

M. Slaying 461

Chapter 461: Trapped

In the Nightmare Demon King's dream realm, the blood moon was eerie, and the Bone Palace was somber.

The former dynasty's army set up a formation around the Bone Palace, relying on their surging murderous intent to resist the chaos and evil brought on by the blood moon.

After sending off Chu Liang and the others, the elderly chancellor quietly sat cross-legged at the entrance of the Bone Palace, seemingly in wait for something.

A long while passed, and a figure descended from the distant sky.

It was a woman dressed in a brightly colored silk dress. She had a slender figure, smooth and fair skin, and a pair of seductive fox eyes. However, those eyes were not flirtatious in the slightest. She had a deeply imposing and wise gaze; she had the eyes of someone who had seen the vicissitudes of life. Those who met her face to face usually avoided her gaze, not daring to harbor a single impure thought about her.

She walked lithely toward the Bone Palace.

The soldiers of the former dynasty turned their halberds toward her, intending to stop her. Yet, the moment they gazed at her, they collapsed to the ground.

The sound of the soldiers hitting the ground rang out continuously, and by the time she arrived in front of the palace, a large number of the former dynasty's soldiers were already lying in a huge pile behind her.

She hadn't glanced back even once.

"I respected your loyalty, so I believed your words, but you deceived me," Caiyi stated calmly, looking at the elderly chancellor.

The elderly chancellor fearlessly met Caiyi's gaze with a smile. "I am loyal to my fallen kingdom and to the human race, yet you expect me to assist the demon race? That is wishful thinking."

"But by doing this, you have completely destroyed any hope of restoring your kingdom."

"If our descendants are going to have to kneel as slaves under the rule of the demon race, then that means the Land of the Divine will no longer exist. What is the point of restoring our kingdom then?" The elderly chancellor shook his head. "How could you beasts in human form ever understand?"

Caiyi fell silent for a moment before speaking. "I do admire the... integrity of you humans. Your will power is intangible, yet it is the key distinction between humans and the other demonic clans. The reason humans have long ruled over the nine provinces is because there are so many like you."

She paused and then said, "I will give you one last chance. If you are willing to serve me, I promise that I will allow you to establish a kingdom. Even if the demon race returns to the nine provinces, you will have an independent territory."

"You must know the situation you're in. Once the Nightmare Demon King awakens and this dream world shatters, you will immediately revert to being irrational and uncivilized lingering spirits... And if the people of the Yu Dynasty rush over here, they will annihilate you. In other words, I'm the only one who can save you now."

"It seems you still don't understand," the elderly chancellor replied.

He shook his head again and then closed his eyes.

The expression on his face conveyed a single message: Do what you will.

Caiyi sighed and stopped trying to persuade him.

She just leaped. Ripples instantly appeared in the air, and she disappeared into them.

The barriers between the dream realms were impenetrable for Chu Liang and the others, so they needed to find the connecting portals to get to the next dream realm. However, Caiyi was a greater demon at a cultivation level that might even be on par with the creator of this dream world, the Dream Immortal. So, she was able to enter and exit the dream realms effortlessly.

As for these remnants of the former dynasty, she was unwilling to kill them herself, nor did she need to do so.

As she had said earlier, if she succeeded in awakening the Nightmare Demon King, the dream world would shatter, and these people would become lonely wandering ghosts again. Even if she failed, it would undoubtedly attract the attention of the Yu Dynasty, and these remnants of the former dynasty would face the most brutal purge.

Yet, even under such circumstances, the elderly chancellor refused to serve her. This was indeed outside her expectations.

Humans were always like this.

Caiyi hadn't been a part of the Demon God War, but she knew of what had happened back then. Despite facing a god-like ninth-realm being, the humans had resisted relentlessly and ultimately achieved the miracle of slaying a god.

Caiyi believed this was the power of civilization, so that's why she had been studying human culture in the Far West. Nonetheless, how long would it take for the demon race to become like the humans?

She did not know.

...

"Qingyuan..."

"Lianhua..."

In the main hall, Gu Qingyuan and Ji Lianhua sobbed as they embraced each other. Their reunion after thirty years was deeply moving.

"Lianhua, you're finally here," Gu Qingyuan said, holding Ji Lianhua's hand. "It must have been a difficult journey."

"It's my fault for coming so late." Ji Lianhua shook her head vigorously, looking at her beloved with pity. "You poor thing. You've been living all alone in the desolate mountains, waiting for me for a long thirty years..."

Watching their heartfelt reunion, the others found it hard to interrupt the couple.

After the initial burst of emotions, Gu Qingyuan glanced back at the group.

"Lianhua, time is running out," he said seriously. "All of you must escape from here and gather reinforcements."

"Right!" Ji Lianhua responded. "Let's leave together!"

"I..." Gu Qingyuan uttered, suddenly hesitant. "I can't leave..."

Ji Lianhua narrowed her eyes. "What are you saying?"

Hearing Gu Qingyuan's words, the group turned to him with serious expressions.

"You must have noticed. Right now, I am merely a primordial spirit..." Gu Qingyuan explained. "My corporeal body is beneath this hall, suppressing the Nightmare Demon King."

"Huh?"

Ji Lianhua had indeed sensed that something was off, but she hadn't had the chance to ask earlier. Nevertheless, as a seventh-realm Eminent One, Gu Qingyuan's primordial spirit appeared complete and showed no obvious anomalies, so the others hadn't noticed anything either.

"Years ago, I obtained an ancient map and ventured into the Southern Bastion Mountain in the Southern Regions to search for the hidden treasures of the Great Noble Dream Immortal. I was hoping to find something that could give me the opportunity to break through to the Heavenly Gate[1]. However, once I entered this hidden realm, I realized something was wrong.

"I was not the first to arrive here. The Nightmare Demon King and the young emperor of the former dynasty had come in before me, and they were already in a dream state, adding to the levels of this

dream world. The dream I entered was that of the young emperor. But at the time, the true self of the Nightmare Demon King was on the verge of awakening."

Hearing that, everyone immediately understood what Caiyi had come searching for.

In some dreams, the dreamer viewed everything from a third-person perspective and did not get involved in anything. In other dreams, there was a true self in the dream that experienced everything firsthand. If this true self encountered a strong enough shock, it might wake up from the dream.

For beings at the level of the Great Noble Dream Immortal and the Nightmare Demon King, leaving their true self in the dream was a matter of choice. It was evident that the Nightmare Demon King had deliberately left its true self in the dream to prepare for its eventual awakening.

After three thousand years, the consciousness of the Nightmare King's true self had gradually developed, and it was now preparing to awaken.

Fortunately, around that time, a group of intruders also entered its dream. It was the army that the former dynasty's chancellor led.

The Nightmare Demon King's true self was not as powerful as its corporeal form. In the dream, its cultivation level was only at the seventh realm, so the two parties were evenly matched.

Gu Qingyuan continued, "At that time, I chanced upon the chancellor fighting against the Nightmare Demon King's true self. I stepped in to help, and in a moment of desperation, I restrained its true self with my bare hands. The chancellor then sealed both my consciousness and that of the Nightmare Demon King in ice, temporarily preventing the demon from awakening.

"With the chancellor's help, my primordial spirit left my corporeal body and has continued to exist here. I also found the cultivation legacy of the Great Noble Dream Immortal—the Dream Techniques."

He smiled bitterly.

Sighing, he told Ji Lianhua, "How ironic. My lifelong wish was nothing more than to reach the seventh realm, impress your family, and then ask for your hand in marriage. But after breaking through to the seventh realm, I still couldn't go find you. I endured an agonizing wait here for so many years until I finally found someone who could help me send a message."

Chu Liang felt rather ashamed. If he had realized earlier that Second Madam Gu was Ji Lianhua, perhaps they could have arrived sooner and been one step ahead of the female demon king.

However, after hearing the whole story, Chu Liang understood why the elderly chancellor of the previous dynasty refused to even consider helping Caiyi awaken the Nightmare Demon King.

It turned out that the elderly chancellor had sealed the Nightmare Demon King's true self with his own hands. Even if he were to help awaken the Nightmare Demon King now, it would not end well for him. So, rather than betray the human race again, he chose to stand firm in his integrity.

Of course, this was just a dark conjecture. Regardless, the elderly chancellor was worthy of respect.

Gu Qingyuan urged, "The most important thing right now is for all of you to leave here. This matter is of great importance. As long as you can find a Master of the Heavenly Origin to take action, the crisis will be resolved."

"Yes, you must leave quickly," Ji Lianhua chimed in. Then she turned to Gu Qingyuan. "But I won't go. I'll stay here with you."

"Lianhua..." Gu Qingyuan uttered, still thinking of trying to persuade her.

Hearing that, Chu Liang smelled trouble. Were they going to drag things out?

Fortunately, Yan Qihu flung out his sleeves and pointed out, "It's not about whether you want to leave; it's about whether we can! Let's first see if we can even break through that barrier! If we can't, we're all dead!"

His loud, gruff voice shattered the dismal atmosphere between the two, pulling everyone back to reality.

The group stopped wasting time and flew to the edge of the Deep Pool of Dreams.

There was a thick cocoon-like barrier overhead. It seemed like countless strands of white thread had been densely wrapped around the hidden realm, blocking off the view of the outside world from every possible nook and cranny. The Deep Pool of Dreams was completely enclosed.

This white cocoon not only blocked corporeal bodies but also all spiritual energy from passing through. No divine abilities or techniques could move through it, including Dimension Compression.

"Mister Wei and I studied it for a long time," Gu Qingyuan replied. "But even with our combined strengths, we still couldn't break open the cocoon."

Long before the group arrived at the hall, Gu Qingyuan and Wei Lang had already tried multiple times to break through the cocoon and send a message out. However, while Confucian divine skills might be profound, they lacked the power to break through such obstacles.

If a seventh-realm cultivator wanted to break open this cocoon, they would probably need a sword cultivator like Daoist Yan.

"Let me try," Yan Qihu said resolutely.

Channeling his qi and blood, he gathered all his strength and threw a fierce punch at the barrier!

Boooooom.

Unexpectedly, the white cocoon, woven from an unknown material, was incredibly sticky and tough. Yan Qihu's punch was strong enough to shatter a mountain, yet it only made the barrier bounce a little.

Then countless strands of white thread shot out, trying to bind Yan Qihu to the cocoon-like barrier!

Fortunately, he was agile and swiftly moved out of the way. The threads extended more than ten zhang into the air, hovered for a moment, and then retracted back into the cocoon.

Yan Qihu's punch didn't just fail to damage the cocoon; it had the side effect of inadvertently alarming the enemy. The loud boom had echoed across the mountain peak, ringing out several times.

Soon after, an ethereal laugh drifted over from afar.

"Trying to leave, are you?" It was a soft female voice. "Just tell me where the Nightmare Demon King is, and I'll let you go..."

Chapter 462: Escape

Caiyi.

This was not the first time Chu Liang had heard the name of this demoness; he knew her to be both mysterious and powerful. Yet, seeing her in person made it hard to think of her as a monster.

Dressed in vibrant robes that fluttered in the wind, she descended gracefully from the distant sky. Her eyes seemed to pierce through time, appearing indifferent and devoid of emotion.

If she had concealed her demonic qi, she would seem just like a human. Unlike the demonic entities Chu Liang had encountered before, there was something uniquely distinct about her, though he found it hard to pinpoint exactly what that was.

Among those present, Yan Qihu, Wei Lang, and Gu Qingyuan were all Eminent Ones at the seventh realm. Second Madam Gu was at the pinnacle of the sixth realm, and she possessed the Xuan Yuan Eyes. As for the three juniors, Chu Liang, Ji Lingyu, and Tang Shi, they were top talents from their respective immortal sects and noble families.

Together, they formed a powerful group that could stand against any sect below the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten. Yet, as they faced this woman, all of them felt this overwhelming sense of powerlessness.

Though she wasn't trying to display her aura, her mere presence radiated an unmistakable essence of the Great Dao. It brought a sense of weight to the air, making everyone aware of her power. They all felt they were in the presence of someone who had reached the Heavenly Origin.

