

The Order 10691

Chapter: 10691

“Chen Ping?”

Yun Xi walked to his side, looking down at the soul crystal, a knowing glint in her eyes. “The remnant souls within this soul crystal... are about to dissipate?”

Chen Ping nodded, his voice hoarse: “The Divine Hall’s Soul Return Array was destroyed, and Zhou Yuanlang is dead. Without the array, the remnant souls cannot be released... In a while, they will completely dissipate.”

He gripped the soul crystal tightly, his knuckles white, veins bulging.

Yun Xi fell silent.

Yun Yao walked up from behind, carefully tugging at Chen Ping’s sleeve.

Her eyes were red, her voice soft, yet carrying a resolute gentleness.

“Young Master Chen, don’t worry. The Divine Hall has been destroyed, but... there’s still the Divine Palace.”

Chen Ping turned to look at her.

Yun Yao pursed her lips, mustered her courage, and continued, “The Divine Hall and the Divine Palace are both branches of the Divine Race. The Divine Hall has the Soul Return Technique, and the Divine Palace might have it too?”

Moreover, the Divine Palace is older and more powerful than the Divine Hall, and their lineage is more complete. If anyone in this world can release the remnant soul within a Soul Crystal, it must be the Divine Palace.”

Chen Ping's eyes flickered slightly.

Yun Yao's words were like a ray of light illuminating the darkness in his heart.

Yes... there's also the Divine Palace.

The Divine Race isn't just the Divine Hall.

The Divine Temple, the Divine Hall, and the Divine Palace are collectively known as the three major branches of the Divine Race.

The Divine Temple has been destroyed by Ning Zhi, and the Divine Hall was also destroyed by him and Ning Zhi together, but the Divine Palace still exists.

That most mysterious, oldest, and most powerful Divine Palace still exists.

"Do you know where the Divine Palace is?" Chen Ping asked.

Yun Yao nodded, carefully choosing her words, "The location of the Divine Palace... is extremely secretive. I once saw some records in a fragment of a scroll, saying that the Divine Palace isn't in the Holy Domain of Light, but in another extremely hidden place in the Fourteenth Heaven.

The scroll didn't specify what that place was called or where it was, only mentioning it briefly as 'Beyond the Heavens.'"

She paused, then added, "Moreover, there are very few tales about the Divine Palace. Many cultivators in the Fourteenth Heaven don't even believe it truly exists.

Some say it's just a legend embellished by the gods, while others say the Divine Palace vanished tens of thousands of years ago." "Yes, some say the Divine Palace has always existed, but their disciples never show their true faces, acting with extreme discretion and never participating in any conflicts within the Fourteenth Heaven."

Chen Ping frowned: "Aren't the Divine Hall and Divine Temple also branches of the Divine Race? They don't even know the exact location of the Divine Palace?"

Chapter: 10692

Yun Yao shook her head: "Although the Divine Hall, Divine Temple, and Divine Palace are collectively known as the three major branches of the Divine Race, the Divine Palace has always operated independently, with almost no contact with the other two branches.

The Divine Hall and Divine Temple operate openly, establishing sects and recruiting disciples throughout the Fourteenth Heaven; the Divine Palace operates in the shadows, hidden from the world, detached from worldly affairs."

Chen Ping remained silent for a moment.

This was far more troublesome than he had imagined.

He had originally thought that the Divine Palace, like the Divine Hall, was a well-known force within the Fourteenth Heaven, easily found by asking for directions.

But now he realized that the existence of the Divine Palace itself was a mystery, a mystery even those within the Divine Race themselves didn't fully understand.

"However..."

Yun Yao suddenly remembered something, her eyes brightening slightly. "There was a sentence in the tattered scroll, I don't remember it clearly, but it seemed to say, 'The Divine Palace is hidden in the far north, beyond the snowfields, and only those with the right destiny can enter.'

If the record is correct, the Divine Palace should be deeper in the far north of the Fourteenth Heaven, farther than any place anyone has ever been."

"Far north..." Chen Ping murmured, repeating.

Yun Xi interjected, "When I was in the Fifteenth Heaven, I heard someone mention that at the northernmost point of the Fourteenth Heaven there was an ice field called 'Gui Xu,' the end of the Fourteenth Heaven, beyond which lies the chaotic void.

