

M. Slaying 721

Chapter 721: Yin and Yang

Seeing that a huge fight was about to break out, Chu Liang quickly slipped back to Silver Sword Peak.

There was no denying that slaying an eighth-realm demon king was an achievement worthy of being recorded in history. Over the past few thousand years, only a handful of human cultivators had managed to do so. So even if his esteemed teacher was carrying a giant snake corpse to clog up the flow of the spring at Jade Sword Peak, Old Wang likely wouldn't dare to come out and face her.

Back then, Di Nufeng had been furious for months over Wang Xuanling's slaying of an evil flood dragon in the East Sea. Now, with such a huge achievement under her belt, she would likely boast about it for years to come.

She was undeniably strong but also incredibly skilled at holding grudges.

Back in his small hut, Chu Liang finally felt a sense of stability. The past few years had been a whirlwind, full of tumult and uncertainty—like being tossed around by a storm. It was only here, in the quiet of his hut, that his heart could finally find peace.

However, now he understood that this peace did not come without a price. It was thanks to Venerable Wen Yuan, the Four Guardian Elders, Daoist Yan, the grand peak master, the peak masters, and the other reliable seniors who had created this safe haven for all the disciples of the sect.

Without them, everything that had been built with that safe haven as its foundation would crumble. Even the seemingly prosperous Red Cotton Peak he had established would be easily torn down.

The reason they had enjoyed these peaceful years was because others had borne the burden for them, forging ahead in silence.

And from this moment on, Chu Liang too would have to bear that burden. He would face the brutal storms of the immortal realm head-on. Venerable Wen Yuan's words about the harsh reality were not exaggerations—they were the truth.

For example, when an unknown hidden realm was first discovered, it was always the cultivators at the Dao Attainment Realm who explored it first. They mapped everything out before allowing the other disciples to enter. By then, most of the risks could be controlled.

To secure enough resources for the sect, seventh-realm and eighth-realm experts had no choice but to venture into dangerous hidden realms or even the Divine Ruins. These were unavoidable risks.

Cultivation power was the key to tackling such responsibilities. What Chu Liang needed to do now was to focus on stabilizing his cultivation power.

Having jumped directly from the fifth realm to the seventh, he was still unaccustomed to controlling the power of his new cultivation level. Although he had managed to slay a seventh-realm cultivator using the Violet and Azure Twin Swords, it didn't mean he was strong—it only meant the swords were.

As he converged the Dao essence of Severing the Void Great Dao, the first thing he felt was the powerful surge of sword intent. For a long time, he had never truly considered himself a sword cultivator, as he had been fighting with the power of the dragon god. And when he was proving his understanding of the Severing the Void Great Dao and ascending the seventh realm, he realized that his understanding of this Dao of the Sword was not deep enough.

When Chu Liang had the time, he could seek guidance from Senior Aunt Yan. She was the Dao Master of the Cloud of Determination Great Dao, but the three Great Daos of the Sword were interconnected, so her mastery of Severing the Void was unlikely to be lacking.

Besides, Senior Sister Jiang treated her as though she were her mother, so it would be beneficial for Chu Liang to build a relationship with her in advance...

After stabilizing his comprehension of Severing the Void, he turned his attention to the knowledge seed of the Great Dao that Baize bestowed to him—the Great Dao of Yin and Yang.

It was one of the Great Daos closest to the essence of the Heavenly Dao, so even a mere seed of the Great Dao of Yin and Yang contained profound Dao essence. Chu Liang had to meditate on it for a long time before he could truly grasp its meaning.

In a narrow sense, "Yin and Yang" referred to the fundamental dual energies of heaven and earth. More broadly, they represented the two opposing yet complementary forces that formed the world. If someone were to cultivate the Great Dao of Yin and Yang to the highest level, they would have the power to create all life-forms.

For this very reason, Baize's path of advancing to the ninth realm would undoubtedly be a challenging and arduous one.

Fortunately, Chu Liang possessed the Golden Cores of both the Lesser Yin and the Lesser Yang. That granted him a deeper affinity with the Great Dao of Yin and Yang, making the process of comprehension somewhat easier.

A long time passed before he was finally stirred from his meditation. It was due to Lin Bei calling out to him from outside.

"Heheheh!" Lin Bei's hearty laughter rang out as he knocked on the door. "Chu Liang, I brought back some specialty fruits from the Eastern Regions—Flowing Sea Fruit."

"Oh?" Chu Liang chuckled, raising an eyebrow. "Am I the only one getting this, or did you bring them for everyone?"

"Huh?" Lin Bei paused, feeling a little confused.

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"You're not usually this thoughtful. You even brought something for me this time. Normally, when you come to Silver Sword Peak, not only do you come empty-handed, but you'd even take some of Golden-Furred Hou's food when you leave," Chu Liang remarked.

"What are you saying..." Lin Bei replied, chuckling awkwardly. Then he added, "Your Golden-Furred Hou never had food to begin with. It always mooches off Little Baize. Now that Baize's mother has woken up, Golden-Furred Hou doesn't dare mooch anymore, and it's been starving, howling every day. It was even lying by the door of Red Moon Pavilion today."

"Alright, alright," Chu Liang muttered, feeling a little embarrassed when Lin Bei mentioned this. He took a moment to shake off the lingering emotions from his meditation on the Great Dao of Yin and Yang, then he looked back at Lin Bei. "Alright, speak up. What do you need from me?"

"Heheheh..." Lin Bei chuckled and said, "I really can't hide anything from you. I do have something to discuss with you. It's about my two friends on Flame Mountain Island in the Eastern Regions..."

It turned out that Lin Bei had come to Chu Liang because of the Hall of Construction.

When the members of the diabolical sect attacked Mount Shu, the Feng-grade buildings on Red Cotton Peak displayed their true power, safeguarding the life and property of the mountain. News of this spread within the Circle of Immortal Friends, and soon, everyone in the immortal cultivation realm became aware of the charm of Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Construction.

No one would be surprised if they found out that the enchanted buildings were as sturdy as the Feng-grade buildings. After all, such buildings could not be built on a large scale.

However, the buildings that the Hall of Construction built were different. They could indeed be built on a large scale, and this had already been proven on Red Cotton Peak.

Two places had been attacked on the same day. Despite suffering a severe attack, Red Cotton Peak remained mostly unscathed. In contrast, the City Lord's residence in Taotie City had been completely demolished by the Mount Mang rebels, and the whereabouts of Huyan Dong and his son remained unknown. This created a stark contrast between the two commercial districts.

Without a safe home, what was the point in having all the money in the world? The money would just end up being someone else's!

Especially now, with the world in chaos, the tragedy in Taotie City served as a warning to many sects. Even a sect in the Terrestrial Ten was not safe.

The Flame Mountain Island in the Eastern Regions was one of the many sects that felt unsafe.

Their sect leader had an idea. Since the buildings on Mount Shu are so sturdy, maybe we can ask them to help build a few in their territory as well?

"I have connections in Mount Shu!" the sect leader of Flame Mountain Island exclaimed.

He quickly contacted Lin Bei, who then hurried to the Hall of Construction to inquire about the request.

After all, according to past traditions, the Hall of Construction only served the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect. Even the large-scale renovation project of Red Cotton Peak had remained within Mount Shu's boundaries. Going out to build houses for others—even if it was a paid job—would be a breach of tradition. Depending on one's perspective, this matter could be seen as either trivial or significant.

The five juniors in the Hall of Construction didn't dare make the decision themselves, so they sent Lin Bei to ask Chu Liang.

"The sect leader of Flame Mountain Island is indeed a good brother of mine, and he's got plenty of money," Lin Bei said. "Of course, he knows this is a tricky situation. It's not something that has to happen, and even if it doesn't work out, he won't hold a grudge..."

"Tricky? How can this be tricky?" Chu Liang's eyes lit up as he listened to the explanation. "This is too easy! If he's your friend, then he's my friend! We are all brothers."

"It's doable?" Lin Bei grinned upon hearing this. "That's great! I'll send him a reply right away. How much per house? Let's set a clear price upfront."

Chu Liang replied, "If we're building for outsiders, we can't charge per house."

"Then by what?" Lin Bei asked, feeling puzzled.

"By square meters," Chu Liang said in a serious manner. "And it depends on the location. Even if the houses use the same materials, the price has to vary based on the area. If there are a lot of orders, we could even build a... residential district—that way, it could be cheaper per unit."

"But of course, the communal areas have to be included in the shared costs too..."

Chapter 722: No Freeloaders Around

"Need a sturdy, high-quality house in just three days? Trust the Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Construction—where speed meets excellence!"

"Seeking a safe haven? The Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Construction builds secure, top-quality homes—fast and reliable!"

"Let the Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Construction protect your wealth!"

"..."

Banners fluttered high above the peak of the Great Astral Sect. Yun Chaoxian stood with his arms crossed, watching the construction crew at work. He nodded in satisfaction.

"This Feng-grade building is truly remarkable," he remarked. "Not a single senior or junior brother has managed to break it. We really have to thank Chu Liang for this."

"Heheheh!" Lin Bei laughed heartily from across the way. "Chu Liang said that the Great Astral Sect is family, so the quality had to be top-notch. If he weren't stuck at Mount Shu right now, he'd definitely be here in person to supervise. Just wait and see."

A few days ago, after Lin Bei helped the Hall of Construction secure a construction project in the East Sea, this information was "accidentally" leaked. Word quickly spread that the Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Construction could help build high-quality buildings for a fee, and this caused an immediate sensation.

For cultivators, constructing a building was hardly a challenge. Even a hundred-story tower was nothing impressive. However, a structure that could withstand a strike from Di Nufeng? That was virtually unheard of.

The fact that the Mount Shu Sect could mass-produce such buildings was nothing short of a blessing for the fellow cultivators of the other righteous sects.

Immediately, the Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Construction started getting a flood of orders.

As the Hall of Construction had only five senior members, Chu Liang didn't blindly accept all requests. The intricate enchanted formations and techniques weren't something that could be mastered overnight, and training new members would take time.

Among them, Senior Brothers Li Wanda, Li Wanke, Fang Zhonghai, and Chen Baoli were capable of handling projects on their own. However, Bi Guiyuan was still inexperienced and could only construct structures of a lower grade than the Feng-grade, making him unfit to work on projects by himself.

To manage the demand, Chu Liang introduced a lottery system.

Sects wishing to purchase buildings had to enter the draw, where lucky winners were randomly selected. This ensured fairness, transparency, and prevented an overwhelming influx of orders.

The five members of the Hall of Construction were now experiencing the troubles of success.

In the past, they barely had any work in a month and often worried about having nothing to build. But now, even as they were still wrapping up the Red Cotton Peak reconstruction, their schedule was already booked well into next year.

