

T. Times 311

Chapter 311: Exotic Romance

The young couple changed their clothes and leisurely went for a walk.

Zhao Changhe casually changed into a different outfit, just to distinguish himself from his “Wang Daozhong” attire. He was now strolling with his wife with his true appearance. He reserved the “Wang Daozhong” identity for other occasions.

Xia Chichi did not quite understand Zhao Changhe’s strange obsession. It seemed that when he was with his woman, he had to be using his true appearance, especially during intimate moments.

If he just always uses that yellow-faced disguise, then nobody would know who he is. I really don’t get why it’s so important to him. He’s still a yellow-faced man even now. Hmph.

Xia Chichi also changed back into female attire. The dashing young master transformed into a delicate little witch, yet she still had those sharp eyebrows and bright eyes, exuding a faint heroic spirit.

After all, she had just used her male disguise when killing someone and fleeing earlier. Tarantula was most likely searching the entire city for that “young nobleman,” so she had to let her male persona disappear.

Anyway, the young couple held hands as they strolled through the night in Kunlun City. They felt incredibly happy as they walked around hand-in-hand.

They had been in love for a year but rarely ever met. Even when they did meet, it was always rushed and they hardly had any time to talk. The lack of time often led them to go straight to intimacy to relieve their longing for each other. It almost seemed like their relationship was just about that, and perhaps that was why Vermillion Bird was so disapproving of it.

This was the first time they had ever walked openly, hand in hand, and using their original appearances. Together, they shared a goal in this remote city of villains on this snowy night.

“Wait, who said we’ve got the same goal?” Zhao Changhe said. “You don’t need to find The Thieves Guild.”

“But I do need to find Tian Lingzi,” Xia Chichi replied with a mischievous smile. “Tarantula offended me. Since she tried to make use of me to deal with Tian Lingzi, that means that Tian Lingzi is a potential ally, so I should go and meet him.”

Who really offended whom? Also, you were even thanking Tarantula earlier.

Zhao Changhe did not expose her, knowing that Xia Chichi was just looking for an excuse.

There was an old man selling wontons by the side of the street. His clothes were thin, and snow and wind brushed past, yet he seemed unfazed by the cold. He hummed a little tune leisurely as he worked.

The classic trope of an old man selling wontons being a hidden master sounded very wuxia, but in reality, Zhao Changhe had never seen such a character. He had seen killers acting as streetside vendors, though. Anyway, the old man fit perfectly in this city of villains. Who knew which former great villains now lived in seclusion in this city.

Zhao Changhe did not avoid the old man, even showing some interest in him. He pulled Xia Chichi to sit by the stall and said, “Two bowls of hot wontons, please.”

Xia Chichi nudged him quietly. “Aren’t you afraid of poison?”

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, “Why would he poison us for no reason? If everyone thought that way, who would dare buy his wontons? People here have to eat too.”

The old man selling wontons chuckled. “With that attitude, I might just poison you for real.”

Zhao Changhe sighed. “Come on, old man, give us a break...”

The old man burst into laughter. “Hahaha! You’re quite intriguing. I’ve never seen someone like you in this city. These two bowls of wontons are on the house. It’s up to you whether you think they’re poisoned or not.”

As the wontons were served, Xia Chichi, who had just expressed suspicions of them being poisoned a second before, was actually the first to dig in. She showed no fear of them being poisoned at all.

The old man's eyes gleamed with understanding.

He knew that it was not that Xia Chichi was fearless. She was extremely cautious and distrustful at heart. Her actions were to protect her fearless, foolish lover by testing the food first.

In this city filled with wicked people, encountering such devoted lovers was indeed rare

But just before she could take a bite, Zhao Changhe snatched the spoon and ate the wonton himself.

Then, he yelped as if he had been burned.

Xia Chichi punched him painfully as he panted like a dog. As he panted from his mouth being burned, she leaned over to blow on another wonton for him.

Then, they began to playfully feed each other, each of them blowing on wontons before feeding it to the other. They laughed as they had a wonderful time.

The old man, with his hands tucked into his sleeves, suddenly felt like a third wheel.

Fuck, I should have poisoned them for real.

But despite having such thoughts, he could not help but smile.

Ah, to be young...

"Old man, your wontons are great," Zhao Changhe said. He did not accept the free meal and placed a piece of silver worth a year's supply of wontons on the table. "Too bad we might not have the chance to come back. Well, I guess we can only leave it up to fate."

Pft. Did you even taste the wontons at all?!

The old man, feeling like he was watching a love story instead of two people enjoying his wontons, could not help but hide his smile and grumble as he accepted the money. He looked at the sky and pretended not to care.

As the couple walked away, he could still hear their playful banter.

“Why are you throwing money around like that? Paying for wontons with silver? If you keep wasting money like that, I’ll beat you up!”

“Carrying copper around is so inconvenient! They’re bulky and noisy. I’d really love to be able to use storage rings...”

Their voices faded as they walked away, perhaps discussing more serious matters and starting to converse using voice transmission.

Storage rings, huh? The old man smiled slightly and went back to cooking wontons.

Meanwhile, the young couple continued their playful banter.

“So, where did you get the money from this time now? Was it from someone surnamed Cui or Tang?”

“...My money ran out in the north. That was a parting gift from General Huangfu. He didn’t really give me much. Well, he isn’t exactly that wealthy. Actually, you could say that some of the money I’ve got is from your cult’s funds. Come on, give me a smile.”

Xia Chichi was not in the mood to smile. So, the rumors about you and the Fire Serpent of Yi having an affair were true? You’ve got some nerve to be flaunting it to me! Oh, wait, just what was that about the Fire Serpent of Yi being the imperial noble consort? That’s really odd. Why hadn’t I heard about such important news before? I only knew that the venerable often stays in the capital.

Whatever. This is the worst possible time to talk about other women.

Xia Chichi leisurely looked at the shops along the street and clicked her tongue. “This city might be quiet, but it’s got everything. It’s even got a general store. The quietness might just be because it’s a snowy night; maybe it’s more bustling during other times.”

Zhao Changhe glanced around and smiled. “Since people live here, they will naturally make sure to have daily necessities available. The thought of a bunch of villains just lurking gloomily in their homes isn’t realistic. It’s not like they’ve achieved immortality or something. The only difference between this place and an ordinary town or city is that the shopkeepers here might be some notorious villain hiding from society. You never know who you might be facing. That is also why nobody really dares make any big moves here. If they do, they usually try getting outsiders to do so for them, just like how Tarantula tried to trick you into going after Tian Lingzi.”

“Exactly. As long as you’re cautious, this so-called city of villains isn’t really all that dangerous,” Xia Chichi said thoughtfully. “I wonder what Daoist Yuxu was thinking by setting up a place like this.”

Zhao Changhe was not interested in Daoist Yuxu’s motives. As long as the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng was not in Yuxu’s hands, he really did not care.

Xia Chichi also did not seem to be very interested in Daoist Yuxu. Suddenly, her eyes lit up, and she pulled Zhao Changhe toward a shop.

“Hey, why are we going?”

“Stop asking questions, I’m buying you something,” Xia Chichi said as she dragged him into the store. “You really haven’t replaced that old gourd I got you, huh? It’s old, worn, ugly, and starting to break apart... Just how can you keep using it?”

Zhao Changhe chuckled and said, “No matter how old it is, I’d still use it.”

Xia Chichi felt happy. As long as that gourd was around, other women would feel hindered and annoyed. Just imagining those scenarios where they could not say anything about it made her happy.

She was overthinking it, though. Few people noticed the gourd, and those who did just thought Zhao Changhe was sentimental, which only made them like him more, such as a certain rabbit.

“I can’t let those bitches think that I mistreat you,” Xia Chichi grumbled as she examined the gourds hanging in the store. “Only I can replace your gourd, right? “

Zhao Changhe looked at Xia Chichi's smiling face, his heart softening. He replied softly, "Mm-hm."

Xia Chichi knocked on the counter and said with a smile, "Shopkeeper, I want a wine gourd. I'm looking for one made of special materials, light but durable and not easily damaged."

The shopkeeper looked bemused. "Miss, are you cultivating immortality? Do you want it to have endless space for wine too? Where am I supposed to find such gourds? Even if the materials to make such gourds exist, no one would use them to make a gourd."

Xia Chichi chuckled. "You're right. It might be hard to find in regular places, but beautiful jade comes from Kunlun[1], the Yukun Pavilion should have some available."

Zhao Changhe came to a realization.

So this shop belongs to the Yukun Gang. No wonder the Earth Deer of Liu said that the Yukun Gang's goods are diverse. They really do seem to have everything. Their range of goods is far too extensive to be sourced through regular channels.

Laughter came from upstairs as a voice asked, "Are you here to buy something or were you looking for our Yukun Gang?"

"I was originally looking for Tian Lingzi," said Xia Chichi with her hands on her hips. "But now I want a gourd. The gourd comes first. Everything else is secondary!"

"If you really want a gourd like that, it's not impossible to get one." A man descended the stairs with a smile on his face. "But what price are you willing to pay?"

Xia Chichi's eyes twinkled mischievously. "How about I catch a spider for you?"

The man was startled. He looked at the two of them before saying solemnly, "Please follow me upstairs."

Chapter 312: Subjective Value

The young couple exchanged amused glances and followed the man upstairs.

Once they reached the top of the stairs, they were momentarily stunned.

Instead of a small loft or attic, they found themselves in a spacious hall filled with burly men armed with swords and sabers. These men were all glaring at them menacingly.

The man dressed like a Daoist who had greeted them earlier retreated and stood by the side of another Daoist seated at the main chair. It appeared that he was the latter's disciple.

The whole setup looked like the headquarters of a gang, and they had walked in right in the middle of a meeting.

Xia Chichi could not help but blink in amusement. Their luck was unbelievable. She had simply guessed that stores with numerous items would likely be under the Yukun Gang and had randomly chosen one to enter. Now, they just so happened to find themselves in the headquarters of the Yukun Gang while the gang bigshots were having a meeting. They did not even need to look for Tian Lingzi—the Daoist in the main seat was most likely him.

How come I never realized how good my luck was before? Maybe it's because I always hang around Changhe, and his luck is just ridiculous.

Both of them showed no signs of unease, confident in their own strength. They cupped their fists in a respectful gesture and said, "Sorry to disturb everyone. It seems that we came at the wrong time..."

The Daoist in the main seat shook his head and said, "If you're here just to buy a gourd, then there's no such thing as coming at the wrong time. Business can be done anytime. But if you have other matters with our Yukun Gang, you might as well just say it directly."

Xia Chichi asked, "Are you Daoist Priest Tian Lingzi?"

"Yes, I am," replied Tian Lingzi. "I conduct my business openly and have nothing to hide."

Xia Chichi smiled and said, "You're a lot more interesting than those who hide and conceal their identities..."

Tian Lingzi said, “Such as yourself?”

Xia Chichi was left momentarily speechless.

Shouldn’t you have pointed someone else out, like Tarantula? Do you even know how to talk to people?

However, it was natural for others to be cautious of them. Zhao Changhe quickly took over the conversation to salvage the situation, “We’re indeed here to buy a gourd. Does your gang have the kind of gourd we’re looking for?”

“Light but durable, resistant to swords and sabers, not prone to wear or tear. We do have such a gourd, we sto—uh...

we acquired it in an ancient secret realm. It’s an artifact from the ancient era,” said Tian Lingzi. “Although its practical value is average, anything from the ancient era is valuable. What price are you willing to pay for it?”

“Name your price, we’ll see if we can afford it,” replied Zhao Changhe.

Tian Lingzi laughed. “Normally, we would be willing to negotiate the price, but since you mentioned catching a spider, the price has changed. This is why you should be careful not to reveal your cards too soon, young lady.”

Xia Chichi laughed as well. In this city filled with deceit, Tian Lingzi’s straightforwardness felt like a breath of fresh air, even though it could just be a persona. It was still refreshing.

She had not mentioned the spider to buy a gourd but to assist her husband. Zhao Changhe was looking for the Thieves Guild, and she needed to make some noise to draw them out quickly. They could not afford another round of indirect probing that would take multiple days or even longer.

Xia Chichi said leisurely, “I was not revealing my bottom line. I was just giving you a piece of information. However, with so many ears around, I’d rather not speak here.”

Tian Lingzi said calmly, “It’s wise to be cautious. However, the two of you have not earned enough trust for a private meeting just yet.”

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, "I'm friends with someone in your gang. Will that do?"

Tian Lingzi asked curiously, "Oh? Who might that be?"

"His surname is Ji," replied Zhao Changhe. "If he's here, maybe he could meet with us in private."

