

M. Slaying 431

Chapter 431: What A Coincidence!

"This is... a tracking talisman?"

Inside the deep cave, Xuan Yinzi stared at the third Spirit-Slaying Jar that had returned... and the yellow talisman that was attached to it. His hands trembled slightly.

This tracking talisman meant that someone had noticed his Spirit-Slaying Jars. However, this talisman wouldn't be able to track down his location because of the seal, so it was unlikely that person would be able to find him. Regardless, this tracking talisman was still the only message he had received from the outside world in years.

It was a glimmer of hope for his escape!

Xuan Yinzi's eyes, which had lost their divine light long ago, lit up with excitement!

Indeed, the heavens always leave a way out! But how can I get this person to help me?

His mind raced.

This place is near Mount Shu, so the one who found the jars is likely a disciple of Mount Shu, which is a righteous immortal sect. That means I can't reveal my identity.

Moreover, even if that person's willing to help me, they'll need to give me a high-grade Great Pill of Qi and Blood or a precious herb. But it's impossible for ordinary cultivators to easily procure such things.

How can I persuade them to help me?

Xuan Yinzi thought about it for a while, then he gently pricked his finger. Using his blood, he carefully wrote two startling lines of small words on the back of the yellow talisman.

I am an eighth-realm Eminent One trapped under a seal due to unforeseen circumstances. Please place Great Pills of Qi and Blood or precious herbs in the jar. After I am freed, I will share with you the secrets of the Immortal Dao.

After writing that, he attached the talisman with his blood message onto a new Spirit-Slaying Jar and sent it out of the seal.

Xuan Yinzi then drained the yin qi from the third Spirit-Slaying Jar, slightly replenishing his exhausted reserves of qi and blood.

He was in high spirits! As long as someone saw his message on the talisman, he would have a chance to see the light of day again!

The Spirit-Slaying Jar with the talisman moved along with the current. It slowly drifted into the Bombax River, where it entered the line of sight of a beautiful pair of eyes.

"Huh? Big Sis, look at this! What do you think it is? It seems like a ghostly thing!" someone said loudly.

Two colorful koi fish, one large and one small, spotted the Spirit-Slaying Jar and quickly swam over. The smaller one had been the first to notice the jar drifting toward them from behind, and it moved closer to take a look first.

These were none other than the koi sisters, Liu Xiaoyu and Xiaoyu'er. The sisters had been staying on Mount Shu for a while, and on this day, they suddenly felt like visiting Bombax River—their old home where they had lived for many years.

That's how they ended up witnessing this strange scene.

Whoosh.

A large black hand suddenly shot out from the Spirit-Slaying Jar, frightening Xiaoyu'er.

"Aaaaaah!!!" Xiaoyu'er screamed and swiftly swam several zhang away. "What's that? It scared the fish out of me..."

"Don't be afraid!" Liu Xiaoyu told her sister, dashing toward the Spirit-Slaying jar.

She instantly transformed into her human form and threw a punch, smashing through the water!

Boom!

That powerful blow shattered Spirit-Slaying Jar.

This mighty koi fish was unafraid of ghosts.

As the jar crumbled into dust, a yellow talisman slowly floated to the surface of the river. Liu Xiaoyu picked it up and took a look.

"Big Sis, what's that?" Xiaoyu'er asked curiously as she approached.

"It seems to be a talisman. But on the back, there are some..." Liu Xiaoyu paused, studying the talisman for a moment. Her expression gradually turned serious. "Words."

"That's right. They are words!" Xiaoyu'er confirmed.

As two koi fish who had never attended school, this was the extent of their knowledge.

"Forget it. Let's not look at it anymore. It's dirty and disgusting," Liu Xiaoyu said.

She glanced at it a few more times before casually smacking the talisman, reducing it to dust.

When Chu Liang hurried back to Bombax River, he found not only had he lost his tracking talisman's signal, but several of that day's wine-jar monsters were also missing. He was so stunned that it was as if he'd been struck by lightning.

This is no longer a case of the occasional missing jar. More than half of them are gone!

He ran upstream, determined to find the despicable wine-jar thief. That was when he saw the two sisters swimming downstream, casually eliminating any wine-jar monsters they encountered.

"Stop!" Chu Liang shouted at them.

"Huh?" Xiaoyu'er uttered. She transformed into her human form and emerged from the water. She smiled and called out, "Big Bro Chu Liang!"

Chu Liang smiled awkwardly. "Xiaoyu'er..."

So, the wine-jar thief was these two koi fish?

Chu Liang's anger turned into a sigh.

All he could do was warn them prudently. "There are ghastly creatures haunting Bombax River now, so it's best you don't come here to play at night."

"I'm not afraid," Liu Xiaoyu stated calmly, showing off her muscles.

"These wine-jar monsters aren't very strong, but coming into contact with them... will make you stupid," Chu Liang said seriously.

"Eh?" Xiaoyu'er was shocked. "Oh, no. Big Sis, you just killed quite a few of them."

Liu Xiaoyu's gaze wavered in surprise for a moment.

Ultimately, she stubbornly repeated, "Hmph, I'm not afraid... I'm plenty smart anyway. Whatever. It's getting cold. Let's just go back to the mountain and sleep."

The sisters swiftly flew back to Silver Sword Peak, disappearing from Chu Liang's sight like a wisp of smoke.

As Chu Liang watched them go, he let out a long sigh of relief.

As expected, the less people have, the more they cherish what they do have.

That was the same for fish too.

...

A few days later, Heaven-Reaching Peak suddenly sent out a message, summoning all disciples at the Golden Core Realm and above to the Hall of Conservation. The disciples who received the message were all a bit puzzled. They didn't really know what was going on.

When Chu Liang arrived, he saw that quite a few people had already gathered in the Hall of Conservation. The front rows were already taken.

Jiang Yuebai was there too. She was dressed in a pure white high-waisted dress with a peach-pink shawl draped over her shoulders. Appearing dignified and elegant, she was the first person everyone looked at when they entered the room.

She was sitting in the second seat of the first row, with her junior sister Mu Yueting on her left and Ling Ao on her right. They had all arrived relatively early.

Ling Ao had been in closed-door cultivation recently, busy with forming his Golden Core. Now, he had finally reached the beginning stage of the Golden Core Realm.

He had faced the most skepticism regarding his position as one of Mount Shu's top four disciples. Many had said that he had only barely earned his place thanks to the True Dragon's blessing and didn't truly have the talent and potential to rival the other three.

In response, Ling Ao could only say with disdain... that they had a point. Nevertheless, that wouldn't stop him from moving forward.

No matter how much doubt there was about his abilities, Ling Ao always appeared in public with a radiant and confident demeanor.

Stepping through the door, Chu Liang glanced around and realized that the first row was already full. So, he had no choice but to head toward the back.

At that moment, Ling Ao suddenly stood up and walked over to Chu Liang. This left Chu Liang feeling a bit confused. Just as he was wondering what this guy was staring at him for, Ling Ao... turned around and walked to the seats at the back.

Ling Ao had deliberately vacated the seat beside Jiang Yuebai's.

The hall was suddenly flooded with a wave of "Ooooh!!!"

It was clear that no one on Mount Shu was unaware of the ambiguous relationship between Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai.

Chu Liang smiled awkwardly. This guy... He's really loyal.

Right when he wanted to act a little coy, booming laughter rang from the doorway.

"Heheheh!" Lin Bei burst in and saw that the seat next to Jiang Yuebai was free. "Huh? There's a free seat in the first row?"

He walked over in large strides, intending to take the seat.

After returning from Python Belly City, Lin Bei experienced a string of events and successfully formed his Golden Core. He was a newly advanced fourth-realm cultivator, so he was qualified to attend this meeting.

Chu Liang hurriedly kicked Lin Bei aside and calmly took the free seat.

After sitting down, he chuckled softly. "What a coincidence. Just so happens that there's an empty seat right here."

Jiang Yuebai smiled and responded quietly without looking at him. "Yes. What a coincidence indeed."

After that, the two of them just sat there in silence. They didn't need to say a word; just being next to each other brought smiles to their faces.

A while later when almost everyone was present, the Conservation Master walked in at a slow pace. This time, he appeared as a feeble elderly man in a white robe.

Standing at the front of the hall, he slowly said to the crowd, "I've gathered all of you here today for a test."

Chapter 432: The Talisman-Making Test

"To select the candidates who will attend this trial, we will be testing your proficiency in talisman-making," the Conservation Master said slowly. "I will now demonstrate the effects of different types of talismans, and your task will be to create a talisman that can replicate those effects."

"A talisman-making test?"

The words sparked a flicker of surprise among those present.

In the Mount Shu Sect, disciples were granted a great deal of freedom in choosing which cultivation arts to study, be it tool-making, alchemy, talismans, or enchanted formations. If a disciple wanted to learn a particular skill, they could easily find manuals in the corresponding halls to pursue it. Unless a disciple showed exceptional talent in a specific area, they were generally not forced to learn it.

But it was the first time the Mount Shu Sect had ever conducted such a large-scale test of talisman-making. What kind of hidden realm could require such a rigorous selection process? They had many questions, but those were quickly set aside as they focused on giving their all in the test. After all, most of those present were the top-performing disciples of the Mount Shu Sect. A single moment was enough to spark their urge to compete.

Yet, this test...To recreate a talisman based solely on its effect...Isn't that a bit too difficult?

Talismanic script was the language of the Heavenly Dao, with multiple characters forming a talisman, and multiple talismans combining to create a set of talismanic spell. Theoretically, by observing the effect unleashed upon the talisman's activation, one could discern the Dao essence it invoked and the specific talismanic scripts used.

But at best, only a rough idea of the talisman's type could be deduced through observation. Accurately determining the precise combination of talismanic scripts within the spell was as difficult as ascending to the heavens, for such complex talismans could not be easily unraveled with just a few glances.

It would be even more difficult to recreate that same talisman.

In The True Dao of Talisman-Making, many complete talismans were difficult to replicate, even when following a diagram. Drawing a complete talisman required a high level of control over one's divine intent. If one did not specialize in that Dao, they would struggle to recreate that talisman.

So, the Mount Shu disciples present were all feeling a bit apprehensive.

But the Conservation Master seemed to not care at all. He led the group to the open space behind the Hall of Conservation and handed each person a piece of yellow paper and a brush dipped in cinnabar.

"Everyone, prepare yourselves. Let's begin the test," he announced, raising his hand to reveal a yellow talisman between his fingers.

With a swift flick, the talisman flashed in midair, transforming into several streaks of lightning that shot down from above!

Crack!

As the lightning crackled, the crowd instantly recognized the talisman.

"Evil-Banishing Talisman of Five Lightnings," someone blurted out.

The Evil-Banishing Talisman of Five Lightnings was a rather common yet powerful basic talisman. Though not considered advanced, it was very useful. This was often used by cultivators at the first three realms when countering ghastly creatures as it was extremely effective against such entities.

A demonstration of its effect wasn't even necessary; anyone who specialized in talisman-making could easily draw this talisman by name alone.

The crowd quickly got to work, their cinnabar brushes moving with practiced precision, leaving intricate marks on the yellow paper. Each stroke carried a subtle, controlled glow of spiritual energy.

It was clear, however, that some disciples had little to no experience with talisman-making. They hesitated with their brushes, unwilling to give up but resorting to sneaking glances at others' work, trying to mimic the strokes.

But talismans could not be easily copied.

After a few clumsy attempts, they could only lower their heads in disappointment... a thick-browed, big-eyed disciple from Jade Sword Peak being a prime example.

Meanwhile, some disciples drew their talismans in one smooth, confident motion without hesitation, creating talismans that radiated a subtle, controlled spiritual energy... A certain disciple from Silver Sword Peak stood out as the prime example.

