

Insanity 39

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Chapter 39: Toad Caravan Merchant

The month of May was a transition between spring and summer.

The fragrance of flowers filled the air, the huge mountains evergreen and the sunlight began to gradually release its ardent side.

Under the clear azure skies, the white clouds drifted like cotton.

On Qing Mao Mountain, the bamboo forest was straight like spears as always, pointing towards the blue sky. Weeds grew wildly everywhere, and unknown varieties of wild flowers dotted the grass thicket. As the light breeze blew, the wild grass moved to and fro, the heavy fragrance of flower pollen and the smell of green grass assailing visitors.

Halfway up the mountain was a huge number of terraced fields. Layer by layer, step by step, the soft green wheat sprouts were planted down. From afar, it looked like a verdant green sea.

On the terraced fields were numerous farmers busily working away. There were some farmers cleaning the canal for the channeling of water to irrigate the fields, while some farmers were rolling up their trousers, standing in the fields and planting sprouts.

These people were naturally all mortal outsiders as the Gu Yue clansmen would never have do these lowly jobs.

Ring, ring...

The sound of camel bells could be faintly heard in the spring breeze.

The farmers straightened their bodies as they headed down the mountain, only to see a caravan moving like a colorful worm from the mountain side, slowly showing its head.

“It’s the merchant caravan!”

“Yes, it’s already May, it is about time for the caravan to come.”

The adults caught on the situation at once, and the children stopped playing with the water and clay in their hands. Together, they energetically approached the caravan.

The Southern Borders had a hundred thousand mountains – Qing Mao Mountain was just one of them. On every mountain, there were villages after villages, which were maintained by everyone through their blood relationships and kinships.

In between the mountains, the forests were deep and ominous, the cliffs steep and full of the dangerous falling rocks. Additionally, in the complex surroundings of the forest dwelled a large number of ferocious beasts and peculiar *Gu* worms.

Mortals could not pass through at all. It was difficult to get past these obstacles alone, one had to at least be a Rank three *Gu* Master.

Because of the poor economy, trading was difficult. Thus, the most important form of trading was through the caravan merchants. Only by organizing a merchant group in such a large scale could *Gu* Masters come together with the power to help each other, conquering the difficulties in the traveling routes and traversing from one mountain to another.

The merchant caravan's arrival was like a bowl of boiling water that poured into the peaceful and serene Qing Mao Mountain.

"All these past years they would come in April, but this year they only arrived in May. At least they're here now." The owner of the inn let out a deep breath upon hearing the news. The inn's business was poor in the other months, so only when the caravan came could he earn enough profit to last the year.

At the same time, there was some green bamboo wine within his storage that he could sell to the caravan merchants.

Besides the inn, the business at the tavern would also boom as a result.

The caravan merchants entered the Gu Yue mountain village one by one, lead by a Treasure Brass Toad. This toad was two and a half meters tall, its entire body orange-yellow in color. The back of the toad was thick and full of warts and knots. It was like the lumps of bronze nails on ancient city gates.

On the Treasure Brass Toad's back, thick ropes were tied around plenty of goods. At a glance, it seemed like the toad was carrying a giant backpack.

A middle-aged man with a circular face full of pockmarks sat cross-legged atop the toad. He was fat and had a large belly. Both of his eyes formed into slits when smiling. He cupped his fists as he greeted the surrounding Gu Yue villagers.

This man's name was Fu of the Jia clan. His cultivation was at Rank four and he was the leader of the merchant caravan this time.

The treasure toad hopped slightly as it moved forward but Jia Fu who was sitting on its head was stable and steady. When the toad hopped, his height would level with the windows on the second floor of a building. Even when he was back on the ground, he was at a height greater than the first level of the bamboo buildings.

The originally spacious streets were suddenly rather packed and narrow. The Treasure Brass Toad was like a beast that intruded into the midst of a great number of bamboo houses.

After the treasure toad was a huge fat worm. It had two eyes that were similar to multi-colored glass windows, the colors bright and gorgeous. The worm was fifteen meters long, its body shape resembling a silkworm. However, the surface of the worm was covered in a thick layer of black porcelain-like leather armor. On the armor was another abundant pile of goods and merchandise, a hemp rope tied around it. In between the gaps and intervals of the goods, *Gu* Masters sat one by one, some old and some young.

There were also mortals who were robust and sturdy martial warriors, slowly moving forward on the ground following after a fat black beetle.

After the fat beetle, there were ostriches with brightly colored feathers, hairy mountain spiders, winged snakes with two pairs of feathered wings and so on. However, these were in small numbers, most of the creatures were toads.

These toads were all similar to the Treasure Brass Toad, but they were smaller in size and had the build of cows and horses. The toads were carrying merchandise and people, their bellies bulging as they hopped forward.

The merchant caravan wound deep into the village.

Children on the road would look on curiously with wide eyes, calling out in joy or exclaiming in surprise.

The windows on the second stories opened one after another, the mountain villagers observing the merchants from a short distance. Some had eyes that flashed with fear and some others waved their hands to express a warm welcome.

“Old brother Jia, you came a little late this year, you must have had a hard journey.” Approaching with the identity of a clan head, Gu Yue Bo came out himself to greet the leader of this year’s merchant caravan.

As Jia Fu had the status of a Rank four *Gu* Master, if a Rank three elder were to be in charge of receiving him, it would be undoubtedly be seen as a kind of negligence and scorn.

Jia Fu cupped his fists and sighed, “This year’s road was rather unfavorable. On the way we bumped into a group of Secluded Blood Bats and we lost quite a few good men. Then on Jue Bi Mountain we ran into a mountain fog, and we didn’t dare to continue traveling at all. So we were delayed for quite a lot of time, and caused Brother Gu Yue to wait for quite awhile.”

As they spoke, their tones were very polite.

The Gu Yue village needed the merchant caravans every year to come and trade, and the merchant caravan also needed business to make money.

“*Heh heh heh*, it’s good enough that you are able to come. Please, the clan has prepared food and wine, let me host a welcoming dinner for you, old brother,” Gu Yue Bo stretched out his hand and said invitingly.

“Clan head is polite, too polite.” Jia Fu was flattered.

The merchant caravan arrived at the boundaries of the Qing Mao Mountain in the early morning, and by afternoon they were stationed in the Gu Yue Village. When it was dusk, the surroundings of the village had formed into a widespread area of temporary shops and stores. All kinds of red, blue, yellow and green lofty tents were built and every inch between the tents was squeezed with numerous little street stalls.

The night was descending, yet it was still brightly lit in the area.

An endless stream of pedestrians spilled into the area from the village. There were mortals as well as *Gu*Masters. The little children hopped around in high spirits, and the adults showed an expression of joy akin to celebrating a festival.

Fang Yuan moved along with the crowd, walking alone.

The crowd was bustling with activity, groups of people either surrounding the stalls or endlessly pouring in and out of the entrance of the tents.

The surroundings were filled with the shouts of merchants hawking their wares.

“Come, come, take a look. Top notch Blue Sea Cloud tea brick, drinking this tea makes one as cheerful as a fairy! Even if it’s not a person drinking, it can be used for feeding and raising tea *Gu*, it is a cheaply priced item for its value. One piece only costs five primeval stones!”

“Brute Force Longhorn Beetle *Gu*, a *Gu* Master who uses this *Gu* will be able to burst out with the strength of a cow. You can walk away, but don’t regret it!”

“Intimate Grass, high quality Intimate Grass. Everyone look at this quality, it’s as fresh as if a newly picked one. One catty for two pieces of primeval stones, very cheap price...”

As Fang Yuan heard this, his footsteps paused slightly, then he followed the sound and walked over.

He saw an ostrich pulling a handcart with two wheels. On the handcart was a heap of pastel green herbs. Every blade of grass was a meter in length, slender and long. Their average width was around that of a fingernail. On some of the pointed tips of the grass grew red heart-shaped flower buds.

The Intimate Grass was one of a *Gu* worm’s supplementary food type, its worth was stemmed from the fact that it could be used to pair up with a few other foods to feed a *Gu* worm.

For example, Fang Yuan needed to give two pieces of flower petals every meal to the Moonlight *Gu* when feeding it. If he mixed in a blade of Intimate Grass, the Moonlight *Gu* would be full just from eating one petal.

The Intimate Grass only costs two pieces of primeval stones per catty, while the moon orchid petal cost a primeval stone for every ten pieces. With a simple calculation, one would know that mixing the Intimate Grass in to feed the *Gu* would be more cost-effective.

“Half a month ago, because I used the Moonlight *Gu* in the academy to kill Gao Wan, I was fined thirty primeval stones. However the Mo family paid me thirty primeval stones later as compensation, so I didn’t really take any losses. In recent days I have robbed twice, my total number of stones amounts to 118. However, recently I continuously spent essence to refine middle stage primeval essence and nurture the four walls of my aperture, and I would use up three pieces of stones every day. Adding on the costs of feeding *Gu*, my own daily expenses and successively buying green bamboo wine, I have ninety-eight pieces at hand right now.”

Ever since Fang Yuan killed a person, the cruel and callous image had deeply rooted itself into the hearts of the students and for a time no one dared to challenge him. This led to his plundering becoming much easier, as every time only a very small number would dare to resist.