For a demon, reaching the eighth realm was much more difficult than for a human, once again proving just how extraordinary she was.

Whoosh—

A gentle breeze stirred as Caiyi landed gracefully before the group.

Wei Lang stepped forward, breaking the silence. "There are only a few eighth-realm demons in the world, so I guess you must have come from the Far West?"

"I am the King of Qingqiu," she replied calmly. "My name is Caiyi."

"So, the Demon King of Qingqiu..." Wei Lang nodded slightly.

In recent years, humans had known little about the Far West and were unclear on the succession of demon kings.

After a brief pause, he continued, "While the King of Qingqiu is indeed powerful, committing murder in human territory could reignite the war between our races. I urge you to consider this carefully."

His words carried weight. The reason humans did not wage war on the Far West was not just because it was difficult, but also because it served little purpose. Even if they invested heavily to eradicate the demon race, they would gain nothing of value. The remnants would simply flee, and they would never be able to completely wipe out the monsters in this world.

The human race was not united in this matter either, allowing the demons of the Far West to continue existing in their secluded corner.

However, if the demon race ventured into the heart of the nine provinces and caused trouble, it could ignite public anger and provoke a campaign against them, leading to heavy losses.

In the presence of an eighth-realm expert, they could only attempt to exert pressure this way.

Caiyi simply smiled and said, "I don't wish to kill anyone. I'm here to awaken the Nightmare Demon King. If you assist me, I'll spare you and even reward you. But if you choose to stand in my way... who would know if I was the one who made you all disappear?"

The pressure from an eighth-realm being was tangible, weighing heavily on everyone. No one wanted to risk their lives, and the atmosphere grew thick with silence.

Despite the overwhelming pressure, Yan Qihu was the first to leap forward. "Demoness! I don't know what you're planning, but if you want to kill me, go ahead and try!"

With that, he leaped into the air, his qi and blood surging to a terrifying level!

It appeared he had unleashed a blood-burning divine ability.

But Caiyi simply waved her hand, and a burst of colorful light surrounded Yan Qihu. Within that glow, he shouted and swung his fists and feet like thunder, as if engaged in an imaginary battle with the air.

It was an illusory technique.

Being the Demon King of Qingqiu, she was clearly a member of the Fox Clan, known for their exceptional skills in illusory techniques.[1]

Even though Yan Qihu had taken Chu Liang's Illusion Dispelling Pill and possessed the cultivation power of the seventh realm, he easily fell for the illusion. It appeared that the pill was ineffective against higher-level illusory techniques.

Wei Lang raised the Soul-Pacifying Scroll, casting a beam of light toward Yan Qihu in an attempt to help him.

However, as light flickered in Caiyi's eyes, a gigantic apparition of a nine-tailed celestial fox materialized behind her.

"RAAAAAR!"

With a powerful roar, the nine tails swayed, and the Soul-Pacifying Scroll shattered with a thunderous crash!

Boom—

This was a renowned enchanted tool from the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures, and yet it had been destroyed in an instant!

Wei Lang felt the backlash, groaning as he stumbled back several steps, blood oozing from his seven orifices.

Her power was so overwhelming that even the two seventh-realm experts couldn't withstand a single round against her.

"I don't want to waste any more time," Caiyi declared, casting a cold glance over the gathered crowd. "Three breaths. That's how long you have to reveal the Nightmare Demon King's whereabouts. If no one reveals the Nightmare Demon King's location, I'll kill the men first, then the women. If I still hear nothing, I'll destroy the entire dream realm. The ending won't change.."

She could certainly destroy the Nightmare Demon King's entire dream realm, but awakening the Nightmare Demon King in this manner would cause a great disturbance and surely attract the attention of an eighth-realm human expert.

This was something she wished to avoid.

As her words faded into silence, Chu Liang suddenly sprang up and shouted, "Caiyi... do you remember Yan Renjie?!"

...

"Hmm?" Caiyi's eyes suddenly sharpened.

As soon as her gaze fixed on him, Chu Liang felt his blood run cold, almost freezing his voice in his throat.

But he pushed through, clenching his teeth as he said, "I am a disciple of Mount Shu. I came across Yan Renjie's diary; it detailed everything about him and a woman named Caiyi... that was you, wasn't it?"

The truth was, the diary merely mentioned Caiyi once, and the remaining pages had been torn away.

Yet at this moment, Chu Liang had no choice but to take the risk and step forward.

His tactic seemed to have an effect, as Caiyi went quiet for a second before shaking her head and saying, "I don't know what you're talking about. Since you were so quick to jump out, I'll start with you."

With that, she raised her hand, reaching out toward Chu Liang.

In that instant, Chu Liang felt death closer than ever. A burst of radiant light plummeted from the heavens, just about to crash down upon him...

This moment of life or death was utterly horrifying.

Chu Liang suddenly shouted, "It's done!"

With a crisp crack, he vanished in an instant!

Shattering the Void!

The jade talisman given to him by Venerable Wen Yuan, which Chu Liang had carefully kept for so long, finally came into use. In a blinding flash, he disappeared and reappeared a thousand li away.

Caiyi remained where she stood, a subtle furrow appearing between her brows.

Her restriction was powerful enough to block all spiritual energy; not even a talisman created by an eighth-realm expert should have been able to activate.

In the following second, she spotted a dark, fist-sized gap where Chu Liang had vanished. The gap didn't need to be massive; just a tiny crack could allow spiritual energy to slip through.

He had successfully opened a gap!

Had he jumped out earlier just to divert her attention and buy time to break the restriction? But how had he managed to do it?

At the exact moment Chu Liang shouted, Wei Lang pulled out an old yellow paper that was blank at first. As his mind focused, words rapidly appeared on the paper as the paper started burning brightly before vanishing in an instant.

Now that the restriction had been lifted, he could finally get a message through to the Noblemen's Hall.

Caiyi's expression turned grim. She had thought success was within her reach, yet in an instant, the tables had turned. With the message already sent, powerful humans would arrive soon, making it impossible for her to secretly take the Nightmare Demon King out of here.

She swiftly turned around, and the nine-tailed celestial fox apparition on her back started becoming bigger and bigger, transforming into a towering monster that reached into the heavens.

Then, she unleashed a roaring cry.

"Aooo—"

Rumble—

The atmosphere around heaven and earth shifted, as the wind and clouds suddenly changed!

The peaceful dream realm at the uppermost level disintegrated instantly, turning everything into pure nothingness. Not only that, but the dream realm below started to fracture as well; the blood moon shattered, and the Nightmare Specters ceased to exist.

At the Bone Palace, as everything crumbled into nothingness, the soldiers of the former dynasty underwent a rapid transformation. Their formation, once brimming with a murderous aura reaching the heavens, turned into hideous, lingering spirits and malevolent ghosts.

The old chancellor knelt before the jade coffin, bowing his head in deep reverence. With a loud voice, he declared, "Your Majesty, the kingdom has fallen beyond repair. I fear we would never be able to restore it. I wish Your Majesty well on the journey ahead. My support, as your old minister, ends here."

With that, he pushed the jade coffin with one palm, and it disappeared in a flash.

Immediately, the collapse of the realm reached this spot, and the old chancellor reverted to the pitiful state of his death—his body smeared with blood, his face distorted in agony.

He transformed back to a lonely wandering ghost.

At the same time, the ground quaked within the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal.

All the citizens were startled from their peaceful state, eyes widening in terror as they turned toward the Demon Mountain...

"The Demon Mountain... it's alive!"

Chapter 463: Arrival of the Master of the Heavenly Origin

"This great dream has lasted for three thousand years..."

"The tides of time turn oceans into fields..."

The violent quake tore through the land, shattering mountains and rivers, causing the heavens and earth to collapse. The once-tranquil Kingdom of the Dream Immortal could not escape the calamity. People scattered in terror, like startled birds and beasts, rushing toward the Holy Mountain, the only place that might offer refuge in this catastrophe.

Amidst the violent shaking, the demon mountain erupted in the distance, unleashing a dense black mist that engulfed half of the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal in the blink of an eye.

Within the dense mist, a crimson shadow appeared to be taking shape.

In that ancient era three thousand years ago, none had ever seen the Nightmare Demon King's true form. Some legends claimed that its divine power spawned every Nightmare Demon, making the entire clan its mere puppets. Others believed that the true form of the Nightmare Demon King existed in the illusory realm with just a projection appearing in the real world.

During the past three thousand years, it had lived as a parasite in the dream world. The Kingdom of the Dream Immortal had sent countless warriors to search for the source of the Nightmare Beasts, yet they never located the Nightmare Demon King within that Demon Mountain.

It seemed to exist without any true form or substance.

Whoosh—

Suddenly, a blood-red glow lit up within the crimson silhouette! Was it the blood moon? No... it was the eye of the Nightmare Demon King!

This demon had at last awakened, and the blood moon that had tormented this world for a few thousand years turned out to be its eye!

In the collapsed dream realm at the highest level, a large block of ice was discovered under the debris of the palace.

Inside the block of ice, Gu Qingyuan's silhouette was faintly visible, his hands pushing down with all his might. His palms were pressing on yet another blood moon.

As the blood moon in the dream realm at the second highest level glowed, the blood moon here also emitted a brilliant glow. The seal could no longer hold back its radiance!

Boom—

As the black mist surged forth, two blood moons shone with brilliant intensity. The three dream realms shattered and fused together instantly. A giant figure rose from the dark mist, stretching high into the sky!

The nine-tailed celestial fox looked up at the massive silhouette and cried out, "Awaken!"

Whoosh, whoosh—

Two rays of light shot straight into the sky, tearing through the clouds and disturbing the serenity of the Heavenly Palace!

The murderous aura, built up over three thousand years, surged forth like a sharp blade, lighting up the world. Almost every eighth-realm Eminent One across the nine provinces sensed this ferocious energy.

As the shattering came to an end, all that remained above the swirling sea of clouds of the Deep Pool of Dreams was a dense mass of black mist. The crimson silhouette within the mist and the two blood moon arcs began to merge, forming a giant and terrifying shadow.

Even the nine-tailed celestial fox seemed somewhat small in comparison. While the fox existed in one dream realm, the black mist came into existence through the fusion of the three dream realms.

Gu Qingyuan's body was far too close to the blood moon, causing it to disintegrate in an instant.

Even though he was an Eminent One at the seventh realm, there was no chance he could resist this.

As his body disintegrated, his primordial spirit quickly weakened. Ji Lianhua held his hand tightly, seemingly unwilling to ever part from her beloved one in the midst of this disaster..

It had been thirty years since they last saw each other, but nothing could separate them anymore.

The others stood in disbelief as they watched the chaos unfold. It happened in the blink of an eye, leaving them no opportunity to flee. All they could do was observe, their hearts heavy with shock. How many times in one's life does one get to witness such a rare natural phenomenon?

In the midst of the chaos, Yan Qihu stood oblivious to everything happening around him.

Enveloped in the glow that Caiyi had cast upon him, he tirelessly swung his fists and feet. It was uncertain what visions the illusion presented to him, but he fought with great passion.

He was the only one present who did not fear the awakening of the Nightmare Demon King.

...

The message that Wei Lang sent earlier now seemed rather pointless.

However, the earlier message gave them a bit of a head start. At least the first to arrive was an Eminent One from the Confucian school.

"What demon are you—" A powerful voice echoed, and golden light filled the sky. A figure, much like a distant projection, gradually appeared.

Even though the Noblemen's Hall did not have an actual eighth-realm expert, it ranked all the renowned Confucian masters of the world. Clearly, they kept close connections. The first to arrive at this moment was Shentu Yang, Vice Headmaster of Ascending Dragon Academy.

Within Ascending Dragon Academy, there was a well-known saying: the Headmaster was the most knowledgeable, while the Vice Headmaster was the most capable in combat.

As a distinguished Confucian master, Shentu Yang was renowned for his deeds, all of which had something to do with fighting. For instance, when he was young, he engaged in a debate and ended up beating up his opponent in a fit of anger; in his middle age, he engaged in a debate and ended up beating up his opponent in a fit of anger; in his old age, he engaged in a debate and ended up beating up his opponent in a fit of anger...[1] In his life of debates, he had never been defeated.

