

M. Slaying 341

Chapter 341: Just Call Me Lin Bei

At this moment, the sky above the Boundary Marker Mountain looked like a scene from a painting of ancient gods and devils.

A giant inferno devil stood tall on the ancient desolate mountain.

He was about to raise his feet and stomp on the enemy in front.

But a gigantic gray and white mountain appeared above the inferno giant.

Wait...No! It was not a mountain but a massive elephant.

It was a giant elephant, nearly as tall as the Boundary Marker Mountain itself. Its entire body was covered in countless gruesome scars and ancient patterns, and its skin was as thick as the city walls. The eyes on its massive head exuded calmness. However, its most striking features were its long trunk and tusks, which resembled towering polearms.

It was a Mammothdragon[1]!

In ancient times, this creature was also called the Draconic Elephant. To differentiate this creature from the mammoths in the Northern Regions and the giant elephants in the Southern Regions, it was renamed as the Mammothdragon.

It was one of the few draconic descents capable of fighting True Dragons at the same realm. If it wasn't because the Mammothdragon found the Great Dao difficult to understand, it would have become on par with pure-blooded True Dragons!

This Draconic Elephant was so massive that when Chu Liang looked up, he felt as if the sky had darkened.

Chu Liang seemed tiny next to the Mammothdragon, and the same was true for the inferno giant. In fact, the size difference between the Mammothdragon and the inferno giant was even greater than the difference between Chu Liang and the giant.

When the Mammothdragon stomped down, it was as if the sky had collapsed onto the inferno giant!

Boom—

As it stomped its foot down, it felt as though a mountain had overturned, causing the earth to tremble!

At that moment, Yang Hong had only one thought: Where did this mammoth come from...

Why did this thing fall from the sky?

The surging waves of qi sent flames splashing, sweeping Chu Liang away and flinging him hundreds of zhang. He barely managed to stabilize himself upon landing.

Bang, bang, bang—

Immediately after, the Mammothdragon's remaining three pillar-like legs landed, causing another round of earth-shaking tremors.

As the Mammothdragon stood on the Boundary Marker Mountain, it seemed as if one mountain had been stacked atop another.

Chu Liang stood there in a daze, feeling somewhat bewildered.

Everything that had just happened was overwhelming, leaving him feeling confused.

It was said that ancient draconic elephants had become exceedingly rare over the ages, with only one known to remain in the world today. This majestic creature belonged to the beast-taming sect known as Thunderbolt Stronghold. The sect's master entrusted it to his most beloved daughter for her protection.

Wait...

Chu Liang suddenly remembered in The Seven Stars Gazette that the daughter of the Thunderbolt Stronghold's master was named Huang Ling'er?

Could it be?

Just as this thought crossed his mind, Miss Ling'er, who had recently departed, descended from the giant elephant on the back of a large black dog, just as Chu Liang had expected. As she landed, she asked, "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine," Chu Liang said, looking at the young girl, his gaze still filled with surprise, "This... this Mammothdragon..."

"Ah..." Miss Ling'er's eyes sparkled as she glanced to the side and said, "I was just thinking of getting reinforcements to save you when I happened to run into it on the way. I asked if it would be willing to help, and it said yes..."

"Heh," Chu Liang chuckled, "It truly is a helpful mammoth."

"Oh, there's no time to chatter anymore," Miss Ling'er said hurriedly, glancing towards the distant sky. "I saved your life, didn't I?"

"I suppose..." Chu Liang nodded.

"Since I've done you a huge favor, you must do me one in return," Ling'er said. "If someone asks about my whereabouts, just say I headed east. Got it?"

"Hmm?" Chu Liang momentarily puzzled, but he nodded nonetheless.

"Then, until we meet again."

With that, Miss Ling'er mounted her big dog again and sped westward, transforming into a gust of black wind.

"Hey—" Chu Liang quickly called out.

You're just going to leave this big guy here? From Yang Hong's perspective, this would count as a hit-and-run.

He looked up at Mammothdragon, a creature resembling a mountain in its sheer size. It seemed just as curious about him, lowering its massive head to gaze at him with emerald-green eyes that shimmered like a lively, gleaming lake, brimming with life.

Chu Liang swallowed nervously.

Even though it appeared friendly, the pressure it gave off was overwhelming.

It didn't matter if they were a prodigy of a diabolical sect. This creature would just finish them off with one stomp!

No matter what, Yang Hong, being in the Form of the Heavens and the Earth, could not dodge that stomp, which meant that it was likely a ruthless and instant kill.

As the giant creature stared at him, the atmosphere grew increasingly awkward. Chu Liang found himself at a loss for how to communicate with it. Communication with his own mount, the Golden-Furred Hou, was much easier. To be treated as a master by the Golden-Furred Hou, all he had to do was feed it well.

As Chu Liang thought of this, he took out a berry and held it up.

"Want some?"

...

A short while later, Chu Liang had formed a friendly bond with the giant beast.

The Mammothdragon lay on the ground with its mouth open and eyes half-closed in comfort while Chu Liang kept feeding it Golden Vein Berries one by one. If he slowed down, the mammoth would squint slightly in displeasure.

It easily swallowed each berry, as if they were pebbles dropped into water.

After a while, a thundercloud descended from the distant sky, and a tall, anxious young man landed nearby.

The approaching man wore dark, tight-fitting clothes. With tanned skin, thick eyebrows, and large, bright eyes, he looked at Chu Liang with a puzzled expression and asked, "Where is my little junior sister?"

Chu Liang glanced at him as he shook his head and replied, "Brother, are you looking for someone?"

The tall young man pointed at the Mammothdragon and asked, "This is my junior sister's mount. Why are you the only one here?"

"Oh. You mean this mammoth..." Chu Liang said. Then, realizing something, he asked, "Are you searching for Miss Ling'er?"

"Yes," the tall young man said with a nod. "I am Wei Tiandi of the Thunderbolt Stronghold. My little junior sister disappeared two days ago, and our entire sect has been searching for her. She suddenly summoned her mount, so I traced it here... Why are you the only one here?"

"So, Miss Ling'er is indeed from the Thunderbolt Stronghold." Chu Liang nodded, "I wasn't aware of her identity; we just had some business interactions in Taotie City. Just now, I was attacked by a member of a diabolical sect, and Miss Ling'er summoned this Mammothdragon to help me defeat an enemy. But she left in a hurry right after."

Her stories about her father being dead, her mother being sick, and her brother studying were clearly lies. She was just a second-generation immortality cultivator who had run away from home.

Why is it that second-generation immortality cultivators always seem to enjoy playing these games?

Last time, he encountered the siblings from the Ji Family, who were competing with each other as runaways. Could it be that families known to cultivate immortality were unable to provide their children with enough love?

Chu Liang had naturally heard of Wei Tiandi's reputation as the second-ranked core disciple of the Thunderbolt Stronghold, renowned for his wit and bravery.

"Which way did she go?" Wei Tiandi asked.

Chu Liang was about to raise his hand to indicate the direction when he suddenly asked, "How can you prove that you are Wei Tiandi? This concerns Miss Ling'er's safety, so I need to be sure."

Without wasting any words, Wei Tiandi raised his hand, causing a sharp whistle to echo from the distant sky as a bolt of lightning struck down.

In an instant, a large turtle with dark purple markings appeared before him. Its limbs and head protruding from the shell were robust, and its eyes gleamed with fierceness. It was very different from ordinary turtles.

"If you've heard of my name, you should know this Purple-Lightning Divine Turtle," Wei Tiandi said.

Chu Liang nodded.

This divine turtle was indeed distinctive. While most people's impression of turtles was their slow pace, this Purple-Lightning Divine Turtle was renowned for its exceptional speed.

"Since you are indeed Young Hero Wei," Chu Liang said solemnly, "I can safely tell you which way Miss Ling'er went." With a serious expression, he pointed eastward and continued, "She flew in that direction not long ago. You should be able to catch up if you hurry."

"Thank you," Wei Tiandi said, "May I ask for your name?"

"I'm just an unknown junior from Mount Shu. Just call me Lin Bei," responded Chu Liang.

Chapter 342: Colorful Doll

The Mammothdragon was very reluctant to leave.

Before leaving to go after Ling'er, Wei Tiandi told the Mammothdragon to return to Thunderbolt Stronghold on its own. However, the big guy didn't really want to go, probably because it couldn't bear to part with Chu Liang's berries.

Chu Liang couldn't take the Mammothdragon with him back to Mount Shu, so he left a few boxes of berries and then flew off first.

As for how the big guy would get back to the Thunderbolt Stronghold, Chu Liang left that for the people of Thunderbolt Stronghold to worry about.

The Mammothdragon had always been Huang Ling'er's mount. Nevertheless, its massive size was too conspicuous, so Huang Ling'er hadn't been able to take it with her when she ran away from home. She had only been able to take Hua Hua with her.

Earlier, Huang Ling'er showed that she was a person with much integrity. She had ignored the risk of exposing her whereabouts and summoned the big guy for help during that critical moment. As expected, someone from Thunderbolt Stronghold had followed the Mammothdragon with the intention of taking Huang Ling'er back home.

On top of that, the Thunderbolt Stronghold and the Mount Shu Sect weren't on friendly terms. The Thunderbolt Stronghold and Taotie City, the two strongest sects in the Terrestrial Ten, had always been eyeing the Mount Shu Sect's spot in the Divine Nine, constantly wanting to take over that spot.

Nonetheless, Huang Ling'er didn't seem to care about that. She had known that Chu Liang was a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, but she had still helped him. Chu Liang would remember that.

After returning to the Mount Shu Sect, Chu Liang told his teacher about this matter.

Di Nufeng got extremely angry and took immediate action. Those who dared to cause trouble for someone from Silver Sword Peak had better not let her catch even a trace of their tracks.

In the next three days, she wiped out all the Inferno Devil Valley's bases that she could find! In total, she took down no more than ten chambers and no fewer than a hundred disciples. Nevertheless, that was a significant loss for the Inferno Devil Valley, which didn't have many disciples.

The members of the Inferno Devil Valley were flabbergasted. At first, they thought it was because their sect's young master had killed Chu Liang, so Di Nufeng was retaliating.

However, they realized later... Wait. That's not right. Wasn't it our young master who died?

You already killed him, yet you still want to take revenge?

...

As anguished wails rang out all over the Inferno Devil Valley, Chu Liang returned to his little cabin. The first thing he did was shut the door and launch his reward session.

