

Medical 291

Chapter 291 The Magical Forest_2

A sudden thought struck Yan Xiaobao. "Lan Feng," Yan Xiaobao said, panting, the mischievous grin on his face growing wider. "You told me I couldn't give this new cultivation technique to the twins or anyone else because their Qi purity is too low," he continued, as Lan Feng nodded, trying to decipher what Xu Yue had been hinting at.

"Does Wang Julong possess Qi pure enough for this method?" he asked, feeling a surge of excitement rise within him. Even though he no longer felt the same rivalry as before, he still hoped Wang Julong would grow stronger—she was the first person in this world to make Yan Xiaobao fully recognize his own potential.

"It should be possible," Lan Feng said with a smile. "Have you finally accepted women in this world?" he teased, but before Yan Xiaobao could answer, Lan Feng continued speaking. "Wang Julong is remarkable." A dreamy expression appeared on his oddly-shaped bird-like face. "Her body is still young, but one day, she will become quite beautiful. You should definitely give her a positive impression, and only then reap the fruits of those feelings."

Yan Xiaobao tried to silence the parrot, but it kept talking. "I still think you should consider the twin. She's already stunning. Your friend is clearly enamored with her, and since his family gifted us this Holy Flower, you could always choose to share her with him."

"Enough!" Yan Xiaobao laughed. "I won't be helping her just to pursue her; I simply hope she keeps growing stronger so I'll have someone to train alongside in the future."

Upon hearing that, Lan Feng let out a faint hum but said nothing further. Instead, he closed his eyes.

"I know the cultivation technique," Lan Feng said, eyes still shut. "We'll assign her one of the Twelve Zodiac methods. The Horse—it should work well."

Feeling deeply grateful for how Lan Feng was assisting his friend, Yan Xiaobao quickly selected a blank Memory Stone from his storage stone and extracted the technique already engraved on a lower-grade Memory Stone.

Since Yan Xiaobao wanted to stabilize the rapidly spinning Qi Cave within him, he spent the rest of the evening training.

Early the next morning, Yan Xiaobao paid his bill before setting off toward the Wang Family Mansion. Though he'd never been there before, he found it easy enough to locate. Once there, however, he noticed the guards weren't particularly friendly toward Wang Julong's peers.

"I just need to deliver a gift to my classmate!" Yan Xiaobao said, glaring at the guards who kept demanding he leave the premises.

"Can you let him know that Yan Xiaobao is here?" he asked, his irritation mounting. He couldn't leave without deciding whether to gift this cultivation technique to Wang Julong before departing for the Magic Forest.

"Did you say Yan Xiaobao?" came a timid voice from inside the courtyard. Wang Jingshen's eyes widened at the sight of the white-haired boy.

"Idiots!" he shouted at the guards. "Never mind them," he added, personally inviting Yan Xiaobao inside. "I'll fetch my sister shortly. Feel free to look around." He turned back to the guards, fixing them with an icy glare. "I'll deal with you later!" With that, he disappeared behind one of the buildings, leaving Yan Xiaobao to survey the mansion grounds.

The entire mansion was stunning. Gardens filled every space between the buildings, each adorned with gold and gemstones.

"Yan Xiaobao!" Wang Julong called, running toward the visitor who was looking around. She hadn't expected to see him here, and her cheeks flushed as she approached. When she reached him, she stopped, caught her breath, and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I'll be leaving the city soon to head to the Magic Forest," Yan Xiaobao said with a smile. "But first, I wanted to give you a gift."

Wang Julong furrowed her brows upon hearing this but still accepted the Memory Stone he handed her.

"This method is far more beneficial than the one you've been using," he explained. "Don't share it with anyone else—I'm giving it only to you. I hope you'll continue to be my rival in the future."

With that, Yan Xiaobao smiled faintly, turned, and started walking out of the mansion. He glanced back once to wave at Wang Julong, who now had several elders gathered behind her.

"What did he want?" one of the elders asked as Wang Yuelong walked onto the street, Yan Xiaobao already out of sight.

"He came to say goodbye before heading to the Magic Forest for training," Wang Julong answered obediently. Her entire life had been dictated by these elders. While she bore no hatred toward them, she didn't feel any warmth from them either.

"What's that Memory Stone?" another elder asked, his greedy gaze locked onto the stone in Wang Julong's hands. As soon as the stone was mentioned, a stubborn feeling arose in Wang Julong's heart.

"This is my gift," she said, clutching it tightly. "It contains Yan Xiaobao's notes on how to cultivate more effectively, but he instructed me not to share it with anyone."

At this, the elders exchanged glances and growled softly, greed gleaming in their eyes. Wang Julong was a woman forced by her family to live as a man. Everything she owned came from these elders.

Unfortunately, the elders didn't treat Wang Julong as her own person but as a means to secure the family's reputation—or at least, to support her mediocrity compared to her brother when he inherited the family title.

Wang Jingshen, the older of the two siblings, was the family's only true son, and the elders automatically placed him in line to become the leader whenever necessary.

On the other hand, Wang Julong was a prodigy but also a girl. When she began cultivation, she was given two choices: leave her family and secretly marry into a noble family for an alliance, or live as a man to support her brother in the future.

For a five-year-old child, the choice was terrifying. Sent away by her loving mother, she decided to live as a boy.

In truth, the lifestyle wasn't bad. Wang Julong received excellent treatment within the family, especially after mastering Qi Thunder. But regardless of how much she was favored, the elders always stood behind her, reminding her that if she ever fell behind, she'd be married off to another family as a gift to secure an alliance.

These same elders now eyed the Memory Stone greedily, while others showed expressions of curiosity and delight. The possibility of befriending a disciple of a Martial Arts Expert was naturally enticing—it would undoubtedly bring benefits in the future. They eagerly wondered what information they might gain.

"You need to share these notes with other clans," one elder finally spoke, letting his greed show, as he still hadn't managed to progress past Duke-level cultivation.

"Yes, these incredible notes must absolutely be shared," chimed another elder, his eyes filled with avarice as he imagined teaching them to his grandchildren.

"I'm very sorry," Wang Julong apologized. "Yan Xiaobao explicitly told me they were for me alone." She paused briefly before continuing, "I really don't want to go against his wishes. If he gets angry, I couldn't possibly fight his master."

Her cautious response served as a form of self-preservation—but it worked. The elders immediately averted their gazes, albeit reluctantly.

No one present dared to challenge Yan Xiaobao, a known disciple of an expert ranked on the Holy Name Rankings. If Li Fen ever decided to retaliate against the Wang Family for defying her disciple, none would step in to stop her.

When Wang Julong's lips curved into a satisfied smile, the elders retreated to their courtyards. She pressed the Memory Stone to her forehead, and after a brief flash, the cultivation technique's knowledge flooded her mind, guiding her training.

On the outskirts of the city, Yan Xiaobao made his way toward the gate, ready to meet others and set off for the Magic Forest.

