

Chapter 631 - The Battle of the Schools of Novels (One)

Several days later, following a large auction that combined the nine stores of miscellaneous goods, the competition between the schools of Miscellany came to an end.

However, due to the toll from the war, the Clear River prefecture ranked last in the end, but that was expected. What came next was the competition between the schools of Music. As the graceful music rose up, the raucous and lively town turned into a grand concert.

The Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures continued in an orderly fashion, and Li Qingshan and Han Qiongzhi spent all of their time together by each other's sides as if they had returned to when they were passionately in love. Under Li Qingshan's intentional honesty, Han Qiongzhi gradually learnt about his secretive past, which brought her great joy.

Of course, he refused to mention anything along the lines of having another woman outside again.

Finally, the competition between the schools of Novels formally began. The matches between the regular disciples came first. They all pushed their Divine Talismans of Great Creation to the limit, turning fiction into reality and making their imaginations come true. They unleashed an endless variety of attacks, which left the spectating cultivators amazed. Sure enough, the school of Novels had its specialty for the founding emperor to designate it as one of the ten standard schools.

However, these matches were merely appetizers. When the matches between the disciples ended, it was time for the Foundation Establishment cultivators to take the stage, and the atmosphere suddenly became tense. Avoiding Liu Chuanfeng, the leaders of the schools of Novels from the eight other prefectures all exchanged glances. They seemed to be communicating through their soul sense.

"The first match, the Clear River prefecture against the Lecheng prefecture!"

Under Liu Chuanfeng and Sun Fubai's encouraging gazes, Li Qingshan smiled at Han Qiongzhi and made his way onto the stage, leading to a series of cheers. However, he waited a while, but he did not see his opponent appear. He glanced around, and the disciples from the schools of Novels all trembled.

"No, this is unfair!"

The school leader from the Lecheng prefecture, Wang Luo Cheng, called out. Originally, he was supposed to face Li Qingshan in this match, but after personally witnessing Li Qingshan's clash with caretaker Zheng, he felt like he had absolutely no chance at victory at all. Fortunately, they had already come up with a plan to restrain Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan asked in surprise, "What's unfair about this?"

"The Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures are about competing with the specialties of each school. You're armed to the teeth with arcane artifacts, so won't you just completely overwhelm us? How can we still exhibit the specialties of our school of Novels? This is completely missing the main point, which is why it's unfair."

The disciples from the other prefectures all agreed. "Yeah. Even if you win like this, you're just winning because of your arcane artifacts. Any cultivator can win like that. Does that still have anything to do with our school of Novels?"

"If you want to compete, then compete with your own strength."

Liu Chuanfeng was furious. "Wang Luocheng, you better stop with the nonsense. None of the matches in the past were like this!"

In the past, the schools of Novels were all broke. They would be doing quite well if they could whip out a single inferior arcane artifact. Even though the situation now had improved drastically, there were no school leaders armed to the teeth with arcane artifacts like Li Qingshan.

Wang Luocheng shook his head like a rattle drum. "The past is the past and the present is the present. The rules have to be changed. If you won't agree to it, we'll have the marquis make the decision!"

The disciples from the other prefectures all called out, "Have the marquis make the decision! Have the marquis make the decision!"

Liu Chuanfeng wanted to continue arguing, but Li Qingshan waved his hand. "Alright, then I won't use arcane artifacts." As he said that, he stowed away all the arcane artifacts on him. "Are you happy now?"

If Si Qing ends up getting involved, that kid won't favour me anyway. Do I even need arcane artifacts to deal with a group of measly people like you?

"It's still unfair! Your cultivation is at late Foundation Establishment, already the highest among us, and you're skilled in water element techniques. When we start fighting, you can easily defeat us even if you don't use the Divine Talisman of Great Creation. It completely defies the point of the exhibition matches."

Seeing how easily Li Qingshan agreed to his demands, Wang Luocheng rejoiced inside and continued making demands. So much for being arrogant. You've offended the marquis, so you're completely at our whim now.

The disciples from the Clear River prefecture were indignant. Since when were there any battles where cultivators were supposed to fight without even using techniques?

Li Qingshan said, "Alright, then I won't use techniques!"

"It's not just techniques. Apart from the arts of the school of Novels, you're forbidden from using all other battle skills and techniques!"

"Alright!" Li Qingshan happily agreed to him once again.

"You seem to have practised the arts of Body Practitioners..."

Li Qingshan smiled. "Don't tell me I'm supposed to be tied up when I fight against you? I have practised the arts of Body Practitioners, and my body is relatively tough. What? Am I supposed to stab myself and suffer some heavy injuries first before it's fair to you?"

It led to a roar of laughter. Even the cultivators from the hundred schools from other prefectures found these demands rather unreasonable. Their eyes were filled with disdain as they felt sympathy for Li Qingshan. How did someone like him end up in the school of Novels?

The school of Novels was renowned for their obscenity. The “Smut Novel technique” was not Liu Chuanfeng’s original creation. None of the Academies of the Hundred Schools were particularly fond of it.

The school of Novels in the Clear River prefecture had primarily been revived through Li Qingshan. Although the schools of Novels in other prefectures copied the Cloudwisp association’s management and strengthened themselves, their status was still not particularly impressive. Some disciples even showed signs of developing the “Smut Novel technique”, even replicating Li Qingshan’s partnership with the school of Paintings by paying hefty prices to invite disciples of the schools of Painting and inventing something like the “Erotic Comic technique”.

After all, only children liked to read fairytales, while this was suitable for both the young and the old. Simply reading it once would not be enough. They would even stow them away secretly and read them repeatedly. When they entered the mood, they were even tempted to replace the main character and enter the book to go at it. Sure enough, it led to a large quantity of power of belief, but their reputation obviously became even worse.

“If you’re willing to, then we obviously have no objections!”

Wan Luocheng shook his head as if he was invincible as long as he was shameless. After tasting the sweetness of the Cloudwisp association, he could already see a vast path of cultivation unfold before him. In order to claim the dominant position within the Greater Cloudwisp association, he had to tie up Li Qingshan with restrictions until he could not even move.

Li Qingshan was speechless. This bastard sure did resemble Liu Chuanfeng of the past. He thought about it and said, “How about this? In order to save time, I’ll take on all eight of you at the same time. I won’t use any arcane artifacts, techniques, or battle skills, but you can. Surely that’s enough to make you happy!”

The spectators were thrown into an uproar. These were all components to a cultivator’s strength. He was already taking the enemy a little lightly by forbidding himself from using them while permitting the enemy to use them, yet he still wanted to take on eight people at the same time? Wouldn’t that lead to certain defeat?

Although most of them had heard of Li Qingshan’s reputation, the only time they had truly witnessed him fight was above the marquis’ estate. His two clashes with caretaker Zheng were rather ingenious, but he could never have done that without his powerful arcane artifacts and clever usage of battle skills.

“You mustn’t, Qingshan!” Liu Chuanfeng called out in objection, but Li Qingshan turned a deaf ear to him. Sun Fubai said, “Junior brother, Qingshan knows what he’s doing. His decision isn’t something we can change, so let’s just wait and see!”

“Do you mean it?” Wang Luocheng’s eyes lit up.

