

Chapter 241 - Before the Ceremony (Three)

She placed the sword on the marble table in the courtyard. The westward sun turned the sea of clouds into a blazing ocean, which reflected on the long blade. It suddenly added a glorious splash of colour to the ordinary sword.

Yu Zijian squinted her eyes and crouched by the table, staring straight at the sword.

The sword laid there quietly, without moving at all.

Clang~

Yu Zijian suddenly stood up. The sound clearly seemed to originate by her ear, but it also seemed to come from the bottom of her heart. She stood up and opened the door, stepping onto the small path covered in verdant grass.

She was in a daze, as if she was in a dream. She was unable to control herself, as if something was calling for her in her heart.

The small path twisted a few times before suddenly opening up. Presented before her were a series of dilapidated walls, like the ruins of an ancient city.

The stone pillars that once held up the hall laid in the wild grass. The hall had already collapsed, while the statues had been weathered to a point where they were disfigured. However, she could still vaguely see their former glory.

Since when was there a place like this on the Green Vine mountain?

A question flashed through Yu Zijian's head, which vanished in a split second.

The setting sun added a splash of bright red to these ruins. No matter how unsophisticated or vulgar a person could be, they would still sigh involuntarily and in emotion at this sight.

As she strolled through these ruins that had almost been swallowed by the green grass, she felt like she had returned home, like she was an exiled princess and this was her home country.

After passing the white stone path covered in vines, she suddenly stopped.

A tiny pond sat in the embrace of verdant trees. The setting sunlight from the west reflected in the water, dyeing it in a beautiful colour.

A man in green robes sat on a round rock by the pond with his legs crossed. His young, thin face was stubbly, like he was sighing. He gave off agedness and weariness that only seemed to appear on old people who had seen and understood everything the world had to offer. He was like a lone king sitting on his collapsed throne, reminiscing his former glory and lamenting over the state of his current empire.

He was fishing, but he did not use a fishing pole. He used a sword. He held the hilt with both hands as a thread dangled straight down from the end of the sheathe into the mirror-like pond.

Yu Zijian's eyes were not set on this sight, or this person, but the sword. She seemed to be drawn in for no reason. She was confident that the graceful thrum from earlier originated from this sword.

"Have you seen this sword before?" The man in green turned around and looked at her in some surprise.

As if Yu Zijian had suddenly jerked awake from her dream, she looked around and almost tried to ask how she had ended up here. She was in a daze. "I haven't. You're not a disciple of the Green Vine mountain, are you?"

At a closer glance, while he did wear green, it differed greatly from the uniform of the Green Vine mountain. It seemed extremely worn-out, just like the sword in his hand.

The man in green said, "I'm not. Are you?"

Yu Zijian said, "I'm not either. You must be a guest invited to the mountain. You're not allowed to fish on the mountain!"

"Since you're not a disciple of the Green Vine mountain, why do you care?"

"I... Forget it. Fish. I'm going back. I'm not going to disturb your fishing." It was slightly inappropriate for a man and woman to be alone here. However, her gaze remained fixed on the sword. The familiar feeling was just like when she first met Niu Juxia.

The man in green said, "Do you want to take a look?"

"Can I?" Before Yu Zijian had even finished talking, the sword landed in her hands. It was weighty, and the thread automatically retreated into the sheath.

The sheath was an inky green, due to a combination of its original colour and the marks left behind with time. The material seemed like jade, yet also like wood. There was a fine image engraved on there, like the silhouette of a city, but it was incomplete and damaged.

"What is this sword called?"

"Green Ruins."

Clang~

Yu Zijian gripped the hilt and drew the sword. The familiar thrum rang out by her ear, just as expected, lingering for quite some time. It did not glow at all, but the shine of the sword was withdrawn like light through clear, autumn water.

"It's a fine sword!"

The man in green's expression revealed even more surprise than when he first saw Yu Zijian. He was shocked as a matter of fact.

"I'm done. I need to go," Yu Zijian sheathed the sword and tossed it back to the man reluctantly.

The man stood up. "Can you wait for me here?"

At this moment, the afterglow in the horizon began to subside.

"I can't. I'm busy." Yu Zijian skipped into the distance as she thought, Who are you? I don't even know you, yet you want me to wait for you. What a weirdo!

"What's your name?"

"I'm Yu Zijian," Yu Zijian said without looking back.

"I- I'm Fu Qingjin," Yu Zijian had already left the ruins and vanished into the thicket, so Fu Qingjin's voice tailed off, like he was talking to himself.

She could easily walk out of the Green Ruins Illusion, and she could draw the Green Ruins sword. The Divining Elder was right...

The first star lit up on the horizon. His gaze shone like a star's.

The scenery around him suddenly twisted like a mirage before vanishing. Only the pond remained, reflecting the black shade of the embracing trees.

Fu Qingjin's gaze passed through the vegetation and landed on the main hall at the top of the mountain.

There was only a single lantern within the dim hall, illuminating a tiny area. The three old men huddled around the lantern. They bore Hua Chengzan's warning in mind, afraid to split up and be taken out one by one.

The disciples of the various sects were on patrol outside. They were not there to help out, but to immediately report to Hua Chengzan as soon as they heard any disturbances.

There was a flash of green light, and the three old men suddenly discovered that the surroundings had changed. They sat within a series of ruins, while above them was the endless night sky, filled with stars.

"Since when?" The Golden Pheasant Elder paled in surprise.

"Thank you for waiting here together. It has saved me quite the trouble."

A voice rang out from behind. The three of them turned around at the same time and saw a man in green clothes walk down from the high steps. He was young yet aged, lonely yet noble.

The Green Vine Elder said, "Y- You're that person!"

"This commander Hua must have told you everything that needs to be said, right?" Fu Qingjin said calmly, as if he was too tired to even explain his reason for coming here.

The three old men stood in a triangle around him. Although they were old rivals, their teamwork was still flawless.

"I haven't come for the three mountains. My mission is not to win over you either."

The three old men exhaled in relief at basically the same time.

"Though, it'll be much more convenient if I win over you first. Don't worry, I won't harm you."

Before the three elders could even become angry, the green shine of the sword turned into thousands of strands and dispersed like fireflies.

A while later, the three elders emerged from the hall. The door was shut firmly behind them.

“Master, do we need to keep patrolling?”

“There’s no need. You can go,” the Green Vine Elder said with exhaustion.

The three of them looked at one another, as if they could see the fear that had yet to disperse, as well as each other’s understanding. No wonder Hua Chengzan had come in person to tell them. This person’s mission was actually to...

The Sword Collection palace really was as resolute as the legends painted it to be. However, if they really did go through with this, then it would be no exaggeration that the world would be in danger.

The Green Vine Elder said, “Please go back and rest. Make your preparations! The Herb Gathering ceremony is about to begin.”

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The deep, open pit was like a huge, hollow eye, staring at the sky.

Almost a thousand pairs of eyes looked back at this huge eye. They were filled with excitement, eagerness, and fear.

The whistling cold wind was unable to overwhelm the hubbub of voices. Everyone discussed among themselves.

The surroundings suddenly quietened. Under everyone’s attention, the three elders arrived by the pit.

The Green Vine Elder moved first to open the formation. Everyone only saw a membrane of light disperse.

The Golden Pheasant Elder’s hand shone with resplendent light, and the snow in the pit rapidly melted away, revealing over a dozen pitch-black caves. These caves were the entrance for the Herb Gathering ceremony. They led off to various parts underground.

Everyone gasped involuntarily, which immediately drowned out the wind.

The Green Vine Elder cleared his throat. “Gathered here, we’ll all be taking part in the Herb Gathering ceremony of the three mountains. It is an honour for me and fellows Golden Pheasant and Lone Grave...”

The dozen or so Hawkwolf guards led by Wu Gen moved through the independent cultivators, constantly examining the people around them, as if they were there to prevent anyone from sneaking into the ceremony.

The disciples of the three mountains were split into three groups, standing behind their respective sect masters. They were further divided into smaller squads.

Because of the past successes of the Herb Gathering ceremony, basically all the disciples of the mountains had been mobilised. It was impossible for over a hundred Qi Practitioners to move together. They would naturally separate from one another as they came across forks underground.

Yu Zijian peered about among them. Suddenly, someone tapped her shoulder gently. She turned around in a hurry and exclaimed happily, "Chenglu, what brings you here?"

Hua Chenglu kept her back bent. "Shh! Don't be so loud, or my brother will hear you. I'm worried for you, so I'll go down there with you to take a look."

Mu Zhicong suddenly called out, "Miss Hua, you're not a disciple of our Green Vine mountain, so please don't stand with us! If you want to participate in the ceremony, please stand with the independent cultivators!"

Everyone looked over. Hua Chenglu pointed at Mu Zhicong furiously. "You-" Suddenly, she felt her collar tighten, and she saw Hua Chengzan as soon as she turned around. He scolded her, "Don't mess around!" He dragged her away before nodding at Yu Zijian. "Good luck."

Hua Chenglu called out, "Zijian, be careful!"

Mu Zhicong said warmly, "Don't worry, Zijian. I'll definitely protect you."

Just when Yu Zijian wanted to say something, she suddenly spotted a familiar figure in the crowd. It was the man in green who fished by the pond. He had changed into the uniform of the Green Vine mountain, and the aura he gave off indicated that he was a fourth layer Qi Practitioner.

He just stood there by himself, without conversing with anyone beside him. For some reason, no one else seemed to notice him either. Sensing Yu Zijian's gaze, he turned his head and smiled.

Yu Zijian asked in confusion, "Senior brother Mu, since when did the Green Vine mountain gain a new disciple?"

"What new disciple?" Mu Zhicong looked over along Yu Zijian's gaze. There was just a sea of green clothing. Fu Qingjin had already vanished.

Yu Zijian scratched her head. "How strange!"

At this moment, the Green Vine Elder finished his speech. The three elders exchanged glances and nodded at the same time. They did not glance at Fu Qingjin the entire time. They did not even display any peculiar expressions.

Hua Chengzan, who remained in the crowd and paid attention to their faces the entire time, sighed gently in relief.

The three elders said at the same time, "The Herb Gathering ceremony of the three mountains formally begins!"

Chapter 242 - Enemy of Humans

Deep underground, vicious daemons gathered from all directions.

The vast cavern was lit by moss, but several dozen pairs of eyes shone even brighter. Most of their irises had narrowed into slits, clearly rather unaccustomed to such a bright environment.

Perhaps vicious, perhaps cold, or perhaps arrogant, the gazes clashed and produced sparks in the air.

The sounds of foul breaths rose and fell one after another. They were restless like volcanoes before eruption. From time to time, there would be deep growls or roars, like the thunder in the sky, resounding through the cavern.

Daemon qi gathered in the darkness, constantly entangling and exchanging information with each other. However, they maintained a cautious distance from one another.

The tremendous figures resulted in a series of black shadows, writhing, swaying, and twisting.

In the past, they lived without any contact with each other, but today, they had all been gathered here because of a person.

Suddenly, their gazes gathered in a single location.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

The heavy footsteps caused the ground to shake. It was still very far away, but violent daemon qi had already gushed into the cavern. This was the way daemons greeted one another, but it was filled with arrogance and provocation. Normally, it was enough to lead to a battle.

All of the daemons withdrew their daemon qi and lowered their heads, as if they were subjects awaiting the arrival of their king.

They could all sense that he had grown stronger. He was like a sharpened blade, shining with bloodthirsty light.

A colossal figure appeared at the dark entrance. The entrance was towards the top of the cavern and was several meters wide, but it was still not large enough for him. Simply raising his head would cause his two sharp ox horns to scrape against the ceiling and produce a series of sparks.

The black shadow leapt into the air. Its colossal body was not clumsy at all; instead, it was like a tiger descending from the mountains.

He landed on the ground with a rumble. His scarlet hair danced like fire, while his scarlet pupils glanced past the daemons like a blade. The daemons all lowered their heads even further.

On his shoulders, Xiao An and Milliped stood to the left and right. Xiao An had assumed her skeletal form, with the two Skull Prayer Beads hovering above her head.

Milliped, on the other hand, napped by leaning against Li Qingshan's head. However, the powerful daemon qi he gave off still slammed against the surroundings wave after wave, scattering the daemon qi from the other daemons.

Li Qingsahn swung his hand, and food ran down like rain, piling at the centre of the cavern. There was food that had been cooked by humans, as well as fresh beef, lamb, and pork. Merging together, they gave off an enticing fragrance.

Basically all of the daemons drooled. Despite how long they had lived, they had never seen so much and so many rich foods.

“This is my promise. Now, let’s eat!” Li Qingshan’s deep voice was like resonating metal, able to penetrate through anything.

His words were like a spark to a room full of explosives. The daemons all lunged forward, each more vicious and powerful than the last. Hunting and eating was an ability that they had been born with.

After a few roars and growls as a test, they naturally assembled themselves into a certain order. The strongest daemons ate first.

The blackwater salamander gulped down a pile of fresh fish. He felt glad. Thankfully, he had come, or he would have missed out on such a great feast.

The boulder viper coiled up and swallowed an entire ox. With a wave of its tail, it ate another goat.

The way the ice frog ate was the strangest. It would open its mouth to a terrifying size and exhale cold air, freezing all the cooked food before sucking hard. Its body would immediately swell up, and all of the frozen food would be sucked into its body, like it was a bottomless pit.

The other daemons paced around restlessly in the surroundings.

This seemed to be an ancient, primal ceremony, like how the ancestors of humans danced around fire, creating human culture.

