

Tang Sect 71

Chapter 71.1: White Tiger Duke's Mansion

Western border of the Star Luo Empire.

It was already so deep into the night that you couldn't see the stars or the moon anymore. In fact, it was so dark that, in the wilderness, you couldn't even see your hand if you were to hold it up in front of your face. This time of night was the darkest part of the night, as it was right before the sun would rise in the faraway east, and a new day would begin.

But at that instant, a white light cut through the sky, leaving behind a magnificent glowing tail; it seemed as if the sky had suddenly been cleaved in two.

This white light looked like a meteor that was descending towards the earth. However, it seemed to be slowing down as it fell.

Suddenly, it grew larger, and the white light transformed into a huge platform that was dozens of meters in diameter. Afterwards, several black forms slowly descended to the earth from the platform.

"Ou..."

"Ou—"

The sound of people retching continuously echoed in the night air. Once the white light had disappeared, the dozen-or-so figures that had appeared were either staggering, squatting on the ground, or leaning against tree trunks. Furthermore, over half of them were in the process of vomiting.

"You all have some skills after all." A hoarse voice echoed. An old man with greasy clothes came forwards, a large calabash in hand. Afterwards, he took a large swig of alcohol. This man was one of the elders of the sacred Sea God's Pavilion of Shrek Academy, and was also the commander of the Shrek Guardians, Elder Xuan.

All of the pale-faced figures who were currently puking were obviously the students he'd brought along.

Even the likes of Ma Xiaotao and Dai Yueheng were in a sorry state; they were having a hard time suppressing their gastric fluids.

He Caitou and Xu Sanshi were in the worst state of those with a higher level of cultivation; they were almost unable to suppress their bile. Who told them to have the largest bodies amongst the disciples of the outer courtyard?

Xiao Xiao, Huo Yuhao, and Wang Dong all threw up several times. Luckily, Huo Yuhao and Wang Dong had the protection of the latter's Golden Light Left Arm Bone, which had sustained itself with their Haodong Power that they had continuously circulated during their turbulent journey. As such, they were slightly better off than the others.

Huo Yuhao, Wang Dong, and the others on the preparatory team had thought that their schoolmates were extremely strong. Yet, compared to Elder Xuan, everyone from the official team were nothing.

Elder Xuan had carried the fifteen of them here by himself; he'd maintained that incredible speed for over four hours, crossing what appeared to be over 1500 miles. Furthermore, if you were to compare his current appearance to that of before he'd begun, you wouldn't find any differences. This might have something to do with his flying-type soul tool, but the main reason was due to Elder Xuan's boundless soul power! Of course, his soul tool had been an important factor too; even if it was Elder Xuan, he wouldn't have been able to fly whilst carrying more than ten people for so long with just his power alone. From this, it should be seen just how important soul tools were for the Douluo Continent.

"Little Dai!" Elder Xuan lazily called out.

Dai Yueheng's face twitched, but he still stepped forward and respectfully said, "Elder Xuan."

Elder Xuan said, "When I descended to the ground just now, it created a large ruckus. The army should've discovered us by now. We're currently only about 25 kilometers away from the western army of the Star Luo Empire. They'll probably send someone over here in soon. Go and take care of it while I take a nap. Your body will become weak when your old like me! Luckily, today's food was quite good." Once he'd finished speaking, his muttering figure disappeared without a trace.

As expected, several figures descended from the sky not long afterwards. They were headed towards them.

Dai Yueheng raised his hand towards the sky, then punched the air. Immediately afterwards, a ball of white light appeared around three meters above his head, then slowly spread upwards and morphed into a white halo.

The figures that were descending from the sky immediately locked onto their position, and a total of thirty men clad in tight-fitting black leather armor landed on the ground.

The flying-type soul tools they were wearing were also black, although they were slightly different from the ones that Shrek's group had previously received from the army. Their quality seemed comparable to the one manufactured by He Caitou.

When they'd reached the ground, they quickly encircled Shrek's group. Their leader, an old man with a cold expression, then stepped forward.

"Who are you and why did you use a flying-type soul tool to approach our army?" After he'd said this, the old man and the soldiers all released their martial souls.

The surrounding area was instantly lit up from the dazzling radiance of their soul rings. What was surprising was that the old man in front was a Soul Sage. He had three yellow soul rings, two purple, and two black. Even though it wasn't the best combination, it was still quite incredible.

All of the soul masters he'd brought along all had at least four soul rings as well. Furthermore, there were also several Soul Kings among them. However, the youngest of them appeared to be in their thirties.

The white tiger's head engraved on their leather armor gave off a pale white glow beneath the radiance of their soul rings. Its head was very large, and covered the majority of the leather armor. It looked lifelike and was quite awe-inspiring.

Thirty men, all of which were at least Soul Ancestors... this was quite the display of power. It wasn't surprising that they'd been able to arrive so quickly using flying-type soul tools.

"Old Du, you don't recognize me?" Dai Yueheng smiled as he stepped forward.

The old man was immediately taken aback. He shone his soul ring's light on Dai Yueheng's face and carefully scrutinized it. When he confirmed who it was, he was slightly surprised. "Ah! It's the young master! What are you doing here? And who are these people...?"

"They're also students of Shrek Academy," Dai Yueheng replied with a faint smile, "I sent a letter to father earlier. Is he here right now?"

The old man in front of Dai Yueheng's was a member of the White Tiger Duke's Mansion known as Du Leisi. He'd accompanied the White Tiger Duke through several different fronts, and had obtained outstanding achievements. Besides his great power, he also possessed the title of Viscount in the Star Luo Empire. The reason he'd called Dai Yueheng 'young master' rather than 'young duke' was due to the Dai Family's strict rules. For one to inherit the duke's title, they needed to be the most outstanding out of all of the the Duke's consanguineous sons. Therefore, even though he'd already grown up, Dai Yueheng still needed to rely on his own ability to inherit the title. This was also why the other two sons of the Dai Family were trying so hard to become stronger, as they were the only two sons of the Duke's main wife. As for the sons of concubines, only Huo Yuhao existed. However, at this point, even the White Tiger Duke himself must've forgotten about him.

Du Leisi raised his hand, after which all of the soldiers withdrew their martial souls. "I see. The commander should be in the military camp. He should already be up for his morning exercise. I'll lead you and your friends to him."

Dai Yueheng smiled bitterly. "Just look at us, do you really think that we can travel as we are? Let us rest a bit; we'll see father once we've recovered."

Du Leisi said, "Fine. I'll send someone to make a report to the Duke," then called over a Soul King-ranked subordinate and told him a few things to relay. The Soul King jumped up after Du Leisi had finished and used his flying-type soul tool to return to the military camp.

Even though his insides were currently a mess, when Huo Yuhao heard the discussion between Dai Yueheng and Du Leisi, Huo Yuhao's mood changed drastically. His pale face had become red due to the excitement he felt.

He hadn't imagined that he'd be able to meet that person whilst participating in the Elite Continental Soul Master Academy Tournament. Would he really be able to see him?

Half of his life had come from this man. Yet, ever since the day he'd been born, he'd never once seen this 'father' of his.

Huo Yuhao's memory regarding him consisted of a single picture: It was the picture of him that his mother used to draw on the ground with a tree branch. When she had, his mother's eyes would become full of gentleness and devotion

Huo Yuhao remembered his mother say that the fact that she'd been able to stay together with him and bear his son were the best things that had happened in her life. She wouldn't regret her actions, even if she wasn't ever able to see him again.

Was he really such a great person? Huo Yuhao clenched his fist so tightly that his nails left deep marks in his palms.

"Will he recognize you?" Wang Dong gently whispered into Huo Yuhao's ear. Only he was privy to Huo Yuhao's background. As such, he was a little anxious right now; he was worried for Huo Yuhao.

Huo Yuhao shook his head lightly. How could he possibly recognize him if he hadn't ever seen him? Inside of the Duke's Mansion, he was nothing more than a small handyman inferior to even the domestic servants. Moreover, his appearance had gone through an earth-shaking transformation over the last year.

Wang Dong could see that Huo Yuhao's body was as taut as a wire. Thus, he reminded him in a low voice, "Waiting ten years to take revenge isn't too long for a wise man. Yuhao, try to calm down a bit."

"I know." Huo Yuhao nodded. He knew that he had to stay calm. However, doing so was easier said than done!

After two hours of rest, they'd more or less recovered from the aftereffects of their flight. Their complexions were still ugly, but they'd recovered most of their soul power and physical strength. Currently, even if a true delicacy were placed front of them, they wouldn't even be able to touch it.

Dai Yueheng informed everyone of Du Leisi and the other soul masters' background. They were all soldiers who'd been personally chosen by the White Tiger Duke, the White Tiger Bodyguards. They only followed the Duke's orders, and also resided in the Duke's Mansion.

Of those in the White Tiger bodyguards, everyone was at least a Soul Elder. Moreover, one's families needed to have held a position inside the Duke's Mansion for at least three generation before one was eligible to become one of the White Tiger Bodyguards. Therefore, besides them being very strong, they were also extremely loyal.

The White Tiger Bodyguards had a total of five hundred members and were the White Tiger Duke's biggest trump card. They had several different types of soul tools, and they were always present at the Duke's side. Wherever he went, they went. Of course, the treatment they received was also the best. Every single one of them had their own residences inside of the Duke's Mansion. As such, it was obvious how important they were to the Duke.

When he'd lived inside of the Duke's Mansion, Huo Yuhao had also seen the White Tiger bodyguards a few times. But because of his status at the time, it had been impossible for him to even approach them.

Chapter 71.2: White Tiger Duke's Mansion

Now that they'd recovered, everyone once again ascended into the air. After being tormented by Elder Xuan, they all began to enjoy the feeling of flying slowly. At the very least, their complexions improved somewhat from doing so. If one were to use Elder Xuan's previous speed along with both his strength and his flying-type soul tool as references, they'd be able to calculate that Elder Xuan would be able to travel to any corner of the entire Douluo continent within a week. Huo Yuhao was growing more and

more curious about Elder Xuan's true strength. The latter shouldn't be just any Titled Douluo; it was likely that even Dean Yan Shaozhe wouldn't be able to compete with Elder Xuan in cultivation alone.

At that moment, the sky had already begun to brighten; the sun had risen from the east and bathed their bodies in a faint golden glow.

A large military camp slowly appeared in front of them. This camp was set up right next to the mountains, while a few more camps were visible in the Ming Dou Mountain Range itself.

The word 'military camp' was somewhat inaccurate; the undulating cotton walls to the west of the camp were over thirty meters tall and nearly fifty meters wide. Just how large of a project was this!?

Even though it wasn't quite daytime yet, an endless number of military carriages that were carrying blocks of stone away from the mountains could still be seen.

At that moment, Dai Yueheng was flying relatively close to Huo Yuhao. Their relationship had deepened slightly after their previous talk. He smiled and asked, "Yuhao, is this your first time visiting an army camp?"

Huo Yuhao nodded.

Seemingly familiar with the matter, Dai Yueheng explained, "The southern, eastern, and southeastern regions of our Star Luo Empire borders the ocean. We're second only to the Sun Moon Empire in size. Our army consists of two sub-armies: the Eastern Army and the Northern Army. Of these, the Eastern Army is the most important, as it has to guard against the Sun Moon Empire. Its total military strength numbers around five hundred thousand."

"The Ming Dou Mountain Range has treacherous and ever-changing terrain, making it extremely hard for troops to march through. Furthermore, every country now has specialised soul masters who scout the mountain range every day. Both the Sun Moon Empire and our empire station our troops at a relatively low-lying part of the mountain range that's advantageous for them, of which there are only three in the entire mountain range. The mountain range itself spreads towards the south, and takes up almost two-thirds of the border; the other third is a soul beast-containing forest that's around half the size of the Great Star Dou Forest. This forest is known as the Great Ming Dou Forest, and is an area populated by a variety of soul beasts. It isn't as dangerous to us soul masters as the Great Star Dou Forest, but it's even more dangerous than the former to an army. This is due to the fact that the soul beasts there are even more aggressive than the ones in the Great Star Dou Forest. It's because of this, that we've stationed our troops at relatively low-lying parts of the Ming Dou Mountain Range.

"Oh, right. Yuhao, I haven't asked you this yet, but where are you from?"

Huo Yuhao had originally calmed down somewhat when he heard Dai Yueheng's explanation, but his expression changed yet again when he heard this question. He lowered his head and said, "I'm also a citizen of the Star Luo Empire."

"Oh? Which part of the Star Luo Empire? I didn't think that we'd be fellow citizens!" The smile on Dai Yueheng's face grew much larger.

"A small village near Star Luo City," Huo Yuhao replied, "I'm sure that you wouldn't have heard of it."

Dai Yueheng chuckled. "Even better! Not only are we fellow citizens, we're even from the same area. I also grew up near Star Luo City!"

As the two conversed with each other, they arrived at the army camp. However, the White Tiger Bodyguards who were leading the way didn't descend. Du Leisi, who'd led the pack, raised his right hand and released something similar to a flare that released a multicoloured array of light. Afterwards they continued forwards unobstructed.

However, Huo Yuhao was able to tell with his visual acuity that a large number of defensive fortifications had immediately reacted the moment they'd approached the barracks. A somber atmosphere seemed to have pervaded the entire camp. Even though it was still early in the morning, a large number of soldiers had already begun their training drills. Not only were they orderly, but they also released an awe-inspiringly murderous air; they seemed like a pack of iron-blooded lions.

"The Eastern Army has the most elite troops within the Star Luo Empire," Dai Yueheng proudly said. "The hundred thousand men from the Central Legion you see in front of us are elites amongst elites."

Even though Huo Yuhao hadn't ever seen his biological father before, he was still somewhat aware of the inner workings of the White Tiger Dukedom. As the marshal of the empire, the White Tiger Duke commanded the Eastern Army. At the same time, he was also the Legion Commander of the Eastern Army's Central Legion. The amount of trust that the Star Luo Empire's imperial family had in him could be seen from this. Supposedly, the hundred thousand men in the Central Legion were enough to rival the combined fighting strength of all of the other soldiers in the Star Luo Empire. Although this was somewhat of an exaggeration, the strength of the Central Legion could be clearly seen with a single glance.

They flew past one barrack after another. Once they'd flown for nearly fifteen minutes more, a large, leather tent appeared in their field of vision.

This leather tent was much larger than the other army tents. Furthermore, it was hexagonal in shape, and was made entirely of dark-brown leather. There weren't too many guards around it. Only two squads of the White Tiger Bodyguards, each of which numbering about thirty, patrolled the perimeter.

Huo Yuhao's gaze quickly landed on a single person who was standing in front of the large tent. Although their figure was somewhat unclear, he was still able to sense a startling pressure from them; it was the sort of tyrannical pressure that came from the combination of a powerful cultivation and an aura of slaughter. That person seemed to be training his fists, though he hadn't released his martial soul. His movements were simple and succinct, yet a muffled explosion of air would appear whenever he punched outwards.

Du Leisi, who'd been flying in front, slowed down, then descended along with everyone behind him. They began to sense the violent fluctuations in the air when they were a hundred or meters in the air.

Huo Yuhao focused his gaze and was able to clearly see the man in front of them. He was currently facing towards them, his golden hair fluttering freely about in the wind. His upper body was naked, which revealed his rugged, copper-colored muscles. His tall figure was almost two meters in height, and one could see just how stalwart his chiseled face was from the side.

His seemingly slow movements had a very natural and flowing tempo to them. Every step he took and every punch he released were followed by a muffled explosion of air. The valiant undulations of qi and blood he was releasing had reached the very pinnacle, which in turn caused Huo Yuhao to feel his blood roil about somewhat as he continued to stare.

That man slowly pulled back his fist, then stood up straight as if he'd sensed their arrival. He exhaled, inhaled deeply, then released a lion-like roar. A gale instantly erupted in the several hundred meters surrounding the leather tent; it truly resembled the descent of an actual lion. The stern aura coming from him caused every single disciple of Shrek Academy to feel their hair stand on end.

The pressure that Ma Xiaotao emanated during battle was already relatively astonishing, but she was still quite a ways away from the tall man in front of them.

Is that him?

Huo Yuhao was stunned, and all sorts of mixed feelings suddenly arose in his heart. He'd never expected to meet his father in such a situation. Was this the man that his mother could never forget? The man who she held no regret for, even when she lay on her deathbed?

As everyone slowly landed, the foremost Du Leisi had already stepped forward. He bowed slightly and said, "Marshal, the young master and people from Shrek Academy have arrived."

Everyone was able to see his full appearance at this point: He didn't look a day over thirty, and his facial features were proper. His deep azure eyes each contained flickering pupils. He looked somewhat thin, yet his entire body gave off a metallic feeling. This was especially true of his gaze, which flickered like an enormous blade as it swept across everyone, which caused them to involuntarily stop moving. However, his gaze quickly turned warm.

Handsome, stalwart, tall, and an iron-blooded temperament. When they saw him, even the Heaven's Chosen of Shrek Academy felt like serving him. An extraordinary splendor repeatedly flickered through Ma Xiaotao's eyes; a steel-like man like this was just her type.

Dai Yueheng stepped out of line, then took a few quick steps forward. He kneeled down in front of that tall man, then said respectfully, "Father."

There was no doubt about it—the tall man in front of them was definitely the current Iron-Blooded War God who stood above everybody in the Star Luo Empire, Dai Hao. He was also Dai Yueheng and Dai Huabin's father, as well as Huo Yuhao's...

The moment Dai Yueheng said the word 'father', Huo Yuhao felt all the blood in his body surge towards his head. His eyes instantly turned red, and he was nearly unable to control the flood of emotions he felt.

It's him, it's him! This is the person my mother was harmed by, yet couldn't forget. He's the father I've never seen before! It's truly him...

His mother's smiling face instantly filled every corner of Huo Yuhao's spiritual sea, and he nearly began to cry.

Wang Dong silently stepped to the side, blocking Huo Yuhao from view. At the same time, he stretched his right hand out, planning to sober him up by grabbing his sleeve. However, he didn't think that his hand would just so happen to grab Huo Yuhao's special area.

Wang Dong's body stiffened, and he immediately let go as if he'd been electrocuted. His pretty face instantly turned bright red, but luckily everyone else had been captivated by the White Tiger Duke.