It is said that a fierce wind that can freeze souls blow year-round on that ice field, and even cultivators in the early True Immortal realm dare not venture deep into it. If the Divine Palace is really there..."

She didn't finish, but her meaning was clear: if the Divine Palace was truly hidden in such a place, then the danger of Chen Ping's journey would far exceed his imagination.

Chen Ping carefully put the Soul Crystal back into his robes, his eyes calm yet resolute.

"No matter where the Divine Palace is, I'm going."

His tone was soft, but there was no room for negotiation.

Yun Xi frowned: "I'll go with you."

"No." Chen Ping shook his head, "I'll go alone."

Yun Xi's frown deepened: "Why?"

Chen Ping looked into her eyes and said seriously, "The Divine Palace has always been secluded, which means they don't want to be disturbed. If I bring too many people, they might misunderstand. If they think I'm going to provoke them with reinforcements, they probably won't even let me in the door."

He paused, then gave a wry smile: "Besides, news of the Divine Hall's destruction will reach the Divine Palace's ears sooner or later. If they know I'm one of the people who destroyed the Divine Hall, they're already wary of me.

If I lead a large group to attack, they'll definitely think I'm there to wipe out their sect."

Yun Xi fell silent.

She understood Chen Ping's meaning.

Chapter: 10693

The Divine Palace is different from the Divine Hall.

The Divine Hall operates openly, its actions flamboyant, and governed by rules;

The Divine Palace operates in the shadows, mysterious and unpredictable, acting entirely according to its own principles.

To deal with an opponent who follows rules, you can maneuver using those rules;

But to deal with someone without rules, you never know what they will do.

Moreover, the Divine Palace's foundation is unfathomable.

If a real battle breaks out, Chen Ping might not win.

Even if he wins, the Divine Palace will be destroyed, and the remnant souls of Mu Sha and his wife will truly have no hope left.

"But you're going alone..." Yun Xi was still worried.

"Going alone is actually safer for me."

Chen Ping said, "I'm coming as a guest, not as an enemy. Besides, with my current strength, there aren't many people in the Fourteenth Heaven who can stop me."

That was true.

After his battle with Ning Zhi, his cultivation broke through to the fifth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm, and his Golden Dragon bloodline became even more solidified.

Although his cultivation level remained at the Upper Immortal Realm, he was confident he could fight a third-rank True Immortal Realm cultivator.

Yun Xi bit her lip, ultimately deciding not to insist further.

She knew Chen Ping was right, but she couldn't suppress her worry.

"Then promise me,"

Yun Xi stared into his eyes, emphasizing each word, "If the Divine Palace turns against you, leave immediately. Don't be reckless, don't fight head-on."

Chen Ping nodded: "I promise you. You all must return to Yunxian City as soon as possible. Long Zhan and Wan Qing alone might not be enough to hold it. If Ning Zhi goes back, he might even lead the Demonic Dragon to attack Yunxian City."

"Okay!" Yun Xi nodded.

Chen Ping turned around and looked at the distant horizon.

That direction led to the northernmost edge of the Fourteenth Heaven, to that unknown land known as "Return to the Ruins," the possible location of the Divine Palace.

“Senior Musha, wait a little longer.”

He silently said to himself, “I will definitely find a way to release you.”

Chapter: 10694

He took a deep breath, transformed into a golden streak of light, and disappeared into the horizon.

Yun Xi stood there, watching his retreating figure, motionless for a long time.

Ming Li walked to her side and said softly, “Mr. Chen is just like that; you can’t stop him.”

Yun Xi didn’t speak, only gripping her sword tightly.

“Let’s go too.” Her voice was calm, but a barely perceptible worry flashed in her eyes.

Chen Ping was her greatest hope now; she was still counting on him to accompany her to the Fifteenth Heaven.

“If he doesn’t return within a month... I’ll storm the Divine Palace and tear down their gates.” Princess Yun Xi’s temper flared.

Ming Li: “...”

He opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but ultimately said nothing. “Forget it, this young lady has an even bigger temper than Chen Ping.

Can’t afford to offend her, can’t afford to offend her.”

.....

There's no teleportation array to the far north, so Chen Ping flew north for seven days and seven nights.

For the first three days, he could still see signs of human habitation: scattered small towns, the caves of wandering cultivators, and the occasional passing caravan.