Milliped caught a whiff of the food and opened his eyes by a crack. Li Qingshan passed the alcohol and food he had already prepared to him. He had a great feast before laying down on Li Qingshan’s shoulder and falling asleep.

Li Qingshan shook his head. Originally, he had brought him to keep up his appearance and say a few words to rile up their morale, but as it seemed, there was no need for that.

He did not take out all the food right at the beginning. Hunger was the main driving force for hunting. When his three strongest daemon soldiers were half way done eating, he ordered them to stop and let the other daemons eat.

However, daemons that were eating also happened to be the most vicious, so why would they listen to Li Qingshan’s command? They ignored him and continued to wolf down the food.

Li Qingshan got to work. He grabbed the boulder viper’s head with his huge claws and pressed it against the ground. The boulder viper wrapped around him a few times instinctively like a thick belt, but it discovered that his body was even tougher than metal. The piercing pain from its head made it return to its senses. Those claws could actually pierce its armour.

The other arm wrapped around the blackwater salamander’s neck. While the blackwater salamander could slide out, it obediently remained still.

The ice frog wanted to eat a few more mouthfuls while he was busy, but a bone sword pointed at him. The flames shone in Xiao An’s eye sockets.

The bone sword had been refined from the skeleton of the first senior brother from the Pheasant’s Grace mountain.

Although a sword did exist within the artifact forging section of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty called the Buddha Slaying sword, it was not something that Xiao An could forge right now. As a result, this sword had no other uses apart from its toughness.

However, a tough sword was enough for a supreme swordsman.

The ice frog was immediately stunned by the sword intent. It became afraid to move. It felt like as long as it moved by even an inch, it would have to suffer a devastating attack.

With the three strongest daemon soldiers subdued in an instant, the other daemons became afraid to move as well.

Milliped opened his bleary eyes and asked, "They're being disobedient?"

Li Qingshan smiled. "You'd best ask them!"

The three daemons expressed their allegiance in a hurry, and Li Qingshan released them. He said nothing more apart from expressing that he had the authority to distribute food. The leader would always have to express the authority he possessed to the group and give the rule breakers a tough beating.

The other daemon soldiers immediately became much more orderly as they ate. After all the food had been split among them, the daemons still seemed dissatisfied. They seemed to become even hungrier after having not eaten in a long time.

"The human cultivators have already begun to venture underground!" Li Qingshan finally spoke. He used daemon qi and his voice to convey his message.

All of the daemons raised their heads in alertness. They understood the danger that humans posed.

"They've come to kill us, to take the daemon cores in us, to take the spiritual herbs from our caverns. From today onwards, you will listen to my command. You will not fight alone. We must band together and face the enemy together. After this, I will redistribute food among you according to your merit in battle!"

"Now, let's go and kill all the humans!" Li Qingshan raised his right hand before swinging down viciously.

Various growls and roars resounded through the caverns, causing loose rocks to fall. The daemon army moved out.

Li Qingshan stood at the very back. Only when all the daemons had left the cavern did he mumble to himself extremely softly, "The name of the operation this time will be the Enemy of Humans."

A strange smile appeared on his face. It seemed like a cruel, vicious smile, like a sorrowful, bitter smile, yet also like a self-deprecating, cold smile. Afterwards, all of it vanished. He recovered his silent composure.

This was the path he had chosen, no hesitation, no regret.

“Alright, go back to sleep!” Li Qingshan placed Milliped down from his shoulder. There would not be Foundation Establishment cultivators venturing underground. With his current strength, he could kill any Qi Practitioner he came across.

“Be careful,” Milliped muttered before wriggling towards his den. His bottom rose and fell as he inched away extremely quickly.

Li Qingshan smiled with ease. He placed his hand over his chest and bowed slightly. “We fight for you!” Afterwards, he nodded to Xiao An. “And for you!”

Afterwards, he straightened himself out and said proudly, “And for me!”

He strode off into the depths of the cavern.

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The sounds of countless footsteps advanced at a steady and rapid pace.

The disciples of the three sects had already separated underground. They followed their own markers and advanced along their own paths. Often, the groups would have a Qi Practitioner at the sixth layer or higher leading several weaker Qi Practitioners.

This group happened to be under the lead of Liu Fengrui, but his face was sunken. He ignored his junior brothers’ flattery.

The past few days had been very tough for him on the Green Vine mountain. He never thought that bringing back a girl would cause so much trouble. Not only did his seniors and juniors give him the cold shoulder, but even the Green Vine Elder did not treat him kindly.

He was not afraid of receiving the cold shoulder from his seniors and juniors. However, it would be extremely terrifying once he fell out of favour with his master in a small sect like this. He could not help but utterly resent Yu Zijian. He basically hoped that she would die in the ceremony this time, and if there was the opportunity, he would not mind helping out a little so that this did happen.

“Senior brother, up ahead is a daemonic beast’s den. There should be Quartz grass growing in the surroundings, which is a crucial spiritual herb for refining Stone Grain pills.” A disciple of the Green Vine mountain held a small mental map and beamed in joy.

He interrupted Liu Fengrui’s thoughts, who said in displeasure, “Quartz grass isn’t some impressive spiritual herb. We’re still very close to the surface here. If you want good things, we need to venture deeper. A mere daemonic beast hasn’t even condensed a daemon core.”

The disciples were all obsequious to him. If they ventured deeper, then the danger would increase too. Daemons with daemon cores were not that easy to handle. Although daemonic beasts did not have daemon cores, they still possessed hides and bones, which were fantastic materials for forging spiritual artifacts. Their flesh and blood had very great uses too.

“Let’s go and take a look!” Liu Fengrui ordered. He had to gather some additional spiritual herbs in the ceremony this time to save his master’s impression of him.

The cave was utterly pitch-black. The ground advanced quickly. The Brightening talismans limited the impact of the darkness on their vision. With their dexterity, even the twisting caves filled with loose rock failed to stop their advance.

Suddenly, a third layer Qi Practitioner disciple said, "Senior brother, it's so cold!" He shivered.

Liu Fengrui sensed the coldness in the surroundings as well. Looking back at his junior brothers, all of their faces had paled, and their lips had become blue. Qi Practitioners who possessed innate true qi were immune to the winter cold and summer heat, but at this moment, they felt cold just like regular people.

"This isn't normal. The records never said it would be so cold here!"

"It wasn't this cold the last time I was here. The underground caves change often, so maybe something has happened here? Senior brother, should we go somewhere else?" said an old Qi Practitioner cautiously. He was only at the third layer, so he had to refer to Liu Fengrui as senior brother.

Liu Fengrui looked around. "Master is waiting for us just on the surface. If we retreat before we've even run into danger, can we still call ourselves disciples of the Green Vine mountain? Let's go. It won't be cold once we move around a bit more. The Quartz grass is right ahead!"

They sprinted through the cave, but the coldness did not decrease at all. Instead, it grew heavier and heavier. Even Liu Fengrui found the cold to be piercing, while the junior brothers behind him found it utterly unbearable. They even slowed down.

"We can't go on anymore, senior brother. Let's retreat!"

"Croak, croak!"

Just when Liu Fengrui was about to give the order to retreat, the resonant croak of a frog resounded through the cave.

"There's a daemonic beast!" Everyone responded. Apart from daemonic beasts, there were no other creatures that could live here.

"We'll leave once we kill this daemonic beast!" Liu Fengrui rejoiced and advanced forwards with his junior brothers.

Cold mist permeated the darkness. A layer of frost had developed over the grey Quartz grass. An ice-blue frog leapt off a rock. "Croak, croak!"

Liu Fengrui could not help but be disappointed by this. The strength of daemonic beasts usually matched their size. The larger they were, the stronger they were, and the more valuable they were. This frog was so small, so it had clearly just turned from a beast into a daemon.

Suddenly, he thought of something. How could a low level daemonic beast give off such coldness?

"Who's there?"

A few blurry figures appeared in the cold mist. Liu Fengrui's eyes narrowed, and he raised his hand, producing a palm strike. Killing other Qi Practitioners over spiritual herbs and daemonic beasts had never been a secret. Underground, humans were even more dangerous than daemons.

The most terrifying part about all this was he actually failed to sense their aura. Clearly, they had hidden it on purpose so that they could launch an ambush on his group, which was why he showed no mercy with his attack.

However, the figures did not move at all. They just let the true qi land on them with a crack. The gust of wind from his attack parted the cold mist, revealing the figures.

Liu Fengrui immediately felt like all of his blood had frozen over. He finally understood why he failed to sense their auras; it was because they had already been reduced to ice statues. Dead people obviously would not give off any auras.

They all wore the uniform of the Pheasant's Grace mountain. One of them had two tail feathers embroidered on their chest, an inner disciple who had reached the sixth layer. However, they were all dead now, still stuck in the same pose the moment before they had died, trying to wield spiritual artifacts or unleash techniques. Their faces were all frozen with fear, and they all looked in one direction, at the ice-blue frog.

"What kind of daemon..." Frightened, a disciple swung a green, glowing staff at the ice frog.

The ice frog opened its mouth and emitted a white cloud of cold air. The disciple was immediately turned into an ice statue.

As the cold air passed by, his senior and junior brothers behind him immediately followed his steps. The cold air was like thousands of tiny, sharp rays that pierced their protective true qi.

Crack! Crack! The sound of freezing filled the air, like notes of death.

Liu Fengrui summoned his flying sword as he roared out before becoming stuck in that posture forever. One last thought flashed through his head. They were facing no daemonic beast, but an actual daemon, and a powerful one among them. But why would daemons appear at such a shallow level?

Just like a tenth layer Qi Practitioner slaughtering a bunch of low level Qi Practitioners, it was a piece of cake.

"Croak, croak! Eleven, croak croak! That's enough for ten!" The ice frog opened its mouth, and the ice statues all shattered into shards, which it sucked into its mouth. Only their spiritual artifacts and hundred treasures pouches remained undamaged.

"Croak, croak! This is what the leader wants!"

The ice frog gathered all the items and shards and placed them in a cavern nearby. All of them served as evidence when it came to calculating his merit. Meanwhile, a huge daemonic beast that seemed like a rabbit cowered in the cavern and constantly trembled, perhaps out of fear or perhaps due to the cold. It was the Qi Practitioners' original target.

"Fellow Green Vine, it looks like your disciples couldn't defeat the daemon there either!" said the Golden Pheasant Elder coldly.

Near the entrance to the ceremony, the three elders sat in a bamboo pavilion and admired the snow while drinking tea, waiting for the results.

Before them was a projection of the underground mental map. There were several specks of light on there, golden, green, or grey in colour, representing the locations of the disciples of the three mountains. It was similar to the pathfinding puppet insects that the disciples of Mohism had used in the past.

With the death of Liu Fengrui's squad, the specks of light that represented them were extinguished. Earlier, the golden specks of light representing the disciples of the Pheasant's Grace mountain had vanished there too.

The Green Vine Elder said, "There must be a powerful daemon there, but this makes no sense. It's still very shallow."

The Lone Grave Elder said, "We'll know if we keep watching."

The boulder viper moved through the earth and flickered its forked tongue, constantly sensing the aura of humans in the caves. Suddenly, it emerged from a wall and saw the fearful faces of a few humans. They were all extremely weak.

All the Qi Practitioners saw was a grey shadow move above. Before they could even see the daemon clearly, they were stunned by the terrifying daemon qi.

The leading seventh layer Qi Practitioner bellowed out, "Summon the zombies!" They were disciples of the Burial Mound mountain.

The disciples of the Burial Mound mountain immediately waved the bronze talismans in their hands, and several dozen zombies scattered around them, surrounding them. The seventh Qi Practitioner even summoned two unstoppable Iron Plate corpses that were surrounded by corpse qi. Both of them were much more powerful than the Iron Plate corpse the Zombie Daoist had refined.

The boulder viper turned back. Its long body wrapped around them before suddenly tightening.

The several dozen zombies and the disciples of the Burial Mound mountain were trapped in the low ceiling cave. The disciples were unable to escape. They felt a tremendous power crush them from everywhere, immediately turning them into mince meat. They merged with the zombies they had refined, never to separate again.

The deathly aura on the Lone Grave Elder's face seemed to grow heavier.

The Green Vine Elder and the Golden Pheasant Elder's expressions were ugly too.

On the underground mental map, large swathes of light were extinguished. Squads were destroyed underground one after another. In just a while, the number of Qi Practitioners that they had lost had already surpassed the total losses during the Herb Gathering ceremony last time.

However, the ceremony had only just begun right now. The Qi Practitioners had only ventured to the shallow depths. They should not have run into any powerful daemons at all.

“Sect masters, what’s going on?” Hua Chengzan, who had constantly kept an eye out for them, walked into the bamboo pavilion sternly. He understood what the specks of light represented.

The Green Vine Elder said hoarsely, “I don’t know. It’s very abnormal this time. The Green Vine mountain has already lost eighteen disciples.”

Chapter 243 - The Mountain is There

The Golden Pheasant Elder said, “Eleven for the Pheasant’s Grace mountain.”

The Lone Grave Elder said, “Seven!” However, they all knew that this was not because disciples of the Burial Mound mountain were stronger, but because they could use corpses as shields.

Almost thirty disciples had died in under four hours. Although it was not a lot compared to the total number of disciples that they possessed, it was enough to shake up the foundations of the three mountains.

Hua Chengzan frowned. He never thought something like this would happen during the Herb Gathering ceremony. Were the daemons already prepared for this, waiting to ambush the Qi Practitioners as they ventured underground?

