

M. Slaying 671

Chapter 671: Engulf the Nine Provinces

"Ziyang!"

The moment Wang Xuanling saw his disciple, he strode forward and flicked his fingers. A streak of golden light hissed as the seal was sliced apart.

Xu Ziyang, seated on the ground, snapped his eyes open. Seeing the two before him, he looked slightly surprised. "Esteemed teacher... Junior Brother Chu?!"

"We mustn't stay here for too long. Let's talk when we are out of here," Chu Liang said quickly, stepping forward.

"Let's get out immediately," Wang Xuanling said.

The pavilion walls were sturdy, but under Tuntun's relentless gnawing, even the refined structure wouldn't hold up past two bites.

"No..." Chu Liang thought for a moment before shaking his head. "If we leave like this, we'll lose the chance to use these identities again."

The Sea Master and Huo Tianya were thoroughly convinced they were Xuan Yinzi and the Violet Gold Marquess. If they simply dug a hole and slipped away, their covers would be blown for good.

"What are you thinking?" Wang Xuanling asked.

By now, he had grown accustomed to not keeping pace with Chu Liang's thought process. There was a strange comfort in surrendering to the flow and letting his mind rest.

"Senior Brother Xu, put on my robe and leave first," Chu Liang said, slipping off his black robe and handing it to Xu Ziyang. To be thorough, he even gave him the Violet Gold Marquess's token. "You two can walk out the front door like this. I'll leave on my own later."

"If you give him your identity and someone discovers you, what will you do?" Wang Xuanling asked urgently.

"Don't worry," Chu Liang replied calmly, pulling out another black robe along with a bronze mask. "I've got another identity ready."

Without hesitation, he slipped the mask on right in front of the teacher and disciple in a skilled manner.

Wang Xuanling and Xu Ziyang were so confused.

The two of them were somewhat familiar with the bronze mask.

To be blunt, even a demon that had cultivated for hundreds of years and taken human form might not have the right to wear such a mask.

But after seeing Chu Liang casually obtain a full set of tokens from the Dark King Sect, this didn't seem all that strange anymore.

Or perhaps, after everything he had been through, nothing felt shocking anymore.

Wang Xuanling patted Chu Liang on the shoulder. "I don't need to remind you to be careful. You've always handled things well. But I'll leave you with this..."

The old man looked into Chu Liang's eyes and said sincerely, "Stay on the right path, and avoid stepping into the shadows."

Hearing this, Chu Liang wasn't sure whether to laugh or sigh. All he could say was, "Senior Uncle, I'll keep that in mind."

After the warning, Wang Xuanling led Xu Ziyang downstairs, casually making up an excuse to leave. Though their appearance and aura had shifted slightly, their disguises were convincing enough to slip past the shrimp soldiers and crab generals without issue.

The Sea Master and Huo Tianya were engrossed in conversation with the demon envoy and didn't have time to inspect closely, allowing the two to leave the pavilion smoothly.

Chu Liang remained upstairs, listening closely. After some time, when he finally heard Immortal Yuan Lu and the West Sea diabolical cultivators leave the room next door, he quietly sprang into action.

First, he had Tuntun gnaw through the wall on the far side, then through the walls of Immortal Yuan Lu's quarters. Finally, Tuntun chewed through the outer pavilion wall, and Chu Liang slipped out with a light leap.

It seemed these people placed immense trust in the pavilion's durability. Aside from a single protective seal, there were no other defenses. However, they hadn't anticipated Chu Liang's secret weapon—Tuntun.

Even if there was no path ahead, there would be one once Tuntun was done eating.

As Chu Liang retraced his steps to the whirlpool area, he found it no longer empty and quiet. Instead, the place was packed with countless sea demons.

For a brief moment, the air trembled as demonic qi surged skyward!

A bizarre assortment of strange and grotesque sea demons crowded beneath a high platform, dancing wildly with expressions of fervor and devotion.

Atop the platform sat a golden toad, as tall as a man. It was the very same toad he had seen sealed inside the pavilion.

Beneath the toad stood a girl with a fish tail, her head lifted as she sang.

"Starlight falls upon the sea of blood, the moon shines on a boat of bones~"

"..."

The familiar song was the same one Chu Liang had heard earlier in the dense fog at sea. As her haunting voice echoed through the air, the golden toad atop the platform slowly began to open its eyes.

Just then, Chu Liang heard a sudden voice transmission.

"Come here!"

...

Chu Liang followed the voice and slipped behind a broken wall, where he found Wang Xuanling and Xu Ziyang, both dressed in black robes, silently observing from the shadows.

With so many sea demons gathered, there was no way they could openly leave through the whirlpool above.

Chu Liang and asked, "What's going on here?"

Xu Ziyang whispered, "This is a ritual of the Ruins of Return Cult. They're waiting for the decree of the South Sea's Hallowed Mother."

"The South Sea's Hallowed Mother?" Chu Liang blinked. "Wasn't she a ninth-realm existence who died long ago?"

"I'm not sure..." Xu Ziyang replied. "But it seems these sea demons treat this golden toad as her envoy. By praying to it, they hope to receive her decree. Only the South Sea's Hallowed Mother could command all sea demons like this."

"Are you saying all the sea demons of the South Sea are followers of the Ruins of Return Cult?" Chu Liang asked in surprise.

"Likely not. If all sea demons belonged to this cult, this cult would have dominated the world by now," Wang Xuanling said as he shook his head. "The Sea Master leads the Ruins of Return Cult, but he doesn't have the authority to command all the sea demons. The chaos in the South Sea with countless sea demons rushing to their deaths must have been a decree of the Hallowed Mother. And now, this ritual that they are doing now would be their way to reply to the Hallowed Mother."

Having arrived earlier, the two had observed for quite some time, gathering more information than Chu Liang.

Hearing this, Chu Liang found it truly astonishing.

The demons of the sea far outnumbered those on land for various reasons. Yet, because they rarely competed with humans for living space, little was known about them.

If all sea demons worshipped the South Sea's Hallowed Mother, how immense would their united force be? Chu Liang wondered.

Then, a chilling thought crept into his mind.

Could the South Sea's Hallowed Mother... still be alive?

Just then, the golden toad opened its eyes and mouth, spitting out a beam of golden light.

The golden light struck the singing mermaid. She trembled, and her eyes flashed with a brilliant white glow. She threw her head back, releasing a cry of pain that echoed across the gathering.

"Aaaaaahhhh!!!" she cried out. Then abruptly turned to face the sea demons, proclaiming loudly, "The Hallowed Mother commands all her descendants to disregard life and death! In order for her to come back to life, the South Sea must engulf the nine provinces!"

Upon hearing her voice, the once-silent crowd erupted into fervent cries for battle.

"Engulf the nine provinces! Engulf the nine provinces!"

Wang Xuanling's brow furrowed. "This war... could it truly have been initiated by the Hallowed Mother?"

"No," Chu Liang said, shaking his head as the fragments of information gradually came together in his mind.

He had previously heard rumors of a false Golden Toad of Many Treasures, believed to be the envoy of the Hallowed Mother. In the pavilion, however, a black toad had been imprisoned...

The Ruins of Return Cult was a hardline faction devoted to the South Sea's Hallowed Mother, notorious for slaughtering any humans who dared set foot in the Ruins of Return...

The Ruins of Return Cult could only command all sea demons through the decree of the Hallowed Mother... and Huo Tianya was a member of the Celestial Charm Sect, who always sought to sow chaos wherever he went.

That means...

"This golden toad is a fake," Chu Liang said firmly, lifting his head. "This must be a scheme by the Celestial Charm Sect!"

Chapter 672: What Are You Thinking Now?

"I only agreed to meet the divine envoy out of respect for the Celestial Charm Sect, but this is basically bullying."

Inside the pavilion, the meeting between the demons of the South Sea and the demons of the Far West seemed far from pleasant.

A thin elder sat at the head seat. His expression was usually unreadable—neither happy nor angry, appearing as calm as the deep sea.

Yet, the moment his face darkened, it felt like towering waves crashing down. The pressure in the room became suffocating, and those around him instinctively held their breath.

Across from him sat the divine envoy. With the mask in place, it was impossible to tell if his face showed any discomfort under the crushing pressure. However, the pair of eyes that peeked through the mask revealed an unwavering calmness.

Huo Tianya waved his hand with a smile. "Sea Master, don't be angry. Let's talk this through calmly. Everything can be negotiated."

At his words, the Sea Master lifted the heavy weight of his aura.

This scene felt strange, as it was a human who was mediating the meeting between the sea demons and the land demons.

Once the dominating pressure was lifted, the divine envoy spoke slowly. "Currently, Abbot Dayu of Buddhist Cloud Monastery is suppressing the South Sea with the Dharma Lotus Platform. None of you sea demons can rise to the surface, let alone set foot on land. While we can lift the blockade, it won't be easy, and it's very risky for us. It's not unreasonable to ask for the Sea-Devouring Demonic Urn as compensation."

"You think I don't know your plans?" the Sea Master said gravely. "We're after the same goal. To put it plainly, we are competitors. There can only be one—"

"Indeed, there can only be one," the divine envoy interjected. "But Sea Master, if we weaken each other, neither of us will prevail. If we cooperate, the final victor will likely emerge from our two factions... That's better than letting someone else claim it."

Huo Tianya smiled faintly and said, "To be fair, we expected the sea to be suppressed by the Dharma Lotus Platform. Even if the demons of the Far West don't get involved, we at the Celestial Charm Sect will step in. This is the duty of an ally. Honestly, it is a bit excessive to ask for the Sea-Devouring Demonic Urn in exchange for helping the sea demons with this."

Huo Tianya continued saying, "If we don't take the Great Dao of Devouring within the Sea-Devouring Demonic Urn into consideration, this urn is ranked forty-two on the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures. Isn't it worth way more than this favor?"

The divine envoy glanced at him and then said, "What do you have in mind, Mr. Huo? Since your sect initiated this meeting, surely you have a suggestion you'd like to make?"

"This isn't my will; it's the Celestial Master's," Huo Tianya replied. He paused and then said, "We shall exchange a Great Dao for another Great Dao."

The divine envoy's gaze sharpened. "Hmm?"

"You already know what the Ruins of Return Cult seeks... the Bottomless Sea.[1]"

"There aren't many treasures that contain the Great Dao of the Bottomless Sea. What do you really want, Sea Master?" the divine envoy asked.

"The Azure Wave Lamp," the Sea Master replied immediately. "The Azure Wave Lamp is ranked sixty-seventh in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures. If we trade it for the Sea-Swallowing Demonic Urn, it should still be a profit for you. The extra value will count as repayment for lifting the suppression done by the Buddhist Cloud Monastery."

"Agreed," the divine envoy said as he rose swiftly. "I will return and report this to the two demon kings. If they find it acceptable, I will bring the treasure to the South Sea for the exchange."

"One more thing..." the Sea Master added, "I hope we can establish a mutual understanding. Since we are cooperating, regardless of which side succeeds, we must ensure that the other has a place in the future world."

"Of course." The divine envoy nodded. "As fellow demons of the mortal realm, there is no reason for us to kill one another."

...

"Sea demons are unlike the demons of the Far West—they have never sought conflict with humans, yet now they suddenly wish to invade the land," Chu Liang said. "Celestial Charm Sect must be behind this. That golden toad is clearly a fake."

"Are you saying there is no decree from the South Sea's Hallowed Mother, and that Celestial Charm Sect and the Ruins of Return Cult created that fake golden toad to forge a false decree from the Hallowed Mother?" Wang Xuanling asked.

"Exactly," Chu Liang replied. "That must be the case."

The Ruins of Return Cult was the hardline faction among the sea demons, driven by great ambition. However, this faction alone was not strong enough to ignite a war that could stir the entire South Sea. They could only achieve this if all the sea demons supported them.

The only figure who could make the sea demons willingly sacrifice their lives was the Hallowed Mother.

The Celestial Charm Sect must have contacted the Ruins of Return Cult and given them a way to fake a decree from the Hallowed Mother.

"But that mermaid was able to receive the decree from the Hallowed Mother..." Xu Ziyang said as he glanced at the singing mermaid, his eyes filled with doubt. "Could there be more to this?"

"Most sea demons have no desire to invade the land. If we can expose this scheme, we might be able to prevent this disaster," Chu Liang said. "If not, judging by how the sea demons are behaving, trouble will rise again sooner or later."

"I know of a sea demon who might be able to help us," Xu Ziyang said suddenly.

Chu Liang and Wang Xuanling turned to him in unison.

