

## M. Slaying 661

Chapter 661: I'll Pass On That.

"Nangong Zhi is dead."

Six years had passed, but the decor of the chancellor's private chamber remained unchanged—simple and elegant as always.

Su Qian, still dressed in his scholar's robes, sat quietly, his expression calm and serene. Having risen to the highest position in the imperial court, there was no further to climb. Maintaining the status quo was his ideal scenario.

"The Imperial Supervisory Bureau was about to take him away, but that Mount Shu disciple intervened and killed him," said the man seated across from Su Qian.

The one sitting across Su Qian was Gu Shanfeng, the sect leader of the Mystic Wind Sect.

Among the Chancellor's Sixteen-Faction Alliance, few could sit as equals with Su Qian. Gu Shanfeng was one of them.

A letter lay on the table. Su Qian had just finished reading it, and with a sweep of his divine sense, Gu Shanfeng grasped its contents as well.

"Compared to Nangong Zhi's death, I find that disciple of the Mount Shu Sect far more interesting," Su Qian said with a smile.

"Chu Liang?" Gu Shanfeng echoed. "Wasn't he that unlucky champion of the Assembly of Immortal Sects? The one who got involved in palace affairs right after winning, exposing Empress Wu and nearly getting killed by Cheng Hu? I didn't expect him to survive, let alone return."

"Yes, it hasn't been long since he started venturing out of Mount Shu, but all his experiences have been rather extraordinary," Su Qian replied.

"If you must say, Cheng Hu was a fool. A powerful seventh-realm cultivator could kill someone of a lower cultivation level at any time. Why would he do it in the palace? Even if he did succeed, he

would still be trading his own life for Chu Liang's life. Regardless, it would be a huge loss. The worst thing was that he failed and became a laughing stock," Gu Shanfeng scoffed.

"Actually, it's quite the opposite," Su Qian said as he shook his head. "Had Cheng Hu succeeded in taking Chu Liang's life, it would have been a great victory for him. Though his failure is regrettable, his actions were far from foolish."

"What do you mean by that?" Gu Shanfeng asked, feeling puzzled. "What's so special about this disciple of the Mount Shu Sect?"

While prodigious disciples were valuable, as long as they hadn't achieved a breakthrough and attained the seventh realm, they could still be stopped. Their worth couldn't compare to that of a cultivator at the Dao Attainment Realm.

This was a common understanding in the world of immortality cultivators.

But from what Su Qian said, it seemed like Chu Liang's life was far more valuable than Cheng Hu's.

"You will know it by just looking at Red Cotton Peak," Su Qian said. "How many seventh-realm cultivators do you think the Mount Shu Sect would be willing to trade for the Red Cotton Peak?"

"That's true." Gu Shanfeng nodded. "But a cultivator must still be assessed by their cultivation level."

"He's clearly someone with great fate. It is impossible for him to live a life of inferiority," Su Qian replied. "Just as clouds foretell rain or shine, one's fate can be predicted through their qi. His fortune shines like a rainbow, and gold lies hidden within his fate. I very much envy him."

"Chancellor, you simply walk a different path. Why envy him? Had you been born into an immortal sect, you would be no less than these prodigies."

"Haha," Su Qian chuckled and shook his head. "I was born with a weak fate, destined for an early death and sickness. It was only because someone altered my destiny that I achieved what I have today. That is precisely why I believe in this Dao."

"Oh?" Gu Shanfeng raised his eyes slightly. "Such methods exist?"

"But every alteration in fate comes with a price. I paid dearly for it," Su Qian explained. "When it comes to the study of destiny, no one surpasses the Celestial Master of Celestial Charm Sect. I suspect that Cheng Hu's attempt to kill Chu Liang was orchestrated by him... or at least he was the one who encouraged it. Most likely, he foresaw the boy's potential to threaten him and sought to kill him early."

"The Celestial Charm Sect's Celestial Master?" Gu Shanfeng found it hard to believe. "He's a powerful eighth-realm cultivator. Why go through such efforts to kill a young disciple? Couldn't he simply handle it himself?"

"It's not that simple..." Su Qian seemed to want to say more but hesitated. "Just remember—whether he's in Mount Shu or not, it's best to avoid going against him in the future."

Gu Shanfeng stared at Su Qian. Everyone around the chancellor knew he believed in fate, but this level of conviction seemed a bit extreme.

"By the way," Gu Shanfeng continued, "the Crown Prince has once again sent an invitation to South Melody Conservatory. This has happened multiple times over the past few years. It seems he still can't forget Miss Shen."

"Let him be," Su Qian replied. "South Melody Conservatory never responds anyway."

"Didn't you previously try to arrange a marriage between the Second Prince and Shen Qingyan?" Gu Shanfeng asked curiously. "Now that the Second Prince has successfully become Crown Prince, why don't you support it anymore?"

"The Crown Prince?" Su Qian's eyes flickered with uncertainty. "No one even knows how much longer the Yu Dynasty will last."

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Standing on the deck of Lianglong, Wang Xuanling voiced his thoughts as the wind howled around him.

"How much longer can the Yu Dynasty last? Ten years? Twenty? If these natural disasters persist, the humans across the land of the nine provinces could collapse sooner than we think. If mortals can no longer survive, how can cultivators stay alive?"

"This Heavenly Peak Banquet isn't just about raising donations. The real goal is to find a solution. We are seeing disasters happen year after year. This is not normal. We must uncover the hidden hand behind this."

As the grand peak master, Wang Xuanling naturally handled Mount Shu Sect's external affairs. As for the disciples accompanying him, they were Chu Liang, Lin Bei, and Shang Ziliang.

These three were part of the core members that led Red Cotton Peak.

"Endless disasters bring endless strife and deaths," Chu Liang added. "Wu'an City fell to the rebels of Mount Mang, with heavy casualties. Many innocent lives were lost, even in the prosperous lands of the Eastern Regions."

"I find it strange that the rebels of Mount Mang were able to seize Wu'an City," Shang Ziliang remarked. "How did such a large force cross the mountains between the Eastern and Southern Regions without leaving a trace? Whether by air or land, there should have been signs of their movements."

"Someone must have helped them secretly but we don't know who..." Wang Xuanling growled. "No doubt it's the work of those who thrive on chaos."

The hardships of the Southern Regions barely stirred the imperial court. The panic only set in when the rebels of Mount Mang breached the Eastern Regions.

As they spoke, the golden haze of Buddhist Cloud Monastery began to shimmer above the clouds in the distance.

Lin Bei suddenly pointed. "That group is from the Great Astral Sect."

"Hm?" Chu Liang uttered.

He glanced over and spotted a colossal exotic beast, its sleek, panther-like body towering like a mountain. Several martial artists in fitted robes stood and sat atop the beast. They were indeed from the Great Astral Sect.

Lin Bei leaped into the air, waving and laughing loudly. "Heheheh!"

The Great Astral Sect noticed Mount Shu Sect's airship and immediately steered towards them.

Not recognizing the accompanying elder of the Great Astral Sect, Chu Liang stepped back and allowed Wang Xuanling to engage alone. However, the disciples behind the elder were all familiar to Chu Liang.

They were none other than Ren Hongdao, the eldest senior brother of the Great Astral Sect, accompanied by Li Fujian and Ji Lingyu.

Ren Hongdao still carried his long saber and maintained his usual stoic demeanor. But when his eyes met Chu Liang's, he smiled faintly. "I heard you were back. I didn't think I'd see you this soon. Unfortunately, Junior Brother Yun hasn't been back recently. If not, he would have rushed to see you the moment he knew."

"I've missed you all as well," Chu Liang said sincerely, glancing at the two beside him with a playful grin. "Brother Li, it seems like you have been living a happy life."

Li Fujian looked very different from back then. Back then, he had been a handsome and sharp young man. But now, he had grown slightly plump. His face was rounder, and a small bulge showed at his stomach. He no longer gave off this aloof expression. Instead, he was always carrying this warm, sheepish smile. If Chu Liang had bumped into him somewhere out on the street, he might not have recognized him.

The most likely reason for this change was marriage.

His wife was none other than the gentle and refined woman standing by his side.

It was Ji Lingyu, the Ninth Young Lady of the Ji family.

Fate had taken an unexpected turn. Back then, Ji Lingyu had run away from home and sought refuge at the Great Astral Sect because she was friends with Tang Shi. What began as a temporary stay gradually became permanent. Over time, she officially joined the sect and eventually married into it.

As one of the rare intelligent minds in the sect, Ji Lingyu quickly earned a place as a trusted advisor within the sect. This was why the Great Astral Sect entrusted her with attending the Heavenly Peak Banquet.

The once sharp-tongued girl remained much the same, though her demeanor now held a gentler, more refined grace.

Ji Lingyu met Chu Liang's gaze with a smile. "It's good to see you back. Senior Brother Yun is always talking about you at the sect. You're basically the second person he talks about the most."

"Oh?" Chu Liang asked curiously. "Who's the first?"

"Of course, it's Miss Tie Chui," Li Fujian replied with a grin.

Hah. Who would've thought one of the Great Astral Sect brothers would be the first among my friends to awaken to love? Truly magical, Chu Liang thought.

After exchanging pleasantries, Chu Liang retrieved several tokens and handed them to the group.

"Take a look at Mount Shu's latest creation—the Circle of Immortal Friends," he said.

"What's this?" Ren Hongdao and the others asked curiously.

"I call it the Circle of Immortal Friends. Just try it, and you'll see," Chu Liang replied with a grin.

Following Chu Liang's guidance, each of them injected a fragment of their spiritual sense into the jade slip, binding the tokens to themselves.

As they entered the interdimensional soul domain, they were startled by the sheer number of participants.

"I didn't expect this many people!" one of them said.

Chu Liang began demonstrating the functions of the Circle of Immortal Friends.

Before long, the airship drifted closer to the gates of Buddhist Cloud Monastery.

A familiar figure hurried forward, beaming with enthusiasm.

"Ah! I saw you approaching and rushed out to greet you. Oh, and friends from the Great Astral Sect too! This is truly—huh?"

"Quick! Put it away!" Chu Liang whispered urgently.

But it was too late. Pushan had already noticed the items Chu Liang handed out. Although the tokens were swiftly tucked away, he became curious.

"What did you just give them?" Pushan asked puzzledly.

"Oh..." Chu Liang chuckled. "Oh... just Mount Shu Sect's latest specialty—stinky tofu, fermented with durian and pickled bamboo shoots. Want to try some?"

Pushan froze. His hand twitched mid-air before he forced a wry smile. "I'll... pass on that."

Chapter 662: I'm Such An Asshole

The monastery in the clouds, where the most supreme Buddhist teachings are taught—this legendary Buddhist monastery was said to be the holiest land. Yet, even those in the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten knew little of it.

For Chu Liang, this was his first time laying eyes on the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, and even from afar, the sight left him breathless.

A vast and dense sea of clouds supported grand temples and pavilions above, glowing with golden light and exuding an air of solemn magnificence. The character 佛, meaning Buddha, was etched boldly on the front wall, radiating a sense of reverence that seemed to echo through the heavens.

Though he had heard countless tales of the monastery's wonders, only now, standing before it, did he truly grasp its breathtaking splendor.

Gazing at the floating sea of clouds, Chu Liang couldn't help but ask in amazement, "Is this really not the result of some divine ability or enchanted formation?"

Raising such an immense temple into the sky seemed impossible without extraordinary power. If this were purely natural, it would be truly incredible.

Pushan, standing beside him, chuckled. "Of course not. This place was discovered by one of our past grandmasters by chance. If divine abilities or formations could accomplish such a feat, wouldn't every immortal sect in the Divine Nine have done so already? Can you imagine the spiritual energy required to sustain such a formation for thousands of years?"

Hearing this, Chu Liang nodded in agreement.

Suspending a temple for a short time using formations was easy. Many sects could achieve this. But for it to hover, motionless, through the long stretch of countless years... such a feat could only be the work of primordial forces of heaven and earth.

"What lies within the sea of clouds?"

Chu Liang gazed into the vast expanse, his mind wandering to the possibility of a powerful source of spiritual energy hidden within.

"No one knows," Pushan replied. "Many esteemed monks have tried to explore the depths, but even the most powerful grandmaster in our monastery's history could only reach the outer edges of the cloud's core. Through the chaotic mists, he caught a fleeting glimpse of what appeared to be... a human figure."

"A human figure?" Chu Liang's interest deepened. "In the very heart of the sea of clouds?"

"That's right," Pushan said with a nod. "But this sea of clouds has existed for countless millennia. Whoever lies within can't possibly still be alive. Our grandmaster speculated that this could be the celestial tomb of a Hallowed One, a ninth-realm being. Furthermore, this Hallowed One seems to have ties to our Buddhist sect, as the rich spiritual energy here carries the power of Buddha's light."



"But Buddhism only arrived in the land of the nine provinces... how long ago?" Chu Liang blinked, suddenly struck by a thought. "Could it be from before that...?"

Pushan smiled, confirming Chu Liang's deduction. Chu Liang was sharp—he understood immediately.

