

M. Slaying 261

Chapter 261: The Ideal Job

The Spirit-Pet Combat Tournament was held the next day, but it was significantly less popular than the fighting tournament. After all, fights between demonic beasts were all about attacking with their teeth, biting and tearing at each other. They weren't as interesting and exciting as the battles between human cultivators.

Only a dozen or so of the spirit pets on Mount Shu had been registered for the tournament, so there was no preliminary round. The tournament started as a knockout tournament and continued that way until the end.

The attendants led all the spirit beasts away to wait for their turn. Their owners were left together in one place, filling the air with fierce tension and the desire to win.

Amid those competitive owners, there was a little girl sitting in a corner, trembling in fear.

"Eh?" a fierce-looking tough guy uttered when he turned around and saw her. He asked, "Little girl, weren't you selling food yesterday?"

"Ah, yes, that's me," Liu Xiaoyu'er answered, quivering as she hurriedly straightened her posture.

She seemed very nervous.

Di Nufeng was attending a meeting as Silver Sword Peak's peak master, and Chu Liang suddenly had something urgent to attend to. So, Liu Xiaoyu'er had become the temporary peak master of Silver Sword Peak and had to shoulder the important task of bringing the temporary deputy peak master, the Golden-Furred Hou, to the tournament.

The little girl was truly terrified.

This was totally different from the Mahjong Tournament. All she had needed to do was arrange her tiles in a row and push them down; it had been extremely simple.

However, the Spirit-Pet Combat Tournament involved fighting!

Liu Xiaoyu'er wouldn't actually be fighting, but she and Golden-Furred Hou had become great friends. She would be very sad if the adorable Big Head were to get hurt.

"Heheh, don't be afraid," the tough guy said. He'd noticed that Liu Xiaoyu'er was quite scared. "I'll look after you, so you can relax."

Liu Xiaoyu'er nodded repeatedly. "Thank you!"

"What kind of spirit pet do you have?" the tough guy asked. Then he made a guess based off Liu Xiaoyu'er's appearance. "A little butterfly? A little bee? A flower fairy?"

"It's a very cute little spirit beast. It's called—"

Just as the little girl was about to answer the tough guy's question, an attendant called out loudly.

"Huang Jingzhu from Iron Sword Peak and Liu Xiaoyu'er from Silver Sword Peak, get ready to fight!"

"I'm coming!" Liu Xiaoyu'er replied.

She scrambled to her feet and hurried over to the stage with small steps.

The tough guy and the little girl stepped onto the stage and stood on opposite sides.

Huang Jingzhu, the tough guy, laughed heartily. "So, I got matched up with you? Hahaha, what a coincidence."

Liu Xiaoyu'er looked at him with a rather pitiful expression, feeling that this was an unfair situation.

This man looks so fierce. His spirit pet must be very ferocious. I wonder if Big Head will get bullied.

"Hey, don't cry later," Huang Jingzhu said quickly. "I'll make sure my spirit pet holds back a bit. I promise it won't kill your spirit pet, so don't worry."

Then a roar ripped through the air. "Raaaar!"

A large mountain-like black bear climbed onto the stage. Its bloodshot eyes gleamed with bloodthirst, matching the tough guy's disposition perfectly.

It was a Boorish Black Bear at the pinnacle of the fourth realm!

Liu Xiaoyu'er looked at the large black bear and pouted in fear, tears welling up in her eyes. "So scary..."

"You..." Huang Jingzhu began.

He was thinking about what he should say to comfort the little girl and what he should do to go easy on her. However, before he figured out what to say, the attendant brought out the little girl's spirit pet...

The words that the tough guy had been about to say changed right then. "You didn't make a mistake, did you?"

Huang Jingzhu was now looking at a massive golden-furred spirit beast that had a languid expression. It was several heads taller than his Boorish Black Bear, and it was shrouded by divine light. Despite its languidness, the spirit beast seemed to be suppressing its ferocious nature, making it much like a dormant volcano. It didn't seem particularly interested in fighting... yet it was chewing on the iron chain holding it down!

Huang Jingzhu thought, Silver Sword Peak... No wonder I thought it sounded familiar.

I heard that Silver Sword Peak got a Golden-Furred Hou recently. Could this be the one?

This adorable little girl is raising this monstrous beast...?

There must be some mistake!

Liu Xiaoyu'er stroked the Golden-Furred Hou's fur and said tearfully, "Xiao Jinjin[1], you mustn't get hurt."

Shouldn't you be saying that to my Xiao Heihei[2] instead?

Huang Jingzhu was completely thrown off.

Now, he wasn't hoping that his spirit beast wouldn't get hurt but rather that it wouldn't get killed.

...

Chu Liang and his two companions arrived at a corner of Southern Bastion Mountain and saw the same black tree from the last time they were there.

It was Liu Sen.

He had given them a referral to join the Chamber of Loyalty, but he had not participated in the operation involving the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm and thus luckily avoided that calamity. Later, when General Hei Yu died suddenly, the Chamber of Loyalty was disbanded, and Liu Sen joined another chamber.

Now, Liu Sen had finally regained a stable standing in White-Bone Hall.

"You actually survived," Liu Sen said. He was quite surprised to see the trio alive. "That last trip to the hidden realm ended in total annihilation. Even General Hei Yu didn't make it back."

"We were on the edge of the group at the time and noticed the situation quickly, so we managed to escape with our lives," Chu Liang recounted. His voice shook a little, a sign of his lingering fear. "Later, we heard something happened on White-Bone Mountain. However, we couldn't find our way back, so we hid for a while."

"That's right. Three immortal sects set up a blockade around White-Bone Mountain, resulting in major casualties for White-Bone Hall," Liu Sen explained angrily. "Daoist Yan killed over a hundred of our brothers with one sword strike. White-Bone Hall still hasn't recovered from the battle. The hall master has ordered us to spread out and lie low and that we should prepare for an important event in a few days."

"What important event?" Chu Liang asked.

"I'll take you to meet my new chamber master first. He'll tell you then." Liu Sen got ready to leave. "I've now joined the Ghost-Face Chamber. The chamber master is rather temperamental. He's not as good-tempered as General Hei Yu, so be careful."

"Understood," the trio replied.

The four of them sped off somewhere. This time, instead of going to White-Bone Mountain, they arrived at an inn in a small town.

In a room upstairs, they met a man with a shocking face. He was tall and burly and dressed in black clothes. His face was covered in horrific burn scars that made it look as though numerous black poisonous insects were crawling on his face.

No wonder his chamber was called Ghost-Face Chamber, Chu Liang thought.

Liu Sen introduced the trio to the man. "Chamber Master, these are the brothers I told you about. We were in the same chamber before. Now, they'd like to join us and become your subordinates."

"Very good. We're in need of people right now. You've come at the right time," the scarred-faced man said with a smile. "Those in my chamber call me Ghost Face. From now on, you'll be with me. Do well, and you may get a fixed position in my chamber in the future."

Ghost Face looked strange, but he seemed more normal than General Hei Yu. At least, Ghost Face didn't make them to do any bizarre and unhygienic blood-oath rituals.

The trio bowed their heads and replied, "We will serve you faithfully like dogs!"

"We've been taking in anyone who wants to join us because there's a major operation coming up," Ghost Face explained. "You've come just in time to join in. You'll be paid very generously."

The trio raised their heads. "Oh?"

Ghost Face continued, "The hall master said that each participant in this operation will receive a thousand Vermilion-Bird coins. If you've contributed by killing, you'll get an additional five hundred for each person you kill. If your contributions are significant, you'll even be rewarded with diabolical artifacts."

Even righteous sects had to offer spirit stones as a reward when they sent their disciples out on missions, so it's obvious that diabolical sects, which placed greater value on receiving gains in exchange for their efforts, would offer even more. Without enough incentives, none of their members would be willing to participate in the sect's operations.

The Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten had their own currencies made from spirit stones, but it was very difficult for the diabolical sects to implement their own. They had to stay concealed in the shadows, so they wouldn't be able to convert their spirit stone currency to those of the righteous sects. Even if the Dark King Sect did make its own currency, its own members wouldn't support its use, as it wouldn't have any value outside their sect.

That's why they used Taotie City's currency.

Chu Liang thought, A thousand Vermilion-Bird coins for one mission... This is an incredibly high-paying job. My sect never has missions with such great rewards. Moreover, that amount is just what we're getting. The chamber master will probably take a cut, so the original pay must be even higher.

People in the criminal world are really generous.[3]

Chu Liang inquired, "Chamber Master, may I ask what the operation entails?"

"I can't reveal the specifics yet. Just hang around somewhere in the southwest, but not too far away. And be ready at all times." Ghost Face threw out three jade talismans. "It's an unusual time right now, so it's inconvenient for so many of us to gather in the same place. Take these tracking jade talismans. I'll summon you here when you're needed."

When Chu Liang took the jade talisman, he was grinning inwardly.

A thousand Vermilion-Bird coins for one operation... We don't need to do anything for now... We just need to hang around in the southwest, which is basically at Mount Shu's doorstep, and be ready to rush over at any time.

It's a high-paying job and requires little work. Just those two conditions make it a great job... but it's close to home too.

It's the ideal job.

Chapter 262: Wanderers of the North and South

As the Mount Shu Summit progressed further, more and more guests from other immortal sects came to spectate. In a tournament with a relatively long duration, the later matches naturally become increasingly exciting, featuring true showdowns between strong opponents.

As time went by, these matches were gaining more and more attention.

In fact, even the arrogant members of the Penglai Supreme Sect were unwilling to miss out on the chance to get a glimpse of the strength of these competitors.

Aside from the representatives of the other sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten who were invited since the beginning of the ceremony, there were many other cultivators who came on their own initiative later on. A big group of these cultivators were minor sects ranked below the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten.

Recently, older cultivators were seen accompanying younger cultivators, whose cultivation energy still felt fresh, as they wandered around Mount Shu, marveling at everything they saw.

There were some visitors who had visited before and they felt that the service on Mount Shu was much better this time. There were snacks and drinks being sold, making the viewing experience of the matches even better. There were specialties being sold.

This way, they could gift their friends and family some items when they head back.

Two important figures also visited Mount Shu today.

"Scholar Sun[1] and Elder Huang, please forgive me for not greeting you sooner." The Weapons Master personally stepped out to meet them. With his gray beard, white robe, sturdy build, piercing blue-gold eyes, and hands of black meteor iron, he seemed almost like a deity.

"It's an honor to have one of the Four Guardian Elders welcome us personally," said the old man standing in front, cupping his hand and smiling. "We wouldn't dare complain."

On the left stood a man dressed in white robes with a jade belt, looking like a scholar. His hair was a mix of gray and white, neatly groomed. With a round belly, he was slightly overweight. As he smiled in a nonchalant manner, he gave off this air of laziness.

This person's surname was Sun and he was a renowned Confucian scholar.

On the right, a man in a simple yellow robe stood out with his ruddy complexion and head of black hair. His eyes appeared bright and alert as he walked, scanning the surroundings with a lively gaze.

This man, with the surname Huang, was an elder of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

If they were just a scholar and an elder, there would be no need for a guardian elder to personally welcome them. Recently, many distinguished guests from the sects of the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten had visited and all of them were hosted by the Foreign Affairs Hall without any special treatment.

However, the influence of these two individuals was extraordinary.

The elderly man with the surname Sun was a preeminent Confucian scholar of his time. His name had been displayed in the Noblemen's Hall for many years, and he taught at the Ascending Dragon Academy. Although he consistently declined official positions offered by the imperial court, he remained vocal in his critiques of current affairs, often shocking the world with his writings.

He was the type of person that refused to take office but intended to give the world a piece of his mind.

Now, his students were everywhere. He had retired from the Ascending Dragon Academy and spent his days traveling the world.