Moments later, everyone stopped moving their brushes.

The Conservation Master smiled and said, "Those who haven't completed their talismans, please step back. Those who have, come forward and demonstrate your talisman's power."

One by one, the disciples stepped forward to display their work.

The first to demonstrate their talisman was Mu Yueting, and her work was rather impressive. In a short time, she managed to create the Evil-Banishing Talisman of Five Lightnings, matching the power of the one the Conservation Master had demonstrated earlier. Clearly, she had devoted time and energy in the study of talisman-making.

The crowd murmured in admiration, and the Conservation Master nodded, appearing very satisfied.

But unfortunately for Mu Yueting, Jiang Yuebai was next.

Jiang Yuebai stepped forward and, with a confident flick of her wrist, unfurled the yellow paper containing her talisman. In an instant, five bolts of lightning surged into the sky, with golden dragons dancing wildly within the storm—their power far surpassing that of an ordinary Evil-Banishing Talisman of Five Lightnings!

The crowd couldn't help but blink in astonishment.

Such formidable power!

The most terrifying thing was that Jiang Yuebai had never shown any strong proficiency in the Dao of Talisman-Making before; she likely hadn't even specialized in it. Yet, her Transcendent Spirit's natural affinity with the Great Dao and spiritual qi allowed her to excel effortlessly in talisman-making.

Was this the power of talent?

As Jiang Yuebai unleashed her talisman, cheers and applause erupted from the crowd.

In that moment, it seemed to everyone that the remaining participants were merely competing for second place.

But Jiang Yuebai displayed no hint of pride. Instead, she quietly stepped aside, her gaze drifting over to Chu Liang, who was up next.

Chu Liang wore a confident smile as he deftly unleashed his talisman.

Swish—

Five tiny streaks of lightning flickered briefly before vanishing.

A moment of silence followed.

Although no one expected Chu Liang's talisman to surpass Jiang Yuebai's, he was at least the disciple who had won second place at the Mount Shu Summit—surely, he should have performed better than this? But the streaks of lightning were...so thin and short...

The lightning faded before anyone could even sense its power.

Yet, it couldn't be denied that it was indeed a complete Five-Thunder Talisman of Evil Banishment. It was technically successful, but it seemed somehow... lacking.

"Hmm..." The Conservation Master hesitated for a moment before nodding, indicating that Chu Liang had also passed.

It was clear that this was Chu Liang's first attempt at drawing the Evil-Banishing Talisman of Five Lightning. He had managed to create the talisman on his first try, relying on careful observation.

Since he wasn't very familiar with this talisman, Chu Liang decided to infuse only a tiny amount of foundational qi, minimizing the risk of losing control.

This wasn't an entirely unwise approach.

Afterward, as more disciples demonstrated their talismans, some managed to draw the talisman but failed to produce any lightning—only a puff of smoke that quickly dissipated.

Naturally, those attempts were deemed failures.

Xu Ziyang's talisman, however, once again amazed everyone. In terms of power, it was not inferior to Jiang Yuebai's. The Eldest Senior Brother of Jade Sword Peak had always been a versatile talent, so it was no surprise that he possessed profound knowledge in the Dao of Talisman-Making.

After the first round of testing, ten disciples had passed. Those who didn't make the cut stood off to the side, watching the proceedings with no intention of leaving just yet.

"Not bad," the Conservation Master nodded before stepping forward once more. "Let's move on to the second round of testing, with the same requirements as before."

As he spoke, he flicked his hand, releasing another talisman.

This time, the talisman's power was far more intense. As it activated, a deafening roar echoed through the air. Massive lightning bolts, as thick as water barrels, crashed down from the sky, while fierce flames erupted from the ground! The sheer force of the display was overwhelming, posing a serious threat even to Fourth Realm cultivators.

Several disciples immediately furrowed their brows.

"Talisman of Divine Lightning and Earthly Fire..." someone murmured.

Once again, someone recognized the talisman.

This talisman was far more powerful, but its difficulty had also increased significantly. Due to the fusion of heavenly thunder and earthly fire, the making of this talisman became far more complicated and challenging.

Even among this generation of young disciples, those who had studied talisman-making in depth would find it challenging to handle a talisman of this level of complexity at the moment.

This time, the reactions of the crowd varied slightly.

Mu Yueting hesitated, her brush pausing mid-air, while Jiang Yuebai seemed lost in deep thought. Xu Ziyang, however, continued to write without hesitation, appearing rather confident.

Chu Liang, on the other hand, closed his eyes slightly, as if he was replaying the scene in his mind.

A few disciples watching from the sidelines couldn't help but wonder—was he really attempting to deconstruct the talisman he had seen earlier, deciphering the various talismanic scripts used to create that powerful spell?

Although it was mentioned that the test would assess one's ability to decipher and replicate the talisman, many had dismissed this as a mere passing remark.

Most of those who succeeded in the previous round were already familiar with making the Evil-Banishing Talisman of Five Lightnings. However, when they had to draw the Talisman of Divine Lightning and Earthly Fire, which they had yet to master, they found themselves at a loss.

Moments later, Jiang Yuebai and Chu Liang moved in perfect sync, their brushes dancing across the paper. In one fluid motion, they completed their talismans.

When everyone finally set down their brushes, only three figures stood with their work completed: Jiang Yuebai, Xu Ziyang, and Chu Liang.

As expected, it was those three again.

These three were the Senior Sister of Azure Falling Peak, the Eldest Senior Brother of Jade Sword Peak, and the Eldest Senior Brother of Silver Sword Peak. The first two had long been recognized as the twin pillars of their era, while Chu Liang had steadily risen to prominence, establishing himself as one of the outstanding talents of this generation.

It seemed that in this generation of Mount Shu disciples, a fierce competition always existed between these three.

"Alright," the Conservation Master said with a smile, "Those who have completed their talismans, please step forward and demonstrate them in turn."

This time, Jiang Yuebai was the first to present her work.

She stepped forward with graceful confidence, activating her talisman with a flick of her wrist.

Boom—

In an instant, the skies roared with heavenly thunder and the earth blazed with fiery flames!

The talisman was already very difficult to complete, but the fact that the power of her talisman matched that of the Conservation Master's demonstration left the crowd gasping in astonishment.

"Just as expected of Senior Sister Jiang!" voices of admiration echoed.

Next, it was Chu Liang's turn.

He approached with his usual smile and raised his hand with a gentle motion.

Bang! Whoosh—

With a muffled sound, a faint flicker of lightning crackled briefly in the air, and a thin layer of flames flared up from the ground, only to be snuffed out almost immediately by the wind.

The crowd fell into a stunned silence once more.

Upon seeing the demonstration, the fellow disciples furrowed their brows in contemplation.

On one hand, if one argued that Chu Liang was not impressive, it was true that he had managed to decipher and recreate the talisman. On the other hand, if he were to be deemed impressive, the power of his talisman appeared far too weak from the perspective of any cultivator.

In the end, his demonstration left many of the onlookers at a loss for words.

Chapter 433: Professional Test Taker of Mount Shu

Chu Liang didn't mind at all.

After all, the objective of the test was to recreate the talisman. By reducing the amount of foundational qi infused, Chu Liang had increased his chances of success. Especially considering that he was not familiar with these talismans, limiting the foundational qi infused made the drawing process more manageable. Naturally, he chose to sacrifice power to ensure success.

Had the test included a power evaluation, Chu Liang's strategy would have been entirely different.

As for these fellow disciples who didn't understand his approach, he could only comment that these people had no idea of the charm of strategies for taking tests.

Next, Xu Ziyang stepped forward and activated his Talisman of Divine Lightning and Earthly Fire.

Boom—

The display was equally impressive, though it fell just short of Jiang Yuebai's formidable power. This difference could be due to Jiang Yuebai having the Transcendent Spirit. In terms of talisman-making, Xu Ziyang was in no way inferior.

In this round, all three passed the test.

Aside from Chu Liang's talismans, which unleashed underwhelming power, the other two demonstrated flawless proficiency.

"Very good," the Conservation Master praised.

Without further ado, he began the next round of testing.

He wasted no time and promptly activated another talisman.

The apparition of a golden-armored warrior descended from the sky, crashing down with imposing might and blazing divine flames!

"Calamity-Suppressing Talisman: Golden Armor?" someone nearby exclaimed in surprise, instantly recognizing the talisman.

The difficulty had suddenly escalated to an unprecedented level!

The Calamity-Suppressing Talisman: Golden Armor was a high-grade talisman, capable of summoning a divine being clad in golden armor to banish evil and suppress calamities.

This kind of talisman was capable of invoking the celestial spirits and was not something that could be created from a combination of just a few simple talismanic scripts. Its complexity rivaled that of an entire set of talismanic spells.

Looking at the expressions of Jiang Yuebai, Xu Ziyang, and Chu Liang, it was clear they were all deep in thought.

Obviously, none of them had encountered this talisman before—they were all mentally deconstructing the complex design they had just witnessed.

Could they really recreate this talisman?

After a moment of contemplation, each of the three began to draw once more, their focused expressions indicating that they were piecing together the insights they had gained.

The watching crowd was filled with awe and disbelief, their expectations rising as they witnessed this unprecedented display of skill. The level of ability on display had surpassed their wildest imaginations.

It took the three of them a bit longer to complete their talismans this time. Once they had finished, the crowd eagerly awaited the results.

With the yellow paper in hand, Jiang Yuebai stepped forward and gently activated the talisman drawn.

Boom! A projection of a golden-armored divine being crashed down with imposing force! While the projection was slightly less powerful than the one demonstrated by the Conservation Master, Jiang Yuebai's performance was still remarkable. Achieving this level of power was impressive in itself!

The golden-armored divine being lingered for a moment before vanishing, its presence lingering just long enough to make an impact.

Next, it was Chu Liang's turn.

The crowd had very low expectations for Chu Liang's performance. Given his previous demonstrations of weak power, it was evident that he had reached his limit. It was only natural if he failed this round.

Yet, when Chu Liang activated his talisman...

Whoosh—

A flash of golden light burst forth, revealing a tiny, five-cun-tall[1] golden-armored divine being hovering in mid-air. If not for the sharp eyes of the onlookers, its presence would have gone unnoticed.

The little golden-armored figure wobbled for a few moments before vanishing.

"..." The crowd fell silent once again.

What was that?

A baby golden-armored divine being?

It was not only tiny but also appeared only briefly...

Nevertheless, Chu Liang did manage to recreate the talisman, which was very strange.

Then it was Xu Ziyang's turn. He stepped forward, confidently throwing his yellow paper into the air.

Whoosh—

A projection of a golden-armored divine being materialized, but before it could fully manifest, it shattered in mid-air with a resounding bang.

It was clear he had failed.

Xu Ziyang shook his head slightly, not appearing too disheartened.

It seemed he had anticipated the possibility of this talisman failing.

With that, Xu Ziyang withdrew from the competition, leaving only Jiang Yuebai and Chu Liang competing with each other. The scene felt like a replay of the Mount Shu Summit, with these two once again standing as the final contenders.

Especially since these two were...

Teasing whistles and murmurs rose from the surrounding crowd.

Chu Liang smiled, and despite standing beside Senior Sister Jiang, he had no intention of holding back. For him, a competition deserved full effort—it was the greatest respect he could offer his opponent.

Jiang Yuebai felt the same. Having Chu Liang as her opponent only made her desire to win grow stronger.

The Conservation Master observed the two competitors and declared, "It seems that the candidate this time will be chosen between the two of you."

With that, he stepped forward again and launched a new talisman into the air.

