

Stranger 321

Chapter 321: Their Bodies Became The Evil Dragon

“Didn’t the Pacification Bureau send anyone to handle this?” Ye Qing asked.

Wu Zhao answered, “Of course they have, but they just couldn’t eliminate the Anomaly of Dragon Sacrifice Bay no matter what they tried. They even lost a lot of Pacification Sentinels in the attempt.”

“That said, the Anomaly only appears at night, and as long as you stay inside your room and avoid looking at it, then no danger would befall you.”

“That is why I ordered the servants to inform everyone not to leave their rooms no matter what they hear. I’m doing this for your own good. Also, Dragon Sacrifice Bay is just a few kilometers long, which is about half a teatime’s journey. We will be safe once we leave this place.”

“I see. Thank you for telling me this.” Ye Qing saluted the steward.

He didn’t think that Wu Zhao was lying. The reason he came out in the first place was because he sensed the Anomaly.

“As long as you understand.” Wu Zhao sighed in relief before saying, “Please rest here for a moment. You will be free to leave once we have passed Dragon Sacrifice Bay.”

“Of course.” Ye Qing nodded. He saw no reason to ignore sound advice, not to mention that this was a case even the Pacification Bureau wasn’t able to solve. He wasn’t so arrogant that he thought that he could solve this Anomaly by himself.

After that, Ye Qing spoke to Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai via sound transmission and briefly told them about the Anomaly. Then, he warned them not to leave their rooms no matter what.

As it turned out, Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai already knew about the story. They had served the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau for a long time after all. They knew better than to provoke such an Anomaly.

Gu Suitang sent them out to test themselves, not to commit suicide.

Thump thump thump!

Ten or so breaths later, a bunch of gong banging noises suddenly came from outside. Ye Qing could also hear prayers and certain disturbing noises that were best left unsaid. The prayers were basically requests to the evil dragon to protect them from harm and illness, grant them good weather, give them plenty of healthy crops and so on.

At the same time, Ye Qing sensed an evil, anomalous aura rising from the depths of the river. It quickly enveloped this section of the river and the boat itself.

Normally, Ye Qing would try to perceive the Anomaly using his demonic thought, but he restrained the impulse. It wasn’t because he was afraid of trouble, but because there were plenty of innocent

people aboard the boat. He might be able to escape if the worst were to happen, but the same couldn't be said for the others.

Unfortunately, not everyone shared his sensibility. As the prayer and the gong noises grew louder and louder, a group of people finally lost control of their curiosity and stepped out of their room.

"Dammit! Why won't they listen to reason?!" Wu Zhao exclaimed in frustration. He had clearly been keeping an ear out for any sign of activity, which was why he reacted immediately when he heard the sound of door creaking.

Wu Zhao hesitated for a moment before ordering, "Stay inside the room, customer." Then, he rushed out of the door.

He was the steward of this boat. His passengers' lives were his responsibility.

Ye Qing too hesitated for an instant before attaching a wisp of demonic thought on Wu Zhao. The steward was a good man. He would rather keep him alive than not.

Eyes closed, Wu Zhao rushed out of the room and blocked the three warriors who were just about to climb onto the deck. "Customers, it's dangerous outside. Please return to your rooms immediately."

"How dangerous can it be? Don't you think you're acting a little too scared?" A brawny, savage-looking man scoffed.

All three men were Astral Refiners, which was why they didn't really feel any respect toward the steward, who was only a late-stage Vessel Augmentor.

"Yeah, stop getting in our—wait a second. Is that it? Is there a treasure or an opportunity outside? Are you stopping us because you're planning to claim it all for yourselves?" A thin man with a pair of beady, mouse-like eyes cackled.

Huge beads of sweat were forming on Wu Zhao's forehead. "You misunderstand, customers! This is the Dragon Sacrifice Bay, and an Anomaly is outside! It's really dangerous right now!"

"Hmph. Just get out of our way." The brawny man pushed Wu Zhao away impatiently before stepping onto the deck. His companions were following closely behind him.

As soon as they made it on the deck, all three men were suddenly struck by a bad premonition. It was at this moment they caught sight of a bizarre illusion at the distant rivershore.

They saw a group of oddly-dressed civilians praying to an evil-looking dragon with crazed expressions on their faces. A boy and a girl were tied at the bottom of the statue, and their fearful cries could've woken up the entire Dragon Sacrifice Bay. Not a single one of the civilians reacted to it, however.

Standing on a sacrificial altar was an old man wearing a dragon's mask. He was holding a book and chanting something illegible. When he was done, someone grabbed the bound boy and girl and tossed them into the river.

The rushing river devoured the two children immediately. All that was left in the air was their final screams.

The river then churned as if some sort of horror was swimming underneath the murky waters. Then, bright red blood rose from the bottom and dyed the river water red.

There shouldn't be anywhere near enough blood for the children to turn the water red, and yet the redness kept spreading until the entire river was red. It was like a literal river of blood.

That wasn't the worst part, however. The worst part was that the bloody river in the illusion had somehow spread to the Luo Shui River and turned it bright red as well. It was like their boat was cruising along a river of blood, dark and eerie.

A chill like nothing they had ever experienced before shot up their spine. Regret came swiftly after. As they weren't locals, they had no idea about the Anomaly that plagued Dragon Sacrifice Bay. When Wu Zhao tried to make them see reason, they were sure that they were strong enough to handle anything. Now, it was too late.

"We... We need to go now!" The brawny man gulped loudly. But just as they were about to leave, the civilians in the illusion abruptly turned their heads and stared straight at them.

Their bodies stiffened, and their hearts welled with great terror. The next moment, the civilians actually stepped out of the illusion and strode straight toward them.

The three men turned as pale as a sheet, but they couldn't even speak, much less move. They could only watch as the civilians came close, grabbed their bodies, and dragged them back into the illusion. Now, they were part of the Anomaly as well.

After that, the three men were tied up and tossed into the river like livestock. The river churned, and new blood surged from its depths.

"And that is why you should listen to people who know better than you."

Inside the room, Ye Qing had witnessed everything through his demonic thought. He felt no sympathy for the three warriors though. They deserved to die for their idiocy.

One thing he noted was that the civilians ignored Wu Zhao as if he didn't exist. It was because he had kept his eyes closed the whole time. This proved that the Anomaly couldn't touch anyone who didn't look at it with the naked eye.

After all, he was technically "seeing" with his demonic thought, but he was fine as well.

"Steward Wu, those guys are already dead. Just come back inside."

Wu Zhao had his eyes closed, so he didn't know what had happened to the three warriors. He was thinking if there was still a chance to save them when Ye Qing's voice abruptly appeared inside his head.

This startled Wu Zhao as a matter of course, but he quickly realized that a powerful warrior was probably speaking to him. He saluted the air, let out a sigh, and began to walk back to his room.

It was at this moment a girl about seven or eight years old suddenly rushed out of another room. She was chasing a cat while crying, "Don't run, White! Don't run!"

Unfortunately, the girl's room was close to the deck. By the time Wu Zhao realized what just happened, the girl had already gotten on the deck.

“Dammit!”

Wu Zhao didn’t think twice. He immediately ran up to the girl, caught her, and attempted to rush back into his room.

The next moment, Wu Zhao froze in his tracks, and an unspeakable horror paralyzed him from the inside out. He couldn’t move, but he could feel a chill slowly but surely approaching him from behind.

Wu Zhao never opened his eyes, but the same couldn’t be said for the girl in his arms. It would appear that being too close to someone who saw the Anomaly put them under its effects as well.

The girl immediately burst out crying when she saw the civilians stepping toward her with maddened grins on their faces. It truly was a sick Anomaly considering that the warriors from before couldn’t even make a sound, and yet it allowed the girl to cry to her heart’s content. Strangely, no sound could be heard even though the girl was clearly crying.

Meanwhile, anxious noises were coming out of the room where the girl was. It was most likely the girl’s parents realizing that she was gone and getting ready to look for her.

“Dammit. What a pain!” Ye Qing sighed deeply. He could leave the three warriors to die, but how could he allow the same fate to befall Wu Zhao and the little girl?

He immediately detached a wisp of demonic thought and froze the girl’s parents in place. It would not do for them to muck up the situation even more than it already was. Then, he tapped the space in front of him and let loose a ripple of demonic thought that popped the civilians walking toward Wu Zhao and the girl like bubbles.

Unfortunately and unsurprisingly, Ye Qing’s resistance seemed to anger the Anomaly. The blood red waters of the Luo Shui River began boiling ominously as the faces of countless children slowly rose to the surface.

Soon, the entire river was covered in countless faces. They almost looked like lotus leaves floating on the river.

A child’s face should be the most innocent, pure and bright face in the world, but the ones floating on the river were utterly warped by resentment, fury and hatred. The already sinister atmosphere grew even more sinister than before.

Tap!

Suddenly, a tapping sound that almost sounded like someone tapping a table with their finger appeared. All the evils and anomalies shrouding the boat abruptly melted like snow.

At the same time, the children’s faces grew even more distorted than before.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh...

The boat suddenly began wobbling unsteadily like it was experiencing a massive tidal wave. The river of blood also surged all the way to the sky. By the time the waters fell back into the river, an absolutely terrifying-looking dragon was towering over the boat.

The dragon was unbelievably huge, but strangely, its body was covered in the faces of children. More accurately, the dragon itself was made from the bodies of countless children. The faces Ye Qing saw earlier was but a small, small portion of the dragon's body.

"To be eaten by the evil dragon when you were still alive, and to become its body even in death. How terrible."

Sympathy flickered in Ye Qing's eyes before he condensed his demonic thought into a saber. Then, he sent a diagonal slash at the dragon. Red lotuses immediately fell from the sky and filled the entire Luo Shui River.

"Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art"

Wisps of hellfire began appearing on the dragon's body. they swiftly grew in size before joining together to form a massive inferno. The faces on its body grew increasingly contorted as bloodcurdling screams filled the air.

The hellfire kept burning and purifying the sins of the dragon. The children's faces gradually turned kind and peaceful as well.

Ye Qing didn't relax, however. This Anomaly had existed for at least a hundred years. If it was this easy to destroy it, the Pacification Bureau would've handled it ages ago.

As expected, the dragon's resentment and evil returned almost as soon as the hellfire disappeared completely. The children's faces turned savage and murderous once more.

Thankfully, Ye Qing knew this was going to happen. This was why he commanded the Boundless Mara Buddha to protect the boat with its Buddhist powers and push it forward as quickly as possible.

"Uwah! Uwaaaah! UWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

Suddenly, all the faces on the dragon's body let out a loud, ear-piercing cry. It overflowed with evil and distorting power. As the man bearing the brunt of the attack, Ye Qing felt like someone had taken a hammer to his head.

The good news was that the evil power was absorbed by his demonic lotus as soon as it entered his headspace. Painful it might be, it was only strengthening his demonic thought.

The bad news was that the dragon was chasing after the boat.

Chapter 322: Lei Martial School

"Palm Thunder!"

Ye Qing was going to use the "Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art" a second time when suddenly, a cry interrupted his attack. The next moment, a massive palm carrying a pool of pure lightning at the center appeared in the sky before flipping downward on the evil dragon. Massive pillars of lightning immediately shot toward the evil dragon with seemingly enough power to disintegrate it into atoms.

In reality, the lightning failed to do any damage to the dragon whatsoever. In fact, it only managed to pin down the dragon for a few breaths.

A few breaths was exactly what the boat needed though. It left Dragon Sacrifice Bay right before the dragon would shake off the lighting shackles, and the next second, the dragon, the insane villagers, the river of blood and more all disappeared into thin air. Moonlight shone down from the sky and washed away all the horror like a ray of cleansing light. It was as if everything that happened before was a dream. Just, a dream.

“Phew... we’re saved,” Wu Zhao let out a huge sigh of relief when he sensed the obvious change in the air. His mouth was dry, and his entire body was drenched in cold sweat. He then recalled something and called out in a hurry, “Thank you for saving my life, senior.”

He didn’t know who was the one who saved him, he had no doubt that he would’ve died a most horrifying death if not for the lotus flowers and the palm thunder.

He had crossed the Dragon Sacrifice Bay many times during the night, but this was easily the closest he had ever come to death. It was terrifying to say the least.

Wu Zhao felt a little disappointed when he waited for a moment but didn’t hear a response. However, he didn’t dare to urge his benefactor to show up. “This junior regrets the fact that he cannot thank you in person, but he will forever remember this favor. Thank you again, senior.”

“Uuu... daddy, mommy. I want daddy! I want mommy! Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

It was at this moment the girl suddenly burst into a full-throated cry and jolted Wu Zhao out of his reverie. He hurriedly consoled the little girl, “It’s fine, everything’s fine now. Uncle will take you to daddy and mommy immediately, alright?” Then, he strode straight toward her parent’s room.

Inside the room, Ye Qing shifted his attention away from the duo as soon as he was sure that everything was back to normal. Then, he traced the vestiges of energies in the air toward the person who helped him earlier.

What surprised him was that the person who created that pool of lightning that resembled the judgment of the heavens... was just a young, small Taoist.

The Taoist looked to be fifteen or sixteen years old at most. He was wearing a Taoist robe, and his hair was tied in a Taoist hair bun. His lips were a healthy red, and his teeth were white. He was literally just a kid.

The young Taoist’s cultivation wasn’t poor at all despite his age, however. He was a middle-stage Spirit Purifier and technically stronger than Ye Qing.

Right now, the young Taoist was sitting cross-legged on his bed with a blush on his face. He looked like he wanted to say something but was bogged down by deep hesitation. It was cute and amusing.

