

Stranger 381

Chapter 381: Chen Ah Sheng

Shrouded Range, Chaos Heaven Mountain.

Shrouded Range was a difficult mountain range that was shrouded by fog all year long. The ordinary people wondered if there were celestials living in the mountain range, and warriors couldn't help but look at it with dread. It was how Shrouded Range got its name, and why it was considered to be a highly strategic location.

No one knew if there were actually celestials living in the Shrouded Range, just like no one knew that the Chaos Heaven Brigands had turned it into their base. More accurately, they were based at its tallest mountain, the Chaos Heaven Mountain.

Chaos Heaven Mountain didn't have a name. It was after the Chaos Heaven Brigands moved it that it got its name.

Of course, Chaos Heaven Mountain was just one of the Chaos Heaven Brigands' many bases. Even a crafty rabbit has three burrows, much less a notorious brigand group like the Chaos Heaven Brigands. In fact, Chaos Heaven Brigands had a total of six such bases.

Chen Ah Sheng loved living at Chaos Heaven Mountain. It might even be his favorite place of all the places he had been to. It was because the fog and clouds gave it the impression of a paradise-on-earth, not to mention that there were legends of celestials living in this place. When he lived here, he felt like he was one of those immortal celestials. This was why Chen Ah Sheng would spend some time here at least once every year to satisfy his vanity.

But of course, he wasn't a real celestial. He would grow old and die just like everyone else. Chen Ah Sheng was over fifty years old, but since he was a Half-Step Grandmaster, he had a lifespan of one hundred and twenty years. Technically, he wasn't even halfway until the end yet.

He was a long, long way from dying from old age, but he could die from murder very soon. It was because a prey who was lucky enough to escape his grasp some time ago was also lucky enough to obtain a champion's inheritance. He was able to enter the True Man stage and become a Grandmaster.

As a result, the tables were turned, and this prey-turned-predator was currently hunting him, the bastard who had killed his father, mother, wife, son and friends. He had to use every trick in the book to evade his pursuer and escape to Chaos Heaven Mountain, and for the moment, he was safe.

That safety was temporary, however. The only way to end this endless pursuit was to kill his pursuer. But how could he, a Half-Step Grandmaster, kill a Grandmaster?

He could rally his troops and slowly ground his enemy to death via sheer numbers, but it wasn't as good of a plan as it might sound. It wasn't that he was unwilling to make some sacrifice—he would sacrifice his whole brigand group if it meant killing his enemy. After all, he was the soul of the Chaos Heaven Brigands, not his people. So long as he was still alive, the Chaos Heaven Brigands would always rise again.

The problem was that his enemy was hardly a mindless puppet. It was entirely possible that he would run away as soon as he found the situation unfavorable, and neither Chen Ah Sheng nor his troops possessed the strength to stop him. Worse, he would have sacrificed his men for nothing.

No, the only way he could kill his opponent and end his threat once and for all was to become a Grandmaster as well. Only then would his numbers advantage actually mean something. That was why he was hiding here in Chaos Heaven Mountain. He would turn the people in the nearby village, Red Sand Village into Human Pills. Then, he would eat those pills and enter the Trueman stage in one fell swoop.

Now, the Human Pills were almost complete. Just two more days, and he would become a Grandmaster.

But today, Chen Ah Sheng wasn't happy at all. It was because he had been plagued by a faint sense of unease the whole day. He kept feeling like something bad was about to happen, but he couldn't pinpoint the source of that feeling.

Is it because of the Human Pills? He muttered to himself. He didn't think that his unease was just baseless worry. At a certain warrior, a warrior could intuit the workings of fate and perceive dangers. Some people called it the sixth or seventh sense.

In fact, when someone became a Sage and built the World Bridge, merging their mind with heaven and earth, they could even perceive someone calling their name from hundreds and hundreds of kilometers away.

Fang Wei! Chen Ah Sheng looked at the door and shouted.

Boss? A brawny man with a square face stepped in.

I want you to take some men and pay Red Sand Village a visit, Chen Ah Sheng ordered.

The Human Pills were a matter of life and death. He couldn't allow anything to go wrong.

Red Sand Village? I thought Fengsans was watching the place? You're worrying too much, boss. Fang Wei said uncaringly.

Just do as I say! Chen Ah Sheng roared. Chen Ah Sheng had a weak-sounding name, but the man himself was anything but weak. Standing at 2.3 meters tall, he was a hairy man with purplish black skin, a wide nose and a large mouth that resembled a lion's. Fang Wei was a tall, muscular adult, but he looked like a child compared to Chen Ah Sheng. That was why the entire house shook, and Fang Wei stumbled away from him with obvious terror when Chen Ah Sheng roared.

Y-Yes, boss! I'll head over immediately! Fang Wei replied in a hurry. He might be one of the Eight Vajrapanis of the Chaos Heaven Brigands, but he knew that he was barely any different from the small fries in Chen Ah Sheng's eyes. If he wanted to, he could've killed them all without batting an eyelid.

Before Fang Wei took his leave, he suddenly recalled something and said, Oh right, your Child Soup is ready, boss. Would you like it to be served now, or?

The Child Soup was, as its name might imply, a soup made from a child's body. First, the child was disemboweled, and their intestines were removed. Then, their stomachs were filled with rice, water, and condiments. The body was then placed inside a steamer and steamed for a full day.

The meal must be eaten hot, or the taste would suffer. Chen Ah Sheng was the one who had invented this cooking method, of course. In fact, the Child Soup was his favorite dish.

What are you waiting for? Bring it up already! Chen Ah Sheng broke into a grin for the first time of the day. Nothing was more important than food.

Enemy attack! Enemy attack!

It was at this moment a bunch of noises came from outside.

We are being attacked! Kill them all, brothers!

Go get them, brothers!

Kill!

Kill!

The battle cries sounded like it was coming from everywhere.

Whats going on? Chen Ah Shengs heart skipped a beat as he rushed out of the building. He immediately saw fire, yin wind, and chaos breaking out not far away from him. The sounds of screaming and clashing blades seemed like it would never end.

This yin qi is no joke. Chen Ah Sheng frowned and bent his knees a little. The ground beneath his feet cracked, and he leaped into the air. He soon descended at the center of the battlefield like a meteor.

Boom!

A large pit appeared where Chen Ah Sheng had landed. Such was the force of his descent that the brigands and yin soldiers within the area were killed instantly.

Whats going on? roared Chen Ah Sheng while looking around. His eyes were as round as bells, and his bloodthirst formed a scarlet wind around him.

Boss, they discovered the secret! A man whose face was covered in blood yelled angrily.

Chen Ah Sheng looked at the speaker and recognized them immediately. He was one of his Eight Vajrapanis, the Patrolling Vajrapani Jiang Chongshan.

Inside the yin wind, Corpse Child was sitting on the one-horned giants shoulder. He looked at the Heartless Brain and asked, Is it him?

Its him, the Heartless Brain confirmed while looking straight at Jiang Chongshan.

No wonder a small fry like him dared to steal from my Ghost Tower! It was because someone was following orders! Corpse Child sneered and looked at Chen Ah Sheng. You are an audacious man!

You guys are pretty audacious yourselves. How dare you ruin my plan! Chen Ah Sheng looked livid. The Human Pills were a matter of life and death after all. Now that it was found out, there was a huge chance his plan was already ruined. How could he not be furious by this?

If it wasnt for the fact that the two ghosts were pretty strong, he wouldve charged forward and destroyed them already. A persons courage only weakens with age.

Good. It looks like youre definitely the man behind it all, Corpse Child said indifferently.

So what if I am? Chen Ah Sheng roared.

Then you die, of course, Corpse Child replied.

You think the two of you can kill me? Chen Ah Sheng scoffed.

Why are you wasting your breath on them, boss? These idiots are foolish enough to attack us in our base! This is our chance to wipe them all out! Jiang Chongshan shouted.

Boom! Boom!

Jiang Chongshan had just finished when suddenly, a series of explosions rippled throughout Chaos Heaven Mountain. Fire and smoke immediately filled the sky.

Boss, that's the direction of the granary and treasury! Jiang Chongshan looked like he might faint from sheer anger.

Boss, watch out!

Chen Ah Sheng was still distracted by the sudden news when Jiang Chongshan blocked in front of him. Before he could figure out what was going on, Jiang Chongshan's chest abruptly caved in, and all four of his limbs were bent at a crooked angle. Bright red blood jetted out of his orifices like fountains.

The next moment, Jiang Chongshan's head was turned a hundred and eighty degrees around and facing toward Chen Ah Sheng. During his final moments, Jiang Chongshan gasped, Take care boss. Then, he crumpled on the ground and died just like that.

AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH! IM GOING TO KILL ALL OF YOU!

The death of Jiang Chongshan, the destruction of his granary and treasury, and the ruination of his Human Pills and years of planning finally pushed Chen Ah Sheng beyond the brink. He let out a bestial roar of rage and hatred and charged straight toward Corpse Child.

Chen Ah Sheng was like a rampaging beast. The yin soldiers might as well be made of paper as he ran right through them without pause.

I'll fight you! Earth Ghost yelled and lifted his palm. A massive saber with a ghost head at the hilt extended out of the ground.

Die!

Earth Ghost grabbed the saber with both hands, took one step forward, and executed an upward swing.

A saber was a forceful weapon. Most sabersmen attacked their enemies with downward swings or diagonal slashes as if they would split heaven and earth in half. Few would execute an upward swing because it was a lot weaker.

Earth Ghost's attack didn't split the sky, but it did lift the earth, literally. The ground beneath his foot rippled and grew taller and taller as it surged toward Chen Ah Sheng like a tidal wave. It reached the height of thirty meters in just the blink of an eye, and from Chen Ah Sheng's point of view, it looked like it would cover up the sky itself.

Chen Ah Sheng was unafraid, however. His energies condensed tightly around his body, he slammed his shoulder against the wave of earth. The false sky shattered into smithereens just like that.

Rumble!

After the wave of earth was destroyed, Chen Ah Sheng resumed his charge, but with his right shoulder still pointed toward the front. His footsteps looked like that of a drunkards, but he wasn't falling on his feet.

Caught off guard by Chen Ah Sheng's strength, Earth Ghost had no choice but to hold his saber defensively in front of his chest. A large amount of yin qi gathered around the saber, and the howls of a hundred ghosts could be heard from it.

The next moment, Chen Ah Sheng's shoulder slammed into the pool of yin qi. Chen Ah Sheng was massive, but he was like a pebble dropped in a pool of water. All his attack did was create a ripple.

But whoever said a ripple couldn't destroy a pool? The pool of yin qi, the saber and Earth Ghost himself abruptly scattered into pieces.

Chapter 382: Chaos Demon Ape

Hahaha, you are weak! Kill them all! Chen Ah Sheng laughed haughtily before looking up at Corpse Child and the one-horned giant with a snarl.

Corpse Child floated off the one-horned giant's shoulder and ordered, You go, One Horn. Earth Ghost is no match for him.

Raaaaah! It's finally my turn! Can I eat him? The one-horned giant asked excitedly.

Yes. In fact, you can eat anyone you want in this place. Don't hold back on my account, Corpse Child replied.

Ohh! That's wonderful! I can't believe I can finally eat things! The one-horned giant patted its chest happily and leaped down from the yin wind. Three of Chen Ah Sheng's Vajrapanis tried to attack the giant, but it easily slapped them away with its millstone-sized hands.

After it landed on the ground, the one-horned giant grabbed a couple of brigands and shoved them into its mouth. Bright red blood spurted as it chewed.

Tasty so tasty

After it was done eating, the one-horned giant looked at Chen Ah Sheng and declared, I'm going to eat you. Their meat is not as chewy as yours!

Careful now! You might break a tooth on my skin! Chen Ah Sheng laughed savagely before charging toward the one-horned giant.

The one-horned giant brought down its hands repeatedly and attempted to slam Chen Ah Sheng into the ground. Every time it hit the ground, a massive, scorching pit would be left behind.

Not a single one of its attacks hit, however. Chen Ah Sheng looked rough and brutish, but his movement art was anything but that. Darting all over the place like a monkey, he always managed to dodge the palms of death by a hair's breadth.

Chen Ah Sheng closed the distance between himself and the one-horned giant in the blink of an eye. Then, he punched the giant's left knee with all he got.

For one, the one-horned giant was so tall that the knee was the only spot he could realistically reach. Two, giants generally had weaker lower bodies, and the bigger they were, the harder they fell.

There was one small problem with his plan, however. His full-powered punch only shook the one-horned giant a little. Forget falling over, it didnt even take a single step backward.

Youre so weak. It doesnt hurt at all! The one-horned giant laughed like a child and grabbed Chen Ah Sheng before he could recover himself. Then, it squeezed hard like it would pop Chen Ah Sheng like a meat balloon.

However, the one-horned giant soon discovered that its fingers were slowly but surely being pushed outward. It then saw something black and hairy growing bigger and bigger until it couldnt fit in its hand anymore.

In just a few breaths, Chen Ah Sheng had transformed into a thirty meter tall, ape-like creature that was covered in black fur. One could vaguely see his face through the mass of black hair. Youre not very strong yourself, bud!