Fang Yuan calculated in his heart, then he moved his line of sight and continued walking deeper into the heart of the setup of temporary stores.

The Intimate Grass stall was surrounded by a group of people. They were all either *Gu* Masters or students, holding primeval stones in their hands as they shouted and rushed to buy it.

It was not that Fang Yuan lacked the money to buy Intimate Grass, but he had no time.

“If memory serves, that Mudskin Toad should be in that store. In my previous life there was a *Gu* Master who got it from gambling on the first night, hence he earned big time. I must hurry, I cannot lose a great deal through trying to save a little.”

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Chapter 40: Toad Gu Slumbering Within the Purple Gold Rock

The further one walked, the more flourishing and prosperous it was. Small street vendors lessened while large tents increased in number.

There were all sorts of large tents to be seen – red, blue, green, yellow, in different shapes and sizes, several being a cylindrical shape. Some erected two door pillars at the entrance of their tents, while others hung large red lanterns instead. Inside, some tents had vibrant lights, whereas others were dim and dark.

Fang Yuan observed his surroundings as he walked, finally stopping near a grey-coloured tent.

“It’s here,” he evaluated while looking at the tent; it had two pillars at the entrance, and there were carvings on the pillars, two lines of antithetical couplet(1).

The left side wrote, “Small display of courage, obtain good fortune during the four seasons.”

The right side wrote, “ Large display of skills, obtain good prosperity in all four directions.”

In the middle there was still another line: “Luck changes with time.”

That’s right, this is a gambling den.

This gambling den took around one mu(2) of land; it was considered a large-sized tent.

Fang Yuan walked inside. Inside of the tent, there was three rows of counters on a side. On the counter were pieces of amber or fossils. Some were as big as a palm, others were as big as a face. There were also others which were even bigger; those were as tall as a person. It obviously could not fit on the counter, thus it was directly placed on the ground.

Different from the other tent shops, it was silent in here.

Several *Gu* masters stood before the counters, some meticulously observing rocks on the display counter while others took the fossils and rubbed it in their hand to get a feel of it. There were some that were discussing quietly with their companions, and some were discussing the price with their shop clerks.

But no matter what they discussed, they spoke softly, doing their best not to disturb others.

This was a rock gambling den.

In the *Gu* world, there were all types of *Gu*, coming with different shapes and sizes and all sorts of effects. *Gu*worms have their respective food to consume. Without food, they can only last a short amount of time before dying.

But nature, towards lifeforms, was both uncaring and benevolent.

If they lacked food, the *Gu* worms still have a chance of survival. That was to hibernate, undergoing self-sealing.

For example, if the Moonlight *Gu* did not have Moon Orchid petals to consume, it may undergo self-sealing. It will try to maximise the conservation of its strength, like winter hibernation, falling into a deep slumber. At this time, not only would the blue glow on its body dissipate, it would also turn from a transparent crystal state into a grey rock, covered in a layer of rock shell. Eventually, the rock crust will get thicker and turn into a boulder.

Or for example the Liquor Worm, if it underwent self-sealing, it would form a white cocoon around it, curling its body and falling into a deep sleep within the cocoon.

Of course this situation of sealing and hibernating may not happen to every *Gu* worm. It has a small chance of occurrence, and in most cases, the *Gu* worm will not fall into hibernation but instead starve to death. Only a small number of *Gu* worms may, under specific situations, undergo self-sealing.

A few *Gu* Masters who accidentally obtain these sealed *Gu* worms' rocks or cocoons would awaken the *Gu*worms that were slumbering within. Thus they would have a stroke of fortune. Some of the *Gu* masters became successful due to this, it being a turning point in their lives. These situations happen frequently in the *Gu*Master world, often being fake or real rumors, giving people hopes and dreams.

The source of the idea behind this rock gambling den originated from these rumours. Of course, these rocks all looked alike on the outside. Only after opening them can one determine if there really is a *Gu* worm hidden inside.

“In a small-sized rock gambling den like this, nine out of ten rocks are solid core, having no *Gu* worms inside. Even if there are *Gu* worms inside the rock, they may not be living worms, most of them are dead *Gu*. But once someone hits the jackpot of a live *Gu*, under most situations, one would be able to earn a huge fortune. If the *Gu*worm is a rare species, they either become a successful person in life or get murdered and robbed of their fortune.”

Fang Yuan was clear about this in his heart, being very familiar with the situation beyond these doors.

In his past life, he had participated in a merchant caravan before, being a clerk in the rock gambling den. Some time later, he even operated his own rock gambling den, even larger than this one; it was a medium-sized rock gambling den. He managed to con some gamblers, and also misjudged at times, allowing other gamblers to win a precious *Gu* worm.

Fang Yuan stood at the door for a while, taking a glance around him before slowly walking to the counter on the left side.

Behind the counter, there was a shop assistant every few metres, both males and females. On their waist hung a green coloured belt, showing that they were not ordinary people but Rank one *Gu* masters. Most were initial stages, while a selected few were middle stages.

Seeing Fang Yuan before a counter, a female *Gu* Master who was nearest by walked towards him and smiled, softly saying, “Young master, what *Gu* worm do you need? Every rock on this counter is sold at

ten primeval stones each. If this is your first try, just for the sake of it, why don't you go to the right counter, the rocks there are sold at only five primeval stones. If you are seeking thrills, you can go to the high-end counter at the middle, the rocks sold there are at twenty primeval stones each."

This was an experienced female *Gu* Master, having worked at the rock gambling den for quite some time already.

She looked at Fang Yuan who entered, and determined that he was a student from his appearance, age and height etc.

Those that came to gamble were all *Gu* Masters. Students were only considered second-rate *Gu* Masters, just starting their cultivation. Because they're often tight on finance due to feeding their *Gu* worms, where would they find the money to come and gamble rocks?

Students like this, normally they just came to take a look and to get an eye-opening experience, satisfying their curiosity. Most were only window shoppers, though if some had well to do families, they might attempt to buy one to try. But most only bought the cheapest fossil.

Thus, the female *Gu* Master had no expectations towards how many rocks Fang Yuan could buy.

"Let me look around first." Fang Yuan nodded at her expressionlessly, then started to look seriously into the pile.

In his memory, it should be at this counter in this particular rock gambling den.

But it had been 500 years, it's been too long. Many things were vague to him already, especially when 500 years of memory was a huge capacity, so to be honest Fang Yuan could not remember distinctly.

He could only vaguely recall, that during this year on the first night the caravan arrived, a lucky bird spent ten primeval stones to buy a fossil with purple gold lustre.

After he opened it on the spot, he obtained a Mudskin Toad. Afterwards this toad *Gu* was bought by another person, thus causing him to earn a small fortune of primeval stones.

Fang Yuan frowned after observing for a while.

On this counter, fossils with a purple gold glow numbered up to twenty. In which rock was there a hidden Mudskin Toad?

Every rock here was sold at ten primeval stones each. Right now Fang Yuan had ninety-eight primeval stones with him, and he could buy up to a maximum of nine pieces.

But realistically, he could not count like this.

In any sort of risk and gamble, one had to consider the consequences.

Fang Yuan was no longer a greenhorn, like those gamblers who thought they were blessed by heaven. Those who thought they were blessed by fate were usually those who fell under the mischief of fate itself.

"I am alone, with no relatives or friends that can help me. I have to save some primeval stones to survive, as well as to buy food for my *Gu* worms." He counted and under the most basic reservation, he could buy at most seven pieces of fossils.

"This rock, the purple gold is dotted like the stars, but it's flat as a pancake, there's definitely no mudskin toad inside."

"This piece has striking purple gold colour, but it is only fist sized. If there really is a mudskin toad inside, the rock should be at least 30% larger."

"This purple gold fossil, well it's big, but the surface is extremely smooth, while the mudskin toad's skin is supposed to be rough and uneven, this is evidently not the one....."

Fang Yuan continued to observe and evaluate, using the method of cancellation.

When *Gu* worms hibernate after self sealing, they would form into a natural fossil, being undetectable from most of the world's detection methods. The remaining detecting methods were too rough, and once used, it would instantly kill the *Gu* worm within that is barely alive.

Thus, when *Gu* Masters choose rocks, they could only rely on their guessing, experience and luck, sometimes relying on a little bit of instinct.

Otherwise, this would not be called gambling.

Of course, in this wide wide world, there are countless wonders, and one cannot exclude the fact that a detection method which is extremely gentle exists, allowing a *Gu* Master to know if the rock contains a *Gu*worm.

Fang Yuan had heard of such rumors in his past life, but after experimenting, found that it was all lies.

Fang Yuan assumed privately, "If such a method really exists, it has to be a hidden legacy, controlled in the hands of a small number of mysterious people, having no impact on the gambling business."

It was still tame around the Qing Mao mountain region, but the more one moves east, the more prosperous gambling dens become. At the Bai Tou(3) mountain region, every family village had its own gambling den. In some large-sized forts, there were even large-sized gambling dens built. The three villages that were famous for their rock gambling were Pan Shi (4) Village, Gu Mu (5) Village and Cang Jing (6) Village, where there were even mega-sized gambling dens.

These three mega-sized gambling dens each had a thousand years of history. Currently, their business was still blooming, with an endless number of gamblers. There had never been a situation of clean sweep by anyone.