Whoosh—

The power of this talisman was even more mystical. When it touched the ground, a burst of light erupted, giving rise to a vibrant and eerie flower. The plant seemed almost alive, its petals fluttering as though it were observing its surroundings.

"Spirit-Eye Flower Talisman?" A few in the crowd murmured. This time, fewer people recognized the talisman.

This talisman not only had to nurture a plant but also required that the plant be erected on the earth and act as the caster's eyes and ears, relaying information back to its creator.

The difficulty of creating such a living entity was beyond most people's comprehension. Moreover, the plant had to possess mystical abilities, adding another layer of complexity.

Some spectators even began to doubt whether such a spirit plant could truly be conjured from a talisman alone. It seemed more like a talismanic spell!

Jiang Yuebai and Chu Liang stood before the challenge, contemplating for a long time. Chu Liang was the first to put his brush to paper, followed by Jiang Yuebai, who began to draw her talisman.

After a while, both of them had completed their talismans.

Jiang Yuebai stepped forward and activated her talisman. A divine light flashed, and a vibrant flower emerged from the ground. However, it remained stationary, quietly blooming without further movement.

She shook her head lightly, indicating her dissatisfaction with the result.

The Conservation Master didn't rush to declare a verdict. Instead, he said softly, "Let's see the next one."

It seemed that despite Jiang Yuebai's apparent failure, they would still evaluate Chu Liang's attempt before making a final decision. If Chu Liang couldn't even nurture the plant, Jiang Yuebai would still be considered the winner.

Among the onlookers, many still believed Jiang Yuebai was the more likely victor.

Under the watchful eyes of the crowd, Chu Liang stepped forward slowly and carefully activated his talisman.

Whoosh—

A flash of light hit the ground, and a small plant sprouted from the earth. Though it was tiny, it swayed left and right as if imbued with a subtle spiritual nature.

He did it?

Immediately, the Conservation Master gave a slight nod and declared, "Chu Liang has won."

He actually did it!

The outcome was a shock to everyone. Despite the embarrassingly weak effects of his previous talismans, it turned out that Chu Liang was the best among them at talisman-making!

Regarding this, Chu Liang knew that it was absolutely not true. If they were all asked to draw a talisman, Senior Sister Jiang and Xu Ziyang would have performed better than him.

However, Chu Liang had frequently deciphered and deconstructed talismans before. When he first began practicing the Talismanic Sword Seal, he delved into talismanic scripts. To master various types of talismanic scripts, he often took a completed talisman and broke it down to understand how each script contributed to the whole.

Talismanic scripts were like fundamental knowledge points, and each talisman was akin to an exam question. He had practiced a variety of approaches to tackle these "exam questions," honing his skills in ways others might not have.

This was why Chu Liang could perform the Talismanic Sword Seal faster than others. He had a deeper understanding of individual talismanic scripts and he knew how to better combine them for a better result.

Although Senior Sister Jiang and Xu Ziyang were also highly skilled in the Dao of Talisman-Making, they had never practiced talisman-making in this manner.

Aside from Chu Liang, no one else in the world of immortality cultivators had studied the Dao of Talisman-Making as though they were preparing for an exam.

A few of his acquaintances gathered around, asking him how he had managed to achieve such a feat.

Chu Liang looked at their inquisitive faces and replied with a question of his own, "Have you never tried doing practice questions for exams?"

...

As Chu Liang turned around, he saw the Conservation Master approaching with a warm smile.

"Conservation Master," Chu Liang inquired, "can you tell me which hidden realm we are going to?"

"This is a hidden realm that the Penglai Supreme Sect, the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals, the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, the Celestial King Sect, the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, and our Mount Shu Sect will be exploring together. Each sect will be sending only one disciple into this realm," the Conservation Master explained. "This hidden realm was left behind by the Celestial Talisman Master."

Chapter 434: Hidden Realm of Talismanic Scripts

Yinlu Mountain used to be the site of the ancient Celestial Talisman Sect. There had been grand halls and towers, resplendent in gold and jade, but now only a ruin of broken walls remained. It was desolate as far as the eye could see.

Additionally, there were remnants of an ancient grand talismanic formation, so even birds and beasts did not dare to approach it. That made the whole mountain deserted, bleak, and eerily silent like the land of the dead.

That was the depressing scene that greeted Chu Liang when he landed.

Following the instructions given by the Conservation Master, he walked to the half-collapsed grand hall at the center of the mountain. That was when he finally saw a few people.

"Young Hero Chu!" a bald figure called out, greeting Chu Liang with a wave.

"You're here too?" Chu Liang replied with a smile.

This bald person, who had smooth, gleaming skin and a handsome face, was Monk Pushan from the Buddhist Cloud Monastery. He was that young monk who had practiced silent meditation in the past.

"What a coincidence, isn't it?" Monk Pushan walked over to Chu Liang with a grin. "There aren't many who study talisman-making in our monastery, so they sent me over here, even though I'm half-baked in it..."

Chu Liang quickly said with a smile, "There's no need for modesty between us."

Buddhism had its own version of talisman-making art, which differed significantly from that of the Daoist sects. In recent years, the two schools of thought had been learning from each other, gradually moving toward a more collaborative process.

Chu Liang looked at the other people present.

The most eye-catching among them was a tall woman standing to one side. She had a slender, graceful figure, with golden hairpins in her beautiful, lustrous hair. The woman had a strikingly beautiful face, with deep eyes that shimmered brightly. She carried the air of an otherworldly person, who seemed to have nothing to do with the mundane world. Intimidatingly stunning, the woman was like a frost-covered saber shining under the moonlight.

Purely in terms of appearance, her face was probably the only one Chu Liang had seen that he thought could rival Jiang Yuebai's.

Chu Liang quickly added in his mind, Of course, Senior Sister Jiang is still more beautiful...

Chu Liang had gotten on this mission by defeating Jiang Yuebai. She hadn't said anything, but it clearly bothered her. Jiang Yuebai went into closed-door cultivation to train intensely in the Dao of Talisman-Making before Chu Liang even left the mountain.

After all, Jiang Yuebai was the one who had taught Chu Liang the Talismanic Sword Seal. Now, her junior had surpassed her in the Dao of Talisman-Making, so Jiang Yuebai most probably felt like she'd fallen behind.

Chu Liang could only respond to her strong competitive spirit with a sigh.

As for the woman standing before him, it didn't long for him to guess her identity. She was Xi Miaoxian[1], the most beautiful disciple of her generation in the Penglai Supreme Sect.

Xi Miaoxian was also well known as one of the great beauties of the immortality cultivation world. Some people even claimed she was the most beautiful young woman in the nine provinces. However, that was an exaggeration. At least, Jiang Yuebai's supporters wouldn't agree.

Chu Liang wouldn't agree either. He didn't think there was much of an issue in saying that Xi Miaoxian was the second most beautiful young woman though.

Out of habit, Monk Pushan introduced the other people to Chu Liang. "That's Xi Miaoxian of the Penglai Supreme Sect, and beside her is Situ Guanhai from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals. You've probably heard of them, right?"

Chu Liang nodded slightly. "Of course."

Xi Miaoxian needed no introduction.

As for Situ Guanhai, he was a prominent young disciple from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals. He had made a name for himself two years before Zhuge Guanxing and was even more famous than him.

Situ Guanhai appeared a bit unkempt, with messy hair that was too long to be called short and too short to be called long. He seemed to be around twenty years old, but his face was already covered in stubble. However, his tall stature, angular face, and distinct facial features made him look ruggedly handsome, rather than simply unkempt.

This young hero, who looked quite dashing at first glance, was standing beside Xi Miaoxian. He was smiling so brightly that his eyes became narrow slits, looking not at all as suave as his appearance suggested.

Monk Pushan continued, "From what I know, he has the highest level of mastery in talisman-making among all of us here. We've all taken it up as a secondary subject of study, but Situ Guanhai specializes in talisman-making. It's said that his current cultivation level is no lower than that of the elite disciples during the heyday of the ancient Celestial Talisman Sect."

"That's indeed impressive," Chu Liang replied.

He was already aware of that. The one who had briefed him this time was not his teacher but the Conservation Master, so the information he received was quite detailed... In the case of Silver Sword Peak, outsiders tended to be more reliable for such matters.

"From the looks of it, the disciples from the Penglai Supreme Sect and the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals will likely stick together. The disciples from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion and Celestial King Sect will surely be allies too. Once we enter the hidden realm, we'll need to look out for each other," Monk Pushan said.

"That's how it should be," Chu Liang agreed.

It was a pity that Xi Miaoxian and Situ Guanhai were already at the fifth realm. Otherwise, once they entered the hidden realm, Chu Liang would definitely have let Monk Pushan see what it meant to have a fallout and become resentful enemies.[2]

Just as Monk Pushan mentioned the Celestial Pivot Pavilion and the Celestial King Sect, the sound of whistling wind came from afar, and a few figures suddenly landed on the ground.

When the dust settled, three figures emerged—one old and two young.

Chu Liang only recognized one of them. It was Feng Chaoyang of the Celestial King Sect.

Feng Chaoyang looked elegant and charming with a bright and spirited gaze.

Seeing Chu Liang, Feng Chaoyang greeted him with a joyous laugh. "Young Hero Chu, you're here too!"

Chu Liang smiled back in greeting. "Long time no see."

"I won't lose to you again this time."

Chu Liang could sense the divine light contained within Feng Chaoyang. The young man exuded an extraordinary aura, indicating that he too had advanced to the fifth realm. That was why he was radiating with confidence from head to toe.

Standing beside Feng Chaoyang was a rather reserved, thin young man. His face showed signs of maturity as well as youthfulness, making it hard to gauge his age. He kept his head slightly lowered, not looking at the people around him. It was obvious at a glance that this young man was quite introverted.

Monk Pushan was a bit surprised. "Ye Yongxing? He actually came?"

"What's the matter?" Chu Liang asked quietly.

Chu Liang didn't have much information about Ye Yongxing, so seeing that Monk Pushan seemed to know something, Chu Liang decided to ask him.

"This person is the successor of Enlightened Wulou, the master of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion. It's said that his talent is unparalleled among the descendants of the Heaven Observer. However, his one flaw is..." Monk Pushan said, suddenly smirking, "that he's afraid of meeting people."

Chu Liang was puzzled. "Afraid of meeting people?"

Monk Pushan explained, "He's afraid of interacting with people. It's said that just being looked at makes him uncomfortable, and he finds it difficult to speak to strangers, so he rarely leaves Mount Reticence."

Well, then. Turns out he's got severe social anxiety, Chu Liang thought. He then figured out why Monk Pushan had a wickedly smug smile. You sure are proud of yourself when it comes to social interaction, huh.

What Chu Liang hadn't noticed was that Ye Yongxing had glanced around at the people present, and when his gaze fell on Chu Liang, an expression of shock flashed across his face. However, Ye Yongxing then quickly lowered his head again.

It was probably because of Ye Yongxing's personality that an elder from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion had taken on the task of opening the hidden realm himself. He was the only elder who had accompanied his sect's representative disciple.

The gray-bearded elder from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion looked around. Then he flung out his sleeves and said, "Since everyone is here, let's prepare to open the Celestial Talisman Master's Hidden Realm."

Everyone stepped forward, greeting the elder respectfully.

The gray-bearded elder continued, "I imagine your sect elders have already told you about the origins of this hidden realm, but I'll just remind you once more. The most important cultivation legacy in this realm is the collection of golden talismanic scripts that the First Celestial Talisman Master left behind. You should try to comprehend and collect as many of the talismanic scripts as possible.

"Each script can only be comprehended by one person, so there will certainly be competition inside. But your priority is to improve your perception of talisman-making, so don't focus too much on fighting each other."

