

## Stranger 191

### Chapter 191: Temple Spirit

“What are you saying, Wang Yang?” Ye Qing pretended not to understand Wang Yang’s meaning. It was time to show off his acting skills yet again.

Wang Yang sneered indifferently, “I mean what I said. To tell you the truth, there’s a certain item in this Thousand Buddhas Temple that I must have. If you obey my orders and help me obtain it, I can consider leaving you alive or even grant you an opportunity. I can convince my dad to make you a disciple and elevate you to the heavens.”

“But if you disagree, then I will do what needs to be done. One thing for certain, I guarantee that you will wish that you were dead.”

“You...” Ye Qing’s face contorted with anger and disbelief.

Wang Yang scoffed, “What? Are you thinking of attacking me? Do you seriously think you even deserve to be my opponent?”

Ye Qing’s eyes turned bloodshot, and veins popped all across his arms. There was hesitation, anger, and fear in his eyes. In the end though, it all morphed into helplessness and despair as he said, “Very well, Brother Wang. You better remember your promise.”

“Relax. I always keep my word. You won’t regret trusting me,” Wang Yang smiled arrogantly. He knew Ye Qing would accept; that he had no other choice but to accept. “Now, please take the lead.”

Ye Qing: “...” If I wasn’t faking it, I would regret trusting you this instant.

In the end, Ye Qing obeyed the order and took the lead. He was here anyway, so he might as well head inside and find out exactly what had Wang Yang so enamored. Frankly, he was quite curious himself.

Also, it really didn’t matter if he took the lead, the center or the rear, because he was strong enough to punt Wang Yang and Yang Xuan to the front if necessary. They thought he was their meat shield, but it was really the other way around.

And so Ye Qing forced down his disgust and carefully stepped on the road of corpses. It felt soft and slimy like he was stepping on a quagmire. He wanted to be anywhere but here.

Strangely, the corpses abruptly spun around and glared at them as soon as they stepped on the road. Every single one of them. Face facing upward, they glared daggers at the trio who were stepping on them or about to with hatred, greed, and anger.

“This road is surprisingly soft. Even the statues are soft,” Yang Xuan suddenly said behind Ye Qing. He turned around and saw Yang Xuan stomping the ground twice and touching the Buddha statue beside him curiously. He did not notice that he was stomping on a corpse’s face, and the corpse’s mouth split open as if it was going to bite Yang Xuan’s arm in half.

As for the Buddhist statue he was caressing, it was really three bodies twisted into a fleshy ribbon. Even their heads were pressed together so that only a small half of their faces were exposed. As Yang Xuan continued to caress the statue, chunks of rotten flesh fell off the corpses' faces and bodies. Ye Qing even saw an eyeball falling out of the face.

Ye Qing: "..."

You are the definition of ignorance is bliss, brother. I didn't even dare to step on their heads precisely because I'm scared they would give me a bite. If only you know how hard you're tempting fate...

Luckily, the corpses ultimately didn't attack them. After they passed through the road of corpses, they were greeted by a fantastical scene. There were small bridges with small, clear streams passing under them, beautiful pavilions and sumptuous decorations, solid stupas and magnificent towers; gold, jewelry, auspicious beasts and precious plants and more.

What was amazing was that it didn't look extravagant or wasteful at all. It just looked calm and tranquil like a true paradise.

"Is... Is this place really a Kingdom of Buddha?"

Both Yang Xuan and Wang Yang were absolutely stunned by the sight before their eyes.

Oh, you sweet summer children, Ye Qing side-eyed the bewildered duo and shook his head in secret. A Kingdom of Buddha? No, it was still hell.

The bridge was sewn from countless tongues.

The crystalline streams were really streams of bright red, stinky blood. Countless bloated, pale white corpses were floating on it as well. The yin souls' screams were neverending.

The buildings were buildings, but they were forged from flesh and blood instead of stone and mortar. Tentacles and faces covered the entire structure.

The gold and jewelry were really rotten heads, hearts, and various internal organs, whereas the flora and fauna were rotten limbs.

To sum it up, the sight was absolutely disgusting, but if he didn't keep an eye on it, then he would be overcome with worry.

Thankfully, the strange things were harmless for now. For whatever reason, they weren't attacking them yet.

And so they crossed over the tongue-sewn bridges, passed by the flesh-and-blood buildings, stepped over the broken limbs and rotten heads, and ventured deeper still into Thousand Buddhas Temple.

On a related note, Wang Yang and Yang Xuan couldn't help but pick up some of the "treasures" and stuff them into their Nature's Shell while they were passing through the area. It was... an eye-opening experience for Ye Qing to say the least.

As they were doing this, they even eyed Ye Qing warily as if afraid that Ye Qing would want a share of their loot.

"Har har..."

Ye Qing wisely stepped aside and allowed them to do as they pleased. Why on earth would he want to snatch heads, limbs, and hearts with them? He wasn't addled! And thank goodness Wang Yang and Yang Xuan hadn't suddenly discovered their conscience and invited him to join in, because it would have been really hard to say "FUCK NO!" without arousing any suspicion.

After Wang Yang and Yang Xuan were done picking up their "treasures", they continued forward until they reached a gilt-gold statue of a Buddha. Tall, majestic, and sacred, it was holding a vitarka mudra and smiling kindly at the world.

Seated in front of the statue was a white-robed monk. He had graceful features that made him look gentle and wise. His robe was immaculately clean, and he was sitting atop a golden lotus while holding the vitarka mudra with one hand and the absolute mudra with the other. He was the picture of a sagely monk who had attained great wisdom and mercy. Their first impression of him was excellent to say the least.

"Attachment, aversion, ignorance, pride, the Seven Emotions and the Six Desires are all sins of a human. Since you managed to endure the Wind of Five Poisons without losing your mind, the Wind of Six Desires without losing your body, and the Winds of Seven Emotions and still retain your heart, you are all men of great wisdom and mercy. You all share a destiny with my Buddha."

"Amitabha..."

As soon as he chanted the word, their shock, doubt, fear, anger and all other negative emotions were soothed until all that was left was purity and calm.

Oh man, this monk's quite powerful, Ye Qing thought to himself while sucking in a deep breath. Thank goodness he had shielded his mind with spiritual power as soon as he saw the monk, or that single word might've been enough to sway him to whatever mumbo jumbo he was spouting.

What really stunned Ye Qing, however, was that he was unable to sense any evil presence from the white monk whatsoever, much less see through the illusions like everything he had witnessed earlier.

In his eyes, the monk was exactly who he appeared to be: clean like he was fresh out of a bath and awe-inspiring like no one he had ever seen. The massive Buddha behind his back was also shining gold as if to say that this monk was a true enlightened monk.

Had he not seen the road of corpses, the tongue-sewn bridges, the flesh-and-blood pavilions, and the broken limbs masquerading as celestial plants and animals, he might actually have believed that the monk before him was an enlightened monk.

But he had witnessed hell with his own eyes, and he knew in his heart that there was no Kingdom of Buddha here. And if he wasn't mistaken, the white monk before him was the culprit behind it all.

"Venerable Bhante [1]. It is nice to see you. May we know your name?" Wang Yang and Yang Xuan saluted him and asked.

"Amitabha. I am Jing Hu," the monk answered, "though I am not a human. I am the temple spirit of the Thousand Buddhas Temple."

“Temple spirit?” Wang Yang and Yang Xuan were just wondering how it was possible for someone to survive to this day when the Thousand Buddhas Temple had been destroyed for over a century, but this dispelled their doubts immediately.

The monk explained, “Everything is impermanent. A hundred years ago, Thousand Buddhas Temple was struck by a terrible calamity and sunk into the underground. Most of our temples were destroyed, but not the Thousand Buddhas Temple. It was why I was able to survive.”

“However, my fate is no less tragic than my fellow monks. As the temple spirit, I am immortal as long as the temple remains standing, but I am also unable to take a single step away from my place of power. For a hundred years, I have spent my time in solitude until the three of you show up. This poor monk is most honored to meet you all.”

“All meetings are destinies in their own right. Since you have overcome the trial of the three divine winds, it means that you share a destiny with my Buddha. Therefore, I shall grant you all an opportunity.”

The monk’s voice was calm and gentle, and yet every single one of them felt a flash of greed then.

“An opportunity, you say?” Wang Yang licked his lips. That was exactly why he was here, wasn’t it?

He had come by the news that a great opportunity lay in the depths of the Thousand Buddhas Grotto completely by accident. As of late, there were rumors in the counties and villages around Luo Shui claiming that some people had accidentally entered the depths of Thousand Buddhas Grotto and stumbled upon the opportunity of a lifetime. They had suddenly grown by leaps and bounds and became geniuses that astounded the world.

At first, he thought it was all rumors and paid it no heed, but during an excursion, he happened upon a familiar face. He was a Vessel Augmentor, but just a month ago, he was still a Qi Invoker.

So, he interrogated the guy until he finally divulged his secret. As it turned out, the rumors regarding the Thousand Buddhas Grotto were real after all.

The guy swore that the Thousand Buddhas Temple was a perfectly safe place, but just in case, he still brought some disciples and a bunch of fodder. He was starting to think that he was being overcautious.

It didn’t matter though. He could simply take out the extras when they left the place later.

It was at this moment the monk asked, “Do you know what my temple used to be, benefactors [2]?”

Wang Yang shook his head. Eager he might be, he wasn’t so eager he couldn’t keep his cool. “We don’t know. Please enlighten us, Venerable Bhante.”

The monk smiled. “The Thousand Buddhas Temple used to be a place of knowledge. All disciples who managed to overcome the trial of three divine winds and gain an imperishable soul, an unbreakable body, and an unwavering heart would be awarded with our Thirty Six Arts and a Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill.”

“Each and every one of our Thirty Six Arts is a Spirit Master stage martial art, and the Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill is a pill that can unlock more meridians, purify one’s marrow, solidify one’s fundamentals, enhance one’s growth, strengthen the body, and improve one’s talent. Upon consumption, it can restore one’s primal state and revert a nurtured body to a natural body. Naturally, this greatly enhances one’s gift for martial arts.”

“You may see why the Thirty Six Arts and the Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill were considered priceless treasures in our temple.”

Chapter 192: The Night Is Still Young

“Spirit Master stage martial arts? Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill?”

Ye Qing, Wang Yang and Yang Xuan’s eyes bugged out when they heard this. A Spirit Master stage martial art was the key to becoming a Spirit Master. Why was Wang Luori stuck at the threshold of half-step Spirit Master stage for over a decade? It was because Sunset Hill didn’t have a Spirit Master stage martial art anymore. Or rather, they used to have them until they lost it for one reason or another.

This meant that Sunset Hill, one of the three most powerful factions in Luo Shui, didn’t have a single Spirit Master. It was also why White Horse Academy and Blood Shadow Castle were considered superior to Sunset Hill; because both factions were helmed by Spirit Masters. It was embarrassing for Sunset Hill to say the least.

To own even one Spirit Master martial art was like owning a ladder that would take you to the heavens. Mind you, there was no such thing as a shortcut to hard work, but if you did put in the work, then there was definitely a chance you might become a Spirit Master.

As for the Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill, it was no less valuable than a Spirit Master martial art. Humans ate the Five Grains [1] and made contact with impurities on a daily basis. Therefore, their body was naturally murky like muddy water. It was what people called a “nurtured body”. A “natural body” was a pure body that was free of taint and naturally compatible with the Ways like a stream of sweet spring water.

The Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill could eliminate one’s impurities, restore one’s primal state, and return their nurtured body to a natural body. To give an example, a weak idiot who ate a Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill would still be an idiot, but they would gain extraordinary talent in martial arts.

Metaphorically speaking, the Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill was like a wind blowing underneath you and supporting your weight as you scaled the ladder that led to the heavens. In other words, the pill was the perfect complement for the martial art. So long as the practitioner didn’t commit suicide, they should have no problems becoming a Spirit Master whatsoever.

Wang Yang and Yang Xuan were so excited that their eyes were bloodshot. They would have rushed the monk already if their last thread of reason wasn’t holding them back.

As for Ye Qing, hah! He was neither naive nor blind to the reality of the situation. Even if this temple was a perfectly normal temple, there was a saying called, “There is no such thing as a free lunch in this world.” He would not have believed the monk’s claim easily.

There were only two types of people in this world who would offer free lunch. The first type was the people who raised you, and the second type was the people who were scheming against you. Obviously, the monk couldn’t be the first type.

It was at this moment the monk continued, “The Thousand Buddhas Temple might be no more, but this poor monk doesn’t wish our legacy to be forever buried as well.”

“Since the three of you are destined with my Buddha, I shall teach each of you one of our Thirty Six Arts and bestow you a Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill. In return, I ask you to bear mercy in your hearts, defeat evil, and deliver all living from suffering.”

“Amitabha...”

The monk pressed his hands together in a prayer and chanted the name of the Buddha once more. Buddhist mantras filled the ears, and golden lotuses sprouted from the floor, giving him a sacred and dignified appearance.

“Thank you, Venerable Bhante!” Both Wang Yang and Yang Xuan exclaimed in pleasant surprise.

“The Buddha is merciful, is all. Please, come closer!” The monk beckoned them smilingly.

Wang Yang and Yang Xuan’s minds were completely dominated by their desire for a Spirit Master stage martial art and the Dragon Tiger Marrow Purifying Pill, so they didn’t hesitate to stride toward the monk as quickly as they could.

Yang Xuan was just an idiot, but Wang Yang shouldn’t have lowered his guard so that he never even considered the possibility that the monk might be lying to him. However, his acquaintance had told him that there was no danger in the Thousand Buddhas Temple, and the monk had used his strange ability to dismantle all of his caution and wariness like a gentle breeze. As a result, he was completely unguarded right now.