"Our grandmasters speculated the same. While Buddhism today was known to have come from the Far West, some believe that in ancient times... it may have originated in the land of the nine provinces. Aside from this sea of clouds radiating the Buddha's light, we have also discovered hidden realms left behind by ancient Buddhist sects. These realms have existed for at least ten thousand years, further supporting the theory."

Chu Liang said, "So, if that's the case, there was once a Hallowed One of Buddhism who emerged long ago and chose to bury himself within this sea of clouds, floating in the skies for eternity. Yet, for some reason, the Buddhist legacy was entirely lost in the nine provinces—almost as if it had been erased..."

The more Chu Liang thought about it, the stranger it seemed.

It reminded him of other stories—tales of fallen Hallowed Ones, ninth-realm figures whose very existence seemed to vanish from history. How did these powerful beings who stood atop heaven and earth meet such fates?

Who could possibly be responsible for something like this?

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The wind howled around them as they approached the gates of Buddhist Cloud Monastery. Chu Liang and the others secured their airship and stepped onto the stone path, continuing on foot through the temple grounds.

At the front gate stood a thin, elderly monk draped in a wide robe, his long white eyebrows swaying in the breeze. Upon seeing the groups from the Mount Shu Sect and the Great Astral Sect, he stepped forward to greet them.

This elder was Dhyana Master Shenjie[1], the chief monk of the monastery and a renowned high monk of his generation.

The highest authority in the monastery was Dhyana Master Shenyou, Pushan's esteemed teacher. However, since Shenyou practiced silent meditation, the duty of hosting guests fell to Dhyana Master Shenjie, allowing Shenyou to focus entirely on his cultivation.

As the elders walked ahead, Pushan led Chu Liang and the others on a leisurely tour from behind.

Chu Liang asked, "Dhyana Master Shenyou has been practicing silent meditation for a long time, right?"

"Silent mouth, listening ears. My teacher seeks the Great Dao through this practice. Until he fully understands it, he must remain silent," Pushan replied.

"Will you be practicing silent meditation again in the future?" Chu Liang grinned.

"Heh." Pushan chuckled softly, casting a glance toward the gate. "I've never liked passing through the front gate. Do you know why?"

"Why?" Chu Liang asked cautiously, bracing himself for an onslaught of words.

"I never knew my parents. My grandfather raised me," Pushan began, his voice slow and steady.

"When I was young, Dhyana Master Shenyou found me during his travels. He said I had a Buddhist nature and brought me to cultivate at this monastery in the clouds.

"For three years, I stayed within the temple grounds, never seeing my grandfather. The monastery sits high in the sky, and it's difficult for him to visit. I believed that once I progressed far enough in my cultivation, I'd be able to leave freely and visit him often.

"But one day, he came to see me. When my fellow disciples told me, I was stunned and rushed to the gate. He stood there, smiling as he spoke to me. But I was in the middle of silent meditation and couldn't say a word.

"I wanted to ask how he was, if his health was holding up, if he was still working hard... if he was tired.

"But for the sake of my cultivation, I said nothing. I didn't even address him as 'Grandfather' before he left. He knew that I was doing silent meditation, so he didn't make me speak. Instead, he simply gave me words of advice and said many things...

"Not long after he left, I received word of his passing. Only then did I learn how gravely ill he had been. Knowing his time was short, he begged at a temple below for days until a monk agreed to bring him here.

"A mere mortal, untouched by cultivation, enduring the harsh winds of the sky—just to see me one last time. Yet, he never even heard me call him 'Grandfather.' I didn't even answer a single question."

"When my silent meditation ended, I ran to his grave and wept loudly. But by then, he could no longer hear me," Pushan said with a bitter smile. "Since that day, I vowed to always speak more with the people I care about. I know you all find me annoying sometimes... but who knows when the next time will be the last? Who knows when... I won't have the chance to speak at all?"

"..."

His story left everyone in silence.

So that's why...

Pushan's past explained his constant chatter. Now it all made sense. As friends, they really shouldn't have treated him that way.

Chu Liang recalled how he had treated Pushan differently from his other friends. As he continued walking, he really felt like slapping himself.

The others felt the same way.

All of them felt guilty about how they had treated Pushan.

A moment later, Chu Liang handed Pushan a token.

"What's this?" Pushan asked.

"The Circle of Immortal Friends," Chu Liang replied. "A place where someone will always listen to you."

"Ah? Does everyone have one?" Pushan asked eagerly.

"They will, eventually," Chu Liang said with a nod.

"That's wonderful."

Pushan accepted the token as if it were a priceless treasure, already turning it over in his hands as he walked away.

Watching Pushan's cheerful figure disappear into the distance, Chu Liang clenched his teeth.

Pushan is just a very friendly and loving person. He did nothing wrong! Ahh, I'm such an asshole.

...

As they stepped into the plaza bathed in Buddha's light, they found groups from other sects had already gathered. Among them were top-ranked members of the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten.

Yet, the atmosphere was far from harmonious.

At the forefront of the Celestial King Sect stood a burly, middle-aged man dressed in white robes lined with gold. He had a broad face, square jaw, and thick, muscular shoulders.

Chu Liang hadn't seen him before, but Lin Bei recognized him at a glance and told Chu Liang that this person was Zhang Kui, the cavalry commander of the Celestial King Sect[2]. Despite his status, Zhang Kui lounged lazily to the side, allowing the young Feng Chaoyang to take the spotlight.

It seemed the Celestial King Sect was putting all its effort into Feng Chaoyang.

At this moment, Feng Chaoyang stood face-to-face with a fierce-looking man—Wei Tiandi of Thunderbolt Stronghold.

The conflict between the two sects had begun with these two, escalating into bloodshed on both sides. Now, meeting under such circumstances only reignited the flames of their enmity.

Wei Tiandi's fury simmered beneath the surface, but he restrained himself. His glare, however, never wavered.

Feng Chaoyang was much more arrogant. With a smug expression, he said, "What happened to Du Wuhen? I'd call it karma. If you think I was involved, bring me proof."

"Heh." Wei Tiandi sneered coldly. "You know exactly what you did."

Rumors of the Celestial King Sect ambushing Du Wuhen had spread throughout the martial world. Du Wuhen's disappearance for many days only strengthened the rumor that he had been killed.

Wei Tiandi's hatred stemmed from this very incident.

"Gentlemen!" a few young monks from Buddhist Cloud Monastery softly interrupted. "Please restrain your anger."

"Hmph." Feng Chaoyang turned, casting a sideways glance. "Out of respect for the high monks of the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, I won't teach you a lesson here. But let me warn you—those who offend the Celestial King Sect rarely meet a good end."

Before his words had fully left his mouth, someone cut in.

"Not necessarily."

They all turned to see a tall, well-dressed young man approaching leisurely, a folding fan in hand.

"Yang Yuhu?" Chu Liang instantly recognized him.

The leader of the group from the Penglai Supreme Sect was Daoist Xuan Lu, but at the moment, Yang Yuhu stood at the forefront, smiling calmly at Feng Chaoyang.

"Your master's here to save you again?" Feng Chaoyang sneered, his words aimed at Wei Tiandi.

Wei Tiandi's chest heaved with anger, but he held back, remaining silent.

Everyone in the world of immortality cultivation knew that without Penglai Supreme Sect's intervention, Thunderbolt Stronghold would have faced total annihilation. Confronted with this accusation, Wei Tiandi had nothing to say.

"Penglai stands only for justice," Yang Yuhu said with a smile. "Only the tyrannical see us as foes."

"Don't you feel ashamed saying that?" Feng Chaoyang sneered.

While others held the Penglai Supreme Sect in awe, the Celestial King Sect refused to bow to them. If anything, the presence of Penglai Supreme Sect members only strengthened their resolve and stirred their excitement.

"I wonder who should really be ashamed," Yang Yuhu said, shaking his head. "We agreed to let the matter involving Du Wuhen go, but someone still set up a secret ambush for revenge. Luckily, Senior Uncle Xuanlu saw it coming and gave Du Wuhen a life-saving artifact."

"Eh?" Feng Chaoyang's expression darkened. He's still alive?

He had just made bold claims. If Du Wuhen survived, it would inevitably hurt the Celestial King Sect's reputation.

"Du Wuhen was badly injured, but Senior Uncle Xuanlu saved him. He has joined the Penglai Supreme Sect. From now on, he's one of us in Penglai," Yang Yuhu said, standing tall and meeting his gaze. "If anyone tries to harm him again, don't blame us if Penglai strikes back!"

Chapter 663: The Demon-Slaying Sword

The atmosphere was so tense that a few young attendant monks were about to call for their elders.

However, Chu Liang laughed loudly right then, drawing everyone's attention to him.

"Hi everyone! It's been ages!"

When the Mount Shu Sect's delegation entered earlier, no one paid much attention to them, as the confrontation between the Celestial King Sect and Thunderbolt Stronghold was in full swing.

Now that all eyes were on Chu Liang, surprise spread across everyone's face.

Most of the representatives present had witnessed the Mount Shu Sect's victory at the Assembly of Immortal Sects firsthand, so they naturally remembered Chu Liang and knew about his disappearance.

Who would have thought they'd see him at this Heavenly Peak Banquet?

Chu Liang's appearance at the banquet caused quite a stir. He stepped forward and greeted the delegations with a bow. Then he pulled out the Circle of Immortal Friends Token and pressed it into Feng Chaoyang's hand.

"What is this?" Feng Chaoyang asked.

He had already seen Chu Liang recently, so he wasn't that surprised. However, he was curious about the enchanted tool in his hand.

Chu Liang whispered, "You can use it to scold people. I'll pull those two rascals in later, and you can scold them in there."

He then walked over and handed tokens to Yang Yuhu and Wei Tiandi too.

"It's embarrassing to argue in public. If you think scolding him in private won't ease your anger, then try this. Everyone will know, but it won't escalate the conflict. It's a great tool," Chu Liang said with a smile.

Yang Yuhu and Wei Tiandi were extremely surprised to see Chu Liang. Yang Yuhu wanted to ask Chu Liang something, but he was left bewildered by Chu Liang's actions.

Chu Liang continued, "Seems like you want to ask me something? Then let's head into this first. Everything I've been through these past years—I've shared it all in there."

With a mix of coaxing and trickery, Chu Liang got them to insert their spirit sense into the Circle of Immortal Friends. That was when he finally stepped away.

When Chu Liang saw Feng Chaoyang and Wei Tiandi confronting each other earlier, a flash of inspiration had appeared in his mind. While others were excited to see a quarrel, Chu Liang saw the perfect opportunity to promote the Circle of Immortal Friends.

Since ancient times, people had always loved watching two things—one would get old quickly, while the other never would. The one that would never get old was, of course, a quarrel.

The parties involved were two prominent figures in the world of immortal cultivators that quarreled every day. Who wouldn't want to check out the Circle of Immortal Friends to watch their quarrels play out?

The Circle of Immortal Friends could accommodate several thousand participants. Chu Liang had thought that would be enough for now, so he hadn't put too much pressure on Wen Yulong. Nevertheless, after this trip, he knew he had to get Wen Yulong to upgrade the Circle of Immortal Friends. It had to accommodate at least several ten thousand participants!

Once Chu Liang was done greeting everyone, the group from the Mount Shu Sect took their seats.

After all, it was the Buddhist Cloud Monastery's banquet. It was enough to let the immortal sects know that Chu Liang had returned; there was no need to turn it into his homecoming reception.

The theme of the banquet was disaster relief.

Before the banquet, Chu Liang had suggested having a charity auction to Pushan. Then Pushan mentioned it to the senior monks at the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, and they greatly approved of the idea.

They couldn't ask for items to be donated, as most of the items cultivators' possessed wouldn't be useful to ordinary folks in recovering from a disaster. They could not ask for spirit-stone coins



either, since each sect would have different amounts of funds. There might not be many who would be willing to donate, so this approach was unlikely to lead to a good result.

On the other hand, a charity auction was a brilliant idea. Everyone could choose something to auction off, and in return, they had the chance to obtain something they desired. Then the spirit-stone coins from the auction could be converted into food, housing, and clothing—things that the common people could actually use to recover from the disaster.

All of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten delegations gradually arrived, and the various other immortal sects had long taken their seats. Yet, the Heavenly Peak Banquet still had not begun.

Someone inevitably got impatient and urged, "Dhyana masters, what are you waiting for?"

"There's still one more guest who has yet to arrive," Master Shenjie answered.

Soon after, someone's laugh rang out nearby. "Apologies, I was delayed by some urgent matters. I'm truly sorry to have kept you waiting, esteemed cultivators."

The final guest to arrive was dressed in blue scholarly robes, walking in with an elegant air. He had the appearance of a cultured and refined middle-aged man.

Chu Liang thought the middle-aged man looked familiar. After a moment, Chu Liang remembered he had seen this man from afar in the capital of Yu.

It's Chancellor Su Qian!

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As soon as Su Qian took his seat, a sect elder from the immortal sects inquired, "Esteemed Chancellor, what brings you here?"

