

Stranger 671

Chapter 671: Dragon Subjugating Platform, Hacking True Dragons

The Dragon Subjugating Platform was an old, broken platform that was shaped like an altar. Shaped like a square, it was exactly thirty meters—or, in the olden metric, nine zhang—tall, wide, and long because nine was the final number and a symbol of the absolute final limit of the world.

The platform seemed to be made from some sort of black, mysterious rock. It looked ancient, rough, and grave. Each side of the platform—east, south, west and north—had a massive stone pillar that was colored blue, white, red and black respectively. The Azure Dragon was circling above the blue pillar, the White Tiger was sitting on the white pillar, the Vermillion Bird was flying above the red pillar, and the Black Tortoise was crouching on the black pillar.

There were also sharp, rusted blades standing upside down at the center of the platform. The ground beneath it was coated in a layer of dark red that looked like dried blood. Even stranger was the fact there was a straight crack at the center of the platform that stretched all the way to the bottom and seemingly split the platform in half.

The platform was without a doubt old and broken. The signs of wear and tear and the erosion of time were everywhere. However, Ye Qing had a feeling that the platform was deadlier and scarier as a result.

Dragon Subjugating Platform? Did they change the name to make it more child-friendly or something? This is obviously an execution ground!

Ye Qing was quite impressed when he saw the platform. In fact, Dragon Subjugating Platform wasn't its original name. At the beginning, it was called the Dragon Scaffold. That's right. This was the blueprint Innocent Miao had based her Dragon Scaffold Magic on.

Legend had it that the ancient Heavens owned a Dragon Scaffold that was specifically used to punish vile true dragons both above and under the heavens. The Dragon King himself had been one of the victims. It was said that the first cut would strip them of their scales, the second cut would remove their skin, the third cut would sever the tendons, the fourth cut would crush their flesh into paste, and the fifth cut would enfeeble the soul.

Regardless of the authenticity of the legends, there was no doubt that a true dragon who entered the Dragon Scaffold would suffer the cruelest of punishments. At best, their scales would be stripped clean. On average, their bones were broken, and their tendons were severed. And at worst, their very mind and soul would be extinguished.

The Dragon Scaffold Ye Qing was seeing right now was an imitation Trueman Dragonrider had built based on the original, and he had definitely used it to kill more than one true dragon. It was why the Dragon Scaffold was world famous for a time.

That was until a woman in white had entered Dragonrider Mountain when Trueman Dragonrider was still alive, and Dragonrider Mountain was still at its prime. Shockingly, not a single person in the entire mountain was able to stop her, not even Trueman Dragonrider himself.

Unwilling to admit defeat without giving it his all, Trueman Dragonrider had transformed into a dragon himself and activated the Dragon Scaffold. The entire Dragonrider Mountain was transformed into a Dragon Scaffold as he did everything in his power to slay the woman.

Unfortunately, neither human punishments, scorching wind and fire, or soul extinguishing lightning and thunder could harm even a hair on the woman's person. When she finally arrived at the Dragon Scaffold, she pressed her index and middle finger together and swiped down like she was wielding a sword. As a result, the platform was split into two, and the entire Dragonrider Mountain fell as still as death.

After cutting the Dragon Scaffold in half, the woman looked at Trueman Dragonrider and said, "You would compare such an ugly thing to the Dragon Scaffold of the ancient Heavens? Don't make me laugh[1]."

She left the mountain after saying that, her clean, white robes not tainted by even a speck of the destruction she wrought.

Trueman Dragonrider sighed in defeat after the woman was gone, and more than once he had nearly succumbed to his darker impulses and destroyed the Dragon Scaffold. In the end though, he was unwilling to destroy his magnum opus and remade the Dragon Scaffold into the Dragon Subjugating Platform, one of the three great arrays that protected Dragonrider Mountain.

That was why most people knew the Dragon Subjugating Platform, but not the Dragon Scaffold.

As for the mysterious woman who had split the Dragon Scaffold with two fingers, she disappeared after leaving Dragonrider Mountain. No one had ever heard of her again.

Ye Qing took a moment to admire the ancient Dragon Subjugating Platform and the crack that split the Dragon Subjugating Platform. He felt like he could almost see the true Dragon Scaffold that could make even Sages quake in their boots several centuries ago, and the amazing woman who had ended it all with two fingers.

"Are you afraid, young man?"

Maybe it was because he took too long, but the voice appeared with a taunt, "If you're afraid, then why don't you surrender? If you kowtow nine times and apologize sincerely for your mistakes at our Founders Hall, then maybe we'll let you live."

"Hahaha... and why should I be afraid of this pale, neutered shadow of past glory?"

Ye Qing barked out a laugh. "In the past, a celestial had split the Dragon Scaffold in one strike. Today, Joyless Ye shall attempt to emulate her example!"

"The audacity!"

"You are courting death!"

As soon as Ye Qing made the declaration, multiple flustered and enraged voices erupted throughout the platform at the same time. If there was one thing that triggered the disciples of Dragonrider Mountain like nothing else, it would definitely be the woman who had singlehandedly defeated the

Dragon Scaffold with barely any effort. That incident was their biggest shame and reverse scale so to speak.

“You may expose others, but not their shortcomings. You may hit someone, but not their face.” It was one thing to press someone’s buttons, and another to press that big red button that should never be touched. Ye Qing had done just that, so of course the voices were furious.

“Save your breath. Will you set foot on the Dragon Subjugating Platform, or will you surrender? Decide, now.”

“As you wish. I shall enter your platform.”

Ye Qing smiled and entered on the Dragon Subjugating Platform. The next second, as if the Dragon Subjugating Platform was a pot of oil, and someone had just added a drop of water into it, the entire platform began shaking violently. Red, fiendish qi began rising from the ground and condensing into waves, and gleaming within the waves were sharp, sinister-looking blades. Wherever the red waves rolled, the blood of true dragons were shed, and their flesh were laid bare for all to see. The horrifying illusions were accompanied by high-pitched, spine-chilling screams as well.

The four spirits residing on the blue, white, red and black pillars of the platform came alive at this moment.

The Azure Dragon roared in anger and let loose waves of destructive lightning and thunder.

The Vermillion Bird circled the sky and unleashed white hot flames that could cook mountains and boil seas.

The White Tiger roared and fired sharp, metallic qi that could split the sun and shatter the moon like nothing.

And the Black Tortoise hissed and summoned a black flood to freeze anything and everything.

The next moment, the lightning, fire, sharp qi and black water transformed into four chains and wrapped around Ye Qing’s limbs. At the same time, the four divine beasts began pulling the chain in four separate directions. They looked like they were attempting to tear him asunder or, at the very least, lift him into the air.

Ye Qing did not move, however. In fact, his feet hadn’t shuffled even half an inch.

“ROAR!!!”

All four divine beasts roared at the same time. Every time the chains made contact with the surrounding space, it would make this terrifying, clattering noise. Not only that, the surrounding space was vibrating, and the entire Dragonrider Mountain was shaking a little. As the origin energy surged, one could even hear the faint roars of dragons.

None of it seemed to have anything to do with Ye Qing, however. He was still smiling and standing on the platform as if nothing was happening. His feet still hadn’t moved an inch, and his smile didn’t falter even a little.

“This is... my lord...”

Inside the Dragonslaying Hall, Yue Hualong, Yun Chaoyu, Zhao Yuanrong and Yu Ningxin had all left their seats to look in the direction of the Dragon Subjugating Platform with wide, terrified eyes.

The four stone pillars on the Dragon Subjugating Platform were called the Dragon Binding Stakes. Built with a mimicry of the four divine beasts at the helm, they drew power from the four directions of the Dragonrider Mountain and conjured four spirit chains representing the eastern Azure Dragon, the western White Tiger, the southern Vermillion Bird and the northern Black Tortoise. Capable of isolating origin energy and sealing one's mind and vigor, it could entrap and bind even a true dragon. That was why the chains were named the “Dragon Binding Chains”.

The Dragon Binding Chains could bind even a true dragon, much less a mere human. In reality, the chains had failed to budge the young man even a little. This should not be possible even if the Dragon Subjugating Platform was far weaker than what it was at the beginning due to centuries of neglect, and it was seriously damaged by that mysterious woman.

In fact, Ye Qing wasn't the first person to intrude into the mountain. A good number of them were heaven-favored geniuses or famous jianghu warriors as well. However, no one had ever managed to overcome the Dragon Subjugating Platform, and they definitely did not possess the strength to ignore the Dragon Binding Chains as if they didn't exist.

Throughout their history, there was one and only one person who had utterly crushed the Dragonrider Mountain's defenses, and she was that mysterious woman from several hundred years ago.

Several hundred years had passed since that day. Were they going to suffer the same humiliation their ancestor had today?

Absurdity and fear gripped the four elders then. They thought it was absurd that they were even entertaining the thought, and yet they were afraid because they all felt the possibility residing within the young man.

If there was anyone who could do it... it would be him.

The clash of emotions made them increasingly anxious. Before they knew it, they were all looking at Yu Longzi.

“Hualong, Chaoyu, Yuanrong, Ningxin, bring forth the Dragonbeating Truncheon, the Dragonsealing Sword, the Dragon Ending Lamp, and the Dragon Suppressing Bottle. With all our power, we will revive the Dragon Subjugating Array!”

Yu Longzi suddenly rose to his feet and declared solemnly, “Dragonrider Mountain will tolerate no atrocious-behaving villain on its grounds!”

Chapter 672: Keep It Coming

The Dragon Binding Stakes and the Dragon Binding Chains, eh? They certainly deserve their reputation.

From an outsider's perspective, it looked as if Ye Qing was handling the trials of the Dragon Subjugating Platform with insulting ease. However, Ye Qing himself knew that wasn't the case.

The Dragon Binding Stakes and the Dragon Binding Chains were already immensely powerful, but the ambient origin energy on the platform was completely isolated as well, meaning that he couldn't borrow energy from his surroundings. On top of that, the platform was heavily suppressing his mind and body. If his body wasn't on the level of a Half-Step Grandmaster, and his strength was almost equal to one sky dragon, he would've been shackled by the Dragon Binding Chains already.

Of course, the biggest reason he was still standing on the platform was because the Dragon Subjugating Platform itself was so, so much weaker than before. If this was several hundred years ago, it was highly likely he would have been bound and lifted into the air like a pinata from the get go.

“The golden truncheon strikes eight directions...”

Suddenly, a drawn out chant entered his ears. He saw a streak of golden light cutting across the sky from the east and landing on top of the blue pillar. It was a square-shaped, metallic truncheon with nine sections.

“The longsword seals heaven and earth...”