Si Qing, who spectated from the Soaring Dragon terrace far away, smiled disdainfully. “Yanying, this subordinate of yours doesn’t seem to be particularly clever!”

Gu Yanying said, “Actually, he’s the same as you. He hates suspenseless fights without the slightest difficulty.”

“Do you think he can compare to me?” Si Qingshan squinted his eyes.

“I think his future accomplishments will definitely surpass yours. Of course, they’ll probably surpass mine too.”

Gu Yanying smiled. There were probably not a lot of people who understood better than her what kind of circumstances he had started off in and how far he had developed so far. She could feel that on the future stage of the nine provinces, he would definitely play the role of a relatively important character. He might even have the chance to stand with the many kings.

Even right now, a simple clone of his can cause an endless headache for a mighty prince like you.

Even Si Qing became slightly fazed by such a great evaluation from Gu Yanying. “Looks like you really do have a high opinion of this child, but most of the geniuses in the world all end up dying early.” Very soon, I’ll personally nip him in the bud.

“Geniuses who die early aren’t geniuses.”

Back to the stage, Li Qingshan said proudly, “Of course. Stop wasting time. Come at me!”

Wang Luocheng and the seven other school leaders all reached an agreement. “We’ll take down Li Qingshan first!”

Immediately, eight Foundation Establishment cultivators stood up and took out their spiritual and arcane artifacts, surrounding Li Qingshan. All of them were hostile, just lacking hideous grins to constantly express their complacency.

There was a hubbub in the surroundings, but they ignored it. Their thick skin had not been developed in a single day. Some of them were afraid Liu Chuanfeng would not accept the outcome of an unfair battle like this, so they called out, “School leader Liu, don’t forget about our original agreement!”

By now, all Liu Chuanfeng could choose to do was have complete faith in Li Qingshan. He said sternly, “I won’t forget about it.”

“Li Qingshan, I’ve heard about you a long time ago too. I want to thank you for coming up with ideas and reviving our school of Novels. However, there’s a saying that ‘arrogance leads to madness’. You might not have realised it yourself yet, but all mad people are like this. I’d advise you to quickly come to your senses. No matter how powerful you are, you’re merely a toothless tiger right now, so you better give up obediently, just in case we damage the relationship between the schools of Novels.”

Wang Luocheng smiled, wanting to sway Li Qingshan with words.

Li Qingshan smiled too. “It’s fine. Even if I can’t win, I won’t let you win either.”

Wang Luocheng's expression changed slightly. If Li Qingshan truly launched a wild attack against just him, suffering some injuries would be unavoidable, which would become a great disadvantage in his matches against the other prefectures. So this was what he had been thinking. Wang Luocheng could not help but feel some regret. Why'd I have to be the one who stood forward? Why'd I say so much? He smiled shamefully.

"Don't misunderstand. All of us discussed and agreed on the matter from before. It's not just my decision, so there's no need to place all the blame on me!"

"Really? May I ask who came up with such a wonderful plan then? I'd like to properly thank him!"

Li Qingshan glanced past the faces of the seven other people. They either held their heads high, expressing their innocence, or their gazes wavered, afraid to make eye contact. They were all afraid Li Qingshan would launch a mad and desperate attack and target them.

Clang!

A guard struck the gong, echoing loudly in the surroundings.

"The match begins!"

Li Qingshan leaned forward. With a bang from below his feet, he produced two holes in the ground. He had already taken off, lunging madly towards Wang Luocheng. He was like a vicious tiger that had emerged from his cage. He was unstoppable!

He truly did not use any techniques or battle skills, but his murderousness tempered through a myriad of battles was faster than any technique or battle skill. He charged straight towards Wang Luocheng.

Wang Luocheng stiffened up as if he saw a beast in human form that wanted to rip him apart alive. Li Qingshan's eyes shone with scarlet light, piercing him like two sharp swords and leaving him completely fear-stricken!

Chapter 632 - The Battle of the Schools of Novels (Two)

Wang Luocheng had many hobbies in his life, from dog-walking and cock-fighting to drinking with women and playing with women and so on. He was skilled in several of them, but fighting did not happen to be one of them. Li Qingshan's murderousness stunned him, where even his thought processes slowed down. He retreated instinctively, hoping that someone else would block Li Qingshan for him.

However, perhaps because the others had never expected Li Qingshan to strike without batting an eye, combined with his imposing manner, everyone else faltered as well. After all, the school of Novels had never been known for their battle prowess. Because the power of belief did not come easily, they were unable to regularly train and spar. They were more willing to conjure some beauty and train and spar in bed.

Of course, some were truly slow, while others wanted Li Qingshan and Wang Luocheng to waste away one another. In the end, both of them would be heavily injured, and two of their competitors would be immediately eliminated. As their eyes drifted about, they discovered none of them were idiots.

As a result, an encirclement of eight people immediately turned into a one-against-one battle between Li Qingshan and Wang Luocheng. Wang Luocheng returned to his senses. He had just been betrayed, so he cursed inside, Novelists are never up to any good! He recovered some of the functionality of his stunned brain and immediately used the Divine Talisman of Great Creation to conjure a great gate formed from steel. It was a foot thick.

At the same time, he desperately powered his protective spiritual artifact. As long as he could stop Li Qingshan for a while, the others would not simply stand by and watch on. As a result, the encirclement would be reestablished.

However, before Wang Luocheng could even catch his breath, there was a great boom, and the huge gate caved in and twisted. Li Qingshan emerged like he had smashed through a gate of paper, reaching towards his face with his open hand.

Only very few people managed to make out that when Li Qingshan collided with the gate, his hands pushed and pulled several dozen times, destroying the very integrity of the gate.

Wang Luocheng was shocked. He let out a strange cry and let a flying sword emerge from his sleeve, stabbing straight towards Li Qingshan's chest. The sword shone brightly; it was an arcane artifact. Although it was the weakest, inferior arcane artifact, it still could not be underestimated.

Liu Chuanfeng could not help but stand up. He was furious and worried. How was he supposed to stop the flying sword with his protective spiritual qi alone, unable to use any protective techniques or arcane artifacts?

However, Li Qingshan completely ignored the flying sword, continuing onwards with a vicious bearing like he had to crush Wang Luocheng's head no matter what. Wang Luocheng was utterly shocked, staggering backwards again and again. Momentarily distracted, the glow from the sword immediately dimmed slightly, and it slowed down.

Li Qingshan smiled. He bent and flicked a finger on his left hand, deflecting the flying sword with a clang. At the same time, he formed a fist with his right hand and struck Wang Luocheng's chest.

With a bang, Wang Luocheng's protective glow scattered, launched away while coughing up blood. His protective spiritual artifact had already been reduced to pieces. With only a thin layer of protective spiritual qi, how was he supposed to stop Li Qingshan's fist?

Wang Luocheng was only at early Foundation Establishment. He was already two minor cultivation realms weaker than Li Qingshan, and his cultivation method paled in comparison to the Arts of the Boundless Ocean, let alone the difference that existed given his untempered body. Li Qingshan had not even used the strength of the ox demon. He even held back slightly in the end, or killing Wang Luocheng with a single punch would have been nothing strange at all.

Wang Luocheng fainted on the spot, and the disciples of the school of Medicine carried him off the stage for treatment. Li Qingshan turned around and faced the remaining seven people, raising a finger. "One!"

