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“Speak.”

“Since the Palace Master wanted to kill those two, why didn’t you do it in the Heavenly Pole Palace? The Palace Master was seriously injured at the time. If we had forcibly detained them and retrieved the Soul-Suppressing Pearl, it wouldn’t have been difficult. Why did you let them go and then send people to the Loose Cultivator City to hunt them down?”

The Heavenly Pole Venerable glanced at him but didn’t answer immediately.

He slowly stood up, stepped down from his throne, and came before the four elders.

“Do you know who Chi Yan and Han Yuan are?”

Elder Zhao was taken aback. “They are newly promoted Golden Immortals of the Divine Race, here to report for duty in the Palace.”

“Yes. They are here to

report for duty.” The Heavenly Pole Venerable’s voice was soft, but every word was heavy. “You should know the rules of the Divine Race in the Golden Immortal Realm. All newly promoted Golden Immortals must report for duty in the Palace designated by the main altar.

If they die during their reporting period, if they die in the Heavenly Pole Palace, how will I explain it to the main altar? Will I still be able to hold my position as Palace Master?”

The four elders remained silent.

“But if they leave the Heavenly Pole Palace and go to the Loose Cultivator City, and die there, then it has nothing to do with the Heavenly Pole Palace.”

A cold smile curled at the corner of the Heavenly Pole Venerable’s lips. “In a place like the Loose Cultivator City, murder and robbery are commonplace. Who would investigate the death of a few Golden Immortals? Even if the main altar investigates, they won’t be able to trace it back to the Heavenly Pole Palace.”

Elder Zhao suddenly realized and bowed, saying, “Palace Master is wise.”

The Heavenly Pole Venerable waved his hand, “No need for further words. Go quickly and return quickly. The Soul-Suppressing Pearl must be brought back. I am determined to obtain that supreme treasure.”

“Yes!”

The four elders accepted the order in unison and turned to leave the main hall.

…

The Crimson Flame Venerable and the Cold Abyss Venerable rested in the Loose Cultivator City for two days.

On the first day, the two did not go out, but simply recuperated and healed their injuries in the inn.

The Crimson Flame Venerable’s old injuries had not fully healed, and the Cold Abyss Venerable also needed to stabilize his divine soul.

The two went into seclusion, neither disturbing the other.

On the evening of the second day, the Cold Abyss Venerable suggested going out to gather information.

Crimson Flame Venerable initially wanted to refuse, but after thinking it over, he reasoned that staying here would only lead to waiting idly, so going out for a stroll might be better.

The two changed into ordinary gray robes, concealed their auras, and blended into the crowd of the rogue cultivator city.

The night in the rogue cultivator city was even more bustling than the day.

Shops along the streets lit up with spirit lanterns, their multicolored lights intertwining to illuminate the entire street.

There were more vendors, selling a wider variety of goods.

Some sold broken magical artifacts unearthed from ruins, some sold pills of unknown origin, and some sold spirit beast inner cores that supposedly could enhance cultivation.

It was difficult to distinguish the genuine from the fake, the good from the bad; whether to buy or not depended entirely on one's discernment.

Crimson Flame Venerable and Cold Abyss Venerable walked through the crowd, their eyes scanning every stall, their ears catching every piece of information.

They were listening, listening to people discuss the situation in the Seventeenth Heaven, listening to people talk about the powerful figures and forces in various places.

"Have you heard? The Guiyuan Sect in the Northern Region is recruiting recently," a rogue cultivator whispered to his companion.

"Guiyuan Sect? That sect made up of rogue human cultivators?" another rogue cultivator asked.

“Yes. I heard their sect leader, Guiyuanzi, is currently searching for rare and precious materials that can repair damage to the soul. He’s offering a high price, but his requirements are also very high.”

“Repair the soul?” The first rogue cultivator smiled. “Whose soul is damaged?”

“Who knows? Anyway, Guiyuan Sect isn’t short of money. If we can find something like that, we’ll be rich.”

Upon hearing the words “repair the soul,” Crimson Flame Venerable’s heart stirred slightly, but he quickly suppressed it.

Guiyuan Sect was a human power, irrelevant to him.

The two continued walking forward.

Just then, Cold Abyss Venerable’s steps suddenly faltered.

“What’s wrong?” Crimson Flame Venerable asked in a low voice.

A cold glint flashed in Cold Abyss Venerable’s silver eyes. “Someone is following us. Not an ordinary rogue cultivator, but a Golden Immortal.”

Crimson Flame Venerable’s expression changed.

He quietly released his divine sense, spreading it outwards.

Soon, he also sensed it; four Golden Immortal-level auras were surrounding them from four directions.

He recognized those auras; they belonged to the Heavenly Pole Palace.

“That old man from the Heavenly Pole Palace!” Crimson Flame Venerable gritted his

teeth, his voice filled with rage. “He really won’t let go.” Cold Abyss Venerable said nothing more, turning and walking towards the city gate.

“Let’s go, don’t fight here. The Loose Cultivator City is crowded and noisy; a fight will expose our identities.”

The two quickened their pace, weaving through the bustling crowd, hurrying towards the city gate.

Four auras followed closely behind, unhurried, like hunters herding their prey.

Once outside the city gate, the two leaped into the air, transforming into two streaks of light, one red and one silver, speeding towards the northern wasteland.

Four golden rays of light also soared into the sky behind them, relentlessly pursuing.

The Seventeenth Heaven, the boundless wasteland stretched for thousands of miles.

The dark purple sky pressed low, three blazing suns hung high, their golden, silver, and crimson rays intertwining and pouring down, dyeing the barren wasteland a dark, blood-red hue.

The atmosphere was oppressive and heavy, the wind howled through the withered grass, stirring up fine dust, desolate and chilling.

This wasteland had no mountains to shield it, no dense forests to conceal it, no caves to hide in; the view was unobstructed. Anyone who took to the air could not hide within a thousand miles. It was an excellent place for battle, and also a place for desperate escape.

Whoosh—

A sharp sound tore through the air, six powerful streaks of light suddenly ripped through the dark golden sky, moving at extreme speed, leaving six long, blinding streaks of light in the sky. The commotion was immense, causing the spiritual energy of the surrounding wasteland to tremble violently.

The two streaks of light ahead fled in panic, their auras disordered, their spiritual energy severely depleted. They were none other than the fleeing Crimson Flame Venerable and Cold Abyss Venerable.

Both were exhausted, their old wounds aroused, the road ahead uncertain, and the killing intent closing in from behind. They were already in a passive and desperate situation.

Four golden beams of light relentlessly pursued them from behind, relentlessly closing the distance, their oppressive aura surging forth. Every inch the distance closed meant death was drawing ever closer.

The gap was rapidly shrinking, a matter of life and death hanging by a thread.

The Crimson Flame Venerable suppressed the churning blood in his chest and endured the throbbing pain within his body, unable to resist glancing back.

One glance was enough to darken his expression, a chill running down his spine; the situation was dire.

Of the four golden beams behind, the two leading ones surged with incredible speed and explosive power, like arrows released from a bow, quickly leaving their companions behind and relentlessly closing the distance to the two men. The gap was now less than a hundred feet, and close combat was imminent.

The golden figure leading the pursuit, clad in standard golden armor, exuded a thick, condensed golden aura, its sharpness intimidating.

This was none other than Elder Zhao, a core elder of the Heavenly Pole Palace. His cultivation was firmly established at the second rank of Golden Immortal, specializing in the domineering and extreme Golden Element Dao technique. His physical body was robust, his spiritual power fierce, and his explosive force overwhelming.

Most importantly, his Golden Element movement technique was unparalleled, granting him a speed far surpassing other cultivators of the same level, even exceeding that of the two newly promoted Golden Immortals, Crimson Flame and Cold Abyss.

Now, in a full-scale pursuit, he was like a tiger with wings, quickly closing in on their retreat and giving them no chance to breathe. “If we continue to flee like this, we’re doomed!”

Crimson Flame Venerable’s mind raced, his thoughts racing. His back was already soaked with cold sweat. Exhaustion, injuries, and the pursuit of his pursuers pressed down on him, leaving no room for maneuver. “There are four of them, all at the Golden Immortal level. If the two of us flee side-by-side, we’ll be too conspicuous. We

‘ll be easily surrounded and locked down, without even a chance to fight our way out. Only by splitting our escape routes and scattering the pursuers can we have a sliver of hope. Even if only one of us escapes, we can still preserve the Soul-Suppressing Pearl!”

In this critical moment, Crimson Flame Venerable no longer hesitated. He lowered his voice and

shouted sharply, “Split up! You head southeast, I’ll head northeast. Break out separately. Don’t linger in battle, focus on escaping!” Cold Abyss Venerable was always calm and decisive, with rich battlefield experience. He knew the current situation was perilous, and every word he uttered increased the risk of death.

Without the slightest hesitation, without turning back or answering, he suddenly shifted his body, his silver robe fluttering, and an extremely cold spiritual light instantly spread around him.

Transforming into a sharp silver arc, he sped off into the vast southeastern wilderness without looking back, his movements fluid and efficient, creating distance at all costs.

In the same instant, the Crimson Flame Venerable's crimson flames surged three zhang high, the flames scorching the sky, waves of heat rolling in, forcefully changing direction and hurtling towards the northeastern wilderness at full speed, flames tearing through the air, desperately diverting the pursuers' attention.

The two, one silver and one red, separated abruptly, heading in different directions, forcibly splitting the battlefield and breaking up the pursuers' formation.

From the void behind, Elder Zhao's powerful and domineering voice boomed like thunder from the heavens, echoing across the entire wasteland. His tone was decisive and ruthless, leaving no room for escape: "Split up and pursue! Form a tactical encirclement, giving them no respite!

Crimson Flame is injured and his combat strength has greatly decreased; he is the slowest, so I will personally take him down! Elder Qian, go quickly to intercept Cold Abyss and hold him back at all costs, not allowing him to escape even a step!

Elder Sun and Elder Li, flank and outflank him, cutting off all escape routes. Today, neither of them will escape! The Soul-Suppressing Pearl must be brought back intact; anyone who fails will be severely punished by the Palace Master!"

With the order given, four golden streaks of light instantly broke formation, each fulfilling its role with seamless coordination.

Two golden lights locked onto Crimson Flame Venerable, relentlessly pursuing him;

the other two golden lights changed direction, rushing southeast at full speed to surround Cold Abyss Venerable.

On the wasteland, killing intent spread everywhere, two pursuit battles unfolded simultaneously, and the spiritual energy between heaven and earth was stretched to its limit.

The Crimson Flame Venerable exhausted the last of his remaining primordial spiritual power, recklessly activating his innate sacred fire. Crimson flames raged around him, the fire reaching the heavens, the temperature so intense it distorted and rippled the surrounding air, making the void itself feel slightly hot.

He forcefully squeezed the potential of his Golden Immortal foundation, disregarding the loss of lifespan and the worsening of his injuries, all to gain a sliver of speed and shake off his pursuers.

However, his old injuries had already taken root and were causing him persistent pain. The previous night, the aura of the Great Luo Golden Scripture had severely damaged his soul and shaken his meridians, and he hadn't had a moment to rest and recuperate during his all-night escape.

Under the intense, continuous high-intensity flight, excruciating pain, as if his meridians were tearing, surged wildly in his chest, and he couldn't suppress it; a trickle of golden blood slowly spilled from the corner of his mouth, staining his chin and clothes.

His aura visibly weakened rapidly, his movement speed decreased, and his stamina completely waned.

"Crimson Flame, stop your futile struggle, you can't escape."

Elder Zhao's voice grew closer, his pressure increasing, like a persistent, stabbing wound in his ear. "The Palace Master has ordered that as long as you obediently hand over the Soul-Suppressing Pearl, your past transgressions will be forgiven, and you will be spared. You will

retain your Golden Immortal foundation and can still serve in the Heavenly Palace, enjoying its offerings. Refusing to resist will only lead to your death and the annihilation of your soul."

Crimson Flame Venerable gritted his teeth, his eyes filled with ferocity and resentment. He remained silent, focusing only on fleeing at full speed, his heart already cold.

He knew better than anyone that a second-grade Golden Immortal was far superior to a first-grade Golden Immortal; the difference in their realms was like an insurmountable chasm.

Coupled with his severe injuries, depleted spiritual energy, and exhausted stamina, with two Golden Immortals pursuing him from behind, there was no way forward and pursuers behind. In this desperate situation, there was absolutely no hope of escape.

He couldn't escape.

Having completely accepted reality, Crimson Flame Venerable's panic subsided, and his composure instantly returned.

Rather than a futile escape, exhausting his spiritual energy, and ultimately being helplessly killed, it's better to turn around on the spot, calmly plan ahead, and fight to the death, perhaps still managing to create a glimmer of hope.

With a sudden low shout, the Crimson Flame Venerable abruptly stopped all his escape light, abruptly halting his movements in mid-air. He stepped firmly into the void, turning steadily to face the two dazzling golden streaks of light approaching from behind, his expression cold and fierce, his fighting spirit surging.

The next instant, Elder Zhao and Elder Sun landed simultaneously, one in front and one behind, their positions perfectly blocking all escape routes, leaving no way out.

Elder Zhao, clad in golden armor, exuded an imposing aura, his oppressive power rolling in;

Elder Sun, with a chilling aura, gathered his spiritual energy, ready to strike from both sides at any moment.

The two worked in perfect harmony, forming a net that trapped the Crimson Flame Venerable on the spot.

“Crimson Flame, a wise man submits to circumstances.

Hand over the Soul-Suppressing Pearl obediently, and you’ll be spared the pain of flesh and blood.” Elder Zhao’s face was icy cold and expressionless. With a flick of his wrist, a long sword, pure gold

and gleaming with a sharp edge, shot out from the air and was firmly grasped in his palm. The blade was covered with layers of golden killing runes, and a sharp blade light soared into the sky, cutting through the surrounding air. A chilling aura swept over, and killing intent was palpable.

Venerable Crimson Flame sneered coldly, his eyes showing no fear. He calmly took out the dark, gloomy Soul-Suppressing Pearl from his sleeve and held it steadily in his palm.

Then, he deliberately raised it high, indicating that the other party should see it clearly. “You’ve been longing for this. If you have the ability, come and take it yourself.”

Elder Zhao’s pupils contracted slightly, his gaze fixed on the Soul-Suppressing Pearl, and a fierce, undisguised greed flashed deep in his eyes.

The treasure was so close, within easy reach. It would be difficult for anyone to remain calm.

He forcefully suppressed his restless greed, remaining completely still and maintaining a safe distance, not daring to approach and touch it rashly.

His fear wasn’t of the heavily injured and weakened Crimson Flame Venerable, but rather of the Soul-Suppressing Pearl.

The Heavenly Extreme Venerable had already issued strict warnings to everyone: the Soul-Suppressing Pearl contained a treasure with terrifying backlash; even a wisp of its aura could severely injure a top-tier

Golden Immortal of the third rank. He, a mere Golden Immortal of the second rank, possessed a soul essence far inferior to the Palace Master's.

If he rashly approached and touched it, the backlash would erupt, instantly shattering his soul and causing his immediate demise—a loss far outweighing the gain, a death sentence for greed.

"You dare not approach?"

Crimson Flame Venerable saw through his fear, his sneer growing even stronger, his tone deliberately mocking. "Since you dare not, then I will lend you a hand and bestow upon you an opportunity."

Before his words were finished, Crimson Flame Venerable suddenly exerted force in his arm, flicking his wrist, and forcefully hurled the Soul-Suppressing Pearl from his palm into the depths of the wasteland.

The jet-black orb streaked across the sky, leaving a short, dark trail as it flew swiftly towards the desolate wilderness, disappearing from sight in an instant. Elder Zhao's expression changed drastically. Forgetting the encirclement of Crimson Flame Venerable and the current battle, prioritizing the treasure above all else, he instinctively turned and sped off towards the direction the Soul-Suppressing Pearl had flown, fearing he would miss the opportunity if he was even a step too late.

Elder Sun beside him also lost his focus and followed closely behind, both heading towards the depths of the wasteland to seize the treasure.

Their backs were completely exposed, their defenses breached.

Crimson Flame Venerable seized this fleeting opportunity, turning into a streak of crimson light without hesitation, using his last bit of spiritual power to flee in the opposite direction. With a flash, he quickly created distance, temporarily escaping danger.

On the other side of the wasteland, in the southeast, the killing intent was equally intense, and a fierce battle had begun.

Cold Abyss Venerable sped along at full speed, his movements swift and powerful, but he still couldn't shake off his pursuers.

Two golden streaks of light surrounded him from the front and back, blocking him in the center of the wasteland, leaving him with no way to retreat or escape.

The one intercepting on the left was Elder Qian, a second-grade Golden Immortal, specializing in water-based, yin-cold techniques. His spiritual energy was gentle yet cold, adept at entanglement, attrition, sealing techniques, and freezing meridians.

The one intercepting on the right was Elder Li, also a second-grade Golden Immortal, specializing in violent fire-based techniques. His attacks were fierce and domineering, with extremely high explosive power, adept at frontal assaults, tearing through defenses, and crushing opponents.

Water and fire, two completely opposite spiritual energy attributes, complemented each other perfectly, complementing each other's weaknesses. They were a unified force of offense and defense, advancing and retreating in an orderly manner. When they joined forces, their combat power doubled, and their suppressive power was extremely strong.

The two had been partners in missions for many years, their cooperation was seamless, and they were experienced in encirclement and siege warfare, specifically designed to counter lone Golden Immortals.

Venerable Hanyuan stood there, his silver robe fluttering slightly in the wind, his expression remaining as cold as water from beginning to end. His silver eyes showed no ripples, no panic, no fear, and no anxiety.

With a formidable enemy at hand and encirclement imminent, his composure remained as firm as a mountain. His only movement was to slowly raise his hand and grasp the hilt of the silver-white longsword hanging at his waist. A clear

,

resonant sword cry echoed across the wasteland, instantly spreading a chilling aura.

The silver-white longsword was drawn half an inch from its sheath, and a chilling, bone-deep cold aura instantly swept over him. The surrounding withered grass froze instantly, the air temperature plummeted, and wisps of cold air seeped into his skin, an aura of murderous intent washing over him.

This sword had accompanied Venerable Hanyuan in his battles for ten thousand years, slaying countless enemies. Its chilling aura could sever souls, and its sharp edge could shatter spiritual treasures; it was his most prized possession and weapon of mass destruction.

“Hanyuan, surrender and hand over the Soul-Suppressing Pearl.”

Elder Qian’s tone was calm and even, not a threat or coercion, but rather a statement of fact as if it were a routine matter. “Alone, you cannot withstand the combined might of the two of us. To resist stubbornly will only increase your injuries and lead to your death in vain, utterly meaningless.”

Venerable Hanyuan remained silent; his silence was the only response.

His eyes turned cold, and with a sudden burst of power, his longsword was drawn from its sheath with full force. He lunged forward, and in an instant, a three-zhang-long (

approximately 10 meters) horizontal, extremely cold sword beam slashed through the air, its energy carrying a chilling, freezing force. Wherever it passed, the void frosted, and the air currents froze, sweeping straight towards Elder Qian’s throat—a deadly move from the start, leaving no room for retreat.

Elder Qian's expression changed slightly; he dared not meet the attack head-on. A flash of spiritual light appeared beneath his feet, and he swiftly slid to the side, barely avoiding the fatal strike.

At the same moment, he slammed out a palm strike, his palm gathering a thick layer of azure spiritual energy. A chilling aura swirled around the palm wind, transforming into a large watermark, carrying a suppressive force, and slammed fiercely towards Venerable Han Yuan's chest and dantian, intending to

severely damage his foundation and suppress his combat power. Venerable Han Yuan blocked with his longsword, precisely parrying the attack. The azure palm print slammed into the sword's spine, exploding with a deafening roar, sending water droplets flying everywhere.

The chilling water-based spiritual energy surged wildly along the sword's blade, colliding violently with its extreme cold sword energy. The two energies clashed and compressed, unleashing a piercing, ear-piercing shriek that sent waves of energy churning and whipping up the surrounding withered grass and dust .

Just as the two forces locked in a stalemate, a deadly attack from the flank suddenly appeared. Elder Li seized the opportunity, his figure flashing forward, crimson flames erupting around him, the fire reaching the heavens. Scorching fire-based spiritual energy coalesced into a ferocious, roaring fire dragon, complete with scales and claws, its aura menacing. Carrying the intense heat of burning everything, it swiftly pounced from the flank, aiming straight for Venerable Han Yuan's vital back, attempting a pincer attack to inflict a fatal blow. Venerable Han Yuan remained calm under pressure, his mind utterly composed. His footwork was unpredictable, his body instantly spinning to avoid the attack from behind. Simultaneously, he swung his sword back again, unleashing another sharp, silvery-white sword beam that precisely struck the roaring fire dragon. Boom! A deafening roar echoed across the land. The silvery-white, icy sword energy clashed violently with the crimson, fiery dragon, the clash of ice and fire unleashing a violent shockwave that swept outwards instantly. Flames scattered and the chill spread in layers, instantly incinerating or freezing the vegetation within a radius of ten feet, leaving the ground cratered and devastated. The battle had officially

reached its climax. Elder Qian's water-based spiritual energy flowed relentlessly, layer upon layer, binding and sealing, constantly freezing the meridians around Venerable Hanyuan's body, restricting his movement, relentlessly pressing forward, wearing down his stamina; Elder Li's fire-based attacks were ferocious and relentless, wave after wave of powerful assaults, directly pressuring and tearing through his defenses, giving him no chance to recover. The two, one soft and one hard, one entangling and one attacking, cooperated seamlessly, perfectly encircling him. Although Venerable Hanyuan was a first-grade Golden Immortal with considerable combat power and superb swordsmanship, even the strongest can't withstand a group attack. Faced with the coordinated attack of two Golden Immortals of the same rank, and after a prolonged battle, his spiritual energy was rapidly depleted, the pressure mounting, and he gradually fell into a disadvantageous position, unable to hold on. With a soft "whoosh," a flash of fire swept past, tearing his silver robe. The aftershock of the flames struck Venerable Hanyuan's left shoulder, instantly charring and shattering his robe, leaving a scorching, painful wound. Immediately afterward, a surge of icy water spiritual energy struck, hitting the meridians in his left arm. Ice instantly spread, sealing the meridians, leaving his arm numb and stiff, making even exertion extremely difficult. More and more wounds appeared, his spiritual energy weakened, his movements slowed, and his stamina was nearing exhaustion. Defeat was inevitable, only a matter of time. Just as the battle was about to end and Venerable Hanyuan was about to be captured from exhaustion, a black shadow suddenly swept across the sky, its arc smooth, before crashing down on the wasteland. It landed on the ground not far from the battlefield, bounced lightly twice, and then settled down. It was the Soul-Suppressing Pearl that Venerable Crimson Flame had forcefully hurled. In an instant, all three sides stopped fighting simultaneously, their movements synchronized, their gazes fixed intently on the jet-black pearl, their breathing slowing in unison, and intense emotions flashing in their eyes. Elder Qian and Elder Li's eyes were filled with undisguised greed and ecstatic joy; the treasure was right before their eyes, within easy reach . Venerable Cold Abyss, however, was filled with astonishment and confusion, his mind reeling, wondering what Crimson Flame's intentions were. The next instant, a crimson figure, carrying the aura of a wounded warrior, sped to the edge of the battlefield. His robes were tattered, golden bloodstains covered his body, and his aura was weak and feeble—it was Venerable Crimson

Flame, who had risked his life to return. “Go!” Ignoring his injuries and the excruciating pain throughout his body, Venerable Crimson Flame let out a low shout, speaking rapidly.

At the same time, he reached out and grabbed the Soul-Suppressing Pearl from the ground, clenching it tightly in his palm. Without hesitation, he turned and flew at full speed towards the distant wasteland to break through the encirclement.Han Yuan Venerable instantly understood, and without the slightest hesitation, he immediately broke free from the entanglement and followed closely behind Chi Yan Venerable, fleeing side by side at full speed, once again joining forces to break through the encirclement.

Elder Qian and Elder Li exchanged a glance, instantly reacting, and roared angrily, immediately giving chase.

Elder Zhao and Elder Sun, who had failed to seize the treasure in the distance, also turned back upon hearing the commotion, and the four golden streams of light merged again, forming a new encirclement and pursuit.

The six figures of light once again raced across the wasteland, pursuing at top speed, the sound of air being torn apart deafening.

Chi Yan Venerable’s injuries were becoming increasingly serious; with each step he took, his chest was filled with unbearable pain, his blood was churning, his aura was growing weaker and weaker, and his speed was visibly decreasing.

Han Yuan Venerable had been fighting relentlessly, his spiritual power was on the verge of exhaustion, his wounds were bleeding profusely, his silver robe was already heavily soaked with blood, and his physical strength was pushed to the limit.

The two ran side by side, but they had already reached the brink of despair.

Ahead lay a vast, desolate wasteland, behind them a raging inferno of killing intent; there was

no room for maneuver. Crimson Flame Venerable, struggling to maintain his speed, transmitted a low, bitter laugh, his voice filled with exhaustion and despair: “It’s no use. My spiritual energy is depleted, my injuries are reopening, we can’t escape.”

Cold Abyss Venerable remained silent for a moment, his silver eyes sweeping over the four golden lights closing in behind them. His tone was calm yet resolute: “If we can’t escape, then we won’t. Stop, fight to the death.”

The two simultaneously halted their escape, turning side by side to stand firmly on the wasteland, facing the four Golden Immortals who had surrounded them. There was no retreat, no fear, only a resolute determination to fight to the death.

Crimson Flame Venerable said nothing more, decisively raising his hand and forcefully placing the Soul-Suppressing Pearl from his palm into Cold Abyss Venerable’s hand.

His tone was extremely solemn, each word heavy: “Your physical body is intact, your spiritual power remains, and you are faster than me. You take the Soul-Suppressing Pearl and leave; I will stay behind to cover your retreat, desperately holding them off to buy you time to escape.”

Venerable Hanyuan shook his head slightly, his attitude resolute: “We’ll go together. We’ve stood side by side since then, never living alone.”

“I can’t leave.” Venerable Chiyan smiled bitterly, his eyes filled with relief and resentment. “My injuries are too severe, my Dao foundation is damaged, and I’m already exhausted. Even if I escape, I won’t live more than three days. Staying to die in battle is more satisfying.

You take the treasure and escape, find a reclusive expert who can refine it, and preserve your opportunity. If you have the chance in the future, avenge my death today.”

Before Venerable Hanyuan could offer any more advice, Venerable Chiyan had already turned around, his crimson holy fire suddenly blazing violently, flames soaring into the sky, the firelight dyeing half of the desolate horizon red.

He held nothing back, no longer caring about his life, directly detonating half of his original spiritual power, burning his lifespan potential, and overdrawing his Golden Immortal foundation, forcibly raising his cultivation from the first rank of Golden Immortal to the second rank in a short period of time. His body

was engulfed in flames, his aura surged, and his fighting spirit soared.

Elder Zhao frowned deeply upon seeing this, his expression grave, and he warned his companions in a deep voice: “He’s going all out, burning his original lifespan. His explosive power is extremely strong. We cannot fight him head-on. Spread out in all directions, circle around and encircle him, wear him down. Don’t confront him directly!”

The four Golden Immortals instantly dispersed in all directions, forming a circle, their spiritual power ready to be unleashed. They applied pressure simultaneously from the four directions, taking turns attacking, avoiding a direct confrontation with the Crimson Flame Venerable, and instead using attrition tactics to slowly wear him down.

The Crimson Flame Venerable’s eyes were bloodshot as he charged forward recklessly, his longsword condensed from holy fire in his hand.

Every strike was delivered with the utmost effort, every blow carried a desperate resolve to perish together. Each strike was a desperate act, each move a fight to the death, flames

crisscrossing as they forcefully withstood the relentless onslaught of the four. The violent shockwaves of spiritual energy spread outwards, burning the withered grass of the wasteland to ashes and cracking the ground with

countless fissures. But two fists cannot fight four hands, and valor

cannot withstand a combined attack. One man's desperate struggle was ultimately no match for the combined encirclement of four Golden Immortals.

In the next instant, a flash of golden light pierced the air, and the Crimson Flame Venerable's left arm was severed, golden blood gushing forth, staining the wasteland before him crimson.

Immediately afterward, a surge of water-based spiritual energy pierced his chest, leaving him a bloody mess and his Dao foundation damaged. Finally, a heavy golden palm struck his back, the sound of bones shattering ringing out, his internal organs severely injured.

Golden blood splattered everywhere, splashing onto the withered earth, a horrifying sight.

Crimson Flame Venerable's body crashed to the ground, slamming heavily into a pool of blood. His eyes were wide open, gazing at the dark golden sky, filled with resentment, regret, and hatred. His breath ceased completely, his life extinguished.

On the wasteland, the wind stopped, the fire died down, and the killing intent stagnated.

Cold Abyss Venerable stood silently, gazing at Crimson Flame Venerable's cold body lying in the pool of blood. For the first time, a ripple stirred deep within his silver eyes.

There was no sorrow, no lament, only a chilling, overwhelming rage that quietly grew and spread, freezing his heart.

Side by side, they had entered the Seventeenth Heaven together, ventured into the Heavenly Palace together, plotted opportunities together, and endured dangers together. Today, in the blink of an eye, they were separated forever, killed in battle on the wasteland.

He would remember this grudge.

Elder Zhao slowly stepped forward, his cold gaze sweeping over the corpse on the ground before turning to Cold Abyss Venerable.

His tone was utterly cold, his voice indifferent: “Han Yuan, the tide has turned. One man cannot fight against four. Hand over the Soul-Suppressing Pearl, and we may spare your life. Resist to the end, and your fate will be no different from Chi Yan’s.”

Venerable Han Yuan remained silent, standing still, his palm tightly gripping the pitch-black Soul-Suppressing Pearl with extreme force.

The next instant, he suddenly looked up, his eyes flashing with a cold light. He raised his arm high, lifting the Soul-Suppressing Pearl into the air, and then, without hesitation, slammed it down hard onto the solid ground!

“No! Stop!”

Elder Zhao’s face suddenly turned ashen, and he shouted in a hoarse voice, rushing forward at full speed, trying to intercept it, seize the treasure, and salvage the situation.

It was too late.

Bang!

A muffled, loud sound echoed across the wasteland.

The Soul-Suppressing Pearl crashed into the ground, shattering instantly, countless pitch-black fragments flying everywhere, scattered all over the ground.

The sealing power of the pearl instantly dissipated, and the long-sealed purple divine soul within, freed from its restraints, slowly floated out from the fragments, revealing itself to the world.

The purple divine soul shimmered and swayed gently; at its core, the warm golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture flickered,

possessing an ancient majesty that protected the origin of the divine soul, remaining steadfast.

Elder Zhao trembled with rage, his anger surging, and he gritted his teeth, growling, “You’re insane! You dare destroy the treasure’s container, ruining your own future!”

Venerable Hanyuan remained silent, his eyes filled with chilling intent. He raised his hand, drew his sword, and a silver light flashed as he slashed directly at the purple divine soul.

He would rather destroy this wisp of divine soul, this treasure, with his own hands than let it fall into the hands of the Heavenly Palace, he would not allow his opponents to succeed.

The piercing silver light tore through the air, arriving before the divine soul in an instant, a fatal blow imminent.

At that very moment, a sudden change occurred. A deep ,

ancient Daoist sound resounded from the depths of the divine soul.

Sensing a fatal crisis, the Great Luo Golden Scripture autonomously exerted all its power to protect its master. The golden light protecting its body instantly surged violently, transforming into an indestructible golden shield that firmly enveloped and protected Kai’s entire purple divine soul, impervious to all attacks. The

sharp silver light slashed fiercely at the golden shield, like a firefly hitting the sun and moon, a mantis trying to stop a chariot. It shattered, annihilated, and dissipated instantly, leaving not even a faint mark, failing to harm the divine soul in the slightest.

Venerable Han Yuan’s pupils suddenly contracted, his heart filled with shock, his face filled with disbelief.

Elder Zhao, Elder Qian, and the others were also stunned on the spot, their expressions frozen, staring blankly at the scene before them, their

hearts filled with horror. Such defense was too heaven-defying, unbelievable.

Before everyone could react, the purple divine soul moved slightly, autonomously changing direction, transforming into a condensed, extremely fast purple stream of light, using the power of the golden light protecting it, and sped away into the depths of the wasteland.

The speed was extreme, covering a thousand miles in an instant, disappearing into the vast expanse of the world without a trace.

“Chase! We must retrieve the divine soul, we cannot let it escape!”

Elder Zhao, regaining his senses, roared angrily and took the lead in accelerating after it.

The other three elders dared not slacken, following closely behind, the four golden lights racing at full speed towards the direction where the purple light had disappeared.

On the wasteland, only Venerable Hanyuan remained alone in the wind.

He raised his eyes to the distant horizon, remained silent for a long time, then turned slightly and silently left in the opposite direction, departing alone, his back lonely, hiding his anger, waiting for the opportunity for revenge.

The purple light raced across the vast wasteland without rest, not daring to stop for even a moment.

Kai’s divine soul was curled up in the thick, warm golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, his mind tense, fleeing at full speed.

He couldn’t see the pursuers behind him, but he could clearly sense the lingering pressure of the four Golden Immortals behind him, their killing intent still lingering, relentlessly pursuing him.

He had only one thought: run, run for his life, he couldn't stop, for if he stopped, his soul and spirit would be annihilated. He raced

through the night, traversing thousands of miles of desolate plains.

The three blazing suns on the horizon slowly shifted, the sky gradually brightening, morning light spilling across the earth, clearly revealing the outline of the wasteland.

Kai finally couldn't hold on any longer; his soul was utterly exhausted. He forced his escape light to slowly land on a remote, desolate low hill, temporarily resting and hiding.

Looking around, all he saw was desolation. Rolling hills stretched endlessly, withered yellow grass swaying in the wind, utterly deserted, without caves to hide in, without spiritual springs to nourish oneself, without a trace of cultivators—a remote and isolated place, cut off from the world.

The air was thick with the dense spiritual energy of heaven and earth, carrying sharp and violent fragments of Golden Immortal Laws, which drifted about silently and invisibly, constantly assaulting all living beings around them.

The golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture barely kept the deadly fragments of laws at bay, protecting his soul.

However, Kai's soul was already extremely weak, and the days of travel and fright had greatly depleted it, pushing it to its limit.

Even with the golden light protecting him, he couldn't withstand the erosion of the remaining power of the laws. His soul

felt a sharp, numb pain, was exhausted and on the verge of collapse and death. His most urgent and only way out was to find a complete physical body to rebuild his body and stabilize his soul;

or to find a superior soul-nourishing secret realm to absorb soul-nourishing spiritual energy, nourish his soul's origin, and stabilize his injuries.

There was no other way out.

But in the vast Seventeenth Heaven, adrift in a foreign land, without relatives or friends, surrounded by enemies and lurking dangers, where

could he find a physical body? Where could he find a soul-nourishing secret realm?

It was as difficult as ascending to heaven, the road ahead filled with despair.

The wind rustled across the desolate plains, a lonely and chilling sound.

Three blazing suns hung high overhead, their dark golden light enveloping the vast expanse of land. The world was boundless, yet there was no one to rely on, no place to find refuge.

Kai's mind was in a daze, involuntarily recalling his days in the Sixteenth Heaven, the peaceful times in Freedom Valley, his comrades-in-arms, Jiang Xuelan's gentle eyes, and countless familiar figures.

Lin Yuan fell tragically, Zhao Tieshan collapsed to the ground weeping. Old Zhao, the tall, thin man, the middle-aged woman, Old Xu—vivid faces flashed through his mind, finally freezing in the instant of death.

To protect their homeland, to resist the gods, everyone had died in battle. Only he remained, a wisp of a soul, adrift in a foreign land, helpless and without support, powerless to avenge himself, powerless to return.

Grief and indignation surged in his heart, a bitter taste lingered in his soul, and the pain was unbearable.

Kai slowly composed himself, suppressing his overwhelming grief and despair, and forcibly stabilizing his trembling soul.

He could not die, nor could he allow himself to perish.

The blood feud remained unavenged, the souls of his fallen comrades rested in peace, and his homeland was yet to be returned to. He had to live, he had to rebuild his physical body, he had to return to the Sixteenth Heaven, and settle scores with all his enemies.

“Bei Mingyuan,” Kai murmured, using his divine sense to silently call out to his companions.

“I’m here,” Bei Mingyuan’s weak yet steady voice slowly echoed from the depths of his consciousness, his remnant soul also severely depleted.

“What should we do now that we’re in this predicament? The road ahead is uncertain, and we have nowhere to go,” Kai asked in a low voice, his voice betraying his exhaustion.

Bei Mingyuan remained silent for a moment, quickly assessing the surrounding aura, spiritual energy, and concentration of laws. He calmly analyzed the situation and replied in a deep voice, “Your soul is severely depleted and extremely weak. You cannot withstand prolonged exposure to the violent spiritual energy of the Seventeenth Heaven.

The fragments of Golden Immortal laws here are too dense, with extremely strong corrosive power. Even with the protection of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, you cannot last long; your soul will eventually dissipate.

The most urgent task is to leave this wasteland immediately and head north.

The Northern Region is crisscrossed by mountains, with relatively mild spiritual energy, numerous secret realms, many sects, and frequent visits from cultivators. There are more opportunities, and you are likely to find

a place to nourish your soul, or even find rare and precious materials and opportunities to reshape your physical body."

Kai silently nodded, saying nothing more. He suppressed all his emotions, activated the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture to envelop his soul, and, supporting his weary body, rose and continued his journey towards the vast northern horizon, seeking survival step by step.

Kai traveled north, drifting alone across the wasteland for three days and three nights.

For three days, all he could see were endless barren mountains, withered grass, and a dark sky. No cities, villages, cultivators' cooking smoke, or sect lights were visible; only loneliness and danger accompanied him.

His soul grew weaker day by day, the golden protective shield visibly dimming and thinning, its defensive power constantly decreasing. Sharp fragments of Golden Immortal Laws gradually pierced through the shield, eroding his soul bit by bit, causing unbearable pain and tormenting his body and mind.

His consciousness began to blur frequently, his soul trembled incessantly, and the risk of collapse increased. Despair gradually enveloped his heart, and he was almost at his breaking point. On the evening of the third day, as the sun dipped below the horizon and twilight descended,

Kai, mustering his last ounce of strength, landed on a low hill, intending to rest briefly and conserve his remaining energy, even if only for a moment.

His mind was hazy, his vision blurred, and he was on the verge of despair.

Just as despair overwhelmed him, he suddenly heard clear footsteps, steady and orderly, approaching the hill.

Someone!

A living cultivator!

Kai's spirit jolted, instantly regaining his senses. A faint hope ignited in his heart, and he quickly looked up.

In the distance, on a winding path, a young cultivator dressed in a simple gray Daoist robe walked slowly towards him. His face was handsome and gentle, he was in his early twenties, and his demeanor was calm and pure. His cultivation was

firmly planted at the peak of the ninth rank of the True Immortal Realm, only one step away from becoming a Golden Immortal. His foundation was solid, and his aura was upright.

The cultivator held an ancient bronze soul-detecting mirror in his hands. A faint, shimmering light flowed across its surface as he scanned the surrounding landscape, searching for unusual phenomena and fluctuations in the soul. He was clearly a disciple of his sect on patrol or training mission in the wilderness.

As the young cultivator approached, the mirror suddenly shone brightly, its light surging and precisely locking onto Kai's purple soul atop the hill, its movement obvious.

The cultivator abruptly stopped, his face showing surprise. Following the mirror's guidance, he quickly stepped forward, his gaze falling upon the floating purple orb. His face was filled with astonishment as he muttered to himself, "Deep in the wilderness, deserted and uninhabited, a complete True Immortal soul has appeared out of nowhere?

The laws of the Seventeenth Heaven are violent; an ordinary soul would be eroded and disintegrated in an instant. How can this soul survive alone? Strange, truly strange."

Curious, he crouched down, carefully examining the purple soul, wanting to reach out and touch it to investigate its secrets.

The moment his fingertip approached, the protective golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture instantly flared up on its own, and a gentle yet powerful elastic force suddenly erupted, repelling his finger and preventing any further exploration.

The young cultivator's surprise deepened, followed by a flicker of joy: protected by a divine weapon, possessing an extraordinary soul, this was no ordinary rogue cultivator's remnant soul; it was highly likely to possess a fortuitous encounter. If he brought it back to the sect, it would surely bring him merit.

He no longer dared to touch it rashly, and quickly took out a communication jade slip from his robes, bowing his head and whispering a rapid report of his strange encounter in the wasteland. The jade slip flashed with spiritual light, transforming into a streak of light that streaked through the air and disappeared into the distance, urgently sending a message to the sect leader.

Having done everything, he crouched down again, speaking gently to the soul, "I don't know if you can hear me, senior, but I mean no harm. I am Li Qingyun, a disciple of the Guiyuan Sect in the Northern Region.

Your soul is extraordinary, possessing a priceless treasure. My sect master is knowledgeable and highly skilled; he will surely protect your soul and heal and nourish it. Please

wait here patiently, senior. I will immediately return to report to my sect master and will be back within half an hour, without delay."

With that, Li Qingyun turned and strode away, his figure quickly disappearing into the twilight of the wasteland.

Kai hovered in place, his heart pounding with unease, yet a strong hope finally ignited within him.

Guiyuan Sect, a righteous sect—perhaps this place could truly save his life, truly help him rebuild his physical body.

Less than half an hour later, footsteps sounded again.

Li Qingyun returned, accompanied by an elderly man in a green robe.

The man possessed an extraordinary air, a steady gait, a full head of white hair, a lean yet vigorous face, and eyes as bright as stars, seemingly piercing the world. A warm, azure light surrounded him, his aura peaceful and profound, devoid of any murderous intent,

yet exuding the dignity of a sect leader. The old man's cultivation was unfathomable; he was clearly a third-grade Golden Immortal, his aura restrained yet his foundation solid. He was none other than Guiyuanzi, the current sect leader of the Guiyuan Sect.

Guiyuanzi strode forward, his gaze immediately landing on the purple divine soul, then piercing through the outer layer of purple light to precisely lock onto the faintly visible outline of an ancient, golden tome at its core.

In an instant, his pupils contracted sharply, his body trembled slightly, and his expression changed drastically, filled with disbelief. He murmured to himself, his tone brimming with endless emotion and shock: "This aura, these patterns, this ancient Daoist charm... it's actually the Great Luo Golden Scripture, lost for tens of thousands of years!"

Kai's soul jolted violently, his heart filled with horror.

This person actually knew the Great Luo Golden Scripture?

The opportunity had truly arrived!

Gui Yuanzi forcefully suppressed the turmoil in his heart, composed himself, and solemnly instructed the disciple beside him, "Qingyun, carefully collect the soul and take it back to the sect's secret chamber. Keep this a secret and do not leak it to anyone."

Li Qingyun nodded hurriedly, took out a high-grade soul-nourishing jade bottle, its mouth glowing warmly with spiritual light, containing a rich soul-nourishing liquid. He said respectfully in a soft voice, “Senior, please rest peacefully inside. The soul-nourishing liquid inside can nourish the soul, isolate it from the erosion of laws, and ensure your safety.”

