

Stranger 681

Chapter 681: The World is Like a Dream, Pain or Joy Lasts But A Moment

“It’s not really my fault though. I can’t help that I’m too young and impulsive!”

Ye Qing cocked his head to one side and smiled at Gigggle. “Don’t you agree, Gigggle?”

“Hahaha...”

The little Stranger was emulating Ye Qing’s behavior and sitting crosslegged on the ground. When it heard Ye Qing’s question, it simply giggled in response.

Ye Qing wasn’t expecting an answer from Gigggle, of course. He was just talking because he felt like it.

Besides, he didn’t really look or feel regretful despite his claims.

Yes, part of the reason he turned down Yu Longzi’s offer was because of passion, but his choice wasn’t without its due consideration.

First, there was no free lunch in this world. Would Yu Longzi really surrender everything to him just to make Dragonrider Mountain great again? Would he really support him from the bottom of his heart? Did he really have no other request besides this?

Ye Qing couldn’t believe that such a person existed.

Suppose that he was wrong, and Yu Longzi was as sincere as he claimed. What about the others?

Dragonrider Mountain might be far below its prime, but it still had hundreds of years of accumulated wealth and power. Only they knew if they had other unpredictable tricks up his sleeve. He had caught Dragonrider Mountain by surprise when he paid them a visit, but now? He was the one out in the open, and they in the dark. If they really wanted to, they had the means to catch him by surprise and kill him. At that point, it would become a matter of survival.

Suppose that his fears were just his cynicism talking, and everyone in Dragonrider Mountain was willing to accept him as their new mountain lord. However, that only worried him more. To begin with, Yu Longzi was fully invested in rejuvenating Dragonrider Mountain, but he wasn’t. On top of that, he knew very well that he wasn’t gifted in this area. Even with everyone’s support, he had no idea if he could bear that level of responsibility on his shoulders and answer their hopes and dreams.

He did not think that he was a good person, but he certainly wasn’t the kind of scumbag who would treat others’ hopes and dreams like a joke either.

Third, Yu Longzi had made the offer without knowing that he was really a wanted man of Chu, and that his nemeses included the Chief Libationist’s favorite disciple and the son of the Grand Mentor. What would he do when he found out the truth?

Logically speaking, selling him out would rejuvenate Dragonrider Mountain faster than supporting him, wouldn’t it?

Yu Longzi was willing to give up everything to support him now for the sake of rejuvenating Dragonrider Mountain. It was very likely that the old man would betray him for the same goal.

This wasn't his paranoia talking. This was just the human condition.

Fourth, he did not want to drag Dragonrider Mountain down with him. He already obtained a reward from Trueman Dragonrider. It was against his morals to knowingly drag them into his mess for his own self-interest.

Finally, he did not want to be shackled. The world was a big place, and the jianghu a never-ending festival of violence and intrigue. He saw no reason to shackle himself to a sect before he was done walking the paths or reviewing all there was to review in life.

Did his heart ache at what he had given up? Of course. But did he regret his decision? Not at all.

Plus, it wasn't like he had gotten nothing out of this little adventure. On the contrary, he would say that he had made out like a bandit.

First, he successfully took revenge for Giggle.

Second, he successfully tempered himself and solidified his current cultivation.

And finally, Trueman Dragonrider's "Dragons Memoir" had enlightened him to a great many things. One could say that it was the biggest reward he got out of this venture.

Although the "Dragons Memoir" was hardly a step-by-step guide on how to enter the Grandmaster stage, like the light of dawn burning away the mist of the night, it had opened his eyes to possibilities he had never even considered before. If before, he was like a lost traveler who had no idea how to make it to human civilization, now he had a path to follow. It had reduced the number of detours he had to take and cleared up some of the brambles he would have encountered in his martial path.

What really delighted him was the fact that Trueman Dragonrider's martial insights and understanding, while not very useful for his body-tempering, was extremely beneficial for his "Dream Butterfly True Scripture" and "Call of the Nether".

It made sense if he thought about it. Trueman Dragonrider was an ancient qi practitioner who focused on cultivating the qi and spirit, and both the "Dream Butterfly True Scripture" and "Call of the Nether" were qi and spirit-focused. Although Trueman Dragonrider had never cultivated these martial arts before, his main cultivation art shared many characteristics with the two martial arts, meaning that many of his martial insights could be applied to them as well.

Speaking of which, he had begun cultivating the "Dream Butterfly True Scripture" and "Call of the Nether" as soon as he obtained them. However, he had only cultivated them for a short time, and both martial arts could carry a warrior all the way to the Grandmaster-stage. Naturally, they were as extraordinary as they were difficult to understand. Even with his excellent talent and the aid of Nanke, he just barely managed to put his foot in the initiate level. After that, well, he couldn't even make sense of the seemingly nonsensical passages jotted inside the manuals, much less make any progress whatsoever.

That was until he obtained the “Dragons Memoir”. Trueman Dragonrider’s martial insight was like a ray of sunshine that revealed the truth hidden within the shadows, or a candle flame that showed him the way when all hope seemed lost. It enlightened him such that some of the obscure, seemingly nonsensical parts of the “Dream Butterfly True Scripture” and “Call of the Nether” suddenly became clear to him.

The more he read the “Dragons Memoir”, the more his understanding and mastery of the two martial arts deepened, and the better his cultivation became. For a time, he even felt like he was receiving a personal lesson from Trueman Dragonrider himself. Every line, every word hit the nail on the head, provoked insightful thoughts, and enlightened him. He had absorbed all the knowledge hungrily like a dry, barren land.

Like a poor man who encountered his benefactor, or a dry land that finally welcomed a hearty rain, Ye Qing’s cultivation in both martial arts—especially the “Dream Butterfly True Scripture”—had improved by leaps and bounds. This was because the “Dream Butterfly True Scripture” shared some similarities to the “Paranirmitavaśavartin Heavenly Demon Sutra”, and he was more invested in the “Dream Butterfly True Scripture” than the “Call of the Nether” anyway.

Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime. He could tell that his progress for the past nine days or so was equal to years of blind cultivation. This was what the people meant when they used the idiom, “Reaching heaven in a single bound” to describe their progress.

It was how he managed to leave Dragonrider Mountain without anyone noticing, and conversed with Yu Longzi inside a dream. Like a ghost, he had entered a dream with his target through an art.

If he was who he was before, forget conversing with Yu Longzi inside a dream, he did not think he could have left Dragonrider Mountain unnoticed without much difficulty. After all, Yu Longzi was an elite who was half step away from becoming a Grandmaster. On top of that, he was an expert in the “Dragonslaying Art” and a warrior with a powerful spirit. Even the slightest disturbance would have jolted him to alertness, making it extremely difficult to fool his senses and even harder to put him to sleep and enter his dream. No, he could not have done it before no matter what he tried.

But now, he was much better at the “Dream Butterfly True Scripture” and in possession of many secret arts and Magia he did not possess before such as Butterfly Transformation, Dream Entering, Dream Viewing and more. That was how he was able to enter Yu Longzi’s dream and slip past Dragonrider Mountain’s defenses unnoticed.

In fact, he was confident that he could now toy with everyone in Dragonrider Mountain except Yu Longzi. He could even massacre the whole sect with the “Dream Butterfly True Scripture” alone.

“Oh well. The world is like a dream, pain and joy last but a moment. So why should I care or worry?”

Ye Qing rose to his feet and patted away the dirt on his clothes. Then, he looked at Giggle and laughed. “Let’s go!”

As Ye Qing took his leave, the hill he was resting on suddenly scattered into countless butterflies. But unlike Dream Master’s colorful, soul-stealing butterflies, his were invisible, formless, and indistinct. Some people might not even call them butterflies.

The next moment, all of the butterflies soared toward the east where the first ray of dawn broke.

Chapter 682: The Water of The Death Sea Plummets From Above

The inner regions of Bei Mo were extremely dangerous. The black windstorms, extreme day-night temperature fluctuations, and harsh environment were bad enough, but it was also home to some of the most dangerous Strangers and Anomalies in the world.

That was why Bei Mo was usually devoid of people, and why it was labeled a forbidden zone in two countries.

But not now. Right now, one man was trekking through the forbidden zone whose name alone elicited terror on most people's faces.

As if that wasn't enough, he was just a young man.

The young man's gait was even, unhurried, and as steady as Mount Tai. The black wind shattered against his presence, the Strangers avoided him like the plague, and the villains hid in their holes when they heard of his arrival. His journey was so peaceful it was almost as if the terrors that haunted Bei Mo were just empty rumors and fanciful stories.

The young man was standing on top of a ridge when he looked up at the burning sun and muttered to himself, "It's March now... the Death Sea should surface any moment now."

The young man was Ye Qing, of course. He made a beeline for the inner regions of Bei Mo after leaving Dragonrider Mountain.

The Death Sea was located at Bei Mo, and it appeared once every sixty years. However, it was impossible to say exactly when and where in the Death Sea it would appear.

Judging from its previous appearances though, the Death Sea most likely would appear at the inner regions. That was why he went there.

Sure, he was relying on luck to a certain extent, but Ye Qing wasn't worried that he wouldn't be able to find the Death Sea. While the location and timing of the Death Sea's appearance was uncertain, when it did appear, the environment would warp in a way that it was visible from tens, maybe even hundreds of kilometers away. Even if he was unlucky, he should be able to find it eventually.

"Hahaha..."

Suddenly, a sand dune behind Ye Qing rustled unnaturally, and Giggle popped out of the sand. It was giggling while carrying a porcelain bottle on its head.

Ye Qing was feeling a little anxious before this, but Giggle's happy giggles wiped it all away like a cool, refreshing breeze.

"Oh well. I might as well catch some rest."

Ye Qing shrugged and sat down on the sand just like that. After producing a jar of wine from his Nature's Shell and pouring some for Giggle, he began drinking at his leisure.

It was certainly an experience to drink with the yellow sand in the backdrop, and the burning sun above his head.

Ye Qing's cheeks were slightly reddened by the time he and Giggie had down the jar of wine. Giggie in particular looked as red as an apple, swaying left and right while hugging the porcelain bottle against its chest.