Perhaps the Daemon General in this region finally became fed up with humans running through his territory freely and began to respond to it. If that was the case, the deaths would only just be the beginning. It was very likely for all the cultivators in the ceremony to be annihilated this time.

He could no longer imagine just how great of a ripple it would cause if almost a thousand human cultivators died. He could not help but sigh. Looking at the dark clouds in the sky, the situation of the world really was going to change!

The three elders were bleeding inside over the loss. Their faces were cold and sunken as killing intent surged through their eyes. That person was right! All daemons deserved to die!

“Brother, are you saying that Zijian will...” Hua Chenglu rushed over from afar and grabbed Hua Chengzan’s sleeve anxiously.

As she said that, a few more specks of light vanished. Although Yu Zijian was not a disciple of the Green Vine mountain, she also carried a sensory spiritual artifact, so she was one of the specks of light there. Who knows when hers would be extinguished.

“We can only pray that the heavens protects good people.” Hua Chengzan pressed down on Hua Chenglu’s shoulder. Right now, he was powerless too. If there really was a Daemon General active, the underground would be a forbidden zone to Qi Practitioners. While he was known as the greatest below Foundation Establishment, he was still a Qi Practitioner.

If the person underground right now was Hua Chenglu, he would rush in there without hesitation, but it was impossible for him to take such a great risk for a girl he was unfamiliar with.

Hua Chenglu bit her lip. She understood what Hua Chengzan was considering. She could not be obstinate and make excessive demands here.

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A black daemon sat alone in a large cavern. It raised its right arm and extended its forefinger. On the tip of the finger was a huge talon, as sharp as a blade, which it placed on a young man's forehead gently.

The young man was alone too. He seemed to be fifteen or sixteen, such that soft facial hair had only just begun sprouting near his lips, but he was already a third layer Qi Practitioner. He could be considered a small genius. The clothes he wore indicated that he did not come from the three mountains. Instead, he should be an independent cultivator from a certain clan who had come to try his luck.

A black shadow reflected in his fear-stricken pupils, and the violent murderousness and daemon qi completely obliterated his will to fight back. However, the daemon did not strike immediately, so he seemed to see a sliver of hope. He begged, "Don't, I beg you. I..."

However, the heavy smell of blood seeped out from behind the black daemon. The young man clearly saw that it was a pile of corpses of Qi Practitioners, which made his lips tremble in fear. Translucent tears streaked across his face.

A while earlier...

A group of disciples from the Pheasant's Grace mountain arrived here. Using the experiences of their seniors, it would often be much easier for them to find blessed lands with spiritual herbs and inhabited by daemonic beasts than independent cultivators.

But this time, the thing lurking here was an actual daemon, and the leader of the daemons.

The familiar uniform made Li Qingshan recall many negative memories, and he seemed to have met the leading seventh layer Qi Practitioner in the Quiet Spring valley as well.

"Ah!" The first disciple to spot Li Qingshan cried out before coming to a halt.

Li Qingshan's index finger had already stabbed through his chest like a spear.

Only then did the other disciples react. They all bellowed out and attacked together. They took out talismans, drew spiritual artifacts, and used techniques.

The one who responded the fastest was the inner disciple, a seventh layer Qi Practitioner. However, before his golden pheasant feather had even managed to take off, a huge hand had already appeared before him. The index finger pushed against the thumb gently before flicking out leisurely. His head was smashed into pieces as bits of brain and fragments of his skull scattered across the ground.

At this moment, those who went for their talismans had only extended their hands into their talisman pouches, those who drew spiritual artifacts had only lit up their spiritual artifact, and those who used techniques had only gathered their true qi. Their minds even struggled to take in everything happening before them, preventing them from reacting properly.

Li Qingshan waved his hand conveniently and blood spurted out. Not a single person was alive anymore.

The battle began in an instant and ended in an instant.

It was so simple that even Li Qingshan himself was slightly surprised. He had sure spent a lot of effort in order to deal with Zhuo Zhibo who was a sixth layer Qi Practitioner back then.

Although he had yet to undergo the heavenly tribulation and take that legendary first step, his great strength had been converted into terrifying battle prowess after he reached the second layer of the tiger demon. He could now suppress even the strongest daemons, so how could any Qi Practitioner be his opponent?

Li Qingshan was not interested in torturous deaths, so they all died extremely swiftly, without any pain. The more direct reason for this was because he did not know these disciples of the Pheasant's Grace mountain. Even the leader of this group would only bark meaninglessly in his face before he died.

However, since they were disciples of the Pheasant's Grace mountain, they were his enemy. There was nothing much more to it. If he killed them, then he killed them.

But right now, he was completely unfamiliar with the young man standing before him.

Clang! Like the thrum of a blade, there was a cold flash, and the young man's corpse with a half-destroyed head collapsed on the ground.

The pause earlier was not due to any hesitation in his heart. Instead, he was just reminiscing, reminiscing about what he was about to cut in half and toss aside.

He was like a mountain climber who wanted to conquer a treacherous mountain, who needed to empty his heavy backpack and toss everything inside into the abyss one by one. However, these items might have been very important in the beginning, so he could not help but sigh a little inside.

Everyone wanted to reach the very top of the mountain without throwing anything away, just like how everyone wanted to achieve success without sacrificing anything. However, this was impossible. The price was more than just hard work.

If Li Qingshan was willing to live a peaceful life, reluctant to leave Qingyang and strive towards somewhere as distant as beyond the Nine Heavens, then he could have it very easy. However, he would not, because the mountain was there.

Li Qingshan speared the corpses with his finger and tossed them aside, which fell into a small pile. He said, "Don't eat them." These were for Xiao An. There was also a cowering daemoniac beast in the cavern. Even though it was enticed by the flesh and blood, it did not dare to move.

Li Qingshan had never studied any military tactics or strategies before, but in his former life, during the age of the information explosion, he was not unfamiliar with knowledge regarding the military. He knew how to unite his forces to crush the enemies.

He stationed his two strongest daemon soldiers in a few places that were most likely to attract Qi Practitioners and got them to wait. As for Xiao An and the boulder viper who were better at moving around, he had them constantly patrol a few main tunnels underground to kill weaker Qi Practitioners.

The other daemons would gather together in fives or threes at the very least, led by the strongest as they guarded against stronger Qi Practitioners. All they needed was a simple adjustment, and the daemons were basically unstoppable. As a matter of fact, it was no more complicated than a game.

Li Qingshan did not take a step back as the leader of the daemon soldiers. Instead, he chose a place teeming with spiritual herbs near a spiritual vein, beginning his wait and slaughter.

Li Qingshan exhaled deeply and stowed the hundred treasures pouches into his bosom. He leaned against his arm as he continued to wait. He did not find much joy in killing people he was unfamiliar with, but he was quite happy about obtaining hundred treasures pouches.

Once the battle ended, the pills he obtained would provide great assistance towards breaking through to the second layer of the Spirit Turtle's Method of Sea Suppression.

Suddenly, he raised his head and sniffed the air. Through the heavy smell of blood, a familiar scent made him recall a few past memories. He could not help but frown. Why was she here?

Although they had separated less than a month ago, it felt like a very long time had passed as he hid and waited in the gloomy underground.

I'll go and take a stroll. Li Qingshan stood up and made his way out of the cavern. After taking a few steps, he suddenly turned around and said to the daemonic beast, "Don't eat them!"

If the daemonic beast could cry, it would have already burst into tears out of fear already.

.....

The jade-green and blood-red pupils danced around in the darkness. Several large demons surrounded a group of Qi Practitioners. Foul air exuded from their huge mouths filled with long, protruding teeth.

"Senior brother, what do we do?" Cheng Jiali turned pale.

Mu Zhicong's forehead was covered in perspiration. He controlled a flying sword that flew around in the surroundings. However, it was already very tough for him to confront just a single daemon with his strength, so he had no chance at all if he had to face several of them at the same time. Even his chances of survival were pitifully slim.

Why was it like this? Why? He had clearly only entered the den of a daemonic beast, so why were there so many demons gathered together? And, they were of different species too!

Mu Zhicong was furious and filled with doubt inside. This place had been cleaned out in the previous Herb Gathering ceremony, and it was disciples of the Green Vine mountain who did that. Even if a daemonic beast had reclaimed this place, they should not have been much more powerful than regular, wild beasts.

He had brought his squad here to try his luck. If he ran into a daemonic beast, he would use it and show his power to Yu Zijian, as well as have his junior brothers and sisters use it to warm up so that they could venture deeper underground. However, he never thought he would barge into the nest of several demons and throw himself into danger.

The demons all used their daemonic qi to communicate in a way that the humans were unable to hear.

"These humans are too weak! Let's eat them!"

"If it weren't for the leader's idea, you'd be eaten already if you were just by yourself."

"I want to eat the one at the very front!"

"Move, the one at the very front is mine!"

“Be careful, this human is a little tough to deal with. Don’t get injured by him, but don’t let him escape either. Humans have a lot of tricks,” the strongest daemon issued orders.

The other daemons immediately obeyed. Under the caution that had been planted in them while they were still wild beasts, they did not charge up together, just like how a group of lions would circle a wildebeest. They would not attack recklessly, just in case they would be injured by the horns.

However, the daemons also possessed intelligence that wild beasts lacked. They constantly growled and roared, tearing down the mental lines of defence in the Qi Practitioners. Their huge bodies formed a perfect encirclement to prevent the strongest prey, Mu Zhicong, from escaping during the chaos.

“Ahh!” There was a shriek, and a daemon that seemed like a huge lizard chomped down on a disciple, dragging him away.

Chapter 244 - The Horrors Underground

The blood sprayed onto Yu Zijian. Her eyes were wide open as she watched all of this unfold, like she was in a surreal nightmare.

The disciples of the Green Vine mountain all cried out in a panic and waved their weapons crazily. The defensive position that they had barely managed to build up immediately collapsed.

Cheng Jiali suddenly felt her waist tighten. A tongue from the darkness had wrapped around her, while the other end of the tongue was a huge mouth filled with sharp teeth.

She planted her sword into the ground, but she was still pulled towards the mouth bit by bit. She felt like her waist was about to be ripped apart. She extended her hand and cried out in despair, “Save me, senior brother!”

As expected, Mu Zhicong approached her. She smiled in relief. Her senior brother still cared for her after all.

With a thump, Mu Zhicong slammed his hand against Cheng Jiali’s chest as hard as he could.

She directly flew into the daemon’s mouth. She was already dead mid-air. Her towering chest had now collapsed into a bloody mess as disbelief still lingered on her face.

Mu Zhicong scrunched up his body and leapt out while Cheng Jiali had plugged up the daemon’s huge mouth. He actually leapt out of the encirclement. A huge boar-like daemon leapt up with speed that did not match its huge size, slamming towards Mu Zhicong like a cannonball.

With a flick of his foot, Mu Zhicong landed on his flying sword and flew thirty meters away. There was a rumble behind him as the huge boar slammed into the ceiling, causing rocks and dust to rain down.

He could vaguely hear a few wails of despair, “Don’t abandon us, senior brother!” “Save us, senior brother!”

He did not hear Yu Zijian’s voice, perhaps because it had been drowned out by the other voices. He made up his mind. Don’t blame me. If I live, it’s better than dying with all of you. There’s nothing I can do about this.

For some reason, the daemons did not pursue him. Before the joy of surviving could flood his heart, he ran into a black wall as he fled blindly.

Li Qingshan felt a tiny figure collide into him. He basically grabbed it and crushed it instinctively. There was a clear crack, and his hand became covered in blood.

Only when he looked at the dead face that had grown purple and bled from all of its orifices did he feel like he had seen this person before. Thinking about it carefully, he recalled Mu Zhicong's name.

He did not know about Mu Zhicong's scheme against him. He scratched his head and felt very apologetic, but since he had ventured underground, he could only be apologetic.

To him, once was enough for something like reminiscence.

Sensing the aura in the dust, Li Qingshan let out a breath of relief. Fortunately, he had made it in time. As long as she was fine.

When Mu Zhicong used Cheng Jiali's corpse to escape, Yu Zijian had already closed her eyes, and her lips crumbled up. If humans ran into something that they refused to accept and were unable to stop, was this how they would behave?

She even blocked her ears. That was, she would not have to hear the shrieks and howls beside her. However, she gripped the hilt of her sword to the point where her knuckles whitened, like she was trying to crush the hilt. However, she did not draw it.

At a time like this, what was the use in drawing her sword?

The bloody, humid air rushed over. Death was right before her. Many scenes flashed through her mind. So her father was right. People really would think through their entire life the moment before death.

Even though her life had been extremely short, it was filled with warmth and happiness. She had received the care and concern of her father, and the care and concern of other fellow people. However, this only intensified her pain before death.

Without Mu Zhicong, the daemons basically finished off the remaining disciples of the Green Vine mountain neatly and swiftly, as simple as a human using chopsticks to pick up food from a dish.

Just as their sharp teeth and claws extended towards Yu Zijian, their movements suddenly stopped. An order rang out from the darkness using daemon qi. The order was very simple. If it was converted into human tongue, then it would just be two words. "Piss off!"

Their teeth and claws dared not advance an inch further. They retreated slowly before turning around and fleeing as quickly as they could. The growls vanished into the depths of the cave.

Li Qingshan shook his head. He emerged from the darkness, suppressing his daemon qi again and recovering his appearance as Niu Juxia.

I don't want to die! Yu Zijian suddenly drew her sword and stabbed it as hard as she could. Her desire to live turned into courage. Even if it was pointless, she wanted to put up a struggle.

