

the mans Decree: Kai Ping / Chen Ping

Chapter 4681

Xiao Dynasty!

Xiao Yuanshan, accompanied by Xiao Feng and a group of elite warriors from the Xiao Dynasty, soared into the sky.

Ahead of them was a young man dressed in white, followed by a woman in a flowing Luo skirt. Behind them stood Zuo Tianzheng, and further back, twelve sword-wielding monks—all of them above the fifth rank of the Mahayana Realm.

Seeing this formidable lineup, Xiao Yuanshan and his entourage grew serious.

Zuo Tianzheng wouldn't bring people like this to the Xiao Dynasty without a reason.

However, despite the intimidating presence of these powerful individuals, Xiao Yuanshan remained unshaken. After all, the Xiao Dynasty had its own backing—Mr. Shi had blessed their dynasty with thousands of years of fortune. No matter how strong these outsiders were, they couldn't shake the foundation of the Xiao Dynasty.

“Zuo Tianzheng, how dare you bring people to my Xiao Dynasty? Do you have a death wish?” Xiao Yuanshan demanded.

Zuo Tianzheng's face turned grim, but he didn't dare retaliate. Instead, he explained, “Emperor Xiao, don't misunderstand. This time, I'm only here to escort His Highness Yun Li. His Highness is looking for Kai.”

“Your Highness?” Xiao Yuanshan's eyes shifted to Yun Li. “Are you from the Temple?”

Yun Li gave a slight nod. “Yes.”

“What business do you have with Mr. Chen? Are you here for revenge?” Xiao Yuanshan asked directly.

“I’ve come because of his reputation,” Yun Li replied calmly.

“Because of his reputation?” Xiao Yuanshan’s brows furrowed. He didn’t entirely believe Yun Li’s words, but he responded coldly, “Mr. Chen is not in the Xiao Dynasty. He left several days ago.”

“I’m aware,” Yun Li said. “I’m here to wait for him.”

Yun Li’s certainty that Kai wasn’t present left Xiao Yuanshan puzzled.

He studied Yun Li carefully, unable to understand his motives. Yun Li didn’t seem hostile, and there was no indication that he had come to start a fight.

“It’s uncertain when Mr. Chen will return to our Xiao Dynasty,” Xiao Yuanshan finally said, his tone guarded. “I’ll wait as long as it takes. I know you’ll find a way to contact him,” Yun Li said confidently.

After speaking, Yun Li descended slowly, landing on the ground before sitting cross-legged on a massive rock.

Seeing this, Xiao Yuanshan, though filled with questions, had no choice but to lead his people back to the imperial city, leaving Yun Li and his group to wait outside.

“Your Highness, I...”

Zuo Tianzheng hesitated as Xiao Yuanshan departed. He wanted to tell Yun Li that he wished to leave. Waiting for Kai made him uneasy—especially if Mr. Shi appeared again. The mere thought terrified him.

But Zuo Tianzheng didn’t dare to voice his concerns outright, so he stammered uncertainly.

“Are you planning to leave?” Yun Li asked, looking at Zuo Tianzheng.

Although Yun Li’s gaze was calm, it was enough to make Zuo Tianzheng shiver with fear.

Yun Li didn’t expect much from Zuo Tianzheng beyond acting as a guide. But seeing how timid he was, Yun Li couldn’t help but question how someone like him could lead the Demon Sealing Alliance or serve the Ten Palaces.

“No, no! I wouldn’t dare. With Your Highness here, how could I leave?” Zuo Tianzheng replied quickly, shaking his head frantically and abandoning any thought of leaving.

Shi Lan, observing Yun Li sitting so composed, asked, “Yun Li, do we really have to wait here? We don’t even know how long it will take.”

“It won’t take long,” Yun Li replied with a slight smile.

He was confident that once Xiao Yuanshan returned, he would immediately contact Kai, ensuring that Kai would arrive soon.

Yun Li’s guess was accurate. As soon as Xiao Yuanshan returned to the imperial city, he instructed Xiao Feng to contact Kai using a sound transmission jade slip.

At that moment, Kai was still in Nanjin City, bidding farewell to Pavilion Master Qian. Upon receiving Xiao Feng’s transmission, he hurried to the square to board an airship bound for the Xiao Dynasty.

Kai hadn’t anticipated that, even after Mr. Shi’s intervention, the people from the Temple would still have the audacity to trouble the Xiao Dynasty.

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When Kai arrived at the airship, he found Ji Yun explaining its controls to Yaomei.

Ji Yun stood behind her, holding her hands and guiding her step by step.

Yaomei's cheeks were slightly flushed, but she seemed to enjoy the interaction.

The two were so close and natural in their movements that they appeared like a pair of young lovers to anyone watching.

Completely absorbed, neither of them noticed Kai approaching the airship.

“Ahem...”

Kai deliberately cleared his throat twice to catch their attention.

Startled, Ji Yun and Yaomei quickly pulled apart, their actions betraying a hint of panic.

When Yaomei realized it was Kai, her face turned crimson, and she avoided his gaze, looking as if she'd been caught doing something she shouldn't.

Ji Yun, on the other hand, gave an awkward laugh and said, “Mr. Chen, I was just teaching Yaomei how to operate the airship.”

“Let's take off immediately and head for the Xiao Dynasty,” Kai instructed without addressing the situation further.

Noticing Kai's urgency, Ji Yun hesitated and asked, “Mr. Chen, is something wrong?”

“Don't ask. Let's go,” Kai replied firmly before heading into one of the airship's rooms.

He didn't want to interfere with Ji Yun's budding connection with Yaomei. If Ji Yun could win her over, it would save Kai a lot of worry.

With Yaomei always following him, he struggled to find the time and focus to care for her properly.

Once inside his room, Kai sat down and began cultivating. The aura around him grew increasingly intense as he channeled his energy.

He knew every moment counted to improve his strength.

He couldn't rely on Mr. Shi forever. Mr. Shi had made it clear—he wouldn't kill Kai's enemies for him.

Kai had to face and defeat them himself. The people from the Ten Palaces sought out the Xiao Dynasty once again, seemingly undeterred by their previous defeat.

This time, Kai resolved not to show any mercy.

Now at the second level of the Mahayana Realm, Kai had progressed rapidly, but what he lacked most was experience.

Though his cultivation level had risen, his rapid advancement left him without the battle-hardened skills that came from years of combat.

Cultivators with more experience often outperformed those of the same realm who lacked it.

While practicing, Kai retrieved the jade slips related to the Heaven and Earth Formation.

Among the four jade slips, he could only access the first. The others remained sealed, impervious to his divine consciousness.

Kai knew that unlocking all four jade slips would reveal the Heaven and Earth Formation itself, giving him the opportunity to decipher and break it.

At present, however, he didn't even know where the formation was, let alone how to unravel its mysteries.

Determined, Kai began cautiously probing the second jade slip with his divine consciousness.

His consciousness, as delicate as a thread, carefully sought an opening in the seal. The process was painstakingly slow, like a race against time and a battle against an invisible, ancient force.

Sweat gradually beaded on his forehead, but his eyes remained steadfast, filled with unyielding determination.

With every attempt, he felt the seal's resistance—a profound, ancient power that seemed to embody the primordial rules of the universe itself.

Yet Kai refused to give up.

Summoning all his spiritual energy, he focused his mind to its peak, repeatedly striking at the seemingly impenetrable seal.

Just as exhaustion threatened to overwhelm him, he sensed a fleeting opportunity.

It was like the brightest star in a dark sky, guiding him to the seal's weak point.

Overjoyed, Kai marshaled all his remaining strength and launched a decisive assault on that spot.

“Boom!”

A faint sound resonated in his sea of consciousness, signaling the collapse of the seal.

In the next moment, a torrent of vast and profound information flooded into his mind—revealing the secrets hidden within the second jade slip of the Heaven and Earth Formation.

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As Kai's consciousness slowly penetrated the second jade slip of the Heaven and Earth Array, an ancient and timeless aura washed over him. It felt as though he had traversed through time and space, entering a mysterious and unfathomable realm.

Within the jade slip, streams of light flowed endlessly, runes intricately intertwined to form a complex and majestic array diagram. It rotated slowly, emanating an energy fluctuation that was both awe-inspiring and overwhelming.

Kai immersed himself in this world crafted by the formation. His mind moved with the shifting lights and shadows, striving to capture even the smallest changes and comprehend the deeper meaning behind each rune.

In this place, time seemed to lose all meaning. Kai felt an inexplicable resonance with the array, as though every breath he took connected subtly to the vast formation surrounding him.

Gradually, he began to grasp the essence of the Heaven and Earth Array. It wasn't merely a prohibitive formation but a profound embodiment of the natural laws governing heaven and earth.

Each rune served as an exact replication of these universal principles, and the entire array was a grand amalgamation of these simulations, capable of mobilizing the forces of nature to produce near-miraculous effects.

As Kai's understanding deepened, he realized that mastering and breaking the Heaven and Earth Array required more than raw power or technical skill. The true key lay in perceiving and aligning with the invisible forces of nature.

It was not simply about arranging or activating the formation—it was about learning to coexist harmoniously with nature, drawing strength from it, and using that energy to counteract beings who defied its laws.

Immersed in this profound realization, Kai lost track of time, while the world outside continued its quiet flow.

