

M. Slaying 561

Chapter 561: What Business Do Children Have Speaking Here?

Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh.

The massive flock of birds, which seemed to cover the sky, produced wind blades that sliced everything in their path cleanly in half. They were sharp enough to rival Hu Sanlang's saberlight.

Of course, Chu Liang didn't dare to come into contact with them. While evading the wind blades, he pushed forward and charged toward Du Wuhen with the Dustless Sword in hand.

Despite having already fought two battles, Chu Liang showed no signs of fatigue. Instead, he seemed to become even more invigorated the more he fought.

Battles were common occurrences for Chu Liang. However, he rarely battled against prodigies in his peer group, and his display of such an intense fighting spirit was an even rarer occurrence than that.

As Chu Liang swung his longsword, a vast and mighty wave of Cloud of Determination sword qi surged forth, making Du Wuhen's heart tremble in fear. There was a clear reason why Chu Liang's status in the world had been rising during this past year—his strength was indeed terrifying.

Boom.

The wave of sword qi and the wind blades revolving around the scythe collided. The impact of the collision sent both forces flying in all directions, leaving countless small cuts on Chu Liang and Du Wuhen. The sound of ripping fabric rang out incessantly.

Many bloody wounds appeared on Du Wuhen's skin, staining it red.

Meanwhile, Chu Liang was protected by the Jiuli Soul Armor, so his torso was unaffected. Only his clothes had been ripped. His limbs and face were wounded, but they healed soon after.

Boom, boom, boom.

After several exchanges of attacks, Du Wuhen was wounded all over. However, Chu Liang's wounds had already healed, leaving only fresh scars.

Seeing that, Du Wuhen felt perplexed. Like Chu Liang, Du Wuhen was at the second level of the fifth realm and possessed the Jia Wood Foundational Qi. So, why was Chu Liang's recovery speed so much faster than his?

Of course, Du Wuhen had no idea that Chu Liang's Jia Wood Foundational Qi was from two Golden Cores. Moreover, he was also at the third realm of the White Dragon's cultivation legacy, making his physique as strong as that of a celestial beast.

In other words, Chu Liang's physique was comparable with that of Du Wuhen's tamed beast Azure Mysterious Wind Bird, while his cultivation power was on par with Du Wuhen's. With the two aspects combined, Chu Liang was undeniably formidable.

...

The scene of Chu Liang overwhelming Du Wuhen so swiftly left the spectators outside the illusory realm dumbfounded.

Unable to understand the intricacies of the fight, the non-cultivators simply enjoyed the exciting fight.

They had seen Hu Sanlang suppress Chu Liang for so long in the previous fight, so they had thought the two young men were on par in terms of strength. Chu Liang had won in the end, but they had assumed it had been a narrow victory. They had not known that it had been because of Chu Liang's strategy to minimize the damage he received.

It was obvious to the spectators that Du Wuhen's strength surpassed that of Hu Sanlang, so most of them had believed this would be a tough battle for Chu Liang. To their surprise, Chu Liang took the offensive right when the fight started, unleashing a storm of attacks that left Du Wuhen overwhelmed.

The eldest disciple of the Thunderbolt Stronghold was being beaten to a pulp.

Lackey A and Shang Ziliang, who had been wailing in despair just before, forgot about their bets for now. They stared fixedly at the screen, feeling their sect might have grasped a glimmer of hope.

"Chu Liang's switch has been flicked!" Lin Bei exclaimed. "Senior Sister Jiang's death must have triggered his battle mode. I've never seen his fighting spirit this intense!"

The other disciples of the Mount Shu Sect nodded in agreement. Chu Liang was always smiling; who had ever witnessed him this fierce?

Bam, bam, bam!

Drenched in his own blood, Du Wuhen finally had enough. If Chu Liang's barrage of attacks continued, Du Wuhen would essentially be subjected to death by a thousand cuts. Their exchanges of attacks were only hurting Du Wuhen; Chu Liang's physique was totally fine, yet Du Wuhen was reaching his limits.

Du Wuhen bellowed, "You've taken your bullying too far!"

Boom!

He swung his scythe fiercely, creating some distance between him and Chu Liang. Then he raised his hand and transformed his scythe back into its spirit beast form, the Azure Mysterious Wind Bird.

The Azure Mysterious Wind Bird spun and transformed again. This time, it became a beam of green light and entered Du Wuhen.

It was the divine ability Tamed Beast Possession!

This divine ability was rarely used by the beast tamers of the Thunderbolt Stronghold, as it inflicted major harm to the beast tamer. The power of a spirit beast could destroy the human beast tamer's corporeal body. The best case scenario was a serious injury, and the worst was that they would shatter to bits. The chances of getting a bad side effect was high if the tamed beast was a spirit beast of the Azure Mysterious Wind Bird's caliber.

Nevertheless, when the tamed beast and its tamer became one, their power was greatly amplified.

After the Azure Mysterious Wind Bird possessed Du Wuhen's body, Du Wuhen grew in size, and his eyes ignited with azure divine fire.

He let out a sharp cry, "Keeew!"

Rumble, rumble, rumble!

A violent whirlwind rose from the ground of the street. In an instant, half of Misty Waters City was engulfed in a massive whirlwind, with a vast wave of divine light surging upward and illuminating the night sky!

Amid the violent winds, Chu Liang felt an immense force pulling at him, threatening to tear him apart!

It's so powerful...

All Chu Liang could do was concentrate on circulating his foundational qi, barely managing to remain standing stably on the ground.

In mere moments, the whirlwind had grown so much that it now encompassed all of Misty Waters City, and it was still gaining velocity and force!

Within the blinding chaos, all Chu Liang could see was Du Wuhen in the eye of the whirlwind. He was enveloped in azure light, resembling a star. As the heart of the whirlwind, Du Wuhen had control over an unimaginable amount of force.

While watching Du Wuhen, Chu Liang's eyes lit up with divine light. He activated a divine skill, and two heads and four arms suddenly sprouted from his torso.

It was the Three-Headed and Six-Armed Form!

Chu Liang did not use this divine skill to directly attack Du Wuhen. Instead, he planned to use his six hands to simultaneously draw six trigram talismans and combine them into three hexagram talismans.

He was going to make the hexagram Xun As Wind![1]

Several of the disciples that had journeyed into the Celestial Talisman Master's Hidden Realm had comprehended the Eight Trigram Talismans and learned to draw them with both hands, mastering the method of combining trigrams. Just that was already quite formidable.

However, Chu Liang did some further research and found that while two talismans was the limit for regular bodies, he didn't have the same limit. When he used the Three-Headed and Six-Armed Form, he could draw talismans with all six arms simultaneously and combine six trigram talismans.

If Situ Guanhai were to witness this scene, he would likely find it unbelievable. Chu Liang had learned how to combine trigram talismans from Situ Guanhai, yet Chu Liang did it in a totally different way now.

Chu Liang's six hands each drew a Xun-Character Talisman and instantly combined them into three pairs, making three hexagrams.

"Xun As Wind!"

A powerful talismanic force emerged, but it was not meant to stop Du Wuhen's whirlwind. On the contrary, Chu Liang's intention was for the power of Xun As Wind to increase the velocity and force of the whirlwind.

The raging winds intensified sixfold!

Rumble, rumble, rumble.

Du Wuhen was already under a lot of strain trying to manipulate the whirlwind. He persisted with gritted teeth, trying to use the whirlwind to rip Chu Liang apart.

However, the raging winds suddenly intensified, and he lost control. Something exploded inside him.

Chu Liang had deliberately intensified the whirlwind, giving it more force than Du Wuhen could handle.

Du Wuhen burst open, and a fountain of blood sprayed out. Without any energy left to resist, he transformed into a soul crystal.

Right then, the violent, raging whirlwind exploded, sending a massive blast of wind through Misty Waters City, which had already been reduced to ruins, and razing it to the ground. After that, only piles of rubble remained.

...

The blast hurled Chu Liang dozens of zhang away. The injuries he suffered this time were quite significant, but he had successfully countered and killed Du Wuhen.

"Huuu..."

After taking a moment to catch his breath, he didn't heal his wounds. Instead, he got up and continued walking forward.

The streets and buildings were gone now, so there was nothing in his way. He could see the people waiting for him up ahead.

Yang Shenlong, Yang Yuhu, Xi Miaoxian, and Qi Lin'er—the team of four from the Penglai Supreme Sect stood in a row amid the rubble, gazing at Chu Liang with shocked expressions.

Qi Lin'er broke the silence with a strange laugh. "Heheh."

Then he leaped in front of Chu Liang. "I didn't expect you to make it here. Since you're so eager to court death, I can only—"

Qi Lin'er didn't finish his sentence.

Chu Liang was suddenly enraged, and an aura of indescribably immense power burst out from him, shrouding him. Taking a step forward, Chu Liang turned his hand over and struck Qi Lin'er's celestial spirit with his palm.

Boom.

That one palm strike obliterated Qi Lin'er!

The gazes of the remaining members of the Penglai Supreme Sect team wavered in fear, even Yang Shenlong's. Their expressions immediately turned grave.

On the other hand, Chu Liang smiled nonchalantly as if he had merely swatted a mosquito to death.

He shook his head and said, "What business do children have speaking here?"

Chapter 562: About to be Sucked Dry

Chu Liang's sudden move stunned many people.

The audience outside the screen didn't know much about Qi Lin'er, only that he was a naturally gifted kid. Initially, they assumed he was just there for the experience due to his connections, tagging along with Yang Shenlong to claim victory... Most of them thought they could take his place themselves.

Later, they realized Qi Lin'er was indeed powerful, having the most solo victories among the Penglai team, giving him ample reason for his arrogance. Yet, without enough strong opponents, his true power remained somewhat vague.

But the three remaining members of the Penglai Supreme Sect team were the most shocked.

As his fellow disciples, they knew well that Qi Lin'er was born with mystical abilities. His skin was made of bronze and bones made of iron. He had the strength of a dragon and his qi flowed as boundless as the ocean. He was terrifyingly gifted.

Among the Penglai team attending the Assembly of Immortal Sects, only Yang Shenlong held a firm advantage over him; Xi Miaoxian and Yang Yuhu were weaker by comparison.

Qi Lin'er was actually Penglai's second strongest!

With his powerful physique, even Yang Shenlong couldn't defeat him so cleanly. To kill him in one slap?

This was simply astounding.

How could this be possible?

If Chu Liang had this strength before, he wouldn't have needed to waste his time with Hu Sanlang and Du Wuhen. He could've just flattened everyone with one smack; who could withstand that?

"Fall back!" Yang Shenlong barked, his killing intent surging.

He sensed it clearly—Chu Liang's aura had suddenly surged, drawing the surrounding spiritual qi into a vortex, flooding into his body and leaving other cultivators with almost no spiritual qi to access.

This level of cultivation power was something he had never seen among his peers.

It was no longer the feeling of facing an opponent; it was a deep sense of danger.

Bang!

In the void, the collision of qi created a sound like thunder.

Xi Miaoxian and Yang Yuhu stepped back immediately, their expressions equally complex. Xi Miaoxian had encountered Chu Liang before; at that time, he was already remarkable, but to say he could rival Yang Shenlong would have been an exaggeration. Yet, he had reached this level in just a few short months?

Yang Yuhu recalled his first encounter with Chu Liang. Back then, Chu Liang was merely at the beginning stage of the Golden Core Realm, but was still able to defeat someone of a cultivation level higher. It was truly an impressive feat.

Back then, he had thought Chu Liang was extraordinary and even mentioned that Chu Liang could one day rival his older brother, though he had really said it with a hint of flattery.

