

### Chapter 451 - Jiaping City, Strongboulder Emerges

In a daze, he saw a person wielding a sword, stabbing it right towards his face.

Li Qingshan's eyes shone, and a spirit turtle appeared in his sea of consciousness, suppressing the sword intent. The figure wielding the sword was reduced to ink strokes before dispersing.

Only then did he make out the rugged ink strokes scattered on the scroll. A stroke of the sword was a stroke of the brush, and a stroke of the brush was a stroke of the sword. In that instant, the hundred swords had struck out together, dancing and weaving into an earthshaking sword style. However, there were still flaws unfortunately. It was not everything.

However, those few strokes alone were like the horns of kylin and the claws of dragons. He could already sense the power of its original form.

Li Qingshan was utterly delighted. This was an arcane artifact through and through.

"It might just be an inferior arcane artifact, but it's probably no weaker than regular low grade arcane artifacts. As I repaired it, my understanding of the Five Absolutes Immortal's epoch-making talent only grew deeper. Qingshan, your strength will definitely increase tremendously with this." Chu Shidao sighed.

"Thank you, senior." Li Qingshan stowed the Cursive Sword Calligraphy away and bowed deeply.

Chu Shidao waved his hand with a smile. "There's no need to thank me. I'm a little tired. You're welcome to leave, the two of you!"

After Li Qingshan and Ru Xin had left, Chu Shidao said, "Danqing, I can tell that this child Qingshan is valiant and courageous, placing great emphasis on debts of gratitude and grievances. Now that this has been done, seek help from him if you encounter any problems. He shouldn't turn you down."

"Master..." Chu Danqing's heart warmed up, unable to say anything more. As it turned out, he had done all of this for him.

"None of your senior brothers and sisters are easy people to deal with. You must confront them slowly. There's no need to search for the location of the Painting Tomb in a hurry."

As if he was speaking his last words to him, tears immediately pooled in Chu Danqing's eyes.

Chu Shidao smiled. "My dumb child, don't be sad. Life and death are all set by fate. You should go. I want to talk to your mistress a little."

Leaving the school of Painting, Li Qingshan said to Ru Xin, "I didn't think you'd actually refine it. Why have you been ignoring me the whole time?"

Ru Xin looked back and asked in confusion, "Who are you?"

Li Qingshan was taken aback. He went up and tugged her sleeve. "What do you mean?"

"It's not like I know you, so please stop pestering me." Ru Xin shook him off in displeasure and took off on her artifact.

Li Qingshan caught up to her in a flash, flying alongside her. He pointed at himself and said, "I'm Li Qingshan. Don't tell me you don't recognise me anymore!" Seeing how unfamiliar Ru Xin was with him, he said in surprise, "Don't tell me... you drank the Water of Oblivion!"

"I may have. I forgot. However, since I've forgotten it, it's not worth remembering. No matter what we had going on between us, none of it matters anymore. Goodbye, fellow Qingshan." Ru Xin clasped her hands as soon as she said that and sped up resolutely. She flew away.

Li Qingshan watched her grow further away as he remained stunned for quite a while. Suddenly, he returned to his senses and began cursing aloud, "None of it matters my ass! You damn woman! You took all those spiritual herbs from me! You better spit it all out right now!"

In the distance, the corner of Ru Xin's mouth curled into a smile. This bastard is getting more and more clever. Fooling him is really quite difficult now.

Li Qingshan used tremendous effort, almost attacking Ru Xin's very dwelling, before finally getting everything he needed from her. However, Ru Xin stuck to her statement the entire time. "I don't know who you are, but since you insist these are yours, I'll give them to you."

Afterwards, even Li Qingshan began to wonder a little whether she had actually drunk the Water of Oblivion and forgotten about him. After receiving this batch of pills, Li Qingshan cultivated for a few more days in his dwelling, converting it all into his own cultivation. When he had nothing to do, he would study the sword intent within the Cursive Sword Calligraphy together with Xiao An.

Yu Zijian's group set off once more, and Li Qingshan could not help but take to the road again as their babysitter. The missions allocated to them this time were clearly much more difficult than the last. The group encountered many dangers. If it were not for Li Qingshan's secret protection, they probably would have sustained a few injuries and losses already.

Li Qingshan knew Hua Chengzan was placing pressure on Fu Qingjin with this, and he had probably even included Hua Chenglu's confession and Yu Zijian's reaction in his calculations. He wanted to force Fu Qingjin into yielding.

Winter had already passed now. The ground began to heat up again.

Yu Zijian flew above the Clear river on her sword. The two sides were both lush with vegetation.

"Junior sister Yu, up ahead is Jiaping city." Sun Yi closed the distance between them.

"Yep." Yu Zijian nodded. After facing life-threatening danger again and again, she had become more and more composed, and her halted cultivation finally broke through again, having reached the eighth layer now. With a supreme grade spiritual artifact, the Nine Yang sword, in hand, she had basically become the strongest among them. No one dared to brush her aside anymore.

Gazing at the city that appeared in the distance, Li Qingshan was slightly touched. I never thought I'd get the opportunity to come back here.

The flowing river suddenly made a turn, and the two banks turned into human settlements, replaced by households. With the three years of war, Jiaping city no longer possessed its former prosperity, but its influence remained, still possessing some of the scale of the past.

The iron hawk on the mountain continued to stare fiercely, like it was flying, but the other structures on the mountain were severely damaged. The branch of the Hawkwolf Guard here had already been dismantled. It was not under the protection of any powerful formations, nor were any powerful cultivators stationed here. They even struggled with regular daemons. It would just become a living target if it remained behind.

Li Qingshan landed on top of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain and gazed over the entire city. He remembered a few matters of the past and lamented slightly inside, but all of this happened in a single instant. He dismissed his thoughts and expanded his senses, but he failed to sense the existence of daemon qi in the city. As it seemed, the trouble-making daemon had already left. There was no need for him to keep such a close eye on them then.

However, he could sense a Qi Practitioner in the city. He leapt off the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, gliding over to a structure that seemed like a garden. He found the surroundings to be rather familiar. He thought about it and recognised it to be the district government.

Li Qingshan arrived in the garden silently and saw a person sitting beside a pond, cultivating. He revealed himself and smiled. "Sir Zhou, long time no see."

Zhou Wenbin jerked to his senses and looked over. He saw a large man standing behind him. He was so close, yet he had actually failed to sense him at all. Even now, he did not give off the slightest aura at all. He found the face to be extremely familiar. Listening to how he spoke, he suddenly remembered. "You're... Li Qingshan!"

The teenager of the past had completely become a grown man now. His bronze face, his tall nose bridge, his steady gaze, and his consolidated bearing gave off an indescribable presence. It inspired admiration.

"I heard you already established a foundation. Is that true?" Zhou Wenbin was well-informed. He had heard many rumors about Li Qingshan the entire time, but he was never really convinced Li Qingshan had established a foundation even right now. When he first saw him, he was only an insignificant first layer Qi Practitioner. Just how long had it been since then?

"It only happened recently. Sir, your cultivation has progressed drastically too, hasn't it?"

"The younger generation will always surpass the older! The younger generation will always surpass the older. Compared to you, I've basically just been wasting away time." Zhou Wenbin stood up in a hurry and invited Li Qingshan to sit down.

The two of them sat before one another and talked about what happened after they had separated. Zhou Wenbin was clearly slightly overcautious as he faced Li Qingshan. The difference in status between Qi Practitioners and Foundation Establishment cultivators was tremendous. Unless they had extremely deep ties, they basically never stood on equal footing.

No matter how old, no matter how much time spent cultivating, Qi Practitioners would always have to refer to Foundation Establishment cultivators as seniors. Even though Li Qingshan had not put on any airs, Zhou Wenbin still felt extremely unnatural. As he gazed at his junior of the past, he had leapt up in just a few years to a level he would never be able to reach. It was impossible for him to not feel even a hint of envy or reluctance to accept this.

Li Qingshan originally had nothing to do, so he revisited this old place to catch up with an acquaintance of his. However, with the conversation, he could not help but feel that the world remained the same around him while people changed. A chasm had already appeared between them, such that they could not even talk freely anymore. As a result, he lost interest in the conversation too, preparing to stand up and take his leave.

At this moment, Li Qingshan's heart skipped a beat. He would develop a slight connection with the ground as long as he was standing on it, and at that moment, he could feel something emerging from underground.

Hua Chenglu held the Daemon Searching compass and moved through the streets and alleyways with Yu Zijian and everyone else, searching for traces of daemons. The needle on the compass would turn from time to time, sensing the residual daemon qi that daemons had left behind before reverting to its original position.

They continued searching until they reached a busy street. Originally, people flowed to and fro on the street, bustling with activity, but with their arrival, it immediately fell silent. The pedestrians all stopped and stared at them, while the bosses and shopkeepers in the stores by the street stopped too, making their way out to take a look. The existence of cultivators was not exactly a secret to them, but women as beautiful as them were not common.

Hua Chenglu had already grown accustomed to gazes like that, so she was completely unfazed. She just stared at the compass in her hand. Seeing how the needle refused to budge, she raised her head and said, "Looks like there's nothing this time."

"That's good too. We can go rest." Yu Zijian raised her head and looked at the sky, searching for the blue bird.

However, in complete silence, everyone's gazes towards them changed.

Cultivators are all indomitable existences. With my status, all I can do is look at beauties like them. They'll just end up in the arms of other men in the future. I hate this. Since I can't obtain her, they can just go die. A spark of danger suddenly rose up in a waiter in front of a restaurant.

What beautiful women they are. Why must they be so beautiful? I've heard cultivators all possess eternal youth. This is completely unfair. I want to rip off their faces. Let's see whether they can still smile like that. A middle-aged woman in a brothel ground her teeth enviously. Vicious thoughts emerged one by one.

Old Li next door has borrowed my money, but he still hasn't returned it, even now. That's completely unforgivable. This bastard is better off dead. An old man carrying a bird cage suddenly thought.

“Stop hitting me! I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you!” A child who had been pressed against a chair, viciously spanked by his mother, suddenly roared out furiously. He put up a desperate struggle as his eyes became blood-red.

Thoughts emerged. Killing intent bloomed.

In that instant, everyone’s eyes became filled with malice and killing intent.

Hua Chenglu checked the compass in her hand, and it began to spin wildly like a windmill. It spun faster and faster. “Everyone, be careful. There’s daemon qi approaching. It’s tremendous and very dangerous.”

Rumble! The ground shook gently, and wild laughter appeared from underground.

“Hahahahaha! Kill! Kill! Kill to your hearts’ content!”

### **Chapter 452 - Running Across Each Other’s Better than Actively Seeking Out**

The ground cracked, and a huge boulder burst out from the earth. An invisible, terrifying power swept through the entire city in an instant. In everyone’s eyes, even the sky turned blood-red, but what was dyed red was not the sky, but their eyes. Regardless of their age or gender, their eyes all glowed red due to being filled with blood.

In the busy streets, everyone became frenzied, growling as they lunged at the people beside them. Their eyes were filled with hatred as they ground their teeth; it was like they were facing their mortal enemies.

“Oh no, the rock demon is slaughtering the city!” Sun Yi’s face changed drastically and cut down the people who lunged towards him. It was rumored that people would kill one another in madness wherever the rock demon went. He could slaughter an entire city without doing anything.

“Let’s go!” Hua Chenglu felt herself become restless and ingested a Pill of Soothing as she spoke anxiously.

Before she had even finished speaking, a voice rang out from beneath her, “To where?”

The ground began to ripple like water, and Strongboulder emerged. He stared at them with a vicious smile, like he was staring at a group of puppets. He had no intention of fighting. Killing them was easy, but Strongboulder wanted to rile up their killing intent and malice before he killed them so that he could feed off them.

Sun Yi was filled with fear, but under Strongboulder’s gaze, his fear turned into hysteric hatred and killing intent very soon. He charged towards Strongboulder.

Strongboulder threw his fist gently, and with a thud, Sun Yi’s head exploded like a watermelon, and pulp of red and white sprayed over Strongboulder. He let out a laugh. The two remaining Qi Practitioners could not withstand it any longer either and rushed over. They were ripped apart like dolls as the ground became covered by their slippery organs.

Strongboulder licked the blood on his hand and admired the slaughter that was everywhere. Only a moment had passed, but tens of thousand people had already killed one another.

In that moment, Jiaping city turned into a blood-soaked purgatory as malice radiated into the air. Strongboulder took in a deep breath and sucked in this malice, converting it into daemon qi and making his power as a Rock of Slaughter even greater.

Suddenly, Strongboulder sensed something and gazed in the direction of the district government's office. There were still other Qi Practitioners! His hand expanded violently and plunged into the ground. A crack stretched into the distance.

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How could Li Qingshan not recognise this familiar daemon qi? He said to Zhou Wenbin, "Run!" before shooting off in the direction of the daemon qi. Soon after he had taken off, a crack stretched over from afar, reaching deep into the government office. A huge hand of rock, several meters long, suddenly extended out from the ground, grabbing Zhou Wenbin who had tried to flee. He called towards Li Qingshan from between the cracks, "Save..."

However, before he could finish, the huge hand closed around him and crushed Zhou Wenbin to pulp with ease. Succeeding with the attack, the huge hand collapsed and shattered, only leaving behind a bloody mess.

Li Qingshan found this situation to be extremely troublesome; it was not because he feared Strongboulder's power, but because protecting two Qi Practitioners in the face of this power was anything but easy. Even if he transformed, it would still be difficult, let alone under the current circumstances.

