

M. Slaying 321

Chapter 321: I'm Not Bidding For It

The Pavilion of Celestial Fate.

It was the day of the auction—the pavilion's busiest day of each month. There was a stage in the center of the pavilion, and the open space around it was spacious enough to accommodate tens of thousands of people.

On the second floor, there was a row of luxurious viewing boxes—rooms for guests to view the auction in private. Important guests or those from major forces like the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten all had their own exclusive boxes.

Before the auction started, the Weapons Master walked through the corridor on the second floor. He was accompanied by a tall white bear standing upright. It was wearing a full set of armor, looking like a majestic general. A wheelchair was strapped to the bear's shoulder armor, and Tantai Jing was sitting in it.

The Mount Shu Sect had entrusted these two men to carry out an important mission in Taotie City.

As they moved through the corridor, a group of people approached from the other end. The person at the front of the group was a tall and burly middle-aged Daoist with bronze-colored skin and a cold, steely expression. He was dressed in a Daoist robe, which had the yin and yang fishes embroidered inside the Eight Trigrams with a fire-red background color[1].

His gaze met the Weapon Master's, and both parties slowed down.

"Greetings, Weapons Master. It's been ages since we last met," the middle-aged Daoist said with a small smile, cupping his hands together and bowing slightly.

"I heard you were in closed-door cultivation at Fanghu for a long time. So, you've finally emerged," the Weapons Master replied, returning the smile.

The person before him was Daoist Chi Niu of the Penglai Supreme Sect.

"I didn't have a choice. I have to get the Demon-Subduing Pestle today." Daoist Chi Niu shook his head. "I don't trust anyone else to do it, so I had to come and do it myself."

"What a coincidence," the Weapons Master said. "My sect is determined to get it too."

"Hahaha." Daoist Chi Niu laughed heartily and threw his hands into the air. "In that case, let's see who will emerge victorious."

Then someone coughed behind Daoist Chi Niu.

Looking over, the Weapons Master saw a rather thin man, who wore black clothes and a jade belt.

The Weapons Master said, "I guess this must be the recently advanced Daoist Xuan Lu? The Penglai Supreme Sect is indeed full of talented people."

"Greetings, Weapons Master. Yes, that is indeed me, esteemed senior." Daoist Xuan Lu bowed in greeting as well. "No matter who gets the Demon-Subduing Pestle today, it is best for both our sects to maintain our friendly relations."

The Weapons Master chuckled. "Of course. All sects following the righteous path share the same qi; it is of utmost importance that we maintain our friendly relations."

He waved his black-iron hand, brushing off the idea that their sects' relationship would sour.

Daoist Chi Niu grinned. "That's right! Let's stay amicable!"

After the exchange of pleasantries, both parties went to their respective boxes and sat down.

"Some years ago, Mount Shu wanted my Demon-Cutting Saber, and now they want to fight me for the Demon-Subduing Pestle. They're so irritating!" Daoist Chi Niu said quietly as soon as he sat down. "If it wasn't because of their intervention, I might have already obtained the Demon-Subduing Pestle."

Before the auction, Daoist Chi Niu had contacted the Pavilion of Celestial Fate in the name of the Penglai Supreme Sect, hoping to offer a price and buy the Demon-Subduing Pestle without going through the auction.

Normally, the Penglai Supreme Sect had a significantly greater influence than Mount Shu, as it was the top immortal sect in the nine provinces. So, under normal circumstances, the Pavilion of Celestial Fate would probably have agreed.

However, Mount Shu had also made an offer to purchase the item. If the Pavilion of Celestial Fate gave it to another sect before the auction, it would be like giving the Mount Shu Sect a slap in the face. Consequently, the Pavilion of Celestial Fate decided not to sell the item to anyone before the auction. Instead, the Pavilion of Celestial Fate promised both sects that they would get a ten percent discount off the price if they won the bid.

"The six demon-eliminating treasures were in the Mount Shu Sect's possession for thousands of years, so it's normal for them to think of the treasures as their own," Daoist Xuan Lu remarked with a light laugh. "Do not be impatient later. Think twice before taking action."

Daoist Chi Niu nodded. "I know. I'll follow your orders later."

He'd brought Daoist Xuan Lu because he was quick-witted and intelligent. Daoist Xuan Lu had not been long since he became a seventh-realm cultivator, so he lacked experience as one, but he had been an important strategist in the Fanghu faction long before his advancement to the seventh realm.

Despite having ample experience as an Eminent One, Daoist Chi Niu did not have an arrogant attitude in front of Daoist Xuan Lu.

Over in the Mount Shu Sect's box...

"If I meet him in a hidden realm someday, I'll have to teach him a good lesson," the Weapons Master said, clenching his black-iron hand into a fist.

His expression was just as dark as Daoist Chi Niu's.

Fortunately, the boxes in the Pavilion of Celestial Fate were completely soundproof, unlike that room Chu Liang had used recently... Otherwise, it would only be too easy for these two groups to start fighting through the wall.

Tantai Jing's large white bear was sitting cross-legged, meditating. Its posture and aura were no different from those of a human cultivator.

As for Tantai Jing, he was seated beside it.

Tantai Jing smiled and advised the Weapons Master, "Elder, regardless of whether we succeed or fail later, please control your temper. If you make the first move in such a setting, it will just give them an excuse to retaliate."

The Weapons Master laughed softly. "Don't worry. I'm not Di Nufeng."

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"An auction?"

Wen Yulong was looking at the jade signboard at the entrance of the Pavilion of Celestial Fate. That's when he recalled that it was the day of the monthly auction.

The public reveal of the Demon-Subduing Pestle had caused a bit of a stir, but it wasn't enough for the news to spread all over Taotie City. Chu Liang and Wen Yulong had been focusing on the fluctuating market for the Spirit-Concentration Pills, so they hadn't paid much attention to the news related to the auction.

Chu Liang swept his gaze over the vertical signboard, moving down from the top and eventually stopping on the last item.

He muttered, "The Demon-Subduing Pestle?"

"It's one of the six demon-eliminating treasures!" Wen Yulong exclaimed excitedly. "This was one of our sect's important treasures. Our sect should have sent someone here. Why don't we go in and take a look?"

Chu Liang nodded. "Sure."

It turned out that the tickets to get auction weren't expensive. Once they were done paying for the tickets, Chu Liang and Wen Yulong received a long-handled wooden paddle that was marked with their assigned seating area and numbers. They then entered the first floor of the main hall and sat in seats near the back of the hall.

This month's auction had attracted thousands of people.

However, like Chu Liang and Wen Yulong, most of them were there just to watch; they didn't intend to buy anything. As for the rest of the people, many of them were just there to try their luck. They would only try putting in a bid for an item if they thought there was a chance they could have a winning bid. Therefore, it was unlikely there would be many people raising their signs during the auction.

Just after Chu Liang and Wen Yulong sat down, there was the loud sound of a gong, and one of the Pavilion of Celestial Fate's managers walked onto the stage.

"Fellow Daoists, I thank you all for coming to the Pavilion of Celestial Fate and attending this auction. I believe the treasures being offered tonight will not disappoint you."

A cool breeze swept through the hall, carrying the manager's voice to every corner of the hall.

"Without further ado, let's start today's auction!"

Gonnnng. The gong was struck again.

Two female servants dressed in colorful clothes stepped onto the stage, their skirts fluttering in the breeze as they walked. Each woman carried a golden tray covered with red cloth.

"Today's first treasure is a pair of ancient clam pearls from the East Sea!" the manager announced.

He lifted the red cloth of one of the trays, revealing a pair of large pearls.

One was a bright red, and the other was purple-black. Both were shining brilliantly.

The manager continued, "The light that the red pearl emits is filled with yang qi, and the light that the purple pearl emits is filled with yin qi. The red pearl can dispel all concealment techniques, making it impossible for anyone to hide or move around stealthily within the range of the red pearl's light. The purple pearl can detect ghosts, making yin qi visible as something solid."

"The starting price is two thousand Vermillion-Bird coins. The bids are to increase by no less than one hundred Vermillion-Bird coins." The manager waved his hand. "Please raise your signs!"

The Pavilion of Celestial Fate had a rule that if a person raised their sign, it meant they were participating in the bid for that item at the base price, increasing the bid by a hundred Vermillion-Bird coins. If they wanted to bid more, they had to call out their bid.

These yin and yang pearls sounded quite practical, so many people participated in the bid for them. Chu Liang, however, just enjoyed watching the bidding competition... until Wen Yulong poked him.

"Senior Brother Chu, those pearls are pretty good. They would be great embedded into an enchanted tool," Wen Yulong said excitedly as he gazed at the treasure on the stage. "Hurry up and bid for it!"

Chu Liang tactfully rejected Wen Yulong's suggestion. "Let's just wait and see."

The pearls were quickly sold for the high price of four thousand Vermillion-Bird coins.

Chu Liang did some rough calculations. The base price of two thousand Vermillion-Bird coins for the two pearls had certainly been low, but the winning bid of four thousand was very high. It seemed that more money could be earned through an auction as opposed to a private sale at a set price. Those who really wanted the items had to pay an excessive amount to get them, raising the price of the items significantly.

Lesson learned.

At this time, the second treasure on offer was brought on stage. It was a fist-sized chunk of crystalized wind spiritual qi. The crystal emitted a brilliant azure light that made objects within a ten-zhang radius float.

The manager boasted about the crystal. "This item is excellent for comprehending the Great Dao of the Heavens and the Earth or as an auxiliary material for making enchanted tools!"

"Yes!" Wen Yulong's eyes lit up in excitement again. "If I had this, I could definitely bring up the quality of an enchanted tool to a whole other level! Senior Brother Chu, hurry up and bid for it!"

Chu Liang was feeling rather regretful. He realized that coming to the auction with this guy was a mistake... Every time the auction staff brought out a new treasure, Wen Yulong would think of a great use for it and get all excited.

Who could stand that? What kind of family could afford to buy everything at an auction?

Feeling extremely annoyed, Chu Liang firmly refused to do as Wen Yulong wanted.

"If you want it, bid for it yourself. I'm not bidding for it."

Chapter 322: Tricking Fools

Phoenix Sheep Mountain.

At the foot of the mountain, a small village nestled by a riverside where a few women were washing clothes. They scrubbed the garments clean in the gently flowing water, then beat them on stone blocks to wring out the water.

Children, aged three to five, ran and played nearby, making the scene appear even more peaceful.

The small river that flowed down from the mountain looked as clear as a mirror. The water was so clear that the fish scales beneath could be seen.

"Huh?" One of the women suddenly exclaimed in surprise.

"What is it?" the others asked, turning to her.

"Look at the water..." she said, pointing to the river. The others followed her gaze and immediately noticed something strange.

The river water had begun to take on a faint reddish-gold color, forming swirling clouds like ink dissolving in water. But it wasn't ink—it looked like... blood?

And it was blood with a golden hue!

The reddish-gold blood spread rapidly, transforming the entire river into a river of blood. To make matters worse, white bones began to surface in the water, creating a terrifying sight!

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh—"

Two of the women were so frightened that they stumbled back and fell to the ground. The others hurriedly grabbed their crying children and ran back to the village. As they fled, the sky turned fiery red, and a flock of birds took off from the forest, flying away into the distance.

By the time they reached the village entrance, the mountains echoed with rumbling sounds, seemingly mixed with the roars of some bird or beast.

"Village chief! Village chief!" they shouted as they reached the village, only to find a large group of people already gathered in front of the ancestral hall.

"Why the panic?" The elderly village chief, leaning on his cane, spoke in a deep voice. "Don't be afraid! Stay calm!"

"There are monsters on the Phoenix Sheep Mountain!" a child cried out in fear.

"Don't talk nonsense! That's not a monster!" the village chief quickly corrected. "That's the celestial beast of Phoenix Sheep Mountain waking up!"

"Ah?" The younger ones looked surprised and puzzled. On the other hand, the older villagers were not surprised but slightly excited.

