

Three Realms 891

Chapter 891: The Monster and the Altar

The chaotic astral wind seemed to have disrupted the natural order of the grassland. This actually made the rest of Jiang Chen's journey proceed even more smoothly. After a period of journeying, his God's Eye caught sight of the end of the grassland. He was delighted. "The disruption caused by the chaotic astral wind actually cleared many of the dangers we would have otherwise encountered along the way. Who'd have thought that we could travel so unimpeded? I can see the end. We should be out of the grassland in less than an hour."

He glanced at the sky. It was already close to dusk. It would be ideal if they could reach the other side of the grassland before night fell. Although day or night didn't make a difference to most cultivators, spirit creatures would become unusually active in the dark. To Jiang Chen, this wasn't necessarily a good thing. Luckily, they were able to increase their pace after the passage of the chaotic astral wind.

They finally passed this vast grassland just moments before sunset. As Jiang Chen stood at the edge of the grassland, he could see a small river meander across. Opposite him was a patch of dense forest. From what he could see on the map, this should be the place that He Hongshu had indicated. He glanced up at the sky—it was almost dark. As he was unwilling to take any more risks, he decided to set up camp on the riverbank and leave the search for the Requiem Wood to tomorrow. The closer he got to the Requiem Wood, the calmer he felt. After summoning Long Xiaoxuan and instructing him to keep watch, he entered a deep state of meditation.

With the dragon guarding them, Jiang Chen felt more at ease. The wood demon parasites might be strong, but they were completely ineffective against Long Xiaoxuan. Dragons excreted a specific kind of saliva that naturally repelled those parasites. In addition to Long Xiaoxuan, Jiang Chen also ordered the mint ginseng to go underground, in case any underground spirit creatures were to suddenly attack them. With such meticulous arrangements made, a few small issues popped up during the night, but nothing particularly dangerous happened. When morning arrived, the two opened their eyes and welcomed the light of a new day. In particular, Huang'er was extremely lively. Today, her eyes seemed to carry a different kind of quality. This was a new day, and perhaps the beginning of her new life.

"Let's go." Jiang Chen made a few adjustments before stepping into the dense forest. After moving just a few hundred meters inwards, most of the sky had already become obscured. The rays of the morning sun were strong, but they couldn't penetrate the dense foliage of this mysterious forest. The deeper they went, the darker it became. However, this had little effect on Jiang Chen because his God's Eye and Evil Golden Eye could see through everything. Even in the dark, he could see everything as clear as day. From time to time, a few noisy wails would resound in the distance, adding a trace of eeriness to the otherwise quiet forest. Occasionally, an ear-splitting roar could be heard as a wild beast displayed its power.

His heart was as tranquil as still water. These kinds of things couldn't obstruct him from progressing forward. "Huang'er, don't worry. My intuition is telling me that the Requiem Wood should be in this forest. As long as it appears, I can definitely obtain it, no matter what it takes."

Huang'er remained silent. She only gently nodded as she held on tightly to Jiang Chen's hand, as if afraid that by letting go, she would lose everything. Suddenly, something pricked at Jiang Chen's

consciousness. He instantly leaned to a side as an enormous banana leaf pressed down on him from above. He huffed coldly and brandished his Featherflight Mirror. That green curtain had been careening towards him rapidly, but the Featherflight Mirror promptly halved its speed. The two of them took advantage of the plant's delayed approach to leap to a safer area. Only, they couldn't jump that far away because they had already been surrounded by at least ten such plants.

One by one, like raging bulls, they violently extended green leaves that billowed in the wind, creating layers upon layers of a green canopy that enclosed Jiang Chen and Huang'er within its center. Jiang Chen was furious, and he immediately summoned his Goldbiter Rats. "Ole Gold, let's see what you guys can do!"

There was almost nothing in the heavenly planes that Goldbiter Rats couldn't gnaw through. At Jiang Chen's command, numerous rats surged madly towards those ten green plant-like existences, like prisoners seeing the light of freedom for the first time. Crunch crunch... Ear-piercing gnawing sounds reverberated from all around them. The Goldbiter Rats' bite was definitely renowned throughout the realms. In just a short while, they had gnawed through the ten plant-like creatures without leaving a single piece behind. Instead of recalling the Rats, Jiang Chen summoned Long Xiaoxuan instead. "Brother Long, we need some of your saliva to cleanse these rats so that the Wood Demon Parasites don't attack them."

Jiang Chen might not fear the Wood Demon Parasites, but he didn't dare to let his guard down after entering this place either. Not only did the Wood Demons have parasites at their disposal, but they also possessed a gamut of other bizarre tactics as well. However, their parasites were undoubtedly one of the most intractable problems to deal with.

"Ole Gold, lead your descendants well. Don't wander anywhere and listen to my commands." Since they had already entered the desolate wildlands, Jiang Chen didn't need to be that cautious. He could do as he wished. With the ferocious Long Xiaoxuan and Goldbiter Rats clearing a path for them, the number of presumptuous creatures along the way significantly decreased. It was to the extent that some powerful spirit creatures were completely intimidated by Long Xiaoxuan and didn't dare to misbehave at all. This was precisely the effect that Jiang Chen wished to achieve.

When He Hongshu had initially entered this forest, he had lost his way. Hence, the area where he had discovered the Requiem Wood was not clearly marked on his map. Nonetheless, He Hongshu had mentioned that there was something terrifying in this mysterious jungle, called the Scarlet Dawn Wasp. This kind of wasp reproduced extremely quickly. Once someone was stung by one, their body would start to burn like liquid fire before violently exploding within an hour. Even the gods couldn't save the victim. Back when He Hongshu's party was in this forest, they had unfortunately run into these Scarlet Dawn Wasps. As a result, many of them had perished. Hence, Jiang Chen was especially cautious and didn't dare to barge forwards recklessly.

"Young master Chen, we discovered a large supply of sky rank spirit herbs in front!" The Goldbiter Rat King suddenly ran back excitedly, reporting this piece of good news to Jiang Chen.

"Take me there." It wasn't that surprising to come across sky rank spirit herbs in this place. Nonetheless, Jiang Chen thought of the numerous stalks of sky rank spirit herbs that had lined his path when he had first entered the desolate wildlands. However, those sky rank spirit herbs looked problematic to him. As

he followed the Goldbiter Rat King a few hundred meters forward, a vast area filled with countless stalks of spirit herbs stretched before his eyes, as though someone had planted them there. Moreover, they were indeed all sky rank spirit herbs. Jiang Chen combined his God's Eye and Evil Golden Eye to survey the area, but couldn't see anything out of the ordinary.

"These sky rank spirit herbs should be real." Jiang Chen confirmed this once again before he decided that these sky rank spirit herbs should not pose any problems. "Ole Gold, you can take half for your clan. Brother Long, take your pick and leave me the rest."

Long Xiaoxuan hummed softly in thought before he picked some out, but he didn't take much. Jiang Chen swept the entirety of what remained into his possession. The Goldbiter Rats also attained massive benefits as well. After this point, however, Jiang Chen had no further plans to let the rats mess around outside. He summoned all of them back. He had a premonition that although these sky rank spirit herbs were genuine, there could be some unimaginable dangers coming for them later after reaping these sweet benefits.

The demon race was extremely underhanded in the way they conducted things. Jiang Chen certainly didn't believe that the demon race would simply allow human cultivators into their territory so that they could share their wealth with them. The appearance of these sky rank spirit herbs in this place could simply be bait. Nonetheless, even if they were bait, there was no way Jiang Chen could turn back. He proceeded forwards, walking side by side with Huang'er. Long Xiaoxuan had succeeded in transforming himself into a skinny youth and was currently leading the way. From behind, his figure looked extremely cold and aloof.

.....

In a deep ravine a few dozen miles from Jiang Chen, a bizarre-looking creature slowly crawled out from within a large white cocoon. That strange creature's body was covered with numerous oily bubbles that appeared extremely nauseating. The loose flesh over its multi-colored body writhed. Even looking at it was enough to give one chills of fear. After it emerged from the large cocoon, it crawled forwards with a startling speed, as though each feeler on its body ended in a sucker. After it crawled for some distance, it reached a neglected altar. This altar was covered with withered dead leaves and the area around it was incomparably desolate. Nonetheless, it emanated a kind of immense power that caused even the monstrous creature to tiptoe around as it approached. The creature came to a stop in front of the altar.

"Yes, yes. Not bad, not bad." From the center of the altar emanated a voice. "You've broken through your cocoon for the seventh time. It looks like you're not far from your true birth."

The monster let out a few grunts, as though it was reporting something to the voice on the altar. The voice on the altar asked in shock, "What did you say? The little ones that you birthed last time were destroyed by someone?"

The monster waved its feelers continuously in the air, looking rather angry.

"Strange, that's strange. Tens of thousands of years have passed and yet, there are still humans able to kill Wood Demon Parasites?" The voice on the altar also seemed to be filled with doubt. However, moments later it sighed, "Perhaps it was an accident. Moreover, your spawn are not yet strong enough. It's possible that someone killed them. Do not be disheartened. With every evolution of yours, the

spawn you produce become more and more powerful in both offensive and defensive capabilities. Now, simply wait for enough hosts to wander in and bring your spawn out of the desolate wildlands, hahaha... Us Wood Demons will finally lead the glorious return of the demon race!" The voice on the altar was filled with triumph. Then it suddenly seemed to realize its situation as it sighed lightly, "It's a pity that the ten great generals of my Wood Demon bloodline all died in battle. My own body was destroyed and soul sealed. I can only wait for you to break through nine times and rescue me from here."

"Uwuwuwu." That monstrous creature nodded incessantly, grimacing towards the altar, as though it had been completely moved.

"There's no need for you to be emotional. We have waited ten thousand years. What more is waiting a little longer? Today, I sense that a large number of human cultivators have entered the desolate wildlands. Go and warn King Nineshadows to control his appetite. Otherwise, when I leave this place, I will force him to spit out everything he's eaten with interest."

That monstrous creature didn't seem to have fully awakened. It seemed only to understand one thing—that the being sealed into this altar was its master, and that the orders of its master prevailed over all else.

Chapter 892: Wood Demon Parasite Progenitor

"Go and take care." The voice on the altar spoke as if entrusting a task to its child. "No need to worry about me."

That monster still seemed somewhat unwilling to leave. It was like a small child completely attached to its parents. It nuzzled the stone stairs around the altar. Suddenly, the voice on the altar made a sound of surprise. "Wood Parasite, go quickly. Someone seems to have broken into your territory." The voice on the altar seemed a little worried. "Go, go now. Watch over the Requiem Wood. Don't let anyone touch it! If I'm to reconstruct my body, I need the Requiem Wood. Otherwise, even if I manage to break out of these constraints, I'll always be flawed."

"Uwuwuwu." When that monster heard its master's instructions, it seemed to realize that things were urgent. Although it was still reluctant, it resolved itself to turn around.

Sealed within the altar, the spirit of King Woodbranch was filled with anxiety. This piece of Requiem Wood was the key for him to recover his soul after breaking free. If he lost the Requiem Wood, his soul would never recover to the peak of its power. The thought of his servant, the wood demon parasite, abated his emotions a little. There are thousands upon thousands of parasites protecting the Requiem Wood. Anyone who trespasses will surely die.

Furthermore, the parasites were not the only line of defense. A number of poison formations, the specialty of Wood Demons, had been carefully laid about the tree as well. The death of would-be explorers was assured.

.....

Jiang Chen's eyes stared straight ahead, his attention caught by a tree seedling. It was as delicate as coral and shimmered a vibrant green hue. From a distance, it looked like a wonder of nature. Any observer would be awestruck by the sight.

"Brother Chen, is that the Requiem Wood?" Huang'er was dazzled by the tree's beauty.

"Yes, that's what we're looking for." This Requiem Wood is pretty large. "It only grows one ring every ten thousand years, so this one should be at least a hundred thousand-some-odd years old. It's still fairly young when compared to other members of its species, though."

