

M. Slaying 371

Chapter 371: What Are You Waiting For?

In a valley just north of Kaoshan City, Ghost Face landed, leading Chu Liang and the others.

Ghost Face turned to them and said with a serious tone, "The imperial court's forces will depart from Kaoshan City, and no matter which direction they take, we'll see them from here. We'll intercept them in this valley. I'll summon a mist that will obstruct their divine sense, ensuring they won't detect us from the air. As soon as the White-Feathered Golden Luan appears, we strike immediately!"

With that, he drew out a large banner and waved it through the air, chanting incantations. He then bellowed, "Come to me, Mist!"

Whoosh—

Sure enough, a thick gray mist rose from the ground, quickly engulfing the entire valley and concealing everyone within it.

All eyes were fixed on the sky, observing secretly from the shadows.

Before long, a magnificent White-Feathered Golden Luan appeared, soaring gracefully through the heavens. The imperial court's forces were heading straight north without a hint of precaution.

Ghost Face looked up at the sky, ready to order his men to attack.

Behind him, Chu Liang and a few others exchanged glances, silently confirming their intentions.

Although they were reluctant to lose Ghost Face, a valuable source of information within the White-Bone Hall, they could not in good conscience help the diabolical sect assassinate an imperial court official. Therefore, their plan was to let the target go amidst the ensuing chaos, sabotaging the mission without exposing their identities. This would be the best possible outcome.

However, things might not go so smoothly. If necessary, they would have no choice, but to work together and kill Ghost Face and Xiao Si, silencing them forever.

But before Ghost Face could give the order, a sudden change occurred in the sky.

A beam of white light fell onto the back of the White-Feathered Golden Luan, and immediately, a group of Celestial Hunting Guardians scattered into the air. Someone attempted to escape using a scroll that activated Shattering the Void but was shot down by a terrifying demonic arrow from afar.

All of this happened in the blink of an eye!

As Ghost Face watched the two people fall from the sky and into the valley, he hesitated for a moment before he ordered, "Go search! Kill the target on sight!"

The dark arrow just now had sent chills down every spectator's spine. Ghost Face didn't choose to dispel the mist as he wasn't confident he could take the arrow if it was aimed at him.

He kept the mist to continue obscuring distant detection. It was only in such a scenario that he would dare to strike at the target.

Moreover, the Celestial Hunting Guardians in the air and the demonic aura from afar were quickly approaching, about to enter the valley in the blink of an eye. Without the mist to obstruct them, those two forces would immediately clash. Ghost Face didn't know their purpose; if the target were taken by someone else, the task of killing that target would then be difficult to achieve. The mist could temporarily slow them down.

According to the order of the Elder of White-Bone Mountain, the target harbored an important secret and must be silenced forever!

The mist hindered divine sense detection, allowing even Ghost Face to see only within a few dozen zhang. However, as they were very near the valley, he knew that by following the direction of the fall, they would surely find the target, kill him swiftly, and leave undetected.

The other two groups wouldn't even know what happened in the mist.

The undercover agents led by Ghost Face were stunned by what had just occurred as they noticed that the person who had just opened a scripture in mid-air and was shot down looked a lot like Zhang Chen.

Previously, Zhang Chen didn't participate in this mission because he had been temporarily summoned for an important task by the Ascending Dragon Academy.

How did he end up on the other side?

Aside from the imperial court and the diabolical sect, there was another group present, and that powerful demonic aura... could they be demons?

Confusion swept over the group, but they quickly refocused on their top priority: finding the target.

Just then, Ji Lingyu approached Chu Liang and said through Voice Transmission, "I can see the target's location. You distract Ghost Face, and I'll go for the rescue."

Chu Liang immediately raised his voice to rally the others, "As the chamber master, it's my duty to tackle the toughest challenge! I'll intercept the Celestial Hunting Guardians. Brothers, find the target quickly!"

Hearing this, Ghost Face frowned immediately.

All these people were new members of the Ghost-Face Chamber. To earn their trust and obedience, a leader had to shoulder the heaviest burdens. Chu Liang's bold declaration and eagerness to perform was a move to establish his authority.

However, despite stepping down as chamber master, the most authoritative figure in the Ghost-Face Chamber remained him. If Chu Liang succeeded in establishing his authority in front of these new members and later defied him, it could undermine his control over the entire chamber.

No! I must take back the opportunity to establish my authority! Ghost Face thought.

So he grabbed Chu Liang's shoulder and said, "It's just a team of Celestial Hunting Guardians! Leave them to me! Go with the others and locate the target!"

"Old Chamber Master..." Chu Liang replied, looking moved, "Very loyal of you!"

Ghost Face then leaped into the air.

The team of Celestial Hunting Guardians had just entered the mist when they were confronted by a ferocious face!

"Go find the target!" Zhou Gu'an, the leader, shouted. Without asking the identity of the figure that appeared out of nowhere, he drew his saber and slashed at them.

Swoosh—

"Trying to leave?" Ghost Face sneered and changed his finger seals.

Hundreds of ferocious faces suddenly emerged from the mist, appearing as ghostly apparitions, their bloody mouths wide open, ready to bite the Celestial Hunting Guardians!

Everyone drew their sabers and slashed at the apparitions, but as soon as the apparitions shattered, they immediately exploded!

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—

The area above the mist was instantly blasted open with craters.

Listening to the intense sounds of battle, Chu Liang couldn't help but click his tongue in amazement. Ghost Face was indeed worthy of being a guardian of the White-Bone Hall; his strength was formidable, far surpassing their previous leader, General Hei Yu.

If they wanted to take him down, it would indeed take considerable effort.

...

Wei Xi fell from the sky. Although he had been very close to Zhang Chen in the air, they landed far apart on the ground. For a moment, the old man found himself all alone.

Fortunately, he was at the first realm of cultivation and was physically strong, so he didn't suffer any serious injuries from the fall.

But in the mist of this valley, a cold, murderous aura constantly swirled. Having served as an official in the Southern Regions for many years, Wei Xi was familiar with this aura; it was clearly diabolical qi!

What should I do? he thought.

His mind raced, and he quickly realized that in his current situation, running was the only option.

Wei Xi was an official in Kaoshan City. One day, a village under his jurisdiction reported finding strangely shaped white bones in the river, suspected to be demonic beast remains.

He could have just reported the matter to the city supervisors, but he decided to check it out himself and get some fresh air. His wife had been quarreling with him ever since she saw him helping the widow Wang fetch water the previous day.

Upon arrival, he discovered that the bones on the riverbank were half-human, half-beast... before death, it seemed to be a beast-headed, human-bodied creature.

He thought it was strange and followed the river upstream to the mountainous regions in the Southern Regions where he found a cave with a crack emanating a malevolent aura.

Wei Xi didn't dare to investigate further, so he returned to the city and reported the matter to the city supervisors.

Somehow, the news reached the capital of Yu and even alarmed the Regent and the Emperor, prompting the palace to send the White-Feathered Golden Luan to bring him to the capital.

After wasting half his life, he thought this was his chance to rise to great heights. Who knew he would fall halfway through the flight?

Run, run, run. The word echoed in Wei Xi's mind.

But after only a few steps, a figure in black blocked his way!

Without a doubt, this must be someone from the diabolical sect!

"A diabolical cultivator!" Wei Xi wailed, trying to turn and flee.

But the diabolical sect member moved swiftly and was already in front of him!

My life is over! Wei Xi immediately closed his eyes, resigning himself to his fate, thinking that if there was a next life, he would never help a widow fetch water again.

"What are you waiting for? Come with me!"

"Hmm?"

After a moment, Wei Xi, who had closed his eyes and braced himself for death, felt no blade. Instead, he heard a voice from the diabolical sect member.

He opened his eyes and saw a woman with delicate facial features and a faint golden sparkle in her eyes underneath the black robe.

"I'm here to save you, come with me!" Ji Lingyu urged, pulling Wei Xi up and fleeing into the mist.

Chapter 372: What's going on with the world these days?

"Miss, you... Are you not from the diabolical sect?" Wei Xi asked hesitantly as Ji Lingyu pulled him along in a frantic run.

"You just need to know that I'm one of the good people in the diabolical sect," Ji Lingyu answered hastily. "Don't ask anything else. I'll get you out of here!"

Her Xuan Yuan eyes glowed with golden light. She could now see through the fog, allowing them to avoid running into danger.

Yet, after running only a short distance, she slowed to a stop.

A figure shrouded in dense demonic qi had appeared in her line of sight, and despite being quite a distance away, their gaze was locked on her. Ji Lingyu could tell that person also had some divine ability allowing them to see through the fog.

However, it seemed that the range of that person's divine ability might not extend as far as Ji Lingyu's Xuan Yuan Eyes. The flow of that person's qi remained still, suggesting that perhaps they hadn't actually seen her after all.

Ji Lingyu released Wei Xi and pointed somewhere.

She said, "Run that way. Keep going straight. Turn right at the bend, and you'll get out of this valley."

Panting heavily, Wei Xi tried to speak. "Miss, you—"

"I'll stop the enemy," Ji Lingyu said and leaped forward.

The enemy was already nearby. He was dressed in a black cloak, and his face was covered with a bizarrely patterned bronze mask. His icy gaze, devoid of any emotion, was like that of a wild beast. The incorporeal flames of demonic qi raging around him clearly marked him as a vicious member of the demon race!

If Chu Liang were to see this demon's outfit, he would recognize it. The outfit was identical to that of the demon divine envoy he had encountered in the past.

Ji Lingyu promptly gave up on hiding her presence. Blinding beams of golden divine light burst from her eyes, shooting toward her enemy like arrows!

In response, the demon unleashed his astonishing power, thrusting his fist toward Ji Lingyu. That fist instantly transformed into an enormous fur-covered fist of a beast and smashed the two beams of golden divine light!

Meanwhile, Ji Lingyu had already cast a spell and activated one of her enchanted tools—a pair of silver bells. She threw one bell with her left hand and frantically shook the other with her right.

As the chime of the bells rang out, the demon's eyes revealed a pained yet fierce expression.

"Argh..."

Then he suddenly transformed into a ferocious spotted leopard! His eyes were filled with blood-red divine light!

The Silver Bells' ability was similar to that of Chu Liang's Demon-Revealing Brick. They were both enchanted tools that targeted demons and could cause them pain and confusion.

Ji Lingyu's attack with the Silver Bells caused the leopard demon to reveal its true form in a rage. It wanted to charge over and kill her!

However, Ji Lingyu's objective had simply been to divert the demon's attention; she had no intention of fighting to the death. Now that she had achieved her objective, she swiftly retreated just as the leopard demon began charging over!

...

Wei Xi had been running alone for a while, feeling like the world was spinning around him. The fog left him disoriented and unsure of what to do.

Suddenly, another black-robed figure appeared in front of Wei Xi. This person was dressed just like the person who had tried to save him earlier.

"Ah!" Wei Xi cried out in surprise.

Earlier, I met a good person from a diabolical sect. Is it even possible for me to meet a second one? This one must be here to kill me!

Wei Xi staggered backward a few steps.

Has my punishment for helping a widow fetch water truly come for me after all?

Before Wei Xi could wallow in regret again, the black-robed figure walked over in large strides and grabbed Wei Xi by the collar.

"I'm guessing you must be Wei Xi?!"

"I.. I... I..." Wei Xi stammered, unsure if he should admit it.

"I'm here to save you," the person said in a gruff and boisterous voice.

"Then I am," Wei Xi admitted hurriedly with a nod.

However, he immediately regretted it. I was so flustered that I admitted it in a rush. What if this man's deceiving me?