Tian Lingzi was momentarily taken aback, then laughed. "So you're here for the Thieves Guild... Whether you're truly Ji Chengkong's friend or his foe, you're asking the wrong person. We only work together with the guild as one of their channels for selling stolen goods. We're not part of the guild. We don't know about the whereabouts of core members of their guild such as Ji Chengkong."

Zhao Changhe was not too surprised about this and said with a smile, "But you can at least communicate with them, no?"

"That's true. Do you need me to relay a message to them for you?"

"Yes. Please tell them that Zhao Changhe seeks an audience with the Thief Saint."

A sudden silence befell the hall, and then everyone erupted in murmurs and whispers.

The First Hidden Dragon, Zhao Changhe!

Everyone had been eyeing this rugged, scarred warrior who greatly resembled the rumors Zhao Changhe. However, as there were so many people who imitated him these days, they had not been sure if it was really him.

Now, he confirmed it himself. He boldly revealed his name to them. No one doubted his words, as seeking an audience with the Thief Saint while being an imposter would mean a gruesome death, especially since Ji Chengkong knew him personally. They knew that he could only be the real Zhao Changhe.

A person's name is like a tree's shadow. If an ordinary person casually revealed their identity, they would be considered a fool. But if that person was Zhao Changhe instead, others could only see him as a hero, fearless and bold.

His fame was not just for show. Within a year, Zhao Changhe transformed from a little carp in a small pond into the first among hidden dragons. Such incredible potential may never be seen again and certainly had no historical precedent. Being the first hidden dragon was essentially a prelude to entering the Ranking of Man. Unless they met an untimely death, there had never been a first hidden dragon who failed to make it onto the Ranking of Man. When Yue Hongling was ranked second, she was already regarded as a distinguished figure wherever she went. Now, Zhao Changhe enjoyed even greater renown.

He had almost single-handedly altered the dynamics of the Grassland, penetrating deep behind enemy lines, traversing thousands of li, and winning numerous battles. To this day, his efforts had left the northern and southern tribes of the barbarians divided and immersed in internal conflict. By causing such internal strife, he ensured peace for the Central Plains for at least several years.

Such epic feats were on a completely different level compared to ordinary battles in the jianghu. Even villains had to give him a thumbs-up for his feats. In Kunlun, who knew how many people drank and sighed to themselves while talking about how they never expected such a mighty figure to emerge precisely while they avoided the world.

His title of Bloodthirsty Asura, initially rather amusing in a boorish way, had now taken on an aura of fierce renown. He had made the nickname famous.

Zhao Changhe revealed his identity with a purpose. He had connections with the Thieves Guild and did not fear exposure. Moreover, with everyone seeing how bold and open he was, nobody would suspect him of disguising himself as Wang Daozhong. Later on, he could easily change his appearance and no one would even suspect him.

However, he still needed to secure a storage ring to hide Dragon Bird. Otherwise, it would be far too easy for people to recognize him.

Tian Lingzi was extremely cautious. "It turns out that you're Young Hero Zhao... Then this young lady should be the Sunset Divine Sword, right?"

Xia Chichi's face suddenly fell, and she looked annoyed. "I don't wear red all the time like some desperate woman eager to get married. Hmph."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Meanwhile, Vermillion Bird, who was watching from a distance, felt as if a slingshot hit her out of nowhere. She ground her teeth in frustration.

Tian Lingzi chuckled and said, “My mistake. Hmm... Well, you may all leave. Since it’s Young Hero Zhao, I doubt he came here to assassinate me.”

The subordinates agreed and stood up. They bowed, then withdrew. Many of them could not help but stare at Zhao Changhe as they passed by, completely ignoring the beautiful Xia Chichi. They looked like a bunch of starstruck fanboys.

Whether good or evil, those of the martial arts world always respected heroes.

Meanwhile, Zhao Changhe thought about how many of his achievements were feats of assassination.

Tian Lingzi whispered something to his disciple, who also took his leave. He then smiled and said, “Since you wish to contact the Thieves Guild, I’ve sent my disciple to relay the message. Now, shall we talk about our business? Young lady, I’d like to know why you mentioned a spider?”

Xia Chichi said “I understand that you have a grudge against Tarantula?”

Tian Lingzi smiled and said, “Recently, we’ve had conflicts with the Jinqian Gang. The meeting we were having was to discuss the attitudes of the nearby gangs. Tarantula is one of the forces we’re focusing on as we’re unsure of which faction she leans toward. Thus, when you mentioned her, we had to stop our meeting.”

“Then the news I have for you is that she wants to kill you,” Xia Chichi said with a smile. “Is that information enough to trade for the gourd?”

Tian Lingzi shook his head. “A single gourd isn’t a big deal. It’s not worth haggling over. However, the information you’ve provided is quite serious. How can you prove the validity of your information?”

Zhao Changhe expected Xia Chichi to say something flippant such as “It’s up to you whether to believe me or not.” However, Xia Chichi actually turned serious and asked, “What exactly is your conflict with the Jinqian Gang?”

Tian Lingzi said, "Tomorrow at noon, we're having a banquet to negotiate with them. As everyone knows, there's no such thing as a friendly banquet. We must consider all aspects."

Xia Chichi smiled and said, "Then it's simple. If I help fend off Tarantula tomorrow, you give me the gourd. If we can manage to kill her together, then tell me the location of the secret realm where you got the gourd from."

Tian Lingzi found this all a bit hard to believe. "You're doing this for a mere gourd? It might be an antique, but it's nothing more than a trinket. I genuinely can't understand why you seem so obsessed with it."

"Is it so hard to understand?" Xia Chichi smiled faintly. "In the jianghu, there are some people who might kill someone for you just because you offered them a drink. Everyone values different things. To you, the gourd is just a collectible trinket, but to me, it's a unique memento."

Zhao Changhe had been silent all this time. He initially thought that Xia Chichi was making a big deal out of nothing. But considering that she had already made an enemy of Tarantula, it made sense for her to ally with Tian Lingzi to eliminate her completely. He had also thought that she might be more interested in the secret realm that the gourd came from.

Her explanation took him aback.

He turned to look at Xia Chichi's profile. Her smile, which might seem mischievous or even evil to others, appeared pure and beautiful to him, as pristine as the jade of Kunlun.

Chapter 313: Chen Family Restaurant

At night, Zhao Changhe changed back into Wang Daozhong's attire, applied the disguise, and returned to Yang Qianyuan's inn.

Hmm, Snow-Treading Crow seems to have been well taken care of. Nobody dared to try anything. Not bad, not bad.

The inn was still lit, and Yang Qianyuan was pacing around anxiously. Surprisingly, his appearance had changed back into the young master on the wanted posters. He was clean-shaven and neatly groomed, no longer the rugged man from their first meeting.

Seeing “Wang Daozhong” return, Yang Qianyuan rushed up to him like he had seen a relative. He hurriedly greeted him, “Senior, where have you been...”

Zhao Changhe glanced at him curiously and then said with an indifferent expression, “Why, do you think you have the right to know where I go?”

“No, no, not at all,” Yang Qianyuan replied with an apologetic smile. “There was an incident at the brothel you were at. The madam was assassinated! Since you just so happened to leave at the same time, they suspected that you were an accomplice and went around asking about you. Someone had seen me take you to that street, so they also came here to ask me questions.”

Zhao Changhe squinted at him. “What did you tell them?”

Yang Qianyuan said, “I had no choice but to reveal your identity, telling them that you’re the esteemed Wang Daozhong. I told them that if you wanted to kill a mere brothel madam, you would not need to go to the neighboring room to eavesdrop. It must have just been a coincidence. Please don’t blame me. Only by telling them about who you are could I shut them up. Of course, I planned to immediately report this to you when I saw you...”

Zhao Changhe sneered. “I’m guessing you said more than just that, right?”

Yang Qianyuan smiled apologetically and said, “Yes... Since you sat in the neighboring room listening for so long, just telling them about your identity was not convincing enough. I told them that you were actually targeting that young master and probably left to chase after him. Only then did they believe me. They might come tomorrow to ask you about that young master’s whereabouts.”

Zhao Changhe’s expression turned displeased. “I did have my eye on him, but I didn’t get to have him.”

These words were sincere, and regret was clearly evident in his voice. His words were more genuine than pure gold.

Yang Qianyuan observed his expression. “Senior, if that’s what you’re into, would you like me to look for a pretty boy to serve you?”

“I’m tired. We’ll talk more later.” Zhao Changhe headed upstairs, looking like he wanted to rest.

Yang Qianyuan hurriedly said, “Senior, senior, our gang leader wishes to meet you...”

Zhao Changhe was furious. “You brat. You revealed my name without permission. You’re just lucky that I’m too lazy to deal with you, and you’re still not done?”

“Senior, please calm down. Please hear me out.” Yang Qianyuan looked around and whispered, “Recently, our Jinqian Gang has had some conflicts with the Yukun Gang over some businesses. We agreed to meet for negotiations at noon tomorrow... Well, actually, our gang leader has no plans of negotiating. He wants to take over the Yukun Gang. As long as we kill Tian Lingzi during the negotiations, the rest of the Yukun Gang won’t be a threat, and we can probably swallow them whole.”

Zhao Changhe said coldly, “Good for you. What does this have to do with me?”

“Senior, you might not know this, but the Yukun Gang has many rare treasures. Although they’re rumored to be backed by the Thieves Guild, there hasn’t been any concrete evidence. It’s likely that they’re only working with the Thieves Guild to sell stolen goods. However, even the Thieves Guild would not have so many weird and exotic items. Where would they have found so many such things to steal? We suspect that the Yukun Gang has actually discovered a secret realm in the Kunlun Mountains. We believe that they’re just pretending to sell stolen goods while actually selling treasures from the secret realm they discovered. Our gang leader is interested in taking over this secret realm.”

Zhao Changhe made it look like he became interested. “So are you saying that you’ll be sharing this secret realm with me?”

Seeing that Wang Daozhong had indeed become interested, Yang Qianyuan sighed with relief and smiled. “Our gang leader said that if you’re willing to help us out tomorrow, you can take one item of your choosing from the secret realm...”

Upon hearing the last part, Zhao Changhe’s expression changed drastically, and he stared at Yang Qianyuan with an extremely cold gaze. “Does your gang leader think that I’m some beggar?”

In reality, Gang Leader Qian had said that Wang Daozhong could take whatever he wanted from the secret realm.

However, when Yang Qianyuan relayed the message, he twisted it and completely changed its meaning.

If the real Wang Daozhong were here, he would have been deeply insulted. Fortunately, this was Zhao Changhe, and Wang Daozhong being insulted had nothing to do with him.

Yang Qianyuan sighed and said, “Senior, please don’t blame Gang Leader Qian for being a bit stingy by nature... If it were up to me, I would have given you the entire secret realm...”

Zhao Changhe looked at him with a half-smile. “Oh? And when could you make such a decision?”

Yang Qianyuan lowered his voice. “With your support, senior, it would be easy.”

Honestly speaking, having an expert on the Ranking of Earth give a helping hand to a mere city-level gang was like taking candy from a baby. The expert would not even need to support the gang openly. As long as they let others know that they favored someone within the gang, that would be enough. Zhao Changhe instantly understood what Yang Qianyuan was plotting and could not help but feel amused.

You’ve only been here for less than a year and you’re already thinking of taking this opportunity to get rid of the gang leader and take over. As expected, this place is really twisted! The people here are really evil.

Seeing that the conversation had reached this point, Yang Qianyuan lowered his voice even further and said, “Senior, if you show that you favor me, I’m willing to offer all of the Jinqian Gang’s earnings to you. The Jinqian Gang will serve you, and we will act as your eyes and ears in this city.”

“Do you think I care about the measly profits of a small gang in a city? Eyes and ears? How many people do you even have? Do you really think you’d be able to act as my eyes and ears?”

“We actually have quite a few people... A lot of them have even been here for a long time and are very familiar with the city.” Seeing that Zhao Changhe still seemed uninterested, Yang Qianyuan finally gritted his teeth and said, “If you enjoy the company of men, senior, then I can find them for you. I... I’m willing to serve you as well if you’d like...”

What the fuck?

Zhao Changhe was astonished. He finally understood why Yang Qianyuan had dressed up like a young master from an aristocratic family again.

What a ruthless and vicious man. The Jinqian Gang really picked up a snake. Oh well, sadly for you, you're Chichi's target. No matter how ruthless and patient you are, it won't amount to much in the end.

Zhao Changhe said calmly, "Go tell your gang leader that I will come along tomorrow to have a look. As for anything else... we'll discuss it some other time."

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At noon the next day.

In the eastern part of Kunlun City, at the Chen Family Restaurant.

