

M. Slaying 741

Chapter 741: The Great Dao of Politeness (II)

"After spending so much time on self-reflection, I gained a deep understanding of my mistakes," Grand Ancestor Fuyou said sincerely. "If all Eminent Ones behaved as I once did, how chaotic would the mortal realm be? I had control of the Great Dao of Reincarnation, yet I showed no respect for the lives of others. I had forgotten my past, my incredibly difficult journey of survival. I had lost my roots. Now, when I think back on what I did, all I feel is regret—overwhelming regret."

Chu Liang remained silent.

After all, he and his friends weren't fools. No matter how polite this old man seemed, he was still a powerful Eminent One at the pinnacle of the eighth realm. He had been sealed away for two thousand years, but he was still capable of killing them with a flick of his hand.

Since he wanted to self-reflect, they would simply listen and reply yes to everything he said. Otherwise, what would they do if he suddenly decided he did want to kill them after all? It was always wise to show reverence to the strong.

Before Chu Liang's train of thought even ended, Lin Bei agreed loudly, "Yes, yes, yes! Grand Ancestor, it's wonderful that you've come to such a realization. With your level of cultivation, you turning over a new leaf would be a huge blessing for the mortal realm!"

Well... there are always bold ones in this world, Chu Liang remarked inwardly.

"I definitely will, hehe." Grand Ancestor Fuyou nodded, appearing well-behaved. "That is why, since Elder Brother Wuchao has not spoken on the matter, I do not dare to ask you to release me. I only have a small request. If it's convenient for you, could you pass a message to him on my behalf?"

"Tell him... that I, Fuyou, recognize my mistakes. I only wish to meet him and apologize in person. Whether or not he chooses to release me, I do not mind either way. I just want the opportunity to apologize."

Finding the request totally reasonable, Chu Liang promptly replied, "If we can make it out of here, we will certainly pass along your message. However, the problem is—"

"Ah, yes." Grand Ancestor Fuyou nodded. "This humble servant may be untalented, but since I have asked you for your assistance, I will, of course, assist you in return. It won't take much for me to help you escape, much like what it takes to lift one's hand. I cannot leave due to the seal, but it won't be a problem for me to help you leave."

His excessive politeness almost made them wonder if he had actually made an unreasonable request.

Chu Liang thought about it for a moment and concluded that clearly wasn't the case. Grand Ancestor Fuyou was helping them escape, saving their lives; he was doing them a massive favor. Meanwhile, all they had to do was pass along a message. His request was truly minor in comparison.

It was quite heartbreaking to witness such humility.

Lin Bei thumped his chest confidently. "Don't worry, Oldie Brodie! As long as you can get us out, consider it done. We got you!"

"This..." Grand Ancestor Fuyou uttered hesitantly. He paused for a moment. Then with trembling hands, he vowed, "If I ever regain my freedom, I will surely repay your immense kindness. But for now, I have nothing to offer. Perhaps I could kneel and kowtow to you all to express my gratitude?"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa." "Esteemed Senior, you do not need to be so polite." "Oldie Brodie, please don't—"

"No, no, I insist."

"Really, seriously, it's not necessary."

The three young men hurriedly stopped Grand Ancestor Fuyou. How could they dare accept such a grand gesture?

After some back-and-forth, Grand Ancestor Fuyou finally rose to escort them out of the cavern.

"Wherever my red mist spreads, it can temporarily block the divine lightning. Bravely follow the path it takes, and you'll be fine," Grand Ancestor Fuyou said. He bowed to them at the entrance of the underground cavern. "This is as far as I can escort you. I leave the rest to you."

Lin Bei waved with a grin. "Oldie Brodie, just wait for the good news."

In actuality, blocking the divine lightning wasn't an easy feat for Grand Ancestor Fuyou. If it were, he wouldn't be emerging from the cavern to absorb spiritual qi at that specific time each day, for just a quarter of an hour. Nevertheless, now that there were finally people who were willing to deliver his message, he was willing to put his life on the line to form an escape route for them.

A red mist rose from the underground cavern once more. It slowly spread forward, forming a path that divine lightning could not penetrate.

Chu Liang, Lin Bei, and Xu Ziyang followed the red mist carefully, moving at a slow pace since they dared not step beyond its protective reach. After what felt like an eternity, they finally reached the edge of Misty Island.

However, upon arrival, they discovered that things had changed. The previously barren perimeter of Misty Island was gone. It was replaced by towering layers of blood-red coral, forming an impenetrable barrier around the island.

Madam Hongyu had sealed the island!

"She must have done this to prevent Grand Ancestor Fuyou from escaping." Xu Ziyang glanced behind him and frowned. "The red mist can't hold off the divine lightning for much longer. We need to break through this barrier quickly!"

"I'll handle it!" Chu Liang exclaimed.

His sword intent surged to its peak as he swung the Demon-Slaying Sword, slashing forward!

The Demon-Slaying Sword made contact, but the coral barrier was unbelievably sturdy. Chu Liang's indomitable Sword Strike of Severing the Void had only managed to make a shallow crack in the barrier! Then in the blink of an eye, the coral regrew, sealing off the crack.

When Madam Hongyu was there earlier, the red mist had instantly shattered parts of her coral barrier, forcing it to regenerate rapidly. It had seemed so fragile, but now that Chu Liang was trying to break through the coral barrier, he realized just how solid it was.

It was no wonder Madam Hongyu had been entrusted with guarding this place.

Chu Liang muttered under his breath, "This isn't going to be easy."

...

At the edge of Bloodmist Manor, Princess Liange stared in horror at Misty Island, which had been sealed off.

"Aunty Hongyu! What are you doing?? If you seal off the island like this, won't Young Hero Xu and the others be trapped in there forever?"

With a complexion as pale as frost, Madam Hongyu said gravely, "Liange... from the moment they fell into the underground cavern, they were doomed to never return.

"Do you have any idea how terrifyingly evil Grand Ancestor Fuyou is? In the past, he alone slaughtered countless members of the sea tribes. Do you think he would spare a few mere humans?"

"But..." Princess Liange gazed at the barrier in despair. "What if they do make it out of the cavern?"

"Even if they manage to escape, it won't be of their own strength. It would only mean that ancient devil is using them as a means to break free," Madam Hongyu replied solemnly. "All Grand Ancestor Fuyou needs to do is attach one mayfly egg to a living being, and he can escape his prison. Anyone who has entered that cavern must not be allowed to leave alive."

Seeing the sorrow written all over Princess Liange's face, Madam Hongyu softened her tone and said quietly, "Today, there were thieves that attempted to free that devil, and those young men just happened to be there at the wrong time. They were simply unlucky."

Right then, a sudden explosion echoed from within the barrier. A fierce sword qi leaked out through a crack.

Princess Liange immediately raised her head to look at the barrier. "Young Hero Chu! They're alive! Aunty Hongyu—"

Thud.

Madam Hongyu didn't give Princess Liange the chance to finish talking. She hit Princess Liange with a swift knifehand strike, knocking her unconscious and then catching her before she fell to the ground.

"That devil must be trying to send them out in order to secure his own escape. Even if I inform Lord Wuchao now, they will have perished under divine lightning by the time he arrives. You're better off not witnessing such a sight."

Madam Hongyu flung out her long sleeve and swung her arm out wide, bringing it inward. More layers of coral grew on the barrier, fortifying the seal over Misty Island.

As she gazed at the coral barrier, there was only grim resolve in her eyes.

That Mount Shu Sect disciple's sword intent was undeniably powerful, but if he wants to break through my coral barrier... that's just a pipe dream.

Among the seventh-realm Eminent Ones, she was the best at forming seals like that. There was no way a mere kid like Chu Liang could shatter her coral barrier.

Madam Hongyu did not want to let the three young men die, but she had no choice. If even one of them was infected with a mayfly egg and managed to escape, all the efforts the sea demons had put into sealing that devil for so long would be for nothing.

It is quite unfortunate, but...

As if trying to harden her resolve, Madam Hongyu muttered, "This is their fate."

Chapter 742: Competitive (I)

Huyan Dong stood amid the cold, mighty gusts of wind blowing past Holy Mountain. He said with slight surprise, "You actually managed to move the Noble Dharma. How did you do it?"

"Sincerity," answered the slender boy, Chu Yi.

Hearing that, Huyan Dong couldn't help but remark, "For someone so young, you sure say a lot of crap."

On the Holy Mountain, Huyan Dong had the Noble Dharma's protection. That meant his safety was no longer under Chu Yi's control, so his courage naturally grew.

Without Huyan Dong's connection to the Noble Dharma, it would have been difficult for Chu Yi to meet the Noble Dharma in the first place, so Chu Yi did not bother responding to his provocation.

Chu Yi simply smiled and said, "I can't share the details with you. You only need to know that the Noble Dharma has taken me as his disciple. He wants me to train on the Holy Mountain for ten years before I may leave."

Huyan Dong nodded.

Of course, he knew that it was extraordinary to have the Noble Dharma's support.

The Noble Dharma was the oldest living human cultivator. He did not wield a legendary artifact, yet he still received the utmost respect from the Divine Nine immortal sects, which spoke volumes.

Even if he had no way of advancing to the eighth-and-a-half realm, the Realm of the Heavenly Origin Terminator, the Noble Dharma was undeniably one of the most powerful eighth-realm Eminent Ones.

Although the Noble Dharma had seemingly remained hidden from the world for years, he still maintained absolute control over two sects in the Terrestrial Ten. The proof was in how the imperial court had bestowed the Monastery Tower, one of the Terrestrial Ten, with the title of "Nation Guard" precisely because of its ties to the Holy Mountain.

The Holy Mountain stood on equal footing with the sects in the Divine Nine. The influence and power it held could not be underestimated.

With the Noble Dharma's protection, Chu Yi had truly found solid footing. Even if the imperial court were to discover his identity as the former dynasty's young emperor, there was nothing they could do to him as long as he remained on the Holy Mountain.

The purpose of Noble Dharma's order for Chu Yi to remain on the mountain and train for ten years was not only to cultivate his character but also to protect him. This way, no one could harm him while he was still a child.

Huyan Dong gazed at the remarkable child before him. "What was the collaboration you were talking about earlier?"

"Are you interested, City Lord Huyan?" Chu Yi asked with a smile.

During his time on the Holy Mountain, Huyan Dong learned about the events occurring in the outside world.

As he had expected, Taotie City had been mercilessly cast out of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. Furthermore, no one had attempted to rescue him—not even the Penglai Supreme Sect, the sect that Taotie City served and had the closest relations with.

In the meantime, the sects in the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten had already begun scheming against one another to determine which sect would ascend into the Terrestrial Ten. Each sect sought to push its own ally to take the spot for the sake of securing greater influence and power in the future.

The name "Taotie City" seemed to be vanishing from history.

"Didn't we have an agreement? If you could obtain the Noble Dharma's protection, we would discuss the collaboration further," Huyan Dong said with a smile. "Now we can talk."

Chu Yi explained, "It's simple. Since I can't leave the mountain, I need someone to act on my behalf outside. Taotie City fell because it lacked a strong supporter and true power. But now, you'll have both. The Holy Mountain will be your supporter, and the Mount Mang rebels will be your strength...

"Since Taotie City has already been destroyed, there's no need to rebuild it. Instead, we will merge Taotie City with the Mount Mang rebels and establish a new force, one even greater than before. We will reclaim everything that once belonged to Taotie City."

Chu Yi's eyes gleamed as he looked at Huyan Dong. "We'll call it Mount Mang City!"

