

M. Slaying 621

Chapter 621: What Does It Have to Do With Me?

Yu Tuoluo left peacefully.

...

From a certain perspective, the Little Golden Dragon was a very reliable friend.

When Chu Liang instructed it to deal with the seventh-realm fish demon that suddenly appeared, it focused all its efforts on the task.

The fish demon fled into the waterways, and the Little Golden Dragon became even more eager.

Isn't this the perfect terrain for us dragons to show our might?

Compared to the sky and land, the underwater environment was indeed where the dragons could better showcase their combat prowess.

In truth, the environment didn't make the dragon stronger. It was really because most cultivators or demons would be greatly weakened underwater.

With this imbalance, water combat became the dragon race's specialty.

But the Little Golden Dragon simply forgot, for a moment, that its opponent was a fish.

As soon as it entered the waterway, the fish demon's speed multiplied several times, moving as swiftly as a bolt of lightning under the surface.

The Little Golden Dragon followed closely, but when it emerged from the waterway, the enemy had already vanished from its sight.

Boom—

The Golden Dragon burst out of the water, realizing it had arrived at an unremarkable river in the capital of Yu. It was already nighttime, and the riverside was sparsely populated, preventing a major commotion.

Just as the Little Golden Dragon was about to return the way it came to find Chu Liang, a figure suddenly caught its attention.

Beneath the drooping willows by the river stood an elderly man dressed in coarse hemp clothing. His hair and beard were completely white, making his age hard to determine.

However, he appeared full of vitality and in good spirits.

He stood there, smiling as he looked at the Little Golden Dragon.

For some reason, the Little Golden Dragon suddenly sensed a powerful and dangerous aura from this inconspicuous old man—an innate sense of crisis unique to the dragon race.

Not good.

It turned around, intending to flee.

But at that moment, the old man spoke. His voice was gentle: "Are you the descendant of the Golden Dragon that has suppressed the dynasty's fate for several thousands of years?"

"You must have mistaken me for another dragon," the Little Golden Dragon replied perfunctorily before turning to dive into the water.

Unexpectedly, the old man waved his hand lightly, and the Little Golden Dragon suddenly shrank to the size of a child, falling to the ground. Its current appearance was exactly the same as when Chu Liang first saw it.

"Ouch." The Little Golden Dragon fell to the ground with a wail, stood up, and rubbed its rear. It tried to return to its dragon form but found itself unable to take flight again.

It was then forced to look at the old man. "What do you want?"

"I simply wish to have a good talk with you," the old man said slowly. "The imperial family of this Yu Dynasty seized the teachings of Dao left behind by the previous Golden Dragon. That was rightfully yours. Don't you want to take it back?"

"Of course I do," the Little Golden Dragon replied.

"I can help you reclaim the Great Dao of Cloud Dominion, allowing you to once again become a mighty eighth-realm True Dragon and dominate the land of the nine provinces," the old man said with an enticing tone.

"Hmm?" The Little Golden Dragon raised its head, its golden irises flickering like flames. A faint veil seemed to obscure its eyes as it responded slowly, "You can help me reclaim the teachings of Dao?"

"This is our Celestial Master of the Celestial Charm Sect," said the fish-scaled demon, who reappeared behind the old man, full of reverence. "As long as you have a wish, the Celestial Master can surely help you fulfill it."

"Celestial Master..." The Little Golden Dragon murmured in a daze, as if sleepwalking. It felt as though something was being imprinted into its mind.

"Come with me," the Celestial Master said softly, yet his words roared like thunder in the Little Golden Dragon's ears. "Follow my command, become my follower, and I can grant all your desires."

Just as the flames in the Little Golden Dragon's eyes were about to be extinguished completely, a terrifying explosion suddenly came from the direction of the imperial city.

Boom—

The Little Golden Dragon was jolted awake.

And it wasn't the only one awakened. That night, the entire capital of Yu saw the sun rise.

...

When Di Nufeng said those words to Mingde, his expression shifted subtly.

First, it was the request to steal fowls. Then, it was the request to fight for control of Dao. After that, it was the request of wanting to become the emperor.

What Di Nufeng had just said was the fourth request. It was the only one that could be considered a legitimate request.

Mingde's expression, which had always been calm and unchanging for decades, suddenly appeared tense, as if his face was shrouded in an extraordinary radiance.

"You want that fish, don't you..." he said as he began to ascend into the sky. "Guardian Ruler, I must trouble you to watch over the imperial city for me."

Blazing light erupted from his body, and the violet-golden divine fire surged outward in torrents. If Di Nufeng's Samadhi True Fire was astonishing in its sheer volume and intensity, then Mingde's could only be described as... infinite.

Boom—

Above the imperial city, a massive fireball suddenly appeared, like a sun rising in the night! The surrounding thousand-mile radius was illuminated by its brilliance, leaving not even a mosquito the chance to escape.

"Yu Tuoluo..."

The blazing sun seemed to be issuing a summons.

Even among the imperial family, many had never witnessed the Imperial Guardian in action, knowing only his name but not his face. Yet as they gazed at the fireball in the sky, they suddenly grasped the true essence of the Great Dao of Incinerating Heaven.

Among all the Great Daos, it was perhaps the simplest and most brutal.

The Great Dao of Incinerate the Heavens!

Celestial Master and Yu Tuoluo were illuminated by the sunlight, leaving them with no place to hide.

"Mingde has gone mad—this is the Mingde I know," the Celestial Master remarked leisurely. "It seems we must leave."

But by now, it was too late to flee.

A massive purple-golden fireball suddenly descended from the heavens, diving straight toward the two of them! It resembled a colossal meteor from the sky, engulfed in a divine fire that could obliterate everything.

All living beings beneath the fireball could only suffocate.

In this critical moment, the Celestial Master let out a soft cough: "Ahem."

A dragon's chant erupted!

For some unknown reason, beams of white light suddenly flashed from the eyes of the Little Golden Dragon that was in front of them. The Little Golden Dragon transformed back into the form of a dragon and let out a mighty roar as it coiled in front of the two and blocked the fireball.

But how could it possibly withstand the divine fire of the Imperial Guardian?

Boom—

At the critical moment, the fireball was instantly dispersed by the wind, revealing Mingde's figure. He grabbed the Little Golden Dragon and, with a single motion, pressed it into the waterway, sending towering waves into the sky.

Before the water splashed down, he was already in front of the Celestial Master.

"This meticulous scheme... it's your handiwork again," Mingde said, his voice sounding deeper as he stared at the old man before him. "After all these years, you still cling to your treacherous ambitions."

"Heh, long time no see," the old man chuckled, his eyes suddenly glowing with a radiant white light.

A faint ripple seemed to spread outward.

At that moment, all the residents of the capital of Yu felt a wave of dizziness, as though a dream realm had suddenly descended upon them.

"You've grown much stronger, strong enough to possibly kill me," he continued speaking to Mingde. "But you still can't do it."

Mingde frowned as he gazed at him, the divine fire surging in the sky like an apocalypse.

For an eighth-realm expert, cities and mortals were far too fragile.

If he were to unleash heavenly fire, he could easily destroy the entire capital of Yu. But the old man before him had the same ability—once his Song of Chaos began, every citizen in the city would march to their deaths for him.

If a battle between eighth-realm cultivators were to begin, regardless of who won or lost, the common people would inevitably face catastrophe.

Eighty years ago, Mingde might have attacked his enemy without hesitation, but now he held back.

He was now the Imperial Guardian and could no longer act recklessly.

"Very good, you've grown," the Celestial Master said with a smile as he prepared to take off into the sky with Yu Tuoluo.

Just then, a sharp whistling sound echoed, like a blade slicing rapidly through the air.

In the blink of an eye, a figure with fiery wings descended like a divine phoenix, crashing down before them with a thunderous impact!

Before Yu Tuoluo could comprehend what had happened, the figure stomped him to the ground, pinning him underfoot!

Boom—

As the figure landed, the Celestial Master intended to act, but Mingde's piercing glare forced him to stand down. He sensed that any action against this person would immediately provoke Mingde's unrelenting assault.

At that point, even the lives of the city's citizens would no longer be leverage against him.

The Celestial Master immediately deduced who this person was.

Whoosh.

As the smoke and dust cleared, Di Nufeng's figure emerged. She planted her foot firmly on Yu Tuoluo's chest, causing him immense pain, while raising her eyes to the nearby Celestial Master. "So, you two are the ones trying to kill my disciple?"

"Chu Liang?" the Celestial Master replied calmly. "I always felt that he was somewhat threatening, so I wanted to end his destiny and fate. But it seems I've failed."

Hearing Yu Tuoluo's agonized screams as the Samadhi True Fire scorched him, he continued, "So I hope you'll release my follower as well. Your father knew that our destinies are now tied to the lives of every citizen in this city."

"Heh." Di Nufeng suddenly chuckled, then raised her right foot high into the air.

Just as Yu Tuoluo thought Di Nufeng was about to let him go and attempted to escape, her foot, imbued with divine fire, came crashing down again! He could only let out a final scream: "Ah—"

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The impact triggered a tornado of flames, rising from her foot and spreading for dozens of zhang. At the center of the fiery whirlwind, Yu Tuoluo was utterly defenseless as her stomp pierced through his chest, and Yu Tuoluo was consumed by the divine fire.

After finishing him off, Di Nufeng turned to the Celestial Master and coldly spat out: "What does it have to do with me?"

Chapter 622: Healing Wounds

As Di Nufeng's blazing phoenix wings spread open, divine fire filled the sky, making it look like the end of the world.

"Hah," the Celestial Master chuckled, his aged face revealing an amused smile. "Why don't you come with me? You seem like you were born to wreak havoc unto the world."

"Why?" Di Nufeng retorted coldly. "Are you missing a mother?"[1]

The Celestial Master laughed again. The cruder Di Nufeng's remarks became, the more delighted he was. Then, without another word, he turned and left swiftly.

"You think you can leave?" Di Nufeng said, scowling.

She leaped into the air again, transforming into a soaring phoenix. Then she threw a vicious punch toward the Celestial Master!

However, the Celestial Master took one step, and he vanished into the void.

Boom!

Di Nufeng's fully charged punch struck nothing but air in the end.

Her slaying technique reigned supreme in the seventh realm, but she was unable to utilize her power against the Celestial Master—a top eighth-realm cultivator and the master of a Great Dao.

After landing back on the ground, Di Nufeng looked at her father.

Mingde could tell that Di Nufeng was blaming him for the Celestial Master's swift escape.

So, Mingde preemptively explained, "The Great Dao of Chaos and Separation is enigmatic and unpredictable. He has tied his fate to that of the city's populace. I can't take action against him—at least, not here in the capital of Yu."

"But how will you track him down once he leaves the capital?" Di Nufeng asked.

Mingde could only let out a sigh.

Ever since that night eighty years ago, he harbored hatred for the Celestial Charm Sect that ran deep into his bones. Then after he became the Imperial Guardian, he had been working hard in secret, pushing for the Celestial Charm Sect's eradication.

Mingde's role as the Imperial Guardian prevented him from leaving the imperial city, but the Seven Guards of the Night Dragon Hall had been scouring everywhere for traces of the Celestial Charm Sect. Whenever leads surfaced, they acted immediately, executing the members of the Celestial Charm Sect without mercy.

Many years had passed since that fateful night, and the Seven Guards of the Night Dragon Hall had managed to eliminate some of the Celestial Charm Sect's outer members. However, its core members remained untouchable. On the contrary, the imperial city—the base of the Seven Guards of the Night Dragon Hall—had been infiltrated again, nearly leading to another catastrophe.

Ultimately, it was simply impossible to defend against the Celestial Master's manipulation ability. It would be extremely difficult to put an end to his influence as long as people continued to exist.

The Celestial Charm Sect eventually amassed enough power and began stirring up chaos again in recent years. That was when the identities of some of its core members were exposed, and the Seven Guards of the Night Dragon Hall finally managed to deal the sect some substantial damage.

Lu Chengchou, Chi Menshen, Empress Wu, Yu Tuoluo—the downfall of these key members of the Celestial Charm Sect could truly be credited to two people.