Xu Ziyang began to recount, "Before I entered the Ruins of Return, I actually encountered a mermaid. At the time, chaos had just started stirring up within the South Sea, and countless sea demons were attacking. Amidst the chaos, I suddenly heard a song..."

As he slowly told his story, Chu Liang and Wang Xuanling learned of his past encounter.

It turned out that Xu Ziyang had not been captured by the Ruins of Return Cult in the beginning.

When chaos started erupting within the South Sea, he instructed his junior brothers and sisters to leave first while he stayed behind to hold off the swarm of demons and find an opportunity to escape later.

Just as the sea demons lunged forward, a haunting, ethereal song echoed from nearby. The serene voice approached, driving away the ferocious sea demons.

The sea demons bared their fangs and claws from a distance but dared not advance on Xu Ziyang. They could only leave in anger.

Xu Ziyang then saw a beautiful young woman draped in light gauze, her ivory skin glowing under cascading black hair. Her bright, lively eyes shimmered like gentle waves, and suspended in the sea, faint silver scales could be seen at her waist.

Xu Ziyang recognized her as a mermaid.

"Human, leave quickly. Go to the shore and warn everyone to stay away from the South Sea," the mermaid girl said softly. "A disaster is about to happen here!"

"Understood," Xu Ziyang replied without hesitation. "Thank you."

As he turned to leave, several shadowy figures suddenly emerged behind the mermaid, wielding sharp blades and exuding a murderous aura, lunging toward her!

"Ah!"

The mermaid cried out, twisting gracefully to evade, but a chain lashed out from one of the attackers, striking her. Blood instantly spilled from her lips.

"Who are you?" the young mermaid shouted.

They were clearly after her. All four of them wore black robes and masks, exuding a surge of diabolical aura that erupted into the sky. In an instant, they closed in, encircling her.

The young mermaid was physically weak, but she had the ability to command sea demons. However, she had just commanded all the sea demons nearby to get out of here. And so, when this sudden attack happened, it was too late for her to summon those sea demons again.

The attackers' cultivation levels were formidable. Each of them cast multiple chains, quickly weaving a net around her, preparing to capture her.

"Hey!"

At that moment, a flash of sword light streaked forth like lightning!

Slash!

One of the masked cultivators was cleaved in half on the spot.

It was Xu Ziyang, who had just left. He sensed that the mermaid was being attacked by the diabolical cultivators and immediately came back to her rescue.

Though the diabolical cultivators were powerful, their cultivation level was lower than the seventh realm. They were no match for him.

As Xu Ziyang's sword qi surged, three of the diabolical cultivators were slain while the last one took advantage of this opportunity to flee with a traversing technique..

Blood stained the sea red.

"Thank you..." the mermaid said weakly.

Xu Ziyang quickly helped her to a nearby reef, tending to her wounds. It was then he learned that she was the princess of the merfolk.

The merfolk held a revered status among sea demons, as legend claimed that the South Sea's Hallowed Mother herself was a mermaid. Their lineage, being half-human and half-fish, valued peace. Only the young women of the merfolk were qualified to serve as envoys of the Hallowed Mother's decree.

As the noble princess of the merfolk, she had long shouldered this sacred responsibility.

After a brief exchange, Xu Ziyang did not stay any longer. He was still in a rush to return and help the coastal villagers evacuate. With the sudden tsunami and the crisis caused by the demons, who knew how many lives by the sea were lost?

The merfolk princess's eyes were filled with sorrow as she said, "I don't understand why the Hallowed Mother has suddenly become so unfamiliar... or why she would issue such a decree."

As Xu Ziyang turned to leave, the waves suddenly surged. A middle-aged man with a cold expression descended from the sky, raising his hand to strike them both down!

Hearing Xu Ziyang's description of the middle-aged man, Chu Liang immediately recognized the figure. "Immortal Yuan Lu!"

At the critical moment, Xu Ziyang pushed the merfolk princess further away into the sea and began fighting Immortal Yuan Lu. Even though this Immortal Yuan Lu was just a clone, it was at the seventh realm. The strength of this clone far surpassed what Xu Ziyang could withstand for long.

In the end, he only managed to release a golden loach before being captured by Immortal Yuan Lu. He lost consciousness, and when he woke up, he found himself in the presence of his esteemed teacher and Chu Liang.

He had no idea where the merfolk princess had gone, but as he watched the ceremony unfold, he deduced that the princess must have been injured. The mermaid singing at the ceremony, bearing the Hallowed Mother's decree, was not the princess. It was likely that the princess' injuries had led to someone else taking on the role of receiving the divine will.

"The Sea Master... Huo Tianya... Yuan Lu... and perhaps even demons from the Far West..." Chu Liang pondered, gradually piecing together their scheme. "It appears not all sea demons are wicked. In fact, the majority do not want to start a war. If that's the case, we might still be able to find the merfolk princess. But..."

As Chu Liang spoke, he suddenly lowered his head, a look of confusion crossing his face.

Seeing that Chu Liang was lost in thought, Wang Xuanling asked, "What are you thinking now?"

"I'm just curious..." Chu Liang replied, looking up, "How did the first merfolk come into existence?"

Chapter 673: Resurrected

Deep within the Ruins of Return was a vast and shadowy lake. At its center stood a jagged and rugged island, scattered with faint traces of ancient buildings.

This was Merfolk Island.

Few sea demons were worthy of entering the Ruins of Return, and even fewer could survive the dry conditions at its center. Only the merfolk had the power to create a livable space in such harsh conditions.

As envoys of the Hallowed Mother, the merfolk held a revered place among sea demons.

Finding this secluded place wasn't difficult. Wang Xuanling and his two disciples intercepted a straggling sea demon, "politely" asked, and got their answer.

The golden loach had returned to Xu Ziyang earlier. He released it again, and the creature slipped into the water, circled once, and swiftly shot off in one direction.

Chu Liang had asked about it earlier. The creature was called "Xunlong," a mystical spirit beast that could track items through spiritual sensing. Anything it had seen up close could be found again. Despite its ordinary appearance as a large golden loach, fewer than three existed in the world.

Xu Ziyang had found the loach frozen in a hidden realm, rescued it, and earned its loyalty. Since then, the creature recognized Xu Ziyang as its master.

As for the age of this creature, it was at least three thousand years old.

Not a single one of its whiskers had grown in vain.

As they crossed the waters to Merfolk Island, the three concealed themselves carefully. The loach, slower on land, lagged behind. Fortunately, most of the merfolk had left the island and they could easily avoid the remaining small number of merfolks.

After weaving through the island, they arrived at a reef on the far side.

A mermaid stood at the edge, gazing over the lake. Her black hair flowed behind her slender frame, and she radiated an ethereal presence.

Xu Ziyang stepped forward. At the sound of his footsteps, the girl turned.

She was indeed the merfolk princess.

Her eyes lit up at the sight of Xu Ziyang. "Young hero?"

However, she quickly noticed the two figures behind him—an old man who hardly looked trustworthy and a baby-faced youth who was smiling at her.

The merfolk princess grew cautious, tensing up once more. Likely due to her recent encounters with danger, she straightened and took a step back, ready to dive into the water at any moment.

"Princess, don't worry. This is my teacher and junior brother. We mean no harm," Xu Ziyang said clearly.

Hearing his deep, steady voice filled with sincerity, the merfolk princess hesitated but slowly lowered her guard.

"Why have you come to my Merfolk Island?" she asked.

"Princess, we specifically came to see you," Xu Ziyang said honestly.

"Ah..." The merfolk princess murmured, lowering her head in surprise. "W-Why would you come all this way for me? We only met by chance. I don't even know your name... and you brought your family too... How does that make sense? And..."

"Princess, what do you mean?" Xu Ziyang asked in a puzzled tone. "There are now traitors who are using the Hallowed Mother's name to stir up chaos in the South Sea. We came to warn you. Who else would we tell if not you?"

"Oh." The merfolk princess quickly lifted her head, the flush on her cheeks fading instantly. She casually brushed her hair aside. "So it's about that."

"Princess, are you alright?" Xu Ziyang asked.

"I'm fine," the merfolk princess replied with a smile.

She paused, then her eyes widened suddenly. "What?! Someone is faking the Hallowed Mother's decree and causing chaos in the South Sea?"

Xu Ziyang looked puzzled, thinking to himself, She seems smart, so why does she suddenly seem not so bright?

Chu Liang shot a teasing glance at Wang Xuanling and whispered, "Senior Brother Xu is usually sharp. Why is he so clueless about things like this?"

"There's no helping it," Wang Xuanling said. Then, as if recalling something, he sighed and added, "Disciples always take after their teachers."

Chu Liang's eyes widened. "We were just talking. Why insult me?"

...

After settling down for a long discussion, the three men explained everything to the merfolk princess.

The merfolk royal family all bore the surname Baozhu, and the princess' full name was Baozhu Liange. And so, the three addressed her as Princess Liange.[1]

After hearing Chu Liang's deduction, Princess Liange frowned deeply. "I sensed something was wrong last time. The Hallowed Mother's decree, usually delivered by the golden toad, would always feel warm and gentle. But this time, it was icy cold. Still, the Sea Master insisted on carrying it out, and my mother felt we couldn't disobey it."

"They likely targeted you because they feared you would uncover the deception and expose their scheme," Chu Liang said.

"Yes!" Princess Liange stood up. "I must inform my mother immediately. She must lead the sea demons against the Sea Master! We can't let him start a war and bring chaos into our homeland."

The queen of the merfolks held great prestige among the sea demons. If anyone could openly oppose the Sea Master, it would be her.

In truth, tensions between the merfolk queen and the Sea Master had existed for years.

The Ruins of Return Cult, led by the Sea Master, was originally founded to protect the Ruins of Return and uphold the sanctity of the Hallowed Mother from outsiders.

However, under the Sea Master's leadership over the past few centuries, the cult grew increasingly aggressive, expanding beyond the Ruins of Return.

They began hunting humans, killing countless fishermen, which led to many cultivators launching a campaign to encircle and eliminate them.

Obviously, the sea demons supported such acts of vengeance, but the queen of the merfolks believed that this would instead spark greater conflict. She wished for the Sea Master to focus solely on guarding the Ruins of Return.

Scattered across the vast ocean, the sea demons were already disorganized. With two leaders who often disagreed, unity was impossible.

The only reason they had managed to unite and launch an assault on the nine provinces was the supposed will of the Hallowed Mother.

If the decree was proven false, the merfolk queen's call to action would surely rally the majority of sea demons who sought peace.

Princess Liange led the three along the waterways to the heart of Merfolk Island, where they arrived at a grand palace.

By the standards of the Ruins of Return, the palace was luxurious, though it really was just a simple white structure with no decorations at all. Based on the color, this palace seemed to be built by the bones of a colossal creature.

With the princess leading the way, the merfolk guards did not stop them and the group managed to arrive at the great hall smoothly.

Atop the platform sat a pool, with a throne resting within it. The merfolk queen lounged on the throne, her well-proportioned figure draped in golden silk robes. Her long hair cascaded down as she lifted her sharp gaze, eyeing the group with clear hostility.

"Liange, how dare you bring human cultivators here?" the queen asked sternly. "Did they threaten you?"

"No, Mother!" Princess Liange quickly explained. "Young Hero Xu is the one who saved me. They mean no harm. I came to tell you about the Sea Master's schemes!"

Without delay, she told her mother everything Chu Liang had told her, which was basically about how the golden toad was a fake and that it was all a scheme by the Celestial Charm Sect.

A long silence followed.

After a moment of deep thought, the merfolk queen suddenly flew up.

"Follow me," she said.

Princess Liange obeyed her mother without question. Xu Ziyang and the others, unsure of what was happening, followed closely behind.

She circled around the throne and pressed something behind it, activating a hidden mechanism. The wall shifted open, revealing a vast golden pool. Its surface was so still it looked like solid gold.

"If you wish to find proof that the golden toad is fake, you must dive downward," the merfolk queen declared before leaping into the pool.

Princess Liange hesitated for a moment before following her mother.

Wang Xuanling exchanged glances with his two disciples before diving in as well. Because the pool was entirely golden, they could not see clearly. They could only rely on their divine sense to detect what was ahead and follow Princess Liange's shadow downward.

Though the pool appeared small, it was astonishingly deep. After a long descent, they reached the bottom and found a cavern.

As they entered the cavern, they realized that it was completely dry inside. Not a drop of the golden water outside had seeped through the opening of the cavern.

Yet, upon entering the cavern, they found only Princess Liange while the merfolk queen was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is my mother?" Princess Liange asked, staring at the three in confusion.

"Shit." Chu Liang immediately sensed something was wrong, but just as he tried to turn back, something unexpected happened right before his eyes.

