

M. Slaying 451

Chapter 451: Being Noble Alone

By the time dawn broke, Chu Liang had already led the group to the edge of the Valley of Bewildering Fog.

Wei Lang, a distinguished Confucian master from the Noblemen's Hall, and Grandmaster Yan Qihu of the Great Astral Sect took the lead. Ji Lingyu, Tang Shi, and Chu Liang followed closely behind, with Second Madam Gu and her mysterious attendant trailing at the rear.

The attendant was a small but sharp-eyed man. He kept his face concealed beneath black cloth.

Second Madam Gu introduced him to the group. "Chabu is from a mysterious village on the Scorching Sun Plains. The people of his village carry a bloodline that can suppress malevolent spirits. He might be of use when the time comes."

Chu Liang had briefly mentioned Second Madam Gu's background with the others, and both Wei Lang and Yan Qihu found themselves having so much respect for this extraordinary woman. With that, the group stepped into the fog.

As the guide, Chu Liang took on the responsibility. The moment they entered the mist, faint whispers seemed to swirl around them, echoing in his ears.

Recalling what happened when he was here last time, he warned the group, "This fog is filled with lingering spirits and Sickly Ghosts. Stay sharp. We'll need to hunt down the Sickly Ghosts. Their bones can ignite a fire, which will help disperse the mist..."

As Chu Liang spoke, Wei Lang raised his hand, summoning an azure scroll that glowed faintly. In an instant, a soft light enveloped the group, and the whispering spirits dissipated.

"Let's get going," Wei Lang said calmly.

Chu Liang's rambling stopped abruptly.

Ah, going with an Eminent One is the best.

Previously, Chu Liang thought the two Guiders of the diabolical sect were quite formidable. Yet, they couldn't protect the entire group, forcing everyone to hunt down Sickie Ghosts just to stay alive.

Now that I'm going through this again, the difference is so obvious. Is this why they say people are afraid to compare themselves with others in the same field?

As soon as the Soul-Pacifying Scroll was activated, the fog retreated, and all the lingering spirits vanished. The arduous task of hunting Sickie Ghosts was no longer necessary.

Chu Liang couldn't help but think, Sometimes, the manager's lack of ability is truly the reason the workload becomes so heavy and difficult.

The group continued forward at a steady pace.

Before long, the shadowy figure of a Sickie Ghost emerged in the distance. Yan Qihu, with a flick of his sleeve, readied himself to attack.

But Chu Liang couldn't hold back any longer. He leaped forward and shouted, "I'll clear the path for everyone!"

"Hey," Yan Qihu stopped Chu Liang with a firm hand on his shoulder. "Just focus on guiding us. There's no need for you juniors to concern yourselves with such trivial matters."

"Esteemed senior, it's precisely because it's such a small matter that we juniors should handle it," Chu Liang said earnestly. "There are greater dangers ahead. You and the others should conserve your strength. Please, allow me to take care of this!"

Sensing the sincerity in Chu Liang's words, Yan Qihu released his grip and nodded. "Alright then, but be careful."

Yan Qihu stepped back twice and whispered to Wei Lang, "This kid is really something. It's a shame he's a disciple of Mount Shu... and that his teacher is Di Nufeng. Otherwise, I'd love to recruit him into the Great Astral Sect."

"Indeed," Wei Lang agreed. "Our little friend Chu Liang here has a kind heart and a strong sense of righteousness. Such qualities truly make people love him."

Chu Liang's intentions were genuinely heartfelt.

He was genuinely wanting to slay a few Sickly Ghosts so that he could open up some rewards in the White Pagoda.

The last time he hunted Sickly Ghosts, he was rewarded with a One-Inch Golden Ghost Bone Pill, which granted him two indestructible "golden fingers."^[1] If he could earn a few more pills this time, he might even be able to forge a golden right hand.

When he was here previously, these Sickly Ghosts could still somewhat threaten his life.

If it wasn't for the Ghost-Slaying Sword of Divine Light, he wouldn't have killed these ghosts so easily.

But he no longer had to exert so much effort this time. With a simple command, his sword flew through the air, effortlessly slicing through every ghost in its path.

The seemingly tough bones of the Sickly Ghosts crumbled under even the faintest sweep of his Dustless Sword's sword qi.

As he collected the golden imprints visible only to himself, Chu Liang's smile grew wider with each one.

Behind him, Yan Qihu watched Chu Liang happily slaying ghosts and said to Tang Shi, "Look at him. He's able to feel such joy from deep within while he is contributing to the group. It shows that his nature is truly noble... What an example worth following."

And so, Tang Shi drew her spear and said resolutely, "I can't let Young Hero Chu bear all the burden alone. I'll help him clear the way."

Chu Liang's smile vanished instantly, replaced by a stern expression.

"That won't be necessary!" he declared.

There was a gleam in his eyes, as if he were protecting something precious.

Tang Shi, still gripping her spear tightly, suddenly felt awkward. She fidgeted with it, feeling a bit wronged.

Why is he being so mean?

How come he gets to be noble but won't let us act nobly too?

...

Chu Liang cleared the path flawlessly, accomplishing the task with ease. Compared to the previous time he ventured here, this journey was infinitely smoother.

Of course, he himself was the biggest obstacle last time.

With no sense of time in the dense fog, it felt as though they had walked for ages. Finally, the group reached the depths of the Valley of Bewildering Fog, where the vast and mysterious outline of the Deep Pool of Dreams emerged before them.

The sound of clashing armor began to echo once more.

It was the undying, tireless soldiers of the former dynasty again.

As they charged over from all directions, they shouted, "Kill the enemy!"

This time, Chu Liang didn't insist on facing them alone, knowing it was too much for him to handle by himself.

But as soon as Yan Qihu made a move, things became different.

The Martial Artist at the seventh realm let out a thunderous shout, stomping the ground beneath him, and in an instant, his figure vanished from the spot.

At the same moment, thousands of Yan Qihu's silhouettes flickered into existence, appearing before every lingering spirit of the former dynasty's soldiers. Each one delivered a punch or a palm strike.

Thud, thud, thud...

A series of muffled sounds blended together, and in the blink of an eye, when Yan Qihu reappeared in his original spot, the soldiers of the former dynasty had all been obliterated.

"..." Chu Liang ground his teeth. Not even one left for me, huh?

Just as he was about to continue forward, countless figures suddenly dashed out toward them.

Ten times more soldiers than before appeared out of nowhere. They came from all directions, charging toward them like an unstoppable tide!

"Hmm?" This overwhelming sight caught Chu Liang by surprise.

At that moment, an earth-shattering dragon roar erupted from the depths of the abyss.

"Roar—"

Several skeletal dragons soared upward, launching their attack alongside the mass of soldiers. Flying beside the bone dragons was a seemingly insignificant figure—the astute chancellor of the former dynasty.

It was clear that the lingering spirits from the Deep Pool of Dreams were launching an all-out assault!

As the group braced themselves for the oncoming battle, they suddenly realized something strange—the lingering spirits weren't heading toward them. Instead, they rushed right past.

"They don't seem to be attacking us..." The Great Confucian Wei Lang raised his hand. "They're fleeing!"

In the blink of an eye, countless lingering spirits, accompanied by the booming sound of thunder, fled from the Deep Pool of Dreams, including the powerful skeletal dragon and the chancellor of the former dynasty.

The group realized that something was wrong. Although their destination was the Deep Pool of Dreams, something weird was clearly happening inside.

They couldn't recklessly advance.

Yan Qihu quickly commanded, "Retreat for now!"

A rainbow-colored barrier appeared in their line of sight, and the group immediately understood why the spirits were fleeing.

The Deep Pool of Dreams was expanding, and the multicolored barrier surged toward them, the dark abyss widening like a massive maw, threatening to devour all life in its path.

"Go!"

Wei Lang waved his sleeve, and the halo from the Soul-Pacifying Scroll above his head condensed into a radiant orb, enveloping the group as they swiftly retreated.

Behind the rainbow barrier, the abyssal mist coalesced and morphed into a giant hand that reached out, attempting to grasp them!

Just as the light orb was about to overtake the fleeing spirits, the chancellor of the former dynasty suddenly turned to face them.

"The land of the nine provinces shall sink...the vast heavens...You officials who did not die for your country are all traitors!" the chancellor chanted. Every word he said sounded eerie.

As he spoke, a scroll materialized in his hand, unleashing countless talismanic characters into the air!

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh—

What's happening?

The group behind was shocked—could the Confucian divine art that Wei Lang had activated have provoked the chancellor into launching such a fierce attack?

The talismanic characters shot toward them, but with a sweep of his sleeve, Wei Lang exhaled a breath of righteous energy, dispersing them all.

The chancellor of the former dynasty may have been powerful, but as a lingering spirit, he was no match for this Confucian Eminent One.

However, that brief delay allowed the misty giant hand to catch up!

Boom!

Yan Qihu had already sprung into action, delivering a powerful punch that shattered the giant hand.

Yet, the dispersed mist still engulfed them, and the rapidly expanding abyssal barrier surged forward, swallowing the group whole.

Whoosh—

In an instant, they were forced into the Deep Pool of Dreams.

Everything went dark as a hurricane-like force swept the glowing orb into a black vortex, pulling everything along with it.

...

A faint floral aroma wafted through the air as he breathed in.

Chu Liang opened his eyes.

Several kind but unfamiliar faces hovered around him. "You're awake?"

"Uh..." Chu Liang was startled, quickly asking, "Who are you... Where is this?"

One of them answered, "This is the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal."

Chapter 452: Utopia

When Chu Liang woke up, he found himself inside a medicinal hall. Upon stepping out of its doors, he was greeted by a peaceful and idyllic scene.

A long street with an old-fashioned charm stretched out before him. A few elders sat on the side of the street, leisurely chatting while fanning themselves with palm-leaf fans. Groups of children ran by, leaving behind a trail of cheerful laughter. Teahouses lined half the street, filled with people casually sipping tea and chatting. There was even the faint clacking of mahjong tiles.

Anyone who stayed in such a place would not be able to help but feel very relaxed and content.

Chu Liang asked, "This is the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal...?"

He turned back into the medicinal hall and looked at the white-bearded elderly physician in confusion.

In Chu Liang's memory, his group had been searching for the Deep Pool of Dreams when there was a sudden shift in the abyss. Caught off guard, the abyss pulled them in.

I thought we were going to fall into the abyss. How did we end up here in the blink of an eye?

"That's right," the elderly physician answered with a kind smile. "Some people who had gone for a hike in the mountains found the two of you and brought you here. Why, are you not from the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal?"

"The two of us? Who is the other person?" Chu Liang asked in return.

"This young lady," the physician answered, pulling back a curtain to reveal Tang Shi's small figure. Perhaps disturbed by Chu Liang's and the elderly physician's voices, Tang Shi's eyelids fluttered as she slowly opened her eyes.

She soon found herself as confused as Chu Liang.

Tang Shi asked, "The Kingdom of the Dream Immortal? What is this place?"

The elderly physician explained warmly, "This is an Immortal's Land that the Noble Dream Immortal established. It's said to be very far from the outside world. No one has ever left, and no one from the outside has ever entered..."

It seemed that even though he had never seen outsiders before, he harbored no animosity toward them.

"Well, this is..." Chu Liang muttered, scratching his head, "quite unexpected."

He had assumed that once they went beyond the Deep Pool of Dreams, they would find the palace on the mountain where he had met Gu Qingyuan. However, he then heard from Xue Ziyang that what he'd found were the desolate remains of a battlefield...

Why has that now changed to the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal??

As for the Deep Pool of Dreams or the Southern Bastion Mountain, the elderly physician knew nothing about them. He had never heard of such places existing in the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal.

At a loss, Chu Liang decided to walk around with Tang Shi first to try and figure out the situation they were in.

The kind elderly physician at the medicinal hall offered that if they had nowhere to stay, they could return and stay at his place. Chu Liang thanked him.

Afterward, Chu Liang and Tang Shi stepped out of the medicinal hall and glanced around the street.

The city seemed the same everywhere they looked. People were drinking tea, enjoying wine, playing mahjong, and eating hotpot. Children were playing games, and elders were chatting. Even the younger adults in the prime of their lives were behaving similarly, passing their time idly.

