

Stranger 291

Chapter 291: Life Size Game of Xiangqi

“What? What?”

Ye Qing’s scalp turned numb, and every hair on his body stood on end. He immediately turned around and threw a might, cloud vaporizing punch.

At the same time, he commanded the Fog Demon to attack the mysterious speaker. A seemingly infinite amount of demonic qi burst out of the Boundless Mara Buddha and formed a massive Buddha palm.

Whoosh!

However, both his punch and the Buddha palm suddenly lost their shape and flew toward a certain direction; a person’s mouth to be exact. His fist force, the Boundless Mara Buddha’s demonic qi, and even the demonic qi in the surroundings were sucked into the mouth, causing a temporary vacuum.

It was only now Ye Qing saw the mysterious speaker clearly. He was a disheveled old man with white beard and hair and deep craters and crevices on his face. He looked old enough to have one foot in his coffin, though the immense amount of demonic qi leaking out of his body said otherwise.

Not only that, his eye sockets were completely empty as if someone—or perhaps himself—had dug out his eyeballs. His cheeks were stained in blood as well. He looked the picture of a crazy old man, and his presence was equally warped and eerie.

Finally, he was holding a blood-drenched rope that bound around twenty to thirty humans and Strangers. They were all alive, though considering the circumstances, they might have been better off dead.

The weakest human among them was an Astral Refiner, and the strongest was a Half-Step Spirit Master.

The Strangers were pretty strong as well. They ranged from Hatred to Phenomenon.

In fact, Ye Qing recognized some of the Strangers. The Pallbearer was one of them.

Both the humans and the Strangers were dozens of times smaller than what they were. In fact, they almost looked like dolls with how they were hanging off the blood-drenched rope and swaying left and right, unmoving and seemingly unconscious.

Huge beads of sweat popped out of Ye Qing’s forehead, and his back was drenched in cold sweat. He didn’t hesitate to run away immediately.

Who wouldn’t after witnessing this scene?

Unfortunately, it was futile. A blood-drenched rope abruptly appeared around his neck, and neither he nor the Fog Demon knew how or when it got there. All he knew was that his astral qi might as well be paper considering how easily the rope had crushed it.

The rope tightened around his neck, and Ye Qing lost consciousness just like that.

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“Huh... Where am I?”

An indefinite amount of time later, Ye Qing opened his eyes and found himself in an unfamiliar environment. He quickly jumped to his feet.

He seemed to be standing in some sort of battlefield. There were rubbles, bodies, blood and smoke everywhere.

There were several things that stood out. One, there was a gigantic river directly ahead of him. Two, he was wearing a set of black armor and holding a long spear. It was like he was a soldier or something. And three, a mysterious power was pinning him in place and preventing him from moving even a muscle.

Ooo ooo...

It was at this moment a war horn sounded, long and ominous. A cold wind blew away the fog and blood stench but brought forth the cold, steel, and the promise of violence.

Multiple soldiers wearing the exact same soldier outfit as him appeared to his left and right side. Some faces were familiar—they were the humans who were hanging from the old man’s rope—and some weren’t. He had no doubt they had all been caught by the mysterious old man’ however.

Most of his fellow soldiers were late-stage Astral Refiners just like him. They were standing in a straight line, though they stood ten or so meters away from each other. If this was a military formation, it was a terribly shitty one. However, they were clearly aligned in some sort of order.

The space behind their backs was shrouded by a thick fog, though Ye Qing could barely make out several massive silhouettes.

What the hell is going on here? Where am I?

Ye Qing was still confused when suddenly, a loud noise ripped a hole in the foggy sky. The next thing he knew, a giant bird descended with a cry and launched itself toward the soldier standing next to him.

“The Cannon Bird!”

The bird was crimson red and so big that its wings blotted out most of the sky. Disregarding its size, it looked mostly like an ordinary bird except that its beak was cylindrical in shape and hollow at the center. Ye Qing knew from the books he studied that it could inhale a ton of air into its beak and spit out massive air bombs at high speed.

It was named the Cannon Bird because its attack method was similar to the Demon Slaying Cannons built by the Craftsman Department, and its beak was shaped like a cannon’s barrel.

The Cannon Bird’s aura was unbelievably strong. Long before it landed on the ground, it was already inhaling a ton of air. The next moment, it spat out a massive air bomb straight at the soldier.

The soldier suddenly moved as if it was released from his restriction. Without hesitation, he swung the long spear at the incoming air bomb in hopes of slicing it in half.

The long spear snapped into several pieces, and the soldier himself was blown into a shower of blood and gore. After that, the Cannon Bird landed at his spot and let out a victorious cry.

At the same time, the Cannon Bird's aura began weakening bit by bit. In the end, its aura stabilized at the power level of a Soulstealer-class Stranger. It was still incredibly strong, but nowhere as ridiculous as it was a moment ago.

Right now, Ye Qing was gripped by great terror and anxiety. He was afraid that the Cannon Bird would give him a fatal spit to the face as well. However, he soon realized that the Cannon Bird was unable to move freely after occupying the soldier's space. Just like him, it too was restricted by some sort of mysterious power.

Before he could release a sigh of relief, a massive stone pillar burst through the sky and flattened the Cannon Bird like a pancake. The ground itself was cracked from how powerful the blow was.

"Neeeeeeigh!"

After the pillar came to a standstill, Ye Qing realized that it wasn't a pillar at all. It was the hoof of an incredibly handsome black horse.

The black horse had a pair of horns and fur that was as black as the night itself. It was also surrounded by black, demonic flames that were so hot that the space around it was distorted.

"Is that the Hell Horse?" Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise. The reason he was surprised was because a Hell Horse was an extremely rare Stranger. It could only be found in gloomy, dusky places.

The Hell Horse snorted and gradually weakened just like the Cannon Bird from before. In the end, it too declined into a Soulstealer-class Stranger.

It was hardly impossible for a Soulstealer-class Stranger to kill another Soulstealer-class Stranger, but to do it in one strike? The circumstances would have to be exceptional for that to happen.

This meant that some sort of mysterious power had drastically increased the Hell Horse's strength.

"Die!"

Ye Qing was still figuring things out when suddenly, a soldier clad in red armor and wielding a huge saber suddenly descended from above. At the same time, Ye Qing felt the mysterious power that was immobilizing him vanishing. Without hesitation, he executed a spear sweep and clashed blades with the red soldier. The impact pushed him a step backward and caused a huge crack on the floor, but the red soldier was sent flying through the air.

"He's a Spirit Purifier... wait, something's not right."

His senses were telling him that his opponent was one hundred percent a Spirit Purifier, but the guy had no mastery over his power at all. It was almost as if the power didn't belong to him, and he was just throwing it around aimlessly like a baby who was granted super strength.

If he was an ordinary late-stage Astral Refiner, then the power boost would've been more than enough to kill him. But he wasn't. In fact, he could go toe-to-toe against a true Spirit Purifier.

"Die!"

Ye Qing wanted more time to process what was going on here, but his opponent disagreed. He rushed him again with a savage, murderous expression.

Ye Qing could tell that his opponent was in full possession of his mental faculties just like him. But why was he so determined to kill him?

There was no time to think. He planted his spear on the ground and dashed forward to meet his opponent. When his opponent's saber was descending about halfway toward his head, he executed an arm sweep and struck the hilt of the saber like a war axe.

His five dragon elephant strength erupted, and the hilt of the crucible steel saber snapped in half just like that. He pushed forward and struck the red soldier right across the chest.

“Pwack!”

The soldier's armor shattered into pieces, and his chest caved in. He flew through the air uncontrollably while blood spilled out of his mouth.

Realizing that he couldn't beat Ye Qing, the soldier turned around and tried to escape. However, he had only taken his first step when his body started distorting and crumbling bit by bit, causing him to fall to the ground and scream. His painful, bloodcurdling scream would last at least dozens of breaths before he finally ceased to exist, his body now a puddle of rotten flesh.

To say that Ye Qing was shocked and horrified would be an understatement. Before he could recover, he felt a mysterious power enveloping his whole body and pushed him straight toward the river.

Strangely, the river wasn't what it seemed to be. He felt like he was treading solid ground as he ran right past it. Moreover, his power kept growing as he charged forward. Eventually, he reached the late stage of the Spirit Purification stage.

Another soldier in red armor appeared in front of him. Clearly, he was meant to kill him. He had no beef with the soldier and didn't wish to kill him, but as soon as the thought crossed his mind, a paralyzing fear suddenly gripped his heart. He felt as if he would die if he didn't kill his opponent. Not only that, he felt like he would die if he tried to run away or back off without good reason, and his death would be just as horrid as the poor man he killed before.

Is that why the soldier tried so hard to kill me just now? Ye Qing thought with realization. I would be just as desperate if I was in his position... which I am.

Left with no choice, Ye Qing raced forward to attack his opponent. His opponent was already waiting for him.

His opponent was just a late-stage Astral Refiner, but he was no ordinary opponent. Had Ye Qing's strength remained the same as before, he would've had to spend quite a bit of time and effort to defeat him. But he was a late-stage Spirit Purifier now, and he was a top-tier Astral Refiner to begin with. As a result, he was able to destroy his opponent in just a few moves.

Ye Qing tried to show mercy by immobilizing his opponent after defeating him, but as soon as the restrictions took place, the guy started warping and crumbling just like the soldier from before. In the end, he exploded in a shower of blood and gore.

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“Why do you look so listless, Xiao Feng? Are you bored?”

Inside an old pavilion, two men were sitting opposite each other. The speaker was none other than the eyeball-less[2] old man who had captured Ye Qing earlier.

A *xiangqi* board lay between the two men. Unlike an ordinary board, this one had three-dimensional mountains and rivers like it was an actual, miniaturized world of sorts. Inside this world, red and black pieces were engaging one another in a fierce battle.

The pieces weren't ordinary either. Instead of the usual round, wooden pieces, they were humans and Strangers.

The Soldiers were humans,

The Chariots and Horses were Strangers,

The Advisors and Elephants were like demons,

And the Generals were like gods.

These two were using an actual world as their game board, and humans and Strangers as their pieces.

How dare they?

How could they?

"How can I *not* be bored?"

On the opposite side, a devilishly handsome man was propping his hand on the table and sitting in a slanted position. He said lazily, "How many years have we played each other, Xiangqi Demon? One century? Two? And every time, you never fail to lose. How can I be anything *but* bored?"

"Perhaps the worst part is that your moniker is Xiangqi Demon. With your skill level? Man, I would have offed myself if I were you!"

Chapter 292: Living Pieces

"What's there to be proud about? You won only because you happened to choose the stronger pieces."

Xiangqi Demon grumbled as he stared at the devilishly handsome man with his empty eye sockets; the bright red blood on his cheeks reflecting his opponent's silhouette. "I'm also losing because of the shitty rules you made. It's perfectly normal in xiangqi to sacrifice Soldiers to gain an advantage, or to have a Horse trample multiple pieces in a row. But no, you just have to make a rule where if the pieces fight each other, then the surviving piece is the one that wins the battle. It's completely unnecessary if you ask me."

"Heh. We're using a world as the board, and living beings as the pieces of our game. What makes this game so interesting is that the world itself can change, and the living beings can adapt to their circumstances. The victor of a duel between *jianghu* elites is never set in stone, and the side with greater numbers may not always triumph over the smaller. After all, it is the same with our world. There

were plenty of examples where the weak triumph over the strong, and the smaller numbers triumph over the greater numbers!"

"Fickleness and unpredictability are the true nature of our world. If we're going to use the world as our board and living beings as our pieces, then it is only right that we submit to the world's principles as well. It is far more interesting when everything is unknown, uncertain, unclear and undecided until it is, isn't it?"

"If we're going to stick to the exact same rules as the normal xiangqi, then we might as well play using normal wooden pieces. What's the point of using living beings if we're not going to allow them to show off their individuality and ingenuity?"

The devilishly handsome man shrugged. "Also, the pieces might be the ones fighting inside the world, but it is we players who selected them and played them outside the world. I won every time because I'm a discerning man who chose the stronger pieces every time. You lost every time because you're a blind fuck who couldn't tell left from right."

"Oh, my apologies. I forgot that you're blind a second there. It's been too long since you lost your eyeballs to me. Speaking of which, you've lost your heart, your liver, your spleen, your lungs, your kidneys and your ears to me as well. What will you give me when you lose this time? Your head?"

"Kekeke. We can talk about that after I lose. You're not worried that I might renege on the bet, are you?" Xiangqi Demon replied with a cackle. A cackle it might be, it sounded like the sound of a million insects crawling over a human's body; grating and uncomfortable.

The devilishly handsome man let out a chuckle of his own. "No, I'm not. We have sworn an Oath of Rahu after all. I'm just worried that your last wisp of consciousness would crumble if you keep losing like this."

"What, you miss me?" Xiangqi Demon tilted his head to one side.

The devilishly handsome man admitted, "But of course! I doubt I'll ever find another shitty player like you again."

"Keke. Let's not get ahead of ourselves, shall we?" Xiangqi Demon scoffed. "I'm the one who has the upper hand this time. Don't you see that my Soldier has crossed the river?"

"Heh. Your shamelessness is exactly why I'm going to miss you." The devilishly handsome man chuckled and dropped a Chariot on the Soldier.

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Inside the xiangqi board that was a world in itself, Ye Qing was wearing a deep frown on his face. *Where am I? What can I do to escape this situation? Who can save me?*

It was at this moment a loud rumble disturbed his thoughts. When he spun toward the direction of the noise where a forest lay, he saw a rising cloud of dust and massive trees toppling one after another as if some giant beast was brutishly destroying everything in its path. More importantly, it was headed straight toward him.

Fear and panic gripped Ye Qing, though the emotions were quickly replaced by steely determination. The next moment, a deformed giant finally burst through the foliage.

The Stranger had a human's upper body, but it was covered in stitches as if it had been stitched together from countless body parts. It had two faces, four eyes, and four arms. It wielded a saber, a spear, a stick and a mace.