The figure that traversed the void had long black hair, a tall hat, and a wide belt, exuding a sense of righteousness and awe.

Facing two demon kings radiating monstrous auras, this Vice Headmaster showed no fear. He immediately attacked with a move to suppress the mountains.

With a swift turn of his hand, he pulled up two peaks surrounding the Southern Bastion Mountain and sent them crashing down toward the Fox Demon King and the Nightmare Demon King!

Clearly, the Great Dao that Shentu Yang mastered in the eighth realm had nothing to do with Confucianism. He was the Dao Master of Houtu[2] in the Great Dao of Earth.

With just a wave of his hand, he could uproot mountains and lift peaks!

While a typical mountain peak might not intimidate an eighth-realm demon, Shentu Yang's attack was exceptional. If they were trapped under the peak, it would take them at least five hundred years to break free.

Having just awakened, the Nightmare Demon King had not yet achieved its full power. Nevertheless, Caiyi was not an easy opponent.

The nine-tailed celestial fox's apparition waved its tails through the air, gathering the surrounding black mist. In an instant, it shattered into countless streams of light, bursting forth like fireworks in every direction.

She was trying to get away!

As she escaped, the two mountain peaks narrowly missed their target.

Even Shentu Yang found it challenging to identify the true Fox Demon King among the streams of light. He raised his hand, summoning sharp rocks that shot into the air like rain, attempting to block all the escaping streams of light.

Ultimately, he couldn't keep up with their speed.

Just as everyone expected the two demon kings to escape without consequence, a sword aura exuding suffocating power suddenly descended from the distant sky.

Boom—

A massive sword light, imbued with the overwhelming weight of heaven and earth, plummeted from above!

It struck right at the very end of one of the seemingly insignificant streams of light.

Sizzle—

In an instant, blood splattered, and a white fox tail fell from the heavens, crashing heavily on the fractured ground.

"Imperial Supervisory Commissioner!" Caiyi shouted from afar, her voice resonating in the sky. "I will never forget what you did to my tail!"

"This old man will be here waiting," an old-sounding voice drifted through the air as the swordlight slowly vanished.

Throughout the nine provinces, aside from the eighth-realm Confucian master who got the message from Wei Lang, the next to arrive was the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner of the Yu Dynasty. After all, his cultivation and responsibility far exceeded those of others.

The source of the sword light witnessed earlier obviously came from the Great Dao under the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner's control. It was the Tai'a Great Dao!

While a thousand li apart, he was able to cut off a portion of the nine-tailed celestial fox's tail.

If an eighth-realm Eminent One intended to escape, they would be nearly impossible to capture, even with a legendary artifact. The fact that they could cause such injury was already an impressive achievement, especially considering how hastily they arrived.

Suddenly, Imperial Supervisory Commissioner Qi Yingxuan appeared in midair. He nodded toward Shentu Yang ahead, saying, "I didn't expect the Vice Headmaster to arrive before me."

"Hmph," Shentu Yang retorted coldly. "I only regret not being able to capture these two demons."

He didn't even bother looking at the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner.

Within the capital of Yu, there had long been open and hidden rivalries between the main factions that were closely connected to the imperial court. These factions were the Ascending Dragon Academy, Monastery Tower, and the Imperial Supervisory Bureau.

After all, in any gathering of people, power struggles were inevitable, especially in the center of the nine provinces.

In recent times, the rise of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau's power led the Ascending Dragon Academy and Monastery Tower to ally against it, which resulted in strained relations between the groups.

While others may have upheld a façade of harmony, Shentu Yang did not care at all.

This Vice Headmaster had devoted his entire life to study and never felt the need to engage in social pleasantries.

...

While the great battle in the dream realm came to an abrupt and anticlimactic stop, Chu Liang found himself in an unknown location.

Venerable Wen Yuan could easily have programmed the talisman with the immortal art of Shattering the Void to transport him to Mount Shu. However, this would allow others to discern the teleportation patterns, which could work against weaker foes but would be pointless against an eighth-realm enemy like Caiyi.

If the teleportation patterns were predictable, the enemy could swiftly intercept and locate them. Therefore, a randomly teleporting jade talisman was the safest option.

As soon as he landed, Chu Liang didn't take the time to observe his surroundings. His gaze was immediately drawn to his palm, where a tiny golden butterfly nestled snugly.

Chapter 464: What a Mess

This little creature had saved him from danger countless times.

A vague sense of dread had always lingered in his heart, warning him not to let it eat too many items that contained a lot of spiritual energy. Yet, no matter what, this little foodie remained his most dependable trump card in times of trouble.

Just moments before his escape, Chu Liang had snatched up the little golden butterfly that had gnawed its way through the barrier, ensuring it wouldn't be left behind in Southern Bastion Mountain. But in the span of a heartbeat, when he took it out again, the tiny creature was already wrapped in a golden cocoon.

It had become a golden cocoon, roughly the size of a fist.

This wasn't the first time it had wrapped itself in a cocoon. Every time it emerged from a cocoon, it transformed into something new. What might it become next?

As Jiang Yuebai previously mentioned, the Heaven-Devouring Bug's power increased with every transformation, with each transformation equating to an increase of one realm. By the seventh realm, it would be exceptionally hard to control, and at the ninth realm, it would be like the legendary Demon God.

It started out as a little maggot, evolving into a silkworm and then into a radiant golden butterfly... Should it undergo another change, it would likely reach the fourth realm of the Heaven-Devouring Bug.

The most terrifying trait of this creature was that it could devour endlessly, advancing without understanding the Great Dao. All it had to do was eat.

While the amount of spiritual energy needed to advance to the next realm would increase, it would eventually reach that realm through slow, steady consumption.

It was still quite dangerous.

However, this little creature had saved him countless times and had never displayed any signs of defiance. Chu Liang couldn't bear to kill it just like that. Had it not been there, he would have met his doom on numerous occasions.

After much contemplation, he decided to wait and see.

He would wait until the little golden butterfly completed its transformation, observe what it became, and then determine its fate. For now, with the White Pagoda in his possession, he could still keep it under control.

Having placed the golden cocoon inside the White Pagoda, he finally looked up to look around, ready to make his way back to Mount Shu.

He seemed to be deep within a dense forest, tucked away in a valley and nestled against the mountainside. The Southern Regions were rugged and mountainous, with terrain like this all around, making it hard to pinpoint his exact location.

Just as he was about to step out, he heard the cheerful sound of laughter coming from outside, as if men and women were frolicking nearby.

With a swift extension of his divine sense, Chu Liang investigated, but what he found made him hesitant to step outside.

...

It turned out that a man and a woman were locked in an embrace outside. The man wore a snug purple outfit and looked to be middle-aged, while the woman, slightly younger, had a seductive figure and fair skin. They had engaged in playful banter all the way here, which resulted in their clothing being disheveled.

He decided to keep himself hidden for now, planning to wait until they were gone before stepping out.

While they were cultivators, their auras indicated they had only reached the third realm. Additionally, it was clear they had practiced various cultivation methods. Compared to Chu Liang's current strength, they were much weaker, which meant they naturally wouldn't be able to detect him.

To his surprise, the two suddenly stopped moving forward. Chu Liang could hear their breaths growing heavier.

"You're so naughty," the woman said coquettishly. "Out here in the wilderness, what do you intend to do?"

"With the sky as our blanket and the earth as our bed, wouldn't we be enjoying the same pleasures that the ancients did, embracing nature?" the man laughed heartily.

I really don't recommend doing that... Chu Liang silently frowned.

Great... Even after being teleported to a random location, I've stumbled upon this thrilling scene. Unbelievable.

"Don't mess around; I'm already pregnant," the woman said softly.

"Huh?" The man looked taken aback.

"Relax, it's not yours," she replied with a snort.

"Well..." His surprise quickly turned into laughter. "I was just shocked! If it were mine, I'd be thrilled! After all, the child would be the future leader of our Red River Sect."

"Haaa, don't even mention it," the woman sighed as she replied, a hint of resentment in her voice. "This child has really put me in a difficult situation."

"How so?" the man asked gently.

"Old Zhao did the math and realized the timing doesn't add up. He seems to suspect I had an affair with Elder Chen, and he's been questioning him for days," the woman said, feeling wronged. "But the child is clearly Elder Bai's!"

Chu Liang: "?"

After listening to just a few sentences, he could hardly wrap his head around what he was hearing.

As for the Red River Sect, he did have some impression of it.

This small sect was not well-known and had connections to both righteous and the diabolical sects.

Various sects that were neither strictly righteous nor evil, such as the Red River Sect, were scattered across the Southern Regions, and the reason why Chu Liang knew of this particular one was because this sect guarded an area known as the Myriad Poison Mountain.

The mountain was home to numerous poisonous creatures, making it a place ordinary people dared not venture near. More than a dozen sects of various sizes surrounded it, carefully monitoring for any potential escape of these dangerous, venomous creatures beyond the mountain's edge.

To reward their efforts in protecting the Myriad Poison Mountain, the Imperial Supervisory Bureau provided these sects with resources and subsidies. In addition, the sects made substantial profits by capturing and selling poisonous creatures.

The most famous of these sects was the Valley of the Three Absolutes.

It was only because of his connection to Luo Yao that Chu Liang became somewhat familiar with the sects near the Myriad Poison Mountain.

"I really envy how lucky Old Bai is," the man said with a chuckle.

"Quit the sarcasm," the woman chided. "Would you actually wish for this kind of 'luck'?"

"Heh," the man laughed awkwardly.

Before he could say anything else, a loud roar echoed from the distance. "You shameless woman! You actually have other men besides me and the sect leader?!"

This time, the voice sounded old and weathered.

Chu Liang had no intention of spying, but his curiosity got the better of him, so he extended his divine sense to take a peek.

He saw an elderly man with white hair and a long beard in a flowing robe, chasing after them and hurling insults like "adulterous couple" and "shamelessness."

"Elder Bai!" The man from before was startled and quickly protested, "It's not what you think..."

"I saw it with my own eyes, so what else could it be?" Elder Bai retorted angrily. "You dare say that this is not adultery?"

"No... wait?" The man was about to argue but suddenly paused. "Aren't you in the same situation as me? Why are you scolding me?"

He was panicking, but as he thought it through, everything clicked.

Even if we're both having an affair... How does it make sense for you, an adulterer, to accuse another adulterer? Does being involved with the same woman automatically turn us into enemies?

"Uh..." Elder Bai was taken aback.

He felt his chest swell with anger but struggled to find the words to argue back.

After a pause, he shouted, "You two have conspired in adultery! I'll take it upon myself to clean up the sect for the sect leader!"

Excellent. Finally, the old man realized he shouldn't confess to being involved, Chu Liang remarked inwardly.

In the next moment, the sharp clashing of metal echoed as both sides drew their weapons.

However, since their cultivation levels were both at the third realm, the fight was far from spectacular. Elder Bai was slightly stronger, pushing the man in purple back after just a few exchanges.

The woman felt she could no longer stand idly by and watch, so she joined the fight. With two against one, Elder Bai soon found himself on the losing end.

With a loud shout, he hurled something, gritting his teeth as he yelled, "Die!"

"Ah!" the man in purple cried, "A Scarlet Demon Spider! You dared to bring poisonous creatures out of the Demon Spider Forest! The sect leader will not forgive you if he finds out!"

"I'll kill you both today and claim my reward. Why would the sect leader blame me?" Elder Bai retorted.

"Old Bai! The child I'm carrying is yours!" the woman cried out, her voice filled with despair.

"What?" Elder Bai's voice trembled, and the flow of his foundational qi halted abruptly.

But almost immediately, he cried out in pain, "Ah! You wicked woman, you dared to attack me with the Five Poison Sword! You..."

"The child is yours, yes, but you just tried to kill me. Do you expect me to show you mercy?" the woman replied coldly.

"Even if I die, I'll take you both down with me!" Elder Bai roared furiously.

"Run!" the man in purple's voice echoed from several hundred zhang away. "He took a Fiery Heart Pill! He plans to drag us down with him before he dies!"

