

M. Slaying 361

Chapter 361: Commercial Advertisement

The undercover squad had unexpectedly transformed into a brigade of members from various immortal sects, a twist Chu Liang hadn't expected.

However, he, Luo Yao, and Pushan remained the core members. Not only had they been commended by the righteous forces to infiltrate the diabolical sect, but they were also under orders from the Violet Gold Marquess to infiltrate the White-Bone Hall. With their multiple identities, the three grew increasingly in sync with each other.

The operation assigned by Ghost Face was scheduled for ten days later. Everyone then agreed on a time to reconvene and returned home to prepare on their own. After all, everyone had their own matters to attend to, except for Ji Lingyu, whose primary task was escaping from home.

The second round of trials at the Great Astral Sect ended for now, with Yun Chaoxian winning largely due to his strong connections. However, the upcoming trials would be a test of personal abilities, and Chu Liang could no longer assist him.

As the guest helper for this trial, he had completed his duties and fulfilled his role.

With this matter resolved, Chu Liang returned alone to Silver Sword Peak.

Upon returning, he saw Lin Bei sighing deeply.

"Business at Berry Wonderland has been quite bad since Xiaoyu'er left," Lin Bei complained.

Not every visitor to Berry Wonderland came solely for Liu Xiaoyu'er, but the koi's blessing was a major part of the Berry Wonderland experience. People obviously wanted to experience this unique aspect of the visit. If they were informed that Xiaoyu'er would return in a few days, they would simply come back then. There was no pressing need to visit Berry Wonderland immediately.

As a result, the number of visitors at Berry Wonderland has plummeted recently.

"Well, there's nothing we can do about it," Chu Liang said with a sigh.

He was genuinely happy for Xiaoyu'er to reunite with her sister and would never pressure her to return to work. After all, Chu Liang was a person with a conscience.

Instead, he considered counting these days as part of Xiaoyu'er's annual leave or as compensatory time off that she would need to make up later. Of course, this was just a joke.

Xiaoyu'er helped out because of her kind heart and because she considered Silver Sword Peak her home. Chu Liang knew he couldn't force her to do anything.

Moreover, if the entire park couldn't function when one person was absent, it meant that the business model was unhealthy. It would then be better for the business to use this opportunity to develop alternative activities or explore opportunities in other industries.

In addition, there were only two creatures on Silver Sword Peak, making it impossible for them to perform in a show at Berry Wonderland. If he left Mount Shu riding the Golden-Furred Hou, Berry Wonderland would lose its security guard. If Xiaoyu'er went to visit relatives, the park would be without its mascot.

Ultimately, the root problem was a lack of manpower.

In addition, the Baize youngling had been having so much fun at Berry Wonderland lately. Due to its young age, it was oblivious to everything. However, if its mother—an existence that had reached the pinnacle of the eighth realm and was potentially on the verge of entering the ninth realm—woke up and found her child working on Silver Sword Peak as a flying-disc catcher, how would she feel?

Chu Liang didn't even dare to imagine.

Fortunately, Berry Wonderland had successfully diverted traffic to Red Cotton Peak, making this period the most prosperous and bustling that Mount Shu had ever seen. Recently, many tourists were drawn to the area, and the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect who had set up stalls there reaped the benefits.

However, the merchants on Red Cotton Peak were still operating on a small scale, with limited goods to offer. Typically, their trade was confined to minor exchanges among disciples.

It was still too challenging for these stalls to handle the sudden influx of visitors. Those tourists who took a short stroll through the Red Cotton Market would quickly find it lacking in variety and excitement.

This created an urgent need for merchants from Taotie City to set up stores on Red Cotton Peak. However, Chu Liang needed to carefully plan how to attract them to the area.

After worrying about these issues, Chu Liang went to the Hall of Conservation to find ancient books and look up information on the Dragon God's throne.

Unfortunately, there was very little recorded about it in the texts.

After all, the Dragon God's throne existed in ancient times. In fact, there weren't many detailed records about the Dragon God either.

Occasionally, the texts mentioned that the Dragon God once burned the Sky-Supporting Pillar and forged the refined bronze into a supreme throne. From this throne, the Dragon God reigned over the nine provinces and four seas, with endless lands submitting in worship.

But there was no mention of the kind of power that this throne held.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang was just curious. All he could do was explore and test it out in the future.

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The next day, another visitor arrived at Silver Sword Peak.

"Miss Xiaohan?"

Chu Liang was slightly surprised by the visit.

It was Zhang Xiaohan, an outstanding disciple from the Wind-Catching Hall of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

Previously, Chu Liang had written two short stories to promote his berries, which Zhang Xiaohan had published. Without her help, Berry Wonderland wouldn't have become so popular. However, that was the extent of their interaction.

He hadn't done anything noteworthy recently, so why would someone from the Wind-Catching Hall come to see him?

"Young Hero Chu," Zhang Xiaohan smiled, "I'm here because I need a favor."

After listening to her explanation, Chu Liang finally understood the situation.

It turned out that his stories "The Legend of the Berries" and "Meng Jiangnu" had caused a huge sensation after they were published in The Seven Stars Gazette. The Celestial Pivot Pavilion had even created a bi-monthly publication for Zhang Xiaohan because of the popularity of these stories.

Although the Celestial Pivot Pavilion managed to get almost every cultivator to own an edition of The Seven Stars Gazette

, its reach among the ordinary people of the Nine Provinces was still limited. While the magazine was known by all, most commoners only heard about it in passing, finding the world of cultivation too distant and irrelevant. Unless the news was particularly interesting, they wouldn't pay much attention.

Therefore, the Celestial Pivot Pavilion had been working to make The Seven Stars Gazette more engaging, aiming to promote it across the nine provinces. The start of the "Uncommon Tales of the Martial World" was part of this effort. While it had some success, it hadn't reached the desired impact.

Zhang Xiaohan's bi-monthly publication, however, unexpectedly caused a sensation. While it was merely well-received among cultivators, it became very popular among commoners.

The high-ranking members of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion took this matter seriously. They promptly instructed Zhang Xiaohan to make the bi-monthly publication a regular feature, appointing her as the exclusive writer for the series of stories.

However, when Zhang Xiaohan wrote a story herself, its popularity fell short compared to the previous ones. Unlike Chu Liang's two stories, her creation didn't capture as much attention.

"I've been thinking, Young Hero Chu. Deities, demons, ghosts, and romance were the themes of your stories and these themes might have been the reason why people loved your stories," Zhang Xiaohan said. She frowned and continued, "I couldn't quite capture that same appeal. Can you write more stories for us? The Celestial Pivot Pavilion will pay you."

Chu Liang then understood why she had come to visit him. She was here to commission him for more stories.

When he wrote the stories, his only intention was to promote the berries, so he used a few folk tales he remembered without much thought.

Hearing Zhang Xiaohan's words, Chu Liang realized something about these stories—It was indeed no easy task to write a popular story.

First, the story had to be simple as not everyone would appreciate overly complex plots. Then, the key point of the story needed to be captivating and emotionally moving.

Meeting all three criteria simultaneously was no simple task.

To write these stories, Chu Liang relied on the works of the writers who came before him.

After a moment of thought, he said slowly, "We are friends, after all. Since you have this request, I won't refuse. There's no need to mention payment. But..." he paused before continuing, "I happen to need some help too. I want to organize a large market on the Red Cotton Peak on Mount Shu and hope to attract some merchants to set up stalls there. I am wondering if you can publish a short announcement for me on The Seven Stars Gazette."

Zhang Xiaohan thought for a moment and agreed, "If it's just a short announcement, that should be fine."

Previously, The Seven Stars Gazette had never considered doing commercial advertising. Chu Liang was the first to make such a request. However, after a moment of contemplation, Zhang Xiaohan realized that a short notice wouldn't take up much space. She deemed this something she could decide on her own.

"Thank you, Miss Xiaohan," Chu Liang smiled. "As for the story you need, I have one that features deities, demons, ghosts, and romance..."

"Legend has it that in ancient times, there was a young man who planted berries and everyone called him the Berry Boy."

"This Berry Boy has an old yellow ox. One day, the old yellow ox suddenly started talking..."

Chapter 362: Sword Emperor of the West Sea

Gurgle, gurgle.

The underground magma flowed like boiling red oil, occasionally bubbling up with one or two gloomy bubbles, exuding an aura of destruction.

Suddenly, there was a splash.

A scarlet-black fin, sharp like a blade, sliced through the surface of the magma, moving forward along the scorching river.

Could there be traces of life in the deepest areas of the magma inside this volcanic cave?

And that was not the end of it. As the black fin moved forward, within the expansive mountain belly, there were signs of construction made by knives and axes. The further in it went, the more exquisite it became, until it reached a grand scarlet palace deep inside!

A large plaque with three characters hung in front of the palace: "Inferno Devil Valley."

This eerie, dark, and mysteriously solemn hall looked like the domain of devils at first glance, but it was now draped in white mourning cloth, carrying a hint of sorrow.

Faint sounds of women weeping occasionally came from within.

In front of the white mourning hall, a weeping woman led the mourners. Beside her sat a middle-aged man dressed in black robes and a dark crown. His expression was solemn and his brows furrowed with grief.

After a long while, he grunted, "Stop crying, it sounds annoying."

"Today is the seventh day since Hong'er passed away. Is it wrong for me to cry?" the woman sobbed. "You, as his father, can't avenge him. As his mother, if I don't weep, how heartbroken will Hong'er be when he comes back and sees this..."[1]

"If his soul really does come back, I'll refine it so he can be by your side forever," the middle-aged man said irritably.

"Yang Heng! What nonsense are you talking about!" the woman shouted as she began to hit him.

The middle-aged man, feeling helpless, abruptly stood up and walked out of the hall. The guards outside saw this and immediately lowered their heads, not daring to speak.

This man was Yang Heng, the current leader of the diabolical sect known as Inferno Devil Valley.

A few days ago, Yang Hong, Yang Heng's son and the one he had high hopes for, went to assassinate Chu Liang. Yang Hong never returned, and the people of Inferno Devil Valley assumed he was killed by Chu Liang, as they did not know the details.

But since Chu Liang was a disciple of Mount Shu, Yang Heng did not dare to go there to seek revenge. Instead, he issued a bounty in the criminal world, but it had yet to yield any results in the past few days.

Since childhood, Yang Heng had designated his most talented son as the young master of Inferno Devil Valley, investing all his resources into nurturing him. Now, on Yang Hong's first venture out, just as he was about to make a name for himself, he suddenly met with disaster, and even the members in the outer halls of Inferno Devil Valley were all eliminated. How could he possibly feel good about this?

However, as the leader of Inferno Devil Valley, he had to prioritize the bigger picture. He could not be impulsive. No matter how intense the pain of losing his son, he had to endure it.

Now, having paid a high price to place a bounty on Chu Liang, he believed that Chu Liang's days would certainly be numbered.

Just as he was thinking this, he saw a black shark with red eyes leap out of the magma river ahead. The demonic beast jumped up and spat a beam of light onto the shore before twisting its body and disappearing back into the magma.

Yang Heng raised his hand, and the green light flew into his palm.

It turned out to be a jade booklet.

It was the Seven Stars Gazette of this month.

Yang Heng opened the gazette, intending to read it to relieve his boredom. As he flipped through it, his expression suddenly tightened.

It turned out that the first entry in the Uncommon Tales of the Martial World read as follows:

"The recruitment event at Red Cotton Peak of Mount Shu Sect is currently in full swing, with all matters being handled solely by Chu Liang of Silver Sword Peak. Any immortal sects or fellow Daoists interested in joining can contact him. This is a unique opportunity. Seize this chance while it lasts."

Not only was Chu Liang not suffering, but he was even thriving.

"Hmph!" Yang Heng spat, throwing the jade booklet into the magma. His teeth clenched in anger as he muttered, "Chu Liang..."

...

"Achoo!"

Chu Liang rubbed his nose, casually fed a berry to the white crane that had just landed, and sent it on its way.

He then picked up this month's Seven Stars Gazette and began to read.

Last month's Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures featured no updates on new enchanted tools, only minor ranking changes.

The established rankings of enchanted tools could still change. They were adjusted based on increased power, displayed battle achievements, or other reasons, with each adjustment rigorously evaluated by the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

New enchanted tools would usually go through such adjustments. The rankings of those that have been listed for many years wouldn't change too much.

A few months ago, Taotie City successfully forged a legendary artifact called Golden Wings That Brush Against the Clouds, which initially ranked ninety-seventh. Over the past few months, Taotie City has tested it against other top-ranked legendary artifacts.

Just the day before yesterday, in a competition of precious artifacts, it won against the Sea King Sect's Cloudcrest Dragon Banner, which was ranked ninety-third.