"Haha, normally a representative from the Imperial Supervisory Bureau would attend an occasion like this. But with chaos breaking out across the lands recently, the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner and the celestial officials have been overwhelmed. An occasion this important can't be taken lightly, so I was sent instead," Su Qian said with a smile.

With Su Qian's arrival, the guests seated themselves neatly in the plaza.

Suddenly, a five-colored flower bud sprouted from the ground in front of the plaza. The flower bud bloomed and expanded rapidly in the wind until it transformed into a dazzling, elevated lotus platform.

From within emerged an elderly monk with smooth, glowing skin, long drooping eyebrows, and a beard that trailed to the ground. He had his eyes closed in deep meditation, only opening them once the lotus platform had fully bloomed.

The moment his eyes opened, warmth spread through everyone present. It was as if two beams of Buddha's light were shining into the depths of their hearts, stirring up an irresistible urge to convert to Buddhism.

The profound compassion in the elderly monk's eyes was something a monk would need at least two centuries to cultivate.

"Benefactors!" the elderly monk said to the crowd, his voice sweeping across the vast plaza in an instant like a breeze. He continued slowly, "I am the abbot of the Buddhist Cloud Monastery. My Dharma name is Dayu. For many years, I have distanced myself from worldly affairs, devoting my heart to Buddha."

In truth, there was no need for him to make an introduction. There was no one present who would fail to recognize the abbot of the Buddhist Cloud Monastery. Only he would make such a grand entrance atop a lotus platform at a time like this.

Abbot Dayu was a being whose age surpassed even that of Venerable Wen Yuan. To many of the younger people, his name was like an ancient legend. Abbot Dayu had distanced himself from worldly affairs for many years, as the disciples of the Shen Generation[1] had already become adults. The Buddhist Cloud Monastery had plenty of talented individuals, so he did not need to be present.

In fact, even for an event like the Heavenly Peak Banquet, Abbot Dayu did not always make an appearance. That alone showed how much importance the Buddhist Cloud Monastery placed on the banquet this time.

"We distance ourselves from the world to devote ourselves to our spiritual development, but we cannot maintain our integrity if we ignore the plight of the people during these chaotic times. It is meaningless to possess the power to vanquish dragons and tigers if we lack the means to help the world and save the people." Abbot Dayu sighed. "This Buddha's Light on the Peak of the Heavens exists only to implore that you be compassionate and find a way to save the people of this world."

"As for the format of this Heavenly Peak Banquet, it's an excellent suggestion that we received from Young Hero Chu of the Mount Shu Sect," Abbot Dayu stated, deliberately mentioning Chu Liang. "We invite all of the sects present to contribute a valuable item for the charity auction. The spirit-stone coins raised from the auction will be used to exchange for disaster relief supplies. We, the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, will take the lead."

Abbot Dayu waved his hand, and Dhyana Master Shenjie stepped forward, carrying over a sword case.

Dhyana Master Shenjie was an imposing chief monk in his own right, but before Abbot Dayu, he was reduced to a junior monk presenting a treasure. Of course, he was happy to do it.

"This item was discovered by my esteemed teacher in the Divine Ruins a few years ago. Although precious, it does not align with our beliefs, so there's no point for us to keep it. Therefore, we have decided to donate it for this charity auction. Those interested in it may now offer a bid."

The auction was presided over by Dhyana Master Shenjie. He announced loudly, "The starting bid for this sword is five hundred thousand Vermillion-Bird coins!"

"What?!"

The guests erupted in an uproar filled with shock and outrage.

The reason for the uproar was clear.

The Buddhist Cloud Monastery is one of the Divine Nine. We're only attending your banquet out of respect for you and to help with the disaster relief since it's a noble cause. But even if it's for charity, surely you don't think we're fools who would blindly pay that much, do you??

Damn baldy, what kind of sword are you selling?! A starting price of five hundred thousand Vermillion-Bird coins? You might as well just rob us straight out.

In the next instant, Dhyana Master Shenjie opened the sword case, revealing a sword with a plain bronze blade. The sword's hilt was engraved with complicated picture-like ancient markings.

Most of the people present didn't recognize the sword, but the few who did gasped in shock. Anyone who could identify it would no longer consider five hundred thousand Vermillion-Bird coins expensive.

"If we at the Buddhist Cloud Monastery are not mistaken, this sword's name should be..." Dhyana Master Shenjie said slowly, emphasizing each word, "the Demon-Slaying Sword!"

#### Chapter 664: Just Casually Throwing It Out?

The Demon-Slaying Sword had been one of the Mount Shu Sect's six demon-eliminating treasures and was ranked twenty-ninth in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures.

Back when the six demon-eliminating treasures were still in the Mount Shu Sect's possession, it was commonly said that the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda held the greatest power, but the Demon-Slaying Sword claimed the most lives. For years, this treasured sword rested in the hands of the peak masters of the Five Peaks of Swordsmanship, serving as the Mount Shu Sect's best weapon for slaying evil entities.

Unlike the Violet and Azure Twin Swords that were used to protect the sect, the Demon-Slaying Sword was wielded in external battles. Whenever evil entities appeared, the Mount Shu Sect would use the Demon-Slaying Sword to slay them, no matter how far they lurked. It was said that this sword had been used to slay so many demons that its murderous qi soared toward the heavens and the countless spirits of the slayed demons lingered around it.

Unfortunately, three hundred years ago, one of the Mount Shu Sect's elders took a trip down the mountain and vanished with the sword.

With the immense murderous qi concealed within the ancient bronze sword, it was obvious at a glance that this was the real thing.

Wang Xuanling's expression hardened. He hadn't expected to see the Demon-Slaying Sword here.

Turning to Chu Liang, Wang Xuanling said gravely, "We must take the Demon-Slaying Sword with us."

"Rest assured, Senior Uncle Wang." Chu Liang nodded. "I'm confident it will be ours."

Hearing that, Wang Xuanling felt inexplicably reassured. He was Chu Liang's elder and the Mount Shu Sect's grand peak master, but when it came to money... he knew who the king was.

Furthermore, the Mount Shu Sect was no longer what it used to be.

At a past auction in Taotie City, they feared the Penglai Supreme Sect would get the Demon-Subduing Pestle. Ultimately, they suffered great financial losses and even resorted to a bit of trickery just to secure the Demon-Subduing Pestle.

However, the Mount Shu Sect had Red Cotton Peak now. They no longer had anything to fear.

Daoist Xuan Lu raised his hand without hesitation. "Five hundred thousand!"

Legendary artifacts of this caliber rarely appeared on the market, so the Buddhist Cloud Monastery had set the starting bid based on the final price of the Demon-Subduing Pestle from the previous auction.

After all, the might of the Demon-Slaying Sword was far superior to that of Demon-Subduing Pestle. Considering that the Demon-Subduing Pestle had been sold at a staggering price of eight hundred thousand, there was no way the Demon-Slaying Sword should have a low starting bid.

Initially, when Abbot Dayu took the Demon-Slaying Sword out from the Divine Ruins, he thought that it was a hot potato awaiting trouble. It was a top-tier legendary artifact, but it was incompatible with Buddhist divine techniques and arts, so it was of no use to the Buddhist Cloud Monastery.

According to the long-standing rules of the world of immortality cultivators, any enchanted tool that had been lost inside a hidden realm for many years was considered ownerless. That meant Abbot Dayu was not obligated to return it to the Mount Shu Sect. If the Mount Shu Sect wished to buy it, a trade could be arranged without issue.

However, the Penglai Supreme Sect was also collecting the six demon-eliminating treasures. Their fierce competition with the Mount Shu Sect in Taotie City over the Demon-Subduing Pestle had become a widely known affair.

If the Buddhist Cloud Monastery sold the sword to the Mount Shu Sect, they would offend the Penglai Supreme Sect, and if they sold it to the Penglai Supreme Sect, they would offend the Mount Shu Sect. For this reason, the Buddhist Cloud Monastery had kept the sword sealed away, waiting for the right moment to sell it.

This time, Chu Liang's suggestion of a charity auction provided the perfect opportunity. As the host, the Buddhist Cloud Monastery needed to take the lead and offer up something impressive. The Demon-Slaying Sword was the perfect item for that. The auction would serve as a fair competition for the sects to obtain the sword.

Chu Liang casually raised his hand and doubled the bid. "One million."

This immediately crushed the hopes of those from the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten who initially thought they had a shot. Such a large amount of spirit-stone coins was beyond the means of most sects. After all, when the Mount Shu Sect bought the Demon-Subduing Pestle for eight hundred thousand, they had to sell off pretty much all their assets and lands to afford it.

Just ten years ago, most cultivators in the world of immortality cultivators did not even know the concept of saving money. If they needed resources, they would obtain the items themselves. It was only when they failed to find the items that they would turn to the market, but the items being sold in the market were mostly items they didn't want. Whenever there were items that could be used to further their cultivation, they would swiftly trade off any spirit-stone coins they had earned.

Apart from the disciples in the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten, wealthier sects that had established internal trade systems, who else would save their spirit-stone coins? Getting stronger was the most important thing.

The Taotie City had been the exception, earning great profits through their shopping district. Even so, the goods they sold were primarily cultivation-related, so they were not wealthy enough to act ostentatiously.

Nevertheless, since the rise of the Red Cotton Peak, the methods for acquiring spirit-stone coins in surplus had increased in number and complexity, followed by further business developments. That also meant cultivators suddenly had many places where they could spend their money. Anyone who went to Red Cotton Peak would leave with large debts—even those who had gone there with no money and no intention to spend.

The cultivators' increased desire to consume pushed them into pursuing more profitable lines of work. It could be said that Red Cotton Peak was gradually reshaping the era. The flow of spirit-stone coins throughout the world of immortality cultivators was accelerating rapidly.

However, the influx of spirit-stone coins didn't stay in the hands of cultivators. Instead, three major destinations absorbed them—Red Cotton Peak, Taotie City, and the Immortals' Square. When it came to spirit-stone coins, no sect could rival them.

"Hah," Daoist Xuan Lu laughed as he glanced at Chu Liang. Their seats weren't far apart, so he spoke to Chu Liang directly. "Young Hero Chu, you're quite decisive. Did you offer your highest bid already?"

Chu Liang shook his head and replied with a smile, "Esteemed Senior Xuan Lu, you're mistaken. I wasn't offering my highest bid; I was offering your highest bid."

"Is that so?" Daoist Xuan Lu raised his hand again. "One million five hundred thousand."

His bid shocked the guests. "Huh?!"

Is such a bid even possible?

One million five hundred thousand Vermillion-Bird coins—what was this ridiculousness? Even if all the smaller sects present pooled their resources, they might not have that much money. The larger sects, on the other hand, might have that much in assets, but it was impossible that they had that much funds on hand either. Some Terrestrial Ten sects might even have to sell their mountain to get that much money.

Chu Liang frowned slightly, narrowing his eyes in thought as he glanced at Daoist Xuan Lu.

The Penglai Supreme Sect's internal factions were divided among three islands. Previously, it was Daoist Chi Niu who had shown the most interest in the six demon-eliminating treasures. Daoist Xuan Lu couldn't possibly drain the reserves of all three islands for his personal gain. So, where was this money coming from?

Chu Liang's gaze passed over Daoist Xuan Lu and landed on the person sitting beside him—Huyan Bin. This old acquaintance, whom Chu Liang hadn't seen in six years, looked much thinner and more pallid than he remembered.

When Huyan Bin's eyes met Chu Liang's, they carried a complex expression.

Huyan Bin had once invested heavily in Red Cotton Peak, providing crucial start-up capital. The dividends Taotie City received from Red Cotton Peak were now substantial and had long exceeded the initial investment, but they had paid a heavy price for that. Taotie City had suffered major losses. Every year, when the dividends arrived, they felt like a slap in the face.

In Taotie City, Huyan Bin faced severe scrutiny about the investment he had made. Fortunately, he had no brothers, so his father couldn't appoint another heir—though there were rumors suggesting his father was working on that.

Two years ago, Huyan Dong, Taotie City's lord and Huyan Bin's father, had been seen seeking out young women. Perhaps he thought his son was useless and wanted to sire a new heir as soon as possible.

All of that had happened because of Chu Liang. Initially, Huyan Bin thought Chu Liang was dead, so he just let go of his resentment. Nonetheless, seeing Chu Liang alive and well now, it was difficult for Huyan Bin to conceal his feelings of hostility.

Meanwhile, seeing Huyan Bin beside Daoist Xuan Lu, Chu Liang immediately pieced things together.

Taotie City and the Penglai Supreme Sect were probably colluding in secret to suppress the Mount Shu Sect. One party provided the funds, and the other provided the force.

If Taotie City is backing them, then...

Chu Liang casually raised his hand again and casually called out, "Two million."

"Pfff!"

This time, it wasn't just the members of other sects who were surprised; Wang Xuanling nearly spat out a mouthful of blood.



Two million???

He turned and stared at Chu Liang with wide eyes. The old fellow didn't understand business and had no idea of Red Cotton Peak's wealth. As a layman in this subject, all he knew was that a few hundred sword coins could buy a fine flying sword, a few thousand could buy a treasure of nature... and tens of thousands could buy a cultivator enough resources to reach the seventh realm—a fortune that took half a lifetime to accumulate. It was already an incredible achievement just having any savings at all.