Conflicts between gangs often lead to negotiation banquets. Such banquets were well known for tables being flipped and blades being drawn, as well as often leading to bloodshed. Both sides thus made thorough preparations before the banquet.

Tian Lingzi held a meeting overnight, while Gang Leader Qian set his sights on "Wang Daozhong."

Tarantula was likely acting as the oriole, waiting to reap the benefits when the opportunity presented itself.

This small conflict in a corner of the city involved multiple factions, showing internal machinations and appearing like a minuscule version of the greater jianghu.

Ever since coming to this world, Zhao Changhe had seen many similar situations. He knew that this was how the jianghu was, just not the part of the jianghu he liked. Fortunately, he had Chichi by his side this time. Amidst the treacherous turmoil that he disliked, there was a touch of tenderness and warmth, making the harsh wind and snow seem refreshing.

He followed Yang Qianyuan to attend the banquet. What he had to do was quite simple, at least in theory.

Others thought that he was there to help the Jinqian Gang by dealing with Tian Lingzi, while Yang Qianyuan hoped that he would conveniently kill the supposedly disrespectful Gang Leader Qian and support him in his rise to power.

In reality, he was there to help the little witch beside Tian Lingzi ambush Tarantula. As for whether or not he would kill Gang Leader Qian, he was not really thinking about it. Instead, he was more concerned about capturing Yang Qianyuan alive.

However, as soon as he stepped into the restaurant, the owner came up to greet him. “You must be Mister Daozhong! I, Chen One, am honored to meet you. We hope that you enjoy your time here.”

The owner was also quite good-looking. The news that Wang Daozhong enjoyed the company of men seemed to have spread throughout Kunlun overnight, and it looked like it would spread even further. Seeing the owner approach, the others winked and nudged each other, already imagining all kinds of scenarios in their heads.

Sure enough, Wang Daozhong appeared delighted. “I must say, you’re quite charming, unlike many of the unsightly faces around here.”

Zhao Changhe was genuinely delighted. Just from the name and the way the owner of the restaurant approached him, he knew that this was his true collaborator here, a contact from Ying Five’s organization.

The Earth Deer of Liu was not an expert in intelligence gathering, and he was unlikely to know much, but Ying Five’s people were different.

As they appeared to exchange appreciative glances, Chen One whispered a warning, “Gang Leader Qian has additional support, and Tian Lingzi is suspected to be allied with Tarantula. Not a single one of them is trustworthy. Do not trust any of them.”

Chapter 314: Thank you, Tarantula

Zhao Changhe could guess that Gang Leader Qian had external support. After all, he only had Yang Qianyuan relay a message rather than coming to meet him personally, suggesting that he had some other backing.

On the other hand, the connection between Tian Lingzi and Tarantula was unexpected.

Although he suspected that Tian Lingzi's behavior might just be a facade and did not trust the other party that much, Tarantula had indeed tricked Chichi into believing that Yang Qianyuan was with Tian Lingzi. With her having done so, it logically made sense for Tarantula to be on the same side as Gang Leader Qian, or at least enemies with Tian Lingzi, as she directed trouble toward Tian Lingzi with apparent malice.

It doesn't make sense for her to do that if she really is allied with Tian Lingzi. Could Chen One's intelligence be wrong?

Zhao Changhe pondered for a moment, but ultimately found Chen One more trustworthy. Initially, he planned to play the role of a senior, simply sitting in the main hall and listening to the negotiations. But now he dismissed that idea. As a senior expert who had been invited to attend the banquet, he did not need to explain his actions to anyone. If he did not want to reveal himself, then he could do just that. He headed to a side room to drink.

Yang Qianyuan, who eagerly wanted him to stay, watched as Zhao Changhe walked away.

Zhao Changhe realized that being alone in the side room gave him a lot more room to maneuver and a lot more options.

Chen One quietly slipped in and sighed with relief. He then said with a smile, "I was afraid you'd think you had the situation under control and join the negotiations openly. It's good that you stepped aside. Now we can discuss some things first."

Zhao Changhe said, "I entered Kunlun as Wang Daozhong, and everyone in the east of the city knows about it. You should have known right away that it was me. After all, you should have been told that I would be coming here. Why didn't you come look for me?"

Chen One replied irritably, "Of course I went to look for you, but you were supposedly chasing a beautiful young man! Then Zhao Changhe appeared at the Yukun Gang, you nearly drove me crazy."

"Uh..." Zhao Changhe found it hard to argue. He forcefully said, "Was it so hard to tell me to come to this lousy restaurant? I could have easily been the one to come to you instead. There was no need for this all to be so complicated."

Chen One remained expressionless and said, "Our base in Kunlun is an important secret. We can't just casually reveal it to outsiders. Who are you to us anyway? You're certainly not Lady Three's husband. How old are you even?"

Zhao Changhe: "..."

"Furthermore, even if you were her husband, she would not reveal our organization's secrets that easily," added Chen One. "I was supposed to find you secretly the moment you arrived here. I was not supposed to reveal what I was doing here. But in the end, it just so happened that you came to this restaurant, so there's nothing much left to hide. That was why I approached you so directly."

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, "Not bad, at least you know what to prioritize and how to be flexible. At this point, there's no point in hiding."

"Of course, we're naturally interested in finding the secret realm. That is my main task here. The conflict between these two gangs involves a secret realm. We lack strength here, so your arrival is very timely."

"Tell me more."

"Originally, although Yukun Pavilion did have many unusual and peculiar goods, they were ultimately just one of the channels for selling stolen goods. Their operations were still relatively normal. It was only recently that they suddenly began selling numerous items that seemed to be from the ancient era. It's one thing to have one or two stolen items that appeared as such, but so many? It was out of the ordinary, so many people began to suspect that the goods they were selling weren't stolen goods but treasures found in a secret realm."

After saying that, Chen One smiled in a suggestive way. "But don't you think it's quite odd?"

Zhao Changhe nodded. "Mm-hm, it's like they're asking for trouble by drawing so much attention. They could have just sold the items slowly or transported them elsewhere to sell. Their actions must be intentional, is what you're trying to say?"

"Indeed, indeed." Chen One secretly praised him. In fact, he had deliberately asked this question to test the intelligence of this supposedly smart man, and Zhao Changhe's response was exactly what he was looking for.

Chen One glanced at the main hall outside, where people from both factions were gathering noisily as they prepared for the banquet. Seeing that the wine was being prepared to be served, he continued quickly, "If Tian Lingzi isn't out of his mind trying to attract powerful enemies to kill him, there's only one explanation. He intends to lure others into a trap, cooperating with anyone who comes to him and leading them into the secret realm. Based on our extensive experience with secret realms, there's only one main reason why someone would lure so many outsiders into entering a secret realm."

Zhao Changhe said flatly, "Poison."

Chen One clapped his hands and said, "Exactly. They need a lot of people to test and clear the poison, and they're using this opportunity to eliminate rivals and have an easier time taking control over the eastern part of the city. This is why I suspect Tarantula to be allied with them. Only with her cooperation would their actions make sense."

Zhao Changhe suddenly understood why Tarantula had tricked Xia Chichi into looking for Tian Lingzi, and even why Tarantula had personally received Chichi. At that time, Chichi appeared to be an outsider to her, and that was the perfect candidate to be lured in to test poison.

Last night, when Chichi mentioned catching a spider at the general store, Tian Lingzi must have been intensely shocked. Yet, he managed to put on an act of being upright and even began talking them into working together to deal with Tarantula.

It was no wonder he and Chichi were misled. Tarantula's move of directing Chichi to Tian Lingzi was extremely deceptive. Fortunately, his collaboration with one of the best intelligence organizations in the world made everything clearer once he got more information.

Zhao Changhe suddenly stood up.

Chichi is in danger! Thank god I didn't waste too much time talking!

*

At that moment, the Jinqian Gang and the Yukun Gang were glaring at each other in the main hall. Gang Leader Qian accused the Yukun Gang of stealing a treasure from the Jinqian Gang, which was clearly just an excuse to start trouble.

The Yukun Gang's connection to the Thieves Guild made Gang Leader Qian worried that Thief Saint Ye Wuzong might support them. He needed an excuse to provoke a conflict and probe them. If Ye Wuzong did not come forward, it would be the green light to force Tian Lingzi to hand over their treasures. This was why he wanted "Wang Daozhong" to make a move. If an outsider made a move, any complaints from Ye Wuzong would be directed at Wang Daozhong, leaving the Jinqian Gang out of having to face someone as powerful as Ye Wuzong. But if Wang Daozhong did not act, Gang Leader Qian still had other powerful backers he could rely on.

Meanwhile, Tian Lingzi was also putting on a show, arguing indignantly and logically that they had not stolen anything from the Jinqian Gang. Both sides were relentlessly bickering.

Xia Chichi was not seen in the main hall. She was lurking in a treetop outside a window, watching and waiting for Tarantula to appear.

However, she had no idea that Tarantula would only appear behind her, as Tian Lingzi had already betrayed her.

A silent and deadly poisonous mist approached her from behind, and behind the mist were eyes filled with intense hatred.

From a distance, Vermillion Bird watched with folded arms expressionlessly. Should I save this little brat? The only thing she's good at is falling in love! She did manage to assassinate a traitor, but when it comes to dealing with Tarantula, I have to step in to save her. Where's the experience you were supposed to gain? What did you come to Kunlun for? To buy a gourd? Fine, go and buy it! See what happens!

As these thoughts crossed Vermillion Bird's mind, Xia Chichi seemed very focused on the argument in the hall. Yet suddenly, a charming smile emerged on her face.

Iceheart flashed out from beneath her ribs. She executed an elegant backward sword slash, cutting through the poisonous mist and directly aiming for Tarantula's throat!

It was as if she had been waiting for her all along!

Not only was Tarantula caught off guard, but even her master and the lover who knew her best both forgot that she had a “lie detector”—Iceheart specialized in figuring out the deceitful and untrustworthy. As early as when they had made plans with Tian Lingzi, Chichi already had to prevent Iceheart from moving.

From the moment she lay in wait in the treetop, Xia Chichi knew that her opponent would not appear in the hall but somewhere around her. She had been waiting for this the entire time!

While Zhao Changhe was disguised as Wang Daozhong and busy with his own matters, this was her trial.

I’m at the peak of the ninth layer, and I’m right before the doors of the Profound Mysteries. I came to Kunlun for training... The venerable said that unless I face a desperate situation where I’m completely on my own, I won’t be able to unlock my full potential and break through.

However, who said that people can only unlock the door to the Profound Mysteries in dire straits? There are multiple paths to a breakthrough in martial arts.

The Profound Mysteries are unlocked when a bridge is formed between heaven and man. Understanding the heaven’s will above, and man’s will below; the convergence of heaven and man is nothing more than this.

In these treacherous lands of the Western Regions, fate brought her and her lover together. In the face of adversity, he appeared before her, easily curing her from the poison that ailed her. He even directly faced the venerable and said, “You don’t dare to kill me.” From the innocent feelings of their time in the mountain stronghold all the way to now, he had become a reliable husband.

They could openly walk hand in hand through the streets of this city of villains. They strolled under the night of this foreign land, enjoying the snow of Kunlun.

As lovers, they did what they should have done a year ago.

Her mind was clear, her heart open. Was this not the true meaning of a connection between heaven and man?

Yue Hongling had already broken through, so why should she delay in reaching the first layer of the Profound Mysteries any longer?

Iceheart soared, swirling snow from the treetops. The roars of a dragon and a tiger stirred the wind and clouds in the sky.

An innate sword, the sign of a breakthrough!

Tarantula's expression changed drastically.

She was ranked fifty-eighth on the Ranking of Man, but she had not unlocked the Profound Mysteries. Yet Xia Chichi, who was supposedly only ranked third among hidden dragons, was actually breaking through to the Profound Mysteries and becoming a master right before her eyes!

"Thank you, Tarantula."

In the distance, Vermillion Bird stared in stunned silence. Then, she smiled and disappeared.

Chichi has grown up. She no longer needs me to protect her in secret. Now, it's time for me to investigate that eruption.

As for that comment she had about red clothes, I'll settle the score for that some other time. She better not think she's suddenly become some kind of big shot while she's just at the first layer of the Profound Mysteries!

Chapter 315: Witch of Troubled Times

Zhao Changhe hurriedly leaped out through the window and was immediately greeted by a bright flash of sword light.

Behind the spinning Chichi, it was as if there was a white tiger projection pouncing on its prey. Her sword shimmered with an icy aura, the aura forming the shape of an ice dragon. The ice dragon shattered into countless fragments under Tarantula's parry, scattering in all directions.

