

F Disciples 371

Chapter 371.: Mobilizing His Forces

Chen Wentian acted decisively, not just in Glacier Province but in all of the other provinces he controlled. In addition to Dragon Flower Province and Glacier Province, these included Divine Blazing Province, Red Bamboo Province, and Cloudy Mountain Province. This was too much land mass to cover for an ordinary immortal but Chen Wentian had more than a few tricks.

He was prepared to mobilize all of his disciples and utilize all available souls for the effort of rooting out demons. He wasn't sure what the result would be but he was interested in finding out. He wanted to see just how many evil demons were hiding out among the human population. Even if it ended up being a dud, it was still a good exercise for his disciples, something that broke up the monotony of day-to-day cultivation.

Divine Blazing Province was the first one to get the news. He went there directly to give out instructions to Li Yuechan, Song Wushuang, and Xu Lanyi. The other three members of the ice sisters were currently here cultivating the flame portion of Summer and Winter's Eternal Sutra. There was no better place to practice flame arts than atop the volcano of Divine Blazing Mountain.

There was no particular reason the sisters were separated in two provinces but Chen Wentian preferred it this way. Five women together in a flock were much more difficult to satisfy than two or three.

His orders for the fiery province were the same as Glacier Province. Use of the teleportation array was restricted. Outsiders were blocked. Residents could only go to Glacier Province or Dragon Flower Province. Ordinary people and strong disciples could go about their daily lives but the weakest disciples of Divine Blazing Mountain were sequestered within the sect.

Moving on to the other provinces, Red Bamboo Province was assigned to Zhou Ziyun. The Zhou Clan already had a large presence there after the events of the monster invasion. Millions of gold taels had been invested and it was widely accepted that this was her province.

Lin Qingcheng was sent to Cloudy Mountain Province to join Wu Qianyu. It was nominally a combined effort but Wu Qianyu was off in the wilderness doing her own thing. He did not ask her to return and let

Lin Qingcheng do whatever she wanted within the human populated sections, starting with Black Rock City. It was sure to annoy the dregs of the Zhou Clan assigned there but it wasn't a big deal.

Chen Wentian allowed his three top disciples to go about the mission without his personal supervision as they all his souls by their sides. Lin Qingcheng had the brand-new Golden Serpent Robe with the morphing ability. Zhou Ziyun had her Insightful Swallow once again; the saber having been reforged into an exact replica by the original weaponsmith. Wu Qianyu still had the trusty Purple Jade Sword.

They would be fine. Not even a Spirit Lord demon could cause them trouble. And as for a Spirit King demon, something like that simply couldn't exist in this subcontinent without the various human Spirit Kings knowing.

Dragon Flower Province, the home of Ten Thousand Flower Valley, would be covered by the remaining disciples and the various branch sects. Jasmine was unreliable and too busy sleeping but she was still powerful. Bei Yingluo was still weak but she was eager to help. Long Yifei was busy studying for upcoming school year at the Virtuous Order of Chunzhen but even she volunteered some of her precious time.

He also had countless shadow anchors pooped out by Chen Mo over the past year, a growing nest of void bees, and a vast network of human informants that consisted of the House of Paradise, the Zhou Clan, and the Bright Moon Kingdom.

Out of all the provinces, his home province had the highest level of protection. It was the safest province, a place where no demon would be able to hide for long.

Lin Qingcheng emerged from the teleportation array and was met with a blast of freezing wind. She let out a gasp and countered with a wave of her own spiritual energy. It wasn't effective as she hoped and icy cold penetrated through the Golden Serpent Robe and made her shiver.

“Cold!”

“I should have worn more clothes!”

“Hug me, sister!”

Cries of complaint came from behind her. The teleportation array flashed continuously as more and more women appeared. Clad in colorful array of dresses and woefully unprepared for the frigid temperature, they huddled together like beautiful tropical birds lost in a snow storm.

Soon, they numbered over a hundred and spilled down the teleportation platform. The black-robed guards around the city square and people passing by all gawked at the new arrivals. Many of them had never seen women so beautiful and so many gathered in one spot. It was as if spring had blossomed in the city of endless winter.

“Welcome to Black Rock City, Mistress Lin!” The guards saluted smartly.

“Ah, thank you. Please rise.” Lin Qingcheng said.

She then tiptoed and peered over the guards' heads, looking around expectantly and little lost. She had been to Black Rock City many times but she had already forgotten much about the place.

“Mistress Lin! This way! You're building is behind you.”

The guards led Lin Qingcheng to the other side of the city square to the entrance of a prominent blackstone building that was three stories tall and covered an entire city square. It used to belong to the Nalan merchant family but now it belonged to Lin Qingcheng and the House of Paradise. She had only asked very politely but the Nalan Family gave up their prime location without any struggle. After Wu Qianyu's recent outburst, nobody wanted to mess with the disciple of an immortal.

“Governor Zhou Guanyu has already handled the transfer of ownership.” One of the guards explained, “The interior decorations are a bit sparse at the moment but the basic necessities are already prepared. Zhou Clan members will arrive soon to receive and carry out any requests you may have.”

“Excellent!” Lin Qingcheng said and clapped her hands to get the attention of the chattering flock of women, “Disciples! Disciples! This is the brand-new location for the House of Paradise within Cloudy Mountain Province. We must get it up and running as quickly as possible and expand outward into the province!”

“Understood, sect master!”

“Let's go!” She said and quickly scampered inside the building.

Chapter 372.: Cloudy Problems

Tonight, the great hall of the governor's castle at Black Rock City was adorned with splendor and brilliance that was more than suitable for an immortal, let alone the disciple of one. Countless bright candles filled the vaulted ceiling with warmth, blocking off the howling snow outside. Rows of smartly dressed servants stood to attention along the walls, below floor-to-ceiling banners depicting heroic battles of cultivators against beasts and demons of the wilderness.

Governor Zhou Guanyu sat at the head of the hall, clad in formal wear, dressed to impress. He had on glittering golden robes fitting for a king. Each hair ornament and ring he wore could buy a mansion. The small table in front of him was laden with sweet wine and fragrant dishes. Each sip and bite cost more than what a commoner could make in a lifetime.

Lin Qingcheng sat close by, in the seat of honor as the governor's respected guest. She wore her normal sunny yellow robes, modest makeup, and no jewelry. She seemed rather out of place next to this gaudy man. Even her disciples that liked to dress up and make themselves pretty paled in comparison to him.

The others at the banquet were her two direct disciples, a select group of talented but lower-ranking disciples, and some peripheral Zhou Clan members that she didn't recognize. It was a sizable crowd but Zhou Guanyu was the most talkative one by far.

Lin Qingcheng wasn't sure what to think of this young man surnamed Zhou. He was perhaps the most ostentatious member of the Zhou Clan she had ever met. They were normally nice people so Zhou Guanyu was a surprise and a disappointment.

This man annoyed her for reasons she couldn't grasp. His boastful chattering was getting more and more unbearable with each passing moment. She looked around at her disciples who were shooting her looks that varied from helplessness to outright frustration. Zhou Guanyu knew he couldn't flirt with Lin Qingcheng so he was trying his best to impress them instead. But his efforts fell on deaf ears as they all seemingly felt the same way towards him as her.

"Ahem." Lin Qingcheng cleared her throat and killed the one-sided conversation, "Let's discuss more pressing matters. I trust you have been informed about the truth behind our arrival?"

