

## M. Slaying 581

Chapter 581: Nothing but a Source of Noise

When Chu Liang arrived at the South Melody Conservatory, he found it completely empty. Just as he was about to leave, a figure quietly emerged from the shadows—it was Shen Qingyan.

While her expression conveyed wariness, she relaxed the moment she saw that it was Chu Liang.

"Miss Shen, what's going on?" Chu Liang asked curiously. "Why are you the only one here?"

"The South Melody Conservatory rarely has the chance to participate in the Battle at the Imperial City, so they all went out to feast and celebrate," Shen Qingyan replied.

She invited Chu Liang to take a seat, and they spoke face-to-face.

"Why didn't you join them?" Chu Liang inquired, then added, "From your expression earlier, it seemed like you were wary of something."

"Haaaaaaa," Shen Qingyan sighed softly.

After a brief pause, she replied, "I guess it doesn't matter if I tell you. After all, you are the one who told me about my origin."

As she explained, Chu Liang realized that she had been filled with doubts ever since she obtained the jade pendant engraved with the character "Shen" and learned of her origin. Eventually, she questioned her esteemed teacher.

It was then that the Master of the South Melody Conservatory revealed the truth—Shen Qingyan was indeed a descendant of the Shen Family.

The ancestor of the Shen Family was a high-ranking official during the previous dynasty. When the dynasty was on the verge of collapse, they prepared a contingency plan by collecting treasures from the state treasury into one hoard, with the intention of using them to restore the empire someday.

Eventually, as the chancellor of the previous dynasty fled south with the young emperor, fully aware that they would be pursued, he entrusted the treasure to an ancestor of the Shen Family. Only he knew its whereabouts and the method to access it.

The Shen Family eventually settled in Shaonan Town, hiding their identities and passing down their legacy for centuries. As the years went by, the existence of the treasure became forgotten.

Everything changed when certain events took place, and someone reported the Shen Family's secret to the imperial court.

The officials of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau did not go there to confiscate a precious bottle containing a wish-fulfilling spirit; they were there to investigate the ancient treasure. This ultimately led to the massacre of the Shen Family, with the master of the South Melody Conservatory taking away the surviving infant as she passed by.

Had this matter not been associated with the previous dynasty, how else could a mysterious case from a small town have garnered the attention of the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner?

At that moment, the master of the South Melody Conservatory struck a deal with the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, ensuring that nothing about the child's past would be revealed, treating her as an innocent infant. Thus, the matter of the Shen Family was buried in the dust of history.

Who would have thought that after only a little over ten years, the seal would be broken, bringing those old events to light once more?

While Shen Qingyan knew nothing of the Shen Family's legacy or the treasure from the previous dynasty, once her identity was revealed, it would inevitably draw the attention of scheming individuals. Thus, the master of the South Melody Conservatory had always kept the truth from her for her own protection.

Now, Shen Qingyan believed that there must be others, apart from the master of the South Melody Conservatory and the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, who were aware of her background.

"Last time, the person who appeared out of nowhere and took the jade pendant clearly had a cultivation level well above ours, yet he simply fled without making a counterattack. I believe that person hiding in the shadows has been keeping an eye on me the entire time," Shen Qingyan explained.

Chu Liang agreed with her on this.

The black-clad figure who suddenly appeared last time was clearly at the sixth realm of cultivation, perhaps even at the peak of the sixth realm. If he had fought back even slightly, it would have been impossible for Shen Qingyan to injure him. Yet, he chose to endure attacks and simply fled.

It was indeed strange.

If his goal was solely the jade pendant, it made little sense. Chu Liang and Shen Qingyan had met by chance that night; no one could have predicted he would give her the pendant then.

It could only be called a coincidence.

So, what was all of this for?

It was quite perplexing.

Now, considering Shen Qingyan's origin, Chu Liang suddenly speculated that someone might have long known her identity and was keeping watch to find clues related to the treasure.

But if they knew her well, they would also know she had no knowledge of her own origins.

In any case, it was very strange.

"For a long time, I'd sensed something was amiss, like I was being observed whenever I went out." Shen Qingyan frowned. "Yet, I hadn't been able to find any evidence.

"But when that person stole the jade pendant, that affirmed my suspicions."

The feeling of being tracked and watched by a highly stealthy individual must have been unsettling.

Fortunately, Shen Qingyan was not a weak woman without any background. She possessed a strong cultivation level and had the support of her sect and esteemed teacher. In addition to the cultivators

at the South Melody Conservatory, many others throughout the world would be eager to assist if the South Melody Conservatory reached out for help.

No one would dare to take action against her lightly.

"I have an idea," Chu Liang said as he contemplated. "So far, the only individuals aware of your origins are your esteemed teacher and the officials of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, neither of whom would have a reason to track you. If there's a third party involved, it could be the one who reported the Shen Family to the bureau. That thief must have known about the Shen Family and your origins. That person is likely still alive..."

"Ah." A sudden realization flashed in Shen Qingyan's eyes as she quickly exclaimed, "Yes! If this person is still alive, they must know everything... But who could it be?"

"The Imperial Supervisory Bureau should have documentation of this case. Miss Shen, you can look into it later," Chu Liang said.

Given his connection with the Imperial Supervisory Bureau, it wouldn't be difficult for him to inquire, but since this was someone else's affair, it would be inappropriate for him to dig too deeply.

The main reason for his visit was to seek help from the South Melody Conservatory.

After listening to Chu Liang's analysis, Shen Qingyan asked, "Young Hero Chu, what brings you to us?"

It was at that moment that Chu Liang shared why he had come.

"I'd like to request assistance for our cultivation."

...

The disciples of the Mount Shu Sect were somewhat surprised when Chu Liang came back with four ladies from the South Melody Conservatory.

They assumed he would simply ask Xue Lingxue for another performance of "Morale-Boosting Melody: The Rise of the Azure Waves," but instead, he returned with a whole ensemble. One might not even see such a lineup during a South Melody Conservatory tour.

In reality, Chu Liang hadn't intended for it to be so extravagant; he simply wanted Miss Xue to perform a single piece.

Upon hearing his request, Shen Qingyan quickly agreed, saying that she would join in as well, along with Miss Xue.

When the other ladies returned from their celebrations and learned of Chu Liang's request, they all eagerly volunteered.

Xue Lingxue and Yu Xiang'er, old acquaintances of Chu Liang, were more than willing to join.

While Tie Chui hadn't known him before, she had fought alongside him in the illusory realm. She struck her chest proudly and proclaimed, "Good sisters are loyal to one another! If Young Hero Chu needs help, I'll be the first to step forward!"

They truly embodied the bold spirit of the martial world.

Their act of loyalty had little to do with past friendships. Unless that rival had helped them advance, even the closest friends wouldn't come to the aid of a rival with the Battle at the Imperial City happening soon.

Looking back at the later stages of the Competition of a Hundred Sects, it was clear that if Shen Qingyan had not chosen to ask the question and join Chu Liang's alliance, the South Melody Conservatory would not have had the opportunity to advance to the round of the Battle at the Imperial City.

Since that's the case, they naturally wouldn't fuss over these things with the members of the Mount Shu Sect.

With their guqin, drum, flute, and pipe, the ladies immediately positioned themselves and started playing the uplifting "Morale-Boosting Melody: The Rise of the Azure Waves."

With a sweep of his large sleeve, Wang Xuanling set up a restriction, ensuring that the sounds and sights within would remain contained, thereby preventing the other immortal sects from learning about it.

Chu Liang, Jiang Yuebai, and Xu Ziyang sat cross-legged in the back courtyard, immersing themselves in their cultivation. Their Sea of Qi swelled more vigorously than before, and as their qi circulated through their meridians, it reached a boiling point.

Boom—

The ensemble's performance of "Morale-Boosting Melody: The Rise of the Azure Waves" had a far greater effect than when Xue Lingxue played alone. Shortly thereafter, the circulation of qi reached its peak, and smokes of five colors began to swirl out.

Ling Ao sat at the entrance of the main hall, vigilantly watching for anyone passing by. He had never attained Perfect Qi Circulation before, and as a physical cultivator, he would not benefit from it. Thus, he assumed the role of a guard to ensure no one intruded on their cultivation.

As the saying went, people experience joy and sorrow in their own ways. To him, the lovely melody was nothing but a source of noise.

#### Chapter 582: Nine Suns

The next day, when Immortal Jiuyi returned to the palace where the Mount Shu Sect team was staying, he was greeted by an astonishing sight.

He saw three figures sitting calmly, with smoke from the Transformation of Five Qi into Essence Phenomenon filling the sky.

Without Wang Xuanling's restriction barrier, the smoke would have drifted across the capital of Yu, making it visible to everyone.

For someone like Immortal Jiuyi, the occurrence of Perfect Qi Circulation was certainly not unusual. His rise to the position of sect leader meant he was regarded as a prodigy among his peers, someone at the peak of cultivation.

However, while it was impressive for one or two prodigies in a sect to achieve Perfect Qi Circulation, having three attain it at the same time was truly remarkable.

If it hadn't been for the "street loafer" squatting in front of the entrance, Immortal Jiuyi might have suspected that the Mount Shu Sect had discovered some extraordinary method that even allowed dogs to achieve Perfect Qi Circulation. In that case, he would have gone straight to question Venerable Wen Yuan.

In fact, after Jiang Yuebai's lecture, they had come up with a few "tricks" to slightly lower the threshold for achieving Perfect Qi Circulation. However, it hadn't reached such an absurdly low level yet.

"Three disciples achieving Perfect Qi Circulation. This generation of the Mount Shu Sect is truly filled with talented figures," Immortal Jiuyi said with a smile, keeping his surprise in check so as not to appear as if he had never seen such a scene before.

Wang Xuanling responded with a smile, "It's all thanks to the disciples' diligence. Perhaps it's Heaven rewarding hard work."

Upon hearing this, Immortal Jiuyi thought to himself, Does this mean the disciples of Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals don't work hard?

After a moment of reflection, he reluctantly admitted that it might actually be true.

The head disciple, the current generation's eldest senior brother, was known for napping all day, which didn't do much to foster good habits within the current generation of disciples.

Even Li Guanlong cultivated in his dreams, and his junior brothers all followed suit.

Seeing the Mount Shu Sect disciples' dedication, Immortal Jiuyi decided to give his sect's disciples a stern scolding when he returned.

Originally, when he offered to help the Mount Shu Sect team improve, it was merely to repay a small favor. It never even occurred to him that the Mount Shu Sect team might be able to challenge the Penglai Supreme Sect team after training in his hidden realm just for dozens of days.

After all, the Penglai Supreme Sect also had a hidden realm, with better training results and longer periods of practice than the Mount Shu Sect.

Yet, witnessing this scene, he couldn't help but wonder if these young disciples of the Mount Shu Sect might truly deliver some surprises.

Immediately, he decided not to waste any more time.

Immortal Jiuyi swept his broad sleeve, and a screen of light rose from the ground, resembling a vast, multicolored mirror. It slowly moved toward the figures of the disciples.

Whizz—

As the light screen swept over the disciples, it moved and settled in the distance. To the naked eye, the young disciples had disappeared from their original spots, leaving only the standing light screen behind.

Looking through the mirror-like surface of the screen, an identical area appeared on the other side, where the three disciples, who had activated the Perfect Qi Circulation, could be seen practicing the circulation of qi calmly and steadily.

"I'll leave this entrance here so that you can enter and exit as you please," said Immortal Jiuyi.

"Thank you, Sect Leader Jiuyi! The Mount Shu Sect will never forget your help today," Wang Xuanling said, expressing his gratitude with sincerity.

"I am merely repaying Chu Liang for helping me," Immortal Jiuyi said as he waved dismissively. He seemed so carefree as he said, "With such a promising youth, I believe the Mount Shu Sect will surely rise in the coming decades."

Having left the entrance to the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, he did not linger further and turned, drifting away gracefully.

Only after this did Wang Xuanling turn and glance at Ling Ao, who had been watching the interactions between Wang Xuanling and Immortal Jiuyi.