Ye Qing followed behind the duo as he slowly mustered his spirit. He might not be strong enough to pierce the veil from a distance, but up close was a different story. He wanted to know exactly what kind of Stranger the monk was, and more importantly, escape at first notice if the danger turned out to be beyond even his ability to overcome.

As he slowly got close to the monk, his appearance and the hall itself slowly took a different appearance. The golden light was replaced by infinite darkness and gloom, and he could vaguely see the true face of the temple. The floor and the building itself was made from countless corpses, and every single one of them was facing outward. Their expressions were hateful, and their mouths were agape and leaking blood.

The Buddha statue inside the temple was real, but instead of gold it was pitch black in color. Its body was covered in evil and twisted patterns, and its face was contorted into a nefarious, savage,

and unsettling smile. It was weeping blood from both of its eyes, and they steamed when they dripped down its cheeks and landed on its left hand.

Speaking of the Buddha's left hand, its palm was facing upward and carrying countless tortured souls. Their agonized wails added to the ambience of this hellish place to say the least. Its right hand was facing downward, and beneath it were countless humans and other living creatures, all kneeling on the floor and kowtowing to the Buddha statue in fear.

On one hand, thousands of ghosts were submitting to the Buddha's will, and on the other hand, thousands of living creatures were kowtowing to it in submission.

It was both the Demon and the Buddha!

It was a given, but the monk beneath the Buddha statue looked different as well. Previously, the monk looked handsome and almost out of the world. Now, all Ye Qing saw was a man so skinny he resembled a withered corpse.

The corpse's expression looked peaceful, but one of his eyes was tightly shut, while the other one was wide open and pitch black. The blackness in his eyes flickered like a tiny demonic flame and emitted a twisted, unsettling light. It was also overflowing with darkness, madness, and violence.

Logically, anyone would want to look away from the eye immediately, but it possessed some sort of bewitching power that made his victims want to sink into the darkness permanently.

Strangely, the corpse's torso was rightly wrapped in chains. His limbs were chained up as well. However, most of Ye Qing's attention were drawn to the seven people kneeling in front of the withered corpse; the seven people he couldn't see until he had gotten close. Since they were all dressed like scholars, Ye Qing reckoned that they came from White Horse Academy. In fact, he was willing to bet they were Cheng Youlan and her companions' escorts and fellow disciples.

All seven people had been disemboweled, and their internal organs such as their heart, lungs, liver and more were nowhere to be seen. And yet, they were somehow still alive and staring reverently at the withered corpse.

It was also worth noting that the corpse was clutching a heart in his hand, bright red blood dripping between his fingers.

"Gulp..." Ye Qing couldn't resist a chill as he gulped. If it wasn't clear enough before, it was clear now that the corpse in front of him was the origin of all the strangeness inside the Thousand Buddhas Temple.

Suddenly, every hair on Ye Qing's body stood on end. He felt as if some great, unspeakable terror was about to happen. When he looked up, he saw the withered corpse tilting his head, opening his closed eye, and staring straight at him.

Boom!

At that moment, His scalp turned numb, and his blood froze in its veins. He felt like he was struck by lightning as infinite terror and darkness suddenly seized his very being. All kinds of horrifying images such as a mountain of corpses, a sea of blood, vengeful spirits, tortured souls and more poured into his head and attempted to corrupt, no, wipe out his mind.

Ye Qing's mind wavered, and his consciousness faded in and out like a light bulb. Before he knew it, he was stepping toward the withered corpse uncontrollably.

He had just taken two steps when suddenly, the Annon Sutra injected a chill into his mind. Ye Qing immediately regained a sliver of awareness, realized what was about to happen, and visualized the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method" immediately. Golden bright filled his head, and all of the terror and taint were immediately washed away like dust.

That wasn't all. As Ye Qing's spirit was powerful, Emperor Fuxi's dharma manifested in real life and shone its purifying rays on everything like a blue sun. The yin qi in the temple immediately started melting like snow, the faces on the walls and the floor began screaming on top of their lungs, and the darkness, taint, and horror of the Thousand Buddhas Temple was finally laid bare.

Wang Yang and Yang Xuan were right in front of the withered corpse when suddenly, they snapped back to reality and saw the truth with their own eyes.

"Uwaaaaaaah! What the hell is this!?" Yang Xuan's eyes bugged out as he screamed like a bitch.

Wang Yang's expression was not much different from his. He was stunned and angry because his dream had shattered in the worst way imaginable, but by far the biggest emotion that currently gripped him was fear. Pure, unadulterated fear.

It was at this moment the demonic flame in the withered corpse's eyes flared. His mouth wasn't moving, but an eerie, mind-shaking chuckle escaped through his lips as he made a grab for Wang Yang.

Wang Yang subconsciously tried to back off, but the White Horse Academy disciples on the floor abruptly spun around and grabbed his legs with all their might.

At the same time, a couple of arms stretched out of the floor and caught his ankles as well.

"Fuck!"

The short delay was all it took for the withered corpse's hand to hang over Wang Yang's head like a massive, demonic claw.

But Wang Yang wasn't out of ideas yet. Ruthlessness flickered behind his eyes as he grabbed Yang Xuan's arm—the Astral Refiner still hadn't recovered from his shock yet—and pulled him in front of him.

"Senior brother, you—no!"

It was too late by the time Yang Xuan snapped out of it. The withered corpse had already grabbed his head. His angry shout was abruptly cut short, and his scalp suddenly split apart and landed on both sides of his feet. The Astral Refiner let out a dying wheeze as blood poured out of his body not unlike how Ye Qing usually ripped the blood of his foes out of their bodies. He was covered in blood in just the blink of an eye.

While this was going on, Wang Yang unleashed his White Flame of Nothingness and incinerated the hands and bodies clinging to his legs. Then, he jumped away from the withered corpse.

"Who on earth are you?"



Wang Yang would have to be an absolute retard if he still didn't realize that he had been tricked after seeing the sea of corpses around him and hearing the wails of countless tortured souls. The so-called opportunity-of-a-lifetime was just something the withered corpse made up. He must have taken control of his victims' bodies and used them to spread rumors to lure people like him to their deaths.

Some people might think that a simple rumor couldn't possibly draw so many people to their deaths like moths to flames, but those people must live in a greenhouse. Countless warriors were spilling rivers of blood over some random rumor and uncertain opportunity everyday.

It wasn't like the withered corpse was spreading rumors blindly either. He had specifically chosen distant counties and villages because it was safer, and targeted jianghu wanderers or members of insignificant sects to be his rumormonger because people like them died or went missing by the droves every day. Their deaths wouldn't concern the administrative division or the Pacification Bureau one bit [2].

Therefore, this Stranger must be an intelligent-type Stranger. It was one of the most ruthless Strangers both Ye Qing and Wang Yang had ever met as well.

"I already told you, didn't I? This poor monk is Jing Hui, kekeke. Since the Buddha has brought us together, why don't you stay with me a little longer, benefactors?"

When the withered corpse let out an eerie cackle, every corpse within the structure began struggling to their feet. The very ground beneath their feet began undulating as countless arms reached toward Wang Yang. They looked like wheats swaying to the wind, except there was nothing pleasant or relaxing about their appearance whatsoever.

Chapter 193: Can't Do It? Then Shut Up And Do What I Say

Boom!

Wang Yang let out a cold hmph, raised his right foot half an inch, and stomped the ground. A gush of White Flame of Nothingness immediately spread out and dyed over half of the arms and the bodies into pale white, freezing them and turning them into dust.

"I don't care what you are, you must die a horrible death for daring to trick me!"

Wang Yang's eyes turned pale white as well. The White Flame of Nothingness he unleashed earlier immediately rolled back and gathered behind his back. It was like hundreds of white streams coming together to form the break of dawn. Soon, a white sun slowly rose into the air.

Boom...

The streams surged violently, and the white sun painted both heaven and earth white. An unbelievable pressure enveloped everything within this tiny corner of hell.

"As expected of an Expression. It's like nature itself has awakened to smite his enemies."

Ye Qing asked the few corpses running toward him with the Burning Wind while squinting at the white sun and white rivers in the air.

The three stages of the Astral Refinement stage was formally known as the Astral Refinement, Astral Tempering, and Expression, but both Astral Refinement and Astral Tempering were just foundations of the Astral Refinement stage. Expression was the stage where a warrior was considered to have reached the adept level.

Expression was the stage where an Astral Refiner's control of their astral qi had become so good that they could manifest an aspect of nature and borrow its power to execute their will. To put it in simpler terms, Expression was the infusion of an aspect of nature into one's techniques so that every hit was as flexible and powerful as a god or demon.

This was why Astral Refinement and Astral Purification were considered to be basic uses of one's astral qi. One could not manifest the true power of their astral qi until they had reached the Expression stage.

Looking at Wang Yang right now, Ye Qing wasn't sure he could defeat him if he fought against him right now. At best, the battle would end in a stalemate. That was how powerful the scion was with his Expression manifested.

"Kill!" Wang Yang growled and threw out a punch. The white river poured down from the heavens, and the white sun crashed down on the world like the sunset.

The writhing, wailing corpses in the temple turned pale white as if their very color was wiped away by Wang Yang's astral qi. When his fist force blew through the area, every taint was wiped clean until all that was left was pure white.

The withered corpse was the only thing that wasn't wiped away together with the others. While leaking incredibly thick yin qi, the demonic flame on the crazed side of his face flared strongly.

"Mara Buddha..."

In response to the attack, the withered corpse reached out with his left hand and pressed upward. An invisible, demonic sound resounded throughout the temple.

Behind the withered corpse, the giant statue also raised its left hand and put its handful of wailing souls between the corpse and the white river and white sun. In a sense, it was a clash between heaven and hell.

A series of rumbles later, the left palm decisively defeated the white sun and the white river. The sky full of white flames were immediately dyed black and demonic.

"Pwack!"

Wang Yang spat out a mouthful of blood and staggered backward. His energies were thrown into disarray after his Expression was destroyed.

Shock flickered behind Wang Yang's pupils as he backed two steps away from the withered corpse. It was then he caught Ye Qing watching from the sidelines out of the corner of his eyes. His eyes flashed with anger, but he quickly broke into a hidden sneer and said, "We need to fight together, Brother Ye. Only then can we defeat this Stranger and survive!"

"Sure. Let's fight him together!"

Ye Qing's response was firm and decisive, but he didn't hesitate to run toward the exit.

Do you think I'm as stupid as Yang Xuan?

He knew exactly what Wang Yang was thinking the moment he heard his words. The young hill lord just wanted to trick him into stopping the withered corpse and buying him time to escape. Naturally, he wasn't going to comply with his wishes.

The reason Ye Qing didn't run earlier was because he wanted to know exactly how strong the withered corpse was. Now, he confirmed that it was at least stronger than Wang Yang and maybe even a Soulstealer-class Stranger. There was no way he could defeat a Stranger like that as he was, so running away was the only course of action here.

Meanwhile, Wang Yang pretended to take one step forward before turning around immediately. He was just in time to see Ye Qing rapidly vanishing into the distance like the wind.

The heck? You should be in front of me, not behind! How did I become the meat shield?

Wang Yang was stunned for an instant. Then, he erupted in anger, "You are courting death, Ye Pingshan!"

His anger was real, and his swearing came from the heart itself. But he did not hesitate to chase after Ye Qing. He wasn't suicidal after all, and why wouldn't he, a late-stage Astral Refiner, fail to outrun an early-stage body-tempering warrior?

Wang Yang was also going to bury the bastard when he caught him. He was the one screwing over others since he was young, but today he was tricked once by a Stranger and a second time by Ye Qing. How could he not swear bloody vengeance against them?

"Keke..."

Behind the duo, the withered corpse let out an evil cackle, and the massive statue behind it began weeping blood. Another mantra resounded throughout the temple.

"Mara Buddha..."

"Mara Buddha..."

An invisible energy spread across the entire Thousand Buddhas Temple. Then, every single corpse in the compound opened their eyes.

Wang Yang was passing by a stupa when it suddenly grew an innumerable number of arms and held him tight. Wang Yang immediately threw a punch and blasted the stupa into smithereens, but all the flesh-and-blood buildings started charging at him as well. Despite his strength, he was unable to break free immediately.

Ye Qing was the same. While he was crossing a bridge of tongues, the tongues suddenly rolled up and attempted to ensnare him.

His reaction wasn't slow, of course. He leaped away from the bridge and landed on a pond next to it. He was about to jump away when the bodies floating on the pond abruptly split open their stomachs and revealed long, barbed tongues that resembled whips. Not only that, countless blood-drenched hair swayed above the waters like grass and shot toward him.

A ripple appeared when Ye Qing kicked off the waters. His movement made no sound and left almost no traces, but the pond suddenly started bubbling like it was boiling hot. Then, the blood-drenched hair ignited into flames at the same time.

Hair wasn't supposed to be alive, but this one was apparently because it let out a bloodcurdling scream. The next moment, he half-turned in the air and severed all of the barbed tongues flailing toward him with a curved saber.

However, the short delay was enough for the bridge of tongues to reach him. Slimy fluid covered the entire structure, and within the slimy fluid were countless human heads that were all staring wide-eyed at him. An evil, filthy energy immediately spread toward him.

"Heavens, you're so disgusting."

Ye Qing's spirit was strong enough that the evil energy wasn't able to influence him. His response was to swing his curved saber and release a ripple of moonlight toward the bridge.