He never thought this day would actually come.

From Chu Liang's point of view, this day came sooner than he had expected.

Originally, the Mount Shu Sect had no intention of confronting the Penglai Supreme Sect in the Competition of a Hundred Sects; they only aimed to safely secure a spot in the top ten to avoid being expelled from the Divine Nine. Yet, unexpectedly, Yang Shenlong had taken the initiative to attack, killing three of Chu Liang's teammates.

If that were all, Chu Liang might have chosen to endure the humiliation, finding a way to gather enough soul crystals to survive till the end, as Mount Shu Sect's future was much more important than settling such petty disputes.

But at this point, he couldn't help but be grateful to his "good friends" from the West Sea Diabolical Forces.

After the airship Lianglong detonated and killed the Black Devil Whale, it granted him a Boundless Swallowing Whale Pill, essentially a fifteen-minute pass to experience a Boundless Sea of Qi.

Since he had gotten this item from an imprint in this illusory world, there was a chance that he would lose it upon leaving this illusory world. It would be a waste if he didn't use it here.

For a typical cultivator in the fifth realm, even with the aid of this pill, there was a limit to how much stronger they could become. Without an improvement in the quality of their foundational qi, it would still be extremely difficult to perform formidable techniques.

But Chu Liang was different.

He had so many treasures.

The Talisman of Life Restoration that he obtained in the Celestial Talisman Master's Hidden Realm had the ability to bestow life upon beings, but doing so came at a great cost. Bestowing life drained an enormous amount of his cultivation power. When he had once used it on a single berry, it nearly exhausted half of his foundational qi. The task of bestowing life on beings with immense spiritual energy would be even more taxing.

But now, fueled by the Boundless Swallowing Whale Pill, he could revive everything in his hands.

Whoosh.

A radiant light erupted as the Dustless Sword rose into the air, its spiritual energy gleaming with brilliance, coming to life in an instant.

Nearby, the Crimson Executioner Sword, glowing red like flames, also levitated with a fierce aura.

The Five Elements Formation Diagram: Celestial Trap, the Razor Leaf Saber...

The biggest difference between legendary artifacts and regular enchanted tools was that legendary artifacts possessed a spirit, capable of controlling themselves when necessary. While Chu Liang's tools had not yet reached the level of legendary artifacts, they seemed to carry a spirit similar to that of such legendary items.

"Dustless Sword, awaken..."

"Crimson Executioner, awaken..."

Chu Liang silently recited their names, and more enchanted tools rose to fly around him. Hidden from others' view, the Blue Dragon's Orb was also spinning furiously.

This was the very reason he had been able to obliterate Qi Lin'er with a single strike.

The Blue Dragon's Orb could command the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm, inheriting part of the authority of a Blue Dragon at the eighth realm. However, due to Chu Liang's previously low cultivation level, many of its powers had been unusable.

But now, he had no such constraints. He immediately channeled the power of the Blue Dragon's Orb, directly borrowing the strength of the Blue Dragon, infusing himself with the qi of the entire hidden realm.

"Raaaaar!!!"

In the ethereal depths, a shadow of a True Dragon loomed over the area, and Chu Liang's figure began to take on a divine, ethereal quality. He could sense a resonance with the enchanted tools surrounding him.

The sharpness of the Dustless Sword, the fury of the Crimson Executioner, the lively clamor of the Razor Leaf Saber—as if each enchanted tool held multiple spirits... and the profound ancient aura of the Jiuli Soul Armor...

At this state, Chu Liang suddenly had a bold idea.

The White Pagoda...

Awaken!

...

Immortal Jiuyi's expression became more and more terrible.

As the master of the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, everything inside, except for invaders like Immortal Yuan Lu, consumed his foundational qi. Although the illusory realm appeared incredibly realistic, it was maintained through Immortal Jiuyi's cultivation.

This was also why eighth-realm cultivators, and even many seventh-realm cultivators, could not exist within this illusory realm. A gathering like the Assembly of Immortal Sects, filled with cultivators at the realms of the Earthly Gate, posed no strain on Immortal Jiuyi.

At least, that had indeed been the case up until now.

But when Immortal Jiuyi watched Chu Liang launch a night raid on Misty Waters City, he was initially puzzled.

Immortal Jiuyi didn't understand why Chu Liang acted so impulsively. Since Chu Liang had helped avert a crisis for him, he wouldn't have minded giving him a little support in secret.

While he couldn't help Chu Liang kill anyone, he could assist by making him invisible on screen, letting him see everyone's positions, masking his qi so others couldn't sense him, or ensuring his abilities hit with perfect accuracy... These small favors were feasible.

After all, if the Mount Shu Sect were eliminated, it might have been due to the fact that Chu Liang had been helping fight the diabolical forces, so it would only be fair to offer some support in return.

Yet, Chu Liang had charged into Misty Waters City just like that. It appeared vengeful, but in the eyes of others, it seemed somewhat suicidal.

Even though he fought his way to Yang Shenlong, shocking many, few believed he could actually defeat him. Most thought he was simply drawing closer to his own demise.

Meanwhile, it became increasingly difficult for Immortal Jiuyi to assist him. With so many eyes watching, it was nearly impossible to perform any subtle maneuvers.

But at that moment, Chu Liang suddenly unleashed a surge of power, his cultivation skyrocketing, like a vortex devouring spiritual qi, absorbing all the energy from the entire illusory realm.

What is he doing? Immortal Jiuyi quickly channeled more foundational qi into the illusory realm.

He felt bewildered as he wondered, How is a fifth-realm cultivator achieving this?

This amount of spiritual qi Chu Liang was using was enough to kill someone at his level eight hundred times over.

Wait...

A terrifying force of absorption suddenly swept over, demanding such an immense amount of qi that even Immortal Jiuyi became terrified. Despite being at the eighth realm, with a seemingly boundless Sea of Qi, the color drained from his face in an instant.

Something's wrong. I can't give anymore. Otherwise, this kid will suck me dry! Immortal Jiuyi screamed inwardly.

Chapter 563: Love and Peace

After a brief attempt, his effort to awaken the White Pagoda failed, as if the spiritual qi in the world had suddenly been cut off, leaving Chu Liang rather disappointed.

He had hoped to use this chance to awaken the spirit of the White Pagoda and perhaps communicate with it, learning about its origins.

The effects of the Great Pill of the Endlessly Devouring Whale effects were supposed to be reliable; with a Boundless Sea of Qi, he shouldn't still be lacking qi.

It had to be that the spiritual qi supplied by Immortal Jiuyi in this illusory realm was finally running out.

Even with Immortal Jiuyi's cultivation energy, it was not enough to revive the White Pagoda, which furthermore indicated the incomprehensible power of the spirit in this enchanted tool.

Chu Liang stopped trying. With the limited time, he couldn't bother wasting it all on this.

Because he was concerned about a sudden attack from the members of Penglai, he had taken the Great Pill of the Endlessly Devouring Whale just before meeting them, allowing him to deliver the blow that instantly killed Qi Lin'er.

With only a fifteen-minute duration, there wasn't much time left.

He needed to act now.

Across from him, Yang Shenlong had already taken action. A three-chi azure light appeared out of nowhere in his hand, and though he stood in place, Chu Liang could feel the killing intent coming from behind him.

The combination of Shadow of Radiance and Dimension Compression, a divine technique he was familiar with thanks to Jiang Yuebai's mastery of both.

Yet, he didn't need to make any moves; the Dustless Sword's senses were far sharper than his own. With a ringing clash, the Dustless Sword surged with sword qi, blocking the strike.

Of course, it was still draining Chu Liang's foundational qi, but that was the one thing he currently had more than enough.

After the Dustless Sword made its first move, the other enchanted tools swirling around also closed in, launching their strongest attacks on Yang Shenlong.

Boom, boom, boom, boom!

Yang Shenlong's sneak attack had failed, and now he found himself surrounded by enchanted tools. Though it was a one-on-one fight, he suddenly felt as if he were being swarmed from all sides.

He instantly moved. Shrouded in a jade-colored glow, he was evidently activating his Jade Pure Physical Form. His foundational qi surged as he struck back the enchanted tools one by one.

At that moment, the actual Chu Liang arrived. "Haah—"

With a clear shout, Chu Liang punched forward, carrying the immense power of the Blue Dragon.

Bang—

Yang Shenlong countered with a backhanded strike, transforming his palm into a massive azure dragon claw, clashing against Chu Liang's blow.

Boom—

Yang Shenlong was hurled backward, crashing into the surrounding rubble. The clash sent him flying with swift, decisive force!

Never in his life had Yang Shenlong encountered a peer so evenly matched, let alone one that made him suffer such a setback. Though his Azure Dragon legacy had not primarily enhanced his physical body, the fortification it provided was still incredibly powerful.

Apart from a natural monster like Qi Lin'er, there was no peer with a stronger physique than his, not even among those with physical cultivation or martial arts training.

The power in Chu Liang's punch...was definitely beyond what anyone below the realms of the Heavenly Gate could possess!

And indeed, that was the case. Chu Liang's punch carried the power of the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm. With his White Dragon legacy at the third realm, even without fortification, his physique was already slightly superior to Yang Shenlong's; with this added boost, it was unmatched.

Yang Shenlong, who had been hurled into the air, could only fully activate the power of his Azure Dragon legacy to alleviate the pain.

When he was about to crash on the ground, he rebounded to counter attack... because Chu Liang was already charging at him!

Boom—

Enveloped in Divine Dragon Fire, he roared forward, his flaming fist crashing down once more!

Yang Shenlong spun around and suddenly, three identical forms of him appeared in place.

There were three Yang Shenlongs!

He had used the Immortal Art: External Manifestation!

This immortal art allowed him to create clones with the same cultivation level and physique as his own. Each additional clone was a significant threshold, and most who mastered the External Manifestation art could only create one clone. Jiang Yuebai and Chu Liang, in his normal state, were no exception.

Yang Shenlong, however, had managed to create two clones—a feat even some seventh-realm Eminent Ones couldn't achieve.

In fights among peers, having additional clones almost guaranteed a crushing victory.

When Yang Shenlong single-handedly defeated most of the members in the team from the Mount Shu Sect, he did not create three clones, if not any.

He wanted to reserve his full power for the next round, the Battle at the Imperial City, and did not want to reveal all his techniques.

But now, he couldn't hold back anymore. He even suspected that three of himself might still not be enough against Chu Liang.

This overwhelming feeling of despair was something he had always inflicted on others, yet he never imagined he'd experience it himself.

In truth, he shouldn't have used this technique.

Because it reminded Chu Liang that he could use this technique too!

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—

With a series of explosive sounds, twelve Chu Liangs appeared, surrounding the three Yang Shenlongs.

At that moment, Yang Shenlong felt a hint of absurdity.

If you create four, or even five clones, I might admit you're stronger. But isn't creating twelve a bit too much?

Most people can't even create twelve mindless puppets using Army of Beans, and here you are with twelve full-powered clones?

Something is definitely off.

Yang Shenlong even thought of Immortal Jiuyi, wondering if Immortal Jiuyi had helped Chu Liang cheat. In the illusory realm, only Immortal Jiuyi could achieve something like this.

But if Immortal Jiuyi is helping him, that would be too much.

Can't you at least pretend?

How on earth is he doing this...

While he was deep in thought feeling confused, the twelve Chu Liangs simultaneously swung fiery fists, causing a series of explosive sounds.

