

The People's God: Sacrificing Trillions to Ascend

Chapter 301 - Stampede

The presence of the Steel Demon and the Abomination vanished from the training ground. The remnants of the Twelve Demons instantly sensed what had occurred. Relief surged through them, but so did fear. Whoever had slain both the Abomination and the Steel Demon possessed the strength to end them just as easily.

That realization hung over them like a blade poised to fall at any moment. The ten remaining demons quickly reached a grim consensus: they had to find the one responsible. They unleashed their underlings, ordering indiscriminate assaults on every Demon Lord trespassing in their territories. Thus, the Demon King Festival grew even more lively as chaos spread.

Han Wu had no idea he was the cause of the stampede. Still reeling from the backlash of Demonification, he was startled to discover that he needed to devour at least half of the Steel Demon's corpse to fully recover. The experience taught him a harsh truth. Demonification was powerful, but unless he saved it as a trump card, its backlash alone would destroy him.

Thankfully, Xun was with him. Without his intervention, Han Wu would have been reduced to fragments. Each time Xun pulled him back from the brink, Han Wu's trust in him deepened.

What remained was the other half of the Steel Demon's body, along with the massive mountain of flesh left behind by the Abomination. It was enough to sustain him for a long time. With his recovery complete, he cautiously used the traits of Abominable Devour. The flesh that passed into his Void Jaw transformed into muscle, driving his body to expand at a startling pace.

When he first arrived with the grafted parts of his units, his height stood at three meters. After consuming the rest of the Steel Demon, he towered at four. His frame expanded in perfect proportion, and with it his attacks and defenses.

Sensing his strength climbing, he turned to the Abomination's corpse. The mountain-sized corpse quickly dwindled beneath his relentless appetite.

Two full days passed before he finished transforming the monster's flesh into his own muscle. His body now towered fifteen meters. Every one of his stats had increased alongside his body. For the first time, he felt he could stand against the Twelve Demons at their peak and, if pressed, escape with his life.

Yet not once did he believe he could defeat them. Each of the Twelve Demons was a Demon Lord who had endured countless ages in this place. They possessed not only raw strength but centuries of experience in battle. With the advantage of their home ground, killing even one of them seemed close to impossible.

He set those thoughts aside and focused instead on Xun, who had just finished grafting the two Stage 9 body parts. The surge of power they brought eclipsed anything Xun had ever gained from his own hunts. Overwhelmed with gratitude, he silently swore to follow Han Wu for the rest of his life. Words were unnecessary. As Han Wu's slave, his thoughts were already laid bare, and Han Wu could feel the sincerity of his devotion. That knowledge alone was enough.

Han Wu opened his interface and checked the progression of the Demon King Festival. Of the original 101 Demon Lords, only forty-eight remained. The number fell by the second, each death flashing across the display like a fading ember.

The rapid decline unsettled him. His instincts whispered that someone was hunting the Demon Lords in earnest. His Epistian Brain confirmed the suspicion and speculated that the Twelve Demons had likely ordered their followers to purge the competition in retaliation for Han Wu's slaying of the Abomination and the Steel Demon.

A low laugh escaped him. "Go ahead and kill them. I will become a God faster that way."

The Festival's rules were simple. The last surviving Demon Lord would ascend as Demon King. Han Wu's goal was just as simple—survive until the very end.

He glanced back at his interface.

[Demon Lord: Han Wu

Demonic Origin: 34,890

Slain Demon Lord: 6

Enhance List:

Dragon Scales, Dragon Claws, Dragon Wings (Red, Stage 4: 70%; Traits: Dragonification)

Swordwind Arms (Purple, Stage 5: 10%; Traits: Steelcutter)

Tigerman Legs (Purple, Stage 5: 50%; Traits: Tiger Step)

Dark Locust Stomach (Orange, Stage 7: 10%; Traits: Void Jaw, Improved Digestion)

Crystal Marrow (Red, Stage 2: 80%)

Epistian Brain (Purple, Stage 5: 90%; Traits: Detection)

Cockroach Cells (Blue, Stage 9; Traits: Vigorous Cells, Supercells, Infinite Energy)]

Han Wu possessed many enhanceable body parts that hovered on the edge of awakening new traits. To push them further, he needed more Demonic Origin, which meant killing more demons.

He used Detection and swept the area for prey. His massive body granted him a far greater range than before, allowing him to sense everything within 100 kilometers. His brow furrowed when he realized just how many demons filled that span. The Steel Demon's territory teemed with them. Whole tribes roamed aimlessly, flooding the land in restless waves.

Within that vast swarm, Han Wu picked out several Demon Lords. Their strength had waned under the relentless assault, and their bodies trembled on the verge of collapse. They would not last much longer.

"It seems I quickly need to grow stronger," Han Wu muttered under his breath, then spread his powerful Dragon Wings and surged toward the nearest Demon Lord.

Meanwhile, Xun remained vigilant, scanning their surroundings for any sign of an ambush.

Before long, they arrived at the scene where the Demon Lord clashed with the demons. Han Wu looked down and saw that the battle was far from over.

The Demon Lord was fighting against a massive horde of Inferior and Intermediate demons, used as cannon fodder by ten or more Superior demons. Alone, the Demon Lord could have defeated any Superior demon with ease, but now it was trapped, forced to expend precious stamina and energy just to clear the swarming weaker demons. It could neither fight efficiently nor escape. Only death awaited it.

"Time to send it on its way then." Han Wu exhaled, ceased flapping his wings, and plummeted. He then used Tiger Step and struck from above with crushing force.

The combined momentum and his enlarged form amplified Tiger Step far beyond its usual power. He crashed into the ground like a falling star, carving a crater 100 meters wide. Everything within it—the Demon Lord, Inferior, Intermediate, and Superior demons alike—was obliterated.

Han Wu collected a vast amount of Demonic Origin and several enhanceable body parts. Satisfied, he prepared for the next wave as more demons charged without hesitation. He summoned the Defiant Sword, Soul Shaver, and Soul Reaper with his

Swordwind Arms while channeling energy into the Soul Seeker through his Dragon Claws.

The Soul Seeker spun violently and generated 10,000 afterimages. Han Wu hurled it, and the weapon duplicated itself 10,000 times. The overwhelming barrage of Soul Seekers swept through the demons, killing them all instantly. Those that survived the initial onslaught were cut down by his wind blades.

Within moments, Han Wu had exterminated every demon within a five-kilometer radius.

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[1,167 words]

Chapter 302 - Examine

Xun emerged from Han Wu's shadow, his keen sense of smell guiding him through the piles of corpses to uncover enhanceable body parts. He deliberately selected only those of Purple quality or higher and presented them to Han Wu.

Having already slain two powerful demons and grafted numerous Red body parts, Han Wu's strength rivaled that of one of the Twelve Demons. He ignored anything below Purple quality and showed no interest in the body parts that Xun presented.

Meanwhile, Xun discovered one with a 90% compatibility rating: the Demon Eye. Han Wu gave him permission to graft it to increase his strength further.

They repeated this process several times. In just half a day, Han Wu had slain five Demon Lords, further thinning the ranks of survivors on the training ground. In total, he had killed eleven.

He used four of these kills to enhance his Cockroach Cells. The energy released from the four Demon Lords coursed through his body and elevated his Cockroach Cells to the next quality.

The process lasted thirty seconds before the energy faded. Inspecting the interface, Han Wu saw the upgrade complete. The Cockroach Cells had transformed into Life Cells, a Purple body part that amplified his recovery by 500%. Their three special traits remained intact, yet their effects had grown stronger with the upgrade.

Han Wu then harnessed the Demonic Origin he had collected from the slain Demon Lords and other demons to improve his remaining body parts. His Epistian Brain reached Stage 6, awakening its second trait.

He was now presented with a choice among the options available.

[Option 1: Meditation – Enhances resistance to status ailments affecting the mental state. It also boosts the Epistian Brain’s stats. Becomes stronger with each stage.]

[Option 2: Examine – Concentrates all senses on a target to gather detailed information. Becomes stronger with each stage.]

[Option 3: Lightning – Charges and unleashes lightning to strike the target. Becomes stronger with each stage.]

Han Wu dismissed the third option as soon as he read it. He already had plenty of offensive abilities and had no need for another. His attention focused on Meditation and Examine.

Meditation promised stronger resistance to mental status ailments and enhanced power for his Epistian Brain. On the other hand, Examine offered a refined inspection skill that concentrated every sense on a single target to extract maximum information.

Both options were enticing, but he ultimately prioritized the advantage of understanding his enemy. Thus, he selected Examine.

Using Xun as his practice target, Han Wu activated Examine. In an instant, his Detection—normally capable of perceiving everything within a 100-kilometer radius—zeroed in entirely on Xun. A flood of data poured into his Epistian Brain, where it was analyzed, consolidated, and distilled into a concise report.

Han Wu’s mind reeled as he read the report. It revealed a staggering array of weaknesses in Xun. His lower body lacked stability and relied on his tail for balance. If Han Wu could seize the Arrow Tail and strike the lower body, Xun would fall effortlessly. Moreover, Xun displayed vulnerability to light, fire, and lightning damage, inherent to his nature as a Demon Lord. Curiously, he was also weak to water.

Examine revealed a host of additional weaknesses, each one a potential opening Han Wu could exploit. The sheer number of them left Han Wu flabbergasted. He struggled to believe all the information was accurate, so he decided to test it through Xun.

Xun could not disobey his orders, leaving him no choice but to comply. Han Wu suppressed nearly all of his strength until he matched Xun’s. He then struck, targeting the vulnerabilities identified by Examine, and defeated Xun in under three minutes.

Unsatisfied, Xun blamed his own carelessness and demanded a rematch. Han Wu applied the weaknesses he had uncovered and fought him a second and third time. Xun lost repeatedly and finally admitted defeat.

Only then did Han Wu trust the information he had gathered. Examine allowed him to discern the weaknesses of someone as powerful as Demon Lord Xun, but what about those stronger than him? What if he used Examine on the Twelve Demons?

Han Wu imagined eliminating them instantly once he uncovered their vulnerabilities. With that in mind, he discussed their next target with Xun. They were going to hunt down one of the Twelve Demons, the Desert Demon.

The Desert Demon was considered one of the easier prey, confined entirely to the desert. More precisely, it depended on sand, and sand was vulnerable to water. Any opponent controlling more water than the Desert Demon controlled sand could overpower it. Yet the demon inhabited the largest desert in the training ground, spanning 1.74 million square kilometers. Defeating it would require an ocean's worth of water.

Han Wu suspected the Desert Demon must have additional weaknesses beyond its vulnerability to water. To confirm this, he would have to use Examine directly on it. Hence, he flew toward the desert to see if his conjecture was correct. He attempted to locate the Desert Demon using Detection but came up empty.

Han Wu's arrival, however, drew the attention of the Jackal Demons roaming the desert. These Intermediate demons had the bodies of jackals and each possessed six enhanceable body parts. They were among the strongest Intermediate demons in the region.

The Jackal Demons worshipped the Desert Demon as their god and had received strict orders to kill any trespassers. They patrolled the desert day and night and slew any Demon Lord who wandered too close to appease their god.

The lead Jackal Demon howled, and the others joined in, encircling Han Wu. Their howls sounded like a war song meant to strike fear into their enemies, though the effect fell short.

Standing eighteen meters tall, Han Wu felt more amused than threatened. He imagined two armies preparing for battle, and the larger one trying to intimidate the smaller by singing war songs. The attempt was both harmless and ridiculous.

Han Wu suppressed his laughter, targeted the biggest Jackal Demon, and used Examine. Instantly, every detail about the demon appeared before him, including its several weaknesses.

Even an Inferior demon could defeat the Jackal Demons with such knowledge. Someone as powerful as Han Wu didn't even need to use Examine to do so. He raised his Dragon Claws, summoned Soul Seeker, and poured a massive amount of energy into it until it vibrated violently and revealed its afterimages.

“This is an attack from 300,000 Soul Seekers. Jackal Demons, you cannot stop this,” Han Wu warned in Demonese.

The Jackal Demons ignored him and continued to bark defiantly.

Han Wu chuckled and threw Soul Seeker. Mid-flight, it split into 300,000 clones and formed a swarm that resembled a vast locust cloud.

The Jackal Demons charged the swarm, led by their pack leader in an attempt to reach Han Wu. It took little time before the sounds of their death throes echoed through the desert.

Han Wu shrugged. “I told you so.”

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[1,086 words]

Chapter 303 - Spirit Core

The Jackal Demons' blood seeped into the sand, turning it black.

After such a gruesome slaughter, the Desert Demon finally noticed them. Amid the strewn corpses, a massive figure of sand began to take shape. It towered ten meters tall, bore a human-like body, had the head of a jackal, and gripped a long lance. Its gaze swept across the battlefield and took in the scattered Jackal Demons' corpses. Rage ignited within it, and without warning, it lunged at Han Wu, snapping its jaw to bite him.

Han Wu used Examine on the Desert Demon and froze in surprise. The demon was not a true being but a cloud of sand manipulated into shape. Frowning, he sliced it clean in half. The body disintegrated into grains and scattered across the desert, yet in moments, the sand converged once more. The undying Desert Demon struck again.

Han Wu cursed under his breath. This was no ordinary enemy. The Desert Demon had no true form and could not die. Its power emanated from the surrounding sand. To defeat it, he would need an ocean's worth of water to flood the desert. Sadly, he couldn't do it with his current power.

Han Wu launched a wind blade and sliced the Desert Demon in half again. The sand scattered, but this time it reformed into 100 identical clones. They attacked in unison but only managed to scratch Han Wu's skin open.

Nevertheless, the sheer number of attackers made it impossible to endure a constant assault. He took to the air, but the Desert Demon refused to let him escape. It controlled the sand and formed a 1,000-meter-tall humanoid jackal that charged after him.

At the same time, a massive sandstorm erupted across the desert. The storm lashed Han Wu with relentless force, blinding him and striking him with gusts of sand. Helpless in midair, he had no choice but to land and brace for the massive Desert Demon's attack.

Only then did Han Wu realize he had walked into a trap. If he could not find an escape, he would die. The key lay in locating the Desert Demon's true body; only by destroying it could the clones and sandstorm be neutralized.

He continued to endure the sandstorm and used Detection. Everything within a hundred-kilometer radius unfolded before him, yet the Desert Demon remained elusive.

Han Wu started panicking. He knew the sandstorm and the massive sand clone were controlled by the Desert Demon, which meant it had to be close. But where? He could not locate it at all.

His thoughts raced until Xun offered a suggestion. "Master, have you noticed the sandstorm is blowing from a single direction? Maybe the Desert Demon is in the opposite direction."

Han Wu nodded and pressed forward against the wind, aiming for the opposite end. Along the way, he had to constantly turn to cut down the massive sand clone before it could strike.

At last, Han Wu traced the storm to its source. He scanned every grain of sand with Detection, yet the Desert Demon's presence still eluded him.

Doubt crept in. "Did it run away?"

Xun shared his unease. "Such misfortune. Why can't we find it?"

Neither could hope to escape the desert if they failed to find the Desert Demon. If the sand clones pursued them endlessly, their death would be inevitable.

Then Xun's Demon Sniffer picked up a peculiar scent. It reeked of rot and carried a mummified undertone—the unmistakable odor of a malevolent demon.

Xun relayed the discovery. Han Wu wasted no time and dug where Xun indicated. His Dragon Claws tore through the sand with the force of an excavator. He unearthed massive amounts of sand, revealing a hidden underground tunnel.

Han Wu scoffed. "So this is where you've been hiding. No wonder you were so hard to find."

He leaped into the tunnel, and finally, Detection worked as intended. He discovered that the tunnel led to a sprawling labyrinth. The Desert Demon lay hidden deep within its innermost chambers.

"You can't escape!" Han Wu howled as he navigated the labyrinth with ease, guided by Detection and Xun's Demon Sniffer.

Not long after, they discovered the Desert Demon's true form. Han Wu blinked in surprise. It looked nothing like the sand clones he had faced above ground. It stood just 1.5 meters tall, skinny and unassuming. Without the immense well of power radiating from it, he would never have believed this was the Desert Demon.

Panic flared in the Desert Demon's eyes as it realized it had been found. It quickly regained its composure and manipulated the sand within the labyrinth to strike at him.

Han Wu had grown tired of the sand. He understood exactly what the Desert Demon intended and unleashed a blast with the Bull King Horns' Horn Cannon.

The Bull King Horns had been enhanced only to Stage 7, yet the influence of his Crystal Marrow elevated their strength to rival Stage 9 Purple body parts. The blast sent the Desert Demon flying.

It scrambled to retaliate with more sand, but Han Wu moved faster. With a flash of Tiger Step, he lunged forward like a striking arrow, slicing clean through the Desert Demon's neck with his Soul Shavers.

The mighty Desert Demon, ruler of the sprawling desert and slayer of countless demons, fell today.

Han Wu claimed 10 million Demonic Origin and collected the enhanceable body parts the Desert Demon had left behind. He examined them and realized some were compatible with him.

[Spirit Core (Red, Stage 9; Traits: Control, Malleable, Spirit Sand)]

The Red body part showed an 80% compatibility with him, meaning he could unleash its full power once grafted. He proceeded and embedded the Spirit Core in the center of his Epistian Brain.

The Epistian Brain's energy-charging ability amplified the Spirit Core's output, granting Han Wu control over hundreds of humanoid Jackal Demon sand clones within a 100-kilometer radius.

With this newfound power, he launched relentless assaults against every demon he encountered, annihilating them through his immortal sand clone squad. Summoning and controlling them required only a fraction of his mental strength.

Disguised as the Desert Demon, he methodically wiped out every demon in the desert, including four wandering Demon Lords.

Each kill yielded vast amounts of Demonic Origin. By the time he checked his interface again, he had amassed nearly 20 million Demonic Origin. Without hesitation, he invested it to enhance his Dark Locust Stomach from Stage 7 at 90% to Stage 9.

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[1,111 words]

Chapter 304 - Almighty Devour

Han Wu enhanced the Dark Locust Stomach to Stage 9 and awakened its final trait. Three options appeared for him to choose from.

[Option 1: Dark Locust Shade – Materializes the Dark Locust Stomach as a ravenous shade. It cannot be killed while the user is alive. Strength set at 10% of the user's power.]

[Option 2: Almighty Devour – Digests everything within a defined range that the user recognizes as food. It also serves as a devastating wide-range attack.]

[Option 3: Dimensional Storage Stomach – Stores an infinite amount of food for digestion at a later time.]

All three options were amazing, and he faced a dilemma.

Dark Locust Shade released a ravenous shadow that could not die as long as he lived. It served as a valuable pawn that could wear down his enemy.

Almighty Devour worked like a domain skill that allowed him to consume anything within a designated range. It not only provided energy through digestion but also served as a formidable AoE attack.

Dimensional Storage Stomach offered limitless storage, letting him devour an endless amount of food and save it for later digestion.

Han Wu weighed each carefully before finally selecting the second option. Almighty Devour synergized perfectly with his Life Cells' Infinite Energy trait for him to recover swiftly. The other two options were exceptional, but his standards were too high to settle for anything else.

With this enhancement, one of his body parts reached the pinnacle of Stage 9. Relief should have followed, yet he felt only heightened tension. Twenty-four Demon Lords remained, and most of his other body parts had yet to reach their maximum.

If the Demon King Festival ended prematurely, he would lose the chance to gather more Demonic Origin and further upgrade his body parts. He pushed himself to work faster to kill more demons and upgrade his remaining body parts to Stage 9.

The only places where he could hunt large numbers of demons lay within the territories of the Twelve Demons. Those domains teemed with high-ranking fiends, and Han Wu could harvest their Demonic Origin while devouring them for more energy.

Han Wu used Dragonification and shot off in a random direction with urgent speed. Once his body shifted into a humanoid dragon, his velocity soared. In the span of five minutes, he had already cut across several hundred kilometers.

He trespassed into the territory of the Tough Demon, one of the Twelve, with the clear intent to challenge it. The moment he crossed the border, he summoned sand clones through Spirit Core and set them loose upon the local demons.

His actions convinced the demons that the Desert Demon had come to seize their land. In panic, they rallied their tribes to defend their territory.

While chaos spread, Han Wu quietly used Almighty Devour. The new trait treated every demon within his recognition range as prey and started digesting them.

The effect spread so broadly that most of the demons failed to realize they were being consumed. Only those with sharper senses felt the strange fever creeping across their skin.

This was Han Wu's first time using the trait, and he still lacked full control over it. Soon, however, he realized he could adjust the range of its effect. By shrinking the radius to ten kilometers, he drastically intensified its digestion effect.

The demons clashing with his sand clones suddenly felt their skin sear as if from an invisible fire. In truth, they were being corroded by the Dark Locust Stomach's enzymes. Under Almighty Devour, the stomach's digestive fluids did not take liquid form but spread instead as a gas that seeped into every pore. Prolonged exposure made the demons' skin blister, burn, and dissolve. The corpses scattered across the battlefield were digested ten times faster than the still-living demons.

The demons soon realized something was amiss when none of them could kill a single sand clone. They knew they had to find the Desert Demon and destroy it if they wanted the clones to vanish, but another mystery unsettled them. Their fallen comrades had disappeared entirely, leaving behind only clothes and belongings on the bloodstained ground. Where were their corpses?

The answer revealed itself when some demons witnessed it with their own eyes. The corpses were not stolen at all. They were digested. Flesh, blood, and bone alike melted into nothing.

“What’s going on?”

“Master, please help us!”

Fear gripped the demons as death closed in, and they prayed desperately for the Tough Demon’s aid. Their pleas somehow reached the heavens they believed in.

As Han Wu slaughtered his enemies, a figure plummeted from the sky like a meteor, aiming directly for him. He sensed the Tough Demon’s focus lock onto him and instinctively beat his wings to avoid the strike.

The Tough Demon lost its target and slammed to the ground. The impact shook the earth, and the shockwave crushed several of its already grievously injured underlings. The demon ignored their deaths entirely. It cared for only one being: Han Wu, the intruder who dared enter its territory.

Sensing its bloodlust, Han Wu transformed using Dragonification again and started attacking. He had already slain three of the Twelve Demons and carried considerable experience against powerful foes, yet he could not deny that the Tough Demon lived up to its fearsome reputation.

Its stamina seemed limitless. With a massive, unyielding frame, the Tough Demon regenerated rapidly and never paused to rest. It appeared capable of fighting relentlessly for three days and nights without faltering.

Han Wu had no intention of wasting that much time. Activating Examine, he searched for its weaknesses, but his Epistian Brain returned only a handful of trivial flaws. None of them could help him bring down the demon, not even if he fought it without rest for a full day.

“Damn, I can’t rely on Examine,” he cursed. “I need to create a weakness for it.”

He focused on a tiny section of the demon’s chest and activated Almighty Devour, compressing the effect to a single square centimeter. The concentrated digestive fluids started eating away at the Tough Demon’s flesh, carving out a wound. Still, the injury

was shallow, and the demon's resilience allowed it to endure the pain and continue fighting.

With no other choice, Han Wu started to kite the Tough Demon to stall for time. He kept Almighty Devour focused on that small area, gradually widening the wound.

The Tough Demon's tenacity was extraordinary, but even it could not withstand Almighty Devour indefinitely. Finally, Han Wu succeeded in digesting its Demon Heart, ending its life. Another of the Twelve Demons was added to his tally.

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Chapter 305 - Returning to the Divine Civilization

[1,056 words]

Chapter 305 - Returning to the Divine Civilization

After Han Wu consumed a massive horde of demons, the energy surging through his body became colossal. It was more than enough to sustain his Dragonification in battle for ten straight days. Using Almighty Devour, he even absorbed the Tough Demon's flesh and merged it into his muscles to accelerate his growth.

His body expanded again, reaching twenty meters in height. The size of a demon's body directly reflected their strength. Han Wu had deliberately enhanced his physical form to overpower the remaining Twelve Demons.

Ten days later, he finally struck down the last member of the Twelve Demons. By then, he had grown to a staggering 100 meters tall. With a single motion, he tossed the final demon's head into his Void Jaw to be digested.

A single Demon Lord, his limbs twisted grotesquely, sprawled before Han Wu and snarled, "Kill me! I, Caido, am no coward! I will not bow to you."

Han Wu studied Caido's dog-like face in silence. He had no intention of killing him; as long as Caido lived, the Demon King Festival would continue. That would allow Han Wu to keep eliminating demons and upgrading his remaining body parts.

Another ten days passed. Han Wu transformed countless demon corpses into energy through Almighty Devour. Meanwhile, his final body part, the Crystal Marrow, finally advanced to Stage 9.

He checked his interface, his excitement barely contained.

[Demon Lord: Han Wu

Demonic Origin: 4,890

Slain Demon Lords: 24

Enhance List:

Dragon Scales, Dragon Claws, Dragon Wings (Red, Stage 9; Traits: Dragonification, Dragon King Transformation, True Black Dragon King Transformation)

Swordwind Arms (Purple, Stage 9; Traits: Steelcutter, Steel Crusher, Gold Splitter)

Tigerman Legs (Purple, Stage 9; Traits: Tiger Step, Tiger Leap, Tiger Sprint)

Dark Locust Stomach (Orange, Stage 9; Traits: Void Jaw, Increased Digestion, Almighty Devour)

Crystal Marrow (Red, Stage 9; Traits: Exoskeleton, Osteomancy, Bone Prison)

Epistian Brain (Purple, Stage 9; Traits: Detection, Examine, Smite)

Life Cells (Purple, Stage 9; Traits: Vigorous Cells, Supercells, Infinite Energy)]

Han Wu then upgraded Life Cells and Epistian Brain to Orange quality using the energy he had gained from slaying the Demon Lords. The two body parts evolved, earning the names Immortal Cells and Wise Brain.

He nodded in satisfaction. "This should be enough."

He used Smite and struck down the final living Demon Lord. With Caido's death, the main objective was complete, and a system message pinged him.

[Main objective complete. Demon Lord, please prepare to become a Demon King.]

A faint sensation rippled through Han Wu. The Demonic Energy that had saturated the training ground seemed to converge around him, waiting to be absorbed to fuel his ascension. He would become a Demon King the moment his body had taken in as much energy as it could hold.

Han Wu activated his Immortal Cells and stored every trace of Demonic Energy he could absorb.

Normally, a Demon Lord required vast amounts of energy to ascend, yet even then, they could only draw a fraction of it from the training ground. Han Wu was different. His Immortal Cells had the Unlimited Energy trait, letting him absorb infinite energy and store it within his cells.

The final vestiges of Demonic Energy vanished into him, and his transformation began. Black strands of energy spiraled outward from his Immortal Cells, weaving around him like a cocoon. Within it, he fell into a deep sleep as his body reshaped into that of a Demon King.

Han Wu could not tell how much time had passed before he stirred. He pushed against the cocoon, and it fractured under his touch. He then activated Detection to gauge his new form.

He towered 1,000 meters tall, clad in crystalline body armor. Beneath it, black Dragon Scales rippled across his body. His Dragon Claws glinted menacingly, Swordwind Arms bore intricate wind engravings, and his Tigerman Legs were sheathed in dense muscle and hide.

Han Wu had a feeling that he could obliterate King life forms with a single punch. In truth, he could. As a Demon King, his body had reached the Sage rank, one step above King. In terms of enhanceable body parts, Sage demons ranked at Class 10. His strength surpassed even what some of the more seasoned Gods could achieve.

“I’ve become a Demon King. It’s time to return to the Divine Civilization and ascend into a God,” he said.

He carefully attuned his senses to his power and confirmed that he was strong enough not to conceal his identity any longer.

Han Wu opened a gate back to his divine realm. The instant the gate appeared, a sinister force surged toward him, a destructive presence capable of annihilating everything in the training ground. Han Wu reacted instantly, darting into his divine realm and slamming the gate shut to shield himself from the Will of the Hell Civilization.

Even so, he was not fast enough. A sliver of the Hell Civilization’s Will slipped through before he could seal the gate completely. That fragment alone was beyond his current strength. The Will of a Civilization emerged from the very laws and physics of the world itself. If the Hell Civilization sought to punish him, Han Wu could not yet defend himself.

The intruding Will of the Hell Civilization showed no urgency to kill him. Instead, it scoured Han Wu’s divine realm for a suitable vessel. Only through one could it attack him. Han Wu’s divine realm teemed with potential vessels, but the Will made its choice quickly. It selected the strongest among them—Han Wen.

As Han Wu's clone, Han Wen was the combination of a sliver of Han Wu's soul and the body of a God. The presence of Han Wu's soul ensured that Han Wen could never turn against him.

Everything changed once the Will of the Hell Civilization seized Han Wen's body. It effortlessly shattered the seal, obliterated the sliver of Han Wu's soul, and fully took control of Han Wen to attack Han Wu.

The attack from a God was devastating, but Han Wu had grown stronger. With a single thought, his body swelled to colossal proportions, rising into a 1,000-meter-tall Demon King.

The Will of the Hell Civilization froze. It had never witnessed a Demon King of such magnitude. Could the strike of a God even harm this towering Han Wu?

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Chapter 306 - A Sliver of Will

[1,363 words]

Chapter 306 - A Sliver of Will

Waves of Divine Authority crashed into Han Wu, and he felt the attack bypass his powerful physical defenses to directly attack his soul. Fortunately, Han Wu's soul had been tempered, making it significantly more resilient and powerful than a regular soul.

The Divine Authority had completely failed to inflict any injury upon Han Wu's soul. Not only that, but Han Wu even managed to retaliate by unleashing Smite on the Will of the Hell Civilization—an attack designed to directly assault the soul, much like the Divine Authority itself. However, the Will of the Hell Civilization proved equally formidable, too strong to be harmed by a mere trait like Smite. Feeling nothing from the strike, it effortlessly shrugged off the feeble attack.

Having used his Examine ability on the Will of the Hell Civilization, Han Wu understood that it would be impossible to defeat it on his own. Knowing he had to find another way, he decided to exercise his right as an inhabitant of the Divine Civilization to contact its Will. His Core accepted his request without hesitation and swiftly transmitted it to the Will.

The Will of the Divine Civilization replied almost immediately, stating that it would arrive in just 30 seconds. Han Wu groaned internally—30 seconds right now would feel as long as a year. After all, even though it was just a small sliver, he was still up against the Will of the Hell Civilization.

Knowing it could not stay for long, the Will of the Hell Civilization quickly acclimatized to Han Wen's body and activated the Merged Divine Skill Han Wu had made for Han Wen, the True Martial Tiger God. In an instant, Han Wen transformed into a thousand-meter-tall giant cloaked in a tiger-shaped avatar of pure Divine Authority, with each movement radiating an intense and palpable bloodlust.

In response, Han Wu quickly assumed his strongest battle form to endure the upcoming battle.

“Dragonification! Dragon King Transformation! True Black Dragon King Transformation! Exoskeleton! Bone Prison! Almighty Devour!”

He rapidly activated almost every trait he possessed that could empower his physical body. However, despite his efforts, a single, powerful blow from the Will of the Hell Civilization was enough to greatly injure him, damaging both his exoskeleton and his dragon scales. Fortunately, however, his Immortal Cells kicked in, healing his wounds at a rapid pace.

The Will of the Hell Civilization attacked once more, this time using Han Wen's Martial God Kick. Han Wu's battle instincts instantly took over, and he swiftly countered with his Tiger Step. The two blows collided with a deafening sound like cracking glass, and the resulting shockwave was so powerful it ripped open the very fabric of space around them.

Han Wu felt his legs scream in protest as he collided with Han Wen's Martial God Kick—he could practically feel his Immortal Cells frantically working overtime to repair the damage. It was quite unfortunate; as a mere Demigod in the Divine Civilization, he could barely last a few breaths against the Martial God Kick before it completely overwhelmed him.

The Will of the Hell Civilization unleashed the Martial God Flash, determined to finish Han Wu off once and for all. Han Wu tried to evade, but his legs had given out, having taken more damage than his Immortal Cells could instantly heal. With no other option, he could only raise his Swordwind Arms and Dragon Claws in a desperate attempt to block the attack.

Just as the attack was about to land, a thin, almost transparent barrier shimmered into existence, blocking the fist. The Epistians had used their Epistian Towers as a conduit to amplify their magic, charging up a massive barrier that spared Han Wu from the hit. With this perfectly-timed move, they had managed to protect him.

Though stunned for a brief moment, the Will of the Hell Civilization swiftly resumed the offensive. This time, however, a sudden gust of wind blew past Han Wen, leaving numerous cuts all over his True Martial Tiger God avatar. Steely had arrived just in time, armed with his four God greatswords!

Right behind him was Alpheus who, accompanied with a group of Great Lightning Dragons, had been silently charging up a breath attack. The combined darkness and lightning breath attack from all ten Great Dragons surged forward, successfully interrupting the Will of the Hell Civilization's imminent attacks.

The dragon breath attack was powerful enough to send the Will of the Hell Civilization barreling backwards. As it struggled to rise, two new figures, Han Wu's Tigerman Saints, Hu Chi and Hu Yong, descended from above. They landed directly on two of Han Wen's six massive arms with devastating force, channeling the impact of their landing to completely shatter the limbs.

The assault from Han Wu's army was far from over—his locusts had just arrived. The huge swarm covered the skies and ground like a dark, living tsunami. On the order from Dark Locust, the entire swarm charged at the Will of the Hell Civilization. Over a hundred billion of them sacrificed themselves, instantly self-detonating to create a massive explosion and buy Han Wu valuable time.

However, the sacrifice of a hundred billion locusts unfortunately did nothing more than graze the Will of the Hell Civilization. With a dismissive wave of its arm, it obliterated the locusts obstructing its vision, instantly clearing the air half a kilometer ahead. It was at that moment that it finally realized Han Wu had disappeared.

Where has the brat gone?

The answer came in the form of a single, powerful punch. A towering bone giant form—an Osteomancer's creation formed from hundreds of millions of skeletons and twice Han Wen's current height—swung its massive fist, smashing it right into Han Wen's face with such overbearing power that even in his powerful True Martial Tiger God form, Han Wen lost a few teeth.

"Unforgivable! Utterly unforgivable!"

It was an outright disgrace for the Will of a Civilization to be bested by a mere group of skeletons!

In a furious rage, the Will of the Hell Civilization infused even more of its Divine Authority into Han Wen's body, causing a powerful surge of energy to slowly build and radiate outwards. The Will was now determined to wipe out everything within the divine realm!

Just then, a beam of iridescent light descended upon Han Wu's divine realm, streaking towards the Will of the Hell Civilization. The Will of the Divine Civilization had finally arrived!

The powerful light easily forced the Will of the Hell Civilization down onto the ground, swiftly immobilizing it. The Will of the Hell Civilization was completely outmatched—a mere sliver of its power was nothing against the full force of the Will of the Divine Civilization.

A boundlessly powerful and emotionless voice resounded within Han Wu's divine realm.

“Smite.”

With a final snarl and hiss, the Will of the Hell Civilization was completely obliterated, leaving nothing but Han Wen's soulless body on the ground. Han Wu let out a breath he didn't even realize he was holding—the Will of the Hell Civilization was finally gone. He looked towards his units that had come to his aid in his moment of crisis, his eyes filled with warmth and gratitude, like a father watching his children all grown up.

The brilliant iridescent light disappeared as quickly as it had arrived, marking the departure of the Will of the Divine Civilization. Han Wu soon spotted a faint strand of translucent light lying on Han Wen's body. Using Examine, he learned that the strand of light was the previous sliver of the Will of the Hell Civilization. The Will of the Divine Civilization had destroyed its consciousness, leaving behind only a blank will.

By incorporating a sliver of his own soul into the blank will, Han Wu could turn it into a Will that represented him. When his divine realm finally evolved into a civilization, that little strand could become its Will!

Han Wu clutched the blank will excitedly. This was a treasure that so coveted that even Major Gods would want it, not to mention regular Gods! and he decided it was a secret he would keep strictly to himself.

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[1,525 words]

Chapter 307 - Exquisite Skill Gem

Han Wu exited his divine realm and returned to his dormitory at Imperial College. The moment he stepped inside, a message from Saliya reached him. Xu Hai had instructed her to tell Han Wu not to ascend into a God upon his return. Instead, he was to go straight to Room 307 of the office and meet him there.

The directive puzzled Han Wu. He could not understand why his professor would delay such an important step, yet he chose to trust his professor's judgment. He walked to the office and knocked on the door of Room 307.

Xu Hai's voice came from inside the room. "Come in."

"Come in," Xu Hai's voice called from within.

Han Wu pushed the door open and stepped inside, only to find that his professor was not alone. A striking woman stood beside him, dressed in form-fitting black overalls. Her beauty was beyond compare, the kind that stirred dangerous impulses. For a fleeting instant, even Han Wu felt an intrusive urge to dominate her. Luckily, his spirit was stronger, and he cast the thought aside almost as soon as it surfaced.

"Professor, are you looking for me?" Han Wu asked.

Xu Hai glanced at him before gesturing toward the woman in black. "This is the student I mentioned. His name is Han Wu."

The woman's gaze swept over him. Her scarlet lips curved and parted slightly.

"Not bad." Her voice carried a strange fragrance, as if the air itself thickened with her words.

Han Wu frowned faintly and looked to Xu Hai for an explanation.

Xu Hai cleared his throat. "Han Wu, allow me to introduce her. She is Su Lan, a Major God of the Darkness faction. More specifically, the Major God of Seduction."

Han Wu bowed with respect. "I greet you, Major God of Seduction."

Su Lan's voice dropped into a purr. "I've heard of you. You led a team of vampires and triumphed against the angels."

Han Wu answered with modesty. "The credit belongs to the entire team. At most, I only offered them some assistance."

Su Lan frowned faintly. "Excessive humility is nothing more than arrogance in disguise.

Xu Hai coughed softly and helped Han Wu a little. "It's good for youngsters like him to stay humble. No need to frighten him. Han Wu, I imagine you're wondering why I didn't let you ascend into a God right away. I'll tell you the reason.

"When someone ascends into a God, they awaken new powers, but the outcome is random. Striking luck and gaining something valuable is rare. That's why I reached out

to Su Lan for help. The two of us vouched for you and submitted an application to the college so that you could receive an Exquisite Skill Gem.”

Han Wu’s eyes widened. He had never imagined it was possible to influence which powers he awakened. The right power would catapult his strength to new heights. He had already witnessed the difference firsthand with Sacrifice, the first Exclusive Divine Power he had acquired. That single skill had allowed him to outpace his peers. Without it, graduating from high school with locusts as his core race would have been all but impossible.

“Thank you, Master! Thank you Ms. Xu.”