But unsurprisingly, her sword struck nothing. Her hand was caught by a clamp, but she was not ripped to pieces like she had imagined.

A blurred voice rang out, which seemed to be calling her name, "Zijian! Zijian!"

She seemed to wake up from her nightmare. She gradually made out the person before her. The simple face and huge figure all seemed so familiar. She rubbed her eyes and said in disbelief, "Niu Juxia?"

Li Qingshan said, "It's me. Why have you come underground? Were you forced by the people of the Green Vine mountain?" However, little did he know that participating in the Herb Gathering ceremony had already been a positive matter before his appearance.

Yu Zijian looked at the gentle eyes. She felt like she had suffered severe abuse inside, and finally, she burst into tears before throwing herself into Li Qingshan's arms.

Li Qingshan was slightly surprised. He embraced her gently and patted her back until she gradually calmed down. Only then did he say, "Let's go. We need to get out of here. The smell of blood here will attract daemonic beasts." Her soft, charming body seemed to ease up much of the restless killing intent in his heart.

She was influenced by his extraordinary calmness and stopped sniffing. She raised her head and looked at Li Qingshan in confusion with her red eyes. "Where do we go?"

Li Qingshan thought, She's still just a kid. She'll probably find this even more difficult to accept than regular people after all she has been through today. He thought of a saying for some reason. Kindness was just ignorance of the dangers the world had to offer, and purity was just before they were tainted by this world.

"The surface, of course."

Li Qingshan released her and walked through the cave.

Yu Zijian followed him in a hurry and grabbed Li Qingshan's hand, like a drowning person hanging onto a piece of driftwood.

"Don't be afraid. I'm here," Li Qingshan said gently.

"Yep." Yu Zijian felt her heart warm up as she nodded gently while biting her lip.

The two of them moved through the caves. Li Qingshan led the way at the front, while Yu Zijian followed closely behind, afraid to fall behind even by the slightest bit. The dark cave was narrow and claustrophobic. Every single strange rock seemed like a vicious daemon in the darkness.

She was afraid to look at everything. She just stared at the tall, wide back before her, like it was the only source of light in the darkness.

Li Qingshan strode ahead, choosing his path without any hesitation at all. He was the one who had stationed the daemons, so he avoided those places and moved towards the surface. However, as Yu Zijian's cultivation was just too weak, she struggled to keep up with his pace, even when he had already slowed down as much as possible.

He suddenly stopped and turned around. "Let's move faster!" Although they were almost guaranteed victory with the underground battle he had organised this time, he still had to pay attention to the battlefield at all times as the commander. And, he just felt slightly uneasy inside.

Before Yu Zijian could even respond, she felt like she had sailed through the air and landed in Li Qingshan's arms.

"Is this alright?" Li Qingshan lowered his head and asked. He understood that men and women should not make bodily contact with each other, but she was as light as a fallen leaf. If this did not work, he could carry her on his back or over his shoulder. Even holding her in his hand worked.

"It's fine," Yu Zijian also lowered her head and said softly.

Li Qingshan nodded. As if he was running through violent winds, he shot off through the tunnel at great speeds.

All Yu Zijian saw was that the still walls of the cave suddenly began to move. They twisted left and right swiftly, constantly shrinking and expanding, and from time to time, it would open up into a large cavern. It was like moving through the writhing guts of a huge beast.

As they ventured upwards, Fu Qingjin rapidly ventured deeper into the earth. He had left the Green Vine mountain's group right from the beginning, travelling deeper all by himself like a green speck of light in the darkness. While the other Qi Practitioners were still at shallower levels gathering spiritual herbs and slaying daemonic beasts, he had already reached an extremely deep level.

He had no idea about the battles and slaughters happening above him, but even if he did know, he would not care. He seemed to possess some clear objective, to advance, advance, and advance further. Whenever he came across a fork, he would not even hesitate with his choice.

He came across a few daemonic beasts that blocked his way, but these daemonic beasts were not even able to respond. All they saw was a green light flash by them, so it was even more impossible for them to pursue him. The spiritual flowers and spiritual herbs growing in the darkness failed to stop his advance either.

He only had a single objective this time. Apart from the objective, nothing else was worth the risk of leaving behind potential traces to collect.

Finally, a speck of blue light appeared before him.

Only then did he stop. He studied the wondrous flower that danced in the air.

The Blue Butterfly flower. This was it!

He continued forwards, finally arriving before the sea of Blue Butterfly flowers. Even for him, a sliver of shock appeared in his bored, exhausted eyes. Originally, he thought he had seen all the beautiful scenery the world had to offer already, but he never thought there would be an unknown like this hidden underground.

His gaze passed through the sea of flowers and landed on the platform, on Milliped who slept on there. He smiled. It was the smile of a hunter who had found his prey.

Daemons did not deserve a place like this!

Fu Qingjin passed through the sea of flowers alone. Countless butterflies danced around him before suddenly returning to the sea of flowers and turning back into petals. Not a single butterfly fluttered through the air anymore.

Milliped, who could never be woken, opened his eyes and sat up straight. He stared at Fu Qingjin in a daze.

Their eyes met and killing intent surged.

Fu Qingjin did not draw his sword in a hurry. Instead, he took out a stick of incense from his hundred treasures pouch. The stick of incense was not particularly thick, but once it was lit, a dense fragrance immediately permeated the area.

Milliped was a daemon that had transformed from a poisonous bug, so he was not afraid of any poisons. However, when he caught a whiff of the incense, he immediately felt extremely intoxicated, like a person who had starved for three days that had suddenly come across a table of delicious food.

Fu Qingjin suddenly turned around and left. He moved even faster than when he had come, and Milliped chased behind him involuntarily.

There was a human and a daemon, one chasing and one running, straight towards the surface of the earth.

Fu Qingjin thought, The effects of this Insect Luring incense sure are potent. Even when carapaced daemons have become Daemon Generals, they still act on their instincts and are as foolish as they come. I just need to lure him to the surface, and I'll be able to kill him fairly. I have the three elders reinforcing me outside, so nothing can go wrong.

Some Words on Making it onto the Front Page as a Recommended Book - Through this Ocean

First of all, thank you. I thank you readers for your support, and I thank the editors for your kindness and generosity. You are the reason why I have the opportunity to say this here.

So far, I've reached six hundred and sixty thousand characters for Legend of the Great Sage. It's a very lucky number. As for speed, I haven't been very fast, but I haven't been slow either. At the very least, I haven't missed any releases, even when I faced some extremely grim circumstances. Gotta applaud myself for this. This is a huge improvement on my behalf!

TL: Contrary to western culture, six is a lucky number in Chinese culture.

Let me just say, from tomorrow onwards, I will be returning to my release schedule of eight in the morning and six at night. I'm just good like that. That's a given.

With the plot so far, Li Qingshan has only begun on his path. You've yet to see the Academy of the Hundred Schools, while the daemon city underground has already shown an inkling of itself. As a person who wanders between these two worlds, he can only pave his own path of humans and daemons with his own hands. The path of humans, the path of daemons, I walk my own path.

Not only do I want to write out the glory, scenery and eventual success of this path, but I also want to depict the hardships, the conflicts, and the struggles.

Li Qingshan will never be able to reach a prominent level with morality, and he will not be able to keep killing enemies with his special advantage all the way until the very end. I hope that one day in the future, when you read those last two words at the end, you feel like you've gone through his grand, magnificent life with him.

Not only will there be joy and sorrow, but there will also be good and evil.

Focus on your life worth living, without any regard for how you will be remembered.

Whether it's clear streams or turbid flows, the boundless ocean welcomes and holds all. Living and dying without regret is the path of great sages.

When you close the page at the end, there's no need to specially leave behind anything, but it shouldn't be empty either.

Of course, perhaps these attempts will all just be arduous and fruitless. Being aware that some parts of the plot will displease people, yet still forcing it and writing it really is just asking for trouble.

But how can you go without any trouble at all in life? This is called practising what you preach, right? Heh.

But I still believe there will be people who will like it. At least, there'll be me. A single person might be a little less, but you can say it's enough. If there's you too, then I'll offer you a lift. Now, let's sail towards the goal and cross this ocean!

Look, I'll handle the steering and you handle the rowing, alright?

Chapter 245 - Another First Senior Brother

Li Qingshan suddenly stopped. He sensed the auras of many human cultivators up ahead. In human form, his senses had decreased drastically, so he only managed to discover them here.

They were very close to the surface now, but they still needed to cross through a long, winding cave. This was almost the only way out. If he turned around now, he would have to take a very long detour.

Yu Zijian said, "What's wrong?"

Li Qingshan smiled, "Nothing. There are a few Qi Practitioners up ahead. Let's go take a look." He took off and the "gut" of the huge beast began to writhe again. A while later, they came across another "stomach", a large cavern of over a hundred meters across.

Several dozen Qi Practitioners either sat or stood. They wore various uniforms. Not only were there disciples of the three mountains, but there were even a few independent cultivators as well. Everyone was shaken, and many of them were injured. Clearly, they had only managed to escape from the claws and teeth of Li Qingshan's daemon soldiers after tremendous effort, gathering here.

They were all extremely frightened now. When they heard the sound, they all stood up and gazed into the tunnel. When they saw two people, many of them immediately relaxed and lost interest.

Li Qingshan continued onwards without stopping, holding Yu Zijian as he leapt high into the air. He did not just want to send Yu Zijian out. He was prepared to turn around and transform after sending Yu Zijian out of the caves and unleash a massacre.

He scanned past everyone and took note of everyone's state. There was actually a ninth layer Qi Practitioner among them, and from his uniform, he seemed like a disciple of the Burial Mound mountain. His face was pale as he gave off a deathly aura. While he seemed like he was in his thirties, he seemed like a thirty year old who had been dead for thirty years. Perhaps he was some first senior brother.

There were three or four eighth layer Qi Practitioners as well, while Qi Practitioners below the sixth layer made up less than half of them. To be able to escape from the encirclement of his daemon army, they truly needed to be powerful.

Mid-air, Li Qingshan heard a cold yell, "Get down here."

His leap had agitated the ninth layer Qi Practitioner. Li Qingshan had guessed correctly. He was the first senior brother of the Burial Mound mountain, someone who possessed absolute power in the sect, so how could he let a fourth layer Qi Practitioner leap over his head? He had suffered a huge loss today, so he just happened to be angry.

Without further thought, he parted his hands, and an inky-green Corpse Poison ball shot out. The target was Li Qingshan in the air. The Corpse Poison ball was one of the special techniques unique to the Burial Mound mountain. It did not seem particularly impressive, but it was condensed from the corpse qi gathered from old corpses over a century old. Not only was it extremely potent, but it could infiltrate protective true qi as well. Death awaited both animals and humans if they came in contact with it.

Li Qingshan raised an eyebrow. He had already grown accustomed to the habit of these Qi Practitioners, where they would try to kill each other over the slightest of dispute. He did not feel particularly angry. If this world really was a huge pit for battle, then he had already grown accustomed to his role as a gladiator or a vicious beast.

The Corpse Poison ball exploded into a cloud of inky-green corpse qi in the air, enveloping Li Qingshan and Yu Zijian.

"Reckless!" The first senior brother swung his hand and snorted coldly. The pent-up emotions in him eased up slightly.

The disciples of the other sects and the independent cultivators all shuffled even further away from him. They had already heard how the disciples of the Burial Mound mountain were cruel and merciless and would kill without thinking. His actions had only proved that today.

"First senior brother, that person has a tall and robust body. He seems quite suited to be refined as a corpse," said a disciple of the Burial Mound mountain. They were not like the disciples of the Pheasant's Grace mountain, who constantly spouted flattery to fulfill their first senior brother's vanity. Instead, all of them were expressionless with dead faces. Only when it came to refining corpses would their eyes shine. This was their desire for power.

On the Burial Mound mountain, the stronger the zombies that they could control, the stronger they themselves would be. They could even challenge Qi Practitioners at higher cultivations than themselves.

“Oh, really?” Before the first senior brother had even finished talking, there were a series of sharp swishes, and hundreds of icicles shot out from the poisonous mist swiftly and densely.

The first senior brother was not fazed at all. He touched his wrist. He wore an old, bronze bangle on his wrist, which was mottled with bloody marks. After being touched by him, it immediately lit up and summoned a Steel Plate corpse before him. The Steel Plate corpse’s body shone brilliantly as corpse qi revolved around it. Who knows how many times more powerful than the Zombie Daoist’s Iron Plate corpse it was.

The icicles landed on the steel plates. When the unstoppable icicles struck the Steel Plate corpse’s body, it only produced a series of clings and clangs, leaving behind many white marks and a layer of frost.

Li Qingshan landed on the ground gently and placed down Yu Zijian. The layer of thin ice around them immediately shattered, reabsorbed into the Whale’s Ingestion of Water. Since the battles last time, he had returned to the spring and replenished the Ice Condensate water in the weapon. He could now handle the Whale’s Ingestion of Water with even greater skill.

His gaze was calm and cold. He did not say anything, nor was there anything to say. They would fight to death sooner or later anyway, but what he had to consider right now was the issue of sooner or later.

Yu Zijian became furious instead. “Why did you attack us?” Underground, she had already witnessed the viciousness and terrors of daemons, but she struggled to understand why humans would still attack each other in a situation like this.

The first senior brother said emotionlessly, “Because I want to.”

“You...” Yu Zijian was speechless from anger.

