

Three Realms 251

Chapter 251: Something's Happened to Gouyu?

Although Elder Shun had quite a background, that was only when compared to those within the sixteen kingdoms. He had neither ascended beyond the limits of heavenly law nor reached the unlimited heavenly law.

Elder Shun could only speculate when it came to the affairs of the gods.

Even though he also knew that his demands of Jiang Chen were a bit harsh. In the annals of the history of the sixteen kingdoms, no one had ever ascended to the original realm within three to five years.

One had to know that within the sixteen kingdoms, including even the hidden sects, there were only just a few venerated original realm practitioners.

Even the lofty Ye Chonglou in the Skylareland Kingdom was only at the peak of the spirit realm, and a mere spirit king.

The level of spirit king was a step away from the original realm.

If put in a better light, one could say that they were half step original realm, but in actuality, they weren't in the original realm at all.

Even an extreme expert like Ye Chonglou was still pacing outside the door to the original realm. To demand that Jiang Chen breakthrough to said rank within three to five years was indeed beyond his power, even when the person in question had no idea of this matter and that someone was observing his movements from the shadows.

However, Elder Shun's notions also made a bit of sense as well.

If Jiang Chen was the genius and the clue that he was looking for, then he would naturally be one of the most unparalleled geniuses of his generation.

Historical records were made to be broken.

Regional restrictions were also made to be broken.

True geniuses would steamroll all the other geniuses of their generation and emerge from the masses in the same environment.

In the world of martial dao, which one of the legendary masters hadn't trampled over scores of other geniuses in their generation to surpass time itself and become eternal legends?

At Elder Shun's level of existence, his eye for appraisal was naturally different from the practitioners of the sixteen kingdoms.

Even Ye Chonglou in Elder Shun's eyes was only someone who barely mustered a pass out of the sixteen kingdom alliance.

When placed in the real world, even some of the younger geniuses would easily trample all over the tutor.

The world of martial dao was just that harsh.

Most would be fated for ordinary accomplishments in their lives if they had started off at a weak starting line by being born in a low and backwater place.

Those who could escape the circumstances of their birth were geniuses amongst geniuses. They were those who could surpass their era and true geniuses who wouldn't be confined by regional restrictions.

Elder Shun had been quite satisfied by Jiang Chen's performance up to now.

At least, he didn't see in him any of the flaws that would appear in those from a small place.

Jiang Chen had a particular bearing, an aura and a presence to him.

There was even a certain mysteriousness that Elder Shun couldn't fully see through.

It was precisely this level of mysteriousness that made Elder Shun feel that there was more to Jiang Chen, that there may actually be something to this youth that might surprise him.

At least, Jiang Chen's endless stream of pill recipes and his methods and demeanor in handling his enemies made Elder Shun feel that this wasn't a disciple that could've been raised in a mundane kingdom.

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Residing in the Jiang manor, Jiang Chen would've never guessed that such a mysterious grandfather and granddaughter duo would be covertly watching him from the shadows and even pinning some hopes on him.

Jiang Chen was going about his business as usual. It was either training or pill refining for him.

With the amount of spirit ingredients he'd collected by now, it would be enough for all of the Goldwing Swordbirds.

When the day came in which all of them broke through, his Swordbird army would become his new trump card!

In this regard, the powers he had at his disposal would be greatly enhanced. It'd be enough to handle any problems that suddenly cropped up.

With the matter of the Hidden Hand last time, Jiang Chen had thoroughly felt that he'd a lack of underlings.

He became a bit fidgety after seven days had passed.

Logically speaking, there shouldn't be any problems with the Dragonteeth Guard as an escort. The time that had elapsed was enough for them to make a return trip already.

Under ordinary circumstances, five days would be enough to make a round trip if they hadn't run into any problems.

It was a bit bizarre that Gouyu and the others hadn't returned after seven days.

With Jiang Chen's sensitive perceptions, he felt that something was wrong. Gouyu's personality was a bit more brash and so she might've run into something along the way, but Tian Shao's personality was quite steady and as such he wouldn't stir up any trouble at all.

Besides, with the current situation in the Skylareland Kingdom, who would dare go against the Dragonteeth Guard?

The Northern Palace?

Jiang Chen thought about it and felt that the Northern Palace may not necessarily have the balls to. After all, intercepting or killing the Dragonteeth Guard was running afoul of a serious taboo.

Even though the Northern Palace was backed by the Precious Tree Sect, if something like this blew up, the Northern Palace would suffer a great loss because they were in the wrong.

"I can wait no longer, I need to go take a look." Jiang Chen couldn't sit still.

He called over the Rat King and left a horde of Goldbiter Rats on guard in the Jiang manor, making straight for the border with the Rat King and another horde of Rats.

He didn't take his eight personal guards with him this time.

If even spirit realm practitioners like Tian Shao and Gouyu couldn't handle things, then his personal guards would be of no use.

The Goldbiter Rats moved through the earth as Jiang Chen rode on a Goldwing Swordbird.

The Goldwing Swordbirds were invincible when it came to short distance sprints. Add to the fact that Jiang Chen had been continuously feeding them good pills, the Swordbirds that he'd brought to the capital all had their level of training raise exponentially, with signs that they were about to break through into the spirit realm.

He made quick time along the way, switching on and off between the Swordbirds. This enabled him to maintain a high speed along the entire trip.

He flew for another two hours after passing by the Qingyang Valley, not pausing or slowing down at all when he entered Northern Palace territory.

He only wanted to make it to the border and thoroughly investigate what had happened.

If any idiots from the Northern Palace came to disturb him, he wouldn't mind clearing away old and new grudges in one go.

It was a good thing that he didn't run into any resistance along the way. This surprised Jiang Chen and made him feel that something was afoot.

Logically speaking, the Northern Palace weren't that accommodating. They were renowned for being robbers and plucking the feathers off of every wild goose that passed by.

It was quiet on his entire trip, and there was not a bit of disturbance where he'd originally stationed the Goldwing Swordbirds.

There were no signs of a fight and not a trace of a single person.

Thousands of Goldwing Swordbirds seemed to have vanished into thin air. Gouyu, Tian Shao, and his Guards had all seemed to have disappeared without a trace.

“Something’s gone awry alright...” Jiang Chen deployed his God’s Eye to the extreme as he looked in all directions. There wasn’t the slightest hint of human presence in the empty valley.

“This Skylareel Kingdom isn’t a peaceful place.” Jiang Chen felt a bit of regret. He’d even sent Tian Shao along with Gouyu.

With Tian Shao’s identity as a general, who would he be unable to handle within the Skylareel Kingdom?

Jiang Chen hadn’t thought at all that someone would dare act against the Dragonteeth Guard within the kingdom’s borders. This was scratching the Buddha’s head!

Jiang Chen conducted a carpet style search with his Goldwing Swordbirds in a radius of a hundred li, but still came up empty handed after a few hours.

This range had been enough for them to search for quite a while. The search would become even more difficult if they increased the area.

The Goldbiter Rat army finally arrived under the Rat King’s leadership at this time.

They could greatly increase the range of their search with the aid of the Goldbiter Rats.

Jiang Chen called over the Rat King and said, “Ole Gold, I didn’t run into any resistance at all when I passed through the Northern Palace. I suspect that even if this matter has nothing to do with them, their shadow can be found within it. You’re skilled at moving through the dirt, so come with me to visit the Northern Palace.”

Unless one went through underground tunnels, it would be impossible to get near to the Northern Palace.

Unless Jiang Chen tried to force his way in, it’d be impossible to get close to the seat of their power if he just showed up at their front door.

It’d be much easier with the Rat King leading the way.

They’d be able to soundlessly approach the seat of their power without none the wiser.

Jiang Chen had made use of the Rat King to obtain evidence of Yang Zhao and Lu Wuji’s scheming last time, and he planned on doing the same thing this time round.

He also planned on accompanying the Rat King.

If this matter really did have to do with the Northern Palace, Jiang Chen didn’t mind letting loose and start a slaughter, thoroughly settling all their debts.

One had to say, the Goldbiter Rat tribe really did have their rich, unique advantages. With the Rat King taking the field himself, they snuck into the Northern Palace’s central training center without expending any effort at all.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in the internals of the Northern Palace.

Those ordinary disciples were practicing and training as usual.

“These minor characters likely weren’t involved at all. Ole Gold, let’s go surveil those three geniuses. If there’s nothing to be gleaned from them, then we check in on that old bastard Liu Chengfeng.” Jiang Chen spoke to the Rat King.

The Rat King naturally listened to everything Jiang Chen said, as it wasn’t the first time this had happened either.

However, the three geniuses weren’t always together at all times. Jiang Chen first discovered Xiao Yu in the inner courtyard, the one who’d proposed marriage to Qing Ningyan last time.

Xiao Yu had obviously been greatly affected by this matter. He took it out on all the targets raised around him, furiously training a sword technique. Each stroke was more ruthless than the last as he seemed to want to thoroughly pulverize all of them.

“Senior brother Xiao, the honored master summons you.” A disciple suddenly walked over and spoke to the crazed Xiao Yu.

Xiao Yu who completely vented his emotions and then wiped off his sweat, asking coldly, “What is it?”

“I, I don’t know. The honored master said that those from the Precious Tree Sect have arrived.” The disciple was patently a bit afraid of Xiao Yu.

Xiao Yu’s eyes lit up when he heard these words. “Good, the senior brothers from the sect are finally here! Time is of the essence, I hope it’s not too late.”

Chapter 252: The Purple Sun Sect is Involved?

“Ole King, follow Xiao Yu.” Jiang Chen gave the order.

Although they were moving beneath the earth, this happened to be one of the Rat King’s strengths, so they easily followed Xiao Yu’s trail.

“Yu’er, hurry and come greet your senior brothers.” Liu Chengfeng’s voice sounded from the ground.

Xiao Yu hastened to walk forwards, “Junior brother Xiao Yu greets his senior brothers.”

“Mm, you’re Xiao Yu? Not bad!” A low voice responded.

Liu Chengfeng obviously held high esteem for the owner of this voice, “Yu’er, this is Zhou Yi, senior brother Zhou and one of Elder Iron’s personal disciples. He’s not yet thirty and already of the earth spirit realm. His future is boundless! You must take heed of your senior brother’s words in the future.”

When Xiao Yu heard that the other person was younger than him but already in the earth spirit realm, shock billowed his heart as he said respectfully, “This junior brother is beyond amazed by senior brother Zhou’s plentiful genius. I’ve been training in the mundane world all this time and thought that I was someone. I had been self satisfied when those in the outside world gave me the title of genius. It seems that I am a true frog at the bottom of the well. Senior brother Zhou is truly someone who lives up to the title of genius!”

Although Liu Chengfeng was rather taken aback by these words, he still felt rather gratified. It seemed that after suffering setbacks from last time's marriage proposal, Xiao Yu's mental state had been elevated.

At the very least, he voiced flattering words quite smoothly. If it'd been the previous Xiao Yu, he would've never disdained to say such things.

It looked like Xiao Yu had matured.

Liu Chengfeng doted on this disciple the most and he was happy to see him develop thus.

One had to say, Xiao Yu's flattery hit precisely the right points. He first self deprecated and lowered his posture, then he heightened Zhou Yi's genius through compare and contrast.

Some traces of a smile appeared on Zhou Yi's originally coolly composed face.

"Xiao Yu, your Northern Palace is also one of my honored master's men. We're all of the same family in the end. You needn't stand on ceremony. When the honored master received your urgent and secret missive this time, he sent me and these junior brothers out of the mountain. Just how large of a business deal is this that even you as the Northern Palace can't get a thorough grasp on things?"

Liu Chengfeng took over, "This time's matter involves too many parties, if it wasn't for the senior executives of the sect backing me up, I would be hard pressed to make this decision. The matter is thus — I saw Tian Shao of the Dragonteeth Guard accompany a woman to the border a few days ago. I sent men to follow them and I discovered that they had stashed away thousands of creatures at the peak of the mortal rank amongst the borders."

"Peak of mortal rank? Thousands of them?" Zhou Yi's tone tightened with gravity.

"Indeed, beyond a doubt! All fine specimens of the peak of mortal rank and they are of even higher quality than our Yellow Winged Condors and the Dragonteeth Guard's Lesser Dragons. I have never seen such numbers of spirit fowl in all my years of raising creatures for the Northern Palace."

The Yellow Winged Condors were the equivalent of the Silverwing Swordbirds. It was also quite difficult to raise them, and each Condor represented painstaking effort from the Northern Palace.