Kai did not hesitate for a moment; he had no other choice now, and trust was his only hope.

He transformed into a streak of purple light and gently flew into the jade bottle.

The soul-nourishing liquid inside was cool and warm, instantly enveloping his soul. The stinging pain from the laws dissipated completely, and his fatigue was instantly relieved, leaving him feeling safe and comfortable.

Gui Yuanzi carefully put away the jade bottle, hiding it close to his body, then turned and led his disciple back, quickly leaving and heading straight for the Guiyuan Sect’s mountain gate.

Guiyuan Sect is nestled in the heart of the Northern Region of the Seventeenth Heaven, surrounded by mountains, where spiritual energy converges and dragon veins stretch endlessly.

The sect’s scale is not grand, covering only a hundred miles in circumference. It lacks the opulent splendor of divine palaces and the imposing grandeur of the Heavenly Palace.

The mountain gate is constructed of simple, ancient bluestone, and the buildings are elegant and understated, exuding the sect’s low-key, calm, and focused cultivation spirit—a place of peace and tranquility, free from worldly strife.

Guiyuanzi, returning with his divine soul, did not linger, avoiding the sight of the sect disciples, and went straight to the forbidden area behind the mountain, entering the deepest, most secluded chamber.

The walls of the chamber were engraved with high-level soul-suppressing and defensive runes, soundproofing, locking in energy, preventing detection, ensuring absolute safety and secrecy.

In the center of the chamber stood a natural warm jade platform, upon which a blue spirit-gathering crystal perpetually glowed, its warm spiritual energy continuously permeating the room, nourishing the divine soul and stabilizing the aura.

Gui Yuanzi gently placed the Soul-Nourishing Jade Bottle on the stone platform, then sat cross-legged, calming his mind and carefully probing a wisp of gentle divine sense into the bottle.

His tone was calm and steady, respectful and courteous: “Fellow Daoist, you are now in the Guiyuan Sect’s secret chamber, safe and sound. You may speak with peace of mind. Can you hear my voice?”

The purple divine soul glowed slightly and responded softly, “Yes.”

“May I ask your name? Where do you come from? Why are you alone, with only a wisp of divine soul left, adrift in the Seventeenth Heaven?” Gui Yuanzi asked slowly, his attitude humble, without a trace of the airs of a Golden Immortal.

“My name is Kai, I come from the Sixteenth Heaven. Hunted by enemies, my physical body was destroyed, leaving only a wisp of divine soul adrift here.” Kai’s voice was calm, unperturbed, having experienced life and death, he had long since become indifferent to honor and disgrace.

“The Sixteenth Heaven? The borderlands of the lower realm.” Gui Yuanzi frowned slightly, sighing softly, “It’s truly not easy for a cultivator from the lower realm to cross realms and find themselves in such a desperate situation. I wonder which powerful force is responsible for the person who pursued you and destroyed your physical body?” “The Divine Alliance, Venerable Crimson Flame, Venerable Cold Abyss.” Kai spoke slowly and deliberately, his tone calm yet carrying a chilling undertone. “They slaughtered my sect, murdered my relatives and friends, and destroyed my physical body. This blood feud is irreconcilable.”

Gui Yuanzi's brows furrowed instantly, his expression grave. "The Divine Clan's power is domineering and formidable, deeply rooted in the Seventeenth Heaven, and indeed, they are a formidable and difficult opponent. Fellow Daoist, you have forged a deadly enmity with the Divine Clan, and your situation is extremely perilous."

After a brief silence, Gui Yuanzi cut to the chase and asked directly, his tone solemn: "If I may be so bold as to ask, is that ancient, gilded book deep within your soul the Great Luo Golden Scripture?"

Kai's soul trembled violently, filled with doubt and surprise: "You truly recognize this?"

"More than just recognizing it."

Gui Yuanzi's eyes were filled with a sense of vicissitude and emotion as he slowly nodded, his tone solemn. "This is the most treasured possession of our Daoist founder. Back then, our founder traveled through countless realms, delving into ancient ruins, and by chance obtained the Great Luo Golden Scripture. He comprehended the supreme Dao, his cultivation skyrocketed, and thus he founded the Daoist lineage, which has been passed down to this day."

Kai's heart was stirred, overwhelmed with emotion. He hadn't expected that the Great Luo Golden Scripture was actually the personal possession of his Daoist founder.

"Then how could your founder's possession be lost?" Kai asked.

"How could it be lost? Since this Great Luo Golden Scripture has recognized you as its master, then you are the person personally recognized by our Daoist founder, you are the young master of our Daoist sect," Gui Yuanzi said.

Boom!

Kai's soul trembled violently, purple light flashed intensely, his mind surged like waves, and he was instantly stunned.

He knew nothing, how could he have become the young master of the entire Daoist sect?

Gui Yuanzi keenly sensed the violent fluctuations in his divine soul. He bowed deeply to the purple divine soul within the jade bottle, displaying utmost respect and courtesy: “Gui Yuanzi, the current sect master of Gui Yuan Sect, pays respects to the young master!

The bloodline of our ancestor, the inheritor of the supreme treasure, is the young master of our sect for generations. From this day forward, the entire sect will follow your lead!”

Kai was momentarily stunned, then quickly regained his composure, letting out a low, bitter laugh: “I am now only a wisp of remnant soul, without a physical body or cultivation. How dare I accept the title of young master in such a wretched state? Aren’t you afraid the sect disciples will laugh at me?”

Gui Yuanzi solemnly shook his head, his tone resolute. Ru Shan said, “Young Master, there’s no need to belittle yourself. As long as your soul remains, you remain. A destroyed body can be rebuilt;

lost cultivation can be rebuilt. The Great Luo Golden Scripture chooses its master to serve, which is destiny. Although Guiyuan Sect isn’t a top-tier power, its foundation is solid enough to protect you.

Young Master, rest assured and recuperate here. I will immediately search the Northern Regions for rare treasures and gather rare materials to rebuild a supreme body for you, so that one day you can return to your peak, avenge your grievances, and restore the glory of the Dao Sect.”

After speaking, Guiyuanzi turned and walked lightly out of the secret chamber, closing the door and sealing it to ensure safety, before heading out to gather resources.

Inside the secret chamber, the spiritual energy was warm, the Soul Nourishing Liquid nourished the soul, and golden light flowed steadily.

Bei Mingyuan sighed softly, “Kai, you’ve suddenly become the young master of the Dao Sect.”

“Senior, does the Dao Sect have disciples in other realms?” Kai asked.

“Of course, the Daoist sect has disciples all over the Heavenly Realm. No matter which Heaven you go to, you’ll have a bunch of disciples and grand-disciples to serve you.”

“Unlike me, our Ice God lineage is almost extinct, and I’m just a wisp of a remnant soul left,” Bei Mingyuan said sadly.

Kai didn’t say anything after hearing this, but was overjoyed. He closed his eyes, focused his mind, and felt incredibly at peace.

For the first time since being stranded in the Seventeenth Heaven, he had let down his guard, felt safe, and waited to rebuild his physical body, to await the day of revenge.

For the next few days, the Guiyuan Sect was quiet and peaceful, with no one disturbing the secret chamber.

Guiyuanzi traveled far and wide, searching for old friends and collecting high-grade natural treasures to rebuild the physical body and nourish the soul. He worked day and night, single-mindedly devoted to his master.

Disciple Li Qingyun came to the secret chamber every day to replenish the superior soul-nourishing elixir, clean the chamber, guard it, and chat with Kai to relieve his boredom. He was easygoing and talkative.

While adding Soul Nourishing Liquid, Li Qingyun gently explained the power structure of the Seventeen Heavens to Kai, speaking clearly and truthfully: “The forces in the Seventeen Heavens are intertwined, with undercurrents and constant conflicts.

The Divine Race possesses three top-tier forces: the Heavenly Extreme Palace, the Divine Abyss Pavilion, and the Heavenly Saint Palace. Their

strength is abundant, with Golden Immortals standing tall, making them the most powerful in the Northern Region. They are aggressively expanding and oppressing cultivators of all races.

The Human Race can only barely resist and protect themselves by joining forces with the Guiyuan Sect, the Qingyun Sword Sect, and the Wanfa Sect, and dares not easily confront them. The Demon Race occupies the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, while the Primordial Soul Race hides in the shadows. The balance of power among these forces makes the situation complex." "

Currently, the Heavenly Extreme Palace is becoming increasingly arrogant, constantly seizing human spiritual vein resources and squeezing our living space. The Sect Master has been worried for a long time, but due to the vast difference in strength, he can only endure and wait for the right opportunity."

Kai listened quietly, silently taking notes, remaining calm and secretly gathering the strength for revenge.

At the end of their conversation, Li Qingyun suddenly remembered the sect leader's instructions and asked softly, "Young Master, before leaving, the sect leader specifically asked if there was still an ancient remnant soul lurking deep within your soul.

I have naturally keen soul perception and vaguely sensed an unusual aura. The sect leader said that if the remnant soul is willing, the Guiyuan Sect can also do its utmost to help it reshape its physical body and protect the young master."

Kai's heart stirred slightly, and he replied softly, "Indeed, an old friend accompanies me. I will convey my gratitude."

Deep within his sea of consciousness, the remnant soul of Beimingyuan stirred with a slight warmth, feeling grateful, and silently nodded.

Li Qingyun asked no more questions, bowed, took his leave, gently closed the stone door of the secret chamber, and quietly withdrew.

Inside the secret chamber, the spiritual energy was warm and peaceful.

Kai calmly recuperated his soul, nourished his origin, and waited for Guiyuanzi's return, waited to reshape his physical body, and waited for the day when his sharp edge would be unsheathed, crushing his enemies and returning to his homeland.

Guiyuanzi went out to investigate for five whole days.

For the past five days, Kai's soul has been placed in a warm, smooth white jade bottle, resting quietly on a stone platform in the deepest part of the Guiyuan Sect's secret chamber.

This chamber was specially prepared for him by Guiyuanzi, its walls engraved with ancient spirit-gathering runes. As the runes flowed, the spiritual energy of heaven and earth was continuously drawn in, gathering into wisps of pale white spiritual mist that slowly seeped into the jade bottle.

Inside the bottle was half a bottle of clear soul-nourishing liquid, a treasured possession of the Guiyuan Sect for many years, each drop containing a rich nourishing power for the soul.

A faint golden light swirled around the bottle, reflecting the radiance of the Great Luo Golden Scripture surrounding Kai's soul.

Kai's soul floated quietly in the center of the soul-nourishing liquid, appearing as a pale purple halo, within which a blurry humanoid outline could be vaguely seen.

For these five days, he had never slackened for a moment; even with his physical body destroyed and only a remnant soul remaining, he steadfastly maintained his Dao heart.

While circulating the Great Luo Golden Scripture's cultivation technique, he absorbed the essence of the Soul Nourishing Liquid, repairing the wounds on his soul.

The areas once eroded by fragments of the Golden Immortal's laws, which were covered in fine cracks like shattered glass, were now healing at a visible speed under the dual nourishment of the golden light and the Soul Nourishing Liquid.

The pale purple aura of his soul was also becoming increasingly dense and solid, no longer as ethereal as before.

The golden light of the Great Luo Golden Classic returned to its bright and dazzling state, radiating a warm and powerful force like the blazing sun.

It not only protected Kai's soul but also subtly tempered the origin of his soul, making it increasingly resilient. At the bottom of the jade bottle, Bei Mingyuan's remnant soul curled up in a wisp of faint black mist.

Over the past five days, he had recovered some of his strength thanks to the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture and the essence of the Soul Nourishing Liquid. The black mist, which had been on the verge of dissipating, had become somewhat more solid.

Although he was still too weak to fight, and even speaking was difficult, he was no longer in danger of being completely annihilated at any moment.

Occasionally, he would emit a faint aura, as if conveying gratitude to Kai.

Kai sensed this and simply nodded slightly, without saying much—at this moment, all his energy was focused on restoring his soul.

He knew that only by quickly recovering his strength could he have a chance to reshape his physical body and return to the Sixteenth Heaven to avenge himself.

On the evening of the fifth day, the afterglow of the setting sun shone through the ventilation opening of the secret chamber, casting a faint golden light onto the stone platform, intertwining with the light in the jade bottle.

Just then, the stone door of the secret chamber creaked softly.

Gui Yuanzi had returned.

When he pushed open the door, he still carried the dust and chill of the outside world. His dark Taoist robe was covered in mud and bits of grass, and even had a few minor tears, clearly indicating that his five days of investigation had not gone smoothly.

His face was etched with fatigue, his eyes were sunken, and the corners of his eyes were bloodshot. Even the gray hairs at his temples seemed to have increased, making him look even more haggard than when he last went out to investigate.

But even so, a faint light flickered in his eyes—the joy and hope of finding a clue.

Gui Yuanzi did not pause for a moment, walking straight to the stone platform. He carefully took out the storage ring from his waist, and with a flick of his finger, an ancient storage ring instantly lit up with a faint spiritual light.

He took out a yellowed animal hide map from the ring. The map was made of a special material, warm to the touch, and the outlines of mountains and rivers were drawn on it with black runes. Although it was old and some of the runes were blurred, it was still clear that it was drawn with great detail.

He gently unfolded the animal hide map on the stone platform. Once unfolded, the map was half the size of the platform.

It clearly marked the major mountain ranges, cities, and secret realms of the Northern Region. One place, marked with red runes, was the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, the northernmost point of the Northern Region.

“Young Master, I have found some clues.”

Gui Yuanzi's voice was somewhat hoarse; the days of travel and intense investigation had taken their toll on his throat, and his voice carried a barely perceptible weariness.

He bowed slightly, his gaze fixed on Kai's soul within the jade bottle, his tone filled with respect and urgency.

Kai's soul brightened slightly, and the pale purple aura trembled gently. A deep and clear voice came from the jade bottle: "Speak."

Hearing Kai's voice, Gui Yuanzi felt relieved and quickly pointed to a mark on the animal skin map, slowly saying, "Young Master, it's not difficult for an ordinary cultivator to reshape their body with their soul, but for you, it's not easy. It requires two rare and precious natural treasures, neither of which can be missing."

"The first is the Primordial Divine Water. This is the most supreme treasure for body shaping in all the heavens and myriad realms, containing the purest primordial power, capable of recreating the body and reshaping bones and muscles."

"Whether it's severed limbs or a completely destroyed body, as long as a wisp of divine soul remains, a drop of Primordial Divine Water can regenerate the severed limbs.

A bottle of Primordial Divine Water can reshape a complete body, and even temper the body, giving the new body resilience and potential far beyond that of ordinary people."

He paused, his fingertip lightly tapping the location of Tianque City marked on the map, his tone carrying a hint of helplessness, yet also a glimmer of hope.

"Primordial Divine Water is extremely rare, a priceless treasure that can only be found by chance. For the past five days, I've searched every major auction house and black market in the Northern Region, but haven't found any in stock." "

However, through some clandestine channels, I've learned that a grand Treasure Auction will be held in Tianque City in three months. This auction is a once-in-a-century event in the Northern Region, gathering rare and precious items from all over."

"And according to reliable sources, a bottle of Primordial Divine Water will appear at this auction. This is currently our only chance to obtain it."

"Three months?" Kai's voice was somewhat heavy, carrying a hint of barely perceptible urgency.

He had lost his physical body for far too long. Although his soul was slowly recovering, without the support of a physical body, his cultivation could not improve, and even his normal movements were restricted.

Three months was neither a long nor a short time, but for him at this moment, every minute and every second was incredibly precious.

"Yes, Young Master, three months." Gui Yuanzi nodded solemnly, his tone carrying a hint of reassurance.

"Three months is already very fast. A treasure of the Primordial Divine Water level sometimes only appears once every few thousand years. To have the opportunity to obtain it in three months is already an incredible stroke of luck."

"In these three months, we can prepare well. On the one hand, you should continue to recuperate your divine soul and strive to restore it to its best condition before the auction begins;

on the other hand, I will also prepare enough spirit stones and treasures to ensure that we can bid for the Primordial Divine Water at the auction."

Kai was silent for a moment, his pale purple divine soul aura flickering slightly, clearly deep in thought.

He knew that Gui Yuanzi was right. The Primordial Divine Water was extremely rare, and to have such an opportunity was already a stroke of luck. He had no right to be picky, nor did he have time to be picky.

After a moment, he slowly spoke, his tone returning to calm: “What is the second kind of rare and precious treasure?”

Seeing that Kai was no longer concerned about the time, Gui Yuanzi felt relieved and quickly pointed to a continuous mountain range at the northernmost end of the Northern Region on the animal skin map, his tone becoming increasingly solemn.

“The second rare and precious material is called the Eternal Soul Wood.

This Eternal Soul Wood is not an ordinary tree, but grows in the Primordial Soul Forest deep within the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. It is a spiritual tree that existed in ancient times, containing extremely rich nourishing power for the soul.”

“Its function is to stabilize the fusion of the soul and the body, preventing the soul from repelling the new body after its reconstruction.”

“Young Master, think about it. Your soul has been separated from your body for too long. Even if you use the Primordial Divine Water to reconstruct your body, without the nourishment and stabilization of the Eternal Soul Wood, the soul and the new body cannot perfectly fuse.” “At best, your

cultivation will regress, and you will never make any progress again; at worst, your soul will dissipate and be completely annihilated. At that time, even the Primordial Divine Water will be of no use.”

“Ten Thousand Demon Ridge?” Kai repeated the name, his tone tinged with doubt.

He had just arrived in the Seventeenth Heaven and was not familiar with the various forces and regions of the Northern Region. He had never heard of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. “Young Master, the Ten

Thousand Demon Ridge is the territory of the demon race, and one of the most mysterious and dangerous regions in the Northern Region." Gui Yuanzi's tone became extremely solemn, and a hint of apprehension flashed in his eyes.

"The Demon Emperor resides there, ruling over all the demons in the Northern Region. His power is immense and not to be underestimated. Within the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, demonic beasts roam freely, and powerful beings abound.

Moreover, the demon race has always been xenophobic, and outsiders are not allowed to enter without permission." "Once someone trespasses, they will be expelled at best, and killed at worst, without exception. The Primordial Soul Forest is even more forbidden territory for the demon race, located in the deepest part of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge."

"It is said that the forest is filled with restrictions and formations left over from ancient times, and countless powerful soul beasts dwell within it. These soul beasts feed on divine souls and are incredibly powerful."

"Even cultivators with the cultivation of a Golden Immortal need to be extremely careful when entering the Primordial Soul Forest. A slight mistake can lead to death, let alone cultivators below the Golden Immortal level. Once inside, it is almost a nine-out-of-ten chance of survival."

Kai's divine soul trembled slightly.

He could sense the apprehension in Gui Yuanzi's tone and imagine the dangers of the Myriad Demon Ridge and the Primordial Soul Forest.

Cultivators below the Golden Immortal level faced a nine-out-of-ten chance of death, and he now possessed only a wisp of divine soul, not even having touched the threshold of the Golden Immortal realm.

If he rashly entered the Primordial Soul Forest, he would likely have no

chance of survival. But he did not back down. Reconstructing his physical body was his only way out, and the Myriad Soul Wood was something he absolutely needed.

No matter how dangerous the path ahead, he had to try.

“Will the Demon Emperor allow us to enter?” Kai asked slowly, his tone carrying a hint of inquiry and uncertainty.

“This subordinate does not know.” Gui Yuanzi remained silent for a moment, his brows furrowing slightly, clearly also pondering the question.

“But through some clandestine channels, I’ve learned that this Demon Queen Qingqiu, although the leader of the demon race, is quite reasonable, unlike the tyrannical and unreasonable gods.”

“Moreover, she has lived for tens of thousands of years, is knowledgeable, and has experienced countless trials and tribulations. She tends to be more tolerant of special people and situations.”

“Young Master, your situation is extremely special. Your physical body was destroyed, yet you survived with a wisp of your divine soul, and you possess the heaven-defying Great Luo Golden Scripture. Perhaps Demon Queen Qingqiu will be interested in your special circumstances and thus make an exception to allow us to enter the Primordial Soul Forest.”

He paused, then added, “I have prepared gifts, all spiritual fruits and herbs favored by the demon race. While they are not earth-shattering treasures, they are at least a token of sincerity.”

“Tomorrow morning, we will set off for the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge to personally seek an audience with Demon Queen Qingqiu. We must find a way to obtain the Eternal Soul Wood, no matter what.”

“Gifts?” Kai’s voice held a hint of doubt; he hadn’t expected Gui Yuanzi to be so thoughtful.

Gui Yuanzi smiled, the weariness on his face fading slightly, his tone filled with certainty.

“Yes, Young Master. The demon race has always favored spiritual fruits and herbs, especially those that are old, which are deeply loved by demon cultivators.” ”

I selected several ten-thousand-year-old Ganoderma lucidum and several Heavenly Fragrance Spiritual Fruits from the Gui Yuan Sect’s treasury. The ten-thousand-year-old Ganoderma lucidum is a rare spiritual material, containing rich spiritual energy that can nourish the body and enhance cultivation.”

“The Heavenly Fragrance Spiritual Fruit is one of the demon race’s most beloved spiritual fruits. Its flesh is sweet and contains pure primordial power, not only nourishing the soul but also enhancing the purity of the demon race’s bloodline.”

“These gifts, though not particularly valuable, at least demonstrate our sincerity and show the Demon Emperor Qingqiu our respect. Perhaps they can even offer a glimmer of hope for our quest for the Eternal Soul Wood.”

Kai said nothing more, his pale purple divine soul aura flickering slightly. His tone carried a hint of gratitude: “Thank you for your hard work.”

For the past five days, Gui Yuanzi had tirelessly traveled far and wide for his sake, even risking his life to venture into dangerous places to gather clues. This loyalty deeply moved Kai.

“Young Master, you are too kind.” Gui Yuanzi quickly bowed, his tone full of respect.

“It is my honor to serve you, Young Master. Please rest well tonight and recharge your energy. Tomorrow morning, we will set off for the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.”

After speaking, he carefully put away the animal hide map, then meticulously checked the Soul Nourishing Liquid in the jade bottle. Confirming that everything was alright, he turned and left the secret chamber, gently closing the stone door behind him, leaving Kai alone to rest in peace.

Silence returned to the secret chamber once more.

Kai's soul hovered within the jade bottle, slowly circulating the Great Luo Golden Scripture's cultivation technique, absorbing the essence of the Soul Nourishing Liquid. His mind, however, was preoccupied with the matters of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge and the Demon Emperor Qingqiu.

He knew that journeying to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge to obtain the Eternal Soul Wood would be a difficult one, fraught with unknown dangers. But he had no way back; he could only forge ahead.

He thought of Bai Qian from the Celestial Realm, Jiang Xuelan from the Sixteenth Heaven, and Gui Yuanzi's loyalty. His resolve grew stronger—

no matter the difficulties, he would succeed in obtaining the Eternal Soul Wood, reshaping his physical body, and then gradually growing stronger to fulfill his wish. The next morning, before dawn, a faint veil of night still shrouded the sky.

The morning star twinkled faintly, and a chill lingered in the air.

Gui Yuanzi arrived at the secret chamber early, having already packed his belongings and changed into a clean black Daoist robe, the storage ring still hanging at his waist.

He carefully held the jade bottle containing Kai's soul, his expression solemn and earnest.

He didn't depart immediately but went first to the front hall of the Gui Yuan Sect to find Li Qingyun.

Ever since learning that Kai was going to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge to seek the Eternal Soul Wood, Li Qingyun had been restless and hadn't slept well all night.

He stood at the entrance of the front hall, his eyes filled with worry, clearly waiting for Gui Yuanzi and Kai.

"Elder Li, what are you doing here?" Gui Yuanzi asked, slightly surprised to see Li Qingyun.

Li Qingyun quickly stepped forward, his gaze falling on the jade bottle in Gui Yuanzi's hands, his tone full of concern.

"Sect Master Guiyuan, I want to go to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge with you. The Ten Thousand Demon Ridge is too dangerous. I'm really worried about the two of you alone. With another person, we can take care of each other."

Guiyuanzi gently shook his head, his tone carrying a hint of helplessness, yet unwavering determination.

"Elder Li, thank you for your kindness, but you cannot go to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge this time."

"The Ten Thousand Demon Ridge is the territory of the demon race, and they have always been xenophobic. The two of us going is already taking a great risk. If too many people go, it will easily cause misunderstandings among the demons."

"They will think we are here to provoke them. In that case, not only will we fail to obtain the Eternal Soul Wood, but we will

also face certain death." He paused, then added, "Moreover, the Guiyuan Sect needs someone to oversee it. After the young master and I leave, Elder Li, you will need to take care of all the affairs of the Guiyuan Sect."

"Your staying in the Guiyuan Sect, protecting the sect and its disciples, is the greatest help you can give us. Please rest assured, Elder Li, I will

definitely protect the young master, do my best to obtain the Eternal Soul Wood, and return safely."

Li Qingyun wanted to say something more, but seeing Guiyuanzi's resolute eyes, he knew his mind was made up, and further persuasion was useless.

He could only sigh helplessly and nod.

"Alright, Sect Master Guiyuan, you must be careful. The Myriad Demon Ridge is fraught with danger. If you encounter any peril, do not be reckless; just try to escape unscathed."

"I will stay at Guiyuan Sect to protect the sect and await your return."

"Thank you for your understanding, Elder Li." Guiyuanzi bowed slightly, expressing his gratitude, then said no more and turned to walk towards the Guiyuan Sect's mountain gate.

The jade bottle in his hand swayed gently. Kai's divine sense detected the movement outside, knowing it was time to depart. The pale purple aura trembled slightly, making no sound, simply waiting quietly.

The two walked out of the Guiyuan Sect's mountain gate, one after the other.

At this moment, the sky was already turning a pale white, the rays of the rising sun about to break through the clouds and shine upon the earth.

Guiyuanzi moved, his spiritual energy circulating within him, and a faint auspicious cloud appeared beneath his feet.

He carefully tucked the jade bottle containing Kai's soul into his robes, keeping it close to his body, then leaped onto auspicious clouds, flying north towards the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.

The northern region of the Seventeenth Heaven was vast, with diverse scenery.

Initially, in their flying area, they could still see some scattered cultivators' caves and a few villages.

These caves were built against the mountains, secluded and quiet, and the cultivators in the villages lived peaceful and stable lives, working at sunrise and resting at sunset.

Occasionally, they could see cultivators flying in the air, either traveling to various cities for trade or to train in the mountains—a lively scene.

But as they flew further north, the surrounding scenery gradually became desolate.

The scattered cultivators' caves became fewer and fewer, and the villages gradually disappeared. The land beneath their feet transformed from fertile plains into barren mountains.

The vegetation became increasingly sparse, leaving only withered yellow grass and a few crooked trees, swaying precariously in the strong winds, appearing particularly desolate.

The spiritual energy in the air grew increasingly thin, replaced by a faint demonic aura. Though not dense, it still caused a sense of oppression.

Gui Yuanzi flew slowly, maintaining a steady pace. As he flew, he would occasionally look down at the jade bottle in his arms, explaining the situation of the Myriad Demon Ridge to Kai.

He was afraid that Kai would be completely ignorant of the Myriad Demon Ridge and unable to cope with any dangers.

"Young Master, the Myriad Demon Ridge is located at the northernmost tip of the Northern Region. It is a mountain range stretching for thousands of miles, with steep terrain, ancient trees reaching for the sky, and shrouded in dense fog year-round, resulting in extremely low visibility." "Moreover

, the mountains are teeming with various demonic beasts and restrictions, making them extremely dangerous."

His voice, penetrating his clothes, entered the jade bottle and reached Kai's ears clearly.

"Qingqiu, the Demon Queen of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, is actually a nine-tailed celestial fox. She has cultivated for tens of thousands of years and has now reached the third rank of Golden Immortal, making her one of the top experts in the entire Seventeenth Heaven."

He paused, then continued, "This Demon Queen Qingqiu is aloof and doesn't like to interact with people. She usually stays in the Demon Queen's Palace and rarely interferes in outside affairs."

"However, she doesn't actively cause trouble, always adhering to the principle of 'I won't offend others unless they offend me.' Under her leadership, the demon race, the gods, and the humans maintain a delicate balance, each not invading the other's territory and cultivating there." "

However, the demon race is always xenophobic, and they severely punish outsiders who trespass into Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. Therefore, after we arrive at Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, we must be careful with our words and actions, not violate the rules of the demon race, and absolutely avoid conflict with them."

"Does she have any weaknesses?" Kai's voice came from the jade bottle, tinged with inquiry.

"Young Master, the Demon Queen Qingqiu possesses profound cultivation and a deep foundation, with no obvious weaknesses," Gui Yuanzi said slowly after a moment's thought.

"Her true form is a nine-tailed celestial fox, with pure blood. She excels not only in soul attacks but also in illusions, making her extremely well-rounded and virtually flawless."

“However, if one had to point out a weakness, it would be her extreme devotion to her people, treating each member of the demon race as her own child.”

“If anyone harms a member of the demon race, whether human or divine, she will spare no effort to avenge them, showing no leniency.”

Kai silently memorized this, his pale purple soul aura flickering slightly.

He knew this might be a breakthrough for them in obtaining the Eternal Soul Wood.

Since the Demon Queen Qingqiu valued her people, they could start from this point, demonstrating their sincerity and avoiding offending the demon race. Perhaps this would earn the Demon Queen Qingqiu’s favor, leading her to make an exception and allow them to enter the Primordial Soul Forest.

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For the next two days, they flew north, the surrounding scenery becoming increasingly desolate, and the demonic aura growing ever denser.

The barren mountains stretched endlessly beneath their feet, devoid of any sign of human habitation. Occasionally, a few enormous demonic beasts could be seen traversing the mountains, emitting deafening roars.

The roars were so loud they seemed to shake the very air, sending chills down

their spines. Whenever Gui Yuanzi encountered a demonic beast, he tried to avoid it, striving to avoid conflict.

After all, their purpose was to obtain the Eternal Soul Wood, not to fight demonic beasts; it was better to avoid trouble.

At noon on the third day, the sun blazed down, baking the earth. Although the northern climate was relatively cold, the midday sun was still quite blinding.

Gui Yuanzi's flight speed gradually slowed. He looked up into the distance, a hint of joy flashing in his eyes.

Ahead, a mountain range stretching for thousands of miles came into view, shrouded in thick fog, through which towering ancient trees and precipitous peaks could be vaguely seen.

The dense demonic aura emanating from it was overwhelming, creating a powerful sense of oppression.

"Young Master, we've arrived. That's the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge," Gui Yuanzi said excitedly, pointing to the jade bottle in his arms.

Kai's soul flickered slightly. Through the bottle's walls, he could vaguely see the distant mountain range shrouded in thick fog, and a ripple of emotion stirred within him.

He knew the true test had begun.

Gui Yuanzi slowly descended, landing at the foot of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge before a canyon.

This canyon was the only passage into the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. The cliffs on both sides soared into the clouds, covered with ancient vines.

The vines meandered and intertwined, densely covering the entire cliff face.

Unidentified flowers bloomed on the vines, their petals a pale green that emitted a ghostly green light in the sunlight, looking extremely eerie.

They also emitted a faint poison; careless contact would likely result in poisoning.

At the entrance to the canyon stood two demon cultivators.

One male and one female, both at the ninth rank of the True Immortal Realm, possessing powerful auras and solemn expressions.

Their eyes warily scanned the direction from which they were coming, preventing unauthorized intruders.

They were handsome, with fair skin and delicate features.

But unlike humans, their ears were pointed, their pupils vertical, and they exuded a faint demonic aura, clearly not human cultivators.

Upon seeing Gui Yuanzi land, the two demon cultivators immediately became alert.

The male cultivator raised his spear, its surface jet black, covered in demonic runes, radiating a faint chill.

He shouted at Gui Yuanzi, “Halt! This is the sacred ground of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. Outsiders, stop! Leave immediately, or don’t blame us for being impolite!”

Gui Yuanzi remained calm, a gentle smile on his face, his attitude respectful.

He took out a cyan token from his robes, engraved with a nine-tailed celestial fox—a token he had prepared specifically to identify himself and his purpose.

He handed over the token and slowly said, “Fellow Daoists, please don’t misunderstand. I am Guiyuanzi, the Sect Master of Guiyuan Sect. I have come today specifically to request an audience with His Majesty the Demon Emperor to discuss important matters.”

“Thank you for informing him,”

the male cultivator said, taking the token and examining it carefully for a moment before handing it to the female cultivator beside him.

The female cultivator also examined it carefully, confirming that there was nothing wrong with the token before returning it to Guiyuanzi.

The male cultivator's expression softened somewhat, but he remained wary, saying to Guiyuanzi, "Wait a moment, I will go and inform His Majesty the Demon Emperor. You must wait here and not trespass."

With that, he turned and walked into the canyon, his figure quickly disappearing into the thick fog.

Guiyuanzi nodded, standing at the canyon entrance, waiting patiently.

The jade bottle in his arms gently pressed against his chest, Kai's soul also waited quietly, his mind filled with countless thoughts.

He knew that the upcoming meeting was crucial, directly related to whether they could obtain the Eternal Soul Wood.

Therefore, he had to remain calm and cautious in his words and actions.

After a moment, the male cultivator emerged from the canyon, his expression much more relaxed than before. He said to Gui Yuanzi, "His Majesty the Demon Emperor requests your presence. Please follow me."

Gui Yuanzi felt relieved and quickly replied, "Thank you, fellow Daoist."

With that, he tightly clutched the jade bottle in his arms and followed the male cultivator into the canyon.

Inside the canyon, thick fog filled the air, reducing visibility to less than ten feet. The demonic energy in the air was even more concentrated, mixed with a faint scent of sandalwood, the unique fragrance of the Demon Emperor's palace.

The path beneath their feet was winding and twisting, with exotic flowers and rare herbs growing on both sides. Some flowers were delicate and beautiful, while others had strange shapes and emitted different auras.

The male cultivator walked ahead, his steps steady and his pace slow, occasionally turning back to make sure Gui Yuanzi hadn't fallen behind.

Gui Yuanzi followed behind, walking cautiously, observing his surroundings as he went, secretly on guard.

He could sense that the canyon was filled with restrictions; if he accidentally touched one, it could trigger danger.

Moreover, the auras of numerous demon cultivators were still faintly visible in the surrounding area, indicating the demons' tight security over this canyon.

After walking for about the time it takes for an incense stick to burn, the thick fog gradually dissipated, revealing

a vast valley. The valley was filled with exotic flowers and rare herbs, and a crystal-clear stream flowed gently.

Colorful fish swam in the stream, and the spiritual energy in the air was so dense it seemed almost condensed; a single breath was enough to refresh the mind and spirit.

In the distance, a majestic palace stood in the center of the valley.

Built of azure jade, the palace was ancient and solemn.

On the roof of the palace sat a colossal statue of a nine-tailed celestial fox.

The statue was lifelike, imposing, and exuded a powerful aura that inspired awe.

That was the Demon Emperor's Palace, the residence of the Demon Emperor Qingqiu.

The male cultivator, leading Gui Yuanzi, walked step by step towards the Demon Emperor's Palace.

The path beneath their feet was paved with smooth, warm blue jade stones, and exotic flowers and herbs swayed in the breeze on both sides, releasing a captivating fragrance.

Occasionally, small, delicate demon beasts could be seen darting through the grass, quite adorable.

But Gui Yuanzi had no time to appreciate the scenery; he remained vigilant, clutching the jade bottle tightly to his chest, fearing any mishap.

Soon, they arrived at the entrance to the Demon Emperor's Palace.

The palace gates were tall and majestic, carved from massive black stones, and adorned with two enormous nine-tailed celestial foxes.

The patterns were lifelike, their eyes majestic, as if guarding the palace.

On either side of the gate stood four demon cultivators, all at the first rank of the Golden Immortal realm, their auras powerful.

Upon seeing Gui Yuanzi, they all cast wary glances, but did not stop him, clearly on the orders of the Demon Emperor Qingqiu.

The male cultivator nodded to the four demon cultivators, then pushed open the gates of the Demon Emperor's Palace and said to Gui Yuanzi, "Please come in. His Majesty the Demon Emperor is waiting for you in the main hall."

Gui Yuanzi bowed slightly, said "Thank you," and then cautiously entered the Demon Emperor's Palace.

The main hall of the Demon Emperor's Palace was very spacious, even larger than the main hall of the Guiyuan Sect, but unlike the magnificent and luxurious Tianji Hall, it

exuded an ancient and solemn atmosphere.

The pillars in the hall were carved from ancient wood, tall and thick, and engraved with the history and legends of the demon race.

The patterns were lifelike, recording the rise and fall of the demon race from ancient times to the present, inspiring a sense of awe.

The floor was covered with a soft animal skin carpet, soft and silent underfoot, embroidered with exquisite nine-tailed celestial fox patterns, very delicate.

On either side of the main hall stood a dozen or so demon cultivators, all at the Golden Immortal level.

Their eyes were respectfully fixed on the throne at the far end of the hall; they were clearly subordinates of the Demon Emperor Qingqiu.

Their forms varied: some were foxes, some tigers, and some eagles.

Although they had taken human form, they still retained the characteristics of their original forms, emanating a dense demonic aura that gave off a powerful sense of oppression.

Guiyuanzi entered the hall without any panic, walking step by step to the center and stopping.

He bowed respectfully to the throne at the far end, his tone respectful and humble: "Guiyuanzi of the Guiyuan Sect pays respects to His Majesty the Demon Emperor."

At the far end of the hall, a woman leaned against a large throne.

She wore a long white dress, its fabric light and airy, as pure as moonlight, embroidered with faint nine-tailed celestial fox patterns that swayed gently in the breeze, making her appear exceptionally elegant.

Her long hair was as black as ink, glossy and flowing down her back, the ends slightly curled like a fox's tail, radiating a faint sheen.

Her face was exquisitely beautiful, her features delicately sculpted like a work of art by the heavens: willow-leaf eyebrows, phoenix eyes, cherry lips, and skin as white as snow, flawless and delicate.

Her eyes possessed an innate allure, captivating anyone who looked at her.

But what was most striking were her eyes—amber eyes, clear and deep, their pupils seemingly burning with flames.

They held both the majesty of a demon queen and a touch of coldness, making one hesitant to look directly at them.

Her pointed ears twitched slightly, as if listening intently to everything around her, and a faint demonic aura emanated from her, intertwining with her aloof demeanor to create a unique charm.

She was Qingqiu, the Demon Queen of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.

A nine-tailed celestial fox who had cultivated for tens of thousands of years, a top-tier expert at the third rank of Golden Immortal.

Qingqiu's gaze fell on Guiyuanzi, a faint smile playing on her lips.

That smile, like melting snow, instantly dispelled some of the solemnity in the hall, adding a touch of gentleness.

Her voice was clear and melodious, like heavenly music reaching Guiyuanzi's ears: "Guiyuanzi, long time no see."

“The last time I saw you was hundreds of years ago at the Northern Region Dao Discussion Conference. At that time, you were only at the second rank of Golden Immortal. Now you have broken through to the third rank of Golden Immortal, quite an improvement, congratulations.”

Hearing Qingqiu’s words, Guiyuanzi felt relieved and quickly said humbly, “Your Majesty flatters me. I only broke through by chance; compared to Your Majesty, I am still far behind.”

“Your Majesty has cultivated for tens of thousands of years; your cultivation is unfathomable. I have the utmost respect for you.”

He knew that Qingqiu’s ability to remember events from hundreds of years ago meant she harbored no ill will towards him, which was undoubtedly a good start.

Qingqiu waved her hand, saying calmly, “No need for formalities. You’ve traveled a long way from Guiyuan Sect to Wanyao Ridge; the journey must have been arduous.”

“Speak,” she continued, “what brings you here today? If it weren’t important, you wouldn’t have dared to intrude into my Wanyao Ridge.”

Her tone, though calm, carried an undeniable authority, leaving no room for concealment.

Guiyuanzi dared not delay, quickly taking out the jade bottle containing Kai’s soul from his robes, gently placing it on the ground, and bowing respectfully.

“Your Majesty, I have indeed come today with a request.”

“A young friend of mine has met with misfortune; his physical body has been destroyed, and now only a wisp of his soul remains, barely surviving. To rebuild his body, he needs two rare and precious materials: Primordial Divine Water and Eternal Soul Wood.”

“I already have a lead on the Primordial Divine Water; it will appear at the Myriad Treasures Auction in Tianque City in three months, and I am confident I can acquire it.” ”

However, the Eternal Soul Wood grows in the Primordial Soul Forest deep within the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, a forbidden area for the demon race.”

“Therefore, I have dared to come here to beg Your Majesty to grant my young friend permission to enter the Primordial Soul Forest to obtain a piece of Eternal Soul Wood to save his life. I would be eternally grateful.”

Qingqiu’s brows furrowed slightly, a hint of displeasure flashing in his amber eyes, and his tone turned colder.

“The Primordial Soul Forest is a forbidden area of our demon race. Since ancient times, there has been a rule that outsiders are not allowed to enter without permission. This is the bottom line of the demon race, and it cannot be broken.”

“You should know the consequences of trespassing into a forbidden area.”

Hearing Qingqiu’s words, Guiyuanzi’s heart tightened, but he did not give up and still bowed and said.

“Your Majesty, I know that the Primordial Soul Forest is a forbidden area of the demon race, and I also know the rules of the demon race. But my young friend’s situation is very special. He did not intend to violate the rules of the demon race. He only wanted to obtain the Eternal Soul Wood to reshape his physical body and save his life.”

“Moreover, I dare to say that my young friend has a past with the demon race. Your Majesty will know the reason when you see him.”

After speaking, he no longer hesitated and gently opened the lid of the jade bottle.

Instantly, a ball of pale purple divine soul slowly floated out of the jade bottle and hovered in mid-air.

Around the divine soul, the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture slowly flowed. The golden light was warm and powerful, dispelling some of the demonic energy in the hall, forming a sharp contrast with the demonic energy on Qingqiu's body.

Kai's soul trembled slightly as he sensed the powerful aura emanating from Qingqiu. He became secretly wary but did not retreat.

He remained suspended in mid-air, awaiting Qingqiu's reaction.

Qingqiu's gaze fell upon the purple soul, initially just a casual glance, not taking it seriously.

In her eyes, it was nothing more than an ordinary remnant soul, insignificant despite the protection of the Great Luo Golden Scripture.

But soon, her pupils contracted slightly, a hint of surprise flashing in her amber eyes, which then became complex.

She had sensed it.

She sensed that within that purple divine soul, besides the aura of chaotic power and the aura of the golden tome, there was also a very faint, almost imperceptible aura.

That aura was extremely familiar to her. That was the scent of the Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox bloodline, the aura of her demon clan's royal blood.

Moreover, although this aura was faint, it was extremely pure, clearly originating from the core bloodline of the Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox clan.

Qingqiu abruptly sat up straight, her previous languid posture vanishing, replaced by a serious and solemn expression.

Her gaze was fixed on the purple soul, her tone becoming heavy, each word carrying immense weight.