Upon entering the White Pagoda's space, Chu Liang saw the Golden-Core Puppet and the Qi-Circulation Puppet. The sight of them sitting together harmoniously made him feel very content.

"I hope I can give you a new companion."

Chu Liang had once envisioned a scene of multiple Large-Headed Dolls sitting in a row, but he hadn't expected that this day would come so soon.

The iron cells contained the phantoms of hundreds of inferno phoenixes. It was inevitable, as he'd killed an excessive number of inferno phoenixes in the Phoenix Sheep Hidden Realm.

Chu Liang had already refined so many of them into rewards that he had gotten tired. Yet, there were still so many left.

So, he decided to store them there for now and take them out when he needed to use them.

Chu Liang quickly walked to the iron cell containing the phantom of the Human-Faced Xiao and pressed the "Refine" button!

Boom!

There was a burst of red light in the iron cell, followed by a white glow. Chu Liang was very familiar with the reward process for the Human-Faced Xiao's phantom.

[Five-Elements Puppet: A puppet used to cultivate the foundational qi of the five elements and assist in cultivation. The host can infuse it with treasures of nature of any attribute to activate the nurturing of that attribute's foundational qi, which will be produced continuously day and night. The stronger the spiritual energy contained in the treasures of nature, the longer the puppet will work. It consumes more resources during combat.

Please be aware that this puppet is to be used strictly as a cultivation and combat aid. There is a risk of damage if used inappropriately.]

Chu Liang frowned. "This..."

In his hand was a puppet that had the same form as the Large-Headed Dolls but with five colors on its body. These colors were currently dull. They would probably light up when the puppet was activated.

The Human-Faced Xiao phantom did not disappoint him. It produced a new puppet. Moreover, it was a fifth-realm Colorful Doll.

However...

It consumes treasures of nature...? That's ridiculous!!!

The Qi-Circulation Puppet, Chu Liang's first puppet, had only consumed Qi-Gathering Pills, so he'd already found it expensive that the Golden-Core Puppet consumed Spirit-Concentration Pills. However, the Five-Elements Puppet actually consumed treasures of nature...?

What kind of concept is this?

To break through each level of the Five-Elements Realm, a cultivator needed a treasure of nature with an attribute that corresponded to the respective level. The sheer amount of resources required to break through this realm had many cultivators gritting their teeth in exasperation.

Now, Chu Liang had to provide for himself as well as the Five-Elements Puppet.

It was like when he formed a core for the Golden Core Puppet.

I need treasures of nature for my breakthrough, and now, I need to give them to this thing to let it break through too...?

This means the resources I need for cultivation will be twice as much as everyone else.

Fucking hell. Is there any justice left?

It's just helping me cultivate, but I have to pay it to help me...? Isn't this daylight robbery?

Placing the Colorful Doll next to the other two Large-Headed Dolls, Chu Liang suddenly felt very fortunate that the Large-Headed Dolls wouldn't jump ship.[1]

The salary inversion among his puppets had reached a ridiculous level. If running the Golden-Core Puppet was quantified as requiring ten times the resources it took to run the Qi-Circulation Puppet, then running the Five-Elements Puppet would need hundreds or even thousands of times that!

The salaries of new employees had to keep up with societal standards and costs of living. If the salaries of existing employees were not raised accordingly, then it would inevitably lead to situations like this, where the employees who had been with the company the longest would earn the lowest. At this point, if the senior employees wanted income that matched their efforts, the only thing they could do would be to change jobs.[2]

Hmph.

Fortunately, it can't leave.

Chu Liang knew that it was definitely worth it to supply the puppets with the resources they demanded, but he couldn't help but feel a bit aggrieved.

I need employees. They need a job. We've been working together from the start.

This is already an equivalent exchange. Why do I still have to pay them?

...

Buzz.

While Chu Liang was lamenting the decline of morals in the White Pagoda, he suddenly felt a vibration he hadn't felt in a long time.

"The Soul Subjugator Token?"

Chu Liang withdrew his divine sense from the White Pagoda and redirected it into the Soul Subjugator Token.

[Eastern-Route Guider]: "I heard that you have now become a chamber master of the White-Bone Hall. Well done."

[Fifty-Ninth]: "Sir, it's all thanks to yours and the Marquess' brilliant guidance that we were able to escape death on the battlefield of Mount Shu! In the future, we will definitely continue to follow the Marquess' leadership without the slightest hesitation! By the way, sir, didn't you mention previously that the Marquess would be giving out rewards..."

[Sixtieth]: "Yes."

[Eastern-Route Guider]: "Rest assured. There will be no shortage of benefits for you. The Taotie Pavilion has sent out the treasures of nature. Wait for the delivery."

[Fifty-Ninth]: "Wow! Many thanks to the Marquess! Many thanks to you, sir! Our admiration for the two of you is as endless as the surging river—"

[Eastern-Route Guider]: "That's enough."

[Eastern-Route Guider]: "I also want to tell you that the Marquess has almost recovered from his injury, and he will return soon. The Four Halls of the Dark King Sect suffered heavy losses this time, and it's hopeful that the Marquess will regain power in the sect. However, the Four Halls will not sit idly by, so keep an eye on their movements."

[Fifty-Ninth]: "What? What? The Marquess is finally coming back? Heavens, we've waited so long for this day! Hurry and let him return! We can't wait any longer!"

[Fifty-Eighth]: "Understood."

[Sixtieth]: "Understood."

Chapter 343: Grand Black Celestial Golden Bone

A few days later, Chu Liang received a gift from the Violet Gold Marquess.

A long time ago, they had promised to reward him with a treasure for infiltrating the White-Bone Hall. However, the delivery had been significantly delayed, likely due to some scheming.

The logic was simple. At that time, the Eastern-Route Guider must have known that the Dark King Sect would soon attack Mount Shu, and the three infiltrators would likely die in that battle. If the delivery was delayed and the infiltrators died, they would be able to keep the treasure.

While the Violet Gold Marquess wouldn't care about such things, the Eastern-Route Guider would make these small calculations. However, after the battle at Mount Shu, most of the Dark King Sect disciples who were sent there died, but the three infiltrators survived unscathed.

After confirming their survival, the Eastern-Route Guider could only marvel at their resilience. Then, he sent the rewards to the three of them.

Chu Liang, of course, didn't set the delivery address as the branch of Taotie Pavilion nearest to Mount Shu. Instead, he provided an address that was farther away and went to retrieve it himself.

The infuriating thing was...that the bastard sent the treasures of nature using cash on delivery.

For some valuable items, the Taotie Pavilion allowed the option of the recipient paying for the delivery. However, if the delivery fees weren't paid for a long time, Taotie Pavilion would be able to keep the treasure.

And so, Chu Liang gritted his teeth and paid the high postage of dozens of Vermillion-Bird coins.

Not long ago, as the richest man in Mount Shu, he wouldn't have cared about such a small amount of money, but now that his fortune was nearly exhausted, he had to be frugal.

However, considering that the treasure delivered was real, Chu Liang wasn't bothered by it...

After all, even if he was bothered by it, all he could do was complain inwardly.

The reward sent by the Violet Gold Marquess was a piece of Grand Black Celestial Golden Bone.

After opening the box, Chu Liang marveled at the effort that had gone into choosing this reward.

Previously, the Eastern-Route Guider had only mentioned treasures that could help them break through to the fifth level, so Chu Liang expected they would send some ordinary items.

Despite having the word bone in its name, this Grand Black Celestial Golden Bone was not actually an animal bone. It was really an ancient divine tree called "Grand Black Celestial Tree" from the Western Regions. This strange and precious item was formed after this tree had been buried underground for thousands of years.

It appeared to be an extremely hard solid, shimmering with a dark golden luster, but the spiritual energy it contained was astonishing.

This was an excellent item for advancing to the next cultivation level, especially for practitioners of yin-nature techniques in the diabolical sects.

In this light, the Violet Gold Marquess was quite generous, though the Eastern-Route Guider was a bit stingy.

However, this item is somewhat unsuitable for Chu Liang.

The foundation of his cultivation lay in the Golden Core of Lesser Yang, which meant that he did not cultivate any actual diabolical techniques. The amount of yin energy in this Grand Black Celestial Golden Bone was far too strong that it conflicted with the nature of his cultivation. It seemed he could only sell it for money.

Wait a minute?

Suddenly, Chu Liang had an idea.

What if I gave this thing to the Colorful Doll?

Activation could be done with just treasures of nature. There was no specific mention of whether the treasure should contain yin or yang energy.

However, he hadn't advanced to the fifth realm yet. What would happen if it activated the circulation of the foundational qi of the five elements?

Could he really absorb the qi it cultivated?

This was a bold idea, but once it occurred to him, he couldn't hold back the thought, and his eyes lit up.

Why not give it a try? he thought.

With this thought, Chu Liang immediately took out the Five-Elements Puppet. Since external items couldn't be brought into the White Pagoda space, he had to take the Colorful Doll outside to fuse with it.

The fusion process wasn't difficult.

With a surge of qi, Chu Liang pushed the Grand Black Celestial Golden Bone towards the Colorful Doll. Instantly, the puppet began to glow with a brilliant white light, eagerly absorbing the ancient treasure with a swift!

Whoosh—

The five colors on the Colorful Doll's body lit up, with the white light flickering continuously as if it was in the middle of digestion.

Chu Liang then placed the Colorful Doll back into the White Pagoda.

He then headed to the Hall of Conservation to retrieve a fifth-realm cultivation technique, Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique: The Book of Five Elements.

Chu Liang's cultivation level wasn't high enough to practice this technique, but activation of the circulation of this qi pathway was not impossible.

However, since he hadn't opened the Secret Reservoir of Five Elements within his body, there wouldn't be any foundational qi of the five elements circulating this qi pathway.

However, his own attempt might be futile, but it might not be same for the Five-Elements Puppet.

By evening, the flickering white light on the Colorful Doll finally stabilized into a steady glow.

Chu Liang knew this meant it had fully absorbed the resources and its spiritual energy was replenished.

So he placed his hand on the head of the Five-Elements Puppet and began activating the fifth-realm cultivation technique.

Boom—

The qi-circulation route of the fifth-realm cultivation technique was quite extensive, making it very challenging for an ordinary Golden Core Realm cultivator to activate. Luckily, Chu Liang's Sea of Qi was vast, allowing him to support it without much strain. However, since his Secret Reservoir of Five Elements was not opened, activating this technique did not result in any impactful effect.

After completing one cycle of the qi-circulation route, the technique was successfully imprinted onto the Five-Elements Puppet.