“Let’s move on, then.” Xu Hai flicked his arm, and in an instant the three of them stood before the rector’s office.

He rapped lightly on the door, and the rector’s voice called from within, “Come in.”

They stepped inside. Xu Hai and Su Lan seated themselves while Han Wu stood respectfully behind Xu Hai, studying the rector with interest.

This rector was not the head of Imperial College but the one who managed its resources. Among the college rectors, he held some of the greatest authority.

Xu Hai spoke first. “Mr. Feng, the application I submitted has been approved. I’ve come today to receive the Exquisite Skill Gem I applied for.”

Feng, a Major God with status equal to Xu Hai, regarded him for a moment before his gaze shifted to Su Lan, then finally to Han Wu. “Are you Han Wu, the first-year valedictorian?”

Han Wu nodded. “Yes, I am.”

“Isn’t it too soon for you to ascend when you’re only in your first year? You’ll need a vast amount of Faith Points to maintain your Divine Authority. Without enough units, you won’t be able to sustain it,” Feng cautioned.

“Rector, please don’t worry. I have many units, and the Faith Points they generate each day are more than enough to support my Divine Authority,” Han Wu replied with confidence.

Feng frowned. “Han Wu, you don’t seem to understand me. As a first-year student, you should be focusing on your foundation and mastering the basics. It’s one thing to collect many units, but what matters is having strong, high-level ones.

“How many High Lord life forms exist in your divine realm? You should return only when you have at least one hundred.”

To Feng, a High Lord was a rare and formidable unit, nearly impossible to amass in large numbers. Even second-year students rarely possessed more than ten. Expecting a first-year like Han Wu to have any more than that was absurd.

“Rector, I have 8,929,420 High Lord life forms in my divine realm. I have long surpassed the required 100 units.”

Feng nearly toppled out of his chair. *What in the world? Almost 8.93 million High Lords? Does this boy think High Lords can be cultivated like weeds? That number is beyond outrageous!*

“Han Wu, it is unbecoming to lie, especially with such a ridiculous claim. I’ll give you one chance. Take back your words and leave, and I’ll pretend none of this happened,” Feng warned sharply.

Xu Hai and Su Lan exchanged a glance. They could see his real intention clearly. Feng simply had no desire to hand over the Exquisite Skill Gem.

Xu Hai’s voice dropped into a hard, dangerous tone. “Mr. Feng, my application has already been approved. Are you trying to play games with me?”

Sensing the rising anger, Feng quickly redirected the pressure toward Han Wu. “Your student is the one making a mockery of this. 8.93 million High Lords? Even a God would struggle to assemble such an army.”

Xu Hai’s face darkened. “Are you accusing my student of lying?”

Feng gave Han Wu a cold, dismissive look. “Accuse him? Your student isn’t even worthy of suspicion.”

Xu Hai did not bother to argue further. Instead, he gave his student a command. “Han Wu, summon every last one of those High Lords from your divine realm and let Mr. Feng see them with his own eyes.”

Han Wu nodded and summoned all of his High Lords at once. The cramped office miraculously warped into a vast expanse of land stretching thousands of kilometers to contain them. Out of the 8.93 million, the overwhelming majority were locusts, numbering about 7.5 million. Next came the Tigermen at 1.4 million, while the combined High Lords of his other races barely surpassed 10,000.

Feng froze when he saw the sheer number of High Lords before him. He weakly pointed at the locusts. “These... Are these really High Lords?”

In raw strength, a Locust High Lord matched a standard Lord of the other races. By rank, however, they were officially High Lords. That fact was undeniable. Even if he set aside the Locust High Lords, nearly 1.4 million Tigermen High Lords still stood before

him. The aura radiating from their bodies alone met Feng's own criteria for a High Lord. Beyond that, roughly 10,000 High Lords from various races added to the tally. That number far exceeded the 100 High Lords Feng had required.

Han Wu's voice dripped with mockery. "Rector, are you going to take back your words?"

Feng felt a flush of humiliation at being taunted by a student. He longed to slap Han Wu, but with Xu Hai and Su Lan watching, he dared not.

"Mr. Feng, do you believe him now? Will you give us the Exquisite Skill Gem I applied for?" Xu Hai pressed, urging him to produce it.

Feng growled, hesitated, and finally muttered meekly, "The Exquisite Skill Gem is not with me."

Xu Hai sprang to his feet and seized Feng by the collar, anger flashing in his eyes. "What? Where is the Exquisite Skill Gem I applied for? It was approved!"

Feng could have shrugged him off but didn't, his shame keeping him rooted. "Someone took it away."

"Who has the nerve to steal the Exquisite Skill Gem I applied for?" Xu Hai seethed. Since becoming a Major God, he had never faced such a humiliating situation.

Feng shook his head.

Su Lan stepped forward, her slim fingers lifting his chin. "Who took it?"

Han Wu sensed a faint ripple of energy emanating from her as she spoke.

Feng replied instinctively, "Major God Butcher."

Both Xu Hai and Su Lan fell silent at the name.

Han Wu frowned in confusion. "Who's Butcher?"

Xu Hai exhaled slowly. "He's a Major God serving the God King of War. His student also studies at Imperial College. You should know him. It's Huang Shengjun."

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,215 words]

Chapter 308 - Major God Butcher

The War Aspect was renowned, and countless individuals coveted it. The God King of War used it to elevate his faction and welcomed anyone who possessed the Divine Aspect, granting them a share of the world.

More than that, the God King of War ranked among the strongest God Kings in existence and commanded a host of Major Gods. The most feared of them was the Butcher. No one knew the man's true name, only the blood-soaked reputation he earned through cruelty. In every campaign, he razed entire cities and kingdoms, his savagery so unrestrained that his peers named him the Butcher.

Major God Xu Hai, though powerful and respected within his own circle, fell short when compared to that monster.

Han Wu, mindful of the situation, made a careful suggestion. "Professor, why don't we wait a little until they receive another Exquisite Skill Gem?"

He had not abandoned hope. He simply did not want Xu Hai to provoke the Butcher over something that could be avoided.

Xu Hai glanced at him with a flicker of gratitude. Students with both talent and kindness were rare. Yet as he thought more on it, his gratitude curdled into indignation. He had filed the application, yet the Butcher had seized the reward instead. Why should he accept such an insult?

"I've been teaching here for years, nurturing countless students," Xu Hai declared. "The Butcher has never once set foot in these halls to teach. Why should he snatch away resources I applied for? Mr. Feng, if you can't give me a proper explanation, I'll take this matter to the chancellor and see who dares to protect him."

The threat made Feng capitulate at once. "Old Xu, *haiya!* It's just an Exquisite Skill Gem. The Butcher took it this time, but I swear you'll have the next one. Wait a single month and I'll make sure you get it. Just one month."

Xu Hai shook his head. "I'm already old. I have no hopes of becoming a God King, so time means little to me. But my student is different. His talent is extraordinary. He cannot afford to waste even a single day, much less a month."

In his heart, Xu Hai swore that he would stake his reputation and honor to ensure Han Wu received what he deserved.

Feng had every reason to be afraid. Even as a Major God and the rector wielding the highest authority, Xu Hai's revelation could still get him terminated. He hurried to calm Xu Hai. "Old Xu, don't panic. I'll contact the Butcher and ask him to return the Exquisite Skill Gem. It'll be done soon."

Feng quickly dialed the Butcher's number, and the Butcher answered with his usual nonchalance.

Feng explained the situation, but the Butcher responded with a single dismissive line. "What does it have to do with me?"

Even though he was a Major God, Feng felt his blood pressure spike and nearly suffered a brain aneurysm. In the end, he risked both his reputation and his personal relationship with the Butcher to persuade him to come.

"Fine," the Butcher said at last. "Give me a moment to prepare, and I'll come."

One hour later, the Butcher kicked open the door and strolled into Feng's office, clad in a bathrobe and holding a wine glass. His student, Huang Shengjun, trailed behind him. The Butcher embodied war and showed little regard for ethics or manners. Still, his face brightened the moment he saw Su Lan.

"Old Feng, you should've told me that Ms. Su is here. I would've arrived here earlier."

Su Lan scowled but stayed silent.

Unbothered, the Butcher shamelessly plopped down beside her and turned to Feng. "I won't return the Exquisite Skill Gem just because you called me. I've already given it to my student."

Feng studied Huang Shengjun carefully, using his senses as a Major God. He confirmed that Huang Shengjun was just one step from becoming a God. "Huang Shengjun, have you used the Exquisite Skill Gem?"

Huang Shengjun shook his head. "Rector, I haven't used it yet."

Feng smiled and clapped. "Good. Please return the Exquisite Skill Gem to Han Wu."

Huang Shengjun scoffed. "Sorry, but no."

Feng frowned. "Huang Shengjun, do you think I'm negotiating with you? I am using my authority to command you to give the Exquisite Skill Gem to Han Wu. The one the Butcher applied for will arrive next month."

Huang Shengjun did not flinch. "My teacher gave me the one I possess. It has nothing to do with the college. Rector, you have no right to take it from me."

Feng's fury flared. Since when had the Exquisite Skill Gem the Butcher had seized from him become irrelevant to the college simply because it was in Huang Shengjun's hands?

He opened his palm and summoned his Divine Authority to lift Huang Shengjun. A mere thought could crush him completely.

The Butcher finally ended his games and slammed his wine glass to the floor. “Old Feng, are you trying to bully my student right in front of me?”

He tore through Feng's Divine Authority with raw force. Even Feng himself was struck, coughing up blood as the Butcher's power crashed over him.

The situation became very tense. Xu Hai and Su Lan sprang to their feet, their faces burning with anger.

“You... How dare you! How could you attack someone inside the college?” Xu Hai demanded.

The Butcher chuckled when he saw Xu Hai. “Ah, so it's you. Xu Hai. I heard you aren't afraid of the Death God anymore.”

He was clearly mocking Xu Hai in his youth when the latter feared the Death God. Rather than taking control of Zombie Town himself, he had left his own units behind to handle it.

Xu Hai's face burned with embarrassment, yet he pressed on, defending his student, “I'll ask you again. The Exquisite Skill Gem I applied for—will you return it or not?”

“*Oh ho?* So you dare show me disrespect with that tone.” The Butcher unleashed his Divine Authority and hurled Xu Hai across the room.

Xu Hai crashed into the wall and sustained severe injuries.

Naturally, Han Wu couldn't stay still as he watched the battle unfold. After all, Xu Hai was risking himself to protect his interests. He tapped into the new power granted by Hell Civilization: Demon King Transformation. In an instant, his towering, thousand-meter-tall form rose between Xu Hai and the Butcher.

“You will have to step over my dead body to touch my professor!” he roared.

The Butcher's eyes gleamed with delight as he sized up Han Wu's immense power.

“Not bad, kiddo. I like your bloodlust.” He stepped forward, summoning a colossal war hammer through his Divine Authority, and swung it toward Han Wu. The strike alone could cripple a Major God, let alone a Demigod like Han Wu.

The attack came with blinding speed and overwhelming force. Han Wu barely had a moment to react before the hammer loomed before his face.

Suddenly, a greyish-black light enveloped Han Wu, stopping the Butcher's blow. A solemn voice echoed through the void, "Do you think you can kill my Holy Son on a whim?"

Han Wu immediately recognized the voice. It belonged to the God King of Death.

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[969 words]

Chapter 309 - Fight

The Butcher instantly recognized the voice of the God King of Death. He dropped to his knees, and his bathrobe shimmered and transformed into armor streaked with dried blood.

"I greet the God King of Death," the Butcher said.

"*Hmph.*" The God King of Death snorted.

Without warning, an invisible force struck the Butcher, hurling him hundreds of meters. He coughed up blood, and even his God armor shattered under the impact. Pain coursed through him, yet he did not rage. Instead, he endured, forcing himself back onto his knees. "Thank you, God King of Death, for sparing my life."

The God King of Death remained silent, as if he had vanished entirely. Perhaps he watched from the shadows, observing how they would sort this mess. It took them minutes to recover from their injuries.

Eventually, the Butcher, Xu Hai, and Feng gathered at the table to plan their next move.

Feng spoke first. "Butcher, just return the Exquisite Skill Gem. The one you applied for will arrive next month. You can use it for your student then."

The Butcher scoffed and ignored him. If not for the lingering Divine Authority of the God King of Death, he would have walked away without a second thought.

Xu Hai's anger flared. "What are you planning? Do you want to resolve this or not?"

Xu Hai felt as if he were a scholar negotiating with a soldier. Neither side would yield at this point.

The Butcher flashed a bloodthirsty smile. "It's not that I cannot return the Exquisite Skill Gem... Let your student face mine in battle. If your student wins, I will instruct Huang Shengjun to give you the Exquisite Skill Gem."

Xu Hai sighed. He should have known that the Butcher would drag the discussion into combat. The Butcher was a bloodthirsty maniac who could not sleep peacefully without fighting at least once a day.

Xu Hai refused to fall for the trap. "Your student is the valedictorian of the second year while mine is only in the first. They are a year apart. How is that a fair fight?"

"Then forget it." The Butcher refused to cooperate, and Xu Hai had no leverage. He faced someone utterly stubborn, unwilling to yield in the slightest.

At last, Han Wu rose to his feet. "Professor, I can fight."

Xu Hai frowned, worried about the risks. "What are you talking about? Huang Shengjun is the second-year valedictorian. You're a year younger. That's a huge gap."

Han Wu shook his head. "We are both Demigods, capable of ascending into Gods at any moment."

Xu Hai froze. Han Wu was right. A fight between Demigods leveled the field.

The Butcher's eyes glimmered with amusement and approval. "Brat, I can tell you are far stronger than your cowardly professor by what you've just said."

Xu Hai looked at Han Wu with concern. "Are you certain?"

Han Wu met Huang Shengjun's gaze, seeing the same mix of excitement and bloodlust reflected there. "Yes. Given the grudges between us, we are fated to clash. We might as well settle this through this war."

Xu Hai hesitated but respected Han Wu's resolve. "In that case, I will not object. I see you have made your decision."

The Butcher chuckled. "Hell yeah. Fight, fight!"

The Butcher, Xu Hai, Su Lan, and Feng stood as witnesses to the coming war between Han Wu and Huang Shengjun. To the Butcher, war demanded that every participant risk everything, down to their very lives.

As such, Han Wu and Huang Shengjun were about to engage in a battle where their divine realms would intertwine, each able to invade the other's domain. The gate connecting their realms would remain open until one side surrendered.

Han Wu returned to his divine realm and issued his commands, declaring war. The locusts had no objection. They were his most loyal race, ready to obey without question, no matter the danger.

The Tigermen, Epistians, Scorching Dwarves, minotaurs, and half-dragons all roared in unison, their voices a testament to their willingness to risk everything for their god. The skeletons remained silent, yet their spiritual flames flickered violently.

Han Wu felt a surge of satisfaction. His units were answering his call. A god nurtured their races, and the races, in turn, protected their god. This was the essence of a thriving divine realm.

Soon, their preparations were complete.

Han Wu spread his senses throughout his divine realm and braced himself for the gate's appearance.

Moments later, the first gate opened, revealing Huang Shengjun's divine realm. Inside, a vast horde of well-equipped goblins prepared for battle.

The moment the gate appeared, the first wave of goblins surged into Han Wu's divine realm.

Han Wu met them head-on. "Smash them to pieces!"

All seven hundred billion locusts swarmed into battle and attacked the goblins. Explosions erupted incessantly as both sides suffered massive losses. This was only the opening salvo.

The four Major Gods watched silently. Death had become commonplace for them, yet Han Wu's exploding locusts still drew admiration.

The Butcher nodded with approval. "He knows his weakness and uses it to his advantage, sacrificing his own locusts for maximum gain. I have to admit, he is worthy of becoming my student."

Xu Hai stared at Han Wu's divine realm in disbelief. "Wait... Han Wu has a lot of towers. Why aren't they attacking?"

Feng and Su Lan scanned the realm and confirmed it. The towers were numerous and activated, yet they remained inert. All three turned to the Butcher.

The Butcher chuckled. "War is cruel. To maximize his advantage, Huang Shengjun traveled to a civilization with advanced technology and acquired a Sacred Object called Stealth Craft. It hides the presence of his core race."

“That’s why!” Xu Hai’s shock deepened, now mingled with unease for Han Wu.

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[1,132 words]

Chapter 310 - Intense Battle

The locusts continued their battle against the goblins. The clash raged for more than three hours, leaving casualties that numbered in the hundreds of billions on both sides.

Han Wu capitalized on his massive swarm and seized the initiative before he successfully invaded Huang Shengjun’s divine realm.

Han Wu’s battle intensified when he invaded Huang Shengjun’s divine realm. The other was a year older and had amassed far more resources. His realm was filled with numerous structures, including the Flame Tower, Frost Tower, Lightning Tower, Goblin Archer Tower, and Goblin Cannon. These towers struck the invading locusts simultaneously and inflicted massive casualties across the swarm.

Han Wu acted swiftly. He commanded the heavily armored Abyss Bugs to take the lead, shielding the swarm while the locusts in the rear struck at the towers. With this maneuver, he managed to preserve the advantage gained at the start of the war.

The war entered its middle stage, and both sides revealed their true strength. They used their respective Divine Skills to reinforce their units.

Huang Shengjun’s master was the Butcher, so most of his Divine Skill revolved around war. He had the Rank 5 Legion Aspect, War Aspect, Slaughter Aspect, and Invasion Aspect, along with the Rank 4 Earth Aspect. Though none of them had yet reached their peak, their combined synergy was impressive. He activated numerous Divine Skills, and his goblins grew stronger. They even started repelling locusts.

Han Wu refused to yield. His Divine Aspects matched Huang Shengjun’s in strength, and he immediately unleashed his most devastating weapon: the Destruction Aspect. Its Divine Skills were brutally efficient, intricately bonded with the Skull Guillotine.

All four Major Gods observing the battle rose in shock when the Skull Guillotine appeared. Each could sense the merciless force of annihilation radiating from it.

The Butcher’s eyes gleamed with approval as he looked at Han Wu, then narrowed at Xu Hai. “That brat is exceptionally talented. It’s such a shame he’s following you.”

Xu Hai bristled at the comment. He was a respected professor with countless God students who held him in high regard.

Meanwhile, Han Wu did not hold back. He burned an enormous amount of Divine Points and set the Skull Guillotine's range to encompass Huang Shengjun's entire divine realm. With a single command, the guillotine fell and annihilated a quarter of Huang Shengjun's forces.

Before such overwhelming destruction, all enemy life forms were equalized, regardless of strength. Only those equipped with extraordinary treasures or skills capable of surviving one-hit kills could survive this, and such exceptions were nearly nonexistent. Huang Shengjun's army suffered a 25% loss, and all progress he had made against the locusts instantly vanished.

The attack seemed effortless, but it had cost Han Wu ten Divine Essence. The Skull Guillotine also entered a twenty-four-hour cooldown. Still, the price was worth it.

With so many goblins destroyed, Han Wu activated Souleater Gaze and devoured the souls scattered across the battlefield. Half belonged to his locusts, the other half to Huang Shengjun's goblins.

With each soul absorbed, Han Wu's Defiant Sword unlocked a new form called Soul Beater. He spent Divine Points and summoned a wooden club the length of his forearm.

Han Wu smiled bitterly. *What can a simple stick do at this stage?*

His doubt vanished when he examined Soul Beater's special properties. It was actually powerful. Its primary status effect was Stun, and the chance of stunning an opponent increased with the strength of the swing. The wooden club also grew in size proportionally to the number of souls it consumed.

Han Wu channeled a lot of the goblin souls into Soul Beater and extended it to a meter long. With even more souls, the weapon could grow far larger.

"Interesting," Han Wu muttered, eager to test his new weapon.

Huang Shengjun had lost the initial clash of Divine Skills, but he was far from defeated. He had lost a quarter of his goblins, yet 300 billion remained within his divine realm. Beyond that, he had countless goblins scattered outside.

As a second-year student, Huang Shengjun had already invaded multiple civilizations through his classes. His core race, the goblins, adapted effortlessly to diverse environments. He had left some goblins behind in every civilization he conquered, allowing him to accumulate resources and strengthen his forces independently of his divine realm. Now, it was time to recall them.

He channeled his Divine Points into the summoning circle he had prepared beforehand and activated it. Streams of energy from various civilizations converged, and a massive army of goblins appeared.

Due to the differing elements and laws of the civilizations, Huang Shengjun's goblins appeared in a variety of forms. Some bore runes or titles, others had mutated bodies reminiscent of demons from the Hell Civilization, and some even piloted mechs.

Every goblin answered to Huang Shengjun, and their presence lifted the morale of his army. They charged into battle and drove the locusts out of Huang Shengjun's divine realm and into Han Wu's.

Han Wu knew that the goblins would devastate his divine realm if left unchecked, so he deployed his second strongest race, the skeletons. He also ignored the cost to his Divine Points and used his Darkness Divine Skills, which complemented the skeletons perfectly.

[Darkness Divine Skill: Eternal Night – Shrouds the designated area in darkness, affecting only enemies.]

[Darkness Divine Skill: Dark Corrosion – Passively erodes the targets' defenses.]

[Darkness Divine Skill: Dark Pocket – Creates small voids of darkness that devour corpses and convert them into energy for the user.]

[Darkness Divine Skill: Chaos – Inflicts the Confused status on targets, causing them to sometimes attack their own allies.]

[Darkness Divine Skill: Dark Domain – Transforms corpses consumed by Dark Pocket into Dark Beings that serve as fodder, while amplifying the power of all four other Darkness Divine Skills.]

The skeletons fell under the domain of darkness, and under the influence of the Darkness Divine Skills, their power multiplied, surpassing even that of goblins of the same rank. The battlefield swarmed with so many skeletons and Dark Beings that the goblin army found itself steadily pushed back.

The four Major Gods watched the clash with quiet contemplation. They had expected a war between Demigods to conclude in an instant, yet this battle had dragged on far longer than anticipated. Even among Gods, they had never witnessed combat of such relentless intensity.

Feng finally acknowledged his error in underestimating Han Wu. Although he was only a year younger than Huang Shengjun, his talent justified allocating additional resources to him. Perhaps, with proper support, Han Wu could uphold the college's reputation in the future.

On the other hand, Su Lan observed Han Wu with amusement and interest. “It’s such a delight to see a youngster with the Darkness Aspect.”

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- Chapter 311 - Kill the Leader

[1,575 words]

Chapter 311 - Kill the Leader

Infuriated at the sight of his army being pushed back by skeletons and Dark Beings, Huang Shengjun was determined to not let the filthy undead remain in his divine realm for a single moment longer. The undead carried death aura, a corrupting force that could silently destroy his divine realm and easily cause deadly plagues.

The moment he noticed the skeletons and Dark Beings entering his divine realm, he activated his Divine Skill, intending to stop them in their tracks.

[Earth Divine Skill: Summon Holy Mountain Ugan]

A huge mountain range, spanning tens of thousands of kilometers and towering a few kilometers tall, suddenly appeared in Huang Shengjun’s divine realm. It radiated with pure Holy energy, acting as an unbreakable castle wall that completely blocked the invading skeletons and Dark Beings. Any undead that dared attempt to scale the range were continuously damaged by the powerful holy aura.

With a single Divine Skill, Huang Shengjun completely turned the tide of the battle. Having halted the advance of the skeletons and Dark Beings into his divine realm, he ordered his goblins to set up their cannons on the peaks of the mountain range, preparing to bombard the enemy from above.

With his newly formed army rapidly suffering heavy casualties, Han Wu was forced to retaliate. He ordered two of his most powerful skeletons—an Osteomancer and a Skeleton Reanimator, both close to the King rank—to take command of his forces.

Working in perfect unison, the Osteomancer and the Skeleton Reanimator stitched the countless bone fragments scattered across the divine realm into a massive 10,000 meter-tall bone giant. This feat completely stunned Huang Shengjun and Han Wu, as neither of them, not even the skeletons’ own master, had expected such immense power.

The Holy Mountain Ugan radiated a continuous holy aura, but it was completely unable to harm the Osteomancer, who was safely lodged deep within the bone giant. The colossal titan trudged forward with heavy footsteps, soon beginning to rain down furious punches upon the mountain range.

One... Two... Three...

With each powerful blow from the bone giant, a huge shower of bone shards would fall from its fist. However, the Skeleton Reanimator, working to assist the Osteomancer, would quickly stitch the fragments back onto the bone giant as soon as they fell.

After hundreds of punches, they finally succeeded in carving a gorge right through the center of the Holy Mountain Ugan. Having finally found an entry point, the Dark Beings poured into the gorge, flooding into the newly-made gorge.

Huang Shengjun frowned in frustration, then sighed inwardly. *At this point, my only option is to confront these filthy undead head-on.*

After summoning his goblins to block the gorge's exit, Huang Shengjun used his Divine Skills to strengthen them against the invading skeletons and Dark Beings. Han Wu likewise used his own Divine Skills to strengthen his army, but unlike Huang Shengjun's Legion Divine Skill, which worked on an entire army at once, Han Wu's Divine Skills could only be used on individual units.

Also, a direct, head-on battle against Huang Shengjun's unified army, which moved as one, was practically impossible for the skeletons and the Dark Beings. It would take more than ten of Han Wu's units to take down a single one of the enemy's—a frightening ten-to-one ratio.

As the two forces clashed, Huang Shengjun made a cunning move. To prevent Han Wu's units from using the goblin corpses to gain energy or to summon new Dark Beings, he ordered his goblins to burn the fallen. He was determined not to give his opponent a single advantage.

The battle was turning against Han Wu. His usual strategy of summoning more units as the war continued was failing. The goblin army was obliterating his skeletons and Dark Beings and slowly pushing them back. With no other choice, he was forced to summon his strongest allied army from his divine realm.

As the battle raged, the Tigermen burst on the scene, their battle spirits transforming into tiger avatars as they instantly charged in as the vanguard. The Epistians followed close behind, charging their magic before raining down massive fireballs upon the goblins. From the air, Alpheus, along with the Great Lightning Dragons, unleashed a powerful dragon breath, devastating the army below. This swift and unexpected assault massively slowed the goblins' advance.

Huang Shengjun watched the Tigerman-Epistian-Great Dragon allied army with a wary eye—they were posing a serious threat to his victory.

I need to deal with them quickly, or my defeat is imminent. The most effective strategy is to eliminate the leaders of the three races—it's the fastest and easiest way to break their morale.

Huang Shengjun summoned his most powerful units: ten King-ranked goblins who had followed him closely and left their names throughout various civilizations. Now, they had all reached the King rank and would be able to easily ascend to Demigods as soon as Huang Shengjun became a God.

The mission was clear: the assassination of the leaders of the three races. Huang Shengjun ordered them to execute it without fail. Moving like undetectable specters, the Goblin Kings easily infiltrated Han Wu's forces. They were strong, experienced assassins who knew exactly when to strike, how to deal the most damage, and when to flee.

It didn't take long for Han Wu's forces to suffer their first attack. One of his Saints, Hu Yong, was ambushed and critically injured by a Goblin King during a moment of carelessness. Luckily, the other units were able to react in time, quickly providing first aid and saving Hu Yong from an otherwise certain death.

Han Wu spent one Divine Essence to activate the Inverse Domain, reversing Hu Yong's wounds. A regular wound would not have cost so much, but the multiple venom types within Hu Yong's wound meant the reversal required a far greater amount of energy.

The incident instantly sent alarm bells ringing in Han Wu's head. Now on high alert, he realized he needed to quickly prepare himself to avoid a second assassination attempt.

The second attack came before Han Wu could devise a countermeasure. A Goblin King had struck the Epistian elder with a dagger right to the heart! The Epistians, however, were masters of healing magic and were able to charge their magic in time, expelling the venom from the elder's body and saving him from death on the spot.

Han Wu was enraged—his units had been targeted for assassination twice! He was fully aware that eliminating a leader to demoralize an army was a common war tactic, one he had personally used many times. However, he was pissed that his units were the ones being targeted this time.

Having realized his units had only survived by sheer luck, Han Wu let out a breath and began to think furiously. After a few moments, he made a decision: he would capture and kill the assassins to boost the falling morale of his army! For this task, he summoned his strongest King life form, Steely.

Steely was not just the strongest among Han Wu's King life forms—he was Han Wu's most powerful unit. The very moment Han Wu became a God, Steely would ascend to become a Demigod.

“Steely, find those despicable assassins and eliminate them!”

Steely bowed in response. “As you wish, my glorious God.”

A faint gust of wind radiated from Steely, allowing him to monitor every movement on the battlefield. He could sense everything, even the slightest movement of a single blade of grass. His brow suddenly twitched, and in the moment, he disappeared.

Three minutes later, Steely reappeared with the head of a Goblin King in his hand. “Glorious God, I am pleased to inform you that I have been successful.”

Han Wu looked at the severed head of the Goblin King, its face still frozen in surprise, showing just how swiftly it had killed. A chuckle of delight escaped him.

“Oh, Huang Shengjun,” he muttered, “you think you're the only one with powerful units? I have many of them too!”

On the other side of the battlefield, Huang Shengjun felt his connection to one of his Goblin Kings was severed and instantly knew that it had been eliminated.

Clenching his fist in rage, he said under his breath, “Han Wu, don't get cocky. Now, you shall know pain!”

Huang Shengjun then activated his Divine Talent, Quality in Numbers. As it took effect, a small orb of energy appeared from each goblin in his army. With 300 billion goblins from his divine realm and another 200 billion recalled from other civilizations, he had a total of 500 billion energy orbs at his disposal.

Huang Shengjun compressed the energy into a small but incredibly powerful energy orb. He then ordered his strongest Goblin King to return and consume the condensed orb. Within five minutes, the Goblin King's body expanded to a monstrous ten kilometers tall, making it as powerful as Han Wu's Osteomancer.

The Goblin King's strength had increased with its size, allowing it to fight against Sage life forms for a short period. Immense excitement filled the goblin as it sensed the power welling inside its body. Upon receiving Huang Shengjun's command, it immediately charged into battle with glee.

The Goblin King's first target was the Osteomancer that had carved a gorge out of the Holy Mountain Ugan. The two giants clashed, their collision sending intense, non-stop tremors throughout the ground that spread across both their divine realms.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,522 words]

Chapter 312 - Han Wu's Despair

The Butcher watched as the massive Goblin King and the Osteomancer's bone giant clashed. "This is so interesting!" he exclaimed, clapping his hands together. "Bravo!"

The Butcher had long since acknowledged that Huang Shengjun's talent far surpassed his own in his youth. However, with the sudden appearance of Han Wu, he realized that the kid was just as talented, if not more so. The Butcher was sure that if nothing happened to him, Han Wu would undoubtedly become a God King in the future.

Xu Hai watched with a satisfied smile. "But of course! He *is* my student, after all," he said. He was very pleased with what was happening, as Han Wu's violent exchange of blows in the battle was increasing his own reputation.

The Butcher let out a mocking chuckle. "You worthless bastard," he sneered. "Aren't you being a bit too cocky? Do you actually think your student is winning?"

Xu Hai felt his pride sting from the insult, but it was quickly replaced with concern for his student, Han Wu. "Who are you calling a worthless bastard?" he snapped. "Does Huang Shengjun have another trump card?"

"Huang Shengjun is my student—I am quite aware of his capabilities. If this is the extent of his strength, Han Wu is destined to lose. Huang Shengjun is going to be victorious."

A sense of alarm shot through Xu Hai, and he was growing really worried that Han Wu was going to lose. "What makes you say that?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

If Han Wu were to lose, the consequences would be catastrophic. Not only would he lose the Exquisite Skill Gem, but his divine realm would also be destroyed. Recovering would take a long time, and even a single day's delay in his ascension to becoming a God would be a major setback.

Xu Hai earnestly hoped the Butcher was bluffing. However, his heart sank as it soon became increasingly clear that the battle was not favoring Han Wu at all.

Meanwhile, on the battlefield, Huang Shengjun, activated his Talent once more, transforming another Goblin King into a massive giant. The goblin's power was on par with that of a Goblin Sage, and with every step, its immense body cracked the ground.

The goblin giant alone was enough to easily overwhelm most of Han Wu's units. The only one capable of defending against it was Steely, but even he could only block its attacks, not kill it.

Soon after, a third giant Goblin King appeared, and Han Wu scowled at the sight. With no choice, he ordered Alpheus and the squad of Great Dragons to engage the giant. At Alpheus' command, the Great Dragons roared and swiftly formed a formation that temporarily managed to block the massive goblin giant.

Huang Shengjun simply smirked, instantly condensing the energy from his goblins for the fourth time and turned yet another Goblin King into a giant.

"Give up, Han Wu!" he said, a triumphant look on his face. "You can't win against me—I can create nine Sage Goblin Kings just like that one! What could you possibly have that can win against that?"

Han Wu gritted his teeth and clenched his fist, bitter resentment welling up within him. He was a genius, far more talented than Huang Shengjun, but he lacked the resources to compete. Huang Shengjun was only a year older, but that small headstart was enough for him to collect far more resources.

However, Han Wu refused to surrender. He looked at his units, who were sacrificing themselves just to obey his orders. He would be wasting their sacrifice by giving up now.

His Saints, Hu Chi and Hu Yong, stepped forward and knelt before him. "Glorious God," they declared with unwavering resolve, "allow us to bring it down!"

As Saints, though they possessed strength far beyond King life forms, they were still slightly inferior to Sage life forms. However, by working together, the two could temporarily hold back one of the giant Goblin Kings.

The problem was that Huang Shengjun could create nine such giants. They could hold one back for a while, but how could they possibly face the others?

As Han Wu was still hesitating, the battle between his Osteomancer and the first Goblin King came to a brutal end. The two had been fighting on equal ground until the second giant Goblin King, which had escaped Steely, joined the fight. Overwhelmed by two opponents, the Osteomancer was ultimately defeated, its bone fragments collapsing to the ground and revealing its true form.

The sight of the severely injured Osteomancer and the Skeleton Reanimator filled Han Wu with a heart-wrenching pain. Their crystal-like bones were riddled with so many cracks that they seemed ready to disintegrate with a single touch. The two skeletons had been with him since high school and had helped him survive numerous battles.

I can't let them perish here today!

As Han Wu unhesitatingly activated Inverse Domain to heal his two loyal units, his Divine Points rapidly drained from his account. However, he didn't care about the cost—he was going to save them, no matter what.

With Inverse Domain continuously reversing all their wounds, the two skeletons returned to their peak. Now, fully healed, they could transform into their massive bone giant form to face the Goblin Kings once more.

The two skeletons, however, knew their efforts were useless. Their spiritual flames flickered as they appeared to have a silent conversation, quickly coming to a decision. With their choice made, they bolted towards the gate connected to Doron City.

Han Wu was baffled. *Have they chosen to abandon the fight?* he thought, smiling sadly.

The two skeletons stood on each side of the gate, and a seal personally made by Han Wu appeared beneath it. Back then, Skelly had been so overbearing in controlling the skeletons in Han Wu's divine realm that it would not allow any of its subordinates to grow even slightly stronger, so that it could maintain its position and curb any potential rebellion.

The obsession was so unhealthy that Skelly had even tried to destroy Han Wu's Core just so that he would lose the protection of his units and ultimately be forced to rely on it alone. For the safety of his divine realm, Han Wu had chased it out and placed a seal on the gate to prevent its return. Now, the Osteomancer and the Skeleton Reanimator were now unhesitatingly breaking that very seal to bring back their tyrant lord—all for Han Wu's sake!

On Huang Shengjun's side of the battlefield, the Goblin Kings charged forward and easily invaded Han Wu's divine realm without the Osteomancer there to stop them. As the goblin army rampaged, many of Han Wu's units fell. Han Wu was close to despair, as he could see no way out of the hopeless situation.

Huang Shengjun, mad with the certainty of his victory, ruthlessly commanded the goblins invading Han Wu's divine realm to destroy his Core the moment they found it. He was going to not just defeat Han Wu but also cripple him and destroy his future!

The four Major Gods naturally heard Huang Shengjun's chilling command. Feng exclaimed in horror, "Huang Shengjun wants to cripple Han Wu and stop him from becoming a God?"

As far as Feng was concerned, both students were Imperial College geniuses. There was no need for one to cripple the other, even if there were grudges between them. A simple fight to determine who was superior would've been sufficient.

Casting aside all dignity, Xu Hai immediately pleaded with the Butcher. “Tell your student to stop this! This is no longer a war—it’s a massacre! You thought highly of Han Wu, didn’t you? I’ll give him to you, but he cannot be crippled!”

The Butcher smirked coldly. “You ball-less coward,” he scoffed. “Keep those weak thoughts away from me. War is cruel. This war will continue until the last surviving soldier as long as one of them hasn’t surrendered. I admit that I admire that brat, but losers do not deserve my sympathy.”

Furious, Xu Hai lost his composure. “Butcher, you bastard! You’re allowing your student to destroy the youth, the precious treasures of Imperial College! If you do not put an immediate end to this, I will report you to the administration and call for the chancellor to deal with you!”

The Butcher completely ignored the furious ranting and watched the now one-sided war with boredom. He was absolutely sure Han Wu would lose, and that unless he surrendered, all of his units would be slain and his Core would be destroyed.

Su Lan, who had been quiet until now, suddenly spoke up. “Wait... why is there a strange aura coming from Han Wu’s divine realm?”

Xu Hai quickly turned to the screen Su Lan was pointing at. He could see that an intense aura was radiating from the now unsealed gate that led to the Class Civilization’s Doron City.

A horrifying aura rapidly spilled into Han Wu’s divine realm. Amidst the terrifying aura, a pale, slender leg stepped through the gate.

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[1,213 words]

Chapter 313 - Skeletal Beauty

As soon as the leg stepped into his divine realm, Han Wu instantly recognized a familiar presence. He completely ignored the ongoing war and turned to the gate, where he could see an ethereal beauty standing before it.

Standing at least two meters tall, she had a slender frame and a captivating yet cold beauty. Her body exuded an aura that deterred any living being from getting close, but despite the chill, Han Wu couldn’t shake the feeling that her presence felt strangely familiar.

“You... Are you Skelly?” Han Wu asked, confused. The answer became apparent the moment she approached and hugged him. He could smell a faint aromatic scent as she held him close, and his doubt was instantly replaced with recognition.

Just then, Huang Shengjun’s massive goblin army invaded. Equipped with excellent gear, they easily infiltrated deep into Han Wu’s divine realm, leaving a path of complete destruction in their wake. Marching proudly behind the goblin army were two ten thousand-meter-tall Goblin Kings. With their massive wooden clubs, they crushed any being that tried to stop the goblin army.

