

M. Slaying 511

Chapter 511: The West Sea Diabolical Forces

The West Sea Diabolical Forces had always been an important branch of the Diabolical Forces.

In recent years, the Dark King Sect had stood out among the Diabolical Forces, the collective name for the evil factions. Most of the time, the Dark King Sect was considered the leading faction within the Diabolical Forces.

However, the sects and factions within the Diabolical Forces were less united than those in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. After all, they shared no camaraderie or common beliefs; they were merely a collection of individuals willing to stop at nothing for personal gain. It would be strange if they could unite.

The reason this collective name, Diabolical Forces, existed was due to a diabolical cultivator from ancient times whose cultivation of the Dao had reached a profound level. He was the one who united the evil sects that had been suppressed by the righteous forces, gathering them together and giving them the collective name of Diabolical Forces. The only commonality among all the sects in the Diabolical Forces was that they were all rejected by the righteous schools of thought.

That diabolical cultivator that united them became known as the first Diabolical Emperor.

Since then, the Diabolical Forces had remained segregated. Only when a powerful individual emerged and subdued all the sects and factions with utmost power could the Diabolical Forces unite once more. That individual would then earn the title of Diabolical Emperor. However, from ancient times until then, fewer than a handful of people had received this title.

Without the existence of an absolute power, the Diabolical Forces would be like a pile of scattered sand. All sects would recognize themselves as part of the Diabolical Forces, but none would acknowledge anyone as the overlord of the Diabolical Forces.

As of now, the current leader of the Dark King Sect was considered to be the one most likely to become the Diabolical Emperor of this generation.

When the current leader of the Dark King Sect first took over the Dark King Sect, he wanted to fight for the title of the Diabolical Emperor. Yet, even as a Heavenly Origin Terminator with the True Form of Ksitigarbha, he still could not unify the diabolical sect.

At that time, the West Sea Diabolical Forces was his greatest obstacle.

The so-called West Sea Diabolical Forces was really a collective name for the thirty-plus large and small evil sects scattered across the islands of the West Sea, with the sect known as Evil Dragon Mountain being the leading force.

The Dark King Sect only became a diabolical sect after branching off from the Heavenly Star Divine Cult. Before it came into existence, the West Sea was the Holy Land of the Diabolical Forces.

In the ancestry of Evil Dragon Mountain, there had been two Diabolical Emperors. Thus, the West Sea Diabolical Forces were really the legitimate evil forces.

As an outsider, although the Dark King Sect rose to prominence in just a few hundred years to become the strongest diabolical sect, the legitimate sects in the West Sea Diabolical Forces still looked down on it.

Back then, the leader of the Dark King Sect sought to subdue the other sects and ascend to the position of Diabolical Emperor. However, he faced severe resistance from the West Sea Diabolical Forces.

At that time, he had just taken on the role of sect leader. His foundation within the sect was still unstable, and severe internal conflicts were occurring. As a result, he had no choice but to put a pause on his ambitions.

The restraints originating from within the sect were caused by the Left and Right Guardians, the White Silver King and the Violet Gold Marquess, who refused to cooperate with him. Thus, in this matter, the Violet Gold Marquess and the West Sea Diabolical Forces had, in a sense, collaborated.

After that, the leader of the Dark King Sect changed his approach. Since those from the West Sea Diabolical Forces refused to allow him to take the title of Demon Emperor, he decided to recruit all the diabolical sects into the Dark King Sect.

He recruited the Four Halls of Darkness and gathered followers mainly for this reason.

With the prospect of profit, diabolical sect followers from all corners of the world flocked to join the Dark King Sect, causing its power to surge to new heights.

If the Dark King Sect Master had proposed consolidating all the diabolical sects within the Diabolical Forces, there was a chance of success. It was a pity that he chose to postpone this plan to first obtain the Breath of the Yellow Springs. In the end, he failed and suffered significant setbacks.

Given this background, it was understandable that the West Sea Diabolical Forces would seek to instigate something significant by bypassing the leader of the Dark King Sect and contacting the Violet Gold Marquess directly.

But... What could they be planning?

...

The Sword-Hanging Kingdom of the West Sea was located on a neighboring island to those inhabited by the Diabolical Force. The relationship between the Sword-Hanging Kingdom and the West Sea Diabolical Force was far from harmonious; they were more like enemies, with grudges as deep-seated as the abyss, constantly engaging in bitter fights.

Back then, an individual from the lineage of Evil Dragon Mountain, known as Immortal Yuan Lu, who had achieved the eighth realm and gained control of the Heavenly Origin, nearly destroyed the Sword-Hanging Kingdom. If it hadn't been for the protection of the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten, he would have succeeded. During that time, the citizens of the Sword-Hanging Kingdom lived in constant fear and were seriously considering relocation.

It wasn't until the Sword-Hanging Kingdom produced the Sword Emperor of the West Sea, who slaughtered the nearby diabolical sects, that the situation was finally stabilized.

One could say that the West Sea Diabolical Force can barely hold onto its own territory, so how would they have the time to meddle in the affairs of the capital of Yu in the land of the nine provinces?

Moreover, during the Assembly of Immortal Sects, powerful members from the sects in the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten would gather in the capital of Yu. What kind of foolish diabolical cultivator would choose that time to cause trouble?

After discovering the letter, the Weapons Master promptly took it to Venerable Wen Yuan. Naturally, there would be further communication with the court.

As for Chu Liang, this enjoyable time of unboxing had come to an end.

Like the loot of other diabolical cultivators, most of what he uncovered consisted of sinister pills, enchanted tools, weapons, and arts manuals that Chu Liang couldn't use at all.

Only a few items were usable, with the most valuable undoubtedly being the Dream of Souls Airship.

To be honest, airships ranked higher than ordinary mounts. After all, even a spirit beast was considered apex at the sixth realm, and at the seventh realm, they were deemed a god. Once they reached such a cultivation level, whether demonic beast or spirit beast, they could no longer serve as mounts.

However, a meticulously crafted luxury airship was undoubtedly more valuable than a sixth-realm spirit beast and offered potential for further advancement.

In Taotie City, there was a small sect known as the Cloud-Surfing Sect. Its fame across the four seas and nine provinces stemmed from its ancestral airship crafting techniques.

It would take the entire Cloud-Surfing Sect three to five years to craft a top-quality Cloud-Surfing Airship, and owning such an airship instantly became a symbol of status and prestige.

However, this was an exclusive secret technique. While Taotie City allowed some shops to open branches at Red Cotton Peak, they would never allow collaborators of such level to establish branches elsewhere.

Chu Liang handed the Dream of Souls Airship to Wen Yulong to tinker with, hoping he could study the airship crafting techniques.

If he can create something similar in the future... wouldn't that be wonderful? Chu Liang thought.

After taking care of matters here, he set off for Azure Falling Peak.

He had arranged to meet with Senior Sister Jiang.

When their conversation reached a crucial point yesterday, the Whale-Riding Immortal suddenly appeared and interrupted him. He felt really sad about it. Now that he was back at Mount Shu, he wanted to speak with Jiang Yuebai once more.

On the towering ancient tree of Azure Falling Peak, Jiang Yuebai stood alone in the wind, her gaze distant and melancholic.

When she spotted Chu Liang, a slight smile gradually formed on her lips. "You've been quite busy."

"Didn't I just acquire the Violet Gold Marquess's storage tool yesterday? I was checking out the spoils," Chu Liang replied with a grin.

"Quite a harvest, I suppose?" Jiang Yuebai asked.

"Not much—just a few usable items," Chu Liang answered. "These diabolical cultivators have all sorts of sinister things."

Jiang Yuebai nodded slightly, and the two suddenly fell into a contemplative silence.

The atmosphere grew a bit tense.

After a brief pause, they suddenly spoke in unison, "Yesterday..."

"Heh." Chu Liang chuckled, "You go first."

It seemed that Senior Sister Jiang was not as calm as she appeared on the surface; she was probably just as nervous as he was. Yesterday, they had nearly revealed their feelings, so she must have given it a lot of thought as well.

"Yesterday, I... thought about it," Jiang Yuebai said slowly. "I feel that now is not the right time for us to discuss personal feelings, at least not until after the Assembly of Immortal Sects. This Assembly is crucial for the Mount Shu Sect. If we fall out of the top ten again and lose our place in the Divine Nine, we would all be considered sinners."

"The top ten..." Chu Liang pondered for a moment before saying, "That shouldn't be too hard, right?"

He thought about the younger generation of the Divine Nine's immortal sects and considered Mount Shu Sect's current strength. Even if securing first or a top-three spot was uncertain, making it into the top ten seemed feasible.

"It's not that simple," Jiang Yuebai shook her head. "The Assembly of Immortal Sects isn't only for the Divine Nine, the Terrestrial Ten, and various other immortal sects. The three great families—well, there are only two now—along with the Imperial Supervisory Bureau and kingdoms from overseas will also have their teams take part to see how strong the younger generation is. Every year, they take up several spots in the top ten, and sometimes they even fill more than half of them."

"I see..." Chu Liang responded softly.

Compared to the sects of immortality cultivators, the kingdoms from overseas and the Imperial Supervisory Bureau would have a much larger pool of candidates. This meant that the four selected from this larger pool would have faced intense competition to be chosen. Given this level of competitiveness, it wouldn't be easy for the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten to secure a spot in the top ten.

Of course, the sects in the Divine Nine had their own strong foundations. Even if each generation was worse than the last, it would still be very difficult to fail to make the top ten consistently.

It was no easy feat for the Mount Shu Sect to have fallen into such a dangerous state.

"Before the Assembly of Immortal Sects, we will likely have a training session during which we'll go into closed-door cultivation for some time," Jiang Yuebai continued. "We should focus on improving ourselves during this period. If we achieve good results at the Assembly of Immortal Sects, then we can continue the conversation from yesterday..."

As she whispered, her eyes appeared somewhat misty.

For some reason, Chu Liang felt that she had other concerns on her mind.

He wondered if it had anything to do with the meeting with the Whale-Riding Immortal yesterday.

Seeing her hesitant expression, Chu Liang offered her a reassuring smile and said, "I understand."

Chapter 512: One Goal

"I heard that a young lady has recently joined the Red Moon Pavilion. She performs every evening on stage and is someone with beauty and skills."

"Oh? Then I must go and see for myself."

"..."

On Red Cotton Peak, the newly opened Red Moon Pavilion had already undergone an expansion. The first-floor hall was now several times larger than before, yet it remained bustling with guests, creating a lively atmosphere. All this was due to the Red Moon Pavilion's exceptional service and innovative approach.

In addition to its standard dishes, it offered a selection of special hotpot ingredients daily. The spicy, flavorful hotpot was already one of the Three Problems of Mount Shu. Nowadays, anyone passing by Red Cotton Peak would feel incomplete if they didn't stop for a meal here.

The popularity of Red Moon Pavilion also inspired others as it showed that opening a hotpot restaurant in the realm of immortality cultivation could be successful. Xu Hongqiu had already begun exploring franchise opportunities in Taotie City, but the first franchise had yet to be established.

Perhaps it was because the Red Moon Pavilion had yet to become famous enough. If it lacked enough recognition, why would people pay to use its name when they could simply open their own?

...

As of today, some new and exciting activities started at the Red Moon Pavilion.

In the center of the hall stood a stage, where performances were held in the evening. This wasn't unusual, as many restaurants across the four seas and the land of the nine provinces offered similar entertainment.