Its lower half was even stranger. Instead of a human's or an animal's legs, it had a pair of chariot wheels. The reason he said this was because the wheels were covered in painful-looking spikes and burning a dark red flame. He could hear the vengeful screams of countless ghosts from the wheels.

"A Ghost Chariot!?" Ye Qing blurted. A Ghost Chariot was a Soustealer-class Stranger that was born in places with great resentment such as the battlefield. More specifically, it was a vengeful ghost who, unwilling to pass away peacefully, stitched itself an upper body using the corpses on the battlefield, and a soul using the vengeful souls around it. The flaming wheels were the manifestation of the souls it collected.

A Ghost Chariot was violent and bloodthirsty by nature. There was nothing more it enjoyed than feeding on raw flesh and human souls.

The Ghost Chariot before him was far stronger than the standard Ghost Chariot. Ye Qing reckoned that it was more or less at the level of a Phenomenon-class Stranger. As soon as it spotted him, it immediately charged him with such speed that the ground split in half, and dark red flames burned on the trail it left behind.

Ye Qing would've loved to see the imagery in an art book, but not so much in reality and especially not when he was in harm's way. He growled, "Fog Demon!"

A shining Buddha with his hands joined together in a prayer appeared in the sky and shone its cleansing light on the Ghost Chariot. The Stranger immediately howled in pain as its dark red flames abruptly grew much dimmer, and filthy yin qi leaked out of its body. Its aura kept weakening as if the cleansing light of the Buddha was too much for it to bear.

In fact, it was. The Ghost Chariot was created from a plethora of vengeful souls and ghosts. One might say that it was a creature of absolute yin and filth. On the other hand, the Buddha's light was one of the strongest yang powers out there and the bane of all things yin and filthy. On top of that, the Boundless Mara Buddha was created from the remnant of Jing Hui, a Grandmaster Buddhist monk. Even in death, his Buddhist power was so pure and immense that the Ghost Chariot was hardpressed to resist it.

As the Boundless Mara Buddha shone like the sun, cracks and craters started appearing all over the Ghost Chariot's body. Large chunks of rotten flesh were falling off its body by the second, and its aura had dropped from Phenomenon to Soulstealer. Despite this, it didn't let up on its attack. It was going to run Ye Qing over if it was the last thing it did.

It would never get the chance. As soon as the timing was right, Ye Qing took one step forward and unloaded his full force against the Ghost Chariot. A raging river of pure power slammed into its body.

“Break Through”

“Five Dragon Elephant Strength”

There was a massive explosion as the Ghost Chariot was engulfed in a blast of white hot light, heat and wind. The ground itself rippled like sea waves as a result of it.

“Die!”

Ye Qing withdrew his right hand exactly half an inch before throwing another punch. His feet sank deep into the ground, and a raging torrent of fist force sent the towering giant flying into the sky.

While the Ghost Chariot was spinning uncontrollably through the air, Ye Qing appeared beside it like an illusion and threw a third punch. The Burning Wind rushed in from every direction and burned the Stranger, and the “Cloud Vaporization Style” surrounded it from every direction and made sure that it wouldn’t go anywhere. It was as if the Stranger was trapped within a furnace of force and fire.

Finally, Ye Qing leaped over the Ghost Chariot’s head[1] and struck it squarely on the top of its skull. There was a brain-shaking boom, and the Ghost Chariot’s head exploded like a pinata. Countless vengeful ghosts and souls spilled out into the open and dissolved into ash as soon as they made contact with the Burning Wind. The Ghost Chariot itself was smashed deep into the ground.

“Kraaaaah!”

The Ghost Chariot let out a death-defying roar and attempted to get back on its feet. It was probably plotting to make one last attempt to defeat its opponent. Unfortunately, wisps of invisible flames leaked out its body and robbed it off its last strength, and its roar was quickly replaced by painful screams. Eventually, it completely dissolved into ash.

Ye Qing let out a deep sigh of relief when he confirmed that the Ghost Chariot was truly dead. He was seriously lucky that his power and Strange Artifacts countered the Ghost Chariot in nearly every way possible.

The Ghost Chariot was undeniably powerful. After all, it was a Soulstealer-class Stranger that was boosted to Phenomenon-class by a mysterious power. However, it also had two clear weaknesses. One, it was afraid of yang energy. Two, its head was its weak point.

First, Ye Qing had used the Boundless Mara Buddha to severely damage the Ghost Chariot. While it was hurt and incapacitated, he seized the opportunity to crush its head and release all the vengeful ghosts and souls trapped within it. Its head was what kept its unholy body together, so without it, the Stranger would disappear naturally.

Besides that, the Ghost Chariot had little to no intelligence. Despite its immense strength, it was an amalgamation of countless vengeful ghosts that only knew slaughter. I was so stupid it didn’t even know to dodge or retreat when taking massive damage from the Boundless Mara Buddha. That was the true reason he was able to slay it with ease.

If the Ghost Chariot was an intelligent Stranger, he would've been hardpressed to defeat it. At best, his chance of defeating the Ghost Chariot was fifty-fifty. Power was power after all, just like how the bosses in an RPG would absolutely annihilate the main character's party if they were sentient or controlled by another player.

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"Hahaha! How's this, Xiao Feng? Surely you agree that I picked my pieces well this time!"

Inside the old pavilion, Xiangqi Demon was laughing uproariously after witnessing Ye Qing defying the odds and killing the Ghost Chariot. Such was his laughter that the cloud of demonic qi above their heads were scattered.

"You picked *one* good piece, sure." The devilishly handsome man remained unperturbed, however. "Who hasn't gotten stupidly lucky at least once or twice in their lives?"

"Say whatever you want, Xiao Feng! This game is mine!" Xiangqi Demon laughed and moved a piece. "C two plus four (The Cannon piece on the second line moves four steps forward)."

In the board, a massive, black-colored Cannon Board flew over the river and crushed a red soldier into bits.

"When will you learn that there is no such thing as a certain victory until the last move is played?" The devilishly handsome man replied easily. "H two plus three (The Horse piece on the second line moves three steps forward)."

"C1+1"

"R4=5"[2]

"H2-3"

"S5=6"[3]

"S4+1"

"G6+1"

"G5+1"

Slowly but surely, the two xiangqi players were moving their pieces faster and faster. It was almost as if they had already played out the scenario in their heads, and they were just going through the motions.

Outside the game board, neither player gave an inch to each other.

And inside the game board, it was like the apocalypse was happening.

A giant split a mountain in half with their axe,

An elephant turned a patch of land into a lake with a single step;
Soldiers were clashing blades with each other,
Horses were threatening camps and dyeing the yellow sand in blood;
Chariots moved up and down, left and right,
And Advisors summoned the wind and rain, storm and lightning.
It was war.

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Inside the game board, violence and bloodshed were happening everywhere. The mountains shattered, the rivers were dried, the earth was sundered, smoke filled the sky, and enemies were everywhere.

Ye Qing was completely drenched in blood, and not all of them belonged to his enemies. Stacked before him were many, many bodies of both humans and Strangers. In the sky, the Boundless Mara Buddha was fully unsealed and filling up the world with demonic qi.

He wanted to hide his strength, but he couldn't. It was because he was forced to fight more than a handful of Soulstealer-class Strangers and Spirit Purifiers since he was dragged into this mess. It had taken him everything he had to defeat his opponents.

He had a couple things going for him, chief among them the Annon Sutra. It might not be able to answer his questions right now, but he could still pop a dragon-serpent rune or two. So long as he hadn't run out of dragon-serpent runes, he would be able to replenish his strength and health. Combined with his assortment of powerful Strange Artifacts, he just barely managed to survive the ordeal.

"The Cannon Bird, the Ghost Chariot, the Hell Horse, the Wildebeest, the Mountain Moving Elephants, the Advisor Spirits and soldiers like me..."

"The Cannon Bird and Ghost Chariot only move in straight lines, the Hell Horse and Wildebeest only move diagonally, soldiers like me can only move one space forward until they crossed the river, and the Mountain Moving Elephants and Advisor Spirits could only move on their side of the river..."

Ye Qing wiped away the blood on his face and murmured, "Assuming that the Cannon Bird is the Cannon, the Ghost Chariot is the Chariot, the Mountain Moving Elephant is the Elephant, and the Advisor Spirits is the Advisor..."

"Am I on a xiangqi board? Am I a piece? Am I a Soldier, the most invisible and expendable piece of them all?"

"That has to be it."

Ye Qing frowned long and hard before looking up at the sky. "I'm inside a xiangqi board, and I'm a xiangqi piece!"

Chapter 293: Opening The Sky Gate

“C1=5”

“G5=6”

“G5+1”

“S6=7”

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Outside the xiangqi board, Xiangqi Demon and the devilishly handsome man inevitably slowed down despite the blazing start. No move was taken without consideration, and every turn lasted at least several minutes long.

There were far fewer pieces left on the board than before as well. This should be the moment where the battle was winding down, but instead, the heat and tension were higher than ever before. It was because a victor wasn't decided yet. A single mistake could doom the player to the point of no return.

“S five plus one, checkmate!”

Xiangqi Demon moved the Soldier piece that was Ye Qing one step forward and checked his enemy's General. He looked up and shot Xiangqi Demon a cheeky grin.

In response, the devilishly handsome man said unhurriedly, “You may have checkmated my General, but the game isn't over yet, is it?”

Xiangqi Demon raised his eyebrows as crimson blood seeped out of his eye sockets. If this was an ordinary game of xiangqi, then he would've won already. But in this game, he could only claim victory if Ye Qing managed to defeat the enemy's General. Otherwise, Ye Qing would die, and the devilishly handsome man would be free to checkmate *him*.

Inside the board, Ye Qing was pondering a way to escape the board when suddenly, he was uncontrollably pushed toward a formidable-looking man wearing a set of rainbow-colored Yanling armor[1] and carrying a banner behind his back. The word “General” was sewn on the banner.

Is that the General? If I kill him and win the game, does that mean I would be released from the board? I think so!

All kinds of thoughts passed through Ye Qing's head as he ran toward his opponent. At the same time, a mysterious power increased his power to that of a late-stage Spirit Purifier[2].

Ye Qing was on full alert, however. It was because his opponent was also a late-stage Spirit Purifier, and unlike him, he was the genuine article.

Finally, he recognized his opponent. He was none other than Zhong Ji, the guy who used an AOE taunt on everyone when they were still outside the Guixu.

There was a stack of bodies in front of Zhong Ji. There were both humans and Strangers. They looked plenty strong as well. They were, at minimum, Soulstealer-class Strangers or Spirit Purifiers.

According to the rules of this unusual game of xiangqi, if the power level of the two combatants wasn't equal, then the disadvantaged side would gain a small boost in power. Astral Refiners would

be boosted into Spirit Purifiers, Hatred-class Strangers would be boosted to Soulstealer-class Strangers and so on.

Zhong Ji must have run into stronger opponents where he was the disadvantaged side, but he couldn't be the weak side all the time. Some of his opponents had to have been boosted to Spirit Master or Phenomenon level.

This meant that Zhong Ji was incredibly strong. So strong that he could defeat a Spirit Master or Phenomenon-class Stranger as a Spirit Purifier. Sure, they were all faux Spirit Masters and Phenomenon-class Strangers, but that hardly meant that Zhong Ji was weak.

Ye Qing's charge slowed a little. He seemed both hesitant and fearful.

"A Spirit... no, an Astral Refiner?" Zhong Ji scoffed when he saw Ye Qing. "This is getting boring."

"Die."

Zhong Ji gripped his ghost-faced saber and unleashed eighteen slashes in a row.

Yin qi boiled, and the world darkened. Every time he executed a slash, a level of hell manifested into existence. By slashing eighteen times in a row, Zhong Ji was bringing forth the eighteen levels of hell.

The Hell of the Mountain of Knives saw sadistic killers climbing literal mountains of knives with their bare bodies;

The Hell of the Cauldrons of Oil saw rapists, thieves, abusers, and false accusers being thrown into pots of the boiling oil and fried;

The Hell of Saw saw unethical businessmen and loophole exploiters being tied to wooden stakes and sawed in half;

The Hell of Mills saw abusers of powers being tossed into giant mills and crushed into itsy bitsy pieces...

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Zhong Ji cultivated the "Ghost King Sutra", and the "Myriad Blades of Eighteen Hells" was its ultimate technique. It was a bonafide Spirit Purification stage saber art that could manifest the eighteen levels of hell, bring forth the Hundred Ghosts Parade, and transform the human world into an endless hell.

Speaking of hells, Ye Qing was quickly engulfed by the attack. When Zhong Ji saw this, he scoffed again and put his saber away. "Definitely a useless piece of trash. Be proud that you're able to die under my ultimate attack."

The second his energies relaxed, he was suddenly struck by a deep sense of unease. By the time he realized something was wrong and tried to resist, a series of disturbing cackles was already assaulting his mind. His headspace shook, and he started hallucinating all kinds of things.

“Fuck!” Realizing he was tricked and suffering some sort of mental attack, Zhong Ji growled and summoned a Ghost King inside his head space. The Ghost King let out a mighty roar that drove the disturbing cackle out of his head.

The damage was already done, however. During the one or two breaths he lost touch with the outside world, a man rushed out of the storm of blades that was the “Myriad Blades of Eighteen Hells” like a raging river. Wherever he went, ghosts burned into ash, and yin qi dissipated like he was the sun itself. He was like an unstoppable force punching through the very concept of hell.

Ye Qing appeared in front of Zhong Ji and reached the peak of his power in an instant. Then, he threw a full-powered punch that dreamed of opening the gates of the sky itself.

BOOM!

Zhong Ji barely managed to cross his saber in front of his chest before the punch struck him. It snapped his ghost-faced saber in half, crushed his armor, and caved his chest in by several inches. The earth beneath Zhong Ji’s feet rippled like water, and a series of thunderous rumblings came from the underground.

“You—pwack—impossible!”

Blood jetted through Zhong Ji’s lips uncontrollably as soon as he opened his mouth. His face started breaking like cracks on a porcelain vase, but strangely, he bled some sort of deathly, bluish black qi instead of blood. It was almost as if he wasn’t human.