Amid the roaring noise, Yang Shenlong's two clones burnt up all their cultivation energy, raising a fierce whirlwind that temporarily forced the surrounding Chu Liangs back a few chi.

The actual Yang Shenlong was instantly cloaked in golden light, transforming into a beam of light that shot straight toward the sky!

This time, he used the Golden Path!

This was the most powerful flying immortal art in the world that could allow the user to teleport across big distances. By using this immortal art, one could cross vast distances in a blink of an eye. Yang Shenlong realized he had no chance of defeating Chu Liang and prepared to escape.

But in the next instant, Chu Liang was already in pursuit.

Yes, although he didn't know the Golden Path, he still managed to keep up.

He was using Dimension Compression.

Certainly, the Dimension Compression couldn't match the Golden Path over long distances. But that was only because Dimension Compression wasn't designed for long-range use.

It was like a sprinter chasing a long-distance runner. While the sprinter might not be a long-distance expert, he could break the thousand of meters into several hundreds of meters and sprint each segment at full speed.

The only drawback was that it might be exhausting.

But Chu Liang wouldn't get tired.

He only worried about running out of time.

Smack.

Yang Shenlong never expected to be caught by the ankle while using the Golden Path.

In that moment... he was so shocked like a living person seeing a ghost.

Boom!

With a single-arm swing, Chu Liang hurled Yang Shenlong back into Misty Waters City.

Thinking of escaping?

Not a chance.

If Chu Liang let him escape, it would be his own death in just moments.

Chu Liang slammed Yang Shenlong to the ground, then leapt down, stomping on his chest and leaning in to deliver a powerful punch!

Boom!

The punch aimed directly at his face, and if it hit, even an Eminent One would perish. But Yang Shenlong still had strength left; flames ignited in his eyes as he opened his mouth, transforming his head into that of a dragon, and actually caught Chu Liang's fiery fist in his jaws!

Whoosh—

While he was in the dragon form, he inhaled, producing this powerful force twisting the Great Dao of the World.

He wanted to shrink Chu Liang and swallow him whole.

Once again, he was using the World Within One's Sleeve technique, a move he usually used with a single palm to suppress opponents. Who would have thought he could apply it with his mouth?

But at this moment, Chu Liang was simply unbeatable.

He fought back by giving another punch with his left hand.

Boom—

Then another punch!

Boom—

And then continuously...

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—

The heavy fiery punches rained down on Yang Shenlong's body relentlessly. No matter how powerful the Azure Dragon's regenerative physique was, it couldn't keep up with the speed of Chu Liang's punches.

By the time Chu Liang had enough of the smashing, he noticed that nothing remained beneath him except a small soul crystal.

"Hah—" Chu Liang exhaled deeply and leaped up.

When he looked over at Yang Yuhu and Xi Miao-xian, he found them both staring blankly, looking somewhat dazed.

It wasn't that they didn't want to help, but there was simply no way for them to intervene in this fight.

They wanted to run, but if Yang Shenlong had not even been able to escape with the use of the Golden Path, how could they possibly escape?

Yang Shenlong had always been an invincible figure in their minds, yet seeing him fall so utterly, defeated in such a brutal manner, left them bewildered and lost.

Then, Chu Liang took a step forward and suddenly stopped.

After a slight pause, a smile appeared on his face. "Brother Yang, Miss Xi, there's no need to be tense. Your elder brother killed my teammates, so I came to seek revenge. Since I know you two, I don't plan to end your path forward."

"Leave behind all the soul crystals Penglai has collected these days, and you may go."

"Brother Chu..." Yang Yuhu was even more stunned upon hearing this. "You're letting us go?"

"When will revenge ever end?" Chu Liang said calmly, "I came here to stand up for my teammates. I am not here to make the conflict with Penglai worse."

In that moment, his smile seemed noble, radiating the light of love and peace.

Xi Miaoxian was quicker to react; upon hearing this, she placed a bag of soul crystals on the ground, saying, "Thank you, Young Hero Chu, for your noble act. We won't forget this kindness."

Saying this, she pulled Yang Yuhu along, and they swiftly took flight.

The two of them fled like startled birds, clearly frightened out of their wits.

Whoosh—

A gentle breeze swept over the rubble-strewn remains of Misty Waters City, leaving only Chu Liang standing there, his gaze distant as if savoring the thrill of the fierce fight.

Moments later, Monk Pushan approached, his face filled with shock. "Oh my goodness, you actually won! I knew you were strong, but I never expected this level of strength. You even let them go! Even us disciples of Buddhism might not have had the same heart. It's truly admirable... huh? Why aren't you moving?"

"Keep your voice down..." Chu Liang replied weakly, "Use your Heavenly Eye to check if there's anyone around."

"Hmm?" Pushan sensed something was wrong, immediately scanning the area. "No one's here."

"Then pick up that bag of soul crystals and quickly take me somewhere safe," Chu Liang instructed.

"What's wrong?"

Pushan looked at Chu Liang in surprise. He had observed the fight from afar; Chu Liang had emerged unscathed and had easily overpowered his opponents, so he shouldn't be injured.

Chu Liang didn't respond; he suddenly stiffened and fell straight back with a dull thud.

Thud.

Chapter 564: Any Kind of Blade Will Do

As Chu Liang launched his night raid on Misty Waters City, a surge of multicolored clouds gathered over Emperor's Mound, lighting up half the sky with brilliant hues.

The audience, absorbed in the battle, was momentarily distracted as a figure in a deep blue Daoist robe descended gracefully from the heart of the clouds.

"Daoist Cangsheng!" someone called out.

Everyone looked up, eager to catch a glimpse of the world's foremost righteous figure.

Though the Assembly of Immortal Sects was a grand occasion, cultivators at the seventh or eighth realms of the Heavenly Gate would often spend years—or even decades—in a single closed-door cultivation session. This twelve-year event wasn't something they always attended.

And the leaders of the sects in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten sects rarely appeared in public, so seeing them wasn't easy. Especially Daoist Cangsheng, the sect leader of Penglai—he hadn't been seen for years.

He showed up for this Assembly of Immortal Sects?

Unfortunately, the clouds surged for a moment before retracting, and the figure vanished atop Emperor's Mound, so those who reacted slowly saw nothing.

The fight between Chu Liang and Du Wuhen was reaching a critical point on the screen, and everyone turned their attention back to the match.

However, Daoist Cangsheng's arrival sparked murmured discussions.

Meanwhile, the people on Emperor's Mound stood up to welcome him.

"Daoist Master Cangsheng, it's been over forty years since you last attended the Assembly of Immortal Sects, hasn't it?" Immortal Jiuyi said with a smile. "What brings you here in the External Manifestation of your true form today?"

The man who sat beside him wore a blue Daoist robe layered over white, his hair secured with a bamboo hairpin. His sharply arched brows and bright, piercing eyes gave him a commanding presence, while his fair face and soft, wispy sideburns lent an air of wisdom and solemnity, making him seem like a dignified and austere Daoist elder.

Immortal Jiuyi could instantly tell that this Daoist was a clone of Daoist Cangsheng. For eighth-realm cultivators who had attained the Heavenly Origin, the cultivation required to comprehend the Dao was time-consuming, making it rare for them to travel freely. Most remained in closed-door cultivation for years, only going out as a clone of their true form when necessary.

For instance, the Venerable Wen Yuan, who was always busy in the Boundless Palace on Mount Shu, was not the actual Wen Yuan. It was just a clone.

For these powerful figures, showing up even as a clone already indicated that something important had occurred. If they actually showed up with their true form, it meant that the situation was serious, and a fight was about to happen.

"Just here to see Lin'er," Daoist Cangsheng replied. "It's his first time away from Penglai, and the Assembly of Immortal Sects is quite important, so I wanted to see how he's doing."

Upon hearing his straightforward answer, Immortal Jiuyi couldn't help but feel curious. He wondered, Are the rumors about Qi Lin'er being Daoist Cangsheng's illegitimate son true? Otherwise, why would he show such open affection for Qi Lin'er?

Meanwhile, he continued, "Qi Lin'er has performed exceptionally well in the Competition of a Hundred Sects, achieving several solo team-wipe victories. At his age, this is truly remarkable, even among top-tier prodigies..."

His words abruptly stopped.

On the screen, it showed the exact moment Qi Lin'er leaped in front of Chu Liang, taunting him, only to be slapped dead in an instant.

The air became thick with tension.

Daoist Cangsheng was the first to break the silence. "This young man is quite excellent. Which immortal sect does he belong to?"

"He's Chu Liang of the Mount Shu Sect," Immortal Jiuyi replied. "He's been outstanding in this competition, though he's likely no match for Yang Shenlong."

"That's to be expected," Daoist Cangsheng said with a slight nod, appearing reluctant to discuss Yang Shenlong further.

Immortal Jiuyi didn't say much more, but he was aware of some internal matters within Penglai. The Yang Family held a prominent position within the Penglai Supreme Sect, much like the Lu Family whose status was glorious in the Mount Shu Sect. These were families with legacies in the immortal sects.

Their ancestors carried the bloodline of Hallowed Yang, a revered figure among humans. Three of the sect leaders of Penglai hailed from this lineage, with the last being Daoist Cangsheng's own teacher.

However, after Daoist Cangsheng assumed leadership, he intentionally sought to diminish the Yang family's influence, both covertly and overtly. When Yang Bujue betrayed Penglai to join the Celestial Charm Sect, rumors spread that Daoist Cangsheng had plotted against him out of fear that another exceptional young talent from the Yang family would threaten his position.

Large family factions within the immortal sects were indeed a chronic issue for many sects. Even the best-managed sects found that these relationships hindered growth. To avoid the complexities of familial ties, many secluded immortal sects even preferred to take in orphans.

As Daoist Cangsheng's cultivation progressed and his position within the sect became more secure, his efforts to suppress the Yang Family became more relaxed. In the wake of this change, outstanding talents like Yang Shenlong and Yang Yuhu emerged in this generation.

Then came the moment when Immortal Jiuyi sensed the tremendous force of absorption from Chu Liang, followed by a brutal display as Chu Liang beat Yang Shenlong up.

Finally, Daoist Cangsheng could no longer bear to watch. He turned to Immortal Jiuyi and asked, "Does this seem normal to you?"

It was no surprise he asked; anyone observing might be wondering if the Mount Shu Sect and the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals had made some under-the-table deal.

They would surely wonder if Venerable Wen Yuan had sent gifts to Immortal Jiuyi. With what had occurred, Chu Liang was clearly cheating. Otherwise, how had he possibly thrashed Yang Shenlong, who was of a higher cultivation level?

Daoist Cangsheng did not suspect that Immortal Jiuyi would do such a thing. But since Immortal Jiuyi was the overseer of the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, he should provide some explanation to this.

Yet, Immortal Jiuyi was equally puzzled.

He could sense that Chu Liang had unleashed an immense vortex of force that nearly absorbed all his qi, but he had no idea about its source.

Using his divine sense to sweep over Chu Liang, he detected that Chu Liang had taken some kind of pill, though he remained unsure of the exact nature of this pill.

With Daoist Cangsheng's skeptical gaze upon him, Immortal Jiuyi suddenly had an idea.

He replied, "It seems he's taken a pill to enhance his power. This doesn't break the rules."

As the overseer of the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams, his words carried significant weight. If he deemed that the pill had not broken any rules, there would be no issue. However, if he questioned its legitimacy, it would necessitate an investigation into Chu Liang.

After all, like legendary artifacts, any item that could significantly alter the balance of power beyond normal cultivation levels would be scrutinized, as such things could render the contest meaningless.

Everything had to stay within certain limits.