Another streak of light appeared from the west, and it landed on top of the white pillar. It was an ancient-looking sword with a dragon's head and a snake's tail.

“The blue lamp boils mountains and rivers...”

The sky turned fiery red after the ancient sword descended. A blue lamp with the image of a chi dragon painted on its surface flew over from the south and landed on the red pillar.

“The old bottle suppresses the four seas...”

Finally, a long, crisp cry came from the north, and a cascade of black water poured down from the sky. It landed on top of the black pillar and transformed into an old, black bottle with a panlong[1] circling around it.

The Dragonbeating Truncheon, the Dragonsealing Sword, the Dragon Ending Lamp, and the Dragon Suppressing Bottle. They're finally getting serious.

Ye Qing lifted his eyebrows when he saw this. Just like the Dragon Nursing Nest, the Dragonbeating Truncheon, the Dragonsealing Sword, the Dragon Ending Lamp, and the Dragon Suppressing Bottle were all inheritances that had been passed down in Dragonrider Mountain for at least a hundred years. They were all Phenomenon-class Strange Artifacts.

The Dragonbeating Truncheon was an offensive weapon that specialized in beating the physical body. It possessed a massive attack range and could shatter bones and muscles like nothing.

The Dragonsealing Sword was a sealing weapon that specialized in sealing origin qi. It could seal heaven and earth and remove all origin qi from a certain area in one swing.

The Dragon Ending Lamp was a murder weapon that specialized in ending the mind and soul. Any soul burned by its fire would disintegrate into nothing and be denied from reincarnation forever.

And finally, the Dragon Suppressing Bottle was a suppressive weapon that specialized in suppressing the qi, essence and spirit. It could suppress anyone's power to a ludicrous degree.

Besides their individual functions, the four Strange Artifacts were also important items that protected the luck and destiny of Dragonrider Mountain.

Trueman Dragonrider was famous for his Dragonslaying Art, and Dragonslaying Art was both a killing art and a qi nurturing, qi accumulating art. It possessed the power to steal natural luck and gather them at once place. The more luck they farmed, the brighter and more prosperous Dragonrider Mountain would become.

This was why Innocent Miao and other Dragonrider Mountain disciples scoured the world for natural spirits and objects such as Giggie. It was to steal their luck and empower Dragonrider Mountain's own. The Dragonbeating Truncheon, the Dragonsealing Sword, the Dragonbinding Lamp, and the Dragon Suppressing Bottle and the Dragon Nursing Nest were the keys behind Dragonrider Mountain's luck farming.

Considering Dragonrider Mountain had brought their destiny securing Strange Artifact to bear, it was clear that they had resolved themselves to kill him with everything they had.

Buzz!

As expected, Dragonrider Mountain began to shake imperceptibly. The clouds gathered in the sky, vast amounts of energy began flowing in the air, the sun and moon were flipped upside down[2]; the stars were falling, dragons were flying, tigers were running, flowers were flying, snow was falling... all sorts of fantastical illusions sprung to life like weeds. False they might be, there was no denying the power behind them.

“Roar!!!”

It was at this moment a dragon's roar filled the world and shattered all the illusions like glass. At the same time, a twin-horned true dragon appeared in the sky of Dragonrider Mountain.

The true dragon was impossibly massive. Hidden behind the clouds, it was so massive that only the head was visible.

This was the true dragon of destiny Dragonrider Mountain nurtured. Formless it might be, its divine might reminded all enemies of the pain of hell. Practically everyone inside and outside the mountain was quaking in their boots right now.

When the true dragon roared, the Dragonbeating Truncheon, the Dragonsealing Sword, the Dragonbinding Lamp, and the Dragon Suppressing Bottle shone brightly. Radiant light entered the Dragon Binding Stakes and solidified the image of the Azure Dragon, the White Tiger, the Vermillion Bird and the Black Tortoise, increasing their power.

Soon, the lightning chain was bursting with lightning, the sharp white chain became sharper than ever, the fiery chain burned like an inferno, and black water flooded the black chain. The next moment, they engulfed Ye Qing at once.

When the four elements gradually subsided, the four elders hiding in the sky saw that the seemingly immovable Ye Qing was finally suspended in the air. For the first time, smiles appeared on everyone's faces.

At the same time, inside the Dragonslaying Hall, Yu Longzi abruptly rose to his feet and summoned a seal into his hand. Then, he brought it down with a forceful swing.

Back at the Dragon Subjugating Platform, the word “Cut” appeared in the sky and bled profusely as if it was living flesh. The sky immediately darkened, and the cold air of murder filled one’s lungs before they knew it. It felt like the calm before the storm; the false respite before the true horror showed up.

The Dragon Cutting Seal commanded the cutting of a true dragon, and its will would not be denied. Ghastly screams filled the air, and vigor churned as the executioner’s blades standing on the Dragon Subjugating Platform abruptly detached themselves from the floor and pointed toward Ye Qing.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh...

Enveloped by bloody, fiendish qi, the executioner’s blades circled around Ye Qing for an instant before shooting toward him at great speed.

The Dragon Scaffold was an execution ground for true dragons. Every time a blade was swung, a dragon’s scale would surely be removed.

Unfortunately, the Dragon Subjugating Platform was but a pale shadow of past glory. The executioner’s blades succeeded in cutting Ye Qing’s shirt and leaving a number of white marks on his skin, but that was it. Forget hurting him, they couldn’t even pierce his skin.

“Acceptable. Continue.”

In the air, Ye Qing remarked with a smirk on his face.

Inside the Dragonslaying Hall, Yu Longzi was narrowing his eyes with an unfriendly expression on his face. He bit the tip of his tongue and spat out a mouthful of blood essence on the bloody “Cut” in the sky, causing it to grow increasingly bloody and terrifying. At the same time, the dancing blades on the Dragon Subjugating Platform transformed into oddly-shaped knives that looked rather similar to a butcher’s skinning knife. They landed on Ye Qing’s neck, joints and other weak points.

The second punishment of the Dragon Scaffold was skinning, which meant that the knives were attempting to skin Ye Qing alive. For a time, the knives fell like the rain, and the man swayed left and right like a palm leaf. The sounds of blades thudding against flesh were disturbing to say the least.

Unfortunately, when nine breaths had passed, and the punishment had run its course, Ye Qing was still unharmed and smiling like nothing had happened.

This time, Yu Longzi did not wait for Ye Qing to taunt him. He shoved his power into the Dragon Cutting Seal once more and caused the skinning knives to transform into four boning knives.

The four boning knives glittered like they had just been sharpened on a grinder. They scattered in four different directions before hacking at Ye Qing’s wrists and ankles.

The third punishment of the Dragon Scaffold severed the tendons and broke the bones.

Compared to the downpour of knives before, the four lonely boning knives looked almost pitiful. They did not seem to be particularly powerful either. All notions of weakness fled when they landed

the fist strike on Ye Qing's wrist and ankles, however. It sounded like a powerful champion was attempting to snap a mountain in half. A seemingly endless wave of blood and violence washed out of the Dragon Subjugating Platform and rattled the four Dragon Binding Chains.

The impact was such that countless Dragonrider Mountain disciples were beset by an onslaught of dizziness, and blood would not stop pouring out of their orifices. As for the weaker ones, they blacked out immediately and had to be carried to the healing hall for emergency treatment.

However, when the wave of blood finally subsided, and Yu Longzi and the four elders looked, what they saw both disappointed and chilled them greatly. The impudent bastard wasn't screaming his lungs out, nor were his arms and legs severed from his body. While he wasn't unscathed this time—a bone deep wound now marred his wrists and ankles—but that was it.

“Oh! You finally managed to hurt me.”

In the air, Ye Qing shot his bleeding wrist one glance before sighing. “It wasn't easy, was it? Well, keep it coming.”

Physically, his words harmed no one. Mentally?

Inside the Dragonslaying Hall, Yu Longzi took one step forward, and the entire Dragonrider Mountain plunged into a sea of bloodthirst.

Chapter 673: Dragonslaying Blade, Killing The Mind

On the Dragon Subjugating Platform, the waves of blood transformed into two blood red butcher's knives. They looked gnarly, savage, and full of killing intent.

The next moment, the blood waves snatched up the butcher's knives like a pair of giant hands and swung them at Ye Qing.

Bang!

The powerful attack blew Ye Qing backward, and the butcher's knives exploded into countless tiny blades that crawled into his body through the wounds on his wrists and ankles. One could see something bulging and squirming under his skin like countless worms.

Before Ye Qing could react, the blood waves summoned a new pair of knives and struck Ye Qing again, repeating the cycle. Not only that, each strike was faster, fiercer, and heavier than the last. The consecutive strikes were as swift as the wind, as rapid as the rain, as violent as thunder, and as heavy as a river.

For a time, it sounded like the assault would never end. Such was the movement of the butcher's knives that their outline blurred together like a professional cook was actually wielding the blades and slicing and dicing the fish that was Ye Qing into meat paste.

And that was exactly what the fourth cut of the Dragon Scaffold was. It was the part where the true dragon was sliced and diced into meat paste.

When the relentless assault finally came to an end, Ye Qing no longer looked as collected as he used to. His body was covered in countless densely packed wounds, and blood was dripping out of his wound profusely. He looked like a victim of torture.

There was one thing about Ye Qing that looked exactly the same as before, however. His beaming smile.

“Is that it? Tsk tsk... how disappointing.”

Scratch that, his words were also as insulting and contemptuous as ever. “The Dragon Subjugating Platform truly is a pale shadow of itself.”

“You are a fool who does not know that death is already upon you.”

Inside the Dragonslaying Hall, Yu Longzi was looking a little pale after the tremendous amount of strength he just used. When he heard Ye Qing’s words, a rare ferocity flashed on his usually calm and collected face.

“Cut a true dragon on the Dragon Subjugating Platform, dye the blue sky in blood and stench...”

Yu Longzi chanted before the Dragon Cutting Seal in his hand flew away and stopped in the sky at the center of the Dragon Subjugating Platform. The next moment, the Dragon Cutting Seal, the Dragonbeating Truncheon, the Dragonsealing Sword, the Dragonbinding Lamp, and the Dragon Suppressing Bottle shone brightly, and the true dragon of destiny hidden within the clouds raised its head and let loose a long roar.

A lever-style guillotine descended from the sky then. The blade was made from dragon scales, the platform was made from dragon bones, the polish on the blade was dragon blood, and the sacrifice was dragon souls. Combined, the guillotine possessed the power to kill all sentient beings.

As soon as the guillotine appeared, the wind and clouds conglomerated at the center, and the sky began weeping blood. What sounded like the final howls of punished dragons resounded throughout the area as well.

There was a thunderclap, and a humanoid silhouette appeared in the sky. It grabbed the guillotine and slowly lifted it into the air.