As for the elderly man surnamed Huang, he had been the master of the Wind-Catching Hall in the Celestial Pivot Pavilion and had achieved remarkable success. The Seven Stars Gazette

had always held significant influence among immortality cultivators. However, it was under his leadership that this publication gained widespread recognition across the nine provinces. Today, the Seven Stars Gazette was known by everyone, largely thanks to his substantial contributions.

The current master of the Wind-Catching Hall, Zhou Yijian, was his successor. Although Elder Huang was still an elder of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, he no longer participated in the sect's affairs and was instead traveling and enjoying the scenery.

Scholar Sun and Elder Huang had been close friends for years. For the past several years, they had traveled the world together, earning the nickname "Wanderers of the North and South."

Occasionally, they would write an article together, which would attract immense attention.

With such renowned figures visiting Mount Shu, they obviously didn't dare to show any negligence. Since the Weapons Master knew them well, he came personally to welcome them.

"Time flies. It's been thirty years since I last attended the Mount Shu Summit. It seems the Mount Shu Sect has only grown more prosperous," Scholar Sun remarked with a smile.

Elder Huang shook his head and replied, "I've always told you how lively the Mount Shu Summit is! It is different from the grand events of other immortal sects. I suggested we visit more often, but you always said no."

"Don't slander me," Scholar Sun quickly retorted. "Twenty years ago, I suggested we come here, but you were the one who insisted on following the tour with the South Melody Conservatory disciples."

"Wasn't it you who was in a hurry to find a fragment of an ancient book ten years ago?" Elder Huang retorted, glaring at him.

"Alright, alright, it's good that both of you are here this time," interjected the Weapons Master with a smile. "It just so happens that the main competition of the Mount Shu Summit is happening today, so you can both evaluate our newer generation of Mount Shu disciples." He waved his hand in a gesture of mediation, clearly used to their banter.

"The new generation of Mount Shu disciples is, of course, exceptional," Scholar Sun responded politely to the Weapons Master, smiling warmly. "We've heard a great deal about Jiang Yuebai and Xu Ziyang from this generation."

"Jiangjiang will surely win!" Elder Huang exclaimed, pumping his fist in the air as he heard Jiang Yuebai's name.

Scholar Sun discreetly rolled his eyes and subtly moved two steps away as he felt embarrassed to be associated with Elder Huang.

As they continued their conversation, the three made their way to the viewing platform and settled into their seats. Staring at the stage in front, the Weapons Master chuckled and said, "Aside from Jiang Yuebai and Xu Ziyang, there are a few other new disciples who has shown great potential. Take Mu Yueting and Chu Liang, who just stepped onto the stage—they both have shown remarkable promise. Why don't you two guess who will win this match?"

Scholar Sun stroked his beard and observed for a while. He then contemplated for a bit before saying, "If we base our judgment solely on the qi they've revealed, assuming that neither is concealing their true power... this young girl is approaching the later stage of the Golden Core Realm. She's incredibly talented for her age, and her sword qi is very fierce. The young man is in the beginning stage of the Golden Core Realm, but his qi... Does he have an ultimate-tier Golden Core? That is very rare. No wonder you mentioned that he has great potential. An ultimate-tier Golden Core could indeed set him up as a key figure in Mount Shu in the future. But he is behind by a stage of cultivation and we don't know if his ultimate-tier Golden Core can compensate for the disparity in their cultivation levels."

"I bet on Mu Yueting to win," Elder Huang said without hesitation, flipping through a small booklet in his hands.

"How can you be so sure?" Scholar Sun asked.

"Ha, this is a notebook written by a disciple of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion a few days ago," Elder Huang said, waving the booklet. "Mu Yueting has shown comprehensive skills in her two fights so far, especially her impressive swordsmanship. As for Chu Liang, he relied on various enchanted tools to surprise his opponent in one fight and used cunning tactics in another. He hasn't shown any real strength."

Hearing this, Scholar Sun pondered for a while.

"And the most important point," Elder Huang continued, "is that Mu Yueting's teacher is Daoist Yan, while Chu Liang's teacher is Di Nufeng."

"In that case, I am also betting on the girl," Scholar Sun said without hesitation.

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For the past two days, Chu Liang had been quite busy. He had signed up for many events and had to participate in one almost everyday. He also had to handle tasks for the undercover operation.

If there were scheduling conflicts, he could always discuss it with the sect. However, since he wasn't the designated participant in yesterday's Spirit-Pet Combat Tournament, it wouldn't matter if Liu Xiaoyu'er went in his place.

When Liu Xiaoyu'er returned, she seemed unhappy. When Chu Liang asked her about it, she revealed that she had met a tall, burly, kind man at the event who cried really loudly because the Golden-Furred Hou had bullied his spirit pet. He cried for a while and Liu Xiaoyu'er spent quite some time consoling him before she could make her way back.

Normally, it was already considered exceptional if there were fourth-realm spirit pets at the Mount Shu Summit. Those at the fifth realm of cultivation would be a strong contender for the championship. Prior to joining the Spirit-Pet Combat Tournament, the tall and burly guy likely never expected that there would be a sixth-realm beast participating in the tournament.

Although the Golden-Furred Hou had just reached the sixth realm of cultivation and had yet to consolidate the knowledge in this realm or master all of its innate divine abilities, it could still easily bully a spirit pet at the fourth realm.

Thankfully, there were no urgent demands for the undercover operation, allowing Chu Liang to return in time for the main competition today.

His opponent today was yet another powerful one.

From the round of sixteen to the quarterfinals, most of the competitors were at the Golden Core Realm, making it difficult to encounter a weak opponent. Nevertheless, Mu Yueting was among the stronger competitors.

If it weren't for Jiang Yuebai and Xu Ziyang, she would be a top-tier candidate for the head disciple position.

The opponents for each match were decided by a draw the day before. Chu Liang felt that his luck in the draws had been average and wondered if he should let Liu Xiaoyu'er draw for him next time.

Mu Yueting was dressed in a white sword outfit with a high collar that covered her neck, creating a sharp and pristine appearance. She had short hair cut to her ears, fair skin, single eyelids, and a tall, slender build. A four-chi-long, thin sword was strapped to her back.

She stood there, emanating an aura that unmistakably revealed her powerful qi at the middle stage of the Golden Core Realm.

Jiang Yuebai was powerful, but she relied on her Transcendent Spirit constitution, which allowed her to master divine techniques and skills easily. However, on the Azure Falling Peak, Mu Yueting was the one who resembled Daoist Yan the most. Mu Yueting focused purely on the art of the sword. She was two years older than Jiang Yuebai, and before Jiang Yuebai became well-known, Mu Yueting was thought to be the successor of Daoist Yan.

Chu Liang's aura indicated that he was at the beginning stage of the Golden Core Realm, which made him seem less powerful. However, having the ultimate-tier Golden Core would at least help narrow the gap between them.

To the spectators, it probably appeared as though both fighters were evenly matched. Although Chu Liang was slightly less powerful, he still had the ability to fight against Mu Yueting.

However, Jiang Yuebai saw things differently.

Standing beneath the stage, she watched Chu Liang intently, her thoughts swirling. It had been some time since she last evaluated his progress in cultivation, and considering his astonishingly rapid growth, she pondered what strides he might have made since then.

Would he have stopped or slowed down his progress during this time?

She should feel a stronger bond with her senior sister. Yet, for some reason, she found herself not wanting Chu Liang to lose.

This inexplicable feeling was difficult to describe, but a whispering voice in her mind seemed to be saying... Chu Liang definitely wouldn't lose.

Chapter 263: I Will Take My Leave First

"Chu Liang definitely won't lose. Rest assured," Lin Bei said, patting his chest confidently.

Shang Ziliang and his two lackeys stood behind, looking rather worried. Shang Ziliang said, "Big Bro has always shown remarkable feats, but Senior Sister Mu is no ordinary disciple. I'm not sure if he will really win if he has to reveal his true strength."

"Although I don't know how he's going to win, I know he will," Lin Bei said confidently, emphasizing each word. "I have absolute faith in him."

Seeing how much confidence Lin Bei had in Chu Liang, Shang Ziliang was shocked...

If Lin Bei has this much faith in my big bro, how can I lose against Lin Bei? Shang Ziliang thought to himself.

And so, Shang Ziliang looked up and cheered loudly, "Chu Liang! Chu Liang! Strongest in Mount Shu!"

Chu Liang hastily gestured for Shang Ziliang to keep his mouth shut, feeling speechless. Turning back to face Mu Yueting, his expression became serious.

"Senior Sister Mu, I'm looking forward to this fight with you," Chu Liang said earnestly.

"Likewise."

The two clasped their hands and bowed.

Then, the supervising elder in the center waved his hand, signaling the start of the match.

"Start!"

As the match began, Mu Yueting's attention zeroed in on Chu Liang's hands, while her own sword emitted a dazzling radiance.

She had seen Chu Liang fight before and knew he relied on a strange enchanted tool that took on various forms. His attacks were extremely fast and powerful.

Nevertheless, as long as one maintained full concentration, his attacks wouldn't be hard to deflect.

Once she blocked his initial strike, she just needed to make the first move and not give him another chance to use his enchanted tool!

Yet, Chu Liang did not take out the Green Leaf. Instead, he pulled out a jade talisman—an art-storing jade talisman.

The Mount Shu Sect had set very strict rules regarding the types of enchanted tools participants could bring on stage. Each participant was allowed to bring only one item, which had to be approved beforehand. Tools like the art-storing jade talisman were permitted but with specific limitations: only one item could be brought on stage, and the divine skills or abilities stored within it could not exceed one realm higher than the participant's cultivation level.

This meant that if Chu Liang had taken the art-storing jade talisman on stage, he wouldn't be allowed to bring the Green Leaf. Additionally, the jade talisman could only be used once and could only store divine techniques and skills that a fourth-realm cultivator could perform.

Despite the numerous restrictions, Chu Liang still brought it on stage. Within this jade talisman was a shamanic curse technique cast by Luo Yao.

The Forbidden Ground!

Bam!

As a breeze swept by, the curse was cast.

Mu Yueting suddenly felt her control over her foundational qi being suppressed by the rules of heaven and earth. Realizing the effect of this shamanic technique, her expression changed immediately.

She had spent her entire life cultivating the art of sword and nothing else. If she couldn't use her foundational qi, she wouldn't be able to control the sword qi.

Yet, she didn't sit idly by. Instead, she fully activated her cultivation energy. Her sword flickered unpredictably, unleashing a sharp and resolute aura!

She knew that as long as she exerted all her force, the duration of this Forbidden Ground would be greatly shortened. It should take her only a few seconds to break free from the restrictions of the Forbidden Ground. By then, Chu Liang wouldn't have any enchanted tools left to use, while she would have the advantage of greater cultivation energy and still possess an enchanted tool.

She just needed to survive these few seconds! But could she make it?

...

Chu Liang had already dashed toward her with the speed as fast as a gust of wind.

From observing her previous two battles, he had seen all of Mu Yueting's attacks. He knew that her entire cultivation was focused on sword techniques, making her attacks extraordinarily ferocious. If she were to go all out, even a fifth realm practitioner wouldn't dare to guarantee they could walk away unscathed.

Similarly, her weakness lay in her lack of proficiency in defense.

While offense might indeed serve as the best defense, what if she were unable to launch an attack? Throughout the previous two battles, Chu Liang had never observed Mu Yueting using any divine skills that solely relied on her physical abilities.

And so, he deduced that Mu Yueting, as a woman who purely cultivated the art of sword, never paid much attention to the cultivation of her physical abilities.

In fact, this was similar to Fang Ting, whom Chu Liang had fought in the previous match. Both Fang Ting and Mu Yueting were disciples of the Mount Shu Sect who purely cultivated the art of sword. They were perfect examples of individuals with high offense but weak defense.

The only difference was that Chu Liang was more familiar with Fang Ting. He knew how to distract Fang Ting and cause him to lower his guard, allowing Chu Liang to win the match with an even simpler method.