Ling Ao looked back at Wang Xuanling.



They exchanged brief glances before Wang Xuanling frowned. "What are you standing around for? Go inside and start training as well!"

Ling Ao gazed at the misty brilliance of the hidden realm and let out a soft sigh. What horrible things have I done in my past life to end up being stuck hanging out with these prodigies?

...

The hidden realm inside the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams mirrored the outer courtyard of the palace, reflecting every detail as if it were an exact replica.

However, as soon as they began practicing the circulation of qi, they realized that the concentration of spiritual qi in the hidden realm was far greater than in the outside world. This realm contained more spiritual qi than anywhere across the nine provinces. Even if Immortal Jiuyi hadn't slowed the flow of time here, they would still have achieved better results in their cultivation than if they had practiced in the real world.

As soon as Chu Liang stepped inside, he sensed strange movements coming from within the White Pagoda.

Although the Perfect Qi Circulation required more mental focus than usual, it did not leave them completely unable to split their attention.

Chu Liang split his divine sense, sending one thread into the White Pagoda to investigate.

At this moment, the scenes inside and outside the White Pagoda were strangely in sync.

Outside the White Pagoda, three youngsters were performing the Perfect Qi Circulation, surrounded by swirling colorful mist. Inside the White Pagoda, the Heavenly Qi-Circulation Phenomenon was also happening because of the three Large-Headed Dolls. The mist generated was so dense and colorful, filling the space everywhere.

The noise was clearly caused by Tuntun in her human girl form. With her eyes closed and still in a daze, she was bumping into walls, trying to find a way out.

It reminded him of the time when they were in the Blue Dragon hidden realm, when she caught the scent of a treasure and insisted on leaving, only to swallow the Blue Dragon's Orb in one gulp.

It seemed she had once again caught the scent of some precious item...

Wait a minute... Chu Liang's eyebrows twitched immediately.

Was there even any need to guess what precious item lies outside? They were now inside the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, a treasure ranked third in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures!

Goodness. Is this little one planning to go out and gnaw on the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams?

Whether or not she could actually bite into the Divine Mirror was debatable, but if she showed even the slightest intent to attack, Immortal Jiuyi would immediately notice.

He would probably say, "I generously lent you my hidden realm for cultivation, and you dare try to damage my sect's legendary artifact? Prepare to die, you little thief!"

At this thought, Chu Liang felt as if he could almost feel the chilling edge of a knife at his neck. He quickly tried to stop Tuntun, saying, "Be a good girl and stay home. Let's not go outside."

"Owh..."

He quickly pinned down Tuntun, who pouted and stared up at Chu Liang with her large eyes, as if silently pleading for his sympathy.

"If there's anything you want to snack on, I'll get it for you," Chu Liang offered, trying to placate her.

As he spoke with the little one, a sudden rumbling noise erupted from outside, as though the entire White Pagoda was being squeezed through a jagged cavern, shaking and accompanied by scraping roars.

What's going on?

Chu Liang was momentarily distracted, giving little Tuntun the opportunity she needed. She suddenly bolted, crashing headfirst into the exit of the White Pagoda.

"Hey!!!" Chu Liang quickly followed after her.

But as soon as he stepped out, he was stunned.

When he opened his eyes again, he found himself no longer in the courtyard where the Mount Shu Sect disciples had been peacefully cultivating but in the middle of a vast desert. Jiang Yuebai, Xu Ziyang, and Ling Ao were nowhere to be seen. The air around him was hotter than fire, scorching his body and making it difficult to breathe as soon as he arrived.

As Chu Liang looked up, a wave of dizziness hit him.

There were nine suns blazing in the sky!

Where am I? Am I still inside the Divine Mirror? Is this another illusory realm created by the legendary artifact, like Misty Waters City before? But why is this happening?

But Immortal Jiuyi shouldn't be interfering with our cultivation, so did the Divine Mirror do this on its own?

Legendary artifacts of this level typically had spirits, and it wasn't rare for them to act without a command. But what could be the reason for this?

Before he could make sense of it, he saw little Tuntun, completely unfazed by the scorching heat, flap her wings and fly forward.

Chu Liang had no choice but to follow. Perhaps she would find something.

The nine blazing suns in the sky radiated intense heat, making the environment nearly unbearable. However, as a fifth-realm cultivator, he could circulate his qi and dissipate the oppressive warmth.

Even when he fully expanded his divine sense, he couldn't find the boundaries of this realm, which felt deeply unsettling.

He followed Tuntun forward, unsure of how much time had passed—there was no cycle of day and night in this world; the nine suns hung perpetually in the sky.

At last, just as Chu Liang was beginning to grow impatient, the desert finally ended.

There, before him, stood a mountain.

Atop the mountain was a temple.

#### Chapter 583: There's One Missing

The mountain, which was so tall it reached through the clouds, stood majestically at the edge of the desert. Jagged cliffs protruded from the face of the mountain, leading up to a peak shrouded in clouds. It looked like something out of the immortal realm.

Strangely, when Chu Liang scanned the area from afar with his divine sense, he hadn't been able to detect the mountain. Yet, when he got closer, he could see it clearly with the naked eye.

In the dense mountain forest, spirit beasts roared from time to time, and white cranes emerged from the treetops, soaring into the sky. This was unmistakably an otherworldly paradise—a mountain belonging to immortals.

There are living beings here?

Chu Liang was stunned.

The Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams could not reflect living beings into the illusory realm. The only exceptions were resurrected corpses, such as the Black Whale Mountain.

If life existed in this world, could it be that Chu Liang was not in the Divine Mirror's illusory realm and had instead been transported to an unknown place?

There appeared to be a Daoist temple on the mountain peak, though it was unclear if it was inhabited. Chu Liang hesitated for a moment over whether he should check it out. Even speaking with an exotic beast or spirit bird might offer him some insight into his current situation.

However, before he even took a step, a deafening thunderclap rang out.

Crack!

A stream of purple-gold lightning suddenly streaked across the Vault of Heaven, and thick, multicolored haze cascaded down like floodwaters from a burst dam.

The lightning hadn't simply streaked across; it had actually split open the Vault of Heaven!

The nine suns in the sky seemed to have a spiritual nature. Faced with this scene, they withdrew discreetly into the background.

Astonishingly, the lightning's destination was the Daoist temple.

Whoosh.

A gust of wind swept past as a figure in a green Daoist robe emerged from the temple. That bolt of lightning was so massive it seemed like judgment from the heavens, yet the person faced it fearlessly without the slightest intention of retreating.

Chu Liang was too far away to see the person's face, but the person seemed to have the nonchalance of a being from the ancient primordial wilderness.

The person raised his sword and slashed down.

The modest-looking white sword light cleaved through the immense bolt of lightning. However, it did not stop there; it continued straight upward, widening the gap in the Vault of Heaven with a resounding whoosh.

He sliced through the sky with his sword!

Chu Liang watched the scene unfold in stunned silence. Overwhelmed by an indescribable sense of awe, he couldn't form any coherent thoughts.

The sky had transformed into a black abyss. Within it, there was a vague outline of a giant standing on the clouds, wielding an enchanted tool in its massive hand.

The white sword continued slashing into the abyss, severing that massive hand at the wrist. A blood-curdling scream rang out as the severed hand fell from the sky.

Boooooom!!!

The hand was comparable in size to a mountain, so when it fell to the ground, it produced the deafening noise and shockwaves of an unimaginable scale. Yet, they did not overshadow the battle raging above in the slightest.

Chu Liang noticed that the giant hand was clutching what appeared to be an ancient Eight Trigram Compass...

Before he could take a closer look, a furious shout erupted from the heavens, and a bronze pagoda that gave off the stateliness of an ancient era long passed descended from the sky.

The moment Chu Liang saw it, he recognized it! It was the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda!

No disciple of the Mount Shu Sect had seen the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda in generations, but they all knew what it looked like.

The Demon-Suppressing Pagoda was the legendary artifact that had brought glory to the Mount Shu Sect for several millennia. Now, it was being used to suppress just one person.

Nevertheless, the person in the Daoist robe remained unfazed. He did the same thing as before, raising his sword once more.

Whoosh.

He unleashed another sword strike. The slash wasn't directed at the pagoda but the giant behind it.

As the swordlight slashed the sky, a beast-like roar ripped through the air.

"RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!!!!!"

If this were the human realm, people across all nine provinces would have heard it.

The force of the roar threw Chu Liang into the air, flying backward over ten zhang before crashing to the ground.

In a battle of this magnitude, his level of strength was no different from that of an insect. Just approaching the battle would place him at immense risk.

Right after that roar, the descending bronze pagoda seemed to lose control. It plummeted to the ground.

BOOOOOOOM!!!

The pagoda landed on the ground with a force that was a hundred times more powerful than the giant hand, unleashing a massive sandstorm that engulfed everything in an instant.

Chu Liang's vision went dark, and he lost consciousness.

...

The sound of drums and gongs filled the air. Firecrackers crackled, and red flags fluttered in the wind. Surging crowds flooded the city.

Seven days passed in the blink of an eye, and after much anticipation, the citizens of Yu's capital finally welcomed the final chapter of the Assembly of Immortal Sects.

It was time for the Battle at the Imperial City!

Commoners could not enter the Imperial City, but they could watch the battle unfold from beneath the Dragon Terrace outside. Cultivators would cast spells there to project the scenes of the battle for all to see.

The Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams had a fixed perspective for the projection, but that wasn't the case for the venue of the third round. The scenes in every winding corridor would be projected, so viewers could freely choose what they wished to watch.

Restaurants and inns lining the main street raised their prices dozens to hundreds of times over, yet they were still packed with people. Young women waved vermilion and emerald silk handkerchiefs, ready to toss them from the balconies to catch the attention of the prodigies below.

Men hoisted banners and large flags adorned with names and cheers of encouragement. Of course, most of them were directed at the disciples of the South Melody Conservatory.

It had been many years since the South Melody Conservatory last advanced to the Battle at the Imperial City. Regardless of their performance in the battle, their fans were satisfied with just being able to see them.

A line of horses and carriages approached the main street.

Someone shouted, "The Penglai Supreme Sect's procession has arrived!"

The Imperial City had sent envoys and celestial horses to escort the disciples of the immortal sects over from the Emperor's Mound.

Yang Shenlong was the first to enter the main street, riding on a tall pure-white horse that seemed incredibly spirited.

There were multitudes of immortal sects in the mortal realm, so it was no small feat for a sect to make it into the top ten. This ceremonial parade through the city was a special honor bestowed upon the sects that managed to achieve that feat.

"The Celestial King Sect's procession has arrived!"



The Celestial King Sect's procession was next. Feng Chaoyang rode in with high spirits, glancing around with eyes shining with divine light.

Any youth would find such a scene exhilarating.

"The Endless Sword Sect's procession has arrived!"

Unlike the previous two sects where the team members rode in one after the other, the Endless Sword Sect's procession consisted of Li Shiyi riding alone, followed by three people riding on three celestial horses side by side. The Xu Family's three brothers—known as the Tiger[1]-Dragon[2]-Leopard[3] Brothers—refused to fall behind one another, so they had to ride together. None of them made any move to conceal their competitiveness; they openly persisted in trying to outdo each other.

As they vied for the leading position, they nearly collided with Li Shiyi's horse.

Li Shiyi covered her face with her hands, silently wishing this embarrassing parade would end soon.

Li Shiyi vowed never to leave the mountain with those three brothers again once this assembly was over.

"The Buddhist Cloud Monastery's procession has arrived!"

Leading the Buddhist Cloud Monastery's procession was none other than Pushan.

Normally, the oldest monk in the team would be the one leading it. However, it was thanks to Pushan's solo efforts that they turned the tide and advanced in the Competition of a Hundred Sects, so his teammates unanimously chose him to be the first to appear.

Pushan sure was amicable. As he rode his horse in, he waved and greeted the crowd. "Ah, benefactors, you've come early! Hey, child, don't climb that tree! I'm telling you, you're in for a treat this time..."

There was another shout. "The Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals' procession has arrived!"

The Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals entered next. In stark contrast to the boisterous monk, their leader was much quieter.

His mouth was shut. But so were his eyes.

Situ Guanhai was second in the procession and noticed the crowd sniggering at them. It didn't take long for him to figure out why.

"Fuck," Situ Guanhai cursed. "Eldest Senior Brother fell asleep on the horse again."

Next was the Great Astral Sect's procession. Like Pushan, they were very amicable and wore warm, sincere smiles.

The Celestial Pivot Pavilion's procession followed next, but they were not that well received. They were more reserved and not widely recognized. Even Ye Yongxing, who was leading the way, was unfamiliar to most of the crowd.

Then came the South Melody Conservatory's procession. They were welcomed by a tsunami of cheers. Tie Chui was leading the way, and she had to cover her ears because of the overwhelming noise.

After the long line of teams entered the city, many children ran after them, hoping to absorb a bit of their spiritual qi.

Some time passed after the children left, but the crowd remained in place.

A hush fell over them, followed by a rising murmur.

They were all discussing one thing.

"Isn't there one missing?"

"Where is the Mount Shu Sect's procession?"

Chapter 584: I'm Here

"Chu Liang..."

Inside the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, Chu Liang's teammates surrounded him with worried expressions.

Chu Liang remained seated on the ground cross-legged, with two fingers on his left hand extended like a sword. A faint yet powerful sword qi swirled around him. The invisible force attacked anything that entered within a three-chi[1] radius of Chu Liang.

Jiang Yuebai and the others were afraid they would disturb him, so they did not even dare try approaching.

The group had entered this hidden realm together to cultivate, and after tens of days of Perfect Qi Circulation, their cultivation levels had advanced considerably. Furthermore, Chu Liang had already prepared the treasures of nature they needed for their breakthroughs early in advance. That meant they could advance once they reached the critical point of their level.

When the seventy days were over, they prepared to leave the hidden realm. However, that was when they discovered that Chu Liang had fallen into a strange state.

His Perfect Qi Circulation had long since stopped, replaced by a mysterious sword qi infused with Dao essence. Anyone who approached instinctively sensed there was something threatening about it.

Immortal Jiuyi and Wang Xuanling rushed over. With one glance, they figured out what was happening to Chu Liang.

"He's in a state of enlightenment."

Nevertheless, it was precisely because they understood what was happening that they were even more shocked than Jiang Yuebai, Xu Ziyang, and Ling Ao.

This state of enlightenment was not a simple moment of sudden insight. It was a mysterious state that only those pursuing a Great Dao would experience, achieving Unity Between Person and Dao.

For cultivators at the realms in the Heavenly Gate, this was a rare state that they might experience but could not seek out. Usually, the lowest realm a cultivator might experience this state of

enlightenment was the sixth realm. That was because they needed enlightenment to open up the Heavenly Gate and advance to the seventh realm.

After reaching the seventh realm, it was highly unlikely they would be able to make further progress in their cultivation through traditional cultivation methods. They had to depend on moments of enlightenment to advance their cultivation.

In the Human Gate phase of cultivation, the focus was on strengthening the cultivator's physique. In the Earthly Gate phase, the focus went beyond the cultivator's corporeal body. In the Heavenly Gate phase, the focus was on a Great Dao.

Chu Liang was only at the middle stage of the fifth realm. How could his understanding of a Great Dao have reached such a high level?

Sensing the flow of Dao essence around them, Immortal Jiuyi mused, "He is experiencing enlightenment for the Great Dao of Severing the Void. This Dao essence does not belong to one of the Mount Shu Sect's cultivation legacies, nor is it associated with my sect. What triggered this enlightenment?"

Wang Xuanling was equally bewildered, but he quickly recalled the matter at hand. "The envoys from the Imperial City are already waiting outside. If he doesn't emerge from the state soon..."

The state of enlightenment could last mere moments, or it could stretch across decades. By then, Chu Liang would emerge to find himself in an extremely different world.

It was simply not an option for them to wait indefinitely for him to emerge from that state.

"Then it's up to you to decide what's more important."

If it were a disciple of the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals, Immortal Jiuyi would have made the decision without hesitation. Nevertheless, this was a matter for the Mount Shu Sect; it was not his place to interfere.

There were only two possible choices. The first was to let Chu Liang continue receiving enlightenment. That would grant him tremendous benefits and possibly change the course of his life. However, this would mean that he might not make it in time for the final round of the

Assembly of Immortal Sects. Chu Liang was undoubtedly the Mount Shu Sect team's ace. Without him, their performance would suffer.

The second option was to forcibly pull Chu Liang out of his state of enlightenment. This was a feat that both Wang Xuanling and Immortal Jiuyi could accomplish. Doing that would prematurely end Chu Liang's precious opportunity to gain enlightenment, but he would then be able to participate in the final round of the assembly.

Faced with this decision, Wang Xuanling did not hesitate in the slightest.

He stated definitively, "His future is more important, of course."

The Mount Shu Sect had already made it far enough into the Assembly of Immortal Sects; they wouldn't regret it even if they advanced no further. A disciple who could attain enlightenment at the fifth realm was the true hope for the sect's future resurgence.

Wang Xuanling turned around and spoke to Jiang Yuebai, Xu Ziyang, and Ling Ao. "You three head to the Imperial City. I'll stay here and ensure Chu Liang finishes attaining his enlightenment."

Jiang Yuebai and the others nodded. "Understood."

"In that case, I'll let him remain in the hidden realm," Immortal Jiuyi said. "Time flows faster here, so he may still make it in time for the Battle at the Imperial City."

"Thank you, Sect Leader Jiuyi!" Wang Xuanling exclaimed, sincerely expressing his gratitude.

Chu Liang's enlightenment might be linked to him entering the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, so it was very important that he had Immortal Jiuyi's assistance.

Wang Xuanling gazed deeply at Chu Liang and the sword qi circling him. The old man seemed to have gotten a glimpse of what the Mount Shu Sect would be like a century from now.

...

The vicinity of the Imperial City was buzzing with bustling crowds.

The imperial court and the higher-ups of various immortal sects were seated atop the city walls, while commoners crowded around the Dragon Terrace, watching the clouds and fog ascend from midair, rising into the sky.

The clouds and fog gradually parted, revealing the Water-Moon Mirror Flower's projection of the scenes within the Corridor City.

The Battle at the Imperial City should have already begun by now, but the ceremonial parade wasn't over yet. Just as some people in the crowd threw out curses and complaints, the last procession finally slowly entered the main street.

The person in the lead had fair, radiant skin that seemed to glow like jade. As she rode in silently on a celestial horse, she resembled a fairy appearing among mortals. Her presence alone brought quiet to Heavenly Street.

She was the head disciple of the Mount Shu Sect—Jiang Yuebai.

Behind her was Xu Ziyang, sitting tall and perfectly upright. The eldest senior brother of Jade Sword Peak had a determined gaze and striking features.

Before Chu Liang's sudden rise in status, Xu Ziyang and Jiang Yuebai had long been known as the twin pillars of the Mount Shu Sect—their top two disciples.

Xu Ziyang even had some fans. As the procession moved through the streets, he drew the attention of many young single and married women.

Riding on a horse behind Xu Ziyang was a short-haired youth who was not well known.

Huh? Is that it?

After seeing the last person in the procession, the same question popped into the minds of those in the crowd.

Where is the Young Hero with the Divine Whip?

Previously, only a small proportion of the capital's citizens knew about Chu Liang. However, after making a name for himself in the Competition of a Hundred Sects, he was now one of the most celebrated figures among the immortal sects. Many people had gathered there just to see him.

Someone yelled, "Where is the Young Hero with the Divine Whip?"

"The Young Hero with the Divine Whip! The Young Hero with the Divine Whip!"

"..."

Hearing the crowd's chants, those within the Imperial City looked puzzled too.

During the last seven days, the teams preparing for the Battle at the Imperial City would have been cultivating intensely. Nevertheless, they would have done it in a way that ensured their safety, preventing any mishaps that might lead to their absence in the final round. It was extremely rare for anyone to miss such an important event.

After the Mount Shu Sect's procession entered Corridor City, a palace attendant approached the city wall. "Your Majesty, all ten teams have arrived. Shall we commence the Battle at the Imperial City?"

On the city wall, the emperor was seated in a throne, surrounded by members of the imperial family and officials of the imperial court.

He asked, "Why has my younger brother not arrived? Did something happen to him?"

Warrior Lao said, "Your Majesty, there is news from the temporary imperial residence..."

Then he stepped closer to the emperor and whispered the rest.

The emperor furrowed his brows slightly. "Enlightenment..."

It was, of course, a tremendously wonderful thing that Chu Liang was experiencing a state of enlightenment, but there was no telling how long it would last. It was unlikely he would be able to

make it in time for the Battle at the Imperial City, marking the end of his participation in this year's Assembly of Immortal Sects.

Nonetheless, right when the emperor was about to declare the start of the final round, a tall, gorgeous woman with an aggressive and domineering demeanor in the Mount Shu Sect's seating area jumped to her feet.

She yelled, "Hang on!"

The emperor looked at Di Nufeng exasperatedly.

Given that they were in a public setting, he refrained from addressing her as Second Aunt and simply asked, "What is it?"

Di Nufeng spoke casually, with her arms folded into her sleeves. "My disciple hasn't arrived yet. Can we wait for a bit longer?"

Before the emperor could reply, someone in the Penglai Supreme Sect's seating area stood up. This man had bronze skin, a cold, steely expression, and a tall and muscular physique that strained against his crimson Daoist robe. He was none other than Daoist Chi Niu of Penglai.

After the second round of the assembly, many more people had gone there to watch the Battle at the Imperial City. The Penglai Supreme Sect now had two more rows of spectators in their seating area—higher-ups who were there to observe the battle.

Daoist Chi Niu had previously clashed with the Mount Shu Sect over the purchase of one of the six demon-slaying treasures. Chu Liang had outplayed him and won the bid for the treasure.

Despite failing to acquire the treasure, Daoist Chi Niu had thought that he had inflicted major financial damage onto the Mount Shu Sect. However, Chu Liang's subsequent success in managing Red Cotton Peak turned the Mount Shu Sect into a wealthy new commercial powerhouse in the world of cultivators, with riches rivaling even Taotie City. The money they had lost in the auction was likely of little consequence now.

So, when Daoist Chi Niu saw that the Mount Shu Sect was trying to delay the start of the Battle at the Imperial City due to Chu Liang's absence, he couldn't just stay silent.



He jumped up and shouted, "The start time for the Battle at the Imperial City was set long in advance. If someone hasn't arrived, it counts as he has withdrawn from the battle. How can we delay the entire event for one person?"

"What's the rush?" Di Nufeng shot a glance at him. "Are you in a hurry to pay respects at your parents' graves?"

"You—!" Daoist Chi Niu glared at her. "How insolent! Are all members of the Mount Shu Sect this rude?"

"It's just me; don't drag the whole of the Mount Shu Sect into this," Di Nufeng replied calmly. "Just because you look like a pile of cow dung in a humanoid form doesn't mean everyone from Penglai is ugly, right?"

"What?!!" Daoist Chi Niu uttered, his face flushed with anger. He raged, "You shrew—"

"So what if I'm a shrew? Didn't a shrew give birth to you?" Di Nufeng rolled her eyes and then shook her head. "I just said a few words, and your face turned so red. Do you have a screw loose? You might as well change your Daoist title. Hm, you've got a big head and a thick neck. You don't seem like a red bull; you're more like a wild pig."

Daoist Chi Niu rolled up his sleeves angrily. "I—"

Di Nufeng interrupted. "You what? Did you suddenly realize you're too ugly and want to say 'I'm sorry' to everyone here? Let me tell you, it's too late! The damage is done."

"If you plan to atone for the damage you've inflicted to the mortal realm by taking your own life, you should find a dark and deserted place. After all, if you scare some kids with your corpse, your merit points, which have already been deducted until there's nothing left, will have to be deducted even further when you get to the netherworld."