Suddenly, Giggie stopped swaying and stared in a certain direction. Ye Qing too sensed something and slowly got to his feet.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh...

Ye Qing had no words to describe the strange noise coming from the horizon. It sounded like something in between a cavalry charge composed of at least ten thousand troops and rushing sea waves.

Slowly, the noise grew louder and louder. Both the earth and the sky were shaking violently. It was at this moment a vast, deep blue that stretched from end to end emerged from the line that separated heaven and earth. It looked like some sort of haze, but grand and majestic.

It wasn't until the blue came closer that Ye Qing realized that it wasn't a haze. No, it was the sea. Even more stunning was the fact that this was no landlubbing sea. Oh no, it existed in the sky.

Imagine a vast ocean of water pouring down from the skies above. How incredible and inspiring was that?

In ancient times, a celestial poet once said, "You do not know until you have seen the Yellow River pouring down from the heavens and becoming one with the sea, ceaseless and unending."

The imagery that line evoked was pretty amazing, but compared to the literal sea-in-the-sky before his eyes? It was the difference between a river and a sea. Literally.

The sea rages above the heavens, red dust churning within its gargantuan body. Ye Qing was still stunned when the sea waters rolled over his head and spread behind him.

He had never felt smaller than he had now.

"... No wonder they call it the Sea Above The Sky. I didn't think it would be so literal," Ye Qing murmured in a daze.

The "Sea Above The Sky" was the Death Sea's other name. However, this name was only seen in certain older books, and it was probably one too many syllables compared to Death Sea. Long story short, most people preferred to call it the Death Sea.

In fact, Ye Qing had seen the name "Sea Above The Sky" in an old book. At the time, he wondered how it was possible for a sea to appear in the sky and tried to imagine how amazing it would look.

Reality proved stranger than fiction when he finally saw it with his own eyes. Not even his wildest imaginations was a pale shadow compared to the sight in front of him.

There was a reason why people said it was better to be well-traveled than well-read. He could explore the world for a couple thousand years, and he doubted he would find another scenery that could surpass this.

The Death Sea was known as the Sea Above The Sky because it literally existed in the sky. Naturally, the Death Sea was known as the Death Sea for a good reason.

Ye Qing could sense an unbelievable concentration of death qi from the waters above his head. He could not sense any signs of life from the sea whatsoever.

Moreover, he could feel himself losing vitality by the second as he stood under the death sea. It was quite powerful too. All around him, he could sense the already barren desert being stripped of its remnant vitality.

While the inner regions of Bei Mo were a wasteland, that didn't mean it was completely devoid of life. There were at least some creatures who stubbornly weathered the harsh environment and clung to life.

Now, those creatures were dying en masse.

It felt as if the entire region was plummeting toward death.

Of course, the Death Sea's debilitating effects were nothing to him. With his body and vitality, he could stay under the Death Sea for a very long time.

Most others could not claim the same, however. In fact, the weak ones would have died and turned into a pile of skins and bones already.

As if that wasn't enough, the death qi was still increasing in power. It probably wouldn't stop until the Death Sea was done spreading.

This explained why Death Sea was by far the more common name.

"This is a problem. If the Death Sea is in the sky... does that mean I have to fly up there to search for the Dark Overlord's inheritance?"

Ye Qing finally recalled his objective after his shock subsided. He could not help but frown deeply as he stared at the deathly sea above his head.

"Hahaha! Finally! It feels like I've waited for an entire season! Damn if this sea isn't gorgeous."

Ye Qing was still thinking when a haughty, unruly laughter interrupted his train of thoughts. It was so loud that it lingered in the area like thunder.

"That's Madman Chu's voice!" Ye Qing lifted an eyebrow and looked in the direction where the voice had come from.

The owner of the voice was none other than Madman Chu, the guy who had happily insulted Mistress Qu of the Li Hentian Palace and more in the Ghost Tower.

He could only hear his voice though. The man himself was nowhere to be found.

It was because he was a good few kilometers away from Ye Qing.

"You're early, Brother Chu!"

As soon as Madman Chu finished, an innocent yet cold voice of a child boomed throughout the area.

It was none other than Six Yins Superior, the one who had joined in on the mockery of Mistress Qu. “Superior” was an honorifics though. His actual moniker was Six Yins Boy.

“What can I do? If I’m late, I won’t get even a cold fart when all is said and done!”

Madman Chu laughed loudly before asking, “By the way, has that old hag from Li Hentian Palace arrived yet?”

“Of course! I ran into her just a few days ago!” Six Yins Boy answered.

As if on cue, flower petals rained from above and assaulted everyone’s nostrils with flowery fragrance. Women dressed in white robes and tulle flew over from the distance like celestials.

“See? Speak of the bitches!” Six Yins Boy cackled derisively. “Did they think this is a temple fair or something? Look at the number of people they brought! There are even two monks among them!”

Madman Chu and Six Yins Boy had come alone, but Li Hentian Palace? They numbered at least a few dozen people, and their leader was one other than Mistress Qu.

Besides Mistress Qu herself, there were two people that caught everyone’s attention not because they were dressed flamboyantly, but because they were monks.

One of the monks had a large head and a pair of big ears. He was wearing a red monk’s robe with an open collar. He was also smiling from ear to ear.

The second monk had an ordinary face and a wooden expression. One glance was all anyone needed to know that he was the introvert type.

“Huh. I actually know these two! What a coincidence!” Ye Qing exclaimed with surprise as he stared at the two monks[1].

“I already know that you’re a degenerate, but monks? Your taste really is quite something, old hag!”

Madman Chu mocked Mistress Qu without any reservation or hesitation whatsoever.

Chapter 683: Warriors Gathering

“Madman Chu, mouths exist so that people can speak. If you can’t speak, then you might as well shut up. It’s better for others and yourself,” Mistress Qu replied with a frosty expression.

“I’m just speaking the truth. What, the monk isn’t your lover?” Madman Chu shrugged.

Before Mistress Qu could say anything, the monk with a large head and big ears guffawed.

“Hahaha... you’re a joker, benefactor. This poor monk does wish that he is Mistress Qu’s lover, but alas, that is not my destiny!”

Madman Chu's interest was piqued by the monk's answer. "Oh? You're quite the interesting one, monk. What is your name?"

"This poor monk is Laughing Buddha. Well met, Benefactor Chu," the monk answered with a chuckle.

That's right. The two monks were none other than Laughing Buddha and the Holy Son of Maitreya, the two monks Ye Qing had met back at the Graveyard of Demons.

"You're Laughing Buddha of the Six Venerable Ones of the Maitreya Sect?!" Madman Chu exclaimed in surprise.

"It is I," Laughing Buddha confirmed.

"Strange. I never knew that the Li Hentian Palace and the Maitreya Sect are acquaintances. How on earth did you get involved with the old hag, monk?" Madman Chu voiced his puzzlement.

The Six Venerable Ones of the Maitreya Sect were the Laughing Buddha, the Weeping Buddha, the Blood Buddha, the Killing Buddha, the Mad Buddha, and the Audacious Buddha. All six of them were Grandmasters. In the Maitreya Sect, they were venerated monks with tens of thousands of people at their beck and call. In the *jianghu*, each and every one of them was an infamous villain who struck fear in any warrior who heard their name.

The Maitreya Sect was one of the Nine Demonic Ways. Naturally, their reputation was anything but good.

Despite the Maitreya Sect's infamy, not all of the six monks were bloodthirsty bastards. Obviously, Blood Buddha and Killing Buddha were the most bloodthirsty of them all. Blood Buddha enjoyed drinking human blood, and Killing Buddha killed others for pleasure. They were both terrible monsters who had committed many horrible crimes and killed countless people in the *jianghu*.

Mad Buddha and Audacious Buddha were less chaotic evil and more chaotic neutral. Mad Buddha was literally mad, and Audacious Buddha was beyond audacious. Although not nearly as bloodthirsty as their demonic peers, they were slaves of their own whims and acted as they pleased. As a result, they had committed more or less as many good as they had evil. They were not as infamous as Blood Buddha or Killing Buddha, but their reputation certainly wasn't good either.

Finally, Weeping Buddha and Laughing Buddha were the least infamous of them all. Despite being members of a demonic sect, they rarely committed evil and even kept a low profile for some reason. It was why many members of the *jianghu* did not even know that Weeping Buddha and Laughing Buddha existed, and why Madman Chu had failed to recognize Laughing Buddha immediately.

Even fewer people knew that Weeping Buddha and Laughing Buddha were, despite their relative anonymity, the strongest of the six of them.

Madman Chu did not care that Laughing Buddha was strong though. He was asking purely because he was curious how the two of them got together when the Li Hentian Palace and the Maitreya Sect, as far as he knew, did not share any ties whatsoever.

“I owed Mistress Qu a favor, and she invited me to join her on her trip to the Death Sea. So I did,” Laughing Buddha answered.

“Hahaha... do you even know why the old hag invited you to the Death Sea?” Madman Chu asked.

“Not at all!” Laughing Buddha replied.

“You didn’t ask?” Madman Chu got even more curious.

“I did, but she didn’t tell me,” Laughing Buddha answered honestly.

“Hahaha... the old hag’s no innocent flower, you know? I can’t believe you would follow her without knowing anything. What if she’s planning to stab you in the back?” Madman Chu blatantly tried to drive a wedge between them.

“Your audacity knows no bounds, Madman Chu! Cease your lies, or we will take action against you!” Mistress Qu interjected in a frosty tone.

“What’s wrong? Was I spot on?”

Madman Chu did not care for her threat at all. “You hear that, monk? That’s the whine of a guilty conscience. I would watch my back if I were you!”

“You jest, Benefactor Chu. I know very well that Mistress Qu is not such a woman, and this poor monk isn’t foolish either.”

Laughing Buddha said smilingly, “And while it is true that I have no idea if this incident will lead to good or bad tidings, your and Benefactor Six Yins’ presence confirmed to me that it is good.”

