

Medical 401

Chapter 401 Earth Essence_3

Although it seems incredibly one-sided and unbelievable, moving across this vast earth was indeed a challenging task for Yan Xiaobao. Even a single moment of hesitation was enough to completely thwart the attack he was unleashing.

"Intimidating them is far better than killing them. This way, after we leave, no new courageous souls will come forward. They should at least remain safe for the next few years." With a slight complaint, Yan Xiaobao retraced their earlier path back, his pace sharply slowing as the white-haired boy poured his entire cultivation base into intimidating the City Lord and his elders.

The journey back to the cabin took ten times longer than their trip outward. Once they reached the clearing, Yan Xiaobao sat down to meditate and began his cultivation. Slowly, he replenished his dried-out Qi and the spiritual energy sea within him.

Inside Yan Xiaobao's body, a small yellow flame appeared—the Earth Element. It was currently smaller than the green Wood Flame and the blue Water Flame.

As his spiritual energy returned to the spiritual energy sea, the yellow flame absorbed every single droplet of water, each drop causing the flame to grow in size.

Even after sitting in the same position for hours, Yan Xiaobao was still far from satisfying the devouring flame, which seemed to be growing tremendously. As the flame swelled to more than double the size of any other flame, Yan Xiaobao trembled as he watched, his body shaking with excitement. When he realized he could now instantly manipulate more of the earth, a surge of elation grew inside him. His bond with the earth had dramatically strengthened, bringing him closer to the level of unity that Sha Yun had with the earth. Deep within, he felt complete satisfaction.

Finally seeing the flame stop absorbing spiritual energy, Yan Xiaobao could now focus on restoring his spiritual energy sea.

Hours passed as Yan Xiaobao cultivated outside the small cabin, and daylight gradually gave way to night. From the house, cheerful voices could be heard, as the season's joy came alive with the return of their mother. The aroma of delicious food wafted out through the open doors, accompanied by a gleaming golden light that made it seem as though night didn't exist inside the cabin.

Hui Yue awoke after finally replenishing his entire reserve of spiritual energy. Observing the ripples of energy in his spiritual energy sea, Yan Xiaobao smiled with satisfaction, feeling as though he was on the cusp of a breakthrough in cultivation.

They were only in the first chamber of these immense underground cities, and Yan Xiaobao felt he had already attained immense power.

Not only had he improved his cultivation base, but by grasping certain laws, the quality of his spiritual energy had been greatly enhanced.

This understanding allowed Yan Xiaobao to amplify the strength of his spiritual energy, which in turn enabled him to face off against Duke-ranked experts. Yet, it also helped him grasp a deeper truth—that no two individuals walked the same path. Each person makes choices throughout their life, and those choices shape their journey. This very phenomenon was what made every person unique.

Above Yan Xiaobao, a strange sight stood out—a star-filled sky hung beneath the stone ceiling. Hui Yue let out a deep sigh and slowly stood up.

Hui Yue gazed at the stars, his eyes wide open, before stepping into the cabin and stepping into a feast. As the white-haired boy entered the house and partook in the gathering, smiles lit up everyone's faces.

Xinyue relished the food and the company but couldn't help worrying about Sha Yun, who was alone in the tunnels. No one noticed that Yan Xiaobao had packed a bag of food, especially as he selected an assortment of treats for his serpent friend for the next time they reunited.

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Chapter 402 Time for Reunion

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The entire evening was spent eating and chatting, and even the usually indifferent sun allowed a smile to appear on her face as she watched how the seasons danced on the table.

Thanks to their host, Yan Xiaobao finally decided it was time for him and the others to reunite with Sha Yun and the wild poppy.

Upon departure, their group was smaller in number than last week, yet there was palpable joy in the air. Now it was just their usual party, and Yan Xiaobao shared a detailed description of the City Lord and his elders' appearances. This brought a slight smile to Wang Julong's face as she imagined the expressions of these men.

With Mr. Sunx joining their group, Wang Julong seemed more open than before, her joy evident as she finally reunited with her beloved flowers. She found the long-haired poppies utterly adorable, though Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu struggled to share her sentiment. Whenever they observed the large flowers laden with lethal thorns and toxic gases, they felt uneasy yet couldn't help but soften as they caught sight of Julong's expression. Every time she mentioned the little poppy flowers, they couldn't resist smiling to themselves.

Yan Xiaobao rushed ahead as best he could, making the journey to the tunnel gates swift. However, once the gates were in sight, he slowed down deliberately, and together they approached the guards at a measured, steady pace.

When they first came here with Mr. Sunx, it was a similar scene. Seeing the black-cloaked men, the guards' faces turned nearly ashen, their fear stark in their eyes. Rumors of black-cloaked men slaughtering guards had become a widespread topic in Cave's End City. These two guards, in particular, felt especially vulnerable, knowing that they had interacted with such men before. When they first came here with Mr. Sunx, it was a similar scene. Seeing the black-cloaked men, the guards' faces turned nearly ashen, their fear stark in their eyes. Rumors of black-cloaked men slaughtering guards had become a widespread topic in Cave's End City. These two guards, in particular, felt especially vulnerable, knowing that they had interacted with such men before.

Now standing before the guards, Yan Xiaobao nodded resolutely, noticing the fear etched on the faces of the two guards. Suddenly, an unexpected thought flashed through his mind.

Just as he was about to step through the gate, he paused briefly, then turned once more toward the forest. Yan Xiaobao raised his right hand, clenched it into a fist, and struck it against the left side of his chest, directly above his heart. He then bowed deeply toward the forest.

"Farewell, oh Forest King," he said with a solemn tone, his voice transformed, now sounding neither like himself nor like the Forest King. Instead, it had an eerie, squeaking quality. After speaking, he lingered

for a moment, then decisively turned and nodded at the two guards before again stepping into the tunnel.

As soon as Yan Xiaobao and his friends entered the tunnel, the two guards exchanged looks for a moment, then hurried back to Cave's End City to report the incident.

"I told you, it's only three this time!" one guard exclaimed excitedly as he recounted the events. "I'm sure they seem to merely follow the Forest King's home. He wasn't with them, and they even paid him homage before leaving."

Sitting in his hall, a sigh slipped from the City Lord, still visibly shaken. Whenever he thought about what happened with his guards, uncontrollable fear crawled over him, causing his entire body to tremble once again.

"Issue a decree banning anyone from entering the forest," he said in a trembling voice. "Though we have never utilized those woods, they are still considered our land. However, in light of this so-called King's savage acts, we are left with no choice but to abide by his rules."

Seated in his chair, a fleeting look of helplessness crossed his face. Even the elders shook their heads regretfully. Although they felt displeased, none of them voiced complaints, as each one vividly recalled their prior encounters with the so-called King. It was simply too terrifying to insult him.

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While Cave's End City busied itself lamenting the loss of the forest, Hui Yue and his friends finally met up with Sha Yun and the little poppy flowers. Ever since they had departed, they had been waiting patiently within the tunnels.