Although the entire process involved a lot of wit and courage, in the eyes of the spectators, Li Qingshan had finished off a Foundation Establishment cultivator in a single lunge.

“His reputation truly is well-deserved. Even without using arcane artifacts or battle skills, uncle-in-law is still so fierce! Tieyi, is he really a disciple of the school of Novels? I think he’s clearly a disciple of our school of the Military!”

The leader of the school of the Military from the Yong’an prefecture was overcome by surprise. The other leaders of the schools of the Military stood to one side, gathered around Han Tieyi. The Han family had held the position of great general for all these years, so all the disciples of the school of the Military were past acquaintances and subordinates. They were all on friendly terms, which was why they referred to Li Qingshan as “uncle-in-law”.

Han Tieyi said, “He really should have joined the school of the Military.”

“Fortunately, he’s a disciple of the school of Novels, or if he were to represent the Clear River prefecture, we can just forfeit.”

Han Tieyi said, “Do you really think you can win right now?”

“Kid, don’t get cocky. Your uncles will test you this year and see whether you measure up to your father or not.” Everyone laughed aloud. Someone said, “Look, the uncle-in-law is striking again!”

A dim, blue haze rose up around Li Qingshan like an illusion as he thought, This is an exhibition match between the schools of Novel after all. If I don’t use the Divine Talisman of Great Creation, they won’t be content even if I win, so I might as well leave them convinced.

He poured all of his attention into the Divine Talisman of Great Creation. Slivers of power of belief were drawn out, gradually weaving into the figure of a person, forming his bones, blood vessels, and meridians. Never had Li Qingshan used the Divine Talisman of Great Creation so seriously before.

“Everyone, use your full strength!”

The seven remaining cultivators all returned to their senses. After witnessing how ferocious Li Qingshan was, how could they still be thinking about anything else? If he truly managed to defeat all eight of them alone, then it would be humiliating. If Li Qingshan learnt what they were thinking, he would definitely be extremely surprised. You still have a sense of shame!?

Four spiritual artifacts and three arcane artifacts whistled towards Li Qingshan together. At the same time, they conjured weapons, natural disasters, and vicious beasts with their Divine Talismans of Great Creation, which surged towards Li Qingshan together.

There were a myriad of attacks, leading to an impressive display of power, which made all of the spectators think that the school of Novels was not as useless as they were rumored to be.

Li Qingshan rose up into the air, leading the attacks into the sky.

The figure he carefully crafted had already taken shape. He was a young man in blue, and he was dressed in a very rustic attire. Even his face was grimy, but his facial features were straight and delicate, radiating with a sense of righteousness. He clasped his hands. “I am Zeng A’niu, and I hope the seniors can show me some guidance!”

TL: Zeng A’niu is the alias of the main character of The Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber, Zhang Wuji. If you don’t remember, that was the novel Li Qingshan originally plagiarised in Chapter 317.

Li Qingshan scratched his head. Originally, he wanted to draw away the attacks and have this Zeng A'niu make use of the opportunity and launch a sneak attack, but he never expected him to be so upright and straightforward in character. He was identical to his depiction in the novel.

As it seemed, the characters conjured by novelists were not regular puppets. As the cultivation of the Divine Talisman of Great Creation progressed, the characters they conjured would become more life-like. Only through the forceful control of the Divine Talisman of Great Creation could they make these characters do things against their nature.

No one expected Li Qingshan to spend so much time and effort to conjure a country bumpkin like this. However, one of the school leaders had specially studied Li Qingshan's works before, so he called out loudly, "Don't be careless! He's Zhang..."

"Shut up, I'll destroy you all!" Zeng A'niu bellowed out and interrupted him. He raised his hands into the air. "The power of dragon-slaying, the strike of heaven-reliant!"

His rustic, honest face immediately lit up, blazing with an imposing manner. His muscles burst through his clothes as he moved around gracefully like a butterfly. A huge, silver sword appeared over his head, with a golden dragon coiled around the hilt. He swung down forcefully.

Silver light filled the surroundings as extremely-sharp sword Qi whistled out, cleaving down on the seven people.

Even Li Qingshan was taken aback. Woah! I almost forgot this was the adapted version! He's no longer that pitiful man who failed to start a harem, but the cool, awesome, wicked leader of the demonic cult who cut through Mount E'mei in a single strike!

Chapter 633 - The Battle of the Schools of Novels (Three)

Zeng A'niu was awe-inspiring, radiating with sword Qi. The seven cultivators fled from him wherever he passed by. No one could stop his edge. They all channelled the Divine Talisman of Great Creation and conjured various powerful figures and vicious beasts to stop him, but they were all cut down in a single stroke, thrown into utter disorder.

These guys sure are surprisingly weak!

Li Qingshan could clearly sense that whether it was the swordsmanship or the battle style of the conjured Zeng A'niu, they all resembled his, which allowed him to understand something new.

Words were limitless. He could write a character as powerful and as clever as he wanted to, but when he truly conjured the character, they were limited by two aspects. One was the amount of power of belief, while the other was the author himself.

No matter how wonderful and extraordinary a person's imagination was, it could not surpass the limits of what they knew. If a novelist did not even have an inkling about swordsmanship, then even if they wrote a supreme swordsman, the character would only be an idiot with the sword if they were conjured. No matter how realistic the characters seemed, they were not living creatures after all, just projections of the novelist's imagination.

Like how even an omnipotent god could not create a rock he could not lift, novelists were unable to write characters that surpassed their imaginations. They might have been life-like in the novels, but their true colours would show once they conjured them through the Divine Talisman of Great Creation.

This was exactly the problem that the seven cultivators faced. They lacked battle experience, so while the characters they conjured possessed a cultivation at Foundation Establishment, their battle prowess was a mess. As a result, despite also using the Divine Talisman of Great Creation, the Zeng A'niu that Li Qingshan conjured was able to gain the upper hand while facing seven other people.

Li Qingshan refused to waste any time. He flew into the air, turned around, and leapt down. The remaining seven people did not even know the most basic coordination, let alone proper teamwork. They were scattered apart by Zeng A'niu. In Li Qingshan's eyes, they were basically riddled with openings, almost no different from facing against them one by one. He threw three punches and two kicks. With that, another two people fainted and were out of the battle.

"Five!" Li Qingshan extended his open hand, about to finish off the remaining two people as well in a single stroke.

"Stop, no more! You win, okay?" The two remaining actually forfeited and admitted defeat. Within the hubbub, they directly left the stage.

Li Qingshan waved his hand, and Zeng A'Niu dispersed like mist. Because he had never been killed, he did not use up much power of belief.

"Victory to Li Qingshan of the Clear River prefecture for the exhibition match between the schools of Novels!"

"We did it!" Liu Chuanfeng waved his fist fiercely. Just like that, the Cloudwisp association would be able to spread across the entire Ruyi commandery. Sun Fubai stroked his beard and smiled.

The surroundings erupted with a roar of admiration. Although Wang Luocheng and the seven others appeared rather disheveled under Li Qingshan's attacks, they were still eight Foundation Establishment cultivators after all! They were not eight newbies. Li Qingshan had managed to defeat them without using any arcane artifacts or techniques, and he had achieved victory so easily. It was unbelievable.

