

## Stranger 561

Chapter 561: Three Solutions To Decide Life Or Death

“What do you mean, Bodhisattva?” Ye Qing voiced his puzzlement.

“You didn’t think that Xiong Kuohai went so far as to risk the wrath of Sword King City and Earthfire Palace of Demons just to destroy me and the Buddhist Hall of Joy, did you?”

Joy Bodhisattva explained slowly, “For the longest time, Xiong Kuohai had plotted to conquer Bei You, which is why he views his greatest competitors—Tower of Cornucopia, Shade of Scents, and my Buddhist Hall of Joy—as the thorns in his side. Long before I became a Grandmaster, Xiong Kuohai had already been scheming to devour us all. To that end, he even colluded with Huang Tianba in secret and enacted multiple crafty plots and machinations, though he hadn’t succeeded so far due to one reason or another.”

“This time, all of the heads in Bei You including Gold Ingot of Tower of Cornucopia and Mistress Ruyi of Shade of Scents are gathered at Blissful Mountain. This is his chance to destroy all of us in one go, and Xiong Kuohai isn’t one to let such an opportunity slip through his grasp.”

Ye Qing nodded in realization. Now he understood what she meant.

Joy Bodhisattva continued, “Therefore, Xiong Kuohai isn’t just plotting to use my guests to eliminate me. He is planning to use me to eliminate the forces of Bei You and especially Gold Ingot and Mistress Ruyi. Assuming that everything went as planned, he could devour the Buddhist Hall of Joy, Tower of Cornucopia and Shade of Scents at once and achieve his dream, all without lifting a finger.”

“Do you think I’m right, scion?”

Ye Qing replied in an impressed tone, “You are. I didn’t think everything through.”

That was what he said, but it wasn’t really his fault. It had only been weeks since he arrived at Bei You, and he hadn’t figured out the complex relationships between the major forces of Bei You yet. It was inevitable that his deductions would have holes in it.

“You are too humble, scion. As an outsider, it is perfectly normal that you aren’t privy to the darkness of our little world.” Joy Bodhisattva consoled him before asking another question, “Since you’ve figured out Xiong Kuohai’s plan, do you have a solution for it?”

Ye Qing thought for a moment before answering, “Well, I can think of three solutions. I’ll start with the bad solution first.”

“The bad solution is to not treat the guests with the Blissful Spring and feign ignorance. Your goal would be to survive this Trueman feast without anymore ‘pleasant surprises’ from Xiong Kuohai.”

“The middle solution is to attack Xiong Kuohai first. While he is still unaware that you are onto him, you can mobilize the full power of the Buddhist Hall of Joy and capture or kill Xiong Kuohai in a blitz attack.”

“And finally, the good solution is to give him a taste of his own medicine. Xiong Kuohai thinks he can use your guests to kill you, and you to kill off your guests. But with the right manipulation, it is not impossible to turn the guests against him instead.”

All three solutions had their strengths and flaws. The bad solution was the safest solution as it completely neutralized the threat represented by the Burning Heart. Neither the guests nor the Buddhist Hall of Joy would be endangered by the conspiracy, and the Trueman feast would reach its conclusion without a hitch.

The problem was that there was nothing they could do against Xiong Kuohai either. After all, the poisoning had never happened, so what justification did they have to arrest or kill Xiong Kuohai? The bastard would be able to walk scot free despite coming so close to ruining everyone at once.

The middle solution treated the ailment at its roots and resolved the threat once and for all, but it was also very risky. On the surface, it looked like Joy Bodhisattva held every advantage since this was her home turf. It would be all too easy for her to mobilize everything she had and slay a single Grandmaster.

However, Xiong Kuohai wasn't the only person on Blissful Mountain right now. Sword King City, Earthfire Palace of Demons, and the rest of Bei You's forces were gathered here right now. Would they really allow Joy Bodhisattva to kill Xiong Kuohai? Of course not. An intricate web of interests bound every force in Bei You, and some of them were absolutely against Joy Bodhisattva killing Xiong Kuohai. Be it the fear of a single tyrant ruling all of Bei You with an iron fist, or the outrage of Joy Bodhisattva killing a guest as the host, her guests would surely do everything in their power to stop her.

Sure, Joy Bodhisattva could tell them about the conspiracy and reveal the fact that Xiong Kuohai was planning to poison them all and wipe out all the major forces of Bei You all at once, but would they believe her?

They might, but they most likely wouldn't. It was because Xiong Kuohai had given Joy Bodhisattva an insanely valuable gift just yesterday. It was such a valuable gift that most people in the room thought that Xiong Kuohai and Joy Bodhisattva shared a deep relationship with each other. What would these people think if Joy Bodhisattva claimed that Xiong Kuohai was plotting to kill her?

They would think that she had gone cuckoo, of course. They might even think that Joy Bodhisattva was a heartless monster who, despite the “deep” relationship she shared with Xiong Kuohai, decided to use this golden opportunity to eliminate her benefactor and claim Endless Sand for herself. In the end, the guests would still be outraged and protective of Xiong Kuohai.

Therefore, the middle solution had clear benefits, but the variables were extremely difficult to control.

Finally, there was the good solution. It had both great risks and great rewards. By manipulating the crowd first and pitting them against Xiong Kuohai, they could give Xiong Kuohai a taste of his own medicine and eliminate his threat once and for all. All Joy Bodhisattva needed to do then was to reap the rewards.

The good solution was good, but the risks were just as great. First things first, how were they going to manipulate the crowd into believing them and acting as their butcher's knife?

If they could not convince the crowd that Xiong Kuohai was plotting to pit them against each other so he could play the fisherman, then everything would fall into tatters. Not only that, they would be giving Xiong Kuohai the opportunity to convince the people into believing his version of the story. That would turn out very, very badly for Joy Bodhisattva.

All three solutions had their strengths and flaws, and he was sure that Joy Bodhisattva had already thought of them herself. In the end, it was up to her to decide which solution she wanted to deal with this issue.

Joy Bodhisattva looked thoughtful for a moment before she asked, "Do you have a detailed plan for the good solution, scion?"

I thought she might choose the good solution, Ye Qing thought with a mental sigh. Having gotten to know Joy Bodhisattva better, he knew that there was a high chance she would not allow this opportunity to slip through her grasp.

Sure, the good solution was incredibly risky, but the rewards were equally tempting. If they succeeded, then eliminating Xiong Kuohai wouldn't be the only reward they received. Joy Bodhisattva would be able to enact Xiong Kuohai's own plan and devour Endless Sand, subdue the major forces of Bei You, and become the strongest faction in Bei You in one go. In short, she would be able to conquer Bei You in one fell swoop.

No leader worth their salt would allow such an opportunity to slip by.

"I don't have a detailed plan yet. All I have are some unripe, poorly thought out threads that barely constitute an idea. If you don't mind, then I can tell you about it," Ye Qing replied.

Since Joy Bodhisattva had chosen to go with the good solution, then it was only right that he did everything in his power to ensure that it would succeed. After all, they were grasshoppers bound by the same rope right now. If Joy Bodhisattva succeeded, then he would benefit from it. But if she failed, then he would suffer.

"Our objective is to give Xiong Kuohai a taste of his own medicine, right? The crux of this puzzle is how we can convince everyone that Xiong Kuohai is planning to use them before tossing them aside like trash."

"There is a saying called seeing is believing. We can tell everyone Xiong Kuohai's plan down to the last detail, but it still wouldn't be as convincing as them seeing it with their own eyes. And what better way there is to do this than to have Xiong Kuohai admit his own plan?"

“It sounds like you already have a core concept for your idea.” Joy Bodhisattva stared at Ye Qing with clear eyes that resembled the celestial bodies of the sky.

“That’s right!” Ye Qing declared with confidence. “The core concept of my idea is... acting!”

“Acting?” Joy Bodhisattva figured out his meaning immediately. “You want me to cooperate with the guests and put on a show for Xiong Kuohai? We would pretend to be afflicted by the Burning Heart and fight each other until Xiong Kuohai decides to step up and claim the spoils?”

“You are wise, Bodhisattva. That is exactly what I’m saying,” Ye Qing answered.

However, Joy Bodhisattva shook her head decisively after mulling over Ye Qing’s idea for a moment.

“What don’t you like about my plan, Bodhisattva?” Ye Qing was caught off guard by her reaction. For the moment, this was the best idea he could think of. “Or are you unwilling to...?”

“Did you think I’m unwilling to accept your idea because I wish to monopolize the rewards for myself?” Joy Bodhisattva asked.

“My apologies, Bodhisattva,” replied Ye Qing while clasping his hands. His apology made it clear that that was exactly what he thought.

For an act to succeed, all the actors must know the script and the truth of the matter. However, this meant that the Buddhist Hall of Joy could no longer monopolize the pie that was Endless Sand. In fact, they could no longer seize the opportunity to subdue the other forces and dominate Bei You in one fell swoop.

Ye Qing thought that Joy Bodhisattva was rejecting his idea because she was unwilling to let go of such a golden opportunity.

“I won’t deny that I am unwilling to allow such an opportunity to slip through my mask. I won’t deny that I wish to monopolize everything either. However, I am not so foolish as to put my self-interests over my own life.”

Joy Bodhisattva did not take offense despite Ye Qing’s doubt. “I am just speaking facts, and the fact is, your idea is too naive, scion.”

Chapter 562: Only When Life Meets Death Can Life Face Death

“Naive? What do you mean?” Ye Qing asked while annoyance flashed in his eyes.

“A human heart is a complex thing.”

Joy Bodhisattva began her explanation, “First, how can you be sure that Xiong Kuohai did not have allies among the guests? What if one of them tells Xiong Kuohai about it?”

“Even if there isn’t one, their lives would no longer be in danger after they learned about the poison. Why would they help me kill Xiong Kuohai then? Don’t tell me it’s because they owe me their lives. In the jianghu, ingrates who bite the hand that feeds are the majority, not the minority.”

“In theory, it looks like we outnumber Xiong Kuohai many times to one. In reality, how many would lend me their full strength, if they ‘deign’ to help me at all? Moreover, you mentioned that Xiong Kuohai is aided by a mysterious Sakyamuni, so the variables are even harder to control.”

“If Xiong Kuohai manages to escape this place, then the consequences would be most severe. There is no room for error. Either we conduct our plan with absolute confidence that it will succeed, or we do not go through with it at all.”

Joy Bodhisattva’s voice was calm, but it was impossible to mistake the ruthlessness and indifference of her words. “What do you think, scion?”

Ye Qing’s mouth opened and closed for a moment before he admitted, “You are right, Bodhisattva. I didn’t really think it through properly.”

