

Three Realms 211

Chapter 211: Ye Qiao is the Mastermind Behind the Scenes

Jiang Chen however, suddenly took a few steps forward, moving past Ye Qiao to the side of his personal guards.

He shot a sharp gaze to the two of them and asked faintly, "Second prince, are they your personal guards?"

"Hmm?" Ye Qiao started.

"What are their names?" Jiang Chen asked again.

"Jiang Chen, you're a vaunted Skylareland Kingdom Medallion holder, yet you're so interested in my two personal guards?" Ye Qiao smiled. "They're personal guards who've been with me since I was little. They have no first names or surnames."

"No first names or surnames? Even dogs have a first name. Second prince, it isn't right to treat your men like this."

Ye Qiao's face darkened. "Jiang Chen, what do you mean by this?"

"What do I mean?" Jiang Chen chuckled. "Second prince, after leaving the maze realm, don't get any nightmares, okay?? I've heard that the tide of Goldbiter Rats is very frightening."

A piercing killing intent flashed through Ye Qiao's eyes, but he repressed it in the end. He was different from Ye Dai. As the first prince, Ye Dai had great power and backing. This had allowed him to act recklessly and outrageously since young, and as such he was used to using absolute power to trample over his opponents.

Ye Qiao was different. He was more adept at using his mind and understood even more the importance of seizing the opportunity when the time is right.

In terms of absolute strength, his team had a ninety percent chance of annihilating Ye Rong's team. However, to erupt into conflict at this moment didn't mean they would be able to quickly end the battle.

They were also in an open space. Once they started fighting, he would be unable to guarantee that he'd kill all of Ye Rong's people. Once someone managed to escape, the consequences would be unthinkable.

In the hidden struggles between the princes, you could deploy countless schemes in private. There was no harm as long as you weren't discovered and there was no evidence.

But once you engaged in open slaughter, unless you could guarantee that you could pull it off flawlessly without any holes, there was no turning back. Once the news of this event travelled, all of his previous efforts would be in vain.

Not to mention that Ye Qiao had the same reservations as Ye Dai, and that was Dan Fei.

Although Ye Qiao's thoughts towards women were much better than Ye Dai, he still drooled over Dan Fei, but not as crazily as Ye Dai did.

He drooled over Dan Fei for one because she was a breathtaking one in the capital and her conduct was above the masses. The most important thing was that her background was simply too impressive. Taking Dan Fei as a wife would mean obtaining the honored tutor's support.

Having the honored tutor's support meant having the world.

Ye Rong chuckled, "Second brother, for you to be so carefree, you must have had a large haul. It looks like I can't fall behind and I will take my leave first."

"Heh heh, not at all, not at all." Ye Qiao's mind wasn't fully here.

"Second brother, say hello to our big brother if you see him." Ye Rong smiled and left with his team.

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When they'd walked roughly ten li away, Jiang Chen suddenly stopped.

"Fourth prince, I sniffed out traces of blood on the two personal guards and those traces of blood matches with the ones from the Goldbiter Rats. Those two people were definitely the culprits who framed us."

"Are you sure?" Ye Rong had used words to probe Ye Qiao as well. He was ninety percent sure that Ye Qiao was behind this matter.

Except that no matter how certain he was, he had no solid evidence in the end. Although it was strange that Ye Qiao had appeared here, Ye Rong could only probe him give his lack of evidence.

"I am hundred percent sure. Fourth prince, you should leave first. We cannot just let this matter go like this.. If I don't kill the second prince, I must at least kill his two personal guards and take him down a peg. This will prevent him from having any other thoughts along this road."

Ye Rong's thoughts raced, "You're going in alone? How about having Qianli accompany you?"

"No need. Have Qianli go with you guys. He's the strongest and will be able to take care of you guys along the way. Although I don't have a one hundred percent certainty of killing his two personal guards, I still have a seventy to eighty percent chance."

"Jiang Chen, I won't object since you've made your decision. However, you shouldn't do anything to number two in case you might bring trouble onto your own head. He'll be in great trouble when I go back and lodge a complaint against him."

Although he said this, Ye Rong actually did wish for Jiang Chen to kill Ye Qiao along with the others, he just couldn't speak plainly in this way.

Jiang Chen cupped his hands, nodded, touched his feet to the ground, and left for unknown whereabouts.

When Jiang Chen left, he circled away and let the Goldbiter Rat King out. "I've found the culprit who killed your descendents. You can sense for yourself if he's the one or not. You will likely sense the blood of your descendents on him."

The Goldbiter Rat King was greatly enraged, "Where is he?"

Jiang Chen said, "About twenty to thirty li away from here. If you encircle him from here, I think they will have no choice but to flee in the direction we left from earlier!"

The Goldbiter Rat King laughed coldly, "Flee? That area's my territory. They want to flee? Not a chance!"

Jiang Chen chuckled, "Let's not waste time. I'll circle around and occupy that intersection first so that they have no place to run to!"

The Goldbiter Rat King nodded, "That works too. I'll send ten troops of my children to surround the premises. We'll use the fastest speed to occupy the path to the mountain valley. This way, they won't have any place to escape to."

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As for Ye Qiao's side, a thick sense of killing intent danced in his eyes when he watched Ye Rong's team disappear from view.

"Your Highness, this... something is odd here." Ye Qiao's underling Ling Xuan said lowly.

Ye Qiao also felt that this was extremely odd. "Ling Xuan, number four is extremely clean all over. He doesn't look like he had encountered the tide of rats at all. Can it be that the tide of rats isn't as frightening as we thought?"

Ling Xuan shook his head. "We saw it on the outskirts as well. The tide of rats stretched to the heavens and covered the ground. There was almost no gap at all. As strong as they were, they should've never made it out. Not to mention that the route we arranged was to surround that mountain valley completely. When the tide of rats arrived, they would've had nowhere to go."

"Ling Shi, Ling Feng, come here." Ye Qiao called out to his other two personal guards. These two were the ones that Jiang Chen had purposefully pointed out just now.

"Your Highness, your underling respectfully requests that you give the order for us two brothers to go after Ye Rong's team. We cannot swallow the humiliation that Jiang Chen gave to the two of us."

Ling Shi and Ling Feng were all practitioners of the first level spirit realm. They were adept at killing in secret, particularly in long distance tracking.

This was why Ye Qiao had sent them to trigger the tide of rats.

"Second prince, with your underling's analysis, Ye Rong's side must have had their suspicions. Their words all seemed to suggest it. Jiang Chen in particular didn't target anyone else but purposefully pointed out Ling Shi and Ling Feng. Did he really discover some traces?"

Ye Qiao's gaze was sinister as he looked at Ling Shi and Ling Feng. "How sure are you two of annihilating their entire team?"

"If we faced them in direct combat, we'd only have a twenty percent chance. If we used our strengths in tracking and assassination however, we'd have an eighty percent chance. In addition, us brothers are adept at concealing and disguising ourselves. We absolutely won't expose the second prince."

Ye Qiao's thoughts raced as he thought of Ye Rong and Jiang Chen's words. They made him feel vaguely uneasy.

"Can it be that number four really has grasped some evidence? Ye Dai and Ye Zheng didn't come out, they're dead for sure. If number four grasped some evidence of this and went back with it, all of my previous efforts will have been in vain if he hands it in. At that time, the position of Crown Prince will naturally fall into his hands!"

Ye Qiao nodded when his thoughts travelled here and said gravely, "Remember, your moves must be ruthless. Since you're going to make a move, make sure you cut the weeds and pull up the roots!"

"Understood!"

"Go, make it a quick and tidy battle!" Ye Qiao gave the order.

He had nothing to hesitate over now that matters had progressed to this phase. He had already done the bigger deed and killed his greatest competitor, Ye Dai. He couldn't very well leave that fellow Ye Rong alive to mess up his grand plans. As long as Ye Rong was dead, he wouldn't have any competitors amongst the princes.

Although the princes weren't just limited to the four of them, the remaining princes were either mediocre or too young. They wouldn't be able to compete with him.

"After killing Ye Rong, I, Ye Qiao, will become almost the only candidate!" A dense killing intent flashed through Ye Qiao's eyes.

"Ling Xuan, you go investigate in that area as well and see just what's going on. Remember, place personal safety above all. Don't enter if the tide of rats has yet to disperse. You're my deeply trusted confidante. Even if I gain the world, it would not be perfect without you."

This was Ye Qiao's strength. He was adept at swaying human hearts. These words were spoken so naturally that his men would be willing to die for him.

"Understood, I will go take a look." Ling Xuan was the head of the personal guards and he turned to say to the others, "You guys must make sure to protect the second prince."

"Understood."

Ling Xuan had been about to set off when his ears suddenly twitched and his body abruptly halted, a trace of gravity showing in his eyes.

"What is it?" Ye Qiao started slightly when he saw Ling Xuan's movements.

Ling Xuan's facial expression suddenly changed as he crouched on the ground and listened for a while. A look of fright suddenly appeared on his face. "This is bad!"

"What's wrong?"

Ling Shi and Ling Feng, who'd just left, came flying back at this moment. Their faces were also filled with terror.

"Your Highness, hurry and retreat. The tide of rats has encircled us in the front and is coming for us!"

“What?” Ye Qiao was thrown into a panic when he heard these words. The tide of rats? Why would the tide of rats be in front of them? They were on the outskirts of the tide and hadn’t sensed the tide of rats pass by here at all. Why would it suddenly change directions and come backwards?

“The route of the tide of rats is very strange. They made a huge circle to flank us. They’ve actually surrounded us now!” Ling Xuan had made out the tide of rats’ line of movement now and made his conjecture.

“Hurry, hurry, Ling Xuan, hurry and find a way where the tide is the thinnest. Use the fastest speed possible to carve a path of blood out. We cannot afford to be surrounded by them!”

Ye Qiao was anxious. How could he have possibly thought that the tide of rats he had so arduously set into motion, would leave Ye Rong’s group alone and surround him instead?

Ling Xuan knew of the dangers of the tide of rats and he crouched down to listen carefully to the movements of the tide in an attempt to devise an escape route. As long as the tide hadn’t fully closed in on itself and completely surrounded them, then with their speed and under the conditions of not stopping at all, they still had a chance to break free.

“Your Highness, it’s really strange. Apart from the mountain valley, all the other areas have been surrounded by the tide. There’s no area of weakness at all.” Ling Xuan said.

“The direction of the mountain valley?” Ye Qiao’s brow furrowed. “Isn’t there only one way in for that valley and no exit? Won’t we be dead for sure if we go in?”

“The mountain valley is a dead end, yes. But we may be able to find other paths on its outskirts. If we circle around it and don’t enter the dead end, perhaps we’ll still have enough time.” Ling Xuan wasn’t sure himself either. Although they had investigated the terrain, they had only investigated it and the real situation was still an unknown.

If the paths of the mountain valley were not easy to take and needed to be climbed, then their speed would greatly decrease. If that was the case, then they would run the danger of the tide of rats catching up with them.

Chapter 212: Second Prince, Enjoy Your Last Moments

Ye Qiao also knew that right then, time was life so there wasn’t much time for him to deliberate.

“Alright, let’s make for the mountain valley!” Ye Qiao made the decision on the spot.

The group of people didn’t bother thinking about chasing after Ye Rong now. In their eyes, by this time, Ye Rong had definitely already been swallowed by the tide of rats.

This was because the tide had come from the direction they’d just left in. Since they’d left in that direction, they would naturally run into the tide of rats. There was no way they could survive!

Although he was also running for his life now, Ye Qiao was actually a bit excited apart from feeling nervous.

For Ye Rong to die in this fashion was even better than him sending someone to assassinate Ye Rong. If everyone died beneath the tide of rats, Ye Qiao would emerge an innocent man. His reputation would bear no stain and this result was absolutely perfect.

Ye Qiao's group made haste and quickly arrived in the mountain valley.

Ling Xuan analyzed the terrain. "Second prince, there are two roads in this area that will both take us around the mountain valley. We should be able to make it to open ground after this. At that time, the power of the rat tide will be greatly diminished. They can't possibly overrun the entire maze realm."

"You make a judgment and see which road is better. This matter can't be delayed; we can't waste any more time." Ye Qiao was still a bit cautious.

Ling Xuan and the others gathered together and quickly chose a road.

"Your Highness, according to our analysis, we should go left. That route should take us past the mountain valley faster. We can..."

Ling Xuan's voice suddenly faded as an exceedingly bizarre expression floated onto his face as though he'd seen a ghost. His eyes looked straight ahead, staring at an area before them.

"Ling Xuan, what is it?" Ye Qiao couldn't help but follow the direction of his gaze when he saw Ling Xuan's strange reaction.

"Jiang Chen?"

Ye Qiao's entire body shuddered as he too, displayed an expression of disbelief. What was Jiang Chen doing here? Hadn't he already left?

And, he'd left in the opposite direction too. Could he teleport? Now that was too ridiculous!