The moment Yan Xiaobao walked through the gate, he caught sight of Sha Yun's overly excited expression, which filled him with even more guilt. Firm in his resolve, Yan Xiaobao rummaged through his Memory Stone until he found a pouch filled with candies. He quickly handed them to his serpentine friend, and seeing those sweets made her smile tenfold brighter.

Hui Yue laughed cheerfully and gave his tall friend a big hug, catching Sha Yun completely off guard. Her cheeks reddened from embarrassment, her hands twitching in surprise and nearly dropping the gifted candies.

"Well done. Now you're only a little bit away from having snake babies," Lan Feng's voice echoed from the depths of the Dantian Cave. Yan Xiaobao sighed deeply, knowing Phoenix would never cease their incessant talk of snake babies unless Yan Xiaobao truly created some of his own.

Yan Xiaobao awkwardly released the Snake Woman, yet when their group fully regrouped, his face was full of bright smiles. However, his grin quickly froze, his eyes widened, threatening to pop out of his head as he stared at the little poppy flower.

Chapter 403 Time for Reunion_2

Before they split, the flower was already quite large, but now it stood about two meters tall, with vines as thick as arms. On those vines, thorns were as big as wolf teeth and as sharp as blades.

It was clear that Sha Yun hadn't just idly spent time in the tunnels waiting; instead, she had used it to tend to the flower—feeding it. Allowing it to digest and absorb so many beast cores, it had grown into a plant akin to a Master-level cultivation base.

The flower no longer had any weaknesses, and its intelligence had similarly improved. While it couldn't speak the human tongue, it could fully comprehend everything said to it, and it displayed a noticeable affection for Wang Julong upon first encounter.

Watching the peculiar flower twist almost excitedly while Wang Julong stroked its petals, Yan Xiaobao chuckled softly, knowing that their journey together would undoubtedly be entertaining.

The Snake Woman, eager to escape the damp tunnels, hastily reunited with Sha Yun and the little flower. Wang Julong and Deng Wu, however, were reluctant to leave—they vividly recalled the days spent waiting for the arrival of the Dragon Army. By now, they were tired of the dark surroundings, the sound of the roaring Demon Beasts, and the stale air they had been breathing.

The tunnels were reminiscent of the labyrinth they first encountered upon entering the underground city; however, unlike the maze, these tunnels were teeming with magical beasts. The further they ventured, the stronger the beasts became. Except for the wolves they encountered on their first day in the tunnels, none of the beasts even offered the slightest resistance.

Sha Yun insisted again on carving her own path through the walls, but Yan Xiaobao stopped her. Fortunately, both Yan Xiaobao and Sha Yun could now leverage their earth affinity to find the most traversed route—the way leading to the next gate.

Throughout their travels, Yan Xiaobao stubbornly hoarded all beast cores, beast blood, bones, and meat. However, days later, even Hui Yue grew weary of the accumulating materials. Reluctantly, he allowed the little flower to devour whatever it desired.

Although the little flower consumed hundreds of magical beasts, these beasts didn't seem to contribute much to its evolution. Yan Xiaobao concluded that this was the bottleneck of its cultivation.

Though it appeared effortless, cultivating a flower like this was extraordinarily rare, considering that this species was typically weak. Witnessing its growth to this enormity was astonishing. Only through the efforts of cultivators—granting it permission to consume vast numbers of beasts—could it possibly transform into something ferocious.

Growing in the harshest of environments within tunnels, rather than being reared by cultivators in a protected kennel, this flower had reached an unimaginable size. However, neither Yan Xiaobao nor Wang Julong realized it was just an ordinary flower, especially to Yan Xiaobao, who saw it as nothing more than a glutton.

After spending several days in the dark tunnels, the surroundings suddenly changed from their previously coarse appearance.

The texture of the walls resembled those found in dungeons, and the air was stale and damp. There were almost no magical beasts here, only traces of attacks—as if someone had already slain the beasts entering the area.

Noticing evidence of others, Yan Xiaobao didn't dare take any chances. He retrieved a black cloak, and they all donned them again to conceal their faces and abilities.

As Yan Xiaobao and his group drew closer to the gate, the walls were soon illuminated by faint stones, and the stale air gradually turned fresh.

He had long sensed the passage through his affinity, but the gate wasn't the only thing he noticed—he also detected the presence of numerous groups of cultivators traversing these tunnels, hunting magical beasts, which explained the absence of beasts here.

Random groups wandered about without paying attention to Yan Xiaobao and his team. He felt relieved as they made their way toward the gate.

Hui Yue approached the gate, noting that guards were stationed there—Master-level guards, no less.

Four guards stood before the gate, while a fifth sat behind a table, a large chest behind them. A sign on the table read: "Entrance Fee."

Seeing this, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but wonder whether the same currency was used in this kingdom. However, upon closer inspection, he noticed a small flyer detailing the entry cost—twenty beast cores per person. Beneath it was another form of currency, which Yan Xiaobao had never encountered before.

Walking up to the counter, Hui Yue retrieved eighty beast cores gathered during their travel through the underground city. Despite feeling a pang of regret at losing the precious cores he had cherished, Yan Xiaobao handed them over to the man behind the counter without hesitation.

The man glanced at Yan Xiaobao and his group, pointing at the flower and holding out his hand once more. Yan Xiaobao reluctantly handed over an additional twenty beast cores, irritated that even plants required such a high price to enter the second chamber.

After paying the entrance fee, the four guards moved aside, and the heavy wooden gate slowly opened, allowing the four cultivators and the oversized flower to pass through.

Upon entering the gate, no one knew what lay ahead in the second chamber, but their expectations were grand as the world before them began to unfold.

Unlike Cave's End, this gate led to a small town, and Hui Yue gasped in amazement as he passed through. He could see how the city sprang from the cave walls and spread outward into the surrounding area, resembling a crescent moon.

This town was far more urbanized than Cave's End City; it reminded Hui Yue of Riluo City as he watched the masses of townsfolk scurrying about.

Behind them, Yan Xiaobao noted the gate was guarded by over a hundred soldiers. A long line stretched toward the entrance gate, and upon seeing the ticketing table at the gate, he deduced that the cost of entering the tunnels was just as exorbitant as leaving the city.

The town was bustling with life, and although Yan Xiaobao and the others wore cloaks, it seemed no one noticed them.

Surveying the scene, Yan Xiaobao observed that most of the townsfolk appeared rugged—likely mercenaries rather than genuine citizens.

Looking around some more, Yan Xiaobao noticed numerous shops selling plants he had never seen before. Considering he had spent most of his free time in the Royal Art Academy's library, this discovery surprised him greatly.

Even Wang Julong, who specialized in plants, was at a loss for which herbs to choose.

Relaxing slightly, Yan Xiaobao spotted several inns scattered throughout the area. As they headed toward the nearest inn, Yan Xiaobao sensed mercenaries beginning to take note of the four newcomers and their massive flower.

