

Medical 461

Chapter 461: After All, A Master

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Although Yan Xiaobao had the ability to control Wuwei Lanfeng's refinement, it is important to remember that, after all, he was still just a Master. The only reason he entered Wu Wei's domain was because there was a Phoenix in his Dantian Cave. Although this Phoenix was a Saint, sadly, it had not made Yan Xiaobao one.

Fortunately for Yan Xiaobao, a King-level expert ranks as the first layer of the Upper Dantian. Their understanding of Wu Wei's strength and the overall concept of power is far inferior to a Saint's, meaning the two sides might wield comparable energy in today's battle.

Yan Xiaobao let out a deep sigh and nodded to his friends one last time before stepping onto the stage. Everyone on the stage was visibly tense, watching to see what would unfold. Once the challenge was issued, rumors spread rapidly throughout the city; rumors that said the participants would include a Master specializing in necromancy.

What was happening now was a duel between a young Master-ranked individual stepping forward and, though remarkable, it was still evident he was only a simple Master. He could never hope to contend with a King Ranking Expert from the opposing side.

Standing on the stage, a muscular man in his designated corner laughed heartily upon seeing his opponent. His eyes narrowed with amusement as his booming laughter echoed.

"Careful now," said the young Master, one of the three participants in the arena. His warning seemed more insulting than helpful to the brawny man.

"This'll be a walk in the park," the man chuckled. "Don't worry, young Master, I'll kill him for you, and then you can claim that magical beast of his."

With that, the muscular man stepped forward, heading toward the stage itself. Just as he was about to fully enter, he stopped, raising an arm toward the heavens. At first, a small cheer could be heard, but

before long, the cheers grew louder and louder. The entire arena erupted in applause and roars for the muscular man, who smirked smugly in self-satisfaction.

Arrogant and utterly pleased with himself, the man glanced at Yan Xiaobao, only to see the young man staring at him with complete indifference. No matter what the muscular man did, there was no reaction. Instead, Yan Xiaobao's eyes were locked onto every movement the giant made, memorizing and analyzing them all.

"Today!" the giant started shouting, his voice silencing the crowd that was still cheering him on. "Today, you shall bear witness to a battle of life and death between me and this young lad!"

Every word he said echoed across the entire stage. Unlike Zhou Long or Yan Xiaobao, who spoke in natural or subdued tones, every listener could clearly hear his voice. It was not one filled with power or vitality—it simply boomed with sheer volume!

"This duel comes with two prizes!" he continued, basking in the audience's response. "If we win, we'll claim that serpent beast over there. If these challengers triumph, they'll earn some Demon Coins from our clan."

"Everyone here is a witness to this agreement. As with all matters in the arena, disputes initiated here will conclude with the loser's blood!"

At this point, he could no longer speak, as the arena's uproar drowned him out. Aside from the audience's screams and cheers, nothing could be heard. Yet Yan Xiaobao paid them no mind.

Yan Xiaobao panted lightly, staring at the man before him. This was a battle to the death, which meant there were no rules. Anything one chose to do would be valid. If anyone fell from the stage, the opposing side would win. Beyond that, nothing was off-limits.

As the battle approached its beginning, Yan Xiaobao began spreading his Qi, forming a Qi Guard around him. That was not enough. He also unleashed his spiritual energy, letting it encase his body in a silvery glow, shielding him from forthcoming harm.

Initially, he decided to test out this new opponent. He summoned three fireballs—all red, or rather, orange.

These fireballs were Yan Xiaobao's standard attack. He intended to use them to probe the man before him. As they were hurled forth, they enlarged rapidly, absorbing more and more essence from heaven and earth along the way.

As he cast these fireballs, Yan Xiaobao utilized his spiritual energy to make them move at a speed imperceptible to the naked eye. And yet, a King Ranking Expert could clearly track the fire's trajectory. With a confident smirk, the opponent allowed the fireballs to explode against his chest, showing barely any visible damage.

Both sides were momentarily shocked. Although the opponent was a King-level expert, Yan Xiaobao had anticipated his flames would inflict more damage than just a minor burn on his opponent's skin. On the other hand, the opponent never imagined that mere firepower from a Mage could mar his supposedly impervious body.

Gauging the disparity between their strengths, both sides hesitated briefly. But after mentally calming himself with the constant reminder that his adversary was "just a Master," the King Ranking Expert finally made his move.

Charging forward, the King unleashed golden light emanating from his body, specifically from his forehead, his Upper Dantian.

This golden light did not swirl around his robust frame like Yan Xiaobao's spiritual energy and Qi. Instead, it floated toward his head and coalesced into a massive halberd. Fixing his gaze on it, he let out a thunderous roar, aiming it directly at the young man before him.

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Watching the rapidly approaching man, Yan Xiaobao did not panic. Unlike the King Ranking Experts, he was fully aware of his own lack of strength. Thus, he activated Velocity Flow, creating a clone and dodging to the side.

The King did not realize the figure before him was a clone. In a full-power swing, he cleaved the clone in half.

He did not laugh loudly and proudly as many had expected. Instead, feeling the lack of resistance, he became solemn and austere.

This King-level expert had killed many before and was well-acquainted with the sensations of cutting a human. Yet, no resistance could be felt this time. His brows furrowed as he realized the young man had escaped his range, leaving a copy behind. Facing an opponent capable of moving so swiftly, whose actions he couldn't even perceive, was something he had to respect.

However, such respect would never make him relent. On the contrary, he turned around, directing himself toward the corner of the stage where Yan Xiaobao had retreated.

The giant wasn't the sole person deeply astonished by Yan Xiaobao's movement techniques; all those knowledgeable about martial arts were stunned to see a Master evade the full-force strike of a King-level expert. This feat required far more than ordinary skill.

Though his agility amazed the audience and his opponent alike, it didn't change the fact that winning required much more than just evading blows—a fact Yan Xiaobao understood better than anyone.

The flames Yan Xiaobao had conjured earlier did little beyond lightly scorching his opponent's skin. With a grim expression, Yan Xiaobao generated another flame, keeping as far from his opponent as possible.

"Well, let's see if this works," he murmured. A tremor rippled through his body as he merged a drop of Lan Feng's spiritual energy into his own. Though only a small amount, the energy drop carried elemental affinity. The red flame in the young man's hand rapidly shifted colors—from red to white, and then to blue.

Seeing the blue flame in Yan Xiaobao's hand, everyone was shaken; both the members of the Demon Dance Family and the Mercenary Guild chose to support Yan Xiaobao.

Witnessing the blue flame, everyone understood this wasn't an ordinary fire, nor was it a mere basic flame.

Historically, flames were ranked by their colors. Red denoted natural fire, orange was stronger than red, white was an even greater tier, but blue flames were pure manifestations of elemental affinity—fire that was fire itself.

Few knew much about such flames. As the audience cheered for Yan Xiaobao due to the flame's beautiful and unusual color, the head of the Demon Dance Family narrowed his eyes. A cold atmosphere enveloped him as he shot his young son a resentful look.

"Why would you insult someone so talented? At least he's not strong, or we'd be in serious trouble. How many times have I told you never to judge people by appearances?!" The family leader cursed his son in a low voice while watching the battle unfold. The blue flame made him uneasy, but so long as this was the boy's trump card, things shouldn't be too dire.

