Chapter 4821

The red-haired old man was momentarily stunned before realization dawned on him. He gave a firm nod of understanding.

Qian Xiaohan had always claimed allegiance to Lian Sanmen but never once mentioned the Four Nether Palace.

Since they had already surrendered, they were now part of the Four Nether Palace—not Lian Sanmen.

This was what displeased Ming Shao, prompting him to continue watching the spectacle unfold instead of intervening.

Qian Xiaohan cast a glance toward the tavern before steadying his mind. Now that they were members of the Four Nether Palace, there was no reason to fear Sun and Moon City.

“Emperor Lin, this Kai has killed our elders. He has slain both the Lingmen leader and the Tangmen elder. We must avenge their deaths!”

“You’d best not interfere—unless you wish for Sun and Moon City to face disaster as well.”

Qian Xiaohan’s voice carried a thinly veiled threat as he addressed Lin Chong.

“Threaten me?”

Lin Chong took a single step forward—and in an instant, he appeared right in front of Qian Xiaohan!

The sheer pressure emanating from him bore down, crushing Qian Xiaohan with its weight.

Shocked, Qian Xiaohan panicked and hurriedly said, “W-What are you trying to do? We are now part of the Four Nether Palace!”

Bang!

Lin Chong struck Qian Xiaohan, sending him flying backward before he crashed heavily to the ground.

“I don’t care who you are—you will act humbly in front of me.”

“And you dare to threaten me?”

Lin Chong’s expression remained ice-cold, his overwhelming presence causing the members of the Three Gates to instinctively retreat.

Qian Xiaohan struggled to his feet, his face filled with humiliation. Gritting his teeth, he looked at Lin Chong and stammered, “W-We really are from the Four Nether Palace! You wouldn’t dare—”

Whoosh!

Snap!

Lin Chong vanished in an instant, only to reappear as another resounding slap landed across Qian Xiaohan’s face!

Qian Xiaohan stood dazed, utterly bewildered, but this time, he dared not utter another word.

Lin Chong swept his gaze across the surroundings.

“I am protecting Mr. Chen. If anyone dares to lay a finger on him… I will kill you.”

His words carried such immense authority that everyone nearby trembled in fear. Just as the crowd stood frozen in silence, too afraid to speak—

A voice rang out: “How bold… how reckless!”

“If you want to beat a dog, you have to consider its owner. He already said he belongs to our Four Nether Palace, yet Emperor Lin still dares to take action? Does that mean you have no regard for our Four Nether Palace?”

Ming Shao’s figure slowly emerged from the shadows.

Beside him stood the red-haired old man, followed by eight black-robed monks, each radiating the powerful aura of the Immortal Transformation Realm.

The moment Ming Shao appeared, Qian Xiaohan hurriedly led his people behind him, seeking protection.

With their arrival, the strength of the Four Nether Palace surged dramatically—there were now over twenty experts in the Immortal Transformation Realm!

Lin Chong’s gaze fell upon Ming Shao, and his brows furrowed deeply.

“No matter who it is—if they intend to harm Mr. Chen, I will kill them. And that includes your Four Nether Palace!”

Although Lin Chong was wary of their power, he was determined. If the Four Nether Palace moved against Kai, even if he had to risk all of Sun and Moon City, he would ensure Kai remained unharmed!

“Hah! You’ve got guts. Looks like coming to Wuwangdi this time was the right decision.”

“The Four Nether Palace has remained in the shadows for years, and now, no one shows us the respect we deserve.”

Ming Shao’s eyes narrowed as his aura steadily intensified.

“If a battle breaks out… who knows who will win or lose?”

Lin Chong's presence flared as well, his own aura surging to match.

With the combined forces of Sun and Moon City, along with Kai and his allies, they had no shortage of Immortal Realm cultivators!

Suddenly, the void trembled as a deep voice echoed:

"The Huo family stands with Young Master Ming!"

At that moment, Huo Zhenfeng arrived, leading the elite masters of the Huo family.

Initially, Huo Zhenfeng had no intention of getting involved in the conflict between Lian Sanmen and Sun and Moon City. Nor did he wish to confront Kai. He had planned to sit back and let both sides weaken each other—waiting to reap the benefits like a fisherman watching a battle between a snipe and a clam.

However, after witnessing Lian Sanmen's allegiance to the Four Nether Palace, he knew he had to make a choice. If Kai were eliminated, the Huo family would gain nothing from standing on the sidelines.

After carefully weighing the risks and rewards, Huo Zhenfeng ultimately decided to side with the Four Nether Palace!

Chapter 4822

It was clear that the strength of the Four Nether Palace far surpassed that of Sun and Moon City.

In today's world, power dictated what was right!

Seeing the sudden arrival of the Huo family, Lin Chong's frown deepened.

The balance had completely shifted in favor of the Four Nether Palace!

“I can’t stay in the shadows any longer. It’s time for life and death!”

A voice rang out as the Tenth Palace Master slowly stepped forward from the crowd.

“Tenth Palace Master! I didn’t expect you to come as well. Join us and help take down Kai!”

Qian Xiaohan’s eyes lit up as he hurriedly greeted him.

Since Qian Lao of the Qian Clan resided in the Tenth Palace, Qian Xiaohan was well acquainted with the Tenth Palace Master. He assumed his arrival meant support for their side.

But—

“Sorry, I’m here to help Mr. Chen.”

With those words, the Tenth Palace Master walked calmly to Kai’s side.

His unexpected choice stunned the crowd. No one could comprehend why he would side with Kai!

“Tenth Palace Master, you’ve betrayed the temple! Aren’t you afraid of the consequences?”

Huo Qing’s face darkened as he glared at him.

“Betrayed? Screw that! I help whoever I want—what’s it to you?”

“Before, I tolerated you out of respect for the Huo family. But now that the Ten Palaces are gone, I have nothing to fear.”

The Tenth Palace Master spat out his words fearlessly.

Regardless of how powerful his opponents were, he had made his choice—he would stand by Kai.

He had seen Mr. Shi's terrifying power with his own eyes, and that sight had been etched into his soul!

"Hah! It's just one more third-grade Immortal Realm cultivator—it changes nothing."

Ming Shao sneered coldly.

"What if I join in?"

A thunderous voice echoed across the battlefield as the Lord of the North Territory slowly emerged!

"Lord of the North Territory!"

Qian Xiaohan's expression twisted. "Instead of focusing on governing the monks of your domain, you're interfering in our battle?"

"Of course! If I don't step in, my precious son-in-law will be bullied to death by you lot." The Lord of the North Territory strode toward Kai, patted him on the shoulder, and said, "Good son-in-law, don't be afraid—I'll back you up!"

"Lord of the North Territory, what do you mean by that? He's my daughter's man!"

Lin Chong frowned as he turned to face him.

"Emperor Lin, you're mistaken. He's my daughter's man—we met long ago!"

The Lord of the North Territory pulled Hua Yueying forward. "Daughter, tell them—Kai is your man, isn't he?"

Not willing to back down, Lin Chong also pulled Lin Keting forward. "Daughter, is Kai your man or not?"

Lin Keting and Hua Yueying flushed with embarrassment. How could they answer such a question in front of so many people?

“Ahem…”

Kai coughed awkwardly and said, “Both of you, listen… They’re both my women. The three of us have already shared a bed…”

For a moment, there was silence—then the Lord of the North Territory and Lin Chong exchanged glances and burst into laughter.

“So, does this make us in-laws now?” The Lord of the North Territory asked.

“Without a doubt!” Lin Chong nodded in agreement.

“Enough of this family bonding nonsense! Hand over Kai, or you all die together!”

Ming Shao’s patience had worn thin. “Even with the Lord of the North Territory, you still have no chance of winning!”

“What if we join in?”

A pair of fiery red figures suddenly appeared—Wenshi and Wenqing of the Huofen Sect.

Behind them stood several robed figures, their black garments emblazoned with crimson flames.

Kai’s eyes widened at their attire. Then realization struck—this wasn’t the same man who had once called himself Ning Zizai!

Ming Shao’s expression darkened at the sight of the siblings. “Wenshi, why is the Huofen Sect interfering? Do you have some connection to Kai? Or has your sister become one of his women?”

Wenshi sneered. “No connection at all. We just don’t like you—and we figured it was about time someone put you in your place!”

Kai turned to the siblings, surprise flickering across his face. He never expected them to be from the Huofen Sect—let alone that they would willingly stand by his side!

Chapter 4823

“The top three forces in the Heavenly Human Realm are about to clash—this is going to be incredible!”

“Why is the Fire Sect suddenly siding with Kai? What’s going on?”

“This is about to get messy. We’d better step back—I bet a lot of people are going to die.”

The crowd whispered among themselves as they watched the tense standoff unfold.

Ming Shao’s expression darkened, his eyes burning with rage as he glared at Wenshi. “Wenshi, don’t think that just because the Fire Sect is known as the largest sect in the Heavenly Human Realm, you can act recklessly.”

“If you don’t want to die, then leave now—I have no interest in provoking you. But if you insist on helping Kai, don’t blame me for being merciless!”

Wenshi scoffed. “What nonsense are you spouting? If you want a fight, then fight! Haven’t you always been arrogant, looking down on everyone?”

He had disliked Ming Shao for a long time and saw this as the perfect chance to settle the score.

In truth, Wenshi and his sister Wenqing had no real connection to Kai. They simply couldn't stand Ming Shao. And as the saying goes, the enemy of my enemy is my friend—they understood that well enough!

