

M. Slaying 391

Chapter 391: The Real Deal! (II)

The vice-chief continued, "First, we want to abduct the Dragon Cavalry escorting the chief and force them to tell us how to open the door of the hidden realm. If that doesn't work, we'll use this squad of Dragon Cavalry members to trick the City Lord's Residence into opening up its gates for us. As long as we find the key before the City Lord returns, there's still hope for us."

Elder Yin said, "During this process, members of the Sun and Moon Pavilion will help out but only in secret. They cannot act openly. Because if we fail, the Blazing Fire Gang will surely get purged. It is necessary for there to still be people to pass on this information. Furthermore, the human race has to keep on existing in Python Belly City."

Chu Liang understood what Elder Yin meant.

They had to keep the hope of escaping from getting snuffed out. Moreover, there were demons in Python Belly City. If both the Blazing Fire Gang and the Sun and Moon Pavilion were wiped out, the remaining ordinary humans would end up as rations for the demons.

However, Chu Liang thought about it from a different point of view.

He asked, "Since we've found the hidden realm's door, the demons will also benefit if we can find a way to leave. Why not get them involved?"

Nevertheless, the City Lord probably sees the demons as being part of that same community with shared interests since they are all trapped here.

So, why not unite all the forces that can be united?

"I had the same thought in the past." Elder Yin shook his head. "But the current leader of the demons in the western part of the city is a greater demon from the Far West. He calls himself Tiger God.

"Ten years ago, he conquered all the demons in just three days and established the Celestial Tiger Hall. Now, his forces are as strong as iron plates. These demonic entities from the Far West are all extremely hostile toward humans. It is simply impossible to cooperate with them."

When Chu Liang heard of the Far West, a sudden thought struck him.

"Maybe I could give it a try?"

...

Celestial Tiger Hall was located in the western part of Python Belly City.

Unlike the structured human territories, there were hardly any buildings in the demons' territory. There had been more buildings there in the past, but they had all been destroyed. The demons' territory was now just a vast land of ruins and pits. Many of the demons used the pits as sleeping spots.

The demons had always scoffed at the humans' ability to construct buildings, but that was just on the surface. They were actually secretly deeply envious of the humans.

At the end of a street in the demons' territory, a rather peculiar figure suddenly appeared.

The approaching figure had a humanoid form. He was wearing a black robe and a bronze mask with simple veined patterns, looking very mysterious. The faint demonic qi he emitted was the only thing that indicated what his identity could be.

He kept walking until he arrived at one of the few intact buildings in the western part of Python Belly City—the Celestial Tiger Hall.

Around four demonic beasts approached the humanoid figure, eyeing him with unfriendly gazes.

One of them, a winged lion-like demonic beast, bared his teeth at the humanoid figure. "Kid, when did you get here? Why haven't I seen you before?"

There were not many demons in Python Belly City, and their territory was not large, so they all had some impression of each other.

This humanoid figure was naturally Chu Liang.

Upon hearing the demon's words, Chu Liang didn't move a muscle or even glance at the demons.

Seeing that, the winged lion beast became enraged.

However, before he could do anything to Chu Liang, someone bellowed from behind them. "You blind fools, how dare you be so impudent in front of the honorable divine envoy!"

The moment the demonic beasts heard that voice, they knew who was bellowing at them. It was the old ape who had a high status in the Celestial Tiger Hall.

Several thuds rang out. Then an old ape covered in red hair, looking much like a ball of fire, emerged from the Celestial Tiger Hall. With each step he took, he kicked away one of the demonic beasts standing around Chu Liang.

Then the old ape looked at the black-robed masked man in front of him with a complicated gaze full of a variety of emotions. In reverence of the divine envoy's presence, the old ape was deeply moved and filled with the desire to flatter him.

The old ape shouted excitedly, "Honorable divine envoy!"

The nearby demons gathered around them in astonishment. "So, this is one of the honorable divine envoys..."

Regardless of whether the demonic beasts originated from the Far West, they all knew of the existence of divine envoys. It was just that some of them had never seen a divine envoy before, so they would not be able to recognize one.

Consequently, when they heard the mention of a divine envoy, they all looked over with excited gazes, wanting to see a divine envoy in person.

"Take me to your hall master," Chu Liang said coldly.

"Yes!" the old ape replied, immediately leading the way. He shouted, "Make way! Make way! The honorable divine envoy is here!"

The old ape quickly brought Chu Liang to the entrance of the hall.

The hall master of the Celestial Tiger Hall, Tiger God, emerged from the hall to greet Chu Liang.

Tiger God stayed in a building that had been built by humans, so he maintained a humanoid form just to live there. His humanoid form was that of a middle-aged strong man with thick eyebrows and a broad face, dressed in tight-fitting clothes.

The moment Tiger God saw Chu Liang, he welcomed Chu Liang excitedly.

"Honorable divine envoy!" Tiger God exclaimed. "How did you get in?"

There was no white rain today, so that meant the passage to the outside world had not opened. Why was the divine envoy making an appearance in Python Belly City now? Tiger God did not understand what was going on.

Instead of replying, Chu Liang asked, "You're Tiger God?"

"Honorable divine envoy, you mustn't call me that. I'm just a lowly Black Tiger Demon. You can call me Xiao Hei[1]," Tiger God answered with a booming laugh.

The tiger demon king's fawning behavior might seem strange, but it was actually expected behavior. Demon divine envoys upheld the will of the demon god, so they always held a high status among the demons. It was a view that was deeply ingrained in them.

Chu Liang paid the tiger demon king's behavior no mind. Instead, he just raised his hands and said, "I have come here in accordance with our god's will."

The tiger demon king dropped to his knees with a thud.

His eyes welled up with tears. "Our god... still remembers us?"

Chu Liang continued speaking slowly. "Our god is about to return and has ordered us to spread the message to every corner of the world where our people reside. So, I came here."

His spirited tone moved the hearts of those who heard him.

"Honorable sir, you came here just to rescue us?" the tiger demon king asked, his voice filled with disbelief.

"Of course." Chu Liang looked down at him. "As long as you follow our god's will, our god will naturally deliver you from distress."

Feeling greatly moved, the tiger demon king bowed deeply. "We are the demon god's people, and we will always heed our god's will!"

After a while, Chu Liang left the Celestial Tiger Hall.

...

Inside the Celestial Tiger Hall, there was a scene of great joy and celebration.

The tiger demon king laughed heartily. "We can finally leave this hellish place!"

At this moment, several of his trusted aides were gathered around him.

One of them, a white crane demon, stepped forward and asked uneasily, "Hall Master, can we be certain that was a real divine envoy? He is asking us to help the humans... Could he be an impostor?"

"How could that be?!" The tiger demon king waved his hand dismissively. "You haven't been to the Far West, so you don't know how divine envoys are born.

"That bronze mask he was wearing—it is a mask that was blessed by the divine demon god in the temple. There are no more than a hundred of those masks in the entire demon race. Only demons with pure, unconditional faith in the demon god can receive the acknowledgment of the demon god's spiritual qi. If demons who have not been acknowledged by the demon god wear those masks, there will be no movement in their spiritual qi.

"Just from this point alone, you can tell if someone is a real divine envoy. And this one... is the real deal!"

Chapter 392: Veteran Victim

There was an unnamed small mountain peak several li away from Mount Reticence. This was just one of the countless earthen hills in the vast nine provinces, but at this moment, it burst into a dazzling brilliance.

Whoosh—

A pillar of white light shot up several zhang high, revealing a figure clad in blue and white.

The man who emerged was middle-aged, with a slightly rounded figure and an open-front long gown that gave him a leisurely air. Despite being in his thirties or forties, his fair and clean round face made him look younger than his years.

Panic flickered in his eyes. As the white light vanished, he immediately leapt up, intending to fly eastward. But before he could take off, a slender figure bathed in fiery red light blocked his path.

"Little fatty, you run quite fast."

The figure was none other than Di Nufeng, her blazing red robe and flowing black hair accentuating her fierce presence. The flames that clung to her body hadn't yet extinguished, indicating she had just arrived.

"Ah!" The man exclaimed upon seeing Di Nufeng, but his surprise quickly turned into a flattering smile. "Big Sis Feng! It's been so long since I've seen anyone from Mount Shu. I've missed you all so much!"

This man was none other than Zhou Yijian, the current master of the Wind-Catching Hall of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

He was famous for knowing all the world's secrets and spreading them across the nine provinces.

In terms of being hated, Di Nufeng had few rivals in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, but even she was outdone by Zhou Yijian.

After all, it was his profession. In the realm of immortal cultivators, the line of people wishing for this little fatty's demise could stretch from Mount Shu to the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

Yet, he thrived.

The more people cursed him, the more he earned.

"Heh, missed me? More like you want me dead," Di Nufeng said coldly. "Ever since you took charge of The Seven Stars Gazette, you've smeared me repeatedly. It seems your wings have hardened. I've noted everything you've published about me."

"Rumors, absolute rumors!" Zhou Yijian immediately shouted in grievance. "Big Sis Feng, our bond is stronger than meteoric iron. How could I possibly talk bad about you?"

"If we're so close, why did you run?" Di Nufeng sneered. "If I hadn't asked your esteemed teacher last time, I wouldn't have known you had an enchanted formation hidden here. No wonder I could never catch you when I visited."

Zhou Yijian's chubby face twisted in dismay.

He felt confused as to how Di Nufeng managed to catch him since his escape formation was usually a well-kept secret. He never expected his esteemed teacher to be the one who betrayed him.

But as he thought about it, he realized it wasn't so surprising. His teacher had attended the Mount Shu Summit and had likely suffered at Di Nufeng's hands. It would have been difficult to leave without giving up something.

Why did you have to get involved in that mess? he thought. At your age, why go anywhere near Di Nufeng?

Elder Huang had been the one who brought Di Nufeng to Mount Shu, which explained why they had kept in close contact during the early days. Since Zhou Yijian started cultivating, he had seen Di Nufeng many times with his teacher.

Back then, he was a chubby little boy, and Di Nufeng's favorite thing to do was pinch his face like dough and force him to call her Big Sis.

It was exactly like what was happening now.

Di Nufeng still grabbed him by his fair, chubby cheeks, pinching them hard and tugging without regard for his current status as a seventh realm Eminent One, the master of the Wind-Catching Hall, and a high-ranking member of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

"Ouch, ouch, ouch..." Zhou Yijian winced and begged for mercy. "I wasn't running. I heard Big Sis Feng was looking for me, so I rushed back from out of town."

Everyone had grown up since then. It was during the Assembly of Immortal Sects sixty years ago that Di Nufeng stirred up a massive commotion in the martial world. He was one of her earliest victims.

Regardless of whether he was in a hidden realm, training, or completing any mission... whenever he encountered Di Nufeng, he inevitably got beaten.

So after he took charge of the Wind-Catching Hall, he intentionally published negative news involving Di Nufeng. But even if the heavens and earth were to bear witness, he would dare to say that he never made up any of those stories.

She claimed he tarnished her reputation, but he only reported what she actually did. How is that tarnishing her reputation?

Of course, he would never dare say this to Di Nufeng.

"Hmph." Di Nufeng rubbed Zhou Yijian's face for a while before pushing him away and saying, "I'm here to settle some scores with you. Over the years, you've constantly attacked me, causing a lot of stress. I've had to drown my sorrows in alcohol..."

"Big Sis Feng, you've always had that drinking habit," Zhou Yijian argued quickly. "The first time we met, you weren't even as tall as a wine gourd and you were already drinking straight from the bottle. That can't be my fault, right?"

"Drinking for fun and drinking to drown sorrows are two different things!" Di Nufeng retorted, waving her hand. "Later on, I didn't even dare to leave my house..."

You don't leave your house because you're lazy and have too many enemies...

Zhou Yijian's face contorted with pain. "Big Sis Feng, please, have mercy. Just tell me what you want."

"Considering the alcohol expenses and comfort fees over the years, asking you for compensation of a hundred thousand or eighty thousand isn't too much, right?" Di Nufeng said as she glanced at him sideways.

Zhou Yijian's face twisted even more.

He could afford the money, but it felt like cutting off half of his flesh. He would rather be killed.

Seeing his expression, Di Nufeng added, "However, I have a little trouble right now. If you're willing to help me with a small favor, considering our past relationship, I won't ask for your compensation."

"Just say it. Whatever it is, I will agree to it. You can just watch me do the work," Zhou Yijian said, immediately standing at attention.