The Demon Dance Family wasn't alone in their shock. Opposite them, Xu Biao was astounded by the blue flame Yan Xiaobao displayed before everyone. The boy's blue eyes matched the hue of the flames.

Realizing the significance of the flame, the Guild Master finally understood that things were not as they seemed, and Yan Xiaobao was far more intriguing than he had expected. If he could conceal the power of this blue flame, there was no telling what other secrets he could keep.

The Demon Dance Family hoped the blue flame would be Yan Xiaobao's last line of survival, but Xu Biao and the Mercenary Guild only wished it marked the beginning of something greater.

Ignoring both sides, Yan Xiaobao increased the flame's size before him, then, as before, hurled it at the giant rushing toward him.

Yan Xiaobao fixed his gaze on his opponent. This time, however, the giant chose not to touch the fire directly but instead stamped on the ground, managing to sidestep out of the blue flame's path.

Seeing the giant successfully evade the blue flame, a satisfied grin spread across his face. Once again, he stomped heavily on the ground, propelling himself forward with his legs as he shot toward the young man ahead of him.

Wu Wei's golden radiance exploded from within once more, forming a halberd-like shape, slicing toward the bewildered boy in a crescent arc.

Again, Yan Xiaobao appeared to be sliced in half. However, just like before, it was merely a clone. A sudden sense of peril surged in the giant's heart as the young man appeared right behind him, holding two blue flames in his hands.

As a King-ranking giant expert, his halberd abruptly shifted mid-swing. The edge suddenly redirected itself toward Yan Xiaobao.

A deafening explosion echoed. The stage's floor disintegrated into sand. The sand was flung outward, obscuring everyone's view.

Only after a while could the figures of the two combatants still standing on the stage be seen. Neither of them moved.

"Too shallow, huh?" Yan Xiaobao remarked with a grin. His body had been sliced open, and blood dripped from his wounds onto the ground.

The opponent did not reply. He didn't react at all for one simple reason—his right arm, the one wielding the martial power halberd, was burned black. The scorching stench of charred flesh wafted into the audience, causing a few to turn pale.

Although the wound looked grim, losing control of his right arm wasn't as disastrous as it seemed. Yet this development left Yan Xiaobao in a perilous spot.

As Yan Xiaobao was about to curse his luck, a green tint suddenly emerged around the wounds on his body. This green pearl seemed to harbor a will to mend its residence, filling Yan Xiaobao with renewed hope.

"Looks like I truly have no choice," he murmured while noticing the pitiful expression on his opponent's face. The wound he had suffered rapidly healed, once again shocking the audience and the two opposing factions.

The green tint was a major surprise to the Demon Dance Family. The leader's eyes narrowed once more, and his mood grew heavier as he observed these unfolding events.

"A cultivator with affinity for both wood and fire elements. Wood and fire!" he spat at his son. "He could become an alchemist. Perhaps he already is one. Yet you had to go and insult him!"

"At this point, we cannot afford to lose to him," the family head continued. "If we do, every powerful family will strive to gain his favor, leaving us to be trampled beneath their feet!"

Upon hearing this, the young leader of the Demon Dance Family trembled slightly, imagining how much his world would change if his association with an esteemed family were severed.

While the Demon Dance Family reeled in shock, they were not the most astounded. That honor fell to Xu Biao. The Guild Master had seen Yan Xiaobao use both fire and earth previously and knew firsthand the young man's affinity was with these two elements. How, then, could he suddenly wield the wood element?

As the two factions remained preoccupied with their astonishment over his elemental affinity, Yan Xiaobao did not revel in the sensation of his healed wounds. Instead, he shut his eyes briefly, focusing intently. His consciousness reached out to the phoenix within his Dantian Cave, pulling threads to bind the two forces together. For the first time ever, golden energy seeped down these threads, infiltrating Yan Xiaobao's consciousness, then coursing throughout his entire body in waves of power unlike anything he had ever experienced.

When he opened his eyes, the inner blue glow transformed into a brilliant gold radiance. Both his body and the surrounding green tint were overtaken by this golden aura, which was so abundant that it began leaking from his very being.

Unlike the King-level expert before him, Yan Xiaobao lacked an Upper Dantian. Instead, the golden energy from Lan Feng poured outward, allowing him to wield it at will.

Soon, a massive golden hand materialized in the air. It was one of the few visible attacks Yan Xiaobao could create, and replicating it in an instant caused Xu Biao's eyes to widen in disbelief.

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Chapter 463: The Aura of a Master Level Expert

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Xu Biao was not the only one whose core was shaken and who stared agape. The entire arena was so silent that the sound of a pin dropping would have been deafening. No one doubted that Yan Xiaobao was a Master-level expert. Even now, if someone looked at him, they could feel the aura of a Master-level expert emanating from him; yet the golden energy, Wu Wei-like, appeared vast and endless as it surged out of his small body.

His palm expanded, growing continuously above Yan Xiaobao's head. Finally, after a moment, the giant realized retreat was no longer an option. Wu Wei gushed forth from his body, forming the shape of a halberd. Unlike the previous two times, this halberd was smaller. But in case it wasn't powerful enough to pierce through the palm, some of the martial power donned protective layers of a cultivator's defense around the halberd.

Time seemed to stop. Everyone in the audience was silent, not daring to breathe. The patriarch of the Demon Dance Family's eyes were bloodshot, his heart gnawed by anxiety, just like his son's fate hanging precariously.

Meanwhile, Deng Wu, Sha Yun, and Wang Julong wore smiles on their faces. Their excited expressions showed their unwavering trust in their friend and absolute confidence in his success.

They weren't the only ones displaying such excitement. Both Xu Biao and even Xie Lan were filled with astonishment and thrill as they watched the battle unfold. Regardless of who won, this was an event that would be talked about for months, resounding through the entire Dantian Cave and potentially even beyond. A Master-level expert who had mastered Wu Wei was an unprecedented sight.

The palm slowly descended from the air. At that moment, crackling sounds could be heard, and in an instant, as Wu Wei still flowed into it, Yan Xiaobao's entire body turned golden.

The sudden burst of sound marked his sudden ascent. Within his Dantian Cave, a small fissure cracked and collapsed, releasing two golden wings that instantly sprouted on Yan Xiaobao's back. These wings began absorbing Wu Wei, and as they drank in the abundant energy, they grew significantly larger in size.

Moments later, the palm hovered lower than Yan Xiaobao. Trusting his instincts, his speed increased rapidly as he prepared to collide with the halberd.

The moment the two forces collided, a golden explosion erupted. The clashing energy surged violently in all directions. Even the audience was nearly overwhelmed by the raw power emanating everywhere.

Yan Xiaobao halted the continuous flow of Wu Wei. Slowly, the newfound wings on his back decreased in size, allowing the young figure to descend to the utterly shattered stage below. The entire platform, ravaged by this young man's raw power, stood as a testament to his might. And yet, what lingered most powerfully in their minds was an indelible image—a beautiful white-haired angel descending from the heavens.

When Yan Xiaobao landed on the stage once more, he enveloped his body with spiritual energy and activated the Qi Guard. As the final dust settled, they stood still, revealing whether he had decisively defeated his opponent or if he still needed to draw upon Lan Feng's painstakingly cultivated powers.

Gradually, everything faded into stillness. Holding his breath, Yan Xiaobao stared ahead, only to find broken stones before him. His opponent left nothing behind. Even as the Demon Dance Family ascended the stage to search for the giant's remains, they could locate nothing. Begrudgingly, they gnashed their teeth and admitted defeat.