The tension in the air grew thicker, and the entire battlefield became suffocatingly oppressive.

At that moment, it felt as though the slightest move would trigger an all-out war.

Just as everyone braced for combat, a sudden shift rippled through the heavens and earth. A strange, radiant white light enveloped Wuwang Land.

The very space around them felt heavy, as if an immense mountain were pressing down on everyone!

"The Ladder to Heaven! The Ladder to Heaven has appeared!"

A voice rang out, filled with excitement.

Everyone instinctively looked up—high in the void, a colossal stairway, as grand as a mountain, slowly materialized.

Rumble...

With a deafening crash, the Ladder to Heaven descended and landed on the ground.

The moment it touched down, the crowd erupted into action, racing toward it in a frenzy.

Even the two opposing factions, moments away from a deadly battle, completely ignored each other and flew toward the Ladder to Heaven instead! Kai quickly moved to the front of the towering ladder.

It stretched high into the sky, an immense structure with nine steps, each leading to a glowing gateway.

On the first step, two large characters were carved: Ascend to Heaven.

As he gazed at the massive ladder, Kai's expression grew serious. The ancient aura radiating from it carried an overwhelming sense of time and mystery, making it feel both awe-inspiring and daunting.

Clearly, this ladder had been constructed with purpose—perhaps by an immortal from the heavens or a cultivator of an even higher realm.

To beings of such power, cultivators from the Heavenly Realm were likely nothing more than ants or mere chess pieces in a grander game.

At that moment, some cultivators, unable to contain their eagerness, rushed toward the ladder.

However, rather than stepping onto the first level, most of them went straight to the third!

Kai frowned in confusion. "Why aren't they starting from the first step?"

Yun Li, who had followed closely behind him, explained, "Kai, those people have been here before and have already passed the first level. Each time someone clears a level, a mark is left on their body, allowing them to skip it in future attempts."

"You, on the other hand, have never been here before. That means you must start from the first level. We can't go with you—once a level is cleared, we can't re-enter it."

Kai quickly understood: once a level was passed, there was no turning back—one could only move forward.

"Don't worry," Lin Kefan reassured him, patting his shoulder. "The first level is fairly simple. With your strength, you'll pass it with ease."

"The cultivators in the first level aren't very strong—they won't pose any real threat to you."

“But there is one tricky part,” he added. “The conditions for clearing each level aren’t fixed. You’ll have to figure them out yourself, and the challengers you face will be different each time.”

Chapter 4824

“I suspect that the world inside the Heavenly Staircase isn’t fixed and unchanging,” Xuan Bin said, gazing at the massive structure before him. “Unfortunately, once we pass a level, we can no longer re-enter, so there’s no way to verify it.”

“Who cares?” Zhou Tang replied indifferently. “As long as we can obtain resources and train within the Heavenly Staircase, that’s all that matters. If anyone thinks they can use it to ascend to the heavens, they’d be better off relying on their own cultivation—it’s not any easier.”

For cultivators of their level, the Heavenly Staircase was merely a place to temper themselves and gather useful resources.

As for reaching the ninth floor and using it as a direct path to the heavens? That was nearly impossible.

“Mr. Chen, we will wait for your good news at the Taoist sect,” Lin Chong said. “The Heavenly Staircase will remain here for three months before it gradually disappears.”

“So there’s no need to rush. As long as you manage your time well, you can leave before it vanishes.”

“But if it disappears before you come out, you’ll be trapped inside the Heavenly Staircase world for a hundred years.”

Kai nodded. “Understood.”

“Father, I want to enter the first level with Kai and take a look!” Lin Keting suddenly said.

“No,” Lin Chong replied firmly. “Your current strength is too weak. Entering the Heavenly Staircase would be dangerous for you. Besides, Mr. Chen is going there to train, not to entertain you.”

“Hmph!” Lin Keting huffed in frustration, clearly displeased.

As Kai and the others conversed, more and more people had already entered the Heavenly Staircase.

Among them were several monks, including Ning Zhi and Su Yuqi, who stepped onto the first floor.

Kai watched their determined figures disappear into the glowing gateway. He hadn’t expected them to be first-time entrants as well.

Just then, a pair of sisters approached him.

“Mr. Chen, we have to go ahead,” one of them said with a smile. “We’ve already passed the first floor and need to proceed to the second.”

“We hope to see you there!”After Hong Yao and Lan Yao finished speaking, they leaped onto the second-level stone steps and slowly walked into the glowing portal.

“I’m heading in as well!” Kai bid farewell to everyone.

But just as he was about to step forward, Lin Keting suddenly jumped and dashed straight toward the first-floor light gate!

“Disciple—!”

Taoist Wuji was shocked, but before he could stop her, Lin Keting had already disappeared into the portal.

“Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on her!”

Without hesitation, Kai rushed in after her.

The moment he entered the light gate, a blinding white light filled his vision. In an instant, he found himself inside the world of the Heavenly Staircase.

As his surroundings became clearer, Kai was stunned—Lin Keting was nowhere in sight. Even when he extended his senses for miles, he couldn't detect a trace of her presence.

"It looks like the teleportation from the light gate is random…"

Frowning slightly, he turned his attention to his surroundings.

A vast wasteland stretched before him, endless and desolate. The spiritual energy here was weak, making the environment feel barren and lifeless.

No wonder this world was only on the first level—it would be difficult for any powerful masters to emerge in such a place.

But in order to pass the trial, Kai still needed to find an opponent to defeat.

And more importantly, he had to locate Lin Keting.

Descending from mid-air, he landed gently on the ground, his feet sinking slightly into the loose gravel. He began walking forward at a steady pace.

Flying would consume too much spiritual energy, and with the thin spiritual aura of this world, there were no natural resources to replenish it. If he wanted to restore his strength, he'd have to rely on his own supplies. Knowing how precious resources were here, he chose to conserve his energy.

After walking for an unknown amount of time, a town finally appeared in the distance. A protective formation barrier surrounded it, safeguarding its inhabitants from the dangers of the wasteland.

Chapter 4825

As Kai approached the town, a dozen monks suddenly emerged, wielding weapons and swiftly surrounding him.

Leading them was an elderly man dressed in a Taoist robe, clearly a Taoist himself.

With just a glance, Kai assessed their strength—these people were only at the Fusion Realm, and the strongest among them, the old man, had merely reached the eighth level.

To Kai, cultivators at the Fusion Realm were as insignificant as ants.

“Fellow Daoist, where do you come from, and what brings you to our town?” the old man asked cautiously.

“I’m from the World of Heaven and Man, and I’m here—”

Before Kai could finish speaking, the group suddenly turned pale with fear. Without hesitation, they spun around and bolted toward the town.

The old man was the first to reach safety, shouting loudly, “A natural disaster is upon us! Activate the formation—quickly!”

In an instant, protective formations sprang to life, enveloping the entire town in a glowing barrier.

The townspeople stared at Kai in terror, their faces filled with dread.

Kai was baffled. Why were they so afraid of him?

Taking steady steps toward the town, he placed a hand on the shimmering protective barrier. With a simple press of his palm, the entire formation shattered instantly.

Just like that, Kai entered the town effortlessly.

Panic spread like wildfire. Women wailed, children screamed—it was as if the world were ending.

“Old man, what’s wrong with you? I’m not a demon! Why are you so afraid of me?” Kai asked, puzzled.

The old man regarded him with nervous apprehension before replying, “Aren’t you here to plunder our resources and slaughter us?”

“Of course not,” Kai scoffed. “I have plenty of resources myself—why would I need to rob you? Besides, you all seem on the verge of poverty. Even the spiritual energy in this world is weak—what resources could you possibly have?”

Kai spoke with an indifferent tone.

Upon hearing his words, the old man burst into tears. “Our world was once rich in spiritual energy, and resources were abundant everywhere,” he lamented.

“But three hundred years ago, powerful cultivators from other planes suddenly descended upon our land. They pillaged our resources and slaughtered our monks.”

“Every hundred years, these powerful outsiders return, leaving devastation in their wake. We call it a natural disaster.”

“Those invaders always claimed to be from the World of Heaven and Man. When you said you came from there just now, I knew the natural disaster had begun again.”

The old man’s voice was filled with sorrow. A once-thriving world had been reduced to this state, leaving its cultivators with barely any resources to grow stronger. Their overall strength had declined drastically.

“Only three hundred years?” Kai frowned slightly.

If this world had only suffered three centuries of plundering, then it was unlikely to be the original first-level world of the Ladder to Heaven. It must have been replaced at some point.

Given the current state of things, when the Ladder to Heaven reappeared, the first-level world would likely no longer be inhabited by these people.

After enduring three waves of looting, this world had been stripped of resources, leaving nothing worth taking.

“Who is aiding the cultivators from the World of Heaven and Man?”

Kai couldn’t understand it. Out of the countless worlds in the universe, why would someone deliberately sacrifice one world to benefit another?

From the looks of it, outsiders were being directly teleported here through the Ladder to Heaven’s portal. However, this world wasn’t actually inside the Ladder to Heaven itself.

“Old man, since you’ve survived three disasters, you must know the conditions for challenging someone to leave this place, right?”

“As long as the challenge is won, it’s possible to escape this world.”

Kai wanted to find out exactly who he needed to challenge in order to leave.

Since someone must know the answer, he couldn’t rely on blind guesses and indiscriminate slaughter to figure it out.