Gu Yanying said to Si Qing, "Looks like he hasn't achieved his objective! Did you expect this result?"

"That's because his opponents are far too weak. Although they're all Foundation Establishment cultivators, he's on an entirely different level. Even if you double the number of opponents he's facing, the results won't change. Even if a tiger has its teeth and claws removed, it's still not something a herd of sheep can defeat. He truly is a genius worth treasuring!"

Si Qing actually admired Li Qingshan from the bottom of his heart.

Gu Yanying furrowed her brows slightly before easing up. As it seemed, Si Qing had made up his mind about finishing him off. If he were not Northmoon, this truly would be quite troublesome. Who would emerge victoriously in the end from this fierce struggle?

She did not have high hopes for Si Qing, but she did not feel that Li Qingshan could deal with Si Qing. At their realm of cultivation, determining victory or defeat was easy, but determining life or death was

difficult. The present situation would probably last for a very long time, until Northmoon showed an opening and was killed off, or he possessed the strength where he no longer had to fear the Great Xia empire's revenge.

On the side of the stage, Wang Luocheng woke up under the treatment of the school of Medicine, sitting on the side and regulating his condition. He raised his head, only to see Liu Chuanfeng striding over slowly. He pointed at them and swaggered around on his high horse.

"Hmph, you group of despicable people might be crafty and treacherous, but under this school leader's power and influence, you've still ended up yielding in submission! You really have been asking for this! From today onwards, I am the leader of the Greater Cloudwisp association. Do any of you have any objections?"

Li Qingshan might have won, but he felt slightly embarrassed right now for some reason. Like everything else, he had to maintain a bottom line and not go too far. If you strut around before them like this, wouldn't everything fall apart if you piss them off and they refuse to cooperate with you anymore?

But to his surprise, Wang Luocheng immediately stood up and flattered him with a smile. "Yes, yes, yes. We tried to stop the unstoppable, and we completely overestimated ourselves. These puny tricks are obviously ineffective against junior brother Li, as well as senior brother Liu. When you take control of the Cloudwisp association in the future, please take good care of us, senior brother Liu!"

The other defeated school leaders gathered over too and congratulated their association leader Liu Chuanfeng.

Li Qingshan was taken aback. These guys who wrote novels truly were absolutely spineless. Little did he know that it was primarily due to his efforts. Even now, Wang Luocheng was still shaken up from the clash earlier, so where would he find the courage to stand up against him? He was the kind of person who would never be convinced until he fought, and he would be absolutely convinced after he fought.

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Time passed by quickly. The exhibition matches passed by one after another. The mechanisms of the schools of Mohism, the buddhist dharma of the schools of Buddhism, the divination of the schools of Yin-yang, and so on all broaden everyone's horizons, allowing the sect cultivators to witness the heritage and strength of the Academy of the Hundred Schools.

A month passed in the blink of an eye. The last match was an exhibition battle between the schools of the Military. Although they all used their full strength, it seemed more like a battle of goodwill than a battle to death. In the end, the disciples led by Han Tieyi emerged victorious, which also brought the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures to a satisfactory end.

All they were waiting for now was Si Qing's final speech, and this grand gathering of the cultivation community of the Ruyi commandery would come to an end. Under everyone's gaze, Si Qing stood up on the Soaring Clouds terrace again and said loudly, "The exhibition matches this time have allowed me to witness the specialities of the various schools and prefectures..."

After giving routine praise to the cultivators of each prefecture, he explained the great significance of the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures this time. Li Qingshan was bored out of his mind from

the speech, but Han Qiongzhi was reluctant for this to end, almost wishing for the exhibition matches to continue like this forever. She gazed at the Soaring Dragon terrace.

“Northmoon doesn’t seem to be there!” Meanwhile, she studied Li Qingshan’s expression. During this time, Li Qingshan told her about many of his secrets and his matters of the past, which did indeed make her think of many things.

“He has probably left!”

Li Qingshan said. Where was he supposed to find all that time to waste on Si Qing? He had made his clone bid farewell and leave a long time ago so that he could continue refining bodies of water. If it were not for the sake of getting his original body out of trouble, he would not have appeared at all.

However, before he bid farewell, Si Qing came up with a strange request. He wanted him to send over some daemons and night roamers to take part in the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures. He said it was for the sake of increasing communication and pacifying their relationship, and he promised many benefits on top of that.

Li Qingshan did not know what wicked scheme Si Qing was thinking of, but under the principle of disagreeing with his opponent over everything, he did not agree to it in the end. He could obtain all these benefits from Gu Yanying anyway, and he still had to worry about being screwed over, so there was truly no point for him to waste any more words on Si Qing.

However, Li Qingshan could vaguely sense that the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures this time would not end so easily.

Sure enough, as Si Qing spoke, he suddenly changed the topic. “The only pity is that our fellow cultivators from the sects could only serve as spectators and could not participate. Even for the cultivators from the various schools, most of you could not participate, which took away a lot of the glamour. As a result, I’d like to add another event after the traditional exhibition matches. All cultivators can participate and benefit from it!”

Si Qing spread his arms and announced in high spirits with his jackal-like voice. He was slightly excited. Li Qingshan could sense that his expression right now was very different compared to when he rambled earlier. It definitely was not an act. His heart sank slightly. Here it is!

The cultivators below the terrace all discussed. “More competitions? And everyone is supposed to participate?” “There are so many people, so how will it work out? If it’s one against one, who knows when we’ll be done!” “Who cares? As long as there are benefits up for grabs!”

Everyone looked at one another, including the Golden Core cultivators on the Soaring Dragon terrace. They had no idea what Si Qing was thinking. They all waited for Si Qing to announce how the last competition would be carried out while thinking of various different things.

After exchanging glances with E Dan and Jia Zheng behind him, Si Qing took out the Dragon Arena and tossed it onto the stage below. First, he roughly introduced the general situation with regard to the Dragon Arena before announcing the rules of the final competition.

All cultivators who were willing to participate could collect a specially-made medal. They differed depending on their respective cultivations, and the medals were split into various levels. Each metal

represented a cultivator's achievements in battle. What the cultivators needed to do was try their best and steal the medals in the hands of others

The competition would last for a total of ten days. After the ten days, the Dragon Arena would open up again, and the cultivators would be able to use the medals in their possessions to exchange for resources like spiritual stones and so on.

It was a battle royale between tens of thousands of people!

Li Qingshan understood what Si Qing was thinking now. As it turned out, this was his objective for Northmoon to send people over. What was he trying to do? Was it merely to fulfil his twisted hobbies? It probably was not as simple as that!

And, would the cultivators of the various sects and schools truly do as he wished and take part in this battle royale?

Immediately, a Golden Core cultivator objected, "Your highness, a competition like this might be inappropriate compared to the peaceful exchanges that have always been proposed by the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures!" Even a Golden Core cultivator from the Academy of the Hundred Schools disapproved of this. "We're proper cultivators, yet we have to fight one another like gu insects in a jar? This is outrageous!"

The other cultivators all kept their opinions to themselves. Gu Yanying exchanged glances with Si Bao, vaguely guessing what Si Qing was trying to do—he wanted to refine the Dragon Arena into an Asura Field!