Tang Shi whispered, "Nothing seems strange..."

"No, everything's very strange." Chu Liang shook his head. "Didn't you notice... no one here is working?"

Tang Shi was taken aback. "Huh?"

Having grown up in an immortal sect, the concept didn't resonate much with her.

However, Chu Liang found it extremely odd. Regardless of their age, not a single person in this whole city was working. It was really strange. How do they sustain themselves?

Filled with curiosity, Chu Liang and Tang Shi returned to the medicinal hall.

Chu Liang asked the elderly physician, "Uncle[1], I walked around the city, but I didn't see a single person working. Why is that?"

"Working?" the elderly physician uttered, blinking blankly.

It seemed he was unfamiliar with the word.

Chu Liang was perplexed. "If no one works, where do you get all your food, clothing, and supplies?"

"Whenever you want something, you just go to the Holy Mountain and make a wish." The elderly physician pointed eastward. "There are holy envoys who cultivate the Dream Techniques on the mountain. They will send whatever you wish for straight to your home."

Chu Liang's gaze followed the direction of the elderly physician's finger to somewhere beyond the distant buildings, and he indeed saw the outline of a vast towering mountain.

A place like this actually exists?

Chu Liang blinked in surprise.

He couldn't help but feel a little envious.

...

"Huu... Huu..."

Tang Shi sat obediently on a cushion with a cup in her hands. She gently blew at her tea as wisps of steam slowly rose the cup.

Chu Liang and the elderly physician were sitting there too. They were sipping tea as they talked.

The elderly physician was explaining the origins of the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal in detail.

It was said that thousands of years ago, the ancient Noble Dream Immortal established this Immortal's Land and led over a group of people, the ancestors of those currently residing there. Thus, the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal was formed.

In the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal, there were no kings, ministers, or officials. Nor was there a wealth divide, segregating the rich from the poor. Everyone was born into a life of leisure, where they lived languidly and died content with the life they had lived.

Whenever someone died, a baby would be born. Thus, the population of the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal remained constant.

Some of its residents were gifted in cultivating the Dream Techniques, so they were chosen to become holy envoys. The Dream Techniques was said to be an immortal art that the Noble Dream Immortal had left behind for them. With it, they could create anything from nothing.

If anyone needed anything, they would go to the Holy Mountain to ask the holy envoys to create it, and someone would later deliver it to their home. Of course, if they wished for something outrageous, the holy envoys wouldn't make it.

While listening to the elderly physician's explanation, Chu Liang thought about it. He had previously heard Wei Lang mention the ancient Great Noble Dream Immortal.

Of course, Noble Immortals were not true immortals. During the era of the Immortal Dynasty, "Noble Immortal" was a title given to some eighth-realm cultivators who had attained the Heavenly Origin. The Immortal Dynasty had conferred the title of Noble Immortal to nine cultivators, all of whom were among the top eighth-realm cultivators in the world.

The Great Noble Dream Immortal had made a name for himself throughout the nine provinces with his Dream Techniques. Could it be that he had created the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal with his divine ability?

When the elderly physician was done explaining, Chu Liang sighed. "This place is a total utopia. There's no danger, no war, no oppression, no work... You just need to make wishes, and you will have anything you want. It's truly a place that can only be found in a dream..."

"Hmm..." The elderly physician's expression suddenly turned serious. "The Kingdom of the Dream Immortal is not entirely free of danger. In fact, I was just about to warn you about it."

"Oh?"

Chu Liang and Tang Shi listened attentively.

The elderly physician said, "Perhaps the original Kingdom of the Dream Immortal truly was a Pure Land[2], completely free of danger. But three thousand years ago, a massive demon descended from the sky... The holy envoys called it the Nightmare Demon, and that demon transformed into a mountain of demons."

"Since then, every full moon, the moon turns blood-red, and Nightmare Beasts descend from the Demon Mountain to devour people." Fear appeared on the elderly physician's face for the first time. "Those Nightmare Beasts can take on countless forms and are extremely terrifying. Fortunately, we have the holy envoys protecting the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal, so as long as we stay vigilant, we can avoid catastrophe."

"Blood moon... Nightmare Beasts..." Chu Liang muttered.

Hearing these familiar words made him furrow his brows.

This place seemed isolated from the outside world, yet it seemed to be linked to the outside world in countless ways. A seed of doubt sprouted in his mind, but he couldn't confirm it just yet.

"Oh, dear," the elderly physician uttered suddenly. "It seems we'll be having the blood moon tonight. You must stay in this medicinal hall. Do not sleep. And no matter what sounds you hear, do not leave. As long as you don't sleep and don't go outside, the Nightmare Beasts won't be able to harm you."

"And why is that?" Chu Liang asked.

"That is what we've learned from experience having fought the Nightmare Beasts for three thousand years," the elderly physician answered with a grim expression. "If you sleep, the Nightmare Beasts will emerge from your dreams. If you go outside and the blood moon's light falls on you, you'll immediately go mad! You'll become just like the Nightmare Beasts!"

Upon hearing this, Chu Liang was struck with a flash of insight.

He figured out why Xue Ziyang's companions had died so suddenly!

Chapter 453: This Is What Martial Artists Are Like

The blood moon would transform those it shone upon into beings like the Nightmare Beasts. This was so similar to how Xue Ziyang's companions had died!

But others in Kaoshan City who saw the blood moon were unharmed, indicating that the blood moon only had this power in the illusory world and did not possess mystical abilities in reality.

The only people affected were those who had visited the Deep Pool of Dreams.

Their bodies might have escaped, but part of their souls had been left behind in the illusory world! When the blood moon reappeared, they would still go mad in the illusory world.

That blood moon appearing over Kaoshan City suggested that the beings in the virtual realm now had the ability to affect parts of reality, at least extending from the Deep Pool of Dreams to the outer cities of the Southern Bastion Mountain.

As Chu Liang thought of this, he couldn't help but feel concerned.

He had initially thought it was just an ordinary hidden realm. As the two Guiders from the diabolical sect had previously led teams there, he thought it would be a piece of cake for the two cultivators at the seventh realm.

But the creator of the Deep Pool of Dreams had clearly mastered the Dao of Reality and Illusion, which meant that they were at least at the seventh realm and likely possessed some eerie power.

As of now, he was unsure of whether Yan Qihu and Wei Lang could even handle this Nightmare Beast.

As for the origin of this hidden realm... was it the ancient Noble Dream Immortal, the Nightmare Demon King of the demon race, the last emperor of the previous dynasty, or perhaps Gu Qingyuan? With so many possibilities for who might have created the Deep Pool of Dreams, it was difficult to piece everything together and form a conclusion.

Fortunately, the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal remained a sanctuary, a place of respite for now. The uproar in the Deep Pool of Dreams was so great that, even if the two Eminent Ones couldn't handle it, surely more powerful and righteous individuals would step in.

For now, he just needed to ensure his own safety.

"Huu..." Tang Shi continued to gently sip her tea, seemingly enjoying herself.

Seeing this, the elderly physician smiled and asked, "Does Miss Tang like tea?"

"Not really..." Tang Shi smiled awkwardly, "We can't sleep tonight, right? So I'm drinking more to stay awake."

There was a subtle difference between martial artists and cultivators: martial artists needed sleep to restore their qi and blood after tempering their bodies, whereas many cultivators could forgo sleep entirely, relying on meditation instead.

Still, if it was just for one night, it should be fine.

The elderly physician said, "As long as you don't drink too much tea and ruin your appetite for dinner, it's fine."

"Don't worry, that won't happen," Tang Shi replied confidently, shaking her head. "I can eat two whole cows in one meal."

Hearing this, the elderly physician's eyelids twitched slightly.

Luckily, Tang Shi didn't need to eat two cows at every meal. Martial artists were like that: when they could eat, they ate in abundance to replenish their qi and blood. When they couldn't, going hungry for ten days or even half a month was no big deal.

Compared to the outside world, the cuisine in the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal was much simpler. While there was no shortage of vegetables or meat, there was a lack of seasoning and refined cooking techniques. If this kingdom had truly been isolated since the era of the Noble Dream Immortal thousands of years ago, then it made sense that it was in a rather primitive state.

After dinner, the three of them spent the rest of the afternoon talking, allowing Chu Liang and Tang Shi to learn all about the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal.

As dusk settled in, the streets grew restless. People hurried through the narrow lanes, banging gongs and shouting, "Tonight is the blood moon! Every household, shut your doors and windows tight! Stay cautious! Don't sleep! Don't go outside!"

The sight of these people rushing around suddenly turned the once peaceful and serene atmosphere in the city into one of tension.

Since sleep wasn't an option, the elderly physician didn't arrange separate rooms for them. Instead, he led them to a quiet room and sealed the doors and windows, making sure they could remind each other to stay awake throughout the night.

"On the night of the blood moon," the elderly physician explained, "it's best to have someone nearby. If you fall asleep without realizing it, you wouldn't even know."

Chu Liang simply smiled in response.

As a cultivator with a strong divine soul, I can go a month without sleep without a problem. Tang Shi, being a martial artist, had vitality, qi, and spirit that burned like a blazing sun, so she shouldn't have an issue either...

Wait a minute? Just as he was thinking this, Chu Liang noticed the Tang Shi's head was already drooping, her body swaying... She was already starting to doze off!

The sun hadn't even fully set yet!

"Wake up..." He quickly patted Tang Shi on the shoulder, "Miss Tang?"

"Ah." Tang Shi jolted awake, a sheepish smile spreading across her face. "Sorry, I tend to get sleepy as soon as night falls..."

"Napping now is fine, just don't fall asleep later," Chu Liang reminded her.

"It won't happen!" Tang Shi shook her head firmly, then grabbed the teapot and took several big gulps before slamming it back down. "I definitely won't give those Nightmare Beasts a chance!"

...

Night fell.

The houses in the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal were specially designed, with tightly sealed doors and windows, layered with thick curtains to block out any moonlight and muffle sounds from outside. Inside, the rooms were cloaked in a deep, calming quiet.

Chu Liang sat cross-legged on the ground, sinking his divine sense into the White Pagoda, beginning to unbox the rewards.

This time, he had slain far more Sickle Ghosts than before—about thirty in total. If he could refine them all into One-Inch Golden Ghost Bone Pills, crafting a golden right hand seemed well within reach.

With some free time, he began refining the imprints of the Sickle Ghosts, one by one.

After he had completed the refinement, he withdrew his divine sense and took a glance at Tang Shi, intending to take the pills while she wasn't paying attention.

But when he looked over, he saw the young girl sitting there, her eyelids drooping, about to fall asleep!

"MISS TANG!"

Good grief, is staying awake for just a short while really that hard? You're only in your teens, and you can't even stay up for one night?

Chu Liang hurried over, pressing on Tang Shi's shoulder and giving her a firm shake to wake her up.

"Ah!" She gasped, her eyes snapping open in surprise. "I almost fell asleep again!"

"Yes," Chu Liang replied with a wry chuckle. "Is it really that hard?"

"I'll stand up. Maybe that'll help," Tang Shi muttered as she stood up straight. "Since I was young, I would always doze off. Sometimes I would even fall asleep during training, and every time I dozed off, my esteemed teacher would make me stand as punishment..."

"Martial artists are like that. It's tough for you, I know," Chu Liang said, trying to comfort her. "But during times like this, we have to endure."

Seeing Tang Shi standing there with a determined look, promising not to sit down, Chu Liang finally felt reassured.

He sat down by the table and began taking the One-Inch Golden Ghost Bone Pills one by one. Following the familiar process, he refined the spiritual qi after each pill, channeling it into his right hand.

Moments later, he felt his entire palm becoming extremely hard.

The golden right hand was complete!

Chu Liang clenched his fist, noticing that the toughness of his right hand now matched the hardness he had achieved when fortified with Geng Metal foundational qi. If he fortified it again with Geng Metal foundational qi, it would likely reach an even higher level.

Unfortunately, it wasn't convenient to test its power now.

Just as he was pondering this, he suddenly heard the sound of steady breathing.