The entire city was in an uproar upon hearing the outcome of the match. And when news spread that the victor had fought a King-level expert from the Demon Dance Family, shock rippled even deeper through the populace.

At first, everyone speculated that the King-level expert had intentionally thrown the match. However, as recordings of the battle spread across the entire city, everyone was shaken to their core by the image of a Master-level cultivator wielding Wu Wei with such mastery.

A rumor quickly began to circulate that Yan Xiaobao wasn't actually a Master-level cultivator at all, but in truth, a King—perhaps even an Emperor—training in secrecy and concealing his true cultivation base.

While rumors flew around outside, Yan Xiaobao secluded himself within the Mercenary Association, refusing to meet with anyone from the city and only seeing his close friends. Though Yan Xiaobao had

wielded Lan Feng's Wu Wei, his body suffered greatly, having endured the complete remolding and strengthening of every cell by the energy.

When a person unlocks their upper Dantian, their body undergoes a thorough purification, leaving nothing as it once was.

The vast amount of Wu Wei within his body forced Yan Xiaobao through such an intensive purification. However, his body had not yet been adequately prepared for this, resulting in a violent backlash that confined the young man to bed.

The moment Yan Xiaobao left the arena, he was only faintly conscious. But upon arriving at the Mercenary Guild, he quickly collapsed and fell into a deep sleep for the next five days.

On the fifth day, when he awoke, it was still dark outside, but the young man couldn't help but chuckle as he noticed Deng Wu sleeping on the floor before him, Sha Yun curled up beside him, and Wang Ju fast asleep on a chair nearby.

He slowly attempted to extricate himself from Sha Yun's tail. When his eyes landed on the defenseless expression on Wang Julong's face, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but laugh even harder. It took a great deal of self-restraint to resist stroking her soft cheek. After a while, Yan Xiaobao finally made his way to the bathroom.

Looking down, he noticed his body was covered in filth from impurities expelled by Wu Wei. Yet beneath this grime, his body felt more powerful than ever before. He began to see how his body had benefited greatly from Wu Wei's purifying energy.

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However, just as his happiness reached its peak, a parched voice echoed from deep within the Dantian Cave: "Everything here is delightful, and you've benefited from it, but the martial power I've left behind is negligible. Don't count on me, and certainly don't expect me to waste my essence on a wasteful brat like you anytime soon!"

Hearing Lan Feng's words, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but laugh sheepishly. Indeed, the energy that had brought such profound changes and immense benefits to the white-haired young man had all come from the painstaking refinement by Wu Wei over the years with Phoenix's aid.

Like spiritual energy, once energy is utilized, it doesn't replenish itself automatically—even if the body relaxes—because there's no Dantian. Everything refined materializes solely within the soul itself. It's as though the soul acts as a box trapping it, but once it escapes, it never returns.

Undoubtedly, they had known this from the very beginning. Even so, they agreed that competing alongside the ranking experts of the King was the best possible solution. This way, they could show everyone within the Demon Residence Cave that they were not to be mocked.

The day prior, while thinking about the upcoming battle, Yan Xiaobao finally scrubbed all the grime off his skin before entering the warm water bath, letting the heat soothe his aching muscles.

As he submerged in the water, the young man's consciousness slowly drifted toward his Dantian Cave, where he approached the newly opened cave.

Up until now, four out of the nine caves had opened. The first, Bloodlust, was undoubtedly the largest and also the most enigmatic energy Yan Xiaobao couldn't comprehend. He avoided trying to understand it further, fearing that the more he used it, the greater the likelihood he might completely lose control of himself.

The second cave emanated the Serene Cloud. This cloud had always been a source of aid for the young man; it seemed to possess a will of its own, often helping suppress the red fog. Yet recently, the Serene Cloud had begun to exhibit peculiar behavior, and to some extent, it started controlling other cultivators enveloped within its cloud. Yan Xiaobao chose not to fully subdue the cloud, allowing it to act on its own—albeit occasionally placing its host in tense situations.

The third cave was no better. Whatever Yan Xiaobao tried seemed to have little effect. By far, this cave's sphere—which possessed the ability to heal wounds—would be considered the most valuable to anyone, but sadly, its actions were driven by uncontrollable phenomena. The sphere automatically healed him whenever it sensed it had drawn something from him. At least, that was his theory.

Regarding the sphere, it had seemingly returned to its usual size. After healing the young man, it had shrunk to the size of a pea. Over time, it gradually expanded and had now reached its former dimensions, though it still appeared to be growing, leaving Yan Xiaobao utterly puzzled. The emerald gemstone remained incomprehensible in every aspect.

Walking past the three known caves, he hastened toward the fourth cave, his heartbeat quickening. Memories of soaring through the skies with wings on his back filled him with incredible exhilaration, almost leaving him intoxicated with delight.

Standing before the cave entrance, his eyes widened in surprise at the sight of two small wings floating at the center of everything. These wings were so diminutive that, had they been worn on his back, they wouldn't even be noticed—a mere centimeter in height, about the size of a finger.

"They're growing alongside Wu Wei," Lan Feng remarked upon noticing the puzzled expression of the other man's face.

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao felt a pang of disappointment. The sensation of flying through the air was something he deeply yearned to experience again soon, but now he understood that without Lan Feng's assistance or reaching the Upper Dantian, it would be impossible. Still, looking at the wings brought a slight smile to his youthful face as the feeling lingered throughout his body. Flying had undoubtedly been one of the most remarkable experiences in this new world.

Returning to his body, Yan Xiaobao exited the bath, beginning to analyze the exact bodily transformations that had occurred during Wu Wei's eruption. The first thing he discovered was that the removal of impurities allowed Qi and spiritual energy to flow within his body far more efficiently than before. Organ reinforcement using Qi had also become significantly easier due to reduced resistance in the process.

Secondly, as he moved his body, he found its elasticity had improved exponentially. Each cell had been reconstructed by Wu Wei, granting his original strength and recovery capabilities far greater levels than that of an ordinary Middle Dantian cultivator.

Power and resilience weren't the only aspects that saw improvement, however. Within his body, there existed a mode of transportation known as meridians. These meridians acted as vessels for Qi movement. The meridian network consisted of twelve regular pathways and eight extraordinary vessels.

Together, these meridians formed a spiderweb-like system within his body, interconnecting various regions and enabling Qi to traverse every part freely.

Every individual possesses twelve regular meridians that are commonly used to circulate Qi within the body. Behind them, however, lies a set of eight sealed meridians. These can only be unlocked at certain points in one's life, or through forceful means if someone manages to open them.

Extraordinary meridians bolster the twelve conventional meridians while storing surplus Qi, allowing the body to benefit from a constant influx of energy.

Out of these extraordinary meridians, Yan Xiaobao had managed to unlock two. The first was the Chongmai Meridian, which permitted Qi to merge into the body itself, fortifying organs with the essence of energy.

The second was the Du Mai Meridian, referred to as the Governance Ship. Previously, Lan Feng had explained its significance in binding all yang meridians together, which would be critical for achieving King-level status. For now, however, this meridian served as a repository for excess Qi.

To his shock, following the reconstruction of his body, Wu Wei had opened a total of not two but three extraordinary meridians. Yan Xiaobao noticed the velocity at which Qi coursed through his body drastically increased, not to mention the amplified speed at which his body absorbed the essence of heaven and earth. Refinement was happening at faster rates as energy streamed through newly opened channels, transforming even greater amounts of Qi.

