

### Chapter 531 - Killed Off and Opportunity

A whip pierced through the air. It was a translucent white, having been weaved together from thousands of threads. It was Lolth's poisonous whip. Although the toxins had been diluted, it was as tough as before. It was still her most suitable weapon.

Lolth raised her hand and caught it. It became as straight as a spear with a tremble, and the tip thrust straight towards the immobilised Wen Zhengming. All he felt was his forehead ache from the chilling killing intent.

"Be careful, junior brother!"

The three grandmasters paled in fright and swung their swords at Lolth. Never did they think that Li Qingshan could still do something like that even after being stripped of his flesh.

However, Lolth was completely focused. She did not even glance at them. At that moment, only Wen Zhengming existed in her eyes!

With Wen Zhengming trapped, the Sword Formation of the Four Seasons had already fallen apart. Even though the three swords were all rare arcane artifacts, they were still not enough to get through her defensive ability.

Thrust!

It was like a white bolt of lightning falling from the clouds in heaven. No matter what obstacles it ran into, it would not even waver.

The three swords basically landed at the same time, kicking up sparks. The spear rapidly spun in her hand and it produced a deep yet ear-piercing thrum. It knocked the swords away without being derailed at all.

No matter what you throw at it, you can't block the sharpness of this thrust.

Staring death in its face, Wen Zhengming erupted with dazzling righteous qi and forcefully broke free from Li Qingshan's arms.

Having been reduced to bones, he did not die, but he was unable to unleash the great strength of the ox demon either.

But at this moment, rings of fire suddenly coiled around Li Qingshan's boney body. Wherever, the flames passed by, his flesh regrew, just like the legendary rebirth in fire. The muscles on his arms twisted as he forcefully crushed down on the white light from Wen Zhengming.

A jade tablet hanging from Wen Zhengming's waist suddenly shattered.

The spear passed through Wen Zhengming's head, but it did not feel like it had pierced anything tangible. Wen Zhengming turned into a soul-like figure.

Li Qingshan fell through with his grip and Wen Zhengming flew to one side. Wen Zhengming's face was completely sunken. If it were not for his life-saving countermeasure, he would have almost failed miserably with this simple mission and died here.

Now, Wen Zhengming no longer feared any tangible attacks. He did not have any weaknesses on him, but he could still control his sword and use techniques. As both daemons before him were weakened, he only needed to assemble the Sword Formation of the Four Seasons with his three senior brothers again, and they would definitely be able to kill them here.

Right as he thought of that, there was a flash of blood-red light, and a huge, blood-red banner rippled through the air, sweeping towards him.

Wen Zhengming wanted to take off with his sword, but the banner constantly extended and expanded with him, enveloping the entire valley. Looking back, the sea of blood surged as far as the eye could see. When he returned to his senses, he had already entered the sea of blood.

"Junior brother Wen!"

The three grandmasters rushed over to provide assistance, but Li Qingshan and Lolth's combined efforts blocked them. All they could do was watch helplessly as Wen Zhengming was sucked into the Blood Sea Banner.

Revitalised, Lolth was about to chase after them, but she suddenly felt her waist tighten. Li Qingshan had wrapped his arm around her waist before pulling her backwards forcefully and throwing her into the Blood Sea Banner as well, producing a faint halo.

Li Qingshan unfurled his wings and grabbed Xiao An, turning around and fleeing immediately.

The three grandmasters tailed behind him on their swords in hot pursuit, but they immediately discovered Li Qingshan's speed was far more startling than what the information from the Hawkwolf Guard detailed. He actually managed to widen their distance immediately.

Little did they know that Li Qingshan completely refused to move at top speed. Flying swiftly through the twisting and turning underground caves basically took up all of his focus. It was even more tiring than fighting.

Upon increasing the distance between them, he suddenly stopped and turned around. He shattered the space there with his fists, and great cracks filled the surroundings. The earth rumbled and trembled like a magnitude 12 earthquake. Rock and soil rose and fell violently.

Afterwards, he withdrew his daemon qi and dove into Xiao An's Blood Sea Banner as well. Xiao An took off with the Blood Sea Banner on her shoulder.

The mega earthquake failed to harm the three grandmasters at all, but it did bring them quite a lot of trouble. It made their hearts sink.

All traces of them had been destroyed, and they still could not sense even a hint of their auras. They pulled closer and searched around, but they found nothing. They could only hope that Wen Zhengming managed to repel them. As long as he gave off a sliver of aura, they would be able to rush over and save him.

On the surface of the boundless sea of blood, Wen Zhengming stood with his sword in hand with a sunken face. Lolth stood nearby.

As for Li Qingshan, he eyed him viciously from behind. In the moment earlier, he had made a decision based on his instincts. Severing a finger of the enemy is better than grazing all ten.

With Li Qingshan, Xiao An, and Lolth's strength, killing the four grandmasters together was virtually impossible. A moment of carelessness could even turn the tables and lead them to their deaths instead. Just with the Sword Qi of the Four Seasons alone, if he took it on again, he would probably be done for.

And, it would be very difficult for Xiao An to suppress a Golden Core cultivator with the Blood Sea Banner if she were alone. Right now, he was using an advantage in numbers to cement his victory.

Lolth gazed at Wen Zhengming who had already become a sitting duck before looking at the familiar sea of blood around her. She could not help but think, When I oppose them, they're without a doubt a great headache, but when I work with them, the battle becomes unexpectedly easy.

When the four Golden Core cultivators assembled a sword formation together, even she was completely helpless against them. However, as soon as he struck, not only did he save her, but he even managed to forcefully bring a Golden Core cultivator with him.

"Come, come, come! You want revenge, come for revenge. If you have grievances, let's get them settled!" Li Qingshan made a gesture of invitation and said to Lolth.

Lolth let out a snort, but she was in no hurry to fight. She smiled gorgeously. "Do you have any last words? Let's hear them."

Wen Zhengming said with composure, "Just do it! If I really end up dying here, then that's fate. However, you might be able to kill me, Wen Zhengming, but you won't be able to kill the righteous path of the world. You won't be able to kill the countless disciples of confucianism. Lowly wretched daemons, only death awaits you for the heinous sins you commit."

Even Li Qingshan developed some admiration for his spirit of being able to cast aside the issue of death. Hearing what he said, he smiled. "The righteous path of the world? Whose righteous path?"

"The path of humanity is the righteous path! Man of all creatures is the one endowed with intelligence! Why else do you think you all transform into humans?"

Li Qingshan said, "Then if I were human, I'd be part of the righteous path too? Forget it. Who cares if it's some path of humanity or some sh\*tty path? Carving it up and splitting it into groups is merely a waste of time. Today, you've ended up in my hands, and that serves you right. If I were to die in your hand some other day, I wouldn't complain either."

With that, he surged with malice.

The sea of blood surged with a colossal wave. Wen Zhengming cut through the wave in a single stroke and Li Qingshan leapt forth, striking the sword with his claws.

Clang! The sword was sent flying.

The poisonous whip twisted like a snake and coiled over. The tip was slightly black like it was a snake's tongue, plunging into Wen Zhengming's body.

Even though he had already become ethereal, the venom still spread very quickly.

Wen Zhengming was still hiding many tricks up his sleeve, but if he fought alone, he could not even defeat Lolth, let alone when she had Li Qingshan's assistance and the Blood Sea Banner suppressed him.

The sea of blood surged. There was no other possible outcome for this battle.

Wen Zhengming said nothing else. Even on the brink of death, he was fearless. He wanted to blow up his golden core, but Xiao An's Samādhi Flames of White Bone swallowed him.

In the moment Wen Zhengming fell in battle, two figures shot over. In that moment, Li Qingshan and Lolth clashed a hundred times before brushing past one another.

A hundred treasures pouch had appeared in Li Qingshan's hand, while Lolth held a golden core.

With an opponent like him and an ally like her, it had always made Li Qingshan wonder whether the path he took was correct or not. Even though he was neither human or daemon anymore, he actually still understood the righteous path that Wen Zhengming was talking about.

However, it was pointless to say anything else. When he faced suffering, he did not see any righteous path. The assistance he received did not come from a confucian gentleman of upright character, but a demon among demons, a daemon among daemons.

The first thing he had taught him was to rely on himself and rely on the blade in his own hand. So what if there were countless disciples of confucianism? Did Li Qingshan even exist in any of their eyes?

"Hand it over!" Li Qingshan extended his hand towards Lolth.

"Did you really think the two of you could kill him without my strength?" Lolth clutched the golden core in her hand. The power it contained tempted her very much.

"I saved your life- No, you can say whatever you want. I'm not going to be negotiating with you. Hand it over!"

Li Qingshan's face sank, and the malice he gave off grew heavier. The sea of blood began to surge again like a huge, roaring beast wanting to devour her.

Lolth wavered for a while before tossing out the golden core reluctantly. It flew through the air as a dazzling curve before landing in Li Qingshan's hand.

Li Qingshan stowed the golden core away and only then did he ease up. He smiled. "That's more like it! Now, let's go find the other three. We can split the spoils evenly. It's three against three now!"

And, the opponents' sword formation had been destroyed. Most importantly, they must have been occupied by anger and hatred. Injured animals were terrifying because of their wildness, but once humans lost their rationality, they would become extremely feeble.

"Junior brother Wen is dead!" The scholar in white suddenly stopped and shuddered.

“What! How’s that possible!?” The expressions of the other two changed drastically. They were in disbelief.

Anyone who reached Golden Core would possess many life-saving countermeasures. They could never be killed so easily. However, the strange, red banner did become a blood-red shadow that loomed over their hearts. Arcane artifacts that created their own region of space were far too rare.

As if it were to verify what the scholar in white had said, the moon demon’s daemon qi surged once more, like a lantern in the darkness, drawing them over. However, Wen Zhengming’s aura did not appear with it. Clearly, he was likely dead already.

“We have to avenge him!”

Their eyes reddened slightly as they surged with murderousness.

The scholar in white stopped his two junior brothers and said reluctantly, “Let’s retreat!”

“Why?”

“I understand what you’re feeling, but now’s not the time. We aren’t going to let our junior brother’s death slide like this.” The scholar in white’s eyes shone coldly.

“I didn’t think they’d actually retreat! They sure are decisive!”

Li Qingshan felt the three auras burst through the earth before vanishing from the underground world in the end. Although he could catch up to them if he tried, he would be alone and he could be killed off if he was not careful. It was possible for the tables to turn with that.

And, he had another important thing to do!

Now, there was no longer anyone who could prevent him from refining the Clear river. This opportunity could vanish in the blink of an eye. He had to do it before the Ruyi commandery responded.

Taking Xiao An with him, Li Qingshan found a hidden river and travelled upstream, arriving in Moon Court lake very soon.

He burst out of the water and flapped his wings, spraying the air with water. They seemed like pearls under the sunlight. He pushed his speed to the limit. Mountains appeared in the horizon before being thrown behind very quickly again.

But in a short while, he arrived in the Boundless mountains, at the source of the Clear river.

### **Chapter 532 - Lord of the Clear River Waters (One)**

Among the mountains, a spring let out a trickle. No one would have thought it was the source of the great Clear river.

The meltwater and the clear springs of the mountains merged with it, droplet by droplet.

As the water meandered through the mountains, it grew larger and larger, twisting and surging, advancing without stop.

Originally, Li Qingshan could only fly above the water. Afterwards, he directly leapt into the water and his daemon qi permeated from his body, enveloping the entire flow.

He knew that time was tight. With a tense heart, he pushed the Water God Seal as hard as he could, using every bit of daemon qi to refine the river water.

The process should have taken an extremely long time, long enough for the Ruyi commandery to respond in time and easily destroy his wild ambitions. However, when he refined water with his original body, he moved with startling speed.

When regular daemons refined bodies of water, they were like common people rising in a revolution. It would take them tremendous physical and mental efforts to carry out. Only then could they gradually sweep across the entire world.

Wherever the spirit turtle passed by, it was like the arrival of the blessed son of heaven in person. All of the water would automatically submit to it.

Pushing forward, he left the Boundless mountains very quickly. If he continued, he would arrive in an area littered with human activity. It would probably be very difficult to fool the cultivators of the Clear River prefecture with his actions. If they actually come to stop him, they would pose quite a large issue.

Once he was delayed and the Marquis of Ruyi responded, probably even more and even stronger Golden Core cultivators would immediately rush over.

Let's see who dares to get in my way!

.....

"Oh no! Sir, the moon demon is refining the waters of the Clear river!"

In the Academy of the Hundred Schools within the Lake of Dragons and Snakes, the news reached Liu Zhangqing's ears very quickly.

"What about the four grandmasters?"

Liu Zhangqing asked in surprise. Right now, the four grandmasters should have forced the moon demon into fleeing for his life. Why would he be bold enough to refine more water systems in such a brash manner?

"I don't know, but apparently a few people saw the grandmasters return to the Ruyi commander, and-and-"

"And what? Spit it out," Liu Zhangqing said impatiently.

"There only seems to be three of them!"

"Don't tell me? That's impossible!" Liu Zhangqing was surprised and terrified. He turned around and made his way towards the door in a hurry. Right when he arrived at the door, he stopped and said, "Keep a constant eye on the moon demon's whereabouts, but don't approach him."

He was not too frantic. With how large the Clear river was, it could not be refined so quickly. He had ample time to make a response. However, he soon discovered he was wrong, and extremely wrong at that.

When he arrived in a place similar to the reporting room of the Hawkwolf Guard, awaiting to see the Marquis of Ruyi, a disciple reported to him that the moon demon had already refined a third of the Clear river.

“What!?” Liu Zhangqing reacted violently. Although the upstream section of the Clear river had a relatively smaller flow, making it easier to refine, it made absolutely no sense for the moon demon to be this quick.

And, the Marquis of Ruyi happened to be doing something else. He still had not appeared.