“How can your soul contain the aura of my clan’s bloodline? And such a pure aura of the Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox royal bloodline at that?”

Kai remained silent for a moment.

He knew this was the key to obtaining the Eternal Soul Wood, and he had to tell the truth.

He spoke slowly, his voice low and clear, carrying a hint of barely perceptible gentleness.

“Back in the Celestial Realm, I had a confidante. She was the Fox Princess, named Bai Qian, a member of the Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox clan.”

“When we were together, our bloodlines merged. That’s why her bloodline aura remains in my soul—the bloodline aura of the Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox royal family that His Majesty spoke of.”

“Bai Qian? The Celestial Realm?”

Qingqiu murmured, repeating the two names, a hint of reminiscence flashing in her amber eyes.

Then, a faint smile appeared on her lips, a gentle and gratified smile, completely different from her previous cold and dignified demeanor.

“That child is my descendant. Tens of thousands of years ago, I ascended to the Celestial Realm, and since then, I have lost contact with my descendants in the Celestial Realm.”

“I thought they were extinct. I never imagined that after tens of thousands of years, I could still hear news of them here, still feel their bloodline aura. It’s truly wonderful.”

Kai's heart trembled, and the pale purple aura of his soul quivered violently.

He never imagined that Bai Qian was a descendant of the Demon Emperor Qingqiu, let alone that he would encounter Bai Qian's ancestor in the Seventeenth Heaven.

Countless memories of Bai Qian flooded his mind.

He remembered Bai Qian's gentle smile in the Celestial Realm;

he remembered the days when Bai Qian forced him to fuse their bloodlines for dual cultivation;

he remembered the scene where she almost died, exhausting her own cultivation to save him;

he remembered Bai Qian's reluctant gaze when he left the Celestial Realm.

He thought he was very far away from Bai Qian.

Unexpectedly, he would encounter her ancestor here.

The warmth and longing in his heart intertwined, making Kai's soul tremble slightly.

He suppressed his emotions and slowly spoke, his voice a little hoarse.

"Your Majesty, Bai Qian is still alive. When I left the Celestial Realm, she was perfectly fine, and her health had already recovered."

"Her father, the old emperor of the Fox Clan, helped me a great deal. At that time, I had just entered the Celestial Realm and knew nothing. It was that old emperor who provided me with resources for cultivation."

"He also entrusted Bai Qian to me, asking me to take good care of her."

Kai's words made Qing Qiu silent for a moment, a trace of relief and emotion flashing in her amber eyes.

She nodded gently and said softly, "Good, good, it's good that she's alive, it's good that she's alive."

After tens of thousands of years, hearing news of her clansmen still moved Qing Qiu.

After a moment, Qing Qiu slowly composed herself, her gaze returning to Kai's soul, her tone returning to calm, but with a hint of tolerance.

"Since you have this connection with my clan and such a deep affection for Bai Qian, I, the Emperor, will make an exception and allow you to enter the Primordial Soul Forest. But there is one condition."

Hearing that Qingqiu was willing to make an exception, Guiyuanzi was overjoyed and quickly bowed, saying, "Your Majesty, please speak. Whatever the condition, the young master and I are willing to agree."

Qingqiu's gaze was fixed on Kai's soul, and he said solemnly,

"The Eternal Soul Tree in the Primordial Soul Forest is not so easy to obtain. The Soul Forest is filled with restrictions and formations left over from ancient times, and countless powerful soul beasts reside within it."

"Those soul beasts feed on souls and are extremely powerful. Even cultivators with the cultivation of Golden Immortals need to be extremely careful when entering, as a slight mistake can lead to death." "

You now only have a wisp of soul left. Without the support of a physical body, your spiritual power cannot circulate normally. Going in would almost certainly be suicide."

Kai remained silent for a moment.

He knew that what Qingqiu said was true.

The Primordial Soul Forest was fraught with danger, and in his current state, entering it would indeed be a near-certain death.

But he did not back down.

Reshaping his physical body was his only way out, and the Eternal Soul Wood was something he absolutely needed.

No matter how dangerous the path ahead, he had to try.

He slowly spoke, his tone firm: “Your Majesty, I know the Primordial Soul Forest is dangerous, but I have no way out. I am willing to agree to any conditions; please give me a chance.”

“I can let you in, but you must pass the trials.” Qingqiu’s voice was calm and authoritative, leaving no room for negotiation.

“The trials are divided into three stages: the Soul Forest maze, a battle against a group of soul beasts, and obtaining the Soul Tree wood. If you pass all three stages, the Eternal Soul Wood will be yours, and I will not stop you.”

“But if you fail and die in the Primordial Soul Forest, I will not be responsible, nor will I send anyone to rescue you. Think carefully; are you willing to accept the trials?”

Guiyuanzi’s expression instantly changed, and he hurriedly tried to dissuade him.

“Your Majesty, no! The young master only has a wisp of his soul left, his body is weak, and he simply cannot withstand such a difficult trial.”

“If he is forced to accept the trial, his life will be in danger. Please, Your

Majesty, have mercy and offer a different condition. Whatever the condition, I am willing to bear it for the young master!” “I know he only has a wisp of his soul left.” Qingqiu interrupted Guiyuanzi, his tone still firm.

“But rules are rules. The Primordial Soul Forest is a forbidden area for the demon race. I have already made an exception and allowed him to enter, which is the greatest concession I can make. If he cannot even pass the trial, even if he enters, he will not be able to obtain the Eternal Soul Wood; he will only be throwing his life away.”

“Moreover, to reshape his physical body and become stronger, he must undergo trials. If he cannot even withstand this trial, even with the Eternal Soul Wood and the Primordial Divine Water, he will not become a great man.”

Guiyuanzi wanted to say something more, but was interrupted by Kai’s voice.

“Guiyuanzi, do not worry.” Kai’s voice was calm, but it carried an undeniable firmness.

“Your Majesty is right. To become powerful and to reshape one’s physical body, one must endure hardship. What kind of life and death haven’t I seen along the way?”

“An ancient soul forest and a trial cannot hold me back. I promise Your Majesty that I will accept the trial.” “Young Master!” Gui Yuanzi cried out anxiously, unable to bear seeing Kai risk his life to undergo the trial.

Qing Qiu looked at Kai’s soul, a hint of admiration flashing in his amber eyes, and nodded.

“Good, you have guts. No wonder my people have chosen you.”

“In that case, tomorrow morning, I will personally escort you to the entrance of the Primordial Soul Forest. Today, you should rest at Wan Yao Ridge, recuperate your soul, and prepare for tomorrow’s trial.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Kai’s soul bowed slightly as a sign of respect, his tone full of gratitude.

He knew that although Qing Qiu had set harsh conditions, he was also giving him a chance.

Without Qing Qiu's exception, he wouldn't even have the qualification to enter the Primordial Soul Forest.

Qingqiu waved her hand and said to a demon cultivator beside her, "Take Guiyuanzi and this young friend to the side hall to rest. Treat them well and do not neglect them."

"Yes, Your Majesty." The demon cultivator bowed and then turned to Guiyuanzi, saying, "Sect Master Guiyuan, please follow me."

Guiyuanzi bowed to Qingqiu again, then carefully put away the jade bottle and followed the demon cultivator out of the main hall.

Inside the main hall, Qingqiu watched their departing figures, a complex expression flashing in her amber eyes.

She sighed softly and murmured to herself, "Child, I hope you haven't misjudged him."

"I hope this Kai can pass the trial smoothly and live a good life."

That night, Kai was arranged to rest in a side hall of the Demon Emperor's Palace.

This side hall was not large, but it was exquisitely decorated, clean and tidy, exuding a faint demonic aura, yet it did not make people feel oppressed, but rather very at ease.

In the center of the side hall stood a warm jade bed. The bed was pure white, radiating a faint warmth, and covered with soft animal hide.

The hide was made from the fur of a thousand-year-old spirit fox, soft and comfortable, its gentle touch soothing to the soul.

In a corner of the side hall sat a stone table and several stone chairs. On the table sat an incense burner, from which burned a faint scent of sandalwood.

The fragrant aroma permeated the entire side hall, refreshing the mind and bringing peace.

The windows of the side hall were open, revealing a dense bamboo forest outside. Moonlight filtered through the bamboo, casting soft, silvery rays onto the warm jade bed.

This, combined with the bed's warmth, created a particularly cozy atmosphere.

Gui Yuanzi gently placed the jade bottle containing Kai's soul at the head of the bed, then sat down on a stone chair beside it.

His expression was grave, his brow furrowed, his face filled with worry.

He had been thinking about Kai's trial tomorrow, feeling extremely uneasy.

The Primordial Soul Forest was far too dangerous, and the trial was even more difficult. Kai now only had a wisp of his divine soul left, and he had no ability to cope with those dangers.

He was truly worried that something might happen to Kai during the trial.

Kai's divine soul floated in the jade bottle, and through the bottle's walls, he saw Gui Yuanzi's worried expression, feeling deeply moved.

He knew that Gui Yuanzi genuinely cared about him and was truly worried about his safety.

He slowly circulated the Great Luo Golden Scripture's cultivation technique, absorbing the surrounding spiritual energy, and said at the same time,

“Gui Yuanzi, you don’t need to worry too much. I will definitely pass the trial smoothly.”

Kai’s voice was soft, but it carried a hint of comfort and a hint of determination.

Gui Yuanzi raised his head, his gaze falling on Kai’s divine soul in the jade bottle, his tone full of worry.

“Young Master, are you really going to participate in the trial? I’ve been to the Ancient Soul Forest once. Although I didn’t go deep into the core area, I only wandered around the outer perimeter, but the outer restrictions were already terrifying. A slight mistake could cost you your life.”

“You only have a wisp of your soul left now. Without the support of a physical body, your spiritual power cannot circulate normally. Even with the protection of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, it will be difficult to cope with the dangers in the trial.”

“What if… what if something happens to you? How will I explain to the Guiyuan Sect? How will I explain to those Daoist disciples?”

“There are no ‘what ifs.’” Kai interrupted Guiyuanzi, his tone calm and firm.

“Guiyuanzi, do you know why I’ve been able to live until now?”

Guiyuanzi shook his head, his eyes full of doubt.

“From the mortal realm to the celestial realm, and then to the seventeenth heaven, I have experienced countless life-and-death situations and countless hardships. Each time I was on the verge of death, but I survived.”

“It wasn’t because I was lucky, but because I never left myself a way out. Every battle, every hardship, I treated as if it were my last, fighting with all my might.”

“It wasn’t that I wasn’t afraid of death, but that I knew fear was useless, retreating would only hasten my death. Only by forging ahead could I have a glimmer of hope.”

He paused, then continued, “This trial, though dangerous, is my only chance. Only by passing the trial and obtaining the Eternal Soul Wood can I reshape my physical body and become stronger.”

“Only then can I have a chance to return to the sixteenth heaven, rescue my companions imprisoned by the gods, and find Bai Qian. I cannot give up, and I will not give up.”

“You don’t need to worry about me. I will definitely pass the trial smoothly and return safely.”

Kai spoke with great determination, but there was one thing he didn’t tell Gui Yuanzi: behind him was Mr. Shi.

His physical body was destroyed, and Mr. Shi didn’t appear, but if his divine soul was in trouble, he would be utterly destroyed. He didn’t believe Mr. Shi wouldn’t appear.

Even if Mr. Shi didn’t appear, Kai believed Mr. Shi had a way to bring him back to life.

This was his confidence, so Kai feared nothing.

Gui Yuanzi remained silent for a long time, looking at the resolute purple divine soul in the jade bottle, his worries still lingering.

But he also knew that once Kai made a decision, he wouldn’t easily change it.

He sighed deeply, a hint of helplessness flashing in his eyes, yet also a trace of respect.

“Young Master, you are so much like the Daoist Ancestor.”

“The Daoist Ancestor back then was also like this. Once he set his mind on something, he would do everything in his power to achieve it, never leaving himself a way out, no matter how dangerous the road ahead, he would not back down.”

Kai didn’t speak, just listened quietly, because he had no idea who the Daoist Ancestor was.

This Great Luo Golden Scripture recognized him, and Kai didn’t know why. Before, it was a wordless heavenly book, and now it had become the Great Luo Golden Scripture. Kai knew nothing about it.

It was as if an invisible hand was giving him things and pushing him along.

“The Great Luo Golden Scripture is the personal treasure of the Taoist patriarch. Back then, the patriarch traveled through the myriad realms and delved into ancient ruins. By chance, he obtained this scripture, comprehended the supreme Dao, and his cultivation increased dramatically. Only then did he establish the Taoist lineage, which has been passed down to this day.”

“Later, the Ancestor ascended to heaven, and the Great Luo Golden Scripture disappeared without a trace. The sect’s patriarchs searched for tens of thousands of years without success.”

“Unexpectedly, it chose you, Young Master. This is the will of Heaven, and the will of Heaven cannot be defied.”

“Guiyuanzi, I will live well and will not let down the expectations of the Daoist Ancestor.” Kai’s voice was low and firm.

Silence returned to the side hall.

Moonlight streamed through the window, illuminating the warm jade bed. The

air was thick with the fragrance of sandalwood, creating a warm yet somber atmosphere. Chen

Ping's soul floated quietly in the jade bottle, slowly circulating the Great Luo Golden Scripture's techniques, conserving his energy in preparation for tomorrow's trial.

Guiyuanzi sat by the bed, his gaze fixed on the jade bottle, his expression solemn.

He silently vowed to protect Kai, ensuring his safe passage through the trial and his return.

Neither of them rested that night.

Kai recuperated, accumulating strength; Guiyuanzi silently watched over him, worried about tomorrow's trial.

They both knew that tomorrow's trial would be a difficult ordeal.

Success or failure hinges on this moment; there is no room for carelessness. The Heavenly Palace, the main hall.

The luminous crystals embedded in the dome illuminated the entire hall, golden light flowing within and reflecting on the figure on the throne, coating him with a cold, golden glow.

The stone pillars on either side of the hall stood silently, their carved divine battle reliefs flickering in the light, seemingly bearing silent witness to the oppressive and chilling atmosphere.

The Heavenly Venerable sat on the throne, his face as somber as the sky before a storm.

His fingers tapped lightly on the armrest, once, once, and again, the sound echoing in the empty hall like the tolling of a death knell.

Before him knelt four Golden Immortal elders—Elder Zhao, Elder Qian, Elder Sun, and Elder Li.

Their foreheads were pressed to the ground, afraid to raise their heads, afraid to utter a sound, cold sweat pouring down their bodies.

The hall's floor tiles were forged from extraterrestrial cold iron, icy and bone-chilling, the cold seeping into their bones from their knees, yet not one dared to move.

They had been kneeling for a full hour.

An hour ago, they brought back news—the Soul-Suppressing Pearl had shattered, and Kai's soul had escaped.

The four Golden Immortal elders had chased for three days and three nights, but failed to catch him, returning only exhausted and filled with fear.

They knelt there, their knees numb, but the fear in their hearts was more agonizing than the pain in their knees.

The palace doors were tightly shut, and the guards outside dared not make a sound. The entire hall was like an ice cellar, with only the dull sound of Venerable Tianji's fingers tapping on the armrests, one tap after another.

"You said… the soul escaped?"

Venerable Tianji's voice was calm, so calm that it lowered the temperature of the entire hall.

Everyone present knew what was suppressed beneath this calm—a boundless rage about to erupt.

Elder Zhao forced himself to speak, his voice hoarse and trembling uncontrollably.

He had lived for tens of thousands of years, experienced countless life-and-death battles, and had never feared any enemy.

But at this moment, kneeling beneath the throne, he couldn't suppress the fear in his heart.

The person sitting upon him was not only his Palace Master, but also a powerful Golden Immortal of the third rank, capable of crushing him with a single finger.

"Palace Master, I am incompetent. That divine soul was protected by the Great Luo Golden Scripture; its speed was too great. We chased it for three days and three nights, but failed to catch it. I deserve to die; please punish me, Palace Master."

His forehead slammed heavily against the floor tiles, producing a dull thud.

The other three elders also hurriedly kowtowed, the sounds of their foreheads striking the ground echoing like drumbeats in the empty hall.

"Chased it for three days and three nights, and failed to catch it?"

The Heavenly Extreme Venerable's lips twitched, and he slowly rose from the throne.

His golden robe trailed on the ground, rustling softly.

He descended the steps step by step, each step feeling like a blow to the hearts of the elders.

He stood before Elder Zhao, looking down at him with disdain.

"You four Golden Immortals, chasing a wisp of divine soul for three days and three nights, and you still haven't caught up?"

His voice wasn't loud, but each word seemed to be squeezed out from between his teeth, carrying suppressed rage to the extreme.

His hand slowly clenched, his nails digging into his palm, as if he were about to unleash this rage into a slam.

Elder Qian hurriedly kowtowed, his forehead hitting the cold ground with a dull thud, his voice filled with fear and self-reproach: “Palace Master, that divine soul’s speed is simply too fast.

We have tried our best to catch up, but it seems to be able to sense our location. Every time we are about to catch up, it suddenly changes direction and disappears without a trace.

It’s not that we didn’t try, we are simply powerless!”

“Sense location?”

Venerable Tianji’s eyes narrowed slightly, a cold glint flashing in his eyes, flames seemingly dancing in his golden pupils.

He bent down, staring into Elder Qian’s eyes, and asked, word by word, “It only has a wisp of its soul left, no physical body, no spiritual power. How could it possibly sense your location?”

Elder Qian’s body trembled slightly, cold sweat dripping from his forehead onto the floor tiles with a soft thud.

He dared not look up, dared not meet his gaze, and even deliberately held his breath.

He didn’t know how to answer this question, because it was completely beyond common sense.

Elder Zhao hesitated for a moment,

then said in a low voice, “This subordinate suspects that the protective golden light of that scripture might possess some ability we are unaware of. It can sense danger in advance and then control the soul to evade it.” He paused, then added, “Palace Master, the level of that scripture far

surpasses all our understanding, and its abilities are beyond our comprehension.

It can withstand the Golden Immortal Soul Refining Array, release an aura that severely injures the Palace Master, and carry a wisp of soul through the Seventeenth Heaven for three days and three nights without fading.

It's perfectly normal for such a treasure to have one or two abilities we don't know."

Venerable Tianji was silent for a moment, his fingers paused, then continued tapping.

He straightened up, walked back to the throne, and slowly sat down.

His golden robe cascaded down on either side of the throne like two golden waterfalls. His fingers returned to the armrests, and he began to tap lightly again, one tap after another, the rhythm slow and heavy.

He knew that Elder Zhao was telling the truth.

The level of that scripture far exceeded his understanding, far surpassing all the treasures he had ever seen.

It could withstand the Soul Refining Array jointly activated by nine Golden Immortals, could severely injure his soul with a mere wisp of its aura, and could carry a faint remnant soul through the violently powerful Seventeenth Heaven for three days and three nights without perishing.

Such a treasure possessed abilities beyond reason, which was not surprising at all.

But he could not accept it.

He was the Lord of the Heavenly Pole Palace, a top expert in the Northern Region of the Seventeenth Heaven.

He had never failed to obtain what he desired.

“Continue searching.”

His voice was cold, so cold that the air in the hall seemed to freeze. “Find him alive or dead. If his soul has escaped, go find him. If you can’t find him, you don’t need to come back.”

This was not an order, but a judgment.

The four elders trembled simultaneously, their foreheads beaded with cold sweat.

They dared not utter a single word of dissent, responding in unison, “Yes!”

Their voices echoed in the hall, filled with fear, resentment, and a hint of despair.

They knew the rules of the Heavenly Pole Palace better than anyone—if the Lord said “you don’t need to come back,” then you truly didn’t need to return.

It wasn’t that they were leaving the Heavenly Palace, but that they were disappearing from this world.

The four stood up, bowed, and left the hall.

Their footsteps were heavy, their robes trailing on the ground with a rustling sound.

The palace doors slowly closed, shutting them out.

Silence returned to the hall. The Celestial Venerable leaned back on his throne, eyes closed, his fingers still lightly tapping the armrest.

One tap, then another, monotonous and persistent, like some ancient timer silently counting down.

The image of that purple divine soul, that golden tome, that indestructible golden light flashed repeatedly in his mind.

The opportunity was right before him, yet he had watched it slip away.

He was unwilling to accept it.

He stood up and paced back and forth in the hall, his golden robe trailing on the ground with a rustling sound.

He stopped before the star map in the hall, his gaze falling on the map of the Northern Region, moving from the direction of the Guiyuan Sect to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, and then back to the Celestial Venerable Palace.

His brow furrowed, his mind racing.

Where was that divine soul?

The Guiyuan Sect?

The City of Loose Cultivators?

Or had it already escaped to the desolate wilderness deep within the Northern Region?

The Celestial Venerable took a deep breath, suppressing his agitation.

He opened his eyes and took out a golden token from his robes.

The token, only the size of a palm, was forged entirely from ancient gold crystal, with an ancient character “悬” (xuan, meaning “suspended”) engraved on its surface, emitting a faint golden light.

This was a bounty notice from the Heavenly Pole Palace, one of its most treasured heirlooms passed down for tens of thousands of years. Once issued, it would reach all the independent cultivators and small and medium-sized forces in the entire Northern Region.

He lightly tapped the token with his fingertip, and a golden light screen emerged from it, hovering before him like ripples on water.

Dense ancient runes appeared on the light screen—the Heavenly Pole Palace's special array for bounty notices, capable of transmitting information to every corner of the Northern Region.

He concentrated for a moment, then inscribed a line of text on the light screen, each character imbued with his divine sense and spiritual power to ensure the message's authenticity and authority.

"Bounty Notice: Anyone who provides clues leading to the discovery of a cluster of purple divine souls will be rewarded with three Golden Immortal Pills and one million spirit stones.

Anyone who brings the purple divine souls back to the Heavenly Pole Palace will be rewarded with a Golden Immortal cultivation technique, ten million spirit stones, and the position of Guest Elder of the Heavenly Pole Palace."

Three Golden Immortal Pills.

A Golden Immortal cultivation technique, a single manual.

Millions of spirit stones.

The position of Guest Elder.

Each of these items alone would be enough to drive the rogue cultivators of the Northern Region mad.

Those desperate scoundrels who would risk their lives for a few spirit stones, those impoverished rogue cultivators yearning for breakthroughs, those small sects clinging to powerful forces—no one could resist such temptation.

The Celestial Venerable looked at the words on the light screen, a cold smile slowly curving his lips.

This was an open scheme; he didn't need to seek it out personally.

He only needed to throw out enough bait, and countless people would naturally be willing to risk their lives for him.

He waved his hand, and the golden light screen transformed into countless points of light, flying out like fireflies, spreading in all directions.

The points of light pierced through the dome of the main hall, through the restrictions of the Celestial Venerable's Palace, through the sky of the Northern Region, flying to every corner.

The bounty had been issued.

Now, all he had to do was wait.

Wait for those greedy rogue cultivators, wait for those small forces wanting to curry favor with the Celestial Venerable's Palace, wait for those desperate scoundrels seeking overnight riches to bring Kai's soul before him.

The Celestial Venerable sat down again, leaning back on his throne and closing his eyes.

His fingers began to tap lightly on the armrest again, once, then again.

Only this monotonous tapping echoed in the hall, like some ancient timer calculating something.

Outside the window, three blazing suns hung high, their golden, silver, and crimson rays weaving and scattering, dyeing the entire land a dark gold.

The bounty had been issued for less than half a day, yet the entire Northern Region was in an uproar.

In the taverns of Tianque City, rogue cultivators sat together, whispering amongst themselves.

The tavern walls were made of rough gray stone, with a few spirit lamps hanging from them, emitting a dim light.

The air was filled with the smell of cheap spirit wine and roasted meat; the clinking of cups and plates, shouts, and laughter mingled together, noisy and chaotic.

But at this moment, everyone's topic revolved around the same thing—the bounty from the Celestial Palace.

Some marveled at the Heavenly Palace's extravagance, some coveted the bounty rewards, and some were itching to search for the purple divine soul.

The tavern owner, an old man at the ninth rank of True Immortal Realm, leaned against the counter, listening to the discussions with a mocking smile.

He remained silent, simply fiddling with the beads on his abacus, the beads clattering loudly.

"Three Golden Immortal Pills! One Golden Immortal Cultivation Technique! Ten million spirit stones! The position of Guest Elder! Has the Heavenly Palace gone mad?"

A rogue cultivator with a scar on his face slammed his fist on the table, his eyes wide like copper bells, his voice filled with shock and greed. "All of this combined is enough to make an ordinary rogue cultivator leap into the hands of a powerful figure in the Northern Region! If it were me, I'd be laughing in my sleep!"

"Tch, you're dreaming? Do you even have the life to take it?"

An old man sitting in the corner sneered. He wore a tattered Daoist robe and held a rusty longsword in his arms.

His voice was hoarse, carrying a hint of mockery and helplessness.

“That purple soul, able to escape from four Golden Immortal elders, can it be anything ordinary?

The Heavenly Palace’s bounty is so high, indicating the soul’s value far exceeds these rewards. Do you think the Heavenly Palace is a sucker?

They’re using these rogue cultivators as pawns, making them search for that soul. If they find it, the credit goes to the Heavenly Palace; if they don’t, it’s not their people who die.”

“So what?” the scarred rogue cultivator retorted, unconvinced. “Fortune favors the bold! If we find that soul and hand it over to the Heavenly Palace, we won’t have to worry for the rest of our lives.”

“You don’t even know what that soul looks like, where are you going to find it?” The old man scoffed, shook his head, and said no more.

In front of the teleportation array in Heavenly Palace City, a black-clad cultivator hurriedly handed over spirit stones and stepped into the array.

He was a spy for a small force in the Northern Region, specializing in collecting intelligence and then reselling it to those who needed it.

Less than an hour after the bounty was issued, he had already copied the message hundreds of times and sent it to various regions through secret channels.

He was gambling, gambling that this intelligence would bring a hefty reward.

In the underground black market of Blackwind City, several sinister-looking cultivators huddled together, whispering amongst themselves.

They were an organization specializing in assassinations and captures; they would do anything for the right price.

The bounty on the wanted poster tempted them, but what they cared about even more was the “Guest Elder position.”

A Guest Elder of the Heavenly Pole Palace meant access to the palace’s resources and the ability to act with impunity in the Northern Region.

This power was more tempting than any spirit stone or cultivation technique.

But they were equally cautious.

They didn’t know where the purple divine soul was, what it looked like, or what its abilities were.

Anything that could escape from the clutches of the four Golden Immortal elders of the Heavenly Pole Palace was no ordinary thing.

They needed more intelligence, more information, before deciding whether to take action.

Discussions raged, but few dared to actually go after it.

It wasn’t that they weren’t envious, but that they dared not.

The four Golden Immortal elders of the Heavenly Pole Palace had lost track of it; for them, these rogue cultivators, to pursue it would be suicide.

Nevertheless, news of the bounty spread rapidly throughout the Northern Region.

It reached major cities, major sects, and even the Guiyuan Sect.

The day after the bounty was issued, the Heavenly Pole Palace received a secret report. The secret report was sent anonymously via a jade slip, leaving no trace of identity, not even the divine sense imprint, clearly to prevent the Heavenly Extreme Palace from tracing the sender’s identity.

However, the content made the Heavenly Extreme Venerable sit up straight, his previously languid posture instantly tense.

“That purple divine soul is in the Guiyuan Sect.”

Only one sentence.

No explanation, no evidence, no signature.

But the Heavenly Extreme Venerable’s intuition told him the message was true.

He picked up the jade slip and read it repeatedly three times, his divine sense penetrating it to carefully examine it, trying to find a clue.

But the sender was well hidden, leaving no trace.

He stood up and paced back and forth in the hall, his brow furrowed, his golden robe trailing behind him in arcs.

The Guiyuan Sect, a human power, its sect leader Guiyuanzi, a third-rank Golden Immortal.

Not particularly strong, but not weak either.

If Kai’s divine soul was truly in the Guiyuan Sect, why hadn’t Guiyuanzi handed him over?

Was he unaware of the bounty?

Impossible.

The entire Northern Region knew about it the day after the bounty was issued.

As a prominent sect in the Northern Region, Guiyuan Sect couldn’t possibly be unaware of this.

There's only one explanation—Guiyuanzi deliberately concealed it, intending to keep the treasure for himself.

A cold glint flashed in Tianji Venerable's eyes, his killing intent radiating a palpable intensity that sent shivers down the spines of the guards on either side of the hall.

Guiyuanzi, a sect leader of a human race, dared to challenge him? He

was courting death.

What was he?

A mere human, worthy of coveting such a heaven-defying treasure?

In the eyes of the gods, other races were trash, inferior beings.

"Guards!" His voice was cold, so cold that no one dared disobey.

The guard outside the main hall hurried in, knelt on the ground, his body trembling slightly, his forehead pressed to the ground, not daring to raise his head: "Hall Master."

"Pass down the order. Elder Zhao, Elder Qian, Elder Sun, Elder Li, accompany me to Guiyuan Sect. I want to personally meet Guiyuanzi."

"Yes!"

The guard left the main hall and hurried to relay the order.

Venerable Tianji stood in the center of the main hall, his hands behind his back, his gaze looking into the distance through the doors and windows of the main hall.

A cold smile slowly curled at the corner of his mouth.

Guiyuanzi, I'll see if you dare to say to my face that his soul is not in Guiyuan Sect.

Venerable Tianji acted quickly.

In less than half an hour, the four Golden Immortal elders had already gathered in the square of Tianji Hall.

The square was paved with white jade, smooth and flat, reflecting a faint light under the sun.

Dozens of massive stone pillars stood around the plaza, their surfaces inscribed with the supreme runes of the divine race, shimmering with golden light in the sunlight.

Elder Zhao stood at the forefront, a second-grade Golden Immortal, his aura as powerful as a mountain.

He was tall, with an ancient face, his long, white hair tied back, and held a golden longsword in his hand, its blade gleaming with sharp light.

He cultivated metal-based techniques, specializing in direct attacks, and was the strongest person in the Heavenly Palace besides the Palace Master.

But at this moment, his face lacked its usual composure, replaced by a solemn expression.

Elder Qian stood behind him, a peak first-grade Golden Immortal, with a lean face and fair skin, holding a whisk.

He cultivated water-based techniques, specializing in support and trapping enemies, and had a gloomy personality, rarely speaking.

Elder Sun stood beside Elder Qian, also a peak first-grade Golden Immortal, with a burly build, broad shoulders and a powerful build, holding a massive warhammer.

He cultivated earth-based techniques, specializing in defense and suppression, and was known for his volatile temper, easily angered.

But now, however, his anger was suppressed, replaced by a hint of unease.

Elder Li stood at the very back, a first-grade Golden Immortal, the lowest in cultivation among the four.

He cultivated fire-based techniques, specializing in attack and burst damage, and

was known for his flamboyant personality and penchant for showing off. But now, he remained silent, head bowed, lost in thought.

The combined aura of the four formed a massive mountain, solidifying the air in the plaza.

The Celestial Venerable emerged from the hall, clad in a golden robe, a long sword at his waist, golden holy light swirling around him, exuding majesty.

His gait was steady, each step resounding firmly on the white jade floor.

He reached the center of the plaza, his gaze sweeping over the four elders, his eyes devoid of any warmth.

“The Guiyuan Sect isn’t large, and Guiyuanzi is a third-grade Golden Immortal. But I dislike trouble. Once you arrive at the Guiyuan Sect, don’t waste words; just ask for the person directly. If Guiyuanzi knows what’s good for him, hand over his soul, and I won’t pursue the matter. If he doesn’t…”

He didn’t finish his sentence, but his meaning was clear.

No need to say it aloud; everyone understood.

Elder Zhao stepped forward and whispered, “Palace Master, although Guiyuan Sect is not large, it is still a human sect. Won’t our direct demand for someone provoke dissatisfaction from other human forces? What if the Qingyun Sword Sect and the Wanfa Sect intervene…”

The Heavenly Extreme Venerable sneered, his eyes filled with contempt and disdain: “Qingyun Sword Sect? Wanfa Sect? Do they dare?”

He paused, his gaze sweeping across the distant horizon, his voice carrying an undeniable domineering air: “Even if they had a hundred lives, they wouldn’t dare oppose the Heavenly Extreme Palace. Besides, we’re not going to wipe out

an entire sect; we’re just going to demand one person. If Guiyuanzi can’t hand over the person, that’s his problem. If he can, everyone will be at peace. I want to see who dares to break ties with the Heavenly Extreme Palace for the sake of a mere Guiyuan Sect.”

Elder Zhao said no more and stepped aside.

The Palace Master was right. Although Guiyuan Sect was a human force, it had never been the core of humanity.

The Qingyun Sword Sect and the Wanfa Sect were the backbone of humanity in the Seventeenth Heaven.

What is the Guiyuan Sect?

Just a small, insignificant branch of the human race.

Those major human powers wouldn’t risk offending the Tianji Palace for the sake of the Guiyuan Sect.

The Tianji Venerable leaped into the air, transforming into a golden streak of light, flying towards the Guiyuan Sect.

His speed was extreme, leaving only a faint golden afterimage before vanishing instantly into the distance.

The four elders exchanged a glance and quickly followed, transforming into four golden beams of light.

Five golden beams streaked across the sky at incredible speed, traversing thousands of miles of mountains and rivers in an instant. Above, three blazing suns hung high, their golden, silver, and crimson rays intertwining and scattering, making the five golden beams exceptionally conspicuous. Guiyuan Sect, Front Hall.

The main hall is built of bluestone, simple and ancient, lacking the splendor of the Tianji Hall or the mysterious depths of the Demon Emperor's Palace.

The pillars in the hall are engraved with the achievements of the Guiyuan Sect's past patriarchs, each relief telling the story of the sect's history.

Inside the hall stands a tall statue of the patriarch, carved from the finest warm jade, lifelike, with a gentle smile in his eyes.

That is the patriarch of Taoism, the ancient master who comprehended the Great Luo Golden Scripture and founded the Taoist lineage, long since ascended to a higher realm.

Li Qingyun sat cross-legged on a futon, facing the patriarch's statue, yet unable to calm his mind.

His brows were furrowed, his eyelids twitched slightly, and a heavy weight pressed on his heart, making it hard to breathe.

Kai's trial was in the next two days, and Guiyuanzi was not in the sect.

His mind was preoccupied, making it impossible for him to cultivate in peace.

He opened his eyes, sighed, stood up, walked to the hall entrance, and gazed into the distance.

The sky was blue, the clouds were thin, and the wind was gentle.

Everything was calm, but his heart was far from calm.

Just then, a disciple stumbled in, his face pale, his voice trembling, his lips quivering, barely able to speak: “Elder Li… Elder Li! It’s terrible! The Hall Master of the Heavenly Pole Palace, Venerable Heavenly Pole, is flying towards our Guiyuan Sect with four Golden Immortal Elders! They’re… they’re almost at the mountain gate!”

Li Qingyun’s expression instantly changed. He abruptly stood up, grabbed the long sword at his waist, and strode out of the front hall.

His fingers trembled slightly, not from fear, but from anger.

The Heavenly Pole Palace was going too far; a bounty wasn’t enough, they had to come and search their own sect?

Did they really think the Guiyuan Sect was a pushover, to be bullied at will?

“Pass down the order: activate the mountain-protecting formation! All disciples, be on high alert!”

“Yes!”

The order echoed throughout the mountain gate, and disciples rushed out from all directions, weapons in hand, their expressions tense.

The mountain-protecting formation lit up, a pale golden light shield enveloping the entire mountain gate. Dense runes flowed across the shield, flickering and radiating powerful defensive energy.

But Li Qingyun knew that this formation couldn’t stop the Heavenly Venerable.

A Golden Immortal of the third rank was not someone a formation could withstand.

But this formation represented the Guiyuan Sect’s attitude—not just anyone could trespass.

Li Qingyun stood before the mountain gate, the veins bulging on his hand gripping his sword hilt.

His robes fluttered in the mountain wind, his gaze fixed on the distance, his eyes filled with vigilance.

The Heavenly Venerable arrived quickly.

Five golden streaks of light flew from the horizon, like five shooting stars, trailing long flames, landing before the Guiyuan Sect's mountain gate.

The golden light dissipated, revealing five figures before Li Qingyun.

Leading them was the Heavenly Venerable, clad in a long golden robe, his aura powerful and imposing.

His gaze fell upon Li Qingyun as if he were an insignificant ant. Behind him stood four Golden Immortal elders, their auras robust and their expressions cold, like four iron towers.

Li Qingyun took a deep breath, suppressing his fear, and clasped his hands in a respectful greeting. His hands trembled, but his voice remained steady.

"Junior Li Qingyun, Elder of the Guiyuan Sect, greets the Heavenly Venerable. The Sect Master is not in the sect; he has gone out on business. May I ask what brings you here, Venerable?"

"Going out on business?" The Heavenly Venerable sneered, a mocking smile playing on his lips. "What business?"

Li Qingyun hesitated, his mind racing.

He knew that if he didn't tell the truth, the Heavenly Venerable would search the sect.

It was better to confess than let him find out; at least it would make the Guiyuan Sect appear open and honest.

Moreover, the sect leader was indeed absent; they had indeed gone to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge—that was a fact, and even the Heavenly Venerable couldn't find any fault with it.

"The sect leader went to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge to request an audience with the Demon Emperor Qingqiu. As for the specifics, this junior does not know."

"The Ten Thousand Demon Ridge?"

The Heavenly Venerable's eyes narrowed slightly, a cold glint flashing within them. His voice suddenly deepened. "What did Guiyuanzi go to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge for? What did he want to see the Demon Emperor Qingqiu for?"

Li Qingyun shook his head: "This junior does not know."

The Heavenly Venerable stared at him, silent for a moment.

His gaze, sharp as a hawk's, swept over Li Qingyun.

Li Qingyun felt his very soul tremble, as if every thought of his was being seen through.

But he gritted his teeth, not allowing himself to reveal a flaw.

Then the Heavenly Venerable smiled. That smile was cold, so cold that it lowered the surrounding temperature, like the biting wind of December, piercing to the bone.

"You don't know? Fine, I'll ask you then. A few days ago, didn't Guiyuanzi bring back a wisp of purple divine soul?"

Li Qingyun's heart sank, as if gripped tightly by an invisible hand.

His expression changed slightly, but he quickly regained his composure.

He remained silent for a moment, his mind racing, weighing the pros and cons.

He knew he couldn't hide it any longer.

Since Venerable Tianji could find Guiyuan Sect, it meant he already had concrete clues.

If he denied it, Venerable Tianji would definitely search the sect.

Finding the Soul-Nourishing Jade Bottle in the secret chamber would only make things more troublesome.

He gritted his teeth and slowly spoke, his voice low and respectful: "Venerable One, it is true. But that soul was discovered by our sect leader during an inspection. At the time, the soul was on the verge of death, and the sect leader, out of kindness, brought it back to the Yuan Sect for recuperation.

We did not know that the soul was the target of the Heavenly Extreme Palace's pursuit. If we had known, we certainly would not have..."

"Enough nonsense." Venerable Heavenly Extreme interrupted him, his tone full of impatience, "Where is that soul now?"

Li Qingyun lowered his head, not daring to look into Venerable Heavenly Extreme's eyes, his voice carrying a hint of helpless sigh: "That soul was taken to the Myriad Demon Ridge by the sect leader."

Venerable Heavenly Extreme frowned, a trace of doubt and apprehension flashing in his eyes: "Took it to the Myriad Demon Ridge? What for?"

"The sect leader said that the soul needs the Eternal Soul Wood to reshape its physical body, so he took it to the Myriad Demon Ridge to obtain the Eternal Soul Wood." Venerable

Heavenly Extreme was silent for a moment, a trace of apprehension flashing in his eyes.

Myriad Demon Ridge, the territory of the Demon Emperor Qingqiu.

Although Qingqiu's cultivation was also at the third rank of Golden Immortal, the difference between him and Guiyuanzi was not significant.

Moreover, the demon race had been operating in the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge for tens of thousands of years, with numerous restrictions and dense formations, making it extremely dangerous for outsiders to break in.

Moreover, Qingqiu has always been xenophobic and dislikes associating with the gods.

If he rashly leads people to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge to demand the soul, it might provoke a backlash from the demons.

In that case, not only would he fail to obtain the soul, but he would also offend the demons and get himself into a lot of trouble.

But he was unwilling to not go.

That supreme treasure was right in front of him, and he couldn't just watch it slip away.

Guiyuanzi was taking the soul to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge to seek the Eternal Soul Wood. If Guiyuanzi succeeded, the supreme treasure would fall into Guiyuanzi's hands.

He couldn't allow that to happen.

"Let's go to the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge."

Venerable Tianji turned around, leaped into the air, and transformed into a golden streak of light, flying towards the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.

His speed was extremely fast, leaving only a faint golden afterimage.

He had to retrieve Kai's soul before Guiyuanzi obtained the Eternal Soul Wood.

The four elders exchanged glances and quickly followed.

Five golden lights pierced the sky and disappeared into the distance.

Before the mountain gate, only Li Qingyun and a group of Guiyuan Sect disciples remained, standing alone.

Li Qingyun stood before the gate, watching the five golden lights gradually disappear, his heart filled with worry.

His brows were furrowed, his fingers gripping the hilt of his sword tightly.

The young master was preparing for his trial at Wan Yao Ridge. If the Heavenly Venerable led his men to cause trouble at this time, Wan Yao Ridge would surely descend into chaos, and the young master might even die there.

He had to inform the sect leader as soon as possible.

He turned and strode into the sect, taking out a communication jade slip. He infused it with his divine sense, leaving a line of text.

His fingers trembled slightly, but the handwriting was clear and powerful.

"Sect Leader, the Heavenly Venerable has led his men to Wan Yao Ridge, targeting the young master. Please prepare immediately."

He held the jade slip in his palm, activating his spiritual power. The jade slip transformed into a stream of light and flew into the distance.

The light flashed and disappeared into the sky.

Li Qingyun stood at the entrance of the main hall, gazing in the direction where the stream of light had vanished, remaining silent for a long time.

The disciples behind him were still whispering amongst themselves, some fearful, some angry, some bewildered.

Li Qingyun remained silent. He turned and walked into the main hall, knelt before the statue of the patriarch, closed his eyes, and silently prayed.

“Patriarch above, I beg you to protect the young master’s safety, and to protect the Guiyuan Sect’s safety.”

Outside the hall, the wind had stopped, and the clouds had dispersed.

Three blazing suns hung high, their golden, silver, and crimson rays casting a dark golden glow upon the earth. Before the mist had fully dissipated over the northern region of the Seventeenth Heaven, Qingqiu personally led Kai and Guiyuanzi, braving the morning dew, straight to the entrance of the Primordial Soul Forest, the deepest part of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.

Along the way, countless demons lay dormant, spirit birds folded their wings, and the air was filled with an ancient and eerie aura of divine souls. Even Guiyuanzi, a Golden Immortal of the third rank, couldn’t help but appear solemn, daring not to slacken his guard in the slightest.

The entrance to the Primordial Soul Forest was hidden in a canyon deep within the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. It wasn’t an ordinary passage, but a massive stone gate that had stood for millennia.