Suddenly, a powerful vibration shattered his meditation. Kai withdrew his consciousness and discovered that he had not only succeeded in unlocking the second jade slip but had also achieved a profound leap in his understanding of formations and his state of mind.

What Kai didn't know was that when he broke the seal of the second jade slip, a strange phenomenon unfolded in the Tianren Realm. Colorful rays of light cascaded from the sky, and within the luminous display, faint human figures seemed to emerge, as though offering a glimpse into another world.

The phenomenon vanished in an instant, witnessed by only a few, but its appearance was enough to ripple through the Tianren Realm like a boulder dropped into a tranquil lake.

Many hidden forces within the realm stirred, revealing their presence for the first time in ages.

Unaware of the commotion he had caused, Kai stretched his muscles and walked out of his room.

On the deck of the airship, he spotted Ji Yun and Yao Mei gazing at the distant horizon. Ji Yun appeared to be explaining something to Yao Mei as the two stood side by side, lost in their conversation. Kai simply smiled, choosing not to interrupt the pair. Ji Yun had been by his side for a long time, and now, with the company of the youngest sister, perhaps his days wouldn't feel as solitary.

As for the youngest sister, she no longer had to wander aimlessly—she had finally found a home.

The airship descended from the sky above the Xiao Dynasty, slowly making its way toward the imperial city.

Xiao Yuanshan, along with Xiao Feng and the ministers of the Xiao Dynasty, had already assembled in neat rows to welcome them.

To the Xiao Dynasty, Kai was a figure of immense importance. Without his intervention, they would never have received Mr. Shi's blessing of a thousand years of fortune.

Meanwhile, outside the imperial city, Yun Li slowly opened his eyes, a faint smile appearing on his face. "They've arrived," he said softly.

"How can you be so sure?" Shi Lan asked, puzzled.

"I can feel it," Yun Li replied calmly as he rose from the boulder. In the blink of an eye, his figure vanished.

Shi Lan quickly gathered her people and followed him into the imperial city.

As Kai disembarked from the airship with Ji Yun and the youngest sister, Xiao Yuanshan and the others immediately stepped forward to greet them.

The sight left the youngest sister in stunned silence. She hadn't expected Kai to command such respect in this world of heaven and man.

"Mr. Chen, about the Ten Palaces..."

Xiao Yuanshan hurriedly approached, ready to report the situation regarding the people from the Ten Palaces.

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But Kai waved his hand, then turned his head toward the void and said calmly, "No need to speak. They're here..."

The void trembled, and Yun Li's figure slowly emerged. Beside him stood Shi Lan.

Behind them, twelve black-robed monks—each at the fifth level or higher in the Mahayana realm—followed closely, sabers in hand, exuding murderous intent.

Zuo Tianzheng trailed behind the monks, keeping his distance despite being unable to leave.

Kai and Yun Li locked eyes, both furrowing their brows simultaneously.

“The second level of the Mahayana realm?”

Yun Li frowned in disbelief.

He had received information that Kai was merely at the ninth level of the Tribulation Realm, so how had he suddenly advanced to the second level of the Mahayana realm?

For a moment, he doubted whether he had the right person.

After all, Yun Li had never seen Kai before.

Xiao Yuanshan was equally stunned. He hadn't noticed earlier, but now it was clear—Kai had ascended to the second level of the Mahayana realm in just a few days. Such a rapid breakthrough was simply unbelievable!

Zuo Tianzheng, who stood further back, was just as shocked. His mouth hung open, nearly dropping his jaw.

“Kai, you... how did you reach the second level of the Mahayana realm?”

He pointed at Kai, stammering in disbelief.

But Kai ignored him. Instead, he fixed his gaze on Yun Li and asked, “Were you looking for me?”

By now, Zuo Tianzheng was no longer even worth his attention.

Yun Li nodded. “Tenth Palace, Yun Li...”

He cupped his hands politely toward Kai.

Everyone watching was surprised. Was Yun Li not here to take revenge on Kai?

His demeanor was calm, devoid of any hostility.

Kai returned the gesture. “Kai.”

“Brother Chen, may we speak in private?”

Yun Li’s words left everyone bewildered.

Brother Chen? A private conversation?

Xiao Yuanshan and the others exchanged confused glances.

Even Kai himself was puzzled. He had no idea what Yun Li was up to. Could it be that this man from the Ten Palaces isn’t here to cause trouble for me?

“Alright.” Kai nodded.

“Mr. Chen...”

Xiao Yuanshan quickly stepped forward, attempting to stop him.

After all, Yun Li was at the peak of the ninth level of the Mahayana Realm. Even though Kai had recently advanced to the second level, facing a cultivator of that caliber was no simple task.

Moreover, no one knew what Yun Li was planning. If this was a trap, Kai could be in serious danger.

But Kai waved his hand, signaling Xiao Yuanshan not to worry. Then, he gestured for Yun Li to proceed.

In an instant, the two figures vanished.

Now, the remaining members of the Xiao Dynasty and the Ten Palaces were left staring at one another.

With the two main figures gone, all they could do was wait—no one dared to act rashly.

Meanwhile, Kai walked alongside Yun Li. There was no hostility between them; in fact, they appeared like old friends.

“You’re not going to kill me?” Kai broke the silence.

“Why would I?”

Yun Li smiled slightly.

“I killed Luo Ta...”

Kai didn’t bother hiding the truth. He knew Luo Ta was a key figure in the Ten Palaces.

“So what?” Yun Li’s smile remained unchanged.

“I killed one of your own from the Ten Palaces. If you’re not here for revenge, then why are you looking for me?”

Kai couldn’t hold back his frustration.

What exactly was this guy after?

Why not just get to the point?

“I’m here simply because I’m curious about you,” Yun Li said, looking directly at Kai. “Your body carries the aura of three different tribes. Do you also possess the ultimate fire of the demon clan?”

“What are you talking about?”

Kai spread his palm, and a flickering demon clan ultimate fire ignited in his hand.

For the first time, a hint of shock appeared on Yun Li’s otherwise calm face.

At the same moment, the blade in his hand began to tremble, seemingly reacting to the demonic energy.

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“You are not a demon cultivator. Your demon clan’s ultimate fire is impure.”

Yun Li gently pressed his sword before speaking to Kai.

“Oh? And how do you know that?”

Kai was slightly surprised.

His current ultimate fire wasn’t purely that of the demon clan but a fusion of multiple ultimate fires.

Yet Yun Li had seen through it instantly.

“I’ve encountered pure demon clan ultimate fire before. Yours is different.”

Yun Li’s tone was certain.

Kai frowned slightly. He hadn't expected someone from the Ten Palaces to have dealt with a Flame Demon before.

"Is Mr. Shi, the one behind you, from the demon clan?"

Yun Li asked.

Since Kai possessed the demon clan's ultimate fire, it was highly likely that his backer was a demon cultivator.

Kai shook his head. "No."

"Then who is he?"

Yun Li was eager to know the identity of the person capable of both killing Luo Ta and bringing him back to life.

Killing Luo Ta wasn't the shocking part—if it came down to a fight, Yun Li was confident he could do the same.

Although both he and Luo Ta were at the peak of the ninth level of the Mahayana realm, Yun Li was the son of the Tenth Palace Master.

The sword in his hand wasn't something an ordinary worshiper like Luo Ta could possess.

When cultivators were at the same level, victory depended on experience and magical weapons.

But killing Luo Ta and then resurrecting him? That was unheard of. Even his father, the Tenth Palace Master, couldn't do that.

"I don't know," Kai replied, shaking his head again.

Yun Li frowned, staring at him. "You don't know who your own backer is?"

He found it hard to believe. After all, Mr. Shi had been protecting Kai.

How could Kai not know his identity?

But Kai remained silent.

In truth, he genuinely had no idea who Mr. Shi was.

He had been curious for a long time, constantly trying to uncover Mr. Shi's true identity. Right now, Kai wasn't concerned with any of that.

All he knew was that Mr. Shi was one of the few people who had truly been good to him.

Nothing else mattered.

"I don't know," Kai repeated, shaking his head once more.

Yun Li studied him for a moment but chose not to press further. Whether Kai genuinely didn't know or simply didn't want to say, Yun Li understood that pushing the issue any further would be pointless.

"You're not from the Heavenly Realm, are you?" Yun Li suddenly asked.

Kai froze for a moment, then nodded.

He had no idea how Yun Li could tell. After all, he looked no different from any other cultivator from the Heavenly Realm.

No one had ever questioned his origins before.

Yet Yun Li had seen through him at first glance.

This guy's insight was terrifyingly sharp.

"Do you want to know how I figured it out?"

Yun Li smirked.

Kai remained silent, his expression unreadable. He refused to let Yun Li dictate the conversation.

Seeing no response, Yun Li continued, “Because in the Heavenly Realm, no such genius exists. No cultivator here fights beyond their level like you do.”

“You’re only at the second level of the Mahayana Realm. Even for a genius, defeating a third- or fourth-level Mahayana cultivator would defy the will of heaven.”

“But you managed to kill someone at the peak of the ninth level. A monster like you simply doesn’t exist in the Heavenly Realm.”

Yun Li spoke with absolute certainty.

Watching him, Kai only smiled.

For someone from the God Clan, Yun Li was surprisingly restrained.

Most God Clan cultivators were prideful and arrogant. If it had been anyone else, they wouldn’t have wasted words—they would have attacked immediately.

