

Stranger 251

Chapter 251: Corpse Suppression Nail

Boom!

Ye Qing pressed a hand against his carriage and shattered it into a million pieces. The fragments fanned out toward the group and skewered at least a dozen people they could react. Cries of shock and pain immediately filled the air.

“I’ll kill you, Ye Qing!”

A dwarf-sized man rushed toward Ye Qing. Despite his small stature, he shook the ground with every step he took. The fragments that should have skewered him like blades exploded into bits when they hit his body.

It was none other than the Vajra Boy.

When Vajra Boy reached Ye Qing, he raised his fists above his head before lowering them slowly. It was as if he was pulling the sky down as the patch of sky directly above Ye Qing’s head collapsed in earnest.

“The Boy Prays the Buddha”

Although Vajra Boy was a small man, he cultivated one of the strongest and toughest body-tempering cultivation arts in the Vajra Temple known as the “Vajra Boy Sutra”. As its name might suggest, it was a cultivation art that must be learned since childhood. The practitioner would have to suffer through tribulations of water, fire, wind, lightning and so on, and it was both painful and dangerous to say the least. The slightest mistake could result in death, and even success didn’t come without a curse: the practitioner would be stuck with a child’s body forever.

That said, an accomplished practitioner would gain enormous strength and become impervious to all kinds of weapons and elements.

“The Boy Prays to the Buddha” was the ultimate technique of the cultivation art. When the boy prays to the Buddha, the Buddha shall descend and help him smite all gods and demons.

“Die!” Vajra Boy roared.

Ye Qing didn’t dodge out of the way, however. Instead, he landed a hook punch on his attacker’s fists. Vajra Boy blinked in disbelief when an unbelievable amount of strength dismantled his fists like nothing and left him wide open. The next moment, Ye Qing threw his arm forward like it was a hammer, caved in Vajra Boy’s chest, and sent him flying toward the crowd.

Some of the jianghu warriors were bowled over and killed just like that because they were too poisoned to get out of the way or protect themselves adequately.

Old Man Hemp and the rest of the late-stage Astral Refiners tried to rescue Vajra Boy, but Ye Qing was faster and was able to slip into the crowd first. He caught Vajra Boy’s leg before he could react and swung him around like a weapon. Four warriors were crushed into bits before they could even scream.

What happened next could only be described as carnage. Like a tiger wreaking havoc in a pen of sheeps, Ye Qing continued to use Vajra Boy as a weapon and smashed anyone and everyone who was unfortunate enough to stand in his path. It was easily one of the bloodiest fights these jianghu warriors had ever experienced in their lives.

The large majority of them were pretty weak, not to mention that the poison had robbed them of most of their strength. They just never stood a chance. Dozens of people were killed in just ten or so breaths.

Everyone here had witnessed Ye Qing massacring the shit out of his enemies in the Luo Shui Arena, but even that was nothing compared to what he was doing right now. Violent, brutal and ruthless, Ye Qing resembled a demon god from the lowest depths of hell. They were like ants and grass that he could slaughter as he pleased.

“He’s a monster!”

“Run! Run!”

At some point, the remaining survivors finally lost it and scattered in every direction, all the while screaming their lungs out.

“Why aren’t you running?”

Ye Qing didn’t go after the small fries. Instead, he turned around and grinned toothily at Old Man Hemp, Bone Monk, Headless Maiden and the rest of the late-stage Astral Refiners.

“Heavens...”

His bloody grin was so disturbing that even these hardened, moderately insane criminals couldn’t suppress a chill. In fact, they were starting to regret their decision to come after Ye Qing.

To be fair, they all thought that Ye Qing was hurt or tired even if his unconsciousness during the day was faked, especially since he fought the Sword Gentleman, Chen Cang. In reality, Ye Qing wasn’t just perfectly fine, he was even stronger than he was in the arena.

This meant that Ye Qing had never fought with his full strength during the day. They saw exactly what the Patrolman wanted them to see and nothing else. Even now, it was impossible to tell if he was going all out.

How could they not be afraid?

“Still not running? Okay then. I’ll personally deliver y’all to hell.”

Ye Qing sneered at their display of indecision and raised Vajra Boy, who at this point was barely clinging to life. Then, he tossed the warrior straight at Old Man Hemp.

Old Man Hemp immediately enlarged his sleeves and swung it at Vajra Boy. It caught Vajra Boy safely and neutralized his momentum. Then, the hem shirt he was wearing grew larger and larger until it was the size of a massive building, no, a hill. As soon as the shirt had reached fifty meters in height, it brought down its sleeves and attempted to squash Ye Qing like a bug.

“Hah! You’re all show and no substance!” Ye Qing scoffed and responded with a punch. The Burning Wind whistled, and the fist force threatened to seal the sky itself.

“Cloud Vaporization Style”

His fist could shake the sky and earth and vaporize anything and everything. Why would he fear a mere sleeve?

At first, the sleeves flapped wildly as if they were being blown by a strong gust of wind. Then, they began dissolving into ash.

It was at this moment a giant maw emerged from the hole in the shirt and devoured Ye Qing before he could react. After that, the hem shirt slowly shrank and revealed a small blue snake wrapped around a thick tree. Its breath smelled absolutely disgusting.

“Hahaha! Well done, baby.”

Snake Whisperer walked up to the blue snake and patted its head gently. In response, the blue snake rubbed its head across his palm like it understood what it was saying.

“Are you sure he’s dead, Brother Snake? The kid’s no joke!” Old Man Hemp warned while inspecting his hem shirt with a look of hurt in his eyes.

Snake Whisperer declared proudly, “Don’t worry, Brother Hem. My baby possess the bloodline of an ancient Blue Hui[1], and it is said that the Blue Hui’s poison is so potent that a single drop of blood could rot metal, and a drop of venom could massacre an entire city. There are few creatures that are as venomous as the Blue Hui.”

“Although my baby isn’t that powerful, its venom can still easily corrode flesh like nothing. Ye Qing’s probably pus water by now, hahaha...”

“Ahhhh! I told you to leave me his head, Snake Whisperer! How could you let your snake eat him whole? Give me back his head, you bastard!” Headless Maiden cried and strode up to Snake Whisperer menacingly.

“Sorry, sorry, I totally forgot,” Snake Whisperer apologized quickly. “Don’t be mad, dear lady. How about I compensate your loss with a hundred heads in the future? I promise that they’ll all be young and beautiful.”

“You promised! Don’t blame me for falling out with you if you break your word!” Headless Maiden hmped cutely.

Snake Whisperer chuckled. “I would never. Ye Qing is—was a member of Luo Shui, right? I’ll head there in a moment and gather your heads for you, hahaha...”

Suddenly, Snake Whisperer turned to his snake and frowned. “What’s wrong, baby?”

He was still congratulating himself when suddenly, he felt a wave of pain and unease coming from his pet. Since he and his blue snake were connected by his heart’s blood, he could sense what it could sense.

It was at this moment the blue snake suddenly let out a bloodcurdling screech and split in half[2]. Since there was no warning, both Snake Whisperer and Headless Maiden were drenched from head to toe in its blood.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!!”

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaargh!!!”

Disturbing sizzling noises filled the night air as both Astral Refiners started smoking and melting at an insane rate. Their screams of pain only lasted a short while because their vocal cords were melted, but their soundless screams made the scene even more horrifying.

The Blue Hui was one of the most venomous snakes in the world. Although this blue snake wasn't nearly as venomous as its ancestor, its venom was by no means gentle. It was nigh impossible for a flesh-and-blood creature to withstand it unless they were powerful body-tempering warriors like Vajra Boy and Ye Qing.

Just a moment later, Snake Whisperer and Headless Maiden had melted into a pile of white bones. Any plant that was touched by the blood was melted, and even the ground where most of the venom was had visibly depressed.

“Were you celebrating my death? So sorry to disappoint you.”

Ye Qing was standing at the center of the venom with the Bronze Tiger Head on. Behind him, a fiendish general wielding a Green Dragon Crescent Blade brimmed with bloodlust.

“It's my turn now...” Ye Qing chuckled ominously and sent a mental command. The general immediately swung his Green Dragon Crescent Blade eight times in a row. His movements were fluid, powerful, and surprisingly gorgeous. It was like all of spring and autumn were contained within the eight strikes.

“Eight Swings of Spring and Autumn”

Thick, powerful blade forces surrounded Old Man Hem and the Bone Monk from all sides, carving up the ground like tofu as they pressed closer. Neither man died, but it was clear they wouldn't be able to hold their ground for long. Old Man Hem's hem shirt was growing increasingly tattered, and his face looked as pale as a sheet. Multiple blade wounds were blooming across his skin like crimson flowers as well.

Bone Monk looked less strained than Old Man Hem probably because he was still in top shape. He wielded a bony saber and used a strange saber art that kept fluctuating back and forth between righteousness and deviousness, benevolence and cruelty from time to time. It was like that saying, “Good or evil lies in a single thought.”

As he danced, bony Buddhas appeared around Bone Monk and kept the deadly blade qis at bay.

“Bone Taboo Breaker”

It looked like Bone Monk might be able to hold on until the blade qis were spent, but he himself knew that was impossible. Something needed to change now, or both him and Old Man Hem were going to die.

There was nothing he could do though. It was taking all of his energy and concentration just to keep the blade qis at bay.

“These useless pieces of trash! They outnumbered Ye Qing one hundred to one, and it looks like Ye Qing is going to win anyway!”

Somewhere in the darkness, Xue Shiwu couldn't help but curse under his breath as he watched the ensuing battle.

“Calm down, Little Commander. The battle's not over yet.” Pang Kun chuckled. “And you shouldn't underestimate the jianghu people. They can be quite annoying to deal with if you don't defeat them as quickly as possible.”

“Speaking of which...”

Five nails abruptly appeared in the sky. They were shaped like a square cone and covered in bloodstains. They were also giving off an incredible amount of yin qi.

“Corpse Suppression Nails?” Pang Kun looked surprised. “Now this is interesting.”

“What's that?” Xue Shiwu asked.

Pang Kun explained, “The Corpse Suppression Nail is a kind of Strange Artifact developed by the Corpse Suppression Sect. It is specifically designed to counter corpse qi, resentment and so on.”

“As the Corpse Suppression Sect thrives on refining corpses, they often steal bodies from tombs and graveyards. In order to avoid the corpses from transforming into walkers or creating ghosts, vengeful spirits and so on, they would often use the Corpse Suppression Nails to suppress the corpse's unnatural energies. Generally speaking, four of the five nails were nailed into the limbs, and the last nail is nailed into the head or more accurately, the mind.”

“Since the Strange Artifact Ye Qing is using channels a similar energy, the Corpse Suppression Nail is the bane of its existence. It's going to be destroyed very soon.”

Xue Shiwu grunted. “I guess they're not completely stupid after all.”

Chapter 252: The Main Cast Appears

While Xue Shiwu and Pang Kun were talking, four nails flew toward the general and entered his limbs.

The general was just a manifestation of killing intent and so didn't have a physical body. However, the four nails still managed to embed themselves into his limbs as if they possessed the ability to touch the intangible.

The second the nails sank into the general's limb, he immediately froze as if someone had cast a spell on him. Ye Qing too felt a sudden stiffness overtaking him as the Bronze Tiger Head shook violently.

When the final nail entered the general's forehead, he abruptly dissipated into nothing. At the same time, the Bronze Tiger Head started breaking all over like it was porcelain, and crimson blood seeped out of the cracks. Ye Qing also felt a surge of violent energy pouring uncontrollably into his body.

A rebound?

More specifically, the Bronze Tiger Head had gone out of control after its physical body was destroyed.

Ye Qing grabbed the mask and ripped it off his face, but the blood still clung to him like glue. It reminded him of The Mask, except that there was nothing friendly or sassy about his mask whatsoever. Not only that, angry, howling faces kept surfacing from the stretched blood and discharged even more killing intent.

“Hahaha! Karmic justice is upon you! Now die!” Bone Monk barked out a laugh and swung his saber at Ye Qing. However, a gloomy voice interrupted him before he could do so,

“That boy is mine, Bone Monk! You would be wise not to take my kill!”

Bone Monk stopped in his tracks and scoffed, “You think he’s yours just because you threw a handful of nails? How delusional! He’s not anyone’s kill until he’s dead!”

“Yeah! He’s not even dead yet, and already you’re calling dibs! Why don’t you say that the world is yours then? You’re just an opportunist who’s all bark and no bite!”
Another jianghu warrior chimed in.

“It’s first come first serve only.”

“Get out of my way! I’ll kill anyone who dares to take my kill!”

Many more jianghu warriors started rushing toward Ye Qing, and everyone of them was as strong as Bone Monk and Old Man Hem. There was the Corpse Puppeteer Ying Xian, the Windfire Thunderbolt Lei Zhao, the Strange Sword Xiao Yue, the Demonic Cook Fei Yiguo, the Gut Cutter Shi Hanzhao and more.

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Pang Kun was muttering the attackers’ names when suddenly, he saw something surprising. “Hmm? That’s Paper Celestial, Dog King, Husband and Wife! It looks like the Way of Taiping has decided to join in on the fun.”

“The Way of Taiping? Perfect. Once they took out Ye Qing, we’ll kill them and earn ourselves some credit.” Xue Shiwu licked his lips greedily.

“A wise decision, Little Commander. The Way of Taiping deserves to be exterminated anyway,” Pang Kun complimented.