Chen Ah Shengs cultivation art was called the Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra. It was the ultimate art of the Chaos Demon Tempering Sect, one of the thirty six unorthodox sects. It was a unique cultivation art that focused on cultivating the body only, and at the adept level, one could transform into the Chaos Demon Ape and gain incredible strength.

Bang!

With his new form, Chen Ah Sheng was just as tall as the one-horned giant was. With a mighty swing of his arms, he sent the ghost flying through the air and crashing through a couple of buildings.

Haha! Im so happy youre so big. Now I can actually eat until Im full! Im going to cut you into pieces!

The collapsed buildings abruptly burst into a sea of flames. The earth and stone melted like the one-horned giant was a walking volcano. When it swung its giant axe, the ground split in half and burst into flames even before it could hit its target.

You think you can stop me?

Chen Ah Sheng threw a punch and shattered the line of fire slithering in his direction. Then, he pushed off the ground, blocked the attack with his right arm, and punched the one-horned giant in its stomach.

A gasp of pain and wisps of scarlet flames escaped the one-horned giants lips. It then kicked Chen Ah Sheng in retaliation.

In his Chaos Demon Ape form, every part of Chen Ah Shengs body had turned into a weapon. His normal punches felt like lightning strikes, his elbow swings felt like they could put a hole in the sky, and it was a testament to the mountains resilience that his legs hadnt crushed it like a sand castle and triggered an avalanche. As if that wasnt enough, he possessed the agility of an ape as well. He was a literal hill of muscle that could crush an enemy faster than they could blink.

The one-horned giant was a Rakshasha Ghoul born in the depths of the Ghostfire Hell. Naturally sturdy and highly resistant to blade, lightning and fire, it could topple a hill with a simple swing of the arm.

Like two titans of legends, the human and ghost waged war of pure strength against each other. Their fight was so epic that it was beyond the ability of words to describe.

Beside Corpse Child, the Heartless Brain asked, Arent you going to help out that idiot?

And whos going to watch you if I join the fight? Corpse Child glanced at the Heartless Brain. Anyone who attempted to get within a certain range of the ghost would immediately start rotting until they were nothing more but a pool of corpse fluid. No one here except Chen Ah Sheng was strong enough to resist its terrifying influence.

Are you kidding me right now? What the fuck can I do with this body? The Heartless Brain scoffed. The body you gave me is so weak I can barely run a few steps without having to catch my breath! How far can I go even if you give me a head start?

Also, you can probably tell that that idiot cant defeat that guy by itself.

Corpse Child grunted. Lets hope that self-awareness will hold until the end of this fight. Stay here while I help One Horn. Otherwise, I will turn you into a smear of blood on the ground.

The Heartless Brain was an extremely cunning Stranger. He was certain that he was plotting something. However, the circumstances didnt allow for him to stay his hand. It might look like One Horn was going even against Chen Ah Sheng right now, but Corpse Child knew that the stalemate was going to be broken pretty soon. The human was even stronger than he thought.

Besides, Chen Ah Sheng wasnt the only threat he needed to watch out for. He had a couple of powerful subordinates and thousands of small fries. On the outside, Corpse Child acted like he could wipe out this whole base with the snap of a finger. In reality, he knew that this fight could still go either way.

Corpse Child squinted as a pool of corpse fluid appeared underneath his feet. He slowly sank into the corpse fluid. A moment later, he appeared behind a man who looked as skinny as a monkey.

The skinny man had an unassuming appearance, but he wielded a Qimei Stick that summoned wind and thunder with every swing. The lightning strikes easily annihilated entire groups of yin soldiers. He was none other than the Lightning Dragon Saint Hou Zhen and one of the Four Protectors of the Chaos Heaven Brigands.

Hou Zhen noticed Corpse Child the second he emerged from the corpse fluid. He let out a strange cry, half-twisted his waist, and swung his weapon horizontally at Corpse Child.

Hou Zhen was overflowing with energy. Every time his stick traveled an inch, the lightning surrounding his stick would grow just a little thicker. By the time the stick had moved behind his back, it had transformed into a massive lightning dragon with gnarly horns on its head.

In response, Corpse Child took one step forward and reached out with his right hand. He pierced through the curtain of lightning and stabbed the lightning dragon seven inches below its head.

The dragons roar abruptly died, and its energies snuffed out like a candle. Hou Zhen could only watch in horror as bluish black spots began appearing all over its body. Despite being made of lightning, it somehow aged rapidly until it finally met its end.

The lightning dragon was a product of Hou Zhens Hatred-class Strange Artifact, the Qimei Stick, and right now it looked like it was a bad swing away from crumbling into dust. At the same time, the pool beneath Corpse Childs feet was slowly making its way toward Hou Zhen.

Save me, Old Zhuang!

Hou Zhen didnt hesitate to drop his weapon and cry for help. The man he was calling for help from was a tall, slender old man with a silver face^[1] and a white beard. He was surrounded by a thick layer of silver astral qi that could assume the shape of all kinds of creatures, and it devoured any and every yin soldier who was unfortunate enough to get close to him.

He was the Silverfaced Wanderer Zhuang Chi and one of the Four Protectors.

Zhuang Chi was about ten meters away from Hou Zhen when he heard his cry for help. With just one step, he appeared between Hou Zhen and Corpse Child. His silver astral qi made it difficult for the pool of corpse fluid to advance further.

My One Meter Astral Qi^[2] resists all arts. Im afraid that your disgusting water wont be able to get through.

Zhuang Chi let out a bark of laughter. Let us work together to eliminate this shortie, Hou Zhen.

Hahaha! Thats exactly what I was hoping for! Hou Zhen laughed before charging toward Corpse Child.

Shortie? A hint of anger flickered in Corpse Childs eyes, and the bluish black spots on his face suddenly spread rapidly. At the same time, a rotten, sickly stench emanated from his body.

Both Hou Zhen and Zhuang Chi blanched in mid-charge. It was because they discovered that bluish purple spots were rapidly growing on their skin. Every time a new spot appeared, they could clearly sense their physical body aging. Even their mind and spirit were aging bit by bit as well.

If the unnatural condition were to overtake them completely

Retreat! Both men backed away at the exact same time, but by then, it was already too late. The ground within tens of meters around Corpse Child was flooded by corpse fluid, and everyone including the yin soldiers fell right into it.

At first, there were splashes in the pool as if someone was trying to escape. However, it gradually quieted when Corpse Childs power overtook them completely.

Raaagh! You are courting death, ghost!

Chen Ah Sheng had just smashed the one-horned giant into the ground when he looked to the side just in time to see his Protectors dying a horrible death in Corpse Childs hands. Furiously, he leaped into the sky, crossed a hundred meters in an instant, and brought his hands down right on top of Corpse Child.

Boom!

Chen Ah Shengs speed was formidable, and his gigantic fists covered a large enough area that there was no chance Corpse Child could have dodged out of the way. But that wasnt the plan anyway. He simply allowed Chen Ah Sheng to smash him into the ground.

The ground caved in like he was punching a biscuit, but Chen Ah Sheng wasn't done yet. He raised his right foot and stomped the pit where Corpse Child was with everything he got. There was an ungodly explosion, and the earth collapsed even further. When the dust clouds settled, Chen Ah Sheng was standing in the middle of a deep, massive crater, and Corpse Child was nowhere to be seen. With that done, he beat his chest like an ape and let out a full-throated victory cry.

Raaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!

Chen Ah Sheng thought he had slain all of his enemies, but he didn't notice the black water flowing into the crater from every direction. By the time he realized something was off and tried to jump out, countless pale hands had reached out from the water and grabbed him, preventing him from escaping.

In his current form, Chen Ah Sheng could've broken free eventually. But of course, Corpse Child wasn't going to let him. The corpse fluid quickly filled up the crater and drowned Chen Ah Sheng.

After Chen Ah Sheng's head had disappeared under the black water, Corpse Child emerged from the corpse fluid. The bluish black spots on his face began expanding rapidly.

Chapter 383: Infinite Resurrection?

Roar!

An angry roar erupted from the bottom of the lake of corpse fluid, and something protruded out of its surface. In fact, Chen Ah Sheng was trying to push his way out of the black lake with both hands.

Corpse Child abruptly disappeared from the edge of the lake and reappeared right above Chen Ah Sheng's head. Before the Half-Step Grandmaster could react, he raised his right foot and brought it down gently.

Corpse Child's stomp was not even close to being as powerful as Chen Ah Sheng's stomp earlier, but it still possessed the strength of many mountains. It pushed the Half-Step Grandmaster all the way back to the bottom of the crater.

Corpse Child's face was completely bluish purple at this point, and the world around him seemed to be decaying by the second. But although the black lake was calming down, Corpse Child's face was growing increasingly severe.

A few breaths later, a series of pops and cracks came from the bottom of the black lake. It grew louder and louder until it sounded like a thunderstorm.

A pair of arms punched through the surface of the corpse fluid again, and this time, it was unable to maintain its form. It split away in multiple directions and exposed Chen Ah Sheng at the center.

Chen Ah Sheng was currently covered in bluish purple spots and reeked of the stench of death, but as soon as he broke free from the corpse fluid, they began disappearing at a visible rate.

The Chaos Demon Ape was strong, resilient, flawless, and overflowing with vitality. As a result, not even the life-killing corpse fluid was able to affect it overly much.

After Chen Ah Sheng had broken free from the corpse fluid, he threw a mighty punch that ripped apart the astral wind surrounding Corpse Child and shattered him into bits.

It was a wasted effort though. Another Corpse Child floated out of a pool of corpse fluid, and he looked perfectly unharmed.

I bet you cant resurrect indefinitely! Chen Ah Sheng snarled and raced toward Corpse Child, but he was only halfway there when the one-horned giant appeared and slammed into his side, hard. Like a pair of meteors, they crashed into a nearby cliff so hard it nearly fell apart.

Graaaaahhhh! Just die! Chen Ah Sheng grabbed the one-horned giants horn with one hand and his left arm with the other. Then, he ripped its arm right out of its sockets.

Crack!

Blood flew everywhere and caught on fire as soon as it made contact with the ground. Screaming in pain, the one-horned giant ripped its head out of Chen Ah Shengs grasp and slammed its horn into his chest.

The sharp pain brought out Chen Ah Shengs violent impulse in full force, and he caught the one-horned giant by the neck before it could withdraw. Then, he began twisting his body as if he would rip One Horns head right out of its neck.

One Horn sensed his intentions and struggled with all its might. However, it was unable to break free because its horn was still lodged inside Chen Ah Shengs chest.

RAAAAAAAAAAAGH!

Chen Ah Sheng let out a full-throated roar and pressed down on the one-horned giants arms, causing his head to move downward. At the same time, Chen Ah Sheng kneed him in the face with all his might.

Bang!

The attack flung the one-horned giants head upward, and caused its horn to slice right through Chen Ah Shengs flesh. However, it quickly came to a stop when it got caught in between his tough rib cage. Sensing an opportunity, Chen Ah Sheng kneed the one-horned giant a couple more times until the horn snapped in half, and the one-horned giant was sent flying.

Is that all you got, small fries?!

Chen Ah Sheng pulled out the horn lodged in his body and laughed madly. Then, he chased after the one-horned giant to dish out the final blow.

It was at this moment a sea of corpse fluid blocked his path, and countless rotten corpses rose from the black water. Chen Ah Sheng recognized some of the bodies. He saw Hou Zhen, Zhuang Chi, and many more faces that belonged to the Chaos Heaven Brigands. More importantly, even the weakest among them possessed the strength of an Astral Refiner.

Corpse Child was a literal one-man army.

Chen Ah Sheng was fearless, however. Like a true demon ape, he threw a flurry of powerful, brutish, and fearless punches at Corpse Child. So what if a sea of dead stood in his way? He would break them all with his fists. So what if the world stood in his way? He would shatter the world and forge a path with its remains!

Chaos Demon Ape Fist

Every punch crushed countless corpses, and every kick or stomp crushed even more. It looked like he was gaining the upper hand, but he didn't notice that a bluish black spot would appear on his body every time he destroyed a corpse. More importantly, these spots didn't disappear like the ones that had afflicted him earlier.

The corpses rising from the black sea seemed endless. Every time he took out a horde, a new horde would emerge. As if that wasn't enough, the one-horned giant had recovered enough to attack him once more. Although the one-horned giant had lost a horn and an arm, it was also fighting harder than ever before. Its whole body was bursting with crimson flames hot enough to melt earth and rock into lava, and it swung its axe wildly and viciously as a hurricane. The fact that the axe was also covered in flames certainly didn't help Chen Ah Sheng one bit.

The one human and two ghosts were all Spirit Masters, so their battle was more than enough to change the weather and the landscape itself. Wherever they went, the sky changed, the wind howled, and the ground gave away like sand. They were leaving behind literal wastelands in their wake.

At first, Chen Ah Sheng was able to overcome Corpse Child and the one-horned giant with the powerful physique and vitality of the Chaos Demon Ape. But as Corpse Child's strange power eroded his strength more and more, the scales slowly tipped in the two ghosts' favor.

That said, the so-called upper hand was so slight that it easily could've gone either way. If one side was even a tiny bit careless, the other side could've easily exploited that carelessness and turned the tables around.

Luckily for Corpse Child, he never underestimated Chen Ah Sheng. He kept a tight rein over the situation and never let up. In the end, Chen Ah Sheng shattered the one-horned giant's head with his fist, but the one-horned giant also managed to chop his heart to bits with his axe. Corpse Child seized the opportunity to extinguish Chen Ah Sheng's mind with his strange power and finally ending this epic battle.