As for the fight with Mu Yueting, it would obviously be more difficult.

He only had a few seconds to attack before she would break free from the restrictions of the Forbidden Ground.

Since Chu Liang had started cultivating the Secret Dragon Blood Technique, his physical prowess had advanced far beyond that of other disciples at his cultivation level.

He strode forward, arriving in front of Mu Yueting within a second.

Mu Yueting lifted her longsword, preparing herself for the attack.

Despite her weaker physique, Mu Yueting was still a fourth-realm cultivator, and she wouldn't be left without any strength to attack. Even if she relied solely on her sword skills, she could likely defeat a martial arts cultivator at the third realm. Therefore, she wasn't panicking at this moment.

Even if Chu Liang had some martial arts[1] foundation, how powerful could he possibly be?

As Chu Liang faced Mu Yueting's longsword, he didn't even draw his blades. In a flash, he instantly appeared behind her with an indifferent expression.

A gleam of brilliance flashed in his eyes.

I have studied all your abilities, but you know nothing of my methods. The outcome of this battle was decided before it even began, Chu Liang thought to himself.

While executing the Turbulent Stream Movement Art, he delivered a blow with the edge of his hand!

Bang!

Mu Yueting's body collapsed without resistance, losing consciousness. In the span of two breaths, the battle came to an end.

...

"Hehe, Old Huang, say something, eh?" Scholar Sun grinned from the viewing platform.

"What are you grinning about? Didn't you guess wrong as well?" Elder Huang looked a bit frustrated. He couldn't believe this kid had managed to win the contest so easily by pulling off another trick.

"I guessed he'd lose simply because of my bias against Di Nufeng. But, putting that aside, I actually like this young man with an ultimate-tier Golden Core," Scholar Sun said, shaking his head. "The result wasn't surprising. I was not the one who analyzed it in detail with a notebook, and still ended up completely wrong."

"Hmph." Elder Huang threw the book in his hand aside, snorting. "It was just luck this time. Without real strength, he won't get far."

"He knows how to use his own advantages and target the enemy's weaknesses. I quite like that," Scholar Sun's eyes lit up as he suddenly suggested, "How about we make a bet on his next match?"

"Oh?" Elder Huang asked, "What do you want to bet?"

"If he wins the next match, you'll let me borrow Omniscience from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion for three days," Scholar Sun proposed.

"I've long noticed your interest in 'Omniscience.' You're really showing your true colors," Elder Huang said with a cold chuckle. "And if he loses the next match, you'll give the Celestial Pivot Pavilion the honor of doing the calligraphy inscription this year."

"Deal!" Scholar Sun said with a smile.

The two old men were chatting and laughing when they heard a commotion nearby. It was the Weapons Master, trying to stop someone.

"Don't make a scene. Is the Mount Shu Summit the time for you to act recklessly?" the Weapons Master said sternly.

"I don't have any other intentions. I heard that the old man with the surname Huang is here?" the person shouted. "I've been meaning to ask him something. His disciple has been badmouthing me in the Seven Stars Gazette all the time. Was it under his orders?"

The fiery voice startled both old men, and they turned to see a tall, beautiful woman in a robe, looking fierce and eager to rush over.

Elder Huang's expression changed drastically. He quickly got up and said, "Just tell her my house is on fire. I'll take my leave first!"

Chapter 264: The Great Berry Bandits (I)

Elder Huang ran off quickly, disappearing in a flash. Scholar Sun reacted a bit slower, so he ended up having to stay behind and face Di Nufeng.

Despite being a renowned figure in the world of immortality cultivators, Scholar Sun felt rather nervous to see her.

"Eheh. Ah Feng[1], it's been a long time."

"Old Sun, it truly has been many years since we last met up," Di Nufeng said when she arrived. Seeing that Scholar Sun was the only one here, she asked loudly, "Where did Elder Huang go?"

"He said his house is on fire." Scholar Sun scratched his head and moved his feet anxiously. "If there's nothing important you want to talk about, I'll go help put out the fire."

"Sit down."

"Aye."

At Di Nufeng's command, Scholar Sun obediently sat down, not daring to make another attempt to flee.

The Weapons Master was watching them from behind. He felt rather amused, so he didn't interfere.

Di Nufeng had a special relationship with the Wanderers of the North and South, but they didn't have much of a relationship with the Mount Shu Sect. So, it was not appropriate for the Weapons Master to get involved.

"The last time the two of you came to Mount Shu was thirty years ago, right? You didn't visit for so many years... Was it because you're afraid I'll beat you up?" Di Nufeng asked bluntly as she looked at Scholar Sun.

"How could that be..." Scholar Sun, who had a very good temper, smiled in response. "We have always been extremely concerned about you. We wanted to visit you ages ago, but we've been too busy. That's why we didn't come over to see you."

Di Nufeng rolled her eyes. "Oh, drop the act. What could you two idle old men possibly be busy with?"

"The world is not peaceful, so how could we be idle?" Scholar Sun said with a sigh.

"Anyway, since I've caught you this time, you'll have to give me some benefits, right?" Di Nufeng pondered for a moment. "Write an article praising me, like those ones that are intriguing and also tear-jerkers. And have Elder Huang publish it in the gazette."

"I have no problems with that!" Scholar Sun immediately agreed. However, he added mischievously, "It's just that I don't know if Old Huang would be okay with that. He's secretly biased against you. Just as you've already found out, his disciple heads the Wind-Catching Hall, and that guy is constantly slandering you more and more every day. Hmph, hmph..."

Seeing as Elder Huang wasn't around, Scholar Sun diverted Di Nufeng's attention to Elder Huang and maddeningly stoked the flames of Di Nufeng's rage.

"Precisely!" Di Nufeng punched the palm of her other hand, feeling extremely furious. "They've been ruining my image. It's practically a crime! I've long disliked Zhou Yijian. One of these days, I'm going to storm into the Celestial Pivot Pavilion!"

"It's about time you did that. Are they taking you for a fool just because you haven't shown them your rage?" Scholar Sun said indignantly, echoing her anger.

"That is exactly it!" Di Nufeng nodded in agreement. "The more I think about it, the angrier I get."

"I'm getting angry too just from putting myself in your shoes. Wait here. I'll go catch Old Huang and drag him back for you to beat up until he confesses!"

After saying that, Scholar Sun stood up and disappeared in a flash.

"Eh?" Di Nufeng uttered as she looked in the direction that the two old men had disappeared.

She blinked blankly, sensing there was something amiss.

Nevertheless, Di Nufeng didn't dwell on it. After all, she was there to watch Chu Liang compete. She had, by chance, heard that the Wanderers of the North and South were there too, so she just went over to see if that was true.

Seeing Chu Liang win so easily put Di Nufeng in a good mood, so she was unbothered by the strange situation with the old men and let the matter go.

The next day, it was time for Di Nufeng's favorite event, the Wine-God Contest.

It was the first time this contest was held at the Mount Shu Summit. There weren't many participants, and there were no preliminaries or finals. Everything would happen in one match.

The contest stage consisted of some long tables, and there were rows of earthen jars filled with strong liquor lined up on each one. The contest was a very simple one. The contestants had to drink ten jars of Drunken Tiger Wine in the first round, ten jars of Raging Inferno Brew in the second, and ten jars of Drunken Immortal Brew in the third. The fourth round and onward would continue in the same fashion.

The contest was designed so that a significant number of contestants would get eliminated in each round. The contestant who lasted until the end would be the winner.

This was a contest where Di Nufeng could drink for free, gain fame, and make money. How could she possibly miss out on such a great opportunity?

However, when she arrived at the contest venue, she saw someone she never expected to see there.

"Aunt Tian?" Di Nufeng stared at the person in question with wide eyes. "You're here to take part in the contest too?"

"Yes, and?" the person in question replied.

She was the Discipline Master. Dressed in black robes, she was standing among the contestants, but no one dared to look at her directly.

"You, a distinguished Guardian Elder, are taking part in the contest...? This..."

Di Nufeng was speechless.

"Who do you think suggested adding this event?" the Discipline Master asked. "And who said a Guardian Elder can't participate in a recreational competition?"

"But who would dare try to win when you're participating?" Di Nufeng muttered.

"If you're capable of outdrinking me, don't hold back." The Discipline Master sneered. "It seems you've forgotten who taught you how to drink."

"Heh." Di Nufeng put on a devilish smile. "Aunt Tian, times have changed."

...

"Mount Shu sure has changed a lot."

A weathered man wearing a conical bamboo hat sighed deeply.

He was gazing at Mount Shu, which was over thirty li away. Yet, he seemed as if he could see every blade of grass and tree in the seemingly unending mountain range.

The man was holding the hand of a little girl, who was struggling hard to break free from his grip.

They were the Whale-Riding Immortal and the little girl who had emerged from the Immortals' Marsh.

"Calm down. We can't go straight to Mount Shu. There are too many people around. If we draw a lot of attention, I may not be able to protect you," the Whale-Riding Immortal said. He coaxed the little girl, "Didn't we talk about this before? I brought you here to get the fruit you want. After that, you'll have to be good and return to the Holy Mountain with me. But if we're doing this, you'll have to listen to me and behave."

"Fruit..." the little girl uttered, pointing upward.

"You're pointing in the wrong direction—huh?"

The Whale-Riding Immortal had been about to say that Mount Shu couldn't be in the sky. However, he saw a beam of swordlight suddenly pass by overhead.

It was a sunny day and still daytime. That made it very difficult to see the beam of swordlight flying past high up in the sky, looking like just a narrow streak of green qi.

Nevertheless, it was undoubtedly extremely easy for the Whale-Riding Immortal and the little girl to see it.

"Come on down," the Whale-Riding Immortal said.

He pointed at the green qi and flexed his finger a little. That green qi dropped from the sky rapidly, plunging toward them.

The sword-riding cultivator seemed to be fighting to stay in control of his flying sword and managed to slow his descent somewhat. However, the Whale-Riding Immortal flexed his finger again, and the swordlight instantly landed in front of them.

"When it comes to playing with flying swords, I'm your ancestor, yet you still think you can escape?" the Whale-Riding Immortal sneered.

The cultivator that got dragged down appeared to be a middle-aged man. He didn't have a high cultivation level and was likely to be at the beginning stage of the fourth realm. Judging from his appearance, he was probably a high-ranking teacher from a small immortal sect.

He'd left his mustache to grow out into the shape of the character for eight 八, completing his rather imposing appearance. Nevertheless, the two people before him were not intimidated in the least.

"This mountain is mine, and these trees are mine. If you want to pass through here, leave the fruit behind!" the Whale-Riding Immortal bellowed.

"Huh?" the middle-aged cultivator uttered, taken aback.

He had been flying in the sky when a powerful force suddenly overwhelmed him and dragged him down. Realizing he had encountered a formidable cultivator, he had no intention of resisting at all. In fact, he had decided he would comply regardless of whether the formidable wanted to rob him or violate him... as long as he could keep his life.

Unexpectedly, all the formidable cultivator wanted was fruit.

But I don't have any fruit...

"Esteemed heroes[2], I'll give you whatever you want. But what fruit do I have?" the middle-aged cultivator asked, feeling quite bewildered.

"You don't have any?"

The Whale-Riding Immortal then looked at the little girl.

The little girl pointed at the middle-aged cultivator. "Fruit... has..."

The middle-aged cultivator became nervous. "This... little hero, what fruit are you talking about?"

The little one in front of him looked young. Yet, when she pointed at him, she emanated a powerful bloodthirst that caused a chill to run down his back and his legs to shake.

The adult wasn't the only formidable one; the little one was formidable too!

The middle-aged cultivator lamented inwardly that he had experienced too little of the world. If he had encountered more powerful cultivators, he would have known at a glance that these two were not simply formidable cultivators but monstrous beings on the same level as Eminent Ones!

"It's a red berry with golden veins," the Whale-Riding Immortal added, clarifying for the little girl.