"We understand," everyone responded in unison.

The gray-bearded elder then swung his hand as he crushed a jade talisman, causing a thunderous sound to rip through the air.

A pitch-black portal suddenly opened in the space before them.

The gray-bearded elder added, "Well, this old man wishes that you will all have a fruitful trip."

"Thank you, Elder."

The young disciples all swiftly stepped into the portal one by one, but Ye Yongxing hesitated in front of the portal.

The gray-bearded elder encouraged him, "Yongxing, just do your best."

Ye Yongxing glanced back at the gray-bearded elder. Then he turned to the front again and finally stepped into the portal.

Whoosh—

A wave of ripples moved across the black portal. After that, the portal slowly closed.

...

Everything went dark. Then Chu Liang's feet suddenly touched solid ground.

When he opened his eyes, he realized he was still in the grand hall. He almost thought he had failed to enter the hidden realm.

Nevertheless, he looked around him again and noticed the difference.

The grand hall was no longer in ruins; it was perfectly intact. The hall's front and back doors were shut tight, and its walls gleamed brilliantly. The hall was still empty, but it was resplendent with gold and jade.

Could this hidden realm have been constructed with the same layout as the former site of the Celestial Talisman Sect?

Before Chu Liang could take a closer look, the roar of a beast rang out behind him.

"Raaar!!!"

He spun around to see a ferocious winged flying tiger, over a zhang tall, pouncing toward him!

This flying tiger had a menacing appearance, but it emitted no demonic qi, only raging flames of qi. It was shrouded in a faint glow, making it look a little strange.

Regardless, Chu Liang had to defend himself. He summoned the Dustless Sword, and in an instant, a beam of swordlight cut through the air, slicing across the tiger.

The tiger was sliced open, accompanied by the clear sound of something being ripped apart. Yet, there was no blood; instead, some rays of light shone out.

Boom.

The tiger completed its pounce, and Chu Liang quickly leaped aside, narrowly avoiding it.

At this point, he could confirm that this flying tiger was not a living creature. It seemed to have been created from a living creature, but it was not alive.

Despite not being a true living being, the flying tiger had formidable combat strength. It felt no pain or fatigue.

After missing its target with its pounce, it swung its tail at Chu Liang, whizzing through the air!

Suddenly under a barrage of attacks, Chu Liang couldn't evade in time. All he could do was use Dimension Compression, intending to dodge the attacks.

However, the moment he tried to use Dimension Compression, his expression turned into one of utter shock. The hidden realm was completely disconnected from the Great Dao of the Heavens and the Earth, rendering his immortal art unusable.

Thud.

The powerful swing of the tiger's tail struck Chu Liang hard, sending him flying more than ten zhang. He smashed into the grand hall's wall before finally crashing heavily to the floor.

"Ugh..."

Chu Liang exhaled a breath of impure qi and quickly climbed back onto his feet.

Fortunately, he had the protection of three types of fifth-realm foundational qi. The Geng Metal foundational qi reinforced his body to be as sturdy as steel, while the Jia Wood foundational qi rapidly healed any minor injuries. Additionally, his corporeal body was as strong as that of a True Dragon, so the flying tiger's attacks didn't end up harming Chu Liang at all.

It seemed that he could still use the power of his blood and qi as well as his cultivated foundational qi. Nonetheless, without the Great Dao of the Heavens and the Earth, he couldn't use his immortal arts.

After figuring out the laws of this hidden realm, Chu Liang switched tactics. Instead of using his flying sword to attack the tiger, he charged at it! With his dragon blood ignited, Chu Liang unleashed an aura that was no weaker than that of the flying tiger!

Boom.

The flying tiger launched its second attack, but Chu Liang didn't dodge. Instead, he met the tiger head-on with a punch, striking its jaw and sending the massive tiger soaring into the air!

Yet, there were no visible wounds on the tiger; there were only ripples in the light surrounding it.

It can't be killed...?

Chu Liang narrowed his eyes.

I'll see if that's really the case!

He shot into the air and then descended with a powerful punch!

Boom!

This punch struck the tiger's forehead like a lightning bolt from the heavens. Chu Liang smashed his fist through the tiger's forehead, sinking half his arm into its spirit.

Pop!

Finally, the massive tiger shattered loudly like a burst balloon, exploding into fragments of black and white apparitions before falling apart into dust.

So, it can be killed after all.

Chu Liang landed lightly.

If there was anything truly useful that his teacher had taught him, this would be it... Nothing is unkillable. If it seems that way, it just means you're not powerful enough.

Gazing at the scattered black and white fragments, Chu Liang frowned.

"Huh?"

He sensed a fading aura in the air and was quite surprised.

"Is this the power of talismanic script?"

Chapter 435: Did I Come At The Wrong Time?

The Conservation Master had explained in detail the origin of this hidden realm to Chu Liang.

During the ancient times, there was an extraordinary individual who studied the Dao of Talisman-Making. He traversed the nine provinces and four seas. He was the one who opened up the doors to control the Great Dao of Talismanic Script. He founded the Celestial Talisman Sect and passed down his legacy to the future generations.

He was known as the First Celestial Talisman Master.

If members of the Celestial Talisman Sect wished to earn the esteemed title of "Celestial Talisman Master," they would first need to become the sect leader. More importantly, they had to master all talismanic arts of the world and become the Dao Master of Talismanic Script. However, this was extremely difficult.

It was a thousand times more difficult to become a talisman specialist than a cultivator, and it was a hundred times harder to become the Dao Master of Talismanic Script than a Dao Master of other kinds of Great Daos.

It required not only exceptional comprehension but also top-notch intelligence. This could only be achieved by a once-in-a-millennium prodigy.

In simple terms, one would need to be smart enough.

Thus, over the thousand years that the Celestial Talisman Sect had passed down its legacy, only six individuals managed to earn the title of "Celestial Talisman Master."

Although there were few talisman specialists, they possessed immense power. These few individuals alone enabled the Celestial Talisman Sect to remain a top force across the nine provinces, with a status comparable to the current immortal sects in the Divine Nine. However, it was precisely because of the lack of talisman specialists that the death of even one was a significant loss to the sect. During the chaos stirred up by the Demon God three thousand years ago, the Celestial Talisman Sect was nearly annihilated.

Only a few disciples survived. Although they tried their best to support the sect, the sect only managed to live on for only a few more generations. Eventually, the sect's legacy was completely lost, and it vanished from the world.

Recently, thunder and rain suddenly struck the old site of the Celestial Talisman Sect. The sounds of landslides and earth cracking echoed through the area, yet the surrounding peaks remained eerily calm.

This immediately caught the attention of several immortal sects.

Eventually, six immortal sects discovered the hidden realm together. According to the custom of the nine provinces, the six sects would explore the hidden realm together.

In reality, some smaller immortal sects noticed the strange occurrences at the old site. However, due to their lower status, the six immortal sects collaborated and forced them out of the competition for this venture. Since these six sects were all part of the Divine Nine and shared the same ranking, they couldn't exclude each other from this venture.

The elders who ventured into the hidden realm investigated and confirmed that it was indeed the one used by the Celestial Talisman Sect to select the successor of the First Celestial Talisman Master's legacy. The six sects then agreed to each send one disciple to undertake the trial for this legacy.

This was how the exploration of the hidden realm started.

In the world of immortality cultivators, this would just be a regular trial, with multiple sects undergoing the challenge together.

But it was the first time Chu Liang had ever witnessed something like this... Could the entire world truly be constructed from talismanic scripts? He found it hard to believe.

When he killed that flying tiger, he sensed that the dissipating life force was nothing more than an intricate and incredibly complex talismanic spell... "Talismanic Character of Illusion, Talismanic Script of Wind, Talismanic Character of Viciousness..." Chu Liang muttered, carefully immersing himself in the power contained within the talismanic scripts.

When he was at the Hall of Conservation, he could easily deduce and deconstruct each talisman into its individual elements. However, he found himself at a loss when he tried to decipher the lingering aura of the vicious beast after it had shattered into pieces.

It was too complex.

For a talismanic spell capable of transforming into a vicious beast, even if he had the talisman right in front of him to replicate, it would still take him a year to complete it. After a moment of contemplation, he raised his hand and drew the Talismanic Script of Fire in the air.

In an instant, a ball of flame ignited out of thin air! A look of satisfaction finally crossed his face. Just as he suspected, the power of the Great Dao wasn't forbidden here; it was just that it could only

be accessed through talismanic scripts. Everything here was crafted through talismanic scripts, and all divine abilities had to be executed using them.

What a grand design.

He had ventured through numerous hidden realms before, but never had he encountered one that could entirely reshape the rules governing the execution of the Great Dao.

The profound cultivation of the First Celestial Talisman Master was demonstrated in every aspect of this realm.

... After gaining a basic understanding of the fundamental elements of this realm, he was ready to leave. But as soon as he reached the main door, he realized that he couldn't push the door open.

Even with the activation of his dragon blood, he couldn't make the door budge even an inch.

The same was true for both the front and back doors. What's going on?

Chu Liang wondered. Since the purpose of this hidden realm is to pass on the Celestial Talisman Master's legacy, he can't possibly have designed something to trap the disciple in this space. This sealed door must be another test.

Chu Liang stepped back a few paces, deep in thought.

As he carefully observed his surroundings, he realized that the walls were subtly curved at the center of each side.

With eight distinct edges, it reminded him of the Eight Trigrams.

"Wait..." A thought flashed through Chu Liang's mind as he delved into his memories, searching for a connection.

"The direction where the vicious beast appeared earlier was..." he muttered to himself, pointing to the side, "There."

He continued, "That's Xun of the eight trigrams[1] so it's the Talismanic Script of Wind?"

"In that case, the Door of Life should be..." His gaze shifted to another direction, but instead of an open path, he was met with a solid wall. Chu Liang hesitated for a moment, but then determination filled his eyes as he approached the wall and tried to push it. Yet, it was solid and would not move at all.

He paused to ponder once more. After a moment of reflection, he drew the talismanic script of the mountain and gently pressed his hand against the wall.

In an instant, a flash of light enveloped him, and his body seemed to be swallowed by the wall. With another flicker, he found himself outside the hall.

The sound of wind and thunder roared in his ears.

Before him rose a towering mountain peak, seeming to pierce the very heavens. The sky was cloaked in dark clouds, with torrential rain pouring down. Pitch-black floodwaters swirled around the mountain, turning the landscape into an endless, chaotic marshland.

At the edge of the peak, a solitary figure stood with its back to Chu Liang, gazing into the distance.

Someone got out faster than me?

Chu Liang glanced at the figure's back and recognized it as Ye Yongxing from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion.

Sensing someone behind him, Ye Yongxing turned his head. His eyes initially held a trace of anxiety, but upon seeing Chu Liang, he suddenly paused. "Huh?"

Having previously been aided by the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, Chu Liang nodded in acknowledgment with a smile. Since Pushan had mentioned that Ye Yongxing preferred to remain socially withdrawn, Chu Liang refrained from initiating a greeting, concerned it might cause him discomfort.

However, Ye Yongxing continued to stare at Chu Liang with a puzzled expression for quite a while.

Chu Liang began to feel uneasy under his gaze. Isn't Ye Yongxing supposed to avoid people? So why is he staring at me like this?

Am I not a person?

Just as Chu Liang was about to speak, Ye Yongxing suddenly asked, "Are you Chu Liang?"

"That's me..." Chu Liang replied, unsure of where this was leading.

"How strange," Ye Yongxing muttered to himself, his expression distant.

"Brother Ye, you..." Chu Liang chuckled awkwardly. "What's the matter?"