Joy Bodhisattva was right. Between repaying a favor and self-preservation, a jianghu warrior would almost always choose self-preservation.

“What do you think we should do, Bodhisattva?” Ye Qing asked humbly.

“If life does not know death, why would life strive toward life? If they aren’t driven into a corner, why would they give us their all?”

Joy Bodhisattva walked to the door and gazed at the moon in the sky. “If we’re going to borrow their strength, then we must allow someone to hold a knife to their neck and push them into a dead end first.”

“Only when life meets death can life face death.”

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“You have all traveled a long way to my Buddhist Hall of Joy to participate in my Trueman feast. I am most grateful.”

A new day arrived, and the second day of the Trueman feast began earnestly. Joy Bodhisattva rose from her seat and saluted her guests.

“You’re welcome, Bodhisattva!”

“It is our honor to be able to participate in your Trueman feast as well!”

The guests rose to their feet and returned the salute as well.

“Thank you,” Joy Bodhisattva gestured at the tables of food and wine and said, “I have prepared some food and wine for you all. I hope that you will enjoy it.”

“Thank you, Bodhisattva. May auspiciousness always be with you,” everyone replied in unison. Their combined voices were so loud that it resounded throughout the Blissful Peak.

“You’re welcome. Please, take your seats.”

After Joy Bodhisattva motioned for the guests to sit down, bamboo flutes began playing a melodious tune, and countless beautiful women wearing long sleeves and thin white dresses descended from above like celestials. They began dancing and entertaining the guests.

What was a feast if not delicious food, spicy wine, sweet music, beautiful dances, and good company? For a time, the sounds of joy and laughter filled the world.

When the feast neared its end, and even the flute music that seemed like it would never end slowed down a little, the sky was suddenly filled with golden light, and countless white lotuses descended from above.

The golden light formed a path, and the white lotuses the steps. Together, they formed a stairway of heaven. The guests were trying to figure out what they were plotting when a file of beautiful women, each one of them wearing a white robe and carrying a white jar in their hands, walked down the stairway barefooted like they were the Jiutian Xuannü[1] herself.

The guests couldn’t care less about the women, however. Their attention was fully drawn by the white jars they were holding.

It was because the white jar could very well contain the object of their desire—the true main course of this Trueman feast—the Blissful Spring.

The women placed the jars on the tables. They retreated only after every guest had received a jar of wine.

“My Buddha is joy, and he speaks of bliss after death.”

It was at this moment Joy Bodhisattva spoke up once more. “In order to thank you all for participating in my Trueman feast, I have prepared a jar of Blissful Spring for all of you. May your joy be dreamlike and blissful.”

“Thank you, Bodhisattva! May auspiciousness always be with you!”

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“Thank you, Bodhisattva! May auspiciousness always be with you!”

Everyone was excited to say the least. If they were just congratulating Joy Bodhisattva out of politeness earlier, now they were truly grateful. Well, some of them at least. The rest were too excited to care about anything except the wine jar before them.

Although the Blissful Spring was useless for one’s cultivation, it was a priceless drink that was readily available only and only within the Buddhist Hall of Joy. Most of them had heard of its fame but never tasted it as a matter of course. But today, they were all given an entire jar of superior quality Blissful Spring. How could they not be excited by this?

Even the Sword Executor Elder of Sword King City, Ji Donglei, and the Vermillion Bird Envoy of the Earthfire Palace of Demons, Huo Ruyu, looked eager.

In fact, a good number of guests were participating in the Trueman feast for the Blissful Spring.

*Let's hope you can still laugh when this is all over.*

At his table, Ye Qing looked away from the smiling, excited faces and shook his head.

Ignorance is bliss.

But ignorance... is also a tragedy.

Ye Qing could not help but look up to the sixth floor where Xiong Kuohai was at. The honest-looking sect leader was currently sitting primly and staring at the jar of Blissful Spring just as fervently as everyone else around him. It was almost as if he wasn't the mastermind behind the tragedy that was about to happen very soon.

*Would you look at that world class acting.*

Ye Qing withdrew his gaze and sighed quietly.

The Blissful Spring was the Blissful Spring.

But once it entered the guests' stomach, it would transform into the incarnation of carnage.

"A toast to all of you."

Joy Bodhisattva raised her wine cup.

"You too, Bodhisattva!"

"You too, Bodhisattva!"

"You too, Bodhisattva!"

As soon as the formalities were over, everyone poured a cup of Blissful Spring for themselves, held the cup with both hands, and watched Joy Bodhisattva expectantly.

"Please, enjoy your drink," Joy Bodhisattva declared before draining the contents of her cup in one gulp.

"You're welcome."

The rest of the guests drank their Blissful Spring as well.

Not long after the sweet liquid entered their mouths, blissful expressions began spreading across everyone's faces. They looked like they might grow wings and fly on the spot.

"It is as if I have soared into the heavens for a moment. Wonderful! Most wonderful!"

A few breaths later, the Sword Executor Elder of Sword King City, Ji Donglei opened his eyes and sighed with appreciation.

The Vermillion Bird Envoy of the Earthfire Palace of Demons, Huo Ruyi also let out a giggle.  
“Haha... the Blissful Spring definitely deserves its fame.”

“It feels like a blissful dream I don’t want to wake up from for as long as possible.  
No wonder it is one of the Three Wonders.”

Xiong Kuohai exhaled with an intoxicated look on his face. “I dare not waste a single drop of this wonderful drink. Everyone, let us toast to the Bodhisattva once more, shall we? May your power be infinite, and your fortune everlasting, Trueman Bodhisattva!”

“May your power be infinite, and your fortune everlasting, Trueman Bodhisattva!”

“May your power be infinite, and your fortune everlasting, Trueman Bodhisattva!”

“May your power be infinite, and your fortune everlasting, Trueman Bodhisattva!”

Everyone echoed in agreement and poured yet another cup of Blissful Spring.

“Thank you, leader Xiong. Thank you, everyone.”

After Joy Bodhisattva drank her second cup of Blissful Spring, she said, “Please, enjoy yourselves.”

Once again, everyone raised their cups and gulped down its contents.

Once the ceremony was over, the music and dances began once more. Alas, the festive mood only lasted a dozen or so breaths before suddenly, someone on the third floor suddenly blanched and shouted, “I’m poisoned! It’s poisoned! The Blissful Spring is poisoned!”

“What are you talking about?”

“Cut the slander!”

“Yeah! This is the Buddhist Hall of Joy. Who would dare to do such a thing in this place? The Buddhist Hall of Joy themselves?”

*Yep, the shills are starting.*

Ye Qing lifted an eyebrow when he heard the commotion. He knew at first glance that these people were shills, and he was sure that this was just the beginning.

“Hmm... something’s not right... I think... I think the Blissful Spring really is poisoned!”

Another person spoke up, and everyone looked. He looked deathly pale, and they could clearly sense an anomalous energy growing inside his body. Although they weren’t the victims—yet—they could sense just how dark, evil, and strange the energy was. Goosebumps broke out of their skin before they knew it.

“I’m poisoned too!”

A fourth person blanched and screeched as the same type of energy bloomed inside their body.

“The Blissful Spring is poisoned!”

“I’m... I’m poisoned as well... help...”



More and more people were blanching and yelling by the second.

#### Chapter 563: Blissful Peak Bleeds

There was a saying called, “Three men make a tiger.” If one person lied, then it was just a lie. If two people lied, then it was an elaborate lie. But if three people lied, then someone might believe it to be the truth—even if it was still objectively a lie.

That was what was happening to the crowd right now. At first, no one believed that the Blissful Spring was poisoned. But as more and more people started yelling and showing symptoms, their doubt inevitably began to sprout like a seed. As if on cue, a dark and evil energy burst out of their heart and flooded their entire body in an instant.

“I’ve been poisoned!”

“The Blissful Spring really has been poisoned!”

“What the hell is this poison? Why is my Blue Dragon Pill not working against it?”

“My... My Poison Removing Golden Cicada isn’t working either.”

“Heavens! This poison spreads insanely fast!”

It was like a plague. It wasn’t long before everyone noticed that something wrong with their body, and they were unable to remove the anomalous energy no matter what they tried. As fear, suspicion, anger and more negative emotions sprouted like weeds inside their heart, so did the anomalous energy. Chaos rippled throughout the entire Blissful Peak.

Ye Qing let out a sigh as he observed the panicking crowd. To be honest, Xiong Kuohai’s method wasn’t all that impressive. All he did was get a few shills to pretend that they were poison and sow the seeds of doubt in the people’s heart. When doubt arose, the Burning Heart would activate. After that, he didn’t need to do anything else. The situation would snowball out of control itself.

Of course, it was partially thanks to the fact that the shills were professionals. They really were infected by the Burning Heart.

In fact, Xiong Kuohai’s tactic was pretty stupid. Yes, it would seem that they really were poisoned, but how did the shills know that it was the Blissful Spring that was poisoned and not the food? For that matter, how did they discover the poison sooner than the Grandmasters residing on the sixth floor? So on and so forth.

It was absolutely possible to poke holes in Xiong Kuohai’s tactic. However, one did not need a perfect or intelligent tactic to get their way. Right now, almost everyone was panicking and freaking out after discovering that they were poisoned. Chaos was everywhere and growing worse by the second. Just who in the world would have the presence of mind to care about the contradictions at this moment?

Long story short, Xiong Kuohai’s tactic was simple, old-fashioned, and full of holes, but it was effective, and that was enough.

Not wanting to stand out, Ye Qing emulated his fellow guests' behavior and sat down on the floor. It looked like he was meditating and attempting to expel the poison inside his body when he was really observing the sixth floor.

It was absolute havoc in the lower floors, but the guests on the fifth and sixth floor were still calm. It was the calm before the storm, however.

“What is the meaning of this, Bodhisattva?”

The Sword Executor Elder of Sword King City, Ji Donglei [1] Like a thundersnow, he was glaring at Joy Bodhisattva while attempting to suppress the Burning Heart.

“I don't understand what you're saying, Elder Ji,” Joy Bodhisattva replied.

“You don't? Is there really any point in pretending at this point, Bodhisattva?”

The Vermillion Bird Envoy of Earthfire Palace of Demons, Huo Ruyi pressed while burning like a literal vermillion bird who just rose from the ashes. “Why did you poison us?”

“I did not.” Joy Bodhisattva attempted to explain, “Just think. What reason do I have to poison any of you?”

“If it wasn't you, then why are we afflicted, while you and your people are perfectly fine?” barked Huo Ruyi while shooting glances at Joy Bodhisattva and the rest of the disciples. It was clear that they were fine.