However, since Immortal Jiuyi had made his judgment, it indicated that while the pill was powerful, there was a limit to it, leaving no room for further debate.

As for whether this was truly the case, no one else's words held more credibility than Immortal Jiuyi's.

Daoist Cangsheng remained silent, appearing calm and composed, but he was likely far from pleased. After traveling so far to witness Qi Lin'er's performance, he ended up watching him get defeated brutally. And now, the Penglai Supreme Sect team was on the brink of elimination. Anyone would be in a foul mood if something like this occurred to them.

...

The losers weren't the only ones feeling awful.

As the victor, Chu Liang wasn't feeling great.

Following Chu Liang's instructions, Monk Pushan gathered the soul crystals, located a secluded valley near the coast, and summoned the great bell to hide there.

Chu Liang's body was rigid; he couldn't move a muscle. Forget channeling qi—even lifting a pinky was out of the question. It felt as though blades were tearing through his insides, causing relentless agony.

So this was why the description of the pill advised using it with moderation? Chu Liang thought.

In that fleeting moment after taking the Great Pill of the Endlessly Devouring Whale, he had wielded his power without limits and it felt awesome. But for every bit of foundational qi he had overdrawn, he now felt the fierce backlash. This was the price of lacking self-control in his youth.

At this moment, Chu Liang could see both a good side and a bad side to his situation.

The good news was that Pushan was right beside him. Thanks to the monk's help in fleeing and hiding, he didn't have to lie there exposed, waiting to be picked off.

The bad news was also that Pushan was right beside him.

"At first, I thought you were going to get yourself killed! But wow, you actually managed to defeat Yang Shenlong. No wonder you looked so confident when you went in..." Pushan commented.

"Uh-huh," Chu Liang replied.

Pushan continued, "If Yang Shenlong hadn't wiped out most of the members in our teams, I bet you would've kept your ability hidden until the Battle at the Imperial City. How cunning of you..."

"Mhm," Chu Liang replied.

"I take it Jiang Yuebai's elimination really got to you," Pushan said. "You rushed into battle out of anger for a beautiful maiden? Honestly, when you charged into Misty Waters City, I thought you were so lost that you were ready to follow Jiang Yuebai to death in the name of love."

"Oh, screw you," Chu Liang retorted.

Pushan continued his enthusiastic monologue while Chu Liang lay there in silence, unable to resist. Eventually, he even lost the will to respond.

It was like a relentless background hum.

After a long while, Chu Liang finally spoke up again. "Pushan, do you have a saber?"

"I don't use that kind of weapon—just a knife for cutting fruit. What do you need it for?" Pushan asked.

"As long as it can give me a quick end..." Chu Liang said with a helpless sigh. "Any blade will do."

Chapter 565: These are Friends and These are Enemies

An eerie laugh echoed, "Hee-hee-hee..."

With Yang Shenlong's crushing defeat, reactions varied—some cheered, some mourned, and others laughed with a devilish thrill.

Di Nufeng leaned back on the platform, a faint smirk curling her lips as she glanced at the two elders on either side. "Now this is what is meant by the saying, 'A great teacher that produces a disciple of such brilliance,' eh?" Scholar Sun looked astonished. "Yang Shenlong was already remarkable for being at the sixth realm of cultivation, yet Chu Liang managed to overpower him and win. It's downright terrifying! I know I've said this before, but your disciple never ceases to amaze. He's truly extraordinary!"

"This night raid on Misty Waters City will no doubt be remembered in the Assembly of Immortal Sects for years to come. Chu Liang seems more like a devil that had descended from the heavens... a Heavenly General of Tai Sui^[1] in the mortal world..."

Scholar Sun shook his head, clicking his tongue in admiration, while Elder Huang looked bewildered, struggling to find words.

As a descendant of the Heaven Observer from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, Elder Huang's senior brothers always made accurate predictions. He, however, seemed cursed to consistently get it wrong, suffering countless misjudgments over the centuries. Still, he believed that a true Heaven Observer needed to make bold predictions.

These days, he could accept being wrong most of the time, but there were some things he simply couldn't accept.

How on earth did Yang Shenlong lose? No matter how much Elder Huang thought about it, he couldn't make sense of it.

After a long, awkward silence, he could only manage to utter two words, "Fucking powerful."

Not far away, Chief Xu Bashan of the Four Seas Whale Gang had a wide smile on his big and fierce face. Leaning back, he looked around and chuckled. "Now this is what it means to have the wisdom to recognize true talent, eh?"

"When I first swore brotherhood with Chu Liang, none of you understood why," Xu Bashan said with a sigh. "Now, perhaps, you see his strength. Though he's young, he never fails to impress. Whatever he sets his mind to, he accomplishes. Python Belly City, Red Cotton Peak, the Assembly of Immortal Sects... This isn't the first time I've seen him in a scene like this."

Meanwhile, Huang Hanshan and Huyan Dong looked as if someone from their family had just died, their faces dark with silent frustration.

After a moment, Huyan Dong finally said, "Something's definitely off. I'm reporting this to the imperial court and the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. We need a thorough investigation. How is it possible that a fifth-realm cultivator could unleash such a power? There must be some trickery involved."

"Give it a rest," Huang Hanshan scoffed. "If there were really an issue, Immortal Jiuyi would have mentioned it already. What makes you think you can question it now? Besides, doubting this isn't just questioning the Mount Shu Sect; it's questioning Immortal Jiuyi himself."

"You were eliminated too, weren't you?" Huyan Dong pressed. "Don't you want to kick the Mount Shu Sect out of the Divine Nine?"

"Of course I do," Huang Hanshan shrugged. "But when my disciple was eliminated, there was no issue. The truth is, my disciple was simply weaker than Chu Liang. So what can I say? Sure, I want Thunderbolt Stronghold to ascend to the rankings of the Divine Nine, but I won't drag others down to make it happen."

"You..." Huyan Dong's frustration spiked.

Everyone here is thinking about how their sect would fail to rise. How can you take the moral high ground and act as if you are above it all? Huyan Dong muttered inwardly.

However, the reality was that he and Huang Hanshan were fundamentally different.

At its core, the Thunderbolt Stronghold was a cultivation sect that respected strength, and Huang Hanshan accepted his disciple's loss without any resentment.

On the other hand, Taotie City had turned into a business entity at its core, willing to use any means to achieve its goals and prioritizing profits over honor. Thus, his mind was open to various approaches.

Below the stage, where the Mount Shu Sect disciples were seated, Lackey A and Shang Ziliang were hugging each other and crying loudly.

"This is unbelievable! It's all thanks to Big Bro—no one else could've done this..." Shang Ziliang said.

"He really did it... I'm bawling my eyes out..." Lackey A sobbed, overwhelmed by joy.

"I told you all, but no one believed me," Lin Bei leaned back, glancing around with pride. "Now this is what it means to be the best bro, eh?"

"If he'd lost just now, I can't imagine how cold the river would've felt tonight," Shang Ziliang said, his voice trembling.

"But we can't relax just yet; my fifty sword coins are still at stake," Lackey A pointed out. "Big Bro's situation doesn't look good."

"Believe in Chu Liang!" Shang Ziliang said firmly.

...

Chu Liang and Pushan's hiding spot in the mountain hollow was certainly secluded, and they had both nearly perfected concealing their presence, yet they were still discovered.

A group of four approached, all dressed in black with sabers at their sides, surrounding the entrance of the hollow, two of whom were familiar faces.

They were the team from the Night Saber Sect.

The leaders among them were none other than the brothers Guo Zhanfeng and Guo Zhanlei, whom Chu Liang had met before.

Guo Zhanfeng rubbed his nose and chuckled, "Good thing I imprinted Baixue's sense of smell onto a spirit talisman before coming here; otherwise, how would we have found people hiding so well?"

The Snow Mountain Divine Hound he kept, named Baixue, was the same breed as Huang Ling'er's Hua Hua.

The dog was not here, but its nose was present.

"Chu Liang of the Mount Shu Sect and Monk Pushan from the Buddhist Cloud Monastery." Guo Zhanlei muttered upon recognizing them. He continued, "You've gathered together here, so doesn't this mean we can eliminate two sects of the Divine Nine at once?"

This person seemed to harbor a unique hostility toward the immortal sects in the Divine Nine. During the last chaotic brawl at the Mount Shu Summit, he had mindlessly helped the sects in the Terrestrial Ten against the sects against the immortal sects in the Divine Nine.

He seemed to very much enjoy the thrill of drawing his saber against stronger opponents.

Monk Pushan suddenly stood up, facing the group. "I advise you not to act rashly. Chu Liang just killed Yang Shenlong."

"Hm?" Hearing this, Guo Zhanfeng's eyes lit up. "He killed Yang Shenlong. If I kill him, doesn't that mean I'm even stronger than Yang Shenlong?"

Chu Liang was momentarily speechless.

How can you say that while I'm lying here paralyzed? Don't you think that's a bit heartless?

Just as it seemed a brawl might break out, the whistling of wind announced the arrival of four figures nearby.

One of them was a petite girl in a black robe, with white hair and a cold expression. While her figure didn't stand out in the crowd, the other three clearly formed a protective formation around her.

It was none other than Luo Yao from the Valley of the Three Absolutes.

By now, it was the fifth day of the Assembly of Immortal Sects, and the various sects, which had initially been cautious, were now actively hunting for soul crystals. Unlike in the early days, coming across a single "fat sheep"[2] could yield enough soul crystals to ensure their advancement to the next round.

The team from the Valley of the Three Absolutes had likely heard the commotion and come to investigate, arriving just as the Night Saber Sect team was about to clash with Pushan.

Spotting Luo Yao, Guo Zhanfeng quickly exclaimed, "Luo Yao! These two just claimed they killed Yang Shenlong and are now seriously injured. They must have a large number of soul crystals. Let's capture them together and split the crystals fifty-fifty. What do you say?"

"Oh..." Luo Yao replied with a slight nod, drawing her curved saber.

Clang—

In the next instant, she appeared right in front of Guo Zhanfeng with her huge saber. If Guo Zhanfeng hadn't drawn his saber in mid-air just in time, that strike would have nearly cleaved him in two!

He stumbled back a few steps and shouted, "What are you doing?"

"These are friends..." Luo Yao said, gesturing toward Chu Liang and Pushan with her saber, then pointing it at the Night Saber Sect team. "And these are enemies."

After explaining this to her teammates, she immediately gave a clear shout: "Attack!"

Chapter 566: Encounter

The eaves were like cliffs, and the wind chimes like the vast sea.

The high walls of the inner palace courtyard divided the sky into square fragments; birds soared with the wind and vanished in an instant.

A woman dressed in a crimson-purple palace gown sat by the water's edge, gazing at the fish drifting across the water's surface. Her face radiated an otherworldly beauty and purity that was almost indescribable. Wherever she appeared, the scene seemed to transform into a living painting.

"The ancients spoke of beauties who made fish sink and birds fall, and our imperial consort lady is no less," one palace maid whispered with a laugh. "Every time she sits here, these fish swim over and blow bubbles as if they want to get close to her."

"Watch your words," another palace maid replied.

The teasing palace maid was younger and didn't quite understand the decorum, so she simply stuck out her tongue, unbothered.

"You two go inside first and let me have some peace alone," the beautiful woman referred to as the imperial consort said, turning to them.

"Yes, my lady," the two maids curtsied and stepped back.

However, they didn't dare leave entirely, instead watching from a short distance. If anything happened to someone of such status due to their lack of attention, they would surely lose their heads.