He asked everyone he met about the Divine Palace, but the answer was always the same: a shake of the head.

"The Divine Palace? Never heard of it."

"That's just ancient legend, who knows if it's true or not."

"Young man, have you been fooled? I've lived in the Fourteenth Heaven for eight thousand years, and I've never heard of any Divine Palace."

By the fourth day, all signs of human habitation had vanished.

The land beneath his feet transformed from a vast grassland into barren frozen ground, and then from frozen ground into an endless ice field.

The temperature plummeted so drastically that even his protective dragon aura felt a chill; his breath condensed into tiny ice crystals that fluttered to the ground.

On the fifth day, even the ice plains vanished.

Beneath his feet lay a void of white, not ice, not snow, but a substance he had never seen before.

The white was like solidified light; it felt unreal underfoot, yet he wouldn't fall.

A chilling silence enveloped him; not even the wind could be heard, as if the entire world had been muted.

Chapter: 10695

The aurora borealis in the sky changed from a vibrant blue-green to an eerie pale white, like a dying flame, flickering silently overhead.

Chen Ping didn't know how far he had flown, nor where he was.

He had completely lost his bearings.

He could only rely on his instincts, flying and flying further north.

On the sixth day, he encountered his first gale.

The gale-force wind blew silently from the depths of the aurora, carrying a chill capable of shattering the soul.

When it swept past Chen Ping's indestructible golden body, the golden scales, strong enough to withstand a full-force attack from a first-grade True Immortal, were instantly covered with fine frost. The frost spread along the scales, producing a teeth-grinding "crackling" sound.

Chen Ping's heart tightened. He activated his Golden Dragon bloodline with all his might, golden dragon energy burning fiercely on his body, barely managing to keep the gale-force wind at bay.

However, his spiritual energy consumption rate instantly increased tenfold.

“This is the gale-force wind of the Ruins of Return...” Chen Ping gritted his teeth and increased his flying speed.

He didn’t know how many more such gales lay ahead, nor how long he could endure them.

But he couldn’t stop, nor could he retreat.

The seventh day.

Chen Ping’s spiritual energy was already mostly depleted, and his protective dragon energy was more than half dimmer than when he set out.

His lips were cracked, his brows were covered in a thick layer of frost, and each breath felt like swallowing razor blades.

He was nearing his limit.

But then, he suddenly sensed something ahead.

It was an extremely faint aura, so faint as to be almost imperceptible, yet the power contained within it made his heart leap.

That aura... was alive.

Chen Ping’s spirits lifted, and with his last ounce of strength, he flew in that direction.

After flying for about two hours, the scene before him suddenly changed.

The ethereal white expanse vanished, replaced by a vast, dark blue ice plain.

On the ice plain stood countless enormous ice pillars, each tens of meters high, resembling a stone forest or a natural labyrinth.

Between the ice pillars, a faint mist flowed.

Chapter: 10696

The mist wasn't white, but an extremely thin, pale golden hue, radiating a subtle warmth that contrasted sharply with the surrounding frigid air. Chen Ping stepped into the ice pillar forest and immediately felt the surrounding gale weaken considerably.

The pale golden mist seemed to have an insulating effect on the gale; the further he went, the weaker the gale became, until it disappeared completely.

His steps grew slower and heavier.

His spiritual energy was almost exhausted; his vision began to blur, and his legs felt like lead.

Just as he was about to collapse, he suddenly heard a clear, ringing bell.

The bell's sound came from the depths of the ice pillar forest, melodious and ethereal, like a mountain spring or an ancient chant.

With each ring, the surrounding mist trembled slightly, as if in response.

Chen Ping followed the sound.

His steps faltered, his consciousness began to fade, but a stubborn determination sustained him, propelling him forward step by step.

Finally, he passed through the last row of ice pillars.

What he saw before him made his breath catch in his throat.

It was a lake.

A vast, circular lake, its surface as still as a mirror, reflected the pale aurora borealis overhead.

The water wasn't blue, nor black, but a deep, inky blue, as if it had melted the entire night sky into it.

In the center of the lake lay a small island.

On the island were no palaces, no pavilions, only a single tree.

The tree was enormous, breathtakingly so, its canopy blotting out the sun, its trunk so thick that dozens of people couldn't encircle it.