A true clash between a dragon and a tiger truly was a magnificent spectacle. In terms of the visual spectacle alone, Chichi was the one who could bring out the most impressive display among his companions.

Clang!

Their swords clashed, and Tarantula's resolve wavered as she suddenly went from being the hunter to becoming the hunted. Having only hastily raised her sword to block the strike, how could she possibly withstand Chichi's long-prepared strike?

With just one strike, Tarantula's blood and qi were thrown into disarray, and even her poisonous mist became chaotic as she rapidly retreated using the force from the impact.

Previously, Xia Chichi had struggled to even block a single strike from her, being forced to retreat immediately. Yet, after just a single night, their roles had reversed, and now it was her who had to retreat from just a single strike.

Fortunately, she was a formidable expert who had even made it onto the Ranking of Man. Moreover, her ranking was not low either. If someone weaker were in her place right now, Xia Chichi's strike might have just forced them to stay there forever rather than retreat.

Of course, it was not like she was no longer in any danger. In a battle between experts, even falling into a slight disadvantage would be difficult to recover from, especially since she could not outrun Xia Chichi with her movement arts!

"I was wondering which young master it was from the Four Idols Cult who had come, but it turns out that it was actually their saintess who came," said Tarantula gravely as she fought and retreated. "There's no enmity between us. You've already completed your mission by killing my subordinate, so why are you pursuing me so relentlessly?"

Xia Chichi continued her assault while advancing swiftly. She laughed coldly as she said, "When you coated your body in poison and secretly harmed me, was there any enmity between us? And what did I do to you when you tricked me into seeking out Tian Lingzi? And just now, you even ambushed me! You did all that, yet you say there's no enmity between us?!"

"Indeed," replied Tarantula. "That is simply how everyone acts in Kunlun. None of that was true enmity. It's all about one's strength. You won't be able to defeat me quickly, and this is my territory."

At my call, my subordinates will gather and surround you. In the face of such a force, even you won't fare well, so why not just stop?"

Xia Chichi chuckled and said, "You make a fair point."

While she said that, she was actually wondering why Tarantula had not called for backup yet. Although she did have the upper hand at the moment, once the other party called for her subordinates, she would be the one who would have to run. So why had she not done so? Was there some plan that she was trying to avoid ruining?

Tarantula continued, "In Kunlun, fists are what decide what is right. At the moment, your fist is bigger than mine, so I shall concede. Tian Lingzi and I have discovered a secret realm. We're willing to share it with you and turn this hostility into a friendship. What do you think, saintess?"

If it were solely up to her, Xia Chichi would have scoffed at sharing. She had not come here to look for some secret realm in the first place. But then, she thought of Zhao Changhe, and she recalled how he seemed to be searching for something.

As she hesitated, she suddenly saw Dragon Bird approach from behind Tarantula. It approached menacingly, yet as quietly as falling snow.

Tarantula doesn't sense it!

Xia Chichi pretended to be unaware and simply questioned Tarantula. "Tell me more about this secret realm. What's in it? Is it where you got the gourd?"

"Yes, the gourd you took an interest in was something we found in its outer area. There are definitely many much more valuable treasures further in..." Tarantula was halfway through her explanation when she suddenly felt a sharp warning in her mind. She quickly tilted her head to the side, narrowly avoiding having her head cleanly sliced off by a broad saber. However, the saber still managed to graze her neck, leaving a deep, bloody cut along the side.

Tarantula held a thin needle between her fingers. She had been planning to use it for a sneak attack when Xia Chichi lowered her guard. But she now flung it backward to fend off the attacker while trying to increase the distance between them.

However, Zhao Changhe did not dodge. He took the needle straight to the chest.

With a clear and crisp sound, the needle was blocked by the golden foil beneath his clothes, failing to penetrate. Meanwhile, Dragon Bird once more swept toward Tarantula's neck.

Xia Chichi cooperated extremely well with him. The tip of her sword wove a web, blocking all of Tarantula's escape routes.

From Tarantula's perspective, as the saber came slashing right at her, it seemed as if the entire space around her had been frozen. Wind stopped, snow ceased to fall, and the branches of the trees nearby became completely still.

It was as if hell had descended upon the world.

Clang!

Tarantula desperately blocked the saber coming at her neck with her own sword. Her sword was a treasured item, and it managed to remain intact, but the terrifying force from the impact sent her sprawling to the side.

Xia Chichi's sword was already waiting on the other side. Tarantula could not dodge this time, and Iceheart effortlessly pierced through her chest.

"What a filthy couple..." Tarantula spat a mouthful of blood mist. "I shall be waiting for you in the Nine Springs!"

Xia Chichi was prepared. She pushed forward with her left palm, and a white tiger phantom roared out, creating a violent wall of air that cleared away the blood mist.

Tarantula's eyes dimmed, and a green gas began seeping out from her body. It seemed as if she was withering, and within moments, she looked a lot more like a woman in her late fifties.

Xia Chichi instinctively began wiping her hands on her pants. Damn, this is who I touched for days?

Zhao Changhe looked over and said, “She’s ranked fifty-eighth on the Ranking of Man? She much weaker than Hu Lie, but he’s only ranked fifty-first, which isn’t that much higher.”

Xia Chichi shot him a glance. “Hu Lie? Who did you fight him with?”

Zhao Changhe fell silent.

“You’re saying that Yue Hongling is much stronger than me, right?” Xia Chichi ground her teeth. “Which is why, despite Hu Lie being so powerful, you still managed to win, is that right?”

“No, no, no.” Zhao Changhe smiled apologetically. “I remember now. It’s probably just because Hu Lie was an expert who had unlocked the Profound Mysteries a while before and had experience. On the other hand, Tarantula hasn’t even unlocked the Profound Mysteries. Actually, I really don’t understand how she’s got such a high ranking...”

“Poison relies on catching others off guard. If you don’t know who she is, her blood mist and green gas can easily catch you off guard. It was through ambushing others using poison that she was able to earn such a high rank. But since we knew who she was, her threat was reduced by at least half,” Xia Chichi said nonchalantly. “This is why individual cultivation is paramount. Once you’re prepared for these underhanded tricks, they aren’t of much use...”

As she spoke, her face suddenly turned pale.

Fuck, I got poisoned again... When?

Zhao Changhe inspected himself and found poison infiltrating his body as well. He realized that he had underestimated Tarantula. She truly was someone who was incredibly difficult to guard against.

When the fuck did we get poisoned?

Well, she did manage to become ranked fifty-eighth on the Ranking of Man. She’s definitely got her tricks... It isn’t a big problem, though. It’s nothing a kiss can’t fix...

Wait... While the ambush on Hu Lie wasn’t announced by the Tome of Troubled Times because he didn’t die, what about Tarantula?

As Zhao Changhe leaned in to kiss Xia Chichi, he suddenly realized something. He quickly spun around with Xia Chichi in his arms, narrowly avoiding another thin needle that grazed his ribs. It tore his clothes but failed to penetrate his skin.

At the same time, the supposedly dead Tarantula suddenly sprang up, darting away with several swift leaps and quickly disappearing from their sight.

The young couple tried to chase her, but the poison slowed them down. They could only watch helplessly as she disappeared into the alleyways.

“That’s what you get for underestimating someone ranked fifty-eighth on the Ranking of Man!” Xia Chichi huffed and playfully punched him

Zhao Changhe grinned apologetically. It’s my fault? While not finishing her off was our mutual mistake, you had the last strike on her.

Never mind, I should just let her vent.

To be fair, Chichi’s sword penetrated her heart, and Tarantula’s body even shriveled up. She looked like she could not be any deader than that. This probably has something to do with her poison arts. It actually seems worth studying if I get the chance.

Just as these thoughts were hovering in his mind, a very short scream could be heard from Tarantula faintly in the distance. It seemed that she had fallen into someone’s hands.

Zhao Changhe felt a little horrified in his heart. He lost any thought of kissing Xia Chichi and quickly used his Rejuvenation Art to remove the poison from Xia Chichi’s body. “You’ve finished your mission here. It would be best for you to leave now. This place is full of dangers, and even a slight lapse could be fatal. Tarantula’s situation is unclear...”

But Xia Chichi shook her head. “We have no enemies here. Whoever dealt with Tarantula isn’t after us, but they are likely after the secret realm. Don’t you want to see what happens next?”

Zhao Changhe asked: “What other evil plans do you have?”

“Tian Lingzi should have no idea that Tarantula has fallen, so he will be continuing with his plan. We should return to the restaurant and wait for an opportunity... If the secret realm has what you’re looking for, then great. If not, why not give it to the person who killed Tarantula? Tian Lingzi tried to trick me, how can I not at least stab him to relieve my anger?!”

The corners of Zhao Changhe’s mouth twitched. She really is a witch of troubled times. But why does she suit my tastes so well?

Her thoughts made sense, though. As his identity as Wang Daozhong was still under wraps, the other side knew nothing. The show had only just begun.

Zhao Changhe hurried back to the restaurant. As soon as he got back, he heard Tian Lingzi sigh and say, “Gang Leader Qian, since you don’t believe that we didn’t steal anything, why don’t you join me in exploring the secret realm?”

Gang Leader Qian was stunned. He had devised countless ways to pick a fight with Tian Lingzi, just waiting for the other party to flip the table over from anger. But then now he just threw this offer out of nowhere?

Tian Lingzi smiled gently and said, “What do you say? The secret realm was never something I could monopolize. I was planning to develop it in collaboration with the Thieves Guild, but... since you’re already here, there’s no reason I can’t just work together with you instead.”

Gang Leader Qian slammed the table. “Are you being serious?”

Tian Lingzi smiled slightly. “Of course.”

Chapter 316: Ancient Pill Refinery

Kunlun City was not originally a city, it was just a town that kept on expanding. It was nestled in a rather cozy spot, surrounded on three sides by mountains, with only the eastern side having access to the outside world.

Thus, whether it was Sisi or Yang Qianyuan in the past or Chichi and Zhao Changhe more recently, they all entered through the eastern part of the city. Both the Earth Deer of Liu and Chen One were also rooted in the eastern part of the city.

However, those in the eastern part of the city also had to make a living by going into the mountains surrounding the city on three sides and engaging in logging, mining, hunting, and other typical mountain-related activities. They never really got to search for any secret realms. These mountains, where people had lived for a long time, had long since lost the mysterious veil that outsiders believed them to have. When the locals went up the mountains, all they found were wild boars defecating everywhere and venomous snakes slithering around. They never saw any secret realms.

Of course, when it came to the distant peaks of the vast Kunlun Mountains, no one could claim they knew everything. But when it came to the nearby peaks around Kunlun City, the locals were almost completely certain that they had nothing of interest left to them. If there really was anything, then it would be on Yuxu Peak, but that was occupied by Daoist Yuxu.

However, a secret realm was called a secret realm precisely because it was not something that could be found through conventional means.

Just like the Blood God Cult searching for long the Azure Dragon Seal in Beimang, unless someone dropped a specific amount of blood in the pool, the formation in the cave behind the waterfall would not appear. The discovery of such secret realms was, more often than not, a matter of fate.

The secret realm discovered by Tarantula and Tian Lingzi was a few peaks away. The reason for the discovery was rather unsettling: the two had gone to this mountain for a tryst. Unfortunately, some unlucky merchants happened to pass by. They were captured and robbed by Tian Lingzi and then taken away by Tarantula so that she could test some of her poison and study more about immortality. Those merchants were truly unfortunate.

She dissected an entire merchant caravan, and their poisoned blood spread across the ground, unexpectedly triggering the opening of the secret realm. A previously solid-looking mountain wall suddenly cracked open, revealing a sinister poisonous mist within.

Who knew if there was any internal conflict that went on between Tian Lingzi and Tarantula right after the discovery of the secret realm... In any case, Tarantula carefully dispelled the poisonous mist at the entrance, leading to the discovery of a stone chamber inside.

This was not just a stone chamber dug out of the ground but one isolated in time and space. Similar to the sword chamber at the bottom of Ancient Sword Lake, it was a solitary stone chamber existing in its independent space-time.

Whenever such a situation arose, there had to be a rare treasure within. It was either that the unique power of the treasure helped maintain the spatial isolation—such as Iceheart, aided by the page of

the Heavenly Tome, maintaining the sword chamber back at Ancient Sword Lake—or that someone had set up the spatial barrier to protect a treasure, such as with the Azure Dragon Seal and the Black Tortoise Gemstone.

Tarantula and Tian Lingzi were both well-informed and experienced, so they were overjoyed at the sight and began exploring the stone chamber.

They discovered that it was an ancient medicine-refinement laboratory filled with various ancient containers containing medicines.