“Of course I know,” the old man said. “But you must not go yet. Wait here for a few days before attempting the challenge!”

He warned Kai with a serious expression.

Chapter 4826

“Why is that?” Kai asked, puzzled.

“If you challenge him now, he’ll be at his peak strength. But if you wait for others to weaken him first, it’ll be much easier,” the old man explained.

Kai chuckled. Even if the first-level challenge was difficult, it was nothing he couldn’t handle with his current strength.

“Fellow Daoist, don’t be so quick to laugh. Do you think just because our world is barren, there are no powerful cultivators? That you can win effortlessly?” the old man said.

Kai nodded, neither denying nor arguing the point.

“You’re mistaken,” the old man continued. “The person you need to challenge isn’t from our world. He arrived here not long ago.”

“The moment he appeared, we knew the natural disaster was about to begin again.”

“This might be the last time… I fear our world won’t survive.”

The old man gazed at the desolate land before him, his voice tinged with sorrow.

“What do you mean?” Kai was taken aback.

“It’s clear now—our world has been chosen as a trial ground. Once this trial ends, our purpose will be fulfilled, and there will be no reason for this world to exist anymore.”

“In the eyes of those powerful beings, our world is nothing more than a speck of dust…”

As the old man spoke, tears streamed down his face.

Kai fell silent. He didn’t know how to comfort him.

“Enemy attack!”

A sudden shout rang out, sending the town into chaos.

The monks sprang into action, leaping into the air in alarm.

Women and children remained behind, hiding inside their homes.

In the distance, two black specks approached rapidly. In mere moments, they hovered above the town.

Both cultivators were at the eighth level of the Mahayana Realm.

To the townspeople, they were insurmountable giants.

“Damn it, this place is a wasteland—there’s nothing here!” one of them cursed.

“At least we finally found a town with people,” the other replied.

“Brother, let’s search the place. Maybe we can find something useful!”

With that, the two descended toward the town.

Seeing this, many monks rushed forward in an attempt to stop them. But the two intruders ignored them completely. One of them casually waved his hand, and a terrifying aura crashed down from the sky!

The monks in the town collapsed one after another—none could withstand the overwhelming force.

The gap in strength was simply too vast.

As the two landed in the town, one of them sneered. “Hand over all your resources, and we might spare your lives!”

The other quickly added, “And send a few beauties over! My brother and I deserve some entertainment!”

The townspeople glared at them in silent fury, but not a single person dared to speak.

“What kind of cowards are you, preying on the weak?”

At that moment, Kai, accompanied by the old man, stepped calmly into the center of the street.

“Who the hell dares to talk to us like that?”

One of the intruders cursed and turned his head—only to freeze in shock when he saw Kai.

Both men went pale.

To the monks in this small town, these two were untouchable masters.

But in Kai’s eyes, they were nothing more than ants.

The two instantly recognized him. They had seen Kai before—back at the Dao Sect, where he had slain the leader of the Ling Sect and the great elder of the Tang Sect.

“Mr. Chen… Mr. Chen, we didn’t expect to see you here!”

Their voices trembled with fear.

“You two are just here to gain experience and clear the trial. Why needlessly slaughter innocent people? The resources these people have are worthless to you.”

“Get lost. Stop bullying the weak,” Kai ordered with a dismissive wave of his hand.

The two monks nodded frantically before fleeing without a second glance.

Seeing this, the monks in the town fell to their knees, bowing in gratitude toward Kai.

The old man was equally stunned. He hadn't expected Kai to be so powerful—even those responsible for the so-called natural disaster were terrified of him!

"Fellow Daoist, please save us!"

The old man, too, knelt before Kai.

Chapter 4827

"Old man, please get up."

Kai helped the old man to his feet, then casually traced a formation pattern in the air. In an instant, a golden light enveloped the entire town.

"I've placed defensive formations around this town," Kai explained. "As long as you stay inside, no one will be able to harm you."

"Thank you! Thank you!" The monks in the town expressed their gratitude repeatedly.

"Old man, I want to issue my challenge. Can you tell me where to find my opponent?"

The old man pointed southwest. "He should be in that direction. A giant, nearly 100 meters tall, wielding a massive axe."

Kai had gathered the information he needed and wasted no time. Without delay, he headed straight southwest.

As he traveled, he spread out his consciousness, searching for any trace of his target's aura.

After all, anyone designated as the challenger's opponent wouldn't be weak. If they were too easy to defeat, the trial would be meaningless.

Before long, Kai pinpointed the target's location and descended immediately.

He remained on high alert, scanning his surroundings carefully.

Rumble…

Suddenly, the ground trembled violently, and the earth split open, forming a deep chasm.

Kai leaped into the air just in time. Looking down, he saw a massive figure emerging from the fissure—a man wielding a colossal axe.

The man's clothes were tattered, making him look like a beggar, but his presence was overwhelming.

With a sinister grin, the giant looked up at Kai.

"A mere third-grade Mahayana Realm cultivator dares to challenge me first? You've got guts…"

"I can't find any decent resources in this miserable place, so I might as well take yours."

Kai's expression darkened as he locked eyes with the towering opponent.

"Damn, is the first level really this ridiculous? How did anyone else even make it through?"

He frowned in confusion.

Even Hongyao and Lanyao had passed the first level—how had they managed to defeat a monster like this? "Kid, this is my first time too. I have no idea how others passed!"

The giant laughed before suddenly swinging his massive axe down toward Kai.

“Shit!”

Kai felt a chill run down his spine. It seemed like the difficulty of the trial changed every time!

As the axe descended, the sky and earth trembled violently. The sheer force was terrifying.

There was no turning back. If he wanted to ascend to the second level, he had no choice but to defeat this opponent.

He had to go all out.

Summoning his Dragon Slaying Sword, Kai raised it to block the incoming strike.

Boom!

A deafening explosion echoed through the air as the impact sent Kai flying back thousands of feet. His hands went numb from the force.

Stabilizing himself, he stared at the giant in shock.

Was the first floor really supposed to be this strong?

Was the trial specifically targeting him?

Tightening his grip on the Dragon Slaying Sword, a sharp gleam flashed in his eyes.

Taking a deep breath, he channeled his spiritual energy, causing his sword to glow with a dazzling radiance.

Against an opponent this massive—standing a hundred meters tall and wielding an axe like a mountain—he couldn’t afford to be careless.

“Again!”

With a shout, Kai shot forward like a bolt of lightning.

His sword sliced through the air, releasing a powerful wave of sword energy aimed straight at the giant’s chest.

The giant grinned and swung his axe horizontally, creating a violent gust of wind that crashed against Kai’s attack.

Boom!

The sky seemed to crack apart as shockwaves erupted, splitting the earth beneath them.

Kai was forced back dozens of feet but didn’t retreat.

Instead, his fighting spirit burned even stronger.

He could feel the giant’s terrifying strength—but also sensed something deeper.

There was a strange rhythm to each of the giant’s attacks, as if his axe swings carried the hidden principles of heaven and earth.

Kai’s mind stirred. He was beginning to grasp something profound.

Chapter 4828

“So that’s it…” Kai murmured, a flash of realization appearing in his eyes.

Instead of rushing to attack, he shifted his focus to observing the giant’s movements, trying to unravel the mystery behind his immense power.

Seeing Kai pause, the giant snorted coldly, raising his massive axe high before bringing it down with devastating force.

As the axe cleaved through the air, the very fabric of space seemed to tear, leaving behind a dark, gaping crack hurtling toward Kai.

His expression remained calm, his figure flickering as he narrowly evaded the strike.

The sheer destructive force of the axe left him more alert—but also more exhilarated.

He knew this battle was an invaluable opportunity. If he could grasp its hidden truths, his strength would soar to new heights.

“Again!”

Kai’s voice rang out as he swung the Dragon Slaying Sword, sending a rainbow-like arc of sword energy crashing against the giant’s axe.

This time, he didn’t simply meet brute force with brute force. Instead, he merged his spiritual energy with his sword intent, searching for the deeper principles hidden within the clash.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Their battle intensified, shaking the heavens as waves of violent energy erupted in all directions.

Kai’s figure flickered through the air, his sword energy intertwining with the giant’s axe swings, creating bursts of dazzling light.

As the fight progressed, his movements became increasingly fluid, his sword intent sharper and more refined.

He could sense himself stepping closer to an elusive state—one that transcended mere strength.

“So power isn’t just about brute force… It’s about understanding and harmonizing with the laws of heaven and earth.”

His mind cleared, and his gaze sharpened with newfound clarity.

No longer content to defend, Kai shifted to the offensive. The energy radiating from his sword grew fiercer, each strike imbued with a mysterious rhythm.

The giant noticed the shift, his expression darkening.

He hadn't expected this seemingly insignificant opponent to grow stronger mid-battle—to the point of becoming a real threat.

"Interesting, kid..."

Sneering, he swung his axe with even greater ferocity, determined to crush Kai under sheer might.

But by now, Kai was no longer the same warrior who had first entered the fight.

His sword intent had condensed to a razor's edge, each strike resonating with the fundamental laws of the world.

With every clash, he began to seize control of the battle.

Boom! With another fierce clash, Kai's Dragon Slaying Sword and the man's giant axe were sent flying apart simultaneously.

Seizing the moment, Kai retreated slightly, a flash of confidence in his eyes. He had finally found a way to defeat his opponent.

"It's time to end this!"

Kai's voice rang out as the spiritual energy within him surged violently. The Dragon Slaying Sword radiated a powerful aura, its energy condensing into a massive sword shadow that slashed toward the man.

