

## Medical 451

### Chapter 451 Dragon Army Mission

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Xu Biao smiled at his work efficiency and, without further delay, led Yan Xiaobao and the others to a room that seemed to have been closed off.

"Li Shao is my second-in-command at the Mercenary Association," Xu Biao said along the way, "Since we have an entire city filled with mercenaries, the Guild Leader of the Demon Residence Cave's Mercenary Guild maintains a main office in Mercenary City. Sometimes I need to go to the Capital for business because mercenaries can also be found there, even in the Capital. So, the Vice President must handle things here."

There was no need for explanation, as everyone had already guessed what was happening. Even so, they appreciated Xu Biao's openness about everything. For the journey they were about to embark on, all six of them needed to trust one another.

"I suggest we stay here for a few days," Yan Xiaobao said as he admired the intricate carvings and the beautiful surroundings of the Mercenary Guild. "I have an idea," he added, immediately piquing everyone's curiosity.

"Currently, we're on a mission. If someone checks our badges, they'll see that we're carrying out a task for the Dragon Army, and the mission involves delivering information."

"My suggestion is that we see if we can take on another task in the Capital, like escorting someone to the next caves or transporting some goods."

"If we have such a task, anyone seeing our badges won't reveal anything about the mission for the Dragon Army, as only the most recent task will be displayed."

"Traveling with others also limits the chances of someone attacking us. From every perspective, I think an escort mission would be ideal. But until we find such a task, let's take a few days to relax and rejuvenate."

Hearing Yan Xiaobao's suggestion, everyone slowly nodded. They remembered seeing the bulletin board earlier, which had plenty of escort missions posted. At the time, they hadn't wanted to travel with others, confident that they could move independently.

Now, the circumstances had changed. An escort mission was precisely what they needed. After giving it some thought, smiles began to spread across everyone's faces.

"While you're in the Capital, you should take some time to shop," Xu Biao continued. "The Capital has every type of delicacy you can imagine. We get items from other caves. Whether it's food, rare materials, or even medicinal herbs, as long as you have enough coins or cores, you can buy anything."

Hearing this, grins became increasingly apparent on the faces of the young people, but what they truly longed for was much more than shopping. After spending so much time on the road and even longer trapped in illusions, without warm water to bathe, they yearned to wash off the travel grime and relieve their strained muscles, which had been on high alert ever since Zhou Long's second attack.

Seeing their expressions, Xu Biao could instantly guess what they were thinking. Laughter escaped his lips, spreading through the conference room where they were gathered. Just as Yan Xiaobao was about to retort, a knock came at the door, and Li Shao stepped into the room with his imposing frame, bowing humbly to Xu Biao, who was seated.

"The rooms are ready," he said in a gentle voice. "Allow me to escort the Guild Master and his esteemed friends to their quarters. Warm baths have been prepared for everyone."

The mention of warm baths was all it took to elicit a collective sigh of longing. Everyone rose to their feet quickly, not willing to wait a moment longer than necessary. Even Xu Biao, despite his usual composure, felt his weary body lighten at the thought. They all moved with haste, as if they were floating along the path led by Li Shao.

The giant was astonished by just how eager everyone was for a warm bath. Though he knew they had come from Mercenary City and that their journey had taken a week, it hadn't seemed so strenuous as to leave the Guild Master and his companions utterly exhausted.

Of course, Li Shao was unaware of the challenges they had faced on the road. Instead, he assumed they had merely completed their mission. The gentle giant admired Xu Pi'ao deeply and couldn't fathom that his Guild Master would be worn out by something as trivial as a simple trip to the Capital.

Li Shao led the group once more through the hallways. Leaving the large house, they crossed a path to another nearby building. This structure was significantly larger than the one they had just exited. He entered the staircase, climbing up with Yan Xiaobao's group trailing behind him.

"These rooms are reserved exclusively for Gold-level mercenaries," Li Shao said in a serious tone, pointing to the ten doors ahead, each leading to individual rooms. "Choose whichever room you like. Each one is equipped with a private bath, and a heated soak awaits you."

Upon hearing this, everyone showered Li Shao with gratitude before dashing toward the rooms. None of them cared which door they took, for all that mattered was the allure of a warm bath. Bursting into their respective rooms, they quickly stripped off their clothes and sank into the steaming water, their muscles practically singing in relief.

Bathing took a long time; no one was willing to part with the soothing waters. But after an hour, Yan Xiaobao was the first to leave his bath. Now dressed in some of his finest clothes, he stood by the window of his room, observing the bustling streets below. A smile spread across his face as he stepped quietly out of his room, heading toward the lively streets outside.

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Yan Xiaobao ran down the stairs, slipped through the back door unnoticed, and slowly made his way through the alley, turning towards the main street.

Yan Xiaobao's plan was simple—he wanted to explore the city and see if he could stumble across treasures. Finding his way back to the Mercenary Guild didn't need to be rigid; the young man boldly strode onto the bustling road.

He clearly garnered a lot of attention. Children pointed at his hair, their mouths busy asking their mothers about the beautiful Angel walking among them. This led to their parents' awkward blushes, hastily apologizing to others around them.

Most citizens mistook Yan Xiaobao for being part Demon Beast, which explained his striking yet distinctive appearance. Xu Yue, however, didn't seem bothered by the brief glance she gave him before he wandered into the first market he encountered, a cheerful smile lighting his face.

All the markets were fenced off; entry was impossible unless one passed through gates guarded by sentries. Some of these markets required payment for entry, while others were free—it all depended on the goods exhibited inside.

At first, Yan Xiaobao believed the markets were owned by families, similar to those in Liluo City, closely protected. But he soon realized they were not owned by families, but by guilds.

A market specializing in medicinal herbs and drugs was owned by the Medicine Association, sometimes referred to by an alternate name known to locals.

Another market sold valuable ores and metals, clearly under the ownership of the Mining Association. Across the street, another market displayed tools, weapons, armor, and other goods created by Blacksmiths.

There were markets selling all varieties of meat, as well as markets offering fabrics and clothing. Everything conceivable was laid out before him, and walking past market after market, Yan Xiaobao felt like an exuberant child.

However, his excitement quickly waned as the wares he saw all seemed mediocre. The herbs were of good quality, but flowers weren't what he needed at the moment. The metals were interesting but commonplace—they lacked anything especially rare.

With a sigh, Yan Xiaobao moved from one market to another until he finally arrived at a much smaller market compared to all the others. Unlike the other markets, this one had no guards, poorly maintained fences, and stalls made not of wood but simple blankets laid on the ground where citizens presented their goods to passersby.

His interest was immediately piqued upon seeing various antique heirlooms mixed with shattered Demon Cores and old Memory Stones. As he stepped into the market, Yan Xiaobao suddenly felt as if he'd entered an entirely different world.

Unlike the guild-run markets, this place was neglected, brimming with poverty-stricken residents—some selling items, others begging for coins or food. Scraps of all forms filled the area, assisting them in daily survival within the city.

Yan Xiaobao walked from stall to stall, casually observing random items here and there—jewelry, Memory Stones containing Martial Arts Skills, and others with unknown artifacts.