Chapter 292 The Magical Beast

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Although Yan Xiaobao's soul now held memories of over thirty years, he was still as excited as a child waiting for Christmas presents. This was because he thought about his outing into the wilderness, which would be a great way to stabilize his Qi after absorbing the Shenzhou Flower and an opportunity to practice Martial Arts Skills primarily designed for solo training.

Walking through the bustling streets, Yan Xiaobao managed to slip through the daily lives of people and rushed toward the city gates. With the towering walls in sight, Yan Xiaobao quickened his pace until he exited through the gates, where he saw all his friends already gathered and waiting for him.

The Rong twins rode their strange beasts, while Deng Wu sat astride a creature that resembled a dragon. Ma Kong and Gao Yan were both on magical horses.

The day before, Yan Xiaobao wouldn't have dared approach the magic horses, but today was different. After Lan Feng absorbed the spiritual energy of the Shenzhou Flower, he could now completely hide his aura, and the only animals showing signs of concern were the same ones Yan Xiaobao had previously walked past a year ago when entering the academy.

Yan Xiaobao approached the magical horse he had borrowed and carefully mounted the mystical beast.

Sitting on the horse felt strange to Yan Xiaobao; the warmth of the saddle against his back was comforting, yet an awkward feeling arose as he noticed every movement of the magical horse seemed to jolt him, causing him to nearly fall.

Fortunately, Yan Xiaobao was a cultivator. His sense of balance was excellent, which allowed him to stay atop the saddle as the horse started toward the path leading into the Magic Forest.

Yan Xiaobao breathed a sigh of relief and realized his horse was following the others, meaning he didn't need to guide it. Uncertain about controlling the reins, he simply held them in his hands with a confused expression.

Laughter echoed from behind him. Gao Yan and Ma Kong appeared on either side of him, openly mocking the way he swayed from side to side. His trembling legs struggled to keep hold of the horse, while the loose reins let the creature move freely.

At first, Yan Xiaobao felt as though every movement made by the horse might send him tumbling, but gradually his body adjusted, and he no longer appeared to be a sack of potatoes tied to the steed. His back straightened, and his eyes gleamed with pride at finally managing to ride properly.

As memories and the sight of others riding magical beasts filled his mind, the surroundings rushed past, yet the group still had several villages to traverse on their journey.

Last year, when Yan Xiaobao had traveled through these villages, he thought they were quite affluent. But now, he saw that although they were not as impoverished as his own household, they couldn't hold a candle to the grandeur of the families living within Liluo City.

While passing through the villages, Yan Xiaobao observed how Rong Ming and his companions demonstrated immense respect, ensuring they encountered no troubles along the way. As the group moved through the villages, Yan Xiaobao began to notice details he had missed on his previous trip.

After passing through two or three villages, Yan Xiaobao noticed that Gao Yan always stared at certain servants, and those servants would barely nod in acknowledgment. Curious, Yan Xiaobao kept observing, and over time, he began to grasp how extensive Gao Yan's connections were.

As the group traveled together through the village, Yan Xiaobao was chatting with Gao Yan and Ma Gang at the rear when suddenly Ma Kong's eyes widened dramatically.

"Wait a minute, Hui Yue, when did you become a Five-star disciple?!" Ma Kong exclaimed in shock. His voice was loud, and the others immediately stopped in their tracks, staring at the white-haired young boy as if he were an alien.

Three days ago, when the Rong twins had seen him, Hui Yue's cultivation rank was that of a three-star disciple. Yet now, within just three days, he had suddenly advanced two stars—this was simply unbelievable.

Rong Xing and Rong Ming were equally astonished, but Ma Kong and Gao Yan were even more so. The days spent in Liluo City had been dedicated not to cultivation but to visiting two prominent families. Deng Wu was the only one who could hazard a guess, speculating that this might have something to do with family wealth, yet even he couldn't fathom how Yan Xiaobao had utilized it to his advantage.

As the group finally reached the outskirts of the Magic Forest, the sun began to set, casting purple and red hues across the towering trees, making the woods appear like an otherworldly realm.

The beasts slowed their pace and allowed the group to walk steadily through the forest instead of the hurried pace they'd maintained up to this point.

The plan was for the group to reach Yan Xiaobao's hometown, where they would set up camp. As students without any overseers, it was clear that the group didn't intend to venture deeply into the forest.

At the campsite near Yan Xiaobao's village, the magical beasts could be cared for by a local village boy, allowing the group to enter the forest to harvest medicinal plants and battle magical beasts.

Normally, they would do this for over two months, but this time, they only planned to spend a month in the wild.

The team wouldn't venture too deeply into the Magic Forest, intending to return to the village by dusk each evening. Neither of the younger members liked sleeping in the dangerous forest. Even its outskirts were perilous. The lowest-ranked magical beasts were equivalent to Disciple Level cultivators, and although the group consisted of six people, fighting two beasts at once would be a real challenge.

Despite this, the danger didn't dampen the smiles spreading across everyone's faces. Excitement bubbled within their souls, knowing they would finally rely on their own abilities to survive in the life-and-death trials that awaited them.

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Because these students operated independently, everything they gained from this trip was theirs to keep. Yan Xiaobao hoped to acquire plenty of magic crystals and beast cores to research.

As the six-person group traversed the outskirts of the Magic Forest, they entered a small valley that seemed to emerge from the forest itself, but it ultimately led to Yan Xiaobao's home.

Excitement bubbled within Yan Xiaobao as he called out to Ma Chicheng to ride the last few miles. A subtle smile crept onto his face, full of anticipation to once again see the place where he spent the first ten years of his life.

Yan Xiaobao rode on a magical steed, a nostalgic expression gracing his face. The landscape they passed was the very hillside where Yan Xiaobao trained in Martial Arts and watched over goats during the first ten years of his life in this different world.

Yan Xiaobao noticed that there were no goats on the hillside today, causing him to furrow his brows. He started wondering whether something was wrong in the village. These goats were the village's most prized possessions and were well cared for. Their absence today was quite alarming.

When he saw Gao Yan and Ma Kong beside him riding with wide smiles and glimmering eyes, he sighed deeply, clearly observing the true state of a village nestled within the Magic Forest.

"Don't expect too much," Yan Xiaobao warned them with a smile. "Our village has no cultivators, and since we can't hunt in the forest, it's really poor."

Hearing this evoked a hint of doubt in the expressions of the two bright-eyed companions. Though they understood they might have overestimated the village, deep-rooted childhood stories in their minds made it hard to comprehend how people without proper cultivation bases could survive in such a perilous place as the Magic Forest.

"You should believe him," Rong Ming commented with a smile from the front, pointing to the hills they were currently crossing. "When I first met him, he was always running up and down these hills caring for his village's goats."

The young Yan Xiaobao, who had gained great fame in Liluo City, was once just a child accustomed to spending his days on these hills. The group continued with steady steps toward the village, eliciting laughter at the thought of all those goats.

Finally, Yan Xiaobao lost patience and urged Ma Chicheng forward, quickly catching up with the Rong twins and Deng Wu as they dashed toward his home. Once Yan Xiaobao began charging towards the village, clear laughter echoed behind him. Within seconds, the calm procession transformed into a group of young people racing against one another, genuinely enjoying their time.