Hui Yue walked to the inn with the same steady pace, seemingly oblivious. When Yan Xiaobao followed him inside, disappearing into its shadows, everyone quickly turned their attention away.

Inside the inn, the entire first floor had been converted into a bar and restaurant. The room was dimly lit, with weak sunlight filtering through the windows but barely illuminating the space. Shadows filled the bar, and edge seats were occupied by customers.

Ignoring the many stares directed their way, an elderly man with white hair approached the counter, where the bar keeper eyed their group closely.

This chamber was much larger than Cave's End and clearly contained more than one city. However, all mercenaries belonged to this particular city. Mercenaries traded in currency earned through materials gathered from tunnels, performing dirty tasks, joining armies, or selling information.

Information was something everyone needed, even the mercenaries themselves. However, none of them had ever heard of or seen this group before, which made them all uneasy—especially since they seemed to lack any cultivation base. As Yan Xiaobao reached the counter, even the typically rowdy bartender quieted down.

"Two rooms, each with two beds," Yan Xiaobao said as he reached the counter, unwilling to be dismissed. The bartender quickly nodded. There was no hostility in the voice he heard—just a detached arrogance that belonged to nobility.

"Will the young master be paying with Demon Cores or Demon Coins?" the bartender gently asked. Yan Xiaobao frowned upon hearing the two terms. Though the names differed, he instinctively associated Demon Cores with beast cores. What Demon Coins were remained a mystery to him.

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Chapter 404 Beast Core

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"We'll pay with Demon Cores," Yan Xiaobao said without hesitation and handed over a hundred beast cores.

Each room costs ten beast cores per day. They would need a few days to gather more information. They also needed a method to earn Demon Coins, because although Yan Xiaobao had many beast cores, he wanted to save them to commemorate their metal attack. Yet now, as he saw his stock rapidly depleting, he was compelled to reconsider.

Before receiving the two key stones, Hui Yue tossed one to Wang Julong, then nodded his head, signaling for the others to follow. As though they hadn't noticed the tense silence inside the tavern, they all moved upstairs to locate their rooms.

While Yan Xiaobao and his companions wandered through the tavern, the moment their shadow vanished, the silence broke. Many mercenaries began whispering and asking questions. Had anyone heard of this new mercenary group in town? Why were they hiding their appearances so thoroughly? How had they managed to completely conceal their cultivation bases?

There were many questions raised, but it seemed no one had any answers. Ultimately, a simple question lingered—who were they? The fact that they paid with Demon Cores meant they came from the tunnels. Yet, no one had seen them before. Could they really be from the wasteland known as Cave's End?

As these questions surfaced, it dawned on everyone that these four were not ordinary cultivators. The truth that they chose to pay with Demon Cores would soon spread like wildfire. These four cultivators had to be incredibly wealthy, but as long as their cultivation bases were hidden, no one dared to provoke them.

Although tempting, many mercenaries in the city, accustomed to living dangerous lives, felt an instinctual warning to stay away from this newly arrived, mysterious group.

Within an hour of Hui Yue and his friends' arrival, rumors swept through the entire city. And just as swiftly as the rumors emerged, they would eventually die down once everyone was aware.

As Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu sat in their room cultivating, Wang Julong and Sha Yun did the same in theirs—resting and improving their cultivation—while the city outside gradually returned to its usual bustling cacophony.

In the quiet of the inn, Yan Xiaobao was unaware of the chaos their arrival had sparked within the city, leading every mercenary to speculate wildly about who these four companions truly were.

Some theorized that the newcomers were actually powerful young masters, venturing into the tunnels for the first time to hunt. Others speculated that Yan Xiaobao and his entourage originated from Cave's End, a trash heap that had somehow managed to produce cultivators with decent cultivation bases. Still, others suspected they were spies sent by the Dragon Clan.

Whoever they were, whatever they had done, they had become the subject of much speculation. Even if unspoken, every mercenary in the city was constantly coming up with their own private theories.

"Did you sleep well?" Yan Xiaobao asked, looking at the three friends sitting before him. During their journey through the tunnels, none of them had managed to properly rest. Instead, they had used the time to cultivate. Upon reaching the safety of their rooms, especially secure with the key stones, they had taken turns—each sleeping for half the night while the others cultivated. In this way, they managed to snatch a few much-needed hours of rest.

Though cultivation helped relax them and restore their physical energy, it wasn't the same as allowing their minds to fully rest and waking up feeling refreshed the next morning.

The four nodded simultaneously as they accepted the bowls of porridge Yan Xiaobao had brought up from the downstairs kitchen.

While eating, everyone remained quiet. Despite being trapped underground, living far from the surface in caves, strangely enough, sunlight still spilled through the windows. The bustling noise of the streets could be heard outside the inn.

Sitting together like this reminded all of them of their earlier years at the Royal Academy, and a wave of nostalgia swept through the group. Smiles tugged at their faces as happy memories surfaced in their minds.

"We'll make it through this so-called Holy Dungeon," Yan Xiaobao said with a grin. "After we leave these underground cities, we'll become stronger. I'm sure the Rong twins will be as strong as we are. Remember how they were accepted into that inner division of the Royal Academy? We can't slack off even a little, or we'll get left behind."

As he said this, Yan Xiaobao's eyes glimmered with excitement. Seeing this, the others recognized the passion in his gaze, one that bordered on an obsession with cultivation.

"We need more information about this cave," Yan Xiaobao said as he took a spoonful of porridge, pleased to be eating something other than dried meat. "We also need to acquire some Demon Coins," he continued, the loss of his beast cores weighing heavily on him.

Knowing Yan Xiaobao's personality, his friends all nodded in agreement. Information and money were crucial for their survival in this new world. Fortunately, they had entered a town teeming with both.

The four friends donned black cloaks and descended the stairs, leaving Li behind to guard their rooms and some of their belongings.

As soon as the four appeared at the top of the stairs, the noise in the tavern instantly quieted. Every eye turned toward the cloaked figures, eager to glean hints of their origins or strength.

Yan Xiaobao had expected their appearance to attract attention; however, he had never anticipated it being so blatant.

Chapter 405: Beast Core_2

Before Yan Xiaobao left the staircase and headed for the door, he paused for a moment in thought. Finding someone interested in selling information in a city like this was akin to searching for a tree in a forest, but locating that person and conversing with them without anyone eavesdropping was indeed a challenge.

After leaving the inn, the silver-haired youth also considered whether he should enter an alleyway without cloaks and emerge from the street with cloaks off, but after weighing the matter, Yan Xiaobao swiftly dismissed the idea.

If he exited an alley cloaked and then appeared in the street without the cloak, their identities would become conspicuous. Yan Xiaobao didn't think he needed to conceal himself nor believed anyone in this city could defeat him, yet a nagging feeling still lingered.

If the Water Mage could track their whereabouts, it would be best if no one knew what they looked like. Upon reaching this conclusion, Yan Xiaobao strode toward a building named the "Mercenary Guild."