"All the hopes you once placed on Taotie City, all the ambitions you never had the chance to fulfill—you can realize them here. You know my ambitions lie elsewhere. This is merely a stepping stone for me. In the future, our fates will be intertwined, but in the end, Mount Mang City will belong to the Huyan Family. You will surpass your ancestors and achieve even greater glory..."

"Mount Mang City?" Huyan Dong uttered. He had to admit that the boy's words stirred his heart.

Taotie City had been wealthy, but it lacked true power of its own. No matter whose protection it sought, it had never been a lasting solution.

However, with the Noble Dharma as a supporter, the possibilities were endless.

In fact, Huyan Dong could do much more than just reclaim a spot in the Terrestrial Ten. If he wanted to, he could even achieve his long-cherished wish of pulling the Mount Shu Sect down from the Divine Nine...

Nevertheless, as he looked at the boy in front of him, Huyan Dong dismissed the thought.

Forget it. This kid's from the Mount Shu Sect. If not for Red Cotton Peak, he might never have gone against Taotie City in the first place.

The Mount Shu Sect was where he learned to make such grandiose promises.

Just as Huyan Dong was about to say something, a scarlet-robed girl emerged from a nearby temple.

The girl appeared to be around the same age as Chu Yi, about twelve or thirteen years old. She was slightly taller than him, which was unsurprising since girls usually grew a bit faster at this age. She was undoubtedly a budding beauty, but her expression was as frigid as the endless frost of the Northern Regions, with a hint of indolence in her gaze.

Huyan Dong did not know who the girl was, but he knew she held a very high status on the Holy Mountain. She beat and scolded the Noble Dharma's disciples whenever she liked, and no one dared to provoke her. She showed little respect even toward the Noble Dharma.

The girl walked over and called out to Chu Yi, "Hey! The old geezer is calling you."

"Got it, Big Sis Jiang Guo. I'll be right there," Chu Yi replied with a smile.

He had heard Noble Wu'e mention the girl's name before, so he had remembered it. The "old geezer" Jiang Guo mentioned was undoubtedly the Noble Dharma.

"I happen to have something to discuss with the Noble Dharma as well," Huyan Dong said, moving to follow them.

Jiang Guo shot him an icy stare. "Go drop dead somewhere else."

Huyan Dong smiled and nodded. "All right then."

He wasn't being so agreeable because he was kind; it was because he could clearly sense that this girl's cultivation power was absolutely terrifying... She definitely had the ability to kill him with a single punch.

When she told him to "go drop dead somewhere else," it could have been a threat... or become a fact.

Watching the two children, whose combined age didn't even reach twenty-five, walk away, Huyan Dong couldn't help but sigh. "Haaa."

The immortal realm has become way too competitive. Are eleven- and twelve-year-olds supposed to have such high levels of intelligence and cultivation power nowadays? Does that make any sense?? When I was twelve, I spent my days eating tanghulu![1]

While Huyan Dong was lamenting inwardly about his situation, someone called out to him from behind, "Father!"

Turning around, Huyan Dong saw Huyan Bin, now in his thirties, walking over with two charred mantou[2] in hand. His face was full of warm, innocent joy.

"Father, all they have here is mantou, and they taste awful. So, I thought I'd try roasting them. Guess what?" Huyan Bin laughed. "They burned!"

"..."

When Huyan Dong saw his son's silly grin, his lips parted. One word hovered at the tip of his tongue, but in the end, he held it back.

...

"Useless!"

Inside a pavilion in the Ruins of Return Cult, the Sea Master raged as he glared at the two blood-soaked subordinates before him.

Standing on the left was Squid King, a master of striking enemies under the cover of black ink, and on the right was Tiger Whale, who was unmatched in close-range rushed attacks. They were among the Sea Master's most capable subordinates.

Yet, despite attacking together, they had failed to get past Madam Hongyu.

The Sea Master had spent considerable time gathering intelligence on Grand Ancestor Fuyou's situation. All his two subordinates needed to do was get into the underground cavern when the blood mist rose. Then Grand Ancestor Fuyou would have a chance to latch onto someone and escape.

Yet, despite their meticulous planning and the element of surprise, they had still failed.

"Esteemed Sea Master, it is not that we are incompetent. It was just bad timing today," Squid King said.

He lifted his black robes, revealing the lower half of his face. It was pitch-black and lined with long, squid tentacles, making for a frightening sight. However, his eyes just showed how wronged he felt.

Tiger Whale chimed in, "That's right. Several human cultivators were also on Misty Island, including an Eminent One with great sword skills. His attacks were extremely sharp!"

The sea demons of the Ruins of Return did not know much about humans. Otherwise, they would have recognized that this human Eminent One was none other than the renowned Chu Liang of the Mount Shu Sect.

"If that's the case, our failure to rescue Grand Ancestor Fuyou will only make that old thief Wuchao more vigilant." The Sea Master's expression turned as dark as stormy waters. "They may even trace it back to you two. How will my Ruins of Return Cult escape then?"

The Sea Master's fear of Wuchao's might stemmed from a terror deeply rooted in his heart. That was precisely why he had wanted to free Grand Ancestor Fuyou, who had once fought Wuchao in a great battle. The Sea Master knew that with his strength alone, he had no chance of victory against Wuchao.

"Sea Master, I have something to say," Squid King said, pulling back into his robes.

"Speak!" Sea Master commanded.

"If someone were to report to Wuchao about Misty Island, it would definitely take some time. You should take advantage of this window to go down in person and rescue Grand Ancestor Fuyou. That way, Wuchao will be preoccupied dealing with Grand Ancestor Fuyou and won't have time to bother with us. Having just repelled our attack, Misty Island would not expect us to strike again so soon..." Squid King explained slowly. "The most important thing now is to be quick!"

Boom!

The Sea Master erupted in fury, striking Squid King with his palm. Squid King was sent flying, coughing up blood as he crashed into the wall. He was already heavily injured before, and now he was barely clinging to life.

Despite attacking Squid King, the Sea Master withdrew his hand and said quietly, "This plan is feasible."

"..." Squid King's eyes widened. "If it's feasible, then why, Esteemed Sea Master—"

"Why didn't you say so earlier?!" the Sea Master snapped, flinging out his sleeves in anger. He took a step outside the pavilion and vanished.

Squid King: "?"

Of course, what the Sea Master said was just an excuse. The real reason for his anger was that his subordinates' incompetence had forced him to take action personally—something he had no desire to do.

If he did that, it would be much easier for others to figure out that he was involved. After all, there weren't many eighth-realm Eminent Ones in the Ruins of Return. It wouldn't take much effort at all to deduce who was responsible for the incident.

However, his subordinates' attempt to free Grand Ancestor Fuyou had already failed. If the Sea Master still refused to act, there would be no salvaging his plan.

No matter what, I have to take Grand Ancestor Fuyou out of that seal today!

If the Bloodmist Manor managed to send word to Wuchao about the failed attempt, he would definitely tighten the defenses around Misty Island. At that point, all hope would be lost. Fortunately, Wuchao had been deeply focused on his closed-door cultivation, so it would take some effort to track him down. This provided a crucial time gap that the Sea Master could exploit.

Chapter 743: Competitive (II)

As those thoughts raced through his mind, the Sea Master swam swiftly through the sea, moving so fast he was nearly invisible.

Eighth-realm Eminent Ones often comprehended the Great Dao of Distancelessness so that they could use it for swift travel. Despite living in the Ruins of Return, the Sea Master was no exception to that.

When the Sea Master arrived at Bloodmist Manor, Madam Hongyu had just knocked Baozhu Liange unconscious.

In the Ruins of Return, there was no convenient messaging system like the Circle of Immortal Friends Token. Consequently, after setting Princess Liange down in a safe place, Madam Hongyu raised her hand and conjured a coral pillar. The coral pillar then softened and reshaped into a long blood-red jade-like arrow.

Madam Hongyu did the same with her left hand, but instead of an arrow, she made a crystal-like translucent coral bow. She then nocked the arrow in the bow, aimed it at the sky, and released it explosively.

Whoosh!

Like a shooting star, the arrow streaked across the sky of the Ruins of Return, heading straight toward Wuchao's location.

The arrow was moving very quickly, but it was still far slower than the Sea Master traveling with the Great Dao of Distancelessness. As a result, by the time Sea Master arrived at Bloodmist Manor, Wuchao still had yet to receive Madam Hongyu's message.

Still far from Misty Island, the Sea Master formed a hand seal, and darkness enveloped him, transforming into a cloak. It was impossible for anyone to see through his concealment unless their cultivation level was significantly higher than his.

With his identity concealed, he finally propelled forward, speeding toward Misty Island!

Madam Hongyu was standing at the barrier, keeping watch to stop Chu Liang's group from breaking out.

Suddenly, she noticed a black-cloaked figure streaking past.

"How dare you!" Madam Hongyu bellowed, striking the intruder with lightning speed.

She fired a crimson beam of light at him, but the Sea Master merely flicked his sleeve, unleashing a ball of darkness. It devoured the crimson beam before slamming into Madam Hongyu.

Wham!

With no chance to retaliate, Madam Hongyu was blasted into the ground. It was uncertain if she was dead or alive.

Just as the Sea Master turned his gaze back to the barrier, a deafening explosion rang out from within it.

Boom!

...

The commotion outside had not affected what was happening inside the barrier.

Chu Liang, Lin Bei, and Xu Ziyang were trapped within it, and their only hope of breaking the barrier was, of course, Chu Liang.

With the Demon-Slaying Sword in hand, Chu Liang stood in front of the sturdy coral barrier. His first attempt to break through it had failed, but he did not panic. Instead, he calmed his mind and lowered his eyelids slightly in deep focus.

Divine thunder rumbled all around them, and Grand Ancestor Fuyou's protective red mist was wearing thin.

Lin Bei asked urgently, "What are you doing?"

"I'm comprehending the Dao," Chu Liang replied calmly.

If he couldn't break through the coral barrier soon, all three of them would die there. Yet, rather than letting this urgency overwhelm him, it led him to a sudden realization.

Hovering between life and death, there is only the sword. If it can cut through, the world will open wide. If it fails, it is uncertain if death or life lies ahead.

This is the Cloud of Determination.

Chu Liang's first glimpse into the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination had been when he was trapped in a water prison in the South Sea. Amid a life-and-death crisis, he had comprehended the immortal art that embodied the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination—the Heaven-Raising Sword.

The mortal peril that Chu Liang was in this time had triggered another moment of enlightenment.

This was the profound nature of the seventh realm. Centuries of closed-door cultivation could not compare to a moment of enlightenment. A cultivator could meditate endlessly with no results, yet in the right circumstances, they could be blessed with divine inspiration.

Unfortunately, the timing was a little awkward for Chu Liang. He wasn't receiving the enlightenment smoothly. The looming shadow of death had spurred the power of the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination, yet he felt that he wasn't getting enough of its power. It was likely because he was there as a clone and not truly facing life and death.

At this moment, Chu Liang wished he was there in his actual body. It was worth risking his life for a precious chance to comprehend a Great Dao.

If he hadn't gotten any inkling of this enlightenment, it would have been just fine. However, he knew it was there; he was just stuck outside of its reach because he hadn't quite met the requirements for receiving it.

It was as if a membrane was blocking his way. He could touch the door, but he could not step through it.

That frustrating itch, the unbearable sense of being just short of success, was agonizing. Due to that, Chu Liang kept his eyes closed for a long time at this crucial time.

Lin Bei was as anxious as a monkey stepping on a hot wok. Scratching his head in frustration, he turned to Xu Ziyang. "Eldest Senior Brother, something's off with Chu Liang. Let's try working together first—wait, what are you doing now?"