But the young lady performing today was quite peculiar. She carried a faint aura of death, complemented by a beautiful face and a graceful figure. Her graceful movements during the dance were enchanting and ethereal.

Her appearance was of the caliber found at the South Melody Conservatory, yet here she was performing in this small establishment, which felt like a waste of her talent.

Her graceful dance, accompanied by melodious string music, was a serene contrast to the bustling surroundings, leaving the crowd in awe. Sadly, this young lady performed only once each day at this time, giving the diners just a brief moment to admire her performance.

"Hun Mengji's performance at this time has indeed boosted business," Xu Hongqiu remarked from the second floor, gazing outside. "The hall is always full, and there are even more people lining up outside. Since it's working so well, why not have her perform more often?"

"We're still a hotpot restaurant, after all. Our focus should be on the ingredients. Other embellishments are fine, but too many might overshadow the main attraction, which wouldn't be ideal," Chu Liang replied with a smile. "It's just right as it is now."

"Why haven't I seen Jiangjiang these past couple of days?" Xu Hongqiu suddenly asked.

"The Assembly of Immortal Sects is approaching. She's probably focusing on her cultivation," Chu Liang replied. "As the head disciple, she bears more pressure than we do."

"Speaking of which, I'm going back for closed-door cultivation tomorrow," Xu Hongqiu said, slapping her forehead. "During these two months, every sect should be gathering their disciples for training at least once. Isn't the Mount Shu Sect doing the same?"

"It should be, but we haven't been notified yet," Chu Liang replied.

This type of closed-door group cultivation, aimed at rapidly boosting strength and teamwork, was standard practice before the Assembly of Immortal Sects.

The Assembly of Immortal Sects was different from the Mount Shu Summit. It was a more intense battlefield that involved a larger number of participants. Adapting to the competition there would not be easy, especially for the younger generation who had not experienced it before.

"Heh, we'll be rivals then," Xu Hongqiu laughed. "I certainly won't go easy on you."

"I'm looking forward to it," Chu Liang replied with a smile.

"But I wonder if we can truly not worry about the Red Moon Pavilion while we're all away," Xu Hongqiu said suddenly.

Although the Whale Gang had many businesses, only a few truly belonged to her, and this was where she invested the most effort.

"Don't worry," Chu Liang reassured her, turning his gaze to Lackey B in the back, who was evaluating food for the food category of Lackey B's Strict Selection. "As long as he's here, the Red Moon Pavilion will stay in business."

...

After returning to Silver Sword Peak, Chu Liang once again immersed his divine sense into the White Pagoda.

To achieve the second stage of the fifth realm, he would still have to cultivate for some time. After all, cultivation was a gradual process. However, the Colorful Doll had already absorbed the last treasure of nature and was ready to achieve the Completion of Five Elements.

As long as it could consume, Chu Liang naturally had an abundance of spirit plants.

He had purchased an Earthy Lingzhi at a high price, which was an excellent material for activating the last element and achieving the Completion of Five Elements.

As soon as he took out the Earthy Lingzhi, the drowsy Tuntun immediately perked up. Though her eyes remained closed, her nose was already twitching.

Chu Liang turned around and handed over a fried chicken leg. "This is for you."

He then approached the Colorful Doll, which had already activated the four colors corresponding to the four levels of the Secret Reservoir, shimmering like a giant orb of light.

Without a word, Chu Liang immediately presented the Earthy Lingzhi to it for refinement.

Boom—

The Five-Elements Puppet operated at high speed. Once the fifth level of the Secret Reservoir of the Five Elements was activated, Chu Liang would be able to wield Wu Earth Foundational Qi.

Among the Five Elements, Geng Metal was sharp and incisive, Jia Wood possessed the power of rejuvenation, Ren Water was dense and viscous, Bing Fire was explosive, and Wu Earth was firm and solid. The Wu Earth Foundational Qi would greatly enhance the stability of his foundational qi.

Although the Geng Metal body was hard, it was prone to breakage due to its rigidity. With the addition of Wu Earth, his defense would be significantly enhanced.

Once he achieved the Completion of Five Elements, a cycle of elements would be established to mutually enhance each other, significantly improving their individual qualities. When the Wu Earth of the Secret Reservoir was activated, his strength would undoubtedly reach a new level.

However, there was no smile on Chu Liang's face.

Instead, there was a serious expression on his face as he knew that his opponents were definitely doing their best to become stronger.

What he had done so far was not enough. In the coming days, he needed to put forth his utmost effort to compete with Yang Shenlong, Zhang Chen, Ren Hongdao, and other true prodigies that stood at the pinnacle of their sects.

Keep working hard, Large-Headed Doll!

...

Boom—

With a loud rumble, golden light erupted from the vast square, filling the air with smoke and dust. From within the haze, a tall and straight figure emerged.

"No, no, no!"

The figure, handsome and youthful in appearance, was none other than Feng Chaoyang of the Celestial King Sect. He was currently shaking his head in displeasure.

"If you can't even defeat me, how do you expect to compete with someone like Yang Shenlong from Penglai or Chu Liang from Mount Shu? If that's the case, our Celestial King Sect should just admit defeat!"

"Cough, cough..." As the dust settled, a youth sitting up straight on the other side spoke helplessly, "Boss, I really did my best, but you're just too strong. We shouldn't sell ourselves short. Are those so-called prodigies really stronger than you?"

Next to him lay two others who couldn't even speak.

These were also disciples of the Celestial King Sect preparing to participate in the Assembly of Immortal Sects. Yet, Feng Chaoyang had easily defeated them in a one-against-three match.

But Feng Chaoyang didn't look proud of himself.

He should have been pleased that he won against all his opponents... if it weren't for the fact that these opponents were his fellow disciples and this was a sparring session within the sect itself.

Feng Chaoyang's expression became increasingly grave.

Since achieving a breakthrough and becoming a fifth-realm cultivator, his strength had grown at a remarkable pace. The person he was now was incomparable to who he had been before.

The fifth realm was a significant threshold for the Celestial King Sect's Heavenly Star Unusual Art.

Upon reaching the fifth realm, he would not have to cultivate elemental foundational qi. Instead, he could activate the Celestial King's Supreme Body, which equated to possessing the power of the sixth realm, despite being still at the fifth realm.

This was similar to Yang Hong from Inferno Devil Valley, whom Chu Liang had encountered before—an overpowered existence that was considered extremely unfair to the others of the same cultivation realm.

Crossing this threshold resulted in a terrifying increase in strength.

It was likely that Feng Chaoyang had achieved a breakthrough so quickly because Chu Liang provoked him.

"The other day, our esteemed teacher said he would open the General's Supreme Constellation Disc for us," Feng Chaoyang announced. "Then, we can train in the secret realm of the disc. By the time we leave the hidden realm, all of you must be fifth-realm cultivators and have activated the Supreme Body!"

"Ah?" A wave of lament echoed throughout the Celestial King Sect.

"AH? HOW CAN YOU ALL EVEN CRY?" Feng Chaoyang frowned. "I want everyone to remember that from the moment we set foot on the path to the Assembly of Immortal Sects, we have only one goal!

"To seize the championship!"

Chapter 513: The Trial in the Primordial Chaos Hidden Realm

"Roar—"

A dragon's chant echoed through the surroundings, shattering the dense mist between heaven and earth and leaving only swirling dragon breath that filled the area.

Xi Miaoxian, wearing a vibrant dress, stood gracefully at the edge of a peak, truly showcasing her stunning beauty.

However, Yang Yuhu, standing beside her, was not gazing at her. Instead, his attention was focused ahead.

In front of them, an azure-colored True Dragon with shimmering divine light on its scales soared into the sky. Its blazing golden eyes reflected the figures of the group, radiating the majesty of a deity!

This was one of the world's oldest True Dragons, the first to coexist with humans. The Golden Dragon of the Yu Dynasty and the White Dragon of Mount Shu both appeared thousands of years after this Azure Dragon of Penglai, and neither matched its cultivation level.

Thus, it held a supreme status within the Penglai Supreme Sect, and all previous sect leaders treated it with the highest reverence. For ordinary disciples, merely catching a glimpse of the True Dragon was considered a great fortune.

But at that moment, a boy stood on the dragon's neck, rising from the water alongside it.

This scene was enough to shock all the disciples of Penglai.

"Hey, you're here!"

The boy leaped off the dragon's neck and landed gracefully on the ground. He appeared to be around twelve or thirteen years old. He was not very tall and he wore luxurious brocade adorned with gold lines and red patterns. As his eyes sparkled and his mouth broke into a grin, two sharp canine teeth resembling those of a tiger were revealed, giving him an untamed look.

"Mm." Yang Yuhu looked at him and nodded slightly.

As Yang Yuhu and Xi Miao-xian glanced at the boy, they displayed no hint of disdain, treating him as someone of the same seniority.

"Yang Shenlong isn't here?" the boy asked, glancing around and pouting his lips. "How dare he not show up when even Grandpa Azure Dragon has arrived?"

"Senior Brother Yang has been investigating the demon race in the Southern Regions, which may have caused the delay," Xi Miao-xian explained with a smile. "However, he has already sent a message, so he should be here soon."

"Hehe." The boy looked at Xi Miaoxian and suddenly said with a wide grin on his face, "Lady Miaoxian, you've become even more beautiful."

Xi Miaoxian frowned and replied, "Didn't I tell you not to talk nonsense?"

"I'm not talking nonsense. When I grow up, I'm going to marry you!" The boy lifted his chin defiantly. "Let's see who dares to take you from me!"

"First, grow tall enough to reach my shoulders before you say that," Xi Miaoxian replied, shaking her head with a smile.

As they spoke, a sudden sound of something breaking through the air caught their attention. A flying airship, polished like blue stone, slowly descended. The surface of the airship shimmered as it glided through the air, resembling a fish swimming gracefully in water.

Boom—

The airship landed, and a handsome figure jumped off first, followed by five servants of various appearances.

"Big Bro!" Yang Yuhu shouted immediately.

"Senior Brother Yang," Xi Miaoxian nodded in greeting.

"Tsk..." The boy pouted again. "You're never this polite to me."

"Qi Lin'er, I have told you before: if you're not willing to admit defeat, you can challenge me to a duel anytime. If you win, I will grant you the position of head disciple." The figure stepped forward, his first words directed at the boy. "However, according to Penglai's rules, I have the right to punish you if you show any disrespect to me, the head disciple."

The person who had just arrived approached, moving like a whisper in the wind. He appeared indifferent as he glanced at the boy.

The boy, known as Qi Lin'er, who had moments ago seemed unafraid of anything, now shivered involuntarily and, with reluctance, managed to say, "Greetings to the head disciple!"

The person who had landed was none other than the head disciple of the Penglai Supreme Sect, Yang Shenlong.

He stepped forward with the Wuyue Mountain Slaves, standing beneath the Azure Dragon, and respectfully bowed. "Disciple Yang Shenlong was delayed due to an investigation into the movements of the demon race. I seek forgiveness from Guardian Elder Azure Dragon."

"Roar!" The Azure Dragon responded with another thunderous dragon chant.

In an instant, a massive wave crashed onto the shore, enveloping everyone on the peak and sweeping them into the swirling blue waters.

In the blink of an eye, all of them vanished.

...

"The Primordial Chaos Hidden Realm?"

On the Heaven-Reaching Peak of Mount Shu, the atmosphere was just as tense.

Chu Liang, Jiang Yuebai, Xu Ziyang, and Ling Ao stood in front of the hall. Venerable Wen Yuan was present, along with several esteemed teachers and elders, as well as a few young men and women with unfamiliar faces standing side by side.