This might be the first time I’ve encountered such a timid jianghu warrior, Ye Qing thought in amusement. He could tell that the young Taoist wanted to greet him, but because he was introverted, timid and hesitant, his greeting ultimately died in his throat.

So, Ye Qing took the initiative and greeted him first, “Thank you for helping me earlier, brother!”

"It's fine, it's fine, I didn't really do much." The young Taoist's expression visibly brightened when he heard Ye Qing's mental voice. "I er... My name is Qi Xuanyun. May I know your name, brother?"

Ye Qing smiled. "My name is Joyless Ye. Pleased to make your acquaintance, Brother Qi."

The young Taoist replied meekly, "Hello, Brother Ye."

"It's a little late, so let's speak tomorrow, shall we?" Ye Qing suggested.

"Oh. Sure!" Qi Xuanyun nodded happily. He couldn't possibly know that Ye Qing could see him through his demonic thought, so who was he nodding to?

Ye Qing's amusement grew as he withdrew his demonic thought and left Wu Zhao's room. But instead of returning to his room, he went to Chu Nianjiu's room. Lin Yuhuai was present as well.

"Did you challenge the Anomaly, Joyless?!" Chu Nianjiu asked concernedly, "Are you fine?"

"I'm fine," Ye Qing replied easily as he poured a cup of wine for himself, "but it was dicier than I thought it would be. That Anomaly is very strong and highly dangerous."

Lin Yuhuai agreed, "I can see that. In the Pacification Bureau, the Anomaly of Dragon Sacrifice Bay is only classified as a Hatred-class Anomaly because it cannot harm you if you don't look at it. But if you do look at it, then its danger level would increase drastically."

"It is truly incredible that you are able to rescue the steward and the girl from the Anomaly."

"Haha. It's nothing," Ye Qing replied humbly.

"Oh right, who was the person who helped you just now?" Chu Nianjiu asked.

Ye Qing answered, "A young Taoist named Qi Xuanyun."

Lin Yuhuai and Chu Nianjiu exchanged a glance with each other before shaking their heads. "Qi Xuanyun? We've never heard of it."

Chu Nianjiu waved his hand and said, "Well, it doesn't matter. Head back to your rooms and catch some rest. We will reach Feng Yang first thing in the morning, and we need to pay Headmaster Lei a visit and congratulate him on his birthday."

"That's true. We'll see you tomorrow then." Ye Qing and Lin Yuhuai nodded before taking their leave.

After the duo was gone, Chu Nianjiu let out a sigh of relief. Had he not chased away Joyless, that damned boozier, he most likely would've found an excuse to engorge himself on his jar of high quality Plum Blossom Brew. *Thank goodness I'm so smart*, he thought to himself.

He was wrong. As soon as he glanced at the table, he realized that his Plum Blossom Brew was nowhere to be seen.

“Joyless!” Chu Nianjiu nearly threw up blood right there and then. In the end, he wasn’t save his precious wine from a certain bastard’s gullet!

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The next day early morning, the boat arrived safely at the ferry point outside Feng Yang. As the trio were getting off the boat, Ye Qing saw a young Taoist carrying a wooden sword behind his back stepping off the boat before them. He drew his companions’ attention and pointed, “That’s the guy who helped me last night, Qi Xuanyun.”

“It’s him? He’s so young!” Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai examined the young Taoist. “His cultivation is higher than ours though. It’s obvious that he hails from a prestigious clan or sect.”

The young Taoist sensed their gazes and turned around to look at them. Since the trio meant him no harm, they nodded at the young Taoist and shot him a polite smile.

However, the young Taoist seemed to be even more inexperienced in social situations than Ye Qing thought. He blushed like an apple, turned away, and slipped into the crowd like a fish in water. He was using some sort of movement art that allowed him to navigate the traffic smoothly without bothering anyone.

“Are we that scary?” Chu Nianjiu was confused by the young Taoist’s reaction.

“It’s not us, it’s you.” Ye Qing said seriously, “You have the ugliest mug of the three of us.”

“Excuse me?”

Chu Nianjiu looked to Lin Yuhuai for support, but the talisman master simply gave him a pat on the shoulder and said, “I’m sorry, but you *are* the ugliest of the three of us.”

Chu Nianjiu: “...” *I would totally dunk their heads in the river and wash their eyes if it wasn’t for the fact that I can’t subdue either of them...*

The trio walked very quickly. It wasn’t long before they reached the Lei Martial School.

The headmaster of the Lei Martial School was called Lei Laohu[ref]Laohu is Tiger.[ref], and he was a good friend of Gu Suitang. Today was Lei Laohu’s fiftieth birthday, so Gu Suitang asked them to visit his friend and give him his congratulations while they were passing through Feng Yang.

The trio were treated to a shocking sight when they arrived at the Lei Martial School, however. It was because the building had burned down to rubble. They saw broken walls, charred wood, and patches of dark red that could only be blood on the ground. They could even smell some soot from the rubble, which meant that it hadn’t been too long since the place burned down.

“Is this the Lei Martial School?” Chu Nianjiu asked hesitantly.

“I think so. This is definitely the address,” replied Ye Qing, though he himself looked mired with uncertainty.

According to Gu Suitang, Lei Laohu was a late-stage Spirit Purifier and a fairly famous person in Feng Yang thanks to his martial school. What the fuck happened here?

It was at this moment a middle-aged woman passing through the area called out to them in a hushed voice, “Boys, boys! What are you doing over there? Come here quickly!”

The trio obliged while asking, “What’s wrong, auntie?”

The middle-aged woman grabbed Ye Qing’s hand and pulled him to the side. It was only then she said in a low voice, “This place is unsafe. It’s haunted, you see!”

“Haunted?” Ye Qing said in confusion before shooting a question, “Is this the Lei Martial School, auntie?”

“But of course!” The middle-aged woman replied before jumping backward all of a sudden. It seemed that she finally realized that she was addressing three strangers; three strangers who could very well be behind whatever befell the Lei Martial School. “Wait, who are you people?”

“We’re not bad people, auntie.” Ye Qing explained, “Our senior is a friend of Headmaster Lei, Lei Laohu, and we came from Luo Shui to congratulate him on his birthday. But what on earth happened here?”

“Oh, I see.” The middle-aged woman patted her chest and sighed in relief. “Last night, a big fire suddenly broke out in Lei Martial School and burned down the entire place.”

“A big fire?” Ye Qing pressed, “Where are the survivors?”

“Shh! Don’t speak so loudly!” The middle-aged woman glanced left and right as if afraid that someone might eavesdrop on the conversation. “There are no survivors. Everyone was burned to death.”

“What? That can’t be right.” Chu Nianjiu frowned deeply. “Headmaster Lei had to have survived, right?”

“Unfortunately, no. Headmaster Lei’s whole family including his thirty or so disciples all burned to death. It was terrible. I heard that the bodies were burned so badly that it took the government a *lot* of effort to identify them.” The middle-aged woman looked both afraid and excited at the same time.

Ye Qing mulled over the information as he asked, “What is the government’s verdict regarding this fire?”

The middle-aged woman rolled her eyes at him. “What kind of question is that? Why would a lowly civilian like me know what the government is thinking?”

“That’s true.” Ye Qing rubbed his nose.

The middle-aged woman suddenly moved closer to Ye Qing and said in a hushed voice, “But if you ask me, I think that the people of the Lei Martial School were murdered.”

“Oh? Why do you think that?” Chu Nianjiu asked innocently.

The middle-aged woman answered matter-of-factly, “Isn’t it obvious? Headmaster Lei is a powerful warrior. How could he possibly die from a simple fire? Even if the fire was bigger than expected, he could’ve easily escaped on his own, couldn’t he? Someone must have killed Headmaster Lei and the others before burning the place to eliminate all the evidence.”

Chu Nianjiu chuckled. “You’re so smart, auntie.”

The middle-aged woman smirked. “I’m aware. That’s how it’s written in the books, isn’t it? Boy, I can tell that you’re not a scholar.”

Chu I-am-not-a-scholar Nianjiu replied, “You’re right.”

“Of course I’m right!” The middle-aged woman declared proudly.

Ye Qing asked another question, “You mentioned that the place was haunted, auntie. What do you mean by that?”

The middle-aged woman explained in an enigmatic tone, “You don’t know? Ever since the Lei Martial School burned down, everyone who shared some relations with the Lei Martial School such as Headmaster Lei’s friends, the disciples who weren’t present during the fire and so on all passed away for one reason or another. It’s obvious that Headmaster Lei’s vengeful soul is searching for his murderer.”

Ye Qing narrowed his eyes slightly. “Are you suggesting that one of Headmaster Lei’s friends or disciples burned down the Lei Martial School, auntie?”

Chapter 323: Conflict On The Streets

“But of course! Headmaster Lei’s disciples and friends must have killed him for his wealth. That is why Headmaster Lei’s vengeful spirit is haunting them and seeking revenge!” The middle-aged woman declared with absolute certainty.

“Makes sense. You’re quite the investigator, aren’t you auntie?” Ye Qing clapped encouragingly.

“And you’re a discerning man, boy! I can tell you’re a scholar!” The auntie looked incredibly happy with the praise. “Anyway, I need to leave for the market now. If you would listen to my advice, leave this place before Headmaster Lei’s vengeful soul haunts you!”

Ye Qing replied smilingly, “Thank you for the warning, auntie.”

After the middle-aged woman was gone, Chu Nianjiu looked at his companions and asked, “What do you guys think?”

Lin Yuhuai answered, “Headmaster Lei and the rest of the victims must have been killed by someone. The auntie is right on the mark about this. But the haunting? That’s just a baseless rumor, though I suspect that it’s spread by the real killers to conceal their involvement.”

“I’m of the same opinion,” Ye Qing echoed in agreement.

“What do we do now?” Chu Nianjiu asked.

Ye Qing thought for a second before answering, “We don’t need to worry about this. Unless everyone in the Feng Yang administration division is an idiot, they should know that Headmaster Lei was murdered as well. I don’t think our presence is going to help the investigation much, so I think we should just leave this case to the Feng Yang government and Chief Gu to handle!”

Chu Nianjiu shrugged. “Makes sense. We still need to go to Tian Yong. We can’t afford to waste time here.”

“I agree. I’ll send a message to Chief Gu later. I have no doubt he’ll find out Headmaster Lei’s murderer one way or another.” Lin Yuhuai nodded.

“Alright. Let’s stop wasting time and resume our journey,” Ye Qing said.

The trio was going to leave the city after walking away from Lei Martial School. When they set foot on a main street, they discovered that it was blocked by a massive throng of people.

“What’s going on, brother?” Ye Qing grabbed a guy and asked.

“Someone is challenging Feng Yang Gentleman... I think,” he answered uncertainly.

“Someone is *definitely* challenging Feng Yang Gentleman,” A guy at the front turned back and said.

“Wow, who are they? In any case, they must be suicidal. Feng Yang Gentleman is a genius whose talent was spotted by an elder of Purity Sword not long ago. He’s now a named disciple.”

“Really? That’s quite impressive.”

“Feng Yang Gentleman? Who’s that?” Ye Qing looked at Chu Nianjiu.

“Duanmu Yu, Feng Yang Gentleman, hails from the Duanmu Clan of Feng Yang. Due to his exceptional talent, he was recruited as an inner disciple by a major sect in Feng Yang, the Rainmaker. Since he embarked on the path of martial arts, he had never experienced defeat in Feng Yang. He is without a doubt the strongest warrior of his age in Feng Yang, which is why they call him Feng Yang Gentleman.”

Chu Nianjiu sipped his wine after he finished narrating Duanmu Yu’s achievements. Despite calling the youngster the strongest warrior of his age in Feng Yang, he didn’t seem concerned in the slightest.

“Not long ago, an elder from Purity Sword had purposely come to Feng Yang to recruit him as a named disciple. He even praised the guy claiming that he had the mark of a qilin on him,” Lin Yuhuai added.

“Sounds impressive,” Ye Qing commented while rubbing his nose.

“What do you mean ‘sound’? Our Feng Yang Gentleman is the greatest!” A beautiful woman in her twenties frowned slightly when she heard Ye Qing’s remark.

“Yeah! My Feng Yang Gentleman is the best!”

“He’s not yours, you slime! He’s mine!”

“No, he’s mine! Get away from him, you thots!”

The group of women began tearing into each other. It was a riot to put it mildly. Before a conclusion could be reached though, a roar suddenly drew everyone’s attention. “You don’t even have a bush down your crack yet, you *children*! Feng Yang Gentleman is mine!”

The roar came from a tall, broad woman who reminded Ye Qing of a barn wall. Despite being in her forties or fifties, her roar easily overpowered the girls’ voices and some more.

When the woman noticed that everyone in the vicinity was looking at her, she immediately put her hands on her waist and threatened, “What are you looking at? Never seen a beautiful woman in your life?”

Everyone quietly turned away and pretended she didn’t exist. *You win.*

“Holy shit, just how popular is this Feng Yang Gentleman with the girls?” Ye Qing rubbed his nose.

The guy from before harrumphed in displeasure, “Hmph! He’s a little more handsome than most, but he lacks the rugged maturity of a true man! I just don’t understand what these girls see in him.”

“What did you just say? Did you just slander my Feng Yang?!”

“Yeah, yeah! Feng Yang Gentleman is a handsome, scholarly man you’ll never compare to!”

“Don’t you dare criticize our baby!”

Just a moment ago, the girls were tearing into each other like they were sworn enemies. Now, they were all united against the guy who slandered their idol.

The giant woman from before chimed in, “Indeed. You claim my Feng Yang Gentleman is immature, but why don’t you take a look at yourself? You’re black as coal and ugly as sin. You are mature, you’re so mature I can smell the overripeness all the way from here. Now get out of the way and stop blocking my view.”