Xu Ziyang had been looking ahead, deep in contemplation. Then the moment Lin Bei spoke, Xu Ziyang suddenly closed his eyes as well. There seemed to be three words written coldly across his eyelids: Do Not Disturb.

"Let me comprehend the Dao," Xu Ziyang replied calmly.

Compared to Chu Liang, Xu Ziyang had a deeper understanding of the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination. After all, he and Jiang Yuebai had been the first of their generation to master the Heaven-Raising Sword.

Jiang Yuebai had learned from her teacher, who specialized in the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination, but Xu Ziyang had comprehended the Cloud of Determination entirely on his own. Despite the many other Great Dao he could have chosen, that was the one he had picked to be his main Great Dao.

During the six years that Chu Liang had been dormant, Xu Ziyang had continued down the path of the Cloud of Determination and had already progressed quite far into it. Furthermore, unlike Chu Liang, who was there as a clone, Xu Ziyang was truly facing mortal peril.

In an instant, he could feel that the opportunity he had sought out for years had arrived at last.

It all depends on one sword strike—advance and live, retreat and die.

Unwilling to perish under divine lightning and terrestrial fire? Then split the world apart to survive!

This sword strike...[1]

Xu Ziyang was completely immersed in a profound state of enlightenment, leaving Lin Bei to wait anxiously alone.

Clutching his hair in despair, Lin Bei thought, Are you two messing with me? You've even made this into a fucking competition?! The red mist is about to disperse. When the divine lightning hits the ground, we will all die. Yet, the two of you chose this exact moment to close your eyes and comprehend the Dao?

"Oh, fuck it," Lin Bei cursed under his breath and shut his eyes as well.

Of course, he wasn't comprehending anything. He just thought that he would have a more peaceful death this way.

Fortunately, fate wasn't so cruel. Just as Lin Bei was about to give up completely, both Chu Liang and Xu Ziyang opened their eyes at the same time.

Chu Liang opened his eyes because he had reached a bottleneck in fully comprehending the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination. Nevertheless, he had gained a deeper understanding of it, enhancing his swordsmanship.

At this moment, he had some comprehension of the Great Daos of Severing the Void, the Cloud of Determination, and Tai'a—each to a lesser degree than the one before. Combined, Chu Liang could attain a high level of swordsmanship he had yet to reach.

Xu Ziyang, on the other hand, had opened his eyes because his moment of enlightenment had ended. His gaze carried incredibly intense determination—like a torch blazing in the long night, like the first light of dawn breaking through the heavens, like the very first bolt of lightning splitting the clouds!

Chu Liang muttered, "Severing the Void."

As he raised his sword, his sword intent gathered into an unstoppable force.

Xu Ziyang muttered, "Cloud of Determination."

As he raised his arm, his sword qi surged resolutely in vast, mighty waves.

Lin Bei muttered, "Mother."

As he clasped his hands together, he contemplated whether he should just kneel and pray.

All three of them moved simultaneously, with two swords slashing forward.

Boom!

Chu Liang and Xu Ziyang struck the coral barrier at the same time—one with razor-sharp sword intent, the other with fierce sword qi. They broke through the red coral; cracks spread across the coral barrier like a spiderweb, leaving it no chance to regenerate in time.

Together, Chu Liang and Xu Ziyang were indomitable!

This was the brilliance of the Mount Shu Sect's younger generation. Among the four people who had once represented the Mount Shu Sect at the Assembly of Immortal Sects, the most gifted and

perceptive was undoubtedly Jiang Yuebai, who had ventured far from home. However, Chu Liang and Xu Ziyang were surprisingly the ones who had attained the seventh realm first.

That was the profound nature of the Dao! Or perhaps, it could be because they had been blessed and influenced by the brilliance of the Mount Shu Sect?

As the coral barrier shattered, Chu Liang, Xu Ziyang, and Lin Bei saw a black-cloaked figure outside. Only his eyes were visible, and they exposed his astonishment.

The Sea Master hadn't expected that the sturdy coral barrier would collapse the moment he laid eyes on it.

Yet, what surprised him even more was the people on the other side of the barrier.

Chu Liang and his companions hesitated for a moment, unsure whether this mysterious black-cloaked figure was friend or foe.

Then the Sea Master blurted out, "Violet Gold Marquess?"

Chapter 744: Scolding (I)

When Chu Liang and his companions saw this imposing figure shrouded in surging flames of demonic qi, the figure's face was obscured by darkness. So, they shouldn't have been able to figure out his identity. However, the words that the figure blurted out gave his identity away.

A sharp glint flashed in Chu Liang's eyes.

Hmm?

The only ones who knew about Chu Liang's disguise as the Violet Gold Marquess were those demons and evildoers from that time they went to the Sea Master's pavilion. However, he was later captured by the land demons of the Far West. He then returned to Moun Shu and even killed a Dark King Sect hall master. That meant the only ones who might still believe that Chu Liang was the Violet Gold Marquess could only be the isolated sea demons.

The identity of the eighth-realm Eminent One standing before him... was now clear as day. It was unlikely that this person could be anyone other than the Sea Master, the leader of the Ruins of Return Cult.

Living in the vast South Sea and the hidden realm the Ruins of Return kept the sea demons isolated from the rest of the world. They had very few channels of communication to acquire information about events that occurred outside. Recently, the merfolk had been in close contact with the Mount Shu Sect, but this was limited to Princess Liange alone. The rest of the sea demon clans rarely left the Ruins of Return.

The Sea Master had previously maintained frequent contact with the Celestial Charm Sect. It was through that connection that he had formed an alliance between the sea demons of the South Sea with the land demons of the Far West.

The Celestial Charm Sect and the Far West should have served as his sources of outside information, but the Far West had been too preoccupied with their own problems to care about the sea demons. Additionally, the recent upheaval in the South Sea had caused many of the sea demons to grow suspicious of the Sea Master's collusion with outsiders, believing he harbored ulterior motives. As a result, the Celestial Charm Sect stopped sending people into the Ruins of Return.

During this period, the Sea Master had not received any updates on the affairs of the world. The Ruins of Return had returned to being isolated from the mortal realm, just as it had been for many years before.

The Sea Master was truly at a disadvantage because of his lack of knowledge.

After deducing the figure's identity, Chu Liang's mind raced as he assessed the situation. Madam Hongyu's qi had vanished; he couldn't tell if she was alive or dead.

As for Sea Master's intervention, it was probably because of Grand Ancestor Fuyou, who was at the center of Misty Island. The two mysterious black-robed figures from earlier were most likely members of the Ruins of Return cult. It was no wonder they had concealed their identities.

Faced with such a powerful foe, if Chu Liang and his companions were to reveal their identities as righteous cultivators, the three of them would meet their end here.

In a flash, Chu Liang came up with a plan. He would play the role of a diabolical Eminent One pretending to be a righteous cultivator.

It was a role that sounded quite layered and complex, but for Chu Liang, it was no challenge at all. After all, pretending to be demons and evildoers was his forte. For an old hand like him, the harder the role, the more chances there were for him to show off his acting skills.

Chu Liang lowered his voice, speaking in a muted tone. "Which fellow Daoist is this, who knows my secret name?"

"This is no place for conversation. Come with me!" the Sea Master said, flinging out his sleeve.

There was a deafening rumble, and a mass of black clouds enveloped Chu Liang's group, carrying them away at lightning speed.

"Eh...?" Lin Bei uttered in shock, about to take action.

He wasn't the only one. Like Chu Liang, Xu Ziyang had just made a breakthrough in his comprehension of his main Great Dao, so he was in his peak state. When the Sea Master suddenly abducted them, Xu Ziyang's first instinct was to draw his sword.

However, Chu Liang swiftly stopped them and spoke with a deeper meaning concealed in his words. "No need to fear. This master of the Heavenly Origin is likely one of our own."

Of course, what Chu Liang really meant was that this black-cloaked figure was not one of their own and that they should

be afraid.

Lin Bei and Xu Ziyang weren't fools. They immediately understood what Chu Liang meant.

They were faced with yet another evil eighth-realm Eminent One. They had just escaped a tiger's lair only to walk into a wolf's den. It was truly overwhelming.

Nevertheless, seeing that Chu Liang remained calm, Lin Bei and Xu Ziyang assumed he had a plan.

Thus, they remained silent.

Of course, the whistling wind accompanied them the whole way.

...

The Sea Master took Chu Liang's group to his pavilion and set them down safely. Then he took a seat at his table, no longer concealing his identity.

Now that his identity was known, the first thing the Sea Master did was scrutinize Lin Bei and Xu Ziyang.

"And these two are...?"

"As expected, it is you, Sea Master." Chu Liang put on a small smile. "These two are my subordinates that I recently recruited from the Mount Shu Sect."

"Violet Gold Marquess, you are pretty amazing. Not only did you infiltrate the Mount Shu Sect but you even managed to recruit righteous cultivators!" Sea Master remarked.

"With the promise of benefits, is there anyone who cannot be persuaded?" Chu Liang said, straightening his posture. He held his head up high and stated, "I have money."

He spoke sonorously with resounding conviction, leaving no trace of falsehood.

"Haha, impressive." Sea Master nodded before changing the topic. "May I ask what business has brought you to Misty Island, Violet Gold Marquess?"

Smiling mysteriously, Chu Liang locked eyes with the Sea Master and asked in response, "May I ask what brought you to Misty Island, Sea Master?"

"It seems you're quite well-informed about the affairs of the Ruins of Return—even the matter regarding Grand Ancestor Fuyou?" Sea Master said, his voice carrying a hint of suspicion.

It had taken him a long time to verify the information about Grand Ancestor Fuyou's location, yet the Violet Gold Marquess seemed to have gotten the information very quickly. It should have been difficult for those outside the Ruins of Return to get that information, so the Sea Master couldn't help but grow wary.

"Then tell me, Sea Master, why do you think Mount Shu has recently been strengthening its ties with the sea clans?" Chu Liang patted Xu Ziyang's shoulder. "Do you believe my subordinate has been making frequent trips to the Ruins of Return merely to court the Merfolk Princess?"

Xu Ziyang's gaze wavered slightly. He nearly lost his poker face, but in the end, he held firm.

The Sea Master suddenly connected the dots. "So that's it. The recent relations between Mount Shu and the sea clans were all orchestrated by you!"

"The one truly driving all of this is Lord Xuan Yinzi," Chu Liang said, cupping his hands to the side as if Xuan Yinzi were there. "I am merely a humble pawn in the grand scheme."

At that moment, the sound of heavy footsteps rang out as Squid King and Tiger Whale, the Sea Master's two most capable subordinates, approached.

The moment the two sea demons saw Chu Liang and his companions, they became wary.

"Sea Master!" Squid King shouted. "They are the ones who worked with Madam Hongyu and injured us!"

"Hmm?" The Sea Master furrowed his brows and looked at Chu Liang. "Violet Gold Marquess, was it you who injured my subordinates?"

Lin Bei and Xu Ziyang tensed up. Their battle to help Madam Hongyu defend Misty Island had been real, and they had no idea how Chu Liang planned to talk his way out of this one.

Chu Liang glanced at the Squid King and Tiger Whale, but his expression remained calm and unshaken. He even let out a little sneer before replying loudly, "That's right!"

What's this? Are we about to start fighting? Lin Bei thought.

His eye twitched twice, and his knees nearly gave out. However, he trusted Chu Liang unconditionally, so he forced himself to stay calm and avoid revealing any clues that would expose the truth.

The Sea Master remained silent and just observed Chu Liang, curious as to how he would explain himself.