“Someone must have poisoned the Blissful Spring. Due to our limited reserves, my disciples and I drank only ordinary water to ensure that every guest in our halls could enjoy our finest. That is why we weren't poisoned.”

Joy Bodhisattva declared with conviction, “Someone must have done this to frame me!”

On the fifth floor, Wei Changhe, the man they called the Sunset Swordsman questioned, “Really? The Blissful Spring is one of the most heavily guarded places in the Buddhist Hall of Joy, is it not? How could any outsider have slipped in without you noticing?”

“The Blissful Spring is guarded, but warriors from all walks of the *jianghu* are gathered today. It is perfectly natural for a champion to slip past the guards and poison my Blissful Spring.”

Joy Bodhisattva suddenly turned in Xiong Kuohai's direction and declared, “It's you. You've been scheming to kill me for the longest time, Xiong Kuohai. It has to be you.”

“How could you accuse me, Joy Bodhisattva?! What did I ever do to you?” Xiong Kuohai hurriedly denied the accusation.

“Have some shame, Joy Bodhisattva! Leader Xiong just gave you a massive gift yesterday, and now you're slandering him? Do you think we're stupid?!”

A brawny man wearing a bronze half-mask that covered the right side of his face roared, “Cut the bullshit and give us the antidote already! Otherwise, you know what’s going to happen next!”

The speaker was known as Punisher Tang, and just like his name implied, there was nothing he loathed more than evil, and nothing he loved more than punishing evil. He was a famous wanderer of Northern Xinjiang and a half-step Grandmaster.

“Yeah. Give us the antidote!”

“Give us the antidote!”

“Give us the antidote!”

Punisher Tang’s words immediately triggered the crowd and caused them to charge the peak. The disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy hurriedly barred their way.

“Calm down. Please think about this. The Buddhist Hall of Joy does not share a hostile relationship with anyone here. What reason is there for us to poison you?” argued Worriless while standing protectively in front of Joy Bodhisattva.

Beside Punisher Tang, a woman wearing a bronze half-mask covering the left side of her face said harshly, “Reason? Is it not obvious? Everyone here knows that the Buddhist Hall of Joy is a group of vile, murderous heretics who would do anything under the sun to achieve their goals. It’s obvious that you’re trying to kill us all in one fell swoop!”

The woman was Punisher Tang’s younger sister. Her name was Slayer Tang, and she was a late-stage Spirit Master. They were known as the Punisher and the Slayer in Bei You.

Once again, her inflammatory words triggered the anger of the crowd.

“Yes, that has to be it.”

“They’re plotting to kill us so they can take Bei You for themselves!”

“I should’ve known better than to believe that a bunch of heretics would uphold the tradition of guest right! “

“I... I don’t want to die...”

“Ahhhhh!!!”

As suspicion, anger and fear continued to grow in the people’s heart, the Burning Heart fully activated and scorched their minds with all sorts of negative emotions. Unable to hold onto their rationality any longer, one man swung their saber and cut a disciple of the Buddhist Hall of Joy in half. Blood splattered against his clothes and dyed everyone’s eyes red.

“If the Buddhist Hall of Joy isn’t going to let us live, then we’re not going to let them live either. Let us fight, my brothers and sisters!”

“Let us fight!”

“Kill! Kill the heretics! Kill them all!”

“If you don’t want to die, then follow me! We’re going to kill these heretics to the last! One of them has to have the antidote!”

“Kill them all!”

The disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy weren’t just going to stand there and die, of course. They immediately got into position and engaged the crazed people in combat.

The fight quickly spread like a spark that consumed the inferno. It only took a couple of breaths for the entire Blissful Peak to be embroiled in battle.

Although the Blissful Mountain was the Buddhist Hall of Joy’s home territory, everyone participating in the Trueman feast was a powerful warrior in their own right. As if that wasn’t enough, they had the numbers advantage as well. As a result, dozens of disciples were killed in just a dozen or so breaths or so.

That said, many of these warriors possessed a weak will as well. It wasn’t long before the raging emotions exceeded their limits, causing them to burst into flames and die.

The terrible deaths were the last straw that unleashed the guests’ fear and fury in full. Combined with the Burning Heart’s influence, and they all charged toward the disciples with suicidal abandon.

“I don’t know what you’re planning, and I don’t care. Give us the antidote now or suffer the consequences, Joy Bodhisattva,” Ji Donglei glared at Joy Bodhisattva while clutching his sword tightly.

If someone were to look closely, they would notice that a bit of crimson was slowly but surely leaking out from the corner of his eyes. Ji Donglei discovered that even he, a Grandmaster, was unable to expel the anomalous energy growing inside his body. Worse, he couldn’t even put a name to the poison. One thing for certain, it was evil, potent, and beyond terrifying. If it wasn’t cured as quickly as possible, then today could very well be the day he died. Those poor people who burned to death just a while ago were the perfect example of that.

“Elder Ji, I—”

Joy Bodhisattva was about to defend herself further when Punisher Tang interrupted with a rude shout, “Is this the time to be talking right now?! Let’s capture this bastard first!”

Punisher Tang roared and pounced toward Joy Bodhisattva. Moving even faster than him was a meteor descending from the sky and heading straight for Joy Bodhisattva.

The meteor wasn’t a real meteor, of course. It was a meteor hammer[2] and Punisher Tang’s main weapon. That said, the power behind the attack was so great that it really felt like a meteor was falling toward Joy Bodhisattva.

Joy Bodhisattva remained calm, however. She pointed her right hand upward and her left hand downward. There existed only her between the gap that was heaven and earth.

The descending meteor abruptly shattered into smithereens, and Punisher Tang flew backward as if he was struck by a heavy blow. Half of his body exploded into a shower of blood and gore just like that.

Chapter 564: Killing The Bodhisattva

“Big brother! I’ll kill you!”

Slayer Tang’s eyes burned with white hot fury when she saw her brother, Punisher Tang, taking a serious injury from Joy Bodhisattva. She immediately pounced toward her.

“Stop hesitating already, old ghost. Let’s go!”

Huo Ruyu shot a glance at Ji Donglei, and both of them charged toward Joy Bodhisattva as well.

Dark red flames burst out of Huo Ruyu’s body as she rose into the air. The silhouette of a vermillion bird could be seen flickering within the flames, and the air turned as hot as a furnace.

Unlike his flamboyant partner, Ji Donglei simply walked toward Joy Bodhisattva. Every time he took a step, his sword would unsheath exactly a-third of a meter, and a layer of cold, yin frost would appear on the floor. Three steps later, his sword fully left its sheath, and the floor was encased in a meter of ice. It felt like he was standing in the middle of the coldest winter.

Above, the vermillion bird scorched the sky, and below, the ice froze the ground.

Huo Ruyu threw a palm strike in Joy Bodhisattva’s direction and caused the vermillion bird to swoop down on her.

Ji Donglei raised his sword and summoned a frost dragon from the ground. The power of autumn and winter resided within it.

Boom!

The next moment, a terrific shockwave shook the entire Blissful Peak. The clouds of fire rolled back toward Huo Ruyu, and the wave of ice exploded into bits. At the center of the twin attacks, Joy Bodhisattva stood tall and proud while surrounded by flying celestials and golden lotuses. She looked completely unharmed.

The cloud she was standing on had been crushed into fine powder, however.

“You just became a Grandmaster several months ago, and you’re already this strong? No wonder you dared to come up with such an outrageous scheme.”

Huo Ruyu and Ji Donglei exchanged a surprised glance with each other. For a newly ascended Grandmaster, Joy Bodhisattva was just as strong as them, people who had become Grandmasters for years. This discovery only increased their determination to kill her, of course.

“Let’s attack her together. And don’t hold back.”

Ji Donglei narrowed his eyes and thrust his sword forward. A spatial tear immediately appeared and shot countless lightning at the Buddhist mirage surrounding Joy Bodhisattva.

“*Sword Form: Thundersnow*”

A winter thunder rumbled, and it was murderous and devoid of mercy. The flying celestials were annihilated, and the golden lotuses were shattered under the attack. Joy Bodhisattva’s Kingdom of Buddha wobbled unsteadily under the barrage of lightning strikes.

Right after Ji Donglei slashed the Kingdom of Buddha open with Thundersnow, Huo Ruyi grew a pair of fire wings from her back and transformed into light. She appeared in front of Joy Bodhisattva in just the blink of an eye and threw a palm strike at her forehead.

Her palm turned bright red all the way down to the hair after it crossed just three inches of distance. It was like her palm was a mini world in its own right where the pores were volcanoes in the middle of a furious eruption, her palm lines were bottomless abysses overflowing with lava, and her flesh were mountain ranges that entrapped both heaven and earth.

Whoever said that a small object could not hold a world?

When Huo Ruyi's palm made contact with Joy Bodhisattva's forehead, the Bodhisattva shuddered, and the cloud beneath her feet abruptly collapsed as if it could not bear the weight of the attack.

The next moment, streams of golden light poured out of Joy Bodhisattva's nose and mouth and transformed into a Buddha of Joy with three heads, six arms, and two genders embracing each other tightly. All three Buddha heads wore a furious expression as they clenched their six fists and punched Huo Ruyi at the same time.

Shaking violently like she had just been struck by lightning, the fire surrounding Huo Ruyi scattered into nothing, and the fiery wings behind her back were snuffed out like a candle flame. She staggered backward six steps before she managed to catch herself, but her complexion was wan and yellow like that of an ill patient.

That said, Joy Bodhisattva wasn't looking so hot herself. After spitting out the stream of golden light, her flawless skin slowly lost its luster, and her aura gradually waned like someone who just lost a ton of life force.

Seeing this and knowing that Joy Bodhisattva was hurt, Gold Ingot of the Tower of Cornucopia, Mistress Ruyi of the Shade of Scents, Five Poison Boy, Sunset Swordsman and more charged the woman without hesitation.

Their lives were on the line here. No one dared to hold back.

Three incense sticks appeared in Mistress Ruyi's hands. One was greenish like a plant and overflowing with life, another was pitch black and overflowing with inauspiciousness, and the last incense stick was fiery red and screamed of danger.

The next moment, the three incense sticks ignited on their own and produced a few puffs of smoke. The smoke of the greenish incense stick flew toward Huo Ruyi and entered her body, restoring her aura and complexion immediately. The smoke of the black incense stick transformed into many snarling or weeping visages and enveloped Joy Bodhisattva, tainting her with the putrid stench of death.

And finally, the smoke of the red incense stick bled bright red blood almost as if it was alive. At the same time, wounds started appearing all over Joy Bodhisattva's body, and blood poured profusely out of her orifices.