Daoist Chi Niu pointed at Di Nufeng. "You—"

Di Nufeng interrupted him again. "What about me? Do you want to ask why I'm scolding you and going overboard with my insults? Well, do you know why you're angry? It's because lies don't hurt. It's the truth that cuts like a knife. You're only angry because my words hit you where it hurts."

Daoist Chi Niu looked around at everyone, his hands trembling with rage. "She—"

"What? You're a full grown adult, yet you're looking for someone to help fight your case like a child? Matters of the martial world should be handled the way it's done in the martial world. Are you even a man?" Di Nufeng pressed on. "It's pointless for us to just keep talking. I propose we add an extra segment—an exhibition match. The two of us will have a duel. How about that?!"

Daoist Chi Niu was so infuriated that it looked like smoke was going to come out of his ears. "Aaaaaaah!!!"

At that moment, someone pressed their hand firmly on Daoist Chi Niu's shoulder. It was a slim man in black robes—Daoist Xuan Lu.

He calmly held Daoist Chi Niu back and said, "Don't waste time with her."

Daoist Xuan Lu stepped forward and ignored Di Nufeng. He directed his gaze at the emperor and the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner instead.

He said, "The time for the Battle at the Imperial City was set early in advance. We've already delayed the start of the battle for too long. The sects of the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten are all present. Why should everyone wait for one person who is late? Is he being given special treatment because he's Your Majesty's younger brother?"

The emperor's expression darkened at those words.

He had no choice but to say, "Since Chu Liang of the Mount Shu Sect still has not arrived even after the long delay, the Battle at the Imperial City shall—"

Right then, a beam of swordlight streaked across the sky at tremendous speed, descending like a meteor into Corridor City.

Accompanying the meteor's descent was a loud, drawn-out yell.

"I'm heeeeeere!"

## Chapter 585: The Elegance of That One Sword Strike

Outside Corridor City, the disciples of various immortal sects had already arranged their formation.

Boom!

As Chu Liang landed, many people around him turned to look. When the dust settled and his figure was revealed, several disciples furrowed their brows.

Did he really need to make such a flashy entrance?

However, the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect were clearly pleased. Jiang Yuebai, standing at the rear of the formation, looked back and saw Chu Liang. She saw nothing but confidence in his eyes.

At that moment, Chu Liang might not have realized how piercing and intense the divine light in his eyes had become.

He had just experienced this peculiar and remarkable state of enlightenment.

Inside the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, he and Tuntun had arrived in a mystical realm where nine suns shared the sky.

He saw a Daoist temple atop an immortal mountain, with a Daoist inside capable of severing the heaven with a single strike. The Daoist then struck the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda, causing it to collapse, and the impact knocked Chu Liang unconscious.

While unconscious, Chu Liang seemed to slip into a dream.

As the image of the Daoist severing the heaven replayed in his mind, Chu Liang felt as though there were wisps of Dao essence swirling around him.

He immersed himself in the wisps of Dao essence and suddenly grasped the meaning of "Severing the Void."

At the Endless Sword Sect, many marks left by the strikes of swordmasters from previous generations still contained lingering Dao essence, allowing disciples to meditate on them for centuries.

If even the marks left by the powerful swordmasters from previous generations could leave such an impact, how much more impactful would it be to witness the strike of a powerful one that could sever the heaven?

That proud figure floating in the sky exuded the aloofness of the ancient primordial wilderness... "Be it gods, ghosts, or demons, all are but illusions in the void—I will sever them with a single strike!"

This was Severing the Void.

Unlike his earlier glimpse of the Cloud of Determination essence, this time he comprehended the entire Great Dao of Severing the Void. Had he been at the peak of the sixth realm, this insight might have allowed him to ascend directly to the Dao Attainment Realm!

The power of that one sword strike was terrifying.

That strike that severed the heavens replayed thousands of times in his dream. When he finally understood the Great Dao, he slowly began to awaken. It was only then that Chu Liang realized he had entered a state of enlightenment.

When he opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was Wang Xuanling's aged face, filled with anxiety.

"How did it go?" Wang Xuanling asked.

"It's done," Chu Liang replied.

"I have never once heard of a fifth-realm attaining Dao!" Wang Xuanling said excitedly. "In the future, as long as you choose a suitable Great Dao, I know the attainment of the eighth realm will not be a mere dream for you."

Over the past centuries, countless prodigies have emerged among the immortal cultivation sects, but only a few have managed to reach the eighth realm, primarily due to the difficulty of the Heavenly

Gate. No matter how outstanding a cultivator's performance is during the cultivation of the Human Gate and Earthly Gate, it would become irrelevant once they reach the peak of the sixth realm. At that point, they had to rely on a different set of skills to continue making progress.

To attain this state of enlightenment, a cultivator needed more than just great comprehension; they needed to have incredible luck or achieve a breakthrough that was so elusive it seemed almost impossible to achieve. The fact that Chu Liang managed to do it meant that if someone were to say he wasn't destined for greatness, no one would believe that to be true.

"Has the Battle at the Imperial City started?" Chu Liang asked.

"According to the schedule, it should have started. But if we hurry, there may still be a chance, " Wang Xuanling said as he gazed far into the distant Imperial City. "Your teacher is there. With how she can make a fuss and act unreasonably, I am sure the Battle at the Imperial City would not start that smoothly."

"Alright!" Chu Liang nodded.

Wang Xuanling immediately summoned his flying sword and took off with Chu Liang.

It had been many years since this old man, who had always carried himself with such seriousness, dignity, and respect, had flown at full speed on his sword, especially above a city under the watchful eyes of countless onlookers. But for Chu Liang's sake, he couldn't bother anymore.

Whoosh—

Like a meteor, they shot up from Emperor's Mound and arrived above the Imperial City in an instant.

Sword-flying over the Imperial City was usually forbidden, but no one cared at this moment. As Wang Xuanling dropped Chu Liang into Corridor City, he made a quick loop and casually landed at the back with the Mount Shu Sect members, as if nothing had happened.

His presence was only acknowledged when Di Nufeng stepped back amidst the group of Mount Shu Sect members. She gave Wang Xuanling a nod of approval and said, "You old man, it's rare to see you actually do something useful."

Though it was a compliment, it sounded off. Regardless, it was already very rare to get any kind of compliments from Di Nufeng.

Wang Xuanling merely responded with a cough.

...

"All disciples of the immortal sects, proceed to Corridor City and choose your entrance gate!"

The guards of the Imperial City oversaw the proceedings below, directing the disciples of the immortal sects one by one through the towering walls of Corridor City. Behind the main gate were four separate directions, each with ten gates.

Generally, the disciples of each sect would discuss beforehand, ensuring each of their four representatives chose different directions to avoid facing each other in the early rounds.

Once each disciple entered and selected a gate, that gate would be marked and unavailable to those who came later.

As planned, Chu Liang chose a gate on the northern side.

Boom.

The massive gate then slammed shut.

The tall walls surrounding him were engraved with intricate formations, cutting off all external senses so that they wouldn't be aware of anything happening beyond the walls..

Suddenly, the area fell into complete silence. All that remained was the sliver of blue sky above and the long corridor stretching ahead.

Then, a loud voice from outside announced, "Let the battle begin!"

Only then were the disciples allowed to act.

Chu Liang wasted no time, swiftly advancing forward. In an instant, he reached the midpoint of the corridor and saw his opponent.

It was a young man wearing a conical hat, a sword strapped to his back. He appeared indifferent and seemed as eager to end the fight quickly as Chu Liang.

"A disciple of the Sword Sect?" Chu Liang asked as he drew his sword. "Which one are you?"

It wasn't that he didn't recognize him; among the disciples participating in the Battle at the Imperial City, there were only a few, and they all knew of one another, whether closely or not.

But the three brothers, Xu Hu, Xu Long, and Xu Bao looked very similar and it was hard to identify them.

"Xu Bao," came the curt reply.

It's the younger one.

Chu Liang confirmed inwardly and raised his Dustless Sword.

Xu Bao likewise drew his ancient-looking longsword, adorned with bronze cloud patterns.

The two did the same exact move, raising their swords as they closed the gap of a dozen zhang between them.

Sizzle—

Their swords fell!

A surge of sword qi erupted, reaching its peak in an instant. With a single strike, the world darkened, and the sun and moon seemed to lose their light.

Compared to the sword qi of grandeur generated through the Cloud of Determination Great Dao, the sword qi generated through the Great Dao of Severing the Void was more condensed. It was like a coiled dragon, but with a glint that was much sharper and more terrifying.

In the blink of an eye, the two streams of sword qi, like flood dragons, clashed and twisted together, each carrying an unstoppable, fearless aura.

For a moment, Xu Bao was surprised.

He had initially thought Chu Liang was reckless to dare cross swords with a Sword Sect disciple.

But he soon noticed something was amiss.

He and his brothers had spent ten years studying the sword marks left by generations of masters on the back mountain of the Endless Sword Sect. Even having comprehended only half, their mastery of swordsmanship was unrivaled among the younger generation.

This was his greatest pride.

Yet, how did this Chu Liang possess a sword intent equal to his own?

The Cloud of Determination Great Dao was a cultivation of sword qi, while the Great Dao of Tai'a was a cultivation of sword force and the Great Dao of Severing the Void was a cultivation of sword intent.

This sword intent conveyed the message, "Whatever it is, just cut and be severed from it." It was the principle of the Great Dao of Sword, Severing the Void. Xu Bao knew that there was no way he would be mistaken. This scene was eerily similar to sparring with his brothers.

Where did he learn this? Xu Bao wondered. Moreover, his sword intent was so pure... In fact, it's even stronger than mine!

Boom—



After a brief stalemate, the flood dragon formed by Chu Liang's sword qi devoured the one created by Xu Bao's sword qi. Xu Bao then felt Chu Liang's sword qi surge forward, whistling past him.

A strand of Xu Bao's hair was sliced off, drifting down, and the conical hat on his head was blown into the air.

Bang—

Chu Liang's sword qi struck a nearby wall, leaving countless scratches. However, the wall seemed almost alive, rapidly healing before his eyes.

Xu Bao stood stunned for a moment before sheathing the sword in his palm, returning it to the scabbard on his back.

In a duel between swordmasters, victory or defeat could be decided in the span of a single breath.

If Chu Liang had not redirected his sword qi at the last moment, it would have been Xu Bao, not the wall, engulfed by the Flood Dragon. In that case, serious injury or even death would have been inevitable.

"I've lost," he said softly.

As a disciple of the Endless Sword Sect who had been mastering the art of the sword since childhood, admitting defeat wasn't difficult. However, it was hard to accept that he had been defeated using the very skill he excelled at.

Xu Bao's eyes flickered.

"Well fought," Chu Liang said, cupping his hands in salute before leaping forward.

Creak—

A door on the side of the corridor creaked open as Chu Liang stepped through. Reaching the next level sooner meant more time to recover.

Though the strike seemed simple, both he and Xu Bao had drawn upon their entire Sea of Qi, leaving nothing in reserve. Had either of them held back, defeat would have been inevitable.

Although Chu Liang's recovery speed was extraordinary, it still required time.

At that moment, an announcement echoed from the high walls: "Chu Liang of the Mount Shu Sect has defeated Xu Bao of the Endless Sword Sect!"

The spectators outside had a clear view of all the fights, so the announcement was not for them. It was intended for the disciples of the various immortal sects inside Corridor City, as this was their only way of knowing what was happening beyond the walls.

Hearing the announcement, the disciples within Corridor City were stunned.

It's over?

That fast?

The fight had just begun!

Chapter 586: Ling Ao of the Mount Shu Sect

"That is the Endless Sword Sect's Great Dao of Severing the Void. I can't believe he has comprehended this much? He didn't show any signs of knowing this during the Competition of a Hundred Sects. Was he saving it for the Battle at the Imperial City to catch opponents off guard?" High above the Imperial City, Old Li Ba, the Supreme Elder of the Endless Sword Sect, seated with the other onlookers, gave a genuine evaluation of Chu Liang's strike. "This boy is truly terrifying."