He was no stranger to the Requiem Wood. It was common to see Requiem Woods that were millions of years old back in his previous life, within the heavenly planes. Of course, a hundred-thousand-year-old wood was enough for Huang'er's Generation Binding Curse. Carefully examining the tree, Jiang Chen didn't rush into things. There were several oddities in its vicinity. A casual glance didn't seem to reveal anything peculiar, but someone with his experience knew better. Every kind of plant near the tree was deadly, and they were placed in such a way as to form an enormous poison formation. The entire setup was very complicated.

Most importantly, the Requiem Wood was in the middle of a deep pool. If Jiang Chen wanted the spirit herb, he'd have to wade in. The muddied waters looked peaceful on the surface, but countless wood demon parasites swirled beneath. A casual estimate numbered them in the millions. The parasites were everywhere. There were even some near their feet, though Jiang Chen had no intentions to tell Huang'er about them. They were scared of the scent on their bodies anyways, and wouldn't attack them.

Jiang Chen looked at the wood for a few more moments, then tossed his hesitation aside. "Huang'er, step back a little and wait for me outside. I'm going in to get it."

"How're you going to get it, Brother Chen? Are you going to take a branch from its body?"

"No," Jiang Chen shook his head. "Why leave nice things behind since we've finally arrived? We'll uproot the entire tree, of course." He smiled strangely. Jiang Chen knew all about the properties of the Requiem Wood. It was very useful for demons to use in refining their own souls. Cutting off a branch inflicted minimal damage. Completely uprooting the tree was much more devastating.

He wasted no time and glided towards the Requiem Wood with his Cicada Wings. As he did so, he summoned his new spirit creature. Its tentacles could do the heavy lifting that was needed to actually uproot the tree. As a plant creature, the mint ginseng wasn't necessarily scared of wood demon parasites. Nevertheless, Jiang Chen took precautions to bathe it in Dragonwhisker Water. This way, it would be completely unhindered by the wood demon parasites teeming in the pool below. Meanwhile, Jiang Chen hovered in the air as backup.

The ginseng's countless appendages grabbed at the Requiem Wood's roots. The tentacles surged with power, their green muscles popping forth like countless arms. They pulled upwards with a mighty strength, brimming with endless vigor. Up! It took several hundred of them only a few pulls to uproot the spirit herb in its entirety. Water pooled in to fill the empty space.

Rumble! Now that the Requiem Wood had been touched, the poison formations about it began to fiercely attack. However, they had very little effect on a plant creature like the mint ginseng. Jiang Chen's added help was only icing on the cake. In the wildlands, poison formations were only really useful against human cultivators. On the outskirts of the wildlands, if the average cultivator were to even slightly brush against one, they would die several times over.

"We did it!" Jiang Chen was overjoyed at the sight of the uprooted tree. He had the lotus take over carrying the Requiem Wood, and placed the huge tree directly into his storage ring, dirt, roots, and all. "Let's go!"

Recalling the ginseng without delay, Jiang Chen turned to leave. Suddenly, jets of air streamed out from beneath the bottom of the pool. Formed by innumerable parasites, they swept towards every part of Jiang Chen's body. In the next moment, a terrifying creature bit at his feet. He was greatly shocked by the attack. He slowed the monster's offense with a sweep of the mirror, then shook his body to call upon his Pentecolor Divine Swords. Drawn simultaneously, the five blades sliced towards the monster's body in five streaks of divine radiance.

Clang! Savage streams of sparks flew as the swords were stopped short by the monster's carapace. Like metal on metal, neither could damage the other.

"What?!" Jiang Chen was shocked yet again. The Pentecolor Divine Swords had been personally given to him by Emperor Peafowl! And yet they couldn't even scratch this monster, much less break through its armor. He hadn't used any special sword techniques, but it was difficult to believe that weapons of the Pentecolor Divine Swords' caliber couldn't even leave a mark on the monster's body. Just how hard could its carapace be?

Still astonished, Jiang Chen had no desire to keep fighting. He pointed several times at the jets of parasites with vehemence. Air streams of Galaxy Slashes divided and disintegrated the bugs within. The monster looked bewildered that Jiang Chen was able to cease the flood of parasites. Roaring loudly, it made a mad dash for the human. Without the Featherflight Mirror's intervention, the monster would have long reached Jiang Chen already.

With another wave of the mirror, Jiang Chen retreated out of the pool's boundaries. "We're leaving, now." He said to Huang'er in a low voice. She didn't miss a beat at Jiang Chen's panic. She instantly gathered that the monster was a difficult adversary. Placing Jiang Chen's hand in her own, she crushed an escape glyph, and the two of them disappeared on the spot with a flash of light.

The monster roared again and again when it saw the humans depart. They'd taken the Requiem Wood! Its cries shook the very heavens, and its fierce eyes radiated a horrific light. Rather than the Requiem Wood, it was as if the monster's own child had been taken. After a few seconds of observation, its body halted, then completely disappeared.

The escape glyph's light subsided, and Jiang Chen and Huang'er landed in a different place. The glyph had taken them more than a hundred miles out, which was hopefully enough to evade the monster's pursuit. However, the air beside them began to ripple before they could even catch their breaths. The monster tunneled out from nothingness, as if moving directly through time and space. Its eyes welled up with blood, and it thrust towards Jiang Chen with another angry roar. The monster had an almost frightening ferocity. There wasn't much that Jiang Chen could do. He had to continuously shine the Featherflight Mirror on the monster to curb its advance. His continual points towards the monster yielded no results. Try as he might, the power of his Galaxy Slash left not a single scar, whether he cut against its head or body. All his efforts went down the drain.

"What an abomination," Jiang Chen cursed under his breath. He summoned the lotus, which sent out hundreds of ground-creeping vines towards the monster.

Pfft pfft pfft! The vines wrapped around the monster tightly, plant whipping against scale. It coiled around the monster, attempting to constrict it to death. No matter how much force the lotus used, however, the monster didn't seem to feel a thing. Noticing this, the lotus switched to fighting with fire. Incalculable lotuses shot out witchfire in an attempt to scorch the monster. The monster was unimpressed. The witchfire was hot enough to melt metal and stone instantly, but it barely tickled the monster.

Since fire didn't work, Jiang Chen swapped to ice. A frost colder than primordial glaciers enclosed the monster within. With a wild shake of its body, the monster struggled free of its icy prison. It resumed its charge towards Jiang Chen, howling in rage. Given the situation, Jiang Chen wasn't entirely sure what to do. Swords didn't hurt it, and neither did the elements.

Beckoning to his magnetic golden mountain, Jiang Chen smashed it into the monster dozens of times. Like an iron hammer against a tortoiseshell, the creature beneath the carapace remained undamaged despite the numerous blows crashing into it.

"What kind of vile creature is this?!" The youth couldn't understand it. It was quite possible that only great emperor realm cultivators' attacks could pierce the creature's armor. Weaker techniques were helpless against its thick, meaty hide. Jiang Chen was entirely lost on what to do next. However, the mountain did exert a certain amount of pressure on the beast, which struggled beneath its weight. Because of this, Jiang Chen had some time to observe it more closely.

The monster's entire body was covered with scales, and it had pores as small as needles. A glittering crystalline substance exuded out of those pores. Upon closer inspection, the substance was actually a mass of wood demon parasites bunched together.

A new possibility materialized in Jiang Chen's head. "Wood demon parasites, huh... is this monster actually their progenitor?!"

Chapter 893: Aura of the Demon King

This scene startled Jiang Chen quite a bit. He'd accidentally stumbled across the true progenitor of the wood demon parasites! It was the culprit for the parasites' infinite plague. If he could kill this monster, the parasite's true progenitor, then the source of the plague would be cut off. Though parasites elsewhere could still reproduce, it wouldn't be hard to exterminate them. The reproductive ability of this parasite progenitor was incomparable to all others—none of its children could possibly match it. This strengthened Jiang Chen's resolve to kill the monster. Unfortunately, he had already played most of his cards.

The only thing he had left was the restriction of his empyrean dwelling. A restriction made by an empyrean cultivator should theoretically kill this parasite progenitor with ease. However, he only had two uses of it left. Jiang Chen didn't want to use them up so casually.

A thought suddenly popped into Jiang Chen's mind. Wood demon parasites had two natural enemies: Fire of First Dawn and Dragonwhisker Water. Didn't he have a fresh supply of the latter on hand? He conjured Long Xiaoxuan up with a snap of his fingers. "Brother Long, only your spit can contain this monster. I'll leave it up to you."

Long Xiaoxuan shot a sidelong glance at the ugly abomination, not bothering to conceal his disgust. With a curl of his body, he revealed his true form. A sneeze resounded in the sky. Countless jets of Dragonwhisker Water scattered towards the monster like a thousand needles. Truly, everything in nature had a natural enemy.

The monster that Jiang Chen had used so many methods in vain on instantly began to writhe in pain when doused with the water. Plumes of smoke sizzled upwards from the places on its body where the water had made contact with. Long Xiaoxuan unrelentlessly followed up with another sneeze. As more Dragonwhisker Water began to seep in, the monster's armor began to melt. Many marks of severe damage appeared on its carapace. The monster itself shrieked loudly in pain. However, the power of the magnetic golden mountain and the endless reflections of the Featherflight Mirror slowed the beast twice over. Its speed restricted, it could only move at a crawl.

Scorched by the Dragonwhisker Water, its wounds only became more severe with the passage of time. So, too, did the intensity of its shrieks. Jiang Chen was unmoved. The parasite progenitor didn't look fully evolved. Things wouldn't have proceeded so smoothly otherwise, even with the Dragonwhisker Water. Calling upon the Pentecolor Divine Swords once more, he readied to strike while his enemy was weak.

In this crucial moment, two terrifying presences rushed through the air, hurtling towards Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan without ceremony. Alarmed, Jiang Chen hurriedly recalled the magnetic golden mountain, placing it in front of his and Long Xiaoxuan's bodies to block the attack. The two presences smashed into the mountain with a resounding boom. The treasure was shaken by the impact, its golden light flickering.

"Solidified... aura? Is this the aura of a great emperor?" Jiang Chen had fought with emperor realm cultivators before. Though the presence of such a cultivator was fairly strong, there was no way that it could be focused into such a potent attack. Not daring to fight further, the wood demon parasite progenitor seized the opportunity to flee. Tunneling into the air, it vanished without a trace.

Jiang Chen tried to find it again using his God's Eye, but it had completely vanished. He spat on the ground in disgust. How unfortunate! Without those two presences, he could definitely have killed the monster. But that was all conjecture. The two presences had been quite extraordinary. Though their source was unknown, he nevertheless felt threatened.

"Are there great emperor realm demons in this forest?" Jiang Chen didn't want to be reckless. Now that he had the Requiem Wood, there was no need to stick around. The heavy injuries that the parasite progenitor had sustained would take a while to heal. On the other hand, the sudden attack cast a shadow over his heart. He couldn't muster up the courage to explore further. He had what he came for—there was no need to dally. He couldn't defeat the entire demon race by himself, after all. Resolving to leave, he shot back towards the outskirts, Huang'er in tow.

He wasn't unwilling to explore further in, but he was more concerned about the possible pursuit from a great emperor realm demon. However, Jiang Chen was guessing that something was impeding the demon's movements. It wouldn't have attacked with aura alone otherwise. If it had come personally, he would've had no chance of victory without using his empyrean dwelling's restriction.

Emperor Peafowl was evidence enough for that. Jiang Chen felt powerless before the man, even though Emperor Peafowl had only been a great emperor for three thousand years. Any reawakening great emperor realm demon was at least a hundred thousand years old, and thus likely to be stronger rather than weaker than Veluriyam's emperor. If an entity like that decided to pursue him, Jiang Chen didn't fancy his chances to put up a fight. These considerations only cemented his desire to leave.

After an extended period of travel, Jiang Chen finally returned to the boundary between the forest and grassland. By now, the sun was going down again. He didn't want to travel by night, so he cautiously made camp in the borderlands, all the while worried about the great emperor realm demon. The night was uneventful, however. There were no signs that a demon was on his trail at all. It assured Jiang Chen that the demon did indeed have mobility problems. His theft of the Requiem Wood was a great loss for the demon race. There was no other reason that a demon as strong as it would just let him go. It could only be that the demon had no way of personally hunting him down.

