

Stranger 581

Chapter 581: Heart Demon Births Hundred Illusions

Skin Painting Gentleman was a former scholar who, after failing the imperial examination again and again and losing all hope, chose to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff. However, as the gods of web novels willed it, he somehow survived and even obtained a martial arts manual for his troubles. It was none other than the “Art of Skin Painting”.

Skin Painting Gentleman first practiced the “Art of Skin Painting” on tramps and beggars. He was forced to watch his victims struggling and screaming in pain as their skin was stripped away little by little.

He was just an inexperienced scholar at the time, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that he was as timid as a mouse. As a result, his nights were haunted by nightmares of his victims seeking to repay what he did to him and skin alive.

Even now after he had mastered the “Art of Skin Painting” in full, the nightmares still haunted him from time to time. It was practically his heart demon at this point.

Just now, he saw his victims coming back to life and demanding that he repaid his evil karma by surrendering his life and his skin. That was why he was as terrified and panicked as he was.

As for the Limp Celestial, he was a victim of a natural disaster that resulted in tens of thousands of civilians dying of starvation. He had been this close from starving to death himself. That was why he was obsessed with food from a young age, and why delicious food was the love of his life.

In his illusion, he was treated to an endless sea of delicious food of all kinds. They were perfect in every way including appearance, smell, taste and more. Once he ate his first “food”, he was unable to stop no matter what.

What they experienced in the illusions were some of their darkest secrets, fears and desires. Of course they couldn't tell Xie Taohua about it.

“Please don't misunderstand. I was just curious. If you don't wish to talk about it, then so it shall be,” Xie Taohua said a little disappointedly. “I can tell I am not welcomed, so I'll be taking my leave now. Try not to succumb to the illusions again, okay?”

“You misunderstand, Brother Xie. Rest assured that we have nothing against you,” Skin Painting Gentleman hurriedly explained before asking, “Do you know something about the illusion, brother?”

Xie Taohua shook his head. “Not at all! I only know from observation that it changes depending on the person's perception, emotion and mental weakness. If you're not careful, then you may never awake again. I can tell that all three of you have chinks in your mental defenses, so you should leave this mountain while you still can.”

Xie Taohua got ready to leave after saying that.

“Thank you, Brother Xie, but we've already come this far. We must catch a glimpse of that treasure if nothing else,” Skin Painting Gentleman replied.

The fact that the phenomenon was so dangerous proved that whatever treasure resided at the peak of the mountain was incredibly potent. Opportunities like this one came only once in a lifetime, so they would be remiss to give up without having given it their all.

“It’s just my advice. It’s not up to me whether you heed it or not,” Xie Taohua said uncaringly as he began to leave.

“Wait, Brother Xie!”

Limp Celestial, Skin Painting Gentleman and Tiger Sovereign exchanged glances with each other before calling out to the feminine man. “It looks like you’re planning to ascend the mountain as well, and we now know just how strange and dangerous this place is. If you don’t mind, can we join you on your journey? Four heads are better than one, right?”

“My companions are right, Brother Xie. We can help each other out if the situation gets dicey,” Skin Painting Gentleman added.

Xie Taohua tilted his head for a moment before nodding. “Well, okay. I was feeling a bit bored anyway.”

He smiled and walked back to the trio. Not a hint of wariness could be spotted from his features.

Skin Painting Gentleman frowned a little. He couldn’t quite figure out the feminine man despite his best efforts. Was he really as innocent and simple as he seemed, or was he so confident in his strength that he thought he could drop their guard around them?

It was most likely the latter.

That was fine though. In fact, it was precisely why he invited Xie Taohua to join them. Xie Taohua possessed the strength to resist the phenomenon’s anomalous illusions. Naturally, their ascent would be that much smoother with his aid.

As for whether Xie Taohua would fight them over the treasure after they reached the top, he wasn’t too worried. There were three of them and only one of Xie Taohua. He refused to believe that he could defeat them all alone.

If Xie Taohua really was so strong that he could defeat them all singlehandedly, then why would he agree to join him? It would be much better and convenient for him to ascend the mountain alone, wouldn’t it?

“What are you waiting for? C’mon!”

Xie Taohua beckoned the trio to follow him before resuming his journey toward the peak.

The higher they climbed, the more frequent the phenomenon became. Sometimes, a cool breeze would suddenly pick up and blow strongly. Sometimes, flowers of all shapes, colors and sizes would rain from the sky. Sometimes, the sky would roar with lightning and thunder. Sometimes, it would rain cats and dogs. Sometimes, divine music would play beside their ears. Sometimes, beautiful women would appear out of nowhere and flirt with them. So on and so forth.

These were the general illusions everyone saw from time to time. The personal ones were far more insidious and indefensible. From time to time, they would fall into bizarre and illogical dreams that were tailored to pry at their biggest weaknesses.

Skin Painting Gentleman had a fondness for power, so he dreamed of becoming the emperor of all, wielding great power and bedding beautiful women all day and night.

Limp Celestial loved wealth, so he dreamed of owning infinite wealth and enjoying all the luxuries the world had to offer.

Tiger Sovereign worshiped strength, so he saw himself becoming invincible under heaven and immortal like the very sky above his head. The world would remember him for tens of thousands of years.

Xie Taohua feared old age, so he dreamed of becoming so old that his youthful beauty was forever gone, his pearly white teeth were completely absent, and all that was left of him was a fleshy pile of ugliness.

The illusions weren't even the only dangers they had to face. The phenomenon occasionally magnified their personality weaknesses without them noticing as well. Greed, bloodthirst, anger, sorrow, joy, loss of control, suspicion, doubt, fear, panic, worry and more; the phenomenon amplified all of them.

Sometimes, they could not tell if the scenery in front of them was real or not. Sometimes, they could not tell if their companions were well-intentioned or malicious. Sometimes, they couldn't even tell if the emotions they were currently feeling were real or fake.

More than once, they had nearly lost themselves in a terrible illusion, never to wake again. More than once, they had suspected and even fought each other over the stupidest things.

If it wasn't for Xie Taohua and the Strange Artifact named the Wood Fish Girl, they would probably be dead a long, long time ago.

As if that wasn't enough, the phenomenon's power kept growing as they got closer and closer to the peak. It eventually got to the point where they were assaulted by illusions even when the phenomenon wasn't happening.

The number of dead people kept growing as well, and a fair number of them were famous warriors of Bei You. There was the Night Cat they were discussing earlier, the Fat Fiend and the Thin Ghoul, Mo Bei Dhutanga [1], Six-fingered Evil Monk and more. Their manners of death were also extremely varied.

Previously, they would have wondered how these powerful warriors had suffered such tragic deaths. But now, everyone knew that it was because of the anomalous power at the mountain peak. They had either killed each other because their personality weaknesses were magnified, or they had succumbed to an illusion and died, or they had suffered a mental breakdown and committed suicide, and more.

"Phew... We're finally here."

Thankfully, no one in their group was a weakling. Despite the scares, they ultimately managed to reach the peak without any casualties.

“Huh? What’s that?”

As soon as they reached the peak, a gigantic black lotus appeared before their eyes. It had nine petals overflowing with mysterious air of dao, and profound energy seemed to ripple through the air with every sway. At the same time, all kinds of beautiful and phantasmal illusions came to life.

Skin Painting Gentleman, Limp Celestial, Tiger Sovereign and Xie Taohua all succumbed to fantastical light show in an instant. While wearing a dumb expression on their faces, they began to step toward the black lotus.

When the girl floating next to Xie Taohua saw that her master was in danger, she hurriedly raised her massive wooden hammer and brought it down on the wooden fish, hard.

Tok!

Xie Taohua trembled, and a hint of struggle flashed across his face. However, he quickly succumbed to the phenomenon and stepped toward the black lotus once more.

Tok! Tok! Tok! Tok...

Seeing this, the girl pouted and hit the wooden fish again and again. Over time, tiny cracks began to spread across the surface of the wooden fish.

The girl looked like she might burst into tears. It was as if she could feel the growing cracks on the wooden fish. However, her efforts seemed futile as Xie Taohua and the others continued to move toward the black lotus.

Chapter 582: Five Phase Tribulation

“Uwah!”

In the end, the girl could not stand it any longer. She let out a cute cry, leaped up from her wooden fish, and smacked Xie Taohu's head with her wood hammer.

Tok!

It was said that one should not judge a book by its cover, and the idiom fit the girl perfectly. What looked like a harmless blow actually caused Xie Taohua’s feet to sink into the ground. This was just the beginning though. the girl would continue to hit his head like she was hammering a nail until he sank all the way up to his neck.

Tok tok tok tok tok tok tok...

“Ow! Ow! Enough! I’m awake! I’m awake!”

A few breaths later, Xie Taohua suddenly cried out in pain and stretched his arms out of the ground, covering his head with one hand and catching the girl with the other. After that, he leaped out of the hole in a flurry of peach blossoms and flicked three of them toward Skin Painting Gentleman, Limp Celestial and Tiger Sovereign’s forehead.

“Hahaha...”

The three peach blossoms let out an eerie, human-like laughter, and three gorgeous women dressed in pink abruptly appeared behind the trio. However, their faces were completely devoid of flesh like pink skeletons. They then hugged the trio and dyed them in pink bit by bit.

The trio snapped out of their stupor and turned as white as a sheet. It was because they recalled what just happened, and because they saw what resided within the black lotus.

Right now, they were less than ten meters away from the black lotus, so they were finally able to see it for what it was.

They thought that a treasure would reside at the center of the black lotus, but they were wrong. It was a man sitting in a meditative position. His eyes were tightly shut, and rainbow-colored spiritual light was gushing from the top of his skull. The black lotus they saw was really an image manifested from his energies and spirit.

The reason they failed to notice this sooner was one, they were too far away; two, the man's spirit and energies were so immense that their senses were unable to pierce through them until now; and three, the black lotus was far too realistic and far more conspicuous than the man at the center.

"Is he... creating a Yin God to become a Spirit Master?!" Skin Painting Gentleman blurted out instinctively after seeing this.

"The phenomenon of Peach Blossom Mountain isn't a treasure? It's just someone trying to ascend to the next stage?!"

Limp Celestial looked dazed and disbelieving as well.

"There was no treasure from the beginning... no treasure... haha! Hahahaha!" Tiger Sovereign muttered to himself before bursting out in laughter all of a sudden, face gradually contorting into a furious snarl over time.