The village had long-standing legends about ancient celestial beasts.

It was said that thousands of years ago, a divine phoenix and a mountain sheep[1] mated here, giving birth to a deformed creature known as the Phoenix Sheep.

The phoenix was an ancient celestial beast on par with the dragons. While stories of draconic descendants were common, phoenix descendants were the complete opposite. This was because the dragons, being the most numerous among celestial beasts, loved to interbreed with various races.

In contrast, the phoenixes were not only few in number but also detested interbreeding. The birth of the Phoenix Sheep had been a beautiful mistake.

The mountain sheep, although a demonic beast, was no match for the Divine Phoenix. It died immediately after giving birth, as the fetus had drained too much of its spiritual energy. The Divine Phoenix did not acknowledge this hybrid creature and left long before its birth.

The newborn Phoenix Sheep was left unattended in the mountains for seven days, nearly dying from cold and hunger. Eventually, kind villagers living at the foot of the mountain found it. Initially, they thought it was a beautiful lamb and took it home to raise.

To their surprise, as they continued raising the lamb, it grew wings.

The villagers were stunned and they thought they had raised a monster. In their fear, they wanted to kill it. However, the family that found the Phoenix Sheep had grown attached to it and decided to protect it with their lives.

The family eventually sent it back to the mountains, instructing it to run far away and never return.

It wasn't until years later that a wave of demonic beasts swept through the area and several powerful demonic beasts attacked the village.

As the villagers faced imminent danger of being slaughtered, the Phoenix Sheep suddenly appeared. Over the years, due to its bloodline, it had evolved into a powerful spirit beast and single-handedly fought numerous enemies. After a fierce battle, it successfully protected the village.

The villagers gathered around the Phoenix Sheep and realized that despite it having lived in the mountains, hunting for food, it had never strayed far and had silently watched over the village all along.

In the years that followed, it continued to reside on the mountain, which, in honor of its guardian, became known as Phoenix Sheep Mountain.

The younger villagers were astonished. They had heard the legend of the Phoenix Sheep protecting the village, but witnessing the legend in real life was truly shocking!

"The celestial beast Phoenix Sheep has been sleeping in the hidden realm for the past thousand years, awakening briefly every thirty years before returning to its slumber," the old village chief explained solemnly. "Zhuzi, hurry to the Daoist temple outside the city and inform the priests that the Phoenix Sheep has awakened!"

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"Next up is the Dragon Embroidered Jade Fan from the distant Fuyao Kingdom across the sea! This exquisite item is exclusive to Fuyao craftsmanship. With a gentle fan, it creates a fragrant breeze that attracts dancing butterflies. When infused with foundational qi and wielded forcefully, it unleashes a powerful wind imbued with dragon's breath, capable of breaking steel and bending iron! We start the bidding at one thousand Vermillion-Bird coins, with increments of fifty Vermillion-Bird coins."

The auctioneer on the stage was still trying hard to promote it, but there weren't many interested in the Dragon Embroidered Jade Fan.

In auctions, the best items were usually saved for last, with the second-best placed at the beginning to warm up the event, while the items that appeared in the middle were generally mediocre.

After the initial few valuable items, the atmosphere in the hall had also cooled down.

Despite its appearance as an exquisite and mystical artifact, the Dragon Embroidered Jade Fan turned out to be merely an ordinary enchanted tool, as revealed during the auctioneer's demonstration. Its starting price of one thousand Vermillion-Bird coins included at least a fifty percent markup, likely reflecting a minimum standard price required for all auction items. If the price were any lower, it wouldn't be worthy of this stage.

Even if it ended up unsold, they couldn't lower the venue's standard.

Of course, it could also have been a test to see how many fools were present in the hall.

After a brief pause, about eight or nine people raised their paddles.

Hmm... with thousands of people here, having fewer than ten fools isn't such a bad ratio after all. Chu Liang thought as he watched coldly.

Meanwhile, Wen Yulong fumed with anger.

"I've seen this thing before. If I made it, the cost wouldn't exceed three hundred sword coins," Wen Yulong said angrily. "Selling it at such a high price is daylight robbery."

"In such a large auction that was held monthly, it's difficult to guarantee that every item is highly valuable. It's no surprise that a few cheap items might slip through and appear here," Chu Liang remarked calmly. "If you attach straw to a crab, the straw could still be sold at a crab's price. Markups are just part of the game."

In the end, the Dragon Embroidered Jade Fan was purchased by a young man of low cultivation, accompanied by two attendants. He seemed to be from a minor immortal sect, likely here to gain experience.

By simply winning the bid for an exquisite and expensive enchanted tool, he could return home and impress his fellow sect members.

"Hehe, the next item is quite intriguing," the auctioneer on stage said with a mysterious smile. The two previous maids exited the stage, replaced by new ones carrying trays.

He lifted the cover from the tray held by the first maid, revealing four pills of different colors.

"Now we invite a few fellow cultivators to come up and taste these pills. Is anyone willing to try?" the auctioneer asked with a mysterious tone.

Since the Pavilion of Celestial Fate was a large and reputable establishment, the cultivators below had no concerns about potential poisoning. Without hesitation, several eagerly raised their hands to participate and were promptly invited up by the auctioneer.

"Here, fellow cultivator, try this pill," the auctioneer said, handing over a pill that the cultivator readily swallowed.

"Hmm?" After taking the pill, he furrowed his brows slightly.

"Can you tell what kind of pill this is?" the auctioneer inquired.

"It seems to be just a regular Spirit-Concentration Pill," the cultivator replied.

"What's special about it?" the auctioneer asked again.

"The taste is excellent... I think it's an apple flavor. It leaves a refreshing and sweet aftertaste. What's particularly special is how delicious it is," the cultivator replied honestly.

"Excellent!" the auctioneer said with a smile. He then invited another cultivator onto the stage and handed over another Spirit-Concentration Pill.

This time, the Spirit-Concentration Pill was tangerine-flavored, tasting both sweet and sour.

There were four pills in total, each with a distinct flavor.

After people were given a chance to try the four types of pills, he smiled and said, "These pills were refined by a remarkable alchemist in the city. All of his pills come in delightful fruit flavors! As some of you may know, the price of Spirit-Concentration Pills in the city has been skyrocketing."

He then lifted the cover from the tray behind him, revealing four gourd-shaped storage enchanted tools.

"Here are four gourds containing Spirit-Concentration Pills of different flavors, totaling one thousand pills. We start the bidding at one thousand Vermillion-Bird coins, with each bid increment set at fifty Vermillion-Bird coins!" he announced loudly.

As soon as this item was introduced, the audience burst into laughter.

For these cultivators, the unique flavors were new and interesting but ultimately useless. However, the existence of these pills were undeniably amusing.

Even with the current price hike of Spirit-Concentration Pills in Taotie City, it was unlikely for the price to reach one Vermillion-Bird coin per pill. The starting bid of one thousand Vermillion-Bird coins for a thousand pills represented a markup of at least three hundred Vermillion-Bird coins, and that was just the starting price.

So, while many found it interesting, very few intended to bid. After all, money didn't grow on trees, and anyone would feel pain if they spent a few hundred coins frivolously.

Just over half a year ago, Chu Liang, a cultivator at the Spiritual Awareness Realm, had felt worried for three hundred sword coins! Normally, it would have taken him a few months to earn that amount.

Perhaps only a few truly wealthy individuals would bid out of curiosity.

Even Wen Yulong couldn't help but laugh as he remarked, "I don't know how that alchemist came up with this. Who would pay extra for flavored Spirit-Concentration Pills? This is more absurd than the last item. Everyone knows the standard pill prices; even a fool wouldn't fall for this, right?"

Immediately after, he heard Chu Liang next to him raise his paddle and bid loudly, "Two thousand Vermillion-Bird coins!"

Chapter 323: For Mount Shu

Wen Yulong: "...?"

There were a few potential buyers interested in trying the new item, but when Chu Liang doubled the starting price, it immediately deterred all competition.

The attendees, hearing the bid, all had the same thought... This guy must be a fool, right?

Seeing Chu Liang happily collecting the four gourds of "fruit-flavored Spirit-Concentration Pills," Wen Yulong was momentarily stunned.

He had thought Chu Liang to be a smart and frugal person that would never waste any money. But now, it seemed that Senior Brother Chu had changed.

After all, nobody's money grew on trees, but Chu Liang's did.

Collecting tens of thousands of spirit stones by standing in the wind would be exhausting, but Chu Liang's method was much easier than that.

He must have become arrogant. Even his Spirit-Concentration Pills had to be fruit-flavored... Wen Yulong thought.

Seeing Wen Yulong's strange look, Chu Liang explained, "I have a use for these."

How refreshing... Isn't it better to keep your money for other purposes? Wen Yulong secretly mocked Chu Liang and continued watching the auction.

The subsequent items became increasingly interesting, each one quite tempting, and the competition grew fierce. The starting bid units changed from Vermillion-Bird coins to Tiger-Head coins, leading up to the final item.

"Fellow Daoists!" the auctioneer called out, "Next is the final item of this auction! The highly anticipated Demon-Subduing Pestle!"

"As one of the six demon-eliminating treasures, the Demon-Subduing Pestle was once ranked eighty-second in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures! Even after its loss, it still holds the eighty-seventh rank. In the past, the combined power of the Six Treasures suppressed a demon god! Against evil entities, it unleashes unparalleled might! Today, at the Pavilion of Celestial Fate, the Demon-Subduing Pestle reappears!"

Whoosh—

With that, he dramatically unveiled the long tray.

On the red silk lay a four-chi-long gold-embossed short staff. One end was sharp, and the body of the staff emitted a dark luster. The entire object appeared ancient and mysterious.

At first glance, it seemed unremarkable, but upon closer inspection, it exuded an aura that was as heavy as a mountain!

The audience collectively gasped in amazement, their eyes widening in disbelief.

For ordinary cultivators, witnessing a top one hundred legendary artifact from the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures was a rare and extraordinary opportunity.

"We here at the Pavilion of Celestial Fate have been doing business for decades, and this is the first time we are auctioning a legendary artifact ranked in the top hundred! Everyone, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! The starting bid for the Demon-Subduing Pestle is one thousand Azure-Dragon coins, with each increment at one hundred Azure-Dragon coins! The auction begins!"

The atmosphere in the hall reached a climax with the appearance of the Demon-Subduing Pestle.

Since the Demon-Subduing Pestle was announced, it had caused a sensation. After all, this was a top 100 legendary artifact. Any small immortal sect that obtained it would definitely keep it as a treasured heirloom; even large immortal sects might not have many such items.

Who would normally put such a treasure up for sale?

The Mount Shu Sect and Penglai were not the only sects here. Representatives from the other immortal sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten were also present, all eager to compete for this item.

However, joining the competition required substantial capital.

One Azure-Dragon coin was equivalent to ten Tiger-Head coins, and one Tiger-Head coin was equivalent to ten Vermillion-Bird coins. A thousand Azure-Dragon coins would be equivalent to a hundred thousand Vermillion-Bird coins.

Chu Liang's entire fortune was just barely enough to cover the starting bid.

But he was, after all, an individual, and having this much was already impressive. The Demon-Subduing Pestle was clearly aimed at the major immortal sects!

"Three thousand Azure-Dragon coins!"

A clear voice instantly quieted the heated atmosphere in the hall by ninety percent. Many small immortal sects and families that were eager to try suddenly calmed down.

"It's an esteemed senior from the Penglai Supreme Sect!" the auctioneer shouted, "The bid is now at three thousand Azure-Dragon coins!"

A beautiful maid standing outside Penglai Supreme Sect's private room on the second floor just raised the bid paddle. Each private room had a maid responsible for receiving and placing the bids.

Revealing that the bidder represented the Penglai Supreme Sect was also mandatory here. If a bid was made from a private room, the identity was made public. The auctioneer announcing it could deter some competitors by using the name of a major immortal sect, which was beneficial.