Currently, the tent that Fang Yuan was in can only be barely qualified as a small-sized gambling den.

If it was any other 15 year old who came, they would definitely be confused by all the different fossils, and even if they chose it, it would be by random guessing.

But Fang Yuan was different.

Firstly, he already knew a portion of the answer from the start, thus his search range shrunk to less than thirty pieces.

Of course, to find that one rock out of these twenty odd pieces was extremely difficult as well. But using his five hundred years of experience as backing, with such a rich pool of information he picked out six pieces of purple gold fossils that best fit the criteria after observing for a while.

He had an 80% chance of confidence that the mudskin toad was hibernating within one of these six fossils!

(1) Antithetical couplet: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antithetical_couplets

(2) Mu (畝): 1 Mu is $666 \frac{2}{3}$ meters²

(3) Bai Tou directly means White Head, (4) Pan Shi is Monolith, (5) Gu Mu means Ancient Grave and (6) Cang Jing is Pale Whale. To be honest most of these mountains will never appear again, so you don't have to remember them.

"I want to purchase some rocks." Having picked his targets, Fang Yuan said to the female Gu Master.

"Newbie!" The female Gu Master immediately thought.

Even the shittiest gamblers would pay very close observation when they wanted to buy the rocks. First they would look carefully, then place the stones in their palms and rub to feel the surface and its weight. Even after such actions, if they find that the feeling is off, they would give up. No one would say 'purchase' at the start.

And for such a type like Fang Yuan, who said 'purchase' upfront, he is undeniably a newbie who is having his first rock gambling experience.

Although the female Gu Master thought this, she did not show any difference in her expression, but continued to smile like a flower, saying softly to Fang Yuan, "Then which piece are you choosing?"

Fang Yuan pointed and said, "This piece."

She immediately retrieved it.

Fang Yuan pointed again and said, "This piece."

She felt perplexed, not expecting this youngster to buy two pieces.

"It seems like this youngster is the type to gamble heavily," she evaluated mentally.

But next, Fang Yuan pointed yet again, "And this piece, that piece, I'm buying them all."

The female Gu Master was stunned, feeling extremely surprised, she could not help but assess Fang Yuan again.

"It seems like this ordinary looking youngster has a really good family background. Otherwise, how would any ordinary Gu Master have the spare cash to spend like this?" Thinking of it, the female Gu

Master's smile became more gentle and friendly. To think that the youngster in front of her was a real customer.

This was an unexpected joy!

However, Fang Yuan surprised her once again as he pointed to the furthest purple gold rock, "Oh yeah, and those two pieces as well."

The female Gu Master could not help but feel shocked internally, "Which young master is this from the Gu Yue Village? It looks like he's the main family branch's inheritor. If I can hook up with him, I may not need to stay here and slog as a shop clerk anymore."

With this thought, the female Gu Master's smile became even more gentle and she even looked towards Fang Yuan seductively.

Six rocks were placed in front of Fang Yuan.

Fang Yuan took out sixty primeval stones and passed it to the female Gu Master.

His act of payment attracted the attention of all the other Gu Masters in the tent.

"Oh? Someone is going to rock gamble."

"We've been watching for over an hour, but we haven't acted yet. Now that someone is giving it a try, we might as well watch."

"It's a student, he actually took out sixty primeval rocks at once, his family must be affluent. He looks like a greenhorn, hmph, gambling rocks isn't so easy. He's gonna get hurt real bad."

The Gu Masters stood on the spot, discussing softly, all directing their gaze towards Fang Yuan.

"Young master, do you want to open the rocks on the spot? Our gambling den provides free service to open the rocks." The female Gu Master gently advised, sending seductive glances with her eyes.

Fang Yuan used the corner of his eye to take a look at the crowd, his lips curling into a mysterious smile. He waved his hand, rejecting the female Gu Master. "Purple gold is my lucky color, and this is my first time betting, it is very meaningful. I'll open the rocks myself!"

The female Gu Master's eyes shone brighter, thinking, this heroic demeanour, as expected of a rich young master.

Never in her dreams would she be able to imagine that Fang Yuan could be said to be kinless in Gu Yue village, a drifter with no backing, having to rely on himself for everything.

"Tsk, so what if you have money."

"I wonder which rich kid this is, coming here to waste his parent's hard earned money!"

"Ignorant young lad, how can one choose the rocks based on lucky color, sigh, this act is simply akin to throw primeval stones into the water, and waiting to see the ripples for fun."

The Gu Masters in the tent lost their excitement at once. After thinking that Fang Yuan was a prodigal son, their already low expectations vanished into thin air.

Some Gu Masters even retracted their gaze and turn around to continue inspecting the fossils on the counter.

The changes to his surroundings did not affect Fang Yuan's state of mind at all. He expressionlessly activated the primeval essence within his primeval sea, pouring it into the Moonlight Gu.

The next moment, the crescent mark on his right palm emitted a faint water-like blue light.

Fang Yuan used this right hand to grab a purple gold rock, holding it in his palm. Next he closed his fingers and slowly rubbed against the surface of the fossil.

The blue light continued to shine, the waves of light rippling like water as the purple gold rock shrunk in size, large amounts of powder from rock shavings falling out from the gaps of Fang Yuan's fingers, landing on the carpet of the tent.

"Young master has good handiwork!" The female Gu Master took the chance and immediately praised.

"This youngster, he isn't a good-for-nothing. What great skills." Seeing this sight, the Gu Masters' eyes shone across with a complicated glint. They had started to see Fang Yuan in a new light.

Fang Yuan used the blue light to rub against the surface of the rock; this was a form of meticulous usage of the Moonlight Gu. Normally, one would have to use the Moonlight Gu for two to three years to be able to reach this level.

With Fang Yuan's age and student identity, being able to do this is really remarkable.

"See, he's using our Gu Yue clan's specialty, the Moonlight Gu." Some of the Gu Masters found this and instantly felt proud, gaining affection for Fang Yuan.

"But opening the rocks with this method, it's still too rough." Some of the older and more experienced Gu Masters shook their heads.

The purple gold rock got smaller and smaller, from being slightly larger than a palm into the size of a fist, being gripped tightly by Fang Yuan's fingers.

The blue light intensified as the fossil became pearl-sized. Until finally, what was left was a pile of rock powder, falling on the carpet to form a small hill.

This was a solid rock, there was no Gu worm inside.

"As expected, he's unreliable." The Gu Masters shook their heads.

"Young master, there's still five pieces left," the female Gu Master encouraged.

Fang Yuan's expression was calm, being completely unaffected. He grabbed the second piece of purple gold rock and continued to grind. But the result of this piece was still a solid rock; there was no Gu worm inside.

The third piece was still the same.

The Gu Masters grew impatient. "Stop looking. By relying on color to pick the rocks, there's no point in this gamble."

“If he can get a good Gu from this, I’ll eat the pile of rock powder on the floor!” Someone laughed insultingly.

“Don’t lose heart young master, isn’t there 3 pieces left, you’re only halfway through,” the female Gu Master continued to edge Fang Yuan on.

Fang Yuan grabbed the fourth piece, and when he got it to palm size, he suddenly stopped all action.

“Oh? There’s something!”

“The rock composition changed, it’s not purple gold sediments, but a kind of ink-black colour.”

“Don’t tell me he really got super lucky from blinding guessing?”

The surrounding Gu Masters exclaimed lightly.

“Young master, you have to be careful from here onwards. Don’t make sudden movements, hibernating Gu worms are very fragile. If you use too much strength, you’ll kill the Gu worm inside.” The female Gu Master did not expect such a situation to occur. After getting stunned for a moment, she immediately advised carefully.

Fang Yuan’s movements slowed, his fingers slowly rubbing as small powder slowly fell. Continuously repeating the action with many intervals, he was no longer as fluid as earlier.

The black coloured rock powder slowly fell off, and as the rock got smaller, Fang Yuan’s movements became slower and gentler.

On the carpet, the rock powder continued to gather as Fang Yuan’s black colored rock was finally scrapped clean.

“Sigh, what a pity, it’s a rock in a rock.”

“What a waste of my emotions, I really thought there was a Gu worm inside.”

“You are all too easy to fool, is rock betting so easy? Nine out of ten are all empty, how else is the shop going to make money?”

“Young master, your luck is already not bad. Getting a rock in rock the first time, normal people cannot do it.” The female Gu Master tried another way to console Fang Yuan, similarly it was to pave way for the result that awaited him.

Getting nothing out of gambling rocks was very common, a nine out of ten occurrence. In her opinion, Fang Yuan was choosing at random, the chance of getting a Gu fossil was close to zero.

Fang Yuan smiled but did not reply, and he continued to take out the fifth rock.

He carefully grinded, and in ten breath’s time, the surface of purple gold coloured rock were all rubbed away, revealing a rough-surfaced yellow mud ball.

“Eh?”

“Don’t tell me it’s another rock in the rock.”

“By the looks of it, probably. But it’s a little strange, this mudball is enclosed by a purple gold rock surface. The mudball surface should be compressed smoothly, so why is the surface still uneven?” The surrounding Gu Masters were perplexed.

Looking at the mudball in his hands, Fang Yuan’s expression did not change, but in his heart he was slightly moved.

