

Medical 391

Chapter 391 Dragon Army

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Yan Xiaobao stood next to Deng Wu, gazing down at the tunnel. When the Dragon Army left the cave's end, they would reach the tunnel.

The biggest problem was that the Dragon Army had just arrived. Yan Xiaobao and everyone else had no idea how long they would spend indulging in the city's delicacies and fine wines before departing.

While the Dragon Army enjoyed the warm hospitality of Cave's End City, Hui Yue and the others stood in the pitch-black tunnel, not daring to light their glow stones as they patiently waited for the army to arrive, so they could rescue Sun and return her to her family.

Yan Xiaobao's decision to engage the Dragon Army in the tunnel was driven by the eerie silence and the presence of many magical beasts.

Killing them within Cave's End—an area devoid of dangerous magical beasts and home to only low-ranking cultivators—would instantly alert the rest of the army, making the remainder of the journey fraught with uncertainty and danger.

Slaying them within the tunnel, however, could be concealed using wolf blood to mask their deaths, ensuring they left no trace and allowing water-affinity cultivators to cover their tracks.

The first day passed with difficulty. Now, Yan Xiaobao and the others were no longer in the stone room. They had split into two teams: two people would cultivate at a time, while the other two dealt with unruly magical beasts and surveyed the tunnel ahead, awaiting the Dragon Army's arrival.

Yan Xiaobao had chosen an ambush plan, prohibiting anyone from using glow stones, as doing so would obviously give away their position.

Life inside the abyss was even worse than life in the stone room. Without using glow stones, every day felt the same, and they had no real sense of how long they'd been waiting.

As he was often busy meditating and guarding their position, they had refrained from refining more bone dust. Instead, they planned to resume once they managed to escape the accursed tunnels. Even the white-haired boy was growing increasingly weary.

The only benefit Yan Xiaobao noticed was that his auditory abilities had greatly improved from living in the pitch-dark tunnels. He no longer needed to rely on Qi to heighten their senses; they were already at the peak of their abilities.

Reflecting on what benefits he'd gained brought some comfort to Yan Xiaobao. But as he drowned in his thoughts, he felt a hand placed on his shoulder.

Wang Julong gestured toward the tunnel before them. After listening attentively, Yan Xiaobao indeed noticed faint sounds ahead.

His hand touched the shoulders of Deng Wu and Sha Yun, waking them from their meditation, a faint smile appearing on his face.

Looking at one another, Yan Xiaobao and his friends exchanged sinister smiles—it was finally time for them to battle the Dragon Army.

As they stood together, awaiting Sun and her captors' arrival, they remained utterly silent. As Qi and spiritual energy surged simultaneously, adrenaline coursed through their veins. At last, they had a chance to resolve matters and bring Sun home.

Kuang Fengji's face brimmed with disdain as she glanced at her teammates. She was the only woman in the ten-person squad, and unquestionably the smallest of the group.

The woman wore an azure robe, with a leather chestplate over her torso, accentuating her well-proportioned figure.

Atop the leather chestplate was a delicate insignia—a dragon head meticulously carved from the finest sapphire.

Her clothing was made entirely of elegant yet durable materials. Upon closer examination, one could discern that they were adorned with intricate inscription patterns to enhance their defenses.

The men were also clad in blue robes, but none had straps covering their upper bodies nor the azure dragon insignia adorning their chests.

The entire squad consisted of cultivators at Master and Master-level ranks, who delighted in bragging to one another—whether about their strength, the newest spiritual art skills they had acquired, the women they claimed to have conquered, or the achievements they supposedly had accomplished.

The tunnel system echoed with loud noises, a warning of magical beasts in the distance. However, this was no real concern, as their team could effortlessly slaughter any beasts they encountered; they couldn't even be bothered to stop and collect beast cores from their remains.

"It's ridiculous that we're assigned to such a trashy city like Cave's End, a place that leads nowhere," one of the senior men grumbled, wielding a heavy axe and gouging long cuts into the stone wall as if it were made of butter.

"It's not that bad," another man replied. This man was slightly shorter, with a face resembling that of a weasel. "I've been here before," he continued. "They have some delicious girls here, and they're so weak they don't even dare speak up." A dreamy expression accompanied by a wanton grin spread across his face, causing Feng Ji's face to twist with disgust.

"That would be great," the first man retorted, "but we've got Captain Kuang with us. Do you think she'd let you near those girls?"

These remarks stirred some discontent among the others, though none dared voice their opinions openly—they all cast a furtive glance in Phoenix's direction.

Feng Ji was an Eight-star Master, her power unquestionably surpassing that of the surrounding men. The dragon head on her chestplate clearly marked her as the leader of the squad.

Kuang Fengji was filled with contempt as she looked at the many men under her command, observing the way they gazed at her—eyes brimming with desire and greed instead of the respect and admiration she had expected.

Having just been promoted to Captain, she had been buzzing with excitement, until she learned her first assignment was to collect taxes in the distant Cave's End City.

Chapter 392 Dragon Army_2

Cave's End City isn't a mediocre city; it is certainly not one of the most powerful cities, either. It lies far from the weakest cultivation realms, distant from most activity. Completing a mission here would take a year, and even if completed, it would earn only the smallest amount of merit.

Unfortunately, Kuang Fung Ji was the newest captain, and this sort of mission is always assigned to the youngest, with no room for complaints.

The legion she was given was a seasoned team, consisting solely of men, all of whom were coarse killers.

None of them were eligible for rank promotion, and they were often referred to as bottom-feeders. However, even though these cultivators were held in low regard elsewhere, they were revered as gods in Cave's End, which is precisely why they were chosen to handle this lengthy mission.

Half a year had passed, and Kuang Fung Ji managed to lead the entire team safely through the labyrinthine tunnel systems, let alone the various other caves they had navigated.

As they arrived at the gate leading to Cave's End, a glimmer of unease appeared in the captain's eyes. She felt as though someone was watching her. Turning immediately, she faced only the oppressive darkness of the empty tunnels.

No sound could be heard, and the only detectable presence was the foul stench wafting from the blood of the magical beasts they had killed earlier.

After a brief pause, Kuang Fung Ji turned back to the gate. Resolutely, she opened it with firm hands and strode into the sunlight. She gave a slight nod to the two guards but did not pause as she walked toward the distant city.

Because of the new captain and her strict rule against fraternizing with local women, the Dragon Army was often in foul moods during their stay at the City Lord's manor. Their stops in the city were shorter than usual.

Kuang Fung Ji felt weary about the entire mission, but the moment she saw Sun, a smile flickered across her face.

She had long believed that the entire tax journey would yield no substantial results, but standing before her was a figure out of legend—a remnant of one of the original laws, created when the four divine beasts still roamed the world. If she could deliver Sun back intact, it would at least secure her a promotion.

As soon as the City Lord presented the woman, a faint smile appeared noticeably on her dazzlingly beautiful face.

She radiated a delicate warmth and subtle glow. Her golden eyes shimmered with an otherworldly aura, and her hair seemed spun from the purest gold.

Her attire, however, was remarkably plain—a thin, inconspicuous white garment draped over her figure, held in place by a golden belt.

The entire team behind Kuang Fung Ji was stunned into silence, their mouths unable to form any words.