Yet, with a casual wave of his hand, Chu Liang threw out enough funds to support nearly a hundred seventh-realm cultivators...

Faced with Wang Xuanling's shocked expression, Chu Liang simply shrugged, signaling him to stay calm. Chu Liang's gaze seemed to say, Since they've teamed up, let's team up too... It's no big deal.

As for the other guests, there were no outbursts of disbelief this time; they were just all in a daze. Their understanding of reality had been shattered so many times that they were left numb.

These are spirit-stone coins, not netherworld money.[1]

Is he really just throwing them around like that?

Maybe we heard wrong.

We must have.

Aaahhh...

How could someone so ridiculously rich exist in this world?!

Seeing Chu Liang's calm display of insanity, Daoist Xuan Lu fell silent and said nothing more.

On the lotus platform, Dhyana Master Shenjie's hands trembled slightly as he held the sword. Of course, the Buddhist Cloud Monastery thought that the more money they raised, the better it would be, but this astronomical sum had completely shattered how he valued things.

Noticing the guests had fallen silent, Dhyana Master Shenjie quickly composed himself and announced, "Since there are no further bids, the Demon-Slaying Sword will go to the Mount Shu Sect. All proceeds will be used to purchase relief supplies, and the Buddhist Cloud Monastery will not keep a single coin for ourselves. You may all supervise the process if you wish."

The Demon-Slaying Sword was taken off the platform, but the guests remained stunned. It took a long while before chatter spread through the venue. Regardless of their rank and status, everyone was deeply shocked by Chu Liang's bid.

Chu Liang, on the other hand, remained indifferent. It wasn't just to intimidate his opponents; he genuinely didn't care that much.

In truth, his winning bid nearly drained all of the savings Chu Yi had accumulated for him over the years. Chu Liang didn't have much money left now, just the few hundred thousand sword coins in his bag. Nevertheless, Red Cotton Peak would remain under his control for a few more years, so as long as his business continued to run, he could earn back all of that money.

Even without the auction, Chu Liang had already planned to donate most of his savings to gather supplies for disaster relief. The Southern Regions, where Mount Shu was located, were home to the harshest lands and the poorest people, and they were the most heavily affected by disaster. That meant Chu Liang just needed to pay a bit more, and he would also get the Demon-Slaying Sword back for the Mount Shu Sect, so he saw no reason not to.

Of course, unlike the Demon-Subduing Pestle, he had bought this sword entirely with his personal funds, so he intended to keep it for himself. Now that his cultivation power had increased drastically, he might just be able to wield a legendary sword like the Demon-Slaying Sword.

"Next, the Mount Shu Sect will present their valuable item," Dhyana Master Shenjie introduced with a sweep of his robe, redirecting the guests' attention to the Mount Shu Sect's seating area.

The old monk then descended from the platform, looking for a quiet place to calm down after that shocking sale.

Wang Xuanling glanced at Chu Liang.

Turning toward him, Chu Liang nodded with a smile. Then he leaped onto the lotus platform.

"My friends and esteemed seniors of the immortal sects, I'm sure you've all encountered these frustrations..." Chu Liang said, without immediately presenting his auction item. "You may have found that spending years in closed-door cultivation can be lonely. Perhaps sometimes you wish to connect with others, but you don't know what to say. Other times, you wish to announce things to the world but don't know how. The Seven Stars Gazette publishes only once a month—too slow for information to be spread in a timely manner..."

"But now... Red Cotton Peak proudly introduces a revolutionary new enchanted tool." Chu Liang retrieved a token from his sleeve. "The Circle of Immortal Friends!"

#### Chapter 665: Open Conspiracy

"Imagine this—you've accomplished some grand heroic feat of slaying evil, defending your Dao, and upholding justice. You want to announce it to the world immediately..."

Chu Liang smiled at the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten delegations seated in the front rows, then he shifted his gaze toward those in the back rows.

"Envision being in the same circle as the elites of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten and being able to immediately see what they're saying and find out what they're doing within the first moments of them sharing the news..."

"Perhaps you admire a young man, and you want to meet up with him, but you're too shy to ask about his location... Or you're fond of a young woman, and you want to ask her out on a date, but you don't know what she likes..."

"You can resolve all of those issues within the Circle of Immortal Friends," Chu Liang said in a very inviting tone. "In our first batch, we have tokens for several thousand members, but the tokens won't be sold to the general public. These will be gifted exclusively to our friends in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten.

"However, today I've brought one hundred tokens for the auction. My dear family of cultivators, this is my gift of consideration for you! For just one hundred sword coins, you can gain access to the Circle of Immortal Friends..."

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! How many of you are interested? Raise your hand and let me see. If more than one hundred hands go up, we'll start the bidding!"

Chu Liang totally took over the stage with his enticing words. Everyone present felt tempted, already envisioning the wonderful scenes of being part of Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten's inner circle.

"The Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten..." Huyan Bin muttered. "When the time comes, let's boycott this thing together."

"It's pointless," Yang Yuhu replied, shaking his head. "Chu Liang has extensive connections. Many of his friends are now key figures in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. He'll be able to gather the support of most of those sects. If you boycott ignorantly, you'll just end up excluding yourself from the circle."

"So we just let him spread this thing around?" Huyan Bin understood Yang Yuhu's reasoning, but he viewed the issue from a different perspective. "If this spreads, it will be even harder for us to compete with Red Cotton Peak."

"Shouldn't you be figuring out how to create something similar... or even better?" Yang Yuhu replied. "No matter who controls it, having a messaging enchanted tool that is capable of accommodating thousands of people is a massive advantage."

Huyan Bin fell silent.

He's right. Why haven't I done the same?

Was it because Huyan Bin didn't want to? No, it was because he couldn't.

Messaging enchanted tools were derived from divine arts involving the soul domain. The righteous immortal sects lagged behind the Dark King Sect in this area. However, the Dark King Sect was a diabolical sect after all. That was probably why they were able to experiment more freely, resulting in such rapid progress.

Chu Liang and his group had utilized the Dark King Sect's advancements and made their own improvements on the enchanted tool, placing them far ahead of the competition. As for how they got their hands on the Dark King Sect's messaging enchanted tool—well, that was a long story...

In any case, much of what made Red Cotton Peak a leader in the commercial industry were the business models they used. Business models could be copied easily, but this new innovation was something with technical barriers. It wasn't something that could be replicated at the drop of a hat.

Nevertheless, Yang Yuhu didn't feel anxious about that. He fiddled with the token that was vibrating constantly in his hand.

Then he smiled and remarked, "This thing is pretty interesting."

Chu Liang spent quite a while taking in bids for the Circle of Immortal Friends Tokens, eventually selling all one hundred of them. There was little competition for the tokens at the start, but as the available tokens dwindled, the bidding war intensified.

In the end, the one hundred tokens sold for nearly thirty thousand sword coins—a considerable sum. On average, each token fetched over two hundred sword coins—enough to buy a decent flying sword.

If Chu Liang had owned such a sword back then, he might not have been so eager to make money. Then, perhaps there might not even be a Red Cotton Peak today.

...

After Chu Liang returned to his seat, a few sects from the Divine Nine took their turns on the platform. The treasures they presented were quite good as well, but none of the winning bids for those items surpassed the final price for Chu Liang's tokens.

It couldn't be helped. If every item in the auction cost tens of thousands of spirit-stone coins, only a few sects would be able to afford them.

The next person to go up the platform was an elder from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals.

He produced a small porcelain bottle and spoke with an air of mystery. "This item can truly save the disaster victims."

His words immediately piqued the interest of the crowd. "Oh?"

The elder continued, "A hundred years ago, an elder from our mountain entered the Divine Ruins and brought back a variety of seeds. Most of them had lost their spiritual energy and died, but a

small portion of them could still be planted, and they produced unusual spirit plant roots. Among them, there was one plant that resembled a rice seedling. Its fruit contained no spiritual energy and grew to the size of a fist. It was thick, sticky, and had an unpleasant taste.

"So, the elders dumped the rest of the seeds in the storehouse, deeming them useless. But recently, a disciple was cleaning the storehouse and found that the seeds had sprouted in a small patch in a corner, producing the same fruit. Upon tasting it, the disciple discovered that while the fruit of the plant had no appealing qualities, it had one key advantage. It is easy to grow and very filling."

At this point, everyone in attendance understood why the elder said his item could truly save the disaster victims.

As cultivators, they could use their power to protect and spare much of the common folk from the physical damage that natural disasters could wreak. However, those natural disasters ruined crops and left fields barren, leading to food shortages. Ultimately, the aftermath of the natural disasters was even deadlier than the disasters themselves.

The greatest issue plaguing the nine provinces now was famine. If this crop could grow easily and fill bellies, it could help disaster victims survive for the next year or two, allowing them to slowly rebuild their lives. This was indeed a treasure that could save countless people!

The elder said, "Our sect leader named this crop the Immortals' Rice and intends to cultivate it on a large scale. However, the Fog-Hidden Mountain lies far across the sea, making it quite a difficult feat. Thus, any sect with the ambition to spread this rice may take the seeds."

The starting bid for the bottle of seeds was ten thousand Vermillion-Bird coins. That wasn't an expensive price at all for something that could achieve the meritorious deed of saving countless lives. Whoever bought the seeds wouldn't simply be buying seeds—they would be winning the hearts of the people.

Chu Liang quickly figured out why Su Qian was there.

The imperial court had likely gotten information ahead of time that the seeds were going to be put up for auction. They couldn't allow such a thing to fall into the hands of a single sect. The imperial court had to be the one to distribute the seeds.

Of course, the immortal sect delegations present knew the imperial court was better suited for such matters, so none of them intended to bid.

Nevertheless, just then, Daoist Xuan Lu raised his hand. "One hundred thousand."

Chu Liang glanced over. "Penglai..."

He had indeed forgotten about them.

They had a close relationship with the Fuyao Kingdom. If the seeds were to fall into the Penglai Supreme Sect's hands, they would probably give the seeds to the Fuyao Kingdom. If the Fuyao Kingdom used it to attract disaster victims to move there, the manpower and strength of the kingdom would increase rapidly. By then, many citizens of the Yu Dynasty might just cross the sea to join them.

The Yu Dynasty could never allow such a thing to happen.

As expected, Chancellor Su Qian raised his hand without hesitation. "Five hundred thousand!"

Daoist Xuan Lu raised his hand again. "Seven hundred thousand,"

"Eight hundred thousand!" Su Qian countered.

The two men aggressively raised their bids, neither one pausing to consider before putting in the next bid.

The imperial court wielded great influence, but they lacked an abundance of spirit-stone coins. Their recent prosperity stemmed largely from the Sixth Princess managing the Immortals' Square so well.

Hang on...

Chu Liang glanced at Daoist Xuan Lu. He had figured out the real reason the Penglai Supreme Sect was bidding for the seeds.

Even if the Penglai Supreme Sect did not exactly have a great relationship with the Yu Dynasty, there was no need for them to go this far for the Fuyao Kingdom. The way Daoist Xuan Lu was

bidding for the seeds mirrored how he had pushed Chu Liang to raise his bids for the Demon-Slaying Sword earlier.

It appeared that Daoist Xuan Lu merely sought to drain the funds of Red Cotton Peak and the Immortals' Square by forcing them to put in higher bids for items they could not pass up. They had fallen into his trap... This was surely a calculated scheme.

It had only been a few days ago that the Buddhist Cloud Monastery announced they would be holding a charity auction. The auction items hadn't been kept confidential, but that did not mean it was easy to gather so much information so quickly and even come up with a plan. Chu Liang was truly impressed by the Penglai Supreme Sect.

This was all a ploy to weaken Taotie City's competitors. After the banquet, Red Cotton Peak and the Immortals' Square would lack the funds to compete with Taotie City.

This is clearly an open conspiracy. The Penglai Supreme Sect and Taotie City are colluding more closely than I expected!

Noticing Chu Liang's look of realization, Huyan Bin smirked. The events of the past years flashed vividly in his mind.

Huyan Bin was one of Chu Liang's benefactors, but Chu Liang was his greatest rival. Business decisions should not be based on feelings of enmity or gratitude, but it was hard for Huyan Bin to suppress the feelings of injustice he felt.

Taotie City had become a vassal of the Penglai Supreme Sect, no different from the Thunderbolt Stronghold. All of this stemmed from the rise of Red Cotton Peak and the Immortals' Square, forcing them to burn their bridges in desperation.

"Chu Liang..." Huyan Bin muttered. "Since you've returned, watch with your own eyes as the tower you built crumbles to the ground."

...

Rumble!



A massive waterspout rose from the sea floor, blocking a colossal sea demon that was larger than a mountain. A dark figure glowed as he swam swiftly through the sea, fleeing through the rapid currents.

The eight-armed sea demon swung out a long tentacle. The man raised his saber in defense, but the difference in power was too great. He not only failed to sever the tentacle, but the impact from the collision sent him flying.

Wham.