The stone gate was about ten zhang high and five zhang wide, entirely constructed of unknown, dark, strange stones. Its surface was smooth as a mirror, yet it was covered with densely packed ancient soul race runes.

The runes, winding and twisting like rushing rivers or coiled serpents, shimmered with an eerie blue light in the dim canyon, exuding an

ancient majesty and eeriness, silently warning intruders of the perilous nature of this place.

Beneath the stone gate, two demon cultivators clad in black beast armor stood silently, their figures as upright as pine trees, their expressions solemn and cold, their auras refined, both possessing the cultivation of a ninth-grade True Immortal.

They gripped a jet-black spear tightly in their hands, its tip gleaming with a chilling light, guarding the stone entrance without even blinking, like two emotionless stone statues.

Qingqiu didn't stop, walking to the stone gate. His gaze swept over the two guards, his tone calm yet carrying an undeniable authority, uttering only one word: "Open."

As soon as he finished speaking, the two demon guards didn't hesitate, simultaneously plunging their spears into the pre-designated grooves in the ground. Their spiritual energy surged wildly, continuously pouring into the grooves.

In an instant, the ancient runes on the stone gate seemed to activate, a sudden burst of blue light. At first, it was just a faint point of light, then it grew brighter and brighter, becoming increasingly dazzling. The blue light intertwined and formed a massive net of light, enveloping the entire stone gate.

With a deep, rumbling sound, the stone gate slowly opened inwards. From the cracks, an extremely dense darkness and aura of divine souls rushed out. Inside, there was no ground, no sky, only boundless blackness, like an abyss that devoured everything.

In the darkness, crisscrossing paths could be vaguely seen, like a maze, winding and twisting into unknown depths, their end unseen, their hidden dangers unknown.

Qingqiu's voice came from behind, carrying a hint of warning and scrutiny: "The first trial, the Soul Forest Maze. This maze is no ordinary maze; it is filled with ancient Soul Clan restrictions and illusion arrays.

The restrictions will injure you upon contact, and the illusion arrays will bewitch your soul, distort your senses, and cause you to lose your way, ultimately trapping you within the maze, your soul slowly eroded away.

Only by guarding your true self, breaking through the illusion arrays, and finding the true exit can you enter the second trial. Remember, a disordered mind leads to a disordered soul, and a disordered soul leads to certain death."

Kai's purple soul trembled slightly. He didn't utter any unnecessary words; he knew that any words were meaningless at this moment. Only by passing the trial could he obtain the Eternal Soul Wood, rebuild his physical body, and avenge himself.

After a moment's hesitation, he transformed into a condensed purple streak of light and plunged into the stone gate without hesitation, instantly swallowed by the endless darkness.

The surroundings fell into deathly silence; there was no wind, no light, and he couldn't even sense his own existence. Only the boundless darkness enveloped him like a tidal wave, pressing down on his soul, making it feel slightly suffocated.

Kai's soul hovered in the void, the warm golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture automatically illuminating a three-foot radius around him, becoming the only light in this darkness, and his only support.

He steadied himself, urged his soul, and tried to fly forward, but after only a few dozen feet, the path ahead suddenly split into three. All three paths were identical, leading to endless darkness, without any markings or distinctions, as if mocking his ignorance and insignificance.

Kai didn't make a hasty decision. He focused his mind, activating the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, attempting to probe the aura of the three paths.

The golden light was immediately blocked by an invisible force in the darkness, making it impossible to detect anything.

Left with no other option, he relied on his intuition and chose the leftmost path, transforming into a purple ray and flying swiftly away.

After flying less than a hundred feet, a pitch-black stone wall suddenly appeared ahead. The wall was tall and thick, constructed entirely of mysterious black stone, and covered with countless ancient soul runes. The runes flickered with a faint blue light, emanating an eerie aura of restriction.

Kai's heart sank; he knew he had encountered the first restriction in the maze.

Without pausing, he activated the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, enveloping his divine soul, and tried to pass through the stone wall.

But the instant the golden light touched the wall, the soul runes on the stone wall suddenly lit up.

A violent black spiritual energy shockwave erupted instantly, slamming into the golden light with a muffled "bang." The golden light trembled violently, and Kai's divine soul was violently thrown back. A sharp pain shot through the depths of his soul, nearly causing it to dissipate.

"It's not a physical wall, it's a soul-binding restriction, specifically designed to target soul attacks,"

Kai thought to himself. He dared not attempt anything more rashly and could only slowly retreat back to the fork in the road, his expression grave.

Since the first path was blocked, he had no choice but to take the middle one. This time, he was exceptionally cautious, slowing his pace and constantly watching his surroundings. The golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture remained at its maximum, a vigilant defense.

This time, he flew for much longer than before, covering hundreds of feet. The surrounding darkness grew increasingly dense, like solidified ink. The golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture was constantly compressed, gradually shrinking from three feet to one foot,

and its radiance dimmed considerably. Even more terrifying, a strange force began to erode his soul. His consciousness gradually blurred, and he seemed to hear countless whispers.

There were familiar voices and unfamiliar roars; these voices entwined around his soul, as if countless invisible hands were tearing at his consciousness, pulling at his soul, trying to drag him into endless depravity.

“It’s an illusion array!”

Kai’s heart skipped a beat, and he instantly regained his senses.

He knew that once trapped in an illusion array, his mind would be lost, and his soul would be completely swallowed by the maze.

He gritted his teeth, enduring the stinging pain in his soul, and with all his might, activated the Great Luo Golden Scripture, frantically channeling the remaining spiritual power within his body into the golden light.

“Buzz—”

A deep Daoist sound rang out, and the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture suddenly surged, like a blazing sun, instantly dispelling the surrounding darkness for a moment.

In that fleeting moment of light, Kai vaguely saw the outline of the exit—just a hundred feet ahead, a faint blue light flickered, the marker for the maze's exit.

Just as he was about to sprint forward, the illusion array suddenly intensified, the surrounding scenery instantly distorted, the outline of the exit disappeared, and in its place appeared countless familiar figures.

Lin Yuan, Zhao Tieshan, Old Man Xu, and the dead disciples of Freedom Valley, covered in blood, stretched out their hands towards him, wailing softly, expressing endless pain and resentment.

"Kai, save us..." "Revenge...we must take revenge..."

Kai's soul trembled violently, grief and guilt surged into his heart, his consciousness blurred again, and his steps involuntarily stopped.

At this critical moment, deep within his sea of consciousness, Bei Mingyuan's voice suddenly rang out, cold and clear: "Kai, wake up! This is an illusion array! It's fake! You can't be deceived, have you forgotten your mission? Have you forgotten that you must rebuild your physical body and take revenge?"

Bei Mingyuan's voice was like a thunderclap, instantly awakening Kai.

He snapped back to his senses, a resolute glint in his eyes. Suppressing all his emotions, he ignored the illusions, channeling all his spiritual power into a streak of purple light, and charged towards the exit he remembered.

Illusions constantly interfered, countless eerie shadows lunging at him, but all were deflected by the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture.

A distance of several hundred feet now felt like an insurmountable chasm; with each inch he flew, the piercing pain in his soul intensified, and the interference of the illusion array grew stronger.

Just as he was about to give up, a blue light shone again ahead; the exit was near.

Kai gritted his teeth, mustered his last ounce of strength, broke free of the illusion array's constraints, and plunged into the exit.

Instantly, the darkness vanished, light flooded in, and he finally escaped the Soul Forest Maze.

Emerging from the maze, a vast, open square space unfolded before him, a stark contrast to the endless darkness within. The second level was a wide, square space.

The space was small, only a hundred feet in circumference, surrounded by towering, steep black rock walls carved with ancient soul runes that emitted a faint blue light, casting an eerie glow over the entire space.

In the very center of the space, a dense swarm of soul beasts gathered, their numbers immense—at least a hundred at a glance—a dark, overwhelming mass, exuding a thick, bloodthirsty aura that sent chills down one's spine.

These soul beasts were not physical entities, but rather formed from pure black mist, their shapes varied. Some resembled agile black wolves, baring their fangs and fierce eyes;

others were like majestic tigers, with thick limbs and an imposing presence;

some were like long, slithering snakes, their bodies nimble, their tongues flicking;

still others were like soaring eagles, their wingspans exceeding ten feet, their talons sharp and pointed.

Their eyes were all blood-red, like burning flames, flashing with a bloodthirsty light in the dim space, fixed intently on Kai at the entrance of the space.

A silent roar escaped its throat, as if it might pounce at any moment and tear his soul to shreds.

Kai's soul hovered at the entrance, tightly enveloped by the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, his expression extremely solemn.

He quickly probed the cultivation levels of these soul beasts, his heart sinking. Each soul beast's cultivation level was between the fifth and seventh rank of the True Immortal Realm, with more than a dozen reaching the peak of the ninth rank, only one step away from the Golden Immortal Realm.

Hundreds of True Immortal Realm soul beasts—if he had a physical body, he could easily defeat them with his own combat power.

But now he only had a weak wisp of soul left, and the power he could use was extremely limited. Although the Great Luo Golden Scripture could protect his soul and withstand soul attacks, it could not initiate attacks, only passively defend.

"I can't fight head-on, I can only outsmart them."

Kai quickly calculated in his mind, his eyes fixed on the group of soul beasts, trying to find their weaknesses.

Soul beasts are formed from divine souls, and their attacks are purely divine soul attacks. The Great Luo Golden Scripture, however, perfectly counters all divine soul attacks, meaning these soul beasts cannot harm him.

Conversely, he lacks offensive means and cannot kill these soul beasts. Once entangled, his divine soul will be continuously depleted, and the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture will eventually dim and dissipate. At that point, he will still be devoured by the soul beasts.

After a moment of silence, Kai made a bold and risky decision.

He wouldn’t engage the soul beasts, but instead flew directly towards the other end of the space. As long as he escaped this space, he would have passed the second trial.

He knew this was the only way out, and also the most dangerous. Once entangled by the soul beasts, escape would be difficult.

Having made up his mind, Kai no longer hesitated, activating the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, transforming it into a purple stream of light, and rushing towards the horde of soul beasts.

He didn’t take a detour, but instead passed directly through the center of the horde, attempting to escape the space as quickly as possible.

Seeing the purple light approach, the soul beasts were instantly enraged, letting out silent roars as they surged forward like a tidal wave, their dense shadows covering the entire sky.

Their claws, fangs, and tails all aimed at Kai’s soul, each attack carrying a violent soul-shaking force, attempting to tear apart the golden light protection of the Great Luo Golden Scripture.

“Bang! Bang! Bang!”

A series of impacts rang out, the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture trembled violently, rippling outwards, yet it steadily blocked all attacks.

Those soul beasts at the forefront were bounced back the moment their claws touched the golden light; some were severely injured by the recoil, their black mist dissipating significantly.

Several weaker soul beasts were even shattered by the recoil, turning into a sky full of black mist that vanished into the void.

These soul beasts seemed to feel no pain or fear. They charged relentlessly, wave after wave, their attacks like a never-ending tide.

Although the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture was sturdy, it gradually dimmed under the continuous onslaught of hundreds of True Immortal Realm soul beasts. Kai's soul, weakened by the constant drain, grew increasingly painful.

Even more terrifying, the higher-level True Immortal Realm ninth-grade soul beasts seemed to have sensed the weakness of the golden light. They ceased their blind attacks and instead gathered together, unleashing a massive black soul shockwave that slammed into Kai.

This shockwave was incredibly powerful, stronger than the combined attack of a dozen or so soul beasts alone. Upon impacting the golden

light, it instantly caved in, nearly shattering. Kai's soul was violently shaken, spitting out a mouthful of soul blood, and the purple light dimmed slightly.

"This can't go on, we have to speed it up!"

Kai thought to himself, gritting his teeth and using all his strength to activate the remaining spiritual power in his body, pouring it into the Great Luo Golden Scripture. The golden light surged again, temporarily blocking the soul beast's attack.

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Taking advantage of the brief opening, he flashed forward, accelerating towards the exit at the end of the space.

Seeing this, the soul beasts gave chase. Those peak seventh-grade soul beasts were incredibly fast, relentlessly attacking him, trying to entangle him.

Kai desperately fled ahead, the soul beasts in hot pursuit, their black soul attacks constantly striking the golden light, each impact causing excruciating pain to his soul.

His speed gradually slowed, and the golden light dimmed. Just as he was about to be overtaken by the soul beasts, he finally saw the exit at the end of the space.

A faint white light, like hope in the darkness, guided him forward. A

resolute glint flashed in Kai's eyes. He mustered his last bit of spiritual power, transforming into a streak of intense purple light, breaking through the encirclement of the soul beasts behind him, and plunged into the exit.

Behind him, the soul beasts roared in despair, their cries mournful, but they were blocked by the spatial restrictions, unable to pursue him out of the exit. They could only howl madly in the space, watching helplessly as Kai escaped.

Having broken through the second barrier, Kai's soul hovered in the void, trembling violently. The purple light had dimmed to its lowest point, and the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture had also weakened. His soul was exhausted, as if it would collapse at any moment.

Kai could only rest for the time being. He hadn't expected that even the Great Luo Golden Scripture would be unable to withstand this barrier.

" Kai, have you ever considered that these barriers might be fake?" At this moment, Bei Mingyuan suddenly spoke up.

"Fake?" Kai was taken aback.

"The Great Luo Golden Scripture is a treasure of the Daoist patriarch, even several Golden Immortals couldn't do anything to it. How come it's struggling to withstand the attacks of True Immortal Realm soul beasts here?"

Bei Mingyuan asked.

Kai thought about it, and it was indeed the case. Even with several Golden Immortals, the Heavenly Extreme Venerable couldn't break through the protection of the Great Luo Golden Scripture.

How come the attacks of these True Immortal Realm soul beasts were making the protection of the Great Luo Golden Scripture weaker and weaker?

Could it be that these barriers were all fake, and everything was an illusion?

Kai stopped speaking and slowly closed his eyes, immersing himself in emptiness.

With only his soul remaining, he couldn't use the Origin of Illusion, unable to discern whether he was still within an illusion, and could only rely on time to comprehend it.

Kai's soul hovered in the void at the exit of the second trial, its purple light dim and its golden light flickering uncertainly.

Around him was a void, without heaven or earth, without direction, only endless gray-white mist slowly flowing, enveloping him.

This was a buffer zone between the second and third trials, a place for rest and a chance for those who had overcome the trials to catch their breath.

The golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture was slowly recovering, the residual medicinal power of the Soul Nourishing Liquid was being absorbed little by little, and Kai's soul was gradually warming up, but he didn't rush forward.

Bei Mingyuan's words echoed repeatedly in his mind: "These trials are all fake."

Fake.

He closed his eyes; the stinging pain from the depths of his soul brought him back to his senses, but also filled him with doubt. Even

with the combined efforts of the Heavenly Supreme Venerable and several Golden Immortals activating the ancient Soul Refining Array, they hadn't been able to harm the Great Luo Golden Scripture in the slightest.

Yet here, a mere group of True Immortal Realm soul beasts could dim the golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture and cause his soul to tremble.

This was illogical.

The Great Luo Golden Scripture's defense was absolute, a power surpassing the Golden Immortal level; how could it be shaken by True Immortal Realm soul beasts?

Unless—the attacks of these soul beasts weren't real at all.

The damage they caused wasn't actual damage to the soul, but a mental illusion.

It was the illusion array's technique that made his soul "think" he was injured, so the golden light "thought" it needed to expend more power to resist, thus dimming.

Kai's soul brightened slightly.

He remembered that in the Celestial Realm, Bai Qian had told him that the Fox Clan's greatest strength wasn't attack, but illusion.

A true master of illusion didn't crush you with brute force, but made your five senses, soul, and even your Dao heart believe that everything before you was real.

If your body believed you were injured, you would truly be injured.

If your soul believed you were attacked, your spiritual power would truly be depleted.

This Primordial Soul Forest was originally the territory of the demon race.

And what were the demon race's greatest skills? Illusion.

He slowly opened his eyes; the purple halo stopped flickering, becoming steady and resolute.

He didn't rush to the third trial, but instead floated cross-legged, closed his eyes, and focused his mind, sinking his consciousness deep into his sea of consciousness.

The golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture slowly flowed around him, no longer expanding outwards, but converging inwards, inch by inch, returning to his soul.

The golden light grew weaker and weaker, finally almost completely dissipating.

Kai's soul was exposed in the grayish-white mist. Without the golden light protecting him, he felt no stinging pain.

The mist was cold, but it didn't corrode his soul.

He smiled.

Just as he expected.

The attacks of those soul beasts, the damage from those restrictions, were all illusions.

The golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture had never been depleted from the beginning; it was merely cooperating with his perception to create the illusion of being "attacked."

If he had continued to believe it was real, he would have truly been trapped in the illusion array, never able to escape.

Bei Mingyuan's voice rang out again, tinged with a hint of relief: "You finally understand. The trials of the Primordial Soul Forest didn't test your combat strength, but your state of mind.

The Soul Forest Maze tested whether you could hold onto your true self when lost.

The battle against the Soul Beasts tested whether you could see through illusions in dire straits.

What truly trapped you was never the Soul Forest, but your own heart."

Kai nodded, saying nothing more.

He stood up, transforming into a purple streak of light, and flew towards the third trial.

This time, he didn't activate the golden light protecting him from the Great Luo Golden Scripture, but instead exposed himself naked in the grayish-white mist.

The mist flowed past him without harming him in the slightest.

Just as Kai was comprehending the true meaning of the illusion array, five golden rays of light pierced the sky above the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, like five burning meteors, trailing long flames, rushing towards the Demon Emperor's Palace.

The five golden beams moved with incredible speed, tearing through the sky and emitting piercing shrieks. The demonic beasts of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge were so terrified that they collapsed to the ground, too afraid to move.

A powerful pressure poured down from the sky, like Mount Tai bearing down, causing the entire mountain range to tremble slightly.

Qingqiu was drinking tea in a side hall. She picked up her white jade teacup, took a small sip, and her amber eyes remained completely calm, as if she had long anticipated this moment.

She put down her teacup, stood up, her long white dress trailing on the ground with a soft rustling sound.

She walked to the entrance of the side hall, looked up at the sky, and a slight smile curved her lips.

“Lord Tianji, you’ve come after all.”

From the moment Lord Tianji issued the bounty, Qingqiu knew he would definitely return; it was only a matter of time. Gui Yuanzi emerged from another side hall, his expression grave, his brows furrowed.

He strode to Qingqiu’s side and whispered, “Your Majesty, the Heavenly Venerable’s arrival is ill-intentioned. The young master is still undergoing trials in the Ancient Soul Forest. If they interrupt him…”

He didn’t finish his sentence, but his meaning was clear.

Qingqiu waved her hand, her tone calm yet carrying an undeniable authority: “The Ancient Soul Forest is a forbidden area of our demon race; outsiders cannot enter. No matter how strong the Heavenly Venerable is, he wouldn’t dare to force his way in. I will stop them. You just need to guard the entrance and not let anyone disturb Kai’s trials.”

She paused, then added, “If I can’t stop them, you take Kai and leave. Under no circumstances can he fall into the hands of the Heavenly Venerable.”

Gui Yuanzi immediately bowed: “Your Majesty, rest assured, I will not fail in my mission.”

Five golden lights landed on the plaza in front of the Demon Emperor’s Palace. As the golden light dissipated, five figures appeared.

Leading the group was Venerable Tianji, clad in a long golden robe, a long sword at his waist, golden holy light swirling around him, exuding an aura

of majesty. Behind him stood four Golden Immortal elders: Elder Zhao, Elder Qian, Elder Sun, and Elder Li, their powerful auras radiating oppressive force.

The demon guards on the plaza gripped their weapons tightly upon seeing the newcomer, their expressions tense, yet none flinched.

Though their cultivation was inferior to the Golden Immortal elders of Tianji Palace, this was demon territory, and they could not retreat.

Venerable Tianji didn't even glance at the demon guards, his gaze fixed directly on the direction of the Demon Emperor's Palace. His voice, like muffled thunder, echoed throughout the valley: "Qingqiu, I have arrived. Come out and greet me."

The hall doors slowly opened, and Qingqiu emerged, dressed in snow-white robes, her long hair as black as ink, her figure aloof and untouched by worldly concerns.

She walked slowly to the center of the plaza, stopping before Venerable Tianji. Her amber eyes were calm and unwavering, and her tone was equally indifferent: "The Venerable Tianji's presence is an honor to Wan Yao Ling. May I ask what brings

you here?" Venerable Tianji didn't mince words, getting straight to the point: "Is Guiyuanzi with you? Is that purple divine soul also with you?"

Qingqiu didn't deny it. "Guiyuanzi is indeed a guest at Wan Yao Ling. As for the purple divine soul you mentioned, I don't know what you're referring to.

" The Venerable's eyes narrowed. "Qingqiu, I don't like beating around the bush. Guiyuanzi brought that purple divine soul from Guiyuan Sect; someone witnessed it.

Hand it over, and I'll leave immediately. If you don't, I don't mind personally searching your Ten Thousand Demon Ridge."

Qingqiu's lips curled slightly, her smile cold. "Palace Master Tianji, what arrogance! Ten Thousand Demon Ridge is the territory of the demon race, not your Tianji Palace. You think you can just search it as you please? I'd like to ask, what qualifications do you have?" The

Venerable's face darkened.

He hadn't expected Qingqiu to be so assertive, much less that she would turn against the Tianji Palace for an outsider.

In his eyes, Qingqiu was merely a mid-stage Golden Immortal, a minor demon emperor, utterly unworthy to challenge him, a peak third-grade Golden Immortal.

"Qingqiu, I'm only speaking politely to you out of respect. Don't be ungrateful."

The Venerable's voice was icy, golden holy light surging around him, his pressure crushing towards Qingqiu like a mountain, attempting to force her to submit with his aura.

Qingqiu remained motionless. A faint white spiritual light shone around her, the primordial power of the Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox, gentle yet resilient, completely blocking the pressure from the Heavenly Venerable.

Although her cultivation was inferior to the Heavenly Venerable, this was the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, protected by ancient restrictions, making her combat power far superior to that outside.

"Palace Master of the Heavenly Palace, I'll say it again, the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge is not a place for you to run wild. I don't care if you want that purple divine soul, but you cannot search within the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. This is the rule, and the bottom line."

Qingqiu's voice was calm, but every word carried weight.

The Heavenly Venerable fell silent.

His gaze lingered on Qingqiu's face for a long time, then swept over the Demon Emperor's Palace behind her, as if weighing the consequences of his actions.

Just then, Guiyuanzi emerged from a side hall, standing beside Qingqiu, a cyan longsword in his hand, its spiritual light swirling, his expression cold and stern.

He didn't speak, but his attitude was clear: he stood by Qingqiu.

The Celestial Venerable sneered, "Guiyuanzi, you, a mere sect leader of the Guiyuan Sect, dare to oppose me?"

Guiyuanzi remained composed, his tone calm: "Your Highness, I have no intention of being an enemy of the Celestial Palace. However, that soul was brought back by me, and I cannot ignore its affairs. I beg Your Highness's understanding."

"Understand?"

The Celestial Venerable laughed, his laughter filled with mockery. "You, a mere cultivator who has just entered the third rank of Golden Immortal, dare to ask for my understanding? Very well, since you are so ungrateful, I will personally take action and show you what it means to be outmatched."

He raised his right hand, golden holy light condensing in his palm, transforming into a gigantic golden sword of light.

The sword was ten zhang long, its blade covered with dense runes, each rune containing the power of Golden Immortal laws, radiating a world-destroying pressure.

He slashed down with his sword, the golden sword light cleaving towards the Demon Emperor's Palace.

Qingqiu did not retreat.

She raised her right hand, fingers spread, and a white spiritual light surged from her palm. The light transformed into a gigantic phantom of a nine-tailed celestial fox, baring its fangs and roaring as it charged towards the golden sword light.

“Boom—!”

The white spiritual light collided with the golden sword light, unleashing a deafening roar.

The entire valley trembled, the ground cracked, and debris flew everywhere.

Qingqiu was blasted back several steps, a trickle of blood escaping from the corner of her mouth, but her posture remained upright, her eyes still resolute.

Her cultivation was inferior to that of a Heavenly Supreme Venerable; in a head-on clash, she was no match. The Celestial Venerable gave her no chance to breathe.

He raised his hand again, and golden holy light condensed into a second sword beam, even sharper and more domineering than the first.

He didn’t want to kill Qingqiu, but he wanted to at least render her incapable of resistance.

Just then, Guiyuanzi moved.

He took a step forward, blocking Qingqiu’s path, his cyan longsword unsheathed, its blade shimmering with cyan spiritual light, spiritual power surging, and he unleashed a slash.

The cyan sword beam collided with the golden sword beam, producing another deafening roar. Guiyuanzi was blasted back more than ten steps,

his arm numb, his tiger's mouth split open, blood flowing down the hilt of his sword.

But he had blocked it.

The Celestial Venerable's expression changed.

He wasn't shocked by Guiyuanzi's strength, but by his determination.

A mere sect leader of the Guiyuan Sect dared to attack him; this was courting death.

"Guiyuanzi, are you insane?" The Celestial Venerable's voice was cold.

Gui Yuanzi wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth, raised his head, and looked at Tianji Venerable. His voice was hoarse but firm: "Palace Master, I'm not crazy. I'm just doing what I should do. That soul is very important to me, and I won't let it fall into anyone's hands."

Qingqiu also stood beside Gui Yuanzi again. The two stood side by side, one in white and one in green, their two figures standing out conspicuously in the golden pressure.

"Your opponent is me."

Qingqiu's voice was soft, but every word seemed to be carved into stone. "Palace Master Tianji, this is not your Tianji Palace, this is the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. I will not allow you to run wild here."

Tianji Venerable clenched his fists.

He wanted to kill Qingqiu, wanted to kill Gui Yuanzi, wanted to rush into the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge to find that soul.

But he couldn't—at least not now.

Although Qingqiu's strength was not as good as his, with the support of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge and the help of Gui Yuanzi, he couldn't kill them in a short time, and might even be killed in return.

And once he made a move, it would be equivalent to completely breaking ties with the demon race.

At that time, the Heavenly Palace's situation in the Seventeenth Heaven would be even more difficult.

He took a deep breath, suppressing the anger in his heart.

"Good, good, good."

He said "good" three times in a row, each word seemingly squeezed out from between his teeth, carrying an uncontrollable rage.

He looked at Qingqiu, then at Guiyuanzi, his eyes filled with killing intent.

"Qingqiu, Guiyuanzi, I will remember you. I will not let this matter rest. I will

obtain that purple divine soul sooner or later. You can protect him for a while, but not forever. When I obtain that divine soul, Guiyuan Sect and Wanyao Ridge will pay the price."

He turned around, leaped into the air, and transformed into a golden streak of light, flying into the distance.

The four Golden Immortal Elders hurriedly followed, five golden lights piercing the sky and disappearing into the horizon.

On the plaza, Qingqiu and Guiyuanzi stood side by side, watching the five golden lights gradually disappear, remaining silent for a long time.

“Your Majesty, you are injured.” Gui Yuanzi turned his head, looking at the bloodstains at the corner of Qingqiu’s mouth, his tone full of guilt. “I am incompetent and have implicated Your Majesty.”

Qingqiu shook her head, raised her hand to wipe the bloodstains from the corner of her mouth, and said in a calm tone, “It’s nothing, just a minor injury. I have lived for tens of thousands of years, this injury is nothing. But you, you took a sword strike from the Heavenly Venerable and are seriously injured.”

Gui Yuanzi gave a bitter smile, “I’m fine. It’s just that the Heavenly Venerable won’t let this go. He retreated this time not because he was afraid of us, but because he was afraid of provoking a joint resistance from the demon race and the human race. Next time he comes, it will probably not be so easy to deal with him.”

Qingqiu was silent for a moment, “I know. But we can hold out for as long as possible. As long as Kai obtains the Eternal Soul Wood and reshapes his physical body, we will have hope of turning the tide. As for what happens after that, we’ll talk about it later.”

She turned around and walked towards the Demon Emperor’s Palace.

After taking a few steps, she stopped and did not look back.

“Guiyuanzi, that divine soul— Kai, who exactly is he? Is he worthy of your Guiyuan Sect’s desperate efforts, worthy of my clan’s trust?”

Guiyuanzi thought for a moment, then said sincerely, “Your Majesty, I don’t know who he is. But I know that the Great Luo Golden Scripture chose him, and the fate of the Daoist sect rests on him. I believe he is worthy.”

Qingqiu didn’t speak again and walked into the Demon Emperor’s Palace. The palace

doors slowly closed, obscuring her figure.

Guiyuanzi stood in the square, gazing in the direction of the Primordial Soul Forest, silently praying: Young Master, you must pass the trial, you must come out alive. The Heavenly Venerable has retreated, but the time left for them is running out.

He turned and walked into the side hall, sat cross-legged, and closed his eyes to heal his injuries.

Spiritual energy slowly circulated within his body, repairing the meridians injured by the Heavenly Venerable.

His face was pale, but his eyes remained resolute.

Outside the window, three blazing suns hung high, their silver, gold, and crimson rays intertwining and scattering, dyeing the entire earth a dark gold.

In the distance, the stone gate of the Primordial Soul Forest remained tightly shut. Deep within the darkness, Kai's soul was undergoing its final trial.

He was unaware that he had already passed the second trial, unaware of what was happening outside, and unaware that the Celestial Venerable had just visited the Myriad Demon Ridge.

He only knew that he needed to obtain the Eternal Soul Wood as soon as possible and reshape his physical body.

Because many people were waiting for him, and many things awaited his attention. In the heart of the Ancient Soul Forest, the afterimages of the second trial's battle against the soul beasts completely dissipated, the violent shockwaves of divine souls slowly subsided, and the entire space returned to deathly silence.

A thin mist, interwoven with black and white, slowly surged and flowed, like smoke and haze, shrouding the path ahead. The mist was neither cold nor fierce, neither harsh nor malevolent.

It lacked the bone-chilling coldness of the first two trials, which devoured divine souls, and the bewitching chaos of illusionary arrays; it was eerily calm.

Kai's purple divine soul concealed all its sharpness, withdrawing the golden light protecting him with the Great Luo Golden Scripture, carrying neither defense nor vigilance.

Naked and light, he floated along the direction of the flowing mist, slowly flying towards the inevitable entrance to the third trial.

This was a choice he had carefully considered.

The first two trials—one a mentally devastating array, the other a battle of soul beasts—were both externally locked down, their killing intent exposed. He had only survived by relying on the Great Luo Golden Scripture's protection, his agility, and his tenacious will to the death.

The more outwardly dangerous the obstacle, the easier it is to overcome; the truly deadly trials are never the obvious clashes of swords or the impact on the soul, but rather the silent, intangible tests of the mind.

The third trial, placed last, is certainly different from the head-on battles of the first two. If one still clings to a defensive, brute-force approach, one is more likely to fall into the trial's hidden traps, causing one's mental defenses to crumble first, one's soul to become chaotic, and one to collapse without a fight.

It's better to let go of all defenses, go with the flow, face the trial with one's true nature, and connect with the Dao through one's soul.

Wisps of warm mist brushed across Kai's soul, cool and moist to the touch, like the lingering dew of a deep mountain morning, gently adhering to the texture of his soul, without erosion, tearing, or disturbance, without a trace of malice.

Instead, it exuded a distant and ancient aura, as if the peaceful essence accumulated over countless ages, encompassing all the past and accepting all joys and sorrows.

There was no stinging, no tremors, no hallucinations, no whispers of inner demons, only tranquility.

Kai traveled at a steady pace, unhurried and unhurried, his divine soul suspended in the center of the mist, drifting gently with the current, allowing the ancient aura around him to nourish his severely depleted divine soul essence.

He flew onward, his mind empty, not dwelling on the deep-seated hatred, not worrying about rebuilding his physical body, not anxious about the future, only quietly appreciating the unique serenity of this mist.

About the time it takes to brew a cup of tea passed, when the surging black and white mist ahead suddenly parted, like tides yielding to a king, revealing a gentle, warm gate of light at the edge of his vision.

This gate was not grand or tall, only about ten feet high, its entire body formed from pure, pale golden light. The halo flowed softly and restrainedly, neither dazzling, domineering, nor intimidating, but warm and soothing, gently permeating the mind and spirit.

Compared to the oppressive darkness of the first labyrinth and the bloodthirsty killing intent of the second soul beast space, the entrance to the third level seemed like two completely different worlds, a stark contrast that instantly relaxed his tense nerves.

Without hesitation, without testing, without wariness, Kai’s soul stirred slightly, transforming into a condensed and gentle purple light, plunging into the pale golden light gate.

The next instant, the world spun, light and shadow shifted, and the surrounding space instantly changed.

The scene before him suddenly opened up, completely transformed.

The third level was neither a complex and captivating underground labyrinth, nor a closed and cramped trial chamber besieged by soul beasts, nor a perilous place filled with killing intent and restrictions, but rather a quiet and peaceful forest retreat, untouched by the world.

The entire forest was not large, only a hundred feet in circumference, with gently undulating terrain, soft and fertile soil, lush green grass, and countless tiny spiritual flowers blooming quietly, their fragrance subtly permeating the air.

The trees in the forest were sparse and scattered, not dense or crowded, their branches spreading out, lush and green, showing no trace of the eerie, withered trees and chilling atmosphere of the outer perimeter of the Ancient Soul Forest.

Warm sunlight filtered through the gaps in the tree canopy

, scattering like scattered gold across the ground, dappled with light and shadow, swaying gently in the breeze, gentle and pleasing. There was no murderous aura of soul battles, no bloodthirsty stench of soul beasts, only the pure fragrance of grass and trees, the delicate scent of spiritual flowers, intertwined and refreshing, nourishing the soul.

From afar, the occasional clear, melodious birdsong echoed from the forest, its gentle notes resonating and adding a touch of life to this tranquil woodland.

This was no dangerous trial ground; it was clearly a secluded paradise hidden in a chaotic world, far from the killing, a perfect secret realm for quiet cultivation.

Kai’s purple divine soul hovered silently in mid-air at the edge of the forest. With a slight thought, the protective golden light of the Great Luo Golden Scripture subconsciously shone forth, illuminating only a three-foot radius around him. It wasn’t for defense, but solely to probe the surroundings, guarding against any hidden attacks.

His gaze swept across the surroundings, meticulously examining every inch of woodland, every tree, every inch of air.

The forest was calm and still, the vegetation growing peacefully. There were no hidden restrictions, no concealed illusion arrays, no lurking soul beast pressure, not even the slightest hint of hidden killing intent or sinister schemes.

Quiet, too quiet.

Peaceful, too peaceful.

The tranquility felt unreal, the gentleness unsettling.

Kai pondered silently, speaking to himself with a cautious tone: “The first three trials are progressively more difficult. The first two are life-or-death battles, extremely dangerous, yet the final trial is completely devoid of any killing intent or warning. This anomaly is definitely not a good thing.

The safer something seems, the more dangerous it may be. The test of this trial is not in the fighting, but elsewhere.”

Deep within his sea of consciousness, the remnant soul of Bei Mingyuan slowly awakened, its voice carrying the wisdom and understanding accumulated over countless years, echoing softly: “You’re right. The Soul Tree takes wood, the Soul Tree takes wood. People all think they’re taking wood, seizing treasures, seeking the opportunity to reshape their physical bodies, but that’s not the case.

This final trial is never about taking wood, never about refining cultivation, never about protecting the soul, but about protecting your heart.”

“Heart?” Kai’s soul stirred slightly, asking in confusion.

“Yes, it’s the heart.”

Bei Mingyuan explained slowly, his tone solemn. “On the path of trials, external forces can be overcome, but the inner demons are the hardest to conquer. No matter how strong your combat power, you can fight head-on;

no matter how high your wisdom, you can see through illusions; but the obsessions, love, hate, grudges, and severance of the human heart are the hardest to understand and the hardest to let go of.

Follow the guidance of my divine sense and look towards the center of the forest. That is your destination on this journey, and also the source of your inner demons in this tribulation.”

Kai did as he was told, looking up in the direction indicated by Bei Mingyuan’s divine sense. His gaze pierced through the sparse trees and reached the very center of the forest.

In the core of the clearing, an ancient tree stood quietly, all alone, neither leaning nor relying on anything, neither humble nor arrogant, standing at the very center where the spiritual energy of the entire forest converged. The ancient tree wasn’t particularly towering or thick, only about the size of two people’s embrace. Its trunk was straight and upright, neither bent nor broken, its dark brown bark rough and thick, covered with a dense network of fine, varying shades of natural veins.

These veins meandered and intertwined, their shapes bizarre and varied; some

twisted and contorted like distorted faces of people struggling in agony and wailing in despair; others stretched out like rivers of time, flowing ceaselessly across the ages.

Wisps of dark light emanated from beneath the bark’s veins, neither menacing nor malevolent, yet exuding a profound aura of antiquity and the weight of time.

The ancient tree was lush with leaves, their deep green hue warm and smooth, each leaf like a carefully sculpted piece of natural jade, its veins clear and its luster subtly understated.

Bathed in the warm sunlight, they shimmered with layers of soft, warm light, vibrant with life, a stark contrast to the dark, ancient trunk.

An ancient, soul-stirring tree.

The three essential treasures for reshaping the physical body, the core foundation upon which Kai had traversed the wasteland, braved three trials, and survived countless near-death experiences, were now within reach, right before his eyes.

Kai's purple divine soul suddenly glowed faintly, the hope suppressed in his heart for many days quietly surging forth. The desire for revenge, returning to his homeland, and seeing his old friends again instantly welled up in his mind.

However, he forcibly suppressed his agitation, still not rashly stepping forward to seize them. Instead, he stopped in place, carefully scanning the surrounding forest again, repeatedly confirming whether there were any hidden guardian soul beasts, deadly restrictions, or fatal illusion arrays.

He probed again and again, sensed again and again, but the result remained the same—no danger, no killing, no protection, no restriction.

The entire forest was only peaceful, only ancient, with only the ancient soul trees standing silently, nothing else.

Bei Mingyuan spoke again, his tone calm yet revealing an unwavering certainty: "No need to search anymore, searching more is useless.

This third trial has no traps, no restrictions, no illusion arrays, no guardian soul beasts—all external killing intent is gone. The trial is never about external things, but only about your heart."

“It doesn’t test your combat strength, your intelligence, or your speed; it only tests three things.”

“First, whether you dare to take this heaven-defying opportunity, and whether you dare to bear the endless karma behind it.” “Second

, whether you are willing to let go of your obsessions and resonate with the essence of the Soul Wood with your pure soul.” “Third

, after you take the Soul Wood, whether you can withstand the backlash of the obsessions of countless losers, never forgetting your original intention, never changing your true nature, and never going astray.”

Kai remained silent for a long time, his soul fluctuating, a thousand thoughts flashing through his mind.

He carried the burden of a blood feud, the debt of blood owed to his fellow disciples, the unwavering desire to return to the Sixteenth Heaven, and the mission to revitalize the Daoist sect and continue the legacy of his ancestor.

His obsessions were deep, his heart heavy, love and hate intertwined, entangled in grudges—how difficult it was to achieve a mind free of distractions and pure innocence!

But he had no other choice.

For his physical body, for revenge, for all those who had perished, no matter how difficult, he had to do it.

Without further hesitation, Kai transformed into a soft purple light, slowly flying to the trunk of the Eternal Soul Wood, hovering steadily.

He concentrated his mind, his divine soul power condensing into a semi-transparent, illusory palm, which he gently extended and firmly placed on the rough, cold trunk of the Eternal Soul Wood.

The touch was cool, yet the texture was smooth, like touching ten-thousand-year-old jade, a delicate and unique sensation. A faint, ancient divine soul aura slowly emanated from his palm, peaceful and profound, neither agitated nor fierce.

Kai exerted a slight force, attempting to uproot the Eternal Soul Tree and forcibly take it away.

The trunk remained unmoved, as stable as Mount Tai, rooted in the void, not shifting an inch.

He added three-tenths of his divine soul power, fully activating his primal power, but it was still useless. The ancient tree remained rooted, as if it had merged with this world and this void, unshakable in the slightest.

Kai frowned slightly, puzzled. “What’s going on? Ordinary spirit wood can be easily uprooted with a divine soul, but this soul wood seems to have no protection. Why can’t it be moved by brute force?”

Bei Mingyuan chuckled bitterly and slowly explained, “You still don’t understand.

The Eternal Soul Wood is not an ordinary plant. It doesn’t take root in the soil, the mountains, or the spiritual veins. It takes root in the origin of the void of the heavens, in the obsession of countless ages, and is one with the Primordial Soul Forest, sharing the same origin and coexisting.”

“You try to pull it out with external force, to seize it with brute force. Even if a fourth or fifth-grade Golden Immortal came in person, let alone a wisp of your remnant soul, it wouldn’t budge an inch.”

“To obtain it, one need not force, nor coercion, nor robbery, but resonance.

When the soul merges with the soul tree, and the heart harmonizes with time, it will recognize your heart, your path, and your convictions. Without your intervention, it will naturally bestow itself upon you.

If it does not recognize you, you may search every mountain and forest, destroy the void, but all in vain.” Upon

hearing this, Kai instantly understood. He abandoned his brute force, withdrew his illusory hand, slowly closed his soul eyes, concealing all sharpness and eliminating all distracting thoughts.

He immersed all his divine consciousness deep within the trunk of the ancient soul tree, rejecting all external interference, emptying his mind, and eliminating all restlessness.

He did not think of the excruciating pain of his destroyed body, the overwhelming grief of his tragic death in Freedom Valley, the deep-seated hatred for the gods, the grand scheme of battle after reshaping his body, or the perilous road ahead and the surrounding enemies.

With no thought arising, all thoughts vanished; only his true heart remained, quietly comprehending.

At first, his divine sense sank into the Soul Wood, finding only boundless darkness, deathly silence, and utter emptiness.

There were no fluctuations in energy, no echoes of time, no lingering attachments; it was as if he had fallen into an endless void, a silence

so profound it was unsettling. Kai remained patient, neither arrogant nor impatient, calmly and attentively waiting, silently sensing, steadfast and unwavering.

He didn’t know how much time had passed—perhaps a fleeting moment, or perhaps countless ages.

Deep within the boundless darkness, a faint light slowly began to flicker, tiny as a bean, dim and weak, like a candle in the wind, teetering on the verge of extinction, as if it would vanish completely at any moment.

Kai's heart stirred slightly. He cautiously activated his divine sense, slowly approaching, gently touching it, daring not to disturb it in the slightest.

Buzz—

A deep, ancient, and profound Daoist sound suddenly resounded deep within his sea of consciousness.

The voice, its origin unknown, its age unknown, traversed countless ages and spanned countless realms, carrying endless sorrow, regret, and obsession. It echoed within Kai's soul, causing it to tremble slightly and his heart to surge with turmoil.

Immediately following the final note, a vast, boundless, and intricate flow of information, like a burst dam, surged into Kai's mind, overwhelming and sweeping across his consciousness.

Kai instantly understood: the primal power of the Eternal Soul Wood was never about killing techniques, cultivation principles, or unparalleled spiritual energy.