The maids could only see the imperial consort sitting alone by the water, unaware that the fish surfacing in the water were making sounds.

"That maid can't be kept alive," It was a chubby five-colored koi that spoke. Even though it looked very pleasing to the eyes, its voice sounded very aloof and cold.

"Give it a few days. I can't keep having people disappear from my palace every other day. It's bound to raise suspicion." The imperial consort seemed to be gazing into the distance, replying casually, "Besides, it's rare to find a maid who can't seem to hide anything. At least I know she's not a spy sent by another consort."

"If she slips up outside one day and the wrong person overhears, it could kill both of us," the chubby koi continued.

"Then we'll make her fall ill someday. When she recovers, she'll be mute." The imperial consort spoke lightly.

"That will do." The chubby koi said and no longer mentioned this anymore. It then said, "The Celestial Master has instructed us to prepare for action. Did you make your selection out of the two people?"

"Hmm..." The imperial consort hesitated slightly. "The second prince is weak in character and easy to manipulate, but he's upright by nature, so it may take some time to get him to cooperate. The thirteenth prince is ambitious, but he's cunning and won't obey us easily."

"Then choose the thirteenth prince," the chubby koi immediately replied. "It will work as long as he has ambition and desire... the Celestial Master can fulfill anyone's desires."

"Very well," the imperial consort said with a gentle nod.

"You must be careful in the coming days, and avoid making any moves except when contacting me," the chubby koi continued to warn. "Ever since we have started making a move against Empress Wu, many have turned their eyes on you. Ever since that incident eighty years ago, the court has kept a strict watch over the palace. This time, their response to what we stirred up was even faster and more intense than before."

"I'll be careful," the imperial consort replied, "You all—"

Just as she was about to say more, a young palace maid hurried over, "My lady, Warrior Lao has arrived."

The chubby koi ducked underwater, disappearing from sight. The imperial consort quickly rose and asked, "What is it?"

“He mentioned that the Assembly of Immortal Sects has been quite spectacular recently, and His Majesty is interested in attending and wants to bring you along to observe,” the young maid reported as she walked.

The imperial consort's eyes sparkled, and she replied, “I’ll go at once.”

The palace had strict rules. If the emperor summoned several imperial consorts to attend a ceremony, Warrior Lao would first visit the Empress Wu's palace, and it would be an ordinary eunuch paying a visit to the imperial consort. If Warrior Lao himself arrived, it meant the emperor had called only her.

Sure enough, when she followed Warrior Lao to the Night Dragon Hall, she saw the emperor approaching with just a few palace attendants.

“Haha, I hadn’t planned on this, but I heard this Assembly of Immortal Sects has been quite exciting, so I couldn’t resist going to see it,” the emperor said as he took the consort’s hand. “I hope you don’t mind accompanying me on this trip.”

“I’m delighted to be traveling with Your Majesty,” the consort lifted her eyes with a tender yet slightly aggrieved look. “However, Your Majesty’s frequent closeness to me could make the other consorts unhappy. It’s one thing if the court officials and citizens outside call me a beauty that will ruin the country... but if the sisters in the palace refuse to associate with me, how will I survive? I only ask that Your Majesty bring along a few more consorts, rather than just me.”

“For this trip, I won’t be wearing the clothes of an emperor. I will be traveling light and avoiding the burden of a large entourage,” the emperor replied with a wave of his hand. “So go with confidence, and let them talk if they dare—I’ll tear their mouths to shreds!”

...

This year's Assembly of Immortal Sects was indeed far more thrilling than previous ones. The shocking loss of the Imperial Supervisory Bureau in the first round was just the beginning, but it was the near-complete defeat of the Penglai Supreme Sect in the second round that truly stunned everyone. News of these dramatic events spread like wildfire throughout the capital of Yu, and it was only a matter of time before it reached every corner of the nine provinces.

Yang Shenlong single-handedly wiped out two teams, while Chu Liang launched a night assault on Misty Waters City in revenge, breaking through four defenses and flattening the entire city, grinding the supposedly invincible Yang Shenlong into the ground... The whole storyline was filled with dramatic flair.

It was rumored that a storyteller in the capital of Yu, who had recently been beaten up on a late-night walk, couldn't resist coming out to tell this tale despite his injuries. After all, he wasn't going to die immediately, and if he didn't ride this wave now, it would soon be too late.

People loved listening to this old storyteller because his tales were always different from everyone else's.

His story explained why Yang Shenlong was really aiming to eliminate the Mount Shu Sect.

These were the storyteller's own words: "Is it really because of Taotie City's bribery? That would be absolutely wrong. He had harbored a secret love for Jiang Yuebai for years, and since he couldn't have her, he sought to destroy her. But Chu Liang and Jiang Yuebai were deeply in love, leading Chu Liang to fight for his beloved."

Only someone who had been secretly watching these three for over a decade could unravel this complex web of love and hate in such vivid detail.

At this moment, the light screen was displaying the fierce battle between the Night Saber Sect team and the Valley of the Three Absolutes team.

It was another extraordinary clash.

The Night Saber Sect was infamous for their treachery, while the Valley of the Three Absolutes prided themselves on their deceptive methods. When these two forces clashed, they truly breathed life into the word "cunning."

As soon as Luo Yao made a move, the four from the Night Saber Sect turned and fled. The Valley of the Three Absolutes team had just begun their pursuit when the Night Saber Sect members turned mid-air, and Guo Zhanfeng's Shadow Gnat, instantly closed in.

Swish—

A large, plump white ghostly figure appeared in front of Luo Yao, blocking all the sneak attacks aimed at her.

At that moment, the attacks from the Valley of the Three Absolutes also reached them. Though they showed no visible action, several small, swift black insects had somehow crawled up to the feet of the Night Saber Sect members.

"Watch out!" Guo Zhanfeng yelled.

His nose twitched as he swung his saber toward his companions, killing the small black insects crawling on them. Even with brief contact, the legs of his two companions had begun to emit dark energy—if those insects had burrowed into their skin, the consequences would have been unimaginable.

These seemingly insignificant insects were, in fact, one of the curse poisonous insects that the Valley of the Three Absolutes had carefully created and nurtured[1].

At the same time, Guo Zhanlei emerged from behind the Valley of the Three Absolutes disciples. It turned out that the one who had fled with his teammates was merely a clone; his true self had hidden underground and now emerged to launch a surprise attack.

But when his saber struck down on the Valley of the Three Absolutes disciple, what burst forth was not blood but a cloud of dark mist.

Puff—

He almost inhaled the poisonous mist, but his quick reaction saved him as he flipped away; however, Luo Yao's curved saber was already following closely.

A black-clad ghostly figure held Luo Yao, moving as fast as lightning, leaping twice to catch up with Guo Zhanlei, launching several swift saber strikes in succession.

Among the three ghosts that always accompanied Luo Yao, there was the strongest one, the ghost kid dressed in red, and he had now been released as well.

While Luo Yao chased down Guo Zhanlei herself, the ghost kid dressed in red went after the other three members of the Night Saber Sect. His aura of killing intent soared skyward, and his strength was immense.

Guo Zhanfeng stepped forward, swinging his long saber, only for the ghost kid clad in red to catch it barehanded! Fortunately, he swiftly drew another saber from thin air, managing to force the ghost kid back.

The Night Saber Sect wielded an array of hidden weapons, while the Valley of the Three Absolutes employed venomous curses and deadly poisons. Though the fight didn't seem fierce, each strike was cunning and lethal.

After a brief clash, the Night Saber Sect team found themselves at a disadvantage. They were, after all, the youngest and weakest of the sects in the Terrestrial Ten, so losing to the Valley of the Three Absolutes was not surprising.

But just then, another team appeared from afar, their arrival marked by a fiery blaze streaking across the sky like a meteor!

It was Samadhi True Fire!

Chapter 567: Alliance

The Sixth Princess had been in a foul mood lately, something her brothers were well aware of. Ever since entering the illusory realm, she had been hunting down opponents wherever she could find them. When she encountered enemies, her brothers wouldn't dare to intervene. However, opponents were hard to find on the first day, so she hadn't had many chances to show her skills.

Finally, on the fourth day, the teams that had been playing it safe earlier began to make their moves, and the Sixth Princess seized her opportunity. After wiping out an entire team on her own, she reveled in the thrill of her victory.

Then, they encountered two groups locked in battle ahead.

This kind of situation was a favorite in the illusory realm, as teams engaging in combat would often fail to watch all angles, making it easy for a third team to swoop in and eliminate both.

So, the imperial family's team moved in to investigate.

Observing from a distance, the Thirteenth Prince whispered, "I think I see Chu Liang. He seems to be injured. One team wants to kill him, while another is trying to protect him."

"We can't let this opportunity slip by," the Sixth Princess whispered back as she raised her hand immediately. "We have to help no matter what!"

"Help who?" a younger member of the imperial family asked from the back, only to be glared at by the Thirteenth Prince.

He deftly took out a bow and placed it in his Sixth Sister's hands.

The Sixth Princess, clad in her Scarlet Flame Chainmail Armor and with the Profound Aetherflame Iron Sword slung across her back, raised the bow with her left hand. With her right hand, she nocked an arrow and pulled the bowstring back, stretching it tight like a crescent moon before releasing the arrow.

Whoosh—

Boom—

The moment the arrow left the string, it ignited with violet-gold divine fire, surging forward with the force of wind and thunder, heading straight for Chu Liang in the distance!

"There's an ambush!"

Strictly speaking, it wasn't much of an ambush, since the powerful arrow could be heard approaching from several hundred zhang away.

Monk Pushan, who had been protecting Chu Liang, sprang into action, summoning a massive Vajra apparition behind him. With a swift motion, the massive Vajra tried to catch the fiery arrow with one palm.

Swish—

Boom—

However, the fiery arrow easily pierced through the Vajra's massive palm and hurtled toward Pushan in an instant.

With the Samadhi True Fire as its arrowhead, the arrow was nearly unstoppable. In a desperate move, Pushan commanded the Vajra to swing its other palm, breaking off a section of the cliff above him. Massive boulders came crashing down, trying to block the arrow's path.

Boom—

The arrow shattered the boulders with a single strike, embedding itself deep into the Vajra's chest before coming to a halt.

"What a powerful arrow. Who could it be?" Monk Pushan muttered, lifting his gaze to see the approaching figures.

The imperial family's team, led by the Sixth Princess, charged forward with a fierce shout, "Kill Chu Liang! Seize the soul crystals!"

The Valley of the Three Absolutes, which had been dominating moments earlier, was suddenly overwhelmed by the imperial family's team, which was clearly much stronger than the Night Saber Sect.

The Sixth Princess was the core of their strength.

The Thirteenth Prince's strength was comparable to Guo Zhanfeng and Guo Zhanlei, placing him on the level of a genius from a small, ordinary immortal sect.

As for the Sixth Princess, wielding the Profound Aetherflame Iron Sword and wearing the Scarlet Flame Chainmail Armor, her power rivaled that of the top prodigies.

The Sixth Princess, a blur of fiery red, charged forward suddenly. She swept her longsword upward, creating a blazing dragon that stretched over a dozen zhang, soaring through the air. In that moment, she cut through the battlefield with such force that no one dared to stand in her way.

A disciple from the Valley of the Three Absolutes tried to block her fiery sword with a black cloth cloak, but the violet-gold flames surrounding the sword surged suddenly. In an instant, they incinerated the cloak and burnt him into ashes as well.

In this level of combat, the Samadhi True Fire was nearly an unstoppable force, making any defense useless. The Valley of the Three Absolutes had already lost one member at the start of the fight. Two disciples rushed to Luo Yao's side, speaking urgently in low voices.

