

War God 231

Chapter 231: Soul Scattered!

CRACK! CRACK!

From within the dust and smoke, two crisp sounds resonated. It was as if something had shattered.

Fang Jian stood up, a calm smile on his face. However, in the next second, that smile froze. As the dust cleared, the three combatants stood facing each other.

They watched as the bodies of Zheng Shi and Zheng Bao trembled violently. A moment later, piercing screams erupted from their mouths.

Their arms were broken!

Bones protruded from their shoulder blades, and the piercing pain was so intense that even with their great strength, they couldn't bear it.

Lin Mu, having shattered both their arms simultaneously, was already lifting his foot. His leg shot out like lightning, striking them squarely in the chest.

PFFT!

With mournful wails, the two men were hurled through the air.

Zheng Shi and Zheng Bao smashed into the ground, spurting out mouthfuls of blood as their faces turned deathly pale. Fang Jian and the others stared blankly, unable to process what had just happened.

Zheng Shi and Zheng Bao looked at Lin Mu in sheer terror. They had never anticipated that he would be so formidable. With just a single punch and a kick, he had severely injured them.

"You... who in the world are you?" Zheng Shi asked, his voice trembling.

Lin Mu glanced at them. Their severe injuries were only because he had held back. If he had intended to kill, they would already be corpses. Although they were two Inner Strength Martial Artists who had joined forces, there was a world of difference between their power and his.

The reason was simple. He was a Cultivator, with power that far surpassed a Martial Arts Grandmaster.

Lin Mu approached the two with an indifferent expression.

"You... what are you doing?" Terrified, Zheng Shi scrambled backward.

"What am I doing?" Lin Mu said coolly. "Since you wanted to kill me, you should be prepared to be killed by me."

He advanced swiftly, his figure blurring into an afterimage.

"No...!" the two men cried out in dread.

However, Lin Mu remained unmoved, his speed only increasing.

"Boy, that's enough!"

Just then, Zheng Long, who had been watching from the sidelines, suddenly bellowed. He stomped on the ground and soared out like an Azure Hawk, his hands curved like hooks, aiming for the top of Lin Mu's head.

"Azure Dragon Claw!" His five fingers stretched taut, resembling a dragon's claw.

At the same instant, Zheng Hu made his move, his kick toward Lin Mu's neck as fast as lightning.

"Fierce Tiger Step!" It was a powerful and heavy blow, as swift as a pouncing tiger.

Both of them unleashed killing blows, aiming to end Lin Mu in a single strike.

"Hmph!" Lin Mu snorted contemptuously. "You overestimate yourselves."

With a wave of his hand, a terrifying power erupted.

"Demonslaying Claw!"

It was a technique from the Twelve Forms of Slaying Gods and Demons and Punishing Immortals. Sharp Spiritual Energy coiled around his fingers as he struck.

CRACK!

His hands instantly clamped down on Zheng Long's wrist and Zheng Hu's ankle. Taking a step forward, his shoulder slammed into Zheng Long's chest.

"Pfft!"

Zheng Long spat out a mouthful of blood and was flung backward like a kite with its string cut.

Without pausing, Lin Mu's arm shot up. Channeling Spiritual Energy, he swung the nearly two-hundred-pound Zheng Hu into the air.

THUD!

He smashed Zheng Hu onto the ground. The man gagged, vomiting a mouthful of blood mixed with fragments of his internal organs.

One move. Zheng Long and Zheng Hu were dead.

At this, Zheng Shi and Zheng Bao were finally consumed by fear.

Zheng Shi began to kowtow frantically. "Master, I was wrong! Please, don't kill me!"

Lin Mu killed his eldest two brothers in a single move. His strength is definitely above the Inner Strength realm. And above Inner Strength is the Grandmaster realm! We actually provoked a Martial Arts Grandmaster! This... this is insane.

"Spare you?" Lin Mu twisted his neck slightly. "Save it for the underworld."

His foot flicked up, kicking a machete lying on the ground. The blade whistled through the air at terrifying speed, piercing straight through Zheng Shi's chest. Its momentum barely slowed as it continued on, embedding itself in Zheng Bao's chest.

"Uh..." Zheng Bao looked down at the hilt protruding from his chest with a desolate expression, then collapsed to the ground.

Within minutes, the so-called Four Braves of the Zheng Family were all dead.

At that moment, Fang Jian collapsed, his face ashen, his eyes filled with despair.

Lin Mu slowly sat down in the chair Fang Jian had just vacated, gazing indifferently at the two who remained: Wang Hu and Fang Jian. As for the corpses and blood strewn across the floor, it was as if he didn't even see them.

"Master Lin, spare me!" Wang Hu fell to his knees with a thud, shouting for mercy. "It was all Fang Jian! He was the one who coveted your company, so he kidnapped your girlfriend to threaten you. I was just misled by him, Master Lin! Please, let me go!"

He grew more agitated as he spoke, and Fang Jian immediately panicked. Wang Hu had sold him out completely. He remembered how Wang Hu had sworn to help him see the plan through.

Lin Mu killed so many people, he definitely won't let me go.

But instead of begging for mercy, he adopted a cold, threatening tone. "Lin Mu, is it? I'll remember you. The green mountains don't change, and the rivers flow forever. Our paths will cross again!"

"One day," he snarled, "I will make you kneel and beg me!"

With that, Fang Jian turned to leave.

"Did I say you could leave?" Lin Mu's voice stopped him in his tracks.

"What, you dare to touch me?" Fang Jian spun around, his expression grim. "Lin Mu, if you lay a finger on me, my Fang Family will never let you go. So, I advise you to know your place!"

The status of the Fang Family in Jiangling was beyond the imagination of ordinary people. A mere Lin Mu couldn't possibly do anything to him.

"You dared to seek a partnership without even investigating who I am. I must say, you're quite bold," Lin Mu said, a playful look on his face. "And you still dare to speak to me in that tone. Are you looking to die?"

Are you looking to die?

The words made Fang Jian's eyes narrow. He, Fang Jian, was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Who had ever dared to speak to him in such a tone? In all of Jiangling, everyone bowed their heads in reverence when they heard he was from the Fang Family. But here, in this tiny River City, he was actually being threatened?

What an absolute humiliation!

"Fine, fine, fine! Lin Mu, I'll remember you!" Fang Jian said viciously. "Sooner or later, I will see to it you die without a burial place!"

"Is that so?" Lin Mu replied, noncommittal. "If your Fang Family gives me trouble, I won't mind erasing them from Jiangling. But for now, you can die."

As he spoke, Lin Mu raised a finger. A streak of purple Thunderbolt swirled at its tip.

"You dare to kill me? You actually dare to kill me?" Fang Jian roared, his face a mask of rage and fear.

Lin Mu waved his arm, and the Thunderbolt shot out, smashing toward the horrified Fang Jian.

"No...!"

Fang Jian screamed, trying to dodge, but the Thunderbolt was too fast. It struck his body in an instant.

BANG!

The moment the lightning made contact, Fang Jian's body convulsed. With a deafening crackle, he disintegrated into ash.

The Thunderbolt was the power of the nine heavens, capable of annihilating a Divine Soul. And just like that, this scion of the wealthy Fang Family from Jiangling had his very soul obliterated.

Chapter 232: Heading North to Jiangling, Exterminate the Fang Family Clan!

Wang Hu's pupils contracted. Fang Jian is dead? With his soul utterly scattered?

Wang Hu was so terrified his blood ran cold, and he instinctively backed away from Lin Mu. When had he ever witnessed such a thing? A living, breathing person had been turned to ash in the blink of an eye. If he told anyone about this, no one would believe him. Wang Hu's scalp tingled. Such a method... it's simply divine.

"This is the price for offending me," Lin Mu said lightly.

His calm tone carried an immense, oppressive weight. Wang Hu's body began to tremble violently. No one is fearless in the face of death, and he was certainly no exception.

"Spare me!" Wang Hu knelt on the ground and begged loudly.

Originally, he planned on helping the Fang Family's young master, hoping to connect with the Jiangling Fang Family after his success and soar to great heights. But now, all such thoughts had vanished. This guy... he isn't human! Over a hundred men, killed just like that. And he killed even the disciples of the Fang Family without a shred of mercy.

Wang Hu considered himself a local strongman with some status in Jiangling, but compared to Lin Mu's methods of killing, he was less than a child.

"Relax, I won't kill you."

As Lin Mu spoke, he stood up and waved his hand. A Thunder Dragon flew out and devoured the corpses on the ground one by one, not even sparing the weapons or bloodstains. In the blink of an eye, the factory floor was completely bare.

Wang Hu collapsed to the floor, paralyzed, as a foul stench suddenly emanated from his lower body. He had been so scared that he'd wet himself.

「An hour later.」

Su Ke'er returned to the factory. No significant commotion could be heard from inside.

Could something have happened to Lin Mu? Su Ke'er's face turned deathly pale with fear. After sending her mother off, she had rushed back as fast as she could, but the round trip had still taken nearly an hour. Lin Mu... could he have held out for an hour? The more Su Ke'er thought about it, the paler she became.