Spending the night worrying, Jiang Chen departed at the dawn of the second day. He only had one thought in mind now—to leave the wildlands. The goal of his journey had not been to investigate the demon race's activities, but rather, to obtain the Requiem Wood, which was already safely within his grasp. His own mission was already complete. Having experienced the chaotic astral winds once before, the plains weren't as scary as they previously seemed. Many strong creatures had died to the natural disaster, so Jiang Chen was met with noticeably less resistance. Besides of the winds' ravaging, perhaps it was Jiang Chen's own might that intimidated the stronger creatures of the plains. He traveled through the grasslands in less than a day.

He didn't let his guard down once he was out though. Just because he'd left the Wood Demons' territory didn't mean that he was out of the figurative woods. Myriad Corpse Valley wasn't a place that Jiang Chen enjoyed dawdling in, either, but it was squarely on his way back. Thankfully, the valley wasn't nearly as vast as the grasslands geographically. If Jiang Chen proceeded at the same speed, he could pass through in only about two hours. There was no way around it. Whether he wanted to enter or leave, he had to go through Myriad Corpse Valley.

"From what I recall, it seemed like the Prince of Shangping died in this valley. Now that it's been three days, I wonder how many more have met the same fate?" Jiang Chen shook his head to himself. He was very upset by Lu Shinan's defection to the demon race. It wasn't hard to imagine the huge losses the cultivators on this excursion would suffer thanks to the man's act of betrayal. The death of the prince, for one, had to be related.

Once deceived, it was likely that most other cultivators would die to Lu Shinan as well. Lu Shinan had such an innocent appearance, too. He was very good at acting. If Jiang Chen didn't naturally dislike people like him, he could have been deceived as well.

.....

"Hmm?" Patrolling bone apparitions had brought him back an important piece of news, but Lu Shinan found it hard to believe. Jiang Chen came back! "Did that kid get the short end of the stick somewhere further in? Did he fail to pass through the grasslands, and that's why he came back?" Jiang Chen's unexpected return naturally made Lu Shinan very happy. Three days had passed since the youth's departure, and the demon king had wanted him to hold Jiang Chen back from advancing further.

Although he didn't succeed at the task, Jiang Chen's return was quite opportune and was essentially a second chance for him.

"Great news, my liege. The kid is on his way back here. I don't think he passed through the grasslands." Lu Shinan relayed the information excitedly to his lord.

"On his way back?" King Nineshadows was extremely surprised. "I thought you said he was strong. How strong can he be if he didn't even make it through the grasslands?"

"My liege, perhaps he has a special reason?" Lu Shinan had an intense interest in Jiang Chen, far surpassing his interest in any other cultivator.

The demon king didn't care. "You don't need to pay attention to the kid. You should keep a closer eye on the things I told you to do instead. How many cultivators have come into this valley in the last three days?"

"Heh heh, we've had a good harvest in these last three days. At least three thousand cultivators had their souls sucked out by my lord's Soulreaver Banner. They're now your loyal corpse puppets. Two thousand more have been poisoned by Demonshade Flowers. They'll become corpse puppets sooner or later."

"That only accounts for five thousand, yes? I thought you said there were twenty or thirty thousand?"

"It's only been three days. As time goes on, more cultivators will surely make their way in here," Lu Shinan chuckled. "Moreover, there are already three emperor realm cultivators trapped by my liege's demonic formation. Though they're still putting up a fight, they'll succumb in due time."

The demon king laughed as well. "I am not capable enough to have set this demonic formation. It is merely a geographical benefit. The land here contains a primordial demonic formation, refined by a great emperor of the Shadow Demons. It's been a hundred thousand years since then. I've only repaired the formation to a third of its former effectiveness. If His Majesty were to awaken and command the formation personally, capturing even a couple of Titled Great Emperors would be a piece of cake." The demon king cackled proudly. He was especially pleased about what he'd just said.

"My liege, you have received a true legacy from the primordial era. Given enough time, I think it's quite possible for my lord to become the next Shadow Demon Emperor." Lu Shinan was particularly well-versed at flattery.

"Hah, you know me well. How about this, I'll let you take three thousand bone apparitions with you to block off that kid. If you can get him to come before the Soulreaver Banner, all the better."

"Yes, your servant will do so immediately." Lu Shinan was overjoyed.

Chapter 894: Fighting Lu Shinan

Lu Shinan was fully focused on robbing Jiang Chen of his possessions. Treasures strong enough to overwhelm the Prince of Shangping had to be extraordinary! He was someone with ambition, having taken shelter under the demon race's wing because he had reached a bottleneck in his cultivation. He knew he couldn't ever become the strongest of the strong. Thus, he had taken a road less traveled—

selling his soul was no object, as long as the demon race could be the strong backer he needed. It was also the reason for Lu Shinan's unscrupulous nature.

Upon entering Myriad Corpse Valley, Jiang Chen's first observation was that the malevolent air was even denser than it had been three days prior.

"Such a big change in such a short amount of time. The corrupt influence of the demon race is becoming more and more evident. The Wood Demons, the Shadow Demons... I wonder how many other branches are stirring?" He was greatly saddened by the discovery. As the factions within the human domain were still at one another's throats, the demon race was already roiling with restlessness. They were ready to make a resurgence any day now. The human domain was in no condition to engage in a battle of life and death with the demon race.

Jiang Chen couldn't spare the effort to think much more. He only wanted to leave this horrible place and find a safer area so that he could remove Huang'er's Generation Binding Curse. His road wouldn't be an easy one. After fifteen minutes, Jiang Chen noticed numerous throngs of cultivators. He could see many walking by on his road of return. There was only one path, so it was natural to spot them.

"How come there are so many of them?" Jiang Chen frowned. "They're not among the original five hundred that entered with me, hmm? Are there more who came in from the entrance in the outside valley?"

The more he thought about it, the odder he found the situation to be. These cultivators were clearly at varying degrees of strength. Some were even mere origin realm cultivators. The original five hundred cultivators had definitely been stronger than this level. A problem with the entrance was the only explanation. More cultivators must have entered this awful place.

Jiang Chen grieved for them. They thought that there were untold riches here. How could they possibly know that deathtraps were all around them? There were treasures too, of course, but there was no opportunity for normal people to obtain them.

"These people are clearly possessed by a demonic aura. Their expressions are noticeably sluggish and the characteristics of the living are gone. Have these people been demonized already?" Jiang Chen paid close attention to these cultivators. They lacked the vital signs that could be seen in every human. In truth, they were more similar to the walking dead under demonic control. He knew that the demon race had a multitude of methods for taking control of others and using them as their puppets, so it was reasonable to infer that these cultivators had already become demonic vassals. As such, he wanted to avoid further trouble all the more.

Suddenly, the ground beneath him moved strangely. Jiang Chen hastily activated his Cicada Wings, shooting towards the sky. The earth where his feet had been a moment prior was plowed open, as if a furious ox had penetrated it. Countless bone apparitions surged upwards from the ground, mounting an aggressive charge at him. It wasn't the first time he had seen bone apparitions. They weren't particularly strong demonic troops. Not wanting to get involved in the fray, he continually flashed his Featherflight Mirror to reduce the bone apparitions' speed. Meanwhile, he sought to break through the encirclement with Huang'er in tow.

However, the malevolent air in Myriad Corpse Valley was too dense. Despite keeping his altitude low and flights short, Jiang Chen still felt tired. He had to adjust after each brief airborne stint. Thankfully, though the Pentecolor Divine Swords had trouble killing the wood demon parasite progenitor, it cut through these bone apparitions easily enough. Large swathes of bone were torn to shreds with every sweep. The light from the swords burst forth like a lion charging into a pack of lambs, ravaging its prey freely.

His God's Eye lit up suddenly, as Jiang Chen locked on to Lu Shinan, who was commanding the bone apparitions in a corner. Like a white crane riding on lightning, Jiang Chen glided towards the cultivator. A point of his fingers through the air carried the power of a Galaxy Slash. It bore towards the hidden Lu Shinan like a river of stars.

Aiya! Lu Shinan couldn't have possibly expected Jiang Chen's sudden attack. He scrambled to respond to it. Thankfully for him, he was an emperor realm cultivator after all. His personal strength wasn't just for show. He evaded Jiang Chen's lethal attack with a shift of his body.

At the same time, he moved to hide himself even more deeply within the shadows with a cackle. As an emperor realm cultivator, he had no fear of Jiang Chen. He was more concerned about Jiang Chen's prior defeat of the Prince of Shangping. As a cautious man, Lu Shinan had no intention of facing Jiang Chen head on without first fully understanding his opponent.

"Lu Shinan, you've allied with the demons and sold your soul. I'd like to see where you're running off to today!" Jiang Chen was hot on his heels. He flashed his Featherflight Mirror at Lu Shinan's back. Being affected by the mirror's power was like touching electricity. Lu Shinan's body slackened a moment. Jiang Chen had arrived at his location in no time. Raising the magnetic golden mountain high into the air, he smashed it towards Lu Shinan's skull with a lofty motion.

Pfft! Seeing this, Lu Shinan knew that he couldn't leave without a fight today. Performing numerous hand signs in succession, he called a large cauldron into being near him. Its silver light caught the golden mountain, even repelling it.

Jiang Chen flashed his mirror once again at Lu Shinan, not stopping for a second. However, the cultivator seemed to have noticed Jiang Chen's Featherflight Mirror. He bolted to the side the moment Jiang Chen's palm moved. The magnetic golden mountain and Lu Shinan's silver cauldron fought each other directly, ramming into each other repeatedly.

Paying no mind to his mountain, Jiang Chen commanded his Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice into action once again. Countless lotus vines flew across the ground, curling themselves around Lu Shinan's feet. Lu Shinan smirked and stomped. Many defensive wooden stakes rose to counter the vines. Curling around the defenses, the vines couldn't reach further towards Lu Shinan himself.

"How could this be?" Jiang Chen thought it was strange that Lu Shinan had countermeasures for all his methods. Upon further consideration, it made sense. A good guess was that the Prince of Shangping must have asked Lu Shinan to be his ally, planning to fight against Jiang Chen together. The prince must have never entertained the possibility that Lu Shinan would join the demon race.

"Kid, why don't you use the rest of your methods?" Lu Shinan cackled, circling around Jiang Chen from a long distance. He had no wish to enter into a direct confrontation with the youth. Clearly, he wanted to

see just how many methods Jiang Chen was actually capable of dishing out. Of course, Jiang Chen had more tricks up his sleeve. However, his brain was operating at max capacity in order to come up with a better solution. In the heat of the moment, he activated a formation disk. The Ancient Slaughter Formation of Seven instantly materialized.

Lu Shinan's face colored immediately. He found himself having already entered Jiang Chen's formation. "You... you're a formation master as well?" He was a little surprised.

Jiang Chen smiled coldly. "Lu Shinan, there's no reason for me to not kill you today. You've joined the demons and are willingly serving as both their informant and lackey."

"Kill me? With what, your half-baked formation?"

The Ancient Slaughter Formation had three levels. Jiang Chen activated the medium difficulty. There was at least some hope of causing Lu Shinan a bit of trouble. However, the defector clearly had a treasure to defeat formations. A blast of radiance heralded an attempt to forcibly break out.

Jiang Chen countered with a swish of his Featherflight Mirror. Greatly astonished, Lu Shinan hurried to dodge. He knew his enemy had a method that could slow both people and attacks down. It was a lethal threat to him. His breakout wasn't delayed by the maneuver. He knew as well as anyone that the longer you stayed in a formation, the greater the risk you'd face. Suddenly, trails of green smoke rose out of the formation, gusting towards him. Lu Shinan tried to sweep the smoke aside with his sleeve. He quickly discovered that the smoke was a little odd. It had a strange restraining power.