As a result, the Celestial Pivot Pavilion decided to elevate the ranking of the Golden Wings That Brush Against the Clouds to ninety-third place, causing the Cloudcrest Dragon Banner to drop one rank and shifting the subsequent ranks accordingly.

Every new legendary artifact on the list would go through such multiple adjustments to finally find its suitable final position.

Next, he flipped to the section of the "Chronicles of the Nine Provinces."

The first major event featured on the Chronicles of the Nine Provinces was the imperial court's manhunt for the remnants of the Celestial Charm Sect.

The rebellion of the Celestial Charm Sect years ago caused huge losses for the imperial court. Even now, no one dared to speak about what exactly happened. Everyone just knew that the imperial court considered the Celestial Charm Sect as evil as snakes. After the battle at Mount Shu, Lu Chengchou was found to have ties to the Celestial Charm Sect, prompting the imperial court to launch its most extensive search ever to capture him.

This implicated Young Noble Xunyang, who had taken Lu Chengchou in. Both of them were classified as Heaven-Class Imperial Traitors and relentlessly hunted throughout the nine provinces.

This was a period of chaos. The widespread panic caused by the news of the return of the demon god had just begun to calm down. But now, there was news of the Celestial Charm Sect reappearing.

Chu Liang couldn't help but think of Huo Tianya, a member of the Celestial Charm Sect. These people, with their high cultivation levels, gathered in the shadows to stir up trouble. Their presence was truly intimidating.

Fortunately, the imperial court and the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten paid enough attention to these matters.

The second major news story was the announcement of the election result for the chief of the Four Seas Whale Gang.

With the disappearance of Xu Bashan, Jiang Shenting, the vice-chief in charge of the Eastern Whale Division, unsurprisingly won the election for the position of chief. The inauguration ceremony would soon be held, and Jiang Shenting was currently basking in the limelight.

As for the former chief who had been missing for days, the Four Seas Whale Gang claimed they were still searching for him. However, the truth was that only Xu Hongqiu and a few loyal followers of Xu Bashan were actually making any effort.

As the saying goes, "When the person is gone, the tea cools.[2]" With the fate of the former chief uncertain, most people thought it better to focus on currying favor with the current chief.

With hundreds of thousands of members and control over waterway transport across the land, the Four Seas Whale Gang was the largest gang in the land of the nine provinces. This election of chief position in the Four Seas Whale Gang could even impact the nation and the livelihood of the people. The Celestial Pivot Pavilion provided comprehensive coverage from start to finish.

But this event had finally come to a close.

The third news story was about Mount Shu's successful retrieval of the Demon-Subduing Pestle.

If this had been the only event mentioned, it wouldn't have taken up much space in the papers. However, it was clear that someone from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion was present, witnessing the

auction's proceedings. The strategic maneuvers of the various immortal sects and Mount Shu's final tactic to win the bidding were described in detail and with great excitement.

Chu Liang's bid at that critical moment was seen as a clever move planned by the leaders of the Mount Shu Sect and was praised as a classic tactic.

The fourth news was the re-entry of the Sword Emperor of the West Sea into the land of the nine provinces.

In the West Sea, there was an island called the Sword-Hanging Kingdom. The people there were obsessed with swords and took great pride in forging and practicing with them. The Yu Dynasty had good relations with the Sword-Hanging Kingdom; in fact, even the imperial swordsmith, Baili Tong, came from this island.

The king of the Sword-Hanging Kingdom was titled the Sword Emperor.

Fifty years ago, the new Sword Emperor of the West Sea reached major perfection in the Dao of the Sword, reaching the eighth realm and declaring himself invincible. He traveled to the land of the Yu Dynasty and challenged the top sword cultivators of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten in the capital.

In the end, he was defeated by Sword Saint Li Ba, who was the leader of the Endless Sword Sect at the time.

Despite his defeat, the West Sea Sword Emperor was pleased with the fight and returned to the Sword-Hanging Kingdom for closed-door cultivation, promising to return another day.

Sword Saint Li Ba also seemed to gain something from this encounter. After returning, he passed the position of sect leader to his son, Li Jiu, and became the Supreme Elder, entering closed-door cultivation himself.

Since then, fifty years had passed and none had seen the face of the one who stood at the pinnacle of the Dao of the Sword during this time.

But now, the Sword Emperor of the West Sea had come to the capital of Yu and visited the emperor of the Yu Dynasty. It was highly likely that the Sword Emperor had achieved a breakthrough.

Speculation that he might challenge the Sword Saint of the Nine Provinces again stirred widespread anticipation.

However, the writers at the Celestial Pivot Pavilion speculated that this battle, while likely to occur, would probably be scheduled for the Assembly of Immortal Sects next year.

After all, every year at the opening of the Assembly of Immortal Sects, there were duels between powerful cultivators. These duels served as a warm-up and were meant to inspire new talents to cultivate diligently. If this year's duel coincided with the rematch of those at the pinnacle of the Dao of the Sword, it would be perfect.

Chu Liang was naturally looking forward to this duel between the sword cultivators at the Heavenly Origin Realm.

However, their sparring would certainly be restrained and lack hostility, falling short of the intensity seen in the legendary battle of artifacts that recently took place at Mount Shu.

If it were a real life-and-death battle, there would be no suspense, as the Sword Saint would surely win.

Chu Liang had met Old Li Ba of the Endless Sword Sect.

That old man didn't appear to have the demeanor of a Sword Saint. If he struggled during the fight, he could simply summon the Chunyang Ancient Sword, ranked fifth in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures, from thousands of li away.

How could the Sword Emperor of the West Sea compete with that?

Chapter 363: If You Have The Guts, Storm Into Silver Sword Peak.

The latest issue of the Chronicles of the Nine Provinces didn't feature any major events, but it still had some rather exciting news that drew a decent amount of interest.

One of the articles was on the theft of the Baxia Dual Rings from the Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor and how its retrieval had been used as a test for the Great Astral Sect's trial. However, the article was quite short, and it had mainly mentioned the four Great Astral Sect disciples.

Chu Liang and the others who weren't from the Great Astral Sect had contributed significantly to the retrieval of the Baxia Dual Rings. Nevertheless, as the helpers, they had been destined to be supporting characters in the article right from the start.

Then Chu Liang eagerly flipped to the "Uncommon Tales of the Martial World" section. He was not disappointed.

As soon as he got to the right page, the first line on the page was the recruitment announcement for Red Cotton Peak. It seemed that Zhang Xiaohan was someone who kept her word.

Chu Liang believed that stores in the immortal sects all over the nine provinces and in the world of immortality cultivators in general would now be aware of the recruitment. It didn't matter if they weren't interested; it was enough that they knew about it.

Compared to the serious news in the "Chronicles of the Nine Provinces," the news in "The Uncommon Tales of the Martial World" was much more relaxed. The second piece of news in "The Uncommon Tales of the Martial World" made Chu Liang chuckle.

The Thunderbolt Stronghold had commissioned the Celestial Pivot Pavilion to put out a missing person notice. The notice stated that Huang Ling'er, the daughter of the Thunderbolt Stronghold's lord, had run away from home. Anyone who could provide information that could lead them to finding her and bringing her home would be generously rewarded.

Huang Ling'er was a pretty decent young lady, but it was unfortunate that the lord of the Thunderbolt Stronghold was her father. He was often mentioned in the gazette due to his involvement in some strange matters.

It was quite depressing just thinking about it. How would Huang Ling'er fare in the world of immortality cultivators in the future?

The next piece of news was a widely circulated rumor that Chancellor Su Qian had petitioned the emperor to make Shen Qingyan, a disciple of the South Melody Conservatory, the crown prince's imperial consort.

News like this was normally undisclosed to the public until the imperial court had finalized the decision, so the gazette only referred to it as a rumor. However, the rumor had already spread wide across the dynasty, and many of the cabinet ministers did not refute it.

The emperor had yet to give his approval, but considering Su Qian's position and the historical precedents, it was likely that this petition had been made at the emperor's behest. After all, as the chancellor of the imperial court, Su Qian had no reason to associate himself with a musician from the South Melody Conservatory; there was simply no reason for him to be her matchmaker.

It seemed that this information had been leaked so that they could see how it would be received by the imperial court and the common people. There had been precedents of the imperial family marrying disciples from the South Melody Conservatory, but it was an unprecedented matter for a crown prince to take a core disciple from the South Melody Conservatory as his consort.

It was important to note that whoever became the crown princess would very likely become the empress in the future!

The musicians from the South Melody Conservatory were public figures. The conservatory's core disciples toured all over the nine provinces and were always in the spotlight. Having someone like that as the crown princess might cause some negative reactions, so the imperial court and the public were now being observed to see if that was indeed the case. If public opinion was favorable, the petition might be put on the agenda for the imperial court soon.

While thinking about this matter, Chu Liang realized he had already met three of the South Melody Conservatory's four core disciples. The remaining core disciple he had yet to meet was the young lady mentioned in the article—Miss Shen.

After the section on "The Uncommon Tales of the Martial World," it was Zhang Xiaohan's bi-monthly release.

Following the successful tales of Madam Bai and Meng Jiangnu, Zhang Xiaohan's original stories weren't well received. Nevertheless, she wouldn't give up just because of one failure.

The story that was released this time was the tale of Berry Boy and Weaver Girl. Chu Liang just changed Cowherd to Berry Boy to fit his berry stuff as usual.. The public embraced it with great passion.

Chu Liang had told Zhang Xiaohan a very detailed tale, and she had recounted it for the readers of the gazette.

It started with Berry Boy stealing Weaver Girl's clothes, which she'd left on the riverbank while she bathed in the river. That led to Weaver Girl having no choice but to marry^[2] Berry Boy, a man of a

lower social status[3]. Weaver Girl helped Berry Boy overcome many difficulties, and they went on to have a happy life together.

However, there was a plot twist. The Queen Mother[4] descended and dispatched celestial soldiers to forcefully take Weaver Girl back to the Heavenly Palace. She then used a silver hairpin to rip through the sky, creating the Milky Way to separate Berry Boy and Weaver Girl forever.

The first half of the story ended abruptly at this point.

The readers shook their fists angrily and scolded the author, calling the author a swindler for stopping at such a cliffhanger! They would have to wait at least half a month to read the rest of the tale.

How despicable!

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A few days later, the tale of Berry Boy and Weaver Girl had already gained significant traction. As Chu Liang walked the streets of Taotie City, he heard passersby discussing the tale, and he couldn't help but smile.

Chu Liang was in Taotie City to finalize the first batch of merchants who would open shops on Red Cotton Peak, including several pill shops from Precious Pill Pavilion. These merchants had good relations with Chu Liang and the Mount Shu Sect, so the process went smoothly. They finished discussing the rough details of the arrangement in just half a day.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang had spent quite a long time in Taotie City, so it was already evening. He led Big Head through the main street of Taotie City and took off for Mount Shu. The Golden-Furred Hou transformed into a golden whirlwind and flew speedily through the sky.

Suddenly, a ball of fire descended from the sky!

Whoosh.

"Watch out!" Chu Liang shouted.

The Golden-Furred Hou was now a sixth-level beast, so its reaction was, of course, not slower than Chu Liang's. It immediately flipped over in midair to dodge the attack.

Boom!

The projectile turned out to be an extremely powerful blazing feather-fletched arrow. It struck the ground, blasting half of a mountain peak to pieces.

A chill ran down Chu Liang's spine. He didn't even want to think about what would happen if he had gotten hit by that.

Looking around, he realized that a group of people were surrounding him in midair.

The leader of the group was a middle-aged man in black silk robes and a black tall hat[5]. He was staring at Chu Liang with a dark expression. It appeared that he harbored a deep hatred for Chu Liang.

The other four members of the group were dressed in full-body armor and covered in flames, leaving their faces indistinguishable.

Sensing the middle-aged man's unique blazing aura, Chu Liang quickly recognized it as the Inferno Abyss Flames! These people were from the Inferno Devil Valley.

"Haaa..." Chu Liang sighed softly. "I knew you would come sooner or later."

"It seems you've figured out who I am." The middle-aged man snorted coldly. "I'm Yang Heng, the lord of the Inferno Devil Valley. Dying at my hands won't disgrace your status as a prodigy."

Chu Liang said helplessly, "It was your son who came after me first without any rhyme or reason, not the other way around. You can't blame me for that, right?"

"If you had just let him kill you peacefully, we obviously wouldn't blame you."[6]

With his eyes locked on Chu Liang, Yang Heng flipped his hand over and gathered another ball of Inferno Abyss Flames.

Yang Heng was at the pinnacle of the sixth realm, so the flames he controlled were a hundred times stronger than Yang Hong's[7] had been!