Buzz!

Every time the guillotine moved up an inch, the world would shudder, and thunder would roar as if afraid of what was about to happen.

When the guillotine was raised three inches, the sky was completely dark, and the thunder sounded positively furious.

The four Dragon Binding Chains then pulled Ye Qing into the sky and until his neck was directly underneath the guillotine blade.

The fifth and final cut of the Dragon Scaffold was a cut that killed the mind, and the guillotine in the sky was called the Dragonslaying Blade. With the Dragon Subjugating Platform as the foundation, the true dragon of destiny as the core, and the five Strange Artifacts—the Dragon Cutting Seal, the Dragonbeating Truncheon, the Dragonsealing Sword, the Dragonbinding Lamp, and the Dragon Suppressing Bottle—as the trigger, it combined the power and force of Dragonrider Mountain to form the Dragonslaying Blade.

The Dragonslaying Blade did not harm the physical body. It only slew the mind.

“Your crime of dishonoring Dragonrider Mountain is unforgivable, and your punishment is DEATH!”

As soon as the word “death” was spoken, the guillotine blade began falling, the wind and thunder began roaring louder than ever before, and the rain of blood grew so strong it felt like a waterfall.

When the blade finally struck Ye Qing’s neck, the wind ceased, the rain stopped, and the thunder ceased all of a sudden. For a moment, the world was completely silent—but not Ye Qing’s body. A destructive, murderous, catastrophic energy washed out from him like an invisible explosion and blew the closest people to the Dragon Subjugating Platform—Yue Hualong, Yun Chaoyu, Zhao Yuanrong and Yu Ningxing—away before they could react. Muffled groans of pain escaped their mouths as their bodies trembled, and the blood drained away from the face and out of their orifices.

If even the four elders could not handle the heat, the disciples could only fare worse. Those unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity of the Dragon Subjugating Platform blacked out and collapsed before they even realized what just happened. Even Yu Longzi in the Dragonslaying Hall shook a little as blood slid down a corner of his mouth.

There was no time to tend to his own injuries though. Yu Longzi immediately stared at Ye Qing after he collected himself.

In the sky, Ye Qing’s eyes were shut tight. His smile looked as insulting as ever, and his vigor was exactly the same as before. However, his aura was completely gone almost as if his mind was no longer inside his body.

“He’s finally dead!”

Yu Longzi let out a sigh of relief when he saw this.

The Dragonslaying Blade only slew the mind and not the body. Although Ye Qing looked physically healthy, his Yin God and consciousness had been annihilated by the final cut.

In the sky, the Dragonslaying Blade grew increasingly transparent until it was gone altogether. The semi-transparent true dragon of destiny circling the sky also let out one last cry before shattering into nothing. It looked as if it had used up all of its strength.

On the Dragon Subjugating Platform, the Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermillion Bird and Black Tortoise also looked incredibly listless. The Dragon Binding Chains regained its bleak, dirty appearance after the thunder, sharp qi, fire and black water enveloping it disappeared into nothing.

Yu Longzi subconsciously rubbed his chest when he saw this. It was because his heart was aching like never before.

The one strike had used up not just every ounce of energy the Dragon Subjugating Platform had been accumulating bit by bit for many years, but also much of their destiny. One could even say that the attack had cost them centuries of time and effort.

Resentment and malice entered his gaze as Yu Longzi continued to stare at Ye Qing’s body.

The price they had to pay to slay their enemy was huge, but thankfully, it wasn’t all bad.

Dragonrider Mountain knew a secret art called the “True Dragon Corpse Nurturing Art”. It required burying an intact corpse inside a Dragongrave and purifying it daily using moonlight. Over time, the corpse would grow draconic characteristics such as dragon scales and transform into a draconic corpse. At the end, it would evolve into a True Dragon Corpse Puppet.

A True Dragon Corpse Puppet was extraordinarily strong and immune to conventional weapons. It could also summon soldiers from the Nether.

Not only that, raising a True Dragon Corpse Puppet cost far less time and effort than the true dragon of destiny. It would only take them several years at most.

As a matter of course, the “True Dragon Corpse Nurturing Art” wasn’t without its flaws. First, the corpse qi of a true dragon was absolutely necessary to use the secret art. It was usually found at the burial site of a true dragon, a.k.a a Dragongrave.

After all, how could they nurture a True Dragon Corpse Puppet without a true dragon’s corpse qi?

This condition alone was enough to bar most aspiring corpse puppeteers from attempting the “True Dragon Corpse Nurturing Art”, but it was basically a freebie for the Dragonrider Mountain. After all, their entire schtick was about slaying true dragons. Sure, dragonslaying hadn’t happened in a very, very long time, but they still had a Dragongrave with a thick amount of true dragon corpse qi. It was perfect for this purpose.

Second, they needed a corpse. It should not need to be said, but not any corpse could be raised into a True Dragon Corpse Puppet. For one, the body must be strong and flawless. Two, their vigor must remain strong even after the person had passed away. And three, they must possess great destiny and luck.

Unfortunately, corpses like this were incredibly hard to procure. After all, anyone who fit the three criterias were also favored by the heavens. People like this rarely died unless they encountered a great tribulation, and even if they did, their corpse was difficult to procure.

Luckily for them, the dead body in front of them fit that requirement perfectly. Ye Qing’s body remained strong and vigorous even after he died. More importantly, he was a man with immense karma and destiny.

There was a secret art in “Dragonslaying Art” that allowed a practitioner to observe one’s karma and destiny. That was how Yu Longzi was able to see that Ye Qing had radiance covering his head, purple qi circling his body, and dark yellow residing within his body. It was obvious at first glance that Ye Qing was a man of great karma.

The fact that his karma didn’t dissipate immediately after his death was also proof of that.

This was also why Yu Longzi tried to give Ye Qing a way out again and again instead of bringing the full wrath of Dragonrider Mountain on top of him from the get go. People like Ye Qing usually possessed a powerful background as well. If he wasn’t careful, then he could become the sinner whose poor decision sounded the death knell of Dragonrider Mountain.

In any case, Ye Qing was dead now. It was literally too late for regrets.

On a related note, the third and biggest flaw of the “True Dragon Corpse Nurturing Art” was that it was against the natural order.

Using the “True Dragon Corpse Nurturing Art” did not just damn the victim’s body into an eternity of servitude. Those related to the corpse puppet such as his friends, family and more would be affected as well. They would suffer an endless streak of bad luck and non-stop tragedies until they died a tragic death. All of them.

That was why the “True Dragon Corpse Nurturing Art” was one hundred percent a secret art of the Dark Ways and against the natural order.

It was also why Trueman Dragonrider specifically commanded his disciples and all who came after not to use the art unless absolutely necessary, and to act with the utmost caution if they did decide to use it.

The thought of using the “True Dragon Corpse Nurturing Art” had never crossed Yu Longzi’s mind until today. But when he realized it was actually doable, the spark of desire quickly grew into an inferno.

Chapter 674: I Came, I Died, I Lived Again

“Ooo... ooo...”

It was at this moment a tiny head crawled out of the ground. When Giggle saw that Ye Qing—still suspended in the air by the Dragon Binding Chains—wasn’t moving at all, it grew anxious and appeared on top of Ye Qing’s shoulder. Then, it gave his shirt a tug.

In the past, Ye Qing would look at Giggle, give it a sunny smile, and play with it as soon as it tugged his shirt. But this time, Ye Qing did not wake up. Forget playing with it, he wasn’t even looking at its direction.

Once, twice, thrice, and still Ye Qing did not awake. Sorrow slowly began to enter Giggle’s expression, and the loneliness welling in its eyes looked so thick it was as if it would never fade.

Back at the Celestial Spring, it had witnessed many, many people who never awoke again after they fell asleep like this.

The humans called it death. Some also called it the eternal parting.

That was how Giggle knew that it had lost a good friend.

That was how Giggle knew that it was alone once more.

“I completely forgot about this little thing due the all the excitement. Don’t let it escape. If it wasn’t for it, Innocent would’ve been fine, and our sect would not have suffered such a tribulation.”

Yue Hualong, Yun Chaoyu, Zhao Yuanrong and Yu Ningxin reappeared beside Yu Longzi.

“Don’t worry. The Dragon Subjugating Array is still functioning. There’s nowhere for it to run.”

“I’ll go and catch it then.” Yue Hualong let out a sinister laugh.

“Don’t kill it, Hualong,” Yu Longzi warned. “That little lotus Stranger is a natural Spirit Root. It is exactly what we need to secure its destiny right now.”

“Don’t worry. I promise I’ll treat it well.”

Yue Hualong let out another sinister laugh before leaping onto the Dragon Subjugating Platform and toward Giggie.

“To think that a mere livestock would have real emotions. How laughable.”

Giggie did not try to run even though Yue Hualong was right next to it. Eyes dripping with disdain, he sneered, “In that case, I’ll be sure to give your friend the best ‘treatment’ right before your eyes! Hahahaha!”

Yue Hualong laughed like a madman as he made a grab for Giggie. However, when his hand was three inches away from the little Stranger, he suddenly found himself unable to move an inch further.

When he looked down, he saw a face looking up at him. The young man he thought whose mind and soul had been annihilated by the Dragonslaying Blade said with a smile that did not reach the eye, “Who did you say you want to give a ‘treatment’ again? I didn’t hear you the first time. Care to repeat yourself?”

“You?!”

Yue Hualong could barely believe his eyes. Hands and legs suddenly turning as cold as ice, he felt like he had suddenly plunged into an icy hell.

That said, he was a warrior. His first instinct was to throw a punch at Ye Qing with everything he got.

As his fist traveled toward Ye Qing’s face, golden scales began growing from underneath his skin. By the time his fist was mere inches away from its target, his entire arm was covered in dragon scales, and his fist was shining gold and roaring dragon.

“Dragonmorph Fist”

The “Dragonslaying Art” mainly cultivated true qi and the spirit, not the body. The “Dragonmorph Fist” was one of the few body-tempering arts that tempered the body via consuming the blood essence of true dragon to form a True Dragon Body.

Yue Hualong’s main martial art was the Dragonmorph Fist, and he had mastered it to the point where he could grow dragon scales on his physical body. Although he wasn’t a pure body-tempering warrior, his vigor and strength already rivaled that of a late-stage body-tempering warrior. It was the font of his confidence and the reason he was able to become an elder on Dragonrider Mountain.

However, Yue Hualong’s eyes quickly widened in astonishment, then in pain.

His eyes widened in astonishment because Ye Qing had actually leaned forward instead of backward when his fist was an instant away from hitting his face. It was almost as if the young man *wanted* to be beaten. This was the first time in his life Yue Hualong ever encountered something like this, so of course he was astonished.