Skin Painting Gentleman and Limp Celestial looked off as well. Their eyes were bloodshot, and they looked like they might explode into violence at any moment.

Seeing this, Xie Taohua removed the peach blossom branch on his head and twirled it in his hand. Pink flowers immediately flew out of the branch and trapped the trio in its pink embrace. At the same time, Xie Taohua began moving away from them.

Fifty or so meters later, Skin Painting Gentleman, Limp Celestial and Tiger Sovereign finally broke free from the peach blossom pinning them down. Without hesitation, they pounced toward Xie Taohua.

A steely glint flashed in Xie Taohua's attractive peach blossom eyes as he swung the peach blossom branch at the trio like a whip. As they sailed through the air, peach blossoms bloomed and withered on their bodies in the blink of an eye.

After the peach blossoms withered completely, the trio finally snapped back to reality. As if on cue, they all turned to stare at the distant black lotus and mysterious man with pale faces.

Still grabbing his peach blossom branch, Xie Taohua reminded, "Protect your mind! Do not allow that man's power to influence you!"

“What on earth is that?” Limp Celestial swallowed audibly as he tried to slow down his racing heart.

“Didn’t you hear Skin Painting Gentleman? The guy’s creating his Yin God,” Xie Taohua answered.

“But... h-how is it possible for someone’s ascension to manifest such a terrifying phenomenon?” Limp Celestial stuttered. “It’s warping everyone’s mind without even trying to!”

“Yeah. What on earth is this spiritual power? I don’t think anyone here as a greater spirit than that man,” Skin Painting Gentleman echoed in agreement.

He was a middle-stage Spirit Master and a practitioner of the “Art of Skin Painting”, a martial art that was highly dependent on one’s spirit. Therefore, his spiritual power was on par or greater than even some late-stage Spirit Masters. Despite this, he felt like a child compared to the man before him.

“This is a big world. Anything can happen.” Xie Taohua pursed his soft lips and narrowed his peach blossom eyes. “There are some profound martial arts out there that can create all sorts of unusual phenomena when the practitioner is cultivating or making a breakthrough.”

“Legend says that certain ancient and mysterious martial arts are so potent that their very existence is rejected by the world itself. Every time they are close to a breakthrough, the heavens would attempt to wipe them from the surface of the world by subjecting them to tribulations. If the practitioner fails, they would perish. If not, then they would become the heavens’ equal.”

“So, you’re saying that his martial art is powerful?” Tiger Sovereign’s breathing grew a little heavier.

At first, he thought that their venture up Peach Blossom Mountain was a complete bust. But now, it would seem that the rewards were even greater than what he initially imagined. Treasures were great, but some martial arts such as the one before him clearly held more value.

“Wait... what’s that?” Suddenly, Skin Painting Gentleman looked up and voiced his puzzlement.

“Oh no. I think... I think I jinxed it.”

Xie Taohua followed his gaze and saw a clump of dark clouds floating above their heads. However, it had five colors—green, red, yellow, white and black—and he could vaguely see lightning rippling across its surface. Its mere presence was intimidating and suffocating.

It was at this moment thunder growled a deep rumbling warning, and a green lightning the size of a water barrel shot out of a green cloud. It didn’t look particularly dangerous, and it even gave off a

floral scent. Only an idiot would think that it was harmless, however. It was aimed straight at the man at the center of the black lotus.

“The Yi Wood Divine Thunder?! Me and my bloody mouth!” Xie Taohua slapped his own mouth before urging, “We need to move!”

Xie Taohua pushed off the ground and appeared ten meters away from his original position.

Skin Painting Gentleman, Limp Celestial and Tiger Sovereign all sensed the terrible power brewing in the sky and decided to heed Xie Taohua’s advice as well. They all retreated farther away from the black lotus.

Boom!

It was at this moment the green lightning struck the black lotus with a deafening boom. The latter shook violently as green lightning scattered everywhere like tiny snakes, and an invisible, anomalous power washed out.

Strangely, the withered plants in the area sprouted new leaves and branches when they should’ve been crushed into powder by the green lightning. When it faded, the former wasteland was overflowing with greenery, and the spot where the black lotus was residing was scorched black. The black lotus itself looked less tangible and realistic than before.

“What... What is that, Brother Xie?” Skin Painting Gentleman asked shakily. The bolt of lightning did not look particularly powerful, but it was a righteous power that could pierce all evil. As his “Art of Skin Painting” was a demonic art through and through, he was especially sensitive toward such powers as a matter of course.

He had no doubt that he would be a pile of ash if he was the lightning’s target.

“That’s the Yi Wood Divine Thunder of the Five Phase Tribulation. Capable of smiting evil and creating life, and it is especially deadly against heretical powers.”

Xie Taohua calmed the goosebumps popping on his skin before continuing, “The Five Phase Tribulation is a type of the Seventy Two Earth Fiends Tribulation. They are composed of the Yi Wood Divine Thunder, Ding Fire Divine Thunder, Geng Metal Divine Thunder, Wu Earth Divine Thunder, and Kui Water Divine Thunder. They correspond to the Five Phases: Wood, Fire, Metal, Earth and Water.”

“Although the Five Phases Tribulation is ranked at the bottom half of the list, it is still a tribulation and not to be underestimated. I wonder what kind of martial art that man is cultivating that the mere act of manifesting a Yin God would summon such a tribulation.”

“The Five Phases Tribulation?!” Tiger Sovereign, Skin Painting Gentleman and Limp Celestial’s eyes flickered with shock and disbelief. To say that their feelings right now were mixed would be an understatement.

The next tribulation did not appear immediately after the Yi Wood Divine Thunder was done. Instead, the fiery red cloud kept boiling and rumbling as if it was gathering its strength.

The black lotus on the ground was slowly undergoing a transformation as well, growing darker and more mysterious. What felt like an infinite amount of inexplicable energy was washing out of it.

Chapter 583: To Swallow A Tribulation

A few breaths later, the fiery red cloud in the sky finished gathering its strength and fired a fiery red lightning bolt at the black lotus. It brimmed with seemingly enough power to burn anything and everything into ash.

“Ding Fire Divine Thunder”

There was a loud boom as the Ding Fire Divine Thunder engulfed the black lotus completely, the newborn plants within tens of meters of ground zero instantly bursting into flames and dissolving into piles of ash. When the lightning finally faded, all that was left of the land was a scorched wasteland, and the black lotus looked tattered and broken.

“If the second tribulation lightning is already this scary, what are the chances he could survive the remaining three?” A pale-faced Limp Celestial muttered to no one in particular.

The third lightning bolt fell before he even finished speaking. It wasn’t going to give the person it was testing any time to recover or react at all.

The tribulation lightning that descended this time was the Wu Earth Divine Thunder. It lacked the Yi Wood Divine Thunder’s ability to pierce evil and create life, nor did it possess the sheer destructive power and heat of the Ding Fire Divine Thunder. However, it did possess a gargantuan weight that neither lightning could hope to compare.

When the Wu Earth Divine Thunder descended from the sky, the entire Peach Blossom Mountain shook as if it couldn’t bear its weight. Then, the peak began crumbling earnestly until all that was left was a gigantic pit.

“Gulp... he’s not dead, is he?”

Tiger Sovereign’s face darkened a little. He did not want the mysterious man to die not because he was merciful, but because the martial art would most likely be lost.

“No. The Five Phases Tribulation is still present,” Xie Taohua replied while staring intently at the center of the gigantic pit. He could barely make out a silhouette through the thick dust clouds, and the man’s clothes were in complete tatters. He cut a sorry figure as far as he could tell, but was the man actually injured, or...?

Before Xie Taohua could confirm if the man was injured, the fourth lightning bolt—the Geng Metal Divine Thunder—descended from the sky.

“Hmph!”

A muffled groan escaped Xie Taohua’s lips, and his face abruptly turned ghastly white. He felt as if his mind had been severed by countless sharp sword qi, and it was painful to say the least. It was

because the Geng Metal Divine Thunder had annihilated the wisp of spirit he extended in the man's direction. Not only that, his spirit actually conducted a small portion of the tribulation lightning back to him and damaged his mind.

The Geng Metal Divine Thunder was, again, very different from the Yi Wood Divine Thunder, Ding Fire Divine Thunder and Wu Earth Divine Thunder. It was sharp, cold, and destructive. The lightning bolt felt like a wisps of million sword qi spread across the sky, and sounded like the clashes of war.

Forget Xie Taohua, everyone felt chilled to their core despite not being the tribulation's target.

Chiang!

When the lightning bolt finally struck the man, the sound that pierced their ears was neither an epic explosion or the dull implosion of flesh. It was that of metal striking against metal. Before they knew it, a white light blinded their vision and pricked their eyes so much that they bled. Then, a terrific boom and metallic shriek deafened their eardrums.

When Xie Taohua's vision returned, he stared at the scene before him and swallowed audibly. The gargantuan pit from before had been completely flattened, and its surface was marred by countless cracks that looked to be at least ten meters deep. He could still sense the sharp lightning's power from those cracks.

The man himself was nowhere to be seen.

He isn't dead, is he? What a shame!

A complicated emotion welled inside Xie Taohua's heart. He could not tell if it was regret or something else.

No, wait, he's still alive! The tribulation isn't gone yet!

Suddenly, Xie Taohua looked up. If the man really was dead, then the tribulation clouds would have disappeared on their own. However, they were still present.

As soon as the thought crossed his mind, the ground suddenly trembled like the beginnings of an earthquake. Then, it exploded into smithereens as a silhouette flew straight toward the clouds.

As if on cue, the Kui Water Divine Thunder finished gathering its strength and fired a powerful lightning bolt at the man. A yin, frigid aura filled the air, and ice actually began encasing the ground below. For a moment, it was as if they had plunged into the deepest winter, and all life threatened to perish under its chilling might.

The man did not dodge, however. In fact, he suddenly stopped in his tracks and... waited for the lightning bolt to hit him?!

"Is he insane?!"

Xie Taohua couldn't help but exclaim in shock. The Kui Water Divine Thunder was yin and cold, and it was said to be capable of freezing anything and everything. Not only was it the strongest lightning of the Five Phases Tribulation, it was several times stronger than any single tribulation lightning from before.

