

M. Slaying 531

Chapter 531: The Most Shocking Turn of Events

As Chu Liang stepped out of the Celestial Observatory Pavilion, a wave of relief finally washed over him.

Originally, all he'd planned to do was enjoy the banquet, say a few nice words, and make some connections. That would've been enough to wrap up his evening. Yet somehow, the night had spiraled out of control, leaving him feeling as if he'd just been grilled over hot coals.

He hadn't taken more than a couple of steps when he suddenly heard a voice calling from behind, "Young Hero Chu."

The sound made Chu Liang's back stiffen. He turned slowly, and just as he'd expected, it was Shen Qingyan. A faint, wry smile tugged at his lips as their eyes met.

What now? Why did you follow me out?

"I know this is a bit abrupt," Shen Qingyan said, "but there are things I need to ask you..."

"It's about this jade pendant, isn't it?" Chu Liang raised his hand, holding out his half of the jade pendant.

"That's right." Shen Qingyan responded, her fingers opening to reveal the other half of the pendant in her palm.

As they brought the two halves together, they clicked into a perfect, seamless fit.

The two halves of the pendant fused together in an instant, as though made of living flesh. When it fell back into Shen Qingyan's palm, it began to emit a soft glow.

A realization dawned on Chu Liang—it was no ordinary pendant. This was an enchanted tool, likely used to verify bloodlines.

Wealthy families sometimes crafted such artifacts to confirm their lineage and avoid potential scandals, a safeguard against pretenders.

"I only came across this pendant by chance..." Chu Liang said, glancing at her.

Although Shen Qingyan was incredibly beautiful, Chu Liang had no intention of being too involved with matters related to her. And so, he decided to reveal everything he knew about the abandoned Shen family residence.

But before he could speak, a sudden gust of black wind burst from the shadows, snatching the jade pendant from Shen Qingyan's hand in an instant and left at lightning speed!

Someone dared to rob them in broad daylight on the streets of Yu!

Moreover, this person had an exceptionally high level of cultivation and had been able to conceal their presence so skillfully that neither Chu Liang nor Shen Qingyan noticed anything, even with their strong cultivation levels.

"Who's there?"

In that moment, Shen Qingyan felt a surge of shock and fury. This pendant was her only proof of identity from birth. As soon as the two halves were combined, it was taken from her. Without hesitation, she rushed forward to chase after it.

With a burst of speed, she raced forward, her red dress swirling around her, and in no time, she had traversed the long street.

Chu Liang was reluctant to get involved in this, but the thief's high cultivation level made him anxious about Shen Qingyan's safety. Therefore, he had no choice but to leap forward and pursue her.

The black wind rushed through the streets and alleys, finally soaring out of the city, with both of them in close pursuit. The shadowy figure darted nimbly, occasionally blending into the shadows, and in the blackness of night, they could easily lose track of him.

Now that they were out of the city, Shen Qingyan had no further reservations. She immediately took out a flute and brought it to her lips.

The sharp notes of the flute resonated like ten thousand arrows raining down from the sky. Suddenly, the forest was filled with rustling noises, leaves shattered, and trees collapsed. It was a sweeping attack that affected everything in its path.

The sudden and powerful divine technique caught Chu Liang off guard. Earlier, when he saw Xue Lingxue, he thought the members of the South Melody Conservatory played a supportive role in battles. But now, he realized that even musicians could unleash strong attacks.

Despite this, the shadowy figure showed no sign of retreat, breaking past the attacks of her divine technique and swiftly moving through the dense brush.

By the time Chu Liang caught up again, the battered forest was marked with bloodstains scattered across the ground, suggesting that the thief had been injured.

Who is this person, and why would they steal Shen Qingyan's jade pendant? Chu Liang wondered. Moreover, the pendant was stolen right after the two halves combined, which means that the person has been tracking them all along. But who was the actual target—Shen Qingyan or me?

This left Chu Liang somewhat puzzled. The thought of someone so well hidden trailing him around day and night was undeniably eerie.

As Shen Qingyan glanced back, she looked a bit downcast. Chu Liang then went on to explain everything he had seen at the abandoned Shen Family Residence that day.

Shen Qingyan, after hearing his words, felt a wave of melancholy wash over her.

Thus, her parents were indeed dead long ago, and her mother had remained a ghost for many years. But why hadn't her teacher shared this with her? Was it to shield her from the harsh reality that the Shen family had met their end because of greed and desire?

After the matter concerning the Shen Family was settled, Chu Liang found himself with some unanswered questions. Now, with the sudden appearance of the shadowy figure, everything was becoming increasingly complicated.

Fortunately, this matter no longer concerned him. After handing over all his doubts to Shen Qingyan, he could finally rest easy and head back.

As they made their way back to Emperor's Mound, Shen Qingyan turned to Chu Liang before they parted and said, "Regardless of everything, thank you, Young Hero Chu, for telling me everything. If you hadn't, I would still be in the dark about the origins of my identity after all these years."

"Oh, it was no bother," Chu Liang said nonchalantly.

With a look of sadness and loss, Shen Qingyan appeared quite pitiable. But on this night, she wasn't alone in her feelings of sorrow.

As the Second Prince's carriage left the Celestial Observatory Pavilion, his face was also filled with sadness.

The Second Prince grumbled inwardly, What was this all about?

In truth, he had always been resistant to the idea of an arranged marriage. But as the future crown prince, he knew his marriage would never be under his control. So, when the chancellor proposed the name Shen Qingyan, the Second Prince was overjoyed.

Compared to the numerous aristocratic women with impressive backgrounds but less-than-appealing appearances, Shen Qingyan was practically perfect. If all arranged marriages were with women like her, the Second Prince wouldn't mind having a few more.

So, he had eagerly awaited this meeting with Shen Qingyan. But somehow, a mishap happened and the spotlight was stolen by someone else.

He couldn't honestly say there was no resentment in his heart, but he realized it was not right to blame Chu Liang. After all, Chu Liang never intended to take the spotlight. The situation just unfolded that way.

He could only say that he felt deeply aggrieved, very much so.

As the carriage made its way forward, a loud, boisterous voice suddenly rang out from the roadside.

"Speaking of that Young Hero with the Divine Whip, Chu Liang, ha! His romantic adventures are not few," an old man continued to chatter on the street. "Everyone's heard the tales of his love for Jiang Yuebai, but what they don't know is how many hearts this handsome young hero has won..."

The Second Prince tapped on the carriage window, and a servant quickly approached.

"I want someone to give that old man a beating tonight," the Second Prince commanded, his voice filled with anger. "And make sure they wear masks."

...

In a flash, the Great Selection of the Four Seas had reached its last day. After today, the eighty-one chosen teams would be confirmed and would compete with the sects of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten in the Competition of the Hundred Sects, marking the official commencement of the Assembly of Immortal Sects.

Although there weren't many duels today, a grand opening ceremony was set to follow the matches, and it promised to be quite spectacular. Many spectators had rushed here to witness the event.

The teams still in the competition were all extremely powerful. All the matches today were contests between some of the most formidable participants.

As soon as Chu Liang and his group arrived, they observed that most of the spectators were clustered around a particular stage.

At the center of the stage stood a dark golden flame giant, towering about seven to eight zhang. With each swing of its fists and legs, it radiated an immense destructive power!

"Primordial Earth Core Fire!"

Chu Liang instantly recognized the flame as the same furnace fire he had encountered that night at the Sword Forging Sect. It was clear that the contestant on stage was a disciple of the Earthfire Sect.

The Earthfire Sect, which had a close affiliation with the Sword Forging Sect, was part of the Chancellor's Sixteen-Faction Alliance.

It was a strong sect that appeared out of nowhere and had recently risen to a position of prominence.

The contestant facing him was a disciple of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau.

The young disciples raised by the Imperial Supervisory Bureau were few, yet they were all incredibly gifted and no less impressive than the brilliant prodigies from the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten.

Based on historical records, the Imperial Supervisory Bureau was recognized as stronger than the sects within the Terrestrial Ten. Their team would often make it to the third round—Battle at the Imperial City—and would stand shoulder to shoulder with the immortal sects in the Divine Nine.

However, from the conversations around him, Chu Liang discovered that both the Imperial Supervisory Bureau and the Earthfire Sect had won one match each, and this final duel would be the decisive round to determine which side would advance.

If the Imperial Supervisory Bureau lost, they would be eliminated in the first round!

Boom—

The Earthfire Giant lunged fiercely, delivering a punch that cracked the ground at the center of the stage. At the same time, the young disciple of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau leaped into the air, his sword transforming into a dazzling array of shimmering light shadows.

Whizz, whizz, whizz—

The figure dressed in white zipped back and forth, thrusting his sword into the Earthfire Giant until it was filled with holes. His divine technique resembled that of Li Chengfeng, indicating that he must be his disciple.

Yet, in the blink of an eye, the Earthfire Giant healed all its injuries and lunged at him with even greater strength!

Boom—

The disciple of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau slashed the air with his sword, creating this black rift in the void. When the Earthfire Giant punched into it, a deafening roar echoed.

However, the giant did not back down; instead, it charged forward with even greater ferocity.

Boom—

With most of its arm engulfed by the black rift, the hole started to tremble with fierce intensity!

Bang!

With a thunderous boom, the Earthfire Giant's fist broke through several zhang beyond the black hole!

This was sheer power, overwhelming enough to break the limits of the disciple's divine technique and pierce right through it!

Rumble—

The Earthfire Giant, undeterred by the black hole, punched the Imperial Supervisory Bureau disciple, sending him flying through the sky like a shooting star!

"Roar!" With a proud roar, the giant's flames swirled away, unveiling the tiny, thin figure of a young boy.

A wave of shocked gasps swept through the audience!

He won!

Twelve years ago, the Earthfire Sect didn't even exist. This was their first time competing in the Assembly of Immortal Sects following the establishment of their sect. Although each Assembly of Immortal Sects brought its fair share of unexpected endings, there hadn't been one this shocking in years.

The Imperial Supervisory Bureau, in whom the audience had placed such high hopes, was unexpectedly eliminated in the first round, defeated by the Earthfire Sect!

Chapter 532: Conflict

In the quiet room of the chancellor's residence, faint wisps of smoke still lingered in the air.

A masked figure in black stood respectfully before the table. "As per your order, Chancellor, I have retrieved the jade pendant," he said, placing the pendant engraved with the character "Shen" on the table.

"Last night, I sustained some minor injuries and had to find a place to treat my wounds before returning, which was why I came back late. I hope you will forgive the delay."

Su Qian still maintained the appearance of a middle-aged scholar. With his delicate features and gentle demeanor, he looked rather feminine. Yet, when his brows arched, the subtle shift in his expression revealed a hidden and unyielding authority.

"You've done well. Why would I blame you?" Su Qian replied with a faint smile. "Shen Qingyan managed to wound you with her divine skills? It seems her cultivation is truly impressive."

The man in black froze for a moment. Why does he sound pleased that I was hurt? By that logic, would he be overjoyed and praise her strength even more if she had beaten me to death?

Though these thoughts raced through his mind, he didn't dare voice them.

Instead, he nodded and said, "Indeed. Even setting aside her musical prowess, Shen Qingyan's cultivation alone ranks her among the finest in the members of the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten."

"Hehe," Su Qian chuckled softly, shaking his head before continuing, "You've accomplished a great deed this time, so you deserve a reward. I'll personally see to it that the materials for the Night-Traversing Armor you requested are gathered, and I'll have the Sword Forging Sect craft it for you. Don't you worry about this."

"Thank you, Chancellor," the man in black quickly expressed his gratitude.

"As for the Assembly of Immortal Sects, more than half of the eight major sects participated. However, the Shadow Sect, to which you belong, could not. I know this must have upset you, even if you haven't said so aloud," Su Qian added. "Therefore, I owe you anyway."

"As your subordinate, I would never dare harbor such thoughts," the man in black replied immediately. "It is only through the Chancellor's favor that the Shadow Sect was able to rise again. How could I ever disobey your orders?"

Unlike the Sword Forging Sect and Earthfire Sect, which were both established and nurtured under Su Qian's guidance, the Shadow Sect was an ancient sect with a history spanning thousands of years.

This sect, renowned for its mastery of stealth and concealment, had always walked a fine line between righteousness and darkness. Over a century ago, under the leadership of an evil sect leader, the Shadow Sect strayed from its original path and ventured into darker dealings, engaging in theft and assassinations for hire.

This dark business was a perfect fit for their skills in stealth and concealment. Naturally, the Shadow Sect thrived, growing more prosperous through these shady activities.

But within a few decades, the Shadow Sect stirred up too much trouble, drawing the attention of the imperial court. They were wiped out, with only a few survivors left, and the sect's legacy was nearly erased.

At that critical moment, it was Su Qian who found the few remaining members of the Shadow Sect. He provided them the resources and support they needed to rebuild and grow stronger. After more than ten years of development, the sect was brought back to life.

Even though they still carried out shady dealings, things naturally changed when they had someone powerful backing them.

"It's good that you think this way," Su Qian said calmly. "The Assembly of Immortal Sects may bring fame, but it isn't the right stage for your sect. A sect like the Shadow Sect thrives in the shadows, and if your methods become too well-known, you'd lose your greatest advantage. Besides, for the tasks I need you to handle, it's best if people know as little about your sect as possible."

"I understand," the man in black replied. "The Shadow Sect will follow your orders without question, Chancellor."

"Good. Now, continue to keep an eye on Shen Qingyan. Report any unusual activity to me immediately," Su Qian instructed. "However, she'll be more alert after your last encounter, so you must be even more careful now."