"What on earth is this?" Lu Shinan gasped in bewilderment. He remembered what the Prince of Shangping had relayed about the battle with Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen had used the mint ginseng in his battle against the prince, so Lu Shinan was at least somewhat familiar with the attack. Pushing at his reserves of strength, he finally struggled free of the green smoke's binds. Lu Shinan waved a hand, and a folding fan appeared within.

"Take this, kid!" The fan's flourishes had a tectonic strength. It sailed towards Jiang Chen with the irresistible force of two mountains.

Bam! Jiang Chen keeled over from the attack, falling to the ground.

"Hmm?" Lu Shinan was amazed. The kid had a strong offense; did he not have the defense to match? It couldn't be. The Prince of Shangping had said that he couldn't break through the kid's defenses even with the eight statues. Had Jiang Chen used the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman to gain such absurd resilience and without it, he was actually quite weak? Countless thoughts passed through Lu Shinan's mind. As he mulled things over, he discovered that the 'Jiang Chen' who had fallen wasn't actually the real one. Instead, it was an illusion created by the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice. The discovery was far from encouraging. "Oh, this isn't good."

Lu Shinan moved to turn around, but was met by several golden rosary beads, rolling underfoot. "What are these?" The beads were fairly non-threatening, but due to the strangeness of the scene, he stepped back instinctually. As soon as he did, Lu Shinan realized that he had underestimated the situation at hand after all. The beads twirled over the ground, then transformed instantly into several soldiers in gold armor. They assailed him without hesitation.

“Out of my way!” Lu Shinan was quite upset now. He had been continually toyed with by a mere youth, and still hadn’t broken out of the formation. It was a thoroughly unenjoyable situation. The waves of his folding fan repelled the golden soldiers. However, the soldiers seemed perpetually resilient—they came back each time after being sent flying, their ferocity increasing with every rebound.

Chapter 895: The Mighty Long Xiaoxuan

These golden armored soldiers were obviously only in the sky sage realm, so Lu Shinan wasn’t afraid of them. However, they were extremely durable to the point where he could only knock them back and not destroy them, no matter what he did. This outcome was a bit depressing. It was at this moment that he felt a sudden tremor beneath his feet. Innumerable tentacles that looked like fleshy tumors suddenly shot towards him from all directions.

It was the mint ginseng’s attack. Although it looked a little similar to the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice’s attack, its effects were completely different. The creature’s strength was greater than even the lotus’, but it only had restrictive powers and lacked the attributes of fire and ice. Right now, Lu Shinan had been forced into a very desperate situation. The mint ginseng’s addition to the mix only made his burden heavier. It was at this moment that Lu Shinan abruptly detected a tremor from the air above his head.

When he looked up, a great domain abruptly pressed down on his head. This domain was accompanied by an energy that struck fear in people’s hearts, and it stifled Lu Shinan so much that he felt like he couldn’t breathe. In the next moment, an enormous paw appeared and attempted to grab him from the sky. The giant paw had five claws, and every one of them was sharp enough to rival any divine weapon in the world. There were black jets of air around the giant paw as well, and they blinked rapidly like black lightning. It was a combination of the dragon domain, the Claw of Crushed Mountains and Rivers, and the Black Cage. This attack was the fatal attack Long Xiaoxuan unleashed at Lu Shinan after materializing into his true body.

Lu Shinan looked up only to find the ever-present might of a dragon locking down every bit of space around him. The Claw of Crushed Mountains and Rivers instantly caught his body. Lu Shinan was instantly lifted into the air, unable to break free no matter how hard he struggled.

“A dragon, a true dragon!” Lu Shinan screamed at the top of his lungs as he commenced his final struggle. “Mercy, Daoist Huang, mercy! I am willing to betray the demon race!” At this point, he couldn’t do anything even if he possessed a million trump cards. The only thing he could do was beg for his life.

There was no reason for Jiang Chen to listen to his pleas of mercy, so he looked at Long Xiaoxuan. “Brother Long, he may be a degenerate, but he’s still an emperor realm expert. Do as you wish.”

Long Xiaoxuan cackled sinisterly and instantly tore Lu Shinan in half. He threw the man into his mouth and devoured him in three chomps. Lu Shinan’s bloodcurdling scream barely broke through the air before he was completely devoured by the dragon. A true dragon didn’t care if Lu Shinan’s body contained the aura of the demon race. The bloodline of an ancient true dragon could purify anything with its blood, and not even the demon race dared claim that their bloodline was stronger than the ancient true dragon race. After all, the dragon race was an ancient royal bloodline. Now that Lu Shinan had been destroyed, his cauldron naturally fell into Jiang Chen’s possession.

“To think that this cauldron can actually block my magnetic golden mountain! It’s definitely a good item. But I wonder what it is exactly?” Jiang Chen didn’t currently have the time to identify it, so he immediately stored it within his storage ring. “Unfortunately, I didn’t manage to get the Prince of Shangping’s formation disk. Otherwise, those eight statues would have truly been a rather powerful offensive treasure.”

Jiang Chen had searched through Lu Shinan’s storage ring, but the formation disk wasn’t in there. After destroying the defector, Jiang Chen departed the area without even bothering to clean up the scene. He paid no attention to the human cultivators who had been corrupted by demonic energy. Everyone governed their own fortune and fate. These people had made the choice to throw away their lives here on their own accord. Jiang Chen had no reason to play the role of a savior and save them all.

.....

Inside the Ten-Thousand-Year Coffin, Demon King Nineshadows was at the final stretch. Since he possessed the Prince of Shangping’s body, the body needed to be tempered with demonic energy. After three days of work, the body was almost fully tempered. Suddenly, Demon King Nineshadows felt a change and his expression notably shifted, “Lu Shinan is dead?”

The demon king was very shocked by this outcome. “Lu Shinan is a skilled cultivator, and I gave him three thousand bone apparitions to aid him in his mission. So how did he get himself killed? How did he fail to run away while he was in my domain? Is Jiang Chen really that powerful?”

Demon King Nineshadows found this outcome a little unbelievable even as wrath grew within him. Lu Shinan was one of the pawns he controlled. While he didn’t really care for the man, the human had still been a very useful and loyal dog as of late. Lu Shinan had also done many other things for him. For example, he was the one who had spread the rumors of this place to the outside world, lured cultivators into the desolate wildlands, and damaged the formation that the Prince of Shangping had left at the valley entrance...

But now that his dog was dead, many of his plans had suddenly been ruined. Thankfully, the formation in Myriad Corpse Valley had already begun operating. Even without Lu Shinan, the mission wouldn’t stray off course too much. Moreover, the recently completed corpse puppets would serve as useful assistants after the demon king gave them the proper training. The corpse puppets retained most of their host’s consciousness, but their first instinct was to obey the demon king’s order. Therefore, they were in some ways more useful than Lu Shinan himself. Although Lu Shinan was an obedient dog, he had plenty of his own schemes. For example, Lu Shinan had gone after Jiang Chen out of his own greed. Naturally, Demon King Nineshadows was privy to his little schemes. He just had no reason to burst the human’s bubble and stop him.

“This brat! If I allow him to run wild in my Myriad Corpse Valley and leave unharmed, he will absolutely think lightly of my domain!” Demon King Nineshadows was no kind demon. It was only natural that he feel deeply offended by Jiang Chen’s act of insolence in his domain and at the murder of his dog. Why should you be the sole exception when everyone else is turned into corpse puppets? Why are you able to enter and exit Myriad Corpse Valley in a flamboyant fashion and even take the life of a dog that belongs to me?

When the demon king thought of this, he felt like going right after Jiang Chen. But another thought quickly followed, "My physical body isn't complete yet, and I have reached a critical moment. If I were to chase after him now while my physical body is still unstable, everything I've done for the past three days would have all been for naught. In fact, the damage may even extend to my consciousness. Worse, if this brat is powerful beyond my expectations, I may even suffer enormous damage by engaging in a fight with him in this imperfect body, so forget it. I'll allow that arrogant brat to live for the moment. When I leave the desolate wildlands, the first person I'm sacrificing for the supreme ceremony that summons the demon race is you!"

Demon King Nineshadows undeniably possessed some semblance of rationality despite his inherent brutality. This was thanks to the infinite tempering of time. All these years had cultivated some shrewdness atop the demon king's foundation of ruthlessness.

.....

Jiang Chen finally stepped out of Myriad Corpse Valley after killing Lu Shinan. However, the ease at which he made his escape puzzled him a little. Why does it feel like my luck is holding up a little too well? I even ran into the emperor realm aura of the Wood Demon King earlier, but Shadow Demons haven't come after me for some reason. I wonder what level the monster that controls the Shadow Demons race is at? It can't be an average demon considering that it is able to control an emperor realm cultivator like Lu Shinan.

He was feeling much better after stepping out of Myriad Corpse Valley. One might say that the most dangerous part of his journey had passed. After leaving Myriad Corpse Valley, Jiang Chen unsealed Huang'er's senses once more. The trip to and from the desolate wildlands had caused her illness to worsen. But now that he had obtained the Soul Requiem Wood, they could afford to waste a few days. When he left, Jiang Chen noted that wandering cultivators were continuously pouring into this place like dumplings dropping into a pot. He was dumbfounded at the sight. Just how many people had rushed in?

Some of these wandering cultivators were filled with hatred when they saw him. It was obvious that these wandering cultivators had recalled the rules set by the Prince of Shangping's alliance upon seeing Jiang Chen, preventing them from entering the desolate wildlands.

"Everyone, this kid was one of the members of that alliance. Don't you think that it's despicable that they are the ones who profited from this venture while we received nothing?"

"Don't you think we should get revenge?"

"Yeah, yeah! We number in the few hundreds while he's alone. He has to give us an explanation today no matter what!" The crowd started jeering.

Jiang Chen's ears were sharp, and he immediately noticed that some of these hooters were members of the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain. How shameless were they to hide themselves amongst the wandering cultivators, but pretend that they were one of the members of the groups who'd come in later? Jiang Chen wasn't a blindly kind person, so he sneered, "Since when did the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain become so pathetic, hiding in the crowd and pretending to be a victim? Let's not forget that you were one of those who benefited from the rules too."

“The Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain?” The group of hundreds immediately turned clamorous. These wandering cultivators had been the second group to enter the valley. They had all formed their own temporary alliances, and their plan was to fight the first group together should they run into them. There was no way they were allowing themselves to be bullied by the cultivators of the first group!

The Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain was within the first group, so why had they purposely disguised and hidden themselves inside the second group? Just what were they plotting at? For a time, these wandering cultivators were all on edge, as if they faced a dangerous enemy. No one knew better than them what kind of people the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain were. There was no way the group would be kind enough to look after the crowd like a nanny.

Jiang Chen began scanning the crowd with his God’s Eye. What on earth was the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain planning by mingling amidst the second group? They couldn’t have been transformed into dogs of the demon race just like Lu Shinan, could they?

The more Jiang Chen thought about the possibility, the likelier he felt it was. It was impossible that a group as arrogant and domineering as them would lower themselves to join the weaker second group of cultivators otherwise. There was only one reason they would do so, and that was to fan the flames in order to lure more cultivators into Myriad Corpse Valley for the demons.

“Don’t listen to this kid’s nonsense, everyone. He’s purposely trying to distract us. Let’s charge at him together and take him out! He’s gone in for so many days and he’s ready to leave. This means that he must have gotten a lot of loot. Who else do we rob if not him? Everything he possesses rightfully belongs to us!”

“Yeah, he’s purposely trying to make us fight. Let’s kill him first and talk about other details later!” The voices kept sounding amidst the crowd.

Jiang Chen kept his Ear of the Zephyr open and roughly locked down the locations of the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain. He abruptly declared in a loud voice, “Everyone, the opening of the desolate wildlands is a complete trap. The desolate wildlands is the forbidden land of the demon race, and almost all of the numerous cultivators who went inside were turned into corpse puppets. If you wish to meet the same fate as them, then enter as you so please. You will be met with no resistance. However, know that once you go in, you will never make it out of that place ever again.”