“To the person on the other side, please report to the marquis again that Liu Zhangqing has something urgent to report!”

By now, the four, now three, grandmasters had returned to the commandery city of Ruyi. They had arrived in the governor’s estate to see the Marquis of Ruyi.

The Marquis of Ruyi paced around with his hands behind his back. His face was terribly sunken. Originally, he thought it had already been overkill to send the four grandmasters together and success was guaranteed.

Yet, not only did they fail to kill the wretched daemon, but they had even lost one of their own instead! They were Golden Core cultivators after all! They could not be compared with Foundation Establishment cultivators. Wen Zhengming and his Pine Sough academy could be regarded as one of the foundations of his reign, but now, it had been forcefully severed from him.

“Did you fall for an ambush of the daemons?” the Marquis of Ruyi cast aside his guilt and asked. This was the most reasonable explanation.

The scholar in white shook his head. “It was only the spider daemon, the moon demon, and a skeleton monster.”

“Just by them, just-” The Marquis of Ruyi’s eyes widened. He raised his hand and pointed right at the scholar in white’s face before letting out a snort and lowering it heavily.

The scholar in white felt extremely displeased inside. We only became involved in this mess because of your orders. Now that junior brother Wen has suffered a horrible fate, not only do you give no comfort, but you instead blame us.

As the leader of the four grandmasters, he was different from Wen Zhengming’s stubbornness and frankness. He had always been known for his great pride, so he clasped his hands.

“My junior brothers and I will avenge junior brother Wen. We’re just giving a word of advice to the marquis right now to be careful of what the moon demon is capable of. We’ll be taking our leave then!”

“You- fellow Tang, how can you say that? Fellow Wen’s revenge is also my revenge...”

“Marquis, sir Liu of the Clear River prefecture has something urgent to report,” at this moment, the envoy reported again.

“Get him to wait! He’s utterly incompetent!”

The Marquis of Ruyi became even more displeased over how Liu Zhangqing had handed the Watermirror disc to the moon demon, but he forgot that if it were not for his command in the past, Liu Zhangqing would have never done that.

It took the Marquis of Ruyi tremendous effort before he managed to pacify the three grandmasters. The scholar in white said, “It would be best for the marquis to see prefect Liu. Perhaps it might be related to the moon demon.”

“Then let’s hear it together.”

The four of them arrived in a secret room behind the governor’s estate. The Marquis of Ruyi heard from Liu Zhangqing and spoke with a sunken face.

“What! You say the moon demon is refining the Clear river? There’s no need to worry. I’ll send people over right now. We’ll definitely kill the wretched daemon this time.”

Not only did he not worry, but he instead felt it was a rare opportunity now that the moon demon had come to the surface. This wretched daemon sure was insatiable. He had grown arrogant with his success. The Clear river was not that easy to refine.

“But sir, the moon demon has almost refined half of it already!”

The Marquis of Ruyi immediately lost his temper. “Why do I even keep you around!? I order you to stop the moon demon regardless of the price. Otherwise, there’s no need for you to remain as the prefect. I’ll be heading over right now!”

The figure of the Marquis of Ruyi vanished, and Liu Zhangqing backed out of the room. He was irritated.

Stop the moon demon? How am I supposed to stop the moon demon? Even the four grandmasters you sent were helpless against him. I’m just a measly Foundation Establishment cultivator. What can I do?

The Marquis of Ruyi’s orders were absolute, so all he could do was hold a meeting with the school leaders. However, he had already made up his mind to avoid the Clear river at all costs.

In the world of cultivation, obstructing a person’s cultivation led to grievances even more severe than killing their parents or stealing their wives. The moon demon definitely would not be soft-hearted this time. Once they caught his attention, they were probably done for.

His position as the prefect was important, but it could not be more important than his life.

Even prefect Liu who had his title directly conferred to him by the Marquis of Ruyi was thinking like this, so it was as clear as day what the other school leaders and powerful members of the academy thought.

There were plenty of courageous people among them, but who would be willing to do something useless that would clearly bring about their own destruction? The moon demon had already taught them a bloody lesson with how Yang Pinghu of the Clear Court sect ended up.



“Actually, we don’t need to directly confront the moon demon. We only need to interfere with his refinement process. With how long the Clear river is, we can go upstream and wreak havoc while he’s in the middle section right now. We can delay him until the reinforcements of the Ruyi commandery arrive.”

The Marquis of Ruyi’s orders could not be defied, so someone came up with an idea. The idea had a degree of safety, so they all agreed to it reluctantly before dispersing.

Han Tieyi stood up suddenly, only to see Hua Chengzan still seated, without any intention to move. Thinking about how even the greatest brain of the Clear River prefecture had remained silent during the intense discussion earlier, he cast a questioning gaze at him.

“If only it were that simple.” Hua Chengzan smiled helplessly. The idea was far too simple, so simple that anyone could think of it. There was no need for him to speak up about it, but would he really not think of it?

The figure with drifting, scarlet hair appeared in Hua Chengzan’s head. He was bold enough to continue with his actions that garnered condemnation from everyone whilst in the eye of the storm, so he was clearly rather confident. If a group of Foundation Establishment cultivators tried to stop him, they would probably pay with their lives.

The cultivators arrived at various places throughout the Clear River prefecture, preparing to wreak havoc.

Huge, vicious skeletons burst out of the water, kicking up great waves and blocking their paths. Xiao An’s twenty-one Skeleton Demons were scattered along the river to watch over Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan had issued an order too. “Apart from the father-son duo of the Han family and Hua Chengzan, kill the others without mercy.”

Familiarity is familiarity, but if you insist on working against me, don’t blame me for being ruthless.

In the beginning, the cultivators did not take these skeleton demons that were clearly under someone’s control seriously, but as soon as they clashed, they realised they were absolutely wrong.

When their spiritual artifacts landed on the skeleton monsters, they could only produce a few sparks. Only arcane artifacts could leave behind some marks on them. However, once these monsters approached them, they would tear through their protective spiritual qi in a single stroke.

Having been refined again and again by Xiao An, every single Skeleton Demon now possessed tremendous physical strength. They could move as swiftly as the wind, and they had absolutely no weaknesses or flaws either. Even clashing with late Foundation Establishment cultivators posed no issue.

Compared to the Marquis of Ruyi’s mission, their own lives still took priority. These cultivators had originally planned to strike and run. They refused to remain in the same place, just in case they angered the moon demon, making him directly fly over and destroy them. Now that they ran into such powerful monsters, they became even more afraid to stay put. They fled as soon as they made contact.

The Skeleton Demons did not chase after them. They simply stood guard in the Clear river, wanting to see who was bold enough to approach the water.

The leader of the school of Miscellany, Gou Dai, silently approached where the waters of the Clear river flowed out of the Boundless mountains. He clutched a Glazed Mirror of Invisibility in one hand, hiding his body and aura perfectly. Even if someone stood face to face with him, they would struggle to discover him.

Li Qingshan had also obtained a Glazed Mirror of Invisibility in the past, but that was merely a mid grade spiritual artifact. The one in Gou Dai's hand was similar in design, but it was a supreme grade spiritual artifact, two whole levels better than Li Qingshan's.

Throughout several millennia of development of artifact forging, many "standard form" artifacts had been produced to fulfill the various requirements of "invisibility", "defence", and so on.

Similar to the five main cultivation methods of practising qi, they took the various strengths and weaknesses into account and maximised their effect. The future artifact smiths only needed to forge them according to the standard.

However, as their level of proficiency differed, the strength of the artifacts would vary.

Gou Dai's confidence did not come from this Glazed Mirror of Invisibility alone. In his other hand was a small bottle that swished with liquid.

As the leader of the school of Miscellany, neither his cultivation or strength was particularly powerful, but he did collect many strange and bizarre items, which could play a wondrous effect when it mattered.

This bottle of Spiritual Condensing liquid had originally been a precious material for forging artifacts. As long as he poured it into the river, not only would it disturb the moon demon's daemon qi, but it would also condense the water spiritual qi in this region. When the moon demon returned and tried to refine this region again, it would become extremely troublesome.

As for him, he would have done the Marquis of Ruyi a great service without encountering any danger. He was trying to maximise his profits with little risk.

Right as he thought of that, a skeleton had arrived before him before he knew it without producing any noise.

Gou Dai's heart shivered. He immediately froze up.

That's impossible! It can't see me!

### **Chapter 533 - Lord of the Clear River Waters (Two)**

Xiao An's fiery eyes stared at Gou Dai quietly, and she tilted her head slightly. She was extremely intrigued by this person that had clearly been discovered yet still stood without moving.

Gou Dai let out a sigh of relief inside. As it seemed, the skeleton could not actually see him, or it would have launched an attack immediately. He studied the skeleton carefully, only to see a small, blood-red banner in its left hand and something that Gou Dai found rather familiar in its right.

Isn't that... the Bamboo-Jade Lot of the Cloud Bookcase!? Has Xiao An been killed too? No, isn't she still in secluded cultivation and hasn't emerged yet? Or perhaps...

He stared at the tiny skeleton in disbelief before hearing a spurt. His chest ached. He slowly lowered his head. A bony hand had been plunged into his heart already.

Gou Dai's expression immediately became twisted with absolute viciousness. As a Foundation Establishment cultivator, he had a powerful life force, so he would not die immediately. He wanted to launch a counterattack before death, but a heavy sensation of coldness had already spread through his body, freezing his soul.

The Samādhi Flames of White Bone devoured him mercilessly. Xiao An took the Glazed Mirror of Invisibility from him and checked it before stowing it away. She lifted up the Bamboo-Jade Lot of the Cloud Bookcase again and began divining.

Detecting and covering openings, seeking out potential danger, and eliminating them one by one.

.....

Many rivers converged in the Clear river. It had already become a roaring flow of water, spanning a great area as it raged along.

Li Qingshan burst out of the water and looked at Moon Court lake from afar. He was filled with lofty sentiments. Having reached here, he had refined half of the Clear river, and he could now borrow strength from the waters of Moon Court lake.

He raised his arm high into the air. In his palm was the Water God Seal.

Turbulent waves erupted on the surface of Moon Court lake. The lakewater surged, pouring into the Clear river wave after wave. The river flow suddenly sped up, and his speed of refinement became even faster.

Within the raging waters, a speck of red appeared. Li'l Red wagged his tail from side to side as he swam over, raising his head and lifting up Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan felt like he was riding a horse as he travelled with the flow. In high spirits, he recited loudly, "From both banks the cries of apes unending, my skiff has passed thousands of mountains."

Note: The poem, An Early Departure from White Emperor City, is by Li Bai, who I think I've mentioned in the past.

In the air, Liu Zhangqing, Hua Chengzan, and the others from the academy stood on a Soaring Dragon ship, gazing at the handsome daemon in his unscrupulous ease. All of them were speechless. None of them dared to stop him.

At the end of the river was a great marsh.

The red glow from the setting sun in the west filled the sky. A wave suddenly rose up in the horizon that had been dyed red, and the wave carried a large fish with a person standing atop, growing from far to near as if they had descended from the sky.

With the end in sight, a smile also stretched across Li Qingshan's face. He looked back only to see several streaks of light shooting across the air, rushing towards him at full speed. In the lead was the Marquis of Ruyi in splendid robes and with a jade belt around his waist.

The Marquis of Ruyi was enveloped in layers of scarlet light, making him seem like a meteor. This was the great energy condensed from the power of belief of the millions of lives in the Ruyi commandery over thousands of years of ruling.

In the moment he saw the moon demon, his eyes shone with cold light, and he moved even faster, throwing the group behind.

Li Qingshan completely ignored his mental exhaustion and pursed his lips firmly, bringing his hands together before spreading them out and conjuring the figure of the spirit turtle. He sped up, accelerated, and sped up again under the cascading waves, making a final sprint towards the end.

“Wretched daemon!”

The Marquis of Ruyi raised his hand, and a scarlet jade seal flew out. The major rivers and renowned mountains of the Ruyi commandery were engraved on the seal, full of artistic design, and at the very top was a coiled serpent.

The seal was known as the Seal of Mountains and Rivers. It had been forged from a single block of jade when the ancestral emperor established the nine provinces, conferring the marquises with their nobility. Not only was it a representation of identity and status, but it also possessed great power.

The Seal of Mountains and River flew into the air and expanded along the way. In the blink of an eye, it towered like a mountain.

A great shadow enveloped the region. Li Qingshan raised his head, and the Seal of Mountains and Rivers descended from above, crushing down heavily. Just by looking at it, he felt like he would suffocate, and even with his startling speed, he could not help but develop a feeling that he could not dodge it.

He was like a monarch who could take the life of a great general who led an army of thousands with only a single golden tablet and an imperial edict. If the lord wanted his subject to die, the subject had to die.

The Seal of Mountains and Rivers was not a simple spiritual or arcane artifact. Instead, it was similar to the Peachwood Prayer Sword Li Qingshan had seen in the Dragon’s Gate sect in the past. It possessed the mighty power of belief.

The Peachwood Prayer Sword had been worshipped by the successive disciples of the Dragon’s Gate sect for several centuries, while the Seal of Mountains and Rivers had gathered all the power of belief from the millions of lives throughout the entire Ruyi commandery. After several thousand years, its power had not merely multiplied by ten thousand fold. Even Golden Core cultivators would be reduced to a dead soul if they were crushed by it.

If the Marquis of Ruyi wanted to fight, he had no need to use anything else. All he had to do was unleash the Seal of Mountains and Rivers and he could basically dominate the Golden Core realm. He would be invincible.

Boom!

With a violent rumble, the Seal of Mountains and Rivers crushed down on Li Qingshan viciously, stamping the earth.

The ground shook, and the flow of the great river was severed.