However, he could not afford to think too much about it. The streets and buildings receded around him rapidly, and he arrived on the busy street in the blink of an eye. The street was no longer noisy. It was deathly silent now. Blood formed streams as corpses were scattered everywhere. It was a chilling sight.

Only when Li Qingshan saw how Yu Zijian and Hua Chenglu were still alive did he let out a sigh of relief. He hid his aura even more carefully and slowly approached them.

Hua Chenglu continued to hold on arduously through the power of the Pill of Soothing, resisting the invading killing intent. However, she knew she was probably done for this time. Who knew how many times she had heard of the infamous rock demon already. Even Foundation Establishment cultivators could not necessarily survive before him. Zijian, looks like we're really going to be going out on the same day.

As for Yu Zijian, she seemed to have become frightened out of her wits by the sight around her. She stood still like a statue, without moving at all.

Strongboulder let out a soft expression of surprise and looked at Yu Zijian's face. She had not been infected by the Rock of Slaughter's power, becoming a bloodthirsty, frenzied madman. She did not even give off a hint of murderousness or malice.

"Why?" Yu Zijian croaked. Her memories from three years ago flooded her head. She felt like she was reliving the moment with everything going on around her, with countless living people dying horrible deaths right in front of her.

Indescribable pain filled her chest, drowning out her hatred and resentment. When she said that, tears had already begun coursing down her cheeks, as if she was asking Strongboulder, yet also asking herself.

“There’s no why. Do you hate it? If you hate it, come kill me!” Strongboulder was rather surprised. She was a mere Qi Practitioner, yet she was actually completely resistant to the Rock of Slaughter. He extended his hand at Yu Zijian and withdrew all of his power, directing it towards Yu Zijian instead.

Her heart beat violently, urging her to kill.

Yu Zijian moved, but she did not charge over madly like Sun Yi and everyone else. Instead, she straightened herself out, wiped away her tears, and drew the Nine Yang sword. The noon sun seemed to flow across the blade like water as she pointed it towards this undefeatable opponent. Her gaze was sorrowful yet determined, without a hint of madness or fear.

“Interesting! It’ll be even more interesting when I kill you!” Strongboulder laughed.

There was a flash of white light, and the Nine Yang sword swung towards Strongboulder’s indestructible body. Hua Chenglu’s eyes widened. She could already see the fate when her sword snapped, and she died.

Strongboulder just spread his arms, completely neglecting the attack. Suddenly, his eyes narrowed, and he raised his arms, as if he wanted to block, but it was already too late. The Nine Yang sword landed on him, and he was sent flying like a spinning top, smashing through several dozen buildings consecutively.

Even Yu Zijian was surprised by the power of her strike, while Hua Chenglu behind her saw a large figure flash by. Before they could even return to their senses, they felt their waists tighten as the surroundings rapidly receded around them.

Li Qingshan could not bother with hiding himself anymore. He grabbed them by the waist and fled into the distance as quickly as he could. He had landed a strike on Strongboulder while he was careless, but he had failed to cause any meaningful damage. Before anything else, he had to take them to somewhere safe first.

Hua Chenglu saw a ripple of blue light, and Li Qingshan’s figure appeared. She said in surprise, “Have you been following us the entire time?” Normally, help would have never arrived so quickly, so only one explanation remained. He had been following them the entire time. If that were the case, all the dangerous situations they had encountered that turned into nothing made sense.

After three years, she saw Li Qingshan once again. However, Yu Zijian immediately became troubled with something else. He’s Niu Juxia!?

Li Qingshan said, “Now’s not the time to talk about that. He’s right behind us.”

Hua Chenglu turned around and took a look. With a great rumble, Strongboulder burst out of the rubble and shot into the sky like a cannonball. Before the dust had even settled, he fell back down like a meteor, shooting towards them.

Strongboulder stared at Li Qingshan with extreme fury. Due to a moment of carelessness, the human had actually managed to land a sneak attack. He radiated with murderousness like an ill omen.

In a different time and place, Li Qingshan would be very willing to fight Strongboulder to the death, but the circumstances right now were rather inappropriate. However, it was very difficult for him to escape from Strongboulder with just his cultivation as a human.

Suddenly, shimmering light filled his eyes. He had arrived above the Clear river again. Li Qingshan came up with an idea and dove headfirst into the river.

The river suddenly surged, rushing upwards with a roar. It turned into a huge dragon, opening its mouth and receiving Strongboulder with a growl.

Strongboulder completely ignored it. The water dragon ripped away at his body and smashed into him, but it failed to even leave a mark. With a wave of daemon qi, he directly rushed through the water dragon, smashing into the Clear river loudly.

Not only did the shockwave empty out that section of the river, but even the structures on the two banks were completely destroyed. He arrived on the flat riverbed and failed to find the three of them. The destroyed water dragon fell as rain before suddenly turning into mist that enveloped the region.

The mist was thick like clumps of cotton, reducing visibility to absolutely nothing. Not only did it restrict sight, but it also interfered with the sensing of aura.

“Mere trickery!” Strongboulder sneered. With a gush of his malicious aura, the mist immediately began to disperse. He vaguely made out three figures who fled into the distance. It was Li Qingshan, who carried Yu Zijian and Hua Chenglu with him.

Strongboulder leapt up and smashed viciously into Li Qingshan’s back, but when he came into contact with Li Qingshan, the three figures dispersed like mist. In the moment before, Strongboulder had clearly sensed the aura of living people from them.

With a rumble, Strongboulder smashed into the ground and formed a huge crater. He became even more vexed. He had killed many Foundation Establishment cultivators before, but never had he been toyed with twice while even failing to land a single blow. With the time he had wasted, they had probably fled far away already.

Sunlight fell down from above, projecting a shadow onto Strongboulder’s face. Strongboulder suddenly raised his head and saw Li Qingshan appear, just standing beside the crater with a sword in hand and staring at him. “Are you the rock demon?”

Li Qingshan had followed the Blaststream Water Dragon with a technique of shrouding mist. Then, he used the Divine Talisman of Great Creation to turn fiction into reality, attracting Strongboulder’s attention in the opposite direction. Afterwards, he used the Invisibility technique to hide Yu Zijian and Hua Chenglu, suppressing their auras as well. He had already fled thousands of meters away in a single instant.

Hearing the rumble in the distance, Hua Chenglu calmed down. The rock demon was terrifying, but this man was extraordinarily powerful too.

But at this moment, Li Qingshan thought of something and suddenly stopped. He summoned a cloud and left it in front of them before turning around and leaving.



Hua Chenglu asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'm going off to kill the rock demon, obviously," Li Qingshan said like it was as clear as day. Running across each other was better than actively seeking out each other. Who cared if the time was right or not? It would be fate if they ran into each other.

"Alone!?" Hua Chenglu said. The horrors of the rock demon had been deeply engraved in her heart. Even the mid Foundation Establishment One Thought master had died to his hands, while Li Qingshan was only at early Foundation Establishment. He was basically seeking his own doom if he did this.

"Of course not." Li Qingshan pointed out, and a streak of green light shot across the sky.

Fu Qingjin finally could not help himself any longer and interfered. Li Qingshan caught the scent of something called opportunity from all of this, so he returned to the crater. Strongboulder leapt out of the crater, lunging straight towards Li Qingshan. Suddenly, he felt a hint of danger. A stream of green light stabbed towards the back of his head.

"Fu Qingjin!" Strongboulder growled furiously. The sword qi was extremely familiar. He would know who it was even without seeing it with his eyes. He dared not treat the Green Ruins sword like any regular weapon. An armour of rock and soil suddenly erupted from his body, and the sword qi stabbed three inches deep before dispersing by itself.

Strongboulder's murderous, beady eyes were fixed on Li Qingshan. He decided to kill this person who had struck him with a sneak attack first, regardless of the consequences.

### **Chapter 453 - White Bone Breakthrough**

In the Chain mountains, within the Qing Xiao dwelling.

She forged the last Skull Prayer Bead. The eighteen prayer beads circled above Xiao An's head, forming a mystical formation. Suddenly, they all turned into skulls and spat flames at Xiao An.

The flames stripped Xiao An's flesh away from her, revealing the translucent, white bones underneath. Under the flames, they became even shinier, like they were sculpted from white jade. However, they were also imbued with a buddhist light that jade lacked.

Xiao An brought her palms together, like a disciple of buddhism being inducted into nunhood. However, she did not kneel, staring at the sky instead. The roaring firelight in her eye sockets seemed to be able to pierce the thick rock, gazing towards the Western Paradise or Sukhāvātī, the hall of buddhas.

Regular skeletons roused a feeling of horror within people, but with the posture she held right now, she seemed solemn and sacred, radiating with righteousness.

Xiao An slowly lowered her head, and the flames cloaked her body, like a multicoloured kāṣāya. She murmured softly.

"Right now, right here, I vow that all my actions, my intentions, are for ending the many buddhas, for slaughtering the boundless creatures, just so I can assist him in reaching beyond the Nine Heavens, right by his side."

With that vow, the flames vanished, and the eighteen skulls turned into eighteen Skull Prayer Beads, returning to her slender, pale wrist.

Breakthrough to the first layer of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty!

The door to Qing Xiao's Home opened loudly. With a flash, Xiao An took off into the air, flying towards Li Qingshan's location.

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Faced with Strongboulder's frenzied attack, Li Qinghan did not dodge at all. In the moment he was struck by the punch, he dispersed as a splash of water. Strongboulder's vicious smile stiffened slightly. He knew he had been played yet again.

This was a water technique. Although it could never compare to his innate ability, the Watermirror's Image, it was enough for drawing away some attacks.

Li Qingshan used the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility again to hide himself, retreating to a safe distance.

Fu Qingjin glanced at where he was. The Green Ruins sword let out a long thrum, and the Green Ruins Illusion rose up, enveloping Strongboulder.

Strongboulder roared angrily, "Fu Qingjin, don't you know anything else? This trick alone can't hurt me!" He radiated with malice, so condensed that it was black. The Green Ruins Illusion immediately began to twist.

At this moment, Li Qingshan suddenly received a message from Xiao An and learned that she had already forged the eighteen prayer beads, reaching the first layer of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty. He beamed inside, and his eyes immediately became filled with confidence.

It was time. His strongest helper had finally arrived.

Li Qingshan told Xiao An to hide first and wait for an opportunity. Xiao An nodded and turned away towards the earth. She swung her white bone sword around and directly burrowed through the ground.

Looking at the Green Ruins Illusion again, Fu Qingjin and Strongboulder were actually rather helpless against one another.

Strongboulder was clad in armour, so the sword qi from the Green Ruins sword could no longer do anything to him. Even if Fu Qingjin managed to get through the rock armour, he was unable to harm his actual body. The only thing Strongboulder was afraid of was the Green Ruins sword, but even if he were struck by it, it would leave behind a mark at most. As long as it was not a fatal wound, he could recover in the blink of an eye with a surge of daemon qi. Even Fu Qingjin was rather helpless against him despite his extraordinary sword techniques.

As for Fu Qingjin, he was basically undefeatable as he stood within the Green Ruins Illusion. No matter how many attacks landed on him, he would just scatter as green light before reassembling. He was indifferent. Clearly, the power of the Rock of Slaughter was unable to shake the will of the Green Ruins sword.

Having cut off Strongboulder from the spiritual qi of the world, he might have been able to win if he dragged this out blindly, but under the surges of Strongboulder's malicious aura, the Green Ruins Illusion gradually began to twist and shatter, with holes appearing from time to time. If Strongboulder wanted to flee, no one could stop him.

Fu Qingjin brought his fingers together like a sword and slid them across the Green Ruins sword. He chanted softly, "Myriad Sword technique!"

Thousands of Green Ruins swords tore through the air, their blades thrumming and their sword qi surging.

Strongboulder's beady eyes shone brightly. He was unable to absorb the spiritual qi of the world here, so he would probably lose the upper hand if they kept fighting. He let out a wild laugh. "I'll play with you next time!"

The black aura of malice gathered on his fist, and he pushed to the right. The halls and structures began to twist like a transitioning scene of a movie, caving into a huge hole that revealed the scenery outside the illusion.

The first person Strongboulder saw was none other than Li Qingshan.

"You want to stop me with just this much?" Strongboulder leapt out and threw a punch at Li Qingshan.

With just his cultivation at early Foundation Establishment, Li Qingshan did indeed possess no right to stop Strongboulder. Neither the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility nor the Arts of the Boundless Ocean could harm Strongboulder properly, let alone kill him.

With a shake of his hand, the Cursive Sword Calligraphy unfurled in the wind. Hundreds and thousands of ink strokes merged together as a sword as black as ink burst out of the paper.

Strongboulder and the ink sword collided, but there was no noise. The ink sword dispersed silently.

However, Strongboulder's unstoppable bearing that could tear through anything had been forcefully severed by the sword intent. At the same time, he felt an extremely sharp strand of sword qi pierce his indestructible stone skin, right through his body. It plunged through the daemon qi and directly headed towards his daemon core. It made his heart leap in fright.

Li Qingshan slowly raised his hands.

The Rising Tide Form—his sea of qi seemed to swell like the tide, endlessly and continuously.

The Cloud Parting Form—the rising tide turned into a tsunami, reaching towards the sky and parting the clouds in an unstoppable manner.

A hand pressed against Strongboulder's chest. Wave-like blue light rippled outwards with a dazzling array of colours.