"Ah!" the middle-aged cultivator exclaimed, suddenly remembering something. He took out two gift boxes. "Are you talking about this Mount Shu specialty?"

These were gift boxes he had bought on Mount Shu for several sword coins. He had intended to give them to his friends once he was back at his sect. They weren't particularly valuable, but they couldn't be bought outside Mount Shu. They could be easily purchased on Mount Shu though.

It never even occurred to the middle-aged cultivator that the berries might be so valuable that two incredibly powerful beings would want to steal them from him.

Chapter 265: The Great Berry Bandits (II)

Whoosh.

Before the middle-aged cultivator even finished his train of thought, the little girl suddenly darted over to him, snatched the two boxes of berries, and darted back to her spot next to the Whale-Riding Immortal. It all happened in an instant.

That speed...

She could have killed me ten times over in the time it took for her to snatch the berries from me.

It only took a moment for the middle-aged cultivator to become drenched in cold sweat.

The Whale-Riding Immortal said, "We're not taking them for free. Here."

He tossed a sparkling stone to the middle-aged cultivator. The moment it landed in the middle-aged cultivator's hand, he felt a surge of spiritual qi. The small crystal contained a turbulent spiritual qi.

Could this be the precious sea-spirit stone?

A sea-spirit stone of this size is probably worth at least a hundred Vermillion-Bird coins, which is more than enough to buy ten boxes of those berries.

The middle-aged cultivator instinctively declined. "How could I accept this..."

"Just take it. There's no need to be polite," the Whale-Riding Immortal replied.

Then he waved his hand, and the scenery around the middle-aged cultivator warped.

When the middle-aged cultivator was able to see his surroundings clearly again, he realized he was now dozens of li ahead from where he'd been stopped.

What amazing divine abilities...

The middle-aged cultivator was stunned. He felt that the abilities of the people he'd encountered were beyond his comprehension, and thus, he did not dare linger there. He set off for home without delay.

Meanwhile, the Whale-Riding Immortal looked at the little girl and grinned. "We're pretty lucky. Someone delivered the berries right to us. Are you satisfied now?"

The little girl pointed at the distant sky. "Fruit."

...

In the upper level of the pavilion on Silver Sword Peak, Chu Liang sighed deeply. "Oh, what a pity, what a pity."

Who would have thought that an alcoholic who drank every day for decades, nearly drinking her family to destitution, would be unable to drink at the Wine-God Contest?

Chu Liang's eyes were filled with disappointment.

Liu Xiaoyu'er sat still on a small stool nearby, with an upright posture and a serious expression. However, she didn't really understand what Chu Liang and Di Nufeng were talking about. The little one was actually just spacing out.

The Golden-Furred Hou lay outside with its big head by the door. Its ears were perked up, and it seemed to be listening in on the meeting, afraid that its name might get mentioned.

Di Nufeng, on the other hand, was sitting in a corner with her head hung low, looking dejected.

Hearing Chu Liang criticize her, Di Nufeng raised her head.

To defend her loss, she muttered, "Well... I had no idea that drinking different types of alcohol would get me drunk so easily. And who could have expected that Aunt Tian, a Guardian Elder, would join the contest... It's not fair!"

Chu Liang shook his head. "Haaa."

Learning from Chu Liang, Liu Xiaoyu'er and the Golden-Furred Hou did the same. Liu Xiaoyu'er's small head and the Golden-Furred Hou's big head shook at the same time.

After getting reprimanded twice, Di Nufeng's bad temper finally emerged.

She glared at Chu Liang and barked, "Since when did you have the right to lecture me? Who's the teacher here?!"

"Esteemed Teacher, it's just that we had such high expectations for you," Chu Liang said. "We'd hoped you would set a good example for us and win. Instead... you were eliminated from the Mahjong Tournament... and even caused so much trouble that you got banned for life from entering the tournament. Now, you've suffered a defeat in the Wine-God Contest as well. On the other hand, look at us."

Chu Liang pointed at Big Head. "The Golden-Furred Hou hasn't lost in the Spirit-Pet Combat Tournament."

Then he pointed at Liu Xiaoyu'er, "Xiaoyu'er hasn't lost in the Mahjong Tournament."

Finally, he pointed at himself. "As for me, I haven't lost in any of the events I participated in."

"There's a reason for my losses. It's not that I'm weak; I was targeted," Di Nufeng argued with conviction.

Seeing Chu Liang's profound gaze focused on her, Di Nufeng ultimately waved off her excuse. "Failure is the mother of success. So, it's right that I failed, and you succeeded."

Sure, Chu Liang thought. You lost, but you're still taking advantage of me.

Chu Liang ignored Di Nufeng's shamelessness and said, "Esteemed Teacher, to motivate us to do even better, I think you should do something to make up for your losses."

"Do what?" Di Nufeng asked.

"Since you lost in the Wine-God Contest, how about we cut our peak's alcohol expenses by half from now on?" Chu Liang suggested.

Di Nufeng narrowed her eyes.

The peak's alcohol expenses... but among the members of Silver Sword Peak, Di Nufeng was the only one that drank alcohol. That meant Chu Liang was basically trying to persuade her to cut back on buying alcohol.

No wonder this kid suddenly called for a meeting this evening. He'd already had this all planned out.

With his plan in motion, I can see the dagger now.[1]

He's showing his true intentions.

This kid has been waiting for me to fall into his trap this whole time.

Di Nufeng pondered for a moment.

Then she suddenly turned around and cried out, "Ugh! My head hurts! My whole body hurts!"

...

Di Nufeng had too much experience in being shameless, so Chu Liang lost in the end.

The main reason was that his combat power was inferior to hers. Di Nufeng threw all three of them out with one hand. Words did not work with her.

It appears that the possibility of being able to reason things out with someone more powerful than you is just a beautiful dream.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang didn't dwell on the matter. It just so happened that it was about time to draw his lot for his match tomorrow in the main competition, so he had Liu Xiaoyu'er help him draw his lot.

Liu Xiaoyu'er drew Shen Qiongguang from Jade Sword Peak to be Chu Liang's opponent.

The main competition was now at the quarterfinals, and there was one disciple at the Realm of the Five Elements, six at the Golden Core Realm, and one at the Spiritual Awareness Realm[2]. That sole disciple at the Spiritual Awareness Realm was Ling Ao from Solitude Peak.

Chu Liang would rather face a normal disciple at the Golden Core Realm than encounter Ling Ao this early in the competition.

Ling Ao was simply too strange.

The remaining participants included Xu Ziyang and Jiang Yuebai, so the lot that Liu Xiaoyu'er drew was an excellent one. In fact, Shen Qiongguang seemed a little weaker than Mu Yueting, Chu Liang's opponent from the previous round. This meant Shen Qiongguang wouldn't be a difficult opponent for Chu Liang.

Chu Liang thought that this was a great result.

Unexpectedly, there was something even better to come after that.

The next morning, Chu Liang received news that Shen Qiongguang had withdrawn from the competition due to injury, giving him a bye[3]!

"Eh?"

Everyone was quite shocked when they heard the news. How could Shen Qiongguang get injured at such an important time?

It turned out that, besides participating in the Mount Shu Summit, Shen Qiongguang had spent the last few days getting to know the young lady from the South Melody Conservatory, and they had been getting along pretty well. Feeling he had a chance with her, Shen Qiongguang had been very attentive to all of the young lady's needs.

Then something popped up, and the young lady needed to return to her sect that very night before Shen Qiongguang's match with Chu Liang. Shen Qiongguang decided he would escort the young lady back to her sect anyway.

However, the moment the pair left Mount Shu, they ran into trouble. Two bandits jumped out and tried to rob them. Shen Qiongguang wanted to impress the beautiful young lady, so he felt this was a heaven-sent opportunity.

Without a second thought, he drew his sword to strike.

Then he was half-beaten to death with one punch.

It's said the one who struck him was a little girl who looked only a few years old. Fortunately for Shen Qiongguang, the adult accompanying the little girl had held her back.

Nevertheless... the part that was hardest for Shen Qiongguang to accept was that after sending him flying, all the bandits took from the young lady from the South Melody Conservatory were two boxes of Mount Shu's specialty berries. Then they left.

Shen Qiongguang thought, Oh, so that's all you wanted? Why didn't you say so earlier?!

Shen Qiongguang had only taken one punch, but that one punch had given him severe internal and external injuries. It had broken through his defenses effortlessly as if breaking through something dry and rotten. The adult bandit had even treated Shen Qiongguang's injuries on the spot, but the damage to Shen Qiongguang's qi and blood circulation routes couldn't be healed so easily. He needed at least ten to fifteen days of bed rest.

It would be pointless to force himself to compete in such a state, so he chose to withdraw from the competition. With only one person withdrawing, the elders couldn't select another participant to replace him.

Nor could they select a replacement from the eliminated participants. When the sixteen participants had been reduced to eight in the previous round, the eliminated participants hadn't been assigned rankings. That meant it would be unfair to the remaining seven eliminated participants no matter who was chosen as Shen Qiongguang's replacement. It was simpler to let Shen Qiongguang's opponent have a bye.

Consequently, Chu Liang was the lucky person who got the bye. Just like that, the Mount Shu Summit got its first semifinalist!

Chu Liang was extremely surprised too...

I was just eating hot pot and singing some songs. How did I suddenly become a semifinalist?

It truly feels like some kind of divine fate.

Chapter 266: That Would be Really Shameless of Him

After hearing more rumors about the incident, Chu Liang couldn't help but think to himself.

According to Shen Qiongguang's description, the robbers were a man wearing a conical hat and a particularly fierce little girl. It was the little girl who had beaten him half to death with a punch.

After hearing such a descriptive story, Chu Liang couldn't help but be reminded of those two people.

In the world of immortality cultivators, there might be more than one man in a conical hat looking after a child. Yet, there wouldn't be many children of such a young age displaying such fierceness.

This combination was especially rare.

But why would they be robbing fruit outside Mount Shu? Why not simply hike up the mountain and ask me for some fruits?

Then he thought about the girl's identity and her complicated ties to the legendary Cataclysmic Ba. Maybe that was why it was inconvenient for them to come up the mountain.

Chu Liang sighed inwardly, thinking this robbery was completely unnecessary. After all, they had met once, and it was thanks to the little girl that he had found the Celestial Herb of Ascension. If they had just sent a letter up the mountain, he could have brought them some fruit himself.

The next day, more news arrived.

It turned out that Shen Qiongguang wasn't the only victim. Yesterday, more than twenty immortality sect cultivators were robbed after leaving Mount Shu. The only commonality was that all of them had their Golden Vein Berries taken. However, after the berries were robbed, they received gifts far more valuable than the berries.

In fact, even Shen Qiongguang experienced this.

Although the man in the conical hat didn't leave him any items, he used his foundational qi to heal him, which also cleansed his meridians and expanded his acupuncture points, greatly benefiting his future cultivation.

Hearing this, Chu Liang couldn't help but feel annoyed.

This was like buying the berries at an even higher price. If he had known, he would have delivered a few hundred boxes himself.

Why would he let the middleman benefit from this?

Before he could do anything, Lin Bei and the others came looking for him early in the morning and told him there was a crazy boost in the sale of the berry gift boxes!

Initially, many people showed no interest in the Golden Vein Berries, feeling that they were not worth the slightly high price. Perhaps only one in ten people would consider them.

But after this incident, everyone suddenly became interested in the berries.

Mysterious cultivators at the Dao Attainment Realm were willing to resort to highway robbery to get these magical fruits!

This gimmick was even more effective than the fruit tea advertisement featuring Jiang Yuebai. After all, in the world of immortality cultivators, more people were inclined to follow powerful figures than beautiful women.

Some suggested this to likely be a publicity stunt, but many people quickly refuted this theory. Could Chu Liang really have the power to enlist two mysterious Eminent Ones or the money to bribe over twenty cultivators from various sects?