“Haha! You say that, and yet absolutes do not exist in this world. I hope you won’t come to regret your decision,” Madman Chu replied noncommittally.

The Dark Overlord’s inheritance was definitely an incredible boon, but just because it was an incredible boon did not mean that it was beneficial to everyone.

As if to change the subject, Madman Chu looked at the Holy Son of Maitreya and asked, “Oh right, who is that little monk beside you? Is he your disciple? He’s quite strong for his age. Barring any accidents, it’s only a matter of time before he becomes a Grandmaster.”

Laughing Buddha laughed. “You jest again, Benefactor Chu. As if such luck would ever befall this poor monk. He is the Holy Son of our sect.”

The Holy Son of Maitreya nodded politely at Madman Chu.

“He’s your sect’s Holy Son? Now that I think about it, I heard that you have a Holy Son who cultivates the Vow of Silence. Is he the one?” Madman Chu raised an eyebrow.

“That is correct,” Laughing Buddha replied.

“No wonder he carries himself with such boldness and poise! He’s definitely going to be stronger than you when he comes into his full power, monk!” Madman Chu complimented the Holy Son without reservation.

“But of course! It would be stranger if our Holy Son turned out to be weaker than this poor monk!” Laughing Buddha laughed.

Despite their praises, the Holy Son of Maitreya himself did not bat an eyelid. It was almost as if they were praising someone else.

“I don’t understand why you brought him with you though, monk. If something were to happen to your Holy Son, then you would have committed a grave sin, no?” Madman Chu asked.

“An uncut jade will not form a vessel for use[1], and a vessel that has not endured the wind and frost will never be a great vessel. That is why some tribulations are necessary.”

Laughing Buddha said unhurriedly, “Besides, Our Holy Son is blessed by the heavens and our Buddha. I am sure that he will overcome any coming trials.”

“Hahaha! Well said! A *jianghu* warrior who stays cooped up in the safety of one’s home could never become a great vessel. On the other hand, some blood and tribulations can transform even the most rotten wood into something great!”

Madman Chu laughed loudly. “You know what, I’ve decided that I like you, monk!”

“Hahaha... this is our first meeting, but this poor monk feels like he’s meeting an old friend as well.” Laughing Buddha smiled widely. “I hope we can enjoy some fine wine together one day, benefactor.”

“Oh! You’re a monk who enjoys wine and meat? Good! Good!” Madman Chu laughed even harder when he heard this.

It was at this moment Six Yins Boy suddenly spoke up. “Look. More are coming.”

The group turned to look, and they saw two men walking over from the distance. One of them was an elegant, cultured scholar carrying a book in one hand, and the other was a Taoist wearing Taoist robes. He had an outstanding appearance that made him look like a celestial from the heavens.

“That’s Chu Wangsun and Yun Qingxiao!” Xin Yins Boy exclaimed in surprise.

“Tsk tsk... I did not know that the disciple of the Chief Libationist are good enough friends with the Dao Child of the San Qing Temple to recruit him for this venture.”

Yun Qingxiao was the Dao Child of the East Kunlun San Qing Temple and the fifth named warrior on the Human Champions Ranking, and the San Qing Temple was known as one of the Three Temples of Dao together with the True Martial Sect and the Dragon Tiger Mountain. In fact, it was once known as the ancestral court of Taoism before East Kunlun and West Kunlun split into two factions.

The San Qing Temple were composed of three groups, and they were known as Yu Qing, Shang Qing and Tai Qing. All three groups usually secluded themselves in the mountains to cultivate the body, mind, and heart. Unless the world was in chaos, the San Qing Temple rarely showed their faces. It would not be wrong to say that they were cut off from the rest of the world.

Of course, no one dared to underestimate or look down on the San Qing Temple despite their seclusion. Since Yun Qingxiao was this generation's Dao Child, he must be quite something.

Although Yun Qingxiao was "just" the fifth warrior on the Human Champions Ranking, that did not mean that his strength was just that. His rank was low because he kept a low profile and rarely showed himself in the *jianghu*, much less fought against others.

As far as everyone knew, Yun Qingxiao had only fought three times in public. Each battle was earth-shattering, however.

Chapter 684: Rain of Bodies

During his first battle, Yun Qingxiao singlehandedly eliminated the Twelve Forts of the Eight Rivers and slew a total of twelve Half-Step Grandmasters. The rivers ran as red as blood that day.

During his second battle, Yun Qingxiao fought against the notorious rapist known as A Flower and pursued him across a distance of hundreds of kilometers. In the end, he was able to slay the Grandmaster as a Half-Step Grandmaster.

During his third battle, Yun Qingxiao offended the Three Lives Sect of the thirty-six unorthodox sects and caused them to pit their full might—three Grandmasters and dozens of Half-Step Grandmasters—against him. Despite overwhelming odds, Yun Qingxiao was able to break out of the encirclement and slew one Grandmaster and five Half-Step Grandmasters. As a result, the Three Lives Sect suffered immense losses to both their strength and their reputation.

Publicly, Yun Qingxiao had only fought three times in his life. However, these three battles were enough to impress the entire *jianghu*.

Not everyone could overcome the gap between cultivation stages and defeat a superior, and the chasm only got wider the stronger one was.

In fact, many people believed that Yun Qingxiao was stronger than the fourth-placed Chu Wangsun, the third-placed Child of the Buddha of Lanke Temple, and the second-placed Child of the Demon of Demonic Mountain. In fact, they believed he could contend against the Little Heavenly Master of Dragon Tiger Mountain[1] for first place.

Of course, the reality was that Chu Wangsun, the Child of the Buddha, the Child of the Demon and the Little Heavenly Master all possessed the strength to slay Grandmasters as a Half-Step Grandmaster. They all had a body count to prove it, so it was impossible to say who was stronger and who wasn't until they actually fought.

Yun Qingxiao's strength was unquestionable though. He was absolutely one of the absolute best among his peers, and he possessed a bright and boundless future.

In any case, no one expected Chu Wangsun to recruit the mysterious and low-key Yun Qingxiao for this venture. It was so surprising that even Six Yins Boy, Madman Chu and more were caught off guard.

For the first time, the quiet Holy Son of Maitreya looked up and stared at the two young men as well.

The Holy Son of Maitreya had not become a Grandmaster yet, so of course he was in the Human Champions Ranking as well. However, he was even more mysterious and low-key than Yun Qingxiao since he had almost never showed his face in the *jianghu*.

When Ye Qing met him for the first time, the Holy Son of Maitreya was only a middle-stage Spirit Purifier. At that level, he couldn't even enter the Human Champions Ranking. It had only been a few months since that day, and now he was a Half-Step Grandmaster with seemingly full control over his powers. The difference was night and day to put it mildly.

The Holy Son of Maitreya was currently ranked sixteenth on the latest update of the Human Champions Ranking, but that was only because the Holy Son of Maitreya had never fought someone before. No one knew exactly how strong he was.

Maybe it was because geniuses naturally attracted each other, but Chu Wangsun and Yun Qingxiao instinctively met the Holy Son of Maitreya's eyes when he looked at them. However, since neither of them were combative people, the stirrings in their eyes subsided so quickly it was almost as if nothing had happened.

Chu Wangsun and Yun Qingxiao nodded at Madman Chu and Laughing Buddha after stopping at a suitable spot. Then, they waited. Neither man seemed anxious or impatient in the slightest. In fact, they looked so calm and natural one could almost mistake them for a part of the scenery.

"Kekeke... youngsters these days are really something." Six Yins Boy cackled after glancing at the duo. Only he knew if his compliment was sincere or not.

Madman Chu chuckled. "Youngsters should be arrogant. A youngster who isn't arrogant might as well be an old man."

A couple more people showed up while they were conversing, but they seemed extremely wary of the group and stayed a good distance away from them.

That was fine by Madman Chu. He could not be arsed to spare cowards and weaklings any attention or energy. Another teatime passed, and Madman Chu asked, "It should be almost time for Sun Sovereign and those creepy bastards from Fengdu to show up, right?"

As if on cue, the world suddenly turned unbearably hot. The next moment, a gigantic fireball descended from above not unlike the sun itself. Its pressure was such that even powerful warriors such as Madman Chu, Six Yins Boy, Laughing Buddha and Mistress Qu flinched a little.

The fireball looked intimidating, but it elicited neither noise nor tremor when it landed on the ground. Two people appeared when the deadly flames faded into nothing.

One of them looked to be in his sixties. He had red hair, red eyebrows, and wore a red garment. His body looked thin, but he was dazzling and eye-catching like the sun itself.

The other person was fully wrapped inside a black robe. It was impossible to tell their shape, size, or even gender, and their aura resembled a black hole that constantly devoured the surrounding light. Not even Madman Chu and the other Grandmasters were able to peer through the black hole

and perceive the mysterious figure's true form with their spirit or eyes. All they could see was a patch of darkness.

"You're all here!" the red-haired old man said casually while shooting a glance at Ye Qing's hiding spot.

Even from a hundred meters away, Ye Qing still felt his eyes hurting like they were stabbed like needles, and his body heating up like he was being cooked inside a pot.

Ye Qing was astonished as a matter of course. Ever since he started cultivating the "Dream Butterfly True Scripture", his ability to hide himself had gone up considerably. The fact that Madman Chu, Laughing Buddha, Six Yins Boy and Mistress Qu hadn't discovered him was proof of his growth. However, this Sun Sovereign had discovered him as soon as he showed up. No wonder even the proud Madman Chu was treating the man with respect. His power demanded it if nothing else.

Thankfully, Sun Sovereign didn't seem interested in exposing him. He had looked away and said nothing after that glance.

"Sun Sovereign..."

On the other side, Madman Chu, Six Yins Boy, Laughing Buddha and Mistress Qu returned to their senses and saluted Sun Sovereign. Even the proud Chu Wangsun and Yun Qingxiao did not dare to treat him lightly and did the same thing.

"Where are the creepy bastards?" Sun Sovereign asked.

He was talking about the ghosts of Ghost Tower, of course.

"We haven't seen them yet," Mistress Qu answered.