I don't care anymore, I have to go in and see! Su Ke'er bit her lip, her expression resolute. Even if he's dead, I have to see for myself!

With red-rimmed eyes, Su Ke'er stepped forward to knock, but just then, the main door opened. Two people walked out. The one in the lead was a young man in casual clothes. Who else could it be but Lin Mu? There wasn't a single injury on him; not even a hair was out of place.

Behind him was Wang Hu, who followed him cautiously while keeping a noticeable distance, clearly terrified of Lin Mu.

Seeing that Lin Mu was alright, Su Ke'er could no longer hold back. She ran to him, tears streaming down her face. As soon as she was close, she threw her arms around him in a tight embrace.

A soft fragrance filled his embrace, and Lin Mu's body stiffened slightly. This woman actually came back. It seems she was really worried about me.

Lin Mu gave a bitter smile, gently pushing her away. "Don't worry, I'm fine."

But Su Ke'er stubbornly hugged him again, crying as she shook her head. Left with no choice, Lin Mu could only begin to comfort the distraught woman gently.

Inside the car, Su Ke'er's eyes were still red, and a faint blush lingered on her pretty face. In her worry earlier, she hadn't thought twice. That thing with Lin Mu... It was the first time in her entire life she had ever been so bold with a man. Though the moment had passed, her heart still couldn't help but pound furiously.

"Drive carefully," Lin Mu reminded her, noticing her distraction.

Su Ke'er immediately snapped back to her senses and gripped the steering wheel tightly.

Wang Hu sat in the backseat on pins and needles. He didn't know why Lin Mu had spared him, but he now felt a fear for the man that chilled him to the bone.

"Speak. How did you learn my company's secrets?" Lin Mu asked, his gaze fixed on the scenery outside the window.

Although Fang Jian was dead, the problem within the company remained. If the issue wasn't resolved completely, more trouble would surely find its way to their door.

Hearing Lin Mu's voice, Wang Hu flinched.

"It... It was Tang Feng who told us," Wang Hu stammered, finally giving a name.

"Tang Feng?"

Su Ke'er was startled. Wasn't he kicked out of the company long ago? How could he still leak its secrets?

Under Lin Mu's questioning, Wang Hu laid out the whole story. It turned out that after leaving Boheng Pharma, Tang Feng had joined another company. To further his own interests, he contacted some old colleagues at Boheng Pharma, planning to steal corporate secrets. Huang Qi, in particular, had been a great help. The two of them worked together, using various methods to extract secrets from Boheng Pharma.

Recently, due to the involvement of various powerful parties, everyone at Boheng Pharma was actively engaged in developing a new project. Although discussion of the matter was strictly forbidden, word still got out. The person Tang Feng contacted was a manager in the project department: He Xun.

After obtaining these secrets, Tang Feng was eager to make a move. But in a city as large as River City, while there were many major corporations, few dared to cooperate with him.

It was then that Fang Jian arrived in River City. He had already been planning to expand his operations there and happened to hear that Tang Feng had his hands on Boheng Pharma's secrets. As Inner Strength Martial Artists, the Zheng Family's Four Braves were astonished when they heard about Boheng Pharma's new project. They instructed Fang Jian to get involved at any cost.

However, Fang Jian's greed was insatiable; he planned to swallow the entire project whole. But he had only just arrived in River City. Although he could find plenty of partners by relying on the Fang Family's influence, those people had long ago pledged their loyalty to Lin Mu. Thus, they rejected Fang Jian without hesitation.

Harboring a grudge, Fang Jian resorted to despicable means, first kidnapping Su Ke'er's mother. He tried to blackmail Su Ke'er into cooperating, but she flatly refused. And so, Fang Jian decided to go all the way, luring Lin Mu out with the intention of killing him.

To him, as long as Lin Mu was dead, Boheng Pharma would be his for the taking, wouldn't it?

But he never considered that Lin Mu wouldn't have dared to play such a high-stakes game without some serious skills of his own.

"Master Lin, Fang Jian forced me into this! It really had nothing to do with me," Wang Hu said with a woeful expression.

Lin Mu smiled.

"Although you weren't the mastermind, you're no saint either," Lin Mu stated. "I spared you because I want you to do something for me."

"Never mind one thing, I'll agree to ten!" Wang Hu answered instantly. At this point, he was willing to do anything just to save his own skin.

"Very well."

Lin Mu said indifferently, "Go to Jiangling and tell the Steward of the Fang Family that if they dare to interfere again... in a few days, I will bring my sword to Jiangling and annihilate their entire family!"

Annihilate the entire Fang Family?! Wang Hu was aghast, his face a mask of terror. He knew that if Lin Mu said he would do something, he would do it. This guy is a Demon who kills without batting an eye!

Even Su Ke'er's pretty face changed dramatically, and she almost lost her grip on the steering wheel.

After Wang Hu got out of the car, Lin Mu said, "Send out a notice. We're holding a company meeting immediately. All managers and above must attend."

This matter couldn't wait.

Chapter 233: Not Convinced? Then I'll Make You Admit Defeat Wholeheartedly!

「Boheng Pharma.」

「Conference Room.」

Department heads and leaders sat ramrod straight, their faces tense.

Just half an hour ago, the chairman's secretary had called them, demanding their urgent attendance at a company meeting. The tone was strong and forceful. The message was clear: anyone who made an excuse not to attend could pack their things and leave.

So, whether they were at home with family or out enjoying themselves, they immediately dropped whatever they were doing and rushed to the company.

They couldn't afford not to go!

The chairman, who rarely made appearances at the company, was a real hard-ass. On his first day, he had taken down quite a few managers and executives who opposed him. Without any consideration for the consequences.

Although they were resentful, they had no choice but to grit their teeth and endure the new chairman to keep their jobs. Fortunately, he didn't show up often, leaving everything to General Manager Su Ke'er, which made things much easier for them all. Although the icy General Manager was difficult to get along with, everyone respected her competence.

As they looked around at the assembled crowd, many realized something big was about to happen.

"Is everyone here?"

Lin Mu sat at the head of the table, with Su Ke'er to his left and Lawyer Jin to his right. Ren Xiaofei and the others were also present.

The unease in everyone's heart intensified.

"President Lin, Manager Hao and Director Qian haven't arrived yet," Secretary Mi Xiaotao said. "They mentioned they were tied up with some matters and couldn't get away."

Lin Mu waved his hand. "Tell them they don't need to come to work tomorrow."

The entire conference room fell silent.

He fired them just like that?

"President Lin, isn't this a bit too much?" a middle-aged man frowned and spoke up.

His name was Tang Ye, a distant cousin of Tang Feng. He had been disgruntled ever since Tang Feng was fired. But between Lin Mu's tyrannical authority and the fact that Tang Feng had brought the trouble on himself, he hadn't dared say much.

However, Manager Hao and Director Qian were his subordinates, loyal ones at that. If Lin Mu fired them, it would be like cutting off his own arms.

"What, you have an opinion?" Lin Mu looked at Tang Ye. "Or was I not clear enough before?"

The crowd was startled. Not attending meant instant dismissal! The chairman was really serious?

Tang Ye's expression turned unsightly as he spoke in a low, firm voice, "Chairman, emergencies can happen to anyone. Manager Hao and Director Qian are on a business trip for the company. It's understandable if they can't make it back in time."

He looked straight into Lin Mu's eyes and added, "Your actions might cause discontent among the staff."

Lin Mu flipped through some records and spoke indifferently, "Neither Manager Hao nor Director Qian are from the sales or business departments. What project requires their personal attention? And if I'm not mistaken, they're having fun in a bar right now, aren't they?"

Tang Ye's expression changed abruptly. The chairman knows?

Lin Mu's tone remained indifferent. "Every Wednesday, those two are absent from the company without taking leave, frequently visiting various bars. Are you going to tell me this is for work?"

Tang Ye was at a loss for words. He had never expected the chairman to know their movements in such detail.

The expressions of several others in the room also shifted slightly. It seemed they had no secrets from the chairman.

Lin Mu scanned the room. "I can overlook what you do in your personal time, but if anyone dares to feign compliance while secretly defying my decisions, don't blame me for being ruthless!"

Those with guilty consciences silently lowered their heads, a cold sweat breaking out on their backs.

"But, Chairman..." Tang Ye tried to say more but was cut off by a wave of Lin Mu's hand.

"Manager Tang, as the new project manager, you should be perfectly aware of the company's business, correct?" Lin Mu watched him calmly.

"Yes, I am aware of the company's projects," Tang Ye said honestly.

"Very good." Lin Mu nodded and tossed a file directly in front of Tang Ye.

THWACK!

The file landed with a sharp slap that echoed through the spacious conference room.

"Then take a look. Are you in charge of this project?" Lin Mu's tone was placid, but everyone could feel the chill in his words.

Tang Ye flipped through the document. In an instant, all the color drained from his face, and cold sweat beaded on his forehead.

This was a project the company had just developed. The company had never intended to put him in charge, but he had used his position to interfere with it repeatedly. A project manager held a powerful and influential position in the company. Plus, Tang Ye was a company veteran; few people would dare to cross him. Even General Manager Su Ke'er was always polite to him.