As Yan Xiaobao approached the village, he passed by several fields and immediately recognized the weathered faces of many villagers toiling diligently with their crops.

Upon hearing the sound of galloping horses, the villagers promptly gathered their tools and hurried to inform the village chief that guests had arrived.

Slowing his gait as he entered the village, Yan Xiaobao allowed the others to catch up. Apart from the Rong twins and Yan Xiaobao, everyone seemed astounded by the meager crops and the struggles of surviving in overused soil, evident on the villagers' faces.

They rode through these fields into the village square, but none of them spoke upon arrival. Everyone stared in awe, realizing Yan Xiaobao had not exaggerated when he described the village's poverty.

Initially, the villagers hid their few possessions that could be salvaged, fearing it might be a bandit raid. However, upon noticing the white-haired boy riding a magical steed, their emotions erupted in excitement.

"Yan Xiaobao!" The village chief's voice rang out, stunned. While it was common for the Rong twins to visit with the guards of the Rong Family, no one had expected them to bring back Yan Xiaobao.

The once-abandoned village burst into joyous laughter as every hidden villager emerged from their hiding spots, warmly welcoming their beloved child returning after almost a year's absence.

Yan Xiaobao scanned the surroundings. Despite being away for nearly a year, everything in the village felt the same as before. The goats remained in their pens, and the houses appeared so fragile they seemed ready to collapse with a gust of wind.

Everything was unchanged, and as Yan Xiaobao searched the crowd for two specific faces, a wave of nostalgia swept over him.

"Your mother has returned home," the village elder said with a smile. "Your father, along with the other men from the village, is currently in the forest."

Yan Xiaobao nodded, acknowledging that it made sense for his father not to be there, though he couldn't understand why his mother was home instead of working in the fields with the other women.

"Come along," a melodious voice called from behind. Rong Xing appeared and effortlessly took the reins of the magical steed Yan Xiaobao was riding.

As they approached the edge of the village, excitement bloomed on Yan Xiaobao's face. The hut they arrived at was considered the worst in the entire village, but it carried immense significance for Yan Xiaobao, knowing it belonged to his adoptive parents.

Upon reaching the house, Yan Xiaobao suddenly paused outside the door, steadying his nerves before knocking. He was strangely anxious, briefly questioning whether to enter or knock first.

Eventually, he decided to knock before slowly swinging the door open, savoring the creaking sound as it revealed the interior of the hut.

Hui Lifen was standing in the kitchen, preparing porridge for her husband's dinner. Her beautiful face remained as Yan Xiaobao remembered it, but her body had changed significantly due to pregnancy and seemed ready for imminent childbirth.

The sight startled Yan Xiaobao, but his shock was quickly replaced by joy. In his previous world, Yan Xiaobao had no siblings, yet in this world, he seemed destined to gain a younger sibling. A sudden surge of protectiveness welled up from deep within his soul.

Hearing the creaking sound of the door, Hui Lifen turned around, her face lighting up with a smile. She rushed toward her young son with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Xiao Yue!" she cried as she wrapped her arms tightly around the boy, giving him a big hug. "We've been so worried about you, you little rascal," she cried while scolding him lovingly. A mother's love was the strongest bond, and Yan Xiaobao had to admit he felt lucky to be home with her again.

Releasing him from the embrace, Hui Lifen ushered Yan Xiaobao to the table where she sat, curious to hear about his experiences over the past year since leaving.

As they sat by the table, Yan Xiaobao retrieved three Memory Stones. One was of high quality, while the other two were of medium quality, each containing different contents.

Hui Lifen's eyes widened as she moved closer to the table, staring at the three black stones placed there in astonishment.

"These are...?" she asked curiously.

"They're gifts for you," Yan Xiaobao said with a radiant smile, picking up a storage stone and placing it before Hui Lifen. "Open it," he encouraged, his face alight with happiness, revealing his anticipation to see how thrilled she would be upon discovering the contents.

Without needing to be told twice, Hui Lifen quickly opened the Memory Stone. Her expression of excitement rapidly turned into shock as she saw an abundance of food, drinks, fabrics, and even money stored inside.

"Xiao Yue, you didn't steal all this, did you?" she asked in a trembling voice, never having seen such wealth before.

"They're gifts from my teacher," Yan Xiaobao explained, honestly attributing all his good fortune to Lan Feng, who had guided him. He spoke without lying, as Lan Feng was indeed part of everything Yan Xiaobao had accomplished.

"You found a good teacher?" Hui Lifen asked, the joy in her expression erasing the earlier shock.

"I found an incredible teacher; he also gave me these," Yan Xiaobao said, holding up the two average-quality Memory Stones. "One contains cultivation techniques, and the other Martial Arts Skills," Yan Xiaobao began to explain, "I initially planned to give them to some random children in the village so they could start training to protect everyone. But now that I'm going to have a younger sibling, I want to ask

you to keep them for him or her. Once the child is born, place these Memory Stones on their forehead, and afterward, hand over the stones to the village chief."

At hearing this, Hui Lifen's face turned serious. She nodded with determination. It was natural for Yan Xiaobao to prioritize his family's safety before anyone else's, especially in a challenging world like this.

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Chapter 294 Share One Body

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Yan Xiaobao sat in his old kitchen for several hours, where he talked with his mother, telling her everything that happened in the past year. He explained how he found an old item containing an expert's soul, and since then they have shared a body.

He even told his mother about his alternate personality, 'Li Fen.' Yan Xiaobao knew his mother wouldn't tell anyone. He also knew it was best to be honest with people he truly trusted.

A few hours later, Yan Xiaobao heard a knock on the door, and the Rong twins appeared with other friends.

"Come out," Gao Yan laughed, as he didn't dare knock on the door like Rong Xing did. He was afraid that if he tried, he might drop the door right off its hinges.

"We found a fanged hog, and we're going to roast it tonight and hold a proper party with the villagers. We have enough food and wine to last longer than our usual training time, so let's start at the main party. God knows these villagers could use one." Gao Yan, also a civilian, knew how to motivate other civilians.

It was during the chase of the fanged piglet that others set up tents for their Magical Creatures and made a pen for them.

As they returned from the outskirts of the Magic Forest each day, they encountered the aroma of roasted meat and rushed toward the scent.

The clearing where the Rong entourage usually stayed each year was now a wonderful bonfire, upon which a whole hog leg was roasting.

The fanged hog was not the only food cooked on the bonfire; small clay pots had been placed in the embers, from which the aroma of spices and vegetables gradually wafted.

Tables were set on the uneven ground, filled with various kinds of wine or juice.

Behind the tables and between the bonfire was a small campfire where villagers sat, their children eating to their hearts' content, chatting as they hadn't done in years.

A sense of relief appeared in their eyes, a look of gratitude on their faces.

As the sun set and the moon rose, the villagers danced together in the old place, enjoying their time together. Although these villagers were far from what Yan Xiaobao's friends expected, they quickly found they liked these down-to-earth people, and Gao Yan's impression of Yan Xiaobao was now filled with respect.