How did he do it?

Even if his power was boosted to that of a Spirit Purifier, it should be impossible for him to hurt me, much less deal me a serious blow!

He was confident he could destroy Ye Qing unharmed, but the fact was Ye Qing had nearly killed him in one strike. If he hadn’t cultivated a Body of Ancient Dead, if he wasn’t so resilient that his physique was comparable to that of a ten-thousand-year-old Zombie, that one punch really would have shattered him like porcelain!

“I won’t lose! I’m going to kill you!” Zhong Ji roared on top of his lungs even as black qi continued to seep out of his wounds. But right as he took his first step, the light in his eyes abruptly dimmed, and his roar turned into a bloodcurdling scream. His pupils slowly contracted until finally, he came to a stop as if his life had departed his body completely.

For a few breaths, the Spirit Purifier stood there unmoving. Then, he suddenly looked up and grinned toothily at Ye Qing. However, his eyes had turned into unfathomable depths of pitch black darkness, eerie and ominous.

“Kekeke, I’m going to kill you, boy!”

Ye Qing wasn’t perturbed by this disturbing sight, however. In fact, he let out a sigh of relief and said tiredly, “Cut it out, Fog Demon. Now’s not the time for games.”

Yes, Zhong Ji was now the Fog Demon, or more accurately, his mind was corrupted and taken over by the Fog Demon. He had now become a puppet that the Fog Demon might control as it pleased.

As a Nine Nethers Demon, the Fog Demon possessed the ability to corrupt a human's mind and spirit. If anything, out of everything the Fog Demon had displayed thus far, this was its true ability. It could control anyone who was weak-willed and low-spirited with little effort. Even Ye Qing himself had almost fallen under its control back at Sky Gate Abyss.

Although Zhong Ji was a powerful late-stage Spirit Purifier with a strong spirit, he possessed a dark mind and spirit because he cultivated the "Ghost King Sutra". Combined with the fact that Ye Qing had dealt him a serious blow through a surprise attack, and the Fog Demon was able to corrupt him and take over his mind with ease.

If he didn't have the Fog Demon, and if Zhong Ji hadn't severely underestimated his strength, this would've been a hard-fought battle.

As for why he only took control of Zhong Ji instead of killing him, it was because he had designs for him, of course.

Now that he realized that he was in a xiangqi board, he was constantly thinking of a way to escape this place. Technically speaking, he should be freed now that he had killed the enemy's General and won the game, but this wasn't an ordinary game of xiangqi now, was it? What if killing the General wasn't the end of the match? What if the old man who most likely tossed him here had other plans for him?

Zhong Ji was a powerful warrior. Keeping him around was far more useful than allowing the mysterious power to explode him into bits.

In fact, he had puppeteered his enemies' bodies a couple of times during his previous battles. The first time he tried this, he discovered that the rules would treat his enemy as dead, and their dead body as his possession. In other words, he could bring them to his next battle.

Unfortunately, everyone he controlled up until now was, frankly, not very powerful. He was forced to sacrifice them all to gain an advantage over some Strangers.

Speaking of Strangers, he was hoping to puppeteer some powerful Strangers to aid his battles, but unfortunately the Fog Demon's ability only worked on humans. Moreover, most of the Strangers he fought were non-sentient and acted purely based on their instincts. They were impossible to control even if it the Fog Demon could corrupt their minds.

Rumble rumble rumble!

It was at this moment the world started shaking violently. Mountains collapsed, rivers flowed in reverse, the earth was torn asunder, and ominous cracks appeared all over the sky. It looked like the final stage of an apocalypse—the end of all that ever existed.

"Fuck! Fuck! The world is about to crumble!" The Fog Demon cried in shock and horror when he saw this. "We're going to die!"

"I see it," Ye Qing replied while glaring at the sky. To his own surprise, he calmed down despite facing what looked like an utterly hopeless crisis.

"It's all your fault, boy! I told you to leave the Guixu as soon as possible, but you just had to linger, didn't you? Now, we're both going to die!"

The Fog Demon complained loudly, “I haven’t enjoyed a day of freedom or done something worthwhile since I came to this world, and now I’m going to die? How tragic! How lamentable!”

“Since we’re going to die anyway, why don’t you release me and allow me to enjoy a moment of freedom, boy? To catch at least a breath of free air?”

Does he think I’m stupid? Ye Qing scoffed inside his head. The Fog Demon’s plan was as clear as day. It just wanted Ye Qing to release it so it could escape.

The Fog Demon was a Nine Nethers Demon, and a Nine Nethers Demon was notoriously resilient. Ye Qing strongly suspected that the Stranger would survive even if this entire world were damned to oblivion.

“You and I are bound by a contract, and as your master, I will never abandon you even in death, so rest easy. Master and servant forever, am I right?”

Fog Demon: “...” *Fuck you and your master and servant forever bullshit! Please abandon me, for fuck’s sake!*

“Attention, Fog Demon. I want you to toss me into the sky with all you got.”

Ye Qing growled suddenly, “Quickly, unless you actually want to go to the afterlife with me!”

The Fog Demon didn’t know what Ye Qing was planning, but it didn’t hesitate to pilot Zhong Ji over and unseal the Boundless Mara Buddha. Together, they pushed Ye Qing into the sky.

Whoosh!

Ye Qing shot into the sky like an arrow, and as he soared, his aura kept growing stronger and stronger. His elbow wasn’t moving, but his forearm—or more accurately, his fist—was raising inch by inch.

His energies peaked at the same time his fist was pointed toward the sky. His spine straightened, and he thrust his arm upward.

If the world was going to destroy him, then he would break through the world with his fist!

Chapter 294: Shoo

“Kekeke... I won! I finally won!”

Inside the old pavilion, Xiangqi Demon burst out laughing after finally winning against the devilishly handsome man. Blood poured down his empty eye sockets and dripped on the floor, causing a crimson ripple that manifested countless red lines into existence. They seemed to cover the interior of the old pavilion completely.

“Yes, you finally won. It only took you a couple hundred years is all.”

The devilishly handsome man didn’t seem concerned with the unusual change, however. He asked lazily, “So, what do you want?”

Xiangqi Demon stared at him with a crazed, savage expression. “I only have one wish. I hope you’ll accept it.”

“Wait! Let me guess.” The devilishly handsome man said unhurriedly, “You want to kill me, don’t you?”

“Kill you? Oh no no no!” Xiangqi Demon shook his head and replied in a flirtatious tone, “How can I bear to kill my partner for hundreds of years? I could never!”

“I just want you to become my artifact spirit!”

“Artifact spirit?” The devilishly handsome man raised his eyebrows, narrowed his peach blossom eyes, and curled his lips into a devilish, soul-stealing smile. “Tell me.”

“Do you know what my dream is?”

Xiangqi Demon didn’t answer him immediately. Instead, he faced toward the outside and stretched his arms wide as if he was planning to embrace the whole world. His voice was full of dreamy and full of yearning as he said, “My dream is to turn the Mountain of Demons into the Xiangqi of Heaven and Earth, the remnant soul and consciousness of every warrior in the Graveyard of Demons into pieces, and the Progenitor Demon’s mind as the soul. With all these elements in place, I would have forged the greatest Strange Artifact in the world; one that could change the world in every sense of the word.”

“I’m just one step away from completing my dream now. If you agree to become the artifact spirit of my Xiangqi of Heaven and Earth, then my dream will finally come true.”

“I see,” The devilishly handsome man replied before asking, “Is that why you went around hunting and refining the remnant souls and consciousness buried in the Guixu?”

“You knew?” Xiangqi Demon sounded surprised.

The devilishly handsome man shrugged. “Of course I do. Unlike you, I’m not blind.”

“Hahaha... they’re already dead, and it’s not like their remnant souls and consciousness are useful for anything. In that case, I might as well use them for my purpose, right?” Xiangqi Demon laughed so loudly that the demonic qi outside the old pavilion was shaking.

The devilishly handsome man rubbed his nose, smiling. “It’s a grand plan, but I’m pretty sure that forging your world-changing Strange Artifact isn’t your only goal.”

“Oh?” Xiangqi Demon narrowed his empty eye sockets into slits and stared at him closely.

“Let me guess...” The devilishly handsome man said lazily, “You wish to steal the Primordial Purple Qi that the Heavenly Way bestows when someone forges a Treasure of the Heavenly Way to resurrect yourself and become immortal, right?”

“At the same time, you’re planning to use the living beings within your Strange Artifact to fuel the reconstruction of your physical body, right?”

How did you know about that!?”

Demonic qi exploded from Xiangqi Demon. He was surprised that the devilishly handsome man found out about his assassination of the warriors’ remnant souls and consciousness within the Guixu, but this latest revelation truly shocked him to the core. It was because it was a secret that he and only he knew about. How on earth did his opponent find out?

His shock was mixed with a hint of worry as well.

The devilishly handsome man smiled devilishly. “Oh, I know a lot of things. For starters, I know that you hail from the Earth Gate of the Two Gates of Heaven and Earth. I also know that the Earth Gate possessed a mysterious cultivation art known as the ‘Infinity Soul Earth Gate True Sutra’. As long as a wisp of your Heaven, Earth, or Man Soul still exists, the cultivation art would allow you to rebirth your Three Heavenly Souls using a wisp of Primordial Purple Qi, and reforge your body using vigor, effectively resurrecting yourself from the dead.”

“And unlike most so-called ‘resurrection’ techniques where you must overcome countless obstacles as a remnant soul, the ‘Infinity Soul Earth Gate True Sutra’ bestows its practitioners true resurrection. Not only that, a being whose Three Heavenly Souls are reborn through the Primordial Purple Qi theoretically possesses an imperishable soul that will last as long as the world itself.”

“But of course, its restrictions are just as insane as its benefits. The Primordial Purple Qi is the first ever wisp of purple qi when the world was first created. It had become one with the world since time immemorial, and it didn’t exist anywhere in the world. The Heavenly Way would only bestow it to someone who attained an unparalleled amount of achievements and virtue, or a treasure that could change the world itself.”

“Am I right, Xiangqi Demon?”

“Impossible! Where did you learn about the ‘Infinity Soul Earth Gate True Sutra’? Who are you?” Xiangqi Demon yelled hoarsely. The fact that his demonic qi was quaking proved just how shaken he was.

He had known and competed against the devilishly handsome man for hundreds of years, but he realized for the first time that he had never truly known his opponent.

The devilishly handsome man smirked. “It doesn’t matter who I am. What matters is that I’m not a pipe dreamer like you.”

“Do you know why no one has ever lived forever even though the Earth Gate possessed a cultivation art that guarantees eternal life?”

Xiangqi Demon didn’t say anything. He simply stared at the devilishly handsome man and waited for an answer.

“It’s because living, aging, sickness and death are fundamental laws of the world. The world gave birth to countless creatures to nurture Man, so Man must die to repay the world. But if Man is immortal, then how could they repay the world? And why would the world ever allow this to happen?”

“That is why the ‘Infinity Soul Earth Gate True Sutra’ is considered a taboo. The world itself forbade Man from cultivating it. Those who tried all met a terrible ending where even their soul was completely wiped from existence.”

“Hahaha! That’s just the excuse of the weak!” Xiangqi Demon convulsed with disdainful laughter. “So what if it’s a taboo? So what if the world forbids it? My decisions are my own!”

“Well said.” The devilishly handsome man gave him a clap. “You are a once-in-a-century genius, and you knew very well that the path you’re trying to walk is most likely going to end in disaster. That is why you decided to use the Demon’s Tomb’s unique qualities to subvert the world’s laws, and the Mountain of Demons to forge your world-changing treasure. This way, you’ll gain everything you desire without the downsides.”

“To be honest with you, I do admire your ingenuity. If you succeed, then even I would have to give it to you.”

“Does that mean you agree?” Xiangqi Demon spun toward him with a crazed but hopeful expression.

The devilishly handsome man shook his head. “I never said that.”

Xiangqi Demon flew into a murderous rage. “But why?! Why do you reject me? It is your honor to be able to witness my ascension to godhood! Plus, I can grant you eternal life after I become a god as eternal as the world itself! Just why?!”

“Because I don’t want to. Because I believe that being a human is more interesting than being a god. It’s that simple.”

The devilishly handsome man clapped his hands and sang,

“A glass of wine,

A blade of steel.

What is fame and glory,

When master of your own destiny, you can be?”

“A cool autumn,

A bright moon.

Wind or rain,

I envy the free and only the free.”

“Foolish. Truly foolish,” Xiangqi Demon scoffed in disdain. “There’s nothing you can do to change your fate though. Absolutely nothing.”

As he cackled, more and more blood poured down his eye sockets until the floor was completely drenched in blood. “So what if you refuse? You and I swore an Oath of Rahu. If you lose, then you must agree to my request. If not, then you would suffer a demonic tribulation and be annihilated.”

“That is why there’s nothing you can do. It won’t be long before I become as immortal and eternal as the world itself! Hahaha! Hahahaha!”

As Xiangqi Demon laughed, the crisscrossing threads of blood shone brightly. The entire pavilion was transformed into a pocket world that trapped the devilishly handsome man in place. However...

“Did I ever tell you that you have a disgusting laugh?” Inside the circle, the devilishly handsome man smiled lazily and flicked a finger. There was a thunderous boom, and the pocket world was shattered just like that. Naturally, the old pavilion couldn’t withstand the pressure and crumbled into thick demonic qi as well[1].

“You dare resist? You’re just going to aggravate your demonic tribulation even more!” Xiangqi Demon exclaimed in shock and a hint of fear. He didn’t think that the pocket world he spent so long to create would be destroyed so easily.

“Heh. You think I’m afraid of a mere demonic tribulation? A mere oath?” The devilishly handsome man scoffed. “You could be the Progenitor Demon himself, and I’m still going to kick your sorry ass!”

As soon as he finished, Xiangqi Demon abruptly disintegrated as if crushed by some sort of massive, unstoppable force.