There had been some controversy regarding the choice of the fourth participant for the Assembly of Immortal Sects, as Ling Ao's cultivation level was relatively low. His previous success in the Mount Shu Summit had been largely due to the advantage of dragon blood, but that advantage would be significantly diminished in a fight against opponents of higher cultivation levels.

Given the significance of the Assembly of Immortal Sects, the Mount Shu Sect had conducted an additional selection process some time ago.

Chu Liang, Jiang Yuebai, and Xu Ziyang were all at the fifth realm of cultivation, making them the only fifth-realm disciples in the Mount Shu Sect. Their right to participate was unquestioned, and the selection process focused solely on choosing the fourth disciple.

Several exceptional young disciples were selected to compete against Ling Ao.

In the end, however, Ling Ao emerged victorious, effortlessly defeating all his opponents.

He initially relied on the advantage of dragon blood, which seemed to have guided him toward a path that suited him. Since then, he had stopped specially cultivating the "Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique" and switched to physical cultivation, practicing a technique known as the "Dragonblood Shadow Wing Technique."

Previously, there were hardly any cultivators in the Mount Shu Sect who were masters of physical cultivation.

The only one who followed this path was the master of Silver Sword Peak. She cultivated in accordance with fate, which meant she adapted to the flow of circumstances, whatever that flow might be. However, she rarely taught her own disciples, so no one expected her to instruct others... At best, she could only offer a few pointers.

Thus, very few disciples of the Mount Shu Sect chose to pursue such a path of cultivation.

However, after his success in the Mount Shu Summit, Ling Ao recognized his potential in this area. He then began practicing physical cultivation techniques on his own, achieving remarkable results with minimal effort. His talent was truly extraordinary.

In this selection process, he defeated the other four competitors at the pinnacle of the fourth realm using his fists and feet. The scene was bloody, but it proved that his status as one of the top four disciples of the Mount Shu Sect was well-earned. He was not just a placeholder.

Even if he was not on the same level as the other three, he could still easily crush anyone outside the top four.

At this moment, Mount Shu had arranged special training for these four.

"These four are the senior brothers and sisters who participated in the last Assembly of Immortal Sects," the Discipline Master introduced. "They secured an impressive twelfth place in the tournament twelve years ago."

The standing young men and women immediately blushed, murmuring softly, "Discipline Master, there's no need for introductions..."

"The Assembly of Immortal Sects is a battleground for all kinds of prodigies. Achieving twelfth place is already no small feat," the Discipline Master said, ignoring their embarrassment. "However, your goal this time is to break into the top ten, so you four must be held at an even higher standard."

"I have invited them back this time to set up some training for you. From now on, they will be your opponents."

Chu Liang and the others looked at the four senior brothers and sisters across from them.

The cultivators on both sides were sizing each other up.

These genius disciples of the previous generation had once represented the Mount Shu Sect in the Assembly of Immortal Sects, and they were far from mediocre. After twelve years of cultivation, they had all reached the pinnacle of the sixth realm.

At this moment, Chu Liang and his group were undeniably at a major disadvantage.

However, none of them displayed any signs of fear.

They had been able to make it this far so they were obviously not cowards.

"It would be difficult for you to defeat them based solely on your current strength," the Discipline Master continued. "Therefore, the rules for this first trial are that you will all enter the sect leader's Primordial Chaos Hidden Realm together..."

Venerable Wen Yuan was the Dao Master of Primordial Chaos.

It was a branch of the Great Dao of Space. Unlike the Great Dao of Distancelessness, which spanned the heavens and earth, Primordial Chaos focused more on chaotic transformations.

During the battle on the day of the Mount Shu Summit, Venerable Wen Yuan had turned the world upside down with a flick of his palm.

"Within the Primordial Chaos Hidden Realm, the space will shift randomly at any moment, and you may encounter new challenges at any time. The four of them will be placed at four random locations throughout the realm and they will be hunting you down. If all four of you are captured, the trial will be considered a failure. However, as long as one of you escapes, the trial will be deemed a success.

"Do you understand?"

Chapter 514: The Mount Shu Sect Will Rise Again!(I)

"It will be very difficult to pass the first trial. Let's see how far they can go, shall we?"

In the vast, quiet hall of the Boundless Palace, a misty screen of light hovered beside Venerable Wen Yuan. Within this screen of light were scenes from the hidden realm.

Typically, those at the seventh realm possessed the ability to comprehend the Great Dao and refine a hidden realm. By the time they reached the eighth realm, they would all have their own hidden realms. The differences between these hidden realms largely depended on the individual Eminent One; some invested considerable effort into designing and constructing their realms, while others took a more relaxed approach.

Venerable Wen Yuan's hidden realm was crafted with great care. At first glance, it appeared massive, and as the disciples entered and spread out, they quickly vanished from sight.

"That's not necessarily the case," Di Nufeng stated confidently. "While students of poor teachers might be weaker, my disciple, along with Yan Zi's and Uncle Sikong's, are definitely not weaklings."

Wang Xuanling: "?"

Out of the four disciples who participated, she specifically selected three, clearly indicating her target.

Wang Xuanling, the grand peak master did not indulge her. He immediately sneered and taunted, "You think you know how to teach? They'd probably only learn how to be a rebel from you."

Di Nufeng's previous attempts to recruit people for a rebellion had become a running joke among the peak masters of Mount Shu, which was why Wang Xuanling mentioned it to mock her.

"Why would you say that?" Di Nufeng responded sarcastically. "I was intending to make you my grandson when the rebellion is a success and I become the ruler!"

"Who would want to be your grandson?" Wang Xuanling snapped.

At that moment, the Alchemy Master tugged at Wang Xuanling's sleeve and advised, "There's no winning an argument with her. Say less and let it go."

"Look at how sensible my crown prince is!" Di Nufeng praised.

Alchemy Master: "?"

"Enough already!" The Discipline Master turned and glared at them, causing an immediate hush among the crowd.

Their eyes were fixed on the screen of light, using their divine sense to track the figures they wished to observe. Although the four disciples had just entered the hidden realm, the situation was already starting to change.

...

The moment Chu Liang stepped into the hidden realm, he felt a momentary daze and found himself in an autumn forest blanketed with withered yellow leaves. The wind whistled past him, unveiling a grim and barren scene.

He extended his divine sense as far as possible, but still couldn't explore the entirety of the forest. With no other options, he decided to move slowly in one direction, careful not to make too much noise or emit a strong aura.

Since he was unaware of the four pursuers' locations, he naturally didn't dare to fly recklessly. After walking for a while, he sensed moisture in the wind and quickened his pace.

At the edge of the forest, he found a coastline, where a rainbow-colored pillar of light shot straight up into the sky from the center of the vast sea.

That pillar of light was likely the exit they were searching for.

However, crossing the vast sea without any protection while being chased would be extremely difficult.

As for crossing the sea, Chu Liang had a feeling that it wouldn't be as easy as it seemed.

After some thought, he gently kicked a stone into the water.

Plop.

The stone plopped into the water, creating a small splash and sending ripples across the surface.

Boom—

In an instant, a giant figure surged out of the water! Its mottled scaly armor sparkled in the light, and its body was as large as a mountain. It looked like an enormous crocodile, yet its four claws were thick and sharp, resembling those of a lion or tiger.

It let out a roar, and a fierce glint shone in its eyes!

"Roar!"

As the giant crocodile emerged, a four-winged flood dragon leaped into the air nearby. Its gray figure ascended for a moment before plunging back into the sea.

"Aooo!"

In the distance, a gigantic tiger-head turtle surfaced, making a splash as it broke through the water's surface.

"Hroooh!"

A single stone sent waves crashing everywhere.

Beneath the calm facade of the water, there existed nothing but terrifying and ferocious creatures!

If he had the strength to fight his way through the sea, he might as well just take down the four disciples from the previous generation.

However...

Chu Liang glanced around. Despite all the commotion he had just created, there was no sign of the pursuers.

...

"Damn, why are two people chasing me?"

With his dragon blood surging, Ling Ao rushed through the towering trees of the forest, darting between the thick underbrush.

He fled recklessly, unafraid of alerting his pursuers, because the pursuers were already chasing him! And there were two!

Ling Ao didn't know why, but as soon as he landed, he found himself face-to-face with a senior brother from the previous generation. The two locked eyes, and Ling Ao's instinctive reaction was not to flee but to engage in a spar with him.

He lunged ahead, but his fist ended up missing the target.

The senior brother from the previous generation was a cultivator at the pinnacle of the sixth realm. There was no way he would let Ling Ao get close so easily.

He used Dimension Compression to widen the gap between them, then, with a quick flick of his hand, summoned ten thousand swords to create a prison that trapped Ling Ao.

The prison made of ten thousand swords was created by activating the Ten Thousand Sword Seal and using the light of the swords to securely trap the target. Even the slightest movement would lead to the target being pierced by countless swords.

But Ling Ao didn't care one bit. As the dragon blood in his body surged, he charged forward without worrying about getting hurt, breaking through the sword prison with sheer force!

This took the senior brother by surprise, causing him to smile slightly.

However, after getting only a few steps away, Ling Ao stumbled upon another disciple from the previous generation. Among the four disciples from that generation, two were men and two were women, and the one standing in front of him was one of the women.

This time, Ling Ao didn't confront her head-on. Instead, he quickly changed direction, but the woman instantly became a blur of afterimages, encircling him with hundreds of shadowy figures.

Gritting his teeth, he swung his fist at one of the afterimages and shattered it. However, as he charged past the afterimages, he suddenly realized that the male disciple behind him had already caught up.

Ling Ao was pursued and surrounded by two disciples from the former generation.

He couldn't help but curse his bad luck. Of all the places to be randomly teleported, how did he end up running into two of them immediately?

Is this fate?

He sprinted with all his might, moving like the wind. Meanwhile, the two behind him were merely trailing along leisurely, showing no urgency and even chatting casually.

"No need to rush, let him run for a bit," the woman said calmly. "If there are other junior brothers or sisters nearby, he might lure them out. We can catch them all at once."

"Hehe, I was thinking the same thing," the man replied with a grin. "But keep an eye on the time. We need to capture him before the Primordial Chaos Hidden Realm changes."

...

Xu Ziyang found himself in a chilling world of ice and snow.

He stood amidst the snow, extending his divine sense to explore the area around him.

Moments later, a shadowy figure descended from the front.

Standing before him was a tall disciple from the previous generation, looking at Xu Ziyang with a strange expression. At this moment, he stared at Xu Ziyang with an odd expression.

"You're not running?" he asked.

"Why should I run?" Xu Ziyang replied calmly, slowly unsheathing his sword. "There are four of you and four of us. If we can each take down one, that should be enough."

"Heh." The senior brother chuckled. "Alright, you're quite bold."

With a swift motion, he drew a bronze longsword, declaring, "But back then, I was even bolder than you!"

Boom—

The sword qi roared like a dragon, crashing violently onto the snowy plain. In that clash of sword qi, it was obvious that Xu Ziyang was at a disadvantage.

Currently, Xu Ziyang had activated two of the elemental foundational qi and was at the second level of the fifth realm. However, this senior brother was at the pinnacle of the sixth realm. Not only had he achieved Completion of the Five Elements, he had also attained the Divine Nine's Profound Transcendent Form.

Upon reaching the Transcendence Realm of the Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique, a unique Divine Nine's Profound Transcendent Form would be unlocked.