Shade of Scents was famed for their skill in creating incense sticks, and Mistress Ruyi was a famous incense master.

The three incense sticks she was currently using were her greatest creations. The green incense stick's theme was life, the black incense stick's theme was death, and the red incense stick's theme was violence.

Hence, the three incense sticks were named the Incense of Life, the Incense of Death, and the Incense of Violence.

Five Poison Boy was small and short like a boy, but he carried a massive red calabash behind his back. While most of the warriors were charging Joy Bodhisattva, he instead slapped his calabash and caused it to spray all sorts of poisonous or venomous creatures into his surroundings. Among them was none other than the Five Poisons: the centipede, the snake, the spider, the frog, and the lizard.

This was how Five Poison Boy got his moniker.

Of course, Five Poison Boy's Five Poisons were no ordinary creatures. Each and every creature was a highly toxic Soulstealer-class Stranger. The centipede was a Blue-winged Centipede, the snake was a Black Crown Snake, the spider was a Seven Star Malus Spider, the Frog was a Blood Melting Demonic Frog, and the lizard was a Tailless Ghost Lizard.

He wasn't just releasing one of each type of creature either. There were hundreds and hundreds of them.

The deadly creatures were either crawling toward Joy Bodhisattva or the Buddhist Hall of Joy disciples who were attempting to rescue their leader. Anyone who touched the deadly creatures either turned bluish black from head to toe, choked as blood filled their eyes and nose, dissolved into a pool of corrosive acid or lost their limbs due to a rapid decay spell. Without exception, all of them died in just a matter of seconds.

Wei Cahnghe, the Sunset Swordsman was wielding a blade that looked neither like a sword nor a saber. He raised it high over his head before bringing it down in one powerful stroke.

Sword qi roared like a river, and an orange, waning sun slowly descended from the sky. For a moment, the reddish rays of evening transformed the place into a beautiful painting.

There were few things more beautiful than a sun slowly falling into a river of swords.

Wei Changhe's sword was named Sunset River, and his sword art was called the Sunset River Sword Art.

Out of everyone who was attacking Joy Bodhisattva, Gold Ingot of the Tower of Cornucopia was the weakest in terms of cultivation. To be specific, he was only a late-stage Spirit Master. However, he was jokingly called the God of Wealth of Bei You because of one and only one reason: he was very, very, very rich.

Money makes the world go round. Money could also buy all sorts of things that people couldn't even dream of. For starters, Gold Ingot owned two Half-Step Grandmaster stage corpse puppets.

Gold Ingot had hired the Corpse King Sect to create these two corpse puppets for him, and the cost was astronomical to put it mildly. However, the power was worth it. Although the corpse puppets were unable to retain their former strength—they were Grandmasters before they perished, and the

puppets fashioned from their corpses were only Half-Step Grandmasters—they were still much stronger than your conventional Half-Step Grandmaster.

Besides that, a corpse puppet was immune to normal sensations such as pain and feared nothing at all. When the two corpse puppets work together in tandem, then even a true Grandmaster would have to stay out of their way.

Besides the two corpse puppets, Gold Ingot was covered from head to toe in Strange Artifacts. They were no ordinary Strange Artifacts either.

The robe he was wearing was a Phenomenon-class Strange Artifact called the Primal Origin Demon Suppressing Robe. It could summon a shadow of the Primal Origin Demon Suppressing Heavenly Sovereign and protect him from all dangers for an incense stick. Not even a Grandmaster could hurt him during this time.

His shoes were a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact called the Meteoric Rise Shoes. In times of danger, he could grow clouds underneath his foot and rise into the sky.

His hairpin was also a Phenomenon-class Strange Artifact called the Twelve Forms of Heavenly Astral. It allowed him to transform into twelve different objects such as plants, rocks, birds, animals, male, female, young or old people.

Besides that, he hid a dozen or so Life Substitution Talismans, Protection Seals and other life-saving items in his sleeves.

Gold Ingot's cultivation level might be poor, but he was easily one of the most powerful combatants in this room.

After all, there was nothing in the world that could not be done given enough money.

#### Chapter 565: What Is My Aim?

Xiong Kuohai hadn't been idle while Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu and more champions were attacking Joy Bodhisattva. He wasn't part of the attacking group though. No, he was singlehandedly keeping Joy Bodhisattva's four champions—Worriless, Wisdom Queen, White-faced God and Black-faced Buddha—at bay.

Worriless and Wisdom Queen were the only Half-Step Grandmasters out of the four. White-faced God and Black-faced Buddha were both late-stage Spirit Masters.

If their opponent was anyone else below the Grandmaster-stage, then they would have broken through already. But Xiong Kuohai wasn't just strong enough to stop them all by himself, he was intentionally drawing out the battle. His aim was obvious: he wanted to save his strength so he could play the fisherman later.

The group of four weren't the only champions of the Buddhist Hall of Joy, but the Wisdom King of Joy, the Lampholding Protector and the Joy Arhat had been executed for their troubles, and Joy Bodhisattva excised the rest of the corruption after returning to her sect. She successfully subdued the foxes in her backyard but lost a lot of quality warriors as a result.

Normally, this wouldn't be a problem. After all, Joy Bodhisattva had become a Grandmaster. She alone could protect the entire Buddhist Hall of Joy from harm, and no one dared to draw her ire so soon after she won her previous conflict.



But now, the flaw in the arrangement was bared for all to see. With Xiong Kuohai pinning down Woriless, Wisdom Queen, White-faced God and Black-faced Buddha, there was no one else in the sect who was capable of helping Joy Bodhisattva. The ordinary disciples couldn't even get up the floor without getting annihilated by all sorts of attacks.

To say that the Bodhisattva was caught between a rock and a hard place would be an understatement. A Grandmaster she might be, there was only so much she could do when she was outnumbered many times to one. A moment later, Ji Donglei managed to seize an opening and destroy her Dharma in one slash. While her energies were scattered, Huo Ruyu landed a palm strike against her back and flooded her veins with fire poison, shattering her body as a result.

Gold Ingot's corpse puppet endured a finger strike from Joy Bodhisattva in exchange for a punch to the stomach. Even as she staggered backward, Mistress Ruyi, Wei Changhe, and Five Poison Boy's attacks arrived right on time and injured her even more.

Unable to weather the barrage of attacks any longer, Joy Bodhisattva fell from the sky and hit the ground with a loud thud. She was bleeding from all orifices and looking as pale as a sheet.

"Hahaha! She's hurt!"

"Kekeke... I'm going to kill her..."

"Kill her..."

"KILL!"

Smelling the kill, countless people rushed toward Joy Bodhisattva with crazed, bloodshot eyes.

*"ENOUGH!"*

It was at this moment a sword beam cut through the air. Some of the attackers charging toward Joy Bodhisattva abruptly stopped in their tracks. Their heads flew into the air like balls, and blood splattered everywhere.

"What are you doing, Elder Ji?" Wei Changhe stared at Ji Donglei as spots of blood slid down his forehead.

Everyone else was staring at him with unfriendly eyes as well.

"Joy Bodhisattva cannot die. If she dies, we all die. Just look at those people."

Ji Donglei glanced at a group of combatants, and they followed their gaze. By now, the entire Blissful Peak was wet with blood. Nearly everyone's eyes were bloodshot with madness and bloodthirst, and they weren't just attacking the disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy. They had been killing everyone who entered their sights since a while ago.

Not only that, tiny wisps of flames could be seen seeping out of their pores, and yet not a single one of them could feel the heat. They kept fighting until they eventually burned down into a pile of ash.

"I'm sure you already noticed it, but the poison affects our mind as well. If we don't cure it as soon as possible, their downfall will become our future."

Ji Donglei kept a tight lid on the negative emotions raging inside his heart as he ended his explanation, "That is why we cannot kill Joy Bodhisattva until she gives us the antidote."

"Elder Ji is right..." Huo Ruyu's expression was contorted into a vicious snarl, and the flickering light in her eyes made it clear that she was struggling to control herself. "Joy Bodhisattva, give... give us the antidote *now*."

Joy Bodhisattva coughed. "Cough... I told you that I'm not the poisoner. Naturally, I don't have the antidote."

Her injuries were quite severe. Every time she coughed, countless cracks would spread across her face almost like she was made of porcelain, not flesh.

"Quit being stubborn and give us the antidote already, bitch! Otherwise, you will wish that you were dead!" Five Poison Boy screeched as he ran up to Joy Bodhisattva and grabbed her by her throat, his face a vicious snarl no less hateful than Huo Ruyi's.

Five Poison Boy looked anything but well right now. His right arm was missing from the shoulder, his chest was caved in, and light green blood was leaking out of his orifices. He had received these injuries while doing battle against Joy Bodhisattva earlier.

In fact, Five Poison Boy wasn't the only one who was hurt. Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu and everyone else who fought against Joy Bodhisattva had taken varying degrees of injuries as well.

Although Joy Bodhisattva was completely isolated, and the two Grandmasters, Ji Donglei and Huo Ruyu were bearing the brunt of the Bodhisattva's counterattack, there were two factors that made this battle a lot closer than it should have been. One, the debilitating influence of the Burning Heart could not be understated. They had to fight while keeping the all-consuming flame at bay at all times. Two, Joy Bodhisattva was a Grandmaster herself, and a powerful one at that. Since she was fighting for her life, she was able to deal a not insignificant amount of damage against them in return.

Ji Donglei's left arm was hanging crookedly by his side, and there was a bloody hole at the center of his stomach.

Huo Rulei's mind was damaged since her Vermillion Bird Dharma was shattered into bits during a counterattack.

Half of Wei Changhe's skull was crushed into bits by Joy Bodhisattva's finger, and his Sunset River Sword was in pieces.

Mistress Ruyi looked deathly pale, and crumbs of dust were falling off her skin just like an incense stick.

Gold Ingot was fine, but one of his corpse puppets had been splattered across the ground like a smear of meat paste.

Besides that, a dozen or so corpses were sprawled across the floor as well. They were all people who joined in on the attack sometime after the battle began, but they were weak enough that Joy Bodhisattva were able to slay them all.

“Calm down, Five Poison Boy!”

Wei Changhe hurriedly stepped forward and grabbed Five Poison Boy’s shoulder tightly. He was seriously worried that the warrior would kill Joy Bodhisattva in a fit of rage.

“Get off of me! I’m killing this bitch if it’s the last thing I do!”

Five Poison Boy shook Wei Changhe off before tightening his grip. He was going to snap Joy Bodhisattva’s neck there and then.