"Why do you think I was able to infiltrate Bloodmist Manor?" Chu Liang asked. He said frankly with conviction, "Because I fabricated an excuse about collecting Thundercloud Seeds. That was why Madam Hongyu willingly took us into Misty Island.

"Initially, we could have entered the underground cavern unscathed and successfully rescued Grand Ancestor Fuyou. But these two subordinates of yours suddenly attacked us and even targeted my brothers."

Chu Liang spread open his hands in a shrug. "In such a situation, when friend and foe were unclear, how could I have gained Madam Hongyu's trust without taking action? Sea Master, let's look at the results—who ultimately made it into the underground cavern? Your people or mine?"

His argument was undeniably compelling. After all, the outcome spoke for itself.

This Violet Gold Marquess' plan was clearly the more intelligent one, making the Sea Master's ambush seem utterly crude in comparison. Naturally, the Sea Master wouldn't admit that his plan had been flawed, so he turned his furious glare toward his subordinates.

"What an utter disgrace!" the Sea Master scolded them. "You nearly ruined the Violet Gold Marquess' plan!"

"Esteemed Sea Master..." Squid King hurriedly tried to protest. "I—"

However, the Violet Gold Marquess standing before him exuded a powerful malevolent qi. This Violet Gold Marquess was completely different from when they fought on Misty Island. The attack that injured him had been a pure sword strike containing the Great Dao of Severing the Void!

Earlier, the coral barrier had blocked the Sea Master's vision, so he had only witnessed the coral shattering, not the Severing the Void and Cloud of Determination sword skills that Chu Liang and Xu Ziyang had used.

Nevertheless, Squid King and Tiger Whale had experienced firsthand how formidable Chu Liang's Severing the Void was. They had also seen that the sword he wielded was none other than the Demon-Slaying Sword!

He might as well have had the word "righteousness" carved onto his face!

However, just as Squid King was about to speak, an imperceptible light suddenly descended upon him.

Whoosh.

Chu Liang had stealthily raised one finger and cast the Evil Heart Curse!

As the light entered Squid King, his expression instantly turned malicious, and he looked like he was about to go berserk. There even seemed to be a pair of crimson horns sprouting from his head.

"I'm a disgrace?! Your momma's the fucking disgrace!"

Chapter 745: Scolding (II)

That insult was like a massive stone thrown into a still lake, turning the calm waters into huge waves.

The room fell silent.

The Sea Master had never imagined that this subordinate of his, who had followed him for centuries, would dare speak so audaciously there. He was so taken aback that he could not even think of a response.

Nevertheless, that did not matter because Squid King was not done yet.

"You may look like a human, but your brain's that of a dog! What's even in that head of yours? Is it just mud mixed with your mother's ashes?" Squid King spat out. His eyes turned bloodshot as he continued his tirade. "You know what? Don't call yourself the Sea Master anymore. Change your name to 'Sea Dog'. That suits your level of intelligence way better! You never take responsibility for your own failures; you always blame them on us instead. When exactly are you going to step the fuck up and take responsibility for your failures?! Every damn time your plans fail, you take it out on us. You know, maybe it's because you've never done anything good in your life that we're always plagued by bad luck! Whenever you get us to do something, it always fails. Why don't you just drop dead already..."

The Sea Master took in a deep breath. "Huu..."

His mind was buzzing all throughout Squid King's tirade. He felt lightheaded and needed a moment to recover from that verbal onslaught.

If it had been mindless cursing, the Sea Master would not feel this angry. However, the things Squid King had said were clearly his true feelings that he had suppressed and buried in the depths of his heart over the many years he had worked for the Sea Master. And every single one of them stabbed right into Sea Master's insecurities!

Seeing his subordinate turn into a raging devil, and in front of outsiders no less, the Sea Master could no longer contain his fury.

He struck Squid King with an explosive palm strike.

Wham!

That palm strike was meant to kill. There was no point for the Sea Master to keep a traitorous subordinate. It was better to make an example of him.

Squid King was a seventh-realm Eminent One, but how could he withstand a furious blow from the Sea Master?

Blood spewed from Squid King's mouth as he was sent flying. He crashed into the reinforced walls of the pavilion with a deafening rumble.

Squid King died on the spot.

If the pavilion had not been reinforced, he might have been able to smash through the wall. Then the wall would have absorbed some of the impact from the palm strike, and Squid King might have been able to hang on by a thread.

Unfortunately, the reinforced walls were too sturdy, and Squid King felt the force of the palm strike—all one thousand jun of it.

Of course, that could be credited to the man standing before them, Chu Liang. After all, he was the reason why the Sea Master had reinforced his pavilion in the first place.

Even after killing Squid King, the Sea Master still berated him furiously, "Wretched traitor."

"T-t-this..." Tiger Whale trembled with fear. "Squid King must have gone mad! Something's not right about this. Esteemed Sea Master, you—"

Whoosh!

Another beam of light descended unseen.

Tiger Whale's eyes immediately turned bloodshot. His shadow grew and transformed into a devil with a pair of horns.

"You're someone who eats foul-smelling, rotten fish!"

This insult seemed weak, but it was packed with venom for the Sea Master. He was left utterly dumbfounded once again.

I thought Tiger Whale was about to persuade me to calm down, but it turned out that he was just picking up the baton for another round of verbal assault?!

Before the Sea Master started his cultivation journey, he had lived an extremely miserable life. He barely survived by gathering and eating the rotten fish he found at the edges of the Ruins of Return. That was the darkest period of his life—one that he found incredibly difficult to talk about.

And now, his traumatic past was ruthlessly being used to hurt him.

"If it's not because you're an eighth-realm Eminent One, do you think we would follow you?! We'd have chopped you into 18 pieces and fed you to 36 sharks long ago!" Tiger Whale spat furiously. "Squid King risked his life fighting for you for so many years. All he did was throw out a couple of insults, and you killed him straight away?! Have you ever treated us like actual people? Was he wrong? In all these years, when have you ever acted like a true leader even in the slightest?? Under your rule, the Ruins of Return Cult is bound for destruction! You better sleep with your eyes open

tonight. Because even if I can't kill you, I'll be peeing outside your bedroom door to make sure you slip and fall face-first into it tomorrow morning like a dog eating shit!"

Boom!

Tiger Whale's fiery outburst lasted for just a while before another muffled explosion rang out.

In the blink of an eye, the Sea Master had killed two of the Ruins of Return's generals with his own two hands. He was so enraged that his hands were trembling as he slumped back into his chair, exhaling deeply.

"These two traitorous scum followed me for centuries, yet I never knew they harbored such rebellious thoughts," the Sea Master said, his voice still brimming with fury. "What an embarrassing scene I've let you witness."

Chu Liang replied, "Sea Master, was that really necessary..."

Although Chu Liang had orchestrated this entire mess, he had not expected the Sea Master to be that ruthless. Two seventh-realm Eminent Ones had perished in the blink of an eye.

Even with Chu Liang and Xu Ziyang's combined force, it would be impossible for Chu Liang's group to escape if they did not succeed in deceiving the Sea Master. For Chu Liang, it didn't matter if his clone died. At most, he would just lose some of his equipment. However, that wasn't the case for his friends. What would Xu Ziyang and Lin Bei do then?

"A subordinate who betrays is worse than an enemy," Sea Master stated coldly, without even sparing a glance at the corpses of his subordinates. "If I had let them live and they ended up leaking news of today's events, and Wuchao got wind of it... we would all be doomed."

"Wuchao..." Chu Liang blinked. "Is he truly that powerful?"

"Haaa! If not for him, why would I need to act with such great caution? The Ruins of Return and the South Sea would have become my domain long ago!

"If we had failed to rescue Grand Ancestor Fuyou this time, I would've been in deep trouble. You diabolical cultivators sure are very good at committing bad deeds."

Huh?

Chu Liang, Lin Bei, and Xu Ziyang froze.

We... rescued Grand Ancestor Fuyou?!

The Sea Master called out, "Grand Ancestor, please reveal yourself."

Tiny crystal-like orbs of red light emerged from Lin Bei, Chu Liang, and Xu Ziyang. They were even smaller than a mayfly, looking much like mayfly eggs.

The tiny red orbs multiplied, gathering together until they condensed into the form of an old man.

"I thought I had deceived even the heavens, hohoh."

The old man was none other than Grand Ancestor Fuyou.

He turned around and gazed at Chu Liang, Lin Bei, and Xu Ziyang.

With a smile, Grand Ancestor Fuyou said, "So, you three came specifically to rescue me."

"Uh..." Chu Liang uttered, staring at the old man before him.

He quickly figured out the truth of the situation. It now made sense why Grand Ancestor Fuyou had been so eager to help them leave. This whole time, all he had needed was a host to latch onto, and he could escape. It also explained why Madam Hongyu had been so desperate to keep them on Misty Island.

This old guy's demonic skills are truly insidious.

After a brief pause, Chu Liang beamed and praised, "Grand Ancestor, your divine abilities are indeed incredible."

"Oh, please don't call me Grand Ancestor," Grand Ancestor Fuyou replied humbly with a deep bow. "How can I possibly repay you for freeing me? Perhaps I should kneel and kowtow to you three instead..."

"No, no, no!" Chu Liang, Lin Bei, and Xu Ziyang quickly stopped him, finding this knee-jerk kowtowing habit a bit too much to handle. "That's not necessary, really!"

"But it is, it truly is," Grand Ancestor Fuyou insisted, maintaining his overly polite demeanor.

"..." The Sea Master, who had been watching this scene in utter confusion, finally stood up and spoke. "Grand Ancestor, I am the current leader of the Ruins of Return Cult. I would like to invite you to join forces with me against Wuchao.

"I'm preparing to invite the land demons of the Far West as well. If the two of us combine forces with the land demons, we will definitely be able to overthrow Wuchao. Once we succeed, you and I shall reign over the Divine Ruins of the South Sea. All the sea clans will bow to our command. What do you think?"

Upon hearing the Sea Master's sincere invitation, the ever-so-humble Grand Ancestor Fuyou slowly turned to look at the Sea Master. A cold, piercing glint suddenly flashed in his eyes.

His next words left the Sea Master completely stunned.

Grand Ancestor Fuyou snarled ferociously, "I think you should die!"

Chapter 746: Alliance

"?"

The sudden hostility caused the Sea Master to freeze in place. For a brief moment, this powerhouse that dominated the Ruins of Return in the South Sea felt wronged—a feeling he hadn't felt for a long time.

What day is today? Why is everyone so aggressive?

His subordinates, who had always been very obedient, and this old man, who had been ready to kneel and kowtow just moments ago... Even if a stray dog by the roadside wouldn't get kicked by everyone it met.

"Grand Ancestor Fuyou, Sea Master, let's talk this through," Chu Liang interjected to mediate.

The Sea Master cast a glance at Chu Liang, and for a fleeting moment, he actually thought, The Violet Gold Marquess isn't so bad after all.

Then he turned back to Grand Ancestor Fuyou and asked, "Grand Ancestor, why did you say that?"

"Hmph!" Grand Ancestor Fuyou flicked his sleeve, brimming with anger.

"I have been trapped under Misty Island for two thousand years. Two. Thousand. Years!" exclaimed the Grand Ancestor Fuyou. "Do you have any idea what those two thousand years were like?"

"..."

Seeing the eldest and most powerful Eminent One in the room fly into a rage, no one dared to speak. They simply listened in silence.

Grand Ancestor Fuyou continued, "Every day, I reflected on why I had ended up like this. And at last, I understood—I cultivated the Great Dao of Reincarnation, yet I never respected life. I took far too many lives. The heavens made me endure this tribulation for one reason—to teach me to abandon my wicked ways and return to the path of righteousness."