The lady simply scoffed when she looked at the goblins. Several summoning arrays floated around her, releasing huge waves of skeletons that stormed forward. They crashed into the goblin army, but the goblins’ formation was strong enough to pulverize the skeletons into bone fragments upon contact.

This, however, was far from the end. The lady began summoning more Osteomancers. These new units used the huge amount of bone fragments on the battlefield to transform into ten-meter-tall bone giants that easily breached the goblin army’s formation.

The goblin army’s formation was strong, but it was no match for the powerful Osteomancers, beings that stood at the peak of Heroic life forms. With their formation shattered, the goblins lost their advantage.

The giant Goblin Kings began to attack the bone giants, their massive blows obliterating a single giant with each strike. However, the lady never stopped summoning. More and more Osteomancers poured out from the summoning arrays, each one stronger than the last.

One by one, more powerful units appeared. First came Heroic Osteomancers, then Lords, and finally High Lords. In the end, the ten-thousand-meter-tall Goblin Kings found themselves surrounded by thousands of bone giants, each a thousand meters tall.

The sheer number of bone giants was overwhelming. They swarmed the Goblin Kings, tripping and pinning them to the ground before pummeling them to death.

Huang Shengjun panicked at the sight. With two of his Goblin Kings killed, he instantly realized that the lady wasn’t someone he could win against.

His mind raced, desperately trying to recall if he had ever seen that woman before. *Who is she? Why haven’t I seen her before? And why is she hugging that brat?*

In his worry, Huang Shengjun resorted to using his teacher's reputation to intimidate the lady.

“Miss, this is a war between me and him, so please don’t interfere,” he said. “My teacher is the fearsome Butcher, working under the God King of War. My teacher would be more than happy to befriend you if you stop interfering now.”

Xu Hai was the angriest of the Major Gods observing the war. He deemed Huang Shengjun’s use of his teacher’s fame to threaten his opponents as less than honorable. It was no different from saying, “I’m related to someone famous. Let me go, and I’ll say a few good words for you.” The possibility that the Butcher might gain such a powerful new ally also did not please him.

Butcher, on the other hand, was greatly pleased with his student. He admired Huang Shengjun’s cunning in using his name for leverage, and it appeared that Huang Shengjun had learned the core of his power.

In the Butcher’s opinion, to win a war, one must abandon their morality. He saw Huang Shengjun’s use of his name to threaten his opponent as a form of psychological warfare—an attempt to make his enemies back down without a fight by using the resources available to him.

Huang Shengjun’s plan, however, backfired spectacularly. Not only did the lady completely ignore his threats, but she also activated a more powerful summoning array, calling forth Osteomancer Kings to join the battle.

The summoned Osteomancer Kings started absorbing the numerous bone fragments on the battlefield, growing rapidly and soon reaching ten thousand meters in height. Hundreds of these massive bone giants appeared, instantly surrounding the battlefield.

Facing an army of hundreds of bone giants, each ten thousand meters tall, Huang Shengjun immediately gave up all hope of fighting. He had nothing that could even begin to stand against such a force.

He quickly ordered his goblin army to retreat, but the lady wasn’t going to let them go so easily. With a single command, the hundreds of Osteomancer Kings began their assault, their every stomp and punch causing the ground to tremble severely. Huang Shengjun’s army suffered a lethal blow from the attack, but Han Wu’s divine realm also suffered heavy damage.

Realizing he couldn’t recall his goblin army from Han Wu’s divine realm, Huang Shengjun made a ruthless and swift decision. He abandoned his goblin army and quickly retreated to his own divine realm to surrender. This closed the gate between the two realms, preventing the Osteomancer Kings from invading his divine realm.

The battle had finally ended, but the Major Gods had no idea how to decide the victor. Han Wu’s divine realm was more or less destroyed, and he had lost a lot of units. Similarly, Huang Shengjun had also suffered heavy casualties, and a lot of buildings in his divine realm had been destroyed.

The only one who truly emerged victorious was the mysterious lady who had somehow appeared in Han Wu's divine realm. She had converted nearly every dead unit on the battlefield into subordinate skeletons.

Who is she? Is she one of Han Wu's units, or an invader from a foreign civilization? the Major Gods wondered.

Xu Hai, visibly relaxed now Han Wu was safe despite the heavy losses to his divine realm, broke the silence in the room.

"Who do you think won?"

"It's obviously Han Wu. Huang Shengjun surrendered, so he lost," Feng stated with conviction. Having just been brushed aside by the Butcher and having seen the young man's potential, Feng had decided to support Han Wu at all costs.

Su Lan nodded in agreement. "That's right. Also, it seems the Skeleton God is connected to Han Wu for some reason, so she should count as his ally."

Xu Hai nodded. "Yes, that's true," he said, chiming in. "At the very least, Huang Shengjun has lost more than Han Wu."

Although the Butcher didn't like the decision of the other three, he was vastly outnumbered and couldn't go against them. He had no choice but to grudgingly command Huang Shengjun to give up the Exquisite Skill Gem after the latter has emerged from his divine realm. Huang Shengjun was initially unwilling, but under the Butcher's fierce glare, he ultimately surrendered it.

Xu Hai gleefully received the Exquisite Skill Gem. He was going to pass it to Han Wu the moment the boy emerged from his divine realm.

Han Wu, however, was feeling quite miserable, witnessing the destruction within his divine realm.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,371 words]

Chapter 314 - Aftermath

Back in his divine realm, Han Wu was still held in a hug by the beautiful lady, even after Huang Shengjun's retreat. Han Wu considered himself quite manly and found this

position deeply embarrassing, though he certainly wouldn't have minded had the roles been reversed.

Embarrassed, he stammered, "C-Could you please let me go?"

The lady, however, ignored his protests and hugged him even tighter.

"Wait, you are hurting me!" squealed Han Wu, a sound that he never thought could come from his mouth. This time, the lady reacted, gently relaxing her grip a little. She looked at him, but still did not let him go.

"Ske-Skelly! I need to console my units!" Han Wu said in panic. The lady, however, did not take it well, and her face rapidly hardened.

"I am the only one for you, my God!" she stated with a cold and resolute tone.

Han Wu could feel a headache incoming. Skelly, with her extreme beliefs, had tried to destroy his Core in the past, resulting in her expulsion from his divine realm. It seemed that even after her long exile to Doron City, her attitude remained unchanged.

Now that Skelly had grown stronger, Han Wu' worry deepened—she could destroy his divine realm on a whim if she became displeased. He instantly knew he had to change his approach.

"Yes, you are the most important in my heart, but these units sacrificed their lives for me. As their God, I am honor-bound to repay and reward their favor and worship in kind."

The sincerity in his eyes caused the coldness on Skelly's face to soften somewhat. "If you really have to, then go. However, you have to return to me, or I will destroy this divine realm."

A chill run down Han Wu's spine at those words. Before, he had been able to control Skelly because she was weaker than him, but now she was much stronger. He was genuinely worried she would destroy his divine realm for real.

Han Wu frantically nodded, and Skelly reluctantly released her grip on him. Now with the freedom to check his divine realm, he scanned the seat area and immediately felt like he had been punched in the gut, his heart sinking at the sight of the immense destruction before him.

Over 60% of his divine realm was destroyed. Not only would he have to use numerous Divine Points to restore it, but he would also have to purchase portions of land from other divine realms to rebuild it.

Nearly 80% of his locusts had died, and 4 billion of his Tigermen had perished. The other races had also suffered heavy losses, with a 30-50% mortality rate—the biggest loss he had experienced so far in this life.

Han Wu appeared before his units and, disregarding the immense cost, activated Inverse Domain to rewind their injuries. He then promised rewards for their participation in the war, especially for those with stellar performances.

After some time, his units finally managed to live past the trauma of the war and returned to their regular lives. With his task complete, Han Wu returned to Skelly like a hen-pecked husband, and she smiled with satisfaction.

Following a quick conversation, Han Wu learned that Skelly had been living a good life in the Class Civilization. After her expulsion, she had used Doron City as her base and, without any opponents, she grew rapidly and became the ruler of Doron City within a year.

Skelly continued to expand her influence, improving her strength using the Class system until she reached the rank of Sage. After gathering and absorbing a large amount of the Divine Points that could be earned in the Class Civilization, she was able to finally ascend into a God.

The fact that Skelly was higher ranked stung Han Wu's ego. He was envious that she was already a God while he was still a Demigod. Acknowledging that he would most definitely be bullied by her, Han Wu grew even more determined to ascend to Godhood as soon as he could.

That reminds me—my battle with Huang Shengjun is over. He publicly announced his surrender, which means... I won! No matter what anyone says, the Exquisite Skill Gem is mine!

Han Wu was quite interested in learning how the Exquisite Skill Gem could help him awaken new powers, so he explained his situation to Skelly. She wholeheartedly supported him in collecting the Exquisite Skill Gem as his rightful prize and even wanted to accompany him back into the Divine Civilization.

Han Wu was startled. Due to the vast difference in rank, divine realms could not directly connect to the Divine Civilization. Regular units could not follow their gods back to the Divine Civilization unless they had reached the God rank themselves. Only by using Divine Authority could they somewhat resist the suppression of the Will of the Divine Civilization.

Han Wu, having no other choice, agreed to bring Skelly with him, and the two were swiftly transported back to the office. Butcher had already departed, unable to stand the smug look on Xu Hai's face, leaving the other three Major Gods in the room.

Seeing Han Wu and Skelly appear in the office together, Xu Hai smiled mischievously and gave Han Wu a knowing look. Though he was a Major God, he understood the appeal of the opposite sex as a fellow male.

“Teacher...”

The moment Han Wu saw Xu Hai’s smile, he knew his mentor had completely misunderstood the situation. With no idea how to explain and fearing that a single wrong word would only escalate the misunderstanding, he decided to remain silent.

“Good job, Han Wu! I am very proud of you!” Xu Hai congratulated, but his eyes kept darting towards Skelly.

Is he congratulating my performance in the battle or my supposed feat of taming a God-ranked skeleton? Han Wu thought, sighing to himself.

With an inward roll of his eyes at his colleague’s childishness, Feng cleared his throat.

“Han Wu, I believe this belongs to you,” he said, proceeding to present Han Wu with the Exquisite Skill Gem. The precious item shimmered with iridescent light, mesmerizing everyone who looked at it.

The moment Han Wu received the Gem, he could sense its gentle energy without even having to absorb it. He could tell this special power was not meant for combat, but rather to serve as a catalyst to activate greater power.

“Thank you so much, Teacher, Ms. Su Lan, and Mr. Feng!”

“You deserve it—it’s the result of your hard work,” Feng praised. “I hope you’ll continue to work hard in the future and establish glorious merits.”

As one of the department heads of Imperial College, Feng was hoping Han Wu would use this chance to ascend to become a powerful God and, in doing so, build up a good reputation for the college.

“I will, Mr. Feng!” Han Wu said, nodding with sincere gratitude.

Once I ascend into a God, my divine realm will increase in size, my Core will be able to equip even more Sacred Objects, and the strength of my core race will grow. When that happens, I’ll definitely need even more resources.

However, those are issues for another day. What’s more important right now is to ascend into Godhood—I cannot be suppressed by Skelly any longer!

Eager to find a suitable place to ascend, Han Wu was about to bid farewell to the Major Gods, but Feng spoke up, stopping him.

“Han Wu, I am at fault this time. I hope you are willing to accept this as compensation.”

Feng handed an unusual helmet to Han Wu, giving both Xu Hai and Su Lan a massive shock. They couldn't decide what was more surprising—the fact that Feng possessed such a rare item, or his willingness to give it to Han Wu.

Noticing the incredulous expressions on their faces, Han Wu hesitated to take the helmet. Xu Hai, however, quickly grabbed the helmet and pushed it into Han Wu's hands.

“Take it, you little idiot! Oh, and don't forget to thank Mr. Feng.”

“...Thank you, Mr. Feng.”

Han Wu used his authority to check the helmet's data, and found that its name was the Reincarnation Helmet.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,437 words]

Chapter 315 - Ascension

After saying his goodbyes to Mr. Feng and Ms. Su Lan, Han Wu was led by Xu Hai to a large, empty space. He then specifically called Qin Shuang and Sun Qingnian to bear witness to his ascension.

Holding the Exquisite Skill Gem, Han Wu sat in the middle of the space and communicated with the Will of the Divine Civilization to proceed with the ascension.

His mind was instantly flooded with a rapid succession of system messages.

[Core ascertained. Upgrading clearance...]

[Citizen number confirmed. Preparing energy...]

[Exquisite Skill Gem detected. Will you use it?]

Han Wu had been eagerly waiting for this moment, and he responded without a moment's hesitation.

“Yes.”

He was enveloped by a wave of multicolored energy, and a Divine Authority began to develop within him. His consciousness was suddenly pulled into a void, where he found the projection of his consciousness surrounded by all five of his Divine Aspects: Defiance, War, Destruction, Death, and Darkness. Each was an Aspect many Demigods would kill for, and yet Han Wu had five of them.

Just as the five Divine Aspects began to merge to fully form his Divine Authority, his Divine Talent, Defiance, somehow activated in the void, causing the Defiance Aspect to suddenly glow brilliantly like a bright star.

Han Wu was alarmed. He couldn't understand why this Divine Talent was acting up at such a crucial step, especially when his more powerful Divine Talent, Chosen One, remained dormant. However, for fear of interrupting the ascension process, he remained silent despite his internal panic.

The Divine Talent Defiance caused the Defiance Aspect to split into four orbs of light. Each orb entered one of the other four Divine Aspects, and they reemerged as four new, contrasting Divine Aspects: Peace, Creation, Life, and Light. Each of these was a highly sought-after Rank 5 Divine Aspect that many Demigods wished to obtain!

While Han Wu was stunned into silence, the four new Divine Aspects that had inexplicably appeared began circling him, joining the original four.

My Divine Talent is much more valuable than I thought! To think that it's capable of splitting one Divine Aspect into four new ones!

He had never heard of any God possessing eight powerful Divine Aspects at once, much less those with opposing powers. Yet, this was the reality before him.

With the power of the Will of the Divine Civilization, the Exquisite Skill Gem shattered. The eight Divine Aspects slowly merged into his body, forming his Divine Authority and completing his ascension.

The Exquisite Skill Gem had granted Han Wu three extra options for his next Divine Power, all of them rare. He could tell, since three of the four options he was given were framed with gold.

[Option 1: Rage (Gold): Sends the target into a blinding rage. Increases combat power drastically, but causes the target to lose all rational thinking.]

[Option 2: Reincarnation (Gold): Targets a soul and allows it to reincarnate with its past memories.]

[Option 3: Transmute (Gold): Can change any non-living objects into any shape desired.]

[Option 4: Life Blessing. Blesses new life and grants them a healthy body.]

Han Wu recognized the fourth option as the Divine Power he was originally meant to receive. Since its atrocious effects were only useful on newly born units, he immediately ignored it and turned his attention to the three golden options.

Rage, a combat-oriented Divine Power, drastically increased the power of its target, making it very suitable for use on his units during invasions.

The Divine Power of Reincarnation was incredibly powerful as well. As a transmigrator himself, Han Wu knew how precious it was to retain memories of a former life, and he was certain that Divine Power could help him nurture many strong units fairly quickly.

The Divine Power of Transmute appeared quite simple, as it could only change the form of non-living objects. In reality, however, it was extremely powerful. He could easily change the terrain of his divine realm to build structures or instantly turn ores into weapons. Its true potential was completely dependent on creativity.

Though Han Wu wanted all three Divine Powers, he could only choose one. Ultimately, he chose the one he was certain was most powerful: Reincarnation. After making his choice, he officially ascended into a real God, and his interface changed to reflect his new rank.

[Name: Han Wu]

[Rank: God]

[Divine Talent: Chosen One (Exclusive), Defiance]

[Divine Power: Sacrifice (Exclusive), Life Infusion, Merge (Exclusive), Famine, Nine Martial Caste, Demon King Transformation, Reincarnation, Replicate (Exclusive)]

[Divine Essence: 35 (778 remaining in account, awaiting absorption)]

[Divine Points: 98.76 million]

[Faith Points: 80.27 million]

[Destruction Aspect: Skull Guillotine. Execution rate of 25%]

[War Aspect: Fanatic, Haste, Knowing, Last Stand, Unparalleled]

[Death Aspect: 197 dying methods]

[Darkness Aspect: Eternal Night, Dark Pocket, Dark Corrosion, Chaos, Dark Domain]

[Creation Aspect: No Divine Skills activated]

[Peace Aspect: No Divine Skills activated]

[Life Aspect: No Divine Skills activated]

[Light Aspect: No Divine Skills activated]

[Skills: Dark Dragon King Transformation, Great Dragon Cleave, Spectral Dash, Summon, ...]

[Divine Authority 1: 0% (Merged from Destruction, War, Death, and Darkness. Capped at 100%)]

[Divine Authority 2: 0% (Merged from Creation, Peace, Life, and Light. Capped at 100%)]

[Core Race: Locusts]

[...]

Han Wu was pleased with his interface. After all, the more he had listed, the richer and more powerful he was. He then began to scan through a few of his newly acquired Divine Powers.

Demon King Transformation was obtained from the Hell Civilization after completing the Demon King Festival, while Reincarnation was granted by the Exquisite Skill Gem. The final one, Replicate, which had “Exclusive” attached, was from his Exclusive Divine Talent, Chosen One.

Han Wu nodded with satisfaction. Armed with these Divine Powers, he felt more confident than ever that he could find his parents in the vastness of the Chaotic Starfield.

Scrolling down, he saw his newly awakened Divine Authorities. While regular Gods only had one, he had two. He carefully sensed the powers of his Divine Authorities to understand their differences.

The two Divine Authorities were complete opposites: the first Divine Authority was like a black hole that devoured everything, while the second felt like the sun, radiating warmth and light to nourish life.

Two Divine Authorities... Does this mean I can take on two positions later when I become stronger? After pondering for a while, he shook off the thought, deeming it unnecessary for now.

Back in the real world, the light around Han Wu dissipated, signaling his successful ascension. As Qin Shuang was about to congratulate him, Skelly moved in a flash, dashed forward to hug Han Wu tightly. She refused to let him go, even trying to drag him back into his divine realm to celebrate while completely ignoring Xu Hai and the others.

With a stern tone, Han Wu refused. "I can not just disrespect my teacher like this. All my accomplishments are thanks to him," he said. "Also, my friends came here to support me—how can I just leave them here? Isn't that just heartless?"

Not listening to a word he said, Skelly tried to use her power to force him back to his divine realm. However, this trick would no longer work—Han Wu was now a God and could easily use his Divine Authority to suppress her. Additionally, his second Divine Authority radiated light, life, and peace—a paradox that surprisingly invoked a primal fear in Skelly's soul.

With Skelly finally suppressed, Han Wu was able to talk to Xu Hai and the others.

Xu Hai chuckled. "Han Wu, to think that you've become a God after just a year of college! You have to work even harder from now on, or you won't be able to sustain your Divine Authority."

"Thank you, Teacher. I'll definitely work hard without fail."

Xu Hai nodded, then a mischievous smile spread across his face once again as he looked over at Qin Shuang, who stood pouting with her arms crossed.

"Ah, how nice it is to be young. I won't bother you guys anymore," he said, smirking. "Oh, and one more thing. If you have the time, try to explore how to use the Transmigrate Helmet. That thing will definitely help you a lot."

After winking at his student, Xu Hai teleported back to his place. Seeing him leave, an agitated Qin Shuang finally pointed at Skelly and asked, "Han Wu, who is that woman?"

Sun Qingnian chuckled. "Bro, not bad. You've gotten another one in just a few days! You can definitely be my disciple."

Han Wu smiled bitterly, feeling an inevitable headache coming on.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,206 words]

Chapter 316 - Transmigrate Helmet

After a round of introductions, Qin Shuang finally realized the beauty standing before her was Skelly. She had never imagined that the small, unassuming Skelly would grow into such a tall and striking figure. She doubted anyone would recognize her.

Skelly eyed Qin Shuang and Sun Qingnian warily and ascertained that these two were the ones preventing her from living with Han Wu.

“Skelly... *Hmm*, that name doesn't suit you. Why don't I give you a new one? Since you are of the skeleton race and have crystal-like bones, how about Jing Jing[1] instead?” Qin Shuang suggested.

Sun Qingnian nodded. “That's a beautiful name. It fits her aura perfectly.”

Skelly turned to Han Wu as if seeking his approval. He chuckled. “I think that name suits you.”

Skelly growled but accepted the name Jing Jing reluctantly. Qin Shuang, delighted at this small victory, invited Jing Jing to go shopping with her on the street behind the college.

Jing Jing remained cautious around Qin Shuang but was curious about shopping. Both agreed and soon left together.

Sun Qingnian was about to leave when Han Wu called after him. “Sun Qingnian, I need your help.”

Sun Qingnian glanced at him skeptically, crossing his arms. “Hey, I only sell my services to ladies. I don't think I can help you.”

“Get your mind out of the gutter,” Han Wu said. “I want to test my new Divine Power since becoming a God.”

Sun Qingnian's interest was piqued. “You became a God and even used the Exquisite Skill Gem. You must have gained a new, powerful Divine Power. Show me.”

“Yep. Give me your hand.”

Sun Qingnian hesitated at the odd request but trusted that Han Wu wouldn't harm him. He extended his hand, and Han Wu grasped it, activating Replicate, his Exclusive Divine Power. Instantly, all of Sun Qingnian's Divine Powers manifested before Han Wu's eyes.

Han Wu scanned them carefully. *Dream Catcher, Strong Desire, Bountiful Harvest, Nine Martial Castes...*

Sun Qingnian's Divine Powers were fewer and weaker than Han Wu's. After reviewing the options, Han Wu decided to replicate Sun Qingnian's Nine Martial Castes.

Once the replication completed, Han Wu absorbed the Nine Martial Castes, which immediately took over the Replicate slot on the interface. Since Han Wu already possessed the Nine Martial Castes, the two similar powers fused seamlessly, forming the Eighteen Martial Castes. Replicate then entered a one-day cooldown before it could be used again.

Han Wu's excitement surged as he examined Replicate's new capabilities. The Nine Martial Castes was a powerful Divine Power that allowed him to temporarily transform into any of the nine units he had merged with. Now upgraded to the Eighteen Martial Castes, he could assume the form of any of the eighteen units at will.

He realized he could continue seeking students who possessed the Nine Martial Castes to replicate them. Over time, this would allow him to transform into a vast array of units, giving him the versatility to handle far more complex situations. Such power would prove invaluable for his future invasions.

Han Wu nodded with satisfaction and lightly patted Sun Qingnian's shoulder. "Not bad. I never expected to gain such an unexpected bounty."

Sun Qingnian remained standing, bewildered.

"Hey, did you do something to me? Hey! Tell me what you did. What did you do to my body?" he shouted, chasing after Han Wu, but in vain.

Back in his divine realm, Han Wu resumed its restoration. He first used the remaining Divine Essence in his account to acquire various plots of high-quality divine realm land to expand his domain. He also invested Divine Points to bless his units, accelerating their reproduction. Under his guidance, the units multiplied rapidly and filled the void left by the previous war.

With his units stabilized, Han Wu entered the Sky Palace to meet the Origin of Mutation. The latter had long sensed the shifts in the divine realm but could not leave without Han Wu's permission.

"Vessel, I know you need my help. With my powers, you can soon cultivate a strong generation of units. Let me out. We are one, and I won't harm you," the Origin of Mutation pleaded, attempting to manipulate Han Wu for its freedom.

Its words carried a subtle hypnotic pull that made Han Wu momentarily believe them. That was when a sudden clarity swept through his mind. His second Divine Authority shielded him, breaking the spell and restoring his awareness.

Realizing its attempt had failed, the Origin of Mutation hissed under its breath, "Shit."

Han Wu's heart raced as he recalled the moment. He had nearly fallen for the Origin of Mutation's lies!

The Origin of Mutation pressed on, its voice weaving further deceit, "Vessel, listen to me..."

Han Wu wouldn't fall for its tricks again. Resolutely, he decided to imprison the Origin of Mutation for an extended period before leaving the eighth floor. Even as he returned to his divine realm, unease lingered. Fortunately, he had ascended into a God and gained the protection of his Divine Authority. Without it, he would have likely considered the Origin of Mutation's suggestion.

"I really need to strengthen my Divine Authority further. I must hasten the recovery of my units and enhance my divine realm as quickly as possible," he said.

He then checked the Core he had hidden in his labyrinth. Ascending into a God had upgraded it as well. Now, he could elevate his Core from Level 20 to Level 30 and equip Rank 5 and 6 Sacred Objects to empower his locusts.

The process was not simple, though. It required a vast number of Core fragments, which could be obtained in only two ways: by defeating other individuals from the Divine Civilization and claiming their fragments, or by competing in the Blood Coliseum, where victory yielded Core fragments as a reward.

Both methods demanded a large number of units. Han Wu decided to postpone the Core upgrade and focus on breeding more units to expand his army. This strategy would not only increase his forces but also help strengthen his divine realm.

While Han Wu waited for his units to reproduce, he examined the Transmigrate Helmet he had acquired. Xu Hai had warned him that it was a valuable treasure and advised him to study its functions.

Using his authority, Han Wu accessed the instructions. The helmet allowed him to transmigrate his soul into another civilization. Once transferred, his body would remain undetected by the foreign civilization's Will, since he would occupy the body of a native being. This made it far easier to study the civilization's laws and powers from within.

However, it was close to impossible to use it to invade the foreign civilization. After transmigration, his strength would drop drastically and align with the baseline power of the host body, making any attempt to invade the new civilization nearly impossible. At the same time, constructing a gate to summon his units posed another massive challenge and could not be done under the vigilant gaze of the civilization's Will.

"I shouldn't think about invading yet. I need to see how this works first," Han Wu said, deciding to test the helmet.

1. Jing is the character for crystal 📖

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[1,210 words]

Chapter 317 - Assist Civilization

Han Wu activated the helmet, and his consciousness was pulled into an empty void. Before him appeared three options.

[Option 1: Consciousness – Cannot bring any Divine Power or Divine Aspect. Only fragments of your memories may accompany you. Requires 50,000,000 Faith Points.]

[Option 2: Mental – Can bring one Divine Aspect and your memories. Requires 50,000,000 Divine Points.]

[Option 3: Soul – Can bring one Divine Power, one Divine Aspect, and your memories. Requires 5 Divine Essence.]

He studied the three transmigration methods, noting that each option carried a higher cost than the last. His resources were more than sufficient, so he chose the most expensive—the Soul option.

Next, he was presented with a list of civilizations to enter. Some, like the Zombie Civilization, emphasized technological advancement, while others, like the Western Fantasy Civilization, focused on swordplay and magic. His gaze caught a peculiar entry: a new civilization called Assist Civilization.

[Assist Civilization: The strength of an individual is limited, but the strength of a group is boundless. Draw on the assistance of others to amplify personal power. Bear the burdens of the masses and become their beacon of hope.]

Han Wu found the concept intriguing and decided to transmigrate there, hoping it would offer opportunities to enhance his own divine realm. After confirming his choice, the interface prompted him to select his Divine Power and Divine Aspect. He studied his options carefully and settled on the newly acquired Replicate for his Divine Power. For his Divine Aspect, he picked his newly gained Life Aspect to experiment with.

With his selections complete, Han Wu embarked on his first transmigration journey into the Assist Civilization.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself lying on a simple wooden bed. A rush of foreign yet oddly familiar memories swept through his mind.

He was still called Han Wu in this world, sixteen years old, and enrolled in the low-ranking Azure Sea Academy. His meek nature had left him with few friends, and without their help, his cultivation had always progressed slowly. The weaker he was, the more timid he became, which in turn stunted his growth even further.

It was a vicious cycle.

Han Wu recalled the fate of his host and resolved to rewrite it. This time, he would no longer remain meek. Guided by his memories, he opened the interface to review his stats.

[Name: Han Wu

Rank: Inferior Disciple (Rank differentiated into Disciple, Elite, Master, Grandmaster, and Founder. Each rank is subdivided into Inferior, Intermediate, Superior.)

Potential: Power: 3, Agility: 4, Defense: 2, Water: 3, Fire: 6, Earth: 4, Wind: 3 (Lowest: 1, Highest: Unlimited)

Skills: Level 2 Fireball (Assist Points: Fire 144/200) (A new Skill awakens upon reaching the next minor rank, e.g., Inferior to Intermediate. Skills may contain hidden potential and can be upgraded once Assist Points are maxed.)

Daily Assist Limit: 3

Divine Power Replicate: Can replicate any single potential once per day.

Divine Aspect Life: High chance of unlocking Life-related Skills upon reaching the next minor rank.]

Han Wu frowned. The host's stats were abysmal. Even his strongest potential, Fire, barely reached 6.

"I need to find someone with more powerful potential to replicate their stats," he muttered.

He followed the original host's memories to locate the academy. The path led him there without complication. Three students guarded the gate. Before them floated seven crystal orbs, each a different color, representing the seven potentials: Power, Agility, Defense, Fire, Earth, Wind, and Water.

The orbs stored the students' Assist Points. Any student wishing to enter the academy each day had to place one Assist Point into the corresponding crystal orb. That was the academy's rule.

Han Wu followed the memories and placed his hand on the crystal orb that represented the Fire potential. The number inside rose by five, showing he had used one of his daily Assist Points.

Just as he stepped forward, one of the gatekeepers stopped him. "Han Wu, did I ever say you could leave?"

Han Wu narrowed his eyes and dredged the previous host's memories. The student before him was Luo Ke, another Fireball wielder. He had discovered that Han Wu's Fire potential ranked six, and he had exploited this by forcing Han Wu to use one of his precious Assists on him. If Han Wu refused, Luo Ke would call his friends to rough him up.

The previous Han Wu had reported Luo Ke's behavior to the teacher, but the teacher had dismissed it, seeing Luo Ke as too valuable to the class.

Taking advantage of this leniency, Luo Ke had beaten Han Wu repeatedly afterward. Disheartened, Han Wu eventually stopped reporting the incidents altogether.

The current Han Wu frowned at the unpleasant memories and finally understood why Luo Ke was stopping him.

"You still have two more Assist chances, right? My Fireball is hitting a bottleneck, so Assist me twice today," Luo Ke demanded.

The previous Han Wu would have obediently handed over both Assist chances without protest. The current Han Wu, however, ignored him, brushed past him, and headed straight into the academy.

Luo Ke's face darkened with anger at being ignored. If not for his duty, he would have struck Han Wu on the spot.

"Han Wu, don't get cocky! Just wait until after class!" Luo Ke roared.

Han Wu ignored the threat, strode into the classroom, and scanned his classmates. He searched for someone suitable to use Replicate on.

He soon settled on a target: a boy named Lu Dazhuang, sixteen years old, with a body weight of 140 kilograms. He could easily be called a wall of muscle. Han Wu recalled from his memories that Lu Dazhuang had a Defense potential of 24. Those who needed help boosting their Defense potential or Skill often sought him out for assistance.

“I choose you, then,” Han Wu muttered and tapped Lu Dazhuang’s shoulder.

The moment his hand touched him, all of Lu Dazhuang’s potential was laid bare before Han Wu. Without hesitation, he selected the Defense potential. In an instant, Han Wu’s Defense potential jumped from 2 to 24—a colossal leap.

Lu Dazhuang felt the shoulder tap and turned with a frown. “Han Wu, do you need something?”

“Nothing,” Han Wu said with a smile, waving his hand before settling into his seat.

Lu Dazhuang silently cursed him as a crazy idiot but said nothing else.

Classes were about to start when another massive boy approached Lu Dazhuang. His name was Meng Qi.

“Brother Zhuang, I’m here to seek your Assist,” he said.

Lu Dazhuang knew his time to shine was here and stood up. “You know the rules. Find someone to Assist me first. I need someone with at least 20 points in Power to Assist me.”

“No problem.” They exchanged their Assists, and the deal was sealed.

Meng Qi checked his interface and let out a sigh. He still needed 20 more Assist Points in his Skill to upgrade it, but Lu Dazhuang had used all his chances for the day. He would have to wait until tomorrow.

That was when Han Wu stood and approached Meng Qi. “Hey, do you want me to help you?”

“You?” Meng Qi recoiled slightly. He remembered that Han Wu’s Defense potential wasn’t high.

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[1,385 words]

Chapter 318 - One Against Five

Han Wu nodded. “Yep, just me. If you don’t believe me, I can Assist you first before you give me anything in return. Is that okay?”

Meng Qi hesitated, but the offer was too advantageous to refuse—even if Han Wu was bluffing.

Han Wu reached out and touched Meng Qi's hand. A moment later, a request to Assist appeared, and Han Wu accepted it. Instantly, Han Wu's 24-point Defense boosted Meng Qi's Assist Points by the same amount, pushing his Skill to its cap and leveling it up by one stage.

Meng Qi stared at him, stunned. "I didn't know your Defense potential was that high."

Lu Dazhuang's jaw dropped. "What's happening? Did he really complete the Assist for you? How much did you gain?"

Meng Qi shrugged. "I'm not sure of the exact number, but it was definitely over twenty."

Now Lu Dazhuang was the one at a loss. His own Defense potential of 24 ranked among the highest in the entire academy. That was why Meng Qi had specifically sought his help. Yet now, someone else had stepped in as his competitor.

Meng Qi chuckled while Lu Dazhuang struggled to process it. "My Iron Shirt finally reached Level 10, and it gained a new effect."

"What kind of effect?" Lu Dazhuang ground out through clenched teeth, frustration flashing in his eyes. Han Wu had become a rival, and there was no justification to raise the cost of Assisting others anymore.

Meng Qi activated Iron Shirt and called to Lu Dazhuang, "Try hitting me."

This was an unusual request, but curiosity overrode caution. Lu Dazhuang threw a punch. His fist slammed into Meng Qi's chest, but the latter remained completely unharmed. Meanwhile, Lu Dazhuang recoiled as his fist turned red and ached from the impact.

Lu Dazhuang immediately grasped the effect. "It's a reflect effect! Your Skill can now bounce damage back."

A tank with a Skill that reflected damage no longer remained just a tank. When wielded skillfully, it could deal serious harm as well. That explained Meng Qi's elation.

"Han Wu, from now on you're my sworn brother. Come to me if you ever need help, and I'll do everything I can to protect you," Meng Qi promised. His joy surged to the point where he wanted to rush home and share the news with his family.

Han Wu smiled, satisfied that he had achieved his goal.

“My Fireball’s level is too low. I need someone to Assist me,” he said. The request was reasonable.

Meng Qi asked, “What level is your Fireball?”

“Level 2.”

Meng Qi waved his hand and declared, “Very well. I’ll find enough people to Assist you until your Fireball reaches Level 3.”

True to his word, Meng Qi gathered several students with high Fire potential during recess to help Han Wu. The three of them Assisted Han Wu until his Fireball reached Level 3. As soon as it did, Han Wu received a notification on his interface.

[Fireball Level: +1]

[Fireball Size: +10%]

Han Wu tapped Fireball to read the details.

[Level 3 Fireball: Release a ball made of fire. Current effect: Magnify (Increases size by 20%)]

He recalled from memory that each Skill gained a new effect every ten levels, and acquiring more powerful effects became easier when Assisted by those with stronger potential. That explained why Meng Qi had enlisted Lu Dazhuang. With his wealth, Meng Qi had no trouble acquiring stronger effects—he could simply spend money to make it happen.

Han Wu was contemplating how to improve himself from that day forward when the bell rang. He stood to leave, only to see Luo Ke burst into the classroom with several of his goons. The other students, accustomed to this routine, paid him no mind and returned to their own business.

Han Wu frowned, realizing just how poor the original host had been at making friends. None of them would step in to help.

Luo Ke stomped up to Han Wu and slammed his palm on the table. “Han Wu, aren’t you a little too bold today?”

His goons echoed him with jeers. “Yeah, you didn’t offer your Assist to Leader Luo today. Do you have a death wish?”

Han Wu laughed lightly. “Leader Luo?”

Luo Ke was merely the head of the class and a guard student, tasked with ensuring everyone followed the rules when using their Assist on the crystal orbs. It was a minor role, yet he wielded it like a weapon to bully others.

Han Wu's laughter only fueled Luo Ke's anger. He lunged to grab Han Wu by the collar. "I think you haven't been beaten enough lately. Come with me to the roof."

Though Han Wu still held the host's original strength, he carried the battle-honed reflexes of a God. He sidestepped Luo Ke's grasp and rose to his feet.

"You want to head to the roof? Fine. Those who don't show up are cowards," Han Wu said and headed toward the roof alone.

Luo Ke was stunned by Han Wu's sudden boldness, but he couldn't pinpoint why. He gathered his puzzled goons and headed to the rooftop, still planning to drag Han Wu into a CCTV blind spot and rough him up.

What happened next defied their expectations. They assumed Han Wu would cower and take a beating as usual, but he struck back instead. With a few simple movements, he sent all five of them sprawling to the ground.

Luo Ke fell so many times he felt his joints would pop out of place. He couldn't get up at all. Meanwhile, Han Wu appeared almost unscathed, barely winded by the ordeal.

"Han Wu, don't get cocky! I will take revenge for this!" Luo Ke growled, his eyes glinting like a wolf hunting prey.

Han Wu chuckled. "You want revenge? Fine, but you have to Assist me first."

"Don't even dream about it!"

Han Wu delivered two swift kicks, and Luo Ke finally relented. The other four goons, seeing their leader threatened, quickly followed suit. With all five of them, Han Wu's Fireball Assist Points surged to 172/300. He was close to leveling it up.

Afterward, Han Wu left the rooftop in high spirits. He had just returned to the classroom when his homeroom teacher stormed in and summoned him to the office.

Inside, Han Wu found the battered Luo Ke and his four underlings. It was clear that Luo Ke had reported the incident.

The teacher pointed at Han Wu and scolded him sharply, "Han Wu, why aren't you studying properly and instead fighting other students? Look at them! You beat them so badly they're injured. You'd better call your parents right now."

Han Wu remained calm against the teacher's accusation. "You know how strong I am. Do you really think I could fight five of them and win? But if you insist I was the culprit, I suppose I have no choice but to admit it."

The teacher froze. It was the truth, yet it sounded impossible. Fighting five students single-handedly and emerging unscathed was unheard of. Han Wu was only an Inferior Disciple, while Luo Ke was already Intermediate, and the other four were Inferior Disciples with more powerful Skills. Any of them alone could have defeated him.

Luo Ke heard Han Wu's words and realized he was right. If it became known that he and his four underlings had been defeated by Han Wu alone, he would lose all credibility standing guard at the academy. Losing to someone as *weak* as Han Wu, even with four helpers, was unbearable.