If he were capable of doing so, he wouldn't need to bother with these petty profits.

Today, when Chu Liang's team went out to sell the berry gift boxes, everything was different. Before, they had to work hard to promote them, but this morning, they were swarmed by people, causing a commotion as they fought with each other to buy the gift boxes.

Usually, it would take them an entire day to sell all their stock, but now, it sold out in the blink of an eye. The group quickly returned to Silver Sword Peak to restock.

Shang Ziliang said, "Big Bro, this is simply a godsend opportunity. Hurry up and restock so we can go back and raise the prices!"

If they took advantage of this wave of popularity, even if they increased the price tenfold, the boxes of berries would likely still sell out!

He was a second-generation heir with a wealthy background, as his father was the peak master of Mount Shu. Money wasn't new to him. Initially, he joined Chu Liang in business out of friendship, not for profit. But the longer he worked with Chu Liang, the more excited he became about it.

He had seen money before, but never this much!

Chu Liang took the lion's share of the profits, but Shang Ziliang still managed to save over a thousand sword coins from his share of the profits. His father couldn't give him that much allowance in a year, but he earned it in just a few days working with Chu Liang. And it wasn't even hard work; all he had to do was set up stalls and sell goods.

He had fully experienced the charm of selling goods!

If they raised the price, he could even give his father an allowance after the Mount Shu Summit.

As he imagined swapping roles with his father, Shang Ziliang couldn't help but smile wryly.

But after pondering for a moment, Chu Liang firmly said, "No price increase. In fact, not only will we maintain the original price, but we also won't restock. You can only sell a limited amount each day."

"Huh?" Lackey A was puzzled. "Once the Mount Shu Summit ends, we won't have such a good opportunity again. Shouldn't we take this chance to make more money?"

"The hardest thing to build isn't a product, but a brand," Chu Liang explained. "If we eagerly raise prices at the first opportunity, what will our product become? Just a fleeting trend stirred up by the two Eminent Ones. Once the trend is over, no one will remember us.

"We must have our own style. We should be attracting the Eminent Ones to want to be our customers instead of having to seek their favor.

"Spread the word. We have sold out all the berries for today. If you want to buy more, please come early to Heaven-Reaching Peak tomorrow. Additionally, using sword coins will give you priority in purchasing."

He didn't fully explain that for relatively low-value products like the Golden Vein Berry, maintaining a high profit margin required building brand value. If everyone could easily buy and consume them, it would soon become obvious that they weren't worth much, and people would quickly abandon them.

The fact that only some people could buy them, while others couldn't, even if they had the money, would give those who managed to purchase them a sense of superiority, making them feel their money was well spent.

Lin Bei nodded in agreement. "Makes sense."

Lackey B looked at him curiously. "Did you understand that?"

"Not really," Lin Bei admitted. "But I know that whatever Chu Liang says is definitely right."

...

When Chu Liang led his team to Heaven-Reaching Peak, they immediately attracted everyone's attention.

Some of the onlookers were those who had wanted to buy the berries but couldn't. They had heard from other Mount Shu Sect disciples that this handsome young man was the owner of the berry garden and the mastermind behind the berry business. These people looked at Chu Liang with surprise.

The other group consisted of people focused on the Mount Shu Summit, who were indignant that Chu Liang had already secured a place in the top four.

It's worth noting that Chu Liang had only fought a total of three matches so far, and those three matches combined had only taken him five seconds.

Never before had a disciple become one of the top four in the Mount Shu Sect with such minimal effort. The time was so short it wasn't even enough for a person to relieve themselves.

Moreover, each of his victories seemed to rely on enchanted tools, tricks, or cunning, showing no real strength. Many Mount Shu disciples felt that they could have achieved the same results.

They were both surprised and jealous.

Some even secretly speculated whether Chu Liang's opponents were actually injured by him and his teacher working together. Although Shen Qiongguang's description didn't match Di Nufeng, who's to say she couldn't have hired someone else?

This was definitely something she would do.

Scholar Sun, who sat on the spectator stand, asked curiously, "Ah Feng, did you really not hire someone to beat up your disciple's opponent?"

Di Nufeng rolled her eyes and replied, "Do I need to hire someone if I want to beat anyone myself?"

"Yeah." Elder Huang hastily nodded as he spoke. "Don't question her character."

His left eye was slightly bruised, and there were burn marks on his body, giving him a slightly disheveled appearance. However, his unwavering expression of support for Di Nufeng remained unchanged.

It was hard to believe that his unwavering support wasn't influenced by the bruises.

"I just thought it was weird. Which Eminent One would rob people for some fruits?" Scholar Sun laughed. Seeing Elder Huang's bruised appearance put him in a good mood.

"I can probably guess some of it. Combining some information I got previously, I already have an idea of who did it," said Elder Huang, "But I'm not telling you."

"Hmph, I can't be bothered to ask anyway," Scholar Sun snorted coldly. "But Chu Liang has entered the top four. Although he didn't have to fight, this should be considered a win, right? So does this mean that I have won our bet?"

"In your dreams!" Elder Huang glared at Scholar Sun as he spoke. "He didn't lose, but he didn't win either. I suggest we postpone the bet and wager on his next outcome."

"You're a cunning one," Scholar Sun chuckled. "How can the quarterfinals and the semifinals be the same?"

Although it sounded like postponing the bet wouldn't change anything, the opponents Chu Liang would face in the quarterfinals and the semifinals would be completely different. The disciples who could make it to the semifinals of the Mount Shu Summit were considered the youngsters at the pinnacle of the nine provinces, which meant that Chu Liang's chances of winning would be much lower in the semifinals than in the quarterfinals.

Elder Huang immediately looked back and said to Di Nufeng, "Ah Feng, did you see that? This guy doesn't have faith in your disciple anymore. He thinks your disciple will lose. Hehe..."

He was clearly trying to provoke Di Nufeng against Scholar Sun.

"Shut up with your nonsense!" Scholar Sun shouted when he felt Di Nufeng's scrutinizing gaze. "I will bet with you. But Ah Feng, remember this. I am betting on your disciple winning, and he is betting on your disciple losing."

Scholar Sun made a comeback.

Feeling the dangerous gaze shift towards him, Elder Huang's thoughts raced, and he quickly interjected, "Ah Feng, I heard you have a bet with Wang Xuanling of Mount Shu. You're using your Phoenix Spirit Blood Jade to wager against his position as the grand peak master. Are you that confident in your disciple?"

"No," Di Nufeng said honestly. "To be frank, when I made the bet with Wang Xuanling, Chu Liang was still very weak. I am proud and happy to see how much he has grown."

"What?" Scholar Sun asked, "And yet you dared to use the Phoenix Spirit Blood Jade in a bet? Aren't you worried about losing?"

"Can't I just take back what I said?" Di Nufeng stared at him weirdly.

"But what if Wang Xuanling doesn't keep his word as well if he loses?" Elder Huang asked.

"If he does that, that would be really shameless of him!" Di Nufeng exclaimed.

Scholar Sun and Elder Huang were so confused.

Chapter 267: The Air Feels Like it's Burning!

Many years had passed since the day Scholar Sun, the renowned Confucian scholar, first saw Di Nufeng. Nevertheless, whenever Scholar Sun looked at Di Nufeng now, he couldn't help but remember the afternoon when Elder Huang had taken him to see a baby in diapers.

Back then, he never would have expected that the pure and innocent baby would grow up to be someone like this.

Elder Huang seemed to be able to tell from Scholar Sun's gaze what he was reminiscing about. Then Elder Huang looked at Scholar Sun with a meaningful glance, as if to say, "It's all because you suggested handing her over to Tian Xinling to raise her. You should have expected this."

Scholar Sun glared angrily, his expression seeming to say, "I suggested that solely because of your ambiguous relationship with Tian Xinling. You didn't say no to that suggestion, did you?"

Elder Huang panicked and began blinking furiously, as if to say, "Don't spout nonsense! We're just friends!"

"Heh." Scholar Sun showed a mocking gaze and chuckled.

Di Nufeng was confused and asked, "Why are you two making these expressions? The match has started."

"Ohhhhhhhhhh."

The two old men hastily and obediently turned their heads back to the stage, moving in perfect synchrony.

This was the match that had garnered everyone's attention. After all, it was Jiang Yuebai's fight. Many disciples of the Mount Shu Sect and various immortal sects in the spectator stands were cheering loudly together.

"Jiangjiang will surely win!"

Elder Huang quickly joined in the cheer.

Jiang Yuebai was considered a seeded player. For participants like her, it was rare to exert full effort during the first few rounds, often concealing their true powers. Only matches at this level would be slightly more exciting.

Her opponent today was Xue Jiang, a senior sister from her own peak.

Xue Jiang had clean features and, while not conventionally pretty, emanated an aloof and cold aura similar to that of Daoist Yan. In fact, the female disciples of Falling Azure Peak all displayed auras reminiscent of their teacher.

Jiang Yuebai, dressed in white, looked pristine and ethereal, like a goddess—no further description was necessary.

Xue Jiang knew Jiang Yuebai well and immediately closed in on her, attempting to win through her close-ranged sword skills.

She knew she couldn't compete with Jiang Yuebai in long-range attacks using divine techniques.

Even as Xue Jiang approached, Jiang Yuebai showed no fear. The two sword cultivators unleashed powerful sword light, engaging in an intense close-ranged combat.

The scene of the two women fighting was both beautiful and fierce.

After a few exchanges, the audience, especially the martial arts cultivators from the Great Astral Sect, were surprised. They knew that Daoist Yan's execution of the Heaven-Raising Sword demonstrated unparalleled fierceness, but they hadn't realized her profound foundation in the cultivation of sword skills.

From the series of attacks and counters, it was evident that both disciples had strong cultivation in martial arts, having clearly dedicated time to their training.

If Chu Liang had tried using the Forbidden Ground against these two, he wouldn't have been able to defeat them within seconds. He had only succeeded against Mu Yueting by exploiting her weakness.

The sword light intertwined, manifesting in the air and intersecting to form dazzling patterns. Any slight graze could result in missing limbs and broken legs.

This exchange of attacks and counters continued for forty to fifty rounds, with the sword light becoming more fleeting and moving even faster. The spectators held their breath, tense and anxious, fearing that any moment could bring a sudden change.

The battle between Xue Jiang and Jiang Yuebai gradually reached a critical point. At the moment Xue Jiang performed a mid-air turn, she suddenly drew out another longsword.

She now held both swords in hand.

The rules of the Mount Shu Summit stated that only one flying sword and an enchanted tool could be taken up on stage. This meant that her enchanted tool was a flying sword, which aligned with the rules.

In a long-range fight, having another flying sword wouldn't mean much. But at this moment, the two were in close combat and evenly matched. Having another weapon gave Xue Jiang an extra advantage!

Seeing Xue Jiang holding two swords and emanating a fierce sword aura that seemed to immediately overpower Jiang Yuebai, Jiang Yuebai could be seen wanting to back away.

However, Xue Jiang quickly caught up and fiercely attacked her with both swords.

This was the advantage Xue Jiang gained by sacrificing the chance to bring an enchanted tool. She was clearly counting on winning through close-range combat. How could she give Jiang Yuebai the chance to create distance?

Her sword attacks moved like a dragon!

"Jiangjiang..."

Everyone spectating was silent. The crowd supporting Jiang Yuebai grew nervous.

Although Jiang Yuebai was strong, the senior and junior sisters of Azure Falling Peak were also formidable. With calculated strategies and unexpected turns of events, there were seeded participants in every instance of the Mount Shu Summit who ended up losing earlier than expected.

Before this fight started, some people worried that the Azure Falling Peak would intentionally have Xue Jiang lose the fight to guarantee Jiang Yuebai's victory. After all, Xue Jiang was a difficult opponent. The smart strategy would have been for Xue Jiang to give up early so Jiang Yuebai could conserve her strength for later matches. There were peaks that had done this before.