Nevertheless, when the man stepped closer, Wei Xi looked under the man's hood and saw an angular face that portrayed a clear image of great strength, highlighted by thick eyebrows and big eyes... The man looked very wise, not at all like a scammer.

Sure enough, the man scooped up Wei Xi and broke into huge strides, running at an astonishing speed!

Wei Xi realized, He really is here to save me.

As Wei Xi jolted about in his rescuer's arms, he asked, "Are you also from a diabolical sect?"

"Yes, but I'm one of the good people in the diabolical sect," replied the large man, who was none other than Yun Chaoxian of the Great Astral Sect.

He didn't have Ji Lingyu's mystical ability, so he couldn't see through the fog, but he was quite lucky. He had just charged around blindly and managed to stumble upon Wei Xi.

Wei Xi blinked. What's going on with the world these days? Why are all the members of this diabolical sect good people?

After Yun Chaoxian ran for a while, another figure emerged from the fog ahead. It turned out to be Zhou Gu'an, one of the Celestial Hunting Guardians.

He had a chilling gaze as he looked at Wei Xi in Yun Chaoxian's arms.

Zhou Gu'an said, "This person is an official of the imperial court. Release him."

Yun Chaoxian glanced at him. "A member of the imperial court?"

Wei Xi whispered in Yun Chaoxian's ear, "He seems to be a fake..."

"What?" Yun Chaoxian's eyes widened as he looked at Zhou Gu'an. "He said you're a fake?"

Wei Xi facepalmed. "Don't say it so loudly..." [1]

He thought, If I end up in that man's hands again, there won't even be the pretense of civility.

"If you don't let him go, don't blame me for being rude," Zhou Gu'an said coldly, raising his bloodstained sword.

Feeling invigorated by those words, Yun Chaoxian replied, "Hah. I, your grandfather[2], am afraid you'll be too polite!"

He threw Wei Xi several zhang away and told him, "Run by yourself. I'll handle him!"

Yun Chaoxian then pulled out a huge halberd from thin air and charged!

Clang.

The sounds of a saber and a halberd clashing rang out before Wei Xi even landed!

...

Thud.

The pitiful old man didn't dare look back. Once he hit the ground, he rolled to his feet and ran. However, after running for a while, he noticed something was off about his surroundings.

There were signs of a recent battle, and dense demonic qi lingered in the air. It looked like some giant beast had just ravaged the place.

Wei Xi then realized that his surroundings looked rather familiar and that this was where he had parted ways with that female diabolical sect member.

She brought me here, but we encountered a demon. She then took action and drew the demon away so that I could escape.

After that, I ran really far away and met that strong man who picked me up and ran...

He ran in the wrong direction!

He went back instead!

Wei Xi finally figured it out. Yun Chaoxian had run in the direction that Wei Xi had run from, taking him back to the center of the valley.

"This..."

The old man wanted to cry, but no tears came.

I don't know if that mighty diabolical cultivator is truly stupid or truly malicious. Regardless, he is most definitely one or the other.

There's danger lurking all over this place. It's full of people who want to kill me. I almost managed to escape after such great difficulty, only for him to bring me back here in a mad dash.

I can't go back in that direction since that mighty diabolical cultivator and Zhou Gu'an are fighting there. I have no choice but to make a detour. But this fog is so thick. Even a slight detour comes with the risk of losing my sense of direction.

While Wei Xi was hesitating, a person approached him from a distance. It was another eerie figure in black robes. This one looked just like the two Wei Xi had met earlier.

This time, Wei Xi didn't try to avoid the black-robed person.

Instead, he went over straight away and asked, "Hey, you're also from a diabolical sect, right?"

The person was startled. "Eh?"

Wei Xi got straight to the point. "What are you standing there for? You've been looking for me, right?"

The diabolical sect disciple seemed confused. "You are..."

"I'm Wei Xi!" the old man said hurriedly, "There's no time to talk. Just hurry up and take me away!"

"Huh?"

The diabolical cultivator had a look of disbelief.

That was because he was Xiao Si, one of the four senior members of the Ghost-Face Chamber and the only genuine diabolical cultivator in the chamber.

Like the others, he had been searching for Wei Xi in this valley, but he had quickly fallen behind. So, he had been wandering blindly in the forest, hoping for a stroke of luck.

Then he spotted someone from a distance and observed them to figure out their identity. However, it turned out that he didn't need to do that. The person rushed over to him and even introduced themselves as Wei Xi.

What is this? Is there really such a thing as dumb luck in this world?

Seeing Wei Xi in such a hurry, Xiao Si was very confused.

What's going on with the world these days?

There's actually someone who is in such a hurry to die?

Huh?

Chapter 373: There Are Still Many Good People in the Diabolical Sect

Confusion spread across Xiao Si's face.

In the decade or so since he joined the Dark King Sect, he had naturally killed many people. There were certainly those unafraid of death, but this was the first time he encountered someone so willing.

Since the other party claimed that he was the target, whether it was true or not, he couldn't let him go.

So Xiao Si drew his dark silver saber and raised it high.

Alright, alright. Since you're so cooperative, I'll make sure to kill you in one strike and ensure that you leave this world with no pain at all.

Wei Xi was happily waiting for the other person to take him to safety, but unexpectedly, the person drew a saber.

There are no enemies around though. Who is he going to slash? Could it be me? These questions flashed through Wei Xi's mind.

Seeing the blade coming down, his blood ran cold. It was aimed right at him!

Wei Xi's body went limp, and he turned to dodge. But Xiao Si, even at his weakest, was at the early stage of the fourth realm. How could an old man at the first realm escape from him?

Seeing the target trying to flee, Xiao Si finally smiled.

This looks correct. If he isn't even afraid when the saber is upon him, I would suspect it's a trap.

The gleaming blade rose, catching the light in a dazzling arc.

This was a mission personally assigned by the Elder of White-Bone Mountain. Anyone who succeeded in eliminating the target would undoubtedly earn significant merit.

Today is my day to earn merit! Just as this thought crossed Xiao Si's mind, a low, strange roar sounded beside him.

"Roar—"

A flash of green crossed his peripheral vision as a large green python lunged at Xiao Si, biting into his upper body. The sharp fangs embedded into his shoulder and chest, and blood spurted out instantly!

A shadowy figure in black robes darted swiftly from the distance—it was none other than Chu Liang, the master of the Ghost-Face Chamber!

Like them, Chu Liang had been aimlessly searching the valley. Suddenly, the sounds of battle reached his ears, and he sprinted towards the commotion. However, by the time he arrived, the fight had shifted elsewhere, leaving behind only a chaotic tangle of broken trees.

He hadn't walked far before spotting Xiao Si, poised to strike with his saber, aiming to kill an elderly man dressed in official robes.

This was naturally the target.

In a state of panic, Chu Liang swiftly deployed the Green Leaf enchanted tool! The movement-restricting form of the enchanted tool, the azure python, immediately coiled around Xiao Si, restraining him tightly!

Xiao Si, caught in the python's jaws, struggled furiously. He slashed at its mouth with his saber, only to discover that the creature wasn't made of flesh and blood—it was solid metal.

It turned out to be an enchanted tool!

He frantically channeled his cultivation power, using all his strength to break free, and the azure python disappeared with a flash of light.

Chu Liang landed softly.

"Chamber Master..." Xiao Si lay weakly on the ground, "Someone ambushed me just now."

Blood pooled on the ground, and half of Xiao Si's body was nearly torn apart. Though he managed to break free, he lost the ability to move.

He might have realized it was Chu Liang who had unleashed the enchanted tool, but in his current state, it was safer to pretend he didn't know.

If he exposed Chu Liang, he would surely die.

Chu Liang looked at him and said with a smile, "It's okay, take a rest."

With that, he struck Xiao Si's neck with a swift knifehand strike, causing him to immediately faint.

Chu Liang then casually picked him up, turned to the frightened old man sitting on the ground, and asked, "Are you Chief Officer Wei?"

Hearing this, Wei Xi almost burst into tears. During this sudden ordeal, Chu Liang was the first person to address him by his official title—the first civilized person he had encountered.

"I am..." Wei Xi replied. "Are you also one of the good people from the diabolical sect? Are you here to save me?"

"Yes," Chu Liang nodded, thinking to himself that this old man was quite perceptive.

Wei Xi felt a wave of relief wash over him as he thought to himself, There are still many good people in the diabolical sect.

...

Chu Liang cautiously moved forward with Wei Xi, making their way to the edge of the valley. Just as they were about to leave, the sounds of battle suddenly echoed from up ahead.

"Chief Officer Wei, stay here for now and don't move."

Chu Liang scattered two Puppet Pills, summoning one puppet to watch over Wei Xi and another to guard the unconscious Xiao Si. Even so, he felt uneasy and bound Xiao Si with the Demon-Binding Rope. Only then did he feel reassured.

He then approached the site of the battle, peeking to observe.

In the clearing, he saw three figures.

He recognized two of them: Zhang Chen and Zhuge Guanxing.

These two prodigious disciples from Ascending Dragon Academy and Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals were working together to battle a demonic entity.

The demonic creature fighting against the two of them wore a black cloak and a bronze mask adorned with strange patterns. Its muscular upper body was covered in powerful gray-brown fur, and it had dragon-like arms.

A divine envoy of the demon race? Chu Liang immediately recognized the familiar attire.

In its left hand, it held a giant bow as tall as the divine envoy, made of black meteoric iron. This bow could not only shoot arrows but also unleash incredible power with just its movements.

The divine envoy's strength was astounding. Whenever its muscles bulged, a mass of black light emanated. Each time it drew the bow, the arrows it shot had the destructive power to shatter mountains!

Anyone who was hit or even touched by it would certainly die.

What a powerful demon divine envoy!

Twelve jade talismans whirled around Zhang Chen as he continuously chanted while activating the Spoken Divine Law, skillfully restricting the divine envoy's movements.

"Whatever your hands hold is as heavy as Mount Tai!"

"Your breathing feels as if blocked by lead, affecting your entire body!"

"Whatever you see will be clouded as if you are seeing through mist!"

Layer upon layer of restrictions were placed on the demon race divine envoy, weakening his combat power. Yet, even under so many negative effects, he still displayed considerable destructive power. Whenever he drew his bow, a long trail of murderous aura followed!

But before he could release an arrow, a starlight would often point to a specific spot.

"Here!"

Zhuge Guanxing held a ball of starlight in his right hand. Before the divine envoy could release the arrow, Zhuge Guanxing would point out where it would land using the starlight's guidance. This allowed the two of them to dodge divine envoy's attack easily.

This way, the divine envoy couldn't do anything to them and could only roar in frustration.

Similarly, the two prodigious disciples couldn't defeat the divine envoy quickly.

At this moment, Zhang Chen was applying layers of restrictions on the divine envoy, which was crucial for maintaining the balance of the fight. It was clear to anyone that the divine envoy's cultivation level was higher than that of the two disciples. The reason he hadn't overpowered them was that Zhang Chen's exceptionally strong restrictions were restraining most of his power.

However, this also meant Zhang Chen was too busy to attack.

Zhuge Guanxing wasn't skilled in attacking, so he focused on deploying formation diagrams around the divine envoy, repeatedly activating them to create powerful explosions.

Yet, the divine envoy's formidable body gradually withstood these attacks. They could not inflict significant damage on him.

The divine envoy wasn't seriously injured, but it was extremely angry.

With just a few glances, Chu Liang quickly understood the situation. This fight was essentially two support-role players working together! While they couldn't launch powerful attacks, their tactics were incredibly annoying and drove their opponent into a furious rage.

If this dragged on, the two prodigious disciples would likely achieve victory eventually, but it would take a very long time.

However, once the mist dispersed, their identities would be exposed. Chu Liang realized he couldn't just stand by any longer.