If an immortal sect in the Divine Nine or Terrestrial Ten wanted to buy something anonymously, they would naturally sit in the main hall below.

Inside Penglai Supreme Sect's private room, Daoist Chi Niu's eyes were fixed on the Demon-Subduing Pestle on the stage, filled with greed.

Daoist Xuan Lu remained calm and said, "This way, we can knock out the insignificant competitors and see who are the ones that remain bidding."

Meanwhile, in Mount Shu Sect's private room, the Weapons Master frowned and said, "They tripled the bid instantly."

Tantai Jing nodded and said, "It's understandable. If they hadn't raised the bid like this, I would have done that. First, we identify the main competitors, then we slowly compete with them."

"The sect leader has allocated us a budget of five hundred thousand sword coins this time. If we exceed it quickly, we might face trouble," Elder Weapons Master said with some concern.

"Our competitors are likely in a similar situation," Tantai Jing mused. "Although other sects might be wealthier, they don't have the same determination to secure this with the entire sect's resources as we do. I estimate that very few can afford a budget exceeding five thousand Azure-Dragon coins."

The representatives of each immortal sect carried only a limited amount of spirit-stone coins, just enough to maintain their liquidity. For the Mount Shu Sect, withdrawing five hundred thousand sword coins significantly impacted their finances, and the entire sect would need to repay this debt in the future. Ordinary sects might not have this level of determination.

"We can only wait and see," Tantai Jing said calmly.

"Three thousand five hundred Azure-Dragon coins!"

After Penglai Supreme Sect raised the bid, a bid paddle was also raised outside the private room of Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals.

The Mount Shu Sect and the Penglai Supreme Sect were indeed not the only ones competing for the item. All the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten were fighting to have this item as well!

"Three thousand and eight hundred Azure-Dragon coins!"

The Celestial Pivot Pavilion also raised its bid paddle.

This move made the other sects frown once more. The Celestial Pivot Pavilion's wealth was ranked among the top in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. If they were determined to bid, it would be hard for any sect to compete.

The Penglai Supreme Sect was rich enough to compete for this item, but of the Penglai Supreme Sect, only the members from the immortals' island Fanghu came[1].

"Four thousand Azure-Dragon coins!"

The paddle outside the private room belonging to the Mount Shu Sect was quickly raised for the first time.

The auction quickly entered a stage where titans clashed. While a few thousand Azure-Dragon coins might not sound like much, tens of thousands of Vermillion-Bird coins piled up to form a small mountain!

Many cultivators would never see that much money in their lifetime.

"I suspect Mount Shu Sect's budget to be between four and five thousand, and while Celestial Pivot Pavilion's determination isn't as strong as Mount Shu Sect's, they have a solid foundation. Their budget should be between five and six thousand," Daoist Xuan Lu mused.

"Does the Celestial Pivot Pavilion have that much money?" Daoist Chi Niu asked. "We only brought enough money to exchange for five thousand Azure-Dragon coins."

"It isn't going to be easy for us to get a legendary artifact of this level," Daoist Xuan Lu pondered. "Judging by the situation, it's unlikely we'll secure it with just five thousand. We'll have to compete. If necessary, we can borrow from the Yingzhou faction. We have a good relationship with them, so it shouldn't be a problem."

"So how much should we bid this time?" Daoist Chi Niu asked.

"Bid the full amount and see if we can kick the Mount Shu Sect out of the competition first," Daoist Xuan Lu suggested.

Soon, the bid paddle was raised again outside the private room belonging to the Penglai Supreme Sect.

"Five thousand Azure-Dragon coins!"

As Chu Liang and Wen Yulong watched the titans clash from the second floor, they were stunned. As disciples of Mount Shu, they had some understanding of their sect's situation.

The Mount Shu Sect had never been particularly wealthy.

The reason they could muster tens of thousands of sword coins this time was likely thanks to the Dark King Sect.

When the Dark King Sect attacked Mount Shu, they suffered a crushing defeat. Aside from revealing Baize's secret, they didn't cause significant damage to Mount Shu. They left behind many corpses, and the spoils from those diabolical sect members amounted to a substantial windfall.

However, reaching the amount of five thousand was already staggering and likely the upper limit for the Mount Shu Sect.

Chu Liang felt a twinge of worry.

"We can't give up," the Weapons Master said firmly.

"Yes," Tantai Jing nodded. "With our 10% discount, we can afford to go slightly over our budget. Our opponents are likely reaching their limits as well. Now, it comes down to who has the stronger resolve."

"I'll sell off my private assets later. I should be able to raise a hundred thousand sword coins to cover the extra costs," the Weapons Master said.

Having overseen Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Weapons for many years, he had naturally accumulated a wealth of valuable items and materials. In terms of personal wealth, the Weapons Master and the Alchemy Master were the strongest contenders for the title of Mount Shu's richest. Aside from a few important items that couldn't be sold, if he were to liquidate his collection, it would be worth a significant amount.

However, doing so would be tantamount to bankrupting himself.

"Weapons Master..." Tantai Jing couldn't help but feel moved.

He immediately turned his head and said, "Bid seven thousand Azure-Dragon coins."

"What?" The Weapons Master was shocked. "This..."

Even with a ten percent discount and his personal contributions, it still wasn't enough. Tantai Jing's bid was clearly far exceeding the available amount.

"There's no need to worry," Tantai Jing smiled slightly. "You aren't the only one. I also have some private assets."

The Weapons Master went silent for a moment before saying, "For Mount Shu."

"Yes," Tantai Jing nodded with a smile, "For Mount Shu."

"Seven thousand Azure-Dragon coins!"

As soon as Mount Shu Sect's bid was announced, the entire audience was instantly stunned.

It went up by two thousand directly!

It reached the maximum!

There had never been an auction for a legendary artifact before, so such a sky-high price was unprecedented.

What kind of determination does Mount Shu have?

It seemed that they were unwavering in their resolve to bring back the Demon-Subduing Pestle this time, even if it meant depleting all the resources of their entire sect.

The amount of this auction has already surpassed any transaction made in Taotie City!

Bang.

Daoist Chi Niu slammed the table with great force.

"How did they get so much money?!" he exclaimed.

"It seems Mount Shu is going all out," Daoist Xuan Lu pondered. "Their sect definitely doesn't have this much stored up. This means they are either taking from their own disciples or borrowing from external sources. Either way, this amount shows their great determination."

"Should we keep bidding?" Daoist Chi Niu asked, gritting his teeth as his eyes began to redden.

This number was already making people's heads spin.

"Bid," Daoist Xuan Lu said with very calm gaze. "No matter what it takes, Mount Shu has definitely reached their limit. Other sects likely won't join in their madness. If we borrow money from Yingzhou, we will definitely secure it."

Soon, a paddle was raised again outside the Penglai Supreme Sect's hall.

"Seven thousand five hundred Azure-Dragon coins!"

Hearing this, the Weapons Master's gaze dimmed.

Tantai Jing furrowed his brows and sighed, "Penglai's foundation is too strong. Even if Fanghu Immortal Island can't come up with this much money on their own, they just need to ask the other islands, and they'll find a way."

The Weapons Master fell silent.

Putting in such great determination only to fail would undoubtedly deliver a blow.

But at this point, gathering more money seemed unlikely. They couldn't decide for the other sect members and sell off other people's possessions.

Moreover, there weren't that many wealthy people in Mount Shu.

Not only was he silent, but the entire hall was also silent. Such a number was staggering. It seemed the Demon-Subduing Pestle would end up belonging to the Penglai Supreme Sect.

Daoist Chi Niu heaved a sigh of relief, but his expression remained serious. "Although we've won, there will be trouble when we return. We'll have to deal with the members of the Yingzhou faction."

"As long as they can help us, it's fine. Our island share an alliance with their island, after all," Daoist Xuan Lu said, shaking his head with indifference.

As Penglai was much more powerful, the other two islands would work together as allies.

As they discussed how to deal with Yingzhou Island after retrieving the Demon-Subduing Pestle, a voice suddenly echoed from the main hall on the first floor.

"Eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins!"

Chapter 324: It's Impossible

When faced with wealth that could be quantified within their understanding, a person would usually feel that it's a lot. However, if the quantified amount was so great that they could not understand its true value, then they would become calm instead.

At this moment, the people watching the auction in the Pavilion of Celestial Fate were thinking similar things.

So what if you bid eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins?

Is there any difference between that and seven thousand to me?

As an ordinary cultivator at the Spiritual Awareness Realm, I might just be able to accumulate such a huge amount with around eight hundred years of hard work.

Haaa...

Nevertheless, most of the observers were still very curious about the wealthy person who had made a bid of eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins. Who exactly were they?

If it were someone from the second floor where visitors from sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten were seated, the observers would have still found the bid shocking, but it would have been easier to accept. Instead, it had been someone on the first floor who made the bid, so it inevitably made the observers curious.

Countless intense gazes fell on Chu Liang. Nonetheless, he remained calm and continued holding up his paddle as he gazed at the manager on the stage.

After all, a person would get used to it after being the center of attention a couple of times.

It was quite a while before the manager finally showed a reaction.

Despite the Pavilion of Celestial Fate's extensive business operations, this was actually their first time holding an auction with top-tier legendary artifacts. They had anticipated that they might be able to sell the Demon-Subduing Pestle at a sky-high price, but they were quite shocked when that number actually appeared.

After all, the development of commerce in the world of immortality cultivators was still at quite a relatively early stage. Taotie City was thriving, but that was just one trading hub.

Most immortal sects were still in a fairly primitive stage of commerce, where they acquired resources by slaying monsters and obliterating devils. They might trade off items they couldn't use, but that was the extent of it. Any usable items were kept to enhance their own strength. After all, in the world of immortality cultivators, strength was always more important than wealth.

Likewise, the Demon-Subduing Pestle was only put up for auction because the Pavilion of Celestial Fate and the forces backing it didn't have someone who could use the Demon-Subduing Pestle. Additionally, they just so happened to need large quantities of other resources, which required funds to acquire.

The manager was astonished that someone on the first floor had bid eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins. Nevertheless, he continued with the auction like a true professional.

The manager yelled, "The fellow Daoist in seat number 88 of the tenth section has bid eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins. Are there any higher bids?"

The people on the first floor weren't the only ones astonished; the representatives of sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten on the second floor were just as surprised.

Daoist Chi Niu's face had turned purple with rage. He scanned the first floor with his divine sense, and it stopped at Chu Liang, shrouding him.

Daoist Chi Niu muttered, "Where did this kid appear from?"

"I have no idea which sect or faction this young disciple belongs to," Daoist Xuan Lu commented.

That was because all the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, the three aristocratic family clans, and the imperial court had private rooms on the second floor... Whenever representatives of a major power in the world of immortality cultivators showed up, the Pavilion of Celestial Fate would arrange a private room for them. There was no favoritism.

That was why this young man's identity... was a big mystery.

With a trembling voice, the manager on the stage asked again if anyone else still wanted to bid for the item.

"Should we keep bidding?" Daoist Chi Niu asked Daoist Xuan Lu.

Daoist Chi Niu had actually asked that question through gritted teeth. He knew that if they continued, it would undoubtedly be very challenging for the Fanghu faction to afford the winning bid.

If they were to borrow a large amount of spirit-stone coins from the Yingzhou faction, there would certainly be a great price to pay for that. It would very likely cause Fanghu to become the lowest-ranking among the three island factions. In that case, the Fanghu faction's losses would outweigh the gains.

If Daoist Huang Long or Daoist Bai Lin were there, they would tell Daoist Chi Niu and the others that the handsome young man below was Chu Liang—the new champion of the Mount Shu Flying-Sword Race, the runner-up of the Mount Shu Summit, the master of the Violet and Azure Twin Swords, the owner of the berry garden that produces Mount Shu's specialty fruits, and the eldest senior brother of Silver Sword Peak![1]

This guy was from the Mount Shu Sect!