The techniques of the Mount Shu Sect were righteous and harmonious, and this Divine Nine's Profound Transcendent Form didn't possess many mystical powers. Instead, it significantly enhanced the three energies—vitality, qi, and spirit—with a particular emphasis on strengthening the foundational qi.

Once a cultivator reached the sixth realm, they could even temporarily enter a state known as the Boundless Sea of Qi, which allowed for effortless use of any divine abilities.

Since Xu Ziyang had not yet reached the sixth realm, he was naturally at a disadvantage in a clash of sword qi.

The powerful rebound from the surging sword qi sent him flying back ten zhang. However, he refused to give up. Instead, he quickly adjusted his strategy.

Taking a step back, he suddenly launched himself forward!

As he soared toward his opponent, his body shifted into the Three-Headed and Six-Armed Form.

He intended to engage in close combat.

His opponent quickly figured out what he was up to but chose to stand his ground. With a swift motion, he formed a seal, and a colorful light enveloped his body in a vajra-like aura. He had also transformed into the Three-Headed and Six-Armed Form!

"Then let's see what you're made of."

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang—

In an instant, they exchanged over a hundred blows, but just after a few clashes, cracks began to appear on Xu Ziyang's fifth-realm Metallic Body!

His opponent's foundational qi strength and the resilience of their Metallic Body were far superior to his.

Clearly, it would be very difficult to win.

In truth, Xu Ziyang had never been confident of winning; he simply didn't believe in running away without putting up a fight. But now, faced with his opponent's overwhelming strength, he realized retreat was his best option.

However, escaping wasn't easy. The senior brother pursued him relentlessly, landing blow after blow, shattering Xu Ziyang's defenses and seemingly intent on completely crippling his combat ability!

Suddenly, Xu Ziyang's six arms moved in unison, and he unleashed three divine abilities at once!

The sight left the former senior brother stunned. While he could also use the Three-Headed and Six-Armed Form, activating different immortal arts with each arm was an incredibly challenging skill—one he hadn't yet mastered.

Swoosh—

Xu Ziyang first activated Dimension Compression to retreat, and a golden mist erupted before him, unleashing thousands of sword rays that shot out to cover his escape.

This technique of using six arms to cast three spells simultaneously created a brief gap between them.

However, the disparity in their strength couldn't be closed by technique alone. His opponent charged through the sword rays with his formidable body, relentless in his pursuit!

As the distance between them diminished once more, a sudden clap of thunder roared overhead!

Boom—

Chapter 515: The Mount Shu Sect Will Rise Again!(II)

When Jiang Yuebai entered the hidden realm, she was surrounded by a beautiful sea of flowers.

The vibrant colors of the flowers bloomed all around her.

Without hesitation, she activated a stealth traversal technique, blending seamlessly into the vibrant sea of flowers that surrounded her.

Before long, a senior sister from the previous generation glided through the air, surveying her surroundings keenly.

She was about to continue on her way when something caught her attention. Suddenly, she turned back, narrowing her eyes at the spot where Jiang Yuebai was hiding, suspicion flashing across her face.

Seeing this, Jiang Yuebai realized that the senior sister had picked up on something unusual. She knew that she could no longer remain hidden in this spot.

While her opponent was still unaware of her exact location, she quickly lifted a large section of the sea of flowers.

With the activation of the Heaven-Raising Sword, she thrust her weapon forward! As she was the weaker one, she knew she had to unleash her most powerful divine technique right from the start!

Even in the face of the sudden attack, the senior sister remained remarkably calm.

Without showing any sign of distress, she raised her hand and pressed forward, conjuring a black hole that effortlessly swallowed the massive, fierce sword light.

However, after deflecting the attack and raising her hand to strike at Jiang Yuebai, the senior sister suddenly realized that Jiang Yuebai was no longer putting up a fight.

With a single swing of her sword light, the senior sister easily severed Jiang Yuebai at the waist.

Swoosh—

In the blink of an eye, Jiang Yuebai's figure shattered into a flurry of falling petals.

Jiang Yuebai had always been a master of illusory techniques, stealth traversal, and transformations. As she navigated through the vibrant sea of flowers, she moved like a shadow, evading her pursuer with grace.

Each time the senior sister lunged to attack, Jiang Yuebai skillfully slipped away, vanishing and reappearing like a whisper in the wind.

If it weren't for the coastal boundary, Jiang Yuebai would have likely escaped by now.

The senior sister shifted her focus, realizing she needed to take things seriously. If she didn't give it her all, this junior sister would continue toying with her.

Just as she spotted Jiang Yuebai again, thunder rumbled ominously overhead. A flicker of frustration crossed her face before she vanished, reappearing a second later in a different location.

"Our locations changed?" Jiang Yuebai muttered.

In the very next second, the senior sister found herself in the center of a snowy, icy landscape.

A somewhat confused young man in fine clothes appeared right in front of her.

...

Chu Liang blinked a few times, staring at the senior sister who had suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

Confusion washed over him as he tried to make sense of the situation.

Just moments ago, he had been contemplating on the ways to reach the center of the coast without being noticed.

Suddenly, a loud rumble echoed in the sky, and he found himself in an entirely unfamiliar location.

And standing about ten zhang away in front of him was a senior sister from the previous generation.

What kind of surprise is this?

Given that he had no knowledge of the senior sister's abilities or strength, he had no intention of engaging in a fight.

Instead, the first thing he did was leap onto his sword and take off into the sky, fleeing without a second thought.

In this vast, icy landscape with no cover, hiding was futile. Instead, he launched a swordlight straight into the distant sky, propelling himself forward.

Only as he ascended did he catch a glimpse of the full expanse of this world.

In this hidden realm, four massive islands stood, each representing one of the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

These islands encircled a central sea, and it appeared that they were periodically shifted to different locations, moving at regular intervals.

The rainbow-colored pillar of light stood as the sole constant in this hidden realm, always radiating from the center of the sea.

Since he was already soaring through the air, he decided to go all out and dash toward the pillar of light! Although it was quite a distance away, with his incredible speed, he knew it would only take him a moment to reach it!

Upon witnessing how incredibly fast Chu Liang could fly on his sword, the senior sister was taken aback. Even when she gave it her all to chase him, she could only keep track of his movements; no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't catch up!

His sword-riding technique was so remarkable that it rendered the difference in their cultivation realms nearly irrelevant.

At this moment, Chu Liang showcased his prowess as the champion of the Flying-Sword Race. With astonishing speed, he shot like lightning toward the center of the sea!

However, as he soared high in the sky, his presence became far too conspicuous. Suddenly, two sword lights shot in from different directions, blocking his path with equal speed!

To make matters worse, someone unleashed a divine technique, summoning a massive wave that surged ahead of Chu Liang, creating an impenetrable barrier!

As expected, his plan wouldn't work.

The sea's surface was far too wide and open.

Flying over it was nothing short of a trap. The moment anyone attempted to cross, they would find themselves surrounded and captured.

If Chu Liang hesitated for even a moment, he would be facing all three opponents at once.

Every possible escape route in the sky had been blocked, and it felt like he was on the edge of being cornered.

In that moment, he suddenly dove downward, his swordlight plunging toward the sea!

"Nooooooooo!" The three disciples from the previous generation shouted in unison.

They thought Chu Liang had no idea what was lurking beneath the sea. If he were captured, it would only mean failure in the trial. But if he fell into the sea, there was a chance that he would die.

Swish—

However, Chu Liang was obviously more clear-headed than they had expected. He glided over the water's surface like a dragonfly, causing ripples while remaining above the surface.

"Roar—"

As expected, a massive dragonfish leaped out of the water! One after another, vicious creatures surged up from the sea, creating a frenzy of churning waves that splashed around them!

The situation on the sea suddenly became very dangerous.

Vicious beasts started leaping out of the water, attacking anything that crossed their line of sight.

In that moment, Chu Liang and the three disciples from the previous generation were all flying in the air, instantly becoming targets of these ferocious creatures.

Boom, boom, boom—

As the vicious beasts surged from the water one after another, the others could only dodge frantically.

In contrast, Chu Liang deftly maneuvered in various directions, making it seem as though he was struggling far less than the other three.

Although his attempt to reach the pillar of light had failed, he successfully made his way back to the icy, snow-covered island.

As they returned to the island, it was clear that the three would not let Chu Liang off the hook easily.

However, the three who followed him immediately noticed something extremely strange.

The young man had vanished.

The three searched the entire island back and forth. The snowy expanse offered no cover; if he had used a stealth technique, there should have been some traces of his aura left behind.

Yet, he was simply gone.

It was odd and perplexing.

"The disciples of this generation have some skills," one of the men remarked. "Earlier, Senior Sister Zhu and I encountered one as soon as we landed and managed to capture him. Aside from that, it seems we've had no success so far."

"Take it slow," the woman said with a frown. "As long as we keep an eye on the exit, we'll eventually track them down."

As the three continued their fruitless search, thunder rumbled in the sky once again.

Rumble—

Chapter 516: The Mount Shu Sect Will Rise Again!(III) [End of Book 5]

In an instant, the scene shifted, and everyone found themselves on islands that were completely different from the ones before.

In the dense forest, a stark white cloak suddenly came into view. Chu Liang quickly flipped over and tucked the White Bear Cloak away.

This item had its limitations in certain environments, but on snowy terrain, it was exceptionally effective—much better than any camouflage technique.

Recalling what he had just overheard, he fell into deep thought.

After pondering for a while, he suddenly lay down on the ground and shouted, "Help!"

The tall male disciple who had also been teleported to this island—the one who had previously fought Xu Ziyang—heard Chu Liang's cries and immediately rushed over.

He saw Chu Liang lying on the ground, shouting, "Senior Brother, the spider silk here is poisonous; be careful!"

"Hm?" The tall man looked at him with indifference. "Don't pretend. This is the sect leader's hidden realm; how could there be poison?"

"I don't know; maybe it's something new this time..." Chu Liang replied, but suddenly his face began to darken, clearly indicating that the poison was taking hold. As his body stiffened, he called out, "Help me..."

This didn't seem fake at all. The male disciple furrowed his brow and flew over, asking, "What kind of poison is this?"

The moment he landed beside Chu Liang, he accidentally got tangled in a strand of spider silk. While he was distracted, a burst of black light suddenly shot out from Chu Liang's hand!

Whoosh—

In an instant, the Demon-Binding Rope wrapped around him tightly! As the enchanted tool activated, crackling electric sparks surged over his body.

With the current toughness of the Demon-Binding Rope, even a sixth-realm cultivator would struggle to break free from it. The only issue with the Demon-Binding Rope was that it wasn't fast enough, which meant that it could only be used during a surprise attack.

"Hmph." The senior brother then realized he had been tricked. He sneered and said, "Do you think you can trap me with this?"

He immediately activated the Metallic Body, attempting to break free from the Demon-Binding Rope.

A sudden surge of black mist rose up, causing his body to stiffen and his qi to slow down considerably.

"It really is poisonous..." he said with a frown.

"It's absolutely real; otherwise, how could I have tricked you, Senior Brother?" Chu Liang said as he struggled to his feet.

He took out a whip and lashed himself a few times, creating loud snapping noises.

With the black mist dissipating, he at last returned to his normal state.

Earlier, he had poisoned himself with spider silk so that he could create a facade that intertwined truth and lies to deceive his senior brother and achieve his goal.

Yet, if this senior brother chose to ignore him, he would be the first disciple to withdraw from the trial of his own accord.

However, if he wanted to defeat a much stronger opponent, he had to gamble on his chances.

"Wanna be whipped too?" he said, glancing at the Senior Brother.