"I understand," the captain finally broke the quiet. "This time, you've provided someone in lieu of paying taxes."

Although the woman was placed in the care of the Dragon Army and brought along with them, Kuang Fung Ji observed that she had not been restrained nor had any measures been taken to prevent her from escaping.

Frowning, Kuang Fung Ji summoned a rope from her storage stone, only to watch it burst into flames the moment it neared the woman before her.

"I will follow you," a melodious voice arose. The sound carried deep wisdom and a gentle breeze, filling the surrounding air with the warmth of sunlight. Even the most debauched adult men felt childlike reverence, as if they were nestled against their mother's embrace on a bright summer's day. None dared entertain impure thoughts.

"I will follow you," Sun repeated, "but I will not allow you to bind me."

Upon hearing this declaration from their captive, Kuang Fung Ji's expression darkened, but she had no choice but to comply with Sun's demands. The rope she had just summoned was capable of restraining even King-level experts, yet this woman had incinerated it into ash in mere seconds without even invoking a spell.

Despite Sun's assurance that she would cooperate, a fleeting unease flickered in Kuang Fung Ji's thoughts. She nodded briefly toward the City Lord before signaling her team members to form a protective circle around their target as they returned to the tunnel entrance.

Each step brought greater imagination to Kuang Fung Ji's mind—visions of the honor and accolades awaiting her upon her return to Azure Dragon Capital.

Rushing through the fields, Kuang Fung Ji neared the gates, feeling a mix of apprehension and paranoid anticipation after six months of grueling travel. Formerly weary of the journey's perils, she now began to embrace them with a strange sense of yearning.

This was Sun—an incarnation of an original law, something entirely beyond Kuang Fung Ji's grasp. If she successfully delivered Sun, she might be elevated to the rank of General. But she was painfully aware that failing to safeguard Sun on this journey meant certain death.

Gazing at Sun, there was no pity nor remorse in the captain's heart—only a fierce determination to complete her mission. At the gates, she gave the guards another curt nod before plunging back into the supposedly empty tunnels, her nerves tightening.

Aware of her heightened vigilance due to Sun's presence, Kuang Fung Ji walked ahead with two men close on her heels. Behind them, two more followed, flanking Sun on either side, while three others trailed behind her. Finally, the last two men brought up the rear.

This formation did not leave much room for conversation among the men, some of whom grumbled about the restrictive arrangement as they trudged toward home step by step.

Suddenly, Kuang Fung Ji halted, her sharp gaze locking onto the strange array of flowers littering the tunnel floor. Her eyes burned with alertness as she signaled for the entire group to stop.

"Enemy!" she bellowed as she recoiled. Say what you will about the Dragon Army's members, despite their relatively low ranks, they were survivors.

The lower-ranked members of the Dragon Army were often treated as expendable fodder, but these particular individuals had proven resilient enough to earn the rewards granted for such prolonged missions.

Following her roar of warning, the ten men fell into synchronized action. They formed a unified line with their backs to each other, scanning their surroundings and lobbing a few luminous stones ahead to reveal potential ambushers.

"I warned you that wouldn't work," a mischievous male voice echoed through the shadows, followed by the sound of an impact—then a grunt from the voice's owner.

"It stopped them, didn't it?" came another voice, impossible to tell if male or female, holding an otherworldly calm.

"There are ten cultivators. They're all at Master and Master-level, the highest being an Eight-star Master," a female voice announced matter-of-factly, analyzing their abilities. Kuang Fung Ji hissed angrily, gesturing for a Fire Element affinity cultivator to step forward and incinerate the countless flowers in their path.

"Quiet! They can hear you," a fourth voice, icy and playful yet laced with chilling undertones, spoke next, causing a shiver to ripple down the captain's spine.

Kuang Fung Ji glanced at the man beside her and motioned. In an instant, flames ignited in his hands. The crimson fire illuminated the tunnel, revealing four young figures standing ahead.

Shocked, Kuang Fung Ji studied the four youths. They all appeared younger than her, and their cultivation levels were visibly lower than hers and most of her team. Yet, strangely, their faces betrayed no signs of worry. The confidence in their expressions was palpable, leaving the captain wary of underestimating them.

"Proceed as planned," the figure in the middle announced, unleashing chaos in a split second.

"They have someone with an Earth affinity!" Kuang Fung Ji shouted, immediately pulling two small circular objects from her bag, which rapidly expanded in size.

As the two circular constructs grew larger, the Dragon Army found themselves standing on rotating metallic platforms. Below them, earthen spikes erupted from the ground but struck only air.

"Not possible!" a female voice exclaimed in frustration, followed by a cheerful male laugh. Kuang Fung Ji's face darkened as she felt the weight of her opponent's gaze.

Her attention quickly shifted to the laughing, black-haired youth. In his hands were numerous scrolls inscribed with intricate patterns, one of which began to activate as he spoke.

Peering into the shadows of the unknown, Kuang Fung Ji's face twisted into an alarmed expression, mixed with subtle traces of disgust. Clearly, she was familiar with the necromantic powers of Deng Wu.

"Men!" she shouted. "Take the woman and retreat. We don't need to fight them; we only need to get past them."

Although Kuang Fung Ji believed she could take down these four young figures, she also knew it would be impossible to do so without losses. Unnecessary death was something she refused to tolerate in her mission.

Chapter 393 Gale Princess

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"How do they know?" the Captain asked herself, grinding her teeth, as she utilized her spiritual energy to propel two circular platforms at astonishing speed toward the young adversaries.

Aside from those at Cave's End, no one should have known about Sun. As they charged past, she observed the calm demeanor of the youth and muttered to herself, "Could they truly be from Cave's End? No, they wouldn't have been able to produce such high-ranking experts. Could there really be another world outside our tunnels and caves?"

Kuang Fengji made a mental note to remember this—she would contemplate it further, just in case it could bring her greater prestige by informing her people of a potential escape route. A world not saturated by the stifling darkness of the tunnels. An ancient word surfaced in her mind: sky—a world beyond the cave ceilings with meanings yet undiscovered.

Lost in her own thoughts, the Captain failed to notice the dense branches blocking her path. The two metal platforms slammed directly into them, throwing the entire Dragon Army to the ground.

As a new wave of Earthen Spears suddenly erupted, blood-curdling screams filled the air—they instantly claimed the life of one Dragon Clan soldier while immobilizing another, a spear piercing clean through his leg.

These spears were smaller than the previous ones but were meticulously placed beneath the wooden barriers created by Wang Julong. It was evident that a different cultivator, not the one who made the first spike, was responsible.

The Gale Princess roared in fury as she realized that at least two enemies were Earth-affinity cultivators. A deep worry churned within her. The earth was all around them—an element the cave dwellers desperately hoped to harmonize with.

Even though the Captain raged furiously, she quickly composed herself and surveyed the cavern, assessing her troops.

Sun, unlike the others, hadn't fallen. She floated down gently and now stood aside. She hadn't participated in the battle at all, merely waiting patiently to see who would emerge victorious.

Kuang Fengji shook her head in disapproval as she observed her unit regrouping. Most were back on their feet, forming a defensive formation, their eyes acutely vigilant against the four youths opposing them.