"My apologies." Ye Yongxing quickly realized he had been a bit rude and said, "When I look at you, I sense something different, something I don't feel when I see others. That's why I lost my composure."

"Huh?" But when Chu Liang heard this, he felt scared.

Didn't Pushan say this guy was socially withdrawn? So why is he making me feel so scared right now?

Noticing Chu Liang's uneasy expression, Ye Yongxing realized how strange his words must have sounded. After a brief hesitation, he asked, "Have you ever heard of the immortal art Netherworld Revelation?"

"Netherworld Revelation?" Chu Liang replied, "I've heard a little about it."

It was an extremely powerful and profound immortal art, typically practiced only by the Eminent Ones who had mastered the art of divination. This art allowed one to see a person's death, roughly predicting the manner and time of their demise, allowing certain Eminent Ones the ability to defy fate and alter destiny.

"My mother mastered Netherworld Revelation while she was pregnant with me. I... was affected and was born with the Netherworld Eye," Ye Yongxing said slowly.

"Netherworld Eye?"

"Whenever I look at someone, I can see how they died..." Ye Yongxing said. "Although I am unable to predict the entire story of their death like Netherworld Revelation, but the images I see are extremely vivid and real." Can such things happen? With this explanation, Chu Liang began to understand why he didn't dare to look at people.

Since Ye Yongxing was born, everyone he looked at carried a horrifying image of their death. It's no wonder he didn't dare to look at people.

"But the strange thing is..." Ye Yongxing continued, "I can't see yours."

"Huh?" Chu Liang was taken aback by what Ye Yongxing said.

But then a thought crossed his mind—it might be something on him that was obscuring the secrets of heaven, like the mysterious White Pagoda...

As they continued their conversation, Monk Pushan approached from the other side.

When Pushan saw Chu Liang and Ye Yongxing talking outside without any apparent difficulty, he was a bit surprised.

Ye Yongxing didn't seem as introverted as the rumors suggested. After all, he was chatting just fine with Chu Liang, whom he'd just met, so surely he could talk to me too, Pushan thought.

With a cheerful demeanor, Pushan walked over and greeted them, "You both made it out!"

But when Ye Yongxing glanced at him, his expression suddenly turned strange, and he quickly lowered his head, half-turning away, as if refusing to take another look at his face.

"..." Pushan momentarily froze in place.

Oh, so he's not socially withdrawn. He's just avoiding me.

Did I come at the wrong time?

Chapter 436: Searching For Kun

The sky was alive with lightning and thunder, fierce winds howling as torrential rain poured down as if the heavens were collapsing. The black floodwaters engulfed the land, their roar mingling with the rolling thunder, creating a scene reminiscent of the apocalypse.

Amidst the chaos, a lone mountain peak stood tall, unyielding, and atop that peak, a cacophony of noise echoed.

"It doesn't make sense, it doesn't make sense, it doesn't make sense," Monk Pushan whispered his complaint to Chu Liang, "Why does he look like he's seen a ghost every time he sees me? I'm at least the face of the temple. No matter what, it shouldn't be—"

Chu Liang quickly interrupted his rant, saying, "Maybe he did see a ghost?"

He glanced at Ye Yongxing, "Brother Ye, is this something you can talk about?"

"It's not exactly a secret," Ye Yongxing nodded to Chu Liang, his expression calm when he looked over at Chu Liang. "What's the matter?" Monk Pushan asked. "It's about why Brother Ye doesn't like seeing people," Chu Liang replied.

"Then why don't you explain it yourself," Monk Pushan suggested, turning to Ye Yongxing.

Ye Yongxing glanced at him and immediately appeared as though he had just seen a ghost, quickly turning his head away. "... " Monk Pushan experienced yet another crushing disappointment.

Chu Liang chuckled and explained Ye Yongxing's Netherworld Eye, essentially saying that it's not personal—he sees everyone as if they were ghosts.

"So that's why!" Monk Pushan suddenly understood, and his curiosity was immediately piqued. "So, Young Master Ye, what did I look like at my death?"

"It's hard to say," Ye Yongxing replied softly, lowering his head. "My parents warned me from a young age not to share such things with others. Besides, even if I told you, there's nothing you could do to change it. Unless your cultivation reaches the Heavenly Gate, you can't defy fate or alter destiny."

"That's true," Pushan responded with a calm demeanor. "Life and death have their own destinies. As cultivators, we should focus on how we live rather than on how we die."

As he spoke, his gaze was filled with compassion, and a serene aura surrounded him, reflecting the deep commitment to his Buddhist cultivation.

But as soon as he turned his head, his eyes lit up with curiosity, and he eagerly asked, "Young Hero Ye, there's something else I'm curious about..."

"Hmm?"

Monk Pushan asked slowly, "Have you ever looked in a mirror?"

Hearing this, Chu Liang thought to himself, You're really bold!

But he had to admit, he was a bit curious too.

Ye Yongxing appeared slightly embarrassed, lowering his head as he softly replied, "I can see the heavens and the earth but not myself. The Netherworld Revelation can't reveal one's own fate."

"I see..."

The three of them continued chatting for a while, though it was mostly Monk Pushan doing the talking. Chu Liang habitually chimed in with a few words to keep the conversation flowing, while Ye Yongxing listened quietly.

As the conversation went on, Chu Liang found Ye Yongxing to be a decent person—perhaps a bit naive and kind-hearted due to his lack of interaction with others. Aside from being somewhat socially withdrawn, he had no major flaws and seemed like someone worth befriending.

After a while, a fourth person finally approached. "So you all got out so quickly," Feng Chaoyang said as he walked up.

Considering the difficulty level of the formation in the hall, it shouldn't be easy to be trapped inside for this long... The three of them smiled but chose not to mention it.

Monk Pushan looked behind them and asked in confusion, "The two from the Penglai Supreme Sect and Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals haven't come out yet?"

Logically, this shouldn't be the case.

He wasn't certain about Xi Miaoxian's strength, but if Situ Guanhai was as skilled in the Dao of Talisman-Making as the rumors suggested, he shouldn't be taking this long.

"They might have been the first to get out..." Ye Yongxing whispered to Chu Liang.

"Oh?" Feng Chaoyang was a bit surprised by this. "Brother Ye, you're taking the initiative to talk to people?"

Ye Yongxing glanced at him, then quickly lowered his head again, looking as if he had just seen a ghost.

"..." Feng Chaoyang fell silent for a moment.

Why does he look at Chu Liang one way but act differently when he looks at me? Why is he behaving like Jiang Yuebai?

...

Monk Pushan then said, "If they got out first, where could they have gone? Could they already be searching for the legendary golden talismanic script?"

"They've likely gone to study the seventh talismanic script," Chu Liang replied.

"That makes sense," Ye Yongxing agreed, deep in thought. "They've probably gone to find a place to study the Kun-Character Talisman and the Li-Character Talisman."

In this hidden realm, there are only two talismanic script missing. We can only leave this space using the Xun-Character Talisman so search elsewhere," Chu Liang explained.

"Exactly," Ye Yongxing confirmed. "They must have already gone ahead."

"Hold on a second..." Feng Chaoyang, thoroughly bewildered, turned to Monk Pushan. "I came in late. What on earth are those two talking about?"

Monk Pushan's nostrils flared, and his pupils widened as he shook his head vigorously, "I've been here the whole time, and I have no clue either!"

I thought the three of us were all talking? Why do I suddenly feel left out? Pushan was even more surprised than Feng Chaoyang. I thought we were all talking?

"We're just trying to comprehend the talismanic scripts of this hidden realm," Chu Liang explained. "Didn't you notice? Everything around us is made up of talismanic scripts, and each natural phenomenon embodies the essence of one. By studying them, we can unlock the powerful talismanic techniques of the Celestial Talisman Master."

He continued, "In this hidden realm, the sky is formed with the Qian-Character Talisman, the rain with the Kan-Character Talisman, the thunder with the Zhen-Character Talisman, the wind with the Xun-Character Talisman, the mountain with the Gen-Character Talisman, and the marshes with the Dui-Character Talisman. The golden talismanic script we're searching for might be hidden here."

Hearing Chu Liang explain so nonchalantly left Feng Chaoyang utterly confused.

Monk Pushan fared slightly better, but he was still quite surprised.

How is it possible to be so close, yet feel so disconnected from Chu Liang and Ye Yongxing? Pushan thought. It's like I am right next to you, yet worlds apart?

"So you two have already started comprehending these?" Monk Pushan asked in disbelief.

"I have comprehended up to the sixth character, which is the Dui-Character Talisman. It should take me a bit more time," Chu Liang nodded as he answered. "Brother Ye, what about you?"

"I started at the Dui-Character Talisman and now I have only the Qian-Character Talisman to comprehend," Ye Yongxing replied.

"No..." Pushan scratched his round, shiny head, looking puzzled. "But I thought we were just chatting earlier?"

"Maybe we were comprehending the talismanic characters while you were talking," Chu Liang chuckled.

At that moment, Monk Pushan felt like a student who suddenly realized his usual goofing-off buddies had secretly been studying all along and aced the exams, while he was the only one left behind.

So you guys were secretly studying like crazy behind my back! Pushan screamed internally.

Both he and Feng Chaoyang were certainly talented, but compared to geniuses like Chu Liang and Ye Yongxing, they simply appeared dumber. Now that they were aware of the profound aspects of this hidden realm, they immediately began to study the talismanic scripts hidden within the natural phenomena.

But before they could dive too deep, Chu Liang announced, "I'll be heading out first then."

With that, he swiftly drew a Xun-Character Talisman, and the wind gathered beneath his feet, carrying him away as he vanished into the air.

It was clear that he had already mastered the rules of this place.

Chu Liang pressed on through the storm, soaring far into the distance, yet all he could see was an unbroken expanse of water. The roaring floodwaters engulfed everything like a vast ocean, and without a Kun-Character Talisman to create land, there was nothing to study or comprehend.

Where had the members of the Penglai Supreme Sect and Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals gone? Wait... As he looked down at the floodwaters, a sudden realization sparked in his eyes.

The Xun-Character Talisman isn't the only one I can use! If I part the floodwaters with the Dui-Character Talisman, I might reveal the land beneath, right?

With that thought, he sprang into action.

He drew a Dui-Character Talisman with each hand and began commanding the floodwaters to part.

The towering waves obeyed, splitting like two colossal walls rising on either side, slowly unveiling the damp earth below.

This feat was akin to moving mountains and over!

The hundred-zhang-high black water walls surged on either side as Chu Liang landed on the newly revealed ground, immersing his senses in the essence of the talismanic script that formed the land beneath him.

It was heavy, solid, and capable of bearing all things—a mighty force that upheld everything. Various profound sensations converged into one, ultimately forming the character that resonated with the Heavenly Law.

I finally found you. A smile appeared on Chu Liang's face.

"Kun..."

Chapter 437: There Were Differences In Intelligence Even Among Fools

Boom.

On both sides, the murky black floodwater surged into hundred-zhang-tall walls. Chu Liang held the floodwater back with the great force of the heavens and the earth. It was impossible for the floodwater to cross the lightning boundary.

Standing between the two towering walls of floodwater, Chu Liang slowly imprinted the Kun-Character Talisman into his mind. With this, he was only one step away from acquiring the Li-Character Talisman and completing the Talismanic Script of the Eight Trigrams.

The greatest difference between the Talismanic Script of the Eight Trigrams and the fundamental Talismanic Script of the Five Elements was the quality. Even though the Great Dao and the sources of spiritual qi that they used were similar, the Talismanic Script of the Eight Trigrams was far more

powerful. One of its talismans could unleash the power of hundreds of the fundamental Five Elements Talismans.

The Talismanic Script of the Eight Trigrams could be taken as the refined, advanced version of the fundamental Talismanic Script of the Five Elements.