The golden pool outside the cavern solidified almost instantly, transforming into a massive, solid gold pillar that sealed the entrance completely.

"A trap?"

Wang Xuanling furrowed his brows, raising the Demon-Slaying Sword and slashing down with force.

Slash!

The blade cut through, carving a crack several chi long. But it was clear that digging their way out this way would take an indeterminate amount of time.

"Chu Liang, it seems we'll need your spirit beast, Tuntun," Wang Xuanling said.

Hah. When you don't need it, you call it the Heaven-Devouring Bug. When you do need it, it's Tuntun, Chu Liang grumbled inwardly. As he stared at the massive golden pillar brimming with spiritual energy, he mumbled to himself, "Wouldn't this fill Tuntun to about eighty percent?"

As the three pondered how to break out of the cavern, the voice of the merfolk queen echoed from outside.

"This is the Merfolk Cavern. Go forward. Everything you wish to know can be found within."

...

"Merfolk Cavern?" Princess Liange looked utterly surprised upon hearing her mother's voice. She muttered, "This is a forbidden ground for the merfolk, accessible only to the queens of each generation. So this is where it is?"

"The queen of each generation?"

Wang Xuanling, Xu Ziyang, and Chu Liang exchanged glances.

After a moment of thought, Chu Liang said, "I think we should go in and take a look. If the merfolk queen's goal was to trap us, she wouldn't use her only daughter as bait. I believe she must have something important she wants us to know."

"Then why not just tell us directly? Why would she use such a method?" Wang Xuanling asked.

"Maybe we'll understand once we see it," Chu Liang said as he drew the Ghost-Slaying Sword of Divine Light, using its red glow to light up the cavern ahead. Then, he took a stride forward and led the way.

It was yet another narrow passage. The four of them proceeded cautiously, and after walking for an unknown amount of time, they noticed a change in the walls around them. The tough golden hue gave way to a raised black surface, with various carvings beginning to appear.

"This seems to be a mural, telling an ancient story..." Chu Liang said, gently brushing his hand over it.

Above the mural, intricate symbols were etched.

Chu Liang commented, "These seem like... words?"

"This is the ancient script of the merfolk," Princess Liange replied.

"You can read it?" Chu Liang asked, pleasantly surprised.

"Not a single word," Princess Liange answered.

Great. Our Princess is a pretty but illiterate person.

Noticing the look in their eyes, Princess Liange blushed and said, "The ancient script is extremely complex. We now use human writing, so we don't use this anymore... But I brought a jade slip with the words written down. I can cross-reference them."

She quickly took out a jade slip and began translating.

While Princess Liange frowned cutely as she read each word, Chu Liang and the others spent their time examining the murals on the entire wall.

The murals appeared to show the changes the world went through from ancient times.

The sky shattered, the earth cracked, and endless floods and fires rained down from above. The creatures on land had nowhere to flee, and the torrential rains quickly merged with the sea, submerging the land.

Amidst this chaos, the Hallowed Mother in the sea attained the ninth realm, becoming a cultivator of the Profound Realm.

In the mural, she was depicted as a merfolk surrounded by a radiant halo.

The Hallowed Mother, full of compassion, protected the creatures who fell from the land into the sea, building the Ruins of Return to shelter them. She sustained their lives at the bottom of the sea for many years.

Things remained peaceful until this very day...

As lightning flashed, the Hallowed Mother fell in a storm of divine lightning. The mural depicting the scene in the sky was blurry, likely because the painter had not been able to see it clearly. Only splashes of color captured the chaotic event.

However, it was clear that a few small human figures watched the entire scene unfold from far across the sea.

Eh? Chu Liang thought to himself. This scene looks exactly like the depiction of the Dragon God's fall in the Blue Dragon's hidden realm.

Who are these people who appear whenever a ninth-realm existence falls? Who are they? Could they be the ones responsible for all of this?

Chu Liang had so many questions and no answers at all.

The final scene in the mural showed the sea gradually receding after the Hallowed Mother's fall, and the earth resurfacing. The creatures of the Ruins of Return returned to the land.

Many sea creatures gathered around the Ruins of Return, surrounding the Hallowed Mother's body.

In the previous mural, she had vanished. Yet, in this one, she lay peacefully as though simply asleep, ready to awaken at any moment.

"What does this mean..." Chu Liang murmured.

At that moment, Princess Liange read her translation aloud. "Reform the Great Dao of the Bottomless Sea again, and the Hallowed Mother shall be..."

"Resurrected?!"

Chapter 674: Battle at the Peak of the Clouds

Upon hearing the word "Resurrected," the three men from the Mount Shu Sect were stunned.

After a long pause, Wang Xuanling said, "An individual at the seventh realm would be borrowing the power of the Great Dao while an individual at the eighth realm would take control of that Great Dao. However, an individual at the ninth realm would merge with the Great Dao... If someone was able to reform the Great Dao again, then it is theoretically possible to resurrect the ninth-realm existence within that Great Dao... I just have never heard of such rumors. It is truly astonishing."

"Merge?" Xu Ziyang asked. "With so many Great Daos in existence, why can there only be one cultivator at the Profound Realm at any given time?"

As young cultivators, they naturally didn't have the same deep understanding of the Great Dao as Wang Xuanling, who had spent many years studying it.

"It's likely because the world lacks enough spiritual energy..." Wang Xuanling explained. "To merge with the Great Dao, a cultivator must elevate the Great Dao of the Profound above all the other Great Daos and complete the act of 'proving their understanding of the Dao.' Only then can one stand at the pinnacle of heaven and earth. Reaching the ninth realm demands an immense amount of spiritual energy from the world itself..."

Chu Liang remained silent.

Upon hearing this, a spark of realization flickered in Chu Liang's mind. Questions he had long pondered now seemed to have answers.

Was this why all traces of the ninth-realm existence would always be erased after their fall?

There were those who did not want the ninth-realm beings from being resurrected. They worked to erase every trace of their existence and diminish their influence, ensuring future generations could not revive them.

A force powerful enough to erase the ninth realm's existence must be ancient and overwhelming. They subdued figures like the Southern Shaman God and the Jiuli Evil God, who had countless followers, and turned them into nothing more than myths in history.

As Chu Liang thought further, he wondered if they had something to do with the fall of the other ninth-realm beings?

No. Impossible. Even if they were powerful, there had to be limits to their powers. They couldn't truly compare with an actual ninth-realm being, Chu Liang thought.

At the very least, the two Hallowed Ones of the human race, the sea demons' Hallowed Mother, and the land demons' Demon God still had a vast number of followers.

Perhaps no one had dared to take such dangerous actions so far. However, should this hidden force learn of any attempts to bring the ninth-realm beings back, those involved would face a devastating strike.

This reminded Chu Liang of the collapse of the Ancient Dragon Lair.

After the fall of the Dragon God, it wasn't until several thousand years later that the Ancient Dragon Lair was destroyed, as though struck by divine punishment.

Did some dragon try to reform the Great Dao again and resurrect the Dragon God? And that caused the destruction of the Ancient Dragon Lair? Chu Liang wondered.

Chu Liang couldn't help but think of the place he had heard of but never seen—the Divine Ruins Monastery.

Are they the ancient force behind all of this? But why would they do this?

Though Chu Liang pondered deeply, he couldn't find the answer to these questions.

Meanwhile, Princess Liange continued reading her translation. "Only the soul of the Hallowed Mother will be revived. A physical body is required as a vessel, and it must be a merfolk with pure divine blood..."

At this point, she stopped reading and said, "Pure divine blood is very rare among the royal family—only my mother and I possess it!"

"The merfolk queen..." Chu Liang pondered aloud. "Maybe she plans to use herself as the vessel..."

He fell silent, not expanding on the thought.

If the goal was to resurrect the Hallowed Mother, the merfolk queen, despite knowing it was part of the Sea Master's conspiracy, would likely agree.

The Ruins of Return Cult had originally intended for Princess Liange to serve as the vessel for the Hallowed Mother's resurrection, which was why men of the West Sea Diabolical Sect had been sent to capture her.

After all, this was not something that could be made public. Until the Hallowed Mother was truly resurrected, it had to remain a secret from all the other sea demons. Otherwise, it could trigger a powerful strike from that hidden, ancient force.

If not for this condition, the sea demons would never have allowed harm to come to the merfolk princess. This was why the outsiders from the West Sea Diabolical Sect were permitted to take action.

If Senior Brother Xu hadn't helped, Princess Liange would likely be in that pavilion now, staying in the room next door to that large toad.

After learning about these matters, the merfolk queen likely didn't want her daughter to serve as the Hallowed Mother's vessel. After all, infusing the soul of a ninth-realm being into a body would destroy the original soul, much like a candle being snuffed out.

The queen wasn't trying to imprison Princess Liange; she was likely trying to protect her daughter.

Now, she must be using this time for something else, something important.

"No!" Princess Liange shouted anxiously.

Chu Liang replied, "If we want to save both of you, we can only rescue the golden toad and expose the schemes of the Ruins of Return Cult."

"But if we do that, the Hallowed Mother won't be resurrected..." Princess Liange murmured sadly.

"If the Hallowed Mother, who sees all sea demons as her children, were alive today, do you think she would want to sacrifice so many of her followers for her own resurrection?" Chu Liang suddenly asked.

The question made Princess Liange freeze for a moment.

If the Hallowed Mother was willing to sacrifice the entire sea demon race to revive herself, she would no longer be worthy of being their deity. If the Hallowed Mother did not wish for the resurrection, then forcing it would be an act that defies her will.

Princess Liange felt that something was off, but then it all seemed to make sense. The compassionate Hallowed Mother who wished to die—she was the deity who truly deserved their worship.

With this revelation, it became clear that stopping everything from unfolding was the right choice, and Princess Liange's eyes lit up.

As the thought crossed her mind, Princess Liange's expression darkened once more. "But my mother has trapped us here. We can't escape."

Chu Liang shook his head, glancing toward the cave entrance and let out a deep sigh, "Haaaaaa."

...

"Why the sighing?" asked a sturdy young man with three purple markings on his face as he stood amidst the sweeping winds, gazing at the towering temple in the distance.

This man was none other than Changfeng, the Demon King of the Great Marshlands from the Far West.

Amidst the clouds beside him stood a woman who exuded a natural allure. She gazed at the Buddhist Cloud Monastery in the distance and let out a few sighs.

She was Caiyi, the Demon King of the Verdant Foxhills.

"I sigh for this temple at the peak of the heavens. It took so much to build, yet today it will be destroyed in a mere moment," she said gloomily.

"It's just a few stupid buildings. If they're destroyed, so be it, what's the big deal?" Changfeng said with a wicked smile. "When we rule the land of the nine provinces, we can just build another one on top."

Caiyi paused in silence as she realized how impossible it was to make these barbaric greater demons understand the deep culture embodied by this temple.

After a moment, she spoke again, "Let's do it."

"Hehe." Changfeng chuckled. "This is the first time in three thousand years we've openly fought back against the immortal sects in the Divine Nine, isn't it?"

With hearty laughter filling the air, his body twisted midair, and in a flash of blinding light, he transformed into a massive, colorful purple-azure serpent. The speed of his transformation sent a deafening roar echoing through the air!

In the blink of an eye, the monks of the Buddhist Cloud Monastery saw a massive serpent stretching across the sky. It was almost bigger than the entire monastery itself and it descended with a deafening rumble!

"Demon!"

A large group of monks in the temple square shouted upon witnessing this scene. However, their voices quickly caught in their throats as a fragrant, colorful wind and smoke swept over the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, causing everyone's vision to momentarily brighten.

Boom.

From the sea of clouds, a massive white jade pillar rose, and upon it, a glowing figure sat, radiating light like a bodhisattva. Upon seeing the figure, one instinctively felt compelled to step forward for a closer view.

Boom boom boom boom boom.

Soon, eight jade pillars rose one after another, with the Buddha lights of arhats and bodhisattvas shining brilliantly. A divine glow cast over the area, transforming it into a sight that resembled a sacred mountain. The sight stirred the monks' devoutness, and many felt an overwhelming urge to renew their faith.

Right then, a voice rang out, as loud and thunderous as the tolling of a great bell.

"Demon! Reveal yourself!"

A gigantic hand, reaching from the depths of the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, extended and grabbed one of the white jade pillars. The pillar twisted and transformed into a fluffy white fox tail!

Upon closer inspection, the eight jade-white pillars, glowing with the Buddha's Light, were revealed to be eight fox tails! One of them collided with the massive hand, bouncing off with force, while the other seven coiled around the sea of clouds that surrounded the Buddhist Cloud Monastery!