Asura Fields were similar to Gates of Hundred Ghosts. They were a secret treasure connected to the Asura realm of the six realms of sa'sāra. To open a Gate of Hundred Ghosts, it required a place piled up with corpses like Burial Mound mountain, followed by the careful arrangement of formations.

To refine an Asura Field, it required establishing a great battlefield, where powerful cultivators could fight against one another mindlessly. The violent killing intent and battle intent conformed with the Asura realm, and an Asura Field would descend.

When the founding emperor conquered the nine provinces, he had created a few Asura Fields of various sizes in the process. The first Dragon Arenas were replicas of Asura Fields.

Chapter 634 - The Asura Field, the Three Absolutes Calligraphy

Right from when the Dragon Arena had first been constructed, it began gathering cultivators from everywhere, making them fight and kill in there. Countless lives had been lost in the process, but their will to fight remained.

Although the intensity of the battles were nowhere close to the wars waged across the nine provinces, later cultivators could use secret techniques to accumulate the slaughter and battle intent and let them constantly ferment. The process was relatively slow, but upon reaching a certain level, the very nature of the Dragon Arena would change, and it would be converted into an Asura Field.

By then, the Dragon Arena would cease to be a large-scale toy that consumed tremendous amounts of resources. Instead, it would be an arcane treasure that could connect with the Asura realm, possessing a

multitude of powers. This was the reason why the imperial clan in the Dragon province constantly constructed Dragon Arenas. No amusements were purely for the sake of amusement.

The Great General King of the Green province, Wu Geng, happened to possess an Asura Field like that. The most outstanding disciples of the school of the Military in the Green province had all trained in there before. Only the most tenacious warriors could pass the ordeals.

However, the method to refine an Asura Field was a great secret. Even with Gu Yanying and Si Bao's identity, they only knew about how it roughly worked. As for the exact process and what kind of formations and inscriptions were required, they were completely clueless.

"Big sis, this is such a vicious idea from Si Qing. He wants to use the entire cultivation community of the Ruyi commandery to make his wild ambition come true. Should we stop him?" Si Bao communicated to Gu Yanying secretly.

"Let's just wait and see!"

Gu Yanying said after some thought. The Hawkwolf Guard possessed very great authority, but they could only watch over the Marquis of Ruyi. They could not directly interfere with his administration of government affairs. If she forcefully got in the way, then she would have completely fallen out with Si Qing. After all, obstructing a person's path of cultivation was like killing their parents.

However, while he could order around the Academy of the Hundred Schools, why would these sect cultivators answer his call? She wanted to see how he would handle this!

Si Qing said proudly, "Right now, the world is chaotic and on the brink of war. If we continue with our past traditions and hold these exhibition matches that are no different from games, how will we be able to handle the turmoil in the future? If you really do refuse to participate, I can't stop you, but do take a look at the value these medals represent first!"

Jia Zheng took a step forward. With a wave of his hand, a black curtain draped down from the Soaring Dragon terrace like a waterfall. There were a few words on there that detailed the value of each kind of metal, as well as the rules of the competition.

Everyone below the Soaring Dragon terrace was thrown into an uproar, as the medals regular Qi Practitioners received were worth a thousand spiritual stones, and the medals would be worth more with higher cultivation. There was absolutely no need for them to fight and kill anyone. If they simply held onto the medal in their possession, it would be quite a sum.

As for late Foundation Establishment cultivators like Li Qingshan, the medals they received could be directly exchanged for an arcane artifact. Probably no one could turn down something so great.

The Golden Core cultivators looked at one another and thought, Si Qing sure is going to some great lengths. He has taken out a tremendous sum of spiritual stones, as much as several tens of million, all at once, as well as countless spiritual artifacts, arcane artifacts, talismans, and pills. He has basically come to spread fortune far and wide.

Si Qing said, "In this competition, all the disciples, guards, and servants of my estate will be participating and contending against you! If you're willing to participate, then collect a medal and prepare to enter

the Dragon Arena. For the sake of fairness, everyone will be transported to a random location in the Dragon Arena. Do you still have any objections?"

Since there were benefits up for grabs and the reason behind this was so impressive, who was still willing to offend Si Qing? They all expressed that they had no objections.

There was a hubbub beneath the Soaring Dragon terrace. The sect cultivators discussed among themselves.

"Senior brother, should we participate?" "Of course we should. Let's go in together and hide. The Dragon Arena is very large." "How disappointing of you. I want to obtain a few medals and exchange for a True Spirit pill so that I can break through to Foundation Establishment!" "How can we compare to you, first senior brother?"

"Anyway, if you really can't win, just hand over the medal. It's not like you'll lose anything!"

As a result, most of the sect cultivators registered and collected a medal, while the cultivators from the academies of the nine prefectures obviously had to follow the Marquis of Ruyi. They had to participate, but they all seemed interested.

Long periods of peace and the peaceful atmosphere of the Exhibition Matches of the Nine Prefectures obviously made most cultivators believe that this final competition was merely a "game" prince Si Qing arranged to win everyone over and make everyone participate.

Gu Yanying shook her head gently. She knew this was already going ahead. Si Qing had taken out a tremendous amount of resources despite the costs. He had won over the recognition of the cultivators. Both sides were happy with it. Intense battles had always been a part of the Dragon province's tradition. Even if this was reported to the imperial court, they would only praise Si Qing's actions. They would never berate him.

Li Qingshan raised his head and carefully read the words on the black curtain. It detailed the way the Dragon Arena worked, as well as some simple rules.

All forty-one battlefields in the Dragon Arena would be activated. By flying off in any direction, they could enter another battlefield. This was equivalent to several hundred kilometers across in all directions, which was anything but small. However, in order to avoid a few people actively avoiding battles, a few battlefields would vanish with each day. The cultivators in them would be transported to a battlefield nearby.

After losing their medal, they still had to remain inside for the ten days. They had to wait until the competition ended before they could leave. This was so that cultivators who had lost their medals had the opportunity to reobtain their medals.

Everything seemed to make perfect sense, but Li Qingshan gradually furrowed his brows. He vaguely caught the heavy scent of blood.

Si Qing must be thinking of using this opportunity to finish me off. He is sending in all of his disciples and guests. There's no less than twenty Foundation Establishment cultivators, and they all must have prepared many powerful tricks up their sleeves so that they can give me a fatal blow!

Han Qiongzhi said, "Qingshan, you have to be careful. Commander Gu just passed orders for all White Wolf guards to continue with upholding order!"

Li Qingshan's frown eased up, and he smiled. "Don't worry. I'll probably be in for a big massacre this time!"

"Qingshan, let's discuss our plan!"

Liu Zhangqing was stern. After being baptised by war, he refused to treat any form of battle carelessly. However, even he did not believe there would be much danger in the competition this time. After all, everyone was human. Deciding victory or defeat was enough. The crux of this all was how to gather together as quickly as possible so that they could collect as many medals as possible.

After a series of discussions, the gong rang again, and the final competition formally began. Everyone entered the Dragon Arena.

Before Li Qingshan stepped into the Dragon Arena, Chu Danqing suddenly rushed over and passed a painting scroll to him.

"You're done so quickly!" Li Qingshan said in surprise before noticing that Chu Danqing was pale and completely over-exhausted.