"I am aware." Zhou Guanyu replied, turning back towards her with a smile that didn't quite meet the eyes. "Although most of the clan is in Red Bamboo Province, I still have many clan members under my command. If manpower is an issue, I can also call upon some forces of Black Rock City."

"Good. Qin Yan, give Governor Zhou the thing we prepared." Lin Qingcheng said.

Qin Yan, the oldest among her disciples and the most reliable director of the House of Paradise, stood up from her table and respectfully handed Zhou Guanyu a large piece of paper, akin to something that would be posted on announcement boards across a town or city.

"Governor Zhou." Qin Yan said, "This our recruitment poster for the House of Paradise. It states that all women currently selling their bodies or otherwise suffering hard times may seek shelter with the House of Paradise. We will take everyone in that needs our help. It also lists the benefits they will receive under us. Please reproduce this exactly and spread it across Black Rock City."

"Okay." Zhou Guanyu frowned ever so slightly before nodding and smiling.

He waved his hand and a servant behind him came by to take the paper.

"Next, Yuan Qiaochu." Lin Qingcheng said.

"Yes, master."

A petite woman with a slim build and a round face stood up. This disciple specialized in fighting and even managed to reach the 2nd Level of the Spirit Initiate Realm in a short time. She was Lin Qingcheng's strongest disciple.

Yuan Qiaochu flicked back her sleek brown hair and unfurled a bamboo scroll. Upon it were carved several names. "Governor Zhou, the House of Paradise will begin the process of assimilating existing brothels in Black Rock City starting tomorrow. I will begin with the Blue Igloo, Snow Garden, and Gao Pleasure House. Please gather your martial forces in front of the House Paradise tomorrow morning and prepare them to follow my orders."

Zhou Guanyu shifted in his seat, obviously discontented. However, he smartly held his tongue and agreed.

Lin Qingcheng then chimed in, "With regards to the primary mission, Governor Zhou does not have to worry. The House of Paradise will handle all matters relating to it. If your people find out anything, report it to me or my disciples promptly."

"I understand, Mistress Lin." Zhou Guanyu replied a little bit sullenly.

"Good!" Lin Qingcheng said, clapping her hands, "It is already quite late. I have to get back to the House of Paradise and settle things there. Thank you for a great reception. We will work together and accomplish master's mission before the others. I'll get his reward for sure!"

"Yes, sect master!" Her disciples agreed.

"Yes... This way, I will show you out." Zhou Guanyu said through gritted teeth.

Bang!

Crash!

Zhou Guanyu returned to his private quarters in a soaring rage. A nearby table and the rather expensive potted plant atop it fell victim to his outburst. A crystal lamp and a nearby chair soon followed.

“These sluts... How can they order me around like a dog?” He spat through great breaths, heaving from sheer fury, “If it was Wu Qianyu, fine! If it was just Lin Qingcheng... fine! I can bear it. They are Lord Chen's disciples! But where did these ugly, pretentious sluts come from?”

Crash!!

A bookcase toppled over, sending a cascade of rare and expensive tomes to the floor.

“Shit! Damn it! Aren't they just a bunch of whores picked up from the streets? How can they order me around like I am dirt? They don't even think I'm good enough for them. I am the governor of Black Rock City! I am a young master of the Zhou Clan! They are just some bitches that spread their legs for money. This is ridiculous! Ridiculous!”

Zhou Guanyu ranted and vented until he ran out of energy. He slumped down on the sofa, weariness taking over. His father and the other elders were completely right. The House of Paradise was a problem, a serious problem for their Zhou Clan.

The House of Paradise took way too much money out of the sect's budget every month without contributing anything in return. Every tael of gold that the Zhou Clan spent brought back many times profit in return. That house of whores, on the other hand, was a bottomless pit, a money-wasting venture.

Many in the Zhou Clan felt this way about Lord Chen's decisions and his irrational kindness towards his disciples. The likes of Jasmine and Long Yifei had no detractors since they were simply too amazing. However, the other disciples were highly unpopular and raised many complaints from within the clan.

And it wasn't just Lin Qingcheng either. The whole deal of supporting Divine Blazing Mountain and Glacier Palace was an enormous debacle, a pointless way to spend as much money as possible. The Zhou Clan could barely manage the task of developing Dragon Flower Province in addition to the subsidiary provinces of Red Bamboo and Cloudy Mountain. Yet they had to sequester a huge portion of the budget to support two immortal sects that had nothing to do with them...

“Young Master Guanyu!”

Zhou Guanyu jerked up upon hearing a voice at the door. It was his trusted subordinate, Zhou Liufeng, a junior cousin from a branch of a branch family.

“Liufeng, come in.”

Zhou Liufeng paused upon seeing the devastating state of the room. “What happened?”

“Ignore it. Tell me, did you hear back from White Diamond Citadel? Did they agree to the deal?” Zhou Guanyu asked.

“This...” The smaller man hesitated; his face contorted with discomfort.

“I can't believe this, is a hundred thousand taels of gold not enough these days? Since when did a bunch of mercenaries get this arrogant and greedy?” Zhou Guanyu spat out, once again getting infuriated.

“No... actually.” Zhou Liufeng said with a shaking voice, “I have no idea if White Diamond Citadel accepted our deal or not. I sent three messengers but all of them disappeared. I finally hired a local mercenary group to go the citadel and...”

“And?” Zhou Guanyu asked.

“No humans reside in White Diamond Citadel anymore!”

“What?”

“The citadel has been wiped out!”

“What!!”

Chapter 373.: Master's Sword

Wu Qianyu slowed her weary steps and stopped beside a clear pond that was fed by a forest stream. There was a natural pebble beach at one end and a curtain waterfall at the other end. It was getting late and this was a perfect place to camp for the night.

She circled the pond and surveyed the area with her spiritual sense. There were all kinds of small creatures, insects, and birds in the vicinity but no dangerous beasts or demons. Anything that could put up a fight would have already fled ahead of her arrival.

She was no longer in the region of White Diamond Citadel but several hundred kilometers to the east. It was impossible for her to know of the recent developments at the citadel. She had not come across a single human for many days, let alone some random mercenary party sent by Zhou Guanyu.

Today, she had encountered a roving band of goblins which she dispatched easily. She also encountered several aggressive beasts that all fell before her sword. At least in this area of the wilderness, there was nothing that could stand up to someone like her at the minor realm of Spiritual Growth.

Wu Qianyu sat down next to the water, tired and dirty but satisfied. She contemplated her progress while eating a small meal consisting of rice balls, preserved fruit, and supplemental spiritual pills.

Her Dao of pain was improving steadily. She felt that she was close to another breakthrough in her Touch of Pain. Perhaps she would be able to incorporate it into a sword attack soon.

Her shoes eventually came off and her sore feet touched the cool water. And as dusk fell away into darkness, her dusty robes stained with beast and demon blood came off as she submerged her naked body for a much-needed bath.

Wu Qianyu cleaned herself under the waterfall before laying down in a shallow spot. She rested her head and stared up at the night sky. Under the light of infinite stars, her thoughts began to drift.

Sleeping in the dream array for a month let her relive many moments of her past, happy moments in the Green Leaf Sect with her parents and her junior brothers and sisters. What she was doing now reminded her of all the times she led them into the forest to study and collect herbs. During those trips, they would often camp out near rivers and lakes. The girls would try to play in the water while the boys would try to peep. Every trip was filled with laughter and joy, tender moments of fellowship and family.