But it was clear that Xue Jiang had no interest in giving up. In fact, she was demonstrating a strong urge to win!

While everyone was nervous for Jiang Yuebai, she finally moved in a gentle manner.

Whoosh!

She disappeared.

When she reappeared, she was several zhang away at the edge of the stage.

She had used Dimension Compression.

Xue Jiang remained calm. Gnashing her teeth, her body vanished in a flash.

Whoosh!

She used Dimension Compression as well!

Immediately, she kept up with Jiang Yuebai's movements, closing in on her! The spectators below exclaimed in rapid succession with two consecutive bursts of shock.

It was no secret on Mount Shu that Jiang Yuebai knew how to perform Dimension Compression. However, many visitors from other sects were surprised to see the immortal art being performed so easily.

But when Xue Jiang also performed Dimension Compression, everyone was astonished.

Xue Jiang had always maintained a reserved demeanor, never revealing her true strength and techniques.

No one had any idea she was this strong!

In the next second, the crowd's jaws collectively dropped and never closed back up.

Because Jiang Yuebai moved twice.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

Her body flashed twice, instantly teleporting to the edge of the stage on the other side.

Xue Jiang was surprised. The person in front of her had disappeared. Immediately, she realized that Jiang Yuebai had appeared behind her.

Unfortunately, her control of the Dimension Compression was not as proficient as Jiang Yuebai's. Performing it once within such a short time was already her limit, and she could not catch up again.

When she turned around, she saw this huge beam of sword light.

She then realized that Jiang Yuebai was finally no longer interested in continuing this fight. Jiang Yuebai lifted her hand and executed the Heavenly Sword Seal!

This was a sword seal derived from a simplified form of the immortal art, Heaven-Raising Sword. Among techniques below the level of immortal art, this was considered one of the strongest.

Xue Jiang had nowhere to hide. She could only form a hand seal and counter with the same Heavenly Sword Seal.

The two powerful bursts of sword light clashed, exploding across the entire stage, filling the air, and spreading to the sky! Within the blink of an eye, Xue Jiang's sword light was crushed by Jiang Yuebai's.

The moment the two sword lights clashed, Xue Jiang's defense shattered!

Xue Jiang was most adept in close-range sword skills, and Jiang Yuebai was in no way weaker in this area.

Additionally, Jiang Yuebai excelled in using divine skills, against which Xue Jiang had no way to defend.

Her defeat was justified.

Without waiting for the Heavenly Sword Seal to reach her, she flew back and landed below the stage.

Jiang Yuebai immediately deactivated the sword seal and flew back. She took her senior sister's hand. Despite their fierce battle on stage, she had a very strong bond with Xue Jiang.

The two girls left the stage holding hands, while the entire area resounded with cheers for Jiang Yuebai's name. A wave of excitement swept across the public square, fueled by her excellent performance.

Even when the next pair of participants took the stage, cheers of "Jiangjiang" continued to echo through the crowd.

At this moment, Ling Ao stood on the stage, his entire being radiating an intense urge to fight. Facing the Golden-Core cultivator from Jade Sword Peak, he once again demonstrated the explosive power of his physique, defeating his opponent with a single punch[1].

Since the start of the competition, he had maintained a record of winning each match with just one strike! With four punches, he made it to the top four.

That was one more than the number of strikes it took Chu Liang to win three rounds.

After his victory, Ling Ao still exuded a blazing fighting aura. He looked around and suddenly fixed his gaze on Chu Liang.

For some reason, Chu Liang felt a strong hostility in his stare.

Why? Chu Liang wondered.

He felt very puzzled.

I didn't provoke you.

Hmm... I don't think I did?

...

The results of the three quarterfinal matches were not surprising. The semifinalists of Mount Shu were Xu Ziyang, Jiang Yuebai, Ling Ao, and Chu Liang.

These four had advanced to this stage with clear advantages... if high intelligence could be counted as an advantage. It was foreseeable that the semi-finals would be absolutely spectacular.

Currently, Xu Ziyang was still the undisputed favorite, but many believed that Jiang Yuebai had the strength to challenge him.

Despite being at the Spiritual Awareness Realm, Ling Ao, with his mysterious and unpredictable nature, often won against people of higher cultivation realms, gaining a following. Chu Liang, of course, had his supporters, mainly from Silver Sword Peak and the neighboring areas.[2].

But Chu Liang had no time to worry about this.

Because the recreational event was happening the day after the main competition and it was the semifinals of the Mahjong Tournament.

And for the first time in his life, Chu Liang encountered a formidable opponent in the game of Mahjong.

Three familiar faces sat around the table.

The lively, excited young girl was Xu Ziqing of Jade Sword Peak. The slender, sharp-eyed young man was Lackey A. The stunning girl in fluttering white clothes, sitting like a beauty in a painting, was Jiang Yuebai.

Xu Ziqing and Lackey A were both somewhat clever, so it wasn't surprising that they had made it through the preliminaries. But the fact that Senior Sister Jiang was also in this group made things tricky.

Interestingly, out of the four semi-finalists in the main competition, two were at this table, drawing many gazes from around the area.

Lackey A glanced left and right, torn between loyalties. He knew he couldn't possibly beat Chu Liang, but with Senior Sister Jiang here, should he hope for Big Bro to win or for Jiangjiang to win?

This was quite the dilemma.

Xu Ziqing's eyes sparkled with excitement. Wow, Senior Brother Chu and Senior Sister Jiang at the same table—is this fate?

Are they going to intentionally give each other the tiles they need?

I don't care if I lose, but I'm so curious. If they played properly, would Senior Brother Chu let Senior Sister Jiang win, or would Senior Sister Jiang let Senior Brother Chu win?

I think Senior Brother Chu will let her win.

No matter how I see it, he should be the one to take the initiative.

"Winning combo." Before three turns had passed, Chu Liang pushed his tiles forward, his expression somewhat serious.

He has no intention of letting her win! Xu Ziqing thought.

Jiang Yuebai, sitting opposite Chu Liang, had eyes gleaming with determination.

In the second round, Jiang Yuebai drew only two tiles before pushing them forward, "Winning combo."

Chu Liang nodded slightly as he looked at her.

Both of them were starting to display a strong fighting spirit through their eyes.

In the third round, the pace suddenly slowed.

Chu Liang had always won because of his excellent memory and deduction skills. From the first round, he remembered where the tiles were going, which allowed him to know what tiles he and others were drawing. He would deduce what choices the other three would make under these circumstances and determine how he could achieve his goal the fastest.

Usually, by the time he finished drawing his tiles, before anyone started discarding, he had already planned which tile he would win with and in which round.

In this kind of deduction, playing with smart people was easier than playing with fools because a smart person's discarding path was predictable. A fool, however, might unexpectedly disrupt Chu Liang's carefully deduced path.

But there was another scenario: playing against someone extremely intelligent.

This opponent would have the same mental acuity as Chu Liang, predicting each move just like him, making the game more challenging. It would be like a chess match, where each player has to plan their every move while predicting their opponent's next move.

Both players would be exceptionally skilled at mahjong, able to predict each other's tiles while disrupting each other's plans. A long, grueling battle would ensue as both tried to stay one step ahead of the other.

For the first time, Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai felt the pressure of facing a worthy opponent. After subtly testing each other in the first two rounds, the third round became a sudden and fierce exchange of strategies.

It felt as though flames were burning between them.

Xu Ziqing and Lackey A were also silently making their deductions about the mahjong game. However, their skills in deduction were worlds apart from those of Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai. Though the four of them sat at the same table, it felt like they were in two entirely different realms.

Feeling the increasing pressure from both sides, Xu Ziqing's eyes darted around nervously, while Lackey A's peripheral vision roamed. Both felt a suffocating tension, as if the earth were about to collide with Mars!

"The air...feels like it's burning!"

Chapter 268: Seriously Shameless

The Wanderers of the North and South had yet to leave Mount Shu and were dining leisurely.

Scholar Sun said, "The Mahjong Tournament's on today. Don't you want to go watch it?"

"No. I have always despised gambling," Elder Huang replied righteously.

Scholar Sun snickered.

He knew why Elder Huang said that. If Elder Huang bet ten times, he would lose nine. If he chose to bet on Big, the result would always be Small. Whatever he bet on, the result would always be the opposite. He was like a guiding light in the gambling scene. It was no wonder he despised it.

Scholar Sun added, "But Jiang Yuebai is competing too. Aren't you a fan of that young lady?"

"Placing small bets can make a person happy, but making large bets is bad for their health. How could such a mentally stimulating game like mahjong be considered gambling?" Elder Huang said as he stood up.

His plates were suddenly empty. At some point, he'd cleared off all the food on his plate, and he was now ready to leave.

Scholar Sun rolled his eyes.

When the two old men arrived at the venue of the Mahjong Tournament, they found an unusually large crowd gathered at one side of the venue.

This was the semifinals, so there weren't many participants still playing in the tournament. That meant the people in this crowd were all spectators, and they had all gathered there to watch the same game.

With their keen eyesight, the two old men could see the state of the game without getting closer, so they stood in place to watch the game.

The most eye-catching person at the table was a delicate, fair-skinned girl, who had her hair up in a ponytail. Looking innocent and happy, she completed a hand and immediately pushed the tiles down.

The girl said, "Huh? It seems I've won again!"

It was the Heavenly Winning Hand.

"She got the Heavenly Winning Hand for the twelfth time? Heavens! Where exactly did this girl come from?"

"She's a little demon from Silver Sword Peak. It seems her original form is a koi fish, so she's overflowing with good luck."

"Even if she was born as a koi fish, she shouldn't have such ridiculously good luck, right? Is it perhaps because she has other mystical abilities?"

"Whatever it may be, she hasn't used any divine skills, so she hasn't broken any rules."

"It's unbelievable..."

"Senior Brother Xu is going to be eliminated in the semifinals!"

The onlookers whispered to each other, expressing their astonishment.

The person beside Liu Xiaoyu'er was Xu Ziyang, who was sitting perfectly upright. He kept a composed expression, but slight ripples were breaking out in the calm of his mind.

This little girl... is ridiculously amazing.

Is she really going to end the game by putting out sixteen consecutive Heavenly Winning Hands?

Xu Ziyang had great mental and physical prowess, but this was mahjong. Even if he remembered all the tiles' positions, it would do nothing to affect Liu Xiaoyu'er's winning streak.

Every time he arranged his tiles and predicted what tiles each person would draw, he realized Liu Xiaoyu'er would get a Heavenly Winning Hand.

That powerlessness he felt from knowing this unchangeable fate was sometimes worse than not knowing.

But why...?

Xu Ziyang had deliberately shuffled the positions of the tiles, but he only had control over a small portion of them. Ultimately, he had no way of stopping Liu Xiaoyu's terrifying streak of Heavenly Winning Hands.

This game had become a tile-laying game that Liu Xiaoyu'er was playing alone, and the other three at the table were like her tile-laying tools.

Liu Xiaoyu'er's presence continued to draw more spectators over to her table. They all wanted to see the birth of a legend.

In contrast, the only spectators left at Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai's table were a few of Jiang Yuebai's die-hard fans, but they were getting rather sleepy. The game was extremely boring.

Ordinary people were unaware of the immortal-tier battle that Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai were engaged in. All they saw was that it had been a long time since someone at the table had gotten a winning hand. Then just before the round ended, someone got a small winning hand.

They had been playing extremely slowly throughout the whole game, spending a long time pondering over each tile... However, their wins and losses were all small, which meant neither of them was clearly in the lead even after six rounds. Naturally, the spectators found their game boring.

Additionally, they were so focused on using their strategies against each other in their intense battle that they let Lackey A have two easy wins.

Hearing the exclamations from the next table, Chu Liang grinned. "Senior Sister Jiang, we're evenly matched now, but I will definitely win in the end."