It was the essence of the souls of countless challengers over hundreds of thousands of years, the unfulfilled obsessions of countless seekers of the Dao, and the dying regrets of countless dream chasers.

Each wisp of soul essence contained a person's entire life. Each lingering obsession was etched with a tale of joy and sorrow. Some, seeking immortality, cultivate arduously for millennia, only to fail at the last hurdle, their souls falling into the Soul Forest, their obsessions lingering.

Some, seeking supreme power, conquer the heavens, only to be besieged by powerful enemies, their bodies extinguished, their hatred enduring.

Some, to protect their sect and loved ones, sacrifice themselves, ultimately unable to withstand the onslaught, separated by death, their regrets forever etched.

Some, seeking revenge, traverse countless realms, only to find their enemies before them, powerless to reverse fate, their resentment etched into their very bones.

Countless joys and sorrows, countless partings and reunions, countless successes and failures, countless lives and deaths, are all sealed within this ancient Soul Tree, sedimented by time, their obsessions accumulating, eternally unyielding.

Kai carefully sensed the pain, resentment, regret, and hope within each strand of obsession, his heart filled with mixed emotions, feeling a deep empathy.

He saw the fates of others, and he saw his own reflection. If he failed, if he perished, in the future, he too would be like this, his obsessions sealed away, forgotten by all.

“So that’s how it is… They are all pitiful souls, all bound by their obsessions.” Kai murmured softly, a sense of pity

welling up within him. He did not resist these chaotic obsessions, nor did he reject these sorrowful emotions, nor did he use the Great Luo Golden Scripture to forcibly suppress them.

Instead, he activated the Great Luo Golden Scripture’s gentle golden light, transforming it into soft threads of light that gently enveloped each wisp of remnant soul’s obsession, tenderly soothing and carefully purifying it, slowly calming their age-old resentment and wailing.

The obsessions gradually subsided, the remnant souls gradually stabilized, and all the chaotic emotions transformed into pure and gentle divine soul essence power, slowly flowing back and merging into the trunk of the Eternal Soul Tree, nourishing the Soul Tree and perfecting its essence.

Crack—

a crisp, subtle cracking sound suddenly broke the silence of the forest.

On the trunk of the Eternal Soul Tree, a fine crack quietly opened, and a black piece of wood, about the length of an arm and of perfect quality, slowly detached from the crack, hovering in the air before Kai's divine soul, silently flowing with a faint black light.

The wooden log was jet black, its surface covered with fine, natural golden patterns that intertwined and shimmered, ancient and weighty, exuding a rich and mellow spiritual aura. It felt warm to the touch and brimming with spiritual energy.

Kai gently caught the Eternal Soul Wood. It was incredibly warm to the touch, and a rich, enduring spiritual nourishing power instantly surged into the depths of his soul, flowing throughout his body. His

previously weak, dim, and wounded soul healed and repaired rapidly at a visible speed, his depleted essence quickly replenished, and his dim purple soul light regained its brilliance and vitality.

His soul was stable, his essence abundant, and his mind at peace.

A huge weight was lifted from Kai's heart.

"The Eternal Soul Wood, I've got it."

He carefully put the wood away, protecting it close to his body, and without lingering, he transformed into a streak of purple light, flying swiftly towards the exit of the third gate, beginning his journey home.

...

Demon Emperor's Palace, Tranquil Heart Hall.

The hall was ancient and elegant, its furnishings simple yet grand, devoid of excessive luxury. Only four blue stone pillars supported the roof, their surfaces inscribed with runes for calming the mind, soothing the soul, and protecting the heart. A gentle spiritual aura permeated the hall year-round, ideal for resting the spirit and healing injuries.

In the center of the hall lay a thick futon, upon which Gui Yuanzi sat cross-legged, eyes closed, concentrating on his breathing to heal his wounds.

Previously, in protecting Kai, maneuvering among various parties, and tirelessly planning, Gui Yuanzi had repeatedly used his primordial spiritual power, damaging his foundation, causing old injuries to recur, and leaving him deficient in qi and blood.

Although his injuries had now stabilized and his life was no longer in danger, the damage to his Dao foundation and the deficiency of qi and blood left him with a perpetually pale and haggard complexion, his former vigor unlikely to return. He needed prolonged rest to fully recover.

Yet, while he was resting, his mind was far from at rest.

Though his eyes were closed, his brows remained slightly furrowed, his mind preoccupied with countless thoughts of the Ancient Soul Forest trial and the safety of his young master, Kai. The Ancient Soul Forest trial consisted of

three perilous trials, countless powerful figures throughout the ages had perished within its walls, none ever to emerge.

Kai now possessed only a wisp of a remnant soul, his combat power meager, his protection weak, and the path ahead fraught with danger, each step a potential death sentence.

Gui Yuanzi sat there, each day feeling like an eternity, each moment unbearable agony, his heart filled with unease. He wondered if his young master could overcome the maze, survive the onslaught of soul beasts, withstand the trials of his inner demons, and successfully obtain the Eternal Soul Wood.

As the sect master of Gui Yuan Sect, he bore the legacy of his ancestor, the inheritance of the Daoist sect, and the heavy responsibility of protecting his master.

If Kai were to perish in the trial, the Great Luo Golden Scripture would be lost, the ancestral bloodline would be severed, and the Guiyuan Sect's ten-thousand-year foundation and hope for revival would be utterly destroyed. A hundred years later, he would have no face to face his ancestors.

Anxiety, trepidation, worry, and anticipation—a myriad of emotions swirled within him, disturbing his peace of mind and making cultivation difficult.

Just as Guiyuanzi's mind was in turmoil, unable to sit still, two steady, light footsteps approached from outside the hall, unhurried and unperturbed.

Guiyuanzi's heart stirred, and he abruptly opened his eyes, his gaze sharp as he looked towards the hall door, a strong premonition rising within him.

The next moment, the hall door slowly opened, and Qingqiu walked slowly ahead, her expression calm, her steps composed, her imperial aura restrained, her demeanor dignified.

Behind her, a bright, luminous purple divine soul floated silently—it was Kai, returning from his trial.

Gui Yuanzi's gaze suddenly locked onto the purple divine soul, then shifted to the piece of pitch-black soul wood floating silently beside it. His eyes instantly blazed with brilliant light.

Overwhelmed with excitement, he abruptly stood up, ignoring his unhealed injuries, and rushed forward.

His eyes were fixed on the Eternal Soul Wood, then on Kai's divine soul. His lips trembled slightly, his voice filled with barely suppressed excitement and a choked sob: "Young Master! You…you made it through? The Eternal Soul Wood…you really got it?" Kai

‘s purple divine soul brightened slightly, his tone calm and composed. Having undergone the trials, his mind had become even more steady and profound: “Yes, I got it. Three trials passed, the soul wood is in hand, I have not failed you.”

These simple six words, however, sounded like heavenly music to Gui Yuanzi’s ears, instantly easing his days of anxiety and lifting a thousand-pound burden.

Gui Yuanzi’s eyes instantly reddened, tears nearly streaming down his face. A complex mix of emotions welled up within him—joy, relief, and deep emotion.

He bowed deeply to Kai, his manners respectful, his voice hoarse and solemn: “Young Master, you have worked hard, Young Master, you are fortunate! With the blessings of Heaven and the protection of the Ancestral Master, the revival of our Daoist sect is hopeful!”

“With this Eternal Soul Wood, only the Primordial Divine Water is needed to achieve the fusion of Yin and Yang, allowing Young Master to rebuild his supreme true body, return to his peak cultivation, avenge his grievances, and restore the prestige of the Daoist sect!”

Qingqiu walked to the main seat in the hall and sat down, picking up her jade cup and taking a sip of spiritual tea. Her expression remained calm and composed, but a hint of barely perceptible satisfaction and approval flickered in her eyes.

She remained silent throughout, listening quietly without interrupting or disturbing the conversation, waiting for the two to finish speaking. Gui Yuanzi wiped the tears from the corners of his eyes, took a deep breath, and forcibly calmed his excited emotions. His expression turned solemn and serious as he spoke in a deep voice, getting straight to the point: “Young Master, I have already investigated thoroughly. The opportunity for the appearance of the Primordial Divine Water has been decided.

Three months later, the once-in-a-century Treasure Auction will be held in Tianque City of the Northern Region. The Primordial Divine Water will be auctioned as the grand finale treasure. At that time, all the major

sects, forces, and powerful figures of the Northern Region will gather to bid for this treasure."

"Only by acquiring the Primordial Divine Water can we perfectly reshape the final link of our physical body."

Kai's soul stirred slightly, and he asked the crucial question in a soft voice: "How many spirit stones are needed to acquire the Divine Water?"

Gui Yuanzi's expression instantly became serious. After a moment of silence, he told him truthfully in a heavy tone: "I have investigated extensively and carefully estimated that the Primordial Divine Water is exceptionally gifted and has endless uses. The starting price will not be lower than five million high-grade spirit stones.

With all the forces vying for it, the final transaction price will definitely exceed ten million high-grade spirit stones."

"The Guiyuan Sect's accumulated reserves over the years, all available spirit stones, total only about three million high-grade spirit stones. The shortfall is enormous, far from enough."

Ten million high-grade spirit stones.

These five words weighed heavily on Kai's heart like a thousand-pound boulder.

Hope was within reach, yet the lack of funds was an insurmountable obstacle.

Kai's spiritual light dimmed slightly, his heart sinking, but he did not panic or despair.

Seeing this, Guiyuanzi quickly reassured him, his tone unwavering: "Young Master, do not worry. I have a comprehensive plan and will not allow the spirit stone shortage to delay your plan to rebuild your physical body."

“I will immediately return to the Guiyuan Sect and sell all non-core assets, idle magical artifacts, treasured pills, and rare spiritual materials, using all the sect’s accumulated wealth over tens of thousands of years, which should raise five million high-grade spirit stones.”

“With a remaining shortfall of five million spirit stones, I will personally visit the two major allied sects of the human race, the Qingyun Sword Sect and the Wanfa Sect, to seek their help.

These three sects share a common origin, and the human race is a unified whole; their fates are intertwined. They will never stand idly by while their young master is in dire straits, nor will they allow the Tianji Palace to dominate.

With the three parties joining forces, we will surely gather the necessary spirit stones and secure the Primordial Divine Water.”

Kai remained silent for a moment, a warmth flowing through his heart, and softly said, “Guiyuanzi, thank you for your hard work. For my sake, the sect has spared no effort.”

Guiyuanzi shook his head repeatedly, his expression solemn as a mountain, and bowed in reply, “Young master, you flatter me. I am not working for your sake alone, but for the last wish of the Guiyuan Sect’s founder, for the continuation of the human race’s Daoist tradition, and for the survival of the righteous path in all heavens. With the appearance of the

Great Luo Golden Scripture, and the young master bearing the founder’s bloodline, you are the only hope for the Daoist sect. Even if I have to give my all and exhaust the sect’s reserves, I will never let this hope be extinguished.”

The next day, just as dawn broke and the first rays of sunlight appeared, the sky began to brighten.

Gui Yuanzi dared not delay for even a moment. He bid farewell to Qingqiu and Kai, and alone departed from Wan Yao Ling, rushing back

to Guiyuan Sect at full speed to devote himself entirely to the fundraising.

Qingqiu arranged for Kai to remain in the Demon Emperor's Palace to recuperate, nourish his soul and spirit, and stabilize his origin.

Firstly, the Demon Emperor's Palace was safe and secluded, and the Tianji Palace dared not easily provoke him, leaving him without enemies to bother him;

secondly, the spiritual energy here was abundant, providing excellent conditions for nourishing the soul, suitable for Kai to harmonize his divine soul, recover from his losses, and await the start of the auction. Kai had nowhere else to go, and with only a wisp of divine

soul left, he could not help with the fundraising, so he stayed to recuperate and await good news. Guiyuan Sect, Sect Master's Hall. Upon his return, Gui Yuanzi immediately summoned all the sect's elders and core disciples to the hall, with no one absent, for a meeting. The hall was solemn and dignified, with the ancestral statue sitting majestically in the center, and the ancestral tablets of the sect members arranged on both sides, incense burning. Li Qingyun and the elders sat on either side, their expressions solemn, knowing that something of great importance must be happening, and awaiting the sect leader's words. Gui Yuanzi stood before the ancestral statue, his expression solemn, and recounted in detail Kai's background, the ancestral bloodline, the inheritance of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, the tribulation to obtain the Soul Wood, and the need for millions of spirit stones to bid for the Primordial Divine Water to reshape his physical body, without concealing a single detail. Finally, his gaze swept over everyone, and his tone was firm as he ordered in a deep voice: "Elders, core disciples. The Daoist sect now hopes that the young master's physical body can be reshaped, and this is of utmost urgency. All spirit stones in the treasury must be mobilized, and all non-essential assets, idle magical artifacts, treasured pills, and rare spiritual materials within the sect must be sold off for cash. All resources will be used to bid for the Primordial Divine Water to help the young master reshape his true body. Does anyone have any objections?" A brief silence fell over the hall. Guiyuan Sect has accumulated wealth over tens of thousands of years, and its assets are substantial. Selling

them all will inevitably damage the sect's strength and vitality, causing a sharp decline in its power in the short term and making it vulnerable to covetous attacks from external enemies. But in the next instant, a white-haired, senior elder was the first to rise, bowing and clasping his hands in a firm voice: "Sect Master, I have no objection! The foundation of the Guiyuan Sect lies in the lineage of our ancestor. Now that the ancestor's descendant has appeared, there is hope for the sect. Even if the sect exhausts its resources and suffers great losses, we will not hesitate! I swear to support you to the death!" The second elder followed suit, bowing and echoing: "I second that! Resources can be replenished, and industries can be rebuilt, but once the lineage of our ancestor is severed, there will be no turning back. Supporting the young master is the right thing to do! I am willing to donate my life savings to help raise funds!" "I am willing to donate my treasured elixirs!" "I am willing to sell my personal magical artifacts!" "We are willing to live and die with the sect to help the young master rebuild his physical body!" In an instant, all the elders and disciples in the hall rose to express their opinions. No one objected, no one backed down, and no one cared about personal gains or losses. They were united as one, with one heart and one mind. Upon seeing this, Gui Yuanzi's heart burned with emotion, and his eyes reddened. He bowed deeply to everyone, saying, "Thank you all for your unity and dedication in protecting our lineage. When our young master achieves his goal, he will surely not forget this kindness and will revitalize the Gui Yuan Sect, ensuring the eternal peace and stability of our human race!" In the following days, everyone in the Gui Yuan Sect worked tirelessly, each fulfilling their duties. Disciples rushed to various industrial strongholds, selling shops, mines, and medicinal fields; elders offered their personal treasures, converting pills, spiritual materials, and magical artifacts into cash; the entire sect tightened its belt, all to raise enough spirit stones, to protect their young master, and to ensure the survival of their lineage. With all their might, the Gui Yuan Sect raised five million high-grade spirit stones in just a few days, storing them safely in a storage ring. Afterward, Gui Yuanzi personally went to the Qingyun Sword Sect and the Wanfa Sect, two allied sects of the human race, to seek their assistance. Upon learning the whole story, the leaders of the two major sects, knowing the domineering and oppressive nature of the Heavenly Pole Palace and that Kai carried the hopes for humanity's revival, immediately stepped in to help without hesitation. The leader of the Azure Cloud Sword Sect personally presented him with

one million high-grade spirit stones, stating, “Guiyuanzi, humanity is one, interdependent. The Heavenly Pole Palace, with its wolfish ambitions, has oppressed us for many years. Now that we have the opportunity to support a fellow cultivator, we will not back down. No need for thanks!”

The sect leader of the Wanfa Sect also sent a messenger with one million high-grade spirit stones, conveying a message of mutual encouragement: “Wait patiently for the young master to reshape his physical body. One day, we will fight side by side to resist the gods and protect our human race’s land!”

The three sects joined forces, united in purpose.

In less than ten days, Guiyuanzi had gathered a total of eight million high-grade spirit stones, only two million short of the ten million target. The outcome was already in sight; only the final payment was needed before he could bid with all his might at the auction, determined to win.

Tianque City, located in the heart of the Northern Region, is the largest and most populous core city for independent cultivators in the Seventeenth Heaven.

The city is vast, lined with shops and bustling markets, a constant flow of cultivators and traders.

Not controlled by any single sect, it is a melting pot of various forces, a diverse and vibrant place, making it the largest resource trading center in the Northern Region and the permanent venue for the Wanbao Auction.

Behind the Wanbao Auction is the Void Merchant Guild.

The Void Merchant Guild’s influence spans across all realms, its foundation unfathomable, its connections ubiquitous. Even the top forces of the Divine Race must give the Void Merchant Guild considerable respect and dare not easily provoke them.

The Primordial Divine Water, a supreme treasure for reshaping the physical body, nourishing the soul, and repairing the foundation of one's Dao, has already been secured by the Void Merchant Guild as the grand finale of this Wanbao Auction, to be publicly auctioned for maximum profit.

The Lord of the Heavenly Pole Palace, the Heavenly Pole Venerable, a top-tier expert at the peak of the third rank of Golden Immortal, and the ruler of the Northern Region of the Divine Clan Alliance, is ambitious, domineering, ruthless, and cruel.

He had already thoroughly investigated the matters concerning the Eternal Soul Wood, the Primordial Divine Water, and the reshaping of the physical body. He knew that once Kai gathered the Primordial Divine Water, reshaped his physical body, and returned to his peak, he

would inevitably seek revenge, join forces with the human clan sects, oppose the Heavenly Pole Palace, and shake the hegemony of the Divine Clan.

He absolutely could not give Kai any chance.

Kai had already obtained the Eternal Soul Wood and could not be intercepted. He had to firmly control the last item, the Primordial Divine Water, and absolutely could not allow it to fall into Kai's hands.

If they waited for the public auction, with all forces gathered, there would be too many variables, and the bidding would be disorderly. It was inevitable that things would get complicated, and perhaps Gui Yuanzi would risk everything to win it.

He could not wait, nor could he afford to gamble.

Before the auction even began, Venerable Tianji decisively made his move, leading Elder Zhao and four other core Golden Immortal elders directly to the stone tower at the headquarters of the Void Merchant Guild in Tianque City, intending to seize the Primordial Divine Water by force.

The Void Merchant Guild headquarters was a towering nine-story black stone tower, its surface covered with ancient restrictive runes, its defenses unparalleled and impregnable; even a Golden Immortal would find it difficult to breach.

Venerable Tianji, without troops or engaging in combat, only exuded overwhelming pressure, standing before the stone tower's entrance, his aura as imposing and domineering.

Elder Zhao went inside to report, and moments later, Wu Heng, the president of the Void Merchant Guild's Tianque City branch, personally came out to greet them.

Wu Heng, a second-grade Golden Immortal, was meticulous, tactful, and neither arrogant nor servile, deeply understanding the interests of all parties involved.

"Venerable Tianji, your presence is an honor. Please come in," Wu Heng said, bowing respectfully with clasped hands, his attitude humble and courteous.

The Celestial Venerable spoke without hesitation, his expression cold and his tone domineering: "President Wu, I have come today for only one thing. The Primordial Divine Water, I want it."

Wu Heng's smile froze, his heart sank, and he hurriedly replied: "Palace Master, please forgive me, the Primordial Divine Water has been designated as the auction's grand finale. According to the Chamber of Commerce's rules, it can only be auctioned publicly, and there will be no private transactions. I request that Palace Master proceed to the auction house for fair bidding."

The Celestial Venerable's lips curled into a cold killing intent, chilling him to the bone: "Rules? Before me, I am the rule. I will not wait, I will not bid, I want the Primordial Divine Water now. Name your price."

Wu Heng still insisted on his bottom line: "Palace Master, the Chamber of Commerce's rules cannot be broken, please understand."

Boom…

The Celestial Venerable said no more, and with a wave of his hand, golden holy light soared into the sky, and the terrifying pressure of a third-grade Golden Immortal descended like a mountain collapsing and a tsunami crashing down instantly, locking onto Wu Heng with overwhelming momentum and murderous intent.

Wu Heng's expression changed drastically. His Golden Immortal second-grade cultivation was like an ant trying to shake a tree before the Heavenly Venerable—utterly powerless, instantly overwhelmed by the oppressive aura, struggling to breathe.

"Wu Heng, I'll say it one last time. Hand over the Primordial Divine Water now.

Otherwise, I'll demolish this stone tower and raze your branch to the ground today. Do you believe me or not?" The Heavenly Venerable's tone was icy, his killing intent chilling.

Wu Heng's face turned ashen, caught in a dilemma.

Refusing meant the destruction of his branch;

giving it would break the guild's rules, leading to endless trouble.

After much deliberation, forced by the overwhelming pressure, Wu Heng could only compromise.

A moment later, Wu Heng retrieved an exquisite jade box. Inside lay a thumb-sized, milky-white divine water bead, warm and radiant, brimming with life—the Primordial Divine Water.

The Heavenly Venerable verified the goods, casually tossing down a storage ring containing ten million high-grade spirit stones, and departed with the treasure.

Wu Heng stood before the stone tower gate, watching the five golden lights disappear into the distance, and sighed bitterly, “Heavenly Venerable, your power and tyranny are bound to lead to your regret sooner or later.”

…

Several days later, Gui Yuanzi, carrying eight million high-grade spirit stones, rushed to Tianque City full of hope and excitement to bid for the Primordial Divine Water.

However, when he arrived at the Wanbao Auction House and looked through the list of auction items, a line of small print caught his eye—Primordial Divine Water, withdrawn from the auction for unforeseen circumstances, not to be publicized.

Gui Yuanzi’s mind went blank, as if struck by lightning, his face instantly turned deathly pale, his body turned ice-cold, and he was incredulous.

He grabbed the staff member tightly, his voice trembling, and anxiously questioned, “Why was it withdrawn from the auction? Why was this highly anticipated finale item suddenly canceled? What happened!”

The staff member remained expressionless, shaking his head and saying only that it was a decision made by superiors and that there was no further information to disclose.

Gui Yuanzi walked out of the auction house, dejected, and stood on the bustling street, watching the people and traffic. The hope that had accumulated in his heart for many days slowly extinguished, leaving him feeling cold and heartbroken.

Kai, sensing Gui Yuanzi’s emotional collapse and despondency from within the Soul-Nourishing Jade Bottle, softly asked, “Gui Yuanzi, what has happened?”

Gui Yuanzi’s voice was hoarse, filled with endless resentment and anger. He knelt on the ground, tears streaming down his face, “Young Master…

this subordinate is incompetent, this subordinate has failed you. The Primordial Divine Water… was taken ahead of time, the auction was withdrawn, and we had no chance to bid."

Kai's soul trembled slightly, his heart sank, but he did not erupt in anger. He had already anticipated that the Heavenly Supreme Venerable must have interfered in secret.

"Who took it?" Kai asked calmly.

Gui Yuanzi gritted his teeth, angrily saying each word, "Heavenly Venerable Tianji! Relying on his superior cultivation, he used his power to pressure the Void Merchant Guild, forcibly buying the Primordial Divine Water ahead of schedule.

No matter how many spirit stones we raise, it's useless now." Kai remained silent for a moment, his mind still calm, and slowly said, "Get up. It's not your fault. It's not your fault; the enemy is strong and we are weak, it's just that power is domineering. This is not the end, but only the beginning."

"Without the Primordial Divine Water, in the vast world of the Seventeenth Heaven, there must be other opportunities. We will search slowly, we will find them, and there will be a day when we can rebuild our physical bodies."

Gui Yuanzi looked up, wiping away his tears, and nodded heavily, his eyes rekindling with determination: "Young Master is absolutely right! No matter how difficult the road ahead, we will never give up! We will find opportunities to the ends of the earth to help Young Master rebuild his true body!" Gui Yuanzi didn't linger and turned to walk towards the city gate of Tianque City.

He planned to leave Tianque City first, find a safe place, and then slowly discuss the next step of the plan.

Tianque City was within the sphere of influence of the Tianji Palace. Staying here would only make things more dangerous, and he might even encounter people from the Tianji Palace.

At that time, not only would he be in danger, but even the young master's soul would be threatened.

The sunlight shone on him, casting a long, long shadow, making him appear particularly lonely, yet carrying an indomitable tenacity.

His steps were slow but firm, each step steady, as if telling of his determination.

Just as he had taken less than ten steps, a warm hand suddenly reached out from behind and gently patted his shoulder.

The touch was light, but it carried an undeniable force, causing Gui Yuanzi's body to stiffen abruptly, and the hairs on his body instantly stood on end.

Years of cultivation and battle had instilled in him an extremely vigilant habit, especially in times of mental vulnerability and danger. Any unusual movement would instantly put him on alert.

He instinctively gripped the cyan longsword at his waist; the hilt was cold to the touch, yet it gave him a sense of security.

Simultaneously, his divine sense instantly expanded outwards, like an invisible net, instantly covering a ten-zhang radius around him, carefully probing everything, searching for the owner of the hand.

His divine sense was sharp, able to clearly perceive the aura of every cultivator around him, every fluctuation of spiritual energy, but strangely, he sensed no hostility.

The owner of the hand stood quietly behind him, motionless, his aura steady, as if he were just an ordinary passerby.

But Gui Yuanzi dared not be careless in the slightest.

Tianque City was a melting pot of all sorts of people, and moreover, he had just lost the Primordial Divine Water, his mind unsettled, making him most vulnerable to a sneak attack.

He slowly turned around, his movements deliberate and cautious, his longsword always ready to be drawn, his eyes warily fixed on the person behind him.

Behind him stood an old man, dressed in a long black robe of luxurious fabric, embroidered with intricate dark patterns that shimmered faintly in the sunlight.

The old man was thin, his hair white and neatly combed, his face etched with wrinkles yet remarkably spirited.

His eyes, though cloudy, held a sharp edge, as if they could see right through people.

A faint smile played on his lips, appearing gentle and kind, but beneath that smile lay a subtle, unsettling calculation.

Gui Yuanzi's brows furrowed instantly, a flicker of doubt in his eyes.

He recognized this man; to be precise, he had heard his name and seen his portrait—Wu Heng, the president of the Void Merchant Guild's Tianque City branch.

The Void Merchant Guild was a renowned guild throughout the entire Heavenly Realm, its power vast, spreading across various domains, and monopolizing most of the treasure trade.

Whether it's spiritual materials, elixirs, magical artifacts, or various rare and precious natural treasures, you can find them all at the Void Merchant Guild.

The members of the Void Merchant Guild are all shrewd merchants, prioritizing profit over righteousness. They are willing to cooperate with or betray anyone for sufficient profit.

Gui Yuanzi didn't understand why Wu Heng would stop him.

He and Wu Heng had no connection whatsoever; their only interaction was that he had come to Tianque City intending to bid for the Primordial Divine Water at the Wanbao Auction.

But now that the Primordial Divine Water had been bought by the Heavenly Extreme Venerable, he and Wu Heng had even less to do with each other.

"Guild Master Wu, what brings you to stop me?"

Gui Yuanzi's voice was low and wary, his eyes fixed on Wu Heng without any relaxation.

He could sense that Wu Heng's cultivation was not weak. Although his realm was only the second rank of the Golden Immortal Realm, his true power was definitely no less than his own. Moreover, Wu Heng had held a high position for many years, emanating a natural pressure that made him feel vaguely uneasy.

Wu Heng smiled, a smile that remained gentle yet made him even more enigmatic.

He spoke slowly, his voice low and hoarse, carrying a hint of age and a subtle calculation: "Sect Master Guiyuan, please wait. I have a few words to say to you."

"Speak frankly," Guiyuanzi said coldly. "I have important matters to attend to and have no time for pleasantries with Guild Master Wu."

He was now focused solely on leaving Tianque City and wanted nothing more to do with the Void Merchant Guild.

The people of the Void Merchant Guild were too shrewd; dealing with them could easily lead to falling into a trap.

Wu Heng seemed unfazed by his coldness, still smiling as he said, “Sect Master Guiyuan, you’ve traveled a great distance from Guiyuan Sect to Tianque City, enduring much hardship. I presume it’s for the Primordial Divine Water at the Wanbao Auction?”

Upon hearing the words “Primordial Divine Water,” Guiyuanzi’s face instantly darkened, a flash of pain and anger crossing his eyes.

He knew that Wu Heng, as the president of the Void Merchant Guild’s Tianque City branch, must know that the Primordial Divine Water had been bought by the Heavenly Supreme Venerable. Bringing it up now was undoubtedly reopening old wounds.

“President Wu, you know perfectly well why you’re asking,”

Gui Yuanzi’s voice was cold, tinged with impatience. “The Primordial Divine Water has already been taken by the Heavenly Supreme Venerable, and your Void Merchant Guild has already withdrawn from the auction. What’s the point of me staying in Tianque City? Please step aside, President Wu, don’t waste my time.”

After saying that, he tried to walk around Wu Heng and continue forward.

But Wu Heng simply stepped aside, blocking his path, his smile unchanged.

“Sect Master Guiyuan, please calm down.”

Wu Heng shook his head and said slowly, “The Primordial Divine Water was indeed taken by Venerable Tianji, and there’s nothing I can change that. After all, Venerable Tianji’s strength and influence are undeniable, and I dare not offend him easily.”

He paused, deliberately lowered his voice, and leaned closer to Guiyuanzi, speaking in a voice only the two of them could hear: “However… although the Primordial Divine Water is gone, there is something that can replace it.”

“A treasure that can rival the Primordial Divine Water, or even surpass it.”

“What is it?”

Guiyuanzi’s eyes suddenly lit up, and he involuntarily took a step forward, his voice filled with urgency and disbelief.

He asked almost subconsciously, all his vigilance and impatience replaced by hope at this moment.

A substitute?

A treasure that can replace the Primordial Divine Water?

For him, this was undoubtedly a ray of dawn in a desperate situation, the only hope for the young master to rebuild his physical body.

Seeing Guiyuanzi’s eagerness, a hint of smugness flashed in Wu Heng’s eyes, but he quickly concealed it. He didn’t immediately answer Gui Yuanzi’s question, but instead made a “please” gesture, smiling gently as he said, “This isn’t the place to talk. Too many people will overhear, and it could cause unnecessary trouble.”

“Sect Master Gui Yuan, please follow me. Once we get there, I’ll naturally tell you what the substitute is.”

Gui Yuanzi’s brow furrowed again, his vigilance returning.

He knew there was no such thing as a free lunch; Wu Heng’s seemingly kind offer of a substitute couldn’t possibly be out of goodwill.

The people of the Void Merchant Guild were always driven by profit, not loyalty. Wu Heng's willingness to help him must have some ulterior motive; he must want something from him.

He hesitated, subconsciously glancing down at the jade bottle in his hand, wanting to ask the young master's opinion.

He knew that although the young master only possessed a wisp of divine soul, he was meticulous and insightful, and would surely be able to judge the pros and cons of this matter.

Almost the instant he lowered his head, Kai's voice slowly emanated from the jade bottle, soft yet exceptionally clear, carrying a hint of certainty: "Follow him and see. Whatever his purpose, as long as the substitute is genuine, it's worth the trip. Even if it's a trap, we might still have a chance to escape."

Hearing his young master's words, Gui Yuanzi's hesitation vanished instantly.

He nodded, raised his head, looked at Wu Heng, and said firmly, "Alright. I'll go with President Wu. But let me make this clear: if President Wu dares to play any tricks, don't blame me for being impolite."

Wu Heng smiled and waved his hand: "Sect Master Gui Yuan, rest assured, I only want to make a deal with you, a mutually beneficial one. How could I possibly play any tricks? Please."

After speaking, Wu Heng turned and walked towards the depths of the street.

His steps were slow and steady, his back upright, exuding the composure of a superior.

Gui Yuanzi followed closely behind him, the jade bottle pressed against his chest, constantly alert to any movement around him. His long sword at his waist remained firmly at his side, ready for battle at any moment.

The two traversed the bustling streets, avoiding the crowds, and headed towards the headquarters of the Void Merchant Guild.

The headquarters of the Void Merchant Guild was a towering stone tower, standing in the center of Tianque City.

Constructed entirely of black boulders, the tower was dozens of feet tall, its surface covered with intricate runes that shimmered with a faint spiritual light, radiating powerful defensive energy.

From afar, it appeared majestic and imposing, deterring anyone from approaching lightly.

Gui Yuanzi followed Wu Heng into the stone tower.

He knew that from the moment he stepped into this tower, an unknown battle had begun.

But he had no way back. For his young master, for the Guiyuan Sect, even if there was an abyss ahead, he had to brave it.

The interior of the stone tower was far more magnificent and imposing than its exterior. In stark contrast to the ancient and austere exterior, the interior was exquisitely and luxuriously furnished, revealing the wealth and resources of the Void Merchant Guild.

The first floor was a grand hall, over ten zhang high, with countless fist-sized luminous crystals embedded in its dome.

These crystals emitted a soft yet bright light, illuminating the entire hall as if it were daytime, leaving no dark corner.

These crystals were not ordinary spirit crystals, but high-grade spirit crystals imbued with rich spiritual energy, each one incredibly valuable.

There were hundreds of such crystals on the dome alone, a testament to the Void Merchant Guild’s wealth.

On either side of the hall stood dozens of thick stone pillars, entirely black, engraved with ancient runes.

The runes emanated a faint spiritual light and a powerful defensive force, enveloping the entire hall and forming a solid defensive barrier.

Neither external attacks nor internal turmoil could easily breach this barrier.

The bases of the stone pillars are intricately carved with auspicious dragons and phoenixes, and lifelike mythical beasts galloping about, seemingly ready to step off the pillars at any moment, adding a touch of dynamism to the majestic hall.

In the center of the hall stands a long counter, crafted from warm, white jade, its surface as smooth as a mirror.

On it are displayed exquisite jade boxes and glass bottles, containing various spiritual materials and elixirs, emanating a faint spiritual aura.

Behind the counter stand several cultivators in uniform, each with a respectful expression and humble demeanor, methodically attending to guests who have come to trade or consign items for auction.

Guests arrive in twos and threes; some inquire about the price and quality of items at the counter, some pace back and forth in the hall, examining the surrounding furnishings, and others converse quietly, discussing the details of their transactions.

Despite the large number of people in the hall, everything is orderly and without the slightest chaos.

Wu Heng didn’t linger in the hall. He led Gui Yuanzi straight through the hall and headed towards a deep corridor at the back.

At the entrance of the corridor stood two cultivators clad in black armor. They were tall, with imposing expressions and steady auras, both at the peak of the True Immortal Realm.

Upon seeing Wu Heng approach, they immediately bowed respectfully, saying, “Guild Master.”

Wu Heng nodded slightly, said nothing, and continued walking forward.

Gui Yuanzi followed behind him, his eyes warily scanning everything around him.

He could sense that these two armored cultivators were quite powerful, and their auras were icy cold, clearly indicating they were experts who had spent years in battle or carrying out assassination missions. They were likely Wu Heng’s guards.

This showed that Wu Heng was also very vigilant.

The corridor was long, with pale blue spirit lamps embedded in the walls on both sides. The lamps emitted a faint light, dim and barely enough to see the path beneath one’s feet.

The corridor floor was also paved with blue stone slabs, covered with fine patterns that faintly emanated spiritual energy fluctuations, clearly indicating a simple restriction.

The corridor twisted and turned, with a corner every so often, making it feel like a maze, with no end in sight and no outside sounds.

Only the footsteps of the two echoed in the corridor, exceptionally clear and oppressive.

Gui Yuanzi’s hand never left the long sword at his waist, his divine sense constantly probing the movements on both sides of the corridor.

He knew that this seemingly peaceful corridor might actually harbor hidden dangers; there might be an ambush around any corner.

Wu Heng was a deep and calculating individual; no one knew what he was planning. He had to remain vigilant at all times, without the slightest lapse in concentration.

He didn’t trust Wu Heng, not at all.

Although the Void Merchant Guild had a renowned reputation for fair trade, it was ultimately a place for doing business. Merchants were profit-driven; in their eyes, there was only profit, no sentiment.

Wu Heng’s willingness to tell him about the alternative, and even to bring him here, could not possibly be out of kindness; he must want something from him.

Perhaps they coveted some treasure he possessed, perhaps they wanted to use him to do something dangerous, or perhaps it was all a trap, a trap set against him and the young master.

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The closer they got to the depths of the corridor, the stronger Gui Yuanzi’s unease grew.

The surrounding spiritual energy fluctuations became increasingly strange, and a faint, pungent smell of blood permeated the air. Though faint, he keenly detected it.

The smell was old, not recent; it had clearly been there for a long time, yet it still sent a chill down his spine.

This made him even more certain that this corridor was definitely not simple, and the place Wu Heng had brought him to was certainly not a safe place.

He subconsciously tightened his grip on the jade bottle in his hand, his fingertips lightly brushing the bottle’s surface, as if sending a signal to his young master, or perhaps encouraging himself.

He silently vowed that no matter what danger they encountered, he would protect his young master’s soul, even at the cost of his own life, he would never allow his young master to suffer the slightest harm.

After walking for about the time it takes to brew a cup of tea, a stone door finally appeared ahead.

The stone door was entirely black, three zhang high and about two zhang wide, covered with complex and mysterious runes.

The runes shimmered with a pale golden light, radiating an ancient and powerful aura, completely different from the runes on either side of the corridor, appearing more majestic and eerie.

The surface of the stone door was as smooth as a mirror, reflecting the figures of the two people, inspiring a sense of awe in those who saw it.

Wu Heng stopped, turned around, looked at Gui Yuanzi, and said with a gentle smile, “Sect Master Gui Yuan, my secret chamber is just ahead. Let’s discuss this in detail inside.”

With that, he took out a black token from his robes. The token was entirely black, engraved with the character “Shang,” its runes flowing and emitting faint fluctuations of spiritual energy.

He gently placed the token against the stone door. The instant the token touched the door, the runes on the door lit up, the pale golden light becoming even more dazzling, almost blinding.

A

low rumble resounded, and the stone door slowly opened inwards. A faint fragrance wafted from the crack.

The fragrance was gentle and mellow, carrying a hint of spiritual energy that invigorated the mind.

However, Gui Yuanzi remained vigilant, knowing that the safest place was often the most dangerous.

Once the stone door was fully opened, a secret chamber was revealed.

The chamber was small, only a few feet in diameter, but exquisitely furnished.

Several landscape paintings hung on the walls, their frames made of precious sandalwood, intricately carved.

The mountains and rivers in the paintings were lifelike, shrouded in mist, appearing as if they were real scenes, making the viewer feel as if they were immersed in the landscape, dispelling much of their anxiety and unease. Even

more peculiar was that the landscape in the paintings subtly changed with the viewer's gaze, as if it possessed a life of its own—clearly an ancient painting imbued with spiritual energy.

In the center of the chamber sat a stone table, crafted from warm, dark jade, its surface as smooth as a mirror.

A set of exquisite tea utensils sat on the table. The teapot and teacups were made of white porcelain, decorated with delicate orchid patterns, elegant and refined.

Steam rose from the teapot, the subtle aroma of tea mingling with the previously smelled fragrance, filling the entire secret chamber, soothing and refreshing.

Clearly, Wu Heng had prepared all of this long ago, obviously premeditated.

On either side of the stone table stood a stone chair, covered with soft animal hides, likely very comfortable.

In a corner of the chamber was a small bookshelf, holding several books with antique covers, all seemingly ancient texts, exuding a faint scent of ink.

The entire secret chamber was quiet and elegant, a stark contrast to the imposing and heavy atmosphere outside.

“Sect Master Guiyuan, please sit,”

Wu Heng said, walking to the stone table and taking the seat of honor. He then picked up the teapot and slowly poured two cups of tea.

The tea was pale green, clear and transparent, emitting a faint fragrance. A thin layer of spiritual mist floated on the surface, clearly indicating it was no ordinary tea, but brewed from precious spiritual leaves. It not only tasted excellent but also nourished spiritual energy.

Gui Yuanzi didn’t sit; he remained standing opposite the stone table, his eyes warily fixed on Wu Heng, showing no sign of relaxation.

He could sense that although this secret room appeared quiet and elegant, it was actually protected by restrictions. If a conflict broke out, escaping would likely be difficult.

“President Wu, there’s no need for formalities between us,”

Gui Yuanzi’s voice was low and icy. “I know you wouldn’t tell me about the substitute without reason, nor would you invite me here without reason.”

“Speak frankly. What is the substitute? Where is it? What conditions are required?”

He didn’t want to waste time or beat around the bush with Wu Heng. What he cared about most now was the news of the substitute—whether it could allow the young master to rebuild his physical body.

As for Wu Heng’s conditions, although he didn’t know what they were, he was mentally prepared. As long as they weren’t too unreasonable and he could get a substitute, he was willing to agree.

Wu Heng picked up his teacup, took a small sip, and the tea was warm and sweet. A faint spiritual energy instantly flowed into his body, nourishing his meridians.

He put down the teacup, leaned back in his chair, and squinted at Gui Yuanzi, his eyes complex, carrying a hint of calculation and scrutiny.

His gaze lingered on Gui Yuanzi for a long time, from his disheveled robes to his swollen eyes, then to his hand tightly gripping the sword hilt, finally settling on the jade bottle in Gui Yuanzi's arms. A barely perceptible smile curved his lips, and a glint of greed flashed in his eyes.

He could tell that this jade bottle was no ordinary item; it must contain something important.

Moreover, Gui Yuanzi cherished this jade bottle immensely, always holding it in his hands and close to his chest. Clearly, what was inside the jade bottle was of paramount importance to him.

Although he didn't know what was inside the jade bottle, he could sense a faint yet exceptionally pure aura of divine soul within it. This aura, though weak, carried an extraordinary depth, clearly indicating that the owner of the divine soul within the bottle was no ordinary person.

However, he didn't reveal this, but instead spoke slowly, his voice low and hoarse: "Sect Master Guiyuan, I won't hide it from you. The Primordial Divine Water was indeed taken by Venerable Tianji. This is something I cannot change, nor would I dare to easily offend Venerable Tianji."

"However, I possess an item called 'Chaotic Spirit Liquid'." Upon hearing the words "Chaotic Elixir," Wu Heng's tone became more solemn, and his eyes turned serious: "This substance has similar effects to the Primordial Divine Water, capable of reshaping the physical body and nourishing the soul. In some aspects, it even surpasses the Primordial Divine Water." "

While the Primordial Divine Water is miraculous, it can only reshape ordinary physical bodies. The Chaotic Elixir, however, contains the power of chaos, capable of reshaping a physical body imbued with chaotic energy. This physical body's strength far exceeds that of an ordinary body, and it may even break through limitations to reach a higher realm."

“Furthermore, the Chaotic Elixir’s nourishment of the soul is gentler and more effective than the Primordial Divine Water. Even a severely damaged soul can slowly recover under the nourishment of the Chaotic Elixir, and may even become stronger.”

Gui Yuanzi’s breathing quickened instantly, a look of disbelief flashing in his eyes, and he involuntarily took a step forward.

Chaotic Elixir?

Superior to the Primordial Divine Water?

Capable of reshaping a physical body imbued with chaotic energy?

It could better nourish the young master’s soul?

This was undoubtedly fantastic news for him, even better than the Primordial Divine Water.