The Celestial Talisman Master had used the Talismanic Script of the Eight Trigrams as the foundation for constructing this hidden realm. In theory, mastering them would allow anyone to create their own world... assuming they had a hidden realm to create the world in, of course.

After comprehending the Kun-Character Talisman, Chu Liang's understanding of the Dao of Talisman-Making improved greatly. He realized the talismans that the Celestial Talisman Master had made were vastly superior to those others made. The essence of the Dao contained within his talismans was something a cultivator could spend a lifetime trying to understand. However, these talismans might not possess such tremendous power outside this hidden realm.

As for the golden script that the gray-bearded elder had mentioned, Chu Liang still had no idea where it was. For now, his only lead was to find the last of the Eight Trigrams Talismans—the Li-Character Talisman.

Being just one talisman away from collecting all Eight Trigrams Talismans was enough to drive anyone crazy. If Chu Liang were forced out of the hidden realm now, he definitely wouldn't be able to sleep that night.

Using the power of the Xun-Character Talisman, Chu Liang once again soared into the sky. He then removed the Dui-Character Talisman's restraint, causing the towering walls of floodwater on both sides to crash down and form massive waves.

Just as Chu Liang was about to search for the Li-Character Talisman, he heard explosive sounds and shouts in the distance. They rang loud and clear even through the screaming wind and rumbling thunder.

Is there a fight going on?

Chu Liang and the other five righteous disciples were the only ones in this hidden realm, so he swiftly headed over to find out what was happening.

He didn't need to fly far before he saw a terrifying monster that was as large as a mountain!

From a distance, it looked like there were eight or nine black slender dragons. However, when Chu Liang moved closer, he realized it was one massive creature with nine heads.

It was a giant nine-headed python!

Its black scales were mottled, and its vertical pupils flickered like dancing flames, yet its gaze was chilling.

Xiangliu!

Chu Liang recognized this vicious beast. It was the tremendously fearsome Xiangliu[1], known in legends as a "nine-headed serpentine monster that had devoured countless humans. Everywhere it went would be turned into marshlands."

To think that this beast resided in this hidden realm?

Or could it be that the Celestial Talisman Master had been capable of conjuring a creature like that with his talismanic scripts?

It's astonishing either way.

The lower half of the giant python was submerged in the water, but its nine heads emerged fully from the water as it chased two tiny figures ahead.

They were a man and a woman—Situ Guanhai and Xi Miaoxian.

The two of them fought while retreating. Unfortunately, the giant python kept pursuing them, and they were unable to shake it off.

Nevertheless, Situ Guanhai's mastery of the Dao of Talisman-Making was indeed exceptional. His hands moved simultaneously, casting two talismans at the same time! His left hand drew a circle, and his right hand drew a square.

Multitasking wasn't difficult for cultivators who could split their divine intent into hundreds, but drawing talismans while focusing on something else was a totally different level of difficulty. Moreover, Situ Guanhai was instantaneously casting two Eight Trigrams Talismans, which were very difficult to draw. He was truly amazing.

With his left hand, he drew a Kan-Character Talisman, and with his right hand, a Qian-Character Talisman.

"Water Arriving From the Heavens!"

The two talismans were activated simultaneously, instantly summoning a massive wave from below. It then transformed into a towering water dragon that crashed heavily onto one of Xiangliu's heads!

Boom!

Watching from afar, Chu Liang felt deeply inspired. So, the Eight Trigrams Talismans can be used like this as well.

...

"Raaaaar!!!"

Struck with such a heavy blow, the giant python was sent flying. However, it quickly returned even more ferocious and enraged! It opened its mouth and spewed a torrent of pitch-black flames!

Fire?

At the sight of this, Chu Liang thought for a moment that he had found the location of the Li-Character Talisman. However, after observing it briefly, he realized that what he sensed from the giant python wasn't true fire. Rather, it was some kind of mystical ability that the giant python had developed with its power.

Hiss—

Yet, even though it wasn't real fire, it evaporated the mist and water raining down on the giant python. Everything in the path of the black flames was incinerated.

Nevertheless, Xi Miaoxian was no weakling. Her mastery of the Dao of Talisman-Making wasn't as advanced as Situ Guanhai's, but she was still capable of holding her own against the giant python.

Her robes billowed in the wind as she floated in midair. She gently raised her hand and cast a Zhen-Character Talisman.

Boom!

Lighting descended from the heavens, striking the destructive black flames head-on!

Whoosh.

Unexpectedly, the black flames weren't weakened at all. On the contrary, they became even more powerful, soaring tens of zhang higher! The black fire was now so immense that it seemed to cover the sky!

Situ Guanhai quickly moved his hands again, drawing another pair of talismans.

This time, he drew the Xun-Character Talisman with his left hand and the Qian-Character Talisman with his right.

"Peace to the Heavens and the Earth!"

Rumble.

In an instant, the earth and the heavens seemed to merge, and a huge barrier appeared out of thin air, blocking all the black flames. Nonetheless, the flames seemed to possess some intelligence. Instead of simply retreating, they clung to the barrier and gradually broke it down.

Situ Guanhai and Xi Miaoxian seized the opportunity to flee again, but the nine-headed Xiangliu followed closely, relentless in its pursuit.

It was obvious to Chu Liang that inside this hidden realm, Situ Guanhai was like a fish in water. He was several times more powerful than when he was outside the hidden realm. Xi Miaoxian, on the other hand, was much weaker. If Situ Guanhai didn't have to save her, he would have already escaped on his own long ago.

Chu Liang thought, Fine... I learned a trick from you this time, so I'll lend you a hand.

Xianglu had broken through the barrier and was once again hot on Situ Guanhai's and Xi Miaoxian's heels. Seeing that, Chu Liang stepped in and mimicked Situ Guanhai's technique.

Chu Liang drew a Zhen-Character Talisman with his left hand and a Xun-Character Talisman with his right. He combined and activated them simultaneously!

The Excitement of Thunder Shakes The Earth!

Boom.

An explosive clap of thunder rang right next to one of Xiangliu's heads, shocking Xiangliu to an abrupt halt.

"Raaaaaar!!!" Xiangliu roared in fury, turning several of its heads toward Chu Liang.

After successfully redirecting Xiangliu's rage toward him, Chu Liang swiftly changed his stance. He cast the Qian-Character Talisman with his left hand and the Xun-Character Talisman with his right.

When Wind Meets the Sky.

In an instant, he transformed into a whirlwind and fled!

The whirlwind was so swift that Xiangliu couldn't catch up. It could only watch as Chu Liang disappeared from its lines of sight.irate, Xiangliu thrashed about in the sea, causing giant waves and unceasing tsunamis.

...

Earlier...

Not long after Chu Liang left, Ye Yongxing went off in search of the Xun-Character Talisman and Li-Character Talisman too. Only Monk Pushan and Feng Chaoyang remained on the mountain peak to continue comprehending the talismanic script.

They weren't well acquainted, but they couldn't help but feel a sense of mutual understanding at this moment.

"Say..." Feng Chaoyang asked, "are the two of us just massive fools? Why couldn't I understand a word of what they said?"

"Young Hero Feng, you're mistaken. The Dao of Talisman-Making is profound and obscure. It's normal to not grasp it easily," Monk Pushan said to comfort Feng Chaoyang. Then, with a slight change in tone, Monk Pushan added, "Besides, we're not quite the same. By the time they were done talking, I figured it out. I've already comprehended five of the talismanic characters."

"Huh?"

Turns out there are differences in intelligence even among fools, Feng Chaoyang thought, feeling a sense of loneliness.

He couldn't help but regret coming here to embarrass himself.

It wasn't really his fault though. The Celestial King Sect didn't cultivate the Dao of Talisman-Making at all, so none of the disciples in his sect specialized in it. However, since they had obtained access to a hidden realm with a cultivation legacy, the Celestial King Sect didn't want to waste the opportunity to acquire the legacy. Moreover, the hidden realm wasn't very dangerous, so they decided to let their head disciple try his luck.

Unfortunately, Feng Chaoyang simply had no talent at all in talisman-making.

Some more time passed by, and Monk Pushan still hadn't left, but Situ Guanhai and Xi Miaoxian had returned. If the relationship between the Mount Shu Sect and the Penglai Supreme Sect was strained, then the relationship between the Celestial King Sect and the Penglai Supreme Sect was filled with deep-seated enmity.

So, the two pairs each occupied one side of the peak. They didn't even greet each other.

That lasted until Chu Liang returned.

Chapter 438: Opening the Heavens

After circling around, Chu Liang returned to the central peak of the hidden realm and, sure enough, found that Situ Guanhai and Xi Miao-xian had also returned.

As soon as he landed, the two approached him and formally expressed their gratitude. "Young Hero Chu, many thanks for rescuing us."

Due to the tense relationship between Mount Shu and Penglai, Xi Miao-xian hadn't even acknowledged Chu Liang before. Now, having been saved by him, she couldn't help but feel a bit ashamed of herself.

Situ Guanhai, on the other hand, appeared somewhat astonished. "I've heard my junior brother mention you before, but I didn't expect you to be this skilled. I had just developed this talismanic technique which integrates elements of the Eight Trigrams so I thought I was the only one who would know it. I really didn't expect to see you performing it too."

"Apologies. I learned it from you without your permission while observing the extraordinary power displayed by the talismanic technique you performed," Chu Liang said with a smile. "Both of you really don't have to thank me. We were just doing each other a favor."

Although Chu Liang was being modest, his words left Situ Guanhai even more astonished.

"You learned it just by watching me perform it once?" Situ Guanhai's eyes widened in disbelief. "This..."

It had taken him countless hours of practice to perfect the technique, yet Chu Liang had mastered it after a single glance. The realization was both impressive and unsettling.

"I've long heard of Young Hero Chu's rising fame and extraordinary talent over the past year. Seeing it today, it's truly remarkable," Xi Miao-xian praised with a smile.

Being complimented by a beauty would certainly spark joy, but Chu Liang knew Situ Guanhai clearly had feelings for Xi Miao-xian. Not wanting to steal the spotlight, Chu Liang subtly shifted his gaze to Situ Guanhai and said, "Brother Situ, as the creator of this technique, you are the one with extraordinary talent."

As they spoke, Monk Pushan and Feng Chaoyang, who had been lingering nearby, approached as well.

Upon hearing that Chu Liang had saved Xi Miao-xian and Situ Guanhai, Feng Chaoyang couldn't help but ask, "Young Hero Chu, why did you save them?"

Chu Liang smiled faintly and felt a sense of apprehension.

The next series of events turned out just as he had expected.

Before he could respond, Xi Miao-xian shifted her attention to Feng Chaoyang. She fixed her gaze on him and remarked, "Just because some of you harbor ill intentions doesn't mean Young Hero Chu should abandon his chivalrous conduct and stoop to your level."

"Hmph," Feng Chaoyang snorted coldly. "Chivalry, you say? It all depends on who's on the receiving end. Hasn't the Penglai Supreme Sect often oppressed the Mount Shu Sect?"

"Stop slandering us!" Xi Miao-xian exclaimed. "We have always worked closely with Mount Shu; we are allies."

"Yeah, right," Feng Chaoyang shouted. "We, the Celestial King Sect, are the true allies of Mount Shu!"

"Regardless of sect, I've long admired Young Hero Chu's reputation," Xi Miao-xian said as she took a step forward.

"I've known Young Hero Chu for a long time!" Feng Chaoyang suddenly exclaimed, grabbing Chu Liang's arm with a firm grip.

"From now on, Young Hero Chu will be my dearest friend!" Xi Miao-xian declared, stepping up and looping her arm around Chu Liang's.