The second and third newly opened meridians were the Yin-Yang Heel Blood Vessels, Yin and Yang Qiaomai. As these vessels opened, Yan Xiaobao realized his refinement speed had escalated profoundly. Not only had it quickened, but through testing, it became evident that activating Velocity Flow didn't require a conscious effort anymore—it was active the moment he thought of using the skill. His newfound activation speed was so rapid that Yan Xiaobao was newly confident in his ability to evade even a King-level expert.

Another advantage of these vessels was that Yan Xiaobao no longer needed sleep. Qi flowed through his body in unprecedented ways, ensuring his mind and body stayed constantly refreshed while rejuvenating his entire system.

The physical changes weren't limited to strength and elasticity either. Opening three extraordinary meridians had also renewed his skin, banishing all old wounds or scars. His formerly pale complexion now emitted a peculiar golden glow.

Leaving the bathroom, Yan Xiaobao was clearly satisfied with the transformations in his body. Yet certain matters troubled him—most notably, the fact that he had spent nearly all of the refined energy Wu Wei and Lan Feng had taken years to accumulate. Ultimately, he understood that without channeling such energy into his palm technique, victory would have been impossible.

Yan Xiaobao had been fortunate to wield his Golden Palm against Xu Biao. Otherwise, he doubted he could have conjured any ability capable of countering his opponent's Golden Martial Power Halberd.

Leaving the bathroom and returning to his room, everyone else was still asleep. He quickly drafted a small note detailing his whereabouts and quietly headed to the Mercenary Guild office, slipping away unnoticed.

Leaving the house, anyone who caught sight of the young man immediately displayed profound respect. Most would bow or turn to take a different path. Those who tried to ignore him dared not meet his gaze.

Entering the office, the guards were too deferential to stop him. Instead, they respectfully opened the doors, bowing slightly, just as they would for the Guild Master.

Yan Xiaobao previously hadn't realized how drastically public perception of him had shifted following his victory at the arena, but much had changed.

Though many King-level experts resided within the Demon Residence Cave, the Emperor's entourage was absent. Upon reaching this stage, families would typically migrate to the next cave for an improved quality of life. For the Mercenary Association to host a King-level expert—and one who concealed his cultivation base—was incredibly surprising.

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Chapter 465: Angel of the Mortal World

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In a world where power determines who prevails, maintaining a good relationship with such a genius is crucial. This led every major family in the Capital to send emissaries requesting an audience with him, but the Guild Master rejected them.

Another day passed, and a large crowd stood patiently in front of the Guild Master's office, waiting for their turn. Everyone in the queue seemed to know what answer they would receive, yet the families continued sending people daily, hoping for different news one day.

Seeing the queue, Yan Xiaobao strode forward steadily with measured steps. His skin still showed a faint golden hue from the heavy strike he'd endured from Wu Wei, his head held high, his blue eyes sparkling with intelligence, and his white hair neatly tied at the top of his head.

Anyone who looked at this young man couldn't help but feel astonished at his genuine youth. His aura undoubtedly seemed to be that of a master-level cultivator. Yet, the golden hue surrounding his body made him appear like an angel sent to the Mortal World.

Truthfully, the golden hue was the residue left by Wu Wei's energy embedded in his body – notably in his skin. It would dissipate gradually, but until it did, Yan Xiaobao stood out like a golden boy, radiating brilliance.

As Yan Xiaobao entered the hall of the Mercenary Guild, every gaze was drawn to the white-haired youth making his steady way toward Xu Biao's office.

Though he tried to completely ignore the many people waiting in line, he couldn't help but feel slightly uncomfortable under their stares. It was clear that he was the reason everyone was here, and it seemed as if each person was contemplating whether to approach him. Despite his efforts to ignore them, their gazes unsettled him.

To avoid any awkward situations or uncomfortable conversations, Yan Xiaobao quickly made his way to the office, knocking briskly on the door before entering without waiting for a response.

Upon entering the room, Yan Xiaobao finally let out a sigh of relief, though he stiffened seeing Xu Biao standing around a round table with four other individuals. He had never seen these four men before.

"Uh, sorry," Yan Xiaobao said as he glanced at the group of men before him. "Please forgive my intrusion." He continued, walking toward a window before deftly jumping out of it. He landed in the main courtyard behind the Mercenary Guild, leaving five stunned men staring at the window that had just served as his escape route.

"Is this the privilege of young Yan Xiaobao?" one of the men suddenly asked, his head slightly throbbing as he massaged his temples. Xu Biao responded with a wry smile and a nod. The young man had appeared at the most opportune moment.

"That young man is undoubtedly a master," another man remarked. "Even if he's trying to hide it, the clues would naturally give it away to us cultivators. However, nothing emanates from him directly. Therefore, he must either be a Holy Name Expert or possess some other means to access Wu Wei's power."

The comment immediately sparked a lengthy discussion among the four men. They debated whether Yan Xiaobao could be a Holy Name Expert or if he possessed some legendary artifact allowing him to utilize Wu Wei's power despite his seemingly low cultivation level.

Soon, greed flickered in their eyes as they speculated what kind of legendary artifact could grant someone mastery over Wu Wei's energy despite his apparent youth. But before they could act on any selfish thoughts, Xu Biao slammed his fist onto the table, silencing all conversation.

"Let me remind you of something," Xu Biao said coldly, his icy tone eliciting involuntary shivers from the four men. "Yan Xiaobao is a member of my Mercenary Guild. You hold the position of elders here. Do you truly intend to harm one of our own members?"

"Yan Xiaobao is not only a member of the Mercenary Association but is currently on a mission for the Dragon Army. Do you dare instigate a conflict with them?" As soon as these words left his lips, the faces of the four men turned from sullen to pale, then from pale to outright fearful.

"Yan Xiaobao is our ally. If we work with him rather than exploit him, we stand to gain the most. I will accompany him to the Central Cave and the Dragon Core, assisting him in completing the task he has undertaken. In the meantime, appoint someone as the interim Guild Master. I don't mind. The only person I will take with me is Xie Lan."

After speaking, Xu Biao didn't wait for any replies. He moved to the window and waved his hand, his gaze falling upon the young white-haired man below, who sat against the wall with his eyes closed.

Although Yan Xiaobao's eyes were closed, Xu Biao was entirely certain he had overheard everything that had been said. A subtle smile formed on the Guild Master's face as he shook his head slightly.

"Eavesdropping is quite unbecoming," Xu Biao said cheerfully as he extended an arm, gesturing toward the friend outside the window to assist him. His amicable demeanor softened into a gentle expression on the young man's face.

"Thank you for standing up for me," Yan Xiaobao said with a faint smile as he glanced around to ensure no one was nearby. Assured of their privacy, he accepted Xu Biao's outstretched hand, allowing the older man to help him into the room.

Seated in the room together, the two men didn't exchange any words. Instead, they simply sat in silence, observing their surroundings and letting out occasional sighs. Both felt an unprecedented sense of calm shared between them.

Chapter 466: Angel of the Mortal World_2

After experiencing a life-and-death battle, Yan Xiaobao gained multiple benefits, but his body was still somewhat fatigued, and he was still replenishing his Qi and spiritual energy. Although Xu Biao did not participate in the match, he handled the aftermath on his own, dealing with each family member who requested to meet the young genius in the city. Even the City Lord's mansion sent people to contact the new arrival.