The ripple looked frail enough to shatter at the slightest touch, but in reality it was the bridge of tongues that shook violently and sprouted fountains of blood as soon as contact was made.

The moonlight saber looked like one saber, but it was really a million sabers and a million attacks.

The bridge of tongues broke into pieces in just the blink of an eye, and the flesh and blood burned into ash before they could hit the ground.

After he had taken out the bridge of tongues, Ye Qing inhaled slightly and dashed forward once more. However, he had just moved a short distance when he abruptly came to a stop.

"Keep running. Why aren't you running?" Wang Yang taunted. He had broken free from the flesh-and-blood buildings and reached Ye Qing as well.

"I'm tired, so I'm not gonna run anymore. You can leave first if you want to!" Ye Qing shrugged and stepped out of Wang Yang's way as if he couldn't hear the scorn in his voice.

"Hmph! You're—"

Wang Yang was going to provoke Ye Qing some more when he finally saw what had balked Ye Qing. All the words he wanted to say immediately went back down his stomach.

The far end of the road of corpses that they walked across earlier had stood up before they knew it. They were blocking all of the exits like walls. At the same time, countless corpses were surging toward them like tidal waves.

Wang Yang narrowed his eyes and swung his palm thirty six times in a row like it was a saber. Thirty six fiery saber forces manifested in the air and slammed into the wall of flesh.

"Minor Flame Saber Art"

Flesh and blood spilled everywhere as the saber forces sank meters deep into the wall of flesh. At the same time, the White Flame of Nothingness gushed out of the cracks and melted them into nothingness. However, it only lasted for two or three breaths before it was devoured by the seemingly endless amount of corpses. The cracks had also healed themselves to normal.

This isn't going to work! Wang Yang thought with a dark expression. He knew the moment he saw his damage dealt that he wasn't going to be able to breach through the wall of flesh, at least not within a short time. Unfortunately, time was the one thing they couldn't afford to waste right now. Already, the countless flesh-and-blood amalgamations behind their backs were almost upon them.

Am I really going to die here? Despair began to slip its insidious tendrils into Wang Yang's heart. When he glanced at Ye Qing out of the corner of his eyes though, he noticed that the young man looked perfectly unperturbed for some reason.

"Do you have a plan, Brother Ye?" Wang Yang's eyes lit up. Ye Qing looked like he had a plan.

"A good plan? No!" Ye Qing shook his head.

Wang Yang: "... Then why are you acting like you can get out of this situation one hundred percent?

Before Wang Yang could say anything, Ye Qing continued, "But I do have an immature plan."

"What is it?"

Ye Qing rubbed his nose but didn't give him an answer. Instead, he ordered, "Can you block these monsters for a moment, Brother Wang?"

"Me?" Wang Yang instinctively loathed the idea. "Why me?"

Ye Qing rolled his eyes at Wang Yang. "Sure! I'll block the monsters, and you can figure a way out of this situation!"

Wang Yang: "... I wouldn't be talking to you if I could come up with a plan, could I?

"Can't do it? Then just shut up and do what I say!" Ye Qing hmphed coldly before urging, "What are you waiting for? Go get them!"

"You..." Wang Yang's complexion turned ashen with anger. If they weren't grasshoppers bound to the same rope right now, he would've ripped Ye Qing to shreds already.

"You best not lie to me, Ye Pingshan! You won't like it when I'm pissed off!"

Wang Yang finally charged toward the incoming flesh-and-blood monsters and slowly raised his right fist. His arm had just reached its full length when the corpses were right in front of him.

There was a saying that to raise your fist above your head was to raise it above the heavens.

A seemingly endless amount of white flames converged in the air. The sky turned pure white for a moment.

Then, he dropped his fist, and the sky fell.

"Sunset Hill Fist—Sunset"

Ye Qing had witnessed this technique from Xiao Yang before. When he used it, it was overflowing with a kind of fatalistic sorrow. But Wang Yang's "Sunset" was very different from Xiao Yang's.

There was neither sorrow nor fatalistic determination. There was only power that seemed capable of destroying heaven and earth; one that reminded Ye Qing of the meteor that had wiped out the dinosaurs.

Rumble!

The sun set, and every corpse and flesh-and-blood amalgamation within tens of meters of Wang Yang was annihilated. The flesh-and-blood floor itself depressed greatly and formed a huge pit.

#### Chapter 194: Five Flames Seven Birds Fan

Ye Qing and Wang Yang gasped when they looked at the pit on the ground. Literally everything from the edge all the way to the bottom of the pit were corpses and bones.

Just how many people had died in this temple?

“Mara Buddha...”

“Mara Buddha...”

The demonic voice resounded once more, and the corpses inside the pit suddenly came to life. They piled on top of one another and formed several humanoid corpse giants about thirty meters tall.

The giants were all shaped like a monk, and their posture was similar to the giant behind the withered corpse’s back: left hand facing upward to hold up hell, and right hand facing downward to master humanity.

“My Mara is merciful...”

“My Mara is merciful...”

The corpse giants mouthed demonic, mind-warping curses to stun Wang Yang while bringing down their right hands to crush him. However, Wang Yang obviously possessed a Strange Artifact that protected the mind because he only blanked out for an instant before regaining his sanity. A feathered fan immediately appeared in his hand.

The feathered fan was penta-colored—red, orange, blue, black and purple—and looked like it was made from the feathers of five types of unique birds. The colorful lights intermingled with one another while seven extraordinarily handsome divine birds sang and danced among them, causing ripples to manifest across space.

The moment the penta-colored fan appeared, the cold, chilly temple suddenly became unbearably hot and scalding.

Whoosh...

Wang Yang flapped his fan lightly, and a penta-colored flame immediately burst into existence. At the same time, the seven divine birds flew toward the corpse giants while dragging long tail feathers behind them.

Wherever the divine birds went, the taint was purified, and the yin qi was annihilated. The five-colored flames especially burned it all into ashes.

“That’s the Five Flames Seven Birds Fan, one of the Seven Treasures of Sunset Hill. Its reputation is well deserved.”

Ye Qing looked envious as he examined Wang Yang's fan critically. The so-called Seven Treasures of Sunset Hill referred to its seven signature Strange Artifacts. They were the Sunset Crown, Hundred Flame Pot, Seven Bejeweled Glazed Lamps, Five Flames Seven Birds Fan, Heaven Patrolling Sun Ship, Yin Yang Fire Calabash, and Eastern Purple Cloud Stele.

All seven Strange Artifacts had their own incredible uses, and even the most mundane of them all was a Hatred-class Strange Artifact. The large majority of them were Soulstealer-class Strange Artifacts, and the greatest of them all, the Eastern Purple Cloud Stele, was said to be a Half-Step Phenomenon-class Strange Artifact.

These seven Strange Artifacts were the reason why Sunset Hill could stand toe-to-toe with the strongest factions in Luo Shui despite owning no Spirit Masters.

The Five Flames Seven Birds Fan was a Hatred-class Strange Artifact. Said to be made from the tailfeathers of the five divine birds—the blue luan, the fire crane, the flamingo, the fire phoenix and the purple phoenix—and the soul essences of seven divine birds, the Five Flames Seven Birds Fan could supposedly repel all evil. It was especially famous for its offensive power.

But of course, the Five Flames Seven Birds Fan cost a lot of power to use as well. Wang Yang had only swung the fan a couple of times before his face turned pale, and his aura became incredibly weak. The divine birds and the flames were all growing increasingly transient.

“What are you waiting for? Do whatever it is you need to do quickly! I can't hold on for much longer!”

Wang Yang was enraged when he glanced at Ye Qing and noticed that the guy was watching from the sidelines and doing seemingly nothing at all.

I'm literally giving my all here, and you're just standing there doing nothing? If I die, then you die as well!

“Calm, Brother Wang.” Ye Qing shot him a mysterious smile. “Our chance will show up very soon.” So please sacrifice yourself a little longer.

“You better not be lying, Ye Pingshan!” Wang Yang uttered through gritted teeth. Although he didn't understand what this “chance” Ye Qing was talking about, he didn't think the young man would lie to him. Their fates were currently bound to one another after all.

Besides, it wasn't like he didn't have other trump cards. If Ye Pingshan was lying to him, he didn't mind sending him to hell first before he followed afterward.

It was at this moment the demonic voice resounded throughout the temple. However, it sounded angrier and harsher than before.

Countless corpses and flesh-and-blood amalgamations crawled out of the walls, the roofs and other areas. They surged toward Wang Yang like a sky of locusts.

When Wang Yang was buried under the tidal wave of corpses, Ye Qing abruptly bounded in the opposite direction toward a certain wall.

He wasn't running particularly quickly, but it had this wonderful cadence where the strength applied and the distance between each step were exactly the same. He stepped forward like a raging torrent that couldn't be stopped; stomped the ground like a booming thunderclap.

It was at this moment the withered corpse noticed Ye Qing's movement. The demonic flame in his eyes suddenly flared wildly as if in fear or anger.

The demonic voice resounded throughout the temple, and the corpses actually abandoned Wang Yang and pounced toward Ye Qing instead. Even the Buddha statue behind the withered corpse had extended its hand to flatten Ye Qing like a pancake.

Ye Qing paid no heed to the incoming danger, however. United in both mind and body, every corpse who tried to impede him or block his path were shredded without a sound.

When he was one meter away from the wall, he finally unleashed his punch. Burning Wind howled, and dark red flames swayed. The incredible force evaporated both heaven and earth like a dream.

“Cloud Vaporization Style”

BOOM!!!

The wall of corpses shuddered for a moment. Then, dark red flames began seeping out of the cracks and burning all of the bodies, tortured souls, yin spirits and more into ash. It wasn't long before the wall abruptly crumbled into pieces.

As soon as this happened, a devastating storm rushed in and blew an entire swathe of corpses into ashes right before they could reach Ye Qing. The statue's palm was melted bit by bit into ash as well.

It was none other than the three divine winds.

“Mara Buddha!”

“Mara Buddha!”

The withered corpse seemed to be terrified of the divine wind. It roared angrily and tried to block the hole with a new wave of corpses, but it was too late. The entire temple began quaking unsteadily as the three divine winds rapidly ate away at its flesh, blood and bones.

Ye Qing smiled as he stood in the middle of the three divine winds, unwavering. “I knew it. The three divine winds are the bane of his existence.”

It was clear that someone had defeated and chained up the withered corpse in this temple. He also saw burn marks that belonged to the three divine winds on the withered corpse's body. As he cultivated the Burning Wind, he recognized the burn marks it left behind almost immediately.

Looking at the clues, Ye Qing deduced that someone had sealed the withered corpse in this place, and the three divine winds outside the temple of flesh, blood and bones was how they kept him sealed. In fact, Ye Qing would go as far as to say that the seal was set up this way so as to inflict punishment upon the withered corpse. The purpose was to rot his flesh and blood, chill his core, and burn his mind for eternity.

As for why they had built this temple of flesh, blood and bones, it was obvious. It was to prevent the three divine winds from annihilating the withered corpse and releasing him from his suffering.



Therefore, their crisis would be resolved so long as he broke a part of the temple and allowed the three divine winds to come in.

As for why he ordered Wang Yang to hold back the corpses for a bit and waited until now to act, it was one, to deplete Wang Yang's strength and two, to use him to draw away the withered corpse's attention. This would minimize the chances of the withered corpse noticing his intention too quickly and weaken the wall as much as possible.

It was clear that his plan had worked. The entire temple was eroding like a dilapidated house that was being beset by a terrible storm. Holes kept appearing all over the place, and its edges were being shaved away with every passing second. In the end, it crumbled completely.

"Argh!"

After the temple had crumbled, the three divine winds blew in harder than ever before. The withered corpse screamed as the Buddha statue bent down and held him tight against his bosom. This was the one moment it acted like a true Buddha, sacrificing itself to protect the withered corpse.

It couldn't last forever though. The three divine winds kept blowing away at the statue's yin qi until eventually, its whole body started crumbling bit by bit like a sandy dune that was being eroded from the top.

The withered corpse wailed and struggled with all his might, but the chains pinning it in place glowed coldly with runes. It was unable to break free no matter what it tried.

"It's no use," Ye Qing said with a smile. The Buddha protecting the withered corpse wouldn't be able to hold on for much longer, and the withered corpse himself was unable to escape to a safe place. His fate was as good as sealed.

It was at this moment Ye Qing sensed a sudden outburst of killing intent. He turned around just in time to see Wang Yang grinning savagely and throwing a punch at his head. The Wind Repelling Carp was swimming above his head and keeping the three divine winds away from him.

"Hahaha! Die!"

Shock flickered across Ye Qing's features as if he hadn't expected Wang Yang to backstab him at the last moment. However, it was immediately replaced by ruthlessness and fatalistic determination. He actually ignored the punch aimed at his head and threw a counterpunch at Wang Yang's chest instead.

Bang!

Bang!

Muffled groans escaped both men's lips. Ye Qing's neck let out an audible crack he was sent flying into the depths of the three divine winds. Wang Yang's chest caved in as he was sent crashing into the ground, hard.

"Pwack!"

Wang Yang spat out a mouthful of fresh blood as he climbed back to his feet. His face was pale, and his aura ran rampant for a bit. He was clearly hurt pretty badly.

“Hahaha! You’re a few years too young to get one over me!”

Wang Yang paid his injuries no heed, however. In fact, he looked overjoyed.

He was the kind of guy who killed anyone who dared to provoke him in any way. Moreover, he had picked up a terrifying aura from Ye Qing earlier, making it clear that he had hidden his strength. It was one thing if Ye Qing was his subordinate, but a strong and intelligent enemy must die no matter what.