They were the teacher-disciple duo of the Mount Shu Sect's Silver Sword Peak.

After a moment of silence, Mingde added, "At the very least, he probably didn't lie to you that Chu Liang's still alive. That much should be true."

"Then, where did he go? Even you and the Guardian Ruler couldn't find any traces of him."

"Perhaps he used a secret life-saving method."

"I am his esteemed teacher. What life-saving method does he have that I don't know about?" Di Nufeng said. Yet, she suddenly paused in a moment of realization and then muttered to herself, "It seems I truly don't know about it."

She wondered, How did I end up stumping myself with my own question...

Mingde found his daughter's expression amusing and couldn't resist letting the corners of his lips raise into a small smile.

"What are you laughing at?" Di Nufeng snapped, looking at him with a fierce gaze. "My disciple is missing, and you're laughing?"

Mingde wiped the smile off his face. "I'm not."

"You certainly were!" Di Nufeng insisted.

"I just thought of something happy..." Mingde said, turning away.

"Hmph." Di Nufeng leaped into the air, intending to fly back to the imperial city. "In any case, this happened in the imperial palace, so the imperial family must bear full responsibility. If anything happens to Chu Liang, I won't let you guys off!"

...

"I'm done for."

Chu Liang felt something sharp sweeping back and forth across his face. His first reaction was that he was dead.

Am I being punished in the netherworld?

I created jobs for so many people. Surely, I accumulated enough good karma to avoid going to the netherworld, right?

Chu Liang finally opened his eyes and found that a stocky little Winged Draconic Beast, about four chi tall[2], was licking his face. Its tongue was covered with sharp barbs. They scraped his face with every lick, causing him a lot of pain.

"Little Winged Draconic Beast..." Chu Liang muttered as he gradually recalled what had happened.

When Cheng Hu's second strike descended earlier, Chu Liang truly thought he was done for. With the restriction gone, they were essentially in full view of all the powerful cultivators in the imperial palace. So, Chu Liang did not expect that Cheng Hu would actually dare to kill him.

Yet, Cheng Hu struck anyway.

This was Chu Liang's first time facing a seventh realm Eminent One in a fight to the death, and he lost.

Just as he thought his death was imminent, the Blue Dragon's Orb in his Sea of Qi refused to let him die. It spun frantically.

Even if Chu Liang had fully refined the orb, he was still too weak to activate some of the powers of the Blue Dragon's Orb—like Shattering the Void and Return to the Lair From Afar.

The orb's greatest life-saving method was the ability to instantly return to the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm from any location. However, this required immense power, far beyond what Chu Liang could manage in his current state.

In the past, the Blue Dragon's Orb had sacrificed more than half of the draconic descendants in the hidden realm to summon the Dragon God's throne into the realm. That meant the spiritual energy in the remaining draconic descendants was not enough for another summoning.

Since the amount of spiritual energy within the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm remained the same, where had the additional energy been sourced from?

It was the Dragon God's throne.

In that critical moment when Chu Liang had been on the verge of death, the massive bronze throne, which loomed like a lofty mountain in the hidden realm, erupted with immense spiritual energy and transferred it to the Blue Dragon's Orb.

That was how the Blue Dragon's Orb was finally able to activate in the instant before Chu Liang's death, transporting him thousands of li away to the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm.

"Ahhh...

"

Chu Liang tried to get up, but he was struck by a wave of excruciating pain that rendered him immobile. It felt as if his body no longer belonged to him. The only part of his body he could move was his head, and even that was extremely difficult to do.

He had experienced this before. This was no accident. He was paralyzed again.

The last time this happened, it had been in the illusory realm of the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams. This time, however, it was in the real world, and his injuries were likely much more severe.

When it happened in the illusory realm, it had been due to the backlash of drawing in and using an immensely excessive amount of spiritual energy. His corporeal body had recovered quickly then, but that wouldn't be the case this time.

Chu Liang had been injured by a seventh-realm Eminent One. He could feel many streams of powerful spiritual energy wreaking havoc inside him, hindering his recovery by repeatedly re-opening his wounds.

With his current abilities, Chu Liang couldn't repair these injuries. Nevertheless, there was an external force doing that for him.

Chu Liang lay on his back on top of an ice-cold, massive bronze throne. Sparks of lightning flashed and darted across the surface of the throne like roaming golden dragons. There was an enormous number of them, and they eventually all converged on Chu Liang, injecting him with spiritual energy.

The Blue Dragon's Orb had paid a tremendous price to summon the Dragon God's throne, and now the throne's value was finally showing.

Chu Liang recalled that time in Baxia's tomb and how the Dragon God's throne had spent countless years reassembling Baxia's shattered soul. This indicated that the throne likely possessed some sort of healing power.

As Chu Liang thought about it some more, he remembered that the Dragon God was an ancient Hallowed One. That meant the Dragon God couldn't possibly have made Baxia carry around such a massive throne every day simply as a show of extravagance.

It was highly likely that the Dragon God's throne was a legendary artifact with restorative and healing effects. That would explain why the Dragon God valued the throne. It had likely used the throne to recover after battles.

As for Chu Liang, he had inherited the cultivation legacy of four kinds of dragons, allowing him to produce dragon breath that was so pure it rivaled that of a True Dragon. That pure dragon breath was likely why the throne was helping him.

As the true master of the Blue Dragon's Orb, Chu Liang could sense the will of both the orb and the Dragon God's throne now that he was inside the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm. The orb and the

throne were inanimate objects, but they had developed a will of their own a long time ago. It was probably similar to how legendary artifacts had spirits.

Chu Liang could sense that the Blue Dragon's Orb's will was quite aligned with his own, while the throne had an arrogant and imposing will. Even as the throne healed him, it maintained an air of superiority.

After all, it once belonged to the Dragon God. It didn't matter that the throne was a little arrogant as long as it could save Chu Liang's life.

Chu Liang lay there quietly, waiting to be healed. The golden dragons of lightning from the throne flashed and flickered over him, channeling spiritual energy into his corporeal body. They gradually expelled Cheng Hu's spiritual energy and began healing Chu Liang's broken limbs and shattered meridians.

These were severe injuries like those he had suffered in the Divine Mirror of the Eight Trigrams. His corporeal body might be able to recover, but the damage to his Sea of Qi would be permanent, effectively ending his cultivation journey.

If not for the Dragon God's throne, that would likely have been Chu Liang's fate. The throne's lightning seemed to be injecting boundless vitality into Chu Liang. It restored his devastated Sea of Qi, letting it grow anew. This amazing recovery shocked Chu Liang greatly.

If he remained conscious throughout, this long recovery process would be unbearably boring. Nevertheless, his corporeal body required vast amounts of spiritual energy for the recovery. So, fortunately for him, he was forced into a prolonged state of slumber, only waking briefly once in a while before drifting back into deep sleep.

The Little Winged Draconic Beast dropped by every now and then to lick him awake and feed him a few plump, juicy fruits to meet his basic sustenance needs.

Chu Liang had given it some berries in the past, and now it seemed the Little Winged Draconic Beast was returning the favor.

There was no distinction between day and night in the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm, so the recovery process seemed to go on for an indeterminate amount of time.

Then one day, Chu Liang woke to find that the corporeal outer parts of his body had healed completely. All that was left were the incorporeal inner parts of his body, which were the most difficult to heal. The recovery process for his shattered meridians would be long and slow.

Nonetheless, Chu Liang stood up excitedly. His heart was filled with gratitude as he gazed at the engravings of the dragon race on the backrest of the throne.

Yet, before he could utter a word of thanks, the Dragon God's throne suddenly lit up with a white glow. Then a bolt of lightning shot down from the clear sky, striking his head.

Crackle!

The chaotic lightning that had appeared unexpectedly sent Chu Liang sprawling to the ground, knocking him unconscious once again.

In his unconscious state, a crimson-gold mark slowly spread across his forehead...

Chapter 623: When the Wind Rises

Night Dragon Hall.

The emperor leaned back in his chair with his eyes shut as his mind wandered elsewhere. He looked quite tired.

Cultivators at his level rarely experienced physical fatigue unless they had been engaged in a great battle of life and death. That meant the emperor's tiredness was likely to be due to emotional exhaustion.

Before the Qinghong Banquet, he was already heartbroken because of the two women he loved most. Then the chaos during the banquet just added to his problems. His son's death became the final straw that broke the camel's back.

The emperor had been sitting there silently for a long time.

In the meantime, Di Nufeng had gone to Mount Retice to ask someone from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion to help do a divination reading to find out Chu Liang's location. If that yielded no results, she would surely return to the imperial city to demand answers.

Guards from the Night Dragon Hall and officials from the Imperial Supervisory Bureau had already gone out to look for Chu Liang, but it remained uncertain as to whether Chu Liang could be found. It was foreseeable that more trouble lay ahead.

"Haaa."

A thousand of the emperor's unspoken words were condensed into a single sigh.

"Your Majesty, why not return to your chambers and rest for a while?" Warrior Lao said as he emerged from the shadows. The elderly walked over in a stooped posture, looking a little worried. "It's almost daybreak. The morning court session will begin soon."

"No, I'm fine," the emperor replied, shaking head. After a moment, he ordered, "Summon Hai'er for me."

Heeding the order, Warrior Lao left.

Soon after, the Second Prince hurried over.

Given the magnitude of what had just occurred, few in the palace could sleep unless they were ordinary mortals who absolutely had to, so the Second Prince had been awake and quick to respond to his father's call.

The Second Prince bowed and greeted the emperor respectfully. "Father."

Like the emperor, the Second Prince looked troubled. The Thirteenth Prince's death meant that the Second Prince's greatest rival for the position of crown prince had been eliminated. However, his mother's fate remained uncertain, and her imprisonment in the inner palace weighed heavily on his mind.

The emperor had issued strict orders to keep it a secret that Empress Wu had been a long-term undercover agent for the Celestial Charm Sect. This was to avoid alarming the remaining undercover agents in the palace and facilitate their eradication, as well as preserve the imperial family's dignity.

The official explanation for Empress Wu's imprisonment was simply that she had killed an imperial consort. Homicides over power struggles in the harem were neither unprecedented nor uncommon. However, the high status of both the perpetrator and the victim made this case particularly shocking. It wouldn't be long before the story spread throughout the territory of the Yu Dynasty—though likely only as a topic of idle gossip.

If news that the empress was affiliated with the Celestial Charm Sect were to leak, it would greatly undermine the imperial court's authority.

The emperor stared at the Second Prince intently for a long moment before asking, "What do you think of your mother's situation?"

The Second Prince fell to his knees abruptly, pleading, "Father! Mother killed a noble consort; her crime is indeed grave. But I beg you, on account of all your years together, please spare her life!"

"Is that all you know? That she killed an imperial consort?" the emperor asked.

The Second Prince raised his gaze, with a genuinely dumb look of surprise. "There's more?"

The emperor could tell at a glance from the Second Prince's expression that he was indeed unaware of his mother's true identity.

The emperor had watched the Second Prince grow up. This child of his was rather soft-hearted and less capable than the Thirteenth Prince, but the Second Prince's pure nature and lack of schemes were redeeming qualities. If Empress Wu had disclosed everything to him, it's unlikely he would have managed to remain in his current state of mind.

"Your mother is a rebel—a member of the Celestial Charm Sect. All the rebels that were purged from the imperial palace last night were working for the Celestial Charm Sect, and she was the one who let them in here! This includes that imperial consort and the Thirteenth Prince. They were both under the influence of the Celestial Charm Sect. Empress Wu was the cause of it all!" the emperor said firmly.

"What?" The Second Prince fell to the floor. "Father, how is this possible? There must be some misunderstanding, right? Mother, she—"

"She does show a willingness to repent, so I will not kill her," the emperor said, his tone softening slightly. "Moreover, I will appoint you as the crown prince. Once your cultivation reaches the seventh realm, I will pass the throne to you."

"Father..." the Second Prince murmured in shock, not daring to lift his head.

It seemed his mind was overwhelmed by the sudden influx of information; he was unable to process it all at once.