After inspecting half the dilapidated market, Yan Xiaobao came across an array of unfamiliar objects, none of which stood out to him—until he spotted a larger stall.

Stopping there, his eyes were drawn to a pile of scrolls and old books. Whenever he encountered ancient documents, his interest was naturally sparked, as they might contain information that could assist his search for the Dark Era and its buried sins.

Picking up a book, dust puffed into the air from its surface. The moment one of them was opened, it released a faintly musty scent—some pages damaged from years of use.

"These books," Yan Xiaobao said, looking at the vendor, "how much do you want for these books and scrolls?"

The vendor squinted slightly at the young man dressed in fine clothes, contemplating whether to be greedy. Meanwhile, Yan Xiaobao did nothing but patiently wait beside him.

Finally, the elderly man made up his mind, raising his wrinkled hand to indicate five Demon Coins. He inwardly felt as if he'd asked for an exorbitant sum, considering the books were worn from years of use and the scrolls barely legible.

Looking further over the stall, Yan Xiaobao's gaze briefly landed on a large chunk of black stone that seemed to have been mined long ago. After staring at it for a moment, he decided against buying it.

'You fool!' Lan Feng's voice suddenly burst into the young white-haired man's mind, catching him completely off guard, as he hadn't heard from the Phoenix in weeks.

"Why am I a fool?" Yan Xiaobao retorted indignantly, feeling unfairly accused. All he'd done was disregard an unassuming chunk of stone.

"That stone is the purest Memory Stone I've ever seen! You must buy it!" Lan Feng's voice was firm and striking, leaving almost no room for debate.

"What use do I have for a Memory Stone?" Despite Lan Feng's commanding tone, Yan Xiaobao had known him long enough to grow accustomed to the bird's overbearing nature. The demand felt too abrupt and selfish for the young man to agree without question.

During their time ensnared by illusions, Lan Feng had left Yan Xiaobao alone. When they faced danger from the Horned Snake, he hadn't shown up, nor had he said anything about Zhou Long. Instead, he busied himself nurturing Wu Wei. So now, when the white-haired youth was about to make a purchase, Lan Feng suddenly voiced his opinion. What made the Phoenix believe Yan Xiaobao was inclined to listen now?

"You can refine it into any type of stone you need!" Lan Feng argued, entirely oblivious to the resentment brewing in Yan Xiaobao's heart.

'Oh, look!' The Phoenix continued to ignore the emotions he sensed from Yan Xiaobao. "There's a treasure among the items under training—it will greatly enhance your cultivation!" The bird pointed at another stone from the same stall.

"Oh, that one? That must also be a treasure," Lan Feng pressed on, gesturing without acknowledging Yan Xiaobao's opinions.

"That should be a treasure?" Yan Xiaobao scoffed as he surveyed the items. The vendor, bewildered by the strange array of expressions appearing on the young man's face, dared not shoo away the customer. The finely dressed youth seemed eccentric—perhaps even slightly deranged—but wealthy and willing to spend.

Ignoring the expressions on his own face, Yan Xiaobao continued his mental dialogue with Lan Feng.

"I've never seen anything like this before," Lan Feng explained. "The uniqueness alone makes it a treasure."

"What nonsense," Yan Xiaobao replied, inspecting the object while infusing his spiritual energy, only to discover nothing happened. The item was nothing but a small round metal sphere—just a piece of metal. "Since when can treasures be sensed? Do you think you're a chicken laying golden eggs? Dream on—you're just a Phoenix, good for nothing but setting things ablaze and complaining."

"I'm being serious here!" Lan Feng insisted. "But if you want to forgo unparalleled wealth, that's your problem."

Yan Xiaobao exhaled deeply, recognizing that Lan Feng had a point. Even if the sphere had the slightest chance of being a treasure, it was worth buying since the price was bound to be affordable.

In the end, the scrolls and books were no longer the only items the white-haired boy purchased. He also acquired the stone and the metal sphere, paying five Demon Cores.

The transaction marked only the beginning. Far from over, Yan Xiaobao found himself retreating to a quiet, shadowy alley, sitting down while finally allowing his emotions to surface—his frustration with Lan Feng blossomed freely.

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Chapter 453 I'm Not Your Wallet

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"Why did you suddenly show up after all this time?" His voice clearly showed resentment, as he felt somewhat betrayed.

"I told you, I can't help you inside these underground cities," Lan Feng reminded him, smiling as if flattered by Xu Yue's nostalgia for him.

"Well, you don't need to help, but don't just pop up when I make purchases! I'm not your wallet!" Yan Xiaobao still thought it was wrong for Phoenix to only appear when wanting something, but he knew

talking to the bird was like talking to a wall. He would never understand anything from his own perspective, he was very stubborn.

"Alright, fine, just hurry up and tell me how to use this stone," the white-haired boy changed the subject, taking out the stone he bought at the market. If Lan Feng hadn't told him to buy it, he would never have thought it could aid his training in any way, but when the bird said it, he didn't doubt Lan Feng.

"Before I go back to training, I'll tell you about it," Lan Feng said with a self-satisfied smile on his face, 'when you're cultivating, hold it in your hand and see what happens.'

That being said, the bird did exactly as he said, sitting within the Dantian Cave, once again fully immersed in his cultivation of Wu Wei and spiritual energy.

Seeing the bird return to sleep, Yan Xiaobao sighed and looked around. He had already purchased some items, he didn't know where the library was, and rather than looking around himself, he quickly decided to return to the Mercenary Guild to spend time checking out the transportation he acquired.

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Walking past the entrance, the guards immediately remembered the white-haired young man, just like the one who came here earlier with Xu Biao, and bowed to him at once, allowing him to enter the Mercenary Guild.

Walking through the main building of the guild and behind it, he could hear the low murmurs inside the building where Sha Yun and others currently resided. Hearing the sounds, his pale lips sighed, as the young man knew what had happened, he rushed toward the building, ready to apologize for the problems and pay for the repairs.

Yan Xiaobao disappeared alone and didn't tell anyone about his trip leading to Sha Yun, who liked to keep Yan Xiaobao anxious in her sight.

When Yan Xiaobao arrived at the upper floor, what he expected happened, he could only swear at his forgetfulness for not telling his friends about his little trip to the market.

The entire first floor no longer looked as nice as before; in fact, all the doors were broken. All his friends gathered in one room, their expressions serious as they spoke in low voices, too low for Yan Xiaobao to hear.

Walking past the door, Sha Yun was the first to see him. She hugged herself, tears streaming down her eyes. An apologetic nod was all Yan Xiaobao gave them before they surrounded him, curious to hear what had happened.

"I'm sorry, okay?" Yan Xiaobao said, his arm around Sha Yun's shoulder, his face truly apologetic. "I took an early bath and decided to check out the market, sorry I didn't leave a note."

That was all there was to it. Clearly, everyone was on edge, they knew Zhou Long was cunning. Adding to that the fact that this white-haired boy had disappeared was enough to send all his friends into a panic. The young man knew this, which led him to display a bashful smile, unsure of how to make it up to everyone.

Just as he was about to offer to pay for the damages, Xie Lan stood up and activated her wood element, using her spiritual energy to restore everything to its previous state. It was a power only certain people could cultivate, something Yan Xiaobao had used before thoroughly smashing a courtyard at the academy.