Sensing the terrifying power within the attack, the man's expression changed drastically. He hurriedly raised his giant axe to block it.

But this time, his defense wasn't enough.

Boom!

The sword shadow struck with overwhelming force, sending the giant axe reeling from his grip and forcing him back hundreds of feet.

He glanced down at the shallow sword mark on his chest, shock flickering in his eyes.

"You… you're not just at the third-grade Mahayana Realm! You've been hiding your true strength this whole time?"

His voice carried a hint of fear.

Kai smirked. "You're just realizing that now? Looks like it's a little too late."

"You tricked me into letting my guard down… That's low!" the man grumbled, frustration evident in his tone.

Kai chuckled, his eyes brimming with confidence. "Come on, that was just the warm-up."

Before the man could respond, Kai struck again.

His sword flashed through the air, its energy sharp as a rainbow streaking toward the giant.

This time, his sword intent was even more refined, each strike infused with the profound power of the world's natural laws. The man found himself struggling to keep up.

The battle raged on, but Kai's attacks only grew stronger and more precise.

He could feel himself approaching the threshold of something greater—a mysterious state beyond mere brute strength.

And then, with one final slash, his blade carved through the air, completely knocking the giant axe from his opponent's grasp.

The impact sent the man staggering backward thousands of feet.

He looked down at the deep sword mark now etched into his chest, a trace of resignation in his eyes.

"...You win, kid," the man sighed.

"You're free to proceed to the next level."

Chapter 4829

"That's it?" Kai was surprised.

"What? Do you still want to kill me?"

The man's face darkened instantly.

"Senior, don't misunderstand! I didn't mean it that way. I just thought it was a bit too simple," Kai quickly explained.

"Hmph! If I were at full strength, I could kill you with just one finger," the man snorted coldly.

"Senior, may I ask you something? You're not from this world, yet you're acting as a gatekeeper. Why is that?"

Kai was curious about where these gatekeepers came from and how they were chosen.

Hearing the question, the man sighed. "Who said I'm not from this world? My era is simply too distant—most people have long forgotten me."

“Wait… Senior, are you saying you were once a great power in this world?” Kai was shocked.

“Not exactly a great power, but I ascended to the heavens through my own efforts…” The man gazed at the sky, his eyes filled with longing.

“Then why did you return? And your strength—while formidable—is far from that of the true immortals in heaven,” Kai asked sincerely.

“That’s none of your concern. Since you’ve passed this trial, I’ll leave a pass mark on you,” the man said.

With that, a red light shot from his palm, striking Kai.

In an instant, Kai could feel a new mark within his body.

“Senior, will you remain here forever? This world is on the verge of being abandoned—soon, it may face complete destruction,” Kai asked.

He was desperate to understand the truth behind the ladder to heaven. More and more, it seemed like the creation of an unfathomable being, with everyone merely acting as pawns.

Seeing Kai’s persistence, the man let out a sigh. “We will never meet again, so I suppose it won’t hurt to tell you…” “I was suppressed here by the Great Dao and branded with a prisoner’s mark. There is no way for me to leave.”

“To put it simply, my current status is that of a prisoner—one being punished…”

The man’s words stunned Kai. He hadn’t known that even the heavenly world had prisoners!

“Then can you leave the world of the Ladder to Heaven? If you could, wouldn’t you be able to return to the heavenly world?”

Kai asked.

The man shook his head. “I can’t leave. Even if I could, returning to the heavenly world would be impossible. I know you all come from there. The heavenly world is sealed by the Great Formation of Heaven and Earth, trapping its cultivators inside. There’s no way back.”

“Besides, the heavenly world itself is also suppressed by the Great Dao. Staying here is far more comfortable…”

“Senior, the Great Formation of Heaven and Earth has started to weaken. I believe it won’t be long before it breaks!”

Kai said with conviction.

“Impossible! That formation was laid by an ancient great power. How could a mere cultivator from the heavenly world break it?”

The man was skeptical.

“I can!” Kai declared, pulling out four jade slips. “These are the jade slips of the Heaven and Earth Formation. I’ve already deciphered two. Once I crack the remaining two, the formation will be fully revealed, and then I can break it!”

The man’s eyes flickered with interest as he looked at the jade slips. He turned to Kai and asked, “So, you want to free me and then use the opportunity to break the Heaven and Earth Formation in the heavenly world, allowing me to return?”

“Yes!” Kai nodded firmly.

“Why would you save me? And even if I leave, the prisoner’s mark remains. I must break that first before I can truly be free.”

The man questioned.

“No reason. I just feel like doing something good.”

Kai smiled.

Seeing his expression, the man chuckled and said, “If you truly free me, I am willing to serve as your subordinate and follow your orders for three hundred years!”

Chapter 4830

Of course, the man knew that Kai wouldn’t help him out of pure goodwill. As the saying goes, no merit, no reward. Since Kai wanted to save him, there had to be something in it for him.

Right now, he was nothing more than a prisoner—he had no resources, no treasures. The only thing he could offer was his loyalty and service to Kai.

“Since senior is being so straightforward, I won’t refuse. But can you at least tell me how to break your prisoner’s seal? And why were you imprisoned here in the first place?”

Kai asked.

“Do I have to tell you? How embarrassing…” The man’s face flushed.

“If you don’t tell me, how am I supposed to help you?” Kai spread his hands.

“Fine…” The man took a deep breath. “Back in the heavenly realm, I met a beautiful fairy, and well…”

“And? What did you do to her?” Kai asked.

“No, no! I wouldn’t dare! She’s the daughter of the Golden Immortal. How could I have the courage? I just… secretly watched her take a bath…”

As he finished speaking, his face turned an even deeper shade of red.

“Wait, you were branded with a prisoner’s seal and locked up here just for that?”

Kai was baffled.

The man nodded, looking thoroughly embarrassed.

“That’s… way too pathetic,” Kai shook his head.

“Hey! In the heavenly realm, immortals like me—who climbed our way up step by step—have the lowest status. It’s nearly impossible for us to find a dual cultivation partner.”

“I was desperate, so I did something foolish… You’re not going to laugh at me, are you?”

The man looked at Kai with a mix of shame and hope.

“No, of course not! I’m a well-mannered person. I would never mock someone…”

“Unless I just can’t help it.”

“Hahaha!”

Kai burst into laughter.

“Fuck!” The man’s face turned green as he glared at him. “You dare laugh at me?! Do you even have a dual cultivation partner?”

“Of course I do! I have more than twenty—I’ve lost count!”

Kai continued laughing.

Getting imprisoned in a place like this just for peeking at a woman bathing—it was almost too ridiculous to believe.

“Braggart…” The man shot Kai a skeptical glance.

Kai didn't respond. Instead, he casually waved the Dragon Slaying Sword, and in an instant, the sword spirit Zhongli appeared before them.

"A sword spirit?!" The man exclaimed in shock.

"Master!" Zhongli snuggled into Kai's arms affectionately.

"Senior, do you really want to watch me being intimate right in front of you?"

Kai asked teasingly.

"I'd rather not!" The man turned away. "You're still so young, yet you possess a spirit sword and can leap an entire cultivation realm with your third-grade Mahayana strength. There's no way you achieved this alone—someone powerful must be backing you. You're just a privileged second-generation cultivator. I won't compare myself to you!"

With a bitter expression, he looked off into the distance.

He had struggled for thousands of years just to climb to the heavens, yet here was a second-generation rich kid who had effortlessly reached the same heights.

Comparisons were infuriating—some people spent their whole lives striving for ascension, while others were simply born into it.

That was fate, sealed from the moment of birth.

Kai patted Zhongli gently, signaling her to return to the Dragon Slaying Sword. Then he turned back to the man.

"Senior, how can I help you break your Prison Seal? And how much of your strength is currently suppressed?"

The man nodded. "Right now, I have only one-third of my full power. If I were at full strength, none of you would have made it past the first level."

“As for breaking the Prison Seal… that depends entirely on your ability!”

With that, the man swung his axe down hard.

A burst of red light erupted from the ground, and a blood-red talisman slowly surfaced. It spread across the entire wasteland, intricate lines filled with flowing crimson liquid.

“This is the Prison Seal, and the red liquid is my blood. To break the seal, I must completely remove it from my body,” the man explained.

“Simple. It’s just a talisman—I can break it with a flick of my hand.”

Kai smiled confidently.

“Are you serious, or just bragging?” The man asked, narrowing his eyes.

Chapter 4831

Kai remained silent, his eyes fixed on the talisman. Slowly, he raised his hand and began tracing symbols in the air.

One after another, divine patterns appeared at his fingertips, gradually forming a talisman identical to the Prison Seal on the ground.

The man was stunned, his face filled with disbelief.

At that moment, the talisman Kai had drawn released a powerful suction force.

The blood within the blood-red talisman on the ground began flowing rapidly into Kai’s newly formed talisman.

Within moments, the Prison Seal lost all its color. Then, with a simple stomp of Kai’s foot, it shattered into pieces.

The man instantly felt the Prison Seal inside his body disappear—but in its place, a new talisman appeared within him.

“You’re free now,” Kai said calmly. “The talisman in your body was carved by me. It won’t restrain you… unless you break your promise or try to harm me. If you do, I can activate it at any time.”

You should never intend to harm others, but you must always be prepared to protect yourself…

The man stared at Kai in shock before suddenly dropping to one knee.