If Daoist Chi Niu and the others were to know that the mysterious bidder was from the Mount Shu Sect, they would definitely bid more desperately. They had investigated the Mount Shu Sect and knew roughly how much they had in their budget to buy the Demon-Subduing Pestle. The Mount Shu Sect's last bid of seven thousand Azure-Dragon coins had been made with the decision that they were going to have to sell their homes and lands to pay for it. They couldn't bid any higher than that.

However, at this moment, Daoist Chi Niu and Daoist Xuan Lu couldn't see through this young man's intentions. They didn't have enough time to figure out which major force he belonged to and how many cards they had up their sleeves...

Daoist Xuan Lu pondered for a moment before finally saying, "Don't bid anymore... If we bid too little, it would be meaningless at such high stakes. We'd just be causing each other to cough up larger amounts of money and increase the mutual animosity. If we bid too much and the other party suddenly stops bidding, it would not be worth it for us."

Daoist Chi Niu nodded. "Okay."

Despite losing the bid, he inwardly let out a sigh of relief.

Daoist Chi Niu had strongly advocated on Fanghu Island that they should take part in the bidding war for the Demon-Subduing Pestle. If they acquired it, it would complement his Demon-Cutting Saber and produce great benefits.

Nonetheless, the price of the bid had exceeded their budget too much. So, the decision of whether they should even continue fighting for the Demon-Subduing Pestle had actually weighed heavily on Daoist Chi Niu.

The manager announced, "It seems there are no more bids. In that case, congratulations to this fellow Daoist for obtaining the Demon-Subduing Pestle—a legendary artifact that's ranked in the top hundred in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures!"

When he made the announcement, he felt that this situation was rather surreal. He'd initially thought this legendary artifact would surely go to one of the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten.

"But, everyone, please do not leave your seats," the manager continued. "We did not verify the funds of those attending this auction upon entry, so we will first conduct a brief verification process for this fellow Daoist to ensure he has the funds for to cover the winning bid. After that, we will announce the end of the auction."

Chu Liang gave a slight nod.

This was understandable. In such a large crowd, there were surely crooks mixed in with honest folk. If someone wanted to cause trouble, they could randomly shout a high price, shrug, and then say they had no money. What should Pavilion of Celestial Fate do then?

For the other treasures, it would be fine to auction them again next time. However, for a legendary artifact like the Demon-Subduing Pestle, could they sell it for as many Azure-Dragon coins next time? They might not be able to.

So, if Chu Liang were to fail the fund verification process, the Pavilion of Celestial Fate might detain him and hand him over to Taotie City for his punishment. Then they would restart the auction from the second last bid of seven thousand five hundred Azure Dragon coins.

...

Upon hearing about the fund verification process, the Weapons Master became anxious.

Earlier, when he heard someone bid eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins for the Demon-Subduing Pestle, the Weapons Master had fallen into despair. However, he then saw that the person who had made the bid was Chu Liang.

The Weapons Master and Tantai Jing were taken aback.

How could this kid have so many Azure-Dragon coins? It was impossible.

They knew Chu Liang had been doing all sorts of things on Mount Shu lately, but he could only have accumulated five or six thousand sword coins at most, which would be five or six hundred Azure-Dragon coins. Even that was a fantasy for disciples at the Golden Core Realm.

So, what exactly was Chu Liang doing now?

"Could it be that he's trying to ruin this auction?" the Weapons Master speculated.

He thought Chu Liang might have shouted a high bid to ruin the auction and give the Mount Shu Sect some time to raise more funds.

"But the auction house doesn't know who he is, so they'll definitely verify his funds before ending the auction. They won't just let him leave," Tantai Jing said, shaking his head. "Instead, Taotie City will punish him."

As expected, the manager then announced that the Pavilion of Celestial Fate would be verifying Chu Liang's funds.

The Weapons Master couldn't sit still anymore. "This won't do. I have to go help him. He's the master of the Violet and Azure Twin Swords. That's more important to our sect than the Demon-Subduing Pestle."

At this moment, an attendant had already invited Chu Liang to the backstage area.

The manager was surprised when he saw the young man's calm expression. It appeared that the young man knew what he was doing and that his bid had been a serious one.

However, there was one problem remaining; the Pavilion of Celestial Fate did not know which major force was backing him.

The Weapons Master, the representative of the major force backing Chu Liang, hurriedly flew from the second floor to the backstage area.

Meanwhile, the manager smiled at Chu Liang and said, "Young noble, please understand. Eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins is a huge amount. We cannot afford to be careless. So, you see—"

"I understand." Chu Liang smiled. "I am a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect."

"Ah, so you're a young hero from Mount Shu!" the manager exclaimed, breathing a sigh of relief.

He felt at ease now that he knew the young man did indeed have a major force backing him.

Right then, a tall old man barged in while shouting, "He is a disciple of my sect, the Mount Shu Sect! Do not make things difficult for him!"

When the manager saw the Weapons Master, he smiled brightly. "Oh! It's the Weapons Master from Mount Shu! Are you here to claim the Demon-Subduing Pestle? This young hero has already identified himself. How could we make things difficult for him?"

Hearing that, the Weapons Master stopped in his tracks.

Then he looked at Chu Liang and asked, "Why did you act so rashly?"

"Seeing that the Demon-Subduing Pestle was about to fall into the hands of outsiders, I felt anxious, so I decided to put in a bid," Chu Liang answered.

"In that case, do you have the eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins?" the Weapons Master questioned grumpily.

He was rather reproachful because he knew Chu Liang didn't have eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins. That meant the Demon-Subduing Pestle would ultimately still fall into the hands of outsiders. Furthermore, the Mount Shu Sect would gain a reputation for being sore losers and become the laughingstock of the world of immortality cultivators.

"Eh?" Chu Liang eyes widened in shock. "Does our sect not plan to contribute anything at all?"

Chapter 325: Heaven-Devouring Bug

The Weapons Master pulled Chu Liang aside and said through Voice Transmission, "What are you talking about? Even if Peak Master Tantai and I use up our entire sect's budget and sell everything we own, we can only put together seven thousand Azure-Dragon coins! Are you going to cover the extra one thousand Azure-Dragon coins?!"

"Yes," Chu Liang replied, looking at him strangely.

I placed the bid, so of course I'll cover the extra cost. Even if I asked Junior Brother Wen for the money, he doesn't have that amount to give, Chu Liang thought.

"You..." The Weapons Master was about to say more but suddenly paused. "What did you say?"

"I said I'll cover the extra cost."

"Where will you get the money to cover the extra cost?" the Weapons Master asked. "The sword coins of Mount Shu are all made by me..."

What he meant was that since he made all the sword coins of Mount Shu, he knew exactly how many Chu Liang could possibly have.

How are you going to gather one hundred thousand sword coins? The Weapons Master thought.

Before he could finish speaking, Chu Liang handed over an enchanted storage tool and said through Voice Transmission, "I coincidentally bought some Spirit-Concentration Pills in Taotie City just as their prices were rising and made a small profit. Here are one hundred thousand Vermillion-Bird coins."

The Weapons Master took the tool and, after a quick scan with his divine sense, confirmed it to be true.

He was stunned for a long while before saying, "You made so much... How many Spirit-Concentration Pills did you happen to buy?"

"I coincidentally bought one hundred fifty thousand pills," Chu Liang answered seriously.

The Weapons Master: "..."

"The elders are all doing their best to raise funds for Mount Shu. Naturally, we juniors will not lag behind. I believe that any disciple of Mount Shu would give their entire fortune without any hesitation at a time like this," said Chu Liang.

The Weapons Master's gaze gradually softened. He patted Chu Liang on the shoulder, momentarily at a loss for words.

When Chu Liang made money from his fellow disciples in Mount Shu, causing a shortage of sword coins, the Weapons Master considered him a troublemaker. But now that he had earned money from outsiders and was giving it back to Mount Shu, the Weapons Master suddenly found this young man very pleasing to the eye.

If he were a hundred years younger, he would certainly want to become sworn brothers with Chu Liang.

Considering Chu Liang's feat of slaying Taowu with the Violet and Azure Twin Swords, the Weapons Master felt that he would even be willing to let Chu Liang be the elder brother.

After a while, the Weapons Master finally spoke. "Rest assured, Mount Shu will not let you down."

"The sect saved my life and gave me the opportunity to cultivate and change my destiny. It's a lifelong debt of gratitude," Chu Liang replied earnestly.

The Weapons Master also said seriously, "That was done by Di Nufeng. Her deeds must be counted separately from Mount Shu."

Alright. Chu Liang grumbled inwardly.

The Weapons Master was so adamant about separating the Mount Shu Sect from Di Nufeng that he considered the good deeds of their esteemed teacher to be unaffiliated with the Mount Shu Sect.

While the two were whispering, the manager grew apprehensive, wondering if their prolonged discussion meant they didn't have enough money.

He would then be in a very difficult situation...

Just as the manager was worrying, the Weapons Master turned around and said, enunciating each word clearly, "We have the money; now hand over the goods."

The manager immediately broke into a smile and quickly responded, "Good!"

Though this old man looked quite strange and intimidating, he is surprisingly handsome when he acts so generously, the Manager thought.

Not long after, the manager took the stage and announced loudly, "This young hero is from the Mount Shu Sect! Today, this Demon-Subduing Pestle has been auctioned off to the Mount Shu Sect for eight thousand Azure-Dragon coins. Congratulations to Mount Shu!"

"Wow—" A murmur of astonishment spread through the crowd.

The Mount Shu Sect was bidding from the second floor while secretly placing hidden bids from the first floor. This was truly unexpected.

Back in the private room, Tantai Jing was amazed at Chu Liang's performance. He had always been very proud of his own intelligence. Nevertheless, he found himself unable to figure out how Chu Liang, a disciple at the Golden Core Realm, could accumulate such great wealth.

Obviously, he couldn't ask much here, so he left with his doubts, and the three of them started heading back to Mount Shu.

As they exited, they saw the team from the Penglai Supreme Sect approaching from the corridor on the second floor.

Daoist Xuan Lu first glanced at Chu Liang, then at Tantai Jing before speaking. "First, you openly competed with us on the second floor, driving the price to an extremely high amount. Then, you placed hidden bids from the first floor, making it hard for us to gauge your strategy. People say that you, Tantai Jing, are smarter than most. Today, I witnessed it firsthand."

To him, it seemed impossible that Mount Shu would let a junior disciple like Chu Liang make such a significant decision.

Among these people, the one with such a keen mind had to be the renowned strategist, Tantai Jing.

"Hmph." Tantai Jing gave a mysterious smile.

He wasn't sure how Chu Liang managed this or whether it was appropriate to reveal Chu Liang's role, so he remained silent.

But in Daoist Xuan Lu's eyes, the smile on Tantai Jing's face clearly meant: Exactly, that's right!

...

When the Weapons Master arrived, he was riding an enchanted tool, a flying device he had spent most of his life modifying. It was an exceptionally luxurious and comfortable aerial loft.

When he left, he was riding on the back of a giant white bear.

Although Tantai Jing's giant white bear had a broad back, it was too cramped to comfortably carry four people, so they were squeezing together. However, for long-distance flights, having a mount was always better than relying on wind-manipulation techniques.

The two young disciples, Chu Liang and Wen Yulong, were still able to ride their swords.

However, the two elders had even sold their flying swords...

"Don't scooch in any more, or my wheelchair will fall off," Tantai Jing said with a smile to Wen Yulong.

"Sorry, Peak Master Tantai," Wen Yulong apologized quickly, moving closer to Chu Liang.

The Weapons Master was the most senior among them, so they left a large space at the front for him. The three of them sat behind him, occupying only about half of the available space. Aside from respect, another reason was the intimidating atmosphere surrounding the Weapons Master.

"My Mysterious Dragon-Phoenix Pendant..."

"My Pioneer Sword..."

"My Sword Formation Diagram: Slaying Eighteen Lives..."