“Let’s go!” Li Qingshan patted her shoulder and casually pulled her in by her waist, walking away with his hand around her. They were not very far from the surface now. He could come back and deal with them after he transformed.

He had decided to kill this first senior brother a little slower this time to show him what “because I want to” meant.

“Don’t you even think about leaving.” The disciples of the Burial Mound mountain summoned several dozen zombies, which surrounded Li Qingshan. The movements of every single one was as swift as the wind, and the number of Iron Plate corpses there amounted to thirteen. The arts of refining corpses that had been passed down through the sect were not something the Zombie Daoist could rival.

Li Qingshan asked, “What do you want?”

The first senior brother said, “Everyone must stay here to fight the daemons.” He had brought the Burial Mound mountain’s strongest group of disciples underground with him. Right from the very beginning, their target had not been those weak daemoniac beasts near the surface, or the spiritual herbs that had been gathered many times before. Instead, they chose a shortcut to directly venture into the depths.

This shortcut was an underground river, but they encountered the attack of an extremely terrifying daemon in the river water. The daemon was pitch-black and moved like a shadow in the water. It directly kicked up a huge flood and constantly bombarded them with water arrows ten times more terrifying than the icicles from earlier.

When their attacks landed on the daemon, it was completely useless. Only when they lost a few junior brothers and a large number of zombies did they manage to escape, and then they encountered the attacks of various daemons that only appeared deeper down. They fought as they retreated, taking the long way back and returning to this cavern. By then, quite a few Qi Practitioners had already fled here, and only then did they learn that the Herb Gathering ceremony was drastically different from the past. However, the first senior brother refused to back out of here and instead gathered the defeated Qi Practitioners, wanting to take the daemons on in a decisive battle.

Li Qingshan asked out of curiosity, "Do you really plan on staying here and fighting with the daemons?" However, he could sense furious resentment flash through the eyes of the Qi Practitioners not from the Burial Mound mountain when they heard that, but they dared not speak up about it.

"Of course. You must stay behind too!" said the first senior brother. Although the daemons were terrifying, they did not pose any life-threatening danger to him, a ninth layer Qi Practitioner protected by a Steel Plated corpse. Even if he came across some of the strongest daemons, he could retreat easily.

And, from earlier, he had already collected sufficient corpses. The Burial Mound mountain was different from the two sects. What they focused most of their attention on were not spiritual herbs, but corpses, the corpses of daemons and the corpses of humans.

All the sects had sustained heavy losses in the Herb Gathering ceremony this time, but from another perspective, it was a fantastic time for the Burial Mound mountain to rise up and completely overwhelm the Green Vine mountain and the Pheasant's Grace mountain. As long as they turned all of these Qi Practitioners into zombies and refined a few powerful corpse beasts, the strength of the Burial Mound mountain would instead increase, while his status in the sect would become unshakeable.

Due to controlling multiple zombies for battles most of the time, the disciples of the Burial Mound mountain had a better eye for battle than the disciples of the other two mountains, while the first senior brother was the best of the best among them. As they spent most of their time with dead corpses, their emotions and sense of morality as humans had faded away as well. They truly believed in and carried out the saying of "Success at the deaths of many".

For a moment, Li Qingshan was unable to see through the first senior brother's complicated, dark thoughts. He just felt like he was up to nothing good. He waved the Whale's Ingestion of Water and called out, "Do you really think that you lot can stop me?"

The first senior brother was just about to give orders to make an example out of him.

Song Ming cried out, "You're Niu Juxia!" Only a moment had passed when Li Qingshan leapt into the cavern, became surrounded by corpse poison, before landing on the ground. After looking at him clearly, he finally confirmed that the person before him was Niu Juxia, the one who had forced him into his current state.

Song Ming was pushed aside by the entire sect. No one wanted to travel with him, and none of the spiritual lands on record were allocated to him either. He only advanced carefully through the caves with Ma Chaoqun, but it ended up being a blessing in disguise, saving him from running headfirst into Li Qingshan's traps. Sensing that something was amiss, he immediately fled back here with a similar speed and decisiveness as when he had fled after being tossed out of the Proud Sword manor by Li Qingshan back then.

That led to a series of exclamations in the cavern. Recently, the name "Niu Juxia" had grown into one of infamy. There were not a lot of people that all three mountains would order for their arrest, and according to the rumors, he had killed the first senior brother of the Pheasant's Grace mountain.

Li Qingshan listened to the whispers in the surroundings and glanced past Song Ming and Ma Chaoqun. He smiled. "So you've already put out an order for my capture. I didn't even know. There sure are a lot of familiar people here today. Whatever. I've killed a first senior brother already, so killing another one won't make a difference."

The first senior brother said, "Since you're an enemy of the three mountains, that's even more reason for why I can't let you go. Disciples of the Green Vine mountain and Pheasant's Grace mountain, why don't you stand? Work with me to kill this thug and his accomplice."

Ma Chaoqun said, "She's not his accomplice. She was forced into this by the Niu person. Zijian, come over here."

The first senior brother said, "Since when did you have a right to speak in this matter?"

Yu Zijian called out, "You're the bad people! I'm never going over!"

Just when they were on the verge of breaking out into a battle, a Qi Practitioner rushed into the cavern. He waved his hands and shrieked, "A monster, a monster is coming! Run!"

"What monster?" Song Ming grabbed him.

"Skeleton..." As soon as the Qi Practitioner had said that word, blood-red flames surged from his eye sockets. He was reduced to a white skeleton in an instant, which scattered on the ground.

Chapter 246 - Dance of the Dead

Only now did everyone see the tiny skeleton standing behind the Qi Practitioner. The white bone sword in its hand had pierced the Qi Practitioner's chest.

However, no one noticed when it had appeared there. It seemed no different from something dead, giving off no aura at all. Even zombies would possess corpse qi.

"W- what kind of daemon is this?"

The scattered white bones melted into fluid and flowed towards the sword. The bone sword was an extremely ordinary short sword, without anything special, just tougher and heavier than usual. It was not even worthy of being called a sword embryo of the Buddha Slaying sword.

Xiao An scanned past everyone with the roaring flames in her eye sockets.

Everyone shivered inside after she glanced past them. They actually found her to be even more terrifying than the daemons that they had faced.

The corner of Li Qingshan's lips curled up. He yelled out, "Run, everyone!" He grabbed Yu Zijian and rushed towards the cave.

Everyone was on edge already, so now that they suddenly saw such a strange monster, they had no interest in fighting at all. With Li Qingshan's yell, they immediately scattered and scrambled for the cave.

The first senior brother was furious. He pointed at Li Qingshan. "Kill him."

Several dozen zombies surged over. Their long nails were like a wave of spears as they stabbed towards Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan suddenly halted. There was a gust of wind behind him, and the Iron Plate corpses extended their sharp claws towards his back.

However, he had been anticipating this. Without even looking back, he forcefully twisted his body and penetrated the group of corpses, ramming into a zombie. In Li Qingshan's hands, just a single body slam was like a battering ram. There was the cracking of bones, and the zombie was sent flying, colliding against the zombies behind it and fracturing their bones too. They were incapacitated, allowing him to clear a path.

He took a step forward, and just when he was about to escape the encirclement, two metal claws directly reached towards Li Qingshan's face.

He had stopped taking these regular zombies seriously a long time ago. The only ones that could threaten him to some degree were the dozen or so Iron Plate corpses. As long as he paused even for a moment, the Iron Plate corpses would surge over. While there was not a lot of danger, they were still troublesome.

He came to a halt and twisted his body again, smashing his way through the zombie horde like a tiger. He purposefully chose to run into regular zombies and managed to collapse the horde in just a few moves. Iron Plate zombies were extremely powerful, but their reaction speeds were slow, so they failed to even touch a hair on him.

Li Qingshan leapt up and charged towards the cave.

Two independent cultivators had already reached the cave before him. A figure suddenly descended from above and blocked their path. Before they could even react, a pair of sharp claws emerged from their backs, dripping with blood.

"A Steel Plate corpse!" Everyone shivered inside. This figure was the shining Steel Plate corpse that originally stood beside the first senior brother.

The first senior brother said frigidly, "I'll kill whoever runs!"

The Steel Plate corpse was like a supervisor, blocking everyone's escape path. It looked at Li Qingshan with its bloodthirsty eyes.

Li Qingshan swung out with the Whale's Ingestion of Water, the crystal blade cleaving down viciously.

The Steel Plate corpse brought its hands together, actually catching the ice blade and swinging it away.

Li Qingshan was thrown into the air. He did a flip and landed on the ground gently. He was surprised, not because of the Steel Plate corpse's strength, but because it was different from regular zombies that only knew how to use brute strength.

The Iron Plate corpses surged in from all directions once again. Their viscous faces and stinging smell of corpses made Yu Zijian's heart thump nervously, but when she saw how Li Qingshan remained composed, she even began to smile in a self-deprecating manner.

The first senior brother's confidence was not groundless. It was already rather tough for Xiao An to face a ninth layer Qi Practitioner by herself, and if other Qi Practitioners were thrown into the mix, it would only be even more difficult for her to triumph. Unfortunately, they just happened to be disciples of the Burial Mound mountain.

Jade-green vines grew from below Xiao An's feet and tried to wrap around her, but they missed.

The two Skull Prayer Beads rose up in the air and expanded into two huge skulls. Their jaws chattered rapidly; it was like extremely strange laughter. Afterwards, they surged over like two meteors.

Boom! The two collisions merged into a single sound. Even the entire cavern shook slightly.

The skulls rolled along the ground, rampaging through the crowd and creating a series of chaotic cries and howls. Apart from one unlucky person, who was smashed to death by a skull, the others were mostly uninjured.

As for Xiao An, she turned into a white blur and passed through the crowd, arriving before the Steel Plate corpse.

A sneer appeared on the first senior brother's emotionless face. This skeleton monster sure was reckless. In this cavern, the strongest was not even him, but the Steel Plate corpse that he controlled. Even against eighth or ninth layer Qi Practitioners, the Steel Plate corpse had the ability to rip them to pieces. If the blackwater daemon had not been lurking in the water, he would have never suffered such a great loss.

If the skeleton monster used its startling speed to rush around the cave like Niu Juxia and kill the weaker Qi Practitioners, it would cause him some trouble, but it was just looking to die now.

The Steel Plate corpse swung its claw, and the whistling of ripping air filled the cavern. It was so powerful that even Li Qingshan frowned. If he wanted to face this Steel Plate zombie, he would have to transform. This first senior brother truly lived up to his reputation as one of the greatest disciples of the three mountains. Every single first senior brother possessed startling techniques. Unfortunately, he had run into Xiao An.

Xiao An did not move at all. She stared straight into the Steel Plate zombie's eyes, and her eye sockets emitted two thin strands of flames.

The Steel Plate corpse's body was impenetrable. Even regular techniques were unable to harm it, so why would it care about two thin strands of flames?

With a thump, Xiao An was smashed into pieces. The shiny bones scattered everywhere.

All the Qi Practitioners let out a sigh of relief, while their gazes towards the first senior brother were filled with awe. They thought, The corpse refining arts of the Burial Mound mountain really are impressive. It looks like I can't disobey this person today.

The first senior brother felt complacent inside. He was just about to say something.

The skull flew up from the ground, and afterwards, the scattered bones all began to assemble themselves. The vertebrae, ribs, and legs bones creaked and crackled as they produced a humanoid figure once again.

Li Qingshan's anxious heart eased up as well. The only way to kill her was to reduce her to ashes. There was not even a single crack on her bones right now. She had purposefully disassembled herself in order to avoid taking too much damage.

"Everyone, attack together!" The first senior brother's face grew even colder. He had never heard about a monster like this before. Killing it would not be easy. At the same time, he controlled the Steel Plate corpse, but the Steel Plate corpse remained in the same position as before, like it had frozen. It did not move at all. Only after a while did it straighten up.

However, the first senior brother had been overcome by shock and fright. His complexion grew paler and paler, and he actually began to perspire. His connection with the Steel Plate corpse had already been severed. The movements of the Steel Plate corpse earlier were not due to him.

"First senior brother, what's wrong?" The disciples of the Burial Mound mountain had never seen their composed first senior brother exhibit an emotion like that.

Most of the disciples of the Burial Mound mountain had hearts of steel and were extremely cold, while the first senior brother was even more so than the rest of them. Even when a mountain collapsed before him, he had never demonstrated such shock and fright. However, the Steel Plate corpse was equivalent to his second life. Who knew how much time, energy, and effort he had channeled into it. All of his strength, status, and authority depended on it, so now that it had suddenly vanished, even he experienced internal turmoil.

The Steel Plate corpse extended an arm and twisted its head, like it was adapting to its current situation. In the end, it turned towards the first senior brother. Red light poured out from its eyes like balls of fire were burning inside.

The first senior brother's heart sank completely. He stammered, but his voice was inaudibly gentle.

"What did you say, first senior brother?" asked a disciple beside him.

"Run!"

The Steel Plate corpse lunged over, while the first senior brother bounded up like a zombie. The disciple who had asked the question was still perplexed. Why did his first senior brother call the Steel Plate corpse over?

The Steel Plate corpse grabbed his shoulders with its claws and pulled hard, ripping him into two. The squirting blood and slippery innards scattered on the ground.

Now, the two giant skulls from the Skull Prayer Beads rolled in front of the zombies around Li Qingshan. They opened their mouths and sprayed out fire. The fire seemed to be self-conscious, flowing into the eyes, noses, mouths, and ears of the zombies. Just like the Steel Plate corpse earlier, all of them halted before turning around together like a well-trained army, lunging towards the Qi Practitioners.