Despite facing a much stronger enemy, Chu Liang didn't panic. Instead, he gave a slight shrug. "What does intercepting me here prove? If you have the guts, storm into Silver Sword Peak instead."

If it were on Mount Shu, Chu Liang wouldn't fear the middle-aged man even if they were to fight one-on-one. After all, Chu Liang would have the assistance of the Violet and Azure Twin Swords.

Nonetheless, Yang Heng didn't bother continuing this pointless conversation.

He yelled, "Prepare to die!"

The fireball in his right hand transformed into a long spear, and he hurled it toward Chu Liang with the speed and momentum of a collapsing mountain!

Boom!

However, the blazing spear exploded right in front of Chu Liang!

Yang Heng now looked alarmed.

The smoke soon cleared, revealing that there was another person present. It was a woman. Her tall figure was highlighted by her bosom, which resembled a pair of full moons, and the pair of blazing crimson-gold wings that stretched out behind her.

Yang Heng had never seen her before, but he recognized the Samadhi True Fire and knew that this woman was the one who had wiped out all of the Inferno Devil Valley's outer halls!

She was one of the Three Problems of Mount Shu, runner-up of the Wine-God Contest, and the peak master of Silver Sword Peak—Di Nufeng!

All official members of the Mount Shu Sect's Silver Sword Peak were now present![7]

"So, you're the small fry who keeps targeting my disciple..." Di Nufeng said as she stared languidly at Yang Heng, looking rather uninterested.

Famous and powerful diabolical cultivators were merely small fry in her eyes.

Yang Heng didn't dare retort. Trembling, he asked, "How did you get here so quickly? This place is so far from Mount Shu... A seventh-realm Eminent One couldn't have possibly followed this person all day long just to protect him..."

Yang Heng had been prepared for Chu Liang to have some life-saving enchanted tool that he could use to escape. However, Yang Heng hadn't expected that Chu Liang wouldn't even need a way to save himself; it was Yang Heng who needed to do that!

Di Nufeng nodded. "That's exactly the case."

Yang Heng was stunned. "Huh?"

Chu Liang couldn't help but grin.

He had been well prepared for his trip to Taotie City. It was all thanks to Yang Hong having previously planted spies in Taotie City, waiting to tail and ambush Chu Liang as soon as he appeared.

This time, knowing he would be arriving in the city with great fanfare, Chu Liang predicted what the Inferno Devil Valley would do. If they wanted to kill him, they would likely use the same trick! So, when Chu Liang set off for Taotie City, he asked his teacher to follow him covertly!

If Chu Liang's teacher were a normal seventh-realm Eminent One, it would indeed be unlikely for them to do such a thing. Most cultivators at the Dao Attainment Realm were racing against time, preferring to spend every day in closed-door cultivation to pursue the Great Dao. Moreover, they typically held high positions in their sects and had many important affairs to manage.

The more common approach that most Eminent Ones would take when they had a disciple that might get attacked on a trip outside the sect was to give them a life-saving enchanted tool. They wouldn't be so considerate as to accompany their disciple to protect them in person.

Nevertheless, that only applied to seventh-realm Eminent Ones who had proper responsibilities in their sect. There were some Eminent Ones who didn't focus much at all on cultivation or the matters of their sect. In fact, their daily tasks might just be drinking wine, reading picture books, and patrolling their fruit gardens...

Chu Liang thought, You should've known... my teacher is Di Nufeng!

The divine light in Yang Heng's eyes went out. The Samadhi True Fire was something that made cultivators of the Inferno Abyss Flames feel a mighty and overwhelming pressure—an instinctual fear that ran down to the bone.

Furthermore, Di Nufeng's divine fire didn't just surpass Yang Heng's in quality but in quantity as well. Di Nufeng would undoubtedly overpower him.

Yang Heng froze for a moment. Then he swiftly turned around and fled as a beam of fire!

He fled without hesitation!

What about his deep hatred for Chu Liang over his son's death?

There was none!

"Trying to run?" Di Nufeng finally revealed a sinister grin. "Go ahead. Run. The longer you run, the longer you live in fear. The more afraid you become, the more excited I get! Let's see where you can run to in the nine provinces and four seas!"

Di Nufeng turned into a beam of fire as well and chased after Yang Heng!

The dark beam of fire that was Yang Heng seemed to have escaped beyond the horizon, but once the crimson-gold fire that was Di Nufeng went after it, it was swiftly brought back within Chu Liang's sights!

The poor lord of the Inferno Devil Valley was totally unable to escape Di Nufeng's clutches!

Chu Liang smiled wryly at the sight.

It would be hard for anyone watching this scene to say for certain who the diabolical cultivator was.

Chapter 364: Wine-Jar Monsters

The lord of the Inferno Devil Valley left this world peacefully.

...

Previously...

While both wielded fire, Di Nufeng utterly overpowered Yang Heng in every way—power, speed, and strength. It was a hopelessly one-sided battle. His only option was to flee and buy himself some time, hoping to repent before the inevitable end.

Why did I provoke her in the first place? Yang Heng thought.

Meanwhile, Chu Liang and the four Inferno Devil Valley disciples, their bodies cloaked in flames, stood their ground.

These diabolical cultivators, wearing the blazing Inferno Devil Armor, were well-known within their sect and were called Inferno Devil Armored Warriors. The entire Inferno Devil Valley had only a few dozen of these warriors, and the four with Yang Heng were among the best.

The four diabolical cultivators were all at the fifth realm of cultivation.

Logically, Chu Liang, at the fourth realm, should have been like a sheep among wolves facing them. However, Di Nufeng was able to leave him behind and confidently pursue the leader of the Inferno Devil Valley because Chu Liang had assured her, "Esteemed Teacher, I will be fine. Please chase after him without worry."

After Di Nufeng left, the four diabolical cultivators had no intention of fighting, uncertain when that monster might return. They were more concerned with escaping.

But it was Chu Liang who wouldn't let them go.

Just as the four Inferno Devil Armored Warriors were preparing to escape using their stealth-traversal techniques, they heard Chu Liang shout, "You think you can just leave after showing up here?"

Indeed, Chu Liang was ready to take on these four fifth-level diabolical cultivators by himself!

The gap between individuals at the fifth realm could be greater than the difference between a human and a hou.

If Yang Hong was a prodigy at the fifth realm, then these four were merely elites. The gap was immense.

And Chu Liang had just refined his Geng Metal foundational qi and was eager to find someone to test it on!

Bang—

With a thunderous explosion echoing through the air, Chu Liang shouted, "Old Fei! Keep them here!"

In that instant, Old Fei's ethereal blue figure materialized behind him. From a distance, he raised a finger and declared, "Within a hundred zhang, no one shall fly!"

Whoosh—

A ripple-like breeze swept across the area.

The Inferno Devil Armored Warriors, who were about to escape into the sky, were suddenly grounded by a binding spell. While they were still in shock, Chu Liang had already reached them!

With the Dustless Sword in hand, the young man before them radiated a golden light. A chilling aura entwined the blade as he struck down fiercely!

With his physique enhanced by the Secret Dragon Blood Technique, Chu Liang crossed a hundred zhang in a single step, arriving in an instant!

As the Inferno Devil Armored Warrior was targeted, inferno flames were conjured into a shield of fire to block the attack. Sizzle—

But a sharp edge was hidden within the coldness. When the strike shattered the fire shield, Chu Liang flipped his wrist and struck again, instantly piercing through the sturdy armor!

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh—"

This Inferno Devil Armor warrior hadn't yet mastered the Immortal Inferno Body and was immediately pierced through the chest by the sword. In his final moments, he channeled all his flames through the sword towards Chu Liang, hoping to take him down too!

But Chu Liang's body shone with golden light! He had already mastered the fifth-realm Metallic Body and wielded the power of the Jiuli Soul Armor.

The entire attack's damage was reduced by more than half, allowing Chu Liang to endure the assault without a scratch.

Even in death, the Inferno Devil Armored Warrior couldn't understand how a fourth-realm cultivator could possess such immense strength!

This was the first time Chu Liang truly realized how powerful this strength was. This was the power of the Geng Metal foundational qi!

Previously, he lost so badly to Yang Hong because Yang Hong not only possessed the Ding Fire foundational qi of a fifth-realm cultivator, but he had also used this Ding Fire foundational qi to master the Immortal Inferno Body, a technique usually mastered by those at the sixth realm.

The immense difference in the quality of their foundational qi caused Chu Liang to collapse at the first touch. It was too difficult for him to fight back.

But the situation has changed.

With the Colorful Doll now in his possession, Chu Liang tapped into the first level of the Secret Reservoir of Five Elements in the Five-Elements Puppet. The Geng Metal foundational qi generated from its qi circulation continually flowed into his body, allowing him to possess the quality of fifth-realm foundational qi in advance!

An attack performed with the Geng Metal foundational qi was invincible, while defense using the Geng Metal foundational qi would forge a Metallic Body. The power of the Geng Metal foundational qi was evident from the brief exchange moments ago.

The moves for offense and defense showcased the sharpness and resilience of the Geng Metal foundational qi!

When the other three Inferno Devil Armored Warriors saw this, they felt even more determined to escape.

But then, they heard a furious roar!

Aoooooooo—

The sixth-realm spirit beast Golden-Furred Hou blocked their way!

The three hesitated slightly, and in the next moment, a gust of wind from behind signaled Chu Liang's pursuit once more!

Killing a fifth-realm cultivator earlier had only slightly charred his clothes. Now, Chu Liang was filled with an unstoppable murderous aura.

The members of Inferno Devil Valley had repeatedly underestimated him, considering Chu Liang an easy target and trying to take his life. But how could he let them go now?

"Brothers, let's fight him together!" shouted one of the Inferno Devil Armored Warriors.

Upon hearing this, the other two charged at Chu Liang. But the soldier who had just shouted turned and fled in the opposite direction!

The two who had charged forward cursed inwardly, realizing there was no turning back. They had no other choice. Their only path to escape was through a bloody confrontation, as they could only flee by defeating this fourth-realm Mount Shu disciple!

But even as Chu Liang faced two opponents of a higher cultivation realm than him, he showed no fear.

With the thirteen talismanic scripts of ice written along its blade, the Dustless Sword swung in one swift motion!

When Chu Liang was at a lower cultivation level, he couldn't fully harness the power of the Dustless Sword. But now, with the Geng Metal foundational qi activating the sword, he could truly unleash its legendary power!

As the Inferno Devil Armored Warrior twisted its body, it transformed into a fiery tiger, pouncing at Chu Liang with bared fangs. Chu Liang crouched low and performed a sliding slash!

Sizzle—

The sword cleaved the fiery tiger in half!

At the same time, the other Inferno Devil Armored Warrior hadn't stood by and did nothing. He swung his arms, transforming them into two fiery serpents, attempting to entangle and restrain Chu Liang!

Even while dealing with the fiery tiger, Chu Liang effortlessly handled the fiery serpents. He immediately shouted, "Golden-Furred Hou!"

Roar—

With a deafening roar, the Golden-Furred Hou lunged forward, sinking its teeth into the upper body of the Inferno Devil Armored Warrior who had transformed his arms into fiery serpents!

This sixth-realm spirit beast was more powerful than Chu Liang, and it couldn't just stand there blocking the path.

While Chu Liang was now strong enough to handle a fifth-realm diabolical cultivator, it was mostly due to the sharpness of the Dustless Sword. If the two fifth-realm diabolical cultivators[1] attacked him simultaneously, it would still be difficult for him to win.

This was when bringing the Golden-Furred Hou along proved its worth.

"Raaaaaaaaaarrrrr..."

The Golden-Furred Hou had just swallowed the Inferno Devil Armored Warrior, but its tongue was burned, causing it to leap around in discomfort. It quickly spat out the remaining half of the body, sticking out its tongue and flailing its massive paws in exaggerated motions as it danced around in pain.

With its massive form, it looked quite funny.

But Chu Liang had already turned his attention in another direction.

The last Inferno Devil Armored Warrior, having bought time by betraying his comrades, had escaped Old Fei's restrictive spell and was now flying away as a streak of fire.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang knew his death would be the worst among the four.

Because...

A crimson-gold meteor descended from the sky.

Whoosh—

Boom!

The fiery meteor crashed directly onto the escaping Inferno Devil Armored Warrior, causing the ground to shake with a thunderous roar.

After a while, the smoke cleared.

Di Nufeng appeared amidst the smoke. With her head tilted, she chuckled and said, "All done!"

"As expected! When my teacher strikes, the result is remarkable!" Chu Liang quickly praised.

These words came from the depths of his heart. He had marveled countless times at how Di Nufeng had never once disappointed him in fights and battles!

"Hehe, anyone who dares to provoke my disciple repeatedly should expect this outcome," Di Nufeng snorted proudly.