Suddenly, a bloodcurdling scream escaped his lips. It was because Joy Bodhisattva had struck him with her sleeves and cut his left arm clean off the shoulders. The warrior was sent flying into the distance.

The retaliation wasn’t without its cost. Joy Bodhisattva’s complexion grew even whiter, and the dense cracks on her face had spread across her whole body.

“Enough, Joy Bodhisattva. Are you really planning on struggling until the last moment? Just give us the antidote, and we might consider letting you live,” Ji Donglei said. He never even looked at Five Poison Boy.

“Joy Bodhisattva, I don’t see why this has to end in death and tragedy. It’s not like our factions are hostile toward one another. Just give us the antidote already!” Gold Ingot also chimed in.

Despite her condition, Joy Bodhisattva remained fearless. “I did not poison you, so I don’t have the antidote.”

“Stubborn bitch!” Huo Ruyu snarled. She could no longer suppress her rage and killing intent at this point. As a practitioner of the Dark Ways, her martial art was powerful and swift to cultivate. Unfortunately, that also meant that her willpower and mental fortitude were weaker than most.

Already, she was on the brink of insanity as the Burning Heart burned at the final threads of her rationality. If she did not receive the antidote soon, she was going to lose her mind and perish just like the weaker warriors around her.

“Do you really think I wouldn’t dare to kill you?!”

“You can kill me, but it will be a futile endeavor. As I have told you many times, I do not have the antidote.”

Joy Bodhisattva’s expression slowly turned scornful as she met her would-be-killers’ furious gazes head on. “None of you are idiots. I beseech you to use your brain and open your eyes a little wider. If I really am the poisoner, then what is my aim for doing this? To have you slaughter my disciples to the last? Or to have you kill me?”

Chapter 566: Who Said I’m Alone?

“You...”

Ji Donglei and the others looked away from Joy Bodhisattva and stared at the battlefield still happening throughout the Blissful Peak for a moment. They stared at the countless Buddhist Hall of

Joy disciples who were being slaughtered by the crazed guests, the guests who were slaughtering other guests, the mountain of corpses and the river of blood that flowed out of it. Suddenly, no one could say anything.

Earlier, they weren't thinking clearly because they were angry, impatient, and desperate to catch Joy Bodhisattva as quickly as possible. But now that they had calmed down a little, they realized that something wasn't right about their initial assumption.

As Joy Bodhisattva said, if she really was the one who poisoned them in an attempt to slay all the key players in one go and conquer Bei You, the price she paid was entirely too big. Not only was the Buddhist Hall of Joy destroyed, she herself was on the verge of death.

It did not matter if someone offered you the world if you weren't alive to enjoy it. Just the same, it made no sense for Joy Bodhisattva to conquer Bei You at the price of her own life.

In fact, this was one of the stupidest plans they had ever witnessed. Anyone could tell that no one would benefit from this conflict.

Was Joy Bodhisattva stupid? Obviously not.

This could only mean one thing.

Joy Bodhisattva really isn't the one who poisoned us?!

Mistress Ruyi said suddenly, "The sandpiper and clam goes to war, and the fisherman catches both?!"

Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu and everyone else's face darkened instantly.

In hindsight, the answer was ridiculously simple. It was just difficult for those who were contending with the problem to realize it. Now that someone had pointed it out, almost everyone managed to connect the dots in an instant.

Mistress Ruyi is one of Bodhisattva's? No wonder!

On the fifth floor, Ye Qing was pretending to be a corpse on the floor. The corner of his lips curled up a little when he realized something.

Just now, a somewhat unique scent had entered his nostrils. It felt strangely calming for some reason. He had wondered what it was and where it came from. He was also surprised that Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyi and the others managed to calm down as quickly as they did.

Of course, one of the reasons they were able to regain their composure was because everyone on the sixth floor was a champion in their own right. They all possessed an iron will that allowed them to temporarily suppress the Burning Heart and the negative emotions boiling inside their heart.

The other reason was Mistress Ruyi. Mistress Ruyi was an incense master proficient in creating all sorts of miraculous incense. She could use them to kill or save a life.

Mistress Ruyi must have ignited an incense stick with a calming effect in secret. That was why Ji Donglei and the others were able to calm down this quickly.

Not only that, the incense stick was incredibly elusive and subtle. If he wasn't a dabbler in incense-making himself, if he did not often create the Twelve Incense Sticks of Ghosts and Gods for his own use, he might not have noticed it either.

The reason Mistress Ruyi did this was obvious. One, it was because she was one of Joy Bodhisattva's allies. She ignited the incense stick so that Ji Donglei and Huo Ruyu wouldn't lose control and kill Joy Bodhisattva.

Later, Mistress Ruyi said, "The sandpiper and clam goes to war, and the fisherman catches both," to enlighten everyone about the truth in the most succinct manner possible. Joy Bodhisattva wasn't the culprit, it was someone else.

It was this line that confirmed to Ye Qing that Mistress Ruyi was on Joy Bodhisattva's side. Although the calming scent made him suspect that someone among the attackers was Joy Bodhisattva's ally, he wasn't sure until Mistress Ruyi revealed herself. He even thought it was Gold Ingot at first because he was the one who suffered the lightest injuries out of everyone present. Of course, he was wrong.

In hindsight, Mistress Ruyi was probably the only one who could produce such a miraculous incense stick. The fact that she was able to "notice" the truth so quickly proved her identity as well.

He wasn't surprised that Mistress Ruyi was Joy Bodhisattva's helper though. If Xiong Kuohai could find a shill or two to assist in his nefarious plans, why not her?

In any case, now that the truth was revealed, it was about time for Xiong Kuohai to appear on stage.

It was as Ye Qing had predicted. Realizing that they had been tricked, Ji Donglei immediately ordered, "Let's get out of this place!"

If Mistress Ruyi was right, and someone really was conspiring to play the fisherman, now would be the time for them to show their face. After all, no one was in a good condition right now. Now would be the perfect time for the fisherman to swoop in, kill everyone, and claim the spoils.

The poison would kill them eventually, but they were going to die now if they didn't leave. Therefore, their first priority was to get to safety as soon as possible.

"Take Joy Bodhisattva with us," Ji Donglei added after a pause. It was just in case their assumption was wrong, and it turned out that Joy Bodhisattva was trying to mislead them. He knew that was an incredibly unlikely possibility considering the circumstances, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

"No need to leave, everyone."

A masculine voice suddenly interrupted them before they could take action. When they looked, they saw Xiong Kuohai suddenly unleashing a powerful shockwave and sending Worriless, Wisdom Queen, White-faced God and Black-faced Buddha tumbling through the air like a rag doll. The blow was such that they all spat blood and looked as white as a sheet.

"What do you mean, leader Xiong?" Huo Ruyu asked with a frown.

"What I mean..."

As he landed back on the floor, he stomped down on Five Poison Boy's chest. Caught completely off guard, Five Poison Boy failed to put up any sort of resistance before he exploded into a shower of blood and gore.

While wiping the sole of his shoes against the floor with a disgusted expression on his face, Xiong Kuohai said slowly, "... is that this hall will be your final resting place."

"It was you?!"

Even as they exclaimed in shock, the group noticed that the anomalous energy plaguing Xiong Kuohai was receding slowly. If they weren't sure that Xiong Kuohai was the true mastermind behind their poisoning, they were now.

"Why are you doing this?" Ji Donglei asked in a dark tone.

"Why?" Xiong Kuohai rubbed his hairy chin while replying in a mocking tone, "Don't you know it already? It's to kill all of you in one go and conquer Bei You, of course!"

"The Earthfire Palace of Demons and Sword King City will have your head for this, Xiong Kuohai!" Huo Ruyu threatened. "You may kill us, but both you and Endless Sand will join us in our graves!"

"Trust me, I know. I know full well that I can't handle even one of you, much less the two of your factions combined."

Xiong Kuohai shrugged before asking in a mocking tone, "But... Joy Bodhisattva is the one who did this, isn't it? What does it have to do with little ol' me?"

"I'm a victim too, you know? I just happened to be lucky enough to survive this crisis... unlike you guys."

"Do you seriously think you can fool our sects?" Ji Donglei uttered coldly.

"Of course I can! Why couldn't I?" Xiong Kuohai smiled. "If you die, then I can shape the narrative however I want! Don't you agree?"

"And you think you can kill us all by yourself? Dream on!" Huo Ruyu scoffed. Sure, they were both poisoned and injured, but they were hardly helpless. It would be extremely difficult for Xiong Kuohai to kill them all himself.

"Hehehe... of course I can't. I know my limits." Xiong Kuohai started laughing louder and louder. It wasn't long before the entire hall was reverberating with his laughter. "But what on earth makes you think that I'm alone?"

A number of warriors began emerging from every direction. They numbered only thirty or so people, but each and every one of them exuded incredible power. Even the weakest among them was a middle-stage Spirit Master, not to mention that there were four Half-Step Grandmasters.

"I've brought my elites with me. Do you think they're good enough?"

Face contorted into an ugly visage, Ji Donglei did not say anything. If he was in tiptop condition, then this group of thirty might as well not exist. One slash was all he needed to kill them all, if not two slashes.

But now, he was both poisoned and grievously injured from the battle against Joy Bodhisattva. This group of warriors was akin to the final straw: they were just heavy enough to snap their backs like twigs.

Chapter 567: Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner

“Do you think this is enough people to kill all of you?” Xiong Kuohai watched Ji Donglei and Huo Ruyu with a smile that didn’t reach the eye. “If not, don’t worry. There’s more!”

As soon as Xiong Kuohai said this, a bad feeling suddenly gripped both Ji Donglei and Huo Ruyu. As if on cue, Wei Changhe suddenly pointed a finger at Ji Donglei’s back. It looked like he was drawing a straight line, when in reality it was multiple curved lines that joined together to form a sunset. The world was bright orange as the sun slowly sank into the horizon.

One did not need a brush to draw a sunset. A finger and a canvas of nothing was enough.

A sword didn’t always need to be a sword either. The sunset could be a sword. The reddened clouds could be a sword as well.

Next to Huo Ruyu, a gold ingot suddenly flew out of Gold Ingot’s sleeve. Sitting atop the ingot was a barefooted girl.

The girl’s whole face was covered in eyeballs. When they opened and closed, they emitted a powerful, impure light that slowed everyone’s reaction.

Grandmasters they might be, neither Ji Donglei nor Huo Ruyu were expecting this at all. Not only that, the impure light was slowing down their reaction as well. As a result, they were a tad too late to defend themselves.