“I am Nan Batian. From this day forward, I swear my loyalty to my master until death!”

“Nan Batian… a strong name.”

Kai nodded. “My name is Kai. You may call me Mr. Chen.”

Just as he was feeling pleased with himself, the sky suddenly trembled. A mysterious force surged toward him.

Nan Batian’s expression changed instantly. Without hesitation, he turned and bolted.

“This is the power of Heaven! You broke the Prison Seal without permission and triggered Heavenly Retribution!” he shouted as he ran.

“What the—?! And you didn’t think to mention this earlier?!”

Kai glared at Nan Batian, nearly exploding with rage.

“Oops… I forgot,” Nan Batian muttered.

Kai instantly knew this bastard had done it on purpose. How could he possibly forget something so important? He had clearly withheld the information deliberately!

Kai's expression darkened. He gripped the Dragon Slaying Sword tightly and swung it, unleashing a powerful wave of sword energy to block the descending force of Heaven.

However, the moment his sword energy collided with it, it was instantly shattered—completely powerless to stop the attack! "It's over… I'm doomed…" Kai muttered in despair.

Why did I meddle in someone else's affairs? Now I have to suffer Heavenly Retribution!

"What's there to be afraid of?" the Red Cloud Demon Lord scoffed. "This is just the power of a Golden Immortal. Hardly worth worrying about!"

"If I had my physical body back, I wouldn't even flinch at this little bit of Heavenly power. Hell, I'd drag that Golden Immortal down here and beat him senseless!"

Seeing Kai's fighting spirit waver, the Red Cloud Demon Lord spoke loudly, trying to encourage him.

"Senior, you might not be afraid, but I am!" Kai sighed helplessly. "I haven't even reached the Immortal Realm yet! How do you expect me to resist the power of a Golden Immortal?"

"Good point… You are ridiculously weak," the Red Cloud Demon Lord admitted with a slight frown.

As the terrifying power of Heaven surged toward Kai, his storage ring suddenly trembled.

A small Swallowing Beast slowly emerged, stretching its body and letting out a lazy yawn.

In an instant, the overwhelming force of Heaven was sucked straight into the beast's mouth!

Then, just as quickly as it appeared, the little Swallowing Beast returned to the storage ring.

The entire ordeal lasted only a single breath—yet the terrifying punishment of Heaven had vanished completely!

Nan Batian stood frozen, his mind blank with shock. “T-That… what was that?”

“Oh, just one of my little pets.” Kai shrugged, looking unfazed. “Why would I waste my energy dealing with something like this?”

Then his gaze darkened as he turned toward Nan Batian. “By the way… were you trying to trick me into getting obliterated by Heavenly Retribution?”

“I swear I wasn’t! I wouldn’t dare!” Nan Batian panicked, immediately dropping to his knees. “I really forgot! That prison seal tortured me for so long, my memory isn’t what it used to be!”

Kai studied him for a moment before waving his hand dismissively. “Fine, I’ll let it slide this time. Get up.”

Nan Batian hurriedly stood, his massive frame looming over Kai as he followed closely behind.

Kai looked up at him and frowned. “Can you shrink a bit? It’s exhausting talking to you when you’re a hundred meters tall.”

“Of course! This isn’t my true form anyway.”

With a grin, Nan Batian instantly shrank down to the size of a normal person.

“I just like looking intimidating,” he admitted sheepishly. “Makes me feel braver!”

Chapter 4832

“If you leave this place with me, what will happen to the other challengers on this floor?”

Kai asked.

“They will be teleported out, and the passage to this floor will be sealed,” Nan Batian explained. “However, each of them will receive a pass mark. In a hundred years, a new guardian will take over this floor.”

“That works.” Kai nodded, relieved. This meant Lin Keting would be safely transported out of the ladder, eliminating any potential danger for her—and saving him the trouble of searching for her.

“Follow me!” he ordered.

“Yes, sir…” Nan Batian bowed in deference.

By now, any trace of contempt he once had for Kai had completely vanished. Instead, he was filled with awe and fear. For someone to so effortlessly dispel the power of a Golden Immortal, their strength and background had to be extraordinary.

Not to mention, Kai possessed a spirit sword and a divine beast—things far beyond the reach of ordinary Mahayana cultivators.

“Senior, right now, you’re only operating at a third of your original strength,” Kai said. “If you enter the Heavenly Realm, you’ll likely be further suppressed, and your cultivation will weaken even more.”

“Moreover, the resources in the Heavenly Realm aren’t well-suited for immortals like you. Here, take these immortal stones. While they may not be as potent as those from the Heavenly Realm, they should at least help you maintain your current cultivation level.”

With that, Kai pulled out a storage bag containing 100,000 immortal stones and handed it over.

Nan Batian accepted the bag, eyes wide in disbelief. “Mr. Chen, are you sure this is okay?”

“Of course,” Kai said, tossing the bag to him. “You’re under my command now. Naturally, it’s my responsibility to provide the resources you need.”

Nan Batian was overjoyed. In this place, he had been completely deprived of resources, forced to rely solely on his own spiritual energy just to survive.

Without a steady supply, he knew it was only a matter of time before his strength was completely drained.

Clutching the storage bag, he took a deep breath, then cupped his fists and said solemnly, “Mr. Chen, from this day forward, I, Nan Batian, will follow you until death!”

“In the Heavenly Realm, I won’t need your help right away. But once I get there, I may have some tasks for you,” Kai said.

Right now, he had Mr. Shi in the Heavenly Realm, a figure powerful enough to dominate the entire realm. However, once Kai arrived, his influence wouldn’t be nearly as strong.

“No problem! As long as I can return to the Heavenly Realm, if Mr. Chen ever needs anything, just let me know!” Nan Batian said, patting his chest confidently.

“I have a question. Do you know who the guardians of the other levels in this ladder are? How strong are they? And what kinds of worlds exist on those levels?” Kai asked.

Nan Batian shook his head. “I’m not sure about the other guardians, but I can say with certainty that they are all prisoners like me.”

“As for the world on each level, it changes. For example, this world will likely disappear when the ladder reappears in a hundred years, replaced by a completely new one.”

“The reason is simple—this world’s resources and cultivators are nearly exhausted, making it unfit for future challenges.”

Hearing this, Kai remained silent, hoping that the fourth level wouldn’t change. Yun Li had mentioned an immortal cave on that level, and if the world was replaced, the cave would likely vanish as well.

“Mr. Chen, two people are approaching,” Nan Batian suddenly said, his brows furrowing. “They’re also cultivators from the Heavenly Realm—most likely here to challenge me.”

“There’s no need to worry. You’re no longer a prisoner or a guardian,” Kai reassured him. “If they dare to attack, I’ll handle it myself.”

“In the Heavenly Realm, everyone knows my name…” he added arrogantly.

But his words weren’t an exaggeration. After the battle at the Dao Sect, nearly every cultivator who had entered the Heavenly Ladder had heard of him.

“Mr. Chen, you’re truly incredible!” Nan Batian gave him a thumbs-up.

Chapter 4833

Soon, two figures rushed toward Kai and his group. Both were engulfed in flames, their faces concealed behind masks.

The moment Kai saw them, his brows furrowed.

But what caught his attention the most was the woman between them. There was something eerily familiar about her.

“Brother Ning…”

The two stopped in front of him, and Kai clasped his fists toward Ning Zhi in greeting.

Ning Zhi was momentarily stunned to see Kai standing beside Nan Batian. After a brief pause, he returned the greeting and asked, “Fellow Daoist Chen, have you completed the challenge?”

Kai nodded, then turned his gaze to the masked woman beside Ning Zhi. “Brother Ning, who is this?”

“Oh, this is my senior sister,” Ning Zhi replied.

“She looks strangely familiar…”

Kai stared at the woman, then extended his hand and said, “Hello…”

He wanted to make contact and sense her aura more carefully.

But before he could, Su Yuqi stepped back, watching him with clear wariness.

“I’m sorry,” Ning Zhi quickly interjected. “My senior sister is rather peculiar—she doesn’t make physical contact with men.”

Hearing this, Kai could only smile helplessly. He never would have imagined that the woman beneath the mask was Su Yuqi—the very person who had occupied his thoughts day and night.

“Fellow Daoist Chen, since you’ve completed the challenge, you can proceed to the second floor. We still have to fight our way through,” Ning Zhi said.

Then, his gaze sharpened as he turned to Nan Batian, clearly preparing for battle.

Nan Batian glanced at Kai but said nothing, choosing instead to step behind him.

“Brother Ning, there’s no need for you to fight. Once you leave, you’ll be able to proceed directly to the second floor,” Kai explained.

“He’s already surrendered—he’s one of my people now.”

“What?” Ning Zhi was dumbfounded, staring at Kai in disbelief. “How could you possibly subdue him? I didn’t even know that was possible!”

“Of course. They’re cultivators, just like us—living beings with thoughts and emotions, not mindless machines.”

Kai said this matter-of-factly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. After speaking, Kai smiled helplessly. He had just mentioned robots, but the other party likely had no idea what that was. After all, only those from the secular world would understand such a thing.

However, what Kai didn’t realize was that Ning Zhi—who stood across from him—was also from the secular world. Of course, he knew exactly what a robot was!

“Fellow Daoist Chen, are you trying to deceive us?” Ning Zhi still looked skeptical.

“Why would I lie to you? If you don’t believe me, you’ll see for yourself once you step outside.”