It felt as if the days of having no projects belonged to a completely different era.

Of course, before accepting all these external orders, Chu Liang first gathered the five members to assist with the Great Astral Sect's renovations.

Compared to other sects, the Great Astral Sect had much higher standards for structural durability. Its disciples were notoriously reckless, and even a casual display of strength could easily cause houses and buildings to collapse.

Upon hearing that the Mount Shu Sect was selling Feng-grade buildings, which were as durable and sturdy as enchanted artifacts, the Great Astral Sect immediately expressed interest. It was also the only sect among the Divine Nine that approached the Mount Shu Sect for a purchase.

The moment the Great Astral Sect brothers made their request, Chu Liang waved his hand grandly and declared, "Sell? It's all free!"

He immediately promised Yun Chaoxian that the Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Construction would build as many as they needed, using only the finest materials and at the highest standards. The bond between the Mount Shu Sect's disciples and the brothers of the Great Astral Sect was something beyond the measure of spirit stone coins.

Just as Yun Chaoxian was starting to feel bad by such generosity, Chu Liang said that the Great Astral Sect's money would definitely not be accepted. However, if they wanted to contribute, they could allow these houses to serve as sample units—where potential buyers could visit and inspect the quality for themselves.

This was a carefully thought-out plan. No matter how impressive the buildings on Red Cotton Peak were, they were still within Mount Shu Sect's home ground. Many might doubt whether the Mount Shu Sect could recreate the same quality for outsiders.

Using another location as a showroom came with its own risks. Frequent visits could inevitably attract troublemakers, whether intentional or not. A smaller sect like Flame Mountain Island wouldn't have the strength to handle such disruptions if they arose.

The Great Astral Sect, on the other hand, was the perfect choice. Its disciples were hospitable, welcoming, and great at fighting.

Anyone looking for trouble wouldn't dare pick a fight in a place like this.

With Great Astral Sect's approval, the Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Construction officially began work at full speed.

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"We make the most of sunny days, work through the cloudy ones, treat drizzles like clear skies. Light rain? Full speed ahead! Heavy rain? Keep pushing through! And a storm? Just a little extra sweat!"

Chu Liang waved his hand confidently as he assured Xu Hongqiu, "Don't worry. As soon as we wrap up the Great Astral Sect's project, we'll start on yours right away."

While Lin Bei was busy running around outside, Chu Liang—though temporarily staying in Mount Shu for safety—was far from idle. After recent events, a steady stream of acquaintances came to visit him, allowing him to reunite with many friends he hadn't seen in six years.

Among them, the most frequent visitor was Xu Hongqiu. Since the Whale Gang worked closely with Red Cotton Peak, she made trips to Mount Shu every few days, which naturally led to frequent encounters with Chu Liang.

At the moment, she was inquiring with Chu Liang about purchasing houses, and naturally, Chu Liang placed the Whale Gang's order in line right after the Great Astral Sect's.

Xu Hongqiu still wore her signature scarlet robes wherever she went. A black cloak draped over her shoulder, making her seem even more valiant and heroic. She had outgrown her youthful, innocent appearance; her complexion had become fairer and her features sharper. A fierce intensity burned in her eyes.

She had been involved in the Whale Gang's leadership since her teenage years, holding a high position for quite some time. Early on, she established ties with Red Cotton Peak, bringing enormous profits to the Whale Gang. Now, the entire Eastern Whale Division looked to her as its leader. All that remained was for her to break through to the seventh realm, at which point she would officially assume the role of vice-chief.

Initially, as the daughter of Xu Bashan, the chief of the Whale Gang, she shouldn't take on this role. However, her family's influence within the gang had become so deeply entrenched that, even if she had no desire for the position, many would still push for her to take on this position.

"Alright!" Xu Hongqiu said with a chuckle. "But don't even think about offering it for free. I know you spent a fortune on the Demon-Slaying Sword recently, and Red Cotton Peak isn't exactly overflowing with funds. Whatever the cost, we'll pay in full. The Whale Gang has made plenty of money working with the Mount Shu Sect over the years."

"At least take a discount," Chu Liang replied. "Even setting aside our ties with the Whale Gang, your teacher was the one who created all the enchanted formations for these buildings. That alone is reason enough to make things easier for you guys."

"Haha, fair enough," Xu Hongqiu agreed. With the business discussion settled, she changed the conversation. "How's Jiangjiang been lately?"

Though she and Jiang Yuebai were on good terms, they hadn't seen each other in a long time. If she wanted to know how Jiang Yuebai was doing, she had to ask Chu Liang.

"She's still traveling the world with her father," Chu Liang said simply.

Xu Hongqiu sighed, "Haaaaaa, I wonder when she'll be back. I really miss her."

"Me too," Chu Liang replied, sighing as well.

As the conversation went on, Xu Hongqiu suddenly said, "Oh right, there's one more thing."

She placed a jade slip on the table. "This is this year's shipping ledger. I used to have Little Yi handle the verification, but now that you're back, I'll leave it to you."

"Alright," Chu Liang said with a nod. Then, with a smile, he added, "He's been handling this well, so there's no need for me to wear myself out. I'll just pass it along to him."

Red Cotton Peak's high-end goods were distributed through the Four Extremities Hall, while bulk shipments were handled via the Whale Gang's maritime routes. Their partnership operated on an annual basis. Payments were not made per transaction; instead, funds were held in reserve and settled periodically. Once the shipping ledger was verified, Red Cotton Peak would then issue payment to the Whale Gang.

However, since the two sides had been collaborating for years and with Mount Shu Sect backing the agreement, Xu Hongqiu had little concern about discrepancies. She was more than comfortable leaving the verifications to the Mount Shu Sect.

Reviewing account ledgers and verifying numbers was no simple task. Fortunately, Chu Yi had spent the past few years training under Senior Brother Yuan, honing a methodical and structured mindset. He was perfect for the task, and Chu Liang was more than happy to delegate the responsibility to him.

"But he's still just a kid..." Xu Hongqiu mused. "Silver Sword Peak truly has no place for idlers, does it?"

Chapter 723: This Kid is Supposed to be Twelve?!

Crackle, crackle.

The firewood in the bonfire cracked and splintered, producing crisp snapping sounds. The roasting beast meat on top was still streaked with blood as someone grabbed it and tore into it with large bites.

Upon closer inspection, the one eating had thick bristles covering the back of his hands—a clear sign that he was not human.

Huyan Dong and his son, Huyan Bin, had long bronze nails driven through their bodies, each engraved with talisman inscriptions that completely suppressed their cultivation power. Sitting quietly to the side, they appeared very well-behaved.

Four or five hulking half-demons stood nearby, gripping legendary weapons and closely monitoring their every move.

As footsteps approached, Lu Jiangtong appeared. He strode toward Huyan Dong and Huyan Bin, exuding a sinister malevolent qi. In his hand, he casually held a large roasted beast's hind leg.

"City Lord, City Lord Junior, Sure you don't want to eat some?" he jeered, flashing his signature smirk. "Even mighty cultivators need a little nourishment to recover."

"No need," Huyan Dong responded as he shook his head.

"Worried we poisoned it?" Lu Jiangtong asked. He sank his teeth into the meat, tearing off a large chunk and swallowing it in just a few bites. Then, he added with a chuckle, "Relax. We people of Mount Mang would never tamper with food. That'd be a waste."

Huyan Dong paused for a moment before raising his gaze to him. "I'm curious. Given how far you've fallen, where did you get all these resources and enchanted tools?"

Huyan Dong had never imagined that Taotie City would actually fall to this group—outlaws relentlessly hunted by the imperial court. When he had suggested they attack Red Cotton Peak, he had only expected them to throw their lives away to create chaos, nothing more.

Yet, the rebels of Mount Mang who attacked Taotie City were clad in gleaming armor, wielding razor-sharp weapons, and each carried at least one enchanted tool. Lu Jiangtong even possessed what appeared to be a legendary artifact—the Devil Armor of Slaughter.

The Devil Armor of Slaughter once belonged to the infamous devil general Chu Hengtou of the previous dynasty. It was said that the more he killed, the stronger the devil armor's devil nature grew and the more powerful he became. Undoubtedly, the devil armor was a treasure worthy of ranking among the top hundred—or even top fifty—of the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures. However, having been lost too early, it never secured a place in the catalog.

Wearing this devil armor, Lu Jiangtong single-handedly slew two seventh-realm honored allies, scared off a third, and completely crushed the defenses of the City Lord's Residence.

"Of course, it was given by people like you. The rebels of Mount Mang wouldn't be where we are today without all of you playing your part," Lu Jiangtong sneered.

"You ignored my orders but followed someone else's instead..." Huyan Dong mused. "There aren't many forces that could offer you more than Taotie City... I told you to attack Mount Shu, but instead, you came here. Could it be...?"

Seeing the hint of realization on his face, Lu Jiangtong warned, "If you keep making silly guesses, I might not be able to keep you alive. I'm here to tell you—if you want to live, tell me where your treasure is. If you keep holding out, I might have to start with your son."

Taotie City had prospered for many years, accumulating countless spirit stones and treasures. Rumors had long circulated in the immortal realm that the city possessed a hidden realm dedicated to storing its wealth—a safeguard for a future resurgence in the event of its downfall. When Lu Jiangtong ransacked the City Lord's Residence, he found little of true value, which made him think that the rumor was indeed true.

Thus, after sealing their cultivation, he dragged them here to interrogate them until they revealed the location of the treasure.

"I'll be honest with you," Huyan Dong said, glancing at his son, Huyan Bin. "Not long ago, I even considered getting rid of him myself. Using him to threaten me might not be the smartest move."

"Father!" Huyan Bin wailed. "I'm your only son!"

"I wasn't sure how to break this to you," Huyan Dong said, a hint of reluctance in his voice. "But, well... that concubine I found? She's pregnant... with a son."

Huyan Bin froze for a moment before asking, "Are you sure it's yours?"

Huyan Dong furrowed his brow. "What kind of nonsense are you spouting?"

The scolding only enraged Huyan Bin, and he suddenly erupted in a stream of curses. "You old scoundrel! You shameless old man!"

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When Chu Liang found Chu Yi, the boy had just returned from the Hall of Conservation. He had once been a six-year-old with a small, oval face, but he had now grown into a twelve-year-old with a square-shaped face.

This should count as a work-related injury... Chu Liang thought.

"Senior Brother?" Chu Yi smiled as soon as he saw Chu Liang. "What brings you here?"

"Miss Xu from the Whale Gang was just here. She left last period's shipping ledger with me and asked me to give it to you for verification," Chu Liang said as he took out the jade slip and placed it on the table.

"Alright," Chu Yi replied with a nod. "I'll start checking it as soon as I finish the assignment Senior Brother Yuan left for me."