Strongboulder had been forcefully slammed back into the Green Ruins Illusion. Fu Qingjin glanced at Li Qingshan in appreciation and did not let this opportunity slip by. The hole that Strongboulder had created immediately closed up.

Strongboulder was furious. He opened his mouth and coughed, forcing out the strand of sword qi with some rock fragments, but he still sustained some internal injuries. By the time he turned around to look, he could not find Li Qingshan anymore. Only countless Green Ruins swords filled Strongboulder's surroundings in formation, trapping him firmly.

"Go!" Fu Qingjin ordered, and the swords took off like rain. The swords spun like sawtoothed blades, chipping and grinding away Strongboulder's armour.

After sending Strongboulder back in there with the palm strike, Li Qingshan immediately ingested a recovery pill, sitting down to recover his spiritual qi. The palm strike was powerful, but it consumed a tremendous amount of spiritual qi. Combined with using the Cursive Sword Calligraphy, which was now an arcane artifact, he had directly consumed thirty percent of his spiritual qi. If they actually began fighting, he definitely would not be Strongboulder's opponent.

It was completely impossible for him to defeat Strongboulder as an early Foundation Establishment cultivator. However, if it were just doing an odd job or two, lending a helping hand every now and then, it was not too difficult. If he wanted to swoop in while they were both heavily injured, then he had to make Strongboulder stay behind and wear down Fu Qingjin.

However, through this, he became very satisfied with the power of the Cursive Sword Calligraphy. It could injure Strongboulder even with his defences. If a regular Foundation Establishment cultivator had received this attack instead, they probably would be dead already.

Strongboulder's vicious smile disappeared. His armour had been chipped away from him, and his body had become covered in many sword wounds. Unable to replenish his energy with the spiritual qi of the world, his daemon qi was nowhere near as vigorous as before either. The rate at which his wounds healed had obviously become much slower.

Strongboulder let out a mad roar, and his arms expanded in size by ten times. He swung them around madly like two huge pillars of stone, smashing apart the Green Ruins swords around him. Riling up his malicious aura, he punched down.

As long as he made contact with the ground, he would be able to flee through the earth. The reason why he could slaughter countless cities, make a name for himself as the rock demon, and go through countless battles without having a single person keep him behind was exactly because of this innate ability.

When the strength of one's opponent was similar, preventing them from escaping was very difficult to achieve. Even Fu Qingjin was helpless in this respect.

The Green Ruins Illusion gave way once again, but what Strongboulder saw was not the ground he was looking for, but flowing water.

Fu Qingjin had unleashed the Green Ruins Illusion near the Clear river. In order to prevent Strongboulder from escaping through the ground, Li Qingshan had dug out a huge pit under the Green Ruins Illusion before filling it with water.

Li Qingshan just floated on the water, holding the unfurled Cursive Sword Calligraphy in his hand and launching the ink sword.

Strongboulder wanted to dodge, but the ink sword moved with lightning speed, and he had been caught off-guard by Li Qingshan. At such a close distance, in such a narrow space, how could he dodge?

Strongboulder had almost gone crazy from anger and resentment. He ignored the ink sword that shot towards his chest and began to swell up, crushing down towards Li Qingshan like a mountain. At the same time, two stony arms reached towards Li Qingshan's shoulders. As long as he killed Li Qingshan or forced him back and returned to the ground, he would obviously be able to force out the sword qi and recover his wounds.

The Vortex Form!

Li Qingshan pushed out with both arms. The water surged and revolved rapidly, turning into two huge vortices and wrapping around Strongboulder's arms. He nullified Strongboulder's terrifying power by conquering the unyielding with the yielding.

Strongboulder's arms swelled once again, and the terrifying power directly ripped apart the vortices. Before absolute power, all tricks seemed so futile. Seeing how he was just millimeters away from Li Qingshan's shoulders, Strongboulder sneered. By then, all he had to do was use some force and rip him apart...

Of course, Li Qingshan would not just die on the spot with his body as a daemon, but it would give him away to Fu Qingjin.

At this very moment, the Divine Talisman of Great Creation lit up. A third arm extended from Li Qingshan's chest, rapidly growing and reaching out like a vine.

The arm happened to resemble Chu Tian's Palm of the Five Elements slightly, but it was much smaller, even smaller than Li Qingshan's arm. There were not just five colours either, but a dazzling array of colours.

Just like that, a tiny arm pressed against Strongboulder's chest, and his indestructible, grey, stony skin actually collapsed slightly.

Afterwards, under Strongboulder's absolute refusal, he was struck back into the Green Ruins Illusion. His way out sealed up once more.

That's the power of belief. Fu Qingjin returned to his senses after a moment of surprise. Only then did he remember Li Qingshan's identity as a disciple of the school of Novels, which made him smile. Everything made sense now. With his assistance, perhaps there really was a chance to kill Strongboulder here and now.

This was the most primitive use of the power of belief, to use it to directly attack or defend instead of conjuring anything, and it could only be used after refining the Divine Talisman of Great Creation again. It was much more effective than Li Qingshan had been anticipating, but it had depleted quite a lot of power of belief too, which pained him. There was nothing he could do. He would always feel like that whenever he used this consumable power.

Li Qingshan said, "Fellow Fu, this is all I can do to assist you. It'll be entirely up to you now."

**Chapter 454 - Swooping in for the Kill**

Fu Qingjin nodded. Now was indeed an unprecedented opportunity for him to kill Strongboulder. A mere early Foundation Establishment cultivator had managed to repel Strongboulder twice, which was truly shocking. The arcane artifact seemed to be anything but ordinary too.

Before Strongboulder could even force out the sword qi, Fu Qingjin merged with his sword and charged over, pulling Strongboulder into a battle.

Li Qingshan let out a sigh of relief. He rolled up the Cursive Sword Calligraphy and sat down on one side, meditating to recover. The Cursive Sword Calligraphy was powerful, but the amount of spiritual qi it depleted was startling.

If it were not for the extremely abundant spiritual qi and extremely fast recovery rate granted by the Arts of the Boundless Ocean, regular cultivation methods really might not have been able to power the arcane artifact.

Even now, he could not use it consecutively. He had to recover with each use.

However, he still had a trump card that he had yet to use!

A sword as black as ink hovered above the sea of qi in his body.

After receiving the Cursive Sword Calligraphy from Chu Shidao, he had refined it once again. This time, he could also store the sword qi of the Cursive Sword Calligraphy in his dantian, which he could use at whim.

However, it was no longer over a hundred strands of messy sword qi. Instead, it had condensed into an ink sword.

Li Qingshan had yet to try out its power, but if he combined it with the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility, it definitely would be able to give his opponents a surprise.

At this moment, Strongboulder suddenly let out a furious roar. He pierced through the Green Ruins Illusion and rushed into the air.

A while later, the earth began to shake. Looking down from above, several large mounds swelled up in Jiaping city. The earth shattered, and the buildings collapsed, radiating with daemon qi.

Where Li Qingshan meditated swelled up too. With a rumble, a hole appeared in the ground, and a blood-red tongue extended out, sweeping towards Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan shivered inside. Strongboulder had finally run out of options and summoned his subordinates. The seven or eight clusters of daemon qi all corresponded to powerful daemons among Daemon Generals. He used the Wave Treading Form and avoided the long tongue before turning himself invisible with the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility and concealing his aura.

Colossal figures all standing over thirty meters tall burst out of the ground in their true forms. Some seemed like toads, some seemed like wolves, and there were even a few that were strangely shaped, making it impossible to tell what kind of wild beast they were originally. They all opened their gaping mouths and roared at Strongboulder in the Green Ruins Illusion.

As if he were responding to these roars, Strongboulder began to expand too, swelling to over thirty meters tall in the blink of an eye. He turned into a huge stone giant as he gazed at Fu Qingjin above with his shiny, beady eyes.

Fu Qingjin was unfazed. The Green Ruins Illusion expanded with Strongboulder, but the waves of daemon qi and malice that slammed against it grew thinner.

“Fu Qingjin, I hadn’t come today to kill you, but since you insist on it, you better leave your life behind!” Strongboulder’s voice was extremely resonant, like it originated from within a huge boulder. As he said that, he slammed his hand towards Fu Qingjin.

Strongboulder also ordered, “Little ones, kill the human on the side!”

Li Qingshan let out a sigh. Plans truly were not foolproof. As it seemed, it would not be so easy for him to watch on from the side anymore.

The senses of daemons were extremely powerful, let alone those that had undergone the first heavenly tribulation. He might have been able to hide himself away from their senses if they were not actively looking for him, but if they were, he would struggle to avoid detection.

Waves of daemon qi swept over, locking onto Li Qingshan’s position very soon. The huge, earthen-yellow wolf bit viciously at him.

Li Qingshan dodged the bite and arrived on the side of the wolf’s head. He materialised and swung the Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility towards the wolf daemon’s neck.

The sword was still transparent, but it shone with a streak of bright blue as it ripped through the wolf daemon’s fur before running out of power.

Only then was his real attack revealed. A strand of sword qi black like ink directly pierced the wolf daemon’s tough flesh.

It was the trump card Li Qingshan had been holding onto the entire time, the strand of black sword qi within his dantian. He had completely merged the sword intent and sword techniques he had comprehended from the Cursive Sword Calligraphy into the strike as well. He did not strike often, but when he did, he would strike with full force.

The wolf daemon let out a painful howl, and the black sword qi erupted as a wave within the centre of his neck, just like ink. Afterwards, its huge head fell from its shoulders loudly. It had actually been beheaded in a single stroke. Daemons had strong regenerative powers, but when they suffered a fatal wound like that, they would still die on the spot. Blood flowed out like a river.

Li Qingshan shoved the entire wolf daemon, corpse and daemon core, into his hundred treasures pouch efficiently. He looked around and saw the daemons gathered around him, glaring at him furiously. In a single instant, claws, fangs, and innate abilities all flew his way.

Li Qingshan moved about swiftly on his sword. The surging daemon qi was locked onto his location the entire time, so all he could do was constantly unleash the Wave Treading Form, waving between the attacks of the daemons. As soon as he emerged from poisonous mist that was right in his face, the

toad's tongue swept over once again. Waves surged below his feet, and he changed directions, avoiding the attack by a hair's breadth.

Every time he used the Wave Treading Form, he would flash before vanishing. He seemed like he was teleporting around.

The Illusory Water Sword of Invisibility was not completely useless. It could not achieve absolute invisibility, but as long as it could mislead the opponent's eyes, dazing them for even a moment, it would be enough for him.

He seemed to be under constant danger, but there actually was not much danger at all. With just some effort, Li Qingshan broke out of the daemons' encirclement and arrived in the sky. He had obtained a daemon core, which was quite nice.

When Strongboulder saw how easily Li Qingshan had broken out of the encirclement he had arranged, he ground his teeth in utter hatred. He knew no benefit would arise if he continued fighting this battle, so he suddenly shrank.

"Xiao An, Strongboulder is about to run. Get ready."

Li Qingshan's eyes lit up. Xiao An had already arrived beneath Jiaping city. Fu Qingjin was not an easy target to deal with, which he understood the most. However, Strongboulder had used up most of his daemon qi, and he was peppered with wounds, so now was definitely the perfect opportunity to kill him.

However, Fu Qingjin was no better. His clothes were extremely tattered, and the Green Ruins sword had dimmed visibly. Li Qingshan silently wondered to himself just how great of a chance he had to kill him if he worked with Xiao An.

"I'll kill you here no matter what today." The exhaustion on Fu Qingjin's face suddenly vanished. Cold light flashed through his eyes, and he radiated with bleakness as he said that.

He raised his hand, and in between his fingers was a scarlet talisman. He called out, "Wind!"

Before he had even finished speaking, a tornado sprung up from beneath Strongboulder, sweeping him into the sky. It connected with the sky like a black dragon.

Li Qingshan curled his lip. Didn't you say you wouldn't use talismans?

The wind from the tornado was thousands of times sharper than any sword or blade. It was like a huge meat grinder, scraping away rock fragments from Strongboulder.

Fu Qingjin sheathed his sword, and the Green Ruins Illusion dispersed with it. He stared at Strongboulder in the air. All of his attention had been focused on a single point.

In that instant, the sword erupted from its sheath with a flash, and he vanished. A perfectly-straight streak of green light pierced through the air, crossing through the tornado.

The tornado seemed to be cut in half. It twisted a few times, refusing to disperse, before turning into a gale of fierce wind. Strongboulder fell from the air. His eyes were wide open, as if he refused to believe



he would actually die here. A tiny hole had been pierced through his chest. He landed heavily on the ground.

Fu Qingjin separated from the Green Ruins sword and glanced back. He frowned slightly and murmured, "Did I still fail?"

Strongboulder leapt up to his feet. Despite his heavy injuries, he roared at the sky, "Fu Qingjin, I'll never die! I'll slaughter another hundred cities with each attempt at my life!"

Fu Qingjin contemplated his choices. If it were not for the other demons present, he could give him a chase. However, even he was reluctant to enter underground without good reason under the current circumstances. Killing someone at the same level of cultivation really was not easy. All he could do was watch as the demons sank into the ground.

However, he failed to notice how Li Qingshan stared at Strongboulder like he was staring at a corpse. Xiao An and her eighteen Skeleton Demons were already waiting down there.