The young prodigy from Liluo City, capable of requesting anything, originated from such a poor family. It was the boy's determination that shocked Gao Yan.

One summer morning, as the sun rose, Xu Yue awoke with the first rays of sunlight filtering through his tent door. Although Yan Xiaobao had only been back in his village for a month or two, he knew he would soon leave, and his bed would belong to his younger brother.

Rong Ming once mentioned that when he spoke to his mother, they needed to make a tent for Yan Xiaobao, while Gao Yan was busy hunting the fanged hog.

A fanged hog was very similar to the warthogs Yan Xiaobao had known in his previous world, except these fanged hogs were much larger. A fanged hog was two meters long and one and a half meters tall. Its cultivation base was very low, and the same could be said of its intelligence.

These animals were usually used for breeding and consumption, and they filled the outskirts of the Magic Forest due to their rapid reproduction.

Though Fanged Hogs had a low cultivation level, they were by no means something Yan Xiaobao underestimated. Firstly, although the cultivation base was low, their massive size made them very dangerous; secondly, even with a lower cultivation base, they were still capable of posing a threat quickly enough to cultivators and civilians ranked similar to Yan Xiaobao's father.

The next morning, Hui Yue stood by the sun as usual, and after a night of meditation, the energy inside Yan Xiaobao's body was overflowing, making him slightly uneasy. If he were at the academy, he would move out to sit under his favorite tree and absorb the morning sunlight, but today he felt he needed to try something different.

Passing through the opening of the tent, Hui Yue squinted as the sun was sharp, but his eyes quickly adjusted to the new light. Looking around the fields where they camped, Yan Xiaobao noticed the morning mist rolling around, revealing that they were currently deep within a valley.

At the end of the field was a path leading to the Magic Forest, and this morning, Yan Xiaobao found himself quietly heading toward this path, towards the slender trees he could see.

As Yan Xiaobao's adrenaline started pumping, a smile appeared on his lips. Now jogging, he was no longer heading toward the grove, but even so, he remained as silent as before.

Yan Xiaobao had decided that it was time to test his transforming weapon, the bow-style, as he moved along the outskirts of the forest.

Soon speeding through the trees, Yan Xiaobao reached the tree line visible in the distance. The young boy was swift like the wind and silent as the morning air as he shot into the forest in pursuit of prey.

After crossing the forest for some time, Yan Xiaobao stumbled upon a lone Fanged Hog. This was clearly a male, as it was even larger than the one Gao Yan found yesterday. Yan Xiaobao found it hard to respect this enormous animal standing before him.

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However, despite being an impressive creature, it was also the perfect target for Yan Xiaobao. The boy slowly approached a large tree and perched on a thick branch. Gradually, he let his Qi flow through his meridians, forming a specific pattern inside, and then shaping it into a bow with his hands.

The bow itself was slightly shorter than a longbow, and the string required significant strength to pull back. The arrows were created from Xiaobao's Qi; though he lacked power, the purity of his Qi more than compensated in destructive potential.

At this stage, Yan Xiaobao could consistently hit his training dummy target, but he could only produce the most basic of arrowheads. The arrowheads Yi created were razor-sharp and infused with a fierce energy that made Hui proud. However, every time Lan Feng noticed this, he would start questioning why the arrows didn't explode or why they lacked the swiftness of the wind.

Whenever he heard Lan Feng's criticism, Yan Xiaobao would feel somewhat frustrated, but he kept training diligently nonetheless. Now, he finally had an opportunity to prove that his arrowheads, while simple, were absolutely capable of causing significant damage.

Yan Xiaobao steadily drew the bowstring back, gathering Qi into a smooth, white arrowhead. Slowly, he aimed at his target and then let the Qi arrow fly swiftly across the air within what his eyes could track, embedding it into the neck of the Fanged Hog.

Although the arrow pierced the hog's neck, it wasn't enough to kill it outright. Yan Xiaobao quickly nocked another arrow. From the start, he had known that defeating this massive hog would require more than one shot.

Arrows descended from the large tree where Yue Hui sat. The first shot hit the targeted spot, but after the initial arrow, some missed slightly, while others completely missed their mark.

Yan Xiaobao watched the enraged Fanged Hog beneath the tree and sighed. He then crafted another arrow and waited patiently.

Finally, he released the arrow. Before a loud noise erupted, a squelch was heard, followed by a pained scream. When he saw the Qi arrow slowly dissipating, a satisfied, silly grin appeared on his face, revealing the hog's bleeding eyes.

The arrow had directly burrowed into the skull. Even though the hog was screaming, it wouldn't live for much longer. Looking down at the beast, Yan Xiaobao wondered whether he should patiently wait for it to die or if he should test out his new dagger to end its life swiftly.

Ultimately, he decided to wait. Though the hog was near death, it clearly still had the strength to wail and thrash painfully, making Yan Xiaobao feel hesitant about approaching the giant beast with his ten-year-old frame. Instead, he leaned against the tree trunk, watching as the hog took its final breaths.

The anguished wails echoed throughout the village's entire area. Deng Wu was the first to wake up, but once Little Dragon told him the sounds were coming from a beast Yan Xiaobao and Lan Feng were currently playing with, he calmed down.

Deng Wu stepped outside his tent and saw villagers gathering in groups, staring anxiously in the direction of the cries. Beside them were a pair of twins, both vigilantly scanning the surroundings. Behind them were Gao Yan and Ma Kong, doing the same, ready to defend if they faced an attack from a powerful Magical Creature.

Seeing this, Deng Wu couldn't help but chuckle. As soon as laughter escaped his lips, Rong Xing appeared to interpret it as mockery and cast a deadly glare.

"What's so funny?" she hissed, clearly nervous, which might have been fair given the agonizing screams permeating the area.

"Nothing really," Deng Wu smirked unapologetically. "What you're hearing is a Fanged Hog playing cards with Yan Xiaobao." Deng Wu shrugged and walked toward a group of villagers whose faces were filled with doubt.

"Yan Xiaobao?" Rong Ming asked in surprise, but soon nodded in understanding. For a high-ranked Magical Creature to come so close to the village, then hunt Fanged Hogs, made little sense.

Apart from magical beasts, the only ones capable of taking down these hogs were the students who had arrived the previous day—of whom Yan Xiaobao was the only one unaccounted for.

The villagers couldn't help but feel uneasy when they heard their beloved young boy Yan Xiaobao had entered the outskirts of the Magic Forest and faced off against a Fanged Hog, an opponent they wouldn't even dare confront.

To their bewilderment, however, Yan Xiaobao's new friends didn't seem particularly worried about the boy fighting a Fanged Hog alone.

As the wailing died down, an eerie silence blanketed the small village. All the villagers returned to their daily chores, knowing that they neither had the strength to protect themselves nor the ability to rescue anyone. They placed their hopes for the future on the shoulders of the five young people who had arrived the day before.