He continued to grind. Under the blue watery light, the powdery sand fell off. Among the powder, there were some soil crumbs mixed in it, falling onto the pile of rock powder beside his leg.

“Don’t tell me there’s really something?!” Upon seeing this, some of the Gu Masters stared with their eyes wide-opened.

“It’s hard to say,” someone spoke with an uncertain tone.

“I feel like there is, there’s really something.” Another spoke softly.

The yellow mudball gradually decreased in size due to the friction, and when it was palm-sized, someone barged into the tent. “Young lad, hold up. I, Jia Jin Sheng, will be buying it!”

Fang Yuan’s movement came to a halt, at once, the Gu Masters in the tent all focused their attention on this person.

He looked young on the outside, his appearance around twenty to twenty-five years old. He wore a golden-coloured robe with a lace belt on his waist, and on the belt there was a square shaped jade piece. There was a word across the piece of jade, showing the letter “One”.

Evidently, this was a Rank one Gu Master.

To still be a Rank one Gu Master at twenty years old, it seems that his talent isn’t good.

But the status of this person was rather unique. Seeing him, the Gu Masters in the tent all bowed and greeted him, saying together, “Your subordinate greets you, second young master.”

“Second young master?”

“He called himself Jia Jin Sheng earlier, is he the half-brother of the Merchant Caravan Leader, Jia Fu.....”

“This means to say, this rock gambling den is opened by him. But now that he appeared to interfere, it seems that he’s breaking the gambling den’s rules,” the Gu Masters softly conversed.

“That’s right, I am this shop’s shopkeeper. Little brother(1), coming out to gamble at such a young age, aren’t you afraid of your family’s scolding? I will offer forty primeval stones now to buy that mudball in your hand. What do you think? Forty primeval stones is a lot already and there may not be a Gu inside, but today I am in a good mood. Thus seeing that this is your first time gambling, I don’t want you to lose everything, so I’ll give you a portion of your capital back.” Jia Jin Sheng quickly walked in front of Fang Yuan and said.

“Forty primeval stones?” Fang Yuan raised his eyebrows slightly and took a look at Jia Jin Sheng with the corner of his eye, coldly laughing, “It seems you want to forcefully buy the mudball fossil in my

possession? Forceful purchase is spoiling the gambling den's rules. Furthermore you're now on Qing Mao Mountain, you want to bully a Gu Yue clansman like me in front of everyone? "

"Oh?" On hearing Fang Yuan's last sentence, all the other Gu Masters could not take it and animosity grew uncontrollably in them as they looked towards Fang Yuan's direction. Their expression towards Jia Jin Sheng also became unfriendly.

Jia Jin Sheng had thought a fifteen year old like Fang Yuan would be easy to deal with, easily persuaded with a few words. But to think this Fang Yuan had such capabilities, and with a single sentence, he caused Jia Jin Sheng to be in such a predicament.

Seeing the Gu Masters getting ready to interfere, Jia Jin Sheng's expression changed immediately as he changed his tone, quickly waving his hands, "Little brother, you're mistaken! I am the shopkeeper of this gambling den, how could I ruin my own reputation by breaking my own rules? How would I be able to conduct business in the future? Hehehe. I just found your mudball a little interesting, thus I wanted to buy it. If you do not wish to sell it, that's fine. But if there's nothing inside later, don't blame me for not reminding you."

Fang Yuan paid no more attention to him. He turned around and continued to focus on grinding the mudball in his hands.

His movements were very slow and very meticulous. Often, there was only a hint of dry soil powder falling off after a moment or so. Following his movement, a hibernating Gu worm gradually appeared in front of everyone's eyes.

"My god, there really is a Gu worm!"

"He really opened a Gu!"

"What the hell, this sort of method of gambling can also work?"

"This young man's luck is off the charts, he actually managed to forcefully luck out on getting a Gu."

Immediately, the Gu Masters' exasperation filled the tent.

The female Gu Master subconsciously covered her mouth, being unable to believe the scene before her.

As shop clerk, along the way she had been to many mountain villages, seen all sorts of people and all kinds of customers, but she had never seen such a comedic scene.

"There is really a Gu!" Cold light flashed across Jia Jin Sheng's eyes as he hated and regretted in his heart. The thing he hated most, was to be taken advantage of.

This gambling den that he opened, he had placed many surveillance methods. Once a customer was about to open a Gu, he'd receive the news and would normally forcefully buy it.

But now Fang Yuan was inside his gambling den, getting a Gu under his very eyes. Jia Jin Sheng could feel his heart bleeding.

What he obtained, was a toad Gu.

Its entire body was yellow from head to foot. The belly was light yellow, and its back was brownish yellow, covered with many pimply boils, full of nodules and warts which were a distinctive characteristic of the toad species. At one glance, it looked slightly horrifying.

It was not big, being only palm-sized. Holding it in the palm was akin to holding two to three eggs.

Fang Yuan's expression was calm under all sorts of admiration, envy and exasperation, carefully deploying his primeval essence and injecting it into the toad's body.

At this moment, the Gu was being refined by Fang Yuan.

Gu worms obtained from within fossils are normally extremely weak. Not only do they have little to no strength left, their consciousness is also lazy, leaving them defenseless and unable to resist. Thus, they can be easily refined by the Gu masters.

Upon being awakened by Fang Yuan, the toad Gu opened its eyes slowly, and its belly slightly vibrated, softly calling out.

Croak.

Its voice was soft but it made everyone's expression very interesting.

The difference in value between a Gu that was alive against one that was dead was huge.

"It's a live Gu, he really opened a live Gu!!" Someone rubbed his eyes, unable to believe this.

"This is the Mudskin Toad, damn it, it really is the Mudskin Toad!" Someone recognised the toad Gu's identity and screamed agitatedly.

"This young man really has got luck, why don't I have such luck on my side!" Someone sighed, filled with complicated emotions such as envy, jealousy and hatred.

"Young master, congratulations! This, this, this is to date, my first time seeing such a precious Gu worm!" The female Gu Master was shocked beyond words, her eyes glistening with life.

"It's actually the Mudskin Toad! This is a rare Rank two Gu worm, its value worth five hundred primeval stones. Damn it, damn. Someone actually managed to open such a Gu worm in my shop. I've lost big time, big time!" Jia Jin Sheng's face was pale as he stared daggers at the toad, his heart having a strong urge to just snatch the Gu away.

But he knew he couldn't, for if he really did that, it would be asking for trouble.

This was not his family's village, but the Gu Yue clan's territory.

"Maybe I should've paid a bit more primeval stones, maybe he might have given it to me. That's right, he's just a student. If I offered a hundred primeval stones, there's no way he'd not be moved. Why didn't I do that?" Jia Jin Sheng was full of regret.

"No, maybe this young lad does not know his stuff. Even though he opened a Mudskin Toad, I should be able to suppress the price and buy it!" Jia Jin Sheng's heart had renewed hope.

But at the next moment, this hint of hope was mercilessly smashed by Fang Yuan's words.

Fang Yuan plainly looked at the Mudskin Toad in his hands, ignoring the surrounding people's praises and shock.

He used an extremely calm tone and said to Jia Jin Sheng, "Mudskin Toad, Rank two Gu worm, requires five hundred grams of yellow soil every meal, the more fertile the soil the better. Its species is few in number and it is the necessary main Gu in refining the Treasure Brass Toad. The market price is five hundred primeval stones. Jia Jin Sheng, do you want to buy this?"

"You, actually know so clearly....." Jia Jin Sheng mumbled. After such a shock, he could not say a word.

Fang Yuan laughed lightly and continued, "If you're unwilling, that's fine. I'll sell it to someone else, I'm sure someone will be interested."

"Hold it, wait, I'll buy it, I'll buy it. But can't this price be cheaper?" Jia Jin Sheng's smile turned bitter.

Fang Yuan turned around and walked away.

Jia Jin Sheng hurriedly chased after him. "Don't! Don't go! I'll buy, I'll buy it!"

Fang Yuan had no plans to nurture this Mudskin Toad.

It was a Rank two Gu, but Fang Yuan was still a Rank one initial stage. Although it ate yellow soil, Qing Mao Mountain was full of green soil, hence finding food for it would be troublesome.

Moreover, if he does not sell this Gu worm, Fang Yuan would have to feed three Gu worms himself. Putting aside the increased primeval stone expenditure, even the current amount of primeval stones in his possession would not be enough to feed them.

Thus, Fang Yuan's plan was to immediately sell away the Mudskin Toad, get the five hundred primeval stones and earn a fortune.

To a Rank one initial stage like Fang Yuan, five hundred primeval stones was considered a large amount already.

The transaction was quickly completed and Fang Yuan transferred the Mudskin Toad to Jia Jin Sheng in front of the crowd, at the same time accepting five heavy money bags. Each bag had a hundred primeval stones.

Fang Yuan originally had ninety-eight primeval stones, and after spending sixty on gambling rocks, he had thirty-eight left. Now, his fortune multiplied many times, and he owned five hundred and thirty-eight primeval stones.

Upon seeing this, many Gu masters turned green with envy.

Fang Yuan put the five bags in his bosom before taking the last piece of purple gold fossil and walked out of the tent.

"Young master, you're not opening that fossil?" The female Gu Master blinked rapidly and stared at Fang Yuan's back, loudly reminding him.