But just because he was astonished didn't mean that Yue Hualong wasn't going to capitalize on this opportunity. Why the hell wouldn't he?

So, he gave it his 120%. In his head, he swore his name wasn't Yue Hualong if he didn't smear Ye Qing's face like a blooming flower.

His imagination did not come true, however. In fact, it was he who let out a cry of surprise and pain. When his fist made contact with Ye Qing's face, his fingers snapped like twigs, his dragon scales cracked everywhere, and his arm bent in ways it never should have. To say he never expected this to happen was an understatement, but it wasn't the end yet. The next moment, he felt a powerful stream of force flooding his every vein and throwing him back like a cannonball. It was a miracle he hadn't cracked like an egg when he struck a Dragon Binding Stake and stayed there for a good few seconds before he slowly slid to the floor.

His condition was terrible, but neither Yu Longzi nor his fellow elders were sparing him a second glance. It was because their attention was completely stolen by the young man who struck him.

Yu Longzi in particular was seriously wondering if he was experiencing a nightmare. The others might not know this, but as the mountain lord and the controller of the Dragon Subjugating Platform, he knew just how potent the final cut that was the Dragonslaying Blade was.

It was an attack that contained the power of five Strange Artifacts, the accumulated energy of the Dragon Subjugating Platform, and even the destiny of Dragonrider Mountain. It was easily several times more powerful than the previous four cuts combined. Even a Grandmaster would be severely injured after taking such a powerful attack, if not dead.

Before this, he did not think that anyone below Grandmaster could possibly survive the attack. At the very least, he couldn't.

After becoming a Half-Step Grandmaster ten years ago, he had continuously honed his strength until he reached perfection. Literally, there was nothing left for him to improve unless he entered the Grandmaster stage. Speaking of which, he was one flimsy paper away from becoming a Grandmaster. All he needed at this stage was inspiration; the right opportunity at the right place at the right time.

Strength wise, Yu Longzi was on par with some newly ascended Grandmasters. Even so, he wasn't confident that he could survive the Dragonslaying Blade at all. However, the young man had done what he thought was impossible.

If this Joyless Ye was a Grandmaster, he would have accepted it as a matter of course. But no, he was just a middle-stage Spirit Master.

Fine, so what if he was a middle-stage Spirit Master? His body and his actual power were on the same level as a body-tempering Half-Step Grandmaster.

That was the problem though. Joyless Ye was a *body-tempering* warrior. He and his ilk were supposed to possess weak spirits. In reality, his spirit was strong enough to block a blow from the Dragonslaying Blade, which meant that he was also stronger than him, a Half-Step Grandmaster who specifically cultivated the spirit.

It was such a realization that he actually questioned his sanity for a moment.

I don't need a bloody reminder that I'm not a genius, dammit!

If he wasn't the mountain lord, if he wasn't in the presence of many, Yu Longzi would be cussing like a ruffian right now. Seriously.

Meanwhile, Giggle was jumping and giggling like crazy when it saw that Ye Qing had awoken. It was so happy that its eyes were narrowed into tiny slits.

Ye Qing gave it a comforting pat on the head and explained smilingly, "Sorry to worry you. I wanted to tease them a little, you know?"

"Hahaha..."

Giggle giggled again, but a second later, it seemingly recalled something and grew worried. It began jabbing a finger at the exit repeatedly.

"You want me to leave?" Ye Qing asked while petting Giggle. It was clear that the little Stranger worried for his safety and wanted him to leave while he still could.

"Seriously, you don't need to worry about me. I am fine."

Ye Qing consoled it, "Besides, I promised I would avenge you, didn't I? How can I leave before I fulfill my promise to you? I'm a man of my word, and I hate leaving things unfinished."

Having said that, Ye Qing finally looked at Yu Longzi and the others and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, if you have anything else up your sleeves, now is the time to use it."

The Dragonrider Mountain group finally jolted back to reality and stared at the beaming young man blankly.

"Otherwise, you won't get another chance."

Chapter 675: If The Mountain Would Not Come To Me, Then I Will Go To The Mountain

There was a moment of silence before Ye Qing prodded, "Well? What are you waiting for? If you're all out of ideas, then it's my turn now!"

"He's just faking it!" Yun Chaoyu declared. Shocked he might be, there was no reason to admit their weakness and inflame the enemy's spirit. Besides, he really believed that Ye Qing was just putting on a brave front.

No one could doubt Ye Qing's strength, but he ultimately wasn't a Grandmaster. The young man had crushed the Dragonscaling Road, crossed the Dragon Nurturing Gorge, withstood the painful punishments of the Dragon Subjugating Platform, and even endured the full might of the Dragonslaying Blade. He had to be exhausted and injured right now.

On top of that, Ye Qing was still bound by the Dragon Binding Chains. Although the Dragon Subjugating Platform was almost out of power, the young man should not be able to break out of his bindings in his current state.

That was why Yun Chaoyu was certain that Ye Qing was faking his strength and confidence. He was just trying to buy time to regain his strength.

“Come at us if you dare then, you toothless dog!”

On the other side of the platform, Yue Hualong also taunted Ye Qing after he snapped back to reality.

The brutish elder had never been humiliated like this until now. The only way he could wash away the shame was to take revenge against Ye Qing as soon as possible. However, it wasn't going to happen immediately, which was why he decided to get some verbal payback first.

“Okay! If that is your wish.”

Ye Qing smiled as he slowly pulled his outstretched arms toward his chest.

Rattle rattle rattle...

The Dragon Binding Chains rattled, and the runes on the Dragon Binding Stakes flickered ominously as Ye Qing pulled. At the same time, an invisible shockwave of energy washed out of him.

The next moment, the entire Dragon Subjugating Platform began shaking slightly, and there were noises coming from the starting points of the vibration.

At first, the noise was so tiny it was barely louder than a mosquito's flight. Over time, it grew louder and louder until it resembled a reverberating thunder that could be heard throughout a plain.

“To your positions! He must not break free off the Dragon Binding Chains!”

Yu Longzi blanched as he yelled at his elders. Then, he channeled the Dragon Cutting Seal once more.

Yun Chaoyu, Zhao Yurong and Yu Ningxin hurried to their positions and channeled the Dragonsealing Sword, the Dragonbinding Lamp, and the Dragon Suppressing Bottle respectively. Yue Hualong too ignored the blood covering his face and channeled the Dragon Beating Truncheon.

Buzz... buzz... buzz...

The five Strange Artifacts shone brightly, and the drained Dragon Binding Stakes, Dragon Binding Chains, and Dragon Subjugating Platform began regaining some of its former power and presence.

However, Ye Qing sucked in a deep breath until his blood ran like a river, and his bones crackled like a series of thunderclaps. They saw him growing bigger and taller as thick, black hair grew out of his face, and sharp teeth grew out of the corners of his mouth.

In just the blink of an eye, the human had been replaced by a huge demonic ape—malicious, unruly, and terrifying. The blood instantly drained away from everyone's face, though only they knew if it was due to energy depletion, shock, or both.

The good news was that the Dragon Binding Chains were still wrapped firmly around Ye Qing's limbs. Not only could true dragons command the weather and navigate the sky like their own backyard, they could also adjust their size as they pleased. Naturally, the Dragon Binding Chains could adjust their size accordingly as well. It would be terribly useless if a captor could break out of it simply by growing larger, no?

Unfortunately, Dragonrider Mountain's hope and relief were shredded the next moment. The demonic ape that was Ye Qing let out a mighty roar before grabbing the chains bound to his wrists tightly. When his fingers touched each other, his muscles swelled so fast that it let out a loud pop that sounded like thunder.

Then, he smashed his fists together in one swift motion instead of slowly pulling the chains toward his chest like before.

The Dragon Binding Chains grew taut in an instant, the sudden motion causing the metal to rub suddenly against the air and causing an odd shrill. Then, the runes on the four Dragon Binding Stakes crumbled at the same time, and the Dragon Binding Chains broke in the middle as if they had finally exceeded their limits. Countless cracks instantly spread across the five Strange Artifacts empowering the chains and stakes as well.

As Yu Longzi, Yue Hualong, Yun Chaoyu, Zhao Yuanrong and Yu Ningxin were connected to the Dragon Cutting Seal, Dragon Beating Truncheon, Dragonsealing Sword, Dragonbinding Lamp and Dragon Suppressing Bottle by blood, they all threw up blood and staggered on their feet.

Before they could catch their breaths, they heard two rapid thumps and felt a terrible pressure pouring down on them like an avalanche. Their faces were already pale to begin with, but now they looked as white as a sheet.

Ye Qing was charging toward them. The first thump they heard was the sound of him landing on his feet, and the second thump was him pushing off the ground and jumping straight toward them.

Yue Hualong's response toward the demonic ape's charge was to cover himself in golden dragon scales. A golden dragon circled his body as he threw out a powerful punch.

Yun Chaoyu pointed his palms upward and caused a blue dragon to rise to soar to the sky. A moment later, winds and clouds gathered into a rumbling thunderstorm.

Zhao Yuanrong slowly retreated into a wall of black fog that had suddenly appeared behind his back. When the fog dissipated, the old man was nowhere to be found.

Yu Ningxin pressed her index and middle fingers together and thrust them toward Ye Qing. It was soundless, breathless, and powerless. However, both heaven and earth had suddenly become as frigid as the coldest winter.

While Yue Hualong was throwing a straight punch at Ye Qing, the thundercloud in the sky abruptly unleashed a flood of lightning so massive it looked like someone had tipped a lightning pool over Ye Qing's head.

However, Ye Qing almost looked bored as he extended his right hand and caught Yue Hualong's fist firmly. A flood of fist force poured into his body, but it failed to elicit any response whatsoever. Not only that, Yue Hualong felt an irresistible force pushing back against his own strength, and suddenly, he found himself flying through the air.

It wasn't voluntary, of course. Ye Qing had tossed him upward.

The next moment, Yue Hualong's eyes widened in terror. It was because he had struck the lightning flood Yun Chaoyu had meant to hit Ye Qing with.

Boom!

The lightning fried his body until he looked as black as charcoal, but the tremendous force affecting his body actually pushed him through the flood of lightning until he scattered the thundercloud in the sky.

As soon as the cloud was gone, the lightning flood disappeared, and the world fell silent.

There was ice growing in the midst of the silence, however. They were spreading on the ground and growing upward until a pure, hornless chi dragon abruptly leaped into the air.

The emergence of the chi dragon was such that it felt like the world was about to turn upside down. Icy energy washed out and froze everything in sight, and not even Ye Qing was able to avoid turning into an ice sculpture.