The white light around the Colorful Doll intensified, and a golden light emerged, circulating along its body following the qi-circulation route. As the golden light completed its first round, Chu Liang immediately sensed something unusual.

A sharp surge of foundational qi instantly flowed into the Sea of Qi!

This was Geng Metal foundational qi!

The Geng Metal foundational qi felt sharp and solid. When infused into sword qi, the sword qi would become indestructible. If this foundational qi was infused into the body, it would transform into a Metallic Body!

This was one of the Five Elements foundational qi possessed only by those at the fifth realm. Chu Liang had seen it being used by Xu Ziyang and Jiang Yuebai. The greatest advantage of the fifth realm over the fourth, besides the expansion of the Sea of Qi, lay in the upgrade in the quality of foundational qi.

But now, Chu Liang, despite being at the fourth-realm cultivation, had mastered an elemental foundational qi that only those at the fifth realm could wield!

And it was all thanks to the existence of the Five-Elements Puppet.

In comparison, the Qi-Circulation Puppet, which could only speed up qi cultivation, and the Golden-Core Puppet, which provided an external golden core, suddenly seemed mediocre even though they had offered amazing advantages.

The Colorful Doll deserved the highest salary!

This was really how Chu Liang felt at the moment.

Before using it, he thought it was too expensive. But after he had employed its services, he couldn't help but marvel at how incredible the doll truly was.

At this moment, Chu Liang's Sea of Qi capacity and recovery speed far exceeded those of his peers, placing him on par with a fifth-realm cultivator. His knowledge of divine abilities was also comparable to those at the fifth realm. Now, with the upgrade in the quality of his foundational qi, a unique characteristic of a fifth-realm cultivator, what still separated him from being considered an actual fifth-realm cultivator?

The only difference was that when he was at the fourth realm, he would be on par with a fifth-realm cultivator. And by the time he reached the fifth realm, he would be much stronger than a fifth-realm cultivator. This was the only difference!

With that, Chu Liang excitedly arranged the three puppets next to each other.

Keep it up!

As long as you maintain your current high spirits, I will surely have a brighter future!

...

The time went on peacefully. Two days passed by when Chu Liang suddenly received a letter.

It was from the Great Astral Sect.

Obviously, in the Great Astral Sect, only his good friend, the macho man Yun Chaoxian would write to him.

Chu Liang felt puzzled as he opened the envelope, wondering why Yun Chaoxian had written him a letter.

His correspondence with Yun Chaoxian had been quite frequent. It occurred not only during the Mount Shu Summit but also afterward. After the summit ended, Chu Liang invited a group of macho men from the Great Astral Sect to boost the atmosphere during the opening of Berry Wonderland.

However, both had been busy lately, and they hadn't been in touch for a while.

"Brother Chu, receiving your letter is almost like having the pleasure of seeing you in person.[1]"

Upon reading the first sentence, Chu Liang smiled slightly. He thought to himself that Brother Yun shouldn't try to use fancy words if he wasn't brought up in a culture that used it.

"Receiving your letter is almost like having the pleasure of seeing you in person" might be a phrase Yun Chaoxian picked up from Chu Liang's previous correspondence. Considering the cultural atmosphere of the Great Astral Sect, he probably wouldn't have heard such expressions often.

Luckily, he only misspelled the word and hadn't accidentally communicated something completely different, such as spelling person as prison. [2].

The next sentence read:

"Lately, I... have a favor to ask of you. When do you have time for me to come and discuss with you in detail?"

Chapter 344: Double the Wisdom and Bravery

In fact, Yun Chaoxian's request put Chu Liang in a bit of a dilemma. Considering that he had very solemnly written this letter to him, it was clear this was not a trivial matter.

The issue was Chu Liang has been very busy these days. If this was a matter of importance, he couldn't say no.

Regardless, he didn't remain in this state of dilemma. He promptly replied to Yun Chaoxian, promising Yun Chaoxian that he could always rely on the brothers from Silver Sword Peak on Mount Shu for assistance.

There was no other reason. Whenever Chu Liang needed help, Yun Chaoxian had never once hesitated to say yes. Regardless of whether it was a big or small matter, Yun Chaoxian would give it his all. The brothers of the Great Astral Sect were known for their loyalty.

Therefore, when Yun Chaoxian needed help, Chu Liang couldn't refuse as a refusal wouldn't be justified.

However, it wasn't a lie that Chu Liang was busy lately. For the past few days, he had been fully focused on refining pills, fusing Golden Vein Berries with Qi-Gathering Pills to create fruit-flavored Qi-Gathering Pills.

Dan Lingzi, the creator of the Pill Fusion Technique, could only refine one batch a day. But Chu Liang could refine three to four batches a day, with each batch yielding about two hundred Qi-Gathering Pills.

In this way, over five days, he had refined thousands of Qi-Gathering Pills.

Even so, if these Qi-Gathering Pills were sold, they still wouldn't be enough to supply the market, as people were used to buying them in large quantities in gourds.

These pills were meant to attract visitors.

Recently, Berry Wonderland launched a new product—Qi-Gathering Pills concentrated with several berries. They claimed that each pill contained the essence of six berries, enhancing qi replenishment while maximizing the beautifying and virility-boosting effects of Golden Vein Berries.

The marketing slogan was: If you use your kidneys often, consume six berries.

But these enticing Qi-Gathering Pills weren't for sale; they were given away for free.

Berry Wonderland explained that these were free gifts for the visitors' families!

The main reason was that only Chu Liang could refine this type of fruit-flavored pill in Mount Shu. Even if he worked tirelessly like a large-headed doll, he couldn't meet the vast market demand. Moreover, besides him, there weren't many in the Hall of Alchemy who could master the Pill Fusion Technique, as it required an immensely powerful divine fire. Apart from the Alchemy Master, no one else could quickly grasp it.[1]

And it was impossible for the Alchemy Master to work for Chu Liang, though Chu Liang was really looking forward to the day when it happens.

The new activity at Berry Wonderland allowed each visitor to taste a Qi-Gathering Pill for free, but a Pill Redemption Coupon was required to get a free pill. To obtain this coupon, one had to visit Red Cotton Market and request it from any stall.

If the tourists wanted, they could visit all the stalls on Red Cotton Peak and collect dozens of coupons in exchange for dozens of Qi-Gathering Pills.

It didn't require any spending of money. They just had to take a stroll around the Cotton Red Peak. As it would only take cultivators a moment to fly to and fro the Red Cotton Peak, many tourists were willing to take a stroll around the Red Cotton Peak.

Chu Liang wanted to direct more traffic to the Red Cotton Peak because he had recently leased it with the intention of managing it well and turning it into an exclusive commercial center for the Mount Shu Sect.

Obviously, the first step was to make this place bustling with activity.

He informed the disciples of the various peaks of Mount Shu that Red Cotton Peak would be very lively these days, encouraging more people to set up stalls.

Then, he would attract more people and make the tourists visit this place more.

Next, Chu Liang planned to invite some official shops from Taotie City to the Red Cotton Market. At the very least, those pill shops that owed him favors from last time would do him a favor of showing up.

When the number of businesses and customers increased, a positive cycle would naturally form.

This activity had only been happening for five days. Even though Chu Liang was working as hard as he could to make pills, he was just barely keeping up with the demand for the event's giveaways. But if he had to leave Mount Shu, the event would have to be paused.

...

"Brother Chu, I am really counting on you this time."

As soon as he received the reply, Yun Chaoxian hurried to Mount Shu. Upon meeting, he warmly patted Chu Liang's shoulder with great enthusiasm.

Chu Liang dealt with that smack on the shoulder silently. Then, while his shoulders remained uneven, he said with a smile, "There's no need for formalities between us. Just be straightforward with me."

It had been days since they last saw each other, and Yun Chaoxian's muscles had noticeably grown, making him even stronger.

"Hey!" Yun Chaoxian waved and said, "It's about the trials for the head disciple of the Great Astral Sect."

Most immortal sects hold competitions among their disciples. Even if it's not for the title of head disciple, there were other titles available. Since resources are limited, prioritizing their allocation became essential. Additionally, this competition would help boost the disciples' ambition.

The Great Astral Sect was no exception.

As a matter of fact, the members of the Great Astral Sect particularly enjoyed competition.

In the world of scholars, there was no true first place, but in the realm of martial arts, there was no room for second place. As martial artists, they honored the principle that strength spoke louder than anything else.

Shortly after the Mount Shu Summit ended, the Great Astral Sect began their own competition for the position of head disciple. However, their trial was different from that of the Mount Shu Sect as it directly targeted the four core disciples—Ren Hongdao, Tang Shi, Li Fujian, Yun Chaoxian.

Unlike Mount Shu, which required a grand summit, the competition would end at the end of the matches between the four core disciples. This approach allowed for more freedom, and the trials could take many forms outside of the arena.

"The trial was divided into three rounds, with an overall evaluation at the end. The first round has already ended, and now the second round is about to begin," Yun Chaoxian explained. "In the second round, each of us can invite a disciple from another immortal sect to assist us."

"Brother Chu, you were the first person I thought of!"

As he said this, Yun Chaoxian's eyes sparkled with confidence.

"We are both wise and brave. Together, we will be double the wisdom and bravery, and there will be no way we can lose!"

Alright then.

So they want a guest performer too, huh?

Chu Liang smiled, thinking that the rules of the Great Astral Sect's trial were a bit peculiar.

He couldn't help but ask, "Since it's a selection of head disciple, it's naturally about comprehensively assessing the abilities of the core disciples. Why would you ask outsiders for help?"

"Because the sect's trial is about assessing our overall strength," Yun Chaoxian explained. "And our sect leader believes that having connections is also a part of our strength!"

Heh. That actually makes sense.

Upon reflection, the Great Astral Sect has always given the impression of being rough martial artists, yet despite this, they still manage to have good relationships with many other sects.

Among the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, from the Penglai Sect to the Mount Shu Sect, alliances and rivalries were gradually formed. But the Great Astral Sect was different, with alliances everywhere and almost no enemies at all.

To be precise, their only strong competitor was the Monastery Tower, which was known for its warrior monks. Both sects followed the path of martial arts, leading to some competition. However, this was limited to healthy rivalry, and there was no strong animosity between them—after all, the Monastery Tower was not quite on their level.

As Chu Liang pondered, he couldn't help but feel that the Great Astral Sect indeed knew a thing or two about maintaining connections.