"Head disciple, we should leave; we can't save him."

Luo Yao frowned but immediately responded, "Take the soul crystals and go. I'll stay and retreat with them."

"Head disciple..." one of the disciples tried to persuade her further.

But the Sixth Princess didn't give them a chance to hesitate. Although she couldn't wield the Samadhi True Fire with the same ease as Di Nufeng, she was still unstoppable when she merged the use of it with her weapons.

At the sight of such powerful reinforcements, the members of the Night Saber Sect began to panic. They weren't sure if this formidable team would turn on them after dealing with the Valley of the Three Absolutes.

At that moment, the Sixth Princess called out sharply, "Fight together, and we'll split the soul crystals!"

Hearing this, the Night Saber Sect members immediately stopped hesitating and resumed attacking the Valley of the Three Absolutes.

As the Valley of the Three Absolutes was forced into retreat, Monk Pushan carried Chu Liang on his back and quickly turned to flee. Luo Yao and her two remaining companions followed, but they didn't simply run—they occasionally turned to fend off their pursuers.

One side chased, the other fled, and in the blink of an eye, they had covered a considerable distance.

Suddenly, a burly man leapt forward, brandishing a halberd and shouting, "This road was paved by me! This tree was planted by me! If you want to pass, leave your life behind![1]"

Monk Pushan stood there, momentarily dumbfounded, unsure if that meant they could pass or not.

From behind, Chu Liang called out, "Brother Yun!"

"Brother Chu?" Yun Chaoxian looked over at the sound, spotting Chu Liang peeking out from behind Pushan.

"How did you end up in this state?" Yun Chaoxian asked, his voice filled with surprise.

"It's a long story; we'll talk later," Chu Liang replied. "We've got pursuers on our tail, and could use some help. Are your fellow disciples here?"

"All here!" With a sharp whistle from Yun Chaoxian, Ren Hongdao, Li Fujian, and Tang Shi swooped down from the sky.

"Senior Brother Yun's been here luring people for days, and when he finally manages to lure someone, he gets Young Hero Chu?" Li Fujian remarked, feeling speechless.

"There are plenty of soul crystals! Follow us!" Monk Pushan shouted, leading the Great Astral Sect reinforcements as they turned to counterattack.

Luo Yao, along with a few from the Valley of the Three Absolutes, was covering the rear and was now trapped in a dire situation.

Suddenly, several mighty figures descended from above, disrupting the formation of the Night Saber Sect and the imperial family teams.

The four core disciples of the Great Astral Sect were paragons of might from neck down. Their fierce assault was unstoppable.

If the Night Saber Sect's sabers were merely sharp blades, Ren Hongdao's saber was a true cutting edge. It was at an entirely different level.

With a swing of his long saber, he unleashed a roaring crimson whirlwind, nearly cutting the four Night Saber Sect members in half. The attack sent them retreating dozens of zhang in fear.

Meanwhile, the Sixth Princess, wielding the Profound Aetherflame Iron Sword, faced off with Li Fujian, who wielded a broad, heavy iron sword well-suited for defense. Though the Sixth Princess could easily destroy her enemies with the Samadhi True Fire, Li Fujian blocked her attack with ease using his thick and heavy sword as well as his superb martial arts skills.

Tang Shi intercepted the remaining three members of the imperial family with her long spear. With sweeping arcs, her spear moved relentlessly, cutting through the air like a force of nature. A flash of icy light flickered as she followed up with a thrust as fierce as a dragon, sending anyone who dared block her flying through the air.

Yun Chaoxian, both clever and courageous, circled the field with a keen eye. Whenever he spotted a faltering opponent, he would swiftly dive in, mercilessly targeting the weakest. With this strategy, he became the first of the four to claim a soul crystal.

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—

The three men and one woman of the Great Astral Sect unleashed thunderous attacks that immediately shifted the battlefield's momentum.

The Night Saber Sect and the imperial family teams, once the pursuers, were now stunned. In their haste, they turned to flee.

Meanwhile, the Great Astral Sect and Valley of the Three Absolutes closed in, eliminating two more members and collecting an additional two soul crystals. Monk Pushan followed closely behind, shouting wildly to boost morale.

As Chu Liang watched the fierce members of the Great Astral Sect chase their opponents like hunting dogs after rabbits, he couldn't help but think, It's always the Great Astral Sect brothers you can rely on.

They only stopped after nearly half a day of relentless pursuit, when the dusk began to fall.

Upon tallying their collection, they found they had acquired four soul crystals—two from the Night Saber Sect and two from the imperial family. The members of these two teams, who had weaker cultivation levels, escaped slower and were swiftly taken down by the brothers of the Great Astral Sect.

Holding the soul crystals, Yun Chaoxian laughed heartily and said, "Didn't I tell you my plan would work?"

The other three broke into wide smiles, looking as joyful as if they were celebrating the New Year.

"We owe you a great deal. If not for you, I don't know if we'd still be alive," Chu Liang said as he stepped forward to thank them. Then, unable to hold back, he asked, "But it's only four soul crystals. Is there really a reason to be this happy?"

"Only four?" Tang Shi looked at him, puzzled. "Soul crystals are hard to come by. Our collection has doubled now!"

"Huh?" Chu Liang and the others exchanged surprised looks.

The powerful members of the Great Astral Sect had only managed to collect four soul crystals after all these days?

A quick inquiry revealed what had happened.

It turned out that Yun Chaoxian, as the team's strategist, had played a significant role. On the first day, he suggested a location, reasoning that the inland areas were mountainous and the waters difficult to navigate. Only the coastal plain offered a clear view, making it ideal for an ambush.

So they decided to head to the coastal plain!

The problem, however, was that everyone knew the coastal plain offered no cover, so no one thought to venture there. They spent half a day searching before finally stumbling upon an unlucky team that had also ended up in the same area.

The next day, when they found nothing, Yun Chaoxian proposed another idea.

"Perhaps we're too strong, and everyone who sees us gets scared and runs away. Why don't you all hide, and I'll act as bait? When they attack me, you can all jump in."

So, Yun Chaoxian decided to lure the enemies out on the deserted plain.

They baited enemies for three days until Chu Liang finally appeared.

After hearing their story, Chu Liang couldn't help but feel a bit concerned for Yun Chaoxian's safety. If the Great Astral Sect were eliminated in this way, Yun Chaoxian might end up being kicked out from his sect when he returned.

Just then, Ren Hongdao sighed and said, "Thanks to Junior Brother Yun's plan, we've obtained these eight soul crystals. If our Great Astral Sect can advance this time, it will be all because of Junior Brother Yun."

"Heeh," Yun Chaoxian chuckled humbly. "Eldest Senior Brother, there's no need to say that. This was just a small contribution."

Hearing this, Chu Liang felt so speechless.

After a moment of thought, Chu Liang sighed and said, "Pushan, take out the soul crystals we collected at Misty Waters City. You can divide them among your sect and the other two sects."

Monk Pushan complied, taking out the bag of soul crystals. At a glance, it appeared there were more than a hundred of them.

The four members of the Great Astral Sect stared, their eyes widening in disbelief.

Are soul crystals actually this easy to get?

Back in Misty Waters City, there were four teams, including the Penglai Supreme Sect. The total number of soul crystals needed for all four teams to advance was around one hundred and sixty.

It was unknown as to whether they hadn't gathered enough or if Xi Miaoxian had withheld some, but there were just under one hundred and twenty here.

This meant that there were only enough soul crystals to guarantee that three sects could advance to the next round.

Chu Liang continued, "Divide them among yourselves; there's no need to save any for me."

"That won't do," Monk Pushan replied. "This year's assembly is especially critical for your sect. No matter what, your sect must make it to the next round. It doesn't matter for the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, so I'll give you my share."

"No need," Chu Liang said, shaking his head with a smile. "These are just soul crystals; I can always gather more."

Luo Yao glanced at his immobile form and gave him a look that clearly said, Don't be stubborn if you can't manage it.

"Even if I can't move right now, you all can," Chu Liang quickly added. "The reason I want you to divide them now is because, in the coming days... I'm hoping we can form an alliance!"

Chapter 568: Soul Crystal!

Chu Liang had no choice but to form an alliance.

As he continued this weakened state, he became increasingly aware of his body's condition. His Sea of Qi was nearly shattered, and his tendons and bones were almost entirely broken. The fact that he could survive was simply thanks to his strong physique. Regardless, he couldn't possibly recover within a few days.

Thus, he needed to find trustworthy allies. Luo Yao and Pushan, the two who went on undercover missions with him, were not weak, but they were not strong enough.

Although he had enough crystals to divide between the three teams, there was no knowing as to whether they could protect these soul crystals and hold onto them during the last few days of the competition, in which things would be the most intense.

The brothers and sister from the Great Astral Sect had outstanding combat skills. They were obviously very loyal and were ideal allies. They were perfect to join the alliance.

Chu Liang could only rely on his mind, as the rest of his body was useless. Meanwhile, the brothers from the Great Astral Sect were skilled at everything except thinking. Together, they would make a great combination.

The reason Chu Liang offered to share all the soul crystals, keeping none for himself, was straightforward.

Since he was proposing an alliance, he had to show the attitude of willing to form an alliance. In his current state, even if he had ten thousand soul crystals, could he protect them?

They were willing to help him because they considered him a friend, but he couldn't expect them to help without getting anything in return. As the saying goes, "To take, you must first give." He had to show sincerity to earn their friendship.

After Chu Liang said this, Yun Chaoxian waved his hand and said casually, "Then let's leave these soul crystals as they are. We'll be sure to gather enough for all four of our teams in the end."

"Exactly," Ren Hongdao added. "We have the fewest soul crystals. If you offer to split these soul crystals between us right now, we would be bringing shame to the Great Astral Sect. If we're forming an alliance, that's fine. All that matters is that our sects can make it to the next round in the end."

To the team from the Great Astral Sect, this was an excellent choice.

They recalled how much they had suffered during the first four days. However, when Chu Liang arrived, he showed them many soul crystals. This meant they would find even more if they followed him.

They had learned this principle long ago.

Even if Chu Liang had only his brain left, as Yun Chaoxian put it, "Brother Chu's wisdom is just as great as mine; forming an alliance with him will be very beneficial."

Pushan had no objections either. Like Chu Liang, he was alone, and now he finally had the chance to team up with others. He was more than happy to agree.

Luo Yao was naturally reclusive and didn't care much for alliances. However, with the shiny soul crystals before her and Chu Liang and Pushan as familiar allies, she had no reason not to say yes.

Thus, the four teams decided to form an alliance to gather enough soul crystals to ensure that all of their sects could advance to the next round together.

Naturally, the paralyzed Chu Liang became the leader of the alliance.

"We can still use the enemy baiting strategy, but we need to change how we do it," Chu Liang said. "Some people might fall for it on the first or second day, but the teams that survived until now have been through so many fights and are extremely vigilant. It's unlikely they would fall for something so obvious."

He paused to think and then continued, "Having just one person as bait is too obvious. However, if it were a fight between two people, it would likely attract nearby teams."

As everyone thought about it, they agreed.

In the current situation, if someone were strutting down a main road by himself, it would be obvious they were setting a trap, and others would be cautious about approaching.

However, if two sides were fighting, many teams would be tempted to jump in as opportunistic onlookers, hoping to benefit as third parties.

"I'll be one of them!" Yun Chaoxian volunteered first. "Baiting the enemy is something I can handle."