And each one of those memories was a painful reminder of what she had lost.

Wu Qianyu let out a shuddering sigh and shook the dark thoughts away. She had a new family now. She had Chen Wentian, her master and lover. She had her sisters, each unique and interesting in their own ways.

She smiled as she recalled each one of their faces, especially that handsome dragon immortal who always seemed to sport an awkward yet teasing smile. He always set her mind at ease and made her heart flutter without any effort.

She sat up suddenly as she remembered that they had given her gifts for her recent breakthrough. She had been so engrossed in her cultivation that she had forgotten completely.

She studied the contents of her camouflaging spatial bag and pulled out the first item. It was from Bei Yingluo and was a homemade healing salve made from desert herbs. Wu Qianyu wasn't sure what benefits it had over healing pills but she appreciated the gesture.

Putting the bottle away, she studied the others. Long Yifei's gift was an archaic poem she didn't understand. Jasmine's gift was a fox fur blanket though Wu Qianyu doubted that the fur actually came from the fox immortal.

The ice sisters each offered something different. Su Xue gave her some kind of fragrant wine. Su Yue gave her a box of fancy pastries. Xu Lanyi gifted an ornate dagger, Song Wushuang a silk nightgown, and Li Yuechan a hair ornament made of snow pearls. Their gifts perfectly portrayed their personalities and interests.

Zhou Ziyun's gift was to be expected. It was a complete collection of five tomes detailing every beast and type of humanoid demon she was likely to encounter in the Eastern Wilderness. Wu Qianyu appreciated the thought even if reading wasn't her hobby.

Wu Qianyu set aside the heavy books and finally came to Lin Qingcheng's gift.

“This...” She was stunned.

The object was long and cylindrical, with a slight curve. It was made of ivory and polished until it was silky smooth. There were squiggly grooves along the side and a cap on one end that was oddly shaped like a rough cone.

It looked oddly familiar but she couldn't quite grasp where she had seen it before...

Then, a slip of paper fell off from the base of the object. Wu Qianyu caught it and read Lin Qingcheng's messy handwriting.

“Elder Sister Wu, since you are going off to practice sword arts, I think it's best if you took master's personal sword with you. It is the only one of its kind in the world and I will miss it dearly. But I am giving it to you since you will need it more than me. Hehe!”

“Master's sword?” Wu Qianyu wondered, “How can this be master's sword?”

She gripped the shaft and waved it around like a sword handle. Nothing happened. She wondered if she was doing it wrong and held it with both hands, letting her right palm rest around the bulbous head.

Wait...

She froze in astonishment and embarrassment. Her heartbeat raced and her body suddenly became weak.

Plunk! The so-called sword left her limp hands and dropped into the pond.

Wu Qianyu jerked out of her daze and scrambled to rescue her master's sword. Before it had sunk to the bottom, she found it and held it to her chest as if it was a precious treasure.

“Chengcheng, you scoundrel!”

Chapter 374.: Alone at Night

Wu Qianyu sat back down in the water with a silly smile. Now that she knew what the object was, she recognized it completely. It was a perfect replica, down to every last detail. It felt almost the same as the real thing, resting between her breasts, right next to her beating heart.

Even though she was alone in this vast wilderness, alone at night, it was as if he was right here with her. She could almost sense his presence, his loving and soothing aura. A joyous warmth coursed through her, allowing her to truly relax for the first time in many days. That heat quickly pooled between her thighs, sparking a wave of pleasure through her womanhood without a single physical touch.

“Wentian...” She whispered as his face appeared to her among the stars.

Unknowingly, her right hand drifted down through the water. Her legs parted without resistance as her fingers naturally sought out her garden of love.

Her index finger brushed against her nether lips, eliciting a surprised gasp. She pulled her hand back out of the water and glared at the offending finger. She had never done something like this, she had never touched herself down there!

But then she looked down at the phallus nestled between her breasts and her thoughts once again returned to her master.

“You can do it, Qianyu.” His playful voice echoed in her imagination, encouraging her.

Her hand once again plunged into the water. When her finger reached between her legs this time, they didn't leave.

“Oh...”

She let out a soft moan as she made contact with that sensitive nub, the one he always teased endlessly. Her fingertip began to move in a circular motion, movements seared into her soul from countless orgasms that he had gifted her.

It didn't feel quite the same but it still felt great. She was so aroused already that just the slightest pressure on her clit was ecstasy. With just one finger, she was driving herself crazy.

Right to left, left to right...

Up and down, side to side...

She got to know her own body like never before. It was a fiery feedback loop. She felt everything she was doing to herself and she knew just exactly how to make it even better. She quickly understood exactly what she wanted and how she wanted it.

It was enthralling!

Her whole body was on fire and she could no longer feel the cold water against her skin. In her mind, he was the one touching her. With every movement of her fingers, she imagined it was him playing with her, driving her helpless.

“Ssss!” Wu Qianyu sucked in a breath of pleasure as the first finger entered her own pussy.

Her middle finger sank into a puddle of warmth up to the second knuckle. It was a strange and illuminating feeling. She never knew it felt like this inside. There were so many sensations, from her touch as well as from the wet folds that gripped her finger tight.

She pushed tentatively. There was only a bit of resistance as her finger slid deeper, all the way until her palm bumped against her clit.

“Wow!”

The combination was amazing so she tried it again, pulling her finger back and shoving it back in. And again, and again, and again.

“Mmm...”

She developed a steady rhythm as she steadily fingered herself.

“Mmm...”

Her actions became rougher and faster. Soon, she added a second finger to the mix, further spreading her pussy apart to delicious results...

Wu Qianyu enjoyed herself for a while before the pleasure gradually abated and she became bored. It was still enjoyable but she sensed something was missing, something big. Her fingers could not reach as deep as she wanted. They could not stretch her wide the way she liked.

She was missing her master's cock, his sword!

“Chengcheng, you naughty girl!” Wu Qianyu muttered when she finally realized the true purpose of this gift.

But she wasn't angry or repulsed. How could she be with her lover's most precious thing? Instead, a surging heat reignited in her loins as she imagined what it would feel like within her.

The last bit of doubt fled her mind. There was no point in imagining when she could just try it!

She grabbed the bottom of the shaft with one hand and spread her pussy lips with the other. Guiding purely by feel, she rested the round tip of the phallus against the entrance. She shuddered with excitement as she paused for only a brief moment.

She then gave a determined push, forcing her master's cockhead into her waiting pussy.

It was bliss.

It was meant to be.

She instantly recognized the familiar feelings and she wanted more.

She pushed harder and the ivory shaft sank in smoothly until it rested gently against her womb. A thrill of pleasure coursed through her. It was almost like he was right here, inside of her. That girth, that curve of the shaft, the way he stretched her and filled her, the sensations were so similar, it was amazing, it was mind-blowing.

Wu Qianyu missed Chen Wentian the most so Lin Qingcheng's gift was the most precious of them all. It let her be with her lover in the most intimate way possible even though he couldn't be here with her.

An inanimate object could never replace him but this was the closest thing. And for a woman like her, alone at night, it was more than enough.

Her hand started to move faster and faster.

Her breaths became ragged and labored.