Unfortunately, the passage of countless years had degraded all the medicines, rendering them useless. Only the containers could still be used after cleaning, such as the gourd that Tian Lingzi intended to sell Zhao Changhe, which had actually been used to store medicinal pills. Apart from their special, durable material and possible preservation properties, they really did not hold significant value as a treasure.

When Tian Lingzi said that it was not something worth bargaining for, he was not just pretending to be generous. The item's use was indeed limited, and no one would be foolish enough to overpay for it. The items they found in the stone chamber were generally like this, and thus a disappointment for the two who thought they had discovered a treasure trove.

After searching around the stone chamber for a long time, they finally found a secret door leading to the core area of the secret realm.

Unfortunately, when they opened the secret door, they were met with an invisible, insubstantial poison. If it was not for Tarantula's extreme sensitivity to poisons, anyone else entering would have most likely failed to realize that the seemingly normal air was poisonous until it was too late.

They quickly retreated. This time, even with Tarantula's skills, they could not completely neutralize the poison. It was simply unlike anything she had ever encountered.

When they returned to the city, Tarantula immediately began capturing people to study how to deal with the strange poison. Over time, she had secretly experimented on quite a few people. The results showed that the poison was extremely lethal. According to her assessment, even those on the Ranking of Man would not be able to withstand it if it infiltrated their bodies, and even those on the Ranking of Earth would suffer significant harm.

Tarantula could not immediately find a solution to the strange poison, but she did discover a crude and simple way to deal with it. The poison mist was limited, and there didn't seem to be anything generating more of it. In other words, every time someone absorbed a bit of poison, there would be that much less poison remaining. So, all they needed to do was to trick a large number of people into coming into contact with it to exhaust the poison.

Thus, a devious plan was born. Tian Lingzi openly displayed the items they had found in the outer area of the secret realm and began selling them through the Yukun Gang. The appearance of many seemingly ancient items naturally attracted the attention of the neighboring Jinqian Gang.

Tian Lingzi knew that other forces might also take notice, but he did not mind. He believed that he could simply deal with all of them at once. Even Ye Wuzong of the Thieves Guild could not surpass Tarantula in the study of poison... However, what he did not anticipate was catching the attention of an intelligence organization under a Ranking of Heaven expert, ultimately leading to the arrival of a powerful figure from afar.

No one in the world was more interested in secret realms than Ying Five. When these ancient items appeared, Chen One, who was Ying Five's representative in the area, was the first to buy a few of them.

After carefully extracting the medicinal residues from the containers, Chen One found some dried ginseng roots. His analysis suggested that they once contained extremely potent blood qi, which had since dissipated.

At that time, Ying Five had been busy searching through a mountain of ancient texts to help Zhao Changhe find clues about the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng. Upon receiving Chen One's message, Ying Five secretly wondered how such a timely coincidence had come to be. He directly reviewed the records related to Kunlun, discovering historical mentions of the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng. The two pieces of evidence aligned perfectly, and he then conveyed this to Zhao Changhe, leading to his trip to Kunlun.

From beginning to end, it was all part of the same story... If Lady Three had not been so cryptic and had simply directed Zhao Changhe to the restaurant where Chen One was, they would have gotten straight to the point much sooner, without all the detours and hidden explorations.

Fortunately, they had not met too late... Perhaps the reason why Lady Three had been so cryptic was to lead Zhao Changhe to meet their cult's saintess and help the saintess break through to the Profound Mysteries.

In any case, the young couple trailed behind the Jinqian Gang's group from a distance, following Tian Lingzi past nearby mountains through valleys until they reached the location. They saw the cave exposed on the stone wall, completely unhidden. It was as if they were not afraid of anyone accidentally entering it.

"There's such a strong smell of blood and lingering poison in the air," Zhao Changhe whispered. "Just how many people did Tian Lingzi and Tarantula kill here?"

Xia Chichi glanced at him and sighed a bit helplessly. She was supposed to be a demonic cult's witch, and she thought she was with a mountain bandit, but it turned out that he was a hero... What could she do, though?

She could only say, "Well, even if Tarantula isn't dead, she's been captured and is facing retribution. As long as we kill Tian Lingzi, everything will be settled. But do you want to stop the Jinqian Gang from going in? If they do go in, it looks like many of them are going to die."

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, "Although the Jinqian Gang aren't really filled with good people... I'd still like to warn them for peace of mind, but whether they listen to me or not is up to them."

As he was considering how to discreetly warn them, the Jinqian Gang was already rushing into the stone chamber.

"It really is a secret realm! This feeling of spatial isolation is definitely not something you'd feel in an ordinary underground stone chamber!"

The faces of the gang members twisted with the. Gang Leader Qian, who had been skeptical at first, now had no doubts upon seeing the isolated space. Overjoyed, he asked Tian Lingzi, "Brother, are you really letting us develop this secret realm together?"

Tian Lingzi shrugged, "Our Yukun Gang lacks the manpower and strength to do so on our own. Even if we can crack the secret realm, we might not be able to keep it. So, we either need the backing of the Thieves Guild, or we can simply cooperate with our neighbors. If we seek the Thieves Guild's help, though, I'm afraid that Thief Saint Ye Wuzong might just take everything for himself. At least by cooperating with you, I can have some of the gains for myself."

"Hahaha! You're absolutely right! I didn't expect you to be so insightful! Hahaha!" Gang Leader Qian was so excited that he patted Tian Lingzi's shoulder heartily twice. "From now on, we're brothers!"

However, what seemed like a friendly pat on the shoulder was actually a powerful strike with internal energy, intending to crush Tian Lingzi's shoulder.

Why should we cooperate? Since you've already shown us where the treasures are, can't we just kill you and take everything for ourselves?

Caught off guard by the sudden attack of someone who had seemed easy to deceive until now, Tian Lingzi reacted too late. He managed to deflect some of the force but not all, resulting in his left shoulder dislocating with a loud crack.

With a sudden kick, he propelled himself backward, retreating while shouting furiously, "You bastard, you just wait!"

He had a fairly impressive movement art, and he was gone in an instant.

Gang Leader Qian sneered. "He's injured. Even if he manages to escape now, we can just take down the entire Yukun Gang later. Men, search the stone chamber!"

A swarm of Jinqian Gang members surged into the stone chamber, but Gang Leader Qian stayed outside, cautiously observing. Seeing no traps, he leisurely followed them in.

Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi watched from afar. After the entire spectacle took place, they exchanged glances. They had been thinking of warning the gang, but now it seemed pointless to do so.

None of these people were good.

However, Gang Leader Qian's actions were likely a part of Tian Lingzi's plan. It was likely that only in this way would Gang Leader Qian truly drop his guard and go in to get poisoned. Zhao Changhe was almost certain that Tian Lingzi had dislocated his shoulder on purpose and could easily set it back in place. Once everyone was inside, he was sure that Tian Lingzi would reappear.

"What should we do?" Xia Chichi asked, amused by the show. "If we keep watching from out here, he probably won't show up. Should we leave for now, or..."

“Let’s go in too,” Zhao Changhe whispered. “Tian Lingzi can’t find Tarantula, so he’ll be suspicious. He’ll only relax if he sees us inside as well.”

Xia Chichi asked, “Are you confident about handling the poison inside?”

“Yes,” Zhao Changhe smiled slightly. “Tarantula has already neutralized the poison in the outer chamber, and that last trap we fell for was Tarantula making use of the poison in the inner chamber. I’ve already tested it and found that my Rejuvenation Art can neutralize it.”

Xia Chichi blinked in surprise, then chuckled. “It seems that Tarantula is also playing Tian Lingzi. She might have secretly taken some core item from inside already, but Tian Lingzi just doesn’t know about it. Hah, this place is really interesting.”

The two walked forward slowly. Yang Qianyuan, who was left outside to keep watch, saw Zhao Changhe and was startled. “Senior, you...”

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, “What, afraid I’d play the role of the oriole and ambush your gang leader?”

Yang Qianyuan almost rolled his eyes. I actually want you to ambush the gang leader, but I can’t just say that in front of his other subordinates...

He felt a headache coming on and was about to say something when piercing screams echoed from inside the stone chamber, followed by a chorus of wails and cries.

Chapter 317: Is This Your Home

Zhao Changhe ignored Yang Qianyuan and quickly entered the stone chamber.

The outer room had been emptied by Tian Lingzi, leaving the hidden passage, which should have been hidden behind a secret door, clearly visible. After going through the passage, he found himself in a larger space. In the center stood a pill furnace, the fire of which had been long extinguished. Surprisingly, however, even with the copper furnace being sealed with a lid, it still emitted a faint glow, suggesting the presence of a treasure within.

If the furnace contained any pills, they were definitely extraordinary pills.

Next to the furnace sat a skeleton sitting cross-legged. Its bones were a deep green, resembling black jade. It almost looked as if the skeleton had been sculpted from jade rather than being the remains of a person... It appeared that whoever the skeleton had once been had died from poison. It was also possible that they had died while refining some poison.

A pill refiner, on the brink of completing their work, suddenly dying from poison, leaving behind the pills in the furnace...

When the era collapsed, was it the power of the pill or pills in the furnace that preserved this isolated space? That would be a bit terrifying, wouldn't it? Just what kind of pill can even achieve such an effect? Or could there be something else at play here?

Whether the skeleton had anything else on it was unclear, as the numerous members of the Jinqian Gang, including Gang Leader Qian, were writhing and wailing around it, obscuring the view.

None of them could get within a zhang of the skeleton and the pill furnace.

It seemed precisely calculated that the poison in the air would fully penetrate anyone's body by the time they reached within a zhang of the furnace, its effects fully taking effect at that point.

Due to her knowledge and expertise in poison, Tarantula had been able to sense the danger upon entering the passage, allowing her to retreat right away in relative safety. She was then able to capture others to test the poison inside the secret realm. Unfortunately, Gang Leader Qian and those in his gang were nowhere near as adept at handling poison as Tarantula. By the time they realized they were poisoned, it was already too late.

In the short time that Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi had been observing, the members of the Jinqian Gang had gone from wailing in pain to rolling on the ground, and now most of them lacked even the strength to roll, only faintly groaning.

They're all done for...

Even Xia Chichi, who had broken through to the Profound Mysteries, could not detect any poison in the air. The poison in the secret realm was colorless, odorless, and undetectable by any special means. It was only by continuously inspecting her internal condition that she was able to notice that poison had seeped through her skin, which Zhao Changhe immediately neutralized before it could do her any harm using the Rejuvenation Art.

Zhao Changhe was not an expert in poison either, but he was prepared, and the Rejuvenation Art made it easy for him to sense the poison. At the moment, the poison in the air had already been significantly weakened. Even if he did not use the Rejuvenation Art, he and Chichi could probably handle the poison for quite some time due to their high poison resistance.

He estimated that if a few more people came and absorbed the remaining poison, it would completely dissipate.

Just as he thought this, Yang Qianyuan exclaimed from outside, “Tian Lingzi! You... Ah!”

His voice was abruptly cut off.

Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi quickly pretended to be affected by the poison, curling up on the ground and lying still.

Moments later, screams echoed as, one by one, the members of the Jinqian Gang who stood guard outside were thrown into the stone chamber.

Tian Lingzi searched outside for Tarantula but could not find her. He was extremely puzzled by that. Without Tarantula, how could he judge whether the poison had dissipated? Was he supposed to go in and test it himself?

But then he suddenly thought, Isn't it a good thing if Tarantula is gone? That's one less person to share the spoils with. What would we have done if there was only a single pill left inside?

With a new plan, Tian Lingzi returned and threw those guarding the entrance inside to test the poison levels.

Sure enough, the people he threw in were taking longer and longer to show signs of poisoning. This indicated that the poison was nearly gone.

Elated, Tian Lingzi threw Yang Qianyuan in last.

Yang Qianyuan, seeing the people lying all over the place, felt his face turn ashen. He thought that his life was over. But after a few breaths, he was completely fine. He waited a few more breaths, and still nothing happened to him.

The poison's gone!

Yang Qianyuan was surprised and overjoyed. He nearly laughed out loud at the sky.

I truly am favored by the heavens!

More delighted than him was Tian Lingzi, who burst into laughter as he entered, "After all that hard work, this day has finally come."

His gaze fell on Gang Leader Qian, who was not yet dead but lay curled up among the others. His head was dripping with sweat, and he was in such extreme pain that he could not even speak.

Tian Lingzi walked up to him with a smile. He then stomped on Gang Leader Qian's shoulder, shattering it viciously. "How does that feel?"

Gang Leader Qian could not even muster a scream, only managing to arduously say, "I was blinded by greed... Just give me a quick death. Torturing me does not make you a good man?"