He turned his head and saw that Tang Shi, at some point, had started swaying and was now leaning against the wall.

Her eyes were already closed!

She can sleep while standing?

Chu Liang truly hadn't expected this challenge. They hadn't even reached the part where they needed to fight the Nightmare Beasts, and she had already nearly surrendered several times.

"Miss Tang..." He hurried over and shook Tang Shi awake once more.

"Ahhh!" Tang Shi exclaimed as she woke up, her face flushing with embarrassment. She lowered her head and mumbled, "Sorry, I... I... I guess I'm just too nervous. And when I get nervous, I get sleepy."

"It's fine. Martial artists like you sometimes behave this way," Chu Liang replied, indicating that he understood. Then, he suggested, "How about propping your eyelids up?"

Tang Shi was quite obedient and immediately agreed to the suggestion.

Without hesitation, she carved two small wooden sticks on the table and propped them between her eyelids. With a martial artist's physique, not blinking for a while wouldn't be a problem. But if she fell asleep again, there was a real risk of the Nightmare Specters invading her dreams, which could be disastrous.

According to the elderly physician, exposure to the blood moon would cause one to transform into a Nightmare Beast. If the Nightmare Specter entered their dreams, they would start hallucinating and it would be extremely difficult to get rid of this Nightmare Specter.

Many people would be tricked by their hallucination into leaving their rooms and bathing in the moonlight. They would be attacked both in their sleep and in their wake and there would be no chance for survival.

Chu Liang watched Tang Shi intently for a while.

It wasn't until she smiled at him, showing no signs of sleepiness, that he finally sat back down, feeling reassured.

He wanted to say something, to keep her engaged and prevent her from relaxing too much and drifting back into sleep. However, they had already talked for most of the day, and now, he found himself at a loss for words.

If only Lin Bei or Pushan were here, he lamented.

As Chu Liang pondered, a distant, beastly roar suddenly echoed through the air, accompanied by faint shouts. It sounded like some kind of ferocious beast had descended the mountain.

Are there still people out there? Could it be the envoys from the Holy Mountain, practicing the Dream Techniques? Chu Liang wondered.

Out of curiosity, Chu Liang extended his divine sense to investigate, but the sound was too distant. Before his divine sense could reach that far, he suddenly heard a soft snoring sound beside him.

"Zzz... Zzz..."

Hmm? Chu Liang was startled.

Turning back, he saw Tang Shi standing there, her eyes wide open, softly snoring!

What kind of girl can sleep with her eyes open?

Oh my heavens.

"Miss Tang..."

He was about to rush over and wake her when she suddenly turned her head toward him.

Her eyes were filled with a crimson hue!

Chapter 454: Could It Be Fake?

At this moment, Chu Liang couldn't help but think that Yun Chaoxian's claim of being smarter than everyone else in the Great Astral Sect might not be without reason.

At the very least, Yun Chaoxian had stood by his side in battle countless times and had never once dozed off at a crucial moment!

Chu Liang caught a glimpse of Tang Shi turning her head toward him, her eyes gleaming a disturbing crimson. It was clear a Nightmare Specter had invaded her dream! He knew what had to be done: she must be subdued until dawn!

He could not let her leave the room.

But restraining a core disciple of the Great Astral Sect wouldn't be easy.

"Demonic entity, how dare you!" Tang Shi bellowed.

With a swift leap, her petite frame hurtled forward. As she soared through the air, her body swelled, expanding with a sudden, fierce intensity.

Boom—

In an instant, her body swelled, muscles rippling as veins snaked across her skin like dragons. She looked every bit the part of a wrathful Vajra.

"Miss Tang, snap out of it..."

But words were futile in her current state. Since words could not do anything, Chu Liang had no choice but to fight!

As Tang Shi's massive fist hurtled toward him, he raised his right palm to intercept it.

Boom!

Their fist and palm collided with a resounding crash, like muffled thunder rolling through the room.

Both Tang Shi and Chu Liang took two steps back from the sheer force of their clash.

Chu Liang was cultivating more than one cultivation legacy; including the ones from the dragon race, he was cultivating three in total! His physical strength had reached a terrifying level! Furthermore, he was wearing the Jiuli Armor, which would reflect a portion of the attack back to the attacker.

Yet, Tang Shi was on par with him!

Yun Chaoxian had once mentioned that Tang Shi possessed Vajra blood. As the temperature of the blood in her veins rose, she would transform into a formidable Vajra battle form. Witnessing it now, Chu Liang realized just how incredibly strong she had become.

However, even with their strength being equal, Chu Liang was at a clear disadvantage in close combat. Tang Shi had been practicing martial arts since childhood, which meant that her combat techniques far surpassed his Brick Combat Technique.

Whoosh—

In an instant, she drew a spear, and her aura intensified, surging to a whole new level.

Chu Liang sighed inwardly. With no other option, he used the Army of Beans technique. Five figures materialized, swiftly encircling the Tang Shi, who was in the form of a Vajra. At the same time, he activated the Divine Dragons' Great Blood-Burning Technique, causing his qi to flare violently within him.

"Hah!"

As Tang Shi faced five opponents on her own, she let out a fierce shout and thrust her long spear forward like a striking dragon!

Chu Liang made a step forward and executed the Turbulent Stream Movement Art. In the blink of an eye, he was already three chi in front of her, dodging the long spear.

But Tang Shi, well-versed in martial arts, was not one to be caught off guard.

It happened in a flash, like a bolt of lightning.

She spun around suddenly, charging toward the clone of Chu Liang behind her. Just as she closed in, she swung her spear in a sweeping arc!

Whoosh—

Boom—

With a single, crushing blow, she smashed the clones back into its pill form.

Sensing Chu Liang closing in from behind, she twisted her body, arching backward as her spear whirled around.

A back-thrusting spear!

Whoosh—

Fortunately, Chu Liang caught the subtle shift in her shoulder, instantly sensing danger. Immediately, he used Dimension Compression, narrowly dodging the ferocious spear. In the same heartbeat, he closed in on Tang Shi, his golden right fist fused with the power of Geng Metal foundational qi!

Boom—

He swung his punch, forcing Tang Shi to abandon her spear and meet his blow head-on with her own fist.

The clash echoed like a landslide, causing the entire room to tremble!

As the fight raged on, Tang Shi's Vajra blood burned hotter, her entire body radiating with a golden light as her blood aura surged. Her bones had become harder than legendary weapons. Fortunately, Chu Liang had just fortified his right hand, allowing him to hold his ground!

After a brief stalemate, two more clones lunged from behind, attempting to seize Tang Shi's arms and restrain her.

But she lashed out with her right foot, kicking the spearhead into the third clone, turning it back to its original form. The two clones holding her arms stood no chance against her raw strength and were flung away in an instant!

Bang! Bang!

She now resembled a humanoid beast; unless someone had a body as terrifyingly powerful as hers, anyone who dared touch her would be crushed and meet their end!

Chu Liang sacrificed all his clones to disarm her of the spear, and that was enough.

Now, with both of them bare-handed, they lunged at each other, launching into a brutal, fist-to-fist, foot-to-foot brawl!

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

But soon, Chu Liang felt something was off—how was it that every time he managed to land a punch on Tang Shi, she had already struck him four times? Competing in martial arts techniques with a disciple of the Great Astral Sect was truly out of his league!

Thankfully, the Jiuli Armor's backlash effect made sure Tang Shi felt the impact of every strike she landed, leaving her just as battered.

Gritting his teeth, Chu Liang activated the Inferno Devil Armor.

Sizzle—

Crackle—

As the pill was launched into the air, it instantly transformed into pieces of armor that attached itself on top of the Jiuli Armor, enveloping his entire body.

Flames then surged around him!

Boom—

The Inferno Devil Armor, built to counter martial artists in close combat, blazed with the power of Chu Liang's foundational qi. Within a one-zhang radius, the Divine Dragon Fire ignited, its scorching heat forcing Tang Shi to stagger back!

Seeing how difficult it would be to defeat Chu Liang, Tang Shi suddenly flipped backward and bolted toward the door, trying to escape the room.

I can't let that happen! Chu Liang thought, his eyes narrowing. If she went outside and was exposed to the blood moon, she might never regain her senses.

Without hesitation, he raised his hand, summoning the Chain of Resentment. In a flash, it shot out and linked him to Tang Shi.

"Hah..."

A surge of anger filled Tang Shi's heart, and in her current state of confusion, she became even easier to manipulate.

She stopped in her tracks and turned around, ready to engage in a fight to the death with Chu Liang!

The provocation done with the Chain of Resentment was flawless!

However, as she closed in, Chu Liang's Divine Dragon Fire scorched her Vajra body. She tried to reach her spear, but Chu Liang blocked her path at every turn. With no other option, she channeled her augmented qi to fend off the flames and continue the fight.

This strategy was draining. After a few intense exchanges, Chu Liang, protected by his Jiuli Armor, remained mostly unscathed, while Tang Shi's vitality and qi began to show signs of weakening.

Seizing the moment, he used Dimension Compression to slip behind her. In one swift motion, he employed his most familiar move—swinging a brick at the back of her head!

Bang—

Tang Shi was finally struck down by the brick, collapsing to the ground in a daze.

Chu Liang rushed forward, quickly pinning her down. Leaning close, he shouted into her ear, "Wake up, Miss Tang! It's time to eat..."

"Hmm?" Tang Shi's eyes twitched, a faint sign of consciousness returning.

...

The next morning, the elderly physician, accompanied by four white-robed holy envoys, finally dared to approach their room.

The noises from last night had been so loud that neighbors several li away heard them. It sounded like a fierce battle between two savage beasts, echoing for hours before finally subsiding. Naturally,

the people nearby began to speculate whether the two newcomers had turned into Nightmare Beasts and met their doom.

However, as soon as the footsteps approached, Chu Liang had already opened the door.

"Good morning, Uncle," he greeted with a warm smile.

"Good morning," Tang Shi added, nodding obediently beside him.

"Hmm?" The elderly physician glanced at the two who seemed completely fine. He was feeling confused as he shifted his gaze to the room behind them.

The scene inside was shocking. The floor was cracked and littered with debris, scorch marks etched into every corner. It was unmistakably the aftermath of a fierce fight.

He couldn't help but say, "Last night..."

"There were some issues," Chu Liang replied with a calm smile, "but they've been taken care of."

Tang Shi blushed in embarrassment and lowered her head.

"I see," the elderly physician said, finally letting out a breath of relief. He turned to the holy envoys and bowed respectfully. "I apologize for making you come all this way."

"It's alright," the leading holy envoy replied, eyeing Chu Liang and Tang Shi. "You seem to possess remarkable power. Would you be willing to accompany us to meet the Noble One?"

The Noble One was the leader of all holy envoys on the Holy Mountain and the most powerful practitioner of the Dream Techniques in the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal.

Given that they were on someone else's territory, Chu Liang and Tang Shi could not really refuse.

And so, they followed the holy envoys toward the nearby Holy Mountain.

As they walked, Chu Liang noticed fresh signs of battle along the streets. Feeling intrigued, he asked, "Do you fight the Nightmare Beasts during blood moon nights?"

"Yes," the leading holy envoy replied. "As long as the Nightmare Beasts exist outside of dreams, we can kill them."

"Then, aren't you afraid of being exposed to the blood moon?" Chu Liang asked again.

"Those of us who have mastered the Dream Techniques do not fear the blood moon," the holy envoy responded calmly.

Chu Liang nodded slightly and asked no more.

When they reached the foot of the Holy Mountain, they found no path leading upward. The holy envoy raised his hand, and a flash of light burst forth, transforming into a large white bird.

The group mounted the bird, which soared into the air, carrying them toward a grand hall nestled halfway up the mountain.

Chu Liang gently stroked the bird's feathers and realized it was truly alive, pulsating with a lifeforce. This wasn't some summoned creature; it was a living mount conjured out of thin air.

He had never seen or heard of such a divine ability in the outside world.

This was life created from nothing—a miraculous feat! Yet, it seemed almost casual here.

Moments later, the bird landed, and the holy envoys led them into the grand hall.