Fang Yuan paid no heed and left the gambling den without turning back.

He left behind a gang of stunned Gu Masters, staring at each other silently.

Jin Jia Sheng calling Fang Yuan little brother is a way of greeting; they are not related in any way.

The green copper primeval sea had tides rising and falling, ebbing and flowing.

Above the sea level, the Liquor worm curled into a ball, emitting the wine vapour that gradually developed into white mist.

A surge of primeval essence with a “swoosh”, rushed up against the tide and into the wine mist. When the tide receded, there was already half left, and the colour was even darker. From initial stage jade green(1), it had converted into middle stage pale green.

Middle stage primeval essence fell into the sea, but it did not mix with the initial stage primeval essence. As if it was denser, it sank to the bottom.

Thus, the situation became that the upper layer of the primeval sea was filled with initial stage primeval essence, while the lower half was middle stage primeval essence.

As time flowed, the wine mist circulated within the aperture. Under the refinement of the Liquor worm, eventually, the initial stage primeval essence continued to decrease, while the middle stage primeval essence gradually increased.

It could be seen with the naked eye where the lower layer middle stage primeval essence gradually rose, while the upper layer initial stage primeval essence continued to decrease, but also rose in sea level.

As Fang Yuan refined his primeval essence, he extracted the natural essence from the primeval stones at the same time, quickly replenishing the dwindling primeval essence in his aperture.

Finally, the 45% primeval sea in his aperture was fully refined into middle stage primeval essence.

“Much thanks to the middle stage primeval essence, or else I would not have been able to open the rocks five times in the gambling den.” Sitting in a lotus position on his bed, Fang Yuan gradually opened his eyes.

It was currently late at night.

After he walked out of the gambling den, he did not tour around any of the other shops, but instead headed back to the academy.

Although it was at the fringe of the Gu Yue Mountain Village, as a Rank one initial stage Gu master, owning five hundred and thirty eight primeval stones is still too much.

This is not only because the primeval stones were heavy and a hassle to bring around. It also attracts other people’s coveting; in another sense, it would endanger his life.

If there was a Rank one upper stage, or even a Rank two who coveted his assets, with Fang Yuan’s current ability he would not be able to contend.

“Wealth comes and goes, but humans die because of wealth, it’s pathetic. What’s laughable is that many people in this world cannot comprehend that. The boat of benefits carries many people, but has also sunk many others.” Fang Yuan’s lips curled into a cold smirk as he looked at the grey white primeval stones in his hands.

A complete primeval stone was around the size of a duck egg. But the stone in his hand, as it had been extracted of half of its essence, was an entire circle smaller.

Fang Yuan did not regret it.

Everything has its gains and losses. Fang Yuan was only a C grade talent, yet he was using the Liquor Gu to refine his primeval essence, and his primeval stones expenditure was multiple times of the people of his age. Yet it was because of this that he was able to overcome the lack of his talent. If the real cultivation pace could be counted, he would be able to rank first three.

Fang Yuan put the primeval stones back into his money bag and took out that final purple gold fossil.

He bought a total of six fossils at the gambling den and opened five on the spot, bringing the last one back with him.

His eyes shone as he activated the Moonlight Gu, grinding with five fingers, slowly dissecting the rock.

The purple gold fossil gradually shrunk under the blue ripples, and finally was grinded to nothingness, leaving behind a pile of powder on the ground.

Fang Yuan was not surprised, because in rock gambling, you lose nine out of ten times.

Even with his five hundred years of experience, he could only manage eight losses out of ten times. And in the remaining two times, it depended on whether it was a live Gu or a dead Gu.

Dead Gu had basically no value. As for live Gu, they might not be a rare type of Gu worm, and even if it was a tremendously precious Gu, one might attract a life-threatening crisis because of it.

Fang Yuan’s current cultivation level was still very low, it was at the bottom tier of the Gu Masters. The Mudskin Toad that he obtained earlier, if it weren’t for the fact that this was the Gu Yue Mountain Village, it might have been forcefully snatched away by that Jia Jin Sheng.

Gambling was never the way for developing family wealth, and in fact it was a bigger cause of bankruptcy and debt. This was not the development path that Fang Yuan wanted to take.

Although the final purple gold fossil did not have a Gu worm, Fang Yuan was not disappointed. In fact he looked at the pile of rock powder and gradually broke into a smile.

Indeed, his ultimate motive in entering the gambling den was all for this pile of rock powder. That Mudskin Toad was only something he had gotten out of convenience.

He privately opened the fossil, and other than him, nobody knew the truth of this result.

From that day forth, he could claim that the Liquor worm was awakened and subdued from the purple gold fossil.

This idea was fabulous.

Firstly, nobody could confirm what Gu worm really exists in the fossils. Who would dare say that the Liquor worm could not hibernate within the purple gold fossil? That's completely possible!

Secondly, he had several eyewitnesses. He opened the Mudskin Toad, which would've left a strong impression on the Gu Masters in the gambling den.

Thirdly, even if someone relentlessly questioned him, he could push everything onto his luck. Luck was something unfathomable. Even if someone suspected that this was the Flower Wine Monk's Liquor worm, against an excuse like 'luck' they'd have no idea how to argue against Fang Yuan.

Within the dark room, Fang Yuan's expression was ominous.

One-sided covering up was akin to covering fire with paper. There would be a day where he would be exposed.

To get rid of a hidden threat like the Liquor worm, he'd have to strike first. This is Fang Yuan's style.

Moreover, he had thought about it carefully, and in the cultivation process that was to follow, he would need to expose the Liquor worm.

"For a Rank one Gu like the Liquor worm, it is extremely precious to Rank one Gu Masters. But for Rank two Gu Masters, it is no longer compatible for them. Thus even if this was exposed, all I would get is some attention, but it would not affect the overall situation, thus becoming nothing to be concerned over. It is not like the Spring and Autumn Cicada. If the Spring and Autumn Cicada is exposed, I might die a horrible death at the very next moment."

Five hundred years of experience in handling problems had already made Fang Yuan extremely familiar with human mentality, with their every thought clear as day to him.

"The Flower Wine Traveler's legacy and the Mudskin Toad, among my memories these are the only two treasures here, and now that they have been obtained by me, what I can do next is only gradual and steadfast cultivation."

Fang Yuan sighed a deep breath and relaxed his body, feeling a strong sense of fatigue engulfing him.

A Gu Master's primeval sea cultivation could not replace sleep.

Fang Yuan pulled his blanket and lay down on his bed, his eyes still half open.

Although there were five hundred primeval stones hidden under the bed, as well as many pots of Green Bamboo Wine, he still felt a sense of urgency and danger.

These five hundred over primeval stones were already a form of limit. From flourish to decline, Fang Yuan was clear that henceforth his primeval stone expenditure would only get bigger.

But his income was mostly from extorting his classmates.

He had been increasingly feeling the growth and improvement of his classmates. Especially in the recent few extortions, Gu Yue Mo Chen, Chi Chen, and his brother Gu Yue Fang Zheng, had greatly improved in their kicks and punches. Previously he only needed one or two strikes to take them down, but now he needed five or six.

“Another three to four plunders, and their punches and kicks would’ve been polished fully. If they challenge me one by one, with my current stamina, I cannot endure that kind of round robin battle. Five hundred primeval stones might seem a lot, but with my current expenditure of four stones a day, it is actually not that much.”

“Qing Mao Mountain already has no treasures left, but nearby on the Bai Gu(2) Mountain, there is a secretly built strength inheritance of a Rank four Gu Master of the righteous path.

“Sigh, it still boils down to the Flower Wine Monk’s treasure being too little, only giving me a Liquor worm. Hmm... there is still that film image wall, maybe I can sell it to a certain merchant in the caravan...”

Fang Yuan thought as his eyelids grew heavier until he finally fell asleep.

On the second day in the afternoon during lunch break, Fang Yuan went to the shopping district outside the mountain village again.

As many of them had to work in the day, there was not many villagers at the tentage area.

Fang Yuan walked to the area where the vendor was selling Intimate Grass last night, according to his memory. He reached only to see an empty cart, still on the spot. An ostrich was dragging the cart along.

It stood on the spot proudly, its body size as large as an ostrich while having the appearance of a chicken, the back of the creature bulged into a curved angle. A pair of wide wings were collected on the side of its body, the feathers splendidly bright in seven colours. The chicken head was raised tall, its huge red cockscomb like an agate crown, flashing with the luster of a gem under the sunlight.

“It seems I was still too late, the Intimate Grass was sold out. What a pity, if I were able to buy a few catty of Intimate Grass, I’d be able to save quite a bit of primeval stones.” Fang Yuan’s footsteps came to a halt as he walked away and continued to venture deeper into the area.

“Come, have a taste of the delicious wine from all the different villages. There are more than a hundred types of wine here, like the Lantern Grass Wine, the Nine Tune Wine with a strong aftertaste, the light and elegant Ancient Dragon Well, the sweet and sour Flower Rock Tune, the mouth-watering Hundred Spring Old Cellar, the rich and heavy fragrant Intoxication of Three Autumns.....” In front of a blue round bucket before the tent, a shop assistant was hawking with gusto.