Meanwhile, one of the jianghu warriors who had stepped out to confront Ye Qing at the beginning—a small man with a millstone-sized head—was scoffing at his fellow brethren, “Idiots. You can run as fast as you like, but you’ll never outrun my ghosts.”

He took a human heart that was covered in twisted, demonic patterns from his shirt. It was throbbing loudly as if it was alive. Then, he closed his eyes, danced a strange dance and muttered, “Tian ling ling, di ling ling. Ghost Gods of Fengdu, heed my call! I wish to summon a Ghost King whose magic applies to the nine heavens, whose maw could swallow the waters of the Yellow

Spring, whose hands could block the sun and moon, whose feet step on a path of corpse and bones, and whose head carries a banner of ghosts and darkness! With this heart as the sacrifice, I humbly request a Ghost King to descend to this world! To this world!”

The thin man knelt three times and kowtowed nine times. Then, he crushed the heart in his hands.

Flesh and blood scattered everywhere, but they didn’t fall on the ground. Instead, they disappeared into thin air as if devoured by some sort of invisible power.

The next moment, a strong gust of yin wind converged in the sky. A massive hand then appeared out of nowhere and made a grab for Ye Qing.

“You think you can snatch my prize from right under my nose, Ghost Whisperer? Dream on!”

Ying Xian roared and spat out a mouthful of disgusting purge fluid. Everything that it touched—even the air itself—sizzled due to how corrosive it was.

Part of the purge fluid splashed a large chunk the ghastly arm and yin wind and corroded them in the blink of an eye. The other part had splashed on Ye Qing instead.

However, Bone Monk laughed tauntingly when he saw this. “The boy is tough enough to survive even the Blue Hui’s poison, and you think your purge fluid can kill him? Thank you for the donation!”

As soon as he finished, Bone Monk’s flesh and blood suddenly plopped on the ground and left him with only bones. When his bone saber burst into cold, white flames, and he swung the weapon down like a general giving a command, the bony Buddhas immediately charged toward Ye Qing while chanting evil sutras.

“And you’re dreaming a little too hard for a pile of bones! Go pick your bone elsewhere, Bone Monk!”

A short, fat man taunted before producing a black pot from his back and tossed it at Ye Qing. It was none other than the Demonic Cook, Fei Yiguo.

The black pot turned red hot after it left Demonic Cook’s hands. At the same time, it started bubbling with boiling hot oil.

The black pot took a detour and crushed the bony Buddhas rushing toward Ye Qing first. It pissed Bone Monk off so much that he couldn’t stop spouting a bunch of unmonk-like expletives for a time.

“Demonic Cook, you’re already filled to the brim with oil. You should learn restraint unless you want to kill yourself.”

Strange Sword Xiao Yue, Gut cutter Shi Hanzhao and everyone else showed off their ultimate techniques as well. It wasn’t just to kill Ye Qing, but also to stop the others from scoring the kill.

There was only one Ye Qing and one bounty after all. There literally wasn’t enough reward for all of them.

Everyone was a miser before the promise of great riches.

When the jianghu warriors were less than three meters away from Ye Qing, golden light suddenly burst out of his body. Lotuses started falling from the sky, and Buddhist chants filled everyone's ears.

At the center of the golden light, a savage-looking Buddha let out a disturbing cackle and asked, "Keke. I have come. Are you all ready to die?"

The fiendish aura and killing intent pinning down Ye Qing immediately disappeared into thin air. As if on cue, the Bronze Tiger Head shattered into a million pieces.

Since Corpse Puppeteer Ying Xian and Bone Monk were at the forefront of the group, they were the first to suffer the Boundless Mara Buddha's wrath. Both warriors screamed out in pain as their bodies started melting like candles.

The ghastly arm in the sky had become much more transparent because of the sudden burst of Buddha light as well. One could even hear a painful, angry roar coming from somewhere.

Ghost Whisperer's fate was even worse. As the one who summoned the Ghost God into the world, he let out a muffled groan and bled from every orifice after the ghastly arm was damaged. Not only that, an invisible force suddenly ripped off his arm and bit down on it like it was a leg of lamb. His painful screams, the crunching noises, and the splatter of blood and gore painted a horrifying scene.

Dang! Dang! Dang!

Before anyone could react, a series of gong beats suddenly filled their ears. An invisible power rippled out and blurred everyone's consciousness. It would continue for a while until all the forces in the air had dissipated into nothing, the natural qi in the air were flowing around haphazardly, and everyone was clutching their heads in pain and bleeding from every orifice.

When the gong sound finally came to a stop, Ye Qing summoned a crescent saber into his hand and swung it once. Demonic red lotuses immediately filled the sky and illuminated everyone's sins.

"Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art"

There wasn't a single person in the area whose hands weren't coated in blood, whose sins couldn't fill an entire book, and whose karmic hindrance would forever prevent them from attaining enlightenment—at least in the Buddhist sense. It was why it only took an instant for demonic red flames to start shooting out of their pores, and the flames kept growing bigger over time.

The hellfire would never fade until their sins and karmic hindrance had been burned away completely. Everyone looked like human torches as they screamed, struggled, and begged for mercy. It was futile though. Death was their only release, and die they did.

"That's... the Red Lotus Hellfire!" Pang Kun exclaimed in shock. He was at least fifty meters away from the scene, and he still felt his dark desires swelling uncontrollably, and tiny wisps of flames bursting into existence from them. It was potent to say the least.

"A Spirit Purification stage saber art!"

Greed flickered in Pang Kun's eyes. Although he was a Spirit Purifier and a key personnel in the Black Feather Guards, he only had one Spirit Purification stage martial art. It was a generic one too

and completely incomparable to the saber art Ye Qing was using to slay his enemies; a true peak Spirit Purification martial art.

Besides that, the two Strange Artifacts Ye Qing used earlier were extremely incredibly potent. The gong was a Strange Artifact that could affect the mind, a quality that was incredibly rare among Hatred-class Strange Artifacts. As for the Strange Artifact that filled the place with Buddhist light, it was obviously a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact. As if that wasn't impressive enough, it was clearly sapient.

The boy has a sapient Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact?

Pang Kun almost lost control of his greed there and then. There were only a handful of those in the entire Luo Shui. If he could obtain it, he would become one of the strongest warriors of Luo Shui immediately.

So far, it looked like Ye Qing possessed a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact, a Spirit Purification stage saber art, and all the loot he had acquired from his attackers. At this point, the boy was far more valuable than the reward the Way of Taiping offered. And if he could obtain them both, then all the better.

Xue Shiwu shared more or less the same thoughts as Pang Kun. While licking his lips, Xue Shiwu urged, "Pang Kun, Ye Qing is almost at his limit. We should go now."

"Yeah. Let's go."

The duo immediately rushed forward to engage the weakened, seemingly exhausted Ye Qing.

"Hahaha! I can't believe it!"

"A Spirit Purification-stage saber art and a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact? This is it!"

"I can hardly believe it. If I can get them all... hahaha! It's mine! It's all mine!"

In the shadows, countless powerful and greedy warriors finally couldn't wait any longer and rushed toward Ye Qing as well.

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"A Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact? A sapient Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact no less?"

Atop a small hill, Wang Luori's eyes were turning bloodshot with greed and envy. Such was his shock that he didn't even notice the ground beneath his feet crumbling a little from the pressure he was putting on it.

He never imagined that Ye Qing would have a sentient Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact. To say that this was a pleasant surprise would be a gross understatement. In the past, Sunset Hill's greatest Strange Artifact was the Eastern Purple Cloud Stele, a non-sentient Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact. If he could obtain it and the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method", then Sunset Hill would be stronger than it had ever been.

When the time came, he would be able to thrash White Horse Academy and that so-called Sage's Notes like nothing.

Ye Qing's Spirit Purification-stage martial art didn't draw Wang Luori's eyes. It was because Sunset Hill wasn't lacking in top-tier Spirit Purification-stage martial arts.

Wang Luori was going to take action when Wen Zilai raised a hand to stop him. "Calm, father!"

The Hill Lord asked in a displeased tone, "Why are you stopping me?"

Wen Zilai explained, "It's because something doesn't feel right about this. We knew Ye Qing was leaving because we had a spy in the Pacification Bureau, but how did these jianghu warriors find out? I just can't shake the feeling that someone's hand is behind all this. Until we figure this out, I believe that it's best if we act with caution."

But Wang Luori disagreed. "If we can plant spies in the Pacification Bureau, then why not others?"

"Also, Ye Qing is an arrogant young man who stood out way too much for his own good. It's entirely possible that someone in the Pacification Bureau holds a grudge against him and decides to leak the news."

"You're overthinking this, Zilai."

"But—"

Wen Zilai still felt uneasy, but Wang Luori continued, "A warrior should plan like he's walking on thin ice, but act like he has no tomorrow. It is good that you are cautious, but if you hesitate and second guess yourself when it is time to take action, then it is not caution, but cowardice."

"Cowardice is completely detrimental to one's advancement in the martial way, and this is doubly true for people like us. If you're not going to fight to better yourself, then you might as well go home and be a farmer."

Wen Zilai saluted him deeply. "Thank you for your guidance, father. I shall remember this."

"But I still don't think you need to go now, father. There are still many more Spirit Purification-stage warriors in hiding, and I have no doubt that they'll attack Ye Qing to obtain the rewards. Why don't you wait until both sides have sufficiently worn themselves down until you act? You'll be able to get it all then."

"Why be the snipe or the clam when you can be the fisherman?"

Wang Luori looked tempted, but in the end he still shook his head. It was because he wasn't just aiming to obtain Ye Qing's Strange Artifacts and the bounty, but also the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method". If anything, the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method" was his primary objective; his key to entering the Spirit Master Realm. That was why Ye Qing couldn't die yet, at least not until he surrendered his prize.

The reason he had taken action sooner was because he knew that the Astral Refiners wouldn't be able to deal any real damage to Ye Qing. But now, Spirit Purifiers were joining in on the fight as well. He simply couldn't risk those people killing Ye Qing by accident.

“It’s fine. Something unexpected might happen if we dilly-dally for too long. Stay here. I’ll come back in a moment.”

Wang Luori jumped down the hill and disappeared just like that.

Wen Zilai narrowed his eyes as he stared at the spot where Wang Luori was a moment ago. Why did he have this feeling that Wang Luori was hiding something from him?

Chapter 253: Why Would We Do That?

“To think you’re so ruthless at your age, Ye Qing! You must die to secure peace for the wulin!”

A man appeared in front of Ye Qing like a ghost and unleashed a palm strike.

“Smite!”

The man’s palm turned as white as jade. It was translucent, warm, and perfectly flawless.

Boom!

But right before his hand would hit Ye Qing’s skull, a long saber descended toward the man’s head. He was forced to cancel his attack and block the sudden attack with his palm.

His palm should be made of flesh and blood, and yet there was a metallic clang when it clashed against the saber. There was a shockwave as the two men backed a step away from each other.

“Who are you? Why are you stopping me?” The man withdrew his palm and stared at Pang Kun with a deep frown.

Of course, no one recognized Pang Kun because he was wearing a mask right now.

“Ye Qing killed my nephew, so I must take his life with my own hands,” Pang Kun made up a random excuse. “I would advise you to stay out of this, Fang Baiyu.”

Pang Kun was accompanied by eighteen armored soldiers. As if on cue, they took a step forward and assumed what looked like a formation.

The eighteen soldiers were Black Feather Guard soldiers, of course. In fact, they were his personal guards. Although they were only Half-Step Astral Refiners, their formation was powerful enough to keep Fang Baiyu occupied. And if he were to join the battle, then he could even kill Fang Baiyu.

Of course, Pang Kun didn’t want to clash against Fang Baiyu unless he had no other choice. White Jade Hand Fang Baiyu was a Spirit Purifier just like him, but unlike him the warrior was famous throughout the jianghu. It would be folly to underestimate him.

“Kakaka! Your nephew, you say? What a joke! I can say that Ye Qing killed my son too in that case!”

Pang Kun had just finished speaking when a man wearing black robes stepped out into the open. He was surrounded by countless black crows that were cawing with inauspiciousness and death.

“Just say that you want his valuables. Lying about your intentions is only going to make you a hypocrite.”

"I completely agree, Crow Superior. There is nothing more I loathe than two-faced bastards."

A woman wearing bright-colored clothes and gold and silver jewelry walked out as well. Her head was covered in flowers. You would think that someone like this would be incredibly beautiful, but in reality she was as fat as a pig and as ugly as a mud fence.

"Lady Flower?" Crow Superior exclaimed in surprise.

"Why are you here, Lady Flower?" Fang Baiyu frowned.

"The fuck do you mean by that? If you can target Ye Qing, then why not me?" Lady Flower retorted while side-eying Fang Baiyu.

Fang Baiyu kept silent. Lady Flower might be ugly and foul-mouthed, but she was very, very strong.

"Hmph! Coward!" Lady Flower spat on the ground before sneering at all three men standing in her way. "Now get the fuck out of my sight. The boy's head and his items are mine."

"You can stand to be a little less overbearing, Lady Flower!" Pang Kun said in an unfriendly tone.

"Overbearing?" Lady Flower sneered before closing the distance between them faster than Pang Kun could blink. Then, she unleashed a palm strike.

Pang Kun raised his saber to block the attack, but the blood drained away from his face when the palm strike connected. He felt as if a mountain had crashed into his body as he flew backward like a rag doll. Even his eighteen personal guards were no exception.

"Trash. So what if I'm overbearing? What can you possibly do to stop me?"