Seeing that Tian Lingzi was ignoring him, Yang Qianyuan bolted.

Tian Lingzi was indeed too lazy to pay any attention to a small fry like Yang Qianyuan. Hearing Gang Leader Qian's words, he sneered and stomped on Gang Leader Qian's other arm, crushing it from his hand toward his shoulder one cun at a time. "I, Tian Lingzi, have never claimed to be a good man."

Holding onto his last breath, Gang Leader Qian stared at the passage.

He had powerful allies, but none had shown up to help. He felt despair creeping in, thinking his allies must have been dealt with by Tarantula. Losing hope, he finally succumbed and died of anger.

Zhao Changhe suspected Gang Leader Qian's so-called allies never cared about his survival. He believed they were likely waiting for Tian Lingzi to trigger any traps around the skeleton and the pill furnace before making their move.

Seeing Gang Leader Qian dead, Tian Lingzi did not bother torturing the other members of the Jinqian Gang. Instead, he looked at Zhao Changhe with a smile and said, "I feared you two might be the real hidden threats, but it turns out you're just fools who ended up getting poisoned as well. Where is Tarantula?"

Zhao Changhe remained silent, and Xia Chichi simply pretended to be unconscious.

Tian Lingzi smiled and said, "If she died in your hands, the Tome of Troubled Times would have announced it. That means that she must be hiding somewhere after being heavily wounded by you. Well, that's not a bad thing. With the poison mist gone, I have no need for her anymore. I can take everything for myself now."

Zhao Changhe sighed. "Even if you take everything for yourself now, Tarantula will still come back to trouble you in the future."

"That's none of your concern." Tian Lingzi bent down and sealed Zhao Changhe's acupoints with a single finger. Then, he pushed him toward the jade skeleton. "Go get me the items on that guy's body."

No matter how one looked at it, the jade skeleton seemed to be covered in poison. There was a high likelihood that it was even the source of the poison in the space. Tian Lingzi did not dare touch it himself, so he simply picked Zhao Changhe as his test dummy.

When Zhao Changhe was pushed towards the jade skeleton, Xia Chichi, lying behind him, opened her eyes slightly. Opening her eyes, she saw Zhao Changhe discreetly gesturing for her to wait.

She had been ready to spring up and kill Tian Lingzi, but seeing that he was not interested in touching her or in torturing Zhao Changhe, only intending to use him to test the poison, she decided to bide her time and watch.

Zhao Changhe squatted beside the jade skeleton and carefully examined it.

There was a thin booklet titled Classic of Materia Toxica[1]. It looked like it had been kept on the skeleton's chest but had fallen to its legs when the clothes rotted away. Scattered around were some other items, including gold, silver, jewels, and a small jade token, which was possibly an identity token.

Tian Lingzi urged, "Bring them all over!"

Zhao Changhe silently handed the poison manual and the token to Tian Lingzi, who wrapped his hand in true qi and received them with a laugh. "It looks like you know how to adapt to the situation, no wonder you've been able to thrive. Now, go open the pill furnace."

Zhao Changhe tried lifting the lid of the furnace but failed. Surprised, he said, "It won't open... It feels like it was cast as a single piece."

"Where nonsense are you spouting?" Tian Lingzi did not believe him. "Are you just pretending and not using any strength?"

Zhao Changhe glanced at him speechlessly, then said, "Why don't you just try hitting it from a distance and see for yourself?"

Tian Lingzi picked up Qian Gang Leader's sword from the ground and threw it at the gap between the furnace and the lid.

Ding!

The sword bounced off, and the lid did not budge at all.

Tian Lingzi was also surprised. "Was that not strong enough?"

Zhao Changhe silently thought to himself: Mm-hm, you'd need the strength of a dragon elephant to open it.

With his "acupoints sealed," Zhao Changhe had no strength. There was no way that Tian Lingzi was going to unlock Zhao Changhe's acupoints, so he gathered his true qi, figuring that he had to try opening the furnace directly.

But when he gathered his true qi, a sharp pain surged through his meridians. The poison lurking in his body, which had been dormant until now, erupted violently, wreaking havoc in his body.

Tian Lingzi had no idea where the poison came from, and he let out a grunt of pain as he bent over.

At the same time, he felt a chilling sensation from behind him. Xia Chichi, who he thought was unconscious, suddenly thrust her sword at his back, while Zhao Changhe, whose acupoints he thought he had sealed, nonchalantly drew his Dragon Bird and slashed at his neck.

Despite the intense pain and disorder in his meridians caused by the poison, Tian Lingzi still managed to counter with a palm strike, deflecting Dragon Bird. He even managed to sidestep Xia Chichi's attack, demonstrating extraordinary cultivation that surpassed even Tarantula's!

However, Xia Chichi was no longer the same as she had been before. Although Tian Lingzi dodged, he could not avoid her attack completely. Iceheart followed him relentlessly, slicing through his ribs and leaving a long gash. The fierce white tiger sword qi burst forth, causing Tian Lingzi to scream in pain and retreat to the corner, clutching his wound as he gasped for air.

This couple advanced toward him, weapons at the ready, closing in on him from both sides.

"Your acupoints were never sealed!" Tian Lingzi exclaimed in disbelief. "Your acupoints were never sealed, and neither of you were poisoned! What the fuck, are we in your home or what?"

Zhao Changhe was stunned by what he said and chuckled. "Maybe."

Tian Lingzi was exasperated, "Since neither of you were poisoned, why didn't you strike me earlier? You even let me seal your acupoints, or well, I guess you let me think I sealed your acupoints. Wasn't that all pointless?"

"Old man..." Zhao Changhe smiled slightly. "Tarantula is ranked fifty-eighth on the Ranking of Man, and she possesses extraordinary poison techniques. Why would someone like her cooperate with you and listen to your arrangements to ambush Chichi, as if you were the one with greater authority?"

Tian Lingzi found himself speechless.

Zhao Changhe continued, "That only proved that you're far more powerful than you appear. At the very least, you had to be stronger than Gang Leader Qian, and your real strength had to be at the same level as Tarantula. My wife and I weren't confident in ambushing such a skilled expert, so we had to let you weaken yourself further."

Tian Lingzi inspected the poison within him, utterly baffled. "But how did I get poisoned?"

Zhao Changhe pointed to the jade token that Tian Lingzi held in his left hand. "Now that you know we're immune to the poison here, can't you figure it out? Obviously, I can handle some things here, but you can't. Hah, using me to test for poison, brainless."

Tian Lingzi furiously threw the token to the ground. The jade token clattered, a crisp sound echoing in the room, but it remained completely intact, not even a corner having chipped off.

Zhao Changhe said calmly, "Chichi despises you quite a bit. We never did any of this to obtain anything. This was all just about killing you."

Chapter 318: Thief Saint Ye Wuzong

Zhao Changhe was engaging in conversation with Tian Lingzi, and while it seemed pointless, it did subtly shake the other party's resolve and made him feel defeated.

Meanwhile, Xia Chichi was not interested in wasting words. She was focused on action, continuing to dish out attacks at Tian Lingzi relentlessly.

Clang!

As Zhao Changhe's final words fell, Iceheart pierced through the feeble defense that Tian Lingzi put up with his sword. The sharp and ruthless sword intent rushed straight toward his spiritual platform.

It was only then that Tian Lingzi realized that Xia Chichi was actually much stronger than Zhao Changhe. This woman's a Profound Mysteries-level expert!

All this time, he had been distracted by Zhao Changhe's reputation as the first hidden dragon. He had been thinking that Zhao Changhe was the one in charge, failing to realize that it was Xia Chichi who was the main force between them at the moment!

With his internal state already in disarray from the poison, he could hardly contend with the razor-sharp White Tiger Fang.

In a single exchange, his sword's path was directly thrown off, and he could no longer put up any effective defense. He had to rely on his intricate movement art to dodge around, kicking a half-dead Jinqian Gang member at Xia Chichi in an attempt to delay her.

At the same time, he dashed toward the passage, intending to flee.

But his path was then suddenly blocked by a flash of blood-red light as Dragon Bird came swooping in.

Zhao Changhe had already anticipated Tian Lingzi fleeing and had long since been ready to swing his saber at the other party's only path of escape.

Tian Lingzi spat blood from anger.

People say that everyone in Kunlun is treacherous, but look at these two! Just how in the world did Zhao Changhe even manage to earn such a heroic reputation? If he had been thrown into Kunlun, he would have fit right in!

However, this was not the end of this cunning expert. Tian Lingzi knew that he would not be able to make it through Zhao Changhe. He could only parry with his sword, halting his escape.

Behind him, Iceheart struck like lightning, aiming right for his heart.

But then, Tian Lingzi still managed to twist his body in a way that would prevent any of his vitals from being struck by Iceheart. Nevertheless, Xia Chichi's sword still sliced across his shoulder blade, nearly severing his arm.

In just a few exchanges, Tian Lingzi had been reduced to look just like a bloodied corpse. He half-kneeled on the ground, supporting himself with his sword as he gasped for air. His eyes glared at the

two with venomous hatred. “You speak of disgust, you speak of heroism, yet you’re after treasures just like everyone else.”

Zhao Changhe pressed his saber against Tian Lingzi’s neck and said calmly, “You’re wrong about that. I really have no interest in the item in the furnace. If I really did take it, then I wouldn’t be able to leave this place alive.”

Tian Lingzi was stunned.

Xia Chichi smiled slightly.

She had wanted to remind Zhao Changhe, but it seemed that his reputation had not really come about by luck. He truly was no less clever than her.

Seeing this, she felt that perhaps she could afford to be a little less cautious in the future.

Zhao Changhe continued, “Tarantula was able to use the poison here earlier. So, it’s either that she’s already figured it all out, or she’s taken some key item that was here. Since she had already been able to do so much, she should have been able to just open the pill furnace and take whatever’s inside it herself. And you can’t possibly think that she was simply waiting to share it with you, right?”

Tian Lingzi was stunned.

Tarantula already grasped how to use the poison here?

“The only reason that I can think of as to why she did not open the pill furnace is that it probably takes a lot of time. Previously, the poison here had not yet dissipated, so she probably could not stay here long enough to open it. She first needed your sinister plot of using others to thin the poison here to succeed. She left the jade token here because she intended for you to touch it. This entire time, she was plotting against you. We just took her place in carrying out the final parts of her plan.”

Tian Lingzi listened silently.

“Opening this pill furnace requires either immense strength, if you were to do it forcefully, or a specific method, which is probably known only by Tarantula,” Zhao Changhe sighed. “Tarantula was captured, but not by us. The senior who caught her is waiting outside, watching us kill you. He doesn’t care about what happens to either you or us, just the treasure. Therefore, as long as I don’t touch whatever is inside the pill furnace, there won’t be a conflict, and we can probably leave... right, Senior Thief Saint?”

A voice echoed from the passage. “You knew I was here?”

“If someone captured Tarantula, they would not have done so just for fun. There had to be a follow-up.”

“How did you know it was me?”

“When Tian Lingzi started selling ancient items, everyone suspected that it had something to do with the Thieves Guild. You, of all people, would have been watching. I figured that Tian Lingzi might be trying to trick you into absorbing some of the poison as well. The fact that you did not react meant that you were watching to see what he was up to. And as for Gang Leader Qian’s backer, that was probably you as well. His provocations against Tian Lingzi must have been due to your support or your instruction.”

The voice began laughing. “You’re quite right. Since you knew that I was watching, why did you still put yourself in danger? Aren’t you afraid that I would just kill you two as well?”

“Last night, I asked Tian Lingzi to inform you that I wished to meet with you... Whether he actually did so or not, I figured that you would know since you were watching. I wanted to meet you in the first place, so why bother with where we meet?” Zhao Changhe then said respectfully, “I, Zhao Changhe, seek an audience with the esteemed Thief Saint. Please allow me this meeting..”

The laughter drew closer and closer, and in a blink of an eye, an old man holding the shriveled Tarantula appeared in the room.

Both Zhao Chang and Xia Chichi’s eyes widened at the same time.

Wasn’t this the old man who sold us wontons last night?!

The dignified Thief Saint was personally selling wontons! Right, his stall was right by the Yukun Gang! He had seen everything that the Yukun Gang did! Even when we went to buy the gourd last night!

Ye Wuzong smiled slightly. “You wanted to meet me, but haven’t we already met?”

Zhao Changhe had nothing to say in response.

At that moment, Tian Lingzi, who had been remaining silent, suddenly struggled, “Master, master, save me! I never schemed against you! When I left, you said that I could not publicly claim to be from the Thieves Guild, but you also said that I could at least use the guild’s name to intimidate others. I never violated your orders...”