Jiang Chen naturally didn't know how to teleport. He had merely used the difference in time to loop around the mountain valley. They weren't that far apart so looping back around only required him to traverse a few hundred li. Jiang Chen hadn't expended much time at all when he had traveled at full speed.

Besides, with the Rat King controlling the rat tide, they had grasped the perfect moment to act. He'd waited until the rats had occupied the mountain area before herding Ye Qiao and the others to the mountain valley.

In this way, Ye Qiao was like a turtle in a jar.

"You're in such a hurry, second prince, what's wrong?" Jiang Chen had an easy smile on his face.

Ye Qiao had no energy to bullshit with Jiang Chen at this moment. "Jiang Chen, I don't have the time to verbally spar with you. Where's number four? Didn't you guys set off in that direction? Why did you circle back?"

Jiang Chen smiled, "The fourth prince? They're on their way of course. I had some matters to take care of so I came back. I'll immediately go and meet up with them after I take care of things."

“On their way? Meet up?” Ye Qiao smiled. “Jiang Chen, does this mean that you were really the only one to come back here?”

Ye Qiao had been a bit worried when he first saw Jiang Chen — worried that number four had also come back instead of being swallowed by the rat tide. His heart settled down again when Jiang Chen said that he was the only one who had returned.

“Just me, second prince. You’ve yet to answer my question. What are you doing here?”

Ye Qiao displayed a meaningful smile, “Nothing much. We heard that there was a spirit creature here and wanted to try our luck. Jiang Chen, go conduct your business and reconvene with number four when you’re done. I’m going to hunt the spirit creature and won’t chat any longer. We’ll go our separate ways now.”

Ye Qiao was feeling quite gleeful inside. Jiang Chen, do you think you’re hot shit? If you’ve got the guts, stay here and don’t leave! And you still want to meet up with Ye Rong? Ye Rong and the others are likely shards of bone by now!

He naturally wouldn’t be so kind as to remind Jiang Chen about the tide of rats behind them.

Jiang Chen chuckled. “Hunting a spirit creature? The second prince is in such a hurry that it doesn’t seem like you are simply hunting a spirit creature. Could it be that you have some unspeakable secret?”

Ye Qiao’s face froze as he shouted, “Jiang Chen, watch your tone! I’m going about my business; how dare you slander me?”

If it wasn’t for the fact that time was of the essence, Ye Qiao would’ve surely rushed up with his personal guards without a second thought and chopped Jiang Chen up into little pieces. However, he didn’t have the leisure to do so at the moment.

The rat tide would here arrive at any moment. Wasting more time with Jiang Chen would mean that the danger they were in would increase.

“Second prince, I also mean well. I know of an area with a lot of spirit creatures. There’s too many to kill, even. If the second prince likes to hunt spirit creatures, I can guarantee that you’ll like it.”

“Huh. No need for your generosity. Go tell your master of it. Come, let’s go!” Ye Qiao snorted coldly and didn’t pay any attention to Jiang Chen.

“Second prince, do you honestly think that you can still leave?” Jiang Chen chuckled.

“What do you mean?” Ye Qiao’s body halted as killing intent flooded his face. He suddenly turned back to glare at Jiang Chen.

“What do I mean?” Jiang Chen took a few leisurely steps forward. “Second prince, you must be feeling quite proud of yourself at this moment. You think you’re so smart as to destroy those two idiots Ye Dai and Ye Zheng with a borrowed knife, and then happen to stick it into the fourth prince as well. In this way, you’ll be the only one left out of the four who had the most amount of hope to attain the position of Crown Prince. You’d be justifiably made the Crown Prince without a doubt after leaving the maze realm, wouldn’t you?”

"What... what are you talking about? What borrowed knife? You're absolutely ridiculous Jiang Chen! I'll kill you for sure if you keep spouting nonsense!"

"You wouldn't dare." Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "You don't even have the courage to linger here. Would you dare kill me if even I stood here and let you attack me?"

"Jiang Chen, what are you trying to say?" Ye Qiao's heart chilled.

"What am I trying to say? Can you really not guess? You're such a smart person and even now, you still can't see it? You triggered the rat tide and killed both Ye Dai and Ye Zheng. Do you think you can get away with that?"

"You... you're making ludicrous accusations!" Of course Ye Qiao continued to deny things. He still thought that Jiang Chen was making things out of midair and didn't have any proof.

"It doesn't matter whether I am or am not. Either way, you can't leave."

"Your Highness! The rat tide has already cut off all routes. We're surrounded!" Ling Xuan suddenly realized that the two directions leading away from the mountain valley had already been thoroughly blocked.

They were truly turtles in a jar now!

"What?!" Ye Qiao's expression changed greatly.

"Jiang Chen, you were purposefully playing for time, weren't you?" Ye Qiao's eyes were vicious as he grit his teeth.

"You guessed correctly." Jiang Chen chuckled and didn't deny it.

"Crazy lunatic!" Ye Qiao cursed loudly. "Do you think that you can get away even if you delay us? Do you think your master can escape?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, "Me delaying you has nothing to do with Ye Rong."

"Then what was it for?!" Ye Qiao was infuriated.

"The reason's simple. You guys made a move on me first so I'm just here to collect on debts. Remember, although I may be easy to talk to, you will die for pissing me off."

Jiang Chen's tone turned cold. "Don't play innocent with me. Your two men did their job quite nicely, but they should at least clean the traces of blood off themselves. Not wiping their asses after taking a dump, what's the deal with that, eh?"

Ye Qiao's face was quite ugly now, "This means that you purposefully came here to hold us up?"

"You're right." Jiang Chen laughed softly.

"Hahaha, crazy, you're completely crazy. You've succeeded in delaying us but now what? We're all going to die together. Madman, a madman!" Ye Qiao shook in his anger.

"You think too much, I said that I was here to collect on debts. I'll leave as soon as I'm finished!"

“Leave? Dream on! That way there has long since been blocked off by the rat tide. Both ways out have been surrounded by now. You want to leave? Not unless you stick wings on your back.”

“I know.”

“Then what are you smirking about if you know?” Ye Qiao’s eyes revealed his internal struggle.

“Because I’m the one who triggered the rat tide this time. The fact that we could emerge unscathed from last time’s rat tide means I can do the same this time.”

Jiang Chen laughed heartily as his body flashed before he landed on top of a tall and large tree. “Ye Qiao, enjoy your last moments. I’ll stand here and admire the view of your death struggles!”

Wham, wham, wham!

The rat tide converged on them from all directions like a tidal wave.

The golden colored seas once again swept across the land.

All the members of Ye Qiao’s group were all flabbergasted and petrified. As they looked at the rat tide swarming from all directions, despair grew in their hearts!

A flash of brilliance suddenly hit Ling Xuan as he called out, “Everyone, go bring down Jiang Chen! This brat isn’t afraid of the rat tide and so he must have a plan. We’ll have a shot for survival if we take him with us!”

This suggestion helped Ye Qiao come to his senses.

He’d been on the brink of despair when the light of hope shot out from his eyes. He too called out, “Right, everyone work together and capture Jiang Chen!”

Ling Xuan’s level of training was the highest as he grasped the air with one hand and his longsword with the other. He flew towards Jiang Chen with a desperate motion.

Ling Shi and Ling Xuan also knew that this was a battle of life and death; how would they retain any of their strength? They also split up left and right in a pincer movement as they shot towards Jiang Chen.

“Hurry, hurry! The rat tide is arriving soon!” Ye Qiao screamed out with all his might. “Everyone go! What are you guys doing standing there in a daze? Go!”

Out in front, Ling Xuan only had one notion at that moment, and that was to capture Jiang Chen and force out the method to avoid the rat tide.

Otherwise, only death awaited them.

He was very well aware that the rat tide wasn’t something that human strength could withstand. There was only a strand of hope if they wanted to avoid the rats.

The aura of his sword was like a dragon; the stroke arrived in front of Jiang Chen in the span of a second.

Suddenly —

The unexpected happened.

Just as his body was about to draw near Jiang Chen, a surge of strength broke through from the earth and shot towards the heavens, bringing with it a wave of mud like an erupting volcano.

An enormous Goldbiter Rat leapt out from the mud wave, pouncing towards Ling Xuan with a flash of golden light, completing ignoring the force behind his strike.

A crisp breaking sound rang out as the sword was halted in its tracks. The Goldbiter Rat had merely clenched its paw and shattered it into shards.

In the next moment, the Goldbiter Rat's other paw had landed on Ling Xuan's chest. Its sharply fanged mouth opened as it chomped down on Ling Xuan's neck!

Ling Xuan's neck was immediately bitten through.

Chomp, chomp!

That Goldbiter Rat actually grasped Ling Xuan's body and started gnawing away at it. It had finished eating Ling Xuan within a few breaths.

Ling Xuan, a solid first level spirit realm, a practitioner who'd been about to set foot into the second level, was like a child who'd just learned how to walk in front of this Goldbiter Rat. He had been completely defenseless. The imposing sword strike had been easily defused with a light grab.

If Ling Shi and Ling Feng on the two sides hadn't reacted quickly and if the Goldbiter Rat hadn't been more interested in Ling Xuan, they likely wouldn't have escaped this disaster either.

After all, this Goldbiter Rat was simply too strong and its speed too fast. These so-called spirit realm practitioners were a complete joke compared to the Goldbiter Rats.

Chapter 213: Jiang Chen Has More Plans

The sight of the Goldbiter Rat holding Ling Xuan's body in its paws and biting down hungrily at it caused Ye Qiao's scalp to go numb. It was as if his entire body had been struck by lightning. He trembled uncontrollably all over and his teeth chattered.

Ling Shi and Ling Feng looked at each other with a despairing but resolute intent to kill in their eyes. The two shadows swept left and right as they once again charged towards Jiang Chen.

They had no other choice now. They had hope to live only if they captured Jiang Chen. This goal hadn't changed even with the death of their boss Ling Xuan.

If they couldn't take down Jiang Chen, they were dead without a doubt.

At this moment, they only hoped that boss Ling Xuan's death would distract the Goldbiter Rat so that it wouldn't be interested in taking the two of them.

Their arts and speed were deployed to their extreme in this moment of life and death.

Ling Feng and Ling Shi could almost see hope again at this point.

The Goldbiter Rat moved again at this time. Its speed was so fast that it surpassed their powers of comprehension.

Golden light flashed.

Pa pa!

Two crisp sounds rang out as Ling Feng and Ling Shi's hovering bodies were slapped down like rotten mud.

When everyone took another look at them, their skulls had been flattened. Upon landing on the ground, their bodies no longer showed any signs of life.

Two spirit realm practitioners had been destroyed in the blink of an eye.

All of a sudden, Ye Qiao felt he became completely lifeless as he finally experienced the despair that Ye Dai and Ye Zheng had felt in that moment.

As he looked at the golden colored sea churning over the land, and then cast a glance at the corpses of his spirit realm personal guards lying on the ground, Ye Qiao didn't react at all as he was swallowed by the boundless rat tide.

The rat tide made a clean sweep of things and slowly began to retreat after fifteen minutes, continuously returning to the Millionditch Stonenests and leaving behind a ground covered by bone shards.

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Jiang Chen caught back up to Ye Rong and the others after an hour.

"Jiang Chen? Back so soon?" Ye Rong was a bit surprised to see Jiang Chen return. He'd been gone only for how long?

"I'm back." Jiang Chen displayed a bizarre grin.

"It's done?"

"I didn't do anything. I don't know what went on in the minds of second prince and his party. They actually entered the mountain valley area and were destroyed by the rat tide."

"What?" Ye Rong was shocked. "Destroyed by the rat tide? Ye Qiao, is he..."

"They are all dead. A bunch of bone shards all over the ground is what's left of them." Jiang Chen shook his head with a sigh, as if this matter had nothing to do with him.

Dan Fei looked at him meaningfully, only somewhat believing him, but she didn't say anything.

It was rather Xue Tong who had a hint of a smile on his lips and didn't say anything.

"Forget it, he brought evil onto himself. Let's go. This place is truly uncanny."

After having so many things happen, Ye Rong wasn't much excited by Ye Qiao's death. He just wanted to leave this maze realm as soon as possible.

Besides, the main opponents who could compete with him, Ye Dai and Ye Qiao, had already been destroyed by the rat tide.

Ye Zheng had dug his own grave in following Ye Dai, being Ye Dai's dog, and had accompanied Ye Dai to the grave. Naturally, he was of no threat to Ye Rong.

With regard to this matter, Ye Rong's mind had long since travelled back to the capital. He had no particular thoughts about the Autumn Hunt itself.

As for Dan Fei, she was coming back with a full haul after obtaining four Silvermoon Monsterape babies. She didn't have any particular opinions anymore as she had already lost interest in the Autumn Hunt.

It was rather Jiang Chen who, despite accompanying Dan Fei in, was the most proactive now. He wasn't particularly enthused about hunting spirit creatures at all. However, he swept up all the spirit ingredients and herbs he found and thus came away with quite a haul as well.

As time progressed, they would sometimes bump into other teams, but everyone walked away unscathed since there were no conflicting interests.