Oddly enough however, his grab was incredibly effective. Huo Yuhao only felt his lower body tighten up, and his originally teary eyes vanished. The mixed feelings in his eyes subsequently transformed into those of astonishment. Even though Wang Dong hadn't used much force, the feeling of being assaulted caused him to wake with a shudder.

"What're you doing?" Huo Yuhao whispered astonished.

Wang Dong acted as if nothing had happened. "Waking you up a bit."

"Then do you want me to grab that part of your body when I wake you up next time?"

"Screw off..."

Despite what had happened, Huo Yuhao's heart had stabilised quite a bit after this interruption. Furthermore, he and Wang Dong were standing in the back, which had made their actions difficult to notice.

At that moment, Dai Yueheng stood up and whispered a few words to the White Tiger Duke Dai Hao, who then took a few large strides and smiled. "Greetings to Teacher Wang Yan and the various talented students from Shrek Academy." *novE)lb(1n*

Chapter 71.3: White Tiger Duke's Mansion

"Greetings to the lord Duke." Wang Yan lead the inner courtyard disciples and outer courtyard disciples behind them in bowing to the White Tiger Duke. The Duke wasn't just the marshal; he also stood at the apex of nobility on the entire continent. Naturally, they're manners couldn't be lacking.

The White Tiger Duke shook hands with Wang Yan, then said, "Everyone, please step inside. Let this Marshal act as a host now." *novE)lb(1n*

Wang Yan smiled, then replied in a neither servile nor overbearing manner, "There's no need for Lord Duke to be so polite. We've come this time to carry out our mission. It'll be enough if Lord Duke can just give us some clues to help us out. We know that you have a multitude of problems to deal with every day, so we won't bother you too much."

The White Tiger Duke didn't attempt to remain, he simply nodded slightly. "Since that's the case, Elder Du, you're in charge of taking care of these distinguished guests. If any of you wish to join the army once you've graduated, the Central Legion of my Star Luo Empire's Western Army will always have its gates' open to you. You might not get paid very well here. However, this is the best choice for men who want to accomplish something in life."

Ma Xiaotao suddenly spoke up, "Lord Duke, are you looking down on us women?"

The White Tiger Duke was slightly stunned. He couldn't help but reveal a trace of astonishment on his face when saw Ma Xiaotao; from his point of view, the young and beautiful woman in front of him held a wild aura. Furthermore, she clearly wasn't weak.

"It's not that I'm looking down on you, but because there are many inconveniences for women within the barracks. However, your cultivation is another cup of tea. If you're willing to follow this marshal after graduating, I'd be honored to accept you."

Ma Xiaotao revealed a brilliant smile, then remained silent; she looked very pleased.

Wang Yan was somewhat helpless. Even though he was the leader of the group in name, he was still inferior to Ma Xiaotao when it came to cultivation. Naturally, he couldn't restrict a brilliant student like her. He apologetically said, "Lord Duke, we won't bother you anymore then."

"Alright then. I hope that I'll have the chance to meet all of you again." Once he'd said this, the White Tiger Duke turned towards the leather tent and entered it.

Huo Yuhao felt like a heavy weight had been lifted from his shoulders when he saw the White Tiger Duke disappear into the leather tent. He'd never felt this nervous before—not even during his fight against Wu Feng when he was much weaker. Currently, he felt like he was about to collapse.

Du Leisi led them to another tent, where he allowed them to rest after he'd arranged for some food to be brought to them. Afterwards, he went to gather the information that they needed. Before he left, he glanced at Huo Yuhao, Wang Dong, and Xiao Xiao with a somewhat doubtful look in his eyes.

Wang Yan said, "We'll rest for six hours after we finish eating, then head into the Ming Dou Mountain Range. I'm confident that we'll have the information we need by then."

Everyone was somewhat exhausted after yesterday's journey. Their current task was to ensure that their bodies were in peak condition before they set out for a fight in the mountains.

Xu Sanshi couldn't help but ask, "Teacher Wang, since the White Tiger Bodyguards beneath the White Tiger Duke are so strong, why hasn't the Duke simply sent them to eliminate the bandits?"

"He has," Dai Yueheng replied for Wang Yan, "however, if he sends too many people, they'll catch wind of it and run away. Contrarily, if he sends too few people, it won't be of much use. The bandits from the Hand of Death are both rather strong and extremely crafty. They might even have a few spies planted within the army. Father has sent several people in the past to eliminate them, yet they've all returned without any success and a large number of losses. The area in which the bandits have stationed themselves is an extremely sensitive part of the border, thus the Central Legion can only endure silently, in order to prevent a needless war. As students of Shrek Academy, we're different; we aren't restricted by any countries. As such, we must make sure to thoroughly wipe them out this time."

Once they'd finished eating, everyone immediately began meditating and recuperating. This was already a familiar task to the inner courtyard disciples, while Bei Bei, Xu Sanshi, He Caitou, and Jiang Nannan were relatively older, thus they were able to take everything in somewhat quicker. However, Huo Yuhao's trio were merely twelve years old. This task was truly a bit too early for them. From another standpoint, they were just kids.

However, this matter had been decided by Elder Xuan, and nobody present could change that. Wang Yan clearly understood that Elder Xuan hadn't done this in order to allow the preparatory team to directly participate in the massacre. Rather, he wanted them to experience what a mission was like first-hand, and hasten the growth of their mental maturity. No matter how good the academy's tests and live-combat training was, it was still incomparable to the improvements gained from a real battle in a situation like this. In reality, the main combatants in this mission would be the seven from the inner courtyard.

Elder Xuan didn't enter their barracks, as he wasn't willing to concern himself with government officials. With his strength and status, he alone could represent Shrek Academy. However, an old man like him would never lose track of his students. Furthermore, he was confident that he could carry these young people through a battle if need be.

After six hours of meditation, everyone's exhaustion had been swept away. Noon had already passed, and after they'd eaten the lunch that Du Leisi's men had left for them, Du Leisi himself brought over the information that the Central Legion had gathered over for them.

According to the information he'd gathered, the Hand of Death mainly carried out its activities in and around the central region of the Ming Dou Mountain Range. When they had a designated target, they'd rush down the mountain and plunder them at the greatest possible speed. The entire bandit group numbered around three hundred in total, all of whom were young men in the prime of their lives. Of them, about a tenth of their entire group were soul masters. Unexpectedly, nobody knew who the leader of their leader was; the only thing they knew was that he was at the very least a Soul King. Nobody knew exactly how strong he was.

The reason why there was so little information about them was because the Hand of Death never left any survivors; their methods were extremely brutal.

The most recent piece of information was from roughly half a month ago: They'd fled into the Ming Dou Mountain Range after looting a group of merchants. This report also included the general direction in which they'd fled.

The army only had this much information because there was a possibility of a quarrel if they were to enter the domain of the Sun Moon Empire. As such, the Western Army couldn't help them out at all, to the extent that they couldn't even bring the flying-type soul tools they'd been lent into the mountains.

However, time was of the essence; they still had to participate in the Continental Advanced Academy Soul Duelling Tournament. Hence, they immediately set off once they'd obtained a map. They first flew to the entrance to the mountains under the guidance of the White Tiger bodyguards, then descended and handed back their flying-type soul tools. After that, they immediately entered the Ming Dou Mountain Range and began to utilize the map provided by the army to navigate the mountains.

"Maintain your formation. Dai Yueheng, Chen Zifeng, and I will remain in front. Control-type and auxiliary-type soul masters will remain ten meters behind us. Huo Yuhao, come over here. Follow me, and make sure to keep your Spiritual Detection up. Bei Bei, Xu Sanshi, you two keep up the rear. Let's set off!"

The person who'd sent out their commands was their leader, Ma Xiaotao. Huo Yuhao felt very depressed when he was expropriated by her. Thus, he could only follow her orders and release his Spiritual Detection Sharing.

His omni-purpose skill once again helped enormously. In complicated terrain such as a mountainous forest, the three-dimensional image provided by his Spiritual Detection was an enormous benefit. Even though Huo Yuhao could only extend it ten meters from him, these ten meters were still enough to allow everyone to enjoy its benefits.

With Ma Xiaotao's trio leading the way, they travelled forwards at an extremely rapid pace. The effectiveness of Chen Zifeng's Soulchasing Sword was extremely evident; as he held his sword in front of them, the brambles in front of them were all cut apart rather quickly. Combined with Dai Yueheng and Ma Xiaotao's strengths, they were easily able to cut a smooth path through the foliage in front of them. They'd already penetrated deep into the Ming Dou Mountain Range by the time that the sky had begun to dim.

When Wang Yan saw that the sky was beginning to dim, he reminded Ma Xiaotao, "Let's let everyone take a rest and eat something."

Ma Xiaotao nodded. "Everyone, let's rest where we are for now. Don't light a fire, so that we don't alert them inadvertently. I'm afraid that we'll have to continue our search throughout the night."

The students sat in a circle to rest, but Teacher Wang Yan soundlessly left. Ma Xiaotao didn't pay any attention to the fact that he'd left. Instead, she turned towards Dai Yueheng, who was next to her, and said, "Dai Yueheng, your father's rather handsome."

"When my father was young, he was the number one noble of our Star Luo Empire," Dai Yueheng indifferently replied, "it wasn't because of his looks, but because of his ability. He didn't enter our Shrek Academy to study, but rather followed his father onto the battlefield at the age of thirteen. He began as an ordinary soldier, then was able to accumulate enough merits to be promoted to a squadron leader, then a team leader, then a mid-team leader, then a large-team leader, then a battalion commander, then a regimental commander... all the way up until he managed to become a Legion Commander at the mere age of twenty-three. At that time, nobody knew where he'd come from. After a large battle, my father achieved outstanding merits, and was called to the imperial capital to hold a post. When he accepted a reward from His Majesty, His Majesty recognised him due to the similarities in his appearance and my grandfather's. Overjoyed, His Majesty entrusted the Western Army's Central Legion to him. Furthermore, he even stated that 'with Dai Hao, the empire will have no worries for a hundred years' in front of all of the ministers."

Ma Xiaotao's eyes lit up. "If you put it that way, is your father still a hero?"

Dai Yueheng revealed a trace of pride in his eyes. "My grandfather said that father's talent is comparable to that of our ancestor's, the leader of the first generation of Shrek's Seven Monsters. Father is now forty-three years old, and he's commanded the army for twenty years already. How could the number of battles he's participated in be limited to just a thousand? You know how strong the Sun Moon Empire is, but my Star Luo Empire's western border has always been invulnerable to attack. That's all due to the presence of my father! If we were to say that only one person could be called a hero in my Star Luo Empire, then that title definitely deserves to go to my father!"

Ma Xiaotao's eyes immediately brightened even more. "Then how many wives does your father have?"

Dai Yueheng was stunned, and his gaze immediately turned somewhat strange. "Only my mother. In our generation, there's only my brother Huabin and I. My father's extremely self-disciplined in the field of women. He's always said 'if a man can't control his lust towards women, he won't have any large accomplishments'. Why do you ask?"

Ma Xiaotao stared at him, "Can't I admire him? A man like your father is definitely a true man. You should learn from him."

A light flickered through Dai Yueheng's eyes. "Once we've finished this task, I'll have completed thirty Guardian missions. Once I've graduated from the academy, I'll enter the army. However, I won't stay in the Western Army; I'll head to the North, even though there are fewer wars there. I want to follow the same path as my father: I want to carve out my own path, solely relying on myself."

Chapter 72.1: Hand of Death—Envoys of the Death God!

Ma Xiaotao and Dai Yueheng however, didn't realise that Huo Yuhao had buried his fists into the soil beneath him.

Only one wife? He's very self-disciplined when it comes to women? What does my mother count as, then? The hatred he'd suppressed for so long grew even stronger when he heard Dai Yueheng. Perhaps he is a national hero, but he's definitely not a qualified husband or father. If he'd intervened, mom would've...

The sky had already dimmed by this point, such that it was difficult to even see one's own hands in front of them beneath the cover the forest. At that moment, Wang Yan returned.

"Everyone, come here for a moment." Wang Yan waved everyone towards him.

The students from the outer courtyard immediately moved towards him, while the seven from the inner courtyard were somewhat impatient. In terms of cultivation alone, Wang Yan was just a Soul King, which meant that he was merely on par with them. Moreover, he was merely a teacher from the outer courtyard; as students from the inner courtyard, they only recognised strength. As such, they didn't truly respect a teacher like Wang Yan, who wasn't much stronger than them. However, a teacher was still a teacher, thus they still decided to give him some face.

"I just finished scouting out the area around us," Wang Yan said in a low voice, "combined with the observations we made on our journey here, I've made a few discoveries.

"I found a few Warm Mist Trees near us. For those of you who don't know, a Warm Mist Tree is a relatively rare type of tree whose core can be used to produce medicine. Its trunk is as hard as steel, which makes it extremely suitable to be used in various types of furniture. During its growth, it has rather stringent oxygen requirements; only areas that have high levels of vegetation are suitable for them. An old book I once read stated that Warm Mist Trees only grow in areas that're at least fifty miles deep into a forest. Furthermore, it stated that these trees like the coldness of Yin, thus their cores can help soul masters with Yin-attributed martial souls."

Ma Xiaotao furrowed her brows. "Teacher Wang, what're you trying to say?"

Wang Yan replied, "What I mean is that the appearance of these Warm Mist Trees signifies that we've entered the core region of the Ming Dou Mountain Range. At the very least, we've reached its border. Moreover, based on the information we've been given, the leader of the Hand of Death might be an evil soul master. I found this just now."

He then retrieved a tree trunk from his storage-type soul tool. The tree trunk appeared to have been snapped in half by something, and a cylindrical hole was present within it.

Wang Yan said, "This is the Warm Mist Tree. Its core is normally dark-blue, but as you can see, it's missing. In other words, it's been removed by someone. Considering who our target is this time, we can make a bold conjecture that this was done by either the leader of the bandits or by one of his subordinates, then eaten by the leader. If this is really the case, then the likelihood of our enemy being an evil soul master is extremely high. At the same time, that also means that we're not far away from our enemies."

"I can agree with the first point," Ma Xiaotao said, "however, what basis are you relying on to say that we're not far away from our enemies? Don't these Warm Mist Trees grow in other areas?" Wang Yan had actually able to deduce such a large amount of information with just a tiny clue like this; the others couldn't help but admire him because of this. Because of this, Ma Xiaotao had also spoken in a polite manner that befit a student.

Wang Yan smiled confidently. "I mentioned that the Warm Mist Tree is a relatively rare type of tree, right? Since it's rare, it obviously doesn't appear very frequently. I only mentioned the environment required for it to grow, but in reality, the number of places it grows in is still extremely few in number. There are a relatively low number of Warm Mist Trees here, and the one that I found was the largest tree. To soul masters with Yin-attributed martial souls, not only does its core assist them, it can also increase their internal organs' resistance to the coldness of their own Yin attribute. Such a thing is very hard to come by. If it were you, would you give up on something like this? Thus, I can practically guarantee that they aren't far away from here, considering the fact that they've discovered and extracted a core already. We're quite lucky; we were able to find our target without going very far. If we hadn't, considering how large this mountain range is, we would've had to scout from the air tomorrow. If we'd done that, we definitely would've attracted their attention, and thus would've had to defend against them."

Everyone present couldn't help but gain a new level of respect for Wang Yan by the time they'd finished listening to him. Of the fourteen students present, he'd only taught Huo Yuhao, Wang Dong, and Xiao Xiao. However, the three of them only knew that he was very knowledgeable and erudite in the field of martial souls; they'd never thought that his experience with the wilderness would be just as abundant.

"Teacher Wang, what should we do now?" Ma Xiaotao asked subconsciously, "Should we just wait for an opportunity to present itself?"

Wang Yan shook his head. "No, we have to take the initiative. When people move about in the forest, they'll always leave a few traces behind. Even though it's already dark and I can't locate these traces by myself, we have Yuhao's Spiritual Detection. Thus, it won't be too hard for us to find them. Yuhao, follow me; listen to my orders and scout ahead."

“Okay.” Huo Yuhao quickly walked over to Wang Yan. He also wanted to learn how to locate unknown enemies within a forest.

Wang Yan led them three hundred or so meters deeper into the forest, then stopped in front of a Warm Mist Tree. “Out of all the destroyed Warm Mist Trees I found earlier, the tracks near this one are the most recent. In other words, it was destroyed last. Yuhao, use your Spiritual Detection to search the thirty meters around us.”

“Understood.” Now that Huo Yuhao’s cultivation had increased, he could share his Spiritual Detection with a total of ten people. However, he only shared it with Wang Yan for the sake of improving the accuracy of his probe.

A three-dimensional image of their surroundings immediately appeared in their minds. Huo Yuhao manipulated his spiritual power and stopped his Spiritual Detection from instantly encapsulating the thirty meters around him; instead, he slowly had it extend outwards, one meter at a time. Doing it this way would make it so that the information wouldn’t immediately flood Wang Yan’s mind. On the contrary, it would appear progressively, which was more beneficial for analysis and scouting.

Wang Yan gave Huo Yuhao a thumbs up. Of the many students he’d taught in the past, the one he liked the most was the person in front of him. Huo Yuhao might not be the smartest student he’d ever taught, but he was definitely the most mature, steady, and hard-working person among his peers. Furthermore, he was also the most talented student he’d ever taught.

“Stop.” Wang Yan whispered, after which Huo Yuhao’s detection radius immediately came to a halt.

Wang Yan motioned for him to stay where he was, then slowly moved to the right and squatted down to a patch of undergrowth. He carefully observed it for a while, and after verifying what he’d seen with Huo Yuhao’s Spiritual Detection, he waved to the rest and slowly moved in the direction of the undergrowth.

Huo Yuhao hurriedly followed behind Wang Yan, making sure to keep his Spiritual Detection activated. The others all followed behind him. Ma Xiaotao and Dai Yueheng flanked the control-type and auxiliary-type soul masters in the middle, while the agility-type Xi Xi and Jiang Nannan vanished into the night, evidently scouting their surroundings. Everyone advanced in an orderly manner, and even though they weren’t quick, Wang Yan’s pace was extremely stable.