Chu Liang himself was especially well-versed in this aspect, gaining a deep understanding of the social intricacies in the world of immortality cultivators.

So what if your cultivation level is higher than mine? I'll just call someone stronger to take you down. While you're in closed-door cultivation, I'm out building connections. How can you win against that?

Chu Liang pondered for a moment and then asked, "So what will you be tested on for the second round of the trial?"

"I am not sure yet," Yun Chaoxian said, shaking his head. "It could be a mission, a hidden realm, or a search for something... the content of the trials varies every year."

"But in that case, with the content being unpredictable, wouldn't it depend heavily on luck?" Chu Liang asked, puzzled. "After all, everyone has different strengths."

For example, the Mount Shu Sect had always categorized the Mountain God Memorial Ceremony as a recreational event rather than the main competition because of its randomness. Chu Liang might not beat Jiang Yuebai in a fight, but he would be a hundred years ahead of everyone at Mount Shu when it came to puzzles and treasure hunts.

"That's true, but our sect leader said that..." Yun Chaoxian paused before continuing, "luck is also a form of strength."

Chapter 345: The Members of the Great Astral Sect Aren't Fools Right?

Everlasting Island, the East Sea.

A golden cloud rolled in and swiftly descended toward the edge of the island, revealing itself to be a Golden-Furred Hou. Sitting on its back was a handsome young man and a robust man with a large halberd at his waist.

They were Chu Liang and Yun Chaoxian.

The Golden-Furred Hou was now a star in the Berry Wonderland, and Chu Liang usually wouldn't ride it outside the sect for personal matters. Nevertheless, he reluctantly brought the Golden-Furred Hou out for a bit just to make his buddy look good.

After all, regardless of whom the other three core disciples had invited, it was unlikely they would have a sixth-realm mount. In terms of appearances, Yun Chaoxian and Chu Liang were already a step ahead.

Located on Everlasting Island was the Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor. The manor's master had belonged to the Great Astral Sect's previous generation of disciples, but he'd left the sect in his early

years. Now, he was a little famous in the cultivation world and still maintained a close relationship with the sect where he'd been born.

This time, his manor was the location where the four core disciples of the Great Astral Sect would be given the test for the second round of the trial for the next head disciple.

Upon landing, Yun Chaoxian had his head held high and chest out, while Chu Liang led the Golden-Furred Hou along leisurely. Without stopping once, they walked until they arrived at the entrance gates of the Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor.

The mountain manor was quite impressive. It had been built on an open space that protruded from the mid level of a mountain on the solitary Everlasting Island. With silver-white walls, bricks, and tiles, the manor was quite beautiful.

At this moment, the manor's entrance gates were open. The manor's guards and servants were standing in two straight lines, five steps apart from each other, to welcome the disciples visiting from the Great Astral Sect. Judging by the appearances of the guards, each one was a martial artist with hidden skills.

It was quite a grand welcome.

The manor's steward walked over to Yun Chaoxian and Chu Liang.

He asked, "Young heroes, are you here to participate in the Great Astral Sect's trial?"

"I'm Yun Chaoxian from the Great Astral Sect," Yun Chaoxian said, introducing himself first. Then he gestured to Chu Liang. "My companion is Chu Liang from the Mount Shu Sect."

"Oh! I've heard of your great names." The steward's smile became much more flattering. He glanced at the Golden-Furred Hou behind Chu Liang. "Please leave this spirit beast in our courtyard for now, as there isn't a lot of space inside. There are already four other young heroes waiting in the guest hall. Please head inside."

"Sure," Chu Liang replied.

He brought the Golden-Furred Hou into the courtyard and had it stay put there.

The steward went to get some food to feed the spirit beast. He certainly wasn't going to mistreat this sixth-realm mount.

Yun Chaoxian and Chu Liang then entered the guest hall.

It seemed that not all the participants had arrived, as the master of the manor had yet to appear. Aside from the attendants, there were only four young people in the hall.

Chu Liang only recognized two of them.

Of the two people he didn't recognize, one was a thin young man with a scarlet scabbard at his waist. His black hair was two fingers long, and his appearance was ordinary. His gaze, however, was sharp and piercing.

When they made eye contact, Chu Liang felt a stabbing pain in his eyes.

What powerful divine intent.

Chu Liang knew that this sharp pain was due to the thin young man having strong mental power. Of the three energies cultivators cultivated, martial artists mainly cultivated vitality, whereas ordinary cultivators, who were also known as qi practitioners, mainly cultivated qi.

Only Confucian cultivators or cultivators of certain special lineages cultivated the spirit, strengthening their mental power. However, having strong mental power was often extremely important for all cultivators.

The thin young man was obviously not a Confucian cultivator, but he had probably cultivated using some special techniques to strengthen his divine intent.

Chu Liang didn't even need to guess. He was certain that this person had to be the Great Astral Sect's eldest senior brother, Ren Hongdao!

Beside Ren Hongdao sat a clean-cut young man in white Confucian robes. His facial features were unremarkable, but he had a gentle gaze and a refined demeanor.

Just sitting there, he exuded a very comfortable presence. His aura alone made those around him feel like they were bathed in a spring breeze. It was quite a magical feeling.

Ignoring all that, the first thing that Yun Chaoxian did when he sat down was yell. "Senior Brother, you actually invited Zhang Chen! That's so unfair!"

Upon hearing that, Chu Liang knew who the Confucian cultivator was. He was the head disciple of the Ascending Dragon Academy, Zhang Chen!

In fact, if anyone were to say which sect among the Terrestrial Ten was the strongest, it would undoubtedly be Ascending Dragon Academy. However, the Ascending Dragon Academy had never considered trying to rise to the rankings of the Divine Nine.

This was due to the sect's unique structure. Instead of concentrating their forces in the sect, they advocated spreading their members across the nine provinces, which got them the support of the imperial court and an established presence among the common people.

Taotie City and the Thunderbolt Stronghold had always attempted to obtain a spot in the Divine Nine, but it was very difficult for them to surpass the Ascending Dragon Academy in terms of strength.

After venturing into the world, the Ascending Dragon Academy's successive generations of head disciples had all become renowned figures across the nine provinces. They ranged from great scholars of the present age to high-ranking officials in the imperial court. Yet, Zhang Chen was outstanding even in comparison to them when they were his age.

It could be said that all of the Yu Dynasty was looking forward to what he would do in the future. The head disciple of the Ascending Dragon Academy might normally be quite disconnected from the world of immortality cultivators, but there was no doubt that his strength and status would play a significant role in it.

Coupled with Ren Hongdao's strength, this was indeed a formidable combination.

"Brother Yun, you shouldn't say that. You invited Young Hero Chu, and Miss Tang invited the ninth young lady of the Ji Family," Zhang Chen said with a gentle voice. "I, a mere Confucian scholar, cannot compare to the two of them."

That's right. There were two young women sitting opposite Ren Hongdao and Zhang Chen.

The delicate-looking girl with the Hegemon King's Spear sitting beside her was Tang Shi, who had a good relationship with Yun Chaoxian. Chu Liang had already met her several times, so he obviously knew who she was.

Surprisingly, the person Tang Shi had invited was someone Chu Liang had met once before. The young lady had snow-white skin and sparkling golden eyes. She was the ninth young lady of the Ji Family, Ji Lingyu!

After greeting everyone, Chu Liang sat next to Ji Lingyu and quietly said, "Miss Ji, it's been a while. That competition you had with your brother—who won?"

Ji Lingyu was a little surprised to hear that and replied, "It's not over yet."

Chu Liang blinked. "Huh?"

"We're competing to see who will get found by our family first... but neither of us has been found yet."

"So, you've just been wandering outside all this time?" Chu Liang asked.

"I didn't want it to be this way, but my eighth brother still hasn't returned home..." Determination flared in Ji Lingyu's eyes. "I can't lose!"

Well, then. I guess she is indeed a woman of the Ji Family—a woman who will be strong-willed for life.

They only managed a brief conversation before there was the sound of footsteps from outside. Everyone looked up to see two people walking in.

"Apologies. We're late."

The person on the left was a young man in white with a steely face. He wore a jade belt and carried a heavy broadsword on his back. This young man was Li Fujian.

Chu Liang had also met him before. Li Fujian was Old Man Zhang Juque's disciple.

The person Li Fujian had brought with him was a delicate and beautiful youth, who seemed a little younger than Li Fujian. The youth was tall and skinny, and he was dressed in the robes of a young master and had a jade hair accessory^[1] pinned in his thick, luxurious hair.

The beautiful youth smiled at the people in the room, his eyes curving into narrow slits.

Li Fujian introduced the youth to the others. "This is my good friend, Zhuge Guanxing from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals."

Upon hearing the youth's name, everyone figured out who he was. So, he's from the Zhuge Family.

The Zhuge Family of the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals was similar to what the Lu Family had been in the past for the Mount Shu Sect. They were an ancient family that had produced sect leaders and elders for the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals, so they had always held a high status in the sect.

The Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals was one of the more traditional sects in the Divine Nine. They focused on secluding themselves from the outside world to focus on cultivation, so they lived as mountain hermits.

They were so withdrawn from the world that they were only second to the Greater-Yin Cult. The disciples of the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals rarely appeared outside their sect, and when they did, it was only to travel to slay monsters and obliterate devils.

Therefore, the disciples of the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals were usually quite unknown to the world of immortality cultivators. Nevertheless, there was no doubt that they were strong. Every once in a while, one of their disciples would suddenly emerge and achieve some astonishing feats.

It appeared that the Great Astral Sect had invited some highly capable individuals this time. None of these people would be easy opponents.

...

Once all the participants had arrived, one of the attendants went to inform the manor's master.

A short time later, someone's hearty laugh came through from outside. "Haha, young heroes, you've come a long way. Please forgive any shortcomings in our hospitality!"

That person had broad shoulders that extended into a wide frame and a dark complexion partially covered by a long beard. Burly and tall, this man exuded a majestic and imposing aura.

However, his face did not reveal his imposing might. Before his lips even curved upward, his smile shone through his eyes. This was Li Zhutian, the master of the Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor.

Li Zhutian walked briskly to the host's seat and sat down.

Laughing, he said, "Rest assured. As someone who was born as a disciple of the Great Astral Sect, I understand the importance of this trial to all of you and will ensure absolute fairness and impartiality."

Li Fujian nodded. "Everyone can rest assured. My second uncle is the most fair-minded person."

Chu Liang leaned closer to Yun Chaoxian and asked, "Are those two related?"