He glared at the Sea Master with righteous indignation and said, "And now you want me to join you in your wickedness...? Let me tell you this—I will never kill again. From now on, I will devote myself to good deeds, accumulate virtue, and peacefully live out the rest of my days."

So it turned out that this guy hadn't just been pretending to be polite to escape. He genuinely wanted to turn over a new leaf.

"Grand Ancestor!" the Sea Master exclaimed. He then fell silent for a moment before speaking firmly. Let me ask you just one thing. You say you want to abandon your wicked ways and return to the path of righteousness, but do you think Wuchao will believe you?"

"Whether he believes me or not, what does that have to do with me?" Grand Ancestor Fuyou said indifferently. "I will leave the Ruins of Return and roam the four seas. Is he going to come after me?"

The Sea Master shook his head. "Even if you hold no intention of revenge, do you think it will be possible that he will believe that you bear no resentment at all? And ask yourself this. If there came a day in which you made progress in your cultivation, can you truly say that you won't harbor even the slightest desire for vengeance?"

Grand Ancestor Fuyou replied resolutely, "I won't."

The Sea Master then said, "And yet, I ask again—will Wuchao believe you?"

This time, it was Grand Ancestor Fuyou who fell silent.

The Sea Master continued, "For countless years, many great and powerful existences have been defeated by Wuchao and not a single one of them escaped with their life. You were the only one and you only survived because he couldn't kill you. Even so, he arranged for you to be struck by the divine lightning in the Misty Island every night. With his personality, he will never rest easy until you are dead. Even if you flee to the ends of the earth, he will stop at nothing to hunt you down."

As the Sea Master spoke, he raised his voice. "Grand Ancestor, trust me. Killing Wuchao is the only path forward for us in the Ruins of Return and for you as well! Even if you have no intention of fighting for power, this is the only way you can have the chance to escape and roam the world freely."

Grand Ancestor Fuyou let out a sigh. "You have great cultivation power and even greater ambition. But challenging Wuchao at your level is nothing more than a fool's dream. For two thousand years, the strikes of divine lightning have steadily eroded my cultivation power. I no longer possess even a tenth of my former power. Even if we joined forces, victory would still be beyond our reach."

The Sea Master spoke slowly. "Grand Ancestor, you need not worry. Our chances of victory are not entirely zero. To defeat such a powerful enemy, we must unite every force available. Wuchao may be powerful, but if I summon the great Demon Kings of the Far West, will he be able to withstand them?"

"What if I ask the Celestial Master from the Celestial Charm Sect to join this fight as well? Even with all his mystic arts, Wuchao won't be able to withstand all that."

"And even if he commands the sea demons to fight with him, what if I enlist Xuan Yinzi, Violet Gold Marquess, and a host of diabolical cultivators? How can he possibly win then?"

...

Seeing that Grand Ancestor Fuyou's resolve seemed to waver, Chu Liang wanted to advise him against this, but with the Sea Master present, he couldn't speak freely.

As for who was stronger between Grand Ancestor Fuyou and Sea Master, it was hard to say. Even if the Grand Ancestor Fuyou had once been able to fight against Wuchao, he had been greatly weakened over time and he was no longer the same as before.

Moreover, as Chu Liang listened to the Sea Master, he suddenly had an idea.

The Demon Kings of the Far West? The evildoers of the Celestial Charm Sect? These evildoers have always been in hiding, making it really hard to eliminate them all at once. If they can all be lured out and wiped out in one fell swoop, wouldn't this be a heaven-sent opportunity? Perhaps there is no need to stop the Sea Master's scheme just yet.

As Chu Liang thought of this, he immediately exclaimed, "The Sea Master is right! If we must risk our lives to drag Wuchao down, then so be it! Our Dark King Sect may be small and lacking in eighth-realm Eminent Ones, but we will throw everything we have into this fight for our allies! Even if Grand Ancestor Fuyou chooses not to act, we can work with the allies in the Far West and Celestial Charm Sect to stir up a storm in the Ruins of Return!"

Hearing that, Lin Bei got fired up as well. He burst into hearty laughter. "Heheheh! Exactly! The reason evil always seems to be suppressed by righteousness is because those so-called righteous sects stand united! The Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten gang up on us time and time again, crushing us beneath their so-called justice!

"It's about time we, the oppressed demons and diabolical cultivators of the world, band together and carve out our own path! And we'll start right here, in the Ruins of Return! Let them witness firsthand how a single spark can set the entire land ablaze!

"Cheers to the Invincible sea demons! And long live the diabolical sects!"

Hearing Lin Bei's impassioned speech, Xu Ziyang and Chu Liang couldn't help but exchange glances.

It doesn't seem like he's acting...

Upon seeing how Lin Bei was behaving, the Sea Master felt deeply moved and thought to himself, Gotta give it to these human diabolical cultivators. Even in doing evil, they do it with intellectual sophistication. No wonder they were able to rescue GrandAncestor Fuyou.

As the Sea Master thought of his two useless subordinates, he was filled with anger.

Without hesitation, he gave a firm nod. "This is the day that we form the alliance of the demons and human evildoers! I swear that you three from the Dark King Sect will always be the most steadfast allies of the Ruins of Return Cult!"

Lin Bei exclaimed in response, "We're all brothers here!"

Their passionate speeches nearly led to a blood pact on the spot.

Perhaps moved by the intense atmosphere, Grand Ancestor Fuyou, who had remained silent at the side for a while, suddenly spoke. "Since the young men who freed me have allied with you, very well. I will assist you this once. But let me be clear. I will only help you deal with Wuchao. I will not kill him with my own hands."

...

While an alliance was being formed in the Ruins of Return in the South Sea, another Chu Liang suddenly opened his eyes in a private chamber atop Mount Shu.

The chamber was lined with intricate enchanted formation patterns, and countless Spiritual Qi Jade Talismans were stacked around it, half of which had already been depleted.

Maintaining a clone created through External Manifestation for everyday activities wasn't difficult, but sustaining it in long-range combat for an extended period consumed an immense amount of spiritual energy. Even powerful eighth-realm cultivators would appear in their true form when fighting at full strength.

A clone created through External Manifestation would not be able to cultivate. Otherwise, it would be just like a Large-Headed Doll. All of its spiritual energy was supplied directly by the true form, and when the distance between them became too great, the energy loss during the transmission would double. Sometimes, the energy lost would be even greater than the energy needed to keep the clone present.

Thus, Chu Liang adopted Chu Yi's method. He kept his true form hidden within an enchanted formation, continuing his cultivation while rapidly replenishing his spiritual energy using Spiritual Qi Jade Talismans. This way, no matter how much energy his clone expended in the outside world, he would always have a steady supply to sustain it.

This was an expensive method that most seventh-realm cultivators couldn't afford, but for Chu Liang, the money spent was like a drop in the ocean.

However, at this moment, his true form could no longer remain silent. Transforming into a gust of wind, he flew straight to Jade Sword Peak and urgently knocked on Wang Xuanling's door. "Grand Peak Master!"

"Chu Liang?" Wang Xuanling opened the door, saw him, and immediately gestured for him to come in. "What's the matter?"

Chu Liang looked at him gravely and said, "The time has come for you to act."

Chapter 747: All the Good Fighters Are Women

After hearing Chu Liang explain everything that had happened, Wang Xuanling's brows immediately furrowed as he grasped the gravity of the situation.

"Grand Ancestor Fuyou?" Wang Xuanling spoke at a measured pace. "The best course of action would be to get Ziyang and Lin Bei out of there first. Your clone should also leave as soon as an opportunity presents itself. Once that's done, we can inform Grand Ancestor Wuchao and launch a coordinated attack to destroy the Ruins of Return Cult and kill Grand Ancestor Fuyou. That would be the safest approach."

"Grand Peak Master, I have another idea," Chu Liang responded, voicing his objection. "Why don't we turn their plans to our advantage?"

"Oh?" Wang Xuanling asked with genuine curiosity. "What do you propose?"

Had it been any other young disciple, Wang Xuanling would not have shown such humility in seeking their opinion.

Despite Chu Liang's junior status, it would not be an exaggeration to call him the master of the Red Cotton Peak. Although he might only hold a ten-year lease of the Red Cotton Peak, there was no way that the Mount Shu Sect would reclaim the Red Cotton Peak by the end of the lease. At most, they might ask him to pay a small renewal fee to maintain the current arrangement.

After all, no one could generate as much benefit for Mount Shu with Red Cotton Peak as he could.

For the past six years, the sect's higher-ups had already begun treating him differently from the other disciples. He was no longer seen as just a promising junior but as an equal. This was the respect he had earned through his achievements.

With gleaming eyes, Chu Liang said, "If the Sea Master intends to gather forces to overthrow Wuchao, he will need to recruit beings at least at the eighth realm—figures such as the Demon Kings of the Far West, the Celestial Master of the Celestial Charm Sect, or members of the Diabolical Forces of the West Sea."

He continued, "These eighth-realm existences rarely reveal themselves, and even when they do, they often show up as clones. But if it's for a full-scale battle, they might appear in person. Wouldn't this be the perfect opportunity to wipe them out in one fell swoop?"

Wang Xuanling fell into deep thought. "If we were to do that..."

The reason he hadn't considered such an approach lay in the natural constraints of his mindset. For most cultivators, the idea of slaying an eighth-realm existence was simply an impossible feat not even worth contemplating.

Without a legendary artifact, it would be extremely difficult to kill a master of Heavenly Origin and this was an undisputed truth.

Di Nufeng had only managed to slay the Demon King of the Great Marshlands because the Chrono Wheel of the East Sea had been used to deal a devastating blow first. It was that devastating blow that had made it possible for Di Nufeng to make the grand feat of delivering the final strike and stealing that kill.

If Xuan Yinzi, who had previously fallen from the eighth realm, were to be counted as a master of Heavenly Origin, then Di Nufeng would have the achievement of killing two masters of Heavenly Origin while at the seventh realm. Having this kind of luck alone was enough for her to be recorded in history books.

However, the Mount Shu Sect did not have a legendary artifact and it would not be possible for the sects in the Divine Nine to travel all the way to the South Sea with their legendary artifacts again. After all, it had not been long since the tragedy at the Buddhist Cloud Monastery had occurred.

Chu Liang roughly figured out what Wang Xuanling was thinking. He said, "It is indeed difficult for us to obtain a legendary artifact, but with Esteemed Seniors Baize and Wuchao, two masters of the Heavenly Origin, we might still accomplish something. It is usually hard to track these evildoers down and this is a rare opportunity. Even if it is difficult, we should still try."

Wang Xuanling pondered briefly but did not object to this.

Just as Chu Liang said, they could only try to see if they could kill them. Luring those elusive and cunning evildoers out was not easy to do on a normal day.

Wang Xuanling was never one to shrink from a challenge. He nodded immediately. "Alright! Come with me to report this to our sect leader. He cannot act recklessly, but we still have Daoist Yan and Noble Baize on Mount Shu, and they are already a formidable force."

With that, the two of them headed straight for Boundless Palace.

Venerable Wen Yuan listened to the plan and smiled at Chu Liang. "You always manage to come up with something new."

Then, he smacked the table and announced, "It's decided! I will summon Baize and Yan Zi immediately. We will take this opportunity to weaken and eradicate the evildoers. I will personally write a letter to Grand Ancestor Wuchao, and additionally... I will send a letter to the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner to request for reinforcements."

As he thought about it, he had already figured out the forces that he could mobilize.

In order to save Chu Liang last time, they had incurred favors from several sects of immortality, which they had yet to repay. Now was not a good time to request for more reinforcements from

other sects. Although slaying these monsters and defending the Dao was the duty of cultivators, whether others were willing to take part in this risky endeavor was another matter.