Half an hour passed before Ma Kong noticed a diminutive figure approaching them, dragging a massive beast. As this figure drew closer, they saw the young Yan Xiaobao hauling the largest Fanged Hog they had ever seen.

The same distance Yan Xiaobao had crossed minutes earlier now took him twice as long, as he struggled to drag the enormous hog by its tail and oversized hooves.

Villagers working on chores nearby quickly stopped in their tracks upon witnessing the sight. Slowly, they all turned to see Yan Xiaobao calmly dragging the colossal beast, eventually depositing it before his friends.

Chapter 296 Sharing One Body_3

"I'm sorry," he said with a smile. "I couldn't wait for you, so I made my first kill of our journey."

Hearing this, the other five friends chuckled softly as they observed the Fanged Hog.

"Don't show off," Gao Yan retorted with a nudge to his chest. "If Fanged Hogs count, then I definitely claimed my kill yesterday."

Yan Xiaobao could only shrug helplessly, as it was indeed true. He didn't bother to argue over the obvious but instead pulled out a jet-black dagger stained with dark blood and carefully extracted the magic core from inside the hog's head with steady hands.

Although this was Yan Xiaobao's first attempt at retrieving a beast core from the head of a creature, it went unexpectedly well. The dagger was truly a treasure, managing to carve through the hog's skull as if it were made of butter.

The core itself was soon removed, though mud and gore covered Yan Xiaobao's hands and clothes. However, compared to killing a classmate, this was nothing alike, so the young boy displayed a rather indifferent demeanor throughout the process.

Staring at the Beast Moon Core, Yan Xiaobao felt a twinge of disappointment. All beast cores were uniform in size, roughly the size of a pearl, about one centimeter in diameter. Yet, this beast core's only resemblance to a pearl ended there. Its exterior was jagged, with an ordinary brown hue, making it resemble a pebble. If Yan Xiaobao hadn't personally dug it out from the head of the Fanged Hog, he wouldn't have believed it was a beast core at all.

The higher the cultivation level of a beast, the more pristine the color of its beast core. Moreover, the jagged surface of the core would become smoother. A demon beast at Duke Level would have a beast core that looked precisely like a pearl, while those above King-level would begin to see a faint golden sheen in their cores. Holy-level magical beasts would bear golden pearls atop their heads.

Looking at the Fanged Hog, Yan Xiaobao sighed deeply. The beast was massive, yet its value was nearly negligible, making the effort to kill it feel almost more trouble than it was worth. Its core was ugly, clearly of the lowest grade, and its meat lacked any particularly desirable qualities.

However, beasts like this were abundant and had plenty of meat, which could aid the village. Its hide was tougher than that of ordinary game and could easily be used to craft shoes. Its bones were sturdy and great for making tools, while its bristles could be used to create durable brooms.

Yan Xiaobao now understood how much he had changed as he made his way back to the elder's home, prepared to tell him about the large hog he had slain, and to deliver the gifts he could provide.

Last year, Yan Xiaobao had been utterly perplexed about how to handle a beast like the Fanged Hog. Even though he had practiced the advanced martial arts skills he now possessed, he was still certain he wouldn't have been able to kill such a large beast back then.

This year, however, a profound transformation had occurred in this reincarnated young man's heart. His endurance and determination had been tested and tempered through relentless training, far surpassing his previous efforts.

This year, Hui Hui and the group of prodigious friends had worked earnestly together. These friends were the only ones aware of the existence of an unparalleled master, who had once turned the entire Liluo City upside down, now residing deep within Yan Xiaobao.

This year had also taught Yan Xiaobao that he was now on the right path. Cultivation was the aspiration he was willing to dedicate his life to, and he could already feel a deep-seated desire to climb to the highest summit of perfection, reaching the pinnacle he sought within his heart.

Chapter 297 A Measure of Survival

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This desire was not a craving for worldly power, nor a measurement of survival. No, his cultivation went far beyond that. This was a journey of self-discovery and trials of taxation. Only the best, the most dedicated individuals could claim to stand at the pinnacle. Only four Divine Beasts had ever entered the Divine Domain.

However, reflecting on this past year, only one face emerged in Yan Xiaobao's mind, souring his previously cheerful mood. Li Cheng was the first person Yan Xiaobao ever killed, and though this act was not pursued by anyone, it left a significant imprint on the young boy.

Despite everything being difficult, Yan Xiaobao's eyes grew cold, recalling the figures of Gao Yan and Wang Julong after his battle with them had ended. A chilling smile curled on his lips. The killing of Li Cheng was done to aid the world. Who knew how many more lives he would take later, entirely based on his philosophy of always ensuring victory.

While reminiscing about the events of the past year, she returned to the village. She arrived at the village chief's house and knocked on the door.

"Anyone home?" he asked, only to find the door slowly opening, revealing seven men clothed in cloaks of invisibility.

Yan Xiaobao froze. Without moving a muscle, he sensed that Lan Feng had completely concealed herself within his Dantian. After acquiring a few additional Disciple Level skills, he hadn't put much effort into feigning Lan Feng's disguise, but the spiritual power decline from the Shenzhou Flower now allowed Lan Feng to completely hide.

As the door opened, the seven figures gradually turned to face Yan Xiaobao, but the young boy couldn't discern whether these experts were inspecting him. Their cloaks shrouded their entire bodies, and the inscriptions Yan Xiaobao saw remained visible only as embroidered marks on the black cloaks.

Two city guards sent by the City Lord and the village chief were also present in the room. All of them now fixated on the boy who seemed to have walked in on them unexpectedly.

"Sorry," Yan Xiaobao apologized softly, bowing slightly to those present and attempting to close the door in front of him.

"Hold it!" one of the guards called out, prompting the white-haired boy to let out a despairing sigh. Clearly, the day wasn't meant to unfold this way.

Straightening up, Yan Xiaobao looked at the guard who had shouted just now. "Does your Lord require anything of me?" he asked in a sweet voice, with eyes wide like a deer's. A perfect expression of innocence, one almost improbably harmless for a child.

Looking at the boy, the guard struggled to fathom how he could be Li Fen's famed Disciple Level prodigy, Re-Yue.

These guards, stationed at the military quarters of the City Lord's Apartment, knew the cloaked figures had been searching for something throughout the latter half of the year, yet none of them knew exactly what.

These men in black showed no interest in anything, nor did anyone else express interest, particularly since no one had once heard them speak. But last night, Lord Rong Liang instructed the guards to lead them to the small village his child happened to be visiting, leaving no explanation.

When they arrived here, no one showed up in the village initially, but the villagers slowly emerged from a northern field. Joining them were village elders, who immediately invited the visitors into their homes.

The seven cloaked figures asked no questions. In fact, they didn't react to anything that happened, yet as soon as Yan Xiaobao and the seven men came face to face, they opened the door.

Yan Xiaobao stood quietly, staring at the seven cloaked figures. Without any warning, the inscriptions on the seven cloaks flickered with a silver glow, and a heavy silence enveloped Yan Xiaobao like the oppressive stillness he had experienced before his descent.