"I skimmed through it just now, and I noticed something. Maybe I'm a bit rusty after not handling this for a few years. But there was a shipment to the Eastern Regions listed as Nine-Colored Vine and raw meteoric iron ore. Do you remember that one?"

Chu Yi thought about it and answered, "I remember. The Nine-Colored Vine absorbs wood qi and latches onto surfaces as it grows, often reaching a hundred zhang in length. Because of that, it must be transported alongside iron and stone objects, which is why they packed it on the same ship as the raw meteoric iron ore."

"But why did the price of this shipment drop the farther east it traveled?" Chu Liang asked, pressing further.

Chu Yi explained smoothly, "The Southern Regions have steep, winding river currents, while the Eastern Regions mostly have open waterways. Transportation costs have always varied between the two."

"But the biggest factor in the price change was the decrease in total weight during transport," Chu Liang stated outright instead of continuing his questioning. "The recorded weight upon entering the Eastern Regions and the weight at arrival show a significant discrepancy. Could something have gone missing?"

Chu Yi immediately caught on and asked, "What?"

Chu Liang said slowly, "Could it be... people?"

"People?"

"Not exactly. More like starving people... with demon blood."

Chu Liang's eyes locked onto Chu Yi, searching for a reaction. But Chu Yi remained calm.

Chu Liang then added, "Or should I call them... the rebels of Mount Mang?"

Chu Yi looked genuinely puzzled. "The rebels of Mount Mang? How would they have managed to board the Whale Gang's ships?"

"Exactly, it's strange. But if the shipment came from Mount Shu, the Whale Gang wouldn't have inspected it too closely. At the same time, a large force of the rebels of Mount Mang suddenly appeared in the Eastern Regions and attacked Wu'an City. No one could figure out how they got there out of thin air—everyone assumed they used some incredible divine ability. But if they simply sailed there in plain sight on Whale Gang ships... that would be a cruel joke."

Chu Yi remained silent, appearing to be in deep thought.

Chu Liang continued, "I made this connection because when I was in Wu'an City years ago, I visited a painter's house where his family had an ancient painting from the previous dynasty. That painting caused strange occurrences, and his son was pulled into the painting. When we investigated, we discovered that the painting contained a hidden realm of its own. The painter's surname was Tang, and the painting... was called Ladies of the Eastern Suburbs."

Chu Yi's gaze drifted to the side wall, where a traditional ink painting hung. It wasn't the same scroll Chu Liang had seen before. In fact, the moment Chu Liang had noticed the original, Chu Yi had swiftly replaced it.

"What a coincidence. I happen to have seen this painting before," Chu Liang said with a half-smile. "If it had been in someone else's hands, I wouldn't have thought much of it. But since it's you..."

"It makes me wonder... What secrets does it hold? Could it be that the legendary treasure left behind by the previous dynasty's royal family is hidden in that realm?"

"That treasure must have played a crucial role, didn't it? It gave the rebels of Mount Mang—the so-called bandits—the strength to take down Taotie City in such a short time.

"The chancellor of the previous dynasty once told me you had lost all your memories. But that was a lie, wasn't it?"

Chu Liang's sudden barrage of questions plunged Chu Yi into silence.

He sat down across from Chu Liang, his expression devoid of the youthful innocence he once had. Instead, a composed and resolute calm settled over him.

After a long pause, he finally spoke. "No, he didn't lie to you. When I first woke up, I truly didn't remember anything."

"Oh?"

"But whenever I dreamed, fragments of memories would flash through my mind. They were so vivid... and detailed," Chu Yi said gravely. "I spent years investigating, slowly piecing together my origins. And in the end... I remembered everything."

He had once slumbered for centuries in the Deep Pool of Dreams. Those dreams had etched themselves into his very being, leaving an indelible mark.

Seeing that his suspicions had been confirmed, Chu Liang didn't dwell on them. Instead, he pressed on. "But haven't you built a good life for yourself at Mount Shu? Why throw the world into chaos again?"

"Senior Brother," Chu Yi countered, "if someone suddenly took Red Cotton Peak from you one day, wouldn't you want to take it back?"

Chu Liang shook his head. "Red Cotton Peak was never mine, just as the nine provinces were never yours. We're all just temporarily seated in positions of importance."

Chu Yi wore a wry smile. "Senior Brother, your perspective is something I have yet to fully grasp. Perhaps if you had been at Mount Shu these past six years, I wouldn't have dared—or even wanted—to do any of this."

Chu Yi was speaking the truth. Had Chu Liang remained at Mount Shu, he wouldn't have been able to act under his watchful eye. And if he had grown up under Chu Liang's influence, he might never have set foot on this path at all.

After all, the peak master of Silver Sword Peak had made rebellion her life's goal. Without the deputy peak master around, it was inevitable that the younger ones would be influenced.

"I have no intention of interfering with your choices, but I was the one who brought you out of the Southern Bastion Mountain. Now that you've done this, I have to take responsibility," Chu Liang finally said.

"And how do you plan to deal with me, Senior Brother?" Chu Yi asked.

"Send you back to sleep?" Chu Liang suggested. "And then deal with the rebels of Mount Mang and ensure that they don't stir up any more trouble."

"Senior Brother, that's impossible." Chu Yi suddenly stood up, his gaze steady as he looked at Chu Liang. "I will always remember your kindness, but I will never return to that eternal slumber."

Seeing how calm Chu Yi was behaving, Chu Liang then realized that something was off. Without hesitation, he unleashed the Demon-Binding Rope.

Whoosh!

The rope coiled tightly around Chu Yi, yet his expression remained unchanged. As it constricted, a radiant white glow surged from him, illuminating the room.

Boom!

With an explosive burst, the Chu Yi before Chu Liang shattered into countless points of light and vanished into thin air.

External Manifestation?!

It was only at this moment that Chu Liang realized the Chu Yi he had been speaking to all this time was merely a clone. At some point, Chu Yi had already mastered External Manifestation and had been using a clone to meet others.

Maintaining a clone through External Manifestation demanded an immense consumption of foundational qi, a feat typically reserved for powerful cultivators at the seventh or eighth realm. However, with access to great wealth, Chu Yi could sustain it by relying on a steady supply of pills.

It was just that most people wouldn't even consider going to such lengths.

Chu Liang had never shown any signs of suspicion. This meant that Chu Yi had likely been maintaining this high-energy-consuming state from the moment he first harbored ulterior motives and thoughts of defiance, allowing his true intentions to go unnoticed.

Apart from the years he had spent in slumber, his actual age had never been in question. But the sheer depth of his meticulous scheming... was truly terrifying.

This kid is supposed to be twelve?!

Chapter 724: The Jiangshi Token

Chu Yi's departure had indeed caused significant trouble for Chu Liang.

When Chu Liang first took charge of Red Cotton Peak, many affairs were still in their early stages. In truth, he had merely laid the groundwork—building a foundation from nothing and taking the Red Cotton Peak from level zero to one.

However, during the years of Chu Liang's absence, Chu Yi had taken Red Cotton Peak from its foundation to new heights, advancing it from level one to level ten. Under the protection of Di Nufeng and the Four Overlords of Mount Shu, he had managed both internal and external affairs with full authority. When Chu Liang returned and saw how well everything was handled, he chose not to reclaim those responsibilities.

But now that this little rascal was gone, all the burdens of Red Cotton Peak had once again fallen onto Chu Liang's shoulders.

Chu Liang had no choice. While they had outwardly claimed that Di Nufeng had been in charge during those years, it was merely for show. Chu Liang couldn't fool himself. If his esteemed teacher had truly been in charge, Red Cotton Peak would have been in ruins by now.

As for Lin Bei and the others, their loyalty was unquestionable, but their four brains put together would not even make up one competent mind. Expecting them to suddenly develop outstanding management skills was nothing more than wishful thinking.

Chu Liang wanted to find another capable assistant, but where in Mount Shu could he find someone both trustworthy and competent? Such individuals were hard to come by.

He had even considered asking Yuan Zhuo to step in. However, after some thought, he realized that while Yuan Zhuo excelled at calculations and record-keeping, he wasn't necessarily suited for the more dynamic responsibilities of management.

It was better to let him remain a quiet, square-headed accountant—someone to call upon when bookkeeping or audits were needed.

Fortunately, Chu Liang didn't have any missions for the time being, allowing him to stay at Red Cotton Peak and focus on managing its affairs.

Yet, after long hours of work, he would often look up at the sky outside, questioning life itself as he wondered, I just wanted to earn some money... How did I end up with a full-time job? Where is the justice in this?

It was only after taking over that Chu Liang truly realized how exceptionally well Chu Yi had managed things.

Over the years, he had kept Red Cotton Peak running like a well-oiled machine, seamlessly organizing everything. Most people hadn't even realized he was the one pulling the strings. Such talent was downright monstrous.

Chu Yi probably was genuinely devoted to Red Cotton Peak. If not for the sudden attack on Taotie City by the rebels of Mount Mang, Chu Liang might not have pieced everything together so quickly.

For the rebels of Mount Mang, recklessly targeting one of the Terrestrial Ten sects was an utterly irrational move.

Had their sole aim been to rebel against the Yu Dynasty, the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten might not have aided the imperial court in suppressing them with full force.

But by making themselves a direct threat to the Terrestrial Ten, they had thrown these powerful sects into a state of alarm, potentially drawing intervention from various factions.

Chu Yi had clearly made this decision of attacking Taotie with the Red Cotton Peak's interests in mind.

Unfortunately, Chu Liang could never stand by that stance. With the world in a relatively stable state, even if his own father wanted to start a rebellion, he wouldn't support it.

Chu Liang glanced worriedly toward Silver Sword Peak and thought, Esteemed Teacher, I really hope you're just making empty threats. Silver Sword Peak only has three human members. If two out of three rebel, there's a very high possibility we'll all get the the punishment of having nine generations of our families wiped out.

After a brief break, he refocused on the tasks at hand, hoping to finish quickly so he could leave early. The daily desk work was suffocating. At times, he found himself questioning whether the modest income of being Mount Shu's richest man was really worth the five-hour slog every single day.

...

After a moment, a sudden knock on the door broke the silence.

Chu Liang called out, "Come in."

Wen Yulong hurriedly entered and exclaimed, "Senior Brother Chu! I made another major breakthrough in our Circle of Immortal Friends Token!"

"Aiya!" Chu Liang slapped his thigh. "Why didn't you say so earlier?"

"Huh?" Wen Yulong froze for a moment. "You already know what the breakthrough is?"

"I have no idea," Chu Liang replied. "It's just that you're a bit late. I was about to clock out and head home."

"..." Wen Yulong was speechless. He thought, You sure don't have this strict clock-in and clock-out mindset when you're making others work overtime for you.