“You can ask me something now. That would make it fair,” Yun Li offered.

“What kind of organization is your temple? What is its purpose?”

Kai asked without hesitation.

He had long been curious about this temple of the God Clan.

Why was it formed?

Did it have anything to do with the ancient war between gods and demons?

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“I don’t know,” Yun Li said, shaking his head.

Kai was taken aback but pressed on. “Who leads your temple? And besides your Ten Halls, where are the other nine?”

“I don’t know...”

Yun Li shook his head again.

Kai studied him, his eyes filled with doubt.

Was this guy just copying him, pretending not to know anything?

But in his own case, he truly didn’t know Mr. Shi’s identity—it wasn’t a lie.

“Then surely you know the strength of your Hall Master?” Kai asked.

Yun Li shook his head once more. “I don’t know, and I doubt even my father knows. It’s not that I don’t want to answer your questions—I simply can’t.”

“I see.”

Kai examined Yun Li’s expression and could tell he wasn’t lying.

The temple must have a strict hierarchy, making it impossible for lower-ranking members to understand the higher levels.

After all, within the temple, the Ten Halls were the lowest tier.

“Now that we’ve learned about each other and you’ve satisfied your curiosity, can we part ways?” Kai asked.

Yun Li had claimed he only wanted to see what kind of person Kai was.

Now that he had, surely there was no reason to stay.

“Suddenly, I feel the urge to spar with you—just a friendly match.”

Yun Li was eager to see if Kai truly had the ability to kill a peak ninth-level Mahayana cultivator.

But if they fought for real, and the rumors were true, Yun Li might end up dead.

So, he suggested a sparring match instead—one that would test Kai’s strength without risking his own life.

Kai chuckled. He had seen through Yun Li’s little scheme from the start.

Still, he wasn’t one to back down.

“Alright,” Kai agreed. “But I have one condition.” Kai wasn’t about to let Yun Li take advantage of him for nothing. This guy was being crafty, but Kai wasn’t a fool.

“What are your conditions?” Yun Li asked.

“Let’s make a wager. A simple sparring match is pointless without stakes,” Kai replied.

“Alright, but I left in a hurry and didn’t bring many resources,” Yun Li said, taking out a storage bag. “I only have 10,000 spirit stones. Will that do?”

Kai almost cursed out loud. A damn rich kid!

Keeping his composure, he glanced at Yun Li and said, “10,000 spirit stones may not be much, but I suppose it’ll do.”

Though inwardly shocked by the sheer amount, he refused to show it.

“Since that’s settled, let’s begin,” Yun Li said. “But remember—stop before it goes too far. If you injure me, you’re not getting a single spirit stone!”

Kai hesitated for a moment.

A peak ninth-level Mahayana cultivator... yet he kept reminding him not to go too far?

What was going on?

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep it under control,” Kai assured him.

As soon as the words left his mouth, both figures moved, instantly widening the distance between them.

The air grew tense, as if frozen in anticipation. Even the wind stilled, awaiting the inevitable clash.

Kai took a deep breath, his gaze sharpening like an eagle’s. The spiritual power within him surged like a flood breaking through a dam—uncontainable, unstoppable.

Slowly, he raised his right hand, palm facing up. A low hum resonated through the air as an ancient, majestic sword began to materialize from the void—his Dragon Slaying Sword.

The blade shimmered with a faint green glow, and a distant dragon’s roar echoed softly from within. It radiated an aura of sheer dominance—one that could cut down anything in its path.

Yun Li’s pupils shrank instantly, shock flashing across his face.

As the son of the Tenth Palace Master, he had seen countless divine weapons—but this...

“This... is your sword?” His voice trembled slightly, unable to hide his disbelief at the sight of the Dragon Slaying Sword.

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“Yes, this is my Dragon Slaying Sword.”

Kai smiled calmly, gripping the sword as spiritual energy swirled around him. He stood poised, like a peerless blade on the verge of being unsheathed.

“No wonder you were able to kill Narota. It seems your sword played a major role,” Yun Li remarked. “But the blade in my hand is no ordinary weapon either!”

His spiritual energy surged, and the long sword in his grasp gleamed brilliantly. Flames flickered along its blade, radiating intense heat.

The battle erupted in an instant.

Yun Li’s figure flashed like lightning, transforming into a streak of light as he lunged at Kai. His sword, carrying the force of whistling wind and blazing fire, slashed down fiercely.

Kai shifted lightly, his Dragon Slaying Sword sweeping through the air. The blade’s light twisted like a dragon, effortlessly neutralizing Yun Li’s attack. With a subtle flick of his wrist, he tapped the ground with the tip of his sword, using the rebound force to strike directly at Yun Li’s vital point.

The two clashed in rapid succession. Sword shadows and blade light intertwined, each collision accompanied by a deafening roar. The force of their strikes stirred shockwaves, distorting the very air around them.

Yun Li’s sword strikes were forceful and overwhelming, while Kai’s Dragon Slaying Sword was swift and unpredictable. At times, it surged forward like a soaring azure dragon; at others, it fragmented into a dazzling rain of sword energy.

As the fight raged on, their speed and strength pushed to the limit, each exchange more perilous than the last.

Despite Yun Li's superior cultivation level, he gradually found himself at a disadvantage. The Dragon Slaying Sword's sharpness, combined with Kai's masterful swordsmanship, overwhelmed him.

Finally, after an intense exchange, Yun Li made a slight misstep—just enough for Kai to seize the opportunity.

With snake-like precision, the Dragon Slaying Sword slipped through Yun Li's defenses at an impossible angle. The tip of the blade barely grazed his shoulder, leaving a faint sword mark before Kai swiftly withdrew.

The battlefield fell silent.

"I lost," Yun Li admitted, sheathing his sword. He glanced at the mark on his shoulder—not with reluctance, but with a hint of admiration and relief.

Kai smiled slightly, returning his sword to its scabbard. "Thank you for letting me win. Your strength is exceptional. If we hadn't been holding back, the outcome could've gone either way."

Yun Li chuckled heartily. Taking out 10,000 spirit stones from his storage bag, he tossed them to Kai. "A loss is a loss. Today, you bested me by half a move—these spirit stones are yours."

Kai caught the storage bag and instantly felt the immense spiritual energy surging within. A wave of excitement welled up in his heart.

I'm rich! Really rich!

10,000 spirit stones! Now, he had the resources to advance his cultivation even further.

Of course, he had intentionally won by only half a move—he didn't want Yun Li to discern his true strength.

Clang! At that moment, a crisp shattering sound echoed through the sky. In the next instant, the blade in Yun Li's hand fractured into several pieces, clattering to the ground.

He was left holding only the hilt, a sight that was undeniably comical.

Yun Li stared at the broken weapon in stunned silence for a long time.

“...Fuck.”

The curse slipped out before he could stop himself.

Kai chuckled. “My apologies—your blade was just too fragile.”

At that moment, Yun Li felt as if he had swallowed a fly.

He had believed Kai had won by only half a move, but now, he realized the gap between them was far wider than he had thought.

Their weapons weren't even on the same level.

If this had been a true life-and-death battle, he would have already been beheaded.

“You've got to be kidding me!” Yun Li glared at Kai, his frustration evident.

“What do you mean? How did I deceive you?” Kai asked innocently, shrugging.

“We agreed to stop at a certain point! If you injured me, I wouldn't have given you the spirit stones!” Yun Li protested.

“I didn't injure you,” Kai replied calmly. “Your weapon just wasn't strong enough. I never said I couldn't break your sword.”

Yun Li gritted his teeth, swallowing his anger.

The spirit stones were already in Kai's hands—arguing now was pointless. Besides, he had never specified anything about weapons in their agreement.

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Yun Li stared at the broken hilt in his hand, his face turning pale. Letting out a helpless sigh, he forced a wry smile and said, "Your Dragon Slashing Sword is truly formidable. My sword is a top-grade spiritual weapon, yet I never expected it to be so fragile before yours."

"May I take a look at your Dragon Slashing Sword?"

"Of course!" Kai tossed the Dragon Slashing Sword to Yun Li.

Yun Li caught it carefully, examining it with a solemn expression. He infused a small amount of spiritual power into the blade, intending to analyze its essence.

However, the moment his spiritual power entered the sword, it trembled violently. In an instant, a sharp sword light slashed toward Yun Li's palm. Shocked, he released the sword, and it instantly returned to Kai's hand.

"Does your Dragon Slashing Sword have a sword spirit?" Yun Li asked in disbelief.

"Of course. Doesn't your precious sword have one as well?" Kai replied.

Yun Li shook his head. "It's different. My sword has spirituality, but it can't attack on its own like your Dragon Slashing Sword. Compared to yours, my sword is nothing more than a broken blade."

“You fought me for so many rounds but only won by half a move. You were holding back, weren’t you? With your true strength, I doubt I’d last more than three moves.”

Kai smiled faintly, sheathing his sword as he said indifferently, “You flatter me. In battle, victory and defeat are inevitable. I also gained a lot from our fight today.”

A complicated expression flickered across Yun Li’s face. “No need to console me. I accept my loss. This time, I wasn’t the better swordsman.”

Kai smiled but felt a quiet sense of pride.