But judging by the chairman's tone, was he deliberately targeting Tang Ye?

"Chairman, I can explain," Tang Ye said, taking a deep breath. "These past few days, Manager Su hasn't been in the office for personal reasons. But this project is of the utmost importance and can't be delayed. So, with the intention of helping ease Manager Su's burden, I just..."

"Just secretly stole company secrets, handed them to Tang Feng, and earned a handsome sum in the process," Lin Mu finished the sentence for him. "Isn't that right, Manager Tang?"

Stealing company secrets?

An uproar swept through the conference room. No one had expected Tang Ye to steal company secrets.

What audacity!

In the past, everyone might have turned a blind eye. As long as it didn't harm the company's core interests, such things were often seen as a form of quid pro quo in the business world and not taken too seriously. But the chairman was Lin Mu now. To dare steal company secrets right under his nose...

Tang Ye must have a death wish.

"Chairman, you shouldn't make unfounded accusations!" Tang Ye's face darkened, his expression one of staunch denial. "For so many years, I have given my all to this company, dedicating my heart and soul to it. It was only through the former chairman's trust that I was given the important position of project manager. I never dared to slack off. And now you suspect me? I refuse to accept it!"

His words were delivered with such conviction that many people nodded in sympathy. They, too, felt that Lin Mu was being far too domineering.

"You refuse to accept it?" Lin Mu laughed. "Then I'll give you a reason you can't refuse."

At his nod, Su Ke'er produced a USB drive and inserted it into the computer. A video and an audio file were on it. The video showed Tang Ye sneaking into the chairman's office, where he remained for a full half-hour before emerging.

The audio was a recording of his conversation with another man.

"This is something I struggled to get my hands on. Tell them if it's not for ten million, I'm not giving it to him!" That was Tang Ye's voice.

"Bro, ten million is too much. They'll never agree." The voice was somewhat familiar. After a moment's thought, the faces of several people in the room changed drastically.

Tang Feng! Tang Ye really was dealing with Tang Feng.

"Without ten million, I'd rather sell this to someone else. I'm sure they'd be willing to pay," Tang Ye sneered in the recording.

"Alright, I'll go ask."

After the recording finished, Lin Mu continued, "Lawyer Jin has also confirmed that just two days ago, a sum of ten million was transferred into your account. How do you explain that? I highly doubt a project manager at Boheng Pharma earns more in a month than I, the chairman, do in a year."

Tang Ye's legs gave out, and he collapsed into his chair.

He knew it was all over.

Chapter 234: I'll take what I want myself!

As the security guards escorted Tang Ye out, the entire conference room fell into a dead silence.

No one had expected this. In just over a month, Lin Mu had taken down another company executive. Everyone could guess Tang Ye's fate; he would likely spend the rest of his life in prison. What no one anticipated, however, was that after confessing everything at the police station, Tang Ye would commit suicide in his cell that very night.

His cousin, Tang Feng, also vanished without a trace, as if he had never existed.

The man behind all this was none other than Lin Mu. With his current status, he didn't need to lift a finger to take care of those two. The various powerful families working with him would spare no effort to assist him. The development of the elixir was the company's greatest secret at the moment. If successful, it would be a cash cow, making everyone involved incredibly wealthy. Therefore, they could not allow this secret to leak under any circumstances.

As for the tycoons who had been in contact with Fang Jian, Lin Mu simply issued a warning and rescinded their shares. If they wanted to continue collaborating, it would all depend on their sincerity.

Having dealt with the matter, Lin Mu suddenly found himself with free time. Now, he could finally deal with the Dark Web.

The Dark Web is a cancer. Only by eradicating them from River City can I be truly free of worries. Lin Mu mused, deciding to resolve the issue within the next two days.

Once he had made his decision, Lin Mu immediately notified Guan Chengye and the others. The Dark Web had been rooted in River City for many years and was deeply entrenched. Trying to eliminate them on his own would be troublesome, and besides, Lin Mu didn't have that much time. So, it was time for those who had consumed his Essence Cultivating Pills to show what they were capable of.

That night, Lin Mu contacted Cheng Bugui, who readily agreed to deploy all his subordinates to investigate the Dark Web's strength. On the public front, the Guan Family would take action, collaborating with the town government to seal off River City, ensuring no member of the Dark Web could slip through the net.

A meticulous plan began to unfold under the cover of darkness. The public remained unaware, as their lives continued on as usual.

「Early the next morning.」

Lin Mu was about to head to the Guan Family's estate to discuss the specific details of eradicating the Dark Web with Guan Chengye when a black sedan pulled up at his villa's entrance. A man in a suit and gold-rimmed glasses got out and bowed respectfully.

"Mr. Lin, my master invites you to a gathering at Qi Shi Xuan. He hopes you will honor us with your presence," the man said with a smile, his sincere attitude leaving no room for complaint.

"Who is your master?" Lin Mu asked, frowning slightly.

"My master's surname is Dao," the man replied, still smiling.

In all of River City, there was only one prominent figure with that surname.

Dao Wuming.

This man was the number one figure in River City's underworld. Even Cheng Bugui was outmatched by him. Legend had it that Dao Wuming had started from scratch, building a vast empire in River City in just over a decade. No one believed he could have achieved this without possessing significant prowess.

And Lin Mu knew something more: this Dao Wuming was the one in charge of the Dark Web in River City. He had just issued the order to annihilate the Dark Web, and now Dao Wuming himself had come knocking.

Is he truly ignorant, or is he just feigning ignorance?

"Lead the way," Lin Mu nodded, readily accepting.

Whatever Dao Wuming's motives were, Lin Mu wanted to see for himself what the person who had repeatedly targeted him from the shadows looked like.

Qi Shi Xuan was a famous private restaurant in River City, frequented only by the rich and powerful. Ordinary people didn't have the qualifications to dine there. When Lin Mu got out of the car, he noticed very few people around.

"My master has booked the entire place to host you, Mr. Lin, so you can be at ease," the bespectacled man said.

"Hm. So if he wanted to make a move on me, no one would know, right?" Lin Mu said, smiling at him.

The smile on the bespectacled man's face stiffened for a moment. "Mr. Lin, you certainly have a sense of humor," he chuckled, gesturing with his hand. "Please. The Family Head has been waiting for quite some time."

Lin Mu gave the man a deep look before smiling and walking into Qi Shi Xuan. He could tell that this man, despite his respectful demeanor, was a formidable martial arts expert. He even carried a familiar scent—the scent of blood and iron from the battlefield. This man had undoubtedly been forged in the crucible of countless firefights.

But Lin Mu was completely unfazed. Even if this place were a dragon's den or a tiger's lair, he was eager to test its mettle.

"Mr. Lin, please!" The bespectacled man opened the door to a private room and stood aside.

Lin Mu nodded and stepped inside. As the door closed behind him, the room grew dim. Visibility was poor, but for Lin Mu, it made no difference at all.

He saw a man of about forty sitting in the room. Dressed in casual clothes, he had an ordinary face with no remarkable features. His eyes, however, exuded a sinister feeling, seeming to radiate killing intent at all times.

This was the head of the Dark Web.

Dao Wuming.

Upon seeing Lin Mu, Dao Wuming's eyes sharpened. He knew Lin Mu was young, but seeing him in person, he was still struck by just how young he was.

This is the Martial Arts Grandmaster who shook the Martial Arts World? This is Lin Wudi, the man who killed the True Immortal of Thunder Law, Yun Xu, with his bare hands? He truly has an extraordinary aura!

These thoughts flickered through his mind for only an instant before he expertly concealed his surprise.

"Mr. Lin, I am Dao Wuming. I have long admired your great reputation!" Dao Wuming stood and gave Lin Mu a fist-and-palm salute.

He knows I'm a Grandmaster, yet he calls me 'Mister.' How intriguing.

"I hope you'll forgive me for not greeting you at the door, Mr. Lin," Dao Wuming said with a smile as he took a couple of steps forward. "I injured my leg a few days ago, so it's a bit inconvenient for me to move around."

Indeed, his gait was unsteady, as if he were genuinely injured.

"It's no matter," Lin Mu said with a nonchalant smile, walking directly to the table and taking a seat.

Dao Wuming's smile didn't falter. "Mr. Lin, these are just some simple, home-style dishes. Please, try them."

"Then I won't stand on ceremony," Lin Mu replied, a smile playing on his lips as he picked up his chopsticks and sampled a few dishes. "Mm, the flavors are quite good," he nodded while eating.

Dao Wuming chuckled, but his smile held a deeper, unreadable meaning.

Lin Mu feasted heartily, paying Dao Wuming no mind. Dao Wuming, however, did not seem offended. He simply refilled Lin Mu's plate and poured his wine, occasionally introducing the various dishes.

After eating and drinking his fill, Lin Mu let out a long, satisfied breath. "Delightful."

Dao Wuming laughed. "If you enjoy the food here, Mr. Lin, you are welcome to come often. To be honest, this Qi Shi Xuan is one of my properties." He made a grand gesture, his face beaming with magnanimity. "If it pleases you, Mr. Lin, I would be happy to gift it to you."

