

M. Slaying 331

Chapter 331: Being the Bigger Person

"Yes," Li Shiyi explained. "The root of the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life lies in the peak of the central mountain, making it the life source for all fire-type spirit beasts in the hidden realm. As these creatures were brought to life by the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life, they revere this mountain as their source of life. My father taught me to seek refuge here in times of danger."

As Chu Liang listened to Li Shiyi's explanation, he scanned the mountaintop with his divine sense. Sure enough, he saw a sturdy spirit plant.

Its roots were embedded deep within the mountain peak, and its thick stem, as sturdy as a pillar, reached a height of four or five zhang, twisting robustly toward the sky. At its peak bloomed a large flower resembling a face, yet it had not yet borne any fruit.

This was the Phoenix Sheep Flower, set to bear the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life.

"I see..." Chu Liang said as he nodded lightly.

"Didn't your sect elders tell you?" Luo Xiaoyong asked.

"..." Chu Liang was silent for a moment.

How should I explain this? My teacher thinks of this place as her happy home. How could she possibly need refuge in a happy home like this?

When she stepped foot into this hidden realm back then, the inferno phoenixes and bighorn sheep were probably the ones that needed to find a place that they could hide.

Chu Liang paused for a moment before changing the subject and asking, "So, do we wait here for the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life to appear?"

"The Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life won't appear yet," Luo Xiaoyong replied. "We need to kill all the inferno phoenixes and bighorn sheep in this area. Only then will all the golden essence return to the root of the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life, allowing the flower to bear fruit."

"But since all the inferno phoenixes are currently gathered together, it's impossible for us to go out and fight them," Li Shiyi said.

The young lady was still scared of the countless inferno phoenixes in the sky.

"I'm sure things will return to normal if we wait a while," Chu Liang said.

As long as he remained hidden here, the inferno phoenixes would stop gathering. However, he couldn't disclose this to the others without revealing the secret of his dragon aura. Therefore, he decided to let them discover it on their own later.

Before he finished speaking, Feng Chaoyang stepped forward. A smile twinkled in his eyes.

"In that case, why don't we have a duel right here?" he said with a smile. "The loser must stop courting Fairy Jiang."

Chu Liang suddenly looked at him with a serious expression and asked solemnly, "How can you say that?"

"Hmm?" Feng Chaoyang was taken aback.

"Senior Sister Jiang is a beloved fellow disciple of Mount Shu, highly respected as our head disciple. She is the pride of our sect. She is not an object! You shouldn't be using her relationship as a wager in a duel," Chu Liang said sternly. "You can challenge me, but I expect an apology for your disrespect toward Senior Sister Jiang first."

"Uhhhh..." Feng Chaoyang was taken aback by Chu Liang's words. He had spoken earlier as a youth who was eager to compete and fight. And now, being reproached by Chu Liang on moral grounds left him momentarily speechless.

After a moment's pause, he nodded and said, "Alright. I take back the disrespectful words I said about Fairy Jiang." He adapted very quickly to the situation.

Not only did he find Chu Liang's words reasonable, but he also feared that Chu Liang might tattle on him to Jiang Yuebai.

Chu Liang nodded in satisfaction and continued, "It's alright for us to duel, but Mount Shu Sect and Celestial King Sect have always shared a close relationship. I wouldn't want our duel to strain the ties between our sects. Regardless of the outcome, we should uphold mutual peace and respect. Do you agree?"

His righteous speech, akin to that of a diplomat, left Feng Chaoyang stunned once more. Compared to Chu Liang, his own trivial challenge for romantic reasons suddenly seemed narrow-minded.

After pausing for a moment, he nodded and said, "Alright, regardless of the outcome, it won't affect the friendly relationship between Celestial King Sect and Mount Shu Sect."

"Good, it's settled then," Chu Liang smiled. "Come, let's shake hands first."

With that, Chu Liang extended his hand to Feng Chaoyang.

After that conversation, Feng Chaoyang had no choice but to be the bigger person and shake hands with Chu Liang.

Whoosh—

Chu Liang used Mystic Fingers.

...

In an instant, an additional item appeared in Chu Liang's storage space. He then stepped back, increasing the distance between himself and Feng Chaoyang.

Feng Chaoyang's eyes glinted with an intense fighting spirit. He spread his arms and urged Luo Xiaoyong and Li Shiyi, "Could you both step back a bit? I don't want anyone getting hurt accidentally."

Before he could finish speaking, a flash of light, visible only to Chu Liang, darted between him and Luo Xiaoyong.

Luo Xiaoyong's gaze sharpened suddenly as he looked at Feng Chaoyang. "Who are you looking down on?"

"Hmm?" Feng Chaoyang looked back at Luo Xiaoyong.

"As a Mortal-Realm Wanderer of the Greater-Yin Cult, do you think I could be easily injured by someone like you?" Luo Xiaoyong's eyes flashed with anger as he spoke. "You are clearly looking down on the Greater-Yin Cult!"

As Feng Chaoyang stared at Luo Xiaoyong, the sight of Luo Xiaoyong grew increasingly annoying. He shouted angrily, "You're clearly asking for trouble! I've already endured once!"

"Hmph." Luo Xiaoyong sneered, "Then don't endure!"

He leaped up, his index and ring fingers pointing towards the sky. In an instant, the weather shifted dramatically, plunging the surroundings into nightfall. The moon gleamed high above!

He executed the immortal art: Stealing the Sky and Replacing the Sun once more

Empowered by the moonlight, Luo Xiaoyong's energy surged. With a flick of his finger and the activation of multiple seals, the world around him froze once more!

"You've gone too far!" Feng Chaoyang exclaimed furiously. "Watch as I burn your moon to ashes!"

He raised his hand and unleashed two rounds of starlight, transforming into two white-gold blazing stars in the sky!

The General's Constellation Orb!

Among the Divine Nine Immortal Sects, the top legendary artifact possessed by the Celestial King Sect was known as the General's Supreme Constellation Disc.

The General's Supreme Constellation Disc consisted of a main disc and twenty-eight General's Constellation Orbs, making its power immensely formidable. However, the General's Constellation Orbs were consumable, meaning that each use resulted in a permanent loss. If all twenty-eight orbs

were used, the General's Supreme Constellation Disc would be depleted of General's Constellation Orbs available for future use.

Therefore, during the era of the Heavenly Star Divine Cult, this consumable nature prevented the General's Supreme Constellation Disc from being considered as a top legendary artifact.

However, after the Heavenly Star Divine Cult split up, the Celestial King Sect branched off as an independent sect. The Celestial King Sect soon developed a method to refine and create General's Constellation Orbs. Though the creation of one orb was extremely costly, this innovation meant that as long as they could recreate the orbs, the General's Supreme Constellation Disc would have unlimited potential!

As a result, the General's Supreme Constellation Disc ascended to the sixth place in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures!

Feng Chaoyang, as the head disciple of the Celestial King Sect, was awarded three General's Constellation Orbs by the sect. Despite their single-use nature, it would take Feng Chaoyang a considerable amount of time to use up all three of them.

In his rage, Feng Chaoyang unleashed two General's Constellation Orbs. However, as he threw them out, he frowned in bewilderment, saying, "Eh? Why are there only two left? I don't recall using one up before."

But there was no time for contemplation.

The two General's Constellation Orbs rose into the sky, transforming into a star wheel. The orbs' fierce heat clashed with the moon's soft glow, nearly overpowering the moonlight in the sky.

Despite being weakened, Luo Xiaoyong retained his sharpness as he lunged forward with a fierce palm strike. The biting cold he unleashed almost instantly encased Feng Chaoyang in an ice block!

Feng Chaoyang reacted swiftly, activating a divine light to shield himself before delivering a fist of radiance to counter the incoming attack.

Boom—

The mountain peak trembled under the intensity of their clash.

The sudden shock caused Li Shiyi's long ponytail to fly upwards. Her eyes widened in fear, her face reflecting a mix of shock and confusion as she tried to grasp what was happening.

What's with this fight now? Li Shiyi questioned inwardly.

Feng Chaoyang's challenge to Chu Liang was within Li Shiyi's understanding, at least she could comprehend it as jealousy over Fairy Jiang of Mount Shu.

But she couldn't understand how the situation suddenly escalated into a duel between Luo Xiaoyong and Feng Chaoyang?

They have quite the temper. It's almost as bad as the bighorn sheep here. Are they really not sick? Li Shiyi couldn't help but question.

As Li Shiyi watched the two starting a fight immediately and aiming for the kill with each strike, she couldn't help but feel that the world was indeed as dangerous as she had feared.

She couldn't understand why the people in the martial world had such terrible temperaments...

Clearly, besides herself, the only other normal person in this hidden realm was Young Hero Chu of Mount Shu.

If Chu Liang had earned a score of ten in terms of the impression he made when he courageously diverted the inferno phoenixes, his reputation now soared to twenty points due to the comparison with these two hot-tempered and fight-crazed individuals.

The increase in impression score was entirely due to the stark contrast.

As this thought crossed her mind, Li Shiyi looked around and suddenly realized that Chu Liang was no longer on the mountain peak.

Where is Young Hero Chu?

Chapter 332: Do Normal People Exist in the Martial World?

Whoosh—

Feng Chaoyang condensed his divine light into a spear over a zhang long, thrusting it through the air with a sharp whistle!

Luo Xiaoyong raised his hand and grasped the air, materializing an ice sword to clash with Feng Chaoyang's radiating spear!

The two exchanged attacks for only a few rounds, but it caused the peak of the central mountain to shake with flying sand and stones. The sun and moon lost their radiance. The star wheel and moon wheel in the sky collided, teetering on the brink of collapse.

Li Shiyi, trembling with fear as she watched nearby, timidly shouted, "Stop fighting!"

But the two blinded by their rage and paid her no attention.

Feng Chaoyang's hands moved swiftly, forming intricate seals. In an instant, a blinding flash of divine light erupted, conjuring a clone made of divine light. With synchronized precision, both bodies of divine light lunged at Luo Xiaoyong and attacked at the same time.

Seeing this, Luo Xiaoyong retreated, raising his hands to form a finger seal. The wind and snow around him swirled with renewed ferocity, transforming the entire peak into a frozen, icy world in an instant!

Feng Chaoyang's two bodies of divine light slowed to a crawl as dozens of icy beams shot out from all directions, instantly coalescing into multiple clones of Luo Xiaoyong.

Ice clones!

When Jiang Yuebai was fighting Ling Ao, she had used similar techniques, creating a clone with ice that was hard to defend and moved extremely fast.

However, Luo Xiaoyong wasn't using these clones for mere deception; All the clones raised their arms in perfect synchrony and aimed their fingers directly at Feng Chaoyang.

It was almost as though Luo Xiaoyong was saying, "You have one clone but I have over a dozen! Let's see who has more manpower!"

Each clone performed the Lunar Deity's Finger, and in an instant, dozens of fingers were aimed at Feng Chaoyang!

Boom—

If Feng Chaoyang were struck by this attack, his yang energy would be completely dispelled and he would need to rename himself as Feng Chaoyin[1]!

Sensing danger in that split second, Feng Chaoyang reacted instantly. The clone made of divine light transformed into an arrow and shot upward. Just before the dozens of Lunar Deity's Fingers could reach him, his body and the clone swapped positions in a flash of light.

Whoosh—

This maneuver helped him evade the deadly strike, but the clone shattered in the process!

Feng Chaoyang's actual body materialized in mid-air. Without wasting any time, he immediately launched a counterattack, hurling a powerful punch downward at Luo Xiaoyong!

"Hah—" He shouted violently as he descended from the sky.

His form resembled a celestial meteor!

Having missed his strike, Luo Xiaoyong immediately raised his palm to the sky, ready to meet Feng Chaoyang's punch!

Their clash was inevitable, like a meteor that was about to collide with earth!

Li Shiyi was so scared that she squinted her eyes shut.

Whoosh.

Suddenly, it felt as though a gentle breeze had swept through.

Feng Chaoyang's body, suspended in mid-air with his fist poised to strike, remained frozen in place, while Luo Xiaoyong, equally immobilized, held his palm upward.

"咦? "

"Huh?"

Both of them voiced their surprise simultaneously.

What's going on?