"Our Great Astral Sect should contribute more," Li Fujian said, nodding. "I'll be the second."

"I'm in, too," Ren Hongdao and Tang Shi both chimed in.

"..." Chu Liang was silent for a moment before saying, "The people acting as bait can't all be from the same sect. They will recognize you..."

"Exactly, I thought the same," Yun Chaoxian said, nodding. "Senior brothers, just sit back and watch me in action."

"There's no rush in choosing the bait. Our main goal is to leave this place," Chu Liang said. "This plain may be open, but... our luck here might not be great."

"Indeed!" Yun Chaoxian agreed wholeheartedly.

...

The four teams moved a good distance away and reached the edge of a dense forest. Luo Yao took out a black gourd, removed the lid, and released a swarm of flies.

These curse insects couldn't fly far, but they were very sensitive to human scent and could quickly indicate the direction of any nearby individuals.

Before long, the flies returned one by one, and Luo Yao collected them. She then pointed northwest and said, "There are people in that forest."

Chu Liang observed their surroundings for a moment and then said, "The mountains are high, and the forest is dense. You should lure the enemies outside of the forest. If a team is inside, they'll likely come out."

"Got it!" Yun Chaoxian nodded firmly.

This time, Yun Chaoxian and Luo Yao took on the role of bait, while the others concealed themselves nearby, trailing far behind the two.

Luo Yao dashed forward, acting as if she were fleeing.

As they reached the edge of the forest, Yun Chaoxian charged forward, swinging his World-Dominating Halberd and shouting, "Where do you think you're going?"

Boom—

The Competition of a Hundred Sects was filled with experts, so simple acting wouldn't fool anyone. The two had agreed in advance to make it look real, as long as they avoided lethal moves.

Yun Chaoxian swung his halberd with full force, showing no mercy as he attacked Luo Yao with a fierce, whistling wind.

Luo Yao responded with equal intensity, her curved saber slicing through the air as she leaped like a ghost, fighting while retreating toward the forest.

As they got closer to the forest, they didn't see any teams trying to take advantage of them. Instead, they heard the soft melody of a guqin. The sound was soft. If they had been farther away, they would not have heard the melody clearly. As they approached, they felt that the melody made them feel slightly intoxicated. There was this strange and alluring pull to this melody.

With their cultivation levels, Yun Chaoxian and Luo Yao were naturally unaffected by the illusory technique. Knowing that a team was inside, they fought with even greater intensity, trying to get the team to come out.

The fight became thunderous and chaotic, creating quite a ruckus.

Yet, despite their fierce fighting, the melody of the guqin inside remained soft and continuous, showing no signs of stopping, as if it were tempting them to enter the forest.

So, they continued, fighting outside while the guqin played inside for quite some time.

Finally, Yun Chaoxian grew impatient and said to Luo Yao with the use of Voice Transmission, "Why don't we stop waiting for them to come out? We know they're inside, so let's just go in and take them out."

"That's exactly what's been on my mind" Luo Yao, who was already feeling frustrated from waiting, replied.

The two exchanged glances, and Luo Yao quickly darted deeper into the forest while Yun Chaoxian pretended to chase her. As they continued their game of pursuit, they spotted a gentle-looking woman sitting in the bamboo grove, playing a guqin, likely the source of the music.

The woman had skin as fair as ice, giving her an ethereal aura. She gently played the guqin beneath the rustling bamboo, creating a scene of remarkable beauty.

Even Luo Yao, a woman herself, was momentarily captivated, thinking to herself, How beautiful.

Yun Chaoxian, holding his halberd upside down as he approached, saw the scene and couldn't help but beam with excitement.

He laughed loudly and exclaimed, "Soul crystal!"

Chapter 569: Her Name is Tie Chui

The woman playing the guqin in the bamboo grove was Xue Lingxue.

The team from the South Melody Conservatory had been lying in ambush in the bamboo grove for days. Initially, they achieved good results. However, for the past couple of days, they hadn't gotten much as there weren't many teams nearby anymore.

On this day, Xue Lingxue finally sensed movement outside and quickly started playing her guqin.

But even as she continued playing and playing, the people outside were not stepping inside the bamboo grove.

If Yun Chaoxian and Luo Yao didn't charge into the bamboo grove in the next second, the team from the South Melody Conservatory was going to lose patience and come out themselves.

Xue Lingxue, a core disciple of the South Melody Conservatory, was someone Yun Chaoxian recognized. After all, prodigies from immortal sects had all crossed paths before. Still, he didn't care.

To a true warrior, beauty didn't matter. All he saw were walking soul crystals. Without hesitation, he swung his halberd and charged forward.

"Your Grandauntie Tie Chui[1] is here! Who dares cause trouble?"

A thunderous shout rang out as a bold figure burst from the bamboo grove. Holding a massive drum and brandishing mallets, a burly woman appeared. As she shouted, it felt like the sun and moon had lost their light and the sky had darkened.

Seeing this, Yun Chaoxian laughed heartily and said, "Good timing!"

The person who arrived was none other than Miss Tie Chui, the current battle musician of the South Melody Conservatory.

She struck the drum with her mallets in rapid succession, each beat sending thunderous waves that echoed and made Yun Chaoxian's ears ring.

Yun Chaoxian leaped into the air, swinging his halberd down to pierce the drum.

But Tie Chui lifted the drum with one arm, pulling it back, and swung her right arm to bring the mallet down fiercely. Yun Chaoxian's halberd missed, and he had to block it horizontally.

Clang—

As the clash of metal echoed, both of them stepped back over ten paces. When they looked at each other again, there was a hint of surprise in their expressions.

Yun Chaoxian was surprised by the woman's immense strength. She actually managed to force him back.

Tie Chui was equally astonished. She was surprised that this man had a powerful physique; any ordinary person struck by her would either die or be crippled.

Both felt the urge to test their strength. Yun Chaoxian stepped forward, twisted his waist, and launched a sweeping slash with his halberd, creating a terrifying gale.

Tie Chui hurled her drum firmly on the ground, sending it tumbling into the distance with a crash, and then pulled out a pair of mallets.

These mallets were no ordinary mallets; they were known as the Drumming Urn Golden Hammers, each the size of a gourd. When she swung them, they conjured the apparitions of a dragon and a tiger!

Boom—

The powerful wind from Yun Chaoxian's halberd collided with the golden hammers, creating an explosive impact that sent both of them retreating over ten zhang. They landed and, without pausing to catch their breath, charged at each other again, clearly enjoying the intense fight.

In that instant, it was like thunder clashing with fire, a tiger descending a mountain meeting a dragon emerging from the sea. The thunderous drumbeats and the whistling halberd created a deafening roar.

The melody from Xue Lingxue's guqin filled the air, boosting Tie Chui's vitality and qi while subtly disrupting Yun Chaoxian's divine soul, creating a rhythmic ebb and flow that had a strong impact.

Watching from the sidelines, Luo Yao stepped forward with her curved saber.

But then, sharp notes from a flute echoed as Shen Qingyan appeared and joined the fight.

She unleashed a whirlwind of sonic blades at Luo Yao, but Luo Yao summoned the white-clad ghost to block the blades as she dashed toward Xue Lingxue's guqin.

But Xue Lingxue wasn't weak or defenseless. As she lifted her slender hand, the strings on the guqin released a wave of force, sending Luo Yao flying back several zhang.

Then, Yu Xiang'er appeared, playing her long flute and creating a swirling vortex of fallen leaves that were as sharp as blades.

Shen Qingyan, Xue Lingxue, and Yu Xiang'er played their instruments together, attacking with coordinated sound. Though they appeared to fight separately, their harmony created a complete melody.

At that instant, Luo Yao found herself trapped in the midst of the three musicians, with danger surrounding her on all sides.

Their music wasn't just trapping Luo Yao; it was also affecting Yun Chaoxian and Tie Chui nearby.

With the support of the melodies from the three instruments, Tie Chui fought with increasing strength, even starting to overpower Yun Chaoxian.

Seeing this, Yun Chaoxian let out a loud roar, "Hah—"

Boom—

Without another word, he ripped his shirt, revealing his chiseled, muscular physique, glistening like forged steel.

But just as he ripped off his shirt, Luo Yao, carried by her Black-Clad Ghost, flew over and shouted, "There are too many. We need to retreat!"

"Huh?" Yun Chaoxian was stunned. I literally just ripped my shirt... You couldn't have said that sooner?

Because of this moment of distraction, he nearly got hit by one of Tie Chui's massive hammers. With his ally calling for retreat, he swung his halberd to create some distance and quickly withdrew from the area.

"If you've got guts, stay here and don't run!" Yun Chaoxian shouted before leaving.

Tie Chui stood with her hammers and drum, laughing loudly, "Ohoho! Coward! You didn't even leave your name!"

Yun Chaoxian promptly shouted back, "Yun Chaoxian of the Great Astral Sect! I'll come back one day to settle this in a deathmatch with you!"

...

Both of them flew out of the bamboo grove one after the other, just in time to meet up with the main group. Chu Liang asked, "Why did you go inside? Weren't you supposed to be luring the enemy out from outside?"

"They weren't coming out, so I figured I might as well go in and take a look," Yun Chaoxian replied, scratching his head with a grin.

Seeing the look on Yun Chaoxian's face, Chu Liang could guess that they hadn't been able to kill the team inside. He then asked, "It seems the opponents are quite strong?"

Yun Chaoxian and Luo Yao were both capable of eliminating an entire team on their own. If they couldn't eliminate this team together, it had to be a strong one.

"It's the South Melody Conservatory team," replied Luo Yao.

"Oh, them..." Chu Liang hesitated upon hearing this.

He had originally thought of charging inside with the entire group and eliminating the entire team in the bamboo grove.

However, the members of the South Melody Conservatory were people he knew. Among the members in the South Melody Conservatory team, Miss Xue had even helped him more than once. It felt wrong to storm in with the huge group of people to fight a team of four. It felt like bullying.

In past Assemblies of Immortal Sects, the South Melody Conservatory rarely advanced beyond the Competitions of a Hundred Sects. Furthermore, the disciples of the South Melody Conservatory in this generation were much stronger than those in the past. Chu Liang felt there was no need to end their journey here.

If he tried to get them to join the alliance... that might not be feasible.

This alliance of four teams already needed a substantial number of soul crystals. If another team joined, this alliance would take up half the ten advancement slots. This might provoke other teams in the illusory realm to join forces to eliminate them.

Currently, the members of the Great Astral Sect were their primary combat force. Their alliance was not strong enough, which meant that they would need to keep a low profile while collecting more soul crystals.

We should just leave, Chu Liang concluded.

After thinking it over, he said, "I consider the members of the South Melody Conservatory as friends, so let's find somewhere else and avoid taking their soul crystals."

"Huh?" While everyone had no objections, Yun Chaoxian suddenly looked reluctant. "We're leaving already? Can't we go back for a bit?"

"Hm?" Chu Liang looked at him, puzzled. "Is there something else, Brother Yun?"

"Heheh." Yun Chaoxian chuckled, a bit embarrassed. "I met a girl there... She is special... I promised I would go see her again."

"What?" Hearing this, everyone's interest was piqued, and they crowded around, asking, "Which girl? What's her name?"

"The core disciples of the South Melody Conservatory in this generation..." Chu Liang said as he pondered. "Shen Qingyan, Yu Xiang'er, or Xue Lingxue? Brother Yun, not bad at all."

Who would've thought? Yun Chaoxian, with his thick brows and big eyes, managed to charm a girl in such a short time?

With a bashful look on his rugged face, Yun Chaoxian replied, "Her name is Tie Chui[2]."