"Trying to escape?!"

A whooshing sound followed, and the group seemed to chase one another, vanishing from sight in an instant.

...

After waiting for a while and confirming that they wouldn't return, Chu Liang finally stepped out.

It wasn't that he was afraid of these third-realm cultivators; it was mainly too awkward. If he ran into them, what would he even say? May this family of yours soon be blessed with a noble child. Harmony brings wealth?

In just a few moments, it felt like he had watched a drama unfold over dozens of episodes.

All the words that could describe what he had just seen could be summed up in a single sentence: What a mess!

Chu Liang stepped out and was about to leave when he suddenly sensed a faint demonic aura on the ground.

Looking around, he spotted palm-sized red spiders with black markings scuttling quickly through the fallen leaves. They appeared fierce and terrifying.

There were about four or five of them.

As they sensed the presence of a living person, they moved toward him. However, when they got closer and detected his powerful aura, they hesitated and stopped.

These were likely the "Scarlet Demon Spiders" the man had mentioned earlier. In their frantic chase and escape, they had left these creatures behind.

They really have no sense of responsibility, Chu Liang thought.

Although Chu Liang didn't know much about these creatures, he knew these were dangerous and venomous creatures from the Myriad Poison Mountain. And so, he decided to eliminate them to ensure the safety of others.

He didn't even reach for his sword; instead, he raised a finger and made a gentle pointing motion.

Puff!

A burst of Geng Metal Sword Qi shot out from his fingertip, instantly obliterating several of the Scarlet Demon Spiders.

Even if these Scarlet Demon Spiders had cultivated a bit, they were merely second-realm creatures. Their venom was their greatest threat, but they were no match for Chu Liang.

However, when their bodies burst open, black blood oozed into the soil, instantly turning a patch of earth black. The leaves in the vicinity immediately withered and corroded, leaving only hollow spots.

It was clear that their venom was highly potent.

Since no one else was around, Chu Liang casually refined their imprints. As his divine sense entered the White Pagoda, a red glow shimmered, and a slender strand of light emerged.

[Scarlet Venom Silk: Silk infused with Scarlet Demon Venom. Upon contact with human skin, they emit toxins that cause paralysis and loss of consciousness. The venom is so strong that it can't be blocked by clothing.]

Chapter 465: Lighting the Candle

By the time Chu Liang returned to Mount Shu, it was already evening.

The first thing he did upon returning to Mount Shu was to send a flying-crane message to the Noblemen's Hall and the Great Astral Sect to check on everyone's safety. Although he had opened a breach before leaving to allow Wei Lang to send a message out, he didn't know if the demon would fly into a rage and start a killing spree.

If an eighth-realm being was intent on killing, it would be extremely difficult for even another eighth-realm being to ensure everyone's safety.

He then made his way to the Hall of Weapons to see Wen Yulong.

"Senior Brother Chu."

"Junior Brother Wen."

They exchanged slight nods of greeting. They knew each other so well that they could often sense what the other was thinking. As soon as Chu Liang arrived, Wen Yulong knew there was new work to be done.

"Can you take a look at this enchanted tool for me?" Chu Liang asked as he pulled out the Demon-Binding Rope.

As one of the first enchanted tools he had acquired, the Demon-Binding Rope had always been Chu Liang's weapon of choice for capturing thieves and subduing demons. The tortoise-shell bondage method of the Demon-Binding Rope not only physically restrained the enemy but also crushed them psychologically.

It could be called an essential tool for home and travel.

Unfortunately, as his cultivation level increased, the effectiveness of the Demon-Binding Rope began to wane.

First, its release speed was no longer fast enough to catch enemies off guard. Second, even if it succeeded in restraining someone, those with higher cultivation levels could easily break free.

This was a challenge every cultivator had to face. The enchanted tools they had relied on could no longer keep pace with their increasing cultivation levels, forcing them to give up on the old ones and acquire new ones.

Typically, they would repair these tools and pass them down to the next generation of cultivators as a legacy item.

However, the Demon-Binding Rope was not the type of tool that seemed appropriate to pass on to the next generation.

When he acquired this Scarlet Venom Silk today, he suddenly had an idea. Perhaps he could enhance his old enchanted tool and make them effective enough to be used in future battles.

Wen Yulong just happened to be an expert in this field.

Any enchanted tool that has been in his hands would receive a significant "enhancement."

"I want to enhance this tool by incorporating this material. Is that possible?" Chu Liang placed the Demon-Binding Rope and the Scarlet Venom Silk on the table and added, "Just a reminder: it's poisonous."

"Let me take a look." Wen Yulong carefully examined the two items for a moment, then frowned and said, "Why didn't you come earlier?"

"Huh?" Chu Liang couldn't help but ask, "What's the matter?"

"My shift ends now," Wen Yulong replied with a grin.

Oh, so I'm holding you up from leaving after work. Chu Liang thought as he heaved a sigh of relief. He thought that there was something wrong with the Demon-Binding Rope.

After a moment, Wen Yulong looked up and said, "The inscriptions on this enchanted tool are quite intricate, and this silk contains a potent paralyzing poison. Combining the two would definitely make for a valuable enhancement. I already have a few ideas in mind."

"Just stick to your simplest idea," Chu Liang quickly suggested. The daring ideas Wen Yulong came up with were not something he could handle.

"Leave it to me. Don't worry," Wen Yulong said confidently.

One could say that all of his confidence had been restored thanks to Chu Liang.

Previously, he had faced failure in alchemy and lost the trust of those around him. Even his tool-making skills had come under heavy scrutiny, as his unconventional ideas were often misinterpreted. He thought he might have to change his career again during that time.

It was Chu Liang who made all his outrageous ideas come to life. Regardless of how outrageous they seemed, their implementation always met the desired outcome.

As Chu Liang's reputation soared, Wen Yulong, as his exclusive artificer, also began to gain recognition on Mount Shu.

The remarkable thing was that when those who wanted Wen Yulong to make a tool for them set aside their pride, showed Wen Yulong the respect he deserved, and followed his instructions, they often achieved outstanding results.

Now, Wen Yulong was highly sought after among the younger generation of attendants in the Hall of Weapons, with his value nearly matching that of some of the older artificers. Yet, requests for his tool-making services were few and far between, much like scattered snowflakes.

At this point, he didn't care about money and only chose the tasks that intrigued him the most.

All of this was made possible because Chu Liang had trusted him from the very beginning.

After thinking for a moment, Wen Yulong added, "But this amount is too little. It won't be enough for even one enhancement."

"How much do you need?" Chu Liang asked.

"The more, the better," Wen Yulong replied.

...

Upon returning to Silver Sword Peak, he received messages from Noblemen's Hall and the Great Astral Sect, informing him about the events that followed in the Deep Pool of Dreams.

Caiyi did not try to kill them again and everyone made it back safely. It was probably because she was too busy to take further action, having awakened the Nightmare Demon King at that crucial time.

The Vice Headmaster of Ascending Dragon Academy and the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau both arrived. If she had been any slower, she could have ended up trapped in the center of the land of the nine provinces.

Even so, she was still struck by the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner's Tai'a Sword, resulting in the loss of one of her tails.

For the nine-tailed celestial fox, tails were the most important parts of their body. Having one severed meant a serious loss of cultivation power, and the time needed for recovery was unknown.

The most severely injured was Gu Qingyuan. His physical body had been suppressing the core consciousness of the Nightmare Demon King, and when the king awakened, it turned his body to ashes.

However, he had inherited the Great Noble Dream Immortal's cultivation legacy, the Dream Techniques. That allowed his primordial spirit to remain intact and his life to be preserved.

At this point, Ji Lianhua had taken him back to Kaoshan City, and with the resources and techniques they had, making a new physical body for him wouldn't be challenging.

If Eminent Ones at the seventh realm had reached a level that allowed their primordial spirit to exist outside their body, they would be incredibly difficult to kill.

Even in the face of great danger, they could abandon their physical form and typically find a way to escape alive.

Ji Lingyu had initially planned to stay in Kaoshan City with her Thirteenth Aunt, Ji Lianhua, for a while. However, after seeing her aunt and uncle reunite after a long separation, she tactfully decided to return to the Great Astral Sect. Although Ji Lianhua wanted her to stay, Ji Lingyu was firm in her decision to leave, assuring her that she would visit again soon.

When Caiyi left, Yan Qihu's illusion was dispelled. When he opened his eyes, he thought that he had been the one to drive away the two greater demons.

If he had not spotted the Vice Headmaster and the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner, he likely would not have come to his senses so quickly.

As the dream realm shattered, Wei Lang's disciples were also freed from the influence of the blood moon.

Everyone was quite satisfied with this outcome.

Only those who originally resided in the depths of the Deep Pool of Dreams—the remnants of the former dynasty, the people of the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal—witnessed the collapse of their world.

It was unknown as to whether the Kingdom of the Dream Immortal still exists.

Deep down, Chu Liang wished that the tranquil paradise could exist forever. Even if it was merely a dream, it provided a glimpse of fantasy in the world.

After reading the two letters, Chu Liang finally felt at ease.

Right now, his plan was to go to the Myriad Poison Mountain and the Demon Spider Forest to hunt some venomous creatures for Wen Yulong to enhance the Demon-Binding Rope.

However, before that...

He had one more thing to do.

Chu Liang left Mount Shu overnight, setting off once again for the Southern Bastion Mountain. As he passed Bombax River, he took the opportunity to slay the wine-jar monster.

Once that was done, he continued his journey, feeling satisfied.

By the time he arrived at Southern Bastion Mountain, it was already late at night. Instead of heading toward the Deep Pool of Dreams, he flew in the opposite direction, flying close to the ground to avoid waking any large evil beings that might be hidden among the peaks.

At last, with dawn breaking on the horizon, he arrived at his destination. It was an incredibly serene deep pool. The water was like a flawless mirror, perfectly still, as if it had been crafted and set in place.

Splash.

Chu Liang unhesitatingly leaped into the water.

The bone-chilling coldness of the pool made even his strong physique shudder. This pool was anything but ordinary. As he circulated his foundational qi to warm himself, he dove straight to the bottom of the pool.

There, he discovered a dark cave hidden beneath the water, covered by aquatic plants, revealing almost no trace of its entrance. After searching meticulously for a while, he finally located the entrance among the foliage.

With both hands, he pushed aside the water plants and stepped inside.

To his surprise, the cave felt warm. As he ventured deeper, it gradually dried up, and by the time he reached the innermost part of the cave, there was no sign of water at all.

At the end of the cave, there lay a jade coffin.

It appeared almost transparent, glowing softly in the darkness. Inside, a small figure dressed in bright yellow could be seen faintly.

It was the jade coffin containing the young emperor of the previous dynasty!

It had somehow ended up here, a hundred li away from the Deep Pool of Dreams.

But Chu Liang was not surprised at all. Clearly, he had come all the way here for this jade coffin.

He quickly approached the jade coffin, ready to open it, when a sudden thought made him step back a few paces.

He then lit a candle in the southeast corner of the cave. Only after the flame flickered to life did he move forward once more.

As the saying went, humans light candles, while ghosts extinguish flames.[1]

Only after that did he open the coffin.

Chapter 466: Origin

Chu Liang's promise to the former dynasty's chancellor was to be fulfilled at this place.

The elderly chancellor had known that he would not be able to retain his consciousness and that he had no hope of restoring the former dynasty's kingdom. However, the young emperor had been asleep for hundreds of years. It was still possible for him to restore the kingdom, but even then, it would be far in the indefinite future.

Consequently, the elderly chancellor had Chu Liang promise to find a good place for the young emperor to settle down.

Initially, Chu Liang was concerned it would be a difficult task. The young emperor was a young child, so it would not be hard to arrange a place for him to stay, but the problem was that he had a special identity. If he were to stir up trouble in the future when he was older, Chu Liang could very easily be implicated.

The elderly chancellor assured Chu Liang that staying in a frozen state for such an extended period would cause the young emperor to lose all his memories from before his slumber. As long as his true identity was kept a secret, he would just be an ordinary six-year-old child.