Only then could he be sure that he wouldn’t return to haunt him later.

This was why Wang Yang had attacked Ye Qing as soon as the crisis was over. He didn’t even care if he took a heavy blow in return.

“Cough cough!”

Wang Yang coughed a couple of times because his laugh had pulled at his injuries. Besides that, the protective shield keeping him from the three divine winds had shrank considerably as well. It was clear that the Wind Repelling Carp was rapidly running out of strength.

“It’s time to leave,” Wang Yang muttered while perceiving the gradually strengthening winds and glancing at the withered corpse. He abruptly turned around and raced toward the exit.

Although this whole trip had turned out to be a dud—no, a death trap even—he had paid back all the grievances he had received, and he himself was still alive. It could’ve been worse, which was why it was time to go home.

Thanks to the Wind Repelling Carp, Wang Yang had no problems leaving the Thousand Buddhas Temple. It wasn’t long before he was completely gone.

Meanwhile, the three divine winds were still eroding away at the Buddha statue. It was mere moments away from complete collapse now. The withered corpse beneath it howled in fury as its demonic qi kept dissipating, but eventually, his savage expression grew calm and tranquil. His evil, crazed-looking eye had turned back to normal as well.

“He thought he could kill me with just that? What a fool. Still, it’s time for the show to begin.”

It was at this moment a silhouette slowly walked out of the three divine winds and shot the exit of the Thousand Buddhas Temple a smirk. Then, he rode the wind and left the temple in the blink of an eye.

“My Buddha is merciful. People these days are so impatient. I was going to give you an opportunity, but now, I can only wait for the next destined one.”

“This poor monk doesn’t have much time left though. Amitabha...”

Not long after Ye Qing was gone, the withered corpse suddenly opened his eyes and let out a wistful sigh. The man himself was exactly the same man as before, but he lacked the demonic qi he exuded earlier. He also gave off a peaceful and enlightened feeling not unlike a great monk who had achieved enlightenment.

## Chapter 195: When Things Go To Hell

“Wang Yang, you dare!”

Wang Yang had just exited Thousand Buddhas Grotto and was getting ready to return to Sunset Hill when suddenly, he found himself surrounded by a group of angry people.

“What is the meaning of this, Vice Principal Cheng?” Wang Yang crossed his arms and frowned at the man standing directly in his way.

The Vice Principal Cheng he was addressing was named Cheng Nuo, and the rest of the group were all White Horse Academy disciples. Chéng Youlan and Mu Yuan were among them as well. Wang Yang couldn’t help but feel a bad feeling about this.

Cheng Nuo was in his fifties. He had a thin but spirited face and a long beard. Wearing a big hat and loose robes, he somewhat resembled a gentleman of the old. However, that image was currently tarnished by the gloominess and hostility in his eyes.

“You know exactly what this is about, Wang Yang!” Cheng Nuo uttered coldly, “That you are a cruel, impulsive and tyrannical man do not usually concern me, but you dare murder a disciple of the White Horse Academy? How dare you!”

Wang Yang scoffed as soon as he recovered from his surprise, “Vice Principal Cheng, freedom of speech does not mean freedom of consequences. Since when did I kill anyone from the White Horse Academy? I get it, you must be here to take revenge for that foolish nephew of yours, right?”

“Beat up the young, and the elder comes yelling. I thought that this tradition is only applicable to us Sunset Hills, but I guess not even White Horse Academy, the so-called successor of a sage, is immune to such customs. What an eye-opening experience this is turning out to be, hahaha!”

Wang Yang wasn’t afraid even though Cheng Nuo was the vice principal of White Horse Academy and a powerful late-stage Spirit Purifier. After all, his father was the lord and master of Sunset Hill itself. There were only a handful of people in Luo Shui he needed to tiptoe around, and Cheng Nuo obviously wasn’t one of them.

Moreover, he heard that Cheng Nuo’s cultivation was pure drugs and no martial arts. Forget his dad, even an early-stage Spirit Purifier from their sect could probably kick his ass with impunity. What did he have to fear from such a useless man?

Wang Yang’s taunt greatly angered Cheng Nuo. “It’s not enough that you killed my nephew, you would slander my White Horse Academy as well? So be it! Today is the day I slay you and rid the world of your loathsome presence!”

His hair started billowing on its own as his pressure washed out. Such was his presence that the White Horse Academy disciples couldn’t help but take two steps away from him.

Wang Yang was stunned when he sensed that Cheng Nuo actually intended to kill him. He thought that the old man was just planning to beat him up a little for his nephew, but killing him? That had far-reaching consequences to say the least. Also...

“Wait? You weren’t exaggerating earlier?” Wang Yang realized something and blurted, “Cheng Yi is actually dead?”

Cheng Nuo’s eyes were bloodshot with sorrow and fury. “How much longer will you feign ignorance, you knave!”

Cheng Nuo had no children to his name, which was why he raised Cheng Yi like a son even though he was technically his nephew. How could he not be angered by his death?

Wang Yang’s eyes flickered with uncertainty. “So Cheng Yi is dead. What does it have to do with me? He was perfectly fine when we parted ways.”

“You’re the one who killed senior brother!” Chéng Youlan took one step forward and glared at Wang Yang with reddened eyes, “Senior Brother Cheng was fine when we parted ways, but he died not long after that! You must have broken his insides when you struck his solar plexus, but did it in a way so that his injuries after we were far away to give yourself an alibi! You killed him because you were annoyed that he would challenge your authority!”

“Senior Brother Mu was present! He can prove that I am telling the truth!”

“It is as Junior Sister Youlan says,” Mu Yuan nodded with a pained look as well, “We did not encounter any other Stranger or unusual objects after we parted ways with you. Therefore, the only one who could’ve murdered Senior Brother Cheng was you.”

“Hmph! What a load of nonsense!” Wang Yang retorted when he finally realized that this wasn’t an extremely elaborate hoax, “All I did was teach Cheng Yi a lesson. There is no chance that a light pat to his chest would kill him. Speaking of Strangers, maybe you did encounter one when you were carrying him back to the surface, and Cheng Yi was killed as a result. Afraid of facing the consequences, you decided to pin the blame on me instead!”

“Yes, the more I think about it, the likelier that seems to be the case. Pinning the blame on others is practically a scholar’s *modus operandi*,” Wang Yang nodded seriously.

“You lie!”

“Lies!”

Both Chéng Youlan and Mu Yuan glared at him angrily.

Cheng Nuo stared at Wang Yang coldly, “It’s no use trying to talk yourself out of this, Wang Yang. I’d personally inspected Yi’er’s body, and I can confirm that there is no other injury on his person except the one you dealt him. Therefore, you must be the man who killed my nephew.”

“A blood debt must be paid in blood. Wang Luori could show up right now, and I will still kill you and take revenge for my Yi’er!”

Cheng Yi made a grab for Wang Yang after he was done talking. Astral wind blew as a massive palm took form in the air and descended on top of Wang Yang.

“Air of Greatness - Great Catch”

Wang Yang pushed off the ground and avoided the attack. Although Cheng Nuo’s cultivation was built on drugs, he was still a late-stage Spirit Purifier. He would be stupid to face his attack head on. Moreover, he was tired and severely injured from fighting the withered corpse, enduring the astral wind, and even taking a do-or-die punch from Ye Pingshan. There was just no way he was a match for Cheng Nuo right now. The only thing he could do was to escape this place.

Of course, he wasn’t afraid of what might happen to him even if he failed to escape. Cheng Nuo was all bark and no bite. The pretentious scholar claimed he wanted him dead, but he knew better than anyone what the consequences would be if he actually died. At the minimum, his father would march up to White Horse Academy to call for justice, and there would be a great battle between the two factions. It was a responsibility no one could bear.

Naturally, he had nothing to fear from Cheng Nuo.

Cheng Nuo was furious that Wang Yang managed to avoid his first move. He manifested an ink stone that manifested a tiny ink man holding a brush. The tiny ink man flicked his wet brush at Wang Yang, and the ink droplets actually transformed into a rain of swords that shot straight toward Wang Yang.

“Kill him!” Cheng Nuo declared. Effectiveness aside, the move certainly looked mighty impressive.

“Hmph!” Wang Yang grunted in annoyance as he felt the sword qis locking down the space around him. He felt like he was being sat on by a massive mountain, and his energies were either impeded or outright locked by the attack.

If escape was impossible, then it was better to stand one’s ground. Wang Yang summoned the Five Flames Seven Birds Fan once more and flapped it, summoning the five divine flames and seven divine birds. The ink swords quickly evaporated into thin air.

“Hmph! There is nowhere to run!”

Wang Yang did well to neutralize the attack, but Cheng Nuo was already standing behind him. Ink forming a sword at his fingertip, Cheng Nuo aimed to stab Wang Yang in the shoulder.

As expected, Cheng Nuo wasn’t aiming to kill Wang Yang. Although he wanted nothing more than to kill Wang Yang, he knew that the consequences were far too heavy for even the principal to bear, much less him. That was why he was only aiming to cripple Wang Yang, and stabbing the young man in the shoulder would ruin his arm.

Sure, he couldn’t kill Wang Yang, but surely his nephew was worth at least one arm?

Wang Yang wasn’t willing to submit, of course. Despite his awkward position, he did everything he could to dodge to the side.

It was at this moment Wang Yang accidentally stepped on a slippery rock and lost his footing. Instead of his shoulder, it was his head that was directly in the path of the ink sword.

If Wang Yang was stunned, then Cheng Nuo was flabbergasted. Worse, Cheng Nuo's cultivation was built atop a pile of drugs, so he was unable to control his force as he pleased. By the time he reacted, his ink sword had already skewered through Wang Yang's brain.

"Ug... ggh..."

Wang Yang's eyes grew unfocused. His shock and puzzlement never faded even until the last moment. He raised his hand to try and grab Cheng Nuo, but his life left him before he could complete the motion.

"I... I..."

Cheng Nuo's ink sword melted into ink as he staggered away from Wang Yang's body in panic. To say that he was flabbergasted would be an understatement.

He just wanted to vent on the guy who murdered his nephew, and Wang Luori to pay White Horse Academy a visit and apologize for the murder after the fact. So how did it turn out this way?

He knew Wang Yang could've avoided the attack, but instead the young hill lord had chosen to put his head directly in harm's way. What the hell just happened? Was he trying to give him a taste of his own medicine or something? With his own life?

Seriously, what the hell just happened?

In any case, Wang Yang was dead, and dead by his hands no less. The situation had just become extremely complicated.

No one would disagree that a blood debt must be repaid in blood, but it was also a fact that some people's lives were more valuable than others. In this case, Wang Yang's life was definitely more valuable than his nephew, and knowing Wang Luori, the Hill Lord would absolutely pay him a visit later.

Oh, no.

"Principal, you... you actually killed Wang Yang?"

Chéng Youlan, Mu Yuan, and the rest of the White Horse Academy disciples were staring at Cheng Nuo with flabbergasted expressions as well. Although they were extremely sheltered, they weren't stupid. Of course they knew what the consequences of killing Wang Yang, the son of the Hill Lord of Sunset Hill was.

"I didn't kill him, I..."

Cheng Nuo wanted to deny all responsibility. He wanted to say that Wang Yang was the one who suddenly turned suicidal and killed himself. But who on earth would believe him? He wouldn't believe himself! It was like having yellow mud in one's pants. Everyone would think he shat his pants even if he hadn't!

"What... What should we do now, principal?" Chéng Youlan and the others asked in panic.

Ruthlessness flickered across his eyes as Cheng Nuo glanced at the disciples. However, he shook his head immediately after he took a step.

His first impulse had been to eliminate all the witnesses and destroy the evidence, but his exit had been anything but silent. There were a lot of people who knew that he was heading out to Thousand Buddhas Grotto to take revenge against Wang Yang. There was no concealing this fact even if he killed everyone here.

Also, White Horse Academy would never tolerate the wanton murder of their disciples. They would boot him out faster than he could say “please”, and how was he going to withstand Wang Luori’s anger without them?

All things considered, his only way out of this was to tell the truth and rely on White Horse Academy to survive this.

The one silver lining of this accident was that Wang Yang was the one who killed his nephew first, so he was in the right. Knowing White Horse Academy’s motto and belief, they would never surrender him to his wrongdoers. Therefore, relying on White Horse Academy was his only way to safeguard himself.

Cheng Nuo took only an instant to figure out his moves. After he had regained his calm, he ordered, “Take Wang Yang’s body. We’re returning to White Horse Academy right away.”

“At once!” Everyone answered, not knowing that they had been one impulse away from being silenced. They carried Wang Yang’s body and followed Cheng Nuo back to White Horse Academy.

The sky was rather cloudy today, so everyone’s shadow looked long and narrow like a crack in the sky.

And what does it mean if the sky is cracked?

Well, it means that it’s about to fall.

Chapter 196: Meeting Jing Hui Again

“Heh. It is done.”

After Cheng Nuo and the White Horse Academy disciples were gone, Ye Qing slowly looked out of the entrance while wearing an eerie smirk on his face. He was holding the Annon Sutra in his hands, and there were a few lines of blood text on its surface. Although the words were fading, the last line was still incredibly clear:

“Wang Yang accidentally stepped on a slippery rock and slipped. As a result, Cheng Nuo accidentally skewered him through the brain and killed him.”

The word “killed” especially was glowing a bloody, vicious light.

“The Annon Sutra’s Orbit of Fate is so scummy. I love it,” Ye Qing looked down on the piece of vellum with obvious delight on his face.