When they were inside, they saw a middle-aged woman in a luxurious white robe. She was slightly plump, with a kind face, and seemed fully absorbed in her work. As they entered, she looked up and immediately smiled. "So, these are the powerful young people from the outside that you spoke of?"

Evidently, the envoys had somehow relayed information ahead of time. But as Chu Liang thought back, he couldn't recall any of them taking action to send a message.

He had no idea how they had done it.

The Dream Techniques seemed to follow an entirely different cultivation system, filled with mysterious elements.

"Noble One," Chu Liang and Tang Shi both greeted her with a nod.

"Ah, young ones from afar," the Noble One said cheerfully. "The moment I saw you, I knew you were the two mentioned in the prophecy!"

"Prophecy?" The two exchanged puzzled glances.

The chubby Noble One turned around and took out an ancient, weathered stone tablet, clearly eroded by the passage of time. A line of half-faded text was carved into it.

A powerful couple from afar shall arrive to eliminate the Nightmare Specters that have tormented the Dream Immortal Kingdom for three thousand years.

The Noble One handed them the stone tablet and said, "This is a prophecy left by the Noble Dream Immortal himself! A prophecy from five thousand years ago!"

"Huh?" The two were utterly astonished at the sight of the stone tablet.

Chu Liang pondered for a moment before speaking, "Noble One, I'm afraid we might not be the people in the prophecy. We're not a couple; we're siblings."

"Oh? Is that so?" The Noble took back the stone tablet, examined it, and said, "Perhaps you misread it. It says siblings."

When she showed them the stone tablet again, the ancient text had indeed changed to: Two powerful siblings from afar shall arrive to eliminate the Nightmare Specters that have tormented the Dream Immortal Kingdom for three thousand years.

"Heh." Chu Liang chuckled. He then said, "Actually, I was joking earlier. We're just traveling companions, not siblings."

"I see..." The Noble One glanced back at the stone tablet. "That seems accurate as well."

When she placed the stone tablet down again, the ancient text had changed once more: A pair of powerful companions from afar shall arrive to eliminate the Nightmare Specters that have tormented the Dream Immortal Kingdom for three thousand years.

"Woow!" Tang Shi marveled, "The prophecy was actually right."

"..." Chu Liang paused before saying, "Actually, we're not just companions; we're twins with different moms and different dads. We didn't know each other but felt like we had known each other for a long time from the moment we met."

The Noble glanced at the stone tablet and looked troubled.

After all, the tablet was not that big, and there were far too many words...

They couldn't fit on it.

Seeing her silence, Chu Liang added, "You made this up using the Dream Techniques, didn't you? You can just say whatever you want; no need for tricks like this."

"Huh?" Tang Shi gasped in surprise. "It's... actually fake?"

Chapter 455: Charging into the Demon Mountain

"Haaa..." The Noble One let out a long sigh and slowly sat back down in her seat. "Since you are so intelligent, I will tell you the truth."

Chu Liang thought silently, There's no need to flatter me. Even our resident Hou at Silver Sword Peak wouldn't be fooled by such a trick. In fact, even my esteemed teacher wouldn't fall for it.

"Although the prophecy is fake, there is one thing that is true," the Noble One explained. "The Demon Mountain is a foreign being, so the only ones who can destroy it are people who are foreign beings. No matter what we do, we, the people of the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal, cannot destroy it."

"Why is that?" Chu Liang asked. "Aren't those who cultivate Dream Techniques immune to the Nightmare Specters and capable of restraining them?"

"In the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal, each successive Noble One has passed down a secret, the biggest concealed truth of our kingdom. But I suppose this doesn't count as a secret to you outsiders."

Chu Liang had a rough guess of what the Noble One wanted to say. "You mean..."

"The Kingdom of the Dream Immortal... and the whole world we live in... It's all just a grand dream," the Noble One said grimly.

Her expression darkened slightly.

It was clear that she found this to be an extremely cruel truth. No one would wish for their world to be a mere dream. Everything was an illusion. The view of the world that the Noble One had believed to be true for the first half of her life had collapsed.

Chu Liang, however, was not surprised; this was exactly what he had suspected.

The people staying in the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal had been born here, so they believed everything in the world they had grown up in was the same as everywhere else. It was normal to them, and they never had any reason to doubt it.

However, it had been easy for someone like Chu Liang, who was from the outside world, to figure that out.

"Huh?" Tang Shi was utterly astonished, Her eyes widened with shock as she looked around. "This place is actually a dream?"

It seemed the situation was a bit too difficult for the young lady to understand though...

"The Noble Dream Immortal was a powerful... cultivator from the outside world. That's what you call people like him, right? Cultivators?" the Noble One said. Then she continued, "When his lifespan was nearing its end, he chose to use his lifetime's worth of cultivation energy to create this grand dream, a dream containing his ideal world."

"The Kingdom of the Dream Immortal is indeed an ideal world." Chu Liang nodded in agreement. "The people here live happy, blessed lives. So what if it is just a dream?"

In fact, how could anyone be certain that the outside world wasn't merely someone's grand dream too? The affairs of the world were as fleeting and illusory as dreams; the only things that were real were the emotions that the people felt. As for everything else, who could say for certain what was real?

The Noble One replied, "That was how we lived in the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal, and it was indeed a great way to live. However, that ended three thousand years ago when the Demon Mountain descended. Its true form is a powerful demon called the Nightmare Demon King... It might not be much weaker than the Noble Dream Immortal. Fortunately, the Nightmare Demon King was heavily injured and on the brink of death when it arrived. Otherwise, it would have destroyed our kingdom straightaway."

The Noble One's eyes gleamed with anger. "However, Nightmare Specters are creatures that feed on dreams. By parasitizing the Noble Dream Immortal's dream, the Nightmare Demon King can devour everything within it. The Nightmare Specters that the Nightmare Demon King spawns continually invade the kingdom and slaughter our people..."

"In our world, whenever a person dies, a baby is born, so the population never decreases..." The Noble One looked earnestly at Chu Liang and Tang Shi. "But ever since the Nightmare Demon King descended, our population has dwindled by more than half in these three thousand years."

Chu Liang thought, So, the Nightmare Specters can kill the people of the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal? The elderly physician from the medicinal hall didn't mention this. If this news spread, it would undoubtedly cause massive panic. Those Nightmare Beasts... they truly have the power to destroy this world!

The Noble One continued, "The Nightmare Beasts feed on the people of the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal, and those they kill can never be reborn. After killing our people, the Nightmare Beasts grow even stronger. They are devouring the power of this dream world!"

The more she explained, the more upset she got. "We've worked hard to fight back against the Nightmare Beasts, but people still get killed. If this continues, we won't have many years left until they've devoured the entire world. By then, the dream-devouring Nightmare Demon King will awaken fully and return to the outside world."

"That's why we've tried numerous times to eliminate the Nightmare Demon King, but our Dream Techniques become ineffective as soon as they reach the vicinity of the Demon Mountain. Moreover, our holy envoys are not skilled in combat."

She finally confessed, "That's why only cultivators from the outside world can eliminate the Nightmare Demon King. And the two of you are cultivators from the outside."

Chu Liang and Tang Shi fell silent for a moment.

Chu Liang was contemplating their next move, while Tang Shi was processing all the information they had just received. This much information was probably overloading her little brain.

After a moment, Chu Liang replied slowly, "You may not be aware of this, but a demon king is incredibly powerful. Even if it's heavily wounded and on the brink of death, it's not something we can easily contend with. I do wish to help you restore peace, but I'm afraid I don't have the capability to do so."

The Noble One continued, "Even if you don't do it to help us—you want to get out of here, don't you? That Demon Mountain is the only way out of this world."

"Hmm?" Chu Liang was a bit skeptical. "Are you trying to trick us again?"

"Absolutely not; I'm telling you the truth," the Noble One said solemnly. "This dream world has many levels. You can only leave it by getting to the highest level."

"In the past, there was a gateway connecting the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal to the outside world, but the residents of the kingdom cannot survive once they leave, so no one has ever ventured out. When the Nightmare Demon King descended, that gateway shifted to the top of the Demon Mountain."

"The Nightmare Demon King has a dream world of its own, rooted within our dream. If you wish to leave, you must enter the Nightmare Demon King's dream... and you'll have to do the same if you want to destroy the Nightmare Demon King."

"I see," Chu Liang said, pondering for a moment. "If what you say is true, we will give it a try. I promise that even if we lack the power to destroy the Nightmare Demon King... as long as we

manage to leave this world, we will certainly call upon our sect elders to come and slay the Nightmare Demon King."

Slaying the Nightmare Demon King was a feat that was easier said than done. Even if the powerful eighth-realm demon king were asleep, they still wouldn't be a match for the demon king. However, finding the gateway should be a feasible task.

Chu Liang did, in fact, believe the Noble One's words, as the situation was in line with what he knew. His concern was whether they could actually find the gateway by entering the Nightmare Demon King's dream.

Was the Deep Pool of Dreams really only two dream levels deep?

"Oh, that's it!" the Noble One exclaimed, nodding with a grin.

Then she lifted the stone tablet again.

The stone tablet now read: A powerful teacher from a distant land will rid the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal of the three-thousand-year nightmare.

"Give it a rest," Chu Liang said, waving his hand speechlessly.

...

The Noble One's stone tablet was useless, but that wasn't the case with the Noble One herself.

Before Chu Liang and Tang Shi set off, the Noble One gave them each a sacred jade pendant, made using Dream Techniques. It could help them stop the Nightmare Specters from invading their souls. However, it was a consumable item and could only protect them for a limited time.

Nevertheless, that was enough. At least, it would allow Chu Liang and Tang Shi to fight side by side. Chu Liang definitely didn't want to end up having to fight Tang Shi while dealing with the Nightmare Beasts as well.

After listening to the Noble One's detailed explanation of the Nightmare Beasts' powers, Chu Liang and Tang Shi set out on their journey to save the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal and, while they were at it, find their way back home... Though, the reverse was just as true.

When they arrived at the foot of the Demon Mountain, they already sensed an eerie and sinister aura before even ascending.

Demon Mountain was a towering mountain. It was barren, with not a single blade of grass in sight, and covered in pitch-black rocks, looking as if it was made of black iron. The mountain was completely out of place in this otherwise peaceful and serene world.

All they did was approach the mountain, and they could already hear sinister whispers in their ears. It was the same soul-luring whispers from the void they had heard in the Valley of Bewildering Fog. There were lingering spirits at the Demon Mountain too.

The jade pendants resting on Chu Liang's and Tang Shi's chests grew warm, helping them maintain mental clarity.

"We need to hurry," Chu Liang said.

"Got it!" Tang Shi took out her long spear, her little face tensing. "I know the pendants have a limited time of effect."

"No," Chu Liang replied, "I mean if we delay any longer, you'll start getting sleepy again."

Tang Shi's face immediately flushed red, but she couldn't refute it.

The two of them leaped onto the Demon Mountain. Black winds howled, and evil entities sprang up all around them! Specters filled with malevolent qi had emerged!

These were Chimei Wangliang[1], the specters residing on the outermost part of the Demon Mountain. They had a mystical dream-manipulation ability, but they were not particularly strong in combat.

Chu Liang summoned the Dustless Sword, and it instantly split into hundreds of sword lights, crisscrossing through the air. In the blink of an eye, all the Chimei Wangliang that had surrounded them were slain.

Tang Shi had raised her long spear into the air, but the fight was already over before she could even make a move.

"Don't worry about it. I'll handle it," Chu Liang said with a smile.

These Chimei Wangliang were evil entities, so killing them would produce phantoms for Chu Liang. They were weak and unlikely to yield anything valuable, but even the smallest gain was still worth something.

After wiping out the Chimei Wangliang, Chu Liang and Tang Shi continued climbing the mountain. Before they even reached halfway up, rumbling rang out above.

A black cloud emerged overhead, blocking out the sky!

No... it was a massive flock of crows!

"Caw, caw, caw!"

The crows' shrill cries ripped through the sky. Those who heard the cries would suddenly feel irritated, so much so that anything they looked at would make them feel angry.

Chu Liang swiftly realized that this was a mystical ability pretty much the same as one of his items, the Chain of Resentment. It made people angry, causing them to lose their sense of reason.