"I don't accept rewards without merit. I think I'll pass," Lin Mu said with a light smile. "Whatever I want, I will take with my own hands."

Dao Wuming's smile stiffened for a second before he laughed. "Mr. Lin, you really have a way with jokes."

But Lin Mu's expression was utterly serious as he replied, "I'm not one for jokes."

Dao Wuming was rendered speechless.

Chapter 235: The Self-Righteous Dao Wuming!

"Heh, Mr. Lin, I'm not quite sure what you mean." Dao Wuming gave an awkward smile.

"You're not sure?" Lin Mu smiled lightly. "If you didn't understand, you wouldn't have invited me here today."

Dao Wuming narrowed his eyes, the smile receding from his face.

"Since you're a straightforward man, Mr. Lin, I'll be blunt," Dao Wuming said, taking a deep breath. "I believe you're aware of my identity, correct?"

"The head of the Dark Web, hmm? That's not a lowly position," Lin Mu said meaningfully.

Upon hearing the words "Dark Web," a flash of pride crossed Dao Wuming's face.

"Correct. I am the person in charge of the Dark Web Organization's River City branch," Dao Wuming declared, puffing out his chest as an invisible aura emanated from him.

Dao Wuming was also a rare master of the Martial Way.

"What's there to be so proud of? You're just a bunch of filthy rats hiding in the dark, afraid to see the light of day," Lin Mu retorted bluntly.

"Mr. Lin, watch your words!" Dao Wuming's expression darkened as he spoke gravely. "I'm aware you're a Martial Arts Grandmaster whose strength is considered unrivaled among your generation, but our Dark Web also has true Martial Arts Grandmasters! Their strength is hardly inferior to yours."

To him, it seemed the Dark Web was his entire faith.

No wonder the Dark Web developed so quickly, Lin Mu thought. The organization's ability to manipulate people is quite potent.

He waved his hand impatiently. "Enough with the nonsense. State your purpose."

Dao Wuming obviously hadn't invited him just for a meal. This might be a trap!

Taking a deep breath, Dao Wuming announced, "I would like to invite Master Lin to join our Dark Web Organization!"

Lin Mu was stunned. He'd considered many possibilities, but he never expected Dao Wuming to invite him to join the Dark Web.

Seeing Lin Mu's surprise, Dao Wuming assumed he was thinking about negotiations and quickly added, "Mr. Lin, as a Grandmaster, your vision and perspective are naturally different from those of common folk. You may have certain biases against the Dark Web, but I guarantee that if you join us, you will receive benefits beyond your wildest imagination."

Lin Mu blinked. "What benefits?"

Dao Wuming glanced around before whispering, "A method to break through the Martial Arts Grandmaster realm."

Lin Mu's expression shifted subtly.

Does the Dark Web really have a way to break through the Martial Arts Grandmaster realm? Could it be... that there are beings stronger than Grandmasters within the Dark Web?

The cultivation path of a Martial Artist was: Acquired Realm, Innate, External Strength, Inner Strength, and Martial Arts Grandmaster.

Above that was the realm of Reaching the Divine.

Reaching the Divine allowed one to commune with gods above and reach the netherworlds below. Those who achieved it possessed the power to reshape the world and were known as Land Immortals. Their methods had already surpassed human understanding.

All of this, Lin Mu knew from Liu Mubai's memories. But in both his past and present lives, he had never heard of, let alone seen, anyone in the Divine Communion Realm.

Dao Wuming stated confidently, "As long as you agree to join the Dark Web, I believe the organization will devote great resources to nurturing you, given your talent and strength, Mr. Lin."

"Once the time is right, the organization will surely help you break through the Martial Arts Grandmaster realm and achieve the Divine Communion Realm!" Dao Wuming continued. "Furthermore, if you agree to join our organization, all previous grievances between us will be wiped clean."

He was alluding to the time Lin Mu entered the Drink and Enjoy Bar, slaughtered everyone inside, and even killed Ding Fengqiu's disciple, Zeng Wen. If Lin Mu agreed to his demand, he could help resolve this grudge.

"Mr. Lin, I can give you three days to think it over. Once you've decided, just call me directly."

Dao Wuming produced a business card with his private number on it. Pushing it across the table toward Lin Mu, he added with a smile, "I believe you will make the right choice, Mr. Lin."

Lin Mu's fingers tapped lightly on the business card, but the smile at the corners of his mouth only grew wider.

"Actually, I'm curious about one thing," Lin Mu said.

Dao Wuming paused. "What's that?"

"With an intellect like yours, how exactly did you become the head of the Dark Web's River City branch?" Lin Mu's tone dripped with disdain.

"You..."

The smile vanished from Dao Wuming's face. In a deep voice, he asked, "Mr. Lin, what is the meaning of this?"

Leaning back in his chair and toying with the gold-trimmed business card, Lin Mu said, "Who gave you the audacity to try and recruit me?"

"Lin Mu, don't be ungrateful!" Dao Wuming exploded in fury, his voice cold. "Do you really think the Dark Web is afraid of a mere Martial Arts Grandmaster? Killing you wouldn't be difficult at all! Our Dark Web has been around for many years. We've killed Grandmasters before!"

His tone was filled with boundless arrogance. He stood up and stared down at Lin Mu. "Lin Mu, do you know why I gave you three days to consider?"

Dao Wuming sneered. "Because after three days, you'll start to feel your entire body go weak. Your cultivation will be completely destroyed, and you'll be reduced to a useless cripple."

"After seven days, your internal organs will begin to rot. In the end, your entire body will be devoured by a Gu poison known as the Heart-Devouring Gu!"

Lin Mu appeared shocked and horrified. "You... You poisoned the food?"

Dao Wuming roared with laughter. "Lin Mu, oh, Lin Mu. You've been clever your whole life, only to be fooled now. You knew this was a trap, yet you walked right into your own grave."

"I'll give you one last chance. Submit to the organization, and I can give you the antidote and control the Gu insect's activity. Otherwise, I assure you, you will die a horrible death!"

At this moment, Dao Wuming had completely burned his bridges with Lin Mu. The Heart-Devouring Gu was a poison the organization had spent countless resources developing. Once afflicted, not even a

Martial Arts Grandmaster had a cure; they could only await death. This was the fundamental reason the Dark Web had grown so rapidly and had yet to be eradicated.

"Mr. Lin, I value you as a talent. To achieve the rank of Martial Arts Grandmaster at such a young age and be placed sixteenth on the Heavenly Ranking is unprecedented. It's no exaggeration to call you a peerless prodigy," Dao Wuming said, looking utterly smug, convinced he had Lin Mu at his mercy. "But have you considered this? The Martial Alliance only did that to get back at you. Perhaps the Grandmasters you knocked off the list already resent you and are planning to challenge you."

"I know your strength is extraordinary, but as the saying goes, two fists can't fight off four hands. So what if you killed Yun Xu? The Celestial Master Mansion aside, the other challengers alone will be enough to exhaust you and leave you unable to cope. Just agree to join the organization, and I can solve all these problems for you."

Dao Wuming was brimming with confidence, certain Lin Mu would agree.

After hearing him out, Lin Mu suddenly laughed.

"What are you laughing at? You're on the brink of death and you don't even know it!" Dao Wuming was truly infuriated.

This Lin Mu is far too unappreciative!

"Heh," Lin Mu said indifferently. "I'm laughing because you're celebrating too soon. Did you really think you could control me with a cheap trick like this?"

The moment he finished speaking, Lin Mu flipped his palm over.

There, in the center of his palm, a white insect enveloped in Spiritual Energy wriggled rapidly.

"The Heart-Devouring Gu Insect?!" Dao Wuming was horrified, shrieking, "You... You were able to force out the Heart-Devouring Gu?!"

Chapter 236: Slap to Death!

"A mere Heart-Devouring Gu, and you think you have a hold on me?" Lin Mu said scornfully. "Dao Wuming, I truly don't know if you're too stupid or just too conceited."

Dao Wuming's face filled with resentment, but he still wanted to make one last effort. "Lin Mu, let me be honest. If you join the organization, the benefits will be immense. But if you insist on going your own way, it won't do you any good."

"Are you threatening me?" Lin Mu's eyebrow twitched as a powerful aura suddenly erupted from him.

BOOM!

Dao Wuming instantly felt immense pressure crash down on his shoulders. His legs gave out, and he fell to his knees.

"Lin Mu, do you really want an endless feud with the organization?" Dao Wuming gritted his teeth. "This is a lose-lose situation, with no benefit for either of us."

"You think far too highly of yourself, and you overestimate your Dark Web," Lin Mu said as he stood up, an innate majesty radiating from him. "I never bow to threats, nor am I afraid of them."

He looked down on Dao Wuming and said flatly, "If anyone dares to threaten me, I'll simply kill them."

"Fine! Fine! In that case, don't even think about leaving here today!" Dao Wuming sneered and roared, "Men!"

BANG!

The private room doors were blasted open, revealing Glasses standing at the entrance with a large group of men. These individuals were all powerful, their faces brimming with murderous intent. In the shadows, numerous other assassins also lurked.