Why did I get so angry just now? Why is it that in the midst of this fight, I suddenly find this person less detestable?

Feng Chaoyang's body stiffened for a moment before he withdrew his fist and gently floated to the ground.

"Well then..." Luo Xiaoyong said awkwardly as his anger suddenly dissipated. "Be more mindful of what you say next time."

"We're good now," Feng Chaoyang nodded and added, "But next time, let's try talking it out instead of jumping into a fight."

"Alright." Luo Xiaoyong nodded in agreement.

If a seventh-realm Eminent One was present, Luo Xiaoyong and Feng Chaoyang would have suspected that they had been mentally manipulated. As disciples of immortal sects, they had some understanding of the Dao of Seven Emotions. They were aware that this Dao could be used to manipulate someone's emotions.

However, there were only four of them present and such divine skill was not something a disciple at the Golden Core Realm could master. And so, they couldn't figure out what had really happened, no matter how hard they tried.

The two of them suddenly reconciled.

They both felt a bit puzzled, but the most confused one was Li Shiyi.

The young lady had already started to back away, fearing she might get splattered with blood. But then, suddenly... they made up?

Are you two just trying to scare people for fun? Li Shiyi wondered. Even if one should stop before things escalate beyond control, they wouldn't usually do it this way... Could this be the unpredictable nature of the martial world?

"Where's Chu Liang?" Feng Chaoyang looked around and realized that his original target had disappeared.

"He probably went out to slay the fire beasts in the hidden realm," Luo Xiaoyong said. "Let's set aside our personal grievances for now. The sooner we kill off these inferno phoenixes and mountain sheep, the sooner the Phoenix Sheep Life Fruit will appear. It wouldn't be too late to fight by the time it appears."

"Alright," Feng Chaoyang readily agreed.

The two of them suddenly became amicable.

"Haa..." Li Shiyi, standing nearby, looked at the distant sky and sighed silently. Do normal people exist in the martial world?

...

"Normal people shouldn't have such a high drop rate, right?" Chu Liang said to himself as he held the orb in his hand, carefully examining it. He confirmed that it was indeed the Celestial King Sect's exclusive treasure, the General's Constellation Orb.

Feng Chaoyang had repeatedly provoked him and harbored malicious intentions toward Senior Sister Jiang. Therefore, Chu Liang decided he would no longer be courteous to him.

But despite his decision, he was in no hurry to challenge Feng Chaoyang to a duel.

Although Chu Liang wasn't afraid, fighting in this hidden realm would be exhausting no matter the outcome. Additionally, it wasn't just two sides involved; four sects were competing for the Phoenix Sheep Life Fruit.

So, Chu Liang quickly came up with a plan: he would take advantage of the handshake to steal something from Feng Chaoyang, then let him fight Luo Xiaoyong while he temporarily escaped.

The General's Constellation Orb was extremely valuable and undoubtedly one of the top treasures in Feng Chaoyang's enchanted storage tool. The fact that Chu Liang managed to steal it on his first try indicated his luck was at its peak.

However, the precious orb had intricate engraved enchantments, making it difficult to immediately test its various powers. Therefore, Chu Liang decided to put it away for now.

He then took out five Puppet Pills.

He used the Army of Beans!

Boom!

He created five puppets and had them set up the enchanted formation, while he soared into the air.

For the Phoenix Sheep Life Fruit to appear, the inferno phoenixes and mountain sheep in the hidden realm had to be killed first. Thus, Chu Liang needed to hurry.

In addition, killing the inferno phoenixes would also reward him with the highly valuable Phoenix Spirit Fire Seeds.

Chu Liang had previously tested the Phoenix Spirit Fire Seed. When infused with foundational qi, it could ignite the Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire, which would burn for an hour. Although this fire wasn't particularly useful in combat, it was extremely valuable for alchemy and tool-making.

Chu Liang had been studying alchemy recently, and the Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire would greatly enhance his practice. With this fire, he could refine many spirit plants and valuable items that were challenging to process at his current cultivation level.

The inferno phoenixes and mountain sheep weren't real creatures; they were created from a special fruit called Phoenix Sheep Life Fruit combined with the flames in this realm. They exhibited predictable behaviors and lacked intelligence.

Chu Liang decided to use this situation to his advantage.

He took to the air, and the nearby inferno phoenixes immediately charged at him. Instead of escaping to a safe spot, he led these phoenixes in a circle.

After drawing nearly a hundred more phoenixes into the chase, Chu Liang changed direction and flew towards the area where his puppets were set up.

Over a hundred inferno phoenixes followed Chu Liang in a powerful swarm, all targeting him alone.

But suddenly, a surge of qi erupted from below! The five puppets, each controlling a segment of the Five Elements Formation Diagram: Celestial Trap, activated it simultaneously, unleashing a massive vortex of foundational qi that spiraled upward into the sky.

Boom——

In the blink of an eye, the vortex tore apart dozens of inferno phoenixes!

Although the five figures managing the formation were just puppets created by the Army of Beans technique, Chu Liang's multitasking and ample supply of qi made their performance as powerful as if five Golden Core Realm cultivators were activating the formation together.

Other Golden Core Realm cultivators couldn't possibly sustain such massive consumption, but Chu Liang, with his two ultimate-tier Golden Cores, had an immense and overflowing reservoir of qi.

He never had to worry about qi depletion, which meant that it was more efficient for him to deploy the formation by himself. Setting it up by himself would ensure that the qi used was maintained at a high quality. Even if the entire Mountain God Memorial Ceremony team were present, it would still be better for the others to support Chu Liang while he set up the formation by himself.

As the mindless inferno phoenixes charged at Chu Liang one after another, Chu Liang was not afraid. Instead, he felt thrilled and delighted!

With so many inferno phoenixes around, he knew he would collect a significant amount of Phoenix Spirit Fire Seeds today!

Chapter 333: Fighting Feng Chaoyang A Third Time

Luo Xiaoyong left the central mountain and wandered around the hidden realm, encountering a pitifully small number of inferno phoenixes.

Why are there so few inferno phoenixes here? Things are really strange today.

Luo Xiaoyong frowned. He just hoped he could get the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life and leave this hidden realm as soon as possible.

The Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm was overflowing with yang qi, so those who practiced the Greater-Yin Cult's method of cultivation wouldn't like it. However, the Greater-Yin Cult insisted on having their disciples temper themselves there. The original purpose had probably been for the disciples to get used to this kind of environment.

After flying out quite a long way from the central mountain, Luo Xiaoyong finally saw more inferno phoenixes, and he was truly surprised by the sight.

Up ahead, hundreds of inferno phoenixes had gathered and formed a cloud of fire. They were crying out angrily as they pursued something.

Curious, Luo Xiaoyong moved to the side to get a better look and saw a beam of white swordlight speeding ahead of the cloud of fire. He noticed that, rather than being chased, it seemed more like the swordlight was leading the flock of inferno phoenixes. When the inferno phoenixes couldn't keep up, the swordlight would pause for a while and wait for them.

Chu Liang?!

Luo Xiaoyong looked at the swordlight and quickly recognized it as Chu Liang's sword—the Dustless Sword.

How does this guy always come up with some new trick?

Luo Xiaoyong followed Chu Liang and watched him lead the inferno phoenixes toward an enchanted formation that was surrounded by a few puppets.

Chu Liang used himself as bait to lure the inferno phoenixes into the formation. Once they were all inside, he activated the formation and killed them.

He's bullying those foolish inferno phoenixes!

Chu Liang wiped out the flock of inferno phoenixes in just a short time. Then he finally went over to greet Luo Xiaoyong.

While luring the monsters to the enchanted formation, Chu Liang's divine sense had picked up Luo Xiaoyong's presence. However, Chu Liang had been too busy to speak with him.

"Brother Luo, what a coincidence," Chu Liang said with a smile.

"It's not a coincidence at all, is it? This is the only place that had inferno phoenixes," Luo Xiaoyong replied in amazement. "How did you manage to lure over so many inferno phoenixes so easily?"

Chu Liang laughed. "I guess I've just got a gift for it."

A gift for attracting hatred...? Luo Xiaoyong looked at Chu Liang and nodded in agreement. This guy is indeed quite outstanding in this regard.

"Oh, are there no more inferno phoenixes around here?" Chu Liang asked, wiping his sweat. "I guess I've gotten rid of most of them then. Brother Luo, why don't you go look for the mountain sheep? I'll go see if there are any inferno phoenixes remaining. Let's divide the work and quickly take the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life out of this hidden realm."

Luo Xiaoyong nodded. "Alright."

He then turned and left.

...

Chu Liang waited until there were no inferno phoenixes in sight before setting off back to the central mountain's peak. It seemed that he had wiped out all of the inferno phoenixes. If there were even one left, it would attempt to attack him upon sensing his dragon aura.

Meanwhile, Li Shiyi had just returned to the central mountain. The young lady had gone out to hunt a few mountain sheep earlier, but after a long and fruitless search, she returned to the mountain to wait for the others.

Seeing Chu Liang land on the peak, Li Shiyi relaxed.

After seeing a few strange people, Li Shiyi realized that having a stable temperament was a very important character trait.

"Young Hero Chu, do you think all the fire beasts have been wiped out?" Li Shiyi asked.

"They should be, more or less," Chu Liang answered. "Let's see what the other two say when they return."

"Those two..." Li Shiyi said quietly. "They always suddenly start fighting out of nowhere. It's really scary..."

"That's just how the people of the martial world are." Chu Liang grinned. "They're quicker to act out and seek revenge."

Right then, Luo Xiaoyong returned to the mountain peak.

Upon landing, he said, "I think this place is clear of the fire beasts now. Take a look at that rootstock."

Luo Xiaoyong pointed at the thick rootstock of the plant that would produce the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life.

Turning to look, Chu Liang and Li Shiyi noticed there was golden light slowly climbing up the thick rootstock. This indicated that all the golden essence was returning to the rhizome[1]. Once the golden essence reached the flower of the plant, it would be ready to produce the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life.

A while later, Feng Chaoyang flew over from afar and landed on the central mountain's peak. His gaze was focused on Chu Liang.

Feng Chaoyang had gone out earlier to search for fire beasts as well as the General's Constellation Orb that was missing from his storage tool. He remembered that he'd had it before entering the hidden realm and during his duel with Luo Xiaoyong. He hadn't used the orb, so he had probably lost it in the hidden realm.

Feng Chaoyang then searched everywhere he had been in the hidden realm prior to noticing it was gone, but he couldn't sense it anywhere.

That meant it was very likely Chu Liang or Luo Xiaoyong had stolen it using some secret method when they made physical contact earlier.

Consequently, Feng Chaoyang stepped forward and asked them, "Have either of you seen—"

"We've all seen that the plant is about to produce the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life. If you still want to duel with me, we can fight for the fruit after it has been produced," Chu Liang said. "There's no need for unnecessary fighting before that."

Feng Chaoyang waved his hand, gesturing that wasn't what he wanted to talk about. "No, I just wanted to ask you—"

"No problem." Chu Liang interrupted Feng Chaoyang again. "You're just asking if I'm willing to accept your challenge, right? I'll definitely have a great battle with you later."

Feng Chaoyang said anxiously, "That's not what I want to talk about! I lost—"

"You lost the face of the Celestial King Sect, right? Brother Feng, you don't have to think that way. Our sects have a friendly relationship, but you picking a fight with me does indeed tarnish your sect's reputation a bit. However, it's normal to be hot-blooded and impetuous when you're young. As a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, I won't harbor enmity toward my friends from the Celestial King Sect because of this."

"Seriously!" Feng Chaoyang uttered in exasperation, unable to keep up with the silver-tongued Chu Liang. He stomped his foot anxiously and said, "I'm looking for my—"

Whoosh.

A brilliant flash of light burst forth from the Phoenix Sheep Flower, radiating countless rays of golden light outward. It was as if some exceptional, one-of-a-kind treasure was about to emerge!

"The Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life is emerging!" Li Shiyi exclaimed in surprise.

The four of them were drawn to the light. After all, their primary goal was to obtain the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life, an ultimate-grade spirit plant for breaking through to the fifth realm.

While watching the fruit emerge, they all distanced themselves from each other. They were observing and guarding against one another because they might become competitors in the very next second!