Under the shroud of silence, a black sphere formed, completely blinding his senses. Yan Xiaobao could neither see nor hear nor smell anything within this domain, yet the relentless sensation of being scrutinized remained.

If this had occurred before Yan Xiaobao obtained the Shenzhou Flower, then Lan Feng wouldn't have concealed herself as deftly. But now, the seven Crusaders perceived nothing.

As the scrutiny intensified, Lan Feng observed how the cave, containing red mist and blue clouds, sealed itself away entirely, allowing nothing to enter or escape its boundaries.

Yan Xiaobao couldn't tell how long the scanning process lasted, nor could he ascertain whether they had managed to uncover the secrets hidden within him. Light began to emerge from a distant point, swiftly advancing to restore the sensory perceptions Yan Xiaobao had previously lost.

Glancing around, Yan Xiaobao noticed the cloaked figures had vanished, along with the city guards. He realized he was now lying in the elder's small hut within the village, wearing an expression of puzzlement.

Before him, all his friends were seated, concern etched across their faces. They rushed toward the boy who had just opened his eyes.

"Are you alright?" Rong Xing asked as she held Yan Xiaobao's hand and measured his pulse, worry glimmering in her eyes.

Rong Xing wasn't the only one concerned. Yan Xiaobao saw all the faces, even Deng Wu, whom Little Dragon had approached before, looked worried. A small signal from Deng Wu suggested he wished to speak with Yan Xiaobao privately afterwards.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," Yan Xiaobao said, smiling warmly. It felt good to be cared for, but his body certainly felt as though he had been beaten fiercely. Sitting upright, he asked his friends, "What happened?" His memories were hazy.

Chapter 298 A Measure of Survival_2

"The elders in the village told us you collapsed." Ma Kong looked quietly at Yan Xiaobao, as if trying to convince himself that the child was alright. "Did you get hurt when you caught that Fanged Hog earlier?" he asked, unable to think of any other explanation for his collapse.

Hearing the question, Yan Xiaobao fell silent for a moment. The elders had clearly not mentioned their visiting guests, and Yan Xiaobao had no interest in telling them. It was obvious that doing so would only make them all worry.

"That must be it," Yan Xiaobao sighed, letting his body fall back onto the pillow and closing his eyes. A throbbing headache was starting to form, and he was deeply concerned that the man being concealed might reveal something that would force them to escape quickly.

Looking at Deng Wu, Yan Xiaobao understood that the other boy knew something about these men—or rather, Little Dragon knew something about them, which could be useful to Yan Xiaobao. Despite this, he knew he had to figure out a way to talk to Deng Wu alone, rather than speaking in front of everyone. Slowly standing up, his wobbly legs trembling, he pretended to go back to the tent to rest.

At first, everyone offered to help him move, but Yan Xiaobao insisted he could manage on his own. By the time he reached Deng Wu, his legs nearly gave out beneath him, and in his stumble, he accidentally kicked Deng Wu's thigh.

"Oh no!" Yan Xiaobao exclaimed, his innocent boyish demeanor automatically showing on his face. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to touch you. Maybe I really can't walk by myself."

"Yes." Deng Wu gritted his teeth in pain. Considering it was just a small boy's kick, his leg hurt more than it should have—but regardless, Deng Wu understood that this was the only chance Yan Xiaobao had to talk to him alone.

"I'm really sorry," Yan Xiaobao said with a sigh. He truly felt regretful, but he had no other options to quickly acquire the information he needed. As he stepped outside, a thought suddenly occurred to him. Turning his head back, he looked at the four friends still waiting inside, their faces filled with concern for him.

"I'll need to rest for a few days. In the meantime, try to capture as many Fanged Hogs as possible. We'll need beast cores."

Hearing this, they all frowned. While they agreed that Yan Xiaobao needed some time to recuperate, they didn't understand why he specifically needed the cores. However, none of them questioned his words, choosing instead to shrug. Rong Ming suddenly broke into a grin.

"Let's make it a contest to see who can catch the most hogs!" he exclaimed, rushing out the door before waiting for a reply, sprinting past Yan Xiaobao and toward the outskirts where Yan Xiaobao had scouted earlier that morning.

Gao Yan was quick to take up the challenge too, chasing after his best friend and brushing past Yan Xiaobao so forcefully that the young boy stumbled. This, in turn, caused Deng Wu to burst into laughter.

Back in the village chief's house, Ma Kong and Rong Xing exchanged suspicious glances.

"Is he hurt?" Ma Kong asked, his voice calm as his eyes lingered on the door where everyone had just walked away.

"No," Rong Xing responded in a melodic tone. "Though Deng Wu seems to know what's going on." She added with a comment, her face displaying a range of emotions.

"One day, he'll tell us what to prepare for when the time comes," Ma Kong sighed as he slowly began walking out, intending to join the others in the hunt.

Rong Xing remained behind the house. Gloom settled on her face, her sadness evident. "Does Deng Wu really deserve more trust than I do?" she muttered.

Yan Xiaobao sat across from Deng Wu in the tent, watching the older boy. Before Deng Wu was a small sky-blue statue, devoid of any new discoveries. Little Dragon remained quiet, his presence entirely concealed, much like Lan Feng had done before.

"Stop being such a stingy lizard, you dumb iguana," Lan Feng said as Phoenix took over his body and spoke through Yan Xiaobao. He had no intention of waiting forever for another Divine Beast to begin talking. The taunt seemed to echo disdainfully, "You idiot, what do you know!"

Finally, an aura long suppressed was released. The little statue began to stir to life, frowning at the small white-haired boy before it.

"So," Lan Feng asked, completely ignoring the previous taunts, "who are those black-cloaked men that scare you so much?"

Little Dragon remained quiet for a long moment, looking at Lan Feng with an unfathomable expression.

"Those men are Crusaders," Little Dragon said uncomfortably, his head continuing to dart around, as if he felt someone following him. Yet there was nothing—he seemed to relax slightly. "The Crusaders are said to be his strongest force, but no one truly knows their real capabilities. If they're here, something's not right."

Hearing this recollection, Lan Feng grew visibly anxious, which in turn made him even more worried.

"If he sent them after us, we'd already be dead, wouldn't we?" Lan Feng hissed, his entire body radiating hostility.

"That's the strange part," Little Dragon continued, truly puzzled. "These Crusaders are the lowest tier; they absolutely belong to the Emperor, so they shouldn't be able to see you or me. Why are they here?"

"I have a suspicion." Yan Xiaobao said calmly. "I'm certain they're looking for 'Li Fen.'" As soon as he said this, the tent fell into silence as everyone considered how this might change their future actions. It was clear none of them were interested in anyone finding out their secrets, yet these Crusaders had made it clear they were aware of something.

"We can't underestimate them, though obviously you're not their target." Little Dragon finally sighed. "If they were after you, you'd already be dead. Either they haven't noticed this little Phoenix yet, or they're not hunting birds."