It was only after that explanation that Chu Liang finally agreed to do it.

After all, only the two of them knew about this. As long as the young emperor didn't pursue any grand plan of restoring the former dynasty's kingdom in the future, there wouldn't be a problem with taking in an orphan.

Thus, Chu Liang and the elderly chancellor made a promise.

The elderly chancellor had informed Chu Liang of this location in that conversation. It turned out that after fleeing to the Southern Bastion Mountain and sealing the young emperor in ice, the elderly chancellor had prepared this as an escape route. He had planned to use it to safely send the young emperor out one day. And just before the dream world shattered, the elderly chancellor finally used this escape route.

Of course, there was some risk involved for Chu Liang as well.

After all, it could be seen as minor or major matter. If it's a minor matter, then he would just be taking in and caring for an orphan. If it's a major matter, he would be harboring a survivor of the former dynasty. However, the elderly chancellor had resolutely refused to assist the demons and cut off his own escape route in the process. That was indeed an admirable act.

With that in mind, Chu Liang felt that he should help the elderly chancellor this once.

Thus, he came to this place.

The jade coffin glowed softly as Chu Liang formed a seal with his hands, following the method the elderly chancellor had taught him. He slowly pressed his hands onto the coffin lid.

Swoosh.

In an instant, the light intensified, and the coffin lid slowly slid open, revealing the small figure inside.

Having been frozen for hundreds of years, the child's appearance had not changed at all. He was a little boy who looked like he had been delicately carved from jade. His small form was dressed in the loose dragon robe of an emperor, looking unnaturally mature.

His breathing was even, truly resembling someone who was simply asleep. It was just that his sleep had lasted a very long time.

Chu Liang didn't rush to wake the boy. Instead, he gently lifted the boy out of the coffin and changed him into some regular clothes.

Then Chu Liang tossed the boy's old clothes into the jade coffin and used a blaze of Divine Dragon Fire to burn them completely. The jade coffin was made of precious material, so it took quite a while to burn.

It was quite valuable, and Chu Liang's ached at having to incinerate it. Nevertheless, many people had seen the jade coffin. If he tried to sell it, it would inevitably leave risks of leading danger to them.

Perhaps he could keep it for personal use... but he was not even twenty years old yet, so there was no rush for that.

After erasing their traces from that location, Chu Liang carried the boy out of the deep pool and flew out of the Southern Bastion Mountain. He then arrived at a remote valley in the southern borderlands and tossed the young emperor onto the ground.

Chu Liang kicked him lightly twice. Seeing that the boy still wasn't waking up, Chu Liang used a bit more strength and smacked the boy twice.

Without the seal on the jade coffin, the boy finally awoke from his long slumber and slowly opened his eyes. His gaze was clear but filled with confusion.

"You're awake," Chu Liang quickly said.

"Hmm?" the little boy murmured, groggily raising his head.

It was impossible that anyone who had slept for as long as he had would wake with a clear mind.

"A demonic beast chased you, and you ended up falling off a cliff. I was the one who saved you."

"Huh?"

The boy stood up and looked around, finally starting to make sense of the situation.

Chu Liang asked, "Where do you live? I'll take you home."

"I..." the boy began. He thought hard, but his mind seemed blank. He muttered, "I only remember a mountain... with a large palace on it..."

Chu Liang knew where that was. It was the palace in the first level of the dream world in the Deep Pool of Dreams. The young emperor had been in that great dream for hundreds of years. Now, in his confusion, he thought of it as his home.

"Then, do you remember your name?" Chu Liang asked.

The boy spent a while trying to recall what it was, but he ultimately shook his head.

Seeing that the boy truly seemed to have no memory of his identity, Chu Liang finally relaxed.

If the boy had retained even the slightest memory of his life before his extended slumber, Chu Liang wouldn't dare to take him back to Mount Shu.

"This place is desolate and uninhabited for a hundred li; you were probably brought here by the demonic beast that was chasing you. But since you don't remember your name or where you live, how can I help you find your parents?" Chu Liang said slowly. "You seem to have good potential. Why don't you come back with me and become an immortality cultivator?"

The little boy looked at Chu Liang, hesitated for a moment, and then slowly nodded. "Okay."

Chu Liang patted the boy's head with satisfaction.

This way, Chu Liang was the only one who would know the boy's background, and there would be no trouble.

However...

Chu Liang suddenly felt a sense of familiarity with the series of actions he had just completed.

When the Discipline Master adopted my teacher back in the day, what did she say about my teacher's background? And when my teacher took me up the mountain, her excuse was pretty similar to the one I made up... Now, it's my turn to take the young emperor to Mount Shu.

It all seemed like a cycle of reincarnation.

The fact is that they all have complicated backstories. So, what about me?

Nevertheless, on second thought, it might have been a bit too difficult for his teacher to come up with an elaborate lie to fool Chu Liang's childhood self.

...

"This little thing..." Di Nufeng looked at the little boy in front of her and then cast a suspicious glance at Chu Liang. "Where did he come from?"

"He was chased by a demonic beast and fell off a cliff. He's lost all of his memories," Chu Liang said. "I found him pitiful, so I decided to bring him back to the mountain to stay for a while. If he has talent, we can keep him as a disciple. If not, we can send him down the mountain and have him settle down elsewhere."

Di Nufeng nodded. "I see."

The little boy sat on the chair, his posture perfectly straight like a pen. He gazed up timidly at this big sister.

Seeing the little boy's fair face and bright eyes, Di Nufeng couldn't help but pinch his cheeks.

She smiled and remarked, "This little thing is quite cute. Does he not have a name yet?"

"He doesn't remember his name," Chu Liang replied.

Di Nufeng laughed. "Hehe, I'm the best at coming up with names."

Chu Liang immediately smelled trouble.

"Let's call him Chu Yi[1]," Di Nufeng declared with a wave of her hand.

"Eh?"

Chu Liang considered the name for a moment and thought it was surprisingly good.

So, he asked, "Why did you choose this name, Esteemed Teacher?"

Di Nufeng gave a mysterious smile. "When I saved you back then, you were hiding from a demonic beast, lying motionlessly on the ceiling beam [2] of a house. So, I thought I'd just call you Chu Liang.

"He's currently sitting motionlessly on a chair, but calling him Chu Yi[3] doesn't sound good..."

Well, then. After more than a decade, I finally find out how my name came about.

Chu Liang tilted his head downward and asked the little boy, "Do you like this name?"

The little boy's expression turned serious, and he solemnly cupped his hands. "Thank you very much for giving me a name, Big Sis."

"You can't call her Big Sis," Chu Liang quickly advised. "You should call her Peak Master for now. If you become a disciple of Silver Sword Peak later, you should call her Esteemed Teacher."

"Hey." Di Nufeng waved her hand and rubbed the boy's cheeks. "What's the harm? Just let him call me that from now on; I like it."

Chu Liang could only sigh in silence.

Is my seniority going to drop every time someone joins Silver Sword Peak?

"Also, you came back just in time... The peaks are about to submit next month's expenses. Since you've just broken through, we'll need to make some changes... " Di Nufeng turned around, took out a bill, and began reading it aloud. "The pill allowance for fourth-realm disciples is five hundred sword coins each... For the fifth realm, it increases to eight hundred, and the talisman allowance goes from two hundred to three hundred sword coins per person... Altogether, there are eight items. Calculate how much more we can claim."

By the time Di Nufeng was done speaking, Chu Liang had already completed the mental calculation.

He was about to speak when a small voice answered from beside him first. "It's one thousand two hundred and sixty."

Chapter 467: Corrupting the Kid

"Huh?"

Chu Liang looked at Chu Yi beside him, slightly surprised.

This wasn't a particularly difficult arithmetic problem, but it was still challenging for his eighty-something-year-old teacher, let alone a six-year-old child. Even Chu Liang's mental calculation speed was just comparable to the boy's.

This kid is really intelligent.

Di Nufeng looked at Chu Liang and asked, "Is that correct?"

"Absolutely," Chu Liang answered.

"This little thing sure is something." Di Nufeng beamed with joy. "Let me test him."

Chu Liang had the same thought.

Di Nufeng leaned forward, thinking hard for a moment. Then she asked extremely seriously, "What does three... plus three equal to?"

Chu Liang: "...?"

"Six..." Little Chu Yi answered hesitantly.

He even looked a bit unsure of himself, as if this was more difficult than the previous calculation. The question was so simple that it made his little brain wonder if he had made a mistake.

Chu Liang quickly stepped forward. "Esteemed Teacher, let me test him instead."

How did I actually believe that someone who is pretty much illiterate could come up with an adequate question to test a prodigy?

He said to Chu Yi, "I'll ask you some questions. What is four hundred forty-three multiplied by two thousand two hundred?"

"Nine hundred seventy-four thousand six hundred."

"Four thousand three hundred ninety-six multiplied by two thousand seventeen?"

"Eight million eight hundred sixty-six thousand seven hundred thirty-two."

"If a person shakes their shoulders three times a day, how many times would they shake their shoulders in two and a half years?"

"Two thousand seven hundred thirty-nine."

"..."

Using mental calculation to answer the series of questions, Chu Yi delivered his answers without hesitation, and they were all correct without a single error. Such a feat wouldn't be unusual for cultivators that specialized in the power of the mind... but Chu Yi was still just a child!

Di Nufeng asked in surprise, "Did you have some special training in this?"

"I don't know..." Chu Yi answered timidly. "It seems that the moment I hear the numbers, the answer appears in my mind..."

Looking at Chu Yi, Chu Liang remarked, "His calculation skills are indeed amazing. How about we test something else? Let's see how well he can memorize things."

"Sure." Di Nufeng casually pulled a book from her bed and handed it to Chu Yi. "Read this once, then recite what's written on it."

Chu Yi took the book, obediently glanced at the page, and quickly handed it back.

"Done?" Di Nufeng asked.

"Yes," Chu Yi answered with a nod. Then he obediently recited, "That rich young master wrapped his arms around Ping'er's shoulders. Sliding his hand inside her sleeve, he laughed lewdly and said, 'My dearest—'"

Chu Liang hurriedly interrupted Chu Yi, "All right, all right. That's enough."

Then he shot a sharp look at Di Nufeng.

Goodness. What kind of unhealthy things have you been reading all day?

You almost corrupted the kid.

Di Nufeng's face flushed as she said, "Grabbed the wrong one."

She walked over to the bookshelf and flipped through them, wanting to find a normal book. However, after flipping through one book, she set it aside. Then she flipped through a second and set that aside too. She repeated this process for quite a while. Di Nufeng didn't have a single book that could be given to a child to read.

Chu Liang buried his forehead deep in his hands. He couldn't help but wonder if bringing this child to Silver Sword Peak was actually harmful to him.

Such an intelligent child could probably easily succeed under the care of any normal guardian, right? But if he stays here... It's hard to say how well he'll do.

Ultimately, Chu Liang took out a foundational cultivation manual, The Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique, from the inner chest pocket in his robe and handed it to Chu Yi to read.

Little Chu Yi took the manual and glanced through it once.

Then he put it down and recited from memory. "The Divine Nine's Profound Apertures lie within a person's body, within the Gate of the Profound..."

As he recited, his gaze grew brighter, and a mildly warm air expelled from his nose.

Naturally, Chu Liang and Di Nufeng knew what was happening.

He's already developing qi sensitivity...?

A person's potential for cultivation was measured by seeing how long they needed to cultivate for before they could sense the existence of foundational qi.

Some people could spend their whole lives cultivating and would still be unable to open up their apertures. There were some that needed two or three years to develop qi sensitivity, but people who needed that long wouldn't have much of a future in cultivation.

Meanwhile, there were others that only needed a few months to develop qi sensitivity. This was considered the average standard in the world of immortality cultivators. However, those who could unlock their qi sensitivity in just three to five days would likely be prodigies in cultivation.

The talent a person had at the start wasn't an absolute factor in determining how much they could achieve in cultivation, but very few people could break through their innate limitations. The speed at which a person unlocked their qi sensitivity was a strong indicator of their level of perception and affinity with spiritual qi.