A light flashed through Fang Yuan’s gaze as he immediately grew interested. With a turn, he entered the wine shop.

The decor in the wine shop was very unique.

At the most inner part of the tent, there was a long counter. A Gu Master was stationed there, with tens of crystal ladybugs around the size of wicker-baskets behind him, sticking onto the tent’s cloth walls.

On the floor there was no carpet, but rather the uncovered mountain rocks and soil. Among the soil, vibrant coloured mushrooms grew.

These mushrooms had all sorts of colours, looking round and slightly cute. Some were as large as tables, while others were short like benches. They were often distributed where a large table mushroom was surrounded by a few shorter bench mushrooms.

“This is the Innocent Mushroom, purposely grown by a Gu Master. It has the ability to absorb dust and particles in the air to purify it, and it’s a type of grass Gu.” Fang Yuan could recognise the mushroom’s origins immediately upon seeing them.

He chose one of the short mushrooms and sat down. The mushroom’s surface immediately sank down a little, making Fang Yuan feel like he was sitting on a sofa like those on Earth.

“Young master, this is the wine catalogue, would you like to take a look?” A shop assistant walked over.

Fang Yuan glanced at the wine catalogue and realised that the wine here was more expensive than the green bamboo wine.

“I’ll have a cup of monkey wine.” Fang Yuan put down the catalogue.

“A cup of monkey wine!” The shop assistant turned around and shouted.

At the counter, the Rank one Gu Master heard and immediately bent down to take out a bamboo wine cup.

Next he took the wine cup and turned around, facing the tentage. On the blue tent walls were the tens of crystal ladybugs, head facing downwards and tail facing upwards, quietly latched onto the walls as if they were merely decorations for the tent.

These crystal ladybugs were also a type of Gu. Its stomach was empty, as they were often used by Gu Masters to carry precious liquids.

Their bodies were transparent, as if they were made of crystals. From the outside, one could see that within the ladybug’s stomach, different kinds of liquor could be found.

The Gu Master quickly found the crystal ladybug that contained the monkey wine among them.

He placed the bamboo wine cup at the mouthpiece of the ladybug, and gently stroked the exoskeleton of the ladybug with his other hand.

A small amount of primeval essence entered the crystal ladybug’s body, and afterwards it opened its mouth and a gush of liquor flowed into the bamboo wine cup.

The liquor splattered around in the cup until it was full.

The Gu Master placed the bamboo wine cup which was filled with monkey wine on the counter. The shop assistant who had already been waiting for a while quickly held up the cup meticulously and walked a few steps to deliver it to Fang Yuan.

Fang Yuan only took a tiny sip, the monkey wine was indeed a fruit liquor, being sweet and refreshing and delicate on the palate.

He stopped drinking, but instead with a thought, Fang Yuan summoned the Liquor worm.

The white and fat liquor worm turned into a flash of white light and curved an arc in the air. With a 'plop', it landed in the wine cup.

The wine splattered everywhere, sprinkling onto the mushroom table.

The Liquor worm joyfully beat about in the wine cup, and the monkey wine could be seen decreasing with the naked eye. In a few breaths time, the cup had dried out, with not a single drop left.

"It's the Liquor worm!" The Gu Master at the counter shouted, his eyes sparkling. He was a Rank one Gu Master with Grade D talent, only able to follow the merchant caravan and work in this wine shop. His objective was to sightsee while finding his chances.

The Liquor worm can refine primeval essence and raise it by an entire realm. To a Rank one Gu Master, it can be said to be an extremely precious Gu worm. Isn't this the chance he's been painstakingly searching for?

"This young master, do you have any plans to sell this Liquor worm?" He excitedly approached, a look of sincerity in his eyes.

Fang Yuan shook his head, rejecting him with a determined attitude, getting up to leave after that.

His motive this time was to reveal the Liquor worm in his possession; he had never thought of selling it.

"Young master, young master, please hold on. I am really sincere about this, maybe we can sit down and have a discussion." The Gu master reluctantly followed Fang Yuan to the tentage entrance but Fang Yuan did not show any response to him.

In the end he could only stand on the spot, his expression extremely regretful as he watched Fang Yuan's rear view turn around a corner and disappear into the midst of the horizon.

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Unconsciously, the sun gradually set as the crescent moon took its place.

In the night, the moonlight shone brightly but was overpowered by the numerous street lights in the merchant shops.

The merchant shop tonight was swarming with business. Fang Yuan was squeezed left and right as he entered, hearing all sorts of conversations inadvertently.

"The stores normally open for three days and three nights. Tonight is already the second night, by the morning of the day after, the merchant caravan would have left on their journey already. Thus, we have to hurry if we want to buy anything."

"I saw a Golden Bell Gu yesterday, sigh, too bad it was too expensive. After haggling with the shopkeeper for a long time, it did not get any cheaper. I'll go and take a look tonight."

"Did you guys hear? Last night, a young man opened a Mudskin Toad and earned a profit of five hundred primeval stones!"

.....

Fang Yuan listened attentively, feeling disappointment in his heart as he did not hear anything about the Liquor worm.

“The Liquor worm is only a Rank one Gu worm but it is extremely meaningful to a rank 1 Gu Master, yet it’s useless to a Rank two or Rank three Gu Master as they are unable to refine their primeval essence any further with it. Thus it is normal that no one paid attention to this. However taking the initiative to expose the matter of the Liquor worm cannot be rushed for a period of time. If I overdo it, it might end up letting the cat out of the bag.” As Fang Yuan walked, he pondered silently in his heart.

At this point, there was a hustle in front of him.

Next, Fang Yuan heard someone shout, “Quickly come and see, there’s a dishonest merchant here selling fake Gu to our clansmen!”

Anger stirred among the crowd.

“Oh? There’s something like that happening.”

“Go and see quickly, which shop dares to cheat our clansmen!”

Fang Yuan followed the crowd and moved towards the commotion as well.

What met his eyes were a group of people surrounding the mouth of a large red tent, the massive crowd swarming it. Some were curiously watching while others stared coldly, but most of the people were enshrouded with a sense of anger.

Outside the tent stood two people.

One of them was a young Rank two Gu Master, whose attire showed that he was obviously from the Gu Yue clan.

The other person had a familiar face – it was the owner of the gambling den, Jia Jin Sheng.

The young Gu Master held a black Gu worm in his hands, raising it up and shouting to the crowd, “My clansmen, this person in front of me sold me a fake Gu yesterday. Lying to me that it was a Black Boar Gu, and sold it to me for two hundred and fifty primeval stones. To think that when I got home to refine it, I realized that it was not a Black Boar Gu but simply an ordinary stinky fat worm!”

Jia Jin Sheng laughed coldly, “Don’t accuse me falsely. Since when did I tell you it was a Black Boar Gu? What proof do you have?”

The young Gu Master on seeing Jia Jin Sheng’s denial, fell into a rage and grabbed Jia Jin Sheng’s wrist, “You cunning merchant, you dare to deny it! You actually dare to lie to me of the Gu Yue clan on Qing Mao Mountain itself, are you trying to look for death?!”

“Let go of me!” Jia Jin Sheng was also furious as he flicked his wrist, slapping away the young Gu Master’s hand, “If you want to find trouble and extort money, you should find a better target. I am not afraid of you! My brother is Jia Fu, a Rank four Gu Master, what can you do to me?”

“You!” The young Gu Master stared with his eyes wide, but did not dare to take action. The name of a Rank four Gu Master was enough to intimidate him.

“Bah!” Jia Jin Sheng spat on the ground, raising his head and looked at the young Gu Master, laughing in disdain, “It was you who wanted to take advantage of the cheap Gu. Didn’t you use your brain to think, why a Black Boar Gu which can raise a Gu master’s strength, being such a rare Gu worm, was sold even more cheaply than a Liquor worm? It is normally sold at six hundred primeval stones. Did you think that you could buy one for just two hundred and fifty primeval stones? Dream on!”

“Bastard.....” The young Gu Master gritted his teeth, his face flushing red as he trembled out of anger, his chest burning with the rage of humiliation.

There were chatters among the people as they got restless, discussing furiously. But no one dared to step up, for the Rank four Gu Master status of Jia Fu was like a giant hill in front of them, stabilizing the crowd.

“This lad is too vicious, what a cunning merchant!”

“No wonder he dared to be so arrogant on Qing Mao Mountain, he is actually Jia Fu’s little brother.”

“I heard that they are just half-brothers, but even with that Rank one cultivation, he is able to use this relationship to act unrestrained in the caravan.”

“What happened here exactly?” At this moment, a loud voice spoke out.

“Jia Fu is here!”

“The leader is here to settle the dispute, everyone give way.”

The discussion came to a halt as everyone separated and formed a narrow path between them.

A middle-aged Gu Master having a muscular short body coupled with a giant belly, walked in. He wore a long-sleeved yellow robe, being the leader of the merchant caravan, Jia Fu.

“Sir Jia Fu, my regards.” The young Gu Master was furious but did not dare to say anything. He forced himself to endure the anger and paid respects to Jia Fu.

Jia Jin Sheng was frozen on the spot, not expecting his brother to arrive, his face suddenly pale as anger flashed across his eyes.

This peculiar expression was captured by Fang Yuan who was observing from afar as he pondered about the situation.