Damn, he’s actually part of the Thieves Guild?

Ye Wuzong’s eyes fell on him, and he was still smiling. “Actually, even if you did scheme against me, it would not matter. I told you when you left that a thief’s success depends on their own abilities.”

“Right, right,” Tian Lingzi said joyfully. “When Xiang Simeng stole from you, you didn’t mind either!”

Ye Wuzong’s smile did not waver. “Exactly, and since we all must rely on our own abilities, why should I save you?”

The smile that had only just emerged on Tian Lingzi’s face froze.

Ye Wuzong gently patted Tian Lingzi’s head, speaking softly like a loving father, “If you had truly fooled me, like that girl Sisi did, I would have been pleased and even admired your skill. But when an outsider openly asks to see me, possibly about important matters relating to the guild, and you hide it from me? Since you don’t consider yourself part of the guild, then you never will be.”

Tian Lingzi was horrified. “Master, please forgive—”

Before he could finish his words, Ye Wuzong shattered his skull, killing him instantly. Tian Lingzi’s eyes still reflected a look of regret.

Zhao Changhe withdrew his saber from Tian Lingzi's neck and, together with Xia Chichi, stood silently.

The Thieves Guild really is a demonic cult. Their logic is just straight-up twisted. He's fine with his disciples scheming against and deceiving him, but kills them for not reporting an outsider's request to meet. We really can't regard him as some kind old man just because he was selling wontons on the street.

Ye Wuzong then turned to them, his gaze softening as he looked at them. "What did you want to see me for?"

"Uh, actually, it wasn't for anything that important..." Zhao Changhe scratched his head. "But since we're already here, I was thinking that the Thieves Guild and the Four Idols Cult could discuss cooperating?"

Xia Chichi quickly added, "Yes, the Four Idols Cult has long wanted to communicate with the Thieves Guild, but we could never find anyone."

"Heh..." Ye Wuzong said leisurely, "The Four Idols Cult is too involved in worldly affairs, unlike our Thieves Guild. We have no major matters to cooperate on. However, since none of us are virtuous and we're all on Tang Wanzhuang's wanted list, it's indeed possible to help each other out in some areas."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Ye Wuzong said, "Such cooperation isn't worth talking about in person. I'm much more interested in what Zhao Changhe wants to discuss with me."

Xia Chichi said no more and turned to look at Zhao Changhe.

Zhao Changhe sighed. "I've been meaning to ask for one of your guild's item retrieval techniques. Initially, I thought that if I helped you kill Tian Lingzi, it might be enough to exchange for one. But now, seeing that everything was under your control, it seems I can't really make you owe me a favor."

“Item retrieval techniques?” Ye Wuzong smiled. “For a storage ring?”

Zhao Changhe felt embarrassed. “Senior, you really do know everything...”

“Of course, I know. I also know that the yellow mud you put on your face is from my unique formula.”

Zhao Changhe suddenly realized that he was still disguised as Wang Daozhong and began sweating profusely. I’m fucked. Does that count as stealing a secret technique from the Thieves Guild?

But then Ye Wuzong sighed and said, “Ridiculous. You smear mud on your face and call it a disguise? Didn’t Sisi tell you that the core of disguise is acting?”

Zhao Changhe quickly glanced at Xia Chichi, relieved to see that she seemed unaware of who Sisi was. He then hastily said, “Uh, I think my acting was pretty decent...”

“Bullshit!” Ye Wuzong burst out in anger. “You carry a broad saber and claim to be Wang Daozhong?! Who the hell would believe you?! Without a storage ring to change your disguise and hide your items at will, what kind of disguise do you even have?! You’re absolutely smearing my reputation!!”

Zhao Changhe was taken aback.

Ye Wuzong casually tossed a booklet to him. “This is the Crane Controlling Art[1]. Next time I see you disguise yourself and still carry that saber, I’ll personally slap that disguise off your face! What a joke!”

Chapter 319: Dragon Tiger Sword Pellet

Zhao Changhe received the booklet in stunned silence.

I secretly learned one of your guild’s secret techniques, yet what you’re concerned about is not that I learned it, but that I didn’t learn it well enough? And now you’re even teaching me more?

Ye Wuzong resumed the calm demeanor of a senior and said, “In ancient times, gods and demons could retrieve items with just a thought. That is the true way to use a storage ring. Nowadays, since

our consciousnesses are much weaker and are unable to grow as strong, we need to use methods such as the Dragon Capturing Art and the Crane Controlling Art as substitutes. These are not techniques that are solely meant for using storage rings but proper martial arts. Do not confuse their primary purpose to be for the use of storage rings.”

Zhao Changhe composed himself and bowed sincerely, “Thank you for the guidance, senior... So do you also have the Dragon Capturing Art or...”

Ye Wuzong: “?”

Xia Chichi turned her head to the side.

Ye Wuzong looked at Zhao Changhe curiously for a moment, then suddenly burst into laughter. “You’ve certainly got a thick face, just like Sisi.”

Xia Chichi turned her head back, and this time she was struggling to maintain her composure.

Zhao Changhe glanced at her, dripping with cold sweat, and said, “Senior...”

I only want to learn a technique! Are you trying to get me killed?

Ye Wuzong said, “The Dragon Capturing Art is domineering, while the Crane Controlling Art is delicate. Now, do you think our Thieves Guild would practice the Dragon Capturing Art or the Crane Controlling Art? Ultimately, both teach you how to manipulate objects from a distance. Once you master the method, it’s up to you to develop it. Whether you learn one or the other doesn’t really matter.”

Zhao Changhe understood and bowed again. “Thank you, senior.”

“There’s no need to thank me. It’s just something ordinary; it really isn’t that important,” said Ye Wuzong. “Stealing is my Dao. Whether you steal from others or from me, it’s ultimately still a part of the path I’ve chosen. So why would I be angry about it? But if you use my techniques poorly... that, I cannot tolerate.”

Zhao Changhe was rather flabbergasted at the man’s morals, but then again, he was the last person who had the right to complain.

Ye Wuzong glanced at him. "Alright, alright, it's not like I'm giving it to you for free. There's something I need you to do for me."

Zhao Changhe quickly said, "What is it?"

"Sisi stole a core cultivation manual from the Thieves Guild. When a secret manual is out in the open, it is no longer a matter of my philosophy; it immediately becomes a threat for others to potentially study it and develop a way to counter our martial arts, and that would simply be a disaster. From what you've shown, it's clear that she only taught you the disguise arts and did not recklessly share our techniques. This shows that she at least exercised some restraint. So, there isn't necessarily a grudge to speak of. If you encounter Sisi in the future, tell her to simply return the manual. If she does, I won't hold anything against her. But if she delays any longer, I will really have to go out and deal with her myself."

Zhao Changhe was surprised at the other party's views.

Ye Wuzong is really quite the man. Not many would be able to remain so calm after having a core manual stolen from them. He's a true master if I've ever seen any.

Speaking of which, Sisi isn't just from a foreign race, but from a different world altogether. Her logic is naturally different from those of this world. When she first arrived, she saw people as NPCs more than even Xia Longyuan. It was only after some time that her perception changed a little. Actually, when Ji Chengkong spoke to her, it was clear that her views were changing.

"If I do see her again, I will definitely relay your message," said Zhao Changhe. "Actually, she should be aware of it already. Brother Ji said something similar before, and she seemed to have been moved by his words. I believe that the main reason why she hasn't brought it back yet is because she has other urgent matters to attend to. If you could, please give her a little more time."

Ye Wuzong said calmly, "Are you... vouching for her?"

Zhao Changhe was stunned for a moment.

Ye Wuzong's gaze sharpened. "Yes or no?"

Zhao Changhe could only say, “I can’t entirely vouch for her, nor can I be certain that I’ll be able to see her again anytime soon. But since I’ve received your Crane Controlling Art, I will definitely take what you said to heart and handle it as if it were my sect’s secret manual that was stolen.”

Ye Wuzong smiled and did not press further. He walked toward the pill furnace, still holding the unconscious Tarantula.

As expected of someone known throughout the world as the Thief Saint—despite a treasure being right before him, he actually prioritized engaging in a long conversation with Zhao Changhe before even glancing at it.

When stealing becomes one’s Dao, the pursuit is no longer mere treasures but the act itself.

“A furnace left here for anyone to take lacks the essence of a true theft,” Ye Wuzong commented. He looked at it for a while and then said calmly, “You said taking what’s inside would cost you your life, but I can only say that you see me too lowly. I’m just curious about what’s inside. If it doesn’t interest me, I might not even take it.”

Zhao Changhe said, “It’s likely related to poison. The Thieves Guild likely has techniques related to poison, while I would have no use for something like that.”

“That might not necessarily be the case.” Ye Wuzong placed his hand on Tarantula’s shoulder and she slowly woke up.

When she regained a bit of clarity, she immediately started pleading, “Senior Thief Saint, it was Tian Lingzi who betrayed you, not me! It has nothing to do with me...”

Ye Wuzong said, “It doesn’t matter whether you schemed against me with him, I just need you to open this pill furnace.”

“If I open this pill furnace, will you spare me?”

“If you try to bargain again, I’ll just kill you right now and spare myself a headache. If you open it now, then maybe I’ll be in a good mood and spare you. It’s your choice.”

Tarantula decisively closed her mouth, then reluctantly took out several bottles of poison from her sleeves. She carefully poured the contents around the outer edge of the pill furnace. As the poison fell, the glow from the furnace intensified, and the seemingly seamless lid began to loosen.

Zhao Changhe's earlier judgment had been correct. The slow and even application of the poison took nearly half an hour. Before, when the poison in the room had not dissipated, it would have indeed been impossible for Tarantula to open the furnace.

This method of using poison as a barrier was something that Zhao Changhe had never seen before. He had mainly seen blood or formations used to construct barriers. Clearly, there was still much he had to learn about the various systems and techniques in this world.

Ye Wuzong said, "It seems the item you took was the Classic of Materia Toxica. After reading and learning the poison arts within, including the special method on how to use poison as a barrier, you returned it here. You covered your tracks pretty well."

Tarantula smiled obsequiously and said, "I really can't hide anything from you, senior. The poison arts within the manual are incredibly vast and profound. I only managed to learn a small portion of it in the urgency I was in, and I was planning to study it in greater depth in the future. Oh, of course, it belongs to you now..."

Ye Wuzong did not respond and simply motioned for her to continue opening the furnace.

After Tarantula carefully laid the poison for a long time, ensuring that no spot was missed, they finally heard a faint click. The lid of the furnace finally began to separate from its body, revealing a slight gap.

Tarantula smiled nervously and said, "It's open now..."

Ye Wuzong remained unmoved. "Remove the lid."

Tarantula stood up to lift the lid. At the moment when the lid was removed, a burst of white light shot out. Tarantula did not even have the time to react before half of her body was obliterated, leaving her lower half to collapse by the furnace.

Zhao Changhe took a deep breath, stunned by the lethal trap. This place is truly sinister. There was still a trap so far in. The pill-refining master who set this all up was definitely not a good person. He

fits perfectly in this land of the wicked. It seems like this area has been full of bad guys since the previous era.

Ye Wuzong, unfazed, did not even spare a glance at Tarantula's gruesome end. He focused on the area above the pill furnace.

As the white light faded, an azure and white pill floated up, hovering at the mouth of the furnace.

Despite the surroundings filled with poisonous mist, the deadly traps, and the pill-refining master clearly being a master of poison, the pill itself emitted no trace of poison. Its glow was gentle, its fragrance pleasant, and it seemed to carry a faint, elusive insight, similar to the feeling inside the Black Tortoise Secret Realm, the feeling of a connection with the Dao.

Moreover, the azure and white pattern on the pill was actually a dragon and tiger intertwined with each other!

Xia Chichi's eyes widened.

I thought I was already done with what I had to do here after capturing Yang Qianyuan. I believed the only reason I was even staying here any longer was to accompany Changhe... So why does it suddenly feel like this pill inside the furnace is connected to me?

Ye Wuzong and Zhao Changhe both turned to look at her, their expressions peculiar.

Clearly, they had not expected the pill to resonate so strongly with her attributes.

Zhao Changhe almost wanted to piece Tarantula back together and ask if she knew anything about this.

Ye Wuzong pondered for a moment, then bent down to pick up the jade token and Classic of Materia Toxica that Tian Lingzi had dropped on the ground. He flipped through the booklet for a while before suddenly laughing out loud. "This has nothing to do with the Four Idols Cult. It just so happens that different paths led to the same end."

Xia Chichi hurriedly said, "Please enlighten us, senior."