A trace of pain surfaced in Yan Xiaobao's heart because he knew this journey would cost him more of his cherished beast cores. But information was the top priority now. Beast cores were things he could always win back through combat in the future.

The Mercenary Guild was a massive building located at the town center. Glancing around, Yan Xiaobao didn't see any sign of the City Lord, deducing that the guild ran the city instead.

Not wanting to waste any time outside, Yan Xiaobao moved toward the entrance, closely followed by his friends. As soon as he stepped through the doorway, ten guards suddenly emerged, weapons in hand, blocking the entry with threatening auras emanating from their bodies as their spiritual energy surged out.

Their spiritual energy was still inferior to Yan Xiaobao's, and their cultivation bases were several stars below his. As soon as their oppressive energy touched Yan Xiaobao's cloak, it dissipated entirely. The entire pressure was rendered null by the cloak draped over him.

Noticing how their oppressive aura had been easily dispelled, and how this veiled figure even revealed hints of his cultivation base, a shadow of fear crept into the guard's hearts. They gritted their teeth, preparing to attack Yan Xiaobao, interpreting his actions as preparing to force an entry.

"Stop!" A piercing voice rang out from inside the Merchant Guild as a stunning woman emerged confidently from the shadows. Squinting at her, Yan Xiaobao narrowed his eyes. She was unmistakably more than just a Middle Dantian Master; she was a King-level expert at the very least. Though Yan Xiaobao could hold his own against cultivators from Duke University, Upper Dantian experts were a different matter. The disparity in strength was something he couldn't defy.

"Mr. Blake, please follow me," she said, signaling the guards to allow Yan Xiaobao and his companions to pass. Gazing at the woman, Yan Xiaobao felt no hostility, only genuine curiosity, and followed along without raising any questions.

The woman they followed didn't lead them toward the hall that most mercenaries frequented but took them through multiple courtyards belonging to the guild's mercenaries.

Returning to the courtyard, Yan Xiaobao and his group were guided into a large mansion. The woman entered first, bringing her guests along.

Inside the grand house, she strode with the same steady pace she'd had all along, not pausing until she stood before a door made of heavy wood, adorned with an intricate image of the Sky Blue Dragon.

She stood silently, knocking several times before entering, gesturing for Yan Xiaobao and his companions to wait outside.

Shrill screams erupted from within, followed by booming laughter. After a few minutes of silence, the heavy wooden door swung open, and an almost-naked woman dashed out of the room. At first, her face was crimson with embarrassment, but when she almost collided directly with Yan Xiaobao, her face paled in shock, and she stumbled away, retreating into another room in the corridor.

"Come in!" A cheerful voice called out, snapping the slightly stunned Yan Xiaobao back to reality. Before stepping inside, he quickly pushed Deng Wu along, followed by his other companions.

The moment Yan Xiaobao entered the office, it was reminiscent of the time he had visited Rong Liang's office. Whoever owned this office was undoubtedly not to be underestimated.

"Welcome, welcome!" The previous voice belonged to a young man who appeared to be about twenty-five years old, yet the wisdom in his eyes far surpassed his age. Seeing this man, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but remain cautious.

He was half-naked, wearing only trousers, and his physique was something Yan Xiaobao secretly envied. The man looked similar to Deng Wu, but despite appearing dangerous, he showed them all a smile that felt more mischievous than menacing.

"Please sit," he continued, extending his arms to indicate the chairs casually placed around the office.

Studying the man before him, Yan Xiaobao made a bold move—he removed the black cloak he had been wearing, revealing his distinctive features and his cultivation base to the man and woman before him.

The moment his white hair and his blue eyes came into view, both individuals stared openly. In a city where most citizens had black hair and brown eyes unless mixed with magical beasts, his appearance was extraordinary.

Those who were half-beast and half-human cultivators always commanded high prices as servants on the market, but looking at him, it was clear he wasn't a half-beast. This fact made his white hair and blue eyes all the more enigmatic.

"What a surprise," the man suddenly laughed upon seeing Yan Xiaobao revealed. Yet, what shocked him most wasn't his unusual appearance—in fact, the most startling thing was that the man before him was

only a Master-level expert, but his surrounding aura far surpassed his rank. This prevented the man from daring to underestimate him.

As Yan Xiaobao shed his disguise, Deng Wu, Wang Julong, and Sha Yun promptly followed suit, removing their cloaks and revealing their appearances.

Initially, Yan Xiaobao had anticipated some commotion over Sha Yun, but mixed-breed appearances didn't seem as unnatural here as they did in the upper world. The leader managed only a whistle of admiration as his eyes fell upon the alluring Snake Woman.

"I trust we all share an interest in working together," the man said with a grin. "My name is Xu Biao. I'm the leader of the Mercenary Guild in this city, and my family owns the entire guild that exists within this Demon Residence Cave."

Before waiting for more gratis information, Yan Xiaobao silently committed the name "Demon Residence Cave" to memory. Clearly, this man prized equal knowledge exchange and would probe for details once he realized Yan Xiaobao knew very little.

"Where are you from?" Though Yan Xiaobao showed no signs outwardly, the man could still sense their lack of familiarity as he shook his head, wondering where they might hail from without knowing the name Demon Residence Cave.

"Such information will come at a hefty price," Yan Xiaobao replied earnestly, with no hint of jest in his gaze, to which Xu Biao solemnly nodded.

"I'll answer three of your questions in exchange for one answer," Xu Biao said seriously, his expression leaving no room for bargaining. Seeing this, Yan Xiaobao looked back at his companions and glanced at the woman beside Xu Biao before nodding lightly.

He narrowed his eyes subtly, noticing the man nod back. The woman slowly exited the room, quietly shutting the heavy wooden door behind her, leaving only five people in the office.

"I hope it's worth it," Xu Biao sighed, though his sudden worry was quickly met with a sly smile from Yan Xiaobao.

"We come from the world above," Yan Xiaobao declared with gravity, nearly causing the man behind the desk to fall from his chair. His eyes widened as his heart skipped erratically.

"Above? There's a world above?!"

"Above? There's a world above?!" Xu Biao's eyes radiated pure disbelief as his breathing turned ragged and his body stiffened.

On one hand, the young man wished there truly was another world, but deep within, a rational voice argued that if such a world existed, he would certainly know about it—everyone would know about it.

Chapter 406: Traversing the Underworld

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"Above," Yan Xiaobao said calmly. "Can't you see the stone ceilings in the cave? Above these ceilings, the ground is full of lush meadows, towering mountains, vast oceans, and endless sky. That's the world we come from."

"How did you get here?" Xu Biao was no longer calm and collected. He sat at the edge of his chair, eyes filled with excitement as he looked at Yan Xiaobao. Even if it was a lie, he yearned to hear about worlds beyond his own. He had always dreamed of moving freely, feeling as though the cave trapped him, and he never expected someone to tell him about his own world.