"Teacher, wait. I think I was mistaken. We weren't beaten by Han Wu. We... We fell in the toilet. Yes, that's what happened." Hastily, Luo Ke changed his story to save face, though his eyes still blazed with anger as he leered at Han Wu.

"Five of you fell in the toilet together? Were you pulling up each other's pants at the same time?" Han Wu murmured, loud enough only for the teacher to hear.

The teacher immediately pictured a scene where five boys were obscenely stacked up together and stared at Luo Ke in disgust. "Be more careful next time. And don't go together. Alright, dismissed. Han Wu, make sure you don't cause any more trouble."

"I understand."

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[1,088 words]

Chapter 319 - Underground Fighting Ring

That evening, the news of Luo Ke and his four underlings collapsing simultaneously in the toilet swept through the entire academy. Han Wu had deliberately mentioned it in front of some particularly gossipy girls, but he had underestimated how quickly the story would travel. Within hours, everyone knew of Luo Ke's humiliating mishap.

Mortified, Luo Ke skipped his classes and went straight home. However, Han Wu knew this was far from over. He braced himself for Luo Ke's inevitable revenge.

By the end of the day, Meng Qi found Han Wu and requested his Assist. In return, Meng Qi recruited eight students with high Fire potential to Assist Han Wu. That single

session boosted Han Wu's Fireball twice in one day, increasing its size by 10%. Still, Han Wu felt unsatisfied. He needed to grow stronger, and fast.

Recalling his memories, he returned home, where his parents had prepared a meal. After dinner, they used their Assist chance on him and raised his Assist Points by 11.

The night passed without incident. The next day, Han Wu returned to the academy without incident. With no Luo Ke in his way, he entered easily after using one of his Assist chances on the orbs.

Meng Qi was already waiting for him. He had requested Lu Dazhuang's Assist earlier and now awaited Han Wu's contribution. While Assisting, Han Wu asked Meng Qi for advice on leveling up quickly. Meng Qi's response was blunt: all it required was money. The more one spent, the faster one grew.

Unfortunately, Meng Qi never revealed where the money came from. Han Wu had to figure it out himself, and he quickly discovered a way to earn credits: tournaments. The official ones were out of reach—he was too young and too weak to qualify—so he had to turn to the illegal circuits.

It didn't take long for him to find an underground fighting ring online. There were no requirements; all he had to do was sign up. The chaotic, lawless atmosphere attracted violent spectators who thrived on blood and spectacle. Allegedly, each match awarded the victor 1,000 credits, and if luck favored them, some spectators would even Assist to tilt the fight in their favor.

Han Wu's anticipation grew as he waited for Saturday, the third day of the week. He told his parents he was visiting a friend but slipped away to the underground arena. After paying for the entrance ticket, he stepped inside and saw two masked Inferior Disciples fighting on stage like clumsy children. Their youth and inexperience made the match dull, yet the spectators reacted with unexpected excitement. Han Wu frowned in confusion.

He registered his name and chose the nickname Fireball. When his turn came, he donned the mask and stepped into the ring. His opponent was a massive man. The mask obscured the man's age, but judging by his size, no spectator expected Han Wu to win and didn't bet on him.

The announcer stirred the crowd, favoring the giant over the newcomer. "Now it's time for a match between the rookie Fireball and the Barbarian Captain, who has won five matches in a row! Everyone, if you want to see Fireball torn apart by the Barbarian Captain, raise your hands and Assist him!"

The man lifted his massive arm, flexing for the crowd. That was when several of them Assisted him and fueled his excitement.

“Young lad, you are unlucky enough to face me today. I will shred you—gently, of course,” the Barbarian Captain boasted.

Han Wu remained silent against the Barbarian Captain’s boastful proclamation.

The bell rang, and Han Wu sprang forward like a panther. Meanwhile, the Barbarian Captain activated his Level 13 Strength Buff, his muscles swelling as his attacks became far more powerful. He prepared to strike, only to find Han Wu already standing before him. A single, precise kick to the jaw staggered him, and before he could recover, Han Wu vaulted onto his back and launched a Level 4 Fireball straight into the Barbarian Captain’s mouth.

Despite his muscular frame, the Barbarian Captain’s mouth was defenseless against the fiery attack. He lost consciousness instantly and collapsed to the ground as smoke curled from his mouth.

The excited announcer froze, as did the crowd. No one had expected this. The newcomer Fireball had defeated the Barbarian Captain, the five-time consecutive winner, with shocking ease!

Han Wu’s movements had been fluid and precise, each attack perfectly executed without waste.

It took the crowd three seconds to process what had just happened before they erupted into thunderous cheers.

“Fireball! Fireball!”

“Fireball, the only god!”

“Fireball, you are too cool!”

...

The roar of the crowd nearly shook the roof from its hinges. At that moment, Han Wu received 32 Assists, and his Fireball Assist Points reached 159/400. He only needed to repeat this a few more times, and his Fireball would level up.

The announcer quickly regained his composure and called out, “Fireball, your actions are a testament to your strength. Look at the crowd going wild! Will you continue to the next match?”

Han Wu recognized the guilt trip immediately. Leaving now would tarnish his reputation with the crowd and likely reduce the Assist Points he earned in future appearances. To maximize his growth in the shortest time possible, he accepted and seized the microphone. “I shall continue the match!”

The crowd erupted once more. Another 30 Assists rained down on Han Wu. Repeating this a few more times would elevate his Fireball further. He fought through four more matches and defeated each opponent with ease. His swift, fluid movements earned the crowd's support.

After more than 400 Assists, his Fireball leveled up dramatically, reaching Level 7.

The victories brought him money and caught the attention of the underground fight ring's boss. Pulling the announcer aside, the boss ordered, "Arrange a Superior Disciple to fight him. Understood?"

The announcer understood immediately and nodded. It was a trap. Han Wu's streak had won the crowd's trust; all eyes and bets were on him. Now the boss only needed to send a strong but relatively unknown fighter to topple Han Wu and claim the wagers. The audience would blame Han Wu for losing and curse themselves for trusting him. It was a classic, reliable scheme the boss had used countless times.

The announcer glanced at Han Wu, standing tall and confident in the arena, and chuckled. "Young lad, it's all up to you whether you'll be beaten to death or left crippled."

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[1,443 words]

Chapter 320 - Intermediate Disciple

The next match started soon under the announcer's direction.

Han Wu, who had already secured five consecutive victories, stood alone in the ring. The crowd erupted with excitement, their cheers fueled by his winning streak.

"Fireball, burn that bastard! I've got 5,000 credits on you—don't let me down!"

"I've bet 10,000 on you!"

"Fireball, you're the coolest! You're the best!"

Han Wu blocked out the noise and fixed his eyes on the man stepping into the ring. His instincts and experience told him this opponent carried a strength greater than the five he had already defeated.

Bai Quan entered without a word, his head lowered. He was nothing more than a slave the boss of the fighting ring had trained in secret, a dog who sank his teeth into anyone

his master ordered. His only reward came in the form of a slightly better meal after each victory.

The announcer's voice rose theatrically as he introduced the fighters. He praised Han Wu as a once-in-a-century genius, a champion of the underground circuit, all to lure the audience into placing heavier bets on him.

Han Wu ignored him. Instead, he stretched his arms wide, a gesture of dominance that matched the announcer's performance. Several Assists landed on him, and he grew stronger. The underground fighting ring and Han Wu both sought only to wring out as much profit as possible, while the crowd remained the fools footing the bill.

The lights from the Assists faded, and the match officially commenced.

Bai Quan crouched low as his body started to twist and change. White fur rippled across his skin, and his limbs grew longer and leaner. His face stretched into a snout, sharp fangs jutting from his mouth. It was his first and most powerful Skill, the Level 29 White Dog Transformation.

A heavy pressure radiated from him, the raw aura of a predator. Without pause, he triggered his second Skill, the Level 12 Rabies. It allowed him to infect every strike with a virus that brought excruciating agony. Even nonlethal wounds carried a death sentence, as the virus finished what his claws could not. Together, the two Skills elevated his combat power to terrifying heights.

Han Wu studied every movement with sharp focus and mentally prepared himself on how to deal with Bai Quan's attacks. His current body was weaker, but his battle-hardened instincts and experience far surpassed his opponent's.

It didn't take long for Han Wu to notice an opening. A faint but unhealed wound marred Bai Quan's abdomen. Exploiting that weak point could inflict serious damage. With his decision made, Han Wu closed in for the attack.

Bai Quan slipped past his strike with ease and lashed back with clawed swipes that carved greenish trails through the air. Han Wu dodged just as smoothly.

They both drew heavy breaths after several furious exchanges, yet neither had managed to land a decisive blow.

Frustration spread through the crowd. They had come for carnage, not a stalemate!

Some of them started shouting for Bai Quan's victory.

"Bai Quan, tear Fireball apart!"

"End this dull match already! I want blood on the floor!"

“Fireball, I put 1,000 credits on you! Don’t you dare lose—pay me back if you won’t fight!”

...

The crowd’s jeers did nothing to shake the contestants’ focus. They studied each other with sharp eyes, each waiting for the slightest opening.

However, the boss had already grown impatient. He ordered Bai Quan to kill Han Wu at once and bring the fight to an end.

The announcer relayed the order with a subtle hand sign directed at Bai Quan. The moment Bai Quan recognized it, his body trembled. He understood the signal all too well. If he failed to tear Han Wu apart soon, his own life would be forfeit.

With no room left for hesitation, Bai Quan unleashed his third Skill, the Level 3 Berserk. Although it was only at that level, it was still a powerful Skill he had gained after advancing to Superior Disciple.

He sacrificed a portion of his Life Energy, and a blood-red mist poured from his body, soaking into his snow-white fur until it glowed a violent crimson. His speed and attack accelerated rapidly, yet the wild nature of his attacks left his weak spot glaringly exposed.

Han Wu slipped past his claws and countered with a blazing Fireball aimed at Bai Quan’s abdomen. Flames scorched fur and flesh and filled the arena with the sharp scent of seared meat.

Bai Quan howled in agony. Han Wu stepped back to widen the distance, but Bai Quan refused to surrender. With his life hanging by a thread, he forced his battered body forward, determined to fight on.

The more his injuries mounted, the easier a target he became for Han Wu’s attacks. After enduring five more Fireballs, Bai Quan finally crashed to the ground. He lay motionless, his abdomen burned through, the flesh and organs around the wound charred black.

The crowd, unaware of the boss’s interference, grew impatient and shouted at the announcer to end the fight.

“Hey, hurry up and announce Fireball as the winner!”

The announcer lingered at the edge of the ring, uncertain whether he should step forward. If he declared the result now, the boss would be forced to pay out to the audience members who had bet on Han Wu’s victory.

Would the boss allow him to, though?

Han Wu noticed the announcer's hesitation and instantly understood the situation. He had lived through countless foreign civilizations. By now, if he added up the years, he would be a venerable old man of several hundred. He could not afford to admit defeat now because he needed money. He would force the announcer to declare him the victor.

Han Wu condensed another Fireball in his arm and aimed at Bai Quan.

Bai Quan teetered on the edge of death. One more hit would finish him, yet his eyes showed no fear. Instead, they glimmered with relief. He would rather die than live like a dog.

"Go in peace. I pray you will reincarnate into a world of stability and live a peaceful life." Han Wu released the Fireball, and flames engulfed Bai Quan's body.

As Bai Quan burned, he seemed to trust Han Wu's words and even smiled. Then something unexpected happened. Han Wu watched Bai Quan's soul detach from his body and merge with his own.

Confusion flashed through Han Wu, but clarity came quickly. He possessed the Divine Power: Reincarnation. Even inactive in the Assist Civilization, it still functioned. He could absorb useful souls and reincarnate them once he returned to his divine realm.

Not bad, he thought.

This ability allowed him to claim souls he found valuable from other civilizations and reincarnate them in his divine realm. Given enough time, he could amass a legion of powerful individuals there.

The announcer stared until Bai Quan was reduced to ash, then forced himself to speak. "Victory goes to Fireball!"

The crowd erupted, not because of Han Wu's triumph, but because most had bet on him and were now reaping the rewards. Nearly everyone in the audience had backed Han Wu and won a hefty sum from his victory.

Han Wu earned more than 600 Assists from this single match, far surpassing the combined Assists from his previous five fights. His Level 7 Fireball surged to Level 10 in an instant, and three enhancement options appeared for him to choose from:

[Option 1: Explosion – Fireball detonates on contact.]

[Option 2: Blood Fuel – Burns the enemy's blood as fuel.]

[Option 3: High Heat – Fireball burns hotter and inflicts greater damage.]

After weighing the options, Han Wu selected the second one. Besides getting a second effect for his Fireball, he also obtained a new Skill thanks to his rank advancement.

The Skill emerged from his high Defense potential and Life Aspect. It was called Life Shield.

[Life Shield: Converts Life Energy into an invisible shield that blocks damage. Effect: Resilient (Increases shield strength by 10%.)]

Han Wu's interface also reflected his new growth.

[Name: Han Wu

Rank: Intermediate Disciple

Potential: Power 3, Agility 4, Defense 24, Water 3, Fire 6, Earth 4, Wind 3

Skills:

1. Level 10 Fireball (Assist Points: Fire 14/1,000)

Effects: Magnify (100%), Fireball Size (100%), Blood Furnace (10%)

2. Level 1 Life Shield (Assist Points: Defense 0/100, Water 0/100, Fire 0/100, Earth 0/100, Wind 0/100)

Effects: Resilience (10%)

Daily Assist Limit: 2/5]

“Life Shield requires five attributes? That's unusual.”

Indeed, upgrading a Skill demanding Assist Points from five different attributes proved extraordinarily difficult, yet it also signaled that its power would be immense.

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[1,246 words]

Chapter 321 - Assassin

This time the announcer didn't let Han Wu remain on stage. Instead, he claimed Han Wu was tired and needed a rest, though in reality he dragged him into the boss's office.

Behind a massive desk, the boss of the underground fighting ring scrutinized Han Wu. He could not fathom how someone as scrawny as Han Wu had defeated Bai Quan.

"Young man, you have two options. One: become a contract fighter here. You'll handle those unruly contestants for me, and I'll pay you handsomely. Two: accompany Bai Quan in the afterlife. Choose."

His voice was ice cold, his gaze sharp and predatory.

The announcer leaned in, his tone threatening. "Brat, the boss admires you enough to offer you this. Make a wise choice. Laws don't reach here. No one will bat an eye if you die."

Han Wu glanced at him, then back at the boss. "I'm here to earn money and gain Assists. I don't care about anything else. I've won six matches, so give me the money now."

The boss furrowed his brow, still unsure of Han Wu's background. As a test, he pulled out a wad of cash worth 10,000 credits and tossed it onto the desk.

Han Wu snatched it, stuffing it into his pocket without a glance. He trusted the boss wouldn't cheat him.

"Become my fighter. Obey my rules, and I'll pay you 10,000 a day."

"I won't lose on purpose," Han Wu said. "I fight to win. That way, I can earn more Assists from the crowd."

"Who do you think you are? Do you really talk to the boss like that?" the announcer snapped, outraged at Han Wu's boldness.

The boss raised a hand to silence him. "Young man, you have guts. Fine. We will do as you say. I will pay you as long as you keep winning."

Han Wu extended his hand. "No problem."

The boss' eyes gleamed with unreadable intent as he shook Han Wu's hand.

"I hope this will be a fruitful collaboration." Han Wu grinned. His smile was not for the deal itself, but because he had successfully replicated one of the boss' potential attributes.

The underground fighting ring's boss was an Inferior Elite, with his highest potential attribute being Power at 32 points. He possessed four Skills: Strong Punch, Bull Demon Punch, Strong Kick, and Mighty Shove, all Level 30 or higher. His strength was undeniable; he would not have become the boss otherwise.

By replicating the boss' Power potential, Han Wu's own Power surged to 32. The increase was monumental.

Han Wu stepped out of the building, removed his mask, and strolled toward the market, where vendors offered countless items to aid in cultivation.

He wandered among the stalls and quickly realized how exorbitant the prices were. One item, a Power Potion, promised to increase a person's Power potential by two to three points, but it only worked for those with a potential of ten or below. A single bottle cost 8,000 credits, and buyers were limited to one per month. Relying on such expensive commodities to grow stronger left a stifling sense of frustration.

Soon, Han Wu spotted a crystal that granted 100 Fire Assist Points. It cost 1,000 credits, and like the Power Potion, each person could purchase only one per month. Prices varied depending on the attribute's demand, and buyers could only acquire one crystal of each type each month.

Han Wu considered his priorities carefully and purchased crystals granting 100 Assist Points in Defense, Water, Fire, Earth, and Wind. The total came to 5,400 credits, leaving him with 4,600, which he reserved for a potential purchase to improve his overall potential.

With his purchases in hand, he headed home. As he passed through a narrow alley, he noticed someone trailing him. Instead of fear, a spark of excitement surged through him. He was curious to discover why someone would follow him. Intentionally, he veered into another alley with a dead end, setting a trap to force the pursuer to reveal themselves.

The assassin, confident in their own strength, followed him into the cul-de-sac. Only when they saw Han Wu standing calmly at the end did they realize their mistake.

The assassin did not panic; they only considered it more convenient to deal with Han Wu here. Brandishing a dagger, they advanced slowly. "Young brat, I'm not sure whether you are smart or foolish to lead me into a dead end."

Han Wu activated Life Shield silently, and a faint green barrier shimmered into existence before him.

The assassin slowed as they sized it up. "You actually have a second Skill? This is different from the intel I received. I'll have to negotiate a higher price when I get back."

"Who sent you here?"

“I’ll answer you when you’re dead!” The assassin lunged forward, unleashing Bone Shaver—a lightning-fast Skill that would have been nearly impossible for an ordinary person to dodge.

Han Wu was no ordinary person. He sidestepped the attack with ease and countered by summoning a Fireball and hurling it straight at the assassin.

The assassin misjudged the Fireball and tried to stab it with their dagger. The fireball fragmented into glowing embers, some landing on the assassin’s arm.

Han Wu’s Blood Fuel effect amplified the embers and turned them into roaring flames. The assassin’s flesh sizzled and burned faster than alcohol, forcing a howl of agony from their lips. They instinctively tried to pat out the flames, but their other hand caught fire as well.

Overcome by pain, the assassin staggered and stammered, “P-Please, let me go. I’ll tell you everything...”

“Who’s your contractor?” Han Wu asked. “I will let you go if you tell me their name.”

The assassin prioritized their life and chose to sell out their contractor. “It’s the Luo family! They paid me to kill you.”

Han Wu knew who it was. He had suspected Luo Ke wouldn’t let him off lightly, but sending an assassin went far beyond a student’s personal grudge.

Don’t blame me for your death in the future, then, he thought.

He stood motionless, watching the flames consume the assassin.

“I’ve already told you my contractor! Extinguish the flames and spare me!” the assassin screamed in pain.

Han Wu nodded. “Sure. You can run toward the exit to find some water to extinguish it. I won’t stop you.”

The assassin turned toward the exit, only to realize too late that the alley stretched far too long. Trying to reach water would take too much time, and they were far more likely to be reduced to ashes halfway there.

“You dare trick me? Fine. I will kill you even if it costs my life!” The assassin summoned the last of their strength and hurled the dagger. This was also a Skill called Final Gambit, currently at Level 5, capable of countering shield-type Skills.

Even so, the dagger bounced harmlessly off Han Wu’s Life Shield. Though only Level 1, the shield boasted five powerful attributes, and the effect of Resilient made it far

stronger than a typical Level 10 shield-type Skill. The assassin's Level 5 Final Gambit simply lacked the power to pierce it.

Shock flashed across the assassin's face as their Skill failed, but there was no time to recover. The flames consumed them, leaving only scattered fragments of bone behind.

Han Wu brushed the ashes from his clothes and left the area. When the time came, he would deal with Luo Ke directly.

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[1,426 words]

Chapter 322 - Surrounded

Han Wu ran to the underground fighting ring after classes for several days. He defeated opponent after opponent, and soon his reputation started to spread. He racked up a thirty-win streak and grew from an Inferior Disciple to a Superior Disciple. He even faced an Inferior Elite once.

The crowd grew increasingly confident in Han Wu, and some fans even formed the Ember fan club to support Han Wu. His Skills advanced rapidly as well, fueled by the Assists the crowd provided.

Despite the progress, Han Wu grew weary within days. Every time his Fireball leveled up, it demanded significantly more Assist Points, and there was no guarantee he could achieve a full upgrade in a single day. Meanwhile, his Life Shield required Assist Points from five different attributes, making it even more challenging to advance. Frustration gnawed at him as he sought ways to accelerate his growth.

Back at the academy, Luo Ke finally returned after the embarrassing rumors about him had faded. He had spent several anxious days waiting for news from the assassin, receiving nothing in return. He assumed the supposed assassin had taken the money and vanished. He could never have imagined that Han Wu had killed the assassin instead. To Luo Ke, Han Wu remained an Inferior Disciple, merely better at fighting for the moment.

The first thing Luo Ke did upon arriving at the academy was seek out Han Wu. He had not idled at home during the past few days; he had requested numerous items to boost his cultivation. With the money he had spent, he had grown noticeably stronger.

His Fireball had reached Level 18, and his second Skill, Flamethrower, was at Level 12. Overall, he had grown roughly 30% stronger, boosting his confidence. Thus, he called

for Han Wu. “Han Wu, I lost last time because I wasn’t ready. Care to join me on the rooftop again?”

Han Wu was bored, so he replied, “You didn’t have enough last time?”

Luo Ke nearly faltered. He had never expected Han Wu to remain so bold. Suppressing his anger, he threatened, “Why you... I’ll give you one last chance. Give me your Assists every day, and I’ll let you go. Don’t blame me if I take it too far should you refuse.”

Han Wu ignored him and rose. “Fine. I’ll take that as you still wanting a beating. Come on, let’s go to the rooftop so I can give you a free chiropractor session.”

He left the classroom and headed up to the rooftop alone.

Luo Ke stared at Han Wu’s back, anxiety creeping in. *Damn, has he gotten stronger too? What if I get beaten again?*

Despite his fear, Luo Ke forced himself to leave the classroom. “Who do you think you are? You really think I’ll go up just because you say so?”

Han Wu heard him clearly and turned to taunt him further. “The one who doesn’t make it to the rooftop is the loser.”

As expected, Luo Ke took the bait and trailed him up. On the rooftop, Han Wu easily overpowered Luo Ke and his underlings. He even threatened and forced them to give him their Assists.

After another defeat, Luo Ke could not endure the humiliation. This time, he acted more cautiously and avoided telling his teacher. Instead, he sought his cousin, a higher-grade student named Luo Jie. Their bond had never been close, but family obligation compelled Luo Jie to help. Luo Jie could not stand idly by while his cousin was bullied twice.

During recess, Luo Jie confronted Han Wu and challenged him to a rooftop fight. As expected, Luo Jie lost. Though older, he was still a student and no match for fighters from the underground ring, especially its champion, Han Wu.

Han Wu forced Luo Jie to Assist him and even replicated his Fire potential. As a result, his own potential grew stronger.

[Potential: Power: 32, Agility: 28, Defense: 24, Water: 29, Fire: 35, Earth: 27, Wind: 31]

Each of his attributes alone placed him among the academy’s elite, and combined, he was undeniably the strongest student there.

Beating the two Luo cousins and the other students had not satisfied Han Wu. Luo Ke had actually hired an assassin to kill him, so Han Wu planned to return the favor—but he had been waiting for the right moment.

Time passed, and the academy day finally ended. Han Wu walked out and headed toward the underground fighting ring when a sleek black car blocked his path.

Luo Ke and Luo Jie rolled down the windows, their eyes fixed on him, while a massive man stepped out of the car. He positioned himself to cut off any escape and asked, “Young Master Jie, Young Master Ke, is he the one who beat you up?”

Luo Ke nodded sharply. “Yes. He’s the one. Mr. Liu, kill him.”

Luo Jie hesitated. “Mr. Liu, will killing him here bring trouble to our family?”

The man chuckled. “Don’t worry, Young Master Jie. I’ve called my brothers to cordon off this street. We also temporarily shut off the cameras. No one will know we did this.”

Luo Ke’s patience snapped. “Then what are we waiting for? Kill him!”

Luo Jie stayed silent, but his hesitation had already faded into tacit consent.

The man nodded as if receiving final orders and rubbed his fists before advancing toward Han Wu. “Young boy, you shouldn’t have offended the Young Masters of the Luo family. I remember a girl once caught my Young Master’s eye. She refused him, so I kidnapped her, tied her up neatly, and tossed her on his bed. Her missing poster still hangs at the police station. Don’t resist, and I’ll make it painless.”

Han Wu snorted at the approaching man. He hadn’t expected Luo Ke to attempt murder in broad daylight after the failed assassination. He was far bolder than Han Wu had imagined.

Luo Ke chuckled and taunted, “What are you laughing at? Han Wu, don’t tell me you are scared shitless.”

“I’m laughing at how stupid you are,” Han Wu replied, lifting his arm to release a Fireball. “Your assassination attempt failed, and you didn’t even stop to figure out why. You came straight to me instead.”

The man braced himself, activating his Level 25 Bronze Skin to withstand the Fireball. He expected his defenses to easily shrug it off, but he could never have anticipated that Han Wu’s Fireball was abnormal—it drew power from the blood and flesh of Han Wu’s enemies.

The Fireball erupted, and its embers scattered across the man's body, quickly igniting into larger flames. Within seconds, he had become a human torch. He flailed and attempted to extinguish the fire, but it only roared higher.

His Bronze Skin remained active, so it shielded him from immediate immolation but prolonged his agony. Unable to endure the searing pain, he raised a trembling hand, slit his own throat, and ended his suffering in a final, desperate act.

Luo Ke and Luo Jie froze, shivering at the horrific sight. Their Inferior Elite driver-cum-bodyguard had been incinerated by a single Fireball before their eyes.

"N-No! That's not possible. T-This can't be true!" Luo Ke stammered wildly in disbelief.

Luo Jie leapt from the car and rushed to explain himself. "I have nothing to do with this! He tricked me, which is why I attacked you. Take your revenge on him, not me!"

Luo Jie bolted, but Han Wu blocked his escape. He launched a Fireball that hit Luo Jie squarely, and the Blood Fuel effect set his body ablaze like a torch. However, his high Fire potential granted him strong resistance, allowing him to endure the flames a little longer.

Han Wu noticed that Luo Jie was hanging on, so he picked up a brick and slammed it onto his head. The skull cracked, and he fell lifeless.

Luo Ke, witnessing his cousin's death, slammed his car door shut on instinct. He shouted and pleaded with Han Wu to stay back while frantically dialing his family for help.

Han Wu had no intention of letting him live. He launched two Fireballs at the car's fuel tank. The tank erupted violently and propelled the vehicle into the air before it crashed to the ground.

There was no doubt Luo Ke had perished in the blast.

Han Wu glanced at the blazing wreck and sneered. "Blocking the road and cutting the surveillance only made it easier for me to finish you."

With that, he vanished from the scene as quickly as possible.

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[1,105 words]

Chapter 323 - Competition

The police arrived at the academy on the second day. With the roads cordoned off and the surveillance system disabled, their only leads came from the Luo family's drivers, who revealed that the two cousins had planned to target a certain student. Unfortunately, none could identify who that student was.

After some investigation, the police learned of the dispute between Han Wu and Luo Ke from one of Luo Ke's subordinates. Thus, they summoned Han Wu for questioning.

Han Wu remained composed throughout, insisting that he had gone straight home after classes and never encountered Luo Ke. The officers observed his calm demeanor and noted his lack of nervousness, quickly categorizing him as innocent. According to their records, Han Wu had long been bullied by Luo Ke. Even if he had motive, he lacked the power to carry out such a crime.

Ultimately, the authorities concluded that the murders were the work of one of the Luo family's enemies. The family's arrogance had earned them plenty of adversaries, so it was plausible that an enemy had killed their heirs.

The case went cold, and Han Wu returned to his classes as usual. With the police keeping him under temporary surveillance, he couldn't visit the underground fighting ring, and his strength advanced at a frustratingly slow pace.

A week passed, and the news of Luo Ke and Luo Jie's murder faded, replaced by a fresh topic that gripped the academy: an upcoming competition to select elite students to represent the academy in the inter-academy contest. Those chosen would unquestionably rank among the academy's finest.

This competition promised grandeur, with tens of thousands of spectators watching. Any student who displayed even a hint of brilliance would instantly earn thousands of Assists.

The entire academy buzzed with anticipation. No one wanted to remain ordinary; everyone hoped to shine like the brightest star in the sky.

Han Wu, who had been avoiding the underground ring, was already contemplating ways to boost his strength when the news reached him. The opportunity was too good to ignore, and he immediately signed up.

Unfortunately, the rules required the participants to register in teams of three. Han Wu was stumped. Since transmigrating to this world, he had focused entirely on increasing his power and had neglected building any social connections. He didn't have a single classmate he could call a friend.

While Han Wu hesitated, unsure whether to give up on the competition, someone came forward to register. It was Meng Qi. Unlike Han Wu, Meng Qi had arrived with two teammates. Both were seniors, a year older, and showed exceptional potential.

“Han Wu? Are you here to register for the competition? Where are your teammates?” Meng Qi looked around curiously but found no one else.

Han Wu smiled bitterly. “I’m afraid I’m here alone.”

Meng Qi was stunned. “You have a Defense potential of 24, and you don’t have any teammates? Why don’t you join mine?”

Han Wu was confused and didn’t answer him. How could he join when Meng Qi already had two people?

The two seniors quickly tried to intervene.

“Young Master Meng, what are you saying? The academy requires that each team have three people. Are you trying to replace one of us? How could you even consider that?”

“Besides, we are Superior Disciples with three Skills each. Do you really think we would lose to an Inferior Disciple?”

Meng Qi rolled his eyes. “I will pay your money as agreed even if you leave me.”

At the mention of guaranteed payment, the seniors’ tone shifted immediately, turning from confrontation to eager persuasion.

“I think that junior is quite powerful. Young Master Meng, it would benefit your team greatly if he joined.”

“I agree. Young Master Meng, you must have your reasons for choosing him. I am willing to step aside so he can join.”

“Jiang, your Power potential is impressive, making you a better fit for Young Master Meng, who has high Defense potential. I should be the one to step down.”

“No, Old Zhang, that won’t do. Your Water potential is strong as well. You should join Young Master Meng and support him.”

Meng Qi’s patience snapped. “Enough! Neither of you is qualified to be in my team. Leave!”

The two seniors clenched their jaws but held back their frustration long enough to ask, “Then what about our money?”

Meng Qi scoffed. "I'll transfer it to your accounts."

Satisfied with that answer, the seniors left. Both were Superior Disciples; it was more advantageous for them to work with someone of equal rank. They had joined Meng Qi only for the money. Now they got the payment and avoided fighting alongside the weaker Meng Qi.

With the two gone, Meng Qi turned back to Han Wu. "Now, can I officially invite you to join my team?"

Han Wu frowned. "Why did you abandon the two Superior Disciples and come looking for me instead?"

Meng Qi didn't hide his reasoning. "Instinct. I sense you are concealing your true strength. I refuse to believe someone with a Defense potential of 24 could be weak. On top of that, I've heard about you defeating both Luo Ke and Luo Jie. Anyone who could take down a Superior Disciple like Luo Jie is definitely no pushover. I trust my judgment."

Han Wu had no comeback; he had to admit that Meng Qi had judged correctly on both instinct and reasoning. Still, one small issue remained. "But there are only two of us right now. We can't register for the competition yet."

Meng Qi pulled out his phone. "Don't worry. I have a plan."

Soon, a girl in a long ice-blue skirt appeared. Her striking face and tall, elegant frame easily placed her among the academy's most beautiful students. Yet her presence carried a cold, unapproachable aura that kept anyone from getting too close.

"Let me introduce her. This is my childhood friend, Leng Ning. She's a genius with 42 points in her Water potential," Meng Qi said.

"Oooh." Han Wu nodded with a knowing smile that conveyed he understood Meng Qi perfectly without further explanation.

Leng Ning huffed and shot Han Wu a scornful glare. "I will freeze you into an ice sculpture if you make a sound like that again. And don't think I'm Meng Qi's girlfriend. Spread that rumor, and I'll freeze you too."

Han Wu learned firsthand that Leng Ning had a short fuse. He didn't mind. Finally, with their trio complete, they registered as a team.

The competition would be held in three days, giving them just enough time to familiarize themselves with their Skills.

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[1,227 words]

Chapter 324 - During Competition

After three days of training together, Han Wu had gained a clear sense of his teammates' strength.

Meng Qi, an Intermediate Disciple, wielded two Skills: the Level 19 Golden Bell and the Level 12 Iron Shirt. He fit the role of a true tank, pouring everything into defense.

Golden Bell carried two effects, Durability and Sonorous Chime. Durability reinforced the bell's strength, while Sonorous Chime released concussive shockwaves whenever he took a hit, disorienting enemies with Confusion.

Iron Shirt served as a sturdier and more versatile defense than Golden Bell. It provided Redirection and Reflection. Redirection softened the impact of attacks, and Reflection hurled the same damage back at the attacker with equal force. Altogether, Meng Qi was a powerful tank with certain damage output.

Leng Ning, also an Intermediate Disciple, specialized in ice magic, a rarity among mages. She commanded two Skills: Level 19 Icicle and Level 16 Blizzard.

Icicle came with Rapid Fire, which reduced casting intervals, and Freeze, which boosted damage while slowing enemies on contact. Blizzard provided wider control, with Increased Radius expanding its area of effect and Frozen Solid offering a chance to trap foes in ice. Her Skills gave her not only devastating offensive power but also reliable crowd control.

Compared to the two, Han Wu appeared more unconventional. When he revealed his Skills, both teammates fell silent. His Fireball, a staple for aspiring fire mages, came with Magnify, which enlarged its explosive radius, and Blood Fuel, which extended its burning duration. Yet his second Skill baffled them. Life Shield belonged more to a tank's arsenal, and his version carried five attributes.

Leng Ning personally tested its resilience and confirmed that Life Shield could withstand both physical and magical attacks. Even Meng Qi was jealous of Han Wu. With Fireball and Life Shield combined, Han Wu seemed less like a typical fire mage and more like a strange hybrid, a chimera of mage and tank.

Three days passed, and the competition finally started. Thirty-two teams entered the arena: twenty-four were made up entirely of seniors, while the remaining eight mixed a few seniors with juniors. No one placed their bets on Han Wu's team, since it consisted

entirely of juniors, but they paid the doubt no mind. The three of them carried full confidence that they would win.

The teacher serving as judge motioned for them to step onto the stage. By coincidence, their first opponents included the two seniors Meng Qi had driven out of his original team. Those two had taken his money and formed a team with another student from their grade.

The one surnamed Zhang stepped forward and said mockingly, “Young Master Meng, who would have thought we’d meet in the first round? Don’t worry. Since we already took your money, we’ll go easy on you.”

He was the one with the good Water potential, and his tone carried the implication that Meng Qi had made a foolish choice by allying with two juniors instead of keeping his old lineup.

Meng Qi only scoffed and dismissed him.

At the judge’s signal, the match commenced.

Zhang conjured a water ball the size of a human head to probe their strength. Leng Ning reacted faster and fired five icicles in a single breath. Two froze the water ball solid while the other three flew toward the opposing trio.

Zhang never imagined her speed would surpass his. An icicle clipped him, leaving him injured and lowering his combat effectiveness. The other two handled the attack more cleanly. The one with high Power potential smashed an icicle apart, while the one with Agility potential slipped clear of danger with ease.

Han Wu and Meng Qi surged forward the instant the icicles flew, moving exactly as they had trained. Meng Qi activated Golden Bell and Iron Shirt, then collided with the Power senior. The layered defenses amplified his strength, and he overpowered his opponent.

Han Wu targeted the Agility senior. Drawing on his combat experience, he quickly predicted the escape route and struck him out of the arena. Leng Ning seized the moment to attack the wounded Water senior, encasing him in ice with Blizzard.

What had been expected to be a one-sided battle, dominated by the seniors, ended in a stunning victory for Han Wu’s team. Their performance immediately captured the attention of both teachers and students alike.

“Who are those three? Their teamwork and combat style are brilliant.”

“What just happened? Juniors beat seniors? I can’t believe it!”

“It’s Leng Ning! Her Blizzard is incredible. I wish she’d freeze me too.”

“You fool, look at yourself. Leng Ning should freeze me instead!”

The trio stood tall in the arena as hundreds of Assists poured down on them. Leng Ning claimed the lion’s share, with 60% of the total. Meng Qi followed with 30%, while Han Wu trailed with only 10%.

Han Wu frowned. He had delivered the cleanest performance of all, defeating his opponent with a single Life Shield without even resorting to his Fireball.

The students, however, only cared for spectacle. To them, the flashier a Skill looked, the stronger it seemed. Han Wu’s precise calculation of his opponent’s landing spot and the effortless push that sent the man tumbling off the stage stirred no excitement. Only the teachers, who had witnessed what had transpired, recognized its true difficulty and cast their Assists in his favor.

The competition pressed on, match after match, until the day stretched into evening. By the end, the sixteen strongest teams had been chosen.

The following morning, Han Wu’s group was set to face a team composed of one junior and two seniors. To his surprise, he recognized the junior. It was Lu Dazhuang.

“Young Master Meng, I’m sorry, but I can’t let you win this time,” Lu Dazhuang said respectfully to Meng Qi, who often relied on him for Assists.

“Dazhuang, this is a competition. Show me your strongest moves,” Meng Qi replied.

Lu Dazhuang nodded, then used Magnify. His body swelled until he resembled a rolling mass of flesh, like a human meatball.

“Lu Dazhuang is somewhat eccentric. Once he grows in size, his strength and defense increase, but his mobility suffers,” Meng Qi explained to his team.

Han Wu studied the massive frame before him. *Hmm... He’s perfect target practice. I wonder how big the flames will be if I hit him with a Fireball. With that much fat, he should burn well enough.*

Lu Dazhuang had more in store. He drew in a deep breath and pulled his head and limbs into his bloated body. Now, he truly looked like a meatball. As one, he hurled himself across the arena, rolling to crush his opponents. His two teammates added to the threat. One commanded earth magic, while the other wielded a sword with formidable Water potential.

The earth mage reshaped the battlefield, carving out specialized paths that allowed Lu Dazhuang to roll unhindered while keeping him from tumbling off the stage. At the same time, the swordsman unleashed a barrage of water blades, which forced Han Wu’s team to dodge while the giant meatball rampaged.

The combination proved difficult to counter, yet Han Wu's combat experience gave him confidence. "Everyone, listen up. Here's what we're going to do..."