"As you command," the man in black responded before silently slipping away.

After the man in black had left, Su Qian slowly reached out and picked up the jade pendant from the table.

In his palm, the pendant began to glow softly, its faint light flickering in the dim, shadowy room, making it all the more striking.

Snap.

With a swift motion, Su Qian flipped his hand and clenched his fist. The jade pendant shattered instantly, crumbling into fine powder.

Then, a look of relief spread across his face.

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"Brother Chu!" a voice called out from a distance.

A group of familiar faces approached Chu Liang. All of them were beaming with smiles.

"Brother Yun?" Chu Liang uttered as he turned to look behind him.

Sure enough, Yun Chaoxian of the Great Astral Sect was leading the group. Behind him were the ever-silent Ren Hongdao, the stern-faced Li Fujian, and the adorably naive Tang Shi.

At the back of the group was Zhang Juque, the one accompanying the Great Astral Sect's representative team this time. He had been silently watching from behind, which explained why Li Fujian was so nervous.

"Heheh, it's been a while," Yun Chaoxian said with a grin.

Chu Liang greeted them before asking, "Why did you all arrive so late?"

Over the past few days, disciples from the sects of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten had been arriving one after another at the residences on the Emperor's Mound. The Great Astral Sect, however, was among the last to arrive.

Yun Chaoxian began to explain. "We were doing some closed-door cultivation to prepare for the Assembly of Immortal Sects—"

But before he could finish, Tang Shi chimed in from behind, "We got the date wrong."

"Haha," Chu Liang chuckled.

The young girl was certainly honest, but Chu Liang was still puzzled.

He said, "But there are so many of you..."

"We all got it wrong," Yun Chaoxian admitted.

Impressive, Chu Liang thought. As expected of the Great Astral Sect disciples, they really do share one brain.

"And I was the one who remembered the date closest to the real one," Yun Chaoxian added, looking rather proud of himself.

"Brother Yun, you're truly wise and brave," Chu Liang couldn't help but praise.

Looking again at the disciples of the Great Astral Sect, Chu Liang noticed a clear change in their demeanor. Their qi and blood were now more refined, giving them a calm and composed presence. Typically, martial cultivators radiate their vitality outward, but it was evident they had learned to contain it.

It was clear that their special training had been intense.

As Chu Liang was chatting with the Great Astral Sect disciples, a small commotion arose behind him.

At this moment, the Great Selection of the Four Seas was nearing its end, and the commencement ceremony was about to begin.

Disciples from the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten had gathered, their presence appearing rather dazzling in the moment.

The names that people had only read about in the news or heard through rumors were now standing right before them, drawing all attention away from the arena and toward the gathering of disciples below.

Suddenly, a child darted in front of Jiang Yuebai.

The child, appearing around eleven or twelve years old, was relatively short for his age, making him seem even younger. However, his face held a strange, sinister charm that didn't match his youthful appearance.

"You must be Jiang Yuebai from Mount Shu, right? You're really beautiful," the child said boldly. "Marry me and be my wife."

The crowd immediately turned their attention to the scene. Many may have shared the same thought, but few would have dared to say it aloud—let alone to Jiang Yuebai's face.

Seeing that it was a child who made the bold statement, the crowd chuckled, treating it as nothing more than a lighthearted joke.

"Whose foolish child is this? Don't his parents watch him?" some of Jiang Yuebai's supporters angrily shouted.

"Wait, that's... Qi Lin'er from the Penglai Supreme Sect!" someone in the crowd recognized the child.

Jiang Yuebai could sense that the child's cultivation was not weak, but since he was a child, she couldn't be bothered to deal with him. She merely frowned slightly and turned away, choosing to ignore him.

But Qi Lin'er wasn't finished. He quickly darted in front of Jiang Yuebai again, this time speaking with a serious tone. "Xi Miaoixian was here first, so she's my first wife. You came later, so you'll be my second wife. Don't worry, I promise I'll treat you both well. Hehe, come with me."

Seeing that Jiang Yuebai remained unmoved, Qi Lin'er spread his hands and added, "What future do you have in a lousy place like the Mount Shu Sect? Marry me, and you can live on Mirage Mountain. I advise you not to be ungrateful."

At this moment, Chu Liang noticed the situation and stepped forward, ready to chase away the brat who was clearly lost in delusions.

But Jiang Yuebai grabbed his wrist and said softly, "I'll handle this myself."

With a swift step forward, her figure blurred as she appeared right in front of Qi Lin'er, extending a single finger.

Bang.

She jabbed Qi Lin'er on the forehead with just one finger.

Qi Lin'er, still wearing a smug, dismissive smile, seemed unconcerned as Jiang Yuebai made her move. But then came a dull thud, and his entire body was flung into the air, somersaulting before crashing to the ground.

As he looked up again, his face was now covered in dust.

"You dare hit me?" Qi Lin'er's eyes widened in disbelief.

He wasn't exactly shocked by Jiang Yuebai's act of hitting him. What truly stunned him was the fact that she had actually managed to move him.

As someone born with copper skin and iron bones, he had reached a high level of cultivation since a young age. Since young, he had never suffered. Given his age, he could have waited another twelve years to join the next Assembly of Immortal Sects. None would have been able to beat him by then.

But he believed that even now, no one could match him, which was why he insisted on joining this assembly.

He hadn't expected to face a setback from this woman before the competition had even begun.

For a moment, he was completely stunned.

Even Jiang Yuebai was slightly surprised. She had sensed that the child's cultivation was extraordinary, so she had used seventy percent of her strength in the initial jab.

Still, that force exerted could not even move the child. It was only when she had exerted her full power that she was able to send the child flying.

The fact that the Penglai Supreme Sect had sent this child to participate in the Assembly of Immortal Sects clearly showed that he possessed extraordinary mystical abilities.

But in this situation, Jiang Yuebai now had the upper hand, and that was enough.

With a slight flick of her sleeve, Jiang Yuebai coldly said, "As the head disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, I can forgive your disrespect toward me because of your young age. But since you insulted my sect publicly, I cannot let it go without punishing you."

She stood proudly as her white dress fluttered gracefully in the wind.

"You—"

Qi Lin'er, his face covered in dust, was about to erupt in anger when he suddenly felt someone press down on the back of his neck. The moment he felt the pressure, his anger was immediately stifled in his throat.

A team from the Penglai Supreme Sect emerged from the crowd, led by a man whose face was as aloof as cold jade. His eyes gleamed with divine light, and he looked so handsome that he appeared otherworldly. This was none other than Yang Shenlong, the head disciple of the Penglai Supreme Sect.

Behind him were his brother Yang Yuhu, Xi Miaoqian, as well as the Slaves of the Five Sacred Mountains[1], each with their own distinct and unique presence. As this group walked forward, their aura radiated a silent warning, urging others to keep their distance. Both cultivators and ordinary people in the crowd instinctively backed off.

It was Yang Shenlong who had grabbed Qi Lin'er by the neck and pushed him down. Instantly, Qi Lin'er was overwhelmed with fear, unable to speak, completely subdued by the presence of someone senior in his own team.

"This child was naughty. It's our fault for not disciplining him properly. I hope the head disciple of the Mount Shu Sect can forgive him," Yang Shenlong said calmly. He paused briefly before adding, "We can settle any conflicts between us during the Competition of the Hundred Sects. How does that sound?"

The surrounding crowd burst into murmurs, and the atmosphere suddenly grew tense.

The first half of Yang Shenlong's words seemed like an apology to the Mount Shu Sect, but the second half felt more like a challenge. Though his tone was polite, there was a clear hint of provocation.

In reality, Yang Shenlong's first sentence was meant for Jiang Yuebai, asking for forgiveness. The second sentence, though, was a message to Qi Lin'er. As the head disciple, he couldn't always protect his own people without good reason, or others would stop trusting him. But if he only controlled his peers without standing up for them, he'd lose respect.

Making such a decision in that instant was already a perfect response.

Sure enough, after Yang Shenlong spoke, the restless Qi Lin'er immediately calmed down. He knew that once the Competition of the Hundred Sects began, he could settle his grievances then.

Now, all the pressure fell on Jiang Yuebai. If she backed down in the face of this provocation from one of the strongest immortal sects, it would destroy the Mount Shu Sect's reputation. But if she accepted the challenge, could the Mount Shu Sect team really handle being targeted by the Penglai Supreme Sect during the Competition of a Hundred Sects?

Chu Liang, Xu Ziyang, Ling Ao, and even Wang Xuanling gathered around Jiang Yuebai, yet none stepped forward and helped Jiang Yuebai as they knew that it was the head disciple's responsibility to handle this.

Facing the tense atmosphere and strong presence of qi, Jiang Yuebai's expression remained unchanged. She simply replied in a calm and composed manner, "We shall see."

Chapter 533: The Commencement

By responding this way, Jiang Yuebai managed to protect her dignity without escalating the conflict. However, the two sides remained locked in a tense standoff. It was as if two opposing auras of different colors clashed, freezing the atmosphere for what felt like an eternity.

The tension only grew when the members of the Great Astral Sect arrived. Having noticed Chu Liang's sudden departure, they were unsure of the situation, but upon seeing the confrontation, Yun Chaoxian was the first to step forward.

"Are we fighting now?" he shouted loudly. "One-on-one or a group fight?"

With a thud, he slammed the World-Dominating Halberd into the ground.

Behind him, Ren Hongdao glared coldly at Yang Shenlong, looking eager to challenge him as well.

Even though little Tang Shi appeared timid, she stood firmly behind Chu Liang, ready to support him.

Li Fujian glanced at his esteemed teacher and saw Zhang Juque glaring at him, his expression clearly saying, With these bastards from Penglai, what are you hesitating for?

"Yes..." Li Fujian muttered, immediately stepping forward to join Mount Shu Sect's side.

Chu Liang felt quite moved as he watched. Of course, it was the brothers from the Great Astral Sect he could count on. They always stepped up when it mattered most.

By now, the standoff had drawn the attention of nearly everyone around, but the Penglai Supreme Sect had backup too. The team from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals quickly sided with Yang Shenlong. However, Zhuge Guanxing, who was on friendly terms with Chu Liang, chose not to step forward from the crowd.

In fact, the relationships among the immortal sects were always complex, with many personal connections intertwined. Chu Liang had previously gotten along well with both Yang Yuhu and Xi Miaoxian, making it difficult for there to be a clear-cut opposition between the two sides.

However, conflicts between sects often overshadowed personal ties. None of them would hold back if they faced each other in the actual competition.

As more and more people gathered to watch, Feng Chaoyang shouted, rallying another group of supporters to their side.

Even if the Celestial King Sect did not share a relationship with the Mount Shu Sect, they would always support anyone willing to take on the Penglai Supreme Sect.

Meanwhile, on the Penglai Supreme Sect's side, the team from Fuyao Kingdom had also joined. The people on both sides continued to expand.

Just as the confrontation was about to extend to the entire arena and the Competition of the Hundred Sects seemed to be on the brink of starting ahead of schedule if someone said something, a stern voice rang out, "What do you think you're doing?"

A figure landed on the ground—it was Ji Zidian, a celestial official from the Imperial Supervisory Bureau.

All the important matters of the Assembly of Immortal Sects were overseen by the Imperial Supervisory Bureau.

At this moment, it was understandable why Ji Zidan felt irritable. He had just seen the team representing the Bureau lose in the first round, and now he was watching the disciples of the immortal sects gathering.

Immediately, he landed and scolded out loud, "If you have issues with one another, resolve them during the Competition of the Hundred Sects. Step into the illusory realm and fight to the death if you must, but stop causing trouble here!"

His words were rather effective as both sides dispersed in response, and the chaos subsided.

Ji Zidian glanced around and then fixed his gaze on Chu Liang, calling out, "You, come here!"

Chu Liang, feeling puzzled, stepped forward and heard Ji Zidian asking with the use of Voice Transmission, "Was that incident at the Sword Forging Sect your doing?"

Chu Liang's heart skipped a beat. Could Xue Yipin have given him away? But upon thinking it through, he figured it was unlikely. The Imperial Supervisory Bureau must have discovered some clues from elsewhere.

The Imperial Supervisory Bureau had been assisting the Famous Chef of the World in the search for the missing knife. They had considered the same matters as Chu Liang but they did not act fast enough.

On one hand, there were only a few swordsmiths capable of refining the Famous Yipin Knife, and the Imperial Supervisory Bureau had narrowed it down to a few around the capital of Yu.

On the other hand, the fragrance from the knife box had also caught their attention, leading them to eventually identify Miss Yunshang.

This made it almost certain that the Sword Forging Sect was involved.

But by then, two days had passed. If the Sword Forging Sect had already started refining the Famous Yipin Knife, this amount of time would have been enough to forge a new weapon, leaving no evidence to prove that they were the culprits.

Fortunately, at this stage of the investigation, they discovered that on the same night the knife was stolen, a massive explosion had occurred at the Sword Forging Sect, and the precious knife had been returned to the Famous Chef of the World.

Although the matter of the Famous Yipin Knife was resolved, the Pair of Male and Female Thieves had caused an uproar.

The Imperial Supervisory Bureau members connected the dots and came to a conclusion. Considering that Chu Liang had sought out Miss Yunshang to ask about the fragrance and had enjoyed the Gourmet Banquet Platter at the Famous Chef of the World, it seemed likely that he was the culprit behind both the theft and the explosion.

That was why Ji Zidian had come to ask.