Chu Liang only knew of one person in the Mount Shu Sect who had unlocked their qi sensitivity just by reading through the cultivation manual once—Jiang Yuebai. However, she possessed the Transcendent Spirit.

Of course, there was the possibility that the child had been cultivating since a long time ago, making it easier for him to develop qi sensitivity. Nevertheless, the boy was only six years old, so even if that was the case, this was still astonishing.

The Alchemy Master's grandson had developed qi sensitivity at the age of seven, and he was hailed as a rare prodigy. For children, even a year's difference could make a huge difference in their innate development.

After considering Chu Yi's situation, Chu Liang suggested, "How about... we find a school for the child? We shouldn't disrupt his development by letting him stay on our peak."

However, Di Nufeng was eager to handle things herself and replied, "Is that necessary? I can teach him myself."

Chu Liang thought, That's exactly what I'm afraid of...

If Esteemed Teacher teaches Chu Yi nothing, he'll probably just end up like me. So, I guess that's not too bad. But if she were to be serious about teaching... he'll probably get ruined.

Of course, Chu Liang hadn't really meant it when he suggested sending Chu Yi away.

After all, he had been entrusted with the child and wouldn't feel at ease unless he was the one taking care of Chu Yi. Given the boy's sensitive background, Chu Liang needed to stay by Chu Yi's side and observe him for at least a year before letting him leave Mount Shu.

"We should observe him for a while longer. Taking in a disciple is a big decision and shouldn't be based on talent alone," Chu Liang advised. "Let's take some time to assess his temperament and then consider accepting him as a disciple."

"That's true." Di Nufeng nodded. "My disciple must not only match my talent but also have a character like mine."

Well, that's not necessary...

This made Chu Liang worry about how bad Silver Sword Peak's reputation could become in the future.

Nonetheless, seeing how little Chu Yi was so well-mannered and composed, seemingly wise and mature well beyond his years... Chu Liang thought it was unlikely that Chu Yi would grow up to be a troublemaker like his teacher.

Chu Liang ruffled the little guy's hair and smiled. "Stay by my side for now. I'll see which areas you can improve in, and while I'm at it, I'll teach you some interesting things like..."

Chu Liang's smile widened, his eyes narrowing into slits as he finished his sentence in a soft and gentle tone.

"Reviewing the account book."

...

The shopping district on Red Cotton Peak was bustling with activity; people were streaming in and out.

Most shops in the world of immortality cultivators were dignified and proper, with an old-fashioned charm. The signboards hanging above their doors, inscribed with the shops' names in gold, tended to look pretty similar, so they rarely stood out visually.

However, there were some shops on Red Cotton Peak that stood out from the rest. For example, there was a shop named Spirit Pill Pavilion. Under the large golden words on its signboard, there was a line of small words with an arrow: The first shop on Red Cotton Peak.

This unusual addition attracted many passersby to check out the shop. Coupled with the fact that the berry-flavored pills it sold were in high demand, business quickly boomed for the Spirit Pill Pavilion.

Not wanting to be outdone, the weapons shop next door that belonged to the Whale Gang had added a line under its name too: Our shop's the real first shop.

This dispute was quite amusing. Both shop owners stuck to their claims, attracting many visitors to come and check out the spectacle.

Seeing that, the surrounding shops followed suit, adding notes below their shop names.

They're all fakes; ours is the real first shop.

Let them fight over being first. We're the second shop anyway.

The shop next door's talking nonsense. We are the real second shop.

Regardless of what number you are, ours is definitely the last shop.

The shop across the street is shameless.

Right back at you.

These childish antics became quite the spectacle, and the visitors found them rather amusing.

Many cultivators from the nearby provinces visited Red Cotton Peak. In terms of scale, it was still incomparable to Taotie City, which had expanded in size over many years. Nevertheless, Red Cotton Peak had already surpassed all of the other markets in the world of immortality cultivators.

With various factions joining and establishing shops on Red Cotton Peak, everyone was convinced that it would only be a matter of time before Red Cotton Peak would stand shoulder to shoulder with Taotie City.

Due to the great distance between them, Taotie City wasn't as heavily impacted as expected. Moreover, they received a share of the profits, so they were happy to see Red Cotton Peak's growth.

Meanwhile, the Mount Shu Sect, a recipient of an even larger share, became more accommodating and granted Chu Liang various conveniences, wishing he could rapidly further Red Cotton Peak's development. After all, his lease period was only ten years, and Red Cotton Peak would still belong to the Mount Shu Sect in the future. That meant Chu Liang was laying the foundations of a great business that could be passed down for generations within the sect.

Initially, the shops on the mountain were all built by the Whale Gang. Now, disciples from the Mount Shu Sect's Hall of Construction were fully stationed on Red Cotton Peak. Shops could be applied for one day and erected the next. With the extra source of income on Red Cotton Peak, the disciples from the Hall of Construction made a fortune during this period, and they wore beaming smiles as they worked.

Red Cotton Peak offered a rent discount for Mount Shu disciples, so many of them were inspired to open shops of their own. However, even with the discount, the cost of opening a shop was still quite high, and most disciples on Mount Shu were relatively poor. Thus, those who were bold enough to try mostly did so through partnerships.

Shang Ziliang, along with Lackey A and Lackey B, teamed up to open a small shop. The three of them had saved quite a bit while working for Chu Liang, so this investment was naturally within their means.

Their shop was called Ink Treasures. It specialized in selling calligraphy and paintings by famous Confucian masters of the current era. With his father Shang Shuwen's connections, it was easy for Shang Ziliang to acquire those precious works.

Lin Bei didn't open a shop, but he quickly built an extensive network in a short period and became quite well known on Red Cotton Peak. He took on a broker-like role, helping shop owners develop business relationships and securing resources for them. He made a considerable income from that.

The thirty-six peaks of Mount Shu gathered their strengths to open shops on Red Cotton Peak. Initially, it was the higher-ups of the Mount Shu Sect that had called upon the peaks to set up shops to bolster Chu Liang's reputation, but everyone had been quite hesitant to do so.

Yet, it hadn't even been two days since the opening, and Red Cotton Peak had already become a sensation. Now, everyone wanted a piece of the action; there was nothing left for them to hesitate about.

By establishing Red Cotton Peak, Chu Liang had effectively created a large platform for all the peaks of the Mount Shu Sect to take advantage of. As long as they had the ability to set up and run a shop well, they had the opportunity to prosper financially.

For this reason, Chu Liang had even reminded Venerable Wen Yuan that while it was a good thing the peaks had a strong interest in running businesses, the disciples shouldn't get too invested in it. After all, cultivators should still prioritize cultivation as their main pursuit.

He hadn't needed to say that though. The higher-ups of the Mount Shu Sect had already warned all the peaks of that. The result was that disciples from each peak would take turns working in the shops, ensuring it didn't affect their cultivation.

Everyone was eager to work in the shops. They got to enjoy the liveliness and excitement of Red Cotton Peak and earn money at the same time. The amount they earned just working there for a few days each month was more than what they would get from completing ten missions. The rest of the time could then be dedicated to cultivation.

Without needing to go on so many missions, they ended up having more time for cultivation and more money to buy resources. This arrangement was actually beneficial to them, so why not take advantage of it?

Despite that, there was no concern that the disciples wouldn't go on missions anymore. After all, once the Mount Shu Sect became wealthy, the rewards for missions would naturally increase. Ultimately, the profits the sect gained from Red Cotton Peak would be passed on to benefit the disciples.

As for Chu Liang, he kept only a tiny bit, just a sliver, of the profits for himself.

That's right. That's how he had explained it to Di Nufeng.

As Chu Liang walked through the streets with little Chu Yi, he shared the key points about Red Cotton Peak.

Then they arrived in front of a grand restaurant.

Chu Liang was here today because Jiang Yuebai planned to open a shop too.

Chapter 468: Red Moon Pavilion

"What's a good name?" Jiang Yuebai wondered aloud, resting her chin on her hand as she stood in front of the still-empty restaurant that had yet to open.

Beside her were Xu Hongqiu and her junior sister, Mu Yueting. This restaurant was a joint venture, a collaboration among the three friends.

Initially, it had been Jiang Yuebai's idea, but she didn't have the time to manage it on her own. When Xu Hongqiu heard about it, she immediately volunteered. Since the Whale Gang had already opened numerous shops, adding one more wouldn't make much of a difference, so they decided to partner up.

However, Jiang Yuebai's idea was to open a restaurant due to her secret love for food.

However, food businesses were less likely to make a profit in the marketplaces of the world of immortality cultivators.

Ordinary ingredients wouldn't sell for much; no one would waste spirit stones on simple beef, mutton, or vegetables. The large restaurants in Taotie City served medicinal feasts, spirit plant feasts, or spirit beast feasts. To justify their high prices, the dishes had to be truly extravagant.

This also required highly specialized sources of ingredients and advanced cooking techniques, neither of which could be arranged quickly.

The thought of starting this restaurant business was still in its early stages, with many specifics yet to be discussed. After a brief discussion, the three of them thought they would ask Chu Liang for advice as he was very smart. There was a chance he could offer some useful ideas.

Chu Liang came over with Little Chu Yi.

After hearing their ideas, Chu Liang smiled and suggested, "Since you and Miss Xu are partners, why not call it Red and White Celebrations[1]?"

It could even specialize in open wedding and funeral banquet services... he silently added.

Jiang Yuebai immediately glared at him.

"Hmph!" Hongqiu Xu scoffed, clearly disapproving of the name Chu Liang had suggested. However, she quickly changed her mind and added, "How about we take one character from each of our names? We could call it Red Moon[2] Pavilion?"

"That works..." Jiang Yuebai said with a gentle nod.

"Heh," Chu Liang laughed, "That's a great name for an elegant hot pot restaurant."

"Hot pot?" The group looked at him.

In the world of immortality cultivators, there really hasn't been a specialized hot pot restaurant.

Generally, if a business wasn't already being done, the first question to ask was: why hadn't anyone else tried it yet? Instead of assuming you were clever enough to have discovered an untapped market.

They had talked about this before. Compared to the extravagant dishes made with rare spirit plants and beasts, hot pot didn't seem particularly special. Every Mount Shu disciple knew how to make hot pot, so why would they bother visiting a restaurant for it?

Chu Liang said, "Hot pot has a long history at Mount Shu; it's a trademark of our sect. Every disciple knows how to make it, so why would they come to a restaurant for it regularly?"

"But think about people from outside Mount Shu," he deduced with a smile. "They might not have the habit of eating hot pot. Visitors come for the sights, but if they could also try our signature dish, wouldn't that be great? Food is a part of our culture too."

"As for the problems you mentioned," Chu Liang continued, "we don't have to use ordinary hot pot ingredients. Instead, we can use premium spirit plants and beasts. We can source them from the market or even grow them ourselves. It'll take some effort in the beginning to find high-quality ingredients, but fortunately, I have a friend who specializes in this."

"He knows what's safe to eat, what isn't, and what tastes good. With his help, choosing ingredients in the beginning will be easy."

"Oh, you mean..." Jiang Yuebai's eyes widened as the realization hit her. "That fellow disciple from Cloud Horizon Peak!" she exclaimed.

"Exactly." Chu Liang nodded.

Chu Liang was indeed referring to Lackey B.

With such a wide variety of hot pot ingredients, choosing the right ones was crucial. Lackey B had always been a foodie, so if he were tasked with taste-testing, he'd likely be more than willing.

"With that key issue solved, our main focus for everything else should be the service," Chu Liang added.

"Service?"

"Exactly." He continued, "Our biggest worry is that hot pot alone might not be worth the spirit-stone coins. But good service can change that. If we can train a team to make guests feel truly at home—welcoming them with smiles at the door, serving tea and snacks attentively, offering dried fruits and sweets, providing games for fun, doing even things like eyebrow shaping, nail painting, and hosting celebrations..."

"If we can perfect all these aspects, then even if the guests are eating the most ordinary ingredients, they won't mind paying a bit more," Chu Liang explained.

As he spoke, the three friends listened intently, feeling as though they had been enlightened. Everything Chu Liang said made perfect sense.