Boom boom boom...

The tails were not attacking; they were locking the entire Buddhist Cloud Monastery in place while the massive purple-azure serpent in mid-air crashed down on the temple.

BOOOOOM!!!

The cluster of temple buildings on the sea of clouds shattered under the impact, half of them crumbling and the ground breaking apart! Yet, the seemingly ethereal vast sea of clouds only rippled slightly from the strike.

The other half of the temples remained intact because they were protected by this old monk in tattered robes. His towering figure stood firm, bearing the crushing weight of the massive serpent's tail.

With a frail and withered appearance, he seemed insignificant, much like a monk who had just discarded his broom after sweeping the back mountain.

Abbot Dayu was far out on the South Sea with the Dharma Lotus Platform, so the only eighth-realm existence left to protect the temple was his senior brother, Dhyana Master Dawu—a Sweeper Monk in the area behind the hill.

With the activation of the Colossal Metallic Body, Dhyana Master Dayu became as large as the serpent, which was as tall as the heavens.

However, Changfeng's attack didn't end there. He flicked his long tail, and a mighty wind swept across, suddenly clearing the air.

The pure qi, impure qi, spiritual qi, yin qi, and yang qi... all dissipated, leaving the sky above as a vast, empty void.

Dhyana Master Dawu slowly murmured, the words barely escaping his lips.

"Severed Breath?"

The Great Dao of Wind, like all Daos, also has its dual aspects of yin and yang.

The Great Dao that the Blue Dragon controlled when it was alive was called "Governing Balance[1]." It was the Dao of Yang Wind, governing the flow of the heavens and earth, sweeping across the world.

The Great Dao that Changfeng controlled was Severed Breath. This was the Dao of Yin Wind, capable of severing the breath of the heavens and returning all things to the void.

At this moment, when he released it within the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, the space would be stripped of all spiritual qi, while the wind of destruction would rise from within the monks and tear through the monks' very flesh.

"AAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!"

All the monks in the temple screamed in agony. Some of those with lower cultivation levels instantly shriveled up, turning into mummified corpses!

This wind was called "Bifeng[2]." This was not a wind that existed in the natural world, but a wind that existed within the organs, seeking to destroy the liver and intestines!

"As expected, demons are evildoers after all..." Dhyana Master Dawu said with a sigh. "You control the Great Dao only to bring death."

As he spoke, each word reverberated like thunder, echoing painfully in Changfeng's ears.

For some unknown reason, a surge of fury rose in Changfeng's heart, but there was no outlet for this rage. He simply felt overwhelmed by it.

A wave of sorrow and bitterness suddenly swept through him. At the same time, joy surged within him, and he couldn't help but guffaw wildly. Then an inexplicable fear filled him, making him feel as though he might cry in terror at any moment...

All these emotions collided at once, mixing together and exploding within him.

"Stop it," Dhyana Master Dawu uttered.

Overwhelmed by endless pain, Demon King Changfeng obeyed the command and ceased the use of his divine powers. Only then did he feel the turmoil of his seven emotions gradually ease.

Dhyana Master Dawu had used the Brahma Sound of Wisdom.

Pushan had once witnessed the Whale-Riding Immortal perform this technique. While using it against someone at the eighth realm was different from using it on others, the fact that it worked proved the strength of Dawu's cultivation.

The surviving monks of the Buddhist Cloud Monastery were freed and fled for their lives. After all, in this fight between eighth-realm existences, even the fish in the pond were better off than they were.

Golden light flashed in bursts, radiating outward and filling the space. It was Dhyana Master Shenyong, the one who never uttered a word, taking action. Wherever he went, groups of monastery disciples disappeared, whisked away to another place by his hand.

On this battlefield, not only were these monks incapable of offering help, but they would only become a burden to Dhyana Master Dawu.

Eighteen high monks, resembling Arhats, stood firm, each gripping a monk's staff as they led the temple-guarding formation. They invoked the projection of the Buddha's figure, its golden light shining brightly to block the rainbow light cast by the eight-tailed fox demon.

However, as the eight tails swayed, waves of colorful light rippled through the air, and the great formation seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

Once the monks and disciples had been ferried away, Dhyana Master Shenyong flipped his hand and drew forth a vajra pestle. He threw it forcefully towards the sky, and as it flew through the air, it expanded to three zhang in length before crashing down with a thunderous clang!

Bang!

The vajra pestle struck the ground with a powerful impact, releasing a dazzling platinum light that cut through the sky like a sword.

In that moment, a thunderous lion's roar rang out from the sea of clouds, as if answering the golden light released by the pestle.

"Roar—"

With that, the roar shattered a corner of the cloud sea in an instant!

Chapter 675: You're Here!

In the farthest depths of the Ruins of Return, there was another vortex connecting to the sea.

The merfolk queen arrived at the vortex and dove straight into the pitch-black seawater. The golden glow from her scales illuminated the darkness slightly as she pressed forward.

She finally reached the center of the dark waters, where an enormous mountain of corals glowed softly, lighting up the surroundings. Upon closer inspection, it resembled a palace.

"Lord Wuchao, I seek your assistance."

The merfolk queen was highly respected among the various sea demons. Yet, outside this coral palace, she behaved like a humble junior.

Rumble.

The colossal coral mountain trembled, and after a brief moment, a gap appeared. From within the darkness, a long, gray object emerged. It resembled a tentacle, but its surface was covered in dark, dull scales.

The tentacle extended toward the merfolk queen, twisting and growing into the upper body of an elderly man. His hair was sparse, and his beard was snowy-white. His age was impossible to discern, and even his eyes seemed clouded by time.

As he recalled her, he said, "You are... the merfolk queen of this generation, aren't you? A descendant of the Hallowed Mother, yes? What is the matter?"

"The Sea Master of the Ruins of Return cult seeks to resurrect the Hallowed Mother," said the merfolk queen. "He has kept many things from me and now plans to use my daughter as a vessel. I do not know what to do, so I have come to seek your counsel, Lord Wuchao.

"If you side with him, I will sacrifice myself as the vessel for the Hallowed Mother. But if you are against this, you are the only one in the South Sea who can stop him!"

"Resurrect the Hallowed Mother?" the elder known as Wuchao uttered. His pupils dilated as he went silent for a long time before saying, "That path leads only to death..."

The merfolk queen's gaze lifted. "Lord Wuchao, do you... disagree?"

"If the resurrection of the Hallowed Mother were truly possible, would countless sea demons not have already attempted it over the past tens of thousands of years?" Lord Wuchao said with a grave expression. "I was born during the reign of the Dragon God and saw the splendor of the dragons with my own eyes. That is why I know about the fate of those True Dragons who once sought to resurrect the Dragon God..."

"This is something we must never attempt..."

"Then, Lord Wuchao, please stop him at once! If we wait any longer, who knows how many sea demon lives he will sacrifice!" the merfolk queen pleaded urgently.

"Very well..." Lord Wuchao nodded and softly called out, "Sea Master—"

The sound of his voice reverberated, and the dark seawater trembled, rippling outward, sweeping across the vast ocean until it reached a distant pavilion.

"Hm?"

In the pavilion, the Sea Master, whose anger had been simmering, grew even angrier upon hearing the call.

"That old... old squid, what does he want with me now?" he muttered. "I suppose I should pay him a visit."

Huo Tianya, standing before him, asked, "Squid? Is that the one who has reigned supreme for tens of thousands of years? The one who none can compete with..."

"That's him," the Sea Master nodded. "He was once the most powerful of all sea demons and one of the founders of the Ruins of Return cult. Nowadays, he rarely leaves that filthy sea of his. I wonder why he's calling for me now."

"Leave matters here to me," Huo Tianya said calmly. "The one who abducted that Mount Shu disciple must be Immortal Yuan Lu, Xuan Yinzi, or perhaps an outsider. Let me visit the West Sea and Mount Shu, and I'll know immediately if there's anything wrong with them."

"That's not the point!" the Sea Master shot back. "Whether that disciple of the Mount Shu Sect is here or not doesn't matter. What matters is that the Azure Wave Lamp must not be lost!"

"Chu Liang plays a critical role. Heh, don't worry about it," Huo Tianya chuckled as he spoke. "Just stay home and wait in peace. The land demon's divine envoy will soon deliver it to your doorstep."

The Sea Master and Huo Tianya left the pavilion together. As they turned back, the Sea Master's eyes fell on the wall, which had just been patched but was now gnawed through again. With a flick of his hand, he conjured a ball of black light, casting it over the pavilion, sealing it from above and leaving only the front entrance open.

Only then did he leave with peace of mind.

...

Chu Liang gazed at the dark, misty halo surrounding the pavilion and said with a frown, "There's another layer of restriction outside the pavilion."

The pavilion was now only accessible through the front entrance. To break the golden pool restraint set by the merfolk queen, Tuntun had eaten through it. She had eaten so much that she fell asleep. Even if Chu Liang woke her up, Tuntun couldn't do anything about the newly added restriction, as she could only chew through physical objects and was helpless against this intangible barrier.

"This restriction is powerful. I believe that eighth-realm greater demon placed it here. If I unleash the Demon-Slaying Sword without considering the consequences, there's a chance I can break it," Wang Xuanling said. "But it would undoubtedly cause a huge commotion."

"I'll go in through the front entrance and take a look," Chu Liang said as he pulled out the mask of the demon divine envoy.

"That's far too dangerous..." Wang Xuanling warned.

"It's fine," Chu Liang said with a reassuring smile. "I have ways to save myself. If that eighth-realm greater demon acts, you two should retreat immediately. Don't worry about me."

Wang Xuanling and Xu Ziyang didn't know where Chu Liang's confidence came from, but hearing him speak with such certainty, they believed him.

If he said he had a way, then he definitely did.

When it came to this, the teacher and the disciple of Jade Sword Peak shared that same confidence.

As Chu Liang made his way toward the front entrance, he was still mulling over what excuse he could use to get inside the pavilion.

Before he even had a chance to knock, the door opened by itself.

The shrimp-headed and crab-clawed demonic monsters greeted him with wide smiles, calling out loudly, "Honorable divine envoy, you're here! We've been waiting for you day and night!"

"Ah..." Their enthusiasm caught Chu Liang off guard for a moment, but he quickly nodded. "I'm here."

"Please, come in! Come in!"

The shrimp soldier and crab general ushered Chu Liang inside without asking a single question or even inspecting the portrait of the South Sea's Hallowed Mother.

Their excitement resembled the joy of finding a long-lost father.

"I didn't expect you to return so quickly! The demons in the Far West really move fast!" the shrimp-headed demonic monster said, barely pausing for breath. "But it's unfortunate. The Sea Master had urgent matters and left. He told us to treat you well if you came."

"The Sea Master left?" Chu Liang's brow arched slightly beneath his mask, and his tone carried a trace of displeasure. "How long until he returns?"

"Ah, hard to say," the crab-clawed demonic monster whispered. "Lord Wuchao summoned him suddenly. That place is quite far... But don't worry, we'll take good care of you! If you need anything, just let us know."

"Uh..." Chu Liang looked around, noticing the emptiness, and asked, "Wasn't it lively here before? Where is everyone?"

"They're all gone, haha," the shrimp-headed demonic monster replied, chuckling. "They were allies of the Sea Master. Once their business was done, they left. Usually, it's just the two of us here."

"Oh..." Chu Liang nodded.

"Is there anything you need, honorable envoy?" the crab-clawed demonic monster asked as they seated him.

"I'd like something to eat," Chu Liang said with a nod.

"What would you like to eat?" the shrimp-headed demonic monster asked eagerly.

Chu Liang pulled off his mask, revealing a bright smile. "Seafood."

...

"All taken care of!" Chu Liang opened the door and waved over Wang Xuanling and the others.

Wang Xuanling, Xu Ziyang, and Princess Liange entered the pavilion with their faces filled with doubt and disbelief. Only upon stepping inside did they realize that the Sea Master was indeed not at home.

They hurried to the third floor, where they found the room with the large black toad. As expected, it was still there.

The moment Princess Liange saw the black toad, her shoulders trembled, and she shouted, "Golden Toad!"

It really is the Golden Toad! I was right, Chu Liang thought.

Chu Liang had guessed correctly, but he still felt confused. "Is your Golden Toad supposed to be black? Black is the new gold?"

"No! I think it's been poisoned..." Princess Liange said, her gaze filled with distress as she looked at the black Golden Toad. "That evil Sea Master! How dare he treat the Hallowed Mother's envoy this way!"

"Let's get it out of this restriction first. I might have a way to get this poison out of its system," Chu Liang said. As the words left his mouth, he said inwardly, I have a whip that I haven't touched in six years.