He realized that Di Nufeng had made a fuss because she wanted him to do something but was worried that he might refuse.

"My disciple is missing. Help me find out where he is," Di Nufeng said directly, no longer wasting words.

"Haaaaaa..." Zhou Yijian sighed.

"Being a Reticent Heaven Observer" was a principle that all members of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion followed. Although they possess the best divination-reading abilities in the nine provinces, they rarely perform divination-reading for others, fearing they might unknowingly reveal the secrets of heaven and get entangled in karma.

The Great Dao of Karma was always mysterious and profound. One would only know it was karma on the day that disaster struck.

But considering the current situation, he knew that if he didn't help, disaster from Di Nufeng would strike much sooner than any heavenly retribution.

With a sigh, he slumped onto a large stone nearby and said, "Tell me the time and date that he was born, cultivation level, clothing and appearance, accent and physique, and approximate whereabouts."

"Do you need such specific information when you are doing divination-reading?" Di Nufeng asked, feeling puzzled.

She had seen divination readings from the descendants of the Heaven Observer lineage in the Celestial Pivot Pavilion before, and it wasn't this complicated.

"I was thinking..." Zhou Yijian raised his eyes and smiled weakly. "Why don't I publish a missing person notice for you in The Seven Stars Gazette? Maybe we'll find him right away, and if not, I'll help youuuuuu... Ahhhhhhhhhh!"

As he spoke, his voice trailed off as he suddenly flew a dozen zhang away.

Di Nufeng had kicked him.

Chapter 393: Can You Do It?

"Can you do it?"

"Definitely."

"This thing of yours is so small..."

"Just wait a moment, and you'll see how powerful it is once it starts drilling. Just watch."

"..."

In the dead of night in the northern part of Python Belly City, amidst the vast darkness, several figures gathered outside a section of the City Lord's Residence's towering fortress.

The massive City Lord's Residence was built entirely of black rock engraved with talismanic scripts, making it incredibly sturdy. Additionally, it was fortified with layers upon layers of enchanted formations. Even with immense force, it was nearly indestructible. Techniques like wall-phasing and earth-escaping were ineffective here.

It was impossible to break this wall.

For this reason, the Blazing Fire Gang's vice-chief and Elder Yin decided to act when the Dragon Cavalry emerged at noon tomorrow. However, Chu Liang felt that this plan was unreliable.

The Blazing Fire Gang members, desperate to save their chief, were grasping at straws. But Elder Yin clearly had another agenda. If his goal was to find a way to escape, the act of kidnapping a member of the Dragon Cavalry was too reckless...

Chu Liang suspected Elder Yin was up to his old tricks again. He was probably using the Blazing Fire Gang to create a distraction while he pursued another objective.

However, Chu Liang knew that trying to outsmart the old man would be futile. For dealing with people like Elder Yin, it was best to let his esteemed teacher handle them.

So, Chu Liang quietly found the vice-chief and proposed an alternative plan.

The plan was... to drill a hole in the wall of the City Lord's Residence and lead them inside to rescue their chief under the cover of night.

This way, they could rescue the chief of the Blazing Fire Gang while also finding a method to escape the hidden realm. This plan would achieve the same goals as the original but in a much simpler manner.

However, the vice-chief's first reaction was disbelief.

"Do you even know how hard the black rock walls fortified by the City Lord's personal enchanted formations are? If you can make a hole in them, why not just break out of the hidden realm directly?" She didn't believe Chu Liang's idea at all.

But Chu Liang understood that while he didn't know how hard the walls fortified by the enchanted formations of a seventh-realm expert could be, he knew they couldn't be harder than a bottle reinforced by a shaman at the ninth realm.

If the ancient bottle that contained the wish-fulfilling spirit could be gobbled up by the little golden butterfly, then this wall could be too... It could only fail because the wall was not tasty.

As for whether it could break the wall of the hidden realm...

How could he break it when the hidden realm didn't have an actual wall? If this wasn't a small world but the belly of the Heaven-Devouring Python, no matter how hard it was, Chu Liang wouldn't be deterred.

He would have already let the little golden butterfly devour its internal organs.

In the end, because Chu Liang was adamant, the vice-chief decided to bring a few powerful experts from the gang and go with him to try out this method. If this plan worked and they managed to rescue their chief tonight, everything would turn out well.

At this moment, there were nine people behind Chu Liang. Besides the vice-chief and another senior martial artist at the beginning stage of the sixth realm, the remaining seven were fifth-realm martial artists.

These people's gazes were filled with such intense focus and anticipation that it almost felt tangible. Everyone stared at Chu Liang as he prepared to drill a hole. If he failed and made them run in vain in the middle of the night, they wouldn't be pleased.

Chu Liang then flipped his hand and took out the little golden butterfly.

The little golden butterfly had been sleeping in the White Pagoda for a long time. Because Chu Liang had been concerned, this little golden butterfly had not been allowed to come out to eat.

Chu Liang was worried that this little golden butterfly was really the legendary Heaven-Devouring Bug. What if it ate so much and actually became the demon god? But considering the urgency of this situation, he had no choice but to use it.

A little bit shouldn't hurt... Chu Liang thought.

He even considered putting the little golden butterfly on a diet. Not just stopping it from eating, but also making it move constantly to burn off energy, controlling its food and exercise. The goal was to slim it down back to its original little maggot form...

That would make it look much safer.

In the pitch-black night where one couldn't see their own hand, nine men and one woman huddled at the base of the wall, nervously watching.

"Is it in?"

"It should be."

"Can it really do it..."

"Look at its head. The head is in. It will be entirely inside soon."

"It looks so soft, but it really made it inside."

"But this hole is so small. Will it fit?"

"The hole will get bigger soon, just give it some time."

"....."

"So fast?"

"That's how it is."

As the little golden butterfly gnawed at the walls of the black rock fortress, it burrowed a hole large enough for a person to pass through. The high-ranking members of the Blazing Fire Gang were left astonished, marveling at this celestial bug.

Chu Liang simply smiled and put away the still-unsatisfied little golden butterfly, not letting it absorb more spiritual energy. Despite its chubby body twisting in protest, Chu Liang ruthlessly tucked it back.

"With this spirit bug, even the bodies of seventh or eighth realm experts can't withstand its bites, right?" someone exclaimed in awe.

Chu Liang nodded. It was true. He had never seen a defense that the little golden butterfly couldn't breach. But as long as the expert wasn't paralyzed for years, they could send this soft little thing flying away with a simple flick. It was almost impossible to use this butterfly in real combat.

Chu Liang then threw a puppet pill to scout the situation inside the wall.

Through the hole, there was an open space surrounded by black buildings. They were all made of rough black rock, not looking much more refined than the exterior of the City Lord's Residence.

"It's okay, let's go in carefully," Chu Liang said. "The demons will soon start wreaking havoc outside, and the members of the Dragon Cavalry should be heading out to investigate. When the defenses are weak inside, we'll start the rescue. When we have the chance, we will seize someone who can talk and get some information out of them."

"Mm!" Everyone nodded in agreement.

Unknowingly, they had already begun to think of this handsome young man as their leader.

This status wasn't baseless; Chu Liang's series of unexpected performances had made them believe that he truly possessed extraordinary power.

Three fights with the members of the Sun and Moon Pavilion... invoking the demons... breaking through the city wall...

He had been in this small world for less than a day and night, yet he had already reached a position they couldn't touch in decades or even centuries.

Now that Chu Liang was ready, he took out a large bow and long arrow that exuded a demonic aura. He pulled the bowstring taut and shot the arrow.

A streak of cold light pierced through the night street!

This was his way of communicating with the demons. He had previously left a Howling Moon Heavenly Wolf Arrow Guide with the demon king. When an arrow landed, it signaled that they could launch their plan.

"It's done." He put away his bow and turned back.

The vice-chief took the lead, and the group slowly crawled through the hole into the City Lord's Residence.

Chu Liang didn't forget to cover the hole with a black cloth, making it difficult to notice in the dark unless examined closely.

"Be careful," he whispered.

As the strongest combatant, the vice-chief led the group, cautiously approaching a building's wall and hiding first.

In just a moment, a loud bang echoed from outside the City Lord's Residence.

Boom—

Something was violently striking the gate of the City Lord's Residence in the northern part of Python Belly City.

The demons had launched their attack.

Everyone knew this was part of the plan, but they couldn't shake their nerves.

Chu Liang had instructed the demons not to attack the gate directly, as that would be too dangerous. A direct assault could lead to a crackdown, risking the extermination of the demons in the city and arousing the demon king's suspicion of his identity as a divine envoy.

Instead, he gave the demon king four Undead-Summoning Talismans, instructing him to find four large demonic beast corpses and use them to ram the gate. Once someone opened the gate, the corpses would flee. When the Dragon Cavalry chased into the city streets, the demons would ambush them. If executed properly, there would be no trace of the culprits by daylight.

As of now, all the creatures that had died, including the giant elephant Chu Liang killed, were awakened from their deathly slumber and ramming the city gate.

Since the demonic beasts in Python Belly City often had to hunt outside, their mortality rate was high. Finding a few corpses in the wild wasn't difficult.

Those four Undead-Summoning Talismans had been confiscated from the Southern-Route Guider long ago and had been lying in Chu Liang's storage enchanted tool for a long time. Now, they finally came in handy.

As the group stayed hidden, they heard a commotion inside the City Lord's Residence, with heavy footsteps sounding in disorder.

It seemed a squad of Dragon Cavalry had gone out.

At that moment, a set of footsteps approached, and everyone immediately held their breath.

The vice-chief gestured to two subordinates behind her, and everyone understood. Robbing was their professional expertise.

In the next second, the vice-chief suddenly sprang into action!

The qi of this sixth-realm martial artist peaked instantly. She circled out from behind the wall, grabbed the person's neck with a dragon-claw technique, and flipped them onto the ground. The

other two subordinates immediately restrained the person's limbs, controlling them firmly with fluid motions.

"Don't move! If you make a sound, I'll kill you instantly," the vice-chief threatened coldly.

"No, no, no..." the person pleaded softly, "Brothers, let's talk this out. Humans shouldn't beat up humans!"

Chapter 394: Why Are You Looking at Me?

The Whale Gang Headquarters, the Giant Whale Mountain Manor.

Unlike the various isolated immortal sects, the Whale Gang was a large gang with branches rooted all over the nine provinces and four seas. The gang's headquarters was a grand manor three hundred li from the Capital of Yu. That's where the famous Ocean Tempest Hall was located.

The manor was situated in the heart of the Central Region, the crossroads of the nine provinces. This made it easier for the headquarters of the Whale Gang to send out orders to their branches across the world.

That evening, two rows of attendants lined up in front of the Giant Whale Mountain Manor. A tall middle-aged man stood among them. Even from afar, it was obvious this was no ordinary man.

He was dressed in a long, patterned robe and a coat[1]. There was a jade belt at his waist, from which his sword hung. He had a tall and slender build, a face that had skin so smooth and fair it looked like polished jade, and a pair of bright eyes that gleamed like stars in the night sky. Like dragons, the man had eyes that radiated divine light. This incredibly handsome man would always light up the room with his glowing presence.

This man was Jiang Shenting, the soon-to-be new chief of the Whale Gang.

His inauguration ceremony was to be held the next day. The important guests were arriving a day early, so the Whale Gang had to arrange accommodation for them. There would also be a banquet this evening, but only the top immortal sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten could attend it. Nevertheless, many figures of the martial world attend the inauguration ceremony the next day, so the guests would be even more varied then.

A cluster of magic clouds floated down from afar. Gradually, the clouds and mist cleared to reveal a group of people.

The person leading the group wore a fluttering green robe and a serious expression. He was none other than Wang Xuanling, the grand peak master of the Mount Shu Sect. Behind him were Xu Ziyang and several disciples from Jade Sword Peak, who were all at the Golden Core Realm. They were accompanied by Jiang Yuebai and Mu Yueting.

Initially, Wang Xuanling had planned to take his disciples from Jade Sword Peak, Jiang Yuebai, and Chu Liang. However, Chu Liang had gone missing, so Jiang Yuebai had brought with her another disciple from Azure Falling Peak, a junior sister at the Golden Core Realm.

Upon seeing this group, Jiang Shenting walked over to welcome them. He gave a slight bow and cupped his hands together in greeting. "We are honored by your presence, Grand Peak Master Wang. I am deeply humbled to have you here."