He slammed into the bottom of the sea, leaving only his pitch-black face visible. His eyes were filled with exhaustion. Confronted by such an immensely powerful sea demon, he wanted to shut his eyes in surrender.

However, at that moment, a shout rang out in the distance. "Yaaaaah!"

A tiny figure suddenly appeared. It seized one of the sea demon's tentacles and swung the sea demon around, stirring up half the sea!

After several spins, the tiny figure hurled the colossal sea demon far away.

In the blink of an eye, the sea demon vanished from sight.

Boooooooooom!

The tiny figure soared over and landed in front of the man embedded in the sea floor.

He said, "Du Wuhen, you really are useless."

The man embedded in the sea floor was none other than Du Wuhen, the eldest disciple who had transferred from the Thunderbolt Stronghold to the Penglai Supreme Sect. Previously, Daoist Xuan Lu had instructed him to train in a certain place and then tossed him into the Sea of Demons.

He was in a deep underwater trench bordering two southeastern seas. The air pressure there was so immense that ordinary humans and even common demonic beasts would be crushed in an instant.

Nonetheless, the spiritual energy there was an exuberant amount of spiritual qi there, and the intense pressure allowed the spiritual qi to enter the corporeal bodies of those that could withstand it. As a result, the demonic beasts that managed to survive were extremely powerful.

Despite being at the peak of the sixth realm, Du Wuhen was suffering constantly just trying to stay alive. Moments ago, he felt so exhausted and broken that he wished for death.

The monstrously powerful person standing before him was a seemingly vicious and obstinate youth. He looked like he was seventeen or eighteen at most.

There was a sinister grin on his face as he stared at Du Wuhen.

"Qi Lin'er..." Du Wuhen pulled himself from the sea floor. "You're here too."

"Of course I am. I've been living here for a few years now," Qi Lin'er replied with a grin. "I quite like this place, but I'm leaving soon."

He gazed upward at the light shimmering on the surface of the water. "I heard... Chu Liang is back."

Chapter 666: The Handsome and Reticent Monk

"One million five hundred thousand!" Su Qian yelled in an icy tone, locking his cold gaze onto Daoist Xuan Lu.

Engaged in a fierce bidding war, the two men seemed to be fighting with the intensity of a real fight. The bidding price had once again reached an astronomical number. However, with Chu Liang's earlier bid of two million, the crowd wasn't as shocked this time.

Daoist Xuan Lu pondered for a moment, then he smiled and shook his head.

Seeing that there were no further bids, the elder from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals declared, "Then, this batch of Immortals' Rice Seeds will go to the imperial court."

Su Qian had won, but he didn't seem pleased.

He hadn't expected to encounter trouble like this at the banquet. Had he failed to secure the Immortal Rice, the emperor would surely be furious. Nevertheless, winning the bid at this price placed an equally heavy burden on the imperial court. If not for the Sixth Princess successfully managing the Immortals' Square, the imperial court would have struggled to gather such a large sum of spirit-stone coins.

This further confirmed Chu Liang's suspicions. The market in the world of immortality cultivators was currently dominated by three major competitors. Daoist Xuan Lu's actions were intended for draining the funds of the other two competitors, giving Taotie City the upper hand. It was like the saying, "A father's love is like a mountain."<sup>[1]</sup>

When the three competitors initially spent lavishly to seize resources, Taotie City had the deepest reserves and greatest strength. Despite that, the alliance between the Immortals' Square and Red Cotton Peak led Taotie City to fall into a plight first. After this banquet, however, the two competitors might not stand a chance against Taotie City even with their alliance.

Once all the sects in the Divine Nine had taken their turn on the platform to auction off their items, Su Qian went up to the platform and faced the various immortal sects.

"By imperial decree, I bring forth a precious but damaged treasure from the palace—a relic known as the Celestial Cosmic Ring," Su Qian announced, revealing the small jade ring in his palm. A visible break marred the otherwise flawless ring. "Though damaged, it still contains immense spiritual qi. If it is restored, it will undoubtedly possess the power of a legendary artifact."

Most of the guests looked puzzled by the item's reveal, but those seated in the front rows—the delegations of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten—reacted with astonished expressions.

It's the Celestial Cosmic Ring!

"It's that item..." Wang Xuanling muttered, glancing toward the Penglai Supreme Sect's delegation.

"What is that?" Chu Liang asked curiously.

"You've heard of Penglai's legendary artifact, right?" Wang Xuanling whispered. "This forms a set with the Chrono Wheel."

After Wang Xuanling's brief explanation, Chu Liang finally understood what was going on.

The legendary artifact that the Penglai Supreme Sect possessed was known as the East Sea Chrono Wheel. It was a top-tier enchanted tool capable of manipulating the Great Dao of Time. It ranked fourth in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures, just beneath the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams.

However, the powerful East Sea Chrono Wheel was incomplete.

In ancient times, there was a pair of artifacts that were wielded by a husband and wife. As a set, the artifacts were called the Cosmic Ring and the Chrono Wheel. The husband controlled the Celestial Cosmic Ring, while the wife wielded the Cataclysmic Chrono Wheel. Together, they roamed the world, unmatched and invincible.

Later, the couple broke up for unknown reasons. The man retreated to the West Sea with the Celestial Cosmic Ring, while the woman remained in the East Sea with the Cataclysmic Chrono Wheel.

The woman later ascended to the ninth realm, the Profound Realm, and became the humans' Hallowed One—Hallowed Yang.[2]

After ascending to the Profound Realm, Hallowed Yang did not try to take back the Celestial Cosmic Ring. Instead, she utilized all of her profound knowledge of the world to upgrade the Cataclysmic Chrono Wheel, refining it into the mighty legendary artifact now known as the East Sea Chrono Wheel.

Perhaps she aimed to prove that she could be unrivaled even without her other half, regardless of whether it was her as a person or her legendary artifact.

Yet, the East Sea Chrono Wheel remained incomplete. Despite its power, it could only use the Great Dao of Time; it lacked the complementary Great Dao of Space that the Celestial Cosmic Ring used. Generations of the Penglai Supreme Sect's disciples had scoured the world for the Celestial Cosmic Ring, hoping to reunite the two artifacts.

If they were successful, the combined power of the two legendary artifacts would surpass even the legendary Seven-Star Sword. As for whether it could rival the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda, no one dared to make a guess.

Unfortunately, Hallowed Yang's ex-husband had vanished without a trace, and the Celestial Cosmic Ring had disappeared with him.

It was a huge surprise to find that it had been hidden in the imperial treasury all this time!

The ring was broken, but it was a glimmer of hope. What if it could be restored?

For that hope alone, the Penglai Supreme Sect would stop at nothing to acquire it.

Chu Liang glanced at Daoist Xuan Lu. Although he appeared calm, his pupils were now dilated.

On the platform, Su Qian gave a small smile and announced, "The starting bid is one hundred thousand Vermillion-Bird coins."

Someone raised their hand. "Two hundred thousand."

Daoist Xuan Lu glanced around but held back from putting in a bid. It seemed he did not want to draw attention to himself.

Chu Liang kept his eyes on Daoist Xuan Lu without saying a word.

After several rounds of bidding, the venue fell silent.

Aside from the Penglai Supreme Sect, there wasn't much point for the other sects to persist in purchasing this damaged artifact, as they did not possess the Chrono Wheel. The sects that had bid earlier likely intended to leverage the item in negotiations with the Penglai Supreme Sect. Nevertheless, they gradually lost interest as the price rose.

This was when Daoist Xuan Lu raised his hand unhurriedly, finally putting in his bid. "Four hundred thousand."

Chu Liang raised his hand without hesitation. "One million!"

"Young Hero Chu..." Daoist Xuan Lu immediately turned to look at him. "Do you even have the money? You're risking Mount Shu's reputation by making such a reckless bid."

"That isn't something for you to worry about, Esteemed Senior Xuan Lu," Chu Liang replied with a smile. "I may lack many things, but an abundance of spirit-stone coins is not one of them. I have so many spirit-stone coins at home that they've piled up into a mountain. Not having somewhere to store them is quite the headache."

Paired with that smile, his words made ninety-nine percent of the guests want to punch him.

Actually, even Chu Liang felt like punching himself. In truth, he had nowhere near that many spirit-stone coins left. He was just driving up the price to squeeze the Penglai Supreme Sect dry.

Considering the imperial court had dug up this relic from the depths of the imperial treasury, it was clear they wanted to use it to entrap the Penglai Supreme Sect. In that case, Chu Liang undoubtedly wanted a hand in that.

How could we let Penglai walk away with the artifact without first peeling off their oh-so-thick skin?[3]

When Chu Liang proposed the charity auction to Pushan, he hadn't thought this far ahead. His real goal had simply been to promote the Circle of Immortal Friends. He hadn't expected the Penglai Supreme Sect and the imperial court to treat this as a battlefield for scheming against one another.

After six years away, Chu Liang's understanding of the grasp of the power struggles was clearly lacking.

There were turbulent waves of conflict surging through the nine provinces under the cover of peace. It had already reached a state where swords and bows were being drawn and strung. The days of maintaining a facade of harmony were long gone.

No one knew how long the imperial court had kept the Celestial Cosmic Ring in storage for, but it was obvious they had believed the ring to be beyond repair. Yet, even a sliver of hope was something the Penglai Supreme Sect could not abandon.

Chu Liang thought, Daoist Xuan Lu has to obtain this damaged treasure.

This too is an open conspiracy.

Since everyone has come here brimming with malicious intent, there is little left to say.

If the imperial court wants to scheme against Penglai, then Mount Shu will gladly lend a hand.

"One million five hundred thousand!" Daoist Xuan Lu called out loudly. Then he quietly spoke to Chu Liang. "Bid any higher, and it's yours. If this broken artifact could actually be repaired, the imperial court wouldn't have put it up for auction."

"Hah," Chu Liang laughed as he met Daoist Xuan Lu's gaze. Then he said loudly, "Two million!"

Daoist Xuan Lu flung out his sleeves in frustration and raised his voice again, though it was rather hoarse now. "Two million five hundred thousand!"

He never expected karma to strike so swiftly. Now, he fully understood how Chu Liang and Su Qian had felt just moments earlier.

Chu Liang seemed quite impressed and cupped his hands to show his respect. "Senior Xuan Lu, you have great determination."

Huyan Bin stared at Daoist Xuan Lu in shock.

With a trembling voice, Huyan Bin asked, "Senior Xuan Lu... can Penglai really afford this?"

Daoist Xuan Lu glared at him. "What do you think?"

"If you ask me... probably not?"

Huyan Bin looked like he was about to cry.

We acknowledged Penglai as our father so that you can protect us, not for you to squander our wealth... Even our ancestors never spent money like this!

Daoist Xuan Lu assured him. "Relax. We'll return whatever we borrow,"

Huyan Bin's expression remained grim, showing no signs of relief.

Over the past few years, the Penglai Supreme Sect had racked up quite a large debt to Taotie City, and not a single coin had been repaid. Now they were borrowing even more.

What's Daoist Xuan Lu planning to repay us with? His great-aunt's heirlooms??

...

[The Handsome and Reticent Monk]: "Oh heavens, oh heavens, it's the Celestial Cosmic Ring!"

[The Handsome and Reticent Monk]: "Chu Liang placed a bid!"

[The Handsome and Reticent Monk]: "Daoist Xuan Lu bid again!"

[The Handsome and Reticent Monk]: "250! He's actually a 250! Heavens! Daoist Xuan Lu yelled out a bid of 2,500,000 Vermillion-Bird coins!"[4]

As the bidding war for the Cataclysmic Cosmic Ring intensified, the Circle of Immortal Friends Tokens vibrated wildly. A user named "The Handsome and Reticent Monk" gave live commentary in a frenzied manner.

For those who were not at the banquet, his live commentary was pretty entertaining to see. However, most of the token users were attending the banquet. It had not been long since they received their tokens, and now they squirmed restlessly from the constant vibrations.

When they checked the Circle of Immortal Friends to see who was chatting, they found that their screens were flooded with messages from the same person. Those who were not acquainted with the person in question wondered who it was.

However, as soon as Chu Liang took a look, he figured out who it was straight away and let out a helpless sigh.

Why did I have to get soft-hearted and give him one of the tokens?



Won't this guy be disturbing everyone in the future?

I'm a fucking idiot...

While regretting his decision, Chu Liang made a mental note to ask Wen Yulong to develop a blacklist feature for members. They could probably make it a premium feature and earn extra revenue from that.

As he brooded over that headache, a different message suddenly slid onto the screen.

[The White Jade Fan of Mount Shu]: "Tsunami in the South Sea! Sea demons are wreaking havoc!"

Chapter 667: Chaos at South Sea

"Is this the work of sea demons?"

Xu Ziyang floated above the South Sea, his gaze sweeping over the calm, endless waters below. His divine sense stretched far and wide, but nothing felt out of place.

Dressed in white robes trimmed with gold, he stood tall and steady. His features hadn't changed much, still sharp and striking. However, his eyes now glowed even more intensely. He used to give off this sharp and dangerous vibe like a sword out of its sheath. Now, he was like a sword resting in its sheath, his strength hidden beneath the surface.