As if that wasn't enough, the man had already endured four tribulation lightning earlier. Even if he wasn't injured, he must be nearing exhaustion right now. In Xie Taohua's opinion, attempting to tank the tribulation's strongest attack head on in his state was no different from committing suicide.

Then, the unthinkable happened. The man slowly stretched his limbs until it looked like he was attempting to embrace the tribulation lightning. At the same time, heaven and earth trembled as if an invisible giant was slowly awakening from its slumber.

The silhouette could not be seen with the naked eye, but it could be perceived with the mind. To Xie Taohua's senses, the invisible giant seemed immeasurably vast and terrible. As dark air of dao circulated throughout its body, the very world before his eyes seemed to warp into something that was both profound yet terrifying at the same time.

Xie Taohua began hallucinating before he knew it. He suddenly wondered what he was doing as all sorts of negative emotions and heart demons began sprouting like weeds.

Thankfully, he quickly regained the faculties of his mind and took measures to steady himself. As soon as he expelled the strange influence taking root in his mind, and his vision regained to normal, he saw that the lightning bolt was less than a meter away from the silhouette.

He wondered if he imagined it, but the corners of the silhouette's lips seemed to curl into a disdainful smirk. Then, it opened its mouth and swallowed the lightning.

That's right. The silhouette—or rather, the man facing the heavens' wrath—had swallowed a tribulation lightning!

The silhouette raised his head and exhaled a little, and the five-colored clouds in the sky soundlessly scattered into nothing. The sky cleared, and the world returned to normal. It was almost as if nothing had ever happened.

“Gulp...”

Xie Taohua swallowed in a futile attempt to rein in his shock. This wasn't the first time he witnessed someone challenging a tribulation, but it was certainly the first time he saw someone's Yin God consuming a tribulation lightning and scattering a tribulation cloud by blowing at it!

What stunned him even more was the fact that the man was only a perfect Spirit Purifier whose Yin God had just just finished manifesting. And yet, it was already strong enough to swallow a tribulation lightning without injury and blow away a tribulation cloud like it was dust. Just how was this possible?

That wasn't all. He could tell that the Yin God the man manifested was of the yin, heretical type. The Five Phases Tribulation was a yang type tribulation, and generally speaking, it was the bane of all yin type existences. However, the man was so powerful that it looked like yin should be the bane of yang, not the other way around.

It was such a stunning sight that he could not say a word.

This wasn't the end of the tribulation, however. Or more accurately, the challenger had overcome the tribulation, so it was time to reward him for his effort and power. A drizzle fell from the blue sky despite the fact that not a single speck of cloud could be seen anywhere, and it was overflowing

with vitality and spirit energy. When it hit the scorched, shattered, dead wasteland that was mercilessly destroyed by the tribulation lightning earlier, new grass and trees began sprouting from the ground as if it was spring.

“The Sweet Rain of Blessing?! The heavens are granting their blessing to celebrate one’s rebirth,” Xie Taohua whispered to himself.

The Heavenly Way was both merciless and merciful. Although it sought to punish those who would disobey its laws with a tribulation, it also left a window open for them. “Perfection is fifty, but it is not possible to exceed forty-nine.” There was no such thing as an absolute fate in the world. A tribulation was without a doubt a disaster, but it was also a challenge from Heaven to Man. If the person successfully overcame their tribulation, then the Heavenly Way would acknowledge their existence and reward them with its blessing.

Right now, the spirit rain was the Heavenly Way’s reward for the challenger who overcame the Five Phases Tribulation. It was an incredibly rare healing boon that was named the “Sweet Rain of Blessing”.

The Sweet Rain of Blessing contained an immense amount of vitality. Not only could it regrow flesh and return the dead back to life, it could even restore one’s injured mind back to normal. Everyone knew that spiritual injuries were the most difficult injuries to heal of them all. Barring a handful of natural treasures and extraordinary medicine, the only realistic way to recover from a spiritual injury was to give it time.

This was why the Sweet Rain of Blessing was unbelievably valuable.

Xie Taohua shot a meaningful glance at the silhouette basking in the Sweet Rain of Blessing. Then, he uncorked a bottle and began collecting the precious raindrops.

Skin Painting Gentleman, Limp Celestial and Tiger Sovereign had different ideas, however. They secretly exchanged a glance with each other before pouncing toward the silhouette.

Chapter 584: Dog Eat Dog

No one could deny that the Sweet Rain of Blessing was a priceless treasure, but there was no way it was more valuable than a martial arts manual that conjured it in the first place.

The mysterious man was just creating his Yin God, and already the act was enough to summon a tribulation. It was proof that his martial art was beyond extraordinary. It had to be a Sage-stage martial art at the very least.

On the surface, it looked like Skin Painting Gentleman, Limp Celestial and Tiger Sovereign were all leading the life. They were respected by many and feared by more. However, that was only within the boundaries of Bei You, and even in Bei You, they were really just small fries who had to answer to a bigger fish.

Forget the likes of Joy Bodhisattva and Mistress Ruyi, they couldn’t even compare to the likes of the late Sunset Swordsman and Five Poisons Boy. Otherwise, they would have been invited to Joy Bodhisattva’s Trueman feast.

Of course, this was really a blessing in disguise. Had they actually attended that Trueman feast, they would either be dead or enslaved—but that was besides the point. The point was that, assuming that they never encountered a fortuitous opportunity again in their life, then what they had now was

what they would have when they were at the end of their lives. They would never become stronger, never gain more power, never become more than who they currently were.

And why was that? They were still in their prime, weren't they? They still had many years ahead of them, right?

The answer was as plain as it was cruel. It was because they had no backer or skill. It was because they did not know a martial art that would take them all the way to the top, nor the cultivation resources that would have allowed them to brute force their bottleneck.

Their current cultivation art was a Spirit Master-stage martial art. They could spend their whole lives devoting themselves to their martial art, and they would never become more than a late-stage Spirit Master or Half-Step Grandmaster.

And what was a Spirit Master? A pebble that a bigger man could kick as they pleased. An ant to be squashed by ignorant giants. Hell, they were so insignificant that they might not register as a blip in their killer's memory.

How pathetic an existence would that be?

It was a different story if they could obtain a Grandmaster-stage martial art though. If their paths weren't capped by their own martial arts, who was to say that they could not reach the pinnacle that was Grandmaster and become a giant themselves?

How could they not fight when the opportunity to change their lives forever was right in front of them?

Sure, the mysterious man looked unbelievably powerful, but he had just become a Spirit Master. Hell, it would not be an exaggeration to call him a "newborn". On the other hand, all three of them were middle-stage Spirit Masters. If they worked together, they could give even a Half-Step Grandmaster a black eye.

Second, the mysterious man had just undergone the Five Phases Tribulation, and they had witnessed the tribulation's power with their own eyes. They were certain that the mysterious man was seriously injured and exhausted right now.

If they didn't act now, then when?

All three of them deduced that now was the best time to act. So they did. A hint of excitement and savagery flashed across their face when they thought of the reward that they were sure they would soon receive.

Behind them, Xie Taohua chuckled to himself. "Yep. Those three are as predictable as depression. Let's see how strong that man is, shall we?"

His smile quickly froze, however. Skin Painting Gentleman, Limp Celestial and Tiger Sovereign were about three meters away from the mysterious man when suddenly, they stopped and began attacking the air in front of them. Judging from their greedy, excited expressions, it was clear that it wasn't a joke or a ploy to fool Xie Taohua. After that, they crouched down and moved their hands across the air looking like they were searching a body.

A few breaths later, Limp Celestial clutched a bundle of thin air and cackled triumphantly. “Hahaha! I found it! I found it!”

Blinded by greed and envy, Skin Painting Gentleman and Tiger Sovereign did not hesitate to attack the cripple.

Caught off guard by the betrayal, Limp Celestial failed to react before Tiger Sovereign caught his arm and ripped the entire limb off. Not a moment too soon, Skin Painting Gentleman arrived and sent him flying with a palm strike.

After he dealt Limp Celestial a grievous blow, multiple skins came off Skin Painting Gentleman’s body and caught Tiger Sovereign in a death grip. The scholar himself was running in a different direction with all his might.

“You are courting death, Skin Painting Gentleman!” Tiger Sovereign roared. A tiger appeared behind his back and shredded the skin puppets in a few swipes. Then, both Tiger Sovereign and the tiger chased after the scholar.

It was at this moment the grievously wounded Limp Celestial roared, “That is my treasure! Mine! I’ll kill you!”

As he leaped into the air, his shrunken right leg grew rapidly in size. Then, he brought his foot down on Skin Painting Gentleman and Tiger Sovereign.

The resulting impact sent both warriors flying through the air. Despite their injuries, they charged toward Limp Celestial as soon as they hit the ground.

“You are courting death, limp geezer!”

More explosions followed. The three men were tearing into each other with a kind of ferocity and madness that was usually reserved for one’s nemesis only. If possible, Xie Taohua was sure that they would feed on each other’s flesh and drink their blood. They were fighting to kill the other person even at the cost of their own life, and that made no sense whatsoever.

“What the hell is going on here?”

Usually, there was nothing Xie Taohua enjoyed more than a good ol’ dog eat dog fight. Not this time though. Not when his pawns were killing each other over a bundle of air. It did not take a genius to know that the trio had somehow plunged into an illusion while they were charging the mysterious man, and the eerie, almost clownish sight sent a chill up his spine.

“Okay, this is too much. I’m calling it quits.”

Without hesitation, Xie Taohua corked his bottle and ran down the mountain.

He would be lying if he said he wasn’t planning on kicking a dog while it was down so to speak, but he didn’t join the trio in their charge because he was planning to use them to sound out the mysterious man.

It was why he bothered to rescue the trio at all. What, did you really think he had a bleeding heart? No, he was just a cautious man. He preferred to plan before he acted; safety over danger.

And thank goodness he did, because the mysterious man proved to be even more dangerous than he expected; so much so that he decided to beat a hasty retreat. It wasn't like he was going home empty-handed. At the very least, he obtained the Sweet Rain of Blessing most people couldn't even dream of. That was enough for him.

He was never a greedy man. If his venture turned out to be profitable, then hurray. If not, he would not hesitate to wrap it up and call it a day. In his opinion, there was no vice a human should be more wary of than greed. Excessive greed would only result in loss and even death, and that just wasn't worth it no matter how he looked at it.