It was only natural for Wang Xuanling to be the one to break the restriction.

With a steady hand, he raised the Demon-Slaying Sword and swung it downward, the blade slicing through the enchanted formation with a crisp, resonant sound.

"Let's take it with us and handle it outside," Xu Ziyang said, wrapping the Golden Toad in a cloth bag and slinging it over his shoulder.

Both the teacher and disciple had come to instinctively understand that whenever they were with Chu Liang, they should step up and take on more of the physical work.

As they were about to leave, a knocking sound echoed from downstairs.

Knock, knock, knock.

Currently, they could only leave through the front entrance.

If there was someone at the door, there was no way they could escape.

"Hm?" Old Wang immediately tensed up. He lifted the Demon-Slaying Sword up and asked with a frown, "Should we fight our way out?"

"Hold on..." Chu Liang raised his hand. "Who knocks when they're coming back home? It must be an outsider."

They gathered on the first floor, and with a sweep of their divine senses, they noticed two divine envoys of the demon race wearing bronze masks standing outside the door.

"Relax," Chu Liang's mind raced as he quickly tossed a black robe to Xu Ziyang. "Senior Uncle, hide on the third floor with Princess Liange for now. Senior Brother Xu... for now, we're sea demons."

With that, he pulled up his hood, opened the door with a hearty laugh, and called out, "Honorable divine envoys, you're here! We've been waiting for you day and night!"

Chapter 676: Close the Door

Outside the door stood two divine envoys from the land demons.

The leader, a seventh-realm greater demon, stood tall and imposing, his eyes sharp and piercing like those of a leopard. He was among the more powerful beings in the temple of the demons. This time, escorting the Azure Wave Lamp was a task of the highest priority.

Since the two demon kings were preoccupied with launching an attack on the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, he had been assigned to handle this task.

The other one was the divine envoy who had arrived earlier. This divine envoy's cultivation level seemed to be in the sixth realm.

When he saw Chu Liang and Xu Ziyang, he frowned.

“Why didn’t I see you two earlier?” he asked in a low voice.

"Honorable divine envoy, you have no idea what happened," Chu Liang replied smoothly as he welcomed the two envoys inside. "When those two were guarding the pavilion, some outsider snuck in and stole a valuable item. The Sea Master was furious! In his anger, he cooked both of them..."

“A valuable item was stolen?” the seventh-realm greater demon asked. “It’s not the Sea-Devouring Demonic Urn, is it?”

"Uhhhhhh..." Chu Liang hesitated, watching their expressions change. He then laughed and replied, "Of course not. Our Sea Master naturally keeps that treasure with him at all times. How could anyone steal it?"

"That's good," the seventh-realm greater demon nodded before continuing, "We have brought the Azure Wave Lamp and can proceed with the trade with the Sea Master."

“Azure Wave Lamp...” Chu Liang muttered to himself before saying, “The two of you, please follow me upstairs.”

“Wait a moment,” the greater demon suddenly interjected.

“Hm?” Chu Liang turned to look at him.

The greater demon frowned and asked, “If you are sea demons, why don't you exude any demonic qi?”

As he spoke, his demon qi surged forth, and the flow of qi instantly reached its peak.

He had been extremely careful during his journey here. But after he arrived at the Sea Master's pavilion, he relaxed slightly. After all, what foolhardy thief would be able to rob the Sea Master's home within the Ruins of Return?

Upon noticing this oddity, he activated his cultivation power. It was clear that he would unleash a strike of lightning without hesitation if Chu Liang didn't offer a reasonable explanation.

"Erm..." Chu Liang chuckled. "Oops. You still saw through my cover in the end. I was just disguising myself as a sea demon. Actually, I have another identity."

Both divine envoys became instantly alert. "Hm?"

They watched as Chu Liang took out a bronze mask and skillfully placed it on his face. In an instant, he transformed into a divine envoy who looked exactly like them.

What does this mean? The Divine Envoys wondered. So he's one of us now? An urgent switch of teams?

The two divine envoys were baffled as they watched a new team member appear out of nowhere. If their faces weren't hidden, their expressions would have clearly said, "Are you kidding me?"

However, their bond with the temple allowed them to sense that the mask was real.

This person was not a fake divine envoy.

"What is going on here?" the greater demon asked urgently.

"It's a long story," Chu Liang replied calmly. "Why don't you start by telling me where the Azure Wave Lamp is?"

"It's right here..." the sixth-realm divine envoy answered, instinctively reaching for it.

However, the greater demon snapped at him. "Did I tell you to take it out?"

Realizing his mistake, the sixth-realm divine envoy quickly withdrew his hand.

Chu Liang nodded with a smile. “I can’t explain it clearly. Someone else will have to explain. Senior Uncle Wang...”

At first, the plan was simply to lure the two divine envoys inside and eliminate them to avoid any future complications. However, upon noticing they seemed to be carrying something valuable, Chu Liang decided to exchange a few more words. Now that he had confirmed the item was in their possession, there was no need for further discussion.

Close the door! Release Old Wang! [1]

Boom!

At Chu Liang’s call, a torrent of sword qi surged from the upper floor, entwined with swirling crimson flames. The sudden pressure made the two demonic creatures' hairs stand on end instantly!

Not only did the two demonic creatures feel it, but even Princess Liange, standing beside Wang Xuanling, nearly collapsed as she weakened under the immense pressure.

This was the overwhelming power of the Demon-Slaying Sword, which naturally suppressed demonic creatures.

The reason it was ranked twenty-ninth in the Catalog of the Mortal World’s Ten Thousand Treasures, despite being ranked forty when used against humans, was because of its unmatched effectiveness against demons. If used specifically against demons, it would rank in the top twenty, which was why its final ranking was adjusted to twenty-ninth.

Now, as the sword was used against the two divine envoys, it unleashed its greatest divine might, like the descent of heavenly punishment!

“Raaaar!”

In face of such a powerful attack, the two demons obviously wouldn't just sit idly and wait for death to hit them.

The seventh-realm greater demon coiled its body, its black robe tearing apart to reveal a torso covered in brilliant yellow patterns. Each black marking shifted into a wisp of black qi, spinning rapidly before solidifying into a shadowy black leopard. The leopard charged straight for Wang Xuanling.

Meanwhile, its true form leaped to another location in an instant, moving at near-teleportation speed.

The sixth-realm divine envoy was not the target of Wang Xuanling's attack.

He had already leaped to the doorway and made a strange cry, "Meow~"

It seemed he was a nimble cat demon.

Chu Liang and Xu Ziyang didn't bother to give the seventh-realm greater demon a glance as that demon was not their concern. They had their attention on the sixth-realm cat demon.

Swordlight flashed as Xu Ziyang gripped the sword in his hands. His gaze was sharp, almost terrifying, and the intensity of his sword qi made even Chu Liang flinch in surprise.

Shiiing.

Hundreds of threads of sword qi lashed out in chaotic patterns, but ultimately, they converged on one point—the cat demon.

The cat demon reacted with a swift sidestep, narrowly evading the barrage of strikes. Yet, as the echoes of the attack faded and it tried to reach the door, it realized it was too late.

The figure who had worn a divine envoy's mask earlier stood at the doorway. Nevertheless, he didn't have a very powerful aura; he was at most at the fifth realm.

With a cruel smile, the cat demon thought to itself, You're asking for death. Don't blame me for what happens next.

Shing, shing, shing, shing—

As the cat demon's claw descended, Chu Liang swiftly raised his right hand, forming a dragon claw to intercept the blow. In that instant, a golden dragon coiled around the cat demon, crackling with purple lightning.

And within the blink of an eye, the cat demon was transformed into yet another golden imprint in Chu Liang's collection of rewards.

The divine envoy was strong, but the number of cultivators at the sixth realm who could resist the combined attack of Xu Ziyang and Chu Liang would probably be fewer than the hairs on Pushan's head.

On the other side, Wang Xuanling's confidence had soared ever since he got his hands on the Demon-Slaying Sword. He had always been ruthless when dealing with demons and evildoers, and with a legendary sword in hand, his strikes became even fiercer.

Beams of sword light crisscrossed, and in the span of a breath, countless strikes drove the leopard demon into a corner.

Realizing it was outmatched, the leopard demon tried to crash through the wall and escape, but a flash of black light sent it tumbling back. The wall, engraved with enchanted formations and reinforced by the Sea Master's restrictions, wasn't so easily broken.

Shiiiiing.

A brief moment of distraction cost the leopard demon dearly, as Wang Xuanling's sword cleaved through it at the waist.

Blood splattered everywhere on the ground.

"Raaaar!

"

The leopard demon, now left with only its upper body, threw itself toward the doorway, leaving a trail of blood behind.

It glared at the two standing in its way, stirring up a howling wind of demonic qi that felt incredibly ferocious!

The two young men remained fearless, starlight flashing in their eyes as their foundational qi surged with a powerful intensity.

Boom!

Chu Liang led the way, partially assuming a dragon form and extending a pair of dragon wings. He moved forward with both palms, blocking the charge for a brief moment. Behind him, Xu Ziyang struck with his sword, sending a cascade of sword light down.

Boom!

The desperate strike of the seventh-realm greater demon was forcibly halted by the two of them for a split second.

In the next instant, Chu Liang and Xu Ziyang were hurled through the air, crashing into the wall on the opposite side. Thankfully, the building was strong enough to withstand it; otherwise, a fight of this scale would have leveled it in an instant.

Although they only managed to block it for a brief moment, it was enough.

Wang Xuanling, who was behind them, had already sent his swordlight descending toward the leopard demon. The gravely wounded leopard demon could no longer fight back, and it was cleaved in half once more.

The scalding blood of the leopard demon splattered onto the ground, releasing a sharp hiss as it sizzled.

Princess Liange watched in horror as she thought, These people are ruthless... They are so cruel to the demonic monsters...

"We've made too much noise. We need to leave quickly," Chu Liang said as he swiftly sprang into action.

He carefully packed the corpses of the two demonic creatures into an enchanted storage tool, making sure not to leave behind any shattered fragments. While the remains could be reused, his primary focus was on any enchanted tools they might have possessed. With little time to search, he simply took everything.

Chu Liang glanced around, took a deep breath, and exhaled a fierce burst of blazing dragon breath.

Puff!

For a brief moment, the dragon breath hung in the air, dissolving the lingering qi that had remained.

Chu Liang explained, "This way, the sword qi will be masked and diluted by the dragon breath. Even if they sense the sword qi, they shouldn't be able to know that it was the Demon-Slaying Sword."

He then created several clones, giving each of them a cloth and having them carefully wipe away their footprints and palm prints.

Chu Liang added, "This way, they won't be able to determine our numbers or race. Princess Liange, you don't have to worry."

It took only around fifteen minutes for Chu Liang to tidy up the entire three-story building. Once that was done, he pushed open the door, and the group hurriedly left the scene of the crime.

Princess Liange followed behind the group, feeling dazed and stunned. Fear gripped her heart.

She had initially thought they were cultivators of the righteous factions, but after seeing how efficiently they disposed of the corpse and cleaned the crime scene, she couldn't help but question everything.

She couldn't help but wonder, Is it really safe for me to leave with them?

Feeling afraid, she instinctively grabbed Xu Ziyang's sleeve. Of all the people in the group, he was the only one who radiated righteousness and looked the most like a good person.

In truth, Chu Liang hadn't always been adept at disposing of corpses and cleaning up the crime scene.

However, when he and Di Nufeng killed Xuan Yinzi, she had taken it upon herself to teach him the fine art of cleaning up after such deeds.

It was rare for her to teach any actual skills, so Chu Liang humbly made sure to learn everything she had to teach.

As for Wang Xuanling and Xu Ziyang, they weren't surprised at all.

After all, a disciple would inevitably take after their teacher.

Chapter 677: Just A Thank You?

After arriving at the hidden site of some ruins, Chu Liang's group could finally take a breather. Xu Ziyang placed the totally black Golden Toad on the ground. Black bubbles were still forming all over its skin.

The Golden Toad appeared to be in a deep slumber.

Princess Liange gazed at it with great sympathy. "It must be in so much pain."

"I'll try to help it now," Chu Liang replied.

He turned over his hand and took out the Poison-Expulsion Whip.

The moment Princess Liange saw the whip, her eyes reddened.

I knew it! They're not good people. Who uses a whip to eliminate poison? Are you trying to eliminate the poison or eliminate the Golden Toad?

Princess Liange mustered the courage and asked, "What are you doing?"

"Don't worry, Princess," Chu Liang reassured her.

He gave the whip a flick.

Snap!