He had indeed concealed his full strength. In the world of immortal cultivation, the more hidden cards one had, the better their chances of survival. However, he didn’t want to embarrass Yun Li. After all, there was no deep enmity between them—it was just a friendly spar.

“Since the match is settled, why don’t we find a place to have a drink?” Kai suggested.

This Yun Li was different from the other monks of the God Clan—he intrigued Kai. He wanted to spend more time around Yun Li and subtly gather information about the Temple. After all, a future clash with the Divine Condor was inevitable. Knowing the enemy was the key to victory. Yun Li was momentarily stunned, then burst into laughter. “Alright! You’re a straightforward person! A loss is a loss—I’m not someone who can’t accept defeat. Let’s go have a drink!”

The two exchanged smiles, and the tension from their battle instantly dissolved.

Though the world of cultivators was harsh, it was also home to many magnanimous individuals. Despite his defeat, Yun Li accepted it with conviction, and his admiration for Kai grew.

Kai followed Yun Li back to the imperial city of the Xiao Dynasty. At that moment, Xiao Yuanshan and the forces of the Ten Palaces stood locked

in a tense standoff. The atmosphere was heavy with unease—though no one had made a move, both sides remained on high alert.

But when they saw Kai returning alongside Yun Li, the two engaged in cheerful conversation, everyone was taken aback.

“Yun Li...”

Shi Lan hurried forward, anxiously inspecting Yun Li for injuries.

“Relax, I’m fine. No need to be so tense.” Yun Li reassured her with a slight smile.

Kai turned to Xiao Yuanshan. “Emperor Xiao, there’s no need to be so on edge. Everything’s fine.”

Sensing the lingering wariness in the Xiao Dynasty’s people, Kai quickly urged them to lower their guard.

“Mr. Chen, what exactly happened?” Xiao Yuanshan asked, still puzzled.

“We just had a friendly chat, that’s all. No need for concern. Emperor Xiao, could you arrange a quiet place for us? I’d like to have a drink with Brother Yun.”

Upon hearing this unexpected request, the gathered crowd exchanged bewildered glances. After a brief pause, Xiao Yuanshan nodded. “Of course, I’ll arrange it immediately.”

Yun Li then turned to Shi Lan. “We can’t return to the Ten Palaces for now, so we need a temporary place to stay. The Xiao Dynasty seems like a good option. Let’s remain here for the time being.”

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Yun Li didn’t care whether Xiao Yuanshan agreed or not—he had already decided to stay in the Xiao Dynasty.

“I’ll follow your lead,” Shi Lan said with a slight smile. She had no objections and left everything up to Yun Li.

“Brother Chen, can I temporarily stay in the Xiao Dynasty?” Yun Li asked, turning to Kai instead of Xiao Yuanshan.

Xiao Yuanshan was the emperor of the Xiao Dynasty, yet Yun Li didn’t seek his permission, addressing Kai instead. It was clear that Yun Li didn’t regard Xiao Yuanshan with much importance.

“Of course,” Kai nodded, then glanced at Xiao Yuanshan. “Emperor Xiao, please arrange accommodations for them.”

“Understood, Mr. Chen,” Xiao Yuanshan responded promptly, making arrangements without the slightest sign of displeasure.

As far as he was concerned, handing over authority to Kai was not something he would ever resent.

Yun Li then turned his gaze toward Zuo Tianzheng, who had been hiding in the background. “Go back and keep your eyes open. Since I’m staying in the Xiao Dynasty, don’t stir up any trouble here.”

“Understood, Your Highness!” Zuo Tianzheng nodded hurriedly before turning and fleeing.

He had been eager to leave for some time but hadn’t dared to move without Yun Li’s permission. Yet even if Yun Li weren’t staying in the Xiao Dynasty, Zuo Tianzheng wouldn’t dare to cause trouble here—not even if he had ten times the courage.

Before long, Xiao Yuanshan had everything arranged, and Yun Li’s people settled in to rest.

Meanwhile, Kai accompanied Yun Li to the room that had been prepared for him. Several pots of spirit wine and platters of spirit beast meat were laid out, and the two drank and feasted.

After three rounds of wine, when they were both slightly drunk, Yun Li suddenly lowered his voice. “Brother Chen, aside from sparring, I had another reason for seeking you out.”

Kai raised an eyebrow. “Oh? What is it?”

Yun Li took a deep breath and said, “Not only can you spare my father, but you don’t have to kill him at all...”

Kai was taken aback and said in disbelief, “Why would I want to kill your father? Do you really think I have the strength to do that?”

“Brother Chen, while you may not pose a threat to my father now, I know that one day, you will surpass him.”

“That’s why I’m asking you—if my father ever offends you, please spare his life. Don’t kill him.”

Yun Li’s eyes were filled with pleading.

“You have such confidence in me?” Kai chuckled. “I should thank you for your faith in me. But as long as your father doesn’t cause me trouble, I have no reason to target him. I hold no grudge against the Ten Courts.”

“He will cause trouble for you—I know my father too well. He won’t allow a mere Mahayana cultivator to challenge his authority.”

“If you kill Luo Ta and my father does nothing, he will lose all credibility in the Ten Courts. Not only will he come after you, but he’ll keep sending people to kill you.”

Yun Li spoke without hesitation.

Kai frowned, displeasure flashing in his eyes. “Your father wants to cause trouble for me, wants me dead, yet you ask me to spare his life? Why don’t you ask your father to spare mine?”

“I live by a simple rule—I don’t provoke others unless they provoke me. But if someone does, I will kill them.”

“Brother Chen, can’t you give me some face?” Yun Li asked sincerely.

“No. We only just met, and the fact that I haven’t killed you is already giving you face.”

Kai shook his head.

He and Yun Li weren’t friends—just acquaintances. In a way, they were still enemies. Why should he do him any favors?

“Then... what if I owe you a favor?” Yun Li pressed on, unwilling to give up.

“Your favor means nothing to me,” Kai replied bluntly.

Yun Li fell silent for a moment. After glancing around to ensure no one was paying attention, he leaned in and whispered, “I recently acquired a treasure map. It’s said to lead to a cave left behind by a great immortal.”

“However, the place is filled with dangers. If you’re interested, we can join forces. I’ll give you a share of the treasure—that’s my bargaining chip for asking you this favor.”

Chapter 4690

“Are you joking? Even if an immortal had once existed in the world of heaven and man, it would be impossible for them to leave behind any treasures. Besides, why would an immortal be drawn to such a low-level plane?” Kai scoffed, completely dismissing Yun Li’s claim.

Yun Li chuckled at Kai’s reaction before saying, “Who told you that this immortal cave is in the world of heaven and man?”

“It’s not?” Kai was stunned. “Then where is it?”

Yun Li pointed toward the sky.

“Heaven? You’re saying the immortal cave is in heaven?” Kai looked at Yun Li in disbelief before his expression turned to frustration. “Are you messing with me? I don’t even know when I’ll be able to ascend with my current cultivation level! What’s the point of telling me this?”

This was no different from promising a feast in the sky—completely unrealistic. Yet Yun Li was seriously offering to share the treasure as if it were within reach.

Yun Li raised an eyebrow. “Why? Don’t you know that ascending isn’t the only way to enter heaven?”

Kai frowned, confused. “There’s another way? What do you mean?”

“You seriously don’t know?” Yun Li stared at him in surprise.

“Enough with the riddles! I don’t have time for games!” Kai said impatiently.

Seeing Kai’s genuine confusion, Yun Li finally explained, “Brother Chen, aside from ascending through cultivation, there’s another way to enter heaven from the world of heaven and man—by climbing the celestial ladder.”

“If you ascend through cultivation, you’ll typically start from the Fourth Heaven. But beneath the Fourth Heaven, there are three lower heavens.”

“Most cultivators in these three heavens didn’t ascend naturally but were guided there through various trials. I can’t speak for other worlds, but in the world of heaven and man, a celestial ladder appears once every hundred years.”

“No matter how strong or weak you are, as long as you can pass the nine trials of the ladder, you can enter heaven. However, this path only leads to the First Heaven.”

Yun Li explained in detail.

Hearing this, Kai's heart raced with excitement. So there was another way! He didn't have to rely solely on cultivation to ascend—he could reach heaven through the celestial ladder!

Would he have a chance to reach heaven by climbing the ladder while still in the Mahayana realm?

However, Kai wasn't sure if he could catch the celestial ladder, which only appeared once every hundred years.

If he had to wait decades for it, he might as well rely on cultivation and ascend naturally.

“How long until the ladder appears?” Kai asked impatiently.

“Based on calculations, it should be soon. But its exact location is unpredictable.”

“Every time the ladder appears, chaos erupts. Countless people want to ascend through it.”

“Especially celestial cultivators trapped in the world of heaven and man—they have no choice but to climb the ladder if they wish to return to heaven. Otherwise, they can only wait for the heavenly formation to disappear.”

“So whenever the ladder emerges, these celestial cultivators will seize the opportunity.”

“I'm not sure how much of this you understand, Brother Chen.”

Yun Li had no idea that Kai had long been aware of the heavenly formation. In fact, the strange phenomenon within it had been caused by him.

“I understand,” Kai replied. “But if that’s the case, doesn’t that mean many people could leave the world of heaven and man and enter the celestial realm by climbing the ladder?”

He frowned.

The Formation Pattern Ancestor had only spoken about breaking the Heaven and Earth Formation—he never mentioned the celestial ladder.