She shoved the guy out of her way after saying her piece. Then, she bulldozed her way through the crowd all the way to the front. No one could stop her.

The poor guy exchanged a glance with Ye Qing, and they both wiped the cold sweat on their forehead. A fangirl was already unstoppable, but a fanwoman as broad as the flat side of a barn? Only someone with a death wish would dare to stand in her way.

“Let’s go check out the fight.”

Even Lin Yuhuai would rather be anywhere but near these thirsty, thirsty women, so he leaped onto a nearby rooftop to avoid them. Chu Nianjiu and Ye Qing did the same thing and quickly realized that the rooftops were covered in people as well.

“Huh? It’s that young Taoist!” Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise when he saw the two men standing at the center of the crowd. He wasn’t expecting the young Taoist who called himself Qi Xuanyun to be the one challenging Feng Yang Gentleman.

Standing on the opposite side of the young Taoist was a tall, handsome man wearing a moon white-colored robe. He looked to be twenty three or four years old. He had to be Feng Yang Gentleman, Duanmu Yu.

“A middle-stage Spirit Purifier? I see why he’s considered the number one young warrior in Feng Yang,” Ye Qing commented while leaning against the eaves and sipping his wine.

“You first, young Reverend.”

On the street, Duanmu Yu extended a hand right before a cool breeze blew past him and fluttered his clothes, giving him a refined and picturesque appearance.

“Oh my heavens! He’s so handsome!”

“How graceful! How elegant!”

“He’s like a celestial from the heavens! I’m swooning!”

“That little Taoist is pretty cute as well. Look at him blushing like a kid. I just want to pinch his cheeks.”

The crowd couldn’t stop cheering for a time.

“Al... Alright. I’m going to make my move now,” the young Taoist mumbled with reddened cheeks.

The next moment, the young Taoist pressed his index finger and middle finger together and pointed toward the sky.

“Command: Lightning!”

Suddenly, a bolt of purple lightning the size of a human’s arm descended toward Duanmu Yu. It was so fast that it reached the Spirit Purifier’s head in just the blink of an eye.

Surprise flickered in Duanmu Yu’s eyes. He wasn’t anticipating the young Taoist’s purple lightning to be this quick either. Realizing that his opponent wasn’t someone he could underestimate, he immediately raised his left arm and summoned a whirlpool of force above his head.

The purple lightning disappeared without a trace as soon as it struck the whirlpool. It looked like it didn’t do anything at all.

“Impressive! It is clear that Feng Yang Gentleman has mastered the essence of the Rainmaker Palm! How impressive!” A refined-looking scholar on the rooftop praised.

“Impressive! That lightning attack looks weak, but it contains an unbelievable amount of power! How impressive!” Ye Qing complimented the young Taoist in the exact same tone.

The scholar immediately glared at Ye Qing. *Is that a challenge? And what’s so impressive about that lightning anyway? Didn’t you see Duanmu Yu absorbing it like nothing? He has eyes, but he can’t see Mount Tai!*

The scholar was just about to taunt Ye Qing when suddenly, Duanmu Yu’s relaxed expression morphed into shock. The next moment, the whirlpool he conjured with his palm force disintegrated and scattered purple lightning everywhere.

The purple lightning came and went quickly, but the damage it did could only be described as permanent. One second ago, Duanmu Yu was still an elegant gentleman. Now, his clothes had become ashen, his hair was standing like a porcupine’s quills, and he was smoking like he was on fire.

The uproarious cheers abruptly disappeared into nothing. Even the crowd suddenly froze as if someone had immobilized them with a spell.

Where am I?

What happened?

What did I just see?

For a time, no one could process what they just saw. Then, the young Taoist said seriously as if he was displeased with Duanmu Yu’s performance, “Can you please be a little more serious, Feng Yang Gentleman? This is a duel.”

Duanmu Yu’s expression turned ugly as something flinty flickered in his eyes. His tone was casual and relaxed, however. “You are right, young Reverend. I shan’t take you lightly any longer.”

“Phew! I knew there’s no way Feng Yang Gentleman would fail to block a single lightning bolt. He was just giving the little guy a handicap!”

“But of course! There’s no way Feng Yang Gentleman could fight such a cute little guy seriously, could he?”

“True. But the little guy has proven his worth, and now Feng Yang Gentleman is about to turn serious.”

The spectators thought they figured out the truth and voiced their opinions out loud, not knowing that Duanmu Yu was just barely keeping himself from reacting to them. He was lucky he was too blackened for them to spot the deep blush on his cheeks right now.

“Come, my sword!” Duanmu Yu called out, and a sword flew out of a nearby restaurant and fell into his grip, ringing.

“This sword is called Rainmaker. Be careful now, young Reverend.”

The next moment, Duanmu Yu thrust his sword forward and fired droplets of light at the young Taoist. It was similar to a downpour, but one that was coming from every direction. Everyone felt a chill when they saw the attack.

“Hahaha! That's one of the techniques of the Rainmaker Sword Art, the Rainmaker Sword Will. Judging from how his sword qi is pouring like the rain, it is clear that Feng Yang Gentleman has mastered the technique. Is there anyone who could avoid a downpour?”

This time, the scholar was staring at Ye Qing directly while shouting his commentary. Ye Qing ignored him though. He continued to sip his wine as if he couldn't hear the guy.

The scholar thought that Ye Qing was conceding defeat and became even more arrogant. “That Taoist is going to lose for sure.”

Back on the street, the young Taoist pointed his finger at the incoming sword qi and cried, “Command: Five Lightning!”

Rumble!

The clouds gathered, and five divine lightning of differing colors—red, blue, black, purple and white—shot toward the sword qi like massive serpents. As the rain of sword qi clashed against the lightning bolts, the limestone floor cracked and gained countless blade marks and scorch marks.

“The five-colored lightning are divine, potent, and fierce like a dragon. Can rain stop a dragon? I think not.” Ye Qing beamed.

“Hmph! Dragon my ass! More like tiny snakes! Like some piss poor lightning can punch through Feng Yang Gentleman's technique!” The scholar retorted in disdain.

As if on cue, the five-colored lightning joined into one and transformed into a massive dragon. They easily annihilated the sword qi headed their way, crushed the limestone floor underfoot, and flew straight toward Duanmu Yu.

A lightning dragon rises from the street, and no wind and rain could possibly trap it.

Chapter 324: One Punch Down

Growing a few sizes did not impede the lightning bolt's speed in the slightest. It was right in front of Duanmu Yu in just the blink of an eye.

Stunned, the Spirit Purifier stabbed his sword into the ground and gathered his sword qi in front of his chest. As the lightning dragon approached, the sword started to bend, and the ground beneath Duanmu Yu's feet began crumbling bit by bit. When the dragon was almost one meter away from him, the sword was bent so badly it was a miracle it hadn't snapped.

“Rise!” Duanmu Yun growled as he slapped the flat side of the sword with his left hand. The sword instantly straightened and pushed the lightning dragon away from him.

At the same time, the ground beneath Duanmu Yu's feet exploded as he rushed toward the young Taoist. By now, he had come to realize that the young Taoist was an expert in lightning arts. If he continued to fight him at long range, he was most likely going to be the loser of this battle.

The only way he could win was to close the distance.

"Beautiful! What a beautiful 'Lifting A River'! His sword qi truly is unparalleled!" The scholar shot Ye Qing a taunting look. "And someone said the rain can't stop the dragon!"

"This is the second move," Ye Qing replied indifferently.

"What?" The scholar looked confused.

Ye Qing explained, "The first move is called the 'Rainmaker Sword Will', and it failed to block the lightning dragon. It took the second move, 'Lifting A River' to finally repel the dragon, so the rain can't stop the dragon after all."

"Also, the young Taoist hasn't lost a single exchange yet. Are you sure your eyes are working alright?"

"Er..." The scholar turned red, but he couldn't refute Ye Qing's words. He could only glare at him and uttered, "So what? He's going to lose when Feng Yang Gentleman closes the distance."

"If he can close the distance, sure." Ye Qing smirked.

Seeing that Duanmu Yu was charging him, the young taoist drew a rune on his left palm with two fingers. He then cried out,

"Palm Thunder!"

A gigantic palm appeared in the air. Floating at the center of the palm was a pool of pure lightning. The next moment, the palm flipped over and poured it all on top of Duanmu Yu.

Rumble rumble rumble!

Countless silver lightning bolts slithered across the sky and toward Duanmu Yu. In response, the Spirit Purifier raised his Rainmaker Sword and hacked, slashed or thrust the lightning bolt away. He also enveloped himself in a layer of sword qi that blocked all of the lightning bolts that he failed to block.

Right now, the young Taoist looked like a god who commanded thunder and lightning. With the simple flick of the wrist, he was unleashing a furious lightning storm against the ant-like mortal who dared to challenge his authority.

Duanmu Yu looked like a tiny boat trying to cut through a storm, though to be fair, he was an extremely sturdy boat. No matter how tall and powerful the waves were, he was able to cut through all of them as he slowly but steadily got closer to the young Taoist.

The clashes of sword qi and lightning damaged much of the street as a matter of course. Fearing their lives, the spectators had long since hidden themselves inside the buildings on both sides of the street.

Thankfully, the main street was wide enough that the shockwaves of their forces hadn't hurt anyone. I'm close!

Normally, Duanmu Yu could have crossed sixty meters in a single breath. But the lightning storm pouring down from the sky was so strong that the duration was extended ten times over.

The scholar grew increasingly nervous as Duanmu Yu got closer and closer to the young Taoist. It was almost as if he was the one crossing the storm of lightning, not Duanmu YU.

When Duanmu Yu was three meters away from the young Taoist, he brought down his sword in a downward swing. A powerful wind blew, and sword qi rose from the ground between his starting position and his latest position, joining together to form the shape of a dragon. It pounced straight toward the young Taoist.

"It is against etiquette not to reciprocate a favor. Since you gave me a five-colored lightning dragon earlier, it is my turn to give you a sword qi dragon. Please accept it," Duan Muyu said with a wide smile despite his pale complexion.

Every time he took a step, he had left behind a wisp of sword qi. He had waited until he was in front of the young Taoist to finally spring his counterattack.

"What a beautiful 'Sword Qi Clears The Sky'! To reciprocate a favor indeed! As expected of Feng Yang Gentleman!" The scholar laughed boisterously before looking tauntingly at Ye Qing. "What are you going to say now, boy?"

"It's not over yet," Ye Qing replied unhurriedly.

The scholar scoffed, "Hmph! Stubborn until the bitter end."

Meanwhile, the sword qi dragon crushed the lightning clouds in the sky before descending toward the young Taoist. But instead of panicking, the young Taoist complimented the attack with bright, pure eyes, "Well met!"

Roar!

A tiger's roar abruptly erupted from the young Taoist. Then, he jumped straight toward the sword qi dragon.

"What? Is he suicidal?" The scholar exclaimed in shock, disbelief, and puzzlement. He wasn't the only one either. Anyone who knew even a bit of martial arts knew just how crazy the action was. Even an ordinary person could sense just how much power was contained within the sword qi dragon. The best way to handle it would be to avoid it altogether. Instead, the young Taoist jumped toward it like he was planning to embrace it. If this wasn't suicidal, then what was?

"What do you think, Joyless?" Chu Nianjiu glanced at Ye Qing.

"I think with my brain," Ye Qing answered with a straight face.

"Chu Nianjiu: "..."

Lin Yuhuai: "..."

"Ahem..." Ye Qing sensed the growing hostility in their gaze and hurriedly answered, "The young Taoist is going to win."

"Win? Are you dreaming, boy? I will swallow this sword of mine if that young Taoist wins," the scholar interrupted before Chu Nianjiu or Lin Yuhuai could speak.

Ye Qing smirked. "Brother, it's a bad habit to declare something absolutely until you know for certain that it's a fact. You're going to get face-slapped like this."

"Hmph! We will see," the scholar scoffed.

Unfortunately, the scholar would find that he was wrong just an instant later. The young Taoist took three steps in total as he jumped toward the sword qi dragon. The first step elicited a tiger's roar, the second step elicited a dragon's roar, and the third step manifested both tiger and dragon next to him. Both silhouettes roared at the same time.

Then, the young Taoist threw a punch. His intent permeated every corner of the sky and infused the earth with the tyranny of a tiger and a dragon, causing everyone to quake in their boots. The sword qi dragon was crushed into bits, and the young Taoist abruptly disappeared from view.

Bang!

By the time Duanmu Yu reacted, he felt a terrible pain afflicting his stomach and bending his body like a prawn. Bitter liquid spilled through his lips freely.

When he looked down, he saw a fist buried in his stomach, and when he looked up, he saw a young, innocent face staring back at him.

Duanmu Yu's mouth was overflowing with bitterness, but not because the punch had sent his gastric juice into his mouth. No, it was the taste of defeat. This was the first time ever he lost to a peer since embarking on the path of martial arts.

He never knew defeat could taste this bad.

He never knew defeat could unlock a flood of resentment he didn't know existed in him.

"I—" Duanmu Yu opened his mouth to surrender, but he suddenly felt another burst of pain behind his back. Before he knew it, the hard limestone floor on the ground came closer and closer until—

Crack!

He heard the sound of the floor breaking and his nose breaking into several pieces. Not only did he faceplant into the floor, he didn't stop until only his feet were sticking out of the ground. The pain came after the realization.

"What... what just happened?"

“How could Feng Yang Gentleman lose?”

“This cannot be possible. I must be dreaming. Hey you, slap me in the face!”

Slap!

“You actually slapped me? I’m gonna kill you, you bastard!”