Yet, his stance remained unchanged. He stood firm, his back as unwavering as a banner held high against the wind.

"Sea demons aren't like those on land. Any trace of them—demonic or otherwise—disappears quickly in the water, making them harder to track," said the young disciple beside him.

Three young disciples followed behind him—two boys and a girl, all around sixteen or seventeen. They were obviously talented. The gentle-looking girl glanced at Xu Ziyang's back, her eyes shining with admiration.

They had grown up hearing stories of Xu Ziyang's feats, and their hearts swelled with admiration for their brilliant and awe-inspiring senior brother.

Of the glorious generation of disciples from six years ago, Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai had already left, becoming figures of legends. Only Xu Ziyang remained, a tangible figure for the younger disciples of Mount Shu to look up to and follow.

"Demonic qi may get washed away, but the scent of blood lingers," Xu Ziyang said softly, drawing a palm-sized bronze vessel from his robes.

He opened the lid, and a golden spirit beast, shaped like a small loach, wriggled free. With a flick of his wrist, he sent the golden loach diving into the sea.

The golden light circled three times in the water before shooting south, picking up speed as it went.

"Follow it!" Xu Ziyang's voice rang out as he soared ahead.

The three young disciples hurried to form the Water-Repelling Seal, but before they could finish, Xu Ziyang's longsword sang as it left its sheath. In an instant, it transformed into a radiant blade of light, slicing through the seawater and parting the ocean in its path. With the way clear, the four of them glided forward effortlessly, carried by the wind.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

They sliced through the waves!

This display left the younger disciples in awe. Even the two male disciples, not just the girl, watched in awe, stars shining in their eyes.

Wasn't this the very freedom and power they pursued in their cultivation?

Land, sea, or sky—one strike could cleave through them all.

As the golden loach dove deeper, the waters around them darkened. Xu Ziyang's foundational qi seemed endless, and the force of his blade did not waver.

Before long, a massive shadow loomed ahead.

A half-sunken, three-story ship lay tangled in thick seaweed, with part of a giant fish fin draped over it. Compared to the fin, the ship looked no larger than a child's toy.

The fin belonged to a colossal black fish stretching deep into the ocean. Its dark scales gleamed faintly, pulsing with immense spiritual energy.

Such a colossal creature was rarely seen on land. It was even bigger than the peaks of Mount Shu, causing the young disciples to gasp in disbelief.

Xu Ziyang said, "This is the demonic beast that stirred the waves and dragged the ship away..."

Xu Ziyang's eyes narrowed, glowing with sharp intensity as he pierced through the cold, murky waters. Their mission had been to locate this missing vessel, and at last, they had found it.

It was clear that the crew of the ship had ended up in the belly of the beast.

Boom—

The massive creature seemed to sense Xu Ziyang's rising aura. Though the figures before it were as small as specks of dust, the sheer force of their presence was too terrifying to ignore. Its attention locked onto them.

Despite its enormous size, the creature moved with surprising agility. It twisted slightly, turning its head to open its colossal maw. Waves surged forward, carrying a dreadful, humming roar as they bore down on the group.

The young disciples scattered, darting away from the oncoming force.

But Xu Ziyang did not move. He stood his ground, eyes locked on the monster's gaping mouth.

His sword left its sheath.

Hiss—

A colossal arc of sword light tore through the sea, slicing cleanly across the massive fish's body. Dark blood surged from the wound, staining the water on both sides.

It was the Heaven-Raising Sword!

Though the immortal art was known to amplify sword energy, this level of power was rare. The young disciples watched in stunned silence, as if witnessing a divine miracle.

Were it not for the inconvenience of being underwater, they might have burst into applause for their senior brother.

Thud, thud.

The severed halves of the giant fish sank slowly toward the seabed. Moments later, two muffled thuds rumbled through the water, sending ripples across the sea floor. It was as if the entire sea had shuddered.

Rumble.

"That thing's huge. Felt like an earthquake when it hit," one of the disciples chuckled.

"Yeah, all thanks to Senior Brother Xu's unbeatable sword," another chimed in.

Rumble.

The tremors didn't stop. Instead, they grew stronger with each passing second.

The young female disciple's expression changed. "Wait, this... feels like an actual undersea earthquake?"

Just then, a faint song echoed through the water—distant yet unnervingly close. In the next moment, countless restless auras surged toward them at alarming speed.

Xu Ziyang's brow furrowed sharply as he muttered, "Something's wrong. The South Sea is awakening."

He turned, eyes narrowing at the distant waters where countless glowing eyes flickered like lanterns, all fixed on them.

"Get out of here!" Xu Ziyang roared. "Return to Mount Shu and report this!"

Boom!

...

"Senior Brother Xu led a few disciples to the South Sea to deal with sea demons. But while they were there, chaos broke out, and countless sea demons relocated from their lairs," Chu Liang explained. "By the time the disciples returned, the South Sea had pushed several miles inland. Sea demons flooded the area, and Senior Brother Xu... he's still under the sea. He didn't return with the others!"

Wang Xuanling immediately stood up. "What?!"

Dhyana Master Shenjie approached swiftly. "What happened?"

Chu Liang repeated the events once more.

Dhyana Master Shenjie's brows drew together in a deep frown. "Chaos in the South Sea on this scale... and not a single immortal sect was warned? Are you absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely. One of my fellow disciples sent the message through the Circle of Immortality Cultivator Friends. Everyone here that joined can confirm it," Chu Liang replied.

The cultivators who had purchased tokens for the Circle of Immortality Cultivator Friends nodded, confirming they had seen the message.

Those without tokens exchanged glances, envy clear in their eyes. It felt as if they had been excluded.

"I'll confirm it myself," Dhyana Master Shenjie said, his gaze narrowing.

Two beams of divine light shot from his eyes, stretching far to the south.

Dhyana Master Shenjie was using the Buddhist technique—the Heavenly Eye.

When cultivated to profound levels, it rivaled immortal arts, with effects similar to the Immortal Art: Heavenly Sight and Hearing.

"It's true!" Dhyana Master Shenjie declared.

At that moment, Abbot Dayu reappeared, his calm voice resonating. "Young Hero Chu, it's all thanks to your warning. The chaos at the South Sea is no small matter. Let us pause the Heavenly Peak Banquet for now. Since everyone is present, we shall head to the South Sea together."

"We will follow the abbot!" the crowd responded in unison.

A mission like this rarely posed much danger but offered great merit in defending the Dao and vanquishing demons. Who wouldn't want to take part?

Abbot Dayu gently raised his hand. Beneath each cultivator, five-colored lotus flowers blossomed, their petals unfurling with a soft glow and fragrant energy, lifting everyone into the air.

High above, a massive lotus bloomed from thin air. Its petals slowly unfurled, enveloping the crowd and forming a radiant platform beneath their feet.

This was the legendary artifact of the Buddhist Cloud Monastery—Dharma Lotus Platform!

During the great battle at Mount Shu, the Buddhist Cloud Monastery had intervened with righteous intent, using the Dharma Lotus Platform to block the True Form of Ksitigarbha.

This act of aid had been a great favor to the Mount Shu Sect.

The disciples of the Mount Shu Sect remembered this vividly.

As the cultivators stood upon the Dharma Lotus Platform, they felt the world blur around them. Wind howled past their ears, and the platform spun gently beneath their feet.

Through the petals, their divine senses stretched outward, catching glimpses of the world below. In mere moments, they had crossed thousands of miles.

They arrived above the turbulent South Sea, where the entire ocean thrashed violently. Seawater had surged nearly ten miles inland, swallowing countless coastal structures beneath its waves.

Amid the rising flood, shadows twisted and surfaced—countless demonic creatures emerging from the depths.

Beneath the waves lay a vast world, untouched by human presence. The sea held far more demonic creatures than the land ever did.

These sea demons lived longer lives, but their cultivation level was lower due to the lower concentration of spiritual qi in the sea. Most sea demons would become significantly weaker upon leaving the water. Only within the sea could they unleash the full extent of their power.

But now, as the sea expanded, these sea demons seized the chance to wreak havoc. Cries of anguish were muffled beneath the thunderous waves, often followed by the howls of the demons.

"Members of all immortal sects, act swiftly—rescue the people, slay the demons, and stop the sea monsters from advancing!"

Abbot Dayu, who had seemed frail just moments before, now radiated with brilliant Buddha's light. He now resembled the reincarnation of an Arhat.

A powerful and unshakable presence spread across the South Sea, pressing down like a mountain of divine authority.

Countless petals drifted from the lotus platform, each one precisely locating a civilian.

A soft glow radiated from the petals, forming a protective barrier that shielded the civilians from the sea demons' attack.

With his power alone, Abbot Dayu protected nearly all the surviving civilians.

The cultivators from various immortal sects descended immediately, rescuing civilians and slaying the demons.

It was at this point that those who did not attend the Heavenly Peak Banquet and those outside the Mount Shu Sect received news of the crisis.

Fortunately, the Heavenly Peak Banquet had taken place that very day, bringing many members of the immortal sects together.

Another stroke of luck was the swift messaging through the Circle of Immortality Cultivator Friends, enabling the rapid assembly of a powerful force to confront the crisis.

Had the other immortal sects received news later and delayed gathering their forces, it was likely that only one in ten coastal residents might have survived.

The South Sea had long been the calmest of all the sea regions. What could have triggered such a sudden and violent change?

Wang Xuanling gazed at the demon-infested waters and said, "I'll head in to investigate."

"Grand Peak Master Wang!" Dhyana Master Shenjie stepped forward, raising a hand to stop him. "The sea reeks of demonic energy. Who knows what lies beneath? It's too dangerous to go in now."

"I know the risks," Wang Xuanling replied, "but my disciple is in there."

"I'll go with Senior Uncle Wang," Chu Liang said firmly, stepping forward without hesitation.

"Eldest Senior Brother is still in there. I'm going too!" Lin Bei insisted.



"Stay behind and provide backup," Chu Liang replied. "The sea is dangerous. If you come along, I'll have to protect you—and that's one less hand to fight with. By staying here, you're giving me another."

Lin Bei blinked. Oh... So that's what it means to be brothers as close as hands and feet.

Dhyana Master Shenjie met Wang Xuanling's unwavering gaze, hesitating for a brief moment before silently offering a sword case.

By the rules, the Mount Shu Sect hadn't made the payment, so the Demon-Slaying Sword shouldn't be handed over yet.

Nevertheless, without another word, Dhyana Master Shenjie placed it in Wang Xuanling's hands.

"Take care," he said quietly.

Wang Xuanling didn't say much; he just expressed his gratitude. "Thank you."

Then he drew the Demon-Slaying Sword and plunged into the waves. He did not even need to use the blade on any of the sea demons in his path, as the sheer force of the aura of the Demon-Slaying Sword would spread out and kill them instantly.

Chu Liang followed closely, the wind roaring around him, pushing him forward with ease as he kept pace.

Before long, the shore faded into the distance, and they pressed deeper into the open sea.

Above them, the sky darkened with thick clouds blotting out the stars and moon.

A faint, eerie song echoed through the darkness, drifting around them like a whisper carried by the sea.

"Starlight falls upon the sea of blood, the moon shines on a boat of bones~

"Traveler, do not open your eyes, for the Hallowed Mother gazes upon you~"

## Chapter 668: I Have More

The ethereal, distant song echoed clearly across the vast, rolling sea. As the melody reached the ears, it sent a shiver down one's spine.

But Old Wang wasn't one to tolerate such theatrics. He bellowed, "What demon hides in the shadows? Show yourself!"

Though the Demon-Slaying Sword had been bought by Chu Liang, it now rested in Wang Xuanling's hands, and Chu Liang had no objections.

The reasoning was simple: the most powerful weapon could only unleash its full strength in the hands of the most powerful person.

As the grand peak master of the Mount Shu Sect, Wang Xuanling had fought across the land of the nine provinces for over a century. Aside from Di Nufeng, no one dared bare their fangs at him, and the reasoning certainly wasn't out of respect for some old man.

Wang Xuanling raised the Demon-Slaying Sword and slashed through the air. Instantly, storm clouds churned, shattering the demonic aura that had blanketed the sky. A mighty surge of sword qi shot toward the source of the song, cutting through mist and wind, clearing a hundred miles of sky in the blink of an eye.

They caught a faint glimpse of a figure standing atop a distant reef, singing at the top of their lungs.

But neither of them bothered to spare another glance.

As the song ceased, two glowing red orbs emerged on the misty sea ahead—like enormous lanterns or fallen stars.

As the orbs drew closer, their forms gradually took shape, revealing a wall covered in jagged scales, towering like a fortress.

No...

Chu Liang extended his divine sense, and at last, the creature's true form was revealed.

It was an enormous head! A colossal whale with a smooth, rounded head loomed toward them. Its body was covered in jagged scales, making it look grotesque and terrifying.

On the whale's back stood a shadowy figure, wielding a massive black banner. With each swing of the banner, ink-colored dragon spirits unfurled, stirring the sea into a deafening roar.