As Chu Liang stripped the broken Inferno Devil Armor and searched the belongings of the diabolical cultivators, he remarked, "These members of the diabolical sect keep hiding in the shadows. It's so annoying. Now that we've beaten up the lower-leveled ones, I wonder if the more powerful ones will show up."

"More powerful ones?" Di Nufeng's eyes lit up as though she had sensed something interesting. "Will such a good thing really happen to us?"

...

While they were on their way back to the Mount Shu Sect, Chu Liang couldn't help but think back to the state of his cultivation just a few months ago.

At that time, he was only at the third realm of cultivation. If it weren't for the power of the Crimson Executioner, the fifth-realm Fiend from the Dark King Sect could have easily crushed him.

And now, even without relying on the Crimson Executioner, he was capable of killing a fifth-realm cultivator.

Those times felt like a lifetime ago.

The sayings that Heaven rewards the diligent and that you reap what you sow were indeed true. The heavens would never disappoint those who toiled earnestly.

None of the efforts of any Large-Headed Doll were in vain!

After returning to Mount Shu, he handed over the damaged Inferno Devil Armor and locked storage enchanted tools to Wen Yulong. After several practice sessions, Junior Brother Wen had become quite the locksmith.

Afterwards, Chu Liang returned to Silver Sword Peak to rest.

He slept peacefully that night.

The next day, following his usual routine, he flew to the nearby black forest to find the adorable thorny black balls.

Although he had made great progress recently, he would still come by to harvest thorny black balls whenever he had free time. By doing so, he acquired more seeds for Golden Vein Berries, which he could use to expand Berry Wonderland further.

With the reputation of the berries already established, there was no risk of them going to waste.

The more, the better.

And thus, a pleasant day began.

But today, upon reaching the edge of the black forest, Chu Liang sensed something was wrong.

He had flown around the forest several times, but he hadn't spotted a single thorny black ball.

Where had his old friends gone?

He decided to venture deeper into the forest, heading towards the ghost tree.

The ghost tree, which produced the thorny black balls, still stood there ominously. Although Chu Liang was much stronger than before, he still didn't dare approach the tree recklessly, sensing the mysterious and dangerous aura emanating from it.

The ghost tree's branches swayed, laden with thorny black fruits, but none had fallen.

Chu Liang immediately realized the problem.

There were no lingering spirits!

In the past, the ghost tree attracted lonely wandering ghosts from a few hundred li away, which would then combine with the fruits on the tree. When the fruits fell on their own, they would transform into these sentient thorny black balls.

But now, while the ghost tree remained, the wandering ghosts were gone.

What was going on?

Chu Liang had formed a deep bond with the thorny black balls and couldn't bear to see them disappear. And so, he decided to investigate the cause.

However, daytime was not the best period to track down lingering spirits. During the day, ghostly creatures would hide themselves, making them difficult to find even if they were present.

Chu Liang then returned to Silver Sword Peak and cultivated on his own for a while.

As night approached, he ventured back to the area around the ghost tree.

The absence of lingering spirits during the day could be explained by their tendency to hide. However, the lack of wandering spirits at night was truly strange.

In such a spooky, desolate place, the absence of ghosts was eerie in itself!

Chu Liang immediately extended his divine sense, flying low over the ground and scanning every area in the vicinity.

He patiently flew until he reached the Bombax River area. It was late at night, with only a few stars accompanying the moon.

After a while, he finally sensed a trace of a lingering spirit.

Following that trace, he discovered an eerie black jar resembling a wine jar bobbing on the surface of the Bombax River.

This jar seemed to emit a strange, cold aura that attracted nearby wandering ghosts more strongly than the ghost tree.

As unconscious spirits approached, a black hand would shoot out from the wine jar, grabbing the lingering spirits and pulling them inside!

This jar is a trap!

A jar that devours ghosts?!

Chapter 365: Fragrance of Intoxicating Spirit Flower

Under the moonlight, the jar that had just captured a lingering spirit gently trembled in the river, creating an eerie and spooky scene.

Is it chewing? Chu Liang wondered.

With each quiver, strange, dark energy seeped out.

Could this jar be a living, demonic entity?

Unsure of what was happening, Chu Liang decided not to act rashly and silently observed for a while.

The wine-jar monster floated in the river, capturing and devouring the ghosts it attracted, without doing anything else.

No wonder the ghost tree could no longer attract lingering spirits.

Across the Bombax River was a bustling human settlement, while this side was wild and empty. The lonely wandering spirits drawn to the ghost tree came from across the river and from upstream and downstream of the Bombax River.

Now, with the wine-jar monster intercepting them here, it was stealing the lingering spirits meant for the ghost tree.

However, it was impossible for this small wine-jar monster alone to intercept all the nearby lingering spirits. Chu Liang flew upstream along the river, and sure enough, he saw nearly ten such wine-jar monsters scattered along the Bombax River.

It wasn't until the confluence of the Bombax River and the Qinnan River that he no longer saw any trace of the wine-jar monsters.

Where did all these wine jars along the river come from?

Could it be that someone intentionally placed them here?

But during his search, Chu Liang saw no one nearby monitoring them; it seemed these wine-jar monsters had their own consciousness.

After some thought, he attempted to approach one of the black wine jars. Immediately, a black hand reached out towards Chu Liang!

With the Geng Metal foundational qi condensed on his fingertips, his finger became a sword as he pointed at the palm of the black hand.

Sizzle.

Immediately, the black hand recoiled in pain, retreating swiftly back into the jar. No matter how close Chu Liang got afterward, it stubbornly refused to emerge again.

"Does this thing really have intelligence?" Chu Liang wondered.

Out of curiosity, Chu Liang lifted the wine-jar monster out of the water!

As he held the jar, an intense burst of resentment-filled qi erupted from it. The black hand reappeared, this time lunging fiercely towards Chu Liang's face!

With a swift reverse grip, Chu Liang seized the black hand by the wrist and pulled!

To his astonishment, the hand stretched longer and longer, extending several zhang without breaking. It seemed endless, as if there was no body behind the arm—just an impossibly long hand!

As the arm stretched further, an even stronger qi emanated from it, a potent mix of murderous and demonic energy!

"What is this strange thing inside?" Chu Liang wondered.

Out of curiosity, he smashed the jar with a powerful palm strike!

Smash—

A scream came from within the jar!

After the jar shattered, a splash of black liquid spurted out, making an eerie "sizzle" sound mixed with ghostly screams, until it seeped into the ground.

Chu Liang intended to collect a few drops in a porcelain bottle to study later, but the black liquid in the porcelain bottle evaporated when the screams sounded. It seemed like the liquid could not exist outside the black jar.

"How strange..." Chu Liang muttered.

As all the black liquid vanished, a golden mark floated up from the ground and merged into his body.

Huh? Do I get an imprint when I destroy this wine jar?

The wine-jar monster was indeed considered an independent life form.

It seemed to be similar to the lantern monsters and the thorny black balls—strange entities that were formed by spirits merging with something else.

I can get rewards for killing these things too? Chu Liang thought as he stroked his chin.

It seemed that to save his dear friends, the thorny black balls, he would have to fight these evil wine-jar monsters.

...

In the White Pagoda, Chu Liang gently pressed the "Refine" button.

Boom.

The wine-jar monster was refined by a red glow and, in an instant, turned into a small white light that floated out.

[Intoxicating Spirit Flower Seed: Can be planted to grow a fragrant Intoxicating Spirit Flower, which is refreshing when it blooms.]

At that moment, Chu Liang was still by the Bombax River. After receiving the new imprint, he eagerly started opening the reward right there in the forest.

The reward was unfortunate...

It seems to be a flower seed that has not much use aside from being fragrant? he thought to himself.

Although this flower was rather useless, Chu Liang still needed to eliminate all the wine-jar monsters. After all, they intercepted the lingering spirits from reaching the ghost tree, which would stop the production of the thorny black balls.

Thus, Chu Liang followed the Bombax River, smashing nearly ten wine-jar monsters in the water and collecting several Intoxicating Spirit Flower seeds.

Only then did he head back, content and satisfied with his efforts.

The next morning, Chu Liang arrived at the small garden outside the wooden cabin early. This garden used to be full of Golden Vein Flowers, but as the scale of the Golden Vein Berries production expanded, the flowers were moved to a different area. Now, this garden was empty and ready for something new.

It was the perfect time for him to try planting the Intoxicating Spirit Flowers.

When it came to planting flowers, Chu Liang was already quite skilled. It was just a matter of digging a hole, adding some soil, and placing the seeds...

He planted a few seeds, watered them, and sprinkled herbal powder on one of them. The land had been fallow for some time, allowing its spiritual energy to recover significantly.

In less than two hours, a small sprout emerged, followed by the rapid growth of the branches and leaves.

A one-chi-tall Intoxicating Spirit Flower with red petals and green leaves was fully grown. However, at this moment, the bright red, round bud was still closed, and the fragrance had not yet been released. The flower's most striking feature was its somewhat gaudy color.

Chu Liang was not in a hurry and patiently waited for another half an hour.

Finally, the bud began to tremble slightly.

Suddenly, the layers of petals unfurled!

At the same time, a strong and somewhat pungent fragrance suddenly overwhelmed him. Just a whiff made Chu Liang's mind explode, as if the scent had cleared a mental block.

He couldn't help but close his eyes as he slowly immersed himself in this sensation.

This was more than just refreshing; it was intensely intoxicating!

After a considerable time, he slowly exhaled.

When he opened his eyes, he discovered two heads, one large and one small, in front of him.

It turned out that spirit beasts had much more sensitive noses than humans. The Golden-Furred Hou and Baize on the peak were drawn to the fragrance. They lay by the Intoxicating Spirit Flower, closing their eyes and swaying, appearing genuinely drunk.

The White Pagoda was not lying about this. The claim that the fragrance was good was not only true but exceptionally so.

Moreover, after smelling this fragrance, he felt his meridians unblocking and his mind clearing, as if he had entered a mysterious and profound state. His only thought was how beneficial it would be to cultivate divine abilities and study the Great Dao in this state.

The effect could vary greatly; if being in this state could indeed help him understand the Great Dao one day, it would be a significant achievement.

After a long time, the fragrance of the Intoxicating Spirit Flower slowly dissipated. The Golden-Furred Hou and Baize withdrew from their dazed state, looking at Chu Liang with reluctant eyes.

"Addicted, huh?" Chu Liang said with a smile. Since the flower's fragrance was harmless, he sprinkled herbal powder on the seeds planted nearby as well.

After a while, several more Intoxicating Spirit Flowers bloomed!

The intensified fragrance greatly satisfied the spirit beasts, and they were immersed in it, swaying their heads. Chu Liang sniffed the scent once more, immersing himself in the sensation.

At this tranquil moment, an unexpected event occurred.

A disciple from Mount Shu was flying overhead on a fire crane. Everything was fine until the fire crane passed over Silver Sword Peak and was suddenly affected by the drifting fragrance of the Intoxicating Spirit Flowers, becoming intoxicated.

The fire crane, with its low cultivation level and intelligence, became dizzy. It followed the fragrance and crashed down into the Intoxicating Spirit Flower garden!

Several Intoxicating Spirit Flowers were crushed by the impact, their vibrant petals strewn across the ground. The Golden-Furred Hou and Baize were awakened by the noise. When they saw what had happened, they were furious. The two spirit beasts glared at the fire crane, their eyes blazing with anger.

"Ahhh!" The Mount Shu disciple who had fallen with the fire crane quickly scrambled to his feet and apologized, "Senior Brother Chu Liang! I was just passing by when my mount accidentally fell. Please, do not be angry!"

Chu Liang had not expected the Intoxicating Spirit Flower's fragrance to cause an accident. He had no intention of blaming the fellow cultivator and was about to shake his head to reassure him.

Suddenly, he noticed that some of the green leaves of the Intoxicating Spirit Flowers crushed by the fire crane had started smoldering. Instead of a sudden blaze, the fire spread slowly, blackening the leaves as wisps of green smoke drifted out.

Chu Liang took a gentle whiff of the green smoke, and suddenly, a flash of insight illuminated his mind. Questions he had previously struggled with now had clear answers!

Chapter 366: That Is Really Strange!

Three days later, on Heaven-Reaching Peak...

"Senior Brother Chu, this is what you asked for."

"Is the scent pure?"

"Yes, I guarantee it."

"Try it."

Wen Yulong showed a rather pained expression. "Won't it be a waste?"

"It's fine. We can produce more in the future," Chu Liang reassured Wen Yulong.

Wen Yulong then opened the long, narrow brocade box in his hand. It contained ten slender sticks of incense.

He gently picked one up, inserted it into the incense burner beside him, and lit it.