The injured man cursed angrily as he tried to stand on his good leg, only to suddenly feel the tightening grip of a powerful vine. Thorns pierced his skin, and then his world went black.

The deadly poppy had grown for ages, feeding on Magic Beasts one after another. Having devoured so many creatures, the flower's vines had become as tough as leather, its thorns sharp and strong as the teeth of wild beasts.

While the flower didn't fare well against fully capable enemies, its ability to finish off weakened foes was unparalleled. When it ended the man's life, vines emerged around the two corpses, dragging them into the shadows.

Seeing her once-intact team reduced by two members, her fury surged to a breaking point. She clenched her jaw, her eyes gleaming a dangerous red as wrath roared within her. With a wave of her hand, two short swords shimmered into existence, brimming with spiritual energy.

With blazing eyes, Kuang Fengji charged at the white-haired man. Someone had claimed he was their leader, and she knew taking him down would make the others easy prey.

As the two leaders clashed, a thunderous rumble echoed from the cave walls, and the Captain was knocked off balance.

The figure before her was taller than any man, and as she took a closer look, her eyes widened at the sight of silver eyes and a serpentine tail. This creature was undeniably a Magic Beast; yet it was one she had never heard of before.

Unfortunately, the beast didn't hesitate in its attack. Its tail struck instantly, meeting the two swords. The resulting clash thrust both beast and human backward with tremendous force.

The beast was hurled several meters back, while Kuang Fengji staggered two steps. A small crack appeared on its tail, and a trickle of blood seeped out. Determining that the beast was merely at the Master level, a dismissive confidence flooded the Captain. This should be easy to kill.

Charging forward, Kuang Fengji sought to press her advantage, but an impending sense of danger abruptly halted her attack. Shifting to defense, she barely reacted in time as a shadow materialized nearby. A black blade grazed her cheek before forcefully driving her back several steps.

Kuang Fengji held her short swords defensively as she fixated on her initial target—the white-haired youth. He strolled nonchalantly toward the beast, grabbing its hand only to chastise it moments later.

"Don't interfere," he commanded softly, gesturing to the shadow. The Captain's heart sank as she saw how the serpent lowered its head and slithered slowly into the shadow.

"Apologies," the youth said as he looked at Kuang Fengji. The once-gentle and serene eyes now held an icy coldness that made her shudder involuntarily.

Gazing at the youth, it was evident that his level was below hers, yet Kuang Fengji couldn't shake the feeling that the battle was tipping in his favor.

Her eyes remained locked on him, waiting for his next move. But before she could act, disturbances arose among the rest of her unit.

Screams of agony pierced the air as their bodies dissolved into liquid forms, and soul shadows loomed to take control of what remained.

Chapter 394 Gale Princess_2

Looking at everything, Deng Wu's face revealed an expression of excitement, as he prepared to draft the inscription pattern to capture those new souls. However, his demeanor caused Yan Xiaobao to frown.

"Don't," he uttered a single word, and Deng Wu understood what wasn't spoken. Clearly, although they had already killed them, Yan Xiaobao wasn't certain whether they had done something irredeemable that would justify barring them from Reincarnation. Deng Wu sighed deeply and canceled the inscription pattern, allowing the dissipating souls to enter the Void World.

Though the souls were granted Reincarnation, their bodies were now under the control of soul shadows purchased by Deng Wu earlier, circling around Hui Yue and Kuang Fengji.

The captain felt her heart sink into her chest. While she knew she had a chance to confront the white-haired boy, she did not feel capable of defeating everyone present. Anger surged momentarily through her eyes.

"Don't worry," the white-haired boy smiled. It was a smile that never reached his eyes. "If you manage to defeat me, we'll allow you to leave freely."

With that said, he gazed at the mocking woman whose hand gripped a black dagger.

Kuang Fengji narrowed her eyes. She didn't trust him in the slightest, yet she had no choice but to try, hoping for the best.

Corpses controlled by souls, the white-haired boy's three friends, and a monstrous oversized flower gathered around the two of them, ensuring escape was impossible should she attempt it.

A sigh escaped her lips. Even if she wanted to flee, there was nowhere to go. The tunnel was blocked by dense vegetation, and the path behind led to a small town lacking cultivation techniques. They offered no help in such a battle.

Kuang Fengji gritted her teeth, swords circling her wrists as she exploded forward with forceful stomps, unleashing her attack on the young man ahead of her. Her swords gleamed under the dim light, their precision sharp enough that Yan Xiaobao dared not underestimate them.

Yan Xiaobao raised his black blood dagger and employed a transforming weapon to craft his own short sword. He then infused it with his spiritual energy and Metal Element Flames.

With both weapons raised high, Yan Xiaobao courageously opposed the cultivator charging toward him, showing no signs of retreat.

Deng Wu, Sha Yun, and Wang Julong felt uneasy, sensing the fluctuating energy behind the captain. Though Yan Xiaobao dared to confront it, their concerns filled their hearts.

Spiritual energy surged from Yan Xiaobao's core, wrapping his body in a protective layer of energy. A scarlet hue exploded forward, followed by an eerie tranquility in the air.

The unexpected atmosphere was both chilling and serenely calm, unsettling Kuang Fengji as she refocused her spirit toward her prepared strike.

One of the white-haired boy's eyes was profoundly deep, like a boundless ocean, while the other was blood red, resembling a Blood Demon's essence. His body emitted red and blue vapors that coiled over the clouds behind him. Right before collision, silver inscriptions gleamed on the black dagger in his hand.

Kuang Fengji sensed an abrupt surge of power emanating from the young man's body, filling her heart with unease. She bit down so hard that the taste of blood filled her mouth. Every ounce of her soul was poured into the attack before her.

The energy prior to their collision was unlike anything seen before, rippling outward and pushing everyone back. The two combatants shot backward from the impact, their bodies slamming into the tunnel walls.

Struggling to stand, Kuang Fengji looked down at herself in disbelief. The sight of a hole beside her shook her entire being. Her stomach and lower torso were completely gone, her blood and organs spilling onto the ground.

As she slowly slumped to the floor, doubt consumed her gaze, and the blackened world descended upon her, taking her away.

All air fled from Yan Xiaobao's lungs as he crashed against the tunnel wall with a loud thud, followed closely by a spray of blood.

Yan Xiaobao felt his body drained of spiritual energy, and he knew that if the woman miraculously survived the final attack, he wouldn't be able to stop her from leaving.

Yan Xiaobao was a man who never went back on his word. While seeing her leave would deeply displease him, he wouldn't retract what he had previously declared.

Sliding down the wall, Yan Xiaobao felt a massive wound along his back, not to mention the damage to his meridians from excessive spiritual energy usage.

Forcing his body upright, his legs trembled weakly. Blood streamed from the wound on his back, as well as another injury on his head.

Muttering under his breath, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but feel dizzy as he slowly moved toward the other end of the tunnel, where he saw the faint silhouette of the woman ahead.

Feeling remorse for the deaths within the cave-town caused by Sha Yun, Yan Xiaobao refused to allow Deng Wu to seal the souls of strangers, no matter the horrors they committed. However, this was different.

The Dragon Army were those who captured the people Yan Xiaobao sought to save. It would've been better if he didn't need to kill them. Yet, if he allowed even one to escape, their remaining days in the Holy Dungeon would only worsen as outlaws.