After a moment of contemplation, he took out a mask from his storage enchanted tool. This was the mask he had acquired from another divine envoy. He put it on and wrapped a black robe around himself like a cloak. With his aura concealed, he now looked almost identical to a demon race divine envoy.

Immediately, he leaped out from the bushes and shouted, "I'm here to help you!"

The three in the clearing were all startled.

The demon divine envoy was drawing his bow. Seeing Chu Liang with a familiar mask approaching from the side, it didn't suspect nor hesitate as it shot an arrow towards Zhuge Guanxing's back!

As a battle-hardened archer of the demon race, all his arrows were shot with precision. At such a distance, this arrow was nearly unavoidable!

But Zhuge Guanxing stood calmly, suddenly motionless, allowing the arrow to pass harmlessly by him like a raging dragon.

Whoosh— Boom!

That one arrow caused a section of the mountain wall to collapse.

The arrow was shot with foresight, but Zhuge Guanxing could predict its trajectory, frustrating the elite archer of the Mountain Range of the Seven Kings to the point of rage!

He had encountered many strong targets in his life, but never someone so elusive that he couldn't hit them!

But now its "companion" had already arrived beside it.

Suddenly, the companion thrust out a sword!

A sword? The divine envoy's pupils dilated in surprise. Among the four divine envoys of the demon race, none used a sword.

Only human cultivators from the nine provinces preferred such fragile weapons.

He raised his giant bow to block, but Chu Liang suddenly flickered a few zhang away.

Swoosh—

Chu Liang had used Dimension Compression!

In an instant, Chu Liang reappeared behind the divine envoy and drove his sword into its back!

The Dustless Sword, infused with Geng Metal foundational qi, cut through the envoy's flesh with brutal force. Thanks to the bronze mask he had acquired, Chu Liang managed a surprise attack.

The sword pierced through the very body that Zhang Chen and Zhuge Guanxing had struggled for so long to severely injure!

"Roar—"

Even as the divine envoy's heart was pierced, he continued to struggle. His powerful muscles clamped down on the Dustless Sword as if it were cast from divine iron, firmly embedding it deep within. With a sudden, fierce twist, the divine envoy swung both the sword and Chu Liang around in the air! Chu Liang couldn't maintain his grip and was flung into the sky.

In a flash of light, the divine envoy transformed into a massive brown wolf, towering several zhang high. Its sharp eyes blazed with a fierce, menacing glare at Chu Liang.

This cunning human scoundrel! He disguised himself as my companion and inflicted severe wounds on me! I must kill him!

Demonic creatures from the Far West were inherently fierce, never backing down even in the direst of situations!

Filled with boundless hatred, the massive wolf leaped into the air, viciously lunging at Chu Liang.

But Chu Liang wasn't about to wait around to be killed.

He immediately ignited blood-red qi flames around his body, activating the Divine Dragons' Great Blood-Burning Technique and fusing a Dragon-Blood Crystal into his bloodstream, driving his power to its absolute peak!

Just as the giant wolf was about to devour him, he performed Dimension Compression once more!

Swoosh—

In a flicker, he appeared beside the massive wolf's back.

As soon as Chu Liang's Dustless Sword pierced the demon envoy's back, the divine envoy revealed its true form. Using its powerful muscles, it clamped down on the sword. As a result, its heart wasn't severely injured.

Then, by enlarging its body, the Dustless Sword's blade was no longer big enough to penetrate its heart.

This was how it managed to escape death.

However, with the sword embedded deep in his back, the envoy suffered significant damage and its movements were severely hindered. Chu Liang seized the hilt of the Dustless Sword and infused his foundational qi into the sword.

"Heavenly Sword Seal!"

Swish!

A huge sword light suddenly illuminated around the Dustless Sword.

At the same time, Zhang Chen, finally free from his previous tasks, pointed a finger at the giant wolf in midair and shouted, "Freeze!"

In that instant, the wolf was momentarily immobilized.

This perfect timing coincided with Chu Liang activating the Heavenly Sword Seal, controlling it with precise skill.

With Zhang Chen's excellent support, the giant wolf was left vulnerable, unable to resist the relentless attack from the sword embedded in its body.

Everyone present then witnessed an incredibly shocking scene.

Chu Liang slashed the wolf demon with a massive sword!

The massive sword light arced through the air, cleaving the giant wolf in two with a thunderous crash! After a brief pause, the sword light continued its relentless path, crashing into the shattered mountain wall and splattering it with streaks of blood.

Amidst the rain of blood, Chu Liang gently descended to the ground.

Though he was still wearing the bronze mask, his aura unmistakably revealed his true identity—he was Chu Liang of the Mount Shu Sect!

As Zhang Chen and Zhuge Guanxing, the two prodigious disciples stared at him, they both felt confused.

This person... Isn't he an undercover agent within the diabolical sect? When did he also become part of the demon race?

Is there anything he can't do?

Chapter 374: Jiuli

A golden imprint merged into his body as Chu Liang sheathed his sword with satisfaction.

Although the fight had ended swiftly, it was very much a risky one. The divine envoy's cultivation level far surpassed anyone else's, but the simplicity and directness of the demons' divine techniques masked the true extent of this disparity.

Using the advantage of their divine abilities, Zhang Chen and Zhuge Guanxing continuously weakened the divine envoy, while Chu Liang, wearing a bronze mask, stealthily approached and landed a backstab.

If it wasn't for the sharpness of the Dustless Sword, this strike might not have pierced the powerful body of the greater demon.

Even so, the demon divine envoy had nearly broken free.

This also made Chu Liang realize Zhang Chen's strength. If he hadn't been there to restrain the divine envoy, even if the divine envoy abandoned his bow, Chu Liang would have been crushed in a direct confrontation.

With Zhang Chen present, even the powerful demon couldn't rampage.

Most importantly, Zhang Chen's decisive action provided his teammates the opportunity to kill the enemy. He was the ideal partner Chu Liang had hoped for!

Of course, Zhuge Guanxing was also formidable. His ability to predict all attack points alone made him invincible in any battle.

In fact, to Zhang Chen and Zhuge Guanxing, Chu Liang was equally strong. However, his strength lay in his ability to always deliver some unexpected miraculous performance. As long as he was there, victory seemed assured. This brought a shock that was even more intense than the power of any divine ability!

"Brother Chu, this mask..."

As Zhang Chen and Zhuge Guanxing approached, they saw that Chu Liang had removed his mask. Immediately, they were filled with confusion.

"Just got it by chance previously," Chu Liang said casually as he put the mask away.

This item is very useful. I must keep it, Chu Liang thought.

With the giant wolf's body severed in two, Chu Liang went back to the pool of blood and rummaged around before he finally found a leather-stitched storage bag. It was considered the lowest grade of storage enchanted tools, but for the demon race, which lacked the ability to craft such items, it was already very precious.

This storage bag didn't require any inscription seal; a sweep of divine sense revealed its contents. Aside from the bronze mask and the giant bow, there were just some food and water, nothing of value. It seemed that even such powerful demons in the Far West were not wealthy.

"I'll hold onto these things for now; we'll split them later," Chu Liang said immediately.

It wasn't that he had selfish motives; this just wasn't a good place to divide the spoils. He only wanted the bronze mask; there was nothing else of value. The giant bow was impressive, but unfortunately, he didn't know how to use it.

"Alright," Zhang Chen and Zhuge Guanxing nodded, showing their trust in Chu Liang.

Turning his head, Chu Liang asked, "Brother Zhang, didn't you say you weren't coming? Why did you suddenly appear?"

"It's a coincidence," Zhang Chen replied with a light laugh. "I was dispatched by the academy on an important mission, and it turned out the task was to escort Official Wei Xi from Kaoshan City to the Capital of Yu."

"What kind of important secret does Chief Officer Wei hold that so many forces are fighting for him?" Chu Liang asked curiously.

"It's a long story. Let's find him first, and then I'll explain," Zhang Chen replied.

"I've already brought him here," Chu Liang said with a smile.

"What?" Zhang Chen and Zhuge Guanxing were slightly surprised again.

Brought him here? So it's all settled?

Chu Liang led Xiao Si and Wei Xi out from the nearby bushes. When Zhang Chen saw the target that everyone had been fighting over, he finally felt at ease.

Looking at Wei Xi, Chu Liang asked, "I'm really curious. Chief Officer Wei, why is everyone fighting over you?"

Wei Xi responded with a bitter expression, "I wish I knew."

...

"Chief Officer Wei is involved in matters related to Jiuli," Zhang Chen began.

Jiuli?

Upon hearing this name, Chu Liang immediately thought of his Jiuli Soul Armor. Could there be a connection?

"In the land of the nine provinces, this matter has been so well hidden that very few people are aware of it. In fact, it's only recorded in a few ancient secret texts," Zhang Chen explained slowly.

"According to legend, there was an ancient evil deity in the Southern Regions who commanded a powerful and malevolent demonic tribe. This demonic tribe was neither fully human nor demon and they were called Jiuli."

Chu Liang had heard stories about the evil deity of the Southern Regions.

Legend has it that the Southern Bastion Mountain was brought down from the immortal realm to suppress him and his countless demons.

Chu Liang used to think it was just a myth, but over time he realized that in this world, legends often contain some distorted truth.

"The Jiuli tribe was a combination of demons and humans, mostly with beast heads and human bodies. Unlike today's half-demons, they reproduced as a stable tribe, possessing the physical strength of demons and the intelligence of humans," Zhang Chen explained in detail.

Chu Liang had previously delved into this matter due to Daoist Yan, learning that offspring born from the union of humans and demons were called half-demons.

Half-demons could live in human form and were often talented prodigies. However, due to their impure genes leading to instability, they could transform into demons at any time. Even if they had never transformed, their descendants could revert to a demon form as well.

The genetics of demons were far stronger than those of humans. Once they transformed into demons, the change was irreversible. This meant that no matter how gentle a half-demon had been, there was always a chance that the gene for transformation into a demon could be triggered, potentially causing a catastrophic outburst.

Therefore, half-demons were highly detested in the land of the nine provinces.

Daoist Yan of the Mount Shu Sect was such a half-demon.

If the Jiuli tribe could combine the advantages of humans and demons, they would be incredibly powerful.

Zhang Chen continued, "According to ancient texts, the Jiuli tribe was brave and warlike, conquering the entire Southern Regions and exterminating all other races. But one day, they were suddenly annihilated overnight, with no descendants left. The mysterious force that wiped out the Jiuli has never been definitively identified, and remains of the Jiuli people have rarely appeared. However, Chief Officer Wei recently discovered skeletal remains that seem to be a member of the Jiuli tribe."

Upon hearing this, Wei Xi finally understood what was happening.

He had handed over the beast-headed human skeleton to the City Supervisory Division, and this skeleton might have been the source of his troubles.

The legendary Jiuli...their hallmark was beast heads and human bodies.

Some demons appear with the head of a beast and the body of a human. However, unlike other beings, these demons revert to their original form upon death, leaving no skeletal remains of a beast-headed human.

Wei Xi wondered if the crack he had seen was an entrance to a hidden realm.

As he speculated, Zhang Chen quickly added, "As a once powerful tribe that dominated the Southern Regions, the Jiuli had their own glorious civilization. Unlike the demon race, the Jiuli were skilled in tool-making and forging weapons, with unique craftsmanship. It is even said that the Xuanhuang Battle Armor was a legendary artifact forged by the members of the Jiuli tribe in ancient times. Previous excavations of Jiuli ruins have uncovered numerous enchanted tools, enough to arm an entire army of cultivators."