"How about we, uh... just do a little bit of overtime?" he asked hesitantly.

"Red Cotton Peak doesn't do overtime!" Chu Liang responded instinctively with a sweeping gesture. "We work here out of pure dedication, not obligation!"

"Then let's, uh... dedicate just a little more time."

Chu Liang had no choice but to agree. After all, if he insisted on leaving now, how could he expect Wen Yulong to help him with anything in the future?

Wen Yulong explained, "A while ago, you asked me to find a way to enable private chats in the soul domain. So, I tried adding more branches to the inscription formations. It turns out that while the extra branches aren't enough to enable private chats for everyone, they do allow us to expand the current soul domain.

"Our Circle of Immortal Friends Token can now accommodate even more people! Considering the current number of cultivators in the immortal realm, even if every righteous sect member had one, there would still be plenty of space left."

"That's fantastic!" Chu Liang's eyes lit up. "We can mass-produce them now! Soon, every cultivator in the immortal realm will have a Circle of Immortal Friends Token! Oh, by the way, did you finish making that batch of Jiangshi Tokens I asked for?"

"They're done, but... what exactly are you planning?" Wen Yulong asked in confusion.

As it turned out, when the Circle of Immortal Friends Token was first developed, Chu Liang had already asked Wen Yulong to create some anonymous tokens. Since each token was bound to a soul flame, they were intrinsically tied to individual identities.

The Jiangshi Tokens, on the other hand, were tokens without a bound soul flame. Their identities were fabricated, and in reality, each one was under Wen Yulong's control. These tokens could seamlessly blend into the Circle of Immortal Friends, but every message they posted was dictated by Wen Yulong himself.

"Obviously, it's to control the narrative," Chu Liang replied. "Otherwise, if too many people are inside, how will anyone notice our messages? With this batch of tokens, we can guide public opinion whenever we want..."

Under Chu Liang's direction, the tokens were used to quietly spread carefully crafted messages in the more overlooked corners of the network.

For example, statements like "Red Cotton Peak offers the best quality at the best price," "Mount Shu has breathtaking scenery," and "Penglai Supreme Sect is arrogant and domineering" began to subtly circulate within the Circle of Immortal Friends.

And whenever an unknown user posted such a message, another wave of unknown users would immediately flood in, fervently agreeing with what had been said.

...

After Chu Liang had been busy for some time, Venerable Wen Yuan suddenly sent word, summoning him to the Boundless Palace once more.

Initially, he thought Venerable Wen Yuan had discussed matters with Baize and reached a conclusion, and he was summoned to hear about it. However, upon arriving, he found an old man who appeared rather disheveled.

The elder was short and stout, with a round face and a long beard. He wore a grayish-white robe. With his hands tucked into his sleeves, he stared at Chu Liang with a kind smile.

It was none other than Sword Saint Old Li Ba of the Endless Sword Sect.

"Esteemed Sword Saint, Venerable Sect Leader," Chu Liang said, greeting them respectfully. Then he looked at the two of them in confusion, uncertain about the purpose of his summons.

Venerable Wen Yuan turned to Old Li Ba and said, "Sword Saint, you may explain it to him yourself."

Chapter 725: Marrying Into the Li Family as a Son-In-Law

In truth, seeing Old Li Ba made Chu Liang quite nervous.

After all, he had advanced to the seventh realm using the Great Dao of Severing the Void, and Old Li Ba the Dao Master of Severing the Void. For seasoned Eminent Ones, this wasn't a big deal, as many of them studied each other's Dao. However, for a newly advanced seventh-realm cultivator like Chu Liang, it was inevitable that he would feel uneasy about this situation.

Surprisingly, Old Li Ba was also quite nervous.

"Sit, hehe." Old Li Ba chuckled as he rubbed his hands together. "I heard that you jumped straight from the fifth realm to the seventh and made quite a name for yourself at Penglai. Not bad, not bad! You didn't bring shame to us—the cultivators of the Great Dao of Severing the Void."

Chu Liang hurriedly replied, "Esteemed Sword Saint, you're praising me too highly. I was quite reckless at the time."

"Bah! There's no need to be modest." Old Li Ba waved his hand, brushing off Chu Liang's show of humility. "You know this, right? The artifact that contains the most Dao essence of the Great Dao of Severing the Void is the Chunyang Ancient Sword, which belongs to my sect. Without meditating on the sight of the Chunyang Ancient Sword, it's difficult to make progress in the Great Dao of Severing the Void, let alone attain Heavenly Origin."

"I've heard a little about it." Chu Liang nodded. "But I never even dared to hope to attain the Heavenly Origin with this Great Dao. It was out of necessity that I ended up advancing to the seventh realm with the Great Dao of Severing the Void. It absolutely wasn't out of any intent to compete with you, Esteemed Senior."

Unsure of the old man's intentions, Chu Liang kept his tone very respectful and only spoke the truth. He was sincere when he said he did not want to compete with Old Li Ba for mastery of the Great Dao of Severing the Void.

The Chunyang Ancient Sword belongs to his sect anyway, so there's no point in trying to fight for it.

"Oh, there's no need to be so polite." Old Li Ba chuckled again. "The future belongs to the young. If you want to comprehend the Great Dao of Severing the Void, you can borrow our Chunyang Ancient Sword to meditate on it."

Chu Liang blinked. "Huh?"

Why is he being so kind?

"I heard you've got some grudges with Penglai. From now on, I'll cover you. If Daoist Cangsheng dares to threaten you with a legendary artifact again... Well, sure, the Chrono Wheel of the East Sea is powerful, but my Chunyang Ancient Sword is no pushover either. That damn wheel's ranked above our legendary artifact in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures, and I've been itching to challenge it for a long time now!" Old Li Ba declared with a grand wave of his hand.

"Uh..." Chu Liang uttered hesitantly, unsure of what to say.

Nothing is scarier than the sudden concern of an old man.

"I'm old. I don't have many good days left in me. In the future, when I'm not doing so well, it wouldn't be out of the question to pass on the Great Dao of Severing the Void to you."

Chu Liang could no longer sit still. He sprang to his feet and waved his hands repeatedly. "How is that at all appropriate?"

What kind of talk is this? I don't think he would be saying this even to his grandson.

Chu Liang was, after all, a businessman. His keen instincts told him that an old man's goodwill wouldn't be given away for free. There had to be a catch.

Old Li Ba laughed and said, "Of course, if you were an outsider, we wouldn't do that. But if you were family, well... that'd be a different story. You know, I have a granddaughter. She's in the prime of her youth, and she's never been married—"

"Esteemed Senior, you want me to marry Li Shiyi?" Chu Liang asked in shock.

The moment Old Li Ba steered the conversation in this direction, Chu Liang had already guessed where it was going.

Arranged marriages aren't uncommon in the world of immortality cultivators, but I'm quite surprised that it's actually happening to me.

After all, the fact that Senior Sister Jiang and I are in a relationship has always been public knowledge. No family would consider me a candidate to be their daughter's future husband.

"There's no need to rush into talks about marriage. You young ones should get to know each other first, spend some time together..." Old Li Ba glanced at Venerable Wen Yuan before looking back at Chu Liang. "Besides, I'm not saying you should marry her... I'm saying you should marry into the Endless Sword Sect."

At this point, Chu Liang completely understood Old Li Ba's intentions.

Good heavens. He wants me to marry into the Li Family as a son-in-law?

So, it turns out that the marriage is just for me to join the Endless Sword Sect. If the marriage actually happens, my kid might end up being named Li Shi'er[1].

This wasn't an unusual occurrence. Many families in prestigious sects that only had female descendants would have their son-in-laws marry into the family.

Back when Thunderbolt Stronghold was prosperous, they had even offered over a dozen powerful treasures to find a son-in-law for Huang Ling'er. Talented and handsome young cultivators from all over had rushed over like ducks, hoping to become Huang Ling'er's husband.

So, it wasn't strange at all that the Endless Sword Sect wanted to pull Chu Liang into their sect. He had advanced to the seventh realm with the Great Dao of Severing the Void Dao way before any of the disciples of the Endless Sword Sect. Furthermore, he had established and managed Red Cotton Peak, demonstrating his exceptional business skills and amassing tremendous wealth for himself and his sect.

If Chu Liang actually became a son-in-law of the Endless Sword Sect's Li Family, Old Li Ba would surely fulfill all the conditions he promised. It was certainly a very tempting offer...

Unfortunately...

"Esteemed Senior, I know you mean well, but my heart already belongs to someone." Chu Liang forced a smile. "Surely, you wouldn't want a son-in-law that's unscrupulous and unfaithful, would you?"

"I've heard about you and that little Jiang girl. But she left Mount Shu. With the two of you living apart, your relationship—"

Chu Liang cut in and said, "It's going great,"

He and Jiang Yuebai were in a long-distance relationship, but they maintained a close connection through the United Hearts Jade. They were both eagerly awaiting their reunion.

"You really won't reconsider?" Old Li Ba asked, still unwilling to give up.

"Absolutely not," Chu Liang replied firmly, shaking his head.

Old Li Ba sighed helplessly, turning to Venerable Wen Yuan with a smile. "You were right after all... He really is deeply in love and devoted to her."

"Haha," Venerable Wen Yuan chuckled. "Actually, he doesn't need to marry into your sect to collaborate with you, Sword Saint. If you were to take Chu Liang as a disciple, he could take care of you in your old age. Wouldn't that be great too?"

Old Li Bai stood up and spoke bluntly, "Oh, forget it. Among all the disciples in my sect, there isn't one who can be a match for him. If he doesn't become our son-in-law, I really won't be able to feel at ease."

Hearing that, Chu Liang could only smile.

The Chunyang Ancient Sword and the Great Dao of Severing the Void were the most important parts of the Endless Sword Sect's cultivation legacy. Even a son-in-law of the Li Family would likely have to undergo a series of trials to gain access to them. So, if an outsider tried to gain access, it was obviously impossible for them to succeed.

If the Endless Sword Sect were so quick to trust outsiders, their cultivation legacy wouldn't have lasted this long. Otherwise, anyone could just walk in, kneel down, and say, "I'd like to take care of you in your old age." Who would believe that?

Old Li Bai turned to Chu Liang and added, "But I really do admire you. The deal didn't work out, but we can still part on good terms. Here, this old man's got a gift for you."

He turned his hand over, retrieved a jade slip from his storage tool, and handed it to Chu Liang.

"Many thanks, Esteemed Sword Saint," Chu Liang said quickly, expressing his gratitude. He accepted the jade slip with a bow.

He wasn't sure what it contained, but a Sword Saint of the nine provinces wouldn't give an ordinary gift. No matter how unkempt the old man looked, anything he gave out was bound to be valuable.

When it was time for Old Li Ba to leave, Venerable Wen Yuan got up to see him off, with Chu Liang following behind.