Whoosh.

A cloud of black qi rose from the Golden Toad and into the air.

Chu Liang hadn't used the Poison-Expulsion Whip for six years, but it worked instantly, living up to his reputation as The Young Hero with the Divine Whip.

When Princess Liange saw that, her first thought was, You whipped it so hard it's emitting smoke...

However, she then realized it wasn't quite like what she thought. The smoke seemed toxic.

Chu Liang whipped the Golden Toad five more times, and the color of the Golden Toad's skin gradually became lighter. It swiftly recovered its brilliant golden glow.

The Golden Toad's large eyelids twitched, and its belly swelled, producing a low rumble like distant thunder.

"Guuu..."

Moments later, the spirit beast fully awakened.

"Gu!"

Upon opening its eyes, the first thing it did was gaze at Chu Liang.

"Guuuuuu!!"

"It's thanking you!" Princess Liange exclaimed.

She smiled embarrassedly, feeling guilty for having misunderstood Chu Liang earlier.

"Really?" Chu Liang stepped closer, gently rubbing the rough back of the Golden Toad with a smile. "All I get is a thank you? I heard that you have a belly full of treasure. Aren't you going to let me see for myself?"

The Golden Toad let out more thunderous croaking. "Guuguu!"

"It says yes!" Princess Liange translated. "As long as you feed it a spirit plant, it will give you a valuable item."

Chu Liang blinked. "..."

This feels more like a trade than an expression of gratitude.

Nevertheless, he had heard that trading with the Golden Toad never led to losses, only gains. In that case, there was no harm in trying. After all, one spirit plant wasn't much. He had plenty stocked up in his storage tool anyway.

With that thought, Chu Liang took out a spirit plant and fed it to the Golden Toad.

"Guuuuuu!"

The Golden Toad's belly swelled dramatically, and it held its breath like that for a moment. Then it opened its mouth wide and spat out a ball of golden light.

Whoosh.

Chu Liang caught the ball of light. When the light faded, he found three smooth, yellow beads resting on his palm. Seeing the beads, he suddenly understood how to use them. It was as if he had been given a boost in intelligence along with his good fortune.

The enchanted artifact was called Bewildering Beads. When thrown together, the three beads had the effect of disorienting the target's senses and divine sense, preventing them from being aware of their surroundings for a short time.

At that moment, Chu Liang felt a strange sense of familiarity.

Why does this Golden Toad's treasure exchange seem pretty similar to my White Pagoda's reward system?

The only difference is that the Golden Toad requires me to supply treasures of nature, while the White Pagoda requires me to supply golden imprints, which I can only obtain by slaying demons and monsters.

Is there some connection between the two?

Nonetheless, the White Pagoda was Chu Liang's greatest secret, so he didn't show any joy at obtaining the enchanted artifact.

Instead, he asked, "Where do all the treasures of nature that the Golden Toad swallows go? Its cultivation level isn't that high, so it probably isn't absorbing them... Where do those spirit plants get absorbed?"

"I don't know..." Princess Liang looked quite puzzled as well. "I've wondered about that too. The Golden Toad's stomach probably contains a hidden realm where the exchange is completed. As for where that hidden realm appeared from, maybe the Hallowed Mother created it?"

Chu Liang wondered, But why would the Hallowed Mother create a hidden realm like that?

Could she have foreseen her own resurrection and was gathering spiritual energy for that day? Or was there some other reason?

Chu Liang pondered for a while, but he still couldn't figure it out.

He then said to the others, "Let's make some preparations. We need to expose the Sea Master's scheme to the sea demons. They must not be tricked into continuing this meaningless war."

...

"It's missing?"

Demon King Changfeng furrowed his eyebrows.

His qi fluctuated chaotically as he leaned backward onto a massive azure lake. Changfeng's upper body remained in human form while his lower body soaked in the water, his huge gorgeous purple tail faintly visible beneath the surface.

Caiyi was in a slightly better state, managing to keep her qi under control. She stood on the shore, clutching a jade slip in her hand. Her expression was equally frigid.

She said slowly, "The jade slip from the Ruins of Return Cult says that... while the Sea Master was away, a thief broke into his home, killed his subordinates and two divine envoys, and stole the Azure Wave Lamp."

"Haha!" Changfeng was so enraged that he laughed. "It appears that it's so darn easy to sneak into the grand Ruins of Return, hey?"

They had just experienced a life-and-death battle at the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, fighting until the clouds shattered and the world around them changed colors.

Fights between the eighth-realm existences were rare, let alone chaotic clashes involving more than two of them. If this fight had taken place on land, countless innocent civilians would have suffered.

When the battle began, the only eighth-realm cultivator remaining at the Buddhist Cloud Monastery was Dhyana Master Dawu. He wielded the Great Dao of Seven Emotions, and his Brahma Sound of Wisdom was godlike. Changfeng was no match for him.

However, the ten high monks maintaining the Grand Mountain-Protecting Formation could not withstand Caiyi's assault. The monastery teetered on the verge of collapse.

Fortunately, at that moment, Dhyana Master Shenyong awakened the Vajra Lion, the Buddhist Cloud Monastery's eighth-realm guardian celestial beast that had been sleeping in the sea of clouds.

The Vajra Lion had guarded the monastery for thousands of years with its immense cultivation power. With the Vajra Lion around, the two demon kings didn't have much of an advantage.

After a brief deadlock, the two demon kings figured that the Dharma Lotus Platform would soon return, so they chose to retreat. Without legendary artifacts, it was impossible for the monks to stop the two eighth-realm Eminent Ones who were determined to leave.

The battle resulted in the deaths of dozens of disciples and the collapse of half of the monastery's structures. Even the foundation holding up the sea of clouds had nearly crumbled.

Despite the apparent devastation, the actual damage to the monastery was, on the whole, not that severe. As long as the core disciples of the younger generations survived, it wouldn't take long for them to bring in new disciples to make up for ones they had lost. Rebuilding the collapsed structures and the sea of clouds' foundation would be an even easier task.

However, the battle certainly served as a great deterrent to the demons' benefit.

This marked the first time in three thousand years that the demons had launched a counterattack against the supreme immortal sects of the human realm. It was a major wake-up call for the rest of the Divine Nine.

From now on, the Divine Nine would have to reconsider whether they should take their sect's legendary artifacts out with them when they leave their sect's mountain. Even if it was unlikely they would lose their sect's legendary artifact, taking it outside meant there was a significantly increased risk their sect's mountain would get destroyed while they were gone.

Of course, the Mount Shu Sect was the exception. They had no such concerns.

Many of the older immortal sects had long since been aware of that risk. They enforced strict rules and rarely took their legendary artifacts beyond their sect grounds. The Buddhist Cloud Monastery, being one of the less experienced sects among the Divine Nine, had likely not suffered such a huge loss yet.

During the last battle at Mount Shu, the Buddhist Cloud Monastery had brought their legendary artifact to assist. It was very unlikely that any of the other sects would ever do the same.

Now, there was an even greater risk that the demon kings would launch an attack on an immortal sect when their legendary artifact was not on sect grounds. It was a very real threat that would send the Divine Nine into an era of fear, where they would avoid taking action against the demons.

This had been the primary goal behind the two demon kings' bold attack. Abbot Dayu had used the Dharma Lotus Platform to suppress the demons in the South Sea this time, but occurrences like that would now become increasingly rare.

Of course, this wasn't simply the work of the demons of the Far West. Demons and evildoers had made secret connections through some factions and then combined forces to coordinate this multi-stage attack. That was how they produced a situation where the Buddhist Cloud Monastery had to split their forces to suppress the sea demons, leaving their monastery vulnerable to being attacked by the demon kings of the Far West.

To counter this, the Divine Nine sects simply needed to unite. When one sect deployed its legendary artifact, powerful cultivators from the other sects would go over to provide support. The power of righteousness would ultimately surpass that of evildoers.

However, it was very difficult for the Divine Nine to achieve unity at the present time.

Fortunately, due to the existence of a certain Mount Shu Sect disciple, the fragile alliance among the evildoers had already begun to fracture.

"They dared to steal from us?" Changfeng sneered viciously. "It's time to teach those sea demons a lesson."

Chapter 678: But It's True

A thunderous croak suddenly reverberated through the endless depths of the Ruins of Return.

"Guuuuu."

The Ruins of Return were vast, and the comparatively few sea demons living there were quite dispersed. Naturally, that meant most of them did not hear the croak. However, the merfolk were highly sensitive to this call.

Soon after, a merfolk singer, a young mermaid, arrived and saw the spirit beast responsible for the thunderous croak.

It was a Golden Toad, and it was sitting upright on a high platform.

The platform had been built specifically for sacred ceremonies and rituals. Whenever the Hallowed Mother issued a decree, a Golden Toad would descend upon this spot.

"It's the Golden Toad Envoy!" the young mermaid exclaimed, breaking into song.

This was the customary reaction of all merfolk upon encountering the Hallowed Mother's envoy.

The shrill, resonant song of the merfolk pierced through the clouds and the sea, quickly drawing large numbers of sea demons from all over the Ruins of Return. They gathered around the Golden Toad, holding an impromptu assembly.

As the young mermaid prepared to receive the Hallowed Mother's decree, someone suddenly yelled, "That Golden Toad is a fake!"

The young mermaid turned her head to look and called out in surprise, "Princess?"

Indeed, it was the merfolk's princess, Baozhu Liange.

"Just earlier, the real Golden Toad came to Merfolk Island and told me it had been captured!" Princess Liange said loudly as she ascended the platform. "The Ruins of Return Cult captured the real Golden Toad and forged this fake one! They used the fake one to issue false orders of war, causing many of our sea demon kin to die needlessly! This is all part of the Sea Master's scheme!"

As the community of sea demons stood in confusion, there was a loud whoosh, then a massive Golden Toad landed on the seabed with a loud rumble. Its golden skin shone brilliantly as it stood next to the fake toad, flames of fury burning in its large eyes.

The two Golden Toads looked identical, as if one of them was a reflection.

Princess Liange said loudly, "Feed them spirit plants and see what treasures they produce. That will tell you which one is real and which is fake."

As the sea demons prepared to test them, someone shouted, "There's no need!"

The crowd of sea demons quickly parted to make a path for the people that were approaching.

They were none other than the Merfolk Queen and Sea Master. The two led the way, each accompanied by a group of people. The group behind the Merfolk Queen was, of course, her bodyguards, while the Sea Master was accompanied by his subordinates from the Ruins of Return Cult—each one fierce and menacing, with bloodthirsty expressions.

Meanwhile, the Merfolk Queen's expression was cold and aloof, while Sea Master's face was dark with suppressed fury... as if he had returned home to find his subordinates dead and his treasures stolen.

"This matter was not Sea Master's doing but the scheme of human cultivators seeking to stir chaos in the South Sea," the Merfolk Queen said, glancing at Princess Liange with a brief gaze of approval.

She then turned and pointed at the fake Golden Toad.

Swish.

A beam of light shot over. That Golden Toad let out an agonizing croak, and its glowing golden skin fell off. In the blink of an eye, it transformed into a grotesque, pus-covered toad demon.

The toad demon had remained calm up to just a moment ago, but now that its true form had been exposed, it shrieked in terror. "Guaaah!!!"

Then the toad demon turned to the Sea Master for help.

The Sea Master said nothing, merely glancing at it.

Boom!!!

The toad demon exploded, dying on the spot. Its foul pus went splattering in all directions, and the crowd of sea demons quickly stepped aside to avoid the mess.

The Sea Master commented quietly, "To think it dared to impersonate the Hallowed Mother's envoy."

"The Hallowed Mother will not let her children sacrifice their lives in vain. Let's hope this never happens again!" the Merfolk Queen said loudly.

The crowd of sea demons erupted in cheers.

After all, there was no demon that wanted to throw away their life. Even though there was a tremendous number of sea demons, they paid a steep price whenever they tried to set foot on land. The last battle had dyed the vast sea red with blood.

Right then, the ground suddenly trembled. A terrifying underwater vortex rose in the distance, rampaging beneath the Ruins of Return and leaving nothing untouched in its path.

"Stop!" the Sea Master yelled.

He leaped up and unleashed a wave of dark qi that halted the vortex in its tracks, revealing a figure inside it—Changfeng.

The Sea Master sealed off the area with a sound barrier to prevent others from overhearing. Then he asked, "You are... the Demon King of the Great Marshes?"

"Yep, that's me," Demon King Changfeng answered with a sinister smirk. "We fought and bled at the Buddhist Cloud Monastery for you, and now you want to swallow up our treasure? I've never even heard of something so absurd."