"Haha. Chief Jiang, there's no need for you to be so modest," Wang Xuanling said with a polite smile. "It's your inauguration day tomorrow. Our sect leader has praised you as a promising young man. You are truly admirable."

"I don't deserve such praise," Jiang Shenting replied, shaking his head with a smile. Then he said sadly, "If it wasn't for the previous chief's sudden disappearance, this opportunity wouldn't have fallen to me. So, although I've invited friends from the various immortal sects to this ceremony, it is not to celebrate my inauguration. It is merely a notification. Please forgive any shortcomings, Grand Peak Master Wang."

Wang Xuanling nodded. "Your thoughtfulness is appreciated, Chief Jiang."

Upon landing, the group from the Mount Shu Sect had already noticed that, although Jiang Shenting welcomed guests with great fanfare, there were no grand decorations in sight. The manor looked quite unadorned, with a rather solemn atmosphere.

In the middle of their conversation, a sharp cry rang out in the distance. "Keeew!"

Jiang Shenting extended a hand, gesturing at the manor behind him. "Grand Peak Master Wang and my fellow Daoists from the Mount Shu Sect, please head inside the manor to rest. There will be a banquet later where we can have a good chat over drinks."

"Alright," Wang Xuanling responded.

He and the others followed an attendant into the Giant Whale Mountain Manor.

In the distance, a massive black goshawk[2] landed. There were over ten people on its back.

Upon catching a glimpse of that group of people, Jiang Shenting went to greet them.

Glancing at Jiang Shengting as he left, Wang Xuanling remarked, "It's no wonder that he can hold such a high position at his young age. He handles everything impeccably. Ziyang and the rest of you, you should all learn from him."

Jiang Shenting had been standing in front of the manor all afternoon. He greeted and chatted with everyone who had come to congratulate him, regardless of the size of their sect.

Moreover, Jiang Shenting greeted each of them by name—old and new acquaintances alike. This made all of his guests feel very welcome. No one could say he wasn't diligent.

Jiang Shenting wasn't even forty[3], but he was already leading one of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. Despite that, he didn't seem arrogant in the slightest; he remained humble and prudent, behaving with integrity. That was truly commendable.

"Esteemed Teacher, I will make sure to keep it in mind," Xu Ziyang said.

"That kid Chu Liang does quite well in this aspect too. Despite being so young, he knows how to conduct himself very well..." Wang Xuanling commented casually.

Xu Ziyang nodded.

In terms of networking in the cultivation world, Chu Liang was indeed decades ahead of his peers.

Thinking of that, Xu Ziyang unconsciously glanced at Jiang Yuebai.

He wasn't the only one. The moment Chu Liang's name was mentioned, the other disciples of the Mount Shu Sect looked at Jiang Yuebai too.

With so many gazes on her, Jiang Yuebai felt quite uneasy and slowly lowered her head.

She wanted to ask, Why are you looking at me?

Nevertheless, saying that would just make things even more awkward. Moreover, she was worried about Chu Liang's safety but didn't know who to turn to...

After hesitating for a moment, Jiang Yuebai just said, "The man standing behind Chief Jiang earlier had a rather hostile gaze. Senior Uncle, do you know who that man is?"

She wasn't just randomly changing the subject. Jiang Shenting had given them a warm welcome, but the tall man behind him, who seemed to be a guard, had gazed at them with a rather malicious expression. It had only been for a second, but Jiang Yuebai had still caught it.

Wang Xuanling snorted coldly. "Hmph. I noticed it too. Just ignore him. That guy's name is Cheng Gan. Before this, he was one of Jiang Shenting's subordinates—one of the Four Great Vajra Warriors[4].

"Some time ago, Di Nufeng uncovered a group of criminals trafficking women. It implicated the Eastern Whale Division and in turn Cheng Gan. The imperial court even executed some government officials and members of the imperial family because of the crime. They also ordered the Eastern Whale Division to conduct an internal investigation.

"When Jiang Shenting found out about the matter, he killed many of Cheng Gan's subordinates and punished Cheng Gan severely. Cheng Gan lost his position as a Vajra Warrior, and he's just working as Jiang Shenting's bodyguard now."

"He probably holds some resentment toward Mount Shu because of that," Wang Xuanling said disdainfully. "If he dares to make a move..."

He didn't finish the sentence, but it was well-known that the grand peak master of the Mount Shu Sect was not someone who should be provoked. After all, how could someone who had been in opposition with Di Nufeng for many years and still managed to live peacefully, even aging over a hundred, possibly be an ordinary person?

Cheng Gan might be a notable figure in the martial world, but in the eyes of the Mount Shu Sect's grand peak master... Well, Cheng Gan should be proud that Wang Xuanling even remembered his name.

At this moment, one of the other Mount Shu Sect disciples suddenly asked, "Was it the case in South Gate City involving the Mountain-Subjugating Marquess? The Seven Stars Gazette reported about it. I think the article said it was Junior Brother Chu Liang who uncovered the crime. It was a very sensational article..."

Hearing that, everyone immediately recalled the article too.

The story of the House of the Mountain-Subjugating Marquess that had to be told...

The Mountain-Subjugating Marquess' women—Jin Lian, Ping'er, and Chun Mei...[5]">[/ref]

It was a tale of great passion, and it had indeed been Chu Liang who uncovered everything and shared the details with the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

Thinking of Chu Liang, everyone looked at Jiang Yuebai again.

Jiang Yuebai frowned. Why are you all looking at me for this too?

...

Chu Liang said, "Wait a moment. Let me take a look..."

The Blazing Fire Gang members all pitched in to pin down the person who was passing by. The vice-chief's large ornate axe hung in the air, ready to strike if the person dared to utter even one more sound.

However, after hearing the person's shout, Chu Liang thought, Why does this voice sound so familiar? His aura's familiar too...

Chu Liang quickly pushed aside the Blazing Fire Gang members and looked closely at the person they had pinned down. Who else could it be but Lin Bei?

"What are you doing here?" Chu Liang asked in surprise.

Lin Bei was just as surprised. "Why is it you?"

"You know him?" the vice-chief asked, looking at Chu Liang.

"We're bros!" Lin Bei interjected. "Big Sis, are you Chu Liang's friend? Then we're all on the same side, so let me go."

"This is my fellow disciple from Mount Shu. We got separated when we arrived here. You can trust him," Chu Liang said.

Only then did the vice-chief release Lin Bei.

Chu Liang briefly explained how he had met with the three major factions in Python Belly City and that the Blazing Fire Gang's chief was trapped in the City Lord's Residence. He had come with the Blazing Fire Gang to rescue the chief as well as find a way out.

"The City Lord's Residence? What City Lord's Residence?" Lin Bei said. "This is a prison."

"Huh?"

"Chu Liang looked around. "All of it?"

"That's right. This fortress is filled with extremely sturdy fortified cells. The Lord of Python Belly City has imprisoned many people here, but he has never actually appeared here."

Chu Liang asked, "Then what are you doing here...?"

"The head steward here is my friend. He let me stay here as his assistant."

Chu Liang wondered, "Since when did you have friends here?"

"I just befriended him," Lin Bei replied.

Chu Liang: "...?"

Lin Bei explained, "After falling here that day, I woke up and saw the head steward of this prison. We had a brief chat and became friends. He said he is a member of the Jimeng Clan, a clan of draconic descendants. He didn't want to be a calvaryman who had to go out and kill people, so he stayed here to manage the logistics. It just so happened that his assistant was recently burned to death by the South-Sea Inferno Dragon, so he let me stay and help him."

"Except you, everyone in this prison is a member of the Jimeng Clan...?"

"That's right."

Chu Liang was dumbfounded. I know that this guy is great at socializing... but I never would have expected that even draconic descendants would accept him so quickly.

"Do you know how to leave this hidden realm?" Chu Liang asked.

"Not yet, but I've already drunk wine and become sworn brothers with two members of the Jimeng Dragon Cavalry. I think if we have a few more drinking sessions, they'll tell me," Lin Bei said confidently.

Good grief, Chu Liang thought. Good thing I got here early. Had I been a bit later, you might have actually joined the enemy.

Lin Bei continued, "I initially planned to secretly search for a way out. Once I'd found it, I was going to sneak outside to find you and escape together. Who knew you'd come to rescue someone and drill a hole."

Chu Liang quickly corrected, "It's drill a hole and rescue someone."

Lin Bei waved his hand, disregarding the correction. "Psht, what's the difference?"

"The order is very important."

Having overheard their conversation, the vice-chief asked Lin Bei eagerly, "Since you help manage things here, do you know where our chief, Hua Zhengshan of the Blazing Fire Gang, is being held?"

"I haven't gotten close with the jailers yet. And it would take at least a few days for me to get to know all the prisoners..." Lin Bei replied. "Also, the cells here only have a small hole for passing food into the cell, so you can't even see what the prisoners look like."

"I guess there's no other option. If we're to save the chief, we'll have to open the cells one by one."

"That won't work." Lin Bei shook his head. "The cells here are fortified with the City Lord's talismanic spells. Even the South-Sea Inferno Dragon couldn't get out. How could you possibly open them?"

"Hmm?" Chu Liang stood up abruptly. "Well, I'd like to see just what it is that can't be opened."

Chapter 395: That's It?

With Lin Bei leading the way, the group's progress became swift and seamless. The Jimeng Dragon Cavalry members were not many to begin with and most of the members had now been dispatched to tackle the demons that were causing trouble. And so, they did not encounter any Jimeng clan members along their route.

"There are many cells here, but only about ten are occupied," Lin Bei said, his tone casual yet confident. "I've taken care of delivering food to every single one during the day. Without me, you'd be wandering around for ages."

"You will be remembered for this great merit," said Chu Liang.

As they continued, the group arrived at a cell that stood out from the rest.

The cells here were small and fortified with intricate enchanted formations, far beyond the complexity of the outer walls. Even seventh-realm experts would struggle to break them. Of course, unless they were on the same level as Di Nufeng.

But if Di Nufeng were involved, there was no knowing who might end up being locked in here.

The cell was devoid of doors or windows, featuring only a small, fortified hole at the bottom for passing in food. The thick walls were evident through this narrow tunnel, which allowed food to be slid in but offered no visibility from either side.

As Chu Liang prepared to break through the wall, Lin Bei couldn't help but remark, "This is not going to be an easy task..."

"..."

"Wow, it actually works?"

A moment later, he couldn't help but exclaim.

The experts of the Blazing Fire Gang all nodded repeatedly. Yes! Exactly, very surprising, right?

We were just as surprised earlier, no shame in it.

The little golden butterfly quickly gnawed a face-sized hole in the thick wall as if it was swimming. It was even faster than before.

Chu Liang guessed there were two reasons: first, it had just woken up earlier; second, the more complex formations here meant more spiritual energy. For the little golden butterfly, more spiritual energy meant tastier food.

As for the hardness...

It was all crunchy anyway.

After making a larger hole, Lin Bei leaned in to look and saw a young man chained at the limbs. He asked, "Is the Blazing Fire Gang's chief in there?"

"No," the person inside replied.

"Sorry, wrong cell," Lin Bei said, turning to leave.

Why are you being polite now? Chu Liang remarked inwardly.

"Hey, hey, hey?" the person inside quickly called out, "Don't go."

Chu Liang glanced through the hole and suddenly exclaimed, "Ji Lingfeng?"

"Ah!" The young man inside also exclaimed, "You're that Mount Shu disciple who rides a Hou?"

His once fine clothes were now tattered, and his previously clean and handsome face was now quite haggard, but his eyes were a mystical blue.

He was Ji Lingfeng, the eighth young master of the Ji family, whom Chu Liang had met before.

When Chu Liang went to the Ji family to deliver a message, he first met the ninth young lady Ji Lingyu, then the eighth young master Ji Lingfeng hitching a ride on the Hou, which was quite an extraordinary experience.

Later, Ji Lingyu followed Tang Shi and joined his Ghost-Face Chamber, saying she wouldn't go home until her eighth brother returned.

So her eighth brother was here?

If Ji Lingyu insisted on competing with him on who returned home later, it would be a prolonged and arduous battle...

Since Ji Lingyu was an acquaintance, Chu Liang had the little golden butterfly continue gnawing and also chewed off the chains on Ji Lingfeng. During this time, he asked Ji Lingfeng how he ended up here.