The Phoenix Sheep Flower bloomed with golden light, revealing a fruit. The fruit instantly expanded in size, drooping downward. It became a golden fruit with mysterious ancient veins. Then it dropped to the ground heavily with a quiet, dull thud.

The gazes of the four people were immediately on alert! The fight for the fruit began!

Chu Liang shook his wrist, hurling out a Chain of Resentment.

Whoosh.

Feng Chaoyang was about to turn into divine light and fly toward the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life. However, just before he did that, he glanced at the others and saw Luo Xiaoyong was glancing at him right at that moment too.

They found themselves looking straight at each other.

Flames of anger ignited in Luo Xiaoyong's eyes. "What are you looking at?"

Hearing that, Feng Chaoyang got angry too and replied, "So what if I'm looking at you?"

"Look at me again, and see what happens."

"Bring it on!"

"Take this!"

With just a few words, the two young men were suddenly started fighting again. Luo Xiaoyong was fighting Feng Chaoyang a third time!

This time, Luo Xiaoyong and Feng Chaoyang were already familiar with each other's divine abilities, so they targeted each other's weaknesses right from the start.

Luo Xiaoyong raised his hand, and a thicket of icy thistles and thorns burst up from the ground. They protected him and prevented Feng Chaoyang from forcing him into close combat.

Feng Chaoyang responded by launching two of the General's Star Wheels. That fully illuminated the sky and prevented Luo Xiaoyong from using Stealing the Sky and Replacing the Sun.

Their fight quickly became intense, leaving only Chu Liang and Li Shiyi to compete for the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life.

Despite being a competition, it wasn't a fierce one. Chu Liang had already flown forward the moment that the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life landed. Li Shiyi, on the other hand, had been startled by the sudden fight between the other two and ended up falling slightly behind.

The young lady wasn't fond of fighting, but attacking Chu Liang was all she could do to hold him back.

Li Shiyi activated her sword seal with a clang, and a wall of swords suddenly appeared in front of Chu Liang. Nevertheless, that didn't hinder him in the slightest.

There was a whoosh of wind, and Chu Liang disappeared, reappearing ten zhang away. He'd used Dimension Compression!

Chu Liang plucked the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life off the plant and turned around.

Smiling at Li Shiyi, Chu Liang asked, "Miss Li, do you still want to fight me?"

Li Shiyi blinked, "No, thanks."

Her shoulders sagged with fatigue.

The young lady's delicate little face was filled with confusion as she watched the two people who had gotten angry over a glance fight with blind rage.

Li Shiyi sighed and said, "I just want to go home."

The martial world... is so exhausting.

Chapter 334: Only One Left?

The vast West Sea blazed with fire.

A fiery cloud swept across the sky with incredible might. Only upon closer inspection could one see that it was actually a soaring celestial beast.

This beast, called the Phoenix Sheep, had the divine feathers of a phoenix and the massive body of a mountain sheep, perfectly combined. It was a rare second-generation bloodline whose talents were on par with the first-generation celestial beast descendants.

In terms of cultivation talent and strength, none of the draconic descents were on par with the pure-blood True Dragon. However, this celestial beast, the Phoenix Sheep, was not only on par with phoenixes but even surpassed them in some aspects, such as strength.

"Baaaaa—"

The Phoenix Sheep let out a low, muffled bleat, filled with anger.

It would wake up once every thirty years and the first thing it would do was fly to the West Sea for a fight with the legendary Divine Phoenix.

The phoenixes were few in number, possibly no more than ten, all living on Divine Phoenix Island in the West Sea. The strongest among the Divine Phoenix Clan was the Phoenix Sheep's father.

Ever since it was fully grown, the Phoenix Sheep would challenge the Divine Phoenix King every time it woke up. Although it was defeated every time, it persistently returned to fight again.

This was its fury!

In the past, whenever the Phoenix Sheep flew to the West Sea, its father, who was a Divine Phoenix, would always come out to meet it. But this time, its father did not appear.

At this moment, the Phoenix Sheep was already close to Divine Phoenix Island, the place it loathed, but the Divine Phoenix King still did not show up.

Just as the Phoenix Sheep thought its father was hiding, another figure appeared in the sky.

Compared to the Phoenix Sheep, this figure looked small. But despite the small size, the figure exuded an extremely strong spiritual energy.

It was a tall man, dressed in a tattered hemp robe, with disheveled hair, and a worn-out gourd hanging at his waist. His face looked rugged and angular.

"Are you looking for the Divine Phoenix King?" he said with a lazy smile on his lips, "I am also looking for the Divine Phoenix King. It seems it has hidden, waiting for the opportunity to reach the ninth realm, and the entire Divine Phoenix Island has disappeared."

The Phoenix Sheep looked down from above, watching the man with fiery eyes.

Through its instincts, it sensed ill intentions coming from this person.

"But I've been ordered to make it appear. Since you're its child," the man continued, "capturing you will surely make the Divine Phoenix King show up, won't it?"

He spoke in such a casual tone, yet his words suggested he intended to single-handedly capture a seventh-realm celestial beast!

However, the Phoenix Sheep, sensing immense danger from the human cultivator, believed he was not joking. So, it decided to strike first!

"Baaaaaaa—"

With an enraged roar, the Phoenix Sheep flapped its fiery wings and unleashed a blast of golden-red flames!

The fire that the Phoenix Sheep had unleashed was the Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire that Chu Liang had just obtained. However, the intensity of this blaze far exceeded what hundreds of Chu Liang's fire seeds could produce!

Boom——

The man raised his hand and shattered the fireball. Water-blue flames swirled around him, and as he concentrated with his divine intent, the West Sea began to tremble!

"I was sent to deal with the Phoenix Sheep because I can counter your phoenix fire!" he shouted, lifting his hand to summon massive waves. In an instant, the seawater formed five spiraling giant dragons!

The five water dragons surged from the sea, coiling around the Phoenix Sheep. As soon as they touched its blazing body, they sizzled and clashed violently!

Amid the chaos of water and fire, the man leaped onto the Phoenix Sheep's back and stomped down with force!

Boom!

...

"Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life!"

After Chu Liang plucked the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life, Li Shiyi conceded and ceased her attacks.

Instead, Feng Chaoyang and Luo Xiaoyong, who were nearby, stopped fighting and glared at Chu Liang with intense hostility.

The effect of the Chain of Resentment seemed to weaken on the same person over time. Initially, it lasted for a while, but now it ended after just a few breaths.

Feng Chaoyang eyed Chu Liang suspiciously. "Did you use some trick to make us fight each other?"

Feng Chaoyang's suspicion was understandable. Although he thought a fourth-realm cultivator shouldn't be able to manipulate such a situation, he recalled the timing of Luo Xiaoyong's sudden attacks. Both the first and second instances occurred while he was challenging Chu Liang, and the third happened right before the fight for the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life.

Chu Liang was the direct beneficiary all three times.

"Heh," Chu Liang replied with a faint smile. "The Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life is right here. Brother Feng, if you want it, feel free to challenge me now."

"Great! I have been wanting to do that for a while now!" Feng Chaoyang declared, a surge of energy coursing through him.

After saying this, he waved his sleeves, instinctively wanting the people beside him to back off. Just as he was about to speak further, his expression suddenly stiffened. For some reason, he forced himself to hold back and avoided glancing at Luo Xiaoyong.

This time, he had learned his lesson: if he was going to act, he needed to do so swiftly and decisively.

Chu Liang had studied Feng Chaoyang's fighting style during their previous encounters and had a rough understanding of his strength. He crouched low and shot forward like an arrow, shouting, "Come on!"

"Let's go!" Feng Chaoyang's body instantly glowed with divine light as he charged forward!

Chu Liang activated the Dragon Blood Burning Technique, flames surging around him! At the same time, Feng Chaoyang shone brightly, enveloped in divine light!

In an instant, they clashed for the first time!

Chu Liang grabbed half a gold brick with his right hand. When Feng Chaoyang's fist approached, he sidestepped using the Turbulent Stream Movement Art, allowing Feng Chaoyang's punch to graze his chest. Meanwhile, Chu Liang struck Feng Chaoyang's face with the golden brick.

Boom boom——

Two almost simultaneous thunderous sounds echoed through the air!

In this collision with Feng Chaoyang, Chu Liang actually used the tactic of exchanging injury for injury!

As Luo Xiaoyong and Li Shiyi watched from the sidelines, they were shocked. Luo Xiaoyong had fought Feng Chaoyang three times, and none of the injuries he inflicted were as severe as this collision!

But correspondingly, Chu Liang also took a solid hit!

As Li Shiyi watched this scene, her pupils dilated sharply. She gained a deeper understanding of the fearsome nature of the martial world and the urge to return home increased even more...

"Ugh..." Feng Chaoyang's punch struck Chu Liang's chest, sending him flying back dozens of zhang, but Chu Liang remained upright.

"Ah—" Chu Liang's brick hit Feng Chaoyang's face, sending him tumbling through the air before crashing to the ground.

Victory was decided in a single exchange!

Chu Liang exhaled softly, adjusting his boiling qi and blood.

He had carefully studied Feng Chaoyang's fighting style before deciding on this strategy. Despite the versatility of the Celestial King Sect's Heavenly Star Unusual Art, Feng Chaoyang's personal preference—likely influenced by his personality—was for close combat with direct punches.

And close combat was exactly where Chu Liang excelled.

Though he could only use the Brick Combat Technique, his physical strength, enhanced by the Secret Dragon Blood Technique and the Blood Burning Technique, was terrifying within the fourth realm.

By using an injury-for-injury approach, Chu Liang faced few challengers within his cultivation realm. The only exception would be tough martial artists like Yun Chaoxian!

A swing of the golden brick with a right hook would form a dent on a body forged from meteoric iron! Despite Feng Chaoyang's divine light protection, he could not fully defend against the hit.

Yet, even this might have only resulted in a tie. The key to Chu Liang's decisive victory was the Jiuli Soul Armor!

The killing of the vicious beast Taowu earned him this reward! The power of this reward was self-evident.

As Feng Chaoyang punched Chu Liang fiercely in the chest, he absorbed about 30-40% of the impact himself due to the rebound damage. Additionally, the damage inflicted on Feng Chaoyang transferred a portion of blood-stained aura to heal Chu Liang.

With this exchange, the previously balanced situation turned into a decisive victory for Chu Liang!

Seeing Feng Chaoyang sprawled on the ground, motionless for a moment, Chu Liang knew he had won with a single decisive blow. However, in a real fight to the death, allowing an opponent to recover could change everything. If Feng Chaoyang managed to get back up, the outcome was uncertain.

Chu Liang approached slowly, bending down to extend his hand to Feng Chaoyang.

The divine light usually surrounding Feng Chaoyang had been shattered by the rebound force. At this moment, he still felt disoriented. Seeing Chu Liang extend his hand towards him, he also reached out to grasp it.

Chu Liang pulled him up and said, "Brother Feng, you've fought several battles earlier, so I had the advantage. Next time, when you're at your best, we can have a proper match."

"No need to say that. A loss is a loss," Feng Chaoyang replied, feeling a flicker of dissatisfaction. He thought that if it hadn't been for the unexpected rebound force, he might have won by keeping his distance. But hearing Chu Liang's words, he waved his hand and said, "I accept my defeat. I'll train harder and win next time."

Chu Liang smiled and said, "It's good for us comrades on the righteous path to spar, as long as it doesn't harm our relationship. Ultimately, we're improving ourselves to slay demons and defend our Dao!"

Feng Chaoyang also felt this deeply and nodded in agreement. "That's right!"

Any hostility he had felt towards Chu Liang was now mostly replaced by respect. This person had not only defeated him with a single blow but also showed a magnanimous spirit.

Just as he was about to speak further, a crackling sound echoed overhead. The sky split open with a huge fissure, and fiery rain began to pour down!

"What is going on?" The four of them were all shocked.

Did the master of the hidden realm, the Phoenix Sheep, come back? But it usually stays in the West Sea for a few days. Why had it come back so quickly this time? Is this an anomaly?

Li Shiyi and Chu Liang immediately summoned their flying swords for protection, while Luo Xiaoyong summoned a layer of mysterious ice shield. All of them were preparing themselves for any danger.