"Yes." Yun Chaoxian nodded. "But it doesn't matter."

Indeed. According to your Great Astral Sect, your bloodline is also a part of your strength, right? Chu Liang mocked inwardly.

However, since the Great Astral Sect had chosen this person to set the questions, it indicated there wouldn't be any favoritism and that this shouldn't be a major concern. After all, the members of the Great Astral Sect couldn't be fools.

Eh? Wait a minute...

Chu Liang suddenly felt a bit doubtful about Li Zhutian's impartiality. [2]

Li Zhutian shot Li Fujian a glare and then said, "My manor was chosen for the second round of the trial because something happened here recently that can serve as your test."

He continued seriously, "Two days ago, Li Feiyu[3], the notorious Jiangnan thief, stole the treasure of my manor, the Baxia Dual Rings. I hope you can help me find Li Feiyu and retrieve the Baxia Dual Rings! Whoever succeeds will be the winner."

Chapter 346: The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea

"Haaa..." Before the master of the Ultimate Martial Manor started talking about the theft of the Baxia Dual Rings, he first let out a deep sigh.

"This treasure is my most reliable companion while traversing the nine provinces and the four seas. I always keep it in a personal enchanted storage tool, never letting it leave my side easily."

Chu Liang had heard a bit about the Baxia Dual Rings.

Legend has it that this treasure was forged by fusing the soul essence of the draconic celestial beast Baxia[1]. When a cultivator wore these rings, their arms gained immense divine power, making them feel as if they could conquer the heavens and the earth.

Currently, it was ranked one hundred and thirty-three in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures.

The reason it hasn't made it into the top hundred was that it has no other abilities aside from enhancing strength. It really couldn't be considered a top hundred legendary artifact. However, the fact that it was able to be ranked this high just by enhancing strength showed how terrifyingly it could boost one's power.

Much of Li Zhutian's early fame in the world of immortal cultivators was indeed due to this pair of enchanted tools.

"However, no matter how careful I am, I can't always carry the storage enchanted tool. The jade ring that contains the Baxia Double Rings is with me even while bathing, except when I'm having... um...with my wife... because it's just really inconvenient." He said, feeling a bit awkward at this point.

"So during that short time, my wife would keep the storage ring, and I would put it back on immediately afterward."

"Why not put the storage ring in another storage enchanted tool?" Yun Chaoxian suddenly asked. "That way, the ring wouldn't be in the way."

"But then the other storage enchanted tool would be in the way," Li Fujian explained to Yun Chaoxian in a serious tone. But then, he pondered to himself and added, "But if the other storage enchanted tool was also stored in a storage enchanted tool..."

"You two, stop embarrassing yourselves," Senior Brother Ren Hongdao said sternly. "No matter how many storage enchanted tools you use, there will always be one storage enchanted tool left to carry... In my opinion, he could have just put it in his pocket and there wouldn't be need for a storage enchanted tool."

Zhang Chen, who was beside him, smiled and gently pressed Ren Hongdao on the arm as he whispered, "Brother Ren, it's not your turn to speak yet."

Li Zhutian, looking embarrassed, scratched his head and said with a smile, "You can't wear any clothes when you are doing that..."

Chu Liang listened thoughtfully from the side.

Although the previous conversation sounded like mentally ill patients from the Great Astral Sect discussing their problems, it did reflect an issue.

There would be moments when even the most powerful storage enchanted tools had to be set aside. Only legendary artifacts with their own storage space that could be fused with the soul, such as the White Pagoda, would always be present.

But the White Pagoda could only store treasures produced by the White Pagoda itself.

To truly store items invisibly and tracelessly, there would be only two ways. The first was to master the immortal art of Hidden Mountains and Seas, which allowed the cultivator to open up a personal space where any item can be stored and accessed at will.

This way, even if you were completely naked, you could still retrieve whatever you need with a simple gesture.

The second method was to create one's own little world. Those at the eighth realm who had attained the Heavenly Origin, or some seventh-realm experts proficient in the Great Dao of the world, could achieve this. In the world they created, they were like gods. If they were able to create their own little world, they were obviously capable of storing items.

Chu Liang could not help but think about the security issue with the increasing wealth and resources he would have in the future. This was a significant issue as this world has no banks. Li Zhutian's incident served as a reminder that the learning of the immortal art—Hidden Mountains and Seas—should be a priority.

Otherwise, if something were ever stolen, even if he cried about it, he would have no way to recover it.

After the brief interruption, Li Zhutian continued, "That night, I was sleeping... with my thirty-second wife and thirty-ninth wife. The ring was kept by the thirty-ninth wife in the cabinet. Unexpectedly, she went out during the process, claiming she needed to relieve herself, and took the ring with her.

"Even after we waited for a long time she did not come back, I then realized she was nowhere to be found in the entire estate, and our newly hired gardener went missing as well."

"So the thirty-ninth wife eloped with the gardener?" asked Zhuge Guanxing from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals. "Then why did you say that Li Feiyu did it?"

"Because we later found this in the gardener's room," Li Zhutian said, showing an item to everyone.

It turned out to be a jade talisman with a swimming fish with two fins carved on it.

"Li Feiyu leaves this behind every time he steals something. Only then did I realize he probably disguised himself, infiltrated my estate, and abducted my wife just to steal the treasure!"

Li Zhutian said with a sigh, "I never expected that the woman I loved most in my life... my thirty-ninth wife would betray me for a thief! How could she betray my deep affection?"

Upon hearing this, Chu Liang understood why someone like Li Zhutian, who was at the sixth-realm of cultivation, had left the Great Astral Sect.

No proper immortal sect would accept such a "deeply affectionate" disciple.

Even the living arrangements for the family members of such a disciple would be difficult to handle.

Li Fujian comforted, "Second Uncle, don't be too sad. Thirty-Ninth Aunt might have been coerced."

"Haaaaaa!" Li Zhutian sighed and finally said, "I know you are all eager for your trials and have little interest in a banquet now. I've prepared rooms for everyone. You can rest here and think about the ways to locate Li Feiyu. After the trials, I'll host a grand feast and invite you all to enjoy it!"

...

Everyone immediately settled into four groups and began discussing the plan in their individual rooms at the Ultimate Martial Manor.

When Ren Hongdao and Zhang Chen returned to their room, Ren Hongdao asked, "Brother Zhang, do you have any ideas?"

With a gentle and confident smile, Zhang Chen nodded slightly and said, "I'm not very skilled at finding objects, but when it comes to finding people, there are a few divine skills of the Confucian sect that I can use."

These were not empty boasts. Chu Liang had previously witnessed Song Qingyi's Half-Page Golden Script and Shang Shuwen's Name-Calling Locating Technique. Confucian divine abilities indeed excelled at locating people.

As he spoke, Zhang Chen flipped his hand, retrieving a white piece of paper and a golden brush, both radiating a faint spiritual glow.

He then formed finger seals with his left hand and gently wrote a name on the paper.

"Li Feiyu."

As the final stroke was completed, the name on the paper began to emit a faint glow.

Buzz—

The paper trembled and flickered, as if it were sensing every utterance of that name under the heavens.

After a while, a blurry scene appeared on the paper.

Zhang Chen observed it carefully for a moment and said, "It should be Donghuai City. Li Feiyu is likely there. Let's go check it out."

Ren Hongdao replied, "Alright, let's head out immediately!"

...

Li Fujian and Zhuge Guanxing returned to their room, both deep in thought. Li Fujian asked, "Brother Zhuge, do you have any ideas?"

Zhuge Guanxing nodded slightly and said, "Brother Li, don't worry. Let me first perform a divination reading."

As he spoke, he flipped his hand to retrieve three black copper coins with golden patterns. Holding them in his right hand and forming finger seals with his left, he meditated briefly, concentrating on the matter he wanted to understand through divination reading.

Clack, clack, clack.

The three copper coins fell on the table, each showing a different side.

Seeing this, Zhuge Guanxing smiled slightly and said, "It can be done."

He then put away the copper coins and took out a sand tray filled with fine, white, pearl-like sand, each grain glistening and looking valuable. Beside the tray was a piece of spirit wood.

Zhuge Guanxing held the spirit wood twig in his hand, dipped it onto the sand tray, and gently chanted, "Seek."

After speaking, he closed his eyes again. In the next second, a golden light suddenly shone from the center of his forehead, as if a divine eye had opened!

His arm began to move spasmodically, drawing complex and mysterious patterns on the sand tray.

Li Fujian watched from the side, feeling as though he was looking at a celestial being.

Among the many arts in cultivation, divination reading was one of the most profound and mysterious skills.

In the world of immortal cultivators, aside from some secret legacies, the most skilled in divination were the Celestial Pivot Pavilion and the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals.

The Celestial Pivot Pavilion specialized in astrology, ranking the first in the technique of astrological divination.

The Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals, on the other hand, embraced various traditions and excelled in multiple techniques, such as planchette writing[2], Liu Ren Divination,[3] astrological divination, deity-invoking rituals, physiognomy, and qi-reading fortune-telling.

Disciples of the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals usually choose to study one of these methods based on their personal interests and talents.

But Zhuge Guanxing was different.

He mastered all these techniques and excelled in each of them.

After a while, the divine eye on his forehead disappeared, and he opened his eyes. He looked at the patterns in the sand tray and said two words. "Donghuai."

...

Tang Shi and Ji Lingyu returned to their room, both girls looking anxious.

"Elder Sister Lingyu, do you have any ideas?" Tang Shi asked as she looked up.

"Yes! Let me try!" Ji Lingyu nodded, "Let's go check the gardener's room."

At their request, the guards of the Ultimate Martial Manor quickly escorted the two girls to the room of the gardener that had run away.

As Ji Lingyu stood in the courtyard, she kept a serious expression.

She had run away from home and wasn't like Huang Ling'er, who could survive on her own. For the past several days, she had heavily relied on her friends. Of all her friends, Tang Shi had helped her the most.

Although she was the youngest sister at home, she was still an older sister to Tang Shi, so it was natural for her to want to take care of Tang Shi.

Furthermore, she had an unusual competitive spirit.

Considering these three factors, she very much wanted to help Tang Shi win this challenge.

She felt even more eager to win than Tang Shi herself...

Ji Lingyu brought her index and middle fingers together, closed her eyes, and brushed her eyelids, causing a flash of golden light to appear.

When she opened her eyes again, beams of divine light illuminated the surroundings!

The Xuan Yuan Eyes of the Ji family possessed various powers, with different eye colors corresponding to different mystical abilities. With her golden eyes, she could see a thousand li away.

