

The Order 10021

Chapter: 10021

The commotion had been completely contained within the small room, without any leakage.

Chen Ping did not leave immediately.

His gaze fell beside the futon where Tu Meng had been sitting cross-legged. There was a small hidden compartment covered by an inconspicuous stone slab with simple restrictions.

He waved his hand, breaking the restrictions and lifting the stone slab. Inside were several jade slips, some Yuan Crystals, and a jet-black token. The front of the token was engraved with a ferocious character for "punishment," while the back bore the words "Tu Meng." Chen Ping picked up the jade slips and probed them with his divine sense.

One of the jade slips was a record of execution missions. Chen Ping quickly scanned it, his gaze soon settling on a record:

"Date: 9763rd year of the Xuan Yin calendar, 17th day of the Frost Moon."

"Location: Fallen Soul Slope. Executed persons: Mu Sha (male), Liu Qingyin (female). Crime: Departure from the Heavenly Realm, spying on forbidden matters."

"Supervisor: Fei Qing, Grand Steward of the Inner Palace. Executioners: Tu Gang, Tu Meng. Remarks: 'Soul Refining Crystal' (number: Jiaxu 73) activated. Soul collection completed, handed over to Grand Steward Fei."

The record's format was cold and concise, yet like poisoned knives, it pierced Chen Ping's heart.

Senior Mu Sha, Senior Liu Qingyin... their names were thus recorded on the executioner's mission list.

Chen Ping's fingers gripping the jade slip turned slightly white, but he forcibly controlled his emotions.

He continued examining the other jade slips, mostly containing rules and regulations of the Punishment Hall and fragments of body-refining techniques, of little value.

Finally, his gaze fell upon the token bearing the character “刑” (punishment).

This token was made of a special material, subtly connected to certain formations within the Punishment Hall of the Jade Immortal Mansion, perhaps serving as identification, or perhaps for other purposes.

After a moment's thought, Chen Ping put away the token and the jade slip recording the executions, returning the other items to their original positions and restoring the hidden compartment to its original state.

Having done all this, he silently passed through the paralyzed security formations, just as he had arrived, and floated out of the courtyard.

Then, finding the energy conversion gap in the outer barrier again, he easily escaped the range of the Punishment Hall.

Throughout, the Jade Immortal Mansion's layers of defense were utterly ineffective.

...

When Chen Ping reappeared at the bamboo grove where Lian Xing and the others were, only half an hour had passed since he left.

Inside the hermitage, Lianxing, Mingli, Leopard Brother, and the anxiously waiting Monkey were all present.

The atmosphere was somewhat tense, everyone speculating about the outcome of Chen Ping's mission.

Seeing Chen Ping return unharmed, without a trace of blood on him, and with his expression still calm, Lianxing and the others were first stunned, then filled with astonishment and suspicion.

“Senior, you...” Lianxing hesitated before speaking.

Chen Ping didn’t say much, but simply placed the jet-black “Punishment” token and the recording jade slip on the bamboo table.

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Seeing the token, Leopard Brother gasped: “This is... the exclusive identity token of an executioner in the Punishment Hall! Only senior executioners like Tu Gang and Tu Meng possess it!”

Lianxing quickly picked up the jade slip and probed it with her divine sense.

A moment later, her expression changed. She looked up at Chen Ping, her eyes filled with shock: “This...this is Tu Meng’s execution record? Senior, you...”

“Tu Gang is dead, in the alley outside Zuixianlou.”

Chen Ping’s voice was calm and even, as if he were talking about something trivial. “Tu Meng is also dead, in his residence at the Executioner’s Lodge.”

Boom!

Despite having a premonition, hearing Chen Ping announce these two pieces of information so casually sent chills down the spines of everyone in the abode, including Ming Li, their hearts pounding!

Killed!

Really killed!

And in such a short time!

Outside Zuixianlou was one thing, but the Executioner's Lodge was inside the City Lord's Mansion!