Feng Chaoyang also summoned the General's Constellation Orbs, ready to use his divine abilities at any moment.

But as soon as he summoned the General's Constellation Orbs, he was shocked.

Why is there only one left?

What?!

Chapter 335: Old Li Ba

The Phoenix Sheep had fled back to its hidden realm.

The power of that human cultivator was beyond imagination. The Phoenix Sheep hadn't expected that it would not be able to fight back. While they were on the West Sea, the human's water-control abilities were at his peak. He raised colossal waves, forming an endless water prison that almost trapped the Phoenix Sheep, completely extinguishing its divine fire.

Despite its severe injuries, the Phoenix Sheep managed to break out of the water prison and fly back to its hidden sanctuary.

Still, the man was pursuing it relentlessly.

Upon returning, the Phoenix Sheep immediately kicked out all outsiders and securely sealed the realm. Unless someone of the eighth realm with control over the Heavenly Origin tried to breach it, the hidden realm would remain locked.

Boom boom boom boom!

Four muffled sounds echoed as the disciples of the immortal sects were kicked out of the Phoenix Sheep's hidden realm, still bewildered by the sudden turn of events.

Landing outside Phoenix Sheep Mountain, the disciples realized that the entire area had become completely scorched. When the Phoenix Sheep came back earlier, it lost control of its divine fire, reducing everything in its path to ashes.

The devastation was a stark reminder of the immense destruction a seventh realm Eminent One could unleash if left unchecked.

As they regained their footing after being thrown out of the hidden realm, a new figure appeared standing on the scorched ground.

A tall man in a hemp robe, with a wine gourd hanging at his waist, walked over. He frowned as he muttered to himself, "It still escaped in the end. I told you I couldn't do it..."

The four disciples of the immortal sects watched him warily, sensing the extraordinary aura emanating from him.

The aura of this Eminent One felt majestic and carried the weight of a mountain. Having just been in a battle, his entire body was still enveloped in qi flames that he had yet to retract.

The pressure was quite intense.

The man glanced at them and asked, "Are you the disciples from the immortal sects here for the trial?"

He hesitated slightly, likely contemplating whether to silence them permanently. His expression conveyed a sense of deliberation, as if he was deciding whether to crush a few bugs.

"What do you intend to do?" Feng Chaoyang raised a General's Constellation Orb, sending a dazzling light straight into the sky!

"Oh?" The man looked at him. "Celestial King Sect? This means your sect and mine share the same origin, so I won't kill you. Just don't tell anyone when I let you go."

As he spoke, he glanced at the others, his eyes immediately revealing a chilling killing intent.

Feng Chaoyang quickly said, "They are also disciples of the Celestial King Sect."

"Do you take me for a fool?" The man sneered. "I know about the four immortal sects doing this trial in this hidden realm."

With that, he pointed at Li Shiyi, who was reaching for a jade talisman.

"Watch out!"

Feng Chaoyang and Chu Liang acted simultaneously!

Feng Chaoyang summoned a General's Constellation Orb and a burst of light appeared in front of Li Shiyi, shielding her from the man's attack.

Boom—

The General's Constellation Orb exploded instantly, shattering with a thunderous blast. This part of the General's Supreme Constellation Disc couldn't withstand a single finger from the man. But on second thought, it was already impressive that it could block an attack from the seventh realm when it was someone in the fourth realm that had activated it.

Meanwhile, Chu Liang launched his attack, sending the Crimson Executioner sword flying toward the man.

When the man appeared, the Crimson Executioner began to vibrate violently. This person was undoubtedly a mass murderer who had committed countless unspeakable evils!

Swoosh—

The Crimson Executioner cut through the air with an overwhelming murderous aura that was incredibly sharp!

But the man merely raised his hand and caught the blade of the Crimson Executioner.

Boom!

The legendary sword, powerful enough to slay a sixth realm cultivator, was utterly powerless before a seventh-realm expert. Despite its furious vibrations, the Crimson Executioner couldn't move at all in the man's grasp; justice was utterly useless at this moment.

Clang clang.

The man struck with his palm, shaking off the sword qi from the Crimson Executioner, and casually tossed it aside.

This was not an existence they could fight!

But at that moment, Li Shiyi raised the jade talisman and let out a sharp cry, "Great-Grandpa! Come save me!"

Her cry sounded utterly pitiful, releasing all her suppressed fear and grievances.

The next second, a stern voice came from the other side of the talisman.

"Who dares to touch my great-granddaughter?!"

Crack—

As his voice still echoed, thunder struck overhead, splitting the sky open. An incredibly sharp sword qi descended, followed by a gigantic hand wielding a sword striking down!

An incredibly sharp sword qi descended from the sky, accompanied by a huge hand wielding a sword.

"You little brat, you must be tired of living!" The voice boomed with anger, echoing like thunder.

"Damn! Old Li Ba!" The man, his expression previously lazy, suddenly snapped to attention with his eyes widened in shock. He raised his wine gourd high, and a torrent of black water poured out from it.

The old gourd appeared small, but the black water flowing from it was like a mighty river, roaring and spanning the sky!

As the sword struck down, the black river instantly transformed into a viscous poison, clinging to the sword and continuously corroding the sword qi.

Clang—

When the sword was struck down, it sliced half of the mountain peak with extremely fierce and terrifying force!

Rumble—

After releasing the black water, the man swiftly employed a traversal technique and escaped without hesitation, narrowly evading capture. Had he been a moment slower, the Eminent One, a sword cultivator at the eighth realm, would have traversed the nine provinces and descended upon him!

Thunder continued to rumble, and it seemed as though a gigantic figure was emerging from the crack. Shortly after, a figure floated down from the sky.

He was a short and stout old man, clad in a white robe, with a round face and a long beard, not quite fitting the image of a legendary grandmaster.

But after witnessing that sword strike, everyone present instantly recognized him, and their hearts swelled with awe!

This was the previous sect leader of the Endless Sword Sect, a sect in the Divine Nine. Currently, he served as the Supreme Elder and the inheritor of the Li family's Sword Saint legacy...

His name was Li Ba!

"Great-Grandpa!" Li Shiyi ran over, calling out in a way that seemed to convey that she had been wronged.

"Oh, my little Shiyi." Old Li Ba said as he swept his sleeve, hugged Li Shiyi, and quickly patted her shoulder. "I arrived late and gave that scoundrel the chance to escape. But don't worry, I'll search every corner of the world to catch the villain who dared to harm my great-granddaughter!"

"Okay..." Li Shiyi nodded gently.

Li Ba raised his eyes again and looked at the three young people around. "What about them? They didn't bully you, did they?"

Luo Xiaoyong, Feng Chaoyang, and Chu Liang all stood at attention and shook their heads in unison.

Are you kidding me? This is a legendary eighth-realm master of the world! Who would dare not to stand at attention when he glared at them?

"No." Li Shiyi quickly shook her head. "Everyone has been very kind to me, it's just that the sudden appearance of that bad guy was too frightening."

Li Ba's gaze turned solemn as he looked up at the sky and said, "It seems that the Divine Phoenix King from the West Sea is on the brink of ascension and someone is scheming to awaken it from that state. It's just those on the brink of ascension plotting against each other. But no matter what, I won't forget those who dare implicate my great-granddaughter... hmph!"

This cold snort sent a shiver down everyone's spine.

Chu Liang looked at this seemingly fragile young girl and made a mental note that she must not be provoked.

When it comes to calling for backup, I have always considered myself quite skilled, but compared to this young girl, I am just an apprentice shaman meeting a grand shaman.

At most, I can summon a seventh-realm master, but she can summon her eighth-realm grandpa at any time!

There are only a few eighth-realm experts in the world. If I could summon Venerable Wen Yuan as easily as a familiar, I would be walking around with an air of dominance. Thinking about it this way, this girl has been acting quite modestly.

"Then I'll take her home. You should also return to your respective immortal sects. That person has already fled thousands of li away, so there's no need to worry anymore," Li Ba said.

"Thank you, esteemed senior!" the three of them said in unison, bowing.

With the use of Shattering the Void, Li Ba took Li Shiyi and departed, leaving only Luo Xiaoyong and the other two behind.

Luo Xiaoyong said, "If there's nothing else for me to do here, I'll be leaving too. See you next time."

"I..." Feng Chaoyang opened his mouth, about to say something.

He came with three General's Constellation Orbs, and now he's going back empty-handed. He desperately needed to get an explanation for this matter.

Before he could say anything, Chu Liang took out two General's Constellation Orbs and handed them over.

"Brother Feng, these are the valuable items I took from you earlier. I should return them to their rightful owner," Chu Liang said with a smile.

"Ah?" Feng Chaoyang was startled as he said, "It really was you who took them. How did you do it?"

"Just some minor tricks," Chu Liang answered as he shook his head. "You wanted to challenge me earlier, so I tried to make you weaker. Now that our sparring has ended, I dare not keep them with me."

In fact, if it were some ordinary enchanted tools, or slightly valuable pills and talismans, it wouldn't matter if Chu Liang took them. Feng Chaoyang wouldn't mind too much anyway.

But the two General's Constellation Orbs were too valuable.

One of them could actually withstand an attack from a seventh-realm cultivator!

Although that man casually used a divine ability, the fact that an enchanted tool wielded by a fourth-realm cultivator could block it demonstrates the tool's considerable strength.

The Celestial King Sect wouldn't let it go easily, and Chu Liang wouldn't be able to use them conveniently in the future. If discovered, it could risk disrupting the unity between the two sects. Selling them secretly could be an option, but it was unnecessary.

Feng Chaoyang did try to protect everyone earlier, and if Chu Liang still stole from him, he would feel ashamed of himself.

So, after slight deliberation, he decided to return them to Feng Chaoyang.

Feng Chaoyang took the two General's Constellation Orbs and stared at Chu Liang for a moment, appearing slightly stunned.

He admitted that if he had obtained Chu Liang's valuable items by some means, he wouldn't have returned them. Moreover, despite his previous provocations, Chu Liang didn't hold any grudges against him. He really...

"Brother Chu..."

Chapter 336: The Golden Age of Immortality Cultivators?

The four of them had only spent a short time in the Phoenix Sheep Secret Realm, but the experience had caused all of them to change.

Feng Chaoyang had been all hot-blooded and rearing for a fight when he first got there, but he ended up leaving after having received several beatings. If Chu Liang hadn't returned the two General's Constellation Orbs to him, Feng Chaoyang's heart would truly have crumbled. He ended up only losing one orb, but he wasn't sure if that was a fortunate thing.

Regardless, that's why Feng Chaoyang's hostility toward Chu Liang vanished like smoke in thin air and turned into admiration. If Feng Chaoyang gained anything, it was a deep understanding of the idiom "Actions speak louder than words." [1]

Meanwhile, Luo Xiaoyong reflected deeply on his temper. He wondered if he had been too bad-tempered lately and decided to be kinder to people in the future. Despite that, he and Feng Chaoyang had forged a friendship they would never have formed if they hadn't fought.

The most unfortunate of the four of them was Li Shiyi. The young lady hadn't gotten injured, but she was the only one who had left in tears.

Li Shiyi had been cultivating in the Endless Sword Sect all her life. She had great talent and a high level of cultivation for her age, but she hadn't experienced much of the outside world. This rare outing had left her a little traumatized.

On the way back to their sect, Li Shiyi kept asking her great-grandfather, "Why are there no friendly relationships in the martial world, just fighting and killing?"

Chu Liang's biggest change was that he now had the Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life and a bunch of Phoenix-Spirit Fire Seeds in his pocket. It could be said that he had a bountiful harvest.

Without taking into consideration their mental growth, Chu Liang was the only winner out of the four youths who had gone to the hidden realm.

By the time Chu Liang returned to Silver Sword Peak, the sky was already dark. He didn't go anywhere else; he just went straight back to his cabin to sleep.

The next morning, he decided to visit the Berry Wonderland.

As soon as Chu Liang stepped outside, he ran into Wen Yulong, who had come looking for him.

Wen Yulong said with a smile, "Senior Brother Chu, I heard you were back, so I came to find you first thing in the morning. Eh, where are you going?"

Chu Liang replied, "I'm going to the fruit garden."

"Oh. I'm here to tell you that I got the information you were seeking in Taotie City."