In battle, losing the initiative could have quite the devastating effect. Wei Changhe’s finger struck Ji Donglei’s unprotected back, and the gold ingot smashed Huo Ruyu in the head.

A penetrating, fist-sized hole immediately appeared in Ji Donglei’s chest. Strangely, the wound wasn’t bleeding at all, and it looked shiny almost like some sort of translucent crystal.

His wound hadn’t turned into some sort of crystal, of course. It was an unbelievable amount of sword qi packed together so tightly that it looked like the wound had crystalized. Clearly, Wei Changhe had compressed his sword qi to the size of a finger in order to pierce Ji Donglei’s body in one strike.

That said, Wei Changhe’s success wasn’t without its cost. Right after he pierced Ji Donglei, the Sword Executor Elder turned his sword around and unleashed an “Annihilating Thundersnow”. Half of Wei Changhe’s hand was severed before he could pull away from the Grandmaster, and the sword qi continued forward and struck him squarely in the chest.

For a time, Wei Changhe writhed like a worm as lightning coursed through his veins. A muffled grunt of pain escaped his lips as he was pushed away.

On the other side, Gold Ingot's gold ingot smashed into Huo Ruyu's head and caused a loud, metallic clang. It was almost as if the Grandmaster's head was made of steel.

That said, Huo Ruyu was still flesh and blood. Her head exploded as soon as contact was made. It wasn't brain matter or blood that flew out of her head, however. It was a swarm of birds made of pure fire. The birds chirped melodiously as they surrounded the golden ingot and burned it in the blink of an eye.

At the same time, a person appeared behind Gold Ingot and threw a palm strike. The late-stage Spirit Master remained calm as a ripple of blue light escaped his Primal Origin Demon Suppressing Robe before the silhouette of the Primal Origin Demon Suppressing Heavenly Sovereign appeared above him.

The silhouette waved its horsetail whisk at the attacker's palm in an attempt to fend off the attack. There was a disturbing buzz and a soundless explosion, and the silhouette of the Primal Origin Demon Suppressing Heavenly Sovereign... lost. Not only was it scattered in one strike, the Primal Origin Demon Suppressing Robe itself lost its magical luster and crumbled into ash like it had aged a million years in an instant.

Gold Ingot's face turned ugly when the unexpected happened. Letting out a strange screech, he unleashed countless yellow talismans and Strange Artifacts from his sleeves to slow down the palm still traveling toward his face a little. The stalling tactic bought him just enough time to transform into a mosquito, escape from the attacker's presence, and fly over to Xiong Kuohai's side. He could not help but look at his almost-killer with fear and trepidation.

Gold Ingot's attacker was, of course, Huo Ruyu. Unfortunately, she didn't look too good right now. Her skin was rosy red in color, her entire body was steaming like she was on fire, and her aura kept fluctuating as if she was having trouble keeping it stable. Clearly, Gold Ingot's gold ingot had dealt quite a bit of damage to Huo Ruyu.

Wei Changhe and Gold Ingot weren't the only ones who had suddenly betrayed their compatriots. A good number of warriors who hadn't lost themselves yet had suddenly attacked their closest allies and killed them. At least a dozen warriors were killed just like that.

Clearly, they served Xiong Kuohai as well.

"Gold Ingot, Wei Changhe, since when did you become Xiong Kuohai's dogs?" Ji Donglei gripped his sword so tightly that veins were popping on the back of his hand.

Gold Ingot transformed back into a human and ducked behind Xiong Kuohai with a cheeky grin on his face. "Hehe. I'm a businessman. It's my natural responsibility to serve the highest paying customer. I hope you won't fault me for acting according to my nature, Elder Ji, Vermillion Bird Envoy."

"He's my employer," Wei Changhe responded much more simply and succinctly.

"So? Do you think this is enough?" Xiong Kuohai took one step forward and grinned maliciously at Ji Donglei and Huo Ruyu.



“We need to run!”

“Let’s make a run for it together! If we manage to escape from Blissful Peak, then we might yet survive this trap!”

Everyone who was still conscious and in control of themselves immediately rushed down the mountain with wanton abandon.

At this point, it was clear that staying at Blissful Peak was a death sentence. In that case, they might as well make a run for it and pray for the best.

“All Sword King City disciples, heed my call! Disengage from battle as soon as possible and escape this instant! The sect must learn of this betrayal!” Ji Donglei declared suddenly.

“All Earthfire Palace of Demons disciples, heed my call! Escape from Blissful Peak and report back to the sect!” Huo Ruyu also ordered.

As long as there were survivors, then it was only a matter of time before Sword King City and Earthfire Palace of Demons learned of this heinous trap. They did not think they would survive, but at least Xiong Kuohai would be joining them in the underworld!

“You’re dead if even one person manages to make it out of Blissful Mountain, Xiong Kuohai!” Huo Ruyu uttered through gritted teeth.

“Oh my, I’m sooo scared!”

Xiong Kuohai did not seem worried at all, however. He continued to grin mockingly at Huo Ruyu while saying, “Here’s a question for you: what if no one makes it out of here alive?”

“Taiping...”

As soon as he said the word “Taiping”, a banner abruptly appeared in the sky. Woven from blue and green fabric, one side of the banner was etched with the image of the five sacred beasts—the Azure Dragon, the Vermillion Bird, the White Tiger, the Black Tortoise and the Qilin—and the other side was etched with the image of three hundred sixty stars. Together, they formed a perfect, harmonious circle.

“Heaven Sealing...”

Xiong Kuohai made a hand seal, and the banner suddenly grew rapidly in size. It wasn’t long before it blotted out the sky itself and enveloped the world in darkness.

Three hundred and sixty stars slowly appeared in the black sky. After that, the Azure Dragon rode the wind to the east, the Vermillion Bird scorched the skies to the south, the White Tiger stood on a patch of clouds to the west, the Black Tortoise rode the waves to the north, and the Qilin ran like the wind at the center.

“The Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner?!” Blurted Ji Donglei as his eyes bulged in disbelief.

“You have a keen eye, Elder Ji. That’s right. It is none other than the Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner.” Xiong Kuohai complimented the old man with a wide smile on his face. “I told you that none of you are leaving. Do you believe me now?”

“The Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner is one of the three sacred treasures of the Way of Taiping! You’re one of them?!”

Ji Donglei was speechless. The Way of Taiping owned three sacred treasures, and they were the Yellow Sky Will Rise Crown, the All Is Well Seal, and the Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner. They were all Disaster-class Strange Artifacts.

The Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner possessed no offensive capabilities whatsoever, but it was capable of locking down space. The five sacred beasts corresponded to the Five Phases—Wood, Fire, Metal, Water and Earth—and the three hundred and sixty stars corresponded to the concept of circle; of wholeness. The Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner was capable of suppressing the Five Phases and the circle, meaning that all things of the Five Phases or the concept of circle weren’t allowed to enter or leave the restricted area. It was beyond powerful to say the least.

To put it in simpler terms, the Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner could lock down an area and cut off all connection to the outside world. Anyone and anything of the Five Phases or the concept of circle would not be able to enter or exit the area. Communication between the two areas were also impossible.

The only exceptions to the rule were beings who had surpassed the boundaries of the world such as a Sage or a living god, or alien beings who were neither of the Five Phases or the concept of circle. Otherwise, nothing and no one could pierce through its restriction.

The Way of Taiping had used the Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner to commit many, many atrocities. For example, they had used it to assassinate the ninth Grandmaster of the Earth Champions Ranking, the Dao Equal of Heaven; annihilated one of the thirty six unorthodox sects, the Ten Directions Pavilion of Annihilation; sealed off an entire commandery of Chu so they could convert its hundreds of thousands of citizens into worshipers of the Way of Taiping; and more.

As a result, there was no one in the entire *jianghu* who hadn’t heard of the Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner. It was ranked twenty-second on the Strange Artifact Register.

Chapter 568: Why Fear Death When Death Is Near?

The Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner was the Way of Taiping’s sacred treasure, and yet it was now in Xiong Kuohai’s hands. This could only mean that he was a member of the Way of Taiping.

It would certainly explain why Xiong Kuohai dared to concoct such a diabolical scheme. Sword King City and Earthfire Palace of Demons were strong, but they were no match for one of the Nine Demonic Ways, the Way of Taiping.

The Way of Taiping usually operated in southern Chu, and they rarely set foot in Northern Xinjiang. In that sense, they shared a non-aggressive relationship with each other. No one knew that Way of Taiping had really raised a faction like Endless Sand in Bei You, and now, their puppet was baring their fangs at them. They must be plotting something big for Bei You—or more accurately, the entire Northern Xinjiang.

“Shh! It’s a secret! You can’t tell it to anyone!” Xiong Kuohai put a finger to his lips and shushed them. Then, he slapped himself in the head and exclaimed with feigned realization, “Oh wait, you’re all going to die today, and dead men tell no secrets. Never mind then!”

Ji Donglei did not say anything. Huo Ruyu did not say anything. No one across the entire Blissful Peak said a thing for a moment.

After the Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner was activated, the entire Blissful Mountain was cut off from the outside world. No one inside could leave, and no one outside could enter. It was impossible to find out what was happening on Blissful Mountain right now.

Worse, the Taiping Heaven Sealing Banner was a sentient Disaster-class Strange Artifact. If Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu and Joy Bodhisattva were in tiptop condition, then their combined power might be able to breach its restriction. But now, they were all poisoned and grievously injured. Xiong Kuohai could just stand there and do nothing, and they still wouldn’t be able to overcome the restriction.

Silence originated from fear, and fear gave way to despair. It would seem that it was their fate to die here.

“I... I don’t want to die... I don’t want to die...”

One man suddenly burst into tears and broke down completely. The flames leaking out of his pores immediately consumed him and burned him into ash.

“I... I’ll submit to you, leader Xiong! I’ll join the Endless Sand! All I ask is that you spare me!”

“I submit as well, leader Xiong!”

“Me too!”

There existed great fear between the curtains of life and death. When one person dropped to their knees and begged Xiong Kuohai for mercy, countless others succumbed to their fear and dropped to their knees as well.

“Hahahahaha!”

Xiong Kuohai laughed arrogantly and scornfully before looking at Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu, and Joy Bodhisattva. “What about you guys? Will you surrender, or will you fight to the death?”

“Dare you accept us even if we did surrender to you?” Joy Bodhisattva finally broke her long-standing silence and asked.

“Hahaha! True.” Xiong Kuohai nodded in agreement. The three of them were Grandmasters after all. Although they were on their last legs, it was impossible to say what kind of trump card they were still hiding up their sleeves. Besides, the only acceptable outcome regarding his grand plan was total success. One

single misstep, and he could end up worse than even his victims. So no, he could never allow the Grandmasters to live.