She stabbed her pussy with his sword, desperately, hungrily. She wanted it. She wanted it more than anything. She wanted his love. She wanted him forever.

“Mmm... ahhh...”

Her hips rose up from the water in the final throes of pleasure. She plunged him into her as deep as possible; once more, twice more.

Everything exploded in a nova of ecstasy and she let out cries of elation into the night.

“Ah!”

At that exact moment, several thousand kilometers away in Black Rock City, Lin Qingcheng sat up from her bed in confusion. She looked down at the orange spiritual crystal between her legs that was covered in her arousal, having been expelled by a sudden and powerful orgasm. It had been much stronger than usual, approaching the intensity of the ones she had exclusively with her master.

Her thoughts spun for a while but she couldn't explain what had happened or how it was possible. The only thing she could do was try again. So, she pushed the egg vibrator back into her pussy and lay down for another round.

Chapter 375.: Picking Up a Trail

Lin Qingcheng had no recollection of this strange occurrence the next morning. She was always a heavy sleeper, a side-effect of pleasurable cultivation sessions before bed. She didn't think it was anything too unusual but she felt much more rested and energetic like she had taken too many spiritual pills.

She directed this energy towards her most important task in Black Rock City and Cloudy Mountain Province, rooting out demon infestations. Her master wanted to find evil demons in particular and promised all the disciples a prize for the first person to find one as well as another prize for the most demons slain.

She wasn't greedy enough to covet both prizes but she wanted at least one of them. She couldn't do it by herself but she had the House of Paradise which would be able to gather information from across the city as well as the province.

This was the first time her branch sect was being used in this way. However, it had always been one of its goals from the beginning. Her disciples were finally going to prove their mettle. With three directors, a hundred disciples, and soon-to-be thousands of employees and affiliates, the house had the numbers to perform the task and the potential to do it much better than Chen Mo's shadow anchors.

The shadow fox's spying abilities were naturally very powerful but still limited by the fact that the world was simply too large. There were too many people, too many towns and cities, and too many places for demons to hide.

Each shadow anchor came at a cost. Each required spiritual energy, effort, and attention. Chen Mo had to constantly spread his consciousness around to all the anchors and it was impossible to monitor all of them at once. Even an immortal soul could not perform so many multiple tasks. There were bound to be instances where things were missed, especially if something particularly exciting was happening at one anchor compared to the rest.

The House of Paradise didn't have this problem. Each disciple, each employee was an individual, capable of following instructions and overserving with their five senses. Their line of work and their training allowed them to see a man's true self in his most intimate moment with a woman. It allowed them to gauge a man's true worth.

In a sense, the House of Paradise was the perfect information network for Ten Thousand Flower Valley.

“Master!”

“Master!”

Lin Qingcheng awoke to see her two disciples. Without Chen Wentian or Zhou Ziyun around, she had succumbed to an afternoon nap. She was lying sprawled on a comfortable sofa and the sun was already dipping towards the western mountains.

“Ahh...” She stretched lazily and blinked to clear her eyes, “What happened?”

Qin Yan, the eldest, took the lead and bowed, “Reporting to master, we have finished the subjugation of Black Rock City. The city is quite small so it only took us a week. The other cities within the province will take more time but we are on schedule. For the city, all established brothels have been taken over by us. All low-level prostitution gangs have all been disbanded by force. Nobody dared to put up a fight and the process was smooth. I'm sure there are plenty of pimps and madams furious at us but nobody would dare to fight back so I expect no trouble.”

“Uh huh.” Lin Qingcheng muttered, more interested in the plate of sweets nearby.

Yuan Qiaochu bowed and went next, “Reporting to master, we have compiled the testimony from all the recruits and have picked up a trail. It fits all of your criteria for multiple deaths under strange circumstances.”

“Oh?” Lin Qingcheng sat up straight, abandoning her snacks, “Tell me.”

“Yes, this report comes from the mercenary district. For the last few months, there have been multiple incidents of brothels losing debutants on their first night. As you know, debutants are quite popular and men who can afford it will pay a small fortune. We've compiled at least twelve instances over the last four months where a debutant died right after or a few days after serving their first customer.”

“There is such a thing?”

“Indeed,” Qin Yan chimed in, “The story has been corroborated many times. The new girls seem fine at first, in perfect health. But soon after, their bodies would wither away as if their life energy had been sucked dry. A few die the next evening and none have lasted more than three days. Some think it's a spiritual illness that's spreading around. Only a few think that it is the work of a demon. But, it fits the criteria you gave us!”

Lin Qingcheng snapped her fingers and began rummaging in her spatial bag. After a short moment, she found what she was looking for, a booklet about demons that Zhou Ziyun had compiled for her.

“Let's see... virgin... demon... virgin... demon...” She muttered as she flipped through the pages, “Ah! Found it, blood-sucking vampire, jiangshi!”

She beckoned to her two disciples who abandoned their formality and crowded around her.

Together, they read about the jiangshi, a type of evil demon that fed on human blood. This demon had an unstoppable thirst for life energy. Virgin women were especially nutritious as they had not yet given birth to new life and were brimming with natural life energy.

A mortal jiangshi had few powers. They looked like normal humans unless they didn't get enough fresh blood and life energy. If not, they would revert to a decrepit, rotting state which would eventually disintegrate.

But if one managed to gather enough life force to break through to the immortal realm, it would become truly fearsome. All jiangshi at the immortal realms were truly immortal as they could live forever off the energy of others. They would also be able to raise their victims into an undead army and use living humans as an unending source of life.

Among all evil demons, jiangshi were particularly dangerous as they had the potential to wipe out all the humans in the world!

“I think it could be this. What do you think?” Lin Qingcheng asked.

“Mmm! I agree, master. But how do we find it?” Yuan Qiaochu wondered.

“Easy.” Qin Yan replied, “It says that jiangshi needs to constantly feed. This one is greedy and is set on virgins as a quick path to improving its cultivation. It's smart enough to target prostitutes but that's where our power shines the most. Since we now control everything in this city, we only need to prevent the willy-nilly presentation of debutants. Starting from now, we will select the time and place for each debutant.”

“Ah! I see!” Lin Qingcheng's eyes brightened, “That jiangshi would have no other choice than to fall right into our trap!”

“Exactly!” Qin Yan nodded, “It should only take me a few hours to spread the word and have everything set up. In time for tonight. If the jiangshi is already hungry, we'll catch it!”

“Alright! Make it happen, I will need a place to hide and observe the debutant's first night.” Lin Qingcheng said, standing up, “I'll definitely be the first one to find and slay a demon!”

“Yes, master!”

Chapter 376.: Experienced Client

The House of Paradise carried out the plan immediately. Orders were passed down to all brothels and a debutant was selected at random. A lot of madams were frustrated by the decision but they could only nod their heads and comply. As for the maidens, it was a relief for many as the prospect of selling their first time to a stranger was a scary ordeal.

Nothing out of the ordinary happened to the first debutant, or the second, or the third. For three nights, the bloodsucking jiangshi did not show itself and the three women put up as bait remained alive and healthy. They were double checked and triple checked by doctors who all declared the women to be in perfect health, without any damage to their dantians.

Three days passed and it was night of the fourth debutant.

“Master.” Qin Yan said upon entering a dimly lit room, “The auction has concluded. We have made contact with the winner of the bid.”

She bowed and offered a slip of paper.