Every set of eyes watching the battle were widened like saucers. They couldn’t believe that the idol they thought to be invincible would be defeated. It wasn’t a close loss or beautiful defeat either. No, it was so, so ugly.

“Feng Yang Gentleman... lost?”

On the rooftop, the scholar was just as speechless as the civilians. He was so shocked that his arrogant smile was still plastered on his face.

“What did I say? He lost.” Ye Qing smirked. “It was such an ugly loss too.”

“How... is this possible? Just how?” The scholar muttered dazedly. He still couldn’t believe that Feng Yang Gentleman would lose.

“You lost, friend. I’m waiting for you to swallow your sword.” Ye Qing grinned at him. “You can sprinkle some cumin over your sword if you’re worried it might taste bad. I have no problem with that.”

“What?” The scholar jolted back to reality as a hint of embarrassment flashed through his face. Then, he let out a cough and declared with a straight face, “I er, I don’t remember ever saying that. In fact, I’m a scholar. I would never make a bet with a ruffian like you! Hmph!”

“Anyway, I have some laundry to put away, so goodbye!”

He then jumped off the rooftop and disappeared into the crowd, giving Ye Qing no chance to react.

But Ye Qing wasn’t planning to press him in the first place. He simply stared at the direction the scholar had disappeared to with an odd glint in his eyes. “Heh...”

Back on the street, the young Taoist’s determination and bravery were suddenly replaced by panic and anxiety as if he just realized what he just did. He looked at Duanmu Yu—the guy was currently flailing his legs in an attempt to wriggle himself free—and asked worriedly, “Are you alright, Scion Duanmu?”

“Cough! Cough...” It took Duanmu Yu some time before he finally wriggled out of the hole. When he looked up at the young Taoist, his eyes were vicious and resentful. “I was going to surrender. Why did you attack me?”

“Ah! Sorry, sorry, I didn’t know!” The young Taoist blushed like an apple. “Before I left my mountain, my master told me to always incapacitate my opponents after I’ve defeated them. Otherwise, they might try to trick me.”

“In fact, I encountered a few opponents who tried to ambush me even though I’ve defeated in a duel. They’re terrible.”

“It wasn’t on purpose, really.”

“Forget it. It’s nothing.” The darkness in Duanmu Yu’s eyes disappeared after he got back to his feet. He patted away the dust on his shirt and asked nonchalantly, “I have lost. Both your lightning art and your fist art are exceptional. May I know what sect you belong to, young Reverend?”

The young Taoist answered awkwardly, “I... I don’t have a sect. I only have my master.”

Duanmu Yu’s eyes flickered. “May I know your master’s name then?”

The young Taoist answered honestly, “I’m sorry, but my master forbade me from speaking it.”

Duanmu Yu replied, “In that case, I shan’t force you to say it. Oh right, will you be participating in the Hidden Dragon Meet?”

“I will. The reason I journeyed south is to participate in the Hidden Dragon Meet,” the young Taoist answered before adding, “My master told me to.”

“Very well. I will challenge you again when the time comes. I hope you won’t find me lacking.” Duanmu Yu nodded.

“Of course not! You are always welcome to challenge me,” the young Taoist answered in a hurry.

“In that case, this is where we part ways.” Duanmu Yu saluted the young Taoist before taking his leave.

When Duanmu Yu arrived at a secluded location, he abruptly clutched his chest and spat out a mouthful of fresh blood. His complexion looked sickly pale.

“Are you alright, young master?” A shadow appeared beside him without a trace and caught his shoulder.

“I’m fine. I just took some damage to my internal organs.”

Duanmu Yu waved away the man’s concern before uttering viciously, “Dark One[1], mobilize our Dark Guards and kill that Taoist.”

Chapter 325: Road Blockers

“Are you sure, young master?” Dark One frowned.

Duanmu Yu answered, “No. One, I tried fishing information regarding his background just now. I can confirm that he isn’t from a major clan or sect, so no trouble would befall the Duanmu Clan if we kill him. Two, he’s attending the Hidden Dragon Meet. I don’t need an additional obstacle in my path. And three, he publicly shamed me before everyone. He must die for what he’s done.”

Dark One voiced his worries, "That Taoist is very strong though. Not even you are a match for him. Unless we mobilize our clan's full strength, I don't believe we are capable of killing him."

Duanmu Yu sneered. "There's no need to go that far. Martial art is but one of many ways to kill a person."

"That young Taoist might be strong, but his *jianghu* experience is quite lacking. That is why I want the Dark Guards to carry out this task. Poisoning, gu arts and curses are your forte, is it not? You should have no trouble killing him."

This time, Dark One nodded in agreement. "Your word makes sense, young master. Should I give the order now?"

"No." Duanmu Yu shook his head. "Suspicion and criticism are sure to happen if that young Taoist were to die in Feng Yang. It would damage the Duanmu Clan's reputation and cause unnecessary trouble."

"That's why he must die outside of Feng Yang. Only then can we avoid drawing suspicion."

"I see you have thought this through, young master. I shall order the Dark Guards to follow him and keep track of his movements right away," Dark One sounded impressed.

"No." Duanmu Yu shook his head again. "He is very strong. If you follow him, there's a high chance you will be discovered and be on guard."

Dark One asked, "What should we do then, young master?"

Duanmu Yu thought for a moment before answering, "There is only one road connecting Tian Yong and our city. You will leave ahead of time and lie in ambush on the road."

"Understood. I shall make the arrangements right away!" Dark One replied before melting into the shadows and vanishing.

After Dark One was gone, Duanmu Yu sneered and muttered to himself, "I must amaze everyone during the Hidden Dragon Meet. No one will stand in my way."

.....

"Have you figured out who that young Taoist is, Yuhuai?"

On a small path outside the city of Feng Yang, Ye Qing, Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai were each riding a horse and leisurely making their way toward Tian Yong.

The horses weren't real horses. They were created using Lin Yuhuai's talismans called the Horse Talisman. Not only was a horse created from the Horse Talisman as fast as an ordinary wildebeest or a Fire Qilin Horse, it didn't need to eat or drink. The flaw was that it could only function for four to six hours before it ran out of energy.

This wasn't a problem though. Lin Yuhuai was a talisman master, so creating a Horse Talisman was not a problem to him whatsoever.

After the trio was done watching the duel between the young Taoist, Qi Xuanyu and Duanmu Yu, they immediately left the city and continued toward Tian Yong.

Logically speaking, they had departed early and had more than enough time to make it to their destination. However, no one could anticipate what they might encounter on their way there. That was why it was better to depart early than late.

Lin Yuhuai answered after thinking for a moment, “Well, the lightning art he used is grand and majestic. It looks very similar to the ‘Divine Thunder of Zhengyang’ from the Zhengyang Mountain, the ‘Five True Methods of the Five Thunders’ from the Five Thunder Sect, and the ‘Five Heavenly Astral Thunder’ from the Dragon Tiger Mountain.”

“As for his fist art, it is forceful, overwhelming, and accompanied by a dragon and a tiger. It reminds me of the ‘Dragon Tiger Ruyi Fist’ from the Jade Palace, the ‘Infinite Divine Dragon Fist’ from the Demon Palace of Kunlun, and the ‘Roaring Tiger, Bellowing Dragon’ from the ‘Mountain of Mind and Heart[1]’”

“In conclusion?” Chu Nianjiu asked.

Lin Yuhuai shrugged. “In conclusion, I’m not sure.”

You said all that only to tell me that you’re not sure? Then why did you waste the breath at all?

Chu Nianjiu looked at Ye Qing next. “What do you think, Joyless?”

“With my bra—” Ye Qing abruptly cut himself off when he heard a series of pops and cracks from Chu Nianjiu’s fists. “I’m not sure either. But didn’t that young Taoist say that he belonged to no clan or sect, and that he only has one master? How is anyone supposed to guess something like that?”

“Rather than wasting time on such useless thoughts, I’d rather we focus on ourselves!”

“About what? Training?” Chu Nianjiu didn’t understand his meaning.

Ye Qing replied indifferently, “We’re being followed.”

“*What?*” Chu Nianjiu exclaimed in surprise. “Who? When? Why didn’t I sense anything?”

Lin Yuhuai exclaimed in realization, “Is it that scholar from before?”

Ye Qing turned to look at him in surprise, “You sensed him too, Brother Lin?”

Lin Yuhuai smiled genially. “No, but I know you’re not an impulsive person. During the duel, I thought it odd that you would verbally attack a random scholar for seemingly no reason whatsoever.”

“Why is that scholar following us?” Chu Nianjiu’s eyes glinted something cold. “Wait a second. Could he have something to do with Lei Laohu’s death?”

“I believe so,” Ye Qing answered.

"I'm assuming that he hasn't come alone. What is he planning?" Chu Nianjiu mumbled.

Ye Qing thought for a moment. "Do you remember what the auntie said about hauntings?"

"Hauntings?" Lin Yuhuai exclaimed in surprise, "Are you saying that they're coming to kill us?!"

According to that auntie, anyone who had ties with Lei Laohu started dying inexplicable deaths after the Lei Martial School was burned down. The woman thought it was a haunting, but it was far likelier that it was Lei Laohu's murderers tying up loose ends.

And now, those murderers had set their sights on them.

"Hah! Who would've thought they would come to us when we weren't even looking for them? Interesting!" Chu Nianjiu grinned evilly after sipping his wine. "Are they still following us, Joyless?"

"Yep. They've been following us since we left the city," Ye Qing answered.

"They are? Why couldn't I see anyone then?" Chu Nianjiu asked, puzzled. *We're both early-stage Spirit Purifiers. Your senses can't be that strong, can you?*

"That's because they're at least a hundred meters away from us. They're watching us using those birds circling above our heads."

"Hmm?" Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai looked up instinctively. As Ye Qing said, they saw a bunch of birds circling above their heads. If not for him, they wouldn't have noticed anything amiss as they looked exactly the same as an ordinary bird.

"I see. I suppose this level of caution is expected considering they managed to take out an entire martial school. Should we take action now?" Chu Nianjiu asked with a smile.

"There's no need. They will come to us themselves." Ye Qing smirked. "That scholar is just an early-stage Astral Refiner. He made contact with us earlier probably because he wanted to sound out our strength. He should've figured out that none of us are weaklings, and since there are three of us, he's probably going to round up everyone to attack us."

"That is why it's better to let them come to us. I'm sure they'll show themselves any moment now."

"Are you sure the three of us can handle all of them?" Lin Yuhuai asked worriedly.

Ye Qing replied uncaringly, "I am here. It will be fine. This is the perfect opportunity to kill them all in one fell swoop."

Chu Nianjiu: "..."

Lin Yuhuai: "..."

We suspect you're showing off, and we have your own confession as evidence.

They didn't reject Ye Qing's suggestion though. After all, they too were powerful warriors in their own right. Worst case scenario, they could simply book it and fight another day.

And so the trio pretended not to notice anything and continued forward until they arrived at a maple forest tens of kilometers away from Feng Yang. Then, they stopped in their tracks.

"Here they come."

Ye Qing looked at the mountain of gorgeous maple leaves and smiled a little. They looked as red as fire... or blood.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh...

As soon as Ye Qing said this, the maple leaves suddenly caught on fire. No, it wasn't just the leaves. The entire forest had burst into flames all of a sudden. The inferno looked hot enough to burn anything and everything into ash.

"Haha, it's not a bad illusion." Ye Qing smiled despite the sea of flames encroaching upon them. In fact, the flames couldn't even get within one meter of them.

Ye Qing snapped his fingers, and the blazing inferno abruptly froze in place. Then, it shattered like a painting that was shredded into pieces.

A muffled groan came from somewhere, and the sea of flames vanished. The maple forest came back as if it had never been burned in the first place.

"I suppose it would've been too easy," said an ancient voice.

An old man wearing a fiery red robe stepped out of the forest. He was followed by two men and a woman.

One of the two men had a cold, unfeeling face and carried at least a dozen sabers on his person. The other guy had a rough face and short hair that stood perfectly straight on his scalp like needles. His arms were wrapped in white bandages that burned a black flame.

The woman was fat, bloated, and covered in smelly pus that could only be described as disgusting. Strangely, his face looked as pretty as a painting, and the way she carried herself oozed femininity and confidence.

None of these people were weak. The old man and the woman were Spirit Purifiers, whereas the two men were Half-Step Spirit Purifiers.

"You're not too bad yourself. Creating a sea of flames with a single thought is an impressive feat, even if it's just an illusion," Ye Qing replied smilingly. "But why are you blocking our way, strangers?"

"To kill you," the short-haired man said coldly.

"Kill us?" Ye Qing pretended not to understand his hostility. "We don't know each other, do we?"

“No, we don’t.” The old man shook his head.

“Have we offended you in some way?” Ye Qing asked again.

“No, you have not.” The old man shook his head again.

“Are you after our wealth or looks then?” Ye Qing asked seriously.

The old man and the two younger men lost their composure for a second. *Sorry, but we’re not gay.*

The woman though, she shot the trio a beatific smile and flirted, “Haha, perhaps?”

“Ahem... It was a joke.” Ye Qing backpedaled immediately when he felt a pair of steely gazes drilling into his back. *Sorry, but you are far too heavy and smelly for us.*

“In conclusion, we don’t know each other, we haven’t offended you, and you’re not after our wealth or looks either. So why are you trying to kill us?” Ye Qing cocked his head as a devilish smile crossed his lips. “You aren’t sick in the head, are you?”

“Hehe. Blame the fact that you are Old Lei’s acquaintances!” The cold man grabbed a short saber and drew a bloody wound on his arm, but he couldn’t seem to feel the pain at all. “Old Lei killed our young master and our brothers and sisters. So, we’re going to bury him, his friends, and anyone who’s related to him in dust. It’s that simple.”