All sorts of weapons were trained on Lin Mu.

Having dared to invite Lin Mu, Dao Wuming had naturally come prepared.

"Lin Mu, I'll give you one last chance!" Dao Wuming retreated behind the crowd. "Join the organization, and we'll be family. Otherwise, this day next year will mark the anniversary of your death!"

"Cut the crap. Since I dared to come here, I'm obviously not afraid of whatever backup you have planned," Lin Mu said, standing with his hands behind his back, looking at Dao Wuming without a trace of fear.

"Kill!" Since matters had come to this, further words were useless. Dao Wuming immediately gave the order.

"Heh, today, I want to see for myself if this so-called Martial Arts Grandmaster is as powerful as the rumors say!" Glasses took off his spectacles, and his aura suddenly surged.

Internal Energy Early Stage, Mid Stage, Late Stage...

It didn't stop, continuing to rise until it reached the Internal Energy Peak before gradually leveling off.

This man, Glasses, was actually an expert at the Internal Energy Peak!

"Allow me to introduce him. This is Yuwen Jing. His master is one of our organization's Martial Arts Grandmasters." Dao Wuming wore a confident smile. "Lin Mu, the power of our organization is beyond your wildest imagination!"

"Dao Wuming, you talk too much," Yuwen Jing said, cracking his neck. "A Grandmaster? It's not like I haven't killed one before. Today, I'll show you what true power looks like!"

"Kill!"

At Yuwen Jing's command, the powerful Martial Artists charged toward Lin Mu, their auras exploding.

"You think this trash can kill me?" Lin Mu shook his head slightly and flicked his wrist.

SWOOSH!

The business card in his hand, wrapped in spiritual power, shot out like a sharp blade.

PFFT! PFFT! PFFT!

In the blink of an eye, three Martial Artists had their throats slit.

"Guh..." The three men clutched their necks, but blood gushed out from between their fingers. The sneers were still frozen on their faces as they slowly collapsed to the ground, lifeless.

The expressions on Yuwen Jing and Dao Wuming's faces changed.

"Manipulating objects with energy?!"

Both were experts of the Martial Way and naturally understood what this meant. This was the true hallmark of a Martial Arts Grandmaster! It proved that Lin Mu was indeed a genuine Martial Arts Grandmaster. Moreover, killing with a business card was something no ordinary Grandmaster could do.

But Lin Mu's attack didn't stop there. Under his control, the business card seemed to have a life of its own. Carrying an endless killing intent, it mercilessly reaped one life after another.

THUD!

As the last man fell, only Dao Wuming and Yuwen Jing remained in the entire private room.

"Well, well, it seems I misjudged you!" Yuwen Jing took a deep breath and said coldly, "But don't get ahead of yourself!"

"Do it!"

The moment Yuwen Jing spoke, Lin Mu sensed a subtle fluctuation in the air. His expression flickered for an instant before returning to normal.

SIZZLE!

A beam of energy shot from behind Lin Mu, aimed to pierce straight through his body. But with a flicker, Lin Mu dodged it preemptively.

BOOM!

The beam of light struck a pillar, silently boring a hole the size of an arm straight through it.

"A Laser Weapon!" Lin Mu revealed himself in a corner, a hint of surprise on his face. He hadn't expected the Dark Web to possess laser weapons.

"How... how is that possible?" Seeing that Lin Mu had actually dodged the laser weapon, both Yuwen Jing and Dao Wuming's faces changed drastically. This was their true trump card. Within the organization, these weapons had all been tested against real Grandmasters and were proven to be capable of inflicting serious harm.

"In my eyes, these toys are all flash and no substance." Lin Mu chuckled softly, his figure vanishing on the spot.

"AHHH!"

A moment later, several shrill screams echoed from the shadows.

TAP, TAP, TAP.

The sound of footsteps followed as Lin Mu walked out from the back of the private room, holding two heads. On the decapitated heads, their eyes were bulging and their features were twisted, unable to rest in peace.

THUD!

Lin Mu casually tossed the heads aside and clapped his hands. "Alright. If you have any other tricks, now's the time to use them."

Dao Wuming and Yuwen Jing exchanged a look, seeing the terror in each other's eyes.

How could Lin Mu be this powerful?

It wasn't that they had never seen a Martial Arts Grandmaster before; Yuwen Jing's own master was one. But none of them were as strong as Lin Mu.

Unafraid of the Heart-Devouring Gu and faster than a laser weapon... was he even human?

"Lin Mu, I..."

Before Dao Wuming could finish, Lin Mu waved his hand impatiently. A surge of power shot out from his palm.

SLAP!

Dao Wuming spun in place as his head flew from his shoulders.

PLOP.

His body collapsed to the floor, blood pooling around it. The esteemed head of the Dark Web's River City branch had just been slapped to death by Lin Mu.

Now, only Yuwen Jing remained.

At that moment, not a trace of confidence remained on his face—only pure terror.

Even Dao Wuming had been slapped to death. This guy is terrifying! With that thought, Yuwen Jing didn't hesitate for a second and turned to flee.

"Trying to leave now? Don't you think it's a bit late?"

Just as Yuwen Jing rushed out of the private room, an indifferent voice echoed from behind him.

"No!" Yuwen Jing shrieked, his Internal Energy erupting from his body as he accelerated, trying desperately to escape.

"If I let you escape, wouldn't my title of Grandmaster be a complete sham?" Lin Mu smiled faintly and struck out with his palm.

Feeling the force of the wind at his back, Yuwen Jing's face filled with despair. Just as Lin Mu's palm strike was about to kill him, an exceedingly hoarse voice suddenly rang out.

"If you kill him, I guarantee you'll suffer a fate worse than death!"

Chapter 237: Heavenly Emperor Nine Steps!

An old man appeared at the entrance of Qi Shi Xuan.

A pair of triangular eyes stared intently at Lin Mu.

The newcomer was Ding Fengqiu.

Ding Fengqiu looked at Lin Mu and said with a chilling tone, "If you kill him, I'll make you wish for death but deny you even that!"

Two vibrant green snakes were coiled around his wrists, hissing toward Lin Mu.

"Martial Uncle, save me!"

Seeing Ding Fengqiu, Yuwen Jing's face lit up with ecstatic joy, and he scrambled toward him.

"Who can stop me from killing the man I want dead?"

Lin Mu smiled indifferently. His body flickered, and he reappeared behind Yuwen Jing, slapping down with his palm.

"Unc—"

SLAP!

Yuwen Jing had only uttered a single syllable before his head flew from his shoulders, landing right in front of Ding Fengqiu.

PFFT!

Blood gushed from Yuwen Jing's neck like a fountain, splattering across Ding Fengqiu's clothes.

Seeing the lingering pain and despair on Yuwen Jing's face, Ding Fengqiu's expression turned hideous.

"Good... very good... excellent!" Ding Fengqiu spat out, his voice turning glacial. "Lin Mu, you killed my disciple, and today you've killed my martial nephew. This blood feud is irreconcilable. I will kill you today!"

"Go!"

As soon as he finished speaking, one of the green snakes on his wrist arched its body and shot out.

HISS!

Though small, the snake was incredibly venomous. It was a Gu Insect that Ding Fengqiu had spent a great deal to tame. It was called the Puppet Gu.

Even a Martial Arts Grandmaster bitten by it would become completely rigid, no different from a puppet. The snake was exceptionally fast. In the blink of an eye, it was before Lin Mu, its fangs bared to strike.

"Such disgraceful trash. How dare you embarrass yourself in front of me," Lin Mu chuckled, waving his hand gently.

A beam of sword light flashed from his palm, instantly slicing through the small snake.

SCHLICK!

The snake stiffened mid-air before its movement ceased entirely. It fell to the ground in two pieces, cleaved in half by Lin Mu's single strike.

Seeing this, Ding Fengqiu's face paled.

"You dare destroy my Gu Insect? You're courting death!"

Ding Fengqiu roared in fury, and the last green snake on his wrist dropped to the floor.

PFFT!

The moment the small snake landed, it opened its mouth and spat out a cloud of smoke. The stench was incredibly foul; an ordinary person who smelled it would have their flesh rot away.

RUSTLE! RUSTLE! RUSTLE!

Following the release of the smoke, countless snakes, insects, rats, and ants swarmed out from every corner of Qi Shi Xuan. Their sheer number was enough to make one's skin crawl, and every one of them was laced with deadly poison.

"A Gu King?"

Lin Mu raised an eyebrow. He hadn't expected Ding Fengqiu to have nurtured a Gu King.

Ding Fengqiu sneered, "Lin Mu, hand over the Nine-Star Bloodshadow Worm and your cultivation technique right now, and I can spare your life. Otherwise, I'll make sure not even your bones remain!"

These venomous creatures were all summoned by the Gu King under his command. Any ordinary Martial Artist who encountered them would face certain death, and even a Grandmaster would find themselves in significant trouble.

Ding Fengqiu had already made up his mind. Even if Lin Mu surrendered the Nine-Star Bloodshadow Worm and his cultivation technique, he would not be spared. After killing his disciple and now his martial nephew, this grudge would not be so easily forgotten.