Chu Liang kept quiet, putting on a puzzled expression. "What case? Are you speaking of the Pair of Male and Female Thieves who were really righteous vigilantes? I don't know anything about that."

Upon hearing his answer, Ji Zidian immediately knew it was him for sure.

"You handled it well, but you still need to be careful. After all, you're a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, and certain things can easily bring trouble to your sect," Ji Zidan cautioned. "If something like this occurs again, make sure to come to me directly."

A wry smile crossed Chu Liang's face. He had shared the same concern, but everything had spiraled out of control that day. If he hadn't gone to retrieve the knife himself when he connected the dots, things would have ended badly...

At the same time, he wanted to ensure that as few people as possible were aware of his involvement, which was why he did not let the Imperial Supervisory Bureau know.

"Thanks for the reminder, Celestial Official Ji. Even though I don't quite understand what you're referring to, I will be more careful in the future," Chu Liang replied with a smile.

"Very well," Ji Zidian replied with a slight nod, feeling assured that his questions had been answered. "The commencement ceremony is about to start. Make sure to perform well."

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When Chu Liang came back, Jiang Yuebai asked, "What did he want with you?"

She was still thinking about what had happened that day, so a sense of worry lingered in her mind.

"Nothing major," Chu Liang chuckled as he spoke. "He just asked if I was involved in the Sword Forging Sect case and even pressured me to name my accomplice, but I told him, 'You can kill me, but I'll never betray the head disciple of Mount Shu Sect!'"

"Pfft..." Jiang Yuebai burst into laughter, rolling her eyes at him with playful annoyance.

The fact that he was still in the mood to joke suggested that nothing serious had occurred.

Before long, the third day of the Great Selection of the Four Seas came to a close. Naturally, some teams were filled with joy while others were steeped in sadness, and as always, there were more losers than winners. The eighty-one sects ultimately selected were exceptionally formidable, with participants in this year's Assembly of Immortal Sects demonstrating significantly higher cultivation levels than in previous years.

This was closely linked to the rapid growth and prosperity of the entire realm of immortality cultivation in recent years.

After that, a large group of palace guards arrived to maintain order. They quickly dismantled the arena and erected a new high platform, arranging the members from the various sects in the right sequence. Naturally, the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten were positioned at the front while the audience was kept at a respectful distance.

Once everything was set, a gong resonated through the air. Shortly after, a procession of Celestial Golden-Winged Horses approached, elegantly surrounded by Golden Luan beasts. The entire spectacle was truly breathtaking.

"His Majesty has arrived!" Warrior Lao announced loudly, standing tall on the yoke of the carriage drawn by the most celestial horses.

The commencement ceremony of the Assembly of Immortal Sects was always attended by the Emperor of the Yu Dynasty, accompanied by the Chancellor, Great General, Imperial Supervisory Commissioner, and other important ministers in the carriages behind him.

Before long, the Emperor of the Yu Dynasty, dressed in his majestic dragon robe, ascended the high platform.

As Chu Liang gazed at his "elder brother," he felt that he seemed different from when he saw him last time in the imperial palace.

In the palace, the emperor had come across as an imposing yet more approachable figure. However, as he ascended the platform now, his aura of authority was fully unleashed. His presence radiated solemnity and grandeur.

As he stood alone on the platform, it felt as if there was a golden dragon coiled behind him.

It was clear that some divine technique was being used to exert pressure and authority. Otherwise, the feeling of pressure wouldn't have been so intense.

The emperor's speech carried a formal tone, declaring that the Assembly of Immortal Sects was the most significant event in the Four Seas and Nine Provinces. He emphasized that the young heroes present would become the pillars of the mortal world for the next century and beyond. He also expressed his hope that everyone would perform exceptionally well.

The only useful part of his speech was the final few sentences.

"At each Commencement of the Assembly of Immortal Sects, we invite esteemed seniors to spar and showcase their skills, inspiring the younger generation to cultivate diligently. This time, it is our honor to have invited the Sword Emperor of the West Sea for a duel with the Sword Saint of the Nine Provinces!"

This announcement was met with an immediate wave of cheers.

In the history of Commencement sparring among the Eminent Ones, these two were undoubtedly among the most distinguished guests.

After all, there were few Eminent Ones willing to spar in front of an audience, and even fewer who demonstrated such high cultivation levels. For many years, the invited participants had usually been at the seventh realm, and their sparring matches had tended to be more symbolic than serious.

However, these two had dueled years ago. Back then, the Sword Emperor of the West Sea was just starting out and lost to the more experienced Sword Saint of the Nine Provinces.

Yet it was through that defeat that he had gained enlightenment. Now, he returned with renewed strength. Surely, this would be a real fight.

The Sword Emperor of the West Sea was a truly inspiring figure. His real name was Chen Erniu[1], and he had been born into a farming family in the Sword-Hanging Kingdom.

In the Sword-Hanging Kingdom, swordsmiths and sword cultivators held the highest status. From a young age, Chen Erniu aspired to become a sword cultivator. Despite growing up with almost no resources, he relied solely on his fighting spirit to challenge opponents wherever he could.

He eventually defeated all the powerful enemies within the Sword-Hanging Kingdom, becoming a Sword Emperor and even breaking through to the eighth realm, mastering the Heavenly Origin.

His greatest strength was his ability to improve after every defeat.

This meant that he would undoubtedly return even stronger, a hundred steps ahead of the person he had been when he lost the challenge against the Sword Saint.

The members of the Mount Shu Sect were particularly interested in this duel, as once Daoist Yan emerged from her closed-door cultivation, she would inevitably have to fight the Sword Emperor of the West Sea.

As the emperor stepped down from the platform, a figure with a sharp aura, powerful enough to tear through heaven and earth, soared into the air from the side. Even from a distance, his presence was blinding. This was the Sword Emperor of the West Sea.

On the opposite side stood the Sword Saint of the Nine Provinces from the Endless Sword Sect, presenting himself as an elder clad in white robes.

If one referred to this duel as a fight between the Sword Emperor of the West Sea and the Sword Saint of the Nine Provinces, it would sound awe-inspiring.

However, if one referred to this duel as Chen Erniu versus Old Li Ba, it would seem like two farmers bickering over a canal at the village entrance.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The thunderous sound of the cannon rang out three times.

The duel between the two eighth-realm swordsmen had officially begun!

Chapter 534: The One Who Stood at the Pinnacle of the Dao of the Sword

Though it was summer, snow began to fall suddenly over the capital of Yu.

The snowflakes fluttered down, growing denser by the moment, almost obscuring the view of the onlookers witnessing the ceremony. Each snowflake that landed on people's skin caused a slight sting, imbued with the profound intent of a sword.

This snowfall was caused by the two sword masters hovering in mid-air. Though their duel had yet to begin, the cold aura they exuded had already pierced the heavens, creating a deadly tension that spread in every direction.

The Sword Emperor of the West Sea stood among them. He appeared as a sturdy, unassuming middle-aged man, with a broad, square face, dark, weathered skin, and a few wrinkles. His height was average and he looked like a plain and simple man.

His entire demeanor suited his humble name perfectly.

Even though he appeared plain and even slightly old-fashioned, the moment he ascended into the air under the gaze of countless onlookers, the awe-inspiring presence of a grandmaster radiated from.

"Esteemed senior, it has been fifty years since our last battle. I have not dared to slack for even a single day and have finally comprehended the true essence of your sword," the Sword Emperor of the West Sea said, his voice low enough for only the two of them to hear as he braved the fierce wind. "I seek your guidance once more."

Opposite him hovered Old Li Ba, a short and chubby elder. His white robes only accentuated the flaws in his physique. When he smiled and squinted his eyes, there was something unsettling about

him, almost perverted, like one of those old rascals who spent their days lounging by the door, leering at passing women.

In the minds of the people, sword cultivators were always seen as figures in white robes, carrying swords and moving swiftly like the wind—sharp and dashing. But with these two standing at the pinnacle of the Dao of the Sword, that image of sword cultivators in the immortal realm hit rock bottom. Not even the similarly aged Imperial Supervisory Commissioner, who stood nearby, could do anything to salvage the situation.

"Heheh, no need for pleasantries," Old Li Ba said with a grin. "After our last fight, I gained some insights too. Even though I've spent most of these years raising flowers, playing with birds, fishing, spanking my grandsons, and doting on my great-granddaughter... I've still made some progress. Just don't cry when you lose this time."

"You needn't worry about that, esteemed senior. I have been practicing the art of sword my entire life and lost countless times. Even so, I've never once lost motivation," replied the Sword Emperor of the West Sea.

"Then draw your sword and show me how far you've come in these past fifty years," Old Li Ba said, gesturing with his hand.

The Sword Emperor of the West Sea remained silent, but he didn't reach for his sword. As a matter of fact, he had no sword at all. Instead, he raised his hand and gently plucked a snowflake from the air.

That tiny, crystalline snowflake solidified in his palm, and with a flick of his finger, he sent it flying.

Whoosh—

With just a light flick, the snowflake, barely visible to the naked eye, sliced through the air and instantly swept away all the surrounding snow. The clouds above parted, and the skies of the four domains emerged once more. The world suddenly became bright and clear.

It was the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination!

At that moment, every cultivator in the audience—Jiang Yuebai, Chu Liang, and all those who had mastered or even glimpsed the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination—felt a jolt in their hearts. For some reason, their blood suddenly boiled within their veins, surging with an inexplicable force.

This was the power of those who had attained the Heavenly Origin. He was the absolute Dao Master of this Great Dao. He was the one in absolute control. Just a simple display stirred the hearts of those who had merely glimpsed this path.

Anyone who tried to oppose him using the same Great Dao would only suffer a powerful backlash.

In a flash, the snowflake had reached Old Li Ba. His expression turned slightly more serious as he swept his right sleeve, forming his hands into the shape of a sword and slashing through the void.

Whoosh—

The sound of wind echoed, yet it seemed as though nothing had happened.

The crystalline snowflake quivered in mid-air, as if another force was trying to redirect its path. After a few flips, it shattered with a sharp bang.

The Sword Emperor of the West Sea's pupils dilated slightly, and he let out a slow breath, clearly uncomfortable.

This was the Great Dao of the Severing Void.

Unlike the grand and overwhelming sword qi of the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination, the Severing Void focused on refining sword intent to such precision that it could cut through anything unnoticed.

The Sword Emperor of the West Sea had suffered from this technique fifty years ago, and though he was still at a disadvantage right now, at least he managed to hold his ground.

As he opened his hand and grasped the void, a nearly transparent swordlight appeared in his palm. After a brief probe, he finally drew his sword.

The Sword-Hanging Kingdom was a small nation in the West Sea. Though It was an island rich with sword culture, there was a lack of resources. Their finest swordsmith, Baili Tong, only became famous after coming to the capital of Yu.

In the Sword Emperor's hand was the finest sword of the Sword-Hanging Kingdom, ranked seventy-first in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures—the ancient sword, Shadow-Bearer.

It was said that this sword was nearly invisible, revealing only a trace of its form at dawn and dusk. The sword qi it emitted was also transparent, making it impossible to guard against.

"If I used the Chunyang Ancient Sword, that would be truly bullying," Old Li Ba said as he laughed heartily. "Little Shiyi, lend Great-Grandpa your sword!"

With a wave of his hand, a swordlight flew up from below and into his grip.

In the audience, Li Shiyi from the Endless Sword Sect let out a surprised "Ah!"

Her sword had already flown off from her back and into the sky. Her Taoshan Spirit Sword, ranked one hundred sixty-second in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures, was a famous sword, though still a tier below the ancient sword Shadow-Bearer.

However, at this level of a duel, such a difference in swords wouldn't be enough to alter the outcome.

With swords in hand, the auras of the two masters of the Heavenly Origin immediately changed.

They unleashed a fierceness that pierced the heavens, creating two dark holes in the once-azure sky, as if the sky itself couldn't bear the overwhelming pressure.

In fact, they had deliberately directed the overflow of their qi upward. Had they allowed it to spread in all directions, countless commoners and low-level cultivators below would have been crushed to death.

The Sword Emperor of the West Sea raised the Shadow-Bearer to the sky. The ancient sword floated before him, transforming into a massive swordlight!

He performed the Heaven-Raising Sword!

This was an immortal art that Chu Liang was familiar with, but it didn't look like the version he knew.

The way the Sword Emperor of the West Sea executed the technique seemed far too simple. There was no massive swordlight tearing through the sky, nor a trace of overwhelming sword qi. It was merely a slightly enlarged swordlight that was slowly pressing forward.

It looked weak—lacking power, and moving at a sluggish pace.

But for the first time, Old Li Ba's expression turned serious.

The slow-moving sword appeared as if it could be easily dodged with a simple sidestep, yet Old Li Ba found himself unable to escape its path. He had no choice but to clash head-on, swinging the Taoshan Spirit Sword in his hand to meet the attack head-on.

Whoosh—

When Old Li Ba struck with his sword, there was no change in light or shadow, yet it felt as if a portion of the sky had suddenly disappeared.

The audience below suddenly felt a wave of dizziness wash over them, and countless people collapsed to the ground. Even after regaining their senses, they were left confused, unable to grasp what had just happened.

When they looked up again, they saw that the swordlight emitted by the Sword Emperor of the West Sea had been cleanly severed in half.

Yet, the remaining half of the swordlight continued to advance toward Old Li Ba, undeterred by the earlier strike.

With a sweep of his large sleeve, Old Li Ba absorbed the remaining swordlight into his sleeve. However, a sharp ripping sound followed, and half of his sleeve was torn apart, exposing his chubby arm.