Fortunately, Chu Liang and Tang Shi had the jade pendants protecting them, so the crows' cries didn't have much effect on them. They just found the crows noisy.

So, Chu Liang raised his hand and unleashed a stream of crimson-gold flames that filled the sky! It was Divine Dragon Fire!

In an instant, the sky was ablaze. The flock of crows scattered in an attempt to flee, but it was too late. With the Divine Dragon Fire and the countless sword lights chasing them down, not a single crow could escape this calamity.

Chu Liang wiped them out with a clean finish.

After hearing the crows' screeches of agony, Tang Shi couldn't help but furrow her brows with a hint of pity.

Chu Liang is always so excessive when dealing with such small monsters.

Done with the crows, Chu Liang and Tang Shi moved on and finally reached a cave at the mountain's peak. The Nightmare Demon King's true form was inside this cave...

"Once we're inside, be careful," Chu Liang urged.

Tang Shi nodded firmly. "Understood!"

Then they leaped down!

The cave seemed like a bottomless pit. They fell for a long time... The fall lasted for so long that Tang Shi almost fell asleep before they finally landed.

Thud, thud.

Before they could even take in their surroundings, they heard a surprised voice. "Young Hero Chu, why are you here?"

Tang Shi shifted her gaze toward the voice and found that it belonged to Ji Lingyu.

Chapter 456: Papa Has Leveled Up

Bam!

Before Tang Shi could get a clear look at Ji Lingyu's face, Chu Liang had already swung his brick, sending her crashing to the ground.

A surge of black qi erupted instantly.

Fear began to creep into Tang Shi's eyes, but before it could take hold, Ji Lingyu suddenly burst apart, morphing into a blood-colored crow that crashed onto the ground. It was a Nightmare Beast in disguise!

"So it was a fake," Tang Shi breathed a sigh of relief.

"These Nightmare Beasts can mimic people from our memories," Chu Liang explained, showing off the brick in his hand. "But they can only copy the form, not the essence. With my Demon-Revealing Brick, their true form will be revealed."

"That's impressive," Tang Shi remarked, eyeing the brick with curiosity. Suddenly, a faint throb pulsed at the back of her head. She muttered in confusion, "Why do I feel like I've been hit by that brick before..."

"Maybe you dreamt about it," Chu Liang quickly stowed away the golden brick and nudged her forward. "No time to waste. Let's go."

Tang Shi only remembered a Nightmare Specter invading her dreams before Chu Liang woke her up. As for how he had done it, she couldn't recall, and Chu Liang saw no reason to tell her he had knocked her out cold.

Just think of that night as nothing but a dream.

The cave was a winding labyrinth, dimly lit and full of twisting paths that slowed their progress. Not long after they ventured further, a figure suddenly darted out from the side.

"Brother Chu! Junior Sister!"

It was Yun Chaoxian.

Bam!

Without a second glance, Chu Liang swung his brick mercilessly. The strike was so fierce that Tang Shi's eyelids twitched. If that had been the real Yun Chaoxian, it would have left him in serious pain.

"You two..." They hadn't gone much farther when Yan Qihu suddenly appeared.

Bam!

"Heheheh..." Lin Bei sprang out next.

Bam!

Without blinking an eye, Chu Liang lifted his brick and knocked down more than ten Nightmare Beasts along the way.

"Chu Liang?" A voice called out as Jiang Yuebai stepped into view from a side path.

Dressed in white, she was breathtakingly beautiful.

"Huh?" Chu Liang hesitated, his hand pausing mid-swing. "I think I need to take a closer look at this one."

"Even I can tell this one's a fake!" Tang Shi shouted from the side, unable to hold back.

"One must act with caution," Chu Liang replied.

You weren't this cautious when you were smashing your way through the monsters... The young lady's eyes were filled with doubt.

Bam!

In the end, Chu Liang brought the golden brick down, knocking the fake Jiang Yuebai out cold.

The blood crows they encountered along the way wielded formidable illusionary powers. Without the jade pendant given to them by the Noble One to protect their divine souls and minds from these illusions, they might have easily fallen into the trap.

After some time, the two finally reached the end of the cave. Sitting there, cross-legged, was a massive demonic creature.

It wore bronze armor, its body cloaked in jet-black feathers. Behind it, a pair of enormous blood-red wings stretched outward. Its head was that of a giant bird, its eyes gleaming with an eerie intelligence.

This had to be the leader of the blood crows they had faced earlier.

Behind the creature loomed a pitch-black gate, leading to an unknown destination. This was likely the gateway to the Nightmare Demon King's dream world, just as the Noble One had described.

As Chu Liang and Tang Shi approached, the creature slowly opened its eyes.

"I am the Commander of the Blood Crows, a loyal servant of the Nightmare Demon King. You dare defy the Demon King's authority? Your fate is to be eternally trapped in nightmares." The Blood Crow Commander's voice boomed through the cave, though its beak remained still.

Sensing its aura, Chu Liang could feel the oppressive power of a sixth-realm demonic beast. He knew that fighting this blood crow wouldn't be easy.

"Such a mighty blood crow," Chu Liang muttered.

With a quiet breath, Chu Liang called out the Dustless Sword and wore the Inferno Devil Armor.

The gate was right in front of them. All they had to do was take down this blood crow—there was nothing more to say.

Boom—

The fight commenced in a flash as Chu Liang charged ahead. In the blink of an eye, both the Divine Dragon Fire and blood flames surged into the air. His aura stood strong, not the least bit inferior to that of the Blood Crow Commander!

The Blood Crow Commander spread its wings wide, releasing a massive flock of blood crows from its back that swarmed toward Chu Liang and Tang Shi like a dark cloud.

However, they were instantly incinerated by his Divine Dragon Fire.

Boom!

Tang Shi followed closely behind, her spear thrusting forward with deadly precision. Her Vajra blood ignited, instantly putting her into a fierce state.

Splat, splat—

But as the two closed in, a faint stream of blood and qi started to ooze from their bodies, drifting toward the Blood Crow Commander. And it didn't stop—it flowed endlessly!

The commander raised an ancient bronze pike in its claws and struck fiercely at Chu Liang!

Clang—

Chu Liang brought up his sword to block, successfully deflecting the blow. Yet, even as he did, more of his blood and qi seeped from him. The Divine Dragon Fire around him flickered, its strength visibly waning.

Meanwhile, the swirling mass of blood crows around the Commander grew larger!

"Something's not right..." Chu Liang flipped backward, retreating as he shouted, "It's absorbing our blood and qi!"

Tang Shi found herself in the same predicament. Although she was powerful, charging forward to reach the Blood Crow Commander, she was quickly surrounded by a swarm of blood crows. The harder she struck with her spear, the more the blood and qi leaked from her body!

When her spear struck the Blood Crow Commander, piercing through its bronze armor and leaving a deep gash, the wound sealed up almost instantly.

It was continuously absorbing their blood and qi to heal itself.

If they continued fighting, they would be killing themselves.

"Retreat!" Chu Liang shouted, leaping backward to create some distance.

Tang Shi obeyed instantly, pulling back in a swift motion.

The Blood Crow Commander made a move to pursue, but in a flash, Tang Shi twisted mid-air, delivering a back-thrust with her spear that drove straight through its chest!

Boom—

The Commander recoiled in shock, and a swarm of blood crows swarmed in to separate it from Tang Shi.

The muscular girl, her veins bulging like coiled dragons, seized the opportunity and leaped out.

Seeing they had gained some distance, Chu Liang summoned the Dustless Sword.

"Heaven-Raising Sword!" he shouted, attacking from afar.

Boom—

A massive sword light filled the cave's depths, slicing straight toward the Blood Crow Commander!

"Caw, caw, caw—" It summoned an endless swarm of blood crows to block the attack, intercepting the sword light completely. Though the crows were obliterated, they were nothing more than expendable creations.

As the dust settled, the two figures at the cave entrance had already disappeared.

...

Chu Liang and Tang Shi retreated to the midsection of the cave, finding a secluded spot to plan their next move.

"That Blood Crow Commander is unbelievably strong," Tang Shi muttered, her small brows knitting together.

"It's not just a sixth-realm demonic beast. It absorbs our blood and qi whenever we get close," Chu Liang replied. "Fighting it up close is out of the question. We need to attack from a distance."

"But..." Tang Shi hesitated. "If we can't fight up close, I won't be of much use."

"That's fine," Chu Liang reassured her. "I'll take it one-on-one."

"But the power of your immortal arts didn't seem to hurt it earlier. Are you sure this is doable?" Tang Shi's concern was evident. "Shouldn't we fall back and rethink our approach?"

"No," Chu Liang said firmly, gritting his teeth. "As the saying goes, there's only been one path up Mount Hua since ancient times. We've come this far. If we don't break through today... who knows how much stronger that Nightmare Beast will become next time?"

As he spoke, he pulled out a jade box from his robe, opening it to reveal a glowing, golden fruit. It was clearly a spirit fruit, though Tang Shi couldn't quite identify which kind.

"What... What are you planning to do?" Tang Shi asked, eyes widening in confusion.

"To defeat it, I have to break through to the fifth realm," Chu Liang replied calmly.

"Huh?" Tang Shi was stunned by his words, feeling that something was off.

Sure, everyone knew that breaking through to the fifth realm would make someone stronger. But why did he make it sound as easy as drinking soup? Countless people spend their entire lives striving to reach that level, yet here he was, acting like all it took was declaring it.

Shouldn't he at least consider what reaching the fifth realm truly entails before making such a bold statement?

In fact, Chu Liang actually could.

He had already reached the pinnacle of the fourth realm. With enough treasures of nature, he could easily achieve a breakthrough. He had stayed at this level only to solidify his foundation.

But now, it seemed he had no choice. Facing this demonic beast required a boost in combat strength.

The Phoenix Sheep's Fruit of Life had been prepared for a long time. While refining it into a pill would have yielded greater effects, there was no time for that now. A simpler, riskier approach would have to do.

Chu Liang opened his mouth, swallowed the glowing fruit, then sat cross-legged and closed his eyes, focusing on refining its power.

"That's it?" Tang Shi blinked in shock. "This is too..."

Too reckless, isn't it? she completed the sentence inwardly.

Even for martial artists, who had an easier time with breakthroughs, it was never this easy!

You didn't even wash the fruit!!! Can you really achieve a breakthrough? Tang Shi thought.

She started feeling more and more worried, but before she could voice her concerns, Chu Liang had opened his eyes and said with a smile, "It is finished."

"Huh?" Tang Shi asked confusedly, looking as if she had question marks popping up over her head.

So, cultivators could achieve breakthroughs even more easily than martial artists? Tang Shi muttered to herself. She felt as if her understanding of the world had been shaken.

If Chu Liang hadn't already started striding confidently toward the depths of the cave, she might have thought he was just messing with her.

In the blink of an eye, Chu Liang stood once more at the entrance of the Blood Crow Commander's cave.

"You dare return..." The Blood Crow Commander's voice echoed, now tinged with fury.

It had taken a significant hit from Tang Shi earlier, and recovering from the wound took it some effort and time.

It was even angrier that it actually let these two pests escape.

And now, they had the audacity to come back.

"We haven't simply returned; we've returned to end you," Chu Liang declared, summoning the Dustless Sword. He formed a seal with his hands, lifting them toward the sky.

"Foolish delusions!" the Blood Crow Commander roared.

Through the fight earlier, it had gauged their strength. This time, it was confident it could finish them off!

But something felt off.

Chu Liang's flying sword shot into the air, instantly transforming into tens of thousands of blazing sword lights, sweeping across the sky in a brilliant display of flames.

Back then, he had relied on the Crimson Executioner Sword to perform the Ten Thousand Swords Seal—a technique far beyond his level at the time. But now, he had grown strong enough to wield it on his own.

If the Crimson Executioner could see this, would it feel a sense of pride and relief?

Boom—

The myriad swords filled the sky, exploding with thunderous force!

Relying solely on his own power, Chu Liang now wielded the Ten Thousand Swords Seal with far greater mastery. He even executed the Talismanic Sword Seal at the same time.