Realizing Xie Lan was specializing in item restoration caught the entire team off guard, as they had thought her expertise was in healing.

"Don't say that," Xu Biao laughed, looking at the group of wide-eyed, confused expressions. "Xie Lan isn't good at fighting," he continued, "but when it comes to restoration or healing, she's the best specialist."

"Restoration and healing are almost the same," Xie Lan's melodious voice drifted in the air, her eyes on Wang Julong, evidently ready to begin explaining some deep secrets of her craft to the young girl. Their relationship had certainly improved significantly since they first met.

Seeing Xie Lan ready to teach her, Wang Julong quickly bowed to Xu Biao and nodded to her friends, then followed her departing teacher.

Watching Wang Julong's eagerness closely, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but smile, as he realized her eagerness to learn from herself and her focus on improving her understanding. It was a trait he had acknowledged during their days at the academy many years ago.

Even now, Yan Xiaobao felt oddly drawn to the girl in front of him. The girl who continuously strived to better herself.

Without noticing, as he gazed at the woman who had just disappeared, his thoughts revolving around her and the memories they shared, a smile adorned the young man's lips.

Allowing someone to invade his thoughts in this way was something Yan Xiaobao had never attempted before. Whether he wanted to consider her or not, Wang Julong was part of his life, having become a part of his daily thoughts. In a way different from Deng Wu and Sha Yun.

Chapter 454 I'm Not Your Wallet\_2

Even Li Fen did not reappear in his mind like Wang Julong. Her every move caught his attention, and her facial expressions always brought great amusement to the young man. The whole situation left Yan Xiaobao quite puzzled and confused.

Seeing Yan Xiaobao watching Wang Julong's departure did not escape Sha Yu's eyes. As she nestled in the warm embrace of her first human friend, a sorrowful expression appeared on her face. Her eyes were full of confusion, slowly turning into determination.

"Oh, right!" Yan Xiaobao hurriedly found a suitable storage stone and took out the items he bought from the market. Everyone either frowned or wrinkled their noses because all the items seemed old and useless.

"This one here, I don't know what it does," Yan Xiaobao said, tossing the round metal object on the bed, leaving it for later.

"I think these books might have some information about the great sins or the Dark Era," Yan Xiaobao explained as he gently placed the items on the table next to him, leaving the stone as the only remaining item in his hand.

"This one should enhance cultivation," he smiled as he twisted it, confused about how or why this item would help him, but he never questioned Lan Feng's words. He might be a little annoyed with the bird, but this treasure was something Yan Xiaobao wouldn't give up.

Seeing the young man staring at the stone in his hand, everyone was curious about what it was, but no one spoke, nor did anyone dare to ask. The smile on his handsome face gradually increased, and the white-haired man's focus was entirely on studying this stone, no longer noticing the many people standing around him.

Seeing what he focused on, everyone sighed in unison. They knew him well; he was the kind of person who wouldn't pay attention to his friends until he completely understood what was in his hand.

This led Deng Wu and Xu Biao to shake their heads as they both walked out of the room, closing the door behind them, as they also decided to sit down and cultivate a bit.

Sha Yun didn't follow the two men; instead, she sat down with Yan Xiaobao, beginning her meditation. Now that her master was back, when he had just disappeared for a long time, she had no chance to leave his side; she sat like a statue, striving to improve her cultivation base.

Although she was sitting in the room, her presence was by no means a disturbance because the young man was accustomed to her. He paid no attention to what was happening around him, standing there, his eyes never leaving the stone in his hand.

As a drop of spiritual energy entered the stone, a small silver light shone in his hand, but no matter how much he searched with spiritual energy, it felt as though it was just an ordinary stone.

There were no inscriptions or patterns twisting and turning on the stone, no matter how much he searched, nothing could be seen. Nothing appeared, nothing stood out.

Yan Xiaobao frowned and murmured to himself as he stood there alone, staring at the stone for a moment, feeling dazed. Before he could take action, the sun flew from its high place in the sky to almost a standstill.

Lan Feng had told him that the way to activate the stone was to hold it in his hand while cultivating, so he sat on the bed, not even glancing at Sha Yun, his eyes only fixed on the stone.

Entering meditation, Yan Xiaobao sat on the bed, legs crossed, holding the stone, it lay calmly between his fingers.

He didn't have to wait long to feel as if a breeze was born in the small room, and after a while, the wind blew towards Yan Xiaobao, filled with the rich air of heaven and earth surrounding the young man on the bed. This shock made him stop meditating.

Once he stopped, the brewing wind in the room immediately died, and the dense essence vanished in an instant.

Not only did Yan Xiaobao stop cultivating, but Sha Yun also stopped, as all the essence in the room disappeared, making it impossible for her to continue her cultivation, and she just suddenly felt it return in a short time.

Looking at the young man on the bed, she noticed his eyebrows furrowing, as he once again checked the stone with his spiritual energy and Qi energy, but no matter what he did, nothing happened; the stone was the same as before.

Pausing for a moment, Yan Xiaobao re-entered meditation. This time, Sha Yun managed to see what happened, her eyes widening in surprise. She also felt how the room now contained a slight breeze, which quickly evolved into a strong wind, then into a hurricane, swirling around the bed and the boy on it.

The size of the hurricane did not grow nor shrink; instead, it just swirled around Yan Xiaobao sitting in meditation. Upon careful observation, Sha Yun found that the hurricane wasn't produced from the wind at all; instead, the wind was a byproduct of the essence of heaven and earth rushing towards Yan Xiaobao and the stone, surrounding him and providing him with all the essence he could refine.

Although this was the only visible effect on the outside, this stone was indeed worthy of being called a treasure, as it also affected one's cultivation techniques; once the essence of heaven and earth entered the body, it would be locked in a Qi line. As it was locked in the Qi line, the essence would begin to refine as it rushes into the body, until it was the same size and purity as the Qi thread it encountered

first in the body. Once refined, Qi would rush through the meridians, completely merging with the rest of the Qi.

No matter how fast previous techniques were, none were as fast as this. He was shocked by the speed but also very vigilant. His strength was growing so quickly that if his cultivation base became unstable, it could be considered dangerous. After absorbing enough essence, he once again exited meditation, just like last time, the wind immediately died, releasing the essence of heaven and earth back into the room.

Yan Xiaobao was now at the nine stars of the Master level. During their journey, he wasn't the only one who increased in power. Wang Julong and Sha Yun were both cultivators at the seven-star Master level, while Deng Wu broke into the Master level, becoming the first Master Star. He also happened to merge with his element at the same time.

Yan Xiaobao opened his eyes to notice Sha Yun asleep beside him, a gentle smile appeared on his face, as Snake Woman was one of his best friends. She was the one who would follow him without asking any questions, always standing by his side. This made the young white-haired boy feel very grateful, although his feelings for her were very different from his feelings for Wang Julong. A blush quietly appeared on his face, as he couldn't imagine what it would feel like if she were sleeping next to him.

The young man shook his head, sighed deeply, and then quietly got off the bed, slipped out the door, and headed to Deng Wu's room. Although Sha Yun was his first follower, there was one person with whom Yan Xiaobao always felt a strange friendship, and now the young white-haired boy felt as if he needed to talk to this particular friend.