"Oh?" Immortal Jiuyi, seated nearby, smiled. "Old Sword Saint, your evaluation of Chu Liang is quite high. Has his mastery of the Dao of Sword reached a level that even you find remarkable?"

"If he were a swordmaster with sixty years of cultivation, it wouldn't be surprising to have attained such insight. But to grasp the Great Dao of Severing the Void to this level at such a young age is truly remarkable. Even in my youth, I was far from achieving this level of understanding," said Old Li Ba. "It is truly something to marvel at."

"But based on what I know, Chu Liang had never once performed any techniques related to the Great Dao of Severing the Void. He only came to understand this Dao a few days ago," Immortal Jiuyi added.

"That's impossible," Old Li Ba said as he shook his head firmly.

Immortal Jiuyi was an eighth-realm cultivator who had attained the Heavenly Origin and stood at the pinnacle of the world, but in terms of swordsmanship, Sword Saint Old Li Ba was the undisputed authority. And so, he spoke with complete confidence.

"Impossible?" Immortal Jiuyi questioned again.

"Our forefather, Hallowed Li, left sword marks on the walls of the mountain behind our sect. Even our most talented disciples had to meditate on these sword marks for three years to fully comprehend the Great Dao of Severing the Void," Old Li Ba said gravely. "And such genius is seen only once in centuries. For ordinary sword talents, it could take a decade.

"Even if you claim Chu Liang's talent surpasses every disciple in our sect's history, could he have found a source of insight more powerful than Hallowed Li's Dao essence?"

Upon hearing Old Li Ba's words, Immortal Jiuyi suddenly became silent for a moment.

He hadn't understood how Chu Liang attained enlightenment in the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, but after hearing Old Li Ba's words, everything started making sense.

According to legends, the origin of the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams was linked to Hallowed Li.

It was said that Hallowed Li once battled celestial beings and struck down numerous legendary artifacts from the sky. Among those was the Eight Trigram Compass, which eventually became the current Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams.

Could it be that Chu Liang saw an echo of Hallowed Li within the Divine Mirror and achieved enlightenment as a result?

The Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams was said to connect the real world and the illusory realm, reflecting both ancient and present eras, perhaps even preserving the silhouette of Hallowed Li.

However, these ancient projections could not be triggered at will; something specific was required to activate them.

Could it be that Chu Liang possesses some kind of ancient artifact? Immortal Jiuyi wondered.

As he pondered, Old Li Ba sighed again, "It's a pity that Chu Liang isn't a disciple of our Sword Sect. Such unparalleled talent is going to waste."

"Mount Shu Sect's swordsmanship has also been renowned throughout the world; it would hardly be wasted, don't you think?" Immortal Jiuyi replied with a light laugh.

"The swordmasters of Mount Shu Sect have traditionally cultivated the Cloud of Determination Great Dao. Both the Cloud of Determination and the Great Dao of Tai'a are enriched with countless exceptional swordmasters. It has always been said that talented figures are shaped by great teachers, and this is not dependent on the sect," Old Li Ba explained.

He then continued, "However, with the Great Dao of Severing the Void, only those who are part of our sect can attain the Heavenly Origin. Do you know why?"

"Why?" Immortal Jiuyi asked, intrigued and playing along.

Old Li Ba explained, "Because a cultivator of the Great Dao of Severing the Void had ascended to the ninth realm. The most powerful essence of the Severing the Void Great Dao is on the Chunyang Ancient Sword that used to belong to Hallowed Li.

"No matter how much one gains from observing sword marks, it cannot compare to the experience of observing the Chunyang Ancient Sword and meditating in the presence of the Chunyang Ancient Sword. That's why the Dao Master of the Severing the Void Great Dao will always be a member of the Endless Sword Sect."

"I see!" Immortal Jiuyi remarked with a hint of emotion in his tone.

"So, even though Chu Liang has fully comprehended the Great Dao of Severing the Void, if he chooses to continue pursuing this Dao when he reaches the seventh realm, he'll be at the end of his path," Old Li Ba explained. "Unless he chooses another Dao or..." He smirked, "switches allegiances."

"I may ask him one day," he mused aloud. "If he is willing to leave the Mount Shu Sect after the Assembly of Immortal Sects and join the Endless Sword Sect. If so, I would gladly let him observe the Chunyang Ancient Sword... perhaps I would even train him to be a successor to the sect leader. Considering how unreliable his teacher might be, I think he will surely be tempted."

Immortal Jiuyi merely chuckled, "Heh."

...

Inside the Corridor City, the fights raged fiercely, and while Chu Liang was the fastest to secure victory, he wasn't entirely alone in achieving swift wins.

Although it was widely acknowledged that there were no weak contestants in the Battle at the Imperial City, everyone was aware that there were still a few "easy targets" among the contestants.

For example, the teams from the Valley of the Three Absolutes and the Celestial King Sect. Aside from the leading disciples, Luo Yao and Feng Chaoyang, the others were somewhat weaker. When facing such opponents, the stronger ones would often opt for quick victories to save time for the upcoming battles.

The fact that Chu Liang defeated an opponent like Xu Bao in record time showed that his speed was on an entirely different level compared to those who were merely cutting down weaker opponents.

However, this wasn't because Chu Liang had overpowered Xu Bao. In matches between sword cultivators, victories were always decisive, with no room for hesitation.

It would always be either the east wind overpowering the west wind or the west wind overpowering the east[1].

Had Xu Bao's swordsmanship been even slightly stronger, the result would have been a swift victory for him instead.

While Chu Liang was fighting Xu Bao, Ling Ao was engaged in a fierce battle with a formidable opponent not far away.

His opponent appeared to be no more than a child of about ten, yet he carried himself with a haughty air, his gaze condescending and his lips curled into a sinister grin.

"A disciple of the Mount Shu Sect..." Qi Lin'er sneered. "Before I get my revenge on Chu Liang, I'll take my anger out on you."

"Do you really think you'll get to challenge Chu Liang?" Ling Ao retorted coldly. "He swatted you away with one strike, like brushing aside a fly."

"Hmph!" Qi Lin'er scoffed. "They told me later on that Chu Liang must have used some pill that burns through his Sea of Qi and lifespan. I doubt he'd dare use something like that here. In a fair fight, I'll make him beg for mercy."

At that moment, an announcement echoed from the high walls: "Chu Liang of the Mount Shu Sect has defeated Xu Bao of the Endless Sword Sect!"

Upon hearing the announcement, Qi Lin'er fell silent for a moment.

Ling Ao shrugged. "See the difference?"

Qi Lin'er was so furious that his brows furrowed. He stomped his right foot hard, launching himself forward like an arrow released from a bow!

He aimed to end the battle swiftly!

Boom—

Ling Ao was ready. Golden flames erupted around him, taking the form of a dragon behind him, with blazing eyes of fire!

As Chu Liang, Jiang Yuebai, and Xu Ziyang rapidly advanced in strength, Ling Ao continued his steady progress. Though he may have lagged slightly behind, he never faltered.

According to Heavenly Law, the diligent ones would be rewarded. Hard work would never be in vain.

Boom!

Qi Lin'er started looking blurry as he launched a punch with blinding speed, but Ling Ao countered with a punch of his own. The impact of their clash echoed through the long corridor.

Thud—

The difference was that Qi Lin'er staggered back a few steps upon landing, while Ling Ao was hurled back a dozen meters, crashing to the ground. Yet, they both rebounded simultaneously and clashed fists once more!

Boom—

In terms of speed and power, Ling Ao, whose power was enhanced by the burning blood, was on par with Qi Lin'er. The only difference was that Qi Lin'er had a weaker physique.

This wasn't something that could be improved through cultivation of arts alone; it required actual replenishment and physical training to strengthen his body. While his current physique was strong enough to compete with others, it fell short against cultivators with particularly powerful bodies.

Once again, Qi Lin'er was pushed back a few steps.

Meanwhile, Ling Ao was sent flying, crashing into the ground with such force that it left a large crater.

"Hah..." Ling Ao sprang up again, exhaling deeply. "I really can't fight you head-on."

Qi Lin'er was born with bronze skin and iron bones, while Chu Liang and Yang Shenlong benefitted from the power of their draconic bloodlines. Achieving such monstrous physical strength required extraordinary fortuitous circumstances.

But Ling Ao was an ordinary cultivator. The greatest fortuitous encounter he had was a drop of dragon blood he had begged for from the dragon in the Dragon-Fishing Pool. Apart from that, everything he had achieved was the result of his relentless hard work.

But who said hard work couldn't lead to success?

Whoosh—

When Qi Lin'er's fist came crashing down again, Ling Ao decided to dodge.

With a swift pivot of his foot, he sidestepped the punch, clamping down on Qi Lin'er's wrist with his left hand. At the same time, he formed a saber-like strike with his right index finger and his middle finger, aiming straight for his opponent.

Bang!

Due to Qi Lin'er's small stature, Ling Ao's strike landed squarely on the back of his neck, sending him hurtling face-first toward the ground. But before he could hit the floor, he was met with Ling Ao's rising knee, which stopped his momentum abruptly.

Smack—

The knee strike, delivered with precise power, bent Qi Lin'er's neck at an almost right angle, leaving him momentarily stunned and dazed.

Reeling from the heavy blow, Qi Lin'er instinctively shoved Ling Ao away, sending him flying several zhang. He then leapt backward, and when he landed, his vision spun for a moment.

If Qi Lin'er hadn't possessed such a resilient physique, he wouldn't have survived. Any ordinary cultivator struck with such force would have had their skull shattered multiple times over.

Even so, Qi Lin'er was left dazed for a while before he could barely make out Ling Ao's figure.

These moves were martial arts techniques. The grip and strike seemed simple, but they were clearly the result of immense hard work. However, a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect shouldn't be good at these techniques.



Qi Lin'er wanted to say something but paused for a moment. After a brief struggle to remember, he finally gritted his teeth and asked, "I don't think I know your name?"

The young man with a buzz cut across from him gave a faint smile, extending one arm and taking a fighting stance as he answered, "Ling Ao of the Mount Shu Sect!"

Chapter 587: If There's a Next Time, I'll Beat You Up Again.

"This... isn't this the Great Astral Sect's Tiger-Breaking Technique?"

Among the spectators, some knowledgeable ones immediately recognized the technique—it was the secret martial arts technique only that belonged to the Great Astral Sect and was renowned for its strength and effectiveness.

It was true that the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect rarely studied martial arts. In fact, most disciples that followed the school of Daoism did not learn martial arts. Even physical cultivators typically concentrated on strengthening and fortifying their bodies rather than honing martial techniques.

The core logic of physical cultivation often came down to this statement: "So what if you cultivate your flashy techniques? I will be faster and stronger than you. My fist will just be more powerful than yours."

This was basically the fundamental approach to physical cultivation.

However, before the recent closed-door training in the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, Chu Liang had a conversation with Ling Ao.

With only seventy days left, focusing further on refining his physical cultivation or advancing his current realm wouldn't have given Ling Ao a significant combat boost. After all, any kind of cultivation eventually reaches a point of diminishing returns.

In martial arts, however, Ling Ao had very little experience. Even the techniques he had learned were primarily aimed at enhancing speed and strength, with little focus on actual combat skills.

Having practiced the Brick Combat Technique himself, Chu Liang knew that martial arts could provide a significant edge in many situations. Martial arts allowed the practitioner to achieve great impact with minimal effort, making them invaluable in combat. Since Ling Ao's experience in this area was limited, focused training over this period would surely lead to substantial improvements.

To learn martial arts, one needed the right manuals. While the Mount Shu Sect had a decent collection, choosing the most suitable one was another challenge.

At this point, Chu Liang once again showcased the power of his extensive network.

He called Yun Chaoxian over late at night to evaluate Ling Ao's physical attributes and help select the most suitable martial arts technique.

The disciples of the Great Astral Sect were often said to share a single brain, having devoted all their intellect to mastering martial arts. In this respect, Yun Chaoxian was undoubtedly a genius.