At the same time, Huo Yuhao shared his Spiritual Detection with Ma Xiaotao, Dai Yueheng, and Wang Dong. They began to respect Wang Yan more and more as they continued to carefully observe their surroundings.

Wang Yan was able to discover a few subtle clues with Huo Yuhao’s help, such as a few snapped branches, some shallow footprints in the dirt, pieces of cloth on the trees, and a few bloodstains left on the brambles around them.

They gradually left the woods as they continued to these clues, and advanced at the same slow pace for an hour.

“Stop.” Wang Yan suddenly raised his hand and said. The students that were following him immediately crouched down and leaned towards him.

“Our search shouldn’t have been wrong,” Wang Yan whispered, “there are a large number of messy footprints in the area in front of us. Evidently, many people frequently pass through here. Our enemies shouldn’t be far away now. Everyone, adjust your conditions. Prepare for battle.”

The trees in front of them had become extremely sparse, and even Ma Xiaotao and Dai Yueheng were able to clearly notice the tracks he was talking about with Huo Yuhao’s Spiritual Detection. Wang Yan had clearly discovered the correct location.

“Teacher Wang, amazing.” Ma Xiaotao praised him in a low voice. The other students clearly respected him much more now.

Wang Yan smiled bitterly. “My talent in cultivation is quite poor, thus I’ve focused most of my energy on these sort of miscellaneous things; it’s nothing much. Once this tournament is over, it’s very likely that I’ll become a teacher in the inner courtyard. If you’re interested, I can teach you all these skills then. Now then, Yuhao, how far can your Spiritual Detection reach?”

Huo Yuhao paused for a moment. “If I direct it in a straight line, it should be able to reach two hundred meters or so. However, I can’t use it that way for very long, as the drain on both my spiritual power and soul power is extremely large.”

Wang Yan nodded. “That’s fine. Scan the area from our eleven o’clock to three o’clock and see whether you can find anything.”

“Okay.” Huo Yuhao eyes focused, causing the gold in his pupils to deepen somewhat. He immediately switched his Spiritual Detection from its usual omnidirectional mode to its unidirectional mode, then sent it forwards in the direction that Wang Yan had told him to. His head slightly swayed as he scanned the circular sector per Wang Yan’s instructions.

“I can faintly sense a hillside five hundred meters to the left. These footsteps also seem to lead to the bottom of that hill.” Huo Yuhao quickly gave an answer as he retracted his Spiritual Detection. A detection like this had drained him by quite a bit.

Wang Yan nodded. “Since that’s the case, our enemies should be beneath that hill. If I’m not wrong, the cave that they’re hiding in is also there. When we make our move later, we’ll have to confirm who they are first. Once we’re sure that they’re members the Hand of Death, I don’t think I need to tell you guys what to do. The preparatory team will be with me, and they’ll be in charge of assisting you guys. Xiaotao, we’ll be relying on you to attack them.”

Chapter 72.2: Hand of Death—Envoys of the Death God!

“No problem, leave it to us.” A fierce flame seemed to have been lit in Ma Xiaotao’s pinkish-red eyes. Now that they’d found their target, the only thing left for them to do was make their move.

Wang Yan said, “Everyone, change into your outfits. Shrek Guardians, prepare to move out.”

As everyone began to move Huo Yuhao felt an indescribable sensation of excitement fill his body. When Wang Yan had said the words ‘Shrek Guardians’, he’d clearly felt his blood begin to boil. He wasn’t even thirteen, yet he was about to fight for Shrek Academy!

Everybody was wearing a Guardian Ring that belonged solely to them, but the smaller a soul tool was, the harder it was to control it. Huo Yuhao wasn't even able to tell what class his Guardian Ring was, but he put it on the index finger of his left hand under Ma Xiaotao's instructions.

He'd already blood-bound the ring to himself during their rest last night. When he put it on, the ring immediately shrunk to fit itself to his finger.

He poured his soul power into the ring, and a bewitching layer of green light immediately flashed across its jade-green surface. He then took out its contents one by one.

The first thing he took out was a set of armor that covered his entire body from toe to toe; the only things it revealed were his eyes, nose, and mouth. This set of armor was extremely flexible, and was made from some sort of unknown material, which made it feel like a very thin piece of leather. Its texture resembled that of skin, yet it was extremely durable. After testing it out for a bit, Huo Yuhao discovered that he was only able to send soul power outwards; he wasn't able to absorb any from the outside while he had it on. The defensive capabilities of this set of armor could be seen without a doubt; a faint layer of thin scales was even visible atop the surface of the armor.

Due to the differences between men and women, everyone naturally changed in two different areas according to their gender. Huo Yuhao had planned to drag Wang Dong along to change, but the latter shot straight into the woods and quickly changed before he could.

Other than armor, everyone had also been provided with a dark-green set of warrior robes and a dark-green mask, as well as a dark-green cloak.

Three Guardian-specialised flares were also strapped to their waists.

When everyone gathered back together, they felt an air of mystery when they looked at each other. Their cloaks covered both their heads and bodies, and were extremely tight-fitting; they seemed to be made out of the same material as their armor. They were very thin, yet seemed to possess a sense of tactility and an extraordinary amount of defensive power.

"Prepare to make a move," Wang Yan whispered, "Xiaotao, you'll lead the fight. I'll be in charge of commanding the preparatory team."

"Alright." Ma Xiaotao immediately replied.

Ma Xiaotao bent her body slightly, then leapt into the air first. Dai Yueheng and Chen Zifeng immediately flanked her on both sides, while the other four inner courtyard disciples quickly moved out as well. They maintained a neat formation as they quietly set out.

Wang Yan waved his hand a few seconds after they'd left and led the preparatory team up as well.

Bei Bei took the lead role of the preparatory team, while Xu Sanshi stayed at the very back. After all, their role was merely to assist their seniors from the inner courtyard; taking care of themselves was of the utmost importance. Under Wang Yan's commands, He Caitou and Jiang Nannan flanked their group on the side. Wang Yan himself, on the other hand, was directly behind Huo Yuhao's trio; he emphasized protecting the three people with the lowest level of cultivation in their group.

Ma Xiaotao and the rest were extremely fast; Huo Yuhao's Spiritual Detection was simply unable to keep up with them. Fortunately, he was still able to use it on his companions in the preparatory team and on Teacher Wang Yan.

They rapidly arrived at the hillside that Huo Yuhao had spotted earlier. There were no traces of Ma Xiaotao's heptet, but the area was completely silent.

"Let's head down as well," Wang Yan whispered, "Bei Bei, prepare for battle."

"Okay." Bei Bei didn't dare to be negligent. He quickly released his Blue Lightning Tyrant Dragon, then descended from the hillside first. They quickly spotted a cave that was covered in a large and dense amount of vines. This was, without a doubt, the nest that the bandits had stationed themselves in.

There were already five or six fallen bandits near the entrance to the cave. Undoubtedly, their statuses as members of the Hand of Death had been confirmed, as Ma Xiaotao and the rest had already made their move.

At that moment, a muffled explosion rang out from in the cave. Immediately afterwards, noisy shouts began to ring out from the cave. After that, there were able to hear some muffled sounds and sense strong fluctuations of soul power.

Bei Bei turned his head towards Wang Yan, who said in a solemn voice, "Head inside. Yuhao, release your Spiritual Detection all around us. Everyone, you must be careful."

Huo Yuhao immediately released his Spiritual Detection to the best of his ability, which caused three-dimensional image in everybody's minds to immediately widen.

The entrance to the cave wasn't big, but its interior was extremely vast. Besides the corpses at the entrance, they only saw another corpse after they'd advanced fifty meters.

The dense smell of blood assaulted their senses as they advanced. Bei Bei, Xu Sanshi, and He Caitou were still somewhat fine, but the other four had somewhat pale expressions.

"Ah—!" Jiang Nannan suddenly screeched, and her body violently shuddered. Huo Yuhao, who'd originally released his Spiritual Detection in a single plane parallel to the ground, immediately increased its range as he looked upwards following her gaze.

The scene awaiting them didn't seem important, but all of their expressions instantly changed.

Unexpectedly, there were ten sheets of human skin hanging from the walls. There was even an infant's corpse impaled on a stalagmite. Earlier, Jiang Nannan had raised her head when she felt the drops of blood coming from the corpse above them.

"Bastard!" The usually-scholarly Bei Bei angrily roared. These were the sins committed by the Hand of Death bandit group! At that moment, everybody present felt their eyes go bloodshot. These bandits didn't even let little infants off! They were simply worse than beasts.

As they continued forward, the number of corpses began to gradually increase, while the sounds of combat began to grow more intense. The bandits within the cave had died in all sorts of strange ways, but nobody gave them even a shred of sympathy. This was because the two walls of the cave were

entirely lined with sheets of human skin hanging from them. From the time they'd entered the cave till now, they'd seen more than a hundred, some of which had even been dried by the wind.

"Rouse yourselves. These are all evil men; killing one of them is equivalent to saving a countless number of people." Wang Yan shouted, causing Huo Yuhao, Wang Dong, Xiao Xiao, and Jiang Nannan's hearts, which were in an extremely nervous state, to shake.

The terrain in front of them suddenly widened, and they finally saw the true situation of the battle that was happening. The constant flickering from soul rings dazzled everyone's eyes. Ma Xiaotao's Evil Phoenix was most noticeable, and none of her enemies were spared from the berserk activation of her scorching flames. Her surroundings were littered with bandit corpses.

Gong Yangmo stood at the very centre of the group, and multi-colored rays of light continuously shot out from his body and landed on his companions. The others had loosely surrounded him and kept him in the middle of them.

Yao Haoxuan had already transformed into his massive body, and was continuously pounding on his chest with his fists. He protected Gong Yangmo's back, while Ling Luo Chen took the other side. The three of them didn't participate directly in the fight, but if anybody were to assume that they'd be easy to deal with, they would be wrong.

The bandits that still had the ability to fight all had bloodshot eyes. A large number of them were soul masters, with some of them even having relatively strong cultivations; there were even three Soul Kings. However, they were still forced to retreat step-by-step by the inner courtyard disciples of Shrek Academy.

Waves of bandits continued to surge forth from the depths of the cave to participate in the battle, but Ma Xiaotao, Dai Yueheng, Chen Zifeng, and Xi Xi all managed to cover very large areas.

Gong Yangmo's powerful auxiliary abilities revealed their true capabilities at that moment. There was no need to mention the two who were already Soul Emperors, but the Soul King-ranked Chen Zifeng and Xi Xi weren't the least bit inferior to Soul Emperors with his assistance.

"Roar—" Dai Yueheng tore an enemy Soul King apart, causing his blood to splash everywhere. Immediately afterwards, he sent out a dazzling White Tiger's Meteor Shower in an attempt to blast away the enemies attempting to launch a sneak attack on Gong Yangmo's trio.

Ma Xiaotao's battle was even more spectacular. Nobody knew what she'd done, but her fiery phoenix wings were now more than three meters long. Her wings were the most terrifying weapon she had at her disposal; they would either injure or kill anybody they touched. There was a Soul King in front of her, yet he simply didn't even dare to approach her. He could only put on a false show of bravado from afar.

According to the information they'd been given, the leader of the bandit troupe was a Soul King. Evidently, he was one of the three in front of them. When he saw that the situation seemed to be settled, Wang Yan waved his hand. "Everyone, move. Don't let a single one go. We can't leave any future troubles for ourselves." n/-O1elbln

The opponents in front of them weren't very powerful. The strongest members of their troupe had been blocked by the inner courtyard disciples, while the remaining few were only Soul Grandmasters and Soul Elders. Some of the bandits weren't even soul masters; they were just ordinary humans.

Bei Bei let out a shout and rushed forward. The others followed behind, and Wang Dong released his dazzling Radiant Butterfly Goddess. In reality, he was still somewhat nervous. The moment he moved, he launched a Light of the Butterfly Goddess towards an area that had a comparatively large number of bandits.

Several dozen bright golden balls were released, which were then amplified by his Golden Light soul bone. This was only a thousand year soul skill, but absolutely none of these bandits had a thousand year soul skill of their own. Moreover, Wang Dong's skill was being boosted by Huo Yuhao's Spiritual Detection and his own Golden Light Left Arm Bone.

The bandits frantically released their own soul skills in an attempt to defend themselves against Wang Dong's attack, but they were still left in a complete mess and let out bloodcurdling screeches as they were struck.

Once he'd succeeded with his first attack, the panic that Wang Dong felt drastically decreased. Even if he didn't dare to attack anyone near him, wouldn't long-range attacks work?

Xiao Xiao had already released her Threelives Soulcrush Cauldron, and the three large cauldrons formed a “品” shape as they protected the trio. Xiao Xiao had clearly assumed a defensive stance. For a small girl like her to kill someone was simply too difficult.

Huo Yuhao couldn't help but get excited by the thrill of the hunt when he saw Wang Dong succeed. Of the two white-colored soul rings beneath him, the first instantly lit up as he looked towards a one-ringed bandit with his pale gold eyes. Like him, that bandit's lonely first soul ring was only a white-colored one.

Chapter 72.3: Hand of Death—Envoys of the Death God!

A golden radiance immediately shone from Huo Yuhao's eyes as the combined force of both his Purple Demon Eyes and Spiritual Shock soul skill burst forth.

The body of the bandit Huo Yuhao had targeted shook fiercely. However, the scene that followed completely shocked him: the bandit's head exploded like a watermelon. Bright red blood, white brain fluids, and other strangely-colored things flew in all directions, which instantly frightened the bandits around him and made them disperse. They'd yet to understand how their companion had died.

Huo Yuhao was dumbfounded. He hadn't expected his Spiritual Shock to be so powerful. When he saw the headless corpse fall to the ground, he immediately threw up. That person had been alive just a moment ago!

He wasn't the only one to throw up; the nearby Xiao Xiao also puked. She'd been holding it back since they'd first entered the cave, but after this last scene, she couldn't bear it anymore.

At that moment, a sharp voice echoed forth from the depths of the cave, “Who dares to oppose the Envoy of the Death God? All of you will die and become corpses under my control.”

The bandits weren't relieved when they heard his voice. Rather, they all began to tremble and quickly retreated.

"Be careful!" Huo Yuhao roared as soon as he'd finished throwing up. Thanks to his Spiritual Detection, he'd discovered that the corpses on the ground had begun to swell at an astonishing speed; they'd also become faintly red in color.

"Boom, boom, boom..." Terrifying explosions began to echo throughout the entire cave. Flesh and blood was scattered all over the cave following each explosion.

The seven members of the preparatory team had just arrived, and since all of them were within the range of Huo Yuhao's Spiritual Detection, they were able to react quickly. All of them ran towards the corpse-free areas of the cave as quickly as they could in order to avoid the explosions.

However, the seven disciples of the inner courtyard—who happened to be in the midst of the corpse-ridden battlefield—weren't so lucky. They found themselves at the center of the explosions!

Luckily, they were able to quickly erect some defenses since they'd heard Huo Yuhao's warning. However... the power wrought by the detonating corpses was just too much. Bones, muscles, and even blood vessels had become weapons because of the explosions. The stronger the corpse had been when it was alive, the stronger the explosion it caused. The corpse of the Soul King that Dai Yueheng had killed caused a particularly earth-shaking explosion when it detonated.

These explosions continued for about ten seconds or so before they stopped. The Shrek Guardians hadn't thought that they'd find themselves in this sort of situation. How could they have expected a group of bandits led by a Soul King to have such a powerful skill? Furthermore, the power of this ability was incredibly high. Its power had far exceeded their imagination, and was the main reason that they took such a big hit.

The old man with messy hair that was sitting outside of the cave drinking alcohol was surprised when he heard the sound of explosions. He immediately turned into a streak of light as he shot into the cave.

Elder Xuan had been following their group since the beginning. He'd checked the auras of the people in the cave as soon as he'd arrived and determined that the strongest one was only a Soul King. Though there was more than one Soul King present, he didn't give it too much thought. These bandits didn't really seem to have a chance against the elite disciples of Shrek Academy. Furthermore, someone as experienced as Wang Yan was in charge of the mission. As such, he'd decided to stay outside and drink alcohol. After all, nobody liked the foul stench of blood.

Even he hadn't expected such a sudden change in their situation. The power from the explosion just now had exceeded that of a Soul King or Soul Emperor.

"Gaga, gagaga... Did you all like the exploding corpses from this envoy? Even if you all were stronger, you'd still die when faced by my consecutive corpse explosions. Furthermore, even if you were survive the explosions, you'd die from the poison!"

The entire cave was now permeated with a thick smell of blood. Moreover, everyone felt like they were wet due to the thick layer of blood covering their bodies. Every single previously dead bandits had had their corpse exploded.

The explosions hadn't distinguished between friend and foe. As such, they didn't only strike the students of the Shrek Academy; even the bandits that were still alive had been hit by the explosions. Despite this, the bandits had been somewhat prepared. Some of them had been able to quickly hide in depressions in the ground to dodge the explosions.

However, the scariest thing was actually the liquid alongside the explosion; it had the same powerful corrosive properties as a strong acid. The 'chi chi' sound of things being corroded echoed throughout the entire cave. Besides the corpses exploding, the hidden soul master had even made them release a deadly poison. It was an extremely vile and cruel tactic.

Everyone had done their best to protect themselves the moment they'd heard Huo Yuhao's warning. However, considering the fact that they all had different martial souls, their defensive capabilities were all different from one another.

Ma Xiaotao and Dai Yueheng were sent flying from the explosion, and they both spat out some blood. Despite their injuries however, their soul skills' protected them from being contaminated by the poisonous blood. Ma Xiaotao landed in a place that not too far off from Huo Yuhao's position.

Ling Luochen's entire body was protected by a layer of ice, but she was still sent flying regardless. However, considering that she'd been in the rear, and that she'd managed to raise her defenses in time, she didn't end up in a bad state. She spat out some blood like Ma Xiaotao and Dai Yueheng had, but she didn't receive any external injuries.

On the other hand, Chen Zifeng wasn't as lucky as them. He was also an assault system battle soul master, and considering the number of soul rings he had, he exceeded both Ma Xiaotao and Dai Yueheng in pure offensive power. However, how was he supposed to protect his entire body with just his Soulchasing Sword? He could only rely on his soul power and protective armor to withstand the explosion.