Xu Hui looked at Xu Biao for a moment, then took out a Memory Stone from his storage stone. This special Memory Stone was a rock bought in Liluo City a long time ago, containing a detailed path from Liluo City to the Capital. It was a map. A map that showed the way instead of being written on paper.

Xu Biao accepted the Memory Stone, still skeptical. He placed it against his forehead, and soon a silver-blue light flashed, showing everyone the recording displayed to the young man.

The recording contained a detailed description of the road, passing through forests, mountains, and crossing lands, showing many different landscapes to the Guild Leader. Almost an hour later, Xu Biao finally tore his gaze away from the stone.

When he handed back the stone, his eyes were misty, but Yan Xiaobao shook his head, refusing to take it back. "Keep it as a gift," he said with a smile.

Xu Biao frowned slightly but eventually nodded. There were no free gifts during information exchanges. Getting such a valuable map from Hui Yue was certainly not free. It was evident that Xu Biao would help him in the future, but this map was very tempting, and he was willing to be grateful to this young man.

"What are your plans in our world?" Xu Biao finally asked, putting the stone in his pocket. An ordinary Memory Stone had become a young man's treasure.

"We're here to train," Yan Xiaobao shrugged. "Our teacher told us to enter the sacred dungeon and pass through it."

Hearing this, Xu Biao stared at the young man as if it was the simplest thing to traverse the underworld.

"Alright, ask your three questions," he said, finally returning to his usual self. Although the information gained was far more valuable than he had anticipated, Xu Biao wasn't someone who wanted to be too generous.

"Tell us about this world." Yan Xiaobao's first question sounded.

"There are four tunnel systems," Xu Biao immediately began explaining, even without questioning the level of detail Yan Xiaobao wanted. "Each tunnel is guarded by a group of elite practitioners. Our tunnel system is guarded by the Dragon Army. The adjacent tunnel system is guarded by the Wings of the Vermillion Bird, the third tunnel is guarded by the Ferocious Tiger Organization, and the last tunnel is guarded by the Armored Black Tortoise.

"These names were given to the four tunnel systems according to the names of these four Ancestors. Only if you do some great deeds, such as capturing a formidable criminal or paying very large compensations, can you enter another tunnel system."

"In our tunnel system, known as the Azure Dragon Trail, there are thirty-nine caves. Some are as large as this one, while others are as small as Cave's End. The closer you get to the Holy Family cave, the stronger the average cultivation base becomes. The stronger you are, the better caves you can enter."

Having said this, Xu Biao finally quieted down, and Yan Xiaobao also remained silent, considering the information just given to him.

Considering this information, these citizens of the underworld seemed unfamiliar with the name "sacred dungeon," and they seemed unaware of the outside world, making Yan Xiaobao wonder how long they had lived in these tunnels and caves.

Another thing that made Hui Yue curious was the cave of the Holy Family. It was evidently the center of the four tunnels, implying it was near the middle castle Lan Feng had previously mentioned.

Were these tunnels possibly leading to the corpses of the four Divine Beasts? Reflecting on this, Yan Xiaobao knew it was impossible to know until they truly reached that place, but he considered his next question.

"Can you tell me about the Dragon Army?" he asked after a moment's hesitation. After careful consideration, it was an important question. Whether he liked it or not, he had already started clashing with them, and Yan Xiaobao believed in knowing one's enemy.

"The Dragon Army is responsible for overseeing and controlling the Azure Dragon Trail. Everyone hoping to join is welcome, but the tasks you receive will be commensurate with your rank."

"Every cave within the Azure Dragon Trail must pay taxes to the Dragon Corps annually to ensure safety and order. In return, each cave will be under their protection, and they will station guards in all cities. This is not important for Cave's End, as they are far away, and no one there knows cultivation. Honestly, no one really cares about Cave's End."

"The Dragon Army has regular troop teams, consisting of cultivators below the Master level and those who never managed to pass the Master level. Masters are usually promoted to captains and control ten-man teams that will carry out certain tasks. Above the Masters are the Advanced Captains from Duke University, who also oversee ten-man teams but sometimes undertake more advanced tasks."

"Besides the ten-man teams, there are five-man teams. Some of these teams are made up of five Master-level experts, while others contain higher-ranked experts. These teams are special task forces, typically used for very significant missions."

Chapter 407: Traversing the Underworld_2

After hearing the news about the Dragon Army, Yan Xiaobao nodded once again. He leaned back in his chair, his eyebrows furrowed in deep thought. Xu Biao remained completely silent, allowing his guest to think as much as possible.

"For my final answer, I want to understand the information about life in these caves. Information about people's lifestyles, ways of working, and the economy would be vast."

Xu Biao nodded before he began to explain the world he currently lived in once again.

"So far, living in these caves has been my entire life. I've dreamed of another world, but I've always known it's just a dream. Most people spend their entire lives in the caves they were born in. There are various job opportunities, but most young people will spend their lives as mercenaries, trying to earn some quick money. Those who don't will become farmers, carpenters, merchants. Truly."

"The currency inside these tunnels is referred to as Demon Coins, which are created from the magical beast core. At a core to coin ratio of one to one. Some Cultivators with Metal Affinity can produce two coins from one core, but they are highly sought after and extremely rare. Usually, they end up working in the capital ranges for many banks."

"The tunnels are typically a place where mercenaries will enter in groups when they harvest herbs or hunt Demon Beasts. Demon Beasts sell for a significant amount of money, even when dead, with their cores always at least equivalent to one Demon Coin."

"Living in these caves is easy. There aren't many noisy crowds in the city, as the Dragon Army handles them. The only downside is that it's not easy to enter the next cave, as they are hard to access. Prices are becoming increasingly luxurious, not to mention the cultivation level needed to traverse the tunnels connecting the caves."

Upon hearing what Xu Biao said, Yan Xiaobao nodded. It seemed that life underground was entirely the same as life on the surface, and somehow, this eased Hui Yue's flood of emotions. As for how they would enter the next cave, Hui Yue wasn't too concerned about it.

"As you might have guessed, it's best not to tell anyone we come from above," Yan Xiaobao said with a shy smile, causing Xu Biao to snort.

Although the young man looked innocent, it was clear he was plotting something, and even Xu Biao knew that staying on the good side of these ubiquitous people would be most beneficial to him.

"Well, I suggest we sign the four of you up as members of the Mercenary Guild," Xu Biao said with a smile, pressing a Memory Stone. Shortly after, the heavy wooden door opened, and a woman rushed in.

"Xie Lan, find me four Golden Mercenary Badges," the woman instructed as soon as she opened the door. She gave a slight bow before leaving again and closed the door behind her.

"These badges will provide you discounts throughout the city," Xu Biao said proudly. Yan Xiaobao was not foolish; he knew they were receiving a lot of face to instantly receive golden badges, but he said nothing, just nodded.

"As members of the Mercenary Guild, there are multiple benefits," the young man continued. "First, you don't need to pay for hotel rooms, but you will have your own courtyard within our area."

"Second, you will have access to the bulletin board, where citizens and the Dragon Clan company request items or small tasks in search of someone. Typically, this is where most mercenaries find work."