The first time when Jiang Chen had passed through the Northern Palace, he so happened to run into the two frauds that the Northern Palace disciples were furiously chasing after. It was because the two frauds had posed as Dragonteeth Guard and defrauded them of two of their Condors that the Northern Palace disciples had run into Jiang Chen and the others.

They had the impulse of giving up on those frauds when they saw Jiang Chen's entourage and switched to robbing Jiang Chen of his Goldwing Swordbirds instead.

This was the beginning of the grudges between the Northern Palace and Jiang Chen.

This also obliquely demonstrated that it was truly difficult to raise a Yellow Winged Condor.

And now that thousands of spirit creatures that were of even higher quality than the Condors had appeared, this caused the Northern Palace's blood to boil and for them to be at a loss of what to do.

Although they knew that all of it had to do with Jiang Chen, they still decided to take the risk when greed stared at them in the face.

Besides, they were well aware that the Northern Palace had long since formed a death grudge with Jiang Chen, and there was no need to be polite with him.

Liu Chengfeng knew that with the Northern Palace's strength, they may not be able to fight against Jiang Chen.

Therefore, he had chosen to send an extremely urgent missive to Elder Iron and ask him for his instructions.

If the sect made an appearance and gave its support, then Liu Chengfeng could act with impunity even if this matter had to do with Jiang Chen and the Dragonteeth Guard.

Zhou Yi also became enthusiastic when he heard Liu Chengfeng's words, "If they really are at the peak of the moral rank, then their battle strength is on par with an expert true qi master. This isn't rare if it was a human practitioner, but it is very uncommon if it was spirit creatures! Palace Head Liu, much credit goes to you for this time's accomplishment!"

Liu Chengfeng was also overjoyed with Zhou Yi's acknowledgement, "Not at all, not at all. We're all working for Elder Iron. I've always toiled away on his behalf without complaint."

"Mm, then, where are those spirit creatures now?" Zhou Yi asked.

Below the ground, Jiang Chen exerted his Ear of the Zephyr to its limits, deathly afraid of missing a single word. Rage was boiling and frothing in his heart for a long time.

All this did indeed have to do with the Northern Palace!

Liu Chengfeng sighed, "I'd thought to ambush them in our territory. After all, Tian Shao didn't take many men with him and he was with a woman to boot. We could ambush them with no one being the wiser. However, a great accident occurred in the midst of all this."

A great accident?

Zhou Yi was immensely startled as Jiang Chen below the ground was also taken aback. What accident could there have been?

"Just what is the situation? Hurry and speak."

"Disciples from my Palace had been keeping an eye on them along the way, preparing to ambush them as soon as they turned back. Who would've thought that the mantis was stalking of the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind. Tian Shao and the others were intercepted by another party before they had time to turn back."

"How is that possible? Apart from you, who else in the Skylaurel Kingdom has such daring to make a move against the Dragonteeth Guard?" Zhou Yi found it hard to believe.

"They're not from the Skylaurel Kingdom. The mountain valley that the spirit creatures were in was not part of our kingdom's jurisdiction, it was part of the neighboring Yunmeng Kingdom. The Yunmeng

Kingdom has always been unfriendly with us and under the protection of the Purple Sun Sect! Those who intercepted them were precisely disciples from the Purple Sun Sect!”

“The Purple Sun Sect?” Zhou Yi’s forehead creased. “Does the Purple Sun Sect wish to become involved in this mess?”

“Indeed, it’d be hard for them not to be tempted with such a large number of spirit creatures.” Liu Chengfeng sighed. “My abilities are paltry and I was forced to ask Elder Iron for his aid.”

“That is to say that the Purple Sun Sect already have the spirit creatures in hand?”

“Not yet, not yet!” Liu Chengfeng hastened to say. “The Purple Sun Sect Group is the stronger party as they have some disciples at the earth spirit realm and the small spirit realm. Although they hold an advantage in absolute power, but Tian Shao and the others have the strength of large numbers of spirit creatures. They’re an even match for now and they are in a stalemate. The Purple Sun Sect disciples obviously don’t wish to harm too many spirit creatures and they want to capture them alive, so they should still be in stalemate.”

“Stalemate?” Zhou Yi chuckled. “Stalemate is good, that’s precisely what we need. Come, let’s go and take a look. We do not be in a hurry to make a move. The best thing is that both sides sustain great losses and we swoop in for the easy pickings.”

Liu Chengfeng beamed, “That’s what I was thinking as well.”

Liu Chengfeng felt greatly reassured with the appearance of the sect disciples representing Elder Iron’s intentions.

“Right, we shouldn’t linger for too long. Tian Shao and his group have been there for a while already, I’m worried that Jiang Chen will become suspicious if they don’t return soon. Things will become even trickier if he arrives.”

“Jiang Chen?” Zhou Yi’s tone turned frosty when he heard this name. “And what the hell is he? I’ve heard that he’s offended my honored master and I was fretting I couldn’t find him. If he pokes his head out, I’ll capture him and take him back for my master’s judgement!”

Liu Chengfeng dithered, thinking that ‘Although the earth spirit realm is strong, Jiang Chen isn’t someone to be overlooked. Your honored master was at the peak of the earth spirit realm and he couldn’t do anything to Jiang Chen.’

Zhou Yi seemed to read Liu Chengfeng’s mind as he snorted, “Old Liu, speak candidly. I know that Jiang Chen scared you out of your britches last time and I’ve heard Wang You speak of the marriage proposal. This Jiang Chen played some power games and he cowered behind borrowed influence. If it hadn’t been for Tutor Ye’s appearance, my master would’ve put ten Jiang Chens to death. If it hadn’t been old man Fei suddenly appearing the last time, what basis would Jiang Chen have to strut around with?”

“Yes, yes! Jiang Chen is flaunting and strutting around with borrowed power!” Liu Chengfeng nodded hastily, but he inwardly prayed that Jiang Chen wouldn’t arrive that quickly. Although Zhou Yi spoke masterfully, Liu Chengfeng wasn’t that certain that the former would be able to do much against Jiang Chen.

After all, many people who'd seemed stronger than Jiang Chen had all walked away with a face full of dust in front of Jiang Chen. Yang Zhao didn't even know how he had died.

Perhaps Jiang Chen was skilled at borrowing strength, but why were these great personages happy to lend it to him?

Liu Chengfeng had thought of this question previously, but he had to admit that there was indeed a great power in Jiang Chen that they were unable to fully see through.

"Alright, good things shouldn't be delayed! Old Liu, lead the way and let's go take a look. I have a better idea now that the Purple Sun Sect disciples have become involved." A few more traces of ease could be found in Zhou Yi's tone.

Jiang Chen below the ground would've never guessed that even the disciples of the Purple Sun Sect would become involved. This posed a rather thorny problem.

"The Purple Sun Sect!" Jiang Chen lightly ground out that name as a sharp light shot flashed in his eyes. "Long Juxue, I hope your current strength doesn't disappoint, otherwise I'll feel rather bored when I kill you!"

The accidental involvement of the Purple Sun Sect reminded Jiang Chen of the events in the Eastern Kingdom, recalling Long Juxue, those disciples, and the battle in front of the Second Crossing.

Even to this day, Jiang Chen still hadn't determined just which hidden power had dissipated Chu Xinghan's mighty blow in the face of his overwhelming advantage and saved him?

Jiang Chen often thought of this matter even now, but he couldn't find an answer.

He'd once suspected that it had been the old grandfather of the Eastern clan, but he felt that that was impossible upon further thought. Chu Xinghan was someone who'd entered the earth spirit realm. The old grandfather of the Eastern clan was most likely not at that level yet.

Besides, there was no motivation for the Eastern grandfather to save him.

And even if he had, there was no reason for him to conceal his identity.

Chapter 253: In a Precarious Situation, the Scorching Green Ray

The Yunmeng Kingdom was part of the sixteen kingdom alliance, and also the Skylaurel Kingdom's neighbor. However, compared to the latter, the Yunmeng Kingdom was far worse off.

It was roughly on par with the Eastern Kingdom within the alliance — a second or third rate kingdom with no right to compete with the four great kingdoms at all.

As one of the four great kingdoms, the Skylaurel Kingdom was naturally a power of mammoth proportions.

In comparison, the Yunmeng Kingdom needed another to protect it, and that happened to be the Shangyang Kingdom.

The Shangyang Kingdom was on par with the Skylaurel Kingdom, and was one of the four great kingdoms within the alliance.

The relationship between the Purple Sun Sect and the Shangyang Kingdom was akin to that of the Purple Sun Sect and the Skylaurel Kingdom's. They provided the foundations for a sect headquarters!

Since the Yunmeng Kingdom had the protection of the Shangyang Kingdom, it indirectly meant that they were protected by the Purple Sun Sect as well. With this in mind, even the Skylaurel Kingdom wouldn't easily light the fires of war and bully the Yunmeng Kingdom.

Overall, even though the Yunmeng Kingdom was both weak and small, the Skylaurel Kingdom hadn't done much to it over the past couple of decades.

But of course, that was only because the Yunmeng Kingdom had docilely stayed within its borders, and had never provoked the Skylaurel Kingdom.

At this moment, in a mountain valley around three to five hundred li away from the Skylaurel Kingdom border.

Tian Shao and Gouyu had injuries all over their bodies, and the guards that Tian Shao had brought with him had all died in battle.

It was down to the two of them, two spirit realm practitioners, and a large flock of Goldwing Swordbirds, to hold the line. They were at the end of their tether, having retreated into this mountain valley.

"Tian Shao, you can leave as soon as you hand over that woman. I promise not to kill you."

A voice filled with the self-assurance of superiority traveled into the valley from the outskirts.

Tian Shao snorted coldly as a sliver of disdain appeared on his fierce expression. They wanted him to betray his friends? Dream on, you piece of shit!

Gouyu was rather calm as she turned to Tian Shao, "General Tian, you can go ahead and agree to their demands. I'm already quite grateful for the fact that you've fought with me to this point. Leave, and tell young master Chen that the Purple Sun Sect is behind all of this, he'll take revenge for me."

Tian Shao smiled in a grimace, "Miss Gouyu, your suggestion sounds great, but alas I have a heart of steel, and will never betray my friends just to flee to safety! Forget trying to make me leave!"

Gouyu had also predicted that Tian Shao would say such a thing and nodded, saying nothing more. Her charming eyes looked into empty space as she became lost in thought.

She was thinking, "Jiang Chen... if I fall in battle today, would that possibly keep my memory alive in your heart longer? If I had the chance to, I'd still tell you that I'd choose to follow you without regrets. Even if I died a hundred times and entered hell a hundred out a hundred times, I'd still have no regrets!"

That piercing sound traveled in from outside again, "Tian Shao, I'm giving you your final chance! Don't blame me for being unkind if you don't treasure it!"

Tian Shao laughed heartily, "Are all the disciples of the Purple Sun Sect wusses like you? Come on in and fight if you dare! I'm afraid of nothing beneath the heavens and on the earth — how could I be afraid of some rats from the Purple Sun Sect? Come on, let's fight! I'll bring some of you down with me, even if I'm to die!"

“Too obstinate to awaken to reason!”

The voice snorted coldly, “Since this is the case, I’ll send you on your way to hell!”

A tall and stockily built young practitioner wearing an almond tinted yellow robe raised his hand outside of the valley, and pointed his broadsword up towards the heavens.

Golden sunlight flashed from it as the broadsword suddenly emitted a heat wave akin to a furnace, and the trees and grass around them began to wither at a noticeable pace.

“Senior brother Luo, are we really going to destroy them?” Another disciple asked in a low voice behind the young practitioner.

“Since they’ve refused to recognize the error of their ways, why shouldn’t we destroy them? Is there any point in having this matter drag out like this?” The youth surnamed Luo frowned.

“Heh heh, senior brother Luo, that woman is the hated enemy of junior sister Long Juxue. It’d be best if she could be taken alive. I’m sure that my junior sister would be grateful towards senior brother Luo.” This person was actually the disciple who’d appeared at the Second Crossing, Yu Jie!

Luo Huang was one of the genius disciples of the sect.

However, he belonged to the Zhenyang faction, different from Yu Jie of the Shuiyue faction.

“Long Juxue?” Luo Huang smiled faintly. “That genius with the azure phoenix constitution? Your Shuiyue faction has indeed picked up a treasure. Alright, since you’ve spoken, I’ll give junior sister Long Juxue some face. However, I may not be able to stay my hand against the Swordbirds once we start fighting, even if I don’t kill the woman.”