“Hello, young Gu Master, what is the problem here?” Jia Fu walked to the middle of the crowd and asked amicably.

The young Gu Master was flattered and he cupped his fists again. Looking at the surrounding clansmen, he bucked up his courage and explained the entire situation.

“So that’s what happened!” Jia Fu nodded while listening. Next, he asked Jia Jin Sheng, “Little brother, is this true?”

Jia Jin Sheng turned his head away and snorted coldly, not looking at his brother.

Jia Fu pondered solemnly.

The surrounding people were silent, not daring to interrupt his thoughts. All awaited in anticipation of his verdict.

This matter was in fact, due to Jia Jin Sheng's scam, but the young Gu Master was also at fault for being greedy and not being vigilant himself, otherwise he would not have gotten cheated.

If Jia Fu wanted to defend his brother, with his Rank four cultivation, even the Gu Yue clan leader could not do anything.

Jia Fu thought for a while before finally speaking. "I've understood the situation, my brother is at fault for this matter, causing this young man to suffer a loss and buy fake products, I am really sorry!" Saying so, he cupped his fists towards the young Gu Master.

"Sir Jia Fu!" The young Gu Master was largely surprised, and quickly said modestly, "You are a Rank four Gu Master, I am merely a Rank two, this is too much for me, too much!"

Jia Fu waved his hand: "Hehe, this has nothing to do with cultivation levels, I act impartially regardless of ability. A wrong is a wrong, I apologise to you on behalf of the merchant caravan. As for compensation, how about this, you lost two hundred and fifty primeval stones, so I will compensate double that amount to you on behalf of the Jia family."

He executed his promise immediately, as a follower took out five money bags and handed it to the young Gu Master in public.

Every money bag was filled to the brim, each containing a hundred primeval stones.

The young Gu Master took over the money bag, so overwhelmed that he could not say anything.

"However, I have a word of advice to you." Jia Fu continued and reminded, "A Black Boar Gu is very rare, for it is able to raise a Gu Master's strength permanently. Although it is only Rank one, it is very hard to find on the market. Every time one appears in the market, it would be bought immediately. The pricing is around six hundred primeval stones. Trying to get one with two hundred and fifty primeval stones is impractical."

"Junior has learnt his lesson!" The young Gu Master bowed deeply to Jia Fu in gratitude.

Cheers erupted from the crowd.

"Sir Jia Fu is brilliant!"

"Magnificent, as expected of Sir Jia Fu!"

"As a Rank four Gu Master, he did not make use of his status to bully the weaker party, Sir Jia Fu really is the role model of the righteous path."

"No, no." Jia Fu smiled, cupping his fists towards the crowd, modestly saying, "Our Jia family business bases our principles on trust and honesty. Everyone, my brother is young and foolish, liking to play pranks on others. He is actually very kind, I hope everyone can be more bearing of him, don't take it to heart."

The crowd's cheers became even louder.

"Hmph!" Jia Jin Sheng's expression was ugly as he stomped on the ground and walked into the tent. Next he walked out from the back of the tent.

Fang Yuan looked at this silently, thinking in his heart, "It seems that the image wall at the Flower Wine Monk's place can be sold."

The Flower Wine Monk had used a Photo-audio Gu to record the ugly acts of the 4th generation Gu Yue clan leader. Before he died, with indignance in his heart, used the Photo-audio Gu and slapped it on the wall, creating an image wall. The image wall's images continued to loop, showing the truth to the people.

With the intention of maximizing his profits, Fang Yuan had wanted to sell this image wall long ago. He believed that the other two clan families on Qing Mao Mountain, the Bai family and Xiong family would be very interested in this image wall.

But to sell this personally would be very inappropriate. His cultivation was too weak and if he brought this image wall to the other villages, he could easily be silenced.

Even if the transaction was successful and he managed to return safely, there was no secret that would stay a secret forever, and once it was revealed to the Gu Yue's higher-ups, he would be kicked out of the clan family at best.

In accordance to Fang Yuan's plans, he still needed to make use of the Gu Yue clan. Thus, the safest way was to sell it to a certain merchant in the caravan. All of them were outsiders, and were not involved in the disputes among the villages, thus it was the best choice for him.

In just one day, this caravan would leave the Gu Yue mountain village and lead towards either the Xiong family or the Bai family.

Fang Yuan could reduce his risks to the minimum by selling to them; it was the safest method.

.....

"One more cup!"

"Wine, where's the wine?"

"Quickly get me the wine, are you afraid that I'm unable to pay?"

Jia Jin Sheng slammed the mushroom table as he howled.

"Young master Jia, here's your wine!" The clerk quickly brought him his wine.

Jia Jin Sheng grabbed the bamboo cup and tilted his head and gulped the liquor.

"Good wine!" He laughed loudly, sounding coarse and bleak.

With a bang, he placed the cup on the table and howled again. "Get me another glass, I want as many as you can supply!"

The clerks did not dare to offend him and could only do as he said.

Luckily, this wine house was already full of people. Not only were the mushroom tables packed with people, even the surrounding streets were packed with people. Jia Jin Sheng's drunkard temperament was not very peculiar in this bustling street.

Jia Jin Sheng drank cup by cup, wanting to drown his sorrows. With his back facing the crowd, no one observed that as he drank, two clear lines of tears flowed down his cheeks.

Who would know of his pain, his sorrow?

A hateful person has to have his pitiful side, conversely. Everybody had their own stories.

Amongst his brothers, he was the youngest, being the most handsome and resembling his father the most, thus being the most doted by his father. But heaven made fun of him by giving him only D grade talent.

As he grew up, he lived under the pressure of his brothers. He was indignant and wanted to resist, but with that talent, there was nothing he could do.

His father felt death approaching and wanted to split his assets. Two people were to lead a merchant caravan. They pledged to break up the family property in accordance to the results.

Jia Jin Sheng wanted to rely on his own method to acquire the family assets and the recognition of his clan. But to think that he became his brother's stepping stone once again.

When Jia Fu appeared, he knew he fell into a trap. This was a scheme right from the beginning. But what could he do? Once he entered this caravan, he was doomed to be Jia Fu's fodder. Rank four and Rank one was such a huge gap that he was powerless to fight again.

"Jia Fu!" He forced this name out of his mouth, his eyes burning with the flames of hatred, he was unable to take it lying down!

"Do you wish to deal with your brother? I can help you." At this time, he heard a voice.

Jia Jin Sheng was stunned but when he turned around, he saw that for quite a while, there was someone sitting beside him.

He shook his head and blinked a few times, finally seeing who it was.

Who else if not for Fang Yuan?

"It's you!" He stared at Fang Yuan, slightly angry, "I remember you! Lucky lad, getting a Mudskin Toad from my gambling den! You're here to mock me?"

Fang Yuan looked at Jia Jin Sheng, his eyes cold as water. "I have a huge business, so if you wish to acquire better results and get more assets, why not listen to me?"

Jia Jin Sheng was suspicious. His back straightened and he sat up, "How do you know about the matter of the assets?"

This secret was not easily known to outsiders, but Fang Yuan was easily able to guess it.

“The Jia family’s business is not top secret, how can it evade people who wish to know?” Fang Yuan laughed coldly and thought of a memory from his previous life.

The Jia family head was a legendary figure who started from scratch. He made his fortune through the merchant caravans and revived the Jia family’s village. He gradually got old, and when he could feel that his time was up, he got his children to form a caravan in twos and according to their results, split the assets. The better they did, the more family assets they get.

But his eldest son Jia Fu and second son Jia Gui were extremely talented. After competing for six to seven years, they still could not come to a conclusion, and even after the family head died, there was no clear victor.

After the Jia family head died, there was an enormous amount of assets. While competing for the assets, the two brothers’ conflict escalated and both called in external help, causing a large scale Gu competition. Finally, the both of them died. The Jia family that had prospered quickly also failed quickly, causing people to talk about it in amazement.

Jia Jin Sheng squinted his eyes, for Fang Yuan’s explanation was irrefutable. He thought, from the time his father declared the asset distribution, it had already been two years. There are no impenetrable walls in the world, so even if someone found out about it, it’s nothing strange.

His real worry was whether this was another trap by Jia Fu. But no matter what, there was no harm listening.

Fang Yuan did not speak immediately. He surveyed the surroundings. This was the same wine cellar he came into in the afternoon. The shopkeeper operated independently, and at night, the shop was bustling with business.

Discussing here was a far safer place than a quiet environment, as it could avoid the eavesdropping of certain Gu worms.

He hooked his fingers at Jia Jin Sheng. “Lend me your ear.”

Jia Jin Sheng unhappily snorted, but still slanted his head forward.

After hearing Fang Yuan’s description, he frowned and looked at Fang Yuan coldly. “This business involves the three families on Qing Mao Mountain, and we merchants detest getting involved in other people’s disputes. Hmph, you were sent here by Jia Fu to harm me right?”

Fang Yuan had long expected for him to be suspicious. He did not bother to explain, but got up and left. “Hehe, in that case, I’ll go talk to your brother.”

Jia Jin Sheng squinted his eyes, staring at Fang Yuan. Only until Fang Yuan had left the wine shop did he lose his patience. He chased out of the tent and caught up to Fang Yuan, “Don’t go, we can have a talk.”