The trio slipped past Lu Dazhuang and the barrage of water blades while Han Wu laid out their strategy.

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Chapter 325 - You Can Do That With Fireball?

[1,092 words]

Chapter 325 - You Can Do That With Fireball?

"Is that possible?" Meng Qi sounded doubtful when he heard Han Wu's plan.

Han Wu wanted him to use both Golden Bell and Iron Shirt to stop Lu Dazhuang's wild rolling. Meng Qi stared at the massive ball of flesh barreling toward them and felt his stomach knot. He feared he would end up flattened like paper instead.

"Don't worry. Your Golden Bell's Sonorous Chime will be the key to bringing him down. And don't forget, you have Reflect," Han Wu reassured him.

Meng Qi grumbled, "Fine, I'll trust you this once. If this fails, I'm smacking your head."

Han Wu didn't flinch. If Meng Qi failed, he would already be crushed into paste and far beyond the ability to smack anyone. If Meng Qi succeeded, victory would sweep away any thought of punishment.

Han Wu gave Leng Ning her orders as well. She would take on the Water senior, meeting his water blades with icicles. Her task was to keep him from pressing the attack and strike back whenever she could.

Han Wu's own role was the easiest. He only needed to distract the earth mage. Once they agreed on their targets, the three moved as one.

Meng Qi felt his nerves tighten when he activated both Golden Bell and Iron Shirt to meet Lu Dazhuang's rampage. The instant they collided, the Golden Bell released the loudest chime it had ever produced.

The sound thundered through the arena and resonated inside Lu Dazhuang's massive body. The force overwhelmed him, and he fainted. Meng Qi took a heavy hit as well, but Iron Shirt's Redirection steadied him and kept him conscious. Wasting no time, he hurried to push the unconscious Lu Dazhuang out of the arena.

The earth mage tried to intercept Meng Qi, but Han Wu had him tied down. The swordsman fared no better, caught under Leng Ning's relentless storm of icicles.

With no one left to bar his path, Meng Qi shoved Lu Dazhuang off the arena. The match shifted into a three-on-two. He drew a quick breath, then rushed to Leng Ning's side. By taking the enemy's attacks himself, he freed her to strike without restraint, and she soon froze the swordsman solid.

Meanwhile, Han Wu put on a show, determined to rack up more Assists. He molded his Fireball into shifting shapes with effortless control, then refined it into streams of blazing bullets. Though each carried less force, he could fire them in rapid succession. To heighten the effect, he even mimicked the crack of bullets tearing through the air. The bullets did little damage, yet they looked dangerous and impressive.

The students stared in awe, unable to believe Fireball could be wielded in such a way.

On the other hand, the teachers frowned at the display.

"Why waste time and energy on such hollow theatrics? He's throwing away his potential in close-quarters combat."

"Mr. Jiang, I agree. He has talent, but he spends it on trifles. A shame, really."

The earth mage blocked Han Wu's fire bullets with earthen walls. Unfazed, Han Wu changed tactics. He condensed a Fireball along his arm and charged. When the earth mage raised more walls to stop him, Han Wu smashed through with a kick, slammed him to the ground, and pinned him there with one leg. Instead of finishing him, Han Wu planted a knee on his chest and kept up his flamboyant show.

Under the watchful eyes of the teachers, Han Wu transformed his Fireball. He molded it into a snarling jack-o-lantern. This change did not stem from a new Skill but from his strong mental focus, forcibly shaping the Fireball with sheer will. Its destructive power remained unchanged, but the form alone was enough to mesmerize the students.

None of them had imagined Fireballs could take on such playful, creative forms. Even the teachers had never considered that their shape could be altered in this way, though their experience allowed them to partially grasp what was happening.

"I can't believe Han Wu's mental state and imagination are that strong," one teacher murmured. "That's a hidden strength beyond the seven potentials. If he can control Fireballs at this level, he has a very bright future ahead."

“But isn’t it a waste to use it just to change the shape? Such talent, squandered,” another remarked.

The vice-principal’s face darkened as he watched. “Who is Han Wu’s homeroom teacher? How did you allow your student to waste his skills on something so trivial?!”

Han Wu’s homeroom teacher received the blame without warning. He had never realized Han Wu’s true potential. Had he known, he would never have allowed Luo Ke to bully him for so long.

In the arena, Han Wu continued to flaunt his abilities. He intended to dazzle everyone. He tossed the jack-o-lantern Fireball aside and molded another into a blazing bird, complete with a piercing cry.

The students gawked.

Was that really a Fireball? They would have sooner believed it was a summoning Skill. No one had ever seen a Fireball take the shape of a bird. This was the first time in their lives they had witnessed Fireballs adopt such diverse, imaginative forms.

Han Wu tossed the bird into the air. It hovered for a moment before vanishing into nothingness. He then condensed a massive Fireball and shaped it into a dragon’s head. He had planned to summon a full fiery dragon, but the Skill’s limitations forced him to settle for just the head.

The crowd froze at the sight. Even the more perceptive teachers could sense that the Fireball carried a fragment of a dragon’s pride.

The earth mage pinned beneath Han Wu’s grasp was on the verge of tears. Han Wu’s ever-changing Fireballs were mesmerizing, yet there he was, completely at the mercy of Han Wu. The embarrassment was unbearable!

“Hey... could you please stop? Just defeat me and stop showing off,” he pleaded, his voice breaking.

Satisfied that his display had dazzled enough, Han Wu ended the performance. He flung the dragon head at the earth mage, who immediately lost consciousness. Han Wu’s team claimed victory and secured a spot among the top eight strongest teams.

His performance also earned him hundreds of Assists in a single stroke. Upon reaching Level 10, his Life Shield gained a new effect called Return, which reflected any projectile back at its caster.

Han Wu had to admit that the Life Shield was strong. With this new effect, he no longer had to worry about attacks from a distance.

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Chapter 326 - Underground Fighting Ring Boss' Visit

[1,278 words]

Chapter 326 - Underground Fighting Ring Boss' Visit

In the later matches, Han Wu leveraged his exceptional mental focus to manipulate his Fireball into a variety of shapes and sizes, demonstrating the full extent of his potential. With numerous Assists from the teachers and students, his Fireball quickly reached Level 20, and he unlocked its third effect. He was presented with three options.

[Option 1: Black Flames – Fire is almost inextinguishable before the death of the victim.]

[Option 2: Mana Burn – Burns off the mana of the enemies.]

[Option 3: Track – Automatically homes in on enemies.]

Han Wu wanted to select all three but was forced to choose only one. Ultimately, he chose Black Flames. Combined with Blood Fuel, his Fireball became a nearly unstoppable weapon that was capable of burning relentlessly until his enemies were utterly destroyed. The synergy created a devastatingly powerful combo.

At the same time his Fireball reached Level 20, Han Wu achieved the rank of Superior Disciple. Thanks to his remarkable potential and the guidance of his Life Aspect, he gained a new Skill called Vigor. This support-type Skill could be applied to anyone. It could boost all of the target's potential slightly while significantly enhancing their primary potential.

Using Vigor, Han Wu and his team swept through every opponent and earned the honor of representing their academy in the official interacademy competition. Naturally, the trio received generous rewards for being the top team. Each of them pocketed 100,000 credits.

For Han Wu, it was a substantial sum, but it barely made a dent in the cost of cultivation items. His potential was already high, and advancing further would require a far greater investment. The reward they had earned was not nearly enough.

Fortunately, with a month still remaining before the interacademy competition, the three had plenty of time to train.

Meng Qi, the wealthiest of the three, suggested an option known only to him. “Why don’t we enter a Survival Site? My family has secured a route for one. What do you think?”

Since Han Wu had transmigrated into this world, he had no idea what a Survival Site was. He did not want to waste time dredging through the original Han Wu’s memories, so he asked Meng Qi directly, “What is a Survival Site? Can we defeat monsters to level up?”

Meng Qi and Leng Ning exchanged puzzled looks.

“Have you been playing too many games? Since when can defeating monsters level you up?” Meng Qi said. “Survival Sites are quarantined zones where humans are forbidden to live. The environment is almost always harsh, and many powerful beings roam there. A normal person couldn’t survive even a single day.”

Han Wu frowned in confusion. “Then why should we go there?”

Meng Qi explained carefully, “There are countless treasures hidden there. Since it’s a dangerous place humans rarely visit, natural treasures accumulate that can help us boost our potential or even grant Assist Points.

“There could also be herbs or other resources we cannot consume directly, but that can be refined into something usable. Those items usually sell for a high price. This is all common knowledge—you could easily look it up online. Don’t you have a terminal at home?”

Han Wu scratched his head, feeling embarrassed. His family was poor, but they still had a terminal and Internet access. He simply had never checked it since arriving here.

“Then we need to leave soon.” Impatience crept into his voice. Now that he had become a Superior Disciple, he needed more Assist Points to level up Vigor. After all, it possessed all seven attributes, making it seven times harder to advance than any other Skill.

Leng Ning stopped him with a calm hand. “Why are you in such a rush? Survival Sites are extremely dangerous. We need to prepare before heading there. The academy gave each of us 100,000 credits, so I suggest we buy the necessary equipment first.”

Her words were clearly aimed at Han Wu. Both Meng Qi and Leng Ning came from wealthy families, so 100,000 credits was trivial to them. They worried that Han Wu, coming from a poorer background, would risk skipping proper equipment to save money.

“Sure.” Han Wu nodded. As someone from the Divine Civilization, he had long since handled sums far greater than his current 100,000 credits. There was no reason to withhold the money for the sake of pride when acquiring the necessary equipment.

Leng Ning felt a flicker of surprise at how quickly Han Wu agreed to part with the money. Clearly, he trusted them enough to let them handle the purchase, and that earned him a measure of her approval.

A set of equipment for entering a Survival Site cost far more than 100,000 credits. They had quoted that price only because it matched Han Wu's available funds, carefully preserving his ego and reputation.

Han Wu transferred the money to Meng Qi and returned home to await their update.

During that interval, the boss of the underground fighting ring had tried repeatedly to lure him into the arena, but Han Wu declined every invitation. His previous visits had been solely to earn money and accumulate Assist Points. Now, with a better opportunity in hand, the fighting ring held no appeal.

Han Wu's actions had infuriated the boss. Without Han Wu fighting in the ring, many fans from Ember stopped showing up, and the flow of betting money slowed to a trickle.

How could the boss make any real profit if no one wagered on the matches? Selling tickets alone would never cover his losses.

When Han Wu rejected him, the boss felt insulted and deceived. He could not allow such insolence to go unpunished.

"Find me everything you can on that brat! The more, the better. I want him to pay for insulting me!" he barked at his subordinates.

Within half a day, they returned with every scrap of information they could gather, including Han Wu's face and some details of his Skills.

The boss studied the files and discovered that Han Wu was just a regular student. His fist clenched tightly. "That poor bastard. How dare he try to fool me? I will kill him."

He flung the papers into the air and roared, "You! Gather some of the fighters loyal to us. We're going to pay him a visit today. Let's see what his parents look like."

The announcer nodded and quickly assembled five strong fighters to accompany the boss to Han Wu's home.

Han Wu's parents were at work, leaving the boss and his men waiting outside. He swore he would recover every coin he had lost because of Han Wu.

However, it was Han Wu, not his parents, who returned home first.

The boss sprang to his feet and bellowed, "You! Do you think you can quit whenever you want? Do you know how much money I've lost because of you? Do you think you're in charge here?"

Han Wu's temper flared as he met the boss's stare. "I will go if I want to, and I won't go if I don't. That is my freedom and my right. I am not some slave who obeys every command."

The boss's anger shifted into a chilling, deadly calm. His voice lost its fire and took on an icy menace. "You are dead to me."

Han Wu realized instantly that the boss intended to kill him, and he knew he had to strike first. There was no reason to let anyone who threatened his family live.

I must end this. The sooner, the better. Han Wu conjured a black Fireball and hurled it straight at the boss.

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[1,168 words]

Chapter 327 - Survival Site

The boss had already anticipated the attack and dodged the Fireball, but his underlings behind him were not so lucky.

The black Fireball struck one squarely in the face. He tried to slap the flames away, but the combination of Blood Fuel and Black Flames only made the fire burn hotter. His efforts failed completely. The flames consumed him faster than he could react, and he never even got a chance to scream. The fire continued until his body turned entirely to ash.

"Someone's dead! He actually killed him!" the announcer shouted, then fled the scene.

Han Wu frowned and sent another Fireball streaking toward the announcer. He screamed in agony, but no one was there to hear him. It was daytime, and everyone else was busy with their work.

The remaining four fighters watched in shock. The black Fireball seemed impossible to resist—it killed anyone it touched without mercy.

Han Wu decided none of them deserved to live. He aimed both hands at them like pistols and unleashed tens of mini-bullets made from the same black flames. These

fighters had spent their time bullying the weak under their boss' protection; they were not worth sparing.

The four men screamed as the black flames engulfed them, dying within seconds. Han Wu dispatched all five fighters and the announcer in less than half a minute.

The boss felt a chill crawl up his spine. He had thought himself capable of facing danger, but Han Wu's cold ruthlessness surpassed anything he had imagined. Not only was Han Wu willing to kill without hesitation, but the black Fireball itself carried an eerie, unnatural power.

Running seemed the only option, but Han Wu would not allow it. He launched another black Fireball, controlling it with his strong mental focus until it expanded into a wall of flames that blocked any escape.

The wall looked thin, almost fragile, yet the boss knew better. One wrong move, and the black flames would ignite his body instantly, leaving him to die like the announcer and his fighters.

Desperation stripped his pride. Using the most earnest tone he could muster, he pleaded, "Wait, I admit my wrongdoings. I won't come and seek trouble with you anymore. I swear."

Unfortunately, Han Wu had already decided to kill him. He activated his other two Skills. Life Shield materialized as a green barrier around his body, while Vigor surged through him, amplifying his potential. In that state, Han Wu felt untouchable. If he were rated within the Divine Civilization, he would rival a Unique life form.

The boss realized Han Wu intended no mercy when he saw the shield and steadied himself. He had survived countless battles, and he resolved to fight back. "It seems you've decided to kill me no matter what. In that case, I will bring you down with me."

He unleashed his most devastating Skill, Mighty Shove. By channeling energy into a single, concentrated strike, he could inflict catastrophic damage.

With a dull thud, the boss collided with Han Wu. The force shattered Han Wu's Life Shield despite the boost from Vigor. The impact rocked him, but it bought him enough time to twist his body and redirect most of the blow. In the end, he emerged with only minor injuries, having withstood the overwhelming force.

At the same time, a small black Fireball struck the boss' shoulder. The dark flames consumed his flesh, igniting with an intensity that sent him reeling.

"Fuck!" The boss stumbled backward and clawed at the flames. He hesitated at the last moment, recalling how his men had tried to extinguish them, only for the fire to flare higher and consume them entirely.

Pain shot through his limb and body as the flames intensified. He gritted his teeth and made a desperate decision. With the last of his strength, he tore off his own arm and threw it to the ground. The fire flared brighter and reduced it to ash. Ignoring his wound, he clutched it fiercely and fled like a madman.

Han Wu charged up and summoned a massive black Fireball. With precise control, he directed it straight at the boss, and the flames consumed him completely.

The boss writhed within the black inferno, but he could not escape. In the end, the fire claimed him, leaving nothing but ash.

Han Wu exhaled deeply, relief washing over him as if a tremendous weight had lifted from his shoulders.

“What an idiot. Threatening my family with so little strength? That’s why you died first,” Han Wu muttered.

He returned home to fetch tools to erase any trace of the scene. He had to erase every trace that someone had been cremated there and ensure the neighbors would notice nothing.

The night passed in quiet calm.

The next day, Han Wu received a message from Meng Qi. They had prepared all the necessary equipment and could depart for the Survival Site immediately. After informing his parents, he packed some clothes and set out for their agreed meeting place.

Soon, the trio arrived, and Meng Qi urged Han Wu to change into the new equipment. They had purchased armor and some weapons for him.

Han Wu realized at once that the gear was of extraordinary quality, far beyond what 100,000 credits could purchase. He understood that Leng Ning and Xiang Meng must have secretly contributed. He had always repaid kindness with greater kindness, so he vowed in his heart to protect their lives no matter the cost.

Once they finished preparing, the three climbed into a jeep and set out for the Survival Site. The vehicle rumbled along winding paths that cut across several mountains before they reached their destination: the Dragon Seal.

According to legend, a true Great Dragon had once been sealed within that mountain range. In truth, there was not even a drake in the area, much less a Great Dragon. Even so, the site was notorious for its dangers. Almost no one ventured there, since countless powerful creatures roamed the terrain, their strength enhanced by consuming the rare herbs that grew in abundance.

The trio had two goals.

First, to locate herbs they could consume to increase their own potential. If they found herbs unsuitable for direct use, they could still harvest them to refine or sell for profit.

Second, to test themselves against the Dragon Seal's ranking board. Anyone who survived there for a set number of days could inscribe their name, and the longer one endured, the higher the ranking. If one were to be ranked first, they would be able to get Assists from others from time to time out of admiration.

Once outfitted, they packed food for three days and stepped into the Survival Site.

Inside, Meng Qi spoke first, his tone firm. "Everyone, we must stay alert. A single spider, an octopus, or even a blade of grass could end us here."

"I understand." Han Wu nodded and kept his head constantly turning, scanning for threats in every direction.

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Chapter 328 - Disturbing A Python's Nest

[1,161 words]

Chapter 328 - Disturbing A Python's Nest

With his rich experience of adventuring in foreign civilizations, Han Wu had picked up a wealth of survival knowledge. He could already identify dozens of poisonous herbs with a single glance. Fortunately, the ones scattered here were only mildly toxic, not lethal.

The three kept their backpacks close and pressed forward with care. The instant they stepped into Dragon Seal, a timer unique to them started to tick.

They had covered barely 100 meters when Han Wu sensed something amiss. A python, its body as thick as a man's arm, blocked their path.

Leng Ning reacted first. She conjured an icicle and launched it like a bullet. It struck the serpent, but its scales deflected the attack. Instead of wounding it, they enraged it, and the python lunged toward them at startling speed.

Han Wu countered with a Fireball, banking on the Blood Fuel and Black Flames effects to burn it alive. Flames crackled against its scales, but the fire never reached its flesh. The serpent only sensed the heat on its back and slithered faster.

Meng Qi coughed. "I knew it would come down to me."

He shouted and used both Golden Bell and Iron Shirt before stepping forward. The python unhinged its jaw, ready to swallow him whole, but it crashed headlong into the shimmering barrier of the Golden Bell. A metallic clang rang out, followed by a resonant chime that stunned the serpent.

Meng Qi drew the dagger at his waist and drove it into the python again and again until it lay still.

Leng Ning approached him once it was dead. "Hey, watch what you're doing. Don't ruin its treasure. Extract the gallbladder first, then skin it. After that, we can cook the flesh."

Meng Qi recoiled in disgust. "Ew. I'm not eating python meat."

She huffed, her temper rising. "Then starve to death once your rations run out. If we want to live longer here, we'll eat what we kill."

Meng Qi glanced at Han Wu for support. "Hey, you wouldn't eat python flesh, right?"

Han Wu chuckled. "What are you talking about? Python meat is delicious."

Meng Qi grimaced. "Are you sure it's edible?"

Han Wu's smile widened. "You'll know once we cook it."

Meng Qi still looked doubtful, but he followed Leng Ning's orders. He skinned the python, removed the gallbladder, and cut the flesh into thick chunks for roasting.

Leng Ning studied the gallbladder with care, recalling passages from her books. After a moment, she looked at the others. "This gallbladder can boost a person's Power and Water potential. Unfortunately, it's from a young snake, so it isn't fully mature. Only someone with both attributes at 10 or below can benefit from it."

"Hey, don't look at me. Do you really think my Power and Water potential are under 10?" Meng Qi shook his head. His parents' wealth had given him access to rare resources since childhood, and his potential had grown far stronger than that.

Han Wu shook his head as well. "I can't use it either."

With both refusing it, Leng Ning pulled out a small vial of clear liquid and dropped the gallbladder inside. "Then I'll keep it safe. We can sell it once we get out of here."

Meng Qi cared little about the money. What worried him more was whether the python meat would taste any good.

Han Wu gathered firewood and began grilling the flesh. Soon, a rich, savory aroma spread through the area. Even Leng Ning, who normally had no appetite for such meat, watched with curiosity. She hadn't expected Han Wu to be so skilled at cooking.

Han Wu gave a casual shrug. "I grew up poor. Of course I know how to cook all kinds of things."

Leng Ning nodded and stared at the roasting meat. When it finished, Meng Qi snatched a piece at once to eat it. Leng Ning thanked Han Wu before taking her share.

Han Wu sampled a piece as well and savored the flavor. He had to admit that a python nourished by herbs and rare treasures made for a surprisingly fine meal.

They ate contentedly until a sudden rustle came from behind them. The sound snapped them from their calm, and in an instant they drew their weapons, eyes sharp and searching. A massive python, its body as thick as a water pail, slithered toward them from only twenty meters away.

Leng Ning's gaze flicked between the python roasting over their fire and the monstrous one advancing on them. She frowned as she pieced it together. "The markings are the same as the one we killed. It's very likely that snake was its offspring."

Meng Qi's face stiffened. "Don't tell me we disturbed its nest. We just killed one, and now an even bigger one shows up. We can't fight it. We have to run."

"Run where?" Han Wu cut in sharply. He had already caught the faint rustling of more movement closing in.

Meng Qi spun around and nearly collapsed when he saw them. Two more pythons glided from the shadows, blocking every path of escape. They were surrounded.

"T-the Dragon Seal is too dangerous. W-what are these monsters eating to grow so big?" Meng Qi stammered.

Han Wu's eyes hardened. "There's no choice. If we want to live, we must kill them."

Leng Ning nodded. "Allow me."

She gathered her energy and unleashed Blizzard the moment the pythons lunged. The intense cold locked all three snakes in place.

Meng Qi was afraid, but he still charged forward with Golden Bell activated to crush the frozen snakes into pieces.

Han Wu refused to stay behind. He swung his blade with force against one of the frozen snakes. Sharp cracking sounds rang out as the ice shattered, and soon all three pythons lay in broken pieces.

Leng Ning panted, her energy spent from casting Blizzard. “Stop standing around. Quickly find the gallbladders. These snakes are enormous, which means their galls should be fully mature. They could significantly enhance our potential and help anyone with Power or Water potential of 30 or less. Even if we don’t consume them ourselves, we could sell them for a good price.”

Han Wu and Meng Qi set to work. It took them half a day to extract the gallbladders from the frozen remains before handing them to Leng Ning.

She examined the damaged gallbladder Meng Qi had brought her and frowned. “I told you to be careful! This one is punctured. Most of its value is gone, and we can’t store it properly now. Eat it while it’s fresh, while its effects are still intact.”

Meng Qi nodded and swallowed the frozen gallbladder. A warm stream of energy flowed through his body as it digested, a sensation that surged and faded within three minutes. He checked his interface and shouted with delight. “It actually increased my potential! Wow, I didn’t expect it to boost so much!”

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,029 words]

Chapter 329 - Dragon Seal

Meng Qi’s Power potential increased by three while his Water potential increased by four. A single gallbladder had boosted his potential dramatically.

He eyed the two remaining gallbladders with keen anticipation. “If I eat the other two, won’t I turn into some kind of genius?”

Leng Ning snorted. “What are you talking about? It only works once per person, and it only raises Power and Water potential. Since yours jumped so much, your Power and Water should be near 30 already, right?”

Meng Qi grinned. “Yep. Power’s at 30, and Water’s at 28.”

“Then there’s no need to eat any more.” Leng Ning glanced at Han Wu. “Do you want one?”

Han Wu checked his interface. His Power was 32, and his Water was 42. They both far exceeded the gallbladder's effective range, so he shook his head. "No need."

Leng Ning's curiosity spiked. She had previously investigated Han Wu's background. His parents were ordinary workers living in a small house on the outskirts. Given their poverty, it was almost certain that Han Wu had never cultivated properly as a youth. She had even seen his potential on the information sheet. Yet he refused the gallbladder to increase his potential, which only deepened her suspicion.

"Hey, what are your current numbers?" she asked.

"It's a secret," he answered.

Leng Ning's expression soured. They were already teammates, yet he still kept his information hidden. Clearly, he didn't trust her.

Han Wu chose not to explain further. He kept his values hidden to avoid discouraging them.

The three cleared the area and pressed forward. The Dragon Seal was a place where treasures and rare herbs could appear anywhere, so they needed to explore thoroughly.

After three hours of walking, they arrived at a canyon.

Han Wu spotted a four-colored flower blooming along the cliff wall. He had read about it before in his book. It was a rare treasure, capable of granting Assist Points for Water, Earth, Wind, and Fire simultaneously. The older the flower, the more Assist Points it offered, making it a crucial resource for leveling up his Skills. Meng Qi and Leng Ning agreed with his plan to collect it.

Most treasures in the Survival Sites were guarded by formidable creatures, and their presence had been documented by previous adventurers. To claim the flower safely, they first had to locate any guardian to avoid ambush.

The three scoured the area, with Leng Ning employing her newly acquired third Skill, Frost Gaze, which could detect the heat signatures of living beings. Through it, she noticed a peculiar stone beside the flower. It was no stone at all but a living creature expertly camouflaged.

Han Wu nodded and launched a Fireball at the creature. Black flames consumed it, and it leaped in agony. In its panic, it tumbled off the cliff and died. Han Wu did not know what species it was, but with it neutralized, he climbed down and plucked the flower without interference.

Under Leng Ning and Meng Qi's protection, Han Wu consumed the flower and absorbed its Assist Points. Having grown for a century, the flower granted him a total of

10,000 Assist Points across the four attributes. Life Shield soared to Level 15 and grew even tougher, while Vigor received enough Assist Points to reach Level 13—though it still required Assist Points from the other three attributes to advance further.

Both Leng Ning and Meng Qi rejoiced at Han Wu's growth.

The trio continued exploring until night fell. Within the Dragon Seal, night was especially perilous, as powerful creatures emerged to hunt.

Meng Qi had heard that many teams failed to survive their first night, so he had made ample preparations. He retrieved a bag of bone dust he had bought at great expense. The dust came from the bones of a powerful, ferocious creature. Scattering it around the campsite, he hoped its scent would ward off some of the night predators. They then took turns keeping watch to ensure their safety.

Han Wu took the first watch and ensured everything was secure. The night in the Dragon Seal pressed heavily on him. He sat within the circle of bone dust, catching occasional sounds of fighting. A massive porcupine bristling with spines and a pack of hungry wild dogs crossed his path. He handled them cautiously, careful not to wake Meng Qi or Leng Ning, until something entirely unexpected appeared.

After incinerating the wild dogs with his Fireballs, he heard a rhythmic marching sound. He hurled a Fireball toward it and discovered a massive swarm of ants, each the size of his fist, advancing toward them. Their numbers were impossible to count.

The ants surrounded them but remained at the edge of the bone dust. The scent of the dead beast deterred them, and they dared not cross it. They had no choice but to circle around the campsite incessantly.

Han Wu quickly roused Meng Qi and Leng Ning. Still rubbing sleep from their eyes, they stepped from their tent and stared at the dense ant swarm in disbelief. There were far too many of them. They could strip flesh from bone in moments. Fortunately, they dared not cross the protective circle of bone dust.

Meng Qi patted his chest with pride. "Thank goodness I was smart enough to buy the bone dust, or we would all—"

A sudden gust of wind swept through, scattering part of the bone dust and leaving gaps in their defense. The ants surged through the breaches to attack them.

Meng Qi was stunned. He had barely praised himself when the wind undid his handiwork.

Amid the chaos, Leng Ning remained calm and issued clear orders. "Stop staring! Activate your Golden Bell and Iron Shirt! Move through the swarm and try to stun them with the Golden Bell's effect!"

Meng Qi had no time to think. He obeyed immediately. The combined defenses of the Golden Bell and Iron Shirt shielded them from the swarm, while the Sonorous Chime effect killed many ants outright, piercing their organs with destructive sound waves.

Even so, the ant swarm was immense. Meng Qi had only eliminated the tip of the iceberg.

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Chapter 330 - Entering the Ant's Nest

[1,108 words]

Chapter 330 - Entering the Ant's Nest

The swarm of ants grew thicker by the second. Meng Qi's strength faltered as he struggled to maintain the Golden Bell and Iron Shirt.

Leng Ning took his place and used Blizzard. Large clusters of ants froze solid, forming a clear path for their escape.

"We need to move now. You two, keep up," she ordered.

Meng Qi was too exhausted to run at full speed. Han Wu hoisted him onto his back and followed Leng Ning as they darted past the encircling ants and scaled a rock face four meters tall.

The ants scrambled after them, slipping and tumbling off the sheer surface, only to climb again relentlessly.

Meng Qi groaned in frustration, "Did we kill their offspring? Why are they chasing us so fiercely?"

Han Wu's eyes lit up with a sudden idea. "Leng Ning, freeze the rock face. They'll slip on the ice."

"I'll test it." Leng Ning approved of the plan. She used Blizzard and limited its range to the rock face beneath them. A layer of ice spread across the surface, turning it slick and treacherous.

The ants attempted to climb, but each one slid and tumbled back down. At last, the trio could catch their breath.

Meng Qi stared at the writhing sea of ants and felt his heart thumping rapidly. “The Dragon Seal is terrifying. No wonder no one wants to live here.”

Han Wu peered down at the relentless swarm, searching for a reason behind their pursuit. Even Leng Ning felt a chill at their persistence.

“Do we have something on us that they’re after?” Leng Ning asked suddenly.

Meng Qi grabbed his bag and emptied it onto the ground. Inside, he found only clothes, some rations, two large bottles of water, and a bit of roasted snake meat. Nothing else.

Leng Ning and Han Wu searched their own bags and found much the same, aside from a few treasures and herbs they had collected earlier.

Leng Ning waved the items in front of the ants, but none of them provoked any reaction. The ants ignored the objects and instead tried to reach the three humans by stacking their bodies into a writhing tower.

Han Wu tested the same theory with his items, and again, the ants remained indifferent. It became clear they weren’t drawn to the treasures or herbs at all. A chill ran down his spine. “Do you think they’re after us... or more specifically, our flesh?”

Meng Qi and Leng Ning froze at Han Wu’s suggestion. Meng Qi’s stomach knotted with worry.

“Han Wu, don’t scare me like that,” he said, glaring at the advancing ants. “I’m a tank, but my flesh is disgusting. You can go back now.”

The ants ignored him completely.

Leng Ning mulled over Han Wu’s theory and tried to recall everything she had learned about this species. Suddenly, a memory clicked. “I think Han Wu is right. They’re targeting the three of us. There must be a queen ant in their nest. If she wants to lay eggs, she’ll need high-quality food. Our bodies can feed her and nourish her eggs at the same time.”

“I don’t want to get eaten by the ants!” Meng Qi groaned, his face twisted with disgust. Just imagining thousands of tiny bites crawling over his skin made his body tingle.

Han Wu refused to endure that nightmare either. “Let me just burn them all.”

“Wait!” Leng Ning stopped him with a sharp gesture. “They want us. This is both a danger and an opportunity. These ants’ larvae can actually improve our potential. The

ant queen must be close to laying more eggs. If we infiltrate the nest and steal some, it's risky, but the payoff is worth it."

Meng Qi detested the swarm below them, yet Leng Ning's words made him pause. "Are the larvae really that valuable?"

"Absolutely. I remember eating one when I was younger. It was processed into a pill that improved my Power potential. The raw material came straight from the larvae," she said confidently.

Meng Qi's eyes sparkled. He peered down at the ants with a strange, eager delight, as if the crawling insects were walking credits. "What are we waiting for? Let's go to the nest and earn our money. My parents have been nagging me about how I've been spending too much lately. Time to show them I can make my own."

Han Wu nodded as well. His family had far less than Meng Qi's, and the thought of earning a little extra was appealing.

The three agreed on the plan, but the question remained: how could they do so without dying? The Dragon Seal sprawled endlessly, and finding the queen's nest was no guarantee.

Leng Ning pulled three sleeping bags from her bag. She kept one for herself and handed the others to the boys.

Meng Qi raised an eyebrow. "Why are you still thinking about sleeping now?"

Leng Ning rolled her eyes. "These sleeping bags are designed to protect us. My family hired an expert at great expense to craft them. They're impervious to damage and can keep us warm. We just need to stay hidden inside and pretend we're dead. The ants will carry us back to their nest."

Han Wu was skeptical. "Are you sure the ants won't see through our act?"

Leng Ning huffed. "Believe me or not, it's your choice. I'll get inside, and the ants will take me straight to their nest."

Han Wu and Meng Qi exchanged a glance, then nodded, trusting her confidence in the sleeping bags. The three slid into their sleeping bags and waited patiently for the ants to climb.

It took a few tense minutes, but the ants finally scaled the rock face and discovered the three bundled figures. They tried to bite through the sleeping bags and tug at the zippers, but the fabric held firm. As such, they hoisted the sleeping bags and carried them back to their nest. Their queen would deal with them.

Han Wu felt himself lifted and moved. He lost track of time as the ants transported him, finally settling him in an unfamiliar space. He waited until the distant scuttling faded, then carefully emerged from his sleeping bag. The chamber around him was a short cave, only two meters high. The queen and the ants were nowhere in sight.

“Where are we? Was our plan exposed? Are they really that smart?” Han Wu muttered, uncertain. He unzipped the sleeping bag beside him and revealed Leng Ning’s face. She had already activated Frozen Gaze and was scanning their surroundings by detecting every heat signature nearby.

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[1,117 words]

Chapter 331 - Stalactite Water

Like an infrared camera, Leng Ning could see every single life form that radiated heat using Frost Gaze. She carefully scanned the space and confirmed that no other living beings were present; only the three of them.

“That’s strange. I thought the ants were supposed to take us to their queen,” Leng Ning murmured.

Meng Qi crawled out of his sleeping bag and suggested, “Well, since they didn’t, we can always find her ourselves.”

Han Wu nodded in agreement. With no other options, Leng Ning accepted the plan. They secured their sleeping bags and moved cautiously toward the cavern’s exit. The corridor ahead was swallowed in total darkness.

Han Wu conjured a Fireball to light their path, while Leng Ning kept Frost Gaze active, scanning for potential ambushes. They chose a direction and soon ran into their first patrol of soldier ants.

These ants were massive, each body stretching fifty centimeters, their mandibles sharp and deadly. Han Wu had no doubt a single bite could sever a human limb.

They carefully skirted the patrol and pressed further into the nest. By fortune, they stumbled upon a cave with a stone pit at its center. Within the pit lay a pool of clear liquid that gave off a faint, pleasant fragrance.

Leng Ning's eyes sparkled as she caught the scent of the liquid. "This can actually help our cultivation! It's called Stalactite Water. If you drink it, your Water potential will rise, and you'll earn Assist Points for Skills with the Water attribute."

"Really? Let me try a sip." Meng Qi stepped forward, but Leng Ning slapped the back of his head to stop him.

"You idiot. I've been telling you to study harder, but you never listen. If your lips touch the Stalactite Water, you'll contaminate the entire pit and ruin the whole batch," she scolded.

Meng Qi rubbed the back of his head where she had hit him. "Then what should I do?"

"You need to use something with a Water attribute to scoop it, like an ice spoon." Leng Ning exhaled and conjured an icicle. She concentrated and carved it into a rough but usable spoon with her mental strength.

Meng Qi seized the ice spoon eagerly, scooped some of the Stalactite Water, and drank it. The liquid flowed through him seamlessly, and he felt his Water potential surge.

He checked his interface. His Water potential had jumped by 5, reaching 33—a level that would rank him among the top students at any prestigious academy. Yet Leng Ning's Water potential of 42 still outshone him by a wide margin.

After testing the effects, he scooped another portion to drink. This time, his potential remained unchanged. He only gained more Assist Points for the Water attribute, and with each sip, the bonus became smaller. Meng Qi gave up and decided to let the others try.

Leng Ning shaped another ice spoon and stepped in front of the pit. Meng Qi had already consumed a third of the Stalactite Water, and she rolled her eyes before chastising him for being wasteful.

Meng Qi scratched his head. As a tank who specialized in defense, he indeed didn't need to drink so much. Unfortunately, he couldn't regurgitate it, so there was nothing he could do now.

Leng Ning scolded him once more before taking a spoonful herself. Ice was her specialty—a mutated form of the Water attribute—so her affinity with the Stalactite Water was unusually high. After the first sip, she watched her Water potential climb until it reached 54.

At this rank, all her Skills would align with the Water attribute, and their power would surge dramatically. She drank another spoonful and noticed her Water Assist Points increasing. Her Icicle absorbed the points and jumped to Level 29, just one level shy of

the Inferior Elite rank. Blizzard and Frost Gaze remained at Level 19 and Level 9, but only a few more Assist Points would push them to a new threshold of strength.

Still, she paused. She had consumed a third of the remaining Stalactite Water, and the rest was meant for Han Wu.

“Han Wu, now it’s your turn,” she said, her voice tinged with reluctance. She was close to growing even stronger, yet she upheld her honor.

Han Wu eyed the remaining water and shook his head. “I’ve already accumulated plenty of Assist Points for Water, Fire, Wind, and Earth. Drinking this won’t help. I need Assist Points for Power, Agility, and Defense. You can take it, but next time, if we find something that boosts the three I need, give me a larger portion.”

He made it clear he had no interest in the Stalactite Water, and Leng Ning felt genuinely touched by his thoughtfulness. With his refusal, the remainder belonged to her. She drank it without hesitation and immediately gained the Assist Points she needed.

Her affinity amplified the effect, sparking remarkable growth. Her Water potential climbed to 59, and all three of her Skills leveled up. She had just reached Superior Disciple rank when the Stalactite Water propelled her all the way to Inferior Elite.

Leng Ning confirmed the three new effects for each of her Skills before turning her attention to her new Skill, Ice Laser. It was a potent single-target attack, finally filling the gap in her arsenal for precise damage.

After verifying her new Skill and effects, she shared her progress with the other two. Their faces lit up with genuine excitement, thrilled by her advancement.

Meng Qi experienced a mix of pride and self-reproach. Han Wu had gained many Assists from the students during the competition and advanced to Superior Disciple with three Skills. Leng Ning had grown even stronger with her fourth Skill. By comparison, Meng Qi had only two Skills and felt like the weakest link.

“Oh, great heavens, please grant me a treasure that boosts my Defense potential or Defense Assist Points so I can quickly gain a new Skill. I am willing to trade ten years of my best friend’s love fortune[1] for it!” he declared.