Yu Jie sighed, “If we could use this Swordbird Army for our own purposes, that’d be for the best. Both the Myriad Spirit Sect and even the Precious Tree Sect outdo us in the manner of flying creatures. It’d be a pity to kill these Swordbirds.”

However, Yu Jie was also well aware that, once the aura of an earth spirit realm practitioner was activated, if these Swordbirds rushed forward without fear of death, they’d be dead without a doubt!

It was patently unrealistic to both keep these Swordbirds and kill Tian Shao.

In addition, these Swordbirds were obviously hard to tame. They’d tried all sorts of methods over the past couple of days, but had been unable to find a way to bring these Swordbirds under their control.

Although the Purple Sun Sect also had spirit creature tamers, Luo Huang didn’t want to wait any longer.

“Senior brother Luo, why don’t we wait a bit longer? Let’s wait until the spirit creature tamers from the sect arrive, and find a way to tame these Swordbirds. It’d be a great accomplishment for us!”

Yu Jie was different from Luo Huang.

Luo Huang boasted of uncommon potential, and was a first rate genius amongst the Purple Sun Sect. He was an elite amongst the personal disciples, and was someone sure to become a pillar of the sect in the future.

Yu Jie was different. His potential wasn't on Luo Huang's level, and thus he naturally didn't want to pass up any chances to accomplish any achievements. After all, if he couldn't climb up on the basis of his martial dao, then moving upwards through his accomplishments was the only other way.

"Wait?" Luo Huang creased his brow. "Those from the Precious Tree Sect are likely to arrive if we wait any longer."

"The Precious Tree Sect?" Yu Jie started.

"Do you think we're hunting Tian Shao and the others without anyone else being the wiser? Someone else has been observing us from the sidelines for a long while now, I just didn't want to alert our enemies. It's about time for those from the Precious Tree Sect to arrive!"

"This..." Yu Jie hadn't thought that something like this could've happened. "But, this is the Yunmeng Kingdom, and even more is part of our sect's jurisdiction."

"Technically speaking, yes, but Tian Shao is someone from the Skylaurel Kingdom after all. The Precious Tree Sect has ample excuse to come knocking. I'm not afraid of them, but the great selection of the four sects is about to begin, and there's no point in engaging in conflict with them at this point."

Luo Huang was a genius, but he didn't have the sort of personality that made him think he was number one under the heavens.

On the contrary, he'd always been quite practical in his doings, and was quite adept at measuring the gains and losses in both power and profit.

"Just one more day. I estimate that the spirit creature tamers from our sect will surely arrive in just one more day!"

Luo Huang frowned. "According to my calculations, the Precious Tree Sect will absolutely find their way here within a day. Are you absolutely sure you want to keep waiting?"

Although Luo Huang didn't think much of Yu Jie, he still felt that he had to ask him, since they were both from the same sect.

"Senior brother Luo, if we can bring all of these Swordbirds back with us, you can take 40% of the credit, I'll take 20%, and the others can have the rest of the credit, what do you think?"

The other Purple Sun Sect disciples were much weaker than Luo Huang, with only one or two being stronger than Yu Jie.

However, Yu Jie's advantage lay in the fact that he'd tracked the Goldwing Swordbirds, knew of their relationship with Jiang Chen, and knew of Gouyu and Jiang Chen's relationship.

This was something that none of the others could take away from him.

And right now, he only wanted twenty percent of the credit, leaving a large majority to Luo Huang.

Luo Huang considered things for a moment, and said, "I want 50%, you take 20%, and the others get 30%. This is how we'll settle things, or I'll take action immediately."

Yu Jie and the others looked at each other. None of them had any objections.

The strong were revered in this world. They wouldn't have been able to complete this task without this earth spirit realm practitioner.

When he saw that no one had any objections, Luo Huang put away his broadsword, and sat cross-legged on a nearby boulder. "Keep a close eye on them, and don't let them slip away. Notify me immediately if you find that they've relaxed their guard."

He was the alpha here, and absolutely had the right to speak as thus.

Yu Jie nodded, "Don't worry senior brother Luo, we'll keep a close eye on them."

He only hoped that his peers who'd taken the message back would hurry back with the spirit creature tamers. Once the Swordbirds were brought back to the sect, it'd be a huge achievement under his name!

If he happened to capture Gouyu as well, and was to hand her over to his junior sister Long Juxue, he'd be able to curry favor with her as well, killing many birds with one stone.

"It's a good thing that it was senior brother Luo Huang who came this time, and not any of the other senior brothers. Their tempers might not be as good as his, and they wouldn't have listened to me at all. Senior brother Luo is both strong, and follows good advice readily. He's sure to become a great character in the Purple Sun Sect in the future. It'd be quite a good thing if I could make use of this opportunity to curry favor with him."

Yu Jie became more and more excited the more he thought about it.

Luo Huang's ears suddenly twitched as he sat cross legged on the boulder. His eyes flashed open like lightning, and shot out a beam of dazzling, rainbow-coloured splendor.

"Who is it?"

Luo Huang's entire body sprang into the air before he'd finished speaking, and the broadsword on his back was also unsheathed, hovering sideways in midair as if a glaring sun in the sky.

Luo Huang's two eyes suddenly flared like two burning suns. His eyes widened as he shot out a stunning radiance towards the west.

The changes in his eyes caused Yu Jie and the others to become greatly agitated.

"It's the Scorching Green Ray! Senior brother Luo has successfully trained in it, that's amazing!"

"The Scorching Green Ray can cut through the void, and make it so that enemies hiding in the shadows and darkness have nowhere to hide!"

Luo Huang was as if a deity hovering in the air, his aura immensely awe inspiring as spirit qi was emanated in all directions around him, "Friend, what's the point in hiding since you've come?"

That burning radiant gaze shot into the empty air to the west, when a hearty laugh suddenly sounded from the thick growth of shrubbery, "It's friend Luo Huang with the Scorching Green Ray, no wonder your vision is so powerful."

The laughter seemed to spread like a storm as it rippled through the grass and trees, churning into waves of qi as it roiled towards Luo Huang, directly confronting him!

Chapter 254: Battle Between Geniuses of Two Great sects

Bam bam bam!

A red blur and a green blur struggled in midair as they punched and kicked, exchanging more than ten blows in the blink of an eye.

Suddenly, both blurs crashed together and then separated as two streaks of light, rebounding in their respective directions.

The red blur landed on the ground — Luo Huang. His blazing green eyes seemed like they would spit fire as they stared fixedly across the distance. Blade cuts criss-crossed the warrior robe draped over his body.

On the other side, the green blur had also dropped to the ground. It was Zhou Yi from the Precious Tree Sect. He wasn't much better off than Luo Huang. His clothes were in great disarray, as if they'd gone through a fire.

"You're Zhou Yi of the Sword of Cloud and Wind!" Luo Huang had also recognized Zhou Yi.

"Haha, you're the Scorching Green Ray alright, that's an impressive vision. Not bad, I am indeed Zhou Yi, the personal disciple of the Precious Tree Sect." A group of people surged out from behind Zhou Yi, which comprised of some peers from his sect and some from the Northern Palace, including both Liu Chengfeng and Xiao Yu.

In this regard, the Precious Tree Sect had superiority in numbers.

"Zhou Yi, if I recall correctly, this isn't within Skylaurel Kingdom borders. Don't you think you're overstepping by throwing your weight around out here?" Luo Huang's tone was cold.

Zhou Yi smiled faintly. "Luo Huang, a straightforward person doesn't resort to insinuations. Your Purple Sun Sect is oppressing people of my Skylaurel Kingdom, and we're the ones who are trespassing? You don't make any sense at all, no matter how you look at it."

Luo Huang smiled coldly, "Your people? Stop crying crocodile tears. Who doesn't know that these people are your hated rivals? When have your rivals become your people?"

"Even if we are rivals, that is an internal matter. When did it become up to your sect to interfere?"

Zhou Yi was bolstered when he saw that Luo Huang had fewer people than him.

Luo Huang's expression turned frosty, "What interference? That woman has a death grudge with my junior sister Long Juxue."

"Alright, I'll give you some face since you say that. You can take the woman." Zhou Yi appeared rather generous.

Luo Huang chuckled. "Give me face? Get this straight, Zhou Yi, you're in Purple Sun Sect territory now. When it comes to giving face, that's me deigning to give it to you! Tian Shao is one of yours, so you can have him back. Forget about the rest!"

Both sides were well aware that what they truly wanted was that flock of Goldwing Swordbirds.

If it was just Tian Shao, how could Zhou Yi have possibly pursued him all the way to this place?

"I say, friend Luo, you've gotten something wrong here haven't you? In the world of martial dao, you know better than I do that whoever has the bigger fist has the right to talk." Zhou Yi's tone was faint as his ruthless gaze spoke of his intention to beat down the other, due to his superiority in numbers. It was a naked threat.

Luo Huang's eyes narrowed as he suddenly started laughing. "Superiority in numbers? With just your little crew? Zhou Yi, you're a frog at the bottom of a well after all. I concede that you're fast, but I can guarantee that if I wanted to strike out with all my strength, I'd immediately dissolve your advantage in numbers!"

"You and what army?" Zhou Yi laughed coldly.

Luo Huang burst out laughing as he said expansively, "Me and my desire to try!"

Yu Jie started laughing as well at this time, "Zhou Yi, my senior brother Luo is amongst the apex of geniuses within the sect. Him mastering the Scorching Green Ray means that his practice of the "Heaven Scorching Sutra" is also complete. This is one of our sect's treasured methods. Once this method is activated, one's meridians will go up in flames and the practitioner's battle strength will increase explosively to become on par with that of a peak earth spirit realm practitioner. You have more people? When did the world of martial dao ever win with superiority in numbers?"

"The Heaven Scorching Sutra?" Zhou Yi's face changed slightly. This name obviously struck a chord in his heart.

He'd naturally heard of this name before. As rivals, the Precious Tree Sect wasn't an unfamiliar name to the Purple Sun Sect, and vice versa.

In terms of numbers of methods and power of treasures, the Purple Sun Sect was the strongest of the four.

Although the Precious Tree Sect possessed many arts as well, this wasn't its main focus. Its strength laid in pill medicines, and it took that crown home from the four sects.

The four sects all had their own respective strengths.

Although the Precious Tree Sect may not lose out in a battle between all the top geniuses, but in terms of individual combat and comparison of martial dao methods, it was really at a bit of a disadvantage.

Particularly when the name "Scorching Heaven Sutra" was quite a familiar one. Zhou Yi was well acquainted with it, and believed Yi Jie's words immediately.

"The Scorching Heaven Sutra. Pfft, Luo Huang, are you bluffing me?" Zhou Yi laughed coldly as his mind calculated fiercely. "I admit that the Scorching Heaven Sutra is quite good, but it's not like there are no

side effects to burning your meridians. If something goes awry and your meridians are damaged, which could adversely affect your training or even result in your death, that'd be quite the poor trade wouldn't it?"

Although the Sutra was impressive, but things couldn't be burned just because one wanted it to. This was a double edged sword. Deploying it to the extreme and provoking your deepest potential could make your battle strength increase explosively.

But the repercussions were also incredible.

Serious injuries would be the best case scenario, with mandatory bed rest for more than a few months.

The worst case scenario would be damage to the meridians and becoming a cripple with no cultivation at all.

The most frightening case would be instantaneous death.

Luo Huang's expression didn't change as he smiled faintly, "As a practitioner, I have prepared myself for death the moment I set foot on this path. It'd be a nice thing to have so many accompany me in death if I die. Besides, I don't think that your capabilities will make it worth for me to deploy it to the extreme. I only need to activate a bit of the flames to completely take out all of you. I'd only need to rest for three or five months at the most."

Zhou Yi roared in laughter, "This is to say that you plan on making such a dangerous play?"

"That depends on if you recognize the circumstances you're in." Luo Huang's expression was remote. "If you, Zhou Yi, are not afraid to die for a bit of profit, then why should I not suffer a tiny bit of injury to send you on your way?"

"Don't be too confident in yourself Luo Huang. You have trump cards and methods, but which one of us doesn't when we've reached this level? Perhaps you can kill me, but the price will absolutely not only be resting for three to five months. Don't forget that the great selection is about to begin. This time's selection doesn't involve only the lower level disciples. Even us personal disciples, with even the stronger true disciples and utmost geniuses will become involved as well. This is a rare occasion that comes around once in a hundred years. Do you truly want to miss it?"

As a sect genius, Luo Huang had naturally heard of the great selection and had his own ambitions for it.

However, his greatest positive characteristic was that he had a resolute heart.

He always acted decisively and would never dither once he made a decision.