Chapter 896: Eliminating the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain

Jiang Chen wasn’t even trying to scare them. He truly hadn’t found anyone alive when he was making his way out of Myriad Corpse Valley. They’d either been turned into corpse puppets or bone apparitions. He sighed as he watched a continuous stream of people flooding in his direction. “If you would use your brains for even a second, you would realize why you were all gathered at this place. It’s because someone has purposely laid down a trap to lure all of you in. I’m sure you all think that there are countless precious treasures lying on the ground just waiting for you to pick them up inside, but the reality is a stark and brutal contrast.”

He didn’t expect them to change their minds. He had already fulfilled his original goals. There was no reason for Jiang Chen to stop them by force if these people insisted on committing suicide. Right now, he only hoped that these people would calm down a little.

“Bullshit! That kid must have gotten quite the haul inside the valley, but is afraid that we’d go in and grab the rest for ourselves. That’s why he’s spouting such idiotic nonsense.”

“Let’s kill him first and see if there’s anything good on him!” Because Jiang Chen wasn’t an emperor realm expert, these people thought that they might have a chance to take him down together. Moreover, the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain was hiding inside the group. If they could spur these blind wandering cultivators into clashing against Jiang Chen, then they would have a good opportunity to benefit from the conflict.

“You want to kill me?” The mint ginseng acted as Jiang Chen sneered. It let out many puffs of green smoke, causing its innumerable wart-riddled tentacles to burst out from underground, enveloping the cultivators. The mint ginseng might have been weak in comparison to Jiang Chen, but it was still quite strong against these wandering cultivators.

The second they were caught, the hundred wandering cultivators couldn’t move a single muscle no matter how hard they struggled. They felt as if they were wrapped by steel. Fortunately for them, Jiang Chen had no intentions of taking their lives. A flash of cold indifference flew through his eyes as he stared at the captured cultivators. “I wouldn’t have given a damn about you lot if the demon race wasn’t lying in wait to profit freely from your corpses.”

As he said this, the mint ginseng swung its limbs repeatedly and tossed the cultivators at least several hundred meters away. Thump thump thump. The wandering cultivators cut a sorry figure as they crashed into the ground like sandbags. Although the collision was hardly fatal, it still hurt them a little. However, not everyone was as lucky as them. More specifically, six particular people didn’t fare so well.

“Hello, Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain. If you don’t mind, can you tell me what you’re plotting by hiding within this group?” Jiang Chen sneered and stared at them, the ghost of a smile passing through his lips. “Don’t tell me you’re trying to take down strong opponents later by pretending to be weak now?”

The Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain wore fearful looks on their faces. They hadn’t immediately turned against Jiang Chen earlier, outside the valley entrance, out of consideration of the bigger picture. Otherwise, how would a group as infamous as the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain let go of the matter as simply as they did otherwise? Moreover, they had never regarded Jiang Chen highly from the beginning to the end. They had always thought that Jiang Chen’s arrogance was a product of ignorance. But now, these thoughts had completely vanished from their minds. Pride was now a forgotten priority as the white-haired old leader of the group hastily said, “It’s all just a mistake, my friend. We surrender.”

The Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountains were flexible people who could bow their heads if need be. Otherwise, their tyranny would’ve already earned them a swift death in the world of wandering cultivators.

“Surrender?” Jiang Chen’s eyes turned cold, “Do you think that this is just a matter of winning or losing?”

The white-haired leader hastily continued, “Friend, we gave you face earlier outside the valley, didn’t we? If you can let us go this one time, our lives will belong to you.”

It was only natural that they would struggle in the face of death. They were strong enough, but because the mint ginseng had ambushed everyone by spewing the green gas, their movements had been greatly slowed. Moreover, Jiang Chen had locked onto the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountains before he'd attacked them. He had subtly pointed the Featherflight Mirror at them a few times during the ambush. Therefore, despite their strength, they weren't able to avoid capture. As long as their movements were restricted, they could possess a million trump cards, but not be able to use any of them.

The wandering cultivators who were tossed to the distance looked shocked to hear that these six people were really the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountains. They glared at the group with disbelief in their eyes.

"The Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountains?"

"Holy shit, is it really those six bastards? Hadn't they already made their way into the valley from the start? Why are they here with us?"

"Also, weren't they fanning the flames and attempting to push everyone into the valley?"

"Can it be... can it really be true that these six bastards have submitted to the demon race and were baiting us into our deaths?" Not all wandering cultivators were foolish, so quite a few of them came to the realization that this whole scenario was a trap after taking the time to consider the entire situation. Everyone turned pale when they heard of the demon race.

The Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountains were shocked when they heard the cultivators' conversations. "You must not misunderstand us. We are simply trying to take care of you, fellow wandering cultivators, as there's strength in numbers. We absolutely haven't surrendered to the demon race."

"Daoist Huang, how can you wrong us? The demon race is an ancient threat, how can we possibly submit to the demon race? Plus, we've only arrived here a few days ago, and the desolate wildlands was still sealed at the time. How can we have defected to them?"

If this conversation had happened in the past, then maybe Jiang Chen might have believed their words. But with the earlier case of Lu Shinan, although he still had no idea how these people had managed to defect to the demon race, facts spoke louder than words.

"In that case, do you mind swearing a heavenly oath to prove your innocence?" Jiang Chen's tone was indifferent, "You know, just in case I did accuse you wrongly. If you, the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain dare swear a heavenly oath to prove your innocence, then I can let you live this one time."

A heavenly oath? A trace of panic appeared in the group's eyes. If they swore a heavenly oath, then there was no escaping death no matter what. But if they didn't swear it now, they might not even be able to live past this moment. All six of them were men of steel. After they exchanged meaningful glances with each other, they decided to take a risk and survive today's predicament first. Whether or not the heavenly oath would strike them down after this was a matter for the future.

Fortunately, Jiang Chen hadn't missed the cunning gleam in their eyes. So he said coldly, "Remember, your heavenly oath must include the people who are closest to you. I know you're trying to make it past this moment and hope to get lucky later on. You can stop thinking such thoughts now."

Jiang Chen's words were like a bucket of cold water poured over the six men's heads.

“Daoist Huang, you go too far. This is intolerable!”

“Why should this involve the people closest to us? Also, I thought the heavenly oath only harms the person who swears the oath and not their family?” His words were in fact true. Most of the time, the heavenly oath only bound the person who swore the oath. However, if an entire group was involved in the oath, it wasn’t unthinkable that the group would be dragged into it as well. At the same time, the oath might not necessarily trigger punishment on every person. For example, the Tristar Sect broke their heavenly oath and was punished for it, but not all Tristar Sect disciples were killed by the oath.

“It’s true that the punishment of the heavenly oath may not befall on your families, but if you’re lying, then I will act on behalf of the heavens instead.” Jiang Chen’s tone was cold.

The Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain shuddered and glared hatefully at Jiang Chen. He didn’t fear them in the slightest. He smiled faintly, “First Lu Shinan, now the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain. It’s exactly because of trash like you all who have surrendered to the demon race that’s prompted their revival and seemingly infinite numbers.”

The Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain turned deathly pale when they heard Jiang Chen bringing up Lu Shinan. They knew that they likely weren’t going to escape death today. The white-haired old man abruptly chuckled evilly. “Do you think you can escape after you kill us, Huang?”

“That’s right. When the demon king descends upon the desolate wildlands, all cultivators who intrude here can do nothing but die!” Realizing that they weren’t escaping today, the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountains decided to discard all pretenses and cackle like madmen. Their faces were ugly and terrifying.

The wandering cultivators who had been previously fooled looked dumbfounded by this. They hadn’t really believed Jiang Chen earlier, but now that they heard the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain’s crazed words, their jaws fell open in shock. Had the group really surrendered to the demon race? Did they just say that a demon king was about to appear in this world? Did these signs really indicate the start of the demon race’s revival?

Jiang Chen’s eyes turned frosty. “The descent of the demon king, you say? That may be true, but you lot still aren’t escaping death today no matter what.”

He hated traitors like these to the bone in both of his lifetimes. After the order was given, the mint ginseng crushed the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain to bits with its tentacles. Unlike the Bewitching Lotus, the mint ginseng didn’t have suckers on its tentacles and thus wasn’t able to absorb their essences into its body. Jiang Chen sympathized with the lotus for missing out on the essences of six cultivators, but he couldn’t summon it in the public like this. He didn’t stay behind after killing the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain. He slipped past the wandering cultivators, as light as a sparrow. “Make your choice. I care nothing for it.”

He had performed his obligation to the utmost anyway. If these people insisted on committing suicide, he had no reason to stop them. One had to say that the lure of the riches and powers within the desolate wildlands was too great. Although these wandering cultivators didn’t dare provoke Jiang Chen any longer, they were reluctant to give up just like this.

“Don’t you think the kid is being a little melodramatic?”

“Yeah, if the demon king really has descended upon this earth, then why is he still able to enter and leave the valley freely? Maybe he just didn’t want us to plunder the riches in there and is trying to scare us away from it?”

“But the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain confessed their sins.” The hundreds of wandering cultivators conversed with each other, but didn’t take a step away. It was obvious that they were all reluctant to leave after finally being given the chance to enter the desolate wildlands. However, none of them realized that a great danger was currently sneaking towards them while they were wasting time there.

Jiang Chen was dumbfounded by these foolish cultivators. He had already said everything there was to say, so there was no way he was turning back to convince them further. A person’s life was destined at birth. If it was their fate to die here, then he wasn’t going to become the anchor that kept them from it. He turned his head immediately and swiftly moved outside.

After passing through the river and walking for a few hours straight, he finally arrived at the crossroads where he had agreed to meet Lin Yanyu. Only five to six days had passed since, and there was still a day or two left before their agreement of seven days was up. Jiang Chen was a man of his words, so he didn’t leave the area.

Chapter 897: Majestic Mountain-Sealing Formation

Lin Yanyu wasn’t as blind as many of the other wandering cultivators. With the weight of a family vendetta on his back, he didn’t overestimate his own strength. He was eager to do well here, but he was careful as well. After a few days, he was rewarded with modest results. He arrived seven days later, as previously agreed upon. He was very surprised when he saw Jiang Chen already waiting for him. He had been worried about the possibility that Jiang Chen might not show up after a week’s time. “Daoist Huang, did you wait long?”

Jiang Chen had indeed waited an entire day, but decided not to comment on it. He glanced at Lin Yanyu. The latter was well-worn from traveling, but free of demonic taint.

“You must not have picked the sky rank spirit herbs on the way in, Daoist Lin?” Jiang Chen asked rhetorically with a half-smile.

Lin Yanyu returned a wry smile. “Maybe someone else would have, if they hadn’t been paying any attention, but the Lin family specializes in pills and medicines. I’m not likely to miss any detail relating to spirit herbs. Those supposed sky rank ones... well, I knew better than to touch them. Frankly, I didn’t think that they were genuine.”

“Quite,” Jiang Chen nodded. “You have a good eye and remarkable self-control. That’s why you’re still alive. Others weren’t so lucky.”

He knew now that the sky rank and earth rank spirit herbs were mere illusions. Demonshade Flowers lay beneath their disguise. If cultivators were greedy enough to pick those herbs, the flowers would immediately strike. Their souls would be captured, and they would be fashioned into corpse puppets. Jiang Chen had seen many such afflicted cultivators on his way back.

The remark from Jiang Chen made Lin Yanyu grow more serious. “Daoist Huang, I think there’s something odd going on this time around. I’ve only been around the outskirts because I didn’t dare go

further in, but I saw a large inward flow of cultivators while I was traveling. They didn't look like they were part of the original five hundred."

"Yes, it's definitely not just five hundred cultivators," Jiang Chen sighed. "I'd say the number is closer to tens of thousands." He shook his head, shrugging. "Each man has his own fate. If they want to go hastily to their deaths, how are we to stop them?"

"Why do you say that?"

Not bothering to explain, Jiang Chen merely waved a hand. "You'll see when we go back outside."