As if on cue, demonic clouds suddenly rolled in from the horizon. Dark lightning flashed, and ominous flames burned within the clouds. Then, the elements transformed into an infinite number of Heavenly Demons, all of them formless and intangible, and descended upon the devilishly handsome man.

At the same time, demonic, disturbing noises engulfed the entire Guixu. Everyone began hallucinating all kinds of things born from one’s Six Desires, Seven Emotions, Eight Bitterness and more.

The strong-willed ones were still able to resist, but the weak-willed ones were immediately corrupted and plunged into the Dark Ways. Their bodies steamed with demonic qi, and their eyes were bloodshot with demonic power.

“That’s the Boundless Heavenly Demon Heart Tribulation! Kekeke! You broke the Oath and Rahu, so the Progenitor Demon has sent a demonic tribulation to destroy you! You’re so dead!”

Xiangqi Demon reappeared a far distance away from the devilishly handsome man and stared at the demonic clouds rolling in rapidly, laughing. His laughter was full of resentment and hatred.

“You should’ve just allowed me to refine you to an artifact spirit. You should’ve just witnessed my ascension and become eternal yourself! Now, you’re just going to die! Foolish! Foolish!”

The Boundless Heavenly Demon Heart Tribulation was the ninth strongest demonic tribulation of the One Hundred and Eight Worldly Tribulations. Formless and insubstantial, it was accompanied by dark lightning and strange fire and possessed the ability to contaminate one’s essence. Xiangqi Demon didn’t believe for a second that Xiao Feng—the devilishly handsome man—would be able to survive it.

To be honest, he was reluctant to lose Xiao Feng to the Boundless Heavenly Demon Heart Tribulation. After all, he was the most critical component of his plans. Xiao Feng was exceptionally strong and most suited to be the artifact spirit of his creation. In fact, he had plotted several hundred years just to get closer to him and earn enough trust to swear an Oath of Rahu.

Unfortunately, he screwed up at the last step and couldn’t convince Xiao Feng to become his creation’s artifact spirit. Not only that, the man had seen right through his ploy.

Still, what’s done is done. If Xiao Feng wouldn’t aid him, then he must die. He had plotted far too long already, and he wouldn’t allow anyone to ruin it at the final step, especially considering that someone knew his secret.

Losing Xiao Feng was definitely going to throw a wrench or two into his plan and extend the time he needed to become a god, but then again, he had already waited for almost a thousand years. He didn’t mind waiting a couple more centuries to become god.

Why must you do this, Xiao Feng? Truly, there is no stopping someone from committing suicide.

“So noisy.”

The demonic noise was growing louder and louder. It got to the point where the entire Demon’s Tomb was affected by it. Countless people and Stranger were going insane under its effects right now, and even Xiao Feng looked clearly irritated by it. So, he looked up at the sky and roared out a single word, “Shoo!”

Rumble!

Space shattered, and the world shook. The skyful of demonic clouds and Heavenly Demons abruptly disintegrated into nothing, and even the demonic noise was overwhelmed by his shout.

When the world returned to silence, only a cool breeze and a bright moon remained.

Chapter 295: Boundless Heart Demon

“Do you know why I didn’t expose you even though I found out your plan a long, long time ago?”

After shattering the demonic tribulation with a single shout, Xiao Feng side-eyed the stupefied Xiangqi Demon and continued, “It’s because your plots and schemes are nothing to me.”

“Also, Guixu is quite the boring place. The monk hates talking, the barbarian loves running all over the place, and that sword maniac didn’t even leave behind his consciousness. Seriously, this place is so boring I could die.”

“Naturally, I couldn’t kill you, at least not right away. And for a time, you have proven to be an interesting and passable playmate.”

“Playmate?”

Xiangqi Demon sounded so insulted that his voice turned shrill and distorted. It sounded like someone was scratching a wooden board with their nails. “You think you’ve won? You think I wouldn’t have a back-up plan or two after spending centuries preparing for this? Oh no! This is just the beginning!”

“The world is my board, and its denizens are my pawns! Show yourself, Xiangqi of Heaven and Earth!”

Xiangqi Demon’s voice suddenly turned shrill and ominous as if it contained some sort of strange power. The next moment, silver lines appeared across the entire Mountain of Demons. Nine vertical lines and ten horizontal lines joined together to form ninety points in total.

The crisscrossing lines severed the space it encompassed without a sound. From an outside perspective, it was as if this part of the world had been cut off from the outside world.

At the same time, thirty two tall and powerful silhouettes appeared on the points. Each silhouette was so strong that their auras filled up the world, and they resembled gods and demons.

“What happened?”

At the periphery of the Mountain of Demons, Hong Jianglong, Laughing Buddha, Lady of Yin Mountain and more Grandmasters were looking at the silver lines and towering silhouettes with severe expressions. Each silhouette was as strong as they were, and the silver lines especially made them feel like they were in grave danger.

One of the Grandmasters decided that it was unsafe to linger and took off, but he had just reached the edge when his body abruptly split into multiple pieces. Not even his mind managed to escape before it was snuffed out like a candle.

“Amitabha! Stay calm, everyone.” Laughing Buddha spoke up, “It would seem that this mountain was placed under some sort of restriction and cut off from the outside world temporarily. Let us wait and see what happens next, shall we?”

The Grandmasters wasn’t the only ones who were stuck, of course. The same thing was happening all over the Mountain of Demons. Some people were shocked, some people were afraid, and some were hacked into pieces by the silver lines...

“So this is your trump card?”

Xiao Feng smiled lazily as he stared at the crisscrossing lines around him. “It certainly looks intimidating.”

Xiangqi Demon ignored his taunt and narrowed his fingers as if he was holding a xiangqi piece. Space shuddered, and the thirty two silhouettes of gods and demons attacked Xiao Feng at the same time.

One silhouette wielded a saber and let loose a slash that seemed capable of tearing the heavens and the earth asunder,

Another silhouette wielded a sword that fired a sword beam that drew everything around it into a devastating cyclone,

A third silhouette spat out a puff of air that brought forth an unstoppable, world-ending storm,

A fourth silhouette swung his sleeves and caused incessant rumbles throughout the skies. There were celestials standing in two lines to their left and right side as well,

A fifth silhouette stepped forth and threw a punch that shattered heaven and earth and shook the sun and moon from the sky. It was a punch that could kill anything and everything,

A six silhouette summoned forth a seal that shattered mountains and rivers, threatened to upend the mortal coil, and blur the fine line between life and death,

And more.

.....

All thirty six silhouettes all used their ultimate moves from the get go. For them, it was do or die.

“The ‘Sky Opening Slash’ from the Crazy Saber, the ‘Nine Heavens Galactic Sword’ from the Chief Sword, the ‘Qi That Moves Mountains and Rivers’ from the Scholar of Wind and Rain, the ‘Flying Immortal Sleeve’ from Celestial Master Zhang, the ‘Finality Fist’ from the King of Killing, The ‘Nine Seals of Mortal Coil’ from the Mortal Coil Visitor...”

“Interesting, interesting.”

Xiao Feng was unperturbed despite staring down the ultimate attacks of the thirty six silhouettes. He even had the time to point out everyone’s identity and technique before the attacks finally reached him.

Xiao Feng opened his mouth and exhaled a breath of fresh air. The breath encompassed the entire pocket world in just a single breath.

A series of indescribable explosions took place as the saber beam, sword qi, fist force, astral qi and more all shattered into pieces. The silhouettes too crumbled along with their ultimate moves.

“Is that it?” Xiao Feng asked with a dissatisfied frown after the world had returned to normal. It was as if he hadn’t just performed the impossible.

“No! No! No!” Xiangqi Demon’s face was contorted with madness, loss and pain.

Blood positively streamed down his empty eye sockets as he screamed in hate and despair, “You ruined a thousand years of hard work! A thousand years! Ahhhhhhhhh!”

It had taken Xiangqi Demon nearly a thousand years to refine the remnant soul, consciousness, martial intent and the like into xiangqi pieces. Each and every last one of them was a foundational piece of his Xiangqi of Heaven and Earth. However, Xiao Feng had annihilated it all in the blink of an eye.

“I won’t accept this! I refuse!” Xiangqi Demon screamed on top of his lungs. Who wouldn’t be angry and hateful after losing a thousand years of hard work?

The Xiangqi of Heaven and Earth began falling apart. As it crumbled, the demonic qi started stirring, the mountains started collapsing, the rivers started drying, the earth started pulling itself asunder, and even space itself began breaking like a cracked mirror.

“Are you going to destroy the Mountain of Demons?”

For the first time, Xiao Feng lost his smile.

Xiangqi Demon screamed back, “Why not? You destroyed *one thousand years of hard work!* The least I can do is to destroy the Mountain of Demons and take you all to the grave with me!”

Xiao Feng scoffed, “Perchance you forgot that we are already dead? You and I are but a wisp of our original self. Even if you destroyed the Mountain of Demons, all you would’ve achieved is destroying our wisps of consciousness.”

“Kekeke! Do you think I’m not aware of the true secret of the Demon’s Tomb? A long time ago, Rahu the Progenitor Demon used his own body to seal off an Extinction-class Stranger, and the Mountain of Demons is the core of the Demon’s Tomb. Simply destroy the Mountain of Demons, and the Extinction-class Stranger would be released from its seal.”

“I didn’t want to destroy the world, really. It’s all your fault! All your fault!”

Xiangqi Demon screamed and laughed like a madman, but he didn’t notice that strange, identical faces were appearing all across his body. Their eyes were narrowed into mocking slits, and their lips were curled into disdainful smiles. It was like they were mocking everyone and everything[1].

“I see! I see now!” Xiao Feng exclaimed in realization. “This explains everything.”

“No wonder you came up with the audacious idea of using the Mountain of Demons as the foundational stone of your Xiangqi of Heaven and Earth.”

“No wonder you were able to assassinate so many remnant souls and consciousness with your pitiful strength.”

“And no wonder you were able to set up something like this in just a few centuries!”

“It’s because the Heart Demon is the one who has been pulling your strings this whole time. Truly impressive!”

Xiao Feng let out a sigh and shot Xiangqi Demon a look of sympathy. “Truly, there is no one more pitiful than the pawn who thinks of himself as the player!”

“Pitiful? Whatever do you mean?” Xiangqi Demon tilted his head to one side, causing the mocking smiles on his body to tilt to one side as well. Still, the man didn’t notice a thing.

Xiao Feng answered, “Do you know who the Stranger the Progenitor Demon, Rahu, had sealed inside the Demon’s Tomb is?”

“Have you heard of a formless, intangible and infinite demon who exists beyond the nine heavens? It cannot be seen or perceived, and it excels at toying with a human’s heart and controlling souls. It is why it is named the Boundless Heart Demon.”

“The Demon’s Tomb is a place where dying people like us come to bury our bones, so the Boundless Heart Demon’s influence on us is minimal. But you, you came here not to die, but to enact this grand plan of yours. You probably caught its attention as soon as you entered the Demon’s Tomb, and everything you did from then to now was probably influenced by the Boundless Heart Demon in some way. To what end? To destroy the Mountain of Demons and free it, of course.”

“Even if I haven’t stopped you, you were never going to succeed in making your Xiangqi of Heaven and Earth. After all, the Boundless Heart Demon just wants to use you to destroy the Mountain of Demons. There is no way it would have allowed you to create a Treasure of Heavenly Way since the Heavenly Way would’ve given it its Primordial Purple Qi and Profound Yellow Mother Qi, which would perfect the natural laws and solidify its boundaries of this place even more than it already was. That would be counterproductive to its plan to escape.”

“This means that you were a pitiful pawn from the start until the end; a piece on a board you never even knew existed.”

“Hehehe...”

As soon as Xiao Feng was finished speaking, the smiling faces on Xiangqi Demon’s body let loose a disturbing cackle. Xiangqi Demon couldn’t seem to hear them, however. He couldn’t accept Xiao Feng’s words either. “I don’t believe it! You’re lying to me! You’re lying to me!”

“I will destroy the Mountain of Demons! Destroy it!”

Xiangqi Demon roared, and the Mountain of Demons began crumbling at an accelerated rate. Countless crisscrossing lines appeared all around the mountain and shook the world.

As the Mountain of Demons crumbled bit by bit, a giant face appeared on the ground underneath it[2]. In fact, the face spanned the entire Demon’s Tomb. The lakes were its eyes, the bottomless chasms were its ears, the mountains were its nose, the long, jagged crevices were its mouth and teeth, and the forest was its hair.

If someone were to look down from above, they would notice that the face was smiling slightly with squinted eyes. It was a cold, evil and mocking smile.

As soon as the face appeared, the demonic qi within the Graveyard of Demons grew even thicker than before. Most of the warriors and Strangers hiding in what they thought were safe places went insane as a result.

“Pitiful!”

Xiao Feng noticed what was going on outside, of course. He immediately reached out and crushed Xiangqi Demon into bits.

As long as Xiangqi Demon was dead, no one would be able to control the Xiangqi of Heaven and Earth. It was just a matter of suppressing its power after that.

This was why he was willing to entertain Xiangqi Demon and the mastermind pulling his strings for so long. Not even the most devious plot didn’t matter before absolute strength.

... Or it would, if not for the fact that Xiangqi Demon reappeared at a different location. The blood drained away from his face when he realized the implications.

“Keke... Since you know that I cultivate the ‘Infinity Soul Earth Gate True Sutra’, you must know that it also contains a secret art called the ‘Infinity Soul Detachment Art’. It allowed its practitioner to split their soul and attach a soul fragment to an object. So long as my main soul is still alive, I will never die.”

“I’ve hidden my main soul elsewhere a long time ago. The me before you is my subsoul. You can kill me a million times over, and you still wouldn’t be able to change anything.”

“Hahaha... No one can stop me! I will take the whole world to the grave with me!”

“Madman.”

For the first time, anger appeared on Xiao Feng’s face. He inhaled, and Xiangqi Demon was sucked into his stomach.

The crumbling didn’t end even after he had eaten Xiangqi Demon. It was then Xiao Feng confirmed that the bastard was telling the truth.