The pursuit was nothing like anything Yan Xiaobao ever enjoyed, driving his ruthless order for the Dragon Army members to be killed.

Yan Xiaobao finally reached the other end of the tunnel, seeing that half of her body was gone. Relief washed over his face as he realized they could finally proceed with relative safety.

"We'll rest for a bit," Yan Xiaobao gritted through clenched teeth, enduring pain's violent throbs that threatened to overwhelm his consciousness, "Sha Yun, take over and make it appear like Demon Beast attacks. Julong, you handle Sun and keep Wu away from her! Wu, come here and tend to me."

Upon receiving orders, Yan Xiaobao collapsed to the ground, green light enveloping him, healing his body slowly but steadily.

Seeing the woman now dead, Deng Wu followed Yan Xiaobao's command, first retrieving a blanket from his storage stone. He laid it on the ground before resting the young, white-haired boy upon it while he recovered.

Deng Wu sat beside Yan Xiaobao, pulling out his inscription tools to re-summon the soul shadows he had previously used to kill the Dragon Army and encircle the captain. Knowing Yan Xiaobao disliked him using new souls for soul shadows, he carefully handled the few remaining ones.

He had used many soul shadows during the battle at Liluo City. Back then, he had tried to capture every dying person's soul, but after the battle, he realized the inscriptions he crafted were flawed, dissipating all souls into the Void World.

Reflecting on it, Deng Wu considered it an error he had let go because he knew Yan Xiaobao would've been furious if those people were made slaves of their second lives.

As Deng Wu gazed at the peacefully sleeping Yan Xiaobao on the blanket, he couldn't help but smile.

Since childhood, he had loathed life in Liluo City. Obtaining the small statue made him feel even more so.

While Deng Wu felt his family admired him greatly, he knew it wasn't the place he wished to spend his days. One day, he wanted to escape, journey far, and experience epic adventures.

Then he met Yan Xiaobao, the refreshing new boy. He helped save his family and now led Deng Wu on adventures. Gratitude for the kindness and friendship shown by the black-haired boy filled him with excitement, pledging to follow his friend's every command, even if it meant facing death itself.

As he contemplated death, Rong Xing's image surfaced in his mind, sparking a longing in his heart. Thinking of his childhood friend, a sigh escaped his lips. Resolving to sneak a look at Sun, he acknowledged the woman wasn't just an ordinary figure.

As Deng Wu glanced toward the woman, Wang Julong's piercing gaze startled him, prompting Deng Wu to quickly turn toward Sha Yun at work.

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Chapter 395 Beast Attack

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The Snake Woman was busy moving corpses. She picked up Yan Xiaobao's storage stone, withdrew multiple wolf corpses and the jade blood vial, and scattered her blood all over the area. Using her beastly attack, she marked the territory. Wherever her attack landed, she made sure the traces left behind appeared as if they were caused by a magical beast instead of a Human.

While Sha Yun worked, nobody spoke within the tunnel. Deng Wu didn't dare glance at Sun again, fearing Wang Julong might tell him off. He didn't want to let Yan Xiaobao down.

On the other hand, Wang Julong had nothing to do with Sun, so all she did was stand by the original law, waiting for Yan Xiaobao to wake up. An awkward silence filled the tunnel, though none of them knew how to break it.

Sha Yun continued her work, but the moment she finished cleaning, she headed straight to Yan Xiaobao, positioning herself beside him, without deeming anyone else worthy of her attention.

Normally, she would enjoy talking to Deng Wu, but now only Yan Xiaobao was injured. Vigilantly, she guarded her friend and master, constantly keeping an eye out for magical beasts.

Sun stood beside Wang Julong; however, she didn't say a word, merely standing there patiently waiting for Yan Xiaobao to wake.

The awkward silence stretched for nearly an hour. Deng Wu struggled against the impulse to look toward Sun. Meanwhile, Wang Julong stared daggers at the black-haired man, ensuring he had no intentions of closing the distance between himself and Sun. Throughout it all, Sha Yun sat quietly to the side, remaining alert.

When Yan Xiaobao finally opened his eyes, he felt the green pearl within him had nearly vanished, losing most of its power. As a result, it was now absorbing Qi from the Qi spiral, and drawing essence from the heavens and earth to replenish itself.

Opening his eyes, Yan Xiaobao's body felt at ease, the green pearl working to restore everything outwardly, sealing all wounds and healing every scratch and injury caused by being thrown against the tunnel walls.

Even his organs had healed, but that was where the restoration ended. His meridians remained torn, in a miserable state. At a glance, it was evident they would need at least a month of rest before they could transmit spiritual energy again.

Because Yan Xiaobao had used up all his strength, it not only shattered his meridians but also forcibly opened the Du Mai Meridian, which is specifically designed to shield the body from external attacks. It was a meridian Yan Xiaobao didn't know much about, but he was nonetheless glad to see it nearly fully open.

Though his meridians were torn from overusing energy, Yan Xiaobao knew they would heal in due time. For now, he needed patience to explore the newly opened meridian.

Yan Xiaobao sat up and looked around, seeing everyone caught up in the awkward atmosphere created by his final command before falling asleep. A brief chuckle escaped his lips. He quickly rose and walked toward Sun, where he respectfully bowed before her.

"I am honored to meet you, Sun Law," the white-haired boy said with a sincere smile on his face, prompting Sun to nod in response.

"We wish to reunite you with the other laws within Cave's End," Hui Yue continued while gazing at Sun, sensing that she had no concern for what their plans were.

"Forgive me, but why do you care so little about what happens?" Yan Xiaobao frowned, genuinely unable to comprehend the presence of the woman before him.

"I am the law of all suns in this world," Sun finally opened her mouth, her voice resonating like music yet filled with warmth. "As long as the suns exist, so do I. As long as I exist, there will always be suns."

Yan Xiaobao nodded; he had been told about these laws before, yet they seemed to offer no reply to the question he had just raised.

"Wherever I go, I will always be the Sun. Unlike those who choose their paths, mine is predetermined. I can follow others, but doing so changes nothing; wherever I walk, I will always remain the Sun. Living within Cave's End carries no other outcome." A trace of regret flickered in her eyes, though it was quickly replaced with pride.

"You are Human; that is one thing you can never understand." She sighed deeply, her gaze carrying a complex expression as she looked at Yan Xiaobao. "Every path you take brings you closer to yourself. Every road alters the person you were before. You grow. You change. But I am a law, and laws are immutable. From the beginning of life to its end, the laws remain the same."

As she spoke, Sun's expression stayed calm as ever, yet Yan Xiaobao felt a slight turmoil hidden within the law standing before him. A sense of pity arose within him. To live in a fixed world, trapped in these eternal dungeons, was something Yan Xiaobao could hardly fathom. Beyond delivering the changes of seasons, it lacked any real purpose for life.

Sun sighed deeply as she cast her gaze toward the tunnel walls surrounding her.

"I miss the seasons," she remarked after a pause. "Once, I wished to be something else, traversing countless tunnels and caves, only to realize that no matter where I went, life within these dungeons remained the same. I still yearn to go home."

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao nodded, and his companions rose to their feet, ready to escort the woman back to the forest she once called home.