Once the explosions had finished, he was lying sprawled on his side. His right leg had disappeared, and he'd begun to scream pitifully due to the corrosion of the deadly poison and loss of his limb.

However, he wasn't the only one that had been severely injured. Gong Yangmo wasn't much stronger than him; even if he was the ultimate auxiliary-type soul master, he definitely wasn't specialized in defense! Moreover, the corpses had exploded without much warning at all. Despite Ling Luochen's assistance, his chest, abdomen, and legs had all been badly mangled. Smoke was still rising from his wounds, and he'd lost consciousness.

Yao Haoxuan had met a tragic fate. As his build was the biggest, he'd had to face the brunt of the explosions. Half of his body had simply disappeared—he obviously hadn't been able to survive the explosion.

Xi Xi had it slightly better off. Her thunder and lightning had protected her body, while thanks to her fast speed, only her back had been struck. However, she'd still suffered severe wounds and was lying on the ground in agony.

Regardless of the intensity of their injuries, the seven disciples of the inner courtyard had all suffered heavy injuries, while one of them had even died. Even though they'd originally held the advantage, they were now in an extremely pitiful state.

All of this had happened too quickly; the disciples of the outer courtyard didn't suffer any damage since they were on the periphery, but they were still shaken by the outcome.

"Bastard!" A hoarse voice suddenly echoed, causing the entire cave to tremble. An intense white light immediately covered every corner of the cave, after which all of the deadly corrosive poison disappeared.

The form of a slovenly old man immediately became visible. Elder Xuan raised his right hand, then made a grabbing motion towards the depths of the cave. A terrifying attractive force erupted from his palm, causing a figure to rapidly fly towards him from the interior of the cave.

The word 'anger' wasn't enough to describe Elder Xuan's current state of mind. His students had been injured to this extent, despite being under his supervision. Furthermore, the ones that had received harm were members of the current Shrek's Seven Monsters! They were supposed to represent the academy at the Elite Continental Soul Master Academy Tournament in a few days, yet now, one of them had died, and the others were all severely injured!

The form that was yanked towards Elder Xuan was shrouded in a black robe. He had a slender build, and his facial features were hidden. Only the radiance of five soul rings, three of which yellow and two of which purple, were visible. This person really was just a Soul King, yet he'd created such a terrifying tragedy!

He let out a terrified scream as soon as he was yanked away by Elder Xuan. He tried his best to struggle free, but how could he struggle against someone as powerful as Elder Xuan? He could only watch helplessly as he was pulled closer and closer to Elder Xuan.

At that moment, the remaining half of Yao Haoxuan's body suddenly began to swell.

"Elder Xuan, be careful!" Huo Yuhao called out in alarm.

Elder Xuan's perception wasn't weak, and his students were much more important than this evil soul master! The academy had already suffered such a huge loss; how could he let more people be injured?

He raised both of his hands, and a ball of white light immediately enveloped Yao Haoxuan's corpse. At the same time, he flicked his finger, which caused the Soul King to feel as if he'd been struck by a huge hammer. However, something strange happened. All five of his soul rings simultaneously shone and he changed into a wisp of smoke. However, he didn't run away. Instead, he pounced towards Huo Yuhao.

His speed was so fast that Huo Yuhao couldn't react even with his Spiritual Detection active. Afterwards he felt the world spin, then heard Elder Xuan's angry yell. There wasn't anything under his feet; they instantly sank through the ground.

A powerful explosion echoed through the cave. Yao Haoxuan's body exploded, and even his skeleton was vaporized. The explosion was contained by Elder Xuan, but it was because of this that he arrived a moment too late to save Huo Yuhao; his hands only grabbed a newly-created slab of stone. Huo Yuhao and the evil soul master had disappeared without a trace. nD*Ve(lB)*In

"Bastard!" Elder Xuan angrily howled. He was now thoroughly enraged. He immediately punched the ground, instantly pulverizing the newly-created slab of stone to. However, he didn't dare to use too much soul power out of fear that he'd harm Huo Yuhao, who might have been below it. As this happened, a series of explosions echoed from the corridor beneath them, causing it collapse. A crafty

person always had several ways out of a predicament. That person was, without a doubt, the leader of the group of bandits known as the Hand of Death.

Chapter 73.1: Third Martial Soul? Necromancy?

“Yuhao!” Huo Yuhao had already disappeared without a trace by the time Wang Dong reacted. When he thought back to the exploding corpses from before, Wang Dong felt his mind blank out.

The scene had truly changed too quickly, such that no one had been able to react in time.

Elder Xuan abruptly flourished his large sleeve, and swept all the oncoming people away. “Wang Dong, quickly, help the others. I’ll save Huo Yuhao.” As he spoke, Elder Xuan released his martial soul in front of the students for the first time ever.

Elder Xuan’s aged back suddenly arched upwards, and his oil-stained, tattered clothing immediately split open. The muscles on his back swelled up at shocking speed, and in the blink of an eye, he bulked up to at least twice his previous size. The strangest thing was that one long, screw-shaped horn also grew from either side of his head. In that moment that he released his martial soul, it seemed as though all the air in the cave wanted to freeze over.

Nine soul rings shone and ascended with a dazzling brilliance – two yellow, two purple, four black and one red. Elder Xuan’s messy bed of hair had turned completely light brown. He abruptly turned his head and looked towards those remaining bandits. An incomparably frightening aura that was like a raging storm suddenly surged towards them. In the blink of an eye, an explosion occurred once more, but this time around, instead of the corpses, the living exploded.

He stomped with his right foot, and a huge crevice suddenly opened up in the ground. Elder Xuan bent his majestic body down and dug into the ground at a shocking speed with large hands that were like palm-leaf fans. He disappeared into the ground without a trace in just the moment that it took to breathe.

The heavy fishy fumes made Huo Yuhao feel nauseous. He was really too unlucky. The reason why the envoy of the Death God had grabbed him was first, to get a hostage, and second, the more important reason, was because the position that Huo Yuhao had previously occupied was at the entrance to the tunnel. This was really a misfortune on his part.

A cold, threatening aura surged madly into Huo Yuhao’s body from the entity in front of him. That icy feeling was completely different from his ice-attribute. This was cold, filled with evil intent, and accompanied by a horrible stench. That cold and dark feeling was like countless vipers boring their way into Huo Yuhao’s body.

The Envoy of the Death God was running down the tunnel at a shocking speed. He continuously slapped the walls as he dashed madly ahead, detonating the explosives he’d buried in them.

He had been able to lead the Hand of Death gang from the warping and winding Ming Dou Mountain Range, not only due to his ability as an evil soul master, but more importantly due to his cautious nature. This wasn’t the first time he’d encountered such a situation, but as long as he didn’t die, it wouldn’t take long before a brand new bandit group would rise up once more.

Huo Yuhao didn't resist. He was now in a far more dangerous situation than he had been before, but contrary to expectations, he'd calmed down. This characteristic was unique to spirit-type soul masters. His mental strength far surpassed that of normal humans, so he could remain clear-headed more than a normal soul master could.

Huo Yuhao knew that the two white soul rings he'd previously revealed must've definitely fooled his opponents. Moreover, when the Envoy of the Death God had attacked, he hadn't shown any signs of resisting at all. But he really couldn't do so, having been caught off-guard. The enemy must've really looked down on him, but that was fine, because this was his only chance to flee for his life.

What am I going to do? There might only be one chance for him to escape, so he definitely couldn't act blindly without thinking it through. As a result of that, Huo Yuhao could only force himself to circulate his Mysterious Heaven Technique to protect his internal organs. He was fighting against that evil soul power surging into his body, but he didn't try to unleash a counterattack. As a matter of fact, his opponent's soul power far surpassed his own. It wouldn't be easy for him to retaliate either.

"Elder brother Skydream, Ice Empress, what are you guys doing?" Huo Yuhao softly called out to them in his Spiritual Sea.

The Skydream Iceworm was extremely serious when he spoke. "Yuhao, don't fret. We are also thinking of a way. In a second, the Ice Empress might temporarily take control of your body. It's really a little troublesome this time. This fellow's soul power has a special quality that reeks with blood. The disparity between your cultivation and his is far too great. If Ice Empress suddenly uses the power she sealed within your body, I'm afraid you'll sustain injuries because of that. You must be mentally prepared."

Huo Yuhao was very calm as he asked, "That also means that attacking him isn't actually that difficult, but the key to this is whether I can bear the burden?"

The Skydream Iceworm was silent for a moment before he spoke, "The Ice Empress's ability is extremely overbearing. We're afraid that it'll injure the source of your spirit."

Huo Yuhao inhaled deeply, then said, "Elder Brother Skydream, Ice Empress. The two of you don't need to care about me. Kill him and avenge those who've died. This bastard definitely cannot be allowed to live. He's killed so many people, including Senior Brother Yao Haoxuan."

"Sure, you're very brave. I'll do my best to protect you. Don't fret. When the opportunity arises, you must strike him in one move." There was a bit of praise in the Ice Empress's chilly voice. She immediately fell silent after speaking, evidently trying to find an opening in their opponent's guard.

Just at this moment, an aged voice suddenly rang out. "Big bug, little scorpion. Let this old man take charge, since you guys don't have the confidence to do so. I am very familiar with this deathly aura."

Huo Yuhao's Spiritual Sea subsequently turned grey. The Skydream Iceworm and the Ice Empress felt a pressure that even they feared. That was an soul ranked on a completely different level than they were.

"You are..."

The cave ahead suddenly opened up into a wide clearing. The Envoy of the Death God had brought Huo Yuhao out of the tunnel, causing the air around them to be fresh and clean. This immediately cleared Huo Yuhao's mind.

However, twelve silhouettes were quietly standing by that exit out of the tunnel.

Those twelve humans, which didn't seem to be breathing at all, immediately knelt down on one knee, respectfully saluting the Envoy of the Death God once they saw him emerge from the tunnel.

"Rise, my corpses. You guys were left behind for me to use as my protection. We've really run into huge trouble this time. I'm afraid that guy's a Titled Douluo based on the aura he's emitting. Hmph, don't fret. Even Titled Douluo will only be able to prostrate themselves before me in ten years' time, at best."

At this moment, an aged voice suddenly rang out, "I'm afraid you don't even have ten years left."

The Envoy of the Death God paused and quickly looked around. "Who is it?!" He shouted in a stern voice, "Come out!"

"I'm right here. Where do you want me to go?" An odd, yet pure smell of death suddenly surged from his left hand. The Envoy of the Death God subconsciously loosened his grip on the person in his hand, and turned his body around at the same time to look at who it was. He was immediately taken aback by what he saw.

He'd been holding a person dressed completely in dark green garb with two white soul rings. But now, that person suddenly shone with an incredible light.

Behind the mask, the eyes that were originally a faint golden color had turned grey. It was a kind of grey that was filled with the vicissitudes of life, as though the owner could thoroughly understand everything in the world. What was even stranger was that a grey soul ring was slowly rising from beneath his feet. As that grey soul ring rose up, a string of fragmented shadow followed suit. One couldn't clearly tell whether it was one shadow or many shadows. n/.0--V.)e./l(-&())1--n

The envoy of the Death God felt an inexplicably stifling feeling as he looked at that grey layer, subconsciously causing him to take a step back.

"Y-you're also an evil soul master?" There was a shocked look on the Envoy of the Death God's face when he asked this question. The mantle on his face had been lifted as he was running just now, revealing a face that resembled a skull. Only a film of skin seemed to be covering his face. His eyes, which were glowing with a light green light, were filled with shock.

"Evil soul master? What's that? I've never heard of that before." There was a bit of astonishment in that aged voice.

The Envoy of the Death God snorted and said, "Every single evil soul master is an existence worthy of the greatest admiration. I am a spokesperson for the Death God, the Envoy of the Death God. You are clearly young, since you dare to deceive the people in front of me. If you really are an evil soul master, you should make your identity known, and maybe then we might still have a chance to cooperate with each other. But you need to tell me something first. Why is your soul ring grey?"

"Envoy of the Death God? You must be joking. Even though I can't remember most things from the past, I faintly remember that I could have been a Death God if I had wanted to be one. You're already sacrificing your flesh, having just recently brushed over the edge of Necromancy. A Necromancer like you is worthy of being called an Envoy of the Death God? A Death God's ability is to purify, not to

summon souls and mess around with corpses. There's no chance of you becoming a Demonic Shaman, and yet you're here boasting in front of this old man. It's really funny."

The Envoy of the Death God stumbled over his words hearing the aged voice. "What Necromancy? What Necromancer? Demonic Shaman? I am an evil soul master worthy of admiration. You actually dare to blaspheme the Death God? You're courting death!"

As he spoke, he raised his hand and pointed in front of him. The third soul ring on his body abruptly lit up, activating the purple soul ring with a few streams of black. The twelve people around them who were emitting cold auras immediately moved and pounced toward Huo Yuhao at lightning speed.

"It's a very familiar aura. Though it is slightly disgusting, I still have a bit of affection left in me." The aged voice sighed, but didn't move as he lifted his finger.

A faintly grey ball of fire was burning on the tip of his finger. When those corpses that the envoy of the Death God had converted into humans came within three metres of his body, they immediately stopped their violent trembling.

"Big bug, I need to borrow a bit of your sealed power," The aged voice said indifferently, "I still can't recall anything from the past, but I remember my own name. A tiny Corpse Shaman actually dares to show off with this kind of unpopular Necromancy in front of me, the Calamity Necromancer Electrolux who possesses the Divine Law of Necromancy. Then, I'll let you play with fire!"

As he spoke, the flame atop his finger suddenly burned brighter. Shortly after that, that grey halo on his body was abruptly activated, encasing the twelve corpses within it.

The twelve corpses stopped trembling, and slowly raised their heads one after the other. One could see that their skin was now a metallic grey – a color that only dead people would have. Their eyes were empty and lifeless; their nails were strangely and incomparably long, and appeared to be dark purple in color. A foul rotting smell also seeped out from every inch of their bodies.

Chapter 73.2: Third Martial Soul? Necromancy?

The Envoy of the Death God discovered—to his astonishment—that he wasn't able to control his corpse slaves anymore. He hurriedly increased the output of his soul power and activated his various soul skills, yet they still didn't react; he couldn't even make them self-destruct.

Gradually, a pale light began to appear in the corpse slaves' eyes. This light was actually a whitish flame, and as the flame progressively appeared in the eyes of every single corpse slave, it also began to circulate throughout their bodies. Unexpectedly, emotions began to appear on their previously rigid faces: suffering, hatred, and boundless rancor. They then turned towards the Envoy of the Death God and immediately shot towards him in a frenzy.

"No, this can't be possible... this is impossible!" The voice of the Envoy of the Death God was filled with disbelief. He quickly turned around to scuttle away.

At that moment however, a purplish-golden light shot out from Huo Yuhao's eyes. The Envoy of the Death God felt as if his head had suddenly been struck by an enormous hammer. This, combined with the panic he felt, caused him to immediately tumble head-first to the ground.

All of the corpse slaves he'd refined had been created utilizing the bodies of soul masters. Not only were they extraordinarily quick, but they were also impervious to blades, and possessed extraordinary strength. These twelve corpse slaves had taken more than half of his strength to refine, and they were his hidden trump card. However, at this moment, these corpse slaves seemed to have regained a portion of their former consciousness; how could they let him off?

All twelve of the corpse slaves launched frenzied attacks towards the Envoy of the Death God, who'd been temporarily stunned by Huo Yuhao's Spiritual Shock. In fact, they attacked in frenzied manner that they didn't even seem to take their own safety into account.

Electrolux's voice rang out from Huo Yuhao's mouth again and said, "A true necromancer controls spirits, not bodies. Even if you become stronger, a corpse shaman like you who can't even touch upon the mysteries of soul control will never become a true necromancer," He then directed his voice towards the corpse slaves, "since he's killed you, this old man will give you an opportunity to gain revenge. Once you've completed your revenge, your souls will subsequently be purified.

"I don't know how long it's been since I've used necromancy. It's so familiar, yet unfamiliar at the same time! But... I like this feeling. There seems to have been an unforgettable hatred carved deep into my heart in the past, yet I feel only tranquility now. My spiritual imprint seems to have been stimulated again. Little Yuhao, big worm, little scorpion, it seems I'll have to enter another period of slumber. Oh, there's one last thing I have to tell you all before I go: Power can be used for good, but if you use your power in an evil way on the pretext that you're only doing it to an evildoer is inherently evil as well. Little Yuhao, I hope that you'll be able to wash away your hatred by the next time I wake up. When your heart is free of hatred, and when you feel only joy and benevolence, I will truly become your third martial soul. Only then will you have the qualifications to inherit my art of necromancy."

The grayness around them vanished, as did the gray light in Huo Yuhao's eyes. The gray soul ring around him also dissipated and disappeared. His body swayed a bit, then he collapsed to the ground.

In this short period of time, the Envoy of the Death God was ripped apart by his twelve corpse slaves. His wretched screams could be heard from several hundreds of meters away.

His sinful life had finally ended as a direct result of his own sins; a person who played with fire would definitely be burned to death. As an evil soul master, his death had come at the hands of his own crimes.

Once the evil soul master had died, the corpse slaves slowly fell to the ground one after another. As they did, strands of white mist rose from their heads and faintly resembled human faces. However, their current expressions didn't contain any rancor; only relief and appreciation was left within them. They stared at the fallen Huo Yuhao as they gradually vanished into the air, their expressions much more peaceful.

Once the imprisoned souls had been purified, the corpse slaves began to rot and disappear at an astonishing rate. In the blink of an eye, only bones were left.

"Boom—" A violent explosion rang out. Immediately afterwards, a figure soared straight into the air, then landed mightily, revealing Elder Xuan's powerful figure.

Elder Xuan's naked upper body revealed his bronze-colored muscles, and the terrifying aura he was currently emanating shot straight into the air once he appeared, causing the weather itself to change.

This was especially so for the two spiralling horns on his head, which shone with an indescribably mysterious luster. Nine types of light seemed to flicker through them before transforming into a jade-white color.

With a flash, Elder Xuan appeared in front of Huo Yuhao's eyes. The current situation, however, quelled the fury within his heart; the Envoy of the Death God had vanished, and had only left a large patch of bones on the ground. Furthermore, there was even a rotten smell present. However, Huo Yuhao had been thrown to the side.