He didn't need to talk about anything important, but he just wanted to chat with him about their daily lives. He was very aware that his friends followed him out of their own will, and when they traveled with him, they followed all of Yan Xiaobao's commands and ideas, which made him feel very grateful.

Leaning against the door, Yan Xiaobao gently knocked, so as not to disturb others, and after a while, a voice came from inside, the door opened, letting the young man in.

"What are you doing here?" Deng Wu asked curiously. It had been a long time since they started traveling together, as they had time to sit next to each other and just talk. Finally, now they had time to chat, so here he was, the white-haired young boy, who aside from returning to the days at the academy, they would chat for a long time, they just wanted to go back there.

He showed a shy smile on his face because there wasn't any particular reason to visit, other than wanting to talk with his good friend. Yan Xiaobao ignored the question and instead sat down in the chair where he had been sitting, smiling at his friend.

Feeling the room, Yan Xiaobao recently might have felt the essence of heaven and earth in the room being disturbed, a clue of Deng Wu's meditation before entering. Yan Xiaobao laughed and tossed the stone to his friend, who awkwardly caught it.

"Is this the thing you just bought?" Deng Wu asked as the young boy nodded.

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Chapter 455 Master Star

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"Next time you need to nurture and master this skill. When you become the second Master Star, pass it to Sha Yun or Wang Julong," Yan Xiaobao said with a shrug.

"This really is a treasure. When he told me to buy it, Lan Feng was right," he sighed, clearly unhappy that he couldn't mock the bird and tell it it was wrong.

"I'm sorry I dragged you all into these long and dark tunnels," Yan Xiaobao finally sighed. Despite them all being friends, he felt somewhat guilty for bringing them to this dreadful place. They had already been underground for several months, and it was likely they would need to stay here for years to surface successfully.

Time wasn't the only factor. A lot of unknown events had occurred, along with constant worries about Zhou Long and the Dragon Army. To be honest, none of them were safe now.

Upon hearing the apology, Deng Wu showed a pained smile and shook his head, "What other choice did we have?" His little laugh echoed through the small room, "Wang Julong and I were both exiled to Liluo City; did we really have any other option? We're grateful you invited us along."

"Honestly, we have much to be thankful for," he said, his usually playful voice no longer filled with laughter and joy, but instead serious and somber, "Back when we were kids, you always helped us," he began. "You taught us all the skills we dreamed of. You helped us improve farming techniques, and even helped our families."

"Whenever we ran into trouble, you would help us—even if it meant doing something incredibly dangerous. You never asked for anything in return. Out of gratitude to you, isn't it obvious why Wang Julong and I followed you? You didn't just save us; you gave our families a chance to survive. Committing to following you for the rest of our lives is fair compensation. Not to mention, we really don't have anywhere else to go." After finishing his last sentence, Deng Wu's face no longer showed a bitter smile, but a self-deprecating transparency that brought immense pain to Yan Xiaobao.

"I don't care about the reason, but traveling with you makes the days more interesting, and you've always successfully managed to support me too." Wu Wu assured them they had been incredibly helpful. As the two young men sat together, neither said a word, simply enjoying each other's company in silence.

After a while, Deng Wu looked at Yan Xiaobao, his former mischievous expression returning with a sly smile on his face. He turned to the two younger individuals and asked, "So, what's going on between you and Wang Julong?"

Upon hearing the question, a faint blush crept onto the pale face, though no reply came. Deng Wu suddenly wondered what might have happened.

"It's nothing," an empty laugh followed the statement, hoping to shift the subject as the youngster glanced around; he was surprised to see the room filled with scrolls everywhere. "You've been working quite hard, haven't you?"

"During the last fight, I used quite a few Fire Orb scrolls," Deng Wu chuckled, "Creating more is the only way to replenish my stock. I can't afford to buy them."

Deng Wu's abilities were all centered around the Metal Element, and as someone striving to grow stronger, he had a certain foresight, which meant he needed to prepare in advance for every battle.

The two young people sat on the floor, neither speaking, simply savoring the silence and the friendship between them. Having finally had time to talk, they both felt good.

Xu Hui had long felt guilty about Deng Wu and Wang Julong's success, but Deng Wu had been waiting for the chance to express his gratitude. Knowing they truly were in the place both had hoped to reach, a sense of satisfaction spread as they sat in a comfortable atmosphere.

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When Yan Xiaobao woke up the next morning, he found himself in Deng Wu's room. The air carried the lingering scent of alcohol, and bottles were scattered across the floor. On the bed, Sha Yun and Wang Julong were tangled up, no longer victims of a once-curved tail.

Recollecting the events of the previous night, Yan Xiaobao chuckled softly as he reflected on the past.

The night before, Deng Jingjing sat for a while, quietly enjoying the silence. Then, Deng Wu slowly got up and left the room. A few minutes later, sounds came from outside the door—a frustrated Sha Yun entered, followed by a bewildered Wang Julong.

These two newcomers were surprised to find they weren't the first to arrive. Their astonishment kept them quiet as they entered, finding random seats on the floor to settle down.

Back at the academy, many of them often drank together, but ever since entering this new area, no place had been safe. On the surface of the earth, Yan Xiaobao's constant running had put them all on high alert, not allowing even the tiniest indulgence.

The same had occurred when they entered the sacred dungeon. Up until now, everywhere had been dangerous, but now, they finally had a place where they could enjoy themselves without worry.

Deng Wu hadn't invited Xie Lan or Xu Biao. Though he liked and trusted them both, this was meant to be a party for those who had been together for years—those who had started this journey with him.

That night, as they drank together, everyone inevitably began talking about their futures and their pasts. Many old memories resurfaced, and they shared their new aspirations for the future—aspirations that, hopefully, they could all come to share together.

#### Chapter 456 Master Star\_2

Everyone was fully focused on traversing the divine underground city. Everyone realized this would be a journey spanning several years. Despite this, none of them regretted joining Yan Xiaobao. On the contrary, everyone seemed excited, just as Wang Julong had mentioned how her abilities had improved since finding her teacher below the earth's surface.

The first to fall asleep was Sha Yun, her senses more acute than a human's. The alcohol worked efficiently and had her asleep early.

Wang Julong didn't last much longer either; she was soon asleep in bed. For Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu's amusement, Sha Yun's tail curled up beside the unconscious girl, and the two quietly nestled together and slept—comfort they hadn't been able to enjoy for months while traveling outside during the unknowns of their journey in the underground city.

Deng Wu and Yan Xiaobao sat on the floor side by side, laughing and cheering all night, reminiscing about how much things had changed.

"Something about this place truly feels different," Deng Wu sighed as he stared at the ceiling. "I miss Rong Xing." He finally voiced his feelings. "Traveling the world has been the most exhilarating thing I've ever done, but I wish we could have brought her along."

Hearing such heartfelt words, Yan Xiaobao silently smiled. He too missed the three friends they left behind in Liluo City, but they all had to grow up. Although Deng Wu, Wang Julong, and Yan Xiaobao could never return to their hometown, the twins and Ma Kong were no longer children. Everyone needed to move on with their lives, yet forging ahead was what they had to do, living as the young masters of their families.