This was the power of the combination of the Ten Thousand Swords Seal, Myriad Talismanic Sword as well as the Divine Dragon Fire!

Rumble—

A fiery storm swirled like heavenly flames descending. The Blood Crow Commander summoned a massive flock of blood crows, forming a black cloud to intercept the attack.

Yet, upon contact, the crows were instantly engulfed and dissolved, unable to withstand the assault.

They disintegrated on impact.

Now that he had reached the fifth realm, the capacity of his Sea of Qi had expanded, and the quality of his foundational qi had greatly improved.

With the duality of Geng Metal qi, the piercing power of his sword light had now ascended to an entirely new level.

It was truly indestructible!

Combined with the Divine Dragon Fire, which naturally countered the crow swarm, the relentless barrage of fiery swords pierced through the Blood Crow Commander's true body in an instant.

The flames cast an eerie glow on Tang Shi's face, her eyes widening in sheer disbelief.

This is... too powerful, she thought.

Before this, the strongest person she had seen among the younger generation was her Eldest Senior Brother, Ren Hongdao. But now, looking at the Myriad Talismanic Sword Seal before her, she doubted even he could withstand it.

She was doubtful.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" The Blood Crow Commander was equally shocked. As the ten thousand beams of swordlights struck, it let out a desperate caw, "Why... why has your strength suddenly increased so much?!"

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

A series of explosions erupted from its body. Blood-red light and flames burst forth, leaving nothing but a heap of dust on the ground.

"The great Nightmare Demon King will not spare you! The day the Demon King awakens will be the day of your demise—"

Its voice continued to echo through the empty cave.

To its final question, Chu Liang could only respond silently in his heart.

Didn't see that coming, did you? Papa has leveled up.

Chapter 457: The Blue Pills

Chu Liang moved forward with determination.

...

With the defeat of the Blood Crow Commander, the greatest obstacle vanished, leaving only a pitch-black, void-like portal before them.

Tang Shi gazed at the darkness ahead, still feeling a hint of apprehension. In contrast, Chu Liang didn't bother at all.

"Even if we hesitate, this will still be the only way forward. So, we might as well go in sooner," he said plainly. "But let me catch my breath first."

"Okay," Tang Shi said with a nod.

Whenever Tang Shi was done with fighting, she would immediately revert to being timid and obedient. It was hard to imagine that she could transform into the glowering Blood Vajra Warrior at any moment.

In truth, the Myriad Talismanic Sword, despite its immense power, hadn't drained much of Chu Liang's energy. With the two Golden Cores and the Ren-Water foundational qi, his endurance was nearly limitless. Even if his Sea of Qi was depleted, it would refill in mere moments.

However, before stepping into the unknown, he decided to claim his reward. If he could obtain something useful, it would give him an extra trump card.

He appeared to be meditating, but his divine sense had arrived in the White Pagoda.

No matter their form, the Nightmare Beasts all dissolved into a mass of crimson smoke upon being slain. It seemed that life in this dream world differed from that of the outside world; there were no distinctions in strength. Even the powerful imprint of the Blood Crow Commander was indistinguishable from that of the lesser blood crows.

Perhaps it was because, at their core, they were nothing more than illusions born from the dream itself.

Chu Liang stepped forward and casually pressed the "Refine" character.

Boom—

A familiar radiance flashed, and a shimmering blue light floated out.

[Illusion Dispelling Pill: A pill that keeps the mind clear, stabilizing the soul. Upon ingestion, it grants immunity to any illusionary disturbances for a quarter of an hour.]

"This... is a key item."

Chu Liang held the small blue pill between his fingers, feeling it was worth every bit of effort. It was kind of the White Pagoda to grant him such a reward of such level just for wiping out a swarm of blood crows.

For a moment, he even considered going back for another round.

But, with the death of the Blood Crow Commander, all the other blood crows had vanished.

The effect of this pill was similar to that of the sacred item given by the Noble One in the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal, which ensured mental clarity.

Though the pill's effect only lasted for half an hour, the sacred jade pendant was also a consumable. Half an hour might not seem long, but it would suffice if he took a few pills.

He had no way of knowing how many Nightmare Specter imprints had accumulated in the prison, but there were certainly more than enough for him to use freely within this dream. Even if he faced illusions again after leaving this dreamland, these pills would prove invaluable.

Of course, the true extent of its power remained uncertain.

It might counter ordinary illusory techniques, but would it be effective against illusions created by immortal arts, such as the Shadow of Radiance? That was yet to be tested.

Upon breaking through to the fifth realm, every aspect of his vitality, qi, and spirit surged. His soul felt perfected, his qi and blood brimmed with vigor, and his Sea of Qi overflowed with energy.

Although he already possessed the Geng Metal, Jia Wood, and Ren Water foundational qi of the fifth realm, this latest enhancement wasn't particularly significant.

However, the Geng Metal foundational qi that he himself generated combined with the Geng Metal foundational qi provided by the Colorful Doll greatly amplified the strength of both sources of Geng Metal foundational qi.

Chu Liang had never felt so powerful before.

After he had collected all the rewards, he suddenly stood up and turned to Tang Shi. "Miss Tang, have you finished regulating your breathing? Let's move."

This question stunned Tang Shi.

Regulating my breathing for what? I didn't even get a chance to do anything this whole journey. Wasn't it all you fighting solo? Tang Shi thought. She had never met anyone quite like Chu Liang.

In the past, when members of different sects joined forces to slay monsters and obliterate devils, they often held back, preserving their strength and leaving others to take action. Even when some took the lead, it was usually just for show.

The people of the Great Astral Sect frequently suffered losses in such situations.

But Chu Liang was different; he truly loved the business of monster slaying.

Not only did he insist on fighting alone each time, but he would also panic if someone else tried to take his turn. After putting in great effort to slay the demons, he would show a genuine, joyful smile of satisfaction.

He carried a noble radiance of his own.

This certainly broadened the young lady's perspective.

...

Whoosh—

After diving into the black portal, there was a flash of light. As the surroundings settled, an ominous and eerie aura immediately swept over them.

"This is... an ancient battlefield?"

Chu Liang scanned his surroundings. The ground beneath his feet was pitch-black, barren, and rugged. When he peered into the distance, there wasn't a single plant in sight—only colossal bones, towering like mountains, under the eerie glow of a massive blood-red moon.

A desolate silence hung in the air.

Eerie whispers filled their ears once more. Thankfully, the sacred item against his chest emitted a faint warmth, pushing back the strangeness. Yet, both of them could clearly feel the jade pendant's energy draining faster than before.

The Nightmare Demon King's dream was far more bizarre than the world outside, though this was to be expected.

"Let's quickly search for an exit on this level," Chu Liang urged.

In this unfamiliar world, they didn't dare fly recklessly, fearing they might attract unwanted attention. Instead, they sprinted across the ground, their eyes scanning their surroundings.

With bodies brimming with qi and blood, like fierce beasts, they ran almost as fast as if they were flying, leaving two blurred afterimages in their wake.

As they approached a rocky hill, the dense sound of footsteps suddenly echoed ahead.

"Wait."

Chu Liang quickly signaled for Tang Shi to stop, then crouched behind the rocks to observe.

In front of them, a group of soldiers clad in armor from the previous dynasty marched forward, halberds in hand, exuding a formidable, murderous aura.

Amidst the formation was a carriage, and seated within it was the chancellor of the former dynasty—someone Chu Liang had seen many times and could not possibly mistake.

If it weren't for this old man, they wouldn't have been swallowed by the Deep Pool of Dreams.

How could soldiers from the previous dynasty appear here? Have they been swallowed up as well? Chu Liang pondered. From the look of things, they seem fully recovered. They don't seem to be in a daze anymore like how they were outside.

In fact, the aura of these soldiers was now much stronger, resembling that of an elite force.

What is going on? Chu Liang muttered inwardly.

Since the chancellor had regained his true form as a powerful seventh-realm cultivator, Chu Liang didn't dare to probe further with his divine sense. He chose to observe cautiously with just his eyes.

As he retracted his divine sense, he didn't notice a figure sneaking up on them.

Someone had discovered them!

"Huh?" A surprised voice broke the silence. "Young Hero Chu, Tang Shi, what are you doing here?"

The two of them turned around in shock, only to see someone standing nearby—fair-skinned, sharp-eyed, and undeniably beautiful. It was Ji Lingyu.

Swoosh.

Without saying a word, Chu Liang appeared behind her with the use of Dimension Compression and smacked down with a brick.

Bam!

Chapter 458: Truly a Person of Passion

"Why did you hit meee???"

Ji Lingyu pouted, her golden eyes welling up with tears, looking as delicate as a flower caught in a spring storm. She had never been hurt like this in her life.

She had just greeted them when she was knocked out cold with a brick. The two didn't even bother saying a word.

She reached back to touch her head, wincing at the sharp pain even from the lightest touch. "Can you check if it's swollen?" she asked.

Tang Shi glanced at it and saw a noticeable bump that looked quite alarming. She winced and whispered, "Just a little."

"Really?" Ji Lingyu asked skeptically. She thought, The swelling certainly feels much bigger...

"Sorry, Miss Ji," Chu Liang apologized, rubbing his hands with an awkward smile. "We've run into too many Nightmare Beasts disguised as people, so I tapped the back of your head out of reflex."

"Couldn't you at least check first?" Ji Lingyu snapped.

"Well, I just did..." Chu Liang nodded. "Now I know you're real."

After Chu Liang smacked her with the Demon-Revealing Brick, Ji Lingyu passed out instead of emitting black qi. That was when Chu Liang realized he had made a mistake and knew that things were bad. He quickly woke her up, which was what led to the current situation.

"It's fine to be cautious, but you acted way too fast..." Ji Lingyu muttered again.

"The speed is just fine. Practice makes perfect," Chu Liang replied with a humble smile.

"You think I'm complimenting you?!" Ji Lingyu shouted as she stomped her foot in frustration.

Seeing her reaction, Chu Liang quickly changed the subject. "Miss Ji, are you wandering through this level of the realm alone?" he asked.

"No," Ji Lingyu replied. "I joined up with Grandmaster Yan and Thirteenth Aunt. We just ran into a squad of imperial soldiers from the previous dynasty. They've somehow regained their peak strength

and are far more powerful now. Grandmaster Yan fought the former chancellor and got injured. Luckily, Thirteenth Aunt stepped in, and we managed to escape. I came up here to get a better view since my eyesight is sharp."

So, those imperial soldiers from the previous dynasty were actually searching for them?

"Then let's hurry and regroup with them," Chu Liang suggested.

The three of them descended the mountain together. Halfway down, they spotted three figures approaching—Yan Qihu, Second Madam Gu, and her attendant, Chabu.

It seemed they had noticed Ji Lingyu was gone for a while and had come searching, worried she might be in danger.

Yan Qihu showed no signs of injury, suggesting he was fine. However, Chabu, the attendant, looked pale and drained of blood.

When they saw Chu Liang and Tang Shi, they were somewhat surprised.

"We searched everywhere for you and couldn't find you. Where did you go?" Yan Qihu asked once everyone settled at the foot of the mountain.

"It's a long story," Chu Liang replied. "This dream world has multiple levels. We fell into the lower level and had to put in quite a bit of effort to reach this one."

"Multiple levels in this dream world?" Yan Qihu was taken aback by this information.

It seemed they hadn't been informed about this yet.

However, Second Madam Gu's eyes sparkled as she spoke. "In the letter Gu Qingyuan sent me, he mentioned cultivating the Great Dao while living off the former emperor's dream. Could that be another level in this dream world?"

"That's right," Chu Liang immediately confirmed. "The ancient Great Noble Dream Immortal's dream lies at the deepest level. The Nightmare Demon King fed on that dream and created its own

dream within this dream world. The young emperor of the former dynasty, in turn, lived off the Nightmare Demon King's dream and probably constructed his own dream inside it."

The first time Chu Liang ventured into the Deep Pool of Dreams, he must have entered the dream on the uppermost level—the young emperor's dream. In that dream, he glimpsed vast mountains, winding rivers, and grand palace halls. It was there that he had encountered Gu Qingyuan.