The emperor continued somberly, "I told you all this so that you'll understand... that it's not easy to be a ruler. From now on, you must temper yourself diligently."

...

Celestial Tome Cave, Mount Reticence.

"Ah Feng, you need not be anxious," Elder Huang said, swinging his hand with faltering movements. "Regardless of whether he's alive or dead, the Omniscience will always provide an answer. We can afford to wait a little longer."

"I'm not anxious," Di Nufeng replied.

"Then can you let go of the back of my collar?"

"Oh."

Di Nufeng released her grip.

...

Earlier...

She arrived in the form of a blazing fireball, crashing right onto Mount Reticence. At the time, the sky was still dark, so the Celestial Pivot Pavilion thought they were under attack.

The disciples of the Celestial Pivot Pavilion swiftly gathered to fight... Then they saw Di Nufeng pulling Elder Huang, who was still sound asleep, out from under the rubble of his collapsed house.

Oh, it's Di Nufeng.

Upon realizing who it was, the disciples quickly dispersed.

Di Nufeng urgently said to Elder Huang, "I'm here to ask for your help."

Hearing that, the still-groggy Elder Huang was rather dumbfounded.

Is this how people ask for favors nowadays?

Nevertheless, this was Di Nufeng after all. Elder Huang was so used to seeing her strange behavior that this didn't seem strange at all coming from her.

Di Nufeng then told him that Chu Liang was missing, and Elder Huang realized the gravity of the situation.

Chu Liang had just been crowned the champion of the Assembly of Immortal Sects. If the Celestial Charm Sect had killed him in the imperial palace the very next day, it would not only be a blow to the imperial court but also to the prestige of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten.

Of course, those blows would be abstract, but the enraged Di Nufeng standing before Elder Huang was all too real.

Elder Huang quickly led Di Nufeng to the Celestial Tome Cave, where the Omniscience was housed. With Elder Huang's status within the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, he had the right to use it.

In truth, the Celestial Pivot Pavilion was reluctant to use the Omniscience to help outsiders because there were countless people in the world with unresolved concerns. If they were to open their doors to such requests, who knew what troubles they would be letting flood in.

Moreover, revealing too many secrets of the heavens could affect a person's lifespan and karma, so they outright refused most of the requests to use the Omniscience. This way, those with truly critical issues would still go to the Celestial Pivot Pavilion to seek their help, but those requests would be significantly lower in number.

Elder Huang led Di Nufeng into the Celestial Tome Cave. After walking through the deep and dark tunnels of the cave, they saw a stone wall that looked like white jade, radiating with a lustrous glow.

This wasn't Di Nufeng's first time seeing it, so she wasn't particularly amazed... However, the last time she was here—that had been for Chu Liang's sake too.

The Celestial Tome was not a book at all but rather a massive jade wall imbued with heavenly insight, capable of producing projections of the events occurring in the world. Since it was able to cast a light on all matters under the heavens, it earned the name Omniscience.

Elder Huang adjusted his robes and stepped forward, bowing respectfully. "I—Huang Wuren, a descendant of the Heaven Observer—humbly seek counsel from the Celestial Tome regarding a critical matter. Please bestow us a revelation."

He formed a hand seal with both hands and closed his eyes slightly.

Whoosh.

The jade wall lit up brightly with a chaotic and blinding radiance. Threads of qi flowed from Elder Huang, connecting him to the jade wall.

As he exhaled, the wind and clouds projected on the wall dispersed chaotically in the blink of an eye, replaced by two lines of large words.

The fish lies hidden at the bottom of the river, Awaiting the wind that will transform it into a dragon.

Di Nufeng looked closely at the wall and muttered, "These are... words?"

"Yes, they are words," Elder Huang replied, opening his eyes with a slightly awkward smile. "These words of guidance likely mean that the person you seek is lying low somewhere. When the time is right, they will have an opportunity to ascend and transform into a dragon."

"I asked you if he is dead or alive and to find out where he is. Yet, this is your answer?"

"He's alive, of course!" Elder Huang chuckled. "How could a dead person transform into a dragon?"

"Reincarnation?" Di Nufeng said skeptically.

Starting over, huh...

Elder Huang cursed inwardly, shaking his head helplessly.

"In any case, Chu Liang's safety is assured, and this is likely a fortuitous opportunity for him. However, his current location is hidden from the heavens. It's possible he's inside an enchanted formation or a hidden realm. When he returns, he will undoubtedly be stronger than before."

Di Nufeng asked, "Then, is there an estimate of when he will return?"

Elder Huang answered slowly, "Naturally, it is when the wind rises."

Chapter 624: The Divine Ruins' Scroll [End of Book 6]

Beneath the ancient tree of Azure Falling Peak, Jiang Yuebai stood alone.

It had been a month since Chu Liang disappeared. Although Di Nufeng brought back optimistic news from the Celestial Pivot Pavilion, Jiang Yuebai couldn't rest easy without seeing him in person.

She sent many messages to Chu Liang through the United Hearts Jade. The light on the other end remained lit, indicating he was likely still alive. However, there had been no response, leaving her unsure of his current state.

As she was lost in thought, a figure quietly appeared behind her.

"It's about time," said the Whale-Riding Immortal, his voice faint and distant.

Jiang Yuebai turned her head, hesitated for a moment, and said, "Father..."

She had never met her parents before, so saying this felt strange. Yet, the Whale-Riding Immortal's gaze trembled slightly.

"Still worried about Chu Liang?" he asked again.

"Yes," Jiang Yuebai admitted.

"That boy has the look of someone blessed with great fortune. I believe he'll find his own opportunities," the Whale-Riding Immortal said. "We also have our destination."

"Where are we going?" Jiang Yuebai asked.

"I haven't explained this in detail before. Searching for the Divine Ruins' scroll is a long journey," the Whale-Riding Immortal replied. "From what I know, the scroll originally came from the demon race of the Far West. It later fell into the hands of a senior from Mount Shu. Using this scroll, he likely found the true Divine Ruins Monastery and obtained what he desired from it.

"He later divided the scroll into four parts, falsely claiming them to be the pieces of an Immortals' Hidden Map scattered all over the world of mortals, causing a storm of bloodshed and chaos across the land."

Jiang Yuebai wasn't aware of this story, so she quietly listened.

"Your mother..." The Whale-Riding Immortal's expression softened as he spoke. "She emerged from the Divine Ruins back then to resolve this matter. Her goal was to gather the scattered pieces of the Divine Ruins' scroll to prevent further chaos and to stop anyone from disturbing the Divine Ruins Monastery again. That's when she met me.

"When I first saw her, she stood alone in a crowd, radiantly beautiful..."

Jiang Yuebai wouldn't have minded hearing more about her parents' love story, but the Whale-Riding Immortal, after a brief moment of immersion, suddenly remembered he was discussing important matters and quickly steered the conversation back on track.

The Whale-Riding Immortal continued, "When she left the Divine Ruins Monastery, she carried with her the deduced whereabouts of the Divine Ruins' scroll. I had heard her mention some of it before. After those events unfolded, I spent another ten years attaining the Dao. Since coming out of seclusion, I've only had enough time to locate one piece.

"There are still three more pieces of the Divine Ruins' scroll, and we must find them together. One piece is suspected to have been taken by the Soul Destroyer Sect, but the sect's cultivation legacy has since ended, making it exceedingly hard to trace.

"Another piece is in the possession of Jin Mucuo, an Eminent One that resided in the Southern Regions. He was once a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect like me, so we should have been able to get it easily. Unfortunately, he has been missing for years, and his whereabouts remain unknown. The final piece was last seen in Muzhi City located in the Northern Regions, but it vanished after a fleeting appearance.

"I don't know how long it will take for us to gather these three pieces, which is why I said that the journey with me will be very long."

The Whale-Riding Immortal added, "You are the head disciple of the Mount Shu Sect. If you were to stay at Mount Shu instead, your future prospects would be bright."

"As a daughter, how could I turn a blind eye to my parents' affairs?" Jiang Yuebai said as she shook her head. "Once I've rescued Mother, it won't be too late to return to Mount Shu."

The Whale-Riding Immortal looked at his daughter and could only sigh softly.

This temperament, seemingly gentle yet truly stubborn, was so strikingly similar to her mother's.

...

On a distant mountain peak in the Southern Regions, another meeting was taking place.

A young noble, dressed in green robes with a jade-like face, ascended the summit accompanied by a beautiful woman in a colorful dress. At the peak, an elderly man with a radiant divine light in his eyes awaited them.

"Celestial Master." The young noble bowed respectfully before introducing, "This is the Celestial Master of our Celestial Charm Sect, and this is the Demon King of the Verdant Foxhills, Lady Caiyi."

This young noble in green was none other than Young Noble Xunyang, who had lived in the Far West for many years.

At that time, he had fled to the demons' territory to avoid trouble. Later, when a large number of fox demons traveled to the land of the nine provinces, he came along with them. This meeting with Caiyi was arranged under the orders of the Celestial Master.

"I have long heard of the Demon King's great name. It is an honor to meet you today," the Celestial Master said with a gentle smile.

"Your Celestial Charm Sect is equally well-known," Caiyi replied with a subtle nod, maintaining a reserved demeanor.

"Our sect's followers who traveled to the Far West owe their safety to your protection," the Celestial Master said with a smile. "I understand that not all parts of the Far West are welcoming to humans, but the Verdant Foxhills is an exception. Your wisdom is truly extraordinary."

"Whether it's humans or demons ruling over the four seas and nine provinces, neither can completely eliminate the other," Caiyi said with a thoughtful tone. "In the end, coexistence is inevitable. I don't reject humans; I simply wish for demons to have their share of this prosperous world."

"In this regard, we share the same vision," the Celestial Master said.

"I've heard that the Celestial Charm Sect seeks chaos and separation, aiming to purge all beings under heaven," Caiyi remarked. "That is very different from what I hope for."

"Ah," the Celestial Master said with a smile, shaking his head. "Our ultimate goals may differ, but in seeking the demon race's return to the nine provinces, we do share a common objective. At least for this first part of the journey, we need each other's help."

He added, "You wish to restore the Demon God and bring about the resurgence of the demon race. Well, I share that same goal."

"Oh?" Caiyi asked with a smirk. "And can the Celestial Master truly help restore the Demon God?"

"Yes," the Celestial Master replied firmly.

"But why have I heard that things aren't going so well for the Celestial Charm Sect?" Caiyi remarked. "Word has spread about what happened in the imperial city recently—years of your planning were completely ruined. The spies you spent so long planting were wiped out, and some of your top generals were lost. If not for this major setback, I doubt you'd even consider working with us."

"A major setback?" The Celestial Master kept his smile. "There were indeed some unexpected events, most of which were caused by a Mount Shu Sect disciple whose fate and destiny remain unclear to me. Still, the ultimate goal was achieved."

"Chu Liang, isn't it? I know of him," Caiyi said. "I also heard that the Thirteenth Prince, whom you supported in the palace, was killed by Chu Liang."

"Sending the Thirteenth Prince to kill Chu Liang was a last-minute decision on my part," the Celestial Master said slowly. "I sensed a hint of danger from that boy. Unfortunately, the plan failed, and it cost Yu Tuoluo his life... but these are trivial matters."

Young Noble Xunyang, who had been silent until now, added, "Indeed. The Thirteenth Prince was ambitious. Someone like that could be controlled temporarily but never permanently. That's why his death was always part of the Celestial Master's plan."

"Oh?" Caiyi raised her eyes, locking onto the smiling old man in front of her.

Young Noble Xunyang continued, "The Second Prince has always been the key to the Celestial Master's plan!"

Chapter 625: The Strange Encounters in Three Dreams[Start of Book 7]

"Grrrrrr."

In the wild jungle, exotic beasts roamed freely.

A massive bird soared through the sky, its broad wings momentarily blotting out the sun. Its sharp gaze fixated on a small blue dragon hidden below.

The blue-scaled dragon hatchling struggled as it tried to dodge.

At the same time, it summoned the spiritual energy of the Blue Dragon and unleashed a wind that slashed like blades toward the bird. The attack tore countless feathers from the giant creature, yet the bird remained unscathed, its body as if made of steel. All it lost were its feathers.