The young master’s soul was severely damaged, and his physical body was destroyed. To rebuild his body, he needed not only a treasure capable of rebuilding the body but also a treasure capable of nourishing the soul.

And this Chaos Spiritual Liquid actually possessed both of these effects simultaneously, even surpassing the Primordial Divine Water. It was practically a treasure tailor-made for the young master!

“Chaos Spiritual Liquid? Are you sure?”

Gui Yuanzi’s voice trembled slightly, filled with urgency and disbelief.

He craved such a treasure so much that he couldn’t believe his ears.

He was afraid—afraid that this was just a trap set by Wu Heng, afraid that Wu Heng was deceiving him, afraid that his newly ignited hope would be shattered in an instant.

Wu Heng nodded, a confident smile on his face: “Sect Master Guiyuan, rest assured. I’ve worked in the Void Merchant Guild for so many years, I’ve seen more treasures than you’ve eaten meals. I’ve personally appraised the Chaos Spirit Liquid; it’s absolutely genuine.”

“Moreover, I do indeed have a small bottle of Chaos Spirit Liquid in my possession. If you don’t believe me, I can show it to you.”

He then reached for the Chaos Spirit Liquid in his robes.

Guiyuanzi quickly waved his hand, urgently saying, “No need, no need. Guild Master Wu, I trust you.”

He was now eager to obtain the Chaos Spirit Liquid and had no reason to doubt Wu Heng’s words.

Even if it was a trap, he was willing to take the gamble; for his young master, he had no other choice.

He suppressed his excitement, took a deep breath, and tried to calm himself down before asking in a deep voice, “President Wu, where is the Chaos Elixir? How many spirit stones do you need?

As long as I can provide it, I will definitely give it to you. Even if I can’t provide it now, I will find a way to gather it and will never owe President Wu a single penny.”

In his view, since Wu Heng was a businessman, all he wanted was spirit stones.

He had already gathered eight million spirit stones. Although he hadn’t won the Primordial Divine Water, these spirit stones should be enough to buy a bottle of Chaos Elixir, right?

Even if it wasn’t enough, he could find another way. Even if he had to sell the last of Guiyuan Sect’s possessions, he would gather the spirit stones to buy the Chaos Elixir for the young master.

Unexpectedly, Wu Heng shook his head, his smile deepening and becoming even more enigmatic: “Sect Master Guiyuan, this old man does not want spirit stones.”

“Doesn’t want spirit stones?”

Guiyuanzi’s brows furrowed instantly, a flicker of doubt and wariness in his eyes. “Then what do you want? Guild Master Wu, please speak frankly. As long as I can do it, as long as it doesn’t violate my principles, I can agree to anything.”

He knew that if Wu Heng didn’t want spirit stones, what he desired must be far more precious and dangerous.

But he had no way out; for the sake of his young master, no matter how dangerous, he had to agree.

Wu Heng stood up, hands behind his back, and walked to the wall. Looking at the landscape painting on it, his gaze became distant, and his voice deepened: “What I need is for you to do one thing for me. One thing only you can do.”

Gui Yuanzi was silent for a moment, his vigilance growing stronger, but he still asked in a deep voice, “What is it?”

Wu Heng turned around, looking at Gui Yuanzi, his eyes becoming serious, and his tone more solemn: “In the vast mountains of the eastern Northern Region, there is an ancient ruin called the ‘Chaos Secret Realm.'”

“It is a Daoist temple left behind by a powerful Chaos expert in ancient times. It contains incomparably precious natural treasures, including Chaos Spiritual Liquid, countless ancient cultivation techniques, magical artifacts, spiritual materials, and even possibly the secrets to breaking through realms.”

He paused, then continued, a hint of helplessness in his voice: “I once sent people in. Those I sent were all cultivators of considerable strength,

including many Golden Immortal level experts, but after they went in, none of them came out alive."

"This old man suspects that they either encountered the restrictions within the secret realm, or its guardians, or were lured by its rare treasures and killed each other, ultimately perishing."

Gui Yuanzi's expression changed slightly.

Ancient ruins?

A chaotic secret realm?

He had never heard of such a place before.

Moreover, none of the Golden Immortal cultivators sent there returned alive, demonstrating just how dangerous and terrifying this secret realm was.

He had a vague premonition that what Wu Heng had asked him to do was probably related to this chaotic secret realm.

Sure enough, Wu Heng's next words confirmed his guess.

"The Chaos Elixir was taken from that secret realm."

Wu Heng's voice carried a hint of greed. "I only have a small bottle of Chaos Elixir in my possession. That was brought back from the outer perimeter of the secret realm by the people I sent earlier, who risked their last breath. It's not enough to reshape a complete physical body."

"If you want the complete Chaos Elixir, enough for your young master to reshape his body, you must personally enter the depths of the secret realm and retrieve the pool of elixir at its core."

Gui Yuanzi's face instantly turned deathly pale, a look of shock and disbelief flashing in his eyes: "You want me to venture into the Chaos Secret Realm?"

He finally understood why Wu Heng didn't want spirit stones, why he helped him.

Wu Heng wanted to use him, to exploit his eagerness for the Chaos Elixir, to make him venture into that perilous Chaos Secret Realm to retrieve more Chaos Elixir, or even other rare and precious materials within the secret realm.

Wu Heng didn't want his own people to die, so he found this gullible fool, eager for a substitute, to sacrifice himself.

The Chaos Realm is so dangerous; none of the Golden Immortal cultivators sent there returned alive. If he goes, will he come back alive?

It doesn't matter if he dies, but what will happen to the young master's soul?

What will happen to the Guiyuan Sect?

His heart was filled with hesitation and struggle. On one side was the hope of the young master rebuilding his physical body, and on the other was the perilous danger of near-death.

He didn't know what to choose.

If he didn't go, the young master would never be able to rebuild his physical body, and could only eke out a living as a soul, eventually slowly dissipating;

if he went, he would likely die in the secret realm. In that case, the young master would not only fail to obtain the Chaos Elixir, but would also lose him as his guardian, making his situation even more dangerous. Wu Heng seemed to sense his hesitation and said with a smile, "Sect Master Guiyuan, you don't need to worry too much. You won't be going alone."

"I can provide a map of the secret realm and some information, tell you about the restrictions and dangers on the outer perimeter, and I will also send two Golden Immortal cultivators to accompany you. With the three

of you working together, your strength will greatly increase, and you should have a chance to come out alive and obtain the Chaos Elixir."

"Send two Golden Immortal cultivators to accompany me?" Guiyuanzi's brows furrowed even more deeply.

He knew that the cultivators Wu Heng sent were nominally accompanying him, but in reality, they were probably monitoring him. Once he obtained the Chaos Elixir, or discovered other treasures in the secret realm, those people would likely immediately seize the treasures, or even kill him to silence him.

He remained silent for a long time, his inner struggle growing increasingly intense.

He looked at the jade bottle in his hand, as if he saw the young master's faint soul, as if he heard the young master's expectations.

He remembered his vow, the expectations of the entire Guiyuan Sect, and everything he had sacrificed.

He had no choice. He truly had no choice.

The Primordial Divine Water had been taken by the Celestial Venerable; it was his only hope, the only hope that could allow the young master to rebuild his physical body.

Even if it meant facing an abyss, even if it meant certain death, he had to go. He couldn't afford to gamble, and he couldn't afford to lose.

Just as he hesitated, Kai's voice slowly emanated from the jade bottle, still calm and firm: "Promise him."

The voice was soft, yet it carried an undeniable power, instantly dispelling Gui Yuanzi's hesitation and struggle.

He raised his head, looked at Wu Heng, took a deep breath, his eyes hardening, and said, word by word, “Alright. I agree. Where is the Chaos Secret Realm? When do we depart?”

Seeing Gui Yuanzi agree, Wu Heng’s smile instantly brightened, a hint of smugness and calculation flashing in his eyes: “No rush, no rush. Sect Master Gui Yuan, you’ve traveled a long way and suffered a considerable blow;

you’re exhausted, both physically and mentally.” “Rest at the Merchant Guild for the night and recuperate. Tomorrow morning, I’ll send someone to take you to the entrance of the secret realm. I’ve prepared a map and supplies, and two Golden Immortal cultivators will accompany you.”

Gui Yuanzi nodded without speaking.

He knew Wu Heng wouldn’t harm him, at least not now.

Wu Heng still needed him to retrieve the spiritual liquid from the secret realm, still needed him to risk his life for him, so until he obtained the Chaos Spiritual Liquid, Wu Heng would ensure his safety.

He was still somewhat uneasy and asked in a deep voice, “Who are those two Golden Immortal cultivators? What is their cultivation level? What are their specialties?”

He needed to understand these two cultivators clearly in order to prepare for any eventuality and avoid being outmaneuvered by them.

Wu Heng smiled and slowly said, “They are both guest elders of the Void Merchant Guild, both at the first rank of Golden Immortal, and their strength is not weak.”

“The man is skilled in concealment and assassination, with rich experience, and is quite well-known in the Northern Region; the woman is skilled in formations and healing, and can provide assistance and

ensure your safety in dangerous situations. With them by your side, your success rate in venturing into the secret realm will be much higher."

Gui Yuanzi nodded, his vigilance not relaxing at all.

A first-rank Golden Immortal, skilled in concealment, assassination, formations, and healing—such a combination is indeed very practical, capable of both offense and defense, as well as healing injuries.

But it was precisely because of this that he was even more worried; these two were probably not simple characters, and dealing with them would likely not be easy.

"Alright, I understand,"

Gui Yuanzi said in a deep voice. "I'll rest at the guild for the night and set off for the Chaos Secret Realm early tomorrow morning."

Wu Heng nodded and said with a gentle smile, "Good. I'll arrange for someone to take you to your room to rest. I'll have someone call you early tomorrow morning."

After speaking, he called out to the outside of the secret room, and the two armored cultivators who had been at the entrance of the corridor immediately entered and bowed, "Guild Master."

"Take Sect Master Gui Yuan to your room to rest, treat him well, and do not neglect him," Wu Heng instructed.

"Yes, Guild Master,"

the two armored cultivators replied in unison, then turned around and gestured for Gui Yuanzi to come with them. "Sect Master Gui Yuan, please come with us."

Gui Yuanzi glanced at Wu Heng, said nothing, and turned to follow the two armored cultivators out of the secret room.

He knew that from the moment he agreed to Wu Heng's request, he had embarked on a path fraught with peril.

But he had no regrets. For the young master, for the Guiyuan Sect, no matter how dangerous, he would go forward without hesitation.

Watching Guiyuanzi's departing figure, the smile on Wu Heng's face gradually disappeared, replaced by a cold calculation.

He walked to the stone table, picked up a teacup, took a small sip, his gaze distant, and murmured to himself, "Guiyuanzi, I hope you won't disappoint this old man. The treasures in the Chaos Secret Realm are not so easy to obtain."

"You'd better come back alive and bring back the Chaos Spirit Liquid and the other treasures in the secret realm for this old man. Otherwise, neither you nor that little remnant soul in your arms will leave alive."

In the secret chamber, only he remained. The faint fragrance of tea and the aura of spiritual energy intertwined, creating an exceptionally eerie atmosphere. At dawn the next day, the night had not yet completely faded, and a thick, inky darkness still hung heavily over Tianque City.

On the far horizon, a faint sliver of pale light broke through the thin, almost imperceptible glow of dawn, like a cicada's wing, unable to penetrate the heavy night.

A cool morning mist permeated the entire city, the white fog swirling around the eaves and cobblestone streets, carrying the lingering chill of deep winter, a fine, icy touch against the skin.

The entire city of Tianque was still fast asleep. The once bustling streets, teeming with people and carriages, were now completely devoid of their usual vibrancy; the cobblestone pavement, damp with the morning mist, gleamed with a cool, watery sheen.

Shops lining the streets stood with their doors and windows tightly shut, banners hanging limply. Only the occasional clear, melodious birdsong

drifted through the woods, piercing the tranquil morning mist and gently breaking the silence of the ancient city, only to vanish in an instant, making the cold peace seem even more profound.

Inside a guest room on the top floor of the stone tower, Gui Yuanzi had already risen.

No candles were lit, only a sliver of sunlight filtering through the window, barely illuminating the simple room.

The wooden table and chairs were simply furnished, without any luxurious decorations, and the air still held a faint scent of sandalwood and the cool aroma of spirit stones.

Gui Yuanzi stood by the window, his plain undergarment clean and elegant, his figure slender and upright, his back ramrod straight, only his eyes revealing an undisguised weariness and solemnity.

He hadn't slept all night.

It wasn't that the guest room was simple or the rest was uncomfortable, but rather that a thousand thoughts tangled in his mind, like a jumbled mess, leaving him utterly unable to sleep.

Last night, sitting quietly on his couch, he closed his eyes and concentrated, repeatedly replaying every detail of his journey to the Chaos Realm in his mind.

Wu Heng's hidden, unpredictable schemes, the perilous rumors circulating about the Chaos Realm, the unpredictable unknown dangers within, and the fragile divine soul within the jade bottle in his arms—countless thoughts piled up, weighing heavily on his heart, keeping him restless all night.

He knew better than anyone that stepping into the vast mountains and venturing into the Chaos Realm was tantamount to risking his life.

That realm, known as a death trap, had seen countless cultivators enter over the centuries, most perishing without a trace, with very few surviving—a near-death experience was no exaggeration.

But he had no choice. For his young master Kai, for that Chaos Elixir that could reshape his body, even if the road ahead was fraught with peril, he had to forge ahead without hesitation.

He had to be fully prepared, eliminating any oversights or hidden dangers. Only in this way could he have even the slightest chance of escaping the secret realm alive, and personally bring back the Chaos Spirit Liquid to help the young master rebuild his physical body and return to his peak.

Gui Yuanzi withdrew his gaze from the distance and slowly raised his hand to straighten his robes.

He walked to the copper basin of clear water in the room, dipped his fingertips in the cool water, and wiped his face and wrists.

The cool water flowed over his skin, dispelling some of the drowsiness from a sleepless night, and barely calming his chaotic mind.

After washing up, he took out a brand-new blue Daoist robe from his storage ring.

The robe was made of simple, unadorned fabric, without intricate embroidery or precious spiritual silk; it was merely the most ordinary Daoist clothing, yet it was washed clean and crisp.

The soft fabric clung to his figure, making him appear even thinner and more upright, surrounded by a detached and otherworldly Daoist aura.

After changing his robes, Gui Yuanzi’s movements became cautious and solemn.

He reached into his robes and took out a warm, translucent white jade bottle.

The bottle was pure white, with a delicate texture. A faint layer of cyan spiritual energy was sealed at the mouth of the bottle, isolating it from internal and external auras. Inside the bottle, Kai's remaining soul was quietly sealed.

The soul was weak and fleeting, like a candle in the wind, and would completely dissipate at the slightest carelessness.

He gently stroked the cool bottle with his fingertips, a resolute yet tender glint in his eyes, before pressing the jade bottle tightly against his chest and wrapping it securely with his robes.

The warmth of his skin against the jade bottle allowed him to constantly sense the faint fluctuations of the soul within, confirming that his young master was safe and sound. In the event of sudden danger, he could also protect his heart immediately, preserving this only hope.

After properly placing the jade bottle, Gui Yuanzi raised his hand and touched an ancient black storage ring on the ring finger of his left hand.

Spiritual energy slowly flowed into the ring, and the items within appeared clearly in his mind.

Eight million high-grade spirit stones were neatly stacked, providing the foundation for this trip's consumption, emergencies, and the purchase of supplies;

dozens of smooth, round, white healing pills, rich in medicinal properties, could quickly repair damaged meridians and heal external injuries;

more than ten talismans with restrained radiance, divided into offensive and defensive categories—defensive talismans could create barriers to defend against enemies, while offensive talismans contained explosive spiritual energy, serving as a life-saving trump card in dire situations.

Finally, a clear blue light flowed from the storage ring, and a long sword silently hovered before him.

The Azure Edge Sword, with its slender and long blade, clear as autumn water, gleaming coldly, and its scabbard engraved with simple cloud patterns, was ancient and understated.

This was Gui Yuanzi's natal magic weapon, accompanying him in his cultivation for hundreds of years, venturing into countless perilous places, slaying demons and monsters, breaking formations and killing enemies, experiencing countless bloody battles, and long since becoming one with his spiritual power and mind.

Within the sword's blade, Gui Yuanzi's pure Daoist spiritual power constantly lingered, achieving perfect harmony between man and sword, mind and will, making it his most trusted and reliable reliance. He

lightly flicked the blade with his fingertips, a crisp, ringing sound slowly echoing in the quiet room, its lingering resonance long and deep.

Gui Yuanzi gazed at the sword, his eyes resolute, then with a slight flick of his wrist, sheathed the Qingfeng sword and slung it diagonally at his waist.

Having thoroughly checked all his belongings, finding nothing amiss,

Gui Yuanzi took a deep breath of the cool mist, suppressing the surging unease in his heart, and pushed open the wooden door to the guest room.

The wooden door creaked slightly as it opened and closed, the morning mist outside even thicker than inside.

Within the greyish-white mist, two figures stood silently, motionless, their auras drastically different yet equally imposing, exuding an aloofness that kept strangers at bay.

These two were the Golden Immortal cultivators whom Wu Heng had arranged beforehand to accompany Gui Yuanzi to the Chaos Secret Realm.

The man on the left was exceptionally robust and tall, over seven feet in height, with broad shoulders and a narrow waist, his physique firm and powerful.

He possessed sharply defined features, his jawline cold and sharp, devoid of any gentleness.

His skin was a cold white, formed from years of wandering in perilous places and accumulating malevolent energy. His eyebrows were thick, black, and sharp, slanting upwards towards his temples.

Most chilling were his eyes, pitch black and deep, devoid of any light, as if sculpted from millennia of ice. There was no emotion in his eyes, only cold emptiness; a mere glance from them was enough to send chills down one's spine.

He wore a tight-fitting, all-black outfit that clung to his skin, perfectly outlining his smooth, muscular lines, revealing strong bones and hidden explosive power.

Two short swords hung at his waist, their sheaths entirely black, their surfaces engraved with intricate, twisted dark patterns. Deep within these patterns, a cold glint flickered, radiating a chilling, malevolent aura—clearly no ordinary weapon. The man didn't deliberately release any pressure, yet the refined, pure, and intensely piercing killing intent couldn't be completely concealed.

It was the culmination of countless life-or-death battles and the slaughter of countless lives—cold, violent, and ruthless. Anyone who approached him would instinctively feel fear and dare not easily speak to him.

This man was named Dark Blade, a specialist in close-quarters assassination, his methods ruthless and decisive. He was a trusted assassin under Wu Heng.

The woman on the right was a stark contrast to Dark Blade.

She was petite and slender, no more than five feet tall, with a graceful and gentle figure.

Her skin was fair and delicate, like the finest white jade. Her eyebrows and eyes were delicate and gentle, with slightly upturned corners. Her almond-shaped eyes were clear and bright, as warm as water, without a trace of ferocity.

A pure white flowing dress draped her body, its wide, swaying hem moving like clouds in the wind. Embroidered with delicate white lotus patterns, the dress exuded elegance and refinement, adding a touch of ethereal beauty.

In her hand, she lightly held a white jade whisk, its handle carved from millennia-old warm jade, smooth and lustrous to the touch.

The whisk's threads were snow-white, fine, supple, and smooth, their surface shimmering with a faint, gentle white light—a high-grade auxiliary magical artifact.

The woman's aura was mellow and soft, her spiritual power gentle and restrained, devoid of any aggression, causing one to instinctively lower their guard and feel a sense of closeness.

This woman was named Ling Yue, proficient in array formations, barriers, defense, and healing, skilled in support and balance; her strength was not to be underestimated.

The two noticed the door opening and simultaneously looked up at Gui Yuanzi.

Their gazes fell on Gui Yuanzi, indifferent and unresponsive, devoid of any respect or friendliness.

There were no pleasantries, no formalities, only pure businesslike conduct, cold and distant.

Gui Yuanzi understood.

These two hadn't come voluntarily; they were merely under Wu Heng's orders, forced to accompany him into the secret realm.

In their eyes, he was nothing more than a mission target to be escorted and guarded, regardless of status or sentiment, so naturally they wouldn't show any extra courtesy.

Gui Yuanzi didn't initiate a conversation, but calmly raised his eyes to observe the two.

His divine sense quietly spread out, carefully probing their auras, memorizing their physical characteristics, spiritual energy fluctuations, and aura attributes.

His refined divine sense swept over them, clearly sensing that both An Dao and Ling Yue were Golden Immortals of the first rank, their auras steady and refined, their foundations solid, without the slightest hint of superficiality—truly top-tier cultivators.

Dark Blade's spiritual energy is dark and cold, its aura violent and sharp, shrouded in murderous intent. It excels at close-quarters attacks, assassinations, and breaking through defenses, its methods ruthless and decisive.

Spirit Moon's spiritual energy is warm and mellow, gentle and enduring, its fluctuations calm and restrained, leaning towards defense, formation, and healing, a combination of offense, defense, and support.

The two, one offensive and one supportive, one hard and one soft, complement each other perfectly, exactly as Wu Heng had previously told them.

After a brief silent standoff, Dark Blade broke the silence first.

His thin lips parted slightly, his voice cold and flat, devoid of any emotional fluctuation, like an ice bead striking a cold stone, piercingly chilling.

“Let’s go.”

With that one word, he said nothing more, showing no intention of waiting. He turned and strode directly out of the stone tower.

His steps were steady and swift, his black figure blending into the white morning mist, decisive and indifferent.

Lingyue pursed her lips slightly, giving Guiyuanzi a gentle nod, her movements soft and understated, still remaining silent. Her

slender white fingers lightly gripped a whisk, which hung at her side as she followed Andao, walking slowly forward. Her pure white skirt swept across the thin mist on the ground, leaving not a speck of dust.

Guiyuanzi stood still, watching the two figures walk away, his chest pressed against the jade bottle, clearly sensing a faint, warm aura of divine soul within.

He slowly exhaled a breath of pent-up energy, suppressing the surging vigilance and unease in his heart, concealing the complex emotions in his eyes, and followed their steps.

The three walked in silence, not exchanging a single word.

The morning mist enveloped the three figures—one in black, one in white, and one in blue—their colors distinct, the atmosphere heavy and oppressive. The bluestone pavement beneath their feet was cool and damp, their footsteps soft and slow, dissolving into the morning stillness.

The three followed the empty street, heading towards the southern gate of Tianque City.

Upon reaching the stone tower gate, an exquisite flying artifact awaited on the empty stone platform.

It was a flying boat propelled by spirit birds, crafted entirely from thousand-year-old spirit wood, its exterior as white as jade. The hull was

sleek and simple, devoid of elaborate carvings, its surface engraved with dense, silver runes.

The runes were hidden within the wood grain, their spiritual light restrained, swirling with faint, luminous fluctuations of spiritual energy.

Two snow-white, long-winged spirit birds were tethered to the bow of the flying boat. Their eyes were clear and full of intelligence, their bodies surrounded by a faint wind-elemental spiritual energy, crucial for controlling the boat and propelling it through the air.

This boat possessed extremely high speed and stable flight, capable of withstanding the fierce winds of high altitudes, making it a superior flying artifact for long journeys.

Dark Blade was the first to leap onto the flying boat, landing silently, his body as steady as a rock.

He went straight to the control position at the bow, sat cross-legged, and rapidly formed hand seals, channeling his own spiritual energy into the runes of the flying boat.

Lingyue followed closely behind, her figure light and graceful, like a falling flower landing quietly in the corner of the stern of the flying boat.

She settled down, her whisk resting lightly on her knees, her eyes closed, focused and at peace. Guiyuanzi was the last to board the flying boat, his blue Daoist robe fluttering slightly in the morning breeze.

He deliberately chose to sit on the edge of the boat, leaning against the cool railing, his gaze fixed on the hazy outline of the city in the distance. The jade bottle at his heart remained warm, a constant reminder of his mission.

The next instant, a faint white light shone from the runes on the flying boat, and gentle spiritual energy lifted the boat, slowly lifting it off the ground.

Two cloud-feathered spirit birds flapped their wings and soared into the air, emitting two clear chirps, before pulling the flying boat steadily towards the gates of Tianque City. The

flying boat passed through the tall city gates, completely leaving the jurisdiction of Tianque City.

Outside the city, the wilderness was covered in frost, white mist filled the air, and few people were visible.

An Dao's eyes turned cold, his fingertips abruptly changing their hand seals, and his spiritual power output surged dramatically.

Whoosh—

The runes on the boat's hull suddenly brightened, a blinding silver light flashing and disappearing in

an instant. The flying boat, like an arrow released from a bow, tore through the white mist, cleaved through the high-altitude air currents, and sped towards the vast mountains of the eastern Northern Region .

The sound of air being torn apart was low and short, instantly dissipating in the high-altitude gale.

Ten thousand miles above, a biting wind howled, and clouds churned.

The flying boat continued eastward, traversing layers of clouds.

Below, the mountains and rivers receded rapidly, verdant peaks, winding rivers, villages, and cities all becoming blurred patches of color, quickly passing by.

The air currents whistled and pounded against the hull, but were completely blocked by the surface spiritual energy barrier, keeping the interior peaceful and undisturbed.

The atmosphere on board remained deathly silent and oppressive; no one spoke.An Dao sat alone at the bow of the boat, his back straight, his hands constantly forming a hand seal. His dark eyes stared straight ahead, his face expressionless, his hard jawline unwavering.

The surrounding scenery seemed utterly irrelevant to him; his world consisted solely of his journey.

Ling Yue sat quietly in the corner, her posture upright, eyes closed, long eyelashes casting soft shadows on her fair cheeks.

Her hands rested on her knees, her fingertips lightly pinching the threads of a whisk. A faint white aura surrounded her, whether she was quietly cultivating her spiritual energy or pondering the pros and cons of her journey was unclear.

Occasionally, she would slowly open her eyes, her clear gaze sweeping over Gui Yuanzi beside her, a hint of scrutiny and doubt hidden in her eyes.

She couldn’t understand this seemingly ordinary Daoist cultivator.

Gui Yuanzi’s cultivation was only at the early stage of the third rank of Golden Immortal, not considered top-tier among cultivators, yet he willingly risked his life to venture into the treacherous Chaos Secret Realm.

What intrigued her even more was the white jade bottle he always kept close to his heart. Its seal was tight, and its inner aura was obscure, as if it held a secret unknown to others.

Each time her gaze swept over it, her doubts deepened, but she never rashly investigated, adhering to propriety and boundaries.

Gui Yuanzi was aware of this but didn’t take it to heart.

He knew Ling Yue meant no harm, merely a curious observer; the most important thing now was to remain vigilant and guard against any potential dangers.

He lightly gripped the boat railing, gazing at the rapidly swirling sea of clouds outside the window, his heart pounding, his thoughts racing.

The Chaos Secret Realm was located deep within the vast mountains of the eastern Northern Region, thousands of miles away from Tianque City.

This spirit bird flying boat was far faster than ordinary flying magical artifacts, able to traverse thousands of mountains and rivers in an instant. Even so, it would still take a full day to reach the outer edge of the Cangmang Mountains.

The journey seemed calm and uneventful, but Guiyuanzi dared not relax his guard in the slightest.

Human hearts were unpredictable, and the road ahead was uncertain.

He couldn't determine whether the cunning Wu Heng would harbor murderous intent along the way, secretly deploying men to intercept and kill him, eliminating any potential threats;

he also knew that the bloodthirsty and obsessive Tianji Venerable had never given up on seizing the soul of the young master Kai. The Venerable's cultivators were scattered throughout the Northern Region, and it was highly likely they had detected their movements and were pursuing them relentlessly.

The road ahead was fraught with countless dangers, both open and hidden, impossible to guard against.

With this thought in mind, Guiyuanzi subconsciously raised his hand and gently pressed it against the white jade bottle on his chest.

The cool jade bottle rested against his warm palm. The faint fluctuations of his divine soul within were clearly perceptible; this faint aura was all his obsession and strength.

He lowered his gaze to his palm, his lips moving slightly as he murmured in a low voice, audible only to the two of them.

“Young Master, we’re setting off.”

“This time, I will definitely obtain the Chaos Elixir, sparing no expense to help you rebuild your physical body.”

“Rest assured, I will risk my life to protect you.”

Within the tranquil jade bottle, a thin, transparent wisp of divine soul slowly floated.

Kai’s remaining divine soul was extremely weak, almost transparent, as if it would dissipate into the world at any moment.

Hearing Gui Yuanzi’s deep, solemn words, his divine soul trembled slightly, rippling with a faint spiritual light.

A weak, hoarse, yet gentle and clear voice slowly emanated from the jade bottle, clearly reaching Gui Yuanzi’s ears.

“Guiyuanzi, be careful in everything.”

“Wu Heng is extremely cunning and unpredictable; never trust him. These two accompanying cultivators are his loyal henchmen; be wary of their every word and action, and never let them scheme against you.” ”

Besides, Venerable Tianji is deeply obsessed and will never easily abandon my soul. His spies are all over the Northern Region; our whereabouts are easily exposed. We must be on guard at all times during the journey to prevent pursuit.”

Kai's tone was calm and composed. Even in dire straits and with his soul wavering, he maintained a clear mind, accurately analyzing the crisis before him.

"Your subordinate will remember your instructions, Young Master." Guiyuanzi nodded slightly, his gaze growing increasingly solemn, his vigilance rising once more. "Your subordinate will be cautious at every step, not missing any abnormalities, and protecting both myself and the Young Master's soul."

Their secret conversation ended in an instant, and silence returned.

The flying boat continued its eastward journey, passing through layer after layer of thick clouds.

Along the way, the sky occasionally revealed flying artifacts piloted by other cultivators: spirit birds with wingspans reaching thousands of miles, exquisitely carved jade chariots, and simple wooden boats.

Cultivators came and went in an endless stream, all traveling to various parts of the Northern Region.

An Dao focused intently on controlling the flying boat, his divine sense spreading wide, keenly detecting the surrounding activity.

Whenever he sensed a high-level cultivator approaching, or a flying artifact with a strange aura, he would subtly change course and quietly give way, unwilling to create unnecessary trouble before reaching the secret realm.

Ling Yue would occasionally open her eyes, her clear gaze sweeping over the rapidly passing mountains and rivers below, her expression calm and undisturbed.

After a brief observation, she would close her eyes again, immersing herself in her own world.

Her occasional glances at Gui Yuanzi still carried a hint of scrutiny and doubt, yet she remained silent, never uttering a single question.

Gui Yuanzi, while secretly guarding his surroundings, secretly circulated the Daoist spiritual energy within his body.

The long, pure spiritual energy flowed slowly through his meridians, cleansing his weary body and nourishing his depleted spirit.

He hadn't slept all night, and his spirit was severely exhausted. He needed to take advantage of the safe passage to quietly recuperate and maintain peak condition.

He knew that once he entered the Chaotic Secret Realm, there would be no more opportunities for rest and recuperation. Only by maintaining his best combat strength could he fight for a sliver of survival in this perilous situation.

Time slowly passed, the sunlight shifted from east to west, the bright daylight quietly faded, and the dusky twilight slowly painted the sky.

After a full day of high-altitude flight, the flying boat finally slowed down.

In the distance, a vast, undulating, dark mountain range came into view.

The mountain range stretched endlessly between heaven and earth, its peaks intertwined, layer upon layer, seemingly without end.

The Cangmang Mountains, a renowned ancient mountain range in the eastern part of the Northern Region, spans tens of thousands of miles. Its terrain is precipitous and rugged, with numerous towering peaks.

Ancient trees reach for the sky, their dense foliage blocking out most of the sunlight, leaving the forests perpetually dark and gloomy.

This place is perpetually shrouded in a thick, viscous, greyish-white fog, which lingers and carries an eerie, mysterious aura.

The spiritual energy here far surpasses that of other cities and plains in the Northern Region, pure and abundant, ideal for cultivators.

However, this spiritual energy is mixed with a large amount of decaying, cold, and dark energy; it is a murky and impure mixture.

Once you step into the mountainous region, the chilling cold seeps into your skin and bones through your pores, making you feel cold all over and restless. The flying boat descended slowly, landing smoothly on a spacious stone platform on the outskirts of the mountains.

The platform was exposed, its surface covered with a layer of damp moss, and the soil beneath its feet was soft, mixed with decaying leaves, emitting a faint, pungent, and damp odor.

An Dao raised his hand and formed a hand seal, a flash of black spiritual energy disappearing from his fingertips.

The pure white flying boat instantly transformed into a streak of shimmering white light, shrinking several times its original size, and was precisely stored in an ancient-looking storage jade pendant at his waist.

The two cloud-feathered spirit birds also transformed into two streaks of white light, concealed within the jade pendant, lying dormant quietly.

The three of them landed, and the cool, damp mountain air instantly enveloped them, chilling them to the bone.

The damp mist seeped into their flesh through the gaps in their clothing, mingling with the acrid smell of decaying leaves, rotten wood, and damp earth, assaulting their senses and causing a slight nausea in their stomachs.

An Dao’s expression remained unchanged, his cold and stern face still indifferent, as if the surrounding frigid environment had no effect on him whatsoever.

He rapidly formed a probing hand seal with his fingertips, a wisp of dark, ghostly spiritual energy swirling around him and spreading rapidly through the surrounding mountains and forests like ripples.

The energy swept across the grass, trees, and rocks, meticulously probing for lurking demonic beasts, restrictions, and deadly intent.

A moment later, the dark energy returned, flowing back into his meridians.

The probing revealed nothing unusual; there were no high-level demonic beasts lurking nearby, nor any hidden killing restrictions.

“This is the outer edge of the Cangmang Mountains, a miasma forest.”

An Dao finally spoke again, his clear, cold voice breaking the silence of the forest. His icy tone carried a rare hint of warning. “The forest is teeming with low-level poisonous beasts, and the vegetation harbors a mesmerizing miasma. Numerous natural barriers exist.

Once inside, do not speak loudly, do not touch unfamiliar plants, and do not stray from the group.”

He pointed towards the depths of the mountains, his gaze sharp and icy: “According to the map of the secret realm provided by the guild leader, we need to traverse this miasma forest and reach the cliffs at the back of the mountain to set up camp and rest.

At dawn tomorrow, proceed to the entrance of the secret realm to begin the challenge.”

Ling Yue slowly opened her eyes, her clear gaze sweeping over the thick, grayish-white miasma around her.

Her slender, white fingers gently brushed the snow-white threads of her jade whisk, warm, pure spiritual energy flowing slowly from her fingertips, perfectly counteracting the poisonous miasma of the mountains.

With a soft hum, a nearly transparent circular light shield rapidly expanded from the three of them.

The shield was thin and light, its radiance delicate and gentle, like a thin layer of glass, enveloping them completely.

The surrounding murky, grayish-white miasma and cold, gloomy aura collided with the shield and were instantly shut out, unable to get any closer.

“I’ve set up a dust-free barrier to isolate the miasma and resist the cold, turbid aura,”

Lingyue’s voice was soft and melodious, a stark contrast to Andao’s cold, hoarse tone, yet equally detached and indifferent. “The barrier’s spiritual energy is stable and can last for twelve hours. Do not forcibly break through the barrier, otherwise the spiritual energy will become disordered, the barrier will shatter, and the miasma will invade your body.”

Guiyuanzi nodded slightly, his gaze sweeping over the thick, persistent mist around him, his heart growing increasingly cautious.

He tightened his collar, ensuring the white jade bottle against his chest remained securely against his skin and wouldn’t shift due to the commotion.

The three didn’t linger, stepping into the dark and deep miasma forest before dusk completely enveloped the mountains.

The grayish-white mist, thick as cotton, hovered in mid-air, obscuring vision and blocking divine sense.

The visible range was only three zhang (approximately 10 meters); beyond that, all was a vast expanse of white mist, concealing trees, strange rocks, and ravines, making them indistinct and difficult to discern.

The forest was dimly lit; the ancient trees' branches intertwined, blocking out the sunlight. A cold, damp wind rustled through the gaps in the leaves, creating a chilling and eerie atmosphere, accompanied by the faint roars of beasts and chirps of insects in the distance.

Although the spiritual energy here was rich, it was mixed with a large number of violent and disordered fragments of Golden Immortal Laws. These

fragments were hidden within the mist, invisible to the naked eye, yet sharp and piercing.

If an ordinary cultivator were to attempt flight without the protection of abundant spiritual energy, the fragments would violently tear through their meridians, causing internal injuries that are difficult to heal.

Even for a Golden Immortal cultivator, flying in this place would require a significant amount of spiritual energy to construct protective barriers, making it a losing proposition.

Therefore, the three unanimously chose to walk, taking solid ground and proceeding steadily.

After nightfall, the temperature in the forest plummeted, the fog thickened, and visibility decreased further.

Gui Yuanzi took the initiative to walk at the head of the group, his blue Daoist robe standing out conspicuously in the dim forest.

He was fully alert, constantly vigilant about his surroundings, each step steady and cautious, avoiding hidden ditches and poisonous plants on the ground.

The white jade bottle on his chest remained pressed tightly against his heart, radiating warmth continuously. Kai's soul lay dormant, occasionally releasing a faint wisp of divine sense to resonate with Gui Yuanzi, jointly probing for potential dangers in the surroundings.

An Dao moved to the right side of the group, his body shimmering with dark light,

his murderous aura subtly concealed. His cold eyes gleamed faintly in the darkness, keenly detecting the slightest movement within the mist. Any poisonous insects or low-level demonic beasts that approached would be deterred and sent fleeing without a fight, his chilling killing intent alone enough to scare them away.

Ling Yue walked on the left side of the group, her whisk gently swaying. The dust-free barrier remained stable, its soft white light isolating all poisonous and turbid air.

Her gaze was calm as she silently observed her surroundings, while secretly watching Gui Yuanzi's every move, her doubts never fading.

The three formed a triangular formation, maintaining a distance of no more than ten zhang between each other—neither too close nor too far, enough to support each other while ensuring sufficient safety.

No one spoke throughout; only the soft crunch of footsteps on decaying leaves echoed slowly in the silent, eerie forest.

The long night passed, and no one rested.

Relying on their powerful cultivator physiques, the three traveled day and night, constantly traversing the miasma forests, secluded valleys, and rocky plains.

Along the way, they avoided dozens of natural illusionary barriers, bypassed three high-level demonic beast lairs, and slew several venomous beasts that launched surprise attacks.

Dark Blade struck ruthlessly, killing with a single blow; Spirit Moon reinforced the barrier in time, dispelling the miasma's corrosive effects; Gui Yuanzi stabilized his mind, breaking through the illusions' allure.

The three cooperated seamlessly, each fulfilling their role without exchanging words, steadily advancing.

Night slowly faded, and a faint glimmer of dawn appeared once more

on the eastern horizon. The cool morning light pierced through the thick fog, illuminating the depths of the vast mountains.

After a grueling night's journey, the three finally traversed layers of mist and arrived at the entrance to the Chaotic Secret Realm.

The entrance to the Chaotic Secret Realm was situated halfway up a towering peak.

The mountain was majestic and steep, its smooth, jagged cliffs piercing the clouds.

Halfway up the mountain, a huge, flat rock face recesses inward, naturally forming a spacious rock platform.

In the center of the platform stands a magnificent, ancient, and dark stone gate.The stone gate, approximately ten zhang high and five zhang wide, was carved entirely from jet-black Xuan Tie divine stone. Heavy and imposing, its surface devoid of superfluous decoration, except for a dense array of ancient runes of varying depths covering the gate panels.

The runes were twisted and obscure, their forms ancient and strange, belonging to no common script of the time, exuding a sense of a barbaric and ancient era.

The morning light spilled onto the stone gate, causing the obscure runes to slowly shift, gleaming with a chilling blue light.

The blue light flickered, and an ancient and powerful mysterious aura emanated from the stone gate—heavy, vast, and violent, as if from the primordial chaos of antiquity, inspiring instinctive awe and deterring approach.

On either side of the stone gate stood two colossal humanoid stone statues

, symmetrically carved from dark blue-green rock. They wore heavy, ancient armor, the armor plates clearly defined, and gripped long, sharp spears, the tips pointing diagonally to the ground, their postures imposing and menacing.

The stone statue's face was exquisitely carved, with strong eyebrows and distinct features, except for its empty, black eyes, devoid of pupils, yet exuding an indifferent and majestic aura that looked down upon all living beings.

Like an ancient guardian deity, it silently guarded the entrance to the secret realm, indifferently watching every creature that dared to trespass.

A mountain breeze stirred, causing the surrounding mist to shift slowly, the blue light of the stone gate flickering, and the statue's shadow twisting and elongating on the ground,

creating a somber and solemn atmosphere. An Dao stepped forward first, his steady footsteps landing crisply on the hard rock.

He stood directly in front of the dark stone gate, raising his well-defined right hand, his fingertips gently tracing the uneven ancient runes on the door panel.

The cold, hard black iron stone door felt slightly cool to the touch, and the runes concealed ancient restrictive power.

After a moment of examination, he withdrew his right hand, turned to look at Gui Yuanzi behind him, his tone still cold and concise, without any unnecessary embellishment.

"The sealing power of this gate is extremely strong; a single person's spiritual power cannot break it. The entrance restriction requires three Golden Immortal cultivators to simultaneously inject their spiritual

power. Only when the three forces merge can the seal be unlocked and the gate to the secret realm opened."

Gui Yuanzi raised his eyes and gazed at the magnificent and ancient stone gate before him. The jade bottle in his heart trembled slightly, and Kai's soul seemed to be sensing the ancient chaotic aura outside the gate as well.

He suppressed the fluctuations in his heart and nodded solemnly: "Understood."

After speaking, Gui Yuanzi slowly stepped forward and stood in the center of the stone gate, raising his hand and placing his palm flat against the cold black iron door panel.

His cyan Daoist robe fluttered in the wind, and a faint cyan spiritual power slowly flowed around him, ready to be unleashed.

An Dao moved to the right side of the stone gate, his black bodysuit clinging to his body. His palm was pressed tightly against the door panel, and dark, cold black spiritual power surged in his palm, his murderous aura restrained, ready to be unleashed.

Lingyue stood to the left of the stone gate, dressed in pristine white, her movements graceful and light. Her fair palm gently covered the stone gate, and a warm, pure white spiritual energy flowed slowly and gently.

The three of them formed a triangle, their palms pressed against the heavy stone gate simultaneously, their auras instantly converging, their minds highly focused.

"Make your move," Andao commanded in a low, deep voice.

The next instant, three distinct streams of spiritual energy surged forth from their palms simultaneously.

Guiyuanzi's azure Daoist spiritual energy was pure and continuous, warm and profound, carrying a righteous and righteous aura;

Andao's black killing spiritual energy was dark and cold, sharp and violent, carrying a chilling killing intent;

Lingyue's white healing spiritual energy was gentle and pure, warm and refined, possessing its own purifying power.

The three-colored spiritual energy flowed continuously into the stone gate along the obscure rune patterns.

The previously dim runes suddenly illuminated, their eerie blue light rapidly surging, transforming from light blue to a deep, icy blue, dazzlingly bright and illuminating the entire rock platform.

The runes flowed and swirled along fixed paths, slowly prying open the ancient sealing power, causing a heavy spatial tremor to emanate from the stone door's surface.