On this day, the team traveled south and walked in the opposite direction of the exit.

"The Autumn Hunt will end in another seven days. We should hurry back to the appointed location, what do all of you think?" Ye Rong suggested.

Dan Fei thought for a moment but didn't say anything. Her beautiful eyes looked at Jiang Chen, obviously seeking his opinion.

Jiang Chen said, "You head for the exit first, I'll meet up with you there before the time approaches."

"What do you have planned?" Dan Fei was curious.

Jiang Chen smiled as his eyes looked into the distance towards the south. "I just feel that it's a bit of a pity to just leave like this after making a trip in."

Ye Rong and Dan Fei looked at each other, both a bit shamefaced. They'd accomplished both of their goals this time, but Jiang Chen hadn't seemed to gain much of anything despite contributing the most effort.

Ye Rong had gained the most this time as his competitors had all been swallowed by the rat tide, indirectly sending him to the throne.

Dan Fei had obtained the baby spirit animals she wanted, thus she did not come in vain.

It was Jiang Chen who'd gone to all the effort, but they were the ones who'd ended up benefitting. Therefore, they could understand why he wanted to linger around a bit longer.

"Jiang Chen, watch your safety." Ye Rong clapped Jiang Chen's shoulder.

Dan Fei originally wanted to accompany Jiang Chen, but when she saw that Jiang Chen had no intention of inviting her, she naturally didn't make herself unwelcome.

"Take care." She seemed to have a lot of things to say but only said those two words in the end.

Jiang Chen left the team, dithered for a bit and then made swiftly to the south.

Ever since entering the maze realm, all the spirit creatures that Jiang Chen had encountered had headed in that direction. This made him curious; just what was happening there? What was it that was caused so many spirit creatures to continuously be congregated in that area?

These spirit creatures all seemed to be in quite a hurry to the point that even those usually interested in the flesh and blood of humans didn't bother to stop and attack when they passed by human camps.

"Something more tempting must be happening in the south!"

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The area to the south was an enormous, deep abyss. There were boundless caverns at the bottom of the abyss that ran in all directions and their entrances were numerous.

Jiang Chen hid himself well outside the caverns.

Suddenly, the ground beneath his feet trembled as the head of the Goldbiter Rat King poked out.

"Young master Chen, this cavern is incredibly big. Many spirit creatures are gathered there, as if waiting for something to happen."

"Oh? How many spirit creatures?" Jiang Chen asked lowly.

"Roughly ten or so. The ones that are strong are similar to me. Those who are weak are at least mid rank spirit realm." The Rat King was at the advanced rank spirit realm.

"That many? What are they waiting for?"

"I didn't go near them and I don't know what they're waiting for. But according to my senses, there should be something special beneath the caverns that all the spirit creatures want to claim for themselves."

"A special item? What can it be?" Jiang Chen was quite curious.

"In my speculation, it should be some spirit item, like a spirit fruit, a spirit source or something. These spirit creatures wouldn't spend so much time occupying this territory if it wasn't something particularly useful." The Goldbiter Rats were renowned for being timid.

Even though not many of these spirit creatures would be assured of a victory over it, the Goldbiter Rat King still didn't dare draw near. They were naturally cautious and timid. It was a trait shared by all the Goldbiter Rats.

"Go, take me there for a look."

It was very easy for Jiang Chen to enter the caverns with the help of a Goldbiter Rat King that could drill and fly through the ground. He followed the Rat King in continuously threading through the ground.

The caverns were deep and dark, twisty and windy, quite serpentine in its makeup.

Jiang Chen deployed his Psychic's Head to the maximum and directed the Goldbiter Rat King to continuously dig in front. The Rat King's drilling abilities were truly amazing.

"Slow down, we're almost there. Don't alert the other spirit creatures." Jiang Chen reminded it.

Jiang Chen and the Rat King both knew that if they entered through the currently existing passages, they'd be discovered by the spirit creatures entrenched in the area, no matter which tunnel they took.

Although the Rat King's strength allowed him not to fear these spirit creatures, and its appearance wouldn't even alarm the other spirit creatures, it was another thing entirely if the Goldbiter Rat King appeared with a human in tow. If it was just the Rat King, that was just another spirit creature and another competitor at most.

Spirit creatures had incredibly high intelligence and an innate wariness of humans. If they discovered that the Rat King had brought a human here, it would be greatly ostracized and perhaps even be attacked by a mob.

Jiang Chen didn't come here to become a living target for these spirit creatures. He had come to take a look at just what the spirit creatures were fighting over.

Jiang Chen was the reincarnated son of the Celestial Emperor. He didn't lack any theories or knowledge. What he lacked was all sorts of divine materials and earthly treasures. It was apparent that the item all these spirit creatures were fighting over wasn't ordinary, given that there were so many of them here.

"I've participated in the Autumn Hunt because I wanted to put myself through trials and search for all sorts of good items. Since I've chanced into it this time, I naturally won't let it go. Although it'll be a bit dangerous, I should still make a play for it!"

Fortune came from risk. With high risk came high rewards.

Jiang Chen naturally understood this, and so he had the Rat King cleave a new passageway. He didn't excavate it through to the end and stopped when they were about two to three meters away from the outside world.

This distance allowed him to observe the scene through the Psychic's Heart without any worry about being discovered by the spirit creatures in the outside world.

The Rat King was cowardly. If it wasn't for Jiang Chen's promise, it wouldn't have wanted to get embroiled in this at all. Therefore, when Jiang Chen called it to halt, it naturally wouldn't refuse.

However, it was rather curious. Just how was Jiang Chen going to observe the situation outside from within the walls?

What it didn't know was that Jiang Chen's Psychic's Heart could feed information to his five senses. He made use of this divine art to sense everything outside and fed it into his eyes, able to see things without seeing them at all.

Jiang Chen deployed the "Psychic's Heart" to the maximum. He saw through the transference of imagery of an enormous chasm, with hundreds of spirit creatures surrounding all corners of the abyss.

These spirit creatures were all staring fixedly at the depths of the deep chasm, with the fervent light of greed emanating from their eyes. It was as if there was something that would make them go crazy beneath the chasm.

"It looks like there's something nice below!"

The perceptive abilities of Psychic's Heart were exceedingly strong. He could even sense that there seemed to be two incredibly abundant spirit powers being contained below the chasm. One of them was the pure spirit power of ice and the other was the pure spirit power of fire.

These two miraculous powers emanated faint blue and red light within the chasm. The two colors blended together and made the entire chasm look quite eerie.

"Can it be that there are two different treasures within this chasm?" This eerie scene made it difficult for Jiang Chen to get a grasp on things. Theoretically speaking, ice and fire were opposing elements. These two powers constrained and neutralized each other. Logically speaking, they wouldn't be able to coexist!

Chapter 214: The Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice

Although Jiang Chen was curious, he wasn't impulsive. He really wanted to charge out of the wall and make it to the side of the chasm to take a good look. But reason told him that unless he had the strength of old tutor Ye and was able to subdue all the spirit creatures, he'd be torn to pieces by all the spirit creatures if he walked out like that.

Although it was quite dreary, he could only wait patiently. After all, these hundreds of spirit creatures obviously hadn't waited only a day or two.

Although some spirit creatures would occasionally interact, most of them remained solitary.

It was apparent that the world of spirit creatures was different from the world of humans. They rarely formed groups and cliques.

"Damn it, I was here the earliest and I have been here more than twenty friggin' days. How much longer do I have to wait before it appears?" A spirit creature complained anxiously.

"What's the point of coming early? The Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice flowers has seven seeds at most. There's so many of us here now that there'll definitely be a massacre later."

"Then we'll kill each other! Who's afraid of that?"

"The first one to die will be those in the mid rank spirit realms. I'm a flippin' advanced rank spirit creature and my battle strength is at least in the top ten. I'm going to get a seed of the Lotus of Fire and Ice no matter what anyone says this time!"

"Ai, that depends on where the seeds appear. If they appear in a bad place, what then?"

"I'll take it from whoever gets it then!"

"Spare the effort. Everyone's thinking the same thing, but it'll still be the strongest spirit creatures who will remain laughing in the end."

It was a good thing that Jiang Chen understood the beast language and he could comprehend the communication between them, even though such interactions were exceedingly few.

However, he still obtained some useful information from these snippets.

"The Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice?"

Jiang Chen wasn't unfamiliar with this name. It was precisely because he was familiar with it that he felt very surprised. The maze realm had something like that?

The Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice was an item of incredible existence.

Once spirit power was awakened in it, it'd be saint rank at the very least, and that was only the start. Most Lotuses could reach earth rank or even heaven rank when they matured.

Jiang Chen had even occasionally heard of Lotuses evolving to the divine rank in his previous life.

With Jiang Chen's knowledge of the maze realm, the strongest spirit creature here was at most of the saint rank. Since even the spirit creatures wouldn't be stronger than saint rank, something on the level of the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice shouldn't have appeared here at all. After all, the difference between ranks was simply too great.

"Can it be that there's another secret in the maze realm?" Jiang Chen guessed as he began to speculate.

He'd been familiar with the Lotus in his past life and he knew that as long as spirit power awakened in the Lotus, it would have the ability to materialize itself.

In addition, the most precious thing about the Lotus wasn't its seeds.

The most precious thing about it was the spirit of its essence – the Flaming Heart of Ice.

As long as its essence wasn't destroyed, it wouldn't be harmed even if the body of the Lotus was destroyed. It'd reborn again after a while.

The Flaming Heart of Ice was usually concealed quite thoroughly within the depths of the earth. The Lotus protected its Heart with utmost care.

This was because the Heart itself was like a baby, without any ability to attack and extremely fragile. Once it was discovered by enemies and attacked, it would have no defensive capabilities whatsoever.

However, the battle capabilities of the Lotus itself were incredibly frightening.

The Lotus was formed by the powers of ice and fire. The horrifying strength formed by such frightening mysteries would rank it at least in the top ten plant spirits in the world.

To think about it for a moment, in all the planes of existence and all the worlds, the attacking power of the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice could rank in the top ten. This was definitely not an undeserved title.

"I wonder to what level has this Lotus evolved to? If it's only a spirit rank, it won't be able to handle all the spirit creatures looking at it covetously, even with its strong attack power. If it's at the saint rank, then even though there are a lot of spirit creatures, they may still fall in the end... "

Jiang Chen mused.

Although he also knew that a seed from the Lotus of Ice and Fire would help him proceed more smoothly and faster on his path in the spirit realm, the Lotus seed was only a spirit fruit of one time use. It'd be gone after taking it and refining it.

Although it could help a spirit realm practitioner breakthrough a bottleneck, it would be nothing after one use.

Therefore, as good as this item was, it wasn't worth for Jiang Chen to take such a risk and attempt to steal the seed in front of all the spirit creatures. Regardless of whether or not he'd be able to avoid the attacks from the Lotus, the spirit creatures wouldn't be able to stomach a human stealing food that was near their mouths.

"Although this Lotus is nice, it's not worth putting my life on the line." Jiang Chen's appetite and ambitions were much greater than these spirit creatures.

"With all these spirit creatures hovering, if that Lotus gets distracted and spends all its energies on these spirit creatures, there may actually be an opportunity for me!"

Jiang Chen had his advantages. His knowledge of the Lotus was much greater than the spirit creatures.

The spirit creatures were gunning for the seeds, yet Jiang Chen's goal was the spirit essence of the Lotus, the Flaming Heart of Ice!

If he could refine the Flaming Heart of Ice and meld it into his spirit ocean, Jiang Chen would receive the arts of the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice. This kind of encounter was something that countless numbers of Lotus seeds would be unable to match up to.

The seed of the Lotus was just that, a seed.

Yet, the Flaming Heart of Ice was the true distillment of the Lotus' essence.

"Ole Gold, listen to my commands later." Jiang Chen told the Goldbiter Rat King.

The Rat King seemed to discern the impulsiveness of taking a risk in Jiang Chen's slightly crazed eyes. It spoke a bit timidly, "Young master Chen, what do you want to do? You're not thinking of going out and fighting these spirit creatures?"

Jiang Chen chuckled, "Fighting them? That thing is nothing to me. Listen to my commands later on and dig further into the ground."

"And do what?"

The Rat King was about to say something when Jiang Chen suddenly said lowly, "Don't speak. Don't open your mouth, and don't circulate any spirit power!"

Jiang Chen's face had suddenly changed and turned extremely grave.

His Psychic's Head was deployed to the maximum when he suddenly felt an extreme tremor through the surface of the depths of the chasm.

These tremors weren't typical tremors. It felt like countless numbers of large hands were continuously reaching out of the depths of the chasm.

"It's the Lotus, it's starting to emerge from the ground!"

This notion flashed through Jiang Chen's heart.

Indeed, great changes occurred in the perimeter of the chasm after a while. It was occasionally bone piercingly cold, and at times incredibly hot.

“It’s the two elemental powers of the Lotus intersecting and exerting themselves!”