With that, Kai grabbed Nan Batian, and in a flash of thought, the two of them vanished, instantly appearing outside the Heavenly Ladder.

Seeing Kai actually leave with Nan Batian, Ning Zhi stood frozen in disbelief.

“Fuck…” he cursed under his breath. How was he supposed to deal with Kai now?

As soon as Nan Batian left the ladder, the world within the first level became engulfed in white light.

At that moment, all the cultivators from the Tianren Realm who had entered the first level felt a strange force surge through their bodies. A glowing pass mark appeared on each of them.

Then, without warning, an immense force teleported them all outside!

“What happened? Why was I suddenly sent out?”

“I didn’t even get to challenge anything—how did I clear the level?”

“Wait… does this mean we can pass the first level without fighting?”

A wave of confusion swept through the crowd as they tried to make sense of what had just happened.

Lin Keting was just as bewildered, scanning the area before spotting Kai. Without hesitation, she ran toward him.

Lin Chong, Taoist Wuji, and the others were equally puzzled. They had no idea why everyone had been ejected so soon after entering the first level.

Meanwhile, the massive stone steps of the first level’s gateway slowly dimmed as the light portal began to fade.

“Mr. Chen, what’s going on?” Lin Chong asked as he and Taoist Wuji approached.

“Relax, it’s nothing serious,” Kai reassured them, noticing their tense expressions.

Chapter 4834

Nan Batian stood to the side, observing Lin Chong and Taoist Wuji—both powerful figures—showing such deep respect for Kai. In that moment, he felt fortunate to have chosen to follow the right person.

“Kai, what’s going on? Why were we all sent out?” Lin Keting asked.

“I brought the guardian of the first floor with me. Naturally, that meant everyone inside had to be sent out as well,” Kai explained.

“Mr. Chen, is this the person you were referring to?” Lin Chong asked, glancing at Nan Batian.

Taoist Wuji also studied Nan Batian with a puzzled expression. “A cultivator from the Heaven Realm?” he asked.

Kai nodded. “His name is Nan Batian. He was once a cultivator in the Heaven Realm, but due to a minor mistake, he was imprisoned on the first floor of the Heavenly Ladder as its guardian.

“I broke the prison seal on him, so I brought him out.”

“You broke the prison seal?” Taoist Wuji was visibly shocked. “Breaking a prison seal at will triggers punishment from Heaven. If the prisoner is someone powerful, the resulting divine retribution can be terrifying!”

As a cultivator from the Heaven Realm himself, Taoist Wuji knew this all too well.

“It wasn’t anything serious, just a mere Golden Immortal. The power of Heaven’s punishment was weak,” Kai said nonchalantly.

“What? A mere Golden Immortal?”

Everyone froze, staring at Kai in stunned silence.

Since when did a Golden Immortal amount to nothing in his eyes?

Not far away, Ning Zhi nearly smacked himself on the forehead when he heard Kai’s words.

“Mr. Chen is truly incredible. My prison seal was branded by a Golden Immortal, yet he broke it effortlessly and even withstood Heaven’s punishment!”

Nan Batian’s words confirmed that Kai wasn’t exaggerating.

This time, no one spoke. They simply didn’t know what to say.

Meanwhile, some cultivators had already started making their way to the second floor. Others, however, approached Kai and asked humbly, “Mr. Chen, are you planning to ascend to the second floor? If you are, could you take care of the guardian there as well? That way, we might benefit from it too!” Kai had taken in the guardian of the second floor, allowing everyone who entered to receive the pass mark as well.

“Of course, I’m going. The Heavenly Ladder has nine floors, which means nine guardians—I plan to collect them all!”

Kai gazed up at the towering ladder before him, his tone filled with confidence.

Though many suspected he was exaggerating, excitement still spread among the crowd.

If they followed closely behind him, could they also clear all nine floors and ascend to the Heaven Realm?

“I want to go to the second floor too!” Lin Keting said eagerly.

With Kai’s strength, she felt reassured that there would be no danger in following him.

“Ting’er, don’t be reckless. Just because the first floor was safe doesn’t mean the second floor will be the same,” Lin Chong warned sternly.

“No! I’m going!” Lin Keting protested, clinging to Kai’s arm.

Seeing this, Kai sighed helplessly and said, “Let her come. With me here, there shouldn’t be any real danger below the fourth floor.”

“I will also protect Mr. Chen!” Nan Batian quickly added.

Although he couldn’t challenge the guardian of the second floor, he could still handle the cultivators in that world.

Seeing their determination, Lin Chong finally relented and allowed Lin Keting to enter the second floor.

Taking her hand, Kai leaped toward the second-floor stone steps, with Nan Batian following closely behind.

“Junior Brother, what should we do? Follow him and wait for an easy clearance?” Su Yuqi asked Ning Zhi.

Ning Zhi’s expression darkened in frustration. After a long sigh, he finally conceded, “We don’t have much choice. I just want to see how far Kai can go…”

With that, he and Su Yuqi also leaped up, heading straight for the second-floor stone steps.

Chapter 4835

Kai and his team stepped into the second level.

The world here appeared slightly better than the first level—but only just.

Despite some minor improvements, the landscape remained barren, the spiritual energy thin, and resources scarce.

Nan Batian took in the desolate scene and sighed. “I can only imagine how many challengers have passed through the first and second levels. Even if there were once ample resources, they would have been depleted by now.”

“The cultivators of this world are hunted like prey. Without resources, their lifespans are drastically shortened, and they eventually wither away…”

“I believe that in another hundred years, this world will also collapse and be replaced by a new one.”

Throughout the vast universe and countless galaxies, minor worlds like this were insignificant in the eyes of the great immortals of the Heaven Realm.

“Let’s go. We need to ask around and figure out where the guardian of this level is,” Kai said, gazing at the endless mountains before him. He had no clear direction in mind.

“Mr. Chen, I suggest we split up to search. It’ll be faster that way,” Nan Batian proposed.

“Good idea. Here, take this sound transmission jade slip. Whoever finds the guardian first should notify the others immediately,” Kai said, handing over the jade slip.

Nan Batian nodded, took the jade slip, and vanished in an instant.

“Let’s move,” Kai said, taking Lin Keting’s hand as they flew over the mountainous terrain.

Along the way, they occasionally encountered cultivators, but all of them were challengers from the Heavenly World.

Strangely, they had yet to see a single native cultivator from this level.

“This doesn’t make sense… Have all the second-level cultivators been wiped out?” Kai murmured, his brows furrowed in concern.

Just as he and Lin Keting continued their search, two figures rapidly approached.

It was Hong Yao and Lan Yao, the sisters who had also entered the second level.

“Mr. Chen, you reached the second level so quickly?” Hong Yao asked in surprise. “Mr. Chen is truly remarkable! He cleared the first level with ease!”

Lan Yao chimed in, offering her own flattery.

Lin Keting rolled her eyes at the two sisters. She couldn't shake the feeling that they had ulterior motives—were they trying to steal Kai from her?

If both of them pursued Kai together, she was certain he wouldn't be able to resist. After all, twin sisters were an irresistible temptation for most men!

"You two are still on the second floor? Haven't you found the guardian yet?" Kai asked.

"We did, but he's far too strong. The two of us stood no chance against him," Hong Yao admitted with a helpless sigh.

"So for now, we're just wandering around, gathering resources to train. We're hoping to improve our strength before attempting another challenge."

"Take me there. Maybe I can help you clear this level," Kai said confidently.

"Mr. Chen, the Heavenly Ladder must be challenged individually. How can you help? If outside assistance worked, my sister and I would've advanced long ago," Lan Yao pointed out.

"Just take me there first. I'll explain later," Kai said, unable to hide his excitement. He hadn't expected to find the guardian so easily!

Hong Yao and Lan Yao exchanged glances before nodding. Without further hesitation, they led Kai toward a distant mountain.

As they landed on a wide clearing at the mountain's peak, the ground suddenly trembled beneath them. The entire mountain shook violently.

Then, from within the trembling earth, a man in a simple cloth robe emerged, walking toward them at a steady pace.

His gaze swept over the group before he frowned slightly. “Go back and train some more. With your current strength, do you really think you can pass?”

“Senior, we’re not the ones challenging you this time. Master Chen is,” Hong Yao quickly explained.

The robed man turned his eyes toward Kai, sizing him up with clear disdain.

“A mere third-level Mahayana cultivator? Even weaker than you two… I’m not interested.”

Chapter 4836

The cloth-robed man turned to leave, but just as he did, Kai suddenly swung his sword!

The void around them shattered in an instant as thousands of sword beams rained down upon the man!

In a flash, the cloth-robed man vanished from his spot. When he reappeared, he had already evaded the oncoming sword barrage!

“A sword cultivator?”

He looked at Kai in surprise.

“Senior, I am an omnipotent cultivator—I know everything!” Kai laughed.

“I don’t care what kind of cultivator you are. Now, taste my sword rain…”

As soon as the cloth-robed man finished speaking, a long sword appeared in his hand, unleashing thousands of sword beams toward Kai!

Kai frowned. He hadn't expected his opponent to wield a sword as well—and with impressive skill!

Boom!

Without hesitation, he swung his sword to counter the attack, unleashing an unstoppable sword intent!

In an instant, the entire world transformed into a sea of swords!

Lin Keting, along with the sisters Hongyao and Lanyao, quickly retreated to a safe distance.

The sword intent of both fighters clashed violently in the air, with dazzling sword light streaking across the sky and razor-sharp energy slicing through space. The entire mountain seemed to sink beneath the overwhelming tide of swords.