The tree's leaves were golden, each one like a tiny sun, radiating a warm glow.

And the golden mist rose from the leaves of this tree.

Chen Ping stared blankly at the tree, a strange feeling welling up within him.

He felt... this tree was alive.

Not just any plant that is alive, but this tree possessed consciousness, a soul, an ancient wisdom that transcended all things.

"You've come."

A voice suddenly sounded behind him.

Chapter: 10697

The voice was soft and gentle, like a spring breeze rippling across a lake, or moonlight spilling across a snowfield.

It carried an innate coolness, yet also a strangely comforting warmth.

Chen Ping turned abruptly.

A woman stood three steps behind him, silently watching him.

She wore a long, plain white dress, the hem trailing on the ice, blending seamlessly with the surrounding snow and ice.

Her long hair was as black as ink, simply styled in a bun, secured with a white jade hairpin, a few stray strands falling beside her ears, fluttering slightly in the cold wind.

Her face... Chen Ping couldn't find the right words to describe it.

It wasn't the kind of beauty that could topple kingdoms, nor the ethereal beauty that seemed untouched by worldly affairs.

Her features were exquisite and aloof, her brows like distant mountains, her eyes like cold stars, her lips slightly pursed, carrying a subtle sense of detachment.

But those eyes...

Those eyes were too deep.

So deep that Chen Ping felt he wasn't facing a person, but an ocean, a starry sky, an ancient world that had existed for countless millennia.

Her aura was so peaceful it was almost imperceptible, yet Chen Ping's intuition was frantically warning him that this person's strength was unfathomable.

Stronger than Ning Zhi.

Stronger than anyone he had ever met.

"You are..."

Chen Ping began, his voice so hoarse he barely recognized himself.

"Isn't this the person you've been looking for?"

The woman said calmly, a slight smile playing on her lips, so faint it was almost imperceptible. "You traveled ten thousand miles north, braving the fierce winds of the Ruins of Return, venturing into the Ice Pillar Forest, all to find this place, didn't you?"

Chen Ping's pupils contracted slightly. "You are... the Palace Master of the Divine Palace?"

The woman didn't answer, simply gazing at him silently.

Her gaze was calm, almost cold, yet beneath that calmness, a barely concealed curiosity flowed.

"The Divine Palace is indeed here."

She finally spoke, her voice still calm, "But... for many years, no one has been able to find this place. The last person to come here was a rogue cultivator a hundred years ago. He strayed into the Ruins of

Return, was severely injured by the fierce winds, and drifted to the lakeside, barely alive. I rescued him, healed his wounds, and sent him on his way.”

Chapter: 10698

She paused, her gaze sweeping over Chen Ping.

“And you... are the first person to actively seek this place out.”

Chen Ping took a deep breath, forcing his aching body to stand, and clasped his hands in a respectful bow: “My name is Chen Ping. I have come here to request the assistance of the Divine Palace.”

“Assistance?”

She repeated, a hint of amusement in her tone, “You’re certainly direct. Normally, when asking for help, one would exchange pleasantries, build rapport, and then get down to business. But you, without even a sip of water, just blurted it out.”

Chen Ping smiled wryly: “I don’t have much time left; there’s no time for pleasantries.”

He took out the Soul Crystal from his robes and held it in his palm.

The two beams of white light within the Soul Crystal had dimmed to their lowest point, like candles flickering in the wind, ready to be extinguished at any moment.

“This soul crystal contains two remnant souls, the souls of an old friend and his wife,” Chen Ping’s voice was slightly hoarse. “I heard that the Divine Palace possesses a secret technique that can release the remnant souls within soul crystals and reshape their physical bodies. I have nowhere else to turn but to seek your help.”

The woman looked at the soul crystal in his palm and remained silent for a moment.

She reached out and took the soul crystal from Chen Ping. Her fingers were long and slender, white, with a faint golden glow at the tips, creating a strange contrast with her overall aloof and cold demeanor.

She held the soul crystal up to her eyes, examining it closely.

The two white lights within the soul crystal seemed to sense something, trembling slightly and moving a little faster.

“Two remnant souls, a man and a woman, indeed a married couple.”

The woman said calmly, “The remnant souls are relatively well-preserved, but extremely weak. If you had arrived three days later... no, two days later, these two remnant souls would have completely dissipated.”