Lin Yanyu was quite confused. Assessing people and trusting others was one of his good traits, and he knew, after prolonged contact with Jiang Chen, that he was someone rather extraordinary. He had good reason to trust Jiang Chen implicitly. As they headed back outside at a brisk pace, they saw even more cultivators rush in. Jiang Chen didn't want to bump into them. He avoided them the entire way back to the valley's entrance. The formation that the Prince of Shangping had set had long been destroyed. The hole in the restriction over the wildlands had been previously repaired somewhat, but there were signs of damage here as well.

"How can this be?" Lin Yanyu gasped in surprise.

Jiang Chen didn't know how to answer. Of course he knew Lu Shinan was the culprit. The wandering cultivators wouldn't have gotten in at all if the formations had remained untouched. Lu Shinan's sabotage was the direct cause of roughly thirty thousand cultivators entering the wildlands. They would never return. Thankfully, nightfall was coming soon, and the number of cultivators near the valley entrance began to dwindle. Everyone that wanted to go in seemed to have already done so. The three of them carefully walked out of the restriction. Jiang Chen stared at it briefly. The restriction showed signs of self-recovery.

"This restriction... it can fix itself?" Huang'er saw a hint of the restriction's recovery as well.

Lin Yanyu was awestruck. He couldn't make any assessments about the restriction aside from noting its immense strength and power signature.

"This is an ancient restriction. It only opens up every so often because of how old it is. It looks like the period for this opening is almost over, though. Good thing we came out so quickly." Jiang Chen sounded pleased. "Otherwise, we'd have to wait until the next time this thing opens up."

"How long would that period be?" Lin Yanyu asked curiously.

Jiang Chen shot the young pillmaker a meaningful look. "Oh? Do you want to come back some other time, Daoist Lin?"

"No, no, I'm just asking. There's no way I'll come back to this dastardly place. It's so creepy here." Lin Yanyu shook his hands hurriedly.

"I'm glad you think so. Daoist Lin, perhaps we three are the only survivors of this wildlands excursion."

However, Jiang Chen was quickly proven wrong. One by one, a few other wandering cultivators exited the opening as well, their appearances haggard. Jiang Chen probed each of them with his consciousness as they exited. If these people had been tainted by demons, he wouldn't have let them just leave.

However, his investigation revealed that these cultivators were likely the timid ones. Just like Lin Yanyu, they had only hung around the outskirts. They hadn't been brave enough to go further in.

Huang'er gazed at the restriction's opening, her expression serious. "Since the opening is closing up, it looks like anyone who still hasn't come out will no longer be able to."

"They certainly won't come out alive again," Jiang Chen sighed. "The only way they can possibly return is as a plague on the human domain."

"Why do you say that?" Lin Yanyu exclaimed, fearful.

"The demon race is awakening once more. These cultivators are only serving as cannon fodder and sacrifices for the demons. When they come out again, they'll either be converted to demons or be turned into their puppets. Lost forever to the abyss, as it is."

"What?"

Jiang Chen continued staring at the opening in the restriction, but Lin Yanyu was pale with terror. The news about the demon race positively frightened him. He wanted to leave immediately and go as far away as possible.

"Daoist Huang, shall we go now?" He called out to Jiang Chen. The latter shook his head, then walked to the side. He found a mossy rock and sat cross-legged upon it. Knowing what he was planning, Huang'er sat beside him as well. Eyes affixed on the opening, Jiang Chen furrowed his brow. He was contemplating something.

Lin Yanyu's heart was bitter with complaint when he saw his benefactor's strangeness. What had come over Daoist Huang? But as a kind-hearted man, he wasn't just about to up and leave while Jiang Chen remained stationary. He didn't want to let the other down by fleeing alone. Picking a spot reasonably near Jiang Chen, he sat down quietly in wait. He didn't know what this 'Daoist Huang' wanted to do, but his instincts told him that his friend had some unfinished business.

Only when the morning of the second day came did Jiang Chen let out a breath of relief.

"The restriction has closed up. Only eighteen people came out during the night. They're the only survivors. I assume they similarly only went around the outskirts and didn't have any clue regarding what happened further in." He muttered, speaking as much to Huang'er as he was to himself.

"Mm. How long is the period until the restriction reopens?"

Having observed the restriction for a long while now, Jiang Chen gave an accurate estimate. "Half a year to one year, but that's only temporary. With the restriction loosening up more and more, I'd posit that the period could shorten to three months, or even one month. Plus, with news of the desolate wildlands spreading further, there'll just be more and more cultivators who go in."

"Then we have to make sure that news about the demon race spreads as well," Lin Yanyu added from the side.

Jiang Chen smiled bitterly. "It's no use. Wealth ruins many. Even if we say that there are traces of a demonic presence, it'll hardly stop the desperados who go in solely to satisfy their own greed."

He wasn't just making things up. Though he'd previously killed the Six Wolves of Sparrow Mountain in front of hundreds of wandering cultivators, none of them had actually left. Clearly, all of them had put their faith in their own luck, as none of them had personally seen a demon before. Thinking about the situation at hand for a little while, Lin Yanyu didn't know what he could do either. "Demons... the demon race... is another demonic calamity going to fall upon the Divine Abyss Continent?"

Jiang Chen had his own ideas regarding the matter, but there was no way he could spread the news himself. Simply making it known to the masses served only to incite panic, nothing more. Those who needed to know the news might not believe in such an unreliable word-of-mouth recounting either. He inspected the fully-healed opening of the restriction. "I'd like to trouble the two of you to intercept any unwise trespassers from a bit further away," he stated to Huang'er and Lin Yanyu. In secret, Jiang Chen instructed Long Xiaoxuan to protect Huang'er.

The girl seemed to know what Jiang Chen was planning. "You should be careful," she pressed lightly upon Jiang Chen's palm.

Jiang Chen caressed the soft, silky skin on the back of her hand. "Don't worry, the restriction is closed now. No matter how fierce the demons are, they can't leave for the moment."

Huang'er and Lin Yanyu fanned out. Jiang Chen circled the restriction a few times. "There's nothing for it," he sighed internally. "If the seniors of the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect were still alive today, they would undoubtedly do the same. As the heir of their legacy, I should strive to be worthy of it."

Back at the sect's forbidden area, Jiang Chen had read the characters carved into the cliff face. They had detailed the history of the sect—every member had been devoted to fighting the alien threat from the outer realms, sealing off their own doors in the process. Such exemplary conduct was characteristic of great sects in the ancient times.

As heir to their tradition, Jiang Chen didn't want to lose face for the sect. Taking out both sets of sect flags, he surveyed the landscape for a good place to begin setting up a formation. Jiang Chen had marked the flags with his own unique signature. Though he was using them in a formation, he wasn't scared of losing them permanently. This time, he was setting the Majestic Mountain-Sealing Formation.

It was two formations in one, one primary and one supplementary. The Majestic Mountain-Sealing Formation was ten times stronger than the Nine Gates Incineration Formation. As one of the formations passed down from the Crimson Sect, it had excellent compatibility with his two sets of flags. Setting the formation would cost a jaw-dropping number of spirit stones, but thankfully, it was what he had the largest surplus of.

Even so, he was only a sage realm cultivator. He could barely unleash a tenth of the power of an ancient formation. It wasn't because his formation skills were insufficient, rather, he simply didn't have enough power to fuel the formation's true capabilities. Three days later, two vastly different Majestic Mountain-Sealing Formations had been completed. One was within, one without; one aligned with yin, one aligned with yang.

It had cost Jiang Chen more than a hundred million saint spirit stones to create. It was a heart-bleedingly huge sum to spend, but he didn't have any regrets. Though using up so many saint spirit stones was indeed painful, the alternative may have led to a lifetime of regret. With the formations complete,

Huang'er and Lin Yanyu were free to return. They saw a newly-fashioned formation and obelisk stationed outside the restriction's opening.

"Beware of demons?" Lin Yanyu pondered over the writing on the monument. The Demonward Obelisk was Jiang Chen's handiwork. It served as a warning to anyone who came after them. There were demons roaming out and about in the wildlands, and any accidental trespassings should be avoided.

Chapter 898: Chasing the Dragonteeth Guard

The formation that Jiang Chen had set was unconcealed. He was absolutely sure that unless several top-rank emperor realm cultivators struck in tandem, the formation would remain unbroken. Even a great emperor would have some trouble breaking through the formation that had taken him three days of time to set up. After all, this formation had been one of the cornerstones of an ancient sect.

Huang'er looked at the formation, then at Jiang Chen. Her clear eyes welled up with renewed adoration. She was naturally quite comforted that her man was so responsible. What girl didn't desire for the boy of their heart to be indomitable, able to hold up the heavens and the earth on their own? The act that Jiang Chen had performed benefited the entire world. Using his own resources and time, he was working for the good of all human cultivators. Many would not know of his sacrifice, much less remember it. It was more likely for others to curse him for his gesture—after all, the formation blocked their way into the wildlands. But what did a truly responsible cultivator care for empty reputation?

Looking at the monument and formation, Lin Yanyu had a lot to think about as well. After a long while spent in amazement, he came before Jiang Chen and deeply bowed. "Daoist Huang, I haven't respected many people in my life, but you have my sincerest gratitude for your righteous gesture."

Jiang Chen gave a lackadaisical wave. He didn't have much interest in such words. "I'm only doing what I can. How useful it ends up being... well, that's up to the heavens."

The formation would stop the average wandering cultivator in their tracks. Even a typical emperor realm cultivator had very little chance of success. However, if a large number of top-rank emperor realm cultivators pooled together their strength, the formation could be broken through after some time. Jiang Chen simply hoped that the words on his Demonward Obelisk would serve as a fair amount of warning to newcomers.

Lin Yanyu was forlorn. The greed of human cultivators was incalculable. When news of the wildlands spread, only more and more cultivators would arrive. The formation was strong, sure, but it could only block things off for a short while. It wasn't a permanent solution. It made Lin Yanyu respect Jiang Chen all the more.

Jiang Chen had some additional temporary solutions for this as well, though. He'd tucked a multitude of image crystals away into various corners. When someone did manage to break through the formation, the image crystals would record who it was. If they took his flags in the process, Jiang Chen would be able to see who had taken them away as well. He had no intention of just throwing away his flags. They were intrinsic to the Crimson Sect's traditions, and he had no right to simply dispose of them. Having done all of this, Jiang Chen looked to Huang'er for affirmation. Her voice was soft with emotion, "You've done enough. Stopping the demon race isn't a job for one cultivator alone. More must join the cause, especially the strong ones."

“But human cultivators are largely concerned with only money and power. Those with vision and wisdom are few and far between.” Jiang Chen smiled wryly. He’d only seen a few cultivators who were like that during his time in this world. People like Ye Chonglou and Palace Head Dan Chi had limited strength. Even though they were quite insightful, they couldn’t affect change on a large scale. The only one he knew that could was Emperor Peafowl.

Lin Yanyu felt the same way. “Truly, Daoist Huang. I doubt there are even a few leaders of the big sects who have their minds set on the well-being of the world. It’s a shame. They’ve climbed so high that it’s distanced them from the rest of us... what do they care if we live or die? They only care about power, profit, and immortality.”

No cultivator could be faulted for pursuing their own dao. But compared to most, Emperor Peafowl was willing to stay within the great emperor realm despite having experienced communion with the heavenly dao. He did so only to keep an eye on the demon race, a gesture of remarkable honor and uprightness that even Jiang Chen had to respect.

“Daoist Lin, what are your plans next?” Jiang Chen asked, once the group was out of the valley.

Lin Yanyu sighed softly, “I’ll keep traveling, I think. Add a bit to my life experiences. Maybe after that, I’ll return to Pillfire City.”

“Then we’ll part ways here,” Jiang Chen nodded. “I hope to see you again someday.”

Lin Yanyu had something on his mind he wanted to voice, but he’d held himself back all this time. After a brief moment of silence, he finally mustered up the courage, “Daoist Huang, I’ve always wanted to know... which great sect’s genius disciple are you?”

He had his guesses, but he didn’t feel that any of them were right. He only had an expectation of the sect’s general level. There was something more to it, though. Daoist Huang had been even stronger than the typical true sect disciple. Especially with regards to the formation he’d set up! Lin Yanyu hadn’t been able to make heads or tails of it, but he could feel its strength. A formation like that required great strength, wealth, and presence of mind. The combination of all three was nothing short of extraordinary.