Li Qingshan pulled his gaze away and flew towards Fu Qingjin slowly. Piercing cold light was hidden in the depths of his eyes, and he was already holding a few scarlet talismans between his fingers, hidden in his sleeve. They could not match Fu Qingjin's talismans in grade, but he would definitely be able to give him a surprise once he used them.

He was able to mobilise his accumulated power of belief instantly too and turn it into a powerful, lethal force. Most importantly, he still had his daemon form and the innate abilities.

He had a seventy percent chance at success.

He had a seventy percent chance to kill Fu Qingjin, to eliminate a great source of trouble here and now, but there was also a thirty percent chance that Fu Qingjin would escape and thus prevent him from using the identity of Li Qingshan to walk among the world of humans ever again.

Everything flashed through his mind, and he made his decision. He would gamble on it. If he was afraid to gamble when he had a seventy percent chance at success, could he still be called a man?

Fu Qingjin said, "You're Li Qingshan, right? Your sword style is very impressive and very special."

"You must be Fu Qingjin. Your sword style is very impressive too." Li Qingshan let out a gentle sigh and answered him calmly. He silently stowed the talismans away and looked back.

A few streaks of light shot over in the sky in the south-western direction as well as the north-western direction. The reinforcements from the Daemon Suppression alliance and the Academy of the Hundred Schools had arrived.

Do I really have to fight him again just like what I promised? Li Qingshan found this slightly unfortunate, but with some further thought, it was fine if he did not gamble too. As his cultivation grew, his chances at victory would only increase, not decrease. Killing Fu Qingjin here would be "checkmate", and the game of chess that was the Clear River prefecture would come to a complete end.

There were two possible outcomes in the future. One was that both sides had understood the brutality of war and decided to uphold the Treaty of Kings, maintaining peace, but this possibility was almost negligible. It was much more likely for war to swallow the entire Green province.

They had eaten the appetizers already, so everyone could roll up their sleeves and prepare for a hearty meal. A shrimp like him probably would not even count as a single dish, so it was best if he waited a little longer.

Fu Qingjin was not angered by Li Qingshan's arrogance. Instead, he said with sincerity, "Thank you for your assistance, sir."

He appreciated Li Qingshan's performance during the battle very much. Not only was he extraordinary with the sword, but he maintained a clear mind in battle and did not actively avoid danger. The rarest part about it was he had broken through to Foundation Establishment already despite being so young. Even in the Sword Collection palace, he would be regarded as a talent.

Through these various coincidences, Li Qingshan was unable to make an attempt at Fu Qingjin's life, earning quite a lot of good will from him instead.

### **Chapter 455 - Freezing Strongboulder with the Ice Flame of Soul Refinement, the Three Together Form White Bone**

Li Qingshan said coldly, "Even without me, you wouldn't die in a place like this, fellow Fu. You have plenty of talismans from the Sword Collection palace anyway."

"I still have to thank you," Fu Qingjin smiled, basically admitting he was under no danger at all.

Actually, he was truly thankful to Li Qingshan for saving Yu Zijian, but he did not mention it openly.

Li Qingshan had vaguely realised that too, but he did not state it either.

Fu Qingjin sighed gently. "I didn't want to use something like that either unless I had no other choice. This isn't our Sword Collection's palace path of the sword. However, the rock demon poses a great threat. He's slaughtered millions of people and countless cities already. In order to kill him, I could not afford to care so much anymore."

Li Qingshan seemed to hear the funniest joke in the world as he laughed aloud.

"Why do you laugh, sir?"

"If you hadn't broken the Treaty of Kings first, why would these daemons run amok above ground in the first place?"

"Since it's called the Treaty of Kings, how can a measly person like me break it? I'm just going with the flow." Fu Qingjin naturally possessed the bearing of a lord who ordered people around at whim. He sounded like he was treating his subordinates courteously and condescendingly, as if they should feel flattered because of him.

"Don't even think about running away from the responsibility. You're connected to this one way or another." Li Qingshan refused to play along. It made him feel even more displeased, as a matter of fact. He had been trying everything to settle these ties of karma involving him, yet all Fu Qingjin did was take an easy step back and push aside his responsibilities.

Fu Qingjin smiled. He really was unable to shirk away from this anymore, so he changed the topic. "Sir, could I take a look at the arcane artifact you used earlier?"

“With how great the Sword Collection palace is, why would you need a measly arcane artifact of mine?”

As they said that, the streaks of light arrived. The group from the academy was led by Wang Pushi and Hua Chengzan.

“Qingshan, are you fine?”

Hua Chengzan literally leapt up in fright when he heard his sister and Yu Zijian had run into the rock demon slaughtering a city. Despite his incredible intelligence and all the calculations he had made, a situation beyond his control like this was exactly what he was afraid of.

If it really were the rock demon, then let alone two measly Qi Practitioners, even Li Qingshan would be in danger.

Li Qingshan said, “I’m fine. I even killed a Daemon General. Don’t forget to record this under my name when you get back, old Wang. Oh right, I am a Foundation Establishment cultivator now after all. I should have been promoted to the same standing as you a long time ago!”

Wang Pushi had already prepared himself for the worst, so he truly let out a sigh of relief right now. When he heard Li Qingshan’s words, all he did was swear in exasperation, “Damn brat, you’ll get exactly what you deserve. Tell us exactly what happened.”

As a result, Li Qingshan told them roughly what he had gone through.

Hua Chengzan clapped his hands together and praised, “Qingshan, you’re a genius!”

The other cultivators present could not help but reevaluate Li Qingshan too, I didn’t think the school of Novels would produce someone like him after all the time I spent in secluded cultivation. Not only did he save two Qi Practitioners in front of the rock demon, but he’s even bold enough to turn back and assist Fu Qingjin in killing the rock demon. He even managed to kill a Daemon General when he was encircled by them. Not only would you require wits to achieve this, but it would require absolute guts too.

If it were them instead, just going back to save two Qi Practitioners would require careful consideration. It would be like walking on a tightrope, where just the slightest carelessness could cost them their lives.

Actually, Li Qingshan had not thought that much at all. Even if he gave a handicap to Strongboulder, he would not be able to kill him. A person who was not afraid of falling from the tightrope would obviously be brave enough to dance around there gracefully, which instead led to gasps of admiration from those who did not know the whole story.

Fu Qingjin finished his conversation with the cultivators of the Daemon Suppression alliance before glancing at Hua Chengzan deeply, basically warning him.

Afterwards, he clasped his hands at Li Qingshan with a smile. “If everyone from the academy could be like fellow Qingshan, brave, resourceful, and open-minded, what couldn’t you achieve? What demons can’t you kill?”

The cultivators from the Daemon Suppression alliance were all surprised. Rarely did they see Fu Qingjin treat someone else so politely.

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In the depths underground, Strongboulder shook off his Daemon General subordinates and reached an extremely deep cavern by moving through the earth. After confirming that no one was chasing after him, he eased up inside. His face was sunken as his teeth creaked from how hard he grit them.

“I’ll make you suffer a horrible end, Fu Qingjin, and that kid too!”

He had been quite heavily injured this time, having been pierced all the way through by Fu Qingjin’s fusion with his sword. This was not a simple stab wound. All of the powerful sword qi and sword intent within the attack was enough to destroy his organs.

If he were some regular Daemon General, he definitely would have died on the spot. It was exactly because he was a stone daemon, possessing no vital points on his body, that he managed to hang on tenaciously.

Just as he tried to force out the sword qi before returning to his territory to heal.

Cling~ Cling~ Clink~

In the darkness, a shiny, snow-white bead bounced over. The bouncing sound was extremely prominent in the silent underground world.

Strongboulder found this rather strange. His beady eyes moved up and down with the bead until it arrived before him. He picked up the bead and wondered, What’s this? Seems like bone.

He was unable to sense even a hint of aura from it. He tried to crush it casually, but the bead refused to budge. He became more and more surprised. There really were not a lot of items in the world that could not be crushed by him.

Clink! Clank! Clonk! Like beads of various sizes falling into a jade bowl, over a dozen beads bounced over loudly. They arrived beside Strongboulder’s feet and leapt up like they were alive.

“Who’s trying to act all mysterious? Get your ass out here right now!” Strongboulder called out.

Despite how sharp his senses were, he was unable to find even a sliver of a living creature’s aura in the darkness, no matter how hard he searched.

He felt slightly uneasy, but with how fearless he always was, he was confident he could escape through the earth no matter how bad the situation was. These beads agitated him as they leapt up and down, so he kicked them. The ones he touched actually stuck to his foot.

He lowered his head and discovered that the bead in his hand was stuck to his hand too. Looking closely, it had turned into a tiny skeleton, hugging his finger firmly. It expanded to the size of an infant in the blink of an eye, grabbing Strongboulder’s entire wrist. Its jaws clattered as it let out strange, chattering laughter.

The eighteen prayer beads turned into eighteen skeletons. Like eighteen monkeys, they clung onto Strongboulder’s limbs, back, and neck. They clung onto every part of him.

“And I had thought it would be something impressive! Is this all?” Strongboulder sneered, but his smile suddenly stiffened. The slender arms of white bone unleashed startling power, causing his entire body to tighten up and become immobilised.

When Xiao An went from fourteen to eighteen Skull Prayer Beads, the power of all the Skeleton Demons had increased yet again. Every single one of them could handle a regular Daemon General. When the strength of eighteen of them was poured together, even Strongboulder was helpless, not to mention that he had just gone through a great battle and was currently weakened.

“Petty tricks!” Strongboulder suddenly expanded, and his head touched the ceiling. The eighteen Skeleton Demons expanded with him, becoming extraordinarily bulky, and their power became even greater. They weighed down on Strongboulder like a small mountain.

Strongboulder collapsed on his knees helplessly. Looking up, a tiny skeleton, “solemn and sacred”, was already standing right in front of him before he knew it.

Strongboulder’s Rock of Slaughter would influence the thoughts of all living creatures, rousing their killing intent. However, in that moment, the skeleton influenced his thoughts instead. His killing intent had been completely washed away, replaced by an omen of death.

There was no difference between white bone and great beauty. Form had already become emptiness.

The tiny skeleton was like a collector of souls from the underworld, preaching the absolute truth of life and death to him. No one could escape it, and no one could change it. All attempts of struggle were pointless.

“What are you!?” Strongboulder broke free from that mental state violently. He unleashed a wild roar and erupted with his remaining daemon qi, which filled the entire cavern.

The cavern suddenly began to writhe, like the guts of a monster. The stalactites bit towards Xiao An like the long teeth of a monster.

Strongboulder was filled with confidence. No matter what it was, challenging him underground would only result in death for them. He was definitely going to crush them to death with this innate ability of his.

Xiao An took a step forward. She raised the sword of white bone and plunged it into the hole in Strongboulder’s chest.

The hole left behind by the Green Ruins sword had become extremely large with Strongboulder’s expanded body. It was large enough to fit an entire person in there.

As a result, Xiao An’s white bone sword hit nothing, and Strongboulder sneered even harder.

Xiao An possessed the ability to reduce blood, flesh, and bones to flames, but Strongboulder was a strange rock, possessing neither blood, flesh, or bone. Neither the Blood Flames of Corpse Incineration or the Pale Flames of Bone Smelting were effective against Strongboulder. She could suppress Bloodshadow, but she seemed to be suppressed by Strongboulder now.

The flickering fire in Xiao An’s eyes sockets suddenly became an icy blue.

Icy blue flames suddenly surged out of the white bone sword too, filling the hole in Strongboulder’s chest. The eighteen Skeleton Demons opened their toothy mouths and spat out icy blue flames as well, enveloping Strongboulder completely.

Strongboulder laughed freely. He had a natural resistance to various techniques. The last thing he was afraid of was a fire attack. Even the scorching lava, the flames of the earth, could not melt him.

His laughter suddenly halted. He felt a deep chill. It did not come from his body, but from the depths of his very soul. He shivered for the first time in his life. So cold!

“Ice Flames of Soul Refinement!” Xiao An chanted. After reaching the first layer of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty, she had finally grasped the three flames—Corpse Incineration, Bone Smelting, and Soul Refinement.

With the three together, she could completely kill him.

“I’ll drag you down with me!”

Strongboulder felt colder and colder. He knew the only thing awaiting him would be death if this continued. Out of pure madness, he wanted to blow up his daemon core, but he discovered that the daemon core directly connected to him was already beyond his control.

Before he knew it, the cavern stopped surging, and Strongboulder’s daemon qi dispersed.

It was not just the daemon core. He could not even move a single finger. He had been frozen by this piercing, bitter cold. Not only had his thoughts halted, but even his fear came and went, as if he had been reduced to the same, senseless rock of the past.

“Don’t... no...”

Xiao An closed her boney hands and wrenched the frozen soul from Strongboulder’s body.

Strongboulder collapsed loudly, turning into a strange rock that landed before Xiao An. It flickered with light senselessly, radiating with intense malice.

The Ice Flames of Soul Refinement receded back into Xiao An like the tide, merging with the two other flames. It turned into a white flame that was almost transparent, flickering in her eye sockets.

This was the foundation of the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty—the Samādhi Flames of White Bone.

All creatures in the mortal world that possessed a soul, flesh, and blood would be incinerated, would be frozen, when they came into contact with this fire. They would go from life to death, beyond salvation.

#### **Chapter 456 - Gathering at the Parlour of Clouds and Rain**

Xiao An fished out the shiny Guardian King’s pearl. After staring at it for a while, she suddenly pressed down on it. Resplendent golden light poured out from the tips of her fingers as waves with the vague roaring of guardian kings and buddhist chanting. With a crack, it turned into golden dust and scattered.