The Marquis of Ruyi smiled indifferently. He was only a Daemon General. Even if he were somewhat capable, how could he be his opponent? He had been taking him far too lightly all this time.

“Hmm?”

The Marquis of Ruyi was slightly stunned. The Seal of Mountains and Rivers that stood several hundred meters tall like a mountain was actually being forced up bit by bit.

Li Qingshan had transformed, going from a handsome man to a fiendish daemon. He stood over sixty meters tall with dark skin and protruding teeth. He was ferocious, standing with an indomitable spirit. He supported the Seal of Mountains and Rivers with both hands as his iron hooves dug deeply into the ground.

The pressure from above was alarming, but it incited his ox-like stubbornness instead. He let out a moo-like bellow, which sounded like a rumble from the depths of the earth—long and deep, yet filled with power even greater than thunder. The muscles on his body twisted together, and his arms in particular swelled up until they seemed like two huge pillars that held up the sky.

“That’s impossible!” That was the Marquis of Ruyi’s first thought. Someone had actually managed to use brute force to stop the Seal of Mountains and Rivers.

“I’d like to see how long you can last!” The Marquis of Ruyi sneered and leapt up, landing on the Seal of Mountains and Rivers as well as the body of the serpent that had become enormous.

The pressure from the Seal of Mountains and Gods suddenly increased drastically. Li Qingshan dropped down on one knee as he used his entire body to support the Seal of Mountains and Rivers on his back. His blood vessels ruptured as his tough tiger bones produced an ear-piercing sound of screeching metal.

The Strength of the Earth flowed into his body endlessly. He gritted his teeth as he stopped the Seal of Mountains and Gods firmly. Victory was already in sight, yet he was unable to take another step forward.

“Moon demon, today is the day you die!” The Marquis of Ruyi laughed in satisfaction.

At this moment, the three grandmasters had arrived too. Gazing at the figure below the Seal of Mountains and Rivers, they no longer resembled refined scholars at all. There was only bare hatred and killing intent.

Once they struck, they would definitely use a startling killing move without holding back at all. The immobilised Li Qingshan had become a perfect target, but as long as they relaxed even in the slightest, the Seal of Mountains and Rivers would crush them into pulp.

“Not necessarily!”

Li Qingshan gulped down Wen Zhengming’s golden core. He had never tried ingesting the golden cores of Golden Core cultivators, nor did he know the effects, but at a time like this, he could no longer afford to care so much.

Golden core, explode!

The golden core exploded loudly, turning into extremely pure spiritual qi. It completely surpassed any pills Li Qingshan had ingested before. This was what Wen Zhengming had painstakingly developed after ingesting who knew how many pills and after who knew how many years.

He practised the Ox Demon Transformation madly, converting all of the spiritual qi into the most primitive strength.

Under the Marquis of Ruyi's dumbstruck gaze, he stood up inch by inch and violently unleashed an earth-shaking bellow. He pushed upwards as hard as he could, throwing the Seal of Mountains and Rivers and the Marquis of Ruyi into the air.

Making use of this, Li Qingshan flapped his wings and threw himself out from under the seal regardless of the cost. He drew in all the daemon qi scattered in the surging waters of the Clear river and lunged towards the end of the river, his final destination.

"Stop him!" the Marquis of Ruyi called out furiously and in surprise.

Three streaks of light criss-crossed and slashed out like halos.

Li Qingshan did not even look at them. He did not even waste a shred of daemon qi to use the Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell.

Blood spattered. The light ripped through his skin and tore through his flesh.

Clang! Clang! Clang! There were three metallic thrums. These were the sounds of the streaks of light landing on his bones.

However, despite all of this, nothing could stop Li Qingshan's lunge. He was like a vicious tiger descending from the mountains, a dragon diving into the ocean, pressing forward with indomitable will.

With a great boom, Li Qingshan's colossal body collapsed in the great marsh, filling the air with splashes. His momentum continued to carry him forwards, skidding for several hundred meters before coming to a stop. He did not move at all as if he had expended everything he had in him.

The shadow enveloped Li Qingshan again. Upside down, the Marquis of Ruyi pushed against the Seal of Mountains and Rivers, treating the earth as his paper and stamping down heavily.

Li Qingshan rolled over. As he stared at the whistling Seal of Mountains and River that filled up his vision, he grinned widely, revealing his pale-white teeth as he let out a great laugh.

"Hahahahahaha!"

The surging rivers of the Clear river, from its source thousands of kilometers away to its end here, merged with the daemon qi, leaping above the waters.

The Water God Seal flickered with unprecedented radiance. It began to swell, growing to twice its size. A slender water pattern coiled around it like a dragon or a snake. It was the waters of the Clear river.

"You better keep laughing!" The Marquis of Ruyi gritted his teeth as he radiated with dazzling, scarlet light, merging with the Seal of Mountains and Rivers.

Bang! Water seeped out in all directions and droplets of water splashed into the air.

The Marquis of Ruyi did not feel like he had struck anything solid. Instead, he felt like he had landed on a ball of cotton. A flexible yet tenacious power emerged from below.

Li Qingshan was not fighting alone. Behind him were the raging waters of the Clear river, the gushing Moon Court lake, and countless other water systems of various sizes. They conjured waves upon waves and streams upon streams of light, surging together to prop up the Seal of Mountains and Rivers.

With this power as assistance, Li Qingshan lifted the Seal of Mountains and Rivers easily. You're the marquis of a commandery, but I'm also the water god of a river!

The three grandmasters arrived, but this time, they each clutched a violet talisman. Clearly, they had even taken out their treasures just so they could drag the moon demon to his doom.

The river rushed over, turning into an enormous geyser that rushed into the air and deflected the Seal of Mountains and Rivers.

Before the three grandmasters could even surround him, they saw a flash, and the moon demon's trace vanished. All they saw was a scarlet streak of light piercing through the sky.

Nothing concerned Li Qingshan anymore. He flapped his wings of wind and fire and shook off the four of them in the blink of an eye. He let out a great chuckle. "What sh\*tty Marquis of Ruyi? I think this is all you're capable of!"

Suddenly, he remembered how Yang Pinghu was once known as the Lord of Clear Court, so he laughed.

"From today onwards, I am the Lord of the Clear River Waters!"

### **Chapter 534 - Within South Hub City**

Feng Buquan burned with impatience as he flew as quickly as he could, traversing countless lofty mountains, cities, and villages.

An armoured giant that stood several hundred meters tall appeared on the horizon.

The giant that stood as burly as a mountain pressed down on his sword. At a closer glance, it was not a true giant, but a statue. However, it was unbelievably large and happened to resemble one in both appearance and spirit. Even every single crease in its skin was clearly visible, and its eyes shone with lustre.

He was the first lord of the Green province, bearing the title of the Mighty King of Chu. He raised his head and gazed at the boundless Ink sea, like he was warning and keeping the dragon king hidden in the sea at bay.

Beside the statue, on the shore of the sea, stood a grand city. The royal palace littered across the land that rose and fell as an unbroken chain, forming a single, lofty and glorious body. Combined with the infiltration of time, it was coated in a faint green lustre.

Waves surged and slammed against the city walls, like it was a huge piece of rock withstanding thousands of years of erosion and collision from the Ink sea. However, as it stood within the rising mist of the sea, it also seemed ungraspable.

Feng Buquan's emotions surged inside. What a familiar sight!

Standing before him was the greatest city of the Green province, South Hub city.

When Feng Buquan stepped into South Hub city, he could not help but feel like everything was still the same, yet everyone had changed. With no time to lament, he directly made his way to the central region of South Hub city.

Guards wielding weapons and adorned in armour stood there like guardian kings in temples, protecting the place and eyeing up any passers-by. None of them actually possessed a cultivation below Foundation Establishment, and they both practised qi and tempered the body. They were powerful. They were figures who could dominate an entire region no matter where they went.

Feng Buquan had once been an esteemed guest of the provincial lord's estate, so he was familiar with the process. With his presence reported up, he was granted an audience by the Dark Queen very soon.

Within a quiet and beautiful pavilion that could see the sea in the distance, a woman sat quietly by a window. A crescent moon hovered above the sea of clouds. Her expression was chilly as she gently caressed the cat in her arms as she cast her gaze outside. She was not looking at the sea, nor was she looking at the moon. Her gaze simply drifted about, gazing at the empty space.

On the contrary, it was the cat that used its dark green eyes that shone like fireflies to study Feng Buquan. Afterwards, with a meow, it revealed an extremely human-like expression of boredom. It lowered its head to lick its claws, revealing the delicate, silver moon that hung on her forehead.

Feng Buquan said, "Your highness, please dismiss everyone else."

The Dark Queen finally turned her head and looked at Feng Buquan. The cat let out a meow, and all the female attendants backed away. Afterwards, she said indifferently, "Speak!"

Feng Buquan glanced at the cat, but the cat directly responded, "I'm not leaving!"

Feng Buquan remembered the name of the cat and sighed inside. He bowed deeply. "Your highness, I... found her."

"What did you say?"

The Dark Queen suddenly stood up. Her voice was chilly and dignified, but it also trembled emotionally.

The cat landed on the ground lithely, glancing at her master in some confusion and letting out a displeased meow.

Feng Buquan said, "I found her. I sensed a hint of the heavenly secrets that belonged to her."

"Where is she!?"

"I don't know, but she's definitely still alive, alive in this world!"

The Dark Queen clenched her hands firmly. Her knuckles whitened as her nails stabbed into her palms. Within the piercing pain, she forced herself to calm down.



“Feng Buquan! I recall you once told me that her life force was drained and death was certain. It’s been so many years, and now you suddenly come to tell me that she’s still alive? And you still don’t know where she is?”

Her voice and expression were both indifferent, without a hint of sternness. However, under the glow of the moon, the shadow behind her constantly grew, climbing up the walls and the ceiling. It was sinister and horrifying, dancing around madly and manifesting her inner perturbation.

Feng Buquan raised his head. “I did!”

“Make it clear for me.” The Dark Queen closed her eyes and let out a long sigh.

Feng Buquan told her everything that led to it. A powerful daemon called “Northmoon” had appeared in the Clear River prefecture and obtained a Water God Seal from somewhere, refining regions of water en masse. The four grandmasters could not find him even when they worked together, so the Marquis of Ruyi requested him to carry out a divination. In the end, he sensed the thread of heavenly secrets that had been severed for all these years again. That was her existence.

The Dark Queen asked, “And then? Did you divine again?”

“I did, but I found nothing.”

“Perhaps it’s merely a false impression.”

“My blind eye, my limp leg, my hunched back, and my heart are all telling me this is no false impression.” Feng Buquan was rather emotional too.

The Dark Queen had also noticed that Feng Buquan’s blind eye had become much clearer, and his hunched back had also straightened out. When he walked in, he no longer limped as badly as when he left back then.

These disabilities had all arisen from the backlash of the heavenly secrets when he clashed with someone in the past. A clash between practitioners of divination could be even more dangerous than a clash between regular cultivators at times. Just lighter consequences involved shortened lifespans, while heavier consequences involved dying on the spot. The injuries they suffered would not be as straightforward as flesh wounds either. Instead, they would be much deeper, closely related to fate.

Technically speaking, as long as a Golden Core cultivator like Feng Buquan did not die, they had methods to regrow their limbs and recover their sight even if their arms were severed and their eyes were blinded. However, nothing could heal the disabilities on his body, as they had already become his “fate”, like a dead knot.

In the past, in order to remunerate Feng Buquan for these sacrifices, the Dark Queen had used the strength of both the provincial lord’s estate and the Umbral Yin sect, yet it was still unable to heal him. Yet now, it had taken such a clear turn for the better. The dead knot seemed to be showing signs of loosening.

Feng Buquan said, “In the past, I could calculate she was already dead, but now, I can’t even calculate whether she’s alive or dead.”

The Dark Queen was finally fazed. She was not absolutely clueless about the heavenly secrets and divination. A situation like this clearly implied the heavenly secrets had changed one way or another. She murmured, "Northmoon!"

"This is an extremely important clue. According to my understanding, this Northmoon is extremely closely related to the Soaring Dragon Elder of the Sword Collection palace's death. The Sword Collection palace sent Fu Qingjin to the Clear River prefecture primarily to investigate this."

Reaching there, Feng Buquan glanced at the cat on the table. Right now, she was the one who was most closely related to the Soaring Dragon Elder's death. If she had not fled for the Dragon province, why would the Soaring Dragon Elder die there so strangely?

"You said Northmeown!? You said Northmeown!?"

The cat suddenly began calling out. When she heard Feng Buquan mention Northmoon, she found it extremely familiar, but she also struggled to believe it. When she left the Ice Sword cliff, he was still a long way away from Daemon General, yet now, even a group of Golden Core cultivators were helpless against him. That did not line up at all.

"Yes. He has a pair of horns, which are engraved with the words 'north' and 'moon'," said Feng Buquan. He had not brought the good news to the Dark Queen rashly. Instead, he specially carried out a series of investigations, particularly focusing on the only clue so far, the Daemon General called Northmoon.

"It can't be wrong! It must be Big Blacko! It must be Big Blacko! I want to go to the Clear River prefecture! I want to go to the Clear River prefecture!"

The cat leapt up and turned into a young girl in dark green. She grabbed the Dark Queen's arm and shook it forcefully. The tail behind her had yet to transform away completely, so it wagged around excitedly.

The Dark Queen was slightly taken aback. "Northmoon is the Big Blacko you speak of?"

"What's Big Blacko about?" Feng Buquan did have a rough understanding that Northmoon and Xuanyue were both related to the Soaring Dragon Elder's death, but he was not particularly familiar with the inside details.

The Dark Queen rubbed Xuanyue's head. "Yue'er came across a daemon in the Boundless mountains..."

"Let me, let me!" Xuanyue excitedly narrated what she went through in the Boundless mountains after meeting "Big Blacko". Afterwards, she smiled complacently. "He even admitted me as his master! Meowhahaha!"