"Because of this, the Imperial Supervisory Bureau took it very seriously. Fearing that news would leak and attract attention, they immediately dispatched a team to bring Chief Officer Wei to the capital of Yu," Zhang Chen said. "However, the news still got out.

"The information from Kaoshan City reached not only the demon race and the diabolical sect but also infiltrators in the imperial city. The Celestial Hunting Guards who set out from the Capital of Yu were likely ambushed along the way, allowing the culprits to brazenly pose as imperial guards.

"My teachers at Ascending Dragon Academy must have anticipated this and sent me to protect Chief Officer Wei, which is why I arrived in such a hurry."

After listening to Zhang Chen, Chu Liang understood the situation.

Wei Xi had discovered a crack that might be the entrance to a hidden realm and this hidden realm could potentially hold ancient treasures, making it no surprise that various demons were coveting it.

This was especially crucial for the demon race.

The cultivation civilization of humans, including tool-making, alchemy, talismans, and formations, was something the demon race could never fully grasp due to their lack of comprehension.

However, the Jiuli tribe, with bodies similar to the demon race but skilled in tool-making, could greatly enhance the demon race's power if their civilization and treasures were found.

Having said that, Zhang Chen added, "Since that's the case, I still have a task to complete, so I'll take Chief Officer Wei back now."

"Alright," Chu Liang nodded, "Brother Zhang, be careful on your way."

Getting out of this Valley of Bewildering Fog might still be dangerous.

"No problem. I have a secret treasure temporarily given by my senior in the sect," Zhang Chen said, opening the golden scroll again. He then looked at Chu Liang and the others, saying, "You all have great merit this time. When we return to the Capital of Yu, I will make sure the academy and the imperial court recognize your contributions."

Chu Liang quickly said, "It's better to keep a low profile."

Recognition was not important; if he was not careful, his undercover status could be exposed.

Zhang Chen smiled, "I know my limits."

Chu Liang nodded reassuringly.

That's true.

Zhang Chen wasn't from the Great Astral Sect; he was reliable. As for Wei Xi, Zhang Chen would instruct Wei Xi clearly so that nothing unnecessary was said.

Whoosh—

With a flash of golden light, a portal opened up.

Zhang Chen took Wei Xi by the hand and stepped into the portal, heading toward the vast unknown!

Chapter 375: Purge

The scroll was an enchanted tool that the Ascending Dragon Academy had given to Zhang Chen. It could execute the teleportation skill Shattering the Void three times.

That scroll was different from Chu Liang's jade talisman. It required some time to charge up, so it couldn't teleport immediately upon activation. Therefore, it was risky to use it as a life-saving tool.

That was what happened earlier in the fight against the demon divine envoy. Zhang Chen had used the scroll in midair, but the demon divine envoy had shot Zhang Chen down before the scroll could teleport him.

Nevertheless, it was quite useful in the current situation. Zhang Chen quickly escaped the valley with Wei Xi.

Chu Liang silently pondered about the situation. The imperial court is in such a hurry to place Wei Xi under their control...

It probably isn't just because they're afraid of outsiders getting hold of him. They're probably also afraid that he might have some wicked desires of his own. After all, the skeleton might be an ancient treasure.

Chu Liang immediately set off with Zhuge Guanxing to search the valley. However, instead of searching for Wei Xi, they were seeing if any of their squad members were still fighting the enemy.

Shortly after Wei Xi left, the deep, loud roar of a leopard rang out from the fog. It seemed to be sending out a message.

Chu Liang and Zhuge Guanxing rushed over to the source of the sound and saw a leopard demon. It was the one that Ji Lingyu had encountered, but it was now entangled with Ghost Face. As for what had happened in between, no one knew.

Meanwhile, two more demon divine envoys heard the leopard demon's call and swiftly rushed over. Ghost Face could hold his own against one divine envoy, but now that he was suddenly facing three, he panicked.

Seeing that, Chu Liang and Zhuge Guanxing just stayed hidden; they didn't make any moves to reveal their presence.

It would be a total joke to even try doing anything. Even one demon divine envoy was hard to handle, let alone three. There was simply no need for them to risk their lives to save Ghost Face.

Ghost Face could tell that this was a losing battle too. His opponent's allies had all come to help, yet he had no one on his side. He quickly retreated several dozen zhang, creating some distance between them.

Then he unfurled a large banner.

"Disperse!"

The fog dispersed at once!

With the fog cleared, the whole valley was now revealed to everyone. The valley was in a sorry state, having been ravaged by the chaotic battle.

Suddenly exposed to the sunlight, everyone paused, feeling a bit awkward.

The fake Celestial Hunting Guardians and the demon divine envoys scanned the valley with their divine sense and found that Wei Xi was no longer there. They then abruptly stopped fighting and left.

Coming to the same realization, Ghost Face frowned.

He flew into the air and shouted, "Members of the Ghost-Face Chamber, follow me! We're leaving!"

The battle in the Valley of Bewildering Fog hadn't lasted long, but it had certainly been chaotic.

Chu Liang and Zhuge Guanxin waited for a moment before getting up to respond to Ghost Face. If they emerged too quickly, Ghost Face might realize they had been nearby but hadn't gone to help him. That would be pretty hard to explain.

Soon after, all the members of the Ghost-Face Chamber gathered and flew to an open space on a nearby mountain. Then they finally took a breather.

"We let the target escape." Ghost Face looked dejected. "The hall master gave me an operation for the first time, and I failed..."

Actually, there had been no issues with his plan. With the fog obstructing outsiders, the members of the Ghost-Face Chamber should have been able to find and kill the target very quickly.

If only the members of the Ghost-Face Chamber were all of one mind with him...

Chu Liang comforted Ghost Face. "Old Chamber Master, this isn't your fault. Who would have thought demons would suddenly appear? Moreover... there's another crucial reason that the target was able to escape... We have a traitor in our midst!"

"Eh?" Ghost Face narrowed his eyes. "It's that true?"

"Absolutely true. This guy's the traitor!" Chu Liang threw Xiao Si to the ground. "Not only did he let the target go, but he even turned around to stop me from going after the target!"

Despite Ghost Face's dejected state, he didn't immediately believe Chu Liang's words. Instead, he shot a beam of silver light toward Xiao Si to wake him up for further questioning.

Xiao Si woke with a quiver and opened his eyes.

The first thing he saw was Chu Liang.

Ghost Face yelled at Xiao Si, "Who sent you? If you don't explain clearly, I will flay you and extract your soul, leaving you in eternal torment!"

While Ghost Face was yelling, a burst of light that only Chu Liang could see shot out from his hand. It was a Chain of Resentment!

This time, Chu Liang targeted Xiao Si and himself! He couldn't target Ghost Face with the Chain of Resentment, so Chu Liang simply made himself the second target.

In a split second, a wave of rage surged in Chu Liang's heart.

As a member of a diabolical sect, this piece of crap must have the blood of countless lives on his hands. Just looking at him makes me angry!

Xiao Si had been lying weakly on the ground in poor health, yet he suddenly flew into a rage too.

Chu Liang had snatched away Xiao Si's position as the new chamber master and even ambushed him, causing him to be in such a miserable state. There was no doubt he hated Chu Liang deeply.

"I'll kill you!" Xiao Si roared, suddenly jumping to his feet.

He drew his saber and slashed at Chu Liang in front of everyone!

Chu Liang flipped his hand over and took out a yin-nature talisman from his storage tool. He ruthlessly smacked it onto Xiao Si.

After that, there were sounds of weapons piercing flesh.

Chu Liang hadn't stabbed Xiao Si. Instead, several weapons appeared out of thin air and flew over, stabbing Xiao Si from the side.

Thud.

Xiao Si's corpse fell to the ground.

The resentment and rage clouding Chu Liang's mind instantly dissipated. So, that's what it feels like to be bound by the Chain of Resentment.

Chu Liang turned to Ghost Face and said, "I intended to keep him alive so that we could interrogate him. I didn't think he'd be so relentless, choosing death over surrender..."

Having witnessed the scene himself, Ghost Face didn't have much to say.

If Chu Liang had killed Xiao Si first and then returned to say that he had eliminated the traitor, Ghost Face might have doubted Chu Liang's claim. However, Chu Liang had brought Xiao Si to Ghost Face. Then Xiao Si tried to commit murder in Ghost Face's presence, making it very clear what was going on.

If Xiao Si wasn't guilty, why would he make a move in such a situation?

Ghost Face gave a light nod and said to everyone, "You all saw that, right? This is the fate of a traitor. I hope there are no more among you."

Chu Liang quickly replied, "Old Chamber Master, please rest assured. All of the brothers we have here now are trustworthy."

After purging Xiao Si, the Ghost-Face Chamber had become a lot purer.

A while later, Ghost Face sighed. "Haaa... You should all go your separate ways for now. I will report this matter to the hall master."

The members of the Ghost-Face Chamber flew off the mountain one by one.

Even if they wanted to meet up again later, they had to first create the illusion that they were going their separate ways.

...

By the time Chu Liang made it back to Silver Sword Peak, it was already late in the day.

He returned to his small wooden cabin, shut the door without a word, and launched his reward session.

The wolf-demon divine envoy had been so fearsome. Chu Liang should be able to get something good for killing it.

Inside the White Pagoda, three Large-Headed Dolls sat in a row against the wall. They were surrounded by an incredibly dazzling and hazy Sea of Qi. Chu Liang felt satisfied just by looking at it.

Oh Large-Headed Dolls, circulate more and more... circulate to give me a good life.

Chu Liang stepped forward and pressed the "Refine" button, and there was a flash of light.

Boom.

A ball of light floated into Chu Liang's hands.

[The Guiding Moonlight of the Heavenly Howling Wolf: These are homing targets made with moonlight and arrows crafted with a wolf's soul. Once a homing target has been stuck somewhere, the arrows will be guided to always hit the homing target as long as the arrows are released with sufficient force to cover the distance.]

As the light faded, Chu Liang looked at the reward in his hands.

One hand held ten long arrows of a dark gold color, with golden wolf heads engraved onto the arrow heads. They gave off a bloodthirsty and threatening aura.

The other hand held ten sheets of moon-white talisman paper that shimmered brightly. This talisman paper was naturally the legendary homing target. It just needed to be pasted somewhere, and the wolf-head arrows would home in on it.

This seems very powerful.

Coincidentally, this is the perfect time for me to practice my archery. I've got a large bow in that bag I took.

Oh, I said I would share the items in the bag with Zhang Chen and Zhuge Guanxing later... but now I'm keeping the bronze mask and the large bow...

Guess if it comes down to it, I could let them split the rations and water in the bag among themselves?

Chapter 376: Off?

After Chu Liang had unboxed the reward, it was already very late. Even so, he didn't feel tired, which was why he headed out to the Bombax River to kill another batch of wine-jar monsters.

These wine-jar monsters behaved like low-intelligence group animals, following certain behavioral rules. For example, only one would live in each part of the river; if there were more, they would move downstream to find a new place. Also, they would vanish during the day and come out at night to catch and eat ghosts.

At some point, Chu Liang started suspecting what would happen to these wine-jar monsters if he had never come to collect them.

They would probably spread downstream along the river, but what would happen after they devoured enough ghosts? Could they grow infinitely?

Although he was curious, he didn't keep a wine-jar monster alive to test his conjecture. After all, there would always be times when he couldn't be here to kill more of these monsters for rewards. By then, he could just come back here and check things in a few days.

Currently, the demand for Fragrance of Enlightenment was high, so the more he could collect, the better.

In the future, once he planted enough Intoxicating Spirit Flowers, the garden would grow big enough to take care of itself, so he wouldn't have to work so hard anymore.