"You—Pwack!" Pang Kun spat out a mouthful of blood before he could say more than a single word.

"You may be strong, Lady Flower, but you're only one person. If we work together, not even you will be able to walk away from this unscathed."

Crow Superior threatened in a gloomy voice, "You wouldn't want us to walk away with your spoils, would you?"

"Are you threatening me, Crow Superior?" Lady Flower's cheeks shook violently as she huffed.

"It's not a threat. It's just a fact."

It wasn't Black Superior who answered her. A group of three men and one woman slowly stepped out of the darkness. One man looked as white as a sheet and was covered from head to toe in paper dolls. The rustling of the paper dolls sounded like whispermings.

One man looked like an old farmer wearing a flag that was sewn from dog skin. He was also carrying a puppy in his arms. He was followed by a ferocious-looking, four-headed mastiff that was as big as a calf.

The last man and woman were the most eye-catching of the four. The man's face was covered in scars, and he looked ugly as sin. On the other hand, the woman was gentle, demure, and extremely beautiful.

Right now, the couple were holding each other and staring into each other's eyes with eyes full of love and sweetness. They seemed unwilling to part for a moment.

"Paper Celestial, Dog King, Husband and Wife? What are you doing here?" Lady Flower asked in an unfriendly tone.

The four warriors were none other than the Twelve Fiends of Taiping. Paper Celestial and Dog King were only late-stage Astral Refiners, so Lady Flower could afford to ignore them. Husband and Wife were bonafide Spirit Purifiers, however. Although they were only in the early stage, they were godlike in terms of cooperation and joint attacks, so much so that they could go up against a late-stage Spirit Purifier.

"What do you think? This brat is the reason our boss, Actor, Matchmaker, Dancer 1 and Dancer 2 are killed. He also ruined the grand plan our holy faith has been plotting for years," Paper Celestial answered. "He is our sworn enemy, and we must have our revenge."

"Revenge?" Lady Flower scoffed in disdain. "I think you just want his items. You guys are seriously hypocritical, you know that?"

"What is the meaning of this, Husband and Wife? You're the one who set up the bounty to hunt down Ye Qing, and now you're going to claim it yourself? Is this a game to you?" Fang Baiyu rebuked them with an ugly expression.

The gentleness on Husband and Wife's faces was replaced by cold ruthlessness when they looked up. "You don't get to tell us what to do. If you're smart, you'll get out of our way and stop us from taking revenge. Otherwise, you'll have to answer to the Way of Taiping."

"You will be the laughingstock of the jianghu if you do this!" Crow Superior voiced his dissatisfaction.

Wife simply cracked a gentle smile and said, "And why would we care about the opinions of the secular world? What I do know, is that the Yellow God would punish you if you dare to offend us!"

She was now threatening them outright. Everyone blanched and cursed under their breaths when they heard this, but there was nothing they could do. Everyone knew that the Way of Taiping were a bunch of maniacs, and to argue jianghu morality with them was like trying to bring the dead back to life—impossible. If they attacked Husband and Wife today, the Way of Taiping would attack them tomorrow. Heck, they might even put their bounties right next to Ye Qing's.

There was one way to stop this, and that was to kill Husband and Wife, Paper Celestial and Dog King. But could they really?

Of course, they weren't willing to give up either. Despite their earlier display of hostility, Lady Flower, Crow Superior and Fang Baiyu moved closer to each other.

"Oh? Is that a threat I sense?" Paper Celestial sneered. "Well, you can certainly try."

That was what he said, but of course they would rather not fight the Spirit Purifiers if possible. Why fight if they could be convinced to back down?

The two groups were locked in a stalemate when suddenly, they all sensed something and looked to the distance. It was at this moment they saw a masked man wearing a black robe stepping out of the darkness.

Every time the black-robed man took a step, their bodies would shake a little. It felt like the sun was descending from the sky and squeezing their lungs bit by bit.

"Half-Step Divine Master?"

Everyone blanched when they saw this.

Technically, a Half-Step Spirit Master was a late-stage Spirit Purifier who was very close to entering the Spirit Master Realm. In reality, all of them combined still might not be enough to defeat a Half-Step Spirit Master.

"Who are you?" Husband and Wife stopped flirting with each other and glared at the black-robed man.

"You don't need to know who I am. You only need to know that I am taking Ye Qing with me!" The black-robed man said slowly.

"And why would we let you do that?" Lady Flower asked coldly.

She had thrown a similar line at Fang Baiyu, Crow Superior and Pang Kun earlier, and it had certainly felt very good. But it didn't feel good at all to be on the receiving end.

The black-robed man answered, "Because I'm stronger than all of you combined."

As soon as he said this, he abruptly appeared in front of Lady Flower like he had teleported. Shocked but not paralyzed, Lady Flower tried to defend herself only to sense an unimaginable power pressing down on her from above. At the same time, nine suns appeared inside her mental space.

The world inside Lady Flower's head was torn asunder, and flames ravaged every corner of her mind. It wasn't long before her spirit was depleted, and her mind was extinguished.

Thud!

The black-robed man casually dropped Lady Flower's body on the ground and looked at the rest of them. "I don't want to be enemies with you. I only want Ye Qing."

"Now consider carefully if some riches you will never get are worth your life."

Everyone: "... He said he doesn't want to be enemies with us after killing one of our strongest? Is he joking right now?

No one said a word for a time.

Then, a cheery voice shattered the gloomy atmosphere. “Hahaha, even a Half-Step Spirit Master wants me dead. I didn’t think I’m this valuable!”

They looked. Ye Qing was leaning against a tree and watching them with a face full of scorn. “Well, don’t mind me. Feel free to discuss among yourself until you’ve decided on the pecking order.”

“You’re going to die. Aren’t you afraid at all?” The black-robed man couldn’t help but voice his doubt when he saw Ye Qing’s fearless smile. He had killed many people in his life and seen just as many dying faces. Some people wept like no tomorrow, some people looked like they had lost their soul, and some wouldn’t stop wailing and begging for mercy. However, he had never seen someone who was so calm.

“Oh, I’m scared. I’m so scared I could die!” Ye Qing shrugged. “And it’s all thanks to you, Hill Lord Wang!”

“Hill Lord Wang?” “Wang Luori?”

His words stunned the others for a second. Then, they all looked at the black-robed man in realization.

“How did you find out?” The black-robed man a.k.a Wang Luori asked curiously. He did not deny the accusation.

“What? It’s obvious, isn’t it? You’re the only Half-Step Spirit Master who holds a grudge against me in Luo Shui. Who else could it be if not you?” Ye Qing smiled a smile that didn’t reach the eyes. “Only an idiot would fail to figure that out.”

Everyone: “...” Who are you calling an idiot?

Ye Qing then looked at Crow Superior, Fang Baiyu, Husband and Wife with a disdainful smile on his face. “Well, what are you waiting for? Do you think Hill Lord Wang would let you go now that you know his identity? I may have left Luo Shui, but I’m still a Patrolman of the Pacification Bureau, you know? Hehe...”

Everyone’s hearts sank because it was the truth. It was one thing if they didn’t know who Wang Luori was, but now that they did, the only way Wang Luori could stop them from telling everyone that he killed Ye Qing was to silence them.

After all, the only person who could be trusted to keep a secret in this world was a dead person, and Wang Luori most definitely possessed the strength to see it through.

Chapter 254: Words Can Take A Life

Whoosh!

Everyone looked at Wang Luori with wary eyes.

“Don’t think we don’t know what you’re doing! You’re just trying to sow dissension and take us to the grave with you!”

Husband suddenly spoke up, “You killed our brothers and sisters and ruined our grand plan for Luo Shui. If Hill Lord Wang kills you, we’d only be infinitely grateful for him for redeeming our sect’s dignity. Why would we ever sell out his secret?”

“Besides, we would be a direct participant in your murder. If the news is leaked, the Pacification Bureau would come after us as well. Why would we put our own lives in danger?”

“Yeah, yeah!”

“He’s totally right!”

Fang Baiyu and the others hurriedly nodded in agreement.

“Haha! It’s one thing if someone else says it, but you? A Taiping cultist?” Ye Qing snorted out loud. “Is there anyone in the world who doesn’t know how the Way of Taiping operates? If Hill Lord Wang lets you go free, I’m one hundred percent certain you’ll hold my murder over his head and order him around like a slave. It would be a worse fate than even the Pacification Bureau finding out about this!”

“Am I right, Hill Lord Wang?”

Wang Luori didn’t say anything. No one could say what he was thinking as his face was covered.

“Oh, right! Allow me to enlighten you all on another secret.”

“You probably don’t know this, but Hill Lord Wang is the true mastermind behind all this. You see, he’s the one who spread the news that I ruined the Way of Taiping’s plans, and if I’m not mistaken, the one who designed the bounty as well. The Way of Taiping allowed it only because it suited their needs.”

Ye Qing then looked at Fang Baiyu and Crow Superior. “As for you guys, you were the idiots who were tricked into attacking me. It’s because he wants me dead, of course! Incredible, isn’t it? Hill Lord Wang sure put a lot of thought and effort into killing me!”

“How did you find out about this?” A steely glint flickered behind Wang Luori’s eyes. The absence of denial was basically an admission.

“Run!”

Husband, Wife, Paper Celestial and Dog King exchanged a glance with each other before breaking into a run.

Fang Baiyu and Crow Superior took off in different directions as well.

If before, there was still a chance they might be able to persuade Wang Luori into letting them go, now it was outright impossible.

Wang Luori had manipulated the Way of Taiping for his goals. What would they do if they found out about this? They would hunt him, his family, his sect and everyone else related to him to the ends of the earth!

Wang Luori had tricked the people of the jianghu for his objective. What would they do if they found out about this?

He would become the target of the entire jianghu!

Some things in the jianghu could be done, but not said.

After all, saying it usually resulted in a bloody feud or the annihilation of an entire sect or clan.

Sure, Ye Qing was the one who said those secrets, but from the moment they entered their ears, there was no turning back. It was them or Wang Luori.

The moment the four Taiping cultists made their move, so did Wang Luori. He used Earth Contraction to get in front of them and threw out a punch that resembled a sunset.

A powerful force locked down the space surrounding them at the same time as his fist intent swelled like the sun. Every plant within tens of meters of the Hill Lord instantly turned into ash, while the soil and stone turned ashen black.

Dog King and Paper Celestial were no match for him. Their faces instantly turned bright red, and their skin cracked from how dry it was. They staggered backward.

The only reason they hadn't died yet was because their two early-stage Spirit Purifiers, Husband and Wife, were bearing the brunt of the attack. But just barely. A Half-Step Spirit Master was someone who had entered the Spirit Master Realm in terms of qi, power, and will. Had his mind and spirit entered the Spirit Master Realm as well, then he would be a Spirit Master already.

"Are you really going to make an enemy out of the Way of Taiping, Wang Luori?"

Husband and Wife were miffed to say the least. Everyone was running, but Wang Luori chose them instead of the others. Was he implying that they were easier to kill?

"Even if you managed to kill us, those jianghu warriors would still tell everyone the truth. When that happens, you'll be hunted by both the jianghu and the Way of Taiping!"

"Don't worry. No one is making it out of this place alive," Wang Luori sneered and slowed his attack just a tad so they could figure out what he was talking about.

It was only now Husband and Wife realized that Fang Baiyu and Crow Superior were being held back by a group of nineteen. Although that group only had one Spirit Purifier—and that Spirit Purifier was keeping Crow Superior busy right now—the rest operated like a single entity. Individually, the eighteen warriors were just Half-Step Astral Refiners. But together, they somehow managed to pin down Fang Baiyu, a Spirit Purifier.

"How is this possible?"

Husband and Wife's eyes widened, but not because the group managed to pin down two Spirit Purifiers. It was the fact that they were helping Wang Luori at all. Were they crazy, or were they a part of Wang Luori's schemes?

"See that? You may rest in peace now!"

Wang Luori's voice rang like a death knell as the strength of his fist force abruptly skyrocketed. Nine suns appeared behind the Hill Lord and threatened to burn the world into dust.

Unable to hang on any longer, Paper Celestial and Dog King burst into golden flames and died screaming. The next moment, Wang Luori appeared in front of Husband and Wife and threw a punch each at the duo.

Bang! Bang!

The two Spirit Purifiers hurriedly blocked the attack, but there was just no way they could withstand the full might of a Half-Step Spirit Master. Their arms broke, and the blazing fist force ravaged both their insides and their mind.

The duo staggered backward. Each time they took a step, a part of their body would burst into flames. Just three steps later, both Husband and Wife had turned into charcoal, and their surroundings transformed into a sea of flames.

All the blood drained away from Crow Superior and Fang Baiyu's face when they saw this. They knew Wang Luori was strong, but this was beyond their imagination. It was too late to escape now, and the chances they might defeat him was less than zero. Thankfully, they had one last card up their sleeves. They hadn't survived the jianghu so far by being stupid after all.

Crow Superior yelled, "I'm willing to join Sunset Hill, Hill Lord Wang. All I ask is that you spare my life."

"Me too. I swear on my heart demon that I will not reveal anything that has happened today. If I do, may my heart demon devour me, and reincarnation forever denied to me."

"Tempting, but... I don't need you two."

Wang Luori closed the distance between them while they were talking and grabbed their skulls. When the great sun entered their mental space, their minds were extinguished, and their bodies were burned into charcoal instantly.