Heavily guarded, with numerous arrays!

How did he get in?

How did he find the person?

How did he kill him?

And how did he get out?

Lianxing, in particular, was acutely aware of the security level within the Jade Immortal Mansion.

Even for her, using all her hidden agents and meticulously planning, to silently kill a seasoned executioner like Tu Meng within the Executioner's Abode would be an almost impossible task.

It would inevitably come at a huge cost, and it would be difficult to avoid alerting the guards.

Yet this Senior Chen before her, alone, made a round trip in less than an hour, not only killing two people but also bringing back crucial evidence, and... he seemed as relaxed as if he had just taken a stroll!

The monkey's legs went weak, his gaze towards Chen Ping filled with awe and boundless fear, as if he were looking up to a god.

He truly realized just how terrifying a being he had brought with him.

Ming Li, though he had some estimate of Chen Ping's strength, was also shaken to his core.

He realized that he might have underestimated his master.

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She pondered for a moment and said, "Fei Qing is an extremely cautious person. He rarely leaves the inner mansion except for necessary official business."

"However, he has a habit: every five days, at midnight, he goes to the 'Spirit Gathering Pool,' located at the border between the inner and outer mansions, to cultivate alone for an hour."

"It is said that there is a cold spring at the bottom of the Spirit Gathering Pool, which is very beneficial to the cultivation of his 'Profound Yin Ice Condensation Technique.' This matter is extremely secretive; we only discovered it by chance after sacrificing one of our brothers. His next cultivation session will be at midnight tomorrow."

"Spirit Gathering Pool? Where is it? What are the guards like?" Chen Ping's eyes flashed.

"The Spirit Gathering Pool is located deep within the Hundred Gardens of the Inner Palace, in a secluded spot, but shrouded by an array."

"Each time Fei Qing goes there, he only brings two personal guards, both trusted assassins of the fourth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm."

"When he cultivates, the guards stand watch outside the array at the pool's edge."

Lian Xing quickly added, "This is the only known opportunity for Fei Qing to regularly leave the core area. But even so, the Spirit Gathering Pool is still within the Inner Palace's territory; if something happens, the Inner Palace's experts will arrive instantly."

Midnight tomorrow... Spirit Gathering Pool...

Chen Ping quickly weighed the options in his mind.

This was indeed an opportunity, although extremely risky.

Acting in an environment the opponent was familiar with and prepared for would introduce too many variables.

“Besides this, does he have any other weaknesses? For example, family, hobbies, or... any conflicts with Yu Wuji or other forces?”

Chen Ping pressed, searching for a possible breakthrough in his psychological defenses.

Lianxing pondered, “Fei Qing was promoted from humble beginnings by Yu Wuji and is utterly loyal to him. It’s said he has no family. He’s greedy and extremely obsessed with improving his cultivation, which is why he regularly visits the Spirit Gathering Pool.”

“As for his relationships with others... the Jade Immortal Mansion isn’t a monolithic entity. Fei Qing, relying on Yu Wuji’s favor, controls internal affairs and has offended many, especially some elders and stewards in the outer mansions. But we can’t delve into the specifics of these conflicts.”

Greedy, obsessed with cultivation...

Thoughts raced through Chen Ping’s mind.

Perhaps, a two-pronged approach could be used.

“Fellow Daoist Lianxing, could you find a way to convey the news that the Tu brothers are dead, and that it might be revenge from enemies, to Fei Qing in a way that won’t directly implicate you?”

“Ideally, it should make him uneasy, even suspecting that someone within the mansion who has a grudge against him is behind it all,” Chen Ping said slowly.

Lianxing’s eyes lit up: “Senior, are you trying to unsettle him, make him suspicious, perhaps causing him to act irrationally, or... increase security around him?”

“Increased security is inevitable. But once suspicion arises, he might rely more on the power he trusts most, or... want to go to a place he considers safe to confirm something.”