Lin Qingcheng grabbed it and read it, “Oh? Why has the price doubled?”

“There is only one debutant per night at the moment so the demand is high. The big spenders in the city are now all competing with each other.” Qin Yan explained.

“Ah...” Lin Qingcheng muttered, a little embarrassed by the obvious answer, “Anyways, when are they going to arrive?”

She looked over to the side at a crystalline window. It provided a view into a large room that was adorned in red. The bedsheets and pillows were made from crimson silk. Scarlet flowers adorned the tables and counters. Ruby lanterns hung from the ceilings, casting the entire room in a warm glow. It was almost like the bedchambers of a newlywed couple.

Her room, on the other hand, was a dim, bare, and covered with spiritual talismans. These were designed by Chen Wentian. They hid her aura and prevented spiritual energy from leaking out. The window was also a one-way mirror. A person on the other side would only see a mirror and even their spiritual sense would be blocked.

This way, she would be able to observe the clients and wait the jiangshi to appear.

“They should be here shortly. Payment was already collected.” Qin Yan said.

Right on cue, the door to the room on the other side opened and a beautiful young woman walked in. She wore an exquisite gown and was adorned with gold and jewels. Barely of-age, she was a blossoming flower that had yet to be plucked.

A man followed into the room behind her. He was middle-aged, with an average build and a moderately handsome face. There was nothing particularly interesting about him except for the fact that he was able to afford the exorbitant amount to win the auction.

“Who is he?” Lin Qingcheng asked.

“His name is... Dong Yi,” Qin Yan read from another slip of paper.

Their voices were completely isolated in the observation room and could not be heard from the other side.

“He is a rather famous loose cultivator in the province. He usually hunts beasts and slays demons in the wilderness to improve his cultivation which has already reached the peak of the Spirit Initiate Realm. He comes back to Black Rock City for two months out of the year to spend all the money he earned drinking and at brothels. His particular preference is debutants and he forcefully outbid all the wealthy merchants and young masters from the cultivation sects.”

Lin Qingcheng scoffed, “He doesn't seem like a demon. Perhaps it's going to be another wasted evening.”

“Perhaps...” Qin Yan agreed.

The two women fell silent as they watched the scene unfold through the one-way mirror.

Dong Yi led the woman to the table where steaming dishes and warm bottles of wine were prepared. His expression was relaxed and happy as he ate and drank his fill. Hers was tense and she barely touched her chopsticks. For him, it was a night like many others. For her, it would be the most important night of her life thus far.

Lin Qingcheng was sympathetic. Her own first time was in throes of passion, with her beloved master. It was as perfect as it could have been. She couldn't imagine doing it with a stranger in a strange place. She could only silently appreciate what each of her disciples and members of the House of Paradise did each day and each night. Their sacrifice supported their families and supported her sect.

“Let's go to bed.” Dong Yi's voice drifted from the room.

It was another effect of the isolation talismans which let sound from the outside in but not the other way around.

“My lord, would you like more wine?” The woman asked meekly.

Dong Yi shifted out of his seat and sat down next to her, wrapping his arm around her waist, "Beauty... don't be nervous. We have a long night ahead of us. I want to thoroughly enjoy you."

He buried his face to the crook of her neck and smelled her fragrance. He placed a few feathery kisses on her skin which made her shiver.

"My lord... eep!" She gasped as he picked her up.

They landed on the bed in a heap and clothes soon started to fly.

The woman lay there helpless, eyes closed, lips quivering, subject to every touch and every kiss. She had no experience and no amount of training could prepare her for the real thing. She wasn't quite enjoying it but it wasn't as rough or painful as it could have been.

His movements were well practiced, not forceful but firm and persuasive. He knew how to handle a virgin and he showed it. He was thoroughly enjoying the moment and making it last for as long as possible.

"Sheesh... he's quite good. The best one I've seen yet." Qin Yan commented, "I wish my first time could have been like that."

Lin Qingcheng rolled her eyes and stayed silent.

"Master, what was your first time like? Mine was with a street thug, it was over in a few seconds and I barely felt anything."

This time, Lin Qingcheng let out a giggle, "Qin Yan! That's private!"

"Come on... you can tell me! Was he good? I will keep it a secret!"

“Shush, just watch.”

The woman was completely naked by now, lying flat on her back, her breasts heaving from either nervousness or excitement. Dong Yi had a hand between her thighs, playing with her, gradually getting her in the mood.

He eventually coaxed her into spreading her legs. He then nestled his face in front her secret garden and began to explore with his lips and his tongue.

“Wow...” Qin Yan muttered.

Lin Qingcheng was impressed as well, not by his skill or anything but because clients rarely performed such acts. They usually cared solely about their own enjoyment and doing otherwise was a waste of time and money.

The maiden began to squirm, her toes curling from the pleasure she was receiving. She gripped the bedsheets and began to pant and moan. Her climax was quickly approaching, one that she didn't have to fake.

“Come for me!” Dong Yi said.

His lips were replaced with his fingers once more. He rubbed her clit, driving mercilessly to the peak.

“My lord... ahhh... ahhhH...”

“Come for me!” He said again.

Her moans became screams. Her voice echoed around the room as she voiced what she was feeling.

Dong Yi's eyes flashed with a strange glow as he let out a fearsome grin.

“Come for me...” He commanded harshly.

“Come for me...” His voice broke, becoming almost inhuman.

“AhhhhHH!” The maiden let out one last howl of pleasure.

Flames of ecstasy seared her body. Her hips rosed into the air uncontrollably as she shuddered from the powerful release.

“Yes!” Dong Yi shouted.

A powerful surge of spiritual energy erupted from his body. His face morphed instantly. His eyes became yellow, his skin became sickly pale, and his teeth elongated into fangs.

Chapter 377.: What Demons Fear (I)

It was the jiangshi!

There was no doubt about it!

“Master!” Qin Yan shouted, horrified.

“I got it!” Lin Qingcheng responded in a flurry.

Her spiritual energy surged, blowing away the overcoat she had on. She was left in a set of summer-yellow battle robes, her customary colors. Her face mask appeared, hiding all features except her eyes. This was followed by a flash of gold as she put on a pair of slender metal gauntlets, weapons at the peak of the Spirit Initiate Realm. And as always, the Golden Serpent Robe remained hidden underneath, ready to come to her defense at any moment.

“Master, hurry!” Qin Yan shouted, wrenching open the door at the back of the room.

Lin Qingcheng didn't reply as she was too focused on the scene unfolding on the other side through the one-way mirror.

The demon had once again stuck its head between the woman's legs. It looked like it was ready to take a bite of flesh with its teeth that looked like a forest of needles. Its long, blood-red tongue flicked out wildly, desperate to taste virgin blood. The woman had probably fallen unconscious as she was making no effort to run or protect herself.

There was no time.

It would take too long to rush to the door in the back, go through the hallway and around the corner, and finally break down the door to the other room.

The jiangshi was ready to strike. If it took a successful bite, that woman's vitality would be permanently damaged. She would forever be robbed a part of her life force and she would suffer an early death.

Lin Qingcheng moved by instinct.

She rushed forward several steps and faced the wall that separated the two rooms. She reared her fist back, and with a mighty shout, slammed it against the wall.

“Ha!”

Crash!

Bricks crumbled and wood splintered. Plaster disintegrated and flew everywhere. All the paper talismans within the vicinity of her strike were blasted away and multiple cracks appeared on the wall from the floor to the ceiling.