Their figures flickered through the storm of blades, moving too fast for the naked eye to follow.

Kai could feel the sheer sharpness of his opponent's sword intent—each strike carried destructive power, as if capable of tearing the heavens apart.

He dared not let his guard down. His sword danced like the wind, flashing with brilliance as it formed layers of sword curtains to block the relentless assault.

"Your swordsmanship is impressive, but you're still lacking!"

The cloth-robed man sneered. His sword trembled violently, splitting into thousands of shadows that poured down like a torrential storm.

Kai's expression hardened. He realized that his opponent's sword mastery had reached an extraordinary level. With his current strength alone, he might not be able to hold out.

Yet he did not retreat. Instead, he focused on sensing his opponent's sword intent, searching for a flaw in the technique.

Suddenly, Kai's sword accelerated. The blade flickered like lightning, piercing through the enemy's sword curtain and striking straight for the cloth-robed man's throat! A flicker of surprise flashed in the cloth-robed man's eyes, but he quickly regained his composure.

In a swift motion, he dodged Kai's fatal strike with ease. Then, with a powerful swing, his sword slashed forward, its light surging like a dragon, aiming straight for Kai's chest.

Kai felt an overwhelming pressure. He knew that if this attack landed, death was inevitable.

He didn't dare to take it head-on. His body retreated rapidly, vanishing in a flash before reappearing behind the cloth-robed man. Without hesitation, he thrust his sword forward.

But as if anticipating the move, the cloth-robed man sidestepped effortlessly, dodging the strike.

Without pause, he countered with a swift swing of his sword, its light flashing like lightning as it streaked toward Kai's back.

A chill ran down Kai's spine. He knew he couldn't evade this one—his only option was to meet it head-on.

His sword trembled, and in an instant, its radiance expanded into a massive shadowy blade, colliding fiercely with the opponent's attack.

Boom!

Their powerful sword intents clashed in midair, shaking the entire mountain.

The impact sent a violent force rippling through Kai's body, forcing him back several steps. A thin trickle of blood appeared at the corner of his mouth.

The cloth-robed man didn't let up. A torrential downpour of sword beams surged toward him, wave after wave.

Each strike carried immense power, as if threatening to tear the very fabric of space apart.

Kai fought back with all his strength. The Dragon Slaying Sword in his hands weaved through the storm of blades, leaving behind shimmering arcs of silver light.

Each swing of his sword rang out with the sharp clash of metal, echoing like the beat of a war drum.

"Hmph, not bad!"

The cloth-robed man snorted coldly. His sword trembled violently, and in an instant, the rain of swords intensified, its density multiplying severalfold.

Kai cursed inwardly. His opponent's swordsmanship wasn't just powerful—it was unpredictable and relentless, leaving him struggling to keep up.

But rather than shrink back, his fighting spirit burned even brighter. Roaring defiantly, he declared, "Then let's see how you handle this!"

"Nine Shadow Swordsmanship!"

Pouring every ounce of his spiritual power into his blade, Kai unleashed his ultimate sword technique without hesitation.

Chapter 4837

As six identical figures materialized, Kai, who had been fighting alone, now had the cloth-robed man completely surrounded!

The Dragon Slaying Sword gleamed with dazzling light, and each swing carried an unstoppable force, as if it could shatter anything in its path.

“Eh…”

The cloth-robed man frowned, then abruptly drove his long sword into the ground.

“As still as a mountain…”

With his chant, countless long swords materialized around him, forming an impenetrable barrier.

Though he remained motionless, the swords around him moved as if guided by his will, launching relentless attacks in all directions.

For a while, their blades clashed fiercely in the raging sea of swords. Waves of sword energy burst forth, reducing mountain rocks to dust.

The ground split into deep, jagged chasms beneath the force of their strikes, and the mountaintop looked as if it had been ravaged by a celestial hand.

Amid the intense battle, Kai gradually entered a profound state.

All distractions faded from his mind—his focus was locked solely on his opponent’s swordsmanship.

Every slash, every movement of the cloth-robed man unfolded before his eyes as if in slow motion.

A realization took root within him. The intricate sword techniques that had seemed unfathomable moments ago now became clear and logical under his understanding.

“So that’s it… the flaw in this move is right here…”

Kai murmured inwardly. In an instant, his six clones merged back into one!

At the same time, the trajectory of the Dragon Slaying Sword shifted—no longer relying solely on brute force.

Instead, he wove through the enemy’s strikes, evading the sharp edges of each attack while pinpointing weaknesses to counter.

The cloth-robed man noticed the change, a flicker of surprise flashing in his eyes.

“Interesting… Comprehending new sword intent in the midst of battle? Impressive. But do you really think that alone will allow you to defeat me?”

As he spoke, his aura surged dramatically.

His swordsmanship underwent a fundamental transformation. The endless barrage of sword rain, which had overwhelmed with sheer quantity, now condensed into something far deadlier.

Each blade of sword energy pulsed with terrifying destructive power, distorting space itself wherever it passed. “Starfall Sword Domain!”

With a soft yet commanding shout, the cloth-robed man unleashed a torrent of sword qi from the earth’s veins, cascading like an inverted Milky Way.

But these weren’t ordinary sword energies. Each strand carried the trajectory of the stars, radiating an oppressive force akin to the gravitational pull of celestial bodies.

Kai felt as if his feet were sinking into thick mud. The immense power of the stars coursed through him, sending waves of pain through his meridians.

Without hesitation, he plunged the Dragon Slaying Sword into the ground. As the Concentration Heart Art surged wildly within him, he absorbed every bit of the starfall sword qi within a ten-foot radius.

The cloth-robed man's pupils contracted slightly. The sudden formation of a vacuum zone in his sword domain caused his momentum to stall for a brief moment.

"You can actually absorb sword qi?"

His expression darkened, and his sword aura shifted instantly.

Tracing a mysterious arc through the air, his blade radiated a profound duality—half of the sword light blazed like the scorching sun, while the other half exuded the icy chill of the moon.

Boom!

A brilliant explosion erupted where the opposing energies met. The Chaos Sword Wheel clashed violently against the Sun and Moon Wheels, tearing three dark rifts in the void itself.

The impact was devastating. Kai's knuckles split open, and his sword nearly slipped from his grasp. His body was covered in deep cracks, with blood seeping continuously from his wounds.

Staring at the cloth-robed man, his eyes were filled with disbelief. He hadn't expected the Guardian of the Second Heaven to be this terrifying.

How in the world did Yun Li and the others make it to the Fourth Heaven?

"Kai, are you okay?" Lin Keting called out anxiously.

Hong Yao and Lan Yao exchanged puzzled glances.

"Sister, when we challenged him earlier, he didn't seem nearly this powerful, right?" Lan Yao asked in confusion.

“Absolutely not. Is he deliberately targeting Mr. Chen?”

Hong Yao frowned. If the cloth-robed man had shown this level of strength before, the two of them wouldn’t have lasted more than a single move!

Chapter 4838

“Are you deliberately targeting me?” Kai asked the cloth-robed man.

“Why would you think that?” The man looked puzzled.

“Damn it! With your current strength, no one can make it to the fourth level. There’s no way past you!”

Kai was furious—this was simply unfair!

The cloth-robed man chuckled. “You’re clearly powerful but conceal your strength, pretending to be at the third level of the Mahayana Realm. You can deceive me, but why can’t I single you out?”

“I am at the third level of the Mahayana Realm! When did I ever lie to you?”

Kai roared in frustration.

“Impossible! No one at that level could be this strong!” The man shook his head in disbelief.

Kai spread his arms. “Then check for yourself! I won’t move—see what realm I’m really in.”

Hearing this, the cloth-robed man sent his divine sense into Kai’s body.

“Huh? It’s true… you really are at the third level of the Mahayana Realm. Kid, you’re absolutely monstrous!”

The revelation left him stunned.

“Great, so I got beaten up for nothing…” Kai muttered in exasperation.

The cloth-robed man let out an awkward chuckle. “My bad! I’ll give you the pass mark now—you can proceed to the next level.”

But Kai shook his head. “I don’t care about the mark. I just want to know your name, senior.”

“Li Chunfeng,” the man replied, cupping his fists. “You’re incredibly strong at such a young age. I imagine your background is extraordinary. May I ask your name?”

“Kai,” he answered. Then, with a deliberate tone, he asked, “Senior, are you here voluntarily, or were you forced into this role?”

In truth, Kai already knew the answer—Nan Batian had told him long ago that these guardians were prisoners.

Li Chunfeng scoffed. “Who in their right mind would volunteer for this miserable place? I was imprisoned here! Otherwise, I wouldn’t bother letting them pass.”

He sighed. “Honestly, I let most cultivators on my level go through. That way, I can get some rest.”

Kai smirked. “Senior, you don’t seem like a bad person. So why were you imprisoned here?” Kai asked curiously.

“I can’t say, I can’t say…” Li Chunfeng shook his head repeatedly.

“Senior, if I could help you escape from here, how would you repay me?”

Kai wanted Li Chunfeng to work for him, but he found it difficult to say outright.

Li Chunfeng scoffed. “Don’t joke around. I have a prisoner’s mark on me—I can never leave unless I’m pardoned.”

“Enough nonsense. Here’s your pass mark. You’d better leave!”

He clearly didn’t believe a word Kai was saying.

At that moment, a familiar voice rang out.

“Old Li, Mr. Chen isn’t joking.”