As they listened, little Chu Yi also nodded along with a serious expression on his face.

Seeing this, Xu Hongqiu couldn't help but find it amusing. She teased, "Does this little one understand as well?"

"This little brother of mine is quite smart," Chu Liang replied.

Chu Yi sat upright on the stool, cupped his hands respectfully, and said, "Ladies, I, Chu Yi, am already six years old. I am not some mere three- or five-year-old child. I do understand these matters."

...

Chu Liang provided them with the ideas, but the specifics would be up to them to implement.

In fact, Chu Liang believed that they could run the restaurant successfully even without his help, as they were all smart and capable individuals.

Not to mention, with Senior Sister Jiang's reputation alone, cultivators from all over would surely come to try it.

While surveying Red Cotton Peak, he shared various bits of knowledge with little Chu Yi before dropping him off at the Hall of Conservation.

Whenever he wasn't around, he would have Chu Yi learn from the square-faced Senior Brother Yuan.

Senior Brother Yuan's square-shaped head was filled with knowledge, and even the smallest bit he shared could keep Chu Yi learning for a long time. Moreover, he was a man of integrity, and setting a good example for a child was far more important than many words.

It was certainly better than staying on Silver Sword Peak and picking up bad habits from a certain someone.

That very day, Chu Liang arrived at Myriad Poison Mountain in the southwestern region.

The mountain wasn't far from Mount Shu, so he made it there quickly. Hovering in mid-air, he could already sense the sinister, eerie aura rising from below.

This place in the Southern Regions was even more terrifying than Southern Bastion Mountain.

While Southern Bastion Mountain was shrouded in mystery, filled with hidden realms and treacherous spots, its dangers were uncertain. Myriad Poison Mountain, however, was different—its danger was predictable. It was poison.

Almost every venomous creature in the Nine Provinces and Four Seas could be found here. Even the records kept by the Divine Nine sects, the Terrestrial Ten, and the Yu Dynasty's palace couldn't list every venomous and poisonous being lurking in its depths.

Even seventh-realm Eminent Ones wouldn't dare venture into the depths of Myriad Poison Mountain. There was a real chance that they could die.

Years ago, the immortal sects joined forces to seal off Myriad Poison Mountain, stopping its poisonous miasma from spreading. Without this barrier, the miasma would have spread, wiping out all life within a thousand li.

Only then did the immortal sects set up outposts around Myriad Poison Mountain, killing any venomous and poisonous creatures that managed to escape its borders. On rare occasions, they ventured into the mountains to hunt, but they only dared to stay near the outskirts.

Chu Liang's destination was the Demon Spider Forest, which was on the westernmost edge of Myriad Poison Mountain and the nearest to the Red River Sect.

Before venturing into the mountain, he made thorough preparations, bringing along more than a dozen antidotes. These should be enough to handle the danger in the outermost area of the Myriad Poison Mountain.

With a rustling sound, Chu Liang landed in the eerie forest.

Contrary to what he had imagined, the Demon Spider Forest wasn't crawling with Scarlet Demon Spiders. Instead, they hid among the dark red trees and foliage, spinning webs of silk that blended seamlessly into their surroundings.

It was difficult to detect any anomalies even when he was scanning the area with his divine sense.

These Scarlet Demon Spiders hunted not only insects but also birds and beasts. Anyone who touched the webs of the Scarlet Demon Spider would immediately feel dizzy and faint.

They would then be wrapped in a large cocoon-like structure and left to corrode, leaving not even a skeleton behind.

Although the Scarlet Demon Spiders weren't very powerful on their own, when they worked together, they could inflict significant damage on powerful demonic beasts.

Facing such cruel and cunning venomous creatures, Chu Liang decided to go with a more cautious way of hunting.

He first activated the immortal art Army of Beans. He then had the clone he created move slowly through the forest.

After the clone had moved only a short distance, faint hissing sounds reached his ears.

The clone's limbs had already brushed against two strands of spider silk. Even though it was merely a clone created from a bean, the surface of its limbs started turning a darker shade of color.

Moments later, two Scarlet Demon Spiders emerged from different directions.

After a brief standoff, the smaller spider turned and scurried away.

The larger spider crawled closer, preparing to wrap the clone in a cocoon.

Swoosh.

In that moment, Chu Liang sprang into action, unleashing a wave of sword qi that struck down both Scarlet Demon Spiders.

The eerie atmosphere made him cautious; he didn't dare let his Dustless Sword come into contact with the venomous creatures, fearing it might be contaminated with poison and he would end up coming into contact with the poison.

With the same method, he killed seven or eight Scarlet Demon Spiders on the same spot.

However, that number was probably not enough for Wen Yulong to do enhancements on the Demon-Binding Rope, so he decided to move on in search of another location.

Just then, he heard faint cries coming from deep within the forest.

"Helppppppppppppp..."

"Helpppppppppppppppppppp..."

Chapter 469: Are You Sure?

In the desolate wilderness, where few humans ventured, a sudden cry for help echoed through the air.

Chu Liang's mind immediately flashed with images—a baldie, a mischievous monkey, and a child wearing a stomach apron.[1]

But after a moment, he shook his head. He wasn't Monk Tang, and he certainly wasn't weak. There was no harm in investigating. If someone was truly in danger, he couldn't just stand by and do nothing.

So, he cautiously made his way toward the source of the sound, extending his divine sense ahead to scout the area.

It wasn't long before he located the source of the cry.

Deep within the Demon Spider Forest, a massive, layered web stretched between the trees. Each strand of spider silk was as thick as a wrist, weaving together to ensnare dozens of towering trees. The web's strands gleamed with a menacing red hue, dotted with eerie black spots, making the sight all the more terrifying.

At the center of the giant web was a colorful butterfly, roughly the size of a palm, with flickers of divine light shimmering around it.

In a desperate human voice, it cried out, "Help..."

The butterfly's voice was hoarse from its relentless cries, but the moment it saw Chu Liang, its tone shifted to one of excitement.

"A young hero of the human race! Please, save me!" it pleaded desperately.

Chu Liang did not look at the butterfly. He looked around carefully as he tried to locate the owner of the spider web.

As he kept his guard up, he asked, "How did you even get caught when the poisonous web is so big?"

"I was being chased by a vicious evil eagle in the sky, and in my panic, I flew straight into this poisonous web!" The butterfly flapped its wings frantically, struggling against the sticky strands.

"And where is the spider that wove this web?" Chu Liang asked again.

"The evil eagle got caught in the web too. The spider wrapped it up and dragged it away, probably to feed on it somewhere else," the butterfly replied anxiously. It flapped its wings weakly, pleading, "Young hero, please save me quickly, or I'll be poisoned to death!"

Chu Liang hesitated. A part of him suspected the butterfly might be a trap, while another part remained on edge, wary of the spider he still hadn't located. He didn't dare step forward recklessly.

After all, to weave such a large poisonous web, the spider must be the Demon Spider King of the area, and its power was certainly formidable. Even with his higher cultivation level, one careless move could leave him vulnerable to its deadly poison. He couldn't afford to take this lightly.

Thus, Chu Liang was extremely cautious.

As someone who had ventured into the martial world for a long time, he couldn't help but remain cautious.

After observing for a moment, he summoned his flying sword. With a few swift strokes, he severed the web surrounding the butterfly, setting it free. Yet the moment the butterfly was released, it fell to the ground.

Its wings were still paralyzed by the poison of the Scarlet Demon Spider, so it couldn't move at all. Chu Liang had no choice but to lift it with his flying sword. After double-checking to make sure all traces of poison were gone, he gently cupped the butterfly in his hand.

"I'll get you out of here," Chu Liang reassured in a low voice as he slowly moved back. "Once the poison wears off, you'll be flying free again."

"Young hero, you must hurry..." the butterfly whispered, its voice faint. "The Scarlet Demon Spider can sense everything through its web. Now that you've cut it, it'll be coming for us!"

"Hmm?" Chu Liang stopped in his tracks upon hearing the butterfly's warning. "It will come after us?"

"Oh no, why did you stop?" The butterfly flapped its wings frantically. "The Scarlet Demon Spider King is the deadliest creature in this place..."

Before it could finish its sentence, a crimson shadow dropped from the sky!

A massive Scarlet Demon Spider, as tall as a person, soared through the air! The cunning Scarlet Demon Spider King had silently circled behind Chu Liang while he was focused ahead, preparing for a sneak attack!

But Chu Liang reacted as if he had eyes in the back of his head. Just before the spider could strike, he whirled around, and a fierce surge of Divine Dragon Fire erupted from his palm!

Boom—

The blazing Divine Dragon Fire instantly incinerated the Scarlet Demon Spider King, reducing it to ashes in the blink of an eye.

Chu Liang had only been careful because he was worried about touching the poison. But now, the Scarlet Demon Spider King brazenly launched a sneak attack instead of fleeing. How could he tolerate such actions?

He had been on high alert, scanning everywhere around him with his divine sense. And so, when he acted, he effortlessly annihilated the spider.

If he couldn't even handle a lesser demon king of this level, he wouldn't deserve to be called one of Mount Shu Sect's prodigies.

...

"Thank you, young hero, for saving my life," the butterfly said gratefully.

After a short while, the poison finally wore off, and the butterfly fluttered up into the air once more.

"It was nothing, no need for thanks," Chu Liang said casually. "Just be careful on your way."

"Your kindness is too great to repay," the butterfly insisted. "I happened to know of a hidden treasure of nature nearby. If you'd like, I can guide you to it if it happens to be something you need."

Chu Liang's eyes lit up at the mention of a treasure. "A treasure, you say?"

"Yes," the butterfly continued, "just a several li from here, hidden behind a waterfall, there's a cave filled with spiritual qi. There is an unclaimed spirit plant growing inside."

"Lead the way," Chu Liang commanded with a wave of his hand.

With that, the butterfly darted ahead, and Chu Liang followed closely behind. Soon, they arrived at the said location.

In front of Chu Liang was a large, beautiful waterfall, its water pouring into a deep pool below like a shining silver curtain. The constant roar of the rushing water filled the air, masking the cave that lay hidden behind it. The butterfly had once been chased by a demonic beast and, in a panic, stumbled upon a narrow crevice that led to this secret cave.

Inside, the butterfly had found a faintly glowing spirit plant that only had a little bit of spiritual qi. It was unknown as to how many years it would take for the plant to fully mature and be ready to harvest but that was why the butterfly had left it untouched.

Chu Liang looked around carefully and sent a clone ahead to check for any danger. Once he was sure it was safe, he dove straight into the waterfall.

Splash—

Upon entering, Chu Liang saw ripples of divine light dancing around. Inside the waterfall was an empty cave, with wide stone walls and a crystal-clear pool resting in the center.

In the center of the pool stood a tall, vibrant plant, its glowing green leaves casting a soft light that filled the entire cave.

It appeared delicate and beautiful.

"Jade Pot Celestial Plant!" Chu Liang exclaimed, instantly recognizing the rare spirit plant.

This plant was a precious water-element treasure that only thrived in areas rich with spiritual qi, taking centuries to mature.

The cascading waterfall and nourishing pool had created the perfect jade-pot-like fengshui[2], allowing this rare plant to grow undisturbed.

Moreover, it hadn't been discovered yet, making it even more precious.

Chu Liang turned to the butterfly and said, "It seems this is exactly the treasure I've been looking for. I should be the one thanking you."

"Young hero, there's no need for such words," the butterfly replied, hovering nearby. "You saved my life, which is far more valuable than this spirit plant."

Chu Liang smiled and nodded. "Let's call it even. We helped each other."

I sincerely hope that all grateful demonic creatures will take this as the standard. If what they have is false gratitude, they'll offer their body, but if it's true gratitude, they'll offer treasures of nature.

Without another word, he flew to the center of the pool, forming a blade with his fingers. With a gentle motion, he carefully sliced off half of the Jade Pot Celestial Plant's stem, taking only part of the plant.

Since the fengshui of the area remained undisturbed, the Jade Pot Celestial Plant would continue to thrive. Spirit plants like this should never be uprooted completely.