“I see.” Ye Qing, Lin Yuhuai and Chu Nianjiu exchanged glances with each other. They had suspected this earlier, but now they got confirmation that these people were the ones who burned down the Lei Martial School, killed everyone inside, and went after Lei Laohu’s friends and acquaintances later on.

They probably mistook them as Lei Laohu’s acquaintances when they saw them visiting the Lei Martial School on his birthday. That was why they wanted to kill them[2].

“What makes you think we’re acquaintances of Lei Laohu. Aren’t you afraid that you might have gone after the wrong people?”

“You’re not locals, and you went straight to the Lei Martial School after entering the city. Who *wouldn’t* think that you’re acquainted with Lei Laohu?” The old man said slowly, “And even if you are unaffiliated with Lei Laohu, what does it matter to us? We are the Kinnaras[3] as we would rather kill a hundred innocent people than miss our target.”

“The Kinnaras?” Ye Qing frowned. He had never heard of such a name before.

It was at this moment the woman chided the old man, “Why are you wasting your breath on them, Slave of Fire? Let us be done with this already. We still have to debrief the captain, you know? You know how short-tempered he is.”

“Kill!” The short-haired man spat exactly one word before charging forward.

Chapter 326: What A Beautiful Saber

Bang!

The short-haired man pounced forward like a panther on the hunt. He chose Ye Qing as his target because his senses told him that the smiling young man was the most dangerous of them all.

Since he was dangerous, it made sense that he should be eliminated first[1].

The short-haired man moved very quickly. By the time a sonic boom could be heard, he had already gotten close enough to Ye Qing to punch him in the head.

Ye Qing raised his right fist and blocked the incoming attack. He tried to grip the short-haired man's wrist, but the short-haired man tightened his muscles and dropped heavily to the ground.

The paper horse beneath Ye Qing's butt was shredded as a result.

As soon as he landed behind Ye Qing, the short-haired man inhaled a new breath of true qi and bent his knees slightly. Then, he shot forward even faster than before to put a hole in Ye Qing's head.

Meanwhile, the cold man tossed a pair of knives at Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai while slithering across the ground like a viper. Both men thought that the cold man was targeting them, but he suddenly changed his trajectory and pounced toward Ye Qing instead.

A moment before the fist would hit Ye Qing's head, the cold man unsheathed his saber and attacked Ye Qing's legs.

This was a pincer attack coming from two different directions by two different weapons. Their coordination was almost perfect.

Ye Qing seemed to know it was coming, however. He tilted his head slightly so that the fist barely brushed his cheek and landed on his shoulder instead. As his legs sank into the ground, the scattering debris shattered the incoming saber force and pushed the cold man away.

The short-haired man was a little caught off guard by this outcome. He knew just how heavy his fist was. Depending on where they were hit, even a Spirit Purifier would break a bone or ten if they took a solid hit. However, he felt like he was punching a boulder when his fist struck Ye Qing's shoulder. He failed to elicit any response from the young man whatsoever.

The short-haired man didn't hesitate, however. Swimming along the momentum, he raised his right hand and prepared to bash Ye Qing's head into bits.

He refused to believe that the young man's head was as hard as his shoulder.

Something unbelievable happened then. his fist had just crossed half the distance when Ye Qing's tilted head suddenly swung back in his direction. It looked like he was planning to catch his fist with his... neck?

The short-haired man felt like laughing at the absurdity of the situation. That amusement lasted until he felt his fist being caught by what felt like a pair of mountains. His momentum stopped dead, and he was unable to move even a single inch forward.

Blanching, the short-haired man channeled his force and attempted to break free. At the same time, violent, pitch black flames burst out of the white bandage.

It was at this moment the short-haired man felt a pain in his stomach. The next thing he knew, a terrifying amount of force surged into his body and broke his bones and internal organs bit by bit. Even his blood was being evaporated by a scorching hot astral qi.

He could feel his life fading from his body as he sailed through the air.

Meanwhile, the cold man had jumped back to his feet and grabbed a pair of sabers from his body. They spun wildly in his hands before he unleashed a pair of saber forces at Ye Qing.

The cold man immediately dropped his weapons after unleashing the attack. Then, he grabbed another pair of sabers and did the same thing. Another pair of saber forces sailed toward Ye Qing with enough power to topple a hill. The cold man would continue to do this fifteen times in a row until he literally had no sabers left to use.

Each saber force was just as swift, powerful, and full of intent as the last. Such was their power that the surrounding maple trees were cut down, the maple leaves were shredded into pieces long before they hit the ground, and the ground was covered in savage-looking marks.

The cold man smiled just as savagely after he had used up all of his sabers. There was also a hint of relief in his expression.

He carried a lot of sabers on his person, but in reality he only knew one and only one offensive technique: the simple cut. In fact, the saber art he learned consisted of two techniques only. The first technique was the Blade Nurturing Technique where he nurtured his saber's force and intent within its sheath. The second technique was the simple cut that slew his opponents. [2]

That was why he owned a lot of sabers despite knowing one move and one move only, and why every cut he unleashed was brimming with unstoppable power and intent.

In the past, he only needed five sabers at most to defeat his opponent. The first hit would snap their weapons, the second, third and fourth hit would destroy their protective qi and expose their body, and the fifth hit would take off their head.

But this time, he had unleashed fifteen saber forces in a row. He refused to believe his opponent could survive this.

It was at this moment he heard a strange noise. As a saber user, he instinctively knew that it was one clang, but a series of clangs that happened in such short intervals that they almost sounded like one long, odd-sounding clang. Astonishment flickered across his expression as a bad feeling hit him. *He couldn't have blocked all fifteen attacks at the same time, right?*

Right?

He knew full well just how swift his saber forces were. He was certain that no one could block all fifteen of them at the same time.

Unfortunately, the thought had just crossed his mind when his eyes suddenly widened like saucers. He saw his fifteen saber forces bouncing off in multiple directions before disappearing in a shade of crimson and a gust of wind.

When the shade of crimson disappeared, he saw Ye Qing standing where he was without a single wound on his person. Even his clothes hadn't been ruffled in the slightest. He was also holding a slightly short red saber that was as gentle and beautiful as a beauty.

The cold man had seen many sabers in the past, but he had to admit that the one he was seeing right now was the most beautiful of them all. It reminded him of passion and fire, beauty and love.

“What a beautiful saber,” he subconsciously said. But as soon as he spoke up, he suddenly realized that his voice sounded a little strange. His throat was hurting a little as well. In fact, multiple parts of his body were hurting for some reason.

He looked down and noticed that his body was covered in wounds. He had no idea when they got there, only that there were so many that he couldn’t even count them all.

It was only then he realized how weak he was. It was the feeling of his life fading from his body.

“What a swift saber,” he spoke one last time before collapsing on the ground.

“Thank you for the compliment,” Ye Qing replied with a smile on his face.

Ye Qing was wielding the Red Sleeve, of course. The saber technique he used to kill the cold man was the first technique of “Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain”, “Spring Wind”.

The spring wind was a gentle wind, coming and going without a trace. Naturally, it killed without a trace as well.

It wasn’t quite the same technique though. The original “Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain” emphasized on gentleness and ceaselessness; to be as soft and gentle as the spring wind, and to be as unending as a fine rain. But during the training process, he subconsciously added the Soulchasing Saber’s speed into the technique. And so it became what it was today.

Whoever said that the spring wind and fine rain couldn’t move as swiftly as lightning? Could not behead a man before they realized what was going on?

The old man, Slave of Fire, and the woman hadn’t anticipated this at all. It had all happened so quickly. One moment ago the duo were still attacking Ye Qing, and the next they were both dead on the ground.

There was no time to ruminate on what just happened, however. It was because Ye Qing was walking toward them. One step, and he went from being twenty meters away to less than one in the blink of an eye.

“Do it now, Gu Lady!” Slave of Fire growled. Maybe it was because he was too nervous, but his voice sounded hoarser than it should be.

The smelly pus covering Gu Lady’s body instantly burst open, and all sorts of venomous creatures crawled out of the wounds. There were venomous mosquitos, venomous spiders, venomous centipedes and more. Each and every creature carried a deadly poison in them, and their mere appearance was enough to cause the nearby plants to wither earnestly.

On the other side, Slave of Fire summoned a flame-like sword to his hand and executed a wide swing at Ye Qing. The wind howled, and the fire danced as they merged into countless Strangers and pounced toward Ye Qing.

Some of the Strangers were real, and some weren’t. Most people would have problems distinguishing between the two, much less defend themselves against the attack. It could disrupt a person’s mind as well.

Ye Qing didn't panic despite facing down a sea of flames and a tide of venomous creatures, however. Black and white astral qi circulated in harmony around him with the power to reverse even life and death. When the Strangers and the flames got close to him, they flowed harmlessly past Ye Qing almost as if they were brushed aside by an invisible hand. The flames melted the ground behind him, and the Strangers fell to the ground for seemingly no reason whatsoever.

Ye Qing alone walked amidst the sea of flames, unhindered and untouched.

"Nine Impetus of Tai Chi"

A bit of regret welled up in Ye Qing's heart. Unfortunately, he had so many martial arts he needed to train that even with the power of the Martial Tower, he just barely managed to reach the journeyman level of the "Nine Impetus of Tai Chi" before his time was up. It would be a long, long time before he incorporated it into his fighting style. Otherwise, he could've borrowed strength from the enemy and even reflected their attacks right back at them.

He had only finished dealing with one threat, however. Gu Lady's venomous creatures abruptly burst through the flames and attempted to catch him by surprise. In response, the Red Sleeve released a crimson, half-transparent wave that looked as loving as a gust of spring wind and as all-encompassing as the fine rain.

Dancing under the wind and rain was a gorgeous, red beauty. She was so beautiful that hearts could melt, and so did the tidal wave of creatures assaulting Ye Qing. As they melted, the crimson wave grew more and more distinct. An invisible, fragrant scent was also permeating from the wave.

Slave of Fire and Gu Lady inhaled the fragrant scent before they could react. Their eyes grew unfocused, and their movements slowed as if they were entranced by the gentle yet murderous saber force.

Slave of Fire was ultimately a veteran Spirit Purifier. He realized the danger at the last moment and managed to break free from its influence. However, Gu Lady was overwhelmed by the gentle force and killed just like that.

Slave of Fire let out a screech of terror and darted off like a rabbit. Unfortunately, he only made it halfway before Ye Qing tapped the space in front of him with his finger and stole his mind, his spirit, and his soul.

When the Slave of Fire collapsed on the ground, the crimson wave finally receded from view and revealed Gu Lady's charred, tattered body.

"Keep watch."

Ye Qing disappeared from view before Chu Nianjiu or Lin Yuhuai could say a word. The two Peacemakers exchanged shocked looks with each other and thought the exact same thing in their heads:

What a monster.

On the other side, the scholar who antagonized Ye Qing during the duel between the young Taoist and Duamnu Yu earlier was running for his life. He was afraid that he would follow in his companions' footsteps if he was too slow.

In fact, he hadn't underestimated the trio. That was why he had notified his four companions. He was sure that two Spirit Purifiers and two Half-Step Spirit Purifiers would be more than enough to overwhelm Ye Qing's group, but it was the other way around. Ye Qing alone had annihilated his group without so much as breaking a sweat.

Terrified, he didn't hesitate to run for his life. He needed to tell the captain what happened as soon as possible.

Unfortunately for him, he had only taken a few steps when his head suddenly felt heavy. It was as if someone had stolen his mind from his body. His eyes glazed over, and his vision abruptly turned pitch black.

Right before he fainted, he saw the young man who slew Slave of Fire and the others appearing in front of him with a small but devilish smile on his lips.

Chapter 327: The Eight Legions

"You thought you could run from me?" Ye Qing smirked as he stared at the unconscious scholar. He had attached a wisp of demonic thought on his person since the beginning. It was how he sensed him even though he was hundreds of meters away. Unless the wisp of demonic thought was destroyed, the scholar would never be able to escape his grasp.

Ye Qing picked up the scholar by the collar and turned back. A few breaths later, he appeared beside his companions and dropped the scholar on the ground.

"Why didn't you just kill them, Joyless?" Chu Nianjiu asked.

All five people were still alive despite the horrible state they were in.

"Because this isn't all of them. Didn't you hear the woman saying that they needed to debrief a captain or something?" Ye Qing answered. "We'll make them take us to their hideout so we can eliminate their whole gang."

"Makes sense." Chu Nianjiu shrugged.

Snap!

Ye Qing snapped his fingers, and all five warriors awakened slowly. They were unconscious not because their wounds were too severe, but because he had confined their minds using the "Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul".

During his time at the Martial Tower, he had focused on training his "Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul", "Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain", and the "Nine Impetus of Tai Chi". Of the three, the "Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul" received the most attention as it was one of his core martial arts. Thanks to his training, he could now tweak the strength of the martial art as he pleased. He could paralyze someone or steal their minds with a single thought.

Just now, he had stolen the minds of the five warriors, effectively robbing them of their consciousness.

“Hey, you. You’re finally awake,” Ye Qing said while leaning against a maple tree and playing with a maple leaf. “Who are you people, and where is your hideout?”

“I admit that it’s our loss this time, but you would release us if you know what’s good for you. Otherwise—ARGH!”

The cold man was sneering and in the middle of threatening Ye Qing when suddenly, he let out a bloodcurdling scream. It was because an icicle had pierced a main artery in his thigh and spilled his blood like a fountain. Before his scream could spread, Lin Yuhuai tossed out a talisman that eliminated the noise completely.

