. Each was unique with their own strengths," explained Yang Yuhu. "But the ones who have surpassed the level of genius and are worthy of being called a genius at the pinnacle of the world would be just you and my elder brother."

Hah? His awesome praise surprised Chu Liang. "Brother Yang, you're really too kind. How could I dare to compare myself with your elder brother?" He hadn't expected this guy to come out with such lofty praises over wine.

"In the past few days, I've looked into your background and found that you've made remarkable progress in the past six months, advancing from the beginning stage of the Spiritual Awareness Realm to forming the ultimate-tier Golden Core," Yang Yuhu said. "Your recent trajectory of development even surpasses that of my elder brother."

"I was just lucky." Chu Liang said.

"Many people have luck, but only one in a million can seize the opportunity and rise as you have. You don't need to be overly modest," Yang Yuhu continued. "But it is truly peculiar that someone like you, only rose to prominence in the third stage after years of mediocrity on Mount Shu."

"Heh..." Chu Liang could only smile.

"It's probably due to resources. Mount Shu treats all disciples equally, and everyone needs to contribute to the sect in exchange for resources, which means that there is a scarcity of resources in the beginning," Yang Yuhu said. "But for someone like you, if you had been given enough support early on, I believe you would have soared to great heights much earlier!"

Listening to his increasingly exaggerated praises, Chu Liang hastily said, "Brother Yang, you're exaggerating. The treatment we receive at Mount Shu is still good. My slow progress in cultivation previously was just because I had yet to achieve enlightenment."

Yang Yuhu shook his head again. "You would think that Mount Shu is good because you have yet to see the other immortal sects in the Divine Nine. Not to mention comparing it with my Penglai or even with the Great Astral Sect and the Endless Sword Sect, which are considered less prestigious within the Divine Nine, Mount Shu is far inferior."

Chu Liang was well aware of what Yang Yuhu said. Among the Divine Nine, Mount Shu provided the least resources to its disciples, who had to work for their resources. In essence, it was because they were poor.

Without top-tier divine artifacts, they couldn't compete for major resource points. Over time, they naturally fell behind. So Mount Shu disciples had to exchange a large amount of labor for their resources, while disciples of other immortal sects in the Divine Nine could receive plenty of assistance without lifting a finger.

"If you join our Penglai Supreme Sect, I can recommend you to join my teacher's lineage, and you'll be my senior brother," Yang Yuhu earnestly said. "Then, you won't need to spend time on mundane matters, just focus on cultivation, and all resources will be provided without limit. I guarantee that you'll reach the Dao Attainment Realm ten years or even more ahead of the time it would take at Mount Shu. This is the ladder to success, Brother Chu."

He spoke earnestly and seemed sincere. As for the promise of unlimited resources, Chu Liang believed that Penglai could indeed deliver.

Still, Chu Liang shook his head firmly.

"Brother Yang, I can see that you are sincere with me, so I will also speak frankly with you," Chu Liang said seriously. "I have been in Mount Shu since I was a child, and that is my home. The fellow disciples and elders of Mount Shu are all my family.

"Being in this sect has its disadvantages. I have conflicts with some people in the sect as well..." Chu Liang appeared aloof as he looked to the side as he spoke, "But the thought of leaving it has never crossed my mind."

Chu Liang continued saying, "Mount Shu has its drawbacks, but I'll find ways to improve it. If there are things I need for cultivation, I'll find a way to obtain them myself. While everyone knows Penglai is great, I know it's not paradise for me. Every sect has its pros and cons. If I were to leave Mount Shu because of its flaws, what if I discover flaws in Penglai later? Where would I go then?

"I would have no other way, because I would have already lost my roots."

"Brother Yang, I'm sorry." Chu Liang said firmly, "I'll never leave Mount Shu in this life."

"But..." Yang Yuhu listened to his words, equally moved, and finally said, "But your esteemed teacher is Di Nufeng!"

"Eh." Chu Liang's brow furrowed at the mention, "Let me reconsider."

...

The next day, Chu Liang returned to Silver Sword Peak.

The familiar scenery of flowers and grass greeted him, each sight at home.