Fang Yuan placed both hands behind his back, staring at him from the side, coldly saying, “I know you are suspicious of me, but now that your brother has you firmly caught, you’re almost close to finished. If you choose to believe in me, there’s still hope, if not you’re doomed. Are you daring enough to take this bet?”

Jia Jin Sheng's expression changed as he corrected and said, "Jia Fu is but only a little older, I have never acknowledged him as my brother! But you're right, I'm taking this bet."

Fang Yuan said solemnly, "Two thousand primeval stones, no haggling."

Jia Jin Sheng laughed bitterly, "Too expensive, this trade involves high risk."

"The greater the risk, the greater the rewards." Fang Yuan shook his head, his attitude firm, "If you sell it to those two families, you will only earn much more."

Jia Jin Sheng nodded, showing a hint of seriousness, "This I believe, for these years the Bai family has been growing fast, and an A grade talent called Bai Ning Bing has appeared recently, he has a great future ahead. Qing Mao Mountain's situation is gradually changing. Your Gu Yue family's dominance is wavering, and if I sell this to the Bai family, I can at least earn twice as much!"

Hearing Jia Jin Sheng's understanding of the Qing Mao Mountain's situation, Fang Yuan could not help but evaluate him again, thinking: 'This Jia Jin Sheng, he is still a merchant family member after all, not those useless second generations.'

Jia Jin Sheng sighed, "Regardless of whether this is a trap, I'm jumping in. I promise you, two thousand primeval stones it is! However, I want to see the merchandise first."

"Of course, come with me." Fang Yuan laughed as he led the way. Jia Jin Sheng was already trapped in the urn, and the situation was fully in Fang Yuan's grasp.

Following his memories, Fang Yuan brought Jia Jin Sheng to the cavern in the mountain.

The two entered the crack in the stone, and the path became more narrow as their vision was dyed in darkness. Jia Jin Sheng grew more vigilant as he was in an unfamiliar environment.

Finally, he could not hold it in any further, "I have a question, Jia Fu always treats people with honesty and is amicable with a good reputation. On the other hand, I lied and cheated, forcing transactions through coercion. Why did you choose to deal with me and not him?"

Fang Yuan's voice travelled through the stone crack. "Because his cultivation is too high, so if he sees the image wall, he can choose to deal with me, or abandon the deal and just give the image wall to the Gu Yue clan head. I do not like giving the decision-making to others, furthermore I do not believe in integrity. The so-called prestigious reputation is just because the profits are small and are unable to incur his greed."

More importantly, it was because Jia Jin Sheng's position was special, for his cultivation was weak and he was easy to manipulate. Fang Yuan was naturally not going to mention this, of course.

"Hehe." Jia Jin Sheng laughed dryly, his suspicions mostly gone immediately. "That last sentence really resonated within me."

The two finally got into the secret cave.

Jia Jin Sheng saw the image wall at once, and could not help but laugh loudly, "Haha, I guessed right, you didn't lie to me!"

Fang Yuan stood behind him, laughing lightly, not saying anything.

Jia Jin Sheng looked at the wall, seeing the changing images and the animosity between the Flower Wine Monk and the 4th generation clan leader.

He looked at it once and retracted his gaze, looking at Fang Yuan, mocking, "Your 4th generation ancestor doesn't look that strong huh."

Fang Yuan replied, "This is nothing. The Gu Yue clan needed a hero, thus the 4th generation became a hero. Not long after, the Bai family needs a despicable scum, so the 4th generation will become a degenerate. Hero, scum, all these are just people's opinions."

"Well said!" Jia Jin Sheng laughed as he surveyed the cave.

His sight was set on the corpse of the Flower Wine Monk, and he stopped for a while before saying, "What a pity, a Rank five powerhouse. You've gotten much benefits from him huh?"

A Rank five Gu Master's inheritance was significant. Jia Jin Sheng's heart beat faster upon thinking of this, and he could not help but ask.

Fang Yuan shook his head. "It's been so long, most of the Gu are dead, I only got a Liquor worm."

Jia Jin Sheng did not believe him. "Don't lie to me brother, as long as this deal goes through, we are accomplices, I won't reveal any information. Tell me honestly, what did you gain from this?"

Fang Yuan laughed coldly and did not bother replying him.

Jia Jin Sheng's response was anticipated, and this was also why Fang Yuan chose him over Jia Fu.

Jia Jin Sheng continued to say: "At the very least, I know the Flower Wine Monk has a Thousand Li Earthwolf spider(1). That is a Rank five steed-type Gu, with a large body and is proficient in burrowing underground. The Flower Wine Monk was a demonic cultivator, and his ability to get about freely was mostly due to this Thousand Li Earthwolf spider, allowing him to escape from the righteous cultivators."

"Oh, there's something like that?" Fang Yuan frowned. Regarding the Flower Wine Monk, he did not have much information.

Jia Jin Sheng smugly said, "I came to your village last year and heard this legend, and I found it interesting so I went home and researched about it. The Thousand Li Earthwolf spider and Flower Wine Monk were inseparable, and in my opinion, this cave should have been dug out by the spider. Otherwise, with the Qing Mao Mountain's rich and heavy soil, how can a cave like this form? Brother, you don't have to conceal it anymore. The Flower Wine Monk died here so there's definitely his Thousand Li Earthwolf spider here!"

Fang Yuan frowned even more deeply, feeling a sense of discomfort, his gaze grim, "Yes, there are no other exits here. The Thousand Li Earthwolf spider is massive, he would not have been able to squeeze out from the crack we just walked through. However, there is a possibility that the Thousand Li

Earthwolf was plotted against and killed by the 4th generation. Seeing that image wall, even when the Flower Wine Monk was fighting he did not summon the Thousand Li Earthwolf spider.”

“That makes the situation even more peculiar. This cave is not formed naturally, thus it has to be created by the Flower Wine Monk. Without the Thousand Li Earthwolf spider, could there be any other methods?” Jia Jin Sheng looked at Fang Yuan suspiciously.

Fang Yuan’s frown swelled into a knot as he felt more and more uncertain. From Jia Jin Sheng’s information, he found out something: it appears as if there was a crucial point that he had missed out.

He could not help but fall into deep thoughts.

Jia Jin Sheng was thinking too, the image wall was no longer enough for him. Once he confirmed that the situation was real, he wanted to dig out the Flower Wine Monk’s inheritance from Fang Yuan.

But at this time, something unexpected to the two of them happened!

The image wall which was playing endlessly, suddenly changed its image.

A gravely injured, pale bald Gu Master replaced the original video and appeared on the wall.

He weakly sprawled on the ground, his back facing the wall. His chest and limbs were deeply cut, but the strange thing was that his wounds did not bleed, as if his entire body’s blood had been drained out.

“I am the Flower Wine Monk.” The bald Gu Master laughed, his expression distorted with madness, “Future person, no matter who you are, to endure this video and let it play for nearly one hundred days, it proves that you have no good will towards the Gu Yue family. Very well, you shall be my successor! My entire inheritance is yours, but I have a condition. You must exterminate the Gu Yue clan for me. Murder the entire clan and leave no one alive!”

Jia Jin Sheng was stunned on the spot, his face frozen with shock.

“A Rank five powerhouse, the Flower Wine Monk’s inheritance!”

He was stunned, and for a moment his brains were churning and thinking.

“My god! A Rank five powerhouse, what does that mean? Rank three is a family elder, Rank four is a village lord, and a Rank five is a mountain lord, able to rule over a mountain and do as he pleases! To think that in this tiny place, there is a Rank five Gu Master’s power inheritance.”

“Wait, Flower Wine Monk is a demonic cultivator, so if I inherit his powers, is it inappropriate? No, strength has nothing to do with good or evil. The Flower Wine Monk wants his successor to destroy the Gu Yue clan, but do I really have to? He’s already dead, I just have to take his inheritance and ignore those issues.”

“This is a godsend opportunity. Even with my D grade talent, if I inherit the Flower Wine Monk’s inheritance, I might be able to improve my talent. Those rare talent-raising Gu worms, they might be part of the inheritance. If I inherit this fortune and become a Rank four or five Gu Master, I’d be able to contest with Jia Fu!”

“Wait! I almost forgot, there’s an outsider, what should I do?”

“Should I split the inheritance with him? No, kill him! Only by killing him can I protect this secret. Yes, I should calm him down first, and lie that we’re going to split the treasure. Getting rid of his guard, then assaulting him and killing him here. This place is so hidden, it’s great. Even if I kill him, nobody would know.”

Although he thought of all these, it was merely a moment in real life.

Having a plan, he squinted and revealed a fake smile.

He slowly turned around and faced Fang Yuan but just as he was about to speak, he saw two blue moonblades flying towards him.

His pupils dilated into the size of a pin; the distance was too small, he could not respond in time!

“You.....” His voice came to a halt.

The moonblade aimed accurately for his neck, and in an instant, his skull flew into the air, fresh blood pouring out like a fountain.

After two seconds, his corpse plopped on the ground.

The scalding blood poured on the mountain walls, dyeing the withering vines red.

“Don’t think so much when killing people.” Fang Yuan looked at the corpse plainly and then shifted his gaze towards the image wall.

“To think there was such a twist here. How interesting,” He muttered as his eyes emitted an eerie glow.