The powerful weapons of the Burial Mound mountain immediately became the nightmare of all Qi Practitioners, while the dozen or so indestructible Iron Plate corpses became the nightmare of nightmares.

There were flashes of light from techniques, but they failed to stop the advance of the zombies. Cries and howls rose and fell like waves. The dark cavern immediately turned into a living hell, while the zombies were the devils of hell.

“What’s going on? Are the disciples of the Burial Mound mountain trying to silence us?”

“No, I don’t know... Argh!” Before a disciple could even finish talking, he was knocked over by the Iron Plate corpse that originally belonged to him, and his heart was wrenched out.

The disciples of the Burial Mound mountain all relied on controlling zombies for battle, but now that they had lost their zombies, they were like toothless, clawless tigers. Their battle prowess was even worse than the other Qi Practitioners. Some even continued to try to control their zombies in a daze, but they were all ripped apart.

No one suspected that the disciples of the Burial Mound mountain were behind this anymore, as the first senior brother was currently being chased around by his renowned Steel Plate corpse, fleeing for his life desperately.

A few zombies pushed a middle-aged man down to the ground. The man felt his arm ache, and it had already been bitten by a zombie. He knew that he was going to die, but the zombies suddenly scattered and lunged towards the other Qi Practitioners.

The pain from his wound vanished as well. He checked it in surprise, and his arm had already turned into a ball of fire. The fire rapidly consumed his entire body, burning up all of his flesh and blood. In the blink of an eye, all that was left was a set of white bones, while the blood-red flames returned to the mouth of the skull.

The zombies would bite the Qi Practitioners and inject them with the blood-red flames in their body. That was something even more terrifying than corpse poison.

A golden streak of light passed through the heads of over a dozen zombies with a swish before returning to an eighth layer Qi Practitioner from the Pheasant’s Grace mountain. It was a Golden Pheasant’s plume. He still managed to remain composed.

The disciples of the three mountains knew about each other’s moves very well. They knew they could kill the zombies like this. Just when he was catching his breath, over a dozen zombies stiffened and lunged towards him, swallowing him in a small pile of corpses.

Chapter 247 - Tremors and Collision

With an explosive roar, there was a flash of golden light, and the pile of corpses scattered. The disciple of the Pheasant's Grace mountain stood straight once again. As an eighth layer Qi Practitioner, he obviously could not be harmed by these regular zombies.

Suddenly, he felt a terrifying sword intent bombard his back. He wanted to turn around, but it was already too late. Lowering his head, he saw the tip of a bone sword protruding from his chest, which was being drawn out slowly.

Xiao An moved through the crowd of people like a ghost, looking for openings to kill stronger Qi Practitioners. As long as she found an opening, she would use the sword style derived from the Cursive Sword Calligraphy to kill them all.

During the chaos, Li Qingshan had already entered the cave with the dumbfounded Yu Zijian. Not a single zombie bothered him anymore. He was just about to leave when he suddenly sensed something. He turned around and saw the first senior brother flying towards the cave as well. His clothes were in rags, and he was in horrible shape too. Right behind him was the Steel Plate corpse in close pursuit.

Li Qingshan smiled. He raised the Whale's Ingestion of Water, which squirted out Ice Condensate water, immediately forming a thick wall.

On the other side of the ice wall, the first senior brother's mouth was wide open, as if he was cursing aloud. He used all of his true qi as well. He was like an enraged lion.

Afterwards, with a bang, he smacked into the ice wall and slowly slid down with a twisted expression.

Li Qingshan grinned. The ice created from Ice Condensate water was as tough as high grade spiritual artifacts, so how could it be destroyed so easily?

The first senior brother just watched through the ice wall as Li Qingshan turned around and fled, vanishing into the dark cave. It was too late for him to curse, as the claws of the Steel Plate corpse were only inches away.

After the howls had been sealed off by the ice, they rapidly drew further away. Yu Zijian opened her eyes and only saw darkness. Li Qingshan had not just sealed in the first senior brother with that. He had sealed off the path of retreat for all those other Qi Practitioners.

"Niu Juxia?"

"What's wrong?" Li Qingshan lowered his head and looked at Yu Zijian, as if he already knew what she wanted to say. However, she shook her head instead. "Nothing." She only furrowed her brows as if she was in thought. Everything that she had gone through underground today had a tremendous impact on her pure mind. If she could understand something, then it would be a piece of wealth much more precious than any spiritual stones or spiritual herbs.

Light seeped into the gloomy depths like water. Li Qingshan stopped and placed down Yu Zijian. "Up ahead is the exit. You can go by yourself!"

Yu Zijian asked, "What about you?"

Li Qingshan said, "I obviously have to return underground."

“But it’s very dangerous right now!” In Yu Zijian’s eyes, the underground was hell, and there were terrifying monsters lurking down there. As soon as she heard that Niu Juxia actually wanted to return to such a place, she began to worry.

“To me, the surface is even more dangerous than underground. The three mountains are searching for me. The three old coots are probably waiting for me up there!”

Yu Zijian said, “Chenglu is on the surface too. You know, she’s a good friend of mine. She has an elder brother who’s a commander of the Hawkwolf Guard. You’ve heard of the Hawkwolf Guard, right? Anyways, he’s a very impressive person and very kind too. I’ll ask him to plead on your behalf. It’ll definitely... definitely...”

Her voice gradually tailed off. She was pure, not stupid. After everything that she had gone through today, she understood just how vile human nature could be. She was just a worthless little girl, so what right did she have to ask for those important figures to help? Even if this important figure was willing to help, could he really guarantee Niu Juxia’s safety?

Li Qingshan smiled. “Thank you for trying.”

She covered her face with her arm, lowered her head, and began sobbing.

Li Qingshan asked, “What are you crying for?”

“I’m useless,” she said as she sniffled.

“If you’re useless, then why did I save you? Don’t worry, I have my ways to deal with this. I won’t die. You should go!”

“Really?” Yu Zijian used her sleeve to wipe her eyes and raised her head. Her eyes were red from crying, her face was covered in tears, but she was full of hope.

“Really.” Tender feelings developed in Li Qingshan when he saw her like this. He turned her around and pushed her back gently. “Stop being so silly.”

She stumbled a few steps before suddenly stopping. She turned around and sucked in a deep breath as if she had become extremely determined. “I want to stay here to help you out!” She pressed on her sword as she stood, and the light from behind made her shine from one side. She had quite the bearing.

“Your snot,” Li Qingshan said helplessly.

“What?”

“It’s almost flowing out.” Li Qingshan rubbed his nose.

Yu Zijian sniffled hard in a hurry. Her tiny bit of bearing vanished completely.

Li Qingshan strode back down the cave, while Yu Zijian called out from behind, “Hey, I’m serious! Don’t go!”

Li Qingshan’s figure had already vanished. Only a voice lingered about, resonating in the cave, “We’ll see after you accomplish something with your divine abilities first!”

Yu Zijian took a few steps forward. All she heard was her own steps. The suffocating feeling of repression and fear filled her heart once again. She gulped before slowly backing away. The strange, jagged rocks seemed like daemonic beasts. No, she felt like she currently stood within the gut of a huge beast, with no one to rely on, alone.

There was a sudden, great rumble from underground, like a huge beast turning over. The daemonic beasts all seemed to spring alive, baring their fangs and swinging their claws, wanting to lunge over. She screamed before turning and fleeing.

Li Qingshan felt the violent rumble as well. He found it to be rather familiar. Yes, a rumble like this had happened when he first met Milliped in the garden outside Salt Mountain city.

Wasn't he sleeping? Did something happen?

Li Qingshan sped up and rushed deeper underground. He arrived before the cavern, and a great, bloody hole had already been ripped open in the ice wall. There were still a few Qi Practitioners in the cavern, curled up in a corner with faces filled with despair.

The zombies had completely vanished now, and only three Iron Plate corpses remained. This only illustrated the intensity of the struggle that the Qi Practitioners had put up before death. However, both the zombies and their corpses had vanished. They had all become nutrients to Xiao An.

Xiao An clutched her bone sword and stared at the cave leading underground. The first senior brother was heavily injured and had fled that way, but she did not send the Steel Plate corpse in pursuit. Clearly, she had realised the cause of the tremor as well.

The first senior brother clutched his injured chest and unleashed all of his true qi, flying deeper underground. He would look back from time to time to see whether the monster was chasing him or not. There were other paths that led to the surface. As long as he could escape, he could rise up again. He would never redeem himself until he got his revenge.

The rumble grew more and more intense. He had participated in many Herb Gathering ceremonies before, so he knew that earthquakes often occurred underground. As a result, he did not care too much about it.

Suddenly, a green flash shot by him. He only managed to catch a blur. It was a cultivator in the uniform of the Green Vine mountain who gave off a strange smell. It was too late for him to think anymore about it. With a thump, a huge figure slammed into him.

Chapter 248 - Ambush and Trap

Who knew how many times more violent the collision this time was compared to when he ran into the ice wall. Not a single bone in his body remained whole. He was only alive thanks to his true qi. Wind whistled by his ear as he was rapidly pushed back by the huge figure. He tried his best to open his eyes, but he discovered that he had returned to the cave. He saw the skeleton monster standing beside the Steel Plate corpse he had spent so much effort refining.

"Fucking..." After that one word, a pink gas swallowed him, making him lose his final sliver of consciousness.

The segmented body was a magnificent pink. Who knows how many legs protruded from the sides as they rapidly moved in a rhythm. It moved with startling speed; only a pink streak was visible, like an underground rail whooshing by. It was enough to kick up a wild gust and make Li Qingshan's clothes ruffle. This was the first time Li Qingshan had seen Milliped's original form, but what he saw was no longer just his original form, but a raging river of daemon qi.

This was the first time Li Qingshan had sensed Milliped's power to such a great extent. Normally, this guy who fell asleep as soon as he was done eating did not seem dignified at all, but he was actually a Daemon General through and through. Moreover, he was one of the stronger Daemon Generals out there.

The remaining Qi Practitioners all held their breaths and widened their despaired eyes at this sight. If everything earlier was all a nightmare, then it felt like something even more terrifying had intruded on the nightmare right now, immediately disrupting their thoughts. Under the impact of the daemon qi, they directly fainted.

Milliped left in a hurry. Li Qingshan and Xiao An stared right at each other. They both saw a green figure easily escape while being pursued by Milliped. Was he...

"Oh no!" Li Qingshan's expression changed drastically. Further up was the surface, and there, Milliped would lose the protection of the Treaty of Kings. He would become prey human cultivators could freely hunt down and kill, and right now, there were three Foundation Establishment cultivators waiting up there, as well as a green flash of unknown strength. He caught the scent of a deep scheme.

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Yu Zijian threw herself into the snow. The dazzling sun forced her eyes shut. The light enveloped her from everywhere, making her dizzy.

She could vaguely hear people rushing over and calling out, "Someone else has come out!"

She gradually opened her eyes and saw over a dozen Qi Practitioners laying in the distance, covered in blood. Some of their faces were numb, while others were sobbing.

They were all independent cultivators. They were unable to choose the most optimal routes and best locations like the disciples of the three mountains, and they even set off later as well, but this turned out to be a blessing in disguise. They avoided many traps of certain death, but they still experienced a lot of danger before escaping with their lives. They were lucky survivors.

Before she could even look at these people properly, three figures suddenly appeared before her, blocking the sun.

The elders of the three mountains asked in a hurry, "How's the situation down there?"

Yu Zijian raised her head in confusion and saw that their expressions were very similar to the lucky survivors. They were filled with gloominess and dejection.

The corner of the Lone Grave Elder's mouth constantly twisted, the Golden Pheasant's Elder's widened eyes were bloodshot, and the Green Vine Elder who had always been composed lost his usual calm too.

If the disciples that died in the beginning made their hearts bleed, then their hearts would basically be springs of blood now, bleeding endlessly.

The specks of light on the mental map were like flying sparks. They were extinguished in great quantities at a time. There were several times when the Golden Pheasant Elder wanted to rush into the caves, but he was stopped by the Green Vine Elder and the Lone Grave Elder. Hua Chengzan was nearby. They could never break the treaty before him.

In the end, very few specks of light remained. They learnt from the mouths of the surviving independent cultivators that they had fallen for the traps of the demons this time.

Although they barely managed to maintain their composure due to the mental fortitude that they had developed over many years, they were ashen. Only the Lone Grave Elder remained mostly the same, but he thought, It's over. It's all over.

Just when Yu Zijian was perplexed by the question, Hua Chenglu rushed over and scooped her up. "Zijian, you're fine! Fantastic! You really made me worry!"

"Chenglu, oh. I'm fine." Yu Zijian looked past her shoulder and saw Hua Chengzan standing nearby with his hands behind his back, but his usual smile had vanished.

Hua Chengzan knew that the Herb Gathering ceremony this time had completely devastated the foundations of the three mountains. A sect was not just its Foundation Establishment sect master. It required a large number of disciples as well, necessary for managing the affairs of the sect and continuing its legacy. From the weakest outer disciple to the strongest first senior brother, not a single component could be missing.

Now, the three mountains had lost ninety percent of their disciples at the very least. They were like a tree that had its roots cut off. While it still stood on the surface, it would wither and die before long.

He felt rather bitter as well. He tried to stop them from killing the demons, but the demons schemed in the shadows and used this opportunity to deal a fatal blow. He even began to suspect that the Daemon General in this region was not as stupid as the records suggested at all, but was instead a wise figure, no, demon who played the fool. The Herb Gathering ceremonies in the past were all just bait that the Daemon General had purposefully cast out.