Chapter 570: Of Course, There Is!

Hearing what Yun Chaoxian said, everyone couldn't bother about anything else. They all cheered as they went with him to fulfill his agreement. They were all eager to see just how "special" this Miss Tie Chui was.

In any other immortal sect, Tie Chui's talent and strength would have already earned her fame. But at South Melody Conservatory, reputation hinged more on beauty and artistry than combat prowess, which was why she had remained relatively unknown even after years in the sect.

Of course, without South Melody Conservatory's dedicated training, she likely wouldn't have achieved her current level.

Chu Liang had someone cut wood and bamboo to make a small cart for himself to sit in, with Pushan pushing him along. All he lacked was a feather fan, and he would have resembled the legendary strategist Zhuge Liang[1].

The group ventured into the bamboo grove, only to find no one in sight. It seemed the disciples of South Melody Conservatory had detected them and hidden themselves in advance.

Yun Chaoxian stepped forward and called out, "Tie Chui! Didn't you agree to meet me here? Have you chickened out?"

"Nonsense!" a booming voice echoed as a large figure burst from the shadows and landed with a thud. Tie Chui's fierce gaze swept over them. "So what if you have more people? Come at me—all of you!"

"Hm?" Her words left everyone bewildered.

Isn't Yun Chaoxian supposed to meet the love of his life here? Could this be Tie Chui? The situation felt oddly intriguing, but that wasn't the main issue at hand. The real question was... is this something that everyone should do together?

"No need for anyone else! In a fair one-on-one, I can take you down easily!" Yun Chaoxian declared as he swung his halberd. While his voice was still loud and clear, he ripped his clothes.[2]

This scene left the others stunned.

By ripping his clothes right away, he seemed a bit too eager for you-know-what.

But the way he undressed... Well, it was certainly unusual.

"What exactly did they arrange to meet for?" Chu Liang turned to ask Luo Yao.

"They had a fight earlier," Luo Yao explained. "There were too many people from the South Melody Conservatory at the time, so I told him we needed to leave. He promised to come back and duel her again."

Ah, so that's how it was. So that's what happened. The special thing about Tie Chui was her especially good fighting skills, Chu Liang muttered inwardly. One should never harbor romantic fantasies about these rugged warriors.

It was like a clash between a dragon and a tiger. As Miss Tie Chui wielded her two golden hammers, the thunderous rhythm of her drums unleashed a terrifying aura.

On the other hand, Yun Chaoxian swung his halberd with such force that it seemed to shake both the land and sky, clearly on par with the attacks unleashed by Miss Tie Chui.

After a few rounds, the two had already cleared out the surrounding bamboo trees. Without her fellow disciples to support her with the instrument's melody, Tie Chui gradually began to fall behind.

Though Tie Chui possessed great innate strength and had trained diligently, Yun Chaoxian was a martial prodigy from the Great Astral Sect. With a physique like a fierce beast and equally refined martial skills, he had the upper hand in their clash.

After several exchanges, Tie Chui began to show signs of exhaustion.

This demonstrated the power of Xue Lingxue's music. Previously, with her playing in support, Tie Chui was basically beating Yun Chaoxian up.

Seeing Tie Chui being at a disadvantage, her teammates could no longer hold back.

The melodies of instruments began to play from the depths of the bamboo grove, shifting the balance of the fight once again.

"Stop fighting..." Chu Liang, recognizing the familiar melody, called out, "Miss Xue, please come out so we can talk face-to-face."

This situation was unexpected. He had initially planned to leave without meeting the members of the South Melody Conservatory, but they had ended up here anyway due to a misunderstanding of Yun Chaoxian's intentions. It would be impolite to leave without saying a word now.

If they thought he had come solely to take their soul crystals, it would be even worse.

Clearly, Chu Liang was seen as a trustworthy figure. Upon hearing his words, Yun Chaoxian withdrew and stepped back into the group, while the three core disciples of the South Melody Conservatory gradually revealed themselves.

The appearance of Xue Lingxue, Yu Xiang'er, and Shen Qingyan transformed the beauty and elegance of the scene, taking it to a whole new level.

"What happened to you? How did you turn out like this?" Xue Lingxue asked in surprise upon seeing Chu Liang.

"A minor injury," Chu Liang replied with a smile. "We didn't come here to seize soul crystals... There was a misunderstanding. We thought Brother Yun had arranged a meeting with Miss Tie Chui for something else... turns out it was to fight."

"We planned to leave as soon as we were discovered, but Tie Chui insisted on staying here to fight him again, so we had to hide," Xue Lingxue said with a resigned smile.

Oh, goodness. So they really do share mutual feelings for each other with this agreed duel.

Shen Qingyan looked at the mixed group across from her and asked, "Young Hero Chu, are you all allied?"

"Yes," Chu Liang nodded, "Since we all met here, we agreed to support each other."

Shen Qingyan's eyes sparkled as she asked, "Then can the team from the South Melody Conservatory join your alliance?"

She had asked this for the sake of her sect. Although they had managed to gather some soul crystals through some schemes in the beginning, the same strategy was becoming less effective.

As the Competition of a Hundred Sects progressed, it truly came down to combat power. Even with an abundance of soul crystals, one misstep could lead to total defeat.

South Melody Conservatory hadn't yet gathered enough soul crystals to make it to the next round, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for them to make further progress on their own. If they ventured out to hunt for more soul crystals, they'd likely become prey themselves.

Over the past day or two, she had already been considering forming an alliance. When Chu Liang and his well-prepared team appeared—and as they were familiar—she naturally asked about joining forces.

Upon hearing her request, Chu Liang smiled.

Before he asked Xue Lingxue to step out, he had done his calculations.

Since their paths had crossed, the team from the South Melody Conservatory might as well join them in the alliance.

Although he had mentioned some disadvantages previously, there were advantages.

Firstly, South Melody Conservatory wasn't weak, especially in a support role. While their individual combat strength might not be top-tier, their contributions in group battles could rival those of the Great Astral Sect brothers.

Secondly, their combat strength was limited. Once they advanced to the next round, the Battle at the Imperial City, he would be happy to fight opponents like them.

It was like how the Penglai Supreme Sect had intended to ally with factions like the Fuyao Kingdom and Taotie City so that they could be the stronger ones in the next round.

The weaker the allies now, the weaker the opponents in the next round.

If the team from the South Melody Conservatory joined...then the Great Astral Sect could serve as the warriors, the Valley of the Three Absolutes as assassins, the South Melody Conservatory as support, Pushan as the cheerleader, and he himself could take on the role of commander...

With this strength, they could temporarily dominate the illusory realm.

Initially, he had two concerns.

First, he worried that the number of soul crystals needed would increase. However, since the South Melody Conservatory had been here for a while, they likely had an accumulation of soul crystals and shouldn't be needing too much.

Second, he was concerned that if this alliance grew too large, it might attract unwanted attention. However, given the current situation, they would just need to act as discreetly as possible.

So, faced with Shen Qingyan's inquiry, he didn't hesitate for long and promptly replied, "That would be ideal."

...

"Your Majesty!"

"Your Majesty!"

The court officials visiting Emperor's Mound that day suddenly noticed a figure at the highest point of the stands. They jolted in surprise and quickly approached to pay their respects. The emperor on the high platform waved them off with a cheerful smile, allowing his officials to enjoy themselves freely.

It was clear that the emperor was in high spirits.

The emperor's good mood had its reasons.

Although he hadn't come to this place in recent days, news from the Competition of a Hundred Sects still reached Night Dragon Hall promptly. Yesterday, he received two updates: one was that Daoist Cangsheng had arrived, and the other was that Yang Shenlong had been eliminated.

The relationship between the imperial court and the sects of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten had always been a blend of cooperation and rivalry, with both sides constantly seeking to suppress one another. As the foremost immortal sect, the Penglai Supreme Sect stood as the primary adversary of the court and other immortal sects. Although they maintained cordial relations on the surface, covert confrontations were frequent.

For instance, the Penglai Supreme Sect's open support of the Fuyao Kingdom in the East Sea was a clear act of defiance against the Yu Dynasty.

One could easily imagine the emperor's delight upon receiving these two pieces of news.

The emperor thought to himself, Ah, Chu Liang, Chu Liang... You are truly my dear Imperial Younger Brother.

Since it was nighttime, he thought that showing up at Emperor's Mound immediately would be too conspicuous. So, he held back his excitement and came the next day, eager to see Daoist Cangsheng's frustrated expression.

Unfortunately, Daoist Cangsheng had already left.

Since he was already there, the emperor sat for a while, enjoying some quiet time with his consort.

However, it wasn't long before the Second Prince arrived as well.

"This humble son of yours pays my respects."

The Second Prince stepped forward, made a gesture of respect, and then took a seat beside the emperor. While his gaze remained fixed on the scene in the light screen, he occasionally glanced to the side.

The emperor glanced at him and quickly guessed what was happening.

It was clear that the Second Prince was here on a mission.

The emperor had come with only his consort to watch the competition. If people saw this, who knew what rumors might spread?

Clearly, Empress Wu was not pleased, but she felt too embarrassed to come herself. Instead, she had sent her son to keep an eye on the emperor and the consort, ensuring they wouldn't be overly affectionate.

The emperor couldn't help but give a wry smile. After many years of cultivation and at an old age, he hardly indulged in such romantic sentiments anymore.

The main reason he had shown favor to this consort in recent years was that his sons were growing older, and it was time to make a decision about the heir. Although the Second Prince was initially the clear choice for Crown Prince, the Thirteenth Prince had displayed exceptional wisdom and intelligence, leading to some hesitation on the emperor's part.

Empress Wu inevitably grew anxious. Whenever they met, she would quickly bring up the topic of succession. Since they had been together for many years, she spoke freely, without holding back like others might. Although the emperor wouldn't scold her, he didn't like hearing it. The more she pressed the issue, the less he wanted to visit her.

Conveniently, this imperial consort was beautiful, gentle, and understanding...

She was really like a sweet little sister.

This contrast only made his wife seem all the more unpleasant.

This subtle atmosphere lingered for a while until the Second Prince's attention was suddenly drawn to the scene displayed in the light screen.

At that moment, the scene displayed showed the South Melody Conservatory team.

The emperor couldn't help but smile and say, "The one I recommended to you before, that would be Miss Shen from South Melody Conservatory, right?"

The Second Prince nodded slightly, "That's right."

"How's it going?" the emperor asked again.

Seeing his son's expression, he didn't bother asking for his opinion on her. It was clear he was satisfied.

"It's going alright," the Second Prince replied.

I've already agreed... I am just waiting for her, he silently added to himself.

"That girl is smart, knowing to ally with Chu Liang," the emperor chuckled. "Maybe this time, the team from the South Melody Conservatory will advance to the next round."

Since Chu Liang had taken down Yang Shenlong, the emperor was finding him more and more likable.

At the mention of this, the Second Prince's expression suddenly tightened.

After a pause, he said angrily, "Chu Liang of the Mount Shu Sect is already injured this badly; what could he still accomplish? I think Miss Shen made a poor choice in choosing him as an ally."

"Oh?" asked the emperor. "Besides Chu Liang, does she have a better option?"

"Of course she does!" the Second Prince blurted out instinctively.

The palace attendants below were startled, unsure why the always-composed Second Prince had suddenly lost his temper... especially in front of the emperor.

The emperor's words had been casual, but it was clear the Second Prince's mind had wandered elsewhere.

The emperor was momentarily taken aback by his shout. After a pause, he said sternly, "Why are you shouting like that?"