After unleashing the blades of wind, the Blue Dragon let out a piercing cry and turned to flee. With the control of the wind, it glided at incredible speed. Using its small size to its advantage, it wove through the dense forest like a fish in water, while the massive bird struggled to maintain its pursuit at such a low altitude.

As the bird flapped its wings to ascend once more, a colossal claw descended from the heavens. In comparison, the once-imposing bird suddenly seemed no more than a tiny chick. The massive claw extended from the side of a towering mountain, seizing the bird before turning to reveal its entire back.

It was a winged beast resembling a tiger. An exotic beast with its two saber-like fangs jutted toward the sky as it gazed upward.

Beside this monstrous beast, the Blue Dragon appeared extremely tiny—so much so that it managed to escape unnoticed.

The Blue Dragon dove to the bottom of a lake, finally stopping its desperate escape, only to be hit by a wave of disorientation.

This Blue Dragon was none other than Chu Liang.

When he woke up that day, he realized that he had been saved by the Dragon God's throne in the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm. Just as he was about to act, a bolt of lightning summoned by the

throne struck him down instantly. When he woke up, he found himself in a wild jungle teeming with celestial beasts and demons. To his dismay, he had been transformed into a tiny Blue Dragon hatchling, forced into a relentless struggle for survival.

He could sense the presence of the primordial Great Dao of the Heavens and Earth, and despite being in the body of a Blue Dragon hatchling, he was capable of wielding immense power. However, his opponents were equally terrifying entities.

The experience was utterly harrowing.

As Chu Liang paused to catch his breath at the bottom of the lake, the water around him suddenly began to boil. The ground quaked violently, as though a great upheaval was unfolding.

Sensing danger, Chu Liang tried to poke his head out of the water, only to see a massive fireball hurtling toward him. Behind it, countless more flaming meteors rained down from the sky like an apocalyptic storm.

These meteors weren't just searingly hot and unimaginably heavy, carrying tens of thousands of jun of force; they were also made of extraordinarily hard extraterrestrial steel. The legendary black meteoric iron[1], prized by cultivators in the immortal realm, was refined from such celestial phenomena.

Each meteor was capable of crushing a mountain upon impact, obliterating everything in a vast surrounding area.

And now, they were falling like a relentless downpour.

"Oh shit."

Chu Liang only had time to let out a wail of despair.

...

The scene then changed as Chu Liang found himself within a shattered nest.

As Chu Liang examined himself again, he found that his body was now shimmering with golden light—he had transformed into a massive golden-scaled dragon.

Unlike the form of the Blue Dragon hatchling he had taken on before, this golden-scaled dragon was fully grown. While this golden-scaled dragon had yet to take control of a Great Dao, his cultivation at the peak of the seventh realm made him nearly invincible against anyone who had yet to attain the Heavenly Origin—provided he didn't face some truly monstrous entities.

This time, Chu Liang finally felt a sense of reassurance. Although he still didn't fully grasp what was happening, the immense power of his new form gave him a semblance of confidence.

Who could possibly kill me now?

Whether it be that giant bird or the tiger with the dragon fangs, regardless of how massive they were, they would be restricted by their innate bloodlines. Even at their peak, they could never rival a True Dragon of the seventh realm.

So he coiled his body as he peeked out the lair. He still hadn't gotten used to the change from walking upright in a human form to soaring as a dragon. Fortunately, thanks to the training he had undergone earlier, he had become adept at controlling his dragon body.

However, as his dragon head emerged from the lair, his blazing golden irises suddenly froze in shock.

He was stunned.

Outside the lair, the sunlight had vanished entirely.

A colossal shadowy figure loomed in the sky, blocking all light. The moment Chu Liang emerged, it descended like the heavens collapsing, accompanied by a deafening roar that shook the earth.

In his final moments of consciousness, Chu Liang saw the true form of the monster.

It was a massive black fish, suspended in the sky like an endless ocean. The dark cloud that had shrouded the entire dragon's lair was merely one of its fins.

That single fin shook the heavens and the earth.

Kun Fist.

These two words surfaced in Chu Liang's mind just before everything went dark.

...

When he opened his eyes again, the scene had changed.

Now, his body was covered in deep blue scales with a golden sheen, each etched with ancient patterns that seemed to embody the essence of the Great Dao. He coiled atop a sky-piercing throne as vast as a mountain as he felt this surging power pulsating within him.

It felt as if the entire world rested in the palm of his hand.

What is this? Chu Liang looked around in astonishment. Did I become the... Dragon God?

The world before him no longer looked the same. Intricate, glowing patterns marked the landscape, each representing a Great Dao. Countless interconnected Daos wove together, forming the fabric of the mortal realm.

To a Hallowed One at the ninth realm, the mortal world was too small.

By moving these Great Daos, he could effortlessly manipulate the lifelines of the Four Seas and Nine Provinces, determining life and death in an instant.

Even the legendary ancient Kun, which once struck fear into him, was now beneath his notice. Though the legendary Kun Peng fed on dragons, it would never dare to target the Dragon God.

It would not even dare to take a bite if the Dragon God, being a ninth-realm entity, offered as a prey.

As Chu Liang prepared to ascend into the skies to fully experience the power of a being at the ninth realm, a sudden clap of thunder rang out. A cascade of heavenly light poured down without warning, its blinding radiance causing the fiery glow in his eyes to falter and fade.

What is this?

Within the blinding radiance, a faint silhouette seemed to take form—a person, shrouded in light.

...

"Ah..."

A sharp pain jolted through him, and Chu Liang regained consciousness once more.

His mind was a chaotic blur. Clutching his head, he sat in a daze for what felt like an eternity before his memories began to return and he finally remembered where he was.

The Blue Dragon hidden realm, the Dragon God's throne.

All those seemingly vivid experiences had been conjured by the Dragon God's throne, brought forth by a single bolt of summoned lightning.

It had allowed him to truly live the lives of a Blue Dragon, a Golden Dragon, and even the Dragon God. Yet, the throne's purpose remained a mystery to him.

Chu Liang shifted slightly, and his joints creaked as though they had rusted—he had no idea how long he had been lying there. But with that single movement, he felt a surge of dragon breath coursing through his entire body. It felt powerful and vibrant.

Moreover, he quickly realized that his body now brimmed with five distinct streams of dragon breath.

The breaths of the White Dragon and Inferno Dragon had been there from the start. After refining the Blue Dragon's Orb, he gained the Blue Dragon's breath. When Little Golden Dragon granted him Dragon Soul Protection, he acquired a trace of Golden Dragon's breath.

Now, the most powerful stream within him was the fierce and explosive thunder dragon breath—a force Chu Liang was not unfamiliar with.

It was the Dragon God's breath!

It was this very power that had coursed through him when he had taken the form of the Dragon God.

Raising his hand to his forehead, he felt a slight protrusion. There, a deep purple mark with a golden sheen had appeared, resembling a third eye.

Is this a mark bestowed by the Dragon God's throne?

Chu Liang turned his gaze to the massive throne. It stood there silently, having had no direct interaction with him. Yet it had been the Dragon God's seat for countless years, likely absorbing the Dragon God's aura. This mark on his forehead had likely come from it.

But why did it bestow this mark to me? Is it because...I am handsome?

Chu Liang chuckled at the absurd thought and decided not to dwell on it. Though he felt disheveled and grimy, he didn't bother cleaning up. Leaping into the air, he was ready to leave the hidden realm and return to Mount Shu.

He had no idea how much time had passed, but it must have been considerable. By now, the people at Mount Shu were surely growing anxious.

Senior Sister Jiang had mentioned she would leave after the Assembly of Immortal Sects. With this delay, who knew if she was still at the mountain?

As Chu Liang soared into the air, he realized that his Sea of Qi felt somewhat clogged, likely a result of his flow of qi not being in circulation for too long.

The Large-Headed Dolls within his body had also stopped working as they hadn't been paid their usual supply of pills. Clearly, they had been on an extended vacation.

Chu Liang sighed silently.

Very unreliable! How much precious cultivation time had been wasted because of this? Refusing to work just because they weren't paid? Is there no justice left in the world?!

Fortunately, even though the Large-Headed Dolls had collectively gone on strike, the dragon breath within his body had grown exponentially stronger, and the power of the dragons' cultivation legacy had advanced by leaps and bounds.

Previously, after refining the Blue Dragon's Orb, Chu Liang had been able to wield its power to fight with those at the sixth realm. Now, with just a clench of his fist, he felt as if he could shatter a mountain with a single punch.

This strength was likely at the peak of the sixth realm.

Did suffering an injury lead to such immense progress? It felt as though he had simply taken a night's sleep and woken up leagues ahead!

As he began to circulate the dragon breath within him, Chu Liang couldn't help but wonder, How far has my Physical Dragon Transformation progressed?

The immortal art of Physical Dragon Transformation relied heavily on the purity of dragon breath; the purer the breath, the more complete the transformation. Previously, Yang Shenlong had used the Azure Dragon's cultivation legacy to achieve a transformation of just one head and one claw.

With the strength of three dragon cultivation legacies, Chu Liang had already surpassed him.

At this moment, the percentage of dragon within Chu Liang was astonishing—his body likely contained more dragon blood than human blood. If he were to fully unleash the power of the dragon...

The thought stirred him to action. Without hesitation, he formed a hand seal, activating the spell. In an instant, his form began to change.

"Roar—"

With a thunderous roar, a five-colored True Dragon soared into the sky within the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm!

Though it was only about ten zhang in length, resembling a young True Dragon, its aura was as imposing as that of a fully grown one.

Chu Liang had achieved a complete Physical Dragon Transformation. This was something unheard of, something no one had ever accomplished since the birth of this immortal art.

Riding on the momentum of this unstoppable force, Chu Liang felt full of vigor. He burst through the gateway of the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm and soared out in his dragon form.

Although he had entered the hidden realm through the use of Shattering the Void from the imperial city's inner palace, he had to exit through the proper gateway. Now, he found himself back at the ruins of the Ancient Dragon Lair, the very place where he had arrived when he entered the hidden realm for the first time.

This place had always been desolate, with few signs of life. Chu Liang wasn't worried about startling anyone as he leapt out into the open.

Thanks to his training in the dream realm, he could control his dragon body with ease. Just as he prepared to soar high into the sky, the sharp hum of a sword pierced the air.

Whoosh—

A streak of brilliant light tore through the sky, accompanied by a thunderous shout.

"Demonic dragon! Give me back my princess!"

Chapter 626: The Four Overlords of Mount Shu

The streak of sword light was as dazzling as a star and as swift as lightning, carrying a fierce and unstoppable momentum!

Chu Liang spotted the attack, halted mid-air, and with a flick of his long tail, struck the longsword with a crisp clang, scattering the spiritual energy imbued within it.

The attackers were instantly stunned.

They were three young men and women. The two young men wore coarse short robes. One had a headband tied around his dark, tanned skin and a sturdy build, while the other, slightly taller, had a broad forehead and large eyes.

The young woman, the tallest among them, had thick golden wavy hair, amber-colored eyes, and snow-white skin, clearly identifying her as a woman from the Western Regions.

The headband-wearing young man had been the one to launch the sword attack. Seeing his full-force Sword Manipulation Technique so easily neutralized by the evil dragon, his expression changed. Without hesitation, he formed a hand seal, summoning rolling clouds to obscure the surroundings—a divine technique meant to confuse vision.

Chu Liang let out a low growl: "Grrr."

With that single sound, the mist around him instantly dissipated.

The three youths, sensing the dragon's overwhelming strength, prepared to unleash their divine skills in a desperate bid.

Chu Liang quickly shouted, "Stop!"

In an instant, he shifted his form, transforming into his human appearance as he landed lightly on the ground.

"Huh?" The three stared at him, stunned by his transformation into a human. Their suspicion, however, remained.

"Don't be afraid, I'm human," Chu Liang said, smiling and spreading his hands. "I was merely practicing a divine skill when you stumbled upon me and attacked out of nowhere."