A thin wisp of azure smoke rose into the air. The two young men in the room inhaled the smoke and immediately felt their minds brighten with clarity. They seemed to be able to sense the flow of spiritual energy in the world.

"Not bad." Chu Liang smiled. "The effect is great."

Wen Yulong carefully snuffed out the incense and laughed gleefully. "As always, the spirit plants that you bring to me are the only ones that are truly powerful, Brother Chu. I've only heard of a few treasures like this that can enhance a person's divine intent and aid them in achieving enlightenment, but they are all very precious."

"It was just a lucky encounter," Chu Liang replied.

It had been a truly amazing stroke of luck.

He'd killed some wine-jar monsters and obtained some seeds of the Intoxicating Spirit Flower. Then he grew a few Intoxicating Spirit Flower plants. When the flowers bloomed, they released an intense fragrance that intoxicated beings that smelled it. The scent also made those who smelled it feel mentally clear and physically light.

However, the flowers only stayed in bloom for a very short period, and the effects were not very strong, so there was nothing notable about that. Then that fire crane accidentally fell into the garden and ignited the leaves of the Intoxicating Spirit Flower. That was when Chu Liang discovered that

burning the leaves of the flower also produced the same effect of having clearing the mind, just without the fragrance.

Moreover, these leaves were quite slow to burn; one leaf lasted for a short while. This made the flowers seem rather useless in comparison.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang still wasn't satisfied. So, he found Wen Yulong and asked him to do some research and testing. He wanted to see if the leaves of the Intoxicating Spirit Flower could be made into spirit incense so that the effects produced by burning the leaves could last longer.

Of course, Wen Yulong did not disappoint. The incense he made could burn for four hours, allowing the effect of having a clear mind to last through that entire duration. It was a very powerful incense. The long duration of the incense could be very beneficial to a cultivator, regardless of whether they were thinking about something, practicing their divine abilities, or comprehending the Great Dao.

Wen Yulong said, "This spirit incense has never been made before. I plan to name it Spirit-Awakening Incense, What do you think?"

Accustomed to naming his enchanted tools, he had already thought of a name for the spirit incense.

"Spirit-Awakening Incense..." Chu Liang muttered. He then shook his head. "This name isn't impressive enough; it won't sell well."

Wen Yulong didn't argue. He just asked, "What would you call it, Senior Brother Chu?"

After all, based on what he'd witnessed in the past, Chu Liang's ideas were usually good.

Chu Liang pondered for a moment and then suggested, "How about Fragrance of Enlightenment?"

"Fragrance of Enlightenment?" Wen Yulong uttered, taken aback.

He considered it for a moment. The name is fine. It's just... a bit exaggerated.

It was certain that this spirit incense would aid in a cultivator's comprehension of the Great Dao, but it was uncertain as to just how effective it was in that regard.

"Keep half of this box as your pay. I'll take the rest back to test the effects," Chu Liang said. "I'll give you another batch of Intoxicating Spirit Flower Leaves later, and you can turn them all into the Fragrance of Enlightenment."

These past few nights, Chu Liang had been going to Bombax River. Every day, there were eight to ten wine-jar monsters there catching lingering spirits, and Chu Liang quickly formed a deep bond with them. He would be really sad if there were to come a night when he couldn't see them anymore.

As for his initial reason for killing the wine-jar monsters, he had already forgotten about it.

What thorny black balls?

He knew nothing about them.

After accepting several sticks of the incense Fragrance of Enlightenment, Wen Yulong said, "Also, I've opened up those storage enchanted tools you gave me last time."

Wen Yulong laid out the storage enchanted tools Chu Liang had taken from the disciples of the Inferno Devil Valley.

Then he continued, "And here are the several sets of damaged Inferno Devil Armor. The enchanted formation inscriptions are so severely damaged that I can't repair them. However, I found that by piecing them together, we might be able to make one complete set. The Inferno Devil Valley's armors are famous worldwide. If I make some modifications, I'm sure it will be extraordinarily powerful."

"Hmm..." Chu Liang forced a smile. "Actually, even just restoring a full set of armor will be an amazing feat. You don't have to persist with the modifications if they're too difficult to make."

"Don't worry, Senior Brother Chu," Wen Yulong said. "We artificers are never afraid of running into difficulties."

You don't fear running into difficulties, but I do... Chu Liang muttered inwardly.

Nevertheless, he let Wen Yulong be.

After all, Junior Brother Wen has helped me a lot these days. I'll just let him have this little bit of freedom.

It was just a set of Inferno Devil Armor. If it got ruined during the modification process, then Chu Liang just wouldn't wear it. He already had the protection of the Jiuli Soul Armor anyway.

Nevertheless, if Wen Yulong succeeded with the modifications, Chu Liang might be pleasantly surprised by the result. After all, who would mind having an extra set of armor?

Chu Liang's divine sense swept through the storage enchanted tools and changed his opinion of those fifth-realm disciples of the Inferno Devil Valley.

They hadn't been elite fifth-realm cultivators; they were poor fifth-realm cultivators. They were even poorer than those Fiends of the Dark King Sect that Chu Liang had encountered in the past. These guys had nothing valuable. There were some intact enchanted tools, pills, and arts manuals, but they were all specific to diabolical sects. Chu Liang had no use for them except to turn them in for some sword coins.

This reminded Chu Liang of a popular joke in the world of immortality cultivators.

It went like this. Among the nine cultivation realms, the fifth realm, the Realm of the Five Elements, had another name—the Realm of Financial Strain.

This was because cultivators at realms lower than the fifth realm didn't need that many resources, so they could save money. On the other hand, those at the sixth realm and above had much better ways to earn money than those at the fifth realm.

Fifth-realm cultivators were the only ones that needed to consume precious treasures of nature to advance through every level of realm. This usually placed the cultivators in financial strain, leaving many destitute.

Of course, that was a distant reality for the elite disciples of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten.

...

Later in the day, Chu Liang arrived at his and Jiang Yuebai's old hangout on Treasured Pagoda Peak. He was there to meet Jiang Yuebai in private.

Jiang Yuebai was already waiting for him in the cave.

She asked softly, "What is it this time?"

"Senior Sister, I have something good to show you," Chu Liang answered with a smile.

Jiang Yuebai had been busy studying fifth-realm divine arts lately, so it had been quite a while since the two of them last met up. Chu Liang had specifically requested that she meet him today.

Chu Liang tugged on Jiang Yuebai, gesturing for her to sit down. Then he placed an incense burner on the table and inserted a stick of the incense Fragrance of Enlightenment.

Jiang Yuebai's face suddenly turned red.

She sprang up and questioned, "What are you doing??"

Huh?

Seeing her reaction, Chu Liang realized that the way he pulled her over to him with the incense burner in front of them was indeed quite similar to something else... It looked like they were about to pay their respects to someone or something together...[1]

Chu Liang hurriedly explained, "It's a new little thing I discovered. I named it Fragrance of Enlightenment. It's very beneficial for cultivation, and I want you to experience it too."

Finally understanding what was going on, Jiang Yuebai nodded and said, "Oh, I see."

Once the Fragrance of Enlightenment was lit, Jiang Yuebai's eyes lit up as well.

This spirit incense was indeed extraordinary. The effect of the incense wasn't very strong, but it was a rare effect other treasures could not produce. That alone made this spirit incense exceptional.

"Try cultivating in this state, Senior Sister. If it works well, I'll bring you more in the future," Chu Liang said with a smile.

Jiang Yuebai nodded. "Alright, I'll give it a try."

She immediately got into a cross-legged position on the couch and activated the Qi-Circulation Technique.

Jiang Yuebai didn't realize it, but the fact that she could enter a meditative state and activate her qi circulation without hesitation in front of Chu Liang showed she trusted him greatly. It was rare for her to trust anyone that much.

Jiang Yuebai had initially thought she would just try out cultivating in this clear-headed state, but once her qi was in circulation, she immediately felt different from usual.

Her complex meridian system, every wisp of foundational qi, and the intricate workings of her qi-circulation route had all become so clear in her mind. Jiang Yuebai's control over her qi circulation had gone up a notch.

She had experienced this feeling before. It was when she was still at the fourth rank. She had used the power of her Transcendent Spirit to achieve Perfect Qi Circulation.

Some time after that, Jiang Yuebai reached the fifth realm. Nevertheless, she still had yet to reach the threshold of Perfect Qi Circulation.

Perhaps she had been just a hair's breadth away this whole time. The effect of the Fragrance of Enlightenment helped her bridge that last gap, allowing her to understand what she had been lacking.

As Chu Liang watched Jiang Yuebai cultivate, he felt a sudden surge of waves in his Sea of Qi. The Large-Headed Dolls inside the White Pagoda were circulating qi at an accelerated rate.

This is... Perfect Qi Circulation!

Boom!

A second later, Jiang Yuebai glowed with lights of five colors. The light illuminated the whole cave and even overflowed outside.

The five lights condensed into five different qi. The platinum-colored qi was the densest, so much so that it seemed like something of substance. Meanwhile, the other four qi were still a bit dispersed.

The five beams of glowing qi shot out from Pagoda Peak and headed straight for the horizon! It was the Transformation of Five Qi into Essence!

This was the Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomenon that occurred when a cultivator achieved Perfect Qi Circulation while cultivating the Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique: The Book of Five Elements!

Observing this phenomenon up close, Chu Liang felt inspired and quickly got into a cross-legged position too.

The occurrence of one cultivator's Perfect Qi Circulation could trigger the activation of another cultivator's qi-circulation technique if they used the same one. It allowed the secondary cultivator to echo the Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomenon. There had been a precedent where all of the Mount Shu Sect benefited from a seventh-realm cultivator's Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomenon.

At this moment, Chu Liang was the only one who got to benefit from Jiang Yuebai's Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomenon. His Sea of Qi surged with raging waves, reaching a peak state.

Chu Liang absorbed a Dragon-Blood Crystal, elevating his vitality, qi, and spirit to peak states too. He then put all of his efforts into circulating his qi.

Boom!

A moment later, Chu Liang exuded white waves of qi. In the blink of an eye, the waves reformed as a Sea of Qi. Its huge billowing waves hung in the air like clouds of white fog. A sun-like golden orb bobbed up and down amid the billowing waves, appearing and disappearing.

As Chu Liang's five qi transformed into essence, the Sea of Qi Phenomenon gradually rose from the Sea of Qi and ascended toward the sky with the five colored lights. The sky over Treasured Pagoda Peak was filled with the colors of cultivation phenomena!

...

All of the Mount Shu Sect saw this wondrous scene.

"What is that?!"

"It's the Transformation of Five Qi into Essence Phenomenon! It's the Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomenon of The Book of Five Elements!"

"In our sect, Senior Sister Jiang's the only one who would have the ability to achieve that, right?"

"Yes, it must be her. She has the Transcendent Spirit. Who else could achieve Perfect Qi Circulation—hang on..."

"Then what's with that rising Sea of Qi Phenomenon?"

"It's the fourth-realm Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomenon!"

"In our sect, the only one who could achieve that is probably Senior Brother Chu!"

"That's right. It must be him. I remember him showing that he had a deep understanding of how to achieve Perfect Qi Circulation at Senior Sister Jiang's lecture. So, it's not surprising that if he's achieved it."

"..."

Disciples and sect members all over Mount Shu's thirty-six peaks stopped to watch the cultivation phenomena and discuss spiritedly. Of course, it was inevitable that they would have questions about what they saw.

"It's not surprising that Senior Sister Jiang achieved a Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomenon. Likewise, it's not surprising that Senior Brother Chu would achieve one too. But... why are their phenomena intertwined?!"

"That's really strange!"

Chapter 367: The Fight for the Control of the Great Dao

On Azure Falling Peak, Daoist Yan sat cross-legged above an ancient tree, her expression cold and aloof. Beside her, Di Nufeng sat casually, legs dangling over a branch as they engaged in conversation.

"You're going into a major period of closed-door cultivation?" Di Nufeng asked, surprise in her voice as she looked at Daoist Yan with a puzzled expression.

At their level, it wasn't unusual to go into closed-door cultivation. Mastering an immortal art or comprehending a bit of Dao essence often required dedicated isolation for a period. Typically, closed-door cultivation ranged from ten days to a few months. However, this kind of cultivation did not have a set time limit; it could last anywhere from a few years to several years. Such extended periods were rare and usually unnecessary unless aiming for a significant breakthrough.

But at Daoist Yan's level, another major breakthrough would mean...

"Yes," Daoist Yan nodded slightly. "If anything happens on Azure Falling Peak, I need you to take care of it."