"Not bad," Old Li Ba said with a smile. "Your sword strike has improved greatly since the last time we fought."

"I still lost," replied the Sword Emperor of the West Sea, though his eyes shone brightly, as if he were pleased. "Your sword intent can now slice heaven and earth... it resembles the momentum of Tai'a."

"All Great Dao are without limits, especially among the Three Great Dao of the Sword," Old Li Ba chuckled.

"Esteemed Senior, you are right," the Sword Emperor of the West Sea nodded, as though a new understanding had dawned on him.

With that, he turned and descended onto the platform, declaring, "I have lost."

It was only then that the bewildered audience below grasped the outcome of the duel. The Sword Saint's sleeve was torn, but he was the one who won?

They were not to be blamed for the confusion. In a duel between sword cultivators, victory or defeat could be decided in an instant. Not only could ordinary people fail to grasp what had happened, but even some Eminent Ones at the seventh realm might struggle to comprehend the deeper mysteries behind such battles.

Sitting beside the Emperor of the Yu Dynasty, the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner grasped the situation clearly. He said leisurely to the emperor, "Old Li Ba has made progress in his cultivation since his last duel with the Sword Emperor. His improvement is just as impressive as the Sword Emperor's."

Old Li Ba's attack and defense had just demonstrated two key points. On one hand, the Sword Emperor could not intercept Old Li Ba's sword strike. On the other hand, Old Li Ba could handle the Sword Emperor's sword strike.

If Old Li Ba's sword strike hadn't been aimed at severing the swordlight but instead directed at the Sword Emperor himself, the Sword Emperor would have been injured at the very least. The fact that Old Li Ba could still absorb the remaining swordlight afterward showed that the Sword Emperor's attack posed no threat to him at all.

With this exchange, the Sword Emperor wisely chose to concede. After all, the Sword Emperor of the West Sea was the junior. Fifty years ago, Old Li Ba had already surpassed him in the cultivation of the Sword Dao. Even though both had made progress since then, the Sword Emperor was still outmatched. However, there was no shame in his defeat.

Most of the audience below were citizens of the capital of Yu, and they naturally feel more supportive of the Endless Sword Sect of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. When the Sword Emperor of the West Sea lost, the crowd burst into cheers.

Though most didn't understand what had happened, they knew it had been something amazing. If they didn't cheer now, it would be like admitting they didn't get it, which would be embarrassing.

The younger spectators were filled with excitement, watching these figures who stood at the pinnacle of the mortal world. Though they knew they couldn't reach such heights themselves, their hearts still yearned for it.

...

The long-anticipated sword duel ended rather quickly, but such was the nature of battles between sword cultivators. The winner was often determined by that one decisive strike. If these two Eminent Ones of the Heavenly Origin Realm had wanted to make the fight flashy and spectacular, it wouldn't have been difficult, but they had risen beyond the need to for such displays.

Next, the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner announced that the immortal sects would have three days of rest. The Competition of the Hundred Sects would begin at noon in three days. By then, everyone would be able to witness the entire event from the base of Emperor's Mound.

The following day, the family and friends of the Mount Shu Sect arrived.

The imperial court had arranged accommodations for the disciples participating in the Assembly of Immortal Sects, but not for those attending as spectators, so friends and family had to find their own lodgings. Since there hadn't been any competitions involving the Mount Shu Sect in the previous days, their fellow sect members hadn't arrived yet.

With the Competition of the Hundred Sects about to begin, disciples from the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten sects also began arriving in the capital of Yu.

Among them was Wen Yulong.

Chu Liang hadn't seen him in several months. Before the special training at Mount Shu had begun, Wen Yulong had gone into closed-door cultivation to work on modifying the airship.

Now, as he emerged from his seclusion, he appeared noticeably thinner, but his eyes shone with a startling brightness.

The moment he saw Chu Liang, he exclaimed excitedly, "Senior Brother Chu, your airship modifications are done!"

Chapter 535: The New Airship

In the wilderness near the outskirts of the capital of Yu, Chu Liang gazed excitedly at the massive airship before him.

But as he continued to stare, his excitement faded into silence.

With Chu Liang's full support, Wen Yulong had worked tirelessly for months on the airship modifications, sparing no expense to achieve the vision he had in mind. Now, its exterior had been completely transformed.

But...

"Junior Brother Wen, I remember asking for... a color that looks neat," Chu Liang said slowly.

The enormous airship before him was a patchwork of red, green, and purple, coming together like the colorful winter coats worn in the Northern Regions, making it particularly eye-catching.

Compared to this, the previous dark, ink-black color seemed much neater and more refined.

"Heheh, Senior Brother Chu, you don't quite grasp the secret behind these patches of colors," Wen Yulong said with a grin. "The original material, Crow Gold Iron, is already top-tier for airships, so

altering it wasn't an option. If I simply painted over it, the result would have been too plain and simple. After giving it some thought, I added a layer of Mystical Hundred-Flower Paint on the surface. It's a treasure that Taotie City had most recently produced and put up for sale!"

"Just watch!" Wen Yulong exclaimed and then rushed into the cabin, clutching the activation medallion.

With a loud rumble, he triggered the airship's enchanted formation.

Whoosh—

As the spiritual qi surged, the airship's colorful patchwork began to ripple, morphing into a smooth, water-like surface.

Wen Yulong's voice came from above, "As soon as you activate the spiritual qi, you can change the color to anything you like. It can even change to match the environment!"

As he finished speaking, the airship's exterior started to blend seamlessly with the surrounding mountains, gradually merging into the landscape. From a bird's-eye view, it would be nearly impossible to detect. If it were soaring through the sky, it could shift to the blue of the heavens, rendering it completely invisible to the naked eye.

After the demonstration, Wen Yulong proudly jumped down. The moment the spiritual qi stopped flowing, the airship reverted to its original patches of color.

"Well? What do you think?" asked Wen Yulong.

"I didn't expect such mystical abilities..." Chu Liang paused for a moment before replying, "Not bad."

As long as the airship was powerful, its garish colors were something Chu Liang could live with. After all, a strong expert wearing flashy clothes was still an expert, and a colorful luxury vehicle was still a luxury vehicle—no need to be too picky. At least no one would recognize this airship as the one that once belonged to the Violet Gold Marquess. Even Hun Mengji wouldn't be able to find her way back home, so the goal had been achieved.

As Chu Liang boarded the airship with Wen Yulong, he asked, "What name did you give it?"

Wen Yulong would name every enchanted tool he made. It was a tradition that had formed between the two of them. Now that the Dream of Souls Airship had been modified, it naturally needed a new name.

Wen Yulong smiled and said, "Thanks to your support, Senior Brother Chu, I was able to modify it so freely. To show my gratitude, I've taken a character from each of our names. I'm calling it... the Lianglong!"

Pfft.

Oddly enough, the name of this second-hand airship matched its colorful design.

The inside of the airship had undergone a complete transformation.

Wen Yulong gestured with pride, explaining, "As you requested, I've removed all the high-damage enchanted tools... and replaced them with even more powerful ones."

As he spoke, he pressed the medallion onto the enchanted formation and the airship came to life.

"Those Soul-Suppressing Stone Statues are quite effective against ghastly creatures, so I left them onboard... and made a few enhancements."

Rumble.

With a loud rumble, four stone statues rose from the bow and stern, giving off a powerful aura that no ghastly creature could infiltrate.

Then, Wen Yulong activated another mechanism.

The stone statues' eyes opened at the same time. This was something they couldn't do before. Now, their eyes glowed with crimson gems, and with the activation of the enchanted formation, they opened their mouths and spewed black Soul-Burning Flames!

Whoosh whoosh whoosh—

The flames spread across the sky, their intensity so fierce that Chu Liang's heart raced. Anyone caught in those flames would have their soul scattered in an instant.

With another quick gesture from Wen Yulong, the airship became encircled by golden electric dragons, crackling purple-black lightning, and blazing crimson-gold flames. The flames expanded into a protective sea of fire around the airship but could condense into a raging sword that thrust forward with deadly force!

As the flames gathered, a thick pike extended from the bow of the airship.

"This Flame Pike at the bow may only be ten zhang long, but if this pike were to ram into something while the airship was at full speed, it could hurt even a seventh-realm demonic beast," Wen Yulong said with confidence.

Hearing this, Chu Liang caught something in his words. "You mean this airship could actually ram into a seventh-realm demonic beast when it's at full speed?"

If even a seventh-realm demonic beast couldn't avoid it, just how fast could this airship be?

"Heheh, now we come to the key part," Wen Yulong said with a grin. "To meet your request for more speed, I sought out several masters who specialize in these types of enchanted formations. In the end, I took it to a whole new level."

Rumble, rumble, rumble.

Wen Yulong activated the enchanted formation, and the airship began to lift off. "This formation operates in three tiers," he explained. "The first tier is powered by your own spiritual qi, giving it a speed similar to your usual wind-riding. The second tier would exhaust a large number of Spiritual Qi Jade Talisman, allowing the airship to almost reach the wind-riding speed of a seventh-realm Eminent One. As for the third tier, it instantly uses up all the stored jade talismans for a brief burst of extreme speed, covering a long distance."

As he spoke, he accelerated the airship, which shot forward with incredible speed, howling through the air.

"That already requires a Spiritual Qi Jade Talisman?" Chu Liang asked, momentarily surprised.

As the name suggested, the Spiritual Qi Jade Talisman stored spiritual qi within talismans, which enchanted tools could then consume.

However, these talismans had to be specially crafted by cultivators and were quite expensive. Chu Liang had wondered how such powerful effects were achieved—it turned out it was all thanks to the talismans.

In other words, increasing the speed of this airship was essentially burning money—and at an alarmingly fast rate, too.

It wasn't that Chu Liang minded spending money, but a single Spiritual Qi Jade Talisman could buy a heap of Soul Ambrosia Incense. Under normal circumstances, he'd much rather ride Old Fei than waste talismans on the airship.

"If you ever reach the seventh realm, you could power it with your own spiritual qi. But for now, that's not possible," Wen Yulong added.

"That's enough testing. Let's stop," Chu Liang said, abruptly shutting down the enchanted formation and pulling out the medallion.

"No, don't!" Wen Yulong suddenly shouted.

"Hmm?"

"I left a failsafe—if you shut down the formation, the airship will assume that the operator has lost consciousness and immediately switch to the third-tier escape mode!" Wen Yulong explained.

"Escape mode?" Chu Liang instantly recalled some unpleasant memories. "Could it be like last time...?"

"Exactly like that!" Wen Yulong confirmed.

As the two spoke, the top of the airship slammed shut with a thunderous noise, plunging them into darkness. The entire vessel, now resembling a flashy multicolored coffin, launched forward with a bang!

Back when Wen Yulong crafted the Green Leaf Enchanted Tool, it had a defensive mechanism that wrapped the user like a zongzi and propelled them into a high-speed escape. It seemed he had applied that same concept to the airship.

He had certainly taken it to the next level.

Fortunately, they hadn't adjusted the direction beforehand, meaning the airship was likely flying downward and wouldn't travel far before crashing into the ground.

Boom—

With a roar of wind and thunder, the airship abruptly launched, sending the two aboard tumbling through the air. Moments later, it came to a halt.

...

Bang—

After the airship's lid popped open, Chu Liang climbed out, looking rather disheveled. He glanced around and was relieved to find they were still in the wilderness. That was a relief—he had worried about crashing into some important place, like the Imperial Family's Ancestral Temple or even the capital of Yu itself. Surely, they would then think that he was a member of a diabolical sect.

But soon, he heard a surprised voice, "Chu Liang?"

Turning his head, he saw Xu Hongqiu, standing by the airship in her striking scarlet robes, staring at him in stunned disbelief.

Chu Liang and Wen Yulong climbed out and jumped to the ground.

"Miss Xu, what are you doing here?" Chu Liang asked.

"This is the hill area behind my house..." Xu Hongqiu answered blankly. "My esteemed teacher said he was going to teach me a new formation, so he brought me here to practice..."

So this was the hill area at the back of the Giant Whale Mountain Manor. Chu Liang had been here before.

This place was indeed close to the capital of Yu. Considering the distance, it made sense that the airship had landed here.

"Miss Xu, could it be that your esteemed teacher is none other than the world's top formation specialist, Dong Futu?" Wen Yulong asked excitedly. "I've been wanting to meet him for a long time! Is he here?"

As Chu Liang's friend, Wen Yulong had naturally interacted with Xu Hongqiu before and was well aware of her prestigious background. For artificers like him, formations were crucial. In fact, the inscriptions for enchanted formations were arguably the most important part of any tool. After all, while materials were provided by the heavens, formation inscriptions had to be carefully crafted by one's own hand.

Thus, artificers held formation specialists in very high regard.

During his work on the airship, he had even sought advice from several well-known formation experts.

Upon hearing his words, Xu Hongqiu's gaze slowly dropped to the airship, now half-embedded in the ground.

Chu Liang and Wen Yulong followed her gaze downward. Their pupils dilated simultaneously, and they exchanged a glance, each seeing a flicker of dread in the other's eyes.

Immediately, the airship began to rumble.

Puff—

The brightly colored airship slowly rose, revealing a battered figure in the pit below—a short middle-aged man who, after today, might appear even shorter. His already dark face was now blacker than usual.

Chu Liang had seen this man before. This was the man who had nearly killed Jiang Shenting using an evil and despicable formation.

It was none other than Formation Sage Dong Futu!

Dong Futu lifted the airship with one arm, forcing out a few words through his clenched teeth.

"You little rascals... better sleep with your eyes open from now on..."