As he thought about yet another brush with death, Xu Yue could only tremble. He let out a deep sigh, standing up shakily and heading out to find the others. Even though he wished to keep secrets, he knew that everyone around him could potentially be in danger. Putting his friends in harm's way was something Yan Xiaobao could not bear to do.

Gao Yan and Rong Ming were laughing and discussing the two Fanged Hogs they'd caught, debating which of the hogs was the bigger one. Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but smile as he overheard their argument. Ma Kong and Rong Xing completely ignored the two and instead focused on extracting beast cores from the other two creatures.

Everyone stopped their work as Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu arrived, walking toward them. Concern was evident on their faces, and Yan Xiaobao's heart was filled with gratitude.

"Gather around." He said calmly, and everyone followed suit. Even though Yan Xiaobao was the youngest in the group, he clearly possessed the authority of someone they all respected, evident in the reverent looks they gave him.

"There may be people following me," Yan Xiaobao sighed, the tension in the atmosphere immediately thickening. Yan Xiaobao smiled, bittersweet, knowing this was exactly why he hadn't wanted to tell them in the first place.

"You two might recognize them," Yan Xiaobao added with a grin, glancing at the Rong twins. "I believe they used to live in the City Lord's mansion. Seven men in black cloaks."

At this, Rong Xing's eyes widened, and Rong Ming furrowed his brows. "I know who they are," Rong Xing said calmly. "They're here searching for a distinguished expert—at least, that's what Father told me."

Hearing this, Hong Yuehui felt a sense of relief. If those men had noticed Lan Feng, they probably wouldn't have allowed Yan Xiaobao to wake up so peacefully.

"Did your father ever tell you more?" Yan Xiaobao asked curiously. He had heard of their name—the Crusaders—but knew very little about them.

Rong Xing shook her head regretfully. "When I asked him, Father wouldn't answer. But I do know they're looking for someone."

Yan Xiaobao nodded, a tinge of disappointment crossing his face, though he had already anticipated that Rong Liang wouldn't share such important information with the children.

"Those black-cloaked figures are likely searching for the expert hidden within me," Xu Yue said, his expression heavy. "If you stay with me, you could become targets of their attacks."

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Chapter 299 We Are Brothers

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Upon hearing this, although the fear was palpable, as they looked around, determination appeared on the various faces.

"We are brothers, we will never betray each other!" Rong Ming said in a steady voice, and the others nodded solemnly. Yan Xiaobao explained what had happened that morning and smiled.

In the remaining time, Yan Xiaobao managed to hunt down four more Fanged Hogs, along with a few wild rhinos and one Vampyrlic Rabbit. Gao Yan, having mistakenly pursued seven Fanged Hogs, eventually chased one down only for the thrill of capturing such a magical beast.

Deng Wu didn't capture any beasts, as he simply followed behind Rong Xing. However, this girl was more irritable than usual and completely ignored her suitor, who tried every possible way to catch her attention.

Rong Xing and Rong Ming worked together, successfully capturing the majority of the beasts. The twins didn't pursue Fanged Hogs but instead seized nine Vampyrlic Rabbits and even managed to capture two Kirins alive.

Although the Rong twins already had a Kirin they used for travel, they had never tamed their mounts before, and when they saw the lower-ranking kirins roaming nearby, they seized the opportunity to capture them.

With two wild Kirins penned together in the same enclosure, Yan Xiaobao and Gao Yan slowly harvested beast cores from the many beasts they had slain that day.

Though Yan Xiaobao was generally against killing animals, the more he thought about it, the clearer the benefits became when he saw the corpses of the animals lying behind him. The first obvious benefit was the numerous beast cores, which made Yan Xiaobao beam with happiness.

Although these could be sold for money, the amount they could get was limited. However, the six of them would soon reach the central Dantian, allowing them to gain elemental affinity.

The power of elemental affinity came from refining energy extracted from these beast cores, which could then be used to craft items. Having these cores might already benefit the team, especially if Deng Lan managed to break into the main lineup within the next month, as both Lan Feng and Yan Xiaobao anticipated.

The corpses were brought back to the village; they preserved some of the meat and consumed the rest. The amount of meat was enough to sustain the entire village for a year. Despite Yan Xiaobao providing them with Ma family coins, they still dared not use too much, for fear of attracting attention by bringing them into the market.

Using the corpses allowed villagers to obtain the raw materials needed for food while also enhancing their safety. Though the beasts defeated weren't of high cultivation rank, they were still dangerous for most villagers, given their poor purity and relatively low cultivation foundations. These magical beasts posed threats to anyone in the village, as they had killed indiscriminately all day long.

By evening, Yan Xiaobao suggested that the six of them return to the same area they had hunted in within the Magic Forest. Over the next few days, they went to the forest daily.

"What the hell?!" Zhong Hui yelled, throwing the Memory Stone onto the icy ground. It shattered instantly into a thousand fragments, which were gently scattered into the air by a fierce gust of wind.

"Don't tell anyone about what you experienced during that trip!" Zhong Hui said, his angry expression giving way to an evil smile on his face. "Go now," he continued, "return to your posts and guard my castle."

"What did you see?" a woman asked as she stepped out from a corner behind Zhong Hui. It was the same woman who had been there before, but this time her features were clearer than ever.

The woman was tall, with golden hair and golden eyes. Her skin was as pale as the icy surroundings, and her lips were as red as fresh blood. She walked toward Zhong Hui, leaned against a chair, and let out a sigh that escaped her lips.

"It's not Sang Yang," Zhong Hui said with an irritated expression, his words causing the golden-haired woman to raise an eyebrow as she gestured for the young man to continue explaining.

"Some kids managed to seal a Holy Demon Beast. He knows some advanced skills. According to intel, he pretended to be an expert, stirring up all this commotion." As he spoke, the young man suddenly burst into hearty laughter, wiping the corners of his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Looks like Sang Ying is quite busy." He said with a smile, "One day, I will surely catch him!"

"It's all amusing indeed," the golden-haired woman said with a dissatisfied expression, observing his hysterical laughter. "What do you plan to do about this child and the beast aligned with the Saints?" She clicked her tongue and asked, "You don't intend to hand them over to him, do you?"

Her voice betrayed some disagreement. Zhong Hui leaned back against his chair, resting both hands on its arms, quietly pondering for a moment before finally answering her question. A bitter smile appeared on his face.

"I don't think I'll tell him about this," Zhong Hui said, his voice slow and calm as his grin grew larger. "A boy who manages to conquer a beast aligned with the Saints from such a low cultivation base only ensures great potential for the future."

Hearing this, the golden-haired woman furrowed her brows lightly, "What if he causes trouble later?" she asked.

"It's none of my concern." Zhong Hui laughed again, toying with the ice crystals in the air, seemingly oblivious to the seriousness of the conversation. "At best, I can employ the boy. At worst, I will have to kill him. Do you think a mere child could prove troublesome to someone like me, ranked among the Saints?"

Chapter 300 We Are Brothers_2

Upon hearing this, the woman's face briefly revealed a faintly carved expression, but it quickly faded away. "If he finds out about this, what will you do?" she asked, her voice tinged with a slight panic.