Chen Ah Sheng had died, but their victory was almost just as hollow. The Chaos Heaven Brigands had lost two Protectors, five Vajrapanis, and most of their forces. The only reason the other two Protectors and three Vajrapanis still lived wasn't because they were strong, but because they were currently away on business. Otherwise, they would've died as well.

Corpse Child's losses were just as bad. One Horn and Earth Ghost were both dead, and the two thousand yin soldiers he brought with him to the yang world were annihilated. Corpse Child himself was exhausted and injured, and this was evident from his appearance. For starters, he no longer looked like a child. His hair was withered, his skin was sagging and wrinkled, and he was covered in bluish purple spots. The corpse fluid beneath his feet was also incredibly shallow and barely the size of a puddle. It looked like it could dry up at any moment.

Tsk tsk to think you could have a day like this, Corpse Child. What a rejuvenating sight this is.

The Heartless Brain emerged from the woods and stared at the weakened Corpse Child tauntingly.

I'm surprised you didn't run away. Then again, you've always been a smart one, Corpse Child shot the Heartless Brain a baleful look.

Haha, you see, I'm the kind of guy I mean, ghost who keeps my promises, unlike that bitch who calls himself your dad!

The Heartless Brain let out a strange cackle. But I wonder if that bitch will appreciate your effort. After all, you lost everyone including that stupid giant of yours. Do you think that that bitch would blow his top and die when he hears about this? Hed certainly be doing everyone a favor! Ah, I cant wait to see his face!

Sorry to disappoint you, but my father would be very happy with this outcome. Corpse Child said slowly, Our objective is to identify and slay the culprit who stole the yin gold, but we managed to get the mastermind behind the theft as well. In that sense, the mission was completed perfectly.

One Horn is a Rakshasha Ghoul, immortal and undying. Given enough time, it would be reborn in the Ghost Reservoir of the Yellow Spring.

As for Earth Ghost and the yin soldiers, the one thing Fengdu doesnt lack is ghosts. Itll take us little time and effort to rebuild our forces.

Therefore, your fake worry is unfounded. Not only did we complete our mission successfully, Im sure that father will reward us handsomely for our efforts.

The Heartless Brain slapped his head incredulously, Reward you? Your brain hasnt been powdered one too many times, has it?

Corpse Child tilted his head to one side. This group is known as the Chaos Heaven Brigands, and they are one of the Thirteen Brigands who plagues Chu. The Chaos Heaven Brigands in particular have caused quite a lot of havoc in Tian Yong, Northern Xinjiang, and other prefectures. That doesnt concern us though. What does concern us is the fact that they had amassed a massive amount of wealth and treasures. What makes you think father wouldnt reward me if I present him these loot?

Oh, right. Money is the only thing that matters to that bitch. I dont even know why a ghost would need that much money, but to each their own, I suppose, the Heartless Brain exclaimed in realization.

Are you done? If youre done, then were heading back to Fengdu, Corpse Child said.

What is the meaning of this, Corpse Child? The Heartless Brain immediately figured out what Corpse Child was planning when the Stranger began walking toward him. I gave you everything you need and helped you to the best of my abilities, and this is the payment I get? Another eternity inside my jar? Just how shameless can you get, you ungrateful, backstabbing bastard!

What do you mean? I let you live and talk to your hearts content for a whole day. You might not agree, but Ive shown you plenty of benevolence already. Corpse Child continued to walk toward the Heartless Brain. Plus, you already received your payment. I dont see how Im being shameless or ungrateful.

The Heartless Brain shuffled backward, but it was nowhere as fast as Corpse Child. Aw dude come on, man! Let me stay here a little longer! If not, can you at least get me a bottle of wine before you pack me away? Too much? What about a sip? Not even a sip? Can I at least smell the alcohol?

The Heartless Brain begged, but Corpse Child was unmoved. Seeing this, the Heartless Brain shrugged helpless before breaking into a sudden smile. Theres no helping it, I suppose. Remember, youre the one who asked for this.

Hmm? Corpse Child paused in his tracks as a bad premonition suddenly struck him. The next moment, he felt the puddle of corpse fluid underneath his feet bubbling like boiling water and evaporating in just the blink of an eye. He blanched.

Realizing that he was in mortal danger, Corpse Child didn't hesitate to jump to the side. Someone was faster than him, however. He grabbed Corpse Child's head and slammed it into the ground.

Boom!

The hardened ground cracked from how much force the man exerted, but he was just starting. He lifted Corpse Child's head and slammed it back into the ground.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Suddenly, Corpse Child melted into a puddle of corpse fluid and seeped into the earth. Seeing this, the man sneered and said, Seriously?

He lifted his right foot exactly half an inch and brought it down. On the surface, it looked like the stomp did nothing at all, but under the ground, it was havoc. The corpse fluid was immediately pushed back onto the surface.

After the black puddle transformed back to Corpse Child, he said with a severe expression, It's you?!

The man standing before him was none other than Jiang Chongshan, the thief that should've died a while ago.

It's me! Are you surprised? Jiang Chongshan patted away the dust on his palms and grinned.

It was all a ploy from the start. You got me. Corpse Child's pupils contracted into pins.

From the moment he saw Jiang Chongshan, Corpse Child realized that he had been fooled. No wonder he felt like something was off even before the battle began. The Chaos Heaven Brigands' granary and treasury had caught on fire, but he wasn't the one who ordered the sabotage. Jiang Chongshan had died a sudden death, but no one on his side had actually laid a finger on him.

It was all to enrage Chen Ah Sheng into battling them to the death. It was all so that Jiang Chongshan, the fisherman, would win it all.

Thank you for your praise, but I'm just average. Jiang Chongshan's grin widened.

You're not one of the Chaos Heaven Brigands, are you? Corpse Child asked suddenly.

Huh! You're definitely a smart one! I'm glad I didn't give you a chance to think! Jiang Chongshan remarked, but the absence of denial was itself an admission.

Chapter 384: When Man And Ghost Schemes

Jiang Chongshan was, of course, Ye Qing.

From the moment he extracted everything Hu Fengsan knew about the Chaos Heaven Brigands, the plan to pit the Ghost Tower against them had occurred to him.

To put it simply, he was going to make his pursuers and the Chaos Heaven Brigand fight each other, ideally to the death. He would watch from the sidelines to ensure that everything went to plan.

Of course, it was simpler said than done. To begin with, how could he pit his enemies against one another when they shared no grudge with each other?

So, Ye Qing infiltrated the Chaos Heaven Mountain and assassinated the real Jiang Chongshan while he was alone. Then, he took on his appearance and pretended to be Jiang Chongshan.

As for why he chose Jiang Chongshan, it was because the man was one of the Eight Vajrapanis of Chen Ah Sheng, the Patrolling Vajrapani. He possessed the authority to go wherever he pleased in Chaos Heaven Mountain, and he was unlikely to draw Corpse Child's attention.

When Corpse Child and his troops had ascended the mountain, Ye Qing immediately ordered his men to clash against them. The goal was to create bloodshed and make it so that there was no chance that the two sides could arrive at a peaceful accord. The good thing about pretending to be Jiang Chongshan was that he could order the Chaos Heaven Brigand's soldiers around as he pleased. Besides that, Chen Ah Sheng had no reason to question his words.

He was going to trigger the explosive talismans he had buried in the granary and treasury when Chen Ah Sheng and Corpse Child were conversing with each other, but to his utmost delight, their dialogue somehow coincided with one another even though they were talking about completely different things. This allowed him to trigger the talismans after Corpse Child declared his intention to kill Chen Ah Sheng, making it seemed like the sabotage was done by Corpse Child, and pretend to die right before Chen Ah Sheng's eyes.

This ensured that Chen Ah Sheng would fly into a rage and attack Corpse Child, and once the fight began, there was no stopping until one side had perished. It didn't matter who lived or died because whoever survived would think that he was already "dead" and forget about him completely, hence freeing him from his crisis. At the same time, he would be able to eliminate a threat to the people, effectively killing two birds with one stone.

"Who are you?" Corpse Child asked coldly.

"You're going to die anyway. What's the point of telling you anything?" Ye Qing smirked.

"You think you can kill me?" Corpse Child scoffed.

"You think I can't? You were grievously wounded in your battle against Chen Ah Sheng, and without your corpse fluid, you cannot revive. Forget me, even that weakling over there could kill you," Ye Qing said while pointing at the Heartless Brain.

"You told him?" Corpse Child turned to look at the Heartless Brain.

The Stranger chuckled deviously. "But of course! Your innate magic is a secret to most, but I know exactly how it works. You can use it to kill your enemies and revive yourself. So long as there is a drop of corpse fluid on the battlefield, you are technically unkillable."

"That is why the only way to kill you is to take out the corpse fluid first. Once done, you are no different from a tiger who was defanged. You might look scary on the outside, but anyone can finish you off in your current state. Am I right, little Corpse Child?"

“When did you start colluding with one another?” Corpse Child asked after a short silence.

As soon as he finished, Ye Qing’s figure melted away like a mirage. Corpse Child’s instincts warned him of grave danger, but all he only managed to do given the time he had was to tilt his head sideways. The next moment, bits of red light blew past him like the spring wind and fine rain. Corpse Child’s body immediately split into perfectly identical blocks like tofu carved by a master chef.

Not done yet, Ye Qing punched down toward the little blocks that was Corpse Child. Like a millstone, his astral qi spun rapidly and ground the little blocks into paste. Then, the heat burned most of it into ash.

The remaining meat paste dissolved into corpse fluid and tried to seep into the ground again, but how could the ploy work when it had already failed once? Before the corpse fluid could go anywhere, Ye Qing plunged his arm into the earth and enclosed the area with his energy. Then, he sucked in a deep breath and pulled so hard that veins were bulging on his arm. It looked like he was lifting a mountain.

Buzz...

When Ye Qing’s hand finally left the earth completely, he was holding a tiny pool of corpse fluid in his hand. No matter how much the Corpse Fluid bounced around, it was unable to break free from Ye Qing’s grasp.

“You may kill me, but you won’t escape us,” said Corpse Child as his face emerged from the corpse fluid. Although he was glaring at Ye Qing, his expression remained calm. “My foster father is the master of the Ghost Tower and one of the Six Ghost Gods of Fengdu. Specifically, he is the master of the Grand Fiend Abode of Forgiveness. If you kill me, you will die.”

The Six Ghost Gods?” Ye Qing frowned a little. Nicknamed the Six Heavens of Luofeng, the so-called Six Ghost Gods possessed the power to judge the life, death, fortunes and tragedies that happened in the human world. Together, they ruled over the Tyrant Extinction Abode of Absolute Yin, the Grand Fiend Abode of Forgiveness, the Bright Star Abode of Resistance, the Illuminating Abode of Sin, the Sect Spirit Abode of Seven Wrongs, and the Daring Charge Abode of The Cojoined.

They were revered in the Fengdu and on par with the Ghost Kings of Five Directions and King Yans of Ten Halls. They definitely counted as a bigshot in Fengdu. Ye Qing had no idea that the master of Fengdu was this powerful.

“You want to live, and I don’t want to die either.”

Sensing Ye Qing's hesitation, Corpse Child persuaded, "If you let me go, I can shift the blame onto the Chaos Heaven Brigand and absolve you from all responsibilities. I promise I wouldn't come after you, and it would be like we have never known each other. What do you say?"

Ye Qing frowned as he mulled over the possibility.

"Don't listen to his lies. The Ghost Tower's master is not one of the Six Ghost Gods, he's just a concubine of the nominal head of the Grand Fiend Abode of Forgiveness; a bitch. The guy is a useless coward who only knows how to use his connections to intimidate people. You have nothing to worry about while I'm still around."

"Also, Corpse Child is a devious, cunning bastard who lies as easily as he breathes. You mustn't believe a word that comes out of his mouth. If you let him go today, I swear on my soul that he would murder your whole family tomorrow. Stop dragging this out and kill him already."

"Silence! You're just a ghost my Ghost Tower raised, and you've yourself to be an oathbreaker and a backstabber by turning against me. It's clear who's the one who's the untrustworthy one between the two of us."

Corpse Child grunted before saying calmly, "It's not easy to differentiate between truth and falsehood, risk and reward. Is it better to make an enemy out of my foster father, or is it better that we stay out of each other's business from now on? I urge you to take your time to consider it all."

Pop!

As soon as Corpse Child finished, Ye Qing clenched his fist and summoned the Netherflame. The corpse fluid that was the Stranger's true body immediately bubbled like boiling water.

"Why?!" Corpse Child snarled in horror and shock. He had made it clear which path was better for Ye Qing, so why on earth would he choose the one that was obviously worse?

"It's nothing. I just don't like entrusting my fate to others is all," Ye Qing said indifferently.

Just as the Heartless Brain said, if he chose to believe Corpse Child's words and set him free, then the Stranger would be completely out of his control. It would be the same as handing Corpse Child his ability to choose and his life. If Corpse Child kept his promise, then he would be safe and sound. But if Corpse Child went back on his promise, then he would regret everything. He had no intention of gambling his life away.