"They're both powerful Spirit Purifiers, Brother Wang. Don't you think it's a bit of a waste to kill them?" Pang Kun said regretfully as he stared at the two charred corpses.

Wang Luori replied indifferently, "They might be useful, but only dead people can keep a secret, no?"

Pang Kun chuckled. "Oh? Does that mean you're going to kill us as well?"

"You are joking, Brother Pang. I'm not so indiscriminating or foolish."

Wang Luori saluted the captain. "If it wasn't for your assistance, I would've been beset by endless trouble. I will forever remember this favor."

"Hahaha! I'm flattered, but I just happened to be at the right place at the right time." Pang Kun guffawed. "Plus, we've been allies for a long time. Why would I abandon you during your time of need?" "Thank you, Brother Pang."

Pang Kun could be lying through his teeth, but it was a fact that Pang Kun had done him a solid. As soon as Ye Qing had divulged the truth, Pang Kun had immediately revealed his identity via sound transmission and helped him. At the very least, he owed the captain a thanks.

As for silencing Pang Kun, the thought had of course crossed his mind. However, Pang Kun was different from these jianghu warriors or the Way of Taiping. These jianghu warriors had no background, while the Way of Taiping's main force[1] was far, far away from Luo Shui. However, Pang Kun was backed by the Black Feather Guards and Xue Beikun, and who was to say he didn't have someone keeping an eye on the battle from somewhere?

Besides that, Sunset Hill and the Black Feather Guards were allies. If this incident could solidify their alliance into true friendship, then why not?

"Oh right, Ye Qing killed my favorite disciple, so I must bring him back to Sunset Hill and execute him before Yang'er's grave. Only then his soul may rest in peace. Don't worry, you may have his Spirit Purification-stage saber art and Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact. It is my thanks for what you've done for me."

Give and take is the way of the world. Although he sorely wanted to claim the Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact for himself, the situation wouldn't allow him to make such a choice.

Plus, a Strange Artifact was just a weapon, while his strength was his own.

"Hahaha! I shan't turn down your gift, Brother Wang!" Pang Kun guffawed. Not far away, Xue Shiwu was walking over with a delighted expression on his face as well.

The entire reason they showed themselves was to obtain the Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact and the Spirit Purification-stage saber art. When the jianghu Spirit Purifiers blocked their way, they thought for sure that their dream was going to end in failure. In the end though, they were ultimately able to achieve their goal. It was a happy ending for everyone.

They didn't care that Wang Luori wanted to execute Ye Qing personally. As long as the young man was dead, then all was well.

"Tsk tsk! I was thinking who in their right mind would help Hill Lord Wang. To think it was Captain Pang and Little Commander of the Black Feather Guards!" It was at this moment Ye Qing whistled and drew everyone's attention. "Have you come to kill me as well?"

"You're imperial officers, but you're colluding with a jianghu sect to murder a Patrolman of the Pacification Bureau? Are you two crazy?"

"How about this: work with me to kill Wang Luori, and I give you my word that the Pacification Bureau will forget this transgression. I'm a Patrolman, I have the power."

"Also, you can dispatch an army to wipe out Sunset Hill on the basis that Wang Luori is colluding with the Way of Taiping to kill an imperial official. Everything on that hill will be yours. Surely that is worth more than the trash I'm hoarding, right?"

Wang Luori: "... Is he seriously negotiating my murder right in front of my face?"

“What a silver-tongued bastard you are. You wasted your talent becoming a warrior instead of a storyteller!” Xue Shiwu sneered in disdain. “Too bad for you, there’s no one I loathe more than silver-tongued bastards.”

Wang Luori said coldly, “Don’t worry, Little Commander. I will pull out his tongue so you may cook it over a pot of soup.”

Ye Qing dropped his smile immediately. Holy fuck, man. Don’t you think that’s a little too hardcore?

“There’s no point trying to drive a wedge between us, Ye Qing. Give up your stuff now, and I might just grant you a swift death.” Xue Shiwu licked his lips with naked greed.

“It’s a shame, really!” Ye Qing said regretfully, “You could’ve had a bright future, but you just have to choose the path that leads to hell, dontcha?”

“Well, I’m not gonna stop you. You can come out now, Old Gu!”

“Old... who?”

The blood drained away from everyone’s face as they heart skipped a beat. “It can’t be... Gu Suitang!?”

Wang Luori, Pang Kun and Xue Shiwu looked around nervously, but no one showed up after they waited a while.

Ye Qing: “...” What’s happening? Did Old Gu fuck up? Or is he dissatisfied with my summoning ritual?

“Chief Gu!” Ye Qing shouted loud enough to shake the whole plain, but still no one showed up.

“He’s just trying to trick us!” The group immediately glared at him murderously.

“Damn. Old Gu really fucked up?” Ye Qing pouted. As if on cue, he heard a loud explosion that kicked up a ton of trees from the forest about fifty meters away.

Chapter 255: Golden Cock

“Who are you people? How dare you block my way?”

Gu Suitang’s furious voice suddenly boomed out from the forest.

Gu Suitang was currently being attacked by four people wearing black outfits, though it would be more accurate to say that they were tying him up so he wouldn’t be able to rescue Ye Qing.

They were three late-stage Spirit Purifiers and one Spirit Master. The Spirit Master was the pivot of the group, and the three late-stage Spirit Purifiers their support.

Gu Suitang was extremely powerful. His fists were as heavy as a mountain, his intent was as tall as the sky itself, and every punch he threw seemed capable of rocking a mountain and tearing down an entire chunk of a city. However, the Spirit Master he was facing wasn’t weak either. They used a

martial art that was the complete opposite of Gu Suitang's fist art in that it was soft, transient, flexible and unpredictable. No matter how powerful Gu Suitang's punches were, he could always render them harmless.

Perhaps Gu Suitang could've broken through by force if the Spirit Master wasn't aided by three Spirit Purifiers, but they were, so he was unable to break free no matter what he tried.

"The Flowing Cloud Sanda[1]? You're Xue Beikun?" Gu Suitang erupted in anger when he recognized the martial art.

The Spirit Master a.k.a Xue Beikun didn't acknowledge Gu Suitang's accusation, of course. Short of capturing or killing him, then there was nothing the Deputy Chief of Bureau could do about it.

To be honest, he didn't want to show himself. It wasn't time yet to go to war against the Pacification Bureau after all. However, his foolish son had fallen for Ye Qing's bait hook, line and sinker. If he was caught by Gu Suitang, then the Black Feather Guards would have an all-out war in their hands.

Although Xue Shiwu's identity was exposed, he wasn't caught yet. As long as it remained that way, then everything was fine. The court was a "wonderful" place where nothing was certain unless you had every piece of evidence lined up. Sometimes, not even that was enough to secure what should be an open-and-shut case.

If Gu Suitang dared to accuse the Black Feather Guards colluding with Sunset Hill to assassinate Ye Qing without evidence, then he would dare to accuse the Pacification Bureau for slander due to personal bias.

His mouth was his anyway. He was free to say whatever the hell he wanted.

Besides that, Xue Shiwu was his only son. It would be terrible if he was killed by Gu Suitang. He didn't want to suffer the same fate as Wang Luori and lose his only son long before his time was up. That was why he stepped up no matter how much he didn't want to.

Meanwhile, Gu Suitang guessed that the Spirit Purifiers were Bai Xihu of the Bai Clan, Song Yushu of the administrative division, and Jiang Huanjian of Blood Shadow Palace.

"Do you think I won't figure out your identity just because you're staying quiet, Xue Beikun? You were a member of the Flowing Cloud Villa before you joined the army, and the Flowing Cloud Sanda is their ultimate technique. Do you seriously think I wouldn't know that?"

When Xue Beikun wordlessly rushed Gu Suitang again, the deputy chief yelled, "Are you really going to go to war with the Pacification Bureau, Xue Beikun?"

"And you three! I don't care who you are, but I, Gu Suitang, will never forgive you for transgressing against the Pacification Bureau!"

The four men remained as silent as ever as they continued to stop him from reaching Ye Qing.

"Graaaaagh!"

Gu Suitang roared again and again, but he just couldn't break through his enemies no matter what he tried.

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“Gu Suitang is actually here...”

Wang Luori, Xue Shiwu, Pang Kun and the soldiers broke out in cold sweat when they heard Gu Suitang’s angry roars. They finally figured out the true extent of Ye Qing’s plans.

“I underestimated you, Ye Qing. To think that you were planning to deal with all of us in one go!” Wang Luori uttered with a low, angry growl.

He was plotting against Ye Qing, but Ye Qing was plotting against him as well. Or rather, he was plotting against everyone who harbored malicious designs toward him. If Xue Beikun hadn’t shown up, then there was a real chance he could have died here.

The best case scenario was already out of reach. Even if he managed to kill Ye Qing today, Gu Suitang already found out that it was him who masterminded everything. He might not have the evidence to take real action against him, but he absolutely could make his life a living hell after he returned to the Pacification Bureau.

It was too late for regrets though, and he wasn’t going to give up when his prize was right in front of his eyes. Worst case scenario, he could join Xue Beikun. The Pacification Bureau probably wouldn’t launch an all-out war against the Black Feather Guards over a dead man.

Ye Qing was a genius, sure, but a dead genius held no value. To some people, a dead genius might be worth less than even a pile of shit.

Finally, Gu Suitang might not necessarily be able to threaten after he entered the Spirit Master Realm. As a Spirit Master, he was confident that he would be able to fight the deputy chief to a standstill at least.

“Kill him now so we may leave, Brother Wang.” Pang Kun wore a dark look on his face as well. At this point, he knew that he had been tricked by Ye Qing. Xue Beikun was even forced to show himself to stop Gu Suitang from entering the scene and sending everything into the worst case scenario. It was already guaranteed that he was going to receive a stern punishment when he returned, the least he could do was to stop the situation from worsening any further than it already was.

Xue Shiwu’s complexion kept alternating between blue and white as all sorts of emotions flitted across his face. In the end, they all culminated into pure, unbridled anger and bloodthirst. He looked like he wanted to swallow Ye Qing alive.

“Heh. I knew it wasn’t safe to have only Old Gu as my safety net.”

Ye Qing shrugged as he listened to the clashes coming from the forest. When he noticed the killing intent in Wang Luori, Pang Kun and Xue Shiwu’s eyes, his grin grew wider and wider. “Hey, don’t look at me like that. You’re the one who did this to yourselves.”

“How much longer are you going to smile like that?” Ye Qing’s smile felt unbelievably offensive to Xue Shiwu. “Well, you won’t be smiling for much longer.”

Ye Qing shifted to a more comfortable position before replying, “Am I? I suppose that’s true. After all, you’re all going to die in a moment.”

“You don’t actually think that Old Gu is my only trump card, do you?”

“What do you mean by that?” A terrible sense of unease suddenly gripped all of them.

“What I’m trying to say is...” Ye Qing played up the tension until it reached a crescendo. Then, he let out a sigh and looked behind the trio. “You’ve come, Uncle Feng!”

“Are you serious? Like anyone would fall for such a simple—” Wang Luo scoffed. He thought that Ye Qing was trying to pull the good ol’ “What’s that behind you?” and try to escape, but suddenly, he noticed that Pang Kun and Xue Shiwu were staring behind themselves with a look of shock on their faces. As if on cue, an amiable greeting came from behind his back:

“Good evening, Scion Ye...”

“When did he—?” Wang Luori’s eyes widened. He never noticed the old man until he appeared behind his back.

Wang Luori immediately took action, but instead of attacking Uncle Feng, he chose to make a grab for Ye Qing.

Wang Luori’s reaction was definitely quick. He knew that this “Uncle Feng” was here to rescue Ye Qing, and he couldn’t tell how strong he was. In that case, the best course of action was to capture Ye Qing. As long as Ye Qing was in his hands, the advantage would be his no matter what.

I will never lose!

Wang Luori was only three meters away from Ye Qing, so it would only take him an instant to catch the young man. His hand was an inch away from Ye Qing’s skull when suddenly, he saw a shower of blood and his right arm flying into the air.

He cut my arm?! Wang Luori thought in shock before the pain hit him.

“Aaaaaaargh!” Wang Luori let out a bloodcurdling scream, but the pain also drove him to further violence. He pushed away the pain and continued to charge toward Ye Qing. The enemy was just too strong. Only by taking Ye Qing hostage would he stand a chance at surviving this.

“You’re too hasty, young man. You should learn to be patient.”

Wang Luori had just twitched a muscle when Uncle Feng’s voice rang behind him. It sounded so clear it was as if the old man was standing right behind his back. In fact, he was.

Wang Luori wasn’t looking, but Ye Qing could see Uncle Feng standing less than a third of a meter behind his back. In fact, there was an Uncle Feng standing behind Pang Kun, Xue Shiwu, and the eighteen personal guards each. They all looked identical to the real thing.

Ye Qing's mouth fell open a little. Not even his spirit could tell him which one was the real Uncle Feng, and which wasn't.

Wang Luori, Pang Kun, Xue Shiwu and the eighteen guards felt death breathing down their necks then. They tried to resist only to find an invisible power trapping them in place.

The next moment, Uncle Feng lifted a finger and caused a bloody line to appear on everyone's necks.

Nineteen heads rolled to the ground then. Wang Luori and Xue Shiwu were the only ones who survived the attack. Wang Luori's body rapidly turned transparent until it disappeared into nothing, and a wooden doll appeared where he used to be.