"Hmph! I'm sure they're already here. They're just hiding in their mouse holes and waiting to stab us in the back," Madman Chu scoffed.

"Crafty plots and machinations are just a small way. There is nothing to worry about," Sun Sovereign said indifferently. His tone was calm, but his confidence was unmistakable. "Since the Death Sea has appeared, let us be off."

Before Madman Chu or anyone else could muster a response, Sun Sovereign grabbed the black-robed person beside him and shot into the sky.

When he got close to the Death Sea, a massive sea wave surged in his direction without any warning whatsoever.

From the ground, it looked as if the waters had suddenly rediscovered gravity and cascaded downward like a waterfall.

Sun Sovereign paid it no attention, however. He simply shone brighter and brighter like the rising sun. As a result, the wave evaporated before it could even get close to him.

The next moment, Sun Sovereign crashed into the Death Sea like a gigantic boulder made of sunlight. The impact caused massive waves that were easily over a hundred meters tall, but they

evaporated into steam before they could do anything. For a time, the entire area including the ground was covered in steam, and more than one person wondered in terror if the Death Sea would fall on top of their heads.

“Hahaha... Sun Sovereign is a real man alright!”

Madman Chu guffawed at the sight of this before cocking his head at Mistress Qu. “Sun Sovereign’s gone, old hag. Are you going?”

Mistress Qu harrumphed and did not deign to give him a reply. She waved a hand and ordered, “Let’s go,” before taking to the sky as well.

Mistress Qu and her subordinates’ flight wasn’t nearly as forceful as Sun Sovereign’s, but it was very beautiful. The way their dresses danced to the wind made them look like true celestials.

Madman Chu sighed as he watched the women for a moment. “I must admit that the women of Li Hentian Palace are quite pretty if nothing else. It’s a shame that...”

“No need for lamentations, Brother Chu. If you like them, you can always join them. With your strength, I’m sure they will happily submit their women to you. Who knows, it might even be possible for you to become their head,” Six Yins Boy teased.

“You’re kidding. I have zero interest in old hags.” Madman Chu shook his head. “Besides, what use is a woman to a warrior? Haven’t you heard that womenfolk are the tomb of all heroes? They will only slow down my fists.”

“I’m lamenting not because I want them, but because most of these beautiful women are going to crumble into a pile of bones very soon.”

As if on cue, bloodcurdling screams suddenly broke out of the sky. Then, the women of Li Hentian Palace began plummeting to the ground like the rain.

Chapter 685: Flying To The Death Sea

It was gruesome the way the women splattered against the ground like eggs.

Madman Chu, Laughing Buddha and more did not try to save them not because they were all heartless, but because it could not be done.

They were already dead when they fell from the sky; their bodies turned into withered husks.

When they got close to the Death Sea, its deathly qi had pierced their defenses and turned them into a withered husk in an instant. There existed no medicine or art in the world that could save them.

This was why the Death Sea was labeled a forbidden zone. This was why this forbidden zone was open only to Grandmasters and ultimate geniuses.

More bodies were still falling from the sky. Even with Mistress Qu yelling at the top of her lungs, she could only save a handful of them.

Not only that, the Death Sea had conjured a wave and sent it surging toward Mistress Qu and her people again.

“I’m taking my leave now, Benefactor Chu. May we meet again.”

Laughing Buddha gave Madman Chu a nod before climbing to the heavens using a number of lotus flowers that appeared underneath his feet. At the same time, a long-eared, round-bellied Buddha wearing a kind, benevolent smile on his face appeared in the sky, his laughter shaking both heaven and earth.

Wherever the Buddha’s light traveled, the death qi of the Death Sea receded. Then, Laughing Buddha made an absolute mudra and met the incoming wave. Before it could claim any lives, the infinite light of the Buddha forced it right back where it came from.

“Namo Bhavishya[1] Buddha...”

With a chant, Laughing Buddha protected everyone and disappeared into the Death Sea. The Holy Son of Maitreya was with him, of course.

The Maitreya Sect worshiped Maitreya, and Maitreya was known as the Future Buddha of Saha[2] in Mahayana Buddhism. That was why their official Buddhist chant was “Namo Bhavishya Buddha”.

Logically, the Maitreya Sect should not have become a sect of the Nine Demonic Ways considering that they worshiped the Maitreya Buddha and fell under Mahayana Buddhism[3]. The problem lay with the word “future”.

Dipamkara, Shakyamuni, and Maitreya are often depicted in a triad representing past, present, and future. Together, they formed the roots of all living beings.

However, the believers of the Maitreya Sect only worshiped Maitreya. They did not believe in either the Buddha of the past, Dipamkara, or the Buddha of the present, Shakyamuni. In their radical belief, they claimed that the past was dust, and the present was filthy beyond imagination. Only by worshiping Maitreya, the Buddha of the future could they be freed from the troubles of the world and obtain the ultimate bliss, forever.

Based on that logic, the believers of the Maitreya Sect proposed that one should end the current world so as to usher in the future. And how should they end the current world? Through destruction, of course. Only through destruction could rebirth be achieved.

Long story short, the believers of the Maitreya Sect were madmen. As they often colluded with the Way of Taiping to stir up trouble, they were eventually lambasted as heretics and villains by the *jianghu*

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Of course, not everyone in the Maitreya Sect believed that ushering in a new future meant destroying the current world. Some people believed that they should practice the holy arts of Maitreya with the body of the present so they would be ready when the future finally arrived.

Of the Six Venerable Ones, Laughing Buddha and Weeping Buddha were the only ones who fell under this category of belief. It was also why Laughing Buddha wasn’t infamous despite being a high-ranking member of a sect of the Nine Demonic Ways.

“This monk really is something!”

On the ground, Madman Chu paid Laughing Buddha a compliment before asking, “Do you wanna go first, or should I take the lead, Six Yins?”

“I’ll go. Please make sure that no one interferes with my work, okay?”

Six Yins Boy said smilingly and appeared in the air before he finished talking. When a sea wave crashed down on him, he let out an eerie cackle and thrust his palm forward.

A massive hand covered in green flames appeared in the air. Although it was burning like an inferno, it was so cold that it froze the sea wave in an instant. The palm continued to press upward until it hit the sea and froze an entire patch of its surface.

“Death Sea? Looks like a normal sea to me!” Six Yins Boy chuckled before diving into the Death Sea in a flash of green light. It wasn’t until several breaths later that the ice covering the sea surface finally receded, and the Death Sea resumed its violent activity.

“Hahaha! Take care, little ones. Try not to die up there.” Madman Chu glanced at Chu Wangsun and Yun Qingxiao as he laughed. “Goodbye!”

As he spoke, the earth shook like an earthquake, and Madman Chu abruptly appeared in the sky. He didn’t wait for a sea wave to hit him and threw a punch first.

Buzz!

The world shuddered, and the Death Sea depressed upward as if it was a piece of fabric.

“Hahaha! A punch like spring thunder is most auspicious! Here I go!”

With that, Madman Chu disappeared into the Death Sea as well.

After Madman Chu disappeared, thunder rumbled in the sky as if responding to his words.

“His punch has no sound because the sound is hidden inside his fist. Senior Chu’s fists have already reached perfection,” Yun Qingxiao remarked with feeling as he listened to the thunderous rumbles and felt the fist intent in the sky.

“His fist leaves a lasting reaction. It is quite extraordinary.”

Chu Wangsun lowered his book and commented, “Let’s go. After all the commotion they caused, I’m sure that a lot of people are looking this way. It will be troublesome if they decide to gather.”

“Agreed.”

Yun Qingxiao nodded and soared to the sky seemingly without any aid whatsoever. It was as if gravity did not exist in his book.

When a sea wave was about to hit him, three celebratory clouds grew out of the top of his head.

The three clouds were arranged in a triangular formation. It looked a little like he was wearing a hat of flowers.

The clouds were pure, flawless, and shielding his whole body. Somehow, the sea waters were unable to touch even a hair on his skin.

Like a fish in the water, he casually entered the Death Sea like it was his backyard.

If Yun Qingxiao's entrance looked cool and elegant, then Chu Wangsun's was much more brutal and simple. While gripping his book in one hand, he blasted his righteous qi into the sea, carved a way through the sea waves, and entered the Death Sea just like that.

It was about this time the prowlers finally made their move as well. At first, they were worried and afraid when they saw the disciples of Li Hentian Palace falling from the sky like the rain. When they saw how easy Yun Qingxiao and Chu Wangsun entered the Death Sea though, a dozen of them lost their fear and raced toward the Death Sea in a hurry.

They shouldn't have. Several people let out a bloodcurdling scream before turning into a withered husk and falling just like the Li Hentian Palace disciples. A couple more were caught by the sea waves and dragged into the Death Sea. Only they knew if they were alive or dead.

For a time, the scene was completely silent.

The deaths were like a bucket of ice water poured over the restless prowlers' heads. It was only now they recalled that they were no Chu Wangsun or Yun Qingxiao, and they were definitely not favored by the heavens. They were just ordinary warriors who got dogshit lucky and somehow obtained a Dark Overlord Token.

They weren't willing to retreat though. The Dark Overlord's inheritance was right in front of them. How could they give out without having tried everything?

Ye Qing knew exactly what they were thinking, but he didn't care. He had no desire to waste his energy and send them away using his abilities either.

Animals die for food, and humans die for fortune. This had been the ultimate truth since ancient times.

Ye Qing sighed. He had waited long enough. After staring at the Death Sea above his head for a moment, he jumped.

The Death Sea was located deep within Bei Mo, and normally, no one would venture to this location. However, Sun Sovereign, Madman Chu and Laughing Buddha hadn't bothered to hold back when they entered the Death Sea, nor had they hidden their energies when they flew over here. Grandmasters were one with the world and so could naturally detect one another. It was very possible that their movements and activities had already caught the attention of some other elites.

In fact, Ye Qing noticed several waves of spirit and energy sweeping across the area after Six Yins Boy and Madman Chu were gone. Clearly, they belonged to powerful warriors.