On the other hand, the Heartless Brain was in the same boat as Ye Qing was. He could be lying through his ass, but he was an element he could control. If the worst comes to the worst, then he could simply kill the Heartless Brain and find another way. The same couldn't be said for Corpse Child.

Besides, from the tidbits he heard about Corpse Child's foster father, there was a good chance the guy wouldn't realize that his adopted son was dead until it was too late.

“You will regret this!” Corpse Child roared his last words knowing that Ye Qing wouldn’t change his mind.

Ye Qing clenched his fist harder, and the Stranger finally burned into ash.

While the Heartless Brain wasn’t paying attention, Ye Qing turned around and quickly checked the Annon Sutra. He let out a sigh of relief only when he saw that a golden dragon-serpent rune had appeared on its surface. This proved that Corpse Child was well and truly dead.

“Well done, lad! I knew that you’re a smart man!” The Heartless Brain didn’t notice what Ye Qing was doing. He was too busy celebrating Corpse Child’s death.

The next moment, the Stranger abruptly flew backward and slammed into a cliffside like a broken kite. Right after he let out a gasp of pain, Ye Qing appeared in front of him, grabbed his throat, and slammed him even deeper into the cliffside. Stones rained down from above as the cliff shuddered unsteadily.

“L-Lad? What is the meaning of this? I just saved your life! Even if you’re going to turn on me, don’t you think this is a little too soon?” The Heartless Brain cried out in pain and confusion.

It looked like he had suffered quite a huge injury, but in reality Ye Qing had taken care to control his strength. Otherwise, he would be dead already. His body was that feeble.

It still hurt like a bitch though.

“Save me? If you hadn’t forced me to show myself, I would be free already. But because of you, I may have a bigger, badder enemy I have to watch out for in the future!” Ye Qing uttered frigidly.

In fact, his plan only went as far as faking his death and running away. He wasn’t planning on ending all of his enemies here because it was unrealistic and risky. Unfortunately, the Heartless Brain saw through Ye Qing’s scheme and proposed that they worked together to free him from Corpse Child’s control. Otherwise, he would expose Ye Qing’s ploy prematurely and cause his death.

He didn’t want to agree to the plan, and he had been looking for an opportunity to end the Heartless Brain while Corpse Child and his troops were battling against Chen Ah Sheng. Unfortunately, Corpse Child’s attention never left the Heartless Brain even once throughout the battle. Had he acted, it would ruin everything. Left with no choice, he agreed to the Heartless Brain’s plan.

That was why the Heartless Brain’s claim that he had helped him was complete bullshit. It was the other way around, not to mention that it wasn’t voluntary. The Heartless Brain should be thankful that he hadn’t crushed his throat yet.

“Calm down, lad!” The Heartless Brain shook his head left and right with a grimace.

“Hehe, you don’t think that Corpse Child is that stupid, do you? Do you think you can escape just by faking your death? Remember, some humans may turn into ghosts after they die. Considering how many people died here, there is no way Corpse Child would let such them go to waste. What do you think will happen when he

interrogates a ghost, and he discovers the truth? Your plan was always doomed to fail.”

“Do you see how I saved your life now?”

Ye Qing sneered but said nothing. While he had to admit that the Heartless Brain had a point—that was one thing he had missed while coming up with this plan—it was no excuse for the Heartless Brain to threaten him.

Chapter 385: Dear Brother

“Plus, this wasn’t the only time I helped you, you know?” The Heartless Brain grinned.

“Explain,” Ye Qing ordered with a frown.

The Heartless Brain did just that. “Earlier, you used a paper doll to mislead us and buy yourself some time, didn’t you? Well, I saw through your effort instantly. Despite this, I feigned ignorance and led Corpse Child and his goons on a small wild goose chase. Otherwise, you’d never have the time to prepare your plan. Surely you can’t deny my merit in this matter?”

Ye Qing raised an eyebrow. Assuming the Heartless Brain was telling the truth, then it was definitely something he couldn’t overlook. Of course, this didn’t change the fact that the Heartless Brain was just using him for his own scheme. In fact, the Heartless Brain was the reason his enemies were able to track him in the first place.

“Hmph. I won’t deny that you did me a favor, but in the end, you were just using me to break free from the Ghost Tower’s control. At most, we’re fellow collaborators,” Ye Qing replied emotionlessly.

“Hahaha! That’s fine. As long as we’re both free, then who cares about the minor details?” The Heartless Brain chuckled.

“True.” Ye Qing lowered his head a little to hide the flash of killing intent in his eyes. “But this outcome isn’t too satisfactory, I feel.”

“Hehe, that is true. After all, that bitch will definitely learn of Corpse Child’s death. A bitch he may be, he’s not someone you want to trifle with.” The Heartless Brain chuckled. He noticed Ye Qing’s killing intent, of course. He knew he was a loose end, and Ye Qing was plotting to end the risk he represented. The only reason he was still breathing now was because the young man still wanted to hear what he had to say. If he proved that he possessed no value whatsoever, Ye Qing would kill him without a second thought.

The Heartless Brain wasn’t afraid though. He wasn’t just valuable, he was extremely valuable.

“But you have nothing to worry about, lad. I can take care of this problem for you.”

“Oh? And how do you plan to do that?” Ye Qing asked slowly.

“Hehehe, that bitch is stuck at Fengdu, and he cannot leave without a good reason. If he wishes to find out the killer of Corpse Child, he could only divine the rivers of fate through the Great Flow, Purple Star, karma hunting and other divination methods.”

The Heartless Brain declared proudly, “I’m not good at most things, but when it comes to muddying the rivers of fate, I dare say that no one is better than me in all of Fengdu... Well, fine, I might be exaggerating a little, but seriously, even ten of that bitch is no match for one of me.”

“In other words, that bitch will never find you so long as I’m by your side.”

“Why should I trust you? What’s stopping you from selling me out the second I turn my back on you?” Ye Qing pressed. He believed that the Heartless Brain possessed the ability to muddy the rivers of fate. After all, a diviner who could force the Annon Sutra to waste a golden dragon-serpent rune to protect him was no joke.

His ability had nothing to do with his capacity for betrayal, however. A human was untrustworthy enough, much less a ghost.

“Come on. I’m not *that* untrustworthy.” the Heartless Brain sighed helplessly.

“It hasn’t even been ten minutes since you worked with me to backstab your owner,” Ye Qing said coldly.

“Think, lad, think! How will it possibly benefit me to betray you right now? We’re grasshoppers tied to the same rope. If I betray you, it’s only a matter of time before that bitch captures me. I just escaped from that hellhole, I have no intentions of returning ever again.”

The Heartless Brain sighed. “Plus, I’m completely defenseless right now. Lying to you at this juncture is akin to commit suicide.”

Ye Qing didn’t say anything and simply watched the Heartless Brain coolly. Everything the Heartless Brain said was true, but he wasn’t agreeing to anything unless the Heartless Brain gave him something that wasn’t empty words.

“Fine, fine, I’ll swear a Dao Oath or an Oath of Burden with you. If I lied to you, then may the heavens smite me where I stand. That okay with you?” The Heartless Brain said with a helpless sigh.

To be honest, he didn’t want to do this as a matter of course, but Ye Qing had proven to be way too paranoid. He could tell that it was impossible to dispel his paranoia with just words, and if he couldn’t dispel his paranoia, then he might die here.

So, swearing an oath was his only way out of this.

“Very well. We will swear an Oath of Burden, but I want to add a few extra terms. One, you must never harm me in any way. If I need your help, then you will give me your all. You will not hold back for any reason.” Ye Qing cracked a victorious smile. *This is what I’ve been waiting for.*

He didn't force the Heartless Brain to sign a master-servant contract with him. All extremes are bad, and the Heartless Brain was no Faceless. He had a feeling that the Stranger would make him regret his decision if he pushed him too far.

One or two additional terms though? That was perfectly acceptable.

"You wound me, lad! I would've fulfilled those terms even without the oath!"

The Heartless Brain looked deeply hurt, but when he met Ye Qing's emotionless gaze, he sighed.

"Fine, fine. I suppose I shouldn't spurn my brother's wishes."

Ye Qing ignored the Heartless Brain and performed the ritual necessary to summon the Oathbearer. Once done, their minds immediately shot through the nine heavens, and they appeared before a massive tortoise who was the size of a planet.

"We meet again, my young friend!" An old man stepped out of the void and greeted him kindly.

"Well met, senior!" Ye Qing saluted him. The old man was none other than Fu Tian, the one who helped him sign his first ever Oath of Burden.

There were more than one Oathbearer in this world. As the master of all oaths, a single Oathbearer couldn't possibly shoulder all the oaths in the world after all. However, Ye Qing realized that the one who answered his call was always Fu Tian. He wondered if it was a coincidence, or something else.

This was good news though. Fu Tian was obviously fond of him. With him witnessing the oath, he didn't need to worry about being screwed over by some sort of loophole.

"It has only been a while since we last met, and you've already grown so much. Congratulations, young friend." Fu Tian smiled kindly.

"You flatter me, senior. It isn't that big of an improvement." Ye Qing saluted back brightly.

At the side, the Heartless Brain was staring at the conversing duo in stunned silence. *Since when is an Oathbearer so friendly? And judging from their conversation, they seemed to be acquaintances! Was I cooped up in the jar for so long that the world had changed, or I've turned senile?*

He knew the answer, of course. The world hadn't changed, and he hadn't turned senile. The man before him was just that unusual.

Realizing that there was absolutely no room for him to try something here, the Heartless Brain gave up his schemes and waited patiently for the duo to catch up with each other. Once they were done, he swore a perfectly honest Oath of Burden with Ye Qing.

After their minds had returned to their bodies, the Heartless Brain grabbed Ye Qing's hands and breathed emotionally, "Brother Ye..."

"Brother..." Ye Qing squeezed back and breathed just as emotionally. It was as if they were actual brothers and not two complete strangers who were moments away from killing each other a while ago.

They had given their true names when swearing the Oath of Burden earlier. Naturally, the Heartless Brain was aware of Ye Qing's real name.

The two men stared into each other's eyes a while longer before the Heartless Brain said suddenly, "Oh right, Brother Ye. Can I ask for your help with something?"

"What is it?" Ye Qing withdrew his hands and said indifferently.

The Heartless Brain: "... *Bro, can you be any more pragmatic?*

The Heartless Brain shook off his incredulity and asked, "Can you get a new body?"

"Excuse me?" Ye Qing thought he heard wrong for a second. The human desire was infinite, and he had heard plenty of strange requests. This was the first time someone asked him for a new body though.

Is this body too masculine for you? Do you want to become my sister?

"You might have inferred from my name, but my true form is a brain. Without a body, I can only hibernate until I get a new body, or I die."

The Heartless Brain revealed everything truthfully, "Corpse Child, that cunning bastard, gave me this weak body because he was afraid that I might pull something on the road. As a result, my abilities are greatly restricted."

"This body is going to fall apart very soon. If I don't switch into a stronger body soon, then I might not be able to protect you when the time comes."

"Plus, this body is so weak there is practically nothing I can do to defend myself. In times of danger, I can only rely on you to protect me. That would be quite troublesome for the both of us."

The Heartless Brain knew that Ye Qing wouldn't release him in the short term, at least not until he was sure he was completely safe. This was perfectly understandable. In his position, he would've done the same thing.

He wasn't worried that Ye Qing would deny his request either. They had sworn an Oath of Burden, and he couldn't even muster the thought of harming Ye Qing without risking death. Even if Ye Qing suspected that he was plotting something, there should be no reason for the young man to reject him.

Plus, he wasn't lying. The stronger the body, the better he could exert his abilities.

For example, Corpse Child had given him a strong body—the body of an early-stage Spirit Purifier to be exact—when he was divining Ye Qing's location and identity. It wasn't anything impressive, but it certainly wasn't weak.

"Very well." Ye Qing agreed after just a few seconds of thinking.

"Thank you very much for your assistance, brother!" The Heartless Brain thanked Ye Qing in an exaggerated fashion.

“But I remember from a book that a Heartless Brain can only infest a living human’s body, right?” Ye Qing asked.

“You’re quite the experienced and knowledgeable warrior, Brother Ye. I am impressed!” The Heartless Brain praised before growing worried. “Er, you’re okay with me infesting a living human, right?”

Ye Qing was a human after all. It made sense that he would loathe a hostile act against his own kind.

“Relax, I’m not one of those pretentious, ‘law-abiding’ pricks who can’t think out of their own asshole. Plus, there are people who only look like humans on the outside, but are less than animals on the inside. The Chaos Heaven Brigands are a perfect example of that. Do you really think I care if they lived or died?”

As if he could read the Heartless Brain’s mind, Ye Qing let out a dark chuckle. “Everyone on this mountain is going to die eventually. I won’t let them live because they don’t deserve to live.”

What bloodthirst!

The Heartless Brain felt a chill as Ye Qing’s bloodthirst washed over him.

Ye Qing ordered, “Wait here. I’ll go find you a brigand.”

The Heartless Brain snapped out of his daze and said in a hurry, “Oh, there’s no need. There’s a suitable body right here.”

“What?” Ye Qing followed the Stranger’s gaze and saw that he was looking at the deceased Chen Ah Sheng. Surprised, he asked for clarification, “You want Chen Ah Sheng’s body?”