Even the other celestial cultivators trapped in this realm had never brought it up.

If such a shortcut existed, why hadn’t anyone used it?

Chapter 4691

Even reaching the first level of the Heavenly Ladder is better than remaining in the heavenly world, where cultivators are suppressed and humiliated.

Hearing Kai’s words, Yun Li chuckled and said slowly, “If ascending the Heavenly Ladder were that easy, there wouldn’t be any cultivators left in the heavenly world.”

“With my strength, I barely made it to the fourth level, and even then, I couldn’t stay for long—I was swiftly defeated.”

“Do you know how many cultivators fought to the death without even getting close to the ladder’s edge? You’re underestimating its difficulty.”

“You couldn’t even remain on the fourth level?” Kai frowned. Yun Li, currently at the peak of the ninth level in the Mahayana realm, was considered immensely powerful. Yet, even with such strength, he couldn’t endure the fourth level.

Yun Li spoke solemnly. “Brother Chen, climbing the Heavenly Ladder is incredibly difficult. It embodies the guidance of the Great Dao—not something just anyone can achieve.”

“Beyond sheer strength, one also needs talent and moments of profound realization. Each level of the ladder represents a unique path, a self-contained world. It’s far more complex than you think!”

“When the Heavenly Ladder opens this time, I can take you to try it. It will accelerate your growth and refine your ability to gain sudden insights. However, it’s also extremely dangerous. Countless cultivators have perished attempting the climb!”

Kai listened intently to Yun Li’s words, deeply shaken. It seemed that this so-called ‘guidance’ was the Great Dao’s way of selecting peerless geniuses from lower realms, granting them entry into the heavens.

Those with mediocre talent might never even dream of stepping foot on it in their lifetime!

“So you’re saying the Immortal Cave is located on one of the ladder’s levels?” Kai asked Yun Li.

After all, Yun Li had no means to enter the heavens yet, so he couldn’t have come to him with a treasure map from there. Based on his words, the cave must be within a level of the Heavenly Ladder—since each level was its own world.

Clearly, these levels had been established by powerful cultivators, yet they existed as real, tangible worlds.

Just like the realm of Heaven and Man, which had been created by the Wuji Holy Sect—though even its creators couldn’t destroy it at will. Such realms were bound by the fundamental laws of heaven and earth.

“Yes,” Yun Li confirmed. “The Immortal Cave is on the fourth level of the Heavenly Ladder. But since I can only stay there for a brief time, I

haven't been able to find it yet." "But I believe that when the Heavenly Ladder appears again, I'll be able to stand firmly on the fourth level!"

Yun Li nodded as he spoke.

Hearing this, Kai's heart stirred. The Immortal Venerable's cave was an incredible opportunity! However, he also understood that such great fortunes often came with immense risks.

"Brother Yun, is this treasure map trustworthy?" Kai asked cautiously.

"Absolutely! I obtained it from the relics of an ancient monk, and it still bears the mark of that great figure," Yun Li said with unwavering confidence.

Kai pondered for a moment before finally nodding. "Alright, in that case, I'll agree to this!"

Seeing Kai's acceptance, Yun Li grinned and added, "You can kill anyone in the Ten Palaces—except my father."

"But be warned, my father will continue sending people to hunt you down, so you must be prepared."

"Understood!" Kai nodded. "How strong is your Ten Palaces? There can't be too many immortal cultivators, right?"

"Of course not. Haven't you noticed how few immortal cultivators exist in the Heavenly Realm?" Yun Li replied.

"Yes, they are indeed rare," Kai agreed.

Aside from the two Domain Lords in the Transformation Realm and the Lord of Beast City, he had hardly encountered any cultivators at that level.

Of course, there was also the old Taoist Wuji, who likely belonged to the Transformation Realm as well.

Chapter 4692

“It is extremely difficult for cultivators in the Transformation Realm to advance within the Heavenly Realm. After all, cultivation resources here are limited, relying primarily on spiritual energy.”

“After reaching the Transformation Realm, spiritual energy alone is no longer enough—external resources become essential. This is why the Ten Palaces require a large number of immortal stones.”

“Many Transformation Realm cultivators retreat from the world to focus solely on their cultivation. A significant number of them reside within the Heavenly Ladder.”

“I’ve mentioned before that each level of the Heavenly Ladder is its own world. Many cultivators enter and choose to cultivate within one of these worlds. Unlike the Heavenly Realm, the Ladder’s worlds contain an abundance of unique cultivation resources.”

“However, these worlds are also filled with peril. The danger within the Heavenly Ladder is thousands of times greater than in the Heavenly Realm. Even on the fourth level, a cultivator’s realm will be suppressed—you can imagine how difficult it must be!”

“Each time the Heavenly Ladder disappears, many cultivators choose to remain within its worlds to continue their training. But just as many become trapped, unable to ever leave.”

Yun Li explained everything to Kai in detail.

“Brother Yun, if each level of the Ladder is a world, does that mean there are many people living within each level?”

Kai asked curiously.

After all, if a world exists, life is bound to emerge within it.

“Of course,” Yun Li replied. “These are fully realized worlds, no different from the realm of heaven and man—except for the unique cultivation resources found within them.”

“But there’s one thing you must always remember: in the world of the Heavenly Ladder, every living being you encounter will be your enemy.”

“In that realm, there are no friends or family. Surviving its brutality requires an unshakable mind.”

At this point, Yun Li’s expression darkened slightly, as if recalling something unpleasant.

“Are the humans in the Heavenly Ladder’s worlds nothing more than emotionless killing machines?”

Kai asked in surprise.

After all, even in the heavenly world, cultivators fought fiercely over resources, making it far crueler than the secular world.

Yet, despite this, Kai had still managed to find friends and confidantes.

“Of course not,” Yun Li reassured him. “The people in the Heavenly Ladder’s worlds have emotions and desires just like anyone else. They are not mere killing machines.” “When we enter the world of the Heavenly Ladder, we are seen as outsiders—intruders. That means we’ll be hunted down relentlessly.”

“This is why many cultivators from the Heavenly Realm who choose to stay and train in the Heavenly Ladder face constant danger,” Yun Li explained.

Kai pondered for a moment. He seemed to grasp what Yun Li meant and finally understood the nature of the Heavenly Ladder’s world.

“Alright, stop overthinking it. When the Heavenly Ladder appears, I’ll take you there, and you’ll see everything for yourself.”

“But before that, I have one more request...”

Yun Li looked at Kai, who was still lost in thought.

“What now? Just because you told me all this doesn’t mean I’ll help you with everything,” Kai said, eyeing Yun Li warily.

“Relax, this won’t put you in a difficult position.”

With that, Yun Li pulled out a dark dagger engraved with mysterious runes and handed it to Kai.

“Kill me with this dagger,” he said.

“What?!”

Kai was so startled he nearly jumped up.

Had Yun Li lost his mind? Why was he asking to be killed?

“Calm down. I don’t mean for you to actually kill me. I came to you not to fight, but because I want to survive.”

“I need you to use this dagger to destroy a wisp of my soul. That way, my soul lamp in the Ten Palaces will go out.”

“If my soul lamp goes out, they’ll believe I’m dead, and I won’t have to return to the Ten Palaces.”

“But if my soul lamp remains lit and I never return, I’ll be labeled a traitor. And once the temple’s enforcers come after me, not even my father will be able to protect me.”

Yun Li explained everything carefully, watching Kai’s reaction.

Chapter 4693

When Kai heard this, he immediately understood why the Ten Palaces had sent Yun Li after him so quickly—they must have known he had just killed Narota!

“It’s quite difficult to destroy a soul without harming your physical body or cultivation,” Kai frowned slightly.

“Of course it is. If it were easy, I wouldn’t be asking you,” Yun Li replied.

“But I won’t have you do it for free. I have a special armor with an incredibly strong defense. Wearing it will significantly enhance your strength.”

“This was a gift from my father, and I’ve never even had the heart to wear it...”

As he spoke, Yun Li extended his palm, and a black box appeared in front of Kai.

“That generous?”

Kai eyed the box, finding it hard to believe Yun Li was willing to part with such a valuable treasure.

“Of course! I’m always generous to my friends,” Yun Li said with a grin.

“I don’t want it,” Kai shook his head.

“What? You won’t help me?” Yun Li was stunned.

“I’ll help you, but I don’t need the armor,” Kai clarified.

“Are you afraid of owing me a favor?” Yun Li frowned, puzzled by Kai’s refusal.

“Not at all. I just think your armor is mediocre—I have no use for it,” Kai replied.

“Mediocre? Let me tell you, this armor is—”

Before Yun Li could finish, golden light suddenly flared around Kai.

In an instant, golden scales spread across his body, encasing him completely like a god of war clad in impenetrable armor!

Yun Li froze, his jaw dropping as he stared at Kai in shock.

“You...?” Yun Li stammered.

“This is my Indestructible Golden Body. How does it compare to your armor?” Kai smirked.

Then, without hesitation, he plunged the dagger into his own chest!

Ding!

A crisp sound rang out as the dagger bounced away, leaving no mark on his golden armor.

“Stop that! Don’t go breaking my dagger again!” Yun Li shouted in exasperation.

Yun Li was stunned!

His prized sword had already been broken by Kai. If this dagger was destroyed too, he’d be left without a weapon!