Once they escorted Old Li Ba past Heaven-Reaching Peak, Chu Liang finally injected his divine sense into the jade slip to inspect its contents.

Inside the jade slip was a dazzling golden inscription that had been made with a sword. The moment Chu Liang's eyes landed on it, the sword qi contained within it pierced him to the bone. If he didn't have a sufficiently high cultivation level in the Dao of the Sword, even a single glance would have injured his divine sense.

Yet, this sword intent was neither of the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination nor of the Great Dao of Severing the Void. Instead, it carried an overwhelming and majestic force that was entirely unfamiliar to Chu Liang.

Consisting of five shining words, the title read: The Tai'a Sword Momentum Inscription.

Seeing those words, Chu Liang couldn't stop himself from grinning.

Heh.

This old man...

Chapter 726: Wang Xuanling's Frustration

After sending Old Li Ba off from Heaven-Reaching Peak, Chu Liang decided to head back to his cabin. Just as he turned around, he noticed a few familiar people.

One of them was a charming and petite young woman dressed in a satin dress skirt. She was hiding behind a wall, sneaking peeks at something in the distance. There were several young men beside her, and they were behaving just as furtively.

Chu Liang knew these people well. They were members of Jade Sword Peak—Xu Ziqing, Lin Bei, Lu Ren, and Fang Ting. Chu Liang had met this group for the first time at the Sword Exchange Pavilion and teamed up to go on missions together.

"What are you all up to?" Chu Liang asked as he walked over.

His sudden approach jolted the group, and they quickly turned to face him.

Upon realizing it was just Chu Liang, they quickly raised a finger to their lips. "Shh."

Xu Ziqing had always been petite and adorable. Though some years had passed, her appearance hadn't changed much.

With her large eyes and a finger, she gestured at something in the distance. She whispered, "Be quiet..."

Following their gazes, Chu Liang spotted two people walking together in the distance.

One of them was a man with a tall and upright posture, looking extraordinarily elegant and handsome. Chu Liang recognized him immediately. He was Xu Ziyang, the eldest senior brother of Jade Sword Peak.

No wonder these guys are spying on them.

As for the delicate-looking woman beside him, Chu Liang could only see her back, so he couldn't figure out who she was.

"Senior Brother Xu?" Chu Liang became just as interested as the others. "Who is he with, and what are they—"

"She's Princess Liange Baozhu from the South Sea," Xu Ziqing answered excitedly with sparkling eyes. "She came ashore just to visit my brother, and now he's showing her around Mount Shu!"

Hearing that, Chu Liang immediately crouched down to join in on the spying.

Lin Bei pulled on his ears in annoyance. "It's a shame we're too far away to hear what they're saying."

Fang Ting reminded them, "Eldest Senior Brother has a high cultivation level and sharp divine sense. If you get too close, he'll notice immediately."

"I have a way," Chu Liang said.

He glanced around and spotted a white crane resting lazily nearby. He grabbed it and whispered into its ear.

With a rustle, Chu Liang discreetly inserted the mother horn of the Mother-Child Voice Transmission Horns under one of the crane's wings.

The crane then tucked the horn in, pressing it against its tail. It tiptoed hesitantly toward Xu Ziyang and Princess Liange, looking every bit as guilty as a thief sneaking around.

Fortunately, Xu Ziyang and Princess Liange did not turn around. Neither of them noticed the white crane tailing them, assuming it was just an ordinary spirit bird passing by.

Of course, they also had no idea that their conversation was being transmitted through the mother horn.

Chu Liang propped up the child horn, and the group huddled around it.

Xu Ziyang's voice came through intermittently.

"The Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Weapons has a history spanning thousands of years and has produced many renowned enchanted tools, such as ...

"The Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Alchemy also has a long history, producing pills that are sold across the nine provinces. ...

"The Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Conservation is a depository for books. It has all kinds of documents and records."

After talking for quite some time, Xu Ziyang finally remembered to ask, "Princess Liange, do you like reading?"

At last, Princess Liange had a chance to speak. She nodded excitedly and answered, "Yes! I really like reading the ancient books of humans, but there aren't many books stored under the sea."

"That's great." Xu Ziyang nodded seriously. "Then let's head to the Hall of Conservation to look at the book depository."

"Eh?"

"Is that not a good idea?"

"Ah... sure..."

Soon after, there were sounds of the pair entering the Hall of Conservation.

The white crane couldn't follow them in, but it was easy to imagine what ensued even without listening in. The rest of the date would definitely be filled with long stretches of silence.

Who in their right mind takes a girl to the Hall of Conservation to read books on a first date? Are you trying to show her how focused you are on cultivating?

Chu Liang and the group from Jade Sword Peak exchanged glances and sighed simultaneously.

They suddenly understood Wang Xuanling's frustration with his disciple.

...

After watching Xu Ziyang's fruitless attempt at romance, Chu Liang returned to Silver Sword Peak.

He needed to study The Tai'a Sword Momentum Inscription that Old Li Ba had gifted him. The old man's intentions were clear—he was trying to redirect trouble elsewhere.

Chu Liang had no objections to comprehending another Great Dao. Even if he couldn't fully grasp it, it would still be beneficial for him to gain some insight.

Among the three Great Daos of the Sword, the Cloud of Determination focused on sword qi. Regardless of whether the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination manifested as a swift and fierce force like Daoist Yan's or as a boundless and overwhelming force like the Sword Emperor's, both relied on the cultivator's sword qi to manifest the Great Dao.

The Great Dao of Severing the Void focused on sword intent. When Caiyi trapped Chu Liang underground, he did not have a sword or sword qi. Nevertheless, he had managed to cut through the restraints with sword intent alone.

The Great Dao of Tai'a, on the other hand, focused on sword momentum.

Among the three Great Daos of the Sword, this was the most elusive. It didn't need to land a direct strike to hurt someone. As long as there was swordlight present, it would harm everything within the trajectory of its momentum, even going across the nine provinces and four seas.

The Tai'a Sword Momentum Inscription had likely been written by the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner. The sword strokes of the characters showed signs of his strength.

Chu Liang had known that the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner, the elder overseeing the Yu Dynasty's entire territory, was powerful—perhaps one of the most powerful in the nine provinces. However, he had not known exactly how powerful the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner truly was.

Now, after seeing this inscription, he had a better idea of that. Each character in this sword momentum inscription possessed enough power to suppress and kill a seventh-realm greater demon. When the characters were combined, the inscription was as mighty as a grand enchanted sword formation.

Chu Liang studied the inscription several times. When he finally withdrew his divine sense from the jade slip, he realized that his back was drenched in sweat.

If he had not advanced to the seventh realm with a Great Dao of the Sword, he might have already fainted. That was the power of momentum.

Chu Liang practiced what he had learned from the sword momentum inscription. He condensed a thread of sword qi at his fingertip and tried to maintain it, but he quickly found that it was no easy task.

A sword was a deadly weapon, and sword qi was inherently sharp. Holding onto it instead of releasing it was just as difficult as unleashing a beam of formidable sword qi.

Chu Liang decided to take a short break before continuing his comprehension.

However, he suddenly sensed an unusual shift within the White Pagoda space. Delving in with his divine sense, he saw that the Tuntun's cocoon was wiggling and cracking open.

She's going to break out of her cocoon again?

Staring at the large cocoon, Chu Liang couldn't help but feel conflicted.

Tuntun had saved his life multiple times before. For emotional and rational reasons, Chu Liang believed he should protect her.

Nevertheless, she was indeed a Heaven-Devouring Bug. She had been an anomaly from birth and could serve as a vessel for the Demon God's essence.

If Chu Liang were to allow her to live, the nine provinces would have to bear the risk of widespread catastrophe.

What should I do?

As he hesitated, a cracking sound rang out. The cocoon wiggled for a while more, and a deep crack appeared in the cocoon.

Pop!

The cocoon burst open, revealing a pair of pitch-black eyes.

The large gemstone-like eyes belonged to a round and chubby little girl around three or four years old. She had fair skin, and her neck and arms were soft and white, resembling lotus root segments.

The only sign that she was not a human child was the pair of transparent, three-lobed wings emerging from her fleshy back, making her resemble a large butterfly. She was draped in a golden muslin dress, looking just like a small celestial spirit.

Upon seeing Chu Liang, Tuntun immediately broke into a huge smile. Her transparent wings fluttered dazzlingly, much like a dog wagging its tail in happiness.

Tuntun opened her mouth and smacked her lips together a few times. "A-ba, a-ba..."

Then she uttered clearly, "Hungry!"

Chapter 727: Kill? [End of Book 7]

Three days later, Venerable Wen Yuan summoned Chu Liang again.

When Chu Liang arrived and saw that Baize, with her divinely radiant face, was there as well, he immediately felt his heart tense up.

The last time he spoke with Venerable Wen Yuan, Venerable Wen Yuan had mentioned he would ask Baize if what Caiyi had said was true. Now, it seemed that there would be a resolution to that matter.

Since Venerable Wen Yuan and Baize were meeting Chu Liang together, it meant, at least, that their conversation had gone well and that Venerable Wen Yuan still had a positive opinion of Baize. Chu Liang felt quite relieved.

"Venerable Sect Leader, Noble Baize," Chu Liang said, greeting them respectfully.

Venerable Wen Yuan raised his hand slightly, signaling that Chu Liang need not be so polite.

Then he got straight into it. "I spoke with Baize about the matter you mentioned last time. Regarding the disappearance of the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda, it is true that there was more to it than we knew. Nevertheless, it was certainly not Baize's doing."

Venerable Wen Yuan stopped there, leaving it to Baize to explain instead.

"On the night that the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda went missing, I was the first to arrive at Treasured Pagoda Peak. At the time, I could have acted to help suppress the Demon God's life essence, and perhaps the events that followed wouldn't have occurred. But I didn't. It's true that I had selfish motives..."

Baize let out a soft sigh, her voice calm yet tinged with regret.

"I found that the Demon God's corporeal body had already been obliterated, and only a small part of its life essence remained. I believed that if I took action, I might be able to slay it. If we continued to suppress the Demon God's remaining life essence in the tower, it might take thousands of years to destroy that life essence. By then, I would reach the end of my lifespan, leaving me with no chance to ascend to a higher realm..."

"In that moment, I chose not to suppress the Demon God's life essence. Instead, I helped to free its restraints, allowing it to break out of its cell."

It's just as I expected, Chu Liang thought.

Although Baize's account was shocking, it was quite similar to Chu Liang's conjecture of what had happened. After all, if Baize was not an evildoer, then this could be the only explanation.