Chen Ping’s heart tightened: “Can they be saved?”

The woman didn’t answer immediately.

Her gaze shifted from the soul crystal to Chen Ping’s face.

Something flickered slightly in those deep eyes.

There was scrutiny, consideration, and a hint of an indescribable emotion.

“They can be saved,” she finally spoke, “but what will you offer in exchange?”

Chen Ping was taken aback.

The woman returned the soul crystal to him, stood with her hands behind her back by the lake, gazing at the enormous golden ancient tree in the center of the lake.

“There’s no such thing as a free lunch. You asked me to save someone, so I have to pay you. That’s the rule.”

Chapter: 10699

Her tone was calm, yet undeniable. “What do you intend to offer in exchange?”

Chen Ping was silent for a moment. “What do you want?”

The woman turned to look at him, a slight smile playing on her lips. Her smile seemed more genuine than before, yet even more enigmatic.

“What do you have on you?” the woman asked.

Chen Ping hesitated for a moment, then began to take stock of his possessions.

He searched through his storage ring, taking out each item one by one.

Spirit stones, pills, cultivation manual jade slips, several decent-grade magic artifacts, some refining materials... a jumbled mess spread out on the floor.

Then he glanced at the sleeping Fire Qilin, but didn’t take it out.

If the Fire Qilin knew that Chen Ping intended to use it as a bargaining chip, it would probably be angry.

The woman glanced at it and gently shook her head. “The Divine Palace doesn’t lack any of these things.”

Chen Ping frowned. He truly had nothing to offer.

His entire fortune, even combined, was probably less than that of an ordinary rogue cultivator in a place like the Fourteenth Heaven.

“Then what do you want?” he asked.

The woman didn’t answer, but instead slowly circled Chen Ping, her gaze sweeping over him.

That gaze made Chen Ping feel as if he were completely seen through, as if he had no secrets before those eyes.

“Golden Dragon bloodline...” she murmured, her voice very soft, as if talking to herself, “and royal bloodline... interesting.”

She stopped, standing before Chen Ping, looking directly into his eyes.

“I want you.”

Chen Ping: “...”

He wondered if he had misheard.

“What?”

The woman said calmly, “I’m taking you. You’ll stay in the Divine Palace and do three things for me. In return, I’ll help you release those two remnant souls and rebuild their physical bodies.”

Chen Ping was silent for a moment. “What three things?”

"I haven't thought about it yet," the woman answered matter-of-factly. "I'll tell you when I've figured it out."

Chapter: 10700

Chen Ping: "..."

He took a deep breath, trying to keep his tone calm. "You mean, I'm selling myself to you, and I don't even know what I'm supposed to do?"

The woman thought for a moment, then said seriously, "You can understand it that way."

Chen Ping felt like he might have encountered a con artist.

"How do I know you can do it?" He stared into the woman's eyes. "How do I know you're not lying to me?"

The woman wasn't angry; instead, she smiled slightly.

The smile was faint, yet it softened her entire face, transforming her from a cold, snowy mountain into a lake rippled by a spring breeze.

"If you don't believe me, you can leave," she said calmly. "But your remnant soul will only be left to die."

Chen Ping gritted his teeth.

He knew he had no choice.

The remnant souls of Mu Sha and his wife wouldn't last much longer; he had no time to find another way.

Even if it cost him half his life, let alone the three things the woman wanted him to do at the Divine Palace, he had no choice but to agree.

"Alright," Chen Ping took a deep breath. "I agree."

The woman nodded slightly, seemingly unsurprised by the answer.

"Follow me."

She turned and walked towards the small island in the middle of the lake.

Her footsteps were light, making no sound on the ice.

Her long white dress fluttered slightly in the wind, blending seamlessly with the surrounding ice and snow, as if she herself were a part of this icy plain.

Chen Ping took a step to follow, but after only two steps, his legs gave way, and he collapsed to his knees on the ice.

His spiritual energy was completely exhausted.

Seven days and seven nights of non-stop flight, piercing the fierce winds of the Ruins of Return, had exhausted all his strength.

Now, the moment his tense nerves relaxed, his body immediately gave way.

The woman stopped and glanced back at him.

That glance held a hint of helplessness, and a touch of tenderness she herself didn't even realize.