Although the Ghost Tower had done well to keep the matter regarding the Dark Overlord's inheritance under wraps—everyone had sworn an Oath of Burden to keep the matter a secret—but if Ye Qing had learned one thing after arriving in this world, it was that there was always a way to circumvent or overcome an obstacle. It was also possible that some people had learned of the Dark Overlord's inheritance or the secret of the Death Sea through some other avenues.

In any case, the people were gathering, and where there were people, there was conflict. He did not want to be around when the secret of Dark Overlord's inheritance was finally exposed either, so the sooner he entered the Death Sea, the better.

Chapter 686: Smiling Death

The Death Sea was floating in the sky. It might look close, but it was actually quite far away from the ground.

Therefore, anyone without a good movement art or a flying Strange Artifact would not be able to enter the Death Sea.

Ye Qing's movement art wasn't his best, but it wasn't his worst either. Combined with the fact that he had a vast reservoir of true qi, flying into the Death Sea was no problem for him.

The closer he got to the Death Sea, the thicker the death qi in the air became. They felt like greedy leeches that continuously drained away his vitality and vigor.

If the death qi everyone felt on the ground was a spring rain, then the death qi when he was about halfway to the Death Sea was akin to a rainstorm, and the death qi when he was less than fifty meters away was practically a raging river. Such was its strength and flow that even he with his level of body felt extremely uncomfortable.

If even he was feeling like this, those weaker than him in terms of cultivation stage, true qi, body, or all of the above could only fare worse. He did not doubt for a second that the weaklings would be sucked dry as soon as they got close.

As if that wasn't bad enough, this was just the second step to enter the Death Sea.

There was the massive sea wave as well.

Ye Qing was about thirty meters away from the sea surface when the Death Sea suddenly started churning violently, and a massive wave abruptly poured down from the sky.

It was truly a spectacle.

Ye Qing looked up, lifted his hand, and clenched his fist. He launched a diagonal punch toward the sea wave that was moments away from sweeping him away.

His energies instantly formed a wave breaker above his head.

Divide the flow, and the current would surely lose its power. Hence, "Divide".

The sea wave crashed against Divide with a loud boom. Sea water scattered everywhere, and mist permeated the air.

There was nothing except air below Ye Qing. As a result of the crash, he fell about one-sixth of a meter before ripples appeared underneath his feet.

Ye Qing remained calm, however. He simply pushed his fist forward another inch.

One inch was enough to generate wind and thunder.

One inch was enough to push the rolling sea wave back into the Death Sea.

From the ground, he looked like a god pushing back the raging tide with one punch. It was both incredible and awe-inspiring.

For a time, the people still on the ground could only stare at his back, awestruck.

Right before Ye Qing would enter the Death Sea, a gigantic, blood red hand appeared out of seemingly nowhere and made a grab for Ye Qing.

Its timing was perfect. It was right at the point where Ye Qing had spent his strength, and new strength wasn't generated yet.

“Stay with me.”

A gentle, seductive voice said as a terrifying aura enveloped him from all sides, and the gigantic hand closed in on him.

The danger had come out of nowhere, but Ye Qing did not panic in the slightest. In response to the grab, he let out a small grunt and mustered in vigor.

The bloody hand in the air abruptly froze for seemingly no reason whatsoever. It lasted no more than a fraction of a second, but it was enough for Ye Qing to break free and disappear into the Death Sea, all the while leaving many afterimages that made him difficult to track.

It was only after Ye Qing was completely gone that the bloody fingers finally clenched into a fist. It elicited such a sound that some of the warriors on the ground had to cover their faces from a sudden, powerful gale.

“Huh? Interesting...”

The voice rang again, and it was tinged with surprise and curiosity. The owner wasn't expecting that Ye Qing would be able to break free from her grasp.

It was at this moment an extraordinarily beautiful woman appeared from the horizon. She had red hair and wore a red dress. Her snow white skin made her look like a fairy shrouded by fire or a demoness who was covered in blood—demonic, bewitching, and intoxicating.

“Can someone please tell me what is inside the Death Sea? Why are you all gathered here?”

It didn't look like the woman was moving quickly, but in reality, she had appeared in front of the group in just the blink of an eye.

There were some who were entranced by the woman's beauty, but there were also some who noticed the danger they were in and turned as pale as a sheet. One of them—did he recognize the woman?—immediately turned tail and tried to escape.

Unfortunately, he began deflating as soon as he started moving. It was almost as if he wasn't human, but a leaky waterskin. It wasn't long before all that was left of him was his skin.

The man did not seem to notice his state, however. He continued to run even after he had transformed into a human skin.

A hundred meters later, the human skin finally collapsed on the ground, unmoving. He would never stand again.

Those who were running or those who were planning to run away subconsciously stopped in their tracks. The death was so horrifying that their self-preservation instincts took over before they knew it.

Cold sweat began pouring down everyone's head. Even the slow ones were staring at the woman with their mouths agape, afraid.

"It looks like you do know something. Would someone please tell me what's inside the Death Sea?"

The woman's smile resembled a blooming flower. One that only grew in the darkest depths of hell.

Her voice was still ringing in the air when she crossed what looked like sixty meters of distance in an instant and appeared behind a man who was trying to run away earlier.

"Can you tell me what I want to know?" The woman whispered beside the man's ear with a smile as beautiful as a flower.

The man stiffened. They were so close that he could feel her warm breath tickling his ear and smell the quiet fragrance that was her scent, but temptation was the absolutely last thing on his mind right now. Not only that, he felt so cold he was surprised he hadn't turned into ice yet.

"It's... it's nothing," the man replied stiffly.

"If it's nothing, then why did you run away just now?" the woman asked gently.

"Is it really nothing, or did you just not want to tell me?"

"It's not like that... I—" The man was still trying to swindle^[1] his way out of this situation when suddenly, he stopped talking altogether.

It was because the woman was now grabbing his skull.

"I see you don't wish to tell me," she said smilingly.

Great terror suddenly burst inside his chest. "Mer—"

His head exploded like an overripe melon before he could finish, tainting the ground in red and white matter. Strangely, the gore did not touch the woman at all.

"He didn't want to tell me the truth. That's fine. Is there anyone here who's willing to enlighten me?"

Still smiling, the woman slowly scanned the rest of the group. Just looking at her bright smile, you would not think that she just murdered a man a moment ago.

No one said a thing for a time. They were so silent it was as if they were already dead.

Suddenly, five warriors attacked the woman at the same time. Someone shouted, "She's only one person! We need to attack her together, or we're all going to die!"

The five warriors just so happened to surround the woman from all sides. When they attacked, they did not hold back.

While they were no match for the likes of Chu Wangsun or Yun Qingxiao, anyone who dared to show their face here was at least a middle-stage Spirit Master. Naturally, their full-powered attacks were nothing to scoff at.

For an instant, the rest of the group looked sorely tempted. Then, reality poured down their heads like a bucket of cold water and chilled them to the core.

The five warriors abruptly deflated as if an invisible hand was crushing their bodies. They started spraying blood out of every orifice for seemingly no reason whatsoever.

The blood did not fall to the ground. Instead, they flew up into the air and floated for a moment.

Smiling, the woman snapped her fingers and caused the blood to shoot toward the five warriors like powerful arrows.

Pssh pssh pssh!

The five warriors were grievously wounded to begin with. They all died after the blood arrows skewered them like pincushions.

“Sigh. Why won’t you just answer my question?”

The woman brushed her silky black hair with one hand while staring at the five corpses on the ground. Her smile was only growing brighter by the second.

“Would someone just please answer my question already? Otherwise, I’m not going to hold back anymore.”

Everyone turned as pale as death when they heard this.

“A cup of wine floating underneath the white clouds, a free soul wandering heaven and earth...”

It was at this moment a lazy, unfettered voice cut through the razor sharp tension.

The voice had reverberated as if it came from a far distance, but by the time it faded, the owner of the voice was already standing before them.

“Why all the blood and violence when there are good mountains, waters, wine and scenery to enjoy? Let’s talk it out, shall we?”

Chapter 687: Little Heavenly Master of Dragon Tiger Mountain

The newcomer looked to be an ordinary-looking youngster around twenty three or four years old. He was dressed in a burlap outfit, and his hair was rolled up into a Taoist bun. He was carrying a rusted iron sword on his left waist, and a wine gourd on his right. At first glance, he looked so average he could melt into any crowd he entered without a trace.

The one and only thing that stood out about him was the black donkey he was riding.

The black donkey was as big as a horse and looked extremely healthy. It was also strong and muscular with pitch black hair that shone like water under sunlight. Its eyes were as big as bronze bells, and there was a proud, intelligent glint in his eyes that resembled a human’s.

Unlike most donkeys, this one had a pair of horns growing out of its skull. Crescent-shaped and standing perfectly parallel to each other, they formed the shape of a full moon. Some sort of black light was gleaming in between the horns as well. It was obvious at first glance that this was no ordinary donkey.

The contrast made the youngster look even more mundane than he already was.

It was at this moment the youngster spotted the corpses littered around the woman and removed his wine gourd. After enjoying a small sip of wine, he ranted at the black donkey, "It's all your fault. If you moved a little faster, we could've prevented a few innocent lives from being lost. Now, it's too late."

"I told you to walk faster, but no, you just had to throw a fit. These people's deaths are on your conscience, you hear me?"

"Snort."

The black donkey let out a loud snort as human-like disdain entered its eyes. Then, it kicked backward as if it was trying to throw the youngster away from its back.

The youngster did not budge an inch, however. He patted the black donkey's head and said, "That's all it takes to piss you off, White? How old do you think you are, three? If you keep this up, I'm gonna turn you into a donkey hotpot, you hear me? It's been a long time since I had a donkey hotpot, so don't you dare tempt me!"

Having failed to throw the youngster off its back, the black donkey bent its knees and sat on the ground just like that. At the same time, it covered up its ear canals with its long ears and licked some of the sand clinging to its lips into its mouth, chewing and paying no attention to the youngster's incessant rants.