Elder Xuan had originally thought that Huo Yuhao had encountered a calamity; after all, he was only human. However, he didn't think that he'd still be perfectly alright. With his level of cultivation, he didn't even need to touch him to verify his status. He could tell that, even though Huo Yuhao's breathing was somewhat weak, it was still present. His heartbeat was still extremely healthy, and his signs of life were well-evident.

Despite this, there were no other signs of life in the surroundings besides Huo Yuhao. Elder Xuan's face revealed a trace of doubt, then he carefully picked Huo Yuhao up and poured his soul power into him.

He quickly discovered that Huo Yuhao's fainting hadn't been due to physical trauma; he'd merely overdrawn his spiritual power. Furthermore, his soul power hadn't even been overdrawn that much.

Elder Xuan was anxious to learn about the whereabouts of the Envoy of the Death God, thus he took out a small bottle made of white jade and placed it beneath Huo Yuhao's nose.

"Achoo!" Huo Yuhao suddenly awoke with a sneeze. A spicy smell had caused him to gradually awaken, but he still felt as if his head was quite heavy. His brain was also dizzy, and he currently wasn't even able to use his Spirit Eyes to see everything in front of him clearly.

"Yuhao, what happened? What happened to that despicable evil soul master?" Elder Xuan asked impatiently.

Huo Yuhao was left blank. After calming himself down, images of what had happened began to appear within his mind. He'd been completely sober when he'd been possessed by Electrolux; moreover, he clearly understood what had happened earlier. However, he didn't know what exactly Electrolux had done. He'd both used his spiritual power, and had even seemingly used the Skydream Iceworm's spiritual power. It was because of this that he hadn't even been able to speak up earlier. Even the Skydream Iceworm and the Ice Empress were still in a state of shock.

Following the recovery of his memories, a spiritual imprint that the aged Electrolux had left in his mind gradually began to appear. Huo Yuhao subconsciously followed the instructions left on that spiritual imprint and replied to Elder Xuan, "I... I don't know either. After the Envoy of the Death God brought me here, he ordered his corpse slaves to bring up the rear and planned to use me as a hostage to run away. When I heard him, I knew that I was running out of time. Thus, I used all of my strength to release a Spiritual Shock. He instantly fell into a short daze, and both his mouth and nose began to bleed. At that instant, I took the opportunity to roll to the ground. When I did, I heard him let out a loud screech, then I felt my head go dizzy. He seemed to have lost control of his corpse slaves, which proceeded to attack him and tear him to pieces. When he died, those corpse slaves also fell to the ground. After that, I seem to have fainted."

An enlightened look appeared in Elder Xuan's eyes when he heard Huo Yuhao's words. "An evil backlash! Serves him right. He got left off lightly. Alright, we'll talk about this more later."

At that moment, Huo Yuhao somewhat came back to his senses. With a somewhat hazy look in his eyes, he asked, "Elder Xuan, what's an evil backlash?"

Elder Xuan carried Huo Yuhao through the cave he'd forcefully created earlier as he explained, "All evil soul masters have powerful and evil powers. For example, the bastard you saw earlier had the ability to control corpses. However, oftentimes the powers they use exceed that of what their bodies can withstand. Once this balance is broken, there's a chance of a backlash occurring. Your Spiritual Shock earlier must've temporarily broken the connection he had with his corpses, in turn causing him to instantly experience a backlash. I didn't think that it'd be you who'd kill him."

Elder Xuan was definitely worthy of being called one of the peak experts of the Douluo Continent; his analysis was fundamentally correct. Even though Electrolux's technique weren't that simple, the overall results and effects it had achieved were still more or less the same. The only difference was that he'd paid more attention to purifying the souls of the dead.

"Oh." Huo Yuhao replied, then sank back into a muddled state.

Elder Xuan quickly returned to the cave that the Hand of Death had stayed in with Huo Yuhao in tow. The smell of blood in the cave had become even stronger since he'd left.

The seriously injured students from the inner courtyard had all been gathered together once he got back. Besides the now-deceased Yao Haoxuan, the people who were in the worst condition were Gong Yangmo and Chen Zifeng. The two of them were currently lying on the ground, unconscious, but their bodies were badly mangled. Even though Xi Xi was also unconscious, her injuries were still somewhat lighter than theirs.

Although Ma Xiaotao, Dai Yueheng, and Ling Luochen were currently bleeding from their noses and mouths due to their heavy injuries, they were still able to maintain their consciousness.

Compared to the desperate state that the seven from the inner courtyard were in, the disciples from the outer courtyard were completely unharmed. They'd originally had the help of Huo Yuhao's Spiritual Detection, and had been a decent distance away from the center of the explosions. The moment they'd felt that something was off, they'd been able to react.

Xu Sanshi had successfully used his Shield of the Xuanwu Turtle to protect Jiang Nannan, who had the weakest defense of the lot. Bei Bei had in turn released a large amount of thunder and lightning, blocking the poisonous flesh that had been sent flying towards them from the explosions. Xiao Xiao's Threelives Soulcrush Cauldron had also played an important role in blocking a large amount of the explosion.

"Yuhao." The moment he saw Elder Xuan return with Huo Yuhao in tow, Wang Dong immediately pounced towards him. The others from the outer courtyard also quickly surrounded him.

"I'm fine." Huo Yuhao replied somewhat weakly. In spite of everything, Wang Dong hugged him, his tears surging uncontrollably.

When the Envoy of the Death God had captured Huo Yuhao earlier, Wang Dong instantly felt as though the most important thing in his heart had been ripped away. At that moment, he'd been sent into a foolish stupor. Before he'd come to, Elder Xuan had already left in pursuit. He'd wanted to chase after them, but he'd been stopped by Wang Yan. At that time, he'd felt his brain space out. He'd thought inwardly, It's finished, everything's over. Yuhao definitely won't be able to escape now that he's been captured by such a terrifying fellow. He didn't think that Huo Yuhao would actually be brought back by Elder Xuan so quickly.

Chapter 73.3: Third Martial Soul? Necromancy?

Elder Xuan left Huo Yuhao in Wang Dong's care, "He's fine. He has just overdrawn his spiritual power. Let him rest."

Wang Dong didn't even hear those words; he held Huo Yuhao tightly and started crying.

Huo Yuhao wanted to say something to comfort him. However, he was just too tired after exhausting his spiritual power. He only managed to fractionally raise his hand and wasn't able to say anything else.

"How is the situation?" Elder Xuan, who still had his martial soul active, turned towards Wang Yan and asked with a very gloomy expression. After that incident in the Great Star Dou Forest, where the disciples of the inner courtyard had encountered a hundred thousand year soul beast and suffered heavy casualties, this was the second time that there had been so many losses under his leadership. An ordinary person would never be able to understand the pain he was feeling right now.

Wang Yan said full of grief, "Yao Haoxuan died in battle. I tried my best to piece the remains of his skeleton together, but after being used by that evil soul master, his corpse was contaminated by the deadly poison and corroded. We won't be able to bring back his complete skeleton."

Elder Xuan painfully closed his eyes, "How are the others? What's the state of their injuries? Are they in mortal danger?"

Wang Yan replied, "Chen Zifeng lost one leg, but the one that suffered the worst injuries was Gong Yangmo. His chest and abdomen have suffered immense damage from the exploding toxic flesh and blood. Therefore, his internal injuries are not only extremely severe but poisonous too. Xi Xi's internal injuries are less serious, but the poison she was infected with is still very dangerous. As, the three of them have already developed a high fever I gave them some pills to restrain the poison and lower the fever, but this is only a temporary measure. We need the best possible treatment to save their lives. Ma Xiaotao and Dai Yueheng were in the epicenter of the explosions While they were able to block the toxic blood and flesh released by the explosion due to their high cultivations, the shock waves left them with internal injuries. They'll need some time to heal. Luckily, neither they nor Ling Luochen were contaminated by the poisonous flesh and blood. With the academy's medicinal pills, they should be able to recover in half a month. What about the Envoy of the Death God?"

Elder Xuan heaved a deep sigh and told Wang Yan everything that Yuhao had told him. After hearing the story, Wang Yan's cold and stern expression thawed a little, "Good, good. At least Haoxuan was avenged. Even that Envoy of the Death God couldn't have expected to die at Yuhao's hands."

Elder Xuan opened his eyes again, a resolute look within them. He had already made up his mind and said in a deep voice, "Wang Yan, you'll have to bear the burden of this difficult task. Bring them back to

the military camp, and once Xiaotao and the other two are stable, make haste towards Star Luo City and join the tournament. I'll bring Gong Yangmo, Chen Zifeng, and Xi Xi back to the academy to get treated. We can't afford to waste any time and must move immediately."

Having said that, Elder Xuan pointed his big hands toward the three people that were lying unconscious on the ground. Dense white soul power wrapped them up in a manner reminiscent of a giant cocoon, protecting them.

Elder Xuan took a deep breath and then looked at at the seven from the outer courtyard as he spoke in a grave tone, "The situation has now changed, and the responsibility lies with me. I'm afraid there isn't enough time to send for new team members from the academy anymore. We can only rely on you lot for the time being. At the very least, you'll have to hold on until Ma Xiaotao and the others have recovered. Children, the academy can only rely on you to preserve its glory. If you win, the honor will be yours. If you lose, I'll personally bear all the shame."

After that, Elder Xuan raised his head, trying to hold back the tears welling up in his eyes. He then brought the three people wrapped in his soul power out of the cave before he activated his flying-type soul tool and headed toward Shrek Academy at full speed. It was of the utmost importance to cure and save the three students that had been injured and poisoned. After hearing Elder Xuan's words, Huo Yuhao also sunk into a deep slumber.

By the time he regained consciousness, the sun was already high in the sky; it was high noon. The stench of blood had also disappeared and had been replaced by the fresh mountain air.

He discovered that his head was leaning against something soft and elastic. The height was just right, and it was very comfortable. A fine and slender hand was lying on his chest, and those same long and slender fingers were also right in front of his eyes.

He didn't even need to raise his head to guess who they belonged to, because he had already held this hand innumerable times, though this was his first time seeing them up close.

Wang Dong's hands were really beautiful! Although they were much smaller than his, the length of their fingers was about the same. They truly resembled the hands of a girl.

After his nap, the dizziness from before had already disappeared. All the memories of what had happened previously now slowly started to resurface in his mind. Even though it had been a while, he still felt his heart skip a beat whenever he thought of what had happened.

The Divine Law of Necromancy, the Specter of Calamity, Electrolux. This was the true identity of the gray ball of light slumbering in his Spiritual Sea! n-/o-/v.-e)/l--b-)1./n

At the time, when Electrolux had temporarily taken control of his body, Huo Yuhao hadn't been able to oppose him in the slightest. He could still feel the outside world and retained all five senses, but he had no control over his body.

This wasn't the first time that someone had taken control of his body. The Skydream Iceworm had also done it once before. However at that time, he hadn't been aware of what was happening in the outside world and had remained in his Spiritual Sea as a spectator. The Skydream Iceworm was a million year soul beast, and even if it was doomed to never become a god due to its special circumstances, it was still

a million year soul beast which specialized in the spiritual field! Did this mean that he was inferior to a mere spiritual imprint left behind by Electrolux? Just who was this Electrolux? Moreover, he said that he could have become the Death God long ago if he had wished to. All of this combined was just too scary.

He had said that he was from another world. What was this world like? And what was this necromancy of his? It seemed somewhat similar to the power of that evil soul master. However, he didn't get an evil feeling from it. Instead, it felt pure and holy.

"It's not that my spiritual power is inferior to his. It's just that I'm not as knowledgeable as him when it comes to the human Spiritual Seas." The Skydream Iceworm admitted unwillingly.

"Brother Skydream." Huo Yuhao hastened to say, "Elder Electro..."

"Don't mention it," The Skydream Iceworm said, depressed, "That guy should be a human like you, but is far from being common as evidenced by his incredible power. I suspect that he met a powerful opponent that destroyed both his body and soul, leaving behind only a small fragment of the latter. When we fused together, we created a strange celestial phenomenon, and that soul fragment was assimilated in the process. That guy should feel grateful. If it weren't for this brother, that soul fragment might've already dispersed."

"Stop making excuses. If you're inferior, you're just inferior. Let alone you, even I am well below him in regards to spiritual strength. He really wasn't exaggerating when he said that if his soul fragment were complete, he might have already become a god." The Ice Empress said. She wasn't depressed as the Skydream Iceworm, and her voice even carried a hint of admiration.

The Ice Empress continued, "Yuhao, don't waste time worrying about this. Elder Electro's strength mainly lies in his knowledge and soul level with the latter being incredibly high. However, he has suffered a lot of damage, and with but a fragment left, there's not much he can do. In his current condition, he cannot even augment your strength. When he displayed his power earlier, he used your body as a medium and Skydream's sealed power as an energy source. He stopped us from taking action with his higher understanding of your Spiritual Sea. Since we were unsure of what to do and felt that acting rashly might cause damage to your Spiritual Sea, we had no choice but to rely on him. Elder Electro's strength lies exactly in his knowledge. The powerful magic he used should also originate from his world, You should learn it should the opportunity ever arise. "

"However, Elder Electro's power and that of the evil soul master..." Huo Yuhao said somewhat anxiously.

The Ice Empress said, "Don't worry. Elder Electro and that guy were on two completely different planes. Elder Electro gave me a feeling of purity and simplicity. His soul has already reached a realm where the words 'good' or 'evil' aren't suitable to describe the its aura. From another standpoint, he should be an existence above this world of ours. Therefore, his power is unlikely to influence your disposition. And from his words, it seems like it won't be easy for you to learn from him due to his exceedingly high requirements towards your moral character. If I'm not mistaken, Elder Electro's attribute should be the same as yours; a light attribute. And even if his light attribute was very weak, it was the purest I had ever seen."

"Then, what should I do?" Huo Yuhao wasn't even thirteen yet. Therefore, it was normal for him to rely on the Ice Empress or the Skydream Iceworm when he was in a dilemma.

“You don’t need to do anything.” The Skydream Iceworm said, “All you have to do is keep cultivating and getting stronger. That soul fragment will still need several years to restore itself and become self-sufficient. And until then, he won’t come out easily, because he would be done for if this only fragment were to be damaged. Moreover, you can only learn from him if you have enough strength and spiritual power. Therefore, keep cultivating.”

“I understand.” Huo Yuhao had now calmed down a bit. Even though they hadn’t completely dispelled the doubts in his heart, the Ice Empress and Skydream Iceworm’s explanations had put him at ease.

After settling this matter, he opened his eyes. Then, he gently moved Wang Dong’s hand away and sat up.

This slight movement caused Wang Dong to shake and call out in alarm, “Yuhao, you’re awake.”

When he sat up, Huo Yuhao saw that his fellow students were all nearby. They were sitting in the middle of the woods in deep meditation, trying to recover their energy. But when they heard Wang Dong’s voice, they began to wake up one after another.

From the main team, only Ma Xiaotao, Dai Yueheng and Ling Luo Chen were left. Their complexions were still pale due to being severely injured. At this time, even they opened their eyes.

Chapter 74.1: The Taotie Douluo and the Dragon God Douluo

Until now, Wang Dong had been leaning against a tree with his thighs acting as Huo Yuhao’s comfortable pillow. Now, without even giving Huo Yuhao a chance to speak, Wang Dong hugged him fiercely and said, “Yuhao, do you know that you scared me to death? I thought that you would become like those corpses...” A sobbing tone crept into his voice as he said these words.

Xu Sanshi, who was standing next to Bei Bei, chuckled and said, “Look, their brotherly feelings really run deep.”

Bei Bei’s lips twitched, and he retorted, “In any case, they’re much stronger than a naturally cold-hearted guy like you.”

Xu Sanshi immediately flared up in anger, “Bullshit! How can you claim that I am naturally cold-hearted?! I just don’t want to be too compassionate towards others! Humph!”

Jiang Nannan furrowed her brows slightly, “How old are you two to still be arguing like children?”

After hearing her comment, Xu Shanshi immediately began to behave. That comment was far more effective than even consuming medicine would have been. With a righteous look on his face, he didn’t bother Bei Bei anymore.

Huo Yuhao patted Wang Dong’s back as he spoke, “It’s alright. I’m alright now. After all, one who survives a great disaster is destined to have good fortune forever after.”

Wang Yan also walked over to Huo Yuhao’s side. “All’s well if you’re alright. You better rest up too, then we can get back on track and return to the northwestern army barracks. After we rest up a bit and get ourselves reorganised, we’ll immediately head straight for Star Luo City.”

He Caitou couldn't help but ask, "Teacher Wang, you're not really going to deploy us this time around, are you?" This question was one that the seven students from the outer courtyard were most concerned about. Wang Dong let go of Huo Yuhao, and they both looked at Wang Yan together.

Wang Yan smiled bitterly and said, "I'm afraid there is no other choice. The Continental Advanced Soul Master Academy Grand Tournament will go on for a month, which is a very long time. Ma Xiaotao, Dai Yueheng and Ling Luochen will need at least half a month to recover completely. All we can do now is entrust you guys to represent the academy in battle."

"Teacher Wang, are we up for it?" Huo Yuhao asked.

Representing Shrek Academy in battle wasn't something to be taken lightly! It meant that they were representing the academy's honor!

Shrek Academy was known as the number one academy in the continent because it nurtured numerous outstanding people of talent and skill. How did it display this strength? The Continental Advanced Soul Master Academy Grand Tournament was the best stage to do so.

Shrek Academy had already monopolised the position of champion for who-knows-how many years continuously. As for the other academies, they could only vie for the position of runner-up. Before the Sun Moon Imperial Soul Engineering Academy from the Sun Moon Empire had appeared, there hadn't been an opponent that could compete with Shrek Academy.

However, this was directed at the main team members! They had had a peak powerhouse like Elder Xuan as their commanding officer, and their opponents had only been Soul Kings. Yet, who would've thought that they would have sustained such heavy losses during their operation this time around? As if one death wasn't enough, three others were so heavily injured that they couldn't participate in battle. The remaining three had also sustained significant injuries. In just a short moment, all seven main team members had lost their fighting strength.