He had already seen far, far too many people who succumbed to their greed and suffered from it, and he had no interest in becoming one of them.

Xie Taohua was a decisive man. He disappeared into the peach blossom forest in just the blink of an eye. After he was gone, the man still basking in the Sweet Rain of Blessing abruptly opened his eyes and stared at the direction Xie Taohua had escaped to, smiling. "Interesting."

The mysterious man was Ye Qing, of course. But why was he here at Peach Blossom Mountain?

After the Trueman feast incident was over, Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows left that very night after engaging Joy Bodhisattva in a secret discussion. It was because he did not want to run into Ding Chong, vice head of Sword King City or Yang Tianming, Azure Dragon Envoy of Earthfire Palace of Demons.

Right after Myriad Shadows left, Ye Qing bade Joy Bodhisattva goodbye as well. He too snuck out of Blissful Mountain without anyone noticing. His involvement was not necessary in what was coming, and he had no intentions of showing his face before the champions just like Myriad Shadows.

Joy Bodhisattva must have noticed his determination because she did not try to change his mind when he visited her. She only gifted him two nine hundred years old Moon Lotus Seed.

The Moon Lotus Seed was the seed of the Moon Lotus, and the Moon Lotus was a natural creation that could only be found in the tallest, uninhabited peak. It grew by basking in moonlight and had an extremely slow growth cycle. It took sixty years to germinate, sixty years to flower, sixty years to fruit, sixty years to seed, and another sixty years to finally reach full maturity.

Long story short, it took a total of three hundred years for a Moon Lotus to reach full maturity. It was worth it though. The Moon Lotus could drastically improve a warrior's spiritual power. To make an example, a three-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus could transform an ordinary early-stage Spirit Purifier into a late-stage Spirit Purifier instantly. That was how potent it was.

That wasn't all. An unharvested Moon Lotus Seed did not wither. It would simply continue its growth cycle and gain more potency over time. A six-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seed was twice as potent as a three-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seed, meaning that its potency would only grow with time.

However, a three-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seed was already quite rare. A six-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seed could only be described as a priceless treasure, not to mention that the Moon Lotus itself was exceptionally rare. As if that wasn't enough, a mature Moon Lotus Seed would give off a scent that attracted all kinds of Stranger to harvest it. To say it was extremely unlikely for a Moon Lotus Seed to reach the age of six hundred naturally would be an understatement.

A nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seed was the stuff of legends. It was a kind of treasure a person might not find, much less obtain for a millennium. It was also said that a nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seed could transform one's soul completely.

But of course, the two nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seeds Joy Bodhisattva gave Ye Qing were slightly different from a true nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seed.

Chapter 585: Heavenly Demon of Freedom

According to Joy Bodhisattva, she had found the two nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seeds in the Age King Strange Realm, and time passed many times faster in the Age King Strange Realm than it was in the real world. To be specific, a single day in the Age King Strange Realm was equal to several incense sticks in the outside world. Therefore, the two nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seeds did not truly possess the quintessence of a Moon Lotus Seed that aged for nine hundred years in the real world.

Of course, that didn't diminish the gift's value by much. According to Joy Bodhisattva, she had obtained a total of six nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seeds from the Age King Strange Realm. She had used one to manifest her Yin God and enter the Spirit Master stage, and three to manifest her Primordial Spirit and forge the bridge connecting her inner world and the outside world while entering the Trueman stage. Now, she only had two left.

When Joy Bodhisattva saw that he was at a critical moment of manifesting his Yin God, she did not hesitate to give him her last two nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seeds.

To be honest, Ye Qing was extremely touched by the gesture, so much so that he nearly offered her his hand in marriage on the spot. Luckily, his rationality and integrity kicked in just in time to prevent him from losing his virginity.

After obtaining the two nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seeds, Ye Qing yearned to convert them into his strength as soon as possible. As soon as he left Blissful Mountain, he sought out a safe, uninhabited place to refine the Moon Lotus Seeds and create his Yin God. In the end, he arrived at Peach Blossom Mountain.

Of course, the Temple of Divination was technically safer than Peach Blossom Mountain. It wasn't like he couldn't wait until he returned to the temple either. However, the "Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra" was no ordinary martial art, and every time he cultivated it would generate all sorts of strange phenomena. He still remembered how he had unintentionally spurred dozens of *jianghu* warriors to slaughter each other to the death while he was cultivating, and he imagined that manifesting a Yin God and entering the next major stage in his cultivation would only trigger an even more potent phenomenon.

That was why he needed to find an uninhabited place to undergo his breakthrough, and Peach Blossom Mountain was an excellent choice. There were no human settlements or lives within a five-kilometer radius of Peach Blossom Mountain because of the Human-faced Peach Blossoms. The Hatred-class Strangers were no danger to him, but they were incredibly dangerous for an ordinary human or your average *jianghu* warrior. He believed that the mountain was secluded enough that no one would notice the oddities of his cultivation, and even if they did, they would not dare to brave the dangers of Peach Blossom Mountain. This guaranteed his own safety and peace as well.

He was wrong though. He ultimately underestimated the time it took for him to manifest a Yin God and the commotion it caused.

The Yin God he was creating was officially called the “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon”. In more secular terms, it was called the Heavenly Demon of Freedom.

To manifest the Heavenly Demon of Freedom, he must undergo three stages. The first stage was called “Forging Heaven”. In ancient times, there existed an unparalleled Heavenly Demon who ruled over the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven. He was the Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon. The Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon loathed the living, so he departed the Three Realms and lived in the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven. This was why the first step to creating his Yin God was to forge a Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven inside his headspace.

Normally speaking, the first step to creating a Yin God was to construct their image, but the “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” was not your ordinary martial art.

Of course, the real Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven Ye Qing was constructing wasn’t the real thing. Legend says that the true Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven was infinitely vast and deep, and residing within it were countless Heart Demons and desires of mankind. Anyone who took a look at it would succumb instantly. Obviously, Ye Qing did not possess the strength to construct a Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven that was even remotely close to it. The so-called Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven he was constructing was just a pocket world bearing some resemblance to the real thing with his demonic lotus as the foundation.

It took a tremendous amount of demonic thought and spiritual power to complete this stage. Despite having begun making preparations several months ago, he wasn’t able to fully construct his Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven. Even the massive quantities of gold dragon-serpent runes and natural treasures he expended amounted to just a drop in the bucket of need.

That was why the first thing he did upon ascending Peach Blossom Mountain was to consume the Moon Lotus Seed. He was certain that the vast power contained within it would be enough to complete the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven.

And it did, albeit barely. The nine-hundred-year-old Moon Lotus Seed that could transform an early-stage Spirit Purifier into a Spirit Master in an instant contained just enough for him to construct his Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven. Not only that, this stage alone took him nearly two weeks to complete.

The second stage of the process was named “Birthing Demon”. It was the stage where he birthed his Yin God using the desires, obsessions, and heart demons of mankind such as the Five Poisons, Six Desires, Seven Emotions, Eight Fears, Nine Terrors and more.

Once again, this stage took a lot of time and effort. Only a sufficiently vast and potent demonic thought could nurture a Heavenly Demon of Freedom successfully.

Luckily for him, he still had another Moon Lotus Seed. After consuming the object, he converted pure spiritual power into demonic through the demonic lotus and successfully birthed his Yin God.

Again, this stage took him another two or so weeks to complete.

The third and final stage of the process was called “Gain Freedom”. To put it simply, Ye Qing must assume control of his own Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven and become its master.

This stage was simpler compared to the previous stages. After all, the Heavenly Demon of Freedom was born from the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven. In essence, the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven was its birthright, which was why it took Ye Qing little effort to succeed.

But just because the process was simple did not mean it was risk free, however. If anything, the last stage was the riskiest stage of them all. It was because he must face a deadly tribulation right after he took control of the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven. Only then could he truly become its master and be acknowledged by the Heavenly Way.

Defeat would see him dead, and victory, life.

In fact, Ye Qing had no idea that he would face a tribulation. He instinctively realized it was only after he controlled the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven.

He was a little miffed, to be honest. All the stories he heard told him that the heavens would bless him, and myriad creatures would celebrate his success if he was an outstanding warrior cultivating a powerful martial art. Hell, even that madman Chu Wangsun got to enjoy such a treatment, so why was he treated to a tribulation instead?

It was probably because of two reasons. One, the “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” was too powerful. Second, it was a heretical, blasphemous martial art that was incompatible with the world itself.

It was a demonic martial art. Of course it was going to defy the heavens and all that nonsense.

As this was his first time facing down a tribulation, he would be lying if he said he was calm. After all, a tribulation was often described as powerful, terrifying, and destructive. Countless champions and legends had perished to all sorts of tribulations while attempting to shed their mortality and enter the Sage stage. It was why even a Grandmaster was terrified of tribulations like a mouse would before a cat, much less a puny Spirit Purifier like him.

Of course his tribulation could not hope to measure up to a Sage’s tribulation, but that didn’t mean he could face it with a calm heart.

As the virgins liked to say, it was their first time after all.

Most importantly, the tribulation had appeared without any warning whatsoever. It appeared the second after he used his Yin God to take control of his Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven, the cheating bastard.

Thankfully, the Heavenly Demon of Freedom he spent countless resources, time and effort to create proved to be extraordinary. First, his demonic thought—a.k.a his spiritual power—was several times greater and stronger than before. Right now, he dare says that his spirit was as strong as a late-stage Spirit Master, if not stronger.

Second, he could now sense one’s emotions with a heart, disrupt one’s heartstrings with a thought, and manifest myriad mortal tribulations with a will.

The Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon was a Heavenly Demon like no other. He loathed the mortals who left the boundaries of the Three Realms and enjoyed causing all sorts of troubles for warriors. A master at manipulating one’s senses and exploiting one’s mental weaknesses, he could toy with anyone in all sorts of methods without leaving behind no traces whatsoever. He could be

whispering poison into one's ears right now, and they would never know even after they were six feet under.

Ye Qing's Yin God was made in the image of the Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon, so of course it inherited a semblance of his powers as well. Invisible, everchanging and untraceable, it could exploit a victim's mental weakness to disrupt the mind, toy with the heart, seduce the soul, and extinguish the will.

In one thought, he could inflict pain and sorrow upon all living things. Such was one they called the Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon.