"Don't mention the great selection to me. If I can't even make it past the small matter of today, then what's the use in mentioning the great selection? Zhou Yi, your little schemes and ploys are useless on me. Either get the hell away from here with Tian Shao, or fight me one on one! The winner is king!"

Luo Huang knew of Zhou Yi's reservations and so he fiercely seized on this weakness and didn't let go.

If Zhou Yi didn't dare do so, then his presence would be assuredly diminished.

If he did meet Luo Huang in battle, then the latter had confidence that he could defeat Zhou Yi. He was full of confidence with his Scorching Heaven Sutra.

Zhou Yi was backed into a corner by Luo Huang's words. His face frosty, "Luo Huang, are you joking? Why must I fight you one on one when I have more people?"

Luo Huang leered, "Then come at me in a group! The more I kill, the happier I am. Perhaps I'll breakthrough as I slaughter you all!"

"Crazy!" Zhou Yi was a bit speechless. This Luo Huang was a true madman alright. If it was anyone else, they would've held back a little because of the great selection and not want to lay their life and future down on the line.

But Luo Huang didn't care about this at all.

Although Zhou Yi wasn't afraid of Luo Huang, he still knew that he was a bit worse off when compared to Luo Huang. Both sides would undoubtedly end up with grievous wounds if they engaged in single combat.

But if Luo Huang really did deploy the Sutra to its extreme and disregarded the costs, it was possible that he could kill Zhou Yi.

However, Zhou Yi had his trump cards as well.

It wouldn't be that easy for Luo Huang to kill him.

"Old Liu, join me in attacking Luo Huang in a moment. The others need to take care of the other Purple Sun Sect disciples as quickly as possible. Make the fight quick!"

Liu Chengfeng was the Northern Palace head at the heart of it all, and his strength was at the fourth level spirit realm. As the head of a great site, although there was a gap between his strength and that of true sect geniuses, it wasn't as if he had no advantage whatsoever in the form of greater age and more battle experience.

Liu Chengfeng nodded, "Alright, make it a quick!"

When Luo Huang saw Zhou Yi and Liu Chengfeng speak to each other in low voices, he knew the two were up to something.

He raised his aura and prepared himself for battle.

At this moment, one of the Purple Sun Sect disciples standing guard sprinted over. "Senior brother Luo, those... those two people... are gone!"

Luo Huang had been holding himself in readiness and about to strike when his body froze upon hearing these words. His gaze chilled, "What did you say?"

"Those two people are gone." The disciple's face was as if he'd seen a ghost.

"Weren't you looking at them?!" Luo Huang yelled.

"I... I turned my head to look in this direction for a few seconds. Besides, there's no way out of the mountain valley."

"Then how could they have disappeared?!" Luo Huang really wanted to fling a slap over. However, with those of the Precious Tree Sect present, in the end, he restrained this urge.

Zhou Yi started guffawing when he heard this, "Luo Huang, although you're quite strong, your teammates are all dumb as pigs!"

Luo Huang glared ferociously at Zhou Yi as he strode towards the mountain valley.

Flap flap flap.

The sound of trees weaving suddenly sounded out from the mountain valley, cascading like the tide as scores of Goldwing Swordbirds suddenly shot for the clouds and rose into the sky.

"No, these Swordbirds want to escape!" Luo Huang's body shot into the mountain valley.

Zhou Yi threw a look at Liu Chengfeng, "Go, go take a look!"

The momentum of a thousands Swordbirds rising from the valley and shooting for the clouds was incredibly astonishing.

Once the Swordbirds spread out, even earth spirit realm practitioners would find it hard pressed to keep them, not to mention that they had no intentions of killing these Swordbirds. They wanted the Swordbirds alive for their own purposes.

However, they had no idea which one to capture once they all spread out. Even if everyone tried to capture one each, how many would they be able to capture?

Chapter 255: The Bewitching Lotus Reveals Its Might

"Ole Gold, do you have confidence in taking them all out in one fell swoop?" Jiang Chen asked.

The Rat King sighed, "The greatest weakness of our Goldbiter Rat tribe is our capability of flight. Until we evolve to the point of growing wings, the fighting prowess of the Goldbiter Rats remains limited. I'm confident in killing them all so long as they don't scatter, but I'm unsure should they try to flee; particularly that Zhou Yi, he's fast and won't be easy to take down!"

Jiang Chen felt somewhat regretful when he heard these words. "Then it turns out that you can't be seen. See if you have the opportunity to ambush some of them."

"Heh heh, my best target is Liu Chengfeng. Young master Chen, honestly speaking, your Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice is actually the best weapon for ambushes at the moment. With the current strength of your Lotus, you'd have no problem devouring four second level spirit realm practitioners in one go should you command four vines at one time."

Jiang Chen's eyes gleamed.

"Young master Chen, the devouring abilities of the Lotus are quite strong. I feel that many disciples from the Purple Sun Sect are suitable targets. They specialize in fire attribute methods and some specialize in

ice attribute attacks as well. If these people were to be swallowed, the power of their spirit oceans will in turn nurture the Lotus, indirectly strengthening your own spirit ocean.”

The Rat King’s suggestion made Jiang Chen’s heart hammer.

Of the other Purple Sun Sect disciples with Luo Huang, most practiced fire attribute methods whereas Yu Jie’s men practiced ice attribute fighting techniques. Jiang Chen had already learned of the latter from the battle at the Second Crossing.

When he thought of Yu Jie, the situation at the Second Crossing once again rose in Jiang Chen’s mind.

“Alright, ole Gold, it’s settled. You feed whenever there’s a good opportunity, but remember not to expose yourself. It’s not time for that yet!”

The Rat King was cowardly by nature and would never have exposed himself, even without Jiang Chen’s reminder. The Goldbiter Rat tribe found most joy precisely in sneaking around, it was in their nature. Even when they held an overwhelming advantage, they still preferred to keep a low profile.

Luo Huang and Zhou Yi were leading the pack as everyone rushed into the mountain valley.

Liu Chengfeng was close behind, following them inside.

The rest of the crowd similarly swarmed into the mountain valley according to their respective speeds.

Jiang Chen silently counted off beneath the ground, slowly spreading out four Lotus vines in formation from below.

His first target was naturally Yu Jie.

That fellow had strutted around and crowed to his face at the Second Crossing, putting on airs as if he lorded over all. Jiang Chen had a deep impression of him.

If it hadn’t been for that fellow, he likely would’ve killed Long Juxue long ago.

“He’s only at the second level spirit realm, his training is nothing much. I shall destroy him first! Lotus, activate; follow him!”

It wouldn’t be difficult to kill Yu Jie, but he’d need to time it right if he wanted to do so without alerting the others.

It was a good thing that everyone was focused on charging into the valley now. So long as he went about things carefully, he’d still have the chance.

Shrubbery and trees grew vibrantly within the valley, providing a natural cover.

Jiang Chen used the Ear of the Zephyr and listened for the rhythm of Yu Jie’s footsteps on the ground, as well as the distance he was maintaining from the other people.

“Mm, this is a chance. Lotus, rise!”

As Yu Jie ran ahead, he suddenly felt the ground beneath his foot give way and just when he was about to look down, a strong force sucked him underground.

An enormous ice lotus suddenly emerged from the ground as its petals unfurled, enclosing Yu Jie like a giant mouth.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!

The ice lotus swiftly returned below the ground after it'd succeeded.

Everything had been completed within a second and hadn't left a single trace behind on the surface.

First one, check!

With this experience, Jiang Chen was like a fish in water in his subsequent attempts. His second target was Xiao Yu. That fellow had likely trained in ice attribute techniques was keenly picked up by another ice lotus vine as it was very sensitive in this regard.

Xiao Yu's strength was roughly on par with Yu Jie's.

He'd expended no effort with Yu Jie, and thus Xiao Yu was easily captured as well.

Coupled with Zhou Yi's large numbers, no one even realized that Xiao Yu had gone missing. After all, the only person who really paid attention to Xiao Yu was his master Liu Chengfeng.

After Xiao Yu was taken, another two fire lotus vines chased after two Purple Sun Sect disciples, locking onto their targets.

These two disciples were Luo Huang's junior brothers and roughly on par with Yu Jie.

However, these two were smarter and hadn't separated from the pack as they charged in.

"These two then!"

Jiang Chen listened in on their footsteps after he surveyed their surroundings and noticed no one was particularly close to these people.

The two fire lotus vines broke through the earth before dragging those two below the ground as fast as lightning.

The petals folded, completely entangling the duo.

Once they'd been enclosed by the Lotus, the victims had no way to struggle free at all. The level of the Lotus was able to rank first beneath the heavens, it was laughable for an ordinary practitioner to even think of breaking free.

Although Jiang Chen's current ability with the Lotus wasn't to the point of being overwhelming, the Lotus' innate strength was still there, so even its weakest form wasn't something that a couple second level spirit realm practitioners could hope to break free of.

One of the ice lotuses slowly unfurled a gap, revealing the beet red and almost suffocated Yu Jie.

His head immediately poked out when the petals loosened up and he gasped for air. Although all was dark in front of his eyes and he couldn't move a muscle from his waist down, he didn't have time to consider where he was at all.

He only wanted to breath, greedily lusting for air.

After panting a couple times, he finally discovered that he'd been entangled by an ice-colored lotus.

Some petals were still stuck to his body and had created an incredible suction, thoroughly holding him in place. He couldn't move a muscle no matter how much he struggled.

"What... what the hell is this?" Yu Jie panicked and reached a hand out to grasp the weapon on his back. His palm had only just reached his weapon when an enormous strength sent his right arm flying!

A dripping, right arm flew out into the air.

"Ah!!" Yu Jie screamed ghastly, scared witless.

He'd never been a part of such a bizarre scene in his life.

"Scream, scream all you'd like. Your desperate screams are music to my ears, Yu Jie." A calm voice suddenly spread from the darkness.

"Who? Who is it?" Sweat beaded on Yu Jie's forehead from pain, but him hearing a human voice at this moment was like a drowning man suddenly finding a floating log.

"Can you not make out who I am?" Jiang Chen chuckled softly in the darkness.

"Who... just who are you?" Yu Jie started. "Brother, no matter who you are, please, I beg you, save me! I've been entangled by this demonic thing, you..."

Yu Jie tried to hold up beneath the soul-searing pain and begged for help when his voice suddenly croaked silent, his eyes widened in stupor.

This was because he'd suddenly discerned the other's face in the darkness.

"You're, you're Jiang Chen!" Yu Jie's teeth chattered in fear as he felt like he'd fallen into an icy cavern as he trembled uncontrollably.

"Your memory's not bad, hmm." Jiang Chen walked closer with a supercilious smile. "Well? It hurts, doesn't it?"

Yu Jie sweated profusely as he rasped out, "Jiang Chen, what... what are you doing here?"

Jiang Chen's face sank. "What am I doing here? You're asking me that? I should ask you what are you doing here? Lusting after my Goldwing Swordbirds, hmm? Want to capture my followers to ask for a pat on the head from that bitch Long Juxue, eh?"

Yu Jie's face was ashen, "I... I... Jiang Chen, this is a misunderstanding, absolutely a misunderstanding. I have no grudge with you, I only followed my master's orders. If you let me go, I swear to the heavens that I'll be your dog in the future. I'll fight in whatever direction you point me to, and bite whoever you want me to!"

Jiang Chen paused.

He'd almost suspected that he'd captured the wrong person!

He took a closer look, It was indeed Yu Jie.

However, that particular Yu Jie had carried himself with such dignity and airs, such aloof nobility that day; placing himself in such a lofty position and acting as a lord above the world!

But now, this Yu Jie was voicing words such as these! His posture was so low, beneath even an ordinary, mundane practitioner.

Jiang Chen had extreme difficulty in connecting these two scenarios together. A sect disciple would be so afraid of death that he would even stoop so low?

Jiang Chen sighed, "Yu Jie, I've seen the greedy, tyrannical, hypocritical, and arrogant sides of sect disciples. But it's the first time I've seen something like your ugliness in cravenly clinging to life instead of bravely facing death. You're teaching me a lesson alright. It seems that the so-called sect disciples are all like this. I truly wonder how the sects will continue to survive into the future?"

Yu Jie had a long face on, "Sect disciples are human too, and humans are afraid of death. Jiang Chen, I'll do anything you want as long as you let me go! I'm very close to junior sister Long Juxue now. I know you hate her. I can even trick her to leaving the sect so she'll be at your mercy, how's that? Long Juxue may be a bitch, but she's still a virgin. Jiang Chen, if you're interested, you can take her first and then kill her. You can do as you please. You know it, I'm useful to you!"