Wen Yulong was quite familiar with Taotie City, so Chu Liang had asked Wen Yulong to enquire around on his behalf.

"Oh?" Chu Liang uttered. He quickly asked, "Information for which thing?"

"Both of them," Wen Yulong replied. "The alchemist is willing to meet you, and the Pavilion of Celestial Fate has gathered information on the Human-Faced Xiao."

"Great!" Chu Liang clapped his hands happily. "I'll check on the fruit garden and then set off for Taotie City."

After receiving the good news, Chu Liang walked cheerfully toward the Berry Wonderland. Even from afar, he could already see that it was bustling with people.

Just after interest in the tale about Madam Bai faded, the tale about Meng Jiangnu took its place and captured the public's interest. In the world of immortality cultivators, the craze for the Golden Vein Berries did not die down; instead, it intensified. There seemed to be an unending stream of people that were curious about the berries.

This was partly thanks to the Berry Wonderland's visitors spreading the word about it, providing a second round of advertising for free.

The Golden-Furred Hou and the Baize youngling were running around the fruit garden. They weren't fulfilling their duties as the Berry Wonderland's security guards. Instead, they were just having fun playing. Yet, that was precisely what made the visitors fond of them.

The game they played with the flying disc even drew in some visiting cultivators, and more and more people joined in. From the perspective of the two spirit beasts, they were just happy to have more people to play with.

Once the news about the Mount Shu Sect's celestial beast Baize being on the brink of ascension spread through the world of immortality cultivators, the Baize youngling drew even more attention than before.

This spirit beast might just become the son of a ninth-realm Hallowed One in the future! Now, people could have it fetch a flying disc for them for only several dozen sword coins. Who could resist going there to have a go?

When Di Nufeng was free, she would patrol the Berry Wonderland and glare at any visitor who seemed like they might stir up trouble. Just one glance from her made them shiver in fear! Di Nufeng looked just like a mob boss watching over her territory.

Chu Liang had initially asked Di Nufeng to only check in if there was trouble. After all, it wasn't difficult for a seventh-realm Eminent One to keep an eye on a place on the other side of the mountain peak.

However, once Di Nufeng learned about the revenue the Berry Wonderland was bringing in, she paid it way more attention than Chu Liang had expected. It seemed that she intended to rely on this fruit garden to fund her retirement.

Meanwhile, Liu Xiaoyu'er, an ordinary person—no, an ordinary fish demon, had become a rising star on Mount Shu with tremendous speed. The number of people seeking her blessings was increasing constantly.

Visitors who wanted to meet with Liu Xiaoyu'er now had to queue for more than an hour, and even then, they could only have a brief conversation to request for a few blessings.

Liu Xiaoyu'er's main business consisted of giving blessings and selling small safety talismans she had blessed. Yet, it seemed like she was attracting fans as well, much like the disciples of the South Melody Conservatory.

Aside from these two idle members of Silver Sword Peak, the other members of Chu Liang's business team did not spend a lot of time in the fruit garden even though they very much wanted to.

Lin Bei, for one, loved being a tour guide, and he was extremely good at it. In fact, if there were a competition for it, he would be a gold-medalist tour guide. In the early days of the Berry

Wonderland, he had pretty much lived in the fruit garden. By working there, he could earn good money and even meet female cultivators from all over the nine provinces and four seas.

However, after observing Lin Bei do that for a few days, Chu Liang felt that a proper cultivator couldn't do that as their main job. So, he asked Shang Ziliang to bring in a group of senior and junior brothers from Cloud Horizon Peak to work in shifts at the Berry Wonderland with the existing team of people working there. That way, all of them would only need to work seven days a month and could spend the rest of the time cultivating, training, and doing missions to increase their strength.

Working at the Berry Wonderland meant they could have fun, interact with many female cultivators, and earn dozens of times more than what they'd get from doing missions in the same amount of time. Everyone jumped at the opportunity to work there. Nonetheless, Chu Liang's strict rule meant they could sadly only work seven days a month.

At first, the disciples of Cloud Horizon Peak had been hesitant to take up the offer, but once the first batch of disciples returned from working at the fruit garden and revealed their earnings, everyone else eagerly signed up.

Di Nufeng had gone to Cloud Horizon Peak with her disciple just a few months ago to extort Shang Shuwen. Never in his wildest dreams would Shang Shuwen have even imagined that all of the disciples from his peak would now be working for Silver Sword Peak.

The twists and turns of life sure were strange and unpredictable.

...

After inspecting the fruit garden, Chu Liang returned to his cabin and saw a message from Heaven-Reaching Peak. The sect leader wanted to see him.

Chu Liang immediately set off for Heaven-Reaching Peak. He guessed that the sect leader was probably going to give him a response to what they had last discussed.

Upon arriving at Boundless Palace, Chu Liang found the sect leader's room as serene and impressive as ever. Venerable Wen Yuan was already sitting there.

Seeing Chu Liang walk in, Venerable Wen Yuan asked, "I heard you encountered some danger in the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm?"

Chu Liang had yet to report about the incident at the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm. That meant Venerable Wen Yuan had likely heard about it from one of the other sects.

"Yes, there was some danger."

Chu Liang then told Venerable Wen Yuan about the sudden appearance of the seventh-realm Eminent One.

Venerable Wen Yuan listened attentively and then nodded. "The seventh-realm cultivator you encountered is probably Huo Tianya, a disowned disciple of the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals."

"The Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals..." Chu Liang muttered.

The nine provinces and four seas were vast, but... seventh-realm Eminent Ones weren't as common as cabbages; they didn't just pop up everywhere. Anyone at such a high level of cultivation would certainly be fairly well known, so it was unsurprising that Venerable Wen Yuan could identify the Eminent One that Chu Liang mentioned.

The Endless Sword Sect was probably leading the investigation. After all, their Supreme Elder had been absolutely furious when he left the hidden realm. He'd vowed that he would grind the person who had frightened his great-granddaughter into dust.

"He was Enlightened Jiuyi's disciple. Back then, he slaughtered dozens of righteous cultivators to seize a treasure. He used extremely vile methods, so much so that Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals was pressured into driving him out of the sect. He has since been on the wanted list of all righteous sects across the nine provinces for dozens of decades," Venerable Wen Yuan said frankly.

Chu Liang couldn't help but gulp in shock.

The world of immortality cultivators acknowledged the law of the jungle, that the weak were prey to the strong. So, it was normal for cultivators to get a bit rough when they fought over treasures. Occasionally, there were even major cases involving deaths.

However, slaughtering dozens of people for a treasure... and doing it with methods so vile that the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals had been forced to drive the disciple out of the sect... That just shows how heinous that disciple's actions had been.

Some might say that the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals had shielded that disciple by merely driving him out. However, for a criminal disciple who had incited public outrage, getting driven out of a sect meant he would no longer be under their protection.

It was the sect's declaration that the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten could go after him however they liked. They needn't hold back out of respect for the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals.

Nine out of ten disciples driven out of their sects like this would get murdered. As for the one remaining disciple, they would escape because they were extraordinarily skilled.

"As for his purpose behind capturing the Phoenix Sheep, it was probably to force the Phoenix King to emerge," Venerable Wen Yuan muttered as he pondered. "This is similar to what happened with Baize. Someone is deliberately trying to disturb these beings while they are on the brink of ascension. There's probably someone plotting behind the scenes.

"Lu Chengqiu was supported by the Celestial Charm Sect. Considering the similar circumstances, it's likely that Huo Tianya has also joined the Celestial Charm Sect."

Chu Liang nodded.

The Eminent One in question had said that he shared a common origin with the Celestial King Sect. He had probably been referring to the Celestial Charm Sect.

Venerable Wen Yuan continued, "Thinking about it now, there have been celestial beasts reaching the gateway of the ninth realm in succession. It seems the demon god has truly fallen."

In eras when the supreme ninth-realm being was still alive and thriving in the world, no beings would be able to be on the brink of ascension to the ninth realm. Even if the ninth-realm Hallowed One were weakened like how the demon god had been suppressed for several thousand years, there still wouldn't be any beings on the brink of ascension.

However, during the past few hundred years, beings on the brink of ascension had appeared one after another. This could be taken as indication that the previous Hallowed One had died. The cultivators of the world could only thrive when the spiritual energy that a ninth-realm Hallowed One had accumulated returned to the heavens and the earth. It would be much easier for the eighth-realm Eminent Ones to achieve enlightenment, and cultivators in all the lower realms would rise in level as well.

When the demon god emerged in the past, the Mount Shu Sect had been able to gather seven Eminent Ones at the Heavenly Origin Realm to join the battle against the demon god. Now, the Mount Shu Sect only had two eighth-realm cultivators, and that was including Baize.

The Mount Shu Sect wasn't the only one affected. As long as the one being at the ninth realm was still alive, all immortal sects would be limited to the eighth realm.

If the demon god had truly fallen, then the mortal realm's cultivation world should soon usher in a golden age[2].

Naturally, the Mount Shu Sect hoped it was true. After all, if the demon god returned, his first target of revenge would undoubtedly be the Mount Shu Sect.

Chu Liang just listened quietly. He wasn't aware of the details of such matters, nor did he have the status to discuss them with Venerable Wen Yuan.

After a while, Venerable Wen Yuan said to him, "As for the proposals you presented previously, I discussed them with the sect's elders, and we have come to a conclusion."

Chu Liang's eyes lit up.

Chapter 337: Dan Lingzi

Chu Liang walked out of the Boundless Palace with a smile.

Venerable Wen Yuan had just informed him that the higher-ups of the Mount Shu Sect ultimately decided to go with the second proposal, leasing the rights to the Red Cotton Peak to Chu Liang.

It was a ten-year lease, which was not an issue. For cultivators of their level, a period of ten years was not very long. However, during this period, if Chu Liang did anything that violated the sect's rules or resulted in reputational damage, Mount Shu would reserve the right to terminate the contract at any time.

Chu Liang was not surprised that the elders reached this conclusion.

The first loan plan he proposed was quite ordinary. He wouldn't lose, but the Mount Shu Sect wouldn't gain anything out of it either. Although it was the least troublesome option, requiring only repayment of the money, the Mount Shu Sect was unfortunately short of funds and naturally didn't want to take on more burden.

When they heard the second proposal, almost all of the four elders rejected it.

No one knew what Chu Liang might come up with. Given the current state of Berry Wonderland on Silver Sword Peak, there was a chance that he would do something extravagant on Red Cotton Peak. Mount Shu, after all, was a traditional immortal sect. The market Small gatherings among disciples were normal, but anything too grand would be hard to accept.

The elders unanimously believed that the sect's reputation was more important than anything else!

However, when they heard the third proposal, which required lending a legendary artifact to Di Nufeng, all the elders fell silent.

Currently, Di Nufeng was already unmatched among the thirty-six peak masters, and even the Four Guardian Elders might not be able to tie her down. Once she had her hands on the two legendary artifacts, there would be no one in Mount Shu, except for Venerable Wen Yuan, who could fight her.

At that moment, all the elders of Mount Shu were reminded of the fear of being dominated by Di Nufeng...

It would be one thing if it happened on Mount Shu, but what if she went out and caused trouble?

Di Nufeng was already arrogant and domineering, causing plenty of problems for Mount Shu. If she became invincible among all cultivators below the eighth realm, it would be a disaster...

The elders unanimously agreed that compared to this, the sect's reputation would be less important. The second proposal now became negotiable.

Compared to his esteemed teacher, Chu Liang, as a young disciple, understood the gravity of situations and would not do anything too outrageous. Even if he did, Mount Shu retained the right to revoke the lease at any time.

In the end, the elders decided to approve Chu Liang's proposal to lease Red Cotton Peak.

This was exactly what Chu Liang had hoped to achieve.

Of the three plans, the first was actually the one he wanted the least.

He had spent so much money. Even if he could get some of it back with interest, it wouldn't mean much over the span of several years.

Although the third proposal would make his teacher stronger, there was no telling how many times he would be able to call upon his teacher's strength. Additionally, there were risks involved. Therefore, when he proposed it, he felt slightly anxious.

The second proposal offered the most flexibility.

As Chu Liang reflected on how he had transitioned from being the second-in-command of Silver Sword Peak to the leader of Red Cotton Peak, his heart swelled with pride.