They truly targeted and wanted to harm one another. The age of the Treaty of Kings was already long past. Just how much longer could the law and order upheld by the school of Legalism remain intact?

At this moment, the underground tremors had already grown more and more intense. Hua Chengzan looked into the pitch-black caves and frowned. This doesn't seem like an earthquake.

Looking at the three elders, they had already left Yu Zijian alone. They all looked into the caves together and no longer bothered to disguise their emotions. Fury and delight intermingled on their faces; it was like they were crazy.

A terrifying demon qi directly burst out from underground like a tidal wave.

Oh no!

Hua Chengzan's expression changed. He arrived beside Hua Chenglu and Yu Zijian in a flash and grabbed their shoulders, unleashing all of his true qi and leaping out of the pit.

The pit was over thirty meters deep, but he pulled higher and higher in the air, arriving above the pit in the blink of an eye. A ball of green light that moved ten times faster than him shot by, vanishing into the sky. When he was being chased by Milliped, he had actually been holding back with his speed.

It was like a lightbulb had lit up in Hua Chengzan's head, and he immediately understood the whole story. His mission had still ended in failure. Not only had Fu Qingjin defeated the three elders silently, but he had even lured the Daemon General out from underground.

Powerful daemon qi rushed into the air as a millipede over a hundred meters long emerged from underground, exposed under the light of day. It raised its head and produced a sharp hiss at the sky.

The huge figure was enough to blot out the sun, and the surviving Qi Practitioners all turned sheet-white. The three elders increased their vigilance as much as possible.

"W- what is that?" Hua Chenglu asked with a trembling voice. No matter how high in the air she was, the pretty colour and vicious shape still made her shiver inside.

"The original form of a Daemon General." Hua Chengzan rubbed Hua Chenglu's head to comfort her. In this age, very few humans had seen the original form of Daemon Generals, and hopefully, it would stay like that in the future.

Suddenly, he saw Yu Zijian looking straight down. He asked in surprise, "Aren't you afraid?"

As if she was possessed, Yu Zijian completely ignored his question as she clutched the hilt of her sword firmly.

"Die, wretched daemon!" A roar filled with hatred and anger erupted from the Green Vine Elder's chest. He brought his hands together in a seal, which unfurled like a lotus. The spiritual qi of the world began to move.

Suddenly, he pointed down, and several green vines erupted from the ground. Each vine was even thicker than a pillar as they wrapped and tightened around Milliped. Even more vines sprouted from the green vines, all as thick as pillars, entangling his numerous legs.

Milliped was immediately immobilised. He was unable to unleash any of his terrifying strength. He produced another hiss, and his body released a pink gas.

The verdant green vines around him immediately began to wither and decay. The pink gas filled the entire pit. The lucky survivors saw this already, so they began to leap out of the pit, but they were nowhere near as fast as Hua Chengzan. Just when they were about to reach the lip of the pit, the pink gas surged over.

They roared out and unleashed all of their protective talismans and techniques, but all they felt was their sights darken and their bodies seize up. They were unable to use any strength anymore, unable to mobilise even a strand of true qi. They fell straight back into the pit, and the only things that struck the ground were the corrosion-resistant hundred treasures pouches, which sank slowly into the earth.

Even the rock and soil was being eaten away by the gas, hissing and producing white smoke. The gas was startlingly potent.

Hua Chengzan had originally been hovering above the pit. Seeing this, he flew away to one side before looking down once again. The pit was like a volcanic crater that was about to erupt. The greyish-white smoke and the pink gas merged into a smoke dragon, extending towards the sky. It was visible even from over fifty kilometers away.

He was shocked inside. This is the power of a Daemon General!

However, before Milliped could break free, even more green vines wrapped around him. Only the three elders continued to stand strong. They used various protective techniques, but the pink gas still ate away at it constantly.

However, even if they combined their true qi, they were nowhere near close to rivalling Milliped's daemon qi. Drawing out the battle was as foolish as idiotic nonsense.

The Green Vine Elder bellowed out, "Why don't you assist me, fellows?"

There was no need for him to say that at all. A golden pheasant rose into the air and erupted with light, merging and shining with the dazzling sun in the sky, which only made it seem even more glorious. With a cry, a pheasant's foot landed on Milliped's head. Then, the pheasant pecked down viciously.

At the same time, a figure surrounded in surging, black smoke passed through the pink gas and stabbed Milliped's soft belly with its claws.

There was a clang, like the screeching of metal, which resounded through the pit numerous times and rushed into the sky.

Milliped let out a pained hiss. His huge body writhed violently and released even more gas. Although he seemed unscathed with the toughness of his belly, it still felt like someone had driven an awl into him.

Afterwards, there was a great thump, and a figure landed a punch on Milliped's belly, leaving behind a dent. Something that seemed like a human general appeared through the surging black smoke. A damaged set of rusted bronze armour covered its body. Even its face was hidden within the helmet, only revealing a set of bloodthirsty eyes. It was actually a zombie, but its eyes were not as hollow as regular zombies'. Instead, they seemed intelligent and self-conscious.

Chapter 249 - Conscience

One of Milliped's long, spiny legs tore through the air and stabbed over like a spear. The zombie dodged it dexterously, almost no different from a living person.

The Lone Grave Elder stood in the distance with a cold expression. At this level of corpse refining, he no longer refined mindless puppets. There was no need for him to actively control it.

He had dug up thousands of graves and eventually found the ancient corpse of a disciple of the school of the Military in a general's cemetery. Back then, the corpse was already close to zombifying. He spent a tremendous effort to suppress its free will and refined it into an Ancient Bronze Corpse General in the end.

Not only was it immune to fire, water, and regular weapons, but its combat awareness from when it was alive remained too. It was equivalent to a Foundation Establishment cultivator. Whenever he fought against people, he just had to summon it, and the battle would basically be two against one.

Failing to achieve anything with a punch, the Ancient Bronze Corpse General threw out another punch. With a series of thunderous thumps, the shell on Milliped's belly cracked and bled.

Milliped writhed in pain, suddenly breaking free from the restraint of one of the green vines and biting at the golden pheasant above him.

The golden pheasant flapped its wings and tried to climb higher into the air. Suddenly, it felt a tug on its tail. Milliped had clamped down on the golden pheasant's tail feathers, throwing it against the rocks with a swing of his head.

Milliped was so powerful that he seemed unstoppable, shocking the Golden Pheasant Elder. This Daemon General's strength is actually so great. He made up his mind to cut his losses. Golden feathers rained down from the sky as the golden pheasant climbed higher, hovering above the pit. It had lost most of its tail feathers, such that its tail was almost bald.

The Golden Pheasant Elder called out, "Green Vine, since when were your techniques so useless? Are you trying to kill us?"

"You have absolutely no idea. This wretched daemon is just too strong. I can't last for much longer. Hurry up and kill it!" The Green Vine Elder basically forced these words out through gritted teeth. His face was bright red. He was trying to contend with Milliped's physical strength with his spiritual energy alone, so he was under the most pressure.

The golden pheasant circled around the stream of smoke and arrived higher in the sky. It shone with resplendent, golden light, rapidly gathering the golden sunlight and gradually blurring itself. A miniature sun seemed to appear in the sky.

Milliped instinctively sensed danger. He lowered his head and spat out a mouthful of pink acid at the Ancient Bronze Corpse General. Even the Ancient Bronze Corpse General was afraid of touching that, so it retreated to thirty meters away. Meanwhile, a huge pit had already formed before it.

Contaminated with acid, over half of the vine's main stalk was eaten away instantly. Milliped used his full strength and pushed down with all of his legs at the same time, about to break free.

"Trees Grow and Grass Sprouts, in an Endless Cycle!"

The Green Vine Elder bellowed out, and he exploded with dazzling, green light. His hair, beard, and skin all turned green from the light, like he was not a human, but a carving of green wood. He shone together with the Golden Pheasant Elder in the distance.

The green vines grew crazily, sprouting from the ground and the cliffs, wrapping around Milliped in a great cocoon.

"Vines Wither and Trees Age, Between Decay and Glory!"

All of the vines ran out of moisture, becoming a withered, yellow colour, like the withered vines in ancient forests and on cliff faces that had been there since forever. They were the toughest, where even machetes would fail to leave a mark on them.

The rate of corrosion immediately slowed down. Milliped had been sealed within this cage of withered vines.

At this moment, there was a pheasant's cry that filled the wilderness. The golden sun fell from the sky.

The golden pheasant had pulled in its wings, with its beak at the front and tail feathers at the back. It directly rushed towards the immobilised Milliped with a long tail of flames.

The Ancient Bronze Corpse General returned to the Lone Grave Elder, who watched on with his head raised. He felt shocked too. He had nothing to fear if he faced against just the Golden Pheasant Elder or the Green Vine Elder, but if they worked together, he would be dead for sure, even despite that move of his.

The three mountains had suffered heavy losses, but he was the least affected by it. Apart from the fact that his heart was like a zombie's, basically emotionless, his thoughts were surprisingly similar to that of the first senior brother of the Burial Mound mountain. If he could refine this Daemon General's corpse into a daemon corpse, his strength would definitely increase significantly, enough to surpass the Golden Pheasant Elder and the Green Vine Elder. After that, merging the three mountains into one mountain would no longer be entirely impossible.

Hua Chengzan sighed gently. He was prepared to return and report this to his commanding officer. Who knows what kind of disturbance the death of a Daemon General would cause. Probably even Wang Pushi would not be able to bear the consequences. He could only make her come.

At this moment, another daemon qi surged into the air, and Hua Chengzan's expression changed all of a sudden. There were actually daemons bold enough to emerge at a time like this. He squinted his eyes and peered through the clouds and smoke, but he failed to spot the daemon.

The Green Vine Elder and the Lone Grave Elder felt a violent tremor from beneath their feet. The tremor was not just an ordinary earthquake. The power hidden within was utterly shocking. They leapt up at the same time and saw large parts of the pit crack. The cracks rapidly expanded towards the edges.

The vines were originally rooted in the ground, so they began to loosen as well, but it was already too late.

Boom!

The golden pheasant fell. With a great rumble, countless beams of golden light erupted in the pit as the cracked rocks began to collapse like booming thunder. The yellow dust in the air, combined with the pink gas, was illuminated by the golden light. The pit was like a huge pot, violently boiling right now.

The golden light was so dazzling that Hua Chengzan struggled to make out what was happening in the pit. However, the Daemon General's daemon qi did not vanish. The Golden Pheasant Elder had missed.

Another huge, blurry figure appeared in the dust and smoke.

Li Qingshan had completely transformed. He stood over forty feet tall as he gasped for air. Milliped laid behind him, having finally broken out of the vines and recovered his freedom.

The perfectly-round pit now had a huge tear. It was possible to imagine what the consequences would have been if the attack had landed. Fortunately, the Golden Pheasant Elder did not have complete control over that move.

When Li Qingshan and Xiao An arrived at the entrance, they sensed the three Foundation Establishment cultivators encircle Milliped and attack him with their spiritual energy. Every single one of them was more powerful than he was, but he would never back down when his friend was under life-threatening danger. He immediately cast aside the possibility of danger and was about to rush out to assist Milliped. However, he was stopped by Xiao An, who told him not to panic.

After calming down, Li Qingshan waited while holding his breath. He wanted to see whether an opportunity to heavily injure a Foundation Establishment cultivator would present itself, but he also knew just how unlikely that was. However, in the final, critical moment, he tore through the ground and used a drastic measure against the situation, destroying the foundations of the vines before grabbing Milliped by his tail and pulling him aside, allowing him to avoid the Golden Pheasant Elder's killing strike.

The blurry, humanoid figure made the three Foundation Establishment cultivators narrow their eyes. Was this another Daemon General? They retreated to one side of the pit cautiously, recovering their spiritual qi as they watched Li Qingshan vigilantly.

Li Qingshan ignored them. He turned around and punched Milliped's head, yelling, "You idiot! Wake up!" It was as if he was trying to verify the three elders' thoughts. Regular daemons would never be bold enough to hit a Daemon General. However, while the daemon qi he gave off was tremendous, he did not feel like a Daemon General.

Milliped shook his head, and his mind seemed to clear up slightly. He hissed at Li Qingshan and said through his daemon qi, "You've come. My head hurts."

Li Qingshan replied with daemon qi, "If it hurts, then you deserve it! Why don't you turn back into human form and leave with me!"

"Okay!" Milliped transformed and turned back into the bald-headed, idiotic-looking fatty. He rubbed his belly. "My belly hurts too!"

Li Qingshan said nothing. He grabbed him and shoved him into the cave.

"Oh no, they're trying to escape! Trees Grow and Grass Sprouts, in an Endless Cycle!" The Green Vine Elder said.

Just when Li Qingshan wanted to dive into the cave as well, countless vines pierced through the rock and merged together, blocking the entrance and separating him from Milliped. Milliped roared furiously as he tried to tear apart the vines.

Li Qingshan sighed instead and said, "Run!" A violent gust of wind kicked up behind him. The golden light projected his figure against the rock face as the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell rose up automatically.

With a few clings and clangs, the pheasant claw that was as tough as a high grade spiritual artifact locked down on the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell. The golden pheasant flapped its wings and lifted Li Qingshan into the air.

The golden pheasant lowered its head. It started at Li Qingshan with its golden pupils filled with fury. "You want to run? That one has escaped, so you can replace him!" The Golden Pheasant Elder was vaguely visible inside.