Jiang Chen also knew that Lotus was born with two elemental attributes, one was extreme cold and the other was extreme heat. These two usually conflicting powers coexisted in perfect harmony in the Lotus. It was precisely because of the combination of these two powers that the Lotus’ attacking abilities were ranked in the top ten amongst all planes of existence.

“Why is it suddenly hot and cold?”

“Yeah, this is really uncanny. Is the Lotus about to emerge?”

“It’s got to be, it’s got to be!”

At this moment — bam!

An enormous bang rocked the chasm, making the earth tremble and walls shake.

Hundreds of vines erupted out of the chasm in the next second. Each vine was as thick as the thighs of the spirit creatures.

The green vines changed at a speed noticeable to the human eye. All sorts of embryonic lotuses began to form on the vines.

The embryonic forms of the lotuses went through a cycle of the four seasons within the span of a breath with extreme speed.

Enormous lotuses had formed on all of the vines after a few breaths. Each of these lotuses were as large as a bull.

These lotuses were either a brilliant, flaming red or an icy, frosty blue.

Each lotus was uncannily beautiful and they exuded a tempting presence.

The lotuses slowly flowered and produced seeds above them.

All of the spirit creatures were green with envy at this point.

“It’s the seed! Get it!”

“Go! Whoever gets to it first gets it!”

All the spirit creatures made their move in that instant, rushing to each of the flowering lotuses with the speed of an arrow. Their goal was only one, and that was the Lotus’ seed.

More than a hundred Lotuses had suddenly appeared. These spirit creatures almost didn’t need to fight amongst each other. Almost each one could obtain one seed.

Jiang Chen used the Psychic’s Head to observe the scene through the wall. He was privately astonished. This scene was too bizarre.

The Lotus had abruptly blossomed so many flowers. It was obvious to see how strong its essence was.

Only a strong spirit essence could give rise to such strong life. Although this Lotus didn't display power to the point of making one despair, Jiang Chen still felt that something was wrong here. With the Lotus' character, it wouldn't allow its seeds to be so easily taken by the spirit creatures.

"What's going on here? There's around a hundred spirit creatures here and they can all obtain a seed? This scene is a bit too harmonious, isn't it?"

Jiang Chen suddenly felt that this scene wasn't as simple as it appeared.

Indeed. A spirit creature abruptly cried out, "No!"

The spirit creature had landed on top of the lotus as it was enveloped by the enormous lotus. The petals actually acted like a lips, first opening and then closing, swallowing the spirit creature into it.

Jiang Chen was startled, "That's it! This must be the case. The Lotus is tempting the spirit creatures to it and then trapping them, absorbing their spirit power and catalyzing its own evolution!"

When he understood this, Jiang Chen suddenly felt waves of fear about the Lotus' intelligence.

He was also quite glad that he hadn't rushed out like these spirit creatures to fight over the seeds. His fate at this moment would most likely be like these spirit creatures, already having become the spirit creature's fertilizer?

Chapter 215: Circling Around Behind It, Stealing the Spirit Essence

The scene within the cavern was a complete chaotic mess. After the first spirit creature was swallowed, it was quickly followed by a second and then a third.

The devouring appetite of the Lotus was incredibly frightening. Once a spirit creature was enclosed by it, it would be unable to break free at all and struggle until it died.

Some stronger spirit creatures with faster reactions immediately understood what was happening and fled when they saw the other spirit creatures being devoured by the petals of the Lotus.

However, the hundreds of vines around the chasm were like hundreds of tentacles as they formed a dense net surrounding everything.

Add to that the enormous mouth that was the Lotus, the spirit creatures were unable to escape from the encasement of the sea of vines no matter where they fled.

Jiang Chen immediately spurred on the Rat King when he took in the situation. "Ole Gold, hurry, and follow me down. We'll circle around behind it."

"Behind it?"

"Don't ask and follow my instructions. We need to be quick, so hurry." Jiang Chen rushed the Rat King onwards and started drilling towards the depths of the ground.

The Rat King also used all of its strength as it moved like it was swimming through water. The rock walls didn't affect its speed at all whilst drilling.

One had to admit, the Goldbiter Rats had a great talent in drilling indeed.

"Mm, we're about two to three thousand meters in. This is the place." Jiang Chen calculated accurately using the Psychic's Head.

Indeed, when the walls were broken through, a man and a rat found themselves at the bottom of the chasm.

In front of Jiang Chen's Psychic's Head, any place was like bright daylight for him and his vision wasn't impaired at all. Add to that searching with the God's Eye, he quickly locked onto the right location.

"Go, over there, that's the place."

The temperature was actually as warm as spring beneath the chasm. Neither the bone piercing cold nor the blazing hot fire was present.

Jiang Chen knew that this was the balance formed by the Flaming Heart of Ice. It was only under these conditions that the evolution of the Heart would be the fastest.

"Hurry, hurry, we must be fast!" Jiang Chen threaded through the bottom of the chasm.

He knew that he was in a race against time with the Lotus and hoped that the spirit creatures would be able to contain it for a bit longer.

Jiang Chen would be safe as long as the Lotus hadn't completely retreated.

He'd have to face hundreds of Lotuses by himself if the Lotus finished its meal and withdrew!

Every single one of those Lotuses was at least at the peak of the spirit realm.

Once that happens, Jiang Chen would be dead without a doubt.

However, if Jiang Chen was able to get to the Heart and absorb it before the Lotus does, then all the Lotuses would immediately wither without the support of its spirit essence. They wouldn't be able to threaten him then.

Time was of the essence, and it was now a race against time.

Jiang Chen's footsteps suddenly halted as fog billowed upwards in front of him. It gave one a mysterious feeling like finding an altar in the middle of water.

"That must be the place!"

Jiang Chen's heart suddenly pounded because he knew that this was an opportunity, but one that came with a lot of risks.

He was about to rush over when his footsteps abruptly halted because he discovered that there were eight vines around the altar in the water. There were eight Lotuses around the altar, protecting it tightly.

"Damnit, this Heart is extremely cautious alright." Jiang Chen was depressed as hell. He could see the item in front of him, but he had no way to get to it.

Each of the eight Lotuses were at the peak of the spirit realm. To approach with Jiang Chen's current level of training meant seeking death.

However, he wasn't willing to leave empty handed.

"Ole Gold, we may have to sacrifice some of your descendants!" Jiang Chen turned and said to the Rat King.

The Rat King smiled ruefully. "Must we really do this?"

"If I don't become stronger, how can I help your tribe become stronger?" Jiang Chen was quite rational.

The Rat King laughed wryly, "I almost don't know whether this choice is worth it or not."

"Ole Gold, this doesn't sound like you."

"Say no more. I'll summon a group of children to attract the eight Lotuses. As for whether you can obtain what you want, that will be up to you!"

"Alright. As long as your descendants can distract them for three to five minutes, I promise that I'll have the item in hand!"

The Rat King didn't hesitate as it summoned a couple thousand Rats to rush towards the altar within the water.

The Goldbiter Rats were as fierce and fearless as always, regardless of what environment they were in. They rushed towards the altar and started ferociously tearing away at the vines of the eight Lotuses.

Jiang Chen laid in wait until all eight Lotuses were contained by the Rats before taking a leap upwards and landing on the altar within the water.

Jiang Chen looked downwards and saw a spirit item shaped like an infant on the altar. It was half blue and half red, sparkling like a crystalline entity and exuding an astonishing presence.

The dense vines around the spirit item were obviously born from it and were extending from it.

"This is the Flaming Heart of Ice!"

Jiang Chen was about to reach out and grab it when his hand was almost burnt to a crisp by a wave of heat before he'd even touched the Heart.

He hastily snatched his hand back.

"That's right, the Heart is half blazing flame and half frosty ice. I'll be unable to take it without using special equipment. I'd only be able to destroy it."

"However, if I can use the mysteries of the Divine Aeons Fist and hold the moon in one hand and the sun in the other, wouldn't that happen to match the mysteries of the Heart?"

Jiang Chen's hands twisted into certain hand seals as he deployed the mysteries of the Divine Aeons Fist. He held the sun in one hand and the moon in another, and placed both hands on the Heart.

"What are you?!"

"A lowly human dares to pollute me?!"

"Damn it, what are you doing?! Don't touch me!"

The Heart possessed inordinate intelligence. How else would it give birth to so many Lotuses to swallow the spirit creatures, absorb their spirit power, and help itself evolve?

However, the Heart itself had no battle capabilities. It couldn't resist at all with both of Jiang Chen's hands on it.

"Human, are you absorbing my spirit power? No, you're actually refining me! How... how are you doing it? You can actually refine me?"

The Heart was panicking by now. It hastened to summon the Lotuses back to attack Jiang Chen.

Indeed, it wasn't long afterward before the Lotuses on the surface of the chasm were continuously summoned back down by the Heart.

The Rat King on the side was resigned. It obviously couldn't watch Jiang Chen be swallowed by the Lotus, so it could only continuously summon out its children and use the tactic of superior numbers to continuously harass and restrain the Lotuses.

It was a good thing that Jiang Chen had a high comprehension of the Divine Aeons Fist. Furthermore, he had studied the Lotus in depth. This continuously boosted his rate of absorption.

As his rate increased, the Heart's defensive capabilities decreased. The amount of Lotuses it could control also continuously decreased. As its spirit essence was continuously siphoned away, the attacks of the Lotuses it had summoned downwards also grew weaker and weaker.

Finally, when Jiang Chen retracted his hands after fifteen minutes, the Heart had disappeared completely from the altar within the water as it'd been completely absorbed by Jiang Chen.

The vines from all the Lotuses also swiftly withered at a noticeable pace after the Heart had disappeared.

Jiang Chen quickly dashed out of the altar and came to the side of the Rat King. "Hurry, let's go."

The Rat King summoned the rest of his children to return back into the Stonenest as they left hurriedly through the tunnels they had come from, leaving behind a scene of devastation.

All of the spirit creatures who had survived the disaster came down not long thereafter.

All of the Lotuses had withered and died above the chasm, this greatly shocked the spirit creatures hanging on by the tips of their claws.

Although there were only less than a third of the spirit creatures left at this point, those who could survive until now weren't your average strong spirit creature.

They weren't satisfied with merely living through what'd seemed like sure death, and wanted to investigate the bottom of this chasm.

They were all greatly astonished when they happened upon the scene of great devastation.

"It was this altar controlling the Lotuses?"

"No, there's no spirit power on this altar at all, how could it have controlled the Lotuses?"

“Eh? There’s the lingering presence of humans here?”

“Can it be that a human secretly snuck in and stole the spirit essence of the Lotus?” A spirit creature who had great knowledge suddenly remembered the matter of the spirit essence.

“A human?”

“Everyone, come look, there’s a passage here!”

“There really is a passage! This must be how the human got in.”

“Yes, judging from this size, it looks big enough for a human.”

“That’s odd, this passage looks new. Does the human know how to drill through the earth? This is a bit strange.”

“Whatever, after the human!”

A few smaller sized spirit creatures rushed into the passage and tried to follow it.

A few bigger spirit creatures couldn’t squeeze themselves in no matter how they tried. They could only go back the way they had came and take a look at the situation when they got to the surface.

Except, Jiang Chen was as if a fish in water at this moment. He quickly arrived back in the outside world thanks to the Rat King guiding him.

After the Rat King returned to the Stonenest, Jiang Chen rushed out of the cave with the fastest speed possible and left the mountain valley.

He had no worries after he left the valley. The maze realm was so vast, he only needed to retract his presence to make it impossible for the spirit creatures to follow him.

After he ran madly for a thousand li, Jiang Chen found a quiet area and had the Rat King dig a cave. He hid in it and started closed door cultivation.

After absorbing the Heart, Jiang Chen’s current spirit ocean almost wanted to explode. He needed to cultivate behind closed doors for a moment to fully subvert the heart for his own use.

It was also Jiang Chen’s good luck that he’d trained in the Divine Aeons Fist and had a high grasp of its mysteries. There was no way he could taken the Heart otherwise.

Any practitioner who hadn’t grasped the concept of the sun and moon and the dual existence of the yin and yang would’ve been directly burnt to a crisp by the power of fire or frozen into an ice cube by the power of ice if they’d brashly tried to take the Heart.

It was only through dual employment of the yin and yang and alternatively absorbing each side could the Heart be slowly absorbed.

Jiang Chen also knew that he’d made out like a bandit this time. The Autumn Hunt had finally not been in vain.

Chapter 216: Returning with Rich Rewards

Jiang Chen finally walked out of the cave five days later. The Flaming Heart of Ice had been fully refined by now and became a seed within his spirit ocean, becoming an additional ability in his arsenal.

There was less than two days left until the day the exit would appear. Jiang Chen didn't dare tarry as he hurried to the appointed time and place.

There was only half a day left when he finally made it there.

Dan Fei and Xue Tong were all very anxious as there was such a short amount of time left until the deadline. If Jiang Chen missed it, he wouldn't be able to get out even with all his abilities.

"Haha, Brother Jiang Chen, you've finally appeared. Sister Dan Fei was about to head back and look for you if you still hadn't appeared." Ye Rong happily walked up.