Everyone knew that Di Nufeng's only friend among the thirty-six peaks of Mount Shu was Daoist Yan. However, few considered the friendship from another perspective: Di Nufeng was also Daoist Yan's only friend. The only difference between Di Nufeng and Daoist Yan was that Di Nufeng was disliked by people, which led to her poor relationships, while Daoist Yan was too reclusive, spending her days cultivating on the ancient tree of Azure Falling Peak, unwilling to socialize. Di Nufeng had no choice but to have no friends, while Daoist Yan chose not to have any. In the end, the result was the same.

So when Daoist Yan needed to enter a major period of closed-door cultivation, she could only ask Di Nufeng to look after her peak. As she made the request, there was a hint of unwillingness and sadness in her voice.

"Don't worry! You can count on me," Di Nufeng said as she patted her chest confidently. Even so, there was a hint of worry in her eyes as she looked at Daoist Yan and said, "But Yan Zi, you are not...reaching that point, are you?"

"Yes, I am," Daoist Yan replied straightforwardly.

"Are you still going to seek the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination?" Di Nufeng asked, her eyes widening.

"Yes," Daoist Yan nodded again.

"Are you serious about not changing to another Dao?" Di Nufeng pressed.

"No," Daoist Yan replied calmly.

After a while, Di Nufeng finally said, "Alright then. I heard the Sword Emperor of the West Sea is coming to the land of the Yu Dynasty again. Even though I have a grudge against Old Li Ba, this time I hope he can beat that bastard from the West Sea to death."

Daoist Yan's mouth twitched, as if she wanted to laugh but was trying to suppress it. In the end, she gently curved her lips and let out a soft chuckle.

"What's the point of that?" Daoist Yan said leisurely. "The path of a sword cultivator is to move forward and personally cut down the enemy."

Despite her light tone, there was an unmistakable sense of severity.

"You can definitely do it!" Di Nufeng said firmly. After a moment's thought, she sighed, "I always thought I'd be the second person in Mount Shu to reach the Heavenly Origin Realm, but now you've beaten me to it."

"If only you focused more on your cultivation..." Daoist Yan began, looking at Di Nufeng, but she stopped midway.

In her gaze, there was a faint hint of regret, as though she was thinking about something that could have happened.

...

The eighth realm in the world was called the Heavenly Origin, and those who reached it were known as Masters of the Heavenly Origin.

The term "master" was used because cultivators in the seventh realm could comprehend various great Daos and utilize them, as long as they could harness their power. However, none of these Daos belonged to the seventh-realm cultivators; they were merely borrowing the power of heaven and earth.

For instance, Daoist Yan cultivated the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination, yet she could still use other Great Daos and divine abilities.

However, to attain the eighth realm, one had to master one of the three thousand Great Daos of the world and become the master of that Great Dao—a Dao Master.

Being the master of that Great Dao meant that no one else could use that Great Dao in the presence of the Dao Master. The Dao Master would have sole control over it. If anyone tried to exert force through that Great Dao, it could result in a backlash, with the force coming under the command of the Dao Master.

By attaining the Heavenly Origin, one would become master of a Great Dao!

One Great Dao could only have one master.

Although it was said that there were three thousand Great Daos in the world, far fewer had actually been discovered and comprehended. Additionally, with countless cultivators, there was bound to be overlap, as many divine abilities and techniques ultimately led to the same Great Dao.

If a predecessor had already become the master of a certain Great Dao, there would be only two choices for someone seeking to advance to the next cultivation realm. One would either have to wait for the current Dao Master to die or compete with that Dao Master for control of the Great Dao.

A fight for control of the Great Dao was more serious than life and death!

If an eighth-realm expert's control of the Great Dao was taken away, their cultivation level would drop to an awkward position between the seventh and eighth realms. This stage was commonly referred to as the "seventh and a half realm." It meant that they were stronger than ordinary seventh-realm cultivators but not as powerful as those at the eighth realm.

Throughout history, it was rare for challengers to seize control of the Great Dao from their predecessors. After all, the current master of that Great Dao would have been in the Heavenly Origin Realm for many years and would obviously surpass the challenger in terms of cultivation, mindset, and experience.

How challenging would it be to fight for control of a Great Dao?

Ambitious and talented cultivators would start paying attention to the Great Daos without masters while they were still in the sixth realm. Great Daos like Yin-Yang, Heaven and Earth, and Five Elements were generally out of the question.

Throughout history, prodigies had fought for control of these Great Daos, leading inevitably to someone's defeat.

By choosing an obscure and unconventional Great Dao, one could ascend to the eighth realm more easily. For example, the Dao of Music followed by the South Melody Conservatory was subdivided into several Great Daos. The number of these Great Daos even exceeded the number of seventh-realm musicians, leaving plenty of Great Daos for musician cultivators to master.

However, musicians who managed to touch the threshold of the eighth realm were rare...

Compared to the musicians with many unconventional Great Daos, the competition among the sword cultivators was extremely fierce.

In this world, there were three known Great Daos of sword cultivation—Cloud of Determination, Severing Void, and Tai'a.

The Dao Master of the Cloud of Determination was the Sword Emperor of the West Sea!

The Dao Master of the Severing Void was Sword Saint Old Li Ba!

The Dao Master of the Tai'a[1] was the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner of the Yu Dynasty!

These three were all prominent figures.

Old Li Ba was the first to reach the Heavenly Origin Realm, holding the position of Sword Saint at the Endless Sword Sect for a lifetime. The Imperial Supervisory Commissioner in the Capital of Yu was the second, serving as a stabilizing force for the nine provinces. He rarely took action but was never known to have lost a fight. The West Sea Sword Emperor emerged from the Sword-Hanging Kingdom decades ago, sweeping through the world's sword cultivators before encountering Old Li Ba, thus claiming the last Great Dao of sword cultivation.

Each sword cultivator was more formidable than the last!

Thus, for the past sixty years, it was widely believed that the Great Dao of sword cultivation was closed off.

Fortunately, not every sword cultivator could reach the eighth realm, so most sword cultivators didn't have to worry about competing with these three for control of the Great Dao.

But Daoist Yan had to worry about this.

If one of the three Great Daos had to be chosen, the one controlled by the West Sea Sword Emperor would be the best choice. After all, the West Sea Sword Emperor was the least experienced of the three Dao Masters, and Daoist Yan had always studied the Cloud of Determination, meaning that her cultivation of this Great Dao was much stronger.

If she chose to fight for control of this Great Dao, her chance of success would be the highest.

However...

There would always be Great Daos left without a master in this world. With Daoist Yan's talent, if she departed from sword cultivation and dived into another type of Dao, she would still have a chance of attaining Heavenly Origin.

Still, Di Nufeng would never ask her friend to switch to another Dao as she knew that her friend would never do something like that. After all, the core of Yan Zi's Dao lay in the motion of moving forward relentlessly.

Thus, with a serious expression rarely seen on her face, Di Nufeng said, "Start your closed-door cultivation without worry. With me here, your disciples on Azure Falling Peak have nothing to fear."

Before she finished speaking, a five-colored glow rose in the horizon.

As Daoist Yan watched the five auras converging over Treasured Pagoda Peak, she smiled and said, "It's Yuebai."

Di Nufeng looked over. A moment later, another phenomenon was witnessed—the rise of a profound Sea of Qi.

She smiled too and said, "It's Chu Liang."

Instantly, Daoist Yan's face turned gloomy, a stark contrast to Di Nufeng's expression.

Her expression changed because she saw that the phenomena of Qi Circulation were intertwining!

"That's my disciple and your disciple! Could it be that they are doing dual—" Di Nufeng's excited words got stuck in her throat as she saw Daoist Yan's gloomy face. She quickly changed her words, "I mean, both achieving breakthroughs? What a coincidence that it's happening at the same time, huh?"

Daoist Yan's gaze flickered gloomily.

Di Nufeng couldn't stop smiling.

After a while, Daoist Yan finally said, "Maybe."

Daoist Yan had just been told that her disciples on Azure Falling Peak would have nothing to fear. Even so, she was already worried before she started her closed-door cultivation and the person she was worried about happened to be Di Nufeng's disciple!

Daoist Yan was even considering her other relationships. She seemed to have good relations with Old Man Sikong and Tantai Jing as well, so asking them to look after her disciples wouldn't be out of the question.

Everything else could be left unattended, except for one thing that must be strictly managed, and that was...the prohibition of dual cultivation!

Chapter 368: Damn You

When Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai opened their eyes, there was a glint of joy in them.

Jiang Yuebai was delighted to have achieved Perfect Qi Circulation at the fifth realm. She had been studying and attempting this for many days. Previously, she was just a step away, and the use of the Fragrance of Enlightenment helped her make that final leap.

Similarly, with the Fragrance of Enlightenment and Senior Sister Jiang's guidance, Chu Liang managed to achieve Perfect Qi Circulation at the fourth realm. For him, it didn't matter if he couldn't reach it again next time because the Large-Headed Doll had already memorized it!

The blueprint of the Perfect Qi Circulation had been conveniently recorded by the Golden-Core Puppet. Now, in addition to the Qi-Circulation Puppet generating misty clouds through the Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomenon at the third realm in the White Pagoda, another cloud of smoke was generated by the Golden-Core Puppet through the Golden-Core Sea of Qi Phenomenon at the fourth realm.

The Large-Headed Dolls sat in a row.

Phenomenal phenomena were happening all around! [1]

If anyone walked inside the White Pagoda, they would barely see the Large-Headed Dolls through the dense smoke filling the air. The Qi-Circulation Puppets and Golden-Core Puppets were emitting thick clouds of smoke, which floated up and down, creating a swirling mist. Amidst this, the Five-Elements Puppet gleamed, their light shimmering through the overlapping phenomena created by the two puppets beside it.

With an ultimate-tier Golden Core and a perfect Qi Circulation Technique, even if this Golden-Core Puppet were given to a pig, it would cultivate at a speed not inferior to that of a prodigy from any sect.

And such a puppet was sitting obediently in Chu Liang's White Pagoda, being paid only three Spirit-Concentration Pills a day. Now, Chu Liang felt a tinge of guilt for ever thinking that it was expensive.

He had already reached the later stage of the Golden Core Realm, and with enhancement provided by the Perfect Circulation Phenomenon, he believed that he would soon be at the verge of advancing to the fifth realm in his cultivation.

Jiang Yuebai gazed at Chu Liang and said, "I really don't know how to thank you."

Considering she had the Transcendent Spirit, it was likely that Jiang Yuebai would achieve the Perfect Qi Circulation Technique even without the Fragrance of Enlightenment. It would just take her a little more time.

However, for the prodigies of this generation, every bit of progress was crucial as they were racing against time. Achieving Perfect Qi Circulation earlier might give them an edge over others, and this edge could be decisive in next year's Immortal Sects Conference.

Chu Liang exchanged a glance with her and smiled warmly. "Back then, you taught me divine techniques and skills with such care and never expected anything in return. There's no need to mention gratitude now."

Jiang Yuebai nodded slightly, but her expression suggested she didn't take Chu Liang's words to heart.

Some people have a natural inclination to help others selflessly, yet they struggle to accept help from anyone else.

After a while, Chu Liang was the first to walk out of the cave.

As soon as he stepped outside, he suddenly paused.

"Guys..." Chu Liang's pupils dilated sharply.

At that very moment, Treasured Pagoda Peak was densely packed with people! Although most Mount Shu disciples didn't know about the cave behind the waterfall, they knew that the intertwined Heavenly Qi Circulation phenomena were emanating from this area. Naturally, they all gathered here, eager to observe up close.

Seeing Chu Liang at this moment, all the Mount Shu disciples paused for a moment, then swarmed towards him!

"Senior Brother Chu!"

"Senior Brother Chu, have you achieved Perfect Qi Circulation?"

"Were you cultivating with Senior Sister Jiang?"

"This is dual cultivation, right?"

"Damn you!"

"Scoundrel!"

"..."

Amid the chaotic noises mixed with undeniable malice, Chu Liang quickly took off, stepping onto his flying sword. Whoosh—

He didn't fly directly back to Silver Sword Peak but circled around the area, drawing everyone's attention to himself. With a stylish drift, he led the noisy crowd away.

The full extent of his Flying Sword Competition champion skills was now on display!

He wanted to divert the crowd so that Jiang Yuebai wouldn't be surrounded when she emerged from the cave.

But he really underestimated Jiang Yuebai.

When Jiang Yuebai sensed the noise outside the cave, she immediately realized what was happening. She extended her divine sense outside and realized that Chu Liang was surrounded by people.

With her ample experience in such situations, she didn't walk out like Chu Liang. Instead, she used the Earth Escape technique and quickly returned to Azure Falling Peak.

As a young, famous, and much-admired prodigy, if she didn't have the skill to calmly escape, she would have been overwhelmed long ago.

However, upon returning to Azure Falling Peak, she looked up and saw her esteemed teacher, whose expression appeared cold and aloof.