Picking up the dagger, Yun Li chuckled awkwardly. “Your armor is definitely better than mine. I didn’t expect you to have so many treasures on you.”

“If only I were stronger than you... I could just kill you and take them all for myself!”

After making his playful remark, Yun Li handed the dagger back to Kai.

Kai accepted it with a faint smile. “You really have the nerve to say that at a time like this. Aren’t you afraid I might just kill you instead?”

“You wouldn’t...”

Yun Li smirked, and at that moment, a faint white mist emerged from his head—his soul leaving his body!

Without hesitation, Kai swung the dagger. The runes on its blade glowed, slicing through Yun Li’s soul in an instant. A fragment of it was severed and slowly dissipated.

Yun Li’s face paled, his aura noticeably weaker, but he still smiled.

“Thank you,” he said sincerely.

Just then, Shi Lan burst into the room, rushing toward Yun Li with a look of panic!

She had sensed a disturbance in his soul!

Seeing his pale face and weakened breath, her expression turned hostile as she glared at Kai.

“Brother Yun, I won’t disturb you any longer,” Kai said as he stood up and walked out.

Shi Lan looked as if she wanted to stop him and demand an explanation, but Yun Li held her back.

“I asked Brother Chen to sever a wisp of my soul so that my soul lamp would go out. Now, we don’t have to return to the Ten Palaces, and the temple won’t send enforcers after us,” Yun Li explained with a smile.

“You’re insane! You actually entrusted your soul to a stranger? What if he had bad intentions? You could have died!”

Shi Lan scolded him, still shaken.

“Relax. If he wanted to kill me, I would’ve already been dead before seeing you again.”

“But now... we can finally be together, and no one will ever separate us again.”

Yun Li pulled Shi Lan into his embrace, then pressed her beneath him.

Chapter 4694

The Ten Palaces

In a dimly lit, secret chamber filled with an air of mystery, candlelight flickered against the hundreds of densely arranged soul lamps. Each lamp represented the life essence of an important member of the Ten Palaces.

Standing alone in this solemn space was the Tenth Palace Master—a figure of imposing majesty and depth. His sharp, falcon-like gaze remained locked onto a single soul lamp: Yun Li’s.

Yun Li, a prodigy of exceptional talent and intelligence since childhood, had committed an unforgivable sin in the eyes of the God Clan—falling in love with an outsider. This fateful encounter not only violated strict clan laws but also marked him as a traitor.

Yet, for the sake of his son’s happiness, the Tenth Palace Master had devised a plan. Under the pretense of assigning him a mission, he sent Yun Li away with his trusted followers, hoping he would seize the opportunity to escape with his beloved and live a simple, peaceful life.

However, at this very moment, the Tenth Palace Master’s heart pounded heavily, his eyes filled with anxiety and unease.

He knew that despite Yun Li’s departure, his soul lamp remained within the Ten Palaces. If Yun Li never returned, the temple would inevitably take notice.

And when that happened, he would be branded a defector. The temple's enforcers would be dispatched to hunt him down—and the Tenth Palace Master knew he had no power to stop or interfere once that order was given.

Desperately, he considered his options: Could he secretly remove Yun Li's soul lamp? Could he extinguish it himself?

If Yun Li's soul lamp vanished unnoticed, the temple would remain unaware of his absence.

But just as he was lost in thought, staring intently at the flickering flame, Yun Li's soul lamp suddenly trembled twice—then, without warning, it went out.

The Tenth Palace Master's eyes widened in shock.

Yun Li was dead. His son was dead.

He had sent Yun Li to find Kai merely as a pretense—a means to help him escape the Ten Palaces.

As long as Yun Li left, he could take the woman he loved and disappear forever.

That was why he had insisted on Yun Li bringing his followers along.

But now, Yun Li's soul lamp had gone dark. “Did that foolish boy really go after Kai?”

The Tenth Palace Master's body trembled slightly.

It took him a while to suppress the turmoil in his heart. Taking a deep breath, he steadied himself and slowly walked out of the secret chamber. Each step felt unbearably heavy.

When he entered the main hall, he found a man in a black robe standing silently. In the dim light, the beast patterns embroidered on the robe

looked especially menacing. The man's face was deathly pale, his deep-set eyes hollow, as if he had just returned from the underworld.

"Palace Master, Yun Li fell in love with an outsider, breaking the sacred laws of our God Clan. He is a criminal. How could you allow him to leave the Tenth Palace?"

The man's voice was cold as he questioned the Tenth Palace Master.

"Huo Qing, I know you suspect me. You think I deliberately let Yun Li escape."

"Let me tell you now—Yun Li is dead. He gave his life for the Tenth Palace."

The Tenth Palace Master's eyes burned with restrained fury.

"Yun Li is dead?" Huo Qing's body stiffened, disbelief flashing across his face. "How did he die?"

"Do you really need to ask? He was killed by that boy, Kai. Yun Li's soul lamp has gone out. If you don't believe me, I can take you to see it for yourself!"

The Tenth Palace Master's voice was laced with barely concealed anger.

"If that's the case, I'll see for myself..."

It was clear Huo Qing did not believe Yun Li was truly dead, nor did he accept that Yun Li had left the Ten Palaces seeking revenge against Kai.

Suppressing his frustration, the Tenth Palace Master turned and strode away, with Huo Qing following closely behind.

When they arrived at the secret chamber and saw Yun Li's extinguished soul lamp, Huo Qing finally believed the Tenth Palace Master's words.

Chapter 4695

“Yun Li, why did you have to die? Your death was so meaningless...”

Huo Qing suddenly burst into wails of grief.

His cries were so piercing and sorrowful, like the howling of ghosts and wolves, that nearly everyone in the Ten Palaces could hear them.

The Tenth Palace Master watched him with a face full of anger but remained silent.

After a while, Huo Qing pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his face, though it was unclear if he had actually shed any tears.

“Palace Master, that Kai deserves to die! We must avenge Yun Li!” Huo Qing declared after composing himself.

“Of course, we will avenge him. I’m ordering you to take care of it. You must kill Kai!” the Tenth Palace Master said coldly.

“Me?” Huo Qing was taken aback. He quickly waved his hands. “No, no, my strength is on par with Yun Li’s. If he was killed, wouldn’t I just be walking to my death?”

“I will provide you with 20,000 fairy spirit stones. You must kill Kai. This is an order, not a request.”

The Tenth Palace Master’s expression was icy, leaving no room for negotiation.

“This...” Huo Qing hesitated. But seeing the unwavering look in the Tenth Palace Master’s eyes, he could only nod in the end.

“Fine, I’ll go!”

As Huo Qing turned and left, the Tenth Palace Master watched his retreating figure, his eyes filled with murderous intent.

He wanted Huo Qing dead.

This insolent man had dared to question him and challenge his authority. He deserved to die.

As Huo Qing stepped out of the hall, a thin old man soon followed. Despite his frail frame, his sharp eyes gleamed with intelligence.

“Master, what happened? Did the Tenth Palace Master truly let Yun Li go?” the old man asked in a hushed tone.

“He did, but in doing so, he betrayed the temple. If we report this, the Tenth Palace Master will surely be punished,” the old man whispered.

“Shut up. Yun Li is already dead,” Huo Qing snapped, glaring at him.

“Dead?” The old man was stunned, his voice filled with disbelief. “Is the Tenth Palace Master really so ruthless that he let his own son die?”

“There’s no mistake. I saw Yun Li’s soul lamp go out with my own eyes,” Huo Qing confirmed.

“If that’s the case, then we have no choice but to endure in the Tenth Palace and wait for an opportunity,” the old man said, somewhat disappointed.

“Wait for an opportunity? What nonsense! The Tenth Palace Master has ordered me to kill Kai and even gave me 20,000 fairy spirit stones. I didn’t have a chance to refuse!”

Huo Qing frowned, frustration evident on his face.

“Twenty thousand fairy spirit stones? The Tenth Palace Master is quite generous. In that case, let’s kill Kai and report back.”

“I heard that Kai’s strength isn’t particularly high, but he’s protected by a powerful master.”

“He won’t be under protection forever. We just need to wait for the right moment, and we’ll definitely take him down,” the old man said confidently.

Huo Qing shot him an irritated look, his eyes flashing with anger. “Old man, are you trying to send me to an early grave?”

“Young Master, what do you mean?” The old man was taken aback.

“Luo Ta and Yun Li both died at Kai’s hands, and you still want me to go after him? My strength is on par with Yun Li’s. If he couldn’t survive, do you really think I can?”

Huo Qing’s voice grew louder, his frustration evident.

“Young Master, I’ve already looked into it. Kai is only at the ninth level of the Tribulation Realm. You could kill him with a single strike!”

“Back then, it was Xiao Huangchao, the old Taoist Wuji, and Mr. Shi who forced the Tenth Prince and Luo Ta to retreat.”

“This time, Luo Ta and Yun Li were killed, and it must have been the work of Xiao Huangchao or Mr. Shi. There’s no way Kai could have done it.”

“Young Master, don’t be afraid. Kai is nothing more than an ant compared to you!”

The old man continued urging Huo Qing to kill Kai.

Chapter 4696

“Alright, since you insist, I’ll listen to you.” Huo Qing nodded, then turned to the old man and commanded, “I order you to kill Kai and bring me his head.”

“Me?” The old man was stunned.