Take Berry Wonderland as an example. Even though Chu Liang hadn't planted new Golden Vein Flowers for many days, he could still let the plants rest and recover by rotating the growth in different areas.

This was the so-called rotational planting system.

After he killed the wine-jar monsters, Chu Liang still felt unsatisfied, wishing he could slash another ten or eight of them.

I am really working too hard, Chu Liang thought to himself.

He then headed back to the Silver Sword Peak to sleep.

Upon waking up, he suddenly felt some changes in himself.

As he worked on activating the Qi-Circulation Technique, combining his qi and spirit, he realized the reason for these changes: he had achieved a breakthrough.

However, he hadn't achieved a breakthrough in the cultivation of the Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique. Instead, he had achieved a breakthrough in the cultivation of the Secret Dragon Blood Technique.

Currently, Chu Liang was simultaneously practicing the cultivation techniques of both human cultivators and the dragon race. These two paths did not conflict with each other and neither required him to exert much effort.

Even without doing anything, I still have everything I need.

The cultivation method of celestial beasts was straightforward. Ever since Chu Liang acquired the Secret Dragon Blood Technique through the reverse scale given to him by the White Dragon, even breathing equated to cultivation. Today, he finally stepped into a new realm, marked by a new golden streak on the white scales on his wrist.

He sensed that the purity of the dragon breath in his body had increased. As he condensed a ball of platinum-colored dragon breath in his palm, he noticed that the golden hue within the ball had intensified.

As Chu Liang stepped outside to an open space, he tried punching the mountain wall. A powerful force instantly created massive cracks in the wall, causing half the mountain to rumble!

Boom—

His physical strength had reached a terrifying level. In terms of pure strength, even physical cultivators or martial artists of the same realm might not be his match.

He was practically a humanoid dragon!

And this was only the second realm of the dragon race. His physical strength was already equivalent to that of a fourth-realm human.

Of course, this didn't mean that the Secret Dragon Blood Technique was superior to the cultivation techniques of the Great Astral Sect. Rather, celestial beasts generally had an incredibly smooth cultivation process in the early stages, easily reaching the peak of their innate abilities.

The stronger celestial beasts, such as the four divine beasts and the four malevolent beasts[1] were destined to cross the Heavenly Gate as long as they could reach adulthood.

The weaker ones, such as the Golden-Furred Hou, could reach the fifth or sixth realm even if they were slow-witted, which would be unimaginable for humans.

However, progressing beyond the seventh realm was particularly difficult for celestial beasts. Their comprehension skills were far inferior to those of humans, making the understanding of Great Dao as challenging as reaching the heavens.

Thus, in the seventh and especially the eighth realm, humans held an absolute advantage.

Chu Liang even suspected that it was because humans had to overcome many difficulties, making breakthroughs step by step to reach the Heavenly Gate, that they accumulated a profound understanding of spiritual qi and the Great Dao, allowing them to succeed at the Heavenly Gate.

Otherwise, many spirit beasts possessed intelligence comparable to humans. Why couldn't they comprehend the Dao?

It might be because their cultivation methods were too simple, making it difficult for them to comprehend the Dao. This was similar to not being accustomed to thinking; when the need arose, they found themselves unable to do so.

This gave Chu Liang a wake-up call.

Although the Large-Headed Dolls were excellent, he couldn't rely too much on them for cultivation. He needed to have a thorough understanding of his own techniques.

No matter how busy he got, he should at least practice the Qi-Circulation Technique once a day—no, twice!

He should strive until he couldn't anymore and work so hard that his effort would move him to tears!

He then wondered if he now possessed both the physique of a celestial beast and the comprehension of a human.

This meant that he would be strong in both the early and late stages of cultivation.

This sounded impressive but wasn't the Jiuli tribe, as Zhang Chen described, just like this?

How did such a powerful tribe get wiped out in the past...

Could it really have been divine punishment from the immortal realm?

...

The next day, Chu Liang returned to Heaven-Reaching Peak.

Wen Yulong had sent a message yesterday afternoon saying that he had finished modifying the Inferno Devil Armor and that it was ready for collection. However, by the time Chu Liang saw the message, it was already evening, so he waited until the next day to pick it up.

Wen Yulong's eyes lit up as soon as he saw Chu Liang. "Senior Brother Chu! You're finally here!"

Seeing Wen Yulong appearing so eager to show his work, Chu Liang knew that the modifications had been successful, so he smiled as well.

"Looks like it turned out well?" he asked with a smile.

"Hehe." Wen Yulong smiled mysteriously, then took out a palm-sized brocade box. "Open it and see."

Chu Liang took the box, opened it, and saw a dark red scaly sphere the size of a fist inside.

Its shape was somewhat similar to a pinecone, but slightly larger than a normal-size pinecone.

Fortunately, he had heard about some high-grade armor in the immortal realm that could be stored in this pill-like form, so he didn't ask what it was.

Chu Liang picked up the scaly sphere and infused it with qi.

Whoosh—

As the scaly sphere shimmered and expanded, red scales started wrapping around Chu Liang's body like a serpent, transforming into a piece of the armor plate. In the blink of an eye, his entire body was enveloped.

As the light faded, it transformed into a set of flame-colored light armor.

Even without considering anything else, its appearance was much better than the original Inferno Devil Armor.

"So, how is it? The original armor was too ugly, so I redesigned each piece of the armor plate. Isn't it much better?" Wen Yulong said, seeking praise.

"Fantastic! This is one of the best armors I've ever seen," Chu Liang praised generously.

Though, to be honest, I haven't seen many high-grade armors up close, Chu Liang thought. Only the Jiuli Soul Armor and the Inferno Devil Armor.

When Wen Yulong heard the praise he was hoping for, he took a few steps back and said, "I didn't make major changes to its original defensive capabilities, so there's no need to test that. But I added a new set of formation patterns. You can try activating it."

Upon hearing this, Chu Liang checked with his divine sense and indeed felt a newly added formation that required active activation. And so, he gently infused it with qi.

Boom—

Considering his previous experience dealing with Wen Yulong, he only infused a tiny bit of foundational qi... In fact, he wished he could infuse only a quarter of that.

The armor suddenly quivered violently, and a burst of Inferno Abyss Flames ignited on it! The flames swirled around, covering a radius of a zhang, like a blooming red lotus!

"Whoa." Chu Liang was startled and quickly asked, "What's going on?"

"The activation of the original Inferno Devil Armor could ignite Inferno Abyss Flames as well, but the intensity of the fire wasn't high and was only strong enough to dissolve external foundational qi," Wen Yulong explained. "So while the Inferno Devil Armor was great for defending against qi attacks, its defense against close-range physical strikes was mediocre, if not nonexistent."

Chu Liang was aware of this.

The Inferno Devil Armor wasn't a thick, heavy type of armor but relied on a layer of Inferno Abyss Flame to dissolve qi. This made it weak in close combat defense, which he had long noticed... after all, he had pierced through several of them himself.

He never expected one set of armor to cover all bases.

The Jiuli Soul Armor excelled in close combat defense but was weak against long-range attacks. It complemented the Inferno Devil Armor well, and this was what he had in mind.

However, it seemed Wen Yulong had other plans.

"I was considering how to enhance its close combat defense," Wen Yulong explained. "Given the material limitations of the armor, it's difficult to improve its defense. So, I decided that the best defense is a good offense. I modified the formation pattern that generates the Inferno Abyss Flame."

"Anyone who tries to engage you in close combat will be burned by the flames. This way, you can be immune to all close-range attacks," Wen Yulong said, smiling confidently.

Chu Liang nodded repeatedly as he commented, "That's a genius idea."

It made perfect sense. If no one dares to engage you in close combat, isn't that essentially defense?

After experiencing the strength of the new armor, Chu Liang was very satisfied and asked, "Alright, so how do I turn off the flames?"

He had studied the formation patterns for a while but couldn't find a way to retract the flames. If it kept burning like this, there was no telling how long it would stay ignited.

It was just a casual question, but Wen Yulong's smile suddenly froze, and he showed a puzzled expression. "Off?"

Chapter 377: That Looks Like Your Place

The word "off" was the antonym of the word "on." In this context, it meant extinguishing the flames that had been ignited. This was exactly what Chu Liang had conveyed to Wen Yulong using mere facial expressions.

Wen Yulong smacked his forehead. "I didn't realize that you'd need to turn off the Inferno Abyss Flames during a fight. When the foundational qi runs out, it'll shut off on its own, right?"

"And when exactly will that happen?" Chu Liang asked.

"I designed an inscription pattern to store foundational qi. As long as you save enough, you just need to infuse a little bit to ignite the flames, and they'll last a long time," Wen Yulong explained, grinning proudly. "When I tested it, I didn't store much qi, so it should burn for another four hours."

Chu Liang fell silent for a moment. He had to admit that the design of this armor was indeed impressive.

In prolonged battles, cultivators might fight until they run out of foundational qi. At that point, this qi saved in this qi-storing formation could be life-saving. Wen Yulong's design was truly thoughtful.

Although Chu Liang felt touched by such a design, he thought it would have been nice to know these things in advance...

"If I take it off, will it extinguish?" Chu Liang asked.

"While the Inferno Abyss Flames are still active, the armor can't be taken off," Wen Yulong explained. "You can only remove it once you're out of combat to prevent damage or accidental removal during a fight."

Great. I am stuck, Chu Liang thought as he felt a sense of helplessness.

With no other choice, he flipped his hand and made a pointing gesture, drawing a couple ice talismanic scripts in the air.

Sizzle!

As expected of the Inferno Abyss Flames being the essence of the earth fire! It took a total of twelve blasts of icy frosts at his own face to extinguish the fire.

"Cough, cough... This battle armor modification turned out pretty well. Thanks... cough!"

Chu Liang brushed off the thick layer of ice and frost from his body, sending a cloud of icy dust into the air and making him cough several times.

After taking off the armor and letting it revert to its spherical form, Chu Liang finally felt at ease and sat down.

Wen Yulong's modifications to this treasured armor were a pleasant surprise. The enhancements he made to the Inferno Devil Armor, features that the members of Inferno Devil Valley hadn't thought of, significantly boosted its power.

With the Inferno Abyss Flame extensively enveloping his body during a fight, those martial artists without long-range combat abilities would be at a severe disadvantage. Unless they were strong enough to kill him in a single strike, there was no way they could withstand the prolonged battle while being continually roasted by the Inferno Abyss Flame.

Despite the improvements, the blend of surprise and awkwardness remained the same.

"By the way, there's something else," Wen Yulong said. "Dan Lingzi, the alchemist you asked me to contact, sent a message. The first batch of Qi-Gathering Pills is ready for pickup."

"Oh?" Chu Liang's eyes lit up.

Previously, he had learned the technique of making fruit-flavored pills from Dan Lingzi. However, after a few days of intense practice, Chu Liang got caught up in various other matters and wasn't able to refine more berry-flavored pills.

Now that he had to oversee all the business operations of Silver Sword Peak, it became difficult for him to personally participate in production. So, he decided to outsource the task of making the fruit-flavored pills.

Chu Liang initially searched the Hall of Alchemy for suitable disciples and found two who were capable of learning this technique. He had them practice the technique with the intention of having them refine the pills later on, which he would then buy at a high price.

However, they weren't as quick to learn as Chu Liang and still needed more time to master the technique.

A few days ago, when Wen Yulong went to Taotie City to purchase tool-making materials, Chu Liang asked him to send a letter to Dan Lingzi, requesting his help in refining the berry-flavored Qi-Gathering Pills. Chu Liang offered to buy them at a price higher than the market rate.

Since Dan Lingzi made a living by crafting fruit-flavored pills, this request wouldn't inconvenience him too much.