Perhaps the senior brother was feeling somewhat embarrassed as he pouted and looked away.

However, before long, the black mist thickened. The spider silk's poison was potent, and the Lightning Orb on the Demon-Binding Rope continuously weakened his ability to fight back, causing the poison to flow chaotically within his body.

This was all thanks to Wen Yulong's design; otherwise, how could one possibly bring down a sixth-realm cultivator? Chu Liang had no idea how Wen Yulong came up with so many ingenious yet wicked ideas.

"Give me a try," the former disciple said, realizing that the whip had a detoxification effect. He had no choice but to ask to be whipped.

Snap.

A whip cracked down, dispersing part of the black mist.

"Whew." His stiffness eased slightly as he exhaled before saying, "One more time."

"No, that won't do. Wait a moment," Chu Liang shook his head. "I'll whip you again if you behave well."

If all the poison in his body were cleansed, it would be difficult to restrain him with just the Demon-Binding Rope.

Suddenly, thunder rumbled in the sky again, and Chu Liang quickly grabbed his senior brother.

Rumble—

...

When the scene shifted once more, Chu Liang and the senior brother he had captured found themselves together in a sea of flowers.

Without hesitation, Chu Liang seized the prisoner, ascended into the sky, and shouted, "Senior brothers and sisters, please come out for a chat!"

As soon as he appeared, the woman who had been chasing him earlier quickly approached. Seeing the tall man he had captured, she was quite surprised. "Senior Brother Liang?"

The tall man remained silent, quietly turning his head away.

"I had to resort to a little trick, and my senior brother fell for it because of his kind heart. I heard that you also captured one of our junior brothers, so I have a suggestion..." Chu Liang said with a smile, "How about an exchange of captives?"

"Hmmm?" The woman looked at Chu Liang, appearing rather dubious. If they exchanged captives, it would likely benefit their side more.

The disciples from previous generations were more capable and powerful. They could easily capture someone again at any time.

On the other hand, it would be much more difficult for Chu Liang to use the same trick to capture another disciple from that generation.

After giving it some thought, she said, "Of course, the exchange is possible."

"That said, all members of your group must be present during the exchange to prevent any tricks," Chu Liang said.

The woman nodded in agreement. "Then all of you must be present too to prevent anyone from escaping."

"Additionally, from the end of the exchange until the next location change, you are not allowed to attack us." Chu Liang quickly set the rules.

"Deal." The woman nodded and invoked a divine technique, exclaiming loudly, "Everyone! Come over here!"

Chu Liang called out as well, "Senior Brother Xu! Senior Sister Jiang! Gather over here!"

With the sound waves vibrating through the air, three disciples from the previous generation quickly assembled. Another female disciple approached, gripping Ling Ao firmly in mid-air to prevent him from breaking free.

Ling Ao's expression at this moment was similar to that of the man opposite; both of them silently turned their heads away, acting like ostriches.

Meanwhile, Xu Ziyang and Jiang Yuebai also arrived beside Chu Liang.

The woman on the opposite side couldn't help but glance at Chu Liang again. It was easy for her to summon the others over here.

However, under these circumstances, the fact that the other two were willing to respond to Chu Liang's call and gather here demonstrated their deep trust in him.

With the basic rules clearly laid out, the disciples from the previous generation readily agreed to the exchange.

The process was quite simple. Chu Liang would release the Demon-Binding Rope from the man, and the senior sister on the opposite side would naturally release Ling Ao as well.

Then, members from both sides would bow their heads and return to their respective places.

At that instant, the surface of the sea seemed to ripple. A horde of fierce beasts let out another round of roars, drawing everyone's attention upward.

"Huh?" Senior Sister Zhu turned her gaze around, saying, "Something's up!"

Suddenly, everyone focused their attention, yet there wasn't a single figure in the sky. Just as they averted their eyes, another woman cried out, "There's someone in the sea!"

It turned out that there was a figure in the sea, using the water escape technique to move forward at high speed.

At this point, she was halfway across the water. Oddly enough, all the vicious beasts had congregated on the far shore, behaving as if they were insane and ignoring the figure crossing the sea.

She was about to reach the exit!

The figure crossing the sea was none other than Jiang Yuebai!

Yet the Jiang Yuebai standing in front of them was equally real.

"Immortal Art: External Manifestation!"

"Stop them!" Chu Liang shouted as well.

Several disciples from the previous generation immediately wanted to leave and stop Jiang Yuebai in the sea. However, her mastery of the water escape technique was exceptional, making her incredibly fast in the water.

Moreover, with Chu Liang and the others blocking their path, how could they possibly catch up?

Dazzling lights lit up the sky as divine techniques and enchanted tools soared through the air, causing instant chaos. While the disciples of the younger generation were no match for their opponents, their intent was merely to obstruct, which was much simpler to accomplish.

In the blink of an eye, Jiang Yuebai's silhouette appeared under the brilliant light pillar.

Whoosh—

Enshrouded in a seven-colored brilliance, her figure quickly blurred and then vanished from the hidden realm.

...

After leaving the hidden realm, several disciples of the previous generation looked a bit dejected but still quite puzzled.

"You all actually managed to win."

"How did you do it?"

"Don't blame yourselves for losing; he was just too cunning," the Discipline Master interjected with a grin. "Everything was part of his plan, starting with the act of pretending to be poisoned."

The woman with the surname Zhu glanced at Jiang Yuebai, looking as if she had just understood something. She then asked, "Could it be that this junior sister from the Jiang family used her blood to attract all the beasts? The blood of a Transcendent Spirit constitution?"

"That's correct," Jiang Yuebai said with a nod.

The blood of a Transcendent Spirit was an irresistible temptation to demonic beasts, so it was no shock that the ferocious creatures in the sea rushed frantically to one side.

Jiang Yuebai needed to create two additional manifestations of herself: one clone headed to the gathering point, while the second carried a vial of her blood to the shore. Meanwhile, her true self began crossing the sea from the opposite bank, using the water escape technique.

By the time everyone realized, there was simply no way to stop it.

The disciples from the previous generation fell for this because they thought that the vicious beasts in the sea would limit the movements of the younger disciples.

They thought of this limitation as a rule and didn't think that it could possibly be broken.

"How did you execute such seamless coordination?" another woman inquired, looking at Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai. "The plan was perfect, but it required constant communication between the two of you."

Chu Liang smiled faintly. "We share a mental connection."

"We have our own method of sending messages," Jiang Yuebai replied honestly.

"Oh?" another male disciple asked. "Are the disciples of this generation given such items?"

"No," Ling Ao shook his head. "Just the two of them have it."

The disciples from the previous generation responded with a playful, knowing tone, "Oooohh—"

"That's wonderful," the tall man said, looking at them with a sudden, sincere smile. "I feel... there is hope for the Mount Shu Sect."

"Indeed," the woman with the surname Zhu added with a smile. "Mount Shu will rise."

Although the disciples from the previous generation lost in this trial, they were all smiling with genuine warmth.

For reasons unknown, the ambiance seemed to suggest that the legacy of the Mount Shu Sect had been passed down to the next generation.

"The Mount Shu Sect will rise again!"

Chapter 517: A Palace (I) [Start of Book 6]

"There is a saying: 'Tigers and dragons roam about on the Emperor's Mound. Howling winds and rumbling thunder reverberate through Panyang City. Twelve years have since passed. Who will the white horses and Qinghong meet next?'"[1]

Inside the roadside teahouse where the storyteller was speaking, there were many patrons scattered about. Meanwhile, several shouts could be heard coming from outside in the street.

The storyteller, a tall and thin old man in long indigo robes, wore a serious expression as he dropped a block of wood to grab the attention of the patrons.

Clack!

He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, it is once again time for the Assembly of Immortal Sects, and our Panyang City is surging with activity and excitement like a gathering storm. Such a grand event must already be on everyone's mind, so today, I will tell you all about the heroes of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten!

"You may be thinking, 'Isn't everything clearly recorded in The Seven Stars Gazette? Why do we need you to elaborate?' Hah. There is the Divine Nine, the Terrestrial Ten, and the other immortal sects across the four seas. How could a mere gazette record the full exploits of the young heroes from all those sects?

"Did you know that the divine dragon[2] of the Penglai Supreme Sect traveled a thousand li by moonlight not to catch demons and take down monsters but to seek out the true face of an enchantress?

"Did you also know that the fairy of the Mount Shu Sect ventured six times to Jiangnan, braving the nine doors, solving the eight formations, and charging through a sea of swords—all to search for a person?

"How about the tale of a Sword Sect disciple's unrequited love, or the tragic love story between the two monks of the Buddhist Cloud Monastery?"

He spoke with fervor, and the patrons of the teahouse listened with rapt attention. There were even several lines of people surrounding the teahouse, listening in from the outside and buzzing with chatter.

"So, Yang Shenlong actually has a story with a female cultivator of a diabolical sect? I have always thought he was very prim and proper..."

"Is that story about Jiang Yuebai true? I heard she's involved with a fellow disciple of her sect?"

"Isn't that disciple the Young Hero with the Divine Whip? Chu Liang!" someone said.

Hearing that, the people around them got excited.

That person continued, "At the last Grand Capture Ceremony, some evil people caused trouble, but my elderly father was saved thanks to the Young Hero with the Divine Whip! In this Assembly of Immortal Sects, I'm rooting for him to win the championship for the Mount Shu Sect!"

With a better understanding of the situation, the person sitting behind the previous speaker shook their head. "That's difficult, really difficult... Do you not know that the Mount Shu Sect has not placed in the top ten for the last four assemblies? They are almost about to fall out of the Divine Nine.

"This time, their goal is merely to make it into the top ten. As for Chu Liang's rise to fame, it was only due to the Violet and Azure Twin Swords. His cultivation power may be considered first-rate among the immortal sects, but it is far from enough to win the championship."

The Assembly of Immortal Sects did not prohibit the use of enchanted tools, pills, or talismans. After all, being able to use such items effectively was also part of a cultivator's power. However, the use of legendary artifacts ranked in the top hundred of the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures

was prohibited.

In battles among the younger generation, artifacts of that level were too powerful and would eliminate all other factors. If they were allowed, it would ultimately turn into a competition of which sect has the most powerful legendary artifacts. The immortal sects would only focus on getting their disciples to master using higher-level legendary artifacts, losing the original intent of the competition.

Another person else jumped out to refute. "What are you talking about? Violet and Azure Twin Swords? I bet they can't compare to his divine whip. Even before Chu Liang rose to fame, the Mount Shu Sect already had Xu Ziyang and Jiang Yuebai. These three youths are serious contenders. They could make the top ten even if all they take in is a dog."

There was someone who was unconvinced. "Are they really that powerful?"

"Heh, have you not heard about the Young Hero with the Divine Whip? One lash strengthens the body, ten lashes extend life, and if you get whipped for forty-nine consecutive days, you will achieve immortality!"

That comment immediately drew laughter. "Hah, how is that possible?"

Someone else loudly rebutted, "If he could achieve immortality, why would he even bother participating in the Assembly of Immortal Sects? But the rumor that the lashing can restore a man's vitality—well, that one is true."

More people turned around.

"Really?"

"I... I have a friend. Next time I see the Young Hero with the Divine Whip, I'll have to ask him to give my friend a few lashes."

The noisy crowd failed to notice the carriage that was parked outside the teahouse. The driver had gone into the teahouse to have a sip of water earlier, but he was now back in the driver's seat, and the carriage was slowly moving again.

...

Inside the spacious carriage, Chu Liang's eyes were half-closed, pretending to be sound asleep.