The ordinary warriors were one thing, but Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu and Joy Bodhisattva must die.

A cruel smile spread across Xiong Kuohai's face as he glanced at the broken warriors who were still begging for mercy. "You wish to live, yes? It's very simple. Kill Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu and Joy Bodhisattva, and you will live."

"Who dares?!" Huo Ruyu yelled as soon as she heard this, her powerful aura sweeping through the area and attempting to nip the seeds of betrayal in the bud. However...

"Hahaha... I thought you people wanted to join me? To live and see another day? If you couldn't even do this for me, then why should I oblige your wishes?"

Xiong Kuohai was in no hurry whatsoever. He looked down on the crowd like a cat would a mouse.

"They're all grievously injured! We can surely kill them if we attack together!"

"Yeah! Let's rush them!"

A few breaths later, several people succumbed to their impatience and raced Ji Donglei and the others with bloodshot eyes. Everyone else looked mightily tempted as well.

"Fools."

Ji Donglei's eyes were as cold as ice as he swung his sword diagonally. There was a blast of sword qi, and the attackers were sliced in half while they were still in the air. Lightning burned their bodies into ash long before they could even hit the floor.

The restless crowd immediately turned deathly pale as if someone had poured a bucket of ice over their heads. It was only now they recalled that Ji Donglei was the Sword Executor Elder of Sword King City and a true Grandmaster. Even at his current state, he was still much, much stronger than them. He could have killed every last one of them without breaking too much sweat, not to mention that Huo Ruyu and Joy Bodhisattva were present as well. To charge the trio would be to commit suicide.

"Fools. Do you really think Xiong Kuohai would allow you to live even if you were successful? No, he wouldn't. Didn't you hear what he said? Dead men tell no secrets."

Ji Donglei swept an icy gaze across the crowd. "Therefore..."

He did not finish his sentence. Instead, he pounced toward Xiong Kuohai with Huo Ruyu and Joy Bodhisattva by his side.

"Hahaha! Well met!"

Having predicted this reaction, Xiong Kuohai let out a boisterous laughter before bending his knees a little. The ground within a hundred meters of him exploded without a sound and came together to form a dragon of sorts. The creature then charged straight toward the trio.

His attack failed to intimidate the three Grandmasters in the slightest, however. They ignored it as if it did not exist and launched various attacks at Xiong Kuohai.

“Do you see? Xiong Kuohai never planned to let us live. You can pour your heart out to him, and you’re still going to die.”

Wei Changhe, Gold Ingot and the rest of Xiong Kuohai’s allies were charging toward the three Grandmasters as well. Mistress Ruyi glanced at the warriors still kneeling on the ground and said, “There is only one way out of this, and that is to kill Xiong Kuohai.”

It was as if Mistress Ruyi’s voice possessed some sort of magical power. The despairing men and women actually rose their heads with renewed light in their eyes.

She’s using another incense!

On the ground, Ye Qing’s nose twitched a little when a new scent entered his nose. This one seemed to be capable of bewitching someone’s mind.

By now, most people had realized that Xiong Kuohai would never allow them to live. All their submission was going to earn them was death, and the knowledge drove them deep into the pits into despair. Even if Mistress Ruyi hadn’t used her incense, it would have taken little effort to convert that despair into hatred and anger; undying hatred and anger toward Xiong Kuohai.

The incense was just the spark. Their despair was what finally transformed their hesitation into determination.

As expected, one man spoke up, “She’s right. If we’re going to die anyway, then we might as well die killing that sonuvawhore.”

“Yeah. He thought he could toy with us like monkeys? I’ll kill him!”

“Better to die with honor than without. I may die, but I’m going to tear off a piece of his flesh and drink a mouthful of his blood at the very least!”

“Well said! I never liked Xiong Kuohai and Endless Sand anyway. They’re all a bunch of hypocritical pricks. If I can kill one of them, then it would be worth it. If I can kill two of them, then it would be my victory! Let’s do this!”

“KILL!”

They were all *jianghu* warriors. Even the most timid among them had some fire in them. At that moment, everyone who was still conscious and in control of themselves charged toward Xiong Kuohai and his allies. Even compared to the time they attacked the Buddhist Hall of Joy to save themselves, this charge was a lot more fatalistic, determined, and angry.

Xiong Kuohai easily killed or batted away those who got too close to him, but even more people replaced those people who failed. They were like moths flying relentlessly toward the flame even though they knew it would kill them.

Why fear death when death was already in front of you?

Chapter 569: Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar

“‘Only when life meets death can life face death’? So this is what she meant!”

Ye Qing finally understood what Joy Bodhisattva meant that day when he saw the *jianghu* warriors charging toward Xiong Kuohai’s group with reckless abandon, and Ji Donglei and Huo Ruyu fighting like every attack might be their last.

Only by driving everyone into a dead end could they fight with their lives on the line.

Only then could they become the sharpest, deadliest blades.

But was it really worth it? Not only did Joy Bodhisattva drive everyone into a dead end, she even used herself and her people’s lives as bait. Was the price really worth the reward?

Ye Qing looked at the mountain of corpses and river of blood tainting the once flawless sight of Blissful Peak for a moment. He then glanced at the Buddhist Hall of Joy disciples still battling against the enemies and let out a sigh.

These poor, poor people. They were giving it their all to protect Joy Bodhisattva and the Buddhist Hall of Joy, not knowing that the Bodhisattva they worshiped was just using them as bait.

Ye Qing recalled Cai Le, the woman Joy Bodhisattva had killed after using her as a poison tester. In the woman’s eyes, her disciples were probably just pawns she might use as she pleased; ants that she could kill as soon as they ran out of use!

Ye Qing turned his gaze next on the guests that were charging toward Xiong Kuohai. They were no different from the disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy. In the eyes of superiors such as Xiong Kuohai and Joy Bodhisattva, they too were just pawns and ants to be used in their game of conquest and dominance.

Ye Qing felt some sympathy for these people, but what really moved him was when he imagined himself in their shoes.

If he hadn’t accidentally discovered Xiong Kuohai’s ploy beforehand, he would be fighting for his life right next to these pitiful people. He would have been just another pawn and ant!

In the end, it was all a matter of power.

A weakling would always be a pawn and an ant. They could never decide their own fate.

A powerful person would be able to act like a god or a celestial. Not even the heavens would be able to restrict them in any way.

If he did not want to become someone else’s pawn, if he did not want to be killed like an ant, then he could only become... the strong.

If he was powerful, then it no longer mattered if someone tried to use, frame, or attack him.

After all, he could just flip the table.

He could just put a hole in heaven and earth.

I could have come up with a better solution. Stopped this senseless slaughter from ever happening.

While Ye Qing was lamenting about life, the battle was growing increasingly desperate and bloody.

Although the *jianghu* warriors were now fighting without regard for their own life, Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu and Joy Bodhisattva's side still couldn't gain an advantage. Or rather, they had been stuck at a disadvantage this whole time.

First, they had to fight while the Burning Heart was ravaging their insides. Second, everyone was tired and injured to a certain degree since they had fought a battle against the Buddhist Hall of Joy earlier. Xiong Kuohai's group had no such problems as they knew that this would happen, and they had been saving their strength until now.

That said, the battle was a lot more even than they had anticipated. After realizing that it was futile to charge Xiong Kuohai, the guests decided to turn their fury and hatred on the Endless Sand elites he brought with him. As they fought with no regard for their health or safety whatsoever, and the intent to take at least one enemy down to the grave with them, his allies inevitably took a lot of casualties.

Xiong Kuohai paid the losses no heed, however. So what if he lost a couple of men? Everything was still under control.

So long as the Burning Heart was still in play, the ending of this battle might as well be set in stone.

Sure, these worthless scum were putting up a good fight, but that was to be expected since it was their final struggle and madness.

His opinion wasn't just directed at the *jianghu* warriors. He thought the exact same thing of Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu and Joy Bodhisattva as well.

A phoenix without feathers was just a chicken.

Xiong Kuohai crossed his arms in front of his chest and wrapped himself in a powerful cyclone. At the same time, the silhouette of a magnificent, intimidating giant appeared in the air.

The giant looked down with an angry expression.

*“Four Symbols of Providence: Wind God's Fury”*

Boom!

When the Wind God looked down, the earth shook, and the heavens quaked. There was a terrifying boom, and Ji Donglei, Huo Ruyu and Joy Bodhisattva were all sent flying into the air. A dozen more people exploded into showers of blood and gore just like that.

“Hahaha! Pathetic weaklings! You can't even take a hit from me!”

Xiong Kuohai's arms remained crossed as he laughed to his heart's content.

The ground beneath Huo Ruyu turned into lava as she snarled viciously, “We may die, but you're not getting away unscathed, Xiong Kuohai!”

“Hahaha! Are you sure about that?” Xiong Kuohai scoffed. “You're too weak.”

Instead of replying, Huo Ruyu threw her hands up like she was knocking over a brazier and sent a wave of molten lava straight toward Xiong Kuohai. She herself was flying right behind the wave of molten lava and getting ready to launch a different attack.

Ji Donglei and Joy Bodhisattva joined up with her midway and clashed against Xiong Kuohai once more.

Although he was only one man, Xiong Kuohai was able to handle the three Grandmasters with ease. And at first, he fully intended to toy with the three Grandmasters until he tired of them. After all, it wasn't everyday you got to toy three Grandmasters at the same time.

More importantly, he was waiting for the Burning Heart to consume his opponents. The more time passed, the more negative emotions that accumulated in their hearts, the stronger the Burning Heart would become. When it was time, Ji Donglei and Huo Ruyu would automatically burn down into ash whether they liked it or not.

Joy Bodhisattva might not be poisoned by the Burning Heart, but there was no chance she would be able to turn the tables alone and grievously injured.

It was also why he was willing to waste his breath on them in the first place.

However, Xiong Kuohai gradually realized that something was off. A full teatime had passed since the final battle began, but neither Ji Donglei nor Huo Ruyu were consumed by the Burning Heart as he thought they would. In fact, they seemed to be getting more and more clear-headed as time went on.

It wasn't just the two Grandmasters either. The small fries were getting better as well.

Logically speaking, barring the most powerful and strong-willed of them all, most of these people should've burned to death already. This was especially true since he had dealt quite the mental blow to them with his "betrayal" and his scathing words, and the Burning Heart was a poison that fed on negative emotions like an insatiable parasite.

In reality, they were getting better and better.

What's going on?!