However, the imperial court held a different kind of power. When it came to eradicating evildoers, they held an even greater responsibility than the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. Moreover, the Celestial Charm Sect had already stirred chaos in the imperial palace and what they did absolutely enraged the imperial family. If there was a chance to kill the Celestial Master of the Celestial Charm Sect outside of the nine provinces, the Imperial Supervisory Bureau would never let this chance slip away.

As Venerable Wen Yuan waved his brush through the air, golden characters imprinted themselves onto the jade slip. Just as he finished writing the two letters, Daoist Yan and Baize arrived.

Unexpectedly, they weren't the only ones.

"Why did Venerable Wen Yuan call Yan Zi here in such a mysterious manner? What good things behold us?" Di Nufeng said as she pushed open the door dramatically. She was the first to enter and casually greeted everyone in the room one after the other. "Eh? My disciple is here too? And old man Wang—you are still alive?"

"..." Wang Xuanling's expression darkened upon seeing her again. He wanted to retort, but ultimately couldn't be bothered, settling instead for a roll of his eyes.

There was a time when he could overpower her with his position as the grand peak master. However, ever since Di Nufeng killed the Demon King of the Great Marshlands and circled Mount Shu forty-two and a half times, Wang Xuanling could no longer muster the confidence to act tough around her.

"Oh, Ah Feng, you're here too?" Wen Yuan chuckled. "This mission isn't suited for you. Why not stay and guard Mount Shu with me? It's just as important."

"Oh, come on. Isn't it just a fight? What's so unsuitable about it?" Di Nufeng pointed out bluntly. Even when facing Venerable Wen Yuan, she showed no courtesy.

"This isn't just a fight. We have to pretend to be villains. Can you handle that?" Wang Xuanling interjected from the side.

"Heh." Di Nufeng sneered. "If it were anything else, maybe not. But playing a villain?"

She turned to glance at Chu Liang, brimming with confidence. "Tell him, my dear disciple. Do I even need to act? Look around. Everyone, do I even need to pretend?"

"Not really, no..." Chu Liang nodded, though he didn't dare to finish the second half of his sentence. But you don't have to be so proud of this, do you?

...

The next morning.

Inside the loft of the Ruins of Return Cult, the Sea Master led his subordinates in a grand welcome for "Xuan Yinzi" from Mount Shu.

Wang Xuanling, dressed in the same Aura-Concealing Robe as before, strode forward with an imposing presence. Behind him followed three tall and slender figures, also clad in Aura-Concealing Robes. Their hoods obscured their faces, leaving only deep shadows visible.

Thanks to Chu Liang's promotion, the people of Mount Shu had grown increasingly adept at using the Aura-Concealing Robes.

The Sea Master stepped forward with a broad smile and greeted Wang Xuanling with great enthusiasm, "Oh my, Sect Leader Xuan Yinzi! I haven't seen you for a long time and I've missed you dearly!"

Wang Xuanling couldn't help but feel puzzled. The last time he interacted with the Sea Master, they barely spoke so why was he acting so familiar now?

However, Wang Xuanling soon figured out why.

The Sea Master gestured to the people behind him and said, "Yesterday, I had a great time with these subordinates of yours. If we weren't generations apart, I would have sworn brotherhood with them. Since you are their guide, you must also be a kindred spirit of mine."

Wang Xuanling glanced over and saw Chu Liang and Lin Bei, both experts in cultivating connections, standing over there. In an instant, he understood why the Sea Master was behaving this way.

He smiled slightly and replied, "Naturally. If Sea Master has any requests, we will gladly comply."

The Sea Master turned his gaze to the people behind Wang Xuanling and asked, "And who might these be?"

Given the unusual circumstances and the looming threat of a Wuchao attack, the Sea Master maintained a certain level of vigilance toward strangers.

Wang Xuanling said with a wave of his hand, "I just recently recruited these subordinates."

At his gesture, the three simultaneously lifted their veils.

Baize, Daoist Yan, and Di Nufeng revealed their faces—two cool and detached, while the other was radiant and striking.

Seeing this, the Sea Master couldn't help but chuckle.

"Heh." He turned his head and looked mischievously at Xuan Yinzi. "Why are they all women?"

Wang Xuanling sighed inwardly.

Yeah... I just brought along the strongest fighters from Mount Shu, excluding our sect leader.

Why are all of them women?

Chapter 748: Composure and Politeness

Seeing his esteemed teacher's embarrassed expression, Lin Bei, the good disciple of Jade Sword Peak, strode forward in quick steps and let out a hearty laugh, "Heheheh!"

He said with a mischievous grin, "Sea Master, please forgive him. Our sect leader has been trapped and sealed away in solitude for a long time. Now that he's finally free, it's only natural that he'd seek the company of a few female attendants..."

Hearing this, the Sea Master chuckled, "Hahaha."

He didn't suspect a thing. Instead, he looked over at Grand Ancestor Fuyou and asked, "Since we are on this topic, Grand Ancestor, do you need any...?"

Grand Ancestor Fuyou, who was standing at the back, quickly waved his hand dismissively and laughed as he said, "I appreciate the concern, but after two thousand years, I no longer have such worldly desires."

Well, isn't that great...

Everyone present gave him a thumbs-up.

It made sense. Abstaining for a dozen years might drive a person crazy, but abstaining for two thousand years? Even if one didn't become a saint, they'd be close enough to one.

"Everyone, take your seats! Once we're all gathered, we shall swear the alliance oath!" the Sea Master declared enthusiastically, gesturing for the guests to sit.

However, Grand Ancestor Fuyou said, "I won't be participating in this. Just summon me when it's time to fight."

The old man had no interest in this so-called Alliance of the Evil Factions. He was only here to put an end to Wuchao's pursuit and resolve the issue once and for all. With that, he turned and headed to the third floor to rest.

Wang Xuanling, Baize, Daoist Yan, and Di Nufeng took their seats.

The three women pulled their hoods back over their heads, likely to keep their faces hidden as they engaged in rather nefarious dealings.

The Sea Master had no objections, having already inspected them.

Chu Liang, Lin Bei, and Xu Ziyang followed suit, taking seats below them.

Looking at the scene before him, Lin Bei whispered to Chu Liang, "Damn, if I didn't know better, I'd think we were in Mount Shu."

Chu Liang nodded. "Agreed."

The Sea Master's other subordinates were not qualified to sit, so they moved about the hall as attendants and served the guests. With Grand Ancestor Fuyou gone, the Sea Master was now the only outsider among the group of people present.

Even though this was the Ruins of Return Cult, it almost seemed like if anyone should be leaving, it should be the Sea Master.

Shortly after everyone settled in, Chu Liang rose to his feet. "I have some matters to discuss with the Grand Ancestor Fuyou. Please excuse me."

This had been prearranged. He was simply too recognizable. At this point, it was no longer safe for him to remain exposed. If any of the demons or the members of the Celestial Charm Sect spotted him, they would likely attack him on the spot.

If these two factions arrived one after the other, one of them might become suspicious.

By leaving early, it could buy a bit more time.

However, the first one to arrive was not the leader of the Celestial Charm Sect or demons of the Far West.

Before long, an announcement came from outside the door.

"Sect Leader Yuan of the West Sea Diabolical Forces has arrived!"

The Sea Master rose again to greet him, "Oh my, Sect Leader Yuan! I haven't seen you for a long time, and I've missed you dearly!"

Immortal Yuan Lu still looked cold, ruthless, and expressionless as usual.

"Sea Master," he said as he cupped his hand in greeting before taking a seat. His gaze swept over Wang Xuanling, and he nodded. "Esteemed Senior Xuan Yinzi."

The West Sea Diabolical Forces and the Dark King Sect had a longstanding enmity. However, they shared a common enemy with Xuan Yinzi, the legitimate leader of the Dark King Sect who had been kicked out of the sect. As a result, they formed an amicable relationship.

"I heard that Lin Poyun of the Dark King Sect, along with several hall masters, suffered a crushing defeat at Mount Shu. It was Chu Liang who wielded the Violet and Azure Twin Swords and forced them to retreat. Was this the doing of the Violet Gold Marquess?" Immortal Yuan Lu asked.

Others might have doubted Chu Liang's identity as the Violet Gold Marquess, but since Immortal Yuan Lu was one of the earliest to "discover" the truth and he had not seen Chu Liang since the discovery, he had no reason to feel skeptical.

Wang Xuanling chuckled. He had been informed of how to respond beforehand. "If not for my informant within Lin Poyun's ranks, how else would Mount Shu have been prepared for this?"

"As expected," Immortal Yuan Lu said with a nod. "I've been in closed-door cultivation for days, but I came out this time because of the summons. Just tell me what you need me to do."

"Sect Leader Yuan, I have invited you to form this alliance with us to fight against Grand Ancestor Wuchao of the South Sea," the Sea Master said. "I have informed you of all the details in the letter I sent you."

"Mhm." Immortal Yuan Lu replied. "I don't care who you want me to deal with. I have only one condition—help me kill my sworn enemy. Unless this person is dead, the West Sea Diabolical Forces will never know peace."

"Who?" asked the Sea Master.

Gritting his teeth, Immortal Yuan Lu uttered, "Daoist Yan of Mount Shu!"

Sensing that the situation wouldn't be as simple as it seemed, one of the black-robed figures sitting opposite raised her head softly.

Meanwhile, another black-robed figure suddenly slammed the table with a loud bang, as if overwhelmed with fury.

"What are you doing?" Wang Xuanling scolded.

The one who had slammed the table was none other than Di Nufeng. Upon hearing that the target was Daoist Yan, her reaction was even more intense than Yan Zi's.

Hearing Wang Xuanling's scolding, Di Nufeng quickly realized this wasn't the time to act rashly. After a brief pause, she raised her voice and declared, "I just remembered something that made me angry... The Violet Gold Marquess still owes me money! I'm going to settle the debt with him!"

With that, she strode upstairs, leaving the room.

Wang Xuanling quickly turned back with an apologetic smile. "My apologies. I failed to discipline her."

...

Gurgle.

Within the Ruins of Return, deep in the ink-black seas, the ancient-looking Grand Ancestor Wuchao stood still, hands clasped behind his back.

Behind him, a thick, jet-black tentacle coiled around a diamond-shaped piece of crystallized crimson coral. Inside the crystallized coral, the faint silhouette of a woman could be seen. The tentacle pulsed with dark light, continuously infusing spiritual qi into the coral.

Gurgle, gurgle.

No one knew how long the infusion of this light went on, but eventually, the figure within the coral opened her eyes.

With a surge of power, the tentacle tightened its grip. A sharp crack echoed through the depths as the crimson coral shattered into countless fragments. The woman's figure tumbled to the ground, her body trembling weakly. She lifted her gaze and murmured, "Lord Wuchao, was it you who saved me?"

This woman was none other than Madam Hongyu.

"Of course." Grand Ancestor Wuchao looked at her with murky yet kind eyes. "Who struck you down with such force? You nearly died. If I hadn't kept your lifebound jade, even this last trace of your soul might not have survived."

Madam Hongyu pondered and struggled as she thought back to what had happened. After awhile, she said, "I... don't know... The attacker was a powerful existence at the eighth realm and I could not even fight back."

"A master of the Heavenly Origin?" Grand Ancestor Wuchao muttered as he closed his eyes.

Madam Hongyu added, "Before that even happened, two seventh-realm existences attacked the Misty Island. Their goal was...to save Grand Ancestor Fuyou!"