But this time, something had changed. The Deep Pool of Dreams had been thrown into chaos, and when it engulfed Chu Liang's group, it scattered everyone across the different levels of the dream world.

This anomaly must have something to do with the woman named Caiyi, right? Chu Liang pondered.

With the limited information he had, Chu Liang couldn't grasp Caiyi's true intentions. However, one thing was certain—they had to ascend another level if they wanted to escape.

"We need to find the true form of the young emperor," Chu Liang said decisively.

Yan Qihu frowned. "It won't be easy. That imperial army from the previous dynasty is troublesome to deal with."

Chu Liang then briefly learned about their situation.

Yan Qihu, Ji Lingyu, Second Madam Gu, and Chabu had all been scattered within the Nightmare Demon King's dream. Fortunately, with his seventh-realm martial arts cultivation, Yan Qihu quickly found the others.

But his boldness had come at a cost. They crossed paths with the imperial soldiers from the previous dynasty. Yan Qihu clashed with the former chancellor, who fought at full strength, and was forced to retreat after suffering minor injuries.

Beneath the blood-red moon of this twisted realm, ordinary people would soon fall into madness.

Luckily, they had Chabu.

His mystical bloodline allowed him to dispel illusions caused by Nightmare Specters by smearing his divine blood between a person's eyes, shielding them from the blood moon's sinister influence. However, while doing this once or twice was manageable, they had relied on Chabu alone for far too long. It was becoming increasingly insufficient.

That explained why Chabu had appeared so pale when Chu Liang first saw him.

"Chabu, you've worked hard," Chu Liang said sincerely.

The brother from the Western Regions, though small in stature, was undeniably tough. He raised his head and replied, "It's fine. Just let me catch my breath, and I'll take care of you two next."

Chu Liang glanced over, noticing that Chabu's hands were covered in cuts.

"No need," Chu Liang said. "The two of us are protected by the sacred jade pendants we obtained earlier, so we can hold out a bit longer. Plus, I have some pills to stabilize our souls. I'm not sure if they'll work here, but it's worth a try."

With that, he took out a few small blue pills and handed them around.

They each swallowed the pills, and after a moment of adjusting their breaths, they nodded in relief. "These pills are effective; the whispers under the blood moon have become much fainter!"

Chu Liang felt a wave of relief wash over him. At least they worked, he thought.

He then looked at Chabu, who raised his head and said, "I don't need it."

"It's not a pill." Chu Liang quickly handed him a cup. "Drink some brown sugar tea^[1] to replenish yourself."

"Heh," Yan Qihu chuckled. "You really came prepared. How do you even have something like that?"

Chu Liang glanced at him and smiled without saying a word.

Instead, Second Madam Gu started laughing. She then asked, "Grandmaster Yan, I take it you haven't married?"

"No, I haven't." Yan Qihu blinked, looking puzzled. "How did you know?"

Everyone exchanged a knowing smile, leaving Yan Qihu even more perplexed.

...

After a brief rest, the group set off once more.

To ascend to the dream on the level above, they had to find the former emperor's true form, which meant starting with the imperial army of the previous dynasty.

According to Yan Qihu, the former chancellor practiced the Confucian divine skills, making him a challenging opponent. Yet, in terms of sheer combat strength, he wasn't particularly formidable.

The real threat lay in the thousands of martial artists in the imperial army, capable of forming a battle formation with a murderous aura and terrifying power that could shake the heavens. Under the chancellor's command, they could slay gods and demons alike.

"If we can't defeat them by force, could we outsmart them?" Chu Liang pondered aloud, glancing at everyone around him. "With Miss Ji's Xuan Yuan Eyes, she should be able to see a thousand li away. Madam Gu can hide our tracks. Could we first identify the location of the former emperor's true body and then find a way to sneak in?"

"This plan is feasible," Second Madam Gu said with a nod. "As long as we know where the target is, I can move freely."

"I'll give it a try..." Ji Lingyu nodded in agreement.

With that, Ji Lingyu moved to a higher vantage point, her eyes gleaming as she scanned the distant landscape.

"I see them stopping in front of a palace made of bones," she muttered. "That must be their headquarters. I can't see any further inside..."

"Then let's go take a look," Yan Qihu said, standing up immediately.

Following Ji Lingyu's guidance, the group quickly made their way to another stone mountain, gazing out into the distance.

On an open plain stood the massive skull of a demonic beast, towering as high as a mountain. The army had transformed this skull into a palace-like fortress.

Thousands of imperial soldiers from the previous dynasty stood in orderly rows around the palace.

It was obvious they were no longer alive. Each one bore the unmistakable marks of death. At the front, the former chancellor even had two large, gaping holes in his chest.

He must have been pierced through the heart by arrows.

Arrows capable of killing an Eminent One could not have been shot by ordinary people.

Yet, these soldiers were unlike the lingering spirits they had faced before. They possessed both intelligence and cultivation, their auras brimming with a distinct and unsettling power.

The former chancellor dismounted from his carriage, rising into the air as he addressed the assembled soldiers in a commanding voice, "Soldiers, the world has changed! Be patient, for the time of our restoration is near!"

"Restore the kingdom! Restore the kingdom!" the soldiers roared in unison.

Chu Liang clicked his tongue in astonishment. Now, this was true conviction.

Even with gaping holes in their chests, they were still clinging to the dream of restoring the kingdom instead of being concerned with fixing the holes in their chests.

It had been over a few hundred years since the fall of the previous dynasty.

Moments later, the former chancellor turned and entered the palace made of bones.

Seeing this, Second Madam Gu stood up carefully and said, "I'll go take a look."

"Be careful," everyone warned.

Second Madam Gu gave a faint smile before her figure turned ethereal and vanished from sight. In an instant, even her aura faded away.

Chu Liang had seen Ji Lingfeng conceal his presence before, but he would always sense remaining traces of his aura. Second Madam Gu, however, was on another level. No wonder she was so confident, moving in and out of places with ease. This wasn't just simple invisibility. She had become part of the void, existing in a different dimension.

It seemed that as one's cultivation advanced, the mystical abilities of the Xuan Yuan Eyes could develop further, revealing an incredibly high potential.

"Such an impressive technique." Yan Qihu couldn't help but marvel.

"Of course," Chabu added. "If our boss hadn't had her state of mind disrupted by that man, she might have already reached the seventh realm by now."

"Truly a pity," Yan Qihu sighed. "Romance is but a fleeting passion, yet it has delayed her for half her life. Truly, a foolish—"

"Watch what you say," came Second Madam Gu's irritated voice from the void. "I'm still here!"

Without missing a beat, Yan Qihu kept a straight face and smoothly changed his tone. "Truly, a person of passion."

Chapter 459: A Humble Servant in Plain Clothes

"Your Majesty..."

"I was but a humble servant, plowing fields on Cow Dung Slope in Gou Family Village, barely surviving the chaos of war. Fame across the nine provinces was never something I sought..."

Inside the palace, carved from the enormous skull of a demonic beast, the elderly chancellor, dressed in the attire of the previous dynasty, spoke as he walked through the smooth corridor, arriving at a vast hall.

The hall was empty, with only a semi-transparent coffin in the center, resembling white jade. Inside was a faint outline of a small figure clad in a yellow robe.

Even with no one else around, the chancellor of the previous dynasty still bowed respectfully before standing up.

He then fixed his gaze on the jade coffin and began to speak, his voice carrying a solemn weight.

The marks of death had vanished from his face. He was no longer a mere lingering spirit but an elderly statesman, burdened with sorrow and compassion.

He had utterly devoted his entire life to this nation.

"Yet, before the late emperor could even rule the country halfway, the foundation was ruined. The land was engulfed in flames, and the nation was in a state of decline. On the day the nation fell, not even the entire court of officials could turn things around. I could only take Your Majesty and escape to this desolate land. But eventually, we were still overtaken by the rebels, and all our forces were annihilated.

"We exhausted every effort to preserve Your Majesty's life. Fortunately, within this dream world, we could revive as lingering spirits. By staying on in this state of the living dead, we can allow Your Majesty to sleep and wait for the right moment. But...

"I hear that centuries have passed in the outside world, and the Yu Dynasty now reigns in peace. The dream of restoring our kingdom might end up being just a dream.

"Not long ago, I may have missed our only chance for restoration."

A hint of struggle and pain crossed the chancellor's face, but not a trace of regret remained.

The elderly chancellor continued muttering, "The female demon king promised that if we helped awaken the Nightmare Demon King from three thousand years ago, she would reinstate Your Majesty when the Demon God descended. In our current state, we are neither human nor ghosts. We can't even leave this dream world. There will be no greater opportunity than this..."

"But I deceived her in the end.

"I directed her to the most dangerous place in this hidden realm, the Blood Crow Cave. With her cultivation level, I don't know how long it will delay her. Perhaps, soon she will return to kill us all.

"Your Majesty, I do not regret it."

The old man's back gradually straightened as he resolutely said, "Restoring the kingdom has been our lifelong wish, and we refuse to die in peace even as lingering spirits. We are still waiting for that day..."

"But no matter what, we are the rightful rulers of the divine continent, and what we seek to restore is the reign of the human dynasty! How can we become slaves to the demon race? Even if we die in defiance, it is better than living in humiliation!

"Your Majesty, today, I must bury you deep underground once again to prevent that female demon king from finding you. When you wake up, all your loyal subjects might not be with you anymore... Perhaps the human race might not even exist anymore. When that time comes, I hope Your Majesty will not forget the dream of restoring the kingdom.

"Even in the netherworld, we will raise our banners for you, and in our next lives, we will be reborn as your loyal officials again!"

After finishing the speech passionately, his voice quivered, and he could no longer hold back the tears. Tears, hot and unbidden, streamed down his weathered face.

In the vast, empty hall, it was just him and the slumbering figure within the jade coffin.

The soldiers outside, despite having regained their peak physical forms in this dream realm, were mere shadows of their former selves. In life, their cultivation had not been strong enough, and their consciousnesses were now fragmented and incomplete.

The harsh truth was that the chancellor alone had been carrying the weight of the entire force.

For hundreds of years, they wandered back and forth on both sides of the Deep Pool of Dreams as lingering spirits, without any sense of rationality or awareness of their situation. Only when they reentered the dream realm within the Deep Pool of Dreams would their complete form be restored.

Back then, to allow the young emperor to wait for the right moment, the chancellor and a handful of trusted aides had sealed him within the jade coffin, casting him into a deep slumber. And so, to this day, the young emperor remained the only one who was actually alive.

But when he wakes up, would his loyal subjects still exist in this world?

"Haaaa..." The chancellor let out a long sigh as he gazed up at the sky.

The years of solitude had gnawed at his spirit, and perhaps, he thought death would be a good way to free himself from this torment. In those words he had just uttered, he had poured out everything that had weighed on his heart.

As for his unwavering loyalty to the human race...

Even if no one knew, so what? It was merely a matter of staying true to one's conscience and not being sorry to the rest of the world.

His gaze shifted toward the Deep Pool of Dreams, a flicker of agitation sparking in his eyes. Suddenly, he raised his finger, trembling with fury, as if he were pointing across the vast land of the nine provinces. "You traitors will never know what this old man has sacrificed... Haaaaaa!"

...

"He gave up the promise of restoring the kingdom, just to delay that female demon king from resurrecting the Nightmare Demon King?"

After listening to Second Madam Gu explain what she had heard, everyone felt a deep respect for the elderly chancellor of the previous dynasty.

It was truly admirable that the elderly chancellor had endured the circumstances he was in for hundreds of years while staying steadfast to his beliefs, remaining loyal to the human race.

Meanwhile, a flicker of realization sparked in Chu Liang's mind.

Caiyi was a demon king with formidable cultivation powers. Could she have been the one who appeared on Mount Shu five hundred years ago? The same one who tricked the Yan Family's ancestor into breaking the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda...

As he connected the dots, the entire story became clear. The disappearance of the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda on Mount Shu was no coincidence—it was a conspiracy planned by the demon race to rescue the Demon God.

And now, Caiyi sought to wake up the Nightmare Demon King from three thousand years ago.