The team had originally consisted of two Soul Emperors and five Soul Kings. Now, it was made up of four Soul Ancestors, one Soul Elder and two Soul Masters.

This was a large difference in terms of strength.

All this pressure fell on the seven reserve students from the outer courtyard. The eldest was just fifteen years old, and the youngest was only twelve years old. It was obvious what they must be going through at that moment.

Wang Yan was slightly at a loss as to how he should respond to Huo Yuhao. He sighed and replied, "The responsibility for the setbacks during this mission rests on my shoulders. I failed to command the team properly and when we return to the academy, I will definitely beg the school's highest officials for forgiveness. As for the Grand Tournament, you guys shouldn't hold back at all. I believe that the preliminary rounds shouldn't be hard with your abilities. If Elder Xuan can rush back in time, the academy might be able to send another team of inner courtyard disciples as reinforcements before the Grand Tournament starts. With Elder Xuan's flying speed, I believe there's a possibility that he'll be able to make it in time."

Upon remembering Elder Xuan's terrifyingly quick manner of flying, everyone immediately became much more relaxed.

Bei Bei stood up and, just as before, spoke with a smile on his face. "Teacher Wang is right. At the end of the day, we are just reserves. Moreover, the Continental Advanced Soul Master Academy Grand Tournament doesn't have a knockout system Elder Xuan originally mentioned that we were meant to take the stage regardless, to polish our abilities and to serve as a shield for the main team members. We can still proceed according to that plan. Regardless of the outcome, everything will work out if we try our best. Besides, we can still trick our opponents. I reckon reinforcements will arrive before we have take on more than a few matches. Our academy isn't that far from Star Luo City. The most it'll take the academy to select people and deploy them is around three to five days. So, in reality, we only need to hold up for a few days."

"That's right, we're not weaker than the others. I've heard that the contestants from the participating academies normally have the strength of three or four ringed Soul Masters; we're Shrek Academy's elite students! What do we have to fear?! The main force might not even need to make a move, because we would've already advanced courageously and stormed straight to the finals!" Xu Sanshi exclaimed, filled with fighting spirit.

Jiang Nannan rolled her eyes at him, "Such developed limbs, and yet such a simple mind."

Xiao Xiao was sitting right beside Jiang Nannan and couldn't help but stifle a chuckle upon seeing the deflated look on Xu Sanshi's face.

A hint of a smile found its way onto Wang Yan's face too. He nodded and replied, "Bei Bei is right. We should do our best." As he spoke, his gaze subconsciously fell on Ma Xiaotao, Dai Yueheng and Ling Luochen.

The three of them didn't utter a word. Wang Yan sighed in his heart and thought to himself, Do your best, and everything will go according to the will of the heavens.

However, Huo Yuhao still held suspicion in his heart, because he could clearly remember what Elder Xuan had said before he left. The academy's reputation can only rest on your shoulders now. This clearly wasn't something that he had said without thinking! Moreover, Huo Yuhao also believed that his mentally dexterous senior brother could not have failed to notice those words. But then, why was he talking like this now? Could it be to bolster everyone's hearts? n)-p).V//e/-l//b-)l//n

With these thoughts running through his mind, Huo Yuhao naturally couldn't expose his senior brother. All he could do was do his best to go along with Bei Bei. It wasn't easy to raise everyone's morale, so how could he say something against him?

Only Wang Yan and the three remaining inner courtyard students knew that there weren't many students in the inner courtyard. There were extremely few students under twenty who were sufficiently capable. On top of that, most of the inner courtyard disciples conducted missions outside as Shrek Guardians. Thus, it was practically impossible for the academy to gather another group of Shrek's Seven Devils from the inner courtyard. Sadly, there wasn't much hope for those in the outer courtyard either. Bei Bei, Xu Sanshi and Jiang Nannan were outstanding individuals from the outer courtyard, but even if

they could gather a few more students with four soul rings, would they really be stronger than Huo Yuhao, Xiao Xiao and Wang Dong?

As a result of that, they could only count on themselves during this Continental Advanced Soul Master Academy Grand Tournament.

The next day in Shrek Academy.

Elder Xuan was sitting on a flight of stairs with a bed of messy hair as he poured alcohol into his mouth. The sound of footsteps rang out from behind him, and an old man clad in white walked over to him.

“What’s the situation?”

The old man clad in white stood respectfully behind Elder Xuan and said, “The situation has already stabilized. It’s corpse poison. Thankfully, this is only a simple kind of poison and you brought them back just in time. Their lives are out of harm’s way now. The Soul Tool Department has already taken a look at Chen Zifeng’s leg, and deduced that it’s not going to be problem to make a prosthetic for him. Even though his movements will be affected a little, it shouldn’t affect his strength too much.”

Elder Xuan spat out a breath full of the smell of alcohol and sighed, “That’s good.”

At this moment, someone walked in from outside the courtyard. That person was the dean of Shrek Academy’s Martial Soul Department – Yan Shaozhe.

“Elder Xuan, the Sea God’s Pavilion conference that you proposed to hold has been prepared. You...”

“Let’s go.” Elder Xuan stood up and walked out. His silhouette clearly seemed a little lonely.

Yan Shaozhe followed behind Elder Xuan, sighing in his heart. It had been many years since the Sea God’s Pavilion conference had been held so frequently.

“Elder Xuan, this matter isn’t your fault. You shouldn’t blame yourself too much.” Yan Shaozhe advised in a low voice.

Elder Xuan didn’t speak, and only responded by shaking his head.

Sea God’s Pavilion.

Things weren’t so different from the last Sea God’s Pavilion conference held here, but the atmosphere surrounding the whole place was somewhat heavier than before. Elder Mu, who was seated at the head of the table, was still lying on his recliner, the shadows obscuring his body.

The ones seated beside him were Elder Lin and Elder Xuan. The four deans and vice-deans from the Martial Soul Department and the Soul Tool Department were still respectfully seated at both ends of the table.

Elder Mu’s gentle voice rang out. “Speak, dear Xuan. Why have you proposed this Sea God’s Pavilion conference?”

Elder Xuan nodded, slowly got up and began to speak in a low tone, “Everyone already knows what happened this time. This isn’t the first time a problem has arisen from my leadership. As the one who was leading the group, I am therefore bound by an unshirkable responsibility. Henceforth, I have

decided to resign from my position as vice-commander of the Shrek Guardians. Moreover, I will leave Sea God's Pavilion and be an idler within the academy."

Once Elder Xuan spoke, everyone in the room was alarmed. One had to know that he held an extremely high post in the academy, second only to Elder Mu lying on the recliner. He was the academy's elder, and had an extremely strong cultivation, hardly all that different from Elder Mu's. Elder Mu was the commanding officer of the Shrek Guardians, and there was only one vice-commander – Elder Xuan. Over the course of nearly 50 years, all of the most outstanding inner courtyard disciples who had represented the school in the Continental Advanced Soul Master Academy Grand Tournament had been led by Elder Xuan. For him to suddenly bring up the topic of his resignation from all of his duties, how could it not shock the Sea God's Pavilion's conference?

Yan Shaozhe was so shocked that his face turned pale. "Elder Xuan, how can this be? No one can guarantee that something won't go wrong. Besides, this responsibility cannot completely rest on your shoulders. Carelessness on the part of Xiaotao and the others also played a huge part in this matter, along with the unusual abilities of that evil soul master. He could actually unleash an all-out attack comparable to that of a Soul Sage. This can only illustrate the direct correlation between the destructive power of his skill and the number of corpses he rose. Elder Xuan, you are one of the main pillars of the academy. The academy cannot lose you!"

Elder Xuan sighed and said, "Shaozhe, don't say anything anymore. I had earlier wanted to take responsibility for my mistake in the Great Star Dou Forest that time and resign. But that girl, Le Xuan, stubbornly knelt in front of me and I didn't have the heart to hurt that child's heart, so I stayed on..."

Chapter 74.2: The Taotie Douluo and the Dragon God Douluo

"However, we have one dead and six heavily injured students this time. If I keep staying by their side, would another thing like this happen again? My martial soul has guaranteed that I'm not suited to be the vice-captain of the Shrek Guardians. I've already made my decision. Yao Haoxuan doesn't even have a corpse I can bury. I feel very pained, let alone the fact that they'll have to represent the school to take part in the Continental Advanced Soul Duelling Academy now. Now that a large mistake like this has occurred, the school's honor as the number one academy in the continent may be destroyed. This responsibility can only be taken on by me."

The Dean of the Soul Tool Department, Xian Lin'er, spoke up, "Elder Xua, please stay your mouth. Although your Godly Taotie Bull requires you to eat things for long periods of time, this doesn't affect your capabilities! Everyone can clearly see the contributions you've made to the academy during these years. We're all sad for the death of an inner courtyard disciple, but we can't stop eating for fear of choking. If you leave, that'll be the academy's greatest loss."

Elder Xuan shook his head bitterly. "Were it not for the fact that we were lucky this time, Huo Yuhao would've died there. Were it not for the fact that his Spiritual Shock coincided with the backlash of that evil soul master when he was captured, the hope of the academy would've been ruined in my hands. With a mistake like this on my hands, how would I have the face to continue staying in the Sea God's Pavilion? You don't have to try and persuade me; I've already made my decision. Yao Haoxuan's family has a relatively decent amount of influence, so I'm going to go take a trip to his clan and do my best to help dispel their sorrows. Everyone, I'm going to say goodbye here."

With that, he turned around and walked towards the door.

“Come back.” A calm, yet imposing voice that contained a formless pressure rang out. These two words were spoken in a very calm manner, but they made Elder Xuan, who’d started walking, forcefully stop moving.

“Elder Mu, I truly do not have the face to remain anymore.” Elder Xuan had his back towards the others, his body trembling slightly. Only he knew just how much pain he was enduring in his heart.

“I’m allowing you to come back. Do you not hear me?” Elder Mu’s voice became serious.

Elder Xuan’s body trembled. Just how many years had it been since he’d last heard Elder Mu get emotional while speaking? Eighty? Or was it a hundred years?

Although he was extremely unwilling, he still turned back and sat back in his seat. Even the other people had subconsciously straightened their backs after sensing the anger in Elder Mu’s voice. They were all silent out of fear, not daring to utter a single word.

Among everyone seated within the hall, the most senior of the elders were Elder Xuan and Elder Lin. However, even they were slightly junior to Elder Mu. Elder Mu was the last disciple of Elder Xuan’s master, and also his youngest disciple. In other words, Elder Mu was actually Elder Xuan’s junior uncle-master. In terms of age, Elder Mu was only ten years older than Elder Xuan. However, the contributions he’d made towards the academy and his strength placed him as the true number one figure in Shrek Academy.

Elder Mu, who’d been reclining on his seat, slowly rose to his feet. His appearance could finally be seen clearly.

Elder Mu had a very ordinary appearance, and he wasn’t very tall either. He even gave off the feeling that he already had one foot in the grave. If Huo Yuhao and Wang Dong were here, they would definitely be stunned. This elder, who was able to make the determined Elder Xuan turn back with a just slightly angry tone of voice, and silence the upper echelons of Shrek Academy, was actually the old man who they always saw lying down outside their dormitories.

Right, he was the Elder Mu who’d shaken the entire continent before. He was now over two hundred and fifty years old, and he was titled as the Dragon God Douluo, Mu En. Two hundred years ago, his name had been famous throughout the continent. Now, perhaps everyone might’ve forgotten about him. Many people assumed that Shrek Academy’s strongest expert was the Taotie Douluo, Xuan Zi, but in reality, the Dragon God, Elder Mu, was undoubtedly the number one figure in the academy.

noVe(lb.1n

Who would’ve thought that the ordinary old man who looked like a security guard for the dormitories would actually be the true number one figure of Shrek Academy? Elder Mu stayed there every day, as he enjoyed watching the students from the outer courtyard, and the dynamism that they emanated.

Only this would help dilute the loneliness he felt in his heart.

Elder Mu revealed a rarely-seen chilliness in his gentle eyes and said in a low voice, “Why is a two hundred-year-old man like you still being so impatient? If everyone else had left the academy after making a mistake, our Shrek Academy would’ve closed down already. You’re indeed no longer suitable

to be the vice-captain of the Shrek Guardians, so stay behind in the academy and help me teach a few students.”

Elder Xuan immediately became somewhat anxious, “Elder Mu, please let me go. I feel very pained, and I don’t even know how I’ll be able to face these kids anymore.”

“If you want to leave, fine.” Elder Mu said indifferently, “If you have the ability, go find a wife and marry her. Then, leave your bloodline of the Godly Taotie Bull behind. If you can do that, I’ll let you go; if you can’t, stop talking. If you continue spewing bullshit, I’ll discipline you on behalf of my deceased senior brother.”

“I...”

The other elders who were participating in the Sea God’s Pavilion’s conference revealed strange smiles as they listened to Elder Mu. Elder Lin, who sat opposite the two, directly laughed.

Humiliated, Elder Xuan said, “Lin Huiqun, what’re you laughing at?”

Elder Lin didn’t fear him in the least. She smiled slightly, “Naturally, I’m wondering whether you’ll even have the chance to pass down your bloodline anymore.”

“Hahahaha...” The other elders immediately laughed in unison. The four elders couldn’t help but laugh, and Xian Lin’er even covered her face with her hand.

Elder Xuan’s aged face immediately turned bright red, and his humiliation turned to anger as he slapped the table and yelled, “No laughing, no laughing!”

His outburst sounded serious, but the other elders seated around him laughed even louder than before; even Elder Mu revealed the trace of a smile on his face.

“Okay.” Elder Mu gently tapped the table with his hand, silencing the other elders. However, the strange looks in their eyes didn’t change in the least.

“Ever since the Guardians were established, every single student who joined was already prepared to make a sacrifice.” Elder Mu said indifferently, “This situation was special. Not only were we facing an evil soul master, we were even facing one who had the very rare ability to control corpses. The large number of massacres he caused with the bandits were for the sake of obtaining more corpses so he could cultivate in the techniques belonging to his evil sect. The fact that you were able to eradicate him is already a good deed. I also feel very pained by Yao Haoxuan’s sacrifice, but the dead are already dead. Our Shrek Guardians, however, have to continue on. Your Godly Taotie Bull makes you gluttonous, and you weren’t wrong in trusting Xiaotao and the rest. This tragedy can be even more of a reminder for us to be careful in the future. You followed them this time, but what would’ve happened if you hadn’t? Perhaps they would’ve suffered even greater losses. Also, will an elder always tag along in every mission the Guardians undertake? It’d be better for you to train even more and better Guardians rather than blame yourself. Lin’er.”

“Present.” Xian Lin’er hurriedly stood up and replied respectfully.

“I’m going to end this now.” Elder Mu said in a low voice, “After this conference ends, every single disciple from the inner courtyard will have to go over to you and have a set of custom-made flying-type

and defense-type soul tools made. Anybody who dares to go against me will leave the college.” Xian Lin’er immediately revealed a delighted look on her face, “Yes.” However, Dean Yan Shaozhe furrowed his brows.

From the very beginning, the Martial Soul Department and the Soul Tool Department had been opposing parties, with the former possessing the absolute advantage. The inner courtyard disciples of the Martial Soul Department had also inherited its arrogance. Because of that, they had all chosen not to use soul tools; they believed that this would maintain the legacy of Shrek Academy. However, the decision Elder Mu made today would undoubtedly tell the Martial Soul Department that they would need the help of the Soul Tool Department.

“Teacher, don’t you need to consider this a bit more?” Yan Shaozhe asked probingly.

Elder Mu glared at him and said solemnly, “Do you want a few more deaths to change your mind? Even if this hadn’t happened, I would’ve organised a conference in Sea God’s Pavilion to talk about these important matters. Our generation keeps advancing, and soul tools were originally a creation of society’s advancement in the first place. An individual can be strong, but working with a soul tool can only improve one’s strength even further. If you keep sticking to your old-fashioned ways, you don’t have to be a Dean anymore. I’ve already made a decision. The inner courtyard of the Martial Soul Department will have to purchase the soul tools from the Soul Tool Department using its own funds, and you’re not allowed to drop behind in your payments.”

Seeing as Elder Mu was getting angry, Yan Shaozhe didn’t dare to refute him even if he was inwardly dissatisfied. Thus, he assented respectfully. On the other hand, Xian Lin’er had a victorious smile on her face.

The vice-Dean, Cai Mei’er, hurriedly tried to mediate the situation with Yan Shaozhe, “Elder Mu, then what shall we do about the Continental Advanced Academy Soul Duelling Tournament? The inner courtyard only has ten or so disciples now, and only two of them can qualify for it. However, they’re somewhat weaker. Shall we take the previously-eliminated student from the Soul Tool Department and send him along with those two students?”

Elder Xuan turned awkwardly and nodded, “If I fly them over, we should be able to make it in time.”

Elder Mu shook his head. “No. We don’t need to aid them any further. Let’s let them show off their skills.”

“Ah?” The various elders present were all astonished. Of which, one elder blurted out, “Elder Mu, this matter relates to the honor of the academy.”

Elder Mu laughed calmly, “Right! Honor. Haven’t you felt that we’ve been tied up by this ‘honor’ for the past few years? Losing isn’t scary; the truly scary thing is complacency. A few people have already assumed that the Martial Soul Department is unparalleled under the heavens, and it’s time for a wake-up call. During the past thirty years, we’ve been seeing new developments in the field of soul tools practically every day. However, what about the development of our Soul Tool Department? If we compare ourselves to the Sun Moon Empire, we’re not lacking by just a tiny bit. As society progresses, we have to continually improve our way of thinking. Even if we send extra help, would they definitely be better than those kids?”

Yan Shaozhe naturally understood that his teacher was referring to him. He couldn't help but lower his head, and his aged face turned slightly red. If anybody else were to speak of the importance of soul tools, he could disapprove; however, the person speaking was the teacher who he respected most. He couldn't just not pay attention to his words.

"Although our official team can't participate this time, you shouldn't forget that our preparatory team this time is our academy's strongest-ever. Since the Heavens have decided to give them some early practice, why don't we help them succeed?"