“How troublesome.” Xiao Feng let out a long sigh and shouted, “Monk, barbarian, you can stop watching from the sidelines now! If the Boundless Heart Demon really breaks out of its confinement, humanity is the one who suffers in the end!”

Chapter 296: Fate Cannot Be Changed

“You screwed up, didn’t you Xiao Feng? I told you you should’ve snuffed that any sooner. Now, you’ve crushed yourself in the foot!”

A rough, bold, and impertinent voice responded, “Once again, I gotta wipe your ass for you!”

“You did? Strange. I don’t remember such a thing.”

Xiao Feng replied unhurriedly, "In fact, I remember a certain someone making a bet with me on whether the Xiangqi Demon could create his Xiangqi of Heaven and Earth and become immortal. I wonder who it was?"

"It definitely wasn't me!" The bold voice denied immediately. "There's nothing I hate more than gambling. Anyway, you can wipe your own ass!"

"What do you say, Moonbearer, Wu Wang, Swordlord?" Xiao Feng ignored the voice and asked. He didn't hear any response, however.

"Hahaha! Not even Sister Tuo Yue and Bai Shuang are gonna help you this time! Looks like you really have to handle this mess yourself!" The bold voice laughed.

"Okay then. Since no one cares, then I don't care either." Xiao Feng shrugged. "I'm already dead anyway. I was a free soul when I was still alive, and I'm not going to change even after I'm dead. No way I'm going to shackle myself to a responsibility I can't bear."

"Goodbye, world! It was nice knowing you!"

As soon as Xiao Feng finished, an honest, compassionate voice broke out, "Enough playing. The Boundless Heart Demon must not escape its prison."

"Mountain Bearer, you will strengthen the Mountain of Demons and delay the speed at which it's falling apart. This poor monk shall suppress the Boundless Heart Demon itself to prevent it from causing any more problems. Xiao Feng, you will find the Xiangqi Demon's main soul and resolve this as soon as possible."

"Fine. I'm only helping you because the bald donkey asked me to, Xiao Feng!"

As soon as the bold voice finished, a giant stepped out of the fog and appeared at the outer edge of the Mountain of Demons in a single step. After poking his gums with its hill-sized fingers, he opened his arms wide and embraced the Mountain of Demons. As he exerted strength into his limbs, the crumbling mountain abruptly froze as if it was pinned by some sort of unknown power.

"Aha!" Not only that, the cracks on the mountain's surface were gradually healing and returning to normal.

At the same time, an old, emaciated monk sitting inside the temple perched atop the shell of a snail Stranger opened his eyes. As he rose to his feet, nine shining gold mountains appeared across the Mountain of Demons. Although they looked as small as seeds, they possessed seemingly infinite weight and size.

A seed could hold Mount Meru[1]. Nine mountains could hold nine worlds. It was also why the old monk's Dharma name was Nine Mountains; nine Mount Merus to be exact.

The next moment, the nine mountains fell from the sky and grew larger and heavier. They sat on the giant face's eyes, ears, mouth, nose, forehead and the top of its skull. A Buddhist chant filled the world, and both the demonic qi in the air and the giant face was temporarily suppressed.

“What are you waiting for, Xiao Feng? Go look for the Xiangqi Demon’s main soul already! The old monk can’t last too long!” Mountain Bearer urged after noticing that Xiao Feng remained unmoved even after the old monk had suppressed the Boundless Heart Demon.

“Heh. Just come out and say that you’re the one who can’t keep the mountain intact for long.” Xiao Feng chuckled before countless images of himself walked out of his body and scattered across the world. They were all searching for the Xiangqi Demon’s main soul.

“Xiao Feng, Nine Mountains, and Mountain Bearer are all on the move. Demon Lord Wu Wang, Precursor Blood Fiend, Heaven Annihilation, we should make our moves as well. Our master’s escape must not be compromised!” A man said inside a hall. He was accompanied by three other people.

“Yes. We must act as soon as possible. Demon Lord Wu Wang, Heaven Annihilation, the two of you will deal with Nine Mountains. Precursor Blood Fiend, you will tackle Mountain Bearer. I will keep Xiao Feng busy.”

An old man wearing a conical bamboo hat said slowly, “Kill them if you can, delay them if you cannot. We simply need to wait until the Mountain of Demons collapses.”

“Even the likes of Xiao Feng and Nine Mountains are but ants before our master. Once our master is freed, it will be all over.”

“We’ve plotted this for so long, and we are so close from succeeding. We must not fumble on the last step.”

“The master is infinite.”

“The master is infinite.”

The flames of zealotry burned in their eyes. A disturbing smiling face was also reflected in their pupils.

Back at the Demon’s Tomb, Xiao Feng was still searching for the Xiangqi Demon’s main soul when suddenly, he sensed his doppelgangers vanishing one after another. He was just wondering what was going on when he saw a decrepit old man slowly making his way toward him. Behind him was an ungodly tidal wave that was so tall it touched the sky itself.

Every time the old man took a step, the sea wave would inch forward a little. It was as if he was wearing the sea wave as a mantle.

“Whalerider Demon. You’re the one who destroyed my doppelgangers?” Xiao Feng asked with a frown.

“It is I,” Whalerider Demon replied with a smile.

“Why are you doing this?” Xiao Feng asked.

Whalerider Demon let out a low chuckle before asking seriously, "Because you're trying to prevent our master from breaking free, of course."

"You're one of the Boundless Heart Demon's lapdogs?!" Xiao Feng sighed sorrowfully. "You were quite the character when you were still alive. To think that your afterlife would be so pitiful!"

Whalerider Demon didn't get angry, however. In fact, he seemed proud of his subordination. "It is my honor to be able to serve under my master. Xiao Feng, you should help us. My master will resurrect you as a reward for your service if you do."

"And why would I be a dog when I can be a human?" Xiao Feng scoffed.

"Why not?" Whalerider Demon smiled. "My master is escaping one way or another. It is fate, and fate cannot be changed. In that case, why not choose an option that will benefit you? Here, listen."

"Heaven Annihilation, Wu Wang, what the hell do you think you're doing?"

Whalerider Demon had just finished when Nine Mountains' furious voice erupted from the horizon.

Right after that, Mountain Bearer's voice shattered the clouds. "Ouch! Did you just ambush me, Blood Fiend? You bloody coward!"

The sounds of clashes came after that. It was obvious that they were fighting.

"Wu Wang, Heaven Annihilation and Blood Fiend had become the Boundless Heart Demon's lap dogs too?" Xiao Feng let out a long sigh. Only he knew if it was due to pity or helplessness.

Whalerider Demon declared victoriously, "See? This is fate. Nine Mountains and Mountain Bearer are occupied by Wu Wang, Heaven Annihilation and Blood Fiend, and even you are occupied by me. No one can stop the Mountain of Demons from crumbling, and our master from escaping."

"This is fate, and fate cannot be resisted. Hahaha!"

"Fate?" Xiao Feng suddenly cracked a confident grin after Whalerider Demon was done laughing. "I have lived my whole life free and unfettered, and fate is the one thing I don't believe. I only believe in myself."

"Why don't you listen a little longer?"

Whalerider Demon was suddenly struck by a bad feeling. It was at this moment the light of a sword streaked across the sky and brightened it so much that it was like daytime.

A round moon rose from the horizon. A person seemed to be underneath it.

Finally, white frost enveloped the ground in just the blink of an eye. Such was its color that it was near impossible to distinguish it from the sky.

"Swordlord, Moonbearer and Frost?!" Whalerider Demon murmured in shock.

When the sword had disappeared, when the moon was gone, and when the frost had melted into water, the sounds of fighting could no longer be heard. There were only nine Mount Merus suppressing the Boundless Heart Demon's face once more, and Mountain Bearer's unbridled laughter booming across the entire Demon's Tomb.

"Do you hear that?" Xiao Feng asked while shrugging at Whalerider Demon.

"This was a trap. You were ready for us," declared Whalerider Demon solemnly.

"But of course," Xiao Feng admitted. "How else could we fish you out of your hidey-holes? Why did you think I kept Xiangqi Demon alive for so long? I'm bored, but I'm not *that* bored. It was because I knew someone was helping him. He alone could not have assassinated all those remnant souls and consciousness, and he definitely couldn't have set up an array big enough to destroy the entire Mountain of Demons."

"Ideally, we would've destroyed your group long before you pulled this stunt, but you were a little too good at keeping your true nature hidden. Forget hunting you down, we didn't even know how many of you are out there."

"I could kill Xiangqi Demon earlier and avert this crisis, but that would only drive you and your group deeper into your hidey-holes. You would've come up with a better, more calculated plan as well. Rather than watching out for you people for eternity, luring you out with the Xiangqi Demon and destroying you all in one go is a much better plan, don't you think?"

"Ah... the world has never been more peaceful. Truly, this is—hey dude, why are you leaving when I'm not done talking yet? How rude!"

Whalerider Demon abruptly jumped into his tidal wave and retreated at top speed. Unfortunately, his efforts were futile. Smiling, Xiao Feng waved his sleeve like he was trying to embrace something, and both Whalerider Demon and the towering sea wave disappeared just like that.

The sun and moon could grow inside a jar, and a world could reside within a person's sleeves.

"This is fate, Xiao Feng! You cannot defy it!"

Whalerider Demon left one last cry before the last vestiges of his existence were crushed.

"Act like a dog, die like a dog." Xiao Feng chuckled devilishly while shaking his bulging sleeve a little.

Rumble rumble rumble!

His joy didn't last too long, however. It was because the world was beginning to shake again. Mountain Bearer's silhouette was starting to turn transparent, and cracks were beginning to split across the Mountain of Demon's surface once more. The giant face Nine Mountains had forcibly suppressed was also resurfacing bit by bit.

"Move your fucking ass, Xiao Feng! I really can't hold on for much longer!"

They were but a figment of their true self after all. As strong as they were, they were nowhere close to their peak.

Knowing that time was wasting, Xiao Feng sucked in a deep breath and grew a million times bigger and taller than before. Then, he looked down on the entire Mountain of Demons like a god. However, he still couldn't find Xiangqi Demon's main soul anywhere.

As time passed, the cracks grew wider and wider, and the giant face was growing clearer and clearer. The mountains at the periphery were already starting to collapse, and avalanches were happening everywhere. At the same time, Mountain Bearer and Nine Mountains grew fainter and fainter as if they might disappear into nothing at any moment.

Is it truly fated that the Boundless Heart Demon would escape and destroy the world?

Xiao Feng still couldn't find Xiangqi Demon despite everything. He couldn't help but feel disappointed and dejected.

He had lived his life as a free soul. He had never bowed his head to another person, nor had he ever submitted to fate. But now, he was powerless to change what was happening in front of him.

One step. He was literally one step away from ruining the Boundless Heart Demon's plan and sending it back whence it came. However, he just couldn't do it no matter what.

Was fate truly unchangeable?

"I suppose that not even the Demon Lord of Freedom could avoid fate after he died!" Xiao Feng chuckled bitterly and self-depreciatingly.

Crack...

It was at this moment cracks appeared all across a certain xiangqi board. Then, it exploded into a million pieces. The next second, Ye Qing emerged from within while laughing,

"Hahaha! I'm finally free!"

Chapter 297: Free Soul

"Oh no, you're not getting away. Die!"

Xiao Feng was currently in a heightened state of body and spirit and could perceive everything and anything within the Demon's Tomb, so Ye Qing's speech and action had caught his attention immediately. That was how he saw the young man shouting and unleashing a furious punch at an escaping soul fragment after breaking out of the xiangqi board he was trapped in.

"Xiangqi Demon? That's... is that its main soul?!" Xiao Feng exclaimed in surprise and delight. It was because the soul fragment Ye Qing was attacking was none other than Xiangqi Demon's main soul.

"No wonder I couldn't find the bastard even after using the 'Soul Scouring Eye of Sky and Earth'! He was hiding in my blind spot this whole time!"

Xiao Feng had to admit that Xiangqi Demon was smarter and more audacious than he gave him credit for. They must have played their games on that xiangqi board for centuries, which was why he had subconsciously overlooked the object while searching for his main soul.

Moreover, Xiangqi Demon had intentionally strengthened his subsoul instead of his main soul like most people would. It was to fool him into thinking that his subsoul was his main soul, and the ruse had worked like a charm.

Of course, he was smarter than Xiangqi Demon. If the circumstances weren't as desperate as they were, or if he had just a bit more time, he would've figured out the ruse eventually. The problem was he didn't have enough time. By the time he figured it out, the Boundless Heart Demon would've broken free from its prison already.

But then, a variable that no one had placed any significance on—a living piece of their game—had emerged and ruined it all for Xiangqi Demon. It was such irony that one could almost say that it was, as the cultists of the Boundless Heart Demon loved to put it, fate.

Xiao Feng's lips curled into a smile that was both mocking and wistful. "Hahaha! What an unpredictable world this is! What a fateful ending!"

Xiangqi Demon could never dream that he would fall to a nobody after successfully fooling everyone and everything.

If he hadn't captured that youngster and tossed him into their game, the youngster wouldn't have had the chance to kill him.

If he had killed the youngster immediately after winning the game, he could've avoided the same fate as well.

Or if he had strengthened his main soul just enough that even a late-stage Astral Refiner couldn't kill him, then maybe he could've averted the worst case scenario.

The what-ifs were infinite, but there was only one reality.

That was why people came up with the concept of fate.

That was why people believed in fate.

Xiao Feng barked out another laugh before crushing the silver lines covering the Mountain of Demons with his bare hands. The array couldn't possibly resist as the one person who could've controlled it was no more. As a result, it began crumbling upon itself and spilling demonic qi everywhere.

The next moment, Xiao Feng moved his hands down and suppressed the origin qi and demonic qi rampaging throughout the world. Then, he directed the energies to heal the cracks covering the entire mountain.

After the Mountain of Demons had recovered, the gigantic face that was this close from breaking out of its eternal prison slowly subsided back into the ground.