Nan Batian appeared.

Li Chunfeng was stunned. “Batian? Why are you here? Weren’t you imprisoned too?”

Nan Batian grinned. “I was locked up on the first floor. Never expected to find you guarding the second.”

Kai raised an eyebrow. “Wait, you two know each other?”

Nan Batian laughed. “Of course! I wasn’t the only one who spied on the Golden Immortal’s daughter while she was bathing. We did it together.”

Kai was dumbfounded. He turned to Li Chunfeng in disbelief.

A man who dressed like an immortal, wielded a sword with grace, and carried an air of wisdom—he did something like that?

“Shut up!” Li Chunfeng shot Nan Batian a glare.

Now it all made sense. Kai finally understood why Li Chunfeng had avoided answering his question earlier—he was embarrassed!

Nan Batian smirked. “Old Li, Mr. Chen can break the prison seal and set you free. All you have to do is serve him for three hundred years.”

Li Chunfeng’s eyes widened. “Seriously?”

Kai nodded. “Yes.”

Li Chunfeng hesitated before asking, “But breaking the prison seal means enduring heavenly punishment. Do you really think you can withstand the power of the Golden Immortal’s tribulation?”

He looked at Kai skeptically.

Kai studied Li Chunfeng’s expression and realized this man was far more cautious than Nan Batian.

Unlike Li Chunfeng, Nan Batian hadn’t mentioned the heavenly punishment at all—and because of that, Kai had nearly been destroyed by it.

Chapter 4839

“The power of the Heavenly Dao of a mere Golden Immortal is nothing to worry about.”

Kai spoke calmly.

Li Chunfeng stared at him in shock, his face full of disbelief. “Daoyou, are you bragging?”

A third-grade cultivator in the Mahayana Realm claiming that the Heavenly Dao of a Golden Immortal was nothing to fear—if that wasn’t boasting, then what was?

“Old Li, what nonsense are you spouting? How could Mr. Chen be bragging?”

Nan Batian scoffed. “The Heavenly Dao of a Golden Immortal? Mr. Chen doesn’t even need to lift a finger. His little pet alone can shatter its power!”

“Is that true?”

Li Chunfeng frowned, still finding it hard to believe.

Without further explanation, Kai prepared to break the prison seal for Li Chunfeng.

At that moment, the Red Cloud Demon Lord spoke up.

“Boy, think this through. My Heaven-Swallowing Beast can’t appear at will.”

“If the punishment of heaven strikes and my beast doesn’t show up, will you be able to withstand it on your own?”

Kai froze, hesitating for a moment.

“Mr. Chen, this old Li doesn’t believe you. Just break it and show him!”

Nan Batian urged.

“I still don’t quite believe it myself,” Li Chunfeng admitted.

“Then let’s give it a try!”

Without further hesitation, Kai pressed his palm to the ground. The Dao Prison Seal appeared instantly, glowing with the same crimson lines, pulsating with Li Chunfeng’s blood.

Using the same method as before, Kai began breaking the prison seal.

Li Chunfeng suddenly felt a powerful force vanish from within him. His consciousness surged inward, and to his astonishment, the prison seal that had bound him for so long was completely gone.

“It’s really broken… It’s really broken! I’m free!”

Li Chunfeng leaped into the air like an excited child.

For years, he had believed he would be trapped in this place forever. He never imagined he would actually escape.

For him, this was a rare opportunity!

“Thank you, Mr. Chen…”

Li Chunfeng bowed deeply to Kai in gratitude.

“Senior, there’s no need for such formality. I’m giving you freedom, and in return, you’ll serve me for three hundred years. Consider it a fair exchange.”

Kai replied calmly.

Li Chunfeng shook his head. “Even if I serve Mr. Chen for three hundred years, I will still owe him a great debt. Mr. Chen is like a second parent to me.”

“Senior, you’re being too polite!” Kai waved his hand before asking, “Tell me, Senior, is your strength also restricted like Senior Nan Batian’s?”

“Yes. Right now, I possess less than 30% of my peak strength. If I were at my full power, no matter how talented Mr. Chen is, he wouldn’t be able to withstand my sword.”

Li Chunfeng admitted.

Hearing this, Kai felt a surge of excitement. These were all immensely powerful immortals. Once they fully recovered, they would be able to roam even the heavens without fear of being suppressed!

He couldn’t always rely on Mr. Shi—he needed to build his own force!

Even though he had yet to ascend to the heavens, Kai had already made many allies there.

Several great demons, Taoist Wuji, the old ancestor of divine patterns, the array demon, along with Nan Batian and Li Chunfeng...

All of them belonged to the celestial realm, and once the Heaven and Earth Seal disappeared, they would return there.

The more Kai thought about it, the more excited he became!

But just then, the earth and sky trembled violently as a terrifying force descended from above!

“Mr. Chen, be careful! The punishment of heaven is coming!”

Li Chunfeng shouted in warning.

Everyone instinctively backed away. This was the divine retribution of the Golden Immortal’s Heavenly Dao—no one dared to face it head-on!

Seeing this, Kai immediately activated his Indestructible Golden Body, surrounding himself with a protective aura of spiritual energy.

He silently chanted in his heart, “Little Tianshu Beast, come out quickly! Tianshu Beast, come out quickly!”

But the more anxious he became, the less the Tianshu Beast responded!

The devastating power of the Heavenly Dao hurtled toward him.

With no other choice, Kai clenched his teeth, shut his eyes tightly, and prepared to fight head-on!

Chapter 4840

Boom!

The power of the Heavenly Dao finally struck Kai, but the little Heaven-Swallowing Beast never appeared!

With a deafening explosion, the entire mountain was flattened, and Kai's figure vanished without a trace.

Where he once stood, a massive crater—100 meters deep—had formed!

"Kai!"

Lin Keting gasped and tried to rush forward, but Hong Yao and Lan Yao held her back.

"Don't go! With your strength, you'll turn to ashes before you even get close!"

Nan Batian and Li Chunfeng stared at the scene in shock.

"This…"

Li Chunfeng glanced at Nan Batian.

"What's going on?" Nan Batian was just as bewildered.

"Didn't you say he wasn't bragging? Then what's this?" Li Chunfeng asked.

"How should I know? Something feels off!" Nan Batian scratched his head, looking uneasy.

"Should we check it out?" Li Chunfeng suggested.

"The Heavenly Dao's power hasn't dissipated yet. Can you withstand it?" Nan Batian countered.

"Nope."

"Me neither."

"Then we wait." Li Chunfeng sighed, abandoning the thought of stepping forward.

Just then, a thunderous dragon roar echoed through the air, and a brilliant golden light surged from the depths of the crater!

A massive, radiant bell slowly floated up from the pit, emanating a divine glow.

Wrapped around the golden bell, an enormous dragon coiled majestically!

Beneath the bell, Kai remained completely unharmed!

“What kind of treasure is that?!” Nan Batian exclaimed in shock.

“To withstand the power of a Golden Immortal’s Heavenly Dao… This must be a divine artifact!”

Li Chunfeng’s eyes widened in disbelief.

Buzz!

As the dragon-patterned bell emitted a deep humming sound, the oppressive power of the Heavenly Dao vanished instantly!

Kai’s body descended slowly, and as he landed, the dragon-patterned bell disappeared.

“Mr. Chen, are you alright?” Nan Batian and Li Chunfeng immediately surrounded him.

“Hmph, the power of a mere Golden Immortal’s Heavenly Dao is nothing to worry about…”

Kai spoke calmly, but no one noticed that his legs were trembling. If he hadn’t summoned the Dragon-Patterned Bell at the last moment, he would have been obliterated!

“Mr. Chen, I truly underestimated you. To possess such a powerful artifact… If you had used it against me, I wouldn’t have stood a chance!”

Li Chunfeng said solemnly.

Kai chuckled. “I have plenty of similar items in my storage ring. It’s not that special.”

Hearing this, Li Chunfeng fell silent.

At this point, he no longer dared to accuse Kai of boasting—because the truth was, he really was that powerful!

“Here, take these Immortal Stones. Use them to restore your strength. While they won’t bring you back to your peak, they’ll at least prevent further decline.”

Kai tossed a storage bag to Li Chunfeng.

Li Chunfeng took the Immortal Stones, looking a little embarrassed. “Mr. Chen, you’ve not only freed me but also provided resources… How can I possibly repay you?”

“There will be plenty of opportunities,” Kai said. “I’ve offended the people from the Temple, so you’ll have to back me up in the future.”

“The Temple?” Li Chunfeng was stunned. “You mean those self-proclaimed divine bloodline elites?”

“That’s right. You’ve heard of them?” Kai asked.

“Of course! The people from the Temple are incredibly arrogant. In the Celestial Realm, they look down on everyone else. Hardly anyone likes them.”

Li Chunfeng scoffed.

“Senior, have you ever clashed with them?” Kai asked curiously.

“Yes. I once dueled a Temple Hall Master in swordsmanship… and I lost.”

Li Chunfeng admitted.

“Which Hall Master?” Kai was surprised.

At his peak, Li Chunfeng must have been a force to be reckoned with. The fact that he lost to a Temple Hall Master spoke volumes about their strength.

“The Third Hall Master.”

Li Chunfeng replied.

“That’s not too bad…” Kai exhaled in relief.

Since the Temple had more Hall Masters ranked above and below the third, they likely wouldn’t send someone of that caliber after him just yet.

For now, at least, he wasn’t in immediate danger.