Baize continued, "But that was, after all, the life essence of a formidable Hallowed One, and in that crisis, it unleashed a powerful attack on the pagoda. However, what happened next surprised me even more. After all the demonic beasts seized the opportunity to escape from the pagoda, the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda shook violently. It seemed to have the power to self-destruct. It was going to obliterate itself alongside the Demon God's life essence.

"I had to retreat immediately. I left the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda, barely escaping with my life. The Demon-Suppressing Pagoda and the Demon God's life essence exploded together, and afterward, there was no trace left of either of them.

"I could no longer detect even a tiny bit of qi from the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda or the Demon God's life essence, so I assumed they perished together. After that, I immediately entered a deep sleep, hoping to seize the opportunity to ascend. I had no idea that, during the next several hundred years, the Mount Shu Sect would end up in a decline due to the loss of the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda, while the Demon God's life essence continued to exist in the world..."

Bringing her account to an end, Baize said, "I am a sinner. I have wronged the Mount Shu Sect."

Considering the matter involved the ninth realm, it was hard even for Venerable Wen Yuan to judge her, let alone Chu Liang, so neither of them spoke.

The opportunity to ascend to the ninth realm was a rare one that only surfaced once in several thousand years. No one could reproach her for wanting to take a gamble to acquire that opportunity. If the Demon-Suppressing Pagoda hadn't activated its secret self-destruction ability and the Demon God's life essence managed to escape, perhaps Baize could indeed have slain the Demon God.

If Baize had become a Hallowed One, everything would have turned out differently. The Mount Shu Sect would have ruled over the mortal realm for at least a thousand years.

However, the reality was that Baize's reckless gamble caused the Mount Shu Sect to lose its position as the leader of the righteous path, and now the mortal realm still faced the threat of the Demon God.

It might not be an exaggeration to call her a sinner.

After a while, Venerable Wen Yuan finally spoke up. "It is meaningless to dwell on the past now. What we must do is eliminate the threat of the demons. If the Demon God's life essence finds another Heaven-Devouring Bug to use as a vessel, then no one will be able to restrain it. The Heaven-Devouring Bug must be destroyed!"

Baize asked Chu Liang: "Is the only Heaven-Devouring Bug in the world in your possession?"

...

The Demon God Temple, the Mountain Range of the Seven Kings.

The demons' temple had been built with the power of the Demon God. Di Nufeng had wreaked so much havoc there, but she had been unable to destroy the temple. Even after being purified by the Samadhi True Fire, the Demon God statue on the divine altar in the temple still shone brightly.

The Great High Priest sat solemnly at the foot of the divine altar.

Caiyi, the Demon King of the Verdant Foxhills, walked into the temple. Her steps suddenly became lighter, perhaps because she recalled that Chanfeng, the Demon King of the Great Marshlands, had died there.

"I heard you took over the Great Marshlands?" the Great High Priest asked.

Caiyi replied calmly, "The clans that were under Changfeng's rule are all free to go as they please. They just know that following me will allow them to have better lives."

With Chanfeng's death, his tribe lost its leader, and his people naturally split up. They joined the other demon territories, adding to the manpower of the other demon kings. However, the territory that benefitted the most was the Verdant Foxhills, which was under Caiyi's rule. Most of the clans from the Great Marshlands had joined her faction.

During ordinary times, they might have varying opinions on which of the Seven Demon Kings was better. Nevertheless, when they had to pick one to follow, the demons obviously knew who had the best territory.

Caiyi had transformed the Verdant Foxhills into a place similar to a human village. With food, clothing, and housing, the Verdant Foxhills was the most comfortable demon territory to live in. The other demon kings did not dare to admit it openly, they all envied her.

The Great High Priest advised, "Don't do anything excessive. That last incident has placed a great burden on you. The other demon kings have a lot of complaints about you."

"As long as the Great High Priest knows the truth of what happened, that's enough," Caiyi said indifferently. "The day when God returns, he will know who the greatest contributor is."

The Great High Priest couldn't help but ask, "Are you still that confident?"

Caiyi replied with a question. "Well, everything is going according to our plan, isn't it?"

She continued slowly, "Even if Chu Liang did hand over the Heaven-Devouring Bug, we wouldn't be using that one as God's vessel. The direction of the Heaven-Devouring Bug's evolution is related to what it has devoured. The one he raised has gone through many stages of evolution, but it doesn't seem to have ever devoured the flesh of the living. Even if it possesses divine power, it does not have any combat abilities.

"So, even if we get his Heaven-Devouring Bug, we must kill it. Then we'll find the next Heaven-Devouring Bug and raise it into the vessel we need."

Caiyi's tone was chillingly cold.

The humans did not know much about the Heaven-Devouring Bug, as they only had a few historical records on it. The demons, on the other hand, knew way more about the Heaven-Devouring Bug. They had, after all, nurtured a Heaven-Devouring Bug, supporting its cultivation into a Hallowed One.

The Great High Priest said calmly, "Indeed. This creature was born from the Great Dao of Devouring, just like the vicious beasts Taotie and Taowu. When those creatures die, new ones will be born."

The Demon God's corporeal form had been obliterated several thousand years ago, leaving only the remnants of his Great Dao and life essence. That meant the Heaven-Devouring Bug of that era had disappeared from the world, making way for a new one to emerge.

"They don't know that the Heaven-Devouring Bug must be nourished with the flesh and blood of many living beings right from infancy to grow into a powerful entity capable of becoming the vessel for God... So, once they learn where the Heaven-Devouring Bug is, their desire for safety and stability will make them kill it. That will align with our goal."

The Great High Priest nodded, agreeing in a chilling tone. "That's right..."

"Now, we just need to wait for them to kill the Heaven-Devouring Bug."

Chapter 728: The First Day of Missing Huyan Bin (I)

Amid the snowy mountains of the Northern Regions, it was bitterly cold for tens of thousands of zhang.

The Whale-Riding Immortal stood before a deep, dark pool that seemed to stretch on for a thousand li. Yet, when he stepped on it, there was not even the slightest ripple. It turned out that the deep pool had frozen over many years ago.

With his bare hands, the Whale-Riding Immortal carved a circle on the frozen surface of the deep pool. He stuck his palm onto the circled ice and then pulled upward, tearing out a large icicle with a loud rumble. Then he turned his hand over, instantly destroying the icicle. It turned into countless fine particles that dispersed in the air.

After pulling out the icicle, he could now see a huge cavity beneath the ice.

The Whale-Riding Immortal took out a golden fishing rod—a legendary ancient enchanted tool that was said to have once been used to catch the Black Devil Whale.

He then turned to look at the light blue humanoid apparition and put on a devilish grin. "Come on."

Unimpressed, the apparition replied, "Jiang Tiankuo, you'd better act like a proper human being."

This light blue soul apparition was, of course, the West Sea's Sword Emperor, who had been hanging around with the Whale-Riding Immortal of late.

The Sword Emperor was now an Eminent One at the seventh and a half realm. Despite only surviving with his soul, he still possessed some of his combat ability. However, some humans and demonic beasts only saw him as a rare cultivation resource, placing him under constant threat.

Consequently, the Sword Emperor left the Sword-Hanging Kingdom under Daoist Yan's protection and followed the Whale-Riding Immortal on a journey across the world. He was hoping to find a corporeal body to house his soul.

Nevertheless, it was no easy task to find a suitable corporeal body for an Eminent One of his level. If it were simple, beings like Hallowed Yang and the Demon God would not be so difficult to resurrect.

The Whale-Riding Immortal assured him solemnly, "Don't worry. My methods are absolutely top-notch."

As he spoke, he turned the Sword Emperor around and attached the hook of the fishing rod to him.

The Whale-Riding Immortal said, "It's a bit deep below, so let's go slowly."

He then kicked the Sword Emperor down with a swift motion.

Whoosh!

Becoming a blur of blue, the Sword Emperor plunged into the bone-chilling cold of the icy abyss below.

After a while, the Sword Emperor's voice finally drifted to the surface. "It's so cold."

"You're at the seventh-and-a-half realm. Why are you afraid of the cold?" the Whale-Riding Immortal replied lazily.

The Sword Emperor complained miserably, "It's because I don't have a corporeal body,"

"All the more you shouldn't be afraid of the cold. Just hold on, it should be over soon!" the Whale-Riding Immortal said, cheering him on.

"Stop talking nonsense up there. Why don't you come down and see for yourself?" the Sword Emperor retorted angrily.

"Hey, I would love to go down there, but I can't exactly leave you up here to do the fishing, right? Do you have my awesome fishing skills?" the Whale-Riding Immortal asked with a laugh.

The Sword Emperor finally exploded in exasperation. "Nonsense! You have no skills at all! Don't think I don't know what you used to fish back then! Hurry up!"

The Whale-Riding Immortal shrugged helplessly. "All right, all right."

He extended his left hand and raised it high above the hole in the ice. Then he stuck out his index and middle fingers of his right hand, forming a knife-like shape. With that, he gently sliced across the wrist of his left hand.

Drip, drip.

The blood of an eighth-realm Eminent One with a Transcendent Spirit contained spiritual qi that was irresistibly attractive to any demonic beast, so much so that they would do anything to consume it.

The Whale-Riding Immortal only let two drops of blood drip down. It could not be more than that. Otherwise, his blood might draw in all sorts of strange creatures that were living in this deep pool that had been frozen over for ten thousand years. Even if it would not place the Whale-Riding Immortal in danger, it could easily ruin his plan.

He quickly wiped his fingers across the wound, healing it in a flash.

As the drops of Transcendent Spirit blood fell into the icy abyss, the situation below changed immediately. There was a sudden rumbling like that of a boiling liquid, accompanied by the sounds of surging winds and approaching thunder.

Rumble, rumble, rumble.

The Sword Emperor's deep voice reverberated to the surface. "It's coming!"

"Keep it down. Don't scare it off," the Whale-Riding Immortal replied at a lower volume.

After a moment, there was a tremor from below, followed by a loud crash!

The Whale-Riding Immortal's eyes lit up with a burst of divine light. Golden flames engulfed his right hand and spread to the golden fishing rod, which was glowing brilliantly with divine light. He raised the fishing rod with thunderous force!

Rumble, rumble, rumble.

There were sounds of a huge struggle coming from below. Despite that, the Whale-Riding Immortal kept his arms steady, focused only on raising the rod. The air seemed to freeze for a moment, then a massive chunk of the surface ice shattered as a giant mountain-like monstrous fish burst through the ice to the surface of the deep pool!

The monstrous fish had extraordinary scales and resembled both a whale and a dragon. It even appeared to have a pair of wings on its back.

Hanging out of the monstrous fish's mouth, the Sword Emperor laughed heartily and remarked, "This thing's got pretty sharp teeth!"

The monstrous fish was a sea demon. So, as a fish demon living outside the sea, it had only managed to retain thirty percent of its immense power. That disadvantage had allowed the Sword Emperor and the Whale-Riding Immortal to catch and kill it with ease.