Jiang Chen smiled. “My identity is a little special. I’m not sure you want to know. But I’m also curious about you, friend. If you really don’t have a place to go, perhaps you can come find me at Veluriyam Capital.”

Veluriyam Capital? Lin Yanyu gasped aloud in surprise. His expression changed several times as he looked at Jiang Chen.

Still smiling, Jiang Chen inclined his head and presented a cupped-fist salute. “Let us meet again someday.”

He was in a rush to find a place where he could remove Huang’er’s Generation Binding Curse. He couldn’t possibly tell Lin Yanyu who he was right now. Why risk complicating things further?

Jiang Chen’s departing figure induced a sense of loss in Lin Yanyu. “Veluriyam? ...Veluriyam Capital?” His eyes suddenly lit up. “Isn’t that Pillfire City’s mortal enemy? If Daoist Huang wants me to go to Veluriyam Capital, does that mean he’s a scion of some great faction there?”

Lin Yanyu was very excited now. Though he had been born in Pillfire City, Lin Yanyu held only endless hatred for his birthplace. He didn't hesitate in his decision. "I'll go. Only Veluriyam can give me the opportunity to enact revenge!" A glimmer of resolution flashed across his eyes.

.....

Jiang Chen's flight took him over the skies of the Eastern Kingdom. He passed by the Boundless Catacombs. As he was preparing to soar past Skylaurel Kingdom, he noticed that there was a gruesome battle taking place in the kingdom's airspace.

Usually, Jiang Chen would have no interest in such a low-level battle, but a closer look revealed the Dragonteeth Guard to be one of the parties involved. Moreover, there were two old friends of his in the group—Tian Shao, who had received many promotions because of him, and Tang Long, whose destiny he had changed. Both of these men were backbones of the Guard now. Because Skylaurel Kingdom was controlled by other factions behind the scenes, the Guard's power in the kingdom's capital had become much weaker than it had been prior.

At the moment, a dozen guardsmen were being attacked by a group of men in black. The latter group had roughly fifty members, all of them in the spirit realm. As for the guardsmen, because of Jiang Chen's connections to the Precious Tree Sect, the sect had invested more into Skylaurel Kingdom accordingly. Thus, there were a number of spirit realm cultivators in the Dragonteeth Guard now as well. In particular, Tian Shao and Tang Long were at the sky rank spirit realm.

Unfortunately, the men in black were no slouches either. Many guardsman corpses were strewn across the ground. It was a grisly sight to behold. Tian Shao and Tang Long led their remaining men in a small circle of resistance. They were fending for their lives. From the looks of it, they were at their limits. Their assailants could overwhelm them any minute now.

"Director Tian, you should go first. I'll cover you!" Tang Long shouted.

"That's right, Director Tian. Go on without us. Go as far as you can, away from Skylaurel Kingdom!" The guardsmen were evidently Tian Shao's most trusted associates. Though they were almost spent and faced inevitable death, their loyalty never wavered.

"Am I the kind of person who would leave my men behind to die?" Tian Shao roared, his face bloody.

One of the men in black snickered, "Tian Shao, what goes around comes around. How did you get your promotions? Wasn't it through flattery? You chased after Hidden Death all those years ago. Did you think about what would eventually happen one day?"

Hidden Death? Jiang Chen suddenly frowned. Remembering the name, he smiled out of extreme anger. It had been such a long time ago that he'd almost forgotten about them. The faction had done as they'd wished in the sixteen kingdoms. They'd been one of the most elite killer organizations. There had even been a killer sent after him, who had tried to kill him here with the Long family's help. When Jiang Chen had returned to Skylaurel Kingdom later on, another stronger assassin had been delegated to accomplish the same. Xue Tong had been briefly captured in the process.

Jiang Chen had caught a few from the organization at the time, but there were always fish that slipped through the net. Because he'd been busy going on to bigger and better things, Jiang Chen hadn't taken

them to task for their crimes. But now, Hidden Death was openly violating the peace in Skylaurel Kingdom?! Something perplexed him, though. Wasn't Hidden Death a, well, hidden organization of killers? Why were they moving about so openly?

Tian Shao and company were at the end of their rope. Jiang Chen shook his sleeves. A golden stream of air poured down from the sky like a cascading waterfall. It crashed down onto the men in black below, wrapping them entirely within. The golden waterfall was actually powered by magnetic energy. Even sage realm cultivators would have a very difficult time escaping from such a prison. The men in black were stuck in place. They couldn't move no matter how much they struggled. They were powerless to resist.

"Who? Who is ambushing us?!"

"Who dares meddle in Hidden Death's affairs?" The men in black were too used to running amok! Even in captivity, they were still quite ferocious. Their tone was filled with an arrogance that showed a complete lack of awareness.

The Dragonteeth Guard on Tian Shao's side had been prepared to fight to the death. They weren't sure what had just happened. This turn of events was shocking.

"Director Tian, we..." Tang Long had no idea what was going on either. Tian Shao had long since been promoted to vice director of the Dragonteeth Guard, but despite that, with regards to the situation at hand, he knew about as much as the rest of his crew.

Chapter 899: Death by One Palm Strike

Jiang Chen and Huang'er were emotionless as they descended into a lower altitude where the battle was happening. Because he was disguised, Tian Shao and Tang Long wouldn't know who he was. In fact, not even Gong Wuji would, even if the man were to come back to life.

The men in black were slightly intimidated by the fact that Jiang Chen and Huang'er hadn't flown on mounts, instead descending midair with their own strength. Tian Shao and his subordinates saw it as well. Flying! They looked at each other with shocked eyes, their faces pale. These newcomers had flown in without spirit beasts. They had to be at least in the sage realm! Although the occasional sage realm cultivator did show up in Skylaurel Kingdom from time to time, seeing such a cultivator in person was off limits for them. Even if they were accidentally able to catch a glimpse, they wouldn't know about it. Both parties were surprised at such a rare sight.

"Wh... who're you?" The leader of the men in black stammered. "We... we are of the Hidden Death..."

"Hidden Death. Is that one of those clandestine killer organizations?" Jiang Chen said impassively. Tian Shao and company were relieved at Jiang Chen's evaluation of the organization. It didn't sound like they were on particularly great terms.

"That's how we were before," the black-garbed leader nodded. "We have become followers of the Ninesuns Sky Sect and are now a faction beneath one of their first-rank sects. Our sect head is one of the division leaders for the Purple Light Division."

“Ninesuns Sky Sect? Purple Light Division?” Jiang Chen blinked. Isn’t the Purple Light Division what the Purple Sun Sect changed its name to after defecting to the Ninesuns Sky Sect? It appeared that after the sect’s elites died, the Division had fallen into Hidden Death’s hands.

The black-garbed leader puffed himself up. “That’s right, the Ninesuns Sky Sect. Our sect head is sworn brothers with an eleventh-rank inspector of that sect and has received sufficient recognition from the sect itself. He’s a sage realm cultivator now. Friends...”

Jiang Chen’s face suddenly darkened. “Friends? What right do you have to call me your friend?”

“We might not, but surely you’ve heard of the Ninesuns Sky Sect’s name?!” The black-garbed leader loudly proclaimed.

Are these guys trying to pressure me using the sect’s name? Jiang Chen couldn’t help but laugh. He hadn’t been scared of the Ninesuns Sky Sect even when he’d been a mere spirit realm cultivator. What possibility was there of that changing now?

On the other hand, Tian Shao and his guardsmen were quite anxious. They were fearful that these two strong cultivators would leave after hearing the sect’s name. If they did, then the Dragonteeth Guard would lose their only lifeline.

Seeing that Jiang Chen had fallen silent, the black-garbed leader thought that the person in front of him had grown fearful. He began to push for an advantage. “I don’t think you’re related to these Skyl laurels, friend. Why risk your head for theirs? We need to settle some old grudges. Surely that doesn’t relate to you?”

Jiang Chen laughed coldly. “Are you threatening me?”

“I don’t think I am. Rather, I’m trying to convince you to see the truth of the matter. Why make an enemy of the Ninesuns Sky Sect? There isn’t anywhere to rest under the heavens for people who do.”

It was sounding more and more like a threat after all. Jiang Chen was no stranger to words like these, but the source that they came from... the men in black didn’t even have an origin realm cultivator in their group. How did they have the guts to threaten him? Quite odd, really. These people from Hidden Death showed themselves to be upstarts after all. Now that they had the Ninesuns Sky Sect to back them up, they thought that they were the greatest in the world.

Jiang Chen bobbed his head a little. “How unfortunate for you. I have old debts to settle with Hidden Death as well. I’ll treat you guys as an advance payment of interest.”

“What? You should think things through... ah!”

The time for talk was over. Jiang Chen smacked his hand down, conjuring a golden hand sign that grew bigger and bigger until it became a mountain. The hand burst the men in black as easily as if they’d been bubbles. Their lives were snuffed out like candle flames, their screams stifled in the process. A cultivator of Jiang Chen’s caliber could fight toe-to-toe with an emperor realm cultivator. These spirit realm toadies were no match for him. They were ground to dust beneath the palm of his hand.

To Tian Shao and his men, however, the sight was enough to make the muscles on their faces spasm. Their opponents were the ones being killed, but the method that had been used to do it was still gut-

wrenchingly fearsome. The scores of enemies who had been after them couldn't even take one slap of this stranger's palm. They had been directly reduced to smithereens. Just what kind of power did he possess? Tian Shao's entire body felt limp. He barely calmed himself, offering a cupped-fist salute to Jiang Chen. "Thank you for your help, sir."

Jiang Chen looked back at Tian Shao, then at Tang Long. Those two's strengths had increased a fair amount during these many years. But alas, the Skylaurel Kingdom of today was no longer the same as the Skylaurel Kingdom of days past. Their skills were a drop in the bucket in the grand scheme of things. Faintly nodding in approval, he asked, "What's up with Hidden Death? Can one of you explain in more detail?"

Tian Shao worked up the courage to come over. He recounted the drastic changes that Hidden Death had undergone during these past few years. Everything was described in detail. When Hidden Death had worked within the sixteen kingdoms alliance all those years ago, their strength had been formidable even back then. Though they weren't as strong as the four great sects, they were only weaker by a small measure.

Their first opportunity came after the alliance of Precious Tree Sect and Regal Pill Palace several years ago. Purple Sun Sect had been at a low point then, and the other sects all had different backers. Ninesuns Sky Sect's plans were greatly disrupted, and that was where Hidden Death had come in. The head of Hidden Death offered up a treasure that greatly pleased a certain rank eleven inspector of the Ninesuns Sky Sect. The inspector instantly became sworn brothers with Hidden Death's sect head, wholeheartedly recommending Hidden Death to his higher-ups. With Ninesuns' assistance, Hidden Death shot up in strength over the course of only a few years. Their strength surpassed the historical four great sects, and neared that of a fifth-rank sect.

When Eternal Celestial Capital invaded the Myriad Domain, a further opportunity for Hidden Death's advancement came. The added chaos was perfect for the Ninesuns-backed Hidden Death to develop like wildfire. The Hidden Death of today was fully under the Purple Light Division. Its sect head was the second-in-command there. There was no difference between the second-in-command and the actual person in charge, since the latter was designated by the Ninesuns Sky Sect. For the most part, they didn't mind much of the division's business. Thus, Hidden Death grew full of themselves in the sixteen kingdoms. Moreover, they were able to spread their reach to the entire Myriad Domain.

Though the domain had a multitude of factions occupying it, others gave the Purple Light Division a wide berth. They were subordinate to the Ninesuns Sky Sect, after all. A few days prior, someone at Hidden Death had probably recalled the shame of their previous failure in Skylaurel all those years ago, putting forward a proposition to get even. Tian Shao had been one of the heads of the taskforce at the time. Unfortunately, he had been found on duty and engaged by this bloodthirsty group.