Chapter 396 Beast Attack_2

Yan Xiaobao passed through the tunnel, grabbing a cloak from his storage stone, demanding Sun to put it on. After donning the cloak, the five of them returned to Cave's End and the forest where Sun had once lived, spending the rest of eternity there.

The preparation to pass through the gate back to Cave's End took longer than expected.

Yan Xiaobao understood that the existence of the Dragon Slayer Army members was something they could not reveal, and ensured everyone wore cloaks that could conceal their appearances and cultivation bases.

"I'm really sorry, Yun," Yan Xiaobao said for the third time that day, patting his friend on the head. "We cannot let them recognize us, and you're too conspicuous."

Upon hearing this, Sha Yun could only nod idly, standing patiently by the door alongside the oversized plant she had left behind. Wang Julong knew that the plant was as identifiable as Sha Yun herself.

When Yan Xiaobao knocked on the door, the newly formed group consisted of four individuals, all draped in black cloaks, concealing even the slightest strand of hair.

The guards were completely stunned upon opening the door and seeing the four figures walk through.

Initially, they thought it was the Hui Clan and its returning faction. However, after pondering deeply, they realized this wasn't the case. Among their entourage was a Snake Woman, and these newcomers did not seem to have tails.

Hui Yue passed through the door but didn't head back to the end of the cave. Instead, he led his party along the cave walls, taking turns. This route required more time but also increased their chances of avoiding recognition.

Watching the departing experts from behind, a guard abruptly set down his spear and shield and dashed toward the town center, a growl breaking the silence. He was running to report the arrival of new cultivators in the caves.

As they traversed familiar surroundings, Sun's face carried complex emotions—she felt a certain happiness about returning to her home but was simultaneously disheartened by her uncertain future prospects.

Yan Xiaobao understood her sentiments, yet he also recognized that the Dragon Clan was unlikely to harbor benevolent intentions. With this awareness, no trace of guilt appeared on the pale-haired boy's face.

Seeing the resolve in Yan Xiaobao's eyes, Sun smiled faintly before beginning to speak.

"Once, a long time ago, this was nothing but an abyss. Four Divine Beasts descended together, hoping to find a place to settle down," she began her tale, her voice gentle yet melodious, weaving through the three individuals walking home.

"When this land was created, the Divine Beasts used five elements to craft the current plane. The laws of earth, metal, fire, and water are our oldest laws." She paused briefly before continuing. "These five elements were so powerful that even now, everything born into this world is influenced by these laws. You may call them affinities, but the truth is that as long as life is born in this world, life originates from the law of life, which in turn is derived from the elemental laws. Everyone stems from these elements, and by observing a person's affinity, you can discern which element birthed them."

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao halted in his tracks, his ice-blue eyes gazing curiously at Sun. The earlier revelation had helped him realize what the laws were, but he now knew that all he understood was purely the basics.

Now these laws were explaining something that had long circled his mind. This included the elements.

Although Yan Xiaobao understood that everyone had a fundamental affinity, he didn't fully comprehend why they possessed it. What caused them to acquire such immense power?

The answer was simple: to be born in this world, people adhered to the laws of life and death.

These two laws were like the laws of Sun, emerging after the elements crafted by the Divine Beasts of ancient laws.

"These laws are partitioned in this way," Sun explained, seeing the hunger for knowledge reflected in Yan Xiaobao's eyes. "You have the ancient laws, which are the five elements. These five were directly created by the Divine Beasts themselves. After the ancient laws came the original laws. We were made by the Divine Beasts, but unlike the ancient laws, we were not created with our physical forms; instead, we were born from the laws themselves."

"Below us, after the original laws, are the basic laws. There are many of them. The seasons you encountered earlier are basic laws. These laws were also created by the Divine Beasts, but this time, they were produced by the original laws instead of the ancient ones.

"To be born into this world means you come from our Ancestors. This land was forged from their bodies, and every inhabitant here lives a life gifted by those predecessors."

These words brought clarity to Yan Xiaobao, yet at the same time, they left him bewildered as he considered the five elemental flames within him. Had he received the life energy of all five elements? How could this be?

A thought suddenly struck Yan Xiaobao. When Lan Feng described the laws mentioned by predecessors, it somewhat confused him, as Yan Xiaobao knew "Ancestors" referred to the Divine Beasts, and Lan Feng often called them "body fathers" or "Divine Beasts," but when Yan Xiaobao raised this question, all he received was a sorrowful smile from Sun, accompanied by silence from Lan Feng and Little Dragon.

Little Dragon had been remarkably quiet throughout the dungeon, as had Lan Feng. This made Yan Xiaobao doubt whether their true purpose here was training, or if the two Divine Beasts had other intentions.

Hui Yue sighed deeply, knowing that no matter how many questions he asked, Lan Feng wouldn't answer, nor would Little Dragon.

Sun had offered them incredibly vital information about the laws, and Hui Yue was mindful not to come across as greedy.

Before long, the group entered a forest stretching across the entire field, and they quickly returned to the clearing they had left during the earlier season.

The remainder of the journey was quiet; no one exchanged a word, instead absorbed in contemplation over Sun's revelations. Although it was insufficient to bring about another breakthrough on the topic, it still provided Deng Wu and Wang Julong with a fundamental understanding of the laws, while broadening Yan Xiaobao's basic comprehension.

The world was vast, filled with countless aspects unknown to Xu Yue. His journey wasn't merely about growing stronger; it also involved shaping his character and expanding his knowledge.

Yan Xiaobao was living his second life, yet in his first, he had been a young man who never faced hardships. Upon reentering a world where strength was paramount, Yan Xiaobao struggled to adapt; nevertheless, with the help he had received from Lan Feng, he ultimately felt superior.

It was during his duel with Wang Julong, when he first realized he wasn't the greatest genius after all, that the desire to become the strongest was ignited within him.

As he recalled his past, Yan Xiaobao was now considered a youth, though still younger than he had been in his previous life. This made him realize just how different this new world was, as in his old world, he would have been labeled a butcher, but here, it was an existence where power was coveted.

His face held a distant expression as he recalled his past, memories of life and death flooding his mind with a deep excitement that stirred his blood. Yan Xiaobao craved these battles. He yearned to test himself. He sought improvement. He aspired to stand atop the peak, carving his name into the heavens, engraving it onto the earth.

Sun had said that her path had been predetermined at birth, but Yan Xiaobao was not bound by laws. He was human, with the right to choose his own path in life. In the end, while listening to Sun, Yan Xiaobao understood: he could become whoever he wished to be. It was all up to him, something others could never control, but he would go further.

Determination filled Yan Xiaobao's face, his icy eyes burning with an Eternal Flame from within, as a grim smile took shape on his face. If he wanted to be strong, all he had to do was cultivate. If he intended to be the strongest, he would need to cultivate far beyond anyone else.

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Chapter 397 You Dare to Mock Me

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Feeling the transformation of Yan Xiaobao's soul, as he rested within the Dantian Cave, a trace of a smile appeared on Lan Feng's face. Phoenix had long understood Yan Xiaobao's personality.

Xu Hui, upon his recent rebirth, was tempted by Lan Feng and driven to gain strength in order to reunite with Li Fen. Over time, however, Phoenix noticed how Hui Yue's soul would let out excited screams in every life-threatening situation; and in his idle moments, how he would bury himself.