...

The next day, Chu Liang headed to Taotie City again.

Previously, he had purchased the gourds of fruit-flavored Spirit-Concentration Pills at a high price and later asked the Pavilion of Celestial Fate to help him contact the seller. The Pavilion of Celestial Fate told him that they could help him send a request to the seller, and if the seller agreed, a meeting could then be arranged.

The seller's name was Dan Lingzi, a rogue alchemist from the Northern Regions who spent most of the year living in Taotie City.

Nowadays, many alchemists and artificers were drawn to settle in Taotie City because it was the most convenient place for business. Therefore, Chu Liang's meeting with this alchemist was also scheduled in Taotie City. However, upon arriving at the agreed address, he noticed that the alchemist's quality of life was not particularly high.

The small courtyard was cluttered with miscellaneous items, mostly damaged alchemical furnaces and discarded materials, essentially cultivation trash.

The main house had only a small hall where Dan Lingzi was waiting.

He was dressed in a long robe, giving the impression of a middle-aged man. His cultivation level appeared modest, likely at the third or fourth realm, and his face was etched with numerous wrinkles.

"Senior Dan Lingzi," Chu Liang greeted as he approached. "I have long admired your work, which is why I came to see you today. I hope my visit did not disturb you."

"No disturbance at all," Dan Lingzi replied with a smile. "I heard that Young Hero Chu is a top disciple of Mount Shu. I read in the reports about a young hero from Mount Shu that killed Taowu with a sword. Was that you?"

When the Pavilion of Celestial Fate contacted the seller, they naturally provided more details about the buyer's identity to alleviate any concerns.

"Yes, that's me," Chu Liang replied with a smile.

"I really didn't expect one of the top prodigies of the nine provinces to be the buyer of my pills," Dan Lingzi said as his face lit up with pride.

"Senior Dan Lingzi, I can only say that your fruit-flavored Spirit-Concentration Pill is a work of genius!" Chu Liang said earnestly. "You are simply the most talented alchemist I have ever met."

Dan Lingzi looked as though he had found a real friend who understood him, but his excitement quickly faded into dejection. "Alas, besides you, no one else appreciates my masterpiece. They all say that my fusion pills are childish and that it's wishful thinking to sell them at a high price just because of the added flavors..."

"Ignore the idle chatter," Chu Liang said, waving his hand dismissively. "This is a groundbreaking method that can revolutionize the field of alchemy! Geniuses are often misunderstood at first, but people will eventually recognize your extraordinary talent. I am just the first, but I will certainly not be the last!"

Upon hearing this, Dan Lingzi was greatly encouraged. He asked excitedly, "Young Hero Chu, did you come today to get more of my fusion pills?"

By fusion pills, he naturally meant the ones with fruit flavors.

"I wanted to ask if you have any other fusion pills aside from the Spirit-Concentration Pills," Chu Liang inquired.

"There is also the Qi-Gathering Pill," replied Dan Lingzi.

"Just these two?" Chu Liang asked again.

"Uh..." Dan Lingzi scratched his head in embarrassment. "I could certainly make other types of fusion pills, but as of now, I only know how to make these two. I haven't tried fusing other types of pills yet."

"..." Chu Liang felt momentarily speechless.

It seemed that this alchemist's skills weren't even as good as his own, yet he had become a full-time alchemist.

The fact that he hadn't starved to death yet really showed how low the cost of living in Taotie City was.

Still, Chu Liang complimented him, "Esteemed Senior, just with these two blended pills, you have enough to make a name for yourself in the history of alchemy in the Nine Provinces!"

"Not at all, not at all," Dan Lingzi replied, a bit dizzy from the flattery but remaining humble.

Chu Liang continued, "Instead of buying more pills, I am more interested in learning the technique to fuse flavors into the pills. Esteemed Senior, would you be willing to teach me?"

At this point, Dan Lingzi looked troubled and said, "This is a unique secret method I have painstakingly developed over half my life. I can only teach it to my disciples. How can I teach it to outsiders?"

"I am willing to pay five thousand Vermillion-Bird coins," Chu Liang said. "Although this secret method is worth far more than that, it is indeed all the wealth I have at the moment."

"Young Hero Chu, you are obviously a person of exceptional talent and brilliance. You will surely be able to carry forward my secret method," Dan Lingzi said seriously. "Since you sincerely hope to learn the art, how can I be selfish with it?"

"Thank you, Esteemed Senior Dan Lingzi!" Chu Liang exclaimed.

"However..." Dan Lingzi hesitated for a moment before continuing, "Even if you learn it, you may not be able to use it. I was able to master this secret technique because of a fortuitous encounter I had when I was young, which allowed me to wield Xuan Yang Divine Fire despite being at the fourth realm of cultivation. Without the ability to control a divine fire that is hot enough, you will not be able to do this..."

Whoosh—

Before he finished speaking, a surge of golden-red flames rose from Chu Liang's palm, flickering dangerously.

"Esteemed Senior, is this divine fire hot enough?" he asked.

"This is..." Dan Lingzi's eyes widened in shock. "Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire!"

Chapter 338: This Boy Has a Promising Future

"I call this technique the Pill Fusion Technique."

Dan Lingzi set up an ancient, ornate bronze furnace in his shabby little courtyard, which looked completely out of place with the rest of the surroundings.

An alchemical furnace represented the dignity of an alchemist. A true alchemist might live in a hovel and eat simple food, but the furnace must be the best item they own.

Clearly, Dan Lingzi was a dedicated alchemist, even though he only knew how to make Qi-Gathering Pills and Spirit-Concentration Pills.

As he set up the furnace and prepared the materials, his whole demeanor suddenly became solemn. He steadied his gaze and slowly said, "Watch closely, I will only demonstrate this once."

Seeing Dan Lingzi suddenly exuding the air of a master, Chu Liang couldn't help but focus his attention.

Then Dan Lingzi continued, "If I have to do it a second time, you'll have to wait until tomorrow because I won't have enough foundational qi!"

Oh, so that's why. So it's because his cultivation level is too weak. Then you really didn't have to put on this stern expression and act like you are a master.

Dan Lingzi, an unconventional fourth-realm cultivator, couldn't match up to Chu Liang, a prodigy with two ultimate-tier Golden Cores. Even compared to an ordinary cultivator in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, he was far behind.

Even Lin Bei, Lackey A, and Lackey B from the Mount Shu Sect, who were not considered exceptional, could still thoroughly overpower unconventional cultivators of the same realm.

For Chu Liang, he had almost unlimited qi, recovering to maximum in just a moment. But for these unconventional cultivators, the consumption of qi was a luxury.

Once they exhaust their qi, they would either have to wait for their Sea of Qi to refill slowly or use expensive Qi-Gathering Pills or Spirit-Concentration Pills to recover to full strength.

Their Sea of Qi wasn't very vast to begin with. For Dan Lingzi to wield Xuan Yang Divine Fire, which he shouldn't be able to at this realm, and make a batch of pills, it was normal for him to use up his qi.

Whoosh——

As he spoke, he arranged four pieces of spirit charcoal and performed finger seals. Instantly, a scorching blue-black flame ignited, burning steadily without flickering or making a sound.

Yet Chu Liang sensed a hint of danger from this quiet flame.

In terms of power, Xuan Yang Divine Fire was only slightly inferior to Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire, both containing extremely terrifying energy. Igniting the divine fire was just the beginning; the alchemist had to control the heat throughout the process, which was a very tiring task.

Sizzle!

As soon as the Spirit-Concentration Pill's materials were placed into the furnace, they immediately began to sizzle.

Dan Lingzi explained, "We need to use divine fire of extremely high temperature to refine these materials, so the process requires very careful control. Even a small mistake in the control of heat or strength can ruin everything. For example, look at what I just did; I've just burnt the materials and will need to start over."

Without changing his expression, he wiped the sweat from his brow, cleared the burnt materials from the furnace, and prepared a new set of materials for the Spirit-Concentration Pill.

It seemed his mistake earlier was just a demonstration of a failed attempt for Chu Liang.

Chu Liang then realized why his Spirit-Concentration Pills were so expensive.

The base materials with a bit of fruit might not be worth much, but considering his failure rate, doubling the price seemed quite fair.

"When the pill is about to form, you add the item you want to fuse with it. Right now, I can only add fruits because adding spirit plants would definitely affect the pill's properties, and I dare not try that rashly. You have to be careful and you mustn't simply toss it in."

As Dan Lingzi got into the rhythm of refining, he carefully placed a prepared apple into the furnace.

"With the use of your foundational qi, you will need to create a fire-repelling layer around the item with the right intensity. When the pill is about to form, add the item at just the right moment so its essence and flavor get absorbed by the pill. If you don't control it properly and add it too early or too late, the fruit will just turn into gas and disappear."

After a long while, he finally finished refining a batch of Spirit-Concentration Pills.

Usually, refining a furnace of Spirit-Concentration Pills would yield around twenty or thirty pills. However, due to the precise control required for the Pill Fusion Technique, he was afraid of failing, so he only used enough materials to make fifteen pills.

Seeing Dan Lingzi's joyful expression as he took out the batch of Spirit-Concentration Pills, Chu Liang thought of the one thousand fruit-flavored Spirit-Concentration Pills he had in his storage tool.

If Dan Lingzi could only refine fifteen pills per day, excluding the ones he used, it meant that he had accumulated these thousand pills over a long time.

He had worked hard accumulating a thousand pills for such a long time and wanted to make a small profit while the price of Spirit-Concentration Pills was high in the city. Even so, he was mocked by so many people.

If I hadn't bought the gourds of Spirit-Concentration Pills for two thousand sword coins, how sad Dan Lingzi would have been, Chu Liang thought.

"Do you understand the technique I just demonstrated?" Dan Lingzi asked.

"Yes, I remember most of the steps," Chu Liang said with a nod. "Let me give it a try."

"Alright, give it a few tries in front of me, and I'll point out any mistakes," Dan Lingzi said, standing aside with his hands behind his back, looking relaxed.

Finally, it was his turn to watch.

He watched as Chu Liang set up the alchemical furnace, ignited the Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire, and placed the materials into the furnace.

With the heat of the Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire, Chu Liang carefully formed the pill. At the precise moment, he placed the fruit into the furnace and immediately performed the Fire-Repelling Seal. The extreme heat of the Phoenix Spirit Divine Fire instantly refined the fire-repelling layer, sealing everything inside perfectly.

Soon, a batch of twenty perfect fruit-flavored Spirit-Concentration Pills emerged from the furnace.

Although it was his first time refining this way, he handled the entire process more effortlessly than Dan Lingzi. His higher cultivation level made controlling the fire easy, making the process look effortless.

Chu Liang took a slight breath and looked at Dan Lingzi. "Esteemed Senior, did I make any mistakes?"

"Uh..." Dan Lingzi's gaze froze momentarily. After clearing his throat, he lifted his head and said, "Not bad. There are no major flaws with your process. I'd say you have about seventy percent of my skill."

Chu Liang went along with the compliment, smiling and saying with a nod, "Having seventy percent of your skill is more than enough for me to navigate the martial world."

Dan Lingzi also smiled.

Deep down, he was reflecting on how the art of alchemy truly depended on talent. Even though he had spent years developing this Pill Fusion Technique, he still performed it nervously and sometimes failed. Yet, this Mount Shu disciple was so proficient on his first try... one really shouldn't compare.

Chu Liang not only demonstrated talent in the art of alchemy but he showed great social skills.

Indeed.

This boy has a promising future.

...

After leaving Dan Lingzi's home, Chu Liang headed to the Pavilion of Celestial Fate. They had arranged for him to meet a cultivator capable of capturing a Human-Faced Xiao.

Chu Liang arrived first, so the Pavilion of Celestial Fate sent a message to the other party and asked Chu Liang to wait in the quiet room.

Before long, someone pushed open the door with a bang.

Chu Liang looked up to see a girl standing at the door. She wore a pale yellow short blouse paired with a green high-waisted dress. She appeared to be about sixteen or seventeen years old, with fair skin and two high ponytails. Her bright, bell-like eyes scanned the room as she stood confidently with her hands on her hips.