However, far from showing fear, Lin Mu's eyes held a look of ridicule.

"When it comes to insect-controlling arts, I'm far more skilled than you."

Lin Mu smiled faintly. He suddenly stared at the Gu King, which was coiled among the swarm with its head held high. An invisible wave of Divine Soul power erupted from him.

A flicker of human-like fear appeared deep within the pupils of the green snake. Its gaze went slack, and it silently turned around to face Ding Fengqiu.

"Hm?"

Ding Fengqiu froze for a second before his expression changed drastically.

"You've taken control of my Gu King?!"

He felt his connection to the green snake snap, and he coughed up a mouthful of blood. When a Gu King's control was seized, its master suffered a severe backlash.

"Your barbarian techniques are only good for scaring common folk. Against me, they are completely useless."

Lin Mu snapped his fingers. The green snake leaped into the air and shot toward Ding Fengqiu.

His face contorted in panic, Ding Fengqiu screamed, "Bite him! Go bite him!"

But the Gu King was now under Lin Mu's control. Ignoring its former master's commands, it lunged and bit down. Not only that, but the countless venomous creatures it controlled also swarmed madly toward Ding Fengqiu.

"AAHHH!"

In the blink of an eye, Ding Fengqiu was enveloped by the horde, letting out a piercing scream.

"Get off me!"

He roared, his True Yuan erupting to blast away the swarms of insects. But the creatures were too numerous. By the time Ding Fengqiu had annihilated them all, his own body was covered in wounds.

The Gu Insects were highly toxic. Even though Ding Fengqiu was ranked twenty-second on the Heavenly Ranking, the flesh on his face and body had begun to rot, making for a gruesome sight.

He had spent his life refining and using Gu, only to finally suffer from their backlash. It was a fitting turn of the Heavenly Dao.

Having narrowly escaped death, Ding Fengqiu glared at Lin Mu with a look of pure, sinister hatred. "Brat, I will remember this!"

Lin Mu said flatly, "I never said I was letting you go."

Since this Ding Fengqiu was also a member of the Dark Web, he deserved to die.

"You want to kill me?"

Ding Fengqiu gave a cruel laugh. "Do you think I'm a weakling like Yun Xu? My rank on the Heavenly Ranking is higher than his. If you want to kill me, come back after a few more years of training!"

"Is that so?" Lin Mu said indifferently. "Your rank on the Heavenly Ranking means nothing. Killing you won't be difficult. It's just a matter of one step."

As his words fell, Lin Mu slowly took a single step forward.

The moment his foot landed, the ground roared with a thunderous sound, and the entire floor of Qi Shi Xuan sank.

Ding Fengqiu's pupils constricted.

This boy's power is unfathomable. I am no match for him. It's better to avoid a direct confrontation for now.

Having made his decision, Ding Fengqiu moved to flee even faster.

"I told you. You're not leaving!"

As Lin Mu's voice faded, he took a second step.

When his foot touched the ground, Ding Fengqiu felt an invisible force in the air bind him completely.

"What is this power?!"

His eyes filled with terror, and his heart pounded with fear.

"Heavenly Emperor Nine Steps!"

Lin Mu's cold voice echoed from the sky.

Ding Fengqiu spun around, and his heart seized.

Lin Mu was standing in the air directly above him.

"Die!"

Lin Mu took another step.

As this foot descended, Ding Fengqiu felt the entire world plunge into darkness, leaving only the sight of that one enormous foot.

Heavenly Emperor Nine Steps.

One Step, Rivers Shatter!

Terrify Ghosts and Gods with the Second Step!

Third Step: Heaven and Earth Change!

BOOM!

The foot landed. Before Ding Fengqiu could even scream, he was stomped into a paste of flesh and blood.

A mighty Heavenly Ranking Grandmaster, stamped to death by Lin Mu with a single foot.

If word of this got out, the entire Martial Arts World would be thrown into chaos.

Looking at the devastation around him, Lin Mu smiled faintly. He took out his phone and called Guan Chengye.

"Elder Guan, it's time to close the net."

"Yes, Master Lin!"

Hanging up, Lin Mu looked up at the sky and murmured to himself, "From this day forward, the Dark Web will be no more in River City."

Chapter 238: Zhang Daoyun's Challenge!

"The Venerable Master has given the order! Begin closing the net!"

"The Venerable Master has given the order! Exterminate the Dark Web!"

"The Venerable Master has given the order..."

The great families, together with the power of the Guan Family, launched a bloody purge in River City. For a time, River City was plunged into turmoil, and its people lived in constant fear. The other major families, all tense, shuttered their gates and did not venture out.

After nightfall, the eradication of the Dark Web gradually concluded, but the major families of River City made a shocking discovery. In just a single day, two of the city's great families had vanished, while countless companies and enterprises had gone bankrupt. The Family Heads and the leaders of these enterprises were either thrown in prison or had disappeared completely.

This news left countless other Family Heads and corporate leaders pale with terror. They mobilized various forces to investigate but came up with nothing. After all, the Guan Family had acted personally, and they were following orders from the Military Department. As for the fact that Lin Mu was behind it all, no one dared to breathe a word.

The Dark Web's assets in River City were either carved up by the other great families or delivered to Lin Mu for his disposal. Lin Mu, however, paid this matter little mind. What had captured his attention were three major events that had occurred in the Martial Arts World over the past few days.

First, the Sword God, Shen Lang, had walked into Dragon Tiger Mountain three days prior, a single sword in hand, to challenge Zhang Daoyun, the current Heavenly Master of the Celestial Master Mansion.

The details of that battle never circulated, but it was said that on that day, for miles around Dragon Tiger Mountain, Sword Qi crisscrossed the sky like a divine miracle. At dusk, someone saw a figure resembling the Sword God leaving Dragon Tiger Mountain, his movements graceful and showing no signs of injury.

That night, an order was issued from the Celestial Master Mansion: Dragon Tiger Mountain would be sealed for one year. Any outsiders who trespassed would be treated as mortal enemies.

Sealing the mountain? For a sect, this was an extreme measure, only taken in the face of a true crisis or a monumental event. Thus, most people concluded that in the battle between Zhang Daoyun and the Sword God, the former had suffered a crushing defeat.

The very next day, the second piece of news emerged: Heavenly Master Zhang Daoyun of the Celestial Master Mansion announced that in one year's time, he would challenge River City Lin Wudi.

This news sent shockwaves through all of Huaxia.

River City Lin Wudi! He was a supreme expert, ranked sixteenth on the Heavenly List. Though not yet thirty, he was rumored to be a peerless prodigy. He had cemented his position in the Martial Arts World after his battle on the Bolan River, where he annihilated Yun Xu, the True Immortal of Thunder Law of the Celestial Master Mansion, with his bare hands. That victory earned him his spot on the Heavenly List.

And now, the Heavenly Master Zhang Daoyun intended to challenge him in a year? Was this to avenge his junior brother, Yun Xu? And what was the connection between this and the Sword God's challenge on Dragon Tiger Mountain?

Setting those two matters aside, the third piece of news took even Lin Mu by surprise: the Martial Alliance had accepted Zhang Daoyun's challenge on Lin Mu's behalf.

The Martial Alliance accepting the challenge on Lin Wudi's behalf? What was going on?

Facing questions from all sides, the Martial Alliance offered an explanation: "All martial artists in the world are under the jurisdiction of the Martial Alliance!"

They claimed their reason for accepting on Lin Wudi's behalf was for the sake of the bigger picture. After all, one party was the Celestial Master Mansion, which held the reins of Taoism in the world. The other was the most outstanding, newly ascended Grandmaster the Martial Arts World had seen in a century. If the two were not allowed to fight, the animosity between the Celestial Master Mansion and Lin Wudi would only deepen, which would be detrimental to both the Martial Arts World and Huaxia. Besides, with Lin Wudi's talent, who knew how much stronger he would become in a year?

At this, the Martial Arts World fell silent, and the matter gradually died down.

Lin Mu, however, sensed something else brewing beneath the surface. His relationship with the Martial Alliance was far from good. Their actions were clearly born from a fear that he would refuse Zhang Daoyun's challenge. After all, as the Heavenly Master of the Celestial Master Mansion, Zhang Daoyun's strength was bound to be unfathomable.

Although his name did not appear on the Heavenly List, the consensus in the Martial Arts World was that Zhang Daoyun had already broken into the top ten. By rule, the top ten of the Heavenly List were not publicly announced.

Someone in the top ten challenging someone ranked sixteenth! Anyone could see this would be a battle with a foregone conclusion. That was why the Martial Alliance had been so eager to accept on Lin Mu's behalf.

"The Martial Alliance?"

In his study, Lin Mu smiled faintly. He wasn't worried about Zhang Daoyun in the slightest. It was the Martial Alliance's attitude that displeased him.

They probably would have wanted Zhang Daoyun to come and kill me right now if he hadn't been severely injured in his fight with the Sword God. Lin Mu's eyes glinted with sarcasm. It seems some people are truly eager for my death. The one-year delay isn't for me to cultivate; it's to give Zhang Daoyun time to heal.