"Haaaa," Ji Lingfeng sighed. "It's a series of unfortunate family affairs. That day, I left home for a fun trip outside. Initially, I planned to travel overseas to avoid being found. But who knew I'd witness a battle in the West Sea! Someone was ambushing Chief Xu Bashan of the Whale Gang! I tried to escape but was discovered. They wanted to kill me but when they notice that I was a member of the Ji Family, they decided to hold me hostage instead."

So that was what had happened. He was unlucky to have been caught in the incident where the Heaven-Devouring Python devoured Xu Bashan. The mastermind behind that incident has never been identified, and naturally, they wouldn't let a witness escape.

"Did you see the identity of the perpetrator?" Chu Liang asked curiously.

"That person..." Ji Lingfeng hesitated before answering, "Should be my eldest brother."

"Ah?" Everyone was shocked again.

Lin Bei asked in surprise, "You've already sworn brotherhood with the City Lord?"

"No." Ji Lingfeng denied as he wondered how such an assumption could even be formed.

He then explained, "He is a member of the Ji Family, and he is the eldest male of our generation, named Ji Lingjue. Although we are of the same generation, he is over a hundred years older than me, so I have only heard about him from the elders."

"Wow," Lin Bei exclaimed.

In such large families, it was normal for people of the same generation to have significant age differences, but such a large gap was rare and only occurred in cultivation families.

It was likely because there had been a man at the age of a few hundred years old and still going hard at it despite the old age.

"His father is my eldest uncle from the main house, but his mother was a dragon lady from the Jimeng tribe. That was likely just a fleeting relationship and his appearance was just an accident and he was then abandoned," Ji Lingfeng said as he scratched his head. "With that monstrous talent, he grew up on his own. He had likely suffered a lot. When he achieved a high level of cultivation, he went back to the house of Ji to be recognized as a member of the Ji Family. My eldest uncle went to see him, but then..."

"When a maid went in to deliver tea, she saw his father lying in a pool of blood and sitting there with a grin."

Good grief.

This is basically the saying: The son laughs when the father leaves the world.

"No one expected things to turn out this way. He fought his way out of the Ji Family and then disappeared without a trace. My family has been hunting him all over the world for many years."

Lin Bei blinked and said: "He must have killed his mother too because I heard from the chief steward that the lord of the city became their new master by killing the former dragon lady of the Jimeng tribe..."

Everyone fell silent.

He was indeed a ruthless person.

...

While this conversation was happening, the little golden butterfly started chewing through all the chains, absorbing all the spiritual energy within, leaving only a ground full of golden threads.

Ji Lingfeng regained his freedom.

"Let's go to the next one," someone said and everyone hastily moved.

According to Lin Bei, there were not many prisons with people here, and they should be able to open them all within an hour.

Chu Liang's mind raced.

If there were seventh-level beings like Xu Bashan and the South Sea Inferno Dragon here... they wouldn't need to find a method to enter or exit the hidden realm.

Even if these beings at the seventh realm of cultivation couldn't defeat the city lord that had sacrificed both his parents to the heavens, they wouldn't be beings that the Heaven-Devouring Python could trap. These beings could easily open up a pathway out.

As long as they were saved, there would be an eighty percent chance of escaping this place!

Then, the little golden butterfly arrived at another prison and started chewing.

There seemed to be a tall and mighty middle-aged man behind the wall. His jaws looked as if they were carved by a saber and his eyebrows were as straight as a sword and his nose was tall like a mountain. He exuded an aura of authority even when he wasn't showing any anger.

Although his limbs were locked with rune chains and there were twelve faintly glowing silver scales on his body constantly torturing him, he still sat upright in the center, meditating with his eyes closed.

When he heard the noise by the wall, he slowly opened his eyes and asked, "Who's out there? Are you here to save me?"

"Chief, is that you?" came a sound from outside.

"It's me," the man replied.

Muffled cheers sounded outside.

Once a round hole was chewed open, the vice-chief immediately peered inside. But upon seeing who was there, she was very disappointed. 'You are not our chief! Who are you?' she demanded.

"I am the chief of the Four Seas Whale Gang," the person in the cell said in a voice like thunder.

"It's a mistake. This is not our chief." The members of the Blazing Fire Gang turned back in disappointment, "Time is tight. Why don't we head to the next one and rescue our chief first?"

Chu Liang quickly advised, "Since we're here, let's save him too."

Good grief. This one is much more useful than your chief. Even if you guys aren't coming along, we have to take him with us.

What are you thinking?

But before a hole that was big enough for a person to pass through was opened, someone with a strange accent shouted, "Who's there?"

As they turned over, they realized that a member of the Jimeng Clan had discovered them!

This member of the Jimeng Clan immediately wanted to call for help, but Lin Bei quickly jumped forward and shouted, "Everything is fine! We're just making a hole in the wall! It's okay!"

"Huh? Making a hole?" The member of the Jimeng Clan paused for a moment, appearing to be on a mental overload. Then, he realized something and said, "Isn't that breaking someone out of prison?"

However, in that moment of hesitation, a few burly guys had surrounded the Jimeng clansman.

The Jimeng clansman guarding the prison was at the fifth realm of cultivation, while the experts in the Blazing Fire Gang, even the weakest one, was at the fifth realm. Obviously, dealing with this Jimeng clansman was a piece of cake! As the group hurdled forward, they unleashed the force of thunder!

As the vice-chief swung her large axe, the Jimeng clansman lifted his weapon to block. But it was useless. That one move sent him flying several zhang high!

Boom boom— As a few more explosions sounded and a few more strikes, the Jimeng clansman was knocked down. Yet, the explosions caused by the fifth-realm expert caught the attention of some in the distance.

"Roar—"

A dragon chant sounded from afar.

The translation of the chant immediately appeared in Chu Liang's mind and he called out, "He's calling for backup!"

"Even though I don't understand the language of dragons, I too know that it's calling for backup," Lin Bei said. "I don't think there are many Jimeng clansmen here so I think we can handle it!"

Bang bang bang bang—

With that dragon chant, a series of heavy and rapid hoofbeats sounded.

It was a squad of eight Jimeng Dragon Calvarymen with sharp sabers in their hands!

This squad was incredibly powerful, with even three Jimeng clansmen among them who had reached the sixth realm of cultivation. As they rode forward, everyone immediately rose and rushed towards them, grabbing their weapons and unleashing their divine abilities.

As the Jimeng clansmen fought, blood-red smoke of qi emanated from their bodies, making them resemble celestial soldiers. It was clear they were performing the Divine Dragons' Great Blood-Burning Technique!

Immediately, Chu Liang used the same move. He activated his foundational qi and his body unleashed a surge of dragon aura, which instantly weakened the flames of qi unleashed by the Jimeng clansmen, who were also draconic descendants.

It was common for draconic descendants to battle in this manner. The competition was all about the purity of dragon blood. Even if one had a higher cultivation, they could be restrained by someone with purer blood.

It was thanks to the dragon blood within Chu Liang that he was able to suppress the Jimeng Dragon Cavalry, giving everyone a significant advantage!

At that moment, the Jimeng Clan member who had been knocked down staggered to his feet and let out a loud dragon roar, "Roar—"

"He said to hold on for a while—he's going to release that dragon!" Chu Liang exclaimed. He then immediately asked, "What dragon?"

"It should be that South Sea Inferno Dragon. The city lord has imprisoned it and is performing some sort of modification on it," Lin Bei answered.

"Huh? Then stop him quickly!" Chu Liang shouted.

But it was already too late.

In the blink of an eye, the Jimeng clansman sprinted to a large prison in the distance. As the silver scale on his forehead lit up, the talisman on the prison began to flash with a red light.

That prison was indeed different. While the Jimeng clansman couldn't open the other prisons, he could open this one. This suggested that the creature locked inside was likely an ally, but it had to be locked up because...it's fierce?

"Roar—"

A dragon chant echoed through the entire Python Belly City and reverberated across the hidden realm, like the sound of a legendary sword being unsheathed.

Chu Liang listened closely to the chant, sensing two somewhat familiar auras within it. Thanks to his own dragon breath, he was particularly attuned to such things.

Part of it came from the South Sea Inferno Dragon, and the other part... from the Dragon Soul of Baxia from that day!

Chu Liang was stunned as he realized that the dragon soul released from Baxia's tomb had been merged with the South Sea Inferno Dragon.

In that moment, he understood why the city lord was so determined to capture the South Sea Inferno Dragon.

"This person refined the Dragon Soul of Baxia, captured the South Sea Inferno Dragon, and then fused the two together. Isn't this..." Chu Liang muttered, trailing off in disbelief.

"A Xia Sea Dragon?" Lin Bei interjected.

"Of all the words you could choose from those two names, you had to pick these?" the crowd shouted in unison.

"Isn't it a massively vicious beast..." Chu Liang continued, his voice trailing off.

Such a heaven-defying method!

The South Sea Inferno Dragon possessed Divine Dragon Fire and immense spiritual energy, while Baxia, a child of the Dragon, was unmatched in power and strength.

By combining the body of the South Sea Inferno Dragon with the Dragon Soul of Baxia, an unparalleled vicious beast with terrifying flames and invincible strength would be created!

Eh?

As Chu Liang was contemplating this, he was reminded of someone..

Esteemed teacher? he thought.

Boom boom boom—

As the giant prison was opened, a flash of red light was followed by a massive explosion that engulfed the entire prison building and the Jimeng clansman who opened it in flames!

It was the endless Divine Dragon Fire! The blood of those caught in it nearly evaporated on the spot!

The divine fire was vast, incinerating all life in its path.

At that moment, Chu Liang briefly grasped a fragment of the essence of the Dao of Incinerating Heaven, but he had no time to reflect on this now.

A towering figure that lit up the night sky rose from the sea of flames. The Divine Dragon Fire enveloping its crimson-gold scales was so intense that the original form of the South Sea Inferno Dragon was barely visible.

All they could see were its eyes, filled with bloodlust—brimming with slaughter and madness!

"What kind of monster did he create?"

Anyone who witnessed this scene and heard the dragon chant was in deep shock. Even if they didn't understand dragon language, they could feel the anger and madness in the chant.

It wanted to kill all the living beings it saw!

The observers trembled in their limbs and souls. They only wanted to escape!

At this moment, Chu Liang finally understood the feelings of those who had once stood against Di Nufeng.

It was despair.

It was suffocating fear and despair!

"There's no escape!" Xu Bashan, still in the cell, roared, "Wait until I get out, and I will deal with it!"

His shout brought everyone back to their senses.

Indeed. Where could they escape to?

Python Belly City was vast enough to house hundreds of thousands of humans, but for this unparalleled vicious beast, it was just a small manor.

It could kill everyone here in an instant!

The only one who could possibly deal with it was Xu Bashan, a cultivator at the seventh realm. As the chief of the Whale Gang, weak cultivation was definitely not a trait associated with him!

Staying by his side was the safest option.

Fortunately, while the entire world seemed to burn like an alchemical oven, and all living beings were in danger, the little golden butterfly was still carrying out Chu Liang's orders.

It just kept gnawing.

Even when the whole world feared the Inferno Dragon, the little butterfly wasn't afraid. It just kept gnawing.

Gnawing continuously.

"Roar!" The Inferno Dragon, now dangerously close, launched itself forward.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The sound of fire waves echoed, and in that instant, everyone stopped breathing...

Finally, at this critical moment, the chains binding Xu Bashan's limbs were released!

"HAH—"

A sudden shout erupted from behind. It was like the rumble of rolling thunder!

A Daoist figure, resembling the Thunder God himself, swept past everyone with great momentum. The mere rumbling left in his wake caused their eardrums to tremble.

Is this the power of an expert at the seventh realm?

Everyone was shocked to their core.

They watched as the thunderous figure collided head-on with the diving Inferno Dragon!

Swish—

But just before the impact, the twelve silver dragon scales on Xu Bashan's body suddenly flashed.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh..." He let out a painful cry as his connection to the Dao was instantly severed.

These twelve dragon scales turned out to be an incredibly powerful seal!

Bang—

The frenzied Inferno Dragon, bound by no code of martial virtue, crashed directly into Xu Bashan, sending him flying.

Boom boom boom—

Splatters of Divine Dragon Fire exploded on the gliding Xu Bashan, embedding him almost into the ground. Amidst the blaze of fire and smoke, he was clearly unconscious.

Ah?

In that instant, everyone experienced a roller coaster of emotions—from the despair and fear of being targeted by the Inferno Dragon, to the sudden hope when Xu Bashan broke free, and then back to despair as he was swiftly knocked down...

It was unbelievable that such extreme ups and downs could occur in the blink of an eye.