"I can take a guess at who's behind this..." Grand Ancestor Wuchao said slowly. "In the Ruins of Return, there's only one faction capable of pulling this off. I may be old... but I'm not dead yet. And yet... he already wants to take charge? A little too impatient, don't you think?"

As Madam Hongyu stared at Grand Ancestor Wuchao, she gradually felt a sense of calmness.

Over the years, more than a few eighth-realm cultivators had sought to wreak havoc in the Ruins of Return. Yet, the moment the seemingly decrepit Grand Ancestor Wuchao intervened, every last one of them was crushed without exception.

He represented the highest authority in the Ruins of Return.

As Grand Ancestor Wuchao's gaze shifted toward the distant horizon, a dazzling swordlight tore through the air, streaking toward them like a meteor.

Whoosh!

The swordlight tore through the sky at incredible speed, leaving behind a blurred afterimage as it came to an abrupt halt right before them. The moment it touched the ground, the light dissipated, revealing a figure bathed in a faint golden glow.

It was an elderly man, much like Grand Ancestor Wuchao, but unlike him, he carried an air of refined elegance, his features clear and dignified, with eyes that shone with piercing clarity.

"The Dao Master of Tai'a?" Grand Ancestor Wuchao immediately recognized the figure before him. "To what do I owe the honor of your visit to this humble corner of the Ruins of Return? Please, enlighten me."

The man cupped his hands in greeting and replied, "I am Qi Yingxuan. I have long heard of your great name, Grand Ancestor Wuchao. Today, I have come to pay my respects and discuss an important matter."

The figure who had emerged from the swordlight was none other than the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner of the Yu Dynasty, a high-ranking official overseeing the nine provinces.

...

"Old geezer, I heard you were a notorious villain back in the day. Where did you used to roam?" Di Nufeng said as she tilted her head and gave Grand Ancestor Fuyou a scrutinizing glance.

When she went upstairs to look for Chu Liang, she saw him chatting with Grand Ancestor Fuyou and decided to join the conversation.

"Oh no, not at all," Grand Ancestor Fuyou waved his hands hastily. "There is no such thing as ruling. I had my reckless years when I was young, but I swore a long time ago to put all that behind me."

"I was asking you where you used to roam. What bullshit are you saying?" Di Nufeng said as she furrowed her brows. "They say the older one gets in the martial world, the more their courage fades. Looks like you've just about lost yours completely."

"Yes, yes, you're absolutely right, young lady." Grand Ancestor Fuyou nodded again and again. "I truly lack the boldness of my youth. But if you're asking where I once roamed, I'll tell you the truth. I was born in the Ruins of Return and have never set foot outside of it."

"Seriously? All that rambling just to say that?" Di Nufeng snapped. "Could've just gotten straight to the point."

"Yes, yes, I was wrong." Grand Ancestor Fuyou admitted quickly. "If I've wasted your time, I really don't know how to make up for it... How about I kneel and give you a proper bow?"

Chu Liang muttered inwardly, Good lord.

He stepped in at once, stopping Grand Ancestor Fuyou before he could kneel and shouting, "Hey, hey—whoa!"

He then leaned over to Di Nufeng and muttered, "The old guy's finally abandoning the evil ways and being righteous. Let's not bully him."

The interaction between Di Nufeng and Grand Ancestor Fuyou felt like the ultimate showdown of composure and politeness. If this conversation dragged on any longer, he was genuinely worried that Grand Ancestor Fuyou would be pushed to the brink and transform back into a devil out of sheer frustration. Even the kindest soul had their limits!

As he was thinking this, a voice from downstairs suddenly announced, "The Celestial Master of the Celestial Charm Sect has arrived!"

Chapter 749: Look Behind Me

Three figures with deep and powerful auras stepped into the pavilion, prompting the Sea Master to rise immediately in greeting.

"Celestial Master!"

"Sea Master!"

The elder on the left wore a coarse linen robe. His hair and beard were completely white, and his face was deeply lined with age. Nevertheless, his eyes gleamed with warm divine light, and his smile was full of kindness.

On the right stood a burly man with a fierce and sinister appearance. He had narrow piercing eyes, a sharp, hooked nose, and tightly furrowed brows. It was the kind of look that would make a child stop crying at first glance. A pair of black-gold wings were folded neatly behind him, shrouded in swirling black flames.

This burly man walked right next to the elderly man, but another figure followed slightly behind. It was a middle-aged man who looked like he had been through a lot. He was giving off this lazy demeanor and seemed very impatient and annoyed.

This was someone that the Sea Master was actually familiar with. It was Huo Tianya, an important member of the Celestial Charm Sect, and he had always been the person of contact for the Ruins of Return.

"This is..." the Sea Master said hesitantly, glancing at the burly man with a pair of black wings. He could tell that the man possessed formidable cultivation and dared not show even the slightest sign of disrespect.

"Just call me the Wing Master," the burly man simply responded.

Upon hearing this, the Sea Master looked surprised. "Oh? Could you be the Black Golden Crow, the Demon King of the Desolate Plains, also known as the Wing Master?"

"Indeed," the Celestial Master said with a smile. "I made a special trip to the Far West to convince the Demon King of the Desolate Plains to join our ranks."

The name of the Black Golden Crow was rarely mentioned in the four seas and nine provinces these days. However, in the era when the Sea Master grew up, it was a name that once shook the world.

Back then, he was one of the Four Great Generals under the Demon God, slaying countless powerful cultivators in his youth and making a name for himself. But after the Demon God fell, the land demons were driven to the Far West, and of the Four Great Generals, only one remained.

Of the six great demon kings ruling over the Mountain Range of the Seven Kings now, he was widely acknowledged as the strongest. Back when several major immortal sects laid siege to the Mountain Range of the Seven Kings, the Demon King of the Desolate Plains only made one move, but that move contained terrifying power.

For the Sea Master, the feats of a greater demon like that were things he had only heard of as legends when he was growing up.

The Black Golden Crow raised his hand slightly and smiled proudly, as if telling them there was no need for such formality.

The Sea Master regarded the Celestial Master of the Celestial Charm Sect as an equal, but in the presence of this legendary demon, he instinctively took half a step back and respectfully gestured for him to take the lead.

The Black Golden Crow did not stand on ceremony. He simply strode forward and took his seat as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Seeing that the Celestial Master, the Sea Master, and the Wing Master were all together now, Wang Xuanling nodded to himself.

Chu Liang's plan of baiting them all together was currently going smoothly. As of now, even the big fish had taken the bait and it was time to reel them in.

Wang Xuanling gripped the Circle of Immortal Friends Token in his sleeve and sent a message out.

This token contained a soul formation designed specifically for this operation, linking only the select few involved. As a result, the message Wang Xuanling sent did not leave the hidden realm but was transmitted solely between the tokens within the Ruins of Return.

"It truly fills me with joy to have so many demons and diabolical members here together," the Sea Master said as he laughed. "With great figures like the Demon King of the Desolate Plains and Grand Ancestor Fuyou among us, I should hardly be the one to speak first. However, as the host representing the Divine Cult of the Ruins of Return, I shall fulfill my duty.

"For years, the imperial court of the human world and the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten had suppressed us demons as well as the diabolical cultivators. Today, we stand together to

form an alliance and overthrow those self-proclaimed righteous forces! We shall unite and carve out a new world!"

"Well said, Sea Master!" Lin Bei was the first to chime in. "A new world! A new world!"

Though Lin Bei was much weaker than everyone else here, his ability to hype up a crowd was unmatched. Naturally, none of the major figures would lower themselves to shouting slogans, so his enthusiastic response ensured Sea Master's words didn't fall flat.

The Celestial Master of the Celestial Charm Sect spoke at just the right moment, "The world can exist because many Daos coexist. But now, the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten enforce only their own and deny ours. That is not very reasonable."

"Unreasonable! Unreasonable!" Lin Bei shouted again.

Meanwhile, Wang Xuanling and Xu Ziyang quietly lowered their heads into their black robes, as if hoping that they wouldn't be associated with Lin Bei. As members of the Dark King Sect, it was only natural for them to be a little more withdrawn...

Up in the third-floor room, Di Nufeng leaned against the window and listened to the speeches outside. Feeling increasingly agitated, she commented, "Hearing all this is making me excited."

Both Chu Liang and Grand Ancestor Fuyou turned to look at her in confusion.

Chu Liang said inwardly, Esteem Teacher, please don't forget your mission. We're here as undercover agents.

Please don't get so caught up in the moment that you actually go down there and swear an oath of brotherhood to overthrow the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten...

Then again, you've probably had that idea for a while now.

But please, for the love of everything, take a good look. The Celestial Master is among them. That man is a great enemy that indirectly gave you life.[1]

...Wait a minute.

Now that I think about it, why does everything sound reasonable?

Di Nufeng noticed their gazes. She ignored Chu Liang but cast a glare at the well-behaved Grand Ancestor Fuyou. "What are you looking at?"

"I..." Grand Ancestor Fuyou answered timidly, "Young lady, I was not looking at you. I am looking in that direction because I can sense that... Wuchao is here."

...

Rumble!

A pitch-black storm erupted without warning, sweeping through the Ruins of Return like an unstoppable force. Wherever it passed, darkness reigned, shrouding the heavens and devouring everything in its wake.

It was as if an endless tide of black ink had spilled into the ocean, spreading relentlessly and swallowing everything in its path as it advanced toward the pavilion. Against this boundless darkness, the once-sturdy pavilion now seemed fragile and insignificant.

There were many powerful figures in the pavilion. The moment Grand Ancestor Fuyou sensed Wuchao's presence, the others felt it too—a terrifying and oppressive force, like a black cloud looming over an entire city.

The Demon King of the Desolate Plains, the Black Golden Crow, was the first to rise. His gaze sharpened as he looked into the distance and spoke in a deep voice. "He's on the brink of ascension."

"Grand Ancestor Wuchao has been lying low in the Ruins of Return all these years because he has been waiting for this opportunistic encounter of Dao," the Celestial Master said with a relaxed smile as he sat firmly on his seat. "If he were easy to deal with, the Sea Master wouldn't have needed to gather so many people."

"Indeed!" the Sea Master stood up and declared loudly, "I will head out first to welcome him. The rest of you, stay hidden. When the time comes, we will all strike with full force! Today, we will make sure that he will never return to where he came from!"

Lin Bei instinctively started chanting, "Never return! Never return!"

Borrowing the courage of those behind him, the Sea Master soared forward, facing the boundless ink-black sea head-on.

He snorted forcefully and thought, No matter what, I am still a master of the Heavenly Origin.

As he thought of this, his presence became stronger and almost on par with that of Wuchao.

Throwing his head back, he let out a resounding laugh, "Hahahahaha! Grand Ancestor Wuchao, welcome! It is truly an honor to have you visit me. Forgive me for not giving you a proper welcome."

From the inky sea, a pitch-black tentacle emerged, twisting and shifting before morphing into the upper body of an elderly man. It was indeed the ancient and murky-eyed Grand Ancestor Wuchao.

Grand Ancestor Wuchao chuckled and said slowly, "Heh, I was the one who approved of you leading the Ruins of Return Cult back then. Turns out, I misjudged you. I thought you had ambition and sharpness... but I never expected you to want to drag all the sea demons down with you."

"Grand Ancestor, what are you saying?" the Sea Master yelled. "Everything that I do is for the Ruins of Return. Even if I have made mistakes, you should not doubt the intention and how it all started.

"You released Fuyou, that devil who killed countless of our fellow sea demons, for the sake of the Ruins of Return?" Grand Ancestor Wuchao asked.

"Grand Ancestor..." the Sea Master said, his expression darkening and his gaze turning icy. "What we sea demons truly need is a leader with ambition—not one who hides away in the Ruins of Return."