Yet, to his surprise, his tried-and-true harmless smile—one that had never failed to win goodwill—didn't work this time.

The three continued to stare at him with wary, hostile eyes, as if he were a demonic creature.

Chu Liang was slightly puzzled by their reaction. After a brief hesitation, he took out a bronze mirror and looked at his reflection. The reason for their wariness became immediately clear.

His clothes were tattered and stained with blood, his hair disheveled, and his matted beard completely obscured his face.

The sudden transformation into a dragon after such a long time caused his entire body to radiate a ferocious qi, making him appear even more terrifying than he had in his dragon form. It was no wonder they were so intimidated.

Without hesitation, Chu Liang formed his fingers into a saber and neatly trimmed his unruly beard and hair. He then condensed water from the air to thoroughly cleanse his face. Finally, he discarded his tattered outer garment and changed into a pristine brocade robe.

After this transformation, he waved at the young men and woman. "See? I'm really a good person."

The three finally appeared to trust him a little, whispering among themselves.

"Ah..."

"He really does seem to be human."

"When he transformed into a dragon earlier, there was indeed no demonic qi."

Watching them murmur amongst themselves, Chu Liang smiled and said, "No need to panic. I am a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, one of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, named Chu... Liuxiang. I mean no harm."

At the last moment, he gave a false name.

After all, having won the Champion of the Assembly of Immortal Sects, the name Chu Liang had likely spread far and wide. The entire world probably knew he was the champion, and by extension, who his esteemed teacher was.

He had suffered enough because of his teacher in the past.

"Mount Shu?" Hearing those words, the three brightened instantly and said in unison, "So you're an esteemed senior from the Mount Shu Sect. We were terribly disrespectful earlier!"

"No need to be so formal," Chu Liang said, smiling as he waved his hand.

He had never realized how useful the name of the Mount Shu Sect could be. He then sat close to the three and prepared to talk with them in detail.

With the misunderstanding cleared up, the three young men and woman apologized to him and explained the purpose of their visit.

...

The Ancient Dragon Lair was located in the Desolate Wilderness in the northeast, long outside the borders of the Yu Dynasty. The territories closest to the Ancient Dragon Lair were the kingdoms in the Western Regions. One such kingdom in the Western Regions was the Gaoyue Kingdom and these three youths were disciples of the Grand Wind Hall in the Gaoyue Kingdom.

Chu Liang nodded thoughtfully upon learning this. No wonder their appearances carried an exotic air.

In recent years, the Far West had experienced frequent disturbances, and the kingdoms in the Western Regions often suffered from demonic calamities. Just days ago, a shocking event had shaken Gaoyue—the kingdom's princess had been abducted by a demonic dragon during an outing.

The incident sent waves of outrage throughout the kingdom. The furious king immediately ordered the cultivators of Grand Wind Hall to search for the princess. Their investigation revealed that a demonic dragon, notorious for abducting women, was said to reside in the Ancient Dragon Lair. Thus, they came to investigate.

However, they found no trace of the demonic dragon along the way. Instead, they encountered Chu Liang in his dragon form and mistook him for the culprit.

"A demonic dragon?" Chu Liang pondered.

The Ancient Dragon Lair had been abandoned for centuries, becoming like a desolate wilderness. Chu Liang had never heard of any dragons still inhabiting the area. When had such a creature appeared?

He recalled hearing of the Gaoyue Kingdom before. One of the many minor kingdoms in the Western Regions, the Gaoyue Kingdom was renowned for its unique herb, Crimson Moon Celestial Grass—a vital ingredient in many healing pills. Thanks to this rare resource, Gaoyue Kingdom was relatively wealthy compared to other kingdoms in the Western Regions.

However, this wealth was significant only within the context of the Western Regions.

The kingdom could afford only one institution for cultivators, the Grand Wind Hall, whose function was similar to the Imperial Supervisory Bureau of the Yu Dynasty. However, its size and scale were more akin to a small sect. These three were disciples of the Grand Wind Hall.

The sturdy youth with the headband was named Qi Lingshan. The taller young man was Qi Lingmu, and the golden-haired young woman was Qi Lingyue.

They were all around eighteen or nineteen years old, with cultivation levels at the peak of the fourth realm. This was quite impressive, making them likely the most outstanding youths of the Gaoyue Kingdom.

Chu Liang found it odd. The kingdoms in the Western Regions also participated in the Assembly of Immortal Sects. Why didn't they recognize him?

So he asked, "Your cultivation levels are quite good. Didn't you attend the Assembly of Immortal Sects?"

"The Assembly of Immortal Sects?" Qi Lingshan paused, then laughed. "Esteemed senior, you must be joking. The Assembly of Immortal Sects won't start for another six years."

"Six years?"

Chu Liang frowned.

The next Assembly was six years away, which meant the last one had taken place six years ago.

What...

Have I really been lying in the Blue Dragon hidden realm for six whole years?!

No wonder I feel like my body has rusted inside and out. It turned out so much time had passed.

He was momentarily dazed, unsure of what to say as his thoughts swirled in confusion.

For cultivators, it wasn't unusual for a closed-door cultivation session to last years or even decades. But for Chu Liang, this was his first experience with such a drastic passage of time.

"By the way, esteemed senior," Qi Lingyue asked, "since you're a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, you must know the Four Overlords, right? Are you familiar with White Jade Fan and Mountain Tiger? They're supposed to visit our kingdom in a few days!"

"Who are they?" Chu Liang asked, puzzled.

"The Four Overlords of the Mount Shu Sect!" Qi Lingyue exclaimed in surprise. "They're the most influential and dazzling figures of the Mount Shu Sect. Even the kingdoms in the Western Regions know of their prowess. Countless girls dream of marrying them—you don't know them?"

Chu Liang's face darkened.

The Four Overlords of the Mount Shu Sect...

That name was ridiculously arrogant. On Mount Shu, he only knew one person bold enough to pull that off.

"White Jade Fan and Mountain Tiger are just nicknames. Maybe the esteemed senior isn't familiar with them," Qi Lingmu interjected, trying to smooth things over. "But if I said Jiang Huaixu and Meng Shouyang, surely you'd recognize them—they're famous!"

Chu Liang froze.

The three stared at him in silence.

Jiang Huaixu, nicknamed White Jade Fan, and Meng Shouyang, nicknamed Mountain Tiger, were two of the Four Overlords of Mount Shu—renowned as the most domineering figures of the sect in recent years.

This "senior" doesn't look that old. If he doesn't know this, he must be a fake Mount Shu Sect's disciple.

Even Chu Liang himself began to doubt himself.

Scratching his head, he muttered, "Maybe I am in a fake world?"

Chapter 627: The Current Landscape

"Esteemed senior, with your cultivation level so high, you really don't have to pretend to be a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect," Qi Lingshan said consolingly.

"Why would I pretend to be a disciple of Mount Shu?" Chu Liang replied helplessly. "If I were to fake it, wouldn't pretending to be from one of the other sects in the Divine Nine make more sense?"

As soon as he said this, the others looked at him with even more bewilderment.

"Perhaps you are not pretending," Qi Lingmu suggested. "Maybe it's just that you have been away from Mount Shu for a long time and haven't ventured into the martial world?"

"That's true," Chu Liang nodded.

"Since the rise of Red Cotton Peak and the victory of the Mount Shu Sect in the Assembly of Immortal Sects, the sect has grown rapidly over the past few years, with its disciples being treated much better than before," Qi Lingmu explained. "Although other immortal sects tried to emulate

this success, none could create a second Red Cotton Peak. The Mount Shu Sect, despite lacking a legendary artifact, could now offer its disciples far better benefits than the other sects of the Divine Nine."

"Better than Taotie City?" Chu Liang asked.

"When we were younger, we heard that Taotie City was the largest market in the world of immortality cultivators. Now, it's almost dropped to third place," Qi Lingshan replied.

"Third?" Chu Liang said, puzzled. "Being surpassed by Red Cotton Peak is one thing, but who else could compete with Taotie City?"

"The Immortals' Square," Qi Lingyue added. "Ever since the Sixth Princess of the Yu Dynasty took charge a few years ago and made big changes, it has quickly become a surprising success."

Through his chat with the three, Chu Liang got a clear picture of the recent changes in the business world of immortality cultivation.

At first, Red Cotton Peak became popular and took a share of the Southern Regions' market. Taotie City didn't think much of it and even invested in Red Cotton Peak, earning them big profits in return. From a financial standpoint, it was a great deal for Taotie City.

But when considering other factors, the decision might not have been so smart.

At first, Red Cotton Peak just copied Taotie City's business model and couldn't outdo them because Taotie City had the advantage of being the first in the game. But later, Red Cotton Peak changed its approach and focused on offering high-end services.

They trained a team skilled in sword-flying techniques specifically for door-to-door delivery.

Any registered sects within the Yu Dynasty, big or small, as well as nearby minor kingdoms, could use Red Cotton Peak's exclusive delivery service.

On top of that, Red Cotton Peak kept track of each client's cultivation level and technique needs, offering personalized cultivation plans tailored just for them.

In the world of immortality cultivation, independent cultivators willing to spend on expensive resources were already a rare group, as most resources were used by sects and factions. By focusing on these high-end clients, Red Cotton Peak captured a large portion of the market, expanding beyond the Southern Regions and starting to encroach upon the land of the nine provinces.

Eventually, even cultivators who weren't associated with any sects could spend enough to qualify for personalized services.

In the past, disciples of immortal sects would have to travel to Taotie City to buy items, often wasting time and effort searching through its massive marketplace. As Taotie City expanded, finding what they needed became even harder, not to mention the risks to their safety.

Now, Red Cotton Peak delivered items straight to their doorstep, making it possible to get what they needed without stepping outside. Sometimes, they even guessed what customers might want before they even realized it themselves by sending a letter with the recommended products.

Physical stores took a major hit. Shops partnered with Red Cotton Peak could adapt and change their business models, but those in Taotie City struggled greatly, and many ended up shutting down.

As a result, Taotie City became less attractive to immortal sect disciples, who now only visited occasionally for leisure or sightseeing.

Even in terms of leisure, though, Red Cotton Peak outshined them. They moved away from focusing on shopping and instead emphasized entertainment, hosting grand celebrations, fireworks shows, and festive events during major holidays. They even introduced mascots like the five-colored koi and the celestial beast Baize, drawing crowds of tourists every day.

Red Cotton Peak had transformed into a massive hub that combined dining, entertainment, and shopping all in one place.

From every perspective, cultivators no longer felt the need to visit Taotie City, leading to the rapid decline of the once-mighty city of the Northern Regions.

If Red Cotton Peak had been the only rival, it might not have been enough to bring about Taotie City's rapid downfall. After all, Taotie City had accumulated vast resources over the years and still offered many products that Red Cotton Peak couldn't provide.

But then, the Immortals' Square suddenly launched its own wave of reforms.

Under the leadership of the Sixth Princess of the Yu Dynasty, the Immortals' Square abandoned most of its high-end market and focused on affordable goods, such as highly demanded pills, talismans, and replicas of high-grade enchanted tools. Using the imperial court's strong supply chains, they quickly took over the low-cost market in the world of immortality cultivators.

With competition from both the high-end and low-end markets, Taotie City was nearly pushed out of existence.

Taotie City didn't give up without a fight. Three years ago, the city lord declared war on Red Cotton Peak, ordering all shops in the city to operate only within Taotie City and cut all ties with Red Cotton Peak. The city worked aggressively to gather resources across the nine provinces, believing that rare resources were limited—if Taotie City got them, Red Cotton Peak couldn't. To do this, they even offered to buy these resources at an extremely high price.

Using a "hurt the enemy more, even if it hurts us" strategy, Taotie City stubbornly held on, relying on its strong foundation to outlast Red Cotton Peak.

Red Cotton Peak fought back by launching an advanced credit system called Red Cotton Credit.

Even if you didn't have money now, you could shop at Red Cotton Peak. Based on your sect's background and your previous spending, you were assigned a credit limit. If you couldn't repay on time, you could settle the debt with other resources or items.