She waved her hand, and the eighteen prayer beads returned to her pale, slender wrist. Long, seaweed-like hair draped down, covering her body that was just as slender and pale.

At this moment, on a whim, she spread her arms and raised her head. Like a sprouting willow in spring, her body gradually stretched upwards.

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Li Qingshan's group returned to the academy. Hua Chengzan specially held a banquet at the Hua estate to welcome him back.

After washing and grooming herself, Hua Chenglu emerged from the back and specially toasted him, thanking him for saving her life.

Li Qingshan emptied his cup and smiled. "Never did I think that the girl back then would end up becoming such a beauty now. If your big sister Han hadn't been a step faster, I probably would not be able to help myself but to ask you to pledge yourself to me."

Hua Chenglu reddened, but she did not back down. "Never did I think either that the brat back then would become such a heroic figure. If big sister Han hadn't been a step faster, I probably would not be able to help myself but pledge myself to you too."

She left Li Qingshan surprised, who asked seriously, "Han Tieyi is not here, right?"

That led to a roar of laughter. Hua Chenglu stamped her foot. "What are you trying to do?"

Hua Chengzan even jokingly said, "Qingshan, you're not even afraid of the rock demon. How can you be afraid of tiger Han?"

Li Qingshan said, "If he's here, I'd like to go three hundred cups with him."

"Brother, why didn't you tell me this beforehand?" Hua Chenglu then grumbled. Who knew how many private conversations he had eavesdropped on during their missions.

Hua Chengzan immediately raised his cup and apologised to his younger sister. Li Qingshan smiled. "It's not just you. Even I was left in the dark without the slightest clue of what's going on."

Before she returned to her seat, Hua Chenglu blinked her eyes and said to Li Qingshan, "Big brother Li, don't forget you still owe me a favour."

Li Qingshan smiled and expressed, "As long as it's not pledging me to you, I'll do whatever I can."

"Zijian, it's your turn now." Hua Chenglu understood the value of his word very well. She returned to her seat and pushed over Yu Zijian who was beside her.

Yu Zijian offered up a cup of alcohol, but her eyes were fixed on Li Qingshan. His smile eased up slightly, but he continued to smile with his eyes. "What, is there something on my face?"

"There isn't. Thank you for saving me." Yu Zijian found he resembled him more and more. Although their statures and appearances were completely different, their manner of speaking and their expressions were basically the same. However, she also doubted whether it was just because of her initial impression of him.

"Zijian, you've done very well with the missions this time. I find it very admirable," Li Qingshan praised.

Hua Chenglu said, "Do you just admire everyone that's a beauty?"

"Haha, basically."

With both the host and the guest thoroughly satisfied, Li Qingshan took his leave from the banquet. Hua Chengzan accompanied Li Qingshan to the entrance and whispered to him, "I just received the news. In three days time, still the Parlour of Clouds and Rain. Negotiations about the alliance."

Li Qingshan's expression changed. "That works too. At least your efforts haven't gone to waste."

"You already know?"

"I know a bit. Don't worry, I won't blabber."

"You should pay a visit to the Han family too."

"Understood." Li Qingshan patted Hua Chengzan on the shoulder. He leapt up and arrived mid-air before taking a step and flying into the clouds. With a few flashes, he vanished into the horizon.

Hua Chengzan stared at the sky for quite some time before sighing gently. "What impressive judgements." Who knew whether he was talking about Gu Yanying or Han Qiongzhi.

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Li Qingshan returned to the Qing Xiao dwelling. Xiao An was already waiting there. She took out the strange rock that Strongboulder had left behind.

The Rock of Slaughter flickered with blood-red light, dimming and brightening over time like a beating heart. This was her gift for him.

Li Qingshan stroked the uneven surface of the Rock of Slaughter gently. Countless riling scenes of slaughter and of war poured through his head, tempting him to fight and slaughter too.

He suppressed this urge and sighed gently. "A tie has finally been settled."

"Qingshan... look at me..." Xiao An called at him extremely softly and murmured.

"What's wrong? You seem a little different today?" Li Qingshan turned his head and finally noticed what was different about Xiao An. He circled around her.

Her seaweed-like hair seemed to have become even longer, and she stood slightly taller too, almost past his waist. Her delicate facial features had become even more distinct, now with a hint of breath-taking beauty.

Li Qingshan clapped his hands together. "You've grown a little."

"If I don't grow, I'll attract suspicion." Xiao An lowered her head and explained it like that.

Although a profound cultivation could delay ageing or even rejuvenate youth, Xiao An's cultivation was nowhere near that profound.

Because she had been practising the Path of White Bone and Great Beauty the entire time, she was unable to change the size of her skeleton. Fortunately, she had been avoiding the eyes of others for the past few years, and she did not attract much attention in the first place. However, as time went on, she would definitely attract suspicion.



“Really?” Li Qingshan rubbed his chin and pressed his hands against Xiao An’s cheeks, rubbing them happily. “Very good. Very beautiful. Though, don’t grow too much all of a sudden.”

“Ah!” Xiao An became disappointed. With his encouragement, she originally wanted to keep growing!

“Don’t tell me you really plan on growing up completely in a single breath!” Li Qingshan had no idea how to respond.

“I could.”

“Don’t. You’ll scare people like that. Don’t worry, I can wait.” Li Qingshan lifted her up with a smile before becoming troubled again. “If you get any bigger, I won’t be able to carry you on my shoulders.”

“This is enough.” Xiao An wrapped her arms around his neck and murmured.

“Look at this.” Xiao An broke free from his arms and opened her mouth towards her hand. She spat out a misty, azure-blue object.

“That’s Strongboulder!” With a closer glance, Li Qingshan noticed that it resembled Strongboulder. Suddenly, he understood that this was Strongboulder’s soul.

Xiao An removed the Ice Flames of Soul Refinement, and Strongboulder seemed to awaken from hibernation. He recovered his senses and immediately tried to fly away.

Pale, white flames surged in from all directions like a cage, trapping him in Xiao An’s hand. As soon as Strongboulder came in contact with the flames, he felt bone-chilling coldness, forcing him back.

Li Qingshan huddled over in amazement.

“Who are you?” Strongboulder was surprised, fearful, and furious. Suddenly, he recognised Li Qingshan. “It’s you!”

“Then who am I?” Li Qingshan snickered, and his pupils gradually turned scarlet.

“Northmoon! It’s you! You’re a human! No, you’re half-daemon?”

“That’s not your problem.” Li Qingshan smiled. It was no wonder both the main characters and the antagonists would monologue in those various stories, as it just felt too fucking satisfying.

“Xiao An, he can’t escape, right?” Li Qingshan asked in confirmation. He liked the beginning of this story, but he did not want an ending where the tables turned.

“Absolutely not. I can refine him.” After achieving the Samādhi Flames of White Bone, not only could she refine blood, flesh, and bone to nurture her white bone, but she could even refine souls to strengthen herself.

“That’s good then. I have a whole heap of stuff to say to him!” Li Qingshan stopped worrying. He ignored Strongboulder’s curses and threats and cleared his throat. He put on an act and said, “Strongboulder, oh Strongboulder. Do you know why you’ve failed?”

He spoke until he became parched. After having his fill, Li Qingshan waved his hand. “Xiao An, torture this bastard properly for me, and see if you can get any useful information out of him.”

Afterwards, he returned to where the Rock of Slaughter lay and patted it. "This might be a good material for forging artifacts!"

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Deep underground, in Cobweb city.

Spider Queen Lolth snapped open her eyes and summoned Dragonsnail. She asked coldly, "Strongboulder's aura has vanished. Investigate who was behind this. The Daemon Generals under Strongboulder will now serve you."

There definitely were not a lot of humans or daemons capable of killing Strongboulder silently within the Clear River prefecture. Apart from some of the heavy-hitters from the Daemon Suppression alliance and the Academy of the Hundred Schools, she thought of Northmoon.

If it really were a case of murder, Dragonsnail would never do it, while Bloodshadow was currently healing. As a result, the only one capable was Northmoon who came from unknown origins.

"Yes." Even Dragonsnail was slightly surprised inside. Strongboulder had actually fallen in battle despite his strength. He felt certain things were escaping his control.

Following the traces and questioning the Daemon Generals who had gone to slaughter the city with Strongboulder, he finally arrived in the cavern where Strongboulder had been slain.

A buddhist glow continued to flow through the cavern. Dragonsnail frowned. "Is this the handiwork of a disciple of buddhism?"

Within the Clear River prefecture, there did not seem to be any powerful figures of buddhism apart from those in the school of Buddhism of the Academy of the Hundred Schools. At the very least, none of them could kill Strongboulder silently.

He could recall that a monk Strongboulder had once killed seemed to be closely connected with the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga. He had managed to heavily injure Strongboulder with the Chant of Deva-Nāga right before his death. If the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga had sent a disciple for revenge, then it would be beyond his control, let alone avenging Strongboulder.

Dragonsnail returned to Cobweb city and reported this to the Spider Queen.

The Spider Queen only dismissed her suspicion of Northmoon after hearing Dragonsnail's theory before sinking into her thoughts again. The Sword Collection palace, the Umbral Yin sect, and the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga were the three great sects of the Green Province. Every single one of them was a colossal existence that required Daemon Kings to contend with.

However, if a disciple of the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga really was responsible for this, there was no reason for them to be so secretive. Were they trying to avenge their disciples while maintaining the current situation, or were they trying to warn them that the massacring of cities could not continue...

The Spider Queen licked her bright, red lips. "Send orders to Northmoon and Bloodshadow. Strongboulder is already dead. I want them to massacre a hundred cities in revenge!"

Xiao An's actions had drawn away the Spider Queen's doubts. As for Dragonsnail, his investigation had already taken up three days.

Today, the Parlour of Clouds and Rain seemed rather deserted. The regular people had all been blocked from entering. Only cultivators could enter.

Regardless of whether they were actually cultivated people or they were purposefully putting on an act, they all spoke under their breaths. Only the disciples of the sect of Clouds and Rain who moved between them demonstrated some of their past liveliness.

"School leader Liu, it's been a long time since you last visited. Are you no longer satisfied with us now that you've reached Foundation Establishment?" A few seductive women clung around Liu Chuanfeng, which filled him with awkwardness. He barked powerlessly, "Begone! Begone!"

"Release him! If you have any problems with him, come at me instead!" Li Qingshan emerged from behind Liu Chuanfeng and shouted.

### **Chapter 457 - The Order to Slaughter Cities**

The eyes of the seductive women all lit up the moment they spotted Li Qingshan. A Foundation Establishment cultivator as young as him was rare, which often represented talent and future prospects. They immediately abandoned Liu Chuanfeng and gathered around him.

"Little brother, you look so familiar. Have I seen you somewhere before?" "How are you so sturdy?"

Some of them brushed past him gently as others lightly touched Li Qingshan's chest. They did not possess absolute beauty, but they were still attractive. Combined with their full figures and revealing clothing, they were extremely charming.

Even Li Qingshan began to be taken away by his imaginations, as it had been some time since he had last done it.

"Back down." Qiu Haitang walked over.

The women immediately retreated to one side and bowed. "Sect master."

Qiu Haitang smiled and bowed gracefully. "I've made the two of you wait. Please come with me."

Meeting Li Qingshan once again, she could not help but reevaluate him. He was not handsome like Hua Chengzan, but he did have a sturdy stature and a lively expression. Just by standing there, he radiated with a sense of power and firmness. Never had she thought that the ignorant young man who had stood up to her would have already grown up into a figure like this.

Qiu Haitang said to him secretly with a smile, "If you're interested, Qingshan, I can make some arrangements for you. Of course, Qiongzhi won't know."

After three years in secluded cultivation, Li Qingshan reached Foundation Establishment in a single breath. He accomplished this at the tender age of his early twenties, and then he killed two Daemon Generals in a row. He was one of the prominent figures of the cultivation world in the Clear River prefecture right now, a young cultivator who surpassed most cultivators in his generation. He even surpassed Hua Chengzan and everyone else, almost earning him the title of the greatest prodigy.

Qiu Haitang was afraid to brush him aside. Thinking about his past disputes with the Sect of Clouds and Rain, she and the entire sect would be in quite a lot of trouble if she failed to handle their relationship properly and he clung onto those past grievances.

However, Li Qingshan had assisted her in killing Wei Zhongyuan in the past, so their relationship was not all bad. Qiu Haitang believed it would not be a problem at all to make him forget about their past disputes with what she was capable of and improve their relationship.

“Unless it’s Haitang yourself, the risk is not worth it!” Li Qingshan studied Qiu Haitang. With her splendid attire, she was like a flowering crabapple. Her appearance seemed no different from three years ago, but her worries had vanished from her face. It seemed like she had already let go of what she had been clinging onto. He felt like it had all been due to his efforts.

Qiu Haitang glanced at Li Qingshan in surprise. She felt like he had suddenly become a little too familiar with her, which left her rather confused. She just found him to be rather different from the Li Qingshan in her impression.

In Li Qingshan’s memory, he already possessed a very deep understanding of Qiu Haitang. He had set off “fireworks” with her, and he had seen her most frail side. He had heard her speak her mind. Their relationship had even exceeded that of regular friends. This sense of familiarity just flowed out naturally.

“It’s a joke, it’s a joke.” Li Qingshan knew that his abilities as an actor were not enough. He showed an opening from just a slight carelessness, so he tried to dismiss it in a hurry.