He saw Liu Xiaoyu'er busy in a field of Golden Vein Flowers. Chu Liang had maintained the habit of tending to thorny black balls, and the garden had grown larger, bringing his dream of a plantation closer.

Seeing Chu Liang return, Liu Xiaoyu'er immediately greeted him, "Brother Chu Liang, what am I doing?"

"Heh heh, working hard again, little fish? That's amazing!" Chu Liang raised his thumb, "What's the most honorable thing?"

"Working hard!" Liu Xiaoyu'er responded loudly.

Chu Liang praised her and continued forward.

Around the corner of the garden was a large wooden shed, the home of the Golden-Furred Hou, Big Head, who was sleeping soundly inside. It had been sleeping a lot lately to accumulate energy for its advancement to the sixth stage.

Chu Liang was about to greet his esteemed teacher when a streak of fire shot over from the pavilion.

Swish—

Di Nufeng suddenly appeared before him. She seemed to still be half-asleep but some unknown force motivated her to fly here.

Although her eyes were closed, her nose twitched as she sniffed around, finally widening her eyes, "Yes, it's the aroma of Penglai's Immortality Peach Brew!"

"Yes..."

Chu Liang blinked, surprised that the scent of alcohol from the previous day could still be detected. In terms of discerning scents, his esteemed teacher's skills were not inferior to the Golden-Furred Hou.

"You-you disobedient disciple, wandering outside and drinking such good wine behind your esteemed teacher's back..." Di Nufeng pouted, looking aggrieved, "Not considering the poor esteemed teacher at home, who has never had such good wine..."

Even if you want to drink this, will the people of Penglai even sell it to you? Chu Liang thought to himself.

"Esteemed Teacher, don't you drink the Drunken Immortal Brew at home anyway..." He chuckled as he spoke, "That drink is not cheap too, right?"

"I don't care." Di Nufeng glared, "Next time you see Immortality Peach Brew, you must bring it back for me to taste, otherwise you're unfilial!"

Chu Liang looked at the woman before him, who was being stubborn and unreasonable, and suddenly doubted his decision.

Maybe...he should reconsider talking to Yang Yuhu...

Chapter 220: The Final Challenge

"When heaven and earth were first created, there was no separation or distance."

"As the energies of yin and yang are thoroughly separated, everything reverts back to the primordial chaos of the universe"

Chu Liang took a deep breath, slowly opening his eyes to find the sky outside had turned to dusk, with a brilliant sunset.

He remembered that after returning to Silver Sword Peak, he had spent the entire night contemplating the Immortal Art: Dimension Compression. Now, as the sun was setting again, he realized that another full day and night had passed.

Later, he learned that the Immortality Peach Brew from the Penglai Supreme Sect, also known as the brew of enlightenment, indeed greatly benefited cultivation.

Unexpectedly, he entered into a state of enlightenment after drinking and completely lost touch with time.

As he stood, stiffness and numbness gripped his limbs and joints. But with the activation of his foundational qi, his blood flow normalized, and his body aches vanished.

This realization marked a turning point. Despite days of earnest study, his grasp of the Immortal Art: Dimension Compression had remained frustratingly vague and abstract. But in a single moment of enlightenment, everything clicked into place, dispelling the confusion and bringing clarity to his understanding.

The Dao of Distancelessness was essentially about returning to the original state of completeness, where there remained no separation or division.

Legend has it that in the primordial chaos of the universe, when all things were just beginning to evolve, the cosmos was merely a point, like an egg, with the yin and yang energies merging in chaos.

Later, after undergoing tremendous changes, the current layout of the heavens and earth emerged. So, no matter how long the distance, in reality, everything originally existed at that one point.

Only one step was needed to cross over that one point.

As the yin and yang energies dispersed and evolved into a myriad of things in the world, the distances began to expand. As long as one returned to the original state of yin and yang energies, they could instantly traverse any obstacle.

Indeed, theoretically speaking, the "Dao of Distancelessness" allowed one to truly go wherever they desired. Wherever their mind wandered, they could instantly teleport to that place.