Silence settled into the room, a quiet born of the evening drink and their shared reflections on the choices they had made.

Deng Wu's only regret lay in leaving Rong Xing. Gazing out at the pitch-black night, an image of a beautiful woman appeared in his mind—a woman he deeply missed. He sighed.

Moments later, Deng Wu collapsed to the ground, the sound of his snores audible even before his head hit the floor.

A deep chuckle escaped Yan Xiaobao's lips as he looked at his sleeping friend. Struggling to his feet, he withdrew a blanket from his storage stone and gently draped it over the two women sleeping on the bed. Searching the stone once more, he found another blanket to spread over Deng Wu, and finally, he found one for himself.

Taking one last look at his companions, gratitude shone in Yan Xiaobao's eyes. Lying down on the floor, exhaustion soon overtook him, dragging him into the comforting darkness of sleep.

Watching the sleeping figures, Yan Xiaobao felt content, as he managed to leave the room without waking anyone. Carefully walking on tiptoe, he made his way into his own quarters. Then, he immediately went for a hot shower. Once again, he relished how he slowly shed the sluggishness from his body—the warmth was so relaxing that the young man fell asleep again.

Standing outside the room where all his friends were sleeping was Xu Biao. He raised his hand as if preparing to knock, but after a while, he lowered his head with a smile and turned away.

On his way out, he encountered Xie Lan, who was about to knock on Wang Julong's room. However, shaking her head, the woman chose to follow him down the stairs, heading toward the main building of the Capital Hiring Guild. It was time for some regular work.

"Let's head over there!" Sha Yun exclaimed cheerfully, grabbing Yan Xiaobao's arm and dragging him along with her.

The whole group was now awake, as it was already noon, and everyone decided to visit the different markets—since Yan Xiaobao had only had a chance to see them so far.

Moving outside, their team attracted plenty of attention, given that there was a white-haired young man accompanied by a Snake Woman with a height of approximately two meters.

Dragged along behind Sha Yun, the young man said nothing, simply offering a smile and motioning for Wang Julong and Deng Wu to follow. Smiling, they quickly caught up to the Snake Woman.

Sha Yun was leading Yan Xiaobao toward the market owned by the blacksmiths; it was one of the largest markets in town.

The marketplace didn't just have armor, weapons, and tools—it also featured a section specializing in jewelry and cosmetics. That immediately caught Sha Yun's attention, and the Snake Woman ignored everything else, dragging her friend—or more precisely, her wallet—toward the pretty, shiny items.

Deng Wu and Wang Julong followed the pair into the market, but instead of accompanying Yan Xiaobao to the jewelry section, they stayed in the armor, weapons, and tools area. Deng Wu possessed plenty of beast cores, so there was no worry the two wouldn't be able to buy what they wanted.

No one minded the group splitting up. A satisfied smile appeared on Sha Yun's lips as she realized how successfully she had isolated the two of them—a happy, childlike grin on her face.

"What do you see?" Yan Xiaobao asked curiously as he glanced at the jewelry around them, crafted by jewelers with blacksmithing expertise.

Scanning the surroundings, Sha Yun picked up a beautiful hairpin crafted from the purest gold, shaped into a flower adorned with stunning red and yellow gemstones.

Looking at the hairpin, the young man felt his heart clench slightly, as his experiences with hairpins had not been ideal. However, he had to admit that the piece was gorgeous—a perfect match for Sha Yun.

Holding the pin, he turned to the stall owner, noting the doubtful expressions on both their faces.

"Excuse me, sir," Yan Xiaobao began, "this hairpin—we'd like to purchase it."

The elderly vendor glared at Sha Yun and Yan Xiaobao. After a moment of silence, he finally spoke up, "The price is one hundred Demon Cores," he said with a smile. The exorbitant price was undoubtedly far higher than usual, driven by the fact that Sha Yun was a magical beast and Yan Xiaobao looked far from

ordinary, leading the vendor to assume he was a half-demon beast. While there was no overt contempt, he carried the typical prejudice often faced in society.

Yan Xiaobao narrowed his eyes slightly. How could he not understand the vendor's intentions? A trace of annoyance flickered in his gaze.

Yan Xiaobao didn't mind being mistaken for a half-demon beast—if anything, it sometimes made navigating situations easier. What he didn't appreciate was the arrogance and scorn shown, especially toward Sha Yun. Yet, seeing the pleading look in the Snake Woman's eyes, he sighed and pulled out one hundred Demon Cores.

Demon Cores weren't something he lacked, but every time he spent them, Yan Xiaobao felt a pang of pain. Demon Cores enhanced his attack power and ensured his survival—yet here, they were treated as currency, making every core he worked hard to earn feel like a blow to his heart.

When the counter was piled high with Demon Cores, the stall owner was thunderstruck. He was overjoyed at the profit but simultaneously overwhelmed by a sense of fear.

The exorbitant price had been intended as a deterrent, knowing few could ever afford it—let alone a mere half-demon beast. However, now that the boy in front of him had paid such a sum, it was clear the young white-haired cultivator was anything but ordinary. In fact, his payment in cores rather than coins indicated he hunted Demons efficiently and, given his casual disposal of such a large number of cores, was likely a powerful cultivator. Best not provoke him.

Grasping the hairpin, Yan Xiaobao ignored the stunned stall owner completely, instead flashing a radiant smile as he gently used his hands to tie the Snake Woman's hair and place the beautiful pin within it.

The hairpin complemented Sha Yun's fiery yellow and red scales, her vibrant hues gleaming even brighter than before. Smiling warmly, he took her hand and began leading her back to reunite with their other two friends from earlier.

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Chapter 457 You Don't Know Who I Am?

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It didn't take long to find Deng Wu and Wang Julong. Smiling, Yan Xiaobao walked toward the two dark-haired youths, who were busy examining the armory and weapons. They cared more about quality than flashy, vain items unsuited for practical use.

The group reunited once more. Just as Sha Yun had expected, her new hairpin received compliments, causing the beautiful Snake Woman to blush with happiness. Her scales turned a faint shade of crimson.

"Let's check out some of the delicacies Xu Biao mentioned earlier," Yan Xiaobao said with a smile, patting Sha Yun on the back. The gesture only deepened the Snake Woman's blush.

The thought of food momentarily froze everyone in their tracks, with saliva nearly dripping from their mouths. Delicious meals were what they truly yearned for. The group of four made their way toward the marketplace, where an array of exquisite dishes awaited them.

As they entered the market, an unfamiliar voice suddenly sounded from behind them.

"Hey, you! The one with the Snake Beast! Stop right there!"

The voice's intrusion drew an immediate reaction from Sha Yun, but most importantly, a fiery anger ignited within Yan Xiaobao. The white-haired boy turned abruptly to face the one addressing him.

Seeing the speaker, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but scoff disdainfully. The man was a Master-level cultivator, seemingly around their age. However, his arrogant demeanor twisted his expression, and his lecherous gaze fixed shamelessly on Sha Yun.

Yan Xiaobao couldn't tolerate the way the man looked at Sha Yun. Without hesitation, he stepped in front of her, blocking the arrogant man's view. This only served to enrage the youth further.