This system let many cultivators stuck at bottlenecks get the resources they needed for breakthroughs right away and pay back later. Since there was no interest, it was a huge advantage, which naturally encouraged even more spending.

Of course, for those who chose not to repay their debts, Mount Shu had plenty of professional "debt-collecting teams" ready to handle the situation.

With this move, the Mount Shu Sect managed to hold its ground against Taotie City's destructive tactics.

Over the three years of competition, neither side had an easy time. However, for suppliers like the High Moon Kingdom, it was a golden era.

Originally, their Crimson Moon Celestial Grass was sold at a fixed price, no matter who the buyer was. Now, with both sides fighting to outbid each other, the price kept going up every year, bringing them huge profits.

A new batch of Crimson Moon Celestial Grass would soon mature, and both Red Cotton Peak and Taotie City considered it a big deal. They each sent top representatives to negotiate with the High Moon Kingdom.

...

Listening to their explanation, Chu Liang wasn't particularly shocked.

Most of these strategies were ones he had originally set in motion and had discussed with the members of Silver Sword Peak. However, the idea of targeting the low-end market had somehow ended up being adopted by the Immortals' Square.

After a brief moment of thought, he realized it was a brilliant move.

Taotie City had decades of resources built up, making it far too powerful for Red Cotton Peak, which was still new and growing, to compete with directly. To level the playing field, Red Cotton Peak gave up part of the market and even helped Immortals' Square grow stronger so they could work together against Taotie City.

It was like teaming up with a smaller ally to take on a much stronger opponent, similar to how forces once joined the Kingdom of Wu to fight the warlord Cao Cao.[1].

However...

With the intelligence of his old companions, continuing the strategies he left behind would already have been challenging enough. To build upon them and innovate further? There had likely been a business expert guiding them behind the scenes.

He couldn't help but ask, "Who's in charge of Red Cotton Peak now?"

"The main affairs are managed by the Four Overlords of Mount Shu," Qi Lingyue replied. "The person ranked above them and overseeing everything is Di Nufeng, the peak master of the Silver Sword Peak of the Mount Shu Sect!"

As Qi Lingyue mentioned Di Nufeng, her eyes sparkled with admiration. Clearly, she greatly envied such a combination of beauty and brilliance.

But Chu Liang immediately and decisively said, "That's absolutely impossible."

He knew exactly what his teacher was like. Having her physically defeat Taotie City? That wouldn't be difficult. But having her outmaneuver opponents in business? That would most likely devolve into a physical conflict eventually.

If Qi Lingyue told him that Di Nufeng led a debt-collecting team, Chu Liang would believe it. But leading all of Red Cotton Peak? Chu Liang wouldn't believe that no matter what.

Just as he was about to ask more questions, a dragon's roar echoed from afar.

Roar—

The roar was filled with a chilling aura of death and violent qi.

"A demonic dragon!"

The three from the High Moon Kingdom instantly became alert upon hearing the dragon's roar.

"Esteemed senior, we're here to investigate the princess's whereabouts. We must attend to this urgent matter, so we'll have to continue our conversation another day," Qi Lingmu said, gazing into the distance.

Hearing the demonic dragon's roar, Chu Liang sensed that its qi wasn't weak. These young people likely wouldn't be able to handle it. Having just emerged from seclusion, he was eager to test the power of the dragon cultivation legacy.

"Fine," he said, rising abruptly. "Since we're getting along so well, let me give you a hand."

Chapter 628: United Hearts Jade

The Ancient Dragon Lair was a land of ruins.

Back then, a great battle happened for some reason, causing the underground channels of spiritual qi to collapse and severe leakage of spiritual qi. Cultivation became extremely difficult in this place. This was likely the main reason the dragons had relocated. In the years that followed, few demons or monsters ever appeared here.

However, after countless years of recovery, the Ancient Dragon Lair had regained about thirty percent of its former vitality. At the very least, its spiritual energy was now comparable to that of ordinary regions in the outside world. While it wasn't ideal for cultivation, it was enough to sustain life.

It was surprising, however, that a demonic dragon would choose to return to this place now.

According to the three from the High Moon Kingdom, the Far West had been unusually chaotic in recent years, with frequent demonic disasters affecting the kingdoms in the Western Regions. This demonic dragon was probably from the Far West.

Thus, Chu Liang proceeded with extreme caution.

He instructed the three youths to stay behind and follow stealthily. Then, he turned into a gust of wind, slicing through the sky and reaching the source of the dragon's roar in no time.

On a distant cliff, a massive tree branch jutted out, shaped into a nest-like structure with vines and greenery. It was as large as a palace.

At the edge of the nest crouched a black-winged draconic descendant, its wings outstretched. Its crimson eyes, inky black scales, and menacing demonic aura sent chills down the spine. The strong scent of blood emanating from the nest revealed it to be a wicked and corrupted creature.

In the middle of the nest was a pile of bones, and nearby lay several unconscious women.

It was clear that the dragon responsible for abducting young women was right in front of him.

As Chu Liang drew closer, the dragon seemed to catch his scent. It froze mid-stretch, narrowing its eyes as it scanned its surroundings cautiously.

"Grrr—"

Seeing this, Chu Liang decided to reveal himself. With a powerful leap, he transformed into a five-colored True Dragon and shot into the sky!

The dense, overwhelming power of his dragon breath made the black-winged dragon shudder at first. But its ferocious instincts quickly took over, and it bared its fangs at Chu Liang with a vicious roar.

"Roar—"

Chu Liang responded with a dazzling burst of light from his twin horns.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Lightning and fire struck the black-winged dragon at the same time, slamming it to the ground. It howled in pain, writhing in agony.

With just one strike, one of its wings was burned to a crisp, and the other was broken. It would never be able to fly again.

It was furious. It raised its head and spat a blood-red beam toward Chu Liang. Yet with a sharp whistle of wind, Chu Liang twisted slightly and dodged the attack. Enhanced by the breath of the Wind Dragon, his speed far surpassed that of the black-winged dragon.

Chu Liang landed and unleashed a powerful burst of Divine Dragon Fire from his mouth.

Boom—

"RAAAAAAAR!" The black-winged dragon let out a gut-wrenching wail as the fire burned through its scales, reducing them to ash with loud crackling sounds.

At this point, the black-winged dragon had completely lost the will to fight. It just wished that it could escape with its life.

Despite the searing pain, it rolled over and made a desperate attempt to flee, leaping dozens of zhang in a single bound.

Meanwhile, after transforming into a dragon, a slim, purple-gold, scale-shaped mark appeared on Chu Liang's forehead.

At this moment, the scale on Chu Liang's forehead started flashing brightly. Then, a massive divine thunderbolt of extreme thickness descended from the heavens. It was Chu Liang's first time using the Dragon God Mark. As he was unsure of the power of this Dragon God Mark, he unleashed it at full strength.

Crack—

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

A series of deafening explosions rocked the mountains, making the entire cliff shake violently.

The black-winged dragon, already weakened with its scales destroyed by the Divine Dragon Fire, was instantly engulfed by the lightning strikes. Its defenses crumbled, and its body was torn apart.

Like the legendary Five-Lightning Heart of the Sky, when the divine lightning finally dissipated, all that remained were countless scales raining down to the ground with a crackling sound.

The massive demonic dragon had been completely reduced to dust by the lightning.

Such terrifying divine lightning.

Even Chu Liang was shocked by the strength of the Dragon God Mark. Although the attack had drained almost all his energy, the combination of divine lightning and fire created an unbelievably destructive force.

"Esteemed senior!"

As the dust settled, the three youths rushed to the battlefield. Hearing the thunderous noise ahead, they grew worried and ran straight toward Chu Liang, not bothering to stay stealthy.

But upon arriving, they saw only Chu Liang standing there.

The three surrounded Chu Liang, their faces tense as they warily scanned the area. "Where's the demonic dragon?"

Chu Liang replied calmly, "It's everywhere."

...

After Chu Liang reassured the three youths that they weren't surrounded, they quickly leapt into the air and climbed up to the dragon's nest, calling out loudly for their princess.

Chu Liang followed, only to see their faces fall with disappointment.

The lair was filled with the stench of blood, and piles of bones told of countless innocent lives lost. The few young women who had survived sat trembling, their eyes filled with fear, clearly traumatized by the horror they had endured.

Qi Lingmu shook his head and said, "Our princess isn't here."

Qi Lingyue frowned, her gaze fixed on the pile of bones. "Could she have..."

"She wouldn't!" Qi Lingshan said firmly. "The princess is blessed with good fortune. There's no way she ended up as food for the demonic dragon."

"Exactly," Chu Liang agreed. "You mentioned she's only been missing for two days. Judging by the condition of these bones, they've been here for months. It's likely she wasn't taken by this dragon at all."

"You're right, esteemed senior. We can't give up hope," Qi Lingmu said. "We'll go back and continue investigating, and we will find the princess."

He then turned to Chu Liang and said, "We're deeply grateful for your help, esteemed senior. Why not come back with us to Grand Wind Hall and let us host you?"

Chu Liang was tempted to decline. He had been away for too long and wanted nothing more than to return to Mount Shu.

However, Chu Liang remembered that before disappearing, he had killed the Thirteenth Prince of the Yu Dynasty. He wasn't sure how things had played out since then. If the Celestial Charm Sect had managed to pin the blame on him, going back unprepared could cause trouble.

It was safer to gather information before showing up again.

Moreover, the High Moon Kingdom held a critical position. With Red Cotton Peak and Taotie City fiercely competing for its Crimson Moon Celestial Grass, forming good relations there could be helpful for the Mount Shu Sect.

But most importantly, there was the message he saw in the United Hearts Jade inside his storage artifact.

With that in mind, Chu Liang nodded slightly and said, "That works."

Qi Lingmu raised his hand, summoning a small airship into the sky. It was a sleek and elegant craft, big enough to seat four or five people.

He turned and gestured, saying, "Esteemed senior, please."

Qi Lingshan chimed in, "Take the esteemed senior and the girls back on the airship. I'll fly back with Ah Yue[1]."

He added wistfully, "I wish I had one too."

Qi Lingyue chuckled, "That's what you get for not winning the grand competition. If you had, that airship would've been yours."

Chu Liang smiled and said, "Why not take mine? It's a bit bigger, and we can all fit."

With that, he raised his hand and summoned the Lianglong.

With a thunderous roar, a massive airship appeared in the sky, its size overshadowing even the nest nearby. Though its colorful design was a bit garish, its materials and craftsmanship were unmistakably top-notch.

Compared to this, Qi Lingmu's small airship looked like it had disappeared completely.

You call this "a bit bigger"?

Chu Liang had once been among the wealthiest in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten, let alone when compared to youths from a small kingdom in the Western Regions. Their jaws dropped at the sight of such lavishness, and they looked at him with even greater admiration.

Qi Lingshan said in surprise, "I never would've guessed! Your clothes looked so shabby, but you turned out to be so impressive."

"Ahem," Chu Liang chuckled awkwardly. "It's called 'beggar chic.' You wouldn't get it."

As Qi Lingyue boarded the airship, she laughed and said, "Esteemed senior, you're amazing. Your beggar chic really makes you look just like a real beggar."

Once aboard, they were even more astonished.

Not only was the airship's exterior crafted from premium materials, but the interior was also equally remarkable. The interior was adorned with intricate formation patterns and equipped with top-tier enchanted tools. Its level of luxury was beyond anything they could imagine, even if they spent their entire lives exploring the Western Regions.

"Guide me to the destination," Chu Liang said with a slight smile, and the Lianglong roared to life.

While piloting the airship, Chu Liang extended his divine sense elsewhere.

Earlier, he had noticed that the United Hearts Jade was packed with messages—dozens of them, all from Jiang Yuebai over the years.

It seemed she had sent a message to him through the United Hearts Jade every time she arrived somewhere new, even though she never received a reply.

I'm leaving Mount Shu... where are you? When will you return?

I'll be traveling across the Southern Regions with my father...

We're heading to Muzhi City...

Six years' worth of messages flooded into Chu Liang's heart all at once.

The most recent one read: We're going to the Western Regions.