“All things in the world can be categorized under the four idols and five elements. Even within the symbol of the Azure Dragon alone, there are many aspects to consider, including medicine and poison. This person refined poison to its pinnacle, resulting in the manifestation of the Azure Dragon. His poison arts can truly be said to have reached the highest level.”

Xia Chichi understood this well. The Azure Dragon branch of the Four Idols Cult also focused on medicine and poison. In fact, this was the reason Vermillion Bird had such great confidence in the cult’s medicinal pills. The disguise technique[1] that Xia Chichi had inherited from her mother fell under this domain as well.

But at the end of the day, the Four Idols Cult was just a small cult. It was suppressed by the imperial court and forced to develop in secret. Their inheritance was rather incomplete. For example, they lacked the Rejuvenation Art. This significantly limited their scope of research, forcing them to focus mainly on martial arts. Although they did dabble in other areas, their expertise was limited. Xia Chichi herself had specialized in sword arts, leaving other areas to the elders, who only had limited expertise themselves.

Even the Azure Dragon branch of the Four Idols Cult, which focused on poison, had not achieved much. Yet, an unrelated poison master had actually managed to manifest the Azure Dragon.

Zhao Changhe asked on her behalf, “Then what about the image of the White Tiger...”

“This is not a medicinal pill, nor is it the Dragon Tiger Golden Pill, as you might think. It’s a sword pellet[2]...” said Ye Wuzong. “This person did not know how to refine sword pellets traditionally, so he used a different approach. His idea was to combine poison with pill-refining techniques. He thus had the dragon and the tiger intertwine, the dragon being poison, while the tiger being the sword.”

Xia Chichi was genuinely impressed: “He took a different path and managed to manifest both the Azure Dragon and the White Tiger. They must have been very renowned in ancient times.”

“Not necessarily... Only if he could successfully control the sword pellet would he have been truly powerful.”

“He couldn’t?”

“No,” said Ye Wuzong. “If I’m not mistaken, the reason for his death was that when the sword pellet was formed, he could not control the overflowing sword qi, ultimately leading to his demise.”

Xia Chichi was speechless.

“But the sword pellet killing him also wore down its sharpness, making it usable now. Before he died, he sealed the sword pellet, hoping to use it in the future. But as you can see, he did not live long enough to do so... This explains what happened here.” Ye Wuzong’s face was filled with the satisfaction of solving a puzzle. “The invisible poison in this room was probably released when he opened the furnace. Since no more was being made, it would naturally dissipate after being consumed.”

Zhao Changhe interjected, “But the sword pellet was still completed, making it a divine treasure. When the era collapsed, the treasure’s unique power must have protected this space, keeping it separate from Kunlun.”

Ye Wuzong clapped his hands and said, “Indeed, that must be the case.”

Xia Chichi looked at the two with a strange expression.

You two know that it’s a divine treasure, yet you seem to be more interested in solving puzzles than the treasure itself. Forget about me, maybe the two of you should be together...

Just as she was thinking this, Ye Wuzong turned to her, his smile fading and his gaze becoming sharp as he asked, “Saintess, do you want it?”

Chapter 320: A Little Game

Xia Chichi understood the significance of a sword pellet.

It was essentially a flying sword, just that it was shaped like a pellet. It could be stored inside the body and used to behead targets with a mere thought. It did not conflict with Iceheart, and she could use it as a trump card.

More importantly, it matched her dragon and tiger attributes perfectly. While she might not be able to use other sword pellets of the same caliber, this one was very much within her reach. Moreover, it

could deepen her understanding of the concepts of the Azure Dragon and the White Tiger, enhancing her grasp of the elements of wood and metal corresponding to the two idols.

The Four Idols Cult also had records of a sword physique that could potentially be refined with such an item.

None of these, however, was the main reason to get the item. Sword pellets were considered lost items in the current world, items that belonged to the previous era. For those in the current era who strived to become like the gods and demons of the previous era, an item such as this was a crucial step toward achieving similar divine abilities. Understanding it could potentially lead to the mass production of flying swords and sword immortals, benefiting many people at once.

Additionally, while the third layer of the Profound Mysteries was considered the peak in the current world, cults with ancient heritages like the Four Idols Cult knew very well that there existed higher cultivation levels. Unfortunately, the paths to reach those levels had been lost. This was why things like the Rejuvenation Art and the sword pellet, which pointed to the deeper essence of the ancient era, were so highly valued.

Although the Four Idols Cult had a fairly formidable foundation and had similar treasures, this particular item especially suited both the cult and Xia Chichi personally. It was as if it was tailor-made for them.

Yet, after a long silence, Xia Chichi responded, "I don't want it."

Ye Wuzong was extremely surprised. "Why not?"

"To possess something beyond one's means only invites disaster," Xia Chichi said calmly. "This item from the era of the gods and demons interests you, senior. I am unable to compete with you at the moment, so forcibly taking it would come at an unbearable price. With you keeping it, at least I would know its whereabouts. In the future, I could simply have the two venerables pay you a visit."

Ye Wuzong was even more surprised after hearing her reply. "This really is surprising. I honestly didn't expect you to be such a clear-headed witch who knows when to advance and retreat and when to be ruthless. I really don't understand how someone as sensible as you can fall so deeply in love, wandering the streets with a random man, feeding each other wontons. It just doesn't make sense."

Xia Chichi: "..."

Zhao Changhe: “Could you use fewer adjectives?”

“No,” Ye Wuzong said. “If anything, I’d use even more. Wait, let me think...”

“Senior, it’s alright, you can stop there. Just take the pellet,” Zhao Changhe said. “Chichi’s right. Knowing where it is at least gives us peace of mind and provides us with room for collaboration in the future. We aren’t foolish enough to compete with you over this.”

The corners of Ye Wuzong’s mouth twitched. He was actually starting to feel a little frustrated.

Why are these two so pragmatic?

If anything here was useful to him, it would actually be the Classic of Materia Toxica and the pill furnace. The poison manual was an incredibly valuable source of knowledge, while the pill furnace was a useful device.

In comparison, the sword pellet was actually fairly useless. As someone who pursued the Dao of theft, he had acquired countless treasures and explored numerous secret realms. As a result of all that he has seen, his knowledge of the stages of the Profound Mysteries was among the very best of the world. This was why others were unsure whether he was actually at the second layer or the third layer of the Profound Mysteries. Furthermore, this was why those on the Ranking of Heaven were wary of him despite him still being in the Ranking of Earth.

There were many reasons as to why he had not reached Xia Longyuan’s level, but lacking this sword pellet was definitely not one of them. This item was irrelevant to his cultivation and was essentially meaningless to him.

Of course, even a meaningless treasure was still a treasure, and he did have an interest in collecting it. But taking it outright just felt too dull. Little did the couple know that all the old rascal wanted was to see them struggle to obtain it through a series of unequal agreements, and then he would entertain himself a bit more by having a look at their faces once he stole it back soon after.

Unfortunately for him, the situation was not unfolding in such a direction at all.

Ye Wuzong maintained a calm expression and said persuasively, “This item is something we found together, so you naturally must have a share as well. If you want it, you can take it away if you just give me some compensation. What’s the difference between me discussing with the venerables of your cult and negotiating with you now?”

His words made sense. However, with them being in Kunlun, there was simply no such thing as everyone having to have a share.

If Ye Wuzong had not said such words, they would have felt it to make more sense. In the end, they could only say, “Senior, you should just take it. If we have to, then how about we take something else?”

Ye Wuzong asked, “What else is useful here? The poison manual? The pill furnace? Or that token?”

Xia Chichi said, “I’m actually quite interested in the poison manual. It would be a great addition to our holy cult’s Azure Dragon lineage.”

Ye Wuzong looked at Zhao Changhe. “What about you?”

Zhao Changhe said, “I’m a bit interested in that token...”

Ye Wuzong asked in surprise, “What’s the point in taking the token? It’s probably just an identity token for a sect. Hmm, it might actually be the identity token of the sect master, but still, that sect has long disappeared, so why bother? You can’t possibly be thinking that you can use it to unlock some more relics in the future, are you? Let me tell you, when I was young, I thought the same and collected a bunch of seemingly useful things, but none of them ever came in handy.”

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, “Everyone has different fortunes. Now that I can use a storage ring, it won’t hurt to collect a few more items.”

“Damn it.” Ye Wuzong was really starting to feel too lazy to waste time here with the two juniors. He simply said, “Sorry, but I want these two things.”

Now, you should want the sword pellet, right?

But then, the young couple exchanged glances and said, “Then we’ll take the furnace.”

Ye Wuzong: “?”

Just ask for the damn sword pellet, fucking hell...

“Forget it.” Ye Wuzong rubbed his brow and decided to lay his cards on the table. “The things you just asked for were what I was after from the beginning. I’ll take them, and you take the sword pellet. I’ll just be frank with you, I will come to steal it later. If I succeed, it is what it is, you end up with nothing.”

The young couple had actually guessed this. Zhao Changhe said, “If you want to play such a game, then we’ll naturally play along. However, there must be a time limit. We can’t possibly play that game our entire lives, can we?”

Ye Wuzong nodded and said, “If I don’t manage to steal it within three days, then it’s truly yours, and I’ll even give you the token. As for the poison manual and the furnace, I’ll be taking them no matter what. If your Four Idols Cult wants the poison manual, you can make a copy.”

After saying this, he impatiently tossed the sword pellet to Xia Chichi and said, “The timer starts now.”

Zhao Changhe grabbed the sword pellet and said, “I’m keeping it. Come steal from me.”

Ye Wuzong said, “You can’t possibly think that putting it in the storage ring will be of any use, right?”

“Of course not,” Zhao Changhe said expressionlessly. “I just don’t want you to touch her, no matter how old you might be.”

Ye Wuzong was dumbfounded, and Xia Chichi turned her head, trying to hide her expression.

After a long while, Ye Wuzong could not help but laugh as he waved his sleeve. “Not everyone in the world is interested in such things... Anyway, you’d better heed my advice, being obsessed with such things is detrimental to your pursuit of martial arts.”

Zhao Changhe had a look on his face that seemed to say that he knew but had no plans of changing his lifestyle anytime soon. “Thank you for the advice, senior.”

Ye Wuzong casually waved his hand, and the token, poison sutra, and alchemy furnace all disappeared in an instant. Zhao Changhe assumed they had been placed inside a storage ring, but he had no idea how that worked just yet.

“Alright.” Ye Wuzong, in high spirits, pointed to the passage and said, “The game starts one incense stick of time after you’ve left.”

Zhao Changhe sat down on the spot and started examining the sword pellet.

Ye Wuzong tilted his head in confusion.

“Sorry, senior, it might not be with me for long, so I feel like I’ve got to study it while I have it... You want to steal it, not snatch it, right?”

Ye Wuzong laughed in exasperation. “Do you seriously believe that you can fully comprehend the mysteries behind the sword pellet in such a short time?”

“That’s not it,” said Zhao Changhe. “If I’m not mistaken, one of the materials that was used to refine this sword pellet was the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng.”

“So what if that’s the case? You can’t extract it unless you refine the sword pellet into your own weapon and fuse it into your body. Only then will it even be a possibility for you to absorb the essence of any of the materials used to make it.” Ye Wuzong seemed amused and laughed. “So, are you going to fight your little lover over the sword pellet?”

Zhao Changhe examined the sword pellet for some time, his mind sinking into the golden foil, looking at the words that were projected: “Dragon Tiger Sword Pellet. It is an extremely sharp flying sword. It can also be used to cultivate the Four Idols Sword Body, but a soul of ice and the essence of fire are also required.”

“If missing one of the three components, the sword pellet can be used to sense the location of the final component.”

Zhao Changhe looked at the Iceheart[1] in Xia Chichi's hand and gestured for it.

Xia Chichi, not knowing what he wanted to do, handed it over anyway.

When he received Iceheart, the sword pellet reacted slightly. A fine thread of sword qi then sprang out like a steel wire, pointing northwest.

Sure enough, Iceheart was made from a soul of ice. The final component, the essence of fire, must be at the northwest.

There must be a reason as to why the poison master decided to refine the sword pellet in Kunlun... He probably did so because the essence of fire was nearby.

Kunlun has many secret realms. After the dimensional collapse, many treasures were scattered across this vast mountain range, forming various secret realms. There was likely another secret realm in the nearby mountains containing the essence of fire.

Zhao Changhe quickly recalled hearing about a volcanic eruption. He believed that the essence of fire had to be there. If the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng grew widely in this area during the ancient era, then it was possible that he could find one in that secret realm. He could only hope that they had not all burned up.

Zhao Changhe stood up, returned Iceheart to Xia Chichi, and said with a smile, "Let the game begin."