Yan Xiaobao sneered at this information and made a mental note to visit the bulletin board later. They really needed money now, and it was clear that the simplest way to obtain it was to be employed in some way.

He still had the possibility of selling many items they had acquired by killing Demon Beasts during their travels; however, the idea saddened Yan Xiaobao, and when he heard another option, hope filled his eyes.

Looking at the young boy in front of him, Xu Biao felt sorrow, as he thought the reason Yan Xiaobao looked so hopeful was because he was truly poor. The old man decided to help them right from the

start. The Memory Stone he was given was a priceless item within the Underworld, containing information about the outside world as well.

The wooden door opened once again, and Xie Lan walked in holding four golden badges, each engraved with a mark at the top, reading "Golden Mercenary Guild Member."

"Don't be shy!" Xu Biao said with a smile as he stood from his chair and opened his arms wide, his face alight with excitement. "Come now, everyone take a badge, and make sure to bind it to yourself with your Qi. Then I'll ensure to take you around the Mercenary Association. Oh, and yes, you might want to wear those black cloaks again."

After leaving the office, Xu Biao carried out his plan completely and first led Yan Xiaobao and his friends to the courtyard to choose a house to stay in within the city.

The courtyard they chose was one of the smaller ones, as Yan Xiaobao's group of four was considered a small group within the mercenary community.

Though Yan Xiaobao was considered only a leader of a small group, this small group became the talk of the town. Other mercenaries displayed much excitement upon seeing how the Guild Leader led the cloaked men and even showed them different places within the Mercenary Guild headquarters.

The compound occupied by the Mercenary Guild wasn't the largest, but many courtyards and palaces were squeezed into the small space. Stalls were placed in every corner and crevice, as everyone misused space and maximized its potential.

Xu Biao quickly walked through the residential area, guiding his four guests toward the stables. "Owning a Demon Beast as a mount is one of the most luxurious things a mercenary can have, as it's hard to tame beasts living within the tunnels."

"We provide shelter for captured Demon Beasts, provided the owner pays 10 Demon Cores or Demon Coins monthly."

Returning to the stables, Yan Xiaobao noticed that inside there were very few magical beasts. Only a few could be seen, none as fierce as those Hui Yue had encountered in the tunnels.

If one wished to tame a beast, then obtaining a magical beast as a mount wasn't easy. The beast would only be interested in following those who bound them. If one wished to purchase a magical beast, they had to be bred by kennels that specialized in breeding magical beasts.

Seeing the few beasts within Huoyue's stable, it was clear although there weren't many, it was evident there were some mercenaries within the city capable of taming these beasts. Clearly, the power within this cave exceeded the previous one.

With the introduction to the Mercenary Guild, Xu Biao led Yan Xiaobao to various stalls to show him what they were selling.

Some sold weapons, while others sold accessories. Some sold inscriptions and other provisions. Some stalls sold all the items mercenaries might need, and even medicinal booths focused on selling various potions.

The Magic Potions here weren't as effective as pills on the surface but were pastes made from herbs sold to the stalls by other mercenaries. Although these potions were far less effective than medicinal pills, they still greatly helped mercenaries who didn't have wood-affinity therapists with them.

Looking at the armor and weapons, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but admire each piece, crafted from black iron. Reflecting, Yan Xiaobao understood that the people living in these caves had abundant and heavy iron.

Looking at the weapons, the prices were quite fair. They were certainly much cheaper than on the surface, and Hui Yue decided to visit the shops more frequently in the future. Even if he had to spend his beast core, it was certainly worth it.

Seeing the keen interest in Yan Xiaobao's eyes, Xu Biao couldn't help but feel quietly pleased. Impressed by the young white-haired boy, the Guild Leader felt a juvenile sense of satisfaction. Earlier shocked by the information about the outside world, being able to astonish this young man with their world, he couldn't help but feel a little proud.

The tour continued as they slowly entered the main hall. The main hall was a large room filled with various stalls. Each stall had its own sign, with some having long queues.

Looking at these signs, Yan Xiaobao felt excitement because he saw how many options there were. One of the stalls was named "Demon Beast Hunting," and it detailed all requirements related to Demon Beast hunts. "Herb Gathering" was another stall, with a huge blackboard behind the counter, showcasing various photos, each representing someone searching for specific herbs.

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Chapter 408 Assassination

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"Assassination" was another counterattack, but no one lined up in front of it. Another counter had a sign that read, "Wanted Criminals." Next to it was "Dragon Army Missions," and the queue in front of that booth was filled with mercenaries. The last booth was labeled "Other Missions."

The place was lively, yet when they saw the Guild Leader enter the hall, many mercenaries fell silent as four black-cloaked men were dragged away.

The sudden quiet made Xu Biao laugh a little awkwardly, but even so, he took a steady step forward and began explaining everything in the surroundings to Zhou Hui.

When they reached the hall, Yan Xiaobao stopped talking but still paid close attention to every movement around him.

"Alright then," Xu Biao sighed and said, "I'll head back now to enjoy myself at my guild; I'm confident you'll adapt quickly."

With that said, Xu Biao turned around and left the hall, leaving Yan Xiaobao and his friends behind.

Glancing around, Yan Xiaobao was very intrigued by what he saw. He couldn't really decide which tasks to undertake first. What they called "herbal collection" and "magical beast hunting," or "Demon Beast hunting," here felt almost redundant to Yan Xiaobao since he had already done much of the same before.

Assassinations didn't seem particularly interesting, as Yan Xiaobao only preferred to kill those who stood in his way. Ultimately, it came down to miscellaneous tasks and Dragon Army missions. Considering his distaste for the Dragon Army, Yan Xiaobao decided to head to the miscellaneous tasks booth, each step scrutinized by the extreme intensity of the room.

Seeing Yan Xiaobao make his decision, Wang Julong, Sha Yun, and Deng Wu closely followed suit, all completely silent, as the suffocating atmosphere pressed on them.

Scanning the board, Yan Xiaobao saw all kinds of tasks—from uncovering the origins of some ancient treasure, to spying on a wife suspected of cheating on her husband, to accompanying young masters into tunnels to help them sharpen their skills.

What caught Yan Xiaobao's attention, however, was not any of those but a large poster centered prominently at the top of the board.

The annual Demon Dwelling Tournament to determine mercenary rankings.

Staring at the poster, Yan Xiaobao saw that the first-place prize was one thousand Demon Coins, the second-place prize five hundred Demon Coins, and the third-place prize two hundred and fifty Demon Coins.

Everyone was allowed to enter the competition, including half-demons. Yan Xiaobao began counting on his fingers and imagining how incredible it would be if they won that money.

Turning to look at Deng Wu, Wang Julong, and Sha Yun, none of the three could see his face clearly. However, when they guessed what was about to happen, an icy chill ran down their spines.

"Training!" was the only word Yan Xiaobao said before turning around and heading directly toward the courtyard they had been assigned.