Can't hear you~ can't hear you~ the tortoise is chanting sutras~

A while later, when the youngster saw that he had failed to elicit any reaction from the black donkey, he let out a long sigh. "You're lucky that I'm a handsome, strong, and kind-hearted master. Otherwise, I really would've turned you into a donkey hotpot! I really gotta steel my heart sometimes, dammit..."

The crowd could not help but exchange confused glances as they listened to the man's nonsensical rants. The razor sharp tension from before had disappeared before they knew it.

"What are you doing here, Zhang Lingyang? Shouldn't you be napping at Dragon Tiger Mountain right now?"

The woman finally interrupted the youngster's incessant rants.

"I know right? This place is full of sand, stone, and more sand! The sun is hot, the wind is dry, and even the scenery grates on you after a while! It's nowhere nearly as comfortable as Dragon Tiger Mountain!"

The youngster—Zhang Lingyang—slowly slid off the donkey's back and sighed deeply. "But my master said that there's a 'great opportunity' waiting for me at the Death Sea and insisted that I

come no matter what. He even threatened to kick me out of the sect if I refused. What can I do? I can only comply with his wishes.”

The warriors’ mouths slowly fell open as they listened. They looked like they could not believe their ears.

If before the name “Zhang Lingyang” only evoked a sense of déjà vu in them, now they knew exactly who he was.

There was only one person in the entire world who was called Zhang Lingyang and a member of the Dragon Tiger Mountain. He was the champion of the Human Champions Ranking and the one they called the Little Heavenly Master of the Heavenly Master Mansion of Dragon Tiger Mountain.

Zhang Lingyang, the “Little Heavenly Master” was favored by the heavens since birth. It was said that purple qi came from the east, the sun stood wide and bright in the sky, and all sorts of strange phenomena appeared during his birth.

The current Senior Heavenly Master of Heavenly Master Mansion had personally descended the mountain to meet Zhang Lingyang, and the first thing he said upon seeing him was, “This boy is extraordinary. He will surely carry Dragon Tiger Mountain to great heights.” He would proceed to name him “Zhang Lingyang (To Surpass The Sun)” and recruit him as a direct disciple.

Zhang Lingyang did not disappoint. He had Reforged his body in one day, Invoked his qi in nine days, Augmented his vessels perfectly in thirty-six days, and Refined his astral qi in seventy-two days. To say his talent far exceeded his peers would be an understatement.

In fact, Zhang Lingyang’s progress was so quick that the Senior Heavenly Master had to seal his cultivation temporarily to prevent issues with his foundation or mind. He wasn’t allowed to break into the next cultivation stage until he had tempered both fundamentals properly.

Zhang Lingyang’s cultivation speed slowed down after that, but even so, his strength far surpassed everyone as his name implied. There were few among his peers who could even catch a glimpse of his back, much less stand shoulder-to-shoulder beside him.

Not only that, Zhang Lingyang had never lost a single battle since he embarked on the journey of a warrior, and it wasn’t like he only fought against weaklings. He had fought against Holy Sons and Daughters, Dao Children and Children of the Demon, and even powerful Grandmasters.

This was why his position was unshakeable since he became the number one warrior of the Human Champions Ranking six years ago. Countless people had tried to dethrone him, but every effort was met with abject failure.

Back in the present, everyone here had heard of Zhang Lingyang at least once in their life. No one expected it to be this ordinary-looking youngster, however.

“You came early, senior Rakshasa. Have you figured out what treasures are hiding in the Death Sea yet?” Zhang Lingyang ignored the crowd’s looks and asked the woman.

“Rakshasa...? She’s the Blood Rakshasa?!” Those who hadn’t guessed it already blurted out as soon as they heard the title.

Blood Rakshasa was the eighty-fourth warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking. Her background was unknown, but people had guessed that she was a member of the Blood God Sect of the Nine Demonic Ways because they practiced blood manipulation.

Blood Rakshasa was a highly emotional, very chaotic neutral person whose behavior was mostly based on her whims. She wasn't truly a villain, but she definitely wasn't a good person either. The fact that she killed without batting an eyelid but gave her victims repeated warnings earlier was proof of that.

"I was just asking them just now, wasn't I? You're the one who interrupted me!" Blood Rakshasa shot him a sideways glance that seemed capable of stealing one's soul.

She was a Grandmaster and a named warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking, but not even she dared to underestimate Zhang Lingyang, champion of the Human Champions Ranking. Otherwise, she would've attacked him already.

Zhang Lingyang coughed. "Ahem... what did I want to say again? Right! One should not resort to murder and violence as their first option."

He looked embarrassed. It was impossible to say if it was because Blood Rakshasa's side-eye was too sexy, or something else.

The group of warriors let out a sigh of relief when they saw this, but Zhang Lingyang's next words plunged back to hell all too soon.

"Instead, we should practice diplomacy before violence. If they tell us, then all is well. If not, then you can kill them to your heart's content."

Everyone: "..."

Is this what a famous warrior of the righteous sect should say?

Hell, is this what a human being should say?

"How can you say that, Little Heavenly Master? You're a representative of Dragon Tiger Mountain and a member of the orthodoxy!"

"Yes, I'm a member of the orthodoxy, but you're not, are you? Why should I save your lives?"

Zhang Lingyang replied matter-of-factly. "Besides, I am giving you a chance. I'm persuading Blood Rakshasa to practice diplomacy before violence, aren't I? Or do you disagree with my solution and prefer it the other way around?"

Everyone: "... *Fuck, we can't refute that.*"

"So? I'm giving you a chance here. Is no one going to speak up?" Blood Rakshasa shot Zhang Lingyang a curious look before asking.

No one answered her. A portion of them wanted to do as she said but couldn't because of the Oath of Burden. The other portion was unwilling to give up the Dark Overlord's Token and the Dark Overlord's inheritance just like that.

And of course, the large majority of the group was a combination of both.

The silence continued for a while longer when suddenly, one man's eyes suddenly grew dazed and unfocused. At the same time, his face began contorting like he was in abject pain, and blood trailed down the corners of his eyes.

Zhang Lingyang lifted his eyebrows and dashed toward the man. Unfortunately, he was only halfway there when someone blocked his way. It was Blood Rakshasa, of course.

That short delay was enough. The man let out a bloodcurdling scream, and his head exploded like an overripe melon.

Chapter 688: Northern Spear King

"Sigh..."

Zhang Lingyang let out a sigh, but he didn't say anything.

Blood Rakshasa shot him another smile before turning around and asking, "So? Did you find anything, Soul Seeker?"

The silhouette of a man abruptly manifested into existence. It was quite difficult to identify his features as he was almost fully transparent. In fact, one could see light penetrating through his body a little. It was almost like he was a soul or a Yin God.

"No. He swore an Oath of Burden, so I couldn't find anything even after I scoured his soul."

The man's voice was as wispy as his existence, apparently. "This indirectly proves that they know what lies within the Death Sea though."

"The Oath of Burden? This is getting interesting." Blood Rakshasa glanced at the rest of the group and asked, "So, you've all sworn the Oath of Burden before? Is that why you couldn't reveal the secret to anyone?"

Everyone exchanged a glance with each other before nodding. They had no choice.

"No wonder," Blood Rakshasa exclaimed in realization, "but why didn't you tell me sooner? If you did, then there would be no need for all this bloodshed, is there?"

Everyone: "... *Are you kidding me right now, girl? You killed them before they got a chance to say anything! Anything!*

"Anyway, does that mean we won't be able to get anything from them?" Blood Rakshasa frowned slightly.

"That is correct," Soul Seeker answered.

"What should we do then?" Blood Rakshasa glanced at the crowd.

You should let us go, duh! Everyone shouted inside their heads in unison.

“If you can’t be of use to us...” Blood Rakshasa spoke up after thinking for a moment, “... then why should I let you live? You might as well all die here.”

Everyone turned as pale as a sheet when they heard this. *Heavens above! Do you even hear yourself? Who the hell crafted this woman’s moral compass?!*

Also, why are you so single-minded? There is more than one way to find out the truth. For example, you can search our belongings! If you find the Dark Overlord Token, then you’ll discover the truth, don’t you?

Are all Grandmasters this stupid? Is stupidity a prerequisite to become a Grandmaster??

Unfortunately, they couldn’t say anything to Blood Rakshasa. They couldn’t even *think*

of giving Blood Rakshasa a hint, or the Oath of Burden would immediately steal their soul, bind them to the Oathbearer’s shell, and expose them to the astrals wind for eternity. It would be a life worse than death itself.

For a time, despair clung to everyone like the plague.

Did the thought of resisting not cross their minds? Of course it had. There was simply no point in doing so.

If Blood Rakshasa was alone, they might have thrown all caution to the wind and fought for that ray of hope.

Unfortunately, the Little Heavenly Master was present, and now this Soul Seeker guy had shown up as well. They could tell that Soul Seeker was a Grandmaster and an expert at scouring souls as well. His name wasn’t in the Earth Champions Ranking, but what did that matter? Best case scenario, they had to go up against *two* Grandmasters if they chose to fight. Worst case scenario, the Little Heavenly Master would become their enemy as well.

Long story short, fighting back would only make their deaths a million times more painful.

“Ahem...”

It was at this moment Zhang Lingyang coughed and spoke up again, “Seniors, I don’t think killing them would change anything, so...”

“Are you pleading on their behalf, Little Heavenly Master?” Blood Rakshasa shot him a ridiculing smile.

“I guess so. I’m a soft-hearted man after all!” Zhang Lingyang replied. “Also, I have a better idea.”

“Really now? Tell us.” The first half of Zhang Lingyang’s sentence tickled her funny bone, but the second half genuinely piqued her interest. Was Zhang Lingyang saying that he knew a way to break the Oath of Burden? It wasn’t entirely out of the realm of possibility. Dragon Tiger Mountain was one of the

Three Temples of Dao and a sect with a long, long history. They must have all sorts of trump cards up their sleeves.

Zhang Lingyang sipped his wine again before answering lazily, “We just need to search them. Who knows, maybe one of them carries a clue in their belongings. That wouldn’t trigger the Oath of Burden, *and* it would reveal the truth, wouldn’t it?”