Chapter 536: Competition of the Hundred Sects

"It was an accident, a total accident."

Chu Liang and Wen Yulong stood with their backs straight, looking extremely well behaved as they faced the furious Dong Futu.

With an even darker expression than before, Dong Futu threw the airship aside and glowered at the two unwelcome guests in front of him.

He had been enjoying the breeze as he taught Xu Hongqiu. Then suddenly, this giant object came smashing down on him. No one would be in a good mood after that, especially not the famed Formation Sage—a man who was treated with great respect wherever he went.

Dong Futu looked at Chu Liang and furrowed his brows slightly. "You're... Di Nufeng's disciple?"

"That's right," Chu Liang replied with a smile. "We met here last time."

"I'll let you off. But it's not because I'm not afraid of your teacher. It's because you're sworn brothers with Old Xu," Dong Futu grumbled.

Then he turned his gaze to Wen Yulong.

Chu Liang introduced Wen Yulong to Dong Futu. "Junior Brother Wen is the grandson of the Mount Shu Sect's leader. He was the one who inscribed all the enchanted formations on the airship. Esteemed senior, if you find anything unsatisfactory, feel free to punish him."

Dong Futu felt stifled again.

After a long moment, Dong Futu waved his sleeve and said, "Forget it. I can't be bothered to argue with you two."

He hadn't been hurt anyway, just startled when the airship crashed down on him. What he didn't know was that he had Chu Liang to thank for retracting the powerful enchanted tools from the airship's bow earlier. Otherwise, they would have gotten an unintended test of the destructive power of the airship's third-tier formations against a seventh-realm Eminent One.

Dong Futu swept his gaze over the massive airship. With his high mastery of enchanted formations, a quick glance was enough for him to understand all of the formation inscriptions.

He let out a small gasp of surprise. "You inscribed all of the enchanted formations on this airship?"

Dong Futu looked at Wen Yulong with a slightly doubtful expression.

"Most of them..." Wen Yulong replied. "I've erased almost all of the original formation inscriptions."

"Hmm, that's quite interesting. The formations themselves are quite basic, but the combinations are quite ingenious," Dong Futu remarked, slowly breaking into a smile. "You've got some real talent, kid."

Wen Yulong beamed with joy at receiving Dong Futu's recognition. "Thank you for your praise, esteemed senior."

Seeing that the timing was right, Chu Liang spoke up for Wen Yulong. "Junior Brother Wen is truly gifted, but unfortunately, we don't have any formation specialists at Mount Shu, so Junior Brother Wen has no one to learn from. Esteemed senior, if you see potential in him, perhaps you could offer him some guidance in the future?"

Dong Futu snorted. "Hmph. You sure are quick to seize the moment. You just hit me with that thing, and now you want me to teach him?"

"Esteemed senior, you're such a magnanimous person. Since you said you'd let us off, you naturally wouldn't dwell on what happened earlier," Chu Liang replied with a bow.

"Haha," Dong Futu chuckled and shook his head. Then he turned to Wen Yulong and said, "I'll be in the capital of Yu during the Assembly of Immortal Sects, so you can come find me. I'll teach you some formations that are useful for tool-making... so we can avoid this kind of accident in the future."

Naturally, Dong Futu was excited that he had met a prodigy with the same interest as him. The Formation Sage had many disciples, but they were mostly like Xu Hongqiu and only used enchanted formations to assist them in battle. It was rare to find someone with such exceptional talent and a desire to delve deeply into the art of enchanted formations. Upon meeting this creative genius Wen Yulong, Dong Futu felt inclined to impart his knowledge on enchanted formations to the prodigy.

In any case, Dong Futu was a rogue Eminent One. Since he did not belong to a sect, it was common for him to spread his teachings to disciples in various immortal sects. It wouldn't be an issue for him to teach Wen Yulong.

Dong Futu wasn't exceptionally powerful and lacked a strong sect behind him, but he had a vast network of connections within the immortality cultivation world. If the need ever arose, he could garner assistance from those connections.

Wen Yulong quickly expressed his gratitude. "Thank you so much, esteemed senior!"

Who would've thought that crashing the airship would help him gain a formation master as a mentor?

Seeing that, Chu Liang smiled. Wen Yulong usually spent his time meticulously researching all kinds of crazy and bizarre things, rather than focusing on conventional cultivation. That was why his cultivation level and combat ability hadn't improved much. If he could build a bond with Dong Futu and learn from him, there was no doubt that it would be immensely beneficial for Wen Yulong.

After Dong Futu let the two young men leave, Chu Liang told Wen Yulong, "When the time comes, I'll cover the costs. You should buy some expensive gifts. Don't visit him empty-handed."

"Senior Brother Chu..." Wen Yulong replied, deeply moved. "Seriously. Thank you so much."

"No problem. Once you're successful, I'll just deduct it from your future earnings," Chu Liang said casually.

Wen Yulong uttered, "Oh."

...

A few days passed by. Di Nufeng, Shang Ziliang, Lin Bei, and the rest of the family and friends of the Mount Shu Sect team arrived in the capital of Yu. The second round of the Assembly of Immortal Sects was finally about to begin!

Midway up the Emperor's Mound, spectator stands with canopies had been set up for the officials of the imperial court and members of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. Meanwhile, many commoners had brought stools and blankets to watch the event from the foot of the mountain. Some even brought their elders and children over too, forming a sea of people.

The Assembly of Immortal Sects had three rounds, each with entirely different rules. The first round, the Great Selection of the Four Seas, was a simple elimination tournament. The second round, the Competition of the Hundred Sects, was a wild and intense battle inside a hidden realm, where they would fight to kill.

Immortal Jiuyi of the Fog-Hidden Sect would activate the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, a legendary artifact, and transform the event venue into an illusory realm. The mirror had a mystical power—everything reflected in it could become real inside the illusory hidden realm.

All the participants would be reflected in the mirror and sent into the illusory realm, where they could fight and kill without holding back. Anyone who got killed would not actually die; they would just be eliminated from the illusory realm. Their soul would suffer some minor damage, but that was about it.

They would not leave a corpse behind in the illusory realm. Instead, there would be a drop—a soul crystal.

The Competition of the Hundred Sects would last for seven days, with two possible outcomes for the end.

The first outcome was that the competition would end early if the number of teams had reduced to ten before the seven days were up. The second outcome was that if more than ten teams remained at the end of the seven days, the top ten teams would be determined based on the number of soul crystals they collected. The ten teams with the highest number of soul crystals would advance to the third round.

Nevertheless, it was rare for the competition to end early. The illusory realm was vast. As long as there were a few teams that were more powerful than the rest, most of the other teams would likely choose to play it safe and hide from them.

In short, they would lie low. This strategy delayed the conclusion of the competition.

However, if most teams were of similar levels in strength and actively sought out prey, the fights would be extremely intense and bloody. That could then lead the competition to an early end.

An extreme case of the first outcome had occurred at an Assembly of Immortal Sects sixty years ago.

At that time, the Mount Shu Sect's team was overwhelmingly strong, with even the second-place team being far weaker than them. Almost all the teams chose to hide. What was meant to be a free-for-all became more like a game of hide-and-seek, with the Mount Shu Sect team as the hunter.

Numerous teams tried to form an alliance to take on the Mount Shu Sect team together. However, their alliance broke on their first encounter with the Mount Shu Sect team. Ultimately, they were left with no choice but to flee in defeat and go back into hiding. Whichever team the Mount Shu Sect team found first would be the first to get eliminated.

By the end of those seven days, many of the cultivators from that generation emerged traumatized. At night, they would often dream of Di Nufeng's sinister laughter and wake up in terror.

After that Assembly of Immortal Sects, the Mount Shu Sect's representative team was always "well taken care of" by the other sects. Otherwise, they probably wouldn't have experienced such miserable results in the four consecutive assemblies that followed.

...

Everything that was reflected in the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams was projected onto a light curtain, allowing spectators to view the competition from Immortal Jiuyi's perspective. They could watch everything that transpired inside the illusory realm.

The spectators were buzzing with anticipation, and excited chatter filled the air at the foot of the Emperor's Mound.

Midway up the Emperor's Mound, Immortal Jiuyi stood up with the watchful eyes of the massive crowds focused on him. He wore flowing white robes with wide sleeves that fluttered in the wind. His long hair flew freely, framing his thin, middle-aged face. He had long, narrow eyebrows and bright eyes, highlighted by the faint glow of divine light shrouding him. There seemed to be an ethereal quality about him.

Among the sect leaders of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, he was by far the most popular. It was due to his eccentric and unrestrained personality, which had remained unchanged since his youth.

It was said that as a child, he enjoyed leaping through valleys without clothes on, seeking the ways of ancient deities—a habit that he continued to this day. He also loved music and often volunteered to sing at the performances of South Melody Conservatory students, despite being tone deaf and extremely unpleasant to listen to. He wielded the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, yet he treated it with far less caution than the other sect leaders did with their treasures.

Immortal Jiuyi would often travel the world, drinking with strangers. When he was in a good mood, he'd let them have some fun in the illusory realm. He was also known to pull pranks—like tugging on the beards of Daoists or tapping on the bald heads of monks. Then when they got angry, he would hide in the Divine Mirror and have a good laugh at them...

Countless stories like these had spread over the past hundred years.

Seeing Immortal Jiuyi stand up, the spectators erupted in excitement, as they knew this meant the illusory realm was about to be opened!

Sure enough, with a wave of his sleeve, a golden, glowing apparition of the Divine Mirror appeared above the Emperor's Mound. As the apparition gradually solidified, the fog swirling within it dissipated, revealing a bird's-eye view of a vast landscape.

In the past, participants in the Competition of the Hundred Sects were randomly sent into the illusory realm. However, the sects realized that luck played too big a role. Those who landed near stronger teams were at a severe disadvantage.

As a result, the rules were changed. Now, the landscape would be revealed first, allowing the teams to see the terrain and choose which area they wanted to land in. Luck would still play a role, but at least the decision of where to land would be their own.

Additionally, the areas reflected in the Divine Mirror were different each year. It could perhaps be a grassland, a mountain range, or even a city. This ensured that no one would be able to prepare for the second round by relying on prior experiences. The teams only had a short time to choose the area they would land in.

On a clearing on the side of the Emperor's Mound, the teams of disciples were ready to go. The representative disciples of the hundred sects sat cross-legged, holding their breath and focusing their minds as they waited to be summoned by the Divine Mirror.

As they gazed at the landscape reflected in the mirror, everyone began to contemplate their choices.

"This map..." Chu Liang stared at the scene before him, feeling a sense of familiarity. "It looks like Misty Waters City near the East Sea."

Xu Ziyang nodded. "Indeed, it's quite a complex area."

To the east of Misty Waters City was the East Sea, and slightly to the north was Black Whale Mountain. Then on the west side, it was a stretch of hills and plains. The map included all these diverse terrains.

Everything reflected in the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams was a true representation of the real world. In this case, it was identical to Misty Waters City, except for the absence of people.

Ling Ao said, "The strong teams will probably choose the city. We'll be in there for seven days after all. It would be more comfortable in the city. The fights will definitely be the fiercest in the city."

"The weaker teams might just choose the sea," Chu Liang joked. "They could spend all seven days soaking in the water."

Jiang Yuebai suggested, "Then we should choose a hill."

There were many hills to the west of Misty Waters City, making that area a relatively neutral and safe option. After all, this Assembly of Immortal Sects was crucial for the Mount Shu Sect. Their top priority was to secure a spot in the top ten. Therefore, everything had to be done with caution.

After deciding on their plan, they waited a moment longer. Then the Divine Mirror emitted hundreds of beams of golden light, enveloping all of the participants.

Whoosh!

A golden scroll slowly unfurled before their eyes.

Chapter 537: Encounter With a Loner

"It's starting, it's starting! The betting window is closing soon. If you don't place your bets now, you'll miss out!"

At the foot of the mountain, a betting stand had been set up by a reputable bookmaker[1] from Taotie City, specifically for the cultivators of the immortal sects.

A hundred wooden paddles were hung on the wall behind him, inscribed with the names and odds of the sects participating in the Competition of the Hundred Sects. The bets were on which teams would make it into the top ten.

At that moment, a young man with thick eyebrows and an aura filled with exuberant yang qi strolled over, glancing at the odds on the wall.

He exclaimed, "Wow! You've got the Penglai Supreme Sect at 30-to-1 and Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals at 10-to-1... but Mount Shu Sect is at 3-to-1? That's crazy! And Earthfire Sect is even worse at 1-to-1."

"Heheh, we base our odds on past performances and the current disciples' potential. The Mount Shu Sect hasn't made the top ten in four consecutive assemblies, and with so many strong competitors this time, their odds of winning are naturally lower," the bookmaker explained. "But if you believe in the Mount Shu Sect, you're welcome to place a bet for an upset!"

"Hmph." The young man grinned. "Of course, I will. I'm just worried you won't be able to pay up when the time comes."

"Don't worry. We've been running the Azure Dragon Betting Parlor for two hundred years. Our reputation is solid," the bookmaker assured. "We have a large establishment in Taotie City. If we can't pay, we'll give you the whole betting parlor."

"All right." The young man nodded and handed over a jade talisman. "I'll bet it all on the Mount Shu Sect."

The bookmaker was very experienced, yet when he held the jade talisman, he was so shocked that his gaze wavered. "This... this much?"

"Yep, that much. Do you dare take it?" the young man asked.

"Well... let me check," the bookmaker said, placing the jade talisman down.

He rushed to the back and used an enchanted tool to contact someone.