Naturally, Dan Lingzi agreed, and Chu Liang sent over a batch of Golden Vein Berries. Now, the first batch of the order was ready.

The Berry-Flavored Qi-Gathering Pills were one of the most attractive products of Berry Wonderland. As long as there were enough pills, Berry Wonderland would always be able to attract tourists to the Red Cotton Market.

However, the stalls run by Mount Shu disciples alone weren't enough to handle the influx of visitors.

The few shops in Taotie City that agreed to open branches here haven't sent any updates for a while, Chu Liang thought. I need to pay them a visit again.

...

As night fell again, a crescent moon hung in the sky.

The wind on the ancient tree on the Azure Falling Peak was very strong at night, causing clothes to flutter.

Jiang Yuebai, dressed in a white gown, stood on a branch of the giant tree as she waited. During this dark night, her eyes sparkled like stars.

As Chu Liang flew over from afar, he couldn't help but feel this wave of emotion. Although he had met Senior Sister Jiang many times, he was still stunned by her beauty each time.

"Senior Sister Jiang, why have you asked me to meet you here?" Chu Liang asked as he looked around, feeling guilty for some reason.

"My esteemed teacher has entered closed-door cultivation," Jiang Yuebai replied with a faint smile.

"Oh..." Chu Liang immediately relaxed, sitting down on the branch and waving his hand. "It's not like I'm afraid of Senior Aunt Yan."

But you are though, Jiang Yuebai thought.

Of course, she didn't expose Chu Liang's little secret and instead said, "Our usual spot was discovered. Recently, people have been disturbing the peace there, but it has become much quieter being on the Azure Falling Peak, so I thought we should meet here instead."

Chu Liang smiled awkwardly, feeling a tinge of guilt.

He was partly responsible for this. That place had originally been Jiang Yuebai's secret base, but during their last visit, two Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomena occurred simultaneously, drawing a large crowd of Mount Shu disciples to the location. To this day, people still go there to take a look. Even though they had been headbutted by Little Baize multiple times, they still wouldn't give up.

However, the ancient tree on Azure Falling Peak was indeed a quiet place.

It was obviously quiet, as it had been Daoist Yan's territory. Daoist Yan had spent all four seasons meditating under the ancient tree on Azure Falling Peak. Apart from Jiang Yuebai, no one dared to approach. With Daoist Yan now in closed-door cultivation, this naturally became Jiang Yuebai's place for solitude.

Speaking of which, it was strange that Daoist Yan had suddenly moved her closed-door cultivation to an unknown location. Moreover, few people knew that she was even in closed-door cultivation.

"My esteemed teacher being in closed-door cultivation is something you should keep to yourself," Jiang Yuebai reminded.

Chu Liang hadn't thought much of it at first, but her reminder made him understand immediately.

Daoist Yan was preparing for a breakthrough!

There was only one reason she needed to be this cautious. Daoist Yan cultivated the Cloud of Determination Great Dao. If she achieved a breakthrough, she would clash with the current Dao

Master of the Cloud of Determination. If word got out, it might attract deliberate sabotage from those with ulterior motives.

For example, there was a scheme to awaken Baize from its state of being on the brink of ascension.

The competition for control of the Great Dao was ruthless, and the methods used in this competition were extremely fierce, both secretly and openly.

The two of them sat side by side on the high branch, their silhouettes against the crescent moon looking like a perfect pair.

"On the first day of next month, the Four Seas Whale Gang is holding a ceremony for the new vice-chief's succession. Representatives from the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten will attend," Jiang Yuebai said softly. "Senior Uncle Wang Xuanling asked me to see if you plan to go."

"The Four Seas Whale Gang..." Chu Liang murmured.

Whenever the Whale Gang's new chief assumed their position, they would hold a grand succession ceremony, inviting fellow immortality cultivators. Besides celebrating, it was also a way to announce the change of leadership and establish connections with the new leader.

Given the controversy surrounding Jiang Shenting's ascension, this ceremony was bound to be exceptionally grand. Inviting representatives from the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten was his way of legitimizing his position.

As the grand peak master of Mount Shu, Wang Xuanling would certainly attend such an event.

Naturally, he wouldn't go alone; a few prominent disciples would accompany him. The head disciple couldn't escape this duty, and Xu Ziyang, being Wang Xuanling's favorite disciple, was also included. The third person Wang Xuanling summoned was Chu Liang.

However, Wang Xuanling was reluctant to visit Silver Sword Peak himself, fearing an encounter with Di Nufeng. Knowing that Jiang Yuebai had a good relationship with Chu Liang, he asked her to relay the message instead.

"I'm actually quite busy these days..." Chu Liang pondered for a moment before saying with a smile, "But if you are going, then I can't miss out."

"Hah," Jiang Yuebai laughed, "I didn't ask you to come along."

"There is a mix of all kinds of people in the Four Seas Whale Gang. As Mount Shu Sect's head disciple, you must not be in any danger. It's our duty as fellow disciples to accompany you and ensure your safety," Chu Liang replied righteously.

Jiang Yuebai smiled, then turned her head and remained silent for a while. Suddenly, she asked softly, "What if..."

"If I were to go to a very dangerous place in the future, would you come with me?"

She seemed a bit nervous.

"Of course," Chu Liang answered without hesitation.

Jiang Yuebai turned back to look at him, her eyes shining like evening stars, making Chu Liang feel slightly dazed.

But he stood his ground, meeting her gaze bravely.

He even felt a slight urge to lean closer...

Boom!

At that moment, a thunderous explosion echoed from afar, so loud it was deafening even from this distance.

Both of them were startled.

Jiang Yuebai looked towards the source of the sound and remarked, "That was a powerful explosion."

Chu Liang replied softly as he tried to restore the atmosphere earlier, "Don't worry. Someone will handle it."

"But..." Jiang Yuebai said, glancing over again, "that looks like your place."

"What?!" exclaimed Chu Liang.

Chapter 378: Am I That Important?

Chu Liang left in a great hurry.

...

He rushed back to Silver Sword Peak, and intense flames filled his line of sight. Half the hillside was ablaze with violet-gold flames, and Di Nufeng's pavilion was gone. All that remained was a crater engulfed in raging flames.

Fortunately, Chu Liang's side was unaffected; the Berry Wonderland and the Intoxicating Spirit Flower garden were still there.

Chu Liang let out a sigh of relief.

Luckily, only Esteemed Teacher's pavilion was blown up.

That's not a huge loss.

These violet-gold flames were clearly from Di Nufeng's Samadhi True Fire, so Chu Liang didn't dare approach. Even with his current cultivation level, it would be really painful if he were to get burned by it.

After a moment, some of the divine fire gradually subsided, converging and withdrawing to where Di Nufeng's pavilion used to be... which was now the site of the crater.

Di Nufeng emerged from the blazing crater.

Dressed in a high-waisted, black-hemmed red dress as always, she stood nonchalantly with her usual languid expression as the flames danced in the wind. Against a backdrop of the scorched ruins of her pavilion, she appeared especially stunning and imposing.

Seeing Di Nufeng emerge, Chu Liang finally dared to approach.

He asked cautiously, "Esteemed Teacher, what happened?"

It looked like she'd been in a battle, but he didn't see any enemies... He guessed that they were likely scattered all over the burning hillside.

"Nothing." Di Nufeng shook her head. "I was cultivating."

"Ah... What?"

Chu Liang was about to sigh in relief, but he suddenly realized something was off about what Di Nufeng had said. His eyes widened in shock, and he took a few steps back.

Chu Liang recalled the various things he'd seen Di Nufeng doing in the past ten-odd years that he'd spent at Silver Sword Peak.

Drinking wine, reading picture books, playing mahjong, sleeping, and fighting... When have I ever seen Esteemed Teacher cultivating?

In fact, even those who had been here twenty years before him might not have ever seen her cultivating.

Why did she suddenly start cultivating today?

There were only two possibilities. One was that Di Nufeng had a sudden epiphany and decided to cultivate diligently. The other was that the Di Nufeng standing in front of Chu Liang was a fake.

Chu Liang thought the latter was more likely.

"Why did you step back?" Di Nufeng asked, giving him a sidelong glance. She said irritably, "Is it that strange that I was cultivating?"

What do you think? Chu Liang muttered inwardly in silence.

Nevertheless, he said, "Esteemed Teacher, you are well known for being diligent, so of course, it's not strange. It's just a bit surprising."

These words of courtesy sounded like flattery to Di Nufeng.

She chuckled and replied, "I wouldn't say I'm diligent. It's just that I've been feeling more motivated lately."

"Esteemed Teacher, did something happen?" Chu Liang asked.

In his mind, he added, I can't figure out what could possibly motivate you enough to cultivate...

"Haaa..." Di Nufeng sighed. "Mount Shu is experiencing some turbulent times, so Yan Zi resolutely decided to go into closed-door cultivation to get stronger. I can't keep staying stagnant like this either..."

Chu Liang advised, "No matter how difficult the situation is, we should proceed steadily. Considering what happened today... Esteemed teacher, did you experience qi deviation?"

Di Nufeng hadn't worked on her cultivation for many years. Her sudden cultivation session had probably caused her qi to deviate. It was a very reasonable conjecture based on the state of the hillside.

However, Di Nufeng glared at him. "What qi deviation? I made a breakthrough!"

Chu Liang was startled again. "Huh?"

She cultivates for the first time in eight hundred years[1] and just casually makes a breakthrough?

What kind of fairy tale is this?

Moreover, Di Nufeng was one of the top seventh-realm Eminent Ones. It was incredibly difficult for someone at her level to make progress in their cultivation, yet she had made a breakthrough just like that...?

"This might happen often on our peak in the future. Be mentally prepared," Di Nufeng warned Chu Liang.

What? Are you planning to make breakthroughs every day?

Chu Liang found it quite absurd, but it also seemed quite possible since it was Di Nufeng.

A cultivator's intelligence and perception were two truly distinct things.

There were many intelligent people in this world, such as the officials and cabinet ministers of the imperial court. At least a quarter of them had no cultivation ability at all, yet they were all undoubtedly highly intelligent individuals.

Then there were some people who could casually make breakthroughs in their cultivation despite not having much intelligence and generally spent their time drinking wine, sleeping, reading picture books, and playing mahjong. This was probably the power of perception.

Indeed, different people had different fates.

In any case, it wasn't a bad thing.

If Esteemed Teacher gets a little stronger, it just means I can walk a little more boldly outside.

After finding out that there was nothing wrong at home, Chu Liang felt at ease. He was thinking about whether he should go back to Senior Sister Jiang and let her know everything was fine. Perhaps they could even continue the good mood they had going earlier...

A second later, Di Nufeng said, "Oh, dear. My place has been blown to smithereens. I have nowhere to stay tonight... Guess I'll go sleep in Yan Zi's pavilion in the ancient tree on Azure Falling Peak.

Heheh, I've wanted to sleep there for a long time, but she never let me... Now she can't stop me. Yan Zi's bed... Heheheh..."[2]

Chu Liang's expression froze.

Esteemed Teacher, do you really have to go there?

How about you sleep at my place, and I'll go there instead?

If that's not possible, could you at least go a little later?

How about it?

I'm begging you.

...

In the end, the night passed by peacefully.

Chu Liang had no idea what Di Nufeng did on Yan Zi's bed, but when she returned to Silver Sword Peak, her smile looked a little perverted.

The next morning, disciples specializing in leveling land, building, and restoring mountains arrived to repair the damaged half of Silver Sword Peak and rebuild Di Nufeng's pavilion. It was impossible to rebuild the exact same pavilion, but before long, it would look as if nothing had ever exploded there.

Seeing the disciples work, Chu Liang couldn't help but marvel at their professionalism. Whenever these disciples were building something, a group of people would go over and enthusiastically watch the creation process.