Chen Ping’s gaze deepened. “For example, to check if the Soul Refining Crystals he’s in charge of are safe.”

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Lianxing and the others were shocked upon hearing this.

Soul Refining Crystals!

Those are the core items involved in the Soul Refining Array at Fallen Soul Slope!

“Mr. Chen wants to...” Ming Li seemed to understand Chen Ping’s plan.

“If he goes to check the location of the Soul Refining Crystals himself because of his suspicion... that might be a better opportunity for us.”

Chen Ping’s voice turned cold. “Rather than taking action at his cultivation lair, a temporary place, perhaps less heavily guarded, is more suitable for a proper talk with him.”

Lianxing felt a chill run down her spine.

This Senior Chen is not only terrifyingly strong, but his meticulous and profound mind is also frightening.

He’s luring the snake out of its hole, and aiming to strike at the opponent’s most vulnerable and vulnerable point!

“I understand.”

Lianxing nodded solemnly. “We’ll try to spread the news through several unreliable channels, creating some chaos and speculation.”

“But Fei Qing is inherently suspicious; whether we can provoke him is still unknown.”

“Just do your best.” Chen Ping finished speaking and looked at Mingli, saying, “Mingli, you assist Fellow Daoist Lianxing. Monkey, Leopard, you two strengthen surveillance of the Jade Immortal Mansion’s perimeter, especially areas where important supplies might be stored.”

“I need to know all of Fei Qing’s unusual movements tomorrow during the day.”

“Yes!” everyone responded in unison, unknowingly, they had completely submitted to Chen Ping as their leader.

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As dawn broke, the faint light pierced the misty spiritual energy above Jade Immortal City, but it couldn’t dispel the suddenly heavy atmosphere within the city.

Inside the Jade Immortal Mansion, in the duty room of the Executioners’ quarters, the atmosphere was as oppressive as frozen ice.

Four executioners, their faces deathly pale and drenched in cold sweat, stood with their heads bowed, barely daring to breathe.

At the head of the table, behind a large desk carved from a single piece of obsidian, sat a middle-aged man with a somber expression.

He wore a dark blue brocade robe embroidered with intricate cloud patterns. His face was lean, with a long, thin beard, giving him a scholarly air.

However, his narrow eyes flashed with a chilling light, and he exuded an aura of authority and suppressed menace.

This was Fei Qing, the Grand Steward of the Jade Immortal Mansion.

“Two living people vanished right under your noses overnight?”

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Fei Qing’s voice wasn’t loud, even somewhat calm, but to the four stewards, it was like an icy chill.

“Reporting...reporting to the Grand Steward.”

The leading steward mustered his courage, his voice trembling, “Last night...last night everything was normal. The shift change at midnight was clear; the duty records were clear. Tu Meng was on duty and didn’t leave the dormitory.”

“Tu Gang...Tu Gang was off duty yesterday and, as usual, went to the Drunken Immortal Pavilion. He hasn’t returned yet.”

“At morning roll call, we found both of them absent. We immediately sent people to search—the dormitory, the Drunken Immortal Pavilion, Qianjinfang, and even several places they frequented—but...they were nowhere to be found.”

“We asked their colleagues, but no one heard anything unusual last night...”

“What about the dormitory’s formation? Was it triggered? Were there any signs of intrusion?” Fei Qing interrupted the steward’s report, his fingertips lightly tapping the obsidian tabletop, producing a crisp, rhythmic sound. “The formation...the formation is functioning normally, with no trigger record.”

“We have carefully examined Tu Meng’s residence and the entire courtyard, both inside and outside, but found no signs of a struggle, nor any residual aura or fluctuations of magical power. Everything...everything is eerily normal.”

Another steward added, his face filled with disbelief.

“Eerily normal...” Fei Qing repeated the phrase, his narrow eyes narrowing slightly, the cold light intensifying.

“Two body cultivators at the fourth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm, especially Tu Meng, who was on duty, within the courtyard, protected by the formation, and just vanished without a trace? Without even a hint?”