Everyone broke into tears of joy when they heard this. *Thank the heavens! There’s someone with a brain among this trio after all! Thank the heavens!*

Blood Rakshasa: “...”

Soul Seeker: “...”

Both Grandmasters were speechless for a moment. *Heavens above, why didn’t I think of this sooner?*

The look on the crowd’s faces only confirmed this. *Oh my heavens, this is so embarrassing!*

That said, Blood Rakshasa and Soul Seeker were Grandmasters. With great power comes a very thick face, so both Grandmasters remained perfectly calm as they grabbed a Nature’s Shell off the dead people’s bodies and began their search.

Embarrassment could only infect you if you let it.

“Hmm? This token...”

It wasn’t long before Zhang Lingyang, Blood Rakshasa and Soul Seeker all found a strange token in the Nature’s Shell. They did not know what material it was, but it was tough enough that they instinctively knew they couldn’t break it. It was obvious it was an extraordinary item.

“Dark Overlord... Dark Overlord...”

Blood Rakshasa examined the words engraved to the token for a few breaths before exclaiming in shock, “Could it be referring to the Dark Overlord Li Hentian?”

Zhang Lingyang and Soul Seeker had arrived at the same conclusion as well.

“The secret of the Death Sea is related to the Dark Overlord Li Hentian?”

All three warriors exchanged stunned and excited glances with each other.

Who was Li Hentian?

He was the unparalleled, indomitable world champion eight hundred years ago!

If the secret really was related to the Dark Overlord, then this was easily one of, if not the biggest opportunity they had encountered in their lives!

Forget Blood Rakshasa and Soul Seeker, even Zhang Lingyang, someone who was carefully nurtured by the ancient and powerful Dragon Tiger Mountain, was brimming with excitement.

He quickly calmed himself down and looked at the excited Blood Rakshasa and Soul Seeker with a sorrowful expression, “Sigh. Assuming that this secret really has something to do with the Dark Overlord, then a bloody storm is sure to befall the *jianghu* once more!”

“Hahaha... the secret of the Death Sea is tied to the Dark Overlord?”

Suddenly, a sinister laugh broke out in the sky. Then, a hand wrapped in thick smoke descended from the sky and made a grab for the warriors carrying the Dark Overlord Token.

“I, Haze, shall be claiming all these tokens for myself!”

“And who do you think you are?”

Before Haze’s hand could get anywhere close to the warriors, a furious, maddened roar deafened everyone’s eardrums. At the same time, a streak of silver light cut through the sky and slammed into his hand.

There was a loud explosion as Haze’s hand was blasted aside. Not only that, the silver beam continued to shoot forward and cut through the ground like a hot knife through butter, throwing up a curtain of sand that stretched hundreds of meters tall.

When the sand settled, the crowd finally noticed that the silver light standing diagonally on the ground was really a silver spear.

“Cough... cough...”

It was at this moment the space around the silver spear distorted, and a sage-like old man wearing a tall hat and a large belt appeared out of seemingly nowhere. His face was pale, and his energies were thrown into disorder. He stared warily at the direction where the spear had come from.

Two men on horseback appeared from the horizon. They were both clad in silver armor, and they were both riding white horses. Their sabers were hanging beside the horses’ stomach.

One man looked to be in his twenties. His face was handsome, and his expression was stern. He looked like stone carved into a man, hard and unyielding.

The other person looked to be in his forties. Tall and slender, his looks were far softer compared to his compatriot. If it wasn’t for the fact that he was wearing a set of silver armor, they might have mistaken him for a gentle scholar.

The man’s words instantly shattered that impression though. “You think a piece of garbage like you deserves to lay your hands on the Dark Overlord Token?!”

“Xu Xiu...! Are you going to stand in the way of my fortune?” Haze’s eyes were filled with hatred, but also a hint of fear.

“So what if I am?” the man sneered from horseback. “I can crush a piece of garbage like you with one hand. Whatcha gonna do about it?”

“You...!” Haze choked, but he couldn’t say a thing in retort. He could only glare at Xu Xiu hatefully yet impotently.

“Your demeanor fits your stature, Northern Spear King Xu Xiu. Unfortunately, we are no longer in Northern Xinjiang.”

A cold chuckle broke out from somewhere, and the shadows on the ground began stirring unnaturally.

Chapter 689: Blood Drenched Sand

“You will speak to me face to face, coward!”

Xu Xiu reached out, and the silver spear on the ground rang loudly before flying back to the commander’s hand. While grabbing the spear in a reverse grip, he stabbed the shadow behind his back with bloodshot eyes.

Boom!

The ground within tens of meters of the man collapsed a single inch before dissolving into fine powder.

At the same time, a black shadow removed itself from Xu Xiu’s shadow and floated in the sky.

“It’s you! Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows!” Xu Xiu glowed bright red in an instant, and his bloodthirst grew so thick it was practically tangible. “You dare show your face before me?!”

In the sky, Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows scoffed, “Why wouldn’t I? For what reason do I have to fear you when even your troops of tens of thousands could not harm me?”

Sakyamuni was insulting Xu Xiu the same way he had insulted Haze. However, Xu Xiu was nothing like Haze. Although Haze was a Grandmaster, he was a weakling who wasn’t strong enough to enter the Human Champions Ranking. Not only that, he was a nobody and a coward who did not have the courage to stand up to Xu Xiu.

Xu Xiu was different. Background wise, Myriad Shadows was one of the four Sakyamunis of the Way of Taiping, and Xu Xiu was the battalion commander of the Silver Spears, a famous battalion in Northern Xinjiang. Myriad Shadows was backed by the Way of Taiping, whereas he was protected by Chu’s border army.

In terms of individual strength, Myriad Shadows was an elite Grandmaster and the thirtieth warrior on the Earth Champions Ranking, whereas Xu Xiu was the fifty-first. Although Myriad Shadows was stronger than Xu Xiu in terms of cultivation level, Xu Xiu was a member of the border army and exceptionally talented in the art of killing. Not only that, Xu Xiu was more commonly known especially among his enemies as “Madman Xu”. It was because he fought like an actual madman when he engaged in battle, and he wouldn’t stop fighting until one side was dead. The “Mad Demon Spear” he invented was such that even some seniors and elites avoided him like the plague.

That was why many warriors were unwilling to fight Xu Xiu even though they were stronger than him. After all, who in their right mind would provoke a madman if they could help it?

Maybe it was because Sakyamuni Myriad Shadows was supremely confident in his power, or maybe he had other tricks up his sleeves. In any case, he had done the unthinkable: he had ruffled the tiger’s hair. As a result, Xu Xiu immediately grabbed his spear and clashed against Myriad Shadows.

Dark Overlord Token? Secret of the Death Sea? Xu Xiu shoved it all into the deep recesses of his mind. Right now, he had one and only one goal, and that was to end Sakyamuni Myriad Shadow’s life.

Boooooooooom!

The world turned upside down as spear lights and shadows clashed against one another. They were both named Grandmasters on the Earth Champions Ranking, so the impacts of their battle were terrifying to say the least. Forget the weaker warriors, even Blood Rakshasa and Soul Seeker had turned as pale as a sheet.

The fight between the two men had also raised the curtain of a most bloody prologue. The sandy ground beneath one man's feet suddenly became as soft as mud and devoured him in an instant. A muffled grunt leaked out of the hole, and crimson blood slowly seeped out of the sand.

A woman was staring at the craziness happening all around her in shock when Haze enveloped her in a cloud of haze. When her bloodcurdling screams finally faded, and the haze dissipated into nothing, all that was left on the ground was a pile of bones.

“RUUUUUNNNNN!!!”

It was impossible to say who was the one who shouted amidst the chaos. However, not a single person hesitated as they scattered in every direction like rabbits.

On his white horse, Xu Rulin[1] swung his spear horizontally and picked two runaways off the ground. A series of thrusts later, the two men broke into many, many pieces.

Right before the two Nature's Shells would land in Xu Rulin's hand though, a withered, severed hand flew out of seemingly nowhere and caught them first. A mouth opened on the hand's palm and cackled,

“These tokens are mine, boy!”

It then shot into the distance like an arrow.

“Suicidal fool!”

Murder crinkled between Xu Rulin's eyebrows as he lifted his spear and attacked the withered hand. Surprisingly, the hand responded by unleashing an exquisite palm art that was as torrential as a river, ceaseless like the rain, and unpredictable as the shadows. As a result, the one man and one hand were locked in a temporary stalemate.

Those hiding in the shadows too jumped out of their hiding spots and began fighting for the Dark Overlord Token as well.

There was an old man covered in liver mortis exhaling a puff of murky air that turned a warrior into a pool of disgusting fluid.

There was a beaming lady who disemboweled another warrior with a single finger.

A young man with androgynous features let out a seductive chuckle and caused someone to suddenly bleed from every orifice until they died.

A woman carrying a coffin on her back raised the coffin with one hand and flattened one man like a pancake.

A fat monk who wore his robes so loosely it was a miracle it hadn't fallen right off his shoulders ripped a poor woman into two.

A strange man with a tiger's head and scarlet eyes bit into a man's neck and ripped off his head.

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It wasn't long before the former owners of the Dark Overlord Token were completely slaughtered.

Those who arrived late or weren't fortunate enough to seize a Dark Overlord Token during the first round began attacking the robbers. Even more people were flooding in from every direction since the word had spread like wildfire.

Even the likes of Zhang Lingyang, Blood Rakshasa, Soul Seeker, Haze and more were forced to fight again and again.

At some point, nearly everyone had lost their heads to the bloodlust. They started killing indiscriminately whether or not they had already gotten a Dark Overlord Token.

What was once a lifeless wasteland had transformed into a living hell where greed and human nature reigned supreme.

While all this was going on, the dark blue waters of the Death Sea stirred restlessly, and the yellow sand of Bei Mo drank the blood of both living and dead with unbridled greed.

The heads rolled like tumbleweeds, the blood ran like a river, the bodies littered the ground, and the souls filled the sky.