A cock suddenly appeared in front of Xue Shiwu and crowed loudly. Then, it laid a golden egg[2]. The bloody line that should've beheaded Xue Shiwu was somehow transferred to the golden egg and shattered it instead. Blood instead of yolk spilled out of its shell.

"In... Incredible!" Ye Qing gulped audibly with bulging eyes. He already had an inkling that Uncle Feng was strong, but his strength still exceeded his imagination. Uncle Feng had nearly killed everyone with a single move, and Wang Luori, a Half-Step Spirit Master was unable to resist at all.

Now he was certain that Uncle Feng was absolutely stronger than Gu Suitang. Wang Luori at least managed to put up a struggle before Gu Suitang, but he wasn't able to do anything before Uncle Feng.

"A Golden Cock? Did your guardian give you that to protect your life?"

"Golden Cock?" Ye Qing jolted out of his shock and stared at the big cock still crowing on top of its lungs and running around without a care for the world. He had heard of the Golden Cock from Wawa before, but this was the first time he saw one with his own eyes.

The Golden Cock was a very special Stranger. Although it was only a Malice-class Stranger with little to no ability to defend itself, it possessed a very special ability. No, it wasn't its ability to lay eggs and crow like a hen, though that in itself was certainly unusual. It was its ability to lay a golden egg that could block any and all disasters for its owner exactly once in its life.

The Golden Cock's golden egg was even more useful than the Scapedoll because it could protect its owner from dangerous environments as well. Besides that, the golden egg was said to possess the ability to harmonize the yin and yang energy in one's body. It was the reason the Golden Cock could lay eggs despite being male.

If someone were to consume the golden egg, then they would become a hermaphrodite. They would literally be able to give birth to life by themselves.

This was just a legend, of course. After all, no one had ever dared to verify it.

"Perfect. I heard that a Golden Crow's flesh is sweet, juicy, and tender, and it could be simmer-fried, steamed or roasted. It'll be a perfect complement for the wine you

promised me, Scion Ye,” Uncle Feng said with a delighted smile while beckoning the Golden Crow to come to him.

“Cock-a-doodle!”

Unaware of the grim fate that awaited it, the Golden Crow crowed and ran up to Uncle Feng.

Ye Qing shook his head wryly. “He’s going to eat you, you fool. Well, that’s not a bad quality though. Just look at the smartasses. They’re just about ready to shit their pants.”

Chapter 256: The Demon's Tomb Appears

“Who... Who are you?”

Wang Luori and Xue Shiwu were white-faced with terror as they stared at Uncle Feng.

Uncle Feng chuckled. “Me? I’m just a servant. My name doesn’t deserve mention.”

“A servant?” Like hell we’ll believe that!

“I... I don’t know who you are, but my father is Xue Beikun and the commander of the Black Feather Guards. You can’t kill me!” Xue Shiwu gulped audibly while trembling like a leaf.

Uncle Feng shook his head and gave him a warm smile. “I don’t know any Xue Beikun or Black Feather Guards. All I know is that someone wants to kill Scion Ye, and my job is to kill them all.”

Wang Luori and Xue Shiwu booked it immediately. The old man had made it abundantly clear that there was no talking their way out of this. However, they soon realized that they were moving in reverse. No matter how hard they ran, they just kept getting closer and closer to Uncle Feng; to death.

“No! No! I don’t want to die!” Xue Shiwu finally lost his shit and howled on top of his lungs.

Wang Luori looked like he was in utter despair as well.

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Some distance away, Xue Beikun noticed that his son was in danger and ordered, “Keep Gu Suitang busy!” Then, he drove Gu Suitang back with a palm strike and raced toward Uncle Feng.

“Hahaha! Do you think you can run, Xue Beikun?”

Gu Suitang wasn’t going to allow this, of course. Karma is such a bitch, isn’t she? Well, it’s my turn now!

Gu Suitang laughed boisterously as he sent Bai Xihu, Jiang Huanjian and Song Yushu flying with a casual flick of his hand. Then, he caught up to Xue Beikun and aimed a devastating punch at his back.

Xue Beikun didn’t react, however. He allowed Gu Suitang’s punch to strike its target and used the momentum to push himself even faster toward Uncle Feng.

“Fuck! He got me!”

Gu Suitang cursed under his breath and got ready to give chase. However, the three Spirit Purifiers got in his way and caused him to miss his chance.

Meanwhile, countless bloody clouds were gathering above Xue Beikun. At the center of the clouds was a bloody star that looked like the epitome of slaughter and disaster, and entrenched above the star was a black wolf.

The black wolf was incredibly huge and had a horn on its forehead. Its eyes were crimson red, its fur was shiny black, and its limbs were muscular yet perfectly balanced. It looked both beautiful and strong.

Even scarier was the fact that it was covered in ominous-looking flames. They were overflowing violence and disaster.

When the black wolf let out an angry roar, an unspeakable aura filled the world in an instant. It was so grandiose and all-encompassing that it felt like the power of nature itself. All living beings within tens of meters of the Spirit Master abruptly prostrated themselves and trembled with fear.

Ye Qing, Wang Luori and Xue Shiwu were no exception. An unbelievable pressure and fear were pressing down on their bodies all the way to their souls. They felt like they were an ordinary human being who was suddenly tossed into a battlefield of the ages, and the only thing they wanted to do was to crawl under a mountain of corpses and hide. Resistance was near impossible.

“That’s the Greedy Wolf...”

Ye Qing forced down the unnatural fear in his soul and slowly raised his head to look at the black wolf in the sky. The black wolf was none other than the legendary Greedy Wolf, and it was a symbol of killing, disaster, and all that was ominous and bloody.

The Greedy Wolf in the sky wasn’t created from astral qi, but it wasn’t an illusion either. It was a Yin God.

A Yin God was the refined form of one’s mind. When a Spirit Purifier had sufficiently refined their mind, they would be able to create a Yin God and enter the Spirit Master Realm.

A Yin God could leave their mortal shell behind and explore the world freely like a ghost. So long as the Yin God still existed, the warrior would never die.

In fact, one must create a Yin God before they could be considered a master of the martial ways.

A Yin God didn’t necessarily need to be a humanoid shape. It could take any form and any power depending on the warrior’s martial arts and personality. In that sense, everything in the world could be a Yin God.

A Yin God was a “spirit that was perfectly compatible with heaven and earth” according to the ancient texts. Therefore, a warrior would be able to use their Yin God to cultivate dharma magic, perceive origin qi, and change the weather itself. They could literally summon rain and thunder upon their enemies if they wanted to.

This was why Spirit Masters were so, so much stronger than Spirit Purifiers. One could say that the gap between the two was like an adult and a baby.

A Spirit Master... Can Uncle Feng stop him?

“Kill!”

Xue Beikun summoned a spear into his hands and executed a downward thrust.

“Roar!”

The Greedy Wolf howled in response and also descended from above. It rode atop a star that was surrounded by thick, bloody clouds. It looked like a sky river from down below.

Even before the river or the Greedy Wolf could reach Uncle Feng, a bloody rain fell from the sky first. The wind howled, and the rain reeked of blood stench. It was also overflowing with an air of tyranny and balefulness. The ground was quickly dyed red as every plant in the vicinity withered and died.

Uncle Feng didn't seem to notice the Greedy Wolf or the river of blood, however. Still wearing a warm smile on his face, he waited until the Greedy Wolf and the river were close before raising his thin right arm. He said, “The ‘Seven Killing Spears of Greedy Wolf’? What a coincidence. You know, I was the one who killed the Greedy Wolf.”

As soon as he waved his sleeve, both the Greedy Wolf and the river rapidly shrank and slipped into his sleeve. The ominous blood rain and smelly wind disappeared just like that, and the world returned to normal once more. It was like nothing had ever happened.

“Pwack!”

Xue Beikun couldn't help but throw up a mouthful of blood after his Yin God took damage. The blood drained away from his face, and the light in his eyes grew dim.

“Gasp!”

The ember of hope that Xue Beikun had lit in Wang Luori and Xue Shiwu's hearts extinguished just like that. Even Ye Qing couldn't help but gasp in surprise.

He knew that Uncle Feng was very strong, but every time he increased his expectations, the old man surpassed it like it was nothing. What kind of warrior did it take to defeat a Spirit Master who had already grasped their dharma magic in one move?

Could Uncle Feng be a Grandmaster?

It would certainly explain how ridiculously powerful he was!

Man, when can I become a Grandmaster like Uncle Feng and looney-toon my enemy like that? I still have a long, long way to go.

Ye Qing's eyes brimmed with envy and admiration.

“‘A world inside a sleeve, a sun inside a jar’... the World Sleeve?”

Xue Beikun groaned out in shock and pain when he recalled something, “You're the World Sleeve Feng Liunian? I thought you were dead?”

“Am I? I guess so!” Uncle Feng hid his hands behind his sleeves and hunched down a little. Right here and now, he certainly didn't look like the legend he was at all.

“Feng Liunian is long dead. There is only an old man called Uncle Feng now.”

“To think that the suave, dashing and bold World Sleeve would turn into this! How pitiful! How ironic!” Xue Beikun taunted before bolting away all of a sudden. The commander was actually leaving his son for dead!

“Don’t let him escape, Uncle Feng!” Ye Qing hurriedly shouted. He had to admit that Xue Beikun was more decisive than he thought. As soon as he realized that the situation was irredeemable, he immediately abandoned his son to save himself.

“He won’t escape!” Uncle Feng bared his yellow teeth and grinned from ear to ear. “Romance and freedom are but reflections in water. Ebb and flow is the true state of humanity. You don’t understand this, and you never will!”

Because you’re about to die.

Uncle Feng suddenly disappeared and reappeared behind Xue Beikun. Then, he made a grab for the man’s head. At the last moment, Xue Beikun dodged left and took the attack with his left shoulder instead.

Splat!

Xue Beikun’s left shoulder was ripped off just like that. Blood immediately rained from above.

Before the commander could react, Uncle Feng swung his sleeve and smashed Xue Beikun toward the ground.

Rumble!

As soon as Xue Beikun’s head hit the ground, the earth within several meters of him collapsed soundlessly to reveal a bottomless pit that seemed to reach all the way to the Nine Nethers itself.

Ye Qing’s jaw hit the floor when he saw this. This... is too much even for a Grandmaster, isn’t it? Is Xue Beikun’s head that hard? Is the ground actually made of tofu? Or is Uncle Feng even greater than Grandmaster!?

Ye Qing realized that wasn’t the case when he looked up though. It was because Uncle Feng was wearing the same stupefied expression as him.

While both of them were trying to figure out what was going on, the pit was still growing bigger and bigger. What looked like an infinite amount of demonic qi gushed into the surface and blotted out the moon and the stars. At the same time, one could vaguely see a giant standing in the sky, infinite and eternal.

“That’s...” Ye Qing’s eyes bled, and his mind shook unsteadily when he took one look at the giant. He quickly looked away. The silhouette in the sky could not be observed, but there was no denying that it existed.

“When the moon and stars lose their light, when the demon stands in the sky, when heaven and earth falls into darkness, the Demon’s Tomb shall appear.” Uncle Feng lost his smile and said seriously, “Be careful, Scion Ye. The Demon’s Tomb is about to appear in our world!”

No wonder he was called the World Sleeve! He's too OP!

Paper Taoist once told him that the Demon's Tomb would appear in Luo Shui within a month or two. He thought the Stranger was just spouting bullshit to save his own skin, but it turned out that it was the truth after all.

According to Paper Taoist, the Demon's Tomb was the resting place of the Progenitor Demon. It would explain how a mere projection could be so terrifying.

“What?” Ye Qing had just returned to earth when his surroundings suddenly turned pitch black. He looked up and saw the giant swaying a little and seemingly looking down on the earth.

Before Ye Qing could react, the giant—it was almost as if it was conscious—snapped his finger.

Space vibrated, and the ground where Ye Qing was standing abruptly dissolved into nothing.

By the time Ye Qing realized what was happening, he had already disappeared into the bottomless pit below, his annoyed, helpless scream reverberating across the plain for a long time.

“I’ve never heard that the demon’s projection has a mind of its own, so why did it do that? Did Scion Ye piss it off somehow?”

“What’s going on? What happened?”

Uncle Feng replied, “The Demon’s Tomb is appearing. These are the signs before it officially opens.”

“Shit!” Gu Suitang obviously knew what the Demon’s Tomb was. “Why did it appear in Luo Shui of all places? Wait, Old Man Turtle mentioned that Luo Shui would be facing a terrible tribulation in recent times. Was he not just referring to the Way of Taiping? This is bad!”

When the Demon’s Tomb appeared, everything within several kilometers of the giant would be shrouded in eternal darkness, and the earth would transform into the void. Anyone and anything within its range would be dragged into the Demon’s Tomb as well.

Even worse, the lack of light would draw countless Strangers toward the Demon’s Tomb. This meant that Luo Shui would be facing a massive influx of Strangers very soon.

The silver lining was that the Demon’s Tomb hadn’t manifested inside the city. Otherwise, the entire city would be dragged into it. It would’ve been a terrible tragedy.

The Demon’s Tomb was an opportunity-of-a-lifetime for some warriors, but it was only a disaster for the ordinary people.

“Oh right, where’s Joyless?” Gu Suitang asked.

Uncle Feng replied, “He was dragged into the Demon’s Tomb.”

The deputy chief frowned. “Unlucky bastard. The passage to the Demon’s Tomb is extremely unstable when it initially appears. It’s possible he will die before he ever reaches the bottom.”