“Yes, I’m sending you. Kai is only at the ninth level of the Tribulation Realm. Killing him should be easy for you, right?”

“Go, kill Kai, and bring his head back. I’ll reward you with fairy stones.”

Huo Qing’s tone was firm.

The old man waved his hands frantically. “Master, I... I can’t! There’s no way I can do it!”

“If you can’t, then what nonsense are you spouting?”

Huo Qing scolded him harshly.

“Master, does this mean we’re not going after Kai? That would be defying orders, and according to the temple’s rules, disobedience is severely punished.”

The old man’s voice trembled.

“Who said we’re not going after him? Of course, we are!” Huo Qing sneered. “Kai killed our people from the Ten Palaces. If we don’t seek revenge, wouldn’t that make us a laughingstock?”

“But I’m not going after him myself. I’ll have others do it. With the Heaven Ascension Ladder about to appear, all the hidden forces are already stirring.”

“This is the perfect opportunity. I’ll issue a bounty under the name of the Ten Palaces. Whoever kills Kai will be rewarded with 100,000 immortal spirit stones!”

A cold smile played on Huo Qing's lips.

“100,000 immortal spirit stones?” The old man staggered, nearly collapsing. He stared at Huo Qing in disbelief. “Master, where would you get that many immortal spirit stones?”

“Of course, I don't have them, but the Ten Palaces do. I'll issue the bounty in their name. Whoever kills Kai will demand payment from the Ten Palaces. It has nothing to do with me.”

“Whether the Ten Palaces actually pay or not is none of my concern. But I'm sure 100,000 immortal spirit stones will drive those hidden factions mad. You know better than anyone—what they need most for their cultivation is resources like these.”

Huo Qing smirked. The old man remained silent, staring at Huo Qing, unsure of what to say.

“Don't just stand there—hurry up and issue the killing order. Make sure to cast a wide net,” Huo Qing urged.

“Young Master, the Demon Sealing League once issued a killing order against Kai, offering a century's worth of tributes, yet he's still alive and well. I fear this bounty might end the same way...”

The old man hesitated. Issuing a killing order in the name of the Ten Palaces and offering 100,000 fairy stones was no trivial matter.

“The Demon Sealing League's century-old offerings are worthless. They only attract low-level cultivators. Those who have truly reached the peak of the Ninth Stage of the Mahayana Realm or stepped into the Immortal Realm wouldn't even bother with such rewards.”

“But fairy stones—those are different. Only fairy stones hold true allure for master cultivators. Just follow my orders!”

Huo Qing's tone was firm and commanding.

“Understood!” Seeing Huo Qing’s determination, the old man could only nod before turning to leave.

After drafting the killing order, he let out a cold chuckle. “Kai, oh, Kai... You’re as good as dead this time. Why did you ever think of provoking the Ten Palaces?”

He knew just how tempting fairy stones were to Immortal Realm cultivators. And with the Heaven Ascension Ladder about to appear, many reclusive monks were bound to emerge from seclusion.

Once the killing order was issued, those monks would undoubtedly go mad with greed!

While fairy stones might be nothing more than trash in the heavens, in the mortal world of Heaven and Man, they were indispensable for ascension.

Ordinary spirit stones held little value for Immortal Realm cultivators, but fairy stones—those were crucial!

Especially for those at the peak of the Ninth Stage of the Mahayana Realm. If they wanted to break through to the Immortal Realm, they needed fairy stones.

Now, with 100,000 fairy stones up for grabs, the hidden forces would surely descend into chaos!

Chapter 4697

Sun Moon City

Lin Keting remained confined to her room, spending her days doing nothing but cultivating.

Though she hadn’t truly reflected on her mistakes, her father had already forbidden her from leaving Sun Moon City.

“Princess...”

The door creaked open as a female cultivator stepped inside.

“What is it?” Lin Keting opened her eyes and looked at the woman before her.

“Take a look at this...”

The female cultivator extended her palm, revealing a sheet of white paper that slowly unfolded before Lin Keting.

As her eyes scanned the contents, she froze in shock.

“A killing order? The Ten Palaces are offering 100,000 fairy spirit stones as a reward for killing Kai?”

“What did he do to provoke them into offering such a massive bounty?”

“No! I have to find my father and ask him to intervene—he must save Kai!”

Lin Keting hurried toward the door, but the moment she reached it, an overwhelming force sent her staggering backward.

“Princess, without the emperor’s permission, you are not allowed to leave this room.”

The female cultivator’s tone was firm.

Lin Keting frowned, her face filled with anxiety.

“Take this killing order immediately and find my master. Give it to him.”

She knew that the connection between her and Kai had been arranged by Taoist Wuji.

If Taoist Wuji saw the killing order, he would surely find a way to save Kai. There was no way she would become a widow before they were even together!

“Understood.”

The female cultivator bowed and quietly retreated.

Lin Keting paced anxiously around the room, restless and uneasy. She was trapped here with no way to contact Kai.

Meanwhile, in the palace, Taoist Wuji and Lin Chong sat drinking spiritual tea, the Ten Palaces’ killing order laid out before them.

“Taoist, I never expected this boy to be worth so much—100,000 fairy spirit stones. Even I’m tempted...” Lin Chong smiled faintly.

“Haha! The Tenth Palace would rather offer 100,000 immortal spirit stones as a bounty than kill Kai themselves. Can you guess why?”

Taoist Wuji chuckled.

“There are two possibilities,” Lin Chong said after a moment of thought. “First, the Tenth Palace might be incapable of killing Kai or have concerns about doing so. Second, this bounty might just be a way to make Kai suffer. Even if he were killed, the Tenth Palace might never actually pay the 100,000 immortal spirit stones.”

“You’re right, those are both possibilities,” Taoist Wuji said with a slight smile. “But there’s another one—this killing order may not have been issued by the Tenth Palace Master at all.”

Lin Chong was taken aback. “Not issued by the Tenth Palace Master?”

“Have you forgotten? The Tenth Palace isn’t a unified entity. Not everyone follows the Tenth Palace Master’s commands.”

Taoist Wuji’s words carried a deeper implication.

“That’s true,” Lin Chong admitted. “But regardless of the reason, Kai is in for a real struggle this time.”

He then looked at Taoist Wuji with amusement. “So, Taoist, do you intend to help him?”

“Let’s wait and see.” Taoist Wuji’s expression remained calm. “Kai is the son-in-law I chose for Xiao Ting. He must have something special about him. If he were just some useless fool who constantly needed saving, wouldn’t that mean I made the wrong choice for her?”

“Fair enough. We’ll wait and observe,” Lin Chong agreed. “Besides, this is a good opportunity to uncover those hidden forces.”

“The great formation of heaven and earth is shifting. The Heaven Ascension Ladder is about to appear, and the powers lurking in the shadows are starting to surface.”

“This time, the entire world of Heaven and Man will be thrown into chaos. I fear it will completely reshape the balance of power,” Lin Chong said solemnly.

“Yes, the emergence of the Heaven Ascension Ladder will undoubtedly plunge the world into turmoil,” Taoist Wuji replied. “I’m not overly concerned about the hidden forces within the world of Heaven and Man.”

His gaze darkened. “What does worry me are the monsters who have survived for a hundred years inside the Heaven Ascension Ladder. If they manage to escape, that will be the real disaster.”

“You’re right,” Lin Chong said, frowning. “Those who remain inside the Heaven Ascension Ladder are the biggest threat. I can only hope that their true ambition is to ascend to the heavens and that they have no intention of returning to this world...”

Chapter 4698

Side Hall of Sun Moon City

Lin Kedong held the killing order in his hand, his face brimming with excitement.

Behind him stood a woman dressed in white, her long hair cascading over her shoulders. Her expression was cold, and in her left hand, she carried a sheathed longsword.

“Ruoya, 100,000 immortal spirit stones... that’s an enormous amount of resources.”

Lin Kedong spoke without turning around, his voice tinged with excitement.

“Prince, it’s uncertain whether the Ten Palaces can even produce 100,000 immortal spirit stones,” Lin Ruoya replied in a low voice. “Besides, the emperor has strictly ordered that none of you are to leave Sun Moon City.”

“The Heaven Ascension Ladder is about to descend, and he has instructed you to focus on your preparations so you can experience the trials of the ladder.”

“Hmph! My father keeps telling us to prepare, yet he hasn’t provided me with any resources. How am I supposed to prepare?”

“Lin Keting is imprisoned, yet she still receives resources for cultivation every day. My father is far too biased!”

Lin Kedong snorted coldly, his tone full of dissatisfaction.

“Crown Prince, the resources of Sun Moon City are dwindling, and the emperor has no other choice,” Lin Ruoya explained. “He wants you to be ready so that when the ladder appears, you can ascend immediately and gain experience.”

“Besides, this killing order from the Ten Palaces is likely a trap. If they couldn’t kill Kai themselves, what makes you think we stand a chance against him?”

“And if they can kill him, why would they need to offer 100,000 immortal spirit stones? The logic simply doesn’t add up.”

“Not to mention, the people of the Ten Palaces are arrogant and untrustworthy. The crown prince shouldn’t be tempted by this offer.”

Lin Ruoya carefully analyzed the situation, trying to dissuade Lin Kedong.