Back then, the Nightmare Demon King, gravely wounded and on the brink of death, had entered the dream of the Noble Dream Immortal, using it as a sanctuary to keep itself alive. There, it fell into a deep slumber. Under normal circumstances, it would need to fully devour the entire Kingdom of the Dream Immortal to gather enough spiritual energy to regain consciousness.

But if the demon race awakened it prematurely, they must have discovered a way to rapidly restore its power. And if that happened, they would face yet another formidable demon king that would be extremely challenging to defeat.

"We must hurry," Ji Lingyu urged. "The female demon king was deceived by the former chancellor and led elsewhere in this dream world. That means this might be our only chance. We need to quickly reach the dream in the upper level, escape, and contact people even stronger than us to handle this threat."

"The problem now is that we can't get close to the young emperor. How can we enter his dream?" Yan Qihu asked.

"Why don't we talk to the chancellor?" Chu Liang suddenly suggested. "It seems that we share the same enemy when the demon race is involved. Perhaps we can discuss it with him."

Everyone looked at him. "Discuss?"

"Yes," Chu Liang said with a nod. "We don't have to resort to fighting all the time."

Moments later, someone with a warm smile on his face approached the outskirts of the palace made of bones.

As he faced the soldiers of the previous dynasty who lacked complete divine intelligence, he loudly declared, "Chu Liang, disciple of Mount Shu, requests to meet with the Chancellor!"

From within the army formation, a wave of murderous aura surged, and thousands of soldiers turned their glares toward him. The pressure descended like an invisible mountain, weighing heavily on Chu Liang.

Chu Liang quickly understood why even Yan Qihu, an Eminent One of the Martial Arts, had struggled to break through their defenses. The combined strength of so many martial artists, united in a formidable army formation, was on par with the top figures of the cultivation world.

This type of large-scale military formation was not something that the disciples of the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten were familiar with, but the Yu Dynasty's army was well-versed in these techniques.

Moments later, the former chancellor walked out from the Bone Palace. His gaze was cold and commanding as he uttered two words. "Step forward."

The soldiers parted, creating a clear path to the palace.

If Chu Liang called out from outside the army formation, he could escape at any moment. However, once he stepped into the formation, retreating would be as difficult as ascending to the heavens.

Yet, he resolutely stepped forward.

As he stepped deeper into the formation, an oppressive force seemed to descend upon him, growing more suffocating with every step. For those with even slightly lower cultivation levels, they would have been forced to their knees after taking only a few steps.

It was clear that the elderly chancellor was intent on making a display of power.

Despite the heavy pressure weighing down on him, Chu Liang's expression remained calm. He still smiled as he walked to the front of the hall and respectfully bowed.

"Mount Shu was once the foremost immortal sect favored by the Great Qian Dynasty," the elderly chancellor said coldly. "Yet, it turned its back on divine grace and sided with the rebels."

The Qian Dynasty was the name of the previous dynasty.

In the current Yu Dynasty, mentioning the Great Qian Dynasty was strictly forbidden.

The final years of the previous dynasty had been marked by corruption and chaos, with the divine continent engulfed in flames of war. Immortal sects, including Mount Shu, had abandoned the regime.

At that time, the Mount Shu Sect still had the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda and maintained its status as the foremost immortal sect, wielding considerable influence in the world of cultivation. Had Mount Shu chosen to support the imperial court back then, many forces in the world of immortality cultivators would probably not have turned against it, or at least would have waited and observed for a while longer.

Mount Shu's betrayal was undeniably a crucial factor in the collapse of the previous dynasty.

Therefore, when the elderly chancellor brought it up, his voice carried an undertone of deep-seated resentment.

"Since it was the foremost immortal sect, Chancellor, I assume you have visited Mount Shu?" Chu Liang asked nonchalantly, steering the conversation in a different direction.

"Naturally," the elderly chancellor answered.

"The sect leader of Mount Shu from back then has long since passed away, but the guardian celestial beast, Baize, is still alive. I'm curious. Did you ever meet Baize?" Chu Liang inquired further.

"The celestial beast Baize is proficient in the profound truths of yin and yang and the teachings of the three schools. I would even consider it a friend," the elderly chancellor said, his voice softening with nostalgia.

"Speaking of the celestial beast Baize," Chu Liang continued smoothly, "you might not be aware of its current situation. While I'm not particularly close with Baize itself, I'm a friend of its child..."

"Now that they shared a common acquaintance, Chu Liang's tone grew animated. He stepped forward and said, "Recently, at our Mount Shu Summit, we had a group of fierce attackers causing trouble..."

"And do you know who came to Baize's rescue? It was none other than this junior right here. Before you could even blink..."

Chapter 460: Oh

"It worked just like that?"

Everyone arrived in front of the Bone Palace with genuine surprise.

When Chu Liang went to negotiate with the elderly chancellor, the others had been waiting some distance behind him, ready to charge in and rescue him at any moment.

They hadn't expected that his talk with the elderly chancellor would go so smoothly.

This is a group of lingering spirits who have been holding onto their obsession for hundreds of years! Did they really treat you with the usual social etiquette and norms?

Chu Liang smiled and said, "It's all thanks to the chancellor's great sense of righteousness and duty. He understands that the current priority is to thwart the demon race's scheme."

However, the elderly chancellor's expression remained stern. It seemed he was still resentful toward the group of traitors from the Mount Shu Sect.

Nevertheless, he turned around, flung out his sleeves, and said, "Follow me."

It wasn't exactly Chu Liang's forte to quickly forge friendships with others; he wasn't Lin Bei after all.

However, having been friends with Lin Bei for so long, he had seen Lin Bei in action plenty of times. He picked up some of Lin Bei's socializing tricks like making a connection through mutual acquaintances and sharing stories about them... In short, it was about quickly breaking the ice and reaching a level where there was no hostility.

As for the subsequent negotiations regarding the conditions of their agreement, that was where Chu Liang truly excelled.

Once the negotiations were over, the elderly chancellor agreed to open the gateway leading to the next dream level for them.

Soon after, he led Chu Liang's group to the jade coffin.

Radiant light swirled inside the jade coffin, where the young emperor had been lying in slumber for hundreds of years.

Although born into the imperial family, he happened to be born during the final years of his family's dynasty. At the mere age of six, he was forced to ascend the throne and was later exiled. He was just a pitiful child with a tragic history.

With a wave of the elderly chancellor's large sleeve, the lid of the jade coffin slowly slid open, releasing a burst of brilliant light that shone an arc of light into the air.

Within the arc of light, there was a faint outline of a portal.

"This level is His Majesty's dream. Be extremely careful when you enter. Do not disturb His Majesty," the elderly chancellor warned.

Everyone agreed they would do as the elderly chancellor said. Then they stepped into the light one by one, their figures disappearing in an instant.

Chu Liang was the last to go.

The elderly chancellor told him, "I hope you will keep your promise."

"Rest assured, Chancellor," Chu Liang replied. "Since I've made a promise, I will not break it."

The elderly chancellor nodded. "Good."

Chu Liang then leaped forward, stepping into the arc of light.

Whoosh.

There was a flash, giving light to the scene before him.

He was in a beautiful paradise with rolling verdant hills and flowing limpid rivers. However, there was something strange. All the birds and beasts seemed to be asleep, frozen in place without even the slightest movement.

It was the very same mountain that Chu Liang, Luo Yao, and Pushan had visited previously.

Normally, crossing through the Deep Pool of Dreams would lead to this place—the first level of the dream world. It was likely due to the chaos in the Deep Pool of Dreams that Chu Liang's group had fallen into the lower levels this time.

According to what Chu Liang experienced the last time he was here, if they stayed in this paradise for too long, their souls would be pulled into the Immortals' Dreams... Chu Liang now guessed that this meant falling into the lower levels of the dream world.

However, the cultivation levels of Chu Liang's group members were much higher than when Chu Liang was here the first time, so he wasn't worried.

With Chu Liang's guidance, they made their way toward the cluster of palace halls at the mountaintop.

They swiftly arrived at a vast white public square, spanning a hundred zhang. It was adorned with the intricate Five-Element Formation of Celestial Design.

This was where the Southern-Route Guider had taken Luo Yao hostage. He'd threatened to kill her to force Chu Liang and Pushan to break through the enchanted formation. However, even with Chu Liang and Pushan working together, they had only managed to take a few steps past the edge of the enchanted formation...

Nonetheless, things were different this time.

Yan Qihu took the lead, taking large strides into the enchanted formation without hesitation.

The enchanted formation around him rumbled, but it didn't shake him in the slightest. The others followed closely behind, unfazed by the enchanted formation.

In fact, even just Chu Liang alone would probably have no trouble breaking through the enchanted formation now.

Rumbleee.

They continued breaking through the enchanted formation as they walked to the palace entrance, where they finally stopped.

Inside the main hall, there was a thin man sitting with his back facing the entrance.

At this moment, Second Madam Gu, who had been suppressing her emotions, could no longer restrain herself. She pushed through the group and rushed forward, grabbing onto the frame of the hall's doorway for support.

"Qingyuaaan!" she cried out, her sobbing voice reaching the man before she did.

After thirty years of waiting and searching, she had finally found the place that had occupied her thoughts for so long. Her countless feelings that had piled up over the years finally erupted like a torrent.

As her sorrowful call echoed through the hall, the man slowly turned around... revealing the familiar face of an elderly man.

He smiled and said, "Second Madam?"

...

"Mister Wei, why were you sitting here when you don't have any reason to do so?"

"And you were even facing away from the entrance. If you had just sat facing the doorway, it would've saved us the misunderstanding."

"Exactly, you wasted Thirteenth Aunt's feelings."

"..."

It turned out that the one sitting with his back facing the hall entrance was Wei Lang, the Confucian master from the Noblemen's Hall. He had previously gotten separated from the group.

The palace hall was very spacious, similar to the palace halls of an imperial palace. At the end of the hall, the imperial throne of the emperor sat vacant. Wei Lang had been sitting in the center of the hall, leading everyone to mistakenly think that he belonged to this hidden realm.

Wei Lang scratched his head awkwardly. "There just so happened to be a meditation cushion here, so I didn't think much of it."

Second Madam Gu's gaze became rather dead. The overwhelming emotions that had almost burst forth earlier had been plugged, and it was obvious she didn't quite know what expression to have anymore.

Wei Lang had no idea that just sitting there for a moment would earn him such complaints.

After a while, the group asked him about what he had experienced during the time that they were separated.

Almost a full day had passed since they fell into the Deep Pool of Dreams. The old man couldn't have been sitting in this hall the whole time.

Wei Lang sighed deeply. "The situation here is not good."

"Hm? Mister Wei, why do you say that?"

"Look outside..." Wei Lang replied, pointing toward the outside.

The group turned around to look and found that the initially transparent barrier around the Deep Pool of Dreams had turned into a solid white wall, resembling a dense cocoon.

"I've tried breaking it, but with my strength, I can't break this restriction," Wei Lang said. "I encountered another Confucian cultivator here. He told me that a powerful demon queen had come by earlier and sealed the entire Deep Pool of Dreams. She's the cause of the crisis we're facing. We are all trapped here now, and we can't send any information out."

The group fell silent for a moment.

They had already guessed that Caiyi might be a powerful demon at the eighth realm, so no one had even considered fighting her head-on. Instead, they wanted to escape this place and seek out formidable cultivators to deal with her. Unfortunately, it seemed she had anticipated that and sealed off the Deep Pool of Dreams in advance.

How were they supposed to break the seal of an eighth-realm greater demon? No one had the confidence that they could do it. Despite his usual bravado, even Yan Qihu of the Great Astral Sect didn't dare make any bold claims.

At this moment, someone called out from the entrance of the palace hall.

"Lianhua!"

They turned to see a handsome young scholar in a green Confucian robe.

Who else could this young man be except for the scholar Chu Liang had met here in the past? He was, of course, Gu Qingyuan.

Gu Qingyuan looked at Second Madam Gu, his beloved who had occupied his thoughts for thirty years and had never abandoned or forgotten him. Unable to hold back his overwhelming emotions any longer, he had called for her in a sobbing voice!

Second Madam Gu uttered, "Oh."