After her subsequent cultivation, her abilities improved. Now she could not only see distant objects but also traces in the void that ordinary people couldn't see.

From Ji Lingyu's perspective, she saw countless mixed and blended colors, among which was the one she sought. As she followed that color, her vision began to extend infinitely.

"He went to a city in Jiangnan... Let's hurry and follow the traces before they disappear!"

...

Yun Chaoxian and Chu Liang returned to their room, and Yun Chaoxian also looked up and asked, "Brother Chu, do you have any ideas?"

Chu Liang spread his hands and said, "No."

"Huh?" Yun Chaoxian scratched his head. "What should we do now?"

"Right now..." Chu Liang rubbed his chin. "I'll go ask the butler if my Golden-Furred Hou has been fed."

Chapter 347: Why Are You So Skilled At This?

"Thank you, everyone," Chu Liang said with a smile as he handed the butler a heavy pouch of Vermillion-Bird coins. By the look of how heavy the pouch looked, there was a significant amount.

"Ah," the butler patted himself on the chest as he spoke, "It's our honor to assist Young Hero Chu. No need to be so courteous with us."

Though he said there was no need to be courteous, he accepted the pouch of money without hesitation.

He then turned around and told the attendants and maids behind him, "Keep this a secret, and you'll be rewarded."

"We'll be on our way then. If we succeed, we'll come back and thank you properly," Chu Liang said with a smile.

"You two will surely emerge victorious," the butler said respectfully, cupping his hands in farewell.

Chu Liang turned back and, along with Yun Chaoxian, mounted the Golden-Furred Hou and took off.

"Is this really possible?" Yun Chaoxian asked, wide-eyed. "You're something else."

It turned out that Chu Liang had previously asked the butler of Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor to keep an eye on the other three teams.

If they had gone to eavesdrop or spy, they would have been detected by divine senses immediately, putting the others on guard. However, if the attendants and guards of Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor just happened to pass by during their patrols, it wouldn't raise any suspicions.

Unexpectedly, the martial arts-trained guards had exceptional hearing. With their ears perked up, they overheard everything and they relayed the information to Chu Liang through the butler.

It wasn't surprising that the celestial sect prodigies had overlooked this. In fact, even Yun Chaoxian, who was on the same team as Chu Liang, hadn't thought of this. He didn't expect Chu Liang to win over the staff of Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor so quickly.

"It's nothing. You just have to give them money," Chu Liang said with a chuckle. "But the helpers that the other core disciples found were much more impressive, managing to locate the thief despite being far away."

Although their divination and tracking abilities weren't accurate, they were able to determine a general direction shortly after the incident, which was already quite impressive.

This was an area where Chu Liang always felt lacking. In fact, the entire Mount Shu Sect wasn't very skilled in these abilities.

For things he wasn't good at, he had to come up with clever ways to handle them.

Even if the eavesdropping trick hadn't worked, he would have found another way to track and follow. No matter what, he couldn't let Yun Chaoxian fall behind because of him.

So, the two of them crossed the sea and arrived in Donghuai City.

Donghuai was an ancient city in Jiangnan, known for its bustling and lively atmosphere. The city was filled with famous historical sites, beautiful gardens, busy markets, and various cultivation spots.

Even before landing, they could sense the vibrant human activity rising up to the clouds.

In such a large, human-populated city, the Golden-Furred Hou definitely wouldn't be allowed to enter. So, Chu Liang decided to let it fly back to Mount Shu on its own. After all, it knew the way and was strong enough that he didn't have to worry about it getting into any accidents.

As the two walked side-by-side into the city, they gazed at the bustling crowds moving to and fro. However, Yun Chaoxian was in no mood for sightseeing. Instead, he was focused on thinking.

"With so many people in this city, where should we start looking for Li Feiyu?" Yun Chaoxian asked.

"Snakes have their paths, and rats have their ways. He's known as the Heroic Thief of Jiangnan. There must be some way to find him here, right?" Chu Liang said, leisurely looking around with curiosity.

"Where are these ways you mentioned?" Yun Chaoxian asked, furrowing his thick eyebrows.

"Ah!" Chu Liang pointed, "Over there."

Yun Chaoxian looked in the direction Chu Liang was pointing, and saw that it was a medicinal herb shop.

He immediately felt puzzled and asked, "Brother Chu, what are you planning?"

"Let's get us some clothes first," Chu Liang said, pulling him along.

The two went to a nearby shop and got Yun Chaoxian a black robe that covered his head and face. Given his large size, it took quite a bit of fabric.

After that, Chu Liang put on his Aura-Concealing Robe and led Yun Chaoxian into the medicinal herb shop.

"What can I get for you, gentlemen?" The clerk at the counter was momentarily startled by their attire.

Chu Liang didn't say much; he simply turned his hand and subtly showed a token in his palm.

It was the chamber master token of the White-Bone Hall.

"Oh. Please follow me," the clerk immediately got a jolt and led Chu Liang and Yun Chaoxian to the backroom.

There, a doctor was attending to an elderly man lying on a sickbed. The clerk whispered something in the doctor's ear, and the doctor immediately stood up.

Then, the doctor and the clerk left.

Leaving behind the elderly man, who had sparse hair and a frail body, looking like he didn't have much time left in this world.

"Are you the new chamber master of the White-Bone Hall?" the old man croaked. "Please forgive me, as I am heavily afflicted and cannot get up to greet you."

"No need for formalities. I've just arrived and want to ask about something," Chu Liang said coldly.

"What does the chamber master wish to ask?" the old man asked.

"I've heard there's a heroic thief named Li Feiyu in Jiangnan. Where can I find him?"

...

After leaving the medicinal herb shop, the two didn't change back into their regular clothes but continued walking through the streets and alleys.

However, along the way, Yun Chaoxian kept giving Chu Liang strange looks.

"Brother Yun, what's up?" Chu Liang asked.

"Brother Chu..." Yun Chaoxian scratched his head, puzzled. "Why are you so skilled at this?"

Earlier, when Chu Liang put on that black robe and showed the White-Bone Hall token, he gave off the demeanor of an actual chamber master in a diabolical sect.

The disguise was too convincing.

It was so convincing that it was frightening.

Chu Liang smiled slightly, "Practice makes perfect. If the opportunity arises, I can introduce you to join the Dark King Sect as well."

"What?" Yun Chaoxian was shocked.

Chu Liang briefly explained his undercover work in the diabolical sect but didn't go into detail. He had no intention of actually recruiting Yun Chaoxian into the Dark King Sect.

Although he had the authority to recruit new members as a chamber master, he would never recruit Yun Chaoxian. He still remembered how Yun Chaoxian disguised himself when they first met—the image of that bull demon had indeed left a deep impression.

Yun Chaoxian was stunned and could only repeatedly say that Chu Liang was indeed remarkable—a man truly wiser than himself.

As for the medicinal herb shop, Chu Liang only learned about it after becoming a chamber master.

In the Dark King Sect, the Four Halls of Darkness had outposts of various sizes in the major cities of the nine provinces. These outposts supported their disciples and provided local information.

These outposts all had a hidden symbol on their facades that ordinary people couldn't detect.

He had already reported this to the Mount Shu Sect. If the righteous sects decided to act against the Dark King Sect, they could wipe out all these hidden bases in a single day. However, they hadn't acted yet to avoid alerting the enemy.

Now was the perfect time to use this network. To gather information under the radar, they needed help from the criminal world.

The old man earlier had given Chu Liang a location.

Qingyun Alley.

"This is the place," Chu Liang looked around and strode inside.

It was a large gambling den, filled with smoke and noise.

Chu Liang and Yun Chaoxian didn't linger and quickly walked through the main hall of the gambling den, arriving at a dim corridor in the back. At the end of the corridor was a dark room where an skilled expert was sitting in the shadows.

Seeing the two of them, he said in a deep voice, "There's no one here."

"We're here to find a ghost," Chu Liang replied.

"Which path did you come from?" the man asked again.

"White-Bone Hall," Chu Liang replied coldly, showing his chamber master token.

"So it's the chamber master of the White-Bone Hall. Please come in," the man said as he immediately gestured, and a secret door opened with a rumble in the wall.

Although the Dark King Sect had suffered heavy losses, it was still the most powerful of the diabolical sects. Naturally, these criminal world people were naturally respected members from the Dark King Sect.

Beyond the secret door was another long corridor, leading to a spacious area.

It was a space even larger than the gambling den outside!

The lighting was still dim, and the place was bustling like a large market. Many people were setting up stalls to sell goods, while others wandered around. In front of them was a huge black jade slab, inscribed with rows of white characters.

"Chu Liang?" Yun Chaoxian murmured.

Chu Liang quickly pulled him aside and whispered, "Didn't I tell you not to use real names here?"

"No, I was reading that," Yun Chaoxian pointed ahead.

It turned out that on one side of the black jade slab, there was a glaring line of large characters.

"Reward for the assassination of Chu Liang, a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect!"

Chapter 348: Chu Liuxiang

When Chu Liang saw his name written on the bounty listing, his heart skipped a beat. Then when he saw the amount written next to his name was fifty thousand Vermillion-Bird coins, one word echoed in his mind.

Crap!

If I were a fifth or sixth-realm diabolical cultivator, I might get tempted by this.

After all, diabolical sects were different from righteous sects. They wouldn't only send their best members out to fight. It was a free for all; even old monstrous cultivators wouldn't hold back.

Moreover, this wasn't limited to Donghuai City. Every major city in the nine provinces would have underground gathering places like this. The diabolical cultivators would definitely share information on these bounties with each other.

Won't I have to be careful wherever I go from now on?

Given his financial strain, Chu Liang might even consider faking his death to claim the reward. Nonetheless, the strict requirements to verify the target's death prevented that possibility.

Yun Chaoxian muttered, "Why is my bounty only twenty thousand while yours is fifty thousand?"

"What's wrong?" Chu Liang asked. "Have you also been targeted by the criminal world?"

"Which notable person in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten hasn't been targeted before? Well, unless you're a nobody," Yun Chaoxian said with a smirk.

Well, then. Seems like you're pretty proud of it, Chu Liang remarked inwardly.

However, he thought about it some more and realized that any standout talents in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten would have inevitably crossed paths with diabolical sects or the criminal world. So, it wasn't surprising that the criminal world would have bounties out for them.

Nevertheless, the bounty for Chu Liang's head was clearly above market price. The person who put it out probably had a deep grudge against him. If that was the case, then it was obvious who put out the bounty.