Jiang Chen smiled. He hadn't thought that a sect disciple could sink to such depths.

He once again thought back to how cocky this fellow had been before.

Jiang Chen lightly raised an eyelid. "Yu Jie, you disappoint me. I rather wish that you'd be as arrogant as you'd been at the Second Crossing. You'd said then that no one beneath the heavens or on earth could save me. You'd also said that you only needed one finger to destroy me. Should I return these word back to you now? Do you still remember how many of my Goldwing Swordbirds you slaughtered then? You lorded it over me with your strength of second level spirit realm that day, but how come beg in front of us for mercy in the blink of an eye?"

All color drained from Yu Jie's face as a chilling feeling gripped his heart and spread throughout his body.

Chapter 256: The Lotus Devours and Grows

Yu Jie had flaunted both his power and his strength in many situations up to now throughout his life, but he'd never forgotten the events of the Second Crossing.

That day, he'd forced Jiang Chen to almost desperate situations in order to curry favor with Long Juxue. In order to express how powerful he was, he'd thoroughly humiliated Jiang Chen with both words and actions, and had killed a countless number of his Swordbirds.

If he hadn't forgotten these matters, how could Jiang Chen have forgotten?

Jiang Chen would've never forgiven Yu Jie, on behalf of those loyal Swordbirds who'd insisted on protecting their master.

Not to mention that Yu Jie was here with Purple Sun Sect disciples to make a second attempt at the Goldwing Swordbirds!

Whether it was the Goldwing Swordbirds, or Gouyu and Tian Shao, they were all Jiang Chen's friends and followers. Raising a blade against them was the same as raising a blade against Jiang Chen.

As glibly as Yu Jie could talk, Jiang Chen remained unmoved, without even a ripple in his heart, given that he'd trained in the Boulder's Heart.

"Jiang Chen, listen to me! We both belonged to our sides then. I had no choice because I needed to curry favor with Long Juxue. If you kill me now, that still leaves the culprit Long Juxue alive. It's much more beneficial if you don't kill me. You'll receive a loyal dog first off, and I can also help you lure and kill Long Juxue..."

"Loyal dog? You?" Jiang Chen smiled remotely.

"Yes! I can swear to both the heavens and the earth if you don't believe me." Yu Jie hastily said.

"It's not that I don't believe you." Jiang Chen smirked aloofly. "But that you don't seem to have the qualifications to be my dog!"

His face darkened and his tone chilled, "Don't you dare talk to me about luring out Long Juxue. I'm sure I'll kill that bitch, what do I need your help for?"

Jiang Chen had no desire to listen to Yu Jie's blather after that, and sent out a thought causing the lotus petals to once again swallow Yu Jie.

The others were also slowly swallowed, digested, and absorbed at the same time.

One had to say, the Lotus' power of devourment was quite astonishing. It cleanly did away with the four spirit realm practitioners in the span of a moment.

The power within their spirit oceans was also transformed into currents that flowed from the vines into Jiang Chen's spirit ocean, and became one with the Flaming Heart of Ice.

The Flaming Heart immediately became much stronger after receiving these nutrients.

The essence of the four spirit realm practitioners was enough to help the Lotus grow rapidly.

"With the nourishment from this time, I believe that I'll be able to manipulate six vines before long, or possibly even more. It looks like my own spirit ocean needs to continuously advance as well, else it'll become increasingly difficult to manipulate more vines."

Of course, now that the Flaming Heart had become one with his spirit ocean, the essence that it absorbed would also feed and enhance his own spirit ocean, becoming a part of his training.

When he sensed the joy of the Flaming Heart within his spirit ocean, Jiang Chen mused, "Perhaps this time's gains can help me assail the third level of the spirit realm. I've heard talk of the great selection of the four great sects before, I wonder what that's all about?"

Jiang Chen was slightly curious, as this news slightly tempted him.

If the great selection's purpose was only to choose who could enter the four great sects, then he wouldn't have much interest in it. However, he'd heard Zhou Yi say that even the top geniuses of the four great sects would become embroiled within it.

This demonstrated that this time's great selection wasn't a simple matter.

There had to be a reason behind a great selection that only came about once every hundred years. Although Jiang Chen wasn't quite enthused about entering a sect, he knew that encountering a sect was unavoidable if he wanted to assimilate himself into the world of the martial dao.

After all, in any world of the martial dao, the sects would command the great majority of all resources.

It was possible to be a wandering practitioner.

However, it was patently unrealistic to be a wandering practitioner for one's entire life. Since the sects controlled most of the resources, one would have to join a sect in order to gain more resources.

"Ole Gold, how did you make out?"

Jiang Chen stowed the art of the Lotus away, and reconvened with the Rat King.

The Rat King belched. "Young master Chen, you really need to thank me. I've chomped on all the people that you hate. I'll take bites out of that Elder Iron one day as well, if he doesn't behave."

"You destroyed Liu Chengfeng?" Jiang Chen started.

The Rat King patted his bulging stomach, "He's inside, haha!"

He sighed after speaking, "But what a pity, that Luo Huang really has a great martial dao endowment. I might have a chance to break free of my shackles if I devour him, and break through the restrictions of the spirit rank, heading towards the saint rank!"

Twists of fortune were needed to enable bloodline evolution.

But there weren't that many restrictions on the raising of one's strength.

With the Rat King's current level of training, he was roughly on par with Ye Chonglou. Although he might not have as much practical experience as Ye Chonglou, they were still roughly on the same level.

A saint rank spirit creature was the equivalent of a human original realm practitioner.

There weren't any saint rank creatures within the boundaries of the sixteen kingdoms.

Dan Fei had wanted to take the risk in the maze realm and capture baby spirit creatures because she was enamoured by the higher potential of spirit creatures within the maze realm, and that they had the potential to be raised into saint rank creatures.

One had to hand it to them, Ye Chonglou and Dan Fei's intentions were good, but the sixteen kingdom's resources were limited, and it was another story as to whether or not they'd succeed in the end.

Of course, their chances would greatly increase if Jiang Chen was willing to help them.

"There's no need to linger here. Ole Gold, let's go!" Jiang Chen was still worried about Gouyu, Tian Shao, and his large flock of Goldwing Swordbirds.

The Rat King grinned, "Sure thing!"

A man and a rat quickly fled the scene.

Back in the valley, Luo Huang and Zhou Yi's mutual check on each other actually gave the Goldwing Swordbirds their best chance to escape.

Apart from a few falling to the earth from injuries, most of the Goldwing Swordbirds successfully escaped from the valley.

With their speed, so long as they weren't injured by splash damage as the spirit realm practitioners attacked each other, they had absolute confidence in escaping from the area.

Luo Huang's broadsword slashed through the air, and a stream of sword aura churned through the air like a fire dragon, rampaging through the air above the valley as it turned everything the color of flame.

Zhou Yi chuckled as he didn't meet the other in a head on fight. He evaded skillfully, and left behind green shadows in the air. No matter how much the fire dragon sword aura pursued him, it could never harm Zhou Yi in the slightest.

"Zhou Yi, you dare make a mess of my plans?!" Luo Huang was infuriated.

Zhou Yi knew that if he were to really engage the other in direct combat, there was still a bit of a gap in their strength. However, he could still trade some blows back and forth if he employed some tricks to deal with Luo Huang.

However, no matter how much the two fought, it was just because of a matter of pride in the end.

The Goldwing Swordbirds had already escaped. As strong as they were, there was no way that they could bring back all of the Swordbirds.

It was just a moment's worth of high running emotions that had caused them to fight each other to the death here.

"Luo Huang, I'll play with you if you want to play. However, the prey's all gone. What's the point in the two of us fighting to the death here?" Zhou Yi busied himself in dodging the edge of Luo Huang's sword as he called out.

Luo Huang was incensed, "Zhou Yi, how would such a thing have happened if it wasn't your interference?!"

"Shut your mouth! I'll give you what your heart wants if you insist on the two of us going down together!" Zhou Yi was also a bit enraged to see Luo Huang's dogged pursuit of him.

A Purple Sun Sect disciple came running over with a stricken look as the two fought, "Senior brother Luo, things are bad! Senior brother He and Zhao, as well as Yu Jie from the Shuiyue faction, have all disappeared!"

Luo Huang had just been getting into the groove of battle when he suddenly heard these words. He halted as he spoke with barely veiled anger, "What did you just say?"

Another Precious Tree Sect disciple came running over before the first disciple had time to respond, "Senior brother Zhou, Liu Chengfeng, and his disciple Xiao Yu are missing as well!"

Zhou Yi had been taking pleasure in another's misfortune, when he heard that the Purple Sun Sect's disciples had gone missing, but he didn't have time to delight in this for long when he heard the same news from his own sect. It was as if a basin of cold water had been unceremoniously dumped on his head.

"Liu Chengfeng and Xiao Yu?" Zhou Yi didn't have the desire to laugh at someone else's misfortunes now. "Could they still be in the back?"

The Precious Tree Sect disciple had a long face, "We saw Liu Chengfeng run out in front. He was only one step behind you. But now that we're all here, he's gone. And as for Xiao Yu, we also saw him maintain roughly the same pace as us, just that everyone's position was a bit spread out. We were here to capture Tian Shao and that hag, yet who would've thought..."

Zhou Yi was both flustered and exasperated. It was his first time meeting Xiao Yu, thus he didn't feel much for the guy. Although Xiao Yu was a genius outer disciple, he'd only make for an ordinary inner disciple.

Liu Chengfeng however, was different. As the head of the Northern Palace, he was greatly valued by his honored master, Iron Elder.

Liu Chengfeng was a fourth level spirit realm practitioner, an earth spirit practitioner, as well. How could he have gone missing just like that? If even Liu Chengfeng had met some danger, didn't that mean that he, Zhou Yi, wasn't completely safe within this valley either?

Luo Huang was also interrogating his remaining peers with a grave face.

"Senior brother Luo, we fanned out in formation when we rushed into the valley, as we were afraid that the two were hiding somewhere and would take advantage of this to escape. So although our formation was a bit spread out, we absolutely remained within a range such that we could easily help one another. We really didn't see how they vanished."

"You didn't even hear a yell?" Luo Huang's gaze was fierce and his tone displeased.

"No." The remaining Purple Sun Sect disciples were all quite dejected.

"Then what are you standing around for?! Go look for them!" Luo Huang roared.

He didn't have the desire to battle with Zhou Yi at the moment. It was a good thing that the Precious Tree Sect was also looking for their missing people as well.

If it weren't for the people missing from both sides, it's likely that they'd've suspected each other, and then have had a mass brawl to the death.

However, they couldn't find any clues no matter how hard they searched.

Logically speaking, with the level of training these people had, there would've at least been signs of a struggle, even if they were ambushed.

Even if there weren't any traces, they would've still had the time to cry out when they were ambushed, right?

But, including even Luo Huang and Zhou Yi, no one present had heard anything. It was as if the missing few had evaporated into thin air.

Some even thought that these fellows had gotten afraid and turned tail to run.

Of course, this notion was quickly dismissed. However, everyone's minds were still full of questions —

If they hadn't retreated, and there were no signs of a struggle, then where had these people disappeared to?

Chapter 257: The Disciple Scared Witless

Luo Huang and Zhou Yi were both geniuses who had seen many great scenes in their life. They were notable characters in their respective sects.

However, such a bizarre scene made chills run down their back.

Although the valley was large, those who had gone missing weren't three year old children. It was impossible that they'd just wandered off. There were only so many areas that they could search in. There was also no reason for them to have separated from the main group.

They searched back and forth in these areas, but they couldn't find any clues at all.

It was like those people had truly just vanished.

A disciple suddenly approached Zhou Yi nervously, "Senior brother Zhou, do you remember how Yang Zhao died?"

"What?" Zhou Yi was startled and immediately remembered the circumstances.

Zhou Yi had also heard his honored master Iron Can mention Yang Zhao's death. Yang Zhao had been in a secret chamber, in the heavily fortified Dragonteeth Guard headquarters when he'd died a mysterious and unexplained death. Those outside hadn't heard any cries for help or sounds of struggle.

But Yang Zhao had well and truly died in the secret room and left only a skeleton behind.

"This... can it be..." Zhou Yi was reminded of the circumstances of Yang Zhao's death, and he remembered his honored master's slightly fearful tone. He felt all the hairs of his body stand up in that moment.

When this frightening notion came visiting his mind, he no longer had any thoughts of continuing the search. Only the urge to retreat pounded in his heart now.

He waved his hand and gathered all those remaining.