"Don't worry." Zhong Hui continued to laugh, focusing more on the ice crystal he was crafting—a sculpture of Yan Xiaobao standing before him. "He needs me."

Zhong Hui shrugged as he looked at the frozen figure of the eleven-year-old boy before him, a satisfied expression crossing his face. "But he will never know. Eliminating seven Crusaders."

"You can't!" The blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman gasped in horror, only to be silenced by the joyful expression on Zhong Hui's face. "Of course I can," he replied, grinning. "I hold them in my grasp."

The young, handsome man stood up from his chair and began moving toward the direction where the Crusaders had just left, only to pause briefly. Tilting his head back, his lips twisted into a malicious smile as he said, "Formally, it's not me but Sang Yong who killed them."

Yan Xiaobao and the others spent the first six days only traversing the outskirts of the Magic Forest during daylight hours. This resulted in the group of six acquiring a large number of low-level Demon Cores, while enabling the village to fill their food supplies with dried, salted, and smoked meats of various kinds.

Each evening became a feast where they indulged in roasted Magical Creatures, stewed Magic Beasts, or fried Magic Beasts. Although Yan Xiaobao considered himself in the prime of his growth phase, he was certain that the amount of protein he'd consumed surpassed any reasonable peak.

The first six days posed no significant challenges for Yan Xiaobao or the others. After capturing so many low-ranking beasts, they were finally prepared to face greater obstacles. They spent a week battling higher-level beasts in the Magic Forest before returning, but they avoided entering the central territory, where truly powerful Magic Beasts resided.

Yan Xiaobao watched as Gao Yan and Rong Ming constantly yawned along the forest path, chuckling softly. It was clear that neither had slept well the prior night, now resulting in trouble for both young men.

Yan Xiaobao couldn't understand why Rong Ming was so thrilled, as he had spent the past six years each year searching for similar reasons. But now things were different—he had six companions traveling with him. Especially given how the two older boys frequently competed fiercely, both eager to prove themselves superior without caring about the disparities in their cultivation foundations.

Smiling faintly, Yan Xiaobao shook his head and redirected his focus to the road they were traveling. The path was evidently forged by Magical Creatures that had moved through the forest, yet it seemed relatively rugged. The ground had been flattened, plants neatly growing to the sides with exposed roots likely trampled or eaten.

On the outskirts of the Magic Forest, trees were quite sparsely arranged, allowing the group to view expansive landscapes ahead. However, as they progressed deeper, the trees became denser, and the rustling of more beasts grew louder.

While this area contained far more beasts than the open wilderness, these creatures remained unseen by Yan Xiaobao and the others. Typically, beasts would flee upon detecting a group of six cultivators entering the forest.

Higher-level beasts possessed greater intelligence, and at this stage, most recognized that a group of cultivators was no easy target. Though human cultivators were generally weaker than beasts of equivalent level, safety in numbers was an undeniable advantage.

Most beasts lacked that sense of security—unless they could ambush or guarantee their own escape, few dared attack groups like this.

After several hours of walking, the group arrived at a small clear pond nestled deep within the forest. Towering ten-meter trees loomed overhead, their dense canopies permitting hardly any sunlight to filter through.

The pond, circular and about twenty meters in diameter, shimmered with transparent water, revealing various aquatic lifeforms within its still waters. The forest floor here was blanketed with moss, contrasting starkly with the rough trails they'd trekked earlier. The moss resembled a thick carpet, dampening all outside sounds.

"We'll camp here for now," Deng Wu sighed as Yan Xiaobao readily agreed. After traveling for hours, all six were eager to sit down, grab a bite, and plan their next steps.

Rong Xing sparked a small fire and quickly began preparing a stew for their lunch. As the cooking commenced, they initially intended to pitch tents, but after some deliberation, Yan Xiaobao vetoed the idea. If they needed to move swiftly during the night, tents might prove to be a liability rather than protection.

Instead, they began scouting the pond and its surroundings, wondering why it felt eerily silent. Before entering the forest, Yan Xiaobao and the others had heard the commotion of countless Magical Creatures, yet this pond seemed unnervingly still—devoid even of shifting shadows.

The tranquil silence suddenly transformed into a foreboding dread. Yan Xiaobao returned to the fireplace, gesturing to the others to do the same.

None of them spoke as they quietly returned to the campfire. Now fully aware of the ominous atmosphere, their eyes remained vigilant, constantly scanning the environment as their senses heightened to the extreme.

Observing everything unfold at an excruciatingly slow pace, Yan Xiaobao knew they were being watched by a beast—likely one of the advanced beasts inhabiting this part of the forest. This realization made him even more alert as he began circulating his Qi through his meridians to activate his Velocity Flow.

In an instant, the water in the pond began to churn, erupting into a cylindrical water vortex that sped toward the six youths gathered around the campfire.

The water's movement allowed them little time to react. Yan Xiaobao darted aside with Velocity Flow while positioning his palms parallel to one another, channeling the Flame Spark Skill.

Though Yan Xiaobao had several offensive techniques, none could counter such a vast amount of water. Hui Yue knew that using fire might evaporate the water, but the flames risked being extinguished as well. Nonetheless, it was his only choice given the lack of time to fully channel a skill.

The cylindrical body of water swiftly split into four smaller sphere-like forms, each trailing a long tail that connected to the central lake.

Yan Xiaobao wasn't the only one to have pre-activated his skills. Hearing a thunderous blast reverberate across the clearing they stood in, a smile crept onto his face. Ma Kong had failed to escape the water prison attacking them but managed to trigger his Qi Bomb, causing dramatic explosions as he struggled to surface.

Rong Ming, Rong Xing, and Gao Yan were also trapped, their respective water prisons erupting in flashes of dazzling white light—which indicated each was exerting their utmost effort to resist.

Deng Wu, who had swiftly escaped earlier, had long since activated his Dancing Qi Pillar, charging it with all his might like Yan Xiaobao.

"Towards the lake!" Yan Xiaobao shouted, noticing that each attack on the water prison led to its persistent regeneration.

Yan Xiaobao's Flame Spark Skill had reached its peak, limiting the amount of control he could exert without exhausting excess spiritual energy. Together with Deng Wu, they synchronized their assault.

As Yan Xiaobao hurled his fireball into the lake, Deng Wu seized the opportunity to use his Qi Pillar to sever the water prisons, finally freeing the captive youths.

The moment the fiery sparks collided with the lake's surface, a blazing explosion erupted, and the searing heat instantly vaporized the touching water. Within seconds, the clearing was shrouded in dense steam.

"We did it!" A jubilant voice rang out amidst the steam, but Yan Xiaobao quickly hushed them, plunging the atmosphere back into silence.

"We haven't seen the beast yet," Yan Xiaobao murmured, his senses still at their peak. "Stay sharp."

A chilling laugh echoed through the dense fog, quickly followed by a blood-curdling scream. The laughter was unmistakably filled with glee, but to Yan Xiaobao's dismay, he believed the scream belonged to Rong Xing.

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