Clearly, the boy was resolved to become a cultivator, prompting Sun to offer a few words to make him understand Lan Feng's plan. This filled Phoenix with immense joy, as he sensed how Yan Xiaobao's soul was bustling with energy and excitement, for he had finally discovered the path he wished to walk.

As these thoughts lingered, Yan Xiaobao and the others were visiting for the first time a pond brimming with spiritual energy. Though it appeared to be just an ordinary pond.

Suddenly, a thought struck him, and Yan Xiaobao approached the cave's walls. Despite his thorough search, he couldn't locate the spot where they had arrived.

"Lan Feng," he mentally relayed a message to Phoenix, "These underground cities. Are there exits?"

"Of course!" Phoenix answered carelessly, "Once you reach the center, we can exit through one of the other four tunnels. Personally, I wouldn't mind going back home to have a look at what's happening there, but once we truly make it to the middle chamber, we'll decide where to go."

"Oh, by the way," he continued, "this is your trial, so don't expect me to assist you. I need to improve my own abilities when we reach the final destination."

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but snicker, for since entering this underworld, Phoenix had been doing his best to keep talking.

Just as Yan Xiaobao was about to reply, a sound resonated throughout the entire forest. Suddenly, the four travelers found themselves surrounded by a group of guards dressed in red uniforms.

"Halt! In the name of the City Lord of Cave's End, freeze!" barked a man at the front, his face a mixture of rage and irritation, glaring at the four cloaked men standing before him.

Frowning, Yan Xiaobao turned from the cave wall, his gaze landing on the man who had spoken. The annoyance in his eyes was apparent, though it was concealed beneath the sealed cloak, hiding everything from sight.

Once his icy blue eyes locked onto the speaker, he couldn't suppress a laugh as he remembered the man who had once invited them to the City Lord's Attic.

Clearly, there had been a misunderstanding. The cloaks made the group appear as though they had no cultivation base, causing these individuals to look down on the four.

"Do you dare to mock us?" The leader unleashed the full force of his practitioner-level cultivation base, attempting to forge an intimidating aura to suppress the four intruders.

Complex expressions appeared on the faces of Hui Yue, Deng Wu, and Wang Julong. As they stared at the ludicrous individuals brazenly acting before them, all three revealed faint smiles of disbelief.

Meanwhile, a slight annoyance arose as they had hoped for a smooth journey back to the hut for Sun's awaited presence.

Hui Yue exhaled deeply, dissolving the inscription on his cloak. Before releasing the aura of his cultivation base, he infused it with his spiritual energy.

While Yan Xiaobao was merely a Master-level expert, his spiritual energy far exceeded that of any ordinary Master, making even other Masters no match for him. How could such inferior guards withstand the pressure?

Smiling faintly at the leader, Yan Xiaobao watched as the man's previously arrogant expression shifted into one of sheer terror. Upon closer observation, one could see how his pants had become damp around the crotch area.

"Who grants you the gall to stand before me? The Forest King, perhaps?!" Yan Xiaobao slightly altered his voice, its thunderous echo booming within the guards' minds on-site.

The shocked guards felt cold sweat breaking out across their bodies, with some noticing a warm liquid trickling down from inside their pants. Trembling before this dangerous figure, they were paralyzed by unrelenting fear.

"...Forest King?" The Guard Captain asked softly, his voice betraying uncertainty. "There... there is no King at the cave's end. Only the City Lord's orders!" Fighting to appear courageous, his legs quivered under the sudden pressure, his voice quavering hesitantly.

Hui Yue chuckled inwardly, leaving behind a trace of red fog in his Dantian Cave. The surrounding area turned frigid like a winter's night while uncontrollable fear overwhelmed the unfortunate guards, already caught in a psychological deadlock.

Three guards dropped to their knees, bowing repeatedly before the cloaked figures. Even the leader was trembling, his knees threatening to collapse beneath him, tears streaming uncontrollably as mucus clung stubbornly to his nose.

Watching the guards rendered powerless by fright, Yan Xiaobao swiftly withdrew the red fog back to the Blue Sky Cave, where the blue cloud enveloped it protectively. He also reeled in his spiritual energy and reactivated the inscriptions on his black cloak.

The guards were left astounded, for the overwhelming, terrifying aura vanished entirely into nothingness, in its own way more spine-chilling than before.

Yan Xiaobao and his companions in dark cloaks patiently waited for the guards to regain their senses, the intent clear upon Yan Xiaobao's face. While he had no intention of bullying the weak, these guards had simply been too arrogant, expecting him not to retaliate.

Chapter 398 You Dare to Mock Me_2

"We apologize, Great Forest King!" one of the guards said in a trembling voice. His face was as pale as freshly fallen snow, his eyes widened in terror, filled with unspilled tears, and his lips quivered as he spoke.

"Listen to my words!" Yan Xiaobao's voice carried an unnatural resonance, and using his Earth affinity, he caused the ground to tremble the moment the words left his lips. This left the guards in a state of disarray, their minds swirling and their eyes spinning.

"Return to your City Lord," the words were practically spat out—the shadowy figure clearly held no respect for the noble lord they served. "Tell him that I, the Forest King, have returned to my humble abode. If he or his men dare to venture into my forest, I will not hesitate to kill!"

Yan Xiaobao wrinkled his nose at the growing stench emanating from the guards. There was no doubt that the fear spreading among them was enough to ensure they never dared to return to the forest depths again. "Now SCRAM!"

The final word reverberated through the air like a hammer blow, sending a fresh wave of terror through the hapless guards. Petrified, they scrambled to their feet and bolted away, leaving Yan Xiaobao with a look of satisfaction on his face.

As he'd anticipated, those guards would now rush back to the City Lord's residence to report their encounter. The City Lord would either be overcome with fear and immediately forbid his citizens from venturing into the forest, or he would gather a powerful force and prepare to destroy this so-called Forest King.

If the City Lord chose to cower within the walls of his city, then Yan Xiaobao's warnings would have served their purpose. However, if the lord mobilized his army, then Yan Xiaobao would prove he was dead serious when he said anyone entering the forest would perish.

Yan Xiaobao's determination stemmed from witnessing how the Dragon Army treated Sha Yun. She was a law unto herself, and she was clearly something they desired to possess. Who knew what might happen if she were discovered by the City Lord's men?

It wasn't a question Yan Xiaobao needed to answer. All he wanted was to cross the passage and enter the tunnel without worrying about meeting friendly laws that might complicate his plans.

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"Milod!" a steward burst through the grand hall's entrance, his feet moving rapidly, narrowly avoiding a mishap on the stone floor, and his face etched with alarm.

"Milod!" he called again, "The guards have returned, but they claim they've encountered a monster!"

Upon hearing this, the City Lord arched his brows and eyed the steward with curiosity. "A monster?" he repeated, breaking into hearty laughter. "Do you think they've run into a low-grade magical beast?" he mused with a faint trace of sarcasm. "Some of those creatures are said to still dwell deep within the forest."

The steward hesitated briefly, unsettled by his lord's seemingly jovial mood before speaking again. "Milod, I'm afraid this isn't about magical beasts," he said in a hushed tone, audible only to the lord due to his heightened hearing as a Senior Expert, far above the average citizen.