"Do you know if there's anyone else by Northmoon's side?"

Even Feng Buquan had never expected the origins of the name "Northmoon" to actually come from the young girl's claws standing right before him. The thread of heavenly secrets had clearly appeared that day to cover Northmoon's location. He definitely had a close connection to it.

"That'll be Li'l Whitey!"

"And who's Li'l Whitey?"

“A little skeleton who didn’t like to talk. Big Blacko is really nice to it.” Xuanyue wrinkled her nose, rather unhappy about this.

“A skeleton!”

Feng Buquan suddenly turned his head and looked at the Dark Queen. There was nothing that was born as a skeleton. In order to be reduced to bones, it had clearly died once before reviving due to some certain reason.

The severance and reappearance of the thread all seemed to be explained now.

The Dark Queen was speechless. Her mind shuddered as she struggled to keep her emotions under control.

She had already heard this story from Xuanyue countless times. In the beginning, she had been perplexed by just how the Soaring Dragon Elder had died, but towards the end, she even lost the interest to investigate. She simply listened along quietly. She had not grown sick of it, but she did lose her initial interest.

However, never did she think it would actually be hiding such a deep secret. An insignificant, measly side character in the story might have been a crucial existence in her life.

The pieces of the shattered puzzle flew together one by one, vaguely assembling into an image.

However, there were still many points of doubt. If that really was her, if she really had been revived from death, why had she not returned? Why did she not tell Gu Yanying her identity on the Ice Sword cliff?

Even if it were all true, could a senseless and mindless skeleton still be regarded as her child?

The Dark Queen exhaled deeply, afraid to develop too much hope. She said in a cold tone, “I want to see them.”

Xuanyue called out, “Let me come along! Let me come along!”

Feng Buquan said, “Definitely not.”

The nine commanderies of the Green province had also been carved up by the three great sects. The Ruyi commandery was located towards the north, within the range of influence of the Sword Collection palace. Only the south was the headquarters of the Umbral Yin sect.

As a result, when Xuanyue escaped last time, the Dark Queen could only leave it up to Gu Yanying, unable to tend to the matter in person. And, the Daemon Suppression alliance also developed vigorously in the north, but it had absolutely no activity in the south.

The central region where the Chan Monastery of Deva-Nāga resided was a buffer zone. Basically as long as disciples of the two sects set foot in each other’s territory, they would be risking their lives.

Moreover, the war between the daemons and humans in the Clear River prefecture was showing signs of development. If a cat daemon like Xuanyue went there, she would be no different from walking into the belly of the beast. Even her nine lives would not be enough for her to use.

“You ugly monster!” Xuanyue pulled a face at Feng Buquan before turning to the Dark Queen and immediately behaving pitifully. “Please, master!”

The Dark Queen considered it for a moment before actually nodding in agreement. “Alright!”

“This...”

Just as Feng Buquan was stunned, he noticed the dim light shining in the Dark Queen’s eyes and said, “Let’s go together.”

### **Chapter 535 - The Raging River**

If the Clear river that passed through the Clear River prefecture was a vine, then the lakes would be like ripe fruit on the vine.

Since the vine was his, what would be the difficulty in harvesting the fruit?

Refining bodies of water had always been relatively difficult when it was a small river merging with a large one and rather easy when it was a large river swallowing up a small one.

Without even leaving the waters of the Clear river, Li Qingshan simply passed by the mouths of the river and used the Water God Seal to constantly devour the major and minor rivers and lakes in the Clear River prefecture. Given the circumstances, no one could stop him anymore.

Even deliberate obstruction would barely be of any use. Unless they guarded the place and constantly contended with the waters of the Clear river, they were unable to cause too many problems.

And, Li Qingshan could simply give up on the region of water temporarily and take over other water systems. Surely the Marquis of Ruyi could not send several dozen Golden Core cultivators to watch over every region of water in the Clear River prefecture!

And, once they were alone, they faced the risk of being slain.

Perhaps the Marquis of Ruyi had realised this too, so it had been extremely easy for him to refine the waters along the way. He basically ran into no obstacles at all.

The Water God Seal constantly extended and changed. Li Qingshan spread out his arms. His heart raged with the river water.

In the Ruyi commandery, in the same, dim room, the Marquis of Ruyi stared at the map on the wall with an extremely twisted expression. An extensive, twisted shape had appeared on there, bright red in colour.

The redness continued to extend, infiltrating and dyeing the surrounding bodies of water. It moved extremely quickly, like the rapid spread of poison.

In a daze, the red colours turned into a smiling face. The Marquis of Ruyi recalled how the wretched daemon had humiliated him and clenched his fist. He was tempted to obliterate him. He turned around and looked at Gu Yanying. “If you had intervened back then, this wretched daemon would have never succeeded with your speed.”

If she had intervened, Li Qingshan's effort would have fallen apart before he even made it to the end, but he still would have faced the risk of being killed.

Gu Yanying laid out her hands. "I never expected a Daemon General would be so difficult to deal with either!"

The Marquis of Ruyi felt like his face was on fire. As the marquis of the Ruyi commandery, a Golden Core cultivator with a Seal of Mountains and Rivers in hand, he could not even capture a Daemon General.

"We can't let him run free anymore." Killing intent appeared in Han Anguo's eyes. At that moment, the temperature in the room seemed to plummet.

The cultivators who busied about in the surroundings all shivered inside. The people with weaker cultivations even stiffened up as their hairs stood on end.

"Then let's kill him!"

Gu Yanying said easily, but something else weighed on her mind.

The Dark Queen is on tour in the north because she wants to come to the Ruyi commandery and see me? Not only is the conflict between humans and daemons gradually intensifying right now, the turmoil of the Green province and the conflict between the Sword Collection palace and the Umbral Yin sect can erupt at any time too. Why is she risking her life to enter the range of influence of the Sword Collection palace at a time like this?

Logically speaking, she should have a great entourage around her, surrounded by guards, if she's going on such a public tour. Even the Sword Collection palace would not dare to act rashly, but that's still something you have to guard against!

Most importantly, even she had not been informed of the Dark Queen's true objective behind this visit, which highlighted many issues with the visit. Combined with how Feng Buquan had left the Ruyi commandery to visit South Hub city, there was profound significance behind all of this.

Feng Buquan had called out that he wanted to see the Dark Queen after he tried to predict Northmoon's location for the Marquis of Ruyi. Was this related to him again?

Li Qingshan, oh Li Qingshan. I really find it more and more difficult to see through you.

Originally, she treated him as a regular half-daemon. At most, he had some potential, but it would take a century at the very least before he would truly be of use. Never did she expect him to rise up so quickly, basically soaring up into the sky in a single stroke.

However, the trees that protrude from the forest are always the ones that get blown down. Do you understand this principle?

.....

The waters of the Clear river raged along for millennia without ceasing.

Cities and villages scattered densely and prospered on the two banks of the river. It was like a silver ribbon that threaded together the most resplendent pearls of the Clear River prefecture. All lives and production were unable to exist without the word “water”.

Several thousand years ago, the banks of the river had once been littered with temples. Regular people offered up incense to avoid floods and pray for rain. Only when the Great Xia empire was established and the world became godless did the practice gradually fade away. But today, it showed signs of revival again. Many places underwent construction.

The name of “Northmoon” had shaken up the cultivation world of the Clear River prefecture before reaching the world of mortals through various channels and avenues. The “moon demon” became the “moon god”.

A temple with red walls and green tiles stood on the shore of Moon Court lake. Wisps of smoke from incense curled about, filling the entire room with fragrance before leaking out through the doors and windows.

There was a hubbub of noise outside, with the deafening sound of gongs and drums and the roar of firecrackers.

A person who seemed to be in charge of the temple called out and thousands of mortals dropped to their knees and bowed, bowing towards the statue shaped from wood and clay in the depths of the temple.

The statue had scarlet hair, red eyes, and heavy facial features. His face was shaped auspiciously, with a full forehead and a round jaw. He stared ahead with a piercing gaze. His chin even had a few dignified wisps of long hair. As he stood there majestically, he was dressed in colourful armour, with a large, bright-red cloak around him.

In the moment everyone lowered their heads, Li Qingshan who resided in the depths of the Clear river suddenly sensed something. He took out the Water God Seal and took a look. Many specks of light had appeared in it. They were extremely small, so small that he would have never discovered it if he had not looked carefully.

Is this... the power of belief?

Then Li Qingshan inspected the Divine Talisman of Great Creation. Under close observation, he discovered they shared many similarities. Even the twisted, meandering shapes shared a hint of profoundness. However, the power of belief inside was similar in nature, yet also slightly different.

When Li Qingshan used his soul sense to inspect the specks of power of belief, he vaguely heard countless thoughts, voices, calls, and prayers. He took out the Watermirror disc and immediately found the temple on the shore of the lake.

When he saw the statue in the temple, he could not help but become stunned. Don't tell me that's supposed to be me?! Since when did I look so rustic? And I even have a beard!

However, with all certainty, on the plaque above the temple entrance were three large gilded words, “Moon God Temple”, which left him at a loss as to how to react. Clearly, this was the common folk's primitive imagination of a powerful god.

When Li Qingshan stopped the wave, he had only done so because it was convenient, but it left behind an unforgettably deep impression among the common people. There was a great fear for his tremendous power, yet also a great joy from escaping with their lives intact, so they built the temple.

Li Qingshan could sense many prayers for rain from the power of belief, so with a wave of his hand, dark clouds surged over from the horizon and brought heavy rain.

There was a great cheer in front of the Moon God temple, and more specks of light appeared in the Water God Seal.

Li Qingshan burst out laughing. It was no wonder that the Marquis of Ruyi behaved like a cat that had its tail trodden on. Clearly, the position of a water god was not as simple as occupying a river.

If the Seal of Mountains and Rivers represented “political power”, then the Water God Seal would probably be a manifestation of “religious power”. If religious power were on the rise, then political power would naturally diminish and decline.

Although the power of belief did not seem to be of much use to him, it was fine as long as he could mess with the Marquis of Ruyi. If he continued with his great undertaking as a water god, he would definitely be able to erode away the Marquis of Ruyi’s power.

The terrors of the Seal of Mountains and Rivers was still fresh in his memory. He could not help but admit that if he fought alone, he really was not that bastard’s opponent.

After ingesting Wen Zhengming’s golden core, he converted it all into the strength of the ox demon. He had only managed to push away the Seal of Mountains and Rivers and avoid the fate of being crushed to death with the explosive power, but he still did not possess the strength to completely overwhelm the seal.

It was just a pity that he still could not break through to the fifth layer of the ox demon, or he would be absolutely confident that he could play around with the Seal of Mountains and Rivers like it was a toy. However, if he really did reach the fifth layer of the ox demon, he would have to worry about whether the spirit turtle could keep it suppressed or not.

Li Qingshan shook his head. His senses constantly extended, reaching every affluent connected to the water. He could feel boundlessly powerful surging through his body. While the power did not come from him, but the Water God Seal instead, he obviously had a way to convert it into a portion of his own power.

Li Qingshan took in a deep breath. The Water God seal shone with dazzling blue light and roaring water spiritual qi surged towards him, like rivers flowing into the ocean.

He continued with his original plan, practising the Arts of the Boundless Ocean. The first layer, the second layer, the third layer, the fourth layer, the fifth layer...

The sea of qi rapidly filled up, reaching its limit. At the same time, he sensed the will within the vast waters. He easily arrived at the peak of mid Foundation Establishment. He only needed to take another step forward and he would reach late Foundation Establishment.

Just like that, Golden Core no longer seemed so far away.

Foundation Establishment cultivators were already regarded as proficient cultivators in the cultivation world, having stepped through the gates of cultivation. However, they only possessed identities of disciples in large sects like the Sword Collection palace and Umbral Yin sect. No one knew how many Foundation Establishment cultivators there were in the Green province. Their reputation would only be limited to a single prefecture.

Golden Core cultivators, on the other hand, possessed some basic renown. There were not a lot of them throughout the entirety of the Green province, and they were all figures with a reputation. Even in large sects, they could hold positions of elders. With how large the nine provinces were, they would receive a degree of respect no matter where they went.

The lord of the Green province had a group of Foundation Establishment cultivators as guards, yet he treated Feng Buquan as an esteemed guest. Even though the highly limited number of practitioners of divination played a factor, it was still enough to demonstrate the tremendous difference between their identities.

It was possible to say that if Li Qingshan broke through to Golden Core before the age of thirty, he would be a rare, almost-matchless prodigy. The entire Green province would be stirred up as a result, and he would immediately become a target that various large organisations would want to rope in. It was even possible for him to be directly summoned to the Dragon province to take office in the imperial court, giving him a limitless future.

Apart from an increase in strength, there were countless external benefits too.

Within his sea of qi, the spiritual qi pulsed again and again, but he was unable to break through to the sixth layer of the Arts of the Boundless Ocean. He knew it would be pointless to continue like this, so he stopped absorbing the water spiritual qi.

Li Qingshan exhaled gently. Sure enough, the breakthrough to each cultivation realm was difficult. Even minor realms of cultivation were no exception. Breaking through to Golden Core would probably be even more difficult. Apart from water spiritual energy, he also required accumulation and comprehension.

However, he was not disappointed. As long as he continued to accumulate experience and constantly tried, it would be enough. He believed there would be a day when he succeeded.

After becoming the Lord of the Clear River Waters, the raging waters and endless spiritual qi had become his foundation. It had already become his greatest capital.

It was about time for him to return to the academy and research how to combine fire and water.

### **Chapter 536 - On Burial Mound Mountain**

The north-eastern direction of the Clear River prefecture was also littered with mountains, but they were not precipitous like the Boundless mountains.