"I want that beast. Sell me her contract," he demanded in an unnervingly calm yet harsh tone, leaving no room for negotiation. At his words, Yan Xiaobao's eyes narrowed slightly. Without a word, he signaled his companions to move along, ignoring the man entirely. To him, this pompous fool wasn't worth a reply.

"I'm talking to you, mixed blood!" the man pressed mockingly, his tone dripping with ridicule. He seemed to find the situation both amusing and trivial.

Pausing in his steps, Yan Xiaobao turned back around. His eyes burned with suppressed rage, his killing intent barely kept in check.

"Don't you know who I am?" the young man shouted, his voice booming across the market, filled with self-satisfaction. It was clear he relished the sound of his own voice.

The commotion soon drew attention from everyone in the market. Even those outside its perimeter could sense the tension, and curious crowds began gathering to witness the scene unfolding.

"I heard you loud and clear," Yan Xiaobao said, spitting each word out one at a time. His voice was filled with anger as he turned and locked eyes with the obnoxious man behind him.

The loud-mouthed man flinched slightly upon meeting the icy glare in Xiaobao's blue eyes. However, his arrogance quickly returned, and a fiery rage sparked within him.

"How dare you look at me like that?!" the youth shouted, slamming his hand down. In an instant, a group of guards materialized around him, each standing menacingly behind their master. Their faces radiated hostility as they stared at the white-haired boy. Some even clenched their fists, producing audible cracking sounds.

Despite their aggression, every guard felt an inexplicable sense of danger emanating from Yan Xiaobao. Though they were all Master-ranked cultivators, something about this young man made them feel utterly inferior.

"Stop staring at me like that," the youth sneered. "You're nothing more than a mixed-blood human. I'll admit you're handsome, but that means nothing. I'm the young master of the Demon Dance Family. You're beneath me, so sell me that magical beast right now!"

The young master's words filled Yan Xiaobao with the urge to tear him apart and release all the fury boiling inside him.

Instead, Xiaobao activated the Velocity Flow technique. As though teleporting, the white-haired boy suddenly appeared behind the arrogant man, his back turned to him. In a casual yet threatening tone, Xiaobao said, "I don't care if you're from the Dance Troupe or the City Lord himself. If you so much as touch a single one of my friends, I'll personally ensure you don't live to see tomorrow's sunrise."

His voice wasn't loud or rushed, but it carried a chilling clarity, shaking the arrogant young master and his followers to their core.

Having said his piece, Xiaobao reactivated the Velocity Flow and returned to his original position. The shift happened so quickly that several guards questioned if they had merely imagined it. Although it lasted only seconds, Xiaobao's movement left the young master visibly terrified.

"Attack!" the young master roared, his eyes wide with a mixture of disbelief and fury. The speed of Xiaobao's movements proved he was indeed strong. However, convinced that Xiaobao was merely a Master-level cultivator, the young master felt reassured. His large group of guards would undoubtedly overpower this dangerous foe, forcing him to surrender the Snake Woman for his life.

Unfortunately for him, things did not go as planned. As the guards charged, Xiaobao once again activated Velocity Flow. With effortless speed, he weaved through their ranks, moving far too fast for anyone to react, and reappeared beside the arrogant youth.

Without mercy, Xiaobao lifted his leg and spun mid-air, delivering a flawless roundhouse kick to the man's abdomen. The sheer force of the impact sent the young master crashing into a food stall in the marketplace.

Chapter 458 You Don't Know Who I Am?\_2

The entire market fell into silence as everyone watched the young master of the Demon Dance Family get knocked down in one swift move. A single person managed to bypass ten guards with ease.

The entire area was so quiet that one could hear a pin drop. No one dared to utter a word.

After being kicked into the distance, the guards immediately rushed to assist their master, attempting to help him stand. This only infuriated the already crazed young man, causing him to unleash his wrath on those near him.

"Well done. Hahaha, very well done!" The young master trembled with rage as he glared at the indifferent young man before him. "So, you dare to stand against the Demon Dance Family?"

"I hope you don't regret your decision. I won't let anyone—even the Dragon Army—stop me from exacting my revenge. Just wait, that Snake Woman will become mine, and you.... you will suffer!"

Saying this, the young master prepared to leave but found himself unable to move. It was as though someone had taken control of his body, issuing commands he himself hadn't given. At the same time, a serene and gentle atmosphere seemed to emanate from the young man standing before him, whose expression remained calm.

Yan Xiaobao hadn't realized that the tranquil Qi he commanded could seize control of another's body. If he had consciously tried, he wouldn't have done it. But deep within his humiliation, a roar had erupted. That roar turned into a command. Yan Xiaobao had ordered his body to stop the young master, refusing to allow him to utter his final words.

The tranquil Qi helped him accomplish this goal. The only one aware of it was the young master himself, who now found himself unable to act. Meanwhile, everyone else in the market simply felt an inexplicable serenity—they felt calm in a situation that was anything but peaceful.

This tranquility was far more unsettling than any killing intent. The gentle air became almost oppressive, and it filled the young master with dread for his life as Yan Xiaobao slowly approached him, step by step, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"Listen," he whispered, his voice low but almost growling, "I don't care if you insult me—call me a bastard or whatever you like—but don't you dare mention anything about my friends. Don't think for a moment that just because scum like you exist, everyone else is the same."

The soft yet menacing tone of his voice blanketed the market in silence, leaving almost no one daring to breathe. His low voice carried to every corner of the plaza.

Behind him, Sha Yun stood, her eyes sparkling with pride as she listened to Yan Xiaobao's words. Her heartbeat raced erratically as he protected her. Yan Xiaobao was furious because of her. A smile adorned her face, gratitude flowing from her heart as she saw how protective and caring he was.

Though she knew she could not return his feelings, she cherished that he valued her so deeply as a friend, warming her heart.

Once the pale lips of the young master uttered their final words, the restraints holding him vanished. He staggered forward and collapsed to the ground before scrambling to his feet like he was fleeing an approaching demon.

Moments later, the calming air that had stilled everyone into silence dissipated without a trace, leaving the crowd motionless, afraid to make the slightest move. Yan Xiaobao turned back to his friends with a gentle smile, reminding them of why they were there in the first place.

"Time to eat!" he said, taking Sha Yun and Wang Julong's hands and dragging the two girls toward a food stall laden with delicious dishes, with Deng Wu hurrying to catch up.

"Oi, wait for me!" Deng Wu called out after them. Laughter lit up Sha Yun's face, and even Wang Julong smiled at the young man trying to catch up to them.

As they walked away, those who had been lingering in the food market, except for the stall owners, quickly dispersed. None of them wanted to stick around, fearing someone would come back to exact vengeance.

Yan Xiaobao seemed utterly unafraid of the family returning. Once they found a stall with a seating area, they immediately sat down and ordered an abundance of dishes, indulging together while chatting freely about various topics.

The group continued ordering more and more food, time passing swiftly as they tried to sample every delicious dish available.

As they ate, the sun gradually moved across the sky. Near sunset, the four finally stood to pay their bill and prepared to return to the Mercenary Guild, only to find the market entrance now tightly guarded in a way it hadn't been earlier.