Han Wu rolled his eyes. *Anyone who becomes his best friend is seriously unlucky. Judging by how often he does this, his best friend won’t just stay single—they’ll probably have a short life too...*

Meng Qi suddenly spun toward Han Wu. “Hey now, bestie, let’s keep exploring the cave. We need to find a defense treasure as soon as possible.”

Han Wu almost fainted. He couldn't believe that the best friend Meng Qi had been referring to was him!

1. Basically whoever his best friend is, they would have to stay single for ten years if Meng Qi gets a treasure like that lol 🤔

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[1,195 words]

Chapter 332 - There's a Dragon?

Han Wu wanted to smack Meng Qi but held back, keeping his hands free to continue probing the ant nest. Using Frost Gaze and Fireball, the trio easily slipped past the patrolling soldier ants.

"There's a cave to the left. Looks like some worker ants are inside," Leng Ning observed.

Meng Qi's eyes lit up at her words. He had already learned that caverns often hid treasures. He darted into the cave and relied solely on Iron Shirt to dispatch the ants. He avoided using Golden Bell, worried that its noise might draw more insects.

"Han Wu, help me light this place up," he called.

Han Wu had become their walking torch, wielding his Fireball to illuminate the dark cavern. The light revealed a thick vine snaking along the walls. Remarkably, it thrived despite the complete darkness of the underground nest.

Leng Ning examined the vine carefully, but even after a full minute, she could not identify it. "I'm not sure... Maybe an Iron Vine?"

Meng Qi tilted his head with innocent curiosity. "What's an Iron Vine? Can I eat it?"

Leng Ning rolled her eyes. Meng Qi's ignorance had surpassed all bounds of her patience. "The Iron Vine is listed on page 34 of our textbook. Don't tell me you never read it?"

Meng Qi scratched his head sheepishly. "I never bring my textbook to class."

Leng Ning fought the urge to pummel him. Meanwhile, Han Wu tried to recall what he had read in the textbook since Leng Ning had mentioned it.

Iron Vine was a rare plant that absorbed iron from the soil to fuel its growth. Its constant intake of iron strengthened its body into a wall of living armor. To consume it, one had to refine its leaves into a special tea, which gradually enhanced a person's Power and Defense potential. With more extensive processing, the vine could be turned into medicine that boosted the odds of awakening specific Skills.

Meng Qi's excitement dimmed after Han Wu explained what the textbook said. The Iron Vine was perfect for him, yet he couldn't eat it directly. Transporting the massive plant back home was equally impossible; it was too heavy, too cumbersome.

While Meng Qi was frowning, Han Wu suddenly crouched and dug at the roots with his dagger. Confused, Meng Qi asked, "Hey there, bestie, what are you doing?"

Han Wu replied, "The textbook says the Iron Vine sometimes forms a Duraseed where its nutrients are most concentrated."

Leng Ning shook her head. "That won't happen here. The conditions are too strict. The vine has to be at least a hundred years old, and it must grow in a place rich in nutrients. Even if this one has reached a century old, I doubt the soil here can support a Duraseed."

Meng Qi believed she was right, and disappointment weighed on him as he rose to his feet. "Han Wu, I know you're doing this for me, but we shouldn't push our luck. Let's stop digging."

Han Wu refused to give up. "How can you be so sure? If there's a Duraseed, it could greatly boost your Defense potential, and you might even gain a new Skill. Isn't that worth the effort?"

Hope flickered in Meng Qi's eyes. "How long are you planning to scrape away with that dagger? Let me take over."

He activated Iron Shirt, covering his hands with an invisible barrier, and clawed into the earth like a mole. Dirt flew as he dug a wide pit beneath the vine, even exposing its thick roots, yet there was still no Duraseed.

Meng Qi turned to Han Wu for guidance. Han Wu brightened the area with a sweep of light and examined the pit with care. No Duraseed lay within, yet something tugged at his senses—a familiar pulse he could not ignore. Following that pull, he dug into the soil and unearthed a bone. It was small, no larger than a finger, but the faint aura that clung to it carried the unmistakable aura of a dragon.

Cold sweat ran down Meng Qi's face. "Han Wu, why are you holding that bone? It's unlucky. Throw it away."

"This is a dragon bone," Han Wu replied evenly.

“What the heck? A dragon bone? Are you saying there’s an actual Great Dragon sealed here in Dragon Seal?” Meng Qi blurted.

He had heard the legends countless times but never believed they were true, but now Han Wu had supposedly unearthed a dragon bone! At last, they held tangible proof that the Dragon Seal truly had been used to imprison a Great Dragon in ages past.

Leng Ning was just as shaken and leapt into the pit to inspect the bone. She had never seen a dragon bone and could not say what one looked like, yet she felt at once that it was extraordinary.

“What should we do next? Take the bone or keep digging?” she asked.

“Keep digging,” Han Wu answered. He wanted to know how many more lay hidden.

Meng Qi threw himself into the task, summoning Iron Shirt once more. An unseen shield coated his body as he dug with wild determination. Han Wu’s senses stirred again, and together they uncovered another dragon bone near the end of the Iron Vine’s roots along with a Duraseed.

Meng Qi’s eyes lit with excitement as he struggled to lift the Duraseed into his hands. For him, it was no ordinary treasure. The seed promised to strengthen his Defense potential and even held the possibility of granting him a new defense-oriented Skill.

Han Wu examined the Duraseed and quickly realized it differed from the one described in the ancient texts. A faint dragon aura clung to it. The seed had clearly absorbed that aura and transformed into a mutated version.

Leng Ning had noticed the same thing, and together they urged Meng Qi to consume it without delay.

With considerable effort, Meng Qi swallowed the Duraseed. As it dissolved within him, a steady stream of energy spread through his body. Every ten minutes, his Defense potential rose by a single point, and the effect continued for two full hours.

He soon realized the energy wasn’t just strengthening his base potential. It flowed into his existing Skills as well. He waited patiently for a new Skill to emerge, but after three hours nothing appeared. Instead, his Golden Bell and Iron Shirt underwent strange mutations.

The Golden Bell retained its form, but a faint engraving of a Great Dragon now coiled around its surface. The addition lent it an air of majesty and grandeur.

Iron Shirt had transformed completely, evolving into a new Skill called Imperial Yellow Jacket. Normally invisible, it manifested as a shimmering yellow barrier that wrapped around his body when activated.

Han Wu struck him with a heavy punch to test its strength. The blow rebounded with startling force, and he marveled at how much tougher the defense and reflection had become.

Meng Qi couldn't decide whether to feel happy or disappointed. He had finally obtained the Duraseed, yet it granted him no new Skill. He could only wonder when he would ever gain one.

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[1,382 words]

Chapter 333 - Huge Dragon Bones

Noticing the complex mix of emotions swirling across Meng Qi's face, Han Wu chuckled.

"Don't be too greedy," he said to Meng Qi. "You've already gotten something far rarer. Your two Skills have mutated, something that has never before been recorded in our civilization's history!"

Meng Qi sighed in resignation, knowing Han Wu was right. Turning to face the pit, he asked, "So... should I continue digging?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Han Wu and Leng Ning simultaneously. After unearthing dragon bones and a mutated Duraseed, the two were excited to see what other treasures were buried beneath the soil and were eager to continue digging.

Activating his new Imperial Yellow Jacket Skill, Meng Qi nodded and continued digging. After a long while, he finally reached the roots of the Iron Vine. He pulled the roots away, revealing a hole from which a dull light emanated.

Not daring to move any further, Meng Qi motioned for Leng Ning and Han Wu to have a look. Leng Ning activated Frost Gaze and peered down into the hole, where she found numerous eggs radiating heat. They had dug directly above the queen's cavern!

Leng Ning suddenly pulled away from the hole, trembling. She had seen a massive heat signature at the end of the cluster of eggs.

"Guys... it seems we've dug a tunnel to the ceiling of the queen's chamber!"

"What? This is great!" Meng Qi shouted with joy.

Startled, Han Wu hurriedly covered his mouth. “We’re in an ant nest! Are you trying to get us killed?” he hissed.

Vowing to himself that he wouldn’t lose his composure again, Meng Qi nodded. “What should we do now?”

Leng Ning sighed. “We need to move carefully. Let’s steal as many eggs as we can.”

“Sure!”

Worried about letting Meng Qi go on his own, Leng Ning turned to Han Wu. “You’re more dexterous than him. Why don’t you steal the eggs instead?”

Han Wu nodded, understanding her worry. He then took a section of the Iron Vine’s roots and used it as a rope to carefully shinny down.

He grabbed one of the numerous thumb-sized eggs that filled the chamber. Noting their softness, he carefully wrapped the eggs before passing them up.

The three worked as a team, managing to steal hundreds of eggs. They knew that if they could successfully transport the eggs back, they would earn several million credits—their first pot of gold as students.

However, Han Wu wasn’t satisfied. While transferring the eggs, he had sensed an even stronger dragon aura just behind the queen ant. Based on the strength of the aura, he was certain that it was a powerful treasure.

After he told them what he found, the two were deep in thought. With the queen ant right there in the chamber, a single misstep would mean the end of them. However, the treasure was likely more dragon bones, a very attractive prospect that would make them much stronger in the future.

“Well, we’re already here, so we might as well try,” Meng Qi said excitedly.

Leng Ning nodded. “We can slowly approach the back of the queen ant, but we need to be extremely careful.”

“No problem,” Meng Qi replied.

Han Wu nodded, acknowledging their determination, and gestured that he would follow Leng Ning’s lead. The three carefully moved behind the queen ant, using the faint light from the crystals around to get a look at its figure.

The queen’s abdomen was huge, measuring three to four meters long and containing numerous eggs. Since it was nurturing so much life, it required an immense amount of nutrients and was eating almost all the time.

The worker ants continued to stuff the queen's mouth with fresh food. As Han Wu got a closer look, he realized with disgust that it was human flesh! It seemed a group of people had been previously captured, dismembered, and fed to the queen.

After a careful look around, Leng Ning noticed that there was only one entrance to the cave. If she could seal it, the soldier and worker ants would be unable to get inside to protect their queen.

"Um, Han Wu, where did you sense the treasure again?" Meng Qi asked in a whisper.

Han Wu tuned his senses, and his eyes were soon drawn to a white stone just beneath the queen. He realized that the stone was actually a huge dragon bone that had retained a powerful aura from when the dragon was alive.

"It's... It's just below the queen ant."

Glancing beneath the queen ant, Meng Qi prepared to attack, a look of focus on his face. "Got it."

Leng Ning took a long breath, waited for a soldier ant to exit the chamber, and then gave her orders. "I will seal the entrance. Meng Qi, protect me. Han Wu, deal with the remaining ants in the cave as quickly as you can."

"No problem."

"Alright."

The two nodded and immediately got to work. Leng Ning used her new Ice Laser Skill to create a huge wall of ice to block the entrance. Meng Qi, in turn, activated the Golden Bell and Imperial Yellow Jacket to protect her.

After Han Wu temporarily increased their strength with Vigor, Leng Ning used Blizzard to freeze most of the soldier ants in the cave. The freezing winds swirled violently, heavily injuring the queen ant's massive body.

The cold caused the queen's abdomen to crack, and many of its eggs were killed. Han Wu ignored the queen ant and began to burn the remaining soldier ants that could still move. They lit up with black flames and instantly burned to death.

The trio swiftly dealt with the ants until only the queen remained. Meanwhile, a huge swarm of worker and soldier ants had gathered outside, trying to break the ice wall to get to their queen.

"Hurry up and get the treasure!" Leng Ning shouted with urgency.

Han Wu ignored the shivering queen ant and quickly excavated the dragon bone, but was surprised to find it was much bigger than he had expected. The bone was five meters long and one meter wide, and given its intense aura and great density, it was impossible to transport.

The dragon bone appeared to be undamaged, and its size suggested that the Great Dragon must have been massive. Unfortunately, they couldn't take it with them, and to avoid losing out on such a treasure, they had no choice but to absorb its energy right there. However, the process would take too long, and Leng Ning was quickly reaching her limit.

With no other choice, Han Wu jumped onto the squealing queen's back and aimed his dagger at her head. "Order your ants to stay outside, or I will kill you!"

"Han Wu, what are you doing?" Meng Qi exclaimed, utterly confused. "Your efforts are useless! It's just an ant—it cannot understand you!"

While Han Wu knew that communicating with an insect was nearly impossible, he was certain that any being with a semblance of intelligence would understand that he was threatening its life.

However, unbeknownst to him, the queen ant was capable of transmitting its thoughts. Soon, a strange, young, and fragmented voice echoed in his mind, but he could understand what it was trying to say.

Please... spare... spare... me... my... children...

The queen ant was clearly begging for mercy for herself and her children. Han Wu agreed, but only on the condition that he become her master. With her life being threatened, the queen had no choice but to agree, and a faint thread soon connected him and the queen ant.

The thread not only supplied him with Faith Points, but it also transmitted the queen ant's emotions—fear, anxiety, and anger. These various emotions proved that the queen ant was more intelligent compared to other life forms.

Han Wu was shocked. *Could this be the dragon bone's influence?*

Meanwhile, seeing that the queen ant had quieted down, Meng Qi did as Han Wu requested and placed his hand on the dragon bone. As he slowly absorbed the energy within it, he received a large amount of Assist Points and soon achieved the rank of Superior Disciple.

Meng Qi also finally obtained a third Skill that he had long wished for: Dragon Armor.

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[1,356 words]

Chapter 334 - Silver Dragon Erebard

The queen ant released a wave of pheromones that signaled safety, and the swarm immediately halted its assault on the icy barrier.

Han Wu slid his dagger back into its sheath. “No need to stay on guard. We’re safe now. I’ve struck a deal with the queen, and she won’t harm us.”

Leng Ning stared in disbelief. The idea of a man conversing with an ant was absurd, laughable even, yet the evidence lay before her. The ants outside the cavern had stopped their relentless attack.

Han Wu used Vigor on the queen ant. The frost encasing her abdomen melted away in moments, but the eggs within her body had long since perished in the cold.

Meng Qi sauntered over and displayed his newest Skill, Dragon Armor. Shimmering scales wrapped around his body until he stood like a war general returning from a campaign. He rocked side to side, admiring the fit. “Well? Do I look good?”

Han Wu rolled his eyes. “I’m not looking at you.”

Meng Qi sighed inwardly. Han Wu had clearly misunderstood him, and there was no way to explain it.

With no need to guard the entrance, Leng Ning finally turned her attention to the dragon aura sealed within the massive bone. She had already reached the Inferior Elite rank and required more Assist Points to unlock another Skill. Thankfully, the bone held more than enough to meet her needs.

After absorbing the dragon aura, her rank rose to Intermediate Elite, and with it, her existing Skills transformed.

Icicle became Frost Fang, sharper and deadlier than before. Blizzard evolved into Frost Dragon Blizzard, which blanketed a vast area in killing cold. Frost Gaze grew into Frost Dragon Gaze, retaining its original effect while adding a dragon’s intimidation that weakened its target. Ice Laser turned into Frost Dragon Breath, now an area-of-effect attack that unleashed devastating force.

Finally, she obtained a new Skill called Frost Dragon Possession. It allowed her to summon the spirit of a frost dragon into her own body, bolstering her physical and magical defenses while amplifying every Skill she wielded.

Meng Qi couldn't hide his awe as he watched. Leng Ning's transformation was nothing short of rebirth. Even she struggled to believe the scale of her own growth. Every one of her Skills now bore the mark of a dragon, and her strength had multiplied tenfold.

When she finished, it was Han Wu's turn. He placed his hands on the ancient bone, and his mind was instantly wrenched into a vast void. A colossal dragon towered before him, its body stretching for tens of thousands of meters. Each movement shattered mountains, and every beat of its wings unleashed typhoons that ravaged the land.

Han Wu doubted he could defeat such a powerful beast even if he summoned every unit from his divine realm.

The Great Dragon sensed his presence, and a solemn voice echoed in his mind. "Great Defier, is that you?"

At first Han Wu thought he was imagining things, yet the dragon truly addressed him as the Great Defier. He remembered his first meeting with Alpheus, who always introduced himself with that same title. Clearly, it carried great weight among the Great Dragons.

Han Wu answered with caution, "I am the Great Defier."

The Great Dragon's voice rang with delight. "A brilliant idea, hiding the power of the Great Defier in a human form. That way those thieving bastards cannot find it. Great Defier, will you accept the powers of the silver dragon Erebard?"

Han Wu's eyes lit up with excitement because the silver dragon sounded powerful. There was no reason to reject its powers. "I accept."

"Very well." With a jubilant roar, Erebard soared toward Han Wu, and the remaining dragon aura within the massive bone fused seamlessly into his body.

Meng Qi and Leng Ning froze in shock. Both Han Wu and the massive dragon bone glowed simultaneously.

The bone shone as it fused with Han Wu's body. The light faded only after the fusion was complete. Even the queen ant watched in astonishment. She knew the bone's value—she had spent years drawing its power to produce countless ants and secure her dominion within Dragon Seal. Yet she had never managed to access the dragon bone's core energy.

Han Wu achieved in mere hours what she could not in years. Her respect for him deepened, and her faith grew stronger.

Meanwhile, Han Wu remained unaware of the events unfolding outside as he was fully absorbed in assimilating the new power. Erebard's energy flowed into his Life Aspect, intertwining with it and showing signs of merging. From that moment, his Skills started to mutate.

Fireball, empowered by Erebard's energy, evolved into Dragon Fireball. It had grown ten times larger while retaining the effects of Blood Fuel and Black Flames. Life Shield transformed into Dragon Shield, keeping its original effects but becoming thicker and ten times stronger defensively. Vigor developed into Silver Strength, which dramatically enhanced its target's potential and granted Han Wu the ability to temporarily transform into a silver dragon, boosting his combat prowess.

Finally, he obtained a new Skill called Contract: Silver Dragon Erebard. This was the product of the fusion between Erebard and Han Wu's Life Aspect. By channeling the Life Aspect's power into Erebard's will, Han Wu could resurrect Erebard as a hatchling.

Unfortunately, the hatchling's strength was reduced to that of a standard Great Dragon hatchling, and all memories and Skills had been sealed. Erebard would need time and growth to unlock them. Even so, the Skill was immensely powerful. Summoning a Great Dragon ranked among the most powerful abilities in most civilizations.

Han Wu eagerly summoned Erebard with the Skill. A small gate opened beside him, and the creature tumbled out. The hatchling was barely a meter long and freshly resurrected, so it struggled to control its wings. It nearly crashed into the wall, but Han Wu reacted quickly and caught it midair.

Leng Ning and Meng Qi leaned forward, eyes wide with curiosity and admiration. The dragon was undeniably adorable.

"My good friend, is this your new Skill? What is this creature?" Meng Qi asked.

Leng Ning reached out to touch Erebard's head. "It's so cute."

"This is a Great Dragon hatchling," Han Wu said calmly.

"A Great Dragon?" Meng Qi frowned, skeptical. He had reason to be—until now, the Assist Civilization had only legends and folklore of Great Dragons, with no concrete proof of their existence.

Leng Ning believed Han Wu's claim. "Can I hug it?"

Han Wu nodded and let Erebard settle into Leng Ning's embrace. The hatchling had no knowledge of its parents, so it allowed anyone to hold it. It curled against Leng Ning and soaked in her warmth.

Meng Qi stared in disbelief but had no choice but to trust Han Wu. He nudged Han Wu with his elbow. "My friend, I've dreamed of becoming a dragon rider since I was young. Could I ride it once it grows bigger? I want to show it off to everyone."

Han Wu glanced at the hatchling and thought that it would take years to grow large enough. "We'll see."

"Hehe, you really are my friend. Becoming a dragon rider is my greatest wish. You have to help me," Meng Qi pressed.

Han Wu rolled his eyes. *As if I'm that gullible. Today's the first time you've seen a Great Dragon. How can that be your greatest wish?*

Han Wu decided to throw the ball into Meng Qi's court. "Sure, but you need to earn its acknowledgement first."

Meng Qi grinned. "Of course. I'll do my best to convince it."

He scooped up one of the ant eggs and held it near Erebard. "Here you go, little buddy. Time to eat something nutritious. In exchange, let me ride you once you're older."

The queen ant's face remained expressionless, but its outrage radiated straight into Han Wu's mind. "You brute! How dare you try to feed my child to the dragon?!"

If not for Han Wu, the queen would have ordered her soldiers to tear Meng Qi apart just to satisfy her fury.

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[1,224 words]

Chapter 335 - Reverse Psychology

After playing with the two of them, Erebard grew tired. Before settling down, it sent Han Wu a message through their contract. It needed to consume dragon bones to grow stronger.

This was Dragon Seal, and the three had already confirmed that plenty of dragon bones lay scattered across the region. To speed up Erebard's growth, Han Wu commanded the queen ant to gather as many as possible.

Sensing his strength, the queen ant had already become his Believer, and she obeyed without hesitation. She dispatched her workers and soldiers to scour the ground, collect every fragment of bone, and send them back to the nest for Han Wu to retrieve later.

Han Wu nodded with satisfaction. He had to admit it felt good to leave a subordinate behind in every civilization he visited. All he needed to do was issue an order, and the rest would be carried out without effort on his part.

After arranging when he would return to collect the bones, the trio departed the nest under the escort of soldier ants. Their time in the tunnels had left all three of them considerably stronger. Leng Ning in particular had reached a breakthrough, unlocking her fifth Skill as an Intermediate Elite.

They spent roughly ten more days exploring Dragon Seal. With Erebard serving as a living deterrent, no other creatures dared approach. The trio waited until their names climbed to the top of the ranking board before leaving. With their names established, they could receive Assists from future adventurers in the area.

Only then did they return to the academy. After resting for a few days, they prepared for the upcoming interacademy competition. As Azure Sea's representatives, they carried the academy's hopes, though because their school lacked fame, their match had been scheduled near the end of the day.

The teacher assigned to watch over them had observed the first few matches and noticed the overwhelming strength of students from the more prestigious academies. Concern creased the teacher's face as thoughts of the trio's chances weighed heavily. While Han Wu and his companions had likely improved over the past month, the teacher doubted the progress would bridge the gap between them and the elite competitors.

The teacher offered a piece of cautious advice. "You three... do your best out there, alright? But don't push yourselves too hard. Participating matters more than winning. Don't risk injury for the sake of some meaningless prestige."

Han Wu froze. *Is this some form of reverse psychology? Other teachers would be urging their students to fight relentlessly to earn points for their academies, yet this teacher prioritizes our safety over glory?*

He would have suspected the man of being a spy from another academy if he hadn't known that he was actually the uncle of the Azure Sea principal.

Meng Qi ignored the warning and replied with unwavering confidence, "Don't worry. We're here because we believe we can win."

Instead of praise, the teacher questioned him, "Meng Qi, I don't want to crush your spirit, but... you're only an Intermediate Disciple. The other academies' students are

Inferior Elites. Don't put on a brave front. Inferior Elites have four Skills and are considered formidable. You have half their strength. How do you plan to compete?"

"*Erm...* Teacher, I think you're mistaken. I'm already a Superior Disciple with three Skills. I'm not—"

Meng Qi tried to clarify, but the teacher cut him off. "Meng Qi, don't lie to me. This time, the academy's hope is for all of you to return safely. That is our true victory."

Meng Qi opened his mouth again, but Han Wu stopped him. It was clear the teacher didn't believe the three could achieve anything in the competition. Words were useless. They would let their actions speak for them.

The trio waited for hours, nearly dozing off as the arena filled with tension. Their opponents were from the more famous low-ranking Blazing Fire Academy. The two academies had long been rivals, yet Azure Sea had failed to claim victory against Blazing Fire for the past ten years.

The Blazing Fire students were confident of another easy win, which made them sneer at Han Wu and his team. To them, Azure Sea Academy was insignificant, and its students had to be weak as well.

"You guys, crush them and toss them out of the arena. I don't feel like fighting," one arrogant Blazing Fire student called out.

"Let me handle this. I'll show those useless fools the gap between them and real geniuses," another said, forming a Fireball in his hand. It pulsed and swelled slowly.

Han Wu glanced at the Fireball and chuckled at how feeble it was. He could summon Fireballs the size of aquariums with far greater power. Yet he had no intention of revealing his strength yet. Instead, he turned to Meng Qi and Leng Ning. "Who wants to go first?"

Leng Ning stepped forward with steady confidence. "Let me show them what Azure Sea is made of."

"*Oho?* They're sending in the beauty first. I never thought Azure Sea's men would be such cowards that they need a girl to fight for them," one student jeered.

Meng Qi bristled at the insult. "What the heck are you talking about?"

He readied himself to strike with his new Skills, but Han Wu put a hand on his shoulder and whispered, "Ignore their provocations. Conserve your strength. That way, the audience will cheer for you more when you actually fight."

Meng Qi grumbled but ultimately restrained himself.

The Blazing Fire students mistook his restraint for fear and pressed their taunts even harder in the arena. “Hey, lady! Want to join our academy? Become my girlfriend, and I’ll handle the transfer paperwork for you. I’ll make sure you get into the best class in Blazing Fire Academy. How about it?”

Leng Ning stayed perfectly still. Only those who had spent time around her understood that this calm was the deadliest state she could be in. Han Wu felt the air around her grow colder by the second. It was clear the boy had struck a nerve.

“Silence,” she spat. “No, your quiet won’t save you. I’ll have to encase you in ice.”

“What’s that, pretty lady? You’re going to encase me in ice? Are you joking? I play with fire all the time. Do you think I fear your ice?” The boy laughed, and his Fireball grew to the size of an aquarium. It seemed this was the largest it could grow through charging.

“Shut up and freeze!” Leng Ning shouted.

In that instant, she used her Level 43 Frost Dragon Blizzard. A wave of icy wind swept across the arena, chilling the spectators to the bone. The temperature plummeted so rapidly that frost formed on the ground and walls.

The boy, who had spent so long charging his Fireball, froze mid-motion, his body locked in an awkward pose. Even his massive Fireball sputtered and died.

The remaining two students watched in terror. They immediately surrendered and apologized to Han Wu.

Leng Ning’s Frost Dragon Blizzard was so powerful that it could freeze a person instantly. The boy with the Fireball had become a cautionary example, demonstrating what happened to anyone who dared challenge her. Had they resisted, they would have ended up in the same frozen state.

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[1,134 words]

Chapter 336 - Second Match

The trio exited the arena, and their teacher hurried toward them. “Leng Ning, when did you acquire such a powerful Skill? Why didn’t you tell me sooner? I was worried about all of you. With your current strength, I will stake my honor as a teacher to convince the principal to secure a seat for you in a top-ranking college!”

Meng Qi's eyes sparkled at the thought of bypassing the grueling admission process. "Teacher, what about us? Will we get into a top-ranking college too?"

The teacher looked at him and sighed. "Meng Qi, do you really think it works that way? The principal doesn't control admission to the top colleges. You two are fortunate to have teamed up with Leng Ning this time. This alone will earn you plenty of Assist Points, so take advantage of the opportunity to grow stronger. Don't get cocky. But I believe that if you keep working hard, you'll be able to secure a top-ranking college spot on your own."

Meng Qi caught the subtle dismissal in the teacher's tone. He wanted to protest and explain that he was only slightly weaker than Leng Ning and that his moment hadn't come yet.

"But—"

The teacher cut him off mid-sentence. "Enough. Stop wasting time. Meng Qi, Han Wu, go back and rest. I need to take Leng Ning to report today's events to the principal."

Before they could respond, the teacher dragged Leng Ning away, leaving the two standing in stunned silence.

Meng Qi's eyes widened. "Wait, is he really a teacher? Han Wu, do you think the academy would expel me if I just whacked him?"

Han Wu chuckled. "I'm not sure if you'd get expelled, but you'd hit the ground in no time. The teacher is an Inferior Master, and I doubt you could fight him."

Meng Qi grumbled, "Fine, I can't beat the teacher, but I can handle our opponents. Tomorrow, I'll show them just how strong I am. Stay out of it, alright?"

Han Wu sighed and nodded. He had transmigrated here mainly to experience a different culture, not to chase power, so the outcome of the competition didn't worry him.

The next day arrived quickly, and it was time for Azure Sea's second match. The trio stepped into the arena again, facing the representatives of Nurturing Rain Academy, another low-ranking school. Their opponents consisted of two Inferior Elites and one Intermediate Elite, and they were all staring at Leng Ning with visible fear.

The Nurturing Rain students had learned of the match only yesterday and immediately requested footage to study their strategy. Watching Leng Ning in action had left them horrified. Her Skill had frozen her enemy almost instantly. Confronting her was essentially a death sentence. They had even sent for equipment designed to resist ice damage and freezing in hopes to tilt the odds slightly in their favor.

However, none of them anticipated that Leng Ning would sit this one out. Meng Qi had insisted on showing off in front of the teacher, and Leng Ning had decided to let him take the spotlight.

The announcer signaled the start of the match, and both sides moved at once. The three Nurturing Rain students unleashed their Skills simultaneously, directing Fireball, Lightning, and Air Cannon straight at Leng Ning. Their plan was simple: eliminate her first and deal with the others later.

Leng Ning remained calm and didn't move at all. She gave no indication that she intended to retaliate. Her opponents had no idea what she was planning.

That was when Meng Qi leapt in front of her and summoned the Golden Bell. The bell materialized around him, encased his body in a shimmering protective shell, and deflected the attacks from the three adversaries. Each strike made the bell chime loudly, yet it remained unbroken. With every blow it absorbed, the dragon engraving on its surface grew sharper, almost as if drawing strength from their assaults.

"Damn. That tank can handle long-range attacks. We'll need to fight him up close," one of them muttered.

They changed tactics and used Skills that specialized in melee combat. One became a blazing human torch and emitted intense heat. Another erupted with electricity, bolts jumping across their limbs. The last summoned a powerful whirlwind that tore through the ground.

The trio approached Meng Qi and struck the Golden Bell. The bell rang continuously under their barrage, finally cracking after more than twenty seconds. Had Han Wu and Leng Ning joined the fight during that window, the attackers would have been finished instantly. But Meng Qi wanted to demonstrate his power, so his two companions didn't make a move and watched quietly.

Meng Qi waited until his Golden Bell began to crack before activating his second Skill, Imperial Yellow Jacket. A blinding light erupted across his body, forcing the three students to shield their eyes. Experienced enough to react instantly, they shut their eyes and summoned every ounce of strength to deliver the final blow that shattered the Golden Bell.

The moment their fists struck Meng Qi's Imperial Yellow Jacket, the damage they inflicted rebounded violently. Within a few hits, the three students' fists were drenched in blood from the reflected impact.

Meanwhile, Meng Qi remained unscathed and grinned with a hint of mockery. "Getting tired already? Good. Now it's my turn!"

Meng Qi then activated his third Skill, Dragon Armor. A grand armor covered his body and made him look like a general.

The three students tried to flee, but Meng Qi had anticipated their move. He instinctively struck the strongest among them. That single punch carried the force of the Imperial Yellow Jacket's Reflection effect combined with the Dragon Armor's defensive power. The student flew five meters backward, gravely injured. The other two watched in disbelief, drained of any will or strength to fight.

Meng Qi's power was overwhelming. They had assumed Leng Ning was the only powerful fighter, but Meng Qi proved just as dangerous. He lacked Leng Ning's lethal edge, yet his resilience allowed him to endure the fight and wear down his opponents.

Meng Qi chuckled. "Do you want to see what it feels like to fly too?"

Realizing they could not overcome him, the two remaining students shook their heads and surrendered. "We give up."

The crowd erupted. A massive wave of Assists poured in for Han Wu and the others: Meng Qi claimed 60%, Leng Ning 30%, and Han Wu 10%. Even at just 10%, Han Wu earned over 3,000 Assist Points.

"I could get this much just by winning a match? I want in next time," Han Wu said, quickly calculating his potential gains and sharing his plan with the others.

Leng Ning nodded. "Fine. You go tomorrow. I'm eager to see how strong you really are."

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[905 words]

Chapter 337 - Strong Opponents

After the match, their teacher stared at Meng Qi, disbelief etched across his face. "My goodness, Meng Qi! I had no idea you concealed your strength so well. You should have told me—you're that powerful! I would have staked my reputation to persuade the principal to secure you a spot in a top-ranking college."

Meng Qi raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "That sounds familiar. Teacher, didn't you say yesterday that gaining admission to a top-ranking college is nearly impossible?"

"*Haiya*," the teacher replied, shaking his head with a smile. "A top-ranking college would jump at the chance to accept outstanding students like you and Leng Ning."

He radiated confidence, convinced the principal would move heaven and earth to secure two spots if he witnessed their performance. "Good luck in your upcoming matches. I'll go find the principal and request your reward."

The teacher turned to leave but paused, eyeing Han Wu with a mix of suspicion and curiosity. After seeing Meng Qi and Leng Ning, he suspected that Han Wu was stronger than he appeared.

"Han Wu... by any chance, are you holding back as well?" he asked.

Han Wu nodded. "A little."

"That's excellent! I admired how well you controlled your Fireball in the last competition. Don't hold back this time. Use your Fireball and show them your strength. Let everyone know that Azure Sea Academy is rising!"

With a final cheer, the teacher skipped away, light on his feet like a child heading to buy candy.

Han Wu watched him go and nodded. "I will show them."

On the third day, their match was scheduled for the afternoon. A victory today would push Azure Sea into the top thirty-two. It was a milestone that seemed modest on the surface but carried immense prestige. The academies in the top thirty-two had long dominated the rankings, each boasting a history of excellence. Securing a spot would also bring substantial resources for the next year, which explained why the teacher pinned so much hope on the trio.

Their opponents, however, were far from easy. They faced the Holy Blue Academy, the team that had claimed fourth place in the previous competition. All three representatives were Superior Elites, each just one step away from becoming Inferior Masters.

The Holy Blue trio sneered at Han Wu and his companions.

"It's impressive that the weak Azure Sea has made it this far," one of them said with arrogant amusement. "But your luck ends here."

Meng Qi growled, "Don't get cocky. The winner hasn't been decided yet."

"You must be the tank. Your Skills are strong, but not strong enough. Da Shan, show them what you've got."

Da Shan stepped forward and activated his Level 47 Skill, Iron Tower Shield. A massive shield of pure energy formed in his hands. He followed with his Level 43 Skill, Hard Qigong, and his muscles tightened with unmatched force. Finally, layers of chainmail,

iron mail, and plate armor materialized across his body, enclosing him completely. Each of these armor Skills was above Level 40.

Da Shan's specialization in defense made him nearly untouchable. Even those at the Master rank would struggle to bring him down.

Meng Qi, a fellow tank, watched with admiration. As a specialist in defensive Skills, he understood exactly how formidable Da Shan had become. Not even Meng Qi's mutated Skills or Dragon Armor could rival that level of protection.

"As for you, Leng Ning," the leader said, "I admit your ice attribute attacks are the strongest among our peers, but they aren't invincible. Their power drops drastically when facing a countering attribute."

At his signal, the representative beside him stepped forward and unleashed his Level 53 Fire's Blessing. Instantly, flames engulfed all three representatives, imbuing every strike with fire damage while shielding them from being frozen.

With that Skill, they could resist freezing, which made Leng Ning's ice attacks far less effective. She glanced at the flames wrapping their bodies and realized they were right.

Their preparations weren't over. The Holy Blue leader turned his gaze to Han Wu. "Han Wu, I've studied your record. You have remarkable mental strength, able to shape your Fireball with precision. But it does nothing to strengthen your power. Against us, it's useless."

After reciting their countermeasures, he revealed his true aim. "The three of you can't possibly defeat us. Stop wasting time and surrender."

The announcer's gaze fell on Han Wu, waiting for his response. Even he saw the futility in resisting such overwhelming power. Surrender would spare them needless injury, and no one could fault them for losing to the academy ranked fourth in the nation.

Meng Qi and Leng Ning stayed silent, their eyes fixed on Han Wu, waiting for his call.

Han Wu let out a low chuckle. "You've been running your mouth for so long. I thought you'd dug up something worthwhile, but this is all you know? Enough chatter. I'll take the three of you on alone."

"Arrogant bastard," the leader snapped. "Not even Violet Demon, the strongest academy, spoke with such conceit."

Han Wu chuckled again. "Then watch as I show you my true strength."

He pressed a hand against his chest and unleashed Silver Strength. A vast dragon shadow loomed behind him, then sank into his body. In that instant, his potential doubled, and his vitality rose to an unprecedented degree.

At that moment, the announcer signaled the start of the match.

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[967 words]

Chapter 338 - Surrender? What for?

The match started, and Han Wu wasted no time. He unleashed a Dragon Fireball of pitch-black flames, its shape forming the snarling head of a dragon that opened its jaws as it hurtled toward the opposing leader.

Da Shan, acting as the tank, stepped forward to shield his leader. The fiery dragon struck with a thunderous impact but failed to breach the Iron Tower Shield.

The leader laughed. "You are too weak!"

Han Wu stayed silent and unleashed even more Dragon Fireballs. They were enormous, and their sheer number blanketed the sky. Like an artillery barrage, they all detonated with overwhelming force on impact.

The crowd gaped at the speed of his assault.

"Doesn't the Skill have a cooldown?"

"Even if it doesn't, shouldn't casting them consume energy? How can he launch so many in a row?"

Confusion rippled through the crowd, but the match pressed on. Dragon Fireballs rained down so densely that even Da Shan could not block them all. He managed to deflect only the first ten before the rest tore through his defenses.

The leader and the second representative were struck next. The Level 53 Fire's Blessing not only resisted ice-type Skills but also mitigated damage from fire-type Skills.

The leader absorbed several Dragon Fireballs without a scratch. A small black ember, however, landed on his arm. It was so tiny that he extinguished it with a single pat and scoffed. "All bark and no bite. What a useless Skill."

Han Wu's smile widened. "You might want to check where you were hit. My flames don't go out so easily."

The leader glanced down at his arm. The ember hadn't gone out. It was crawling up his arm, spreading until it engulfed the lower half of his elbow. Thanks to Fire's Blessing, it caused no harm.

He sneered. "As long as it doesn't hurt me, your black flames are useless."

His companion's voice rang out in alarm. "What are these flames? How are they burning through my Fire's Blessing?"

No sooner had he spoken than Da Shan's Iron Tower Shield started to crack under the relentless assault of black flames. Even the Fire's Blessing on his body was gradually being consumed.

Just as his companion had warned, the black flames devoured the effects of Fire's Blessing. The more they spread, the more relentless their damage became. The moment the flames touched their bodies, their lives were set on a ticking clock.

Sensing the Blessing's power fading, the leader knew he had only moments to defeat Han Wu—or all of them would fall. "Fine. I will make you feel the full force of my wrath!"