“Dragonslaying Art: Chi Dragon Sutra”

The chi dragon pounced toward Ye Qing, and for a moment, it looked like it would crush Ye Qing into a million icy pieces. Unfortunately, when it was about two inches away from the demonic ape, the ice suddenly shattered, and Ye Qing grabbed its head with a gigantic hand.

Bang!

Bits of ice flew everywhere as a deafening impact struck everyone’s ears. The charge failed to budge Ye Qing even an inch, but to the chi dragon credit, it hadn’t shattered into pieces despite the numerous cracks spreading across its body either.

While Ye Qing and the chi dragon were wrestling each other, a black fog appeared behind Ye Qing out of seemingly nowhere. Then, a pair of pitch black daggers emerged from the fog and slashed toward his throat.

The dagger wielder was, of course, Zhao Yuanrong.

The four halls of Dragonrider Mountain—Dragonmorph, Flying Dragon, Hidden Dragon and Crouching Dragon—inherited an ultimate art recorded in the “Dragonslaying Art” each.

The Dragonmorph Hall cultivated the “Dragonmorph Sutra” and focused on honing their strength and bloodline. They walked the path of evolving their physical body and giving it draconic characteristics.

The Flying Dragon Hall cultivated the “Thunder Dragon Sutra” and focused on their mastery over lightning and thunder. They commanded lightning with qi and thunder with the mind.

The Crouching Dragon Hall cultivated the “Chi Dragon Sutra” and focused on their mastery over ice and frost. They commanded ice with qi and frost with the mind.

And finally, the Hidden Dragon Hall cultivated the “Hidden Dragon Sutra” and focused on honing the stealthiness of a dragon. They could conceal themselves like a dragon and move about without a trace.

Out of the four, Yue Hualong was the strongest combatant in a direct fight, Yun Chaoyu and Yu Ningxin were masters of lightning and frost, and Zhao Yuanrong was the best at stealth and assassination.

The four elders knew exactly what their peers were capable of and cooperated wonderfully with each other. Not only that, they had gone after Ye Qing with a clear strategy in mind. Yue Hualong kept Ye Qing busy, Yun Chaoyu and Yu Ningxin provided support from the rear, and Zhao Yuanrong lurked in the shadows until an opportunity to assassinate Ye Qing presented itself.

However, Ye Qing was even scarier than they imagined. Not only had he dealt with Yue Hualong on the first exchange, he had dismantled Yun Chaoyu's meticulously prepared lightning flood with ease and blocked Yu Ningxin's ice chi dragon with one hand.

It wasn't over though. Their teamwork had created the exact opportunity for Zhao Yuanrong needed to kill Ye Qing in one strike.

Chapter 676: Dragons Memoir

The "Hidden Dragon Sutra" could pierce a target's protective astral qi and flesh in one strike, but physical damage wasn't the only thing it could do. It could snuff out the target's mind and consciousness as well. The particular technique was called "Hidden Dragon Pierce".

This was what the "Hidden Dragon Sutra" was capable of, and why they left the final blow to Zhao Yuanrong.

Zhao Yuanrong's daggers flashed across Ye Qing's throat faster than the eye could blink. However, the technique that could cut another man's throat like paper only left two white marks on Ye Qing's skin. He felt like an ordinary person trying to cut through tough leather with a pair of blunt daggers.

Not only that, the mental attack of the "Hidden Dragon Pierce" sank into Ye Qing's mind like a clay ox entering the sea. It failed to elicit even the tiniest of reactions.

Shocked and afraid, Zhao Yuanrong attempted to step back into his fog and turn invisible once more. However, Ye Qing roared and threw a backhand swing that seemed to possess enough force to split heaven and earth in half.

Boom!

The space where Zhao Yuanrong had just disappeared into was torn asunder, and the old man shook like he had just been struck by lightning. The next moment, he found himself straining against a crushing weight so heavy that his knees hit the floor hard enough to crack it.

"Roar!"

It was at this moment Yu Longzi finally took action. He chose the exact moment Ye Qing finished using his breath and energy, and there was a lull in his movement. He took one step forward, transformed into a sky dragon with five claws, and rushed straight toward Ye Qing.

While Yu Longzi was transforming into a sky dragon, Ye Qing abruptly looked back at him with his wide eyes that were full of bloodthirst and violence. In one motion, he shoved the chi dragon's head downward with his left hand and grabbed its throat with his right. Then, he bent his knees slightly—the floor crumbling bit by bit as if it could not withstand his weight—and his arm muscles swelled even bigger than before. It looked like he had mini mountain ranges for arms.

Crack!

When Ye Qing's feet sank another half a meter into the floor, and the ground started undulating like a wave, the sixty meter long chi dragon was finally lifted into the air. It could not break free no matter how hard it struggled.

The next moment, Ye Qing swung the chi dragon at the incoming sky dragon.

BOOOOOOOM!!!

Two dragons slammed into each other, and the sky dragon was flung back like a rag doll. The ice chi dragon itself finally shattered into smithereens.

The sky dragon transformed back into Yu Longzi in mid-air, and he looked nothing like the elegant master he was. His clothes were torn and disheveled, and his complexion was yellow like gold paper.

Even after he landed on the floor, Yu Longzi could not stop staggering backward. Every time he took a step, a mouthful of fresh blood would burst out of his lips. Three steps later, his back hit and sank deep into the wall of the Dragonslaying Hall, shaking the entire building in the process.

After the ice chi dragon exploded, Yu Ningxin let out a muffled groan and trembled like a leaf. Her aura also nosedived as if she had just suffered a huge blow.

The battle was over. It was clear that Ye Qing had won.

Ye Qing looked up into the sky and let out a mighty roar that cleared up every patch of cloud in an instant. The blue sky reappeared, and the sun shone brightly as if to celebrate his victory.

The people of Dragonrider Mountain stared at the demonic ape that was practically glowing under the sun. No one could say anything for a time.

As they watched, Ye Qing slowly turned back to human and shot Yu Longzi and the elders his signature smile once more. It was bright and clear just like the sky above their heads.

“See? I told you it would be your loss if you give me a turn!”

“Indeed... we have!”

While clutching his chest, Yu Longzi pulled himself out of the wall and walked up to Ye Qing. He said forlornly, “To the victor goes the spoils. You may take my life as is your right.”

“My lord...”

Yu Chaoyu, Zhao Yuanrong and Yu Ningxin called out weakly.

Yu Longzi raised his hand to silence them before continuing in a deathly serious tone, “However, I ask that you spare my men. They were simply following orders. If you must have revenge, then please let it end with my life.”

“Why are you begging him, my lord?” On the floor, Yue Hualong struggled to climb to his feet while glaring at Ye Qing. “It is an honor for any son or daughter of the jianghu to die in the jianghu. If I die because I am not strong enough, then so be it! Come get me, you bastard!”

“Silence.”

Yu Longzi waved his hand, and Yue Hualong was flung against the Dragon Subjugating Platform. This time, he did not wake up.

“I beg you, warrior. If you spare their lives, then I will be more than happy to give up my own! Please!”

Yun Chaoyu, Zhao Yuanrong and Yu Ningxin opened their mouths, but in the end, they could not say anything. Everyone bowed their heads in shame, humiliation, and helplessness as if their qi, essence and spirit had been completely sucked away.

To their credit, they were keeping silent not because they were cowards, nor because power and position had ground away their spirit like so many others. It was just that they understood that with great power comes great responsibility.

If they gave in to a moment of passion and riled their enemy up completely, it was entirely possible that he might slaughter them all. He might even wipe out every Dragonrider Mountain disciple on this mountain.

No one here was a coward who was afraid of death, nor did they think that they were too important to die. However, they could neither drag a thousand innocent lives down to the grave with them, nor become the sinners who led Dragonrider Mountain to extinction. If Dragonrider Mountain ended here, how could they ever face their ancestors in the underworld?

It was clear what Yu Longzi was trying to do. He was offering his own life so that everyone would survive, and Dragonrider Mountain would live on.

Therefore, no matter how humiliated they felt, no matter how reluctant they were at bowing their heads before their destroyer, they could not allow their passion to get the better of themselves no matter what.

They could only be silent.

Sometimes, people cherished their lives not because they were afraid of death, but because their death would have repercussions no one could bear.

“Do you want to die that badly?”

Ye Qing asked smilingly, “Or do I look like a monster who would massacre innocents to you? Come on, man.”

Whatever Yu Longzi was expecting, it wasn’t this. He looked up in surprise.

“What... What do you mean by that, scion?”

Ye Qing’s smile turned into a smirk. “I told you why I’m here. One, I’m here to pay you a visit. And two, I’m here to take revenge for this little guy. Since I’ve accomplished both of my objectives, I’m content. So why would I kill anyone?”

“Ah...”

Frankly, Yu Longzi couldn't quite process what was happening. It wasn't that he didn't believe Ye Qing—there was no need for the young man to lie in this situation—but... You really caused all this commotion and wreaked all this havoc... just for that?

It was at this moment Ye Qing spoke up again. "Well, I guess there is one thing I'd like you to do for me."

"What is it?" Yu Longzi asked.

"I would like to borrow Trueman Rider's 'Dragons Memoir' for a read. Is that okay?" Ye Qing asked.

"You want to borrow the 'Dragons Memoir'?"

Yu Longzi hesitated. "Dragons Memoir" sounded like someone's travel notes, and in fact it was. "Dragons Memoir" was a record of Trueman Dragonrider's experience while he was wandering the jianghu.

If this was all "Dragons Memoir" was, then Yu Longzi would not hesitate to lend it to Ye Qing. The problem was that "Dragons Memoir" didn't just record the sights, customs, and interesting events Trueman Dragonrider encountered during his journey, but also his discoveries while he was seeking to enter the Grandmaster stage. In short, it contained his martial insight and understanding regarding the breakthrough.

It was said that the martial way was wide and varied, and you could not find two paths that were the same even among a thousand warriors. Therefore, Trueman Dragonrider's insights really only applied to himself. However, they also said that the three thousand ways all ended up at the same place in the end. Just because no two men shared the same path didn't mean that one couldn't glean something useful from another's experience. As a reference material, "Dragons Memoir"'s value was immeasurable.

"What's wrong? Are you unwilling?" Ye Qing noted Yu Longzi's expression and asked.

Yu Longzi shook his head after a moment. "No, it's fine. You may have it."

"Dragons Memoir" was undoubtedly valuable, but compared to the many lives living on Dragonrider Mountain and the sect's continuation? It was nothing at all.

Besides, it wasn't like the young man would definitely become a Grandmaster after he read the "Dragons Memoir". It might contain valuable martial insight and understanding, and one that pertained to the step to enter the Grandmaster stage no less, but in the end, the notes were just a reference material, and it was ultimately up to the man to make that final leap.