"Forget it, they're not three year olds. They'll be able to find the way back if they're lost. If they were captured by the enemy, then the fact that this enemy could do so without us noticing at all means that they are much stronger than us. There's no point in us remaining here. Let's go back and report it!"

As highly valued as Liu Chengfeng was, he still wasn't worth as much as Zhou Yi, a personal disciple!

Zhou Yi didn't want to go down in a forsaken place like this.

Apart from Liu Chengfeng and Xiao Yu, a few other elite disciples had also come along this time. Their faces darkened when they heard Zhou Yi's words.

"Young master Yi, are we truly leaving without Palace Head Liu and Xiao Yu?"

Zhou Yi's face chilled, "What about it?"

"We're not leaving before we find them." The Northern Palace elites were quite different to Zhou Yi. Liu Chengfeng was their Palace Head. If he was dead, that made them headless flies, without any support at all.

"Not leaving? Do you think you're stronger than Liu Chengfeng? If Liu Chengfeng's been ambushed by the enemy, you're just waiting for death if you remain. If Liu Chengfeng has gotten lost, they'll return to the Northern Palace sooner or later. What's the point of you remaining here?" Zhou Yi naturally couldn't voice his worries and doubts. It would show others that he was afraid of death and cravenly desired life.

Luo Huang remained quite resolute on the Purple Sun Sect's side as he fully deployed the Scorching Green Ray, searching all over and stopping in one place.

This was precisely where Yu Jie had disappeared.

He was stronger than Zhou Yi in terms of martial dao training alright.

The Scorching Green Ray, with its sensitive perceptions in particular, allowed him to be more than five times stronger than his peers.

"This is the place. If I sense things correctly, Yu Jie's ice attribute aura stops here." Luo Huang stopped here and he began to comb over the area finely.

"Hmm?" A curious gaze suddenly flashed in Luo Huang's eyes. "You guys, come here and take a look at this. Do you think the dirt in this area is a bit softer and different from other areas?"

Although the Lotus' abilities in extension and retraction would leave almost no trace on the ground, it would still leave the most minute of details.

It would be difficult for a practitioner of the same level to detect them.

But Luo Huang practiced the Heaven Scorching Sutra, and he had mastered the Scorching Green Ray. His vision was at least five times, maybe even ten times superior to that of his peers.

He still found a few traces when he observed keenly.

The others walked over and looked all over, but they couldn't make anything out. After all, their vision was far inferior to Luo Huang's.

Luo Huang's expression was grave as he grasped his broadsword in his hands. He roared, "Out of the way!"

Everyone sprang to the two sides.

A gout of flame as fierce as the sun ignited into existence around the broadsword.

Luo Huang yelled, "Open!"

The broadsword cut savagely through the air like a sharp edge hewing open the heavens and earth, landing on the ground.

A crack split the ground open like a tofu being sliced into two, moving swiftly forward and forming a great moat.

Luo Huang, immensely courageous and possessing high skill, leapt down into the moat. His Scorching Green Ray swept in all directions as he brandished his broadsword.

Ravines and gullies kept appearing as Luo Huang continued to cleave the ground open.

The criss crossing gullies were all revealed to him in a short amount of time.

Luo Huang's eyes suddenly shifted as his questing hand picked something up. His figure blurred as he landed on the ground like a fiery bird.

He was clutching something in his hand.

When everyone focused their eyes, they saw that it was an arm! It was one that looked rather fresh!

"This... This is Yue Ji's arm!" A Purple Sun Sect disciple immediately recognized it.

"It's... senior brother Yu Jie's. He has the unique tattoo of the Shuiyue faction on his arm. I recognize the bracelet as well!" Another disciple also training under Master Shuiyue was ashen faced as he started stammering.

Those from the Precious Tree Sect all rushed over when they heard the commotion.

Their facial expressions also changed drastically when they saw the arm.

Zhou Jie's heart grew cold as he thought of Yang Zhao's death and recalled his master's fearful tone. The hairs all stood up on his body as he grit his teeth, "We shouldn't remain here for long, let's go!"

None of the Precious Tree Sect disciples wanted to stay. After all, the missing Liu Chengfeng and Xiao Yu were all outer disciples and they didn't have much to do with them.

So what if they'd gone missing? There was no point in risking their lives looking for them.

Luo Huang yelled when he saw Zhou Yi act so oddly, "Zhou Yi, where are you going? How dare you think of leaving when you haven't explained things fully?"

Zhou Yi smiled ruefully, "Luo Huang, are you crazy? The two of us were charging out in the front and we didn't leave each other's line of vision. You think this has something to do with me!?"

Luo Huang snorted lightly, "Even if it has nothing to do with you, you're certainly concealing something!"

Luo Huang's Scorching Green Ray possessed great observation capabilities. Even the slightest changes in Zhou Yi's expression out of the corner of his eyes were enough to make Luo Huang formulate suspicions.

Zhou Yi laughed wryly, "I have nothing to conceal. Yu Jie's death is indeed baffling. I suspect that even Liu Chengfeng has ended up like him. We contribute to nothing by staying here other than awaiting our deaths. Stay if you want, but I won't be keeping you company!"

Zhou Yi waved his hands after he spoke and he fled swiftly with his peers.

Luo Huang wasn't a brash person. When he saw Zhou Yi's performance, he knew something was gravely amiss. He called out, "There's no point in staying here since they're dead. We will return to the sect!"

He made up his mind decisively and he took the rest of the Purple Sun Sect disciples with him.

Those from the Northern Palace stared blankly into space as they looked at the area of devastation around them. They couldn't stay, nor could they leave.

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On the borders of the Skylaurel Kingdom, Tian Shao and Gouyu were riding on a Goldwing Swordbird with feelings of have narrow brushes with death.

The fleeing Swordbirds had all been gathered up now, and Jiang Chen was returning to Skylaurel Kingdom's borders ahead of their enemies.

"Young master Chen, Tian Shao is incompetent and has let you down." Tian Shao looked at Jiang Chen with no small amount of embarrassment. If it hadn't been for Jiang Chen saving them from the shadows this time, he would've been dead without a doubt.

It would be fine if he died, but if young master Chen's beautiful follower had died as well, he really would've wronged Jiang Chen!

"Who would've thought that those people from the Purple Sun Sect would make a move as well?" Jiang Chen sighed. "It was my miscalculation this time and it's not your fault. You've suffered on my behalf."

Tian Shao sweated even more profusely when he heard these words, but a warmth filled his heart. Young master Chen was young master Chen alright!

"Gouyu, does this matter have to do with Long Juxue?" Jiang Chen asked.

Gouyu thought for a moment and shook her head. "I don't think so. However, Yu Jie definitely recognized me and he wanted to capture me for her."

Gouyu displayed a resigned smile when she paused here, "It was a good thing that they were greedy and they wanted to get the secrets to commanding the Goldwing Swordbirds out of me. Otherwise, with Luo Huang's strength, it would've been very easy for him to destroy us with no reservations at all."

Gouyu had always been quite proud. She had been a martial dao genius since she was quite young in the Eastern Kingdom, and the path of her training had been quite smooth all along.

But today, thanks to Luo Huang, she had finally experienced the gap between her and sect disciples.

However, far from being dejected, her intentions to follow Jiang Chen became even more resolute after she understood the differences between them.

"As long as you're alright. This situation was threatening, but not dangerous. Luo Huang is much stronger than ordinary sect disciples. His personality isn't as flighty as those other genius. He would actually amount to something given enough time. What a pity."

Jiang Chen's sigh of regret was that he couldn't devour Luo Huang. It would've surely been a great source of nourishment for the Lotus.

After all, with his mastery of the Heaven Scorching Sutra, his fire attribute spirit power wasn't something to be overlooked.

However, Jiang Chen also knew that with the current power of his Lotus, there was no way he'd be able to confine Luo Huang. Luo Huang's cultivation level was likely between the fourth and fifth level spirit realm, a solid earth realm practitioner.

The limit of the Lotus' current devouring abilities was at the third level spirit realm and it would be hard pressed to handle an earth spirit realm practitioner. It'd be a bit impossible for it to swallow an earth spirit realm practitioner at this moment.

Jiang Chen felt damn good when they sped past the Northern Palace along the way. With Liu Chengfeng and Xiao Yu's death, the Northern Palace was sure to decline and they would have no way to contend with the other three great sites.

According to Jiang Chen's original intentions, he wouldn't let a single one of those people off the hook since they had voluntarily provoked him.

But he considered that if he used the Goldbiter Rat army to kill everyone, he'd be sure to alarm the two great sects.

Therefore, he had to temporarily keep his impulse in check since he was unable to handle wrath from both sides at the moment.

Chapter 258: Jiang Feng's Departure

Jiang Chen didn't raise a high profile after returning to the Jiang manor. He acted as if nothing had happened. He didn't care even if this matter was traced to him in the end.

Firstly, the other sides had no evidence, and even if they did, those dead had provoked him first.

Besides, Jiang Chen and the Rat King had acted surreptitiously with no one being the wiser. They hadn't left behind anything that would incriminate him.

The devouring abilities of the Lotus were even more perverse than the Rat King's, it could swallow even the bones of its victims.

After he returned to the manor, Jiang Chen went into closed door cultivation for a few days to thoroughly refine the spirit power essence that the Lotus had taken in and make it a part of his spirit ocean.

The essences of four second level practitioners were naturally greatly nutritious.

This actually made Jiang Chen's spirit ocean achieve a tangible breakthrough, and he welcomed the advent to the third level spirit realm shortly after.

This breakthrough had come about quite suddenly.

Jiang Chen hadn't thought that the Lotus would be so heaven defying, that none of the spirit power essence it had absorbed had been wasted and had all become a nutrition for him.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk. No wonder the Lotus ranks in the top ten of plant spirits beneath all those in the heavens. This frightening devouring power is a supreme cheat!"

Jiang Chen had known that the Lotus was powerful, but hadn't imagined that it was powerful to this extent.

However, this kind of cheat wasn't without side effects. First of all, the Lotus was only suitable to absorb the spirit essences of the fire and ice attributes.

It would reject all other attributes.

Furthermore, at the heart of it the Lotus was still manipulated by Jiang Chen's spirit ocean and so the level of his spirit ocean dictated the level of opponents he'd be able to swallow. He was only able to take in those similar to his own level of training.

Those who were stronger would be a problem.

Of course, the Lotus wasn't completely helpless when faced with stronger opponents. With Jiang Chen's current level of training, it was easy for him to manipulate four vines now.

The Lotus could continue to grow now that he'd risen to the third level spirit realm, and manipulating six vines was a given.

If six vines attacked one opponent in the initial earth spirit realm together, then Jiang Chen would have a shot of winning.

Devouring his opponent, however, would be much more difficult.

A shroud of blue and red light covered Jiang Chen within the secret room, making the interior misty and enigmatic.

Since ascending to the third level spirit realm, Jiang Chen discovered that the Lotus had indeed continued its growth. Since he'd melded in the mysteries of the "Divine Aeons Fist", the form of the Lotus was also developing according to Jiang Chen's will.

Jiang Chen's eyes were like the celestial heavens, one of them was burning with the flames of the scorching sun, and the other was sparkling with the unparalleled splendor of the cold moon.

"The essence behind the boxing of the Divine Aeons Fist and the cycles of blooming and wilting, from one to nine cycles, encompasses the development of all beings, the theory of the shifting of the universe. The moon in one hand and the sun in the other; this matches quite nicely with the Lotus. It looks like the hand of fate is at play here. The Divine Aeons Fist that I practiced allowed me to comprehend the theories of the sun and the moon, and have allowed me to obtain such a wondrous item as the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice. The first two forms of the Moonshatter Flying Daggers can also be combined with the mysteries of the Divine Aeons Fist. I've truly underestimated its might previously..."

Jiang Chen thought carefully and felt that he had indeed overlooked the Divine Aeons Fist previously.

This boxing technique that combined the sun and the moon to distill the complex down to the simple had caused Jiang Chen to treat it merely as an ordinary boxing technique before.

If one contemplated carefully, they would discover that this boxing technique wasn't as simple as it seemed.

Jiang Chen emerged from closed door training with enormous gains once again. He raised his head toward the sun and took in a deep breath of the crisp morning air, feeling refreshed and lighthearted.

He breathed in the pure air and exulted in the joy of training. However, this kind of life didn't let Jiang Chen lose himself in it.

His goal was clear, and that was to break through, continue breaking through and pursuing that boundless martial dao.

Only when he broke through the shackles of the heavenly law and took his place amongst the heavens would he be able to investigate the matters surrounding his past life.