After careful assessment, Yun Chaoxian concluded that Ling Ao's speed, explosive power, and reflexes were top-tier, but his physical resilience was lacking. Therefore, he recommended techniques that emphasized offense and agility over defense.

In the end, Yun Chaoxian left the Tiger-Breaking Technique with Ling Ao to practice.

The Tiger-Breaking Technique emphasizes close-quarters combat, relying on swift, decisive strikes and precise maneuvers, making it a formidable weapon in melee encounters.

Now, Ling Ao was demonstrating the results of his seventy days of grueling practice with the Tiger-Breaking Technique.

"Ha!"

While Qi Lin'er was still in a daze, Ling Ao seized the opportunity, charging forward with relentless speed.

His movements were so fast that they left a blur of afterimages. Qi Lin'er twisted and dodged, but Ling Ao was relentless, closing the gap with every step.

Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh, swoosh—

Thanks to the spacious corridor, the chase continued, but it didn't take long before Ling Ao caught up to Qi Lin'er.

Thwack.

Qi Lin'er spun and threw a punch, but Ling Ao intercepted it with a sharp chop to the wrist, quickly following up with a knee strike.

Bang—

The strike landed hard on Qi Lin'er's waist, sending his small physique crashing into the corridor wall. Before he could recover, Ling Ao landed another punch!

Crash—

Each of these blows would have killed an ordinary person, yet Qi Lin'er managed to endure them all, despite his small and slender physique.

As Ling Ao prepared to seize the opportunity and deliver another strike, Qi Lin'er suddenly opened his mouth and roared, "Aaargh—!"

His roar was like the cry of a celestial beast, and his eyes blazed with fierce light!

The force of the roar sent Ling Ao flying, crashing into the opposite wall!

"Cough..." Qi Lin'er dropped to the ground and spat out a mouthful of blood. He sounded raspy as he said, "I originally planned to use this move to defeat Chu Liang, but since it's come to this, I'll settle things with you first..."

As he spoke, his pupils started looking different. They became vertical, glowing with golden flames. Azure scales began to emerge, spreading across his skin, while horns sprouted from his forehead. His body twisted and reshaped, transforming into a terrifying dragon-human hybrid.

This was... the Dragon Soul Possession!

Ling Ao had studied dragon techniques extensively—perhaps even more so than Chu Liang—and he immediately recognized that this transformation was a gift of a higher level than the legacy of the dragon scale.

The gifts of power granted by dragons were strictly tiered, ranging from dragon blood to dragon breath, and finally to dragon soul—each representing a distinct level of power and mastery.

Dragon blood was often bestowed upon subordinates or servants, using a drop of True Dragon blood essence to refine their physical body. This granted a temporary boost in power, but it ended up limiting their potential.

The gifting of dragon breath was reserved for juniors or disciples, involving the bestowal of a dragon scale imbued with Dao essence. This granted them the presence of dragon breath. While it might not result in immediate increases in strength, it held immense potential and the highest upper limit over time, serving as a form of legacy or cultivation inheritance from the True Dragon.

The dragon soul was even rarer and more valuable, as it required the True Dragon to weaken themselves and bestow a fragment of their soul to another. This allowed the recipient to tap into the dragon soul when needed, borrowing some of its immense power. This gift was typically given by mature True Dragons to their pure-blood offspring to protect them from being killed by enemies.

It could be said that dragon blood served as an enhancement, dragon breath as a legacy or cultivation inheritance, and the dragon soul as a form of protection.

At this moment, Qi Lin'er had activated the protective power of the Azure Dragon.

"Roar—" Fully transformed into a dragon, Qi Lin'er exuded immense pressure, releasing an enraged dragon chant that echoed through the sky.

Boom!

With a sudden burst of speed, he charged forward. The air cracked with explosive sounds, and he seemed to teleport, appearing instantly before Ling Ao.

Break, redirect, strike.

Ling Ao silently recited the essentials of the Tiger-Breaking Technique, his body bracing for impact. But when his palm made contact with the opponent's fist, he was met with an immovable force.

Bang—

Even though he blocked Qi Lin'er's fist with his left hand, Ling Ao was still struck on the shoulder.

In retaliation, he smashed his right elbow into Qi Lin'er's temple, causing the flames in the latter's vertical pupils to flicker.

However, dragon scales covered Qi Lin'er's entire body, including every vulnerable spot. After the hit, he quickly turned his head back.

Boom boom boom boom crash—

When Ling Ao executed the Tiger-Breaking Technique again, he found that he could no longer inflict significant damage to Qi Lin'er. Although he could land three strikes for every one of Qi Lin'er's, the difference in their physical strength had become insurmountable—this gap was beyond what martial arts techniques alone could overcome.

After exchanging blows, Qi Lin'er's dragon scales cracked, and the flames in his eyes flickered weakly. Clearly, this form of Dragon Soul Possession was very exhausting. Meanwhile, Ling Ao lay collapsed on the ground, gasping for breath, his body worn from the intense battle.

"The fact that you forced me to use my dragon soul shows just how powerful you are," Qi Lin'er said. It hadn't been an easy win, which was why he acknowledged the opponent before him.

With that, he turned and walked into the open portal.

"Qi Lin'er of the Penglai Supreme Sect has defeated Ling Ao of the Mount Shu Sect!"

The announcement echoed through the corridors as Qi Lin'er stepped forward, his gaze lifting to meet the figure he had long anticipated.

"Chu Liang?" A cruel smile spread across his dragon-scaled face. "So it's you after all."

Since Qi Lin'er and Chu Liang had entered from different directions, the chances of them encountering each other in the first two rounds were very small. However, with five participants coming from each direction in the second round, a one-on-one matchup would inevitably leave one person without an opponent.

And now, unexpectedly, they had encountered each other.

Ever since Chu Liang had slapped Qi Lin'er unconscious during their last encounter, Qi Lin'er had been unable to let it go. He felt humiliated, believing he had been ambushed unfairly and had not even gotten the chance to use his divine techniques.

When had he ever suffered such humiliation in his entire life?

If he had the chance to face Chu Liang openly in a fair fight with real blades and spears, he would never have suffered such a humiliating defeat, nor would he have become the laughingstock of the immortal sects.

Thus, Qi Lin'er had harbored a grudge, waiting for the opportunity to seek revenge on Chu Liang during the Battle at the Imperial City.

He didn't think that this moment would come just like this!

"I just defeated your fellow disciple, so it seems I'm destined to reach the top by trampling the members of your sect. I hope I can meet Jiang Yuebai in the next round. If she agrees to be my wife, then I..."

While Qi Lin'er was still rambling, Chu Liang had already drawn the Dustless Sword.

He didn't particularly dislike children, but for a brat like this who seemed poorly disciplined, some lessons had to be taught.

If once wasn't enough, then twice.

Last time, Chu Liang had needed the aid of the Great Pill of the Endlessly Devouring Whale to instantly defeat Qi Lin'er. This time, with a full grasp of a Great Dao, he struck again. With a single swing of his sword, a dragon-shaped burst of sword qi roared forward with unstoppable force!

Qi Lin'er hadn't even finished speaking when he saw Chu Liang strike. He planned to endure it with his formidable body, but the moment the dragon-shaped burst of sword qi materialized, a wave of dread washed over him.

No! This sword qi is too dangerous for me. I have to dodge! Chu Liang must have used some despicable, underhanded technique again; this attack doesn't match his cultivation level.

The warning rang in his mind, but Qi Lin'er found himself unable to avoid it in time. Desperation surged through him, and he dove into the earth, burrowing underground!

But the sword qi generated through the Great Dao of Severing Void relentlessly pursued him, slicing through the earth and splitting the thick ground in an instant... Boom!

When the dazzling sword qi finally dissipated, a massive pit nearly a zhang deep had formed where Qi Lin'er had been standing.

Chu Liang slowly approached the edge of the pit, his gaze fixed on Qi Lin'er, whose dragon scales were shattered, and blood streaked across his body. The child trembled, struggling to climb out of the massive hole.

"You..." Blood filled his eyes as he gritted his teeth. "You snuck up on me again..."

"Who told you to run your mouth so much, kid?" Chu Liang looked down at him without a trace of emotion. As he watched Qi Lin'er struggle to the edge of the pit, Chu Liang slowly lifted his foot and added, "Many admire Senior Sister Jiang, and I don't mind. But I don't want to hear you say her name again... You're not even of age."

As Qi Lin'er was about to climb up, he saw a patterned shoe sole descending from above, stamping onto his face.

Boom—

With all his strength, Chu Liang delivered a powerful kick to Qi Lin'er's face, smashing it inward and sending him tumbling back into the pit, unconscious. It was fortunate that Qi Lin'er's skin was thick—had it been another child of his age, they would have died eight hundred times over from such a blow.

Nevertheless, it was uncertain if Qi Lin'er could hear Chu Liang's last words to him.

"If there's a next time, I'll beat you up again."

Chapter 588: I Will Have to Win With My Intelligence(I)

"YASSSSSSS! STEP ON HIS FACE!"

Di Nufeng on the spectator stand cheered wildly, baring her teeth and claws in excitement at her disciple's impressive performance.

In stark contrast, the members of the Penglai Supreme Sect fell silent. While they still believed Yang Shenlong would secure the final victory, Qi Lin'er's humiliating defeat was not something to be celebrated.

The Penglai Supreme Sect had expected to overpower all the other teams. Even without Yang Shenlong, they had full confidence in their other disciples' abilities to match the top prodigies.

But they didn't expect that Qi Lin'er, whom they regarded as the second most powerful member of their team, would be so swiftly defeated by Chu Liang.

And not just once.

When it happened the first time, they could blame it on Qi Lin'er being unprepared, not activating the form of Dragon Soul Possession, and Chu Liang using a pill to launch a surprise attack.

But this time, the sword strike Chu Liang unleashed shattered Qi Lin'er's defenses right before everyone's eyes. There was no excuse to make this time.

Daoist Chi Niu furrowed his brows and spoke in a deep voice, "That boy... he actually comprehended the Great Dao of Severing the Void. Truly absurd."



"There must be a reason why Chu Liang from the Mount Shu Sect suddenly rose to fame," Daoist Xuan Lu remarked. "I've studied his past feats. Do you know what the most incredible part is?"

"I certainly don't know," Daoist Chi Niu replied.

"What he has accomplished in one year is something most people would not even be able to complete in ten. The trials, the Mount Shu Summit, and managing Red Cotton Peak—all of these tasks would have taken up all his time and energy.

"If an ordinary person were to do all those things, they would have no time left for cultivation. Yet, despite this hectic schedule, his cultivation has advanced at an astonishing rate. I've often wondered how he finds the time to cultivate. Sometimes, I even suspect he possesses a hidden realm that slows the flow of time."

As Daoist Xuan Lu spoke, his gaze remained fixed on the light screen showing Chu Liang heading into the next corridor, his eyes filled with intrigue.

Daoist Xuan Lu continued, "If he can accomplish such feats with scraps of time, how strong would he be if he fully dedicated himself to cultivation? And why has such a peerless genius been so obscure until now?"

"Are you suggesting..." Daoist Chi Niu looked at him.

"I suspect he has some heaven-defying stroke of luck, or perhaps he was born with great karmic fate as a Hallowed One," Daoist Xuan Lu concluded. "If only we could recruit such a disciple into the Penglai Supreme Sect."

Though Daoist Xuan Lu had no knowledge of the Large-Headed Dolls that were working tirelessly for Chu Liang, he couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. He knew that even if he himself had dedicated all his time and energy to cultivation, his cultivation level wouldn't be much higher than it was now... So how was Chu Liang progressing this quickly? Daoist Xuan Lu had a gut feeling that something was amiss.

"Recruit?" Daoist Chi Niu scoffed. "I'd rather snap his head off his neck."

Clearly, he had redirected his frustration from being roasted by Di Nufeng onto Chu Liang.

"This is where your narrow-mindedness lies. If everyone thought like you, how could the Penglai Supreme Sect have developed into its current glory?" Daoist Xuan Lu said leisurely.