After a while, he ran back to the young man with a smile. "Our boss says we'll take any amount. If you win, we guarantee that you'll be paid in full."

The bookmaker then handed the young man a bamboo slip marked with a seal.

The young man turned and walked away. There were many eyes on him, curious about the identity of the young man who had surprised the bookmaker.

A beautiful female cultivator approached the young man and struck up a conversation. "Young hero, which sect are you from? That bet you placed really startled the bookmaker!"

"Heheheh," the young man laughed. "It's just a bit of pocket money. I'm just playing around."

"As for me..." he said, flipping his hair back, "I'm known in the martial world as the Mount Shu Sect's most romantic man—Lin Bei."

...

Whoosh.

When the summons of the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams ended and the golden light dissipated, the four representatives from the Mount Shu Sect truly did find themselves on a lush, green hillside.

Recalling the landscape that had flashed in their minds earlier, they confirmed that this was indeed the hill in the rolling plains that Jiang Yuebai had chosen.

"Let's proceed according to the plan. I'll go scout the area," Chu Liang told his teammates. "You three follow me but keep a safe distance. Be ready to support me at any moment. We'll clear the area around this hill first."

"Got it," Jiang Yuebai replied with a nod. Gazing at Chu Liang, she said, "Be extra careful."

Chu Liang smiled. "Don't worry."

With that, he leaped into the air and darted off.

The four of them had trained many times in the Primordial Chaos Hidden Realm for situations like this. They had also sparred with senior disciples of their sect and learned many valuable lessons from them.

In the Competition of the Hundred Sects, it was crucial for the participants to gather information on their surroundings. A cultivator's divine sense had its limits, and the range of detection was roughly the same for cultivators at the same realm. Once someone spotted their opponent, it usually meant their opponent had spotted them too.

This was why experienced teams would send out a scout to act as the team's arrowhead, scouting ahead in every direction they intended to go. Doing that extended the team's range of detection. If the scout encountered strong enemies or unforeseen danger, they could relay the information back in time, allowing most of the group to avoid the crisis.

These insights had been passed down through generations of disciples. This was one of the advantages of being from an established immortal sect. New sects participating in the Assembly of Immortal Sects for the first time often suffered due to not having that advantage.

For instance, there was a team like that not far ahead of Chu Liang.

The Wandering Deities Temple was an ancient Daoist temple just outside the capital of Yu. A thousand years ago, this temple enjoyed a brilliant reputation and renown. However, the temple's reputation had since been in decline for a long time, with no powerful cultivators emerging in nearly a millennium.

This year's Assembly of Immortal Sects was different though. Ten years ago, one of the temple's disciples discovered a hidden realm behind a statue and unearthed the long-lost second volume of their sect's cultivation manual, the Wandering Deities Art. With the complete cultivation manual, the current generation of disciples made soaring progress in their cultivation and charged into the Competition of the Hundred Sects for the first time.

When the Wandering Deities Temple's team chose their landing spot, they had opted for safety and selected a hill in the plains—the same one Jiang Yuebai had chosen. It wasn't uncommon for multiple teams to choose the same landing spot.

The four Daoist monks from the Wandering Deities Temple had the same idea as the Mount Shu Sect team—to first clear the area around the hill first. However, unlike the Mount Shu Sect team, the four Daoist monks chose to move together.

Soon after, they detected a figure approaching them swiftly.

"Someone's all alone?" one of the younger Daoist monks chuckled. "That's practically a free soul crystal being delivered to us!"

"Do not underestimate the enemy," the team's leader cautioned. "Get into formation. We'll start things off with him!"

...

As the scout, Chu Liang naturally detected the presence of the four Daoist monks within the range of his divine sense. Nevertheless, instead of alerting his teammates, he decided to face them alone.

The Wandering Deities Temple served the Day and Night Wandering Deities. Their cultivation art, the Wandering Deities Art, allowed their monks to call upon the power of those deities, giving them vastly different abilities during the day and night.

During the day, they invoked the Day Wandering Deity. They would become monstrously ferocious and immensely strong and muscular. At night, they invoked the Night Wandering Deity. They would gain heightened senses and the ability to move stealthily without a trace.

Since it was currently daytime, they received a boost in combat power from the Day Wandering Deity.

Yet, Chu Liang showed no fear. He flew straight toward them. In the blink of an eye, he arrived before the four Daoist monks.

I've waited so long for this day. It's finally here. I'll start this Competition of the Hundred Sects with you! Chu Liang thought.

Boom!

Seeing Chu Liang charge at them alone, the Daoist monks from the Wandering Deities Temple were surprised. They assumed he was merely bait and that his teammates would spring out once he got close. As a precaution, two of the Daoist monks positioned themselves on the sides to guard against an ambush.

However, Chu Liang simply charged over, landing right in front of the two Daoist monks in the middle with a resounding crash.

Chu Liang was shrouded in blazing qi flames. It was clear that he was running his Qi-Circulation Technique at full force; his foundational qi was circulating at the maximum circulation speed!

"How bold!"

The two young Daoist monks in front of Chu Liang furrowed their eyebrows and activated the hand seals they had prepared in advance.

Thud, crack.

Thunderous sounds rang out from them as they transformed into incarnates of the Day Wandering Deity, growing taller and larger. They each thrust a hand toward Chu Liang in unison, attacking with a palm strike—Two Spirits Strike the Gate!

Blood flames and whistling winds curled around theirs. If their strikes were to land, even a small mountain would tremble from the massive force they contained.

Yet, Chu Liang didn't dodge at all.

So, you think you're strong? Let's see who's stronger.

He threw his fists forward, meeting the Daoist monks' palm strikes head-on. Chu Liang was taking the two monks on alone!

Boom! Boom!

The hill they stood on did indeed tremble, and the ground cracked beneath them. Chu Liang's fists slammed against the iron palms of the two Day Wandering Deity incarnates, yet he didn't take a single step back.

On the other hand, a tremor ran up from the hands of the two Day Wandering Deity incarnates to their shoulders, accompanied by the cracking sound of shattering bone. They lost.

Over the past few months, Chu Liang had made further progress in the White Dragon's cultivation legacy, advancing to the third realm. His strength had now reached a level that no physical cultivator at the same realm could ever reach.

The Day Wandering Deity incarnates were extremely strong, but they could not subdue this humanoid True Dragon!

Whoosh.

With just one strike, Chu Liang severely injured the two incarnates of the Day Wandering Deity.

As the other two Daoist monks closed in, crimson-gold flames suddenly ignited all over the two injured Day Wandering Deity incarnates. This was Divine Dragon Fire!

It turned out that when Chu Liang punched their palms earlier, his fists had been enveloped in flames.

He had learned this move from Di Nufeng. It was a combination of divine fire and overwhelming strength. If the punches were not enough to kill the opponent, the fire would. If the fire didn't work, then the punches surely would in the end...

At this point, Chu Liang's fighting style was like the poor man's version of Di Nufeng's fighting style.

Many cultivators might use their foundational qi to defend themselves against the divine fire. However, the impact of a heavy strike would often disperse the foundational qi and allow the fire to burn the cultivators even more quickly, crippling their combat abilities.

As the two injured Day Wandering Deity incarnates cried out in pain from the Divine Dragon Fire, Chu Liang followed up with another punch, sending them crashing to the ground.

By the time the remaining two Daoist monks arrived, their companions had already burned to death and disappeared.

Chu Liang was once again facing two opponents alone, but no one would think he was at a disadvantage.

He roared as he swung his right fist at the Day Wandering Deity incarnate on the left. The punch caused the Daoist monk to explode in midair, dying the grass red.

Seeing that Chu Liang had his back turned, the Day Wandering Deity incarnate on the right thought it was his chance to attack. He raised his iron fist, wrapped in blazing blood flames, and swung it at Chu Liang.

But in the next moment, Chu Liang vanished.

Instead, a figure that was like the god of devils appeared behind the young Daoist monk. The terrifying heat and pressure at his back made him realize what had happened.

It's Dimension Compression.

That's quite shameless.

Weren't we competing with our strength and trading punches? Why did you suddenly use an immortal art?

This isn't very fair.

As that thought crossed the young Daoist monk's mind, a deafening explosion rang out. He did not get to hear it though.

The Wandering Deities Temple team was eliminated. The four Daoist monks hadn't even lasted a quarter of an hour in the Competition of the Hundred Sects.

Chu Liang had wiped them out alone. They were swift and clean kills. There were no bodies left on the ground, just four gleaming purple soul crystals.

Chu Liang withdrew his Divine Dragon Fire and shook his hands.

My teacher's methods are simple, crude, and brutal, but they are undeniably effective.

Right then, Chu Liang received a message on the United Hearts Jade. His teammates had likely sensed the commotion on his end.

[Jiang Yuebai]: "Is everything okay? Need any help?"

[Chu Liang]: "No need. I ran into four guys out here alone. I've already taken care of them."

Chapter 538: What's There to Talk About

Although Chu Liang had performed excellently by eliminating an entire team on his own, it did not stir up too big of a wave. After all, he was not the only one who had made such achievements. Many strong teams had efficiently eliminated those around them the moment they landed.

This included the team from the Penglai Supreme Sect.

As the most powerful immortal sect in the world, the Penglai Supreme Sect had obviously made choices that aligned with their status. With a flash of brilliance, the four of them appeared on the main street of Misty Waters City.

At the end of the street, the silhouettes of people from another team could be seen, and atop a nearby pavilion, figures also emerged.

In this eastern section of Misty Waters City, within visible range alone, there were already three teams gathered.

It was unclear whether the other two teams were confident enough to fight their way out of Misty Waters City or if they were simply gambling on the chance that no one else would also make a sneaky move and land here. Regardless of the reasons, when they saw the team from the Penglai Supreme Sect, they were stunned.

"Go on," said Yang Shenlong. "You may do whatever your heart desires."

"Heh," Qi Lin'er chuckled wickedly, a gleam of excitement and cruelty flashing in his eyes.

Whoosh—

In the blink of an eye, he shot forward like an unleashed wild dog, racing toward the team at the end of the street. In just a few flashes, he had arrived before them!

One against four!

The team on the rooftop wanted to seize this opportunity to turn back and escape.

But then, they saw Xi Miaoxian already landing on the rooftop with her robes fluttering in the air. She was beautiful as always. With a gentle smile, she sent forth a talisman brimming with deadly intent.

It was the Talisman of Life Destruction, a powerful talisman she had acquired from the Celestial Talisman Master's Hidden Realm. After countless rituals to refine it, she could finally unleash the talisman's exceptional power, and nothing could stand in its path!

Swoosh—

She swept past with the Talisman of Life Destruction, and it grazed the cultivator who couldn't dodge in time. Instantly, the cultivator collapsed, leaving behind only a soul crystal on the ground as his lifeforce was snuffed out in a flash.

The remaining three tried to flee, but the green tiles beneath their feet seemed to stretch endlessly, turning the rooftop into an inescapable path. No matter how they leapt or struggled, they couldn't break free from the confines of the roof!

When they turned, swords in hand, ready to fight Xi Miaoxian to the death, they found that she had vanished, replaced by the Talisman of Life Destruction. It dawned on them that Xi Miaoxian had swapped places with the talisman—she was now standing where the talisman had been. Through the masterful execution of this illusion, they were completely trapped.

Xi Miaoxian came from Yingzhou, one of the three islands of Penglai. She was always great at using illusion, stealth, and manipulation techniques, but when it came to direct fighting and killing, she wasn't as strong. This Talisman of Life Destruction perfectly compensated for this weakness.

In no time, she trapped the remaining three cultivators and took them down with the Talisman of Life Destruction. The fight was over in seconds.

By the time she returned, Qi Lin'er was already back at the original spot, waiting for her.

"Let's clean out this city first," Yang Shenlong said calmly.

It was as if the two victories they had just secured were barely worth mentioning.

In truth, for him, they probably weren't.

Before Yang Shenlong even spoke, Yang Yuhu had already unleashed a swarm of white Mirage Flutterbugs, glowing like tiny stars as they drifted on the wind. These bugs, native to the island of Penglai, spread swiftly through the entire city in mere moments.

"There are sixteen teams in the city," Yang Yuhu then reported. "Nine are now fighting. The rest are hiding."

"We'll split up," Yang Shenlong commanded. "First, track down the ones in hiding. As for those fighting, let them finish their fights. We'll collect their soul crystals afterward."

At his command, the three moved in perfect harmony, each shooting off in a different direction.

Meanwhile, Yang Shenlong casually strolled down the street.

...

In the Competition of the Hundred Sects, each immortal sect went with different strategies.

Some teams began by aggressively hunting for soul crystals, while others chose to lie low amid the chaos, quietly observing and conserving their strength, waiting to fight for the soul crystals at a later time.

By then, defeating a single team would be enough to claim all the soul crystals they had gathered, essentially letting others do the hard work while they swooped in to reap the rewards in one decisive strike.

Earlier, Chu Liang had mentioned that weaker teams might head to the sea, but strong teams could make the same choice. At this moment, the four members of Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals were quietly drifting on a small boat across the calm waters.

In addition to Zhuge Guanxing and Situ Guanhai, whom Chu Liang had met before, the other two were Li Guanlong, the leader of this team, and Song Guanchao, the youngest member of the team.

Li Guanlong wore yellow robes, with a broad forehead and strong features that gave him a sturdy look. His hair was tied up in a topknot with a yellow ribbon, and he sat facing away from his junior brothers.

At the back of the boat sat Song Guanchao, who had just turned seventeen. He was a fair-skinned and thin young man, appearing young and naive.