“With your youth, talent, and heroic bearing, I’m instead not worthy of you, Qingshan.” Qiu Haitang took advantage of that to improve their relationship, but she maintained her distance from him. She felt like Li Qingshan’s behaviour probably originated from the complacent arrogance of youths.

It was reasonable for a person as young as him to develop some outrageous thoughts with how high his cultivation was. However, she did not feel anything special towards Li Qingshan at all.

Thinking up to there, another figure appeared in her mind. Although they had only met twice, both times so fleeting, the impression he had left behind was so deep that she would never be able to forget him.

Of course, he had already become known as a terrifying existence called the “moon demon” now. Humans and daemons were destined to travel down different paths, so there were no possibilities for them to become entangled again. However, if she did meet him again, he should not kill her. She did have that confidence.

The mechanism of the Parlour of Clouds and Rain had already been activated, dividing into two layers. Qi Practitioners mingled on the bottom, while above was a meeting that only Foundation Establishment cultivators had the right to join in.

This made Li Qingshan think about the elaborate banquet in the Hua family three years ago. Now, he saw many of those familiar faces once again. As he stepped on the cloud elevators and traveled up with Qiu Haitang, those people all raised their heads and stared at him, becoming smaller and smaller.

Among them was the first senior brother of Horned Rhinoceros mountain. Who knew what his name was, but he refused to accept this. Although the tenth layer of Qi Practitioner was only a step away from

Foundation Establishment, it had never been an easy step to take. Three years would often not be enough.

Arriving upstairs, the surroundings immediately became much more spacious. Many Foundation Establishment cultivators had already gathered there, keeping each other company. They did not worry about any taboos as they spoke, all talking about the huge matters that happened recently in the Clear River prefecture.

The battle between Fu Qingjin and Strongboulder three days ago was obviously the most popular topic. As one of the people directly involved, he garnered a lot of attention the moment he set foot on the floor.

Fu Qingjin nodded at Li Qingshan in acknowledgement. Li Qingshan did not want to come off as overly impolite, so he clasped his hands back at him. Seeing Wei Yangsheng and a few others, he went over and greeted them. They all congratulated on his repeated victories.

Before long, basically everyone was present. Everyone retreated into the surroundings.

The leader of the school of Mohism tossed out a wooden box. The box began to swell and change rapidly, letting out a mechanical clicking. Before long, it had expanded into a circular, stepped stand.

Everyone took their seats. The academy and the Daemon Suppression alliance took up many of the seats. Those who were directly involved in the discussions sat towards the bottom, while those uninvolved sat towards the top to listen along, which was convenient for them to speak up at any time too. It saved them from a lot of the trouble of being seated according to seniority.

The meeting had finally begun. The representatives from both sides, Liu Zhangqign and Fu Qingjin, arrived in the centre of the stand to make a speech one after another before engaging in a debate.

Li Qingshan watched on from a corner towards the back. After listening on for a while, he found it rather boring, so he lowered his head and began cultivating. This meeting would definitely take some time.

He had already become a Foundation Establishment cultivator, but his experiences were still rather lacking, and he was not skilled at debating either. Instead of all that, he would be better off settling down and increasing his cultivation.

The fragrance of medicine appeared from beside him. Li Qingshan knew it was Ru Xin, but he ignored her.

“Wake up!”

A thunderous voice assaulted his ear drums, which made Li Qingshan shudder all over. He glared at Ru Xin beside him.

“Leave me alone.” Li Qingshan suddenly frowned heavily before closing his eyes again.

“Oh my? Your temper has grown.”

Li Qingshan’s temper had not actually grown. Instead, in the cavern underground, he just happened to receive the Spider Queen’s orders to slaughter cities.

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“Master, what should we do?”

With Li Qingshan’s main body moving about outside, his mirror clone watched over underground so that he could react to anything unexpected.

He opened his eyes. Ye Liusu and Ye Liubo stood to his left and right, awaiting his orders.

Li Qingshan asked in thought, “What do you think?”

Ye Liubo suggested, “If we move independently, there might be losses. Should we gather the matriarchs again? Night roamers may not be accustomed with large-scale killing, but if we work together, it shouldn’t be too difficult. Among the techniques that night roamers are capable of, there’s something called “Gathering Nightshroud”. It can cover a very large range. It’s not particularly powerful, but it’s more than enough to deal with regular humans.

Little did she know that Li Qingshan had no interest in carrying out this order at all. Even if he tossed his morals and ethics aside, contemplating purely his interests, what benefit would killing regular people bring? It would cause many problems instead.

The current war might have been restricted to the Clear River prefecture, which he could rampage through freely with his cultivation as a Daemon General. However, there would be one day when this game of chess ended and stronger cultivators could become uninhibited from their constraints.

The cultivators on the side of the academy prohibited such acts the most. Let alone others, even Gu Yanying would not allow a Daemon General that slaughtered entire cities without batting an eye to run freely through the territory she governed.

The Sword Collection palace was just a powerful organisation among the many sects of the Green province, but slaughtering regular people was forbidden by the entire empire. This would definitely lead to the consequence of being specially hunted down in the future. The combined strength of the academy was far more terrifying than a single Sword Collection palace. He could go into hiding, but it would be impossible for him to keep everything he had built up underground after so much effort.

He was not afraid of battle, but he did not want to become involved in pointless battle, not to mention all the people he was familiar with that he could not lay his hands on in the academy. Taking a step back, if he killed everyone, who would still read his novels and help him gather the power of belief?

Only an idiot would do something that brought no benefit and only detriment.

Ye Liusu said, “Now is without a doubt the perfect opportunity to carry out this order.”

“Why?”

“The Daemon Suppression alliance and the Academy of the Hundred Schools are currently holding a meeting in Clear River prefecture. Most of the Foundation Establishment cultivators are attending it.”

“How do you know?”

“I purchased this information from the humans.”

“This is a heaven-sent opportunity. Master, let’s go make a great mess!” Ye Liubo’s eyes shone.

Li Qingshan noticed the uncertain and worried expression on Ye Liusu’s face. “Liusu, you don’t seem particularly willing.”

“Master doesn’t seem to derive his power from slaughtering cities like Strongboulder or Bloodshadow.”

“That’s true.”

Ye Liusu suggested, “This matter brings no benefit at all, and it’ll probably lead to a destructive blow to Night Roaming folk. Please give this matter careful consideration, master.”

“Oh? Why do you think that?”

Ye Liusu gave an explanation similar to Li Qingshan’s analysis. Her objective was for the night roamers to return above ground, so they could live under the stars and moon again. Falling out with the humans for a conflict between daemons and humans was completely meaningless.

Li Qingshan admired her secretly. She did not possess so many avenues of information like him, yet she was still able to see so far. Her insight was truly impressive.

“Sister, it’s just killing a group of regular people. Will the consequences really be so severe?” Ye Liubo felt like she had come up with a good idea for once, but she had been overshadowed by her elder sister yet again.

“All chest and no brains.” Li Qingshan patted Ye Liubo’s cheek. “Hmph!” Ye Liubo directly grabbed his hand and stuffed it between her impressive breasts.

Li Qingshan did not pull his hand out, enjoying himself between her soft breasts. He asked, “Liusu, looks like you’ve learnt quite a lot about the human world recently. I don’t like wasting time on something like this, but how should we deal with this?”

This order definitely could not be carried out, but the Spider Queen was a difficult target to appease. Completing ignoring her orders was impossible too. This was the helplessness that came with a lack of strength. If he served someone, then he would be bound to them. He was unable to approach matters the way he wished all the time.

### **Chapter 458 - Intentions Revealed**

Li Qingshan contemplated it silently. Since he could not deal with this using a direct approach, he would have to cover it up with something else and lead the spider queen astray.

“Liusu, apart from the Rose Cloud sect currently occupied by the Daemon Suppression alliance and the academy’s Clear River city, are there any other places we can attack in the Clear River prefecture? It has to be strategic points to the war. Only then can it hold up before the Spider Queen as an explanation.”

Ye Liusu saw how he approved of her suggestion, so she smiled and came up with a suitable counterplan.

“There are. We can target spiritual stone mines!”

As the currency in the world of cultivation, spiritual stones were also important items of use. They were all mined from the individual spiritual stone mines before being forged by artifact blacksmiths into regular spiritual stones.

This was one of the most important resources to cultivators. Without spiritual stones, the mechanisms and puppets of mohism would all be rendered useless.

Fu Qingjin was able to gather all the sects together, but he was unable to take these spiritual stones along with him.

Ye Liusu took out a mental map and indicated certain spots. "There are over a dozen larger spiritual stone mines in the Clear River prefecture right now..."

"Gather everyone!" Li Qingshan swung his hand. He had to launch an attack as soon as possible so that he could draw over everyone's attention before the daemons began massacring cities.

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In the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, Li Qingshan opened his eyes and glanced at Fu Qingjin from afar. You may be an enemy, but I hope you receive my warning.

He turned towards Ru Xin. "Earlier, I..."

"Who are you? Why are you sitting beside me?" Ru Xin glanced at him before turning away again.

Li Qingshan shrugged and let out a smile.

As his summoning orders were being carried out in a hurry underground, the meeting continued in a systematic manner.

Through Li Qingshan's eyes, he saw two worlds, one dark and one light. They both symbolised the centres of the world of humans and the world of daemons. Even though the Clear River prefecture was just a chessboard, he believed he was a rook that could move freely, one that could affect the developments of the entire chessboard.

TL: The chess reference here is actually a reference to the chariot piece in Chinese chess. It's a piece that moves in basically the same way as the rook does in western chess, except it's the piece that can move most freely and quickly through the board in Chinese chess, thus making it one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, piece in Chinese chess.

With the Spider Queen's orders, the middlegame had finally arrived.

In the meeting, both sides bickered over every single point, refusing to relent no matter what it was.

Fu Qingjin sat with his arms crossed in silence. Suddenly, he frowned and pressed his finger against his ear, as if he was listening to something. A while later, he stood up and arrived in the centre of the meeting.

The disputes stopped. Everyone's gazes landed on him.

Fu Qingjin said, "I just received news that the rock demon is dead."



After a moment of silence, everyone became riled up again. "What? When?" "Did he succumb to the injuries dealt by that strike from fellow Fu?" "That's fantastic! My disciples have finally been avenged!"

Various sounds reached Mind Enlightenment's ears, but it only turned into a buzz. Only five words continued to echo through his head. The rock demon is dead. In the end, it turned into a verbal murmuring, "The rock demon is dead." He exclaimed, "Master!" His face was already covered in tears.

Li Qingshan glanced at Mind Enlightenment from afar and muttered quietly, "That's the end to that grievance. We no longer owe one another anything."

Li Qingshan was rather surprised with how quickly Fu Qingjin had received the news. The death of the rock demon had been announced with the Spider Queen's orders to massacre cities, but the news had not been spread very far.

Just where did he receive this news from?

The hall became filled with a jubilous atmosphere. The rock demon had slaughtered countless and caused great damage. The number of regular people who died to his hands had reached into the millions a long time ago, and he had killed countless cultivators too. He was like a great shadow, looming over everyone's heads. Now that he finally faced retribution, of course they would all be overjoyed.

Even the cultivators with extremely impressive self-restraint could not help but smile. Some people even began to dance about.

However, Fu Qingjin's next words immediately diluted the joyous atmosphere while attracting even more suspicion from Li Qingshan.

"The daemon queen has already sent out orders to massacre cities. She wants a hundred cities slaughtered in revenge for the rock demon."

Just as everyone was surprised, Li Qingshan contemplated a certain question. How had the information been leaked?

Fu Qingjin seemed to be using some kind of high level voice transmission spiritual artifact earlier, or it would have been impossible for the message to be transmitted across such great distances, even overcoming the interference from the underground magnetic fields.

Daemon Generals could refine spiritual artifacts and use them, but spiritual artifacts like that normally came in pairs or groups. If they were to be refined, they would be refined together. Fu Qingjin would never move around with an item radiating with daemon qi on him, so it must have been the doing of a night roamer.

Who was this night roamer? There sure were a lot of hidden secrets in the world!

However, Fu Qingjin did not mention anything regarding attacking spiritual stone mines, which made Li Qingshan relax slightly. As it seemed, it was not someone from his personal guards, but a clansman possibly. Otherwise, he would have his mirror clone turn the entire place upside down right now to sniff out the damned spy.

It was not necessarily bad news that Fu Qingjin had learnt about this beforehand. At least it could save countless cities, reduce the casualties of this war, and speed up the progress of the war.

“Fellow Fu, is that true?” Liu Zhangqing could not help but stand up. He was solemn. As the prefect of Clear River, he had the responsibility of safeguarding his citizens in the place of the emperor. More importantly, it had to do with the accumulation of merit for all Confucian disciples.

“That’s right. The daemons are leading a large-scale attack, yet we’re still here bickering over puny matters. What do you think about this, sir Liu?”

Wang Pushi’s brows became firmly furrowed as Hua Chengzan let out a soft sigh.

The situation had instead pressed the academy against the wall. All of the advantages they had built up had vanished. It was impossible for the academy to turn a blind eye to the lives of millions. If the Daemon Suppression alliance just stood aside, and they had to face the daemons alone, they would definitely suffer severe losses.

Liu Zhangqing said after a moment of consideration, “Please set the rules, fellow Fu. As long as they’re not too excessive, we’re willing to accept them!”