The pit below his feet rapidly shrank in size, but the Green Vine Elder and Lone Grave Elder seemed to shine no matter how far away they were.

Li Qingshan immediately understood the danger that he was in. His blood boiled, but his mind instead became calmer and calmer. He sucked in a deep breath and unleashed the Tiger Demon's Fierce Roar. The sound wave flooded the wild wind and slammed against the golden pheasant together.

The golden light shuddered, and the claw of the pheasant loosened. Li Qingshan fell out of the sky, but before he had even hit the ground, countless thick vines extended over from the surroundings of the pit like arms, wrapping around the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell and turning it into a ball of vines.

Under the control of Foundation Establishment cultivators, the ground immediately became even more distant than the sky. Cut off from the depths of the underground, Li Qingshan had nowhere to run. He was extremely large, but against the three Foundation Establishment cultivators, he was like a skinny child facing three tough adults. That was how puny he seemed.

The three elders flew through the air and revolved around the ball of vines.

The Green Vine Elder said, "Oh no, he's only a regular daemon!" Although his shape and strength was very extraordinary, his daemon qi did indeed make him a mere daemon. It was a huge contract compared to their original target.

The three of them had worked together and schemed against the unsuspecting, yet they still failed to kill the Daemon General and exact revenge. They were humiliated so much that their faces immediately twisted!

"Dammit!" The Lone Grave Elder slammed the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell emotionlessly. With a rumble, the shell shook violently, but it remained undamaged.

The three elders were surprised, but their fury only intensified. The Golden Pheasant's Elder said, "Smash through his shell. I want to skin him alive and cut him to pieces out of hatred!"

The Green Vine Elder thought of something. "Perhaps we can lure out that Daemon General."

The Golden Pheasant Elder said, "Green Vine, you're dreaming. Daemons have no concept of friendship or loyalty. They're heartless. All they know is to struggle for survival. Carapaced daemons are the dumbest out of all of them, so it's even less likely for them to understand what ties of friendship mean." As he said that, the pheasant's beak struck the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell viciously, while the Ancient Bronze Corpse General threw out a punch.

The shell trembled uncontrollably. No matter how tough it was, just how much longer could it last against the combined attacks of three Foundation Establishment cultivators?

“It’s true that daemons have no concept of the ties of friendship.” What Li Qingshan said stunned the three elders, “They only act on their own conscience!”

A huge, pink bug leapt up as hard as it could and left the ground like a carp leaping out of the water before biting onto the Spirit Turtle’s Profound Shell.

Chapter 250 - The Battle in the Pit

“Woah! Look, Zijian, that monster has come out again! It has come to save this monster!” Hua Chenglu grabbed Yu Zijian’s arm and shook it around.

Hua Chengzan smashed her over the head. “Don’t move about.”

The three of them currently sat on a paper crane. The paper crane was covered with glyphs as it flapped its wings and soared through the air, just like a real crane.

After her initial fright, Hua Chenglu had calmed down. Unaware of the implications, she completely treated the battle below as a show to watch.

Yu Zijian asked, “Do daemons have ties of friendship too?”

“All living creatures, as long as they live in this world, do. How can they not have ties of friendship? I just never thought that there would be such a strong bond between daemons of different types, such that they’re willing to risk their lives for each other,” Hua Chengzan said suddenly. His eyes were filled with emotion.

Yu Zijian said, “Then, is it still right for humans to punish and put daemons to death?”

“Of course. Even among humans, we have people trying to kill each other, let alone with other races. And, if it weren’t for the pressure from humans, why would daemons band together? Killing each other is the norm. All living creatures, as long as they live in this world, will. How can they not kill and compete with one another?” Hua Chengzan’s expression then became desolate.

Bonds? Killing? Right or wrong? Yu Zijian’s mind was in a mess.

The battle in the pit had already begun.

Hua Chenglu watched in a fixed trance. She did not divert her attention to listening to Hua Chengzan at all.

Milliped grabbed the Spirit Turtle’s Profound Shell with his mouth and pulled Li Qingshan out from the ball of vines. The three elders rejoiced.

The golden pheasant flapped its wings, the green vines grew and spread while the Ancient Bronze Corpse General controlled its corpse qi, leaping up.

The encirclement was complete. They would not be letting this wretched daemon escape this time.

Milliped twisted his body like a dragon swaying its tail. With enough force to destroy an entire army, it collided against the golden pheasant.

The golden light shattered, and the Golden Pheasant Elder shot off like a broken kite, smashing into the rock head-first and becoming deeply embedded. Only a sky filled with pheasant feathers was left behind.

The Ancient Bronze Corpse General rushed forward at a time like this.

Li Qingshan released the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell and gathered all of his daemon qi, which raged like a river. Unconcerned, he threw out a punch.

The Ancient Bronze Corpse General felt like a great, dark cloud had enveloped it above before a black bolt of lightning struck it.

The fist was anything but ordinary. It was the size of a boulder, so no matter how skilled the corpse was, it was difficult to dodge, let alone the fact that the corpse was mid-air. With its viciousness aroused, the Ancient Bronze Corpse General let out a roar, and its fangs protruded as it threw out a punch as well.

The Lone Grave Elder sneered inside, Just like an ant trying to shake a tree, overconfident! Do you really think you're a Daemon General that can compete with the Ancient Bronze Corpse General in physical strength? Daemons are all this foolish, thinking that they can win just because they're bigger. Once I refine you into a daemon corpse, you might be a little cleverer under my control.

The two fists collided and actually froze up in the air. The corpse qi and daemon qi clashed violently, pushing aside the smoke and gas and creating an empty region.

The Lone Grave Elder was slightly surprised. Was it actually able to match the Ancient Bronze Corpse General with its brute strength?

However, the Ancient Bronze Corpse General gave way just a while later, falling to the ground with a great thump and creating a huge pit.

Having reached the second layer of the ox demon, he possessed a huge advantage from his size alone, and he had the advantage of height too. If he lost to a Corpse General in terms of physical strength, even if he would not hang himself, the black ox would hang itself.

Although the Ancient Bronze Corpse General had lost the clash, it was not injured either. It let out an explosive roar, and just when it had straightened itself out, the black cloud descended from the sky again.

I'll attack while you're weak! How could Li Qingshan let such a great opportunity slip by? From above, his iron hoof landed heavily on the Ancient Bronze Corpse General.

The bottom of the pit raged and stirred like the surface of the ocean. Tonnes of rock and soil were thrown about. Only the ground where the hoof stood rapidly sank down.

Innate ability, the Ox Demon Tramples!

All of his power was concentrated on the Ancient Bronze Corpse General. Only after passing through its body did it spread to the surrounding ground.

Cracks immediately began to appear on the Ancient Bronze Corpse General's seemingly-indestructible armour as it produced a twisted sound. In reality, the Ancient Bronze Corpse General's internal injuries

were much worse than the damage on the surface. The bronze armour was extremely effective when it came to blocking flying swords, flying blades, and other sharp weapons, but against the most primitive, most barbarous blunt weapons, it was much less effective.

On the ancient battlefields on Earth, the weapons used by generals rapidly changed and evolved with the development of the technology of armour. When blades or swords failed to pierce armour, a swing of a mace would be enough to crush the enemy's organs and make them spew blood.

Li Qingshan raised his hoof, but he was definitely not foolish enough to give the opponent any chances to do anything. He unleashed the Ox Demon Tramples once again. From afar, it just seemed like a daemon with the horns of an ox and the tail of a tiger stomping around furiously, while the ground surged like boiling water, rising and falling constantly.

Above the pit, the vines did their best as they extended towards Milliped, wanting to bind and constrain him once again. However, Milliped was prepared this time, and he was quite a distance away from both the rock face and the ground, so it would take some time for the vines to reach him.

Milliped broke free from a few vines and swung his tail against the rock face. A huge breach appeared in the pit again. Milliped borrowed the force to rush towards the Green Vine Elder. He moved with startling speed while his sharp mandibles were on full display.

The Green Vine Elder was shocked. As the sect master of the Green Vine mountain, it had been many years since he last clashed with people on the same level as him. Although he was full of great power, he had still declined with his advanced age, so how could he engage in close combat against such a terrifying daemon? He flew in a hurry and climbed up the sky steeply, dodging and weaving.

Milliped suddenly twisted his body and wrapped around the Green Vine Elder several times before suddenly closing in on him as an insect ball. He used his colossal body to keep the Green Vine Elder trapped.

His many legs were like spears. Using his powerful joints, he stabbed at the Green Vine Elder from every direction. All he needed to do was land a single attack, and he could inject him with venom, which would rapidly eat away his body.

The Wood Spirit Protects the Body, Providing a New Lease of Life!

The Green Vine Elder formed a seal with his hand, and he became encased in withered wood. The legs stabbed into it and produced a series of thumps.

The withered wood was condensed from pure wood spiritual energy, but it was being rapidly depleted as the venom in the legs ate away at it.

The Green Vine Elder called out, "Save me, fellows!"

Without the restraint of the vines, Milliped immediately unleashed his terrifying strength, demonstrating the great power of a carapaced Daemon General.

The golden pheasant flapped its wings and flew into the air again, landing on the insect ball and unleashing a series of pecks. The Golden Pheasant Elder threw his life on the line, without any regard for his spiritual energy. As such, he produced a series of bloody holes on the insect carapace.

If these holes had appeared on human cultivators, every single one of them would be fatal, disemboweling wounds. However, Milliped's body was huge, so these wounds could only be regarded as grazes. And, with his powerful vitality as a carapaced daemon, he recovered extremely quickly.

Over half of the Green Vine Elder's spiritual energy had been depleted now. Pieces flew off from the withered piece of wood, turning back into spiritual energy and dispersing. It grew much thinner in the blink of an eye. He was just about to be stabbed by the legs and injected with venom.

In the blink of an eye, the tables had turned completely, which amazed Hua Chengzan. "Carapaced Daemon Generals truly are impressive!" If it were not for the fact that the three elders' techniques could be used together, with the Green Vine Elder's vines being especially troublesome with how they could restrict Milliped's movements, it would be very difficult for three regular Foundation Establishment cultivators to defeat it. Instead, the slightest of carelessness could result in them being killed.

Hua Chenglu asked in surprise, "Brother, are those three s-seniors going to lose?" Although she disliked the Green Vine Elder, she could not help but feel sad over the loss of her own kind now that these powerful human cultivators were about to die to the hands of daemons.

Hua Chengzan shook his head. "That hybrid daemon has only managed to gain a temporary upper hand. How can it actually win against a Foundation Establishment cultivator? Once it's killed, they can reestablish their encirclement and emerge victorious."

His gaze suddenly turned to the clouds. And, that person has yet to interfere! He had probably failed to anticipate something like this earlier, so the Daemon General had almost escaped. However, he would never make this mistake a second time.

The Lone Grave Elder's expression finally changed. He looked at the Ancient Bronze Corpse General he had refined after so much effort in disbelief. Why was it being beaten up by a mere daemon in a one-sided fashion?

The Ancient Bronze Corpse General should have managed to break free a long time ago, but the Ox Demon Tramples caused violent vibrations too. With each tremor, it would momentarily affect the Ancient Bronze Corpse General's movements, which would be enough for Li Qingshan to unleash a second the Ox Demon Tramples.

The Ancient Bronze Corpse General was clearly extremely powerful, but due to its carelessness, it had fallen for this move. This was clearly a mere coincidence, yet it seemed like it had all been planned. Li Qingshan was truly suited for actual battle. He was not very smart most of the time, but in battle, he would always be so clever and be able to erupt with one hundred and twenty percent of his battle prowess.

"Die, wretched daemon!"

The Lone Grave Elder, who had yet to directly interfere, finally took action. He also wore a bronze bangle on his withered wrist, but the lustre was much better than the first senior brother's. The glyphs on the bangle lit up and twelve Steel Plate corpses appeared in an orderly array, all rushing towards Li Qingshan.

With these twelve Steel Plate corpses, he could deal with any regular daemons as easily as winking. The reason why the Lone Grave Elder had not summoned them from the very beginning was because Steel Plate corpses were not particularly useful against a Daemon General, and it was very easy for them to be corroded and get destroyed by the gas. Now that Li Qingshan was trying to destroy his very lifeblood, he immediately unleashed all the strength he had.

The Steel Plate corpses lunged over together. Li Qingshan frowned. He could sense that the corpse qi of the Ancient Bronze Corpse General below his feet had been scattered many times already, but it had not sustained any fatal damage.

If he used the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell, it would obviously resolve the issue temporarily, but the Ancient Bronze Corpse General would be able to break free too, which would free up the Lone Grave Elder to save the Green Vine Elder. He needed to make time for Milliped.

Li Qingshan grabbed a Steel Plate corpse and stabbed its throat with his thumb. His sharp, tiger claw forcefully pierced the steel plating and black corpse qi leaked out. The Steel Plate corpse immediately crumbled and stopped moving like a broken rag doll, which Li Qingshan tossed aside.

However, the other Steel Plate corpses used this opportunity to throw themselves on Li Qingshan. Some climbed onto his shoulders and attacked his ears, some bit his neck while others grabbed his legs. They all tried to limit his movements so that the Ancient Bronze Corpse General could break free.

Li Qingshan felt like a tree covered with monkeys. He extended his hand, but the Steel Plate corpses could climb to another part of his body nimbly to make trouble. His entire body itched and pricked with pain, but the Steel Plate corpses struggled to rip through his ox hide that was a hundred times tougher than the steel plates.