Beside her stood a large black dog, its coat gleaming with a deep, uniform blackness. Its pupils were deep ink-black with a subtle hint of gray.

"Are you the one looking for a Human-Faced Xiao?" the girl asked directly. Her voice sounded crisp.

"Yes," Chu Liang answered with a nod.

"One thousand Vermillion-Bird coins, no bargaining!" declared the girl. "If you agree, I'll bring the Human-Faced Xiao to you tomorrow."

Chu Liang recalled that the price for a Human-Faced Xiao in the Hall of Ten Thousand Beasts was only eight hundred Vermillion-Bird coins, which was already a bit overpriced. However, specifying a target for capture was akin to a custom order, so a higher price was reasonable.

So he asked, "Miss, if you can disclose the location of the Human-Faced Xiao and I capture it myself, could the price be reduced?"

"No," the girl replied firmly, shaking her head. "It's a thousand. I will not accept anything less than that."

"In that case, I will still pay you a thousand Vermillion-Bird coins for the location. I will capture it myself," Chu Liang proposed again.

He insisted on capturing it himself, not to save money, but out of concern for any potential accidents during the capture. What if she accidentally killed the Human-Faced Xiao?

A live Human-Faced Xiao was invaluable to Chu Liang, whereas a dead one held no value at all.

"No," the girl reiterated, shaking her head. "I charge for the job, and since I'm taking your thousand coins, I must capture it myself and bring it to you."

Hearing this, Chu Liang could only smile.

She certainly had quite a character.

Chapter 339: If It Wasn't For the Pressures of Life

"It was at the nearby Boundary Marker Mountain of the Northern Regions. When I passed by yesterday, I heard villagers at the foot of the mountain saying that a Human-Faced Xiao has been causing trouble—killing livestock and even almost killing villagers. It is extremely ruthless and cunning.

"Last night, I ambushed it in the village to eliminate it, but this Human-Faced Xiao has already matured. It has a high level of cultivation and is extremely vigilant. The Human-Faced Xiao fled the village. I went after it, but it still managed to escape into the Boundary Marker Mountain. By then, it was already nighttime, so I didn't venture deep into the mountain, but Hua Hua remembers the Human-Faced Xiao's scent.

"Then I arrived in Taotie City just earlier and happened to hear that you're looking for a Human-Faced Xiao."

The young lady briefly recounted what she'd experienced.

Chu Liang had just received the news about the Human-Faced Xiao the day before. The villagers had probably just spread the news, and the Pavilion of Celestial Fate then immediately passed the

information to Chu Liang. That was how Chu Liang managed to have such a timely encounter with the young lady who had fought the Human-Faced Xiao.

Chu Liang glanced at the imposing large black dog behind the young lady and asked, "Is that Hua Hua?"

"Yes." The girl nodded. "I'm Ling'er, and this is Hua Hua."

Chu Liang smiled and said, "But it only has one color all over its body..."[1]

"Who said that?" The young lady, Miss Ling'er, huffed. "Hua Hua, stick out your tongue."

The black dog had a rather calm temperament. Instead of refusing the young lady's request, Hua Hua's eyes just showed a sense of helplessness and great affection toward her. It stuck out its scarlet tongue briefly to indulge the young lady's request and then immediately retracted it.

That showed that Hua Hua did not have just one color; it had two.

Chu Liang couldn't help but chuckle at that. "Haha."

Miss Ling'er thought for a moment and then added, "Don't be fooled by its all black fur. It's got many 'flowers'[2] in our hometown; it's intimate with many little female dogs—"

"Woof woof..." Hua Hua hurriedly barked softly.

It seemed to be saying... Please stop. That's enough.

After leaving Taotie City, Miss Ling'er climbed onto Hua Hua's back and then patted Chu Liang's shoulder.

She said, "Get on."

Hua Hua was a large dog, but it was ultimately still just a dog. With a teenage girl already sitting on its back, there wasn't much room left for Chu Liang to get on as well.

Seeing that, Chu Liang smiled and replied, "It's okay. I'll just follow you."

"Acting like you've got it all handled..." Miss Ling'er scoffed before turning away. "Well, up to you. I'll have Hua Hua fly slower."

With a swoosh, Hua Hua soared into the sky.

Once Chu Liang was up in the sky as well, he found that Miss Ling'er hadn't simply spoken those words out of courtesy. As soon as Hua Hua took off, it turned into a gust of black wind, flying at an unimaginable fast speed that an average fourth-realm cultivator would not be able to keep up with!

Fortunately, Chu Liang's sword-flying skills were far superior to that of cultivators at the same realm as him. He was able to follow Hua Hua on his sword at a steady pace.

After taking off, Miss Ling'er had intended to pat Hua Hua to have it slow down. However, she swept her divine sense over to Chu Liang and noticed he was following at a steady pace. Feeling quite surprised, Miss Ling'er didn't get Hua Hua to slow down in the end.

The Boundary Marker Mountain was not far from Taotie City; they arrived in a short time.

In ancient times, this place had been part of a battlefield, and humans had erected a monument there. It was considered one of Taotie City's outposts. Even after so many years, some ancient ruins and artifacts would occasionally be unearthed nearby. Nevertheless, most of them were worthless, so few people went there to search for treasures. It was totally unlike the ancient lands of the Southern Bastion Mountain, which attracted countless explorers every year like moths to a flame.

Hua Hua stopped at the mouth of a valley.

Miss Ling'er said, "This was where I lost track of the Human-Faced Xiao last night. From here, we can have Hua Hua lead the way as it follows the Human-Faced Xiao's trail."

Chu Liang replied, "Then I'll have to trouble you, Miss Ling'er."

The young lady waved off Chu Liang's courteous words and took out a pill. She fed the pill to Hua Hua, patted its head, and followed it, walking forward in large strides.

As she walked, Miss Ling'er grumbled, "I thought I was quite unlucky to encounter this Human-Faced Xiao. I put in a lot of effort, but I ended up failing to kill it, so I didn't receive a reward from the villagers either. But who knew that I would meet you the moment I returned to Taotie City? It seems my fate is tied to this creature."

Chu Liang suddenly asked curiously, "Miss Ling'er, why are you doing this job where you exorcize evil from places for others?"

He asked that because he didn't think the young lady was an unorthodox cultivator.

To put it simply, the Spirit-Energy Raising Pill that Miss Ling'er had fed to the dog was similar to the ones the Mount Shu Sect fed to Bai Ze. The reward for exorcizing one evil spirit for the villagers wouldn't be enough to buy one of those pills. This behavior didn't seem like that of someone from the martial community, who were known for their meticulous planning and careful handling of financial matters.

"Haaa..." The young lady sighed and rolled her eyes. "My father died early, my mother is bedridden, and my younger brother has just reached the age where he has to start going to school. If it wasn't for the pressures of life, who would want to do this?"

...

As they entered Boundary Marker Mountain through the mountain pass, Hua Hua's expression became cautious and fierce, its black eyes gleaming with cold light. Hua Hua picked up the scent of the Human-Faced Xiao and followed its trail.

Ordinary ghosts didn't have corporeal bodies and would sometimes disappear during the daytime, reappearing at night. The Human-Faced Xiao didn't have this issue though, as it was a rare ghost with a corporeal body and thus existed at all times.

However, those cunning Human-Faced Xiao wouldn't typically enter human settlements. This particular Human-Faced Xiao hiding in the Boundary Marker Mountain had dared to descend into the human village to steal livestock because it had already matured. When the villagers tried to stop it, it even injured a villager, almost killing them with one swipe of its claw.

Crack...

The Boundary Marker Mountain was overgrown with trees. It was to the extent that they blocked out the sun, making it very dark on the mountain. The ground was covered with twigs and dead grass. Each step that the two humans and one dog took was noisy, the dead plant matter crunching underfoot.

Yet, there were no sounds of insects or birds. There was a saying that this place had been a battlefield in the ancient past. To this day, it still exuded such an intense murderous aura that ordinary birds and beasts were unwilling to live here.

After walking for nearly a quarter of an hour, Hua Hua suddenly crouched down and let out a low growl toward a path up ahead that led deep into the mountain.

"Grrr..."

"Be careful. Hua Hua has found the target!" Miss Ling'er yelled.

Chu Liang had already spread out his divine sense, but he couldn't detect anything besides the dense yin qi.

While he was still feeling doubtful, the large black dog sprang forward! It looked like a streak of black lightning!

Whoosh—

Sand and stone suddenly flew up from the ground!

Before Chu Liang and Miss Ling'er could go after Hua Hua, a gale blasted out from the path with a wave of black qi, forcing them to keep their eyes closed! The wind was mixed with frigid yin qi that pierced like arrows!

"Miss Ling'er, be careful!"

Chu Liang immediately opened up the Green Leaf Umbrella in front of him. The sounds of the yin qi hitting the umbrella rang out incessantly.

"I'm fine. Go after Hua Hua!"

Miss Ling'er darted forward and raised the bracelet of five-colored ropes on her wrist. The ropes immediately turned into colorful clouds, surrounding her and blocking all the attacks hidden in the fierce wind.

With the Green Leaf Umbrella shielding him from the wind, Chu Liang was able to move faster, and he quickly caught up to Hua Hua. He went down that path, venturing deep into the mountain.

Then he saw a huge egg-shaped nest made of gathered leaves and twigs. It was quite wide and contained many of what seemed like bone fragments of the recently deceased. This was likely the Human-Faced Xiao's nest.

Just as Chu Liang stepped inside, he heard someone cry out, "Come save me!"

He turned to see Miss Ling'er sitting on the ground. There was a bleeding wound on her ankle.

Chu Liang's first reaction was not to approach but to ask a question.

"What happened to you?"

"Hua Hua has gone mad! It's being controlled by the Human-Faced Xiao!" Miss Ling'er shouted.

A beam of black light suddenly shot out from above the nest. It was the large black dog, Hua Hua!

Hua Hua charged out with a flurry of leaves and its mouth wide open. It was ferociously baring its teeth at Miss Ling'er!

It looked like Hua Hua was about to snap its owner in half with one bite!

Miss Ling'er hurriedly moved to avoid the attack, but she was too late. Hua Hua bit her thigh, and blood spurted out all over!

"Save me! Help me hold it down!" Miss Ling'er yelled.

Hua Hua let out a muffled growl as it bit Miss Ling'er repeatedly, seemingly determined to rip her apart!

Faced with a decision at this critical juncture, Chu Liang raised his hand, and a beam of golden light suddenly shot out from it!

Wham!

It was the Flying Brick Technique!

The Demon-Revealing Brick swiftly smashed into Miss Ling'er's head, making her bad situation even worse!

Black light poured out of her head, and Miss Ling'er instantly transformed into a gray large-headed Human-Faced Xiao!

The Human-Face Xiao howled in pain and cursed, "You wretched creature, I will never coexist with you under the same sky!"

It turned out that this Miss Ling'er had been a Human-Faced Xiao in disguise. The matured Human-Faced Xiao had the ability to change its form, making it hard to identify it. But unfortunately for the Human-Faced Xiao, it had encountered a highly skilled spirit dog! There was even someone who could throw bricks!

The real Miss Ling'er ran in and chased the Human-Faced Xiao. She raised her hand and shot three beams of silver light toward the Human-Faced Xiao.

Seeing that, the Human-Faced Xiao gritted its teeth and turned to flee.

Suddenly, there was the sound of flesh being ripped! The Human-Faced Xiao tore off its own leg!

Clang, clang, clang.

The three beams of silver light hit empty spots. The Human-Faced Xiao was extremely fast and disappeared into the forest in the blink of an eye!

At this moment, a beam of white sword qi broke through the air!

Slash—

It cleaved the Human-Faced Xiao in two with a single strike!

Behind the Human-Faced Xiao, Chu Liang deactivated the sword seal with full satisfaction.

He snorted coldly and scoffed, "You think you can escape?"

Chapter 340: Do None of You Fire-Wielders Have a Brain

After the golden imprint floated into his body, Chu Liang fulfilled his wish.

"I remember you preferring for it to be alive, but you killed it yourself, so no discount," the girl named Ling'er stepped forward and said.

She had only rushed over here because she remembered the requirement of this deal. Because she remembered Chu Liang's request to capture the Human-Faced Xiao alive, she hesitated to kill it, which gave the creature a chance to escape. After a pursuit outside, it circled back and unexpectedly ran into Chu Liang.