Song Guanchao muttered, "Isn't this a bit embarrassing? We're one of the Divine Nine immortal sects, and yet we're hiding out at sea..."

"We're just saving our strength. What if we rushed out and ran into the team from the Penglai Supreme Sect right away?" Li Guanlong calmly replied. "No need to rush. Let me check the surroundings first."

With that, he closed his eyes and placed two fingers on his forehead.

A long moment passed.

"Senior Brother, how's it looking?" Song Guanchao asked.

"Maybe things are bad," Situ Guanhai remarked.

After a moment of silence, Zhuge Guanxing suddenly said, "Did he fall asleep again?"

Situ Guanhai quickly moved forward to check. "Damn, he really did."

When Li Guanlong was young, he had a fortuitous encounter and accidentally swallowed a Curse Insect of Dreams that had existed since ancient times. According to legends, this was a spirit curse insect that could take immortals on divine, dreamlike journeys. However, it had been sealed for countless years, and its mystical powers were now uncertain.

Because of this curse insect, Li Guanlong learned to cultivate in his dreams, which led to rapid progress in his cultivation. However, the side effect was quite obvious. He would just fall asleep at any time.

"Senior Brother, wake up." The junior brothers teamed up to shake him awake.

"Huh?" Li Guanlong jolted awake, blinking in confusion. "Why are you guys pushing me?"

The other three were left speechless. After a moment of awkward silence, one of them finally spoke up, "Weren't you supposed to be checking the surroundings?"

"No, there's nothing around here," Li Guanlong said, shaking his head. "I've already checked almost half of the illusory realm. We're completely safe for now. All the intense fighting is happening elsewhere. Let's lay low for two or three days before we start hunting for soul crystals."

"Wait here for two or three days?" Song Guanchao groaned. "That's way too boring!"

"No worries, I came prepared." Li Guanlong pulled out a square box and opened it to reveal neatly arranged mahjong tiles. "No wonder the Mount Shu Sect loves this game. I tried it out—it's actually pretty fun. Once we start playing, two or three days will fly by."

"Speaking of which..." Zhuge Guanxing smiled slightly.

"Don't use any of your divination tricks here. Let's rely on skill," Situ Guanhai quickly interrupted.

And so, the four disciples of the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals set up a small table on the boat and started playing mahjong.

"Senior Brother, put out a tile already. Why are you taking so long?"

"He fell asleep again!"

"..."

"Wait, no rush to wake him up. Let's take a look at his tiles first," Situ Guanhai suggested.

...

Through the giant mirror of light atop the Emperor's Mount, Immortal Jiuyi first checked on the situation of the teams from the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. When the crowd saw the team from the Penglai Supreme Sect, they all gasped in amazement, which was expected. But when they saw the team from the Mount Shu Sect, they reacted with surprise, clearly not expecting them to be so strong. Then, when the team from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals showed up, the crowd couldn't help but laugh.

Immortal Jiuyi remained unfazed, showing no concern over the public display of his sect members' embarrassing actions—or perhaps he didn't see them as embarrassing at all.

However, the two elders from the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals, sitting nearby, were grinding their teeth in frustration.

Of all times to play mahjong, did they really have to choose the once-in-twelve-years Competition of the Hundred Sects? Was it really that urgent? Do you not realize the entire world will be talking about this? And you're playing so terribly on top of it!

On the same row as the seats reserved for the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals, just a short distance away, were the seats for the members of the imperial court.

To the emperor's left sat a noblewoman adorned with pearls and jade, graceful and poised—it was none other than Empress Wu.

Perhaps in an effort to dispel the recent swirling rumors in the capital of Yu, the emperor and Empress Wu attended the event hand in hand, appearing deeply affectionate.

The Competition of the Hundred Sects would last for seven days, but the emperor usually only attended the first and last days, and there was no need to bring his family along. However, this time he was accompanied by the empress, which was likely a deliberate choice.

Not far away sat the Imperial Supervisory Commissioner, his expression calm and composed. Behind him, officials from the Imperial Supervisory Bureau were constantly on the move, frequently coming forward to report updates.

For those familiar with previous Assemblies of the Immortal Sects, it would be clear that there was a noticeably larger presence of personnel from the Imperial Supervisory Bureau and Night Dragon Hall around Emperor's Mound this year—and that was just what was visible on the surface.

Due to an earlier report from the Mount Shu Sect, the imperial court had learned that the West Sea Diabolical Forces might try to disrupt this Assembly of the Immortal Sects, and it would be a significant move. As a result, the imperial court had been on high alert. Though everything appeared normal on the surface, powerful undercurrents were stirring beneath.

At first, they suspected that the diabolical cultivators might strike during the earlier sword duel between the Eminent Ones, given the longstanding blood feud between the West Sea Diabolical Forces and the Sword-Hanging Kingdom. It was highly likely they would attempt to ambush the Sword Emperor of the West Sea.

Thus, the Imperial Supervisory Bureau had specifically warned the two Eminent Ones not to overexert themselves to avoid being caught off guard in a weakened state.

However, the diabolical cultivators did not make a move that day.

From that point onward, it became difficult to predict when the diabolical forces would make their move. The Imperial Supervisory Bureau could only respond by increasing their personnel and tightening security in the surrounding area.

The members from the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, seated in the spectator stands, had also noticed something was off. Even those unaware of the specifics could sense the growing tension in the atmosphere.

Amidst the seats reserved for the members of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, two elderly men exchanged glances.

One of them, being a scholar dressed in traditional robes with a round belly, muttered softly, "Something feels off, doesn't it?"

The other man, with a ruddy complexion and a warm smile, waved it off. "The Imperial Supervisory Bureau is on high alert. Even if something is wrong, nothing bad will happen."

These two were none other than Old Sun and Old Huang, who had previously shown up at the Mount Shu Summit.

Old Sun was a distinguished figure from Ascending Dragon Academy, while Old Huang served as an elder of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion. Both were highly regarded individuals with many years of experience. Now, seated in the spectator stands, they found themselves surrounded by others. Every gesture they made attracted attention, so they communicated discreetly through voice transmission.

At that moment, someone nearby jokingly asked, "So, Old Huang, which sect do you think will win this year's Assembly of Immortal Sects?"

"Haha..." Old Huang stroked his beard with a smile. "Well, if you're asking me, I'd naturally want my own sect, the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, to win. But aside from that, I'm quite fond of Jiang Yuebai from the Mount Shu Sect, Xi Miaoian from the Penglai Supreme Sect, and Shen Qingyan from the South Melody Conservatory..."

"They are asking who you think will win, not who you think looks good," Old Sun interrupted sarcastically.

"What's the difference?" Old Huang shrugged. "I want them to win, don't I? But if you're asking about strength, everyone already knows the Penglai Supreme Sect will win. There is nothing to debate about this."

"Have you already forgotten the lesson you learned at the Mount Shu Summit? And you're still making such bold claims?" Old Sun retorted. "I think the Mount Shu Sect might just surprise everyone this year."

"Let's see if the Mount Shu Sect team even makes it to the top ten first," Old Huang said as he shook his head with a chuckle. "I'd love for Jiangjiang to restore the Mount Shu Sect's glory as the head disciple, but we can't ignore the power of the Penglai Supreme Sect. You clearly don't know Yang Shenlong well enough."

"I guess I'll just have to see for myself..." Old Sun started, but his gaze suddenly shifted. "Huh?"

Chapter 539: The Sharpest Sabers

The sky was clear, scattered with white clouds. Without warning, dark clouds gathered, and a storm swept in with fierce winds and heavy rain.

The weather in the illusory realm shifted wildly—wind, frost, rain, and snow striking without warning, likely designed to force the disciples of the immortal sects to fight in every kind of environment

Thunderstorms had little effect on cultivators of this cultivation; at most, walking in the rain was mildly uncomfortable.

Chu Liang pushed forward through the rain. After dealing with the Daoist monks from Wandering Deities Temple on the hilltop earlier, he and his team pressed on, sweeping through nearby hilltops as they moved farther from Misty Waters City.

If they kept to the flat plains, they'd be easily spotted by the enemies ahead. Chu Liang slowed his pace, careful not to miss anything, while Jiang Yuebai and the others followed at a distance, keeping their formation.

At that moment, Chu Liang detected another figure through his divine sense.

It was a young man in black, sprinting across the plains. The moment Chu Liang spotted him, the young man seemed to have noticed him as well.

They reacted simultaneously.

Chu Liang sped toward him, while the black-clad youth turned back and retreated, moving away like a whirlwind.

It was unclear whether the youth retreated because the sight of people made him scared or if he recognized Chu Liang. But the moment Chu Liang saw him sprinting away so quickly, he summoned his sword and leaped into the sky. A brilliant arc of light followed, slicing just above the ground as he gave chase.

Whoosh—

Once Chu Liang took to the skies on his sword, few at his cultivation realm could match his skill. And this youth, at the pinnacle of the fourth realm, was someone with a cultivation level much lower than that of Chu Liang.

In an instant, Chu Liang closed the gap, the youth's back now clearly within sight.

The youth darted into a nearby valley.

Chu Liang knew immediately that it was an ambush. Still, he didn't stop and went on pursuing the youth into the valley.

With such a short time, Chu Liang doubted that they could set up anything too complicated. At best, the youth might have a few teammates waiting. But knowing he was more than capable of taking down an entire team by himself, Chu Liang felt no fear.

It was a circular valley. The moment the youth crossed the entrance, Chu Liang closed in from behind. Desperate, the youth spun around and formed a hand seal, causing Chu Liang's movements to suddenly slow.

It appeared to be some kind of controlling divine technique.

Even so, though his movements slowed, Chu Liang was already close enough to draw his sword.

Chu Liang raised both hands and pointed.

Whoosh—

The Dustless Sword transformed into a dazzling streak, piercing through the youth's body and turning him into a soul crystal that dropped to the ground. Since Chu Liang was a level higher in cultivation, he was able to kill the youth easily with a simple sword technique.

Thud.

The soul crystal hit the ground, but Chu Liang didn't bother picking it up.

All around the valley, several figures emerged—eleven in total.

Typically, a team from an immortal sect consisted of just four members, but seeing eleven gathered together was not unusual. Alliances often form both inside and outside the illusory realm.

However, the imperial court has strict standards for determining alliances in the Competition of the Hundred Sects. These standards are based on whether participants have formed alliances aimed at securing victory for their own sect.

If ten sects formed an alliance to eliminate all the participants of the other sects so that they could be in the top ten of this competition, that would be allowed.

However, if ten sects formed an alliance and members of nine of them committed suicide, transferring all their soul crystals to the last sect to secure its place in the top ten, that would not be allowed.

The entire illusory realm was under constant surveillance, and any such behavior detected would result in the sect's immediate elimination.

At that moment, it was clear that Chu Liang was up against an alliance of three sects.

...

They were the Divine Movement Sect, the Five Poisons Sect, and the Mountain-Shifting Sect.

All three were part of the Chancellor's Sixteen-Faction Alliance , so they quickly regrouped upon entering the illusory realm. It was here that they began to set their trap.

The weakest disciple of the Divine Movement Sect was sent out as bait, luring enemies into the valley where they planned to ambush them. With this tactic, they were confident they could gather enough soul crystals.

However, they made a slight miscalculation. Despite being a disciple of the Divine Movement Sect, he couldn't escape this young man's pursuit and was killed by a single sword strike the moment he entered the valley.

"Chu Liang from the Mount Shu Sect?" one of them exclaimed, recognizing his identity.

Meanwhile, Chu Liang recognized the figures standing before him. The members of the Sixteen-Faction Alliance were no ordinary individuals. He had some impression of them after watching the matches over the past few days.

One of the advantages of being a disciple from the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten was the exemption from the three rounds of arena matches, allowing them to keep some of their trump cards hidden. However, most disciples from these sects had grown up in the spotlight, which meant they had fewer secret techniques.

The three on the left, dressed in black like the youth from earlier, were likely all members of the Divine Movement Sect.

The four in front were tall and muscular, clearly burly men who likely belonged to the Mountain-Shifting Sect.

The four on the right had their faces concealed, wore black gloves, and bore chilling gazes. Based on their appearance, they were likely members of the Five Poisons Sect.

Amidst the intermittent thunder and rain, several disciples from the Five Poisons Sect circled around, blocking the valley entrance and making their intentions clear: they aimed to cut off Chu Liang's escape route.

Given the speed he had just demonstrated, if he chose to flee suddenly, they might not be able to stop him.

"Heh," Chu Liang chuckled. "No need to worry. Even with all of you here, I have no intention of running."

"Then leave your soul crystal behind!"

One of the burly men from the Mountain-Shifting Sect shouted loudly, and all four leaped into action simultaneously.

Immediately, Chu Liang sensed a faint network of qi weaving behind them, connecting their energies and binding them together.

The art and techniques of the Mountain-Shifting Sect were quite peculiar. The techniques they practiced enabled practitioners to connect with one another, allowing for the transfer of energy and qi. This energy could converge on a single individual at any time.

Thus, the sect did not depend on high individual cultivation levels; the greater the number of members, the stronger they became. If they were truly united as one, even the weakest among them could summon enough power to shift mountains.

At that moment, Chu Liang stood against the four. The first man launched a punch at him, but Chu Liang fearlessly met the blow head-on.

Boom!

After the clash, Chu Liang staggered back two steps, while the four opponents trembled in unison.

Under the relentless assault of the four, their punches and kicks were like a torrential downpour, each strike fueled by the combined strength of all four. For a moment, Chu Liang struggled to keep up.