He himself was a living example of that. As the successor of Trueman Dragonrider's line, he had full access to the "Dragons Memoir" and knew its contents like the back of his hand. However, he remained stuck in the Spirit Master stage for over a decade. If even he was unable to make a breakthrough, how could an outsider possibly do better?

Again, it was ultimately up to the person to make that final leap. Anyone who attached too much importance to a reference material and believed that it would surely carry them to the top was foolish and delusional. In fact, people like that specifically could never make it to the top.

Finally, Ye Qing specifically said that he was only borrowing it for a read. He wasn't demanding ownership of the travel notes. Therefore, it was no loss to Dragonrider Mountain.

So, Yu Longzi agreed.

Chapter 677: Reading Dragons Memoir In The Dragon Hoard Hall

“There is one thing I don't understand. You are incredibly strong for your age, and that cannot be possible without an extraordinary background. Why do you need to borrow our ‘Dragons Memoir’ when you have better choices?”

Yu Longzi was asking a serious question. He believed that Ye Qing must have an extraordinary background considering how strong he was. Assuming that the young man was a member of a major sect, clan, or aristocratic family, then surely he would not be lacking in guidance, right? He would not be surprised if it turned out that a living Trueman was tutoring him, so why was he seeking out a dead object like the “Dragons Memoir” instead of consulting his betters?

“Haha... Haven't I told you already? I'm just a wandering warrior with no background.”

Ye Qing shrugged. “No doors or windows are open to me, so I have to make my own.”

He was telling the truth. When he scoured Innocent Miao's memories, he found out that Trueman Dragonrider had left behind a travel note called the “Dragons Memoir”. It contained his martial insights and understanding regarding the breakthrough to Grandmaster. His interest was piqued immediately.

Right now, his body was at the level of a Half-Step Grandmaster. If he wished to advance further, he must become a Grandmaster.

However, it was no easy feat to enter the Grandmaster stage. Hard work was a matter of course, but he also needed some opportunities to achieve the breakthrough. For example, he would dearly like to be taught by an actual expert.

Unfortunately, he was, in terms of background, a nobody with no one he could consult with. That was why he had to make his own fortune.

Ideally, he wanted to obtain the martial insight and understanding of a body-tempering warrior ascending to the Grandmaster stage. However, an item like this was priceless to say the least, not to mention that he didn't know the first place to find such a thing.

By coincidence, he found out that Dragonrider Mountain owned one such item, and it just happened to be a powerful sect that was on the decline. How could he let go of such an opportunity?

Besides, Trueman Dragonrider was an accomplished, knowledgeable, and insightful warrior who excelled in many areas. Even if his martial understanding and insights had little to do with a body-tempering warrior's experience, they were still highly valuable.

Long story short, “Dragons Memoir” was something he absolutely needed not just for his impending breakthrough, but also his future cultivation.

On the off chance the reference material turned out to be applicable to him, then even better.

This was the last reason why he chose to visit Dragonrider Mountain. First, it was to test himself and hone his skills. Two, it was to take revenge for Giggie and put Dragonrider Mountain back on the straight and narrow. And three, it was to borrow Trueman Dragonrider’s “Dragons Memoir”.

“Is that so? You are amazingly talented then. In any case, please follow me.” Yu Longzi didn’t really believe Ye Qing’s claim, but he didn’t contradict him either. Whatever the truth might be, the young man remained someone who was untouchable to Dragonrider Mountain. Right now, the best course of action was to fulfill his wishes so they could see him off as soon as possible.

“Thank you, mountain lord.” Ye Qing saluted him.

Before he left, Yu Longzi instructed, “Chaoyu, Yuanrong, the two of you will continue the ceremony. Ningxin, please reassure the disciples and maintain the order.”

“As you command!” The three elders echoed in unison. After shooting Ye Qing a long look, they saluted Yu Longzi and left to carry out their orders.

“This way please, scion!” Yu Longzi beckoned for Ye Qing to follow him after the three elders were gone.

“Of course, mountain lord,” Ye Qing replied before he followed Yu Longzi to the Dragon Hoard Hall.

The Dragon Hoard Hall was the root and foundation of Dragonrider Mountain, but from the outside, the hall looked quite ordinary. This impression did a one-eighty when Ye Qing entered the hall and felt like he had stepped into a different world. The decor was traditional but exquisite, ancient but not excessive. The hall was much bigger than it looked from the outside, and it was filled with all kinds of books. This was what the hoard of a formerly powerful sect should look like.

There were three floors inside the Dragon Hoard Hall. The first floor was filled with history records, classics, philosophy, medicine, divination, astrology, and other miscellaneous books. The second floor was where the martial arts manuals were kept—the ordinary ones, of course.

The third floor was where the main inheritance and important items of Dragonrider Mountain were kept such as the “Dragonslaying Art”, the four sutras (Chi Dragon Sutra, Dragonmorph Sutra, Thunder Dragon Sutra and Hidden Dragon Sutra) and more.

It was also where Trueman Dragonrider’s “Dragons Memoir” was kept.

After they arrived on the third floor, Yu Longzi walked up to a wall portrait and respectfully offered it an incense stick.

The man in the portrait was wearing a golden robe and facing away from the audience, making it impossible to see his face. However, his back was tall and massive like that of a mountain. It was

just a portrait, and yet Ye Qing couldn't help but feel a great pressure coming from it. It was almost as if the man inside the portrait was alive.

He had no doubt that the man in the portrait was the legendary Trueman Dragonrider.

"I beg your forgiveness, founder, but unfilial disciple Yu Longzi wishes to borrow your notes for a read."

After he offered the incense stick, Yu Longzi stepped forward and reached out toward Trueman Dragonrider's right hand where he was holding a book. When Yu Longzi's fingers made contact with the portrait, the book suddenly popped into reality and landed on his palm.

"Amazing! I did not think that the 'Dragons Memoir' would be hidden inside a portrait!" Ye Qing exclaimed in wonder. If he wasn't certain before, he now knew that the portrait was definitely something special.

"You jest, scion. It is but a petty trick."

Yu Longzi replied humbly before handing Ye Qing the book. "This is the 'Dragons Memoir'."

"Thank you," Ye Qing replied and took it.

"We have a private room down this corner. Would you like to read it inside?" Yu Longzi asked.

"Sounds good. Thank you again, mountain lord." Ye Qing saluted him. He then followed Yu Longzi into the private room not far away from the portrait.

After he took Ye Qing to the private room, Yu Longzi stepped outside and said, "I will be waiting outside, scion. Please, do not hesitate to call me if you need anything."

"I will."

After he took his leave, Yu Longzi glanced at the door of the private room with a complicated expression on his face. A small sigh later, he sat in front of Trueman Dragonrider's portrait and began meditating.

.....

Buzz...

An invisible force suddenly washed out the Dragon Hoard Hall and jolted Yu Longzi out of his meditation. He immediately looked in the direction of the private room. That was where it was coming from.

At first, the shockwaves were messy and unstable. Over time, it became deep and distant, mysterious and profound. In the end, it evolved into something that was impossible to describe with words.

"What in the... is he experiencing enlightenment?" Yu Longzi abruptly jumped to his feet with an expression of shock and disbelief.

It had been three days since Ye Qing entered the private room. Absolutely nothing had happened until now.

Yu Longzi had been sure that Ye Qing would not glean anything out of “Dragons Memoir”. Even if he had, it would not be something substantial.

His sentiment was understandable. The paths leading to the Grandmaster stage were myriad and profound, and no two paths were the exact same as one another. While not impossible, it was almost unheard of for someone to “leap over the Dragon Gate and become a dragon” or “reach the heavens in one step” per se just by reading some papers or hearing some motivational words.

Take him for example. He had guarded the “Dragons Memoir” for decades and read it at least a couple hundred times, but his rewards were insubstantial at best. That was why he could not believe that an outsider could glean more from the book than him.

Of course, reality proceeded to defy his expectations and slap him in the face.

Chapter 678: Fortune and Misfortune are Two Sides of the Same Coin

“My lord... what happened?”

While Yu Longzi was still trying to process his shock, Yun Chaoyu, Zhao Yuanrong and Yu Ningxin stepped into the Dragon Hoard Hall and voiced their concern. Clearly, they could feel the shockwaves as well.

Yu Longzi did not answer them. He simply stared at the private room with a complicated expression on his face.

The three elders[1] subconsciously traced the shockwaves to its origin and turned to look at the private room. At first, they were confused and puzzled. When realization finally struck them, they exchanged shocked glances with one another.

“Did that man... actually learn something from the ‘Dragons Memoir’?!”

“Impossible! He’s an outsider! How could he possibly learn anything from the founder’s notes?”

They were all late-stage Spirit Masters, and they had all read the “Dragons Memoir” as a matter of course. While they couldn’t say that they hadn’t learned anything from the travel notes, their gains were trivial at best.

If even they, people who had had decades to study the “Dragons Memoir”, was unable to glean much from it, how could an outsider possibly do better? Or so they thought. They could not help but feel amused and saddened by their own naivety.

“There is no such thing as impossible in this world.”

A long silence later, Yu Longzi finally spoke up, “The jianghu has existed for countless years, and geniuses are born every year. The one thing this world does not lack are geniuses.”

“From the moment they are born, they already hang in the sky like the moon. We are but fireflies compared to them. That is why the saying, ‘There exists Man who shines like the moon and makes you feel like a firefly’ exists.”

Yun Chaoyu, Zhao Yuanrong and Yu Ningxin did not say anything. No one liked to admit that they were mundane, but in the end, one must accept reality.

“We’ve been cooped up for so long that we are like frogs who view the sky from the bottom of the well!” Yun Chaoyu said with a bitter smile.

Zhao Yuanrong and Yu Ningxin looked a little depressed as well.

Yu Longzi advised seriously after giving his elders a moment to process their thoughts, “I did not mention this so as to expound your or my inferiority. Admiring the moon is one thing, undervaluing yourself and wallowing in self-depreciation is another. So long as you affirm your heart, keep your feet on the ground, and relentlessly toil toward your dream and goal, who is to say you cannot join the heavens one day?”

“We obey your lesson, my lord.”

His advice was most enlightening. The three elders solemnly saluted Yu Longzi in thanks because of it.

“Engrave your goals in your heart and work toward them with your body and soul. That is the martial way.” Yu Longzi gave them one last piece of advice before instructing, “You may go. Have the disciples lock down the Dragon Hoard Hall temporarily. No one is to come near without my express permission.”

“As you command, my lord!” The three elders saluted him and left to carry out their orders.

After the trio were gone, a complicated expression overcame Yu Longzi once more. It was a blend of shock, envy, jealousy, admiration, and dejection.