"Milod, the only message they managed to deliver was a warning not to provoke the Forest King. Their minds seem to have been shattered." The more the steward said, the lower his voice fell, finally reducing to an almost indistinct whisper.

Even as a whisper, it was enough to fully ignite the City Lord's fury. Who dared claim to be king at the forest's edge?! His eyes were bloodshot with wrath, and with a clenched hand, the cup he held shattered into shards.

"Take me to the guards!" he commanded, his voice seething with rage. The steward, anxious for his own life as the bearer of bad news, bowed repeatedly before hurrying out of the room; he moved slowly to guide the lord toward the infirmary where the guards were recuperating.

Upon stepping through the doorway, the City Lord's scowl transformed into a twitch at his nose—the stench was appalling. Nevertheless, his anger did not dissipate easily as he strode inside. He entered only to find his most trusted and highest-ranking experts lying in a pool of tears and mucus.

Fury flickered in his eyes as he contemplated what could have possibly reduced his men to such a pitiful state. Still, even the numerous Wood-affinity cultivators running back and forth seemed utterly bewildered and powerless.

The moment the City Lord stepped into the room, its previously busy activity immediately fell into silence. No one moved to clean the guards or examine their injuries. The only sound was the quiet whimpering of the three guards who had returned.

Scanning the room, the lord identified only one individual—the captain of the guards—who appeared to retain a shred of composure. Even so, he clung to that fragment desperately for survival.

"He's not what you think he is." The captain repeated frantically, and upon spotting the City Lord, he stumbled as he rushed toward him, his speech stuttering, words gushing from his mouth like a torrential waterfall.

"Milod, we followed the cloaked men and caught up with them. When we encountered them, they displayed no cultivation base whatsoever." The captain was frantic, his words tumbling out without pause, leaving the City Lord no chance to interrupt. "One man stepped forward and declared himself the Forest King. Naturally, we laughed at him, told him there were no kings near this cave—only our City Lord and his orders. That man grew angry, terribly angry. He ended the world with his thunderous wrath, and the ground trembled from his fury. My lord, his cultivation base is undoubtedly no weaker than yours. If I may say so, he is surely stronger—and then there were the three companions following him, all cloaked in black to conceal their power."

The captain collapsed the moment he finished speaking, his body convulsing as foam bubbled at his mouth. Moments later, he was pronounced dead.

Seeing one of his loyal guards driven to such a state, the City Lord felt anger burning deep in his core, but he refrained from acting irrationally. Instead, he left the foul-smelling room and proceeded to his residence to cleanse himself.

"You there!" he called out to a steward standing nearby. The man immediately bowed in deference upon noticing the lord. "Summon the elders for a meeting; I shall be there shortly."

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While the City Lord prepared for the meeting, Yan Xiaobao was traversing the forest alongside Xingye, retracing the path he had walked days ago. This time, they made the journey in mere minutes, with Sha Yun joining them midway, accelerating the team's travel pace. Sunlight filtered through her black cloak, wrapping their surroundings in a soft golden glow.

"Mother!" A voice called from the distance, and within moments, the entire group gathered around the four cloaked figures.

Recognizing Xingye, Yan Xiaobao halted and removed his own cloak. Upon seeing Yan Xiaobao do so, his companions quickly followed suit, and soon, a reunion unfolded.

"Missed any interesting trails?" Xingye asked Yan Xiaobao, the white-haired youth flashing a bittersweet smile at the smaller man. "I couldn't bring her. She's guarding the tunnel, waiting for us." Yan Xiaobao felt a pang of guilt but quickly shook his head. While his decision may have been impulsive, he stood by it.

If they were discovered, moving forward safely would become impossible. It wasn't just for his own safety, but for Sha Yun's and the others' as well.

As he made yet another choice, determination once again filled his gaze. They would remain within the clearing for a week to observe if the City Lord planned to act. Should he do so, Yan Xiaobao would retaliate as promised; if not, they would make their way out of this place and continue onward without concern.

Time at Cave's End passed slowly for Yan Xiaobao as his longing to return to Sha Yun grew. He still felt guilty leaving her to guard the tunnel alone, her only companion an oversized poppy flower. Yet despite his feelings, he remained confident that his decision prioritized their safety during this journey.

The first day passed uneventfully, aside from Yan Xiaobao and the others entering the law's small cottage. To prepare for a possible attack by the City Lord, Yan Xiaobao assigned Deng Wu the task of placing inscription patterns along the forest's edge as a warning system.

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Chapter 399 Earth Essence

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Picking up the inscription slowly brought a certain sense of security to Yan Xiaobao. Although they didn't cover the entire outskirts of the forest, they should still trap intruders, as the inscriptions spread randomly and couldn't be seen by the naked eye.

While Yan Xiaobao indeed felt a degree of safety from these inscriptions, he still spent a bit of time every hour using his close affinity with the earth to scout the area. Yet no matter how much he inspected, there was nothing out of the ordinary.

One day passed, then another, and soon the week was nearly over. During this time, Deng Wu was attacked by his own emotions, questioning why he resembled his father so much.

"Stop! Stop it!" Deng Wu finally shouted as he tried to rid himself of the lingering thoughts that clung to him like vines. No matter how hard he worked to peel them away, nothing changed.

Seeking help, Deng Wu felt his heart sink, as Wang Julong and Yan Xiaobao had turned their attention elsewhere, completely ignoring him. In fact, both seemed to avoid even making eye contact with this pitiable young man.

Yan Xiaobao looked away, as he knew Deng Wu wished to conceal his secrets. The white-haired boy understood why. While Deng Wu gained some assistance from Little Dragon, the soul of the holy beast didn't reside in the dark-haired youth's body but was instead sealed within a small statue easily stolen.

Out of respect for Deng Wu's need for silence, Yan Xiaobao made every effort to overlook him. But as he was doing so, a sudden tremor coursed through the ground. Instantly serious, his eyes sharpened as he merged with the earth, allowing his lower body to be enveloped in soil.

As Yan Xiaobao fused with the earth, a surge of power poured forth—from himself, his earth fire, and external energies—as he sensed an immense concentration of Earth Essence.

Seated in a meditative position, Yan Xiaobao let his spirit projection break free and meld with the soil, floating outward to the edges he controlled. Those edges where the City Lord and his chosen men now tread.

The City Lord brought over a dozen guards, clad in red uniforms. Each seemed to hold rankings as practitioners.

Behind the City Lord were four elders. Hesitation hung over the five figures like a dark cloud as worry etched itself clear on their faces.

Through the earth's connection, Hui Yue observed everything. Everything sensed by the earth was partially sensed by Yan Xiaobao. Truly one with the land, his control over it grew more proficient by the second.

Watching the men wandering through the woods, those nearing Yan Xiaobao's physical body suddenly felt an inexplicable unease. Deciding quickly, Yan Xiaobao acted. He had already warned the City Lord, and if the man disregarded his warnings, it was no longer the white-haired youth's concern.

Spread out in search of any signs or clues, the men moving through the forest fell into silence. Even the songs of birds ceased to echo.

A sharp, blood-curdling scream shattered the stillness, freezing every man in his tracks before they rushed toward the source of the cry.