“I don’t care whether the Ten Palaces are trustworthy or not,” Lin Kedong scoffed. “If I kill Kai and they dare to withhold the immortal stones, I’ll lead the Sun Moon City Guards and wipe out the Ten Palaces in one strike!”

“Don’t forget—the command token of the Guards is in my hands now. My father entrusted me with their command.”

“100,000 immortal spirit stones will be enough for me to break through to the Immortal Realm and become the strongest among the princes.” Greed flashed in Lin Kedong’s eyes.

Although he was the eldest prince, his talent was mediocre. He remained stuck at the peak of the Ninth Level of the Mahayana Realm, struggling for years to break through to the Immortal Transformation Realm.

Among the many princes, some had already advanced beyond him—especially the fourth prince, Lin Kefan, who had been in the Immortal Transformation Realm for years.

The two had always been at odds. While Lin Kedong’s status as the eldest prince allowed him to suppress others, his lack of strength meant Lin Kefan never respected him.

This had long been a thorn in Lin Kedong's heart. He desperately wanted to surpass Lin Kefan, but the more anxious he became, the harder it was to break through.

Advancing to a higher realm required talent, power, and opportunity—none of which could be lacking.

“The eldest prince, you...”

“Enough! I've made up my mind.” Lin Kedong cut her off. “I must kill Kai and claim those 100,000 immortal spirit stones.”

“If you're willing to come with me, then follow. If not, stay in the city—but you will not tell my father.”

His tone carried a thinly veiled threat.

“I will follow...”

Seeing no other choice, Lin Ruoya lowered her head in resignation.

As Lin Kedong's personal maid, how could she refuse to accompany him?

“That's the spirit.” Lin Kedong smirked. “When I inherit the throne, I'll make you my concubine. You'll finally have status and won't have to be a mere maid anymore.”

He grabbed Lin Ruoya's hand, his touch wandering over her body before pressing her beneath him.

Lin Ruoya's expression remained blank. She offered no resistance, knowing she had no choice. As a member of a collateral branch of the Lin family, those of her lineage had only one path—staying close to the royal bloodline.

Chapter 4699

Inside Liangyi Gate The God Pattern Patriarch and the Array Demon sat playing chess.

Before them lay the killing order issued by the Ten Palaces.

“Brother, how did Kai manage to provoke the Upper Temple in such a short time? And now the Ten Palaces have even placed a bounty on his head,” the Array Demon asked as he placed a chess piece.

“Have you not noticed the disturbance in the Heaven and Earth Array? The only one capable of such a feat is that boy, Kai,” the God Pattern Patriarch replied.

“Besides, the Heaven Ascension Ladder is about to appear, throwing the world of Heaven and Man into chaos once more. Issuing a killing order at this time will only add fuel to the fire!”

“Moreover, the Temple’s people are notoriously arrogant. When have they ever paid to get things done? This bounty reeks of conspiracy.”

The God Pattern Patriarch smiled faintly.

“Then what should we do? Shouldn’t we help that kid?” the Array Demon asked.

“Help? And how exactly do you propose we do that? Both you and I are trapped by the suppression of this realm. What could we possibly do?”

The God Pattern Patriarch’s words left the Array Demon silent.

This wasn’t the Heavenly Realm. Their strength had been suppressed for years, weakening them with time. No matter how much they wanted to help, they simply couldn’t.

“It’s up to the boy’s own fate. We should leave it be,” the God Pattern Patriarch said as he placed another chess piece on the board.

“Your move...”

With that, they returned their focus to the game, ignoring the killing order entirely.

Meanwhile, many hidden forces across the Heavenly World were stirred by the bounty. Though some doubted the legitimacy of the Ten Palaces' order, the temptation of 100,000 immortal spirit stones was enough to make them restless.

Yet, Kai himself remained unaware of the bounty. Ordinary cultivators in the Heavenly World had no access to such information.

Kai's Room "Brother Chen, congratulations!"

Yun Li entered the room with a broad smile.

Ever since he severed his soul's connection, his expressions had grown lighter, his smile more frequent.

Finally, he was free from the Temple's control.

Finally, he could roam as he pleased and be with the person he loved.

"Brother Yun, what are you congratulating me for?"

Kai looked at him in confusion, not understanding what good news he was referring to.

"You'll understand once you take a look."

Yun Li said as he spread a white sheet of paper before Kai.

Kai's eyes widened as he read the contents. His brows furrowed.

It was a killing order—issued by the Ten Palaces.

A bounty of 100,000 immortal spirit stones.

"The Ten Palaces are quite generous. Am I really worth that much?"

Kai asked Yun Li with a smirk.

“Of course not. Even if you were, the Ten Palaces wouldn’t actually pay 100,000 immortal spirit stones just to hunt you down.”

“Don’t forget, our God Clan is a superior bloodline. We wouldn’t resort to such crude tactics.”

Yun Li chuckled.

“But isn’t this an official killing order from your Ten Palaces?” Kai asked, puzzled.

“Yes, but I’m certain my father had nothing to do with it.”

“He couldn’t possibly offer such a large sum. Someone else must have issued this order.”

Yun Li said firmly.

“Someone else?” Kai frowned. “Is there really anyone in the Ten Palaces with that much power besides your father?”

“My father’s influence isn’t as absolute as you think. If it were, I wouldn’t have been imprisoned in the Ten Palaces for hundreds of years.”

“He must have seen my soul lamp extinguished and assumed you had killed me. That’s why he sent someone to take revenge.”

“And this bounty—it was undoubtedly issued by the one he sent.”

Yun Li analyzed the situation carefully.

“Then do you know who was sent?” Kai asked.

“If my guess is right, it’s Huo Qing—he’s the only one who would dare pull something like this.”

At the mention of Huo Qing, a cold hostility flashed in Yun Li's eyes.

Chapter 4700

“Huo Qing? What's his level of strength?”

Kai needed to assess his opponent first.

If the man was already in the Immortal Realm, then Kai would have to find a way to stay hidden.

“His strength is about the same as mine,” Yun Li replied. “But he's extremely cunning and has a dark, ruthless nature. This killing order is his way of killing two birds with one stone.”

“Once word spreads, countless cultivators will come after you for 100,000 immortal spirit stones, saving him the trouble of acting personally.”

“And when they kill you, they'll go straight to the Ten Palaces to claim their reward. But my father can't possibly hand over 100,000 immortal spirit stones.”

“That would leave my father in an impossible position, damaging his credibility. Meanwhile, Huo Qing gets exactly what he wants—humiliating my father while eliminating you.”

Yun Li's disdain for Huo Qing was evident in his voice.

“He's only at the peak of the Ninth Grade of the Mahayana Realm. Can't he just be crippled or expelled from the Ten Palaces?”

“A mere Mahayana cultivator daring to scheme against the Palace Master? It sounds like your Ten Palaces aren't as powerful as I thought.”

Kai was surprised that someone at Huo Qing's level could openly challenge the leader of the Ten Palaces.

“You don’t understand. Huo Qing has powerful backing—his time in the Ten Palaces is just a stepping stone.”

Yun Li sighed.

“A political connection?”

Kai scoffed. He hadn’t expected even the Heavenly Realm to have its own version of nepotism.

That kind of favoritism was rampant in the secular world—every department had its share of people who climbed the ranks based on connections rather than merit.

“So, what’s your plan?” Yun Li asked. “I can’t reveal myself before the Heaven Ascension Ladder appears, so I won’t be able to help you.”

“If enemies come, I’ll fight them. If obstacles arise, I’ll crush them. If someone wants to die, I’ll gladly grant their wish,” Kai said calmly.

“In my world, connections mean nothing.”

“If Huo Qing dares to show up, I hope you kill him.”

“That way, he won’t be able to stir up trouble for my father anymore.”

Yun Li’s tone carried a trace of cold intent.

“Are you begging me?” Kai asked with a smirk.

“Yes, I know your rules. I can offer you something in return.”

Yun Li replied, pulling out a scroll and handing it to Kai.

“What is this? If it’s another piece of treasured armor, I don’t want it. It’s useless to me.”

Kai took the scroll and examined it.

“This is the Body Refining Scroll of our God Clan. Unlike ordinary humans, our physical bodies aren’t fragile—we’ve spent generations refining them.”

“Your cultivation realm is advancing rapidly, and you can fight across levels, but you do have a weakness.”

“The speed of your body refinement can no longer keep up with your cultivation.”

“You must understand—at higher realms, many techniques require a strong physique as a foundation. The stronger your body, the more powerful your techniques will become.”

“With this scroll, you’ll have access to the God Clan’s body refinement techniques. It may prove useful to you.”

Yun Li explained.

Kai nodded. He had to admit Yun Li had a point—his physical refinement had been lagging behind his cultivation speed. He could already feel the gap widening.

“You’re giving me a God Clan technique. Isn’t that considered betrayal?”

Kai asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I am no longer part of the God Clan, so what is there to betray?” Yun Li smiled.

“In truth, I’ve long realized that this ‘God Clan’ of ours is just another branch of the human race. There are no real gods in this world...”

Kai looked at Yun Li in surprise. He hadn’t expected him to see things so clearly.

He unrolled the scroll—suddenly, a brilliant white light shot out, surging into his forehead!

Boom!

Instantly, a flood of knowledge poured into Kai's sea of consciousness!

The God Clan's Body Refining Scroll was indeed extraordinary—its techniques far surpassed those of the ancient body-refining clans!