For a moment, everyone was stunned, not knowing what to do. Countless emotions converged in their hearts, ultimately culminating in one thought.

Is that it?

Chapter 396: Going Against The Current In The Sea of Fire

It was late at night.

Jiang Shenting stood outside the Giant Whale Mountain Manor, his tall figure silhouetted against the late-night sky.

The grand banquet of the immortal sects had ended, yet he remained there, fixing his gaze on the distant horizon.

"Chief, it's already late. Why not return and rest?" a voice beside him urged gently. "We have to rise early tomorrow to prepare for the grand ceremony."

Jiang Shenting shook his head. "Hongqiu hasn't returned yet. She said she'd arrive a day early. I'll wait for her a bit longer."

"Perhaps the Lady-I mean Miss Xu has been delayed by something?"

The attendant nearly addressed her as the young lady out of habit, but quickly corrected himself, recalling that her father was no longer the chief.

Jiang Shenting sighed, a heaviness in his tone. "It's possible, but there's no harm in waiting a little longer. I know she must resent me for taking her father's position like this. Whether I can resolve that or not, I must at least treat her with the respect she deserves." He paused and added, "Remember, she is still the young lady of the Whale Gang. Her status remains unchanged. Treat her as you always have."

"Yes." The attendant nodded in agreement.

After turning around and retreating back into the manor, the attendant couldn't help but remark to the others, "The chief is truly too kind."

The autumn night was cool, with a chill settling into the air.

After some time, a sharp whistle echoed from the sky, as if a colossal creature had soared overhead before spiraling downward.

Whoosh—

A powerful gust of wind swept through, so fierce that people could not open their eyes. Jiang Shenting's hair and robes billowed wildly, yet he remained unmoved.

As the wind died down, it revealed a monstrous beast.

The creature was enormous, with wings that spanned wide and thick, its body armored in scales that shimmered like molten fire. A fiery mane encircled its neck, and its head, resembling a deer's, bore sharp, intelligent eyes and a pair of antlers that twisted like chaotic blades.

It was extremely vicious.

As it landed, its gaze locked onto Jiang Shenting, fierce and unyielding, though it made no sound.

Jiang Shenting recognized this beast at a glance.

Feilian[1] was a demonic beast, ranked just below the four great vicious beasts of the world. It had once roamed unchecked, feared by all, until it was subdued by Huang Hanshan, Lord of Thunderbolt Stronghold, who made it his personal mount.

Huang Hanshan had a particular fondness for the beast's ferocity and rarely parted from it.

Yet now, the wildness in Feilian's eyes was unmistakable. Without Huang Hanshan's control, it would likely revert to its vicious instincts in an instant.

"Hahaha!" A booming laugh suddenly erupted from behind the fierce creature.

"Brother Jiang! I didn't expect to find you outside the manor welcoming guests at this late hour! I was waiting for Hongqiu because I wanted to travel here with her, which caused a bit of a delay. I hope you'll forgive us!"

The voice was loud and rugged, clearly sounding like a man brimming with dominance and power.

Sure enough, a group of cultivators descended from Feilian's back, led by a middle-aged man with a broad, weathered face, a grizzled beard, and fierce eyes that gleamed like a predator's.

The man stood tall and imposing like a steel fortress, his broad frame, with muscles bulging visibly even beneath his wide robes. Each stride was powerful, reminiscent of a dragon or a tiger, and his laughter rumbled like distant thunder.

Even from a distance, an invisible pressure radiated from him.

As his gaze swept over the gathering, the attendants behind Jiang Shenting—all cultivators themselves—instinctively lowered their heads, avoiding his eyes.

All except for Jiang Shenting himself.

The newly appointed chief of the Four Seas Whale Gang met the man's gaze with a slight smile. "Lord Huang, it's an honor to have you personally grace us with your presence. I only regret that I couldn't escort you all the way from the Southern Regions."

His gaze shifted as he continued, "Hongqiu, you're back as well? I was starting to worry about you."

Beside Huang Hanshan stood a tall young woman, dressed in a striking scarlet robe, her hair tied back with a cloak flowing behind her. She was vibrant and full of spirit. At this moment, her gaze was fixed on Jiang Shenting, her eyes bright and intense. When he called her name, she nodded slightly and responded, "Uncle Jiang."

Behind her stood the disciples of Thunderbolt Stronghold, including two of the three young masters, Wei Tiandi and Deng Yixiao. The man with tanned skin, thick eyebrows, and large, commanding eyes was Wei Tiandi, while the man with a long beard and ageless features was Deng Yixiao.

Huang Hanshan's favorite disciple, Du Wuhen, however, was stationed at Thunderbolt Stronghold.

"I heard there were mysterious giant waves in the South Sea a few days ago, so I went to investigate," Xu Hongqiu explained. "I also took the opportunity to visit my uncle[2] at Thunderbolt Stronghold."

"Oh?" Jiang Shenting's eyes lit up, "Did you gain anything from the trip?"

Xu Hongqiu shook her head, a hint of sadness in her expression. "No, it was a wasted trip."

Jiang Shenting sighed along with her. "Haaaaa..."

"Brother Jiang, don't worry. Xu Bashan is my sworn brother. I will find him, alive or dead!" Huang Hanshan declared firmly. "And until I do, you must ensure my niece is well taken care of within the Whale Gang. If anyone dares to bully her, they'll have me to answer to."

"Rest assured, Lord Huang," Jiang Shenting replied solemnly. "Hongqiu will always be the young lady of our Whale Gang. Nothing will change."

"Hahaha! Now that you've said that, I'm relieved." Huang Hanshan stepped forward, patting Jiang Shenting on the shoulder with a bold, reassuring gesture. As he walked away, his voice boomed like thunder, "And if I catch the one who harmed my brother, I'll make them suffer so much that they'll find no relief in either life or death."

His voice carried far, echoing across the manor grounds.

It was obvious that he had come this time to support Xu Hongqiu.

A sharp glint flashed in Jiang Shenting's eyes as he turned to walk alongside Huang Hanshan. He then said solemnly, "There's no need for Lord Huang to trouble himself. The Whale Gang will ensure the culprit is brought to justice. Otherwise, the world might think the chief of the Whale Gang can be easily trifled with, and that's something that concerns me deeply."

Huang Hanshan laughed heartily, then pointed to Feilian behind him, addressing the attendants of Giant Whale Manor. "My beast will be handled by Thunderbolt Stronghold's people. Stay clear of it, or it might eat you if it gets angry!"

...

By the time everything was settled, it was already past midnight.

Jiang Shenting finally returned to his room to rest. He wasn't staying in the main hall that traditionally belonged to the chief of the Whale Gang yet, but rather in a side chamber where he had resided as the leader of the Eastern Whale Division. He would officially move after tomorrow's inauguration ceremony.

As he approached the chamber, he noticed someone already waiting for him.

"Did Huang Hanshan come?" the person asked.

The man had red hair and a red beard, tall and rugged, dressed in a black robe with his chest exposed.

"He and Xu Bashan have been friends for many years. It's no surprise he came to support Xu Hongqiu this time," Jiang Shenting replied as he sat down.

"I think you should get rid of the problem entirely. Why not just kill that little girl too?" the red-haired man suggested casually, as if discussing something as trivial as crushing an ant.

"Going after Xu Bashan was already a risky move. If we target Xu Hongqiu as well, don't you think people will start to suspect it was me?" Jiang Shenting replied in a deep voice. "Besides, Xu Bashan may be gone, but the forces he built over the years are deeply entrenched. Even after I become the chief, it will take time to fully gain control over the Northern and Western Whale Divisions. Without Xu Hongqiu, those factions will likely scatter, and it will be nearly impossible to unite them again."

The Four Seas Whale Gang wielded immense power, boasting tens of thousands of members within the gang itself, not to mention the countless affiliated factions that swelled their ranks beyond measure.

This immense power was also the reason it had ascended to become one of the Terrestrial Ten, despite being merely a martial world faction.

Having a lot of people does not always mean having real power in the world of immortal cultivation, but having enough people still makes a big difference.

The connections between these vast factions were intricate and intertwined. The chief could only manage them through a series of key nodes, and if one major node were to suddenly disappear, it would inevitably lead to chaos.

Of course, Jiang Shenting didn't explain all of this. He figured that, given the red-haired man's limited understanding, it would be difficult to make him grasp the intricacies, even if he tried.

"I don't understand all the intricacies. Anyway, I'm staying here to keep an eye on you. Once you take office tomorrow, don't forget our agreement," the red-haired man said.

"Even if you, Chi Menshen[3], forget, I won't," Jiang Shenting said, staring at him. Then he asked, "When do you plan to kill Xu Bashan?"

"Heh, no rush," the red-haired man, known as Chi Menshen, also laughed. "Xu Bashan has been in charge of the Whale Gang for so many years. He must have a lot of important information. The more we get out of him, the more it will benefit you."

"Hmph," Jiang Shenting sneered.

He naturally understood the intentions of these people. As long as Xu Bashan was in their grasp, they held a card to keep him in check. As long as Xu Bashan lived, he would be under their control.

"As long as you don't mess it up, I won't go back on my word," Jiang Shenting said. "If Xu Bashan escapes and makes it back here, I will naturally be doomed, and at that time, I will definitely drag you all down with me."

"Heh, don't worry." Chi Menshen said as he patted his chest. "Xu Bashan has been locked inside the belly of the Heaven-Devouring Python by Little Ji, with multiple seals added. If he can escape, I'll take your surname!"

...

Inside Python Belly City.

At this moment, everyone was looking at Xu Bashan, who lay at the bottom of a pit surrounded by roaring flames. All they were thinking was that he probably wouldn't make it out alive.

So what should we do?

The answer was obvious: run.

But the Inferno Dragon, which was only momentarily delayed by Xu Bashan, was already charging forward again. Who could possibly escape from it?

"Split up and run!"

In this critical moment, Chu Liang could only shout out a desperate command before turning and flying away on his sword.

As the old saying goes, "When your father dies and your mother remarries, everyone is on their own."

In this situation, no amount of sacrifice could stop the Inferno Dragon. It was better to split up and try to give as many people as possible a chance to escape. Though fleeing might only prolong their fear, where else could they hide from the relentless hunt of the Inferno Dragon within Python Belly City?

Upon hearing Chu Liang's command, everyone snapped out of their paralyzing fear and scattered like a burst of fireworks, fleeing in all directions.

As the crazed eyes of the Inferno Dragon reflected the tiny figures fleeing, a hint of cruelty and mockery surfaced in its gaze.

"Roaaaaaarr."

It suddenly opened its mouth wide and let out a muffled roar.

A surge of vibrant crimson-gold flames burst forth, like a blazing red sun emerging from the depths of the sea!

Boom—

The fireball exploded outward, transforming into countless flaming meteors that streaked through the sky, instantly engulfing everyone who hadn't managed to escape far enough!

This vicious beast...

Though consumed by its crazed thirst for slaughter, it still remembered the divine abilities of the Inferno Dragon Clan from the South Sea!

There was no chance of survival!

Each burst of flame was like a miniature Inferno Dragon, fierce and unstoppable. In an instant, everyone who had just scattered was blasted down from the sky!

No, there was one person who remained unharmed.

Chu Liang was the first to escape.

Hearing the chorus of screams behind him, Chu Liang was able to see the entire scene with his divine sense. Strangely, not a single flame was directed toward him, as if they were deliberately avoiding him.

What is going on?

Could it be...

A vague suspicion formed in Chu Liang's mind.

Before him loomed the image of the ultimate ferocious beast, howling and rampaging, preparing to unleash a sea of flames that would consume everything in its path. The others who had fled with him had already been struck down, their fates uncertain. If he left now, they would certainly perish. For some reason, the Inferno Dragon hadn't attacked him.

Should I run?

A fleeting moment of hesitation flashed in Chu Liang's eyes, but then he turned back, charging forward with resolute determination, unwavering as he faced the fierce dragon head-on—like a moth flying into fire.

"Roar—" The Inferno Dragon unleashed wave after wave of flames, obliterating everything in its path. Even the sturdiest black rocks crumbled under the relentless burning of the Divine Dragon Fire.

Yet, Chu Liang, charging headlong, arrived directly in front of those blazing golden irises!

He plunged into the sea of flames, confronting the fierce dragon!

At this moment, his figure dove into the overwhelming Divine Dragon flames, appearing so small, yet radiating a spark of light.