Finally, Ye Qing learned a Magia known as the Boundless Heart Demon Tribulation.

He did not rush to leave the mountain though. He would stay there for a couple more days to fully familiarize himself with his new Yin God. It was only then that he finally took his leave.

Chapter 586: Blessing and Curse Are Two Sides Of The Same Coin

"The bearer of the Boundless Heart Demon Tribulation shall gather all of their demonic thought and transform the red dust into their Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven. Those within their Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven shall lose sight of themselves, succumb to the influence of the Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon, and suffer the tribulation of Heart Demons. They shall never escape."

To put it in more secular terms, Ye Qing could use up all of his demonic thought to summon his Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven in the real world. While he was still inside his domain, he was unkillable and everchanging. He could fight his enemies head on, or he could muddy their consciousness, awaken their Heart Demon, and drag them to eternal damnation.

A Heart Demon was a human's obsession. It was also a warrior's greatest fear. If it was awakened, and there were chinks in the warrior's mental armor, then it would be all too easy for them to suffer a deviation and "fall into eternal damnation" so to speak.

The description alone sounded scary, but he had neither fully grasped the Boundless Heart Demon Tribulation nor used it yet. Therefore, he could not be certain of its effects.

In conclusion, Ye Qing was certain that his Yin God could contend against Spirit Masters who had a decade or even decades to strengthen their Yin God. It was also why the Five Phases Tribulation, as strong as it was, could not threaten him.

On a funny note, he noticed that being struck by lightning was surprisingly beneficial. What was a Yin God? A Yin God was a warrior's proof of accomplishment of the mind. A mind was afraid of yang and brute force, which was why it could only appear during yin hours. That was why it was called a Yin God.

The Spirit Master stage was the stage where the warrior strengthened their Yin God and refined it with origin energy. At a certain point, the Yin God would be able to shed their yin shell and become impervious to heavenly lightning or violent flames, hence becoming a Yang God. Once the warrior had successfully built a bridge between their inner world and the outer world and essentially became one with the world, they would enter the Trueman stage and become a Grandmaster.

The Five Phases Tribulation was a yang tribulation, so every lightning strike dealt a significant amount of damage to his Yin God. However, it also tempered his Yin God and made it stronger and tougher. It was the definition of blessing and curse being two sides of the same coin.

There was a quote in the “Martial Scripture” that went something like this: “A heavenly tribulation is both a blessing and a curse. The Way is both merciless and merciful.” It described the essence of a tribulation perfectly.

Of course, the Five Phases Tribulation was nothing to be scoffed at. Despite his Yin God’s extraordinary power, he still took quite a lot of damage when all was said and done.

It was also why he allowed Xie Taohua to escape.

Xie Taohua’s malice was as clear as day to Ye Qing. If given the opportunity, he would not mind killing the young man and ending the threat he posed. Unfortunately, Xie Taohua was no Skin Painting Gentleman, Limp Celestial or Tiger Sovereign.

Despite being middle-stage Spirit Masters, the trio’s spirit was surprisingly weak. He could tell at first glance that they were Dark Way practitioners who cared more about accumulating power in the shortest amount of time possible than honing their mind. That was why it took him barely any effort to exploit their greed and create an illusion that tricked them into thinking that they had obtained his martial arts manual. Then, he further amplified their greed and bloodlust using his demonic thought and pitted them against each other.

Xie Taohua was different though. For one, he was a Half-Step Grandmaster and much, much stronger than the trio.

Second, he could sense a strange aura and wisps of dark energies from Xie Taohua. He was almost certain that the young man also cultivated a demonic art, but unlike the trio, he was neither a small fry nor weak in the mind. The fact that he did not hesitate to leave as soon as he determined that Ye Qing was a great threat proved this.

Since his Yin God was damaged, and Xie Taohua had acted too quickly and decisively, Ye Qing had no choice but to allow him to slip away from right under his nose.

After confirming that Xie Taohua was gone, Ye Qing turned his attention back to the gasping trio—by now, they had injured each other so badly that all of them had one foot in their graves—and snapped his fingers, wiping their consciousness from existence just like that. Finally, he concentrated inward and began repairing his damaged Yin God earnestly.

The Sweet Rain of Blessing lasted about half a teatime or so. By the time it ended, the entire Peach Blossom Mountain had regained its former glory, and Ye Qing’s Yin God was almost back to optimal condition.

He did not hurry down the mountain though. Instead, he lingered in Peach Blossom Mountain for a couple more days and seized the opportunity to master the usage of his Heavenly Demon Yin God. Only then did he finally take his leave.

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“So many things happened while I was in seclusion...”

At Number One, Ye Qing was enjoying a sip of tea as he eavesdropped on the conversations happening on the first floor. It didn't take long before he figured out what had happened during the past couple months he had secluded himself from the world.

First things first, it was clear that Joy Bodhisattva's plan was progressing smoothly. Not only did she manage to trick Sword King City and Earthfire Palace of Demons, she was able to lay claim to all the profits and territories of Endless Sand, Tower of Cornucopia etc while the two sects were enacting their vengeful crusade. As a result, she was able to assume control over all the forces of Bei You. Ye Qing had no doubt Joy Bodhisattva was behind the newly arisen forces and gangs.

Bei You might look no different from before, but it had really become Joy Bodhisattva's possession.

Of course, the reason she was able to control Bei You this quickly was probably thanks to Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows and the Way of Taiping. But what were those bastards plotting? Why did they try so hard to control Bei You?

Knowing the Way of Taiping, it could only be something bad.

"It feels like the calm before the storm."

Ye Qing sighed, a bad feeling circulating in his heart.

The good news was that he managed to make a friend out of Joy Bodhisattva. No matter what happened to Bei You, Joy Bodhisattva should be able to keep him out of trouble.

It was nice being under an umbrella again.

But of course, it wasn't a permanent solution. The Way of Taiping and Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows' appearance also made him feel a sense of urgency. In the end, he still wasn't strong enough.

Now that he had created a Yin God and entered the Spirit Master stage, it was unlikely he would experience another major boost in this area in the short term. Therefore, he should focus on honing his body instead. Specifically, he should refine his stock of Profound Yellow Qi, reach the adept level in the "Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra", and perfect his "Chaos Demon Ape Body" so his physical body would enter the Grandmaster stage.

Only then did he possess the ability to protect himself—albeit barely.

"Sigh. The grind is neverending, is it?"

Ye Qing drained his wine in one gulp. He was about to pay the bill and leave when suddenly, he saw two men walking through the entrance.

The man leading at the forefront wore a purple robe. His appearance was lofty, noble and dignified, and his face was devoid of emotion. He attracted everyone's gaze as soon as he set foot inside the restaurant.

"Chu Wangsun?!"

Ye Qing's pupils contracted a little. At the same time, his wine cup crumbled into powder without a sound.

Yes. The newcomer was none other than Chu Wangsun.

“Chu Wangsun? It can only be...”

“Is that *him*? Is he Mister Nine?”

“Yeah. He’s Mister Nine, disciple of the Chief Libationist of the Jixia Academy. I saw him once during the Hidden Dragon Conference, so there can be no mistake.”

“Heavens above... I can hardly believe that I’m seeing *the* Mister Nine with my own eyes!”

“But why is he here? Bei You is no place for a man like him...”

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Loud murmurs filled the restaurants after a moment of silence. Seemingly immersed in his own world, Chu Wangsun paid them no attention whatsoever. It was almost as if he wasn’t at the center of the gossip.

What the hell is that bastard doing here? He can’t possibly be here to kill me, can he?

Ye Qing rejected the thought just a second later. *Oh right! The Dark Overlord’s inheritance!*

Suddenly, Ye Qing recalled something he had pushed to the back of his mind a while ago; the Dark Overlord Token and the Dark Overlord’s inheritance to be exact.

The Death Sea was located in Bei Mo, and it appeared once every sixty years. Assuming that his calculations were correct, next year March would be the year the Death Sea was open to the world once more. However, the Death Sea was only open for a month. Once a month had passed, it would sink back into whatever abyss it came from. Anyone who missed this opportunity would have to wait another sixty years.

It was the end of the year right now, and there were only three or so months left before the Death Sea appeared. Bei You was the closest city to Bei Mo, so it made sense for Chu Wangsun to come here.

In fact, he reckoned that everyone with a Dark Overlord Token would soon arrive at Bei You and other locations that were close to the Death Sea.

The Death Sea only appeared once every sixty years after all. If they missed this opportunity, then they would have to wait another sixty years to obtain it. Not even a warrior could afford to waste sixty years like it was nothing, not to mention that there might only be one Dark Overlord inheritance. If someone obtained it first, then that was it. The opportunity would be lost to them permanently.

Naturally, no one with the Dark Overlord Token would allow a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity like this to slip through their grasp.

Chapter 587: Demon Tempering Hand

“The Dark Overlord’s inheritance, eh?”

Ye Qing rubbed his chin and wondered if he should join in on the fun as well. Although he wasn’t lacking anything right now—he had all the martial arts, Strange Artifacts and even cultivation

resources he currently needed to advance to the next level—and the best thing he could do right now was to keep a low profile and grow at a slow and steady pace...

This was the Dark Overlord's inheritance that was on the line here. Sure, those who owned a Dark Overlord Token included terrifying warriors such as the Sun Sovereign and Madman Chu, and the Death Sea was a famous death zone in Bei Mo, and he probably amounted to no more but a pawn in this competition, but who could possibly give up on the Dark Overlord's inheritance like it was nothing? This was the greatest warrior of the Spring and Autumn period back then; the so-called unrivaled champion of his time, Li Hentian.

Ye Qing would be lying if he said he wasn't tempted. He knew full well that the chances that a pawn like him might obtain the Dark Overlord's inheritance was next to nil, but... what if?

What if the Dark Overlord deemed him worthy?

What if he got dogshit lucky?

Who *hadn't* gotten dogshit lucky at least once in their life?

Even if he failed to obtain the Dark Overlord's inheritance in the end, the juices that slipped through the elites' fingers would be greatly beneficial to him, right?

It was why he couldn't quite make up his mind.

Suddenly, a voice caught his attention. "Mister Nine, I am a disciple of the Eight Ruler Sect, Jiang Baichuan. I would like to spar with you. Will you please spare me a bit of your time?"