Instead, they were short hills. There was no clear division from hill to hill. While they were called mountains, they were actually hills.



Spiritual veins rarely passed through such terrain, and spiritual qi was relatively scarce. Cultivators normally would not establish sects here.

However, there was an exception, which was the Burial Mound mountain of the three mountains from the past. As a sect that primarily focused on refining corpses, they did not emphasise on spiritual veins, but suitable “corpse-nurturing lands”.

The hills were like huge burial mounds, turning them into natural places for accumulating yin qi and corpse qi. Followed by modifications made by generations upon generations of cultivators from the Burial Mound mountain, it was enveloped in gloom all year round. Even the sunshine seemed feeble.

If any mortals accidentally entered this place, they would stiffen up and fall dead before long before climbing back up again soon.

Yu Shukuang stood at the base of the hills and frowned as he gazed at Burial Mound mountain. Through the information network of the Hawkwolf Guard, he had finally found out that Ma Chaoqun was currently in Burial Mound mountain. He had changed his allegiance and become a disciple of Burial Mound mountain.

Ever since the deaths of the Green Vine Elder and the Golden Pheasant Elder, the “holy land of the three mountains” had fragmented and fallen apart. However, a first elder who had been cultivating in seclusion then emerged for the Burial Mound mountain to manage the situation.

The rumor was that this first elder had crawled out of the coffin. As for the exact details, no one knew about them.

After several years of war, the other sects all sustained losses, but Burial Mound mountain instead prospered more than before. The gloominess that enveloped Burial Mound mountain was much heavier than when the Lone Grave Elder was still alive.

If the corpses of mortals who died in the war were left to rot, it would lead to disease outbreaks, but both incineration or burial was extremely troublesome.

Most of them had been gathered and transported to Burial Mound mountain before being converted into zombies and bound to commanding tablets under the corpse refinement of the secret techniques of Burial Mound mountain. They were transformed into a force to contend with the daemons.

Yu Shukuang knew about all of this. He worried inside, Surely Ma Chaoqun isn't that crazy! He did love his wife deeply, but he did not wish to see her rise again as a corpse.

He arrived at the entrance of Burial Mound mountain and could not help but experience an urge to turn around and leave this place. The heavy aura of death was enough to bring disgust to anyone living. It was no wonder that even daemons had not attacked this place. If it were possible, he really did not want to set foot in this place.

With his identity as a Hawkwolf guard, he entered Burial Mound mountain with great ease. The surroundings immediately grew dimmer. Figures flickered through the gloom, either standing in groups or moving around alone. There were an extremely great number of them, and they all produced various strange sounds, but it did not seem lively at all. Even Yu Shukuang was unable to tell which were corpses and which were people.

The disciple who guarded the entrance received him. After learning he had come to see Ma Chaoqun, his pale face became more enthusiastic. He immediately said, "I'll go invite my first senior brother over right now."

"First senior brother!"

Yu Shukuang was rather surprised, but the disciple was already long gone. He left behind a zombie to lead him along another path.

He was brought to a stone room that resembled a coffin chamber to wait, politely declining the tea on the table. Standing behind him was the corpse who held the tea jug and served as an attendant. He stared at the tea cup with his hollow eyes as if he was waiting for Yu Shukuang to drink it. It truly was unsettling.

After waiting a while, Yu Shukuang grew bored. He stood up and paced around. He felt rather worried inside, Don't tell me that guy fled after knowing I came. However, he was a disciple of the Burial Mound mountain after all, so apart from paying a proper, formal visit, there was nothing else Yu Shukuang could do.

He turned around and his heart suddenly tightened, almost drawing the sword on his waist. Before he knew it, a figure had appeared at the door.

"Who is it?"

The person did not answer. The corner of his lips twitched stiffly as if he was sneering.

Yu Shukuang frowned and said in surprise, "Ma Chaoqun!"

It was not his fault for being so surprised. The Ma Chaoqun right now bore almost no resemblance to the Ma Chaoqun in his memory.

Ma Chaoqun's nickname was the "Pitted Madman". He had quite a mad aura about him, but the person before him was extremely sunken. Both his face and his figure was terrifyingly gaunt. His complexion was so horrible that he had almost even overlooked his pitted skin.

What brought Yu Shukuang even more surprise was Ma Chaoqun's cultivation. He was actually a tenth layer Qi Practitioner.

Yu Shukuang was merely a sixth layer Qi Practitioner right now, and that was only because of his daughter, because Yu Zijian had received quite a lot of support from the Hua family. He could already be regarded as rather quick. As for Ma Chaoqun, he had never been a particularly talented person, or he would not have spent so many years on Pheasant's Grace mountain.

It was no wonder the disciple earlier called him first senior brother!

However, Yu Shukuang did not fear his cultivation. He barked, "Ma Chaoqun, where did you take Zi'er's corpse?"

He originally thought Ma Chaoqun would feign ignorance before viciously mocking his attempt at retribution. However, never did he think that Mao Chaoqun would be extremely frank. "Come with me!" Afterwards, he turned around and left.

All Yu Shukuang could do was follow behind him. Ma Chaoqun's footsteps were rather stiff, but he moved as fast as the wind. Before long, they arrived before a stone door. From the quality of the stone door, it could already be regarded as rather luxurious on Burial Mound mountain. They stepped inside and a long passageway appeared.

Yu Shukuang caught the smell of blood, which grew heavier and heavier, enough for him to feel nauseated. It was no longer just the reeking of blood anymore. There was also a foul smell of rot. Simply by taking a breath of it, he felt like his chest had been filled with filthy pieces of cotton.

They passed through a series of stone doors. At the end of the passageway was a huge, underground palace. A circular pool of blood occupied most of the underground palace. Severed limbs floated in it as it constantly bubbled, producing a series of glugging sounds, like the pool of blood was alive.

It was clearly extremely thick, but when he cast his gaze over, he felt like it was bottomless.

The moment he stepped into the underground palace, Yu Shukuang's gaze was drawn away by the crystal coffin in the centre of the blood pool. Compared to the foul pool of blood, the crystal coffin seemed so pure.

Within the coffin lay a beautiful woman dressed in violet. Her cheeks were rosy and her face was peaceful. She seemed like she was sleeping.

Yu Shukuang could never forget that face. He called out uncontrollably, "Zi'er!" He turned around and asked with an expression of confusion of whether he should be angry or happy, "What did you do?"

He could not help but admit that the fact he was not seeing a walking zombie brought him some comfort. At a closer glance he discovered the crystal coffin that Zi'er laid in seemed to be connected with a messy series of cables, connected with the blood pool.

Ma Chaoqun said, "I'm doing what you can't do."

"What?"

"I want to revive her!" Human emotions appeared on Ma Chaoqun's face. There was a combination of complacency, excitement, and fanaticism.

"That's impossible!" Yu Shukuang said. Let alone Qi Practitioners, even Foundation Establishment cultivators, no, Golden Core cultivators could not revive the dead.

"That's because you don't love her enough!" Ma Chaoqun pointed at Yu Shukuang as his voice echoed through the underground palace. Afterwards, he threw himself on the crystal coffin and caressed in an enamoured manner through the coffin.

"Do you see? Zi'er, this is the man who sweet-talked you, who kept on saying he loved you wholeheartedly, yet also made you lie in the pitch-black ground, unable to see the light of day. I was the one who saved you. I was the one who let you down. If I hadn't left back then— it's fine, it's fine. We can still be together."

His confusing drivel gave Yu Shukuang chills. He's actually gone mad!

After Zi'er's death, he had never touched another woman, constantly grieving over her. He could be regarded as quite a rare, lovesick man. However, compared to Ma Chaoqun's insanity, he only felt inferior.

Yu Shukuang backed away slowly. He felt extremely uneasy inside. He needed to return and find reinforcements. He had to find the two commanders. They would definitely help him out and bring back Zi'er's corpse.

Ma Chaoqun suddenly turned around. "She's your wife. Can you really just bring yourself to leave like this? You better stay behind to accompany her too!" He leapt over the pool of blood and lunged towards Yu Shukuang.

He's been planning on killing me right from the beginning! Doesn't he care about my identity as a Hawkwolf guard? Oh right, he no longer cares about anything now!

Yu Shukuang exclaimed inside. He struck out with a flash. The moment he stabbed Ma Chaoqun's throat, he wondered, Why isn't he dodging? However, the sword showed no mercy and his true qi channeled in, plunging into his throat but unable to pierce all the way through.

A sneer appeared on Ma Chaoqun's face. He advanced over, pressing against the sword until it curved. His right hand grabbed Yu Shukuang's throat like it was made from steel, lifting him up like a chicken. He walked over to the pool and pressed him down.

"For her sake, you can go down too!"

The pool of blood bubbled and a vicious face appeared, opening its mouth and staring at Yu Shukuang. Am I going to die here today?

.....

"Chengzan, nothing has happened lately, right?"

As per usual, Li Qingshan paid a visit to the Hawkwolf Guard first, patting Hua Chengzan on the shoulder in an unconcerned manner.

All Hua Chengzan could do was force out a smile. A Golde Core cultivator had died, the moon demon had united the regions of water, and the Marquis of Ruyi had retreated helplessly. Were these supposed to be something?

However, he still did not appear this time! It seemed like as long as the moon demon appeared somewhere, he would never be there. However, just how did he predict these turmoils again and again? It was probably because of Xiao An's divination of the seven lots, right? Sure enough, having a practitioner of divination by his side really did allow him to pursue good fortune while avoiding calamities.

They were technically major matters, but as it had nothing to do with them, they became minor. He remained happily uninvolved just like before, increasing his cultivation at an almost-exaggerated speed. Although he was still at mid Foundation Establishment, his aura had grown by far too much compared to the last time they had met. If this continued, the Clear River prefecture would probably produce a never-before-seen young Golden Core cultivator.

However, Hua Chengzan also felt rather perplexed. How could his cultivation advance so quickly? His startling talent and an exceptional ability to comprehend could be explained one way or another, but where did he find so many resources from?

Hua Chengzan had no intentions of suspecting this friend of his, but his sharp and inquisitive nature made him think that there were many suspicious aspects involved.

Of course, every suspicious aspect could be explained after some effort, but together, coming off as slightly strange was unavoidable.

After meeting numerous times with the moon demon, he developed a strange feeling. They seemed to bear some kind of resemblance!

### **Chapter 537 - The Strange Hand in the Blood Pool**

“Chaoqun, what are you doing?”

A cold bark echoed through the underground palace.

“Sect master!”

Ma Chaoqun turned his head stiffly and saw a tiny, skinny old man in black the size of a child in the passageway. He walked into the underground palace, his face withered like a skeleton’s as he radiated with yin qi and corpse qi. Impressively, he was a Foundation Establishment cultivator, and late Foundation Establishment at that.

He was the elder who revived Burial Mound mountain, the current sect master of Burial Mound mountain.

“Release him!”

The old man ordered. Yu Shukuang was only a measly Qi Practitioner. He did not take him seriously originally—if he died, then so be it. However, he was also a Hawkwolf guard, so he dared not be careless. The Academy of the Hundred Schools was currently rising in power. If a Hawkwolf guard died on his Burial Mound mountain, it would be no laughing matter.

However, Ma Chaoqun did not release Yu Shukuang. Instead, he pressed him towards the blood pool.

Yu Shukuang widened his eyes as the blood pool filled his face. The smell of blood grew heavier and filled his eyes and nose. He felt an indescribable sense of great horror from the depths of his heart. As if he had become stricken with fear, he was unable to move.

The moment the tip of his nose approached the blood pool, it stopped.

“You’re crazy!”

A hand that resembled a chicken’s claw grabbed Ma Chaoqun’s arm firmly. The old man had never thought his first disciple who had always been so obedient would actually defy his orders. He grabbed Yu Shukuang with his other hand and tossed his aside casually.

Launched into the air, Yu Shukuang flew away from the blood pool and slammed heavily against the wall. Having scraped by with his life intact, the blood pool he stared into earlier seemed to want to suck him into another world.

Just as the old man wanted to teach this disciple of his a proper lesson, he suddenly felt there was something wrong with the pool of blood. The smell of blood was nothing to him—he had no sense of smell—and he had seen plenty of sights that involved mountainous piles of corpses and seas of blood before.

Pools of blood on Burial Mound mountain were used to refine blood corpses. It seemed very chilling to regular people, but it was nothing special to him. However, there was something different about this pool of blood as if something was hiding beneath. He tried extending his soul sense into it and his expression suddenly changed drastically.

“This- How dare you! No wonder your cultivation progressed so quickly!”

Before Ma Chaoqun could reply, he slammed his hand towards the top of Ma Chaoqun’s head. Overcome by surprise and fury, he actually showed no mercy at all, wanting to execute the first senior brother of Burial Mound mountain on the spot.

As a measly tenth layer Qi Practitioner, he was worlds apart from a late Foundation Establishment cultivator. Ma Chaoqun could not make any response at all. All he could do was accept his fate and await his death.

However, he sneered without a hint of fear.

Splash!

A great wave suddenly arose from the pool of thick, dense blood. A huge, withered hand extended out and grabbed the old man like it was grabbing an insect. His bones shattered and ruptured like firecrackers before the hand pulled itself back into the pool.

The pool of blood surged a few times before settling down very quickly.

All of this had happened in an instant. A late Foundation Establishment cultivator had simply vanished silently like that. Let alone putting up a struggle, he had not even been able to let out a shriek.

“Thank you for saving my life, sir!” Ma Zhaoqun knelt on one knee and stood up, about to chase after Yu Shukuang.

“There’s no need to chase after him! Let him draw in even more people. I need even more corpses.” A dry, hoarse voice rang out from the pool of blood.

“I’ll go gather all the disciples right now.” A sliver of viciousness flashed through Ma Chaoqun’s eyes.