The guards were at least Master-level, with some ranked even higher at the Duke University level. Among their ranks were even a few experts of exceptional renown. All these individuals stood

unmistakably at the command of the young master from earlier. He now sat safely positioned far away, complex emotions swirling in his eyes.

Hatred, worry, and even fear flickered in the young master's gaze. Upon his return to the Demon Dance Family, he had informed his father of the incident. His father had then ordered him to bring guards to deal with those who'd caused trouble.

His father was indifferent to Sha Yun and entirely uninterested in his incompetent son's antics. What he cared about was the reputation of the Demon Dance Family. Allowing low-level cultivators to trifle with them was unacceptable.

"They're here!" someone suddenly shouted. The guards harassing civilians and challenging the original market guards promptly ceased their actions, gathering together to confront Yan Xiaobao and his companions.

Yan Xiaobao's group consisted of four cultivators—only one of Master level, while the others were merely at the Master Level tier. The guards roared with laughter, confident they could effortlessly dispatch such insignificant opponents.

"Don't underestimate them!" The young master shouted from his hiding place outside the market, surrounded by four Duke University-ranked experts. He looked uneasy, glancing at the fifteen cultivators standing between him and Yan Xiaobao's group.

The fifteen cultivators laughed boisterously, clearly unshaken by the warning, their confidence bolstered by the sheer number of men and strength on their side.

"Capture the Snake Woman alive!" the young master shouted again. "Bring her to me unharmed, and I'll pay you handsomely!"

Hearing these words, a glint of coldness appeared in Yan Xiaobao's eyes. Slowly, he raised his hand, drawing his friends' attention. They waited silently for his command.

"Kill them all," Yan Xiaobao said in a deep voice that carried across the area. For reasons unknown, many of the guards preparing to attack began to tremble.

"Big words for a little man," one of the guards sneered maliciously, his face twisting with disdain at Yan Xiaobao's audacious order. Who did he think he was to command their deaths?

Deng Wu raised his scrolls. Most contained Fireball spells, but three of them held soul shadows of beasts. He began his summoning, directing the beasts at the men before them, commanding them to kill their enemies.

The appearance of the massive shadows widened everyone's eyes in shock. Necromancers were rare in the underground world, and encountering one was often considered a stroke of dreadful luck. For the Demon Dance Family to have insulted and provoked a Necromancer was astonishing.

Until Deng Wu released the soul shadows, everyone had assumed Yan Xiaobao was the strongest of the group since he was their leader. But witnessing the soul shadows alter their perceptions entirely. All eyes turned toward the black-haired, handsome young man with newfound respect and fear.

Fear was evident on the young master's face as he realized Deng Wu was a Necromancer. Yet, amidst the life-threatening situation, his mind raced frantically, far faster than it had ever before. He quickly stood and shouted,

"Wait!" The young master bellowed, waving his hands wildly. Seeing this, Yan Xiaobao raised his arm, signaling Deng Wu to cease his attack. The three beast souls flanking their group stood their ground, keeping the guards at bay.

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Chapter 459 One-on-One Struggle

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"Killing everyone here benefits none of us," the young Master said. His mind was restless with fear, worried about how he would extricate himself from this situation. Even if he somehow managed to deal with the man here, he would still have to return home and inform his father of the battle's result.

"I'm listening," Yan Xiaobao said hesitantly. Though he knew he could overpower everyone present, he also understood that if they ended up fighting the entire family, it would bring significant trouble. It

wasn't something he could take lightly. Nevertheless, if anyone dared to threaten his friends, Yan Xiaobao would endure all hardship to overcome them.

"Next week, we will have a one-on-one battle in the arena," the young Master said with a serious expression.

"In the arena, battles are to the death—no one is allowed to defy the verdict. If you lose, you must hand over the beast to us. If we lose, we will never bother you or your friends again." The young Master's plan was for a one-on-one fight. Though the Necromancer possessed a soul shadow, if it was a one-on-one match, there was a chance he could be defeated.

"No deal," Yan Xiaobao's voice cut through the crowd, extinguishing the sliver of hope the young Master had begun to hold.

"Arena battles will work to your advantage," said the white-haired boy, his voice devoid of emotion, presenting only the facts.

"If we lose, we must give up Sha Yun? Fine. But if you lose, you'll have to hand over ten thousand Demon Coins or Demon Cores." His voice was steady and firm.

For any family, ten thousand Demon Cores was no trivial sum. If the Demon Dance Family weren't as renowned as they were, they might not have so many liquid assets, but the young Master carefully weighed their options.

The first option was that they could all die here. The second option was to fight them, in which they would likely emerge victorious. It was clear which of the two options the young Master preferred. When he nodded with a smile, his choice was evident.

"Four days from now, at high noon, let our two groups battle each other." He spoke before quickly fleeing the scene to return home and inform his father of the matter.

Back at the Mercenary Guild, the entire team was under intense pressure. None of them could truly enjoy a leisurely stroll or reflect fondly on their meals. Instead, they were all deeply angered by the thought of facing a battle in the arena.

Entering the Mercenary Guild, Xu Biao stood waiting at the front, arms crossed over his chest. When they walked into the courtyard, his eyes seemed to scold them.

"Seriously, I leave you alone for one day. One day! And you go provoke the Demon Dance Family! Why not go and insult the City Lord while you're at it?!"

Hearing Xu Biao's scolding in this manner brought a smile to Yan Xiaobao's face. The more he was chastised, the more he smiled, happy to receive the elder's care.

"It's fine," Yan Xiaobao said with a grin. "I'll do everything in my power to ensure we don't have to give up Sha Yun," he added casually. He didn't even consider Deng Wu's strength in the upcoming fight, even though he ranked as the strongest.

"This is no good!" Xu Biao said sternly, his expression grave. "They might use their strongest man. While the family head and elders won't intervene, the family still controls several King-level experts. You're just a Master-level cultivator—how do you expect to win against a King-level opponent?!"

"Don't worry," Yan Xiaobao replied again, a confident smirk forming on his face. "I have a way to protect my life and deal with a King-level expert. Although I can't use it often, I can use it in the next battle. For Sha Yun, I will give it my all."

Xu Biao and Xie Lan were stunned upon hearing this. Both were sure they had already seen the limits of his abilities during the battle with the Horned Snake, and later when he helped them escape the illusions of the Endless Forest. Yet here he was, claiming he hadn't given his all. The shock was enormous.

"Let's say I believe you," Xu Biao hesitated, his voice still riddled with doubt. "Even if you manage to defeat one of their men, they'll likely involve their elders, and eventually, the family leader might step in. Do you truly have the strength to handle all of that at once?"

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao took a moment to think. After contemplating, he nodded. "At the very least, I can survive. But as long as I win the first fight, they will swear to leave me alone. For the rest of the time, I'll remain in the Demon Residence Cave."

The young man's certainty in his voice caused significant unease in Xu Biao's heart. The white-haired boy clearly knew his abilities well. Until now, everything he had said had proven accurate, leaving the elder somewhat convinced that Yan Xiaobao's words were true. Yet, at the same time, doubt persisted.