Then, no longer holding back, he summoned the Divine Dragon Fire to envelop his fists, diving into the fierce exchange. With a single punch, he severely injured the lead attacker.

Boom—

The man was struck, half of his body charred black, and he cried out in pain.

Seeing Chu Liang's fierce and bold fighting style, the members of the Divine Movement Sect could no longer stand by. In unison, they formed hand seals, pointing at him from the air.

As a sect renowned for its speed, the Divine Movement Sect didn't rely solely on retreating to compete in the Competition of the Hundred Sects. The deceleration technique they were using now was one of their specialties.

After all, slowing down the enemy was akin to speeding themselves up.

As the effects of the divine technique started, Chu Liang felt himself slowing down. He had initially been winning the fight against the four opponents, but now, with his reduced speed, he began to take hits in rapid succession.

Fortunately, his physique was as robust as a dragon's. While the members of the Mountain-Shifting Sect would be crippled by a single hit from him, Chu Liang could withstand several blows without much trouble.

Swoosh—

Seeing the situation unfold, he swiftly activated Dimension Compression, appearing in a flash behind one of them to deliver another fiery punch, severely injuring yet another opponent

Even though he became slower, he could still execute immortal arts, moves that caused the members of the Mountain-Shifting Sect to feel overwhelmed.

The other two disciples from the Mountain-Shifting Sect quickly flew backward, creating some distances away from Chu Liang. They turned out to be the first to retreat.

Just as Chu Liang prepared to repeat the maneuver, he felt a surge of qi and blood as he circulated his foundational qi, followed by a sudden ache in his chest.

Poison? He glanced up at the rain falling from the sky and swiftly activated a layer of qi around his body, creating a shield that kept him completely dry.

"Heh, you've caught on. Unfortunately, it's too late. You've already been poisoned by our Five Poisons Sect's Meridian-Severing Poison," one of the disciples said with a sneer. "If you try to forcefully circulate your foundational qi, your meridians will— What?" His tone shifted to shock midway through.

Chu Liang pulled out a long whip, but instead of directing it at his opponents, he lashed himself twice.

Crack! Crack!

With each lash, a mist of black qi was expelled from his body, instantly curing him of the poison.

The technique of poisoning someone through the rain was undeniably clever, but unfortunately for them, they had crossed paths with the Young Hero wielding the Divine Whip. They could only blame themselves for their bad luck.

Realizing they were on the verge of defeat, the disciples from the Divine Movement Sect joined the fight, drawing their sabers as they soared down, leaving a dazzling trail of afterimages.

Meanwhile, the disciples of the Five Poisons Sect drew weapons that gleamed with a sinister black light, as venomous creatures—snakes and scorpions—coiled around their bodies, readying themselves for an all-out attack on Chu Liang.

Initially, they had stayed back to guard against the other disciples of the Mount Shu Sect, but now they had no choice. They couldn't even handle Chu Liang on his own, let alone concern themselves with his fellow disciples.

Confronted by so many troublesome foes, Chu Liang smiled slightly and said, "So, everyone's here, huh? I suppose it's time to call for some help."

"Hmph, you might as well summon Jiang Yuebai, Xu Ziyang, or anyone else from the Mount Shu Sect for a fight with us," the lead disciple of the Divine Movement Sect retorted.

"Them?" Chu Liang shook his head, "To deal with you lot, I don't need them to step in."

Chu Liang formed a hand seal and lightly tapped the air. In a flash of light, another figure identical to him materialized beside him.

A clone made with a puppet? No, he's using the immortal art: External Manifestation!

The External Manifestation was an immortal art capable of creating a clone that matched the true form's cultivation level for a short duration. This technique was far more powerful than those clones produced using puppetry techniques.

So the helper that Chu Liang was going to call for turned out to be none other than himself.

One Chu Liang was already challenging enough to handle, but with two now present, everyone's expressions grew tense in an instant.

In that moment, despite being outnumbered, Chu Liang seized the initiative and launched his attack!

Chu Liang and his clone dashed in opposite directions, undeterred by the venomous creatures.

With his top-tier cultivation, strong physical bodies, and versatile divine techniques, a massacre was about to start.

The first two disciples from the Mountain-Shifting Sect were quickly beaten up, followed by the few members of the Five Poisons Sect.

The disciples of the Five Poisons Sect felt aggrieved. While their cultivation wasn't top-tier, they had always held their ground within the Chancellor's Sixteen-Faction Alliance, thanks to their elusive poison techniques.

Unexpectedly, they encountered someone immune to poison, rendering all their techniques useless.

How could their cultivation and divine techniques possibly compare to Chu Liang's?

After just a few exchanges, Chu Liang incinerated all of them with his Divine Dragon Fire.

Recognizing the dire situation, the disciples from the Divine Movement Sect quickly resorted to their specialty—running away.

The three of them bolted in different directions at lightning speed!

Chu Liang and his clone pursued each of the fleeing disciples, unleashing blasts of Divine Dragon Fire that took down one each. However, the last disciple from the Divine Movement Sect managed to escape the valley.

When the last disciple from the Divine Movement Sect realized he was about to escape, a look of joy spread across his face. But then, he saw Chu Liang, having just incinerated his fellow disciple, launch a green streak of light up into the sky.

Seeing that, the disciple from the Divine Movement Sect couldn't help but wonder, Who is he trying to hit?

He felt puzzled for just a moment, but in the next instant, a sharp pain pierced through his back.

Huh? I was the target?

Everyone knew the Razor Leaf was fast, but its deceptive nature was the most important trait. If Chu Liang had aimed directly at him with a divine technique, he could have dodged the attack. But if the saber was aimed right up at the sky, would he have expected the hit? Absolutely not!

With a thud, the disciple fell to the ground.

Before he could get up, Chu Liang's shadow had already loomed over him.

"Haiya!" Chu Liang's fists, wrapped in Divine Dragon Fire, came down in quick succession.

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—

Amidst the explosions, the last person was also tragically turned into a soul crystal.

...

Meanwhile, in the spectator stands, Old Sun and Old Huang observed with grim expressions.

"It seems like Chu Liang would always pull out something new every time. He might just work a few miracles," Old Sun murmured.

Chu Liang's ability to swiftly and decisively handle so many opponents on his own certainly exceeded the spectators' expectations.

"Forget about whether he might work miracles or not. Why does this technique look so familiar to me?" Elder Huang said, his gaze fixed on Chu Liang as memories from sixty years ago began to resurface.

At that moment, it wasn't just the two elders who struggled to catch their breath; countless other older spectators felt the same way.

This moment was exactly like that moment from long ago.

It was the same move—Divine Fire combined with immense strength, wielded by the sharpest saber of the Mount Shu Sect.

"Truly terrifying," the two elders spoke in unison.

Chapter 540: Don't Attack! It's Me!

"Slurp."

"Girls should eat more gracefully."

"Who are you to tell me what to do?"

"..."

Within the imperial city, numerous restricted areas existed, some heavily guarded while others were so exclusive that even the guards were forbidden to enter. One such place was the Divine Fire Hall. Aside from the emperor, no one else was allowed to step foot into the hall or its surrounding grounds.

The Divine Fire Hall was the residence of the guardian for each generation of the Xia imperial family. Being an eighth-realm cultivator and the Dao Master of the Great Dao of Incinerating Heaven, the guardian held a status within the imperial family that, in some respects, surpassed that of the emperor. Even the emperor required an important reason to enter this sacred space.

But at this very moment, a beautiful and commanding woman sat casually in the center of the Divine Fire Hall, using a copper cauldron to prepare a hotpot. With her chopsticks, she picked up some thin noodles from the steaming pot, slurped them loudly, and let out a satisfied sigh.

Across from her sat a handsome middle-aged man clad in a purple-gold robe, radiating a deep and refined aura. Yet, despite his dignified appearance, his expression was one of helplessness.

This man was none other than the Crown Prince Mingde from back then. He was now the guardian of the Xia imperial family and also Di Nufeng's father.

After a moment of silence, Mingde sighed and said, "It's been eighty years, and this is the first meal I've shared with you."

"Yeah, what a memorable meal this is, yet you won't even catch a Qinghong bird for me to eat," Di Nufeng said, shaking her head.

"Honestly, if you really wanted to eat it, it wouldn't be impossible," Mingde said with a wry smile. "But using a Qinghong bird for a hotpot? Isn't that... a bit of a waste for such a rare delicacy?"

"Slurp." Di Nufeng responded by slurping another mouthful even more delightfully.

A few drops of oil splattered onto Mingde's robe, causing the veins on his forehead to bulge visibly. Yet, all he could do was sigh again, "Haaaaa."

"That's just how we people from Mount Shu are," Di Nufeng said after swallowing. "How can you know it won't taste good in a hotpot if you don't try it?"

"If you are willing to leave Mount Shu and come back and stay with me in the imperial city, I'll catch one for you," Mingde suggested again.

"Don't even think about it," Di Nufeng said, wiping her mouth. "It all depends on whether my disciple can win the Assembly of Immortal Sects. If he does, I'll be competing with you for control of the Great Dao."

"Heh," Mingde chuckled softly. "I still don't understand the sudden ambition."

"Didn't I tell you? Things aren't going well for Mount Shu, and Yan Zi is preparing to compete for control of the Dao," Di Nufeng replied. "I can't afford to slack off for her sake..."

She cleared her throat and spoke seriously. "My plan is to first fight for control of the Great Dao of Incinerating Heaven and attain the eighth realm. Then, I'll kill the Sword Emperor of the West Sea so that Yan Zi can smoothly take control of the Great Dao of the Cloud of Determination."

"Doesn't your plan sound a bit too complicated?" Mingde asked. "It's almost as convoluted as the scheme you had when you wanted to start a rebellion just to save your disciple."

Di Nufeng glared at him and said, "How did you find out about my top-secret plan?"

"The top-secret plan that even those talking spirit beasts of the Mount Shu Sect know about?" Mingde said with a laugh and a sigh.

"We have a traitor among us..." Di Nufeng muttered in a serious tone.

"You really aren't suited to be emperor; otherwise, I'd have no problem helping you ascend the throne," Mingde said solemnly. "While people say you're unruly, you actually have a strong sense of justice. You're just not good at managing affairs, which makes you perfect for the role of a guardian—free to do as you please and only stepping in when necessary."

"That sounds pretty much like what I do on Silver Sword Peak..." Di Nufeng glanced around, eyeing the cold, chilling hall. "But you call staying here for eighty years free to do as you please?"

"It's different. I am—" Mingde paused, leaving the sentence unfinished.

I am atoning for my sins, Mingde finished the sentence inwardly.

For him, every day he lived was a form of penance, and it would only end with his death.

"I don't care what you're doing. Anyway, you called me here for a meal, and I've finished eating," Di Nufeng said suddenly as she stood up. "Now I'm going to watch how my disciple wins the championship."

...

"Counting the previous batch, that makes a total of sixteen. If we can gather the same amount over the next six days, we should be in a good position."

A shining pearl lay on the ground, emitting a soft, bright glow.

At this moment, Chu Liang took advantage of the night to tally up the day's gains with his teammates.

After the initial chaos, the illusory realm settled into a calm, and at night, few teams dared to act recklessly.

The Competition of the Hundred Sects had always been this way. The first day after arrival brought the most significant wave of eliminations.

Having just arrived in the illusory realm, the participants were unfamiliar with their surroundings and would inevitably encounter enemies nearby, which would then lead to these chaotic fights.

Once the initial chaos subsided, the surviving factions would secure a decent number of soul crystals and establish relatively safe zones, bringing the situation under control.

The cultivators inside the illusory realm couldn't see the full picture, but the audience outside could. By the end of the first day, nearly forty teams had been eliminated, and many of the remaining teams had suffered significant losses.

Nearly half of the participants had already been eliminated.

The next wave of eliminations wouldn't occur until the seventh day, when teams with insufficient soul crystals could no longer afford to hide. They would have to emerge and fight for an opportunity, while also giving others a chance.

In the five days that followed, aside from the most powerful teams continuing their hunts, there would typically be only sporadic clashes.

The Mount Shu Sect was naturally prepared to sweep through those teams.

By the last day, time would be running out, and every cultivator in the illusory realm would be desperate. The risks would become unpredictable, and every year, strong teams would falter at the last moment. Those teams would want to avoid scrambling for soul crystals when the time came.

Fortunately, on the first day, the team from the Mount Shu Sect encountered an ambush from the three sects, resulting in a significant haul of soul crystals. This was basically a gift from Mother Nature.

This significantly reduced the workload for the coming days.

If they could take down one team a day, they would have thirty-six soul crystals by the seventh day, which would then allow them to easily secure a spot in the top ten. At that point, they could lay low during the most turbulent period without taking any risks.

"You've worked hard," Jiang Yuebai said softly.

Chu Liang had only briefly described his encounter earlier in the day, but defeating three teams single-handedly was no easy feat no matter what.

"It's nothing," Chu Liang smiled.

"Be careful," Xu Ziyang, who was on guard duty at the perimeter, warned suddenly in a low voice.

Chu Liang and the others immediately rose to their feet, sensing the approaching presence. They spread out their divine sense and saw a shining orb floating toward them from a distance.

"This looks a bit familiar," Chu Liang remarked.

As they drew closer, they realized it was a young monk, his bald head reflecting the moonlight with a bright sheen.

This monk was none other than Pushan from the Buddhist Cloud Monastery.

"Young Hero Chu?" Pushan called out from afar, having recognized the team from the Mount Shu Sect. He waved and shouted, "Don't attack, it's me!"