Jiang Yuebai widened her eyes and gazed at her teacher with an innocent expression.

There was a hint of pain and sadness in her teacher's eyes.

It felt like her cherished daughter, whom she had raised with great care, was being led astray by the mischievous boy next door, whose parents were notorious troublemakers.

"Haaaa." Daoist Yan let out a long sigh.

In truth, she didn't have a problem with Chu Liang himself, but seeing her beloved disciple get close to another man for the first time stirred these feelings within her, regardless of who it was.

Jiang Yuebai blinked and said, "Esteemed teacher, let me explain."

...

"Explain what? Oh, come on!" Di Nufeng waved her hand dismissively. "It's not a bad thing!"

She looked at Chu Liang with satisfaction.

It was like her mischievous boy who loved racing flying swords had finally grown up and, in one fell swoop, brought back the model student and beauty from next door, whose parents were her close friends.

"Not bad at all," she said, giving him a thumbs up in praise.

"It's really not what you think. Senior Sister Jiang and I were just cultivating together and happened to break through simultaneously," Chu Liang explained.

"Yes, that's exactly how I used to brush off Yan Zi," Di Nufeng laughed heartily. "No wonder you're my disciple; your excuses are just like mine."

Chu Liang could only sigh inwardly. "..."

It's no wonder members of the Mount Shu Sect misunderstood; cultivating together was inherently ambiguous. If they didn't trust each other deeply, how could they perform qi circulation seated together?

Even if it wasn't dual cultivation, it wasn't far from it.

Besides, just because Chu Liang explained that it was not dual cultivation, doesn't mean people won't think otherwise.

It wasn't long before Lin Bei and Shang Ziliang showed up.

Shang Ziliang, eager for the inside scoop, asked what exactly had happened. Lackey A wanted tips on how to talk to female cultivators, while Lackey B was already curious about the number of dishes at the wedding banquet.

When Lin Bei arrived, he broke down crying, "This is worse than death!"

On Jade Sword Peak of Mount Shu, Xu Ziyang said with a determined look, "They have all achieved Perfect Qi Circulation. I must work even harder!"

In a quiet corner of the same peak, Xu Ziqing cheered into the air, shouting, "Yayyyyyyyy!" She chuckled to herself, muttering, "I knew they were together! Hehe, I knew it all along!"

Now that everyone knew, she no longer had to keep the secret. She was ecstatic.

Soon, a rumor about Chu Liang once going to the Hall of Conservation to buy dual cultivation techniques spread quickly from Jade Sword Peak throughout all of Mount Shu.

At this time, Chu Liang was still trying hard to explain that it wasn't dual cultivation, but that they had simply been discussing cultivation and happened to achieve a breakthrough together.

And now, all his explanations seemed to lack credibility.

After a few days, the situation escalated and became increasingly heated, even showing signs of spreading outside Mount Shu. Chu Liang himself didn't really mind, but Jiang Yuebai was, after all, a young lady, and it wasn't good for her reputation to be involved in such rumors. Therefore, he had to take additional measures to address the situation.

So he "reluctantly" brought out his trump card.

He released the news that he and Senior Sister Jiang had achieved the perfect Qi Circulation Technique because they discovered a valuable item called the "Fragrance of Enlightenment." This treasure was extremely rare and could significantly enhance one's comprehension.

With the Fragrance of Enlightenment, everyone could have a Transcendent Spirit!

Chu Liang explained that he hadn't wanted to reveal the existence of the valuable treasure, the Fragrance of Enlightenment. However, the disruptive rumors were affecting both his and Senior Sister Jiang's daily lives. To prevent these rumors from overshadowing more important matters, he made the difficult decision to go against his ancestors' teachings and reveal the truth.

If anyone doubted him, Chu Liang was ready to take out the Fragrance of Enlightenment and let them experience its power firsthand!

But...

Since it was such a rare treasure, Chu Liang couldn't just give it away for free. There had to be a fee, and it wouldn't be cheap.

No way was he selling it!

This was absolutely not for sale!

This was both to prove his innocence and to offer the Mount Shu family a valuable benefit!

Chapter 369: Wishing For A Hundred!

North of Mount Shu was the Bombax River, and the wind was blowing fiercely and relentlessly there. Under the mellow moonlight, a strange black wine jar emerged from the river and drifted down the river. After a short distance, the wine jar came to an abrupt stop, bobbing up and down as it exuded a chilling aura.

A while later, a remnant soul that had lost its rationality approached. The moment it neared the mouth of the jar, the black hand of a ghost extended out from the jar and dragged the soul inside. Then the wine jar shook with the rhythm of a person chewing their food.

If someone were to follow the wine jar as it drifted along the Bombax River, they would eventually find themselves in an extremely well-hidden underwater cave. Then if they entered the cave, they would end up traveling through a long, narrow waterway and arrive at a strange pitch-black area where a mysterious force prevented all living creatures from approaching.

Whenever aquatic creatures entered this black area, they would disappear and then reappear at some corner upstream in the river. If they ventured further into this magical black hole... they would find an underwater cavern.

The cavern was filled with talismans of gold and silver colors. It looked like a cage where a monster had been sealed, but the only resident of this underwater cavern was an old man with disheveled hair, a dirty face, and raggedy clothes.

His messy hair and beard had almost completely covered his face. Peeking out from behind his hair, his pitch-black eyes shone brightly like stars, still burning with the will to survive. He looked like a cold-blooded beast that had gone mad from being trapped.

"Haa..."

The old man exhaled and placed the empty wine jar in his left hand on the ground. Then, treating the fingers on his left hand like a saber, he used them to slash his already cut and bruised right hand.

Sizzle.

His veins had almost dried up, but he still managed to squeeze out a few drops of blood into the wine jar. The blood immediately transformed into a black substance that exuded a chilling aura. The pain of forcing his blood out left him clenching his teeth in agony.

Something seemed to stir inside the wine jar, causing it to rock gently. The old man shoved the wine jar into the black hole in the wall with great force.

Boom.

As the wine jar was sent out, ripples flickered across the black hole.

That was when the old man finally lay down on the ground with satisfaction, his head dripping with sweat. He'd sent out another Spirit-Slaying Jar into the world.

The old man's name was Xuan Yinzi. He had once been a prominent and extremely powerful figure among the diabolical sects, capable of shaking up the whole world. Of his many titles, the most illustrious one was the Sect Leader of the Dark King Sect.

That's right. Xuan Yinzi used to lead the largest diabolical sect, the Dark King Sect. He had undoubtedly been the top figure among those in the diabolical sects. However, the glorious first half of his life started to decline when he took on a taciturn and reserved disciple.

That boy...

Just the thought of that disciple still had Xuan Yinzi gritting his teeth in rage.

Xuan Yinzi had imparted his divine arts to that disciple and even made the disciple his trusted assistant. He had no idea that the disciple had harbored ill intentions against him.

...

That disciple had somehow managed to secretly gain control over the True Form of Ksitigarbha. With its power, that disciple went on to snatch away Xuan Yinzi's control over the Great Dao of the Profound Darkness and became the new Dao Master of the Profound Darkness. That disciple then naturally became the Dark King Sect's new sect leader.

Xuan Yinzi's cultivation level fell miserably to the seventh and a half realm. On top of that, his disciple banished him, forbidding him from returning to the Dark King Sect in this life.

Nevertheless, Xuan Yinzi did not get discouraged. He wanted to reclaim everything he had lost, but that was impossible with his current cultivation level. He had to return to the highest level he had achieved in the past... and surpass it!

Consequently, he set his sights on the legendary Immortals' Storehouse. However, he got into a fight with someone for the map that had the location of the Immortals' Storehouse, and that person sealed him here at the cost of their life.

...

Apart from the talismans, the walls of the cavern were covered with horizontal strokes that Xuan Yinzi had drawn. He was unaware of the passage of time in this place, so he marked the days according to his qi-circulation cycles. There were tens of thousands of strokes on the wall; he'd been trapped there for a very long time.

Fortunately, he used to be a great drinker of liquor, and the wine he loved most was the peculiar Soul Wine, which was stored in earthen jars. So, he had numerous wine jars piled up like a mountain in his storage enchanted tool, and he used them to make the Soul-Slaying Jars.

After doing his utmost for several decades... Xuan Yinzi finally tore a small opening in the seal. It wasn't enough for him to escape, but he could send out the Soul-Slaying Jars that he'd made with his blood essence.

"The life of a seventh-realm Eminent One is worth trading several decades of my lifespan for..." Xuan Yinzi muttered. "But that's all I can do."

As long as the Soul-Slaying Jars went out, they would quickly capture remnant souls. Once they had accumulated enough power, the jars would then return to the cavern. If he could recover eighty percent of his power... then it would be an easy feat for him to break out of the seal through this small hole!

The person who had sealed Xuan Yinzi couldn't have gone far and had likely perished nearby. Once Xuan Yinzi got out of this cavern, he could easily search for the map to the Immortals' Storehouse.

Now, he just needed to send out as many Soul-Slaying Jars as possible and wait for the jars to return. Then he would be able to reach his peak cultivation level again!

His foundational qi had dried up a long time ago, and he had exhausted his vitality. The only usable energy he had left was the small amount of spiritual qi in his blood. Using that meager amount of spiritual qi, he was able to make around ten Soul-Slaying Jars a day. This was his limit.

He really wished he could make a hundred Soul-Slaying jars a day! Nevertheless, any more would be tantamount to suicide.

Even if only three jars returned every day, he would be able to escape within a year!

I, Xuan Yinzi, swear that once I get out, I will reclaim everything I lost!

...

"When will you be back?" Wen Yulong asked urgently.

"Not sure," Chu Liang answered. "It will depend on how things play out."

He was going to participate in an operation for the Dark King Sect. Diabolical operations were always unpredictable. Chu Liang might never return, or he might return the next day.

"The members of our sect who won the Fragrance of Enlightenment are all waiting anxiously for you to deliver the incense," Wen Yulong said, pressing for Chu Liang to take action.

A few days ago, Chu Liang had taken advantage of the rumors about him and Jiang Yuebai to promote the Fragrance of Enlightenment in the Mount Shu Sect. The incense quickly became extremely popular.

His promotional slogan was especially effective.

With the Fragrance of Enlightenment, everyone can have a Transcendent Spirit! With berries and incense, you'll live a long life!

Many people wanted to buy the Fragrance of Enlightenment, but Chu Liang didn't have enough stock to meet the demand. He had been waiting diligently by the Bombax River every night, but only ten wine-jar monsters would appear each day.

That meant there would only be ten Intoxicating Spirit Flowers each day, allowing Chu Liang to harvest forty to fifty Intoxicating Spirit Flower Leaves. Wen Yulong wouldn't even be able to produce five hundred sticks of the Fragrance of Enlightenment with that amount. Furthermore, it would take a long time for the next batch of Intoxicating Spirit Flowers to bloom because the Herbal Wood Spirit Powder couldn't be used indefinitely.

Five hundred sticks of incense might sound like a lot, but the Fragrance of Enlightenment couldn't be purchased one stick at a time. A cultivator needed to use at least ten for there to be a significant effect on their cultivation.

However, five hundred was Chu Liang's limit. He really wished he could kill a hundred each day! Nevertheless, there were never more than ten.

So, Chu Liang implemented a reservation system. All members of the Mount Shu Sect could put in a reservation to purchase the Fragrance of Enlightenment, and their names would go into a lucky draw. The winners of the lucky draw would get to purchase fifty sticks of Fragrance of Enlightenment.

Consequently, all of Mount Shu was waiting eagerly. Those who didn't win awaited the next draw, those who did waited for their shipment, and those who had already received their incense used it up very quickly and wanted more.

The craze over the Fragrance of Enlightenment even overshadowed the rumors about Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai. Everyone forgot about how the Fragrance of Enlightenment was revealed; they just wanted to try it.

It was an aid in comprehending the Dao! Was there a stronger temptation for cultivators? There were extremely few treasures with such effects in the world, so this was the first time there was something that everyone in the sect had a chance of acquiring.

The berries that Chu Liang sold were popular too, but they were seen as more of a novelty item, whereas the Fragrance of Enlightenment was undoubtedly useful. This was why the sect members had a very different attitude to the latter.

However, the great enthusiasm of Chu Liang's fellow sect members left him feeling totally helpless. After all, Chu Liang couldn't split himself in two. Even if he used the Immortal Art: External Manifestation, he couldn't send his clones more than a thousand li away. The Intoxicating Spirit Flower Seeds would only be given as a reward if he killed the wine-jar monsters in person, but he couldn't easily abandon his rare undercover position in the White Bone Hall.

While Chu Liang was thinking about all that, almost ten top talents from various sects arrived at Silver Sword Peak. They had agreed in advance to meet on Mount Shu before leaving to converge with Ghost Face.