That was what he said, but he wasn’t really that worried mainly because there was nothing he could do even if he did worry himself to death. Besides that, Ye Qing was a journeyman body-tempering warrior with a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact. He should be able to survive until the end. If not... such was life!

“Speaking of which, thank you for your timely assistance, senior.” Gu Suitang looked away from the bottomless pit and said, “If you’re free, would you like to come with me to the Pacification Bureau and enjoy a meal with me? I would like to thank you properly.”

Uncle Feng narrowed his eyes and shook his head. “You’re welcome, but I still have other things to do. I shan’t take up your time.”

“Very well.”

It was a shame he couldn’t recruit Feng Liunian’s aid—the city would be so much safer otherwise—but it wasn’t like he could force a possible Grandmaster to do anything, so he saluted the old man and said, “I need to go now. I’ll visit you some other day, senior.”

He needed to head back and notify the Tian Yong Pacification Bureau, Jiang Muyang and more about the appearance of the Demon’s Tomb as soon as possible. The sooner the preparations were complete, the more they could minimize its damage to Luo Shui and the surrounding settlements.

Uncle Feng smiled. “Do as you please. You have my deepest respect for choosing to protect the people when you could’ve entered the Demon’s Tomb to seek out your opportunity.”

“You flatter me, senior.” Gu Suitang said smilingly but seriously, “I am the deputy chief of the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau. It is my responsibility to protect the people. Also, I’m a human before I’m a warrior.”

He would be lying if he said he wasn’t tempted to venture into the Demon’s Tomb and seek out his opportunity. He was a warrior after all. But as the deputy chief of the Pacification Bureau, he carried the entire Luo Shui on his shoulders. It was his duty and responsibility to protect Luo Shui before anything else. That was why he needed to return to the city and oversee things as quickly as possible.

“I will take my leave now. See you someday, senior.” Gu Suitang left after one last salute.

After Gu Suitang left, Feng Qingyou appeared behind Uncle Feng like a ghost and remarked, “Gu Suitang is a man alright. He’s as daring as he is responsible. He has a bright future ahead of him.”

Uncle Feng nodded. “I agree. Are we entering the Demon’s Tomb now, Miss?”

Feng Qingyou replied, “Things will get complicated when more people show up, so yes. Let’s go.”

“As you command, Miss,” said Uncle Feng before whistling. A whinny sound could be heard as three handsome horses pulling a bronze carriage emerged from the space. When they came to a stop in front of Uncle Feng, one of the horses rubbed its head affectionately against Uncle Feng’s palm.

“Let us ride, Miss!”

“Let’s.”

Feng Qingyou entered the carriage first, and Uncle Feng second. Right before he would slip through the entrance, he glanced in a certain direction and broke into a small, enigmatic grin. A loud crack later, the three bronze horses roared and galloped straight into the void that was the entrance leading to the Demon’s Tomb. In fact, large patches of the void were scattered, and the horse carriage slipped through the hole between the void.

The world returned to relative silence after Feng Qingyou and Uncle Feng were gone. For a time, there was only the howling demonic qi and the not-so-intact void that was still growing every second. The sky was completely blotted, and the darkness was eternal.

Suddenly, a naive-sounding voice broke the silence,

“You truly are a master diviner, master. How did you know that the Demon’s Tomb would appear at this location?”

Beneath a pile of corpses, a silhouette suddenly pushed away one of the bodies and sat up.

“Master? Are you okay, master?”

After calling out to his master and hearing no answer, the naive-sounding man grew worried and pulled away the bodies as quickly as he could. Then, he dragged out an old man whose hair and beard were drenched in blood.

He was none other than the old Taoist who unintentionally ruined much of Ye Qing's plans earlier, and the naive-sounding man his disciple.

"Huff... huff... cough! Cough..."

The old Taoist took a couple of deep breaths before he was seized by a series of hacking coughs. When his breathing finally returned to normal, he slapped his disciple on the back of his head and swore, "You fucking brat! Were you trying to suffocate me? Did you want my inheritance so badly? Traitorous disciple! Traitorous disciple!"

"You should stop, master. Your hand is all red and sore," his disciple advised while scratching his head. "Also, you're the one who said we should pile a couple more bodies on top of ourselves to minimize our chances of being discovered."

"Oh? And since when you're so obedient? You never listened to me when I told you to eat less, did you?"

The old Taoist rubbed his sore palm and muttered a bunch of expletives under his breath before saying, "Your brain isn't just for show. Use it."

"Kay." His disciple scratched his head again before saying, "Oh right. I think that old senior who went into the Demon's Tomb noticed us. He glanced at us right before he went inside."

"He noticed you, not me!" The old Taoist scoffed. "'World Sleeve' Feng Liunian was no less famous than me back then. Of course he noticed that you were playing dead!"

"Really? Senior Feng must be incredibly strong then!" His disciple mused with envy and admiration. "Who's stronger between you two, master?"

Caught off guard, The old Taoist let out an embarrassed cough. "I-I said he's no less famous than me! What do you think?"

His disciple thought for a moment before exclaiming in realization, "That senior must be stronger than you! You wouldn't need to play dead if you were just as strong as him, am I right?"

"Yes, you're absolutely right that you're an absolute retard!" The old Taoist couldn't stop himself from slapping his disciple again despite his sore hand. "Fighting is for brutes and one of the worst ways to survive in the jianghu. We, the Temple of Divination, use divination to invite luck and avoid misfortune. In other words, we use our brains to survive in this world, not brawn!"

"Take this for example. Could you have found the Demon's Tomb without me?"

"But master, you also said that we warriors depend on our fists to survive in this jianghu," His disciple questioned.

"You think you're so smart, don't you?" The old Taoist fumed. I wanna hit him, but my hands are seriously sore. What should I do?

As if he could read his master's mind, his disciple said, "You can kick me if you want, master. You won't hurt your hands that way."

Old Taoist: "... " What a filial disciple you are! But kicking you is still going to hurt my legs!

"The Demon's Tomb only opens for three days. If we miss the deadline, then we'll never leave. The early bird catches the worm, so let's go."

"Huh? Isn't it, 'The early worm gets eaten by the bird'?"

Old Taoist: "... " Why did I take him in as my disciple again? Sigh!

The old Taoist ignored his dumb disciple

The old Taoist decided to ignore his dumb disciple and focus on the present. He made a hand gesture and muttered, "The path of divination opens to those who believe. I bestow these coins with the power to guide us away from misfortune and toward fortune!"

The old man threw three coins into the air. Instead of falling, they flew in a certain pattern and drew what looked like a profound-looking picture. He wore a serious expression as his fingers danced across the air rhythmically and created all manners of illusions.

A moment later, the old Taoist made a swiping motion and caught the three bronze coins. He said smilingly, "Three is on the left, and five is on the right[1]. The trigram has shifted, but not so much that it is folly to venture into the Demon's Tomb. There is fortune in danger; life in death."

"To put it simply, our journey in the Demon's Tomb will be daunting but without mishaps. You may take the lead, disciple."

"Okay." His dumb disciple never questioned why his master told him to take the lead. He simply walked over to the spot the old Taoist was pointing and jumped down.

A few breaths later, when the old Taoist confirmed that he couldn't sense anything amiss, he nodded. "Mm. Looks like there is no danger."

Then, he jumped down into the pit from the same spot as well.

Time passed, and dawn broke. The world should've been basked in warming light, but the city and its surroundings were still as dark as the night. The celestial bodies were all invisible, and a demonic giant cast a massive shadow across the ground. It was like he was a god looking down on the world, cold and unfeeling.

By now, the land within several kilometers of the giant to the south of the commandery of Luo Shui had transformed into the void. The demonic qi shrouding the area looked like a black, impenetrable sea that was filled with mystery, unknown and danger.

"Kekeke... it really is the Demon's Tomb. The Demon's Tomb had finally surfaced once more."

Space shook, and a cold light glittered in the darkness. It was a coffin flying through the sky until it was directly above the Demon's Tomb. Whoever was lying inside the coffin was letting out a sinister cackle.

“Hmm? There’s a human city here? Oh, there are quite a lot of humans as well. Now that I think about it, it’s been a long time since I’ve feasted on human flesh and soul. Oh, I’m so hungry.”

The coffin lid shifted to one side, and an unbelievably thin arm reached out of the coffin. When the owner of the arm made a grab for the city, a giant palm bigger than the city itself suddenly manifested right on top of it. It looked like the person inside the coffin was planning to kill all living things in Luo Shui in one strike.

“How dare you, Demon of Unliving!”

Right before the demonic palm would land, the light of a sword suddenly shot through the sky. It easily sliced the demonic palm in half and caused it to crumble away like dust.

Chapter 258: Intimidation Tactic 101

“Why are you getting in my way, Song Xilai[1]? What did I ever do to you?” Demon of Unliving raged after his attack was crushed.

“Hmph! You were going to slaughter hundreds of thousands of people, and you’re asking me why I stopped you?”

A handsome man with a sharp, imposing aura appeared in the sky. He had white hair and wore a white outfit. Before Demon of Unliving could react, Song Suyu unleashed a sword thrust and left a thin crack on the coffin. The next moment, an unbelievable amount of sword intent erupted from inside the coffin.

Boom!

After the coffin was destroyed, a scrawny, bony and freaky-looking man tumbled into view. He looked ragged and blackened probably because the explosion had done a number on him.

“Song Xilai, you piece of—”

“You-you-you-you-you what, you ugly sonuvabitch? No wonder you always hide yourself in a coffin. If I was you, I would’ve hanged myself a long time ago!”

A different voice interrupted Demon of Unliving before he could finish. The next moment, a sloppily-dressed Taoist appeared behind him and unleashed a palm strike.

An image of Yin and Yang appeared in the sky and rotated slowly. Everything within the image such as Demon of Unliving and the surrounding space were immediately crushed like grains in a millstone. His body was twisted like a rope, and blood spurted from multiple parts of his body. It looked like the invisible force might crush Demon of Unliving into powder at any moment.

“Your Yin Yang Millstone Hand deserves its reputation, Yellow Dragon Trueman!”

Suddenly, a giant sun that shouldn’t exist in this world of darkness rose into the sky. At the same time, a crescent moon fell into the horizon. There was a blur as if the corner of space where Demon of Unliving was was being distorted, and the warrior abruptly vanished into thin air.

Some distance away, the artificial sun and moon abruptly extinguished as if it was crushed by some sort of invisible force.

“The Heavenly Body Switching Art? I didn’t think you would come, Old Ding!” Yellow Dragon Trueman withdrew his right hand and looked at the spot where Demon of Unliving was transferred to.

There was a short, thin man standing next to Demon of Unliving. His eyes looked like soybeans, and a pair of buck teeth were sticking out of his mouth. He also had a goat beard. The guy looked just like a rat.

While stroking his beard, Old Ding greeted Song Xilai and Yellow Dragon Trueman, “Hail, Brother Song. Hail, Yellow Dragon Trueman.”

“Are you going to fight us, Ding Qiu?” Sword intent billowed like the autumn wind as Song Xilai side-eyed Old Ding.

Ding Qiu’s beady eyes narrowed into lines as he denied the accusation in a hurry, “Of course not! It’s just that we’re all compatriots here. Why fight among ourselves when cooperation would benefit us more?”

“Benefactor Ding is right. There’s no need to sour the peace over a small issue.”

A bald, fat monk with his stomach exposed like Budai[2] and shrouded in golden light floated over on a golden lotus. Despite his appearance, he was actually quite young.

“A small issue? You call the attempted slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people a small issue, Laughing Buddha?” Song Xilai said coldly. He looked like he might cut the monk down to size if he so much as breathed another word.

It was at this moment a feminine giggle interrupted their spat. “Guys, the Demon’s Tomb is only going to appear for three days. Are you sure you want to waste your time on pointless arguments? Wouldn’t it be better to murder each other after you’ve left the Demon’s Tomb?”

The giggle sounded like it came from a few kilometers, but less than a second later, a litter appeared right before their eyes.

No one was carrying the litter, but it didn’t need a carrier because it had four human legs. It also had a giant mouth and a tongue that was hanging outside the lips. For whatever reason, it was panting like a dog.

A woman sat inside the litter, and her face was completely masked from view. However, the curtains covering the litter were just transparent enough to reveal an hourglass figure.

The woman inside the litter suddenly looked at Song Xilai and asked, “Why aren’t you greeting your ex-lover, Xilai?”

“Hmph.” Song Xilai grunted but didn’t say anything[3].

The woman suddenly let out a mournful sigh that drew everyone’s sympathy even though they had no idea what was the story between her and Song Xilai. “How heartless. Back then... Actually, I’d

prefer not to recall those woeful days, and you probably don't want to see me anyway. See you later, everyone."

The next moment, the litter ran into the void leading to the Demon's Tomb and disappeared.

Yellow Dragon Trueman couldn't help but move closer to Song Xilai and asked, "Ahem... Xilai? Did you... actually have an affair with the Saintess of Yin Mountain?"

"Fuck off!" Song Xilai's face darkened as he unsheathed his sword half an inch. An incredible amount of sword qi immediately filled the sky.

"Ahem. The saintess is right. The Demon's Tomb is only going to appear for three days, so... goodbye, y'all!" Ding Qiu flinched at the display of power and slipped into the void with Demon of Unliving just like that.

Song Xilai harrumphed, but he didn't try to stop them. Ding Qiu was a Thief's Sect elite, and no sect was better than the Thief's Sect when it came to making a run for it. Like a rat, it was impossible to stop Ding Qiu from escaping even if he wanted to.