The Heartless Brain smiled. “Everyone thinks that a Heartless Brain can only occupy a living body, but in reality it was a misunderstanding. The reason we usually choose a host that is alive to infest is because their bodily functions are intact. Theoretically, we can infest any body that hasn’t broken down in some way.”

“Chen Ah Sheng is a Half-Step Grandmaster and a body-tempering warrior no less. His body is so strong that even after his brain has died, his body is still perfectly intact. To give you a picture, it would’ve taken years for the body to start rotting.”

“More importantly, Chen Ah Sheng’s consciousness is long gone. It will take me no effort to occupy this body whatsoever.”

Chapter 386: Switching Brains

“You have quite the appetite, don’t you?” Ye Qing wore a smile that didn’t reach the eyes.

“Hahaha... I’m just lucky. Plus, Chen Ah Sheng is pretty strong. If I can occupy his body, then I can help you, can’t I?”

The Heartless Brain pretended that he couldn’t notice the evil eye Ye Qing was giving him and continued, “If I became Chen Ah Sheng, I can help you with many things. For example, I can help you locate the rest of the Chaos Heaven Brigands’ treasures and treasures. This is but one of the many bases they have after all. I also know you offended a bigshot in the Ghost Tower, and no, I’m not talking about that bitch. I am much more helpful as a Spirit Master than a weakling, don’t you think?”

“How did you know that?” Ye Qing narrowed his eyes a little. The Heartless Brain should not know anything about his quarrel with Mister Nine.

The Heartless Brain chuckled. “It’s my innate magic. All things in this world are connected by karma, and I can view the threads of karma to a certain extent. I simply need to read the threads to find out a certain event that has happened a short time ago.”

“Can you see everything as long as it happened within a certain timeframe?” Ye Qing exclaimed in shock. If that was true, then it was a bullshit ability, almost as bullshit as the Annon Sutra itself.

“Nah,” the Heartless Brain denied while scratching his head. “The simpler the matter, and the weaker the strength of the people who are involved in the matter, the clearer I can view a certain event, and vice versa. This is especially true if one or more people in the event is blessed with great destiny. People like them can muddy the rivers of fate and complicate the web of events so much that even I can’t make sense of it.”

“Besides, my innate magic exhausts me greatly. I can’t use it whenever I want to. Otherwise, I would become the strongest Stranger in the world already.”

“So, you’re saying that the reason you can find me is because I’m an ordinary person?” Ye Qing rubbed his nose, insulted.

The Heartless Brain knew better than to answer that and continued his explanation, “Take your conflict with that bigshot for example. I could neither see his face nor obtain any information because the threads of karma surrounding that man are too complex. He is definitely a man of great destiny and is protected by the world itself. If I try to glean into his fate, then I will pay a hefty price.”

Scarlet tears abruptly slid down the Heartless Brain’s cheeks. “See this? I just tried to take one glance at the man’s threads of karma, and already I’m pushing it.”

An idea suddenly occurred to Ye Qing. “Do you see a woman in that event?”

“Woman? What woman?” The Heartless Brain looked confused.

Ye Qing hesitated for a moment before telling the Heartless Brain about Greenlake and how she framed him for the theft of the yin gold. Earlier, he already asked the Stranger why the Ghost Tower had come after him.

It wasn't the proudest moment in Ye Qing's life for sure, but if he looked at the result alone, he couldn't say that he had come out shorn. If the Heartless Brain could help him locate Greenlake and take revenge, then even better.

"I see, I see now!" The Heartless Brain murmured with quiet realization and disbelief. "I noticed that one of your threads of karma is missing, but I didn't think much of it at the time. It's because someone had removed it!"

"Can you find her?" Ye Qing asked.

"I'll give it a try," The Heartless Brain replied before he started walking. He looked like he was following a certain pattern that only he recognized, and transparent threads began appearing in his eyes. One look at the threads caused Ye Qing to feel dizzy and sore like he had stayed up the whole night playing games in front of his desktop.

The next moment, the Heartless Brain let out a bloodcurdling scream and collapsed to his knees. His eyeballs abruptly exploded into gooey bits, and blood sprayed out of every orifice. Disturbing cracks also spread all across his skin like a spider web and leaked blood.

"Are you alright?!" Ye Qing hurriedly supported the Stranger.

"Take... Take my brain out and press it against Chen Ah Sheng's head... quickly!" The Heartless Brain gasped out while clutching Ye Qing's hand.

"You want me to... remove your brain? Are you sure?" Ye Qing blinked. *No seriously, brother, are you sure about this?*

"Quick!" The Heartless Brain urged again, and this time Ye Qing didn't hesitate. He grabbed the Stranger's skull and spat out a tiny bit of force from his palm. Slowly, he peeled away the skull without hurting the brain like he was peeling a rambutan or lychee.

If this was a few days ago, he probably wouldn't be able to pull this off. However, his force control had increased by leaps and bounds thanks to the Nanke Dream. Danger was everywhere on the battlefield, and any power he managed to conserve now might contribute to his survival later. Like a miser, he came to learn how to spend no more power than what was absolutely necessary to achieve his goals. If he could spend ten percent power to accomplish a certain objective, then he wouldn't spend eleven. If one slash was enough to kill an enemy, he wouldn't slash twice. Efficiency was the key to everything.

Of course, efficiency didn't matter much if his effectiveness was shit, so he learned how to identify the most effective action in a given set of circumstances and apply it perfectly. Inside the dream, he had continuously fine-tuned his movements and decision-making until it was practically magic even in the eyes of a warrior. If he could kill two birds with one stone, then he would strive for three. If he could kill three birds with one stone, then he would strive for ten. So on and so on.

That was how he managed to survive the endless battles; how he managed to last until the end of the dream.

After he had successfully pried open the man's skull, a brain slid right out of the hole and into his hand. It was twitching rhythmically, but each twitch was just a little weaker than before. It was only a matter of time before it ceased moving entirely.

This brain was the Heartless Brain's true body. In this state, it was so weak that even a child could stomp it to death.

Ye Qing didn't rush to save the Heartless Brain, however. Instead, he rubbed his nose as if he was contemplating something.

A few seconds later, he produced the Annon Sutra and sprayed his blood on it. When he had gotten what he wanted, his eyes lit up, and he wrapped the vellum around the Heartless Brain. It was only then he pressed the Stranger against Chen Ah Sheng's head.

Ye Qing watched with great curiosity as Chen Ah Sheng's skull abruptly split open on its own. Chen Ah Sheng's shot out of his head, and the Heartless Brain occupied the space where it was before. The gap closed after the Stranger was in place, and he couldn't see a single wound on Chen Ah Sheng's skull whatsoever.

Ye Qing was pretty impressed. Chen Ah Sheng was a Half-Step Grandmaster. An ordinary human would never be able to hack open his skull even if he was dead. However, the Heartless Brain could make it split open and heal back on its own. Not only that, he would gain the body's abilities as soon as he occupied the body, meaning that he was now a Half-Step Grandmaster, one who was a body-tempering warrior no less.

Two or three Ye Qings wouldn't be able to defeat him. Four or five Ye Qings would be a different story, but the point was that there was no way Ye Qing could defeat the Heartless Brain right now.

So why did he agree to the Heartless Brain's proposal despite the risks? It was because the Stranger's plan was sound, of course. When he ran into Chu Wangsun at Tian Yong, he no longer had to fear for his life. Besides that, he could see how the Heartless Brain's innate magic could be useful in certain situations.

Most importantly, he wasn't worried that the Heartless Brain would slip out of his control after taking over Chen Ah Sheng's body. When they signed Oath of Burden, he had specified that the Heartless Brain to help him to his fullest capabilities. Through the Annon Sutra, he had also learned of the Heartless Brain's incredible power and magic. There was no way he was going to let such a useful helper go without having exploited its abilities to the fullest.

On top of that, he had prepared some insurances just in case the Heartless Brain had second thoughts. If the Stranger decided to exploit a loophole or two, he would find himself regretting the decision. Worst case scenario, he might even cease to be altogether. So no, Ye Qing wasn't worried in the slightest.

A while later, Chen Ah Sheng abruptly opened his eyes and panted heavily for a moment. A while later, he slapped the ground with both hands and caused a massive ripple that shook everything within two hundred meters of him and shattered the dead bodies on the ground to bits, causing blood and flesh to rain from the sky.

“Hahahaha! I love this body!” Chen Ah Sheng got on his feet and let out a powerful roar. Then, he opened his mouth and sucked all the yin souls created from the dead brigands into his stomach.

Not done yet, Chen Ah Sheng dashed through a couple of buildings and destroyed them in the process. A series of rumbles later, the Half-Step Grandmaster was nowhere to be found.

Ye Qing didn’t try to chase Chen Ah Sheng down or stop him, however. He simply crossed his arms and waited patiently.

About half a teatime later, another thunderous roar broke out from deep within the forest. It sounded like it came from far, far away, but by the time the roar faded, a man descended from the sky and landed right in front of Ye Qing.

Boom!

Once again, the ground rippled like water from the sheer force of Chen Ah Sheng’s descent.

“Hahaha! Hahahahaha!” Chen Ah Sheng, or more accurately, the Heartless Brain threw a couple skewers of heads[2] to the ground and declared, “I’ve located and killed all the Chaos Heaven Brigands who escaped for you.”

“Thanks. That saved me a lot of time and effort.” Ye Qing nodded approvingly while examining the heads for a bit. He could tell that the Heartless Brain had ripped their heads right off their shoulders, and everyone’s faces were frozen in varying expressions of shock, pain, and terror.

Some of the heads belonged to prominent figures in the Chaos Heaven Brigands such as the “Formidable Vajrapani” Hu Yanzhuo, the generals of the Thirteen Armies and so on.

“Hehe, aren’t you worried that I would run away, brother?” The Heartless Brain asked while shaking his head and cracking his neck.

“We are brothers, aren’t we? I believe you won’t do such a thing.” Ye Qing smiled confidently. “Would you?”

“Hahaha... of course not! As you say, we are brothers now. Why would I do such an unbrotherly thing?” The Heartless Brain guffawed, though he was swearing on the inside.

In fact, he was plotting to run away. When they made the oath, Ye Qing had not specified that he must stay by his side. He only specified that he must never harm him in any way, and that he must help him to his fullest capabilities when he needed him.

The crux of this matter was awareness. If Ye Qing needed him to save his life, then he would need to do everything in his power to save Ye Qing. If Ye Qing needed him to serve him wine, then he would need to perform to the best of his abilities. However, this was only possible if he was aware that Ye Qing needed his help. If Ye Qing was, say, a thousand kilometers away from him, and the young man couldn’t contact him during his time of need for whatever reason, then it was hardly his fault that he couldn’t help Ye Qing, right?

This was a loophole the Heartless Brain identified immediately when he swore the oath to the Oathbearer. Theoretically, he could go into hiding far, far away from Ye Qing, and he wouldn't need to do anything for the young man. It wouldn't count as breaking his oath.

Of course, the odds were slanted against him because Ye Qing and the Oathbearer shared a good relationship with each other. If the Oathbearer decided to be biased and punish him, then he would be a sad, sad Stranger. Still, he thought that his freedom was worth a gamble.

But no more. When he left just now, he had used his innate magic to check if Ye Qing had done something to him while he was switching bodies. Strangely, he couldn't find anything not because Ye Qing hadn't done anything, but because the rivers of fate were completely muddled. He couldn't glimpse into that particular time and place at all.

This was very, very bad. If he was able to glimpse into the rivers of fate, then he wouldn't be nearly as worried. He was certain he would be able to resolve whatever insurance Ye Qing had planted in him to control him. But since he couldn't see anything at all, he had no idea what kind of insurance Ye Qing had planted in him, or if he had done anything to him at all.

There was nothing scarier in this world than the unknown. If he knew what Ye Qing had done to him, then he could be working to solve it. Where there's a will, there's a way. But how could he solve something he knew nothing about? It was simply impossible.

Unwilling to gamble against unknown odds, the Heartless Brain had no choice but to return to Ye Qing's side. At the same time, his evaluation of Ye Qing had climbed to a new level. The young man's intelligence and methods were all above average, leaving him no choice but to treat him with the utmost caution and respect.

Chapter 387: Severing Karma

"Oh? What perfect timing! That bitch is finally divining Corpse Child's cause of death."

Suddenly, Heartless Brain let out an odd, somewhat crazed cackle. This was easily the most excited Ye Qing had ever seen him. "Hehehe... the payback is gonna be sweet."

Countless transparent threads appeared in the Heartless Brain's eyes, interweaving and changing all the time. A few breaths later, the Heartless Brain raised his palm and swung it downward like he was wielding a blade.

The hand knife looked weak, but the world shuddered a little as if someone had touched on its foundation. At the same time, Ye Qing sensed something indescribable vanishing from his body.

Meanwhile, inside an extravagant palace, a handsome young man with long hair was lying lazily in between a pair of scantily-dressed, extremely sexy women. He was wearing a dark green-colored long robe.

He was fondling one woman's breast with one hand and moving his fingers rapidly with the other. He looked like he was calculating something.

The woman he was fondling was blushing so hard that her entire face was red. Her eyes were full of lust and desire as well. Her lips parted slightly like she might moan at any moment, but she didn't dare to make a sound for fear of interrupting the young man.

Suddenly, the young man froze and turned blue and white in the face. A second later, he abruptly spat a mouthful of reddish black blood right against one of the women, dying her milky white skin red like a begonia.