He wanted to find out whether the father in his previous life was dead or alive. He didn't think that he would reincarnate like this without reason.

Something must have caused this twist of fate, and he would uncover it!

However, it was a bit too early to speak of this. With his current training, he was quite far from that heavenly law, and that gap wouldn't be bridged overnight.

"Young master Chen, you've finally emerged from training!"

Xue Tong was a bit panicked when he saw Jiang Chen.

"What is it?" Jiang Chen started. "What's happened?"

"The duke... the duke has taken Jiang Ying with him and left Skylareland!!" Xue Tong stammered but finally spat out.

"When did this happen?" Jiang Chen was shocked. Hadn't his father been in closed door cultivation? When had he emerged?

Xue Tong spoke with some awkwardness. "Your subordinate doesn't know when it happened either. I happened to see the door to the duke's secret room ajar one day while I was patrolling and poked my head inside. The duke had already disappeared and had only left a letter behind."

"The letter?" Jiang Chen's brow creased.

Xue Tong hastily fished out a letter that was yet to be opened and handed it over.

"Private and confidential to Chen'er" was written across it. With these words, Xue Tong and the others hadn't dared open the letter when they saw it.

Of course, although this matter had been rather abrupt, since the duke had left a letter, then he likely wasn't in any danger. Perhaps the duke missed home and wanted to go back to the Eastern Kingdom for a look?

Xue Tong had thought that this wasn't a big matter and hadn't disturbed Jiang Chen since he had been in closed door cultivation.

The duke had left a letter behind anyways, so no matter where he'd gone, all would be properly explained within the letter.

As Jiang Chen held the letter, his intuition told him that if his father had departed and left him a letter, then something was definitely amiss. If he'd gone out for just an ordinary trip, there would've been no need to leave anything behind.

And if he'd gone out on a longer trip, there would've been no need to leave in the dark of the night. He could've waited for Jiang Chen to emerge from training to take his leave.

To only leave a letter and keep even Xue Tong and the others in the dark, that indicated that his father's departure this time wasn't as simple as it appeared on the surface.

Jiang Chen ripped open the letter. There wasn't much to it, it was only a page long —

Chen'er, forgive me for not bidding farewell before I left.

You asked me about Xue Tong a few months ago. That day, you asked why was it that Xue Tong was the son of your aunt, but you couldn't feel the resonance between bloodlines with him.

I changed the topic then, but in reality, it was because I had purposefully concealed some facts.

Now, your father will tell you everything.

Xue Tong's mother is a member of the Yinglan Tribe in the Jiang Han territory, this much is true.

However, your birth mother isn't one of the Yinglan Tribe. Your mother has no blood relation to Xue Tong's mother and Lan Yizhou's father.

No one had known of this secret originally. I didn't, and neither did your mother.

Not until the day, a group of people with unknown origins, claiming that they were from the Upper Eighth Region, suddenly appeared in the Jiang Han territory with the intention of taking your mother away.

Yes, your father has always concealed this from the outside world and from you.

Your mother isn't dead, she was taken by others. Those who took her claimed to be from the Upper Eighth Realm.

They were incredibly strong, strong beyond imagination. They could destroy a manor with a finger and an entire mountain range with a fist.

They said that your mother was of the noble bloodline in the Upper Eighth Realm and shouldn't be sullied by the mundane world.

If it hadn't been your mother threatening them with her life, you and I might've been annihilated that day.

Chen'er, regardless of how strong the opponents were, would you not have fought to the death if someone was taking your woman away?

Yes, your father was going to fight to the death that day. But a mere random poke from those people forced me into a coma, senseless to the world.

Three days had passed by the time I woke up again.

They had taken my woman, your mother, and taken the love of my life.

Chen'er, now do you understand why I've always given you free reign? Why even though I knew full well of your ludicrous antics, still never forced you like many other fathers?

That was because I felt deep remorse toward you and your mother.

I am a man, but I couldn't protect my most beloved woman and couldn't protect my son's mother.

Can you empathize with my feelings, Chen'er?

I've lived in deep self-incrimination everyday since then, living with my boundless yearning for your mother.

Chen'er, I've never been able to put you down with ease all these years.

However, the heavens took pity on me as you were suddenly enlightened and rose head and shoulders above others and your father's last worry vanished.

However, your mother is still roaming on the streets outside, her whereabouts unknown. Our family has yet to be reunited.

Chen'er, your pill has helped your father break through the restraints of the true qi realm and set foot into the spirit realm.

Perhaps the so-called Upper Eighth Realm is much stronger than our world. Perhaps those who took your mother away are hundreds of times stronger than the spirit realm.

But —

She's my woman. As long as I have a breath left in me, I must go find her and bring her back home!

Even if mountains of knives and oceans of fire lay in front of me, whether it's climbing up to the Upper Eighth Realm or venturing into chasms of dragons and caves of tigers, I won't back down even half a step!

Remember, don't come find me before you grow into your own.

I've never been an adequate father. But I deeply love you just like I love your mother. I hope to find your mother one day and tell her myself that our son is now grown into a man.

I'll say this one more time, don't come to look for me. If I know that you've come for me before you've truly grown into your prime, I'll immediately commit suicide so you'll never be able to find me.

If it's ordained in the heavens, our family will be reunited one day.

Even if the heavens are torn asunder and the earth cracks, even if the oceans dry and stones crumble, they will never halt my desire to find your mother.

Chen'er, I hope you can understand your father's selfish decision. I hope you can also respect my wishes and not take any careless moves. Await my safe return together with your mother.

Chapter 259: The Monsterapes Begin to Awaken

As he looked at the signature at the end of the letter, it was indeed his father's handwriting with nothing fake about it.

Jiang Chen stared dumbly at the letter in his hands, feeling a mix of emotions.

When he reincarnated into this world's Jiang Chen, he'd inherited the latter's memories, his body, and had always cherished the fatherly love he'd received from Jiang Feng.

Since he'd reincarnated, that father son relationship had risen to new heights after going through countless trials together in less than two years.

It could be said that Jiang Feng's position in his heart wasn't any less than that of the Celestial Emperor's in his past life.

As for his mother, Jiang Chen had always thought that his mother was no longer part of this world, so he hadn't had any particular feelings towards her.

Now, he'd suddenly learned that she was actually still alive. Although Jiang Chen was taken aback, he didn't feel anything else.

However, Jiang Feng had left just like that and he had set out without even knowing where the Upper Eighth Region was, proceeding without hesitation on a path to locate his wife.

This deep level of sentiment and level of guts made Jiang Chen solemnly respect this father.

The doubts that had been present in the bottom of his heart were thoroughly dispelled with the appearance of this letter.

Why had Jiang Feng always given free reign to his son? Why wasn't he as strict as the other fathers?

This was because he always felt apologetic towards his wife.

Why hadn't Jiang Chen been able to find any resonance between his bloodlines and Xue Tong's?

This was because Jiang Chen's mother and Xue Tong's weren't sisters at all. Her background was bizarre, something about an Upper Eighth Realm.

It sounded like a place that was a lot stronger than the sixteen kingdom alliance.

From his father's letter, Jiang Chen could see that his father was leaving with the determination to die.

If his father didn't find his mother, Jiang Chen believed that he would never see him again in this life.

His father had repeatedly emphasized for Jiang Chen not to go to find him.

It was obvious that the Upper Eighth Realm wasn't a simple place. Jiang Feng wasn't fully confident, and he didn't want his son to come to his death.

Jiang Feng even went to the point of using suicide to threaten Jiang Chen, thereby alluding to the fact that he would have a slim chance of surviving in the face of this danger.

"Father, you've truly handed me a difficult problem." Jiang Chen folded the letter and twisted his hands, turning the letter into dust.

Since his father had always viewed the information about his mother as a secret, Jiang Chen naturally didn't want anyone else to know.

"Young master, where has the duke gone? Did the letter mention that?" Xue Tong was on tenterhooks when he saw Jiang Chen's solemn expression. He felt quite guilty.

Would things have been better if he'd notified the young master earlier?

Jiang Chen sighed lightly, "My father has gone to a place very far away and he won't be back for a while. Xue Tong, this matter is not your fault. You're dismissed for now."

Xue Tong saw that Jiang Chen's spirits were flagging and he remonstrated himself even more harshly.

Jiang Chen knew that Xue Tong greatly valued relationships. His every move and gesture would most likely affect his feelings.

However, Jiang Chen really had no intention to fault Xue Tong. His father had obviously made up his mind. Even if he hadn't gone this time, he definitely would've gone in the future.

Jiang Feng might've left at any moment as long as the resolution in his mind had not been resolved.

This wasn't Xue Tong's fault, it wasn't anyone's fault.

This was the love of a man for his wife. It was an incredible power that had compelled his father to start out on this journey to the unknown.

It was a kind of power that even if Jiang Chen erected ten walls, he wouldn't have been able to stop his father.

As the captain of the personal guard, Xue Tong's decision to not interrupt his closed door cultivation was correct without a doubt.

Although Jiang Chen now knew that Xue Tong wasn't actually his cousin from the contents of the letter, and the fact that they had no blood relations at all, he didn't mind in the slightest.

Forgetting the fact that he had reincarnated into the body of another and retained the memories of his past life, he actually hadn't placed the greatest importance on blood ties in his past life either.

He valued Xue Tong because he admired Xue Tong's personality and his potential.

This was like Jiang Chen taking care of Jiang Yu. Although ties of family and blood had a little bit to do with it, at the heart of it, it was because of a congenial relationship. It was this kind of relationship that had ignited his emotions.

It could even be said that this was the reason why he had such close relations with his father.

If Jiang Feng had been indifferent and apathetic the moment that he'd reincarnated, then Jiang Chen's impression of his father would've been greatly affected.

But the moment he'd reincarnated, Jiang Feng was already preparing to rally his men and go at it with Eastern Lu.

It had been this fatherly love, that was willing to fling all reservations aside, that had triggered the emotional whirlpool of Jiang Chen's past life and made him quickly accept this life's father.

It was because in this past and present life, his two fathers had been cut from the same cloth, their love as weighty as the mountains.

"If one had to name one thing in all the heavens and realms, on the mortal realm and not, that both gods and men cannot see through and define clearly, that would likely be 'affection', no?"

The sentiments of a husband to his wife.

The love of a father for his son.

These sentiments and love were the bonds between heritage and bloodline, both on this world and the heavens above.

If the skies held affection, they too would age.

Was it due to "affection" that had caused the heavens to collapse and order to decay?

Jiang Chen sighed lightly and laughed ruefully, finally deciding to restrain his impulse to go find his father.

With his understanding of his father, he might truly commit suicide the second that he discovered that his son had gone after him.

It wasn't that Jiang Feng's personality was stubborn or cruel, it was precisely because of his love for his son and his lack of desire to see him take risks and be embroiled in this danger.

"Father has left things open ended in his letter. He told me not to go looking for him before I'd reached great perfection and grown into my strength. However, the boundaries of growing into my strength are a bit blurry."

Jiang Chen suddenly felt an extreme sense of urgency. The limits of great perfection would most likely be reaching the original realm.

That would be growing into his strength in his father's eyes, no?

"Father, although I have no particular feelings for my birth mother, your wondrous love for her gives me even more of a reason to go find you. Since you're worried about me, I will respect your wishes. If you haven't returned before I reach great perfection, then you have no reason for me not to come find you!"

Jiang Chen felt light hearted when he thought through these thoughts.

No matter where the Upper Eighth Realm was, his father wouldn't reach it that quickly. Besides, even if he did reach it, it would be inordinately difficult for him to find Jiang Chen's mother without any proof or keepsakes.

Jiang Chen trusted that with his father's personality, he wouldn't be that brash either.

His goal was to find his wife, not to go and die.

Jiang Chen's worry for his father lessened slightly when his thoughts traveled there.

He knew that with his father's caution and ability to swallow humiliation and bear a heavy load, he would keep within his limits.

As long as he kept a low profile along the way and didn't get into too much trouble, there should be no danger to his life at least.

His father's sudden departure gave Jiang Chen a greater sense of urgency.

He had to quickly raise his strength and reach the requirement of "great perfection" as soon as possible.

The longer he delayed it, the greater danger his father would be in when he braved the Upper Eighth Realm.

Jiang Chen wasn't concerned about many people in this world. His father was undoubtedly ranked first when it came to those he cared about.

"Young master."

Jiang Chen was deep in thought when a somewhat shy voice came from behind him.

A series of scattered footsteps walked up to him. Jiang Chen knew that it was his shy follower Wen Ziqi judging from sounds alone.