Wang Xuanling, the Mount Shu Sect's grand peak master, sat opposite Chu Liang. His expression was as calm as still waters.

Beside Wang Xuanling was his disciple, Xu Ziyang. Sitting tall and straight with a very stable posture, Xu Ziyang wore a similarly tranquil expression, closely resembling his teacher.

And next to Xu Ziyang sat Ling Ao, whose hair was now reduced to a short buzz cut. The hairstyle made him appear taciturn and fierce. It turned out that every time Ling Ao faced defeat, he would cut his hair as a vow to improve himself. That eventually led to his current appearance.

Sitting across from Ling Ao was the elegant Jiang Yuebai, dressed in white. Her silky hair cascaded down her shoulders, and her eyes were bright and limpid like clear waters. She was undeniably captivating.

When the carriage was parked outside the teahouse earlier, they had all heard the crowd's discussions. Nevertheless, no one spoke for a while.

It was only after the carriage had traveled some distance that Ling Ao glanced at Chu Liang.

Breaking the silence, Ling Ao asked, "Is it true?"

Chu Liang, who was pretending to nap, appeared as if he had not heard Ling Ao's question, but his eyebrows twitched slightly.

"Pfft," Jiang Yuebai laughed softly beside Chu Liang.

Xu Ziyang could not restrain himself either and repeated Chu Liang's title with a grin. "The Young Hero with the Divine Whip..."

They had heard about Chu Liang's heroic deeds, but few on Mount Shu knew of the title "The Young Hero with the Divine Whip." After all, Chu Liang would never hang those banners up for others to see. Who knew he had won such great admiration from the people in Yu's capital?

Wang Xuanling's mouth twitched, curving up slightly, but he quickly straightened his lips again.

"Senior Uncle Wang, if you want to laugh, just laugh." Chu Liang covered his face in resignation.
"It must be tiring to hold it in."

"Pfft."

Wang Xuanling, who had always kept a stern expression for many years, finally cracked a rare smile.

"Then I won't hold back either," Ling Ao said with a laugh.

"You've been laughing the whole time... You never stopped," Chu Liang replied helplessly.

Had he known this would happen, he would have lent the Poison-Expulsion Whip to someone else and let them save the people instead. Now, not only would the citizens of the capital of Yu talk about him and that incident for a lifetime, but they had also spun all sorts of outrageous stories.

What a disaster.

When others were mentioned, it was the "divine dragon of the Penglai Supreme Sect" and "the fairy of the Mount Shu Sect." But when it's about me, it's "The Young Hero with the Divine Whip"...

What would people think when they first hear this title?

Chu Liang wanted to explain, but he could only say things like, "This whip isn't that kind of whip," or "It's all rumors." However, saying all that only made the others in the carriage more amused. The carriage was soon filled with a cheerful atmosphere.

It was rare for this group from the Mount Shu Sect to be in such a relaxed mood. They had spent the last two months undergoing rigorous training in the Primordial Chaos Hidden Realm. So, they now displayed demeanors that were a bit different from before. They appeared more composed, tempered, and polished, as well as a tad weary.

The next day marked the beginning of the Assembly of Immortal Sects, but these youths were not anxious. Instead, they spent these last few days having a good rest.

Chapter 518: A Palace (II)

The Assembly of Immortal Sects consisted of three stages: the Great Selection of the Four Seas, the Competition of a Hundred Sects, and the Battle at the Imperial City.

The Great Selection of the Four Seas involved a series of arena battles, in which hundreds of sects across the four seas and nine provinces competed to become one of the eighty-one teams that would proceed to the next stage.

The Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten were akin to seeded players and did not need to participate in the Great Selection. However, teams from the imperial family and from the Imperial Supervisory Bureau had to go through the selection process like everyone else. This showed the high status of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten.

In the second round, the Competition of a Hundred Sects, no privileges would be given to anyone. All representative teams would compete fairly to become one of the top ten teams selected to enter the final round, the Battle for the Imperial City.

The Mount Shu Sect had been eliminated in the second round for the last four consecutive assemblies. Due to their repeated failures to advance to the Battle for the Imperial City, the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect were mockingly referred to as the Gatekeepers of the Imperial City by disciples of the other Divine Nine sects.

Nonetheless, the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect were never resigned to accept this nickname. After all, the gatekeepers of the imperial city were supposed to be standing behind the gates, inside the city...

Chu Liang's team did not have to participate in the first round, but they traveled to the capital of Yu a day early anyway. They intended to use the extra day to familiarize themselves with the environment and observe their future opponents.

At every Assembly of Immortal Sects, there were dark horses who slayed the competition and emerged victorious from the preliminary rounds, advancing onward with impressive performances. So, Chu Liang's team could not afford to be complacent.

They arrived at the gates of the capital of Yu to find people waiting there to receive them. The imperial court had arranged for Chu Liang's group to be transported by carriage to their accommodation at the Emperor's Mound.

...

The Emperor's Mound was the site of a dragon's rising[1] and the place where the founding emperor of the Yu Dynasty had unearthed the Panyang Ancient Jade. It was just an unremarkable-looking hill outside the capital of Yu, but it held major significance to the Yu Dynasty.

The Yu Dynasty's ancestral shrine had been built at the top of the Emperor's Mound. Every spring, the emperor would bring the imperial family and the officials of the imperial court there to hold religious ceremonies. When major events like wars or natural disasters occurred, sacrifices would be made to deities at the temple.

That was why there was a palace that served as a temporary imperial residence halfway up the hill, surrounded by many houses and lodgings. They were for the emperor, his family, and his officials to stay overnight.

The Assembly of Immortal Sects' second round, the Competition of a Hundred Sects, was going to be held on the Emperor's Mound. Of course, the emperor would not allow cultivators to fight near the ancestral temple.

Instead, the disciples of the immortal sects would be battling it out in a hidden realm. The base of the Emperor's Mound would serve as a viewing area, ensuring that the ancestral temple on the mountaintop would remain undisturbed.

This location was chosen for two reasons. The first was that it would be disruptive for such a large number of cultivators to gather in the city. The second was that the imperial court wanted to demonstrate that it held the Assembly of Immortal Sects in high regard.

The imperial court gave the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten special treatment for the event. Their representative teams were allowed to settle in the lodgings halfway up the Emperor's Mound early and rest up before the battle.

Upon arriving at the foot of the Emperor's Mound, the carriage carrying Chu Liang's team went up the hill, following a straight road. The hill was not particularly large, so it didn't take long for the carriage to reach the lodging area.

When Chu Liang's group got off the carriage, they found there was a young palace attendant already waiting to greet them.

However, before the palace attendant could do so, the carriage driver approached the group first.

With an embarrassed smile, he quietly asked Chu Liang, "Young Hero Chu, I found it too embarrassing to ask earlier, but does your divine whip... really have that kind of miraculous effect?"

Seeing the driver's earnest and eager expression, Chu Liang could only advise him realistically, "Elder Brother, you should be seeing a doctor for that."

The driver left in disappointment.

On both sides of the main road were short, simple houses that appeared rather shabby at first glance. These lodgings were, after all, for officials to rest in when they went there for the religious ceremonies at the ancestral temple. That meant they could not be luxurious; they had to be simple and modest to reflect the nature of the business being handled there.

The young palace attendant then continued with his task of leading Chu Liang's group to their lodgings, but first, he took the chance to speak with Chu Liang's group while they were still standing idly on the side of the road.

The young palace attendant greeted them formally. "Greetings, young heroes and Esteemed Cultivator Wang. I am Lao Fangrong. I'm in charge of overseeing this temporary residence. Today, I will guide you to your lodgings. Please follow me."

Chu Liang had been puzzled that such a young palace attendant was wearing such fine clothes. It indicated that his rank was probably quite high. Nevertheless, Chu Liang figured it out straightaway when he heard the young palace attendant's name. The young palace attendant, Lao Fangrong, was likely Warrior Lao's adopted son.

Wang Xuanling nodded. "Thank you, Eunuch Lao."

As always, Wang Xuanling, the grand peak master of the Mount Shu Sect, put on a rather imposing demeanor when in the presence of outsiders. He held his hands behind his back and gazed at Lao

Fangrong with a grave expression. Wang Xuanling naturally exuded the dignified air of an esteemed cultivator.

Lao Fangrong led the group through a street of simple houses.

Then as they walked by a courtyard with a rare pavilion and a fence, someone suddenly called out from inside.

"Miss Jiang—I mean, Young Hero Chu, has your team from Mount Shu arrived too?"

Chu Liang's group turned to see several robust young men standing in the courtyard. One of them was a familiar face—Feng Chaoyang of the Celestial King Sect.

It had been a while since Chu Liang last met him. Feng Chaoyang's eyes were now bright and sharp. He had clearly undergone some intensive training.

As for the three youths beside Feng Chaoyang, Chu Liang did not recognize them, but it did not matter. He had heard early on that the team representing the current generation of the Celestial King Sect's disciples consisted of Feng Chaoyang and his three "accessories."

The first person Feng Chaoyang had looked at was Jiang Yuebai... which was understandable since Jiang Yuebai was the most eye-catching and always the first one that everyone looked at. Feng Chaoyang had been about to call out to her earlier when he noticed Chu Liang standing beside her, so he reluctantly switched to greeting Chu Liang instead.

"Brother Feng, you seem to be in high spirits. It looks like you must have made great progress in your cultivation," Chu Liang replied with a smile.

Feng Chaoyang laughed. "Hehe, I don't know if I can beat you in the assembly, but you've definitely lost in picking a place to stay. This is the only pavilion around here, and we got it first."

Chu Liang laughed too. "You sure beat us to it."

He looked around and found that most of the houses there were indeed simple. They were not much better than his cabin on Mount Shu. The only pavilion was the one that Feng Chaoyang's team had taken.

"The conditions here are indeed quite modest, but it's not that the imperial court doesn't hold the Assembly of Immortal Sects in high regard. The ancestral temple is above on the mountaintop, so the officials do not dare to indulge in extravagance," Lao Fangrong explained. "This particular residence happens to be the residence of the Guardian Ruler[2], which is why it's slightly more refined."

"Cultivators don't place much importance on material things; these are of no consequence," Wang Xuanling commented.

He had been to this place many times, starting from when he participated in the Assembly of Immortal Sects as a youth to when he accompanied the representative teams there as a grand peak master. So, he was unsurprised by the accommodations.

Wang Xuanling pointed to the residence next door. "We'll stay next to the Celestial King Sect's team then."

The Mount Shu Sect had a good relationship with the Celestial King Sect. Seeing as they had already exchanged greetings, Wang Xuanling thought it was best to be neighbors.

Unexpectedly, Lao Fangrong said, "Esteemed Cultivator Wang, I do not wish to stop you. However, the lodging for your team has already been arranged, and it is not here."

"Hm?" Wang Xuanling looked at him in surprise. "Then, where is it?"

Lao Fangrong raised his hand and pointed at the residence at the end of the road.

He answered respectfully, "There."

Everyone turned to look, and astonished expressions appeared on their faces.

The residence in question had green-tiled roofs, white walls, pavilions, and grand architecture—all of which were completely out of place in this modest setting.

It was, unmistakably, an imperial palace.

Chapter 519: The Incident at Jade Dragon Pond

As Feng Chaoyang stared at the grand and imposing palace in the distance, he voiced his genuine confusion. "I don't understand."

The Celestial King Sect had arrived early. After thoroughly inspecting the area, they chose this residence with the pavilion, believing it to be the best lodging available.