“We ask you a question, you give us an answer. That’s all we ask. Break this rule, and the next few icicles will go to your mouth,” warned Chu Nianjiu while toying with an icicle and wearing a smile that didn’t reach the eyes.

The cold man stopped talking. He could tell that Chu Nianjiu would kill him without a thought if he gave him an excuse to do so.

“Who are you people?” Slave of Fire asked.

Pssh!

The second he finished, an icicle pierced his calf.

“You—!”

Slave of Fire’s face contorted with pain and anger, but Chu Nianjiu cut him off before he could say anything, “What did I just say? We ask a question, and you give us an answer, not the other way around.”

“Don’t make me repeat myself a third time. Disobey me again, and you are dead. Get it?” asked Chu Nianjiu while slowly sweeping his gaze across the group.

The five warriors looked disgruntled, but they finally wised up and kept their mouths shut. Satisfied, Chu Nianjiu nodded and asked, “Good. Let’s start with the basics. What are your names?”

“Slave of Fire.”

“Gu Lady.”

“Fifteen Saber.”

“Mad Fist.”

“Bird Scholar.”

The five warriors answered. Fifteen Saber was the cold man’s moniker, Mad Fist was the short-haired man’s moniker, and Bird Scholar was the scholar’s moniker.

“See? You wouldn’t have suffered if you were this cooperative from the beginning, would you?” Chu Nianjiu smiled in satisfaction. “Now, who are you people?”

The five warriors exchanged glances with each other. In the end, it was their leader, Slave of Fire who spoke up, "We are the Kinnaras."

"The Kinnaras?" They had heard the name before, but they had no idea about the context.

"Have you heard of the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas?" Slave of Fire asked when he saw their confusion.

"Hmph!"

But as soon as he asked the question, an icicle pierced Bird Scholar in the arm.

"I'm the one asking the questions. You just need to tell us what we want to know. Don't give me that counter question bullshit," Chu Nianjiu said coldly.

Despite his warning, Bird Scholar couldn't help but ask as he shook with pain, "Why are you stabbing *me* when *he's* the one who asked you a question?"

Now he understood why Fifteen Saber, a hardened veteran who often cut himself with his sabers screamed as loud as he did when he got stabbed earlier. Chu Nianjiu had specifically targeted the frailest and most painful areas of their body. Just because they were warriors didn't mean they had no weak spots or were immune to pain.

It was clear that Chu Nianjiu was a master interrogator.

Chu Nianjiu sipped his wine and answered matter-of-factly, "Because I still need him to answer my questions. I'm sure you can take an icicle or two for your friend's sake. Don't worry, you won't be the only one to suffer. Every time something useless comes out of his mouth, I will put a hole in one of you people. I'm also skilled enough to turn you all into ice porcupines without you falling unconscious. It's a fun game. You can give it a try if you want to."

Are you a monster?

All five warriors shuddered when they heard this. Slave of Fire hurriedly launched into an explanation, "According to the Buddhist scriptures, eight groups of deities often seen among the audience addressed by the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. They are the Devas, the Nagas, the Yaksas, the Gandharvas, the Asuras, the Garudas, the Kimnaras and the Mahoragas[1]."

"Of the eight legions, the Devas and the Nagas' role was the most important of them all, which is why they are collectively known as the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas."

"We are the Kimnaras of the Eight Legions."

"The Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas?" Ye Qing rubbed his nose. *Why do I feel like my confusion is only growing the more I listen to them?*

Suddenly, Lin Yuhuai recalled something and exclaimed in surprise, "The Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas, the People of the Divine?"

"That's right! It is us!" A hint of pride flickered across Slave of Fire's face.

“Hmm?” Ye Qing and Chu Nianjiu turned to look at Lin Yuhuai. *Why do you know what we don’t? Why are you so smart, huh? Huh?*

Lin Yuhuai explained, “I read about them in a file regarding mysterious factions in the *jianghu*. They claim to be the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas and the People of the Divine. They believe themselves to be the descendants of gods and Buddhas and naturally superior to all other humans.”

“As the guy said, the organization is split into eight groups based on the actual Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas. Technically, the eight groups are equal in status, but in reality the Devas and the Nagas consistently wield the greatest power within the organization.”

“Very little about the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas is known. What is certain is that everyone in the faction is strong, independent, and anti-social in the sense that they only mingle among themselves. They don’t usually mingle with ‘mortals’, and they do not usually involve themselves in the *jianghu*. That is why few people are aware of their existence.”

“It looks like the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas prefer to keep a low profile, but that’s because they prefer to be the puppeteer behind the strings. In fact, they were behind many major happenings in the *jianghu*. They are mysterious, but they are anything but low profile.”

“Did I get it right?” Lin Yuhuai looked to the five warriors for confirmation.

Slave of Fire nodded. “You are correct... warrior.”

The two school dropouts[2], Ye Qing and Chu Nianjiu, nodded. In other words, they had offended someone they shouldn’t have.

“Hmph! At least one of you isn’t a complete fool. Now that you know who we are, release us while you still can!” Mad Fist declared arrogantly.

Pssh!

Five icicles abruptly pierced his arms and legs. Before he could scream out in pain, countless mini icicles the size of a needle pierced his lips and sewed his mouth shut, causing his screams to turn into muffled groans.

“That’s the third time. I told you I would sew your mouths shut if you disobey me again, but it looks like none of you actually took me seriously!”

Chu Nianjiu narrowed his eyes dangerously and swept his gaze across the group. “Do you believe me now? Or do I have to kill someone to prove a point?”

“You...!”

The group of five was furious, but they didn’t dare to say anything. It was clear that this was their final warning.

“Good. I love it when you wear that angry yet impotent look on your face,” Chu Nianjiu said smilingly while sipping his wine.

“Who are your accomplices?” Ye Qing asked.

Slave of Fire hesitated, but when he saw Chu Nianjiu twirling an icicle as if he was just waiting for him to give him an excuse to kill him, he gave in. “Our captain, the Radical Fire Captain of the Kimnaras, and a squad of thirty six Fire Guards.”

“Where are they hiding right now?” Ye Qing asked.

Slave of Fire answered, “They’re hiding at Vicious Tiger River about two point five kilometers south of here. It was occupied by a bunch of Grave Raiders until we killed them all.”

“What’s your captain’s name?”

“Huo Hao.”

“How strong is he?”

“He’s an early-stage Spirit Master.”

“What about the Fire Guards?”

“They’re all middle-stage Astral Refiners.”

“What are Huo Hao’s hobbies?”

“... Er...”

“Don’t ‘er’ me and just answer my question. Otherwise, my friend will turn you into an ice porcupine, get it?”

“I guess his hobby is drinking and beautiful women...?”

“What type of woman does he like? Fat, thin, tall, short?”

“Fat.”

“Wow! He’s a unique one, isn’t he?”

.....

Slave of Fire had given up resisting completely. He just answered whatever question Ye Qing threw at him no matter how nonsensical it was.

“Good. I can tell that you weren’t lying to me.”

Literally, he could tell. Ye Qing had been using his demonic thought to perceive his victims’ emotions this whole time. “Alright. It’s time to get serious.”

Slave of Fire: “...” *Oh, you’re aware?*

“You mentioned that the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas dislike mingling with ‘mortals’, so how did you get involved with the Lei Martial School to the point where their headmaster even killed your scion?”

Slave of Fire was silent for a moment before answering, “Two days ago, our young master drank himself silly at Phoenix Come Restaurant and got into a violent argument with Lei Laohu. It ended with Lei Laohu killing my young master and his subordinates.”

“In the Eight Legions, we believe in repaying any harm or death we take multifold. So, we took revenge for our young master and wiped out his family.”

“Is that so?” Ye Qing rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “But why don’t I believe you?”

The group of five paled a little.

“As I asked earlier, I thought the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas do not mingle with ‘mortals’, so why would you show up in the city of Feng Yang, and in such numbers no less? Speaking of which, why is your scion there? Their wine can’t possibly be that good, can it?”

Ye Qing’s eyes narrowed. “Don’t tell me that you’re here for a vacation. You must have some sort of ulterior motive.”

Slave of Fire quietly swallowed the lie he was about to give.

“Why aren’t you talking? Are you trying to come up with a lie that would fool us?” Ye Qing’s smile widened. “It better be a good one then, because we’re gonna separate you all and interrogate you in isolation. If your lies don’t match, then trust me when I say that you will regret being born in this world.”

Ye Qing waved a hand, and both Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai immediately grabbed a person each and walked a fair distance away from them. Just in case, Lin Yuhuai used a few talismans to ensure that there was absolutely no way anyone could send any sort of signal to Slave of Fire.

He’s a monster too, Slave of Fire thought with a shudder. *All three of them were monsters. Why oh why did we choose to attack them? It would’ve been fine if we just minded our own business!*

A short silence later, Slave of Fire said with a bitter voice, “It’s not that we don’t want to tell you, warriors. We just can’t.”

“Oh? And why not? Tell us.” Ye Qing smiled like a cunning fox.

Slave of Fire took a moment to choose his words. “It’s because we’ve all sworn an Oath of Devas and Nagas. If we reveal anything at all—literally anything—we would be burned by the Fire of Deva and damned for eternity.”

“If you don’t believe me, then watch.”

“We are here to—”

As if on cue, invisible flames suddenly burst out of Slave of Fire's body. Draconic roars could be heard from the flames as well. The fire didn't look or feel hot, but Ye Qing, Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai's hearts all skipped a beat when they saw it. At the same time, Slave of Fire's soul suddenly emerged a little from his mortal shell and writhed in the invisible flames as if it was being burned alive.

A few breaths later, the invisible flames vanished, and Slave of Fire's soul went back into his body. He immediately collapsed on the ground covered in sweat like he had just run a marathon.

"As you can see, the mere thought of leaking our plans nearly cost me my life. It's also the one and only warning I'll get. If I say another word, then the Fire of Deva would annihilate my soul. I would die in pain and agony."

"I'm telling you the truth, warriors. I literally cannot say what you wish to hear."

Chapter 328: I'll Let You Go

"That... sounds kinda troublesome." Ye Qing rubbed his nose as if he was troubled.

Sensing an opportunity, Slave of Fire persuaded, "Warriors, there are some things in the world that are better left unknown. Since you know who we are, you should be aware of our rules and influence as well. What happened today is just a misunderstanding, and it hasn't gotten to the point of no return. Why don't we both take a step back and make peace instead of war?"

"And how do you intend to make peace, exactly?" Ye Qing asked.

Slave of Fire hurriedly said, "It's simple. If you let us go, we swear in the name of the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas that we will never trouble you again. It would be like this conflict had never happened. What do you say?"

"Is that so?" Ye Qing rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "It sounds like a good plan, but can you actually keep your word?"

"But of course! We are the descendants of the divine, the Kimnaras. We will never go back on a promise." Slave of Fire added in a hurry, "Watch. In the name of the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas, I solemnly swear that I will never trouble you for as long as I draw breath."

"Sounds good." Ye Qing raised an eyebrow. "Okay! I trust you. You may leave."

"You are a smart man, warrior! Hahaha!" Slave of Fire exclaimed in excitement. "I promise you won't regret your decision today."

"I think so too." Ye Qing drew Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai's attention and said, "You can bring the rest over now."

After the duo hauled the prisoners over, Chu Nianjiu asked Ye Qing via sound transmission, "Are you seriously going to let them go? That they won't come back and cause us trouble later?"

“Not at all. I don’t trust a single word that comes out of his mouth.” Ye Qing shrugged nonchalantly. When Slave of Fire solemnly swore he wouldn’t trouble them just now, he could sense a sea of hatred bubbling inside the old man’s heart. He was willing to bet his pinky finger that the group would bring Huo Hao over the second they were out of sight and out of mind.

To be honest, Ye Qing would have let them go if Slave of Fire was actually sincere with his promise. He could tell from the name alone that the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas was no ordinary organization. They might prove to be more troublesome than even the Way of Taiping. He didn’t mind staying out of their way if they would stay out of his.

But they wouldn’t. Slave of Fire’s feelings made it crystal clear. In that case, there was only one thing left to do.

“Then why are we letting them go?” Chu Nianjiu frowned.

“I didn’t though?” Ye Qing shook his head.

Chu Nianjiu put two and two together. “Do you mean...”

“The language of Chu is deep and complex. It’s not my fault they didn’t clarify exactly what I mean.”

Ye Qing’s lips curled into a devilish grin as he snapped his fingers, causing the five warriors who foolishly thought that they were going to escape to freeze all of a sudden. Their eyes grew unfocused as several wisps of fog slipped into their heads.

The Fog Demon’s voice rang inside Ye Qing’s heart, “Kekeke, are you plotting something again, boy?”

“I’m not plotting anything. I’m just protecting myself,” Ye Qing mentally replied.

“Anyway, cut the bullcrap and take over them already, will you?”

“Easy peasy.” The Fog Demon let out an evil cackle.

A few breaths later, the five warriors regained their consciousness. They shook their heads a little and asked Ye Qing with eerie unison, “Kekeke... What is the plan, boy?”

“Is that... the Boundless Mara Buddha?” Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai quickly put two and two together despite their initial surprise. “Why are you controlling them with the Fog Demon, Joyless?”

Ye Qing smirked. “Nothing much. I just want to eliminate the threat by the roots, that’s all.”

.....

Vicious Tiger River was a deep river located in the middle of a mountain. Surrounded by difficult terrain, it was easy to defend but difficult to assault.

Previously, Vicious Tiger River was occupied by a group of Grave Raiders. Led by a late-stage Astral Refiner, they frequently raided traveling merchants, dug graves, and committed all sorts of crimes. The Feng Yang government had tried multiple times to annihilate them to no avail.