Strangely, as his figure was fully reflected in the Inferno Dragon's vertical pupils, the ferocity in its eyes seemed to wane.

"Roar..."

The Inferno Dragon hesitated, its torrent of flames pausing as it let out a low, confused growl. The light in its vertical pupils flickered, as if it were struggling with something deep within.

Then, Chu Liang raised his hand, revealing a glowing orb! Though small in his grasp, the light it emitted was as bright as the stars.

I have a shining orb that can illuminate a thousand rivers and mountains!

Chapter 397: Run. Go Ahead and Run. (I)

It was the Blue Dragon's Orb.

The essence of the ancient Blue Dragon's cultivation was condensed into an orb. It served as the key to the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm and all of its power. As long as the person wielding the orb was strong enough, they could become the god of the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm.

Be it in terms of how vast the hidden realm was or how much spiritual energy it contained, the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm surpassed Python Belly City by a hundredfold. It was just like the difference between the ancient Blue Dragon and the Heaven-Devouring Python.

Chu Liang's current cultivation level was not high enough to activate many of the Blue Dragon's Orb's powers. Nevertheless, he could at least do one thing: connect to the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm and let the aura contained in there flow out.

All he could do at present was open up a gateway for aura. However, if he reached a higher cultivation level one day... perhaps the sixth or seventh realm, he could even open up a portal that could transport him into the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm whenever he wanted! Then he would never be trapped in situations like the one he was stuck in inside Python Belly City.

It would be like having a Shattering the Void jade talisman that can be used at any time, but unlike Shattering the Void, Chu Liang would be able to set the destination. The portal to the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm would be an incredible life-saving tool. If he were to encounter danger, he could simply open the portal and teleport to his backyard.

Of course, Chu Liang had to get through today's challenge first for him to even have a chance at acquiring that power.

In front of him right now, there was an extremely vicious beast that looked like it had gone mad. Yet, under the light of the Blue Dragon's Orb, the beast gradually calmed down.

When the Divine Dragon Fire descended from the sky like rain earlier, it had, for some reason, avoided Chu Liang. That led Chu Liang to suspect something. Considering that this maddened Inferno Dragon had killed even the draconic descendants, it surely did not feel any affinity for the faint dragon breath that lingered on Chu Liang. So, what could be the reason for the difference in treatment?

The Dragon Soul in Baxia's tomb had been derived from the Dragon God's throne and had no consciousness. Therefore, the City Lord of Python Belly City had been able to refine it very easily, making it entirely his own. He then killed the soul of the South-Sea Inferno Dragon and integrated Baxia's Dragon Soul into the South-Sea Inferno Dragon's body. With that, the City Lord had made a vicious beast that killed on sight, and he was its only master.

Nevertheless, if there was anything in the world that could control this Dragon Soul, it would only be its origin—the Dragon God's throne! And the Dragon God's throne was within the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm.

I'm linked to the Blue Dragon's Orb, so I've long been stained with the aura of the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm. Could this be why the Inferno Dragon treats me differently?

Chu Liang decisively turned back and raised the Blue Dragon's Orb toward the Inferno Dragon.

As the Inferno Dragon basked in the magnificent radiance of the Blue Dragon's Orb, its rage gradually died down, just as Chu Liang had expected.

The Inferno Dragon let out soft growls, "Raar..."

It sounded like a child whispering helplessly to its mother.

Chu Liang slowly directed the orb's light toward the Inferno Dragon's head.

Then he softly gave an order. "Withdraw your flames, and stop harming others."

The Inferno Dragon raised its head and let out a long cry. "Raaaaaaaaaar."

Chu Liang was so surprised that he nearly turned and ran, but when he looked closely, he realized that the Inferno Dragon's roar was one of elation. It was happily wagging its super long tail and even accidentally knocked down several black-rock buildings in the process.

Chu Liang noticed there was a figure buried under one of the collapsed buildings and wondered who the unlucky person was. They had gotten knocked out by the Inferno Dragon when it was mad and then suffered from its playful actions too.

Such a small action caused such great harm...

While Chu Liang experienced an emotional rollercoaster, the Inferno Dragon drew a very deep breath, and the fierce, scorching Divine Dragon Flames around them suddenly vanished. The Inferno Dragon had sucked them all up into its mouth!

The Inferno Dragon's chest swelled up. Moments later, the Inferno Dragon slowly exhaled two streams of dense smoke from its nostrils.

The absence of flames revealed a scene of broken and crumbling walls, with bodies strewn about. It was unclear how many of them were still alive.

Chu Liang was just about to check on the others when he saw one of the bodies move. The person flipped over and stood up.

"Is everything okay now?"

That person was Lin Bei.

"Are you all right?" Chu Liang asked.

"Before I even had the chance to react and run, they got hit by the fireball. I knew I couldn't escape, so I just played dead on the spot," Lin Bei said, scratching his head with a smile.

"Same." The vice-chief, who was nearby, got up as well. "When it went berserk, it seemed like it would attack anyone who moved, so I figured it might be best to just play dead.

"Good thing you subdued it, or else we'd have all been burned to death by the Divine Dragon Fire in no time."

The members of the Blazing Fire Gang all stood up one by one.

Well, then. Chu Liang couldn't help but smile. It turns out that the huge fire didn't do much harm.

The Divine Dragon Fire was incredibly mighty, but it was not as powerful as the Samadhi True Fire, which could obliterate everything. Almost everyone present was a martial artist at the fifth or sixth realm, so their corporeal bodies were strong enough that they had managed to endure the fire, instead of dying instantly. They had not been able to avoid getting burned all over, but they had all survived in the end.

As for the third-realm cultivator Lin Bei, it was fortunate that, although his body had been slow to react, his mind had worked quickly. If that fireball had hit him, he would have been burned to ashes and scattered all over the place by now.

The vice-chief said, "We're very lucky that everyone is okay..."

"Really?" Lin Bei pointed at the collapsed buildings. "Earlier, it looked like several people got buried under the rubble."

"Ah!"

The Blazing Fire Gang members exchanged shocked glances and rushed toward the still scorching rubble, shouting, "Chief! Hold on! Chiiiiiiief!"

In that large charred pit lay Xu Bashan, who was now pitch-black from head to toe. Hearing the voices calling for him, his eyelids twitched slightly.

...

Amid the vast East Sea, where there were boundless rolling waves... there was an island, and the mood there was quite tense.

Di Nufeng sat with her arms crossed over her chest, looking imposing. She did not say a single word and only occasionally glanced at the little fatty beside her.

The little fatty had his gaze fixed on her, and whenever their eyes met, he would give an awkward smile.

"It should be here soon."

"Don't be afraid. I trust in the abilities of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion. I'll wait as long as it takes, until we find the Heaven-Devouring Python," Di Nufeng said softly.

Zhou Yijian sighed in relief. "That's good then..."

Di Nufeng added, "But you'll have to wait here with me. For each day that the Heaven-Devouring Python doesn't appear, that's one more day you'll have to stay."

Zhou Yijian wore a pained expression. "Big Sis Feng, I'm swamped with tasks..."

Di Nufeng shot him a sidelong glance. "Are you the only one that's busy? Am I not busy?"

Zhou Yijian blinked, feeling rather puzzled. Is that not the case?

Seeing Zhou Yijian's expression, Di Nufeng sheepishly paused for a moment. Then she said in a much quieter voice, "I have a huge fruit garden at home..."

...

The day before, Di Nufeng had gone to find Zhou Yijian, wanting him to help her divine Chu Liang's whereabouts. Zhou Yijian had no choice but to agree to do as she asked. However, he had not known how huge a task that would be until he actually tried to locate Chu Liang's whereabouts.

Zhou Yijian first performed a simple divination to find Chu Liang, but all he saw was a blur.

Noticing something was up, Di Nufeng questioned him, "Can you do it or not?"

Zhou Yijian broke out in a cold sweat.

He then tried to divine the cause of Chu Liang's disappearance and the vicious beast responsible, but he was once again met with a blur.

Considering Zhou Yijian's skills, it might just be a coincidence that he got one blurry reading. But it happened a second and then a third times... The only explanation was that someone had obscured the secrets of heaven!

Someone had indeed cast spells to obscure the secrets of heaven concerning the Heaven-Devouring Python, and it had been done long before Zhou Yijian's attempt to locate Chu Liang. Otherwise, how could the Whale Gang have been unable to find Xu Bashan for so long? They had already asked divination experts to locate their chief ages ago.

Regardless, Zhou Yijian had already agreed to help find Chu Liang, so he could not bring himself to say that he could not divine Chu Liang's whereabouts. He was too afraid to say it.

So, Zhou Yijian had no choice but to grit his teeth and return to his sect. He had to request for permission to use his sect's legendary artifact, Omniscience.

Chapter 398: Run. Go Ahead and Run. (II)

Ranked twenty-first in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures, the codex Omniscience was the world's most powerful legendary artifact for divination.

Rumor had it that, considering its abilities, Omniscience should rank at least in the top twenty of the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures. However, the Celestial Pivot Pavilion feared too many people would seek it out for divination, so they deliberately ranked it lower. Despite that, it still held the twenty-first rank.

A lot of paperwork was required to apply for permission to use Omniscience. Zhou Yijian was the head of the Wind-Catching Hall, but it wasn't easy for him to get permission to use it.

Fortunately, contacting his teacher, Elder Huang, solved that problem. Elder Huang's status was so high in the Celestial Pivot Pavilion that he could even allow outsiders to use Omniscience, so there was no issue with his disciple using it once.

Zhou Yijian divined Chu Liang's whereabouts once more, this time using Omniscience. He finally had a clear vision of a scene. The Heaven-Devouring Python swallowed a towering water prison whole, and at the edge of that water prison was Chu Liang.

At last, the culprit of Chu Liang's disappearance had been found. It was the Heaven-Devouring Python again!

Back when Xu Bashan disappeared, the Whale Gang paid a huge fee for the Celestial Pivot Pavilion to agree to their request to use Omniscience. The result of the divination was the same scene that Zhou Yijian just saw. Nevertheless, even after finding out that Xu Bashan's ship had been swallowed by the Heaven-Devouring Python, they still couldn't locate his whereabouts.

Cold sweat streamed down Zhou Yijian's face.

Never in his wildest dreams would he have imagined that Chu Liang had disappeared in the same way.

Well, this is a big problem.

Di Nufeng watched Zhou Yijian with a cold gaze, not saying a word. Zhou Yijian thought that Di Nufeng was even more terrifying when she was silent than when she shouted that she wanted to fight and kill.

He had always known that when Di Nufeng barked a lot, she wouldn't bite. It was when she was silent that she would be absolutely ferocious...

In the end, Elder Huang urgently returned to the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, had a meeting with several of the pavilion's greatest divination experts, and even alerted the pavilion master, Enlightened Wulou. After all that, they came up with a plan.

The Whale Gang had not received such great treatment when their chief went missing!

Normally, when outsiders went to the Celestial Pivot Pavilion to request their help, the pavilion would put in a totally different amount of effort. There certainly would not be a high-ranking member of the pavilion like Elder Huang running around sincerely to help the outsider.

After analyzing Chu Liang's situation, the Celestial Pivot Pavilion's conclusion was that it was impossible to divine the Heaven-Devouring Python's location, as someone had obscured the secrets of heaven related to it. Nonetheless, the Heaven-Devouring Python's ginormous size meant it could only roam the Four Seas.

As long as it moved, there would definitely be a trail of its movements, which might have a regular pattern. A being of the Heaven-Devouring Python's size would cause the earth to quake and mountains to shake wherever it passed; it was impossible for it to move stealthily.

So, the group of divination experts made separate divinations of the Four Seas, extracting any possible routes the Heaven-Devouring Python might take. Then they used Omniscience to divine which path it would take next. In the end, they divined that there was a sixty percent chance that the Heaven-Devouring Python would pass by this island in the East Sea today.

After that, Di Nufeng dragged Zhou Yijian over there to wait for the Heaven-Devouring Python. Nonetheless, even after waiting for many hours, the creature still had not appeared.

"This..." Zhou Yijian uttered, mulling over what to say. Then he said hesitantly, "We put in our best efforts, but we could only divine a 60% chance of the Heaven-Devouring Python taking this path. So, it is possible... that the python may not pass through here."

Di Nufeng let out a cold laugh. "Hah."

That nearly made Zhou Yijian burst into tears.

Right then, Di Nufeng's knitted eyebrows suddenly relaxed, and she stood up swiftly, looking into the distance!