He was sincerely grateful from the depth of his heart towards Jiang Chen. Without Jiang Chen, he likely wouldn't even have made it out alive from the Autumn Hunt this time round.

It was because of Jiang Chen that he had benefited from misfortune and swept away all the contestants for Crown Prince.

Dan Fei was slightly embarrassed to hear Ye Rong's exaggeration, "Ye Rong you little monkey, what are you blathering on about?"

"Heh heh, now that Jiang Chen's back, this means that we haven't lost a single person and the entire team has returned safe and sound." Ye Rong hastily changed the topic.

"Ai, the losses during this time's Autumn Hunt has been truly great. Look, only this amount of people have come back by now. It looks like only half of the group has made it back?"

Ye Rong sighed. "Who knew that so many spirit creatures would suddenly appear in these last few days and hunt all of us so ferociously? If we hadn't come back early, things probably wouldn't have gone so smoothly for us. Jiang Chen, were you not pursued by the spirit creatures in these past couple of days?"

Jiang Chen shook his head wryly, "I've been in closed door cultivation the past couple of days and didn't run into them."

He found that there was a look of "I wouldn't believe you even if I was beaten to death" in everyone's eyes. He could only laugh ruefully, "I really was in closed door cultivation. What's with all of the looks you're giving me?!"

"Alright." Ye Rong smiled. "It was a good thing that you were in closed door cultivation. I heard from the survivors that there were more than ten spirit creatures hunting through the realm for human practitioners. Most of the participants in the Autumn Hunt have lost their lives in the past couple of days."

Jiang Chen laughed with resignation inside and also wondered, could it be that the spirit creatures who didn't die to the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice are hunting for me?

This was a possibility.

However, Jiang Chen would never admit to this even if he was beaten to death.

No other accidents occurred in the remaining half day. Jiang Chen walked to the exit transportation portal with the rest of the entourage, porting out in batches.

When his footsteps once set foot on Skylaurel Kingdom territory, he felt a wave of emotions at the thought of so many things that were occurring and how different everything was.

A group of Precious Tree Sect disciples were maintaining order at the exit.

Jiang Chen knew that although they were maintaining order, it'd be more accurate to say that they were actually guarding the proceedings. They were worried about practitioners slipping away and making off with their fruits of labor from the Autumn Hunt.

As the host of the Autumn Hunt, the Precious Tree Sect would be able to take half of all that was gained without any effort on their behalf, no matter how much or little. Therefore, it wasn't surprising that the Sect would be on full alert.

Letting one escape meant they would receive less of the spoils.

Even Ye Rong's status as a prince didn't make him an exception. He also had to hand over his storage items and open them, taking out all his gains and give half away.

When it was Dan Fei and Jiang Chen's turn however, old tutor Ye Chonglou walked over and said to the disciple making inspections, "I was the one who sent those two in, so there's no need to inspect them."

The old tutor was quite domineering as he took one of them in each hand and led Jiang Chen and Dan Fei away. The disciple could only stare open mouthed, furious but not daring to mouth it.

They weren't afraid of anyone in the entire Skylaurel Kingdom, not even the king, but they were quite fearful of this old man.

They could only wave their hand in irritation, "Next!"

They had a belly full of anger but with nowhere to vent it, the next group of people in line naturally became their scapegoats.

The old tutor led Jiang Chen and Dan Fei to the side.

Dan Fei smiled merrily, "Teacher, those disciples don't seem very happy?"

"The hell does that have to do with me. At your teacher's level, the emotions of those disciples are naturally not of any importance. They can be happy or sad for all I care."

"Little girl Dan, your gains seem to be great this time." The old tutor was in a wonderful mood as he looked at the bamboo basket on Dan Fei's back.

"Hehe, things never go beyond a third attempt. If I didn't get some sort of gain this time, Little Dan wouldn't have dared to come out and see my teacher."

The old tutor laughed. "And how was my suggestion to form a team with Jiang Chen? I'm willing to guess that Jiang Chen didn't put forth any less effort than you this time.

Dan Fei's beautiful face reddened. Well... she really couldn't deny that bit.

Jiang Chen however, smiled. "I was just an assistant, what help could I have possibly been?"

Dan Fei pouted, "Teacher, this time I made an agreement with Jiang Chen that half of the spirit creatures we've obtained must be split with him."

The old tutor smiled dashing, "That's a given. Since you were a team, the spoils of war should be evenly split."

Dan Fei had been a bit worried that the lordmaster would have some opinions. The unease in her heart abated somewhat when she saw the lordmaster's attitude.

The lordmaster's gaze looked at the crowd and his forehead creased slightly. "The amount of people who have come out this time seems to be quite low."

"Lordmaster, out of the four princes who participated in the Autumn Hunt this time, all of them are dead except for Ye Rong." Dan Fei suddenly recalled this matter.

"Mm?"

"Both Ye Dai and Ye Zheng conspired with each other to destroy Ye Rong, but were constrained by Ye Rong and Jiang Chen. I pleaded for mercy on their behalf, but... ai. We ran into the rat tide in the end. Ye Dai and Ye Zheng were unable to escape disaster and were swallowed by the rat tide. Ye Qiao, who had triggered the rat tide, ended up smashing up his foot with his own rock and was swallowed by the rat tide."

The lordmaster's gaze was far away as he listened silently and didn't respond.

"You didn't run into the rat tide?" The lordmaster asked after he'd finished listening.

"We were also surrounded by the rat tide, but..." Dan Fei's gaze looked towards Jiang Chen at this moment as she didn't quite know how to say it.

"Heh heh, it seems that there's something more to this?" The lordmaster chuckled.

"Nothing much, just that I happened to know a bit of the beast language and chatted with their leader. I just persuaded them, that's all." Jiang Chen spread out his hands.

The lordmaster smiled meaningfully but didn't comment on anything else. He sighed. "To think that releasing a rumor would result in another struggle for the position of crown prince. Everything has been illuminated in a moment and after the dust has settled, Ye Rong has indeed become the final victor."

"This isn't necessarily a bad thing." Jiang Chen smiled.

His eyebrow suddenly quirked as he made his apologies in a low murmur, walking swiftly to Ye Rong's side.

"Xue Tong, who was the person who just walked past you?" Jiang Chen walked up to ask.

Xue Tong shook his head. "I don't know. He only talked with me for a bit and asked for my name. Maybe it's because he saw that I was with the fourth prince."

"Did you tell him?"

Xue Tong nodded subconsciously, "Young master, is something amiss?"

Jiang Chen thought for a moment and lightly shook his head, "I feel that that person's been observing you all this time. Perhaps it's my wrong impression. Forget it, it's just a small matter. I'm probably thinking too much."

Xue Tong also knew that with Jiang Chen's personality, he definitely wouldn't randomly ask this question. Xue Tong scanned the crowd but didn't find a trace of that person.

Although he felt it was odd, he didn't say much.

"Heh heh, Tutor Ye, I heard that you directly took two young people out just now, making things difficult for the disciples afterwards. Everyone in the line afterwards keeps saying that it's unfair and are constantly causing trouble for us."

A Precious Tree Sect Elder smiled merrily as he walked towards the old tutor.

Old Tutor Ye narrowed his eyes, "Who cries foul? Tell them to come find me."

The elder smiled, "How would they dare say that in front of you? They could only complain incessantly at our disciples and refuse to cooperate."

"Elder Iron, what are you telling an old man like me this?"

"Ai, I just wish that you'd make things easier for us and be a good role model."

Ye Chonglou laughed heartily, "This is just a bad coincidence. The two young people I took away entered the Autumn Hunt to broaden their worldview and didn't gain much. How will they be able to give you half?"

Elder Iron's facial expression froze. "Lordmaster, this isn't the kind of thing to do?"

"There is nothing to do or not about it. If you don't think this is alright, have Sect Head Xie come find me or have your great elder come find me as well."

The lordmaster's tone was indifferent as he obviously didn't want to waste his spittle in talking to the elder.

Elder Iron also seemed to be a bit fearful of the lordmaster as he gave a few glances at the latter but didn't say anything in the end. He left with an angry flourish of his sleeves.

Elder Iron halted when he walked in front of Jiang Chen. "You're one of the ones that Tutor Ye brought out right?"

"Yes." Jiang Chen nodded.

"I'm an elder of the Precious Tree Sect. Young man, I'll ask you, how much did you hunt and bring down inside?"

"Lordmaster Ye seems to have already discussed this? I won't blather on then." Jiang Chen knew that this elder was attempting to include Jiang Chen in his schemes.

“Playing tricks with me huh?” Elder Iron’s face darkened. “You’re young with not bad potential. Do you want to impede your own future for a small matter like this?”

The connotations of this was that you’re young and will still fall into my grasp if you want to enter the Precious Tree Sect in the future. Why don’t you docilely hand over the items now and avoid damaging your own future.

Jiang Chen smiled noncommittally as the corners of his eyes and lips drooped. He didn’t want to pay any more attention to this fellow. How would he not know that this fellow was trying to start something? If he, Jiang Chen, really handed over half of his items, he would’ve been used by this fellow to indirectly slap Lordmaster Ye’s face.

The items were a small thing. This Elder Iron was obviously making use of the opportunity to face off against the lordmaster.

“What kind of attitude is this?!” Elder Iron felt a surge of rage in his heart when he saw Jiang Chen being so cocky.

Old man Ye strutted around because his strength was extraordinary coupled with great seniority, so he couldn’t do anything to old man Ye. But the hairs hadn’t even fully grown on this brat, so how dare he behave like this?

And it looked like his attitude was even more arrogant than the old man!

“Elder Iron, every wrong has a source, and every debt a debtor. Go vent your ill feelings on whoever’s roused them. I’m young and I can’t take this kind of shock.”

Jiang Chen’s tone was noncommittal as he obviously wasn’t falling for Elder Iron’s act.

Chapter 217: Pressure from the Elder of the Precious Tree Sect

Elder Iron was the epitome of frustration right now. He wanted to threaten and scare Jiang Chen for a bit and make him hand over the items. He wanted to take advantage of this to slap the old lordmaster’s face and poke holes in his bullshit.

Who knew that this kid would put up such an impenetrable front and even hint that he was picking on the weak and afraid of the strong, only picking on a young man because he couldn’t handle Ye Chonglou?

Although this was the truth, speaking the truth at an occasion like this made Elder Iron lose a great amount of face.

“You... what’s your name? What house do you belong to in the Skylaurel Kingdom? Do you understand decorum? Do you know who I am?!”

Jiang Chen flicked a baffled look at Elder Iron, thinking, is something wrong with your head? I’ve already called you Elder Iron, how would I not know who you are?

Of course, he couldn’t very well continue butting heads with Elder Iron here. He laughed wryly and decided to take his leave. Although the old mad dog barking in front of him hadn’t bitten anyone, it was still displeasing just to listen to him.

However, Jiang Chen taking a step away thoroughly infuriated the Elder Iron.

This... this was complete disregard of an elder of the Precious Tree Sect!

“Halt!”

Jiang Chen ignored him, but Ye Rong walked over and pulled on Jiang Chen’s arm, “Younger brother, just say some words and gloss the matter over.”

Elder Iron pointed at Ye Rong, “Little fellow, you go away! It’s none of your business.”

Ye Rong laughed wryly, “Elder Iron, he’s young and you’re an esteemed elder. Don’t be mad.”

Elder Iron’s anger had nothing to do with Jiang Chen’s age. He was ticked off at Jiang Chen’s uncooperative attitude.

“Alright, alright! Alright. The young men of the Skylaurel Kingdom have more and more attitude these days. Brat, don’t think that I won’t find out who you are just because you didn’t offer your name.”

Jiang Chen lightly pushed Ye Rong’s hand away and arched his eyebrows, “Elder Iron, you don’t have to ask around. I’m called Jiang Chen. Remember, Jiang as in the great river, and Chen as in dust.”

“Good, good! Brat, you’ve got some guts. Jiang Chen is it? I can clearly tell you now that you don’t need to think about even setting foot into the Precious Tree Sect doorway in this life.”

Elder Iron had pondered for a while to come up with what he thought was his most devastating threat.

Jiang Chen hadn’t planned on stirring up trouble today, this was truly called an undeserved catastrophe. Elder Iron had been met with a face full of dust from Ye Chonglou and he had vented his resulting rage on Jiang Chen.

However, Jiang Chen wasn’t a punching bag.

He’d already planned on keeping quiet seeing that the other was an elder of the Sect and he had tried his best to not pay attention to this fellow.

Who would’ve thought that this fellow would become more and more outrageous? He’d actually said publicly that he was blacklisting Jiang Chen on the Precious Tree Sect’s behalf.

Jiang Chen had held his temper in for so long and he could no longer do so. As good as his manners were, he was ready to erupt when confronted with such an unreasonable fellow.

“Elder Iron is it? I really hadn’t cared about whether or not I could enter the Precious Tree Sect before, but since you’ve thrown down the gauntlet, I’m going to make it in just for you. Not only will I enter the Sect, I’m going to do so with great fanfare and celebration. Your Sect will beg me to enter! This is all I’m going to say, watch how things go in the future.”