It was always easier to say something than it was to do it, and the human heart was the hardest hurdle to overcome of them all.

That said, Yu Longzi was a Half-Step Grandmaster with a tenacious will. His loss of composure only lasted a brief moment before he regained his calm and sat down on the floor, meditating.

Did the thought of creating some sort of commotion and interrupting Ye Qing’s enlightenment cross his mind? Of course it did. Humans naturally envied others for what they have and desired to deny them their objects of desire. Not everyone could overcome that natural instinct and cultivate magnanimity, and people who naturally enjoyed sharing and took joy in another’s happiness were even rarer.

At the very least, Yu Longzi did not consider himself to be such a lofty breed. If he was younger, he would be seething with jealousy at the thought

that his “Dragons Memoir” had benefited another far more than it ever benefited him.

He did not succumb to his baser nature though. For one, the consequences Dragonrider Mountain would suffer even if he succeeded was unbearable. Some things could not be done no matter how much you desired to do it.

Since it could not be done, then why not be magnanimous and look for the silver lining? For example, compromising here would generate some good karma for Dragonrider Mountain, and that was good enough, was it not?

And so Dragon Hoard Hall returned to silence once more, though the profound shockwaves continued to spread out of the private room Ye Qing was cultivating in.

The ancient poets once praised that some music were so divine that they could reverberate in your ears for three days straight. The shockwaves washing out of the Dragon Hoard Hall were similar in that sense. It lingered like divine music and elicited many thoughts like the most profound dao.

The shockwaves would continue for nine days straight. On the first three days, the shockwaves were like a mountain fog; ephemeral and invisible. In the next three days, it felt like the birth of a new dawn. The fog had faded, and the sun was bright. And in the final three days, the sun reached the center and its maximum intensity. Its light was strong, all-encompassing, and all too profound.

To Yu Longzi’s surprise, he actually gleaned something from the shockwaves. He could feel the bottleneck that had trapped him in the Half-Step Grandmaster stage for over a decade loosening a little.

Overjoyed, Yu Longzi did not hesitate to fall into cultivation.

Another nine days later, the shockwaves suddenly disappeared like a curtain call.

It so happened that Yu Longzi was at a critical moment of his cultivation, and the disappearance of the shockwave instantly jolted him back to reality.

“Sigh...”

Yu Longzi could not help but sigh as he glanced at the private room. For obvious reasons, he hoped that the shockwaves would last longer.

He had only cultivated for nine days, but he could tell that this one session was more useful than his tireless effort for the past decade. He had a feeling that he could have welcomed a tribulation and become a Grandmaster if the shockwaves had lasted another ten days or so. Just ten more days, and he could have achieved his lifelong dream!

For the first time, Yu Longzi sincerely wished that Ye Qing would glean more from the “Dragons Memoir”. That way, the shockwaves would also last longer.

Unfortunately, what-ifs only existed in fiction.

Still, this unexpected breakthrough had given him hope. Once upon a time, he had no idea how he could ascend to the next stage, and his efforts had felt as futile as fighting against the march of time.

But thanks to this experience, he had glimpsed some of the sights of that peak and found his direction.

Although the experience was no Dragon Gate that would transform him into a Grandmaster, he now had hope and direction. So long as he kept his feet on the ground and worked toward his goal, he might yet scale that impossible peak and become one of the giants!

So yes, Yu Longzi was disappointed, but it wasn't a big disappointment at all.

In fact, he found himself no longer resenting Ye Qing for what he did. Instead, he was grateful and impressed.

It was true that Ye Qing had scaled their mountain and humiliated them in a way that only the celestial woman from centuries ago could compare. However, it was equally true that he would never have glimpsed the sights of that peak called Grandmaster via his own efforts. He could have toiled his whole life and never even reached the starting line.

It was said that fortune and misfortune are two sides of the same coin. Who could say that a humiliating disaster wasn't a blessing in disguise?

His thoughts were still racing when the door to the private room suddenly swung open, and Ye Qing appeared.

Right now, Ye Qing felt like a paradoxical existence to Yu Longzi's senses. The young man was standing right in front of him, yet for some reason, he also felt as far away as the horizon. His presence felt ordinary, but it was also vast, ephemeral, and profound at the same time.

Before Yu Longzi could probe further though, Ye Qing withdrew his aura like the clouds covering up the sky. This time, he truly felt no different from an ordinary person.

The first thing Ye Qing said after offering Yu Longzi a smile was, "Congratulations on piercing the veil and glimpsing the stars above, mountain lord. Given enough time, you will surely become a Trueman."

Yu Longzi was surprised. He did not think that Ye Qing would see through him at first glance. He quickly gathered himself and replied with a slightly complicated expression, "It was all thanks to you. Speaking of which, congratulations on your enlightenment and taking yet another step toward greater heights."

"I wouldn't call it a step. It is at most a small gain."

Ye Qing said smilingly, "I definitely have to thank you and Trueman Dragonrider for the 'Dragons Memoir' though. His martial arts challenges the heavens, and his dao encompasses both heaven and earth. This junior is most impressed."

"Your talent is also one of a kind, warrior," Yu Longzi replied sincerely.

"You flatter me, mountain lord. I'm well aware that I possess outstanding talent, but one of a kind? That is not a compliment I am willing to bear," Ye Qing replied with a carefree smile on his face.

A moment of silence later, Yu Longzi asked suddenly, "You mentioned that you are a wanderer with no background before, warrior. Is it the truth?"

“That is correct.” Ye Qing nodded. He wasn’t surprised by Yu Longzi’s sudden change of topic. It was almost as if he could read the older man’s mind.

Yu Longzi asked with the utmost sincerity, “In that case, would you like to join Dragonrider Mountain?”

Chapter 679: Freedom Lies Everywhere

“Are you... trying to recruit me, mountain lord?” Ye Qing asked calmly. Again, he wasn’t surprised to hear this.

“Yes, I am!”

Yu Longzi admitted without any reservations whatsoever. “You possess a bright and limitless future. It would be our greatest honor to have you.”

This was a decision he made after serious consideration. He was speaking from the bottom of his heart.

“I see. And what can you offer me, mountain lord?” Ye Qing asked.

“How does one Dragonrider Mountain sound?” Yu Longzi declared without hesitation.

“One Dragonrider Mountain?” This time, Ye Qing was surprised. “The mountain or the name?”

“Both!” Yu Longzi answered. “If you agree to join Dragonrider Mountain, I am willing to surrender my position to you immediately. Everyone in Dragonrider Mountain including myself will answer to you and you alone.”

“You will become the new master of Dragonrider Mountain in both power and name. Your word and your word alone will decide our fate.”

“I can’t say I’m not impressed by your generosity, mountain lord!” Ye Qing sighed. “But is this what everyone wants, or just you?”

“It is what I want,” Yu Longzi answered, “but it makes no difference, as my want is the same as everyone’s want.”

“And why do you want me at the helm?” Ye Qing asked.

“For the prosperity of Dragonrider Mountain!” Yu Longzi answered.

“Is that all?” Ye Qing pressed.

“That is all!” Yu Longzi declared.

“I can tell you have a very high opinion of me. But are you sure you haven’t misjudged me?” Ye Qing chuckled. “What if I turned out to be the one who led Dragonrider Mountain to destruction instead?”

Yu Longzi answered, “No, because I believe in my own judgment, and I believe in you. I am sure that Dragonrider Mountain will regain its former glory under your leadership.”

Before, Yu Longzi was impressed by Ye Qing’s talent, and that was all. But after Ye Qing achieved enlightenment while reading the “Dragons Memoir”, he came to the realization that there was real hope for Ye Qing to rejuvenate Dragonrider Mountain.

Yu Longzi was an orphan who lost his parents from a young age. It was the previous mountain lord who took him to Dragonrider Mountain and raised him to adulthood.

The previous mountain lord was named Qiao Shi, and he was as honest, kind, and good-hearted as his name implied. His talent was ordinary, and his business acumen was even more ordinary. He was the definition of an average person be it as a warrior or a businessman. However, he was an extraordinarily good-hearted man who spared no effort in cultivating Dragonrider Mountain. He cared for every disciple like they were his own children, and he gave them every bit of knowledge and experience he had to offer. He was less of a mountain lord and more of a father to everyone.

Unfortunately, not only did Qiao Shi achieve his dreams, Dragonrider Mountain only got worse despite his ceaseless efforts. To Yu Longzi, Qiao Shi was a man whose stature and animosity was rivaled by no one, but not even the greatest man in the world could not resist the merciless march of time; the sickness and death that were set in stone in everyone’s lives.

He could still remember that it was a cold winter. The old man had fallen ill, and unlike the previous times, he did not recover. In less than half a month, he had grown so ill that his once gigantic back now resembled a stick caricature, and his breathing had become shallower than even an ordinary human. Anyone could tell that he could pass to the other side at any moment.

During his final moments, Qiao Shi passed the mountain lord’s position to him and gave him many, many last words. He had grabbed his hand with both hands and told him to take care of himself, take care of his junior brothers and sisters, make sure he didn’t overwork himself, make sure he didn’t provoke a powerful enemy, so on and so forth. It reminded him of better times where the old man told them to wear more clothes when the weather was cold, to be careful when they were heading out, and more.

Qiao Shi had told him many, many things. It was so long that his hand hurt a little due to how thin and bony the old man’s hands were. However, the one thing he never told Yu Longzi to do was to rejuvenate Dragonrider Mountain.

Did Qiao Shi not dream of a better, brighter future for Dragonrider Mountain? Of course not. He just knew better. The burden was too heavy, and the path was too thorny for anyone to tread. He had toiled and suffered his whole life, and he wanted it to end with his generation. From the bottom of his heart, he did not want his disciple, his junior, his *son* to suffer pain and burden as he had.

All he wanted for him was an easy, happy life.

That was why he didn’t say anything. He did not so much as breathe the word “rejuvenate” until he drew his last breath.

But of course, Yu Longzi knew his wish even though he never said a thing. He knew that, even during his final moments, Qiao Shi still dreamed of making Dragonrider Mountain great again.

That was why he chose to take on the dream the old man had avoided mentioning during his final moments. He took on the dream of rejuvenating Dragonrider Mountain.

To this end, Yu Longzi did everything. Everything. He had done good things, he had done bad things; he had committed righteous acts, he had committed evil acts; he had conducted himself honestly, and he had conducted himself despicably.

Unfortunately, Dragonrider Mountain remained an average sect despite over a century of tireless effort. It was fairly famous in Bei Mo, but beyond that, the sect's reputation was akin to throwing a stone into a large river—it could not elicit even the slightest splash.