If it weren't for Hua Hua and Chu Liang's sharp senses, the Human-Faced Xiao might have hidden itself into the gust of black wind and escaped.

"No worries. I will pay the full amount," Chu Liang said with a smile.

He had gotten the imprint, which meant that he would be able to unbox another Large-Headed Doll. The rest did not matter to him.

With this, he took out a jade slip and tossed it to Ling'er.

"Spoken like a real man!" Miss Ling'er caught the jade slip in one hand.

As the two were about to leave, the big black dog's nose twitched, emitting a low growl.

"Awooo..."

"An enemy," Ling'er said as her eyes flashed.

Before they could react, the enemy moved with startling speed. In the next instant, a streak of fire surged towards them.

Boom——

A thunderous explosion shattered the air as a figure appeared. It was a robust young man clad in red brocade, with prominent brow bones and deep-set eyes. His cold, fierce gaze gleamed with malice, unmistakably revealing his sinister intent.

He exuded an arrogant aura that filled the space with an oppressive presence.

"I've finally found you," he chuckled darkly, fixing his gaze on Chu Liang as an evil smile crept across his face.

Upon sensing the malice intent, Chu Liang furrowed his brows and asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Yang Hong, the young master of the Inferno Devil Valley," the young man stated coldly. "You may not have heard my name before, but I will be infamous tomorrow... because I will kill you."

Upon hearing this, Chu Liang sighed inwardly and thought, Incredible... The very thing I fear almost always seems to happen.

After Chu Liang became famous through TheSeven Stars Gazette, Jiang Yuebai had specifically warned him that things would change, and that some people might intentionally approach him out of malice. Venerable Wen Yuan had also reminded him of this and even gave him a jade talisman to activate Shattering the Void for protection.

Such situations were all too common. Every prodigy in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten had faced sudden hostility during their path to greatness.

The reason was simple.

It was all because of fame.

In the world of immortality cultivators, the quickest path for an unknown individual to achieve fame was by killing someone well-known.

It was the same for Chu Liang. His path to fame followed two significant milestones. First, he defeated Xu Ziyang, and second, he slew Taowu. In both instances, he gained renown by surpassing a renowned prodigy and a famous vicious beast.

This was something all new prodigies had to go through. If they were targeted by those from the righteous path, it usually ended in a duel. If the rising prodigy lost, their opponent would use their fame to boost their own reputation.

If they were targeted by diabolical sects, it could escalate into a life-and-death situation.

Fights between diabolical sects and righteous prodigies had been happening since ancient times and never stopped, and Yang Hong was now involved in one of them.

"I began cultivating at six years old. After twenty years of rigorous training in the Inferno Devil Valley, I've mastered the Immortal Inferno Body. Now that I've emerged from my closed-door cultivation, I'm here to take your head," Yang Hong declared as he fixed his gaze upon Chu Liang, displaying such an arrogant attitude.

The Inferno Devil Valley was not a major force within the diabolical sects. Nonetheless, it was rather famous. Although this sect has few members, they valued quality over quantity.

This diabolical sect never recruited disciples and kept its headquarters hidden, possibly in a hidden realm. If none of its members showed cultivation aptitude, the sect would remain concealed. When a talented member emerged, they would appear and challenge others to duels, quickly gaining fame through their victories.

In the past, many of the top diabolical cultivators in the nine provinces were from the Inferno Devil Valley.

As for the Immortal Inferno Body...

This physical form was achieved through an art unique to the Inferno Devil Valley. Typically, arts and techniques only allowed for physical form attainment at the sixth realm. However, some arts allowed for quicker progress, allowing cultivation of this physical form as early as the fifth realm. The trade-off was an incomplete mastery of the five elements, necessitating focus on training only one element. Nonetheless, this approach offered a shortcut in one's cultivation journey.

In other words, the person facing him was at least a fifth-realm prodigy of a diabolical sect!

"Okay," Chu Liang nodded calmly, then added, "But I'm the one you're after. Others needn't be involved. I'd appreciate it if you allow the young lady to leave."

"No problem," Yang Hong replied with a wicked smile, "I need someone to spread the news."

How arrogant,

Chu Liang thought to himself.

The fact that he dared to let Miss Ling'er leave freely without worrying that she would call for backup showed that he was confident that he could kill Chu Liang before any backup could arrive.

Upon hearing this, Ling'er nodded. Without hesitation, she swiftly mounted the large black dog and departed like a gust of dark wind.

She left very swiftly.

After she left, Chu Liang asked, "I'm curious, though. How did you know where to find me?"

If the locations of Mount Shu disciples were easily known, they would have been hunted down long ago. The reason some Mount Shu prodigies' locations were known beforehand was because of that traitor within Mount Shu.

But now that the traitor was dead, Chu Liang was very curious as to how Yang Hong had found his location.

"Are you stalling?" Yang Hong sneered. "It doesn't matter if I tell you. Ever since you appeared in The Seven Stars Gazette, I've been watching you. I had people in Taotie City tracking your every move. They reported to me as soon as you showed up. It was only a matter of time before you came."

No wonder, Chu Liang nodded knowingly. If the other party was set on ambushing him, there would always be an opportunity.

The reason Yang Hong targeted Chu Liang was that he had all the characteristics of a stepping stone.

Firstly, he was very famous.

It was too shocking that he had slayed Taowu during the battle on Mount Shu. Among the cultivation prodigies of other sects within the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, none had achieved such feats. In terms of fame alone, Chu Liang had become as famous as top prodigies like Yang Shenlong and Jiang Yuebai.

Secondly, his strength was far weaker than his fame.

Everyone knew that Chu Liang used the Violet and Azure Twin Swords to slay Taowu. Without those swords, he was merely a fourth-realm cultivator. Yang Hong knew it was impossible for Chu Liang to take the Violet and Azure Twin Swords out of Mount Shu. If he had managed to take the swords with him, Yang Hong would not be the only one intercepting him here.

A tense silence fell, filled with hostility as both of their gazes sharpened.

Yang Hong's foundational qi surged into action, engulfing him in dark red flames instantly!

Chu Liang, on the other hand, flicked his hand, summoning a bluish-green soul. "Old Fei, it's time to work!"

"This again..." As soon as Old Fei appeared, he lifted his chin and glanced at Yang Hong, clearly taken aback. "Inferno Abyss Flame! It's most effective against souls. Why summon me for this opponent?"

"If it were easy to handle, I wouldn't have summoned you. Stand by and help me maintain the formation," Chu Liang replied swiftly.

In the span of this brief exchange, Yang Hong, engulfed in flames, had already drawn near!

If this was a simple close-combat fight, Chu Liang would not be afraid. However, as Old Fei had warned, this Inferno Abyss Flame could burn both the body and soul simultaneously, which was why it was exceptionally powerful. In fact, even a slight touch of this flame would be unbearable.

Immediately, Chu Liang summoned the Dustless Sword. With a clang, he unleashed the Thousand Swords technique, sending a storm of sword rain hurtling towards Yang Hong!

But his opponent made no attempt to dodge at all!

Hiss, hiss, hiss—

In an instant, hundreds of swordlights pierced through Yang Hong's fiery body. He made no attempt to dodge, allowing the swordlights to pass through, leaving holes wherever they struck.

In the blink of an eye, his entire body was covered with holes, yet no blood splattered out. Instead, sparks of fire flew out from each hole where the swordlights had passed through, and the wounds were immediately filled with flames again. It was as though no damage had been done at all!

Immortal Inferno Body!

Chu Liang then understood why this physical form had such a name.

This was not some camouflage or puppet technique, but a true transformation into the inferno Flame, capable of deflecting all techniques!

But understanding was futile at this moment. His attack had missed, and Yang Hong was rushing toward him, swinging a fist blazing with flames!

Bang—

Amidst the chaos, Chu Liang had no choice but to open the Green Leaf Umbrella to block the strike!

But the punch was truly fierce. Even though Chu Liang managed to block it, he was still sent flying dozens of zhang away. Though he wasn't injured, his arms were completely numb.

What a fierce punch!

No wonder this person was so arrogant! This person indeed had the right to be arrogant!

And Old Fei, who had already retreated several zhang away, now pointed at Yang Hong and declared, "The fire you wield is mere mortal fire!"

Whoosh—

Old Fei just used the Immortal Art: The Spoken Divine Law!

According to the rules of the Immortal Art: The Spoken Divine Law, anything affected by the law must not surpass the caster's strength. Otherwise, the spell would rebound on the caster. Thus, Old Fei's best course of action was to transform Yang Hong's powerful Inferno Abyss Flame into ordinary fire, significantly diminishing the threat.

When Yang Hong noticed the changes, he frowned and raised his hand toward Old Fei, unleashing a massive fireball!

Boom!

Fortunately, this flame was no longer the soul-restraining Inferno Abyss Flame, so Old Fei managed to dodge it. However, the intense foundational qi within the fireball still caused his ethereal form to waver.

As Old Fei stalled for time, Chu Liang sprang into action.

A swordlight flew towards Yang Hong, multiplying into a hundred beams mid-flight. These hundred beams of swordlight simultaneously traced a talismanic script in the air!

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh—

The silver light in the air coalesced into a continuous stream and swiftly descended.

Yang Hong still did not dodge, but his expression changed drastically the next second!

As the swordlight carrying talismanic scripts pierced his Immortal Inferno Body, it also brought a chilling effect that weakened the flames around him.

One, two, three... After dozens of swordlights, the flames around him were completely subdued!

This was not just a simple Hundred Swords Seal. Instead, it was the combination of the Talismanic Sword Seal and the Hundred Swords Seal—the Hundred-Character Talismanic Sword!

In the blink of an eye, a thin layer of frost had formed on Yang Hong's body, extinguishing the flames! If another wave of sword lights were to strike him, he would end up having as many holes as a sprinkler!

"How cunning!" Yang Hong cursed angrily as he forcefully lifted his hand and summoned a pillar of fire from underground!

As the pillar of fire shot up to the sky, it enveloped Yang Hong's body, pushing and destroying all the swordlights.

"Obviously, I need to use the type of divine skills that can counter your physical form. Even a child would know this. How is this cunning?" Chu Liang retorted with a sneer. "Do none of you fire-wielders have a brain?"

As he spoke, he and his four puppet clones had already surrounded Yang Hong and launched the Celestial Trap!

Boom—

A powerful vortex of foundational qi surged forward, compressing the fire pillar until it weakened, flickering like a candle in the wind!

"Hmph." Yang Hong showed no fear. Instead, he sneered and said, "Do you intend to compete with me in the vastness of the Sea of Qi?"

Bang!

Suddenly, the sky-piercing fire pillar stopped.

Then, limbs grew out of the pillar, following with a head.

In the blink of an eye, the pillar had transformed into a giant inferno devil!

This was similar to the Form of the Heavens and the Earth but the Inferno Devil Valley's version. With the addition of flames, the power had undoubtedly grown much stronger!

If Old Fei had not weakened Yang Hong's fire, this giant would have been composed of Inferno Abyss Flame, making it far more challenging to handle!

"Then let's do this!" Yang Hong's voice echoed from the heart of the giant.

At that moment, his towering figure, seven or eight zhang tall, loomed over the landscape like a terrifying god of devils. Suddenly, he stomped down with incredible speed!

The moment that the giant inferno devil appeared, Chu Liang and the four puppets were blasted away by the surging waves of qi. The puppets exploded into thin air, leaving only Chu Liang himself flying backward.

The opponent's divine ability was too powerful!

In the end, it was too hard for him to bridge that huge gap in cultivation between him and Yang Hong.

As the giant's foot was about to come crashing down, the sky above him suddenly turned red.

Is it time for me to use the life-saving talisman given to me by the sect leader? Already?

Chu Liang refused to accept defeat, but facing this life-threatening moment, he had no time to hesitate.

From the beginning, he had asked Miss Ling'er to leave with the plan that if he couldn't win, he could always escape.

Just as he was about to activate the talisman used for the technique, Shattering the Void, and escape, a terrifying pressure descended.

The sky, which had just turned red, suddenly darkened once more.

Another foot appeared directly above the foot that was about to stomp down on him.