"Didn't I send a letter to explain? By the time I returned, everything was over. Even the underlings I'd left to guard my home were killed," Sea Master said angrily.

He was enraged too.

Everything had been proceeding smoothly according to the plan, but then that old bugger Wuchao called me over just to scold me and forbid me from continuing with the plan. Then when I returned home, I found the corpses of my shrimp soldier and crab general, along with the blood of demons from the Far West.

It all fell apart in an instant—the chicken has flown the coop, and the eggs are all broken. There's nothing left.

And now, someone has even come to fight me.

"Hah!" Changfeng sneered. "If you were me, would you believe the crap that's coming out of your mouth?"

"I wouldn't believe it... but it's the truth!"

The Sea Master's tone carried a mix of feelings. He felt equal parts helpless, angry, and aggrieved. Those accounted for ninety percent of his feelings. As for the last ten percent, that was a great desire to kill. If he were to find out who was responsible for ruining everything for him, he would tear them to pieces without hesitation.

...

"Ah-choo!"

Chu Liang sat cross-legged on the deck of the ship in the face of the wind. He sneezed, but he wasn't bothered and calmly shut his eyes again, resuming his meditation.

The reveal of the real Golden Told in the Ruins of Return had, of course, been coordinated by him and Princess Liange. If human cultivators got directly involved in the sea demons' affairs, it would only complicate matters. So, the best solution was to let the Golden Toad return to the ruins and take advantage of the decree-receiving ritual to reveal the truth.

The official story would be that the Ruins of Return Cult was to blame for scheming and needlessly sending the sea demons to their deaths. There absolutely could be no mention of the attempt to resurrect the Hallowed Mother. This way, the war could finally be put to an end.

If the resurrection of the Hallowed Mother were mentioned, it might appeal to the sea demons' faith and devotion to the Hallowed Mother instead, turning the gathering into a pre-war rally.

In any case, Chu Liang was certain that even the Sea Master wouldn't dare make the resurrection attempt publicly known, making the sea demons a target of attacks.

With the South Sea temporarily at peace, Chu Liang's group could be at ease as they sailed home aboard the Lianglong, leaving quietly with their accomplishments a secret.

However, Chu Liang received a shocking piece of news through the Circle of Immortal Friends. The Demon King of the Verdant Foxhills and the Demon King of the Great Marshes had attacked the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, dealing major damage.

No wonder the Dharma Lotus Platform, which guards the South Sea, left then. So that was the reason.

Chu Liang gradually figured out how the trade between the two demon factions had gone down. In exchange for the Sea-Devouring Demonic Urn, the land demons of the Far West gave the sea demons the Azure Wave Lamp and their support in the siege on the Buddhist Cloud Monastery.

The Sea-Devouring Demonic Urn contains the Great Dao of Devouring... Could the demons of the Far West be attempting to resurrect the Demon God?

But didn't they say that the Demon God's not dead yet?

Could it be that the demons were just... bluffing to make it look like they still have power?

But what benefit is there in spreading false news and becoming the target of everyone's ire?

Or perhaps they want the enchanted tool for an entirely different reason...

After thinking about it for a while, Chu Liang decided it was best to just focus on his own affairs for now.

He took a spirit plant from a jade box, consumed it, and circulated his qi briefly. Then he exhaled.

Done. I broke through.

After days of accumulating cultivation energy, Chu Liang was finally able to break through to the fifth level of the Realm of the Five Elements. He just needed to accumulate more cultivation energy for a bit longer, then he would be able to advance to the pinnacle of the fifth realm.

Forming a transcendent body was a major hurdle that cultivators normally struggled with at this stage. However, Chu Liang had already cultivated the Mystical Winged Divine Dragon Transcendent Form to near perfection. When the moment arrived, he would break through to the sixth realm in an instant.

In other words, it was like he had already defeated the final boss in a game stage and was now killing mobs to farm experience points. It was just a matter of time before he would clear the stage.

After his breakthrough, Chu Liang sank his divine sense into the White Pagoda. There were three new golden imprints in cells—a shrimp soldier, a crab general, and a cat demon. It was time for Chu Liang to have a happy reward session with three rewards.

Excited, he eagerly approached and refined the golden imprint of the demon with a shrimp head.

Boom.

A burst of light floated out, and Chu Liang caught it in his hand. A stream of information flowed into his mind.

[Crimson Devil Helmet: A powerful helmet that is the culmination of mystical ability and aesthetics. When worn, the helmet enhances the wearer's divine sense, increasing their scanning range tenfold and boosting their ability to see through things. Recommended for exploration, combat, and surveillance. Not recommended for improper use.]

The item in Chu Liang's hands was an unusually shaped helmet.

Chu Liang muttered in disbelief, "Culmination of mystical ability and aesthetics..."

The helmet resembled a freshly severed shrimp head that had been hollowed out, with the shell repurposed into a helmet. If a shrimp's head were the size of a human's, it would look like some kind of devilish creature—undoubtedly terrifying.

Chu Liang tried it on, enclosing his whole head in the shell. The two golden orbs on the helmet rose vertically, flooding his mind with spiritual energy. He could feel that his divine sense was indeed enhanced significantly.

Whoosh.

In an instant, the White Pagoda appeared much clearer in his mind.

The Large-Headed Dolls, which were shrouded in smoke... Tuntun, who had fallen asleep and turned into a cocoon... the seemingly endless iron prison in the dark... and Chu Liang himself, now transformed into a shrimp-headed man—all of these images were transmitted into his mind through his divine sense. If he were scanning the world outside, the range would likely expand even further.

Not bad. Their sense of aesthetics is rather ahead of their time, but the effects are excellent.

"Hm?"

As Chu Liang scanned the White Pagoda space with his enhanced divine sense, he discovered a tiny detail he had never noticed before. There was a small black on one of the White Pagoda's walls.

Upon closer inspection, it appeared to be a tiny hole in the wall—tinier than the tip of an embroidery needle. Yet, that hole certainly was there, and it seemed to lead outside.

Ever since he first saw the White Pagoda, Chu Liang had regarded it as a mysterious and formidable artifact, likely on par with the top ten legendary artifacts listed in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures.

There's something that managed to pierce through this...?

That sure is hard to believe.

Chapter 679: It's Smiling at Me!

Boom.

The second reward, which was refined from the crab demon's imprint, looked a little strange. It was quite long like a weapon, yet it didn't seem suited for combat.

[Crimson Augmented Shears: A divine pair of shears imbued with qi that is naturally augmented with crimson flames. When used, the shears release bursts of the flame-augmented qi. The shears can cut through even the most indestructible materials. If you're curious about the hardness of an object, just test it with these shears, and you'll know.]

The light faded to reveal a large pair of crimson shears. The shears' handles were very long, and the blades had curved tips that rounded off at the end. When Chu Liang pulled open the shears, he found that the inner part of the blades had jagged edges lined with crimson-gold patterns.

The description of the shears sent a chill of excitement down Chu Liang's back.

To test the shears' strength, Chu Liang took out one of the extra bronze masks he had acquired previously. The first time he found one, he had attempted to destroy it, but despite using a full-powered attack, he hadn't been able to damage it in the slightest.

Even now, with his incredible dragon strength, it was extremely difficult for Chu Liang to damage it with his bare hands, proving the mask's exceptional durability.

He placed the bronze mask in between the blades of the Crimson Augmented Shears and activated his foundational qi.

Then he pushed the shears' handles inward, moving the blades toward the mask, and the jagged edges glowed with crimson-gold light. As the blades touched the mask, intense heat radiated from the contact point. Chu Liang pushed the handles harder, and the bronze mask warped slightly.

Snip.

After a brief standoff, the mask split in two and fell to the ground.

Chu Liang lifted the Crimson Augmented Shears and examined its blades. There wasn't the slightest nick or dent on them.

What incredible shears!

The item's design as a pair of shears made it unsuitable for use as a weapon in combat, but it had been made with a remarkably strong material. Beyond its hardness and sharpness, the most important component was the qi it was imbued with—qi augmented with crimson flames. That was the secret to its unparalleled cutting power.

In certain situations, this tool could even rival a legendary artifact.

Stowing away the Crimson Augmented Shears, Chu Liang turned his attention to the final imprint, the one of the cat demon.

He seemed to be pretty lucky today. The last two rewards were enchanted tools with great practical value.

Boom!

After Chu Liang refined the imprint, another ball of light floated out. This time, it revealed a book.

[Spirit Cat's Tiny Steps: A divine skill that allows a cultivator to channel the divine abilities and character of spirit cats. While moving, the cultivator's flow of qi and any sounds they make will be concealed, allowing them to evade detection. However, their movement speed will be reduced slightly.]

It was a manual for a divine skill. Chu Liang skimmed through the manual, quickly understanding the key points of the divine skill.

The divine skill was about mimicking the hunting style of spirit cats, which involved slowly approaching the prey. During the time that the spirit cat abilities were active, the cultivator's flow of qi and movements would go unnoticed—truly stealthy movements.

After studying the divine skill for a while, he was done grasping the essence of Spirit Cat's Tiny Steps.

When he opened his eyes, he spotted Wang Xuanling standing on the opposite side of the deck. Chu Liang decided to test out the divine skill on him.

First, Chu Liang lowered his posture, then he took a step forward, followed by another.

The divine skill worked flawlessly. His breathing and aura vanished without a trace, and his steps were soundless.

However, the part of the description that said the "movement speed will be reduced slightly" was misleading. At this pace, Old Wang could have relieved himself at the side of the airship and pulled his pants back up long before Chu Liang got to him.

It took quite a while for Chu Liang to creep from one side of the deck to where Wang Xuanling was standing.

Just as Chu Liang was about to get right behind Wang Xuanling, Xu Ziyang stepped out of the cabin.

Puzzled, he asked, "Junior Brother Chu, what are you doing?"

Hearing that, Wang Xuanling turned his head to find that Chu Liang, who had been on the other side of the deck earlier, was suddenly behind him, creeping up in a sneaky stance.

He hadn't sensed anything at all!

Chu Liang grinned awkwardly as he straightened his bent knees. "Hehe. Senior Uncle Wang, do you think my shoes look good?"

Wang Xuanling immediately grew alert. A wave of fear washed over him, and his imagination ran wild.

No matter how good-natured Chu Liang appears normally, he's still Di Nufeng's disciple. Perhaps one day, when I've let my guard down... he'll stab me in the back. Then this teacher-disciple duo—these two villains will dominate Mount Shu...

I must never let my guard down around Chu Liang.

...

Around the time Chu Liang was done collecting his rewards, the Lianglong entered Mount Shu's airspace. Compared to Red Cotton Peak, which was bustling and lively with lights all over, the Lianglong had arrived at a side of Mount Shu that was much quieter.

Chu Liang went straight to Heaven-Reaching Peak to find Wen Yulong.

Upon seeing Chu Liang, Wen Yulong smiled and said, "Senior Brother Chu? You came at the right time. I've thought of an excellent way to expand the Circle of Immortal Friends Token!"

Instead of rushing to talk about his own matters, Chu Liang replied, "Oh? Let's hear it?"

Wen Yulong took out a piece of paper and drew two circles on it. "One enchanted formation can hold thousands of spirit sense fragments. If we have one person's spirit sense join two enchanted formations to act as a go-between, information could be exchanged between the two formations. With this method, we could create countless formations and connect all cultivators in the world!"

He used his brush to dab a dot in between the circles, forming an interconnected network.

Chu Liang pondered, "But... once the number of connected formations increases, wouldn't the spiritual energy required be much greater?"

"Yes," Wen Yulong replied. "We're currently relying on the supply of spiritual energy from a large number of spirit talismans. That means we can only maintain up to three formations at the same time. In the future, we may need a stronger source of spiritual energy. If we had an eighth-realm Eminent One, they could maintain hundreds of fully active formations. And if they're willing to put in the effort, they should be able to maintain even more than that."

"Why don't you discuss it with your grandfather?" Chu Liang suggested.

"Oh, please, no. I'm not that close to him. Why don't you talk to him instead?"

"Well, it's not urgent. We don't have that many users yet. The immediate issue is—"

"The blocking!" Wen Yulong nodded. "I've been thinking about this problem for the past two days. How can a connection between two spirit senses be severed unilaterally? It's really difficult. That's what I was thinking about when I got the idea for the connected formations."

"I realized that it would be really hard to give everyone the ability to block others. But we could set up a second formation. If someone doesn't want to see messages from him, they could simply jump to the other formation... to avoid him."

As for who was the "him" that Wen Yulong mentioned... Well, Chu Liang didn't need to ask about that.

It's just unfortunate.