“Are you alright, Mistress?”

“Do you need help, Mistress?”

Both women immediately looked at the young man[1] with concern.

“Who could sever all karma relating to Corpse Child and muddy the rivers of fate in an instant?”

The young man’s face took a tinge of wine red color after throwing up the blood. Like a layer of makeup, it temporarily concealed his masculine features and gave him a feminine look instead.

“It takes a powerful being to perform such a deed, but Corpse Child isn’t a brainless retard. He would never provoke a formidable enemy of his own accord.”

The young man sneered. “This means that the Heartless Brain is most likely the suspect. Did he manage to kill Corpse Child and One Horn? Interesting... Still, did you really think you could escape me?”

.....

Back at Chaos Heaven Mountain, the Heartless Brain yelled excitedly after making the cutting motion, “Hahaha! I bet that bitch is spitting blood right now! No way he could take a rebound from the rivers of fate without suffering some damage!”

“Say, would you like him to suffer some more?” Ye Qing asked with a devilish grin.

“What? What do you mean?” The Stranger immediately looked at Ye Qing.

Ye Qing produced the purse Greenlake had given him and asked, “You recognize what is inside this purse, don’t you?”

“The Seventh Young Master?!” The Heartless Brain exclaimed in pleasant surprise.

“What is your plan?”

Ye Qing explained, “That bitch doesn’t know that his so-called son, a Soul Eater, is in our hands, right? What do you think he will do if I kill him?”

“She’ll try to divine why he died, of course!” The Heartless Brain blurted out.

Ye Qing’s grin widened. “Exactly. This means you get to screw that bitch over a second time.”

“A wonderful idea! Kill him now!” The Heartless Brain urged.

“As you wish.”

Ye Qing opened the purse, and the Soul Eater who was the Seventh Young Master immediately tried to escape. But of course, his effort was completely futile. Using his hand like a saber, Ye Qing executed the “Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art” and caused him to burst into flames immediately.

“Argh!”

The Soul Eater let out a bloodcurdling scream and dissolved into ash just like that. He never even managed to leave behind some parting words.

Ye Qing smiled after killing the Seventh Young Master. He was just wondering how he should deal with this hot potato when the solution fell into his lap. He loved it when everything was going his way.

“Here he comes! He’s coming back for another dicking!”

The Heartless Brain’s face was red with excitement as he drew out the moment for a dozen breaths or so. Ye Qing could hear him muttering to himself, “Stay cool, me. Stay cool. I’ll wait until the last possible moment before severing the threads of karma. How satisfying it would be for me, and how frustrating it would be for him when he was denied release at the last moment? Hehehehehehe!”

The Heartless Brain’s perverted laughter resounded throughout the mountains for a time.

.....

Inside the palace, the young man’s face had returned to normal. He was lazing about when suddenly, he started counting on one hand again. “Strange? Seventh is dead as well.”

“Who is the bastard who murdered my son? They must pay the price.”

The young man’s fingers moved quickly as some sort of indescribable energy rippled out of his hand again and again. A small smile crossed his lips as his divination approached the final stage.

Suddenly, his smile stiffened, and his face turned as white as paper. Then—

“Pwack!”

The young man started bleeding pitch black blood from every orifice. His smooth, tender skin began withering like a plant that someone had forgotten to water for days, his hair turned white at an astonishing rate, his face was covered in wrinkles in just the blink of an eye, and his hands turned as thin as twigs.

The temperature inside the palace had nosedived in an instant as well, so much so that the floor was covered in a thick layer of frost.

“Mistress!”

“Mistress!”

Both women flew into panic. They had no idea what they should do.

Seventh’s threads of karma are severed as well? Is it the Heartless Brain again? But no, that can’t be. There’s no reason for them to be together.

The young man who was young no longer completely lost his lackadaisical attitude. He looked angry and overflowing with the promise of violence. But instead of succumbing to his impulses, he grabbed one of the panicking women and let out a strange cackle, “No need to be afraid, pretty...”

The young man ignored the woman’s struggles and kissed her in the lips. She began aging rapidly. Her flesh grew soft and thin, her skin turned saggy, and her hair turned gray at an astonishing rate.

On the other hand, the young man was turning young again. It was like someone was reversing his time while accelerating the woman's.

A short while later, the woman had turned into a white-haired grandma who had lost most of her teeth. She was still alive, however. The young man now looked like a middle-aged man in his forties or fifties. His skin was still wrinkled and saggy, but it wasn't nearly as bad as it was before.

The young man dropped the old woman on the floor and looked at the other woman. The woman finally snapped out of her shock, screamed, and ran toward the exit.

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that. Bad girls get punished, you know?" The young man said with a chuckle. His voice was full of allure, temptation, and something else. It was because the woman suddenly stopped in her tracks, turned around, and slowly shambled her way back to the young man as if someone had stolen her mind.

When she finally went back to the bed, the young man kissed her and sucked her life force much, much faster than when he sucked the first woman. Just a few breaths later, the woman had turned into a skeleton.

The young man now looked like an adult in his thirties. A careless person might even say he looked exactly the same as before, though a closer look would reveal that there were strands of silver in his jet black hair, and his complexion was unnaturally red.

"Second!" The young man dropped the skeleton to the ground and called out. There was a painting hung on the wall of the palace, and it showcased a man and a woman. The man was devilishly handsome, and the woman was angelically beautiful. They were standing with their backs facing toward each other.

The pose wasn't particularly unusual, but what was definitely strange was the fact that their backs were joined together. It was as if they were conjoined twins sharing the same body.

When the man and woman heard the young man's cry, they turned their heads and walked out of the painting. The man was at the front, and the woman at the back.

The moment they left the painting, the picturesque background of the painting—lush trees, colorful flowers, vibrant beasts and free birds—began withering at an alarming rate. The plants wilted, the animals rotted, the mountains turned barren, the river dried, and ghosts were everywhere.

It was as if the world inside the painting had plunged into hell in an instant.

"Father!"

The conjoined man and woman saluted the young man respectfully after they stepped out of the painting.

"Second, I need you to head to the yang world and grab me some women. Remember, they must be pure ying in nature, and they should be young and beautiful. I'll be able to recover faster that way," the young man instructed.

"As you command, father," The two ghosts replied.

“Also, lock down Jade Splendor Palace immediately. No one, not even the head may enter without my permission. Just say that I’m currently unavailable because I’m in closed door cultivation. I will not let those bitches see me like this.”

“Be quick.”

“Don’t worry, father. I won’t disappoint you,” Both man and woman answered at the same time. The way their voices overlapped with each other made it sound like they were singing a tune.

“I have full confidence in you, Second.” The young man smiled. “Also, your older brother, Corpse Child is dead. That means you’re my First now.”

“Thank you, father,” the two people replied, though their voices were devoid of emotion.

“Good. Now go. Don’t make me wait too long,” The young man said a bit tiredly and waved them away.

After saluting their father, the man and woman walked toward the painting once more. This time, it was the woman who led the way.

After they returned to the painting, they kept walking until they were completely gone from the painting. It was almost as if the painting wasn’t a painting, but a portal to another world.

“Hmph! No one gets to kill my children and get away with it. They will pay the price eventually,” the young man uttered while caressing his dull-looking skin. His voice was full of hatred and the promise of vengeance.

“And I will get whoever did this to me.”

.....

“Ahahahaha! That bitch lost three sons[2] in a row and still failed to track us down! Do you think he’d do us a favor and die from sheer anger?”

The Heartless Brain was giggling like he was crazy. “Nah, that would be asking too much. That bitch is a coward who treasures his life more than anything else. He won’t die, but he’s definitely going to throw up a lot of blood and grow old and wrinkly. Wahahahaha! It’s a shame I can’t be there to witness his decline myself, or this would be the perfect ending.”

Ye Qing paid no attention to the Heartless Brain’s antics. After scanning the mountain and confirming that there was no human or ghost in the area except him and the Heartless Brain, he brought down his left hand and summoned the Netherflame.

The Netherflame could burn anything and everything. It couldn’t be extinguished by wind or water either. It wasn’t long before it burned all of the corpses on the mountain into ash.

After that, Ye Qing walked around the mountain[3] and scanned the areas beyond the mountain just in case he missed someone. When he confirmed that all was well, he finally returned to the Heartless Brain and said, “Alright, we can leave now.”

“Yeah! We should find an inn and celebrate our victory!” The Heartless Brain chirped happily.

However, the Stranger had just taken a few steps when a thought occurred to him, “Wait, we can’t leave yet! We haven’t paid the Chaos Heaven Brigand’s treasury a visit! It’ll be a waste to leave now.”

“Don’t worry. It won’t be.” Ye Qing smirked.

Chapter 388: Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra

“Have you... been to the treasury already?” The Heartless Brain exclaimed in surprise.

“What do you think?” Ye Qing countered.

Of course he had visited the treasury already. While the Heartless Brain was hunting down the stragglers, he got bored and decided to pay the treasury a visit and swipe every last valuable inside it. And thanks to Hu Fengsan’s memories, the looting didn’t take much time at all.

The explosive talismans he set were powerful enough to set the granary and the treasury on fire, but not nearly enough to blow up the whole thing. This was especially true for the treasury where the Chaos Heaven Brigands’ greatest treasures were stored. Naturally, nothing of real value was harmed.

Although the Chaos Heaven Mountain was just one of the Chaos Heaven Brigands’ bases and not their real headquarters, there was a surprising amount of good stuff in here such as Strange Artifacts, various tools and equipment, money, provisions, pills, martial arts manuals and more.

Ye Qing had zero interest in the provisions, tools and mundane equipment. He took only the Strange Artifacts, martial arts manuals, pills, money and other valuables.

Of course, Ye Qing didn’t possess nearly enough Nature’s Shells to store all of the items. Heck, the money alone could fill up an entire Nature’s Shell and more. Luckily, Chen Ah Sheng’s Nature’s Shell had a big enough space to store all of the items.

Ye Qing had swiped Chen Ah Sheng’s Nature’s Shell while he was moving the Heartless Brain over to his body. In fact, he had stripped off his gloves, which was a Strange Artifact, and other valuables as well. By now, he had looted enough bodies that the work felt like second nature to him.

On a related note, Chen Ah Sheng’s Nature’s Shell was no ordinary Nature’s Shell. In fact, it was one of the best Strange Artifacts Ye Qing had ever obtained. He called it “a” Nature’s Shell, when in reality it was nine Nature’s Shells bound together by a chain bracelet. Each Nature’s Shell was a superior-grade Nature’s Shell with a space that was dozens of times bigger than the best Nature’s Shell Ye Qing possessed. Its value couldn’t be understated.

The bracelet’s name was Nine Heavens. It was probably referring to the fact that the owner of the bracelet might never run out of place to store their items.

With Nine Heavens, Ye Qing only needed to use three Nature's Shell to store everything he took from the treasury.

To be fair though, the items inside the treasury were nothing to write home about. The really, really good stuff were already stored in Chen Ah Sheng's Nine Heavens. Chen Ah Sheng's Trueman-stage cultivation art, the "Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra", was an obvious example. There were various Spirit Purification stage to Spirit Master stage martial arts such as the "Sky Piercing Fist of the Sage", the "Staff That Overturns Rivers and Seas", and the "Sky Star Palm".

As for medicine, the Temptation Breaching Pill of Heavens and the Water of Insight could aid a Spirit Master in entering the Trueman stage. Chen Ah Sheng also had a couple of Hatred-class Strange Artifacts. Finally, the guy had a mountain of silvers, properties, deeds and more.

Ye Qing could tell that Chen Ah Sheng had made a lot of preparations to enter the Trueman stage and become a Grandmaster. Too bad for the fucker, it all belonged to Ye Qing now.

"Brother Ye, you... are a very fast man, aren't you?" The Heartless Brain sighed helplessly after a long moment.

"Don't worry, I'm not a greedy man. I'll give you the reward you deserve when I'm done tallying everything," Ye Qing said with a smirk.

If he still had the Nine Heavens, then he most likely could've kept the best items to himself. But now, it was too late. He couldn't ask Ye Qing for the items because the young man had already allowed him to occupy Chen Ah Sheng's body. If he made such a request, it would make him look greedy and ungrateful.

It might look like he and Ye Qing shared a cooperative relationship right now, but in reality he was subordinate to him. In fact, his life was partially in Ye Qing's hands. He had to be careful. It wasn't worth risking death over some items.

"There's one thing you should know if you really are planning to reward me. Although I can use Chen Ah Sheng's power, I am not him in terms of body and mind. Therefore, it is impossible for me to cultivate my strength and become stronger, meaning that martial arts manuals and the like are useless to me. Therefore, you should give me Strange Artifacts that I may use to protect myself or attack my enemies and some money. It's been a long time since I enjoyed the food and wine of humanity, and even longer since I fuc... ahem..."

The Heartless Brain trailed off with an awkward cough before he could say something he would regret.

Ye Qing chuckled. “Sure. Don’t worry. Chen Ah Sheng didn’t have much stuff[1], but the one thing he didn’t lack was money. I promise you you’ll be able to eat and drink to your heart’s content.”