A Master-level cultivator was endlessly weaker than a King-level expert. The gulf between them was vast, even worlds apart, and wasn't something that could be bridged with Advanced Spiritual Art Skills alone.

Nevertheless, the young man seemed unwavering in his confidence. In the end, Xu Biao sighed and nodded. "If you can defeat the person they send, we will stand by your side and ensure they dare not take any further action. But if they win, I'm afraid there's nothing we can do. The rules of the arena are absolute."

#### Chapter 460 One-on-One Struggle\_2

Yan Xiaobao nodded. He had already guessed so much, but he wasn't too worried about this battle. His determination was steadfast, and he was prepared to use his soul fusion with Lan Feng for the first time. Whether the bird liked it or not, now was the moment for Yan Xiaobao to harness the energy refined by Phoenix. To save a friend, he would give it his all.

"Do you plan to ask for permission first?" Lan Feng sighed deeply. Even if he opposed it, there was no way to stop Yan Xiaobao. Their souls were merged, and because of this fusion, the bird could refine more martial power at a time. But equally, because of this fusion, Yan Xiaobao could access energy without asking for permission. Everything belonging to Lan Feng also belonged to Yan Xiaobao.

"Even if you refuse, nothing will change," Yan Xiaobao said with a sigh. "Would requesting permission make you feel better?"

"No," Lan Feng chuckled sarcastically. "Though I'd like to say no, I know this is a very critical situation."

"I won't take over your body and do it for you," Phoenix continued. "Instead, you can throw yourself down together with my martial power, just don't get yourself killed."

Upon hearing Lan Feng's approval of his plan, Yan Xiaobao felt as if a giant weight had been lifted from his shoulders. Gratitude filled his entire soul, causing the Phoenix within his Dantian to proudly ruffle its feathers.

"In this world, death is always looming," Phoenix warned Yan Xiaobao. "We shouldn't fear death, as long as it's something we encounter on the path of vengeance. Some things are more important than living, and one of those things is friendship. Sha Yun is an important friend. If you don't stand by her, then I will lose respect for you."

These words brought a bitter smile to the white-haired man's face. Since entering the underground city, this was the most he'd ever heard from Phoenix. Yet now was the ideal moment for these words. This was the most dangerous situation they had faced since arriving in these caves.

"You know, you could always ask her for something to thank you for saving her," Lan Feng continued. But before he could finish clarifying what Yan Xiaobao should ask for, the young man interrupted him. "I refuse to give birth to any snake babies. That's enough. Go refine some more martial power; we all need it."

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After finishing his conversation with Lan Feng, Yan Xiaobao, like everyone else, returned to his room. Yan Xiaobao sat on the bed, entering into meditation, slowly allowing the tranquil blue cloud to encircle him.

Unlike last time, Yan Xiaobao maintained complete control, ensuring the cloud didn't leave his room. With the essence of the sky and earth flooding into the small chamber, one could feel how charged this space became. The vitality entered his body and was refined into Qi and spiritual energy.

The blue cloud operated in the same manner as the stone he had just obtained. When the two were combined, Yan Xiaobao's refinement speed for Qi would become extraordinary, surpassing even the world's most talented individuals.

Though this practice came with its drawbacks, Yan Xiaobao couldn't sustain it for long before he would have to stop to stabilize his energy. As he trained in skill after skill, he pushed the limits of the small chamber.

While these skills weren't enough to defeat a King-level expert, they were sufficient to stabilize his Qi and spiritual energy and help it progress steadily. Even if he had to rely on Lan Feng's martial power, it

was clear he would leverage his spiritual energy to its fullest extent, as well as his Qi and everything he possessed himself.

During his nighttime training, he never noticed the sun setting outside the window nor the moon beginning to glow. Sha Yun entered the room carrying two lightweight stones and some food. The only thing the young man took note of was his energy—slowly but steadily stabilizing drop by drop within his body. His goal was to fully stabilize all of his energy before he was required to fight.

One day passed, then another, with not much attention paid to these days, until finally, the day arrived when Hui Hui was scheduled to fight in the arena.

\* knock \*\* knock \*

Xu Biao slowly opened the door after hearing the knock. His heart churned like never before, worry etched across his face. Over the past days, the Guild Master had been observing Yan Xiaobao. Everything he saw had been simple, standard skills the white-haired man had used in the past. There were no new or surprising attacks, no evidence that Yan Xiaobao could defeat a King-level expert.

Yet, even though Xu Biao was deeply worried, it was now too late to do anything about the battle. He sighed profoundly and gazed at the young man who had become a close friend.

"Are you ready?" was all he could manage to ask, fearing this might be his last conversation with the friend.

Seeing the anxiety on Xu Biao's face, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but flash a gentle smile. His pale hand lightly patted the old man's shoulder. The smile on his face showed no signs of pain or defeat. In his ice-blue eyes lay an unyielding certainty of victory, though Xu Biao couldn't fathom where it came from.

As they left the room, Sha Yun, Deng Wu, and Wang Julong said nothing. They each slowly patted Yan Xiaobao on the shoulder before joining him and walking behind him, together leaving the Mercenary Guild.

Through the small town's bustling streets, they pressed onward toward the arena, the roads becoming more crowded as they approached.

Unlike Mercenary City, this arena wasn't used for annual competitions. Instead, it served to settle disputes that had no other resolution but battle. Ultimately, in this world, the strong were right, and the weak had to yield.

Though one might think the arena was a constantly crowded place, battles didn't happen as often as one might expect. This scarcity led to some fights becoming rather popular when they did occur. It was extremely rare for both participants to survive the battles. Most often, one's death occurred due to the severity of their injuries.

Upon reaching the arena, Xu Biao led the group through a side entrance, guiding them to the underground quarters. They settled in a cold chamber below.

"We can accompany you until you step onto the stage," the Guild Master explained. "But once you're on the stage, we won't be able to assist you in any way. The moment you stand there, only defeat of your opponent will allow you to leave."

"Everything will be fine," Yan Xiaobao reassured the concerned Guild Master once more. The battle he was about to face wasn't for entertainment, nor was it a challenge he had chosen for personal advancement.

This was a fight Yan Xiaobao was engaging in to protect his friend—the friend who had shown him indisputable loyalty and had always been the first to stand by his side. If Yan Xiaobao didn't fight and secure victory, he would lose the right to call himself Sha Yun's friend.

Stepping into the arena, Yan Xiaobao spotted another group gathered on the opposite side of the stage. The group consisted of four individuals, three of whom wore extravagant clothing, promptly eliminating them as potential opponents in the white-haired man's assessment.

Having dismissed three of the four, Yan Xiaobao shifted his focus to the last man. This individual appeared to be in his thirties, with a face framed by rugged facial hair and sharp, piercing eyes.

His upper body was exposed, displaying a muscular and powerful physique. His hands were at least three times the size of Yan Xiaobao's, not to mention his height seemed two heads taller, his width three times broader.

As Yan Xiaobao observed this man, his senses heightened with vigilance. It was evident the man had invested substantial effort in physical conditioning and muscle strengthening. This suggested he might not have spent equal time training in martial power techniques, which was advantageous for Yan Xiaobao—a young man untested against such formidable strength and energy in the past.

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