The jiangshi jerked up in surprise and stared at the source of the commotion. Lin Qingcheng's golden gauntlet made it through completely, forming a neat hole.

“Who?” It snarled, distracted from its prey momentarily.

Lin Qingcheng pulled back her fist and leaped into the air. Spinning her body around, she launched a powerful kick.

“Hyah!”

Bang! Crash!

The already crumbling wall collapsed completely. Debris went flying, spilling out onto the floor of the room on the other side. The gaping hole that was leftover was just enough for her to dive through.

She did just that and rolled to a kneeling position, ready to fight.

“Who are you?” The demon demanded. “What are you doing? Is this how you people conduct business around here?”

It had changed its face back into the human Dong Yi.

Lin Qingcheng didn't bother to respond. She swept her spiritual sense through the room. The woman was indeed unconscious but seemed otherwise fine. The Zhou Clan fighters and city guards were no doubt on their way. What she needed to do now was protect the victim and prevent the demon from escaping.

She rushed at the bed and tackled the astonished demon, sending them both tumbling.

“You crazy bitch! Do you know who I am?” Dong Yi bellowed, leaping back up with fists raised.

It was still trying to put up an act, pretending to be a human. If it turned back into a demon, then the entire city would descend upon it. Jiangshi had several powerful abilities but none that allowed it to meld into the darkness and sneak away like a shadow fox.

Lin Qingcheng stood up and put herself between the demon and the bed. "I am the Golden Madam, owner of this brothel. You have broken one of our cardinal rules. Therefore, you are under arrest!"

"You?" Dong Yi eyed her up and down before realizing something. His eyes flashed dangerously with a slight tinge of yellow, "What did you see?"

Lin Qingcheng smirked under her mask, "I saw... everything. Demon!"

With that, she leaped towards her foe.

Nineteen Demon Subduing Palms, First Palm, Demon Subjugation!

Her palm crashed ahead, cloaked in an invisible layer of spiritual energy that contained a mysterious attribute capable of subduing demons. Although she was at the 7th Level of the Spirit Initiate Realm and three levels lower than it, the demon shrank back and dodged towards the door. It wasn't prepared for a fight during its feeding time and sought to flee. It also felt an unnatural sense of crisis and primal fear, something that shouldn't have been possible, even when facing an immortal or certain death.

Her attack landed on thin air, sending her out of balance. The demon took advantage with a swift kick, sending her flying into the nearby furniture.

"Master!"

"Mistress Lin!"

Overlapping shouts drowned out the noise of Lin Qingcheng's impact. her disciple Qin Yan spilled into the room, along with several Zhou Clan experts at the upper levels of the Spirit Initiate Realm, the name of their clan emblazoned on their uniform.

“Crap! Master's going to scold me again...” Lin Qingcheng muttered as she extricated herself from the broken pile of wood.

The jiangshi spun its head around from the new arrivals to the surprisingly sturdy masked opponent. When it realized the truth, it let out an unnatural snarl.

“I see... I see... Zhou Clan, Ten Thousand Flower Valley.” It then faced Lin Qingcheng, “And you are Lin Qingcheng, the first disciple of that immortal.”

“You are correct,” She replied slowly, “And you... are a demon!”

The jiangshi gave a harsh laugh and transformed. Its pupils turned an unnatural shade of orange-yellow. Its mouth gaped open, enough bite off a small human head with its sharp fangs. At the same time, its skin turned skeleton white and its hands transformed into claws.

“Demon!” Someone shouted.

“It's a demon!”

Several people recoiled in fear while others stood their ground with conflicted expressions. Nobody seemed sure of what to do. Nobody wanted to be the first one to fight a foe they weren't expecting.

Lin Qingcheng took the lead and charged at the demon. Her palm shot out once more towards its chest. The jiangshi recoiled its body and then made a powerful leap into the air. Her strike once again missed while the demon collided with the ceiling, forcibly tearing open an escape path with its body.

She slapped the floor in frustration and scrambled back up. She leaped through the hole in the ceiling and landed on the clay-tiled roof of the brothel.

Seeing the demon dashing away, she sprinted after it.

Chapter 378.: What Demons Fear (II)

Jiangshi, compared to the faceless demon that Su Xue and Su Yue encountered, was less physically gifted and did not rely on raw power. Instead, it specialized in resilience and endurance. Jiangshi sucked human blood and absorbed life essence to give themselves a deep and seemingly endless sea of spiritual energy. In a fight, such a demon could last two or three times as long as a human cultivator at the same level.

Lin Qingcheng experienced this first hand as she chased the demon in disguise through the slumbering city. They covered the roof of the brothel in a few short leaps and descended onto the deserted streets. The demon tried to lose her in narrow and winding alleys but she kept up, never letting it leave her sight.

“Stop it!”

“Ahhhh!”

“Help!”

“It went that way!”

Dong Yi encountered an abundance of city guards, Zhou Clan fighters, and enforcers of the Crime and Punishment Division as it fled. It was past midnight and the only people out and about were Lin Qingcheng's people. They were posted at critical junctures to prevent escape.

But they were all too weak to stop the demon. One by one, in pairs and small groups, they were all defeated in the blink of an eye. Her forces suffered serious casualties but they at least allowed her to stay on the demon's tail.

Lin Qingcheng was giving it her all but she was starting to fall behind. After the initial burst of excitement wore off, the reality of the difference in power and the demon's specialty set in. She simply didn't have

the endurance to keep up. She couldn't even get close enough to launch an attack. If she didn't have so much backup slowing the demon's flight, she would have already lost it in the maze-like backstreets.

“Chengcheng, it will be bad if this continues,” Chen Wentian's voice drifted into her ear as she ran. It came from the Golden Serpent soul which always watched over her during critical times, “Do you want me to trap it?”

“No!” She said through gasps for air, “I can catch it, master!”

“Alright! You can do it!” He replied encouragingly. “I trust you!”

Since she was so determined, he chose not to undercut this opportunity for her to fight and grow. He didn't care about a few losses here and there of mortal lives as long as she benefited.

“I can do it!” She shouted, her spirits lifted by his belief in her.

The jiangshi was an endurance freak but in certain conditions, so was she! If this demon wanted to compete with her in sheer stamina, she would give it a good fight!

“Hah!” She gave a small shout as the sensation she had been waiting for arrived.

The pool of pleasure that had been collecting in her lower stomach poured out like a tidal wave, washing over her tired body, filling her muscles with new spiritual energy. This tiny orgasm came just in time, adding a powerful spring in her steps.

The demon had just been delayed by a patrol of city guards. Those precious few seconds gave her the opening she needed.

With a tremendous burst of spiritual energy, she leaped into the air and descended on the jiangshi's undefended back.

Nineteen Demon Subduing Palms, Fifth Palm, Flight of Demons!

Crack!

Her palm landed on its back like a falling meteor.

It bounced on the ground and crashed into a nearby wall of stone.

“AhhhH!” The demon let out a wretched howl.

It slowly extricated itself from the rubble and glared at Lin Qingcheng with hate-filled eyes.

Lin Qingcheng faced it and mockingly shook her palm. This made the demon bare its fangs angrily. She replied with a small smile. She knew it had suffered a few broken bones which gave her a tiny bit of satisfaction.

“I'll kill you!” The demons shouted suddenly, scaring away the wounded guards nearby and making her pause.