For the first time, the disturbing smile on the face curled into a sad expression. At the same time, a pair of bloody tears began streaming down its cheeks. A ghastly wail also resounded throughout the

Demon's Tomb. The sky began raining blood, and every human and Stranger under the rain felt sad all of a sudden.

It didn't matter if they were sentient or not. Everyone and everything began to feel sad and weep tears of blood as well.

"Do *not* make contact with the blood rain, boy. They're unsafe," The Fog Demon floated out into the open and warned.

"I know."

Ye Qing wiped away the bloody tears pooling under his tear ducts and expanded his astral qi into a protective cocoon. At the same time, he visualized the "Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method" to protect his mind.

After the golden light had dispelled the formless, invisible energy affecting his mind, the unnatural sorrow afflicting him subsided considerably.

What the hell happened in the Guixu?

Ye Qing wondered as he stared at the tattered center of the Graveyard of Demons.

He couldn't have been trapped in the xiangqi board for more than an hour or two, so why the hell did it feel like the entire world had changed?

Shit! Surely that old fuck can't control time, right? What if a century had already passed while I was trapped inside the board...?

"Screw it. Let's leave this place first!" Ye Qing decided after thinking for a moment.

Since he entered the Guixu, almost nothing had gone his way at all. First, he ran into a gigantic snail that almost infected him with a mini snail. Then, he was captured and thrown into a xiangqi board where he had to fight to survive. Worse, he was left to die inside the game world even though he scored the final blow. He had seen the sun crumbling into pieces, the moon sinking into the horizon, the earth being swallowed into a bottomless void piece by piece and more.

It was a scene straight out of the apocalypse, and he wasn't equipped to handle it to say the least.

If he hadn't picked up that the sky was the weakest part of the unnatural world he was trapped in, if he hadn't combined his, the Mara Boundless Buddha and Zhong Ji's strength together and just barely punched a hole in the sky, he would probably be atoms already.

As if that wasn't miserable enough, it wasn't even a completely smooth journey. While he was attacking the sky, a soul fragment had appeared out of nowhere and attempted to stop him, and at first, he almost shat his pants. It was because it shared the same presence as one of the players outside the xiangqi board, and that presence was so powerful any resistance he could've mustered would've been completely futile.

When he actually clashed against it though, he abruptly realized that the soul fragment was stupidly weak. He didn't understand why that was the case, but he had no qualms destroying it after he broke out of the strange world.

Speaking of which, he was fully ready to fight a hopeless battle after returning to reality. Surely the players wouldn't be pleased that one of their pieces had broken free, right? He didn't find anyone

around him, however. Instead, he saw a graveyard that looked like it had been ravaged by a bunch of rapists, the ground was shaking like a magnitude 8 earthquake, and the sky was literally weeping blood. This series of discoveries snuffed out any desire he might have had for the Guixu.

What was I thinking entering this place? I'm just a small fry, and I don't feel like dying just yet. I belong anywhere but here.

He was just about to take his leave when suddenly, someone called out to him from behind, "Leaving already, young friend? Don't you want to stay here a little longer?"

Ye Qing froze for a second. Every hair on his person stood on end, and his forehead was covered in cold sweat before he knew it. He turned around and saw Xiao Feng smilingly devilishly and lazily at him.

"Hello... senior."

Ye Qing forced a smile on his stiff face and adjusted his posture to exude as much sincerity as possible. "It's er, it's raining right now, so I need to rush home and put away my laundry immediately. I'll see you another day?"

"Is that so?" Xiao Feng smiled, thinking that Ye Qing's reaction was quite amusing. He waved his sleeve once, and the blood rain abruptly subsided rapidly. It stopped completely just a few seconds later. Then, a blood moon rose into the sky, and the demonic qi scattered its light and dyed everything in the Guixu in red.

"Now you don't have to hurry home, do you?"

"Ha, haha..."

Ye Qing's sweat grew thick enough to slide down his nose. His smile was already stiff in the first place, but now he was just barely keeping it together. He knew from the start that the mysterious man was extraordinary, but to literally change the weather with a single wave?

I'M JUST A SMALL FRY DAMMIT. WHY DOES THIS KEEP HAPPENING TO ME!?

"T-Thank you, senior, but maybe next time. A-Also, your skill is most impressive. I'd never seen such incredible power."

"Oh? You're a flatterer as well?" Xiao Feng chuckled.

"I'm not trying to flatter you, senior. I'm telling the truth. In the *jianghu*, they call me the Honest and Dependable Gentleman or the Man Who Never Tells Lies. It's how you know I'm telling the pure, unadulterated truth."

Ye Qing wiped away a bead of sweat and continued in a sincere tone, "Your power and skill aren't the only things that are impressive either. You're also one of the most handsome men I've ever met. You remind me of a heavenly celestial who descended upon the earth to enjoy the pleasures of the world. I must have used up three lifetimes' worth of blessing to be rewarded with a meeting with you. I am sure that I will take this memory to the grave."

To emphasize just how excited and honored he was, Ye Qing even squeezed out a tear from his tear duct.

“By the Nether, he is even more shameless than I am!”

Inside the Boundless Mara Buddha, the Fog Demon was so disgusted it couldn't help but make a mental spit. Shamelessness was something that transcended the boundaries of race, but the effect was magnified on someone with an honest-looking face like Ye Qing.

“You will take this memory to the grave, is it? If that is your wish, then so it shall be!” Xiao Feng smiled devilishly and pointed a finger at Ye Qing's forehead.

“Wa—”

Ye Qing's eyes bulged in shock and horror. *This isn't how the script should go! I refuse to be the protagonist who committed suicide because of excessive bootlicking!*

Ye Qing tried to resist, but he was immobilized practically the instant the thought appeared in his head. He could only watch helplessly as the finger came closer and closer.

Boom!

When the finger finally made contact with his forehead, his headspace churned, and his mind wobbled like a leaf caught within a storm. His eyes rolled to the back of his head, and he collapsed on the ground just like that.

“You actually killed him, Xiao Feng?”

A colossal figure appeared next to Xiao Feng and lamented in mock horror, “He's the man who wiped your sorry ass for you! How could you do this to him? My, I have never seen a more heartless and ungrateful man in my life!”

He was none other than Mountain Bearer.

Xiao Feng smirked and tapped Ye Qing on the head again. “What can I do? It's what he asked for.”

Mountain Bearer slapped his hands on his cheeks. “Oh my heavens! It's bad enough you murdered your benefactor, you would desecrate his corpse too? Monster! Monster!”

Then, Ye Qing's aura began growing stronger and stronger. From time to time, he would emit powerful spiritual shockwaves.

Mountain Bearer turned serious when he saw this. “You unlocked his Xuanguan point for him? Are you actually going to make him your successor, Xiao Feng?”

“Aren't you the one who keeps pushing me to repay the favor?” Xiao Feng countered.

It was at this moment Nine Mountains joined the trio. “Amitabha. Have you decided, Xiao Feng?”

“I have,” Xiao Feng responded with a smile. “You Buddhists are very concerned with karmic bonds and destiny, aren't you? Well, to borrow your words, this boy shares a karmic bond with me.”

“Not only did he do us a huge favor, he just so happens to be carrying an item that I left outside[1]. I see no reason not to pass down my signature martial art to him.”

“All arts must not be passed down carelessly, not to mention that your signature martial art is more dangerous than most. You really should consider this carefully.” Nine Mountains said with a frown, “Do you know what type of person he is? Do you even know if he’s good? If he’s a villainous monster, then what you’re doing is no different from committing mass slaughter. Are you aware of that?”

Xiao Feng shook his head. “Heavens, you just can’t help but be a goody-two-shoes, can you? When you were alive, you hunted countless evils and protected many from disaster. After you died, you kept watch over the Demon’s Tomb and act as his watchdog. Now, you’re still worrying about the future of humanity. Aren’t you tired, man?”

“Amitabha! My Buddha is merciful!” Nine Mountains chanted solemnly in response.

“Heh. Truly, you and I cannot be anymore different. You’re a Buddhist and a goodie-two-shoes. I’m a demon who does whatever I like. We literally don’t even pee in the same jar.” Xiao Feng scoffed. “Seriously, if you hadn’t saved my life back when we were still alive, I wouldn’t even leave a wisp of my consciousness in this place. I swear, it’s a laborious and thankless job.”

“To be free when I was alive, and to be ash after I’m dead. That’s the kind of life I wanted to lead.”

“On behalf of all of humanity, this poor monk thanks you for your selfless service,” Nine Mountains saluted him deeply.

“Save it. That doesn’t work on me.” Xiao Feng chuckled. “All I ask is that you stop trying to change my mind. My eardrums are a little sore after all that noise from earlier, you see.”

Knowing that Xiao Feng truly had made up his mind, Nine Mountains shook his head and chanted, “Amitabha.”

“If it helps you rest easier, know that this boy does not cultivate any unsavory martial art. Yes, his bloodthirst is stronger than most, but he isn’t a full blown monster either. He won’t cause the kind of disasters you fear.”

Mountain Bearer interrupted, “You have a good eye for people, Xiao Feng. For someone so young, this boy already possesses a powerful physique and flawless talent and aptitude. He’s definitely qualified to be called a once-in-a-century genius. Assuming he doesn’t die young, he’s destined to leave his name in the annals of history. You’re one lucky bastard, Xiao Feng.”

It was clear that Mountain Bearer was jealous.

Xiao Feng chuckled. “Why are you jealous? You can teach him your skills if you want to. As you say, he’s quite compatible with your ‘Pan Emperor Mountain Bearing Sutra’, isn’t he?”

“You’re not wrong,” Mountain Bearer rubbed his chin as if seriously considering the opinion.

Then, Nine Mountains interrupted with a cough, "Ahem. Amitabha..."

Mountain Bearer got the hint and laughed. "Hahaha... forget it. The monk's already pretty annoyed that you passed him your signature martial art. If I passed him my signature martial art as well, I'm afraid that he would pass onto the afterlife this instant!"

Nine Mountains said seriously, "Amitabha, I am not annoyed."

"Sure, I believe you." Mountain Bearer laughed again before urging, "Come on, monk. There is still stuff to clean up regarding the Boundless Heart Demon, and I'm sure Xiao Feng could use some peace and quiet."

"Amitabha..." Nine Mountains shot Xiao Feng one last complicated look before taking his leave. Mountain Bearer was gone as well.

Xiao Feng paid their departure no heed. He simply smiled at Ye Qing's unconscious figure and tapped his forehead again.

"Since you're going to inherit my signature martial art, I consider you my disciple. My name is Xiao Feng, and I was a free soul who toured every walk of life, followed my heart, and changed the world as I pleased. Back in the day, they called me the Demon Lord of Freedom."

"I don't really care, but try not to forget me as soon as you leave this place, hahaha..."

Chapter 298: When Want Exceeds Supply

"... I was a free soul who toured every walk of life, followed my heart, and changed the world as I pleased..."

"Ugh... my head hurts!"

At an unfamiliar pace, Ye Qing mumbled in his dreams before a spike of pain jolted him awake. His head felt full and painful like someone had shoved a pail of shit into his brain.

"Where am I? I was..." Ye Qing shook his head left and right when his last memory hit him like a train. He immediately jumped to his feet and examined his surroundings warily.

"I'm... at the foot of the Mountain of Demons?!" Ye Qing watched his environment carefully. He vaguely recognized it, but a certain floating mountain was conspicuously missing.

"Where is... oh. It's daytime already."

Ye Qing was still feeling a little slow and dizzy. It took him a while before he finally recalled Hong Jianglong mentioning that the Mountain of Demons only appeared during nighttime. That was why it was missing right now.

“But I was inside the Guixu, wasn’t I? How did I get here?” Ye Qing muttered with a frown. When he looked around and found no danger, he sat back down on the ground and slowly sorted out his discombobulated memories.

“Was it him...?”

Ye Qing eventually recalled his final memory; a devilishly handsome man touching him on the forehead and knocking him out as a result. As soon as he did this, an indescribable melody of Dao began playing in his head, and a black lotus descended from above.

The black lotus had nine petals. As it bloomed, a sense of sublime profoundness enveloped Ye Qing, and the air of Dao was everywhere. It was like the black lotus was the culmination of all arts and Daos there were.

Ye Qing blanked out, and a pair of black lotuses appeared in his eyes. As the melody of Dao continued to play not just in his head, but also the outside world, the images of countless gods and demons appeared one after another.

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“Deaf! Deaf! I think I heard something from over there!”

Not far away from Ye Qing, an old, decrepit woman slowly brought a hand to her ear and kicked an equally old man beside her. “What a beautiful melody it is! It’s like the sound of Dao itself!”

The old man next to her was currently crouching next to a body and clutching a human heart. He was taking bites out of it with an intoxicated expression like it was the most delicious thing in the world.

When he felt the old woman’s kick, he turned around to face her, grinned, and handed the heart over, asking, “What’s wrong, Blind? Do you want to have a taste?”

“No I don’t, you glutton! Look over there!” The old woman kicked him again before pointing at the distance.

The guy looked at the direction she was pointing, and a second set of pupils abruptly appeared inside his pupils. “Oh, so that’s what you mean.”

Suddenly, he grew excited. “What a marvelous phenomenon! Is it the birth of a treasure? Let’s head over and take a look, Blind!”

“Let’s. It would be terrible if someone gets ahead of us!” The old woman chirped just as excitedly before bounding in Ye Qing’s direction.

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“Must you press me so over a Nature’s Shell?”

At a forest, a blood-soaked man was shooting a rather weak threat at his three pursuers.

“Excuse me? You just happened to be the one we ran into while we’re cleaning out this place, Black Fox! Do you really think that someone like you deserves our attention?” The thin man among the trio retorted.

The thin man barely counted as a human, really. In fact, all three of them were like this. It was because their eyes were completely red, the ears were sharp and pointy, their face was covered in yellow fur, and their nails were far longer than what you might see on an average human. Frankly, they looked more like a dog than a human.

The guy called Black Fox argued, “We’re all scavengers here, and I’m the one who came first. Going by *jianghu* rules, the items on these bodies should go to me.”