"I originally wanted to hand it to you after you came back. You'll probably be in danger this time, so quickly refine it again after you enter the Dragon Arena. The Three Absolutes Calligraphy will definitely be of great use!"

During the past month, Chu Danqing spent all of his time in his room repairing the Three Absolutes Calligraphy apart from attending the matches between the schools of Painting. He used up a lot of his Jade Blood of Vermillion and Black, and his understanding of its power grew even deeper.

"Thanks! You be careful too!" Li Qingshan accepted the Three Absolutes Calligraphy and shoved all of the paintings he had obtained as spoils from the battle into Chu Danqing's arms before stepping into the Dragon Arena.

Chapter 635 - Ready

Wind and snow assaulted his face. Li Qingshan appeared on an icebound mountain out of thin air. It glistened with white snow as far as the eye could see as huge snowflakes fell from the air.

The tall mountain was the very centre of the battlefield, giving an extremely vast view. Li Qingshan had a bird's-eye view of the surroundings, only to see black specks appear in the distant snowy land. There were roughly two hundred people, and there were a few Foundation Establishment cultivators among them. Although they had all kept their auras hidden away, they could not fool Li Qingshan's senses. However, he did not know any of them.

It's more crowded than I imagined it to be!

A region of several dozen kilometers across was indeed an extremely vast region for mortals, but it was not that large to cultivators. It would only take half a day at most for Qi Practitioners to explore the place, let alone Foundation Establishment cultivators.

Would it be a chaotic encounter right from the beginning?

As Li Qingshan observed his surroundings, the other Foundation Establishment cultivators sensed him too. They raised their heads and looked through the wind and snow. When they made out his familiar figure, their faces all changed.

Li Qingshan!

Afterwards, they all took off without the slightest hesitation, flying off in all directions. They were only afraid they would be a little too slow, and he would catch up to them and take their medals.

The eyesight of Qi Practitioners was not as powerful, and they lacked sharp senses. Obscured by the wind and snow, they could only see a few kilometers away at most. The Foundation Establishment cultivators gave off light when they flew away, which led to some disturbances, but seeing how the balls of light were not flying towards them, they all eased up.

Many Qi Practitioners took out their medal and stared at it with fervent light. As long as they managed to keep this item for ten days, then all would be well. If they were lucky, perhaps they could even collect a few more. The stronger Qi Practitioners began to silently approach the weaker auras nearby.

Li Qingshan stood on the top of the mountain and had no intentions to chase down everyone. He was not particularly interested in collecting medals. He was primarily here to deal with the vindictive attacks of Si Qing, E Dan, and Jia Zhen's subordinates and disciples.

He took out a glazed ball that resembled a compass. The bright red needle was fixed firmly in a single location. This was the item of contact Liu Zhangqing had given to him. All the cultivators from the Academy of the Hundred Schools of the Clear River prefecture possessed one. They all pointed towards Liu Zhangqing.

This was the plan they had come up with right from the beginning. Everyone would gather together as quickly as possible after entering the Dragon Arena so that they could gain an advantage in numbers first, avoiding separate battles and being defeated individually.

With Li Qingshan's speed of flight, it would not take him very long to reach where they converged. Being together with them would without a doubt assist him. However, after a moment of consideration, Li Qingshan stowed the glazed ball away.

He was absolutely confident that his current position had already been sold out. Once his enemies gathered enough force, they would rush over without the slightest hesitation; a battle to the death would follow.

He was actually still a little worried. Once he converged with Liu Zhangqing and the others, he would cause troubles for all of them. I'd still be better off dealing with my own problems by myself! Let's see whether it's actually you who destroys me, or it's actually me who massacres your disciples and grand disciples!

Si Qing's voice suddenly rang out from the sky. "Thank you all for participating. In order to give you the opportunity to unleash your full strength, there will be no one monitoring your actions. You are welcome to use everything you have to obtain medals, as well as other spoils of battle so that you can guarantee your final victory."

“I’d like to say that in here, not everyone will survive the ten days, but none of the dead or the weak are worth any sympathy. Only the living, the strong, can survive. For the sake of this path of cultivation, fight and kill with everything you have!”

Without a doubt, he said that to establish the atmosphere of the chaotic battle, which cast a shadow over everyone’s hearts. Even the naive optimists suddenly felt the competition probably would not be as simple as it originally seemed.

“In other words, no matter who kills who, it’s all within the rules?”

Li Qingshan sneered in response to this statement of ill intent. He sat down on the top of the mountain and sent his soul sense into the Three Absolutes Calligraphy in his possession, beginning the refinement.

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This was a forest of jagged stone that aligned with the spiritual qi of the world, forming a natural maze-like formation. Faint, white mist permeated the place, making the strange rocks resemble vicious demons and beasts. If a mortal were to set foot in it, they would definitely be trapped in there for the rest of their lives.

It originally existed on the boundary between the Dragon province and the Harmony province. Si Qing had collected it for the Dragon Arena. Afterwards, a formation master consolidated it, which made it a special battleground.

A young disciple of the school of Yin-yang currently carried a compass, finding his way. He was not anxious at all. Instead, he smiled confidently. Apart from being skilled in divination, the school of Yin-yang was rather knowledgeable in destroying formations, and he happened to be among the best of the best.

The heavens are basically smiling at me! I can both advance on the offence and retreat on the defence with this place. As long as I grasp the operation pattern of this formation, I’ll be able to use this favourable geography to my advantage. If I fail with my attacks, I can retreat into the formation. Even Foundation Establishment cultivators can’t do anything to me if they don’t understand the wonders of this formation!

Right as he thought of that, a black shadow suddenly shot towards him. Frantic, he was unable to dodge in time, and the black shadow brushed past him. Looking back, the black shadow had already vanished into the forest of stone.

He was still shaken. He was not even certain whether that was a person at all. If it were a human, the black shadow was a little too small. He took another step forward before suddenly collapsing on the ground, noticing tremendous pain from his waist. He had been completely reduced into two, bisected along his waist while alive. His internal organs flowed out with his blood.

“Aahh!!!” In a panic, he let out a deafening scream, but it was absorbed by the forest of stone and unable to travel particularly far away.

He managed to calm down after great difficulty. Before he could even think about whether the black shadow was responsible for this, he reached for his recovery medicine in a hurry, only to discover that

the hundred treasures pouch that was supposed to be on his waist had already vanished. His heart immediately sank.

With his cultivation at the ninth layer of Qi Practitioner and the fact that he was not a disciple of the school of Medicine, it was impossible for him to heal a wound like that by himself. Moreover, a strange power had been imbued into the horrific wound along his waist. It had completely died off the moment he had been cut apart, unable to heal.

“Save me! I want to leave!”

However, there obviously was no reply. If he wanted to leave here, then he had to wait ten days. All he could do was watch helplessly as he bled, soaking the soil around him and waiting for the arrival of death in pain. In despair, he began screaming again.

He struggled to understand why the black shadow wanted to kill him. If he wanted his medal, then he could have given it to him. Suddenly, he remembered what Si Qing had said—only the strong could survive!

The black shadow moved through the forest of stone like it was its own backyard. He was one of the fighters from the banquet that night, the dwarf. His expression seemed as relaxed as if he had just crushed an ant.