"My seventy-two rare materials..."

For a man to suddenly lose all his wealth at such an old age, it was understandably quite depressing. The other three showed great understanding. After all, the Mount Shu Sect didn't provide any pension or retirement fund, so fending for himself in his old age would be difficult.

Although Tantai Jing also lost his fortune, he was younger and not as fond of collecting valuable items as the Weapons Master, so it was not as devastating for him.

Chu Liang was even less concerned, as he only drained his liquid assets; the business he had built remained intact.

Moreover, after this incident, Venerable Wen Yuan would surely meet with him to discuss compensation. His expenditure of one hundred thousand sword coins might not be a total loss after all.

Wen Yulong advised, "Esteemed teacher, don't be too sad. There's an old saying: wealth lost can always be regained."

When Wen Yulong was training in the Hall of Weapons, the Weapons Master was his teacher. So, strictly speaking, Wen Yulong would be considered a generation above Chu Liang[1]. However, in Mount Shu, they usually care more about the seniority within their own peak and pay less attention to the seniority of attendants within the chamber.

"Then go and persuade your grandfather to compensate me for all the valuable items I lost," said the Weapons Master.

But when Wen Yulong heard that this would involve him, he immediately shrank back and said, "I can't persuade him."

Chu Liang had heard some rumors about Wen Yulong's grandfather being Venerable Wen Yuan a while ago. Initially, he had some wild guesses, but he didn't expect them to be true.

This kid could be considered the top third-generation immortal in Mount Shu.

You wouldn't be able to tell just by looking at him...

Upon returning to Mount Shu, Chu Liang first went back to Silver Sword Peak.

He hadn't had time to rest when he saw a paper crane flying over from Senior Sister Jiang, inviting him to meet at their usual spot after his return.

Although they could now meet openly as the top two of the Mount Shu Summit, they still habitually met in private at the old place. Chu Liang quickly replied and then headed to the cave at Treasured Pagoda Peak.

Jiang Yuebai arrived soon after.

"What's wrong?" Chu Liang asked. Senior Sister Jiang rarely came to him in such a hurry, so he wondered what the big deal was.

"If you remember, I saw your little butterfly last time," Jiang Yuebai said. "It seemed familiar to me then. Later, I checked some ancient books and found out it's the same kind of creature recorded in them."

Little golden butterfly? Chu Liang was also very curious about its origins, so he asked, "What is it?"

"Let me ask you," Jiang Yuebai said, "did it first transform from an egg into a white larva, resembling a maggot; then from a larva into a large green insect, resembling a silkworm; and now from a green large insect into a golden flying insect, resembling a butterfly? At every stage, did it have strong penetration abilities, able to almost devour anything?"

Hearing her describe it in such detail, Chu Liang nodded. "Yes, that's exactly it."

"That's it! It really is the legendary Heaven-Devouring Bug!" Jiang Yuebai exclaimed.

"Heaven-Devouring Bug?!" Chu Liang repeated. The name sounded very powerful.

"The Heaven-Devouring Bug has appeared very few times; from ancient times to the present, there have only been two recorded instances. However, each time, it caused quite a stir. It can undergo nine transformations, and after the ninth transformation, it gains the power of the Profound Realm. The Heaven-Devouring Bug that appeared last time was the..."

She paused before slowly uttering the last two words.

"Demon god!"

Chapter 326: How Dare I Ask for Any Reward

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

The little golden butterfly lay curled up in Chu Liang's palm, looking very sleepy. Chu Liang kept poking its tiny fleshy head with his finger. In response, the little creature used its two large wings to wrap around its head, hoping to be left alone.

But Chu Liang continued to poke its chunky butt, so it wrapped its wings around its butt.

Then Chu Liang poked its head again.

The little creature wriggled around, acting coy.

Since transforming into a butterfly, its intelligence had noticeably increased, resembling that of some cats and dogs. It recognized Chu Liang as its master and was usually very affectionate with him.

However, after gobbling that wish-fulfilling spirit precious bottle last time, it had been sleeping in the White Pagoda, unconscious most of the time. This behavior had occurred before its previous transformations, suggesting it might soon evolve again.

Yet Jiang Yuebai's words made Chu Liang feel a bit wary. Could this little creature really be a Heaven-Devouring Bug?

According to ancient texts, the Heaven-Devouring Bug had appeared twice in history.

The first time was in ancient times. Tens of thousands of years ago, when there were only seven realms in the cultivation system of this world, the Heaven-Devouring Bug suddenly emerged and devoured its way to the seventh realm. Various cultivators tried to trap and stop it, but nothing could contain it. Finally, many Eminent Ones joined forces to annihilate it.

The second appearance was three thousand years ago when a demon god emerged, whose true form was this legendary Heaven-Devouring Bug.

Although demons had long lifespans, they often had very poor comprehension. After reaching the Heavenly Gate, they suffered greatly in attaining enlightenment. Prior to the emergence of the ninth-realm Heaven-Devouring Bug, no other demon had ever reached the ninth realm.

The reason it became a demon god was not through attaining enlightenment but by devouring everything in its path!

The first two appearances of the Heaven-Devouring Bug caused a great stir in the world. This creature's nature was to consume spiritual energy, growing stronger as long as it continued to eat. It wouldn't stop even after reaching the ninth realm. If it continued like this, it might actually destroy the world one day!

Unexpectedly, the third Heaven-Devouring Bug emerged from the rewards given by the White Pagoda.

Chu Liang looked at the little white bug wriggling its butt in his palm and wondered, could this tiny creature really destroy the world? To be safe, he thought, he should immediately hand over this young Heaven-Devouring Bug to the sect and have them kill it right away.

But...

Looking at its chubby body acting all coy with him, and remembering how it had saved him several times and helped him a lot, he couldn't bring himself to do it.

After much consideration, Chu Liang decided to keep it for now. He gently placed the little creature back into the White Pagoda to continue sleeping.

From today on, it would be on a diet!

Even if this cute little thing grew into something terrible, as long as he remained stronger than it, wouldn't that solve the issue? If it ever showed its fierce nature, he would be the first to kill it.

After putting it back into the White Pagoda, Chu Liang's thoughts wandered again.

The Heaven-Devouring Bug originated from the Mysterious Beast Egg that the White Pagoda rewarded. It was the only living thing the White Pagoda had ever given. What was the connection between these two?

He had never figured out where the White Pagoda's valuable rewards originated, but he eventually stopped questioning it since the possession of this White Pagoda was undeniably beneficial.

This White Pagoda, which contained countless treasures, was definitely considered a legendary artifact. If not for its vastly different appearance and mystical abilities, Chu Liang might have thought it was the Mount Shu Sect's long-lost Demon-Suppressing Pagoda.

But why had it suddenly appeared in his mind? Where did these valuable items come from?

In theory, all items in the world should follow the law of conservation. If he received one, another place should be losing one. However, Chu Liang had checked all the White Pagoda's rewards and found no reports of missing items.

Except for the Qi-Gathering Pill dropped by the lantern monster at the beginning, none of the treasures could be traced back to their origins in the world of immortality cultivators. Could they really have been created out of thin air?

...

The next morning, Chu Liang arrived at Boundless Palace on Heaven-Reaching Peak.

Venerable Wen Yuan was already waiting for him. As Chu Liang entered, a hint of surprise appeared in the Mount Shu sect leader's eyes.

This disciple always seemed to accomplish unexpected feats.

Not long ago, he had achieved the great feat of slaying Taowu. He had retrieved a drop of shaman god's blood from the abandoned Shen Family Residence, and now he had intervened at a critical moment to bring back the Demon-Subduing Pestle.

Time and again, he astonished everyone. Although he hadn't reached the highest level yet, his drive reminded Venerable Wen Yuan of someone special.

That person was his esteemed teacher, Venerable Wuqi.

Lu Wuqi had been a prodigy from a young age, taking over Mount Shu in times of adversity, repeatedly creating miracles, and always accomplishing astounding feats in unexpected ways.

Chu Liang now gave off that same aura, as if there was something special about him.

Venerable Wen Yuan had met countless people in his life, and only three had this kind of presence.

"You spent one thousand Azure-Dragon coins to retrieve the Demon-Subduing Pestle for Mount Shu. This is another significant achievement," he said, smiling at Chu Liang. "What reward do you want?"

He genuinely asked Chu Liang because he himself hadn't decided on a reward.

For disciples like Jiang Yuebai and Chu Liang, the Mount Shu Sect typically didn't give many rewards.

Ordinary disciples might leave Mount Shu when their cultivation plateaued, seeking new opportunities outside the sect.

But the top four of each Mount Shu Summit were almost guaranteed the position of peak master, as long as they didn't commit serious crimes and get expelled.

They were destined to be a core part of Mount Shu's future, sharing both its fortunes and misfortunes. Thus, the sect's resources were fully available to them, and their merits wouldn't earn much extra reward.

The monthly stipend of several thousand sword coins was enough to exchange for all the cultivation resources needed at the Hall of Weapons and Hall of Alchemy. The Hall of Conservation was freely accessible, representing the sect's full support.

However, there were always exceptions. Chu Liang's expenditure of one thousand Azure-Dragon coins this time was absolutely crucial. If there wasn't any extra reward, Venerable Wen Yuan himself would feel uncomfortable.

Chu Liang sat down and said with a smile, "Sect leader, it's true that I spent one thousand Azure-Dragon coins, but without the seven thousand provided by the sect beforehand, that thousand wouldn't have accomplished anything. Just like if it weren't for the great merits of the Weapons

Master and Peak Master Tan Taijing, my efforts wouldn't even be worth mentioning. I am just a part of Mount Shu, like them, so how dare I ask for any reward?"

"They have made significant contributions to the Mount Shu Sect and will surely be compensated in the future," Venerable Wen Yuan laughed. "If there's anything you want, don't be shy. Tell me and I'll see if I can fulfill it."

"Although Mount Shu has retrieved the Demon-Subduing Pestle this time, we have spent a lot of sword coins, so resources will be tight for a while. How can I ask for anything?" Chu Liang smiled shyly and then turned his hand to take out a large scroll. "So, I wrote a plan with a few proposals for the sect leader to consider."

With that, Chu Liang suddenly stood up, unfurled the scroll in mid-air, and began explaining it to Venerable Wen Yuan.

"The first proposal is a fairly standard repayment plan," Chu Liang stated confidently. He stood straight, facing Wen Yuan with a professionally spirited smile, his left hand pointing sideways and his right hand resting on his waist.

"You can consider the one hundred thousand sword coins I provided for the sect as a loan, which I call the legendary artifact loan. The sect can choose a three-year term with an interest rate of 3%, which means there would be three thousand sword coins of interest each year; a five-year term with an interest rate of 3.5%, adding three thousand five hundred sword coins of interest each year; or a ten-year term with an interest rate of 4%, adding four thousand sword coins of interest each year."

"In light of my deep affection and bond with Mount Shu Sect, if the repayment is made within one year, the interest can be waived," Chu Liang added generously.

"..."

Venerable Wen Yuan looked at the densely written and carefully illustrated scroll and recalled Chu Liang's earlier words. "How dare I ask for any reward?"

This kid is really something, Venerable Wen Yuan thought. As expected of Di Nufeng's disciple...

Chapter 327: I'll Have A Duel With Him First

Chu Liang continued to explain his proposals. "The second option is that the sect doesn't have to pay me back. Instead, lease a peak to me."

"I've chosen Red Cotton Peak. I propose a lease period of ten years, during which all rights to Red Cotton Peak belong to me, and the sect cannot interfere in its activities. After the ten-year lease ends, the peak will be returned to the sect."

Venerable Wen Yuan was expressionless, but he asked curiously, "What do you want Red Cotton Peak for?"

There wasn't much there. All that was left outside the mountain forest was the neglected Mountain God's Altar and a large empty clearing. It was usually just a place for disciples to set up stalls.