“I’ve really troubled you for the past three years. You haven’t disappointed me, so I won’t disappoint you either.”

“Yes.” Ma Chaoqun was overjoyed. Ever since he began hearing the voice, he had never stopped working hard. He could finally see a ray of hope now.

When the old man tossed out Yu Shukuang, he immediately fled for his life. Only when he escaped from the underground palace did he glance back and discover that Ma Chaoqun was not after him. Had the old man killed him? He dared not return and verify his thoughts.

No, I need to report this to the Hawkwolf Guard!

.....

Without much effort, Li Qingshan found a few cultivation methods that simultaneously practised water and fire in the library of the academy. Sure enough, they explained in detail how to merge fire and water and make them supplement one another. This was the most difficult aspect of it all.

After reading for a while, a thin, azure water flow rose up from Li Qingshan's palm, coiling up like a spirit turtle. At the same time, a tiny ball of fire lit up, dancing about like a phoenix.

Under his control, the water and fire collided together and engaged in a violent clash, like two mortal enemies. The water wanted to extinguish the fire, while the fire wanted to burn away the water. How was this merging water and fire? In the end, the water gained the upper hand and suppressed the fire, but the fire only lost the upper hand temporarily. As long as an opportunity showed itself, it would fight back vigilantly.

There was not a single trace of merging together. Li Qingshan shook his head, stowed the water and fire away, and returned the books. The usage of the information in the books was very limited. It was easy to balance out regular fire and water, but both the spirit turtle and the phoenix were the purest embodiments of water and fire.

They were powerful because of how pure they were, but it also made the water and fire more intolerant of one another.

"Commander, you're here!" Hua Chengzan paced over and appeared between two bookshelves.

"What's happened?" Li Qingshan turned around and asked. Normally, Hua Chengzan would not refer to him as commander.

"One of our Hawkwolf guards, Yu Zijian's father, ran into some trouble."

"Oh? What trouble?"

"We'll talk as we go."

Letting Li Qingshan walk in front, Hua Chengzan glanced from the corner of his eyes and discovered the cultivation method that Li Qingshan had been studying was called the Study of Water and Fire. Then he looked away.

Doesn't he have the Arts of the Boundless Ocean already? What's he looking at this third-rate cultivation method that can only be practised till Foundation Establishment for?

"What're you thinking about?" Li Qingshan patted Hua Chengzan on the shoulder. Hua Chengzan raised his head and met his eyes that had contrasting whites and dark irises. He shivered inside and shook his head. "Nothing."

The two of them returned to the Hawkwolf Guard together and saw Yu Shukuang. Listening to what he went through, Li Qingshan nodded. "It is a little strange. Let's go and take a look."

He paused because he suddenly sensed an omen of warning. He could not help but become confused. With his current cultivation, he could escape without losing his composure even if he ran into Golden Core cultivators and Daemon Commanders. Just what would he be running into during this trip that would actually be so dangerous?

However, he was an old acquaintance of Yu Shukuang and he also cared about Zijian's mother. He was also the Scarlet Hawk commander and someone had just tried to kill a Hawkwolf guard. Whether it was from an emotional or a logical sense, he could not turn a blind eye to this.

Of course, the omen of warning was not very strong. He only had to be a little more careful. If this was a warning where it was basically certain death, he would not simply walk to his death either. It was a pity that Xiao An was currently refining that old man Wen's remains and soul, or he would be even safer.

Li Qingshan, Hua Chengzan, and Yu Shukuang arrived at the outskirts of Burial Mound mountain together. They gazed at the gloomy mountain from afar.

Yu Shukuang roughly indicated the location and Li Qingshan said, "Old Yu, you should just stay here!"

"Yes, commander!"

Hua Chengzan said, "What, you think it'll be dangerous?"

"It never hurts to be on the safe side. Let's just be a little more careful!" Li Qingshan smiled and drew the Heavy Water sword, placing it on his shoulder. "Let's hope we see the sect master of Burial Mound mountain bringing his traitorous disciple Ma Chaoqun to us in chains and apologising to us as soon as we enter!"

The warning from the spirit turtle had completely eliminated this possibility already.

The two of them arrived before the entrance of the sect with a single leap and Hua Chengzan suddenly asked, "Qingshan, are you very familiar with Yu Shukuang?"

He struggled to disguise this feeling of familiarity. Especially when Zijian's mother was mentioned, Li Qingshan did not become curious about the details involved, and Yu Shukuang had not given a detailed explanation either. He felt like Li Qingshan knew exactly what had happened, but the two of them should not have had a lot of contact.

"We happened to meet a few times in the past. Let's announce our presence!" Li Qingshan changed the topic, but he remembered a saying, You can fool everyone for a moment, you can fool one person for eternity, but you can never fool everyone for eternity.

Particularly with fooling a person with sharp senses and accustomed to thinking deeply. That would be even more difficult.

Hua Chengzan called out and announced the reason for their arrival. The haze on Burial Mound mountain weighed heavily as there was no reply at all.



The two of them exchanged glances and walked over. They passed through the formation with ease and entered Burial Mound mountain.

There were no sneak attacks or ambushes that they had imagined. All was silent.

The chilly winds whistled as the sky was without any moon or stars. There was not a single shadow to be seen on the mountain. Even the zombies that roamed everywhere had vanished. They could not sense any auras either.

This situation was even stranger than a hundred thousand Corpse Soldiers encircling them. Where did all of the Burial Mound mountain's disciples go?

Hua Chengzan joked, "Commander, I want to go home."

Li Qingshan patted Hua Chengzan's shoulder with a smile. "Don't be afraid. We'll leave as soon as we get a glance."

Following the direction that Yu Shukuang had indicated, the two of them arrived before the entrance of the underground palace. Wind whistled through the passageway like howls of ghosts.

Even without any warning from the spirit turtle, Li Qingshan knew this place was anything but good. He said to Hua Chengzan, "Wait here. I'll go in and take a look!"

Hua Chengzan said, "I'll become scared if I'm alone!"

Li Qingshan grinned. "Then follow along behind me!"

With one at the front and one at the back, the two of them passed through the passageway and arrived in the underground palace.

"Oi, Ma Chaoqun, get out here and die!"

Li Qingshan frowned. The smell from the blood pool was truly unpleasant, and it made the warning intensify. He spotted the crystal coffin above the blood pool with a single glance, as well as the woman who resembled Yu Zijian.

Meanwhile, Ma Chaoqun who resembled almost nothing of his past self stood behind the crystal coffin. He stared at the person in the coffin with great affection. He raised his head and looked at them coldly.

"Another two!"

Creak! Crack! Crick! Thump! A series of mechanisms were activated and among the sounds of rubbing against rock, stone doors fell one by one, sealing off the passageway. Inscriptions appeared on the doors. Clearly, they could not be destroyed so easily.

"There's something wrong with the pool of blood." Hua Chengzan studied the inscriptions engraved around the blood pool and found them extremely familiar as if he had read about them in a book somewhere before. He tried sending his soul sense into the pool, and his expression changed drastically.

"Oh no! Qingshan, destroy the pool of blood!"

As Hua Chengzan said that, three scarlet talismans flew out of his hand.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The scarlet talismans exploded into three scarlet-red fireballs that rapidly swelled in the air. Li Qingshan could sense the great power hiding inside. Let alone the tiny pool of blood, they were even enough to flatten an entire city.

Talismans that powerful were extremely rare. Often, they would be reserved for life-threatening moments, yet Hua Chengzan used three right off the bat. When they exploded in the underground palace, they could even threaten his own life, but in that moment, he could no longer care so much.

Li Qingshan did not know what Hua Chengzan was worrying about, but he did trust his judgement. With a swing of his sword, the Heavy Water sword that had already been huge suddenly swelled to ten times its size. He cleaved down as if he was trying to destroy everything.

Ma Chaoqun, the crystal coffin, and even the pool of blood were all included in the sword's trajectory.

The Siege Breaking strike!

### **Chapter 538 - The Gate of Hungry Ghosts**

Splash!

The pool of blood surged, splattering blood everywhere. A large, withered, greyish-white hand with long, sharp nails extended out and splayed its fingers, enveloping the three fireballs. They stopped growing in size, shrinking instead until they were completely extinguished. At the same time, it used its index finger and middle finger to easily catch the Heavy Water sword.

Li Qingshan's eyes narrowed suddenly. Even though he had not used the strength of the ox demon, the strike was still not something anyone could catch easily with two fingers.

However, the feeling that the hand gave him already resembled a terrifying monster. If its entire body crawled out from the pool of blood, then even if he assumed his daemon form, he probably still would not be its enemy. He had never thought the Burial Mound mountain would actually be hiding such a terrifying thing.

Hua Chengzan abruptly experienced a great sense of crisis. Before he could even respond, a great force smacked into him violently, launching him into the air viciously. He stared at Li Qingshan in shock as he sailed through the air.

What struck him was not the terrifying, strange hand, but Li Qingshan.

Has he discovered my suspicions and wants to silence me with death?

Li Qingshan was stern. Without even looking at Hua Chengzan, he placed his sword across his body, assuming a defensive posture.

Boom!

The withered hand smacked against Li Qingshan. The ground beneath him immediately cracked and collapsed as he sank to his waist.

Li Qingshan's body could be considered as lofty, but under the hand, it was like a tiny nail being hammered into a wall.

“Qingshan!” Hua Chengzan came to a realisation. Li Qingshan had saved him. With his reactions, he would not have been able to respond to the hand’s attack. If it were not for Li Qingshan, he would have been reduced to a pile of pulp already. He would be as dead as he could be.

“Hmm?” The owner of the hand was rather surprised. If regular Foundation Establishment cultivators took on that attack, death would be certain for them. Not only did this puny cultivator possess endless strength, but his body was as tough as steel too. He gave off a feeling that he was indestructible.

“If you’ve stared long enough, get going!” Li Qingshan glanced at Hua Chengzan. Before he could finish, the hand suddenly closed around him, dragging Li Qingshan into the pool of blood.

Hua Chengzan rushed to the side of the pool, only to see that the blood had already settled. His heart completely sank. Suddenly, the pool of blood began to surge violently like boiling water. The entire underground palace shook.

He gritted his teeth, turned around, and left. He would be of no help even if he remained here. Instead, he would waste his opportunity to escape that Li Qingshan had earned for him with his life.

If it really is like what I’ve been guessing, he might still have a chance to survive.

Grabbed by the hand, Li Qingshan constantly descended towards the depths of the pool. The gurgling blood constantly surged towards his ears and nose. A ring of faint, blue light rose up, pushing away all the blood.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed. There was actually a dim light at the bottom of the pool, but it did not resemble any glow of spiritual qi. Instead, it was like sunlight. He tried extending his soul sense into the bottom of the pool.

At that moment, a boundless world unfolded in front of his eyes before his soul sense immediately broke off. A blade seemed to cleave apart his soul sense. However, he would never be able to forget the landscape he saw momentarily.

White bones scattered the lands and blood flowed as rivers. The miserable gathering clouds and rolling mists obscured all celestial bodies in the sky.

Zombies roared at the skies madly, wrapped in extremely thick corpse qi. Not only were there Corpse Generals, but there were even Corpse Commanders.

If that was not alarming enough, the number of Corpse Generals amounted to tens of thousands like they were common soldiers. They gathered in noisy groups, strewn across the wilderness, while the number of Corpse Commanders amounted to over a hundred.

The number of Corpse Soldiers could no longer be described with words. They filled his entire vision, stretching as far as the eye could see.

At the very centre of this horrifying image was a dried corpse standing over three hundred meters tall, reaching towards the sky. The corpse qi on his body could basically be described as rising clouds. His eyes shone as two specks of horrible, green light as his arm extended towards the sky as if it was holding it up.

It was a legendary Corpse King!

What is this place? Why are there so many zombies!?

The omen of warning in his heart was set off like a police siren. If he were dragged in there, then even if he had ten lives, it would be nowhere near enough!

Li Qingshan immediately reverted to his original form. His body tightened, and he pushed the fingers away from his body. Tremors of the Ox Demon! The faint blue Spirit Turtle's Profound Shell swelled up as well, pushing apart the five fingers of the huge, withered hand.

Bang!

The pool of blood exploded loudly, and Li Qingshan burst out. The wings of the phoenix unfurled gloriously as his scarlet hair drifted through the air. He landed beside the pool and dared not remain for a second longer, rushing out of the palace.

The huge, withered hand tailed right behind him. It snatched down, brushing Li Qingshan's back, merely millimetres away.

The phoenix wings were ripped to pieces, turning into scarlet feathers that drifted through the air.

Li Qingshan lunged forward as hard as he could. The warning vanished, and he let out a deep breath. Only then did he feel the severe pain from his back.

His back seemed to have become plowed farmland. His flesh had been turned inside out, having gained three bone-deep injuries. Even suffering three strikes from an anti-cavalry blade would not be so horrific.

The protruding flesh became a dark green as the colour rapidly spread. He had been poisoned.

The huge hand reached about madly in the surroundings, shattering and crushing the tough rock like mud. However, it could not extend too far away.

"You've been infected with corpse poison! You won't last long!"

A dry, hoarse voice boomed out, making the entire underground palace tremble.

"What are you?"

With a wave of his hand, the scattered feathers turned into specks of fire and returned to his body, transforming his flesh and blood contaminated with corpse poison into fire. When the flames subsided, he had already made a full recovery, completely unscathed.

There was no reply. The huge hand pulled back into the pool as if it had also realised it was unable to do anything to Li Qingshan like this.

Li Qingshan glanced at Ma Chaoqun and considered whether he could kill off this bastard and steal back the crystal coffin under the interference of the withered hand.

The pool of blood surged, rapidly beginning to revolve. It formed a huge whirlpool as the level of liquid began to drop like someone had pulled out the stopper.