A short silence enveloped Number One for a moment. Then, derisive jeers and boisterous laughter filled the restaurant.

Ye Qing looked down and saw a young man about eighteen to nineteen years old standing in Chu Wangsun's way with his hands clasped together in a salute.

The young man was carrying an iron ruler around his waist. It wasn't long, but it was pitch black in color, thick and heavy-looking. It was obviously not a toy weapon.

The young man must be new to the *jianghu* because he turned red with embarrassment after being teased by the crowd for just a couple of seconds. Even so, he did not change his mind and back down from his challenge.

Chu Wangsun furrowed his brow. He seemed displeased with the fact that someone was barring his way.

It was at this moment the man following behind Chu Wangsun stepped forward with a smile and said, "Our deepest apologies, young warrior, but my teacher has had a long journey and would like to catch some rest as soon as possible. Perhaps another day?"

The speaker was a brawny man in his forties. He had dark skin and an honest face that gave him the appearance of a longtime farmer.

"You heard that, kid? That's your cue to get off the stage. Better get lost before you humiliate yourself further!"

“Yeah, who do you think you are to ask for a spar with Mister Nine himself? Just go home and drink your milk already!”

“Stop delaying Mister Nine’s rest and fuck off, boy.”

Practically everyone was taunting or jeering at the young man. It was because they could tell that his request for a spar was just a ruse to get his name out there. The young man was just an early-stage Astral Refiner, whereas Mister Nine was one of the strongest and most famous warriors of his age for a long time. A spar between them was like a spar between an adult human and an ant. Literally no one would benefit from it.

“You’re no match for me. Get out of my way!” Chu Wangsun looked up and declared indifferently.

“Hahahaha!”

Everyone in the restaurant laughed when they heard this. Etched on their faces was undisguised schadenfreude.

“I... I know I’m no match for you. I just wish to spar with you for a bit.” Jiang Baichuan’s gaze grew resentful as he gritted his teeth. “My apologies!”

He then attacked Chu Wangsun without warning.

If you won’t accept, then I’ll make you!

Jiang Baichuan appeared before Chu Wangsun in just the blink of an eye. He swung his iron ruler straight at the scholar’s head.

Chu Wangsun did not react. Instead, the man standing behind him stepped between the two and reached out to grab the iron ruler with his hand.

A hint of disdain flickered in Jiang Baichuan’s eyes. Although the Eight Ruler Sect wasn’t famous in Northern Xinjiang, the martial arts they taught weren’t weak in the slightest. Their main martial art was called the “Iron Ruler Strikes Eight Directions”, and their weapon of choice was an unorthodox weapon called the iron ruler. A master in one-inch moves and explosive power, disciples of the Eight Ruler Sect fought best when they were inches away from their opponent.

It might look like Jiang Baichuan was wielding an inferior weapon—after all, an iron ruler neither possessed the sharpness of a blade or the reach of a stick—but his explosive power could only be described as terrifying. Not even a warrior who was one cultivation level above him could block his iron ruler without breaking a bone or two, and this man was crazy enough to try and catch it with his bare hands!

In Jiang Baichuan’s opinion, the action was about as suicidal as lighting a lantern in the toilet!

He did not hold back, however. Not only was Chu Wangsun looking down on him, he had humiliated him in public as well. It was only right that he gave him a taste of his own medicine!

Unfortunately, Jiang Baichuan was destined to be disappointed. The young man had anticipated the sound of breaking bones and a burst of blood and gore, but instead, it was his iron ruler that was bent ninety degrees when it struck the brawny man’s palm.

“Ah, excuse me for using too much force.”

The brawny man smiled humbly before swiping Jiang Baichuan’s iron ruler out of his hand and straightening it. Then, he returned it to Jiang Baichuan and said, “There you go.”

The young man was so stunned that he did not react even after he accepted the iron ruler.

The onlookers were just as stunned as Jiang Baichuan was, so much so that they temporarily forgot to make fun of him. Although they were jeering Jiang Baichuan, they were aware of his strength to a certain extent. Most of them wouldn’t dare to take a direct blow from the youngster, but not only did the brawny man caught the ruler with his bare hands, he even bent it a full ninety degrees, not to mention that he had snatched it right out of Jiang Baichuan’s hand like it was nothing. It was such a one-sided affair it wasn’t funny.

If even Chu Wangsun’s servant was this strong, then Chu Wangsun himself could only be many times stronger. Everyone shoved their petty schemes to the far corner of their mind at that moment.

“Tsk tsk! I never thought I would see the day the infamous Demon Refining Hand bullies a kid! I wonder how the *jianghu* would laugh at you when they learn about this?”

Suddenly, a ridiculing, lazy-sounding voice broke the silence. A hint of killing intent flickered in the brawny man’s eyes as he turned toward the exit.

An exceptionally beautiful man wearing pink clothes and a peach blossom flower on his head was leaning against the door frame. He was also wearing a small smirk on his face.

“Xie Taohua?!”

At the second floor, Ye Qing was smirking as well. It would seem that they quite fated with one another.

“The Demon Refining Hand?”

“Could he be referring to the eighteenth warrior on the Human Champions Ranking, the ‘Demon Refining Hand’ Pei Qiansui?”

“But I thought Pei Qiansui is a disciple of the Demonic Mountain, one of the Nine Demonic Ways? Why is he together with Mister Nine?”

The questions quickly rose to a clamor inside Number One.

“Yeah, I’m quite curious myself. I thought you’re one of the Nine Sons of the Demonic Mountain, the infamous Demon Refining Hand. Since when did you become Chu Wangsun’s follower?” Xie Taohua held a peach blossom before his nose and sniffed it a little. His posture was seductive to say the least.

“Did you master not teach you that curiosity kills the warrior, Xie Taohua?” Pei Qiansui’s honest smile vanished behind a cold, dark visage. “Keep your nose out of my business, or else!”

Xie Taohua did not take his threat to heart. “But I’m not trying to meddle in your business. You and I share the same origin. Of course I would be concerned for a fellow brother, wouldn’t I?”

Before he could say anything else, Chu Wangsun—the man had seemed immersed in his own world until he heard Xie Taohua’s name—looked up and stared at Xie Taohua, “Are you the Peach Blossom Celestial’s only disciple, Xie Taohua?”

His movement was nothing out of the ordinary, but Xie Taohua suddenly felt like someone had pressed a blade to his neck. His hair stood on end as he involuntarily stood up straight.

Chapter 588: Peach Blossom Celestial On Peach Blossom Mountain

“That’s right. My master is the Peach Blossom Celestial,” Xie Taohua answered.

Everyone gasped when they heard this. When they looked at Xie taohua once more, it was with renewed respect and fear.

Xie Qingxi, the “Peach Blossom Celestial” was an independent warrior with no patron just like many others in the *jianghu*. However, he was ranked fifteen on the Earth Champions Ranking. They called him the Peach Blossom Celestial.

All Earth Champions Ranking warriors were Grandmasters, and they were not your ordinary Grandmasters either. There was no denying how powerful he was.

Not only that, Xie Qingxi had never experienced defeat since entering the *jianghu*, and he was only in his sixties. He was expected to become a Sage in the future, and everyone had high hopes for him. They all praised him as a once-in-a-century genius.

If there was one flaw to Xie Qingxi’s character, it was the fact that his desire for martial improvement seemed lacking. A lover of beautiful views and gorgeous landscapes, there was nothing he loved more than peach blossom. He called himself the Peach Blossom Celestial and lived at Peach Origin Temple of Peach Origin Mountain.

It was said that a human could not live alone, and they were right. It was just that peach blossom was all the companionship Xie Qingxi needed. He spent most of his time drinking wine with flowers and generally doing whatever he wanted.

“There exists a Peach Origin Temple at Peach Origin Mountain, and a Peach Blossom Celestial in Peach Origin Temple. The Peach Blossom Celestial plants peach blossoms for his own entertainment and to trade for wine.” That was how the people described him.

It was also said that Xie Qingxi spent twice as much time managing his peach blossoms, drinking and creating poems than cultivating. There was even a quote in “Martial Review” that went like this: “Xie Qingxi’s martial talent is something that appears only once in a century, but his addiction to the pleasures is also once-in-a-century. If he can devote even one-third of the time and effort he spends on his entertainment on martial arts, then he already would be a Sage.”

From this, one could tell just how talented Xie Qingxi was.

Xie Taohua was Xie Qingxi’s disciple, so of course he was an extraordinary warrior in his own right. He was ranked ninth on the Human Champions Ranking despite his young age, and his talent,

while not as clear cut as his master's, was also one of a kind. He was guaranteed to become a Grandmaster unless he met an early death or something. When the time came, his success would add yet another stroke to the legend that was peach blossoms.

On a related note, the reason Xie Taohua claimed that he and Pei Qiansui shared the same origin could be traced back to yet another legend in the *jianghu*.

A long time ago, Xie Qingxi was just a helpless, powerless son of a rich family. He was exploring a forest and enjoying the beautiful nature when he was nearly eaten by a tiger. Luckily for him, a Sacred Son of the Demonic Mountain—also known as the Demonic Mountain Sacred Sovereign today—Xu Yunxiao happened to be passing through the area and saved him.

When Xu Yunxiao realized that Xie Qingxi wasn't feigning his powerlessness, and yet he was somehow audacious enough to explore the world alone, he could not help but ask, "You cannot even fight a chicken, and you would dare to explore the world? Aren't you afraid of death?"

Xie Qingxi thanked Xu Yunxiao first before replying in a carefree tone, "For these beautiful mountains and waters, sun and moon? A million deaths."

Xu Yunxiao pressed, "Beautiful the bodies of nature may be, they are ultimately not you. How can they compare to your own life?"

Xie Qingxi countered, "The mountains and waters are endless, just like the sun and the moon are eternal. On the other hand, a human's life is but a flash in the endless stream that is time. There is no comparison."

Xu Yunxiao guffawed. "No comparison? It is true that the mountains, waters, sun and moon are eternal, but I too am eternal. And if I am eternal, then how can there be no comparison?"

"I can see that your eyes are wholly enraptured by the bodies of nature, but what of your heart? I do not see a blade of grass, a drop of water, not even a ray of light in there. After all, as you currently are, your life *is* but a flash in the rivers of time. You may witness all that exists in a corner of the world, but you will not live long enough to experience all the world has to offer, know the vastness of the universe, and understand the everchanging tides of time. What difference is there between you and an ant?"