"Sirs, the Purple Light Division will surely investigate now that you've killed someone from Hidden Death." Tian Shao couldn't help but mention after his explanation. "They're backed by Ninesuns Sky Sect now, and they use that as license to run rampant all over the place. You should depart as soon as possible."

"What about you?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

Tian Shao looked depressed. "We can only change our names and retire. Skylareel Kingdom isn't what it once was. If it wasn't for our loyalty to His Majesty the king, we would all have left long ago."

Jiang Chen sighed softly. It hadn't even been ten years, but things had already become this bad. Even a place as insignificant as Skylareel Kingdom had been caught up in the sweeping changes of the world. The Eternal Celestial Capital and Ninesuns Sky Sect were the ones ultimately responsible for the state of things. Thinking for a moment, he took some time to sort through a few things before giving Tian Shao a storage ring. "Here, take this."

Tian Shao figured out its nature as soon as he received it. "Sir, what are you..."

"Ole Tian, this is Jiang Chen," Jiang Chen messaged. "There are a lot of things in this storage ring that will help you in your retirement. Some of it will also increase your strength. Go split them up with Tang Long. As for the fourth prince... he'll have to sit tight for a while longer. Remember, as long as you're still alive, there's always hope."

The message shook Tian Shao to the core. He immediately remembered that Jiang Chen was still technically a criminal at large. His location could not be betrayed. Suppressing his elation, he bowed. "Thank you for your generosity, sir. If you have any interest, please come to the capital for tea and a chat."

"There's no need," Jiang Chen waved. "If you intend to hide yourselves and your names, you should leave now." He followed up with a message. "Don't worry about Hidden Death. Starting tomorrow, there will be no such organization anymore. However, you should still retire into seclusion. There will definitely be an investigation from the Ninesuns Sky Sect if Hidden Death simply vanishes off the face of the earth. You should be prepared for it so as to avoid being implicated."

Tian Shao had wanted to retire for a long time. His heart was amazed at the contents of Jiang Chen's second message. Was the young man going to destroy Hidden Death alone?

Hidden Death was as strong as a fifth rank sect and had the Ninesuns Sky Sect as its backer. It was the strongest entity in the sixteen kingdoms alliance. It was likely that the current Purple Light Division could do as it wished even within the Myriad Domain. Not necessarily due to their own strength, but because Ninesuns Sky Sect's name carried far too much weight.

However, Tian Shao recalled a few rumors that had circulated about Jiang Chen. A few years ago, Jiang Chen had been able to kill an emperor realm cultivator from Eternal Celestial Capital. Perhaps his cultivation as of late allowed for even greater miracles? Though Hidden Death was strong, they were mere upstarts. They had a million chinks in their armor before a genius like Jiang Chen. There was no more time for small talk, though. Tian Shao bowed once more with the rest of the Dragonteeth Guard, then beckoned to them. "We're off!"

Chapter 900: The Delight of Old Acquaintances

Tian Shao couldn't contain his excitement when he left. Though he was silent the entire way back, the recent revelations sent powerful waves surging through his heart. After they returned to the capital, he dismissed the rest of the guardsmen. "Come with me for a moment," he spoke to Tang Long.

The latter had been promoted by Tian Shao and naturally obeyed his every command. The two of them walked towards a secret room in the Dragonteeth Guard headquarters. Tian Shao's serious expression made Tang Long a little uneasy. He knew as well as anyone that they couldn't survive in Skylaurel Kingdom anymore after killing those people from Hidden Death. Seclusion via retirement was their only choice. Closing the door of the secret room, Tian Shao looked about him before erecting a soundproof barrier. "Little Tang, do you remember how you got to your current position?" He messaged, as a final security precaution.

Tang Long paused a little before nodding. "It's because I met young master Chen, my great benefactor, while I was out on border patrol. After that, you promoted me every step of the way."

Tian Shao smiled wryly, "My current position was given to me through the same way."

It wasn't good for subordinates to comment about the matters of their superiors. Thus, Tang Long kept silent. Still, he thought that something was odd given how solemn Tian Shao was. He also messaged silently, "Director, what's the matter?"

Taking out the storage ring he had been given, Tian Shao retrieved a wealth of treasures from it.

"Did... did that cultivator give this to you, director?"

"Yes, he gave it to the both of us." Tian Shao remarked after a glance. The things in the storage ring were portioned for pairs. One set for him, one for Tang Long. These things were useless to Jiang Chen, but for Tang Long and Tian Shao, they were priceless treasures. Pills, the essence of a wood spirit spring, the blood and bone of a Redscaled Firelizard, various weapons and armors, talismans, and hundreds of thousands of origin spirit stones... It was an enormous treasure trove.

"How come there's so much stuff? There's some for me, too?" Tang Long was surprised.

Tian Shao laughed, "Do you know who that cultivator was, Little Tang?"

Tang Long thought for a moment, his eyes glittering. Tian Shao's earlier question inspired him. "Was it young master Chen?"

Smiling, Tian Shao nodded affirmatively. "That's right, it was him. Young master Chen messaged me about it and how we should split up these things he gave me."

"Young master Chen... thank goodness he's alright!" Tang Long's eyes reddened. "I always knew that a genius like him would come out unscathed. It's the best news I've heard in a couple of years. He's... he's already a sage realm cultivator, huh!"

"I don't think he's just at the sage realm anymore. He mentioned that he was going to destroy the entirety of Hidden Death."

"What, the entirety of Hidden Death?" Tang Long stammered. "Taking down the whole sect? By... by himself?"

Tian Shao found it hard to believe as well, but he had mulled over the entire situation for a little longer than Tang Long had. "When has young master Chen done anything brashly since making his way into the world? He's always had a good grasp on things."

The reminder rang true. Tang Long agreed after thoroughly considering everything.

“He told me some other things as well. He said that we should be patient. As long as we’re alive, there’s hope. It looks like he has great ambitions in sight. Maybe he’ll recover the entire Myriad Domain some day and drive out the bandits who are currently residing here.” Tian Shao was enthusiastic at the prospect.

Tang Long’s face was full of joy. “I’m sure that day will come. Someone as prodigious as young master Chen will definitely return with a vengeance. Look at how long the Eternal Celestial Capital has chased after him for, but he’s still fine!”

“Yes, that’s why he gave us these things. We should become strong in preparation for that day’s arrival.”

Tian Shao’s tone was very passionate. “We’re here today entirely because of young master Chen. That’s why we must keep his secret, even unto death. You must remember this, Little Tang.”

Tang Long nodded gravely, “Don’t worry, I won’t sell him out even if I’m at death’s doorstep. Oh, yes, should we tell His Majesty about this?”

Sighing softly, Tian Shao shook his head. “Young master Chen probably doesn’t want His Majesty to know yet. After all, His Majesty has to stay to maintain the current situation here in Skylareel Kingdom. From his point of view, there’s no way for him to leave.”

Tang Long nodded. “Then if we go now, wouldn’t His Majesty be even lonelier?”

“We must go. We cannot burden him with our continued presence. His Majesty has suffered for so many years already. Perhaps it is a kind of trial from young master Chen?” Tian Shao had thought through things more thoroughly than Tang Long had. It was difficult to judge the machinations of men in power. Though young master Chen and His Majesty had been almost akin to brothers in the past, Tian Shao didn’t know if that was still the case now. Thus, in the end he couldn’t tell the king about these things.

“Little Tang, make your preparations. We’ll turn in our resignation to His Majesty shortly.” Tian Shao instructed.

“Will His Majesty agree?” In truth, Tang Long wanted to quit as well. He had stayed these past years because he had wanted to repay Tian Shao, not out of devotion to the king. Now that the director was leaving, it was natural for him to follow.

“His Majesty will understand,” Tian Shao said sadly. “We can’t help him much anyway. I find it hard to understand what His Majesty thinks sometimes, nowadays.” Because of the change in circumstances, Ye Rong now lived an aggrieved life as a figurehead king. His relationship with Tian Shao wasn’t as seamless as it had been before. Tian Shao was nominally a vice director of the Dragonteeth Guard, but the Guard itself was powerless in Skylareel. They had none of the glamour and style of their bygone days.

.....

Jiang Chen was not in a hurry to leave Skylareel Kingdom. He wanted to make sure that Tian Shao and Tang Long were able to safely depart. He didn’t want them to encounter any further complications. He also took the time to draft up some plans against Hidden Death.

The organization had crossed him twice before, and he hadn't returned the favor. This was the perfect opportunity to uproot them in their entirety. No matter who their new backer was, no matter what faction they were now part of, Jiang Chen would no longer allow Hidden Death to exist in this world. Such a faction was not fit to exist.

Tian Shao and Tang Long left in the night, and Jiang Chen protected them part of the way. He only left after ensuring their safety. The next day, he arrived at the Purple Light Division's headquarters very early in the morning. The division was located in the Purple Sun Sect's former territory. He had heard rumors about a gathering held here in three days' time. Everyone belonging to the division would come to the gathering.

Given Jiang Chen's current level of cultivation, there was no one at the division who could even detect him, much less throw a wrench in his plans. Any security became just for show around him. He had enough time to wait. He observed that half of the Purple Light Division was made up of original Purple Sun Sect members, and that the other half consisted of Hidden Death newcomers. However, the killer organization was in the leading position now. The Purple Sun Sect people were forced to occupy second place.

Purple Sun Sect's geniuses of yesteryear were pretty much all gone by now. The ones that remained were largely the elderly. Knowing that they didn't have a future elsewhere, they treated the Purple Light Division as a retirement home. They spent their days living off the Ninesuns Sky Sect's handouts. The Purple Sun Sect no longer possessed its previously illustrious prestige.

Jiang Chen was unsympathetic. They had brought their troubles upon themselves. They had been in cahoots with Ninesuns Sky Sect from the very start, and they were the first ones to sell out the sixteen kingdoms alliance. Their current situation was well-deserved. How pretentious they once were in the sixteen kingdoms! It was not easy to forget the overbearing old man Sunchaser of the past.

Three days passed, and the conference was set to begin. All of the middle and high-ranking members of the Purple Light Division had gathered together. There were several hundred people in the same place. Most were from Hidden Death, but a few were old-timers from the Purple Sun Sect. The head of Hidden Death was seated high on the division head's throne. His gaze was proud and his spirits high.

"Everyone," he looked all around him. "After the last few years of growth, our Purple Light Division is improving with every passing day. There's some good news that just came in during these last few days. A territory with a spirit vein that used to belong to the six great sects has fallen under our control. We will use this land in the next decade to strengthen ourselves even further. We are sure to receive even more accolades from the Ninesuns Sky Sect!"

The audience below resounded with applause. Waves of flattery swelled up like an incoming tide. The Hidden Death head looked over at Purple Sun Sect's previous members. "Elder Qiu, do you or any of the other Purple Sun Sect people have leads on the Precious Tree Sect? It's been so long since their leader's disappearance and the disbanding of their sect. Even their precious tree has disappeared. How can this be? Have you forgotten your grudge with them?"

The elder who'd been called on laughed ruefully. "Precious Tree Sect must have received some kind of forewarning. They scattered even before mass change swept across the land. Even if we wanted to pursue them, what clues do we have?"

“Hmph, do you Purple Sun Sect old-timers all waste away your days like this? Wallowing in incompetence?” The Hidden Death head’s tone became chilly. “We can’t have that kind of thinking here. Useless people are not welcome within the Ninesuns Sky Sect.”

The old-timers from the Purple Sun Sect could only agree. One of them piped up, “They can hide for a time, but they can’t hide forever. Skylarell Kingdom is the Precious Tree Sect’s home. If we decimate the place, maybe they’ll show up.”

It was a very malicious suggestion.

“Decimate Skylarell Kingdom? What, you want me to just walk in and slaughter some people there? The martial dao world has unspoken rules about interfering with worldly affairs. That’s a stupid idea. I remember there was a group sent to the kingdom in order to take revenge for something,” the head of Hidden Death added suddenly. “That was a few days ago. Is there any news of them?” Having said this, the head looked to an officer responsible for the delegation.

“Maybe they’re still waiting to strike,” the officer explained hastily. “They can’t publicly make a scene in the capital. They might need a bit of time.”