Jiang Chen couldn’t be bothered to look at the elder after venting this annoyance. He laughed coldly and left with a flourish of his sleeves.

Elder Iron had obviously overestimated his influence and power, as well as underestimated Jiang Chen’s fortitude. In his knowledge, all young people from a mundane, ordinary kingdom were supposed to be

humble and almost grovel in front of the Precious Tree Sect. Add to that his status as an elder, he'd thought that the young man in front of him would be unable to bear up if he exerted even the slightest bit of pressure.

What young person in the Skylarell Kingdom could bear it if he voiced the idea of blacklisting them from the Sect?

He'd thought that the young man would surely submit and lower his head in apology. Who would've thought that the young man wouldn't follow his predefined plan at all?

Not only had he not submitted and asked for mercy, he'd been even cockier than an elder of the Precious Tree Sect!

The elder had never thought that the young men of current times would have such character and temper!

Shaking all over in his fury, Elder Iron stabbed with his finger, "Jiang Chen, I don't care how much of a background you have, if you make it into the Precious Tree Sect anytime in this life, I'll let you use my head as a seat cushion!"

He was a vaunted elder of the Precious Tree Sect and he had lost so much face in front of a young man that he couldn't retreat. It was easy to see that the fires of rage were burning within his heart. He also made up his mind that even with Ye Chonglou's recommendation, he would still collude with some compatriots and completely reject this Jiang Chen brat!

As long as he, Elder Iron, was within the Precious Tree Sect, he'd never allow Jiang Chen to enter the Sect!

Being one of the elders of the Sect, Elder Iron had great deal of power. It was an easy thing for him to deny a common disciple's request to join the sect.

As strong as Ye Chonglou was, he still wasn't the head of the Precious Tree Sect!

The atmosphere at the scene had been a bit stifled when all various disciples were incredibly surprised by this conflict.

In their eyes, this was simply too incredulous.

An ordinary disciple butting heads with an elder of the Precious Tree Sect? Had a door slammed on or a donkey kicked this young man's brains? Wasn't yelling at an elder of the Precious Tree Sect courting death?

See, now he'd gotten blacklisted by the elder.

As talented as you may be or as much potential as you had, how great could you grow if you could never make it into a sect? You'd only have some mundane wealth and fortune.

However, would you be able to enjoy your mundane wealth and fortune in peace after insulting an elder of the Precious Tree Sect?

Whenever the elder thought of you some day in the future, he'd be able to dispatch a disciple to trample you with a flick of his finger.

"This Jiang Chen had it too easy in the capital that he dared even strut around in front of the Precious Tree Sect. He's in for it now!"

"Hah! He deserves it! I really wish there'd be more people like Jiang Chen so that I'd have less competition when the Sect holds its open recruitment in the future."

"This kid has some guts alright. I'd probably lack even the courage to speak if it was me up there."

"Ai, he's unlucky too in that an elder of the Precious Tree Sect was creating trouble for him. If he handed his things over, he would've offended Tutor Ye. If he hadn't, he'd be offending Elder Iron. He was destined to come up short when caught between two powerful people."

The disciples present had all sorts of thoughts. Some felt that this was a pity for Jiang Chen, and others secretly felt that this was unfair to him. Of course, there were also others who gloated over Jiang Chen's misfortune and there were even more who wished that he would be even unluckier.

Since Jiang Chen didn't care about the attitude of even an elder of the Precious Tree Sect, why would he care about what the bystanders thought of him? He walked out of the valley entrance as if nothing had happened.

When he passed by Dan Fei, she felt a bit apologetic. Her beautiful eyes alighted on Jiang Chen as her mouth moved slightly, but she wasn't sure how to comfort him.

This thorny matter had indeed been started by the lordmaster, and he bizarrely hadn't stepped out to smooth things over for Jiang Chen.

This made the others present feel even more sorrowful for Jiang Chen. They all felt that he had become Tutor Ye's discarded pawn and been thrown away.

It was because of this that the guilt within Dan Fei's heart grew even stronger.

As she watched Jiang Chen walk outside all alone, Dan Fei's upper cheek twitched a few times as she looked a bit aggrieved at the lordmaster.

What greeted her was the sight of a merrily smiling Lordmaster Ye, as if all this had nothing to do with him.

"Little Dan, are you thinking why I was so recalcitrant as to not help Jiang Chen?"

Dan Fei did indeed have such a thought within her heart, but she had always greatly respected the lordmaster and naturally wouldn't admit to this.

"Heh heh, this little fellow is quite interesting. I like watching him reveal and shine in his true glory. Young men should dash forward and should exploded every now and then. It's only then that they are energetic."

“Lordmaster, it’s just that I’m afraid that Jiang Chen will think that we have no loyalty.” Dan Fei truly did feel guilty when she thought of Jiang Chen’s contributions up until now. “Jiang Chen must be feeling very aggrieved right now.”

“Little Dan, if you think this way, that means you don’t know our little friend Jiang Chen well enough.” The lordmaster laughed meaningfully. “Alright, let’s not chat of this any more. Let’s go as well.”

Many matters weighed heavily on Dan Fei’s heart along the way. She naturally didn’t have much enthusiasm for anything.

Even Ye Rong felt slightly indignant on Jiang Chen’s behalf. It wasn’t his fault today at all.

It had been Elder Iron’s fault, who was purposefully looking for bones to pick.

Elder Iron had then picked on Jiang Chen to make an example of when he couldn’t do anything to Tutor Ye. That was a truly low move, but although Ye Rong felt this way, there was nothing he could do about it.

When he returned to the capital, Ye Rong said to Xue Tong, “Xue Tong, go back and comfort your young master that plans can be slowly formulated for this in the future. There’s got to be another way, just like a road always appears when the carriage arrives in front of the mountain.”

Xue Tong was rather open minded about it all as he laughed. “Don’t worry fourth prince. Perhaps Elder Iron thinks that my young master’s words are quite arrogant, but with my knowledge of the young master, he may not actually think highly of an elder of the Precious Tree Sect.”

Ye Rong felt speechless in that moment. Even his followers are this cocky!

However, he supposed it made sense. Jiang Chen had created countless numbers of miracles all along the way. Just like Ye Rong had said in the beginning, Jiang Chen was gold buried in the sand. He was destined to shine brightly with great radiance one day.

With Jiang Chen’s stunning talents and knowledge, it really may not be Jiang Chen’s loss if the Precious Tree Sect didn’t want him. With such a young genius as Jiang Chen, there’d be plenty of sects who would fight for him.

The Precious Tree Sect wasn’t the only strong sect amongst the sixteen kingdom alliance.

When Jiang Chen returned home, he saw that all had been peaceful in the month that he’s been gone. Nothing particularly special had occurred. What surprised Jiang Chen was that after a month, Guo Jin’s level of training had advanced by leaps and bounds as he’d taken another step forward in breaking through to nine meridians true qi after Xue Tong. He had entered the ranks of the true qi masters!

“It looks like Xue Tong’s remaining Rare Jade Fruit will end up going to Guo Jin.”

Gouyu had still yet to emerge from closed door cultivation. It looked like she had received much after taking the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill and was likely trying to assail the spirit realm all in one go.

The person who’d had the best time during this period would be Qiao Baishi. As time progressed, Elder Ning of the Azure Heaven Southern Palace became more and more unable to tear herself away from Qiao Baishi.

The two of them actually did fall in love the more time they spent together. Although Elder Ning was a few years older than Qiao Baishi, this wasn't a problem at all.

Elder Ning had taken the initiative and chased after Qiao Baishi. To think that Jiang Chen had actually ended up foretelling what would happen to the two of them!

However, Qiao Baishi was still quite cognizant of the greater picture and knew his place. Even though he'd confirmed his relationship with Elder Ning, he was still absolutely loyal to the Jiang family.

He would come visit every two or three days whenever he was in the capital to see if he could help with anything.

Chapter 218: Jiang Feng's Martial Dao Goals

"Chen'er, I heard Xue Tong say that you got into a conflict with an elder of the Precious Tree Sect when you left?"

"Father, don't worry about this. It's just a small matter." Jiang Chen knew that his father was worried about his future. But in Jiang Chen's eyes, a mere elder of the Precious Tree Sect was really not someone worth worrying about.

Jiang Feng sighed, "Chen'er, your father still thinks it a bit incredible when I ruminate over all that has happened to you. My abilities are paltry so I can't smooth the way for you any longer. It will be up to you to pave your own road step by step in the future."

"Oh right, father, you've lingered at the peak of true qi for long enough. It's about time to start assailing the spirit realm. I have a Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill here. It's a wondrous medicine for making any attempt to reach the spirit realm. It will give you a ninety percent chance of success."

Jiang Feng was greatly astonished, "What did you say? Ninety percent?"

In fact, Jiang Chen had given a conservative estimate as he taken out an upper rank pill this time. An upper rank actually gave the user a 99% chance of success.

It was only because his father's age was slightly older than the optimal timing to transmute his qi into spirit, that Jiang Chen was giving a ninety percent estimation.

The last time he'd refined the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill, there'd been five acceptable ones. Two of them were of lower rank, one was of middle rank, and two were of upper rank.

He'd given the middle rank one to Gouyu.

He'd taken one of the upper ranked pills himself, and the remaining one was naturally for his most beloved father.

"Father, word of this matter cannot travel. Take this pill in closed door cultivation. You should have no problem in making it to the spirit realm."

Jiang Chen was using the calmest tone he could say those words in but they still sounded like a ringing bell in Jiang Feng's ears, sending tremors through him to the extent that he couldn't react at all.

Ever since he'd set down the mantle of the Duke of the Jiang Han, he'd striven his hardest in the area of martial dao. He had always wanted to break through to the spirit realm.

But time and time again, he'd been able to find no inspiration and couldn't identify an opportunity to breakthrough.

He knew that at his age, he'd already missed the prime opportunity to transmute to spirit.

The best timing was before thirty years old.

And he, Jiang Feng, was already almost forty. Although this age wasn't that awkward, it was definitely no longer within the golden period to transmute to spirit.

Therefore, he'd been contemplating lately whether or not he still possessed a way forward in the area of martial dao.

His conclusion was tragic but he wasn't willing to accept that even though his son had grown up into a towering tree that was enough to protect this family.

In the depths of his heart, Jiang Feng had a matter resting heavily, a matter that he would have to take care of personally.

It was a matter that even his son could not take care of for him.

Therefore, his heart of martial dao had never died. He'd even advanced to the point of resting neither day nor night in his training in the past year.

But the results had brought him disappointment and dejection.

Just as he had become completely lost, his son Jiang Chen actually told him that this pill would give him a ninety percent chance to break through to the spirit realm!

Jiang Feng was speechless for a long while before finally recovering. He grabbed Jiang Chen's hand with agitation as tears of emotion flowed out of the corners of his eyes. His lips trembled lightly, "Chen'er, are you lying to me?"

"I don't have the courage to lie to my old man." Jiang Chen smiled. "Father, don't be so shocked. Not only can this pill help you break through to the spirit realm, it can also shape your body and your spirit ocean, making your spirit foundation much stronger than ordinary people. When you cast off the mundane and enter the spirit realm, you'll have much more potential than ordinary spirit realm practitioners. Such is the true effect of the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill."

"Chen'er, why do I feel like all of this is a dream?"

"Father, I promise you that this is only the beginning. The spirit realm is merely a stepping stone in the path of martial dao."

Jiang Feng surged to his feet with great emotion and grabbed the pill, "Chen'er, I'm going into closed door cultivation!"

Jiang Chen sighed lightly in his heart as he watched his father. "Father's potential for martial dao is actually quite high. Unfortunately, he was caught in the mundane shackles of dukeship and missed the

best training period. The Jiang family's hereditary martial dao method is also much too inferior, further constraining his development. This pill will enable him to enter the spirit realm and reset everything. I hope that father will walk farther down the path of martial dao."

Jiang Chen actually had a great haul from this time's Autumn Hunt.

Firstly, he had half of the four Silvermoon Monsterapes brought out of the maze realm. That made for two that were his.

In addition, although he hadn't tamed many fierce monsters or spirit creatures along the way, he'd foraged many spirit ingredients, grass, and fruits. These items supplemented much of his deficiencies in the area of spirit ingredients.

Of course, his greatest gain was the Goldbiter Rat tribe that numbered in the hundreds of millions.

He had now formed a very cooperative partnership with the Rat King — basically the rat tribe's fates were tied to his. They had become his trump card to be deployed when necessary. It was a great power that was enough to shake a kingdom.

One thing on par with the Goldbiter Rats was naturally the refinement of the Flaming Heart of Ice.

By this time, the Heart had now become a seed within his spirit ocean and would grow into a frightful divine art one day if used properly!

Jiang Chen knew that the quality of the Heart was actually very high. It was only because it had been at the bottom of the chasm that it couldn't absorb much spirit power, and thus had a slow rate of evolution.