"So, when they came to see me, how did you get everyone to leave?" Yan Xiaobao curiously asked, remembering the long queue outside staring at him like a tiger eyeing its prey.

"Oh, yes." Xu Biao began, "I persuaded them that you're a young master from the Capital with a mission to understand the outside world. I told them that since your task is now complete, you are ready to return to the Capital, and you have no interest in meeting with commoners in this Demon Residence Cave."

"So you made me look like a complete fool, huh?" Yan Xiaobao replied with a smile. Any excuse Xu Biao made was good, but this one was brilliant. It not only explained why Yan Xiaobao was unheard of but also why he had such power and why he appeared in this relatively small cave. Most importantly, it even made it possible for Yan Xiaobao to head to the Capital without anyone questioning him.

The white-haired boy nodded in agreement, found a chair to sit on, and then fell silent in the room. Upon seeing Xu Biao appearing uneasy, the heavy atmosphere pressed upon him.

Seeing the Guild Master seemingly unsure if he should voice his thoughts, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but laugh out loud.

"Do you want to know how I can use the Wood Element and who Wu Wei, always by my side, belongs to?" Yan Xiaobao asked, instead of waiting for his old friend to finally decide.

Hearing the topic brought up without himself, Xu Biao was a bit surprised but didn't waste time and nodded urgently. "I very much want to know," he said enthusiastically as if finding an important insight.

"In the surface world, if you come from a large family, you can merge your soul with a high-level expert, allowing you to occasionally use their power." Yan Xiaobao smoothly lied. While it was a lie, it was close to the truth, and he dared to say, "My soul merged with such an expert who could sense when I was in a desperate situation and lend me his Wu Wei."

Upon hearing about the Soul Fusion, Xu Biao's eyes trembled with excitement. "How can I merge my soul with someone?" he asked curiously, but Yan Xiaobao shook his head, "Merging with someone else isn't a good idea. You basically have someone who can steal your power at will, even if you oppose it."

"The ritual also requires many things I don't have, and I don't know the full process. The senior priestess from the city can perform Soul Fusion."

Although Yan Xiaobao disliked lying to his friend, when he and his fused soul with Lan Feng discussed the truth, he hadn't spent enough time saying it to Xu Biao honestly. However, he managed to gracefully steer away from the topic.

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In the days following the battle, Yan Xiaobao's name rose. So much so that even Mercenary City heard of the battle.

Memory Stones filled with battle records were sold cheaply across the Capital, and soon they appeared in other cities like Mercenary City.

Zhou Long was the first to purchase one of the recordings and watch the battle. Even he was deeply shocked.

Initially, when he heard about the life-and-death battle between Yan Xiaobao and a King-level expert, the Dragon Army's captain was filled with fear, worried that Yan Xiaobao might die.

Zhou Long wasn't concerned for Yan Xiaobao's sake but was focused on his mission rewards; if Yan Xiaobao died, he wouldn't get them. Considering that he was given the items stored by Wu Wei, Zhou Long was surer than ever about their blood relations.

The only thing that annoyed Zhou Long was his task to reduce the number of companions with this young man, but all the assassins sent were killed by Xu Biao. Finding assassin techniques enough to handle two King-ranked experts while leaving Yan Xiaobao alone was absolutely no easy feat.

Zhou Long sighed deeply, picked up the Memory Stone containing the battle against the King Expert, and moved towards the cage. Inside the cage was a black and blue crow, its inner feathers black with tips deep blue.

These crows were called messengers of death; they were what the Dragon Army used when receiving very important news. Thus, these birds were called messengers of death.

Zhou Long now didn't want a judge's opinion but sent off his crow wrapped with a Memory Stone in parchment, writing only one name: Frozen General.

These black and blue crows, messengers of death, were chosen as couriers for their speed. No other Demon Beast even matched half this bird's speed. The crow would reach the Capital in a month, a journey that would take years normally, and after just one month, this bird would reach the Capital.

"Look!" The guard, who took the Memory Stone from the crow's leg, was immediately shocked upon seeing the Frozen General. Anything arriving from the surface had to be handled with special care.

Rushing into the Dragon Army's main office, the guard held the Memory Stone with both hands, his heart pounding with worry about damaging it.

"Commander! Commander!" he shouted, his voice hoarse, eyes wide with fear. "Commander, I've received a message from the Frozen General!"

"Commander! Commander! I've received a message from the Frozen General!" The guard ran through the Dragon Army's main office, his voice hoarse, appearance disheveled. At first, the Dragon Army's leader looked at him disdainfully, but shortly after the panicked guard spoke his way into his mind, he realized his heart rate had skyrocketed.

"You said Frozen General?" he confirmed as he leaned back in his chair. Outside, no one betrayed how his heart kept accelerating, his thoughts unable to make a decision.

If he were to deliver the stone to the Frozen General, but the information it contained was insignificant, even uninteresting to the legendary figure, he might end up being a new member of the Frozen Brigade; however, if he provided something truly exciting, he would receive as many gifts as possible.

Another thing he had to consider was choosing not to share this information, and if the person caught wind of this on the surface, and he had concealed information, then the leader would be in a very bad position.

After all, the Dragon Army's leader let out a deep breath, accepted the Memory Stone, and took decisive steps towards the Hope Staircase.

The Hope Staircase, located within the Dragon Army Headquarters, is the greatest secret of the Dragon Army. It is a set of stairs delving deep underground, straight into the abyss. What lies there is unknown even to the Lord of the Dragon Army; only the president knows and is allowed to descend them.

What the leader could do was enter the staircase and then head to the Central Palace.

The staircase felt like it went on forever, its size unique, and whenever he looked down, the leader felt a bit dizzy as he watched the stairs endlessly disappear into the void. This, coupled with the constant doubt about whether his decisions were justified, made him feel sick.

After walking the stairs for seven hours, when he finally reached the surface, the leader of the Dragon Army found himself surrounded by men in black cloaks. Looking at these black-cloaked men, it was impossible to discern any features at all due to the masks they wore.

The leader slightly trembled, straightened his back, and loudly announced: "I am here to deliver a message to the Frozen General. Please grant me passage."

Upon mentioning the Frozen General, the Crusaders made a path for the leader. None of them spoke, clearly indicating they would not allow unwelcome guests into the underground castle, nor were they interested in letting the leader linger there long.

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Chapter 467: Frozen Land

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The man lightly stepped out of the Central Palace, heading as quickly as possible to the Frozen Castle crafted by General Frozen in the Frozen Land.

The Frozen Land is a deep mountain, located in the depths of the mountains between the Sun Kingdom and the Divine Domain. Decades ago, this territory was taken over by General Frozen, and no one dared to reclaim it.

General Frozen is one of the four pillars supporting them. He also controls the Crusaders along with the Central Palace. His authority is so great that whatever he desires, no one dares to offend him, not even one of the three other pillars.

Considering all of this, the Lord became even more uncertain about the decisions he made, but now he really couldn't return to the Central Palace and the Ladder of Hope unless he sent a message first.

This journey took him three days, arriving at the valley at noon on the third day, white as soft clouds, snow-covered.

Gently shaking for a moment, he stopped. After persuading himself to continue, he took another step and stopped again. He approached the castle very slowly, his heart filled with fear.