Inferno Devil Valley?

Chu Liang was eighty percent sure it was them.

After all, their young master came looking for trouble with me and then died. My teacher even went to bother them after that.

But... what does that have to do with me?

Your young master was stomped to death by a Mammothdragon, and your outer halls were wiped out by my teacher.

"Why didn't you put a bounty on my teacher instead?" Chu Liang muttered.

"Your teacher is Di Nufeng, right?" Yun Chaoxian said. "Her bounty listing's over there."

This guy sure has good eyesight.

Chu Liang glanced over and saw another black jade board. It seemed to be filled with old, unfulfilled bounties.

The first row had a name that shone out to him.

The Mount Shu Sect's Di Nufeng. Bounty of 1.2 million Vermillion-Bird coins.

"Huh?" Chu Liang uttered in shock.

My teacher is worth more than the Demon-Subduing Pestle...?

Isn't this amount a bit excessive?

Even among the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, there wouldn't be anyone who would use this much money to order an assassination, right?

On further thought, Chu Liang figured it out... It wasn't just one person who wanted to kill Di Nufeng! She had made countless enemies in her life. There might have been dozens or even hundreds of people who had come here to put a bounty on her, and that's why her bounty accumulated to such a huge amount.

This couldn't even be called a reward anymore; it should be called a jackpot! If this bounty continued to accumulate, it would be a much more astonishing number in the future.

Damn. If the Mount Shu Sect ever hits rock bottom, just killing Di Nufeng would be enough to support the entire sect for years, Chu Liang thought. Then he suddenly realized, Now it makes sense why Mount Shu's higher-ups are always indulging my teacher. Could they be playing the long game?

Nonetheless, there was no need to worry about his teacher. Even if the whole world put a bounty on her, she would definitely live better than anyone else. As long as the bounty wasn't high enough to tempt an eighth-realm Eminent One, there was no need to worry about her.

The person I should be worrying about is me.

So, Chu Liang said to Yun Chaoxian, "To be safe, don't call me by my name while we're still in Donghuai."

"Then what should I call you?" Yun Chaoxian asked.

"Just call me by my childhood nickname... Chu Liuxiang[1]."

...

This black market seemed to sell practically everything. There was a greater variety of items than there had been at the Pavilion of Celestial Fate's auction.

Many of the items, including enchanted tools, medicinal pills, and spirit plants, had not been acquired by legitimate means. They were stolen goods that could only be sold at black markets, as selling them in normal markets would likely draw the attention of the items' owners and land the thieves in trouble. That's why the prices in the black market were usually lower than those of normal markets.

There are also many diabolical artifacts and pills that had been produced by diabolical cultivators. It was forbidden to sell such things in the martial world. At Mount Shu, diabolical items would be destroyed upon discovery, yet they could be sold here.

Unsuppressed waves of malevolent qi were leaking out all over the black market.

Regardless, Chu Liang and Yun Chaoxian couldn't deal with this issue right now. Once they were done with the matter at hand, they could report this black market to the righteous sects and the imperial court of the Yu Dynasty. The combined forces would then dispatch troops to destroy this place, which should yield considerable results.

Chu Liang and Yun Chaoxian walked through the black market and arrived at a counter.

Chu Liang said, "I want to contact Li Feiyu. I want him to steal a treasure for me."

"Which treasure?" asked the man in black behind the counter.

"The World-Dominating Halberd that belongs to Yun Chaoxian of the Great Astral Sect. He is currently in Donghuai. If Li Feiyu can steal the halberd, we negotiate on the fee."

The man in black gave a slight nod. "We will contact him for you. You can come back in three days. If he accepts the job, we at Qingyun Alley will arrange a meeting for you."

Chu Liang nodded. "Sure."

"Please provide us with some proof of your identity," the man in black said. "We will keep it absolutely confidential."

Chu Liang understood the reason behind that request. As an intermediary, Qingyun Alley had to verify that both parties were capable of making good on their promises. It was Chu Liang's first time there, so they would naturally be concerned about his ability to pay.

As for his proof of identity, it certainly wouldn't be disclosed.

Chu Liang showed his chamber master's token to the man in black. "I am also working for someone higher up."

The man in black immediately replied, "So, you're an esteemed senior from the White-Bone Hall. In that case, there will be no problem with this job."

In the underground, the Dark King Sect was like a king.

Chu Liang and Yun Chaoxian swiftly wrapped up their affairs and left the black market.

Yun Chaoxian asked worriedly, "Will he take the job?"

"He might, or he might not," Chu Liang replied.

"Huh?" Yun Chaoxian was confused. "If he doesn't come find us, won't we have wasted our efforts?"

"Regardless of whether he accepts the job, it's very likely he will still come find us," Chu Liang said slowly. "Li Feiyu is a very arrogant thief. It's obvious from his self-proclaimed title 'Heroic Thief of Jiangnan' and the fact that he leaves his signature mark after every theft."

Chu Liang continued, "If he doesn't suspect we're luring him out and takes the job, that's the best outcome. But there's another possibility. Li Feiyu just stole a treasure from the Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor and surely knows that Li Zhutian is a disciple of the Great Astral Sect. If we send him to steal from another disciple of the Great Astral Sect, he might guess it's a trap."

"Then..." Yun Chaoxian looked bewildered. "Will he still come if he guesses that?"

"He will," Chu Liang said with a nod, "because he is a very arrogant thief. Since we've challenged him, he will likely come to steal your World-Dominating Halberd. That way, we'll have a chance to capture him."

"But what if he doesn't come find us?" Yun Chaoxian asked again.

"Then we'll try another method. There's no strategy that will result in guaranteed success," Chu Liang answered. "As long as the worst-case scenario—where he steals the halberd and escapes—doesn't happen, we'll be fine."

Yun Chaoxian pondered for a while and suggested, "Can't we have him steal a different treasure?"

"Do you have any other treasures on you?"

The disciples of the Great Astral Sect valued weapons the most and rarely used other enchanted tools.

Yun Chaoxian shook his head. "No..."

"I do have a few treasures, but I don't dare risk losing them. Li Feiyu is pretty skilled," Chu Liang remarked seriously. "All of my treasures are still useful."

Yun Chaoxian: "...?"

Chapter 349: The Stories of Zhang Chen

The two walked out of Qingyun Alley and stepped onto the main street. It was only after they had walked another block that they finally took off their robes.

Just as they were about to find an inn to settle down, they heard a commotion from the crowd before they witnessed a large group of people rushing in one direction. Many of them were shouting "Hurry, go take a look!"

"Don't let him get away!"

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!"

"..."

The two, feeling curious, approached an old man selling melons at a roadside stall and asked, "Sir, what's happening?"

The old man chuckled and said, "Oh, I heard that Zhang Chen, the head disciple of Ascending Dragon Academy, is here. Everyone is rushing to get a good look at him."

"Zhang Chen?" Chu Liang said, turning to look at the growing crowd. "I didn't expect him to be this popular."

In fact, this highlighted the limitations of being a disciple of an immortal sect.

In the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten or the world of immortal cultivators, Zhang Chen wasn't as famous as those prodigies. However, among the common people of the Yu Dynasty, he had a large and loyal following.

This was because Ascending Dragon Academy was deeply rooted in the common folk, supported by the Yu Dynasty, and recruited students widely. The best scholars from all over could try to enter the academy. Many of its outstanding disciples went on to become officials, giving back to the people.

The prodigies of immortal cultivation were still distant figures to the common people, but the students of Ascending Dragon Academy could directly impact their future welfare, thus garnering more attention.

And Zhang Chen was the most popular head disciple among recent generations of the academy.

"Hey, of course," the old melon seller said immediately after hearing Chu Liang's words. "Zhang Chen is exceptionally talented and very kind-hearted. Everyone hopes he'll become an official in the imperial court in the future and bring us blessings. If it wasn't because of my stall, I'd go see him myself."

"Wow."

Upon seeing their reaction, the old melon seller felt a bit puzzled and asked, "Haven't you heard his story?"

"His story?" Both Chu Liang and Yun Chaoxian were intrigued.

"Have you heard the story of 'Searching for the Sheep in the Muddy Path'?" The old melon seller asked, taking on the posture of a storyteller. "This was the story of Zhang Chen finding out an old man had lost his sheep and was heartbroken. And so, he didn't hesitate to help. To find the sheep, he trudged through a muddy path and managed to return the sheep to the old man. He was completely unbothered by the fact that his feet were covered in mud."

"Do you know the story of 'Walking in the Rain in Plain Clothes'?" the old melon seller continued. "It tells of a rainy day when Zhang Chen saw an auntie walking in the rain. He took off his outer garment to shield her, walking through the rain himself in plain clothes."

Chu Liang listened and nodded slightly.

It seemed that this head disciple of the academy was indeed a noble and moral person without any low or selfish interests.

Yun Chaoxian laughed and said, "With his popularity, now that so many people are flocking around him, he certainly won't be able to get anything done."

"This means that..." Chu Liang smiled as well. "He definitely was not the one who released the news."

...

Zhang Chen sat on a chair in the inn, gently rubbing his forehead with a hint of a helpless smile on his face.

He had just spent quite some time talking to the enthusiastic townsfolk outside, making sure a group of them went home peacefully. However, more and more residents of Donghuai City who admired him kept coming. If he had to appease them all, he wouldn't have time for anything else in the coming days.

"Someone intentionally spread the news of me coming to Donghuai City to slow us down," Zhang Chen said, shaking his head. "It must have been one of your... I mean, one of those helpers invited by your fellow disciples who came up with this idea."

"So what do we do now?" Ren Hongdao, who was sitting beside him, asked.

"The people outside came to see me, and I can't disappoint them. I'll go out and show my face again, telling them that I'll be heading to another city soon. After that, let's try to be careful and not reveal our whereabouts," Zhang Chen said.

"I didn't think you would be this popular," Ren Hongdao said, astonished, as he listened to the noise outside.

"Haaaaih... it's all fake," Zhang Chen smiled wryly. "The academy intentionally built up my image, so I'm inevitably burdened by fame."

"So are all those stories about you fake?" Ren Hongdao asked.

"They aren't necessarily fake, but they are exaggerated," Zhang Chen replied.

"Is the story about you finding the old man's sheep fake?" Ren Hongdao asked.