"That's the Cloudcrest Dragon Banner!" Wang Xuanling immediately recognized it. "No wonder there is such an abnormal disturbance in the South Sea!"

Chu Liang had heard of this treasure. It was ranked ninety-fourth in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures. Its low rank was due to its lack of combat effectiveness. Instead, its power lay in its ability to stir seas and overturn rivers.

The current seaquake and massive tsunami were clear testaments to its power.

Yet, this artifact should have been kept with the Sea King Sect. How had it fallen into the hands of these unknown sea demons?

As Chu Liang pondered, the figure atop the whale swung the banner in their direction.

Rumble.

The sea and sky merged as a massive wave engulfed them. Wang Xuanling swung the Demon-Slaying Sword, effortlessly slicing through the watery veil.

"I'll slay that scoundrel myself!" Wang Xuanling roared.

Unable to suppress his rage, he prepared to charge forward with the legendary sword in hand.

But Chu Liang's sharp eyes caught a glimmer of gold within the waves, carrying a trace of dragon breath. It was heading straight toward them.

Upon sensing the tiny creature's dragon breath, he realized it was coming toward them.

He raised his hand and used it to scoop up the tiny creature. It was a lively golden loach.

Wang Xuanling immediately recognized it. "That's Ziyang's spirit pet. It's excellent at tracking people underwater."

"Oh?" Chu Liang's eyes lit up. "If Senior Brother Xu left it behind, perhaps it's meant to guide us."

He tossed the loach forward, and sure enough, it transformed into a streak of golden light, darting ahead.

Wang Xuanling glanced at the massive whale in the distance and snorted. "Ziyang's safety comes first. I'll let the beast live for now."

With no time to waste, the two followed the golden light, diving deep into the sea without hesitation.

After a short descent, they encountered a massive whirlpool spinning rapidly ahead. It was dark and unfathomable, even to their divine senses.

The golden loach zipped straight into the vortex. It seemed Xu Ziyang had already ventured inside, leaving the loach behind to guide them.

Boom, boom!

Without hesitation, they moved forward. A deafening roar echoed in their ears as they passed through the barrier of a hidden realm, landing on the ground with a heavy thud.

Chu Liang quickly regained his balance, his eyes wide with amazement and shock as he took in the scene before him. "This is..."

Wang Xuanling said seriously, "The Ruins of Return!"

...

At this moment, the two men stood on a desolate, gray land, facing rows of crumbling city walls and buildings. Although no dust had accumulated there, the extent of the damage indicated countless years of neglect. It felt as though half of the wall would disintegrate into ashes with the slightest touch.

As their divine sense stretched ahead, the cluster of buildings seemed endless, resembling an expansive city. Even the capital of Yu, the largest city in the nine provinces, could not compare to it.

"The entrance to the legendary Ruins of Return is said to lie deep within the South Sea, yet it opened here. Could all this chaos be the work of the Ruins of Return Cult?" Wang Xuanling muttered to himself as he strode forward with his sword in hand. "I don't know much about them, but if anyone could stir up such turmoil in the South Sea, it would have to be them."

Wang Xuanling and Chu Liang surged forward once more, following the golden loach.

The golden loach, now away from the water, seemed less sharp and less nimble. Still, it continued on, flying for a long stretch before finally stopping.

A strange building appeared ahead.

It was a three-story pavilion. What made it strange was that the surrounding area was filled with ancient ruins and crumbling walls, yet this carved tower remained intact and elegant, even exuding a sense of grandeur.

The golden loach circled the pavilion from a distance several times, appearing hesitant to draw closer, as if it sensed some hidden danger lurking within.

Wang Xuanling and Chu Liang hid behind the crumbling walls as they carefully observed the tower. The pavilion doors were tightly sealed, and their divine sense failed to penetrate, leaving them completely unaware of what lay inside.

"I wonder if Ziyang is imprisoned inside. If we can't find an entrance, I'll just go inside with my sword and cleave through whatever stands in my way," Wang Xuanling said after he had observed the surroundings.

"Senior Uncle, let's not rush. Let's observe a bit longer," Chu Liang patiently advised. "If Senior Brother Xu has truly fallen into enemy hands, we must be cautious not to alert them."

As Chu Liang and Wang Xuanling observed the area, a black cloud drifted across the sky. They quickly concealed their presence and took cover, watching carefully.

When the black cloud descended, it morphed into a group of four or five figures, all dressed in black. At the forefront stood a middle-aged man, his expression cold and devoid of emotion. Faint traces of sinister divine light flickered in his eyes.

Chu Liang felt a sense of familiarity upon seeing the man.

The man stepped forward and knocked on the pavilion door.

Knock, knock, knock.

After a few knocks, the door creaked open, and two demonic creatures stepped out.

One was completely dressed in red, wearing red armor, with a large, grotesque head and bulging eyes. The other appeared human but lacked hands, with pincers where his arms should be.

It turned out to be a shrimp and a crab. As they opened the door, they asked in strange, distorted voices, "Who goes there?"

The man in black said nothing, raising his hand to unfurl a scroll with a rustling sound.

Upon seeing the scroll, the two demonic creatures immediately prostrated themselves, chanting, "Praise be to the Hallowed Mother."

After bowing in reverence, they rose and said, "You must be Sect Leader Yuan? The Sea Master has been expecting you."

With that, they led the group inside.

Wang Xuanling frowned as he watched. "Those people seem to be diabolical cultivators. Could they be involved in this matter as well?"

"That man is Immortal Yuan Lu, the leader of the West Sea Diabolical Forces," Chu Liang replied.

That day, when he was inside the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, he had seen Immortal Yuan Lu's true face, which was identical to that of the middle-aged man before him. However, this person still did not appear to possess the power of a cultivator at the eighth realm, suggesting this was another avatar.

People from the diabolical sect were known for their cunning and caution, rarely appearing in their true form. Only those who relied on exceptionally powerful weapons, like the sect leader of the Dark King Sect, would be confident that no one could capture them and thus be bold enough to reveal their true form.

Otherwise, they would end up like the Violet Gold Marquess, splitting into half upon meeting someone.

After a moment of thought, Chu Liang said, "Senior Uncle, I have a way for the two of us to sneak inside."

"What way?" Wang Xuanling asked eagerly.

The members of the Mount Shu Sect trusted Chu Liang completely. If he said he could do something, they believed he could.

Chu Liang took out a black Aura-Concealing Robe and retrieved Xuan Yinzi's Dark King Command Token. "You can disguise yourself as Xuan Yinzi, the former sect leader of the diabolical sect. He was connected to the Ruins of Return Cult. I obtained a similar scroll from him. Since he has been missing for decades, no one should recognize him if he appears."

...

Wang Xuanling naturally knew that Di Nufeng and Chu Liang had killed Xuan Yinzi.

Chu Liang had advised his teacher to keep this a secret. But to Di Nufeng, killing without showing off would be pointless like wearing fine clothes at night. She was fine not telling others that they managed to kill the former sect leader of the Dark King Sect, but she couldn't keep it from Wang Xuanling.

The very day it happened, Di Nufeng specially went to the Jade Sword Peak to ask Wang Xuanling if he could give his position of grand peak master to her if she managed to kill the leader of the Dark King Sect.

Wang Xuanling thought she was just saying some nonsense and replied impatiently, "Sure."

Then, Di Nufeng presented the results of her achievement.

Wang Xuanling argued with her for a while about whether killing the former sect leader counted.

Di Nufeng firmly insisted, "Isn't defeating the former sect leader just as impressive as the current one? Are children from a previous wife any different from those of the current one?"

After much debate, news of her killing Xuan Yinzi did not spread. However, rumors began to circulate widely across Mount Shu that Wang Xuanling had a former wife and a child—one that wasn't even his biological child.

...

Wang Xuanling put on the black robe and took the token. Then, he glanced at Chu Liang and asked, "If you're giving me this disguise, what will you wear?"

"It's fine," Chu Liang replied smoothly, pulling out another set of clothes and the Violet Gold Marquess' token with a smile. "I have more."

Chapter 669: That Can't Be Right

Wang Xuanling and Chu Liang, fully dressed and ready, stepped forward and knocked on the pavilion door once more.

Knock, knock, knock.



Moments later, the shrimp soldiers and crab generals opened the door again.

"Who goes there?" they asked.

Without responding, Chu Liang calmly unfurled the scroll. Earlier, Immortal Yuan Lu had used the portrait of the South Sea Hallowed Mother to gain entry.

As expected, the moment their eyes fell on the scroll, the two demonic creatures immediately knelt and bowed deeply.

When they rose, one of them asked, "And you two are...?"

"Xuan Yinzi of the Dark King Sect," Wang Xuanling said, raising his token.

"Violet Gold Marquess," Chu Liang added, flashing his token.

"So it's the two of you. Please wait here for a moment. I will report to the Sea Master at once," the shrimp-headed creature said before turning and hurrying upstairs.

Before long, it rushed back down, loudly announcing, "The Sea Master will see you now!"

The first floor remained empty. Once the doors were closed, the shrimp soldiers and crab generals led them to the second floor. Unlike below, this level lacked separate chambers. Instead, there was a large, rectangular table in the center of the room.

At the head of the table sat a thin, gray-bearded old man. His aura was vast and profound, like the tides stretching endlessly into the horizon. As he sat with a straight posture, his very presence seemed to command the space—like the ocean itself had taken human form.

He was likely the Sea Master the shrimp and crab had mentioned.

To his right sat Immortal Yuan Lu with several diabolical cultivators behind him.

Before they could take their seats, Immortal Yuan Lu of the West Sea Diabolical Forces sneered.

"Violet Gold Marquess, we finally meet in person. I imagine you didn't expect to see me here today, did you?"

Previously, Yuan Lu had collaborated with the Violet Gold Marquess on an important scheme, but Chu Liang, using the marquess' token, had sabotaged the plan. Yuan Lu had blamed the Dark King Sect, causing the start of a war between the West Sea Diabolical Forces and the sect. The ensuing war dragged on for years, with heavy casualties on both sides.

"Sect Leader Yuan, I had no choice that day," Chu Liang replied calmly.

For most, the question would have caused confusion, leaving them unsure of how to respond. But since it was Chu Liang who had been asked, it worked out—he was the one directly involved.

Chu Liang slowly replied, "Sect Leader Yuan, I never intended to go against you. It was that fucker Lin Poyun who feared that if you seized the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, his position as leader of the diabolical sect would be threatened. So, he ordered me to sabotage your plans in secret. I only obeyed him to win his trust and uncover where he had imprisoned the former sect leader. After years of searching, I finally found him and released him."

As he spoke, he glanced at Wang Xuanling behind him.

Wang Xuanling froze for a moment before nodding. "That's correct."

Haaaaaaa. Chu Liang sighed inwardly. The old man's acting is atrocious. I laid out the entire backstory, and he couldn't even add a few more details.

Then again, the more you say, the more mistakes you might make. Maybe this isn't such a bad thing.

"Heh." The Sea Master, the elder at the head of the table, suddenly chuckled. "Years ago, we reached out to Sect Leader Xuan Yinzi, but he vanished soon after. So, he was imprisoned by the current sect leader. Now that he's free, it is naturally his time to rise again."

"Indeed," Wang Xuanling replied gravely, taking his seat.

After sitting down, Chu Liang smiled and said, "We came to the South Sea today for matters of the past. I hadn't expected such a lively gathering. Since that's the case, we won't impose. Please proceed with your discussions. If necessary, we can excuse ourselves."

In truth, Chu Liang had no idea what plans Xuan Yinzi had made with these people. He spoke only to appear proactive, hoping to sidestep any probing questions.

"Eh." The Sea Master raised his hand slightly. "If we were concerned about you overhearing, we wouldn't have called you up here."

Immortal Yuan Lu still spoke with irritation. "So, you already contacted him long ago, Sea Master. It seems our West Sea Diabolical Forces were nothing more than an afterthought to your plans."

"Sect Leader Yuan, don't be upset," the Sea Master said leisurely. "For years, your West Sea Diabolical Forces kept to themselves. Even if we wanted to reach out, we had no way of finding you. It's only in recent times that your ambitions have come to light."

"Indeed," Chu Liang chimed in. "With the West Sea Diabolical Forces locked in conflict with the Dark King Sect, it's clear our common enemy isn't just the righteous sects, but Lin Poyun as well. This is exactly why we should work together sincerely."

"How do I know you're not an undercover agent sent by Lin Poyun?" Immortal Yuan Lu questioned. He seemed to agree with Chu Liang's reasoning, but after years of conflict, resentment lingered.

"Sect Leader Yuan!" Chu Liang declared. "If I am an undercover agent sent by Lin Poyun, let my entire family perish, and may I be left an orphan!"

His words rang with conviction, each syllable echoing through the room. The weight of his oath left little room for doubt.

"Hmph." Immortal Yuan Lu snorted but said nothing more.

"Alright, alright," the Sea Master interjected, waving his hand as if smoothing the tension. "Xuan Yinzi and Violet Gold Marquess, you both came here to discuss cooperation. Let's speak plainly."