Chu Liang would have liked to watch too... if he wasn't busy.

Unfortunately, he had to fly to Taotie City early in the morning. He had quite a burdensome task to deal with that day.

After having breakfast, Chu Liang got on the Golden-Furred Hou, and they flew north.

Sitting on the back of the Golden-Furred Hou, Chu Liang found time to complete his two qi-circulation cycles for the day. He was deeply moved by his own diligence.

Upon arriving in Taotie City, Chu Liang went to see Dan Lingzi.

"Ah, Young Hero Chu," Dan Lingzi said in greeting.

He was much more cordial this time. He beamed with enthusiasm and warmth that was reserved for his financial backer.

"Esteemed Senior Dan Lingzi, long time no see," Chu Liang replied with a smile. "I heard you've already concocted those berry-flavored pills; your speed is truly astonishing. You really do live up to being the genius alchemist who pioneered the Pill Fusion Technique!"

"Heh." Dan Lingzi blushed at the praise. "It's just a few thousand pills. Even if it were a few thousand more, I'd be done making them for you in just a few more days."

"Really?" Chu Liang asked incredulously.

He was thinking, If that's true, then I will certainly ask you to concoct even more pills next time.

"Hehe," Dan Lingzi chuckled instead of replying. Then he took out a storage gourd and handed it to Chu Liang. "Please check them."

"Esteemed senior, the pills that you concoct will, of course, be excellent," Chu Liang commented. Nevertheless, he still used his divine sense to inspect the pills and randomly took out a few of them for a taste. "Mm, it's a very pure berry taste."

The pills were authentic berry-flavored Qi-Gathering Pills. They were slightly less effective than the ones Chu Liang had concocted, but the quality was the same.

"I used as much of the Golden Vein Berries you sent me, so of course, they have a pure berry taste," Dan Lingzi said. Then he smiled awkwardly. "There are some extra berries left over. Could I—I heard they're quite valuable."

From his expression, it seemed he wanted to sell the leftover berries.

"Of course, esteemed senior. The extras are yours to keep," replied Chu Liang. "Feel free to use them. These are all home-grown spirit fruits. Just let me know if you'd like more."

"Young Hero Chu, you're so generous!" Dan Lingzi praised sincerely.

Chu Liang looked around and continued, "You have such great talent, esteemed senior. It's a pity that no one in Taotie City appreciates it."

"Haaa!" Dan Lingzi sighed, lamenting his unrecognized talent too.

It was true there wasn't a market for his fruit-flavored pills in Taotie City.

After all, the cultivators there were regular folks, and few were willing to pay a premium for pills that were essentially just sweet treats...

Seeing Dan Lingzi's dejected appearance, Chu Liang immediately asked, "Esteemed senior, have you heard that my sect's Red Cotton Peak is currently recruiting merchants? Why not set up a shop there? It's near my peak, so your fruit-flavored pills would definitely be in high demand!"

"This..."

Dan Lingzi was, of course, tempted by the idea.

Earlier, he had seen the recruitment announcement for Red Cotton Peak in The Seven Stars Gazette and had considered the possibility of shifting his business there.

Dan Lingzi fidgeted for a while in hesitation.

Ultimately, he admitted, "But I don't have the money to rent a shop."

"I know the elder who is in charge of this. If you want to shift your business there, I can arrange for you to rent a shop for free for ten years. During this time, if there are any pills that you can't sell, my sect will buy them from you. How about that?" Chu Liang offered a set of favorable conditions.

Upon hearing that, Dan Lingzi was inclined to go. Nevertheless, having been in Taotie City for so long, he was still a bit hesitant about moving so suddenly.

Chu Liang leaned close to him and said earnestly, "Esteemed senior, you have such great talent. If you don't move to Red Cotton Peak, it would be a tremendous loss for all of Mount Shu!"

All the flattery was getting to Dan Lingzi's head, and he was feeling rather dizzy.

He blinked and muttered, "Am I... really that important?"

Chapter 379: I Took His Place

After dealing with Dan Lingzi, Chu Liang headed straight to the Precious Pill Pavilion.

Previously, he had negotiated with several shops to open branches on Red Cotton Peak. Nevertheless, it has been many days with no progress at all, so he naturally went to inquire about it.

But when he met up with Elder Sun, whom he was now well-acquainted with, the elder appeared troubled.

"Young Hero Chu, Mount Shu is far away, and going through Taotie City... it's just too difficult," he said slowly.

Upon hearing this, Chu Liang fell silent.

Reading between the lines, it was clear that the distance to Mount Shu had already been acknowledged, so it wasn't the real issue. What the elder truly meant was the latter part of his statement—trying to go through Taotie City would be too difficult.

Could there be some resistance?

Seeing Elder Sun's reluctance to elaborate, Chu Liang didn't press further. Instead, he stood up and bade farewell. The Precious Pill Pavilion wasn't the only shop he had negotiated with earlier, so he decided to visit the others.

As expected, all the shops had backed out.

Although the managers of the shop wouldn't reveal the reasons why they had backed out, there were no secrets that could be kept forever. After some probing, Chu Liang managed to get a name—Huyan Bin.

Huyan Bin was the name of the son of Taotie City's city lord.

Chu Liang had heard of him before. Despite his young age, Huyan Bin was quite capable and had already taken charge of many affairs in Taotie City.

Who would have thought he would interfere with Mount Shu?

Logically, the market soon to be built on Red Cotton Peak did have similar functions to Taotie City. However, most people wouldn't see the two as competitors.

It was like comparing Chu Liang to Sword Saint Old Li Ba—the vast difference between them made the idea sound absurd.

For Huyan Bin to start suppressing the development of Red Cotton Peak now, it was likely because of a personal grudge or he had incredible foresight, predicting that Mount Shu would eventually become a rival.

But even Chu Liang wasn't so confident in Red Cotton Peak's potential.

Still, if the other party wanted to nip a potential competitor in the bud, now was indeed the best time. Taotie City's market was an ocean, while Red Cotton Peak was just a small pond. If he declared that anyone who chose Red Cotton Peak would be unable to do business in Taotie City, it was clear what choice people would make. After all, merchants were all driven by profit.

After pondering for a while, Chu Liang realized that this hurdle was unavoidable. He decided to pay a visit to Huyan Bin to discuss the matter.

It wasn't difficult to locate the City Lord's Residence in Taotie City, as it was the most imposing mansion in the city. Chu Liang went there alone, reported his sect and name, and requested to meet the city lord's son.

After the gatekeeper reported his arrival, an elegant and graceful maid promptly led Chu Liang to a waiting room, instructing him to wait there. She informed him that Huyan Bin would come to see him when he was available.

There were already two people in the waiting room: a middle-aged man with a distressed expression and an elderly man with white hair. Both of them sat in silence.

Chu Liang quietly took a seat behind them. Even after waiting for an hour, no one came to inform any of them about a meeting.

Feeling puzzled, he stood up and looked around.

The middle-aged man said, "You shouldn't wait anymore. No one will meet with you."

Chu Liang turned and asked, "Isn't it my turn after you two?"

"After us..." The middle-aged man smiled bitterly. "Then you'll have a long wait. I've been here for seven days."

"Hmm?" Chu Liang was slightly surprised and looked at the elderly man.

The elderly man slowly raised his head and cleared his throat, "Let me put it this way. My father started queuing here a year before I was born. I took his place."

What? Chu Liang was so confused.

...

Chu Liang finally understood that the purpose of this waiting room was to wear down visitors until they gave up. Even if a demon god had been queuing here since before it entered the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda, it still wouldn't get to see the son of Taotie City's city lord.

Realizing this, he immediately got up and left.

Although he couldn't think of any ways to counter Huyan Bin, the situation hadn't developed to the point where he would need to beg for mercy to ensure the growth of his business. Still, suppressing a potential competitor without giving any chance for negotiation was excessively tyrannical.

But since this was a business competition, he couldn't just summon his esteemed teacher here. If he had done that, it would change the nature of things and people would be even less willing to cooperate with Mount Shu in the future.

Upon closer consideration, Chu Liang realized that Taotie City might secretly harbor hostility toward the Mount Shu Sect, especially since this was a sensitive period with the Assembly of Immortal Sects approaching.

For the past several years, the Thunderbolt Stronghold and Taotie City had been looking down on the Mount Shu Sect. From their point of view, the Mount Shu Sect was just a declining immortal sect living off its past glory.

The feat of suppressing the demon god and saving humanity was indeed admirable, but it had allowed them to lead the righteous path for over two thousand years, which was more than enough. The disappearance of the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda was a wake-up call that it was time for them to step down.

If the Mount Shu Sect didn't hinder the growth of other sects, they could remain a well-respected immortal sect. However, despite their lack of capability, they continued to occupy a higher status. This behavior would eventually exhaust any remaining respect for the founding fathers of the sect.

The status as one of the Divine Nine symbolized not just honor but also significant influence within the Nine Provinces. Many privileges, occasions, and top-level resources were exclusive to the Divine Nine Immortal Sects. Matters of slightly lesser importance would be handled by the Terrestrial Ten Sects.

In recent years, Thunderbolt Stronghold and Taotie City had been developing rapidly. With no more room for upward growth, they could only ambitiously set their sights on this prestigious position. In fact, they were already very close.

When the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten were established in the past, the various immortal sects and the imperial court jointly set a charter.

One of the rules was that if a sect in the Divine Nine continuously ranked below the top ten in the Assembly of Immortal Sects for five consecutive sessions, it would lose its status as one of the Divine Nine. Similarly, if a Terrestrial Ten sect fell out of the top twenty for five consecutive sessions, it would lose its status as one of the Terrestrial Ten.

In the world of immortal cultivation, the law of the jungle ultimately prevails. No other sects could tolerate one relying solely on its past glories.

The rules of the charter were not very harsh. After all, the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten should be exceptionally powerful. The rule of being in the top ten prevented any lower-tier sects from suddenly rising to prominence in any given year.

Considering that some sects might have very powerful elders but weak disciples, it might have been inaccurate to determine the status of a sect based on the performance of young disciples. The five consecutive sessions of the Assembly of Immortal Sects spanned a total of sixty years. If a sect still failed to nurture outstanding disciples over such a long period, it would have been fair to judge it as declining.

This rule also encouraged the elders in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten to focus on nurturing young disciples, preventing situations like those in diabolical sects where the higher-ups were selfish and treated the lower-level disciples as less than human.

But as of now, the Mount Shu Sect has fallen out of the top ten for four consecutive sessions.

Mount Shu's last moment of glory in the Assembly of Immortal Sects was during the generation of Jiang Tiankuo, Daoist Yan, and Di Nufeng. The three of them defeated everyone in the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten, sweeping through the competition to take the crown, marking Mount Shu's final triumph.

Since that generation, Mount Shu hasn't produced any outstanding talents.

Thus, between the peak masters and the newest generation of disciples like Chu Liang, there were almost no exceptional young talents in the Mount Shu Sect. Nevertheless, this session of the Assembly of Immortal Sects was crucial.

There were rumors in the world of immortal cultivation that this session of the Assembly of Immortal Sects would be exceptionally competitive.

In the past, a fifth-realm genius disciple would be considered a top expert in the Assembly of Immortal Sects.

But this year, many prodigies seemed to have achieved breakthroughs, reaching the fifth realm. This meant that this session of the Assembly of Immortal Sects would be even more competitive in terms of cultivation level than in previous years.

"Haaaa." Chu Liang sighed as he sat on the back of the Golden-Furred Hou.

This world is too competitive, Chu Liang thought. I must achieve a higher cultivation level as soon as possible. I can't always be challenging someone of a higher cultivation level and hope that I can win.