"Of course it's true, but..." Zhang Chen explained, "the old man is the headmaster of the academy, and the sheep was his spirit pet. It wandered into a swamp in the hill area behind the academy, so we had to help find it. Honestly, we were reluctant, but since it was the headmaster's spirit pet, we had no choice. When the story spread from the academy, it turned into 'Searching for the Sheep in the Muddy Path.'"

"Really?" Ren Hongdao blinked. "What about the story of you giving your clothes to shield an auntie from the rain..."

"That's true too, but the auntie was actually our headmaster's wife," Zhang Chen said with a wry smile. "The headmaster had secretly accompanied some guests to a brothel, and when his wife found out, she stood in the rain, refusing to leave until he returned. As disciples, we didn't dare say anything, so I covered her with my clothes and rushed to inform the headmaster."

"The headmaster's wife didn't get much rain on her, because the headmaster received the message and returned shortly after. He ended up kneeling in the rain for most of the night, while she had already gone back inside to sleep."

"When this story spread from the academy, it turned into the story of 'Walking in the Rain in Plain Clothes,'" Zhang Chen laughed.

"I see," Ren Hongdao said with a nod.

Rumors were clearly not to be trusted easily. Even if they had some truth to them, they might not be entirely accurate. By exaggerating one part of the story and concealing another, the truth could become something completely different.

...

"Isn't this a bit underhanded?" Li Fujian asked, looking at Zhuge Guanxing with concern.

“We only spread news of Zhang Chen’s location to slow them down,” Zhuge Guanxing replied. “We didn’t actually hurt them, so what’s the harm in that?”

“That’s true, but…” Li Fujian scratched his head as he spoke, “I still respect my Eldest Senior Brother very much.”

"In a competition, there should be no distinction between seniors and juniors," Zhuge Guanxing said with a smile. "Rules can be set afterward, but when we're all facing the same trial, we must give our best to win. Your Senior Brother is the strongest in terms of power, and Zhang Chen is likely the most cunning. Their combination is formidable. Without a bit of cunning ourselves, how else can we hope to win?"

“That’s true,” Li Fujian agreed. “Can we find Li Feiyu’s location?”

Although they had pinpointed Donghuai City earlier, finding a more precise location was difficult. After all, divination wasn’t foolproof.

“Wait a moment.”

Zhuce Guanxing took a deep breath, formed a finger seal with his left hand, and tossed three black-gold copper coins into the air with his right hand. When the coins fell, he tossed them again, repeating the process several times.

He then opened his eyes gently and uttered the word, “Fire.”

“Fire?” Li Fujian was puzzled.

"The divination reading revealed that the main element is fire. The person we're looking for will appear in a place associated with fire tonight."

Chapter 350: Real or Fake

As night fell, Yun Chaoxian placed the World-Dominating Halberd on the table, staring at it with wide eyes, as if trying to lock it in place with his gaze.

"Brother Yun, there's no need to be so tense. If you keep staring like this and Li Feiyu doesn't show up for a few days, you'll tire yourself out first," Chu Liang advised.

"I'm worried that as soon as I take my eyes off it, the World-Dominating Halberd will disappear," Yun Chaoxian said with some concern.

"The situation won't escalate to such an extent. No matter how skilled that thief is, there are limits," Chu Liang said. "Based on his past actions, he is able to perform some magical tricks but his greatest strength is his cunning.

"Cunning?" Yun Chaoxian frowned as he pondered.

"For example, he might disguise himself as someone you know, confuse you, and then steal the World-Dominating Halberd," Chu Liang explained.

"Huh?" Yun Chaoxian stared at Chu Liang's face for a moment and asked, "Brother Chu, you're not a fake, right?"

"Of course I'm real," Chu Liang rolled his eyes and said irritably, "Since we left Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor, I haven't been out of your sight. When would I switch places?"

Yun Chaoxian glanced at the bronze mirror on the table, as if to confirm he himself wasn't fake either.

Chu Liang chuckled and said, "I'll go rest next door, but I'll keep my divine sense over this area. Call me if anything happens."

Yun Chaoxian appeared a bit nervous, "How about we keep watch together?"

"Then he won't come. Let's keep everything as usual," Chu Liang said. "I also want to see what tricks he has."

"Alright," Yun Chaoxian agreed, then muttered, "If his target wasn't the World-Dominating Halberd, I'd actually want to see it too."

Chu Liang nodded in agreement.

Most people, except for the treasure's owner, would be curious about how a thief managed to steal it under such strict surveillance.

After Chu Liang left, Yun Chaoxian continued to stare at the World-Dominating Halberd. As a cultivator with abundant vitality, he could keep watch for days without needing sleep.

As the night grew darker, a sudden shout pierced the silence from outside. "Fire!"

Suddenly, a commotion erupted, and a faint glow of firelight flickered through the window.

"Brother Yun!" Chu Liang called out as he pushed the door open. "Something's happening at the inn. Let's go check it out!"

"Alright!" Yun Chaoxian stood up abruptly and began striding out.

Chu Liang quickly pushed him back as he shouted, "Take the World-Dominating Halberd with you!"

"Oh right," Yun Chaoxian remembered, turning back to grab the halberd.

When he turned around again, Chu Liang, who had been standing at the door, was gone.

"Huh?" Yun Chaoxian stepped out and saw Chu Liang emerging from the next room.

"Brother Chu, where did you just go?" he asked, feeling puzzled.

"You just saw me?" Immediately, a light flickered in Chu Liang's eyes as he leaped through two floors and into the air.

Realization dawned on Yun Chaoxian—the Chu Liang he had encountered earlier might have been an imposter!

Chu Liang had not left the room, and his divine sense hadn't detected anyone else. Unexpectedly, Li Feiyu had a method to avoid divine sense detection!

So, instead of relying solely on his divine sense, he quickly scanned the surroundings with his eyes. As expected, he soon spotted a vague, ethereal figure.

The figure stood out not only due to Chu Liang's keen eyesight but also because it made no effort to hide, seeming to approach deliberately.

...

Yun Chaoxian saw that the figure was identical to Chu Liang in appearance, expression, and posture. It was as though Chu Liang had performed the Immortal Technique: External Manifestation, which would create a clone.

He locked eyes with Chu Liang from across a rooftop. Then, with a swift motion, he wiped his face, revealing a mask that concealed his true appearance. With a flip of his hand, he drew out a halberd and shouted, "I took the Baxia Dual Rings from Ultimate Martial Mountain Manor out of necessity and have no intention of being enemies with the Great Astral Sect. I came to steal the World-Dominating Halberd this time just to prove my skills. Now, I won't take this halberd, and I hope you won't trouble me again."

This person was indeed Li Feiyu.

Chu Liang looked at him and smiled before saying, "Did you guess that we had prepared a fake World-Dominating Halberd?"

"Of course," Li Feiyu replied. "When Yun Chaoxian entered the inn, he wasn't wearing any storage-enchanted tools. But now, he's wearing a storage jade ring. Obviously, this ring was prepared to store the World-Dominating Halberd."

Ancient legendary weapons, like the World-Dominating Halberd, had slain countless evil entities and carried a powerful murderous aura. Such items couldn't be contained by ordinary storage enchanted tools.

As a result, disciples of the Great Astral Sect typically carried their legendary weapons in hand for easy access. This way, they didn't have to worry about finding special storage for these formidable items and could use regular storage enchanted tools for the ordinary items.

In this situation, for Yun Chaoxian to store the World-Dominating Halberd, he would need a high-level storage enchanted tool. The fact that the thief noticed this small detail was rather surprising!

"Moreover," Li Feiyu continued, "Yun Chaoxian's acting wasn't very convincing. Although he pretended to care, when the fire started outside and I called him, he didn't pay any attention to the legendary weapon on the table. It was clear he knew it was fake—that was his flaw."

"So, did you steal the real legendary weapon from his storage enchanted tool?" Chu Liang asked again.

Previously, he and Yun Chaoxian had indeed planned to create a fake halberd, which looked and weighed very similar to the real one. Without being infused with foundational qi, it would be difficult to tell the difference.

The fact that Li Feiyu could make this judgment and steal the halberd in such a short time showed he was sharp-minded. On the other hand, Chu Liang couldn't help but wonder if Li Feiyu's method of stealing the World-Dominating Halberd from the storage enchanted tool was similar to his own divine technique, Mystic Fingers.

"I have no interest in this halberd," Li Feiyu sneered. "If you continue to be relentless, I won't be so courteous next time."

"Quite arrogant of you to say that," Chu Liang replied with a smile. "Are you so sure the halberd you stole is real?"

"What?" Li Feiyu frowned. He quickly infused a bit of foundational qi into the weapon and realized that the legendary halberd in his hand was just a piece of ordinary iron. His expression changed immediately.

"I anticipated that Brother Yun might expose a flaw, so I swapped his storage enchanted tool," Chu Liang said, turning his hand to reveal the real legendary halberd.

Yun Chaoxian appeared behind him, charging towards Li Feiyu. At that moment, Chu Liang tossed the halberd to Yun Chaoxian. As he caught it, the halberd shone with a majestic glow!

Indeed, this was the real World-Dominating Halberd!

"Where do you think you're going?" Yun Chaoxian shouted, swinging the halberd as he chased after Li Feiyu.

As Li Feiyu's figure flickered, he moved as swiftly as a rabbit, instantly disappearing from the rooftop in a shadowy blur.

Chu Liang didn't hesitate and chased after him! The swordlight he controlled cut through the night sky. Although it might disturb the residents of Donghuai City, this was the least of his worries right now.

Li Feiyu's cultivation level wasn't particularly high, likely at the peak of the fourth realm. However, he specialized in stealth, transformation, and wind manipulation. At this moment, his figure flew like a ghost and was about to vanish from sight.

If Chu Liang's sword-flying speed wasn't as fast as a meteor, he might have been left behind like Yun Chaoxian.

The muscular man shouted loudly as the two in front sped ahead, leaving him hundreds of zhang behind.

Li Feiyu's shadowy figure descended into an alley and it seemed as though he had prepared another way to escape.

But suddenly, a mysterious light illuminated the area around him!

Whoosh—

It was as if a cage of light had suddenly formed, trapping Li Feiyu!

It was an enchanted formation!

Even from afar, Chu Liang recognized the Five-Prison Golden Light Formation, a classic enemy-trapping technique in formation arts.

However, he hadn't been the one to set up this enchanted formation.

A name instantly came to his mind. As expected, the formation was set up by Zhuge Guanxing from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals.

As the formation lit up, two figures flashed into view. One held a heavy sword, while the other gently waved a feather fan.

Sure enough, it was Li Fujian and Zhuge Guanxing!