The breeze was still, and the waves were quiet. However, Di Nufeng had sensed something!

Zhou Yijian's expression shifted from sorrow to joy at last. "It's here! It's finally here!"

He sounded like he was crying with joy.

"Many thanks to your sect," Di Nufeng said suddenly. "Regardless of whether I can save my disciple, I'll remember the help you've given me."

"We did indeed put in a lot of effort—"

Zhou Yijian wanted to say something, but Di Nufeng cut him off.

"Your debt for smearing me—let's call it even with this. We'll owe each other nothing from now on."

Zhou Yijian was stunned again. Oh, so you counted this request for help as a favor from me?

At the next moment, Di Nufeng leaped into the air, and a pair of blazing wings unfurled from her back! She instantly took on the form of a fiery Divine Phoenix soaring into the sky!

Di Nufeng looked particularly dazzling as a fiery Divine Phoenix!

Boom!

It was a well-known fact that Di Nufeng wasn't skilled in water combat.

So, when she plunged into the sea, she used her raging Samadhi True Fire to immediately evaporate the seawater within a hundred zhang of her, creating a void wherever she passed by! Be it fish, shrimp, or shellfish, everything in the sea around Di Nufeng disappeared!

A moment later, Zhou Yijian could even smell a foul fishy scent rising from the sea.

Di Nufeng advanced at full speed through the sea. After the brief time it took to take a breath, she saw an enormous shadow ahead.

The Heaven-Devouring Python was truly enormous. It was simply impossible for a being large enough to swallow a city whole to hide!

Nevertheless, when this ginormous creature—possibly the largest creature in the world—sensed the formidable aura charging toward it at full speed, its first reaction was...

Run!

The approaching figure was so small yet so terrifying! That aura made the Heaven-Devouring Python tremble with fear!

Rumble.

Massive waves suddenly surged in the East Sea as a great force rose from the seabed. The turbulent waves of a tsunami smashed against the shore.

Normally, the Heaven-Devouring Python wouldn't dare make any movements that would cause a tsunami because it was afraid of being discovered by humans. It saw its tremendous size as a huge source of distress. Whatever the Heaven-Devouring Python ate—be it an island or a small state—would always end up causing humans to hunt it down.

Fortunately, the Heaven-Devouring Python had encountered its current master, who obscured the flow of its qi. That had allowed the Heaven-Devouring Python to eat freely.

However, its eating habits had still led it into ruin in the end. Now, it cared for nothing but to escape!

In no time, Di Nufeng had already reached the tail of the Heaven-Devouring Python!

Sizzle—

When the Samadhi True Fire evaporated the seawater, it came into contact with the giant tail of the Heaven-Devouring Python, shooting a wave of searing pain up its body.

Hot, hot, hot, hot, hot!

Frightened, the Heaven-Devouring Python shot into the air!

That's right. It could fly!

However, it was a world-shocking event whenever the Heaven-Devouring Python took to the skies, all thanks to its tremendous size. That was why it had always remained hidden underwater in the sea. Nevertheless, the Heaven-Devouring Python was now in a critical moment of life and death; this was no time to be caring about such things.

In an instant, something that looked like massive black clouds ascended from the East Sea, blocking out the daylight! It rose from the east and moved to the west! The droplets of seawater that fell from the Heaven-Devouring Python's body turned into a spurt of torrential rain.

Following closely behind the Heaven-Devouring Python was a ball of fire with the vague shape of a phoenix. Its radiance shone through the vast black clouds like the sun rising at dawn.

On the ground, countless people looked up at the black clouds. They had no idea what was happening.

The Heaven-Devouring Python was rather lacking in intelligence. There was a great contrast between its tremendous size and its small brain.

In this intensely dire moment of impending death, the Heaven-Devouring Python did not care at all that its presence had been exposed. It just wanted to find its master!

Help! Save this python!

Meanwhile, Di Nufeng was flying behind the Heaven-Devouring Python. The wings of her Divine Phoenix form, which were made of Samadhi True Fire, showed no signs of burning out. It seemed like they would stay ablaze forever, illuminating the sky with their divine radiance!

As Di Nufeng drew near to the Heaven-Devouring Python, she reached out, wanting to grab it. However, the Samadhi True Fire was not meant for grabbing things. So, instead of using her fiery wings, Di Nufeng extended a claw and sliced off the tip of the Heaven-Devouring Python's tail! The fastest blade in the world was not the sharpest but the one that burned the hottest!

The Heaven-Devouring Python let out a rare scream of terror. "HIIIISSSSS!!!"

It was truly terrified!

Someone save me! Save me! Save me!

Di Nufeng said, "Run. Go ahead and run. I want to see if you can escape from my grasp!"

Her horrifying laughter echoed through the sky, making the Heaven-Devouring Python even more afraid.

"Kekekekekeke..."

Chapter 399: Set the Sail!

As the smoke settled in Python Belly City, the group gathered in a circle, discussing their next steps.

However, it was difficult for them to focus, as the ferocious Inferno Dragon lay quietly on the ground behind Chu Liang, its blazing golden irises fixed on them. Though it no longer appeared ferocious and evil, its presence was still terrifying.

Some flames would feel colder as you grow closer to it.

"Don't be afraid..." Chu Liang said, forcing a smile. Although he was scared as well, he tried to reassure the others. "We still need to rely on it to get out of here."

The Dragon Soul of Baxia within the Inferno Dragon was like that of an innocent infant, one that had never seen the outside world since birth. The murderous and bloodthirsty nature instilled by the Lord of the Python Belly City had turned it into a vicious beast.

But It had calmed down through Chu Liang's constant soothing.

To put it simply, it was not very intelligent.

It had been filled with rage from being imprisoned for so long. When it was finally released, it wanted to destroy everything around it, much like an angry child throwing a tantrum.

The terrifying part was that it truly had the power to destroy everything.

Fortunately, Chu Liang had temporarily stabilized the Inferno Dragon with the aura of the Blue Dragon's Orb. But this was only a temporary solution; there was no telling when the dragon might suddenly be overwhelmed by negative emotions again.

It could be in a very good mood, wag its tail at you, and then, as a sign of affection, spit out a small ball of flames in your direction.

Anything was possible.

"Can we really rely on it?" Lin Bei whispered as he leaned closer. "Isn't Chief Xu also a seventh-realm expert?"

As soon as he finished speaking, a hurtful hiss echoed from the side.

"Owh—" Xu Bashan groaned as he tore a blood-stained silver scale from his body.

This was the third one.

The silver scale seal placed on him by the Lord of Python Belly City had caused unbearable pain, and each scale was became even more difficult to remove than the last.

"Seems like we can't count on him..." Lin Bei muttered.

Upon hearing this, Xu Bashan immediately opened his eyes and said, "Give me some time, and I will remove all these silver scales and restore my cultivation power to its peak. Once that happens, breaking out of this hidden realm will be a piece of cake."

"Jiang Shenting's inauguration ceremony should be starting soon by now," Chu Liang said as he gazed into the distance.

"Let's ride the dragon," Xu Bashan said as he suddenly stood up. "It seems quite docile."

"The chaos in this hidden realm has not been quelled, so I request that the members of the Blazing Fire Gang stay here. If Chief Xu and we manage to make it out, we will surely subdue the Heaven-Devouring Python and then take everyone in Python Belly City out," said Chu Liang.

It was unrealistic to expect everyone in Python Belly City to ride the Inferno Dragon out together. The dragon wouldn't be able to shuttle back and forth, carrying people out, and there was no guarantee it would even be willing to transport them. Given this uncertainty, Chu Liang decided that he, Lin Bei, and Xu Bashan should leave first.

By then, whether it be subduing the Heaven-Devouring Python or asking for support from the Mount Shu Sect and the Four Seas Whale Gang, they would be more prepared.

As for those in Python Belly City, they would have to wait slightly longer.

The leader of the Blazing Fire Gang, Hua Zhengshan, had yet to regain consciousness due to the severe injuries he sustained. The building had collapsed on him, and he was badly burned while trapped inside. The members of the Blazing Fire Gang, wanting to stay and care for him, agreed to the plan.

After all, they had been in the hidden realm for many years and weren't in a rush to leave.

Ji Lingfeng was tempted to join the first group, but considering the dangers the Inferno Dragon might face while breaking through the hidden realm, he decided to wait a bit longer.

After all, Chu Liang and Xu Bashan were the ones in a hurry to return home. Why would he be rushing to go home?[1]

After the plan was decided, Chu Liang, Lin Bei, and Xu Bashan climbed onto the back of the Inferno Dragon.

At first, Chu Liang felt a bit nervous as he mounted the dragon, but seeing how obediently it behaved, he finally relaxed.

Then, Chu Liang leaned down on its head and commanded, "Take off."

Boom—

As the Inferno Dragon soared into the sky, its Divine Dragon Fire surged.

"Owh... Tell it to put out the fire, it's burning hot!" Lin Bei cried out in distress, but the Inferno Dragon paid no heed as it suddenly charged toward the dim halo in the sky.

Whoosh—

In the blink of an eye, it crashed into the halo and passed through. The next moment, they caught sight of the faint glow of an enchanted formation behind the halo.

"Break through it! We're getting out!" Chu Liang shouted.

Roar—

The Inferno Dragon let out a powerful roar and slammed forcefully into the gate!

Bang!

Fierce flames erupted from the impact, bursting through the crack.

...

The heavy doors to the great hall creaked open, revealing a spacious hall flanked by numerous tables—this was the Ocean Tempest Hall of the Whale Gang!

The members of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, who had come to witness the inauguration ceremony, were seated inside the hall in their designated spots.

Outside the great hall, a wide set of stone steps descended to an expansive public square, where esteemed heroes from various factions had gathered.

Today marked the inauguration of the new chief of the Whale Gang, and anyone with connections had naturally come to offer their congratulations. Over ten thousand people were gathered inside and outside the hall, eager to witness the event.

Jiang Shenting slowly ascended the stone steps, pausing at the top to take in the vast sky and clouds. With his back to the Ocean Tempest Hall, he felt a profound sense of pride and accomplishment.

"Everyone!" he called out loudly, his voice carried by the wind to every corner of the square.

"My cultivation level may be modest, and my experience limited, but today I stand on this high platform because Chief Xu is missing, and the Whale Gang cannot be left leaderless. Secondly, because my brothers in the gang trust me and believe in my character. Today, I promise you all that I, Jiang Shenting, will lead the Whale Gang forward and not disappoint any of my brothers' expectations..."

There was some truth in his words; if not for his ambition, he wouldn't have fought for the position of chief.

The fact was that the Eastern Whale Division in recent years had achieved remarkable success through Jiang Shenting's leadership. On the other hand, the other three divisions had remained stagnant and were left far behind.

Therefore, Jiang Shenting had the support not only of the Eastern Whale Division but also of the younger factions within the other three divisions. Without the backing of these reformists, he wouldn't have risen to power, even in Xu Bashan's absence.

As Jiang Shenting ascended to the platform, his mind was set on taking the Whale Gang to new heights. From his point of view, the methods he had used along the way were simply necessary steps to remove obstacles and achieve greatness.

If he failed this time, it could be another ten years before he had another chance. But who knew what the world would look like by then?

Time waits for no one.

His ambitions would be set in motion from today!

Jiang Shenting shared some practical ideas, and his straightforward speech earned the approval of those both inside and outside the Ocean Tempest Hall.

After all, the Whale Gang was a major faction with hundreds of thousands of members. As long as he could bring benefits to everyone, most wouldn't care how Xu Bashan had disappeared.

After his speech, a Whale Gang elder shouted, "Set the sail!"

The symbol of the Whale Gang's chief was a large sail, tattered and stained with golden blood, a testament to the countless near-death voyages of the first chief.

The sail was mounted on a wooden pole, resembling a grand banner.

Once Jiang Shenting raised this sail, it would signify his inauguration as the Chief of the Whale Gang, and his name would echo across the four seas!

After each chief raised the sail, it would be returned to the Ocean Tempest Hall for safekeeping, which is why it hadn't been lost along with Xu Bashan.

Jiang Shenting grasped the wooden pole of the sail with both hands and gently unfurled it.

Whoosh——

Suddenly, a gust of wind and thunder erupted from the ground!

Ripples appeared beneath his feet, and layer upon layer of whirlwinds, like towering waves, instantly enveloped him!

What's happening?

Jiang Shenting was startled, immediately sensing a faint spiritual energy emanating from the sail, as if it were some kind of trigger.