Black Fox really, really didn’t want to fight against the Three Lunatics of Mo Bei if he could. It wasn’t because he wouldn’t be a match for them—he was a Half-Step Spirit Purifier, while the trio were only middle-stage Astral Refiners—but because he most likely would walk away in poor shape.

As their moniker might suggest, the Three Lunatics of Mo Bei were complete lunatics. They fought with complete disregard of their own lives or injuries. The meek was afraid of the assertive, and the assertive was afraid of the suicidal. It was that simple.

It was said that the three brothers possessed the bloodline of a Scarlet Wolf. As the blood of a Scarlet Wolf was stronger than most, they were unable to properly control their bloodline after they awoke to it. As the Scarlet Wolf was violent and bloodthirsty by nature, they lost control of their aggression and literally bit their own parents to death. Since then, their personality became twisted and vicious like a beast’s.

The trio enjoyed eating raw meat, drinking raw blood, and fought without any regard for their own lives whatsoever. They were also mentally unstable in the best of circumstances. To put it simply, they were insane. That was why they came to be known as the Three Lunatics of Mo Bei or the Mad Hounds of Mo Bei.

“What the hell are you on about? In the *jianghu*, the strong take all. That is the one and only rule in the *jianghu*. Now cut the bullshit, or I’ll kill you!” The trio bared their teeth at the same time, and they were covered in bits of flesh and blood.

Dammit! Of all the people I could’ve run into! Black Fox cursed inside his head.

When morning came, and the Mountain of Demons disappeared, nearly everyone who left the mountain was attacked. The attackers were people who wanted the valuables inside the Mountain of Demons, but weren’t willing to risk their lives venturing into the place themselves. So, they lay in wait outside and ambushed anyone who left the mountain, forcing them to give up their treasures, inheritances or whatever.

Black Fox was only a Half-Step Spirit Purifier, and he knew full well he didn’t possess the strength or skill to play the oriole. So, he settled for looting corpses and picking up the leftovers of those battles.

He might not be able to get the best valuables this way, but at least he wouldn’t be leaving empty-handed.

Unfortunately, he had just gotten his first valuable loot when he ran into the three lunatics. To say that his luck was shit would be an understatement.

“Huh? What’s that?” Suddenly, Black Fox glanced behind the trio with a stunned expression on his face.

The trio subconsciously looked in that direction and immediately saw images of gods and demons and heard the profound melody of Dao. It was definitely not your usual phenomenon.

“Is that the birth of a treasure, big brother?” The third brother asked.

“I think so. Let’s check it out,” the first brother answered.

It was at this moment the second brother turned around and discovered that Black Fox was nowhere to be seen. “Big brother, Black Fox ran away while we weren’t looking.”

Obviously, the Half-Step Spirit Purifier had run off while they were distracted by the unusual phenomenon.

“It’s fine. I already memorized his scent. We can track him down after we obtain the treasure.” The first brother sneered.

“Hehe. I’ve memorized his scent as well.”

“He won’t escape.”

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“Sigh. Not only did I fail to catch the big fish, my gorgeous face was ruined! Ruined!”

A woman was sighing loudly under a big tree. She had an hourglass figure and was wearing a palace dress. Looking at her figure and aura, she was absolutely a beauty that could topple countries. But if you looked at her face, then you would probably throw up last night’s dinner.

Not only was her face covered in wounds, there were some spots that were completely devoid of flesh. It was like someone had dug them out with a spoon and exposed the horrifying red and white within. Right now, the woman was holding a mirror and complaining non-stop while examining her pitted, scarred face.

When she was finally done, she finally put away the mirror and looked at the tree behind her. Rows and rows of faces were hung on its branches; women faces to be exact. Some of them looked freshly stripped as they were covered in bright red blood.

The woman grabbed one of the faces and wore it on her face like a mask. It covered up her wounds and made her look normal for a bit.

“Eh, this one’s ugly!” The woman moaned in dissatisfaction after examining herself in the mirror for a bit. She stripped off the face and tossed it away. Then, she grabbed another face.

“This one’s lips are too thin...”

“This one’s face is too round...”

“This one’s nose is too flat...”

“Heavens, why are there so many wrinkles!?”

“This one doesn’t have double eyelids...”

“This one’s eyebrows are too short...”

It was like she was the most nitpicky woman in the entire world. Objectively speaking, none of the faces she wore was ugly, but there was always something that she was dissatisfied about.

A long time later, the woman finally found a face that she was okay with, but even then she couldn’t stop complaining, “Sigh. A dead person’s face just isn’t as lively as a living person’s face. I should pick my faces from living people only from now on!”

Suddenly, the woman looked in a certain direction and exclaimed in surprise and excitement, “What is that? I see gods and demons, and hear the melody of Dao. It must be the birth of a treasure!”

“I was so sad I couldn’t get anything last night, but it looks like my fortune is turning around!”

“Wait for me, dearie!”

.....

“The heck? It’s not a treasure.”

When Deaf arrived at the scene, he was both surprised and disappointed to find that the so-called treasure was really a man.

“You said it was a treasure!” Blind kicked him in the leg when she heard this.

“The illusions and Dao melody are definitely coming from him though,” Deaf replied.

“Wait...” The old woman suddenly recalled something and exclaimed in pleasant surprise, “Maybe he’s one of the people who entered the Mountain of Demons, and he’s currently absorbing the inheritance of a martial champion!”

“It’s very possible!” The man was also brimming with delight. “Hahaha! Our fortune has turned around, Blind! Once we steal his inheritance, we’ll become famous warriors of the *jianghu*! Hahahaha!”

“Blind, Deaf, you were nearby?”

It was at this moment a beautiful woman entered the scene. She was sashaying, but that didn’t stop her from reaching Deaf and Blind in the blink of an eye.

“‘Skin Painter’ Chen Xiaojiao? Why are you here?” Deaf immediately eyed her warily.

“The better question is, why not?” Chen Xiaojiao giggled. “Don’t you know that sharing is caring?”

“Well said!” Chen Xiaojiao had just finished when the Three Lunatics of Mo Bei showed up. “We want a cut of the pie as well.”

The Three Lunatics of Mo Bei were insane, but they weren't stupid. If Chen Xiaojiao, Deaf and Blind were weaker than them, they would've just killed them all and claimed the inheritance for themselves.

"Hmph! I don't remember leaving three mad hounds to call the shots!"

The Three Lunatics of Mo Bei had just finished talking when a man wielding a bloody spear and overflowing with bloodthirst stepped in.

"'Blood Spear' Mu Zheng!?"

Everyone grew nervous when the man entered the fray. There was a cute little proverb that went something like this: One monk would shoulder two buckets of water, two monks would share the load, but add a third and no one would want to fetch water. The moral of the story was very simple: when the want exceeded the supply, problems were bound to happen, not to mention that there were more than three people present at the scene right now.

At this point, the question became: was there even enough water for everyone?

Chapter 299: Paranirmitavaavartin Heavenly Demon Sutra

"Please give me a moment. I have a suggestion to make."

Everyone was gearing up for conflict when suddenly, Chen Xiaojiao let out a giggle.

"The phenomenon this man is giving off is so obvious that it is only a matter of time before more people show up. If one of them is a Spirit Master or something, then we won't even be able to enjoy the scraps!"

"What do you propose?" Blind asked. Everyone else was also waiting for her to continue.

Chen Xiaojiao beamed. "In my opinion, we should move him somewhere safer than here before forcing him to divulge the inheritance. We can negotiate how we should share it then. What do you say?"

A moment later, everyone nodded in agreement. "Very well."

Although Chen Xiaojiao's solution only treated the symptom but not the cause, it did prevent more people from sharing the pie or worse, a true powerhouse who could claim it all for themselves. For now, it was the best solution to their problem.

As for whether they would duke it out or resolve their conundrum peacefully after reaching a safe place, that was for future them to worry about!

"In that case, may I make another suggestion? I would like the Three Lunatics of Mo Bei to carry that man. What do you all think?" Chen Xiaojiao suggested.

"I agree." Mo Zheng was the first to figure out Chen Xiaojiao's meaning.

"We agree to this arrangement as well," Blind and Deaf voiced their agreement right after.

They all understood why Chen Xiaojiao had suggested this. The Three Lunatics of Mo Bei were the only middle-stage Astral Refiners of their group. Everyone else was a Spirit Purifier. If a Spirit Purifier were to carry Ye Qing, it would only stir up undue restlessness and suspicion.

The Three Lunatics of Mo Bei were the weakest of the three of them, and it was extremely unlikely they would be able to pull anything under the watchful eyes of four Spirit Purifiers. If they did, they would only be too happy to trim the fat.

Also, the Three Lunatics of Mo Bei were as insane as they were fearless. They were the perfect fodder to scout out any potential danger.

“We’ll do it as long as you don’t forget our share in the end.”

As expected, the trio suspected nothing. They were a moment away from reaching Ye Qing when suddenly, the young man opened his eyes to reveal a pair of pitch black pupils. They were pure, ruthless, and bottomless.

A pair of black lotuses swayed gently in the night black pupils. They were exceedingly profound and beyond description.

As Ye Qing’s lips curled into a devilish smile, he tapped the space in front of him with a finger. There was no shockwave of energy or even changes to his aura, but the three Astral Refiners abruptly shuddered as if they were struck by something. Their scarlet pupils slowly contracted into pins and turned glassy. They collapsed like puppets whose strings were cut.

“Not good! Run!”

Chen Xiaojiao, Mu Zheng, Blind and Deaf immediately realized that they were in trouble. They didn’t hesitate to turn around and make a run for it.

Unfortunately for them, they couldn’t possibly be faster than Ye Qing. He tapped the space in front of him a second time, and they experienced the exact same thing as the Three Lunatics of Mo Bei. Their pupils contracted into pins, their eyes turned glassy, and they all collapsed to the ground, dead.

“The ‘Paranirmitava?avartin[1] Heavenly Demon Sutra... the Demon Lord of Freedom...”

The black lotuses slowly faded, and Ye Qing’s eyes slowly returned to normal after he took out the seven warriors. He was currently basking in the shock of his newfound power.

The black lotus that appeared in his head earlier was none other than the inheritance of the Demon Lord of Freedom, Xiao Feng. It was a cultivation art that would take him all the way to the Grandmaster stage, the “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra”.

At the very beginning of time, there existed a Heavenly Demon known as the Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon. He was the supreme ruler of the Paranirmitava?avartin, and he disliked living beings who could enter and leave the Three Realms[2] as they pleased, namely warriors, which was why he enjoyed nothing more than harassing warriors and disturbing their cultivation.

As an expert in manipulating one’s senses and perceiving one’s weaknesses, he could attack the heart and lead one astray while being completely undetectable. He was formless, shapeless, infinite

and chaotic. He comes and goes as he pleases, and there is no one he wouldn't toy with should they catch his attention.

The “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” was a supreme art that the Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon himself had bestowed upon humanity; a cultivation art that could take a practitioner all the way to the Sage[3] stage. If he cultivated a Demonic Heart, refined a Demonic Body, and identified a Demonic Will, he would reach the adept level and be able to create a Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon dharmakāya. He would be able to take any form he wished, roam the world with a single thought, and create countless mental tribulations that could wear down even the toughest hearts.

As the “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” was too potent and heretical, the world itself was unable to tolerate its existence. As a result, parts of the cultivation art was destroyed, and the path to sagehood was lost forever. One could only become a Yang God Trueman.

The “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” was split into three volumes and nine levels. The three volumes were Spirit Purification, Spirit Master and Trueman-stage cultivation arts, whereas the nine levels scrutinized the mini stages of each cultivation level i.e. the early stage of the Spirit Purification stage, middle stage of the Spirit Master stage and so on.

What this meant was that he now had a guidebook that would take him all the way to the Trueman stage and make him a Grandmaster. All he needed to do was to follow the instructions.

This wasn't the only pleasant surprise Xiao Feng had left him. The man had unlocked his Xuanguan point and primordial points inside his forehead for him, meaning that he was now officially a Spirit Purifier.

Of course, Ye Qing didn't really need his help. As the practitioner of the “Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method” and the owner of a powerful spirit, he was qualified to enter the Spirit Purification stage a long time ago. The reason he hadn't was because he didn't have a Spirit Purification stage cultivation art... until now. Xiao Feng had simply saved him the time of doing it himself.

Since his Xuanguan point was unlocked, and he had received a true martial inheritance from Xiao Feng, it took him little effort to master the first level of the Spirit Purification stage of the “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra”. He also mastered a mental attack technique called the “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul”.

The “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul” gave Ye Qing the ability to capture a victim's Three Heavenly Souls and Seven Earthly Souls[4] with a single thought. Yes, it sounded as insane as you might think it was.

Although Chen Xiaojiao, Blind, Deaf and Mu Zheng were all Spirit Purifiers, they were only early-stage Spirit Purifiers who didn't even cultivate their mind more than was necessary. As a result, their spiritual power was so-so at best. Ye Qing too was an early-stage Spirit Purifier, but thanks to his constant use of the “Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method” and certain fortuitous experiences, his spiritual power was at least as strong as an ordinary late-stage Spirit Purifier. Naturally, he was able to capture their Three Heavenly Souls and Seven Earthly Souls with ease.

As for the Three Lunatics of Mo Bei, they weren't even Spirit Purifiers. Naturally, killing them took less effort than snuffing out a candle.

To be honest, he only wanted to capture his enemies and assume control over them. That was the true function of the “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul”. However, this was his first time using the technique, so he lost control and accidentally snuffed out their souls.

He didn’t mind the failure or the deaths though. They were plotting to kill him anyway.

“‘Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra’... ‘Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul’... Demon Lord of Freedom... Xiao Feng...”

Ye Qing rose to his feet and faced toward the Mountain of Demons. Then, he produced a porcelain cup, filled it with wine, held it over his head and knelt on the ground.

“You taught me your cultivation art and martial techniques. Hence, you are my master. Disciple Ye Qing humbly greets his master.”