Now that Jiang Chen had refined it into his spirit ocean and was using his spirit power to feed the Heart, he'd be able to develop the divine art of the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice one day, to be used as he wished. Not only would such power be unexpected when facing off against his enemies, but it'd be frightening and shocking as well.

He would need some time to develop this ability.

Although Jiang Chen had absorbed the Heart, he would still need time to manipulate how to integrate it into his spirit ocean and make it into one of his trump cards.

On the whole, he'd walked away with impressive gains from the Autumn Hunt.

Although there'd been some unpleasantness with Elder Iron of the Precious Tree Sect when he left, Jiang Chen didn't think much of it at all.

"I have to admit that Dan Fei's words that day pointed me in a new direction of thinking. The raising of spirit beasts, the evolution of their bloodlines — these are all good schools of thoughts. With so many Goldwing Swordbirds and my a partnership with the Goldbiter Rats, if I follow this train of thought through, I can absolutely raise some Goldwing Swordbirds to the spirit realm. Once the Goldwing Swordbirds enter the spirit realm, their strength will be incredibly frightening."

However, although this was the case, with the Goldwing Swordbirds' potential alone, it'd be difficult for them to enter the spirit realm.

Jiang Chen also knew that this plan would need long term planning and couldn't be accomplished in one night.

The raising of spirit creatures needed treasures from heaven and earth. The amount of resources that such an act would take was enormous. If one hadn't achieved a certain status, one would be completely unable to bear the burden of those pricey materials.

Although Jiang Chen was not lacking in money, that was only on a mundane, ordinary level. It wasn't much to look at once he reached the spirit realm.

If a spirit realm practitioner truly wanted to develop fully, the amount of resources needed wasn't something that an ordinary family or mundane power could afford.

The gold, wealth and power of a common family amounted to nothing at all in the spirit realm.

Of course, this was all relative as well.

In the spirit realm or an even higher realm, there was business to be done and transactions to be conducted. There were always venues to earn money.

Except, the higher one's level was, the more advanced the ways of conducting business and the subjects of said business were.

"Sigh, I still need to earn money. How will I back up these plans if I don't have money?" Jiang Chen sighed with emotion.

"Young master, Miss Dan Fei seeks an audience." His men came to report this just as he was thinking about it.

"She's probably here with the baby Silvermoon Monsterapes." Jiang Chen walked outside.

Dan Fei stood up from her chair when she saw Jiang Chen walk over.

"Jiang Chen, are you alright?" Dan Fei asked.

"Haha, you're not just here to comfort me, are you? It's alright. Whether it's an Elder Iron or Elder Copper who wants to threaten me, they're all barking up the wrong tree."

Dan Fei understood that this fellow really hadn't taken any of it to heart when she heard Jiang Chen's words. But even so, she still felt a bit guilty, "Actually, you were also innocently drawn into today's matter."

"Forget it, let's not talk about those things. These two baby Monsterapes are for me, right?" Jiang Chen saw that two baby Monsterapes were placed in the bamboo basket next to the chair.

"Yes." Dan Fei nodded.

"See, talking back at Elder Iron is not that bad. If I'd been scared by him, those two Monsterapes would've turned into just one." Jiang Chen self-deprecated.

Dan Fei now truly believed that he wasn't disturbed by the matter of Elder Iron. Otherwise, he wouldn't have the capacity to joke about this.

She mused silently for a bit as she played with the tea cup with one graceful finger. Her delicate eyebrow suddenly arched as she asked, "Jiang Chen, what plans do you have for the future?"

Jiang Chen started, "Why are you suddenly asking me this?"

"I..." Dan Fei stammered. "I want to ask, do you really want to enter the Precious Tree Sect?"

"Elder Iron would be rather proud of himself if I don't join." Jiang Chen smiled.

"Well, if you follow the lordmaster, he'd absolutely be willing to pass on all his teachings to you. You wouldn't be confined by the rules and behavior of the sects." Dan Fei hesitated and once again offered Jiang Chen an invitation.

Jiang Chen laughed leisurely. Dan Fei still didn't understand his world after all.

He wished to enter the sect neither to take someone as a master nor to learn techniques.

He was entering the sect for its resources, and to interact with more sect geniuses.

One would only emerge from the masses and challenge the true peak after continuously accepting and overcoming challenges on the path of martial dao.

All this were not things he'd be able to obtain by following the lordmaster!

Dan Fei was speaking of the details of only one small pond — a single city, but what Jiang Chen was considering was a grand ambition that spanned the heavens.

Dan Fei's expression darkened slightly when she saw that Jiang Chen didn't respond before she immediately recovered her original indifference after this moment of dejection.

"Jiang Chen, if there's nothing else, I'll be leaving now."

"Yes. Sister Dan Fei, please go back and tell the lordmaster that I know he was only testing me with regards to Elder Iron. I won't bear a grudge."

Jiang Chen spoke only after Dan Fei had set foot outside the door.

Dan Fei halted briefly before walking out, her beautiful form slowly vanishing around the corner.

Chapter 219: Qiao Baishi and His Conflict with His Future Mother-In-Law

Three days later, a matter so significant occurred that it rocked the entire Skylaurel Kingdom.

Fourth prince Ye Rong was officially vested as the Crown Prince, becoming the heir to the Skylaurel kingdom.

All the various struggles and interplay regarding the position of Crown Prince became history from then on. Although the clan of Ye Dai's mother was strong, it was a strength built on the premise of having an heir to the kingdom.

Now that Ye Dai had perished in the maze realm, that so-called greatness had all become but mere smoke.

In order to ensure that Ye Rong's position as Crown Prince would be stable, the royal family began to strip away the power from the clan of Ye Dai's mother. They, and even some of the powers behind second prince Ye Qiao, slowly faded out of the capital.

This was to create momentum for the Crown Prince and remove the obstacles in front of his feet, paving the way for him!

Since the Crown Prince had been decided, there was no need for any opposing powers. Those tumors naturally had to be cleared away.

Jiang Chen felt sincerely happy for Ye Rong. Just like Ye Rong had said, he and Ye Rong were actually both gold buried in sand.

Now that Ye Rong had emerged as a piece of true gold from the yellow sands, he'd turned into a sparkling, distinguishable gold.

Ye Rong's first act as Crown Prince was to reward his confidantes and followers.

As his greatest harbinger of fortune, Jiang Chen was awarded with the position of a second rank noble and enjoyed all accompanying privileges.

To the Jiang family, although their power and influence had yet to reach the peak they'd had in the Eastern Kingdom, this was already quite impressive for a family who'd arrived in the Skylaurel Kingdom a mere half a year ago.

After the public investiture ceremony, Jiang Chen and the Jiang family finally officially set foot in the noble circles of the Skylaurel Kingdom and became an existence known to every household throughout the kingdom.

All sorts of versions regarding the relationship between Jiang Chen and Ye Rong arose, making him out to be more impressive even than the gods.

However, the rumor mills didn't have to go to great efforts as merely having the Skylaurel Kingdom Medallion was enough to have everyone in the kingdom pay homage to him.

As for how Jiang Chen had helped Ye Rong to his position, how he'd helped Ye Rong take out his other competitors within the maze realms, numerous versions of those stories abounded. Each was as if the teller had been present and had seen things with their own eyes.

Naturally, none of these tales came even close to the truth.

Naturally, Jiang Chen paid no heed to the rumors from the outside world. Whether it was a fourth rank or second rank noble, in the end, it was only to find a safe place to settle down for the Jiang family.

Jiang Chen didn't give much thought to mundane wealth and fortune.

Jiang Chen had just returned from outside one day when the guard at the door reported, "Young master, a Dragonteeth Guard is outside and seeks an audience."

"Dragonteeth Guard?" Jiang Chen started. "Send him in."

The Dragonteeth Guard usually rarely acted alone. Was it Tian Shao? But Tian Shao was a common visitor to the Jiang family, his men would've definitely recognized him.

After coming in, Jiang Chen discovered that it was actually Tang Long who had come!

"Young master Chen." Tang Long was actually a bit reserved after coming through the door. He rubbed his hands down his sides, as if not quite sure where to place them.

He'd been in the Guard for two months now and had finally figured his way around things. He often heard the name Jiang Chen when chatting with his comrades.

However, if anyone asked him about Jiang Chen's matters, he would usually gloss it over with a laugh and a smile. In his comrade's eyes, Tang Long definitely had some relations with Jiang Chen to be able to receive the position of a sixth rank Guard as soon as he'd entered the Dragonteeth Guard.

Except, Tang Long knew quite well that he really didn't have much to do with Jiang Chen. To be frank, he'd only ever seen Jiang Chen once. All other matters had occurred because Jiang Chen had casually deigned to offer a helping hand.

The aid from those carefree actions however, had changed his entire life.

Therefore, Tang Long was grateful to Jiang Chen from the bottom of his heart. He'd always wanted to find a chance to visit Jiang Chen and express his thanks.

However, thanks to his low self confidence, he was afraid that he'd be looked down upon by Jiang Chen and his men if he visited with empty hands.

He'd hemmed and hawed for two months until he'd managed to scrape some money and buy something. He'd then finally mustered his courage and come to visit.

"Good man, you look absolutely different with the Dragonteeth Guard uniform on you." Jiang Chen chuckled. "How's your little brother doing?"

"He... He can walk normally now. He only spends some time on the wheelchair because his body is a bit weak. It will take him some time to completely recover."

"Mm, that would take some time for one to recover and adjust." Jiang Chen nodded and looked at what Tang Long had brought. He smiled, "Don't bring anything with you next time you come find me, or else I'll have my men sweep you out the door. You said you earned a bit of money, then buy more stuff for your woman. She's a good woman and you should cherish her."

"Yes, yes." Tang Long hastened to nod repeatedly.

"Mm. I'll accept it this time, but this should not occur again. So, how does it feel after two months in the Dragonteeth Guard?"

"Everything is quite good. My comrades are all very nice to me." Tang Long started laughing in a silly fashion as he scratched his head, a bit embarrassed. "Everyone thinks I'm good friends with young master Chen and so gives way to me in many places."

Jiang Chen chuckled heartily, "You and I have interacted so many times, it'd be nice to call you my friend. You're someone who Tian Shao has recruited into the Dragonteeth Guard. Tian Shao has unlimited potential. He may even advance to the position of grand director of the Dragonteeth Guard. You should follow him closely."

"Yes, I'll go about my business properly so that I don't lose face for General Tian."

Tang Long suddenly remembered something as he spoke and gathered his courage to speak, "Young master Chen, I think there's a matter that I should tell you."

"What is it?"

"The last time we went on an outing to conduct a mission, I happened to hear the disciples of the four great sites discuss something, saying that some sort of heavenly treasure was about to emerge in some mountain valley of the Southern Palace. It's said that many Precious Tree Sect disciples know of this matter and are making their moves."

"Heavenly treasure?" Jiang Chen smiled. "What kind of heavenly treasure can exist in this mundane world?"

Tang Long smiled in a simple and honest way, "I don't know either, I only heard them talking about it. But if even the Sect disciples are interested in this, it likely won't be fake intelligence?"

Tang Long's intentions were actually quite simple. He purely felt that this intelligence may be of use to young master Chen. Out of a sense of gratitude to him, he felt that he should notify Jiang Chen of this news.

The sound of footsteps rang out on the other side of the door at this moment. Xue Tong walked in.

"Young master, Qiao Baishi requests to see you."

Xue Tong also started when he saw Tang Long, "You?"

Tang Long also had an impression of Xue Tong, but his face changed slightly when he took a look at Xue Tong. "You... last time I saw you, were you not only a true qi master? You're now at the peak of a true qi masters?"

Only a short amount of time had passed, no wonder Tang Long was so surprised.

Xue Tong smiled and looked at Tang Long's uniform. "You're also doing quite well for yourself, you've made it into the Dragonteeth Guard."

Jiang Chen had merely lifted a finger to help Tang Long, so he'd never mentioned the man to his men.

"Tang Long, since you've come, have a drink with us. Xue Tong, tell Baishi to go to the back yard."

Tang Long's emotions had been a bit muddled during this visit and he was feeling rather uneasy. He subconsciously wanted to flee when Jiang Chen invited him in for a drink.

But Xue Tong didn't allow him to protest as he pulled on his arm, "Old Tang, don't stand on ceremony now that you're here. To be honest, if it hadn't been for your enthusiastic introduction of the things in

the Skylaurel Kingdom when we'd just arrived, we might have really met our downfall at the hands of the Northern Palace."

Tang Long was slightly embarrassed, "That was just a small act. Besides, young master Chen gave me such a good pill."

"Don't be so formal." Xue Tong patted Tang Long's shoulder. "Come, all my other brothers are here. You know them as well."

A banquet held at home was naturally very casual.

Although Tang Long was a bit restrained, the presence of the sillies Qiao Shan and Qiao Chuan in Jiang Chen's personal guards made it easy to get to know everyone. Not long after, Tang Long had mingled in with the crowd.