The crystal coffin sank rapidly, spinning with the vortex. Ma Chaoqun threw himself at it and hugged the crystal coffin firmly.

With a series of glugs, the pool of blood was drained, leaving behind a huge, circular space of emptiness. The walls were layered from brick, extending downwards to the unknown depths.

Suddenly, the hole produced a powerful suction force. Fierce winds surged over as they whistled.

The suction force was so great that the underground palace finally gave way, trembling and collapsing. A huge boulder fell in front of the entrance, and the wind halted for a moment, but the boulder was rapidly ripped apart. The hole seemed like a huge, greedy mouth, devouring everything madly.

Li Qingshan's figure began to waver too. He dared not remain for any longer, rushing out of the place.

Hua Chengzan happened to be waiting at the entrance. He saw Li Qingshan and was overjoyed. "Li Qingshan!"

Li Qingshan grabbed Hua Chengzan and took off into the air. He only stopped when he arrived at an extremely high altitude, lowering his head to look.

The yin qi that enveloped Burial Mound mountain for thousands of years formed a colossal vortex, all surging madly towards a single point. The surroundings of Burial Mound mountain had never been so clear before.

Burial Mound mountain collapsed at a visible rate, forming a colossal pit. The pit continued to grow, swallowing the earth in the surroundings.

Li Qingshan asked, "What the hell is this?"

Hua Chengzan said sternly, "A Gate of Hungry Ghosts!"

Li Qingshan asked in confusion. "What's a Gate of Hungry Ghosts?"

"Have you heard about the six realms of sa?śāra before?"

"Of course. Don't tell me this hole is connected to the Hungry Ghost realm?"

Li Qingshan came to a realisation. Among the six realms of sa?śāra, every single realm was extremely vast. In comparison, the World of the Nine Provinces was almost negligible in size. The sight he saw earlier was the Hungry Ghost realm, and that probably could only be regarded as a small spectacle in the Hungry Ghost realm.

"That's right. I've already sent a message back. We need to seal off this gate as soon as possible, or there'll be a lot of trouble."

"Yeah."

Li Qingshan expressed his agreement. Just with what he saw earlier alone, a Corpse King, a group of Corpse Commanders, and a pile of Corpse Generals could throw the entire Green province into chaos, let alone a puny Clear River prefecture or the Ruyi commandery.

“But how do we seal it? There’s no way in hell I’m going to the other side.” If he were accidentally sucked into the Hungry Ghost realm, he would be done for.

Hua Chengzan laid out his hands. “I don’t know either. We can only wait until others arrive and then confer with them. This is probably already beyond what Foundation Establishment cultivators can handle.”

Li Qingshan said, “Just Ma Chaoqun, that puny Qi Practitioner, actually managed to cause something so major!”

Hua Chengzan shook his head. “It’s not just Ma Chaoqun. Burial Mound mountain has always been a corpse-nurturing land where yin qi gathers. Over the several years of warfare and turmoil, the number of corpses that have been delivered here have probably reached the tens of millions. Burial Mound mountain has already become a living Hungry Ghost realm. Its boundary with the Hungry Ghost realm became extremely weak. We only focused on combating the daemons, but we neglected this point.”

“Ma Chaoqun then cooperated with the powerful undead in the Hungry Ghost realm, working from both inside and out. That was how he managed to establish this Gate of Hungry Ghosts.”

“Then we better move a little further away!”

Li Qingshan said. Even if the Corpse King was stuck due to being too large, unable to emerge from the hole, there were still many Corpse Generals and Corpse Commanders. If they surged out together, then no matter how powerful he was, he would still be swallowed by a sea of corpses and forcefully whittled to death. However, if Xiao An were here, she could use the Samādhi Flames of White Bone, and it should be extremely easy for her to deal with them.

“Don’t worry. The Gate of Hungry Ghosts doesn’t open so easily. The more powerful they are, the harder it is for them to pass through. Right now, it’s only equivalent to having opened by a crack. Probably even Corpse Generals won’t be able to squeeze through. However, as time goes on, that’s not going to hold true.”

Hua Chengzan finished speaking and the final sliver of yin qi was sucked into the pit. The pit stopped growing and changing, and the surroundings became clear and bright.

Boom! Like a volcanic eruption, a pillar of black mist erupted violently, connecting the earth with the sky, making the ground shake and shrouding the sky.

Erupting with it were thousands of corpses. Corpse Soldiers were thrown into the air one by one, scattering all over the ground. Some climbed up again, while others had their bones shattered to pieces and were completely immobilised, only for other Corpse Soldiers to immediately cover them up.

Li Qingshan could not help but become dumbfounded. This sight was literally unheard of and never before seen. It seemed- it seemed like a huge “zombie geyser”!

The Corpse Soldiers rolled along the ground like droplets of water.

“Stop them. It’ll be bad if we let these Corpse Soldiers spread out.”

Hua Chengzan said urgently. The Corpse Soldiers were not particularly powerful to them, but they were basically undefeatable monsters to mortals.

A ball of fire descended from above, constantly swelling in the air and slamming against the sea of corpses. Thousands of Corpse Soldiers were reduced to ashes as the shockwave rushed out, sending countless Corpse Soldiers flying. A huge, empty circle appeared in the sea of corpses.

But it was filled again in the blink of an eye.

### **Chapter 539 - Sea of Corpses**

Boom!

Li Qingshan descended from above and smashed into the sea of corpses.

At that moment, the ground sank and earth was thrown into the air. Hundreds of Corpse Soldiers were knocked into the horizon.

The Heavy Water sword expanded to ten times its size and produced rings of blue light as Li Qingshan swung it about. Wherever it passed by, corpses would be cleaved apart and sent flying. He crushed them like paper and was unstoppable.

Hua Chengzan cooperated in the air, raining down with extremely powerful techniques one after another. The Corpse Soldiers were gathered together and they did not know to dodge, so he would often be able to kill off an entire swathe with a casual technique.

However, after swinging for a while, Li Qingshan discovered that not only had the Corpse Soldiers in his surroundings failed to decrease, but they even increased instead. He pulled back his sword and flew into the air, exchanging glances with Hua Chengzan. Both of them were shocked.

In a short while, they had killed over ten thousand Corpse Soldiers together, and they were all relatively powerful Corpse Soldiers. There were not even that many Qi Practitioners throughout the entire Clear River prefecture. However, they had not even managed to reduce the rate at which the Corpse Soldiers piled up.

Once the Corpse Soldiers left the pit and scattered, killing them would not be so easy anymore.

“They’re finally here!”

Hua Chengzan gazed into the horizon. A Soaring Dragon ship pierced through the clouds and flew over. When it was still five kilometers away, hundreds of streaks of light criss-crossed and sailed through the air, sweeping along the ground and vaporizing thousands of Corpse Soldiers.

Thousands of puppets rained down from above, locking into battle with the scattered Corpse Soldiers.

They had finally managed to contain the sea of corpses slightly.

“Sir Liu, you’re finally here!”

Li Qingshan arrived on the deck of the Soaring Dragon ship, only to see Liu Zhangqing and the Foundation Establishment cultivators behind him all shocked. While the opening of a Gate of Hungry Ghosts caused them a very great impact, only when they saw this for themselves did they understand how terrifying it was.

So what if they were Foundation Establishment cultivators? If they fell into this sea of corpses, they would probably be gnawed to death in the blink of an eye.

“I’ve already reported this to the Marquis of Ruyi. Reinforcements will be arriving soon. Right now, we need to stand together and contain the Corpse Soldiers!” Liu Zhangqing cut right to the chase and flew down first.

He seemed dignified on the surface, but he constantly lamented inside. His job as a prefect had been far too difficult. First, the Clear River prefecture had become a battlefield between humans and daemons, and then the moon demon refined the Clear river. The Marquis of Ruyi was already very displeased with him.

But compared to the sight right now, even ten moon demons running amok would be nothing. If the Gate of Hungry Ghosts really opened by a little more, then the fifteen hundred kilometers of the Clear River prefecture would become a land of death. There would be no need for a prefect anymore.

The other cultivators followed closely behind. They unleashed their various abilities, casting formations and unleashing techniques, tearing apart the Corpse Soldiers madly.

Under Han Anjun’s arrangements, they each watched over a region and established a dam, stopping the tide of corpses.

Li Qingshan’s horizons widened again. He had remained in the Academy of the Hundred Schools for many years, but only now did he truly witness what each school was capable of. Under the terrifying pressure, no one dared to hold back.

Among them, the school of Mohism did the most. Huge puppets rampaged through the sea of corpses and cleaved through the waves, all possessing the strength of Foundation Establishment cultivators.

The teeth and claws of the Corpse Soldiers could only make sparks fly and leave behind marks on their tough armour.

In the air, the Soaring Dragon ship lent great support too. Streaks of light flashed through the air constantly, tearing through the sea of corpses.

But a while later, the “corpse hole” in the pit suddenly retracted violently and expanded, spurting out even more zombies.

The sea of corpses could no longer be described as “thickly dotted”, but rather “layers upon layers”. The thickest part stood several storeys high as it flooded the surroundings like waves. If they ran into mountains, they would directly smash into them, and if they ran into valleys, they would directly fill them.

The huge puppets had already been completely swallowed, turning into huge, bulging mounds in the sea of corpses.

Li Qingshan guarded the slope of a mountain. He did not need to think at all. He only needed to swing his sword constantly and slaughter the incoming waves of Corpse Soldiers. Broken limbs and bodies formed a great pile before him in the blink of an eye, but the Corpse Soldiers were endless.



If it were not for the relatively fast recovery that the Arts of the Boundless Ocean granted him, if it were not for the fact that his physical strength was almost endless, he would have collapsed from exhaustion a long time ago.

Even he was like that, so the other Foundation Establishment cultivators were much worse off. Some of them had already given up on guarding their positions, flying into the air.

On the eastern slope, the current leader of the school of Daoism, Juechenzi, wielded a sword and struck firmly. Just a flash of his weapon would be enough to pierce several dozen Corpse Soldiers. He also experienced troubles with his circulation of spiritual qi, so he took off into the air, but he suddenly felt his body sink.

A Corpse Soldier had leapt out of the sea of corpses and lunged over, grabbing Juechenzi's foot. It opened its mouth filled with protruding teeth and bit down viciously.

Its corpse was so dense that it approached Daemon General. It was equivalent to a tenth layer Qi Practitioner. It was powerful among Corpse Soldiers, but it was nothing before a Foundation Establishment cultivator.

Spiritual qi blocked its teeth, and with a swing of his sword, Juechenzi chopped off the Corpse Soldier's arms. However, having been momentarily delayed, over a dozen more Corpse Soldiers lunged over.

"Oh no!"

Juechenzi flew up as hard as he could. He took out a life-saving escape talisman, and with a flash, it turned to ashes, but he remained exactly where he was.

A shadow enveloped him. Filled with shock, he raised his head to take a look. The sky had become covered by a layer of sinister clouds before he knew it.

The sea of corpses suddenly produced a great wave, composed of thousands of Corpse Soldiers. Their vicious, greyish-white faces filled Juechenzi's face, slamming against him heavily and swallowing him.

A vortex immediately appeared in the sea of corpses. At the centre was Juechenzi. The Corpse Soldiers pushed towards the centre madly as their vicious arms tugged at every inch of his body.

Juechenzi circulated his spiritual qi madly, but never had it been so sluggish before. Blood oozed out, his limbs were torn from his body, and he erupted into a mess of bones and blood. The Corpse Soldiers all feasted on pieces of his flesh.

Juechenzi's aura vanished.

"Juechenzi!"

There were a series of cries. Within the endless slaughter, all of the Foundation Establishment cultivators looked down on these Corpse Soldiers in an almost-numbing way, as if they were unable to pose any realistic threat apart from their sheer numbers. Even if they could not stop them, they could always choose to retreat.

However, at that moment, they suddenly came to their senses. Even ants could kill an elephant if there were enough of them, and these Corpse Soldiers were not ants.

The huge puppets were riddled with damage and covered in Corpse Soldiers. Gradually, they experienced difficulties with moving and they collapsed on the ground heavily, swallowed and ripped apart by the sea of corpses.

Before they knew it, the claws and teeth of the Corpse Soldiers had become more powerful.

Black smoke rose into the air, forming a huge, dark cloud before they knew it. It spread out seemingly slowly, but in the blink of an eye, it had already enveloped a large area, and wherever the shadow covered, vegetation would wither and water would turn red. Life would be destroyed.

A miserable layer of gathering clouds and rolling mist permeated the surroundings that refused to disperse with wind.

It was like the scene Li Qingshan saw in the Hungry Ghost realm with his soul sense.

Under the shadows, even he felt discomfort. Suddenly, he realised that zombies were not the only things invading. Instead, it was the entire Hungry Ghost realm.

The living were all suppressed within the miserable layer of mist, while the dead gained the upper hand, becoming stronger and faster.

The humans and daemons had been at war for many years, but only at that moment did many people understand just what war was.

“Come back, everyone!” There was a bellow from the Soaring Dragon ship. The leader of the school of Mohism’s beard bristled as his eyes shone like fire.

The cultivators all flew into the air. This time, they were all careful, clearing out a large region of their surroundings before taking off so that they could avoid the same tragedy as Juechenzi.

The dragon head on the front of the ship suddenly opened its mouth. Specks of light gathered towards it.

The main cannon, the Dragon’s Roar, had been activated, targeting the corpse hole in the pit. The dragon’s mouth was enveloped in a light haze, undergoing a lengthy phase of accumulating power.

An extremely blinding beam of light pierced through the clouds and illuminated the surroundings, shooting straight into the pit.

Golden light poured out of the scorching-white colour. Rings of light radiated from the stream.

The Soaring Dragon ship was pushed five kilometers away as wooden shrapnel flew everywhere. The glass was on the edge of shattering. The dragon head on the front of the ship melted away and was destroyed the moment it unleashed the beam of light.