It was a battle that his victory was originally guaranteed in, but he ended up losing, directly allowing Li Qingshan to choose an advantageous battleground for the final battle. He was believed to be the reason for their defeat, so he suffered severe punishment from Si Qing. He felt furious inside, so he was especially vicious when he struck.

Very soon, he arrived at the centre of the forest of stone. A few people were already waiting there. Every single one of them was a Foundation Establishment cultivator, and they all gave off a faint aura of murderousness. Their leader happened to be the scarred man who wielded the high grade arcane artifact, the Earth Shattering Hammer of the Eight Directions.

The dwarf asked, “How’s the prey?”

“He’s still on the snow mountain. He hasn’t moved yet.”

The scarred man’s eyes seemed to be able to see through space, allowing him to see Li Qingshan’s location. As the owner of this Dragon Arena, it was far too easy for Si Qing to cheat.

They had a total of three missions this time. The first was to provoke the cultivators into killing each other, the second was to take back as many medals as possible, and the last was to kill Li Qingshan. They were relatively confident with the first two missions, while the last mission was the most troublesome.

“Is he the person they’re converging towards?”

“No, the cultivators of the Clear River prefecture haven’t approached him. They’re gathering around another person. He seems to be the only one there as if he’s waiting for us!”

“Waiting for us! We have nineteen Foundation Establishment cultivators. Doesn’t he know?”

“Perhaps it’s exactly because he knows that he’s chosen to remain there, wanting to deal with us all alone. It’s like what his highness had guessed. He’s an arrogant bastard!”

The scarred man swung his Earth Shattering Hammer of the Eight Directions viciously, striking the ground with a great boom. The ground shook and fierce winds filled the surroundings.

“He’s probably treating us like the trash from the school of Novels!”

A cold, sinister light flashed through the dwarf’s eyes. He had witnessed Li Qingshan’s battle against eight other people, but he did not find it particularly impressive. He alone could slaughter eight pieces of trash who did not know how to fight at all.

“He’s underestimating us, but that’s for the best. I’ll definitely smash him into mince meat!”

“When do we set off?”

“Wait until everyone has assembled. That was his highness’ orders!”

No one dared to defy Si Qing’s orders, so they waited in the forest of stone, preparing to gather all of their strength and tear Li Qingshan to shreds. As for the several hundred Qi Practitioners who were relatively weaker under Si Qing and the others’ command, they had already entered this huge, chaotic battle, making sure to stir up a lot of turmoil.

Hua Chenglu raised her head and looked around, but she could not see the sky. Layers above layers of leaves completely blocked off the light. The surroundings were as dark as night. She took out the glazed ball and began travelling in the direction of the needle before suddenly halting.

“Come out!”

There was a rustle in the tree canopy, and a man in black flew down. A sliver of surprise flashed through his eyes. There were plenty of pretty women among cultivators, but such great beauty was rare. However, he immediately recovered his composure and said coldly.

“Hand over your medal!”

Hua Chenglu frowned. The enemy was a tenth layer Qi Practitioner, far more powerful than her. And, from the way he was dressed, he should have been Si Qing’s subordinate, so he was probably even more difficult to deal with than regular tenth layer Qi Practitioners.

The man in black was not expecting to obtain her medal with just that. Right when he was about to strike, an item flew towards him. It was not fast, so he caught it with ease. It was exactly the medal he wanted, which left him surprised.

“Take it and move aside!”

Hua Chenglu had never really cared about the value of the medals. Let alone a thousand spiritual stones, even if they were worth ten thousand spiritual stones, so what? If Si Qing had not passed an order with his identity as the Marquis of Ruyi and made all the disciples of the academy take part, Hua Chengzan would have never let her set foot in this Dragon Arena.

If she began fighting here, it would definitely attract a lot of attention. Her priority was still to gather with everyone else. She could always find her lost medal again.

“Hold on! Your hundred treasures pouch too!” The man in black’s lips curled. The cultivators of the Ruyi commandery sure are naive. It’s no wonder his highness wants us to teach them a lesson.

Chapter 636 - A Bunch of Trash

“You want to rob me?”

Hua Chenglu’s frown deepened. The dark, moist jungle suddenly became lurking with killing intent. The twisted, gnarled roots and vines that draped down from above all sprung alive like snakes.

This was a wood element cultivator. He smiled. “Who knows whether you’re hiding medals or not!”

“I just came in here, so how am I supposed to have a second medal?” Hua Chenglu was furious, and she noticed that the situation was rather wrong. If he were a regular cultivator, he would not have badgered her anymore after obtaining her medal.

“I need to check just in case. If you refuse, I’ll have to take action. Of course, I’ll have to look through your body too.” The cultivator in black licked his lips and smiled with ill intention.

“Go die!” Hua Chenglu took out a scarlet talisman. It turned into a raging ball of fire and rushed towards the cultivator in black. The vines and roots hissed from the heat, all receding.

Boom! Fire rushed through the canopy of leaves. A flower of flames bloomed in the endless sea of trees.

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After saying that, Si Qing directly waved his hand, and the images that displayed the situation inside the Dragon Arena vanished. The Dragon Arena had completely become a sealed-off black box.

“Your highness, how can you say that? Aren’t you basically asking for our cultivation community of the Ruyi commandery to kill one another?”

An old man in violet was surprised and furious on the Soaring Clouds terrace, questioning Si Qing loudly. The other Golden Core cultivators changed in expression as well, unable to understand what benefit Si Qing could derive from this.

Not only had the regular cultivators failed to anticipate that danger might have existed in the Dragon Arena, even these Golden Core cultivators had never expected it. A desperate battle like this would drastically diminish the strength of the cultivation community in the Ruyi commandery, and it would make Si Qing lose all of his prestige. He had to cough up tremendous amounts of resources too. There was basically only detriment.

Without the knowledge of how an Asura Field was refined, even the most clever people in the world could not guess Si Qing’s intentions, let alone imagine he would make a decision like this.

Originally, under the circumstances where they could spectate the situation in the Dragon Arena, the cultivators would definitely hold back a little when they fought inside. Otherwise, even if the rules permitted it, they would come off as overly vicious, and they could completely fall out with a certain

aristocratic clan or sect if they were careless, leading to endless problems. The spectatorship of these people formed an invisible restraint, preventing the situation from spiralling out of control.

Once this surveillance was gone, the clashes and battles between cultivators could very easily turn into a bloody slaughter. Originally, this was something that no one wanted to see, but there was one exception.

Si Qing turned around slowly with a smile of amazement on his face. "What a bunch of trash!" Putting up with Northmoon had already worn away his patience long ago. Now that he had achieved his objective, he immediately revealed his vicious true colours.

Right from the very beginning, he never had any plans to properly administer the Ruyi commandery like Jiang Fu and treat it like family estate that he could pass down through the generations. Instead, he wanted to use all the resources that the Ruyi commandery could offer to increase his strength. He was even willing to kill the golden goose and leech everything the Ruyi commandery had, leaving it crippled.

In simpler terms, a cultivator's world still referred to personal strength. So-called "power" and "influence" did possess their value, but absolute strength could completely overlook power and influence.

If killing all the Golden Core cultivators before him could guarantee Si Qing in undergoing the third heavenly tribulation and reach the realm of kings, he would definitely do so without batting an eye. And, as long as he succeeded, not only would the imperial clan leave him unpunished, but they would even find ways to cover this up for him.