But instead of attacking, it turned tail and fled. Outnumbered and in enemy territory, staying and fighting was certain death even if it could slay tens or hundreds of humans.

Lin Qingcheng once again chased after it. With her body still full of orgasmic energy, she managed to catch up with the desperate demon.

She launched a flurry of attacks right away. She knew her enhanced state wouldn't last long. She had to end it in the next minute or so. Otherwise, she would get left in the dust once again.

Nineteen Demon Subduing Palms, First Palm, Demon Subjugation!

Second Palm, Dominate Demons!

Third Palm, Demon Cries in Misery!

One move after another, her attacks flew towards the demon wildly. Some landed on thin air while others met flesh and caused pain and suffering. Accuracy was left to the wayside in favor of overwhelming force and total suppression.

She wasn't going to let this demon escape!

“Shit! Shit! Shit!” The jiangshi cursed up a storm.

The demon finally had enough and gave up on fleeing. It faced Lin Qingcheng in the middle of a deserted street. It was already in a wretched state, with multiple wounds covering its body, its clothes dyed in thick, dark red blood. Its eyes were filled with fury as well as an unreasonable amount of fear. It shivered as it stared at Lin Qingcheng like she was the demon instead.

By ordinary standards, no attack from a cultivator at her level should have been able to hurt it. Demons individually were on average far stronger than humans. Yet her palm strikes managed to do and it even cut through its demonic physique like it was nothing.

Her palm strikes weren't even that special. They were filled with terrible form and telegraphed moves made it trivial to block. She was probably the most untalented human the demon had fought in its life but she was also the only one that managed to trigger a primal fear with its soul.

Something like this defied common sense. It was impossible... except...

“Who are you really?” The jiangshi spat out.

Lin Qingcheng didn't understand the question and simply advanced with her palm at the ready, “You already know who I am.”

With that, they collided together in a flurry of punches and kicks.

The demon's claws easily penetrated her shoddy defenses and raked her body. Her battle robe was ripped to shreds but that was it. The Golden Serpent Robe protected her from harm completely.

On the other hand, her palms continuously rained down on the jiangshi, tearing flesh, snapping tendons, and crushing bone. There was nothing it could do as its defense of flesh and spiritual energy all failed in the face of her unnatural attacks.

All of the demon's abilities and experiences were ineffective against Lin Qingcheng. It was a wholesale slaughter. It was almost cruel.

"Puuu!" The demon spat out a fountain of blood.

A powerful palm strike finally broke through its defense and landed directly across its chest. It was blasted away, landing some distance away in a heap. It tried to get back up but after several miserable moans, collapsed for good.

Lin Qingcheng walked over and was about to finish the job when the demon's rattling laugh made her pause. Its body was broken and it could no longer put up any fight. But it still had the energy to laugh?

"What are you doing?" She asked suspiciously.

"Hahaha... I know the truth now... I know who... no, what you are... demon slayer... demon slayer..."

"What?" She frowned, unsure of what was going on.

She studied the demon with her spiritual energy. It was definitely dying and there were no tricks or traps that she could detect.

“Haha... humans like you are too dumb and arrogant... I have already figured it out...” The demon said, smiling with a mouthful of broken teeth. “Now there won't be anywhere for you to hide!”

“What?”

“Your palm art is your downfall. You haven't accomplished anything... by killing me! You are all going to die soon... demon slayer, you're going die!”

“Tch.” Lin Qingcheng ran out of patience and slammed her palm into the demon's chest, crushing its heart for good.

The jiangshi let out a gurgle and fell onto its back. Its breath slowed as its life rapidly dimmed. But before its soul disappeared into the cycle of samsara, it let out one last burst of spiritual energy in defiance.

Woosh!

A black message talisman shot out of the demon's body and disappeared into the night sky.

Chapter 379.: Real Trouble

Almost immediately, the Golden Serpent soul barreled out of the Golden Serpent Robe and stormed after the ray of black energy that was streaking towards the eastern horizon. Lin Qingcheng watched helplessly as the giant golden phantom slithered away in the night.

“Crap!” She muttered, knowing she had messed up.

Chen Wentian left his disciple behind, his focus solely on the fleeing message talisman. With the Golden Serpent soul, he chased after the strand of spiritual energy with everything he had. He didn't know what the message contained or who it was heading towards but it had to be destroyed. Nothing good ever came out of emergency message talismans for the opposing side, that was an unbreakable rule of the cultivation world.

The Golden Serpent's body was huge and ungainly. His flight speed was slower than even his human form. The message talisman was faster and it wasn't slowing down. It had to have been created by a Spirit Lord. Its initial burst of speed was frightening and its cruising speed was on par with natural flyers such as the Insightful Swallow.

The Golden Serpent was perhaps the worst soul for something like this. The beast was a total landlubber, slow but powerful. It had tremendous defensive and close-range offensive powers. Agility and speed couldn't be taught or trained.

But... these abilities could be transferred from another source!

The golden snake phantom shrank rapidly and its color also changed. It went from a giant mass that could crush buildings to a white bird the size of a man. The soul of the Insightful Swallow took over and with a flap of its wings, shot eastward like an arrow.

The Insightful Swallow was an excellent flyer. Born as a white sun swallow, it was a beast that managed to obtain wisdom at the Spirit Initiate Realm. It gave itself the name insightful and arrogantly ruled the skies with a huge pack of birds of all species, wreaking havoc on human farms and orchards. Many cultivators tried to catch it but it was simply too fast and too smart. It only fell to Chen Wentian because of the sheer number of tricks he had.

After becoming Chen Wentian's soul, the Insightful Swallow's natural talent remained and even improved. It still wanted to dominate the skies. It cultivated the Flying Dragon Saber Art almost obsessively. In its eyes, there was nothing that flew that it couldn't catch!

Chen Wentian turned the situation around with the bird soul and started to gain on the message talisman. The distance between them decreased steadily until he was finally within range. As scenes of mountains and rivers pass below in a blur, he launched an all-out attack.

First Flight, Dragon Snatching the Sea!

The Insightful Swallow's talons glowed with white-hot spiritual energy as it slashed ahead repeatedly. Five simultaneous crescents of saber energy covered the sky, racing towards the tiny strand of black energy. It was as if a dragon god was trying to swat a mosquito.

Poo!

There was a burst of spiritual energy but it didn't come from Chen Wentian. Instead, the talisman let out a surge of power that surpassed the Spirit Lord Realm. With this burst of speed, it outran his attacks completely and continued eastward.

It was a built-in defensive array designed to protect against exactly what he was trying to do. His massive wide-angle attack should have taken care of all possible defensive maneuvers but this sudden acceleration was beyond his predictions.

“Not good!”

There was only one explanation. This message talisman came from a Spirit King. This meant real trouble, life-threatening trouble!

Chen Wentian urged the Insightful Swallow forward. He sent as much spiritual energy as the soul could handle through his soul realm.

It simply wasn't enough. He could only watch it grow smaller and smaller as it streaked eastward in a straight line. The speed at which talisman was traveling was something he simply couldn't match. Even though the Insightful Swallow was a great flyer, it could not keep up, not unless he was a Spirit King himself.

But... this didn't mean he was out of options. Since the message was heading east, towards the wilderness, he still had a chance, one last chance.