The key to a sect's rise was the people, and out of all of them, no one carried more weight than a champion.

Yu Longzi knew his worth well. Even if he could now scale that impossible wall and become a Grandmaster thanks to this unexpected opportunity, he knew very well that this was as far as he, and by extension Dragonrider Mountain, could go.

But Ye Qing was different. He looked barely older than a teenager, and yet he was already a Half-Step Grandmaster on the verge of becoming a Grandmaster. He was a rare breed even if you searched the entire *jianghu* for someone like him, and he was already on par with the geniuses of the world's greatest sects such as the Five Profound Sects and the Nine Demonic Ways.

For someone like Ye Qing, Grandmaster was just the starting line. His finish line lay high, high up in the heavens, if he had a finishing line at all.

Yu Longzi recognized that Ye Qing was exactly the kind of person who could carry Dragonrider Mountain to greater heights. More importantly, Ye Qing had proved via his behavior and conduct that he was ruthless, but not unjust; impulsive, but not foolish. He was also loyal, passionate, righteous, brave and resourceful. If even someone like him couldn't rejuvenate a sect, then who could?

That was why Yu Longzi was willing to give up everything to earn Ye Qing's loyalty. Everything.

"Okay. But you will be giving up everything to me, and this is quite sudden for me, much less you. Don't you feel any reluctance at all?" Ye Qing asked while staring into Yu Longzi's eyes. His pure, bright eyes seemed capable of reading someone's mind.

"I would be lying if I say I don't feel any reluctance," Yu Longzi replied honestly. "But this is my choice. My lifelong wish. I will not waver from it."

"You won't waver from your choice, huh? You truly are an impressive man, mountain lord." Ye Qing paid Yu Longzi a compliment before saying, "Unfortunately, I must decline your generous offer."

"But why?" Yu Longzi wasn't expecting this. "Is Dragonrider Mountain not enough? Or should I say, is Dragonrider Mountain too small for you?"

“You misunderstand me, mountain lord.” Ye Qing explained, “In this world, there are men who envy those who are drowning in wine and gold, and then there are those who envy those who are free and unfettered. It so happens that I am someone who enjoys freedom and guard it very, very zealously.”

“I can see that,” Yu Longzi saluted Ye Qing, “but we will not fetter you even if you join us. I will handle all matters in Dragonrider Mountain so that you can wander the *jianghu* as you wish. Besides, you have no master or sect to your name, do you? Even the freest bird must rest its legs or take shelter under a roof sometimes. I personally think that Dragonrider Mountain isn’t the worst sect in the world, so why don’t you consider our offer?”

“Thank you, but I don’t enjoy receiving from others without giving anything in return, and I’m a believer that there are no free lunches in this world.”

Ye Qing shook his head. “Also, you are right that even the freest bird must rest its legs or take shelter under a roof sometimes, but the world is a big place, isn’t it? Surely I can find a place that suits my needs at the moment.”

“If all else fails, then there is still the world itself. The mountains and rivers will shield me, the floating clouds will shelter me, the sun and moon will light my path, and the books and wine will become my friends. That is the definition of freedom, no?”

Chapter 680: Fame and Fortune

“I’m not joking, warrior. Will you seriously consider joining us?” Yu Longzi tried. He truly wanted Ye Qing to join Dragonrider Mountain.

“I’m not joking either.”

Ye Qing turned him down smilingly. “I am honored that you think of me so highly, but the mountain is too heavy, and my heart is too small. I simply don’t have it in me to bear it.”

“The mountain is heavy, but it is also lofty. If you are willing to lend your hand in prospering Dragonrider Mountain, Dragonrider Mountain is more than willing to lend you ours. You have my word that we will do everything in our power to spread your name and help you climb the very top.”

Ye Qing’s rejection only made Yu Longzi admire him more. There were countless people in the world who would do anything for fame and fortune. To that end, they could surrender even their closest and dearest. The opposite, however, was so rare that most thought they only existed in myths and fables.

“There is no need to make an important decision immediately. Why don’t you take a few days to mull it over first?”

“Hahahaha! Thank you, really, but I must say no.” Ye Qing laughed. “There’s a reason why they say it’s lonely at the top. Even if it wasn’t, how frustrating would

it be if I climb to the top and forever wonder if I could not have done it through my and only my power? That too is a burden my petty heart is too small to bear!”

“The mountains are tall, the waters are long. If the fates are willing, perhaps we’ll meet again someday. So long, mountain lord!”

“Warrior!”

Yu Longzi wanted to say more, but the young man suddenly grew increasingly transparent and insubstantial almost like he was a mirage; a reflection. It wasn’t long before he was completely gone.

“What the...?”

Yu Longzi’s eyes widened. For a moment, he could not understand what was going on. Then, a wave of dizziness assaulted him, and he opened his eyes—*wait, my eyes were closed?*—and realized that he was still sitting on the floor, and the door to the private room was still closed. It was almost as if his conversation with the young man was nothing more but a dream.

“Was it really just a dream?”

Yu Longzi frowned. Did he really fall asleep? Was it really just a dream? If it was, then why did it feel so realistic?

“No, it can’t be!”

Yu Longzi immediately rejected the idea. At his level, meditation had long since replaced sleep. He would be fine even if he didn’t sleep for half a month straight.

Besides, he was in the middle of meditation just now. There was no way he would suddenly fall asleep all of a sudden.

Having realized the incongruity, Yu Longzi rose to his feet and walked over to the private room. A moment of hesitation later, he gave the door a tentative knock.

No one answered him.

Raising an eyebrow, Yu Longzi swung the door open and found no one inside. All he saw was the “Dragons Memoir” sitting snugly on a praying mat.

Yu Longzi picked up the book and let out a small sigh. The book was here, but the man was nowhere to be seen. This could only mean that he had taken his leave.

But how was this possible? He had been guarding the entrance this whole time. When did the young man take his leave, and how did he do it without alerting him in the slightest?

The strange dream he had must have been his handiwork as well.

At this, Yu Longzi hurriedly descended the stairs and left the Dragon Hoard Hall.

“My lord!”

At the main entrance, Zhao Yuanlong greeted Yu Longzi with a salute.

“Have you seen him, Yuanrong?” Yu Longzi asked.

“I thought he’s cultivating inside the private room?” Zhao Yuanrong looked confused.

“I guess you didn’t notice either.” Yu Longzi sighed again.

“What happened, my lord?” Zhao Yuanrong asked.

“He’s gone,” Yu Longzi replied simply.

“He’s... gone?” Zhao Yuanrong repeated dumbly before realization struck him.

“You mean he left?”

Before Yu Longzi could answer, Zhao Yuanrong raised his voice, “That’s impossible! I’ve been guarding the entrance this whole time. If he really left, there is no way... I wouldn’t.... Notice...”

But the more he talked, the quieter and meeker his voice became. It was because he was recalling everything he had seen from the young man and coming to the realization that it was perfectly within his power to slip away unnoticed.

“Did he take the ‘Dragons Memoir’?!”

It was at this moment Zhao Yuanrong their treasure. If the young man had stolen the travel notes, then they would be in deep trouble to put it mildly.

“No. The book is safe,” Yu Longzi answered.

“Thank goodness.” Zhao Yuanrong let out a sigh of relief. Then, he noticed an odd expression on Yu Longzi’s face. “We didn’t lose the ‘Dragons Memoir’, and that guy is finally gone, so why do you look unhappy, my lord?”

“I’m not unhappy. I’m just... feeling regretful, is all,” Yu Longzi replied.

“I don’t understand, my lord.”

“I invited him to join us.” Yu Longzi looked at the clouds floating above their heads as he explained in an indifferent tone, “I offered him my seat and everything Dragonrider Mountain has to offer.”

The first half of Yu Longzi’s sentence already surprised Zhao Yuanrong, but the second half stunned him so much that his mouth turned into an O shape.

Understanding quickly replaced his shock though. Most people didn’t know Yu Longzi’s desire, but he did. He wasn’t just the hallmaster of the Hidden Dragon Hall, but also Yu Longzi’s junior brother. He knew exactly what his junior brother was obsessed with.

Yu Longzi would do anything to rejuvenate Dragonrider Mountain, even if it entailed surrendering everything he had.

“Unfortunately, he turned me down!” Yu Longzi did not notice Zhao Yuanrong’s expression and so continued without thought.

“W-what? He turned you down?” Zhao Yuanrong could not believe this. “But why?” Dragonrider Mountain was far below its prime be it in terms of fame or power, but it still possessed centuries of history and accumulated wealth. For most people, it might as well be the staircase to the heavens. Who could possibly reject such a tempting offer? At the very least, he did not believe he could’ve rejected it.

But the young man did, and it both shocked and confounded him to no end.

“I know, right? I thought he would accept my offer as well, but not only did he reject me, he did it without any hesitation whatsoever and left no room for misinterpretation.”

Yu Longzi sighed. “Since ancient times, people have pursued fame and fortune like no other. Not even immortality held as much allure as these two. That is why there are so, so few people who truly view fame and fortune like air in this world.”

“In terms of heart alone, he has already surpassed most people. A man like him will surely go far.”

A pause later, Yu Longzi continued in a wistful tone, “Had he chosen to remain with us, it is but a matter of time before Dragonrider Mountain rises to the top. What a shame. What a shame...”

“He just left. We can still catch up to him if we give chase now!” Zhao Yuanrong blurted. “Just give us the—”

“It’s fine.”

Yu Longzi interrupted Zhao Yuanrong before he could finish. “You can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. If we try to force him to change his mind, we will only earn his distrust and loathing, not to mention that one-sided affairs usually end poorly.”

“Besides, Dragonrider Mountain may have waned, but we haven’t fallen so low that we need to beg someone to save us, have we? We can lose a valuable person, but we must never lose our backbone.”

“A man without a backbone might as well be dead, and a sect is no exception.”

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“Man, why did I turn him down? I can’t believe I let my impulse get the better of me!”

On a hill not far away from Dragonrider Mountain, Ye Qing was sitting on the ground and hitting himself in the head, grumbling.

When he turned down Yu Longzi in the dream, he had felt like a boss through and through. But now, reality had caught up to him and infected him with a condition called regret.

No wonder people said that a person on the stage and off the stage are two different people.

Although Dragonrider Mountain was a waning sect, they still possessed an immense amount of accumulated wealth and power. It was also guarded by powerful warriors such as Yu Longzi. Had he agreed to become the new mountain lord, Dragonrider Mountain would've been a great help to him. He would be so much closer to his revenge and other goals.

Unfortunately, he allowed his emotion to get the better of himself and rejected it.

After that, well, there was no after that.

You can't take back the words you say. Once you start something, you better finish it even if you're weeping on the inside.