However, that level of ability required at least reaching the seventh realm. At Chu Liang's current state, he only needed to comprehend that same concept and would not have to achieve that level. As long as he could apply the same principle to cross the distance of one zhang, his learning of the Dimension Compression would be considered a success.

Yin and yang energies...

Chu Liang could feel the true essence of qi within the atmosphere. Compared to others, he had more advantage in the learning of this immortal art as he could simultaneously activate the circulation of the Lesser Yin and Lesser Yang, which meant that the comprehension of the true essence of qi became relatively easy.

Navigating the complex yin and yang energies within the void, which shape heaven and earth, was like traversing a convoluted mountain road that could take an entire day. Yet, by constructing a bridge, one could swiftly cross this straight-line distance in a mere moment.

Yet divine abilities would be needed to traverse this straight line.

Between the Great Dao of yin and yang, there existed a narrow gap. By crossing over this gap, one would gain clarity.

Chu Liang once again attempted to executed the Dimension Compression, but unlike before, he could see this time. The world seemed like lines of black and white, with everything mixed within the lines, yet there was an extremely clear path.

Swoosh—

Chu Liang stepped onto this path.

In the blink of an eye, when he looked again, his figure had already moved one zhang to the left out of thin air.

"So, this is the Dimension Compression. This feeling is quite..." he murmured. Aside from the wrong direction, everything else was a success.

He had thought the path was to the right.

Overcoming the usual way of understanding direction should also be a significant challenge of this immortal art.

But for Chu Liang, it wasn't too difficult, because he had practiced how to use the Razor Leaf...

This discovery surprised him greatly. The feeling of finding the correct direction from a complex mass of lines was surprisingly similar to the extensive practice he had done with the Razor Leaf technique!

As expected, efforts would never go to waste.

Junior Brother Wen, listen to me as I sing you a thank you song.[1]

...

Swoosh!

In the dead of night, a shadowy figure suddenly flashed on Silver Sword Peak, darting left and right.

The use of Dimension Compression would deplete a significant amount of foundational qi. At Chu Liang's current cultivation level, he could probably only perform this immortal art four or five times before exhausting his foundational qi. However, with his double ultimate-tier Golden Core actively operating, he could swiftly replenish his foundational qi, enabling him to practice extensively.

Combined with his previous foundation of practicing the Razor Leaf technique, by the time the moon reached its zenith, Chu Liang had already become proficient in executing the Dimension Compression.

Wherever he pointed, he would flash in that direction but just a zhang away.

Swoosh!

He suddenly appeared in front of a large rock.

When he previously didn't understand the divine abilities that allowed him to walk between reality and illusion, Chu Liang was worried that he might get stuck in a wall or a mountain if he couldn't traverse far enough.

Now that he understood, he realized that if he couldn't completely traverse through a cluster of lines, he would be blocked outside, unable to enter that chaotic mass.

In simpler terms, he would be teleporting and hitting a wall.

Once again, he had depleted his foundational qi. Chu Liang leaned against the massive stone, taking a moment to rest.

As he gazed up at the sky, Chu Liang noticed that the moon seemed exceptionally full that evening. It was the fifteenth night of the lunar cycle.

A flying bird glided beneath the moonlight, casting a solitary shadow that melded into the glow of the moon, reminiscent of an ink painting unfurling on a scroll.

Hm?

Upon witnessing the scene, a sudden realization dawned on Chu Liang. With the lingering effects of the Immortality Peach Brew, his normally sharp mind was unusually clear.

He thought of something in an instant!

He soared into the air, carried by the wind, gliding effortlessly until he reached the valley of the Treasured Pagoda Peak, landing gracefully beside the towering rock in front of the cave. In the stillness of the late hour, he was the only one here.

With his arrival, the forest echoed with the distinctive calls of "Hreeooooorh," and swiftly, the figure of a Baize youngling emerged from the shadows, drawn by his presence.

The little thing is quite dedicated.

Chu Liang gently patted its head, wondering what benefits the high-level members of Mount Shu had promised it, to make the usually unruly Baize youngling diligently guard this place.

With a light leap, Chu Liang settled himself atop the large rock.