And it had indeed been the best available.

But why are there people who can stay in the imperial palace?!

Are you part of the imperial family??

Even members of the imperial family don't just get this kind of treatment whenever they want, right?

Compared to that palace halfway up the hill and above the other lodgings, the residence with the pavilion now seemed like the small buildings by the city gates that the old fellows on night watch stayed in. The joy that the Celestial King Sect's team had felt a moment before was gone now. Normally, cultivators wouldn't care about such things, but nothing was worse than having something better to compare to.

It wasn't just the Celestial King Sect disciples who didn't understand; even the Mount Shu Sect disciples were puzzled. They looked at Lao Fangrong in confusion.

"This isn't in compliance with the rules, is it?" Wang Xuanling frowned. "I've attended the Assembly of Immortal Sects several times and never heard of anyone staying in the imperial palace..."

"It wasn't allowed before, but this time, His Majesty gave an imperial decree," Lao Fangrong explained. He turned to Chu Liang and bowed. "The Imperial Younger Brother is to be accommodated in the temporary imperial residence."

Well, then.

I almost forgot about that.

Chu Liang suddenly remembered that he did have such a title.

It was unsurprising he had forgotten. After all, he always spent his time among immortal sects, where no one cared about the things that the imperial family or court bestowed. The last time the emperor bestowed Chu Liang with something, it had just been a few shops. Chu Liang hadn't even thought much about them.

But now, after arriving in the capital of Yu, he realized that his title as Imperial Younger Brother had its uses.

"This is rather embarrassing," Chu Liang said with an embarrassed smile. He paused before adding, "My elder brother is quite thoughtful."

The group from the Mount Shu Sect made their way to the highest point of the lodgings area and entered the imperial palace.

The Celestial King Sect disciples had watched them enviously. Nevertheless, the teams from the other Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten sects would arrive and soon enough. The Celestial King Sect would regain some sense of superiority then.

The imperial palace on the Emperor's Mound was relatively plain and modest—well, that was compared to the grand palace halls of the imperial city. In comparison to the surrounding residences, the palace was richly ornamented, but it was not flamboyantly luxurious. The courtyard of the temporary imperial residence featured rockery and flowing streams in a very serene and elegant garden.

After escorting the group from the Mount Shu Sect to the palace, Lao Fangrong and the several palace attendants accompanying him left. The palace attendants usually served the emperor in the temporary imperial residence, but they left to avoid disturbing the Mount Shu Sect disciples' cultivation.

The group from the Mount Shu Sect didn't object to that. In fact, they would have felt uncomfortable if the eunuchs and palace maids were constantly attending to them.

Soon after they settled in, a visitor dropped by the palace.

"My goodness, this... You're actually staying in this imperial palace? What a great honor for you!" the visitor exclaimed in surprise as he entered the palace.

Wang Xuanling and the four Mount Shu Sect disciples received the visitor in the main hall.

Wang Xuanling said, "Junior Brother Chen, it's been a long time."

The visitor was Chen Xuanlu. He was the sect leader of the Profound Mind Sect, which was located just outside the capital of Yu. Chen Xuanlu used to be a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, two generations after Wang Xuanling. That was why Wang Xuanling called Chen Xuanlu "Junior Brother."

Chen Xuanlu replied, "Senior Brother Wang, another twelve years have passed in the blink of an eye."

He was wearing a Daoist robe with cloud patterns and had his hair tied and pinned high on his head. He had a pure and gentle appearance, giving him a rather ethereal and otherworldly presence.

There were three youths behind him—two male disciples and one female disciple. All three of them seemed quite young.

The two groups arranged their tables in the hall so they were across from the other group. Then they sat down on the floor, facing each other.[1]

"The youths of our dear old Mount Shu Sect's current generation of disciples are truly quite good," Chen Xuanlu praised, looking at the disciples with a smile. "I was quite worried for a while, wondering what the sect would do if the current generation of disciples failed to produce good results too. But later on, I kept hearing news about our dear old Mount Shu Sect's current generation. I gradually felt reassured."

Wang Xuanling glanced at the youths behind Chen and remarked insincerely, "The youths from your sect are great too."

"Hehe," Chen Xuanlu chuckled. "These mischievous disciples—I'm letting them participate in the Assembly of Immortal Sects, but I'm not hoping for them to achieve great results. I just wanted them to experience it."

...

Disciples of the large immortal sects ranked in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten often left their sect to explore the martial world and eventually ended up establishing their own sects.

If someone were to tally them up, the sect with the highest number of branch sects would be the Mount Shu Sect. After all, it had reigned as the top immortal sect for thousands of years in the past, so it was natural that it would produce many offshoots.

However, these smaller sects often only lasted a few generations before dying out. Even if they could persist for hundreds or thousands of years, their ties to the main sect would weaken, and they would gradually become independent entities.

That was why the sect leaders of the branch sects typically had the closest ties with members of the main sect that were from a generation or two before them, like Chen Xuanlu and Wang Xuanling.

Before each Assembly of Immortal Sects, Chen Xuanlu would bring the disciples of his sect to greet the representative team from the Mount Shu Sect, allowing them to get to know each other. Generally, every small sect that branched off from a main sect would do this. It was so that if their teams encountered each other during the rounds of the assembly, they could look out for one another.

In other words, this was a routine courtesy visit.

The Profound Mind Sect and the many other small sects located just outside the capital of Yu were not sects with long-established cultivation legacies to pass down. Nevertheless, it did not matter, as these small sects mainly catered to the offspring of officials and wealthy families who did not have much potential for cultivation.

These youths often lacked the talent to enter the major immortal sects and could not use connections to gain entry into sects like the Ascending Dragon Academy or the Nation Guard Monastery Tower because they had strong ties to the imperial court. So, if their elders wanted them to cultivate, they had no choice but to find a small sect near the capital of Yu. If they learned basic cultivation arts and divine skills, that would be enough for them to be considered as having become a cultivator.

They weren't aiming for high achievements; they just wanted to strengthen their bodies and prolong their lives. Therefore, neither the disciples nor their teachers took their cultivation journeys seriously.

Naturally, the typical cultivator wouldn't want to waste time teaching disciples with little talent, but anything could be negotiated as long as they paid enough.

Nevertheless, if Chen Xuanlu encountered a particularly talented youth, he would not teach them. He would recommend them to join the Mount Shu Sect instead.

There were many cultivators like Chen Xuanlu that had hit a bottleneck in their cultivation at the pinnacle of the sixth realm. It was too difficult for them to break through to the Heavenly Gate. Even if they continued to cultivate arduously into their final years, there was no guarantee they would make a breakthrough to the next realm. They figured it was better to take in some disciples and earn some money, enjoying the remainder of their lives. They had come to terms with their situation.

Being a cultivator was a very costly expense for aristocratic disciples; it was what they spent most of their money on. They needed to pay a substantial sum just to join one of the small sects. Then they still had to buy cultivation arts manuals and cultivation resources, but the ones the sects sold were more expensive than those being sold outside. In fact, the four disciples that each of these small sects had selected to participate in the Assembly of Immortal Sects might not necessarily be the best of their generation; their families might have simply given their teachers the most money.

Of course, there were sects that were willing to foster disciples without payment, but if the youths did not have enough talent for cultivation, they would not get accepted. Consequently, youths like that could only join these small profit-focused sects.

Wang Xuanling advised Chen Xuanlu, "You can't be too harsh on your disciples. With the Assembly of Immortal Sects soon to begin, it's important to give them some confidence."

"Oh, I don't always criticize them. My disciples are reasonably talented. They're just not very disciplined and instead quite playful," Chen Xuanlu replied with a laugh. "You see, I told them early on that we would be visiting you today, but when I went to gather them earlier, one of them was missing. Who knows where that one has gone off to play this time."

The female disciple from the Profound Mind Sect quietly defended the disciple in question. "Maybe Little Liu left because something happened at home..."

Chen Xuanlu shot her a glare, and she quickly lowered her head.

Wang Xuanling nodded in understanding. "This year's Assembly of Immortal Sects is different from the previous ones. It may get chaotic in the capital of Yu, so it's important to warn your disciples to be cautious."

The Mount Shu Sect had already informed the Imperial Supervisory Bureau about the information Chu Liang had acquired—the diabolical sects of the West Sea might take this opportunity to stir up trouble. However, it was decided that they would keep this information a secret for now to avoid alerting the enemy that they were aware. It was unclear what exactly the Diabolical Forces intended to do, so Wang Xuanling could only give a warning to Chen Xuanlu.

"That's true." Chen Xuanlu nodded in agreement. "The Assembly of Immortal Sects hasn't even begun, but strange occurrences have been happening frequently in the capital of Yu these past few days."

"Oh? What sort of strange occurrences?"

Chen Xuanlu glanced around and then lowered his voice. "Let me tell you about something I personally encountered—something quite bizarre."

...

Chen Xuanlu slowly began telling them what had happened.

"At the foot of the mountain where my sect is located, there's a small lake called Jade Dragon Pond."

Jade Dragon Pond had gotten its name because of its crystal-clear, blue-green[2] waters and its winding banks that made the pond resemble a coiled dragon. The name sounded grand, but the pond was actually quite small, much like how the Emperor's Mound was not even close to being the biggest of hills. Compared to truly great lakes, Jade Dragon Pond was just a small puddle.

"One day, the nearby villagers came to me and said that blood had been gushing to the surface of the Jade Dragon Pond for several days. They asked for my help to investigate."

Since Chen Xuanlu had founded a sect in the populous area outside the capital of Yu, he often had to interact with the local villagers.

The Jade Dragon Pond was a common resource for the neighboring villagers, so when blood kept surfacing in the pond, it had frightened many of the villagers. Seeing as there were cultivators living nearby, they didn't bother going into the city to ask for help from the Imperial Supervisory Bureau. Instead, they went straight to the Profound Mind Sect.

Chen Xuanlu didn't refuse their request for help and promptly agreed to investigate the pond.

"I activated a seal and entered the water, quickly descending to the depths. I found that there was indeed a lot of blood in the water. I followed the trail of blood and discovered it was pouring out from an underwater cave. And when I went inside the cave, I found a coffin! Unending streams of blood were gushing out from the cracks in the coffin. It was so strange.

"I thought it was the work of some ghosts, so I brought the coffin to the surface. Once it was exposed to sunlight, the blood stopped flowing out.

"With the gathered villagers serving as witnesses, I opened the coffin. Inside it was the corpse of a woman, lifelike and intact as if she were still alive. I couldn't tell when or how she had come to rest there, but she had a very serene expression as though she was merely asleep."

At this point, his expression grew tense. He seemed to be recalling something that still troubled him.

"That alone was strange enough. But one of my disciples had once attended a banquet in the imperial palace with his family, and as soon as he saw the corpse, he recognized her...

"She looked exactly like Empress Wu!"

Chapter 520: I Have

"Empress Wu?" Everyone in the hall gasped in disbelief at the mention of her name.

Empress Wu, the first wife of the current emperor, had been the crown prince's consort when she was young, ascending to her role as Empress as the crown prince rose to power. How could she suddenly be found in a coffin at the bottom of Jade Dragon Pond?

Even if Empress Wu had really died, her passing would not have gone unnoticed.

"Of course, the Empress is fine; otherwise, there would have been news. I'm just baffled by how this corpse could look so much like her. I have already informed the Imperial Supervisory Bureau," Chen Xuanlu assured.