"Hmph." Jiang Yuebai raised her eyebrows slightly. "How can you be sure of that?"

"Do you want to make a bet?" Chu Liang chuckled. "If I win, you'll have to let me ask you a question, and you must answer me truthfully."

"Sure," Jiang Yuebai said with a smile. "Then if I win, you'll have to answer a question from me, and you must not lie."

Seeing the sparks flying between Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai, Xu Ziqing screamed inwardly, Aaaahhhh... Their interactions are so ambiguous! If I hadn't seen Senior Brother Chu buy that dual cultivation technique, I might not have realized the truth!

Listening to Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai's conversation, Lackey A blinked puzzledly. We're in a four-player mahjong game. Why have two of us suddenly been stripped of the right to win? Moreover, aren't I the one with the most chips right now...

Nevertheless, Lackey A found out why soon after.

The neighboring table was in its final round. Xu Ziyang decided to close his eyes as he shuffled the tiles, giving up on memorizing their positions. After all, it was pointless knowing in advance that his opponent was going to get a Heavenly Winning Hand.

This time, however, Liu Xiaoyu'er didn't show her hand immediately after drawing her tiles. Instead, she hesitated for a moment and then slowly pushed out a tile.

Noticing something was different, Xu Ziyang opened his eyes. "Hmm?"

She doesn't have a Heavenly Winning Hand?

Unfortunately, this was already the final round of the game. The chips in front of Liu Xiaoyu'er were piled up like a mountain. Even if Xu Ziyang managed to have a huge win this round, it wouldn't overturn Liu Xiaoyu'er's fifteen wins.

Nonetheless, winning one round was better than losing all of them.

So, Xu Ziyang regained his focus and observed the tiles in front of him. Then he carefully selected a tile to play.

"Hang on..." Liu Xiaoyu'er suddenly called out. "Look at the tile he played. That seems like the one I need...?"

She revealed her hand in disbelief.

Xu Ziyang gradually furrowed his handsome brows. Just after he had decided to focus on winning this round so that he could leave with dignity...

He gave Liu Xiaoyu'er the winning tile.

Everyone around them fell silent.

If it had been someone else, they might have already spat out a mouthful of blood earlier due to the absurdity of this situation. Fortunately, Xu Ziyang was able to remain calm.

He stood up slowly and exhaled deeply. Then he turned and left.

All the spectators were now looking at Liu Xiaoyu'er. Their gazes made the little girl extremely nervous, but she couldn't leave just yet because Chu Liang had given her a task to do.

Before leaving Silver Sword Peak, Chu Liang had told her that if she were to win her game very quickly like before, she should go to his table... to cheer him on.

...

That evening, the remaining participants of the fighting tournament were drawing lots on Heaven-Reaching Peak.

"He's seriously shameless," Jiang Yuebai fumed.

She was thinking about Liu Xiaoyu'er's presence at the mahjong game earlier in the day, and she still felt pretty angry.

Jiang Yuebai and Chu Liang had been evenly matched. Yet, the moment this little girl went over to their table, Chu Liang's luck suddenly increased. Jiang Yuebai and Chu Liang had similar strategies, so it was obvious that the one with better luck would take the lead and have an easy victory.

That was how Chu Liang had won the game. He had used this "small" advantage to defeat Jiang Yuebai and the remaining two unimportant players, advancing to the finals of the Mahjong Tournament.

Chu Liang was now one of the candidates to become Mount Shu's Mahjong God.

Xu Ziyang empathized with Jiang Yuebai greatly. Just the mention of the koi-fish girl left him speechless.

However, after a moment of contemplation, he said, "Ordinary koi-fish demons shouldn't have such ridiculously good luck. She must have some mystical ability that enhances her luck."

Hearing that, Ling Ao's expression darkened, with a hint of malice flashing in his eyes.

While those three were in conversation, the last participant, Chu Liang, arrived. Unsurprisingly, he had brought Liu Xiaoyu'er with him.

"You're here to draw your match from among the top four. Why did you bring her?" the supervising elder asked with a chuckle as he brought over the tube with the lots. "There are no weak options."

Chu Liang grinned and replied, "No matter what, the name on the lot that Xiaoyu'er draws will definitely be the best opponent for me."

Jiang Yuebai smiled. "All right. Then, let's have little Xiaoyu'er go first."

"Thank you, Big Sister Jiang," Liu Xiaoyu'er said politely.

Then she approached the tube.

The supervising elder knew that Liu Xiaoyu'er would be drawing a lot on Chu Liang's behalf, so he let her reach into the tube.

Liu Xiaoyu'er pulled a lot out and handed it to Chu Liang.

Chu Liang looked down and saw two words: Xu Ziyang.

Chapter 269: The Semifinals!

After drawing lots, Chu Liang asked Liu Xiaoyu'er to return to Silver Sword Peak alone first while he waited outside for Jiang Yuebai for a while.

When Jiang Yuebai saw him, she wasn't surprised. The two of them naturally turned and continued walking together for a while, as if they were taking a leisurely stroll.

After walking for some time, Jiang Yuebai finally asked, "Did you come to ask me that question you've been meaning to ask?"

"Yes," Chu Liang smiled, "Is now a convenient time?"

"Of course," Jiang Yuebai said as she nodded.

"To be honest, I've wanted to ask this question for a long time, but I've never dared to bring it up. Today, I want to seize the opportunity and gather the courage to tell you about it," Chu Liang spoke in a light tone.

Jiang Yuebai blinked, looking at him with a hint of curiosity, mixed with a barely perceptible nervousness.

"I want to ask, Senior Sister Jiang, can you..." Chu Liang asked, "tell me your actual cultivation level?"

"Huh?" Jiang Yuebai was taken aback for a moment.

"Even though I sense that your aura is very powerful, I know you're hiding something more," Chu Liang said, scratching his head. "I really want to know how far you've progressed in your cultivation."

In terms of aura, others could determine your cultivation based on a portion of the qi you unleash. Although the use of divine techniques inevitably releases qi, one could still retain a portion of the foundational qi and conceal their cultivation level.

"I don't mind telling you, it doesn't matter anyway. I'll probably reveal it all tomorrow," Jiang Yuebai said, shaking her head and chuckling lightly.

With that, she slowly unleashed her qi.

Boom!

A powerful and freezing cold qi surged forth.

She was at the Fifth Realm!

"Just as I expected," Chu Liang said to himself, appearing as though his speculations had been confirmed. He continued, "For someone as gifted as Senior Sister Jiang, it's impossible to remain at the Golden Core Realm for too long."

Just as he had concealed much of his own strength, everyone had held back during the previous matches.

They were all reserving their trump cards for the intense battles ahead, aiming to surprise their opponents during the explosive clashes.

Xu Ziyang was no exception.

Chu Liang only dared to ask because Jiang Yuebai wasn't his opponent. If they were to fight tomorrow, even with a truth bet on the line, he wouldn't take advantage of her this way.

It was just as Jiang Yuebai had said. Everything would be revealed tomorrow, which was why Chu Liang had casually asked.

Jiang Yuebai's current cultivation level was within his expectations. The Transcendent Spirit was a body constitution favored by the heavens and earth, destined to make progress at incredible speed.

When they first met, she was already at the pinnacle of the Golden Core Realm.

And now, Chu Liang had grown so much that his current cultivation level was incomparable to what it was back then, which meant that it was even more impossible that Jiang Yuebai had remained stagnant in her cultivation.

"You must be hiding something as well, right? With the speed of your cultivation progress, it's impossible that you're still at the beginning stage of the Golden Core Realm," Jiang Yuebai said with a smile as she suppressed the flow of her qi.

"Yeah, I won't be able to hide it tomorrow either," Chu Liang chuckled. "Even if I tried to conceal my cultivation level, the meager cultivation energy I possess would only serve to make my defeat less embarrassing."

"You don't need to be modest. I've watched you grow into who you are today, and I know how capable you are," Jiang Yuebai said, looking at Chu Liang with eyes sparkling like the stars in the night sky. "I believe you have the strength to face anyone, and..."

"I would rather see you win than Xu Ziyang."

Her voice was gentle as she stood in the breeze, her dress fluttering softly. The moonlight cast a gentle glow on her skin.

Chu Liang looked earnestly into her eyes as their gazes met. He asked, "Is it because you want to fight a weaker opponent in the finals?"

"..." Jiang Yuebai felt so speechless.

"I was just kidding," Chu Liang turned and said with a smile. "Senior Sister Jiang, thank you for having faith in me. I believe that you will win tomorrow. See you at the peak."

"Mhm," Jiang Yuebai nodded gently. "See you at the peak."

...

The wind atop the Heaven-Reaching Peak was particularly strong today, but the gust of wind was constantly blocked by the large crowd. Their clothes were billowing in the air and their dresses fluttering.

Today marked the semifinals of the Mount Shu Summit, and at this stage, the competition had intensified, with every match promising to be a thrilling battle.

"At last, the semifinals have arrived. Elder Huang, what are your thoughts on today's situation?" Scholar Sun inquired from the spectator stand.

"Haaa," Elder Huang sighed and shook his head. "In the first match, although I strongly support Jiangjiang, that disciple in the Spiritual Awareness Realm seems to have some hidden secrets. If they're true... the outcome is truly unpredictable, and it's concerning."

"As for the second match, there's little to say. Xu Ziyang will undoubtedly defeat his opponent in a dominating victory," Elder Huang remarked.

"Oh?" Scholar Sun said. He had always been aware that Elder Huang was unreliable, but he also knew that Elder Huang had good judgment. So, he asked, "What secrets does Ling Ao have?"

"If I am not mistaken, I am seeing traces of his body having been refined by dragon blood," Elder Huang remarked.

"Are you talking about the legendary ancient secret technique?" Scholar Sun asked.

"Yes. In ancient times, True Dragons would reward their servants by refining their bodies with dragon blood, greatly strengthening them. Although he is only at the third realm of cultivation, through the power of the Dragon-Blood Body Refinement, the overall toughness and strength of his body would reach a terrifying level," Elder Huang said. "If the Dragon-Blood Body Refinement occurred while his cultivation level isn't high, the enhancement of his body would be even greater. For example, martial arts cultivators would be much stronger at lower cultivation levels."

"Indeed. There is a True Dragon suppressing fate on Solitude Peak of Mount Shu," Scholar Sun said. "It seems like he had an extraordinary encounter. Old Man Sikong's disciple ended up receiving the blessing from the hundred years of fishing for a dragon."

"It is already strange that a True Dragon was attracted to settle down on Mount Shu," Elder Huang frowned as he said. "All the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten were fishing for dragons. The Celestial Pivot Pavilion is doing the same. Even the Penglai Supreme Sect wanted to acquire another one. However, the True Dragon is not choosing those immortal sects in the Divine Nine that are protected with legendary artifacts. For some unknown reason, it chose the Mount Shu Sect, a sect that had lost its legendary artifact and was in a declining state."

"It is true that the Mount Shu Sect had been in a declining state. But looking at the Mount Shu Sect now, it seems like they are on the rise." Scholar Sun looked over to the other spectator stand and said, "Venerable Wen Yuan is quite skilled."

"Among all the human cultivators at the eighth realm, Venerable Wen Yuan is relatively young, yet his strength and capabilities should rank among the top," Elder Huang said, nodding.

"Unfortunately, being from the Mount Shu Sect has limited his growth. He has had to keep a low profile and wait for the right moment. If he were to possess a legendary artifact, his power would appear much greater than it is now."

"Even in Mount Shu's current state, a figure like him could emerge. This further demonstrates his remarkable abilities," Scholar Sun remarked.

Soon, both parties of the match stepped onto the stage.

Jiang Yuebai was still dressed in white, her clothes fluttering around her like that of a goddess.

When she showed up, Elder Huang couldn't bother to chat anymore. He immediately waved his fists and shouted, "Jiangjiang will surely win! Jiangjiang will surely win!"