Daoist Chi Niu snorted twice before responding, "Still, being taught a lesson by him twice may not be such a bad thing for Qi Lin'er. On Mirage Mountain, no one dares to provoke him, and he's nearly become a little tyrant. Who knows what his true origins are."

As for Qi Lin'er's origin, even the elders of the Penglai Supreme Sect knew little. The rumors surrounding him being the illegitimate child of Daoist Cangsheng were nothing more than baseless gossip.

"The matters related to the Divine Ruins are not to be discussed recklessly," Daoist Xuan Lu said calmly.

Daoist Chi Niu curled his lip in slight disdain but said nothing more.

Daoist Chi Niu, being one of the senior members of Mirage Mountain, had attained the seventh realm many years ago, while Daoist Xuan Lu was a recently promoted elite.

Daoist Chi Niu was nearly a generation older than Xuan Lu, possessing the seniority, cultivation, and wisdom that came with his long years of experience.

However, Daoist Xuan Lu had quickly gained favor with the higher-ups after his promotion, and his influence on Mirage Mountain now far surpassed Chi Niu's. This shift in power naturally stirred some underlying resentment in Chi Niu.

...

While Chu Liang continued his streak of swift victories, there were others still engaged in prolonged battles, holding their ground in the first corridor.

Xu Ziyang was one of them.

His opponent was also a fellow disciple of the Endless Sword Sect.

It was Xu Hu, one of the Tiger-Leopard-Dragon Brothers[1].

As the eldest senior brother of Jade Sword Peak faced this relatively unfamiliar disciple of the Endless Sword Sect, he unleashed his most powerful strike, the Heaven-Raising Sword, which roared through the air.

Likewise, Xu Hu, unfamiliar with the disciple of the Mount Shu Sect before him, did not hold back at all.

As the overwhelming sword light bore down, Xu Hu chose a tactic similar to Chu Liang's—he condensed his sword intent and struck with a single, powerful slash.

Hiss—

Where the sword rose, a cold glimmer erupted.

This exchange of sword strikes was a clash between the sword qi generated through the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination and the sword intent of the Great Dao of Severing the Void. Though the light of the sword intent created through Severing the Void seemed much smaller, it was denser and sharper, splitting the Heavenly Sword Seal cleanly in two.

However, the slash imbued with the Great Dao of Severing the Void was completely dissipated at that moment.

The two were evenly matched in this exchange of sword strikes.

Although this appeared to be a clash of powerful divine techniques, both were merely testing each other's limits. When they figured out the extent of each other's strength, they immediately adjusted their tactics.

Recognizing the intensity of his opponent's sword intent, Xu Ziyang lowered his stance and charged forward, aiming to close the distance and engage Xu Hu in close combat.

Seeing this, Xu Hu swung his longsword, instantly shrouding the surrounding five-zhang radius in sword intent. Anyone who dared enter would be met with a torrent of swordlight crashing down.

But Xu Ziyang paid it no mind and charged straight in.

Swishhhhh—

Suddenly, the sword light descended like a torrential rain, converging on him from all directions.

Xu Ziyang's figure suddenly flashed forward with a swift motion, appearing right in front of Xu Hu, closing the distance for close combat.

He used Dimension Compression!

Just as the spectators thought Xu Ziyang's tactic had succeeded, Xu Hu suddenly opened his mouth and spat out a dazzling blade of sword light!

Swish!

Caught off guard, Xu Ziyang barely dodged the attack, and the blade narrowly missed his face. Thankfully, he reacted quickly and summoned a layer of golden light around his hands, clapping them together mid-air.

He gripped the sword that had been sent his way, the weapon struggling fiercely in his grasp.

At the same time, Xu Hu swung his longsword directly at Xu Ziyang's chest!

Boom! With a resounding explosion, Xu Ziyang transformed into a Three-Headed and Six-Armed Form. His second pair of hands wielded swords to block Xu Hu's attack, while the third pair formed seals, summoning a swirling pool of lightning around them.

Crackle—

He performed the Five-Lightning Heart of the Sky!

Xu Hu's flying sword swept horizontally, once again expanding into a five-zhang sword domain. In an instant, the space within several zhang was flooded with overwhelming thunder and crisscrossing sword qi.

Both Xu Ziyang and Xu Hu activated their fifth-realm Metallic Bodies, enduring each other's attacks with sheer resilience.

However, as Xu Hu became injured, his life-bound flying sword suddenly glowed crimson, and a surge of intense energy erupted, as though Xu Hu had become one with his sword.

Xu Ziyang's hands were forced apart, struggling to maintain control.

He had no choice but to summon divine lightning, shaping it into chains to bind the small flying sword. The concentrated spiritual energy erupted in a deafening boom.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Both were flung apart by the force, flipping through the air before landing on their feet.

When their eyes met again, their gazes were like that of a lion meeting a tiger.

Chapter 589: I Will Have to Win With My Intelligence(II)

While Xu Ziyang and Xu Hu were locked in battle, Chu Liang had already entered the third corridor. After a brief moment of rest, he encountered his third opponent.

"Wahahahahaha!" A hearty laugh came from the other side. "Brother Chu, I can't believe it's you!"

It was none other than Yun Chaoxian.

As Chu Liang stared at the dude across from him, who was laughing heartily, he couldn't help but let out a bitter smile. He hadn't expected to run into one of his closest brothers from the Great Astral Sect.

However, of the ten teams competing in the Battle at the Imperial City, five of them had been Chu Liang's allies. Therefore, the odds of encountering one of the allies were fairly high.

"Brother Yun, since it has come to this, I guess I'll have to fight you," Chu Liang said. Even though it was against Yun Chaoxian, Chu Liang had no choice but to draw his sword.

Having reached this stage, even if it was his closest friends, he would have to engage in a fierce fight, like the clash of a dragon and tiger.

Boom!

Yun Chaoxian slammed his World-Dominating Halberd heavily on the ground and spoke earnestly, "I've never had a real fight with you."

Chu Liang concentrated his sword intent, the edge of the Dustless Sword gleaming sharply as a way to warn Yun Chaoxian to stay on guard.

Despite his relaxed demeanor, Yun Chaoxian was fully alert. He raised his halberd high, a grin spreading across his face. "Here I come!"

Boom.

The massive halberd tore through the air, accompanied by the sound of wind and thunder.

Chu Liang's response was swift and decisive—he met it head-on with a single, powerful sword strike!

Hiss—

Sword light flared once again, and a dragon-shaped sword qi erupted, carrying the full might of the Great Dao of Severing Void. The force was overwhelming, nearly unstoppable.

As Yun Chaoxian charged forward, he immediately felt the immense power of the strike. When he realized it was indestructible, he instinctively tried to change his path to dodge the attack.

Even as he did that, he had a gut feeling that no matter where he went, this sword would follow and he would never be able to escape this strike.

In that fleeting moment, Yun Chaoxian relied on his instincts to make the best possible choice.

He swung his halberd with precision, meeting the sword light head-on. As the overwhelming sword intent rushed toward him, he twisted his halberd, redirecting the sword light to the side just in time.

This move was called Redirecting the Dragon to the Sea!

This was one of the martial arts techniques of the Great Astral Sect. It was a move that relied on the precise control of foundational qi to redirect powerful attacks that would otherwise be impossible to withstand. This technique allowed the user to deflect a forceful strike with the least amount of strength.

This technique demanded precise control over qi, as it involved redirecting sword qi with the force of a halberd without activating its sharp edge. This was a highly challenging move.

Yet, in the hands of a core disciple of the Great Astral Sect, it appeared effortless.

As he redirected the attack, it caused Chu Liang's sword light to crash into the wall, shattering a section of the corridor.

Boom!

But Chu Liang could already tell something was off.

As soon as Yun Chaoxian completed that move, Chu Liang immediately followed up with another wave of attacks.

Although another strike generated through the Great Dao of Severing the Void couldn't happen in quick succession, Chu Liang easily switched to other sword seals.

As Yun Chaoxian looked back, he saw a rain of sword light flying toward him.

Chu Liang had used the Ten Thousand Swords Seal!

Having just used the technique of Redirecting the Dragon to the Sea, Yun Chaoxian was momentarily caught off guard by the Ten Thousand Swords Seal. He couldn't raise his weapon in

time to block the torrent of swords. With a stomp of his left foot, a surge of augmented qi erupted from him, expanding over a zhang and forming a protective barrier around his body.

Augmented qi, of course, was a specialty of the Great Astral Sect disciples.

An ethereal layer of augmented qi enveloped Yun Chaoxian, creating a swift gust of wind. As the countless sword lights rained down upon him, ripples formed on the surface of the shield, but none could penetrate Yun Chaoxian's defense.

Following the Ten Thousand Swords Seal, Chu Liang had already closed in!

"Be careful, Brother Yun!" With a clear shout, two clones of Chu Liang closed in, attacking Yun Chaoxian from both sides.

Yun Chaoxian was slightly surprised. Even though he hadn't expected that Chu Liang would engage in close combat, it was fine.

Using the Immortal Art: External Manifestation, Chu Liang created two clones. One clone wielded a sword, while the other clone held a brick, and both attacked Yun Chaoxian together.

Yun Chaoxian swung his halberd fearlessly, taking on both of the clones without hesitation.

In truth, the Brick Combat Technique was a martial arts technique Yun Chaoxian had created for Chu Liang on a whim. When it came to martial arts, Chu Liang still lagged far behind this core disciple of the Great Astral Sect.

Yun Chaoxian defended from both directions, spinning his halberd with precision and unleashing three consecutive strikes at the brick-wielding Chu Liang. As the wind of augmented qi howled, he swiftly redirected his halberd to block the sword-wielding Chu Liang.

In terms of physical strength and resilience, Chu Liang was on a higher level than Yun Chaoxian. His physique, fortified through various means, surpassed even that of fifth-realm martial cultivators.

However, sheer physical strength alone was not enough to overcome the vast difference in their martial arts techniques.



With two resounding booms, both of Chu Liang's figures were shattered by Yun Chaoxian's halberd.

But as soon as the explosion rang out, both Chu Liangs transformed into Puppet Pills, falling to the ground.

They were both fake? Yun Chaoxian was momentarily stunned.

He had thought Chu Liang had used the immortal art External Manifestation, but it turned out to be a simple Army of Beans technique.

But the question remained. Where is the real Chu Liang?

He soon got his answer.

A figure erupted from the ground, clad in intricate scales. As it emerged at close range, flames erupted from the armor!

Boom—

When Chu Liang had first obtained the Inferno Devil Armor, he had considered using it to counter martial cultivators, and now it was proving its worth.

Flames engulfed a two-zhang radius, forcing Yun Chaoxian to retreat. Though he was not particularly afraid of the Divine Dragon Fire, prolonged exposure would inevitably lead to injuries.

An unusual scene then unfolded.

The martial arts cultivator Yun Chaoxian was pursued down the corridor by Chu Liang, a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, with a sword in hand.

He gripped his halberd upside down and sprinted down the long corridor as fast as he could.

Unfortunately, the corridor came to a dead end. Realizing there was nowhere left to run, Yun Chaoxian suddenly spun around, thrusting his halberd backward over a zhang!

Back-thrusting halberd strike!

It turned out that Yun Chaoxian had been pretending to flee.

His escape had been nothing more than a facade, a way to set up this sudden strike.

When the brothers of the Great Astral Sect fight, they certainly know how to use their brains!

Fortunately, Chu Liang was well aware of this. He had witnessed Yun Chaoxian's combat prowess years ago when he defeated a high-ranking demon envoy, so he never underestimated him.

While Yun Chaoxian's back-thrusting halberd strike was immensely powerful, it came as no surprise to Chu Liang. With quick reflexes, he swiftly dodged back, dodging the attack just in time.

Boom—

Yun Chaoxian's upper garments tore apart, his body radiating a fierce aura as qi flames surged around him. The wind of augmented qi swirled, and he swiftly shifted into counterattack mode!

He had ripped his shirt!

This was the moment that Chu Liang had been waiting for!

He knew that Yun Chaoxian was now going to exert his full strength. And so, he immediately moved a step back.