"I have some ideas that I haven't fully developed yet. Once I've decided what I want to do, I will inform the sect about them," Chu Liang said. "I promise that no activities that violate sect rules or public morals will take place on Red Cotton Peak during the lease period."

Looking at Chu Liang's serious expression, Venerable Wen Yuan couldn't figure out Chu Liang's intentions.

So, he just nodded. "What's the next option?"

Chu Liang continued with his third proposal. "The third option is to consider the one thousand Azure-Dragon coins as my investment in the Demon-Subduing Pestle."

"Investment?"

Chu Liang explained, "Yes, it means I have a share in the Demon-Subduing Pestle and the right to use it. But my share is small, we could say that I will be limited to using it three times a year. That means if I need the Demon-Subduing Pestle, I can borrow it three times and return it to the sect immediately after each use."

"But with your current level, it's much too early for you to try wielding the Demon-Subduing Pestle."

Venerable Wen Yuan wasn't looking down on Chu Liang. Any of the top one hundred legendary artifacts would be too much for a cultivator at the Golden Core Realm to handle. Their qi might get sucked dry with just one use.

"It's true that I can't use it yet, but my teacher can," Chu Liang said.

Just think, if the Eminent Di Nufeng, a seventh-realm combat master, were to wear the Phoenix Spirit Blood Jade, which was ranked 57th in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures, and also wield the Demon-Subduing Pestle, which was ranked 87th...

Who could stop her?

It was already amazing if a seventh-realm Eminent One possessed just one top-hundred legendary artifact. Who was that wealthy that they would possess two legendary artifacts? This proposal would undoubtedly make Di Nufeng invincible below the eighth realm!

If there was an enhanced version of Di Nufeng, it meant that Chu Liang—the only one who could summon her—would have a much more powerful arsenal. From now on, he would never have to bow down to anyone.

Venerable Wen Yuan, who had attained the Heavenly Origin, had a composed mental state that was as steadfast as Mount Tai. This meant his emotions rarely ever wavered.

Yet, faced with Chu Liang's proposals, Venerable Wen Yuan couldn't help but furrow his brows.

He'd found Chu Liang's first proposal improper, but after listening to the other two, it turned out that the first one was the most reasonable.

The first proposal, which would treat Chu Liang's contribution as a loan that the Mount Shu Sect had taken from him, had sounded strange to Venerable Wen Yuan at first. However, upon further consideration, he thought it made sense. After all, disciples shouldn't be contributing to the sect financially without getting anything in return. If it wasn't possible to give them their desired rewards, then giving them money would be acceptable.

The second proposal was to let Chu Liang rent Mount Shu's land...

Does he want to experience the thrill of being a peak master?

Nonetheless, the Mount Shu Sect had never—not once in all of its history—had a precedent for leasing out its land.

The third proposal was even more ridiculous.

Let him use the Demon-Subduing Pestle three times a year, but it would actually be for Di Nufeng to use...?

If she were to wield two legendary artifacts, wouldn't I be the only one in Mount Shu who is capable of restraining her?

Then once she leaves the mountain...Wouldn't she become a huge danger to the nine provinces?

Chu Liang had stopped talking and was staring at Venerable Wen Yuan eagerly.

Seeing that, Venerable Wen Yuan asked, "Are you done?"

"Yes. I only have these three proposals," Chu Liang said shyly. "I do not dare ask for anything else. Sect Leader, please choose one of these proposals if you find any of them suitable."

Faced with this difficult choice, Venerable Wen Yuan fell silent for a moment.

Then he said, "I will consider them and discuss with the elders before making a decision. As for you... it just so happens that the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm will open in the next few days. You should go spend some time there, and I'll give you an answer when you return."

"The Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm?"

The name made Chu Liang pause.

...

In the Eastern Region's Phoenix Sheep Mountain, there was a hidden realm where the Phoenix Sheep, a celestial beast, lived in seclusion. It awakened once every thirty years and then roamed the West Sea for ten or so days before returning to sleep.

During its slumber, the hidden realm would accumulate spiritual qi and produce a spirit plant called the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life. It was an extremely rare treasure of nature.

When the Phoenix Sheep awakened, the hidden realm would open, drawing in a throng of demonic beasts from the nearby mountain forests. The Phoenix Sheep would then devour these demonic beasts to boost its health before heading to the West Sea.

The first ones to discover this hidden realm had been the Mount Shu Sect, the Greater-Yin Cult, the Celestial King Sect, and the Endless Sword Sect, so it was a joint ownership between these four sects.

In the world of immortality cultivators, it was customary for the sects that first discover a hidden realm to collaborate and extract resources from it. By working together, they could overpower the latecomers and drive them away.

Consequently, it eventually became the norm that hidden realms were jointly monopolized by several sects. Independently owned hidden realms became a rarity.

The four immortal sects that shared the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm had agreed that every time the celestial beast Phoenix Sheep woke up and left the hidden realm, they would each send a disciple to the hidden realm to harvest the fruit of the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life plant.

The Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life plant typically bore only one or two fruits every thirty years, so it's inevitable that not all four sects would get a fruit. That meant their disciples needed to compete with each other for the fruit.

As a medicinal ingredient, this fruit was of excellent grade, as it had the attributes of metal and fire. It was a great choice for breaking through either the first or fourth levels of the Realm of the Five Elements.

The disciple that the Mount Shu Sect sent this time was Chu Liang.

Normally, the head disciple would be sent for such an occasion. However, Jiang Yuebai happened to be in closed-door cultivation to break through to the second level of the Realm of the Five Elements, so Mount Shu could only send its second best disciple.

Ordinarily, Xu Ziyang, who had entered the fifth realm even earlier than Jiang Yuebai, should have taken on this responsibility. Nevertheless, Chu Liang's sudden rise in power had stunned everyone.

Chu Liang had achieved many great feats in a short period. There was no doubt that the Mount Shu Sect's higher-ups now ranked Chu Liang above all the other disciples, even Jiang Yuebai. After all, he had been selected by the Violent and Azure Twin Swords, and that was of utmost importance.

Chu Liang looked into the distance at the unusual natural phenomenon occurring at Phoenix Sheep Mountain. The sky was filled with layers of red clouds that looked like raging flames, and gold liquid surged through the rivers winding down the mountain. Demonic beasts were approaching the mountain from all over, bringing with them immense waves of demonic qi.

The hidden realm hadn't fully opened yet, but dense spiritual qi was already leaking out.

The Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life plant was likely one of the Phoenix Sheep's mystical abilities, the Phoenix Sheep used it to lure prey over the moment it woke from its long slumber.

Chu Liang arrived at a small pavilion on the summit of Phoenix Sheep Mountain—the meeting place the four sects had agreed on.

He saw there were already two people waiting in the pavilion.

One of them was a petite young lady with a long ponytail, a small and delicate face, and a lively gaze. She stood elegantly with a long, slender sword on her back.

The other person was a familiar face. It was a man with an icy expression and a stunning appearance—Luo Xiaoyong from the Greater-Yin Cult.

Seeing Chu Liang approach, Luo Xiaoyong gave a slight nod as a greeting.

Returning the greeting, Chu Liang nodded too. Then he looked at the young lady next to Luo Xiaoyong.

The young lady was looking at him too.

She grinned and asked, "Are you from the Mount Shu Sect or the Celestial King Sect?"

Chu Liang answered, "I am Chu Liang, a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect."

"Ah!" the young lady exclaimed. "You're the one who killed Taowu some days ago! I read about your story in the gazette! Very impressive!"

Chu Liang smiled. "I was just lucky."

"I'm Li Shiyi, from the Endless Sword Sect," the young lady said cheerfully, appearing rather animated and friendly. "I wanted to go watch the Mount Shu Summit, but something came up."

Li Shiyi?

Hearing this name, Chu Liang could make a rough guess about who she was.

The Endless Sword Sect had a famous lineage of members that descended from the same family—the Li Family. The current swordmaster of the sect was Li Shi, the current sect leader was Li Jiu, and the most powerful member of the sect, the Supreme Elder, was Li Ba.[1]

These three people were three generations of the Li family—son, father, and grandfather[2]. So, it was obvious just from hearing the young lady's name that she was a descendant of that family.

Chu Liang chatted with her with a smile while Luo Xiaoyong just listened. Knowing what Luo Xiaoyong was like, Chu Liang didn't ask him any questions.

After a short time passed, a beam of light shot over, streaking across the distant sky. Then suddenly, a person landed at the pavilion.

The newcomer was tall and had a handsome face, highlighted by sharp eyebrows and bright eyes. He had the confident air and drive of a young genius. This was the head disciple of the Celestial King Sect, Feng Chaoyang!

The first thing Feng Chaoyang did after landing was look around. When he noticed Chu Liang, his gaze froze there.

"Why are you here? Where is Fairy Jiang?" Feng Chaoyang asked.

"Senior Sister Jiang is in closed-door cultivation, so I'll be handling the hidden realm in her place," Chu Liang answered with a smile. He paused before adding, "But it doesn't matter which of us comes; it's the same."

"Oh, that's great actually. Because I've disliked you for a long time!" Feng Chaoyang said spitefully. "I still remember the time you hugged Fairy Jiang on the fighting stage."[3]

Feng Chaoyang wasn't the only one who resented Chu Liang for that. Which disciple from the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten wouldn't call him a scoundrel if they'd seen that hug?

Nonetheless, Chu Liang maintained a calm smile. "It's inevitable that accidents happen on the fighting stage."

Feng Chaoyang swung out his arm, waving off Chu Liang's excuse. He then said aggressively, "Once we're in the hidden realm, you girls should step aside. I'll have a duel with him first!"

Chapter 328: A Person Filled with Passion

Luo Xiaoyong was not actually someone with a bad temper.

Having spent considerable time in the Greater-Yin Cult, he had grown accustomed to a cold and reclusive demeanor, avoiding interactions with outsiders and exuding an unapproachable aura.

His androgynous appearance often led others to mistake him for a woman, a misunderstanding he would patiently clarify unless the person approaching was particularly annoying.

Normally, he didn't mind being mistaken, especially not by someone like Feng Chaoyang.

But then, a flash of light in the void, visible only to Chu Liang, connected Luo Xiaoyong and Feng Chaoyang.

It was the Chain of Resentment!

Naturally, it was Chu Liang who did this.

Given Feng Chaoyang's aggressive nature, Chu Liang anticipated that he would be antagonized upon entering the hidden realm. Therefore, Chu Liang decided to test Feng Chaoyang's powers first.

Both Luo Xiaoyong and Feng Chaoyang had reached the peak of the fourth realm. They came here to retrieve the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life, a crucial resource for breaking through to the Realm of the Five Elements.

This level of cultivation was exactly the upper limit that Chu Liang's Chain of Resentment could influence.

If they had reached the fifth realm, they would be at a higher cultivation level than Chu Liang, which meant that the Chain of Resentment would then be rendered ineffective.

As a flicker of light flashed, Feng Chaoyang's words suddenly sounded extremely irritating to Luo Xiaoyong. With a frown, Luo Xiaoyong flew over abruptly, raising his hand to deliver a palm strike!

"Who did you call a woman?" he shouted.

Feng Chaoyang quickly raised his hand and countered the strike. As a divine light flashed, a resounding bang echoed.

He flew backward as anger surged in his heart and he questioned, "So you're a man? If I mistook you, so be it. Why did you have to attack me? Aren't you being too domineering?!"

For reasons they couldn't comprehend, the sight of each other felt extremely repugnant, and they began fighting violently.

Luo Xiaoyong's foundational qi circulated, causing frost to condense in the air around him. As ice crystals fell, he thrust out his palm and a piercing cold instantly enveloped Feng Chaoyang.

For ordinary people, just this one palm strike would be enough to freeze them to death!

But Feng Chaoyang was clearly not an ordinary person. As the invasive cold encircled him, he immediately shook his body and enveloped himself in a layer of golden divine light!