The Sword Emperor reached out with both hands and sliced off one of the monstrous fish's razor-sharp teeth.

The Whale-Riding Immortal exclaimed, "The more vicious, the better! This Draconic Kun is the king of the Icy Abyss. The stronger it is, the better the effect will be when its dragon bones are ground into powder. The corporeal body I'm going to reconstruct for you will have a raised golden spear that will never fall. With it, you might be even more powerful than before!"

The Sword Emperor: "?"

...

Meanwhile, on the northern side of the frozen pool, a graceful and slender young lady dressed in white stood holding a translucent ancient jade. She was clearly uninterested in the joys of the two middle-aged men.

The ancient jade lit up with golden text.

[Chu]: "What are you doing?"

[Jiang:] "Fishing with the two elders."

[Chu]: "I'm drunk."

[Jiang]: "Why have you started drinking?"

[Chu]: "No, you should be asking me what I'm drunk on."

[Jiang]: "...What are you drunk on?"

[Chu]: "I'm drunk on the thought of being with you, forever and always."

[Jiang]: "..."

[Chu]: "Why, why, why?"

[Jiang]: "..."

Seeing the ellipses that Jiang Yuebai sent him, Chu Liang laughed giddily before setting down the United Hearts Jade.

Lackey A had just entered Chu Liang's office and caught sight of that scene. He grinned mischievously and teased, "Chatting with Senior Sister Jiang again?"

Chu Liang cleared his throat with a cough. "Ahem. Don't pry into unrelated non-work matters during work hours. What's up?"

To lighten his workload, Chu Liang had reassigned Lackey A, the most intelligent of the Four Overlords, to work directly alongside him. He basically made Lackey A his secretary.

Actually, if it were up to Lin Bei, he would assign eight to ten beautiful female secretaries to Chu Liang, making for a pleasant and impressive sight.

However, Chu Liang had firmly rejected the idea.

Does he really think that Senior Sister Jiang never gets angry?

...

A few days ago, Old Li Ba wanted to take Chu Liang as a son-in-law, but Chu Liang rejected the offer outright on the spot. Yet, Jiang Yuebai still ended up being annoyed with him for several days straight.

Out of nowhere, she would remark that it wouldn't be bad if his child took the surname Li and then took his given name, forming the name "Li Chu." It sounded great; it was a very handsome name.

At that point, Chu Liang would tactfully reply that "Jiang Chu" sounded pretty nice as well.

Jiang Yuebai would then glare at him. "What are you talking about? My family does not accept sons-in-law marrying into the family. We, the Jiang Family, are a fallen aristocratic family. How could we possibly have the ability to do that?"

She was so unlike her usual self that it made Chu Liang wonder if she was the one studying the Great Dao of Yin and Yang.

He did not even dare to think about what would happen if he had not been so firm in his refusal and ended up going on a date for a potential arranged marriage. The next day, Chu Liang would

probably find himself hanging from the highest branch of the tallest tree on Azure Falling Peak, and Daoist Yan certainly would not allow him to be taken down.

Although Di Nufeng adored Chu Liang, it was obvious to him who she would choose if it was between him and Daoist Yan.

So, the best that Chu Liang could do was have a male secretary.

Chapter 729: The First Day of Missing Huyan Bin (II)

Lackey A wiped the grin off his face and gave a report to Chu Liang. "Head Disciple Ye and Young Heroine Zhang from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion have arrived. They are here representing The Seven Stars Gazette to discuss a collaboration."

"They actually sent two young people," Chu Liang muttered with a smile.

He had expected, at the very least, Zhou Yijian, the master of the Wind-Catching Hall, to handle the negotiations. It seemed the Celestial Pivot Pavilion still valued their status greatly and sent young disciples in Chu Liang's generation instead. However, considering that Chu Liang represented the Red Cotton Peak, Celestial Pivot Pavilion's actions seemed rather petty.

Hearing what Chu Liang said and then seeing his expression, Lackey A could tell what he was thinking.

Lackey A promptly explained, "Head Disciple Ye has acquired a lot of power in the Celestial Pivot Pavilion the past few years. Enlightened Wu Lou has been having him handle everything. It seems he is grooming Head Disciple Ye to be his successor. So, sending him to negotiate this collaboration isn't a sign of disrespect."

Chu Liang nodded. "I see."

After all, six years had passed, and his peers had experienced a lot during that time. Ye Yongxing had always been calm and exceptionally clever, but he had a bit of social anxiety. It made sense that Enlightened Wu Lou would want him to gain more experience in social interactions by having him handle negotiations like this.

In any case, they were all old friends, so Chu Liang got up and went out to warmly welcome Ye Yongxing and Zhang Xiaohan inside.

Ye Yongxing's appearance hadn't changed much; he still seemed like a quiet, refined, and shy young man. He would also still avert his gaze slightly away from the gazes of others. However, when he saw Chu Liang, he showed a normal expression.

Zhang Xiaohan was there because she was fairly well-acquainted with Chu Liang. Additionally, she was more talkative than Ye Yongxing, so she complemented him well. The once delicate and naive young lady now seemed much more mature. Chu Liang had even heard that her writing style had changed; it was no longer as flamboyant as before.

"It's been a long time," Chu Liang said with a big smile. "It's really great to see both of you again."

Ye Yongxing gave a slight nod. "Yes, we've been worrying about you all these years."

Zhang Xiaohan smiled back. "We couldn't find you for so long that Esteemed Senior Feng was pretty close to demolishing our sect. Fortunately, you're back."

"Indeed, my teacher loves me very dearly..." Chu Liang replied, chuckling embarrassedly.

He gestured for them to sit down.

This time, they were there to discuss a deep collaboration between the Circle of Immortal Friends and The Seven Stars Gazette.

Chu Liang had initiated this meeting, but the party that was more in need of this collaboration was definitely the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

Since the launch of the Circle of Immortal Friends Tokens, the use of the tokens had quickly become widespread, expanding from the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten to all the immortal sects. It greatly reduced everyone's reliance on The Seven Stars Gazette

for information.

The Seven Stars Gazette still had a large readership, and the immortal sects would still keep a copy of the monthly releases. However, with all information being released late, it was just a matter of time before the gazette was abandoned entirely.

This was inevitable; news just spread too quickly in the Circle of Immortal Friends. Users of the Circle of Immortal Friends could receive information and news within fifteen minutes of an event occurring. What was the point of waiting a month to buy The Seven Stars Gazette?

While the immortal cultivation world benefited from the emergence of the Circle of Immortal Friends, the members of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion were sweating and staying up all night trying to figure out how to save their sect from this situation.

Fortunately, at this time, Chu Liang took the initiative and sent them an invitation to collaborate. The Celestial Pivot Pavilion was on board with having the meeting, ready to listen to whatever ideas he might have.

Chu Liang smiled, his eyes narrowing into slits as he opened up the negotiation. "I'm sure the Celestial Pivot Pavilion has noticed that the Circle of Immortal Friends we launched at Red Cotton Peak overlaps with the functions of The Seven Stars Gazette, which could negatively affect both sides."

Ye Yongxing and Zhang Xiaohan smiled as well. You're being too polite; how is this going to negatively affect Red Cotton Peak? You've one-sidedly left us in tears.

"So, rather than letting both parties suffer, why don't we start collaborating before that happens?" Chu Liang said. "Perhaps we can achieve a win-win result."

"Oh? Young Hero Chu, What kind of collaboration are you suggesting?" Zhang Xiaohan asked.

Chu Liang explained slowly, "We're currently considering launching a project called 'Circle of Immortal Friends Influencers,' which would provide dedicated soul domains for high-quality content creators to release information. When users enter your exclusive soul domain, their replies will only appear under the information you release. This model can help attract more attention to your content."

"I plan to create an exclusive soul domain for your sect and give you the number one spot among the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, placing you ahead of even my sect. I wonder if you're satisfied with this arrangement?"

The Mount Shu Sect currently had the upper hand over the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, the long-standing content provider. Nevertheless, they still held a great deal of respect for the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

There were several reasons for that. The Seven Stars Gazette still had a vast readership across the nine provinces—a level of reach that was impossible for the Circle of Immortal Friends to achieve, as it was only being used by cultivators. Moreover, the Celestial Pivot Pavilion was a top-tier immortal sect with the legendary Seven-Star Sword. In other words, it was not an easy target to push out of the competition. Lastly, the Mount Shu Sect had always had a good relationship with the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, so the Celestial Pivot Pavilion couldn't be seen as simply a competitor.

That was why Chu Liang came up with this solution.

"Number one?" Ye Yongxing blinked. "That sounds great."

"As for The Seven Stars Gazette, I think you can make some appropriate adjustments," Chu Liang said. "The original sections can be kept, but the contents can be more detailed, focusing more on in-depth investigations and interviews to distinguish them from the surface-level information in the Circle of Immortal Friends. This way, The Seven Stars Gazette

and the Circle of Immortal Friends can complement each other."

Ye Yongxin and Zhang Xiaohan nodded in unison. This indeed coincided with the plan Celestial Pivot Pavilion had in mind.

"Lastly..." Chu Liang hesitated for a moment. "If your sect is still worried about the development of the Circle of Immortal Friends and how it might negatively affect The Seven Stars Gazette, I have a solution that works for both sides, which is..."

He slowly uttered one word, "Investment."

"Investment?"

Ye Yongxing and Zhang Xiaohan looked at him a bit strangely.

Chu Liang explained with a sincere smile, "It means that you can invest a certain amount of money to purchase thirty to fifty percent of the shares for the Circle of Immortal Friends. All the profits from our operations will be shared with you accordingly. Whether it's The Seven Stars Gazette or the Circle of Immortal Friends, they will both be considered part of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion's enterprises. This way, you don't need to worry about competition, and we can focus on collaborating."

Indeed, the dagger revealed itself once the map was fully drawn. This had been his goal all along.

Red Cotton Peak was facing serious financial issues. After the fall of Taotie City, it had left a massive gap in the market. Nevertheless, for Red Cotton Peak to expand and claim that portion of the market, it needed to acquire resources, and for that, it needed money. Furthermore, Red Cotton Peak still had yet to make a return on the funds that had been invested in the Hall of Construction.

Red Cotton Peak had been stuck in this situation of only having an outflow of funds for an extended period. Why else would Chu Liang have invited the Celestial Pivot Pavilion to collaborate when Red Cotton Peak was clearly winning with the Circle of Immortal Friends?

It was all because Red Cotton Peak was in dire straits, like when even the grain reserves of a wealthy landlord's household had run empty.