"Wait, wait, wait..." Chu Liang quickly pulled his arms free and leaped back in a hurry.

Well, it's fortunate the people from Celestial Pivot Pavilion aren't here, he thought. Otherwise, if this scene reached the Wind-Catching Hall, it would probably end up in The Seven Stars Gazette, and explaining it would be impossible!

Over the years, the disciples of the Penglai Supreme Sect and the Celestial King Sect—two of the top immortal sects—had always clashed like fighting crickets, squabbling whenever they met.

Disciples from other immortal sects had long grown accustomed to it.

But why was that strange competitive spirit being directed at me?

"In this hidden realm, let's stop arguing over pointless things," Chu Liang advised. "How about some healthy competition? Let's see who can comprehend the eight talismanic scripts first or who can obtain the golden talisman."

"I'm not competing with her," Feng Chaoyang pouted.

"Oh? Why not?" Xi Miaoxian shot him a sideways glance.

Feng Chaoyang loudly declared, "Because I can't beat her!"

"... " Chu Liang fell silent.

Honestly, you really didn't have to sound so proud of that.

...

Xi Miaoxian, clearly tired of the bickering, turned her focus to Chu Liang and said, "We've likely already pinpointed where the golden talisman is hidden."

"What?" Chu Liang looked over as he spoke. "Then that Xiangliu from earlier..."

"Exactly," Xi Miaoxian confirmed with a nod. "We stumbled upon an underwater palace guarded by the Xiangliu. It seems we need all of the Eight Trigram Talismans to unlock the entrance. I got impatient and tried it anyway, using a talismanic for each of the seven heads. But two heads were left untamed, and that's why things turned out the way they did earlier..."

So that's what happened. Chu Liang thought back to the earlier scene when Xiangliu had been chasing them; sure enough, only two of its heads had attacked. But even so, that monstrous beast was on par with a seventh-realm demonic beast. Even if it only had two heads left, it was not something that they could handle.

If they could gather all eight talismanic scripts, the eight heads would allow them entry, and subduing the final head wouldn't be nearly as difficult.

This was the actual trial that the Celestial Talisman Master had set up.

Situ Guanhai then remarked, "But actual fire doesn't exist in this hidden realm, so there's no way for us to study the Li-Character Talisman."

Chu Liang nodded slightly.

To comprehend the talismanic script, they needed to study something that exist in this hidden realm. It had to be something that came into existence through a talismanic script. They could not summon a fire through a talisman.

But with the endless rain and wind in this realm, how could even a single spark of fire survive?

Everyone gathered in a circle, silent for a moment, each lost in their own thoughts.

Monk Pushan leaned over and whispered to Feng Chaoyang, "What are they doing?"

"I have no idea. It looks like they're deep in thought," Feng Chaoyang whispered back.

Not wanting to stand out, Feng Chaoyang furrowed his brow, pretending to think hard about something, though he had no clue what he was supposed to be thinking.

Monk Pushan covered his face with a hand and sighed. "Young Hero Feng, you really have it rough."

"Yeah," Feng Chaoyang muttered. "There's no sun, moon, or stars here. My Heavenly Star Unusual Art is completely useless."

"What did you say?" Chu Liang suddenly looked up.

"I said..." Feng Chaoyang shivered under Chu Liang's gaze, blinking nervously. "My Heavenly Star Unusual Art can't be used here..."

"The sentence before that," Chu Liang muttered, "There's no sun or moon here..."

Suddenly, he stood up and looked to the sky. "This place is composed of the most primal elements of the Eight Trigrams Talismans. But no matter how primal, there should be one essential thing..."

"Exactly!" Xi Miao-xian's eyes brightened, a divine light flickering within them.

"Thanks to you, Brother Feng," Chu Liang patted Feng Chaoyang on the shoulder before shooting up into the sky.

Thanks for the casual remark that answered my question. Indeed, there is no fire here. But there should be one important thing—and that is... the sun!

At that moment, dark clouds rolled across the sky, with winds howling and thunder rumbling, concealing the heavens and blocking all sunlight and moonlight.

Chu Liang soared higher, his hands tracing intricate patterns in the air as he activated the Qian-Character Talisman, unleashing a powerful, rumbling force.

Boom—

The sky full of dark clouds slowly parted, as if pulled aside by a pair of giant hands, moving with a thunderous sound to both sides.

Opening the heavens!

As the clouds parted, a crimson sun emerged, blazing brilliantly in the sky, its radiant light flooding the earth. Divine light cascaded down, illuminating everything in its path and filling the world with a scorching brilliance!

It was fire.

An unimaginably blazing fire!

Chapter 439: Entering the Hall

As soon as the sun appeared, the dark floodwaters that had engulfed the hidden realm of the Celestial Talisman Master swiftly withdrew, evaporating in an instant, revealing vast stretches of solid land.

Such a spectacle would defy reality, but here, the laws of nature bent to different rules. High above, the Li-Character Talisman hovered, its presence dominating the sky, while the Dui-Character Talisman shrank away, yielding before its might.

Chu Liang knew he was on the right path.

The crimson sun blazed fiercely, its flames burning with unrelenting intensity, casting a fiery aura around Chu Liang, who stood closest to its radiance.

This was an overwhelming and intense energy, capable of both illuminating the world and reducing it to ashes. It mirrored the duality of the Great Dao of Fire—one side embodying the Incinerating Heaven, the other, the Heavenly Radiance.

It was the strongest and most dangerous kind of energy. The Celestial Talisman Master had likely concealed it in the deepest depths, perhaps as a warning for those who sought to wield it—to proceed with the utmost caution.

Moments later, Chu Liang fully grasped the essence of the talisman.

Immediately after, he saw the palace that emerged in the center of the land once the floodwaters receded.

On the vast, flat ground, the lone palace stood out, even more so because a massive nine-headed python was guarding it.

Xiangliu...

Chu Liang flew swiftly to the front of the palace, with Situ Guanhai and Xi Miao-xian close behind. Both had also completed their comprehension of the talismanic script. Almost at the same time, Ye Yongxing appeared, arriving just as the clouds parted, revealing the presence of the elusive Li-Character Talisman.

Now, everyone had fully comprehended the Talismanic Script of the Eight Trigrams, gaining much from it.

Well, except for Feng Chaoyang.

Though Feng Chaoyang finally understood the process, starting from scratch to comprehend all eight talismanic scripts had left him far behind the others.

Monk Pushan comforted him from the side, "Young Hero Feng, don't worry, take your time. Every moment of contemplation here brings its own rewards. There's no need to keep pace with others."

"Good thing you're here with me," Feng Chaoyang said, his voice carrying a trace of emotion. If he had been left alone, the awkwardness and pressure would have been unbearable.

Immediately, Monk Pushan said, "This is as far as I can accompany you. If I don't make my way over now, I'll miss out on being part of the first group to enter the palace. Young Hero Feng, I'll be heading ahead."

With that, he activated the Xun-Character Talisman and soared toward the center of the land.

While flying, he didn't forget to call back to Feng Chaoyang, "Young Hero Feng, take it slow! There's really no rush!"

"..." Feng Chaoyang stared after Monk Pushan's retreating figure in grief and indignation, feeling utterly betrayed. Now I'm the only fool left behind, he thought bitterly.

Moments later, the group of five gathered at the entrance of the palace without Feng Chaoyang.

Looking at the massive Xiangliu before them, Chu Liang spoke up, "When we enter the palace to search for the golden talisman, let's cooperate where necessary and compete when needed, but let's not harm our camaraderie in the process."

"Rest assured, Young Hero Chu," Xi Miaoxian responded with a nod. "We'll each rely on our own abilities. Wins or losses here will be left behind once we depart."

Ye Yongxing, not one for unnecessary conflict, remained silent as he stared at Xiangliu.

With its nine enormous heads, Xiangliu's eighteen vertical pupils gleamed with a fierce, menacing light. It stood utterly motionless as it guarded the palace.

Having reached an agreement, everyone began casting their Eight Trigram Talismans one after another.

Qian, Kan, Kun, Dui, Gen, Li, Xun, Zhen... Each talisman floated into the air one after the other. With every talisman cast, one of Xiangliu's nine heads lowered, and its eyes gradually closed.

After the eight talismans were cast, only the third head of the python remained raised, its fierce glare still exposed and burning with defiance.

If this were a Xiangliu at full strength, they wouldn't stand a chance. But now, with only a fraction of its power remaining, the fear that once gripped them had faded. The beast was still dangerous, but no longer invincible.

Having been chased earlier, Situ Guanhai's fury flared at the sight of Xiangliu. Without hesitation, he stepped forward, casting the Li-Character Talisman with his left hand and the Zhen-Character Talisman with his right. The two talismans fused as he fiercely launched his attack. "The Fire and Lightning Devours!"

Boom, boom, boom—

When it came to sheer destruction, nothing rivaled the power of the Li Fire! A massive black flame ball with streaks of lightning formed in mid-air and slammed violently into Xiangliu's raised head.

"Roar—"

Xiangliu was struck by the talismans, its scales half-charred and shattered. In a fit of rage, it immediately retaliated, spewing a torrent of black flames in a furious counterattack!

But in an instant, two talismans merged from the side. The Kun-Character Talisman traced with the left hand and the Kan-Character Talisman traced with the right formed a dense water sphere that blocked the black flames entirely.

"Earth and Water Mastery!"

The person who cast this talisman wasn't Chu Liang but Ye Yongxing. He had also mastered the fusion of these Eight Trigrams Talismans. Whether he had figured it out on his own or learned it after watching Situ Guanhai once was unknown.

Meanwhile, Chu Liang's attack had also landed squarely on Xiangliu's head!

Boom—

The Fire and Lightning Devours again!

Now that everyone could cast the fusion of the Eight Trigram Talismans, their combined strength surpassed anything they had achieved before. Meanwhile, Xiangliu grew weaker with each passing moment, its power halved, and it couldn't endure much longer under the relentless pressure of their attacks.

After being struck by several talismans, Xiangliu raised its head and let out a mournful wail.
"Roar..."

Then, with a final effort, it raised its head to the sky before shattering with a deafening crash!

Bang—

As its body broke apart, Xiangliu transformed into a swirling apparition of black-and-white talismanic energy, revealing that it had never been a living creature, but merely a manifestation of a talismanic spell.

Even this massive beast had been formed from talismanic scripts. Although the group had already suspected this after everything they had witnessed, the technique was still utterly astounding.

As Xiangliu's mountain-sized form crumbled to dust, it unveiled the grand palace hidden behind it.

...

The palace's exterior was ancient, far simpler than the grand and ornate halls of the immortal sects. The strangest feature of its design was the row of nine large doors at the front. These were not solid doors but nine pitch-black openings, each with a small serpent head symbol intricately carved along the edges.

A piece of text was inscribed on the wall next to the doors.

"Once you step into this palace, there is no turning back. Choose the wrong door, and you will be immediately expelled from the hidden realm, never to enter again."

Choose?

The group stared at the nine dark doorways, uncertainty settling over them like a heavy fog.

The inscription's meaning was painfully clear: pick the wrong door, and you would be banished from the hidden realm forever. Each person had only one chance to make their choice, and this decision was of utmost importance to every single one of them.

No one dared to act rashly.

After observing for a while, Chu Liang was the first to step forward. "I'll test the path for everyone," he announced with quiet determination.

Without hesitation, he boldly strode toward the third door on the left.

Whoosh—

Ripples spread across the black void as he disappeared into the darkness, and after a brief moment, the doorway returned to its original state, as if nothing had happened.

"What..." The group stared in astonishment, taken aback by how decisively he had acted.