He produced a golden cudgel, then vanished. In an instant, he reappeared behind Han Wu, raising the weapon high. Every motion screamed that he aimed to smash the back of Han Wu's head!

He was too close for Meng Qi to intervene. The leader already envisioned Han Wu's skull splitting beneath the blow and savored the thought.

The crowd gasped. This was an interacademy competition for youths. Their Skills did not match the Masters, yet casualties were inevitable. Everyone could see that blood would be spilled today.

Han Wu's teacher acted immediately, shouting to the announcer and referee that they intended to surrender. Reaching this stage had been a blessing for Azure Sea, and he would not allow his student to be injured.

Unfortunately, the announcer and referee were too far away to respond in time. Almost everyone waited, frozen, for the next second when blood and brain matter would fly.

The leader swung his cudgel down with deadly force, and the audience collectively inhaled in horror.

Unexpectedly, no blood spilled. The cudgel struck a thick jade shield instead. The moment it appeared, everyone saw its immense weight, density, and durability. Not

even the leader's mightiest blow left a dent. It resembled a castle gate more than a shield.

Han Wu's teacher was elated. He had always known Han Wu wielded Fireball with skill, but he had never imagined Han Wu possessed such formidable defensive strength as well.

The referee froze, then turned to the teacher. "Are you still going to surrender?"

"Surrender? Why would we? The match continues."

The match resumed in the arena.

Leng Ning and Meng Qi knew how strong Han Wu was and remained motionless as they stood on the side.

The leader's scowl deepened as Han Wu effortlessly deflected his deadliest, one-hit-kill trump card. Humiliation burned in his chest!

With his first plan thwarted, he had no choice but to fall back to his backup plan. "Second plan!"

The representative tasked with maintaining Fire's Blessing obeyed instantly and summoned a Fireball the size of a room.

The crowd gasped at its immense scale. A massive Fireball did not guarantee power, but it could cover a wide area. Yet in the small arena, the sheer size seemed unnecessary. The damage mattered more than the area of effect.

The representative had a purpose. Focusing his formidable mental strength, he compressed the Fireball until it shrank to the size of a ping pong ball.

Now the crowd could see the terrifying energy contained within the tiny orb. Any target struck by it would be vaporized in an instant.

Meanwhile, the leader, frustrated by his failure to breach the Dragon Shield, retreated slightly and warned, "Han Wu, surrender now! You still have time."

Han Wu roared. "Bring it!"

The leader snapped the order. "Fire the condensed Fireball! Vaporize him!"

The representative nodded and shot the compressed Fireball. It streaked through the air like a miniature sun, leaving a trail of searing gas. The arena floor itself started to melt into magma under the intense heat.

Han Wu made no move to dodge. He raised the Dragon Shield and planted it firmly before him.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,543 words]

Chapter 339 - Inextinguishable Black Flames

How can he possibly block this? Han Wu's teacher thought, clearly panicking. He had seen how strong the Dragon Shield was, but Han Wu wasn't defending against a cudgel this time, but an entire explosion! How could a single shield possibly stop it?

However, it was already too late for him to call for the announcer or referee to stop the match, as the referee had already activated the arena's barriers to protect the crowd from the compressed Fireball.

"I'll blow both you and that flimsy shield away!" roared the opposing team's leader maniacally. He wanted to see Han Wu's team and the Dragon Shield blown to pieces by his Fireball.

The Fireball smashed into the Dragon Shield, but much to the crowd's shock, instead of exploding, it was reflected! The Shield remained unharmed, and the compressed Fireball shot back at the caster at an increased speed.

Boom!

The leader barely had time to recover from his shock before the compressed Fireball flew towards them and exploded, engulfing the three in a blast of intense light and heat. The powerful explosion destroyed the arena, but Han Wu's half remained intact thanks to the Dragon Shield's protection.

Amidst the ruins of the arena where the three Holy Blue representatives had stood, a plume of black flames still burned. Miraculously, Da Shan was still alive after being hit by the explosion, though on the verge of death, as most of his body was being consumed by the black flames.

After his Iron Tower Shield shattered and his three layers of armor were destroyed, Da Shan, writhing and screaming in agony, clung on to his last shred of consciousness with his final Skill, Hard Qigong. If he were to release the Skill, his body would be instantly consumed by the black flames. However, the pain was so intense that death by black flames seemed like a welcome release.

The crowd also noticed the Holy Blue Academy's team leader, standing fifty meters away from the arena. While black flames still burned on his body, he was in relatively good condition. The moment the compressed Fireball exploded, he had disappeared and reappeared outside the arena. The barrier had contained the explosion, so he was in a much better condition than Da Shan.

However, the third Holy Blue representative was unfortunately standing in the direct center of the explosion and was unable to escape or block it, reducing him to nothing. His death caused the Fire's Blessing to disappear from the other two, and without it, the leader finally felt the burning pain of the black flames on his muscles.

The leader jumped into the crowd like a maniac and snatched a bottle of water to douse the fire, but it was futile—the black flames continued to burn. Thinking it was due to insufficient water, he desperately pleaded to the audience for help. "Anyone with powerful water Skills? Hurry up and douse the flames!"

There were indeed quite a few in the audience who specialized in water manipulation. They quickly activated low-damage, high-output water Skills in an attempt to douse the flames. A huge amount of water poured down and submerged the leader, but to his dismay, even that wasn't enough. The black flames remained unaffected and continued to burn his skin and flesh.

"*Ahh!* Let me go! Let me go!" the leader howled in agony. He began rolling on the ground in a desperate attempt to snuff out the flames, but his efforts were futile.

The crowd watched in shock as the black flames refused to be extinguished and continued to torment the leader. His fate was clearly worse than being killed outright.

Even the announcer couldn't bear to watch any longer. He gestured to Han Wu and pleaded, "Han Wu, the match is over—you've clearly won. Can you please extinguish the black flames?"

"Alright."

With a snap of Han Wu's fingers, the black flames tormenting Da Shan and the leader vanished. The two instantly fell unconscious, finally freed from their misery. Medics quickly rushed forward and used their healing Skills, but they could only heal their skin. Their deep tissue burns required professional care, and they were immediately sent to the hospital.

The audience looked at Han Wu in terrified shock. The shattered arena and the unextinguished black flames cemented the rise of his legend, and in that instant, he received tens of thousands of Assists from the crowd.

Han Wu's Skills were rising at an incredible rate. His Dragon Fireball reached Level 40, and he finally achieved the rank of Intermediate Elite. He even unlocked a powerful new Skill, Dragonfall, which could be used to attack multiple targets at once.

The new Skill was exactly what Han Wu had needed. Satisfied, he used all of his Assist Points to upgrade the powerful offensive Skill to Level 10, a Skill he had been lamenting he hadn't had before. Although Leng Ning and Meng Qi received some Assists, their total was barely a tenth of what Han Wu had received. The audience had single-handedly determined that Han Wu was the leader of the trio.

Soon, their teacher joyfully rushed to the bottom of the arena and excitedly welcomed the three students, carefully assessing each of them for any conspicuous injuries.

"Han Wu, you never told me you had such a powerful defensive Skill! Why didn't you tell me before? I was worried sick about you brats!

"I'm so pleased to see how much you've all improved. Don't you worry, I will be sure to report your success today to the principal. I will stake my reputation as a teacher to persuade the principal to get you three spots at a top-ranking college!"

Han Wu chuckled, having heard this familiar speech before. "Thank you. We will be sure to follow your guidance, Teacher."

A smile spread across Bai's face when Han Wu called him *Teacher*. The feeling was as refreshing as a can of cold juice on a hot summer day. He had to hold back an overwhelming urge to point at the three and proudly announce to everyone that they were his students!

However, as they were going to head back to rest, two referees stopped them. One stepped forward and stated, "Mr. Bai, I apologize for this, but we've just received a complaint from the Holy Blue Academy. They claim that Han Wu used a restricted drug to temporarily boost his strength, which is against the rules. We would like you to cooperate with our investigation to clear this up."

"What? This is preposterous!" Meng Qi furiously retorted. "If they had won, no one would have batted an eye, yet because we defeated them, we are accused of using drugs? Why on earth should we cooperate with this?"

"We are acting based on the information submitted by the Holy Blue Academy," the referee simply stated. "Han Wu's performance was indeed different from what was previously known. We are simply doing our job, and I ask for your understanding."

Before Han Wu could even get a chance to reply, the second referee impatiently shouted, "We are just giving you face by asking you to cooperate with the investigation! Do you really want us to publicly announce that you've used illegal drugs?"

The referee's loud voice reached the audience, and they stared at Han Wu in disbelief. The impossible victory suddenly made sense—the weak and relatively unknown Azure Sea Academy had only managed to defeat the fourth-ranked Holy Blue Academy because they had used drugs!

Bai was visibly upset by how they were being treated.

“Sir, you’re supposed to be a referee in charge of fairness of the competition,” he said, bristling with barely contained fury. “How can you accuse us without any evidence? Your suspicion doesn’t make my students guilty. Do you think you can take responsibility for your accusations? I will report you to your superior!”

Ignoring Bai, the second referee yelled even louder, trying to turn the crowd against them. “Illegal is illegal! You use drugs, but we’re not allowed to accuse you? Do you think your Azure Sea Academy is so great? How could you, a team always in the bottom ten, suddenly defeat Holy Blue Sea Academy and reach the top thirty-two? Do you think that’s even possible?”

He continued, “In fact, I will be investigating not only you, Han Wu, but also Leng Ning and Meng Qi. I am officially declaring that your last two matches were also extremely suspicious. I refuse to allow you to tarnish the sanctity of this inter-academy competition!”

Mr. Bai was visibly enraged by the referees’ clear abuse of power and was about to fight them for it. “You—!”

Seeing his teacher’s fury, Han Wu pulled him aside. “Calm down, Teacher. We haven’t done anything wrong, so there’s nothing to worry about. Let them do as they wish.”

Turning to the referee, he said, “I don’t care who you are or who is backing you. You’ve publicly accused us of something we did not do. *We will* report this to your superior.”

“*Hmph*. Useless cheating bastards like you have no right to even submit a complaint,” the referee scoffed without a trace of fear, as if he already held the evidence in his hands.

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[1,415 words]

Chapter 340 - Blood Test

The two referees brought the Azure Sea team to an office where the teacher and two representatives from the Holy Blue Academy were already waiting. As they entered, the Holy Blue teacher glared murderously at Han Wu. Meanwhile, the chief referee and the two referees sat in their chairs, closely observing Han Wu.

Not even waiting for the other team to get comfortable, the Holy Blue teacher stood up and furiously pointed a finger at them.

“Referees, I wish to file a complaint that the Azure Sea Academy’s students used illegal drugs to enhance their performance!” he snarled. “They not only killed a student with great potential from our academy but have also tarnished the sanctity of this entire competition!”

Bai also rose from his seat in anger. “What on earth are you talking about?” he demanded. “You are accusing us of using drugs simply because we won? What nonsense is this? Either show us some proof or stop accusing us of cheating.”

“Enough! Quiet, both of you!” snapped one of the referees, swiftly putting an end to the argument.

The chief referee cleared his throat and set an official-looking sheet on the table. “Azure Sea Academy, after reviewing your submitted information, we have confirmed that your students indeed displayed Skills not mentioned in the report. What is the reason behind this?”

Even though Bai himself was unsure why his students had such powerful, new Skills, as they had hidden them very well, he was determined to defend them, certain they had not cheated. “The report was submitted a month ago,” he argued. “It’s natural there would be some inconsistencies.”

The Holy Blue teacher noticed a slight quiver in Bai’s voice and took it as a sign of hesitation.

“Inconsistencies? You call those inconsistencies?” the teacher hissed. “That level of strength can’t be explained by just inconsistent information! You are clearly covering for your Azure Sea Academy!”

“In fact, I recently heard about a new drug on the black market that drastically improves the strength of the user’s Skills but tires them out and reduces their potential after each use. Given that you sent a different student to each match, I have reason to believe your students were using the drug one by one for their matches!”

By this point, Bai’s face had turned red with anger. “Bullshit! You are defaming my students! Chief referee, you can see they’re trying to tarnish my students’ reputation and drag my academy’s name through the mud!”

“Are you trying to conceal your guilt with anger? Don’t think for a second that you can hide the fact that you’ve used drugs,” snarled the Holy Blue teacher as he began to list his demands. “I request that the chief referee cancel their qualifications for future matches as well as all their previous victories, and make them compensate us for the death of our student. I want my student’s killer to be put on trial!”

Bai tried to argue back, but Han Wu hastily stopped him. “Teacher, since they are so insistent on investigating us, let them. We haven’t done anything wrong, so we have nothing to worry about.”

Meng Qi and Leng Ning both nodded. “That’s right, Teacher! We won with our own strength. We have nothing to hide and are not afraid of any investigation!”

Bai looked at his students, and he was touched by their calm understanding. At the same time, he was not going to let them be accused without fighting back.

“*Hmph!* I won’t stand for my students to be accused for no reason. We’ll cooperate, but if the investigation proves our innocence, then the Holy Blue Academy must compensate us and publicly apologize!”

The Holy Blue teacher ignored him completely. Instead, the referee who had yelled at them in public sneered, “Who do you think you are? Actually, do you think your Azure Sea Academy is important enough for my academy to have to apologize to you?”

The teacher nodded in agreement, with arrogance and disdain plain on his face. “Our academy is among the top five strongest in the country and has nurtured countless talented individuals. One of the referees here is even an alumnus. Azure Sea is nothing but a bottom feeder; you have no right to talk about conditions with us!”

Bai was about to go crazy with anger. *This is simply too humiliating! Not only are we being accused, but we aren’t even allowed to voice our grievances! Are these really the rules of this competition?*

“Fine, we’re not staying in this competition! Who cares about it anyway?” Bai was about to lead his students out when the biased referee blocked their path.

“Do you really think you can leave so easily?” he asked. Unleashing his aura as a Superior Master, he instantly pinned them in place. “You’ve already broken the rules, and you want to leave without any repercussions? I will not allow it!”

The Holy Blue teacher released his aura as a Superior Master as well. Against the combined might of the two, Bai, an Inferior Master, was clearly outmatched. His strength was insufficient.

Just as Han Wu was about to secretly summon Erebard to get them out, the chief referee chastised the two. “You two, where do you think you are? Do you really think this is your academy?”

He unleashed the power of an Intermediate Grandmaster, easily overpowering the pressure from the two. Sensing the chief referee’s aura, Han Wu could tell the chief referee was as strong as a High Lord. While someone of that rank was no threat to Han Wu in his divine realm, in a remote place like the Assist Civilization, the chief referee’s strength was definitely considered top tier.

“Chief referee, please calm down,” the Holy Blue teacher said, offering a quick apology before taking his seat. “We were too rash in our actions just now.”

The chief referee had graduated from the Violet Demon Academy, so he held no bias toward the Holy Blue Academy. Likewise, as a referee, he was also impartial to Han Wu. He was determined to be just, no matter what.

“Since you have accused them of using drugs, I will have to ask for the Azure Sea Academy’s cooperation,” he said. “We need the students to undergo a blood test, as it is the fastest and most accurate way to determine if they have indeed used any illegal drugs.”

Someone soon brought a blood test kit into the office. Bai looked at Han Wu and the other two with nervousness. The trio’s performance had been so overwhelming that Bai was no longer sure if they hadn’t used illegal drugs, and this worried him.

However, before they began the blood test, Han Wu spoke. “We can do the test, but I’d like you to listen to our Teacher’s condition first,” he said. “If our blood test comes back negative, the Holy Blue Academy must compensate us and publicly apologize to us.”

“Don’t get cocky, murderous brat!” the Holy Blue teacher snarled, trying to use his strength to intimidate Han Wu. However, the chief referee easily dismissed the pressure and ordered the teacher to sit still.

“Young man,” the chief referee said, “it seems you are very confident. In that case, I will use my powers as a referee to uphold justice and fairness. If your test is negative, the Holy Blue Academy must compensate you. For now, the compensation will be one Assist Crystal with at least 100,000 Assist Points for each of you, and I will also arrange for them to issue a public apology to the Azure Sea Academy.

“However, if the test comes back positive, your previous records will be forfeited, your academy will be banned from all future competitions, and the three of you will be punished as well.”

Han Wu smiled, satisfied with the chief referee's decision. Turning to Meng Qi and Leng Ning, he said, "Since the chief referee has agreed to hold them accountable, let's cooperate and take the test."

Han Wu pricked his finger and let a drop of blood fall into the test kit. However, everyone noticed something unusual—his blood was not purely red, but shone with a silver light. Seeing this, the Holy Blue teacher let out a scornful and contemptuous laugh.

"Hahaha! Your blood isn't even red, and you still have the audacity to claim you never consumed any drugs? Your academy is now forever doomed, all because of you three arrogant brats!"

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,352 words]

Chapter 341 - Truth

Han Wu gave the Holy Blue teacher a silent glance. Leng Ning and Meng Qi followed his example, dropping their blood onto the test kit. Their blood had a faint silver color, though not as pronounced as the silver light in Han Wu's.

The teacher from the Holy Blue Academy, with a smug look, began his accusations once again. "This is irreparable proof that these kids cheated!" he declared. Then, turning to the trio, he asked, "Well? What more do you have to say for yourselves?"

The referee who had antagonized them chimed in. *"Hmph,* I knew it! A useless academy like yours can only produce students of poor quality. I'm not surprised at all."

Mr. Bai felt his world crumbling. He stared at the three of them, a mix of confusion and betrayal on his face. "The academy never forced you to get excellent results from this competition. Why would you destroy our reputation like this?"

With a calm voice, Leng Ning replied, "Please be patient, Teacher. The test results aren't out yet."

Noticing how calm the trio seemed to be, the referees curiously watched the reagent in the blood test kit. The reagent was supposed to change color to show the presence of drugs. Unexpectedly, even after a full minute, the reagent didn't darken; on the contrary, it became even clearer. It was definitive evidence that the Azure Sea Academy team had not used any illegal drugs.

The Holy Blue teacher couldn't believe his eyes. "W-what? How is this possible?"

Still in denial, he rose from his seat and, pointing at Han Wu, began a new accusation. "Wait! The new drug must be able to avoid the blood test kit's detection. Yes, that must be it! That's why they were so willing to do the test! It has to be!"

However, none of the other referees could agree with the new accusation. The chief referee cleared his throat and said, "We already included a reagent that would react with the active ingredients of the new drug. As such, there's no reason to doubt the validity of the blood test kit."

"How then do you explain the abnormal color of their blood?" the teacher demanded, yelling at the chief referee with a furious expression.

With a sigh of exasperation, the chief referee turned to face the three. "Now, I suppose you have some explaining to do about the unusual color of your blood."

Leng Ning and Meng Qi looked at Han Wu with questioning expressions, waiting for him to decide what to do. After a moment of thought, Han Wu decided to explain.

"Normally, no one would have the right to pry into our personal matters, but since certain... shameless people are determined to frame us...", Han Wu paused, staring pointedly at the arrogant referee-teacher pair.

He continued, "And we *did* promise to cooperate with this investigation, we have no choice but to reveal our secrets. Our blood is a different color because of a lucky encounter[1]we had. As our academy's representatives, we three went to Dragon Seal to train, and that was where we encountered something extraordinary—"

"Ridiculous!" the Holy Blue teacher interrupted. "So many people go to the Dragon Seal every year to train, and I've never heard of anyone's blood changing color—"

He stopped suddenly, sensing the chief referee glaring at him, and wisely shut up.

"That's why I called it a fortuitous encounter," Han Wu retorted, rolling his eyes. "You *do* know what that means, don't you?"

The chief referee's interest was piqued, and he ignored the Holy Blue teacher, whose face was reddening in fury. "So, what happened in the Dragon Seal?"

"Well, we found evidence of Great Dragons; a massive dragon bone, to be exact."

The office immediately went completely silent at his words, but soon, some of the referees started laughing.

“He’s an amusing one. He could’ve just said he wasn’t going to tell us why his blood was silver. Great Dragons? Everyone knows they’re just a legend!”

“*Haha!* I have to admit, he has a good imagination, bringing out Great Dragons!”

Han Wu wasn’t offended. He understood why the natives of the Assist Civilization didn’t know about Great Dragons. Their civilization was a lower-ranking one, far beneath the Divine Civilization, so it made perfect sense that they wouldn’t know.

Seeing the serious expressions on the trio’s faces, the chief referee remained hesitant. “Young man, could you tell me more about this evidence?”

To avoid any future trouble for his team, Han Wu decided to end the issue once and for all. “Our Skills mutated after absorbing energy from the dragon bone. If you don’t believe me, we can show them to you.”

Meng Qi showed off all three of his Skills. The referees surrounded him, meticulously analyzing his abilities. A few even struck his body to test the mutated Skills, and they all ultimately confirmed that Meng Qi’s Skills had indeed been mutated.

Leng Ning went next. Being a damage dealer, most of her Skills were offensive, and she demonstrated all of them: Frost Dragon Fang, Frost Dragon Blizzard, Frost Dragon Eye, Frost Dragon Breath, and Frost Dragon Possession.

The referees were completely enthralled by her Skills. They could clearly see that her abilities had been affected by the energy from the dragon bone to a greater extent than Meng Qi’s, causing them to mutate even further.

The referees were especially shocked by her Frost Dragon Possession. In that form, all her damage was amplified, and even Inferior Masters would not be able to survive being frozen by that attack.

With the proof now provided, Leng Ning swiftly deactivated her Skills. Still not satisfied, the referees turned to look at Han Wu expectantly. They had more or less ascertained that he was the leader of the group, based on Meng Qi and Leng Ning’s attitude.

Han Wu inwardly rolled his eyes, then showed them his Skills. *That compensation had better be good after all the time we’ve wasted here.*

The Dragon Fireball was a powerful attack that covered a wide area, and its Black Flames and Blood Fuel effects could burn any living object. The Dragon Shield was thick and powerful, with the ability to return projectiles.

Han Wu also demonstrated Silver Strength, a powerful buff capable of empowering even Inferior masters. He then explained his newest Skill, Dragonfall, which he had

never used before and wasn't certain of its power. Finally, he showed his last Skill, Summon Erebard.

The referees were shocked at the sight of the one-meter-long Erebard. Though small, his dragon aura and affinity for all four attributes were unmistakable. All the referees assumed that the silver dragon Erebard would eventually become as strong as a Grandmaster once it matured.

If Han Wu had known their thoughts, he would have laughed at their ignorance. A Grandmaster would be powerless in front of a fully grown Erebard. A mature Great Dragon had strength on par with a Sage life form, which was why they were able to invade other civilizations so easily.

After the trio demonstrated their Skills, the Holy Blue Academy's complaints and accusations were dismissed. The chief referee announced his decision: the Holy Blue Academy had to compensate the three for defamation damages and issue a public apology to the Azure Sea Academy in addition. Should they refuse, they would be banned from the competition forever.

The Holy Blue teacher slumped to the ground after hearing the decision. He had not only lost face for himself, but for his entire academy as well.

The antagonistic referee tried to sneak away, but Mr. Bai would not allow it, not after the humiliation the man had caused. He quickly filed a complaint with the chief referee, who, in a rage, fired the referee and banned him from ever being employed by the competition committee again. Han Wu was satisfied by the outcome.

With the compensation received and the public apology heard, the trio took a much-needed rest to ensure they would be at their best for the remaining matches.

1. I finally got to use this term lmao 🤔

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[1,036 words]

Chapter 342 - Semifinals

The matches among the top thirty-two academies carried immense danger, yet for Han Wu they posed little difficulty. Word of his team confronting the Holy Blue Academy's accusations directly and the subsequent public apology had already spread throughout the arena, lending his team an air of authority.

Even the Holy Blue Academy, last year's fourth-place finisher, had fallen in defeat. It only seemed natural, then, that other academies would lose to Han Wu's team as well. Match after match, day after day, they advanced without faltering. Each win granted them a flood of Assists, and their strength grew at a rapid pace.

Meng Qi advanced twice, reaching the rank of Intermediate Elite, and gained two new Skills—Bronze Skin and Iron Bones. While neither rivaled the might of Dragon Armor, together they fortified both his defense and offense, sharpening his role on the battlefield.

Leng Ning's brilliance outshone even Meng Qi's. She amassed more Assists, which elevated her to Superior Elite, and unlocked a rare domain-type Skill: Eight Path Frost Domain. It covered an area of 100 square meters and released a ceaseless wave of frigid air. Any foe who lingered within its reach for too long would inevitably be frozen solid.

Her new Skill sent her combat prowess soaring. The Eight Path Frost Domain was especially devastating in the confined arena. Her opponents had no choice but to defeat her team quickly or risk being frozen solid, yet none had managed to withstand her icy domain since she obtained it.

As for Han Wu, he hadn't advanced even once. His Skills demanded an enormous number of Assist Points, a cost that reflected their overwhelming strength. Even so, he remained the unquestioned powerhouse of the trio.

After numerous matches, the competition had finally reached its climax. The semifinals were about to begin. Of the four academies that remained, only Holy Blue was relatively unknown. The other three were legendary institutions with long histories and great reputations: Violet Demon, the reigning champion from the last tournament; Golden Lightning, the previous runner-up; and Aquamarine Wave, which had claimed third place.

The semifinal pairings would be determined by drawing lots. As the contestants gathered, the representatives of the three great academies fixed their eyes on Han Wu's team. They had already gathered intel on their Skills and had prepared meticulous countermeasures. Each was confident of victory the moment they faced them.

For Golden Lightning and Aquamarine Wave, defeating Azure Sea and claiming at least second place was an irresistible prospect. Even Violet Demon welcomed the chance to face Han Wu's team, seeing it as an opportunity for an effortless win while conserving their trump cards and energy for the next round.

Still, the lots would decide everything. Four lots lay in the box. Any teams that drew the same number would face each other, with the winners advancing to the finals. The losing sides would then fight again to determine third and fourth place.

When the moment came, Han Wu sent Meng Qi to draw for their team. He reached in carelessly, pulled out a lot, and his expression immediately sank. Their opponent would be Violet Demon.

The Violet Demon representatives burst into applause, grinning as though victory was already in hand.

Meng Qi let out a heavy sigh. “Sorry, this is on me. My luck’s the worst. Now we’re stuck against the strongest academy.”

Leng Ning gave him a rare word of comfort. “It doesn’t matter. No matter who we drew, we’d still have to face someone stronger sooner or later.”

Han Wu nodded in agreement. “We’d have to fight them eventually.”

Meng Qi felt a wave of relief.

Their match was about to start—they were scheduled for the first bout. Bai warned them to stay sharp, and the three made their way to the arena.

At the same time, the Violet Demon representatives entered. Their team also consisted of one girl and two boys, mirroring Han Wu’s lineup. Once they were in position, they introduced themselves.

“Hello,” said the girl, her voice confident and measured. “I am Su Mei, leader of the Violet Demon Academy’s team. These are my teammates, Ding Shanhai and Xue Qian.”

Su Mei was striking, with curves in all the right places. Her looks and strength made her the undisputed diva of her academy. Ding Shanhai was massive and muscular, either a barbarian who dealt devastating damage or a tank capable of withstanding heavy attacks. Xue Qian was short and petite, yet radiated a dangerous aura and seemed attuned to darkness. He was likely their assassin.

“I am Han Wu,” he said, gesturing to his teammates. “This is Meng Qi, and she is Leng Ning.”

Meng Qi’s eyes widened as he looked at Su Mei. He came from a wealthy family, but he had never seen a girl like her before. His heart skipped a beat at the sight. “About that... I’m single too, and looking for a girlfriend.”

Han Wu stared at him in disbelief. *Really? We’re in an arena. This isn’t the time to flirt. You can try after you win. Are you trying to provoke them even more?*

As expected, Ding Shanhai and Xue Qian’s glares sharpened instantly.

Meanwhile, Su Mei chuckled. “I am single as well. We can talk more when we have free time.”

“Really? My room number is 1308—” Meng Qi barely got the words out before Leng Ning, clearly irritated, punched him squarely in the face.

“What are you doing?” he grumbled, blood streaming from his nose. Bronze Skin, Iron Bones, and the Imperial Yellow Jacket could boost his defenses, but he hadn’t had time to activate them.

Leng Ning huffed. “Keep spouting nonsense, and I’ll strip you naked and freeze you so everyone can stare at you forever.”

Meng Qi went silent. He knew his childhood friend too well to doubt her seriousness.

Han Wu exhaled and shook his head. “Stop wasting time. Let’s start the match. The audience is already waiting.”

He cast a wary glance at Meng Qi, secretly hoping he wouldn’t get beaten up further.

The announcer confirmed they were ready and signaled the start of the match. Instantly, all six competitors sprang into motion, and the arena crackled with tension.

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- Chapter 343 - Intense Battle

[1,292 words]

Chapter 343 - Intense Battle

Just as Han Wu had anticipated, Xue Qian was an assassin. The moment the match started, Xue Qian activated Infiltration and vanished from sight. Ding Shanhai raised a round shield and became an immovable fortress to protect Su Mei.

Confident in Ding Shanhai’s defense, Su Mei unleashed Succubus Descend. Her already stunning figure became even more mesmerizing under the transformation.

Han Wu heard the male spectators gasp audibly at the sight.

“Submit.” Her voice dripped with sultriness and ensnared the hearts of every man in the arena. It was as if her words caressed their ears, leaving almost no one able to resist.

Han Wu relied on his exceptional mental strength and spiritual resilience to shake off the effect in an instant and simultaneously activated Dragon Shield.

At that moment, Xue Qian struck. He had aimed to eliminate Han Wu with a single blow, but when his attack collided with the Dragon Shield, it only caused a faint ripple across its surface.

Han Wu's eyes widened. He knew the Dragon Shield's toughness. If Xue Qian could disturb it, his power was undeniable.

Failing to finish Han Wu outright, Xue Qian vanished once more and bided his time for another opportunity.

Leng Ning shook off the lingering effects and unleashed her ultimate Skill, Frost Dragon Possession. The buff enhanced her strength, perception, and mastery of ice-type Skills. With it, she simultaneously activated the Eight Path Frost Domain and Frost Dragon Eyes.

The Eight Path Frost Domain spread across the entire arena, releasing icy air that started to freeze her opponents in place. Frost Dragon Eyes let her track her enemies through their heat signatures. She immediately spotted Xue Qian attempting to sneak behind her for a surprise attack. Calmly, she waited until he was right beside her, then struck with Frost Dragon Blizzard, catching him off guard and freezing him solid.

Seeing their teammate incapacitated, Ding Shanhai and Su Mei intensified their assault. Su Mei summoned swarms of imps to harass Leng Ning, while Ding Shanhai activated a powerful Skill that painted blood-red runes across his body. Meanwhile, his round shield morphed into a blood-red blade.

Han Wu had never seen a fighting style that transformed a shield into a blade. He quickly realized Ding Shanhai was neither a tank nor a barbarian. He was a bruiser, blending both forms with formidable defense and offense. His sole weakness lay in his speed.

Han Wu was a versatile fighter and raised his Dragon Shield to meet Ding Shanhai's strike. Despite the two-rank difference, he handled the attack with ease.

On her end, Leng Ning used Frost Dragon Fang to fend off the attacking imps. At that moment, Meng Qi moved toward her. She kept her guard down, trusting her teammate, and called out, "Go help Han Wu handle Ding Shanhai. We can deal with Su Mei once he's down."

Meng Qi didn't respond. Instead, he punched her in the face. Bronze Skin, Iron Bones, and the Yellow Imperial Jacket made him stronger than most, while Leng Ning's ice magic left her physically weak. The blow overwhelmed her, disrupting her Eight Path Frost Domain completely and leaving her defenseless.

“What are you doing, Meng Qi?!” Bai bellowed from below the arena. He wanted to whack Meng Qi senseless!

Leng Ning took a sharp breath and looked at him in shock. Only then did she notice Meng Qi’s vacant gaze, as if his soul was gone.

Without the Eight Path Frost Domain, the frozen Xue Qian shattered the ice in anger and unleashed his strongest Skill, Shadow Demon Descent. Darkness enveloped his body, and even Leng Ning’s Frost Dragon Eyes could not detect his heat signature.

Xue Qian and Meng Qi struck from opposite sides. Leng Ning tried to evade, but it was too late. She faced either severe injury or death as Xue Qian’s black dagger was going to pierce her body.

Suddenly, a torrent of Dragon Fireballs rained down, striking both attackers.

Xue Qian had studied Han Wu’s Dragon Fireball in advance. The combination of Black Flames and Blood Fuel was devastating, but as long as he could isolate the flames from his body, he would be unharmed. He used the dark energy enveloping him to effortlessly repel the fire.

Meng Qi was in a different situation. He was under external control and hadn’t activated his Golden Bell. The black flames engulfed him, searing his body and snapping him out of his stupor.

“*Ouch!* Han Wu, why did you burn me?” Meng Qi shouted and frantically tried to extinguish the flames.

Now that Meng Qi had regained his senses, Han Wu extinguished the fire and ordered, “Take Leng Ning and get out of the arena.”

Meng Qi noticed that Leng Ning was severely injured and shouted in fury, “Who did this to you? I’m going to make them pay!”

Leng Ning grumbled, “Stop wasting time. Listen to Han Wu. Get me out of the arena and stop causing trouble for him.”

Meng Qi nodded, carefully lifted her, and headed toward the exit. Just as he stepped down, Bai slapped him. “Are you stupid? Why did you attack her?”

Meng Qi was stunned, unable to understand why he had been slapped. How could Leng Ning’s injury have anything to do with him? Memories flooded back, and he finally understood—Su Mei had controlled his mind. He had been the one to hurt Leng Ning.

“I... I’m so stupid! I don’t deserve to live. I actually hurt you...” He gently set her down and struck himself in frustration.

Leng Ning gritted her teeth against the pain and muttered, "You'll pay for what happened today. For now, let's focus on Han Wu. The match isn't over."

In the arena, Han Wu now stood alone, representing Azure Sea. He faced the powered-up trio of Su Mei, Xue Qian, and Ding Shanhai by himself.

Su Mei giggled. "Han Wu, your companions are out of the arena. Stop wasting time fighting us alone."

She had assumed that the match was over. There was no way Violet Demon could lose in a three-against-one scenario.

Han Wu chuckled. "They left the arena on my orders. I have one last trump card."

"Trump card? Is it the hatchling or the buff?" she asked.

They had studied Han Wu's Skills and planned accordingly. Three against one was their perfect setup.

"It seems that you've done your homework. Then you should know I have one last Skill called Dragonfall."

Su Mei sneered. "It's just a new Skill. I doubt you have the resources to upgrade it yet."

Han Wu shook a finger. "A generous benefactor gave me a crystal containing 100,000 Assist Points. I used every one on Dragonfall. I've never unleashed it after upgrading because it's too dangerous."

"You think we would fall for your lies? Just die quietly." Xue Qian lunged at him. His strikes were heavier this time, leaving scratches on the Dragon Shield. Still, they weren't enough to break it.

Han Wu seized the moment. Activating Silver Strength, he boosted all his baseline potential and unleashed his Level 36 Dragonfall.

In that instant, a massive array formed 100 meters above the arena. Four meteors shot down, each taking the shape of a dragon and containing the pure energy of wind, water, fire, or earth. Han Wu guided the wind meteor at Xue Qian, the water meteor at Su Mei, and the remaining two at Ding Shanhai.

Four colossal explosions shook the arena and reverberated through the stadium. Fortunately, the chief referee had anticipated this and erected a triple-layered barrier of extreme durability. Without it, the audience would have been gravely injured.

When the smoke cleared, Han Wu stood alone amidst the decimated arena. No one else was left.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,266 words]

Chapter 344 - I Represent Myself

The crowd reeled in shock, murmuring in the aftermath.

“Where are the Violet Demon representatives? Did the explosion wipe them all out?”

“Han Wu is terrifyingly strong! He defeated all three on his own. What incredible talent.”

“Such a shame about Su Mei... we’ll never see her beauty again.”

Han Wu stood amid the ruins of the arena and turned his head. His gaze fell on the spot where Su Mei, Ding Shanhai, and Xue Qian had stood. To his surprise, the three were staring back at him with stunned expressions.

They had survived. Just as the meteors had been about to strike, the chief referee had intervened and pulled the three from the arena, sparing the Violet Demon Academy from losing its most promising students. Yet their removal confirmed the academy’s defeat.

Han Wu remained the only fighter left standing and was declared the victor. The announcer’s proclamation triggered a storm of rewards. Hundreds of thousands of Assists rained down on him, gifts from the audience that both honored his triumph and symbolized their respect.

The flood of Assist Points surged into his Skills and pushed them to new heights. One after another, they rose in level until they reached Level 50 and unlocked a sixth Skill.

It was a domain-type Skill known as Life Dragon Domain. Within its range, his allies would gain heightened potential, vitality, and endurance, while his enemies would have to endure the oppressive aura of a dragon. The domain also amplified the strength of Han Wu’s existing Skills. It was a formidable addition to his arsenal.

When the match between Azure Sea and Violet Demon concluded, the next round began. Aquamarine Wave and Golden Lightning clashed in a contest of near-equal strength. After a brutal struggle, Golden Lightning emerged victorious and secured its place in the finals.

Even so, the Golden Lightning representatives lacked confidence. After their match, their teacher gathered them in a room to discuss the upcoming final.

Meanwhile, Violet Demon and Aquamarine Wave faced each other to determine third and fourth place. Violet Demon won with ease and claimed third, leaving Aquamarine Wave in fourth. They felt disappointed but not devastated, since no one had expected Azure Sea to produce a dark horse like Han Wu this year.

The following day, the long-awaited finals commenced. Azure Sea and Golden Lightning were set to face off in the newly repaired arena.

The crowd buzzed with anticipation, eager for a dazzling battle. Many hoped this match would surpass even the last one. Yet to everyone's shock, the Golden Lightning representative surrendered before the referee could signal the start.

The decision had been made the night before. After reviewing the recording of Azure Sea's battle with Violet Demon, their teacher and superiors concluded that Han Wu's overwhelming strength left their team with no chance of victory.

A single Skill of his had leveled the entire arena, forcing the chief referee to intervene and rescue the three Violet Demon representatives. Such a feat was unheard of. Golden Lightning was weaker than Violet Demon, and their own alumnus on the referee panel was only an Inferior Grandmaster. He would never be able to save their students in time. Faced with that reality, Golden Lightning decided that surrender was their best option. Finishing second carried no penalty, and it matched last year's result.

However, Han Wu and his team stood to lose at least 100,000 Assist Points from the crowd. Without a match or a decisive result, no one would spend their Assists on them without cause.