"Zhang Daoyun, is it?" Lin Mu laughed nonchalantly. "One year from now, I'll be waiting for you."

...

"Master Lin, you've heard about it, haven't you?"

The moment Guan Chengye learned the news, he sought out Lin Mu, his expression fraught with worry.

"Mm, I've heard," Lin Mu nodded casually, not taking the matter to heart at all.

Seeing his attitude, Guan Chengye felt a touch helpless and urged, "Master Lin, you must not accept this challenge!"

"Oh?" Lin Mu raised an eyebrow. "And why is that?"

Guan Chengye's expression was grave as he said, "Master Lin, Zhang Daoyun's strength is beyond what any ordinary person can imagine. He is a direct descendant of the Celestial Master Mansion, and his life story is the stuff of legends."

Having served in the Military Department and being a part of the Martial Arts World, Guan Chengye knew more about such matters than others.

"Legend has it that he could speak from the moment he was born, and the words he spoke were the countless Daoist scriptures of the Celestial Master Mansion.

"He began practicing with the sword at the age of three. He not only mastered all the sword manuals of the Celestial Master Mansion but comprehended them more completely than any ordinary person!

"At seven, he could fight an Inner Strength expert to a standstill.

"By eighteen, he had entered the Celestial Master Mansion's Ancestral Master Hall and was named the successor by the previous Heavenly Master."

Guan Chengye's voice grew hoarse. "At twenty, it was rumored he had already reached the realm of Grandmaster, though it was never confirmed. But think about it—with Zhang Daoyun's talent, people would believe it even if you said he became a Grandmaster much earlier. After all these years, who knows how much stronger he has become.

"I don't know if there is a realm higher than a Martial Arts Grandmaster in this world, but if there is, Zhang Daoyun is definitely one of those who has reached it!" His face filled with awe. "A person of that realm can hardly be considered human anymore."

Lin Mu's expression gradually turned serious. He had not expected Zhang Daoyun to be so formidable. Of course, it wasn't his realm that was formidable.

It was his innate knowledge.

Perhaps this Zhang Daoyun, just like me, is a reincarnated person carrying memories from a past life. Otherwise, it would be impossible for him to know so many of the Celestial Master Mansion's Daoist scriptures and sword manuals. In fact, Lin Mu was almost certain that the man was the reincarnation of a past sage from the Celestial Master Mansion.

If that was the case, then this was a battle he absolutely could not miss.

Since his return, every enemy he had faced had been far too weak to spark any real interest. Now that someone like Zhang Daoyun had finally appeared, he couldn't possibly let the opportunity go.

"Elder Guan, rest assured. I have my own plans," Lin Mu said reassuringly, while thinking to himself, Zhang Daoyun, you had better not disappoint me.

Chapter 239: Heading to Southern Sky!

「Two days ago.」

「On the day the River City Dark Web Branch was annihilated.」

「In a great mountain within the Southern Tri-Province.」

An Elder in a black robe held a small, ancient-looking cauldron, which was trembling intermittently.

With each tremor, the Elder's expression grew more grave, and he would occasionally spit a mouthful of blood onto the cauldron. As the blood splattered onto it, the cauldron seemed to come alive, absorbing the liquid. After absorbing the blood, the trembling cauldron gradually calmed down.

After this was repeated several times, a faint smile appeared on the Elder's face.

"Success!"

His eyes brimming with joy, the Elder caressed the small cauldron lovingly.

"High Priest!"

Just then, a knock came from the door.

The Elder's expression darkened instantly as he grunted, "Haven't I told you? Do not disturb me unless it is a matter of utmost importance!"

The person outside seemed to fear the Elder, his voice trembling as he spoke. "Elder Sang Ge and Du Ta's soul worms are dead!"

"What?!"

Alarmed, the Elder abruptly stood up and strode out the door. At the entrance stood a young man in strange attire, his face adorned with colorful makeup. Several bulging pouches hung from his waist.

"When did this happen?!" the Elder roared, a terrifying aura erupting from him.

The young man fell to his knees with a thud and kowtowed frantically. "Just now!"

"Who did this? Junior Brother Sang Ge was protected by the Gu King, and Du Ta had two Hidden Guards with him. How could they have died?" Though furious, the Elder was also shocked.

While Sang Ge wasn't the strongest in the village, according to the standards of the outside world, he had the cultivation level of a Grandmaster. With the Gu King's protection, he should have had more than enough power to escape from two Grandmasters, even if he couldn't win the fight.

And yet, his Junior Brother Sang Ge was dead. So was his disciple, Du Ta! The two Hidden Guards, who were among the organization's most powerful forces, were also dead. This was clearly too much for the Elder to accept.

"According to our subordinates' investigation, they were killed in River City by someone named Lin Wudi. The specific details are still unknown," the young man said.

"Lin Wudi?"

The Elder snorted coldly. "And who is this Lin Wudi?"

The young man replied honestly, "We don't know. We're still investigating."

The Elder scoffed, "Useless! You can't even handle such a simple task!"

With a slap to the small cauldron he held, a colorful shadow shot out from its opening.

"High Priest, spare me!"

The young man screamed in terror, but the shadow was incredibly fast, landing on him in the blink of an eye.

It was a butterfly with a skull pattern on its wings!

The young man watched in horror as the butterfly landed on his face.

HISS...

A piercing scream followed, and the young man's entire body melted into a puddle of blood. It had all happened in a matter of seconds.

"Hmph. Useless trash. You're lucky I didn't throw you into the Dragon Lair, yet you dared to beg for your life!"

The Elder recalled the colorful butterfly, a look of satisfaction on his face.

"This Gu King," he mused to himself, "could easily rank in the top three in all of the Miao Territory."

He then snorted coldly. "But to dare kill my Junior Brother and my disciple... I will have my revenge for this!"

Lin Wudi, is it? I will remember this name!

「River City.」

Lin Mu awoke from his seclusion. Feeling the density of the Spiritual Energy within his body, a satisfied smile appeared on his face. After a period of consolidation, Lin Mu had finally broken through to the Ninth Level of Qi Refining.

It wouldn't be long before he could break through to the tenth level. By then, he would have many more techniques at his disposal. Against the likes of Zhang Daoyun, he could hold his own in a fight. After his conversation with Guan Chengye, Lin Mu had started to take Zhang Daoyun seriously. The priority now was to increase his strength as quickly as possible.

I wonder how their preparations are going.

After some thought, Lin Mu dialed Cheng Bugui's number.

"Venerable Master, the matter you asked me to look into has been thoroughly investigated." Cheng Bugui's tone was deeply respectful, even over the phone.

Lin Mu said, "Speak."

"Reporting to you, Venerable Master, the Chen Family has indeed made some moves recently." After eradicating the Dark Web, Cheng Bugui absorbed some of its forces, and his influence now made him the number one figure in River City's underworld. He was the most suitable person to investigate such matters. "When the Fang Family from Jiangling came to River City, their first stop was the Chen Family. The Family Head, Chen Tianxiong, met with the Fang Family People for several hours," Cheng Bugui reported in detail.

As expected, the Chen Family has made its move.

Lin Mu asked, "Anything else?"

"Also, the Chen Family is planning to invest in our company, but this is just a rumor we heard from their side. I can't confirm if it's true," Cheng Bugui said with a laugh. He knew a little about the relationship between his Venerable Master and the Chen Family.

Lin Mu also laughed. "If they really want to invest, you know what to do."

"Yes, Venerable Master!"

After hanging up with Cheng Bugui, Lin Mu made another call to Liang Yue, the Liang Family Head.

"Venerable Master, I was just about to call you," Liang Yue said, sounding excited to receive Lin Mu's call.

"Have you found the things I asked for?" Lin Mu asked, his own excitement growing.

He was now at the Ninth Level of Qi Refining and on the verge of breaking through to the tenth. He needed to start preparing the materials for Foundation Establishment. He was confident that he would definitely break through to the Twelfth Level of Qi Refining within three months.

The Liang Family's medicinal herb business was second to none in River City. With their numerous channels, they were the most qualified to find the herbs required for cultivation.

"We've only found four of the types you listed. We haven't been able to find the remaining three," Liang Yue said with some trepidation. He was worried the Venerable Master would blame him for his inefficiency. But the medicinal herbs the Venerable Master required were simply too rare. Of the four types they did find, two were considered treasures of the Liang Family's own collection. But since the Venerable Master required them, it was his duty as a subordinate to do his utmost.

"You've done well," Lin Mu said. "After all, the herbs I need are uncommon. Finding four types has already exceeded my expectations."

Hearing Lin Mu's praise, Liang Yue felt a wave of relief. He quickly added, "Venerable Master, I actually know the location of the other three herbs. I was just about to send people to retrieve them."

"Oh?"

Lin Mu was surprised. The medicinal herbs he had asked Liang Yue to find were all needed to concoct the Foundation Establishment Pill. In the Immortal Realm, they were commonplace, but on an Earth where Spiritual Energy was depleted, finding even one was a matter of incredible luck. Yet Liang Yue had found four and had leads on the other three. This was a pleasant surprise for Lin Mu.