That’s right. The series of unfortunate coincidences that led to Wang Yang’s death was all caused by the Orbit of Fate.

Assuming he hadn't altered the trajectory of Wang Yang's fate, the young hill lord would've been able to dodge the ink sword without much trouble. But since he had, he slipped at the last moment and accidentally put his head directly in the path of Cheng Nuo's sword, which resulted in his death.

As for why he wanted Wang Yang to die in Cheng Nuo's hands, it was very simple. It was to pit Sunset Hill and White Horse Academy against one another. Best case scenario, Wang Luori would be so busy with his new enemy that he completely forgot that he existed.

Wang Luori was arrogant, petulant, and extremely protective of his own, so much so that he would even challenge the Pacification Bureau for a disciple. His only son? Ye Qing only wished he could be there when the showdown happened.

As Wang Luori's only son, Wang Yang was pampered to the extreme from a young age. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he was Wang Luori's reverse scale. Besides that, Wang Luori wasn't the kind of person to plot before he acted. It was why Ye Qing was almost certain that he would pay White Horse Academy a visit as soon as he learned that Wang Yang had perished in Cheng Nuo's hands. So what if Cheng Nuo was the vice principal? Wang Luori was still going to murder him, take revenge for his son, and contemplate the consequences after the dust had settled.

As for Cheng Nuo, he was the vice principal of White Horse Academy and enjoyed both a good status and reputation. No matter how much White Horse Academy abhorred butting heads with Wang Luori, they would never give up Cheng Nuo without a fight. Even if Cheng Nuo wasn't a VIP, Cheng Nuo was in the right here. What would people think of White Horse Academy if they surrendered an innocent person to Wang Luori just because his fist was bigger?

A scholar practiced the Way of the Gentleman; believed that there are certain things that a gentleman would do and not do. If White Horse Academy broke their own code, their reputation in the jianghu wouldn't be the only thing that was sullied. Their standing with the temples, other scholars and more would be in tatters as well.

Wang Luori would never swallow the death of his son without retaliation. White Horse Academy would never give up Cheng Nuo without a fight. Therefore, their conflict was inevitable, and compromise was impossible. There would only be one victor when all was said and done.

Usually, the side with the bigger fist wins the day, but White Horse Academy and Sunset Hill were evenly matched as they were two of the three biggest sects in Luo Shui. It wouldn't be a bloodbath, but it definitely wasn't going to be all bark and no bite either. In other words, the conflict would not end easily.

When the time came, Wang Luori would be too busy to come after him. He might even forget him altogether. After all, what was more important, the death of his only son, or a shitty disciple that could be, relatively speaking, easily replaced?

The best case scenario for Ye Qing was the principal killing Wang Luori. It would never happen, but it was a good daydream.

This was Ye Qing's ultimate objective. Everything he did earlier—killing Cheng Yi, weakening Wang Yang, buying time until White Horse Academy showed up and more—was all in preparation for this one moment.



But in order for his plan to succeed, there was one critical component that he must get right no matter what: he must get Cheng Nuo to kill Wang Yang publicly, and to do it in a way that no one would suspect foul play?

While this would be rather difficult for most people to pull off, it was fairly easy for him thanks to the Annon Sutra. It was no Death Note though. The Orbit of Fate was potent and practically undetectable, but only if the circumstances would allow a certain fate to take form. Moreover, the stronger the target, the harder it was for the Orbit of Fate to affect them.

That was why he had clipped Wang Yang's wings bit by bit and dealt a severe blow to him at the end. It was to reduce his strength to the point where the Orbit of Fate would actually work on him. Even so, it had taken three silver dragon-serpent runes to accomplish his objective.

Ye Qing was hurt by the loss of course, but it was worth it if it meant freeing himself from a Spirit Master's attention.

"My plan is flawless, perfect, and sublime, hehehe. I should give my intelligence a like and subscribe!"

Ye Qing snapped his fingers smilingly while removing all traces of his presence from the surroundings. Only then did he return to the Thousand Buddhas Grotto.

He hadn't forgotten his main objective for coming to the Thousand Buddhas Grotto, of course. It was to refine the Burning Wind and grow stronger, not to screw over his enemies. As fun as it was, that was just a side quest.

The Thousand Buddhas Temple had gotten a new makeup by the time he returned. The flesh, blood, corpses and filth had all been cleansed by the three divine winds, and the temple was returned to its original appearance. There were no golden buildings, holy light or divine lotuses. All that was left of the temple was a pile of ruins and the many, many marks of time.

Despite this, Ye Qing actually felt safer than ever before. This was real. The mundane reality before him proved that there was nothing to worry about.

After entering the Thousand Buddhas Temple and observing his surroundings for a bit, Ye Qing resolutely made his way toward the withered corpse.

He wasn't planning to desecrate the corpse or anything, of course. Although he was surprised that the three divine winds had failed to annihilate the body, Buddhist monks had always been famous for their tough, resilient bodies. It was entirely possible that the withered corpse was a body-tempering master in his previous life and possessed a body that could withstand even the all-consuming power of the three divine winds.

Most importantly, he couldn't sense any evil influence or aura from the withered corpse. The chance that the Stranger would suddenly come back to life to haunt him was almost zero.

As for why he was heading toward the corpse, it was because he noticed that the three divine winds of the Thousand Buddhas Temple—the Corrosive Wind, the Icy Wind and the Burning Wind—were centered around it. The winds were blowing in from left, right, and behind the withered corpse, and their purpose was obviously to suppress him. On a related note, the Burning Wind was blowing in from behind the corpse.

He only needed the Burning Wind to refine his astral qi. Not only would the Corrosive Wind and the Icy Wind not help him one bit, it would actually negatively impact his cultivation. That was why he needed to move behind the withered corpse.

After walking up to the withered corpse, Ye Qing saluted him and said, "I don't mean to disturb your rest, senior. I'm just borrowing your Burning Wind for a bit. Thank you."

Three bows later, Ye Qing was going to step around the corpse when suddenly, he heard a voice saying, "You're back, benefactor. You truly are fated with my Buddha!"

"What?" Ye Qing felt a chill shooting up his spine as he jumped away from his spot. He appeared at the entrance of the Thousand Buddhas Temple a moment later with his arms lowered and his energies concentrated, ready to react to anything.

"This monk is Jing Hui. I am glad to see you, benefactor!" The withered corpse slowly opened his eyes. "Do not be afraid. I harbor no ill will toward you!"

The withered corpse tugged the corners of his lips into a smile, but it only made him look scarier because of the state of his body.

"Jing Hui? You're still alive?" Ye Qing shrank. He looked like he might run at the slightest hint of trouble.

It might seem cowardly, but Ye Qing had experienced enough of the monk's madness to be traumatized for a long, long time to come.

"Amitabha," the withered corpse chanted gently, "Please don't misunderstand, benefactor. This monk is Jing Hui, but this Jing Hui is not that Jing Hui!"

Ye Qing watched him suspiciously. Can we speak human please, brother? I don't get what you're saying!

Thankfully, the withered corpse did not keep him in suspense. "The Jing Hui you encountered earlier is a strand of my demonic thought. He is not me."

"A... demonic thought?" Ye Qing frowned but didn't say anything. He simply watched the withered corpse in silence.

Keep talking. I'll listen. I'll decide if you're telling the truth or not.

As if he could hear Ye Qing's thoughts, the withered corpse continued, "Amitabha. When I was still alive, I was the head of the Moko Hall. Moko represents the spirit of lack of colors and sex, which is why the Moko Hall is also the place to study the teachings of the Buddha and cultivate one's heart."

"However, I don't study the teachings of the Buddha nor cultivate my heart despite being the head of the Moko Hall. In fact, I was so intoxicated with martial arts that my temperament gradually became twisted. I became a competitive, irritable, cruel and bloodthirsty man."

“When my martial arts reached a peak, I ignored my abbot’s advice and went to the secular world. I challenged all kinds of martial arts practitioners, and everyone who fought me were either dead or seriously injured. However, I took this as a badge of honor and continued to commit countless sins.”

“Eventually, my evil actions culminated in multiple factions banding together to attack Thousand Buddhas Temple. Although my temple ultimately survived, many lives were injured and lost as a result.”

The withered corpse’s tone became full of remorse. “That was what opened me to the fact that I am full of sin and possessed by my personal demon. So, I decided to lock myself up inside this place and be destroyed by the three divine winds. The Wind of Five Poisons cleanses the soul, the Wind of Six Desires exposes the body, and the Wind of Seven Emotions reveals one’s nature. I was planning to spend the rest of my life atoning for my sins.”

“Later, the Thousand Buddhas Temple suffered a great calamity and was destroyed. As a result, my remains and this small temple fell to this place.”

“Since I cultivated the Great Sun Glazed Sacrifice Sutra, my body survived even though my soul had deteriorated to the point where only a sliver of a fragment was left.”

“About five years ago, a man who called himself ‘Mara Buddha’ entered this place and found me. Recognizing the fact that my body had become the perfect embryo of a Strange Artifact because of the constant baptism of the three divine winds, he plotted to transform my body into a Strange Artifact and my soul fragment into an artifact spirit.”

“Mara Buddha?” Ye Qing raised his eyebrows. It was obvious that this mysterious person was powerful from their name alone.

The withered corpse continued, “That is why he used a demonic flame and burned my body for forty-nine days straight, and a demonic sutra to pollute my soul fragment and create a demonic thought.”

“To strengthen the demonic thought, Mara Buddha scattered the baits and lured countless greedy people to come to the Thousand Buddhas Temple and commit suicide. Over time, he gathered enough corpses to build an unholy temple that would block out even the three divine winds. I did my best to resist, but as the number of dead people grew, so did the demonic thought. Eventually, the demonic thought managed to overcome me and become the dominant mind. Although my mind still exists, I was unable to resist it.”

This reminded Ye Qing of the withered corpse’s odd expression earlier. It would explain why one half of his face was peaceful, and the other half was savage earlier.

“Thankfully, you are able to destroy this temple of corpses and suppress the demonic thought. As a result, I was able to escape. Had Mara Buddha succeeded in his plans, a million deaths would not be enough to cleanse me from the sins I would have committed. That is why I am most grateful for what you’ve done, benefactor.”

Chapter 197: The Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art

“You don’t need to thank me, Venerable Bhante. I was just doing my own thing,” Ye Qing said while saluting the withered corpse. He had mulled over the withered corpse’s statement and couldn’t find any real holes in it. He couldn’t feel any malice from the withered corpse’s either, so he saw no harm in being polite for the moment.

The withered corpse said smilingly, “Amitabha. All things in the world are tied by karma. You may be doing your own thing, but it doesn’t change the fact that your deeds have freed me. Therefore, you are deserving of my thanks.”

“You flatter me, Venerable Bhante,” Ye Qing responded with a smile of his own, “If nothing else, I am glad I am able to free you from your demonic troubles.”

“Excellent, excellent!” The withered corpse chanted, “This monk is impressed at your humility and open-mindedness, benefactor.”

“Since you have freed me from my demonic troubles and future sins, I would like to offer you a small token of appreciation. I hope you won’t refuse it.”

Is this... my opportunity? Ye Qing’s eyes lit up, and his heart pounded with excitement. Sometimes, good luck falls on you like a hurricane. Should he accept it or accept it [1]? It wasn’t just a gift from an elder, but also the dying wish of a soon-to-be-departed. He couldn’t possibly reject such an offer, could he?

But of course, there was still a chance this might just be a trick. That was why Ye Qing remained where he was and waited for the monk to continue.

The withered corpse didn’t get angry despite Ye Qing’s obvious suspicion. He continued in a gentle voice, “You have nothing to worry about, benefactor. I am but a soul fragment right now, and I could disappear at any moment. The way I am right now, I am unable to harm even a hair on your person.”

The withered corpse lowered his mental defenses and bared his soul for Ye Qing to see then. Ye Qing carefully scrutinized Jing Hui’s soul and found that he was telling the truth. Not only was he just a soul fragment, he was like a candle flame that could be extinguished by the three divine winds at any moment.

“Do you believe me now? If you do, then come to me,” the withered corpse said smilingly.

After Ye Qing was sure this was no ploy, he walked up to the withered corpse and apologized, “Please forgive me for my rudeness, Venerable Bhante.”

The withered corpse chuckled. “The jianghu is a dangerous place, and even if it isn’t, it is natural to be cautious. What is there to apologize for?”

He then raised a withering finger and tapped his forehead. A red lotus immediately flew out into the open.

The red lotus was pocket-sized at best, but it was incredibly lifelike and burning a pure, red flame. It also contained a great air of mystery and Dao.

Before Ye Qing could react, the red lotus entered his head in a flash. Then, it began spinning slowly and unfurling its flame into many scrolls of sutras and martial arts insights.

“What the...” Ye Qing couldn’t help but looked astonished as he perceived the sutras and insights.

“This is the Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art, one of the Thirty Six Arts of my Thousand Buddhas Temple. Although it is just a Spirit Purification stage martial art, it is quite potent.”

“Those who are sinful will burn in hell. The Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art can transform one’s heart demon and sins into hellfire to purge the sinner.”

“The hellfire purges the heart, and the red lotus cleanses the world.”

The withered corpse continued, “When I was still alive, the Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art is my signature martial art. Since your astral qi is fire-based, I believe that you are a good fit with it. I have transferred all of my insights regarding the Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art and saber arts in general to you. Simply perceive the red lotus with your spirit, and you will be able to glean into my understanding and insights. I believe this will be greatly beneficial to your cultivation.”

“With this gift, I hope you’ll be able to slay more demons and save more people.”

“Thank you, Venerable Bhante. This junior will not betray your expectations,” Ye Qing thanked him with barely suppressed excitement.