He had said he would test the way, but they had no way of knowing whether Chu Liang had entered the palace or been expelled from the hidden realm.

Monk Pushan quickly stepped forward and said, "Then I trust Young Hero Chu."

Without further hesitation, he followed closely and entered the same door.

Over the past few days, Monk Pushan had often followed Chu Liang's lead and had never taken a wrong step. He had come to trust Chu Liang's path to success, so in this unfamiliar setting, his first instinct was to continue trusting him.

With two already inside, Ye Yongxing silently followed suit. Now, only Situ Guanhai and Xi Miaoxian remained, both of whom had been working together throughout their venture in the hidden realm.

Situ Guanhai glanced at Xi Miaoxian, furrowing his brow, "This..."

The situation was clear: if Chu Liang had chosen the correct path, they would fall behind if they didn't follow; but if his choice was wrong, blindly following him could lead them all to failure.

"Did you figure out the trick behind these doors?" Xi Miaoxian asked, her gaze sharp.

"I'm not sure," Situ Guanhai replied, "but the doors are marked with serpent heads. These nine doors likely correspond to Xiangliu's nine heads. Since only the third head was alive earlier, this must be the gate of life."

This was his conjecture, but he was unsure. After all, there was no remedy for choosing the wrong door. He hadn't expected Chu Liang to charge in without hesitation.

"Then let's go," Xi Miao-xian said decisively.

She was direct and wasted no time. After hearing Situ's logic, she leapt forward without hesitation.

Situ Guanhai had no choice but to follow.

A flash of black light enveloped them, and when it faded, they found themselves in a vast space. The others who had entered earlier were already there, confirming they had made the right choice.

Chu Liang stood tall at the front, and Situ Guanhai couldn't help but feel a twinge of admiration.

In truth, the puzzle of choosing the door wasn't particularly complex, but it did test one's courage. Chu Liang's willingness to step forward without hesitation gave him an edge over the others.

But in reality...

The reason Chu Liang had strode forward so boldly was that he had already swiftly gathered all the necessary information, eliminating any lingering doubts. He quickly deduced that the serpent-head symbol carved on the edge of the door was the key to the puzzle, and the most logical solution was to choose the door corresponding to the head of the Xiangliu that had not been subdued earlier.

Spending more time thinking about it would have been a waste of time.

The others hesitated because they were still considering whether there might be other possibilities. They worried they might have overlooked hidden clues, fearing their deductions could be wrong.

It might have seemed like Chu Liang won because of his bravery, but in reality, it was a victory rooted in intelligence and quick reasoning.

...

What lay before them now was not the golden talismanic script they sought, but an expansive hall. Eight doors loomed ahead, each as dark and ominous as the ones before.

At the center of the hall stood a stone sundial, a single beam of sunlight cutting through the shadows and casting the current time with eerie precision.

Above each of the eight doors, the characters of the Eight Trigram Talismans were clearly engraved.

It was unmistakable.

They were now faced with a new choice!

Chapter 440: Divergence

Xi Miaoxian's beautiful eyes looked around the hall before ultimately fixing her gaze on Chu Liang's back.

Stepping toward him, she asked, "Is this another puzzle? Have you figured it out, Young Hero Chu?"

Chu Liang smiled and replied, "I'm still thinking about it."

Situ Guanhai had come on this trip to the hidden realm because of Xi Miaoxian, so he had stayed by her side the entire time. Now, with Chu Liang stealing the spotlight and Xi Miaoxian taking the initiative to approach him, Situ Guanhai felt a sense of crisis.

Fortunately, he specialized in the Dao of Talisman-Making.

Situ Guanhai stepped forward and said, "According to the Qimen Dunjia, the Door of Life (生) should be at the Gen (艮) position." [1]

He walked over to the Door of Gen and then turned around. Situ Guanhai found that everyone was watching him, but no one made a move to follow him.

"Why...?" Situ Guanhai asked sheepishly. "Am I wrong?"

"You're right." Chu Liang nodded. "Brother Situ, go on and give it a try."

Situ Guanhai's heart thumped hard like a drum. This wasn't something he could just try. One wrong step, and he'd be expelled from the hidden realm.

Monk Pushan shook his head. "That line of thinking is too simplistic. Considering all the trials that we had to overcome just to get to this point... If I were the Celestial Talisman Master, there's no way I'd make this stage so easy."

"It is the Door of Gen," Ye Yongxing suddenly said.

Chu Liang smiled in agreement. "That's right."

"Huh?" Situ Guanhai straightened his posture. "Is it really?"

However, he was still nervous, wondering if they were trying to trick him into checking out the path... or maybe they were just using this as an opportunity to eliminate a competitor.

"The problem is that it's not as simple as just corresponding to the positions of the Eight Trigrams," Chu Liang explained, glancing at Ye Yongxing. "It's connected to the sundial."

"Yes." Ye Yongxing nodded. "The qian (乾) character represents the heavens. Using it as the guide, the sundial can be divided into eight parts."

"And the sunlight is currently..." Chu Liang said, tracing a faint line over the sundial with his hand, "shining toward the Door of Gen."

"Oh, I see now!" Monk Pushan exclaimed, nodding vigorously. He quickly added, "Just as I thought!"

Situ Guanhai's face grew hot. It turned out that his earlier conclusion had been the result of a very superficial analysis and that it was pure luck that he'd gotten it right, like a blind cat stumbling upon a dead rat.

Feeling quite ashamed, Situ Guanhai just wanted to get out of there.

So, he said, "Then I'll go ahead and give it a try."

"Wait!" Chu Liang suddenly called out to him.

Situ Guanhai stopped in his tracks. "Hmm?"

Chu Liang explained, "The sunlight has now moved to the boundary between the sections, making it hard to judge which position the Door of Life is in. It will likely shift soon, so let's wait a moment to be cautious."

Situ Guanhai shuddered with fear and thanked him, "Many thanks for your warning."

Chu Liang could have remained a passive observer. If Situ Guanhai had indeed chosen the wrong path, there would be one fewer competitor, which would benefit to Chu Liang.

However, Situ Guanhai was still the most knowledgeable in the Dao of Talisman-Making among them. The path ahead was unknown, so losing him might not be advantageous in the end.

There was no doubt they would have to compete at some point, but it wasn't that time yet.

Initially, everyone was only thinking about competing with each other. Nevertheless, because both Chu Liang and Ye Yongxing were leading the way with such noble behavior, the tense atmosphere in the group became much more relaxed.

After waiting a bit longer, they all passed through the new Door of Life.

Whoosh.

The black light in the door rippled around them continuously until they arrived in the new grand hall.

They had indeed made the correct choice!

...

This new grand hall was not the final destination. The number of black doorways ahead had been reduced to five, each marked with the same strange symbol above. It was a simple leftward diagonal stroke and a horizontal line (丿一), resembling an unfinished character.

In the center of the hall, there was a square stone slab covered in a chaotic array of drawings. It looked as if countless talismans had been scattered across it, forming an overwhelming blur of overlapping lines.

As the group swept their gazes over it, they all frowned.

"Another puzzle..." Monk Pushan muttered and scratched his head, feeling like his bald head was about to overload.

Situ Guanhai suddenly said, "This is the Disorderly Board of Talismans."

"Oh?" everyone uttered, turning to him.

"When I first began studying the Dao of Talisman-Making, my esteemed teacher would use this to test me," Situ Guanhai explained. As his confidence increased, so did his volume. "Most of the symbols are meaningless. There are only a few valid talismanic characters in there. We'll have to use divine intent to filter out the useful talismanic characters. Any mistakes will result in punishment.

"Nevertheless, it doesn't matter how complex a talisman or talismanic spell it is. After practicing this for such a long time, I can instantly identify the core talismanic characters with just a glance."

"It seems this method of studying talismans and talismanic spells was passed down from the ancient Celestial Talisman Sect," Chu Liang said. "So, Brother Situ, can you identify the talismanic characters on this board?"

It was likely that the group could just follow the method that Situ Guanhai mentioned and use their divine intent to solve the board, but they would inevitably be slower than Situ Guanhai. However, their speed wasn't the main issue; Situ Guanhai had something they didn't.

Situ Guanhai had studied using the Disorderly Board of Talismans for many years, so his proficiency and accuracy were much higher than the rest of the group's.

Situ Guanhai nodded firmly.

Then he concentrated all of his divine intent on the board. As he held his breath and focused, his eyes lit up with fervor.

Moments later, Situ Guanhai gave his answer. "This board contains the Five Elements Talismans: four metal (金), three wood (木), one water (水), five fire (火), and two earth (土)..."

"It's the second door!" Chu Liang and Ye Yongxing exclaimed in unison.[2]

The other three were startled. "Huh?"

How did they identify the Door of Life's location just by counting a few talismans?

Chu Liang explained, "This time, the five doors are all marked with the same symbol, with no distinguishing markers. The number of talismans for each element on the board most likely corresponds to the elemental affiliation of each door."

Ye Yongxing continued the explanation slowly. "The first door corresponds to water, the second to earth, the third to wood, the fourth to metal, and the fifth to fire... The Door of Life is the Door of Earth."

"Why is that?" Monk Pushan asked.

Chu Liang replied, "Look at the symbol above each door. It's not entirely useless."

Monk Pushan hadn't connected the dots earlier, but the moment he took a closer look at the symbols above the doors, he finally understood.

"That symbol (丿一)... when combined with the character for earth (土), it forms the character for life (生)!" Monk Pushan cried out in surprise.

Xi Miao-xian and Situ Guanhai looked over and immediately understood as well.

If they had been given the time, they would have been able to solve this puzzle fairly easily too. However, the speed at which Chu Liang and Ye Yongxing had figured it out was truly remarkable.

"Impressive," Situ Guanhai remarked.

"It was just a lucky coincidence that I happened to think of it," Chu Liang replied humbly. "We solved it thanks to Brother Situ's solid skills in talisman-making."

This was true. Without Situ Guanhai, the others, who were unfamiliar with the Disorderly Board of Talismans, might have been stuck at this stage for a long time.

This confirmed what Chu Liang had thought earlier. Those who became overly focused on competing too early would never make it to the end.

"Nothing special, really," Situ Guanhai said modestly.

Despite that, one side of his mouth couldn't stop from curving up, so much so that it formed a crooked grin. Situ Guanhai felt quite triumphant, as he had managed to redeem himself after that embarrassing incident in the previous stage.

Now that they had found the Door of Life, the group wasted no time and ventured inside.

Whoosh.

With a flash of light, they arrived in yet another new space.

...

However, this still wasn't their final destination. This new grand hall was empty, and the number of doors on the wall ahead had been reduced to two.

One was engraved with the words "Talismanic Script of Yin," and the other with "Talismanic Script of Yang."

The only clue was a stone relief mural on the wall.

The mural depicted what appeared to be a doomsday scene. The sky was filled with dark clouds and flashes of lightning as roaring floodwaters approached from afar. Raging flames ravaged the earth, incinerating plants and mountain rocks alike.

The scene depicted in this mural was similar to ones Chu Liang had seen in a previous hidden realm[3]. It was a doomsday artwork.

"This..." Monk Pushan frowned deeply. "How are we supposed to choose?"

Silence fell over the group.

Situ Guanhai looked at Chu Liang and Ye Yongxing and asked, "Are both of you at a loss as to which door to pick too?"

"I'm not sure..." Ye Yongxing replied, "but I think I'll choose the Door of Yin."

Chu Liang, on the other hand, said, "I'll choose the Door of Yang."

"Huh?" the others uttered in shock.

Up until now, Chu Liang and Ye Yongxing had always had the same opinion, so following them had allowed the group to progress smoothly to this point.

But now... why are they suddenly making different choices?

Who should we trust?!