Now, they were all dead. Not a speck of them was left behind in this world—literally, the Radical Fire Captain had burned them all into dust.

Huo Hao, Radical Fire Captain of the Kimnaras was a tall, muscular man with a rugged appearance. Bare-torsoed, he was currently sweating buckets in the main hall eating a lamb leg with one hand and drinking a jar of delicious wine with the other.

There was no one around him. A closer look would reveal that the temperature inside the main hall was unbelievably hot, and the furniture and pillars holding up the place were giving off a burned stench.

The source of the unnatural temperature was none other than Huo Hao. His bared torso was packed with fiery tattoos, and the tattoos were swaying back and forth almost like they were real flames. Not only that, actual flames flickered just above his skin and gave off the choking odor of sulfur. It was where the heat was coming from. Strangely, the wine jar and the lamb leg he was holding wasn't affected by the flames or the heat whatsoever.

“Captain, Slave of Fire and the others are back.”

It was at this moment a man in red robes stepped in and gave his report.

“Finally. What took them so long?” Huo Hao knitted his brow before ordering, “Send them in.”

The man left. A short while later, Slave of Fire, Fifteen Saber, Gu Lady, Mad Fist and Bird Scholar entered the main hall.

“Huh. What the hell happened to you guys?” Huo Hao took a bite and asked. It was because all five warriors looked like shit.

“The targets were stronger than expected,” Slave of Fire replied respectfully.

“What? Don't tell me you failed to take them out?” Huo Hao's tone immediately turned unfriendly. The flames grew stronger, and the temperature inside the main hall shot up by several degrees.

The five warriors subconsciously stepped away from Huo Hao while Slave of Fire explained in a hurry, “No! The targets are strong, but of course they're no match for the five of us. We just took some injuries during the fight is all.”

Huo Hao scoffed in disdain, “Hmph! You outnumbered the mortals, and you still got hurt? You've brought shame to the Kimnaras. I expect you to flagellate yourselves ten times when you return to your dwellings.”

“As you command.” No one dared to reject the punishment.

Huo Hao gulped another mouthful of wine before asking, “Have you taken out everyone who's related to Lei Laohu?”

Slave of Fire answered, “More or less, captain.”

“Good.” A vicious, bloodthirsty smile crossed his lips. “How dare these lowly mortals murder our venerable young master. Lei Laohu should count himself lucky that we didn’t have someone who could capture his soul and burn him for eternity.”

“Continue the good work until every man and woman who’s related to Lei Laohu is dead. Let this be an example to all who would dare to challenge the Eight Legions.”

“As you command.” Slave of Fire saluted before producing a few jars of wine from his Nature’s Shell and handing it to Huo Hao. “Captain, we found these in the targets’ Nature’s Shell. They’re all well-aged, high-quality brews. Please accept it.”

“Oh? I appreciate the gesture, Slave of Fire!” Huo Hao’s eyes lit up. The moment he accepted the gift, he immediately removed the seal and poured its contents down his throat.

“Gulp... Gulp...”

In just a few breaths, the whole jar of wine had entered his stomach.

“Rich, strong, flavorful! Now this is what I call fine wine!” Huo Hao complimented before grabbing the next jar and gulping down its contents as well. It took him only a moment to finish all three jars of wine.

Huo Hao’s complexion didn’t change, however. When a warrior had reached a certain level, what would’ve killed an ordinary human wouldn’t faze them in the slightest. It was at this moment Huo Hao noticed that the five warriors hadn’t left yet. He asked with a frown, “Why are you guys still here?” Slave of Fire slowly approached Huo Hao with an odd smile on his face. “There is one more matter I must report to you, captain. A very important one.”

“What is it? Spill it already!” Huo Hao said impatiently.

“It’s...” Slave of Fire got closer and closer. “About... sending you to the next life!”

Pssh!

“What are you doing, Slave of Fire?”

Huo Hao roared and punched Slave of Fire in the chest, blowing a hole in it and throwing him all the way to the wall.

And why did he attack his subordinate? It was because his subordinate had stabbed his stomach with a dagger!

Before Huo Hao’s voice even finished speaking, Gu Lady, Fifteen Saber, Mad Fist and Bird Scholar pounced toward Huo Hao as well.

“Have you all gone mad?” Huo Hao’s eyes bulged with shock and anger as the fiery tattoos on his torso suddenly turned bright red. A terrific wave of heat washed out of him and knocked the four warriors away, burning them from head to toe.

The four warriors couldn't seem to feel their wounds, however. Even Slave of Fire had climbed back to his feet to attack Huo Hao again.

"You are courting death!" Huo Hao roared with fury as the flames joined together to form a massive vortex. It caught the five warriors before they could even approach him and burned them into dust.

"Pwack!"

However, Huo Hao abruptly threw up a mouthful of blood and lost control of his technique. The flame vortex scattered in every direction and burned down everything except the building itself. His stomach was hurting like someone was twisting a knife in his gut, and his vitality was in a disarray.

He looked at the blood on the floor. It was black-colored instead of red.

"Poison? Was it the wine? Not good!" Huo Hao blanched immediately. "Fire Guards!"

No one responded to his call, however.

"Shit!"

By now, Huo Hao realized that he was in deep trouble. He sucked in a deep breath, forcefully suppressed the deadly poison ravaging his insides, and rushed out of the main hall.

It was deathly silent outside the main hall, and all thirty six Fire Guards were lying dead on the floor.

"Who did this?" Huo Hao roared furiously. "How dare you attack the noble Kimnaras! Come out so I can rip you to pieces with my own hands!"

His flames burned so hot that the ground within ten meters of him had melted into lava.

"How does my wine taste, Lord Huo Hao?"

Ye Qing slowly stepped out of the darkness. He was holding an extraordinarily beautiful saber in his left hand, blade still dripping with fresh blood.

At the same time, Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai also emerged from their hiding spots from two different directions. They essentially had Huo Hao surrounded.

The three jars of wine Slave of Fire had given Huo Hao contained the deadly poison of the Blue Demon Hand. The idea occurred to him as soon as Slave of Fire told him that Huo Hao was a wine lover.

You like wine, don't you?

It'll be your last supper!

Huo Hao was a Spirit Master, and the three of them were just early-stage Spirit Purifiers. They might be far stronger than your conventional Spirit Purifier, but they still weren't confident that they could take Huo Hao on in a straight fight. One simple mistake was all it took to lose their lives.

That was why he came up with the idea of poisoning Huo Hao through Slave of Fire. It was the perfect plan as Huo Hao had no reason to suspect Slave of Fire of pulling such a stunt whatsoever.

Ideally, Huo Hao should be writhing on the floor in agony and more or less incapacitated right now. In reality, he still underestimated the vitality of a Spirit Master. The Blue Demon Hand was dozens of times stronger than what it used to be after going through a rebirth, and its poison especially was beyond deadly after it was refined with the Cold Spring of Myriad Poison. Not only could it damage a warrior's body, it now attacked the mind as well. It could easily snuff out a Spirit Purifier with an average constitution and a weak spirit.

That was why he thought that the poison should be enough to kill an unguarded Spirit Master, especially since Huo Hao downed all three jars in rapid succession. In reality, the guy easily killed his ambushers and even walked out of the grave they had prepared for him, ready to fight his killers to the death.

The poison wasn't useless though. He could clearly sense Huo Hao's energies weakening rapidly by the second.

Chapter 329: Molten Hell

"Who are you people? How dare you challenge the Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas?" Huo Hao asked while glaring at Ye Qing angrily.

"Oh? You wanna know?" Ye Qing smirked. "I don't feel like telling though!"

"Insolence!"

Huo Hao roared as the molten lava beneath his feet climbed up his feet and covered his whole body. He quickly transformed into a molten giant that was over four to five meters tall. The rapid flow of the lava caused the ground to sizzle ominously.

The next moment, Huo Hao exploded toward Ye Qing and threw out a mighty punch.

Ye Qing slipped Red Sleeve under his actual sleeve. Then, he clenched his right fist and met the Spirit Master head on.

Boom!

Two fists met, and the ground within sixty meters of the duo cracked like porcelain. Huo Hao's fist and the molten lava surrounding it exploded into bits, and even his arm was popping and cracking disturbingly at places.

Huo Hao cried out in pain and staggered backward. Every time he took a step, large globs of molten lava would drip from his body.

His attempt to put some distance between himself and Ye Qing and gather himself was futile, however. Like a phantom, Ye Qing caught up to Huo Hao and threw a second, third, fourth and many, many more punches.

For a time, it sounded like the punches would never end. Each one was as loud as a bell strike.

Huo Hao kept retreating, and Ye Qing kept advancing. When Huo Hao's back was pressed against the wall, Ye Qing landed his final punch.

BAAAANG!

A pit appeared on the solid wall behind Huo Hao's back, and cracks spread out of the edges like a spider's web. The molten lava covering his body had long since been blown apart by Ye Qing's fist force, revealing his pale angry face.

"Graaah! How dare a bunch of ants attack the noble Kinnaras! Not a speck of you would be left by the time I'm done with you!"

Huo Hao could not believe that he was being pushed back by an early-stage Spirit Purifier. Eyes bloodshot, the fiery tattoos on his body burned brightly as he let out an unearthly howl. A terrific amount of energy washed out of his body, and the ground within hundreds of meters away from him began shaking and splitting apart like spider webs. The pungent stench of sulfur rose from the cracks as something terrible was hidden underneath.

"Molten Hell"

"Get back!"

Ye Qing had jumped back as soon as Huo Hao howled like a madman. He also reminded Lin Yuhuai and Chu Nianjiu to take evasive actions.

The trio had just retreated halfway when the ground beneath their feet abruptly exploded into pieces. Gigantic fountains of lava then shot out of the cracks all the way into the air. It was like countless volcanoes erupting at the same time.

The trio dodged all over the place. No one wanted to take a faceful of lava.

When the lava reached its highest point, it poured down on the trio like a capsized basin. In the process, the lava transformed into countless ghosts and homed in on the trio. Not only that, the thick, sulfuric smoke rising from the depths burned their eyes, choked their lungs, and made them feel like they were burning in hell. There were even malicious, anomalous, mournful wails blasting away at their ears in an attempt to bend their mind and spirit to the Spirit Master's will.

Ye Qing shielded his mind with his demonic thought and punched away the ghosts flying toward him.

Chu Nianjiu surrounded himself in an icy qi that froze any and all ghosts who got within a certain range.

Lin Yuhuai threw out an innumerable number of talismans that merged into a talismanic dragon and crushed all of the ghosts into bits.

For a time, lava poured like rain, and the entire Vicious Tiger River had turned into a burning hell.

A dozen breaths later, the trio rushed out of the burning hell looking as black as soot. Such was Huo Hao's ultimate attack that no one managed to escape unscathed.

"Where's Huo Hao?" Chu Nianjiu looked back at the living purgatory with a sigh of relief and fear.

"He probably ran away." Lin Yuhuai narrowed his eyes slightly.

"He most definitely had." Ye Qing declared, "Huo Hao had never planned on fighting us to the death."

“Tsk! The guy looked arrogant, irritable and stupid, but to think he’s a coward as well.”

“The Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas may be arrogant, but they’re definitely not stupid.” Lin Yuhuai smiled. “The guy had most likely planned out everything from the beginning. If his ultimate attack is enough to kill us, then all is well. If not, then he would run away. It’s a good plan.”

“That’s not my concern right now. My concern is that we’d be in deep shit if he manages to escape!” Chu Nianjiu sipped his wine and said lazily. Strangely, he didn’t look worried in the slightest even though the risks were very real.

“Can you track Huo Hao down, Yuhuai?”

A paper crane flew out of Lin Yuhuai’s sleeve and flew a circle around the trio. It shook its head when it landed back on his shoulder almost as if it had a mind of its own.

Lin Yuhuai put away the paper crane and shook his head as well. “Unfortunately, my paper crane cannot find Huo Hao.”

“It’s up to you then, Joyless.” Chu Nianjiu looked at Ye Qing.

Ye Qing smirked. “You seem very confident in my abilities.”

“Of course I am!” Chu Nianjiu sipped his wine before answering, “After all, you’ll be the the Eight Legions’ first target if Huo Hao manages to escape.”

Ye Qing: “...” *As expected of my brother-on-the-surface.*

“Shouldn’t we get moving already?” Chu Nianjiu asked.

“It’s fine. We can afford to let him stew for a little longer.” Ye Qing smiled while staring at the molten hell in front of him.

.....

Inside a forest, Huo Hao was running for his life. Large beads of sweat were rolling down his forehead, but they were bluish black in color. In fact, Huo Hao’s face was bluish black in color, and even the air he exhaled was bluish black as well. Death was slowly but surely creeping up on him.

Huo Hao grabbed a pill from his Nature’s Shell and threw it down his gullet. For an instant, vitality returned to his complexion before it was devoured by bluish black once more.

“Dammit! What the hell is this poison?” Huo Hao cursed under his breath. He could clearly sense his bodily functions declining by the second. The poison was ravaging his vigor, his organs, his muscles, and even his mind. His consciousness was starting to blur as well.

He carried some antidotes with him, but forget eliminating the poison, they couldn’t even suppress it for a short time.

That was why he was growing weaker and weaker. He wasn’t even sure if he could escape to safety, or if the poison could be removed after that.

Huo Hao's fury and hatred burned even hotter when he thought until this point. He was so sure that this trip to Feng Yang would be a milk run, but not only did his carelessness lead to the death of his young master, he himself was teetering on death's door right now.

The good news was that his young master was just a collateral relative of the Kinnara Royals. He could still atone for his sins if he completed the mission and bring that thing back to the Kinnaras.