They had poured all of the Soaring Dragon ship’s remaining spiritual energy into this attack. The destructive power was so great that even Golden Core cultivators would struggle to endure a direct blow.

The Gate of Hungry Ghosts suddenly stopped spurting zombies, and the huge, withered hand that Li Qingshan was extremely familiar with extended out. It could only extend up to its wrist back then in the underground palace, but half of its forearm was visible now.

It faced the direction of the incoming beam of light and its five fingers trembled, like plucking at the strings of a zither. The hand closed and tugged in an extremely profound fashion, and the beam of light deflected slightly, landing on a hill several kilometers away from the pit.

Boom!

A hemispherical ball of light rose up from the ground, rapidly growing larger. It unleashed dazzling light, even more blinding than the sun.

Li Qingshan could even make out the violent tremors on the ground with his eyes.

The light dissipated slowly, but the bright glow lingered clearly in his eyes. A mushroom cloud surged into the air.

The hill had been reduced to a basin and tens of thousand Corpse Soldiers had been instantly vaporised. The shockwave had blasted away even more of them, shattering their bones and tearing them to pieces.

Most of the Corpse Soldiers were cleared away. They no longer formed the horrifying, mountainous and sea-like swathes like earlier, while the remaining scattered Corpse Soldiers were unable to stand up immediately.

However, the Gate of Hungry Ghosts in the pit was perfectly fine. The black smoke only trembled slightly like it was a colossal pillar forged from steel. Even the violent shockwave failed to shake it.

The huge, withered hand clenched into a fist and lifted up a black barrier, enveloping the Gate of Hungry Ghosts.

Only then did Li Qingshan truly witness the terrors of a Corpse King. It definitely was not as simple as possessing brute strength. It was highly intelligent too.

Although it could not even use a tenth of its powers due to the boundary limits, its ingenuity with making use of its power completely exceeded what Foundation Establishment cultivators could achieve.

The strike from the Soaring Dragon ship was powerful, but a machine emitted it at the end of the day. It was not under the precise control of cultivators.

The Corpse King used ingenuity to triumph over absolute power, easily receiving the strike and saving the Gate of Hungry Ghosts from destruction.

Although it had lost large numbers of Corpse Soldiers, they were cannon fodder to make time in the first place. Nothing was more worthless than Corpse Soldiers in the Hungry Ghost realm.

The withered hand pulled back and thousands of Corpse Soldiers surged out of the gate. They did not run around wildly in a mess, assembling in a neat array instead.

A zombie clad in armour, riding a zombie horse, followed closely behind. It glanced around, clearly intelligent.

A Corpse General!

### **Chapter 540 - A Great General Among Corpses**

The appearance of the Corpse General meant the crack in the Gate of Hungry Ghosts had grown larger.

The Corpse General waved his hand, and a black cloud of corpse qi rose up from his body, carrying almost ten thousand Corpse Soldiers towards the Soaring Dragon ship.

The Corpse General from the Hungry Ghost realm could actually use techniques, reducing the cultivators' advantage of flight to nothing.

Liu Zhangqing let out a long howl, and the sword in his hand rose up, turning into a streak of white light and shooting towards the Corpse General!

The Corpse Soldiers layered upon each other to block, assuming a standard defensive posture. The sword pierced through several dozen Corpse Soldiers before running out of force.

Only then did the Corpse General take action. A smile appeared on his stiff face as he swung down viciously towards the flying sword with his pitch-black blade.

The flying sword produced a miserable thrum, wanting to fly back. The squadron around the Corpse General were powerful Corpse Soldiers that resembled personal guards, restraining the sword with everything they had.

Liu Zhangqing's face changed as he urged the flying sword desperately. At this moment, the dark cloud arrived over his head, and his connection with the flying sword weakened drastically.

The Corpse General gripped the hilt of the sword, and with a surge of corpse qi, the light on the sword rapidly dimmed before becoming enveloped by black qi. It had actually been refined on the spot.

Hanging the sword on his waist casually, the Corpse General grinned with his toothy mouth and let out a soundless sneer, gazing at the cultivators on the Soaring Dragon ship scornfully.

Only then did everyone notice that the Corpse General seemed to be sending the corpse cloud towards them recklessly, but he had carefully controlled it within the range of the dark clouds.

With his intelligence, he did not resemble a zombie at all!

Over the years, Burial Mound mountain had obtained large quantities of corpses, and they had refined many Corpse Generals. However, Corpse Generals under the control of military tablets were only powerful puppets at most. They were worlds apart compared to the Corpse General standing before them.

Liu Zhangqing's heart ached. It was painful to have his spiritual artifact stolen from him, but he could no longer care about that anymore. Even more Corpse Soldiers were surging out of the Gate of Hungry Ghosts, and the Soaring Dragon ship had lost all of its fighting capacity.

He ordered loudly, "Strike together!"

The Corpse General swung the blade in his hand and almost ten thousand Corpse Soldiers shifted around, adjusting their formation with great speed and precision. The corpse qi from almost ten thousand Corpse Soldiers actually merged together and rose into the air, forming a huge, black shield.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! The attacks rained down on the black shield endlessly, but the Corpse Qi only dispersed slightly. They could not destroy it.

Han Anjun's expression changed. This bore some resemblance to the military formations of the school of the Military.

Military formations placed very high demands on the disciples who used them. They needed long periods of practise and consolidation before they could become connected in will and mind. But even with that being the case, when they faced real battle, they would still be influenced by various emotions like fear, fury, and so on, leading to the collapse of the military formation.

However, that was clearly something Corpse Soldiers did not have to worry about. Under the Corpse General's control, he could wield them like his own arm, forming the most ingenious combination. Compared to the difficulty of becoming connected in will and mind, these Corpse Soldiers simply had no will or mind. Even if they were cleaved through the head, they would not be fazed.

A military formation assembled like that was without a doubt even more pure and powerful.

Among the cultivators present, no one understood the power of military formations better than Han Anjun. Perhaps the individual Corpse Soldiers were not powerful, but once they poured their strength together, it would go from quantity to quality. Even he dared not underestimate their power.

The Corpse General did not charge over single-mindedly, so for a moment, the cultivators had no idea what to do.

They stood in the air, in a distant stalemate.

The Corpse General rode the corpse horse, controlled the corpse cloud and led the Corpse Soldiers, pressing over slowly as the dark clouds in the sky spread out. Despite facing almost twenty Foundation Establishment cultivators, he gave off the demeanour of a great general like he was taking his time and devising strategies from his tent.

This is a cultivator of the Hungry Ghost realm!

Li Qingshan felt like his horizons had widened yet again. He could no longer treat the opposing Corpse General as a "monster" anymore. He was clearly a cold, powerful cultivator, even though the way he cultivated was vastly different from humans, from daemons, from all living creatures.

The Corpse General had indeed not taken Liu Zhangqing and the other cultivators seriously, but that did not mean he was confident enough to completely defeat them.

That was because slaughter was truly commonplace in the Hungry Ghost realm. Its intensity was well beyond what Liu Zhangqing and the others could imagine. Let alone facing a group of Foundation Establishment cultivators who were equivalent to Corpse Generals when he had a geographic advantage, he had faced situations involving Corpse Commanders, Corpse Kings, or even higher

existences countless times already. Even putting up a struggle was pointless. All he could do was accept his fate.

Sometimes during the struggles on the battlefields, the only way to survive was to completely depend on luck. Having been through all that, the sight before him was no longer particularly significant anymore.

Hua Chengzan said, "We can't afford to waste any more time!"

During this period of stalemate, a few more Corpse Generals climbed out of the Gate of Hungry Ghosts. They varied in sizes and appearances, where one of them clearly did not resemble a human's corpse at all.

However, their eyes all flickered with intelligent light. The first thing they did after emerging was assembling the Corpse Soldiers. They glanced at the sky, but they did not launch an attack immediately.

Instead, they allowed the original Corpse General to face off with the cultivators in a stalemate. They instead led their armies out of the Gate of Hungry Ghosts and assembled a huge military formation, like some kind of wondrous formation.

The Corpse Soldiers served as the formation diagram, while the Corpse Generals served as the crucial points. No one would have imagined that measly Corpse Soldiers of the lowest level actually had so many wondrous uses if it were not for the fact that they had witnessed it in person.

In the moment the formation was completed, the black pillar of smoke from the Gate of Hungry Ghosts immediately became even thicker. They were working together from both inside and out to widen the Gate of Hungry Ghosts so that even more and stronger undead could enter this world from the Hungry Ghost realm.

Once the Gate of Hungry Ghosts widened to the point where the owner of the withered hand, the "Corpse King", could enter, then it truly would be the end of the world.

If they remained passive like this, the situation would become more and more disadvantageous.

Whether it was to fight or to flee, they had to make a decision fast.

"Kill them!"

Han Anjun called out coldly, flying over and landing on the top of the dragon head, raising his spear and pointing it at the Corpse General.

He was also a general!

Before he set off, he had already received military orders from the great general Han Anguo. They could not flee from this battle. They had to hold their ground until reinforcements from the Ruyi commandery arrived.

Military orders were absolute!

The Soaring Dragon ship suddenly set off, smashing towards the corpse cloud like a furious, roaring dragon.

The Corpse General did not back down. He waved his blade again, pointing it straight at the sky. Surging corpse qi rose from the bodies of the Corpse Soldiers, turning into a hundred-meter-long edge that swung down towards the Soaring Dragon ship.

The Soaring Dragon ship had almost depleted all of its energy. It could not even activate its defensive formations. The colossal blade swung down and split the Soaring Dragon ship into two with a single stroke, clearly exposing its internal structure. Wooden shrapnel flew about like rain.

The momentum of the broken hull carried it forward, smashing into the corpse cloud viciously. Countless Corpse Soldiers were sent flying, falling to the ground.

The central furnace exploded loudly, swallowing the entire corpse cloud.

The military formation collapsed!

With a single measly Corpse General, how could he be the opponent of all these cultivators? Everyone wanted to kill him quickly and relieve themselves of any future problems, but they discovered that the Corpse General had already rushed off towards the Gate of Hungry Ghosts on his corpse horse with a wisp of smoke.

The Corpse General had turned around without hesitation as early as after swinging his sword. The corpse horse treaded on four clumps of thick smoke and sparks, taking off like the wind with startling speed.

It completely contrasted against his composed demeanour from earlier. The only way to describe him was fleeing for his life. For a moment, everyone struggled to make an appropriate response.

He was like an ancient general—no matter how valiant he was on the front lines, as soon as he fell to an ambush and faced certain defeat, he would take to his heels without even caring about his family. Victory and defeat were common in battle. All of this was just so he could rise from the ashes again in the future.

The cultivators pursued for a while, but they were forced to stop. The closer they were to the Gate of Hungry Ghosts, the heavier the aura of death became. Even the energy of the world became extremely feeble.

The chilly wind whistled, worming into their bodies through every single pore and snatching at their life force greedily.

If there were Qi Practitioners present, they would probably lose their lives in a short while.

Although the lives of the cultivators were not under threat, their strength diminished drastically, and the miserable mist and clouds obscured their visibility. All they could see was that over twenty Corpse Generals had already climbed out from the Gate of Hungry Ghosts from its surroundings, and Corpse Soldiers flooded the region like the sea.

They no longer possessed any advantages at all, whether it be in terms of quality or quantity.

Charging forwards would only lead them to their deaths.

Meanwhile, using techniques and spiritual artifacts from afar would struggle to achieve anything.

What were they supposed to do!?

The cultivators looked at one another. Even with how valiant and fearless Han Anjun was, he would not choose to lay his life down pointlessly.

They were stuck between a rock and a hard place.

“Qingshan, if this continues, the entire Clear River prefecture will become a land of the dead. All of the nine provinces might even become a part of the Hungry Ghost realm,” Hua Chengzan suddenly conveyed to Li Qingshan secretly.

Li Qingshan replied with a non-committal “yep”. He knew he had not fooled Hua Chengzan’s eyes with his actions in the underground palace.

How could a regular Foundation Establishment cultivator take on a strike from a Corpse King and escape even after being dragged into the pool of blood? Even if he had weakened drastically because of the limiting boundaries, he was still something powerful enough to rival Daemon Kings.

The Hungry Ghost realm definitely did not have any existences like water or mountain gods. That was definitely a land of death. If these zombies managed to invade this world, his career as a water god would be over too. And, the Hungry Ghost realm definitely was not suited for the living to cultivate.

However, Li Qingshan had no plans to take action. Even if the “moon demon” could slaughter these Corpse Generals and Corpse Soldiers and temporarily slow down the opening of the Gate of Hungry Ghosts when he took action, the huge, withered hand would definitely strike again. He had already tried clashing with it after transforming, and it had been very difficult.

Now that the Gate of Hungry Ghosts had already opened up so much more than before, the withered hand definitely would have become even more powerful. Combined with its terrifying tricks, it was extremely dangerous.

Li Qingshan was not arrogant to the point where he was bold enough to look down on a Corpse King. As a result, he replied to Hua Chengzan, “If the sky falls, you always have the tall ones to hold it up.”

Hua Chengzan was taken aback before forcing out a smile. “Fair enough.”

Li Qingshan stared at the Gate of Hungry Ghosts. These Corpse Generals seem terrifying, but to Xiao An, they might be highly nourishing. The Samādhi Flames of White Bone just happen to suppress these things.

Li Qingshan had already told Xiao An to rush over, but he also asked her to hide, to see and wait without taking action.

He was afraid that when the stronger people arrived later and saw them “step forward for a just cause” to “save the world”, they would destroy them first without even batting an eye.

Maybe not with Golden Core cultivators, but if it were the lord of the Green province, or the ones who stood at the apex of the large sects, they would not even have the chance to escape.