Fei Qing stood up, slowly walked to the window, and gazed at the gradually brightening sky outside, but his eyes grew even more profound.

The Tu brothers, Tu Gang and Tu Meng, were his trusted henchmen, handpicked by him to handle shady matters, especially the Fallen Soul Slope incident some time ago...Now, both of them have disappeared simultaneously, neither alive nor dead, this is absolutely unusual. “Recently, has anyone been inquiring about things they shouldn’t be inquiring about in the city?” Fei Qing asked suddenly, his back to the stewards.

The stewards exchanged glances. One of them seemed to remember something and hesitated, “Reporting to the Grand Steward, a few days ago... there seemed to be a rumor that someone in the Zhiwen Pavilion in the dark alleys of the West District was spending a large sum of money to inquire about... about the Fallen Soul Slope.”

“Especially... about that male and female cultivators. But the old fox at the Zhiwen Pavilion is tight-lipped, and our people haven’t been able to find out exactly who they are.”

“Falling Soul Slope... that male and female...” Fei Qing turned around, a barely perceptible shadow crossing his face. “Anything else?”

“Anything else...”

Another steward whispered, “Yesterday afternoon, an informant from the Punishment Hall reported that there seemed to be an unfamiliar face loitering near the Drunken Immortal Pavilion, seemingly...”

seemingly inquiring about Tu Gang's whereabouts. But at the time, we thought it was just a common revenge or debt dispute, and didn't... didn't take it too seriously."

Bang!

Fei Qing slammed his palm on the obsidian table, smashing a chunk of the hard corner to dust!

"Useless trash!"

He roared, his eyes blazing with murderous intent. "Someone has already tracked down the executioner! How dare you be so negligent?!"

The four stewards fell to their knees in terror, kowtowing repeatedly: "Grand Steward, please calm your anger! We have failed in our duty! We deserve to die!"

Fei Qing's chest heaved slightly, suppressing his surging rage and a growing unease.

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The disappearance of the Tu brothers, the inquiries about the Fallen Soul Slope incident, and the executioner... the connection between these two events was too obvious!

Could it be... that old acquaintance of the man and woman has come knocking?

But according to intelligence, those two have no foothold in the Thirteenth Heaven. How could they possibly mobilize such cunning experts, capable of silently bypassing even the academy's array?

Or perhaps, when they infiltrated the vicinity of the City Lord's Mansion, they truly discovered something, and this involves more than just them?

Countless thoughts raced through Fei Qing's mind.

He knew Yu Wuji's temperament well, and he understood the consequences if anything entrusted to him by the Divine Clan went wrong.

The matter at Fallen Soul Slope had to remain a secret. Any possibility of it being revealed had to be nipped in the bud immediately!

"Issue my orders!"

Fei Qing's voice returned to its icy tone. "First, immediately seal off all information. Publicly declare that Tu Gang and Tu Meng are secretly away on official business. Anyone who dares to discuss this privately or spread rumors will be punished severely for disrupting government affairs!"

"Second, mobilize the entire Punishment Hall and Inner Guard to secretly investigate all unfamiliar faces entering the city recently, especially those with unclear cultivation levels or suspicious movements."

"Focus on tracking down those two people who inquired about Fallen Soul Slope and the Tu brothers! Dig three feet into the ground, find them!"

"Third, strengthen the security and array alert levels in all areas of the City Lord's Mansion, especially key locations such as the Inner Palace, the warehouse, and Fallen Soul Slope. No one is allowed to approach without my authorization!"

"Fourth, notify the deacons of the West District to immediately impose a city-wide curfew. Only entry is permitted; exit is prohibited! Strictly check all city gates and teleportation arrays. All those leaving the city must undergo rigorous questioning!"

The series of orders was issued clearly and decisively.

"Yes! We obey the Grand Steward's orders!" The four deacons, relieved, quickly accepted the command and left.