He was going to take out the rats who attacked the Kinnaras before he left this place, but the rats had turned out to be newborn calves[1]. Not only that, these calves were smart and strong enough to threaten him, a tiger.

"Hmph! If they hadn't exploited my blind spot and poisoned me, I could've crushed them as easily as ants!" Huo Hao growled. It was a mistake. Maybe it was because his display of anger accidentally triggered his wounds, but he couldn't help but throw up a mouthful of fresh blood.

"It's not good to get angry when you're wounded, Captain Huo!"

A playful voice suddenly rang beside his ears.

"Huh?"

Shocked, Huo Hao turned his neck to look at the speaker. The instant he did this, he caught a glimpse of something crimson and smelled something fragrant.

"You—agh—ghk..."

The crimson flash vanished, and Ye Qing stood right in front of Huo Hao. The Spirit Master's eyes bulged as he tried to speak, but he quickly discovered that he couldn't say anything at all.

Huo Hao staggered two steps away from Ye Qing as he touched his own neck. But right before his fingers would make contact, a thin, red line appeared from the left and slowly spread toward the right. When it finally reached the end, Huo Hao's head fell to the ground and rolled a circle like a ripened fruit.

"Red Sleeve is seriously a great saber." Ye Qing commented as he stared at Huo Hao's wide-eyed head. The saber slowly consumed the bloodstains covering its blade until it looked as good as new. It even gave off a whiff of something fragrant like an incorruptible beauty.

Just now, he had cut off Huo Hao's head as soon as he appeared behind Huo Hao's back. Since the blade was impossibly thin and razor sharp, the guy's head actually remained on his neck for a short time until he jolted it out of position himself.

He was incredibly satisfied with Red Sleeve's power to say the least.

Two or three breaths later, Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai arrived late. "Where did he go, Ye Qing?"

"Down here." Ye Qing moved out of the way so they could catch a full view of the body.

"You killed him?" Chu Nianjiu exclaimed in surprise.

“Er, duh? Is there a reason I should keep him alive?” Ye Qing shrugged.

“You could’ve waited for us to catch up. None of us even landed a hit on the guy, you know?”

Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai exchanged a somewhat bitter look with each other. The three of them had departed together, but Ye Qing eventually sped out of view despite their best efforts. By the time they arrived, Huo Hao was already dead.

“It feels like we’ve been doing nothing. All we did is torture a few people and kill a few underlings.”

“It doesn’t feel like it, you *have* been doing nothing. Aren’t you ashamed of yourselves?” Ye Qing joked.

“Shameless bastard.” Chu Nianjiu rolled his eyes.

“Ah, shit.” Ye Qing suddenly slapped his own head in frustration.

“What’s wrong?” Lin Yuhuai asked.

Ye Qing sighed. “I completely forgot to ask Huo Hao why the Eight Legions had shown up at Feng Yang.”

“Oh, that?” Lin Yuhuai smiled uncaringly. “The Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas is a mysterious faction. Even if we found out what they were planning, dare we involve ourselves in it? For now at least, we’re better off not knowing.”

“Anyway, let’s deal with the corpse and resume our journey, shall we?”

“You’re right.” Ye Qing nodded in agreement.

Chapter 330: The Nanke Dream

“The ‘Molten Hell Art’? It’s probably the martial art Huo Hao used earlier.”

“Pills for treating all sorts of ailments and injuries. They’re kinda trashy though.”

“Hmm? What’s this? A door?”

Inside the forest, Ye Qing was looking through Huo Hao’s Nature’s Shell after cleaning the crime scene as much as possible. It was at this moment he noticed a strange item.

The door was pocket-sized and seemingly made from bronze. Strange, twisted patterns were engraved to its double doors[1], and coiled around its frame was a black snake and a white snake. They stretched from the hinges all the way to the top, and their necks were intertwined and facing toward each other. They looked extremely lifelike.

“Hiss!”

Suddenly, the two snakes turned toward Ye Qing and stretched forward a little, hissing a little with curiosity.

“Oho! He’s a cute, sweet and delicious lad, isn’t he?” The white snake commented brightly, vertical pupils flashing with human-like intelligence and emotion.

“Yes, he is,” the black snake replied.

“Where is Huo Hao? Is he dead? Did you kill him? I knew he was a short-lived one. He looked like one of those throwaway villains who dies as soon as he runs into someone who’s even a little stronger than him.”

The white snake spoke very rapidly, though its pronunciation was extremely clear. “But you’re just a Spirit Purifier. How on earth did you kill Huo Hao? Tell us the story, boy! Did you poison him? Stab him in the back? Or seduce him with your good looks? Oh yes oh yes, you definitely seduced him with your good looks. My, I feel like swooning just thinking about it...”

The black snake simply let out a long, meaningful whistle.

Meanwhile, Ye Qing finally recovered from his shock and subconsciously tossed the double doors away from him. His expression looked wary.

The doors didn’t fall on the ground, however. It floated in the air while the white snake continued to prattle, “You’re too timid and easily startled, boy! Haven’t you heard that those great people who did great things could face even an avalanche of shit with a straight face? You’re cute, handsome, attractive and strong—”

“Just like us,” the black snake interjected.

“—But you won’t be able to achieve your full potential if you remain as you are?”

“What are you?” Ye Qing asked with a deep frown and even greater caution. He was certain that the snakes weren’t Strangers—they didn’t exude the vital signs a living being would normally exude—so they could only be Strange Artifacts.”

“As you already noticed, we’re a Strange Artifact! A sentient Strange Artifact!” The white snake admitted right away before exclaiming its surprise, “Don’t you know who we are? Aren’t you one of those robbers who came to steal us?”

“Oh my heavens! He really isn’t here for us! I’m so sad!”

“Uwu!”

The second the white snake said it was sad, the black snake immediately started weeping sorrowfully. However, its tears appeared and disappeared almost as soon as they left its eyes.

So they’re the reason Huo Hao came to Feng Yang!

Ye Qing thought as realization struck him. He was still on guard against the two snakes though.

“Wow, no sympathy at all? Not even a little? What a heartless man you are. I bet you don’t have a girlfriend!” The white snake complained when it saw that their act failed to elicit any response from Ye Qing whatsoever.

“Bachelor! Virgin! I bet you go stag wherever you go!” The black snake added mercilessly.

This time, Ye Qing’s mouth did twitch a little. *So what if I’m a bachelor and a virgin, you fucks? One more word, and I’ll spin you like a hula hoop!*

“Fine, fine, I’ll stop. Don’t glare at me like that, you’re scaring me! *Men...*” The white snake flinched, but its last word made it clear that it was anything but intimidated. “Anyway, allow me to introduce myself. My name is White Lord. You may call me Li’l White or whatever. My companion is called Black Lord. Again, you may call it whatever you want. We are the artifact spirits of these doors.”

“This Strange Artifact is called Nanke as per the Buddhist story, the Nanke Dream. Behind the doors of Nanke is a dream that lasts a hundred years, but with actual logic and structure. To put it simply, Nanke can create a dream based on its user’s wish so they may enter and experience that dream. It can be used to practice one’s martial arts and hone their strength.”

“For example, a warrior who wishes to practice a fire-type martial art would probably find a blazing hot environment when they enter the dream. A warrior who wishes to practice an ice-type martial art would find the opposite. If they wished to research and expand on an existing martial art, then Nanke would create a dream where hundreds of martial arts could be used as a reference. If they wished to practice their technique and proficiency instead, then it would create countless Strangers and or warriors for the warrior to fight. It could even be used to temper one’s mental fortitude such as creating a world full of beauty and lust to test how well you can resist it...”

“Most importantly, anything you gain inside the dream, you will gain in the real world as well.”

“Moreover, one year in Nanke is only one day in the outside world. In other words, you’re gaining extra time. Such is the Nanke Dream.”

Ye Qing was so stunned that he was speechless for a time. It was because Nanke’s ability was absolutely overpowered. Most people dreamed in their sleep, but they had no hold over their dreams. They could only go with the flow so to speak. A strong-willed *jianghu* warrior could force themselves not to dream to give themselves the best possible sleep. But to purposely use a dream to train? That was very, very difficult.

Assuming that the artifact spirits weren’t lying to him, Nanke could create dreams that specifically targeted the area he wanted to focus on. It was extraordinary to say the least. In a sense, it was on par or better than the Martial Tower itself.

The difference between the two was that the Martial Tower improved one’s cultivation in the real world. Training one day in the Martial Tower was equal to training several years outside. On the

other hand, Nanke created a dreamscape out of one's desires and subconscious where one could train for a hundred years. For example, a ten-minute cat nap in real life could be months or even years could've passed inside the dream.

One Strange Artifact was centered in reality, and the other inside a dream.

However, the white snake—White Lord—shook its head in disappointment. “That’s bitch talk, brother.”

Black Lord helpfully deciphered its companion's meaning, “It’s saying that you’re shallow and shortsighted.”

Ye Qing could barely control his facial expression. *I don't need your explanation!*

White Lord cackled. “You can use Nanke to train, but you can also use it to live all kinds of dreams. You can use it to experience what it’s like to be a rich man, a hero, an emperor, or the ruler of everything. Or you can use it to satisfy your more... baser instincts. Oh yeah...”

The black snake added suggestively, “You’re a man. You understand what we’re saying.”

Ye Qing: “...” *No, I don't. I'm just a kid.*

Assuming that White Lord was telling the truth though, then Nanke's usefulness was immeasurable. One might even say that its usefulness rivaled that of the Annon Sutra, not to mention that they complemented each other very well.

The Annon Sutra's dragon-serpent runes was a great boon in his training, but it could only be used to improve his cultivation or replenish his strength. It couldn't act as his teacher. Until he met Gu Suitang, he had to learn everything by himself.

He was lucky that he was pretty gifted and talented in martial arts. Otherwise, he could've turned into a warrior with all the power but none of the skill.

Nanke could fix this though. He no longer had to worry about not having a teacher to show him the right away and fix his mistakes, or not having enough time to grow his strength to the point where he could effectively protect himself from this world. Nanke would create a dream that would give him exactly what he needed and more.

Of course, Ye Qing kept his emotions well under wraps despite feeling like he was standing on top of the world right now. He said slowly, “That all sounds great, but what are the price and limitations?”

There was no such thing as free lunch especially when it came to Strange Artifacts. The stronger the Strange Artifact, the bigger the price one must pay.

“A good question! As you know, free breakfast, lunch or dinner don't exist in this world.” White Lord flicked its tongue as if to say it was glad that Ye Qing wasn't too stupid. “If you wish to use Nanke, then you must fulfill Black Lord and my conditions...”

“You must satisfy our demands so to speak,” Black Lord added.

White Lord explained, “Also, the following are Nanke's limitations. One, you can only use Nanke for a day. Two, once the dream is created, it cannot be controlled in any way. Three, you will leave

Nanke as soon as you die in the dream. And four, you cannot enter Nanke immediately if you are ejected from Nanke midway because you died or something. You will have to wait another day before you can use it again.”

Ye Qing fell quiet for a moment before asking, “And what are your demands?”

“Hehe. Don’t worry. They’re all simple demands that you can fulfill.”

Black Lord agreed. “They’re quite simple.”

“Such as?” Ye Qing pressed.

White Lord swayed left and right while answering, “For example, I might ask for an authentic apricot blossom brew or sweet and sour carp if I’m feeling hungry. I might ask you to sing a song or dance a tune if I’m bored. Or I might ask you to divulge some of your secrets.”

“One thing for certain, anything we ask of you is within your capabilities. For example, we wouldn’t ask you to assassinate the Emperor of Chu or something.”

“Not like you can do it even if you try,” Black Lord added.

Ye Qing nodded before asking another question, “Do I have the right to refuse your requests?”

White Lord hissed happily. “Naturally! This is a fair trade after all. We would never force you to do something you don’t want. Of course, you won’t be able to use Nanke as well, and the next time you come to us, our requests would become twice as hard to fulfill. The difficulty of our requests would keep doubling if you keep turning down our offer. Get it?”

“Finally, if you refuse our demands five times in a row, then you would have to give up one of your organs to us. Otherwise, we would... kekeke...”

“Of course, if you agree to our requests before that point, or if you gave us an organ during the fifth request, then the difficulty would reset. It’s a very humane system, isn’t it?”

“Heh...” Ye Qing chuckled but didn’t give it a reply. Nanke’s terms, conditions and limitations seemed pretty humane on the surface, but his experience was telling him that there were a lot of pitfalls. White Lord also avoided telling him what would happen if he refused their fifth request, and he was pretty sure that the answer was death!

“Boy, it’s not a good habit to ‘heh’ someone in the face,” White Lord said slowly.

“You won’t have friends if you act this way,” Black Lord finished the sentence.

Such kind words! Ye Qing sneered internally. He fell silent for a moment before asking his biggest question, “Why are you telling me these?”

“What? Aren’t *you* the one who’s asking us the questions?” White Lord exclaimed with mock exaggeration, “Oh my heavens, are you actually experiencing memory problems at your age? How pitiful!”

“Just pitiful,” Black Lord added.

“I’m sure you know what I really mean.” Ye Qing ignored their provocations. “You’re the artifact spirits of Nanke, and you’re both quite intelligent. Generally speaking, artifact spirits have their own character and preferences. For example, some would only attach themselves to a strong or fated owner. If whoever found them doesn’t meet their fancy, they would rather hide themselves and fake mundaneness.”

“With your abilities, I’m sure you could’ve pretended to be a mundane object if you wanted to. I’m just a Spirit Purifier with average strength. Why would you show yourselves to me and tell me all this?”

White Lord and Black Lord intertwined their necks and reached forward in unison. “Because we want you to be our master, duh!”

Ye Qing narrowed his eyes dangerously.