Chapter 629: Mystical Winged Divine Dragon Transcendent Form

After six years, the Lianglong was once again soaring through the skies.

The three youths, who were likely considered the pride of the High Moon Kingdom, explored the luxurious airship like curious children. This wasn't surprising—this airship, built with the full resources of Mount Shu Sect's wealthiest individual, far surpassed ordinary airships in quality and grandeur.

Chu Liang let them wander freely while he quietly sat meditating at the prow.

The first thing he needed to do, of course, was reply to Senior Sister Jiang's messages.

Although he had briefly awakened a few times in the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm, the hidden realm had blocked the messages from showing up in the United Hearts Jade. He had no idea that he had been getting these messages. Only after leaving the hidden realm did he realize that Jiang Yuebai had never stopped caring for him all these years.

After pondering for a while, he replied slowly.

Chu Liang: I'm back. I was healing in a hidden realm all this time. I had a dream that went on for several years. I'm in the Western Regions now. Where are you?

Chu Liang: I've missed you.

After sending the messages, he waited for a moment, but no response came.

He figured Jiang Yuebai might be busy or perhaps in a hidden realm herself, unable to receive messages from the jade. Such things couldn't be rushed, so he set it aside for now.

Next, he directed his divine sense into the White Pagoda.

Several dimly glowing Large-Headed Dolls sat in a row, completely lacking their former vibrancy. The sight filled Chu Liang with heartache.

Six years.

Six whole years... All the cultivation progress I could have made during this time had been completely wasted.

Fortunately, he had some pills stored on him. Without hesitation, he fed them to the Large-Headed Dolls. The puppets immediately sprang back to life, their energy restored, and they resumed their operations.

Among them, the Qi-Circulation Puppet, Golden-Core Puppet, and Transcendent Form Puppet had all required regular pill supplements to function. Without these, they had effectively gone on strike over the past few years.

Only the Five-Elements Puppet had managed to hold out for an extra year. Unlike the others, it consumed treasures of nature instead of pills. A single spirit herb could sustain it for a long time, allowing it to produce a substantial amount of elemental foundational qi for Chu Liang.

At this moment, Chu Liang's elemental foundational qi was abundant. With a little focused cultivation and enough resources, he could likely achieve a breakthrough soon.

His current cultivation level remained at the third stage of the fifth realm, but the Divine Nine's Profound Mental Cultivation Technique was no longer his primary cultivation legacy. Now, with the legacy of the dragons, his combat strength was comparable to someone at the pinnacle of the sixth realm.

Rather than being called a cultivator, he was better described as a humanoid True Dragon.

Tuntun had been in a deep, hibernation-like sleep nearby, seemingly trying to conserve spiritual energy.

When Chu Liang arrived and the Large-Headed Dolls started working, the noise woke Tuntun from her deep sleep.

The little creature groggily opened her eyes, and when she saw Chu Liang, her round eyes widened in disbelief. She rubbed them to make sure she wasn't imagining things.

Once she confirmed it was really Chu Liang, she bolted forward like a blur and leapt straight into his arms.

"Whoa!" Chu Liang exclaimed as he staggered slightly, surprised by how strong the little creature was.

Looking down, Chu Liang saw Tuntun gazing up at him with a pouty face. Her big, teary eyes sparkled as she softly murmured, "Hungry..."

The moment she spoke, tears streamed down her cheeks. It was clear that the poor creature was truly starving.

Thankfully, Tuntun was an abnormal creature with strong innate spiritual energy. An ordinary spirit pet wouldn't have survived this long without any food.

Chu Liang quickly rummaged through his storage artifact for food. Most of the ordinary items from six years ago were likely spoiled, and he didn't dare give her treasures of nature. Fortunately, he found some berries sealed in jade boxes, which should still be safe to eat.

Chu Liang gently coaxed little Tuntun and fed her several boxes of berries. Once she seemed satisfied and full, he carefully placed her back to rest.

With that, the matters within the White Pagoda were finally taken care of.

...

Chu Liang approached the imprint he had gotten from killing the black dragon, and a sudden wave of disorientation washed over him.

It had been six years since he last claimed a reward.

Though the passage of time in the hidden realm had blurred in the haze of his long dream, standing here now felt strangely unfamiliar. Thankfully, this process was second nature to him—something so deeply ingrained that it was impossible to forget.

He stepped forward, raised his hand, and pressed the character for "Refine."

Boom—

A burst of red light erupted, and the massive imprint disappeared, transforming into a glowing orb of light that hovered in front of him.

[Mystical Winged Divine Dragon Transcendent Form: This transcendent form can be learnt by those at the fifth realm who also inherited the legacy of the dragons. This form would grant the abilities of Dragon Breath Transformation into Wings, Mystic Scales as Enveloping Armor, Lightning-Fast Speed of Wind, Mountain-Crushing Strength, and Indestructible Metallic Scaled Armor.]

As Chu Liang looked at the jade slip containing the cultivation technique, he couldn't help but feel that saving up six years' worth of karmic luck had finally paid off.

This transcendent form was exactly what he needed at the moment.

He had yet to reach the sixth realm of cultivation, which meant that he was technically not at the level to cultivate and refine a transcendent form. Thankfully, the Mystical Winged Divine Dragon Form conveniently had no such cultivation restriction; as long as one was at the fifth realm and possessed the legacy of the dragons, it could be learned. It was just like some unique transcendent form he had seen before, which could be cultivated before the sixth realm.

With his current combat strength, he didn't care whether he could ascend to the sixth realm. However, if he wished to continue ascending to the cultivation realms in the Heavenly Gate, he would have to put enough effort into cultivation.

He could cultivate the Mystical Winged Divine Dragon Transcendent Form with his real body while assigning the Transcendent Form Puppet to cultivate the Divine Nine's Profound Transcendent Form. By then, he would possess two transcendent forms simultaneously.

The Mystical Winged Divine Dragon Transcendent Form fortified speed, strength, and defense—purely at the physical level. Meanwhile, the Divine Nine's Profound Transcendent Form enhanced foundational qi, divine sense, and casting speed, offering immense benefits in the realm of divine abilities.

Once he mastered two transcendent forms, he would become a true all-rounded warrior.

Moreover, the Mystical Winged Divine Dragon Transcendent Form drew its power from dragon breath, perfectly aligning with the high concentration of dragon lineage within him. He was an absolutely ideal match.

With this thought, Chu Liang quietly studied the Mystical Winged Divine Dragon Transcendent Form. As the dragon breath circulated within him, he started cultivating and refining this transcendent form.

For someone with the legacy of the dragons, refining this transcendent form would normally take some time.

After all, it required dragon breath to suffuse the entire body, transforming every part of one's physical vessel.

However, for Chu Liang, refining this form was like a world champion athlete enrolling in college to major in the sport they had already mastered—completing the curriculum was merely a matter of moments.

The journey from the Ancient Dragon Lair to the High Moon Kingdom was relatively short.

After some time, the three disciples of Grand Wind Hall approached Chu Liang, intending to let him know they were nearing their destination.

Suddenly, from the once quietly seated Chu Liang, a pair of pitch-black scaled wings burst forth, resembling those forged from Black Meteoric Iron. Each wing spanned more than ten zhang, blazing with an ominous, inky flame.

His entire figure rose into the air, standing solemnly aloft, exuding an aura like a god of devils!

"Ah!"

The youths, who had been about to step forward, recoiled several steps in fright, nearly falling to the ground.

The moment this transcendent form manifested, the surrounding air grew palpably heavier. The Dragon God Mark on Chu Liang's forehead began to glow, and within a hundred-li radius, all demonic beasts bearing dragon lineage felt an inexplicable fear, as though compelled to kneel in submission.

With his wings spread in midair and dragon breath surging, Chu Liang felt an overwhelming urge to let out a roar, announcing his return.

Fortunately, he noticed the group behind him in time and restrained the impulse.

He quickly deactivated the transcendent form, reverting to his elegant, brocade-clad figure as he landed lightly on the ground. With a smile, he addressed the group: "My apologies. I got a little carried away while practicing my technique and startled you all."

Though several years had passed, his appearance remained mostly unchanged. With his naturally innocent-looking, baby-faced features, Chu Liang still didn't appear particularly mature.

His disarming smile quickly put the group at ease.

Qi Lingmu said, "Esteemed senior, we've arrived at the capital of the High Moon Kingdom."

"Very well," Chu Liang said with a slight nod. "I'll pay a visit, then."

The Lianglong soared above the city, drawing the attention of the capital's citizens. Unlike the expansive Yu Dynasty, the High Moon Kingdom was no larger than a single province within the land of the Yu Dynasty. Its capital was relatively small, and even the slightest commotion quickly captivated the entire city.

Chu Liang promptly landed the airship. Guided by the disciples of Grand Wind Hall, he accompanied the rescued women as they made their way to the palace.

...

The imperial palace of the High Moon Kingdom consisted of more than ten halls, surrounded by lush greenery, clear springs, white walls, and golden tiles, exuding an elegant atmosphere. While it was no match for the imperial city in the capital of Yu, it was a wealthier kingdom than the other kingdoms in the Western Regions.

Qi Lingshan and Qi Lingyue went ahead to report their mission and arrange accommodations for the rescued women, while Qi Lingmu escorted Chu Liang directly to the palace to meet the ruler of Gaoyue.

The structure of such minor kingdoms was far less rigid than that of the dynasties in the Nine Provinces. The emergence of a powerful individual often led to usurpation of the throne. To counter this, the royal family tightly controlled cultivation resources, and all cultivator factions within the nation were directly under their jurisdiction.

Children identified at a young age as having cultivation talent were directly taken into the Grand Wind Hall, given the royal surname, and treated as members of the royal family, enjoying elevated status. The Grand Wind Hall was led either by the king himself or a close confidant of the royal family, ensuring that all cultivators in the country remained under the king's control.

The king was often one of the nation's strongest individuals—if not the strongest, then at least among the top few. Otherwise, the throne was vulnerable to being usurped.

Despite these measures, regime changes in the Western Regions remained frequent. The smaller the kingdom, the harder it was to establish a balance of power among factions, making it easier for powerful individuals to seize the throne.

The High Moon Kingdom was relatively better off, thanks to its valuable resource production, which made the immortal sects keen to ensure the region's stability.

"Your Majesty," Qi Lingmu said as he entered the imperial hall and bowed. "We did track the demonic dragon's whereabouts at the Ancient Dragon Lair and rescued several women who had been abducted, but the princess was not among them."

"Haaaaaa." The man on the throne, appearing to be in his fifties or sixties, with a chubby face full of good fortune, let out a sigh before turning to Chu Liang. "And this is?"

"This is Senior Chu Liuxiang, whom we encountered at the Ancient Dragon Lair," Qi Lingmu replied. "He is from Mount Shu and single-handedly killed the demonic dragon. He was of great help to us. We invited him to the capital to express our gratitude."

He emphasized the name Mount Shu slightly as he spoke.

It seemed this young disciple, despite his age, had some cunning. His effort to align with Chu Liang wasn't entirely out of gratitude.

"A disciple of the Mount Shu Sect?" The king's eyes lit up, and he smiled. "Our kingdom has collaborated with the Mount Shu Sect often over the past two years. Young Hero Chu, please stay in the capital for a couple of days. Tomorrow, the White Jade Fan and Mountain Tiger of Mount Shu will arrive in my capital. It will be a great opportunity for all of us to have fun together."

"Then I thank Your Majesty for your hospitality," Chu Liang said. "I came here because I heard that the princess had been abducted by a demonic dragon, and you were deeply concerned. I have some knowledge of draconic descendants and might be able to help, so I thought I'd take a look."

"Oh?" The king's smile widened. "Our small kingdom in the Western Regions lacks skilled experts. If Young Hero Chu is willing to help, that would be wonderful. I entrust this matter to you. Qi Lingmu, inform your fellow disciples in Grand Wind Hall to fully support Young Hero Chu."

Although the ruler of the kingdom wasn't required to reach the seventh realm of cultivation, he was still at the peak of the sixth realm. Without such strength, his position on the throne would be unstable. From his point of view, there was little reason to hold Chu Liang, whose aura only revealed a fifth-realm cultivation, in such high regard.