He was not the only one doing this. More than half of the audience started shouting and cheering for Jiang Yuebai.

Soon, Ling Ao stepped onto the stage. He was still dressed in black, with his hair covering one of his eyes. His expression remained cold and aloof.

As he listened to the people at the spectator stand cheering for Jiang Yuebai, he glanced around and suddenly sneered coldly. Lifting his head, he placed his index finger on his lips.

"So arrogant," remarked Scholar Sun with a chuckle.

Ling Ao's actions were clearly meant to mock everyone at the spectator stand, sending a signal to all of Jiang Yuebai's supporters.

Silence!

Chapter 270: Feeling Relieved

"This dude is too arrogant. If it's not because I can't win, I would have punched him a few times."

The entire crowd at the spectator stand was triggered by that one gesture of Ling Ao. Many of them reacted with shock and there were many who reacted with anger. In fact, even Lin Bei was saying words of anger.

Lackey A frowned and said, "He probably just had an extraordinary encounter. He's getting ahead of himself, but he's not that strong.

Lackey B added, "He has never faced a truly strong opponent before. Otherwise, he would have learned his lesson."

Shang Ziliang, who was at the side, remained quiet. His expression was horrible. While they were talking, his face was flushing red and paling. It seemed as though he wanted to say something, but was feeling ashamed.

Chu Liang, standing in the center of the small group, had a smile on his lips.

He was naturally a supporter of Jiang Yuebai, but he wouldn't be angered by Ling Ao's response. After all, he knew that the outcome was determined by what would happen on stage.

There was nothing wrong with being arrogant. This was a mere personality. If he were to win, he would just be labeled as a rebellious and recklessly bold person. If he were to lose, he would just be considered a clown. These were the consequences.

Chu Liang looked over at Jiang Yuebai and saw that she was still dressed in that clean white attire, untouched by the dust stirred in previous matches. Despite Ling Ao's taunt to the entire crowd, Jiang Yuebai remained as calm as ever.

She made only one move.

She drew her flying sword.

The three-chi sword conveyed more than a thousand words ever could.

As the tip of the sword traced a half-circle like a crescent moon, sparks of fire flew. Immediately, there was a sense of danger.

Seeing this, the Supervising Elder in the center of the arena realized that the atmosphere had reached its peak. With a clear understanding of the situation, he had no desire to steal the spotlight. After shouting a command, he immediately stepped back.

"The first match of the semifinals! Ling Ao from Solitude Peak versus Jiang Yuebai from Azure Falling Peak!"

"Start!"

Boom!

Before the attack started, the invisible clashes of qi were already occurring. The benefit of a solo match was that one could focus their entire mind and spirit on the enemy before them, with divine intent as sharp as a saber.

Jiang Yuebai's eyes gleamed with brightness. Unexpectedly, she attacked first this time, which was very rare in previous fights.

But she raised her hand not to attack! She sent her sword flying up into the sky, transforming into hundreds of beams of swordlight that formed a shield in front of her with a resounding whoosh!

All these beams of swordlights stood in front of her like a barrier!

In the very next second, a shadowy figure clashed with that shield of sword.

Bang!

From the spectators' perspective, Jiang Yuebai first used the Thousand Sword Seal as a shield and Ling Ao clashed onto it then.

But in reality, Jiang Yuebai had sensed through the flow of qi that Ling Ao's fierce qi was charging through the air towards her. It was this awareness of his impending attack that prompted her to set up a defense.

She formed a shield of a thousand swords!

Ling Ao continued with his usual tactic, charging forward and then throwing a punch!

Crack!

It felt as though lightning streaked across a clear sky. Countless beams of swordlight flashed and cracked. The punch shattered the shield of swords.

As Ling Ao did a flip and landed, he lost his momentum.

This first attack was just a test. If Jiang Yuebai's ability had been merely a facade boosted by her fame, she would have been instantly defeated by that punch. However, when she blocked it, Ling Ao finally showed an expression of caution.

Since he started participating in the Mount Shu Summit, this was the first time he felt unable to break through!

Her defense was strong, but more importantly, she had constructed the shield of swords before he even began his attack. She had essentially predicted his path of attack!

Is she just good at guessing? Ling Ao wondered.

Ling Ao's eyes were as sharp as a saber. His body moved left and right, leaving two afterimages on the stage, as if two figures had appeared, one on the left and one on the right. At that moment, he dashed toward Jiang Yuebai!

Which side will you block!

...

The fight began with intense energy. The crowd in the spectator stands widened their eyes, their hearts in their throats.

In many of Ling Ao's previous fights, he had always defeated his opponents with a single strike, never using any divine techniques or skills. However, the fact that he used a new technique right

from the start this time indicated that he wasn't a one-trick pony. He simply hadn't needed to use other techniques before.

"External Manifestation?" Someone exclaimed out of shock.

"No! That's a martial arts technique of the Great Astral Sect, the Shadow Fighting Style," a petite girl corrected. This girl was Tang Shi, and the person next to her was Yun Chaoxian. Naturally, they wouldn't miss the semifinals.

"With only two afterimages, his performance of the Shadow Fighting Style is a bit sad. He clearly started learning at the last moment after an enhancement of his physical strength," Yun Chaoxian analyzed, his eyes gleaming with intelligence. "However, as long as he's fast enough, it will still be effective."

The weakness of a Martial Arts cultivator would always be their shorter attack range. Most of the time, a martial arts cultivator would try to close the distance between themselves and their opponents during the fight. If they succeeded, it meant victory for them. If they failed, their opponent would win.

Martial arts cultivators had developed many methods to close the distance between themselves and their opponents for situations like this. The Shadow Fighting Style was one of these methods. It was a technique developed by a senior at the Great Astral Sect. While dashing forward, the user would generate thousands of afterimages, with only one being real. This left the enemy almost defenseless.

Although Ling Ao only produced two afterimages, he was dashing forward at such a fast speed that the small arena seemed too short for him. He could reach the edge in an instant. Even if Jiang Yuebai wanted to launch an attack, she could only eliminate one of the afterimages.

If she chose the wrong one, the other one would get close to her!

If she tried to defend against both afterimages, her strength would be divided, and whether she could truly block this attack would be uncertain.

What would she choose?

Jiang Yuebai very quickly gave the answer.

She raised her hand and swiftly traced intricate patterns in the air with her flying sword, forming the talismanic script of ice.

Jiang Yuebai had been teaching Chu Liang the Dao of Talisman-Making and Talismanic Sword Seal, so her own mastery was naturally advanced. She immediately unleashed the Thirteen-Character Talismanic Sword!

Crack!

With the power of the Thirteen-Character Talismanic Sword, the attack moved at a slower speed. Wherever it touched, frost spread, covering the ground with ice crystals and causing water droplets to condense in the air. Within a radius of several dozen zhang, the temperature dropped sharply in an instant!

Ling Ao once again lost his forward momentum. He had to twist his body to narrowly avoid the incoming sword. As the sword swept toward him again, he struck downward with a fierce punch, hitting the spine of the flying sword!

Bam!

The flying sword was driven downward by the impact, its blade piercing into the platform. However, it still contained some spiritual energy. In the next second, more than a dozen ice walls rose from the ground, completely surrounding Ling Ao!

After this exchange of attacks and counters, all the afterimages on the other side of the arena had already disappeared.

With just a glance, Jiang Yuebai identified and targeted the real Ling Ao.

Ling Ao, now trapped within the ice walls, temporarily disappeared from sight. Through the frosty surface, only a shadowy figure could be seen. The walls were not merely confining him; they were continuously closing in, intent on trapping him inside.

Jiang Yuebai's divine techniques and sword skills were powerful, but she was also extremely proficient in other forms of techniques. Her Transcendent Spirit constitution naturally attracted spiritual qi, allowing her to manipulate it with far greater ease than others.

However, would Ling Ao be someone easily trapped by a few thick walls?

Suddenly, the shadowy figure behind the ice wall suddenly unleashed a powerful burst of energy. Instantly, this crimson-gold aura surged up!

Boom—

The thick ice walls shattered completely from all sides! Four figures of Ling Ao burst out, each burning with a crimson-gold aura that smelled like blood, their qi blazing like raging flames!

There were now four of them!

Choose again! Ling Ao shouted inwardly.

...

"It's useless. No matter how many afterimages he generates, he won't be able to get close to Jiang Yuebai," Scholar Sun said, shaking his head.

"The Omniscient Sword State." Elder Huang said with a smile. "It is truly surprising for someone her age to understand this state of Sword Dao, but I guess it's normal if it's Jiangjiang."

"There is a reason why the constitution of the Transcendent Spirit is desired by countless demons and devils. The benefit of the affinity with the heavens and earth might not be obvious, but this benefit is really comprehensive," Scholar Sun explained. "She can practice and learn any divine techniques and skills with ease."

The so-called affinity with the heavens and earth would include an affinity with spirit beasts, spiritual qi, and the Great Dao... In short, it meant being favored by the heavens and earth throughout one's life.

The Omniscient Sword State was the ultimate technique of Daoist Yan.

Strictly speaking, this was not a divine ability or technique, but a state of Sword Dao.

A reactive defense happened when you acted after seeing the opponent's sword strike. However, if the opponent had not yet struck but you could detect where the attack would come from through their flow of qi, line of sight, divine intent, karma, and other subtle cues, this resulted from being in the Omniscient Sword State.

Jiang Yuebai, who was currently in this profound state, could clearly identify the real Ling Ao that would attack her. Therefore, no matter how many illusions he generated, they would be meaningless.

"I was worried about Jiangjiang earlier, but now I feel relieved," Elder Huang said. "She's not only exceptionally talented but also incredibly dedicated in her training. Her strength undoubtedly places her among the top prodigies in the nine provinces."

But just as Elder Huang finished speaking, the situation in the arena changed abruptly.

The four afterimages of Ling Ao rushed toward Jiang Yuebai from different directions. Just as they were about to close in, Jiang Yuebai's eyes flickered. With a wave of her sword, the fallen flying sword once again broke through the air, blocking the path of one of the Ling Aos. At the same time, the ice spiritual qi in the air rapidly increased, turning the entire arena as cold as an ice cellar.

Even the audience in the spectator stand far away from the arena started to feel the biting chill.

Obviously, the one blocked by the flying sword was the real Ling Ao.

However, instead of dodging, he allowed the sword to stab at him. The sword was about to pierce through his chest when suddenly, he moved and grabbed the sword with his bare hand.

With flesh and blood, he held the indestructible sharpness in his grip!

Slash—

The result was just as expected.

He started bleeding but the blood was crimson and golden, flowing out and instantly staining the sword.

Jiang Yuebai was not going to show any mercy. She was just about to control the sword and continue attacking when she found herself unable to use her divine intent. It was as though she had lost her divine intent and nothing was responding.

The flying sword, tainted with golden-red blood, suddenly lost all its spiritual energy, and its divine light dimmed.

Though Ling Ao's hand was bleeding profusely as he gripped the sword, there was no pain in his eyes. Instead, they conveyed a sense of satisfaction.

His blood contained powerful and aggressive spiritual energy. Once it tainted the sword, it immediately overwhelmed the sword's spiritual nature. The blood on the sword began to boil and burn fiercely, like a poisonous fire.

Upon seeing this, Chu Liang's pupils dilated.

No one knew better than him what this was—the smell of dragon blood!

After cultivating the Secret Dragon Blood Technique, the concentration of dragon aura in his body increased, causing these changes to his blood.

Ling Ao indeed had a connection to the True Dragon of Solitude Peak.

But Chu Liang had no time to ponder further as he focused his attention on the stage. With a swift motion, Ling Ao seized Jiang Yuebai's flying sword and, in an instant, stepped in front of her.

She appeared frozen in shock, unable to react in time, as Ling Ao, without hesitation or mercy, thrust the sword through her body!

Thunk.

The blade pierced through her, making a dull echoing sound.