“Good, good!” The Heartless Brain guffawed. “Oh right, now that I’m technically a human, I should have a human name as well. What do you think I should call myself, Brother Ye? I’d like to have an awe-inspiring name, but ah, please don’t give me a name like ‘Batian’ (Dominate The Heavens) or ‘Wudi’ (Invincible). It’s too overt and distasteful, you see.”

Ye Qing mulled over the matter for a moment before answering, “The body’s surname is Chen, and your original name has ‘Wuxin’ (Heartless) in it. How does Chen Wuxin sound?”

“Chen Wuxin? The world is heartless, and so am I! Very well!” The Heartless Brain laughed heartily. “From now on, my name is Chen Wuxin!”

.....

Inside a guest room, Ye Qing was recalling the passages inside the “Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra” and walking around in measured, precise steps. Sometimes, he would lie down on the floor. Sometimes, he would dash from wall to wall. Sometimes, he would climb up a furniture or two, and sometimes, he would hang off the ceiling. To put it simply, he was acting like an ape.

When he was still, he was so still that someone could walk into the room and not see him unless he happened to be right in front of them. When he was moving, it was like the heavens had called down the thunder. He was perfectly in control of his actions and could flow from form to form like water. It was quite the graceful sight.

Ye Qing was currently practicing the stances of the “Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra”. The “Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Stance” was a moving stance that required him to be moving constantly instead of holding a pose like a normal stance.

Three repetitions later, sweat was rising off Ye Qing’s skin like steam. His blood flow was so loud that it was like a train was running through his veins.

The next moment, Ye Qing threw a punch at the empty air in front of him like a spirit ape who was battling a mortal enemy. He would cut, slash, strangle, smash, claw or even headbutt his imaginary enemy like a wild beast, and there was no part of his body that he wouldn’t use to gain the upper hand.

Over time, Ye Qing’s movements grew faster, wilder and more aggressive. After all, he didn’t want to be a spirit ape. He wanted to be a spirit ape who had transformed into a demon ape, one who would transform order into chaos, turn the world upside down, and even restart it anew with pure violence and bloodthirst.

Considering how powerful and aggressive his movements were, it wouldn't be surprising if he accidentally or intentionally tore the whole place down. In reality, not a single piece of furniture or brick was harmed.

What Ye Qing was practicing now was a fist art that came attached with the "Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra". It was called the "Chaos Demon Ape Fist".

There were nine forms and thirty six variations in the martial art. Each form targeted the skin, flesh, bone and internal organs with purpose and precision and honed a practitioner from outside to inside.

Obviously, the "Chaos Demon Ape Fist" could also be used to battle against foes. Earlier, Chen Ah Sheng had transformed into the Chaos Demon Ape and used the "Chaos Demon Ape Fist" to rip the one-horned giant to shreds and deal Corpse Child a grievous blow. Had luck been on his side, he might even be able to kill both ghosts and claim the victory.

But of course, the main application of the "Chaos Demon Ape Fist" was still the tempering of one's body. Assuming he reached the end of this cultivation art, his body would enter the Trueman stage, and he would gain the ability to transform into the Chaos Demon Ape[2]. He would be impervious to most weapons, immune to water and fire, and overflowing with strength and vitality.

The "Chaos Demon Ape Fist" could not reach its full potential unless the practitioner had transformed into the Chaos Demon Ape. In other words, the Chaos Demon Ape was the foundation, and the "Chaos Demon Ape Fist" the art.

The reason Ye Qing was practicing the "Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra" was to forge his own Chaos Demon Ape Body.

He had wanted to obtain a body-tempering cultivation art for a long time. Sure, his strength and bodily control were no weaker than a pure body-tempering warrior's, but ultimately, he was relying on his gifted body and his instincts to do most of the hard work. He had never truly trained in the ways of a body-tempering warrior, and what Gu Suitang taught him were techniques, not cultivation. As such, he was unable to unleash the full potential of his body like an actual body-tempering warrior could. He was like an uneducated miser who had no idea how to spend the mountain of wealth he possessed properly.

Moreover, his body had hit a bottleneck a while ago. It would take a tremendous amount of effort and time to progress to the next stage. Like a piece of refined steel that had been refined countless times already, the only way it might be refined further was to find a better blacksmith, a bigger hammer, and a hotter flame.

A suitable body-tempering cultivation art was the blacksmith, hammer and flame all wrapped up in one. The better the body-tempering cultivation art, the bigger the boost.

The "Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra" was the ultimate art of the Chaos Demon Tempering Sect, one of the thirty six unorthodox sects. It was a cultivation art that could carry a warrior all the way to the Trueman stage and make them a Grandmaster. Once they had successfully

forged their Chaos Demon Ape Body, they could supposedly carry mountains, wield an entire hill as a weapon, cut rivers and so on. Long story short, it was incredibly powerful.

Out of all the valuables Chen Ah Sheng possessed, the “Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra” was easily the most valuable of them all. It was why he didn’t hesitate to study the cultivation art as soon as he got his hands on it.

The entry level of the cultivation art was entry level, but the farther the practitioner got, the bigger the cost became. It took an obscene amount of natural treasures to sustain it.

As the leader of the Chaos Heaven Brigands, Chen Ah Sheng had obtained a lot of natural treasures through countless raids and plunderings. Despite this, he never managed to enter the adept level of the cultivation art before he died. Because of this, the Chaos Demon Ape Body he transformed into wasn’t perfect, and he wasn’t able to become a Grandmaster either. Otherwise, his battle with Corpse Child would’ve turned out very differently.

This problem was nothing to Ye Qing, however. Everything he might need was right inside his cheat, the Annon Sutra. The gray runes replenished his vigor, and the silver runes replenished his true qi. The runes were better than natural treasures in every way not only because they were tailored to a specific aspect of the body, but also because he didn’t need to run all over the world to collect them. He simply needed to kill Strangers to gather more. In short, they were perfect to cultivate the “Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra”.

Thanks to the dragon-serpent runes, it took him only ten or so days to enter the journeyman level. Not only that, he now had the strength of seven dragon elephants.

Of course, part of the reason he was improving so quickly was because his body was incredibly strong. It was only natural that he improved quickly.

Chen Ah Sheng had taken five years to reach the journeyman stage. If he knew that Ye Qing had reached the milestone in just ten days, he would probably retire and return home to be a farmer on the spot.

Pop pop pop pop pop!

Suddenly, Ye Qing’s bones popped like a series of thunderclaps, and the silhouettes, fist intent and force within the room disappeared like they were never there. Standing at the center of the room, Ye Qing sucked all of the air inside the room into his stomach like a dragon.

Chapter 389: Monk, Taoist, Woman and Child

“This ‘Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra’ really is quite something.”

Satisfaction and delight danced in Ye Qing’s eyes when he opened them. He was now at least twice as strong as he was ten days ago.

It was already bright outside when he opened the windows. Ye Qing half-lidded his eyes and basked in the warmth of the sun, the delicious scent of food, and the sight of people traveling along the street.

“Brother Chu and Brother Lin should arrive today or tomorrow.”

After he left Chaos Heaven Mountain, he had written an anonymous letter and reported the Human Pill incident of Red Sand Village to the local Pacification Bureau. Then, he traveled south, bypassing Qing He and He Jian [1], and reached Tian Yong.

With Chen Wuxin guarding him, he didn’t encounter any danger or people stupid enough to challenge a Half-Step Grandmaster. They were able to reach Tian Yong without any troubles.

They were currently staying in one of the cities located next to Tian Yong City known as West Yong. It was named so because it was located to the northwest of Tian Yong City. It was a very prosperous city.

In fact, they had arrived at West Yong two days ago. The reason they hadn’t entered Tian Yong City yet was because Chen Wuxin caught wind of the so-called Three Musts of West Yong and insisted that they enjoyed them all. Ye Qing was thinking that it was safer to meet up with his three companions in West Yong than Tian Yong City as well, which was why he ultimately decided to stay for a bit.

The so-called Three Musts of West Yong was one, the roasted squab pigeon of Yong He Inn; two, the tea and wine of Clear Heart Teahouse; and three, the Raiment of Rainbows and Feathers Dance of the Beauty Pageant Palace.

Ye Qing had tried out the roasted squab pigeon, the tea and the wine with Chen Wuxin already. He had to admit that they more than deserved their fame. He didn’t watch the Raiment of Rainbows and Feathers Dance, however. It wasn’t because he didn’t want to broaden his horizons, but because the show was way, way too popular.

As the day of the Hidden Dragon Meet grew closer and closer, more and more people were flooding into Tian Yong and its surrounding cities. There were independent warriors, sect elites, clan disciples, strange people practicing eccentric arts, scholars and more.

It wasn’t every day these people traveled to distant lands, so of course they wanted to enjoy everything those distant lands had to offer. This was why the queue of people wanting to watch the Raiment of Rainbows and Feathers Dance stretched from the entrance of Beauty Pageant Palace all the way to the city entrance.

As if that wasn’t bad enough, every single attendee was a wealthy and authoritative figure, so he literally couldn’t abuse his status and cut the line even if he wanted to. By the time it was his turn, the Hidden Dragon Meet would have begun already. That was why he chose to opt out of the show.

Chen Wuxin didn’t care about the wait though. He was willing to wait for days if it meant watching the dance, or more accurately, the gorgeous beauties performing the dance.

He didn’t know how badly Chen Wuxin had suffered in Fengdu, but he cut himself loose completely after arriving at civilization. To say that he ate, drank, and played to his heart’s content would be an understatement. It was like he was trying to make up for all the suffering he had endured in Fengdu. As such, he had spent over one thousand silvers in just ten days. If they didn’t have the money from the Chaos Heaven Brigands, Ye Qing wouldn’t have been able to sustain his lifestyle.

“Time to eat!”

Ye Qing was feeling a little hungry since he had been practicing the whole night. So, he went downstairs to grab some food.

The dining hall was already jam-packed with people when he arrived. It was loud and noisy.

Ye Qing swept his gaze across the area but could not find any empty table. In fact, there were only a handful of empty seats, and there was a reason why those seats had remained empty.

The table near the window to the southeast corner was occupied by a monk with a broad head and large ears. He looked like a friendly dude, but the bloody monk's knife laid on the table told a different story. The food on the table wasn't vegetarian either. They were all fish and meat. Not a speck of green could be spotted anywhere.

Seated at the table next to the monk was a mother and her son. It was impossible to tell the woman's age since her face was covered up by a veil, but she had an hourglass figure that drew plenty of gazes anyway. The child was about seven or eight years old, and he looked as cute and adorable as one might imagine.

A scholar was occupying an entire table to the north wall. No one tried to share his table because his complexion was sickly yellow, and he kept coughing like he was gripped by some sort of terrible disease. His saliva and snot were all over the table and the food.

The scholar didn't care though. He continued to eat his food at a leisurely pace.

Finally, an elderly Taoist was seated at the table at the corner of the west wall. A small banner with the words, "Unerring Predictions" written on the flag was set against the wall. Strangely, three additional sets of flatware besides the Taoist's were set on the table. There was rice, vegetables and meat in the bowls as well. The end of the chopsticks were facing toward the seat instead of the other way around[2].

Currently, three of the four tables were occupied by the type of people Ye Qing should theoretically stay away at all costs. The last table was occupied by a scholar, but that scholar was obviously ill and coughing so hard that his spittle and snot were all over the table. Forget sharing a table with him, even looking at his table was enough to diminish Ye Qing's appetite.

A moment of consideration later, Ye Qing walked up to the monk and saluted him respectfully. "Venerable Bhante, it would seem that there are no available tables at the moment. May I share a table with you?"

There was zero chance he was sharing a table with the scholar, and the Taoist's table looked... occupied. However, it didn't feel right to share a table with the woman and her son either, so Ye Qing ultimately chose to impose on the monk.

"I don't own this inn. Feel free to sit wherever you please," the monk replied without looking up from his food.

"Thank you." Ye Qing sat down on a chair and asked with a smile, "My surname is Ye. May I know your dharma name, Venerable Bhante?"

"Boy, I came here to eat, not to make chit-chat. Haven't you heard that all troubles in the world originate from the mouth?" The monk replied impatiently.

"Haha, you're right. My apologies, Venerable Bhante," Ye Qing apologized. He didn't take offense because the monk was right. They were here to eat, not to make friends. He was only being polite.

A moment later, the waiter served Ye Qing the food and wine he ordered. He drank as he ate and was generally having the time of his life.

Suddenly, the monk sitting opposite him spoke up. "What wine is that? It smells pretty nice. Do you mind offering me a cup?"

"Do you drink too, Venerable Bhante?" Ye Qing asked.

"I'm eating meat, aren't I? Why wouldn't I be able to drink?" The monk declared uncaringly. "Now give me some wine, will you?"

"Sure." Ye Qing poured the monk a cup of wine. The monk licked his lips happily after downing it in one gulp. He commented, "The wine is strong but not dry. It has a smooth, rich taste as well. How fine!"

"Give me another cup—no, a cup is too small. It just lacks a punch. Give me a full bowl, please."

Ye Qing glanced back and forth between his jar and the monk's ridiculously large bowl. He was pretty sure that he could pour the whole thing in and not fill up even half of the bowl. So, he said, "Since you enjoy this wine so much, you may have it all. Take it as my thanks for allowing me to share a table with you." "Hahaha! You're a good one, boy!" The monk declared and accepted the wine without any hesitation. Then, he drank greedily directly from the jar.