The tables had turned. Now, it was Chu Liang who was escaping, while Yun Chaoxian was pursuing.

The chase continued down this end of the corridor to the other end.

The spectators, watching the entire scene unfold, couldn't help but feel a sense of absurdity. The chase added a surprising layer of comedy to the otherwise ancient and solemn azure-colored corridor.

As Yun Chaoxian chased Chu Liang to the opposite end, Chu Liang suddenly spun around.

Though he didn't know how to perform a back-thrusting sword strike like Yun Chaoxian, he had another move prepared.

### Sword Strike of Severing Void

It was truly difficult for Chu Liang to fully unleash the power of the Great Dao of Severing the Void. As a result, this strike drained a significant amount of his vitality, qi, and spirit. He could only use it once within a short span of time.

The reason he had engaged Yun Chaoxian in close combat earlier was to buy time to restore his Sea of Qi.

Thanks to the Large-Headed Dolls circulating qi frantically, his Sea of Qi was nearly replenished in mere moments. Without hesitation, Chu Liang swung his sword again!

Hiss—

Yun Chaoxian did not think it was possible that Chu Liang could unleash such a powerful strike a second time within such a short period.

This might have felt short to Yun Chaoxian, but for the Large-Headed Dolls, it likely felt like an eternity.

This time, Yun Chaoxian found it even harder to defend.

During the first Sword Strike of Severing Void, he had enough time to use the technique of Redirecting the Dragon to the Sea, but now, there was no time for that—he could only face the attack head-on.

For the first time, a trace of doubt crept into his mind.

He couldn't help but think, Can I really withstand this?

Boom—

The sword qi, taking the form of a dragon, clashed directly with Yun Chaoxian's World-Dominating Halberd, unleashing a deafening explosion. The sword qi scattered in all directions, and Yun Chaoxian, covered in wounds, was sent flying through the air before crashing violently to the ground.

What a vicious strike!

After a long moment, as the dust settled, Chu Liang approached to check on him. "Brother Yun?"

"I'm fine," Yun Chaoxian replied firmly, hearing Chu Liang's concern. "I just suddenly feel like lying down for a bit."

"Then... can you still fight?" Chu Liang asked again.

Yun Chaoxian paused and replied, "Rest for a bit."

"If you can fight, then fight; if you can't, then you can't. What does rest for a bit mean?" Chu Liang asked.

"Then... let's say I can't," Yun Chaoxian exhaled deeply, sighing. "I once thought we were evenly matched in both wits and courage. But now, it seems your strength surpasses mine... I'll just have to win with my intelligence from now on."

Chapter 590: Xu Ziyang's Decision (I)

"Chu Liang of the Mount Shu Sect has defeated Yun Chaoxian of the Great Astral Sect!"

When this announcement rang out, the people in Corridor City displayed expressions of surprise. They were shocked to hear that Chu Liang had defeated Yun Chaoxian, but it had not been entirely unexpected. They had known that Chu Liang was likely to be overwhelmingly strong, but it was his methods that always caught them off guard.

Chu Liang had achieved three victories in a row, each in a remarkably short time... In fact, Chu Liang's first two opponents had not even managed to withstand a single strike from him.

Yun Chaoxian had only managed to withstand two strikes. If his halberd were as firm as he was in speech, perhaps he might have lasted a bit longer.

This meant that Chu Liang was, without a doubt, the first to make it into the top five, granting him the first bye.

The whole purpose of Corridor City's mechanism was to accelerate the pace of the competition while minimizing luck as a factor. The first three rounds of the Battle at the Imperial City were different from the final round.

In the first three rounds, the participants advancing to the next corridor in the same direction would have to battle whoever entered the same corridor shortly after them, making it unlikely for the stronger competitors to encounter the weaker competitors for three consecutive rounds.

The competitors that won their battles quickly would have to face other swift victors, while those that took longer to win their battles would go on to face other slow victors. In other words, the competitors of a similar level would be matched up.

This could lead to some strong competitors being eliminated earlier than the weaker ones, but it was unavoidable. Nevertheless, the rankings in the first three rounds of the Battle at the Imperial City were not that significant; only the final round mattered.

Even if a weaker competitor was lucky enough to somehow reach the third round, they would have to face a formidable competitor that had fought their way there. That meant it was nearly impossible for one of the weaker competitors to advance to the top five just because they had good luck.

There could be instances where the fastest competitors in each direction who, despite leading by a wide margin, ended up getting slowed down because they had to wait for their next opponent to arrive. However, that reduced the chances that matched competitors would have an overwhelming gap in level, causing the battles to end too quickly. Furthermore, if they had to wait for their next opponent, that likely meant their opponent was up against another strong competitor in long and grueling battles, placing their opponent at a disadvantage.

Of course, the faster competitors held a huge advantage to begin with. After all, they would be well rested, whereas their next opponents would be exhausted from having been stuck in prolonged battles.

That was why the fastest competitor was given the first bye.

However, the competitor that defeated their opponent the fastest in the semifinals would advance straight to the final duel. The other victor from the semifinals would then have to duel the competitor that had won the first bye to compete for the remaining spot in the final round. This ensured that both finalists would likely have had to fight in four duels.

There had been two times in which the final winner turned out to be the slower victor, despite having fought five, instead of four, battles to get to the finals. These were exceedingly rare occurrences in the history of the Assembly of Immortal Sects.

Ultimately, this complicated competition boiled down to a focus on five words—fairness, fairness, and more fairness.

To the spectators who were familiar with the Assembly of Immortal Sects, they had come to a simple realization—speed equaled strength.

Chu Liang had been the fastest to reach the top five, making him the man who defeated his opponents the fastest in Corridor City. Did that mean he was also the strongest?

Then what about Yang Shenlong?

...

At this moment, Yang Shenlong was engaged in his duel for the third round.

His opponent was the Great Astral Sect's eldest disciple, Ren Hongdao.

The eldest senior brother of the Astral Sect stood proudly with a flame-colored long saber in his right hand. Despite facing Yang Shenlong, who was known to be the top immortal sect disciple of their generation, Ren Hongdao showed no fear. Rather, his gaze was blazing with determination.

When it came to fighting, the disciples of the Great Astral Sect were never afraid, no matter who they had to fight.

Yang Shenlong's expression remained indifferent, his gaze deep.

Ever since losing to Chu Liang, much of Yang Shenlong's arrogance had faded, replaced by a restrained but intense determination. It seemed that it had not been a bad thing for him to experience defeat once.

Whoosh.

Ren Hongdao raised his saber and exuded an intense murderous intent, instantly becoming extremely imposing. As a martial arts cultivator at the pinnacle of the fifth-realm, his qi and blood surged to terrifying levels. He was pretty much akin to a celestial beast.

His saber, Soaring Serpent, measured five chi and three cun[1]. It was forged from Heavenly Fire Meteoric Iron and ranked 168th in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures.

Boom!

A thunderous noise resounded as crimson augmented qi and its scorching flames struck down heavily toward Yang Shenlong.

Yang Shenlong swiftly dodged the attack. Despite being a sixth-realm cultivator, he did not dare underestimate a martial arts cultivator whose cultivation level was a little lower than his. The two followed different cultivation paths, but once they engaged in close combat, Ren Hongdao would pose a major threat.

Whoosh.

After using Dimension Compression to evade Ren Hongdao's strike, Yang Shenlong followed up with a hand seal. There were only several zhang between them, yet when Ren Hongdao chased Yang Shenlong and tried to attack again, he realized he could not close the distance even with two leaps.

It was the Great Dao of Primordial Chaos.

The normal spectators outside were puzzled by the scene, but the higher-ups of the immortal sects promptly recognized what Yang Shenlong was doing.

He wasn't using a divine skill or an immortal art but the Great Dao of Primordial Chaos. His deep understanding of it allowed him to instantly alter the spatial distance between him and Ren Hongdao.

This was another manifestation of the World Within One's Sleeve—a demonstration of Yang Shenlong's excellent, albeit incomplete, mastery of the Great Dao of Primordial Chaos.

If Ren Hongdao had no way of countering it, then he would never be able to close in on Yang Shenlong.

While Ren Hongdao continued to leap, Yang Shenlong formed more seals with his hands. Countless streams of green qi emerged from the ground and into the sky, transforming into vines that looked like dragons and snakes. They rushed toward Ren Hongdao, aiming to entwine around him.

Ren Hongdao's response to this series of continuous attacks was comparatively straightforward.

You have a world within your sleeve? Then I'll just slash your world apart!

You have vines? Then I will just slash through them!

The strategy for his counterattack was just one word—slash.

The Soaring Serpent Saber flew through the air, and an apparition of a long saber apparition in midair. Then it descended toward the ground with explosive force.

Boom!

The ground split open, forming a deep trench as raging flames surged toward Yang Shenlong's feet. He turned his palm downward, extinguishing the fiery saber wind with his hand.



Ren Hongdao pressed on relentlessly, slashing through the space that the World Within One's Sleeve had altered. With a leap, he closed in on Yang Shenlong and directed a slash at him.

Whoosh.

The saber's frigid wind pressed against Yang Shenlong's face, yet he remained calm and collected. He turned his right hand over and drew out a three-chi-long[2] Dragon Bone Jade Blade, blocking the saber with a clang.

His legs sank into the ground up to his knees, the force of the collision driving him downward.

Right then, another figure emerged from behind Yang Shenlong. He used External Manifestation!

The clone leaped up high and transformed its right arm into a massive dragon claw. The claw swiped down toward Ren Hongdao!

Caught off guard, Ren Hongdao pushed the Soaring Serpent Saber harder, forcing Yang Shenlong, who was still in front of him, to retreat. With a fierce swing of his saber, Ren Hongdao summoned strong winds to defend him!

Rumble!

The explosive collision shook the earth, sending shockwaves in all directions. The summoned winds quickly swept away the dust from the collision, revealing Yang Shenlong's clone clutching the Soaring Serpent Saber with its dragon claw. The clone held the saber firmly in place, refusing to let it go even as his golden blood sprayed out.

Meanwhile, Yang Shenlong stepped forward, thrusting the three-chi-long Dragon Bone Jade Blade toward Ren Hongdao.

Faced with attacks from above and below, Ren Hongdao unleashed the valor of the Great Astral Sect's eldest senior brother.

He roared, "DIE!"

Ren Hongdao ripped his shirt to shreds and emitted an indescribably intense murderous intent.

Rather than abandoning his saber, he intensified the augmented qi on the blade to maximum power, intending to slash both Yang Shenlong and his clone in half!

The Soaring Serpent Saber rose and fell, and Yang Shenlong's clone exploded to bits in midair. Faced with the Dragon Bone Jade Blade, Ren Hongdao did not retreat. Instead, he advanced fearlessly, undeterred by the prospect of mutual destruction.

He stopped his fierce sword strike when the saber was just an inch from Yang Shenlong's face. Tension filled the air.

The Dragon Bone Jade Blade in Yang Shenlong's hand was pointed at Ren Hongdao's chest, a mere motion away from piercing his heart. Meanwhile, Ren Hongdao's saber hovered over Yang Shenlong's head, a slight descent away from killing him.

Was it going to be mutual destruction?

The spectators were astonished by this scene.

Yet, it was at this very moment that another Yang Shenlong emerged from the void.

"You've lost."

The clone in front of Ren Hongdao shattered with a resounding boom.

There had been two clones!

Yang Shenlong's mastery of External Manifestation had already advanced to the point where he could have two clones simultaneously, while he had stayed concealed the whole time using the Shadow of Radiance. All of Ren Hongdao's efforts had been focused on the two clones.

This scene left the spectators exclaiming in admiration and letting out sighs of relief. Just moments earlier, they had feared that the two young men had entered a deadly stalemate. Had either one lost control, it could have ended with two deaths.

Fatalities like that had indeed occurred in past Battles at the Imperial City.

Amid the clamor, an announcement rang out.

"Yang Shenlong of the Penglai Supreme Sect has defeated Ren Hongdao of the Great Astral Sect!"