Even if the Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art was a mediocre saber art—which Jing Hui confirmed personally that it wasn’t—the word “Spirit Purification stage” alone was enough to send him into hype overdrive. What delighted him even more was the fact that Jing Hui had injected all of his learnings and insights regarding the saber art into his mind. To give an example, it was the difference between having to study chemistry from scratch, and having a chemistry book to refer to. It was going to save him so much time.

The Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art was a Spirit Purification stage martial art; a martial art that involved the use of the mind and spirit. As an Astral Refiner, it was inevitable that he would be hardpressed to apply it properly or even understand it. Worst case scenario, he could hurt his own mind and suffer a deviation.

Of course, he didn’t think he would suffer a deviation thanks to his powerful spirit, but of course he would experience more difficulties than an actual Spirit Purifier.

This problem was circumvented since Jing Hui had given him his insights; his “martial arts essence” for short. A martial arts essence could be directly implanted into another’s mind or be sealed within an object such as a manual, a jade box and so on. It could be used to accelerate one’s cultivation. The reason it wasn’t commonplace was because it could only be created by some peak martial arts practitioners, and Jing Hui was clearly one of them.

“This monk believes in you, benefactor,” Jing Hui replied smilingly, although his voice was a lot weaker than before. It was clear that transmitting the martial arts essence took a lot out of the monk.

“Besides the Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art, there is one more thing I would like to give you, benefactor.”

“What? There’s more?” Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise. Did his ancestor come back to life or what? He wasn’t expecting to be so lucky today!

Jing Hui explained, “My second gift to you is my corpse.”

“Thank—wait what? Your corpse?” Why would I need your corpse? I’m not necrophilic, bro! Oh wait, maybe he just wants me to bury him. I can do that.

“As I’ve told you earlier, my body was refined by a man named Mara Buddha before. I am practically a Strange Artifact at this point, and my body has been fully corrupted by demonic energy. I can seal it, but I don’t have the means to destroy it. If my body were to be left alone, Mara Buddha would surely return and claim it one day. I can only imagine the number of lives he would take in my name. That is why I want you to have my body.”

Ye Qing turned serious and nodded. “I am grateful for your trust, Venerable Bhante. I swear I won’t betray your expectations.”

Jing Hui advised, “I will use the Moko Boundless Chains to seal my body later. The Moko Boundless Chains is a valuable treasure of my Thousand Buddhas Temple and possesses the power to suppress heart demons and evils. It would keep my demonic energy well under wraps.”

“I will inform you how to use the Moko Boundless Chains in a moment. When the time comes, you may release the chains, unleash my demonic energy, and transform my body into the Boundless Mara Buddha. I am sure it will be of great use to you.”

“However, I must warn you that my demonic energy is incredibly powerful. If possible, you should only reserve it for grave dangers. Otherwise, it may change your nature.”

Ye Qing saluted him again. “This junior will remember your advice, Venerable Bhante.”

However, Jing Hui chuckled, “That said, the Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art I taught you possess the power to slay one’s heart demons and sins, and it isn’t just limited to enemies. You simply need to

cut yourself often, and you should never lose your clarity of mind. It is one of the reasons I decided to grant you my Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art.”

“You stand tall and see far, Venerable Bhante. This junior is most impressed,” Ye Qing praised before hesitating for a moment. “Venerable Bhante, I have a question. Aren’t you afraid that you might have misjudged me? I could be a rotten bastard with good acting skills.”

Jing Hui smiled. “This monk is slightly familiar with the art of discerning people, and I can tell that you are a good person despite your cunning. I believe that I have not misjudged you.”

He paused for a moment before adding jokingly, “That, and I really don’t have much time left. I don’t have the luxury to pick the best fruit out of the lot.”

“Thank you for believing in me, Venerable Bhante.”

Ye Qing abruptly straightened up and saluted the monk seriously, “This junior is Ye Qing, a Patrolman of the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau. I cannot swear that I will never kill another person, nor can I promise that I will save every life I encounter. However, I promise that I will never lose my heart and succumb into evil. I will do what I can and follow my heart. Wherever my actions take me, I swear that it will never betray my own beliefs.”

“Excellent!” Jing Hui laughed joyously. “Just follow your heart, and it is like having consulted the Buddha Himself! Amitabha! Excellent! Excellent!”

The chains wrapped around Jing Hui slowly glowed as he said this. The runes sparkled, and a soft layer of golden light basked the tattered temple.

Multiple Buddha silhouettes began manifesting in the golden light. Golden lotuses descended from above, and the sounds of peaceful chanting filled the ears. It made Ye Qing feel calm and in control of himself.

The next moment, the Buddha silhouettes descended like gods entering the mortal coil. They transformed into many enigmatic runes and imprinted themselves upon the chains.

The chains glowed brightly and slowly shrank. Somehow, Jing Hui started shrinking as well. Just a few breaths later, the body had become as small as a palm like a little mud sculpture. It was wrapped by a single chain that glowed with mysterious, gentle light.

“Amitabha...” A solemn chant rang one last time inside the tattered temple. It was like a final goodbye and well-wishes to this world.

With that, the sculpture slowly floated into the air and into Ye Qing’s hands.

The sculpture felt warm to touch. Although it was a corpse, it was devoid of the darkness and coldness of a body. It was fairly light and circulating with some sort of air of Buddha that ultimately went back into the chain. It looked and felt very mysterious.

The body seemed to contain a tremendous amount of power. Its aura felt unholy and evil as well. However, it was tightly sealed by the chain.

Ye Qing could no longer feel Jing Hui's soul fragment inside the sculpture. He reckoned that the monk had finally passed to the afterlife.

"Rest in peace, Venerable Bhante. This junior wouldn't betray your expectations," Ye Qing sighed. He was sad, but he was also happy. Quite happy, in fact. This trip had turned out to be far more fruitful than he could possibly expect.

No wonder there was this saying, "Whatever will happen to our plans is up to fate." Wang Yang had come to the Thousand Buddhas Grotto as prepared as he could be, but he still died in the end. He only wanted to refine the Burning Wind that was in the grotto, but he had walked away with everything he could ask for.

Truly, you reap what you sow, and I am daddy heavens' favorite son.

"Time to check what grade, taboos and abilities this Strange Artifact possess."

After leaving the Thousand Buddhas Temple and finding a secluded and windless spot, Ye Qing unfurled the Annon Sutra and spat a mouthful of blood on the vellum, asking, "What grade is the Strange Artifact Venerable Bhante Jing Hui transformed into? And what abilities does it possess?"

The Annon Sutra didn't respond though. Clearly, one mouthful of blood wasn't enough.

Chapter 198: The Boundless Mara Buddha

"You're gonna suck me dry one day, bud."

Ye Qing let out a sigh and proceeded to spit out a dozen mouthfuls of blood. Blood donation had never been this easy and exhausting. If he wasn't as vigorous as he was, he would've reached his limit in a couple mouthfuls at most.

Finally, the familiar blood red text appeared:

"The Boundless Mara Buddha is a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact. It is created from the remains of the enlightened monk and Trueman-stage warrior of Thousand Buddhas Temple, Jing Hui, the power of the Mara Buddha, and the Moko Boundless Chains. To put it simply, the body is the foundation, the Mara Buddha's power is the core, and the Moko Boundless Chains are the complement. Together, they form the Mara Boundless Buddha."

"The Mara Boundless Buddha contains both Buddhist and demonic powers. In its sealed state, it is a Hatred-class Strange Artifact. It possesses the power of a Buddha as it is created from the remains of an enlightened monk and a Buddhist artifact. It can be used to steady one's mind, calm one's spirit, and protect one's soul. It can also be used to suppress and exorcise many evils."

"In its unsealed state, the Boundless Mara Buddha is a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact that can unleash the power of the Mara Buddha. The Boundless Mara Qi can be used to corrupt body and soul and manifest a demonic domain."



“However, the wielder of the Boundless Mara Buddha may be corrupted and turned into a mindless puppet by its Boundless Mara Qi if their willpower is weak.”

The blood text ended here.

“A Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact? I can hardly believe it! Hahaha! Hahahaha!”

Ye Qing tried really hard to suppress his mad cackle, but in the end he just couldn’t help himself. Finally, he had something that would allow him to give Wang Luori the middle finger and taunt, “Come at me, bitch!”

Generally speaking, a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact was as potent as a Spirit Purifier. In fact, it was usually stronger because the ingredients and conditions necessary to create such a Strange Artifact was far more stringent than it was to create a Spirit Purifier. Take the Boundless Mara Buddha for example, it had been created from the remains of a Trueman. Trueman was the cultivation level above Spirit Master, and it required combining one’s Yin God, astral qi, and physical body into one to form the Yang God. Trueman warriors were also known as Grandmasters.

This was why even the most ordinary Strange Artifact was usually greater than its warrior counterpart. In fact, they could often threaten a warrior at a higher cultivation level. Therefore, in terms of potency alone, a Soulstealer-class strange Artifact absolutely could threaten a late-stage Spirit Purifier and even a Half-Step Spirit Master. If it was sentient, then it could even threaten a Spirit Master—assuming that it could unleash its full power, of course. In fact, most warriors could never unleash the full potential of their Strange Artifact due to its various restrictions and side effects.

Even so, Ye Qing definitely possessed the right to stand against Wang Luori now. At the very least, the Half-Step Spirit Master could no longer threaten his life just by glaring daggers at him like the last time.

According to the Annon Sutra, the Boundless Mara Buddha could be used in two ways. In its sealed state, it was a support-type Strange Artifact that could be used to protect his mind, spirit and soul. It would safeguard him against the tricks and ambushes of say, an illusion-type Stranger.

In its unsealed state, the Boundless Mara Buddha would transform into an offensive-type Strange Artifact that supposedly possessed incredible potency. While the description didn’t really do a good job at explaining how he should use it or how powerful it was compared to your conventional Spirit Purifier, he could always test it out after he went back to his residence.

As for the risk of using the Boundless Mara Buddhas in its unsealed state, Ye Qing decided to overlook it for now. To worry about it now was like fussing over the watermelon seeds inside a juicy watermelon. For now, the benefits seemed to outweigh the risks.

“Hoooh, hehehe...”

After that, Ye Qing put away the Annon Sutra and admired his new toy. From time to time, he would even let out a silly laugh. He just couldn’t have enough of it. He would do this for the next six hours to come.

He hadn’t gone insane, of course. He was waiting to see if danger would show up.

He hadn't forgotten what Jing Hui said earlier. The monk had transformed into a Strange Artifact only because he was corrupted and refined by a person who called himself "Mara Buddha", and Ye Qing had just stolen the fruit he spent much time and effort to cultivate.

It wouldn't be surprising if Mara Buddha had left behind some sort of alarm to alert him just in case something had gone awry. What if Mara Buddha came over to take a look, found Ye Qing with his Strange Artifact, said, "I am fated with this item", and slaughtered his ass to reclaim it?

After all, Mara Buddha was the man who built a temple of corpses to refine the remains of a Trueman into a Strange Artifact. There was no way a guy like this would be weak, and this time he no longer had Wang Yang to act as his meat shield.

This was why Ye Qing had chosen to hide himself instead of cultivating his astral qi immediately. It would be most awkward if Mara Buddha showed up and stumbled upon him in the middle of his cultivation.

If Mara Buddha did show up, he would find no one and think that the thief had already escaped with his Strange Artifact. If Mara Buddha did not show up, then even better.

In this world, it was always better to be safe than sorry.

.....

Far, far away, a young man cultivating at the edge of a cliff slowly opened his eyes. The dark light circulating in his pupils took the shape of a Buddha, but it was an evil-looking Buddha filled with demonic power. It painted a stark contrast with the gentle and merciful smile on his face.

"Huh! Someone took the item I kept in the Thousand Buddhas Temple."

The young man closed his eyes and counted with his fingers, but he quickly frowned and muttered, "Strange. Who is it? Not only did they wipe out the strand of mind I imbued on the item, I couldn't calculate their exact location with my Southern Dipper Calculation. Are they that strong, or do they possess a powerful artifact that could conceal their fate from scrutiny?"

The young man spent a moment longer trying to identify the thief to no avail. He didn't take the failure to heart though. In fact, he smiled a little and whispered, "It's okay. You may keep my item for a while longer. All things in the world are bound together by fate. I will find you one day."

"Senior brother! Senior brother!"

It was at this moment an anxious voice interrupted his train of thoughts. A young disciple was rushing up the cliff and calling out to him.

When the young man turned around, the demonic Buddha in his pupils vanished like it was never there. He watched the young disciple with warm eyes and asked, "What's wrong? Take your time."

The young disciple felt his anxiety subsiding a little when he heard the young man's gentle voice. He took two breaths to calm himself further before saying, "The Hill Lord is looking for you, senior brother."

"Master wants to see me? Did he say why?"

The disciple looked a little pale as he shook his head. "The Hill Lord didn't say, but... he looked incredibly angry. He had already killed a handful of servants and maids. You should be careful when you meet him later, senior brother. You wouldn't want to provoke his ire right now."

The young man smiled. "Thank you for the warning. I will be careful. By the way, please take this Yellow Dragon Pill. It will aid you when you attempt to enter the Astral Refinement stage."

"The Yellow Dragon Pill? I can't possibly accept that! It's too valuable!"

"It's okay. The sooner you enter the Astral Refinement stage, the better you'll be able to serve the sect. Please don't turn down my gift, junior brother."

"O... Okay. Thanks, senior brother. I swear I won't betray your expectations."

"Cultivate well. I'll be taking my leave now."