"How lamentable and pitiable you are!"

With that said, Xu Yunxiao shook his head, jumped into the sky and soared away, leaving a dumbfounded but thoughtful-looking Xie Qingxi behind. Not long after that, Xie Qingxi began his martial journey. He took a year to temper his body, two years to invoke his qi, three years to augment his vessels, four years to refine his astral qi, five years to purify his spirit, six years to master it, and seven years to become a Grandmaster. What most people viewed as an insurmountable wall or impossible bottleneck was nothing to Xie Qingxi: he blasted through the cultivation levels as easily as one might poke a hole in a paper.

In just the span of ten or so years, Xie Qingxi had transformed from a helpless, frail scholar into a famous warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking.

When asked why he embarked on his martial journey in the first place, Xie Qingxi answered, “I wish to see the beauty of mountains and rivers; to feel the warmth of suns and moons; to learn the vastness of heaven and earth; and to know the everchanging tides of time. To that end, I will become eternal.”

Such was his answer that his story became an inspiring legend in the *jianghu*, the *wulin*, and the world. Xu Yunxiao also came to be known as the “Enlightening Master” for what he did for Xie Qingxi.

Because Xu Yunxiao had saved his life and enlightened him, Xie Qingxi always treated the man like his master. Xu Yunxiao himself had never refuted it, and so the connection stayed to this day.

Xie Taohua was Xie Qingxi’s disciple, and Xie Qingxi addressed Xu Yunxiao as his master. Since Pei Qiansui was a disciple of Demonic Mountain and technically counted as the Sacred Sovereign’s junior, Xie Taohua wasn’t wrong to say that they shared the same origin.

This did not matter, of course. What mattered was the fact that a glimmer had appeared in Chu Wangsun’s eyes after Xie Taohua admitted his identity. “Good.”

Chu Wangsun jabbed a finger at Xie Taohua then. To an outsider, the gesture looked perfectly ordinary. Someone even thought that Chu Wangsun wanted to say something to Xie Taohua. But from Xie Taohua’s perspective?

He felt a tyrannical, indomitable power pressing in from every direction. The gesture looked so harmless, and yet he felt as if every wisp of energy within hundreds of hundreds of kilometers of him were flooding toward him. There was nowhere to run; nowhere to hide. The origin energy in the air was locked so firmly that he would be dead long before he managed to shatter its constraints. He was as trapped as a bird in a cage; a fish in a net.

Xie Taohua paled a little, but he did not falter. If he could not escape or hide, then he would fight.

Xie Taohua pulled out the peach blossom branch on his head and spun it between his fingers. A spring wind blew, and peach blossom branches began growing out of the floor, the walls, the roof and more[1]. Green shoots sprouted out of the branches before transforming into gorgeous peach blossoms.

In just the blink of an eye, Number One had transformed into a peach blossom paradise.

“The spring wind blows, the peach blossom blooms. The peach blossom (Taohua) blooms where the spring wind blows. Xie Taohua definitely deserves his fame!”

On the second floor, Ye Qing snapped a peach blossom flower from a branch next to him and complimented the warrior. The peach blossoms were, in fact, not an illusion. They were real peach blossoms overflowing with fragrance and life.

It was said that the spring wind blew, and peach blossoms bloomed whenever Xie Taohua sparred or fought against someone. It was how he earned the moniker, the “Walking Wind of Spring”.

A person could be born with the wrong name, but never a nickname. After the peach blossoms bloomed, Xie Taohua twirled his branch again and caused the flowers to fall off the branches of their own accord. They converged into a river of peach blossoms and clashed against Chu Wangsun’s force.

There was a moment where the river of peach blossoms simply stayed there as if frozen in time and space itself. It was followed by a soundless shockwave that was somehow more impactful otherwise. Everyone in Number One suddenly blanked out and turned pale as if they were struck by lightning.

Xie Taohua's rosy complexion suddenly turned as pale as a sheet, and the ground beneath his feet shattered without a sound. The next moment, the river of peach blossoms abruptly exploded like a bomb.

If no one did anything about the explosion, then it would certainly bring down the entire building. Most of its guests would be killed as well.

Right when it looked like the restaurant would meet its end, Chu Wangsun abruptly flung his sleeve like he was trying to sweep the sun and moon into his arm. The chaotic blast of energies disappeared into his sleeves, and peace and quiet returned to Number One just like that.

As if on cue, the guests jolted back to reality and stared at Chu Wangsun with both lingering fear and abject astonishment. No one could believe what just happened and what *almost* happened a moment ago.

Now they understood why the saying, "When gods fight, the mortals suffer," existed. If before they were all hoping to watch a good fight, now it was the complete opposite. If they stayed here any longer, they might just lose their lives.

Is this the strength of a Human Champions Ranking warrior? How terrifying!

"Ahem..."

Xie Taohua coughed, and the peach blossom branches spread across Number One abruptly withered. His pale complexion returned to normal as well. He ignored the odd looks the guests were shooting at him and the schadenfreude look from Pei Qiansui before saluting Chu Wangsun. "You are strong, Brother Chu. This one is most impressed!"

He was speaking from the bottom of his heart. He was ranked nine on the Human Champions Ranking, and Chu Wangsun third. Since they were both Half-Step Grandmasters, and their rankings were fairly close to each other, he thought for sure that they were more or less on the same level. But after he fought Chu Wangsun, he realized that he couldn't be any more wrong.

Chapter 589: Striking The Hand

Chu Wangsun was clearly stronger than him. Not only was he at the threshold of Grandmaster, Xie Taohua could tell that the scholar could cross over to the next cultivation level if he really wanted to. On the other hand, he still had a ways to go before he could enter the Grandmaster stage.

If Chu Wangsun, the fourth ranked warrior on the Human Champions Ranking, was already this powerful, what about the third-ranked warrior, the "Little Senior Monk of Lanke Temple"[1], the second-ranked warrior, "Sacred Son of Demonic Mountain", and the first-ranked warrior, the "Little Heavenly Master" of Heavenly Master Mansion.

Ever since he mastered his martial arts and entered the Human Champions Ranking, he had never encountered any true obstacles and kept advancing triumphantly. He was even planning on challenging the top ten warriors of the Human Champions Ranking, defeating all of them, and entering the Grandmaster stage as the indisputable champion of the Human Champions Ranking.

But now that he had gotten a reality check, he realized that he still had a long, long way to go.

“Your mastery of the ‘Peach Blossom Celestial Scripture’ is lacking.”

Chu Wangsun remained unmoved despite Xie Taohua’s compliment. He said directly, “You are no match for me.”

Xie Taohua’s main cultivation art was the “Peach Blossom Celestial Scripture” invented by Xie Qingxi himself. He had created it after experiencing an epiphany while observing the life cycle of peach blossoms. A martial art that embodied the power of life and death, growth and decline, its practitioner could grow a thousand flowers in an instant, or wilt them just as quickly. It was quite powerful to say the least.

However, it was clear that Xie Taohua’s mastery of the “Peach Blossom Celestial Scripture” was lacking. To be specific, his understanding of the power of life and death, growth and decline wasn’t good enough to unleash the martial art’s full potential, which was why it had performed rather poorly against Chu Wangsun.

Xie Taohua did not get angry despite Chu Wangsun’s blunt words, however. He even gave him a carefree smile and said, “Thank you for your guidance, Brother Chu. I promise I won’t disappoint you the next time we fight.”

“Good. I’ll be waiting.” Chu Wangsun turned around and got ready to go upstairs after that.

Pei Qiansui grew anxious when he realized that Chu Wangsun was going to let Xie Taohua go. “Are you just going to forgive him, young master?”

Chu Wangsun stopped in his tracks and looked at Pei Qiansui with clear, pure eyes. His gaze was such that Pei Qiansui was suddenly struck by a bad feeling.

“Give me your hand!” Chu Wangsun said suddenly.

Pei Qiansui’s face immediately turned ugly. “Young master, I—”

“I won’t repeat myself.” Chu Wangsun’s voice was indifferent, but it would not take no as an answer. “Give me your hand.”

It looked like a black storm was brewing behind Pei Qiansui’s face, but he ultimately gritted his teeth and extended his hand. His palm was facing upward.

Everyone wondered what Chu Wangsun was planning to do when the scholar summoned a ruler to his hand and struck Pei Qiansui on his palm.

Slap!

The crisp sound resounded throughout the establishment. If the guests were stunned before, now they were positively speechless. For a time, they could only stare at Chu Wangsun and Pei Qiansui with dumbfounded expressions.

On the second floor, even Ye Qing was blinking in confusion and wondering what the hell was going on inside Chu Wangsun’s head.

The ruler was a perfectly ordinary ruler, a wooden ruler to be exact.

The strike was perfectly mundane as well. Besides the fact that it was a little louder than normal, it was exactly the kind of strike one expected a teacher to mete out against a student. Forget a named warrior on the Human Champions Ranking like Pei Qiansui, not even a beginner who just entered the Body Tempering stage would feel any pain from such a strike.

The physical damage was nothing, but the mental damage was a completely different story. His face grew dark and twisted, and his eyes were blazing with uncontrollable killing intent and fury. The entire restaurant turned as cold as ice because of it.

“Do you know why I struck you?” Chu Wangsun asked.

Pei Qiansui bowed his head and said nothing. He simply trembled in place with bloodshot eyes.

“It would appear that you still haven’t recognized your mistake. Even now, you’re attempting to sow dissension.”

“You are different, however. Your master is the Old Man of A Hundred Virtues, and he is a vile, vile man who has committed countless evils. You, his disciple, are no different from him. You are outmatched by your master only in terms of body count and insanity.”

“You should have died to atone for your sins, but death is the easiest thing in this world. Living, on the other hand, is the hardest. The reason I’m keeping you alive is because I wish to reform you for the better. I will transform you into a righteous man who holds justice and benevolence close to his heart, do what is good for the people, and benefit the country. It is the best way for you to atone for the evils that you have done.”

“Do you understand now?”

The Old Man of A Hundred Virtues Chu Wangsun spoke of was an elder of the Demonic Mountain. The reason he was called the Old Man of A Hundred Virtues was because he performed a hundred good deeds every month without fail. However, his interpretation of good deeds was quite different from your average person.