Having spent many years working outside the capital of Yu, Chen Xuanlu was an experienced cultivator well-acquainted with the court's inner workings. He knew how things worked—until the palace officially declared Empress Wu dead, the identity of the body didn't matter. Even if the body turned out to be Empress Wu, it would still be considered a fake. There was no need for him to make any judgments.

"Not long after, the Imperial Supervisory Bureau sent people to retrieve both the coffin and the body. I thought that would settle everything," Chen Xuanlu continued. "However, I later learned that before anyone from the palace could examine it, a strange fire broke out at the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, turning the coffin and the body into mere ashes."

The Mount Shu Sect team stood in stunned silence, grappling with the implications of what they had just heard.

Though the sects in the Divine Nine seemed otherworldly, they were not without their share of open confrontations, mind games, and hidden schemes. Most of their conflicts centered around the pursuit of the Great Dao. However, in Yu's capital, the intricacies of human nature and court politics revealed a level of intrigue that was entirely beyond their understanding.

"I was advised by the people from the Imperial Supervisory Bureau to stay silent about this matter, and I obeyed," Chen Xuanlu continued. "However, the following day, the villagers living near Jade Dragon Pond began to report strange dreams..."

"In their dreams, a woman appeared, soaked from head to toe, wailing, 'Return my life!'

"Three days have passed. And now, even the people in the capital started getting this strange dream. Countless individuals have reported having the same dream. We, the members of the Profound Mind Sect, were not the only ones who knew about the coffin being retrieved from the Jade Dragon Pond. Many villagers saw it as well, so the news started spreading like wildfire..."

"Word is spreading rapidly throughout the capital, with people claiming that the Empress in the palace is an imposter and that the real Empress drowned long ago."

"I regret pulling that coffin out of the water," Chen Xuanlu lamented with a regretful expression. "I've created quite a mess, and who knows what kind of trouble awaits us now?"

The Profound Mind Sect gained sudden fame in the capital of Yu due to this incident, but as they said, fame was not always a blessing.

In light of the current tensions between the emperor's concubines, this bizarre case became particularly intriguing.

In their younger days, the emperor and the empress were truly in love. In fact, the emperor was not even willing to take concubines. However, due to his duties as emperor, he eventually did so and expanded his court of women.

A downside to being a cultivator was that the higher the cultivation level, the harder it became to conceive children.

Perhaps this was a limitation imposed by the Heavenly Law, for if a powerful cultivator lived for several centuries, they could have fathered thousands of children if they so wished.

The children of such powerful cultivators were often born with extraordinary spiritual natures. If these cultivators had been allowed to have as many children as they wanted, the world's spiritual energy could have been depleted in just a few generations.

The emperors of the Yu Dynasty were all at least at the seventh realm, making it incredibly challenging for them to produce heirs. Historically, they often took multiple concubines, and sometimes they only felt compelled to try for more children out of a sense of duty.

The current emperor made great efforts to have children, but he could only manage to have ten, and of those ten, only three had the Divine Fire Spirit constitution.

Some emperors in past generations were less diligent, resulting in only one or two children.

Despite having many concubines, the emperor remained loyal to Empress Wu, a story of love that was once celebrated in their early years.

Three years ago, a woman named Gong Yu'er entered the palace and somehow won the emperor's affection, quickly being granted the title of Noble Consort. Since that time, all his attention has been on her, resulting in Empress Wu being neglected.

This was understandable. Empress Wu was in her fifties or sixties, and despite her efforts to maintain her beauty, she couldn't compete with a younger, more attractive woman. Nevertheless, her noble lineage, popularity among the people, and status as the mother of the Second Prince kept her position secure.

What really ruined Empress Wu's image was the rumor that she secretly consumed Eternal Youth Pills.

The Eternal Youth Pill was a diabolical pill that could only be crafted through the sacrifice of human lives. Although it had been banned, the refinement of these pills never truly stopped as this pill was known to be the best beauty-preserving pill in the world. There had always been rumors of noblewomen in the capital using this pill, but there was never any concrete proof.

No one knew how the rumor began, but it spread rapidly, infuriating the common people and completely ruining the virtuous reputation she had worked so hard to build over the years. Although the palace quickly released a statement to defend her, many remained skeptical.

After all, the idea of one of those concubines taking diabolical pills to preserve her youth in the competition for the emperor's affection seemed highly plausible.

In the years that followed, many people began to secretly refer to Empress Wu as the Demon Empress.

Then came the incident with the Roupu Kingdom. Great General Wu Anmin had aimed to boost his reputation through military accomplishments, but the captives he brought from the Roupu Kingdom into the palace caused chaos.

It was later revealed that the ritual bone teeth from the Roupu Kingdom had been tampered with. Regardless, Wu Anmin, as the person in charge, was held accountable for failing to notice this. He was demoted and stripped of his military power, leading to a significant decline in his influence.

A wave of criticism swept through the capital, with many blaming Wu Anmin for the poison that infiltrated the palace. They argued that even if it was unintentional, such a chaotic disaster would

not have occurred if he hadn't been so eager to arrange a Grand Capture Ceremony and earn more military achievements.

In reality, the Grand Capture Ceremony had been decided by the court long before the expedition, with the emperor himself approving it. Wu Anmin, however, couldn't blame either the court or the emperor, so he had to bear the weight of the public's accusations in silence.

As a result, the Wu family's reputation became even worse.

In light of this recent event, rumors spread rapidly throughout the capital. Many believed that the virtuous Empress Wu from back in the days had been murdered and replaced by an evil demon, which would explain she had been involved in these strange events time and time again.

...

Upon listening to Chen Xuanlu's story, the Mount Shu Sect team recognized that this issue was anything but simple. Fortunately, the political games in the capital of Yu had nothing to do with them.

They were only here to participate in the Assembly of Immortal Sects, and as for the rest of these strange events, they treated them as nothing more than interesting stories.

As they chatted, a young man entered from outside and stopped at the doorway, saying, "Esteemed Teacher, I am sorry for arriving late."

Everyone present was a cultivator and could easily sense the weakness in his voice and the instability of his energy.

"What happened to you?" Chen Xuanlu asked with a frown. "Come in and tell us."

Only then did the disciple enter the hall.

Wearing a brocade robe and a jade belt, he exuded a heroic charm with his high-arched brows and bright eyes. He was a rather handsome young man.

However, he reeked of perfume and alcohol. In addition, his pale face and the fading light in his eyes suggested that he had suffered considerable injuries.

This was likely the fourth member of the Profound Mind Sect, the disciple named Liu Yunzheng, who had not been present earlier.

"I got into an argument earlier that led to some minor injuries..." he confessed, his head hanging low as he took a seat.

"Minor injuries?" Chen Xuanlu's eyes blazed with anger. He clutched Liu Yunzheng's shoulder and infused his energy throughout Liu Yunzheng's entire body.

Immediately, Chen Xuanlu's face turned even grimmer as he scolded, "Most of your meridians are damaged! And you call this 'minor' injuries? What on earth happened?"

Liu Yunzheng couldn't bring himself to meet Chen Xuanlu's gaze, turning away instead. After he had been questioned and pressured, he confessed, "I left early today, thinking I'd join you later, so... I went to the Hundred Flowers Pavilion first..."

"Hmph," Chen Xuanlu snorted coldly.

"I didn't expect to encounter a child around eleven or twelve years old causing a ruckus in the Hundred Flowers Pavilion. I tried to stop him... and, well, he beat me up..."

Liu Yunzheng stammered, clearly embarrassed. After Chen Xuanlu scolded him and pressed for more details, he finally told the full story.

Liu Yunzheng had a special someone at the Hundred Flowers Pavilion, a woman named Yunshang. Despite her tragic past filled with hardships, she maintained her purity and virtue.

Liu Yunzheng would frequently seek her company.

Knowing that he would meet up with the Mount Shu Sect team later, he set out early. When he realized he had some time to spare, he figured he would visit Yunshang and enjoy a moment with her.

Unexpectedly, he saw a young boy storm into the Hundred Flowers Pavilion, loudly announcing that he would reserve the whole place for himself and make all the women his wives.

The boy appeared to be around ten years old and was quite short, so everyone just took what he said as a joke.

Liu Yunzheng walked over to toss the boy out of the Hundred Flowers Pavilion, but to his surprise, when he attempted to grab the boy, he realized he couldn't move the boy at all. In a swift moment, the boy's palm came flying back at him, knocking him into the street.

With severe injuries, he had no choice but to leave in a mortified state.

He stammered and struggled to finish his story as he felt utterly embarrassed about being injured by a child in a fight at the brothel.

"A child?" Chen Xuanlu said with a grave expression. "What sort of child could wield such immense power? If you had been less fortunate, that palm strike might have killed you! It has to be a master pretending to be a kid."

"He said..." Liu Yunzheng explained, "His name is Qi Lin'er. If you want to take revenge on him for my sake, go ahead and look for him."

"No wonder!" As soon as they heard the name, the members of the Mount Shu Sect quickly put the pieces together.

All teams sent by the sects from the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten to participate in the Assembly of Immortal Sects were extensively studied by everyone.

In the team sent by Penglai, there were Yang Shenlong, Yang Yuhu, Xi Miaoqian, as well as a mysterious new participant named Qi Lin'er. The addition of the mysterious Qi Lin'er took many by surprise.

After conducting some research, only a handful of details regarding his background came to light.

Twelve years ago, it was reported that Daoist Cangsheng ventured into the Divine Ruins and returned with a multicolored stone. When the stone was cracked open, a baby was discovered inside. Recognizing the child's special nature, Daoist Cangsheng brought him back to Penglai, where he was trained alongside the Azure Dragon.

Of course, this was the official version provided by Penglai.

Other sects of immortality cultivation remained skeptical, with many speculating that the child was merely an illegitimate son of Daoist Cangsheng, who had to fulfill his lustful desires at an old age.

In simple terms, they believed that Daoist Cangsheng secretly had a child with someone and brought him back to be raised on the islands of Penglai.

"So he's from Penglai, huh?" Chen Xuanlu grumbled, feeling even angrier.

"If it had been a small sect, he might have sought justice for his disciple. But since it was a powerful sect like Penglai, he had to swallow his grievances and stay silent."

It was common for young people to be hot-headed, and conflicts like these were frequent at the Assembly of Immortal Sects. It wasn't all that unusual.

Liu Yunzheng, seeing the anger on his teacher's face, quickly said, "Don't worry, I'll heal up fast and make sure that my injuries will not affect my match tomorrow."

"That's easy for you to say," Chen Xuanlu replied with a grim expression. "While your external injuries aren't severe, your meridians are heavily damaged. You won't be able to circulate your energy, let alone fight. Without a spirit medicine, it will take at least three months for you to recover."

"Ah?" Liu Yunzheng was shocked.

If this affected the competition happening tomorrow, the consequences would be dire. After all, everyone would only get one chance to participate in the Assembly of Immortal Sects in their lifetime. If he lost his chance because of this...

But the spirit medicine Chen Xuanlu mentioned was certainly made from rare treasures of nature, making it incredibly expensive.

Liu Yunzheng's family had already spent a considerable amount to ensure he could take part in the Assembly of Immortal Sects, and affording such a medicine would be an unbearable financial burden, even for a family of officials.

Chen Xuanlu was well aware of this. During the Assembly of Immortal Sects, the costs of spirit medicine skyrocketed. If the prices weren't so outrageous, he would have gladly covered the expense himself to ensure his sect's success.

Just as Liu Yunzheng gritted his teeth in frustration, a hand unexpectedly reached out from the side, revealing a jade box.

A voice then sounded.

"I have it."