Chapter 74.3: The Taotie Douluo and the Dragon God Douluo (Preview)

"It's too soon to talk about defeat. And even if we lose, we can use this opportunity to temper the seven children of the preparatory team, and turn them into an outstanding generation of our Shrek Academy. In that case, even if we lose, it will be still worthwhile. For the time being, let them do as they wish. Lin'er, after the tournament ends, send a request to the Sun Moon Imperial Soul Engineering Academy on behalf of our Soul Tool Department and apply for a student exchange program. Let's send the students of our Soul Tool Department to their empire to study."

Xian Lin'er was stunned. "Elder Mu, will they agree? And even if they agree, I'm afraid that our students..."

"The objective isn't to send them there to learn," Elder Mu said with a faint smile, "I want them to go there to gain experience. I want them to have a look at the number one soul engineering academy of the continent, and see what their soul tools look like for themselves. As for the Sun Moon Imperial Soul Engineering Academy, they will agree. They've already sent a request to apply for a student exchange with our Martial Soul Department. So tell them that as long as they agree to accept our students first, they're allowed to send ten students of their own to study here."

"Yes." Xian Lin'er replied.

Elder Mu said, "Talk things over carefully. Within five years, I want the Martial Soul and Soul Tool Departments to undergo a partial fusion. Add a weekly course on soul engineering for the students of the Martial Soul Department. Even if they don't learn how to manufacture soul tools, they must know how to use them. Shaozhe, Mei'er, Lin'er and Duo Duo, you must remember this: the advent of soul tools cannot be stopped. We're unable to predict to what degree they will develop in the future. Therefore, we must gain an advantage while there is still time. Our Shrek Academy has never had a lack of talents, and in the future, soul masters will fight while combining both their martial souls and their soul tools."

Perplexed, Yan Shaozhe asked, "Teacher, aren't we rushing things? Even if soul tools are developing quickly, soul engineers aren't comparable to soul masters that have surpassed the Soul Sage rank."

"Aren't you neglecting the real problem and concentrating only on details?" Elder Mu said coldly, "Anyway, you're mistaken. Not too long ago, I personally went to the Sun Moon Empire, and the things I saw there were able to shock even me. The growth of soul tools in the Sun Moon Empire has already exceeded your imagination. I even saw a huge soul tool that needed many people to control it, and that soul tool was capable of threatening even my life. Something like that has the power to change the

course of an entire war. Everything I said today wasn't without cause. If you keep on with this mentality and refuse to change, Shrek Academy won't last for long."

"What?" Yan Shaozhe was dumbfounded. He was aware of how strong his teacher was. Even if he was a powerful Titled Douluo that had reached Rank 95, in front of his Elder Mu, he was only a tiny existence. And now, his teacher said that there was a soul tool capable of threatening his life. Just how powerful was this soul tool?

"And if we look at things from the Sun Moon Empire's perspective, they should be unwilling to remain in the shadows anymore. If a war breaks out, you think our academy can shut itself up in an ivory tower? With things as they are now, we might even be the real objective of the Sun Moon Empire's attack."

After hearing these words, the expressions of the nearby elders turned solemn.

"It's been a long time since I have proposed something." Elder Mu said in a grave tone, "Now, let's vote for what I've proposed today." After that, he raised his hand first.

Given his position as Master of the Sea God's Pavilion, no one had ever gone against Elder Mu's propositions in the past, let alone now that his words had moved the elders. Everyone voted in favor.

Elder Mu nodded and said, "The academy needs to support the development of soul tools. Huiqun, your department will receive a little more funding."

Elder Lin nodded.

Elder Mu said, "That Fan Yu from the Soul Tool Department isn't bad. What about making him the vice-dean?"

Once again, everyone voted in favor.

"He'll be in charge of researching and developing soul tools," Elder Mu said to Xian Lin'er, "he doesn't need to teach anyone else except his two inheriting disciples. Moreover, he'll be the one leading the students in the exchange with the Sun Moon Imperial Soul Engineering Academy."

"Yes."

.....

Tang Ya was sitting in the dormitory and gazing out the window. Her pretty face was a bit pale.

"I wonder how Bei Bei and the others are doing. Elder sister Le Xuan said that the disciples of the inner courtyard were seriously injured during this mission. One of them died in battle, and the other six were wounded. Even if Bei Bei and the others are alright, I'm afraid they'll have to participate in the competition."

"Even Little Yuhao, Wang Dong, and Xiao Xiao are there. On the other hand, I'm quite useless. Even if I'm the head of the Tang Sect, I don't seem to have a bright future. It's already been a year since I broke through the third ring bottleneck, and up til now, my soul power has only reached Rank 33; it's getting harder and harder to advance. As of now, even that Dai Huabin from the second year has surpassed me. I'm already in my fifth year, and I'm starting to wonder how I'll be able to graduate once I'm in the sixth grade! Breaking through the fourth ring seems so difficult."

The always-bright Tang Ya was talking to herself. Her beautiful face was quite gloomy right now.

“Father, mother, the both of you died in such a tragic way, and yet, there is no one that can really help us. Ten thousand years have passed, and all the friendships from back then have started to wane. In any case, Shrek Academy still remembers the contributions of Ancestor Tang San and gave me a place to stay. But the Clear Sky Clan? I went to look for them, but they said that they would help the starving but not the poor. The decline of the Tang Sect seems unavoidable. No, I refuse to believe it! I must rebuild the sect, and even if I have to pay a great price, I can’t shrink back!”

Tears were streaming down Tang Ya’s tender cheeks. After all, she was only a fifteen-year-old girl, but she had so many responsibilities already.

The Tang Sect had recruited Bei Bei, Huo Yuhao, Xiao Xiao, Wang Dong, and He Caitou. This had given the Tang Sect some hope. However, her talent was the worst among them. How was she supposed to lead them in the future?

After wiping her tears, Tang Ya stood up and clenched her delicate fists. “I want to become stronger. I’ll do everything to make the Tang Sect great again. Father, mother, forgive me. I’m afraid that your Little Ya will have to go Star Luo City.”

In regards to the Star Luo Empire, Star Luo City was worthy of being called the number one city. It was the Star Luo Empire’s political, cultural, and economic center. It also had the title of ‘The Undefeated Imperial Capital’.

Star Luo City’s city walls reached a height of hundred meters, and unexpectedly, their width was also a hundred meters. These walls were made of a very durable stone. The area it encircled surpassed a thousand square kilometers; it surpassed fifty kilometers in both length and breadth.

The core of the city, the so-called inner city, was obviously situated in the center of Star Luo City. The inner city had a length of 960 meters and a width of 750 meters, and the inner city walls around it were 20 meters high—it was a city within a city. The Imperial Palace was already complete thanks to the White Tiger Duke’s lineage and the Imperial Family. Every time it was rebuilt, it got bigger in scale and more magnificent.

Star Luo City’s population exceeded 8 million inhabitants, and could hold up to 20 million people if one were to add the foreigners.

However, even such a big city had started to become crowded as of late. The number of visitors had rapidly increased in a short half-month, and all the hotels were full. Therefore, the officers had to take over the residences of a few commoners and open their houses up to the visitors. The number of troops inside the city had also increased quite a lot due to security reasons.

There was only one reason for such a huge change: the Continental Advanced Academy Soul Dueling Tournament that was held every five years. And now, the tournament was taking place in Star Luo City.

There were four great empires on the continent, and the various capitals of the empires would take turns to host the tournament. Therefore, Star Luo City would need to wait another twenty years to hold it again. How could such a grand occasion not attract all the residents of the Star Luo Empire?

The tournament was going to be held in Star Luo Plaza, in front of the inner city. Star Luo Plaza was very big, and could hold many spectators. There were thirty thousand soldiers tasked with keeping order in the city, and ten thousand of them were stationed at Star Luo Plaza. ~~no re-lB~~-In

Not far from the east side of the Star Luo Plaza was a big hotel with seven stories. This was the Imperial Star Grand Hotel, and it belonged to the royal family. Currently, it was being used to welcome the various high-ranked soul masters and soul engineers coming from the other countries to participate in the tournament.

Due to the fact that they were the reigning champions from the number one academy on the continent, the members of Shrek Academy were situated in the most luxurious room on the highest floor. Everyone had their own bedroom, and in addition, they also had a meeting room that they could use as they wished.

At this time, the ten members of the team and their leading teacher, Wang Yan, were in the middle of the meeting room, talking things over before the start of the match.

They had only arrived in Star Luo City yesterday. They were quite late compared to the other academies participating in the tournament. However, in their eyes, it was just Shrek Academy acting arrogantly because they were the defending champions and the number one academy on the continent.

Wang Yan sat in the place of honor. On his left were Ma Xiaotao, Dai Yueheng, and Ling Luochen; all three of them had pale complexions. Their internal organs were still damaged. Even if they had received medical treatment and tried to recuperate their strength with their own methods, they had rushed here in great haste with the aid of a flying-type soul tool. This had taken quite a toll on them, and had actually aggravated the state of their injuries. The time they would need to recuperate was going to be higher than the previous estimates.

Given the situation, it would be strange if Wang Yan had a good complexion.

The registrations would end today. Wang Yang had already discussed things with the organizers of the tournament and signed up the current students, but the reinforcements from the academy were yet to be seen. The competition would start tomorrow, and at this point, they could only rely on themselves.

Wang Yan tried to calm down, and showed a slight smile on his face as he said, "Did you have a proper rest yesterday? The Star Luo Empire's hospitality isn't half bad."

Bei Bei, who was the first on his right, said, "We had a good rest. However, today is the last day for the registration, and those reinforcements from the academy..."

Wang Yan waved his hand and said, "Don't worry. I've already received a letter from the academy. It takes some time to gather students that were away. Moreover, our academy has a certain privilege... thus, we must fight for Shrek's glory! I really wonder how far the preparatory team can go."

Chapter 75.1: The Start of the Tournament

"Privilege?" The disciples from the outer courtyard looked at Wang Yan in astonishment.

Wang Yan nodded. "Right! Don't forget, our Shrek Academy reigns as the number one academy across the entire continent. When were we not the champions of a tournament? Because of that, we'll be able

to complete our registrations regardless of when we arrive. However, the inner courtyard disciples are also Guardians, and many of them are carrying out assignments in the outside world, so they'll definitely need some time to rush over. We won't meet any strong opponents in the first few matches, so I'm confident there'll be no problem with your strength. Now, I'll explain the rules of the Continental Advanced Academy Soul Duelling Tournament."

After putting the students from the outer courtyard at ease, Wang Yan explained calmly, "The Continental Advanced Academy Soul Duelling Tournament is the ultimate competition for the various academies around the world. It has fair and equitable rules that test the total strength of each academy's students."

"Because of that, the manners in which we compete are extremely plentiful and lively. I'm going to explain some of them today. There are a total of a hundred and thirty three advanced soul master and soul engineering academies who've come today, and all of them are staying in this hotel. The first round of the preliminaries is a direct elimination match. In other words, the losing party will be directly eliminated. The first round will be a 7v7 team fight. The lot-drawing for which will be carried out tomorrow. I reckon that it'll take three days for the first round to be finished."

"Once the first round is finished, we'll be split into groups. Each group will have eight or nine teams, and will undergo a round-robin tournament. The rules for each of the round-robin matches will be randomly chosen from one of three situations: Firstly, Single Elimination. Secondly, a 3-man, 2-man, and 2-man Coordination Match. And lastly, a 7v7 Team Fight. This will test the comprehensive strength of every team. Every match will have a lot-drawing preceding the match, and this will determine which situation will be used for that match. This is the best way to test your strength as a whole."

"I'll explain the specifics of these matches after you get through the first round. Right now, you'll have to face your opponents in the first round. After you finish that, we'll be able to get into the elimination round and wait for our backup. Xiaotao and the rest won't be able to make it in time, so we can only rely on you guys to win this no matter what. After the elimination round, you won't have to be so nervous about the later matches. Furthermore, we could have our backups coming at any time. Even if they aren't able to make it in time, Xiaotao and the rest will be able to recover their strength within half a month, at the very most. And after all, we're still the number one team."

The moment they heard that the first round was an elimination round, everyone's faces clearly turned serious. If Shrek Academy were to take their leave in the first round of the Continental Advanced Soul Duelling Tournament, they would become a joke.

Yet, Wang Yan was extremely confident. Without revealing any worry at all, he smiled slightly. "What are you guys doing? Are you nervous? You don't need to be nervous at all. After the tournament starts, you'll realise that your opponents are far far weaker than what you were expecting. You've forgotten one thing; you're the elites who've been chosen from Shrek Academy. Even if you're the preparatory team, the fact that you've been chosen to represent Shrek Academy on this platform has proved that you've got enough strength. Moreover, this strength is something that the other academies will never be able to compare against. You can't assume that your opponents from the Continental Advanced Soul Duelling Tournament will be as strong as the powerful enemies you've faced during your advancement tests!"

Everyone present was slightly stunned, Right! Teacher Wang was right. They were the disciples of the number one academy on the continent. They couldn't use their fellow peers to judge the strength of their opponents.

Wang Yan leaned back in his chair comfortably, "Other than Yuhao, all of you have optimum soul ring combinations; every single one of you has a thousand year soul ring. What about your opponents? Do you think thousand year soul beasts are that easy to hunt? I can tell you that even Soul Kings are rare in many of the advanced soul master academies. Although your opponents are all around twenty, it's already quite hard for them to guarantee that their whole team will be filled with soul masters who have three or more rings. Four-ringed soul masters are extremely rare. I dare say that unless you meet the Sun Moon Imperial Soul Engineering Academy, you won't meet a Soul King. What cultivations does our team possess? We have four Soul Ancestors, and two people with twin martial souls; we even have an Ultimate martial soul. Your opponents should be the nervous ones. Okay, go rest. Preserve your energy and go beat them up tomorrow. Let the other academies see that they won't have any chance against us, even if we send out our reserve team. Oh, right. I have to remind you that we'll definitely be going out on the first day of the elimination round. As the reigning champions, we'll be the first ones out."

Somewhat astonished, Xu Sanshi asked, "Teacher Wang, are you not going to make any strategies for us?"

Wang Yan snorted unhappily. "What do you need a strategy for? Are you trying to humiliate me, or yourselves? Do you even need a strategy against these types of opponents? Go. Xiaotao, you three stay behind for a moment. I'm going to get some medicine for you." The seven from the preparatory team all returned to their rooms and rested. After Wang Yan's speech, they had become much less nervous. Right! We're the elites of Shrek Academy! So what if we're from the preparatory team? We're not weaker than anyone else.

Once the seven left, Wang Yan rose to his feet and shut the door to the conference room. The relaxed look on his face instantly vanished as he let out a long sigh. Once he sat back down, the look on his face turned extremely serious.

Dai Yueheng sighed, "Teacher Wang, is there a need for you to console them like this? Although nothing you said was wrong, the students who are representing their respective academies are the most elite existences among their peers as well. Although there might be a few weaker ones, the overwhelmingly large majority of our opponents are at the Soul Ancestor rank on average. Furthermore, the academy we're fighting against in the elimination round tomorrow will definitely go all-out."

Ma Xiaotao said, "What Teacher Wang did was right. Were it not for him, they wouldn't have any morale at all; they wouldn't have even needed to fight if that was the case. All we can do now is trust them completely. Can you or I even move now?"

"I asked you three to stay behind to tell me how long you'll need to recover from your injuries and fight," Wang Yan said solemnly, "I need an accurate timespan."

Ma Xiaotao said, "If I go all-out cultivating to recuperate, I'll need fifteen days."

Dai Yueheng said, "My cultivation isn't as good as Xiaotao's, so I might need a bit more time. I reckon seventeen days or so."

Wang Yan's heart became increasingly heavy. This was his first time taking a team to a tournament and he wasn't confident in himself at all!

Ling Luocheng said, "My injuries are relatively lighter, so ten days or so should be good." n-)o/(v).e(-l/)b-(1-(n

There was finally a rather good piece of news. After doing a few calculations, Wang Yan continued, "In other words, you'll be able to fight in the third or fourth match of the knock-out tournament if everything goes well."

After sinking into contemplation for a while, Wang Yan nodded. "We can only hope that they'll win their first match. We'll only have the chance to continue on if we're able to get into the knockout stage. You have to keep the fact that we don't have a backup team a secret. Their confidence has to be established via victory, and I believe that they'll have the strength to maintain the glory of our Shrek Academy."

Huo Yuhao and Wang Dong both returned to the former's room.

After shutting the door, Wang Dong couldn't help but ask, "Yuhao, do you think what Teacher Wang said was the truth?"

Huo Yuhao smiled slightly. "Regardless of whether it's true or not, we have to assume that he's being honest, because we simply don't have any other choices. Come, let's start cultivating. After the lot-drawing for the knockout round tomorrow, the tournament will officially start. The only thing we can do now is make ourselves more confident. There are no alternatives."

"Right." Wang Dong sat directly opposite Huo Yuhao, and the two placed their palms against each other and started cultivating their Haodong Power.

Shrek Academy wasn't the only academy that was holding a meeting; at this moment, all of the participating academies were trying to boost the morale of their students. The Sun Moon Imperial Soul Engineering Academy that was on the same level as Shrek Academy was also doing the same.

They were always second place in practically every single tournament, so there was practically no difference between the treatment that they and Shrek Academy received in the Imperial Star Grand Hotel. They only had a single target, that was, to become champions.

Two elders sat at the head of the table within the conference room, and a total of fourteen students were sat by their sides. The students seated on the left were evidently older, and the students seated on the right were slightly younger. Clearly, the Sun Moon Imperial Soul Engineering Academy had also sent an official team and a preparatory team for the tournament that was to be held five years later.

The elder who sat on the left had a straight nose, and a square mouth. His facial features were majestic, and he was wrinkled like a date. As he sat there with his wide shoulders, he gave off an extremely sturdy feeling. He spoke in a low voice. "According to our investigations, Shrek Academy has actually brought only ten people this time. Furthermore, three of them look younger than twelve. The others are a bit older. We've used a few men who've infiltrated the inner parts of the Star Luo Empire, and we've obtained accurate information. When they registered, only those three were nineteen. The other seven were all under fifteen. In other words, Shrek Academy didn't even make an official team of seven to participate in this tournament. Out of the seven from last time's preparatory team, only two of them

showed up. It's the first time we've seen that nineteen-year-old girl show up. Do you know what this means?"