Around him were the Crusaders, patrolling the ground, but they did nothing to the cold and terrified Lord, who was walking so slowly towards the Ice Palace.

The Lord took nearly an hour to move from the valley entrance to the castle, an incredibly slow pace, showing how afraid the Lord was. Once he reached the doorknob, he realized there was really no hope of turning back and straightening himself. He took a deep breath before knocking.

After he knocked, the door slowly opened, with no servants present, causing the young Lord's fine hairs to stand on end. Not missing his step, which seemed to ignore his surroundings, he demonstrated a demeanor befitting a Lord, even though he was terrified to his core. He entered the Frozen Castle, walking along a set of light stones towards the room where Zhong Hui sat on the icy throne.

"Welcome to my castle, I'm curious to know what the master of the Dragon Army is doing here." he said, a smile revealing itself on his lips, a genuinely joyful smile.

Zhong Hui was not foolish. Previously, he had sent the Crusaders into the Underworld to hear news about Yan Xiaobao, and now a Lord appeared with his message. How could he not guess what the message was about?

Even God knew he worried that something might have gone wrong. What if this was a video showing General Frozen's favorite theme of death? As he bowed before the powerful man, many thoughts swirled in his mind.

"Milod, I received a Memory Stone," the Lord said, on the ground, lifting his hand and the Memory Stone simultaneously.

Seeing the Memory Stone, a trace of impatience appeared in Zhong Hui's eyes, his hand waved, and the stone was sucked into his palm, the smile on his face greatly increasing.

"Please stand up, my dear friend," Zhong Hui said with a smile, patting a woman who appeared beside him with one hand.

"Take this man to the treasury and let him choose any item he likes," General Frozen said, as if it meant absolutely nothing to him that his treasure was being taken away.

Though Zhong Hui seemed impatient in solitude, the young Lord suddenly impatiently left the room to enter the treasury. Quickly moving to his feet, the Lord once again bowed to Zhong Hui, then turned to follow the silent, cold woman before him.

With the hall left behind, Zhong Hui did not pay attention to the two figures leaving, but instead immediately placed the Memory Stone on his forehead. As the record of life and death began, he beamed with a smile and closed his eyes.

As Zhong Hui re-entered the game, time slowed down. Finally, after watching several times, he removed the stone from his forehead.

His face no longer carried a smile; instead, it seemed he was contemplating something important. After a while, a false smile appeared on his face, which grew larger over time, eventually erupting into loud laughter echoing off the icy walls of his Frozen Castle.

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Hui Yue's excuse for his soul fusion was quickly accepted by Xu Biao, and after some time, the two sat quietly in the headquarters, neither speaking but enjoying the silence.

"I think we should look at the different tasks available," Yan Xiaobao finally sighed, "Ideally, if we can find an escort mission to the Capital, but if we can't, I suppose we'll be fine with whatever comes up for the next few caverns."

Xu Biao nodded, agreeing after some time of searching, then picked up a large book, saying a piece of Parchment fell out.

"This is the book of all ongoing tasks," he explained to Yan Xiaobao's odd expression, "I know it doesn't look like much," he continued with a slightly embarrassed smile, "but it's how we keep track of tasks."

Going through the tasks wasn't as difficult as Yan Xiaobao expected. Initially, Xu Biao cleared the table, then he took out each task to read it. If it was an escort mission, he handed it to Yan Xiaobao; if it was not an escort mission, he put it aside on his own.

Through escort missions, most of them involved escorting wealthy young masters to academies in other cities, hoping they could improve and bring fortune and honor to their families.

Chapter 468: Frozen Land_2

Looking at these escort missions, Yan Xiaobao quickly decided to accept such missions, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't find a mission that led all the way to the final cave.

Ultimately, Yan Xiaobao selected four escort missions. All of these were missions to escort a young master to the academy. They collectively hired at least ten mercenaries, which seemed to be the standard number required for escort missions, and they would leave in a few days, providing everyone the time they needed. Because he knew nothing about the caves they were about to enter, nor which mission would bring them closest to their final destination, he let Xu Biao make the final call.

Once again, Yan Xiaobao escaped through the window, leaving the remaining tasks to Xu Biao as he rushed back to the room where his friends were still sleeping. The reason they were so exhausted was that they had been sitting vigilantly by his side until they could no longer stay awake and fell into a deep sleep. Their bodies were exhausted, and they needed rest.

Back in the office, Guild Master Xu Biao looked at the paper in his hand, nodded finally, and walked towards the door, opening it to face the sea of people outside.

"I need to speak with the envoy from the Zhang Family." he shouted, causing a burst of noise to immediately erupt in the room. This was the first time the Guild Master had summoned anyone. What was more exciting was that earlier today, Yan Xiaobao had already walked through everyone. Was this the time the family finally met the elusive young genius?

The envoy from the Zhong Family immediately stepped out from where he stood in line, slightly bowed to the rest of the line, and proceeded towards the office.

Upon entering the office, the door closed behind him. The envoy was shocked to see that Yan Xiaobao was not in the room; the only other exit was a window, the thought of the genius leaving through the window somehow made the envoy boy smile a bit.

"I've called you because of the task your family requested." Xu Biao began, the man nodded. Even though he knew the escort mission, to guide the young heir towards his academy.

"Yan Xiaobao and his six-person team have already proposed to occupy six positions in this mission," Xu Biao continued as a matter of fact, which left the young man stunned. He had only one thought in his mind; is this for real?

Once the news spread that Yan Xiaobao decided to take on the mission to escort a young master from the city, a huge commotion occurred in the capital. The largest commotion was that there were still four spaces for mercenaries in the mission. These four positions were highly sought after by both mercenaries and family guards.

The family guards did not participate because they were already tired of their jobs as guards and did not apply, because their families were willing to pay huge funds if they managed to perform the mission near Yan Xiaobao.

A simple escort mission turned into a prestigious and highly sought-after mission that everyone applied for.

Applicants had various reasons for wanting to join the team. Some wanted to get close to Yan Xiaobao, while others just wanted to see and meet this unparalleled genius. Some hoped to challenge the young genius to test their own abilities, and there were even some who simply wanted to assassinate the young white-haired boy.

This was a mission that soon occupied all the conversations in the city, and the Yang Family benefited greatly from the fame. Families from all over the city came to visit them; everyone brought gifts, and some even tried to buy the last four spots on the mission.

In the days while the Yang Family enjoyed their newfound fame, Yan Xiaobao and his friends spent all their time preparing again at the Mercenary Guild.

"Do you think we'll encounter more assassins?" Deng Wu raised the question that most people were thinking. Though he asked the question, he already guessed the answer, and his face darkened.

Yan Xiaobao nodded and then replied, "I think we need to expect assassins to appear anywhere in these underground cities."

Everyone nodded, displaying a solemn expression on their faces as they recalled the days wasted in the endless forest fantasy and how Yan Xiaobao pushed himself to the limits, forcing himself to endure the fantasy.

Everyone in the room vowed they would increase their strength so as not to drag their friend down.

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Looking at the men in front of him, Yan Xiaobao frowned slightly, as it was clear the Yang Family had ultimately given up on buying these mission spots. The last four members of this group were clearly not mercenaries who once lived dirty lives in the tunnels; instead, they were neatly dressed, standing there.

After glancing at them once, Yan Xiaobao no longer paid them any attention before looking at the most important person in their group. The young master enrolling at the renowned academy.