"Amitabha. This poor monk shall be taking his leave as well," Laughing Buddha said with a smile before entering the void on his golden lotus.

"Ahem... Let's go, Xilai."

After Laughing Buddha and the others were gone, Yellow Dragon Trueman beckoned Song Xilai to him and put some of his disciples into his sleeves[4]. "Xilai, I don't want to reprimand you for your habits, but you already have Junior Sister Bai, you know? When will you learn to appreciate what you have and stop womanizing... ahem. Looks like Junior Sister Bai is here. Good luck, brother!"

Song Xilai subconsciously looked in the direction where he sensed a pocket of auras. He saw a flying boat that seemed to be made from white jade flying toward him, and standing on the bow was a woman with a chilling expression and presence. She was like a winter plum who stood proudly in the winter.

Song Xilai immediately pulled a handful of Purity Sword disciples into his sleeves as well. Then, he put a hole in the void and slipped inside faster than one could blink.

A few breaths later, when the boat finally arrived at the scene, a woman walked over to the cold woman and asked, "Was that Senior Brother Song, senior sister? Why didn't he wait for us?"

The woman replied coldly, "He's just a coward, that's all."

"Let's go!"

The boat dove into the void and disappeared as well.

More and more people showed up. Some of them were alone, and some of them brought disciples with them. Regardless of their company or lack thereof, they were all here to enter the Demon's Tomb.

"I had no idea that Song Xilai had a fling with the girl from Yin Mountain Palace. That gossip alone is worth the trip."

Inside a tower overseeing the phenomenon that had taken over an entire chunk of land, a man was lying in his chair and enjoying some melon seeds. He was wearing a lazy smile on his face.

Fang Xiaoman, the Chief of Bureau, and Gu Suitang, the Deputy Chief of Bureau, were standing on his left and right side. Gu Suitang looked worried, while Fang Xiaoman was shoving one shaobing[5]

“Hmm? A Stranger is coming,” Fang Xiaoman mumbled suddenly. As if on cue, a Stranger bearing a coffin and surrounded by crows slowly appeared from the horizon[6].

“That’s the Pallbearer!”

Gu Suitang looked at the Stranger walking toward the Demon’s Tomb and asked, “Should we kill him?”

The man on the chair cracked open a melon seed and replied, “Nah, he’s too weak. It wouldn’t achieve the intended effect.”

“What about that one?”

A few breaths later, a Stranger with a tiger’s head and an ox’s body showed up. Over six meters in height, it had four hooves that were literally on fire, three eyes, and a pair of long, sharp horns that looked as crooked as the Yellow River itself. The horns were pitch black and emanated some sort of eerie light. For some reason, the gap between the horns almost looked like a gateway that was connected to another world. There were also children running back and forth through the gap repeatedly[7].

The man took one look and said, “That one’s definitely not weak. I’ll leave it to you!”

Gu Suitang answered honestly, “I’m too weak.”

The man abruptly threw the melon seeds on the ground and swore, “Then what the fuck makes you think I can beat it? That’s fucking Tubo, man, Tubo! I don’t think even two of me can kick its ass, much less kill it!”

“Besides, Tubo is no irredeemably evil Stranger. Why the fuck would I provoke such a Stranger? It’s just unnecessary!”

While the man was swearing up and down, a couple more Strangers and jianghu warriors entered the Demon’s Tomb. Usually, they would be murdering the hell out of each other, but this time everyone shared an unspoken agreement. There would be no fighting until they had entered the Strange Realm.

“Finally! A suitable prey arrives!”

Suddenly, the man leaped into the sky and pushed his hands in front of him. A draconic roar shook the world, and a golden dragon at least three hundred meters long burst into existence. It flew straight toward a mountain that was hundreds of meters tall.

The mountain was no normal mountain. For one, it was floating in the air. Second, it was covered in all kinds of bones from head to toe. In fact, it looked like the entire mountain was made of bones.

It was the Bone Mountain, a Disaster-class Stranger[8]

Clatter clatter clatter...

As if sensing the danger, the bones on the mountain came together to form a pair of massive hands. It grabbed toward the golden dragon like it was catching a worm, but the dragon easily shattered the hands into pieces with the flick of a tail.

The next moment, the golden dragon swooped down and let out another roar. The massive Bone Mountain was shattered just like that.

“The Dragon Wars In the Wilderness”

Not done yet, the man roared and unleashed another three golden dragons. They trapped the rain of bones before they could hit the ground and crushed them over and over like a grinder. They didn’t stop until every single bone that made up the Bone Mountain was fine powder.

After the Bone Mountain was killed, the man clasped his hands behind his back and declared with a booming voice, “Just because the Pacification Bureau didn’t take action doesn’t mean that we’re sick kittens, you walking pieces of garbage!”

“I am Hong Jianglong, a member of the Pacification Bureau. You are free to enter the Demon’s Tomb, but anyone who damages the land or the people of Luo Shui will share Bone Mountain’s fate.”

“Just try me if you dare. I promise it’ll be the last thing you ever do in your life!”

For a time, everyone hiding in the shadows be it those who were planning to enter the Demon’s Tomb or exploit this opportunity to cause trouble was speechless with shock. Hong Jianglong was formally titled the “Revered Dragonbane”, and he was one of the four champions of the Tian Yong Pacification Bureau. A Grandmaster who was famous for his brutality, there were few warriors or even Strangers who hadn’t heard of his name.

Hong Jianglong was here obviously to support the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau and warn those humans or Strangers who harbored malicious designs for Luo Shui.

The reason he killed Bone Mountain was to make a show of force. It didn’t necessarily have to be Bone Mountain, it just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. The poor thing.

“Fuck, that damn mountain is harder than I thought.”

A while later, Hong Jianglong returned to the city and shook his sore hands. Then, he looked at Gu Suitang and Fang Xiaoman and said, “I’ve scared the chickenshits for you. There shouldn’t be anyone who’s dumb or ballsy enough to attack Luo Shui in the next three days.”

But Gu Suitang shook his head and said, “You should’ve discussed your plan with us, my lord. I would have asked you to hide yourself until we’ve baited all of our would-be-attackers into showing themselves. That would’ve earned us months, maybe even years of peace for Luo Shui instead of days.”

Hong Jianglong looked at Gu Suitang in surprise. “It’s only been a few months since we met. When did you become such a bad boy, Old Gu?”

As far as he remembered, Gu Suitang was an honest, straightforward man. He was smart, but he never thought that the deputy chief had it in him to come up with such a devious—but admittedly great—plan. He was basically suggesting to use everyone in Luo Shui as bait to take out all of their enemies in one go.

“Ahem...” Gu Suitang felt a little embarrassed. “I learned it from a brat who has more courage than sense.”

“Well, that brat has a bright future ahead of him,” Hong Jianglong praised him before sighing. “It’s too late though. Also, I’m going to enter the Demon’s Tomb with a couple of hopefuls myself, so I wouldn’t have been able to stay in Luo Shui for long anyway.”

“Still, Luo Shui should be safe for the next few days, so rest easy. I’m going to sneak away now. I trust the two of you to keep the peace while I’m gone!”

“Wait! If you run into a young man named Ye Qing during your exploration, please keep him safe. He’s our Patrolman,” Gu Suitang said suddenly.

“Ye Qing? Got it,” Hong Jianglong responded before vanishing into thin air.

“I hope everything will turn out fine.” Gu Suitang looked at the black sky above his head and sighed.

“Me too,” Fang Xiaoman replied.

May Luo Shui, its people, and even that brat be safe!

Chapter 259: Nature’s Water

“Ugh... Where am I?” Ye Qing shook off his dizziness and glanced at his surroundings. A second later, he massaged his forehead and sighed. “I’m inside the Demon’s Tomb, aren’t I?”

He was currently inside a lush forest filled with all kinds of fruits. There were pears, peaches, apples and more.

This would be a perfectly ordinary sight in a perfectly ordinary orchard if not for the fact that there were also strawberries and watermelons on the trees. I know my strawberries and watermelons, bro, and I can tell you that they definitely do not grow on trees!

But of course, this was a magical world. What was abnormal in his previous life could be perfectly normal in this one.

Ye Qing let out a small sigh of relief after observing his surroundings for a bit and finding no danger. There was a non-zero chance he could have fallen right into the middle of trouble and turn into a coffin as a result. That would have sucked to say the least.

He didn’t touch the fruits on the trees, of course. The Demon’s Tomb was a strange and perilous place. He didn’t want to attract trouble or throw his life away just because of a moment’s gluttony. Caution was the default mode until he left this place.

After resting for a bit and returning to optimal condition, Ye Qing finally started plotting his next move. Honestly, he didn't really care for the Demon's Tomb's so-called fortunes or opportunities because he had the Annon Sutra. He had never planned on entering this dangerous place either.

Unfortunately, the demonic giant decided that he was "special" or something and literally finger-snapped him into this place. There was just nothing he could do to resist.

In any case, his first order of business was to find the exit. He had checked the files regarding the Demon's Tomb before, so he knew that it normally appeared for only three days before disappearing. If he couldn't locate the exit or a spatial rift that connected to the real world in time, then the Demon's Tomb would sink back into the void. He would never be able to leave if that happened.

Opportunities and fortunes could wait until he had secured his escape.

His mind made up, Ye Qing produced the Annon Sutra and asked, "Where is the exit?"

Ye Qing spat a couple mouthfuls of blood on the vellum. A short while later, the Annon Sutra gave its answer: "Journey to the north."

"Journey to the north? Is that a wordplay on journey to the w—ahem. I mustn't jinx myself."

Thankfully, the Annon Sutra's answer was fairly clear this time. Instead of making him solve a poem or a riddle, it outright told him to journey to the north.

Ye Qing put away the Annon Sutra and got ready to leave. It was at this moment a red apple fell from above and hit him squarely on his head.

Ye Qing subconsciously picked up the apple from the ground and gave it a look. It didn't look any different from your ordinary apple. "Looks good. I wonder how it tastes?"

Ye Qing was just about to take a bite when suddenly, the apple started wriggling on its own. A pair of big, round eyes appeared on its surface, and a pair of arms and legs grew out of its sides.

For a time, the man and the apple could only stare incredulously at each other. Is he the man who's going to eat me? The small apple thought. The next second, large, beady tears started falling profusely from its eyes.

"Oh come on, I haven't even eaten you yet!" Ye Qing rolled his eyes. It wasn't long before his palm was completely drenched in tears.

Strangely, the apple's tears smelled fragrant instead of salty. It stirred his appetite before he realized it.

I wonder if its tears taste just as sweet?

When the apple saw Ye Qing unconsciously licking his lips, it grew even more afraid and bawled loudly. "Uwah! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

The apple's voice was that of a small child, but it resounded inside Ye Qing's head instead of his ears.

It can speak? No, it's some sort of telepathy. Ye Qing immediately replied telepathically, "Stop crying."

If the apple was alive, then it was very possible that every other fruit on the trees were alive as well, meaning that they were all Strangers. That was why he told the apple to stop crying—the last thing he wanted was the fruit Strangers attacking him because he was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

He had thought of crushing the apple outright, but he was afraid that the act of murder would trigger the fruits as well.

The apple continued to sob despite his order, so Ye Qing threatened, "Cry some more, and I will eat you whole including your core."

"..." My core? What a monster!

The apple immediately stopped sobbing and clamped its tiny hands around its mouth. At the same time, Ye Qing felt a pulse of spirit. "Don't eat me! Don't eat me! I'm not fully mature yet, so I'm not tasty! And my core is definitely worse!"

"Sure. I won't eat you as long as you don't cry," replied Ye Qing with his spirit.

"Really? You're a good person, big guy!" The apple's eyes turned into crescents, and Ye Qing could clearly sense a pulse of joy from it.

"Big guy?" Well, I suppose I am way bigger than it is.

"Oh right! Are you hungry, big guy? You don't need to eat me! I know a place where you can eat a fragrant thing until your tummy is full!"

"Fragrant thing? What's that?" Ye Qing asked for clarification.

"It's... a fragrant thing?" The apple tilted its head in confusion. A fragrant thing is a fragrant thing. What else can it be?

The apple leaped down Ye Qing's hand and beckoned him to follow. "Come! I'll take you there!"

Ye Qing noticed that the apple was heading toward the north. Since that was the direction he was going anyway, he decided that there was no harm in following it.

The apple walked surprisingly fast despite its thin, short limbs. It wasn't long before they arrived at a puddle. Strangely, the puddle was floating about a meter above the ground, and the water were golden yellow in color. Bright, translucent, and unbelievably fragrant, it looked like the coalescence of countless essences of life.

A single whiff of its scent was enough to make Ye Qing feel like his soul had sublimated. All the fatigue and sequelae he had accumulated after days of non-stop fighting was wiped clean in an instant.

"Is this... Nature's Water?"

Also known as the Water of Life, Nature's Water was a product of the essences of life. It could only be found in places that were overflowing with nature and rich in energy, and it took tens of thousands of years to take form. A true product of nature, it was why it was called Nature's Water.

Nature's Water contained an immense amount of life essences and the power of nature. Any plant that made contact with it would automatically grow a soul, any animal that saw it would immediately become sapient, and any human who ate it would be changed forever.

To put it simply, a human who drank Nature's Water would become better in every way imaginable. Their blood vessels would be unlocked, their marrow would be purified, their body would be strong, their soul would be sublimated, their lifespan would increase and so on. It was the power to transform one's life completely all contained in a puddle.