The fourteen students were all somewhat doubtful.

The elder seated by the right had a curly beard and was similarly tall and big. His short white hair resembled steel needles, and the hairs on his temples, along with his curly beard made him seem impressively terrifying.

Chapter 75.2: The Start of the Tournament

He pounded the table violently, and stood up, saying, "It means that they're looking down on us! They think they can defeat us just with their preparatory team! This is like getting a slap in the face; do you understand that? This is the most direct way they could use to slap us in the face. According to the rules of the tournament, the registrations will end today. Therefore, they're planning to rely on that team to fight us. Ma Rulong."

"Here." A male student sitting in the place of honor on the regular team's side stood up. His face was somewhat similar to the angry old man's. He had a large stature and short hair with curly sideburns. Both his eyes were bright, and his entire body was emitting a boundless power.

"If we manage to lose against such a lineup, you will be kicked out of the Illustrious Virtue Hall."

"Yes." Ma Rulong replied with one word just like before, but his voice was already filled with murderous intent.

"Elder Ma, don't be anxious. I don't think things are so simple." Sitting in front of Ma Rulong was the captain of the preparatory team; he was less than fifteen, and looked very pretty and delicate. He had big bright blue eyes, and a tall and slender build. His hands, which were now placed on the table, were also as white as jade and very delicate. Even a girl was unlikely to have such beautiful hands. He seemed to like his hands very much. Even while talking to Elder Ma, he was still gazing at them as if looking at the most beautiful piece of art in the world.

Elder Ma furrowed his brows slightly and asked, "What's not so simple?"

The delicate youth was still looking at his hands as he said, "Shrek Academy isn't made of fools. How can they not know that those three aren't enough to stop us? I have great confidence in Big Brother Rulong, but as I see it, Shrek Academy must have run into some kind of problem. Didn't they always attach great importance to us? It's strange that they would get careless at this time."

After hearing these words, Elder Ma's face became slightly red. He had also suspected that something like this might have happened, but he had still said those words to rally the students.

"That would be better. Xiao Hongchen, you should use all this energy to deal with those students of Shrek Academy that are under fifteen years old. They'll be your opponents in the next tournament."

The youth named Xiao Hongchen finally raised his head and smiled. This smile was just like that of a beautiful woman. Then, he said, "Elder Ma, only I can be my opponent."

Ma Rulong, who was sitting on the other side, gave him a supercilious look as he said, "Xiao Hongchen, if you have something to say, just say it."

Xiao Hongchen put on a happy face. “Big Brother Ma, I’ve already said it. You should try your best, because if you fail to defeat the current members sent by Shrek Academy, you’ll be kicked out of the Illustrious Virtue Hall just like Elder Ma said. That would be a pity, wouldn’t it?”

“You...” A hint of anger immediately appeared in Ma Rulong’s eyes.

Elder Ma glared at him and said in a grave tone, “Sit down. I’ll now choose those that will participate in the first round.”

Even if he was only the captain of the preparatory team, both the leader of the main team Ma Rulong and the old man that was leading them seemed to dread him. Behind Xiao Hongchen’s smile was hidden an arrogance that seemed to place him above every other living thing.

Early morning. Just as the first rays of sunlight started to shine over Star Luo City, the capital of the Star Luo Empire was shrouded in a solemn atmosphere.

All the roads leading to Star Luo Plaza were blocked by soldiers in shining armor. The Imperial Star Grand Hotel was even more well-guarded. More than a thousand soldiers were stationed around it, and all the roads leading to Star Luo Plaza from there were under strict supervision.

Only the members of the various academies that were participating in the tournament could get through the encirclement.

The location where the tournament would take place wasn’t the middle of Star Luo Plaza. It was instead going to take place in front of the inner city gate. This way, the emperor could watch the show with his civil and military ministers from the top of the walls of the inner city. Not only was the view very good, but it was also very safe.

The platform that would be used for the matches had a length and breadth of 100 meters and a height of 5 meters. Moreover, there were 108 pillars of metal on the periphery of the platform. These pillars weren’t there as an ornament, but were instead a defensive-type soul tool. After the start of the tournament, these pillars would be controlled by 108 soul masters, creating a defensive formation around the platform that would stop the leakage of soul skills. This was to avoid destroying the inner city and causing casualties.

The platform had cost a large amount of money to construct. Moreover, they would have to compensate the 108 soul masters that would operate the defensive-type soul tools for the duration of the tournament, which would go on for more than a month. It was difficult to achieve all of this without the power of an empire.

At this time, except for the far off soldiers, there wasn’t a single soul in the wide Star Luo Plaza.

The previous time the tournament had been held in the Star Luo Empire, there was an incident where people had trampled on each other. Therefore, the royal family had decided to attach great importance to this matter. Not only they dispatch the army to keep order this time, they also found other ways to avoid problems.

There were many iron bars in the plaza. These iron bars were around 1.5 meters high, and wouldn’t cover the line of sight for most of the audience. Their purpose was to divide the plaza into different

zones. The audience had to enter and exit the plaza from different places; this made the soldiers' work much easier. Every area could only hold a certain number of spectators.

The inner city was located on the northern side of Star Luo City, facing south, and a luxurious resting area was built on the eastern side of the platform. It had been specially built for the members of the various academies that would be participating in the tournament. However, there was only space for around seventy academies in this resting area. This meant that there wasn't space for the academies that would be eliminated in the first round. With that, there would be no waste of space, and the students would be more motivated.

After the tournament had changed its system to the current one, except for the final stage, the thorniest one was exactly this first round of eliminations. Both its awesomeness and harshness exceeded that of the round-robin that would come later.

There was still place for tactics in the robin-round stage, and you could even make use of tactical defeats. However, the first round would lead to a direct elimination. Losing the match would mean that you were out of the tournament, and every team had to go through this first round. Even the defending champions of Shrek Academy were no exception. When drawing lots, there was a possibility of a team obtaining a bye. However, none of the academies could enjoy its privileges directly.

The teachers leading the respective academies had arrived at the inner city very early in the morning. They received a number plate based on the time they had registered, and afterward, they started to draw lots. At this time, the lots had already been drawn. An official of the Star Luo Empire had the duty of announcing the results of the lots. Once the order of the matches was decided, the final preparations for the early phase of the tournament could be considered complete.

The sun slowly rose from the far away east. And Star Luo City, which was located in the middle of the continent, was engulfed in warmth.

On the city walls of the inner city was a middle-aged man with his hands crossed behind his back and an imperial golden crown on his head. He was wearing a long bright yellow gown, and was standing exactly on top of the main entrance to the inner city. This also happened to be the best place from where to watch the match.

At his side was a beautiful woman wearing fine attire that belonged to a palace lady; she was standing respectfully and quietly beside him. A few steps behind her were the Star Luo Empire's civil and military officers.

"Your Majesty." An old man wearing the red clothes of a civil officer took a step forward and bowed respectfully after arriving at the man's side. On his long gown was embroidered a python; this signified that his status was very high. He was worthy of holding the highest position.

"Prime minister, how are the arrangements going?" The emperor asked with a smile.

The prime minister respectfully said, "Everything is ready. The lots were drawn, and the order of the matches has been decided. There are no problems in the periphery either. We can allow the citizens to enter the arena."

The emperor of the Star Luo Empire nodded and said with a smile, "Good, pass my order down. Clear the important passages, and allow the people to enter the arena. Make them enter in a slow and orderly fashion. If there are problems, the ones in charge of the area involved will be punished severely."

"Yes." The prime minister retreated several steps before turning and leaving.

The emperor spoke to the beautiful woman beside him. "Empress, we have waited twenty years for this grand occasion. It reminds me of when I was young! If the royal family didn't have so many customs, I would have participated myself."

"The emperor has always had the heart of a soldier," the empress said with a faint smile.

"Look," The emperor said with a smile of his own, "the students of the various academies are already entering the arena. However, not all of them will be able to make use of the resting area. Only those that achieve victory will have this privilege. It seems that Shrek Academy has only sent ten people this time, and their age is quite young. One of the leading students is Dai Hao's eldest son. I thought of calling him back and letting him watch the tournament. After all, it's something that our country can host only every twenty years. But in the end, I decided against it; the Sun Moon Empire is getting more and more restless. If he is there guarding the western border, I'll feel more at ease."

The empress listened quietly and didn't say anything. As the first lady of the nation, she wasn't allowed to interfere with politics. Especially when there were many civil and military officers around them. Every one of those military officers was a powerful soul master. Their hearing was very keen.

At this time, the crowd started to enter Star Luo Plaza under the lead of the army; the long lines converged inside the plaza.

You couldn't watch the tournament for free. However, the admission cost wasn't too high either; it was only two gold soul coins. And even if a limited number of people could enter the plaza, there was enough space to accommodate more than twenty thousand spectators. Two gold soul coins was the base price. The nearer you were to the platform, the higher the price. You had to pay a hundred gold soul coins to enter the area that was nearest to the platform.

For the commoners, it was a lot of money. But for aristocrats and merchants, it wasn't that much.

The Star Luo Empire was treating all the spectators fairly. The more you paid, the nearer you would be to the platform. But aside from this, everyone was treated the same. There weren't any seats, and you could watch only while standing. This was so that they could accommodate more people.

Chapter 75.3: The Start of the Tournament

This simple entrance fee they collected would earn the Star Luo Empire two million or so gold soul coins every day. Within a single month, they could earn a total of sixty million gold soul coins. After deducting the military and other various costs, the empire would still earn a large sum. This was one of the main reasons why the four empires were very willing to host the Continental Advanced Soul Duelling Tournament. It had to be known that a year's worth of revenue from Star Luo City wasn't far from this number!

Just as the spectators began to fill the arena, Huo Yuhao and his companions were standing in the participant's area.

Today, the people from Shrek Academy were dressed in their traditional, dark-green school uniforms; these were the standard colors of the academy. Furthermore, they stood at the very front of all of the other academies. However, there were no objections to this. This was the glory that Shrek Academy had accumulated through their strength for over a thousand years.

However, the other participants who stood behind them involuntarily revealed a look of astonishment as they looked at their lineup.

It would have been fine if only ten people had turned up, but an overwhelmingly large majority of the ten didn't seem like they were anywhere near twenty years old. They were able to see how young they were without even using a bone test. Only the three who stood at the very front seemed like they were of an appropriate age. However, they all wore cloaks that concealed their facial features.

A large majority of the academies were inwardly praying that they wouldn't meet Shrek Academy or the Sun Moon Imperial Soul Engineering Academy in their first match. Otherwise, it was practically announcing that they would be eliminated.

The participants from the Sun Moon Imperial Soul Engineering Academy stood behind Shrek Academy, allowing them to get an even better view of the students from the latter.

The youngest students from Shrek Academy were Huo Yuhao, Wang Dong, and Xiao Xiao. Huo Yuhao was slightly better than the other two; after fusing with the Ice Empress' torso bone, his stature had changed greatly. He could now pass for a fourteen or fifteen-year-old youth. However, Wang Dong and Xiao Xiao's faces still looked somewhat infantile. This was especially true for Xiao Xiao. She was rather short, and looked like she was only a young girl. At this moment, even the proud Xiao Hongchen was filled with doubt. Just what was Shrek Academy trying to do by sending out a lineup like this?

It took a full hour for the spectators to enter the arena; there were simply too many people.

The originally-empty Star Luo Plaza was now packed with people. Fortunately, the place didn't seem too chaotic due to the iron fences partitioning it, in addition to the army maintaining order.

It was now 9am.

"Silence." A loud voice suddenly spread throughout the entire field. After hearing this voice, every soldier in the army stood perfectly straight and raised the lances in their hands.

Immediately, as the solemn voice covered the entire field, the originally-clamorous Star Luo Plaza promptly went silent.

"His Majesty, the Emperor, arrives!"

With a crash, the populace immediately knelt down in large numbers. Several hundreds of thousands of people simultaneously made the same, orderly movements, creating a truly spectacular scene.

The soldiers only knelt down on one knee, but the participating academies had been given special permission to not kneel. However, they had to give a ninety-degree bow to show their respect to the emperor.

"Subjects, you may rise." The voice of the Star Luo Empire's emperor was magnified with a loudspeaker-type soul tool. Only then did the populace get to their feet, and the participating students subsequently

straightened their backs. The gazes of everyone present were cast towards the top of the imperial capital's walls.

The Star Luo Emperor was already standing at the very front of the city walls, along with the empress and his civil and military officials. His gentle gaze didn't lose any of its grandeur as he surveyed his people.

"The Continental Advanced Academy Soul Duelling Tournament is the most important occasion on our Douluo Continent. This time, it's our Star Luo Empire's turn to host it, and I'm very happy. Now, on behalf of the Star Luo Empire, I welcome each and every academy who has travelled far to come here. I wish that you'll be able to reveal the elegance you should have in the tournament one month from now.

"Thank you, your majesty." The leaders and students from the hundred and thirty-three academies bowed again.

The Star Luo Emperor nodded and smiled slightly in their direction.

"Okay, I now announce that the Continental Advanced Academy Soul Duelling Tournament has formally begun!" The Star Luo Emperor's loud declaration opened the curtains to this grand occasion.

"Long live the king, long live the king, long live the king!" The masses all cheered in chorus. The atmosphere in the plaza seemed to have been aroused instantly.

"Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom...." Gun salutes rang out from the city walls, and rang out a hundred and eight times before stopping. Star Luo Plaza had already transformed into an ocean of excitement and cheers.

The Star Luo Emperor retreated slightly with his generals, then took a seat alongside the empress in a chair that was already prepared for him. He waved towards the prime minister beside him, who then obeyed his command and ordered a subordinate to start the tournament.

The sonorous voice that had previously spoken immediately rang out again, "According to the rules of the Continental Advanced Academy Soul Duelling Tournament, the first round of the tournament will be a knockout round. This year, there have been a total of a hundred and thirty-three academies who have registered so far. After drawing some lots, there will be a single team who has a bye. A total of sixty-six matches will be conducted. The first round will be a knockout round, and the loser will have to end his journey in this tournament. Now, the first match will begin. The first team consists of the participants from the Tian Ling Advanced Soul Academy, while the other is the continent's number one academy, the academy that has countless feats of glory to its name, the academy that has won every single tournament for the past thousand years, Shrek Academy!"

Following the announcer's declaration, the atmosphere in Star Luo Plaza immediately reached its boiling point.

"Shrek, Shrek, Shrek..."

The shouts for Shrek Academy thoroughly covered every single corner of the plaza.

The seven from the preparatory team were left staring blankly as they watched the scene unfurling in front of them. This was the first time they'd seen something like this, and their faces were somewhat

pale for a brief moment. This was a crowd of several hundreds of thousands! If they were to lose this match, leading to Shrek Academy's disqualification, they simply couldn't imagine what would happen.

"Everyone, don't panic. This is the glory that belongs to our Shrek Academy, and also the glory that will soon belong to you. During the last tournament, we too faced a scene like this. I can tell you that our opponents will definitely be ten times more nervous and panicked than us, because we're Shrek Academy." Ma Xiaotao's voice rang out in the ears of every single member of the preparatory team.

A scene like this was a first even for Wang Yan, who was leading the group! Only Ma Xiaotao, Dai Yueheng, and Ling Luochen, who'd previously represented Shrek Academy as the preparatory team in the last tournament, would've seen something like this. At this moment, Ma Xiaotao's words were naturally most persuasive to them.

Dai Yueheng immediately continued, "Xiaotao's correct. These cheers are for us, and for the glory of Shrek Academy. Right now, we need you to burst forth and step up. Use your strength to prove how powerful our Shrek Academy is. Go. Raise your chests, and put on your most enthusiastic face to thank these supporters."

With the morale boost from the two seniors, their incessantly excited hearts calmed down slightly. However, their palms were still sweaty. They naturally didn't know that Shrek Academy's preparatory team had never appeared in the first round before. This was because the first match represented the face of Shrek Academy. Furthermore, their hearts would definitely be affected after facing such a passionate crowd for the first time. Thus, the main team would go out in full force during the first round.

However, they simply had no other choice now!

Right at this moment, the announcer's voice rang out. "May the team members from the Tian Ling Advanced Soul Academy take the field."

A group of young, pale-faced students walked out from the far side of the contestant's area. As they walked out, even their footsteps were somewhat unstable. Ma Xiaotao giggled, and turned towards Huo Yuhao and the rest, "Look, these are your opponents. Have you noticed? Some of them are shaking all over. The reputation of Shrek Academy is indeed a large responsibility and a heavy burden on you, but our glory is also one of the most effective weapons you have. Bring out your courage and strength. Shrek, win."

With that, Ma Xiaotao strode towards Bei Bei and extended her right hand. The others then stepped forth, and eleven right hands were placed atop each other.

Wang Yan whispered, "Huo Yuhao, you're in charge of commanding the team after we're up. The rest of you have to follow and maneuver according to his Spiritual Detection. Yuhao, use your second soul skill carefully, if possible."

Huo Yuhao's mind had originally still been somewhat blank, but he was suddenly enlightened after hearing Wang Yan's reminder and the words that Ma Xiaotao had said. His Spirit Eyes immediately lit up, and he nodded heavily. "Teacher Wang, I understand. Seniors, don't worry. We won't lose any of Shrek's face. Shrek, win."

As they looked at the determination in Huo Yuhao's eyes as he said the word 'Shrek', every single member of the preparatory team felt their blood boiling. Right, they were students of Shrek Academy, representing the ten thousands years of glory it had held. Their opponents would only feel fear towards them. What they had to do was beat every single opponent who stood in front of them.

They no longer had an escape, nor did they need to retreat. They needed to unceasingly advance, advance, and advance!

"Okay, the members of the Tian Ling Advanced Soul Academy have stepped up. Under the eyes of the crowd, let us now have the continent's number one academy, the true king of academies, Shrek Academy, take the field!"

The announcer's resounding voice immediately reached its peak, and Star Luo Plaza instantly became a sea of voices that cheered for Shrek. Even the Star Luo Emperor, who sat on the city walls, couldn't help but stand up and reveal a look of excitement on his face. Who would've imagined that he'd studied in Shrek Academy during his youth using a pseudonym? Even now, he still deeply loved a person, the person who eternally stood guard within Shrek Academy's inner courtyard...