"Where?" Lin Mu asked impatiently.

"Southern Sky!"

Liang Yue explained, "The Southern Tri-Province is in the southwestern part of our country. It is filled with dense forests and deep mountains and has been slow to develop. As a result, many rare medicinal herbs can be found there. Many of our Liang Family's herbs are sourced through channels in that region, but..." Liang Yue hesitated.

"But what?"

"But the three herbs you require are in a village in Qianzhou, Southern Province. The people there are very xenophobic, which makes it difficult to purchase or trade for these three herbs."

Lin Mu pondered for a moment before asking, "When are your people heading to Southern Sky?"

"Venerable Master, you mean..."

"That's right," Lin Mu said. "I plan on making the trip to Southern Sky myself."

Chapter 240: Sour Soup Fish!

「Two days later.」

On an off-road vehicle heading to Qianzhou, Southern Province, the driver was a casually dressed girl. She was under twenty years old but very pretty.

"Mr. Lin, we will arrive at Kai City in two more hours. Our destination this time is Thunder Mountain in Kai City."

Inside the car, Liang Sheng looked at Lin Mu excitedly and began to explain earnestly. Ever since Lin Mu had saved him at the martial arts meeting in River City, Liang Sheng had remained deeply grateful. He had tried to visit several times, but his elder brother always stopped him, even reminding him to show more respect to the Venerable Master. Traveling with Lin Mu this time, Liang Sheng felt both excited and nervous.

After all, he was sharing a car with Grandmaster Lin Wudi, ranked sixteenth on the Heavenly List! It's just that the Venerable Master is so low-profile. I'm only calling him Mr. Lin or Young Master Mu... if my big brother finds out when I get back, who knows how he'll chew me out.

"Mm. I'll rest for a bit. Call me when we arrive," Lin Mu nodded, then closed his eyes.

His only purpose for heading to Southern Sky was to find those three medicinal herbs, but he had a premonition that this trip would not go smoothly.

"Understood, Mr. Lin. You rest well; I'll call you when we get there," Liang Sheng said respectfully.

"Dad, why are you so polite to this guy? You're not like that normally," the girl driving said irritably. "I've never even seen you be this courteous with the elders in our family."

"Shut up!" Liang Sheng scolded in a low voice. "What do you know? Just drive the car!"

"Fine, I don't get it! You're the one who gets it, alright?" the girl retorted, puffing out her cheeks in dissatisfaction.

From their first meeting, Liang Shanshan had been unhappy with her father's overly courteous, even groveling, treatment of Lin Mu. It left a bitter taste in her mouth. In her heart, her father had always been a hero. Yet today, she saw him acting so cautious and reverent in front of a young man not much older than herself. She was utterly indignant.

"Shanshan, don't be so resentful," Liang Sheng said with a wry smile. "Mr. Lin's strength is far beyond what you can imagine. So, you must be polite and respectful to him in the future. It can only do you good, no harm."

"Strength?" Liang Shanshan scoffed disdainfully. "Dad, don't tell me this arrogant guy is a martial artist?"

She, Liang Shanshan, had also practiced martial arts with her father since she was young, but to this day, forget Internal Energy, she wasn't even an Innate Martial Artist. Although her skills weren't great, three or four burly men were no match for her. How old was the guy in the back anyway? Even if he'd started training in the womb, he probably wasn't as strong as her.

"Ah, you stubborn girl. You'll understand in due time," Liang Sheng said helplessly.

Liang Shanshan pretended not to hear.

...

Lin Mu opened his eyes.

"Have we arrived?" He glanced outside and noticed that the people here were dressed differently, exuding an exotic charm. He also found some of their speech hard to understand.

A dissatisfied voice immediately came from the driver's seat. "We've been here for a while! If it weren't for my dad seeing you were still asleep, we would have already reached Thunder Mountain. Because of you, we have to stay in Kai City for the day and can only go to Thunder Mountain tomorrow!

"Do you have any idea how precious our time is? Do you think everyone is as idle as you are?"

Her father had told her that this man was from some family in River City and had just come along for a sightseeing trip. What did he think she was? A tour guide? They were here to procure medicinal herbs!

Liang Shanshan was already annoyed with Lin Mu, and now that he had caused a significant delay, her resentment grew. Staying an extra day in Kai City would disrupt their entire schedule. The Liang Family was in the medicinal herb business, so Liang Shanshan knew better than anyone that they couldn't afford delays at a time like this. If someone else beat them to it, they would return empty-handed.

"Sorry, it was my fault you've been held up," Lin Mu apologized, feeling somewhat embarrassed.

Liang Shanshan snorted coldly, seeming to not appreciate the gesture.

Lin Mu felt a bit helpless but didn't offer any further explanation.

Just then, Liang Sheng walked over. "Mr. Lin, you're awake?" Seeing him up, he said, "Mr. Lin, by the looks of it, we won't be able to reach Thunder Mountain today. How about we rest here for the night and go tomorrow?"

Lin Mu naturally had no objections.

"Alright, let's do as you say."

Liang Sheng immediately beamed with joy. "Oh, Mr. Lin, please don't say that! This is what I should be doing."

"Hmph!"

Unable to stand her father's obsequious behavior any longer, Liang Shanshan threw open the car door and got out.

BANG!

She slammed the door shut.

"Uh..." Lin Mu was a bit embarrassed.

Liang Sheng, however, just smiled. "Mr. Lin, don't mind the girl. That's just her temperament. I'll have a word with her when I get the chance."

Lin Mu shook his head. "No need. It's not as if she's wrong."

Then, Lin Mu also got out of the car. "Let's go. I've heard the local snacks here are quite good. Let's give them a try."

"My treat!"

Liang Sheng was overjoyed and chuckled.

"Oh, how could I accept? How could I possibly accept? But, I do know a place that makes excellent sour soup fish. Let's go try it!" Despite his polite protests, Liang Sheng showed no hesitation.

So, the three of them found a small restaurant hidden in an alley, where Liang Sheng ordered three fish and several side dishes in one go.

"Boss, add more bean sprouts and extra sour soup! And make it quick!" Liang Sheng called out before sitting down with a grin.

The restaurant was small, with room for only three or four tables, but business was good and it was completely full. The owner had to bring out a small folding table and place it by the doorway for them.

"Oh my, I'm so sorry, everyone. It's busy today, so I'll have to ask you three to make do here," the owner, a young man whose Mandarin had a thick accent but was still understandable, apologized profusely. "I'll give you a discount later to make up for it."

"No need, no need. Go on with your work," Liang Sheng said, waving his hand.

"You got it! Please take a seat, your food will be right out!" the owner said cheerfully before hurrying away.

Liang Sheng turned to Lin Mu. "Mr. Lin, don't judge it by its appearance. I guarantee that after one taste of this place's sour soup fish, you'll be craving a second."

"Greatness often hides in plain sight. Many of the world's finest delicacies are found in deep mountains and old forests," Lin Mu replied with a smile.

"You seem to know a thing or two," Liang Shanshan commented, glancing at Lin Mu.

Lin Mu just chuckled, offering no explanation.

Interestingly, for a woman from the city, Liang Shanshan showed no disdain for the modest establishment and even seemed quite delighted. This wasn't an act but a genuine expression. This girl isn't half bad, Lin Mu thought.

"Here you go! Your sour soup fish for three!"

Shortly after, the owner brought over a large pot. The broth inside was bubbling and steaming, and three tenderly cooked fish tumbled merrily within.

"Let's dig in!"

As soon as the pot was on the table, Liang Shanshan eagerly grabbed a bowl and started to ladle soup for herself.

"Mr. Lin, with sour soup fish, you have to drink the broth first and then eat the fish. The flavor is simply divine!" Liang Sheng explained, uncharacteristically refraining from scolding his daughter.

The three of them ate the three fish and several side dishes until they were dripping with sweat, exclaiming in delight.

Toward the end, Liang Shanshan and Lin Mu even started fighting over the last few morsels. It couldn't be helped; it was Lin Mu's first time trying such a deliciously sour and spicy dish. Paired with the restaurant's unique local side dishes, the meal was absolutely addicting.

And he also discovered that this Liang Shanshan could really eat.

Two pairs of chopsticks lunged for the last fishbone at the same time.

Their eyes met, and sparks flew.

"Mine!" Liang Shanshan put force into her wrist, trying to snag the fishbone and pull it into her bowl.

However, the other pair of chopsticks were quicker.

The fishbone did a little twirl in the air and was snatched away.

Lin Mu, holding the fishbone with his chopsticks, declared, "You lose."

"Hmph!"

Although resentful, Liang Shanshan accepted her defeat and put down her chopsticks.

Just then, the young man across from her placed the fishbone in her bowl.

"Go on, eat it. I'm full."

Liang Shanshan was taken aback and glanced at him.

His face bore a faint smile.

"Hmph. You're the one who gave it to me, so don't you dare say I didn't play fair."

Without further ceremony, Liang Shanshan picked up the fishbone and began to slurp away, the rich flavor making her eyes narrow in bliss.

Hmph. It seems this guy isn't so detestable after all.