In this moment, the moon hung suspended in the center of the sky, its luminous glow resembling a translucent jade disc. Beside the Treasured Pagoda Peak stood the Azure Falling Peak, the highest peak of Mount Shu.

The ancient tree on the Azure Falling Peak reached upward, its branch appearing as if captured within the jade disc.

The wall adorned with intricately carved jade within the cave behind him portrayed a White-Jade Porcelain Cup set against the jade disk. This scene perfectly mirrored the image in the painting! It wasn't the moon itself, but rather the area where shadows intertwined.

Chu Liang ascended once more, soaring straight towards Azure Falling Peak. He landed on the huge tree branch that appeared to be captured within the moon's glow.

All disciples of Mount Shu knew that the ancient tree on Azure Falling Peak was Daoist Yan's cultivation ground. Aside from Jiang Yuebai, none of the other disciples of Azure Falling Peak would dare ascend this tree so recklessly.

But Chu Liang boldly landed there at this moment. He settled himself on that branch, surveying the emptiness around him.

Empty? It can't be...

Just as he thought so, there came a sound of wind above.

Turning his head, he saw the aloof figure of Daoist Yan, standing indifferently there.

"Senior Aunt Yan!" Chu Liang immediately greeted and said, "It is indeed rude of me to visit you at this late hour. Please forgive me."

Chu Liang had always held respect for this senior, one of the few friends of his teacher on Mount Shu. Being able to befriend Di Nufeng for many years without being harmed by her was indeed a skill.

"You knew it's late at night, and it's rude to visit, yet you still had the guts to come to the ancient tree on Azure Falling Peak. What's the reason for your visit?" Daoist Yan calmly inquired.

"I..." Chu Liang looked around, asking, "Shouldn't there be something here?"

"What something?" Daoist Yan's expression remained unchanged.

Chu Liang asserted, "The White-Jade Porcelain Cup that belonged to the Weapons Master!"

Chu Liang was confident that his observation was accurate.

According to that wall adorned with intricately carved jade, the White-Jade Porcelain Cup should be here.

"Heh." Daoist Yan suddenly smiled slightly and said, "You are indeed remarkably clever. You've truly outsmarted all the other disciples of Mount Shu."

"Senior Aunt Yan, thank you for your praise, but it's just a lucky guess," Chu Liang modestly replied.

"But if you want the White-Jade Porcelain Cup, one final challenge remains," Daoist Yan's tone suddenly became somewhat sharp.

"Hm?" Chu Liang frowned. "I've already solved three puzzles. According to how the event went in previous years, shouldn't I have found the valuable item by now?"

The first puzzle led to the Red Cotton Peak. The second puzzle led to the Treasured Pagoda Peak. The solving of the third puzzle led to the Azure Falling Peak. According to how the event went in past years, the final valuable item should be hidden here. Why did they add another step?

"Are you not embarrassed of yourself for asking such a question?" Daoist Yan said in an irritable tone. "In previous years, none of the disciples solved the puzzles so quickly, nor did any act recklessly by selling the answer to the puzzle for people to progress to the next stage... As a disciple of the immortal sect, what kind of conduct is this?"

"... " Chu Liang immediately understood.

His act of selling the second stage's puzzle answer had displeased the elder and senior members who devised the puzzles. They had intended to train the disciples through this event, but they never expected a disciple to profit from it, especially with zero cost.

However, this action didn't violate Mount Shu's regulations in any way. The Mountain God Memorial Ceremony activity already granted a considerable degree of freedom, and they couldn't find grounds to penalize Chu Liang.

They were really angry about this, but they could not stop Chu Liang!

And thus, they likely made the spontaneous decision to introduce an additional challenge solely for Chu Liang, given that he would most likely be the first to solve the final puzzle. It was a unique question tailored specifically for him. Had another disciple discovered it, they wouldn't have faced this additional challenge.

And now, Chu Liang probably felt exactly what the elders of the sect had felt when they found out that he had sold the second puzzle.

He could only ask, "What is the last challenge? Senior Aunt, please tell me."

"I wasn't the one who came up with this challenge, but the task is simple," Daoist Yan said slowly. "You just need to bring me a high-grade Green Pill in exchange for the White-Jade Porcelain Cup."