Disciples of the Celestial King Sect mainly cultivated this divine light, which possessed various powers, including the ability to repel cold and heat. He swung a backhand punch, and the divine light shot out like a meteor!

Seeing this, Luo Xiaoyong did not dodge. Instead, he grasped at the air with his right hand, instantly conjuring a sword of ice in the void. The ice sword glittered with a cold light, aiming straight at Feng Chaoyang's fist.

Bang—

The radiant fist was thrust forward bit by bit, shattering the ice sword into fragments that flew in all directions. The shards embedded themselves with impressive force wherever they landed.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh—

Three shards of ice whizzed past the young lady Li Shiyi, who blinked in terror.

As the eleventh-generation disciple of the Endless Sword Sect, she had high cultivation aptitude. However, she was too young.

Being at such a young age, her family was too worried to let her venture out for more experiences. And so, she had little exposure to the martial world. Still, she had worked hard to earn the opportunity to venture in the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm.

Although she had mentally prepared herself, she still panicked when she arrived here.

She had heard that the world outside was dangerous and she now realized it to be true! These two individuals started fighting to the death over a disagreement?!

These two both have quite the temper. Is this what the martial world is like? Li Shiyi wondered.

The next second, the two actually unleashed their rage, and Luo Xiaoyong performed a divine technique by pointing to the sky.

Boom—

A thunderous roar filled the surroundings as the world changed!

The clouds above rapidly surged, and in an instant, the clear sky turned into a nightscape! The sun receded, and the moon took its place!

The alternation of the sun and moon happened in a single breath!

This was the Immortal Art: Stealing the Sky and Replacing the Sun!

Chu Liang, the instigator behind the scenes, was secretly startled by Luo Xiaoyong's divine technique.

This was clearly the legendary Immortal Art, Stealing the Sky and Replacing the Sun, capable of changing the celestial phenomena within a certain range. Luo Xiaoyong used this technique to make the sun and moon alternate over Phoenix Sheep Mountain. He did this because the techniques of the Greater-Yin Cult harnessed the power of moonlight, which meant that they would become stronger as the moonlight intensified.

By performing the immortal art, Stealing the Sky and Replacing the Sun, he essentially buffed himself.

Sure enough, as the moonlight shone down, Luo Xiaoyong's aura grew stronger, and the surrounding cold became even sharper. Despite the divine light enveloping Feng Chaoyang's body, frost still formed on his body.

He immediately flew back dozens of zhang, his sharp eyes fixed on the moon in the sky. With a wave of his left hand, he condensed the divine light into a bow. Then, with a stroke of his right hand, he drew a long arrow.

Drawing the bow to shoot the moon!

Feng Chaoyang had fully drawn the bow, but Luo Xiaoyong obviously wouldn't let him shoot. He immediately pointed a finger at Feng Chaoyang from afar!

Whoosh—

Greater-Yin Cult's exclusive secret technique, Lunar Deity's Finger!

Although this was not an immortal art, its power could rival one in certain situations.

As he pointed, the yang energy in Feng Chaoyang's body was violently driven out through his back. A surge of crimson-gold qi expelled from his spine and evaporated.

With the point of a finger, his yang energy was driven out, leaving only the yin energy remaining.

Feng Chaoyang enveloped his entire body with divine light, keeping his qi and blood boiling. However, as more yang energy was driven out, his strength was increasingly affected.

He gritted his teeth and endured the power unleashed by the technique, Lunar Deity's Finger, as he slowly drew the bow!

After a long standoff, he finally drew the bow fully and suddenly released the arrow!

Whoosh—

A golden light like a dragon shot out and struck the moon created by Luo Xiaoyong in mid-air, resulting in a resonant boom!

The moon shattered, revealing the real sky once more.

The rays of sunlight beamed down from the clear sky, causing Luo Xiaoyong's buff achieved through the moonlight to vanish. Yet he remained in peak condition.

However, Feng Chaoyang had been significantly weakened during the standoff. His arms trembled, and he struggled to keep his qi and blood boiling.

Whoosh—

Luo Xiaoyong's figure had already flown over, striking with his palm!

Feng Chaoyang could only raise his divine light in front of his chest, transforming it into a round shield as he prepared to take the palm strike head-on!

At the sudden moment when they were about to clash again, Luo Xiaoyong's palm stopped one chi away from Feng Chaoyang's chest. He frowned and looked at Feng Chaoyang weirdly.

What puzzled him was that he didn't seem to be that angry anymore.

Why did we start fighting? He wondered.

Feng Chaoyang also felt confused.

Huh? What just happened?

The two looked at each other, and Luo Xiaoyong withdrew his hand, saying, "Forget it, I will let it go. Just keep it in mind next time."

Feng Chaoyang scratched his head and responded, "We are good then."

Still, he felt somewhat confused. How did the situation go from him suddenly being beaten up to them being in total harmony?

The two, who had been fighting fiercely just moments ago, suddenly reconciled and stepped back, both looking confused.

Li Shiyi looked at them, appearing even more bewildered.

What's going on? How did they go from fighting to making up so quickly? Is this what it means to be a person filled with passion? The martial world is truly full of uncertainties, she thought.

Question marks seemed to pop out one after another from the young lady's head.

Chu Liang calculated the time. The effect of the Chain of Resentment seemed to last less than a quarter of an hour. It was likely due to both of them being at a high cultivation level, which somewhat weakened the effect.

Still, it was very useful.

This item was almost like a legendary artifact for inciting anger.

Feng Chaoyang looked at Chu Liang, feeling conflicted, then at Li Shiyi with an uncertain expression. Finally, he said, "Once we're in the hidden realm, you two should step aside and let me duel him first."

Chu Liang said with a grin, "I will gladly do so."

Just then, a thunderous explosion echoed, and a golden crack suddenly appeared in the sky above Phoenix Sheep Mountain. Crimson-gold flames then fell from the heavens, like a rain of fire!

However, the falling flames never reached the forest. Four disciples from the immortal sects intercepted them one by one, preventing any damage to the forest and villages below. This was one of the tasks assigned by their sect before they arrived.

Next, a huge golden curved horn emerged from the crack, its brilliance dazzling like a legendary weapon from the heavens!

Then the second horn came into view!

Boom...

A massive sheep's head, engulfed in crimson-gold flames, emerged from the sky. The head alone was as large as the peak of Phoenix Sheep Mountain!

Then the body emerged into view. As its enormous back appeared, it revealed a pair of horizontal wings! From the sheep's head downward, its entire body was covered in fiery feathers!

A sheep's body with phoenix wings!

It took a moment for the giant beast to fully emerge from the crack. Then, it soared into the sky, stretched its body, and let out a clear cry!

"Screech—"

The celestial beast, which was known as the Phoenix Sheep!

The Phoenix Sheep Mountain was reflected in its golden pupils, which burned with flames. Naturally, it noticed the disciples of the four immortal sects. Still, their presence didn't bother it. After all, it had given them permission to take the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life.

Otherwise, who would dare to recklessly enter the hidden realm of a celestial beast?

After a brief pause, the celestial beast Phoenix Sheep spread its wings and flew westward.

Its destination was the West Sea.

As for Chu Liang and the others, their destination was the hidden realm that the beast had left behind. Since the crack would close soon, they had to enter the realm before the crack closed fully.

Although Chu Liang had entered various hidden realms before, this was the first time he came with the purpose of training and treasure hunting.

Before setting off, Chu Liang had specifically asked his esteemed teacher about the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm.

Sixty years ago, the head disciple was Daoist Yan. However, because Di Nufeng was closer to the Divine Phoenix bloodline, she was the one who went for this trial.

This situation was quite similar to the present one.

At that time, Di Nufeng had paused thoughtfully before saying, "The Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm? It's a very comfortable place. It's like going home. It's not an exaggeration to call it a paradise in the mortal realm. When you arrive, just have as much fun as you want like you're on a vacation."

Chapter 329: Paradise in the Mortal Realm?

Rumble——

The sky was void of sun, moon, or stars, with only layers of overlapping red clouds from which flames continuously rained down. Anyone touched by the flames would quickly realize that these flames were not so easily put out.

On the ground, there was no flat land, only rivers of burning lava flowing sinuously and terrifyingly. Scorching black rocks scattered between the rivers provided the only places to step.

Even the air was filled with a scorching heat. If a piece of raw meat was left here, it would probably be cooked in no time.

It was practically a hell of flames.

Chu Liang hovered quietly just above the ground, gazing at the sea of fire and the endless flow of flames.

He recalled what his esteemed teacher had said.

A paradise in the mortal realm? Feels like home? Sure enough, I should never trust Di Nufeng for anything other than fighting, Chu Liang thought.

Of course, in some ways, one had to admit that she was not wrong, as this place might indeed be a happy home for her.

"Haaa." Chu Liang sighed silently and quickly moved.

Each hidden realm was an independent small world with a Great Dao that would be completely different upon entry. As a result, when entering a new hidden realm, positions often changed. Even if several people entered together, they would find themselves in different, random locations. Thus, Chu Liang saw no one else in his view.

A significant amount of foundational qi was consumed every second to resist the fiery qi outside one's body. If Chu Liang's cultivation level weren't high and his recovery weren't fast, he might have exhausted his Sea of Qi in no time.

He needed to find the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life as soon as possible and get out of here.

It was said that the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life had miraculous life-giving powers. One could track the fruit down by following the demonic beasts here, but what could possibly survive in this sea of fire?

Just as this thought crossed his mind, he heard a whistling wind. A flaming bird flew from afar, its wings spanning four to five zhang, a truly frightening sight.

Looking at the feathers on its head and its long tail feathers, it seemed to bear the shadow of the Divine Phoenix Clan. However, it didn't seem to be an actual living creature, which was why Chu Liang wondered if it was a creation of this hidden realm.

Nonetheless, Chu Liang didn't care where it came from. At this moment, all he cared about was that this big creature was flying straight at him, blatantly showing a sense of hostility!

The inferno phoenix's eyes reflected Chu Liang's figure, blazing with anger!

Screech—

It let out a sharp cry and lunged at him with its wings spread wide!

Chu Liang raised his index and ring fingers, summoning his sword. The swordlight shone brilliantly as it flew, slicing through the center of the inferno phoenix's body.

With a hiss, one sword strike split the inferno phoenix into two pieces!

The body of the inferno phoenix shattered with a bang, turning into a dense rain of fire that fell down, among which was a drop of golden blood.

Its entire body was made of flowing flames, and only this drop of golden blood contained spiritual energy.

Is this a creature given life by the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life? It didn't seem very difficult to deal with. Chu Liang thought.

Chu Liang was about to move forward in the direction where the inferno phoenix appeared when he suddenly saw a cloud of fire rising rapidly from that direction, surging towards him.

In the blink of an eye, it had moved closer, allowing him to see the cloud of fire clearly.

It turned out to be a large flock of inferno phoenixes, all connected with each other in a single fiery mass!

Handling one was manageable, but there were thousands upon thousands of them—enough to completely overwhelm him!

Without a second thought, Chu Liang turned and ran!

He immediately showcased the speed befitting his championship title in the Mount Shu Summit's Flying-Sword Race, transforming into a streak of light and shadow. The cloud of fire behind him relentlessly pursued, as if it harbored a deep grudge against him!

A moment of thought allowed him to grasp the situation immediately. This was happening because of the dragon aura on his body!

His esteemed teacher had mentioned earlier that the aura of that True Dragon was somewhat irritating. She was still human, with some characteristics slightly influenced by the Fiery Divine Phoenix constitution.

These inferno phoenixes had only a hint of Divine Phoenix spiritual nature, but their entire existence depended on it.

The less intelligent the creature, the more aggressive it became!

The chase continued for quite a while until Chu Liang flew over a mountain peak, where the phoenixes finally stopped. They hovered around for a moment, then dispersed into the sky.

Chu Liang landed on the fiery mountain peak, letting out a sigh of relief.

As he had been practicing the Secret Dragon Blood Technique, the dragon aura had likely seeped out with every breath. This was beyond his control. If this continued to attract attacks from the inferno phoenixes, it would be impossible for him to take even a single step.