But to everyone’s surprise, Fu Qingjin did not take advantage of the situation to maximise his benefits. Instead, he said, “You’d be underestimating me if that’s what you say, sir Liu. The objective of the Daemon Suppression alliance is to purge daemons and protect the common people. How can we pressure everyone into favourable agreements?”

“Our alliance must be centred around a common goal. If we continue to clash endlessly over our own interests, will it be different from the past at all? We’ll go with what we roughly discussed earlier as the rules. As for certain details, we’ll set them aside for now and discuss them in the future. What do you think, sir?”

“Fellow Fu is a man of noble character. You have my admiration.” Liu Zhangqing bowed deeply.

Fu Qingjin had spoken perfectly. Even the people in the academy who were very displeased with the Daemon Suppression alliance and Fu Qingjin in the past found that he truly lived up to his reputation as a disciple of the Sword Collection palace. He possessed a great bearing that regular people struggled to match.

“Please forgive me for making this decision for everyone. As people seated here, we’re all fellow cultivators to one another, so we should be standing together and helping one another in the first place. I do believe I don’t need to elaborate on the principle of mutual dependence, right? Over the past three years, who hasn’t lost people to the hands of daemons? Compared to our interests, purging daemons and avenging them is more important. Fellow Li Qingshan of the school of Novels has already made a model example out of this point.”

As Fu Qingjin spoke enthusiastically, he suddenly pointed at Li Qingshan. “A few days ago, it was exactly fellow Li Qingshan of the academy who obstructed Strongboulder from fleeing despite the tremendous danger, which led to his heavy injuries and eventual death!”

Everyone’s gazes swept over to Li Qingshan, Li Qingshan had no idea on how to react inside. Out of pure coincidence, he had instead become the ice breaker of the meeting, also earning great praise due to the rock demon’s death. If it were not for his other identity, his goodwill towards Fu Qingjin would probably skyrocket right now.

Li Qingshan stood up and clasped his hands. "Fellow Fu, you are too kind to me. As a Hawkwolf guard, this has always been my responsibility. The One Thought master of the academy died at the rock demon's hands, and I had personally witnessed the brutality of his actions too, so I can't just stand aside and let him run about freely."

Mind Enlightenment's heart heated up. He felt like he had gone a little too far with what he did to Xiao An. He felt rather ashamed.

Fu Qingjin said, "Well said." Then he said to Li Qingshan secretly, "I hope your performance today won't bring me disappointment."

Under great, external pressure, the meeting about the alliance came to an end very quickly. They immediately began discussing countermeasures to the orders of slaughtering cities.

At this moment, Fu Qingjin changed the topic. "Forgive me for wasting everyone's time, but there's something critical that I hope the fellows of the academy can assist me with."

Liu Zhangqing said, "Feel free to mention it, fellow Fu. As long as we can assist you, we'll never shirk away from it."

Fu Qingjin said, "Some of you might know a little already. I've carried out most of the investigations already too, so all that's left is to tie off a few remaining loose ends, as some fellow cultivators have refused to cooperate. However, as this has to do with the death of the Soaring Dragon Elder of our Sword Collection palace, I really must handle it with my full attention."

Everyone remembered how Fu Qingjin ran around questioning people a while back. "Where were you that day, and what were you doing?"

Li Qingshan shivered inside. He could sense the situation was taking a bad turn. With how much Fu Qingjin was rambling, he felt like he was about to reveal his true intentions.

Touching on the Soaring Dragon Elder's death, Liu Zhangqing was prudent too. "Please elaborate, fellow Fu! Just what has happened?"

"Recently, the Soaring Dragon sword emerged, and the Sword Collection palace determined its location. That's right, it was that day. I just want to ask a few more fellows where they were that day." Fu Qingjin's gaze was like a sword, sweeping across everyone present, including Li Qingshan's face.

Li Qingshan was unperturbed and let out a small sigh of relief. I'm supposed to tell you the truth just because you've asked? However, he felt slightly uneasy for some reason.

"How are you so certain that the people you've asked already aren't suspects?" Wang Pushi immediately stated his doubts.

Fu Qingjin let out a sigh. "Commander Wang, have you heard of the xiezhi?"

"It's said to be a divine beast that can tell guilt from innocence, the truth from lies."

"That's right. This is one of the secret treasures of our Sword Collection palace, the xiezhi's horn. It also possesses the ability to detect lies. As a result, may the fellow cultivators who did not tell me the truth back then answer my question again?"

Fu Qingjin lifted up his hand, and sure enough, the xiezhi's horn was in there, radiating with a divine aura. He had already set up the situation, so there was no need for him to keep hiding anything. If that person really was here, he would definitely be able to force them out. With so many cultivators present, he would not be able to flee no matter what he was capable of.

As he pulled out the xiezhi's horn, Fu Qingjin took note of everyone's expression, especially the suspects high on the list.

Li Qingshan's heart turned cold. Suddenly, he understood why Fu Qingjin had asked him so many questions for no reason on Bronze Cauldron mountain. It all made sense now! He could not help but experience some lingering fear. If he had spoken carelessly back then, Fu Qingjin would have gotten him good. Even if he did not expose his true identity, Fu Qingjin would probably still be able to deduce many things.

The real question was now if the xiezhi's horn really was as magical as Fu Qingjin described it to be, how was he supposed to deal with the situation right now?

### **Chapter 459 - Judgement**

Liu Zhangqing considered it. Fu Qingjin had already demonstrated so much commitment to this, and he had taken such a great concession in the negotiations too. If they still refused to cooperate, it would be far too unreasonable of them.

He looked back and asked the people of the academy, "Do you have any objections?"

Everyone remained silent, only glancing at one another.

If someone objected at a time like this, they would probably garner actual suspicion. None of them could afford to become involved with the death of an elder of the Sword Collection palace.

"Fellow Fu, please go ahead. I believe no one in our academy will be connected to this, and if there really is someone, we definitely won't side with them. We'll definitely make them give the Sword Collection palace a proper explanation."

"You have my admiration for how impartial you are, sir." Fu Qingjin clasped his hands. He strolled over to the semicircular stand where everyone sat and scanned around. No matter who he saw, their hearts tensed up.

In the end, Fu Qingjin's gaze landed on Li Qingshan's face, and he smiled.

Li Qingshan's heart tensed up too. This bastard buttered him up good, but never did he think he would be the one questioned first. If he really were questioned, he would give himself away regardless of whether he answered or not.

What was he supposed to do next? Admit he had found the sumeru ring? But that would be a lie, and it would be picked up by the xiezhi's horn. Fu Qingjin would definitely get to the bottom of this.

Or perhaps he could directly kill his way out of here, but that would be even worse. If Fu Qingjin wanted to prevent him from leaving, he would unleash the Green Ruins Illusion. Unless he transformed, he was unable to break out at all, but if he did transform, there were almost a hundred Foundation Establishment cultivators here. They would not simply idle around.

Fu Qingjin had cast out an all-encompassing net. Once he reeled it in, Li Qingshan would be thrown into dire straits.

Various thoughts flickered through his head. Fortunately, Li Qingshan had already established some foundations with his ability to act, so he frowned slightly. "Don't tell me you're suspecting me, fellow Fu?"

"I'm not..." Before Fu Qingjin had even finished speaking, a roar of laughter erupted, as the xiezhi's horn in his hand actually lit up.

"The xiezhi's horn truly lives up to its reputation." Li Qingshan smiled.

The xiezhi divine beast passed impartial judgement. It only knew right and wrong, regardless of who it was.

Fu Qingjin smiled bitterly and rubbed his nose. He said clearly, "I admire your courage and adaptability very much, so I really don't hope it's you. I want to question you last."

The xiezhi's horn did not respond, proving he was telling the truth.

"Whatever you want." Li Qingshan said without minding at all as he eased up inside, but his feelings also became rather mixed. What would Fu Qingjin say once he exposed him?—"I didn't think it would be you!"? How was he supposed to answer?—"Sorry, I'm a police officer!"

Stop kidding around.

He had avoided it for now, but the danger was nowhere close to being over. It had just been temporarily delayed. Li Qingshan thought long and hard. Just how was he supposed to fool the xiezhi's horn? The ox demon? The tiger demon? The spirit turtle? None of them seemed to work.

Fu Qingjin paced around a little more and arrived before the slovenly daoist priest, Zhou Tong. He bowed deeply. "Please answer me, senior!"

Fu Qingjin had questioned Zhou Tong in the past, but as the person closest to Golden Core in all of Clear River prefecture, he had developed an unscrupulous character where he did whatever he wanted. Why would he pay any attention to Fu Qingjin?

But given the current situation, even Zhou Tong was forced to answer. He said seriously, "You're a real fucking likable kid!"

The xiezhi's horn lit up brightly, leading to another roar of laughter. Zhou Tong said, "It sure is useful!"

Fu Qingjin said, "Please continue, senior!"

"I feel joy from the bottom of my heart when I see you!" The xiezhi's horn lit up once more.

"Fu Qingjin is wise and kind-hearted... The Daemon Suppression alliance is justice and righteousness... May the Sword Collection palace prosper for many generations to come..."

The xiezhi's horn flashed constantly, and Zhou Tong resorted to cursing aloud. The people of the academy laughed a few times, but when they saw the faces of the people from sects becoming more and more warped, the laughter gradually died down.

Only Fu Qingjin continued to smile. "Senior, if you haven't had enough, I can make some time and let senior go on for three days and three nights. However, please don't forget that the daemon armies underground have already begun assembling. A hundred cities will be reduced to hells of blood before long."

Zhou Tong's cursing came to a sudden halt. No matter how uncontrollable he was, he was still a person after all. In the face of a righteous cause, even he could not act stubbornly and recklessly. He gazed at Fu Qingjin deeply. "I haven't seen that Soaring Dragon Elder or whoever you're talking about, let alone some Soaring Dragon sword."

The xiezhi's horn finally dimmed, and Fu Qingjin clasped his hands again. "Thank you, senior." He proceeded to the next suspect.

Li Qingshan smiled gently too, but he was extremely nervous inside. I need to interrupt this meeting before he gets to me!

"They're in a meeting in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain? Let me go take a look!" Underground, Li Qingshan's mirror clone notified Ye Liusu before unfurling his wings of wind and flying out from underground. He rushed into the sky and accelerated, producing a few sonic booms as he shot towards Clear River city.

However, Fu Qingjin's next few suspects suddenly began to cooperate very smoothly. Even someone like Zhou Tong had to cooperate obediently, let alone them. They were even more afraid of offending the Sword Collection palace. Even if they were reluctant to tell him where they were and what they were doing that day, all they had to say was they had never seen the Soaring Dragon sword, and it would basically be enough.

The lie-detecting property of the xiezhi's horn made the questioning process as simple as possible.

When his mirror clone had only flown half of the distance, they had already gone through most of the suspects. Only three remained, and it would just take a few words before it reached him.

Li Qingshan clenched his fist firmly. Suddenly, a pale hand grabbed his fist. It was smooth and warm. It came from Ru Xin.

Due to the obscuring table they sat behind, his subconscious movements were hidden away from the eyes around him, but they were not hidden away from Ru Xin beside him.

Li Qingshan shivered and looked over. Ru Xin behaved like nothing had happened at all, focusing on the outcome of Fu Qingjin's questioning like everyone else. However, there was a sliver of concern in the corner of her eye.

The stretch of structures appeared on the horizon. The Clear River prefecture was in view. Li Qingshan's mirror clone stared at the city, but he slowed down instead. He withdrew his aura and approached silently.

It was already too late...

Fu Qingjin finished asking the second last suspect. Only Li Qingshan remained.

Li Qingshan's suspicion increased drastically. Almost a hundred scorching gazes gathered on him.

Hua Chengzan became slightly nervous, Han Tiewi furrowed his eyebrows slightly while Liu Chuanfeng was completely dumbfounded. Everyone Li Qingshan had befriended and gotten to know in the academy over these years cast over gazes of worry, concern, and undispellable suspicion towards him.

If he interrupted the meeting right now, he would basically be giving himself away. Li Qingshan had already prepared himself for the worst. His mirror clone was for reinforcing him, just in hopes of creating a chance to kill his way out.

"I do hope my judgement is wrong." Fu Qingjin stared at Li Qingshan. His slightly blue pupils were as clear as water.

The xiezhī's horn glowed dimly. Li Qingshan smiled. "That's not true at all. Ask me whatever you want!"

He appeared completely calm, but this was not an obstacle he could get past with acting anymore. The battle began.

Fu Qingjin tightened his left hand and placed the slender and curved xiezhī's horn between them.

Vaguely, a one-horned xiezhī seemed to be crouching between them, like a solemn judge of law, ready to make its final judgement. Friends or foes, success and failure, or even life and death would depend on this verbal exchange.

Fu Qingjin's right hand pressed against the Green Ruins sword without any attempt of hiding it.

Li Qingshan seemed extremely relaxed. He did not even stand up. He made a gesture of invitation.

Finally, Fu Qingjin asked the questions he had asked countless times before again, "Where were you that day and what were you doing?"

Li Qingshan smiled. He opened his mouth, and when he began to speak, his mind suddenly sank into chaos.

"I forgot!"

Fu Qingjin was taken aback. The cultivators present were all overcome with disbelief too. This answer was unable to satisfy anyone.

After reaching Foundation Establishment and splitting open a sea of consciousness, not all cultivators necessarily developed eidetic memory, but their thought processes and memories would be much clearer than regular people. They would still be able to recall whatever they wanted.