His name was Yang Bai, a young man of about twelve. On one hand, he looked like your ordinary teenager looking at Yan Xiaobao with immense respect and awe, but on the other hand, when dealing with others in the group, he was a bit arrogant. The only person he seemed to show respect and admiration for was the white-haired genius.

The mercenaries in the mission were not the only ones; it seemed the entire city showed up at the headquarters of the Mercenary Guild to see the entourage on their journey to the next cave.

The wage involved in this effort was three hundred Demon Coins, and the mercenaries had to handle their own food. Initially, not many people would take such a long time to earn such fleeting money, but now the situation was different with Yan Xiaobao celebrating the fact: they were paid to travel as planned anyway.

Everyone gathered, the mercenaries received half the fee, and without any ceremony, the entourage began their journey to the west tunnel of the Demon Residence Cave.

Unlike before, this caravan was far more sophisticated than anything seen before. Three black iron-made carts were used to transport everyone helping the young master. The young master, his personal servant, and the Yang Family's steward took the first cart.

The second was filled with the Yang Family's guards, and the final transport was left for the mercenaries to use on a shift schedule.

The duty of the mercenaries was to ensure the caravan passed through the caves and tunnels without a scratch, which was much harder than one might imagine.

The group left at dawn. On one hand were Yan Xiaobao and his friends walking together, and on the other, the guards being watched over. While the guards walked with straight backs, watching them precisely, Yan Xiaobao's team was more vigilant, their eyes constantly darting from side to side, observing any slight movement around them.

This was one of the most obvious differences between the mercenaries and the guards. Another was that while the mercenaries all wore robes, the guards were clad in armor made of shiny reflective material; although their armor looked very good, it was not very beneficial in battle.

The weapons they chose were different too. Each mercenary in the group had their own weapon and specialization, but each guard used a halberd. While a weapon with good targeting, it required substantial practice, which the guards lacked.

All in all, Yan Xiaobao didn't put much confidence in the guards, having determined they would encounter bandit attacks and assassins along the way, not to mention powerful tribes and Demon Beasts he doubted these guards could handle.

While the mercenaries felt slight disdain towards the guards walking beside the carts, they felt even more disdain for the guards inside the second cart. Being a cultivator was akin to being a warrior; though sometimes relaxing inside a cart was nice, if attacked, it would turn into a death trap. When they're all inside, how do they expect to exit the cart and save their master, let alone know what was happening around them?

Sighing, Yan Xiaobao no longer wondered about the guards, instead focusing his attention on the road ahead.

Leaving the city was more nerve-wracking than he anticipated. He was very aware they were targets for all sorts of assassins and bandits, and he was sure they wouldn't hold back even inside a city. Thus, the journey took only about an hour, but for Yan Xiaobao and his friends, it felt like an eternity as they were constantly on high alert. They tried to observe everything happening around them.

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Chapter 469: The Expectations of Travel

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Now that they were no longer restricted by the city, the six friends remained vigilant, though in a completely different way. They were now able to observe anyone approaching them, even if it was done at speed. The open plains allowed them to fully perceive their surroundings, giving them an oddly comforting sense of security.

Before the group had to enter the tunnel, they planned to rest for two days in two larger cities. As the group headed toward the first city, Xu Biao took the time to explain these two cities.

"The city we're heading to is led by an old family. It was the first city built within this Demon Residence Cave. In every aspect, it resembles the Capital, except it's not under the control of the Dragon Army. Instead, the family that leads it is like the King and Queen of the city. Don't let anyone mock you, so try to keep your temper in check."

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao was just about to quip that he had never sought out drama, but drama always found him; however, when he saw the expression on Xu Biao's face, he quickly decided to bite his tongue instead and offered an awkward smile.

The day dragged on from morning to noon, and from noon to afternoon, with not even a single break for the caravan. The lucky ones who had secured the last four positions as guards for this mission were panting heavily, their faces flushed, with sweat dripping from their foreheads.

While they were thoroughly exhausted, Yan Xiaobao and his friends walked with ease, their robes fluttering lightly in the breeze. Their faces were healthy, and not a single drop of sweat could be seen on their skin.

As dusk descended upon them, the young master Yang Bai's servant finally opened the carriage door and gave the order to stop for the night and make camp.

Once the command was issued, the guards immediately sat down and took out water from their Memory Stones to quench their thirst.

Yan Xiaobao and his team, already seasoned in camping, had their site fully set up within half an hour. Tents were erected, a campfire roared, slicing through the darkened sky, and a stew simmered warmly over the flames. They sat quietly together, chatting about their expectations for the ongoing journey.

While Yan Xiaobao and his friends sat there watching Wang Julong work on their mouthwatering meal, others weren't as fortunate.

Although the young lord had brought many guards, none of them knew how to cook proper meals, and none had the skills to pitch a tent. All of them had spent their lives in the Capital. The guards belonging to the Yang Family received food as part of their wages, but the dried meat without vegetables smelled nothing like the delicious aroma of the stew nearby.

"Sir! Sir!" Youthful voices echoed across the campsite as the guards from various families struggled to put up their tents. Their gazes immediately focused on the young master, curious about whom he was addressing.

The young master climbed out of his carriage and dashed toward Yan Xiaobao and his friends' camp. There, they were enjoying their stew and chatting about how foolish it would be to encounter an ambush in the city.

"Sir! May I sit with you?" the young master asked, his eyes nearly sparkling as he looked at Yan Xiaobao, as though he were gazing upon a deity.

Yan Xiaobao was slightly unsure of what to say, but after thinking for a moment, he nodded, allowing the boy to join them.

"Someday, I'll be as strong as you," Yang Bai said with conviction in his voice. "I'll go to Qianli River Academy to study. I must be better than my peers—or even my father." As he spoke, mentioning his father brought a nostalgic smile to Yan Xiaobao's face as he thought of his two fathers. The first that came to mind was his late father, who would have done anything to make the young man's dream a reality. He also recalled his second father, who had felt immense pride upon learning that Yan Xiaobao could attend Qianli River Academy.

Seated among the mercenaries, the former arrogance in Yang Bai's eyes had given way to excitement as he looked from one person to another, wearing a wide smile.

Just as he sat down, Wang Julong began portioning out the stew she had made, sharing it with everyone around the campfire, including the young master.

Yang Bai stared down at the bowl of food, his face showing hesitation, unsure if he dared to taste it. But when he saw Yan Xiaobao and his friends eating it happily, he swallowed his reservations—and his saliva—before taking a small spoonful and putting it into his mouth. He immediately noticed that it tasted far better than he had expected.

It was, without a doubt, much tastier than the dry food he had eaten in the carriage earlier that day. His expression brimmed with delight as he polished off the entire portion with a smile.

After finishing his meal, Yang Bai looked at Wang Julong with dreamy eyes. In a flash, like a cat pouncing, he moved to her side, taking her hand and dropping to one knee.

"Will you marry me?" he asked, his eyes still glimmering as he gazed at Wang Julong. His words stunned the entire group.

Sitting next to Yan Xiaobao, Deng Wu leaned in slightly, his mouth near the white-haired boy's ear, and laughed softly. "Looks like you've got yourself a rival!"

Xu Yue felt a bit uneasy at Deng Wu's comment, but dismissed everything he said with a scoff. Still, Deng had been glancing at Wang Julong more frequently since that morning, though he was confident nobody had noticed. Nevertheless, the group's self-proclaimed romance expert had picked up on Yan Xiaobao's subtle changes, leaving him slightly embarrassed.