.....

Ye Qing waited for almost nine hours before he was finally certain that Mara Buddha would not be visiting the place. It was only then he crawled out of his hiding spot and returned to the Thousand Buddhas Temple. After finding a suitable spot and taking a seat, he took out the Star Lotus and swallowed it in one gulp.

The Star Lotus melted as soon as it made contact with his tongue and filled his mouth with a sweet, fragrant scent. Before Ye Qing could enjoy its taste, a calm, gentle energy seeped out of the liquid and flowed straight into his dantian.

The energy was neither turbulent nor immense. It was like a calm stream or a wispy cloud that entered his dantian before he knew it. It wrapped around the isolated Burning Wind and true qi inside his dantian and fused them seamlessly.

This was the power of the Star Lotus. It could blend astral qi and true qi into one instantly.

While the Star Lotus was still in effect, Ye Qing hurriedly channeled the "Nirvana Sutra of Burning Wind" and pulled in a copious amount of Burning Wind. It quickly merged into one with his true qi and became indistinguishable from one another.

Every time Ye Qing ran out of true qi, he would absorb a silver dragon-serpent rune and replenish it immediately. He made sure to maintain the speed at which he was refining the Burning Wind, and the speed at which it was merging with his true qi at the same level.

Over time, a terrifying molten hurricane had taken form around Ye Qing. It was so hot that the stone and soil on the ground were melted into molten lava.

Ye Qing was sitting dead center in this pool of lava, but he wasn't moving at all. In fact, his aura kept growing stronger, and his body and even his hair slowly turned dark red in color. Wisps of dark red flames were pouring out of his pores, giving him the appearance of a molten mold or a fire spirit.

An incense stick later, when Ye Qing felt that his body had accumulated the maximum amount of astral qi it could accumulate, he immediately took out the Blood Jade Lotus.

Ye Qing didn't swallow the Blood Jade Lotus in one gulp like the Star Lotus because one, it was too big, and two, it would be wasteful to consume it this way. Instead, he tore off one petal and

swallowed it slowly. After it entered his stomach, it transformed into a ball of red energy that spread to every corner of his body.

He could feel the Blood Jade Lotus' power seeping into his dantian and spreading out like many layers of invisible web. Then, it began filtering out all of the impurities and filth inside his astral qi.

Ye Qing was surprised to see the dark red astral qi turning as black as the night. He thought that this was its true color at its purest, but he was wrong. More time passed, and his astral qi gradually shedded its black color. This would continue until his astral qi had become completely transparent and seemingly non-existent.

There was no denying the sheer power contained within this "nothingness", however.

It was then Ye Qing had a revelation: wind was invisible and formless in the first place. That was why the Burning Wind's purest form was invisible and formless as well.

"PHew..."

Ye Qing opened his mouth and spat out an invisible wisp of Burning Wind. Everything within several meters of him instantly became distorted with heat, and an entire patch of Burning Wind blowing in from the opening was blown apart with ease.

"So this is the Burning Wind's true power!" Ye Qing exclaimed happily. But it was too soon to be happy just yet. The power of the Star Lotus and the Blood Jade Lotus hadn't faded yet, and there were still more work to be done. He immediately threw himself into his cultivation once more.

Every time the Blood Jade Lotus filtered out a large amount of impurities, the volume of astral qi inside his dantian would decrease. As a result, he could absorb more Burning Wind from his surroundings and blend them with his true qi all over again. Once he had reached his limit, he would consume another petal and remove all of the impurities.

Time passed little by little. The winds of the Thousand Buddhas Temple were as noisy as ever, and yet this moment felt surprisingly peaceful.

White Horse Academy only wished they could say the same.

Chapter 199: All Things In Life Are Decided By Power

White Horse Hill, White Horse Academy.

Wang Luori was standing in front of the entrance and glaring at the inscribed board with a murderous expression on his face. He was accompanied by various elders, attendants and disciples. Everyone was as silent and afraid as an ant.

It was said that the inscribed board hanging at the entrance of White Horse Academy was written by the Chief Libationist of the Jixia Academy himself. It contained a sliver of the dao of Confucianism and so was overflowing with righteousness and power.

Capable of repelling all evils and Strangers within fifty kilometers of the academy, it was the symbol of White Horse Academy and their most prized possession.

However, not even this treasure could wash away the darkness and promise of violence pouring out of Wang Luori right now.

The atmosphere in front of White Horse Academy was solemn and quiet. Anyone could tell that it was the calm before the storm.

Boom!

Suddenly, Wang Luori took an earthshaking step and shone like a golden sun. Then, he threw a punch straight at the inscribed board.

The surrounding space shook violently as the punch force flew toward the board. It was like the sun itself was descending from the sky.

Buzz!

The three words on the board “White Horse Academy” lit up at the same time. The milky white light formed a white horse that raced forth to meet the sun.

The white horse’s aura was pure and unblemished. It was also carrying a ton of ancient scriptures that flipped open to unleash shockwaves, wind, rain, and more books.

“The white horse carries books and the sound of the wind, rain, and reading.”

As the sounds continued, the descending sun grew smaller and fainter. At some point, it began flickering like a candle flame that could extinguish at any moment.

“Hmph!”

Seeing this, Wang Luori took another earthshaking step toward the board, and his eyes shone like a pair of mini suns. His aura skyrocketed, and the wavering sun quickly regained its power. It was like the sun piercing through the dark clouds and illuminating the world after a heavy rainstorm.

The white horse the board created abruptly shattered into pieces. A second later, Wang Luori’s fist force finally struck the board.

There was a loud boom as the board shuddered like a leaf. Its white light grew much dimmer, and cracks spread all across its surface like a spider web.

Wang Luori’s fist force ultimately failed to shatter the board in one hit, but the gate and posts holding it up weren’t so lucky. They crumbled like paper structures and shattered into a million pieces. Not only that, the remnant force of the attack spread deeper into the academy and bathed countless White Horse Academy disciples in uncomfortable heat.

It was at this moment a deep and refined voice spoke up, “What do you think you’re doing destroying our entrance and damaging our priceless treasure, Hill Lord Wang?”

The voice was like the spring wind. It blew away the uncomfortable heat in an instant.

Then, an elegant old man with white hair and beard stepped out of the crowd. He looked to be in his sixties, and he was wearing a confucian robe. His huge, long sleeves flapped in the wind and unleashed invisible ripples that wiped away the remaining energies in the air, preventing Wang Luori from using it to cause more havoc to the academy.

He was the principal of the White Horse Academy, Zhang Lanjiang “The Righteous One”.

“I’m sure you know what I want, Principal Zhang.”

Wang Luori was wary of Zhang Lanjiang, but verbally he didn't relent at all. In fact, his killing intent was greater than ever.

"Surrender the murderer of my son, Cheng Nuo now, or suffer my wrath!"

He came even sooner than I expected, Zhang Lanjiang sighed on the inside. He knew that there would be trouble from the moment he saw Cheng Nuo returning with Wang Yang's corpse. He just wasn't expecting it to be so soon.

"This matter is more complicated than you think, Hill Lord Wang. May we have a careful discussion inside the guest hall?" Zhang Lanjiang beckoned politely.

"There is nothing complicated about this. Just answer me this: did Cheng Nuo kill my son?" Wang Luori clasped his hands behind his back and asked in a murderous tone.

"That is true, but it is not what you—"

Wang Luori interrupted Zhang Lanjiang before he could finish, "That's all I need to hear. All debts must be repaid, and I must have Cheng Nuo's blood to make up for my loss. Surrender him now, and I will leave immediately. Refuse me, and it will be your fault that a river of blood runs inside your academy."

Zhang Lanjiang frowned as helplessness flickered across his wizened face. "Everything in the world happens for a reason, Hill Lord Wang. Will you please allow me to say my piece?"

"My son is dead!" Wang Luori replied coldly.

"Hill Lord Wang, it is true that a member of White Horse Academy has killed your son by accident, but it was your son who murdered one of ours first. Can you please reconsider your actions for the sake of both our sects?" Zhang Lanjiang explained patiently.

"My son is dead!" Wang Luori repeated.

"Hill Lord Wang, both Sunset Hill and White Horse Academy are sects of Luo Shui. We should be looking out for each other, not attacking one another like this. Can you please restrain your anger and come in to have a careful discussion with me?"

"My son is dead!"

"Do you have to be so unreasonable and aggressive, Hill Lord Wang?"

"My son is dead!"

"You..."

A bit of frustration entered Zhang Lanjiang's eyes as he swallowed his words. He had tried to reason with Wang Luori with logic, unwritten rules, and even emotions, but the Hill Lord had rebuffed it all with a simple, "My son is dead."

The fact was, Wang Luori's sentiment was perfectly understandable. To him, what could possibly be bigger than his son's death?

Seeing that Zhang Lanjiang had fallen silent, Wang Luori continued in a cold tone, "I'm just a brutish man who has never read a single book in my life, so your great Confucianist logic is wasted on me. I won't understand them, and I don't want to understand them."

"I have come to ask for one and one thing only: Cheng Nuo. Surrender him, then this matter is settled. Refuse, and I'll ruin you and your precious sect even if I have to sacrifice my own sect to do it."

A moment of silence later, Zhang Lanjiang asked, "Is there truly no other way?"

"My son is dead!" Wang Yang's eyes grew a little bloodshot. "I only have one son!"

"Show yourself, Cheng Nuo! Show yourself this instant!"

"Are you a man or what? You have the balls to murder my son, but not the balls to face the consequences? What kind of man hides behind another's back? Are you a woman? No, even a woman has bigger balls than you!"

"Hahaha, vice principal of the White Horse Academy my ass! Disciple of a sage my dick! To call you a turtle would be an insult to turtles, so I'm just going to call you out for what you are, a dickless coward!"

"Now come out and face me, you dickless coward!"

"How uncouth!" Cheng Nuo stepped out of the crowd with a look of ashen anger. "I'm here, Wang Luori. What are you going to do now?"

Wang Luori stared at Cheng Nuo like a wild beast who couldn't wait to rip and tear him to pieces. "You killed my son. What do you think I'm going to do?"

Wang Luori took one step toward Cheng Nuo and uttered through gritted teeth, "I'm going to eat. You. Alive for what you did to my son!"

"Gulp..."

Wang Luori looked so savage at this moment that Cheng Nuo couldn't help but stumble two steps away from him. He tried to mask his own fear and threatened, "It is true that I had killed your own son, but it was your son who killed my nephew first! You're the one who said that all debts must be repaid, so by your logic, it's only right that I take your son's life to compensate for my loss, am I right?"

"Of course it's not right!" Wang Luori's eyes were completely bloodshot at this point. "Who the fuck do you think your nephew is? He's just a garbage human being who hasn't even weaned off his mother's milk yet! How can his life possibly compare to my son's? Ten of your nephew isn't worth a single finger on my son's body!"

"You!" His callous declaration angered Cheng Nuo. "My nephew is a human being just like your son! Their lives are equal!"

Wang Yang scoffed, "I'm not even going to comment on how stupid your words are, but know that it is an honor that your garbage-of-a-nephew got to die in my son's hands. Hell, it's an honor to you as well. My son was saving your White Horse Academy from a lifetime of shame and humiliation by killing a black sheep!"

Cheng Nuo was so angry that he couldn't speak. So, you're saying I should thank you for killing my nephew?

Wang Luori continued uncaringly, "Plus, even if it's true that my son screwed up first, I'm his dad. I'm the one who should get to teach him a lesson first. Who the fuck do you think you are to supersede my authority?"

Cheng Nuo was furious, but what could he possibly say against Wang Luori? He could only grumble, "You... you really are an unreasonable brute!"

Zhang Lanjiang interrupted, "You are wrong, Hill Lord Wang. The sage decreed that there is no such thing as a kindness that is greater than the other, no etiquette that is more superior than the other, and no life that is more noble than the other. Naturally, all lives are equal."

"Plus, all lives and matters in life are connected to one another. If someone finds something they disagree with, it is perfectly within their right to interfere. Why would the order matter? Why would an order even exist?"

Wang Luori shot Zhang Lanjiang a glance and said, "I don't understand your Confucianist logic, and I don't care. All I know is my own jianghu logic and rules."

"His trash nephew and my son are technically peers. It's his own fault he's so weak that he couldn't even take a hit from my son. But Cheng Nuo is many years older than my son, and he has abused his power to kill him. Do you think this is the jianghu way?"

"Therefore, Cheng Nuo is the one who broke the rules first. Blood must be repaid with blood, so Cheng Nuo must die today!"

"That said, this is between me and Cheng Nuo. It has nothing to do with White Horse Academy. I would advise you not to interfere in our private business, Principal Zhang."

"There is no such thing as private business when it is a sect matter, just the same as no one's death is absolutely right or wrong."

Zhang Lanjiang shook his head. He was hoping to minimize the problem, but alas, it was not meant to be. Besides, neither side was completely right or wrong in this matter. This was humanity. Perfect black and white did not exist when humanity was involved.

A reasonable person could be reasoned with, but an unreasonable one could only be fought.

Ultimately, all things in life are decided by power. To put it simply, the one with the bigger fist would always have the bigger say.



“Hmph! I really don’t get scholars. You could’ve just said that you would defend the murderer until the end, but no, you just have to bring up all the big words and waste everyone’s time,” Wang Luori taunted. However, the fact that he had entertained Zhang Lanjiang and Cheng Nuo for this long was because he hoped that the principal would cave in and turn in Cheng Nuo willingly. He too didn’t wish to fight Zhang Lanjiang if he could help it.