"Since Sect Leader Yuan arrived first, it's only right for you to speak with him first," Chu Liang said with a wry smile. "Besides, we are weak and few in number. How could we presume to speak ahead of him?"

"Let's not mention that again. Anyone who enters this hall is an honored guest of the Ruins of Return Cult," the Sea Master replied with a shake of his head.

Still, he turned toward Immortal Yuan Lu. "Then I shall speak with Sect Leader Yuan first."

Wang Xuanling watched in stunned silence. Is this really happening?

How does this kid negotiate with diabolical sects so effortlessly? It's as if he knows things even they don't.

You'd better have been recovering in some hidden realm all these years... and not secretly running around in the criminal world.

"My conditions are simple," Immortal Yuan Lu said bluntly. "As long as you fulfill your promise to kill the Sword Emperor of the West Sea, we will cooperate fully with your plans. But if the immortal sects in the Divine Nine use a legendary artifact, I'll leave immediately."

"Legendary artifacts are indeed troublesome. No one can fight a legendary artifact head-on," the elder said with a chuckle. "Naturally, we wouldn't force you all to die."

As their conversation unfolded, footsteps echoed from below. A moment later, someone ascended the stairs and entered the room.

The person who arrived was a middle-aged man dressed in loose robes, faint stubble lining his face. He gave off this lazy demeanor, and with each step, the large wine gourd at his waist swayed gently.

Upon seeing the man, Chu Liang immediately felt a sense of familiarity.

He's Huo Tianya!

This was the Celestial Charm Sect member he had encountered outside the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm.

As expected, the shadow of the Celestial Charm Sect always seemed to loom behind every upheaval in the mortal world.

Huo Tianya approached the Sea Master and took out a small black flag the size of a palm. "Sea Master, this is for you."

The enchanted tool he brought out was none other than the Cloudcrest Dragon Banner!

"Heh." The Sea Master chuckled as he accepted the flag. "If stealing a legendary artifact from the sects in the Divine Nine were as easy as taking the Cloudcrest Dragon Banner from the Sea King Sect, life would be far simpler."

Huo Tianya's gaze drifted to Chu Liang and Wang Xuanling seated nearby and suddenly asked, "Who are these two?"

The Sea Master introduced, "That is Xuan Yinzi, the former sect leader of the Dark King Sect, and that is the Violet Gold Marquess."

"Hm?" Huo Tianya furrowed his brows. "That can't be right. I've met Violet Gold Marquess before..."

Chapter 670: You Are Not Him

The Aura-Concealing Robe could obscure one's features, leaving only faint shadows across the face. For those in the criminal world, this was nothing unusual. The actual powerful cultivators didn't rely on sight to recognize people. Instead, they relied on the flow of qi.

This was precisely why Huo Tianya could sense that Chu Liang was different from the Violet Gold Marquess he had encountered before.

Huo Tianya had seen the Violet Gold Marquess when the Violet Gold Marquess and the White Silver King were fighting Immortal Jiuyi. He hid somewhere and observed from afar.

That was the time when Violet Gold Marquess had appeared in his true form. Huo Tianya was certain that he had seen the real Violet Gold Marquess that day, which was why he could confidently denounce Chu Liang as a fake.

Upon hearing Huo Tianya's words, Wang Xuanling tensed instantly. He had his mind on the Demon-Slaying Sword, ready to strike at any moment.

His thoughts raced. Although Immortal Yuan Lu was a powerful eighth-realm cultivator, the clone before him was only at the seventh realm—strong, but not terrifying. The one he truly feared was Huo Tianya, whose power far surpassed that of the clone.

Even so, Wang Xuanling believed that with the Demon-Slaying Sword in his grasp, he could fend off any enemy that crossed his path.

The Sea Master though...

The Sea Master didn't look like a human. He seemed more like a sea demon in human form. The lack of demonic qi could mean two things—either he hadn't unleashed any divine abilities, or his cultivation vastly exceeded Wang Xuanling's.

He was likely a greater demon at the eighth realm!

Even though the Demon-Slaying Sword was highly effective against demons, it couldn't make up for the difference in their cultivation. Facing three foes alone, death seemed inevitable.

He might have a chance to escape if he focused solely on fleeing, but how could he leave Chu Liang behind?

Chu Liang was the hope of the Mount Shu Sect.

In an instant, Wang Xuanling made up his mind. If the demons attacked, he would see to it that Chu Liang escaped with the Demon-Slaying Sword. He would sacrifice himself to hold them back. The sword had been missing for years, and now that it was found, it must not be lost again.

It's a pity I haven't found Ziyang yet... My disciple, there's still so much I haven't had the chance to tell you...

Just as Wang Xuanling was contemplating his final words, Chu Liang suddenly chuckled nonchalantly. "Haha."

Hmm?

Upon hearing that calm chuckle, Wang Xuanling's eyes flickered with light. Might there be a way out?

Wang Xuanling knew all too well just how extraordinary Chu Liang had always been.

Could he truly have a way to turn things around even now? Wang Xuanling wondered.

Without hesitation, Chu Liang pulled off his mask, revealing his face.

Fuck! He's just going to give up?

Wang Xuanling's grip tightened around the Demon-Slaying Sword, intending to make the first move... but Chu Liang laughed again.

Chu Liang said, "Have any of you seen this face before?"

"Chu Liang?" Huo Tianya asked, his voice filled with doubt.

Huo Tianya had indeed encountered Chu Liang before. After all, as the Champion of the Assembly of Immortal Sects, Chu Liang had drawn the attention of the entire cultivation world. It was no surprise that someone from the Celestial Charm Sect remembered him clearly.

"Yes, it is Chu Liang indeed," Chu Liang replied with a calm smile. "Since you recognize me, Mr. Huo, why haven't you made a move yet?"

At this, Huo Tianya was left speechless, momentarily stumped by the question.

After studying Chu Liang closely, Huo Tianya let out a soft chuckle and shook his head with certainty. "You're not him."

"Oh?" Chu Liang asked. "You sound pretty confident, Mr. Huo."

"If you were truly a righteous disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, would you dare walk openly into this pavilion? Wouldn't the esteemed Senior Xuan Yinzi recognize you at once?" Huo Tianya took a step back and sat down, smiling confidently. "Besides, the whole world knows Chu Liang has been missing for six years and suddenly appeared again. There must be a reason behind his disappearance and sudden return."

"Mr. Huo, you are indeed sharp." Chu Liang shot him an approving look. "That day at Fengya Mountain in the Northern Regions, the Whale-Riding Immortal struck me down with a single blow, leaving me on the brink of death. Soon after, this little Mount Shu thief found me and tried to kill me. Fortunately, I specialize in Soul Techniques and managed to hide a fragment of my soul within him. When he was severely injured, I seized the chance to take over his body. For the past six years, I have remained hidden, quietly nursing my wounds."

"Indeed," Immortal Yuan Lu added, "both the Violet Gold Marquess and Chu Liang have both disappeared for six years."

Huo Tianya's gaze shifted. "Then with the Violet Gold Marquess now in Chu Liang's body, does this mean he will be able to infiltrate the Mount Shu Sect?"

"Haha!" Chu Liang laughed. "Mr. Huo, your foresight is commendable. That is precisely my plan. This little rascal was well-regarded within Mount Shu. If I return to Mount Shu being Chu Liang, I can easily gain access to the secrets known only to the sect's higher-ups."

"If you pretend to be Chu Liang, you must be careful of his teacher," Huo Tianya warned. "Di Nufeng of the Mount Shu Sect is a ruthless monster who is ten times more ferocious than any of us. If she discovers this, you will be in grave danger."

The Celestial Charm Sect had suffered many defeats at Di Nufeng's hands, and the lingering fear was evident.

Hearing this, even the ever-silent Wang Xuanling couldn't help but nod in agreement. "Indeed!"

...



The commotion subsided, and Chu Liang pulled his hood back on, concealing his face.

Old Wang silently gave Chu Liang a thumbs-up in his heart. After six years, this kid had become much better at making nonsense up.

If Ziyang had even a fraction of his cunning, I wouldn't have to worry about his lifelong commitment every day.

"Let's get back to the point," said the Sea Master. "The creatures emerging at the South Sea are part of an operation led by Mr. Huo, myself, and the aquatic clans from the Ruins of Return. The goal isn't to invade the land. That doesn't matter. What matters is drawing the attention of the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten here, forcing them to waste their energy."

"The land of the Yu Dynasty is burning on all sides now. They won't last much longer," Huo Tianya said.

"But without a legendary artifact, we can never change our fate," Immortal Yuan Lu replied.

"A legendary artifact, huh..." Huo Tianya chuckled.

Just as he was about to say more, a demonic monster with a shrimp head entered and reported, "Sea Master, the divine envoy of the demons from the Far West have arrived."

"Oh?" The Sea Master glanced outside. "They arrived very quickly."

Huo Tianya whispered, "The matters we're discussing with the demons from the Far West are not for others to hear."

The Sea Master turned to Wang Xuanling and Immortal Yuan Lu. "Since we've already met, I ask that the two of you lead your people to a private chamber and rest for a while. Once I've finalized the plan with the divine envoy of the demons from the Far West, we can reconvene and discuss it together."

"I didn't expect the demons of the South Sea to have ties with the demons from the Far West. We'll wait in the meantime," said Immortal Yuan Lu as he stood up.

"That works as well," Wang Xuanling agreed, rising to leave.

The shrimp soldier and crab general led them to the third floor of the pavilion. The second floor had no rooms, but the third floor featured a ring of private chambers. Chu Liang, Wang Xuanling, Immortal Yuan Lu, and several diabolical cultivators from the West Sea Diabolical Forces were placed in rooms next to each other.

As Chu Liang stepped out, he glanced down and spotted a familiar figure—a black-robed individual wearing a strange bronze mask.

Since the first time Chu Liang saw the mask typically worn by the divine envoys of demons, Chu Liang had learned more about it. This was a mask blessed by the Demon God that could only be given by the temple. Only the most devout follower of the Demon God could wear this mask and anyone who was unworthy of it would be exposed instantly.

Yet, he had worn it several times before and was never recognized. He wasn't quite sure why.

Chu Liang even wondered if the silly little Tuntun he raised might actually be the Demon God and maybe that was why he shared such a bond with Tuntun.

But when he first wore the mask, Tuntun hadn't even appeared yet.

In any case, he couldn't quite figure out the reason.

Upon entering the private chamber, Wang Xuanling said, "The first floor of this pavilion is empty, and the second floor has no partitions. If Ziyang is trapped here, he is likely in one of the private chambers on the third floor."

"Shall we take a look?" Chu Liang asked.

"This entire building has been refined, which means it's essentially an enchanted tool," Wang Xuanling said with a furrowed brow. "If the rooms are locked, we can't pass through the walls with any divine techniques and stealth methods. If I use the Demon-Slaying Sword to cut through, it might create a path for us, but it will inevitably make noise and alert those outside."

"I have a way," Chu Liang said with a grin.

Again? Wang Xuanling's eyes widened in astonishment as he thought, How does this kid have a solution for everything?

Chu Liang gently took the still-sleeping Tuntun out, cradling it in his hands, and softly coaxed, "It's time to eat."

The little creature perked up immediately and sat up straight.

"That's..." Wang Xuanling's pupils contracted. "A Heaven-Devouring Bug! This is a demonic creature that must be exterminated on sight!"

Chu Liang quickly covered Tuntun's ears. "Why would you say that in front of the child?"

"Once this creature matures, it will wreak havoc. The chaos brought by the Demon God will repeat itself," Wang Xuanling said. "How dare you raise one in secret?"

"I'm not raising one in secret," Chu Liang said. "Didn't I just take it out right in front of you?"

Wang Xuanling was stunned. "You..."

"Senior Uncle, don't worry," Chu Liang reassured him. "Tuntun has been with me for years. I've never fed her anything with spiritual energy and I only let her act in difficult situations. She's saved me several times by now. I can't betray her after all she's done for me. As long as she's willing to do good, even a Heaven-Devouring Bug can walk the right path. Besides, how else are we going to save Senior Brother Ziyang?"

Chu Liang's words left Wang Xuanling speechless. After a long pause, he finally flicked his sleeve and said, "Fine. But you must watch over her carefully. If this demonic beast grows into an existence that will cause calamity, even a thousand deaths won't atone for your sin."

"I understand," Chu Liang replied.

By then, Tuntun had already chewed a large hole through the wall. The room next door was empty, its furnishings identical to theirs.

The reason Chu Liang dared to let Tuntun chew so recklessly was that he figured the pavilion was guarded too strictly for many guests to enter. As long as they avoided the side of the wall where Immortal Yuan Lu stayed, they were unlikely to run into any of the Sea Master's allies.

Tuntun chewed through another wall, revealing a figure inside the next chamber.

But it wasn't human.

It was a massive toad, pitch-black like ink, standing as tall as a person. It lay in deep slumber, bound by a talismanic spell beneath it. With every breath, dark bubbles swelled and popped across its skin.

The two paid little attention to it and pressed on.

Finally, after opening yet another private chamber, they found a figure seated with eyes closed.

It was Xu Ziyang!