Chapter 470: The Expectation of Travel_2

Although the quick exchange took place by the campfire, on the other side, Wang Julong was watching the young boy with a blank expression. Then she chuckled lightly, her voice stiff and unnatural as she spoke two fragmented phrases, "I can't..."

Upon hearing these words, Yan Xiaobao felt an impulse to laugh but instead arched his eyebrows, noticing the young Master showed no signs of giving up. Trying to drag her into the carriage, he tightened his grip on Wang Julong's hand.

"Don't worry, I'm old enough to get married. We are already married!" he continued but this time Wang Julong lost her patience. She pulled back slightly and broke free from his grasp.

"I will not marry you," she said flatly, using the tone she reserved for moments when either bored or rebuking Deng Wu's words. Seeing her use that voice with the young Master, Yan Xiaobao finally burst into laughter, unable to hold it in anymore.

When the young Master stormed off toward his carriage, his pouting face was visible. Moments later, Yan Xiaobao and the others could hear loud sounds echoing from inside the carriage, causing them to exchange glances before spotting a servant heading toward their campsite.

Standing beside the mercenaries, the servant immediately bowed deeply and sighed, "I apologize for our young Master and his behavior. This was never intended as an insult to you. He is simply too excitable."

Yan Xiaobao waved his hand dismissively, chuckling, "Don't worry about it," he said. "Even the Giant Dragon rejected the young Lord, so there's nothing worth fretting over."

With those words, Yan Xiaobao waited for a moment before scanning the now pitch-black surroundings. Even though the moon was out, its light was insufficient to illuminate the ground, and an unsettling feeling arose in Yan Xiaobao's heart.

"Return to the caravan and lock yourselves inside," he murmured as he stood up. His friends immediately followed him as they noticed Yan Xiaobao was acting strangely.

Walking from the periphery to the campsite's center, Yan Xiaobao wanted to ensure every guard was stationed where they were supposed to be.

There were three campsites: the first belonged to Yan Xiaobao and his companions, the second to four guards who had purchased spots for the mission, and the last to the guards sent by the Yang Family.

The Yang Family had sent ten guards in total, but as Yan Xiaobao approached their campfire, only nine men were sitting by it, laughing and chatting loudly.

"Where's your last man?" Yan Xiaobao asked quietly, his hairs standing on end as a sense of danger gripped him.

"Wu and Zhu Long," Yan Xiaobao called out softly, "Take Xu Biao and Xie Lan to the young Lord. Ensure no one enters or exits the carriage, and that no one comes close. Keep anyone outside who tries to force their way in. If they persist, kill them."

"He went to relieve himself," one of the guards grumbled, annoyed. "Why should we bother tracking where our men go?"

"How long has it been since he left?" Yan Xiaobao continued to press, clearly irritating the man. While considered a prodigy, the guards didn't care much for him, finding his attempts to instruct them on their job bothersome.

Leaving the nine guards behind, Yan Xiaobao advanced toward the second campfire where the four guards were stationed. He could only sigh as he approached.

All four were present, but they appeared uneasy. As soon as they saw Yan Xiaobao, their eyes lit up with hope.

"There's something in the darkness," one of them said, his face etched with fear. This comment caused Yan Xiaobao to frown slightly, unease creeping into his heart.

"Go to the young Master's carriage and follow the lead of my subordinates," Yan Xiaobao instructed before heading back to confirm the state of things with the nine guards at the other campfire.

Upon returning, he discovered that there were now only eight; another had disappeared. This time, the guards weren't arrogant anymore. Instead, they seemed hesitant, their eyes darting nervously.

"Head to the main caravan and protect the young Master," Yan Xiaobao ordered, his gaze sweeping the ground outside the camp, but he found nothing discerning—no clue about what might lie behind their troubles.

"What about our missing comrades?" one guard asked, his voice trembling slightly. These guards had never faced an ordeal like this before.

"Tomorrow, we'll look for them," Yan Xiaobao replied sternly. While he understood the guards worried for their missing friends, a search would benefit no one. They needed to prepare for an attack.

At the carriage, a new campfire was already lit. Everyone remained vigilant, scanning their surroundings, some startled to see Yan Xiaobao and the remaining Yang Family guards trailing after him.

"Has anything happened here?" Yan Xiaobao asked Xu Biao quietly. The Guild Master, after glancing around, shook his head.

At the forefront, Hui Yue announced that no one was allowed to move unless traveling in groups of four or more. This way, if something happened, they could defend one another.

Night blanketed the area. The moon provided little light to illuminate the campsite; the only illumination came from the main caravan's campfire. All remained on alert, yet nothing out of the ordinary occurred.

As dawn broke over the eastern sky and bathed it in purple hues, the weary guards finally breathed a sigh of relief. Eight Yang Family guards retreated to their own caravan, planning to rest, as the convoy prepared to venture onward into the western tunnel route.

But things did not go as planned. Soon, the camp was pierced by blood-curdling screams, causing Yan Xiaobao and his companions to rush toward the caravan where the screams originated.

When they arrived at the source, Yan Xiaobao's face turned ashen. Instinctively, he raised his hand to cover the young Master's eyes. Blood, accompanied by a stifling stench, wafted from inside the carriage.

"Take him away," Yan Xiaobao commanded curtly. The servant nodded gravely, ushering the butler, the helpers, and Yang Bai away toward the safety of their camp.

"Xu Biao, Xie Lan. Follow them, then enter the carriage to protect the young Master," Yan Xiaobao said in an odd tone. Both obeyed without hesitation and rushed into the carriage to secure the young Lord and his two servants.

Glancing back at the bloody scene inside the caravan, Yan Xiaobao sighed deeply. He felt the red fog within his Dantian stir slightly, but after several deep breaths—with the aid of the blue cloud—he managed to calm himself.

The remains of two guards were inside the caravan, but what he saw was more than just corpses. These men were brutally ripped apart—no intact body parts remained for a burial.

Their limbs were severed, their heads halved, their stomachs ripped open, guts spilling out, leaving the carriage steeped in foul stench.

Staring at the gruesome sight, Yan Xiaobao could instantly discern the carnage. His rapid deduction led him to conclude this wasn't the work of a human—only a Demon Beast could wreak such grotesque havoc.

A dangerous glint flickered in Yan Xiaobao's eyes as he uttered the simple command: "Burn it." Then he walked to the next caravan to relay what they had discovered and his decision.

The decision to burn the caravan displeased the others, as it meant they'd have to proceed on foot. However, there was no alternative. The young captain quickly sided with Hui Yue's suggestion to burn the remains. They were on a road where burial was impossible, and it was no longer feasible to return the bodies to their families. Instead, they burned them, taking a brief moment of pause before their journey resumed. Now, the eight remaining Yang Family guards stood alongside Yan Xiaobao and the mercenaries.

Their pace slowed, and a grim mood settled over them. Despite traveling only a day, they had already lost two men. Worse still, no one had witnessed what—or who—was behind the attacks.

Given the placement of the bodies inside the caravan, one might expect a person to be responsible for the carnage. But the nature of the injuries left no room for doubt—it had to be a beast. Could it be someone who controlled such a beast? And whoever it was, why would they target the convoy? They had neither offended anyone nor sought profit—their sole purpose was to escort the young Master to the academy.

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