The tournament was set to begin in just a few days, and it wasn't anything like the one-on-one duels Yan Xiaobao had seen before. Instead, it was mercenary teams pitted against one another. Each team had to consist of at least five members, and they would fight in either group battles or five individual duels, with the first to win three advancing to the next round.

One loss meant the entire team would be eliminated. That wasn't something that confused Yan Xiaobao. What worried him was that they were short one member, and there was no one in this world Yan Xiaobao could think of who they could rely on.

Thinking about this issue for a while, Yan Xiaobao left the courtyard again, heading toward the administrative building where Xu Biao was waiting.

When he arrived at the building, everyone courteously moved out of his way as he once again found himself outside the heavy wooden doors, waiting to hear the voice from within call him in.

Just as Yan Xiaobao expected, the voice quickly rang out, and Yan Xiaobao stepped into the room, once again coming face-to-face with the young man from earlier.

Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but burst into laughter as he saw the woman standing behind the charismatic man. Her face was beet red, undoubtedly remembering the earlier encounter when she had almost no clothes on while fleeing Xie Lan, who was cloaked in black.

Now, she stood behind the Guild Leader once again, though this time fully clothed.

"You've returned faster than I expected," Xu Biao said with a laugh, gesturing for the girl to leave his side. The girl frowned slightly, her lips forming a cute pout as she walked out of the room, glaring at the black-cloaked figure as the door slammed loudly behind her.

"Please forgive her behavior," the Guild Leader said with a sigh, his eyes lingering on the woman until the door closed with a loud thud behind her.

"How can I help you?" Xu Biao continued, shifting his gaze back to Yan Xiaobao. The moment the younger man saw the woman leave the room, he removed his cloak, once again revealing his features.

"We plan to enter the Mercenary Tournament," Yan Xiaobao said, neither hurried nor slow. His voice was as resolute as a mountain, his eyes brimming with determination. "Our team is short one member, and I trust you to provide us with that crucial final addition."

Hearing this, Xu Biao contemplated for a long while, trying his best to think of the most suitable candidate.

If he weren't the Guild Master, he would have joined them himself, but that was impossible. Nevertheless, there was still someone else he could recommend. With a calm expression, he pressed down on a Memory Stone, summoning Xie Lan into the room. She entered and greeted the two men with a gentle bow.

Chapter 409 Assassination_2

Xie Lan was slightly surprised to see the young man in front of her and the black cloak hanging on the chair.

"Xie Lan, you will be participating in the Mercenary Tournament. You will become one of the Black Cloak Mercenaries."

Xie Biao had ulterior motives, assigning his most trusted cultivator to join their team. He clearly hoped to gain information about the four cultivators who had come from another world. Assigning this task to Xie Lan was his best choice.

Yan Xiaobao nodded slightly at Xie Lan. How could he not know that Xu Biao was seeking information? Nevertheless, the white-haired boy was willing to accept a King-level expert to strengthen his team, even if it meant reporting their activities to the Guild Leader daily.

Hui Yue touched his storage stone, retrieved another black cloak, and handed it to Xie Lan, who quickly pulled the garment over herself, making her look identical to Xu Yue before.

Xie Lan could feel how her cultivation base automatically activated the inscriptions on the cloak, causing silver light to shimmer briefly in the office before gradually fading away, making the cloak appear completely black and ordinary. Her cultivation base was nullified by the inscriptions, rendering Xie Lan as mysterious as Yan Xiaobao.

Before donning his own black cloak, the white-haired boy flashed a smile at Xie Lan. Bowing to Xu Biao, Yan Xiaobao turned and followed him. The two Black Cloak cultivators left the office and returned to the courtyard where they would reside for a period of time.

"Hello," Xie Lan greeted as she stepped into the courtyard, where she encountered three other figures also cloaked in black. Having worked for Xu Biao for a long time, she understood perfectly why she had been sent here to mingle with these unknown cloaked individuals. Resolutely, she committed herself to gathering useful information for her master.

While collecting information, she also planned to perform in the tournament, hoping to become the most astonishing member of the team. This way, the peculiar Black Cloak cultivators would hold Xu Biao in even higher regard.

When Hui Yue arrived, he gestured for everyone to enter the small house, prompting them to rush inside, eager to see who the newcomer was.

Once inside, all four immediately removed their cloaks, breathing a sigh of relief. Even though they had agreed to hide their appearances for as long as possible, none of them enjoyed the stifling world inside the cloaks.

Yan Xiaobao was well aware that their concealed faces attracted much attention. Personally, he preferred being called a masked figure rather than a white-haired youth since his distinctive hair always drew people's notice.

Having come to this conclusion, Hui Yue decided that, although he did not wish to stand out, he had no choice but to make his mark in this underground realm and utilize the resulting reputation to progress into the next tunnel system.

"Everyone," Yan Xiaobao called out as the group sat in the room, "please welcome the newest member of our team. Her name is Xie Lan. You've seen her yesterday; she's a King-level expert, which significantly increases our odds of claiming first place in the tournament."

Upon hearing that she was a King-level expert, Deng Wu seemed slightly taken aback, his eyes quickly masking any traces of prior curiosity that had been left unconcealed. As the handsome young man considered the risks of offending a King-level expert, the initial intrigue he displayed vanished.

"We will do our best to win with us four, but if we encounter too much trouble, Xie Lan will step in to assist us," Yan Xiaobao said with a serious expression. "We've come here to train and improve ourselves."

If we can't even win a silly competition on our own, then we shouldn't be considered successful cultivators."

Hearing Yan Xiaobao's words, his teammates solemnly nodded, though Xie Lan felt slightly uneasy about what he had said.

Experts from the King Ranking had predicted the cloaked team might exploit the presence of a King-level expert among them, yet rather than relying on her for an easy victory, they treated her as a backup—a contingency rather than a shortcut.

What struck Xie Lan even more was how youthful all the cloaked individuals looked. The oldest seemed to be a young man with black hair, likely in his early twenties, while the other two appeared just barely of age.

The last member of their group was a half-demon beast, whose lower body was a snake's tail. Although Xie Lan had already noticed this before, she was still stunned by the creature's beautiful upper body and intelligent silver eyes.

Spending only a short time in the same room with these individuals clarified to Xie Lan why her master was so interested in this quartet. She understood that if they could prove useful to the Mercenary Guild, it would be remarkable.

"You all know that entering the tunnels requires a specific cultivation base or performing something extraordinary to earn recognition from the Dragon Army," Yan Xiaobao said, sighing as he sat on a chair. Hearing this, everyone in the room nodded in unison.

"If we wait to reach higher levels, it might take us years to enter. Our only apparent route is to gain recognition from the Dragon Army, so let's first prove ourselves in the competition. Afterward, we'll start completing tasks for the Dragon Army. Eventually, they'll notice us, and we'll be permitted to pass."

Glancing around the room, Yan Xiaobao spotted doubt in their eyes. Cooperating with the force they wished to escape from seemed bold, yet they all longed to venture deeper into the tunnels, far enough to eventually gather the power to leave this underground city.