He then poured the wine on the ground, filled the cup with more wine, and poured it on the ground again. Three times later, Ye Qing put his head on the ground and kowtowed three times.

“Worry not, master. This disciple will work hard to master your techniques and ensure that I do not sully your reputation.”

Ye Qing then drank three cups of wine himself and bowed to the Mountain of Demons one last time. It was only then he turned around and walked away.

As he slowly disappeared into the wind, he sang loudly while carrying half a jar of wine in his arm, “The way leads to joy and freedom! Why waste your time when there is pleasure to be found?”

Somewhere in the Guixu, a devilishly handsome man leaned lazily against his gravestone and sipped from his wine, eyes peering through many layers of space and landing on Ye Qing. He cracked a devilishly handsome smile and said, ‘Well said...’

After Ye Qing had left the mountain, he checked his bearings and continued toward the north.

He didn’t return to the temple to seek out Yi Pin and Li Longxiang because one, it was very, very far away. By the time he got there, he bet that the duo were long gone. Two, they were just partners of circumstances. He didn’t know them nearly well enough to head back and confirm their safety.

And three, he was sure that shrewd bastard, Yi Pin was more than capable of keeping himself and his disciple safe.

That was why his first priority was to find the exit and secure his safety. He had already earned fortunes that would garner the envy of countless people anyway. Therefore, there was no need to linger here any longer.

About two hours of trekking later, Ye Qing suddenly heard the sounds of fighting from nearby. When he went over to check it out, he was surprised to see some familiar faces.

“That’s... Xue Beikun and Xue Shiwu?”

Five men were currently attacking the Xue father and son. Ye Qing didn’t know who the five men were, but their auras were strong, and they were clearly warriors with a lot of blood on their hands. They were all Half-Step Spirit Masters, and their teamwork was pretty impressive.

Although Xue Beikun was a Spirit Master, he was seriously injured by Uncle Feng when he was outside the Demon's Tomb. His Yin God was damaged, his left arm was broken, and not nearly enough time had passed for him to recover from his injuries. Add to the fact that Xue Shiwu was nothing but a burden under these circumstances, and he was just barely hanging on right now.

A spear wielder successfully landed a stab on Xue Beikun's shoulder. As the Black Feather Guard Commander staggered away, the spear wielder laughed, "Have you ever thought that your sins might catch up to you when you slaughtered four hundred and seventy five villagers and claimed that we were bandits, Xue Beikun?"

"Ah. You're the remnants of the Blackwind Bandits. You and your band of criminals deserve everything they got!" Xue Beikun sneered while driving them back with a powerful spear sweep.

"Even now, you remain an unrepentant bastard!" Another man uttered, "We Blackwind Bandits may call ourselves bandits, but we have never attacked our neighbors, and we mostly killed Strangers for a living. But you, not only did you falsely accuse us as Grave Raiders, you even slaughtered all four hundred and seventy five people in our village including the old, women and children for your own profit. Are you even human, you bastard?"

"I'm an officer, and you are bandits. Since when is it a crime for an officer to eradicate some bandits?" Xue Beikun scoffed.

"It's not a crime, he says!" A man laughed madly while his face was contorted by anger and hatred. "No wonder they say officials have two mouths! You distort the truth and invert right and wrong with nary an effort!"

"But karma exists in this world. Just because your retribution hasn't arrived yet doesn't mean that it will never come."

"Today is the day you pay for your sins. The five of us will kill you and take revenge for the four hundred and seventy five innocent souls who had died that day! You will pay the price of blood, Xue Beikun!"

"The price of blood!"

"The price of blood!"

Chapter 300: Cocoon Tree

"You can try, but I highly doubt it'll go the way you think it would!" Xue Beikun sneered. When the five men rushed him once more, he thrust his spear seven times in a row and summoned a howling gale and a bloody rain. The next moment, a giant blood wolf riding on a star emerged from the sky.

“Seven Killing Spears of Greedy Wolf”

“Yin God—Greedy Wolf”

The moment the Greedy Wolf appeared, a seemingly infinite amount of killing intent poured into the battlefield. All five men felt their mind and spirit quaking from the sheer pressure and bloodthirst the Greedy Wolf was exuding. Then—

“Roar!”

A mighty roar deafened their ears and battered against their mental defenses like a windstorm blowing against a wooden hut. They survived the mental attack, but their guard was also wide open as a result.

Before neither man could recover, the blood rain—or more accurately, a rain of spear qi—skewered their bodies and killed them all. Unfortunately for the men, they were ultimately unable to enact their vengeance.

Standing behind Xue Beikun, Xue Shiwu’s fear and worry evaporated into nothing as he let out a mad laugh, “Hahaha! You should’ve known better than to challenge us!”

“Pwack!”

Xue Beikun didn’t look happy in the slightest, however. In fact, the blood abruptly drained away from his face, and a mouthful of fresh blood burst out of his lips. His Yin God also crumbled into nothing.

“Dad!? Are you alright?” Xue Shiwu hurriedly rushed over and supported his father.

“I’m fine. It’s just a rebound,” Xue Beikun answered weakly, “Cough! if it wasn’t for Feng Liunian, these walking pieces of garbage wouldn’t even be able to scratch me—cough cough!”

“You should rest, dad. We can think about that later. When we get out, we’ll make Feng Liunian and Ye Qing pay the price of blood,” consoled Xue Shiwu.

“But of course,” Xue Beikun replied succinctly. His eyes were dark and cruel like that of a wolf on the hunt.

“Yeah! But remember to give me Ye Qing, okay? I must slice and dice him to ribbons to vent my hatred!” Xue Shiwu chirped with excitement and bloodthirst.

However, Xue Beikun shot him a cold look before giving into his temper. “Hmph! If you were strong enough to kill Ye Qing, then none of this would’ve happened! Trash!”

“Worse, Gu Suitang found out who I was. He’s absolutely going to give me hell when we get out of the Demon’s Tomb. You’ve singlehandedly ruined my plans for Luo Shui, you know that?”

“If you’re not my son, I would tear you to a million pieces myself! Trash!”

“I’m sorry.” Xue Shiwu flinched visibly. He was like a meek, defenseless child before his father. “Anyway, try catching some rest, dad. I’m going to forage for food.”

Xue Beikun didn’t say anything, so Xue Shiwu took it as a yes. After setting his father down underneath a tree, the Little Commander rose to his feet and walked away.

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“Even now, the bastards are plotting to kill me. Hmph! Should I make the first move and kill *them* first?”

At his hiding spot, Ye Qing was weighing his chances of sneaking up to Xue Beikun and killing him before he could react.

Not only did Xue Beikun tolerate his son’s action, he had stopped Gu Suitang from coming to his aid earlier. If he hadn’t sought out Feng Liunian and obtained his cooperation beforehand, he would be long dead by now.

Worse still, Xue Beikun wasn’t afraid of the Pacification Bureau like Wang Luori was. Wang Luori couldn’t attack him directly and could only pull some petty little tricks from behind the scene, but Xue Beikun was the commander of the Black Feather Guards. He would and could use every dirty trick in the book to kill him.

If Xue Beikun lived to escape the Demon’s Tomb, he was certain that he would woe the days that would come. That was why killing him here and now would be the optimal outcome.

The Demon’s Tomb was the absolute best place to kill Xue Beikun. The Demon’s Tomb was a highly dangerous place where even a Grandmaster wasn’t safe. No one would suspect a thing, and the Demon’s Tomb itself would disappear in another two days.

Besides that, Xue Beikun was severely injured and didn’t seem to possess even a tenth of his usual strength. Normally, not even two of him could give Xue Beikun a run for his money. But now? There really was no better chance for him to kill the man.

If I miss this opportunity, I’m probably not going to get a better one. Let’s do this!

Ye Qing made up his mind to kill Xue Beikun, but he didn’t take action immediately. The commander was a veteran Spirit Master with a Yin God after all. He might be severely injured right now, but that was exactly what made him dangerous. One should never underestimate a cornered animal, not to mention that it was entirely possible that he might have one last trick or two up his sleeves. He would if he was in Xue Beikun’s situation. If he rushed in blindly, chances were he was going to lose his life.

Some people might think that he was just being paranoid, but the five warriors who attacked Xue Beikun earlier were proof that his worries weren’t unfounded. The five warriors had had the upper hand the whole time, and they were absolutely certain that today was the day they avenged their dead brethren. But then, Xue Beikun suddenly turned the tables on them and killed them before they could react.

No, it was better to be safe than sorry.

“Hmm, wait. There is Xue Shiwu.”

Suddenly, Ye Qing recalled Xue Beikun's worthless son. Despite his terrible vices, Xue Beikun was ironically a good father. Perhaps Xue Shiwu would give him a better vector of attack?

His mind made up, Ye Qing stealthily left his hiding spot and chased after Xue Shiwu. It wasn't long before he found the guy picking fruits while mumbling something angrily under his breath. Ye Qing listened in for a bit before his lips pressed into a tight line.

The bitch! Even now, he's cussing me out!

"You're dead as soon as I've no more use for you." Ye Qing grunted and made a mental command. A wisp of mist entered Xue Shiwu and clouded his eyes immediately.

It only lasted for a fraction of a second, however. Xue Shiwu might not be a Spirit Purifier, but he was a late-stage Astral Refiner and apparently carrying a Strange Artifact that protected his mind. That was why the Fog Demon wasn't able to control him immediately.

Realizing the danger, Xue Shiwu opened his mouth to scream for help. He might not be the smartest cookie in the world, but he wasn't that stupid that he didn't recognize what a dangerous place the Demon's Tomb was. As a late-stage Astral Refiner, a bloody gust of wind could mean the end of him, which was why he made sure not to move out of earshot. One cry was all he needed to grab Xue Beikun's attention.

Ye Qing knew exactly what Xue Shiwu was planning, of course. Right before the Little Commander could make a sound, Ye Qing tapped the space in front of him with his finger and triggered a flash of invisible power.

The next moment, Xue Shiwu abruptly blanked out and froze in place. His eyes looked dull and lightless.

"Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul"

At the same time, Ye Qing appeared beside Xue Shiwu and chopped him in the neck, causing him to turn limp. Ye Qing caught him before he could fall downward and gently set him down on the ground.

"Phew... it's done."

It was only now Ye Qing let out a sigh of relief, and a smile flickered across his face.

"Why didn't you just kill him, boy?" The Fog Demon asked mentally.

Ye Qing explained, "He can't die yet. He's Xue Beikun's son, and it's not impossible that Xue Beikun might have put some sort of detection spell on his son. If Xue Shiwu dies, there's a huge chance Xue Beikun might sense it and rush over. That'll ruin my plan."

He wasn't going to make the same mistake he did with Chen Zheng.

"Second, I can use Xue Shiwu as my hostage if my plan fails, and Xue Beikun survives."

His plan was to capture Xue Shiwu and assume control of his body, and while the “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul” was meant to do exactly that, he wasn’t nearly familiar enough with the technique to guarantee success considering the circumstances.

If he used too much strength, Xue Shiwu would die. If he used too little strength, Xue Shiwu might be able to warn his father. And just a couple of hours ago, he had accidentally killed a bunch of Spirit Purifiers when unleashing the “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul”.

That was why he commanded the Fog Demon to possess Xue Shiwu first so that he would have enough time to take control over the Little Commander. As for the “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul” earlier, that was only to temporarily incapacitate Xue Shiwu so he could carry out the actual control part without issues.

So far, everything was proceeding as planned.

“What are you going to do now?” Fog Demon asked. Honestly, it was feeling quite curious right now.

“You will know in a moment.” Ye Qing shot the Stranger an enigmatic smile before he began stripping Xue Shiwu.

“By the Nether, you’re gay? Why didn’t you tell me sooner? Tsk tsk...” Fog Demon let out a dubious cackle when it saw this.

“The hell are you talking about?” Ye Qing shot it an unfriendly look. *I suppose I should’ve expected this from a Nine Nethers Demon, but seriously?*

After Ye Qing had stripped Xue Shiwu, he put on his clothes and began modifying his body. A series of pops and cracks later, his physical body looked no different from Xue Shiwu’s. Then, he tweaked his aura to be identical to Xue Shiwu’s as well.

“I see!” Fog Demon let out another cackle after exclaiming in realization. “I knew you were plotting something devious.”

“You didn’t have to do this though. I could’ve disguised your appearance myself!”

Ye Qing smirked. “This is safer.”

While Fog Demon could disguise him much quicker, it was just an illusion. On the other hand, Xue Beikun was a veteran Spirit Master. It was quite possible that he might notice that the Fog Demon’s illusion was just that, an illusion.

But if he changed his body and aura to resemble Xue Shiwu and put on his clothes, then it would be far more difficult for Xue Beikun to see through his disguise.

Things were simple after that. He carried Xue Shiwu and hid him in a safe, secluded spot.

“What’s this? A cocoon tree?”

Ye Qing was on his way back to Xue Beikun when suddenly, he noticed a curious-looking tree. It was a massive tree with a wide trunk that would take several humans to hug. But instead of fruits,

huge, white cocoons were hanging off its branches. Even the smallest cocoon was at least as big as a human adult.

“What are you cooking now, schemer?” Fog Demon asked again.

“You of all people have no right to call me that!” Ye Qing rolled his eyes at Fog Demon and ignored it. He circled around the Cocoon Tree twice before a devious smirk crossed his lips.

Ye Qing abruptly bit on his tongue and spat out a mouthful of fresh blood. Thick blood stench immediately permeated the air.

The next moment, the cocoons started shaking as if they were agitated by something. Then, malformed humanoids began tearing their way out of the cocoons.

They looked human, but that was only if you ignored the colorful wings growing out of their backs. They looked just like a butterfly’s wings, big and colorful. When they flapped, they released glittering powders that sparkled beautifully in the sunlight.

Although their wings were beautiful, the humanoid’s faces were anything but. It was rotten, ugly and dry like that of a dried corpse. Some had eyeballs that were hanging off their eye sockets, and their mouths were covered in small but sharp teeth. They also made these throaty noises that sounded like the wails of a beast.