For example, if the Old Man of A Hundred Virtues encountered a poor man on the streets, he would kill him. This way, his suffering would end, and he would be able to join the cycle of reincarnation and be reborn with a better life.

If someone refused to pay after eating a meal, the Old Man of A Hundred Virtues would burn down the entire restaurant. When asked why he did such a thing, he declared, “The guy can’t dine and dash again now that there is no longer a restaurant, right?”

If someone tripped on their feet, the Old Man of A Hundred Virtues would break their legs so they could never walk again. This way, they would never trip again.

If someone's money was stolen, the Old Man of A Hundred Virtues would rob them of all their wealth. This way, no thief would ever steal a single coin from them again.

Long story short, the Old Man of A Hundred Virtues' so-called "good" deeds were one hundred percent evil from a normal person's point of view. It was also why he was lambasted as a heretic and a monster; one that everyone would sooner see dead than alive.

Back in the present, the guests oohed and aahed in realization. Now they realized why Pei Qiansui had become Chu Wangsun's follower. He was "volunteered" into this position so to speak.

A few seconds later, Pei Qiansui's killing intent abruptly disappeared like it was never there. At the same time, he replied with a simple smile, "Yes, I've recognized my mistake, young master. I swear I will obey your teaching and become a good person from now on."

On the surface, he looked like the honest farmer boy he pretended to be. But on the inside, he was barely keeping a sea of humiliation, bloodthirst and fury at bay.

If possible, he would carve up Chu Wangsun and everyone in this restaurant and burn their souls on a candle. Only then could he be absolved of his hatred.

But he couldn't, because he was no match for Chu Wangsun.

Running into Chu Wangsun was a stroke of bad luck, plain and simple. His main cultivation art was called the "Soul Refining Hand". His hands acted as a furnace that could refine souls. At the adept level, he could extract, refine, and annihilate one's soul the instant he touched a person's body. It was extremely scary to say the least.

The way to advance the "Soul Refining Hand" was just as evil. To put it simply, the practitioner must use a living person's soul and spirit to nurture and temper their hands.

Most people would have second thoughts about using such an evil and inhumane martial art, but Pei Qiansui was raised to adulthood by the Old Man of A Hundred Virtues. He was a man who witnessed all sorts of deaths before he even knew how to walk. As a result, killing was as natural as breathing to him.

When he was happy, he would kill to celebrate his joy. When he was unhappy, he would kill to vent his sorrow. When he was cultivating, well, his martial art couldn't progress without killing now, could it? When he was idle, he still killed because why not?

Long story short, his daily life consisted of eating, sleeping, and killing. Lots and lots of killing.

One day, he ran into a couple of wandering scholars and noted that their souls and spirits were fairly pure. So, he wanted to kill them and practice his martial art.

Unfortunately for him, Chu Wangsun happened to be passing through the area, and after that... well, there was no after that. Since then, he became Chu Wangsun's "faithful" follower.

In Chu Wangsun's words, a sage accepts students from all walks of life. That was why he planned to emulate their ancient wisdom and bring him back to the straight and narrow as well.

What could Pei Qiansui do? He could only accept, of course.

Chapter 590: The Price For Humiliating Me Is Death

Pei Qiansui scorned Chu Wangsun's philosophy and despised the bastard for thinking that he could "bring him back to the straight and narrow" as a matter of course. Not a single minute passed by where he did not think of escaping Chu Wangsun or better, kill him.

That was why he had tried to instigate a fight between Chu Wangsun and Xie Taohua just now, preferably to the death. After all, one of them was ranked ninth on the Human Champions Ranking, and the other fourth. If a tiger and a dragon were to battle each other to the death, chances were one of them would die, and the other was going to be injured. That would allow him to make his escape.

If both men were grievously injured, then even better. He was perfectly fine with playing the fisherman.

In his opinion, Chu Wangsun was a so-called "disciple of the sages", and he loathed evil like he loathed his nemesis. That was why he was certain that Chu Wangsun would kill Xie Taohua, a disciple of a demonic sect. He was wrong, however. As it turned out, Chu Wangsun was neither stupid nor blind. He had seen through his petty scheme in an instant.

Even worse, the bastard had the audacity to smack his hand with a ruler like he was a child, and he did it in front of all these ants too. If the rumors spread—who was he kidding, the rumors must be spreading like wildfire already—then he would be a laughingstock for ages to come.

Could he swallow this indignity?

Of course... he could. He literally did not have any other choice. If he did not swallow this indignity, then Chu Wangsun was only going to humiliate him further. Worst case scenario, he might just kill him outright.

It was said that ten years wasn't too long for a nobleman to take revenge. He was no nobleman, but even he knew that he could not wash away his humiliation if he was dead. Only the living possessed countless possibilities.

So he would admit his "fault". He would endure.

And when the time came, he would make Chu Wangsun wish that he never lived.

"There is no better quality than being able to admit one's mistake."

Chu Wangsun nodded. "However, reward and punishment should not be mixed together. You made a mistake earlier, so I'm going to punish you for it. Do you accept?"

"I accept!" Pei Qiansui replied.

“Good.” Chu Wangsun said, “Your thoughts are impure, and you desire to do harm. But since this is your first time, I shall strike your hand nine times as a warning. Do you accept?”

“I accept.” Pei Qiansui nodded.

While wearing a stern expression that was not dissimilar to a teacher reprimanding a naughty student, Chu Wangsun raised his ruler about three inches before hitting Pei Qiansui in the palm.

Slap!

A crisp sound resounded throughout the restaurant once more.

Pei Qiansui’s expression was a mixture of regret and sincerity. To an outsider at least, it looked like he truly recognized his mistake.

The smack jolted the guests back to reality, and as if on cue, everyone stared at the scene with excited expressions.

Who would have thought that an notorious and untouchable genius would one day have his hand smacked like a boy? It was practically a once-in-a-century moment. They might never witness something like that ever again in their lives, so of course they wasn’t going miss every second of it.

Chu Wang paid no attention to their gazes whatsoever. He simply continued his punishment with a serious expression on his face.

Slap!

Slap!

For a time, the crisp and rhythmic slaps resounded throughout the restaurant like a wonderful melody.

Most people wouldn’t notice this, but he could clearly sense the anger, hatred and killing intent boiling inside Pei Qiansui’s heart like a volcano. Furious and neverending, it was directed not just at Chu Wangsun, but everyone else inside the restaurant.

In fact, he couldn’t just feel Pei Qiansui’s emotions. Now that he was a Spirit Master, he could identify exactly what they were and how much they weighed inside their hearts. In his senses, the warrior’s emotions were now presented in different colors. For example, anger was red as fire, hatred was gray and filthy, killing intent was black as despair, and more.

The mixture of colors were vibrant and beautiful. Not only that, he could identify who the emotions were directed at. He could tell who hated someone the most, who wanted someone dead and so on.

Although he could already identify emotions when he was still a Spirit Purifier, it could at best be described as a blurry sensation with occasional fluctuations and changes. He could not have identified the type, quantity, or target of these emotions like he had grown a whole new sensory organ.

Pei Qiansui could not know this, but his emotions were completely bare to Ye Qing. If he wanted someone dead, he would know. If he wanted to take a shit, he would know as well.

This was just the first qualitative improvement his demonic thought gained after he created a Heavenly Demon Yin God, however.

Now that he could “see” emotions, he could also draw out or influence a person’s emotions and thoughts as well. He could make them obsessed with a certain emotion until it took precedence over their rationality.

“All hearts are bare to my eyes. My thoughts flow like water into the field that is your heart.” That was how the “Paranirmitavaśavartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” described this power.

Ye Qing caressed his wine cup while feeling the growing fury, hatred, bloodthirst and more negative emotions every time the ruler dropped and struck him on the palm. Then, his lips slowly spread into a clear, bright smile.

“Everyone says that it’s not good to repress your emotions. Here, I’ll lend you a hand.”

Ye Qing gently placed the wine cup on the table, and a crisp sound resounded throughout the restaurant. However, Chu Wangsun’s ruler happened to be striking Pei Qiansui’s palm at the exact same time, so the sound was muffled, and no one noticed a thing, just like no one noticed that Pei Qiansui’s originally calm eyes slowly turned as red as blood, and as deep as the abyss.

Nine strikes later, Chu Wangsun put away his ruler and looked at Pei Qiansui, “It is done. I hope you will remember this lesson and never repeat this mistake again.”

“This one shall remember your teaching, young master.” Pei Qiansui saluted him with a simple smile on his face.

“Mm.” Chu Wangsun didn’t suspect a thing. As usual, he ignored the people around him and turned around to walk up the stairs.

However, right as he turned his back on Pei Qiansui, the redness in the warrior’s eyes abruptly erupted like a mighty volcano and enveloped everything.

At the same time, his hands turned illusory, and demonic, mysterious-looking patterns appeared on his palms. Without hesitation, he pressed his hands against Chu Wangsun’s back.

The surprise attack had come out of nowhere. No one saw this coming, not even Chu Wangsun himself.

Chu Wangsun paused for a brief moment before bright light burst out of his body. It was so bright and all-encompassing it was as if a second sun had appeared inside the restaurant.

There was righteous qi in heaven and earth, and it was vast enough to punch through the nine heavens.

For a time, everything inside Number One was dyed in white. No one could see even the fingers in front of their eyes, much less everything else. But despite how all-consuming the light seemed, not a single person was actually hurt. Not the furniture, the utensils or even the plants.

Pei Qiansui could not say the same, however. Every part of his skin began cracking as if he was boiling under the sun, and his feet sank into the floor as if he was bearing an unthinkable weight. His body was trembling from the strain.

“Why?”

Chu Wangsun asked calmly without looking back.

“You shamed me in front of all these ants, and you ask me why?”

Pei Qiansui uttered with bloodshot eyes, “You are a genius, Chu Wangsun, and I am a named warrior on the Human Champions Ranking. You’re stronger than me, and I have no qualms with that. You want me to be your follower, and I am okay with that either.”

“I see that you do not regret your actions,” Chu Wangsun replied indifferently.

“Change my ass! Who the fuck do you think you are?!”

Pei Qiansui’s face contorted into a vicious snarl. “I may die today, but I will take you and everyone in this restaurant to the grave with me!”

“The price for humiliating me is DEATH!”