It was a sound strategy: if one could not increase their own harvest, then the next best option would be to cut into the enemy's. Golden Lightning also cared little about Azure Sea's reaction. Their dissatisfaction or complaints carried no weight. To Golden Lightning, Azure Sea was just a lower-ranked academy unworthy of respect.

The crowd erupted when the surrender was announced. They had paid heavily for tickets to see a thrilling final, only for Golden Lightning to bow out. The audience didn't care who won or lost; all they wanted was a match worth watching.

"You bastards! Are you cowards?"

"Expel the Golden Lightning Academy from the board and ban them for life!"

"Golden Lightning Academy, refund my ticket! It cost me 3,000 credits!"

"You three are cowards! You bully the weak but bow before the strong. You're unworthy to be students!"

The three representatives clenched their fists as the crowd booed and hissed. They had expected scolding once their teacher revealed the decision, but they had never imagined the fury of this backlash.

Only now, under the crushing weight of public contempt, did they realize the truth: they had been used by their own academy. Their academy had sacrificed their reputations just to spite Azure Sea.

Yet, they had never questioned the order and had followed it with loyalty, treating their academy with respect, only to be treated like fools in return. Surrendering without a fight in such a crucial competition would leave a permanent stain on their records. No matter how talented they were, their chances with the top-ranking colleges could now be jeopardized.

Their anger boiled over until the Golden Lightning leader ripped off his shirt and roared, "Azure Sea Academy! I surrendered under my academy's orders, but now I stand on my own. I challenge the three of you!"

His two teammates followed suit, ripping their shirts and shouting toward Han Wu, "We represent ourselves and challenge you three!"

The referee raised an eyebrow while the chief referee chuckled, impressed by the students' quick thinking. Realizing their own academy had used them, the three declared independence by casting off their uniforms. Their defiance turned a forced surrender into a show of ferocity and redirected the shame from themselves to the Golden Lightning Academy.

By severing ties, they ensured that the stigma of cowardice would stain the academy, not their individual names. Though they risked offending their academy, they secured their own futures. To them, that was far better than being discarded after their reputations were ruined.

Han Wu had felt disappointed when he thought he would miss another round of Assists, yet now a new opportunity had unexpectedly arisen. The crowd paid no attention to politics and cared only about how intense the match would become.

Han Wu nodded. "We accept your challenge."

Leng Ning and Meng Qi stretched and warmed up. Neither had shown their true strength in the fight against Violet Demon, especially Meng Qi, who had been forced by Su Mei's control to attack his ally. Now he burned with determination to reclaim his honor.

The two teams prepared, and the arena roared at their boldness.

“Hell yeah! The Golden Lightning Academy is so stupid they almost crushed their own hot-blooded students!”

“Only idiots go to the Golden Lightning Academy!”

“Good luck! We’re rooting for you!”

Others threw their support behind Han Wu’s team.

“Han Wu, good luck! Show us Dragonfall again!”

“Leng Ning, you’re so pretty! I want to have a baby with you!”

“Meng Qi, jump off the stage and stop holding the other two back!”

Meng Qi nearly cried at the mockery. Clearly, he was not held in the same esteem as his teammates. He clenched his fists. “Han Wu, Leng Ning, let me go first. I need to win back my honor.”

Han Wu chuckled. “Go ahead. Lead the charge.”

Han Wu then used Silver Strength on Meng Qi to buff him. Brimming with energy, Meng Qi unleashed every Skill he had before charging at the Golden Lightning representatives.

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Chapter 345 - Choosing a Skill Inducement

[1,268 words]

Chapter 345 - Choosing a Skill Inducement

Half a minute later, Meng Qi was hurled backward by their Skills and tumbled toward Han Wu. His body was scorched black, and faint wisps of smoke drifted from his mouth. Thankfully, he had activated all five Skills simultaneously, so his injuries remained superficial, and he could still fight.

He tearfully looked at Han Wu. “Why didn’t you come when I was getting beaten black and blue?”

Han Wu arched his brows. "Didn't you say you were going to take them on?"

"I regret my decision," Meng Qi admitted, almost wanting to slap himself for his foolishness. He looked even more disheveled now.

Han Wu chuckled. "Sure."

The three Golden Lightning representatives grew serious. They had seen the video and understood Han Wu's strength. Leng Ning had also been observing, preparing herself for the battle to come.

The Golden Lightning Academy specialized in training students with an affinity for lightning, which explained why the three opponents wielded lightning-based Skills. Though powerful and fast, lightning-based Skills were vulnerable to ice-based attacks.

Leng Ning cautiously unleashed a barrage of Frost Dragon Fangs to gauge her opponents' strength. The three kept their focus on Han Wu and deliberately avoided retaliating toward Leng Ning. They dodged or shattered the icicles without faltering.

Quickly, Leng Ning assessed their fighting roles. One was a mage, while the other two excelled at close-range combat. Their strength was undeniable; Meng Qi's defeat had not been a fluke.

"Han Wu, assist me," she requested.

Han Wu nodded and released the Life Dragon Domain, which encompassed the entire arena. Leng Ning and Meng Qi felt a surge of energy swell within them. Meng Qi's wounds began to heal as the domain's life force coursed through him.

Meanwhile, their opponents struggled under the domain's oppressive influence. Within its bounds, an invincible pressure weighed on them, slowing their movements. Their Skills faltered, their senses dulled, and a creeping paralysis gripped their bodies. Their strength was effectively capped at 30%.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the end of their plight. Leng Ning activated her Eight Path Frost Domain, and icy currents seeped into the three opponents' bodies, threatening to encase them in solid ice.

"Take down the ice mage, now!" their leader barked.

The lightning mage summoned bolts from the empty air and aimed to strike Leng Ning. Meng Qi, fully recovered, positioned himself as a shield, absorbing the lightning and protecting her.

None of their attacks could pierce her defenses, while the cold relentlessly froze them. One by one, they succumbed to the ice, and the match ended decisively.

The crowd felt a twinge of disappointment; the fight lacked the spectacle of the previous match, where Han Wu had single-handedly annihilated the Violet Demon representatives. Yet it remained a solid, impressive display.

When the results were announced, Azure Sea claimed first place. As victors, Han Wu, Leng Ning, and Meng Qi earned the right to select any single Skill from the vault maintained by the Association of Academies. Each also received a crystal containing one million Assist Points.

Additionally, their academy would receive priority in resource allocation for the coming year. It would also gain various intangible benefits, though Han Wu could not measure them, as they depended on reputation and honor.

Golden Lightning secured second place, but the crowd was far from satisfied. Some called for their disqualification due to their cowardice. In the end, nothing happened; Golden Lightning's long-standing reputation ensured their second-place claim remained valid. Violet Demon took third place. Though they were the strongest, they had the misfortune of facing Han Wu. Naturally, fourth place went to Aquamarine Wave.

After confirming their rankings, the representatives from the top four academies would have the chance to acquire the method to induce a single powerful Skill from the vault. Only Han Wu and his two companions would receive the additional reward of crystals containing Assist Points. Still, the true goal for all was the chance to select a Skill inducement.

Han Wu had learned during his fight against the Violet Demon representatives just how crucial a powerful Skill could be for survival. One could eliminate their enemies instantly.

The chief referee announced the rules. "You must rely on your own senses to identify the type of Skill and the content of each entry. You have half an hour to make your choice, and you may select only one. If you fail to choose within that time, you forfeit your chance. Understand that no one may take more than one inducement method."

A chill ran down the spines of everyone except Han Wu. They felt as if invisible eyes were watching their every move. Only Han Wu knew this was not their imagination—the chief referee had used a Skill to monitor them continuously and to ensure no one acted suspiciously during the selection process.

"Alright, time starts now. Go choose a Skill that suits you."

The twelve representatives ran into the vault like beasts released into the wild, racing toward the sections holding the most powerful Skills.

While everyone else scrambled to claim a Skill that suited them, Han Wu focused on the types of Skills and their organization. The Skills were arranged according to their compatibility with the seven potentials: Power, Agility, Defense, Water, Fire, Earth, and

Wind. Some rare exceptions existed as well, including ice, lightning, light, darkness, demon, holy, and space.

Han Wu scanned the Skills but found nothing related to dragons or life, so he was slightly disappointed. He considered what else would suit him. His other Skills were already powerful and compatible with most of his potentials, so he primarily needed to focus on leveling them up.

As he continued browsing, Meng Qi called out, "Han Wu, can you help me?"

Han Wu frowned and approached Meng Qi, who was holding two powerful Skill inducement methods.

The first, Earth Protection, focused on Earth and Defense potential. Once mastered, it allowed the user to absorb energy from the ground beneath them to heal wounds. The user could also form a dense crust of earth and stone to shield themselves from attacks.

The second, Indomitable Vajra, transformed the user's muscles into a mineral resembling adamantium and enhanced both defense and physical attack. This Skill leaned toward the Power and Defense potential.

"Han Wu, which one should I choose?" Meng Qi asked, torn between the two.

Han Wu examined them with his senses and advised, "Go with the latter."

Meng Qi hesitated. He didn't want to let go of Earth Protection. "But isn't the first one better? It can heal me and let me fight longer."

Han Wu shook his head. "You have plenty of defensive Skills. You need to improve your offense, or the gap between you and Leng Ning will widen again."

Meng Qi nodded and set Earth Protection aside, glancing at it with longing. "What about the gap between me and you?"

"What gap? It's a bloody canyon," Han Wu said bluntly.

Meng Qi wanted to argue but realized Han Wu spoke the truth. He hated admitting it, but Han Wu was right.

Their conversation was cut short by Leng Ning's shout from a nearby aisle. "I found this Skill first! Don't try to take it from me!"

"You think it's yours just because you found it first? I want it too!" Another girl called back. She wasn't Su Mei, and the Golden Lightning representatives were all boys. She must be from Aquamarine Wave Academy.

“Let’s see what’s happening,” Han Wu said and sprinted toward Leng Ning.

Meng Qi shook off his melancholy and chased after him. “Wait for me!”

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Chapter 346 - Simps and Pick-Me Girl

[1,168 words]

Chapter 346 - Simps and Pick-Me Girl

Han Wu and Meng Qi arrived in haste and found the three Aquamarine Wave representatives surrounding Leng Ning. Their intent was clear: they meant to seize the Skill Leng Ning had already claimed for herself.

Han Wu’s sudden appearance made them tense. They had seen his matches and knew he was strong enough to defeat the three Violet Demon representatives. None of them wanted to test him directly. Still, they were inside a vault overseen by the Association of Academies, where Skills with destructive power above a certain limit were prohibited. That restriction gave them a sliver of hope.

The female Aquamarine Wave representative spoke in a deliberately affectionate tone. “Brother Han, this is between me and her. You don’t need to interfere. Please, leave us be.”

Han Wu rolled his eyes. “You three are ganging up on my companion, yet I’m not allowed to interfere? What kind of logic is that? I’ll give you a chance to walk away, or I’ll fight.”

The Aquamarine Wave representatives were taken aback. Han Wu left no room for negotiation.

“We are the Aquamarine Wave Academy’s representatives. Even if your academy got lucky and took first place, don’t think you can bully us.” The leader spoke with the arrogance typical of a student from a long-established, prestigious academy.

“And what if I do? What will you do about it?”

Anger flashed across the three faces. Since threats failed to sway him, they decided to change tactics.

The girl raised her voice into a falsely sweet, high-pitched lilt. “Han Wu, you misunderstand. I sensed that Skill first, but she grabbed it before I could. I trust that you’re fair-minded and know what to do now.”

Leng Ning froze, her expression twisting with disgust. She had been the one who first sensed the Skill and secured it. Yet this girl was twisting the truth, trying to frame her in order to steal it.

Han Wu let out a low chuckle. “If she took it first, that means she sensed it first. The Skill belongs to her, not you. Don’t tell me you can’t grasp a simple logic like that.”

The female Aquamarine Wave representative cursed him inwardly but forced a sweet tone. “But I rweally[1] want it... Brother Han, please pity me and persuade her to return the Skill...”

The two male Aquamarine Wave representatives quickly joined in.

“She’s already begging you. Hurry and give her back the Skill.”

“Are you still a man if you let a weak girl beg on your behalf?”

Leng Ning finally saw how well simps and pick-me girls complemented each other. In her mind, the Aquamarine Wave Academy deserved a new name: Simp Academy.

Han Wu laughed at them with open disdain. “Are you idiots? You think I’ll hand over the Skill just because she’s begging? She means nothing to me. I’m here to support Leng Ning, not to stomach your disgusting act. It makes me sick.”

The three Aquamarine Wave representatives frowned. Never before had anyone scolded them so harshly.

Meng Qi chimed in, “If you’re trying to use a honeypot tactic, at least check a mirror first. You’ve got no curves, no chest, no ass—just a glorified stick. Maybe try eating more.”

The female representative nearly collapsed from humiliation. She had always taken pride in her slender figure, yet Meng Qi dismissed her as malnourished. Her two male companions bristled with anger. To them, she was the most perfect woman in the world, and they refused to let the insult pass.

Meng Qi had managed to enrage all three at once, and they attacked without hesitation. “Combined Skill: Tri-Water Prison!”

A sphere of water formed around Han Wu and his companions, sealing them inside.

The leader shouted, “This is a water prison forged from our combined strength. Even Superior Masters cannot escape. You have two choices: surrender the Skill or drown.”

The girl nodded in agreement. “Brother Han, don’t even think about releasing your powerful Skill. This is the vault of the Association of Academies. If you destroy it, even the Azure Sea Academy wouldn’t be able to compensate for them.”

The other representative laughed. “The competition winners mean nothing to us. You should be glad you didn’t face us, or we would’ve taken first place.”

The trio struggled as the water prison tried to force itself into their noses and mouths. The liquid felt alive, relentless in its attempt to suffocate them.

With one hand over his face, Han Wu pressed against the walls and found them pliable. Brute force alone wouldn’t break through. He needed another way.

Meng Qi floated in the water and blinked rapidly at the others, signaling them to act quickly.

Han Wu met Leng Ning’s eyes, and they both nodded. Leng Ning released Frost Dragon Blizzard. A surge of icy air burst from her body, freezing the Tri-Water Prison into a rigid triangular block. Together, they shattered the ice and escaped.

Shards of ice clung to Meng Qi as he staggered forward and coughed up water. “You dare attack us without warning? Don’t blame us for what comes next.”

He then activated every Skill he possessed and charged like an unstoppable juggernaut. Golden Bell, Imperial Yellow Jacket, Dragon Armor, Bronze Skin, and Iron Bones turned him into a fortress of flesh and steel.

The Aquamarine Wave representatives were no pushovers. As students of a prestigious academy, they possessed more Skills beyond the Tri-Water Prison.

Their leader conjured a trident of surging water, the girl formed a gleaming seashell of water, and the other male student snapped a whip shaped from flowing currents. The three prepared to strike, but Han Wu unleashed Life Dragon Domain.

The crushing pressure shattered their focus and dissolved the weapons before they could land a blow. Leng Ning followed with the Eight Path Frost Domain, and the trio’s water and bodies froze in an instant, leaving them trapped as ice sculptures.

At that moment, a sudden round of applause echoed from the shadows.

Han Wu and his companions turned to see Su Mei rounding the corner, accompanied by Ding Shanhai and Xue Qian.

“What an interesting combination,” Su Mei said. “Han Wu, your new Skill is impressive. Leng Ning, your Skill is overwhelmingly powerful, and you timed it perfectly.”

Meng Qi finally laid eyes on Su Mei again and stared at her, dazed. “What about me?”

Though she considered his Skills underwhelming, Su Mei offered a small compliment. “Meng Qi, you’re very tanky.”

Han Wu swore he saw Meng Qi’s pupils form a heart shape as he murmured, “*Hehe...* She praised me for being tanky.”

Han Wu and Leng Ning exchanged exasperated glances at his simplicity.

Han Wu turned back to Su Mei. “What brings you here? Trying to steal our Skills too?”

Leng Ning was already gathering energy for a powerful strike, while Meng Qi remained lost in the thrill of Su Mei’s praise, entirely unprepared.

1. Intentionally left it as a cute way of saying it. 📄

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[1,148 words]

Chapter 347 - Su Mei's Invitation

“Don't get hasty. We aren't here to take your Skills. We already took what we needed.” Su Mei's grin was both devious and alluring. “We're here to invite you on a mission. Complete it, and you'll receive a reward far more lucrative than anything this competition offers.”

Leng Ning remained calm. “Don't trust her, Han Wu. She's trying to seduce you, just like Meng Qi did. Control yourself.”

Han Wu really wanted to tell her that his spirit and mental strength were far beyond Su Mei's influence. Instead, he sighed and gestured for Leng Ning to relax. “Tell us more about this mission.”

Su Mei's grin deepened, radiating charm. “As expected from the man I admire. I'll explain the situation. The Violet Demon Academy manages a Survival Site called the Demonic Miasma Forest. Recently, something went wrong with the seal, allowing demonic aura and miasma to leak outward.

“Many of the native creatures were affected. They escaped the sealed area, causing chaos that forced our academy to dispatch numerous teachers to contain it. But their

efforts are only temporary. We need someone to enter the forest and reinforce the seal. Currently, only those under twenty can enter due to the seal's restrictions.

“The three of us are strong, but we lack confidence to handle it alone. We entered this competition not only to uphold our academy's prestige but also to find reliable partners. Han Wu, you are exactly the person we need.”

Han Wu listened to her plea patiently and weighed his options. As a transmigrator, he had little reason to care about the Violet Demon Academy's affairs. Still, he welcomed any chance to gain extra resources to strengthen himself. According to Su Mei, a successful mission would yield exactly that, which made him willing to take the risk.

On the other hand, Leng Ning remained guarded. “Han Wu, don't trust them. This is probably a trap. They still resent us for beating them.”

“Leng Ning, that's a bit harsh, isn't it? I'm usually a gentle little girl.” Su Mei looked pitiful, but her every gesture and word contained a hint of seduction.

Meng Qi, acting like a lovestruck fool, defended her. “Leng Ning, there must be some misunderstanding. She's far too pretty to be evil.”

Leng Ning felt an urge to freeze Meng Qi in place and leave him behind to avoid further embarrassment.

Han Wu sighed. “Don't worry. I can judge the situation. I'll retreat if I can't win. I doubt anyone could stop me from escaping.”

Leng Ning recalled that Han Wu could summon Erebard and felt a flicker of relief, though she still worried he would be deceived. “Let me go with you. I won't be a burden.”

Su Mei studied her, evaluating whether she met the criteria. Leng Ning's stage performance had fallen short of Su Mei's expectations, yet her ice-based Skills were undeniably useful. Bringing her along could prove advantageous.

Su Mei nodded. “Alright. Leng Ning, you can come with us.”

Seeing both Han Wu and Leng Ning invited, Meng Qi grew anxious. “What about me? I'm part of the team! I want to go as well.”

“Meng Qi! Stop being foolish and step aside!” Leng Ning snapped.

She was certain Meng Qi would quickly become Su Mei's personal shield, given how infatuated he was. There was a high chance that Su Mei would sacrifice him to protect herself.

Meng Qi refused to accept this quietly. “Why can you go but not me? I want to go with Su— No, with all of you. We're a team!”

Everyone could read his thoughts instantly.

Han Wu decided to help him since he was still a friend. “Let him come with us. No matter what, he's still an excellent tank.”

Meng Qi nearly jumped in excitement. “As expected of my dear friend! You know me well.”

Leng Ning exhaled and fell silent.

Su Mei had no choice but to accept Meng Qi on the mission. She needed Han Wu and Leng Ning, even if Meng Qi was slightly too weak for her taste.

By the time they finished discussing the mission details, the window to select their Skills was nearly gone. Han Wu still hadn't chosen one, so he quickly picked a random Skill inducement method linked to the Space attribute: Dimensional Pocket. The Skill allowed him to create extra space for storing items. It wasn't suited for combat, but its versatility made it exceptionally useful.

Before long, the selection period ended, and they were transported out of the vault. The Aquamarine Wave representatives thawed and nearly engaged Han Wu's team immediately.

Having been frozen, they missed their chance to select Skills within the allotted time. Once the timer expired, their opportunity was gone. Naturally, they had only themselves to blame. If they hadn't insisted on seizing Leng Ning's Skill, they would have had enough time to select their own.

The chief referee, adhering strictly to the rules, dismissed any appeals. The Aquamarine Wave representatives had lost their one and only opportunity.

After collecting their rewards, Han Wu decided the time to meet the Violet Demon representatives before everyone returned to their respective academies.

Back at Azure Sea Academy, the trio received the highest level of hospitality. The principal personally led every teacher and student in welcoming them back. Their outstanding results, coupled with Azure Sea's first-place finish in the inter-academy competition, brought immense pride to the school.

The Association of Academies had already informed the principal that Azure Sea would be upgraded from a low-ranking academy to a high-ranking one, along with a substantial increase in resources for the coming year.

The principal also received accolades from the Association of Academies, elevating him to prominence within educational circles. Once an obscure figure, he had become a well-known and respected educator following the competition.

Even before the new semester and enrollment season started, the academy was flooded with applications from prospective students. Many transfers also arrived, eager to leave prestigious academies to join Azure Sea.

The principal had never experienced the sweet taste of fame before, and he knew clearly that this success owed entirely to Han Wu, Leng Ning, and Meng Qi. He was determined to reward them generously.

The Association of Academies had granted each of the trio a crystal containing one million Assist Points and a powerful Skill. Although Azure Sea did not possess such abundant resources, the academy emptied a significant portion of its vault to provide each of them seven crystals corresponding to the seven potentials. Additionally, the trio was granted unrestricted access to the academy's vault to select any Skill they desired.

Teachers and students alike envied the rewards, but no one objected. Everyone understood how much the academy had benefited from the trio's efforts. Some even suggested erecting statues in their honor for future students to admire, but the trio strongly refused.

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[1,081 words]

Chapter 348 - Demonic Miasma Forest

Any Skill above Level 50 required more than 5,000 Assist Points to advance, even if it had only one associated potential. Most of Han Wu's Skills, apart from Dragon Fireball, demanded Assist Points across multiple potentials.

The most daunting of them was his Life Dragon Domain, which consumed thirteen times more Assist Points than a single-potential Skill. Raising it to Level 60 alone cost him nearly one million Assist Points and drained every crystal he had received.

Once he finally reached Level 60, he unlocked a new Skill. Like the inducement method that had created Dimensional Pocket, this one merged with his Life Aspect and transformed into Living Dimension. The Skill not only preserved Dimensional Pocket's effects but also gained the ability to store living creatures, from plants to animals.

The drawback was steep. Upgrading Living Dimension demanded twenty times more Assist Points than a basic Skill. Han Wu felt both admiration and resentment toward it, knowing he would need to amass an enormous amount of Assist Points to strengthen it further.

Leng Ning and Meng Qi also unlocked new Skills through their cultivation, each influenced by their respective inducement methods. Leng Ning unlocked Liquid Frost, which infused her ice-based Skills with the fluidity of water.

On the surface, it seemed unimpressive, but in practice it was deadly. When combined with her Frost Dragon Fang, the strike erupted in a wide arc of splintering ice. The shards not only froze whatever they struck but also penetrated flesh, melting into the bloodstream before refreezing within the body and killing the target from the inside out. With this addition, her combat prowess rose dramatically.

Meng Qi unlocked Indomitable Vajra, a Skill that hardened his muscles like unbreakable diamond while simultaneously increasing his weight, ensuring he could withstand and resist even powerful blows without being thrown back.

With his companions' newfound strength, Han Wu felt greater confidence in their upcoming mission. When the appointed time arrived, the three set out for the Violet Demon Academy.

The institution, renowned for its long history and prestige, radiated far more luxury than the Azure Sea Academy. Yet Leng Ning and Meng Qi remained unimpressed, convinced their own academy would one day rival its scale and influence after their victory in the competition.

Su Mei received word of their arrival and hurried out to welcome them. The supervising teacher followed close behind and repeated the mission briefing. Seeing that the details matched exactly what Su Mei had told them, the trio finally set aside their doubts. Leng Ning, in particular, chose to place a little more trust in her.

The situation in the Demonic Miasma Forest had grown worse, and they needed to act quickly. As a gesture of goodwill, the Violet Demon Academy granted them half of the promised reward in advance. Each received a crystal worth a million Assist Points along with a method for inducing a powerful Skill.

Han Wu, however, needed skills tied to dragons or life. The so-called powerful Skills held no appeal for him, so he traded his for another crystal of equal value. Using both, he advanced his Living Dimension to Level 44. At this level, its space now spanned forty-four square kilometers. It still fell short of his divine realm, but the expansion was more than sufficient.

While the others absorbed the Assist Points from their crystals, Han Wu took the opportunity to purchase an assortment of daily necessities from the Violet Demon Academy and stored them inside his Living Dimension.

Erebard, bound to him by contract, sensed the favorable environment within and decided to reside there. Fortunately, his current size made it possible.

By the time Han Wu completed his preparations, the others were also ready. They had grown noticeably stronger since the competition. Under the teacher's watchful eye, the six of them stepped into the Demonic Miasma Forest.

No sooner had they entered than Han Wu noticed a faint violet haze drifting through the air. He analyzed it and learned that it was a blend of demonic aura and miasma. The concentration posed no immediate danger, but prolonged exposure could bring nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and eventually death.

Su Mei had anticipated this. She handed each of them an antidote and a simple gas mask. Han Wu almost mentioned that he had already prepared the same items, safely stored in his Living Dimension, but since Su Mei had provided them of her own accord, he chose to use hers instead.

With their breathing secured, Han Wu shifted his focus to their surroundings. The Demonic Miasma Forest stretched upward with ancient trees, their canopies blotting out the light. Insects and animals swarmed among the branches and undergrowth, long altered by the toxic air. Years of exposure had twisted their forms until even the most harmless creatures had become bloodthirsty beasts that would lunge at them with jagged teeth and claws.

Han Wu avoided using his Dragon Fireball in the forest, worried he would set the entire place ablaze, so he left the fighting to the others. Leng Ning unleashed Frost Dragon Fang, Su Mei summoned her imps, and Xue Qian loosed a shadow arrow that pierced through the mutated animals.

That was only the beginning. As the six of them pressed deeper, the miasma thickened until they could no longer see ahead. Without guidance, they would have wandered aimlessly and remained trapped forever. Fortunately, they had both Leng Ning and Su Mei.

Leng Ning relied on her Frost Dragon Eyes, which detected subtle shifts in temperature and allowed her to steer them through the fog and warn of approaching beasts. In contrast, Su Mei depended on her Rosy Eyes, which pierced the haze and bent weaker minds to her will. Together, the two guided the group swiftly through the forest.

After a day of constant travel and battle, exhaustion set in. Su Mei was about to set up a tent, but Han Wu activated his Living Dimension instead and gestured for them to enter. Inside, they found a sanctuary of greenery, flowing water, and soothing warmth—a

sharp contrast to the oppressive Demonic Miasma Forest. What's more, streams of fresh water wound through the space, giving them the rare luxury of bathing and resting in comfort.

Su Mei's eyes sparkled with admiration as she took in the scene. Overcome with delight, she praised him without pause, "Han Wu, you truly are the man I chose. Bringing you on this mission was the best decision I've made."

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Chapter 349 - Invasion of the Hell Civilization

[1,018 words]

Chapter 349 - Invasion of the Hell Civilization

After resting overnight in Han Wu's Living Dimension, everyone shed their fatigue and felt vibrant Life Energy coursing through their bodies. A prolonged stay in that sanctuary would have strengthened their physiques to the point of resisting illness. Unfortunately, their mission demanded they move on.

Once they finished their preparations, Han Wu reopened the entrance to the Living Dimension. They stepped out at the same campsite they had prepared the night before, only to find the surroundings altered in their absence.

Scattered across the ground lay the remains of massive insects, each nearly a meter long with grotesque, armored exoskeletons that had made them notoriously difficult to kill. Something, or someone, had torn through them with ruthless force.

The group exchanged sharp glances, silently agreeing this place was no longer safe. They were about to withdraw when the insect carcasses started to exude thick plumes of demonic aura and miasma. The smoke spread unnaturally fast and curled around them in an oppressive shroud.

Su Mei activated her Skill to pierce the haze, but her vision found nothing beyond a suffocating wall of white.

Han Wu was worried this was an ambush and warned the group to take their positions. "Everyone, get ready!"

Meng Qi activated all his defensive skills immediately. In the next instant, a heavy strike slammed into his back. The loud bell chime rattled him, and he felt relieved that he had prepared his Skills in advance. Without Han Wu's warning, his head might have been severed before he could react.

Han Wu activated Dragon Shield and bellowed, "Stay alert! Tanks, protect everyone!"

Meng Qi nodded and moved in front of Leng Ning and Su Mei, shielding them. Han Wu could protect himself with Dragon Shield.

Su Mei's eyes scanned the area, and alarm rose in her chest when she noticed Ding Shanhai hadn't responded. "Ding Shanhai, what are you doing? Regroup!"

Silence answered her.

A cold sense of foreboding settled over her. The attacks came in relentless waves, each one sending ripples across Han Wu's Dragon Shield. Any strike capable of such force had to be formidable. Thankfully, Dragon Shield drew power from Han Wu's Life Energy, which allowed him to sustain it indefinitely. He had enough to maintain it for five days straight, yet he despised being forced into defense. He would not let the hidden assailant within the miasma escape so easily.

He turned to Leng Ning. "Prepare Eight Path Frost Domain. I'll initiate Life Dragon Domain, so time your Skill to coincide with mine. This way, we stand a better chance of freezing them. Let's see what's trying to kill us."

Leng Ning nodded and activated her Skill in perfect sync with Han Wu's. The Life Dragon Domain expanded in a 100-meter radius, pressing down on everyone outside Han Wu's group. The dragon's aura suppressed their strength and lowered their potentials.

Meanwhile, cold air spread through the area as Leng Ning's Eight Path Frost Domain took effect. Ice crackled relentlessly, and the demonic aura and miasma began to dissipate under the chill. She then used Frost Dragon Blizzard to blow away the thick white smoke, revealing their attackers.

They were humanoid, yet their bodies bore grafts of various organs from different life forms, giving them a monstrous, unnatural appearance.

Han Wu's brow furrowed. He knew what they were—demonoids, hybrids of demons and humans. They possessed human intelligence and the powers of demons.

Why are they here?

Han Wu wondered. The Assist Civilization was a backwater that didn't even know Great Dragons existed.

He glanced at Su Mei, ready to ask if she knew anything, but noticed she did not recognize the creatures. At the same time, Xue Qian noticed Ding Shanhai had already collapsed.

“Shanhai!” Xue Qian rushed forward to check his friend’s wounds, but Han Wu stopped him.

“Why are you stopping me? I need to help him!” Xue Qian shouted, desperation cracking his voice.

Han Wu shook his head. He could sense everyone’s Life Energy within his Life Dragon Domain and confirmed that Ding Shanhai was already dead. Worse, his body had been implanted with strange spores that radiated demonic aura and miasma. Any external disturbance would trigger an explosion.

He said nothing, but his expression conveyed everything. The loss of an ally was devastating, yet they still had a mission to complete.

After crushing the frozen demonoids, they pressed onward toward their goal. They were only a third of the way there. Leng Ning’s Frost Dragon Blizzard cut a path through the treacherous terrain, and it significantly increased their speed. Still, sustaining it drained her severely. Dizziness overtook her, and her strength felt completely spent.

Han Wu placed her in his Living Dimension to rest. Without her aid, the rest advanced painfully slowly.

The deeper they ventured, the stranger the place became. Sometimes, mutated life forms dropped items that seemed oddly familiar. Han Wu examined them carefully and realized they were enhanceable organs unique to the Hell Civilization. The fact that the mutated life forms carried them confirmed they had all been transformed into demons.

Han Wu suddenly realized that the seal of the Demonic Miasma Forest hadn’t weakened with time. It had broken because another civilization was invading—the Hell Civilization! The Hell Civilization must have infiltrated the Assist Civilization through a hidden passage beneath the forest’s seal. If that were true, sealing the corridor with their own strength alone would be an almost impossible task.

Han Wu was weighing a retreat when Erebard reached him telepathically, drawn by the scent of something delicious.

Confused, Han Wu glanced at the enhanceable organ in his hands. *Erm... Can he even eat this?*

Han Wu tossed it into the Living Dimension. Erebard pounced like a cat on a fish, swallowed it in a single gulp, and informed Han Wu that it wasn’t enough. He observed

that the dragon had grown slightly larger after eating the organ and was convinced that it was a good source of food for the dragon.

If he wanted Erebard to grow faster, he would need to harvest more of these organs.

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[1,225 words]

Chapter 350 - Demonoid Elixir

Han Wu and his party faced increasingly fierce attacks as they pressed deeper into the forest. Swarms of demons blocked their path and slowed their progress to a crawl.

The death of Ding Shanhai weighed heavily on Su Mei and Xue Qian, leaving them distracted in the midst of the relentless assaults. If this continued, they would never reach their destination, let alone survive the forest.

When the group finally found a momentary respite, Han Wu called Su Mei over. "Su Mei, I know Ding Shanhai's death has hit you hard, but if this continues, we will lose more than just him. Do you understand?"

He spoke with deliberate severity to force her to snap out of her grief.

Su Mei nodded, acknowledging his words, though she struggled to regain control of her emotions. She was brilliant, but young and inexperienced. A seasoned leader would not falter over the loss of a single ally.

"I'll control my emotions and keep everything in order. But I would like you to help monitor the team during this trying time." Her words made it clear she was temporarily relinquishing command to Han Wu.

He didn't relish the role, but he accepted it without complaint. The position meant little to him. To lift her spirits, he produced an enhanceable organ he had discovered among the mutated life forms and handed it to her. "Carefully sense this. It can strengthen you further."

Su Mei hesitated but followed his instructions. At first, she detected nothing and suspected he was teasing her.

Han Wu looked puzzled before instructing her to use Succubus Descend again. This time, she detected something unique about the organ. Unfortunately, its low compatibility prevented her from grafting it onto her body.

Su Mei then called Xue Qian to use Shadow Demon Descend and probe the organ with his senses. He discovered it was highly compatible and decided to graft it onto his head. Once grafted, a small horn sprouted whenever he activated Shadow Demon Descend. The horn was sharp and durable, and it increased the requirements to upgrade the Skill from nine times the usual threshold to eleven. In effect, the organ enhanced the Skill's potential.

Su Mei was immediately fascinated by how the organs could further augment their strength, and the two picked up the slack. Leng Ning and Meng Qi also became interested upon learning that the organs could improve their abilities. Unfortunately, lacking Skills to transform them into demons or generate demonic aura, they could not graft any organs. There was also the risk that the organs would be poorly compatible with them.

Leng Ning and Meng Qi sighed in frustration. Meanwhile, Han Wu quickly devised a method for them to graft the organs. He reverse-engineered techniques developed by the Assist Civilization to induce specific Skills, then combined them with knowledge he had gained from adventuring in other civilizations.

First, he used the blood of demonoids and selected organs as base materials. Then, he calibrated the concentration and properties of the mixture using his own Life Energy, eventually creating an elixir capable of transforming humanoids into demonoids.

He presented two vials of black Demonoid Elixir. His friends could hardly believe that it could make their bodies compatible with the enhanceable organs and even doubted whether it was safe to drink.

Han Wu did not rush them. He placed the vials in their hands and left the choice entirely up to them. Facing the decision, Meng Qi turned to Su Mei. He liked her, and everyone knew it, but he also understood the vast gap between their strengths. If he didn't push himself now, he would never have the chance to stand beside her in the future. For the sake of that future, he steeled himself and drank the vial.

"My dear friend, I trust you!" he shouted, his voice both a declaration of gratitude for the opportunity to grow stronger and a desperate attempt to convince himself that the elixir would work.

He closed his eyes, enduring the vile taste as it lingered in his mouth. Thirty seconds passed, and nothing happened. Doubt crept in. Perhaps Han Wu's elixir had no effect at all.

"*Hmm...* I think I know why. It's probably waiting for a catalyst." Han Wu approached Meng Qi, placed his palm on his shoulder, and infused him with Life Energy and Dragon Energy to act as the catalyst.

Suddenly, Meng Qi felt a violent surge of strength erupt from deep within his body. He grew larger, and his muscles tore through his skin as blood spilled freely. Under ordinary circumstances, he would have bled to death many times over, but the elixir's restorative properties accelerated his healing. His body teetered on the edge of life and death, simultaneously destroying and regenerating itself.

Each time a part of his body was torn apart, new muscle sprouted from the wounds, stronger than before. The elixir offered no relief from the searing pain, and Meng Qi writhed violently in agony.

His companions watched, trembling at the sight of the relentless torment.

Han Wu chuckled. "Don't worry. He won't die. He'll survive this and emerge stronger than ever."

Although Han Wu's knowledge of medicine and alchemy was limited, he had infused the elixirs with vast reserves of Life Energy, enough to support Meng Qi's evolution.

Five hours passed before the pain finally subsided. Meng Qi collapsed from exhaustion, and his body returned to its normal state. His clothes, however, had been shredded beyond recognition, leaving him completely naked.

Han Wu poured water over him to wash away the stains and then dragged him into the tent to rest.

Leng Ning studied Meng Qi's pitiful state and then the vial in her hands. She had initially thought that it was ineffective, but now it seemed otherwise. Still, she could not bring herself to drink it. She was a girl, and a striking one at that. The thought of ending up like Meng Qi—naked, writhing in agony as her body was torn apart—was unbearable.

Han Wu cleared his throat, a hint of embarrassment in his voice. "The effects vary with each person. Meng Qi's body is exceptionally resilient, so the elixir transformed him physically. You, as an ice mage, will experience a different process. It shouldn't be nearly as painful."

"Really?" She sounded skeptical.

Han Wu nodded. "Really."

Leng Ning resolved to drink it. Before she did, she warned coldly, "If I end up like Meng Qi, I will freeze you into an ice sculpture, shatter your body, and then kill myself."

Her tone carried unshakable conviction, and her gaze cut like ice. She was not bluffing. For the first time since meeting her, Han Wu felt a flicker of fear.

Leng Ning braced herself for the elixir's vile taste and drank it. Han Wu stepped forward and activated its effects. Her body began to transform. Unlike Meng Qi's violent transformation, her skin gradually became coated with a thin layer of icy scales, spreading even over her ears and eyes. She did not writhe in agony but sat perfectly still, her body rigid and controlled. At the same time, faint cracks echoed as frozen blades sprouted spontaneously around her.

Han Wu and the others kept a careful distance, both to avoid the blades and to ensure they did not distract her during the transformation.

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