That didn’t mean he was afraid to fight the man though. He, Wang Luori, did not believe that revenge was best served cold. In fact, he preferred to solve everything immediately whenever possible.

“If you have nothing else to say, then let’s get on with it. All Sunset Hill disciples, kill Cheng Nuo now! Don’t hesitate to kill anyone who dares to stand in your way!”

“Yes, my lord!” The Sunset Hill disciples responded and charged toward Cheng Nuo.

“This is a sanctuary of Confucianism! You will not ruin this place!”

A furious Zhang Lanjiang tried to stop the group from entering, but Wang Luori blocked his way first. “Your opponent is me, Principal Zhang!”

Zhang Lanjiang channeled the wind and clouds and swung his sleeves at Wang Luori, hoping to drive the Hill Lord back with a powerful attack and assist his disciples. Martial arts wise, they were the equal of Sunset Hill, but experience wise, they were lacking to say the least. Moreover, Wang Luori had brought only elite disciples with him. He counted many elders and stewards among the group as well. As a result, many White Horse Academy disciples were injured practically since the beginning of the battle.

Unfortunately, his attack failed to push Wang Luori even a step backward. The Hill Lord brought his palm down in a spiral and collapsed the very space around him, creating a black hole. It wiped out Zhang Lanjiang’s force and forced the principal to keep his attention on him.

“Is this a declaration of war, Wang Luori?” Zhang Lanjiang’s normally gentle voice abruptly turned stone cold.

Wang Luori clasped his hands behind his back and summoned a scorching sun behind him.

“I don’t want to go to war with you either. You’re the one who asked for this.”

Chapter 200: The Purple Qi Comes From The East

“All disciples, form up and retreat into the academy!” Zhang Lanjiang shouted before returning his cold gaze to Wang Luori. “Tolerance does not equate admission of guilt. Compromise does not equate cowardice.”

“You crossed the line, Wang Luori.”

As soon as he said this, the principal pointed one hand to the sky, and the other toward the earth. Together, they formed a perfect harmony.

“The sage decreed that one cannot achieve harmony without rules.”

An invisible force spread out and formed crisscrossing lines across the entire academy after Zhang Lanjiang said this. The Sunset Hill group was just giving chase when suddenly, their hearts sank, and their footsteps suddenly came to a halt. As if trapped inside a tiny cage, they were unable to move their limbs, much less break free from their invisible shackles.

It was the same for Wang Luori. He was going to punch Zhang Lanjiang in the face as he was speaking, but the moment he took a step, countless chains appeared out of nowhere all around him. Crisscrossed and perfectly straight, they formed a pocket world that bound him tightly.

There could be no harmony without rules, and there could be no movement without harmony. While the Sunset Hill group was temporarily shackled, the White Horse Academy disciples were able to withdraw back into the academy.

“This is a sanctuary of Confucianism and no place for you ruffians to cause havoc! Get lost!”

Yelling at the Sunset Hill disciples, Zhang Lanjiang sent them all flying with a sleeve sweep.

Almost everyone except a handful of elders spat out a mouthful of fresh blood and became incapacitated. Even then, none of them were able to catch themselves until they were flung out of White Horse Academy.

No one perished, but they were all stunned by how easily the principal had tossed them out like nothing. Was this the power of a Spirit Master?

“Rules are made to be broken! Only a weakling will believe in rules when power is what they should really be worshiping!”

It was at this moment Wang Luori let out a mighty roar and erupted into an inferno. A total of nine fiery suns appeared above him, and every plant in White Horse Academy suddenly withered and burst into flames at the same time. It was like the place had suddenly transformed into an infernal hell. The crisscrossing chains that kept him bound melted without a sound as well. None shall withstand the wrath of the nine suns!

The moment the chains disappeared, Wang Luori pushed off the ground like an earthquake and pounced toward Zhang Lanjiang. Following right behind him were his nine suns.

“Those who respect the rules are civil. If you don’t respect the rules, then what difference is there between you and an animal?”

Wang Luori’s charge looked formidable, Zhang Lanjiang wasn’t afraid. His white hair flying all over the place, he opened his mouth and spat out a mouthful of clear, righteous qi.

Righteous qi was clear, vast, and righteous, and there was no one better at cultivating righteous qi than a scholar.

The righteous qi transformed into a powerful gust of astral wind as soon as it left his mouth. It looked weak, but it shook the nine suns and extinguished their flames.

As for Wang Luori himself, he suddenly found himself upside down. It took him a moment to realize that he had been blown right out of the academy and even the hill itself. He didn’t stop spinning until he hit the foot of the hill.

A single breath of righteous qi was worth hundreds of kilometers of wind.

The moment Wang Luori was blown away, Zhang Lanjiang took one step forward and somehow appeared at the foot of the hill in the blink of an eye. Then, he moved his hand as if he was physically pulling the air and smashed his astral wind into the disoriented Wang Luori.

What were mountains when you could alter rivers as you pleased?

The world shook, and the earth was torn asunder as Wang Luori was engulfed by the astral qi.

“Phew... They weren’t kidding when they called you the Righteous One whose righteous breath is worth hundreds of kilometers of wind.”

However, Wang Luori slowly stepped out of the dust cloud before it could dissipate. He also looked mostly unharmed.

Floating around him were seven glazed lamps. They spun circles around him and emitted ripples that pushed away all of the dust and astral wind.

It was none other than one of the Seven Treasures of Sunset Hill, the Seven Bejeweled Glazed Lamps.

Out of all the Strange Artifacts, the Seven Bejeweled Glazed Lamps possessed the strongest defense. It could block both astral qi and protect the mind. Without it, it would’ve cost him so much more to shield himself from Zhan Lanjiang’s follow-up attack.

He had to admit that Zhang Lanjiang was incredibly powerful though. He might be a Half-Step Spirit Master, but Zhang Lanjiang was a true Spirit Master, and not a sham like Cheng Nuo either. A Spirit Master was someone who had forged their Yin God and could learn to master the magics of the world. They could summon wind and rain, command lightning and thunder, and cause the very weather to change with the snap of a finger. They were incredibly powerful to say the least.

Moreover, Zhang Lanjiang was a qi practitioner, and qi practitioners were slightly different from your conventional warrior. If a conventional warrior focused on cultivating the essence, qi and spirit, then a qi practitioner focused on cultivating the spirit and astral qi only.

Caring little about their bodies, a qi practitioner believed that their physical body was just a shell and a prison, and that cultivating an eternal qi and Yang God was the true way. One might say that they were the direct opposite of a body tempering warrior.

A qi practitioner’s manipulation of astral qi and spirit were much more exquisite, flexible and potent than your conventional warrior. Barring exceptional circumstances, it would be suicide to challenge one into a ranged battle. That was why the best way to deal with a qi practitioner was to fight at close range, and why Wang Luori had tried to shorten their distance earlier. It was too bad his strategy had failed.

“You can still back down, Wang Luori,” Zhang Lanjiang said indifferently after shooting the Seven Bejeweled Glazed Lamps a glance.

“Back down? I will never back down until you’ve given me Cheng Nuo, Principal Zhang,” sneered Wang Luori. Turning his right foot a little and causing an unearthly screech that sounded like an earth dragon flipping on its back, he sent multiple

dragons that were created from earth straight toward Zhang Lanjiang. He himself stayed where he was and gathered his strength.

“Hmph. You truly are a stubborn man.”

Zhang Lanjiang looked disdainful as he manifested a giant palm created from his Righteous Astral Qi. It easily buried the earth dragons into the ground.

While Zhang Lanjiang was wasting his energy on the earth dragons, Wang Luori took one step forward and transformed into a dragon of fire [1]himself. He abruptly appeared beside the principal and landed a solid punch on his ribs.

Bang!

Zhang Lanjiang exploded, but he scattered paper instead of flesh and blood.

“The Doll Substitution Art?!” Wang Luori exclaimed. He knew he was in trouble, but he didn’t panic. He wheeled around and threw a mighty punch at his right.

“Sunset Hill Fist—The Sun Descends On The West [2]”

Zhang Lanjiang revealed himself with his index and middle fingers pressed together. He thrust them forward like a sword.

The wind howled, and the rain showered. The wind and rain from everywhere came together and formed a huge bell.

It was the White Horse Academy’s Hatred-class Strange Artifact, the Eight Directions Bell of Wind and Rain.

Zhang Lanjiang struck the bell with his sleeves like a mallet.

DANG...

Wang Luori’s ears were deafened for an instant as the sound rippled out like waves, the wind and rain howled, and the world turned yellow all of a sudden.

Rumble rumble rumble...

The trees, the rocks, the soil. The sound waves crushed everything in its path and kicked up what looked like an avalanche. That was just the beginning though. The wind and rain transformed into soldiers, and the earth turned into armor that protected the soldiers. They quickly took formation and waited for their turn at the sidelines.

Wang Luori’s eyes grew blurry as he was assaulted by the seemingly never-ending sound waves. His energies fluctuated wildly, and he was pushed back uncontrollably despite the fact that everything under his knees had sunk into the ground. Even the Seven Bejeweled Glazed Lamps controlling him were shaking violently as cracks appeared across their surfaces, and their lights grew dim.

Clearly, Wang Luori had lost this exchange. Not only did he take a huge hit, his Seven Bejeweled Glazed Lamps was severely damaged as well.

While both the Seven Bejeweled Glazed Lamps and the Eight Directions Bell of Wind and Rain were classified as Hatred-class Strange Artifacts, the Eight Directions Bell of Wind and Rain was a

tad stronger than the former. Not only that, the Strange Artifact was a rare sound-based offensive-type Strange Artifact. It was perfectly natural that the Seven Bejeweled Glazed Lamps would fail to protect its owner fully and suffer great damage after enduring a full-powered blow.

Wang Luori felt heartbroken when he saw the damage, but he didn't have time to lament about it. After the sound wave attack had ended, the army of million standing by this whole time charged straight toward him.

"This is nothing, Zhang Lanjiang!" Ruthlessness flickered within Wang Luori's eyes as he roared. Before the principal could react, he pummeled the ground with his fists and kicked up an entire chunk of earth. It melted into lava before it could hit the ground, and when it did hit the ground, it washed over the whole army like a tidal wave.

That wasn't all. A purple stele slowly floated out of the lake of lava. Its front was inscribed with old, imperial seal scripts, and its back was engraved with a painting that showed a bunch of living things worshipping the sun. Its whole body was covered in tiny cracks. It looked both weathered and ancient.

The moment the stele appeared, a thick cloud of purple qi abruptly flew over from the east. Wherever it flew, the plants bent backward as if terrified, and the wind and rain fell as if submitting to their emperor.

The purple qi came from the east and lorded over everything.

"You brought the Eastern Purple Cloud Stele?!" Zhang Lanjiang exclaimed in a grim voice. He tapped the Eight Directions Bell of Wind and Rain and unleashed another sound wave attack, but its power decreased rapidly almost as if it could not bear to attack its own sovereign. By the time it finally washed over Wang Luori, it had become as harmless as a mild breeze.

"That's exactly right," Wang Luori sneered and tossed the Eastern Purple Cloud Stele into the air. Floating in the sky, it summoned more purple qi and soon engulfed the entire battlefield in purple.

As soon as this happened, Wang Luori rushed toward Zhang Lanjiang like a tiger. In response, Zhang Lanjiang swung his sleeves and sent torrents of Righteous Qi straight at him. However, his counterattack weakened rapidly seemingly without reason, and by the time it made it to Wang Luori it had lost over ninety percent of its original power. The Hill Lord easily shattered it with a casual punch. If he didn't know better, he would've thought that Principal Zhang was fooling around with him.

Zhang Lanjiang blanched and reacted immediately. He tried to use his Earth Contraction Magic—the very magic that had allowed him to reach the foot of the hill in an instant—and escape the purple qi's range, but he felt a hitch in his energies as soon as he took action. As a result, he was just a step too slow to get away from Wang Luori.

There was a saying that went something like this: “If your first step is slow, then the rest of your steps are slow as well.” It was the case for Zhang Lanjiang. Wang Luori was able to close the distance and land a mighty punch that blew him into the sky.

Wang Luori wasn’t going to wait now that he had the upper hand. While Zhang Lanjiang was still trying to catch himself, he appeared above the principal and smashed him in the stomach with both fists.

The silhouette of the Eight Directions Bell of Wind and Rain appeared behind Zhang Lanjiang. The next instant, the principal had hit the ground like a meteor.

Zhang Lanjiang burst out of the dust clouds just a fraction of a second later. At the same time, the Eight Directions Bell of Wind and Rain shrank to the size of a pocket watch and hung above his head. It was glowing a little.

Before Zhang Lanjiang could react, Wang Luori flew up to him once more and conjured a multitude of suns once more. His astral qi looked all-encompassing, and his fist force seemed unstoppable as he whaled on Zhang Lanjiang.

Zhang Lanjiang emitted a sword qi between his fingers and met Wang Luori’s attack head on, the wind, the rain, and sword qis blew all around the two combatants. It looked like a scene straight out of a master artist’s ink wash painting.

#### “Eight Directions Sword of Wind and Rain”

Their forces clashed, and astral winds howled. The shockwaves alone resembled natural disasters that tore up the surrounding landscape like wet tissues.

At first, the duo were evenly-matched. But over time, Zhang Lanjiang was actually pushed back by Wang Luori. In the end, he couldn’t even launch a single counterattack and could only endure Wang Luori’s blows passively.

A fight where you could only defend was destined to end in defeat. Gradually, Zhang Lanjiang grew weaker and accumulated more and more injuries. Somehow, the Spirit Master was being one-sidedly pummeled by Wang Luori, his inferior!