After Xiong Kuohai forced back the three Grandmasters with another palm strike, he furrowed his brows and scanned his surroundings carefully. He quickly noticed that everyone's negative emotions were penned up almost as if they were suppressed by some sort of invisible power. Not only that, he smelled a light, spiritually calming scent in the air.

He traced the scent and quickly found its origin. It was an altar. Inside the altar was a deity statue, and it wore a peaceful expression and wielded a horsetail whisk. Seated in front of the altar was an incense burner covered in incense sticks, and the smoke they emitted gave the deity statue an ephemeral and mysterious quality.

Strangely, the smoke didn't dissipate like a normal smoke would. Instead, they entered the statue almost as if it was absorbed.

As the statue absorbed the incense smoke, it emitted some sort of five-colored qi that combined into three colorful flowers. Seated between the three flowers was a single five-colored cloud.



“Three flowers surrounding a five-colored cloud? Is that the Shade of Scent’s Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar?!”

Xiong Kuohai’s expression darkened when he saw the Buddhist altar next to Mistress Ruyi.

The Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar was an auxiliary-type Phenomenon-class Strange Artifact belonging to Mistress Ruyi. The deity statue of the altar fed on incense smoke to produce three flowers and an auspicious cloud that had a calming effect on one’s mind, and a suppressive effect on heart demons.

There was no doubt that the Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar was the reason his enemies hadn’t been consumed by the Burning Heart yet.

Did she recognize the Burning Heart? No, that’s impossible!

A worrying thought entered his heart, but Xiong Kuohai rejected it immediately. The Burning Heart was one of the nine ancient poisons, and barely anyone knew about them at all. Only those sects and clans with a long-lasting history or powerful warriors with knowledge of the ancients might have heard of the Burning Heart, and even then, most of them would not know about its effects, much less the way to suppress it.

Take him for example. He had never heard of the Burning Heart until the Sakyamuni taught him about it.

It must have been a coincidence!

Xiong Kuohai narrowed his eyes and charged toward Mistress Ruyi. Coincidence or not, he needed to destroy the Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar as soon as possible. Otherwise, this battle was going to be a lot more dicier than he thought.

His one step felt like a lesser warrior executing an Earth Contraction Magic. He abruptly appeared in front of Mistress Ruyi and threw a punch at her.

Chapter 570: Opening A Blue Sky

Mistress Ruyi sneered at Xiong Kuohai before disappearing in a puff of blue smoke. She seemed to have predicted that this would happen.

Xiong Kuohai didn’t give chase either. After all, his true objective wasn’t Mistress Ruyi, but the Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar. The only reason he attacked Mistress Ruyi was to misdirect his enemies. The next moment, his fist slammed into the Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar.

Suddenly, Xiong Kuohai was struck by a bad premonition. Before he could make sense of it, a baby wearing a red dudou flew out of the shattered remains of the Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar.

The baby’s skin was ashen green, and a wrinkly umbilical cord was sticking out of its stomach. Their eyes were lifeless, and their face was warped into a vicious snarl.

The baby puffed up their cheeks and spat out a strange fog that was neither black, green, red, gray or blue, yet all of them at the same time. After that, their savage expression slowly faded back into peace and calm.

Xiong Kuohai blanched when he saw the fog, but it was too late. It landed on his fist and slipped into his body.

As soon as the fog entered his body, Xiong Kuohai felt as if he was submerged into a ten-thousand-year-old frozen pond. His entire body felt as cold as ice, his blood had literally turned into ice, and a hateful, tainted energy was spreading rapidly inside his body. At the same time, his consciousness was assaulted by a myriad of terrifying and bizarre illusions.

He saw a pregnant woman strangled to death right as she was about to give birth.

He saw a bandit disemboweling a pregnant woman and cutting out her heart.

He saw a jealous lady poisoning a pregnant woman and causing her to lose her baby.

He saw a pregnant woman being beaten to death and died with her baby.

And finally, he saw a baby being drowned inside a wooden basin right after they were born.

“The Calamitous Qi of Five Lifetimes?”

Xiong Kuohai turned even whiter. When a person died, a puff of air would be stuck inside their throats. It was the air of resentment the person had collected for an entire lifetime. People called it the Calamitous Qi.

The Calamitous Qi was highly poisonous. It could kill a lesser life like a plant upon contact and corrode through stone like nothing. If a person made contact with it, they would suffer a terrible illness at best, or perish at worst.

The fog the baby spat out was none other than the Calamitous Qi, but it was no ordinary Calamitous Qi. It was five lifetimes worth of Calamitous Qi. According to his hallucinations, the baby's mothers had been killed for one reason or another during their first four lifetimes. Naturally, the baby did not survive. During their fifth lifetime, when they finally managed to see the light of the world, someone had cruelly drowned them to death in a wooden basin.

All the resentment the baby had accumulated across five lifetimes became stuck inside their throat, never to fade no matter how many deaths they experienced. It did not need to be said how potent the Five Lifetimes Calamitous Qi was.

Xiong Kuohai was a Grandmaster, but even he could not shake off such a terrible qi like it was nothing. It had corrupted his mind in an instant and caused him to blank out for a brief moment.

The qi wasn't what scared him, however. What scared him was the sudden realization that Mistress Ruyi's resistance might not be a coincidence after all. It might be a premeditated, well thought out trap she had set up for none other than him.

Mistress Ruyi must have known that he would attack her Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar. That was why she had hidden a Calamitous Child bearing a Five Lifetimes Calamitous Qi inside it. Once he shattered the Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar, he would naturally make contact with the Calamitous Child and become infected with their Five Lifetimes Calamitous Qi!

There was no other explanation as to why she would hide such a cursed object inside her Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar.

Otherwise, why was Mistress Ruyi so calm when he attacked her by surprise? Why had she escaped without attempting to protect her precious Strange Artifact at all?

It was almost as if she knew that this would happen, and she did. Once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. Three times is enemy action!

But how did Mistress Ruyi know that he would attack the Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar?

There was only one possibility. Mistress Ruyi must have known that the poison he used was the Burning Heart, and that its effects could be suppressed by medicine or items that produced a calming effect!

This would explain everything.

Mistress Ruyi must have known about the Burning Heart. That was why she hid the Calamitous Child inside the Five Qi Auspicious Cloud Altar and even left it out in the open so that he would discover it. The moment he attacked the Strange Artifact, he would be infected by the Five Lifetimes Calamitous Qi.

The trap was well thought out and wonderfully executed. Short of having foreknowledge, there was never any chance he could've avoided it.

But since when did she find out about the Burning Heart?

Did she recognize it after he revealed himself?

Was it after the Burning Heart activated?

Was it after she drank the Blissful Spring?

Or was it even earlier than that?

A ludicrous notion suddenly entered his mind.

Did Mistress Ruyi know about my plan from the start?

If she did, what about Joy Bodhisattva? What about Ji Donglei? Huo Ruyi?

Did they all know about this?!

The ludicrous notion quickly turned into full-blown terror. He could barely breathe at the thought of it.

If his assumption was correct, then... now would be the time his enemies unveiled their final trap, wouldn't it?!

As soon as the thought crossed his mind, Xiong Kuohai stopped holding back completely. With a thought, he summoned four giants into existence. One of them was surrounded by a powerful cyclone, another was embroiled in flames, the third giant was roaring with thunder, and the fourth giant was wrapped in lightning.

*“Four Symbols of Providence”*

*“Wind God's Fury”*

*“Fire God's Fury”*

*“Thunder God's Fury”*

### *“Lightning God’s Fury”*

As soon as the four giants appeared, the illusions and resentment ripping away at his mind abruptly vanished into thin air. Having returned to reality, he opened his eyes...

... And saw something that caused every hair on his body to stand on end, and his soul to quake like a leaf.

Ji Donglei was running toward him while holding his sword in a reverse grip. Then, he executed an upward diagonal slash at Xiong Kuohai.

As the sword swung upward, Ji Donglei stumbled on his feet almost as if he was being pulled forward by the sword. A deepening straight line appeared on the floor, and it stretched all the way to the sky itself.

At that moment, the wind crumbled, the clouds scattered, and the blue sky was cut in half.

### *“Sword King Scripture: Opening A Blue Sky”*

The “Sword King Scripture” was Sword King City’s ultimate martial art. A Grandmaster-stage martial art, it featured thirteen forms and was capable of both offense and defense. Not only that, it was said that those who successfully subsumed the thirteen forms and figured out the final fourteenth form would be able to cut through the gates of heaven and become a Sage, so one could even call the “Sword King Scripture” a Sage-stage martial art.

“Opening A Blue Sky” was the fastest, most powerful move of the thirteen forms of the “Sword King Scripture”. Its one flaw was that it took time to channel one’s energy and push one’s essence, qi, spirit; body, mind, and intent to the peak. Only then could “Opening A Blue Sky” unleash its greatest power.

Earlier, Xiong Kuohai had blanked out for a moment after being infected by the Five Lifetimes Calamitous Qi. Naturally, Ji Donglei wasn’t going to allow such an excellent opportunity to slip through his grasp.

The attack wasn’t just the most powerful attack he knew of, it also contained everything he had. He did not believe that Xiong Kuohai possessed the ability to dodge it.

He was right. When Xiong Kuohai opened his eyes, the sword qi was already right in front of him. There was no dodging this one.

Pupils contracting, Xiong Kuohai made a hand seal and summoned all four of his giants at the same time. They joined together to form a bigger, scarier giant wearing a thunderous crown and a fiery red robe.

Riding a cyclone and wielding a spear of thunder and lightning, the giant thrust its spear forward and met the sky opening slash head on.

### *“Four Symbols As One: Providence’s Fury”*

Rumble!

An unspeakable explosion ensued, and the giant's thunder and lightning abruptly vanished like they were never there. The giant himself froze for a moment before a line began appearing from his forehead. It slowly stretched downward until the giant split into two halves.

Xiong Kuohai himself was cut by a bone-deep wound that stretched from his forehead all the way to his stomach.

The Endless Sand leader staggered backward as he looked down at the terrible wound and the shattered Bagua Mirror pressed against his solar plexus, heart beating like a drum. If he hadn't reacted quickly and correctly, if he didn't have a Bagua Mirror on his person, he might have been split in half just like his giant already.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the sword qi had infiltrated his body and did a number to his insides. He was now seriously injured and not even a tenth as strong as he was before.

Before Xiong Kuohai could let out a sigh of relief, his hair stood on end once more.

He looked down and noticed that the ground had turned bright red. There were strange lines that vaguely made up the image of a vermillion bird.

**“The Vermillion Bird Heaven Burning Art?!”**

Xiong Kuohai's eyes widened like saucers as he screamed in fear.