In actuality, he had made great progress in his cultivation at a speed faster than anyone in the Nine Provinces. Unfortunately, he just wasn't talented enough for cultivation. Even though he had these rows of Large-Headed Dolls working tirelessly for him, he had only reached the later stage of the Golden Core Realm, still some steps away from the pinnacle of the fourth realm.

Fortunately, he still had time.

By the time he returned to Mount Shu, it was already late at night. After running around so much lately, Chu Liang planned to settle down at Silver Sword Peak for a while.

Starting tomorrow, I'll live a leisurely life, tending flowers, growing fruit, and dealing with wine-jar monsters. I will wake up facing Mount Shu and enjoy my peaceful days.

But the next morning, an unexpected guest arrived.

"Heheheh!"

The visitor arrived with a hearty laugh as he landed outside the small wooden cabin.

As Chu Liang pushed the door open, he saw what he had expected—Lin Bei with his bushy brows and big eyes.

"What's up?" Chu Liang asked.

"Bro, I'm finally about to achieve a breakthrough. I need to start preparing to make my Golden Core Pill," Lin Bei said with a proud smile. "I came to ask for your help."

Chapter 380: The Fire Dragon of the South Sea

Once upon a time, Lin Bei's cultivation level was on par with that of Chu Liang or perhaps even slightly ahead.

Thanks to a stroke of luck, he managed to keep up for a while. However, Chu Liang eventually left him far behind. After all, relying solely on fortuitous encounters for cultivation was not sustainable.

Chu Liang, on the other hand, relied on enduring opportunities...

This time, Lin Bei had come because he was finally ready to advance to the fourth realm and form his Golden Core.

According to the process, he first needed to refine a Golden Pill.

The Golden Core he planned to cultivate was the high-tier Heavenly Golden Core of Lesser Yang. Given his appearance, which at first glance exuded an abundance of yang energy, it was no surprise that he chose this.

Like Chu Liang at that time, he also needed a treasure of nature with a yang attribute.

"I found some information in the Office of Precious Herbs, and I need someone to go with me," Lin Bei said.

When Chu Liang was refining his Golden Pill, Lin Bei had helped him a lot. Now that Lin Bei was refining his own Golden Pill, it was only right for Chu Liang to return the favor and assist him.

But...

Chu Liang couldn't help but voice his confusion. "Why don't you just buy it?"

"Buy?" Lin Bei was taken aback.

As the two stared at each other, they could see a deep gap in their perspectives reflected in each other's eyes.

It wasn't just Lin Bei; most normal cultivators wouldn't consider buying cultivation resources as their first choice if they could get information about them.

The main reason was simple: they couldn't afford it.

The treasures of nature available in the market were usually those that cultivators had found by chance and couldn't use themselves, so they put them up for sale. In such a market, where the seller held the ultimate advantage, prices were dictated entirely by the seller and every single one was outrageously expensive.

For example, the Mountain-Subjugating Marquess of South Gate City reached the sixth realm entirely by purchasing resources. Even with the entire marquessate and his shady businesses, he could barely afford it.

It was virtually impossible for an ordinary cultivator at the fourth or fifth realm to accumulate that much wealth, which was why they had to take risks to locate the natural treasures on their own or wait for the right opportunity.

Secondly, the process of searching for resources was a form of training in itself.

For core disciples of large immortal sects, the sect could fully support their needs, but they would never do so as they hoped that the search for natural treasures would serve as valuable training for the disciples.

For cultivators, there were many things aside from making progress in cultivation that they needed to understand.

But for Chu Liang, the time saved could be used for more meaningful activities that better enhanced his cultivation, such as hunting lantern monsters, black furballs, and wine-jar monsters. This type of training was not as important to him.

As for the price...

If the issue can be solved with money, is it still an issue?

When Chu Liang passed through Taotie City, he even casually bought a top-grade Green Jade Bodhi Branch.

Although he had not reached the fifth realm, the first level of the Secret Reservoir of Five Elements, which the Colorful Doll had opened up, had reached a state of stability. This meant that the Colorful Doll was ready to open the second level of the Secret Reservoir of Five Elements at any time. Therefore, when he saw a wood-element treasure of nature for sale, he bought it without hesitation, deciding to feed it to the Colorful Doll immediately.

When the Colorful Doll opened the second level of the Secret Reservoir of Five Elements, it would emit a white and green light, simultaneously providing Chu Liang with Geng Metal foundational qi and Jia Wood foundational qi.

He spent a total of eight thousand and eight hundred Vermillion-Bird coins, which was considered a lucky number.

For such a rare spirit plant, the price could range from two thousand to ten thousand coins. This was the kind of spirit plant that one should buy immediately upon seeing it.

The significant profit he made from the Mount Shu Sect issuing a large number of sword coins was all spent on purchasing the Demon-Subduing Pestle. After that, the value of the sword coins plummeted. Now, sword coins could no longer be exchanged one-to-one with Vermillion-Bird coins and could only be exchanged for eight Black-Tortoise coins.

This meant that the Green Jade Bodhi Branch would cost over ten thousand sword coins in Mount Shu.

Even so, Chu Liang paid for the Green Jade Bodhi Branch as if he were buying a simple cabbage. This resulted in the managers and attendants in the shop looking at him with utmost respect and a hint of disbelief.

Their expressions looked the same as the expressions on Lin Bei's face.

After a long pause, Lin Bei shook his head and said, "You have changed. When we first met, you even had to borrow my sword coins to use as tokens."

"Well, I saved money then so I can spend it now," Chu Liang replied with a chuckle.

Lin Bei muttered, "No wonder you had us working so hard all the time..."

"It might have been tough while you were working, but you were pretty happy when you got your share of the profit," Chu Liang responded.

"That's true," Lin Bei chuckled.

As Chu Liang's second-in-command, Lin Bei wasn't just a worker; he also got a share of the profits, so he wasn't exactly broke either. But relying solely on money to buy rare natural treasures would still be a big strain.

Chu Liang thought for a moment and said, "Since we have a lead on the location of the natural treasure, I'll go with you. We should save money where we can. But I need to be back in three days for the Four Seas Whale Gang's celebration."

It just so happened that he wanted to venture out to gain more experience and test the quality of the Jia Wood foundational qi.

"Don't worry, we'll definitely be back in time," Lin Bei said with a laugh.

After a pause, he continued, "So it's because of the Whale Gang's celebration... I was wondering why my Eldest Senior Brother hurried into closed-door cultivation, saying he wanted to advance to the second level of the Realm of the Five Elements within the next three days."

Senior Brother Xu is about to achieve another breakthrough?

Chu Liang was certainly happy to hear this news. After all, they were no longer competing, and any improvement would benefit the Mount Shu Sect as a whole.

The second level of the Realm of the Five Elements. What a coincidence. My Colorful Doll has just reached this level too.

...

The islands of the South Sea were encircled by endless azure waves.

Legend has it that when the Ancient Dragon Lair collapsed, the dragons migrated to the Abyss of the Hidden Dragons.

The Abyss of the Hidden Dragons was a vast and deep underwater trench. Since dragons generally preferred water, it became an ideal nesting ground.

But not all dragons were the same.

One Inferno Dragon, unable to endure life in the Abyss, chose to set out alone, migrating to a new location.

This was understandable.

However, a powerful celestial beast like an Inferno Dragon, which left scorched earth in its wake, was not permitted to inhabit the Land of the Nine Provinces.

The Inferno Dragon ventured to the boundless South Sea, where vast and numerous islands, many as large as entire nations, provided a new territory to call home.

Here, it finally found its place. Over the years, it thrived and multiplied, producing countless offspring and even giving birth to several pureblood True Dragons.[1].

Thus, the Inferno Dragon Clan of the South Sea emerged.

Among the pureblood True Dragons, Inferno Dragons were extremely unique existences with bodily fluids that flowed like liquid flames. Over time, a type of spirit plant, nourished by these fiery liquids, began to grow in the places where Inferno Dragons roamed.

These spirit plants, which grew in the Inferno Dragon's habitat and contained the essence of the Inferno Dragon, even resembling them in shape, were known as Flowing Inferno Fruit.

The Flowing Inferno Fruit, a fire-element treasure of nature, was exactly what Lin Bei had his eyes on. It was located on one of the islands in the South Sea.

Mount Shu was located in the southwest, not far from the South Sea. After flying for half a day, the two arrived over the South Sea. Lin Bei checked the map in his hand, found their direction, and after flying for another hour, they finally saw the island depicted on the map.

This was a large volcanic island with a massive crater that resembled a dark, silent lake. At this moment, it appeared black and peaceful. Even so, as they drew nearer, they started sensing the dangerous aura that the crater emanated.

To the disciples of Mount Shu, it looked like a hotpot with all the base ingredients added but no broth.

"The growth period of the Flowing Inferno Fruit suggests that the Inferno Dragons of the South Sea might not be active right now. The creature might not be here. Even if it is, it should be hibernating at the bottom of the volcano. As long as we don't make too much noise, it shouldn't wake up."

As they landed, Lin Bei muttered while tiptoeing toward their target.

While they were still flying, they had already located the Flowing Inferno Fruit with their divine sense.

Currently, the Flowing Inferno Fruit was on a tall tree of flames at the foot of the volcano.

A tree blazing with flames stood before them, without leaves or flowers, as if the flames themselves were its blossoms. Within one of the fiery spheres was a golden, glowing fruit, about the size of a fist, exuding such powerful spiritual energy.

Around the fiery tree was a grassy lawn, with each blade of grass flickering like a tiny flame.

The two landed just outside this fiery lawn.

"There are plenty of living creatures on this island. I'm sure it will be fine for us to walk around normally. Why are you so scared?" Chu Liang said, laughing at Lin Bei's sneaky behavior.

"Even if we know it won't wake up, it's still really scary being so close to something that can turn a person to ashes with one breath," Lin Bei whispered.

"I guess I'm used to it..." Chu Liang mused.

Lin Bei didn't dare respond.

"To pick the Flowing Inferno Fruit, you must first extinguish the flames with qi of frost. You cannot use water as the fruit will dissolve on contact. Also, don't touch it directly. You need to cut the branch and catch the fruit in an ice-jade box," Lin Bei recited the harvesting process, having memorized it by heart.

"And be careful of the treasure-guarding demonic beast," Chu Liang reminded.

"This place is barren. How could there be any demonic beasts here?" Lin Bei laughed, preparing to pick the fruit.

Chu Liang looked around and found it to be true.

He formed a sword gesture with his fingers and drew multiple talismans in the air. In an instant, he unleashed a gust of frosty spiritual energy through the dozens of icy talismanic scripts and extinguished the flames on the fiery lawn and the tree of flames.

In the blink of an eye, a thin layer of frost started forming on the fruit.

"Pick it quickly before the frost melts," Lin Bei murmured to himself as he leaped under the tree, pulling out an ice-jade box.

Just the small box alone looked quite expensive.

The Flowing Inferno Fruit, enveloped by the layer of frost, looked like a thin-skinned soft-boiled egg, with the inside seemingly still flowing. With the flames in the outer layer extinguished, the fruit turned out to be in a liquid form.

Although Lin Bei was surprised, he didn't have much time to think. He swiftly formed his fingers into scissors and cut the branch holding the Flowing Inferno Fruit.

Snap.

The fist-sized Flowing Inferno Fruit dropped neatly into the ice jade box. Just as Lin Bei's face lit up with satisfaction and he was about to close the box, he felt the world around him suddenly darken.

"Watch out!" Chu Liang shouted from behind.

A deafening screech pierced the air as a shadow descended from above.

"Hroooh!"