When they arrived, a chilling scene awaited them. A gaping hole had formed in the earth—a pit at least four meters deep—its bottom-most two meters filled with menacing, jagged Earthen Spears.

But only three men were able to witness the pit. These three immediately agreed to retreat, fearing more traps could emerge at any moment.

Faces pale, the guards began to back away, only to be met by a tall earth wall crashing against them.

The once-quiet forest abruptly roared to life as three more men met their doom within its depths.

Standing outside, the City Lord's grave expression grew even darker as the scent of blood wafted from the forest. The moment the metallic tang hit the air, many cultivators began fleeing out of the woods.

Unfortunately, the City Lord wasn't satisfied with this course of action. Brandishing his sword, he forced the men back into the grasp of the dense woodland.

Watching the City Lord's grim demeanor, Yan Xiaobao quickly withdrew his consciousness from the soil and returned to his physical body. Without alerting anyone to his specific location, Yan Xiaobao leaped from the open clearing, charging toward the intruders' positions.

Though Yan Xiaobao didn't share his intentions with his companions, they were wholly aware of his urgency. Deng Wu immediately rose from his spot, his gaze fixed on the opportunity to escape the others.

"I'm sorry, but he'll need me," Deng Wu called over his shoulder, rushing toward the direction in which Yan Xiaobao had disappeared.

Watching Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu rush off, Wang Julong did nothing but sigh as her attention returned to the seeds she had been observing earlier. Devoted to plants and healing, Wang Julong recognized that her abilities could entrap intruders, but she also knew they were merely practitioners ranked lower than the Master level. For the elders, anything beyond Master Rank remained out of reach.

Yan Xiaobao may have shared their rank, but his combat power vastly outstripped theirs. He always refined the highest quality spiritual energy and possessed a Spirit Sea brimming with strength. His earth and fire affinity rivaled that of a Duke, and his metal affinity undoubtedly matched the standard of a Master.

Aware no cultivation techniques had survived at Cave's End, Wang Julong reflected on how the elders and City Lord—despite holding similar ranks—dwelt at the very lowest limits of expectations. Even before Hui Yu reached the Master level himself, he'd likely overpower them.

Chapter 400 Earth Essence_2

All these thoughts swirled in Wang Julong's mind, but the girl quickly shook her head. "I only care about him because he's my friend," she thought as her gaze briefly swept toward the path Hui Yue had taken. Before returning to her task of observing plant seeds, she sighed once more.

As he crossed the forest, Yan Xiaobao quickly arrived at the area guarded under the forced control of the City Lord.

Standing in the shadow of a tree, Yan Xiaobao observed the people ahead, waiting for Deng Wu to catch up with him.

"Keep my body safe," Yan Xiaobao said. Without waiting for a response, his companion acted swiftly. The white-haired boy sat down in meditation, fusing himself with the earth, letting his consciousness merge completely with it.

Yan Xiaobao allowed the ground to tremble everywhere, leaving traps and soil-crafted spikes scattered across the area. Coffins formed of earth buried people alive, suffocating them to death.

A scream echoed through the forest. Once the final guard was dealt with, Yan Xiaobao withdrew his consciousness back to his body and stood up.

"I am the Forest King!" His voice, amplified by Qi, reverberated through the entire forest, shaking the ground once again.

"I warned you not to come here!" Yan Xiaobao continued as he swiftly located the black cloak he'd previously donned and wrapped it around his body again. Gesturing for Deng Wu to follow, he made his way toward the elder and the City Lord.

Hui Yue walked along the forest's outskirts, where numerous corpses lay scattered. With a simple hand motion, the earth beneath the bodies began to shift, gathering all of them beside Yan Xiaobao as he proceeded toward the outskirts where the City Lord was waiting.

As a figure draped in a black cloak emerged, visible shock flashed in the eyes of the City Lord and his entourage. Another cloaked figure followed, alongside rolling waves of earth delivering the bodies of the guards who had entered the forest.

Yan Xiaobao stepped forward, and upon closer inspection, the City Lord noticed that his feet never touched the ground. Instead, he hovered several centimeters above it, suspended there without any traceable ripples in his cultivation.

"He's not what you think he is." Suddenly, the voice of the City Lord's former captain rang out in his mind, causing his heart to pound painfully as adrenaline and Qi stirred violently within his body. Every fiber of the man standing before him exuded fear, much like the guards had felt. The key difference lay in the City Lord's awareness that everyone cultivates some sort of path through existence, as the

essence of heaven and earth is omnipresent. Yet here was a man, floating without any detectable cultivation base.

Yan Xiaobao wasn't truly flying by himself, but rather hovering atop two small spheres of Qi.

Gazing at the City Lord, Yan Xiaobao commanded the earth to deliver all the corpses directly before him. As the bodies piled up, the City Lord's own fear caused his body to tremble uncontrollably, regret overwhelming him for not heeding his former captain's warnings.

Observing how the man manipulated the earth with such mastery, it became clear that Yan Xiaobao's cultivation base far surpassed not only his own but also that of the elders. This realization caused an almost explosive sense of regret to erupt within the City Lord's heart.

"I'll give you one last warning," Yan Xiaobao said in his altered voice. "Step into my forest again, and I will not spare you any face!"

With those words, Yan Xiaobao turned around. Relying on his Qi spheres, he floated back into the forest, leaving behind the elder and City Lord, who stood paralyzed in disbelief and terror.

Watching the figure disappear into the distance, the City Lord and his elders exhaled heavily, as though their very lives had narrowly been spared.

What they didn't know was that Yan Xiaobao could have gone to great lengths to avoid killing the City Lord.

This was not out of respect or even the slightest fondness for him. No, it was because Yan Xiaobao recognized the precarious state of Cave's End City. If the City Lord were to be lost, the city would likely fall into chaos.

"Let's go back," the City Lord said with a weary sigh, his eyes, which once burned with pride and battle-hardened determination, now dulled and vacant. His former arrogance had shifted into the appearance of a broken old man. "From this day forward, we must stay far from the forest."

Allowing no room for further discussion, the City Lord moved toward the corpses, placing each into a storage stone. He then turned and began the journey back to Cave's End City. For the remainder of the trip, his face bore a heavy, oppressed expression, while the four accompanying elders kept close and wore similar looks of grim defeat.

At the forest's edge stood two cloaked figures in black. Neither moved as they silently watched the five men slowly retreat toward the city, carrying storage stones filled with countless bodies.

Every step was slow and heavy, their faces marked by a bleak oppression, the air around them thick with suffocating tension.

As he gazed at the five retreating men, Yan Xiaobao's eyes burned with lethal intent. They had sided with Sun in this matter, attempting to sell her for personal gain. Although Yan Xiaobao could slightly comprehend their motivations, he resolutely refused to accept their choices.

"Why didn't you kill them?" Deng Wu's voice cut through the eerie silence lingering in the forest after the bloody confrontation. The dark-haired man easily recognized the murderous intent that still flickered in his friend's eyes.

"Killing them wouldn't solve anything," Yan Xiaobao sighed, slowly turning his gaze away as the group disappeared into the horizon. "If I killed them, a new City Lord would take over. Who knows if he'd dare to challenge me, the Forest King," Yan Xiaobao explained, his voice weary and his body aching from the clash with the soldiers.