He had just landed and steadied himself when he suddenly felt the ground beneath him shaking.

No, the ground was moving up??

Boom—

Clop, clop, clop—

Heavy footsteps echoed around him, and as Chu Liang extended his divine sense, he made a startling discovery—he wasn't standing on a mountain peak but on a gigantic mountain sheep the size of a mountain!

The massive creature had been lying on the ground, its head tucked into its chest and its back facing up. As a result, Chu Liang thought he had landed on a mountain peak.

This mountain sheep might have been the reason those inferno phoenixes didn't dare approach!

Clop! Clop!

Fortunately, the mountain sheep didn't seem aggressive and didn't mind Chu Liang using it as a mount. Awakened by the earlier noise, it now rose and continued its journey, stepping heavily on the ground as it slowly moved forward.

Standing on the mountain sheep's back, Chu Liang thought for a moment and felt that this was actually quite good.

Since he was still unfamiliar with the situation in the hidden realm, he decided it was wiser to follow the sheep and observe for a while. Leaving hastily could provoke another attack from those inferno phoenixes.

As he thought of this, he settled down.

He immersed his divine sense into the White Pagoda and arrived in front of the iron prison.

The inferno phoenix he had just slain contained a bit of true spirit. Any independent life form, even a weak entity like a lantern monster, could yield a reward. So, an inferno phoenix would certainly offer something valuable.

So Chu Liang raised his hand and pressed down, refining the phantom of the inferno phoenix.

Boom.

With a flash of a radiance, a small glowing orb floated out.

[Phoenix Spirit Fire Seed: When infused with foundational qi, the fire seed can ignite the powerful Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire, capable of burning everything in the world.]

A fire seed?

Chu Liang gazed at the small crimson-golden orb in his hand, feeling only a faint warmth emanating from it.

The Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire was the innate flame of the Divine Phoenix Clan, one of the top-tier divine fires in the world. Its power was second only to that of Samadhi True Fire.

For now, Chu Liang stored this fire seed away.

After traveling for a while, he noticed the heavy footsteps suddenly sync up with another set. Looking up, he saw another gigantic mountain sheep in the distance.

When the second mountain sheep appeared, the one Chu Liang was riding suddenly arched its back, raised its head high, and let out a powerful bleat. "Baa——"

"Baaaaaaa!" The mountain sheep opposite let out a deep, resonant bleat in response.

What are they doing? Chu Liang wondered.

While Chu Liang was puzzled, the two mountain sheep suddenly charged at each other with their massive bodies!

CLOP! CLOP! CLOP!

BAM!

The two mountain-sized rams charged across several hundred zhang and collided their giant horns with a thunderous crash!

The collision sent flames splashing in all directions!

Luckily, Chu Liang had flown down early, or he would have been thrown off by the tremendous impact.

It turned out the mountain sheep wasn't docile at all. It had likely not reacted because it hadn't noticed him. No wonder the inferno phoenixes didn't dare approach it.

The creatures in this Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm all had such explosive tempers!

Chapter 330: Young Hero Chu Is Truly A Good Person

Boom!

The battle between the two mountain sheep was like a collision of two blazing mountains, causing the molten rock in the ground to shake. Chu Liang retreated rapidly, afraid of being caught in the crossfire of these two bad-tempered mountain sheep.

After retreating some distance away, he noticed a beam of swordlight nearby. Someone was evading the mountain sheep in the same direction as him.

Whoosh.

There was a flash of light as the swordlight stopped in front of Chu Liang. The person standing on the sword was the young lady with a waist-length ponytail—Li Shiyi of the Endless Sword Sect.

Upon seeing Chu Liang, Li Shiyi uttered, "Huh?"

She furrowed her brows and blinked her dark brown eyes nervously.

Chu Liang responded with a greeting. "Miss Li."

Li Shiyi stared at Chu Liang for a moment before asking weakly, "Are we going to fight?"

"Ha." Chu Liang couldn't help but laugh. Then he shrugged. "I don't think it's necessary. We haven't even seen the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life yet. There's nothing to fight over."

"That's good then."

Li Shiyi's tense shoulders relaxed immediately, clearly feeling relieved.

The young lady had left home with a mix of nervousness and anticipation, but she had become much more apprehensive after seeing Luo Xiaoyong and Feng Chaoyang fight at the slightest disagreement. She was now very afraid that she would encounter someone who would suddenly hit her.

Boom!

The two mountain sheep collided repeatedly. It seemed they weren't intended to stop until one of them fell.

"They are so fierce..." Li Shiyi muttered.

Not really knowing what to say, Chu Liang just nodded. "Indeed."

Then suddenly, there was a loud buzzing sound, and a cloud of fire emerged in the distant sky.

It was another massive flock of inferno phoenixes! And there were even more of them this time!

Chu Liang's pupils dilated in alarm. "Run!"

The incoming flock of inferno phoenixes even caused the two mountain sheep to stop fighting. There were simply too many inferno phoenixes, forcing the huge mountain sheep to retreat!

Swoosh, swoosh.

Two beam swordlights, one white and the other pink, shot up. Chu Liang's flying sword rushed out at full speed, gliding across the sky like a streak of lightning! However, Li Shiyi's sword-riding speed was pretty similar to Chu Liang's; she was right behind him!

Chu Liang was dumbfounded. It seemed this young lady was more capable than her young age suggested.

Li Shiyi was feeling very surprised too. Her sword-flying speed was considered unmatched in her generation at the Endless Sword Sect. Yet, this disciple of the Mount Shu Sect was so ahead of her that there could be another person flying between them...?

The Mount Shu Sect's swordsmanship had once been renowned throughout the nine provinces. Nonetheless, the Endless Sword Sect was now acknowledged as the mortal realm's holy land of swordsmanship! She couldn't let her sect down!

So, Li Shiyi put in more effort to try and fly faster so that she could surpass Chu Liang, but Chu Liang still flew steadily ahead of her. They were quickly approaching a lofty volcano and proceeded to go around it.

Chu Liang made a sharp, low turn around the bend, instantly widening the gap by another ten zhang.

What a smooth drift! Li Shiyi thought.

She became even more astonished. She had never seen anyone use that technique before in her sect. Could it be that the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect all had such strong sword-flying skills?

It wasn't that the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect had particularly strong sword-flying skills. It was simply that the Endless Sword Sect didn't have the flying-sword races that the Mount Shu Sect had, so their disciples wouldn't think about these speed-enhancing tricks.

In the Endless Sword Sect's sword-flying style, cultivators had to improve the strength of their foundational qi and the quality of their swords if they wanted to increase their flying speed.

Of course, the Endless Sword Sect had observed the Mount Shu Sect's flying-sword races over the years. Nevertheless, in the eyes of this old and traditional sword sect, the techniques that the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect had used in those races were simply a bunch of crafty tricks. They thought those races were merely recreational events for entertainment.

Chu Liang and Li Shiyi had to maneuver around the mountain, but the cloud of fire didn't have to. Accompanied by whistling wind, the flock of inferno phoenixes rushed over with torrential momentum and pierced through the volcano, almost causing it to collapse!

Li Shiyi was startled by the sound of the crumbling volcano.

She looked back with her divine sense and exclaimed, "The inferno phoenixes weren't like this earlier. Why have they suddenly become so angry?"

Li Shiyi was panicking. Her breath became erratic, and her sword-flying speed suddenly dropped.

Sensing a threatening aura behind him, Chu Liang knew those inferno phoenixes were coming for him!

Normally, the inferno phoenixes would be in a similar state to the mountain sheep he'd encountered earlier—living in a carefree manner. Even if they fought with intruders, they wouldn't gather in a flock with such rage. However, Chu Liang's draconic aura had drawn them over to him.

Li Shiyi was only suffering now because she was following him. If she continued to flee with him, she might end up in even more danger. However, Chu Liang couldn't say that his presence had drawn these inferno phoenixes to them, as that would undoubtedly expose his weakness.

So, Chu Liang suddenly stopped and said righteously, "Miss Li, don't panic! I will draw away this maddened flock of inferno phoenixes. Let's split up and head in different directions!"

Chu Liang raised his hand and pointed at the flock of inferno phoenixes. He shot a beam of swordlight toward them, killing two inferno phoenixes!

A strange screech rang out from amid the flock, and Chu Liang immediately turned around to flee. The multitude of inferno phoenixes all flew toward him.

Li Shiyi followed his instructions and fled in the opposite direction, and as expected, none of the inferno phoenixes chased her. Nevertheless, she thought the flock of inferno phoenixes was only chasing Chu Liang because he had just provoked them.

In reality, that provocation didn't matter; the inferno phoenixes' target had always been him.

Unaware of that, the young lady was deeply moved by Chu Liang's altruistic act. She turned around and gazed at the sky, muttering to herself, "Young Hero Chu is truly a good person."

...

The sky was filled with fire clouds. Chu Liang often turned around and used his divine abilities, killing two inferno phoenixes each time. However, their numbers only seemed to increase.

The problem was that Chu Liang had been flying all over the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm in his effort to flee. The inferno phoenixes throughout the hidden realm were drawn to Chu Liang's draconic aura and flew toward him. His attempt to escape ended up being a monster-gathering exercise.

The power of this large flock of inferno phoenixes had reached a terrifying level. If they were to catch up with him, Chu Liang would very likely become one of the few core disciples of the Four Great Immortal Sects to die in the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm.

That's right. The death rate in the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm was very low, but it wasn't zero!

A paradise in the mortal realm? Take it as if I'm on a vacation?

Chu Liang thought of his teacher's words while he was being chased, and he shed glistening teardrops that looked like ice crystals.

The massive flock of inferno phoenixes seemed to extend across half of the sky. Chu Liang was about to be surrounded.

He gritted his teeth and reluctantly took out a pill from his chest pocket. It was the Essence-Concealing Pill!

Alchemists had ceased production of this rare pill for many years. Every pill he consumed was one he could never replace. There were only three left of the pills Chu Liang had found in that gourd.

The Essence-Concealing Pill was definitely a great thing, especially when he needed to take action in secret. It was the perfect tool for taking action in stealth. Nonetheless, he had no choice but to take an Essence-Concealing Pill at this moment.

Chu Liang swallowed the Essence-Concealing Pill, concealing all of his qi and, of course, his surging draconic aura.

The clouds of fire in the sky suddenly came to a halt. The inferno phoenixes stirred restlessly in unease. The aura of their enemy—the being their genetic memory told them they had to kill—had suddenly disappeared, leaving only a residual trace of his qi. It wasn't enough to help them track down the enemy.

Chu Liang seized this opportunity to flee swiftly. The effect of the Essence-Concealing Pill only lasted for a quarter of an hour, so he had to find a safe place to hide within this time.

While he was flying, he swept his divine sense over the peak of a high mountain and sensed the auras of three people.

Hmm?

Chu Liang was a little surprised and immediately turned back there.

Upon landing, he found Feng Chaoyang, Luo Xiaoyong, and Li Shiyi, the disciples of the other three immortal sects, just as he'd expected. They were gathered on the mountain peak, standing apart and across from each other.

When Li Shiyi saw Chu Liang, she smiled. "Young Hero Chu, it seems you're fine. That's great!"

"It was a fluke that I managed to escape," Chu Liang said, returning the smile. "What are you three doing here?"

"It's because of what just happened. Something strange has happened in the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm. All the inferno phoenixes have gathered together..." Li Shiyi explained. "So, all we can do is hide here for now."

"Hide?"

Chu Liang was puzzled. What was there to conceal them on this bare mountain peak?

So, he asked, "Won't the inferno phoenixes come here?"

"You didn't know?" Luo Xiaoyong looked at Chu Liang with an astonished expression. "The peak of this mountain, the central mountain, is the only safe spot in the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm."

"A safe spot?" Chu Liang uttered, blinking in surprise.

There's such a thing?