Chu Liang nodded. "Just hurry up and get it done."

"So, did you bring back something good again this time?" Wen Yulong asked.

He knew that if Chu Liang came looking for him right after returning to the mountain, it usually meant he had picked up some loot.

Just as Wen Yulong expected, Chu Liang took out a storage bag. It looked quite plain and simple; it was likely quite old.

Earlier, he searched the two demon corpses he had stored in his enchanted tool, but all he found was this storage bag.

"Whoa!" Wen Yulong exclaimed in surprise. "It's a high-grade storage bag. This is an old item."

In the present day, high-grade storage enchanted tools were typically discreet and elegant objects like jade rings, belts, or hairpins. Storage bags were generally lower-grade items, mainly used to transport bulk goods.

The demons of the Far West were the only ones that would still use these outdated high-grade storage bags and even treat them as valuable items.

The storage bag had been tied shut with a knot that required a specific technique to untie.

After studying it for a while, Wen Yulong tried several times before finally succeeding in untying the knot.

He said, "Good thing you brought this straight to me. The bag's enchanted formation has a security mechanism. Had you tried to force it open, the items inside might have been sent scattering into the endless void."

"Of course, I was careful. After all, there might be a great treasure inside," Chu Liang replied.

He then sent his divine sense inside the storage bag to search for items. The first thing he pulled out was an ornate box.

Upon opening it, he found a palm-sized azure jade lamp. The craftsmanship was exquisite, and there was dense spiritual energy around it. Sparkling crystal-clear water seemed to be flowing inside the translucent wall of the jade lamp, and touching the lamp sent ripples through the water.

Wen Yulong gasped. "Could this be... the Azure Wave Lamp, ranked sixty-seventh in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures?"

"That's right," Chu Liang answered, gently brushing his fingers over the lamp. He sighed and said, "As I expected, it's here. Unfortunately, those demons probably stole this from an immortal sect. I'll have to find out who this enchanted tool belongs to. I may have to return it to them."

"I know who it is. This is the cherished enchanted tool of Daoist Qinghu[1] from Penglai. However, Daoist Qinghu went missing a few days ago after leaving for a journey. His whereabouts are still unknown."

"So, it's Penglai's..." Chu Liang blinked, then he suddenly looked down. "Junior Brother Wen, look!"

"Hm?" Wen Yulong uttered as he glanced at the Azure Wave Lamp. He asked puzzledly, "Look at what?"

"Look at the Azure Wave Lamp... It's smiling at me!"

Wen Yulong: "?"

"Well, there's nothing I can do. Haaa..." Chu Liang sighed. "It seems this item is fated to be with me."

Chapter 680: The Azure Wave Lamp

For an enchanted tool like the Azure Wave Lamp, ranked sixty-seventh in the Catalog of the Mortal World's Ten Thousand Treasures, there was no concern about not knowing how to use it. Chu Liang just needed to search through the books in the Hall of Conservation, and he would naturally develop an understanding of the lamp's powers.

Chu Liang did not rush to test out the lamp. Instead, he continued to see what else the two demons had kept in the storage bag.

He pulled out two weapons. They looked quite old, but they were made of pretty good materials. However, their age could not be overlooked; the craftsmanship showed that the swordsmithing techniques that had been used to make them were very outdated. In terms of quality, they were worth only a few hundred sword coins.

As the years passed by, cultivators continued to make progress in many aspects of the immortality cultivation world, such as divine techniques, arts, and skills, pills, alchemical cauldrons, enchanted formations, enchanted tools, and so on. That was why ancient enchanted tools were often inferior to those of the present.

There were exceptions to that. Many of the famous legendary artifacts were very old too, but that was because they had likely fallen from the heavens during the ancient times or even earlier, rather than having been crafted by mortal hands. That was why they were superior to modern ones.

Another exception was ancient enchanted tools that had been made with rare materials that had since become unavailable, making it impossible to reproduce an enchanted tool of the same quality or above.

As for ordinary ancient weapons like these, only the demons of the Far West would still use them. There was only one reason for that—the demons were poor.

Aside from the weapons, there were a few jade slips. Some simple but unusual breathing techniques had been recorded on them. These were likely part of the demons' cultivation legacy, which appeared rudimentary by human standards.

There was only one item in the storage bag that seemed potentially useful—a map.

The map had been drawn on animal hide using black ink. Certain locations had been marked in blood-red ink, accompanied by simple symbols.

Wen Yulong examined the map briefly and recognized the eight marked locations: the Verdant Foxhills, the Great Marshlands, the Desolate Plains, the Abyss of Wrath, the Mount Thunder, the Frostveil Tundra, the Emerald Forest, and the Temple of the Demon God.

Wen Yulong studied the map several times over before saying, "This is... a map of the demon factions in the Far West."

"Why would they need a map of their own territory?" Chu Liang asked puzzledly.

Wen Yulong explained, "The Far West is vast, and apart from the endless desert land, it's just desert mountains and dry, rocky barren lands. It's easy to get lost without a map."

"Let's keep it then. This will come in handy if we ever launch a counterattack against the demons there."

"Launch a counterattack on the Far West?" Wen Yulong chuckled. "How could that ever happen?"

The humans had allowed the remnants of the land demons to retreat to the Far West because that region was pretty much a death zone. Even grass struggled to grow there.

If the humans were to insist on wiping out the demons, the greater demons might abandon their clans in fury, storm into the nine provinces, and massacre civilian humans. Even if the humans could hunt the greater demons down eventually, it would come at a great cost.

Thus, the humans heeded the principle of "Do not pursue cornered enemies" and left the demons of the Far West alone.

Moreover, the immortal sects of the time understood that the demons could never be eradicated. As long as any non-human living thing developed cultivation power, the humans would view it as a demon. How could they ever eliminate them all? As long as no new Demon God emerged, that was enough.

Of course, the other reason was that it was simply too difficult to find and kill all the demons.

The Far West had complex terrains. Even if someone were to go there with a legendary artifact to attack, the demons could make swift escapes, scattering across the Far West. They could climb mountains, dive into the sea, burrow into the sand, or hide in forests. It was impossible to predict how much effort it would take to locate and eliminate them all.

That effort would be better spent on further developing the nine provinces.

It was like fighting someone who had already admitted defeat and jumped into a manure pit to hide. It was pointless to follow them in just to beat them up. The best course of action was to stand guard and make sure they didn't climb out of the manure pit.

Thus, the immortal sects were strict about eliminating demons within the nine provinces and the four seas, but they never set foot in the Far West.

For this reason, even when two great demon kings attacked the Buddhist Cloud Monastery, the monastery did not go to the Far West to retaliate.

Being impoverished was the demons' weakness, but it also worked as an advantage.

If the monks were to head there with the Dharma Lotus Platform to attack, the demons would simply scatter in all directions. Even if a few lesser demons were killed, what difference would it make?

Apart from the Demon King of the Verdant Foxhills, who was trying to build a civilization, the rest of the demons remained as wild as ever. There was nothing they could not abandon.

Fortunately for the demons, they did not need to depend on treasures of nature to advance in their cultivation. Of course, it would be better to have the treasures of nature, but even without them, as long as the demons were of a sufficiently powerful bloodline, they could endure the hardships and persist with their arduous cultivation over the years.

However, if things continued this way, the demons would likely gradually weaken. The humans would keep growing stronger, until the day demons could no longer fight back at all.

The average human cultivator at the Spiritual Awareness Realm was far stronger than that of three thousand years ago. Thanks to their continuous advancement of divine techniques, arts, and skills, pills, alchemical cauldrons, enchanted formations, and enchanted tools, the humans could achieve a level of progress that was impossible for the demons.

In short, there were many reasons why invading the Far West would not be a wise move for the humans.

Chu Liang hadn't known much about the Far West before this, so it was only while he was listening to Wen Yulong's brief explanation that he realized there was far more scheming going on than he had expected.

When Wen Yulong's explanation ended, Chu Liang let out a sigh.

"So, this map is basically useless," he said in a disappointed tone.

Wen Yulong consoled him, "Well, at least you have the Azure Wave Lamp. And the corpses of these two demons are worth quite a lot."

"They are indeed worth quite a lot." Chu Liang glanced at the demon corpses on the ground. "They deserve a grand burial."

...

Chu Liang left and made his way to the Hall of Conservation.

"Senior Brother Sq—Yuan!" he called out, greeting Yuan Zhuo enthusiastically.

"Junior Brother Chu."

Yuan Zhuo was sitting upright as always. He still looked as youthful as ever, with his squarish head and the same serious smile on his face.

"I'm looking for books on the Azure Wave Lamp. Are there any records that describe how to use this enchanted tool?" Chu Liang asked.

Yuan Zhuo nodded. "One moment."

His eyes glowed as he raised his finger. Then a few books swished over, landing gently in front of Chu Liang.

That's impressive, Senior Brother Yuan, Chu Liang thought with admiration.

It had been years since he last saw Yuan Zhuo, but Yuan Zhuo's efficiency had only improved.

Chu Liang quickly scanned the books with his divine sense, committing the contents to memory.

He then asked, "I've been gone for some years... I heard that Little Yi has been attending lessons here that whole time. It was fortunate you were here to teach him, Senior Brother. Has he been diligent in his studies?"

"Chu Yi is exceptionally gifted. You need not worry," Yuan Zhuo replied, full of praise for the young disciple. "He would thrive with anyone as his teacher."

Haha... It seems you still don't understand the situation at Silver Sword Peak, Chu Liang thought.

He smiled and said, "That's good then."

After exchanging pleasantries with Wen Yulong, Chu Liang returned to his cabin on Silver Sword Peak and shut the door behind him. That was when he finally revealed the grin of a landlord who had stumbled upon unexpected riches.

Chu Liang pulled out the Azure Wave Lamp.

The jade lamp was translucent, looking like there was liquid flowing across its surface.

Chu Liang ran his fingers over it. Ripples spread through the lamp's wall, and the spiritual energy it contained undulated like the rolling waves of the sea.

He smiled as he poured his foundational qi into the lamp, extending his divine sense along with it.

Rumble.

An intangible wave spread out from the wooden hut, covering all of Silver Sword Peak in the blink of an eye. However, when the wave attempted to expand further, it faltered. Chu Liang's cultivation power was insufficient, limiting the reach of the wave to Silver Sword Peak.

In the world he saw with his divine sense, Silver Sword Peak was submerged in a lake filled with rippling azure waves. Every living being appeared as a ripple. With a mere thought, he could clearly see what each ripple was.

For example, one of the ripples was a young cultivator standing confidently in front of Berry Wonderland. He had thick eyebrows, large eyes, and a face that radiated yang qi. The young man was speaking to a beautiful young woman.

The young woman was tall, with long legs, a voluptuous figure, and strikingly heroic facial features. She was likely a tourist.

The young man was none other than the Fragrant Tiger, the leader of Mount Shu's Four Overlords—Lin Bei.

He was reciting something loudly to that female cultivator, whom he had only just met.

"Ah~ Fair lady, allow me to recite a poem for you!" Lin Bei's pitch rose and fell dramatically. "My heart beats... with a love that burns like a blazing wildfire that cannot be contained..."

He turned to gaze at her with an expression of deep affection. "When you smile... you make me a person who goes absolutely insane..."

The young woman's face stiffened noticeably. She was clearly on the brink of losing her temper.

That rascal is harassing female tourists again...

Chu Liang pointed his finger at Lin Bei.

Whoosh.

A beam of emerald light shot down from the sky. Lin Bei was lifted into the air, and he suddenly found himself in the midst of a turbulent sea of azure waves!

The surrounding seawater was a deep emerald green. There was a powerful pulling force in the seawater, seemingly determined to drag him into the depths of the sea.

Lin Bei struggled with all his cultivation power, but it was futile. Every bit of foundational qi he unleashed was absorbed by the sea!

He tried to escape but couldn't!

Everything had happened so suddenly that he panicked.

Just as he was beginning to regain his composure, the seawater vanished abruptly.

Thud.

Lin Bei fell to the ground, flailing for a bit more before. When he finally raised his head and looked around, he realized he was still at Berry Wonderland.

The tall woman was watching him with a bemused smile.

At some point, Chu Liang walked over.

He asked, "What are you doing?"

"Ah..." Lin Bei stood up hurriedly. "I was just giving this tourist a tour of the area..."

After a pause, he said quietly, "Chu Liang, is there something strange going on on Silver Sword Peak?"

Before Chu Liang could respond, a deep and resounding voice rang out from behind the woman.

"Chuichui, you're here already? Eh?"

The person paused abruptly.

Then he raised his voice excitedly and called out, "Brother Chu!"