Fei Qing remained alone in the duty room, his expression shifting between anger and uncertainty.

He walked to the wall and opened a hidden compartment, revealing a row of neatly arranged jade boxes, each labeled.

His finger traced over several of the boxes, finally stopping at one labeled "Jiaxu 73".

Inside were the "Soul Refining Crystals," condensed from the soul fragments belonging to Mu Sha and Liu Qingyin, collected from the Soul Refining Array at Fallen Soul Slope.

According to custom, Soul Refining Crystals of this level required periodic reinforcement and sealing with a special array, and were reported to the Divine Race.

"Could it be... that they really came for this?"

Fei Qing muttered to himself, his eyes flickering uncertainly.

Instinctively, he wanted to immediately check if the Soul Refining Crystals were safe, but years of caution held him back.

The situation was unclear, and if he rashly went to the secret vault where the Soul Refining Crystals were stored, he might be targeted...

He pondered for a moment, then took out a specially made communication jade talisman, infused it with magical power, and whispered a few words.

A moment later, the jade talisman glowed faintly, transmitting a brief divine thought message.

Confirming that the secret vault's formation was intact and there were no immediate abnormalities, Fei Qing breathed a slight sigh of relief, but his vigilance was at its peak.

He decided that he must see the Manor Lord, Yu Wuji, today to report this matter in person.

Chapter: 10028

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As the sun rose high in the sky, the atmosphere within Jade Immortal City had drastically changed.

The previously relatively relaxed city gates and main streets were suddenly filled with a large number of Jade Immortal Palace guards, clad in sleek blue armor and exuding a powerful aura.

They sealed off all the city gates, leaving only a side gate open for entry, and those who entered were subject to rigorous questioning and inspection.

The number of patrol teams within the city had doubled, increasing from three men to ten men per team. The leaders of these teams were at least at the fourth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm, their sharp eyes scanning every pedestrian on the street.

The teleportation array area was completely sealed off; anyone attempting to use it to leave was rudely stopped.

“What’s going on? What happened?”

“I don’t know! I heard something happened at the City Lord’s Mansion last night...”

“Shh! Keep your voice down! Didn’t you see the guards’ eyes? Do they want to die?”

“This kind of atmosphere... we haven’t seen anything like it in hundreds of years! Could it be that some important figure is coming? Or...”

The cultivators on the street whispered amongst themselves, but all kept their voices low, their faces filled with surprise and unease.

Jade Immortal City had been peaceful for far too long. This sudden tension and martial law made everyone feel a sense of impending doom.

Some well-informed or perceptive forces quickly restrained their disciples, closed their doors, and waited to see what would happen.

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Inside the Bamboo Forest Abode, Chen Ping, Ming Li, Lian Xing, and the others naturally noticed the changes in the city immediately.

“They’re moving so fast.”

Ming Li glanced through the bamboo grove at the noticeably increased number of patrolling guards on the distant streets, his brow furrowing slightly. “It seems the disappearance of the Tu brothers has already put Jade Immortal Prefecture on high alert. The entire city is under martial law, no entry, no exit—they’re checking us.”

The monkey’s face paled, nervously wringing his hands: “S-Senior, what do we do now? The city gates and teleportation arrays are sealed off, how...how do we get out?”

Leopard Brother’s expression was also grave: “Jade Immortal Prefecture’s reaction this time is so intense; it’s probably not just about the deaths of two executioners. That old dog Fei Qing must have sensed something.”

Lian Xing looked at Chen Ping, who had been resting with his eyes closed and expressionless, and said in a deep voice, “Senior, our intelligence just...” “Confirmed news has just arrived. The investigation within the Jade Immortal Palace has clearly pointed to the two unfamiliar faces who inquired about Fallen Soul Slope at the Knowledge Pavilion a few days ago.”

“They are currently conducting a secret city-wide search for anyone matching their description. Although we are well-hidden here, it’s probably not a place for us to stay for long.”