Boom!

A deep, muffled rumble exploded from within the stone door, shaking heaven and earth and echoing through the empty mountains.

The hard, heavy black iron stone door slowly slid inward along the central crack, gradually widening into a dark, deep crevice.

The instant the crevice opened, a vast, ancient, and chaotic aura rushed out.

The airflow was turbid and heavy, carrying countless fragments of chaotic laws, its impact extremely powerful.

Gui Yuanzi's flowing azure spiritual energy suddenly stagnated, his meridians slightly numb, the speed of his internal spiritual energy flow involuntarily slowing, and an instinctive feeling of oppression and discomfort arising within him.

He frowned slightly, took a deep breath, and forcibly suppressed the unease surging in his heart. He tightened the jade bottle in his chest and gripped the Qingfeng sword at his waist.

The cool hilt of the sword brought him a sense of security, and his gaze was firm, without the slightest hesitation.

“Enter.”

With a single, brief word, Guiyuanzi moved, taking the lead and stepping into the dark, deep crevice of the stone door.

His azure figure was instantly swallowed by the chaotic mist and disappeared into the light outside the door.

Andao and Lingyue followed closely behind, one in black and one in white, stepping into the stone door one after another. All three figures disappeared within the entrance to the secret realm.

After the three stepped in, the heavy stone door rumbled again, the crevice slowly closed, the blue light gradually dimmed, and finally returned to its original tightly closed state, as if it had never been opened.

The two stone statues still stood on either side, their empty eyes gazing indifferently, silently guarding this ancient secret realm.

The moment he stepped through the stone gate, the surrounding light vanished abruptly, cutting off all sounds of the wind, birdsong, and air currents.

Within the secret realm, there was no sky, no earth, no mountains, no vegetation, and no sun, moon, or stars.

As far as the eye could see, there was only an endless expanse of gray mist.

The mist was thick and murky, its color dark, resembling a primordial space before the creation of chaos and heaven and earth—desolate, lifeless, and vast.

Countless tiny, transparent fragments of chaotic laws floated in the air, varying in size and shape, drifting, colliding, and annihilating randomly.

Compared to the fragments of Golden Immortal laws in the mountains outside, the chaotic fragments here were far more violent, more primal, and sharper.

Each fragment contained the purest and most domineering chaotic power, tearing and slicing apart any living being that dared to enter.

A layer of azure spiritual energy barrier spontaneously enveloped Gui Yuanzi, its protective aura flowing faintly.

However, this barrier proved exceptionally fragile before the raging fragments of chaos.

The fragments collided and rubbed against the spiritual energy barrier, emitting sharp, crackling sounds, and the spiritual light dimmed and dissipated at a visible rate. His spiritual

energy was rapidly draining away, his meridians throbbed slightly, and a strong sense of exhaustion swept over him.

Gui Yuanzi knew this place was not safe to linger; he had to find the Chaos Elixir as soon as possible to complete his mission.

He suppressed the discomfort caused by the depletion of his spiritual energy and continued forward steadily, not daring to pause for even a moment. Dark Blade led the way, clearing the path.

A dark, swirling light enveloped him, his tight-fitting clothes covered in a layer of condensed, dark spiritual energy that shielded him from the surrounding chaotic mist.

His steps were steady, his gaze sharp, his black eyes piercing the gray fog, precisely surveying the path ahead and avoiding hidden spatial rifts and chaotic vortexes. An

aura of killing intent surrounded him, intimidating any unknown creatures lurking within the secret realm.

Lingyue brought up the rear, her white robes standing out starkly against the gray mist.

She gently waved her white jade whisk, the snow-white threads tracing soft arcs in the air, spreading out rays of shimmering white light that formed a second, delicate protective shield around the three of them.

The pure white spiritual energy was gentle yet resilient, actively intercepting numerous fragments of chaotic laws, reducing the spiritual energy consumption of the other two.

Her expression was calm, her breathing even, silently guarding the rear of the group, wary of any potential attacks from behind.

Gui Yuanzi walked in the center of the group, the white jade bottle pressed tightly against his skin, its warmth constant and clear.

Within the sealed jade bottle, Kai's senses were amplified, allowing him to perceive the raging chaotic power, the shattered laws, and the spiritual energy of the three individuals.

He could clearly sense Gui Yuanzi's rapidly depleting spiritual energy, his meridians enduring a constant tearing pain, and a wave of worry washed over his weakened soul.

"Gui Yuanzi,"

Kai's deep voice softly emanated from the jade bottle, avoiding the other two's detection, audible only to Gui Yuanzi, "The chaotic power is too violent, the laws here are disordered, and your spiritual energy is being consumed far faster than in ordinary places. Do not force yourself to

endure it. If your spiritual energy is exhausted, retreat immediately to rest. Do not be stubborn."

Gui Yuanzi's steps did not falter, his back remained straight, his tone firm and steady, without the slightest wavering.

"Young Master, rest assured, I can still hold on."

"This loss of spiritual energy is nothing to fear. As long as we can find the Chaos Spiritual Liquid, this pain and consumption are insignificant."

He had already prepared to pay the price. To reshape Kai's physical body, even if it meant exhausting his spiritual energy and suffering serious injuries, he would never give up halfway.

The three continued to venture deeper into the secret realm. The surrounding fog grew increasingly thick, the dark fog almost turning black, compressing the visible range to within two zhang.

There was no clear path beneath their feet; the ground was formed from soft, condensed chaotic energy, soft and weak to the touch, slightly sticky. Each step required extra spiritual energy to maintain their form.

The surroundings were deathly silent, without wind, without beast roars, without any sound of living beings. The extreme silence was oppressive, instilling fear in their hearts.

Only the faint crackling sound of fragments of law colliding with the barrier, monotonous and repetitive, constantly pounded on their minds.

This silent and tedious journey continued for a full half hour.

Just as the three maintained their usual pace, a blurry figure slowly emerged from the thick gray fog ahead.

The figure was tall and slender, with an elegant and upright posture; one could vaguely discern that it was an elderly man dressed in a loose white robe.

The old man stood with his hands behind his back, his spine straight, surrounded by a faint halo of chaotic spiritual light. His aura was vast and profound, as deep as the sea, making it impossible to accurately determine his cultivation level.

He lightly held a whisk in his hand; the whisk was snow-white and smooth, its threads floating gently in the turbid fog, radiating a warm and pure white light, particularly conspicuous in the dark and desolate secret realm.

This man stood silently in the center of the fog, motionless and unmoving, yet possessing an aura of detachment and indifference that seemed to look down upon all living beings.

The raging chaotic fog around him would automatically disperse and avoid him if it approached within a ten-foot radius.

Gui Yuanzi suddenly stopped, his azure spiritual energy instantly tensing, his mind highly focused.

He subconsciously spread his divine sense, attempting to probe the old man's cultivation level, origin, and aura.

But the instant his invisible divine sense touched the old man's surrounding spiritual light, it vanished without a

trace, like a mud ox sinking into the sea. There was no leakage of spiritual energy from the old man, no heartbeat, no breath, no trace of any living being's aura—like a phantom image formed out of thin air, not existing in this world.

"Dark Blade, what's ahead?" Gui Yuanzi lowered his voice, his tone grave, and softly asked Dark Blade beside him.

Dark Blade's dark eyes were fixed on the white mist figure, his brows furrowed tightly, and for the first time, a clear seriousness appeared on his usually cold face.

His black spiritual energy stirred slightly, and his killing intent quietly condensed, ready to strike at any moment.

“I don’t know.”

Dark Blade’s tone was low, carrying a rare hint of caution. “The map of the secret realm provided by the guild leader never marked this place as having a humanoid phantom.

It’s most likely a guardian spirit naturally born in the secret realm, or the remnant soul of a cultivator who perished here in ancient times. Do not approach rashly; beware of hidden dangers.”

Lingyue also stopped, her clear gaze falling on the white-robed elder. She slightly tightened her grip on her whisk, and the pure white protective shield subtly thickened.

Her spiritual energy circulated smoothly, her spiritual light contained, silently observing the phantom’s every move, ready to assist in the defense at any moment.

The three maintained a vigilant posture, exchanged glances, and then tacitly moved forward slowly.

One zhang, five zhang, ten zhang…

When the three were exactly ten zhang away from the white-robed elder, the phantom, which had remained motionless and silent, suddenly spoke.

An aged, hoarse, gentle voice, carrying a trace of ancient vicissitudes, rang out from nowhere in the deathly silence of the mist, precisely reaching Guiyuanzi’s ears.

The tone was calm, yet it seemed to transcend endless ages and the cycle of life and death.

“Guiyuanzi, you’ve finally arrived.”

Seven simple words, devoid of sharp killing intent or oppressive force, yet they caused Guiyuanzi to stiffen abruptly, his blood nearly freezing.

His pupils contracted sharply, his heart clenched, and a storm raged within him.

An overwhelming sense of shock and bewilderment instantly engulfed his thoughts.

Did this person know him?

Guiyuanzi clearly remembered that this was the first time in his life he had stepped into the Chaos Secret Realm; he had never set foot on this land before, nor had he ever seen this white-robed elder.

Yet, the other not only recognized him but also accurately called him by name, his tone familiar, as if he had been waiting for him for a long time.

Countless questions surged into his mind, tangled together in a chaotic mess. Guiyuanzi suppressed his inner turmoil and asked in a tense voice, “Who are you?”

The white-robed figure did not answer immediately.

His movements were slow and elegant, as he slowly turned his body.

The wide white robe swayed gently with the movement, its hem brushing against the murky mist without a speck of dust.

An old, ancient face slowly came into view of the three.

The old man’s brows and eyes were covered with fine wrinkles, his forehead was deeply furrowed, and his white hair was casually tied back. His face was unfamiliar, and Gui Yuanzi was certain he had never seen this person before.

Yet, for some reason, gazing at this aged face, he felt a strange sense of familiarity, both warm and bewildering. In his moment of confusion, Gui Yuanzi's gaze suddenly fixed on the whisk in the old man's hand.

In that instant, his entire body trembled violently, his pupils contracted sharply, his breath caught in his throat, and a tidal wave of emotion surged within him.

That whisk was etched into his very being, unforgettable for a lifetime.

Inside the ancestral hall of the Guiyuan Sect, portraits of past patriarchs hung.

Among them, the portrait of the founding patriarch, the ancient ancestor who laid the foundation for the Guiyuan Sect's thousand-year lineage, held tightly in his hand this very same white jade whisk, identical in style, texture, and luster.

This object was the founding patriarch's natal magic weapon, vanished a thousand years after his patriarch's death. How could it appear in this chaotic secret realm, held by a strange, ethereal figure?

Shock, bewilderment, disbelief—countless emotions intertwined and clashed, assaulting Gui Yuanzi's mind.

His lips trembled slightly, his voice dry and trembling, filled with undisguised astonishment and awe.

"You…you are the founder of the Guiyuan Sect?"

The white-robed elder's expression was calm, neither explicitly affirming nor outright denying.

He merely raised the corners of his lips, revealing a distant and enigmatic smile, gentle yet carrying a world-weary air.

The next instant, the elder slowly raised his right hand, his withered, slender fingertips flicking gently.

A ball of soft, pure white light rapidly condensed from his palm, instantly transforming into a gigantic white palm of light.

The palm of light had a clear outline, its spiritual light warm and gentle, lacking any violent killing intent, yet it carried a heavy, oppressive force, tearing through the murky mist, and crashing directly towards Guiyuanzi's position.

The white light descended with incredible speed, approaching him in an instant, giving Guiyuanzi no time to think or hesitate.

Instinctive alertness erupted instantly, Guiyuanzi's pupils contracted sharply, and his azure spiritual energy surged forth without reservation.

He swiftly gripped the hilt of his sword at his waist with his right hand, his wrist snapping with a sharp, resonant clang that echoed through the mist. The Qingfeng sword was drawn, its cold light gleaming as it sliced through the murky gray fog.

"Hah!"

A low shout dispersed the surrounding air currents, pure Daoist spiritual energy flowing into the sword, instantly causing a thick, azure light

to emanate from its clear blade. This light condensed into a sharp sword beam, carrying an unstoppable, resolute momentum, and slashed straight towards the white giant hand.

Boom—!

The azure light and white light collided violently, the two drastically different forces exploding outwards.

A blinding wave of light swept across the surroundings, forcibly dispersing the murky fog, and a transparent shockwave radiated outwards from the point of impact.

A deafening roar echoed through the deathly silent secret realm, lingering for a long time.

The violent impact traveled back along the sword, striking Guiyuanzi's body directly.

The muddy ground beneath his feet instantly collapsed, and his legs slid backward involuntarily under the immense force of the impact.

One step, two steps, three steps...

he stumbled back more than ten steps before barely managing to regain his footing.

His tiger's mouth was split open from the shock, and fine blood trickled down the hilt of his sword, the warm blood staining the ancient cloud patterns and leaving glaring red marks on the cyan blade.

His face turned deathly pale, his blood surged, and a sweet taste rose in his throat, which he forcibly suppressed.

His back muscles tensed, his arms trembled slightly, his spiritual energy was disordered, and his meridians throbbed with pain.

Looking up at the white-clad phantom in the distance, Gui Yuanzi's eyes were filled with disbelief and shock.

With just a casual palm strike, without any build-up or killing move, the seemingly ordinary force had injured and defeated this early-stage Golden Immortal Rank 3 cultivator.

The true cultivation level of this illusory figure far surpassed his own, reaching the peak of the third rank of Golden Immortal and infinitely approaching the fourth rank.

The difference was enormous and obvious.

"Attack!"

An Dao’s cold shout suddenly rang out.

The instant Gui Yuanzi retreated, An Dao had already moved.

The black baleful aura around him suddenly surged, his black bodysuit billowed slightly in the airflow, and his figure suddenly became ethereal, turning into a black afterimage that completely merged into the gray mist.

The speed was so fast that the naked eye could not even catch the trajectory.

The next second, the black figure suddenly appeared three feet behind the white-robed old man. A

flash of cold light, and two black short swords at his waist were simultaneously drawn, their blades gleaming with a dark, cold light, their sharp edges piercing to the bone, carrying a concentrated killing power, slashing fiercely towards the old man’s vital point on the back of his neck.

At the same moment, Ling Yue also made her move.

With a slight flick of her fair wrist, the white jade whisk in her hand suddenly burst into a dazzling white light.

The snow-white threads instantly lengthened and thinned, like countless silver threads weaving into a dense net, wrapping around the white-robed elder’s limbs and torso from all directions, attempting to imprison his movements and restrict his space to attack.

One assassinated, the other restrained; their coordination was impeccable, combining offense and defense.

Both were first-grade Golden Immortals, attacking without holding back, suppressing the unknown phantom with all their might.

Yet the white-robed elder remained calm and composed.

Facing the sudden attack from behind, he merely raised his left hand, palm facing outward, and calmly unleashed a soft white light.

The white light was not fast, but it was incredibly precise, striking the dark blade squarely in the chest.

Thud…

A dull impact rang out.

The dark blade's condensed black aura barrier shattered instantly, and his powerful body flew backward uncontrollably like a kite with a broken string.

He gritted his teeth, his face icy, enduring the blow head-on. He staggered two steps after landing, barely managing to regain his footing. His chest heaved slightly, his breathing visibly erratic, and for the first time, a deep sense of apprehension surfaced in his usually cold and stern eyes.

Then, the old man's gaze swept across the room, and he casually flicked his finger.

A thin beam of white spiritual light shot out, precisely striking the countless interwoven white threads

in the sky. A series of crisp snapping sounds rang out as the incredibly strong threads of the whisk, capable of binding even Golden Immortals, broke like fragile cotton thread, dissipating into countless tiny white specks of light that vanished into the murky mist.

Lingyue's wrist went slightly numb, her spiritual energy momentarily stagnant. She staggered back two steps, her clear eyes filled with astonishment.

In just two moves, he had easily shattered the combined attack of two Golden Immortal cultivators.

The white-robed elder remained standing, his robes impeccable, his hair perfectly styled, his aura calm and gentle, his presence completely still, as if the previous exchange had been nothing more than a casual brush away of dust, effortless.

His gaze returned to the pale-faced Gui Yuanzi, his tone calm and gentle, yet carrying an undeniable resolve.

“Gui Yuanzi, you are no match for me.”

“Leave now, exit the secret realm. The Chaos Elixir is not something you can covet in your current state.”

A simple sentence, devoid of mockery or contempt, yet carrying an indifferent acceptance of fate, directly shattered Gui Yuanzi’s obsession with this journey.

Gui Yuanzi’s right hand, hanging by his side, gripped the sword hilt tightly.

Blood from the wound on his palm soaked the hilt, sticky and warm.

He lowered his head slightly, his disheveled hair obscuring his eyes, making it impossible for others to see his expression.

After a moment of silence, he slowly raised his head, his once gentle eyes now dark and resolute, revealing a stubborn determination.

“I cannot leave.”

His voice was hoarse, yet each word was firm and unwavering. “The young master is still waiting for the Chaos Elixir to reshape his body. If I leave, the young master’s body cannot recover.”

“Young master?” The white-robed elder looked puzzled.

“Yes, young master, our Daoist sect’s young master. The young master possesses the Great Luo Golden Scripture, a relic of the Daoist sect’s ancestor,” Gui Yuanzi said.

The white-robed elder’s eyes widened in shock.

The young master of the Daoist sect?

He was merely the patriarch of the Guiyuan Sect, one of countless sects within the Daoist realm. Compared

to the entire Daoist sect’s young masters, his status as the Guiyuan Sect patriarch was utterly insignificant.

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A moment later, the white-robed elder snapped out of his shock, his voice cold and resolute: “No matter the reason, you must leave immediately.”

With a flick of his whisk, an invisible force pushed Gui Yuanzi back three steps.

Gui Yuanzi steadied himself, raised his head, and looked directly into the elder’s eyes.

Those eyes were deep, as if they held the vicissitudes of countless years, yet they were as clear as mountain spring water.

He took a deep breath, clasped his hands, and said, “Senior, I have not come for personal gain. My young master possesses the Great Luo Golden Scripture of the Daoist sect and is the chosen successor of the Daoist patriarch.

His physical body has been destroyed, leaving only a wisp of his soul. He urgently needs the Chaos Spiritual Liquid to reshape his body and revitalize the Daoist sect. I beg you, senior, to grant my request.”

The white-robed elder's brow twitched slightly, a flicker of emotion flashing in his eyes, but he quickly regained his composure.

He shook his head, his tone still cold: "Young Master of the Dao Sect? The Great Luo Golden Scripture? I don't care who you are, nor who this so-called Young Master is.

The Chaos Secret Realm has existed for hundreds of thousands of years, and its rules have never changed. If you want the Chaos Spirit Liquid, there are only two paths: either defeat me, or offer something more precious than the Chaos Spirit Liquid in exchange.

Since you can't defeat me and can't offer a treasure of equal value, then please leave."

Gui Yuanzi clenched his fists. He knew the old man was telling the truth, but he couldn't give up.

The Young Master was still waiting in the jade bottle; the Young Master needed him.

He gritted his teeth and said in a deep voice, "Senior, this junior has offended you."

This time, Gui Yuanzi didn't hold back.

He pushed his spiritual power to its limit, and dazzling spiritual light flowed across his cyan longsword. Dense cyan runes appeared on the sword, the secret sword technique passed down through generations of the Gui Yuan Sect—the Azure Dragon Sword Art.

He unleashed a sword strike, the sword energy transforming into a ten-zhang-long azure dragon, baring its fangs and roaring as it charged towards the white-robed elder.

Wherever the azure dragon passed, the mist in the hall was torn apart, space itself distorted slightly, and the air emitted a piercing shriek.

The white-robed elder watched the charging azure dragon, a hint of admiration flashing in his eyes.

He had lived for ten thousand years and seen countless geniuses, but few could unleash such a fierce sword technique at the early stage of the third rank of Golden Immortal.

He raised his right hand, fingers spread, a ball of white light surging from his palm.

The light was pure and warm, without a trace of ferocity, yet it contained world-destroying power.

The light transformed into a massive shield, blocking the azure dragon.

The azure dragon crashed into the shield, unleashing a deafening roar, causing the entire hall to tremble slightly.

The shield trembled violently, yet remained unmoved, showing no sign of shattering.

Gui Yuanzi gritted his teeth and unleashed another sword strike.

This strike was even fiercer and more domineering than the first.

He channeled his primal spiritual power, sacrificing his foundation, pushing the Azure Dragon Sword Technique to its limit.

The Azure Dragon’s size doubled, its roar causing the mist in the hall to churn violently, and even the ancient runes on the walls to flicker.

The Azure Dragon slammed into the light shield again; this time, cracks appeared, spreading outwards like a spiderweb.

The white-robed elder frowned slightly.

He withdrew his right hand, and the light shield dissipated.

Freed from its obstruction, the Azure Dragon pounced on the elder with overwhelming force.

The elder didn't dodge, nor did he cast any defensive spells; he simply raised his left hand and casually struck the Azure Dragon on the head.

Boom!

With a deafening roar, the Azure Dragon shattered, transforming into countless azure specks of light that drifted through the hall like fireflies.

Gui Yuanzi was sent flying backward by the backlash, spitting out blood. He tumbled several times in the air before crashing heavily to the ground, sliding several meters away.

His cyan longsword was stuck in the ground not far away, its spiritual light completely dimmed, and several fine cracks appeared on the blade.

Gui Yuanzi struggled to stand up, but found that his legs were no longer under his control.

His left arm was broken, his right leg was also injured, and at least two ribs in his chest were broken.

He lay on the ground, panting heavily, blood dripping from the corner of his mouth onto the ground, staining a small patch of bluestone red.

An Dao and Ling Yue stood at the entrance of the main hall, watching Gui Yuanzi being severely injured, and then looking at the unfathomable aura of the white-robed elder. The two exchanged a glance and made a decision at the same time.

They were only sent by the Void Merchant Guild to monitor Gui Yuanzi, not to fight to the death.

If they couldn't get the Chaos Spirit Liquid, they could just go back and report; there was no need to lose their lives here.

An Dao sheathed his twin swords, turned and ran.

Ling Yue followed closely behind, and the two rushed out of the main hall one after the other, disappearing into the deep tunnel.

They didn't even leave behind a "take care."

Gui Yuanzi watched the two fleeing figures, a wave of sorrow washing over him.

He didn't blame them; they weren't his comrades to begin with, merely spies sent by Wu Heng to monitor him.

But he still felt a chill, not a physical one, but a chill in his heart.

For his young master, he could fight to the death, but he couldn't expect others to do the same.

"Gui Yuanzi, go…you go too."

Kai's voice came from the jade bottle, tinged with urgency and helplessness.

He had seen everything outside through the jade bottle: Gui Yuanzi severely injured, An Dao and Ling Yue fleeing.

He knew that if the fighting continued, Gui Yuanzi would die.

"Young master…this subordinate can try one more time…"

Gui Yuanzi gritted his teeth, his hands bracing against the ground, trying to stand.

But his body wouldn't obey him; his elbows buckled, and he collapsed back down.

"Go!"

Kai's voice turned stern, carrying an unquestionable command. "Don't throw your life away in vain. As long as you're alive, there's always hope. If you live, we still have a chance. If you die, who can I rely on?"

Gui Yuanzi's body jolted violently. The young master was right.

He couldn't die.

If he died, the young master would truly have no hope.

He gritted his teeth, using his last bit of strength to get up from the ground, stumbling towards the entrance of the main hall.

He glanced back at the white-robed elder, the figure standing in the center of the hall, his whisk gently swaying, his expression indifferent.

"Ancestor, you... why did you stop me from rebuilding the young master's physical body?"

His voice was hoarse, filled with confusion and a hint of resentment.

The old man in white didn't answer, only staring at him silently, his eyes devoid of any emotion, like a stagnant pool.

Gui Yuanzi waited a moment, receiving no response, then turned and staggered into the tunnel.

Behind him, the light in the hall gradually dimmed, and the old man's figure slowly dissipated into the mist, leaving only a barely audible sigh.

"Gui Yuanzi, you are stronger than your master."

Gui Yuanzi didn't hear these words.

He was already far away.

After leaving the secret realm, Gui Yuanzi dared not linger for a moment, gritting his teeth as he flew towards the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.

His injuries were severe; two ribs were broken, his left arm hung limply at his side, and every step he took with his right leg was excruciatingly painful.

His face was as pale as paper, cold sweat dripped from his forehead, and his clothes were soaked in blood, clinging to his body, sticky and cold.

But he dared not stop. He feared that the figure would pursue him, and even more so, he feared that the Heavenly Supreme Venerable's subordinates would appear at this moment.

He gritted his teeth, urging on the remaining spiritual power within his body. The auspicious cloud beneath his feet dimmed to the point of almost dissipating, but he still persisted in flying forward.

What he feared most came to pass.

After flying less than a thousand miles, five golden lights appeared in the sky ahead.

The five golden lights moved at extreme speed, tearing through the sky with a piercing shriek, and in the blink of an eye, they blocked Gui Yuanzi's path.

The golden light dissipated, revealing five figures—it was the Heavenly Supreme Venerable and his four Golden Immortal elders.

Elder Zhao, Elder Qian, Elder Sun, and Elder Li.

The combined aura of the four elders was like a mountain, pressing down on Gui Yuanzi, making it hard for him to breathe.

Standing at the forefront was the Heavenly Venerable, a peak third-grade Golden Immortal, his body radiating golden holy light, his pressure as imposing as a mountain, his aura overwhelming.

Gui Yuanzi's face instantly turned deathly pale.

He subconsciously stuffed the jade bottle in his robes deeper into his clothes and gripped the cyan longsword tightly.

The cracks on the sword were glaringly obvious in the sunlight, and the spiritual light on the blade had almost completely dissipated, yet he still held it tightly .

The Heavenly Venerable looked at Gui Yuanzi, a cold smile playing on his lips.

His gaze swept over Gui Yuanzi, landing on his tattered robes, severed left arm, and numerous wounds, his contempt undisguised.

“Gui Yuanzi, why aren’t you staying in the Gui Yuan Sect? What are you doing in the Cangmang Mountains? Are you looking for something to help that little remnant soul rebuild its body?”

Gui Yuanzi gritted his teeth, remaining silent.

A mouthful of blood was stuck in his throat, unable to be swallowed or spit out.

He knew that saying anything was useless; the Celestial Venerable would not let him go, nor would he let the young master go.

The Celestial Venerable’s gaze fell on the jade bottle in his arms, his greed undisguised.

That purple divine soul, that golden tome, that heaven-defying treasure surpassing even the Golden Immortal, was all inside that small jade bottle.

He only needed to kill Guiyuanzi to obtain everything.

“That purple divine soul is in your arms, isn’t it? Hand it over, and I might spare your life.”

Guiyuanzi gripped his longsword tightly, raised his head, looked at the Celestial Venerable, and said, word by word, “Dream on.”

The Celestial Venerable’s face darkened, a hint of killing intent flashing in his eyes. “You won’t listen to reason, so you’ll have to suffer the consequences. Elder Zhao, kill him.”

Elder Zhao responded and stepped forward, his golden longsword unsheathed, its blade shimmering with a blinding light, slashing towards Guiyuanzi’s throat.

This strike was swift and ruthless, the blade tearing through the air with a piercing shriek.

Gui Yuanzi raised his sword to parry, the blade clashing and sparks flying. Already severely injured, the blow caused his hand to split open, blood streaming down the hilt of his sword,

nearly causing it to fly from his grasp. He was thrown back several steps, staggering and almost falling.

Elder Qian, Elder Sun, and Elder Li surrounded him, their auras intertwining like an iron wall, sealing off all his escape routes.

Gui Yuanzi’s heart sank.

He knew he might not be able to leave today.

He glanced down at the jade bottle in his arms; the purple divine spirit within glowed faintly, as if telling him: Don’t give up.

“Young Master, I am incompetent…” he murmured, his voice barely audible.

Just then, a white light flew from the horizon, moving with incredible speed, like a shooting star, leaving a long trail of flame, and landed beside Gui Yuanzi.

The light dissipated, transforming into a woman in a white dress—the Demon Empress Qingqiu.

Qingqiu's figure was as aloof as snow, her white robes as bright as the moon, her long hair as black as ink, gently swaying in the wind.

A faint white spiritual light surrounded her, the primal power of the Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox, gentle yet resilient.

Her amber eyes, calm and undisturbed, swept over the four Golden Immortal elders, finally settling on the Celestial Venerable.

The Celestial Venerable narrowed his eyes, a cold smile playing on his lips. "Qingqiu, you also wish to oppose me?"

Qingqiu remained silent.

She raised her right hand, fingers spread, a white spiritual light surging from her palm.

The light transformed into a gigantic phantom of a Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox, ten zhang tall, its nine tails swaying gently behind it, each tail shimmering with a different color—red, orange, yellow, green, cyan, blue, purple, gold, and silver.

The Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox phantom opened its maw, letting out a silent roar. The roar was soundless, but an invisible shockwave of divine souls surged forth like a tsunami.

The shockwave caused the surrounding mist to churn violently, and even the four elders behind Venerable Tianji involuntarily took a step back.

"Guiyuanzi, take Kai and leave. I'll hold them off here."

Qingqiu's voice was calm, utterly devoid of emotion, as if stating something utterly ordinary.

But Guiyuanzi sensed the resolute determination beneath that calm.

Guiyuanzi hesitated, glancing down at the jade bottle in his arms, then at Qingqiu's retreating figure.

He knew Qingqiu was risking her life to buy him time.

He couldn't let her down.

"Your Majesty, take care!"

He gritted his teeth, turned, and flew towards the direction of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.

Elder Zhao tried to give chase, but his path was blocked by Qingqiu's nine-tailed celestial fox phantom.

The nine tails swept across like nine giant dragons, and Elder Zhao hastily raised his sword to parry, only to be forced back several steps.

Venerable Tianji's face darkened, and he raised his hand to strike Qingqiu.

Golden holy light condensed in her palm, transforming into a gigantic golden hand that blotted out the sky, crushing down upon Qingqiu.

This palm strike used seventy percent of the Heavenly Venerable's power, enough to level a mountain.

Qingqiu did not retreat.

She activated the illusory image of the Nine-Tailed Celestial Fox; its nine tails lit up simultaneously, the nine colors of light intertwining to form a nine-colored pillar of light that met the golden palm.

Boom!

The two forces collided, unleashing a deafening roar.

The entire sky trembled, the ground cracked, debris flew everywhere, and the mist within a hundred-foot radius was torn apart by the shockwave, revealing a gray sky.

Qingqiu was forced back dozens of steps, a trickle of blood spilling from the corner of her mouth, but her posture remained upright, her gaze unwavering.

Her white dress was torn in several places by the shockwave, revealing her fair skin, but she didn't care.

Her cultivation was inferior to that of the Heavenly Venerable; in a head-on confrontation, she was no match.

However, this was the Vast Mountain Range, not far from the Myriad Demon Ridge. She could use the ridge's protective barriers to ensure that the Heavenly Venerable couldn't kill her in a short time.

The Heavenly Venerable's expression was grim, a hint of apprehension flashing in his eyes.

He hadn't expected Qingqiu to fight so desperately, much less that she would completely break with the Heavenly Palace for an outsider.

"Qingqiu, do you think you can stop me?" His voice was icy, filled with suppressed rage.Qingqiu wiped the blood from the corner of her mouth and smiled.

The smile was faint, yet carried a chilling stubbornness. "Even if you can't stop me, you will. I've said it before, the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge is not a place for your divine race to run wild. Today, unless you step over my dead body, don't even think about passing."

The Heavenly Extreme Venerable's fists clenched, veins bulging.

He wanted to kill Qingqiu, but he couldn't.

At least not now.

Although Qingqiu's cultivation was inferior to his, this was the Vast Mountain Range, not far from the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. Qingqiu could use the Ridge's restrictions to her advantage; he couldn't kill her in a short time.

Moreover, if Qingqiu died, the demon race would surely retaliate fiercely, making the Heavenly Extreme Palace's situation in the Northern Region even more difficult.

He took a deep breath, suppressing his anger, and said in a deep voice, "Withdraw."

The four Golden Immortal elders were stunned for a moment, but seeing the Palace Master's expression, they dared not ask further questions, quickly sheathing their weapons and retreating behind him. Five golden lights pierced the sky and disappeared into the horizon.

Qingqiu stood in the void, watching them depart, and let out a long breath.

Her face was pale, her lips bloodless, and cold sweat streamed down her face.

That palm strike had seriously injured her, and most of her spiritual energy had been depleted.

But she couldn't fall; she had to go back, to see Kai rebuild his physical body, and to lead the demon race to continue their struggle against the gods.

She turned and flew towards the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.

Guiyuanzi staggered into the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, passing through layers of thick fog and overcoming numerous restrictions, finally returning to the Demon Emperor's Palace.

Qingqiu had returned a step earlier and was already waiting in a side hall.

Her face was still pale, and her breath was somewhat weak, but her eyes remained resolute.

She sat on the warm jade bed, holding a cup of spiritual tea in her hand. The tea had gone cold, but she didn't drink it, simply gazing quietly out the window.

Gui Yuanzi entered the side hall, his knees buckling as he knelt on the ground. "Your Majesty, thank you for saving my life. Otherwise, both the young master and I would be finished."

Gui Yuanzi wasn't afraid of death, but if Kai's soul in his arms were also taken away by the Heavenly Venerable, he would be a sinner, a sinner of the entire Daoist sect.

Qingqiu put down his teacup and shook his head. "Get up. It was I who took the initiative to help you. I didn't do it for you, but for Kai. After all, he also has the bloodline of my Fox Emperor clan within him."

Gui Yuanzi stood up, looking at Qingqiu, his eyes red-rimmed. "Your Majesty, the guardian in the Chaos Secret Realm is too powerful. I can't defeat him, and the Chaos Spirit Liquid… I can't get it."

Qingqiu was silent for a moment. "What realm is that guardian at?" "

Peak of the third rank of the Golden Immortal Realm, but I don't know if that's his peak cultivation."

Gui Yuanzi's voice was full of self-reproach. "And… and he is also…"

"And what?" Qingqiu asked.

"He's still our Guiyuan Sect's ancestor. I don't know why he became the guardian of the secret realm, how he's survived until now, or why he only has the cultivation of a peak third-grade Golden Immortal." Guiyuanzi knew nothing about his ancestor.

“What?” Qingqiu was full of doubt. “The Guiyuan Sect’s ancestor is actually the guardian of the secret realm?”

Qingqiu was also puzzled, not understanding what was going on. What did the Chaos Secret Realm have to do with the Guiyuan Sect, or rather, with the Daoist sect?

“Alright, we’ll talk about the secret realm later. You go and recover first. I also need to arrange the defense of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. The Wuji Palace won’t let this go easily.”

Qingqiu waved his hand.

“Yes!” Guiyuanzi nodded and then withdrew.

…

In the vast mountains, An Dao and Lingyue had been hiding in the shadows.

Only after Guiyuanzi left, and Qingqiu and the Heavenly Extreme Venerable had left, did they dare to show themselves.

“Let’s go back…” An Dao said, and his figure disappeared instantly.

This time, they didn’t dare to take the spirit boat, afraid of being discovered.

An Dao and Ling Yue raced forward, not daring to linger for a moment.

The nights in the vast mountains were far more dangerous than the days. Thick fog churned in the darkness, like invisible behemoths, their jaws agape, waiting to devour any lone cultivator.

The roars of demonic beasts echoed from distant valleys, rising and falling, filled with bloodlust.

An Dao gripped his twin blades tightly, while Ling Yue's whisk constantly shimmered with spiritual light. Their divine senses were constantly extended, covering a radius of a hundred feet, vigilant for any potential danger.

They traversed layers of fog, bypassed the treacherous peaks teeming with demonic beasts, and finally returned to Tianque City the following evening.

The setting sun bathed the entire city in a golden-red hue. The three blazing suns on the horizon were slowly sinking below the horizon, their last rays casting a dark golden glow upon the black stone tower of the Void Merchant Guild.

The tower soared into the clouds, solemn and oppressive, like a colossal beast lurking within the city, silently watching over everything.

The two landed before the stone tower, straightened their robes, and strode through the gate.

The hall was brightly lit, and several cultivators were handling business at the counters—some selling spirit herbs, some buying magical artifacts, and some consigning items for auction.

Behind the counters, staff busily recorded each transaction, spirit stones piled high on the tables, shimmering with spiritual light. An Dao and Ling Yue's entry attracted little attention; they walked straight through the hall and into the back corridor.

The corridor was deep and dark, with pale blue spiritual lamps embedded in the walls on both sides, the light dim, barely enough to see the path beneath their feet. The two walked quickly, one after the other, to the stone door at the end of the corridor.

An Dao took out a token from his robes; the token was entirely black, with the character "令" (command) engraved on the front and the Void Merchant Guild's mark on the back—an open eye, symbolizing all-seeing insight.

He affixed the token to the stone door and infused it with spiritual power.

With a flash of light, the stone door slowly opened.

Inside the secret chamber, Wu Heng was sitting at a stone table, drinking tea, engrossed in an ancient scroll.

The ancient book's cover bore the inscription "Secret Records of the Northern Region," a copy he had retrieved from the Void Merchant Guild's main archives. It contained the hidden histories and legends of the major powers of the Northern Region.

He had already perused most of it but found no clues about the Guiyuan Sect's patriarch.

Hearing the stone door open, he slightly raised his eyelids, but without looking up, simply said, "Back? Did you get the Chaos Elixir?"

His tone was flat, devoid of any expectation. An Dao knelt on the ground, head bowed, his voice hoarse: "Guild Master, I am incompetent."

He paused, seemingly choosing his words carefully, before finally speaking truthfully, "There is a guardian in the Chaos Secret Realm, whose cultivation is at least at the peak of the third rank of Golden Immortal. Even Gui Yuanzi, fighting with all his might, was no match for him. Ling Yue and I... did not even make a move."

His forehead pressed against the cold ground, not daring to look up.

The floor tiles of the secret chamber were made of obsidian, icy cold, the chill seeping into his bones from his knees.

But that wasn't the coldest thing; the coldest thing was that Wu Heng didn't utter a sound. That silence was more unsettling than any reprimand.

Ling Yue also knelt down, her voice trembling slightly: “Guild Master, that guardian’s aura was too terrifying. I knew I was no match for him. Making a rash move would only have been a pointless death. I… I withdrew with An Dao. Please punish me, Guild Master.”

Wu Heng’s fingers paused slightly. He put down the ancient book in his hand and looked up at An Dao.

His gaze was calm, without reproach or anger, only a hint of scrutiny.

He had lived for tens of thousands of years and seen countless cultivators like An Dao. They were loyal, but not blindly so; they knew when to fight and when to run.

He didn’t blame them; the Void Merchant Guild didn’t tolerate reckless fools.

“How is Gui Yuanzi?” Wu Heng asked.

“Gui Yuanzi was injured but escaped the secret realm. He was later ambushed by the Heavenly Extreme Venerable and his men, and almost died,” An Dao said.

Ling Yue quickly chimed in, “However, the Demon Emperor of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge intervened and saved Gui Yuanzi.”

“Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, Heavenly Extreme Palace, interesting. The Seventeenth Heaven is about to fall into chaos.” Wu Heng smiled coldly, then asked, “What does the guardian look like? What are his characteristics?”

An Dao thought for a moment, recalling the appearance of the white-robed old man.

“He wore a white robe, with a faint spiritual light flowing through it, like moonlight shining on snow. In his hand, he held a whisk, its white bristles fine and resilient, each one seemingly alive, gently swaying in the mist.

His face was aged, but his features were regular; he must have been handsome in his youth. His eyes were calm, devoid of murderous intent, yet they inspired awe and fear.

His aura… I can't quite put my finger on it; it seemed peaceful, yet unfathomable, like a bottomless abyss hidden beneath a calm sea."

Lingyue added from the side, "That guardian, Guiyuanzi calls him 'Ancestor.' Moreover, his whisk is engraved with the Dao patterns of the Guiyuan Sect, which I saw with my own eyes. Those Dao patterns are exactly the same as the whisk in the portrait of the Guiyuan Sect's founder; there's no mistake."

Wu Heng's eyes narrowed.

He put down his teacup, stood up, and walked to the wall with his hands behind his back, looking at the landscape painting on it.

The painting depicted a majestic mountain peak, upon which stood an ancient Taoist temple. Before the temple stood an elderly man with white hair, holding a whisk, gazing up at the sky.

It was a portrait of the founder of the Guiyuan Sect, which he had specially commissioned to be painted.

Hadn't the founder of the Guiyuan Sect ascended to heaven tens of thousands of years ago?

How could he appear in the Chaos Secret Realm, and even become its guardian?

This defied logic and the laws of nature.

An ascended powerhouse wouldn't remain in the lower realm, much less lower their cultivation to guard a secret realm.

"Are you sure you haven't misread it?"

Wu Heng turned around, his gaze sharp, as if trying to pierce Ling Yue's eyes and see into the depths of her soul.

Lingyue shook her head, her tone firm: "I have cultivated for thousands of years and know the Dao patterns of the Guiyuan Sect inside and out. I would never be wrong.

The whisk in the guardian's hand is indeed the possession of the Guiyuan Sect's founder. Moreover, the spiritual light on that whisk is exactly the same as the aura of the founder recorded in the Guiyuan Sect's scriptures."

Wu Heng was silent for a moment, then nodded. "I will investigate this matter thoroughly. The Void Merchant Guild's intelligence network covers all the heavens. There is no secret in the Seventeenth Heaven that can escape our notice.

You two will have to go through the trouble of guarding the vicinity of the Chaos Secret Realm and watching the entrance. Report any unusual activity immediately, but do not approach or disturb the guardian."

An Dao raised his head and looked at Wu Heng. "Guild Master, the guardian of that secret realm is too powerful. I..."

"I'm not asking you to venture into the secret realm,"

Wu Heng interrupted him. "I'm just asking you to keep an eye on things and see if anyone else enters the secret realm, especially people from the Guiyuan Sect. If they do, report back immediately. You only need to watch from a distance. Even if you only see a single figure, you must send a message immediately."

"Yes," Dark Blade and Spirit Moon replied in unison, rising and leaving the secret chamber.

The stone door slowly closed, and silence returned to the chamber.

Wu Heng stood alone by the wall, gazing at the landscape painting, his fingers lightly tapping the tabletop, again and again.

Dark Blade's words flashed repeatedly through his mind—the patriarch of the Guiyuan Sect, the guardian of the secret realm.

What secrets did the Guiyuan Sect hold?

What was the connection between the Chaos Secret Realm and the Guiyuan Sect?

He had to find out.

His intuition told him that what was involved in this matter was far more important than a bottle of Chaos Elixir.

Perhaps, the entire Northern Region's格局 (geju, a concept encompassing overall structure, overall situation, and overall dynamics) would change because of this.

He stood up, walked to the other side of the secret chamber, and opened a hidden door.

Behind the hidden door was an even larger secret chamber, in the center of which floated a huge crystal ball, about ten feet tall, completely transparent, with countless tiny points of light flowing within.

That was the Void Merchant Guild's intelligence network—each point of light represented a message, and behind each message lay a secret.