As a matter of fact, even regular people would not forget about something so recent completely. They would still have some impressions, yet he actually claimed he had forgotten.

If this was a normal interrogation, it would basically confirm the suspicion on Li Qingshan. However, Fu Qingjin glanced at the xiezhī's horn in his hand, and it remained still, without reacting at all. It meant that Li Qingshan's forgetfulness was not an excuse. He had truly forgotten.

Li Qingshan laid out his hands. "It was a few months ago. Who still remembers something like that? I was probably cultivating!"

Fu Qingjin would never relent. His gaze was as sharp as swords as he stared into Li Qingshan's eyes. He continued questioning, "What about the Soaring Dragon sword? Have you seen the Soaring Dragon sword before? Be direct. Just tell me yes or no."

Yes, I've seen it!

Li Qingshan basically reacted with so much certainty without even thinking at all. Not only had he seen the Soaring Dragon sword before, but he even knew its shape and size.

Afterwards, as he tried to recall it, his eyes suddenly became slightly lost. The glistening Soaring Dragon sword turned into mist and dispersed.

His memories gave him the exact opposite as an answer. Not only had he never seen the Soaring Dragon sword before, but this was even his first time hearing about the Soaring Dragon sword, even though Fu Qingjin had clearly asked the cultivators so many times earlier.

That was the only reply Li Qingshan could give. "No, I haven't."

The xiezhi's horn did not light up. The xiezhi divine beast seemed to judge Li Qingshan to be innocent, proving he had nothing to do with the Soaring Dragon Elder.

It was impossible to tell whether Fu Qingjin's reaction was disappointment or relief.

Don't tell me I was mistaken? The person who obtained the sumeru ring is not a Foundation Establishment cultivator of the Clear River prefecture, but from somewhere else, or perhaps a night roamer? But why would a night roamer make a special trip to the surface just to open the sumeru ring?

However, anything was always possible in this world.

The lead had come to an end! Fu Qingjin could not help but admit the feebleness and powerlessness of human intelligence before the unfathomable, unpredictable world. He would only be able to gain a grasp over the tracks of fate if he possessed the arts of divination like the Divining Elder.

Liu Zhangqing let out a sigh of relief and smiled. "Fellow Fu, are you satisfied now?"

Fu Qingjin let out a gentle sigh and nodded towards Li Qingshan. "Looks like I was mistaken."

#### **Chapter 460 - The Past is Easy to Forget**

"People aren't perfect. All we can do is strive for the better." Li Qingshan shrugged. Suddenly, a gentle voice rang out in his ear.

"You owe me this time." Ru Xin's lips curled into a slight smile as she spoke to him secretly.

I owe you this time? Li Qingshan tried to think, but his memories were like sand sculptures on the beach, collapsing under the waves. He furrowed his brows and pressed his hand against his forehead. He was afraid to recall anything else.

What was going on? He clearly knew the answer, yet he was afraid to think too much about it.



A while earlier, Ru Xin held Li Qingshan's hand. After a while of consideration, she shoved a tiny bottle into his hand. The bottle rippled with golden fluid. It was the Water of Oblivion Ru Xin had only refined recently.

Li Qingshan widened his eyes slightly and glanced at Ru Xin before looking towards Fu Qingjin below.

It was almost up to him.

He could no longer care about the effects and side-effects of the Water of Oblivion. He grabbed Ru Xin's soft hand and tightened around it slightly, expressing his gratitude. Her hand was warm, smooth, and gentle, but he had no time to properly appreciate it.

He changed his posture in a very natural manner, placing his elbow on the table as his hand covered his mouth. The Water of Oblivion flowed down his throat in a scorching manner.

Because Li Qingshan sat towards the back and everyone's attention was gathered on Fu Qingjin and the questioned cultivators, Li Qingshan did not attract any attention with his subtle movements.

In the beginning, Li Qingshan did not sense anything strange when the Water of Oblivion reached his stomach. He raised his head and did find the resplendent ceiling lights rather dazzling.

When he lowered his head again, Fu Qingjin had already returned to the platform in the centre, standing beside Liu Zhangqing. The danger had already passed by.

"The large-scale invasion of daemons will be a great danger to Clear River city as well as us. The oath of the Daemon Suppression alliance, the responsibilities of the academy, will completely depend on this battle. We must pour our strength together and defeat the daemons, fighting side by side!" Liu Zhangqing waved his hand in an enthusiastic manner.

What beautiful spring scenery! Li Qingshan sighed inside.

Through another pair of his eyes, he currently stared at the Clear river that flowed east. It just happened to be the end of spring, where the weeping willows on the two banks were shrouded in mist. The weather had already grown very warm, but it had yet to reach a level where it was scorching.

As he walked through the spring breeze, he felt like he had just drunken some good liquor. He felt tipsy.

What was I doing? I can't think about it! It's useless even if I do think about it. Is this called getting lost on the road of life?

Li Qingshan plucked a willow branch out of pure boredom, breaking his shadow in the water.

Nearby on a road, there was a banner labelled "Tea" swaying in the wind.

Old man Liu had already run this tea stand for thirty-one years. This was a road that everyone had to use if they wanted to enter the prefectural city from the west. Merchants and visitors flowed to and fro. If they became thirsty or tired, they would sit down at his stand to rest and have a bowl of tea. Business was still booming.

Since three years ago, business gradually took a turn for the worst, but he was very content with what he already had, at least compared to those who had fled here with their entire family. He was located on

the edge of the prefectural city. The greatest city within fifteen hundred kilometers watched over his tiny tea stand from behind.

There were no daemons that would come to make trouble here. Even if a few ignorant ones appeared, they would be dealt with quickly and cleanly by the sirs in the city.

Business today was alright. In threes and fives, over a dozen customers sat at his tea stand, conversing among themselves leisurely. Among their discussions, they could not avoid mentioning the horrors of daemons.

Old man Liu smiled as he listened along. He did not feel pressured at all. Suddenly, he saw the vegetation on the river bank rustle, and a person seemed to sit down. He called him over, "Sir traveller, you must be tired from all the travelling. Why don't you come here and have a cup of tea and quench your thirst!"

The other customers all looked over too. All they saw was a person standing up, and the first thing they noticed was his head of fiery, long hair, which seemed to burn. His scorching, scarlet eyes could make people shiver even under the light of day.

"D- daemon!"

Everyone shuddered inside. None of them were unfamiliar with the word daemon, but they had only heard about daemons that could assume human forms. Never had they seen one before. It was said that all those who had seen one were dead. And, it was said that even the great sirs in the cities who could use magic were not their opponents. They had no idea whether that was true or not.

Old man Liu was tempted to slap himself across his face. With his unlucky mouth, what was he calling out for? He immediately turned around to flee.

However, with a scarlet flash, the daemon had already arrived right in front of him. He lowered his head and said to old man Liu, "Alright!"

"It's been a while since I've had..." Before Li Qingshan had even finished speaking, he heard a thud, and old man Liu's legs gave way, falling onto his knees. He soon remembered this was a daemon and pleading for mercy was useless, so he just straightened himself out to play dead!

The other customers all shrieked and howled as they scattered.

Li Qingshan curled his lip and poured himself some tea, drinking a cup. Unsatisfied, he picked up the entire teapot and directly poured it into his mouth.

The tea was not particularly good tea, but over the past few years he spent cultivating, he had almost forgotten the feeling of being "human". Having some tea once more was quite the sensation.

Gazing at Clear River city in the distance, a thought crossed his head. I probably want to go there, right?

As a result, Li Qingshan made his way towards the city at a leisurely pace with a teapot in one hand and a willow branch in the other.

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In the Parlour of Clouds and Rain, everyone had become riled up with Liu Zhangqing's motivational speech. They were eager to get a piece of action. There were not people who could be fooled with just a few words, and they understood the dangers of war too.

Actually, in the past three years, millions of regular people had lost their lives. Countless Qi Practitioners had too, but when it came to Foundation Establishment cultivators, there were not a lot who died at all. If the moon demon had not emerged, it would have only been ten or twenty percent at most.

With their levels of cultivation, they would always possess a few methods to protect their own lives, whether it be talismans or arcane artifacts. As long as they knew how to respond to the situation without biting off more than they could chew, escaping from danger was not particularly difficult for them.

However, if they killed daemons, they would obtain precious daemon cores as well as their other remains like bones, flesh, and hide, all of which was extremely precious. It was possible to say that killing a Daemon General was equivalent to obtaining a treasure trove of items.

If the daemon cores they obtained matched their elemental affinity, they could even take a great step forward with their cultivation, earning them an opportunity to break through to higher realms that they originally had no chance at reaching.

Moving around alone might have been dangerous, but with so many people together, what were they afraid of? Even if they ran into the rock demon or blood demon, they had countermeasures against them. Everything would be fine as long as they did not get too unlucky and run into the moon demon.

"We're well-informed on the enemy right now, and we have the advantage of striking first. If we plan carefully, we'll definitely catch the daemons off-guard. I'm not particularly skilled in this aspect, so could you come up with some strategies for us, general Han?" Fu Qingjin requested politely.

Han Anjun, who had remained silent the entire time, accepted the responsibility and stood up, arriving in the centre with a flash.

The very aspects that the school of Military focused on had always been mobilising troops, battle formations, strategies, and the military law. Even Fu Qingjin could not claim he surpassed Han Anjun when it came to a large-scale operation of mobilising all the cultivators in the entire prefecture.

"There are only a few dozen Daemon Generals underground right now, and they lack organisation and a leader. The rock demon is dead, while the blood demon is injured. They're nothing worth worrying about. Only the moon demon and the several dozen Foundation Establishment night roamers under his command are a problem."

When they heard the moon demon being mentioned, everyone felt like a bucket of cold water had been dumped over them. Their enthusiasm was completely extinguished. If they ran into the night roamer army led by the moon demon, fleeing would not be as easy as running into the rock demon or blood demon.

Fu Qingjin let out a gentle sigh. He knew that this was an unavoidable obstacle. As he murmured, "Northmoon," even he found him rather troublesome. He had never expected the Daemon race of the Clear River prefecture to produce such a powerful daemon.

Not only did he possess an extremely powerful cultivation, but he also possessed intelligence that regular Daemon Generals lacked, having united a great group of night roamers under his banner. Anyone who wanted to destroy this force would have to pay a heavy price.

As a member of the cultivation community in the Clear River prefecture, Qiu Haitang also listened along from a corner. She knew she would no longer be able to maneuver between the two organisations and remain uninvolved once the alliance was forged. As she watched how they reacted when the moon demon was mentioned, she found it rather funny, and she felt rather proud too.

She had seen the moon demon, no, Northmoon, in person before. She had even forced him into a heart-to-heart conversation on the Soaring Dragon ship. In retrospect, she sure was audacious back then! He was a cruel and vicious daemon after all!

However, he did not seem as terrifying as they described him to be in her impression. Although he was rather irritable, he was actually very mischievous or even rather gentle. Sometimes, he seemed more like a big child to her, also possessing feelings of love inside.

At this moment, a Scarlet Wolf guard responsible for surveilling the surroundings of Clear River city reported, "Commander, a daemon has entered the city."

Was it about to begin? Everyone shivered and prepared themselves to purge daemons.

"It's just a daemon, isn't it? What're you so flustered for?" Wang Pushi became displeased at how unsettled the Scarlet Wolf guard was.

"I think... I think... it's the moon demon!"

"What did you say?" Wang Pushi's expression changed. It was not just him. The other Foundation Establishment cultivators were all taken aback too. Most of their motivation to purge daemons vanished into thin air.

Liu Zhangqing immediately fished out the Watermirror disc. Stroking across it, the scenery of the entire city immediately appeared on there. The west side of the city had descended into turmoil and people shrieked and fled.

Everyone could not help but raise their heads and look into the Watermirror disc.

Under the control of his spiritual energy, the scenery in the Watermirror disc rapidly expanded. A devilishly handsome face filled the entire disc. He seemed rather lost and lethargic. As if he had suddenly sensed something, he looked around before narrowing his eyes, locking onto Liu Zhangqing's eyes.

"So there you are!"

Liu Zhangqing staggered backwards slightly in fright as he cried out, "Oh no, the moon demon is going to slaughter the prefectural city!"

"Why didn't the formations respond?"

"The moon demon can conceal his aura."

As it turned out, they had set up a formation within the vicinity of Clear River city when the war first began. It did not restrict the entry and exit of regular people, but as soon as it sensed even a hint of daemon qi, it would give off a warning, and the formation would activate. As the person watching over the city, Liu Zhangqing would be able to respond immediately. However, Li Qingshan had hidden his aura away completely, thus making his way in here with ease.

Fu Qingjin's heart sank. He had personally witnessed the state that he had reduced Bronze Cauldron mountain to. The moon demon seemed to be able to cause earthquakes. If he really wanted to slaughter cities, he would probably be even more efficient than the rock demon or blood demon, and he would be almost unstoppable.

He could imagine just how many buildings and structures would collapse once he produced an earthquake. Clear River city would be reduced to ruins! This bastard rarely struck, but when he did, it would always be startling.

Li Qingshan had no interest in slaughtering the city at all. After drinking the Water of Oblivion, he had forgotten many things before he knew it. The more important they were to him, the more he was afraid to think of them, as he was afraid of forgetting. However, he could still remember that he wanted to come to the prefectural city, and he still felt angry inside.

Fu Qingjin you bastard! You're trying to scheme against me again! I'll show you what's what!