"I can't believe I hit the jackpot right from the get go! Hahaha!"

Ye Qing couldn't stop laughing himself silly for a time. He didn't even notice his saliva dripping down his mouth.

For a warrior, Nature's Water could only be described as a holy grail. Even a single drop of Nature's Water could transform a warrior completely, much less an entire puddle. Forget him, even a Grandmaster would be salivating out of their minds.

"It's mine. It's mine. It's all mine!"

"Let me up! Let me up! I wanna drink the fragrant thing too!"

The small apple jumped up and down anxiously, but it was just too short to reach the puddle. When it tried calling out to Ye Qing, it discovered that the young man was completely drunk with wild joy. He hadn't heard the apple at all.

Seeing this, the apple puffed up its cheeks and thought of a plan. It climbed up Ye Qing's clothes until it reached his shoulder. Then, it leaped into the puddle like a professional swimmer.

"Glug glug glug..." It began chugging down the water like no tomorrow.

The apple's action jolted Ye Qing back to reality. After observing for a moment and finding no danger that he could see, Ye Qing hurriedly produced some porcelain bottles from his Nature's Shell and filled them up with Nature's Water.

He quickly ran into a problem though. All the porcelain bottles he got were pill bottles, so they could only store so much water. Besides that, he only had so many bottles. They were all full in a moment.

"What should I do?" Ye Qing frowned in thought until he glanced at the apple. It was currently swimming around the puddle and blowing bubbles as it did so. The answer immediately came to him then: My stomach is way bigger than these bottles!

Ye Qing immediately bent down and drank from the puddle. The moment the water entered his stomach, he felt a tremendous energy spreading throughout his whole body. The power wasn't violent, however. Instead, it nourished him like the rain and sunlight of spring, smooth yet of-so-satisfying. His internal organs, his blood vessels, his bodily points, his bones, his flesh, his blood, his mind and his spirit were all undergoing an experience.

“Uwu... my fragrant thing...”

The apple immediately panicked when it saw the puddle decreasing at a visible rate. It was like a certain man’s mouth was a vortex that was sucking everything dry. While whining cutely, it opened its mouth wider and chugged down the water as quickly as it could. It knew the puddle of Nature’s Water would be all gone in a moment.

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“Disciple, my divination is telling me that a great opportunity awaits inside this forest.”

At the edge of a fruit forest, an old Taoist was holding a luopan[1] and pointing straight ahead.

The brawny, simple-looking man beside him stared at the delicious fruits on the trees and licked his lips hungrily. “I’m hungry, master. Can I eat some of the fruits?”

“Eat, eat, eat! Would it kill you to eat less, you glutton?” The old Taoist yelled but felt a bit thirsty himself, so he changed his tune and said, “Never mind. I’m feeling a little thirsty myself, so go.”

“Okay! Just give me a minute, master,” His disciple chirped excitedly before running up to a fruit tree. He was just about to pluck a fruit when suddenly, the tree started withering at a visible rate. Its yellowed leaves fell on top of the disciple like the rain, and the fresh, juicy fruits also rotted and fell to the floor.

“What’s happening?”

The disciple scratched his head, puzzled. When he looked around, he discovered that the fruit tree wasn’t the only tree that was withering. Every tree within his vicinity was withering at an insane rate as well. What was a lively forest quickly turned deathly and ill-looking.

“Come back, Longxiang!”

At the distance, the old Taoist called for his disciple to return after noticing the oddity. He flinched when he counted his finger. “Shit! Someone is stealing our opportunity! We need to go now before it’s too late!”

The old Taoist grabbed his disciple and rushed into the forest. They were gone just like that.

Chapter 260: Hill Mover Bell

Meanwhile, Ye Qing and the red apple had almost drained the puddle of Nature’s Water completely. The red apple wasn’t a red apple anymore. It was now shining gold from head to toe. Ye Qing himself was the same. His skin looked as smooth as jade, and his pores were discharging golden air that was overflowing with life. If he cut his hair, he would look just like a golden Buddha.

It was because the water contained too much power. He wasn’t able to absorb and refine it before it was released from his body.

Ye Qing could feel that his body and his soul had undergone a fundamental transformation. His mind was solid and perfectly transparent, his reservoir of spirit was enormous, and all impurities

within his body had been removed. In fact, his body had gone from a nurtured body to a natural body, meaning that he was now what they called a one-in-a-million martial genius.

Even better, his strength was now the equivalent of four dragon elephants. Thanks to Gu Suitang's training a while ago, he was able to hone his strength further and hit the ceiling of one dragon elephant. However, any progress after this point would require an enormous amount of precious resources.

Luckily for him, Nature's Water was exactly that. It contained so much power that it outright quadrupled his body strength even though he wasn't able to refine all of it. If he did, he might even be able to hit five or even six dragon elephants.

"Phew... it's so worth it..."

Ye Qing kept drinking until he couldn't anymore. It was only then he stood up and let out a loud, golden burp.

The apple was also floating inside the puddle and burping loudly. It looked so happy and at peace that it might ascend to the heavens at any moment. From time to time, he could also hear it pulsing, "Fragrant... so fragrant..."

"Glutton," Ye Qing chided it jokingly before rubbing his own swollen belly.

I feel like peeing, but that would be a waste!

Suddenly, an icy voice entered his ears, "Are you the thieves who stole my Nature's Water?"

Ye Qing flinched and wheeled around. He immediately saw an old man with white hair and beard glaring at them.

Before Ye Qing could say anything, the apple hurriedly climbed to its feet and protested loudly, "Uwu... it's him! He's the one who forced me to bring him to the fragrant thing!"

"I didn't want to, but I'm just a kid! What can I do?"

"..."

Ye Qing immediately glared at the apple. You couldn't even wait a second before selling me out? Also, you're the mastermind here, okay? I didn't even know the water was here until you brought me over, and now you're accusing me of coercion? Shameless!

"Senior, I—"

Ye Qing was going to put his silver tongue to use when the old man slammed his wooden stick on the ground. As if sensing his fury, the earth abruptly swelled like a tidal wave and threatened to bury him alive.

"Not even going to let me explain myself? Come on!"

Clearly, the old man was planning to kill him. Ye Qing stomped the ground with the strength of four dragon elephants. The ground shook violently, and the avalanche was blown apart just like that.

"Time to go!"

Ye Qing didn't hesitate and took off immediately. If he wasn't mistaken, the old man was the spirit of this forest and something like the Mountain God or a River God. He was unkillable and immensely powerful so long as he remained inside this forest. Therefore, his only chance of surviving was to leave the forest as soon as possible.

Ye Qing was fifty meters away from his original location in just the blink of an eye. His speed after his recent improvement was insane.

"You think you can escape after drinking my Nature's Water? I will bury you alive, thief!" The old man let out an angry roar that literally shook the mountains. The wind howled, and the tree branches twisted and flailed all over the place.

It was clear that both the old man and the forest were angry. Or rather, the forest was the old man.

Ye Qing was unafraid, however. He surrounded himself in astral qi and unleashed his newfound strength. Like a brute, he sprinted toward the north while crushing every branch and root that tried to stop him. They were unable to impede him for even an instant.

"Rarrgh!"

Seeing that the usual method was unable to stop Ye Qing, the old man roared again and caused all the fruits to open their eyes. Their colors weren't nearly as bright and clear as the small apple's, however. They were blood red in color, and their center split apart to reveal rows and rows of sharp teeth.

There were strawberry giants who were made of countless strawberries and spat poisonous strawberry juices at him, pears that grew holes that released a sickly sweet mist that was dark green in color, watermelons that grew black wings that flew up to Ye Qing before exploding and more. Every plant and fruit in the forest had become Ye Qing's enemy.

"Flashy but useless," Ye Qing sneered in disdain. His physique was stronger than ever, and he was immune to all poison. Such attacks wouldn't even be able to tickle him, much less threaten his life.

Suddenly, a crack appeared right underneath his feet. "What the—"

He fell inside, and the crack slammed shut as if it would crush him alive.

Boom!

The earth exploded, and Ye Qing was back on the surface. However, he had just leaped into the air when a massive hand that was made of mud smacked him right back toward the ground.

At the last second, Ye Qing slammed his palm against the earth and swiped backward. He immediately shot forward like an arrow.

Hmph! Did he think this is enough to—

Bang!

Ye Qing hadn't even finished his thought when he slammed head first into a craggy hill. Literally half of his body was stuck in its sides.

“Poo! Poo! Ptooey! The fuck? When was there a hill at this location?” Ye Qing complained after pulling his head out and spitting out the soil inside his mouth.

His answer came a second later. When he looked around, he saw the ground swelling into countless hills, and they were all moving in his direction.

“Okay, this is getting annoying...”

Ye Qing hmped coldly and stomped the ground. After the hills collapsed from the shockwave, he continued to sprint toward the distance.

“You cannot escape...”

“You cannot escape...”

Unfortunately, he had only taken a few steps when a loud, invisible, yet all-encompassing voice enveloped the world. More hills rose all around him and surrounded him from every direction like prison bars.

Shit shit shit! This is bad!

Ye Qing frowned as he stared at the layers upon layers of hill blocking his way. Despite his newfound power, it was just too difficult to go up against a whole forest.

Ah, I regret everything. I shouldn't have allowed that cunning little apple to tempt me. I wouldn't be in this situation if it wasn't for it...

“This way, brother!”

Ye Qing was getting ready to fight for his life when suddenly, the hills parted to reveal a small path. He then saw an old Taoist holding what looked like a silver ox horn bell standing in the middle of the path and calling out to him. Standing behind him was a brawny, simple-looking man.

It's them? How did they survive?

Ye Qing immediately recognized the old Taoist. He was none other than the bastard who, together with his disciples, exposed most of his schemes to his enemies.

What was strange was that he clearly remembered smashing Vajra Boy into his simple-minded disciple's chest and sending both him and the old Taoist flying. Logically speaking, there was no chance they could've survived the attack, but not only did the old Taoist look alive, he looked quite healthy.

He had a feeling that the old Taoist didn't recognize him though. After all, his whole body including his face was shining like a light bulb right now. It wasn't impossible to see through all this light, but if the old man knew who he was he most likely wouldn't have tried to save him.

“What are you waiting for, brother? You've become the forest's enemy! If you don't leave now, then you'll never leave!” The old Taoist urged.

“Right. I'm coming.”

Ye Qing didn't hesitate to run over to the old Taoist. The guy could've saved him out of kindness, or he could be scheming something. Regardless, the politicking could wait until he had left the forest!

It took Ye Qing only one step to appear next to the old Taoist. The old Taoist immediately turned around and said, "This way!"

Ye Qing and the simple-minded disciple and Ye Qing followed closely behind the old Taoist. Whenever a hill or ten rose to crush them, the old Taoist would shake his bell to emit some sort of strange energy. The hills would immediately move out of the way like meek lambs.

"What's that?" Ye Qing's eyes lit up with curiosity. It wasn't every day you saw such an interesting Strange Artifact.

"It's called the Hill Mover Bell and one of my master's treasures. It possesses the power to move hills and is quite powerful," the simple-minded disciple explained after hearing Ye Qing's question.

"It has a fitting name alright," Ye Qing exclaimed in realization. No wonder the old Taoist dared to rescue him. With the Hill Mover Bell in hand, no hill could possibly stand in his path.

"Ignore the idiot. My Hill Mover Bell can move hills and only hills. We still need your help to push through the plants, brother."

"It's only fair," Ye Qing agreed without hesitation.

Ye Qing was treated to a show after that. Every time the old Taoist waved his bell, the hills would either move out of the way or crumble where they stood, crushing the unfortunate plants who happened to be underfoot. It could even fill up the fissures on the ground, which was most appreciated.

The bad news was that the Hill Mover Bell only worked on the hills and not the plants, and the good news was that plants were the last thing Ye Qing was afraid of. And so he and the Taoist's disciple worked together to crush every plant and fruit that tried to attack them. It wasn't long before the trio had stepped out of the forest.

The trio felt a burden lifting from their shoulders as soon as they left the first. At the same time, a reluctant, hateful and angry voice deafened their ears. When they looked behind, they saw a giant silhouette floating above the forest and roaring at them again and again. There was nothing he could do though. He could only watch helplessly as the trio got farther and farther away from them.

The trio wasn't stupid enough to linger at the edge of the forest. They continued running until they were far, far away from the forest.

"I'm done. I need a break. We should be safe anyway, so let's take a break, shall we?"

The old Taoist's stamina was the worst of the three of them, so he was sweating bullets and panting like a dog after just a bit of running.

On the other hand, his disciple looked completely unperturbed. His breathing wasn't even disturbed in the slightest.

Ye Qing had noticed something abnormal with Li Longxiang even before they left the forest. He was definitely a Vessel Augmentor, but his vigor was unnaturally rich, and his physique was awe-inspiring to say the least. This was high praise coming from a cheat like him.

“Yes, we should be fine now. I don’t think the forest spirit is coming after us,” Ye Qing echoed in agreement after pulsing his spirit.

Mountain Gods, River Gods, spirits of a land and more were Strangers who were born from the essence of their nature. Inside their territory, they could borrow the power of the land and unleash power that were several times greater than their own. But outside their territory, they were much weaker just like the officials of Chu.

The spirit of the forest was wise to not chase them down. If he did, Ye Qing wouldn’t mind delivering him to the afterlife.