Grand Ancestor Wuchao laughed again. "Hah. You do have ambition, and you might be just the person to lead the sea demons. However, are you truly qualified to say that?"

"Whether I'm qualified or not, you'll understand once you see who stands behind me! Come out!" Sea Master declared, suddenly spreading his arms wide.

But silence followed.

His voice echoed through the pavilion, yet the silence remained. The heavy restrictions he had put in place were meant to block any aura from escaping. While those outside wouldn't be able to hear a sound from within, those inside should have heard his call loud and clear.

After a brief pause, Grand Ancestor Wuchao let out a doubtful murmur, "Hmm?"

"Ahem!" the Sea Master cleared his throat. "The time has come, my allies! Today, we will carve out a new world!"

A heavy silence followed. The Ruins of Return was drowned in silence tonight. Even that Dark King Sect disciple who would always cheer was nowhere to be found.

The Sea Master felt this wave of awkwardness. He turned back and raised a hand at Wuchao while saying, "Hold on a moment, let me go check what's going on."

"Heh." This time, Wuchao actually laughed. With that chuckle, a sharp brilliance suddenly burst forth from his murky, aged eyes.

Do you really think I'd let you go back and call for reinforcements at a time like this? Do you think I cultivate the Great Dao of Politeness?!

As the beams of light shot out, the endless ink-black sea roared to life, surging wildly as it rushed toward the Sea Master in an instant. It was like a monstrous abyss finally opening its gaping maw to swallow the heavens and earth whole!

Rumble!

Chapter 750: Give your Brother A Hand

As soon as the Sea Master left, chaos erupted within the pavilion.

The Celestial Master turned his gaze at Lin Bei—the most exposed among the veiled disciples of the Dark King Sect and someone he had never met before. He suddenly remarked, "Young man, with your thick brows and bright eyes, you look as if you're brimming with righteous qi."

"Hehehe! Celestial Master..." Lin Bei was about to humbly express his gratitude, ready to claim he was merely three times as handsome as Yang Shenlong. But before the words left his lips, he suddenly recalled that he was now a disciple of a diabolical sect. His expression stiffened, and he immediately questioned, "What's with the sudden insult?"

The Celestial Master merely chuckled. "I am not that talented, but I do have some skill in predicting the fate of people by looking at their faces."

His smile remained as he continued, "Judging by your features, you were meant to walk the righteous path and be the disciple of an immortal sect in the first half of your life. In the later half of your life, you would own a brothel or a restaurant. You were never meant for the diabolical path. Instead, you would live a long life as a good-hearted man."

"For real...?"

Lin Bei nearly broke into a grin. The life that the Celestial Master had described was, after all, his lifelong dream! It was a pleasant surprise to know that his dream would come true.

However, in the next instant, he snapped back to reality and quickly replaced his smile with a scowl. "Utter nonsense! Celestial Master, I respect you as an esteemed senior, but you can't just slander people like this! I am someone who will turn an old granny in the wrong direction before helping her cross the street! And you call me a good person?"

"Celestial Master, do you suspect that this guy is a spy of the righteous factions?" the Black Golden Crow asked as his eyes locked onto Lin Bei.

Immediately, Lin Bei felt this terrifying pressure pinning him to his seat. He couldn't move a muscle.

The Black Golden Crow continued, "Then just kill him."

Before the words had even fully left his mouth, a spark of black fire shot out from between the feathers on his back and streaked straight toward Lin Bei!

Whoosh!

Just that spark of black fire carried the destructive force of a collapsing mountain!

Boom!

At this critical moment, Wang Xuanling tried to stop the Black Golden Crow. However, because his cultivation level was slightly lower, his reaction was slower.

Daoist Yan raised her arm and extended two fingers. Sword qi condensed at her fingertips, and with a sizzling sound, the black fire was extinguished. However, it came at a cost. Wisps of azure smoke wafted from her fingers.

“It’s the Dao Master of the Cloud of Determination!”

The moment Daoist Yan struck, the truth could no longer be concealed. The real evildoers—the Celestial Master, the Black Golden Crow, and Immortal Yuan Lu—leaped up, their eyes gleaming as they cast six beams of divine light on Daoist Yan.

The righteous sects had planned to wait until Wuchao and the Sea Master clashed before making their move. The moment the demons and evildoers were fully engaged and were less aware of their surroundings, the righteous sects would reveal themselves and launch a coordinated assault. At this point, the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner and other Eminent Ones had yet to appear; moving in too soon would only raise suspicion.

However, they didn’t expect the Celestial Master to be so perceptive and notice something was off about Lin Bei. They also didn’t expect the Black Golden Crow to be so decisive, going for a kill the moment Lin Bei was suspected.

If they were to sacrifice Lin Bei, the evildoers would not have been alerted this soon. By the time the righteous factions laid siege, it would be even harder for these evildoers to escape.

A more ruthless Eminent One might have chosen not to save Lin Bei. But Daoist Yan, despite her aloof nature, was still a member of the Mount Shu Sect—a sect that upheld the principle of never abandoning and never giving up on another fellow disciple. She couldn't simply stand by and do nothing.

Daoist Yan bore the full weight of their attention and pressure. In that instant, Lin Bei felt as if the mountain pressing down on his shoulders had been lifted, leaving him light and nimble. Without a second thought, he turned and bolted.

Lin Bei, the only one who was not an Eminent One, knew this battle was far beyond his level. It was a battle he had no place in.

On the other hand, there was someone who did totally the opposite of what Lin Bei had done.

A loud roar sounded from the third floor. “The fight has finally started! Let me see who dares touch Yan Zi!”

Di Nufeng guffawed and leaped down as a ball of violet-gold flames! She headed toward Immortal Yuan Lu. She had chosen Immortal Yuan Lu as his target because of two reasons.

Firstly, he had been the one who said that he wanted to kill Daoist Yan. Secondly, of the three masters of the Heavenly Origin, he was clearly the weakest.

If she had to choose, she would obviously choose the softest of the powerful targets.

If it turned out that he was not soft, she would just have to hammer him down a few more times.

Immortal Yuan Lu was totally caught off guard. Just moments ago, he had been boldly declaring his intent to kill Daoist Yan, never expecting that Daoist Yan would appear right before him. But before Daoist Yan could even make a move, a ball of Samadhi Divine Fire came hurtling toward him.

Even as an eighth-realm Eminent One, he couldn't ignore the Samadhi Divine Fire that Di Nufeng had unleashed. As he twisted his body, this black void suddenly formed within him and the ball of fire shot straight through him, entering the black void and exiting from the back in a sharp whoosh.

The Black Golden Crow, standing right behind Immortal Yuan Lu, frowned. As a temporary ally, Immortal Yuan Lu's actions were hardly befitting of one.

With a sweep of his left wing that seemed to be forged from pure black diamond, the Black Golden Crow struck the Samadhi Divine Fire. Black flames coiled around his wing as it collided with the divine fire, erupting in a thunderous explosion. Yet, he emerged completely unscathed!

It was just as expected of the Wing Master's incredible wings!

The Celestial Master's left hand trembled slightly, and countless translucent lines, like delicate spiderwebs, extended from everyone present. But before he could act, Baize lifted her hood, revealing a face radiant with divine brilliance.

Whoosh!

With a flash of brilliance, the figures around her dissolved into soft, glowing halos, leaving only the Celestial Master and Baize with corporeal forms.

"The Realms of Yin and Yang?" the Celestial Master asked hesitantly. "Baize of Mount Shu?"

Ripples spread beneath Baize's feet as she slowly approached him. "I heard someone plotted against me back then, and it was your subordinate who carried it out. But you're not on the brink of ascension, so whose orders were you following?"

...

On the third floor, after Di Nufeng leaped down for a kill, Grand Ancestor Fuyou hesitated as he observed the unfolding chaos below. The sudden change was jarring even for those present, let alone an old man who had been detached from the outside world for two thousand years.

He couldn't quite grasp the changes in the alliance downstairs, so he simply frowned and observed, choosing not to act immediately.

At this moment, Chu Liang, who was next to him, pulled off his black robe and revealed the white sword robes typically worn by the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect. He then said solemnly, Grand

Ancestor Fuyou, you said you wanted to leave the darkness and be part of the light, right? Well, now's the time!"

"Ah?" Grand Ancestor Fuyou was stunned as he stared at Chu Liang, who had transformed from looking utterly diabolical to radiating righteous qi. He couldn't help but think, Does it really just take a change of clothes? Is it that easy to desert the evil ways and become righteous? Then why am I here working so hard for it...

"The ones below are Noble Baize and Daoist Yan of Mount Shu. They are the two powerful masters of the Heavenly Origin, and they came here to eliminate the evildoers. If you help them, Mount Shu can help you be recognized as part of the righteous path." Chu Liang enunciated each word clearly. "We will vouch for this with the reputation of the Mount Shu Sect in the Divine Nine on the line."

When Grand Ancestor Fuyou heard this, he looked confused and asked slowly, "I know Mount Shu, but what is the Divine Nine?"

Chu Liang yelled inwardly, This is common sense! If you didn't know, you should've asked earlier, okay???

He then took a quick look at the fight and saw that Daoist Yan had already joined forces with Di Nufeng to attack the Black Golden Crow. Meanwhile, Immortal Yuan Lu was assisting the Black Golden Crow from the side, unleashing a barrage of fierce and rapid attacks.

Because the fight started earlier than the time they had intended, the powerful cultivators outside had yet to arrive at the pavilion. As a result, the righteous side had fewer eighth-realm powerhouses in the fight and was now at a disadvantage.

It was already difficult for one seventh-realm and one eighth-realm cultivator to take on two eighth-realm opponents, especially when one of the eighth-realm opponents was the Black Golden Crow, a powerhouse at the peak of the eighth realm. Even if Chu Liang joined the fight, his contribution wouldn't make much of a difference. However, if he could convince Grand Ancestor Fuyou to switch sides, that would be enough to turn the tide of battle.

Chu Liang turned around and said, "There's no time to explain! You just need to know who the good guys and bad guys are. Everything I told you before about attacking Grand Ancestor Wuchao wasn't true. The real goal is to eradicate the evildoers!"

The old man still looked a little dazed, as if silently questioning, Then what exactly is the truth? What should I believe?

Just then, Lin Bei, who had been fleeing moments ago, charged up to the third floor, shouting, "Oldie Brodie! Give your brother a hand! Help a brother out!"

Grand Ancestor Fuyou looked at Lin Bei and suddenly said with determination, "If it wasn't because of Brother Lin Bei, how would I have escaped the underground cavern of Misty Island? As the saying goes, one must give peaches in return for plums.[1] How can I let him fall into danger? Fine! I shall help you this once!"

As soon as he said that, he leaped forward while yelling, "This place is too dangerous! Get out of here at once!"

Chu Liang and Lin Bei felt a wave of dizziness as streaks of red light enveloped them and moved them to the doors of the pavilion on the first floor. Grand Ancestor Fuyou had been the one who helped them leave this place.

"Oldie Brodie, you're a true brother!" Lin Bei declared passionately. "I'll go rally reinforcements right now! Let's see who dares to lay a hand on you!"

As soon as he said those fierce words, he turned and ran away!

However, just as Lin Bei and Chu Liang rushed out of the pavilion, they were met with a shocking sight. The entire sky was erupting in a chain of brilliant explosions, like a vast sea of stars bursting apart. It was Grand Ancestor Wuchao pursuing the Sea Master.

They then saw this wisp of black smoke flying toward them at high speed!

From within the smoke, a desperate voice howled, "What were you two doing in there?! Hurry up and give me a hand!"