Chen Ping slowly opened his eyes, his gaze deep and calm: “As expected. Fei Qing isn’t stupid. He must have connected the deaths of the Tu brothers to Senior Mu Sha’s matter. Martial law and a search are inevitable reactions.”

He paused, looking at Lian Xing: “You said before that you had a way to muddy the waters, make Fei Qing suspicious, and perhaps even lure him away. How’s that progressing?”

Lian Xing’s spirits lifted, and she quickly replied: “Our people have already begun their operation. Through several...” “A few unreliable intermediaries connected to the outer court officials of the Jade Immortal Palace spread several messages, some true and some false.”

“First, it implied that the Tu brothers were silenced because they knew certain shady details of transactions within the Jade Immortal Palace, especially those involving resource allocation and the handling of certain special materials.”

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About an hour later, a rhythmic bird song drifted from outside the retreat.

Lian Xing’s expression shifted. She quickly left the retreat, returning a moment later with a mixture of suppressed excitement and tension on her face.

“Senior! We have news!”

Her speech quickened. “Our men saw Fei Qing, accompanied by two bodyguards, leave Qingxin Pavilion about 15 minutes ago, heading towards the west side of the Hundred Gardens, behind the old alchemy room!”

“Further in that direction lies an abandoned courtyard and mountainside designated as a restricted area. We’ve always suspected a hidden entrance or secret chamber there!”

Chen Ping’s eyes flashed: “He really went there. He only had two bodyguards with him?”

“Confirmed, only two. Both are his trusted henchmen, their cultivation around the fourth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm.”

Lianxing confirmed, “And they moved very quickly, deliberately avoiding the main roads, choosing secluded paths, and their expressions were wary.”

“Good.” Chen Ping no longer hesitated. “Tell me the most likely point along that path, the most suitable spot to make your move.”

Lianxing was prepared. She immediately took out a simple but clearly marked map of the inner palace’s outer perimeter, pointing to a narrow path winding between the artificial hill and the old garden.

“This place is called Listening Pine Path. It’s lined with ancient pines and scattered rocks, the path is winding, visibility is obstructed, and because it’s near an abandoned area, there are very few guards patrolling, and the intervals between patrols are long.”

“It’s one of the most likely routes they’ll take from Qingxin Pavilion to that restricted area, and the most probable one.”

Chen Ping carefully studied the map, memorizing the route and surroundings.

“Ming Li, you come with me. Provide support around Listening Pine Path, in case of any unexpected events or to facilitate a get-back.”

“Lian Xing, all of you, move immediately. Leave this place and go to the safe houses you prepared earlier. Don’t act rashly without my message.” Chen Ping quickly issued the orders.

“Senior, please be careful! Fei Qing’s cultivation is not weak, and he’s as cunning as a fox. He must have methods to protect himself!” Lian Xing solemnly warned.

Chen Ping nodded, said nothing more, exchanged a glance with Ming Li, and the two of them vanished silently from the hermitage, as if disappearing into the shadows under the sunlight.

The window of opportunity left for them was very short.

They had to complete the high-risk operation of intercepting, subduing, interrogating, and then evacuating from Tingsong Path before Fei Qing returned after inspecting the secret vault.

Outside the hermitage, the sunlight was perfect, and the bamboo shadows swayed gently, but Chen Ping and Ming Li seemed to blend into the gaps in the light and shadow, disappearing in an instant.

Lian Xing gazed in the direction they had vanished, silently praying.

Then she turned and solemnly said to Leopard Brother and Monkey, "Pack your things immediately and move to Safe House Number Two as instructed by the senior. Be quick, and leave no trace."

Chen Ping and Ming Li moved at high speed through the complex streets and rooftops of Jade Immortal City like two invisible shadows.

They avoided all main roads and heavily patrolled areas, choosing instead quiet alleys, abandoned courtyards, and even underground drainage channels, their movements unpredictable, their auras concealed to the extreme.