Chen Wentian continued to track the trajectory of the message talisman with the Insightful Swallow while he summoned another soul, the Purple Jade Hercules Beetle. Wu Qianyu was slumbering in a wild forest more than a thousand kilometers away. She just so happened to be within range of the path of the fleeing message.

The Purple Jade Hercules Beetle soul silently slipped out of her Purple Jade Sword. Less than the size of a fist, the small phantom insect opened its wings and shot off into the starry sky on an intercept course. Its speed couldn't match the Insightful Swallow but there was more than enough time to get in position.

A message talisman was a vessel created by an immortal's spiritual energy and their will to transmit messages across vast distances. It had the ability to travel fast but not much else. Simple defensive measures were possible but nothing more complex. It was simply a strand of spiritual energy designed to return to its originator, not a living and thinking being that could react with flexibility to all kinds of situations.

The Purple Jade Hercules Beetle settled into position, directly in the path of the message talisman. It was still out of sight and out of range of spiritual senses. It was several hundreds of kilometers away but approaching fast.

Chen Wentian channeled soul power into the beetle as it began collecting sword energy for a powerful attack. Through the eyes of the Insightful Swallow that was still chasing behind the talisman, he could gauge its exact trajectory and could launch an attack from beyond the beetle's normal range.

The talisman closed within a hundred kilometers. It was finally time.

Sword energy collected atop the horn of the Purple Jade Hercules Beetle. It built up until it was a blinding ball of pure destruction.

Dugu's 10th Sword, Second Movement, Pierce the Heavens!

The sword beam pierced the western sky. It illuminated the night like a shooting star, a deliverance from the heavens.

The attack slammed into the message talisman head-on. The Spirit King spiritual energy within it resisted valiantly for a split second before it was all used up. Everything was then vaporized by sheer force and concentration of pure sword intent.

Chapter 380.: Demon Slayer Art

Grrrrr!

A deep voice trembled in the darkness, bringing life to a lifeless world.

This land was so dark, there was no sun, no moon, and not even the faintest stars. The air was filled with immeasurable weight that pressed down like mountains, crushing even the smallest existence into nothingness. Everywhere smelled like death; blood and guts, burnt flesh, rotting corpses.

This was a hellish place that only unnamed and unmentionable beings resided. It was far beyond anything where even the bravest human or hardiest beast would dare to tread. This... was a demonic land.

“Who... Who is it?” The voice bellowed.

Power radiated in all directions, dominating, unfathomable. The ground shook so heavily that it was hard to distinguish up from down and east from west. Any mortal souls within earshot would have died instantly, from fear and shock.

A being awoke from its deep slumber, a tyrannical existence that had no equal here. It shook its ponderous head and looked upward in a particular direction. It had sensed something, something that shouldn't have been possible. One of the messengers crafted with its spiritual energy had been destroyed, or more accurately... partially destroyed.

One messenger out of tens of thousands meeting an untimely end wasn't the issue, however. The issue was the fragment of the original message that managed to return home after being scattered to the four winds for an indeterminate amount of time. This fragment contained just two words but these two words were the ones that the being didn't want to hear, two words that should have been wiped clean from this world already.

Demon Slayer!

Demon Slayer!

Demon Slayer!

The being of darkness let out a roar of frustration.

Demon slayers didn't exist anymore. They were all gone. There were no mistakes, the archdemon pantheon made sure of it. All humans wielding demon slayer arts were annihilated during that war that shook the heavens. All demon slayer sects were razed to the ground and their members hunted to the edge of the world.

The cost had been astronomical but it had been worth it. There was now nothing that could stop the ascension of demons. It was only a matter of time before the world was theirs.

But there was always the possibility...

Humans were stubborn and resilient. They were like cockroaches, constantly breeding, constantly spreading in all directions. Perhaps the message was wrong but perhaps it was right. There was no way to know unless it was verified. This matter was too important not to.

"Qin Shui'er! Come here!" It commanded, letting its powerful voice seek out the intended target.

A few moments later, a surge of spiritual energy came from above as a much smaller figure landed in front of the giant being. This new arrival was tiny in comparison, the height and build of an average human.

"My master, you called?" It replied curtly with a bow.

“Go west, to the human frontier. Investigate. Seek out the root of this message and find out who this demon slayer is and where they are. Leave no stone unturned. Destroy them all if you have to. Don't come back without results, understand?”

Qin Shui'er bowed once more, “Rest assured, it will be done!”

“Good! Go now!”

Halfway across the world, Chen Wentian was completely unaware that he had stirred a sleeping giant.

He was simply glad that the message talisman had been successfully destroyed. It had let out a surprisingly large amount of spiritual energy in all directions but he mostly managed to clean up the aftermath. He was pretty confident that the message recipient wouldn't be able to make sense of anything even if they had some strange method to still receive the message.

Task now completed; all the souls involved in the effort returned to their respective homes.

The Purple Jade Hercules Beetle returned to Wu Qianyu's side. She was still peacefully sleeping, dreaming with a smile on her face. She was deep in the wilderness but she was taking care of herself. There wasn't much to worry about there and he would continue to watch over her silently.

The Golden Serpent returned to Lin Qingcheng. She was a little shaken from the ordeal but still happy that she managed to catch the first demon out of all the disciples. Chen Wentian reprimanded her lightly for being careless but still promised to deliver her reward in a few days. She was as happy as happy could be and promised that she would do better in the future. He accepted her promise and let her clean up the aftermath in Black Rock City.

And lastly, the Insightful Swallow returned to Zhou Ziyun's saber in Red Bamboo Province. She should have been asleep so Chen Wentian was surprised to see her greet his return.

“Master, what happened?” She asked.

He shrank the bird phantom until it was able to hop onto her shoulder. He tickled her ear and proceeded to narrate the events of this evening, leaving nothing out. She was quite entertained by Lin Qingcheng's antics but the thing that caught her attention was the finale.

“Master, what do you think it meant by demon slayer?” She asked.

“I'm not really sure.” He replied honestly.

“What about the Nineteen Demon Subduing Palms? Is there anything special about it?”

He shrugged, “I found it in a weird tomb. Other than that, there was nothing else.”

He had never heard of that name before, especially from the mouth of a demon. The texts of the palm arts he found made no mention of it. It was simply a casual set of martial arts well suited for all kinds of foes, not just demons.

Zhou Ziyun strolled along the balcony and peered at the night sky, thinking out loud, “Demon slayer could be a kind of boogiemán, something that demons are afraid of, kind of like ghost stories told to human children across the provinces. But... from the way you described it, its reaction was way too unnatural for it to be some common phobia.”

She paused and rubbed his feathers, “Master, tell me, what are demons afraid of?”

“Demons? They aren't afraid of anything except death and stronger demons.”

“Are they afraid of humans at all?” She asked.

“Nope.”

She turned to him and spoke the next few words slowly, clearly so that he didn't mishear, "What about demon slayers? What if... there are humans that specialize in slaying demons? What if this Nineteen Demon Subduing Palms is the secret art of a demon slayer clan?"

"Huh?"

"What if it's true, that there is one thing that demons fear above all, something that is ingrained into their psyche so deeply that even the lowest demon dreg knows about it? What if this is a demon slayer?"

"..."

"And what do you think demons would do if they found out the existence of their most hated enemy?" She asked.

"Yeah... that won't be a pretty sight." He said lamely, the confidence he had felt before evaporating into the sky.