He raised his hand and placed it on the crystal ball, probing it with his divine sense to search for all information about the Guiyuan Sect, the Chaos Secret Realm, and the Guiyuan Sect's patriarch.

The light within the crystal ball flickered intensely, information surging forth like a tidal wave, traversing millennia to converge before him.

Wu Heng's brow furrowed deeper and deeper.

The Guiyuan Sect's patriarch ascended to heaven 38,000 years ago from the sect's back mountain.

On the day of his ascension, extraordinary phenomena graced the heavens and earth; auspicious clouds stretched for miles, spiritual energy rained down, and the entire Northern Region could feel the immense pressure of the Heavenly Dao.

After his ascension, successive generations of Guiyuan Sect patriarchs had tried to contact him, but never received a response.

Everyone assumed he had ascended to a higher realm, severing all ties with the lower realms.

But now, he appeared in the Chaos Secret Realm, a guardian, his cultivation suppressed to the peak of the third rank of Golden Immortal.

What had happened in between?

Who had trapped him there?

Or did he choose to remain there himself?

If it was his own choice, why?

Wu Heng withdrew his divine sense and let out a long breath.

He knew that the Void Merchant Guild's intelligence network in the Seventeenth Heaven alone would probably not be able to uncover deeper secrets.

This matter might require higher-level authorization, or even the use of headquarters resources.

But that's for later.

Right now, he must keep an eye on the entrance to the secret realm and see if the Guiyuan Sect will go again.

He can tell that Guiyuanzi is relentless; he won't give up until he achieves his goal.

He will definitely go again. An Dao and Ling Yue left Tianque City overnight, heading once more towards the Cangmang Mountains.

The night was thick; there were no stars or moon in the sky, only heavy, dark clouds obscuring the entire expanse.

A howling wind whipped up pebbles and withered grass, stinging their faces.

The two traversed the mountains, avoiding a group of nocturnal beasts and navigating several natural traps, finally arriving near the Chaos Secret Realm around midnight.

Instead of approaching the entrance, they lay in ambush on a mountaintop a hundred miles away.

This mountaintop was the highest point within a hundred miles, offering a wide-open view and excellent visibility, clearly showing the entrance to the secret realm.

An Dao set up a concealment array on the summit, while Ling Yue took out two gray cloaks from her storage ring, draping them over herself to completely conceal their presence, blending into the surrounding vegetation.

From a distance, it appeared as a barren mountain, completely unremarkable.

"What do you think the Guild Master is thinking?"

Ling Yue leaned against the stone wall, gazing at the distant entrance to the secret realm, and asked in a low voice.

The stone gate leading to the secret realm in the distance glowed with a faint blue light in the night, like a half-closed eye.

An Dao shook his head, remaining silent.

He wasn't one for speculation; he only did what he was supposed to do.

Wu Heng had told him to keep watch, so he kept watch.

As for why, that wasn't his concern. His task was simply to monitor, not to ponder.

Ling Yue didn't seem to care, continuing, "The fact that the patriarch of the Guiyuan Sect has become the guardian of the secret realm is too strange.

The Guiyuan Sect isn't a major power in the Seventeenth Heaven, but Guiyuanzi is no ordinary person, and the young master he's chosen is even more extraordinary.

The Great Luo Golden Canon chose that young master; there must be a reason. Tell me, what is the young master's background?"

An Dao still didn't speak, only staring intently at the entrance to the secret realm, his eyes unblinking.

Ling Yue sighed and fell silent as well.

The two of them silently guarded the realm, from night to day, and from day to night.

...

Heavenly Palace, Main Hall.

The luminous crystals embedded in the dome illuminated the entire hall, golden light flowing within and reflecting on the figure on the throne, coating him with a cold, golden glow.

The stone pillars on either side of the hall stood silently, their carved reliefs of divine battles flickering in the light, seemingly bearing silent witness to the oppressive and chilling atmosphere.

The Celestial Venerable sat on the throne, his face as somber as the sky before a storm.

His fingers tapped lightly on the armrest, once, once, and again, the sound echoing in the empty hall like the tolling of a death knell.

The four Golden Immortal elders stood in the center of the hall, heads bowed, not daring to raise their heads or utter a sound.

Fine beads of sweat glistened on their foreheads, and the backs of their robes were soaked with cold sweat.

They had stood there for a whole day, their legs numb, yet none dared to move.

The palace doors were tightly shut, and the guards outside dared not utter a sound. The entire hall was like an ice cellar, save for the dull thud of Venerable Tianji's fingers tapping the armrest, one tap after another.

"Qingqiu... Guiyuanzi..." Venerable Tianji's voice was soft, but each word seemed to be squeezed out from between his teeth, filled with suppressed rage. "A mere demon king of the demon race, a minor sect leader of the human race, dare to oppose me? Dare to block my path?"

The scene from that day flashed repeatedly through his mind.

Guiyuanzi was covered in wounds, yet he clutched the jade bottle in his arms tightly, refusing to hand it over.

Qingqiu, dressed in white as snow, his nine-tailed celestial fox phantom blotting out the sky, took his palm strike head-on, not retreating a single step even as blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

Those two ants dared to challenge him.

He slammed his palm on the armrest, shattering it and sending splinters flying.

The four elders shuddered simultaneously, their heads bowing even lower.

Elder Zhao steeled himself and stepped forward, clasping his hands in a fist salute. “Palace Master, I have something to say, but I don’t know if I should.”

“Speak.” Venerable Tianji’s voice was cold, so cold that it seemed to lower the temperature of the hall.

Elder Zhao took a deep breath, trying to make his voice sound calm.

“Palace Master, the Myriad Demon Ridge is guarded by Qingqiu and protected by ancient restrictions, making it easy to defend and difficult to attack.

Although the Guiyuan Sect is not strong, Guiyuanzi is no ordinary person. He was able to gather all the disciples of the Guiyuan Sect in just a few days, so his strength should not be underestimated.

Although our Tianji Palace is stronger than them, if we fight head-on, we will suffer heavy losses.”

He paused, carefully observing the expression of the Tianji Venerable. Seeing that he was not angry, he continued, “Palace Master, the Seventeenth Heaven is not only home to the Tianji Palace, but also other divine forces. The Northern Region has the Shenyuan Pavilion, and the Western Region has the Tiansheng Palace.

If we attack the Myriad Demon Ridge alone, even if we win, we will be severely weakened. At that time, will other forces take advantage of the situation? Will they reap the benefits? Palace Master must be wary.” The

Tianji Venerable frowned.

Elder Zhao was right; he had to be wary.

Although the divine races belonged to the same race, the open and covert struggles between the various forces never ceased.

If the Tianji Palace suffered a major loss of strength, the Shenyuan Pavilion and the Tiansheng Palace would certainly not let this opportunity pass.

At that time, not only would he fail to obtain the Great Luo Golden Scripture, but he might even lose the Heavenly Pole Palace.

“What do you mean?”

Elder Zhao raised his head, a glint of light flashing in his eyes. “Palace Master, I suggest we unite with other forces of the Divine Race in the Northern Region to jointly launch an attack and besiege the Myriad Demon Ridge.

Explain the advantages and disadvantages to them, let them know that allowing the Myriad Demon Ridge and Guiyuan Sect to grow stronger will not benefit anyone. At that time, with the combined efforts of all parties, the Myriad Demon Ridge can be destroyed in the blink of an eye.”

The Heavenly Pole Venerable was silent for a moment, his fingers lightly tapping the armrest, one tap after another.

He was weighing the pros and cons.

Uniting with other forces meant sharing the benefits.

He couldn’t guarantee that he could keep the Great Luo Golden Scripture and the purple divine soul all to himself.

But if he didn’t unite, he wouldn’t even have a chance to obtain them.

“Alright.”

He stood up, a resolute glint in his eyes. “I will personally go to the Divine Abyss Pavilion and the Heavenly Saint Palace. You will stay and guard the Heavenly Pole Palace, strengthen the defenses, and do not allow anyone to approach.”

“Yes!” The four elders responded in unison, relieved. The Divine Abyss Pavilion sits atop a solitary peak at the northernmost tip of the Northern Region, covered in millennia-old ice.

This solitary peak, named “Ice Abyss Peak,” is tens of thousands of feet high and perpetually blanketed in ice and snow.

Legend has it that in ancient times, a powerful ice-elemental cultivator passed away atop the peak, his life’s cultivation transforming into eternal ice, freezing the entire mountain to this day.

The founder of the Divine Abyss Pavilion discovered that this place was rich in spiritual energy and contained a profound concentration of ice-elemental laws, so he established his sect here, which has been passed down to this day.

The palace is entirely constructed of black ice, crystal clear, refracting seven-colored light under the sun, like a crystal palace built in ice and snow.

The temperature here is extremely low; even True Immortal Realm cultivators would be frozen solid if they did not circulate their spiritual energy to protect themselves.

The cultivators within the palace wear white robes, their faces cold and stern, their aura chilling, all cultivating ice-elemental techniques.

Frost often adorns their brows and eyes, a result of years of practicing ice-elemental techniques.

Venerable Tianji arrived at Shenyuan Pavilion alone, without any attendants.

He landed before the mountain gate, gazing at the ice-blue stone door.

Two large characters were carved on the door – “Shenyuan” – the strokes powerful and chilling.

On either side of the door stood two ice sculptures, depicting the guardian beast of Shenyuan Pavilion – the Ice Qilin.

The Ice Qilins were lifelike, their eyes wide with fury, as if they might come to life at any moment.

The guarding cultivator recognized him and quickly went inside to report.

A moment later, the Pavilion Master of Shenyuan Pavilion – Venerable Xuanbing – personally came out to greet him. Venerable

Xuanbing was at the same cultivation level as Venerable Tianji, a peak third-grade Golden Immortal, cultivating ice-based techniques. He had a somber personality and disliked speaking much.

He wore an ice-blue robe, his long hair as white as snow, his face thin, with a hint of malevolence in his eyes.

His eyes were ice-blue, with snowflakes seemingly drifting in his pupils; he stood there like a millennia-old iceberg.

“Palace Master Tianji, your presence is an honor. I am deeply sorry for not welcoming you sooner.”

Venerable Xuanbing clasped his hands in greeting, his tone flat and devoid of any emotion. “May I ask what brings you here today?”

Venerable Tianji did not beat around the bush. “Palace Master Xuanbing, I have come today to discuss the matter of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.”

Venerable Xuanbing's eyes narrowed slightly. "Ten Thousand Demon Ridge? The territory of the demon race. What does it have to do with me?"

Venerable Tianji briefly recounted the events.

Of course, he concealed the matter of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, only saying that the purple divine soul contained a lost ancient treasure of the divine race, crucial to his breakthrough.

"The Demon Emperor Qingqiu of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge has joined forces with the Guiyuan Sect of the human race, intending to oppose my divine race. If we allow them to grow stronger, they will eventually threaten the safety of the Divine Abyss Pavilion. I hope the Divine Abyss Pavilion can send troops to join forces with me to jointly besiege the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge."

Venerable Xuanbing was silent for a moment, a barely perceptible glint flashing in his icy blue eyes.

"Lord of the Heavenly Pole Palace, neither of us is a newcomer to cultivation. There's no need for such formalities."

His voice was slow, each word seeming to emanate from an ice cellar. "You've come to me because you can't defeat the Myriad Demon Ridge alone, haven't you?"

"Besides, they only target your Heavenly Pole Palace. What does that have to do with my Divine Abyss Pavilion? We have never provoked the Myriad Demon Ridge or the human race."

The Heavenly Pole Venerable's expression darkened, but he didn't lash out. "Xuanbing, we are both members of the divine race. Are you just going to watch the demon race and the human race unite to bully our divine race?"

“Stop…” Venerable Xuanbing waved his hand. “Although our Ice God lineage is also a member of the divine race, have the other branches of the divine race ever treated us as their own?”

“Back then, our Ice God lineage was practically enslaved by the gods, our entire race nearly wiped out. I survived for ten thousand years in the Seventeenth Heaven, establishing the Divine Abyss Pavilion. Did you, my fellow gods, ever help me even once?”

Venerable Tianji frowned slightly. “Xuanbing, you know better than I why your Ice God lineage was suppressed by the God Emperor back then. In all these years in the Seventeenth Heaven, have I ever suppressed you?”

“Alright, enough said. You’ve asked me for help, and I can send troops. But I have one condition.”

Venerable Xuanbing smiled faintly. “After it’s done, I want a share of the treasure within that purple divine soul.” Venerable

Tianji’s pupils contracted slightly.

He hadn’t expected Venerable Xuanbing to also know about that supreme treasure.

Had the news leaked?

Or… He asked calmly, “What treasure? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Venerable Xuanbing smiled.

That smile was cold, so cold that it lowered the surrounding temperature.

“Lord of the Heavenly Pole Palace, do you think I’m deaf? Although it wasn’t mentioned in your bounty, the Void Merchant Guild has already spread the news.

Hidden within that purple divine soul is an ancient treasure, surpassing even the Golden Immortal level, which even the combined efforts of your nine Golden Immortals from the Heavenly Pole Palace couldn't refine.

You sent four Golden Immortals to pursue it, and even personally went to the Guiyuan Sect to demand its return. Do you think I don't know?"

He paused, his tone laced with sarcasm. "You traveled a thousand miles to the Divine Abyss Pavilion to find me, isn't it because you can't handle it all alone and need help?

Since you need help, you have to pay the price. There's no such thing as a free lunch."

The Heavenly Pole Venerable's fists clenched.

His worst fears had come true; the news had leaked.

The secret of that treasure was no longer known only to him, Han Yuan, and Chi Yan.

Now, the Xuanbing Venerable knew, and the Heavenly Saint Palace probably knew as well.

"How much do you want?" The Heavenly Pole Venerable's voice was cold.

"Thirty percent." Venerable Xuanbing held up three fingers. "I want thirty percent of that treasure. I also want thirty percent of the resources of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge." "

Thirty percent?" Venerable Tianji's face turned ashen. "You're only sending five hundred soldiers, and you want thirty percent?"

"Pavilion Master Xuanbing, five hundred soldiers isn't a small force. Moreover, without the help of Shenyuan Pavilion, you can't conquer Ten Thousand Demon Ridge alone. You know that yourself."

Venerable Xuanbing's tone left no room for argument. "Thirty percent, not a penny less. If you don't agree, I'll pretend I never met you today. Please leave."

Venerable Tianji remained silent for a long time.

He was calculating, weighing his options.

Thirty percent, plus the possible share from Tiansheng Palace, how much would he ultimately get?

But without cooperation, he wouldn't get even a tenth.

"Fine. Thirty percent." He gritted his teeth, saying each word clearly.

Venerable Xuanbing laughed. "Excellent. Shenyuan Pavilion will send five hundred soldiers, led by me personally. When do we make our move?"

"We'll talk about it when I return from the Heavenly Saint Palace." Venerable Tianji turned and left, his eyes filled with killing intent. The Heavenly Saint Palace is located in the central part of the Northern Region, built atop a range of rolling hills.

These hills are called "Holy Light Ridge," with gentle terrain and abundant spiritual energy.

The founder of the Heavenly Saint Palace discovered an ancient holy light array here, and thus established the sect, based on holy light, a tradition that continues to this day.

The palace is entirely constructed of white jade, resplendent and magnificent.

The roof is covered with golden glazed tiles, shimmering in the sunlight, resembling a sun built on the earth from afar.

In the plaza in front of the palace stands a massive white jade pillar, atop which floats a golden sphere of light—the Heavenly Saint Palace's most prized treasure—the Eye of Holy Light, said to be able to perceive everything a thousand miles away.

The cultivators here practice light-based techniques, inheriting the holy light of the Heavenly Extreme Palace, yet with differences.

The Heavenly Extreme Palace's holy light emphasizes attack and defense, while the Heavenly Saint Palace's light-based techniques emphasize perception and purification.

Their cultivators wore long white robes embroidered with golden sun patterns at the hem, exuding a pure and untainted aura.

When Venerable Tianji arrived at the Heavenly Saint Palace, Venerable Shengguang was meditating in the main hall.

The hall was softly lit, its ceiling inlaid with countless luminous crystals, illuminating the entire space. A faint sandalwood incense filled the air, bringing tranquility to the mind.

Venerable Shengguang was a middle-aged man who appeared to be in his forties, with a gentle face and a detached, otherworldly air about him.

He wore a long white robe, his long hair tied up with a jade hairpin, and a faint golden halo surrounded him.

His cultivation level was mid-stage of the third rank of Golden Immortal, slightly lower than Venerable Tianji's.

He didn't rise to greet him, but merely glanced at Venerable Tianji indifferently, his tone distant: "Palace Master Tianji, long time no see. The last time we met was at the Northern Region Dao Discussion Conference three thousand years ago. Back

then, we sparred a few moves, ending in a draw. Now that your strength has increased, you haven't come here today to challenge me, have you?"

Venerable Tianji suppressed his displeasure and clasped his hands in greeting: “Palace Master Holy Light, I’ve come today to request that the Heavenly Saint Palace send troops to join forces with me to besiege the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.”

Venerable Holy Light frowned slightly. “Ten Thousand Demon Ridge? The territory of the demon race, what does it have to do with me?”

Venerable Tianji repeated the same words.

This time, he didn’t hide the matter of that supreme treasure—because Venerable Holy Light already knew, and there was no point in hiding it.

“Qingqiu, the Demon Emperor of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, has joined forces with the Guiyuan Sect of the human race, intending to oppose my divine race.

They possess a purple divine soul, within which lies an ancient treasure, surpassing the level of a Golden Immortal.

I want that treasure, and the resources of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge can be shared with you.”

Venerable Saint Light paused for a moment, a meaningful smile playing on his lips.

“An ancient treasure, surpassing the level of a Golden Immortal…” he murmured, “Lord of the Heavenly Pole Palace, you’re quite willing to part with it.”

“It’s not that I’m willing, it’s that I have no choice.” Venerable Heavenly Pole’s voice was cold. “Venerable Xuanbing has already agreed to send troops, on the condition of receiving 30%. What about you? How much do you want?”

Venerable Saint Light smiled.

The smile was gentle, but Venerable Heavenly Pole knew that behind it lay greed.

“Fifty percent.” Venerable Holy Light held up five fingers. “That treasure, I want fifty percent. The resources of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, I also want fifty percent.” Venerable

Heavenly Extreme’s face darkened completely. “Fifty percent? Why don’t you just rob it?”

“Palace Master Heavenly Extreme, calm down.”

Venerable Holy Light’s tone remained gentle. “Think about it, the Divine Abyss Pavilion only sent five hundred soldiers, while the Heavenly Saint Palace sent a thousand, twice as many. My fifty percent is fair.”

“Fair?” Venerable Heavenly Extreme sneered. “Palace Master Holy Light, your appetite is too big.”

“Big?”

Venerable Holy Light stood up, walked to Venerable Heavenly Extreme, and looked him directly in the eyes. “Palace Master Heavenly Extreme, let me ask you a question. Without the help of the Heavenly Saint Palace, could you have conquered Ten Thousand Demon Ridge?

Even if you had, how many people would your Heavenly Extreme Palace have left? Could you bear the losses?”

Venerable Heavenly Extreme fell silent.

Venerable Holy Light was right; he couldn’t bear it.

Without the help of the Heavenly Saint Palace, even if he managed to conquer the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, the Heavenly Extreme Palace would be severely weakened. Would the Divine Abyss Pavilion and the Heavenly Saint Palace take advantage of the situation? Would those

smaller forces that had always coveted the Heavenly Extreme Palace's territory kick him

while he was down? He dared not gamble. "Forty percent," the Heavenly Extreme Venerable gritted his teeth, "Forty percent of the treasures, forty percent of the resources." "Fifty percent," the Holy Light Venerable did not budge, "Not a single penny less." "Forty -five percent." "Fifty percent." The Holy Light Venerable's tone remained gentle, but the smile in his eyes had vanished. "Heavenly Extreme Palace Master, I have already given you a chance to bargain. Now, I will not yield. Fifty percent, if you agree, I will send troops. If not, then so be it. I don't mind cleaning up the mess after you've both been severely weakened. At that time, I won't need to send troops; I can take everything." The Heavenly Extreme Venerable's fists clenched so tightly they cracked, veins bulging. He knew the Holy Light Venerable was right. If he didn't agree, Venerable Holy Light would truly sit back and watch them fight, waiting until they were both weakened before reaping the rewards. At that point, he wouldn't even get forty percent. "Fine. Fifty percent." Venerable Heavenly Extreme gritted his teeth, saying each word as if squeezed out from between them. Venerable Holy Light laughed, "Excellent. Heavenly Saint Palace will send eight hundred troops, led personally by me. When to make our move?" "Wait for my notification." Venerable Heavenly Extreme turned and left, nearly bursting with anger. Venerable Holy Light watched his retreating figure, a meaningful smile playing on his lips, "Venerable Heavenly Extreme, I hope you won't disappoint me." When Venerable Tianji returned to the Tianji Palace, it was already late at night.

The hall was brightly lit, and the four Golden Immortal elders remained standing, not moving an inch.

They had been standing for a full day and night, their legs numb, their robes soaked with sweat, yet none of them dared to sit down.

Seeing Venerable Tianji enter the hall, the four bowed simultaneously, their eyes filled with anticipation.

"Palace Master, how did things go?" Elder Zhao spoke first, his voice hoarse and tinged with urgency.

Venerable Tianji did not answer immediately. He walked to the throne and slowly sat down. His

fingers tapped lightly on the armrest, once, then again.

His face was gloomy, but a barely perceptible glint of coldness flashed in his eyes.

“The Divine Abyss Pavilion agreed. Venerable Xuanbing will send five hundred troops, on the condition that they receive thirty percent of that supreme treasure, as well as thirty percent of the resources of the Myriad Demon Ridge.”

His voice was calm, so calm that it sent chills down one’s spine.

The four elders exchanged glances, a hint of dissatisfaction flashing in their eyes.

Elder Qian stepped forward, clasped his hands, and said, “Palace Master, demanding 30% of the 500 troops is too much…”

“I know,”

Venerable Tianji interrupted him, “but that old fox Xuanbing isn’t easily fooled. He already knows about the treasure. If we don’t give it to him, he won’t send troops. We have no choice.”

The four elders fell silent.

They knew the Palace Master was telling the truth.

Without the help of the Divine Abyss Pavilion, if Tianji Palace attacked Wan Yao Ridge alone, even if they won, it would be a Pyrrhic victory.

In the end, Tianji Palace itself would suffer even greater losses.

“What about Tian Sheng Palace?” Elder Zhao asked.

Venerable Tianji's face darkened further, "Venerable Sheng Guang wants 50%."

"50%?" Elder Li exclaimed in shock, "He's only a mid-stage Golden Immortal of the third rank, and he dares to ask for 50%? Palace Master, have you agreed?"

Venerable Tianji snorted coldly, "What can we do if we don't agree? Venerable Sheng Guang said he doesn't mind cleaning up the mess after we've both been weakened. At that time, he won't need to send troops to get everything."

The hall fell into a deathly silence.

The four elders' faces were grim.

Three percent plus five percent, that's already eighty percent.

Their Heavenly Pole Palace had been running around trying to get it all, only to end up with twenty percent.

This deal was a huge loss.

Elder Zhao gritted his teeth and whispered, "Palace Master, in this way, wouldn't our Heavenly Pole Palace only have twenty percent left..."

The Heavenly Pole Venerable waved his hand, signaling him to stop talking.

He leaned back on his throne, his fingers still lightly tapping the armrest, the rhythm slow and steady.

His eyes held no anger, no resentment, only a chilling calmness.

"Do you really think I would share the treasure with them?"

The four elders were simultaneously taken aback.

Elder Zhao's eyes lit up, "Palace Master, you mean…"

The Heavenly Pole Venerable sneered, a smile so cold it seemed to lower the temperature of the hall.

"The Divine Abyss Pavilion and the Heavenly Saint Palace—I know exactly what they're up to. They simply want to take advantage of this opportunity to squeeze a piece out of me. But they've forgotten that I've never been one to be slaughtered."

He stood up, walked to the center of the hall, put his hands behind his back, and gazed at the glowing crystal on the dome.

Golden light shone on him, casting a long shadow.

"The Divine Abyss Pavilion, remnants of the Ice God lineage. Back then, they were suppressed within the God Clan and fled to the Seventeenth Heaven to eke out a living. Does Venerable Xuanbing think that I haven't touched them all these years because I'm afraid of them? What a joke. I'm just too lazy to bother with a bunch of stray dogs."

His voice was full of disdain. "This time, they've come to me willingly; how could I let them go?"

Elder Zhao's breathing quickened. "Palace Master, you mean…"

"Use them first to conquer the Myriad Demon Ridge. Once the Myriad Demon Ridge is destroyed and their forces are nearly exhausted, I'll turn against them."

A cold glint flashed in Venerable Tianji's eyes. "By then, how many of the five hundred cultivators from the Divine Abyss Pavilion will be able to return alive? Whether Venerable Xuanbing himself can even leave the Myriad Demon Ridge alive is a question."

Elder Qian frowned. "Palace Master, what about the Heavenly Saint Palace? Although Venerable Saint Light's cultivation is not as high as yours, he's not easy to deal with."

Venerable Tianji snorted coldly. “Venerable Saint Light? He’s nothing but a treacherous opportunist. Although the Heavenly Saint Palace has eight hundred soldiers, only half of them are truly capable of fighting.

As long as we turn against them before the Divine Abyss Pavilion… ” The Holy Light Venerable had no time to react. Even if he did react, would he dare to fight me?

Elder Zhao’s eyes lit up. “Palace Master, you’ve prepared everything all along?”

The Heavenly Extreme Venerable didn’t answer, only saying calmly, “Within the Divine Race, there are never eternal allies, only eternal interests. The Profound Ice Venerable and the Holy Light Venerable want to take advantage of me, and I will make them pay the price.”

The four elders bowed in unison. “Palace Master is wise!”

The Heavenly Extreme Venerable turned around and looked at them. “Pass down the order: prepare for battle. One month from now, crush the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge. Also, send people to closely monitor the movements of the Divine Abyss Pavilion and the Heavenly Saint Palace. Report any abnormalities immediately.”

“Yes!”

…

In the following days, the entire Heavenly Extreme Palace was busy.

On the training ground, Divine Race cultivators practiced day and night, with flashing swords and deafening battle cries.

Elder Zhao personally led the training of battle formations, dividing the three thousand elites into five large teams, each with six hundred men, equipped with different weapons and spells.

The first battalion, personally commanded by Elder Zhao, excels in frontal assaults;

the second battalion, commanded by Elder Qian, specializes in ranged attacks;

the third battalion, commanded by Elder Sun, excels in defense and trapping the enemy;

the fourth battalion, commanded by Elder Li, specializes in ambush and assassination;

and the fifth battalion serves as a reserve force, ready to support the front lines at any time.

In the storeroom, spirit stones, pills, and magical artifacts are continuously being moved out and distributed to each cultivator.

Each cultivator receives ten high-grade healing pills, five bottles of spirit-restoring liquid, and twenty offensive talismans.

Armor and weapons have also been reforged, gleaming with spiritual light and incredibly sharp.

In the council hall, Venerable Tianji and the four elders sit around a massive sand table, repeatedly deducing the routes and tactics for attacking the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge.

“The Ten Thousand Demon Ridge is surrounded by nine layers of restrictions. The first layer is the Misty Forest, perpetually shrouded in dense fog, with extremely low visibility.”

Elder Zhao pointed to the markings on the sand table, “The fog is riddled with traps and warning arrays laid by the demon race. Rushing in rashly will easily trigger the alarm.”

“How do we break through this misty forest?” Venerable Tianji asked. Elder

Sun stood up and took out a fist-sized golden bead from his sleeve. The bead's surface was covered with dense runes, radiating a dazzling golden light.

"Palace Master, this is the 'Barrier-Breaking Bead,' which I spent hundreds of years refining. It's specifically designed to counter fog and illusion arrays. Throwing it into the misty forest will dispel the dense fog within a hundred feet radius, lasting for an hour. As long as we cross the misty forest within an hour, we can reach the gate of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge."

Venerable Tianji took the bead, examined it carefully for a moment, and nodded in satisfaction. "Good. The first hurdle depends on you."

"Your subordinate obeys." Elder Sun clasped his hands in a fist salute.

"Beyond the Misty Forest lies the gate of the Myriad Demon Ridge,"

Venerable Tianji said, pointing to the sand table. "The gate is personally guarded by Qingqiu, and further reinforced by ancient restrictions. Although Qingqiu's cultivation is only at the mid-stage of the third rank of Golden Immortal, with the blessing of the Myriad Demon Ridge, their combat power can be raised to the peak of the third rank of Golden Immortal.

Adding Guiyuanzi, they've likely also contacted Golden Immortals from the Qingyun Sword Sect and the Myriad Laws Sect; their high-end combat power is no weaker than ours."

Elder Qian frowned. "Palace Master, what do we do then?"

Venerable Tianji sneered. "We'll leave the high-end combat power to the Divine Abyss Pavilion and the Heavenly..." "The Holy Palace. Venerable Xuanbing is a third-grade Golden Immortal, Venerable Shengguang is a mid-stage third-grade Golden Immortal,

and with myself, the three of us can easily take on four of them. As for those miscellaneous soldiers, our three thousand elite troops are more

than enough to crush them." He paused, then continued, "After breaching the mountain gate, we will split into three groups. Elder Zhao will lead the first and second battalions to attack the Demon Emperor's Palace from the front;

Elder Qian will lead the third battalion to circle around to the rear of Ten Thousand Demon Ridge and cut off their retreat;

Elder Sun will lead the fourth battalion to clear out the scattered demon soldiers on the outer perimeter. I will personally lead the fifth battalion to oversee the central army and provide support at any time."

"Yes!" the four elders responded in unison.While the Heavenly Palace was preparing for battle, the Myriad Demon Ridge was not idle either.

Qingqiu, her injuries not yet fully healed, forced herself to personally inspect every defensive line of the Myriad Demon Ridge.

Her face was still pale, and her steps were somewhat unsteady, but her eyes remained resolute. Guiyuanzi followed behind her, his left arm still in a sling, his chest wound not yet fully healed, but he could already walk.

Along the way, demon warriors bowed their heads in respect upon seeing Qingqiu, their eyes filled with reverence.

"Your Majesty, your injury..." Guiyuanzi said softly, his voice full of worry.

"It's nothing." Qingqiu waved her hand, her voice weak but undeniably firm, "The Heavenly Venerable won't give us much time. We must make all preparations before he arrives."

She walked to the edge of the Misty Forest, looking at the perpetually thick fog.

The fog surged and billowed, like a living thing, occasionally revealing faint glimmers of light from its depths—traps and warning arrays laid by the demons.

She reached into the mist, feeling the cool, damp air, and remained silent for a moment.

“The Misty Forest is the first line of defense. As long as we hold this place, the Heavenly Palace army can’t get in. But the Heavenly Venerable is no ordinary person; he must have a way to break through the mist. We need to set up more traps and ambushes in the Misty Forest.”

Gui Yuanzi nodded. “I’ve already arranged for Gui Yuan Sect disciples to set up hundreds of warning arrays and offensive rune arrays in the mist.

As soon as a Divine Race cultivator steps into the Misty Forest, these arrays will be triggered. The arrays are based on spirit stones and use talismans as catalysts; once triggered, they can injure at best and kill at worst.”

Qingqiu shook her head. “It’s not enough. The Heavenly Palace has three thousand elite troops, plus the people from the Divine Abyss Pavilion and the Heavenly Saint Palace, at least four thousand five hundred.

A few hundred arrays won’t stop them. Even if each array can kill ten people, it’ll only be a few thousand. Moreover, once an array is triggered, its location will be exposed, and subsequent enemies can easily bypass it.”

“Then what do you mean, Your Majesty?”

Qingqiu was silent for a moment, “Send the demon warriors into the Misty Forest, using the fog as cover to ambush the gods. The goal isn’t to kill them, but simply to buy time.

Every day we can hold them off is a day in the future. The demons have lived in the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge for generations, and they know this mist like the back of their hand. They can move freely through it, while god cultivators are like blind men once inside.”

Guiyuanzi frowned, “Your Majesty, while the demon warriors have an advantage fighting in the mist, they will also suffer heavy casualties…”

“I know,”

Qingqiu interrupted him, her voice tinged with reluctance but even more so with determination. “But this is the only way. We cannot allow them to easily cross the Misty Forest. Every day we delay, we have one more day to prepare, one more chance of victory.

The demon warriors are not afraid of death; they fear the destruction of their homes, the enslavement of their descendants by the gods.”

She turned to Guiyuanzi. “Guiyuanzi, go and invite the leaders of the Qingyun Sword Sect and the Wanfa Sect. Tell them that the survival of Wanyao Ridge hinges on this battle.

If Wanyao Ridge falls, then it will be the time for your human forces to be wiped out. You are both human forces; they should not stand idly by.”

Qingqiu knew that the demons alone were no match for the alliance of the gods; only by uniting with the humans could they have a glimmer of hope.

“Yes,” Guiyuanzi clasped his hands and turned to leave.

Guiyuanzi’s injuries had not yet fully healed, but he forced himself to go to the Qingyun Sword Sect and the Wanfa Sect himself.

He dared not delay; the Celestial Venerable could attack at any moment, and the sooner they joined forces, the greater their chances of victory.

The Qingyun Sword Sect was nestled in a mountain range in the eastern part of the Northern Region. Its mountain gate was majestic,

its sword aura soaring into the sky. From afar, the entire mountain gate was shrouded in a layer of pale blue sword light—the Qingyun Sword Sect’s protective array, said to be composed of tens of thousands of longswords. Once activated, all ten thousand swords would unleash their power simultaneously, unleashing boundless might.

The stone steps before the mountain gate numbered nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine, each engraved with sword runes. Walking on them, one could feel the sharp sword intent rushing towards them. The sect

leader, Qingyunzi, was an elderly man with white hair, a Golden Immortal of the third rank, and had known Guiyuanzi for many years.

He wore a blue Daoist robe, a long sword at his waist, and had a lean face and an air of otherworldly grace.

Upon seeing Guiyuanzi's wounded and pale appearance, his expression instantly changed.

"Guiyuanzi, what happened to you? Who injured you?"

Qingyunzi quickly stepped forward, supporting Guiyuanzi's arm. Warm spiritual energy emanated from his palm, helping to stabilize the chaotic energy within him.

Guiyuanzi gave a bitter smile and recounted the entire incident.

From Kai's soul being taken to the Seventeenth Heaven, to the Heavenly Venerable's coveting of the Great Luo Golden Scripture, to the Guiyuan Sect recognizing him as their master, to seeking the Eternal Soul Wood at the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, to the Heavenly Venerable forcibly taking the Primordial Divine Water, to seeking the Chaos Spiritual Liquid in the Chaos Secret Realm, to finally being intercepted by the Heavenly Venerable and Qingqiu being injured.

He became more and more agitated as he spoke, almost shouting at the end. His voice echoed in the hall, causing dust to fall from the dome.

"Sect Leader Qingyun, Venerable Tianji has gone too far! He not only wants to steal the Young Master's Great Luo Golden Scripture, but also wants to destroy my Guiyuan Sect, my Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, and my human race!

I have come today to beg the Qingyun Sword Sect to send troops to fight against the God Race! If the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge falls, the God Race's next target will be my human race!"

Qingyunzi remained silent for a long time after hearing this.

He stood up, walked to the window of the main hall, and looked at the sea of clouds outside.

The surging sea of clouds mirrored his current emotions.

With his back to Guiyuanzi, he slowly spoke, his voice low and heavy.

"Guiyuanzi, we've known each other for hundreds of years, and I trust your character. As for the young master you mentioned, although I haven't met him, I trust your judgment. And as for

the Great Luo Golden Scripture you spoke of, although I haven't seen it, I trust the lineage of the Daoist patriarch.

The Heavenly Palace has oppressed our human race for years, and my Qingyun Sword Sect has long held a grudge against them. It's just that in the past, our strength was insufficient, so we could only swallow our anger and watch the gods run rampant in the Northern Region."

He turned to look at Guiyuanzi, a resolute glint in his eyes—an anger that had been suppressed for hundreds of years and had finally found an outlet.

"Guiyuanzi, rest assured. I will immediately gather the elites of our sect and personally lead the team to Wanyao Ridge.

Although our Qingyun Sword Sect is not as powerful as the Tianji Palace, all three hundred of our disciples are at least at the ninth rank of True Immortal Realm, with sharp sword energy and fearless courage. The blood of our human race cannot be shed in vain."

Guiyuanzi's eyes reddened, tears welling up. "Sect Leader Qingyun, I cannot express my gratitude enough. If there is any need for your service in the future, the entire Guiyuan Sect will be ready to die for you."

"No need to thank me."

Qingyunzi waved his hand, walked up to Guiyuanzi, and patted him on the shoulder. "We are not doing this for you, but for the human race. To prevent the gods from defecating on our heads.

Three hundred years ago, my junior brother died at the hands of the Tianji Palace. I have always remembered this debt. Today, it is time to settle it."

The Myriad Laws Sect was located in the western part of the Northern Region. Its sect leader, Fa Yuanzi, was a middle-aged woman with a cultivation level of the third rank of Golden Immortal. She was forthright and had a fiery temper.

Her sect was built on a plain, without towering gates or imposing palaces, only ancient stone towers scattered across the plain in a pleasing arrangement.

Each stone tower was a magical artifact, capable of fighting alone or forming an array, possessing immense power.

When she met Gui Yuanzi, she was reprimanding her disciples in the training ground.

Her voice was loud and could be heard from afar. She wore a dark red robe, with a string of bells hanging from her waist, jingling as she walked.

Seeing Gui Yuanzi covered in injuries, she was first taken aback, then burst into laughter, her hearty laughter causing leaves to fall from the trees.

“Gui Yuanzi, you’ve been beaten? Who dared to do this? Tell me, and I’ll beat them back! I’ll see if I don’t beat them to a pulp!”

Gui Yuanzi recounted the events once more.

This time, he spoke in greater detail, from the bounty placed on him by Venerable Tianji, to the pursuit of the young master by Venerable Chiyan and Venerable Hanyuan, to the process of Guiyuan Sect recognizing him as their master, to the dangers in the Chaos Secret Realm, to the circumstances of Qingqiu’s injury.

His voice was hoarse, but every word was clear.

Fa Yuanzi’s laughter gradually subsided, and the smile on her face disappeared, replaced by a solemn expression.

Her brows furrowed into a deep knot, and her fingers unconsciously rubbed the bell at her waist, making a crisp tinkling sound.

“The Celestial Venerable… that old bastard, I’ve disliked him for a long time. Relying on the support of the Divine Race, he runs rampant in the Northern Region, bullying my human cultivators.

I used to tolerate him because I couldn’t beat him. Now, with your Guiyuan Sect, with the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, and with my Myriad Laws Sect joining forces, what are we afraid of?

No matter how strong his Celestial Palace is, he only has three thousand elites. The three of us combined have two thousand people, plus the ancient restrictions of the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, we might not be unable to defeat him!”

She patted Guiyuanzi’s shoulder, making him almost vomit blood, but her eyes were full of sincerity.

It was a sincerity born of experience and a deep understanding of the world.

“Guiyuanzi, rest assured. My Wanfa Sect is sending troops! Two hundred disciples, each proficient in magic and formations. Although we may not be as good as the Qingyun Sword Sect in a direct assault, when it comes to defense and support, the Wanfa Sect is second to none.

Don’t worry, with me here, even the Heavenly Extreme Venerable will have to step over my corpse before he can flatten the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge!”

Guiyuanzi bowed deeply. “Sect Master Fayuan, your great kindness and virtue will be forever forgotten by the Guiyuan Sect.”

“Stop with the formalities.”

Fayuanzi waved his hand. “After the battle, have your young master invite me for drinks. I heard he has the Great Luo Golden Scripture, which belongs to an ancient Daoist patriarch. I’ll have him tell me what the mysteries of the Great Luo Golden Scripture are all about.”

The two sect leaders kept their word.

In less than three days, the Qingyun Sword Sect and the Wanfa Sect each arrived at the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge with their elite disciples.

Three hundred disciples from the Qingyun Sword Sect arrived, all with cultivation levels above the ninth rank of the True Immortal Realm. Each wore a blue Daoist robe, a long sword at their waist, and exuded a chilling aura.

Their steps were perfectly synchronized, causing the ground to tremble slightly with each step.

Leading them was Qingyunzi, the sect leader of the Qingyun Sword Sect, dressed in a blue Daoist robe, his white hair flowing,

possessing an air of otherworldly elegance. Two hundred disciples from the Wanfa Sect arrived, also with cultivation levels above the ninth rank of the True Immortal Realm. They wore robes of various colors and

carried a diverse array of magical artifacts, including whisks, bells, talismans, and array plates.

They huddled in small groups, discussing something in hushed tones, their eyes gleaming with shrewdness.

Leading them was the Grand Elder of the Wanfa Sect, a second-rank Golden Immortal, proficient in various spells and arrays.

Adding the three hundred disciples from the Guiyuan Sect and the demon warriors from the Wanyao Ridge, the total force reached nearly two thousand men.

Two thousand men, though still fewer than the four thousand five hundred of the Heavenly Palace, were at least no longer utterly helpless.

More importantly, these three forces came from different races and sects, but their goal was the same—to protect their homeland and resist the gods.

Qingqiu stood in the plaza before the Demon Emperor's Palace, watching the reinforcements arriving from all directions, a warm feeling welling up inside her.

She had lived for tens of thousands of years, witnessing countless betrayals and deceptions, as well as countless acts of loyalty and sacrifice.

At this moment, she knew she had not chosen the wrong allies.

She turned to face everyone, her voice not loud, but clearly reaching everyone's ears.

That voice carried the Demon Emperor's majesty, and also the hope of an entire race.

"Fellow Daoists, I am deeply grateful for your arduous journey to Ten Thousand Demon Ridge today.

The Heavenly Palace's Divine Race harbors wolfish ambitions, seeking to unify the Northern Region and enslave all races. We refuse to be slaves and have no choice but to rise up in resistance.

Today, we join forces not for power or territory expansion, but simply to survive, so that our descendants will never again be enslaved by the Divine Race."

She paused, her gaze sweeping over every face—young and promising disciples, white-haired elders, and sharp-eyed demon warriors.

She took a deep breath, her voice suddenly rising.

"I am not good with empty words. I only know that whoever tries to oppress the demon race, whoever tries to oppress our allies, I will fight them to the death. Even if it means being shattered to pieces!"

Nearly two thousand cultivators on the plaza echoed in unison, their voices shaking the heavens and the entire valley.

Gui Yuanzi stood in the crowd, watching Qingqiu's retreating figure, then looked down at the jade bottle in his arms.

"Young Master, we have allies and troops. Now, we await your physical reshaping."

Kai's soul flickered slightly within the jade bottle, remaining silent.

He knew the true decisive battle had not yet begun.

But he was not afraid.

Because he was not alone.

Behind him were the Guiyuan Sect, the Ten Thousand Demon Ridge, the Qingyun Sword Sect, and the Wanfa Sect.

Behind him were all those who refused to be enslaved by the gods.