It took the monk only a few gulps to down the whole jar of wine into his stomach. Once done, he let out an alcoholic breath and declared, "It truly is a fine wine! It's too bad there's only one jar, but eh, whatever."

"Anyway, I shan't bully you any longer. Take this as payment for your wine."

The monk tossed something in Ye Qing's direction. When Ye Qing caught it and took a look, he noticed that it was a jade thumb ring; an incredibly rare emerald green jade too. It felt smooth and warm to touch. Clearly, it was a well-worn ring.

Ye Qing tried to return the ring. "This is too much. I can't possibly accept this."

"I don't like it when people reject it. I gave it to you, so just take it!" The monk snarled while staring at Ye Qing with his large, bloodshot eyes. Such was his demeanor that Ye Qing wondered if the monk would attack him if he insisted on rejecting the gift.

"In that case... thank you very much, Venerable Bhante," Ye Qing replied with a wry chuckle. Plenty of people had tried to rob him, but this was the first time someone forced him to accept a gift.

Ye Qing put the thumb ring into his shirt instead of Nine Heavens. There was no reason to show off the Nature's Shell and garner unnecessary attention. It was at this moment he heard a loud voice asking,

"Are you a fortune teller, Taoist?"

"Would you like me to tell your fortune?" The old Taoist looked up from his food and asked.

"What else? It's not like you have wine to share with us!" A man with a thick, gnarly beard grunted with a loud burp. "I want you to check if the two of us are going to wow the world and become famous in the Hidden Dragon Meet."

"You can do that, but are you aware of my rule?" The fortune teller asked.

"Rule? What rule?" The bearded man abruptly swept the other three sets of flatware to the floor and exploded, "Just tell us our fortune already! Otherwise, I will punch out all the teeth in your mouth!"

"Quickly," the thin, small man standing next to the bearded man also urged.

"Fortune and misfortune are perfectly objective. It is the man who decides what befalls them. Since you must find out your fortune, then find out I shall."

The fortune teller didn't get angry with the guy's rude behavior, however. He examined his facial features for a moment before starting, "You have a large forehead, and that is usually a lucky sign. However, your center is spread out in a way that suggests that you are unable to keep your fortune despite being born fortunate. From this, I can infer that you are born in a powerful, wealthy family, but later in life, your family experienced a major decline, and you are forced to set out and make a living for yourself."

The bearded man turned beet red and shouted, "Shut up! I asked you if we're going to become famous in the Hidden Dragon Meet, not dig up my past!"

"To tell you the truth, no. Neither of you will not be able to make a splash in the Hidden Dragon Meet." The fortune teller said, "In fact, there is a dark spot that spans

the center of your foreheads. This means that disaster awaits you two if you leave your abode."

"What did you say, you stinking Taoist?" The small man immediately seized the old Taoist's collar and uttered angrily, "I think you're the one who's going to have a disaster if you keep talking nonsense!"

"I am just doing my job. It's not my problem if you don't believe my fortune telling." The fortune teller gave a push, and the small man let go of his collar before he realized it.

"Since I've told your fortune, it is your turn to fulfill your promise."

"Promise? Since when did I promise you anything?" The bearded man looked confused.

The Taoist picked up the banner he set against the wall and turned it around. As it turned out, the other side of the banner stated:

"A life for a fortune."

"A life for a life? What does that mean?" The bearded man asked.

"It means that if you want me to tell your fortune, then you'll have to kill someone for me. A life for a fortune. It's not so difficult to understand, is it?" The fortune teller said slowly, "Since I've told your fortune, you now must kill someone for me."

"You want me to kill someone for you? Dammit, you're not a fortune teller, you're just a crazy person!" The bearded man laughed while shaking his head. "What terrible luck. Oh well, I'm feeling good today, so I shan't stain my mood with murder. Let's go, Si'er."

The bearded man sneered and started toward the exit.

In response, the fortune teller shook his head. "Why blame others when you won't save your own life."

As soon as the duo stepped out of the inn, the small man abruptly drew his knife. Then, he plunged it into the bearded man's back. He would do this a couple more times until his face was covered in blood.

Chapter 390: The Intelligence Department

"What are you doing, Guo Si? Have you gone mad?" The bearded man looked around and stared at the small man in shock and horror.

"You're the one who's mad, you vile, heartless murderer. Who's the one who killed his adopted brother for just a hundred gold, huh?" Guo Si snarled.

"How did you... Who are you?" The bearded man's eyes widened.

“You want to know? You can ask those people you’ve killed when you’ve gone to hell!” Guo Si snarled while plunging his knife into the bearded man’s solar plexus once more.

Unwilling to go down without a fight, the bearded man threw a palm strike at Guo Si’s head. However, Guo Si easily dodged the attack and pulled his knife downward, eviscerating the bearded man and causing his intestines to spill all across the road.

“Hah... hah... Someone... Someone save me...”

Desperation, regret, hatred and all kinds of emotions flitted across the bearded man’s face as he extended a hand toward the inn entrance. He only managed two steps before the light in his eyes disappeared, and he collapsed lifelessly on the floor.

“Hahaha... father, mother, I finally got revenge for you!” Guo Si laughed loudly as he stared at the bearded man’s corpse. Once done, he leaped into the air and tried to leave.

He was in mid-air when suddenly, two crossbow bolts pierced through his legs and elicited a bloodcurdling scream from him. He immediately fell from the sky like a bird whose wings were clipped.

The next moment, dozens of masked men wearing dark red, form-fitting outfits rushed out of the streets and rooftops. It took them no time to surround the inn.

The group was pretty strong. The weakest of them was a Vessel Augmentor, and they were all pointing Astral Breaking Crossbows at the inn.

The sudden incident terrified everyone, of course. No one seemed to know what to do.

The people surrounding the inn all wielded Astral Breaking Crossbows, a type of weapon that could pierce through astral qi like paper. There was no doubt that they were members of the imperial court.

This was the true reason everyone in the inn was panicking.

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Suddenly, a series of claps came from the second floor. Then, someone said, “Unerring predictions, a life for a life. Your ability to tell fortunes is quite impressive, Fortune Taoist! But are you aware that you are also going to face a disaster today?”

The people looked up. They saw a young man with somewhat feminine features smiling down on the Fortune Taoist from the stairs. He seemed to be in his twenties.

Standing behind him were two men and a woman. One guy was plump, honest-looking, and full of smiles. He was the kind of person you take one look at and feel like smiling as well. The other guy

was as skinny as a bamboo and looked like he hadn't eaten for days. He had long arms that reached down to his knees, and his finger bones were exceptionally flat and wide. His hands were covered in calluses as well.

The woman was in her thirties and looked fairly beautiful. However, she was dressed like a Taoist. She was wearing a Taoist robe, and her hair was tied up like a Taoist. She carried a sword behind her back and looked cold and indifferent.

"Doctors can't treat themselves, and people can't judge themselves objectively. Naturally, I never tell my own fortune," the old Taoist named Fortune Taoist said slowly. "Besides, I'm a good man who always does good deeds. Why would I need to worry about disaster?"

"Is that so?" The young man looked on with amusement. "You call taking a life for every life you save a good deed?"

"You call killing an imperial official and stealing their wealth a good deed?"

"You call wiping out an entire family down to their animals a good deed?"

"You seriously think that a vile, monstrous murderer like you has any good karma?"

"I killed that official because he is corrupt and abuses the law for his own benefit. I stole his gold because he didn't use them in the right place. And I killed his whole family because there isn't a single soul in that family who is good."

"I killed those who deserved to die, made sure that the evil wouldn't spread, and did what is right. If this isn't good karma, then what is?" Fortune Taoist countered.

"What absolute nonsense and sophistry," The young man scoffed. "Let's pretend that everything you said is true. Even so, it is up to the imperial court to decide that official's fate, not you."

"Imperial court? What could they possibly do?"

Before the Fortune Taoist could react, the monk sitting opposite Ye Qing shoved a drumstick into his mouth and crushed both the flesh and the bones between his teeth. "By the time the imperial court takes action, everyone in the realm would've starved to death already."

"The imperial court doesn't give a shit about corrupt officials. In that case, we'll take matters into our own hands!"

"All who are corrupt and abuse the law must die!"

"All who are selfish and malevolent must die!"

"All demons and monsters must die!"

"And all evils and dark spirits must die!"

“No wonder they call you the Killer Monk. Your bloodthirst is quite something.”

The young man’s scorn didn’t change. “But you’re just a nobody. How dare you criticize the ways of the imperial court? You know nothing!”

“You push us around as you please, but you won’t allow us to criticize your behavior?”

“You turn a blind eye on a corrupt official, but you won’t stand for it when we take matters into our own hands?”

“What kind of logic is that? Cough! Cough...”

The scholar argued between violent coughs. He sounded like he might cough out a heart or lung at any moment.

“More nonsense and sophistry! A family has family rules, and a country has country laws. That is how order is kept. If anyone can stick their nose into any business and do as they please, then what is the point of law? How can order be maintained?” The young man narrowed his eyes. “If we do things your way, then this realm would have plunged into chaos long ago!”

“You claim that you’re doing it for the people and good karma, but if that is true, you would’ve reported those so-called corrupt officials to the imperial court and let them take action. You wouldn’t take matters into your own hands, break the laws, and disrupt the order.”

“In my opinion, you’re just doing this to grow your fame and status.”

“Merchants chase profit, and warriors chase fame. Both are flies chasing after a pile of shit.” The young man let out a cold chuckle as he played with his silk handkerchief. “‘The monk, Taoist and scholar will deal with all the injustices in the world’. It’s a good slogan, but it doesn’t change the fact that you’re just a bunch of deceivers and murderers.”

The plump man standing behind the young man added smilingly, “You’re like whores trying to pretend that they haven’t lost their chastity.”

“‘The monk, Taoist and scholar will deal with all the injustices in the world’? It’s them?”

It would seem that the slogan was quite famous in Tian Yong, because subdued murmurs immediately broke out inside the inn.

“Who are they?”

“You don’t know? The monk refers to Killer Monk, Bu Jie. He’s a hot-tempered and fiercely righteous monk who would fly off his handle as soon as he sees injustice. The Taoist is Fortune Taoist, and he is incredibly good at telling one’s fortune. However, he has a rule where in exchange for his service, his customers must help him in taking a life. Hence the slogan, ‘A life for a fortune’. The scholar is the Sick Scholar[2]. He calls himself the disciple of a sage, though no one knows if it’s actually true. There is no one he hates more than a corrupt official, and he will kill any corrupt official he runs into.”

“Oh, you’re talking about them! I heard them annihilating the Feng Clan of Qing He[3] and the newly appointed governor just a few days ago. How crazy are they to show up at West Yong of all places?”

“The Feng Clan? I thought that the Feng Clan is a literary family? Why did they annihilate the whole clan including the women and the children?”

“This is just a rumor, but I heard that the Feng Clan colluded with the governor to raise the price of goods and bully their competitors around. Whatever their deal is, it isn’t good.”

“Oh, then they did a good thing.”

“I agree, but annihilating the whole clan is a bit extreme, don’t you think? What about the children? Surely they must be innocent?”

.....

“Fuck you and your bullshit! You officials are all as bad as each other! I will kill you and rid this world of your sins!”

Bu Jie flew into a rage as soon as he heard the young man and the plump man’s insults. Pushing off the floor with a might crack, he shot straight toward the young man like an arrow and swung his knife straight at his face. The blade of the knife shone so brightly that it blinded most people.

Clang!

There was a soft twang, and the power surrounding Bu Jie’s knife disappeared. At the same time, Bu Jie was flung back even faster than when he charged the young man. After he landed on the ground, he staggered backward and left behind footprints that were several inches deep and reeking some sort of cold energy. Bu Jie’s weapon arm and knife was also covered in a thick layer of frost.

“The Great Supreme Yin Hand?! Who are you?”

Fortune Taoist’s expression grew a little severe. Bu Jie was a veteran Spirit Purifier, but the young man had dealt him a heavy blow in a single exchange. Clearly, their situation was more dire than he thought.

The young man elegantly wiped his hand with his handkerchief while answering, “Now that you mentioned it, I haven’t introduced myself, have I? I am the inspector general of Tian Yong, Chu Renhe.”

“Inspector general? You’re a member of the Intelligence Department?!” Fortune Taoist blanched.

“What do you think?” Chu Renhe chuckled.

The murmurs inside the inn immediately rose an octave.

The Intelligence Department?

Everyone in the Intelligence Department was an elite just like the Pacification Bureau. However, they were far more enigmatic and secretive by comparison. They had branches in commanderies and prefectures only, but not all commanderies had a branch. A branch was established only in territories that hosted a vast number of factions or was plagued by complex circumstances.

Of course, this didn’t mean that the Intelligence Department didn’t have personnel planted in places that didn’t have a branch. There was a reason the Intelligence Department boasted that they knew what was going on in the nine provinces and the four seas at all times. Naturally, they had spies everywhere. They could be a peddler, a soldier, a helpless scholar, a wealthy merchant, a powerful official, a famous warrior; your acquaintance, your best friend, or even your spouse.

In fact, a large number of Pacification Sentinels were really spies planted by the Intelligence Department. Ye Qing wouldn’t be too surprised if Gu Suitang and Fang Xiaoman told him one day that they were really members of the Intelligence Department.