"Ziqi, what is it?" Jiang Chen was always polite and soft spoken to her because he knew that she became embarrassed easily.

A few patches of red did indeed float onto Wen Ziqi's cheeks. There were a few traces of panic in that shyness, as if she was a child who had done something wrong. She stood hesitantly in the corner as her hands rolled up the hem of her clothing helplessly.

"Young master, something... something's gone wrong. You asked me to take care of the two Silvermoon Monsterapes. Ziqi is incompetent. They... they... "

"What is it?" Jiang Chen smiled. "Don't be nervous, it's just two baby spirit animals. Don't worry, speak slowly."

Wen Ziqi patted her chest, trying not to be so nervous.

"The two Monsterapes learned how to fight yesterday and they started attacking each other. I didn't pay any attention to them then because I thought they were playing. But... but just now... "

"What happened just now?" Jiang Chen's eyes gleamed. "Are they fighting more and more fiercely?"

“Eh? Young master, how do you know?” Wen Ziqi started.

“Wonderful, it looks like they’re finally starting to awaken. Fight! The fiercer, the better! Silvermoon Monsterapes are destined to be unable to coexist in harmony.”

Jiang Chen smiled. “Ziqi, the day that only one Monsterape lives is the day that you’ve accomplished something great!”

“Eh!” Wen Ziqi never would’ve thought that this would be Jiang Chen’s attitude. She had been denouncing herself along the way, worried about her personal gain and loss, afraid that the young master would fault her for not taking care of the Monsterapes.

What she didn’t know was that the Monsterapes were spirit creatures that were terribly self conceited.

Two tigers couldn’t coexist in one mountain. This logic was equally applicable to the Monsterapes.

Even out of a litter of Silverapes, only one would survive in the end. If their genders were different, there would only be one male and female left.

The Silvermoon Monsterapes would never allow any others of the same gender to coexist by their side.

The strongest Monsterapes would rule a region and they never allowed any others of their kind to live.

Even when babies grew up, they would challenge their fathers and fight for the throne until one of them died!

Although this kind of rule of survival looked incredible, this was the rule that many races in this world lived by.

Not only did the Monsterapes do this, many other races did the same.

“Come, let’s go take a look!” Jiang Chen’s depressed feelings regarding his father vanished when he heard that Monsterapes were awakening.

The days of feeding all sorts of spirit medicines to the Monsterapes were finally paying off.

The two babies had grown noticeably bigger, and they were twice the height as before.

They were attacking each other more fiercely and ruthlessly than before.

It was apparent that the innate nature in their bloodlines were slowly starting to awaken, and they were beginning to fight for their survival and battling to defeat their competitors.

This was their rules of survival, their unavoidable destiny.

Ever since their bloodlines had awakened, they were no longer brothers, they were rivals to the death.

In actuality, the ties of brotherhood didn’t exist with most of the spirit creatures.

Chapter 260: Dan Fei’s News

As she saw the two Silvermoon Monsterapes fight fiercely with blood and fur flying, some traces of anguish appeared in Wen Ziqi’s eyes.

She had already formed an attachment to these Monsterapes over the few days of taking care of them.

Seeing them suddenly fight to the death made Wen Ziqi feel as if her two children were fighting, making a nameless distress rise in her heart.

Jiang Chen sighed lightly. He didn't know why, with a character as Wen Ziqi's, she'd chosen to walk the path of martial dao.

Whether it was martial dao for human practitioners or beasts, which genius hadn't paved the road of their rise with the bodies and skeletons of the fallen?

Slaughter and fresh blood were unavoidable on the road to the peak of martial dao.

That Wen Ziqi couldn't bear to see two Monsterapes fight each other to the death meant that her heart of martial dao wasn't just typically fragile.

When approached from another perspective though, kindness and gentleness were likely her greatest positive traits?

"Young master, does one of them really have to die?" Wen Ziqi lightly bit her lip in question.

"The rules of survival for the Silvermoon Monsterape means that only one is destined to live. The other one will become the food of the one who lives. Swallowing the bloodlines of its kind is also a way for the Monsterapes to evolve."

"But..." Wen Ziqi's eyes were a bit misty. "I really can't bear for that to happen. Young master, can I beg you to raise them separately?"

Wen Ziqi's voice was like a mosquito's buzz. She was like a shy child raising a slightly ridiculous request to her parents. She hung her head and almost didn't dare look Jiang Chen in the eye.

"Young master, I'm willing to spend double, no, four times the effort to raise them." Wen Ziqi promised Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen sighed lightly. "Ziqi, your personality is truly not suited for training. How about this, I'll gift you a Monsterape and raise the other myself."

"Young master, I can raise both of them separately at the same time." Wen Ziqi became a bit anxious.

Jiang Chen smiled. "Don't worry, I'm not blaming you. Actually, it makes more sense for me to raise one myself. You can raise the other. Perhaps in the future, it will become your bonded creature and protect you!"

Jiang Chen wasn't joking. With Wen Ziqi's personality, she may very well run into many dangerous matters in the future. Having a fierce Silvermoon Monsterape to protect her would be quite appropriate.

Wen Ziqi only let go of her worries when she heard Jiang Chen's words and knew that he wasn't blaming her.

Jiang Chen was about to speak when he suddenly heard footsteps come down the hallway.

"Young master, miss Dan Fei from the Tutor Manor is here to visit." Xue Tong walked in with Dan Fei.

Dan Fei, amongst a few others, enjoyed special treatment. If it'd been anyone else, Xue Tong would've never brought them in without reporting first.

Dan Fei saw that there was only Jiang Chen and Wen Ziqi present, and the latter had a shy expression on, with traces of tears not yet dried at the edges of her eyes.

"Hehe, it looks like I haven't come at the right time?" Some traces of teasing were present in Dan Fei's laughter.

No matter how extraordinary a woman was or stunningly beautiful, she was still a woman in the end.

Women would always have those sort of nuances to her thoughts.

When Dan Fei saw this situation, her first thought was that Jiang Chen had been flirting and teasing this genteel lady follower, bullying her so much that she'd ended up crying.

"Sister Dan Fei, such words don't seem to match your bearing." Jiang Chen smiled and didn't mind Dan Fei's teasing.

This woman was an eccentric one. You'd only be torturing yourself if you treated her words seriously.

Dan Fei's laughter tinkled. "Little sister, did Jiang Chen bully you? Tell your older sister and I'll lecture him for you!"

Wen Ziqi's already reddened face flushed even hotter as she hastily waved her hands, "No, not at all. Sister Dan Fei, please don't misunderstand my house's young master. He... he would never bully me."

"Tsk ts. Oh Jiang Chen. I have to say I envy you a little. Of your female followers, one is prettier than the next, and each is the epitome of loyalty. She still covers for you after being bullied, steadfast to the end. Tell me, just how do you treat them?"

Dan Fei looked at the Silvermoon Monsterapes as she spoke.

She suddenly exclaimed in surprise as her beautiful eyes were thoroughly attracted. She kept exclaiming in shock as her slender, jade hands couldn't help but cover her mouth.

"Jiang Chen, your Monsterapes have already started to awaken? How did you do it?" Dan Fei didn't waste any further effort on teasing Jiang Chen as her attention was completely taken up by the Monsterapes.

"You'll have to ask them about that." Jiang Chen smiled and pointed at them.

Dan Fei was a spirit creature fanatic alright. She completely cast her womanly demeanor aside and rolled up her sleeves, preparing to pick up a Monsterape and examine it.

"Don't touch them, you have the presence of their peers on you. They're unable to discern what is real and fake when they're only half awakened and will attack you!"

Dan Fei had already let out a startled scream before Jiang Chen had finished talking as the two Monsterapes turned their heads in unison and swiped at her.

It was a good thing that her level of training wasn't weak, dodging stiffly to the side and evading injury.

"Why didn't you say so earlier Jiang Chen?!" Dan Fei couldn't help but complain when she heard Jiang Chen's warning after the fact.

"I already spoke up as soon as I could alright? Who knew that you'd move faster than I could speak? Don't you already have two Monsterapes? Why do you want mine?"

Dan Fei chuckled as her beautiful eyes darted back and forth twice, a hint of slyness in her gaze.

"I hadn't planned on making any designs on yours, but since you've raised yours so well, it's tough for me to not covet them."

Jiang Chen's face darkened when he heard these words. "Forget about it. It's difficult for these Monsterapes to become familiar with a master. If you trade with me now, that means everything we've done up until now would've been a waste. It would be even more difficult to build a relationship with them in the future."

Jiang Chen wasn't voicing a shocking statement just for the heck of it. Spirit creatures changing master was a huge taboo.

Dan Fei responded huffily, "Jiang Chen, am I really such a greedy person in your eyes? Who says I wanted to trade with you? I still possess that bit of knowledge that spirit creatures shouldn't change masters easily. I only wanted to ask if you had any secrets to raising spirit creatures that you could share with me."

"Heh heh, well then, this we can talk about. However, I'm in sore need of some spirit ingredients lately because of raising these spirit creatures. Miss Dan Fei, your Tutor Manor is quite well off, how about..." Jiang Chen chuckled.

"Alright, you Jiang Chen! You're including even the honored tutor in your schemes! And to think that he was so protective of you! You wolf!" Dan Fei's beautiful eyes flicked slightly as her slender brows arched.

Although she was pretending to be angry, her every expression and laughter made Wen Ziqi off on the side feel self conscious.

Miss Dan Fei was truly a flawless beauty. There was a certain spirituality and air to her every word and smile. No wonder all men and women fell victim to her charms.

Jiang Chen, however, laughed heartily. "The honored tutor takes great care of youngsters. I'm sure he would greatly support me if I felt embarrassed about the state of my money pouch."

"Hmmp. Glib tongues, do you think you're the only one who knows how to talk? Alright, Jiang Chen, the honored tutor is sure to have the spirit ingredients that you want. But the Precious Tree Sect has even more of them. One can say that half of the spirit ingredients in the sixteen kingdoms belong to the sect. The sect is a natural vault of spirit ingredients, an enormous medicine garden. You can only go to the sect if you want more spirit medicine ingredients."

Dan Fei's lively eyes looked at Jiang Chen as they sparkled with the light of seriousness.

“What? Sister Dan Fei has come to persuade me to join the Precious Tree Sect this time?” Jiang Chen chuckled. “Is it that you find me irritating and want me to join the sect so that fool Iron Can can torture me?”

“Jiang Chen, stop joking around. I’m speaking seriously now. I’m here on the honored tutor’s orders to tell you something.”

Jiang Chen started when he saw that Dan Fei didn’t seem to be speaking lightheartedly. He suddenly remembered something and blurted out, “Does this have something to do with the great selection of the four sects?”

“Hmm? You’ve heard of it? Where did you hear about it?” Surprise glimmered in Dan Fei’s eyes. This type of top secret intelligence was only something the core disciples of the sects would know.

“Hehe, I heard about it from the wind.” Jiang Chen realized that he’d revealed his knowledge too quickly. He naturally couldn’t say that he heard about it from Zhou Yi and Luo Huang.

It was a good thing that Dan Fei didn’t dwell on this, but nodded instead. “The scale of this time’s great selection is unparalleled. The honored tutor had originally held no good feelings towards this so-called selection, because there’s nothing fresh about it at all. However, this time’s selection is quite different. The four sects have gone to great lengths and brought out rich rewards to award those who emerge. Even some of those old hidden original realm monsters will be making an appearance.”

A trace of respect and admiration was present in Dan Fei’s tone when she spoke of the “old original realm monsters”.

Although there were aspects of her personality that were aloof and lofty, Dan Fei was still in awe when she faced a true practitioner.

A venerated original realm practitioner undoubtedly meant the peak of the sixteen kingdom alliance.

Even honored tutor Ye was a step away from that peak.

Dan Fei viewed Ye Chonglou as her god, and thus naturally held the utmost respect for original realm practitioners.

Jiang Chen, however, wasn’t that interested in those old monsters.

He was most interested in what rewards the four great sects had brought out to sweeten the deal for the geniuses participating in the great selection.

What Jiang Chen lacked the most right now was resources, which were precisely the materials the sects possessed.

In the entirety of the sixteen kingdoms, these four sects held the majority of the core resources.

“It looks like I can’t miss this time’s selection. I should make use of this opportunity to thoroughly swindle some good stuff out of these four sects.”

Although Jiang Chen was quite irritated with the sect disciples, he could set those prejudices aside for the chance to obtain the resources they controlled.

He must make use of the great selection to enter the sect and make use of their resources!