Of course, the veteran undercover agents Monk Pushan and Luo Yao—the core members of Chu Liang undercover team—were there too. They had become quite familiar with Silver Sword Peak, yet every time they went there, they would be amazed to find that it was slightly different from before. It was currently the off-season for the Berry Wonderland, but if Pushan and Luo Yao had gone to visit earlier, they would have been even more shocked.

Next up was Zhuge Guanxing from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals. The beautiful young man smiled, and his eyes narrowed into narrow crescent slits, making him seem rather astute.

As Zhuge Guanxing glanced around Silver Sword Peak, he grinned and said, "I heard that Mount Shu had a new fruit garden, but I didn't expect it to be this large.

"Oh? A sixth-realm Golden-Furred Hou? Well, that's impressive.

"Is that Senior Di Nufeng's residence? Let's avoid it."

Ji Lingyu had arrived with the four core disciples of the Great Astral Sect. This runaway youth was actually missing home, but her family hadn't come looking for her. Returning on her own would be too embarrassing, so she decided to stay with this group for now.

The core disciples of the Great Astral Sect showed no signs of discord. The time for the most important part and most brutal competition of the trial was soon approaching, but their bond remained strong.

They all respected their eldest senior brother Ren Hongdao, cared deeply for their junior sister Tang Shi, fully trusted the wise^[1] and courageous Yun Chaoxian, and greatly admired the skills of Li Fujian's second uncle.

Chu Liang was not surprised by that. It was well known that the Great Astral Sect was of one mind, so they wouldn't have any problems with unity.

Zhang Chen, the last member of the undercover squad, wasn't there.

"Brother Zhang asked me to apologize to everyone," Ren Hongdao said. "The academy assigned him an important mission at the last minute, so he can't join us for this operation."

Chu Liang felt a bit regretful about that. The head disciple of the Ascending Dragon Academy had left a deep impression on Chu Liang. He had a feeling that Zhang Chen was the strongest among them. Even if Zhang Chen wasn't the best fighter, he was definitely the most reliable.

"No matter. We have many people in our group; Ghost Face shouldn't mind that we're one less," Chu Liang replied.

It was common for diabolical sects to gain or lose a member anyway.

Chapter 370: Are None of You Going to Tell Him?

It was indeed true that the diabolical sects did not care about their disciples.

This stemmed from the principles upon which the sects were founded. In the righteous sects of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, disciples felt a sense of belonging to their sects, which in turn supported and protected them.

But such principles did not exist in the diabolical sects. Members joined for profit alone, and the sects exploited their disciples without concern for their lives. Similarly, the disciples felt nothing for the sects. They were willing to abandon their allegiance if they didn't receive enough benefits.

As a result, the turnover rate of disciples in the diabolical sects was very high.

In fact, within the Dark King Sect, it was common for disciples to move from one faction to another.

Everyone in the diabolical sects found the concept of camaraderie laughable.

Nevertheless, people continued to join diabolical sects.

If these people could be disciples of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten sects, none of them would join the diabolical sects. However, many were not talented enough to compete with the prodigies. In a fair competition for resources, they would only be able to watch the prodigies' backs and live as ants in the dust for the rest of their lives.

Therefore, some chose the crooked path, using various means that harmed others' interests to compete with true prodigies. This was the purpose of the diabolical sects' existence.

With the existence of competition in this world, there would always be those with insufficient talent and unscrupulous hearts, ensuring the legacy of the diabolical sect would never be cut off.

The way the diabolical sects sustained themselves and survived created an extreme estrangement between the sect and its disciples. Because of this, the undercover operation led by Chu Liang and his companions was able to proceed smoothly.

After leaving Mount Shu, the group dispersed, each heading to the gathering point on the outskirts of the Southern Regions mountains to meet up with Ghost Face.

Soon, every member of the Ghost-Face Chamber of the White-Bone Hall was fully assembled.

Ghost Face was dressed in a set of black armor with a flowing dark luster, exuding a sinister aura. This was a treasured armor, provided to each of the White-Bone Hall's guardians, and it possessed very powerful abilities.

"Is everyone here?" Ghost Face coldly glanced around.

"One is missing, probably had an accident. No need to wait," Chu Liang replied.

Chu Liang stood at the forefront, with the elite members of the Ghost-Face Chamber behind him.

Xiao Si, a genuine disciple of the diabolical sect, followed closely behind with his head held high and eyes sparkling. He was clearly eager to perform well on this mission and leave a good impression on his superiors.

"Alright," Ghost Face nodded and said, "Let me explain the mission details to you first."

"This time, we are going to hunt down an official from Kaoshan City in the Southern Regions. He will be escorted to the capital by the court's forces, and we will intercept him halfway. Under no circumstances should he reach the capital of Yu alive," he said slowly. "Understood?"

"Understood," the group responded in unison.

Monk Pushan quickly asked, "Old Chamber Master, why do we need to kill that imperial court official? This matter is of great importance. If it's not for something crucial, why provoke the imperial court? And if it's something important, why do we only need to kill the person?"

Ghost Face glanced at him and replied decisively, "You don't need to know."

"And..." Monk Pushan seemed to want to say something else.

"Shut up," Ghost Face shouted.

"But..." Monk Pushan opened his mouth again.

"Speak again, and I'll pull out your tongue," Ghost Face said viciously.

"Mm mm mm," Monk Pushan shook his head repeatedly.

Ghost Face then got up and flew off while the group followed silently behind him.

Monk Pushan tugged on Chu Liang's sleeve and said with Voice Transmission, "There's a hole in the back of his pants. Are none of you going to tell him?"

Chu Liang pondered for a moment and replied, "Since he doesn't like to hear it, we should just keep quiet."

Monk Pushan looked back at the silent crowd, who were just watching and not making a single sound, and thought to himself, We Buddhist disciples are too kind-hearted.

...

"Official Wei Xi of Kaoshan City?"

"That is me."

In front of the government office of Kaoshan City stood a majestic White-Feathered Golden Luan, two zhang tall and five zhang long. Its glossy body and slender, sharp feathers exuded an aura of dominance and pride, commanding the center of the long street.

Passersby could only gaze in awe before detouring around it.

In the cities of the Yu Dynasty, large demonic beasts were strictly prohibited, except for a few registered tame ones. Even those registered had to enter the city on foot and were not allowed to fly high. If they had done that, the city supervisors were allowed to shoot them down at any time.

However, there were exceptions being the Three Golds and Five Banners.

The Three Golds referred to three types of spirit beasts: the Five-Clawed Golden Dragon, the Celestial Golden-Winged Horse, and the White-Feathered Golden Luan.

The Five-Clawed Golden Dragon needed no explanation. It was the imperial guardian, a beast that carried the fate of the nation. This creature was only ridden by the emperor on very formal outings and might not have left the capital of Yu even once in a hundred years.

Only imperial family members or high-ranking officials on imperial orders were allowed to ride the Celestial Golden-Winged Horse. Wherever it went, officials and commoners would kneel at its sight.

Similarly, the White-Feathered Golden Luan also served the emperor, carrying envoys sent out to represent the imperial court.

The Three Golds represented imperial authority.

The Five Banners were the military banners hoisted by the five regional military towns. As these banners were hoisted, they signaled a call to action, demanding the unwavering support of every city they passed through.

And today, the White-Feathered Golden Luan, one of the legendary Three Golds of the imperial city, was stationed in Kaoshan City! This creature represented an envoy sent directly by the emperor, a rare sight that many might never witness in their lifetime.

Below the Golden Luan, a team of saber-wielding guards in scarlet robes stood ready. These were the Celestial Hunting Guardians, one of the seven elite units of the Night Dragon Hall.

The leader was a robust and imposing middle-aged man who stared directly at the city official in front of him, exuding a powerful aura.

"I am Zhou Gu'an, Banner Hoister of the Celestial Hunting Unit, commanded by the emperor to escort you to the capital of Yü," he declared with unwavering authority.

As he spoke, he raised a Celestial Hunting Guardian token.

"At your command!" The official in green robes hurriedly bowed, his face showing signs of age and a habitual humble smile. He added, "Thank you for your efforts, sirs."

Although his official rank was slightly higher than that of the Banner Hoister of the Celestial Hunting Unit before him, he knew these were the guards of the Night Dragon Hall! They were the emperor's guardians!

Court officials held a rank higher than local officials, while the emperor's guardians stood yet another rank above the ordinary court officials.

In the imperial bureaucracy, being two ranks lower was like being two generations apart.

Moreover, the Banner Hoister was here under imperial orders to bring him back to the capital. How could he not be respectful?

Wei Xi was nearly sixty years old and had always held a low-ranking official position in Kaoshan City. In his youth, he had practiced cultivation, but his progress stopped at the first realm, serving mostly the purpose of keeping him fit.

He had resigned himself to living out his days in this small city, but unexpectedly, an opportunity had arisen.

An opportunity that might allow him to rise to great heights!!

With overwhelming excitement, Zhou Gu'an took Wei Xi up onto the Golden Luan's back. The White-Feathered Golden Luan does not lower its head to welcome anyone; one either flies up themselves or is taken up by someone.

Whoosh—

The White-Feathered Golden Luan quickly flapped its wings and soared into the sky, leaving the citizens of Kaoshan City gasping and looking up in awe.

As the Golden Luan flew out of the area designated as Kaoshan City, Wei Xi smiled and asked, "Sirs, please don't laugh at me, but I have never been to the capital of Yu. How long will it take to get there?"

"We'll be there soon," Zhou Gu'an replied without turning his head.

"Ah?" Wei Xi was stunned.

Even though Wei Xi had never been to the capital of Yu, he knew it was far to the north, while Kaoshan City was in the south. The journey there and back was long.

How could they arrive soon?

Was the White-Feathered Golden Luan really that powerful?

As Wei Xi pondered the long journey ahead, he noticed the Celestial Hunting Guardians around him suddenly turning to look at him. Before he could question their gazes, a voice called out from afar.

"Wei Xi!"

The gentle voice seemed to strike his mind like a bolt of lightning. Instinctively, he responded loudly, "Here!"

In the next moment, he found himself wondering why he had answered this inexplicable call.

Soon, a young man in a scholar's robe appeared on the back of the White-Feathered Golden Luan, standing tall and graceful, with a kind face and gentle eyes.

"Zhang Chen, student of Ascending Dragon Academy, greetings to you all," he announced with a gentle smile.

"Zhang Chen?" Banner Hoister Zhou Gu'an stood up, his hand gripping the hilt of his saber. "Do you know that riding on the Golden Luan's back without permission is punishable by death?"

"Oh?" Zhang Chen met his gaze and replied in a gentle tone. "And impersonating the emperor's envoy is not?"

“What did you say?!”

The sharp sound of sabers being drawn filled the air, creating a cacophony of steel!

Wei Xi, paralyzed with fear, collapsed on the back of the Golden Luan. This sudden turn of events was beyond anything he had expected. What was happening?

From what this academy student implied, could it be that these Celestial Hunting Guardians were impostors?

Were they here to kill him?

Surrounded by these saber-wielding Celestial Hunting Guardians, the sense of security he had felt just moments ago suddenly turned into a sense of crisis. Fear gripped his heart as he realized he might be in grave danger.

But Zhang Chen showed no fear, forming a hand seal and chanting, "No staying on the back of the Golden Luan."

Buzz—

As soon as he finished speaking, the Celestial Hunting Guardians all trembled as if struck by a heavy blow. Each of them lost control of their bodies and involuntarily flipped backward, jumping off the back of the Golden Luan without hesitation!

Only Banner Officer Zhou Gu'an resisted the effect of the Spoken Divine Law slightly, but soon he too leaped off!

As the group of Celestial Hunting Guardians left the White-Feathered Golden Luan's back, they regained control of their bodies and immediately hovered in midair, ready to attack again.

But Zhang Chen had already stepped forward, grabbed the collapsed Wei Xi by the shoulder, and soared into the sky!

At the same time, he opened a page of a scripture in front of him, which instantly burst into dazzling light, seemingly opening a portal to a distant place!

Just as Zhang Chen was about to escape with Wei Xi, a black arrow filled with demonic aura suddenly shot from afar!

Whoosh—

The arrow, like a black meteor, shattered the teleportation scripture Zhang Chen had opened and continued straight toward him!

It was hard for Zhang Chen to dodge while carrying Wei Xi. Nonetheless, with his quick reflexes, he was able to raise a finger up and activate a row of twelve exquisite jade talismans. The talismans circled in front of him, blocking the formidable arrow!

Boom—

A thunderous explosion echoed in midair, and Zhang Chen and Wei Xi fell together!

A valley shrouded in thick mist was right below them!