Seeing Ye Yongxing's and Zhang Xiaohan's expressions become even stranger, Chu Liang put on an awkward smile, feeling a little guilty. "This... If either of you have any doubts, feel free to bring them up, and I'll explain in more detail."

Ye Yongxing and Zhang Xiaohan were actually quite knowledgeable about investment models. As an established media outlet with access to first-hand information, the people behind The Seven Stars Gazette were well aware of the previous cooperation between Taotie City and Red Cotton Peak.

Of course, Ye Yongxing and Zhang Xiaohan were among them, and that's why they looked so conflicted.

"Actually, we don't have any objections to the investment model. We don't think it's bad, but..." Zhang Xiao said meekly. "Young Hero Chu, if our information is correct, the first person to invest in Red Cotton Peak was someone named Hu Yanbin, right?"

...

Chapter 730: The Business World (I)

"AA!!!!!!!!"

A scream echoed through the desolate valley, its sound lingering in the air before fading into silence. Moments later, a weak, trembling groan followed.

"I kind of miss Chu Liang..." Huyan Bin muttered under his breath. "If we hadn't schemed against him... and even if we couldn't take down Red Cotton Peak, we could've at least lived comfortably off the dividends. Why did we have to end up suffering like this?"

"Father..."

Half-covered in blood and miserably bound to a thorn pillar nearby, Huyan Bin muttered incessantly.

His father, Huyan Dong, was standing before him. The Mount Mang rebels had sealed Huyan Dong's cultivation power for a long time as well, yet his robes remained relatively neat. Perhaps the rebels of Mount Mang recognized that, while he lacked exceptional combat strength, he was still a seventh-realm cultivator whose unwavering dedication to the Dao made him impervious to their methods. Thus, they didn't bother to lay a hand on him.

They focused all their efforts on torturing Huyan Bin. At this rate, they were practically demoting him from son to grandson[1]. Meanwhile, Huyan Dong, untouched and unscathed, skipped straight to great-grandpa status without lifting a finger.

"The world's conflicts have always followed the same brutal logic—victors reign as kings, while the defeated are branded as thieves. The strong prey on the weak, and once you step into the game, emerging unscathed is anything but easy," Huyan Dong said as his eyes narrowed slightly.

His expression remained aloof as he continued his lecture, "We cannot win against Red Cotton Peak, and beyond them, many others are just as eager to tear us apart. The rebels of Mount Mang are merely the most barbaric among them. Falling into their hands is simply an unavoidable calamity—one that fate has dealt to both you and me."

"It's clear that fate has dealt me this calamity, but you... you're still eating well and sleeping soundly," Huyan Bin muttered, his expression growing even more sorrowful.

Huyan Dong continued to take the opportunity to impart a lesson. "It's because you are weak. The weaker you are, the more control others have over you."

“Enough already! It’s obvious they’re leaving you alone because you have something they want. If they’re after information, just tell them. As long as they let us go, we’ll still get a share of Red Cotton Peak’s earnings for the next few years—more than enough to live comfortably for the rest of our lives.”

“Absurd,” Huyan Dong retorted. “Our ancestors spent a thousand years building our family business. How could we abandon it simply because of our own incompetence? Even if we die here, I will never surrender the family’s treasure.”

“You...” Huyan Bin’s lips twitched twice before he finally snapped, shouting, “You just want to leave everything to that unborn baby! If both of us die here and the bloodline is severed, what’s the point of a legacy? You’re only acting so recklessly because you have another son out there! You think I’m useless, so you’re fine with letting me die!”

"Yes." Huyan Dong nodded. His expression was calm, as if to say, So, you knew all along.

Huyan Bin fell silent for a long time, stunned by his father’s blunt honesty. Only then did he realize that sometimes, sheer sincerity was the most devastating weapon of all.

...

The mountain wind howled, carrying with it the wild, rancid stench of the rebels of Mount Mang—a foul scent thick with the presence of barbaric demons.

At first, when the group departed from Mount Mang, the lingering trace of humanity still outweighed the taint of the demonic. But now, the scent of demons had unmistakably overpowered that of humans.

Not long after the rebels of Mount Mang began their uprising, Taotie City, acting under the Penglai Supreme Sect’s orders, provided them with aid.

The Penglai Supreme Sect had done that with a clear motive—they sought to extend their influence into the lands of the nine provinces. However, both the Yu Dynasty’s imperial court and the major sects of immortal cultivation opposed them, obstructing their ambitions through both open resistance and covert maneuvers.

Over the past few years, the Penglai Supreme Sect had spared no effort in expanding its influence. They not only forged alliances with cultivation sects like Thunderbolt Stronghold and Taotie City but also secretly funded rebel forces such as the rebels of Mount Mang.

However, the aid they provided to the rebels of Mount Mang only ensured they wouldn't starve to death. When they offered the support, they made it clear that if any of the people transformed into demons, the Mount Mang rebels had to sever all ties and show no mercy.

In simple terms, Taotie City had wanted to stir up some chaos in the land of the Yu Dynasty to reap some benefits from this chaos, but they never expected the rebels of Mount Mang to grow into the formidable force they had become today.

To some extent, Taotie City had unknowingly played a hand in its own downfall.

...

Moments later, Lu Jiangtong arrived with a few others. The moment Huyan Bin laid eyes on this demon, a shudder ran through him—not once but three times.

Lu Jiangtong was nothing like the top prodigies of the immortal sects Huyan Bin had encountered before. He was undoubtedly talented, yet he hadn't been nurtured in the refined, disciplined halls of an immortal sect. He was not one of the cultured and civilized men. Instead, he was a barbaric person of demonic descent, one who had fought his way to survival through mountains of corpses and rivers of blood.

In some ways, he was even more ruthless than the cultivators of the diabolical sects.

To the surprise of both father and son, it was not Lu Jiangtong who walked at the forefront of the approaching group.

A few of the high-ranking rebels of Mount Mang, led by Lu Jiangtong, crowded around a small, slender figure at the forefront. The figure, frail and childlike in appearance, walked straight toward the father and son.

Huyan Dong lifted his gaze and frowned. It was clear the real challenge had just arrived.

As the figure approached, they lifted their hood, revealing a youthful face that still carried the traces of adolescence. He was undeniably handsome, with delicate features, and looked no older than twelve or thirteen.

This is the true mastermind behind the rebels of Mount Mang? Huyan Dong thought.

Even Huyan Dong, who had witnessed much in his lifetime, couldn't hide his astonishment—let alone Huyan Bin. He had always known that there was a hidden hand pulling the strings behind the rebels of Mount Mang, but he never expected it to be such a small hand.

“Wait a minute...” Huyan Bin suddenly frowned. “I think I’ve seen you before. Aren’t you that little boy who used to roam around Red Cotton Peak...?”

He had often been in close contact with Red Cotton Peak and had frequently gone there on errands, so he naturally knew of Chu Yi, the one who held real power under the guise of being a messenger.

“Big Brother Huyan, you’ve got a good memory!” Chu Yi replied in a crisp voice, a harmless smile playing on his lips. “I’m Chu Yi. We’ve exchanged greetings a few times.”

Huyan Bin felt a sense of familiarity upon seeing the smile, for it was exactly the same as Chu Liang’s signature grin.

“How did you end up here?” Huyan Bin asked, “Did Chu Liang send you to rescue us?”

Huyan Dong scolded, “Stop embarrassing yourself.”

Anyone with a sharp eye could tell that this child was the one in charge of the rebels of Mount Mang, yet Huyan Bin was still clinging to unrealistic hopes. As his father, Huyan Dong could no longer stand to watch his naivety.

It’s truly sad how this child seems far more intelligent and composed than my own son, Huyan Dong thought.

“Big Brother Huyan,” Chu Yi replied with a faint smile, “it’s a pity, but what’s happening now is the complete opposite of what you guessed. I was the one who had Lu Jiangtong invite you and your father here.

"As for Red Cotton Peak... I've completely severed ties with them."

Upon hearing this, Huyan Bin's face turned ashen.

I knew it, Huyan Dong thought before speaking. "You severed ties with Red Cotton Peak? Yet, you were still willing to act against Taotie City for the Mount Shu Sect? Could it be... you did it out of loyalty, because you value the bond and connection?"

"There's no need for you to concern yourself with that, City Lord. I have my own reasons," Chu Yi replied calmly.

He then turned his gaze to Huyan Bin, scrutinizing him briefly, before casting a frowning look at Lu Jiangtong. "I didn't expect them to treat you like this. I only asked him to ask a few questions. How did it end up like this?"

The sinister leader of the rebels of Mount Mang immediately took a step back and knelt on one knee. "I am willing to accept my punishment."

Instead of responding, Chu Yi simply had Lu Jiangtong remain kneeling as he turned to Huyan Dong.

"I'm not after the treasures the ancestors of Taotie City left behind," he said casually. "That's just something that came up since we're all here together. I'm sure you two can tell that the treasures I've given the rebels of Mount Mang are far more valuable than anything Taotie City has hidden away. What I really want... is something else."

As Huyan Dong stared at the calculating expression on this child's face, he couldn't help but feel a sense of uncertainty. He had no idea what Chu Yi was about to say.

"I know that Taotie City once pledged allegiance to the Noble Dharma's sect before you joined the Penglai Supreme Sect," Chu Yi said, speaking deliberately. "If I wanted to arrange a meeting with the Noble Dharma, would you be willing to help facilitate it? In exchange, I will set you and your son free after the meeting. Will you agree to this?"

Being located in the Northern Regions and lacking eighth-realm cultivators, Taotie City naturally relied on external support. For the past few centuries, the Noble Dharma of the Holy Mountain in the Northern Regions had been their honored ally, sending vast resources to the Holy Mountain every year.

In the Northern Regions, as long as a person paid proper homage to the Noble Dharma, peace and stability would follow them. When an individual's power reached a certain level, even sects in the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten had to show them respect.

However, when Taotie City sought to compete with Red Cotton Peak, they had to expand beyond the Northern Regions and the influence of the Northern Regions alone was no longer enough. And so, they turned to Penglai Supreme Sect. With the protection of Penglai Supreme Sect's powerful cultivators, they were able to accomplish much more and gradually distanced themselves from the Holy Mountain.

Yet, their centuries-old connection meant that even though Taotie City drifted away, they never completely severed ties. Had the rebels of Mount Mang not struck Taotie City so swiftly, the Holy Mountain of the Northern Regions might have intervened.

"Are you also seeking the Noble Dharma's protection?" Huyan Dong asked in a deep voice. "A group of rebels of demonic descent—"

Chu Yi interrupted him. "I simply wish to talk. Without the protection of an eighth-realm cultivator, one cannot stand firm in this world. City Lord Huyan, there's no need for you to worry about what I plan to do. Just tell me—do we have a deal or not?"

Huyan Dong answered without hesitation, "Deal."

...