When Xu Yue aligned her views with the team, everyone displayed a shared sense of determination. The sudden tension in the house did not escape Xie Lan, who was keenly aware of the connection between the Dragon Clan and the cloaked group.

"Today we need to train; the tournament begins tomorrow, so we must prepare ourselves," Yan Xiaobao said with a sigh. He noticed the glint in Xie Lan's eyes, aware that she wouldn't allow anything to be overlooked. At the very least, the Guild Leader could not discover any ties between Yan Xiaobao and the Dragon Army.

Upon hearing Yan Xiaobao's words, everyone quickly entered meditation, wasting not a single moment. Xie Lan was once again impressed by the group's efficiency.

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The next day, the sun rose within the cavern, replacing the soft moonlight from hours prior. As morning light merged with the shadows of night, a new day began.

This day had been highly anticipated, and the entire city buzzed with activity as mercenaries moved in groups, preparing to register for the once-a-year tournament.

This competition represented pride, with groups from every corner of the region gathered here, filling the streets with endless streams of people. The crowd was dense enough that one would need to elbow through to move.

Amid this chaos, Yan Xiaobao used force to clear a path for his team through the busy streets toward their singular goal: tournament registration.

Most of the time, Xu Yue had to resort to brute strength for their tasks. Whenever people spotted the group of black-cloaked figures, murmurs of astonishment rippled through the crowd. Now that the original quartet had become a five-member team, including one registrant, this shock seemed to intensify.

While some feared encountering these enigmatic strangers, others secretly hoped for a confrontation, eager to test their skills against them. However, their real goal wasn't victory but snatching the storage stones these cloaked figures carried.

Everyone shared one assumption: the cloaked group wouldn't wear their cloaks during the final match. They believed the garments absorbed energy, making combat impossible while wearing them.

Ignoring those staring him down once more, Yan Xiaobao stepped up to the counter manned by a Mercenary Guild employee.

"Hello," Yan Xiaobao said, his voice mimicking the tone he used when posing as the Forest King deep in the caves. The low yet commanding sound instantly drew the employee's undivided attention as they began registration.

"Apologies, sir; your team needs at least five members. Could you call your other four teammates?" Despite their initial shock, the employee handled the situation seamlessly.

Yan Xiaobao stepped slightly to the side as four cloaked figures emerged silently behind him, their daunting and mysterious presence transforming the previously lively atmosphere into one of tension and unease.

Chapter 410 The Golden Badge

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Although the cloak actually concealed their entire cultivation base, it was obvious that the cloak was working overtime, as it was difficult to hide Xie Lan's level, making Yan Xiaobao wish they would leave the crowded People's Square quickly.

Looking at the four invisible figures, the staff nodded. "Hand over your Mercenary Badge," he commanded, naming the group as one hundred and seventeen.

Just as the employee requested the Mercenary Badge, additional chaos arose as five golden badges appeared simultaneously.

The correct way to acquire a golden badge is to complete a large number of tasks or some very dangerous tasks previously. For these people to arrive with golden badges in a low-level cave like the Demon Residence Cave was truly surprising.

"Did they come for the tournament?" a voice arose from the crowd, with some people nodding, while others shook their heads.

"I bet they came here for an extremely rare task, and they decided to join the fun." Some people nodded again, while others shook their heads.

Various theories began to spread in the area, but Yan Xiaobao was not interested in this and instead patiently waited for the staff to lower the ranking. Even the previously calm and collected staff was very annoyed when he saw five golden badges ahead.

Finally, he completed all the necessary paperwork and handed a small board to Hui Yue, a plate for group number one hundred and seventeen.

"Over there, you'll see a schedule. Your group will fight later today when the sun reaches its highest point. Your group is seeded, so your battle will be on the main stage."

With that said, the man quickly turned his attention to preparing the next batch of mercenaries registering for the competition, while Yan Xiaobao turned and headed toward the place the man pointed out.

A massive board filled the entire wall of a street opposite the staff handling the registration. Looking at the board, Yan Xiaobao found it divided into three sections. One was when the sun rose in the morning. Another was when the sun was high in the sky, and the last part was when the sun slowly set on the horizon but vanished before the next day began.

In the morning, the lowest-ranked mercenary teams fought each other, while the highest-ranked teams and the seeded teams battled at noon. The last part of the competition included those who were neither high nor low-ranked. Average mercenary parties residing in the city or surrounding areas.

Each group would have one battle per day, alternating between individual duels and team battles. Their alternation was not only to see if all members knew how to fight but also to keep the audience interested.

Looking at the schedule, Yan Xiaobao found a wooden tablet that read one hundred and seventeen groups, next to the twenty-third group. Between the two wooden plaques was a small symbol resembling an arena.

After taking a final glance at the map, Yan Xiaobao once again prepared to pass through the dense crowd of mercenaries to fight, but what he found made him smile slightly because all the mercenaries around cleared a path, squeezing against each other to ensure the pathway was available for him and his followers.

Hui Yue paid no attention to the numerous mercenaries around, walking down the carved path through the crowd, heading towards the city's arena. For the first time in a long time, it was a place to truly exchange pointers.

While crossing the street, Yan Xiaobao expected the hordes of people to thin out gradually to make entry easier, but the opposite happened. The streets leading to the arena were particularly crowded, filled with multiple groups of mercenaries and vendors.

Temporary stalls were set up everywhere, selling all items usually found in the Mercenary Guild and the market. Since it was close to the location where battles occurred, the items were able to be sold at much higher prices than usual.

Outside the arena was a large park with four smaller training grounds. These grounds were now used for matches between lower-ranked cultivators. The arena only allowed high seeds to enter.

The arena was not yet open to the public because workers were preparing for the upcoming battles, but Yan Xiaobao didn't mind too much as he strode towards some of the battles taking place.

Watching these battles, Yan Xiaobao saw that they all participated in group fights, a type of battle he had never engaged in during friendly duels, piquing his interest.

The park area was spacious, and many mercenaries used it to train themselves, improve their skills, and earn some easy coins in daily life. Due to the vast area covered by the park, it also made moving around much simpler.

All the mercenaries walked around in groups, glaring at their opposition, but no fights broke out except for the scheduled battles.

The audience watching these group fights was mostly citizens from the Demon Residence Cave, while mercenaries only went to watch their opponents fight.

Yan Xiaobao had to admit that as he walked around seeing different battles, he felt like a tourist, quickly gaining a clear understanding of what the battles were like.

Slaying was never disappointing. If a person died, it would be due to their own lack of capability. This was the first thing Yan Xiaobao noticed as he watched various ongoing fights.

Although one of the fights was a brilliant display of technique, the other three fights were clearly desperate life-and-death battles, filled with blood and gore. The cultivation base and strength of these teams were evenly matched, which was why they were so fierce. Using stronger and stronger attacks, they were met and responded to with similar power, resulting in both parties bleeding and pushing their limits.