He planned to report the location to the Office of Precious Herbs upon returning to Mount Shu.

A hundred years from now, disciples of the sect could come here and harvest this plant.

After carefully harvesting part of the plant, he placed it into a jade box. Just as he was about to put it away, he suddenly heard two soft thuds from behind, followed by a loud shout: "Stop!"

Chu Liang certainly would not stop. He quickly closed the jade box and put it away before turning to look at the people who just stepped inside.

Three cultivators entered the cave. They were two men and one woman.

The young man at the front wore a white robe with cloud patterns. His sword, along with a few enchanted tools, hung from his jade belt.

He looked noble and rich.

Beside him stood a delicate-looking woman with fair skin and striking features.

Behind them was a young man in yellow clothes, dressed simply, appearing like a servant as he closely followed the pair.

From the way they approached with clear ill intentions, it was obvious they had their eyes on the Jade Pot Celestial Plant as well. However, Chu Liang remained calm. In the world of immortality, when a natural treasure was claimed or cultivated by someone, it would be tied with a red string and have a nameplate placed beside it, even if it was left unattended. Taking it afterward would be considered a direct challenge.

But since there was no red string or nameplate around the Jade Pot Celestial Plant, it was clear that it was unclaimed. If these people wanted to take it, they would have to fight for it.

So, Chu Liang cupped his hands and said, "I am a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect. I found this unclaimed spirit plant and harvested part of it. Is there any problem with that?"

This time, he was smarter. He only mentioned Mount Shu, without giving his name, and he didn't mention his esteemed teacher.

The young man in the white robe thought for a moment before saying, "This is the territory of our Red River Sect. My father, Zhao Duanyang, is the sect leader. We cultivate treasures of nature here. Even if you're from Mount Shu, you can't just come into our land and take our spirit plants, can you?"

The truth was that they were just wandering nearby.

When Chu Liang entered the waterfall, a small surge of spiritual qi leaked out, allowing them to sense it and enter the cave, where they saw him harvesting one part of the spirit plant.

Seeing that Chu Liang was young and seemingly alone, they felt tempted to fight for the plant.

To Chu Liang, the Jade Pot Celestial Plant was likely just one of many treasures of nature. But for disciples from small sects like them, this could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Naturally, greed began to stir in their hearts.

Upon hearing that Chu Liang was a Mount Shu disciple, they felt a bit scared. However, conflicts over treasures of nature between disciples from different sects were common, and sects usually wouldn't get involved. It was an unspoken rule in the world of immortality.

With that in mind, they became even more confident.

However, when Chu Liang heard the words Red River Sect, it reminded him of something that he witnessed yesterday. Though the sect wasn't very big, it was known for having plenty of tricks up its sleeve.

The Red River Sect's leader, Zhao Duanyang, was likely the "Old Zhao" that the woman from yesterday had mentioned. And the young man standing before him must be his son...

After the young man in the white robe finished speaking, he expected several possible responses—perhaps Chu Liang would threaten him with the status of the Mount Shu Sect, ignore him entirely, or even attack outright. However, the reply he received was something he had never expected in his life.

"So, you're the son of the Red River Sect leader Zhao..." Chu Liang asked with a hint of doubt in his tone. "Are you sure?"

Chapter 470: Don't Blame Us for Leaving First

"Huh?" The young man in white was taken aback by Chu Liang's question, unsure of how to respond at first.

After a moment's hesitation, he furrowed his brows and said, "What do you mean by are you sure? Do you think I would lie to you? Zhao Duanyang is my biological father, and who around Myriad Poison Mountain doesn't know that?"

Chu Liang thought to himself, Well, you might not be lying, but whether your father has been deceived is another story.

Of course, this was something Chu Liang couldn't say aloud, as it would come across as offensive. Instead, he calmly replied, "This spirit plant clearly grew here naturally, and I was the first to discover it. If you want to fight for it, I will gladly fight with you for it."

"Hmph..." The young man in white sneered, "Then don't blame us..."

From his point of view, this man looked to be only seventeen or eighteen years old. Even if he was a disciple of the sects in the Divine Nine, how strong could he be? Could he possibly fight all three of them?

Before the young man could finish his sentence, a deafening roar echoed from behind.

Roar—

Kaboom! Splash!

The waterfall split violently and the cascade of water stopped flowing.

The entrance to the cave was suddenly revealed, exposing an uninvited guest as terrifying as a god of devils.

A massive, sinister python's head emerged from the cave, its cold scales glistening. Its vertical pupils, brimming with cruelty and rage, fixated on the cave entrance like a predator eyeing a mouse's hole.

"Ah!" The three young cultivators were startled. "The Blood-Fog Venomous Dragon-Python! This is a poisonous beast from the depths of Myriad Poison Mountain! How did it get here?!"

"Hiss—"

The python flicked out its tongue, the bright red forked tongue extending over one zhang long, scaring the three cultivators at the entrance so much that they rushed over to Chu Liang's side.

The cave was far too small for the Blood-Fog Venomous Dragon-Python. Its massive head couldn't even fit through the entrance, leaving it to unleash furious roars from outside. Its vertical pupils swept the interior relentlessly, as if searching for something.

Seeing the python's agitation, a sudden realization dawned on Chu Liang. The Jade Pot Celestial Plant wasn't unclaimed after all. Its guardian beast had merely been away and likely only returned periodically to check on it.

The Blood-Fog Venomous Dragon-Python was clearly here searching for the Jade Pot Celestial Plant!

"It's fine, stay calm!" The young man in white waved his hand dismissively after glancing at the python. "It can't get inside."

"Even if it can't get in, what if it spews poison fog inside?" the young man in yellow asked, his voice trembling with panic. "The fog it exhales can cause instant hallucinations, and in just minutes, we'll dissolve into liquid!"

The Blood-Fog Venomous Dragon-Python had been roaring furiously at the entrance, but as if it understood the young man's words, it suddenly lifted its head, opened its massive jaws, and unleashed a thick, blood-red fog!

"Why did you have to remind it?!" the young man in white shouted angrily.

With no other exits, the blood-red fog quickly spread through the cave. The group was trapped, and within minutes, they would be dissolved alive!

Chu Liang observed in silence for a moment. At this moment, he knew he could no longer stand by and do nothing.

He raised his hand and tossed a few pills to the others, saying, "Take these to prevent hallucinations, and follow me!"

With that, he leaped out of the cave, cutting through the thick blood fog.

The python's massive head blocked the cave entrance. As Chu Liang darted out, it opened its gaping jaws, ready to swallow him whole!

But Chu Liang was prepared. In midair, he swung a powerful punch, landing it squarely on the python's upper jaw!

Bam—

The punch was so strong, way beyond normal human strength, that it completely caught the Blood-Fog Venomous Dragon-Python by surprise.

Its huge head jerked backward, and a visible lump quickly formed on its cheek.

"Roar—" It crashed backward with a heavy thud, letting out a cry of pain.

Chu Liang shot up into the sky, now free to unleash his full strength. Earlier, in the cave, he had to be careful not to hurt the others or the little butterfly, which had held him back.

He flipped his hand, summoning the Dustless Sword. With a pinch of his fingers, a massive swordlight crashed down from the sky with a thunderous roar!

The giant python, still angry that it had been punched heavily, opened its huge jaws and spewed a torrent of toxic fog, trying to engulf Chu Liang.

But as Chu Liang's sword came down, it sliced through the blood fog in an instant!

Swish—

Even with its tough scales, the python couldn't withstand the Heaven-Raising Sword, strengthened by geng metal foundational qi. The powerful sword light sliced its head in half!

Boom—

The python's huge body, now split in half, crashed into the river, and dark red blood quickly spread through the water.

The move was swift and decisive—a merciless strike that ended the battle in a single blow.

The three Red River Sect disciples, who had just rushed out in time to witness the scene, were left utterly dumbfounded.

The Blood-Fog Venomous Dragon-Python was not an actual descendant of dragons, and no one knew how it earned the name "venomous dragon-python." Still, it remained a powerful greater demon at the fifth realm, capable of surviving in the deepest part of the Myriad Poison Mountain.

But Chu Liang killed it with just one strike, which completely changed what they thought of power.

For disciples from small sects like them, they knew the geniuses from the immortal sects were powerful, but they never truly grasped how powerful. Now, after seeing this, they realized the gap between people could be as vast as the distance between heaven and earth.

Once the dust settled, the river resumed its flow, and the waterfall continued its course again. The blood was quickly washed away, but half of the python's enormous body remained on the ground while the other half was in the water.

The scene appeared rather gruesome.

Chu Liang turned to the young man in white again and asked, "You didn't finish earlier. What was that about not blaming you?"

"Haha..." The young man in white forced a smile, though he looked more like he was about to cry. "Young hero, we owe you our lives. We'll repay this debt one day! But for now, I hope you won't blame us for leaving first."

With that, the three of them hurried away, worried that Chu Liang might hold them responsible.

They were definitely overthinking it.

With Chu Liang's current wealth, robbing these three and selling their organs wouldn't even come close to what he would make in a day. He had no interest in fighting them.

After saying goodbye to the little butterfly, he quickly hurried back to Mount Shu.

Time was precious.

He still had to kill wine-jar monsters in exchange for rewards tonight.

...

Myriad Poison Mountain was truly a special place. Although it was extremely dangerous as demonic creatures roamed freely and poisonous beasts lurked everywhere, it was a paradise to Chu Liang. The mountain was rich with hidden natural treasures and was a prime location for demon slaying.

For Chu Liang, it was now a new area he could explore.

He first visited Heaven-Reaching Peak and handed over all the Scarlet Poisonous Silk to Wen Yulong, instructing him to begin upgrading the Demon-Binding Rope. Only then did he return to Silver Sword Peak.

Upon his return, he found a flying-crane message from Jiang Yuebai.

Without delay, he hurried over to Red Cotton Peak.

The signboard for Red Moon Pavilion was already up, though the official opening hadn't yet happened. Inside, a tasting event was in full swing.

Thanks to her connections with the Whale Gang, Xu Hongqiu had managed to secure sources for hunting demonic beasts. The first batch of raw ingredients for the hotpot restaurant had arrived. But many of these ingredients were untested, so they needed to be tried out to determine if they were edible.

Lackey B sat solemnly at the table, facing a steaming hotpot filled with red oil.

With chopsticks in hand, his serious expression was like that of a focused and dedicated craftsman.

"The first dish, Changling Grass," Xu Hongqiu instructed, signaling for the first ingredient of the day to be brought out.

Changling Grass was considered a spirit plant, but it wasn't particularly rare. It grew in many areas abundant in spiritual qi and often appeared alongside more valuable natural treasures.

It was useful for medicinal purposes and alchemy, but its suitability for hotpot was still unknown.

Lackey B carefully picked up a piece, dipped it in the pot a few times, and began chewing.

Under everyone's watchful eyes, he slowly shook his head. "It can't be cooked and the texture is too rough."

After hearing the verdict, Xu Hongqiu waved her hand decisively. "Eliminate it."

"Second dish, Yellow-Scaled Tiger."

This meat came from a demonic beast that had been hunted, sold to a store, and later bought by the Whale Gang.

For example, Chu Liang could have sold the Blood-Fog Venomous Dragon-Python he had just slain if he wanted to.

It was just too inconvenient. Its size was too massive to fit into his enchanted storage tools. It would be too troublesome to carry it back as the python's body was filled with poison. In the end, he gave up on the idea of bringing it back.

Lackey B picked up a slice of meat, dipped it in the pot, and tasted it.

After savoring it for a moment, he nodded and declared, "Dip for thirteen breaths—six up, seven down—for perfect texture. This one is good."

"Take this to the back kitchen," Xu Hongqiu immediately instructed her staff.

"Third dish, Blood Puffer of Mount Yue."

Another dish was swiftly placed on the table, and Lackey B once again picked up his chopsticks.

After dipping and tasting it, he calmly stated, "This one definitely cannot be approved. The meat is tender, the flavor's decent, but it's poisonous."

With that, he collapsed onto the table with a heavy thud.

"Hey! Quick, save him!"