The reason for such respect likely came from the powerful Mount Shu Sect backing Chu Liang.

As they chatted pleasantly, a loud announcement suddenly echoed from outside:

"The Royal Uncle has arrived—"

For some reason, the moment those three words were spoken, the king's chubby face froze, and his expression immediately fell.

Chapter 630: Isn't All That Impressive After All

No sooner had the announcement been made than the sound of footsteps echoed, and a tall man strode into the imperial hall without waiting for the king's permission.

The man was tall and broad-shouldered, with sword-like brows and piercing eyes, appearing to be around forty years old. He wore a crimson robe with a pure black cloak flowing behind him, exuding an imposing aura as he walked.

Chu Liang immediately sensed that this man was at the seventh realm and quickly understood the subtle tension in the hall.

The disciples from Grand Wind Hall hadn't had a chance to explain the kingdom's situation to him earlier.

The royal uncle of High Moon Kingdom was the brother of the previous king, and he was around the same age as the current king. Back when they contended for the throne, the current king had been the stronger contender, both in ability and cultivation, and thus ascended the throne.

Perhaps due to the current king's focus on governing affairs, his cultivation progress had stalled. Meanwhile, the royal uncle, having experienced defeat, seemed to have gained enlightenment and became the first to achieve a breakthrough and stepped into the realm of the Heavenly Gate.

With the royal uncle becoming the only seventh-realm expert in the kingdom, the king's position had become somewhat awkward.

The king had, on occasion, suggested abdicating and giving the position of king to the royal uncle, though it was unclear as to whether such a suggestion was sincere. However, the royal uncle, having attained the seventh realm, now focused his attention more on cultivation and declined the chance to become king.

This led to a stable arrangement where the king managed affairs of the kingdom while the royal uncle oversaw Grand Wind Hall. As they were both part of the royal family, the arrangement worked.

However, the royal uncle often showed a lack of deference to the king, and though the king refrained from openly expressing displeasure, tensions inevitably built up over time.

"Your Majesty," the royal uncle stepped forward, giving a slight bow before stating, "The envoy from Taotie City has arrived, and I have specially brought him here to see you."

"Taotie City?" The king frowned. "Didn't the officials of the royal court already decide on the day before yesterday that we would work with the Mount Shu Sect this year?"

"The envoy from Taotie City has traveled a great distance, and they have offered equally generous conditions. Your Majesty should at least hear them out before deciding," the royal uncle insisted.

"But the Mount Shu Sect had not only offered us a good price, but they had allowed us to send a disciple of the Grand Wind Hall to their sect each year to learn their skills and techniques. That is something Taotie City simply cannot match," the king said, his expression turning slightly displeased.

Listening from the side, Chu Liang couldn't help but blink in surprise. The Mount Shu Sect even offered to accept a disciple from the Grand Wind Hall? That is quite a clever move.

For a small kingdom like the High Moon Kingdom, purchasing cultivation resources with spirit stones was important, but having enough powerful experts was even more critical. Cultivators raised in their environment would never match those trained in the immortal sects ranked in the Divine Nine.

In the past, neighboring kingdoms might not have valued the Mount Shu Sect as much. However, six years ago, Mount Shu's decisive victory at the Assembly of Immortal Sects had left a profound impact.

This meant that the disciples of the Mount Shu Sect were the strongest of this generation.

Such influence was the reason disciples of various immortal sects were willing to risk their lives for glory.

If the youths of the High Moon Kingdom had the chance to cultivate and study at Mount Shu, they would return completely transformed. One disciple per year was no small opportunity, and the king would undoubtedly prioritize sending his own children. Upon their return, they would easily outshine their peers at Grand Wind Hall.

Even if the price of Crimson Moon Celestial Grass continued to rise, the benefits of this arrangement far outweighed the cost.

For Mount Shu Sect, there was no need to spend any extra resources. This was an advantage that the Taotie City lacked.

After careful consideration, the civil and military officials of the High Moon Kingdom decided not to work with Taotie City this year, choosing instead to build a favorable relationship with Mount Shu Sect.

Yet now, the royal uncle had stepped in to interfere.

The king could easily guess that Taotie City, realizing they had no chance with the royal court, had likely bribed the royal uncle. While their offer to the High Moon Kingdom might not have been particularly generous, the bribe to the royal uncle was surely substantial.

The royal uncle frowned and said, "It's only natural to compare offers in business. Why limit ourselves to just one option? Even if Your Majesty meets with them, how would the Mount Shu Sect ever find out?"

"Hmm..." The king cast a glance at Chu Liang.

“I can pretend I didn’t hear anything,” Chu Liang said seriously.

“You’re from Mount Shu?” The royal uncle turned sharply to look at him.

“Heh.” Chu Liang smiled. “I’m just passing through and don’t represent Red Cotton Peak. I haven’t returned to Mount Shu in years, so there’s no need to worry.”

“As I thought...” The royal uncle said, turning back around. “If someone like White Jade Fan or Mountain Tiger had come personally, that would be another story. If the Mount Shu Sect actually sent some nobody, that would be looking down on us and the High Moon Kingdom!”

“Enough,” the king said with a wave of his hand. “Bring in the envoy from Taotie City. Let’s hear what he has to say.”

...

An attendant immediately brought two people into the hall.

On the left stood a middle-aged man dressed in a long robe with a jade belt. An embroidered insignia on his chest marked him as a second-rank honored ally of Taotie City.

In recent years, Taotie City, eager to compete with Red Cotton Peak and the Immortals’ Square, had been rapidly promoting its members. As a result, the number of ranked honored allies increased and the title was no longer as valuable and prestigious as before.

The middle-aged man had a pale face with a faint mustache, and his sharp, bright eyes revealed the cunning of an experienced merchant.

Beside him stood a young man with messy, shoulder-length hair and pitch-black eyes. His wary gaze swept across the room, observing everything in an odd, cautious manner.

“I am the Second-Rank Honored Ally Tian Mingtai of Taotie City,” the middle-aged man said. “Greetings to the King of High Moon Kingdom.”

“Shopkeeper Tian, there’s no need for such formalities,” the king replied. Though he had seemed reluctant earlier, his tone remained polite. “You’ve traveled a long way, and if High Moon Kingdom has not welcomed you properly, I ask for your understanding.”

“Ah.” Shopkeeper Tian smiled and said, “The royal uncle has already shown great hospitality, so how could there be any neglect? Today, I’ve come to discuss the matter of the Crimson Moon Celestial Grass.”

“Well…” The king mused, “You may share Taotie City’s proposal.”

“We are aware of the price Red Cotton Peak offered you,” Shopkeeper Tian began. “On that basis, Taotie City is willing to increase the price by another ten percent. The condition remains the same: all the Crimson Moon Celestial Grass produced must be exclusively supplied to us.”

“Haaaaa.” The king let out a long sigh. “Neither of your sides is willing to share the Crimson Moon Celestial Grass, which puts us in a tough spot. As a small kingdom in the Western Regions, how could we dare offend either a faction in the Divine Nine or Terrestrial Ten?”

“We’re aware of Mount Shu Sect’s offer to accept disciples from Grand Wind Hall,” Shopkeeper Tian continued. “In response, we can promise that if High Moon Kingdom partners with us, we, too, will accept one disciple from Grand Wind Hall each year. However, not to Taotie City—but to the Penglai Supreme Sect.”

“Hmm?” At these words, the king’s eyebrows immediately relaxed. “Is this true?”

The others in the hall, upon hearing this, showed visible astonishment.

Although the Mount Shu Sect had seen tremendous growth in recent years through Red Cotton Peak, offering top-tier benefits for its disciples, it had only managed to win a single Assembly of Immortal Sects. The unshakable dominance of Penglai Supreme Sect as the leader of the righteous path remained unmatched.

If a choice had to be made, Penglai Supreme Sect would undoubtedly be the far superior option compared to Mount Shu Sect.

In the past, if any kingdom in the Western Regions managed to produce a disciple accepted by Penglai Supreme Sect, the entire nation would prosper once that disciple rose to prominence.

However, such occurrences were extremely rare.

The king had been merely going through the motions earlier, but now he was genuinely tempted.

“Of course, the Penglai Supreme Sect wouldn’t agree without a price,” Tian Mingtai continued, “but the cost will be entirely covered by Taotie City. And to be frank with Your Majesty, Mount Shu Sect’s current strength is nothing but a flash in the pan. Red Cotton Peak... won’t last much longer.”

“Well then...” The king chuckled. “The conflicts between the factions in the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten are none of our concern. But as for the matter of the Crimson Moon Celestial Grass, we can certainly discuss it further.”

“I haven’t finished yet,” Shopkeeper Tian continued. “When we arrived, we heard about the disappearance of your princess, and I was deeply concerned. So, I specially brought along a third-rank Honored Ally, Han Lu, from our city. He’s an expert at locating people and objects and will certainly help Your Majesty find the princess.”

As he spoke, he gestured toward the young man beside him.

The young man named Han Lu raised his eyes to glance at the king and gave a slight nod, appearing rather aloof.

“But I’ve already entrusted this matter to Young Hero Chu...” The king glanced at Chu Liang, looking troubled.

“Just have this Mount Shu Sect’s disciple leave,” the royal uncle said firmly.

Upon hearing that Chu Liang was a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect, Shopkeeper Tian’s eyes flickered. His sources had informed him that Mount Shu’s representatives were only expected to arrive tomorrow; he hadn’t expected that one would already be here in the main hall of the High Moon Kingdom.

If this information were to reach the Mount Shu Sect ahead of time, the Red Cotton Peak might then have time to prepare a counteroffer, potentially causing unexpected complications.

Chu Liang saw through the situation instantly. He understood why the king had allowed him, a disciple of Mount Shu, to stay and listen for so long. The king likely wanted him to relay this information back, so that when Red Cotton Peak's representatives arrived tomorrow, they could present a stronger offer.

In essence, the king was subtly ensuring the message got passed along.

Chu Liang smiled but hadn't yet responded when Shopkeeper Tian suddenly spoke up, his tone sharp.

"This disciple of the Mount Shu Sect is only at the fifth realm. What use could he possibly be? How dare he take on the task of finding the princess? If something happens to her, can you bear the responsibility?"

As he finished, he suddenly struck out, unleashing a powerful pressure that crashed down on Chu Liang like a towering mountain.

Chu Liang immediately understood his intention.

This seasoned schemer wouldn't lose his temper for no reason. It was clear he was trying to provoke Chu Liang into retaliating so he'd have an excuse to strike back. While he wouldn't dare kill him, he could at least injure him badly enough to knock him out for a day or two. That way, the Mount Shu Sect would lose any chance to gain the upper hand before their representatives arrived tomorrow.

As Chu Liang was a cunning fox as well, he naturally would not be fooled by such schemes.

Instead, Chu Liang simply smiled and calmly asked, "Shopkeeper Tian, what is your cultivation level?"

"You can't tell?" Tian Mingtai sneered, intensifying his pressure until it surged like an unstoppable tide. "I am but a humble cultivator. After over forty years of effort, I have reached the later stage of the sixth realm."

"Is that so?" Chu Liang replied with a slight nod.

Boom!

In the blink of an eye, Chu Liang appeared exactly where Shopkeeper Tian had been standing, calmly retracting his right foot.

As for Tian Mingtai, he had been sent flying by Chu Liang's kick, crashing straight through the palace wall, soaring across several wide corridors, and finally landing with a thud in another hall far away.

On the other side, palace maids and attendants screamed in panic, their shrieks echoing through the chaos.

Everyone in the hall stared at Chu Liang in stunned silence, including the king and the royal uncle. None of them had expected a fifth-realm cultivator to strike so boldly against someone at the sixth realm.

Even more shocking was the fact that Chu Liang had nearly taken him out with a single blow.

This doesn't make sense, right? That was the thought on everyone's mind.

Under everyone's gaze, Chu Liang nonchalantly pulled back his foot and resumed his calm, smiling expression.

"The sixth realm..." he said with a casual shrug, "isn't all that impressive after all."