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Ye Qing had no idea about the bloody massacre that was happening outside the Death Sea. Even if he did, he couldn't afford to spare it any attention.

After all, he was submerged inside the Death Sea right now.

The Death Sea did not seem to possess any buoyancy whatsoever. He kept sinking the moment he plunged into the waters[2].

The Death Sea was sky blue without a trace of impurities in it. This was a bad thing because it also meant that he was submerged in pure, unadulterated death qi, and its concentration only increased the deeper he sank. It was easily several times, no, dozens of times thicker and deadlier than it was outside.

As if that wasn't enough, the death qi was turning skin and flesh sky blue just like the Death Sea, and the deeper he sank, the greater the pressure became. If he was a weaker man than he was, his internal organs might have ruptured and killed him already.

If this was all the dangers the Death Sea posed, it would've been fine. However, he quickly discovered that there was no oxygen inside the Death Sea; not even a little. With his body strength, he could endure a little over two hours without oxygen. However, it had been almost an hour since he entered the Death Sea. Even now, he still hadn't found the sea bottom, or more accurately, the sea "ceiling". How much longer must he remain in the Death Sea until he found something—if he found anything at all?

Right now, he had two options. One, he could turn around and swim back to the ground. He definitely had enough time to make it back. He would survive, but he would most likely miss the Dark Overlord's inheritance as a result.

Two, he could continue his journey until he passed the point where he *definitely* could not turn back. Again, the option had its pros and cons. The pro: he would find the mysterious place where the Dark Overlord's inheritance supposedly resided. The con: he might never find that place and drown inside the Death Sea.

The first option was obviously the safest option, but it also meant giving up on this opportunity.

The second option was highly risky in the sense there was no guarantee he would succeed. Considering the seemingly bottomless depths of the Death Sea, it was entirely possible that he might run out of breath and drown before he found anything.

Ye Qing quickly arrived at a decision. He decided to continue.

He was already here. This was what he had been striving for for the past few months. He had no intention of giving up until the very end.

Sure, there was a good chance he might fail and die here. Even if he found the place, he would just be at the starting line of a most perilous journey.

Having made up his mind, Ye Qing mustered his courage and swam deeper into the waters.

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Time passed slowly. At some point, his heart and lungs felt like they were on fire, and his chest felt like it might explode. It was because he was lacking oxygen.

Ye Qing knew full well that he was approaching his limit. If he didn't find the place where the Dark Overlord's inheritance resided soon, he was going to die.

He couldn't turn back, however. It was far too late for that. His only option was to go forward.

Chapter 690: Giant Tortoise

Ye Qing forced down his fear and steeled his heart. Then, he continued to press forward.

Some time later, Ye Qing suddenly caught what looked like an outline of something at the distance. A humanoid silhouette to be exact.

Ye Qing perked up. He hadn't seen a goddamn thing since he entered the Death Sea until now, so this was a fantastic sign. This meant that he was close to something—most likely the way out.

Even if that wasn't the case—even if the silhouette turned out to be one of the warriors who entered the Death Sea—it was fine either. At this point, he would take something rather than nothing at all.

Ye Qing realized that the silhouette wasn't a human when he got close to it though. It was a stone sculpture.

Whoever carved the stone sculpture must be incredibly skilled as it looked identical to a human in every way. The only difference was that it was made of stone, and it was sky blue color and gleaming like a piece of jade probably because of the Death Sea.

Strangely, the stone sculpture wasn't sinking upward. Instead, it was floating toward a certain direction.

The Death Sea's water had next to no buoyancy, and this sculpture looked pretty heavy. It should've sunk to the "bottom" per se. Instead, it was floating sideways toward somewhere.

A moment of hesitation later, Ye Qing decided to follow the stone sculpture.

The stone sculpture floated surprisingly quickly. A while later, Ye Qing saw more stone sculptures in the distance. The further he traveled, the greater their numbers became.

At first, there were only three. Then, their numbers grew to five, ten, a hundred, a thousand. It wasn't long before his entire field of vision was filled with the stone sculptures.

Not all of the stone sculptures were intact. Some were missing an arm, some were missing a head, and some were missing an entire half of their body.

Even stranger was the fact that all of the stone sculptures were floating in the same direction.

As the only human being of the group, Ye Qing could not help but feel a little chill down his spine.

He continued to swim in the direction the stone sculptures were floating for about a teatime or so. At this point, his chest was hurting so bad it felt like it might rip itself apart, his head was pounding like someone was hitting it with a jackhammer, and even his consciousness was growing blurrier and blurrier.

He was starting to suspect that he might have made the wrong choice to follow the stone sculptures.

He did not regret making that decision though. It was literally the only viable option at the time.

The only thing he could do now was to stick with his decision until the end.

Ye Qing massaged his forehead not just to keep himself awake, but also spread his demonic thought in waves. His eyes weren't a reliable sensory organ when all he could see was stone sculptures.

"Huh?"

He was just about to fall into despair when suddenly, his demonic thought picked up something gigantic.

It felt like a mountain. A humongous mountain.

Perking up, Ye Qing did not hesitate to swim toward the mountain at full speed.

It was a long and painful process, but eventually, the mountain came into view.

From a distance, the mountain looked just like any other mountain. But the closer he got, the more he realized just how insanely huge it was.

The mountain was floating inside the Death Sea, but for some reason, it also felt like it was existing in a different space. He also couldn't catch a full view of the mountain because it was shrouded by clouds.

What stole Ye Qing's breath away wasn't the mountain, however. It was the giant tortoise crouching underneath the mountain.

No, that wasn't quite right. The giant tortoise was the one carrying the mountain.

The mountain was massive, but compared to the tortoise? It was almost puny.

The giant tortoise had limbs that looked like the pillars that held up the sky, a shell that looked like a continent in its own right, a head like a mountain that pierced the heavens, and a body that stretched from end to end. Hells, it felt like the Death Sea was barely big enough to accommodate it!

“Is that... an Oathbearer?!”

Besides its unbelievable size, one of the reasons Ye Qing was so shocked was because it looked very similar to the Oathbearer in that they were both ludicrously massive and boundless. The difference was that the Oathbearer he knew carried countless steles on its back, whereas this one was carrying a mountain.

He could almost imagine this tortoise roaming the universe with the mountain on its back.

Unfortunately, the giant tortoise was long dead. He knew this because it was leaking an unimaginable amount of death qi into the surroundings. In fact, the dead Oathbearer might very well be the source of the death qi of the Death Sea.

That wasn't all. He could also sense a deep sorrow from it. It was impossible to say if it was sorrow toward its own death, mourning toward the deceased, yearning for the infinite universe and its myriad beings, or all of the above.

Its lingering frustration and sorrow were such that tears were leaking out of Ye Qing's eyes before he knew it.

Besides the mountain and the tortoise, there was one more thing that caught his attention: the stone sculptures.

The stone sculptures were all floating horizontally with their heads pointed toward the tortoise and the mountain. It felt like they were devote worshipers prostrating themselves before their god.

Could this mountain be the place where the Dark Overlord's inheritance resides?

Ye Qing quickly made the connection. A few seconds of thinking later, he swam resolutely toward the mountain.

He did not have a choice. He was moments away from running out of breath now. Even if the mountain had nothing to do with the Dark Overlord's inheritance, even if it turned out to be one giant death trap, he had to get there no matter what.

It was do or die.

Unfortunately, he quickly realized that entering the mountain wasn't as simple as he thought.

For one, the giant tortoise was leaking an insane amount of death qi. It was easily a hundred times thicker than the death qi he felt when he initially entered the Death Sea. A single speck of it was enough to kill an ordinary person upon contact.

That wasn't the problem though. The death qi was bad, but it was still within his limits of endurance. The real problem was that, at some point, he was unable to get closer to the mountain no

matter what. It was as if there was an invisible boundary separating him and the mountain, or some sort of magic that increased the distance between him and the mountain from one to infinity.

What should I do?

If I don't enter the mountain soon, I'm going to run out of breath and die here!

Despite the fatal crisis he was in, Ye Qing remained as calm and collected as a machine. He did not allow his panic or his physical pain to affect his thoughts.

Wait. The Dark Overlord Token!

It was at this moment Ye Qing recalled the Dark Overlord Token. Without hesitation, he immediately pulled it out of his Nature's Shell.

As soon as the Dark Overlord Token entered his palm, the blurry, almost illusory mountain abruptly became as clear as crystal. Suddenly, he knew that with absolute certainty that it was no longer out of his reach.

It was a feeling that couldn't be described with words. All he knew was that he was no longer impeded when the Dark Overlord Token was in his hands. It wasn't long before he reached the mountain, took one step forward and—

His vision turned white, and he felt the world turning upside down. For a moment, he completely lost his grip on his surroundings. It felt as if he was entering a different spacetime.

Thankfully, the vertigo only lasted for an instant. When his vision returned to normal, Ye Qing realized that he was no longer swimming inside the Death Sea. Instead, he was standing in the middle of a paddy field.

“I got in?”

Ye Qing scanned his surroundings for a moment. The sky was perfectly blue and clear like a mirror, the air was clean and refreshing, and the paddy field he was standing at stretched as far as the eyes could see.

Every single wheat in the paddy field was golden yellow in color. The ear of the wheat was round, wholesome, and overflowing with spiritual qi. When a cool breeze swept through the paddy field, a refreshing scent filled his nostrils, and the paddy field rippled like a golden sea.

Ye Qing could tell at first glance that the wheat growing in this paddy field was extraordinary. Every single wheat was equal to a hundred year spirit herb in the outside world, and this paddy field was so big that he literally couldn't see the end of it.

If he had to estimate its value, he would say that it was worth one or two cities at least. Maybe more.

What really surprised Ye Qing wasn't the wheats though, extraordinary as they were. It was the fact that the paddy field was perfectly square and tidy, which was nothing like what a natural paddy field would look like. No, this paddy field looked like it was managed by someone, which meant that there might be living people in the area.

When the thought occurred to him, Ye Qing narrowed his eyes and spread his demonic thought far and wide.

Of course, he wasn't able to find anyone.