Except, Qiao Baishi didn't seem particularly happy.

"Baishi, what's wrong? You don't seem very into this. Is it that men in love become more sentimental?" Jiang Chen joked.

Qiao Baishi smiled wryly, "Young master Chen, to be honest, I hadn't thought that I would develop anything with Elder Ning when you had me go to the Southern Palace. Perhaps it was fate from our past lives that she would look favorably upon someone like me, coming from a small place. However, the head of the Southern Palace has given an edict lately that ordered Elder Ning to cut off all relations with me."

"Why is that?" Jiang Chen felt it odd.

"They're probably looking down on me for coming from a small place and without a great backer. They think I have no future and am not a suitable match for Elder Ning."

"That's bullshit!" Jiang Chen was greatly enraged. Qiao Baishi was his disciple. Who the hell was that head of the Southern Palace to disdain one of his disciples?

"Is this head a man or a woman?"

"Woman, and Elder Ning's birth mother at that. Very few people in the outside world knows this, Elder Ning told me this in private."

"This..." Jiang Chen was a bit speechless. If it was only the head of the Southern Palace, then she was merely a supervisor. If it came down to it, Elder Ning could just quit.

But since it was Elder Ning's birth mother, this made things a bit tricky.

The conflict between a mother-in-law and son-in-law was one of the most difficult problems to tackle beneath the heavens.

"How does Elder Ning feel about this?" Jiang Chen asked.

"Her attitude has been quite resolute as she's continuously fought against her mother's will."

“Then there’s no problem. As long as Elder Ning holds on, all will be fine. She’s just a mother-in-law, at the end of the day. Baishi, you’ve seen many things in your time, can you not even handle an old hag?”

Qiao Baishi smiled ruefully, he’d never met such a matter before either, so he really didn’t know what to do.

“Young master, I have no clues what to do right now and seek guidance from you.”

“There’s no guidance to give. Go ask that head what conditions does she want and just handle them! Don’t you know to use the Four Seasons Eternal Spring Pill to handle an old hag?”

Qiao Baishi started and a light shimmered in his eyes afterwards, “That’s right, how did I forget this bit?”

Using the Four Seasons Pill was a trump card against old women!

“Of course, just the pill alone won’t be enough. Just have her list whatever conditions she has. The Southern Palace is just a mundane sect for the Precious Tree Sect. There’s nothing about it. Baishi, don’t have an inferiority complex. Remember, when you want to have marital relations with the Southern Palace, it’s they who are out of their league, not you. Don’t get this backwards, if you do, don’t say you know me in the future!”

Chapter 220: Danger with No Forewarning

Upon hearing Jiang Chen’s words, Qiao Baishi felt greatly reassured. His honored master was hinting that he could act however he wanted and that his honored master would be the strong shield behind his back.

Jiang Chen was a god in Qiao Baishi’s heart.

After the banquet was over, Jiang Chen had Qiao Baishi gift a package of pills to Tang Long in return.

Tang Long didn’t even know how he made it out of the door. Today’s banquet had helped him become closer to Jiang Chen’s crew.

However, Tang Long still felt a bit embarrassed.

The presents he’d brought hadn’t been worth much money, but what he’d received in return were all exceptional pills. Some such as the Heavenly Karma Pill were for injuries, and others such as the Vast Ocean Pill were for recovering true qi .

These were all fine items that Tang Long couldn’t afford to buy.

A Dragonteeth Guard often ventured outside for cases, with fighting and killing being inevitable. Bloodshed was also a common thing. These pills would provide timely assistance akin to fuel delivered in a snowstorm.

“Old Tang, come and visit often in the future if you have nothing to do, but don’t bring anything with you next time. Or my house’s young master won’t let you through the door.”

Xue Tong accompanied Tang Long out of the door and down two streets before heading back.

His ears suddenly twitched before he turned into the alleyway of his home and shouted, "Who is it? Show yourself!"

His body moved like a fish through water as he leapt, landing onto the corner of a nearby rooftop, Xue Sha's bow gripped in his hand. His eyes were like a hawk's as they scanned the surroundings.

"You're called Xue Tong?"

A sinister voice suddenly rang out without warning from behind him.

Xue Tong was greatly startled. He'd been practicing the Ear of the Zephyr and his ability to pick up on small sounds was many times more superior than the average person.

But he hadn't noticed that someone was hiding behind him as he flashed by!

His body tilted as he swept Xue Sha's bow backwards.

Pa!

Tremors immediately traveled up his arm, numbing it. Xue Sha's bow was grasped by a withered hand.

No matter how Xue Tong pulled on the bow and circulated the true qi in his body, it was as if it'd sunk into the ocean like a large rock. He was completely unable to move the bow in the slightest.

"Don't waste your strength." The sinister voice said faintly. "It's all useless."

With a slight flex of his opponent's hand, it seemed as though Xue Sha's bow was being baked in hot flames. It was painfully hot to the touch, cooking Xue Tong's hand and making it sizzle.

Xue Tong loosened his hand as his left palm formed a fist and crashed down onto his opponent. This had become close combat.

Pa!

Something that looked like a branch smashed onto the back of Xue Tong's hand from somewhere in the darkness.

A crack rang out.

In the next second, Xue Tong's entire arm trailed down limply, as if he'd been electrocuted.

"Now fall down." The remote voice sounded. Xue Sha's bow that had fallen into his hands carelessly tapped on Xue Tong's body, felling the latter where he stood.

"Take him!"

Several equally sinister forms emerged out of the darkness, placing Xue Tong into a large cloth sack and hauling him onto their shoulders. They disappeared into the shadows with a few rises and falls.

These moments from the initial attack to Xue Tong's capture had been completed in almost one smooth motion, within the span of a couple of breaths. It'd been done so surreptitiously that neither the gods nor ghosts would've realized something had happened.

Jiang Chen had already entered the secret chamber when an uneasy feeling surged up, thanks his practice of the Psychic's Head.

"Mm? Has something happened?"

Jiang Chen leapt up and dashed outside, arriving at the mouth of the alleyway.

"This is bad, Xue Tong!"

Jiang Chen's consciousness was so sensitive that it immediately captured the fact that Xue Tong's presence had vanished into thin air from this place.

Jiang Chen's sudden movement also alerted his other personal guards as they all came running out.

"Young master, what happened?"

"Hmm? There seems to be traces of a fight here!"

Jiang Chen's facial expression was dark as his eyes roved coolly around the area. His tone was frosty, "Xue Tong was taken!"

"Ah? Who dares to do such a thing?"

"To kidnap someone from the doorway of our manor? That is too bold!"

"Young master, who's the enemy?"

Jiang Chen shook his head. "I don't know for now, but the opponent is very slippery and exceedingly adept at hiding his presence. The fight took place just a moment prior, but by the time I came out, I could no longer find any traces of their presence."

"They're that strong?"

Jiang Chen nodded. Their opponent was indeed strong. The Psychic's Head that he was practicing was sensitive beyond comparison. To make it so that even his Psychic's Head couldn't capture traces of the enemy's movement, this wasn't something that an ordinary practitioner could do at all.

In addition, Xue Tong was at the peak of the realm of true qi. The enemy had taken him down so cleanly without even giving him time to cry out for help. Hence, it was apparent that the enemy's possessed frightening strength and was definitely a spirit realm practitioner.

"Young master, there seems to be a wax ball in this corner." The attentive Wen Ziqi made a discovery in the corner.

"Don't you use your hand to pick it up!" Jiang Chen hastened to remind her.

He walked up, put on a pair of glove to avoid poison and crushed the wax ball in his hand. There was a note inside, "Jiang Chen, if you opened this note without dying from the poison inside, continue on to the next note. Select one of your men as the first sacrifice as the next step will be the death of every single person in your Jiang family, one after another!"

"It, it really was poisoned!" Everyone's hearts were still jittery with fear.

It was a good thing that the young master had been cautious. Otherwise, Wen Ziqi might have died on the spot after using her bare hand to pick up the wax ball.

“This enemy is incredibly crafty, he’s laid traps at every step along the way!”

The corners of Jiang Chen’s twitched. He had to admit that the enemy they’d run into this time was on a different level from the previous ones.

His opponents before had either been arrogant sect disciples or tyrannical noble sons. Although these people could be sinister, none of them could craft a plot of this level.

“Let’s go inside first!”

Jiang Chen knew full well that this matter was tricky. If the enemy had come knocking with weapons and attacks, he wouldn’t have been afraid at all. But this sort of soundless, traceless, and unexpected ambush was much more frightening.

He was in the light and the enemy was in the shadows. This kind of feeling was as though the enemy held all the initiative, and the only thing that they could do was defend, defend, and defend even more!

After they entered the house, Jiang Chen sent a group of people to distribute some antidote pills. “Keep these pills handy. If the enemy dared to attack us once, they’ll dare to attack us twice. It’s easy to defend against blades and spears in the light. What’s more frightening are the continued use of poison-related methods like these. We have to make our own preparations.”

Even a genius at the peak of the true qi realm like Xue Tong had been captured by the enemy. The remaining personal guards were naturally on the alert.

Even the Qiao brothers didn’t clown around for once.

“Damn it, where does this bastard come from? Young master, can it be the remnants of first prince Ye Dai’s influence?”

“The first prince? His influence has long since been wiped out. I think it’s very likely that it’s people from the Northern Palace.”

When the Azure Heaven Northern Palace was mentioned, it immediately resonated with a lot of people.

Considering the grudge they had with the Northern Palace, it was the most reasonable explanation that their old enemies from the Northern Palace had come to create trouble.

But the disciples of the Northern Palace didn’t seem to have this style of intricate crafting and plotting.

The Northern Palace’s style was straightforward — blatant highway robbery.

These bizarre methods and ways weren’t something that the disciples of the Northern Palace could pull off.

“Can it be the disciples of the Precious Tree Sect? Is it because the young master gave offense to Elder Iron the other day so he’s sent people to stir up trouble with us?”

The expressions of the personal guards all became grave when sect disciples were mentioned.

If it really was the sect disciples coming seek revenge, there wasn't much that the personal guards could do with their current level of strength.

Without Xue Tong, they couldn't even set up the Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation.

"Young master, should we notify the Dragonteeth Guard first?" Guo Jin proposed an idea.

"Right, we must blow this matter up and make sure that Crown Prince Ye Rong knows of it. This is the capital, the Ye family's territory. To think such a hidden power exists that it dares to openly kidnap people on the doorstep of a second rank noble!" Another personal guard, Shen Yifan, spoke up.

Jiang Chen nodded, "The numbers of our people are limited in this matter. We will need to borrow the Crown Prince and Dragonteeth Guard's strength to aid our investigation!"

Crown Prince Ye Rong had been about to rest for the night when he suddenly heard that something had happened in the Jiang family. The captain of the Jiang family personal guard, Xue Tong, had been taken in front of his home's own door.

This news broke the peace within the capital. It was though the news had grown legs with the speed at which it spread throughout the capital.

Tian Shao led the third troop of the Dragonteeth Guard and personally took charge of this case, commencing in a carpet-style search.

The Crown Prince obtained the decree of martial order from the king, commanding that all city gates, no matter on the ground or in the air, were to be sealed. People were only allowed into the city and weren't allowed to leave.

The originally peaceful picture within the Skylareland Kingdom was broken once again, like a wind sweeping in front of a rising storm.

Crown Prince Ye Rong was incensed, not just because something had happened in Jiang Chen's household or because of his existing friendship with Xue Tong since he had once been part of Ye Rong's team in the Autumn Hunt. It was more so because he thought he'd had a grasp on the situation within the capital, but hadn't known that such a lethal loophole exposed the danger lurking beneath the surface.

If they could capture the captain of the Jiang family personal guard from the Jiang manor doorstep today, perhaps these people could come to the East Palace and take him next.

Although the East Palace was under high security, Ye Rong didn't think that with Jiang Chen's strength, he'd be unable to protect even the doors of his own house!

This enemy was certainly very strong and very frightening.

Tutor Ye was also greatly taken aback when he received this shocking news. He sighed, "Even I was wrong this time. I had thought that the situation within the capital was at peace. Who would've imagined that such danger would be lurking? Little Dan, things are not so simple this time."

Dan Fei's slender brows creased slightly. "Lordmaster, can it be the remnants of the other princes rising from the ashes?"

The loadmaster shook his head, "The true core of their power has either been smothered or surrendered. This world is just this realistic. Not that many people would be willing to become martyrs for a few dead princes. Not to mention that Ye Dai and the others didn't possess such charisma. The enemy must certainly be enemies of the Jiang family."

"Could it be the Northern Palace?" Dan Fei thought of another potential suspect.

"Little Dan, stop guessing randomly. No possibility can be excluded before the truth has been excavated. I'd like to see how Jiang Chen handles things this time!" Ye Chonglou chuckled.

Although the Crown Prince and Dragonteeth Guard had already started moving, Jiang Chen didn't pin all his hopes on others. He hastily began making his own preparations as well.

He knew that this time's challenge would possibly be more difficult than any that had come before.