He quickly realized that it was an enchanted formation!

It had lain dormant until now, but the trigger was on the sail, and it activated the moment he unfurled it.

Immediately, a clear shout sounded from behind him.

"Jiang Shenting, I will kill you to avenge my father today!"

Chapter 400: Killing with Formations

As the incident unfolded, the distinguished guests from the immortal sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten were still seated in the hall.

The moment Jiang Shenting unfurled the large sail, a storm suddenly erupted in the sky, and layers of whirlwinds instantly engulfed him!

His entire figure was completely obscured by the forces generated by this formation!

The sudden change shocked everyone.

The elders in the Ocean Tempest Hall were frozen in shock, unsure of how to react. Most remained motionless, while a few sprang up, ready to rush forward to rescue him. But before they could act, a thunderous shout echoed through the hall.

"Hongqiu!"

It was Huang Hanshan, the Lord of Thunderbolt Stronghold. As the only sect leader from the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten who had personally come to offer his congratulations, he was seated near the head of the hall, far from the door.

But when trouble arose, he was the first to rush toward the door. While shouting loudly, he made a seal, and three mighty figures, full of murderous qi, descended from the sky!

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh—

One was the mount he had ridden in on the previous day—a bird with a deer's head and scaly armor.

The second was a giant red ape, nearly ten zhang tall, with a mane of white hair, unleashing a deathly and fierce aura.

And the third was a massive nine-headed snake, each head glowing with scarlet vertical pupils, eerie and terrifying.

Feilian, Zhuyan[1], Xiangliu[2]!

Everyone present easily recognized these three as legendary vicious beasts. Despite their fearsome reputations, they all shared one commonality: each had been subdued by Huang Hanshan and had become his spirit beasts.

Didn't he summon them here a bit too quickly?

Did he really bring three vicious beasts along just to attend a banquet?

For a moment, everyone was astonished.

As these three beasts approached, the murderous qi they emitted grew so thick it seemed to pierce the very sky! Each of these creatures possessed the cultivation of the seventh realm; who would dare approach them easily?

At this moment, it could be said that Huang Hanshan alone had the power to challenge four Eminent Ones at the seventh realm!

A few elders loyal to Jiang Shenting immediately prepared to take action, but they were quickly blocked by Huang Hanshan's vicious beasts. Among these elders, only one had reached the seventh realm, while the remaining three or four were at the peak of the sixth realm.

To be honest, they still couldn't match Huang Hanshan, even if they joined forces.

They could only angrily ask, "Lord Huang, what is the meaning of this?"

"Hongqiu is my niece; I can't stand by and watch her do something foolish!" Huang Hanshan's voice boomed like thunder as he shouted outside the formation, "Hongqiu, even though your father was harmed by him, we don't have evidence yet. Don't be stubborn! If you stop now, I can ask the elders of the Whale Gang to spare you!"

In the Ocean Tempest Hall, there were more elders supporting Xu Bashan. When they saw that it was Xu Hongqiu who had made a move, they became hesitant.

As for the elders who maintained a neutral stance, they were surprised and uncertain about whom to support at that moment.

They knew that allowing the new chief to be killed in front of everyone would be disastrous, regardless of what truly happened. But taking action would mean confronting Huang Hanshan and his three vicious beasts.

Was it worth opposing Huang Hanshan for the sake of Jiang Shenting?

Huang Hanshan seemed to be persuading Xu Hongqiu, but his true intentions were highly questionable.

And the suspicion didn't end there.

The inauguration ceremony had been meticulously arranged by Jiang Shenting's trusted aides, who must have checked everything thoroughly multiple times.

It would have been impossible to set up such a formation within a day, and only someone from within the Whale Gang could have had the opportunity to do so.

There were even fewer people who could have access to the chief's token.

Who could harbor such deep hatred for Jiang Shenting that they would plan to kill him at the inauguration ceremony, setting everything in motion days ago?

It had to be Xu Hongqiu.

The layers of formation patterns beneath Jiang Shenting's feet rippled with increasing intensity. The talismanic scripts began to entwine his body like chains, binding him tightly and rendering him immobile.

This was the Grand Primal Origin Immortal-Binding Formation, composed of three hundred and sixty layers of intricate formations!

In the entire world, there were fewer than ten people capable of setting up such a formation. And only one person could have done so with such secrecy and skill.

That person could only be Formation Sage Dong Futu!

He was the honored ally of High Heavens Pavilion, the foremost formation specialist of his time. A man of such stature that even when entering the palace to see the emperor, he did not need to bow.

And he also happened to be Xu Hongqiu's esteemed teacher.

Xu Bashan had been on good terms with Dong Futu, and sent Xu Hongqiu to study formation techniques under him when she was young.

And today, Dong Futu sat among the guests, dressed in wide robes with large sleeves. He was of short stature, with a black face and a neatly trimmed mustache. Despite the chaos unfolding around him, he sipped his wine calmly, his expression untroubled and composed.

Amidst the upheaval, the members of the immortal sects adhered to their principle of staying out of others' internal affairs, choosing to remain as mere observers. It was reminiscent of when Lu Chengchou acted under the pretext of being a descendant of the Lu Clan, resulting in that incident being considered an internal conflict within the Mount Shu Sect.

During that time, the cultivators from the immortal sects who had come to witness the ceremony watched passively. They remained neutral until the Dark King Sect from the diabolical sects made a move, and only then did the righteous forces feel compelled to rise up and attack.

It was an unwritten rule in the realm of immortal cultivation that outsiders did not intervene in internal sect conflicts.

Thus, Huang Hanshan's sudden intervention seemed all the more abrupt.

In contrast, Dong Futu's behavior did not seem out of place at all.

However, some sharp-eyed individuals began to recognize the intricate design of the formation and couldn't help but glance toward Dong Futu.

"Master Dong, this formation..." someone quietly inquired.

"Hmm?" Dong Futu looked over, then nodded approvingly. "To think she even mastered this—Hongqiu's talent in formation techniques is truly impressive."

"..." The others were speechless.

Who could possibly believe that Xu Hongqiu had set up this formation herself? Not even a ghost would buy that story!

...

Within the Grand Primal Origin Immortal-Binding Formation...

The woman who charged out was dressed in red. Her skin was white as snow and her beauty rivaled that of peach blossoms. She wielded a crimson and gilded saber with both hands, exuding an imposing presence and a murderous aura!

It was none other than Xu Hongqiu, the Young Lady of the Whale Gang.

Even though she was at the peak of the fourth realm, she dared to attempt to kill Jiang Shenting, someone who had recently entered into the seventh realm.

By doing so, she was not trying to seek death.

She had unwavering faith in the Grand Primal Origin Immortal-Binding Formation, which her esteemed teacher had spent forty-nine days setting up.

Jiang Shenting looked at Xu Hongqiu, who was charging at him with the saber, and groaned, "Hongqiu! What are you doing? Your father's matter has nothing to do with me!"

He had expected that Xu Hongqiu might take some action, but he never expected her to attempt an assassination so boldly, right in front of everyone.

What a ruthless woman.

"You can deceive others, but not me," Xu Hongqiu shouted as she flew toward him, her voice filled with determination. "My father always said that while you appear upright, your heart is insidious. If something ever happened to him, it would certainly be your doing, Jiang Shenting!"

As she spoke, she closed the distance, her saber already poised to strike.

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—

Jiang Shenting summoned all his cultivation power, and several blood-colored dragons emerged around him, writhing and roaring as he attempted to break through the bindings of thousands of Celestial Talismans of Primal Origin. But no matter how much he struggled, he couldn't break free.

He had achieved a breakthrough and stepped into the seventh realm, which qualified him to compete for the position of chief. Given his age, he was already considered one of the top talents. The fact that he had managed to reach the seventh realm despite spending the last decade managing the Eastern Whale Division, with limited time for cultivation, further demonstrated his exceptional talent.

But no matter how talented he was, he was still just a newly advanced, unstable seventh-realm cultivator.

And Dong Futu, being the Formation Sage of this era, could set up formations capable of killing even the Eminent Ones!

Pierce—

Xu Hongqiu's saber pierced into Jiang Shenting's body.

With the enhancement effect of the formation, her vitality, qi, and spirit had been elevated to a peak.

Jiang Shenting could hardly move. His cultivation power was suppressed and his access to the Great Dao had been cut off.

It was as if he had already been pinned down and all Xu Hongqiu needed to do was deliver the fatal blow. Yet, this task was far from easy.

Xu Hongqiu's saber blade had only penetrated less than half an cun[3] before Jiang Shenting's powerful physique stopped the penetration. The skin, flesh, and bones of a seventh-realm cultivator far exceeded those of ordinary people and could not be easily pierced.

It could be said that even if an Eminent One lay unconscious on the ground, it would still be difficult for a fourth-realm cultivator to kill him.

But Xu Hongqiu was well-prepared. She gripped the saber with her left hand and formed a hand seal with her right, pressing it two chi down the blade.

Whoosh!

The crimson-gold saber suddenly radiated an unusual brilliance, with raised patterns lighting up and rotating, filling the air with a sharp, murderous tension.

It was another formation technique!

Jiang Shenting's eyes narrowed.

The formation engraved on Xu Hongqiu's saber was undoubtedly the handiwork of Dong Futu. As it activated, the saber's power surged, carrying an aura of unstoppable force.

Jiang Shenting barely had time to twist his body, shifting the point where the saber would strike.

Sssht—

The blade slid into his scapula, and blood spurted out.

A divine light flashed in Jiang Shenting's eyes, and the drops of blood that splattered out suddenly flickered and then shot towards Xu Hongqiu!

Boom—

Xu Hongqiu was struck by the blood droplets and was thrown back four or five zhang before crashing to the ground, spitting out blood.

Although Jiang Shenting's cultivation power was intensely suppressed by the Grand Primal Origin Immortal-Binding Formation, the spiritual energy contained in his blood was still formidable. Just a few drops were enough to seriously injure Xu Hongqiu.

This was the insurmountable gap between their realms.

Today, Jiang Shenting's encounter with this formation could be seen as a fight between him and the formation-setting Eminent One, Dong Futu. Though Jiang Shenting was currently at a disadvantage,

Xu Hongqiu was merely a pawn in this grand game. It would be exceedingly difficult for her to kill him with her own hands.

But she did not give up. She flipped back onto her feet, leaving the saber embedded in Jiang Shenting's shoulder. The light of a formation glowed beneath her feet, and in a blink, she was back in front of Jiang Shenting.

It wasn't that her speed increased—it seemed that time around her had slowed down?

The formation under her feet altered the flow of time. She gripped the saber's hilt without pulling it out, gritting her teeth as she slashed horizontally.

She seemed intent on slicing through her enemy's shoulder and decapitating him!

...

It all happened in a flash before anyone could react. From the sudden appearance of the formation to Xu Hongqiu thrusting out her saber, it all took place in just one or two breaths.

The Whale Gang elders in the hall quickly responded, rushing forward to encircle the scene.

If the chief were really assassinated on the day of his inauguration, how could the Whale Gang retain any honor?

An elder in the crowd shouted loudly, "Lord Huang, if you continue to block the way, it will be equivalent to declaring war on the Whale Gang!"

After all, this was an internal affair of the Whale Gang, and Huang Hanshan, no matter how shameless and stubborn he was, could not continue blocking their way as he represented the Thunderbolt Stronghold.

"Hmph, I'm clearly helping out," Huang Hanshan said as he slowly backed off. "But good intentions are not appreciated."

His remark made others silently criticize him. He was indeed helping, but who he was helping was far from clear.

But due to their status, elders like him and Dong Futu could only assist to a certain extent; the actual action had to be taken by Xu Hongqiu herself.

However, just as Huang Hanshan cleared the way, another sudden change occurred.

A loud laugh echoed from mid-air, and a man with red hair and a beard suddenly descended from the sky, landing on horseback. He waved his hand, unleashing a cloud of blood fog!

Boom—

The blood fog exploded like thunder, spreading to every corner of the hall.

Immediately, the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, along with the Whale Gang elders, were engulfed in the fog! All they could see was an illusion as relentless and fierce as an Asura.

Jiang Yuebai, who had been sitting quietly to the side, suddenly frowned as she sensed this aura.

"Shaman god's blood essence?"

Indeed, the aura in the blood fog was unmistakable—it was exactly the same as the shaman god's blood essence she and Chu Liang had encountered in the abandoned Shen Family Residence!