"What did you say?!" To be able to reach Golden Core, none of the cultivators present were untalented. They had reached their current position under countless praise. The term "trash" was far too foreign and distant to them.

Si Qing waved his hand. "I'm helping you train your disciples, yet you spout so much indecisive nonsense! If you aren't trash, then what are you?"

"Si Qing, you're a proper prince. Do you still think you can continue with the position of marquis by insulting us like this?"

"Open the Dragon Arena and let out all of our disciples!"

The Golden Core cultivators finally responded, feeling fury from the depths of their heart. They began to glow, radiating with alarming auras that rushed into the clouds.

During the battle of Burial Mound Mountain, the Golden Core cultivators who fell in battle all belonged to the Academy of the Hundred Schools. The orthodox forces that belonged to the Great Xia empire had been heavily weakened. If it were not for Gu Yanying's presence, the sects would have taken advantage of the situation and boldly expanded a long time ago.

As a result, most of the Golden Core cultivators who had been invited to the Soaring Clouds terrace belonged to sects. There were a few Golden Core cultivators that belonged to the academy. However, due to Si Qing's identity as a prince, they had to remain silent. And, all they could do was stand on the side of the "Marquis of Ruyi" if they truly began fighting. They all looked at Gu Yanying for help.

These Golden Core cultivators from sects were not particularly worried about Si Qing's identity, but they were rather fearful of Gu Yanying. Gu Yanying had spent many years in the Ruyi commandery. Her power and influence was much greater than the recently arrived Si Qing.

If she stood on Si Qing's side, then Si Bao definitely would not simply watch on, and the Golden Core cultivators of the academy would be forced to follow her lead. Just like that, the difference between their strength would not be so great anymore, and they might have to accept this slap to the face.

To Si Qing, Gu Yanying's attitude was extremely important too. For a moment, everyone's gazes gathered on Gu Yanying.

"A'qing insists on taking it his own way, so how can I stop you!" Gu Yanying strolled over and arrived on the edge of the terrace, deciding to keep her nose out of this. Si Bao obviously followed over.

Although hearing her refer to him as A'qing caused Si Qing frown a little, her decision to not interfere made him ease up slightly. His largest problem had already been dealt with.

"The scenery here is quite nice! You're all welcome to take a look!"

Gu Yanying turned around and called towards the Golden Core cultivators of the academy. They were all relieved. They bowed towards Si Qing indifferently and politely before arriving by Gu Yanying's side. Although they were forced to acknowledge Si Qing's identity, none of them recognised him from the bottom of their heart.

The cultivators from the sects all riled up with vigour. Sure enough, Gu Yanying was not with him. Given that, their enemy were only three people, but they did all come from the Dragon province. They could not be underestimated. Moreover, this prince's identity was a little troublesome.

"Oi, why are the two of you still there?" Gu Yanying then said, referring to Jia Zhen and E Dan.

"As you wish, commander." Jia Zhen waved his black feather fan as he smiled, leaving Si Qing behind and walking over. E Dan followed closely behind with his hands by his side, glancing back at the sect cultivators and grinning hideously.

Like that, only Si Qing remained to face these Golden Core cultivators. They all looked at one another with no idea what Si Qing was trying to do.

"Yanying truly be the one who knows me!" Si Qing praised her loudly. Then his face sank. "You've spent all these days eating and drinking, watching those boring matches. You must be tired of it already!"

"What are you trying to say? You want us to compete against you one by one? Don't even think about it!" None of them were idiots. With Si Qing's cultivation at peak Golden Core and his cultivation method from the imperial clan, probably no one present was his opponent in a one-against-one battle.

"I don't have the time to take on trash one by one. Come at me together! Your opponent is only me! You fear Northmoon just because he defeated a group of Daemon Commanders. From today onwards, you will fear me too!"

Si Qing's eyes blazed fervently. Watching duels could never surpass the delight that came from personally taking part.

On the Soaring Clouds terrace, a streak of black light shot into the sky. Over a dozen streaks of light, all varying in colour, followed closely behind.

Chapter 637 - The Three Graves, Five Classics, Eight Chains and Nine Mounds

The Golden Core cultivators unleashed a myriad of attacks. Some powered nine, small banners that assembled into a formation, enveloping Si Qing from above. Some used techniques, conjuring huge boulders that smashed towards Si Qing. Some formed a steel awl with their soul sense, directly attacking Si Qing's soul.

Flying swords turned into sharp streaks of light, criss-crossing through the air and sealing off Si Qing's ability to maneuver about. Even without any practice, their cooperation was flawless. They were determined to teach Si Qing a lesson.

A dragon's roar rang out endlessly, originating from the horizon.

Si Qing transformed into a black dragon around a hundred meters in length, complete with scales and claws. He burst through formations and the light, moving about freely above the city. With a sweep of his tail, he sent a Golden Core cultivator flying.

Gu Yanying said, "I never expected him to have reached such a level with the Black Emperor Dragon Classic. It's no wonder he's ranked eleventh."

The imperial clan of Great Xia had many supreme cultivation methods, which were known as the Three Graves, Five Classics, Eight Chains and Nine Mounds. The Black Emperor Dragon Classic that Si Qing practised was one of the Five Classics. It was an extraordinary cultivation method. Not only could it be practised to the realm of kings, but it could also allow the cultivator to directly ascend from this world. It was extremely powerful.

To regular Golden Core cultivators, possessing a cultivation method that could be practised to Soul Nascence, taking them through the third heavenly tribulation, was already everything they could hope for. They were unable to imagine the power of the Black Emperor Dragon Classic.

Si Bao said sternly, "With this cultivation method alone, Si Qing is undefeatable. If he wishes to fight, then he can fight. If he wishes to leave, then he can leave. No one can stop him."

The Golden Core cultivators refused to back down. They unleashed their ultimate techniques, hurling devastating attacks that could split mountains and sever rivers towards the black dragon.

The black dragon's colossal body suddenly shrank to an extremely small size, only a few meters long, avoiding most of the attacks. The dragon could be prominent or obscure, large or small. It could be large enough to usher the clouds and small enough to be almost invisible.

It was rumored that when this cultivation method was practised to its limit, the cultivator could turn into the size of a mustard seed, allowing them to directly pass through all obstructions, whether it be fire, water, mountains, or rocks. Si Qing had yet to reach that level, so he could not avoid some of the attacks, but none of them were able to pierce his black scales.

After missing, some of the powerful attacks flew off into the distance, while others directly flew towards the estate below. The Golden Core cultivators had become carried away with the battle, so why would

they still care about the lives of mortals? Guarding the land and leading the citizens was not their responsibility.

It was possible to imagine that once the battle ended, the prosperous city would be reduced to ruins apart from the marquis' estate protected by formations. The population of millions would be decimated. Mortals were truly the ones to suffer in a battle among immortals.

Gu Yanying leaned against the railing and gazed composedly at the streaks of light that contained terrifying power, descending from the sky like meteors.

A black shadow suddenly swept over above. The Dragon Arena had suddenly risen up, swelling in the air and becoming something akin to a colossal island, hovering in the sky. It was also like a huge protective umbrella, absorbing all of the attacks.

“What a good plan!”

Gu Yanying smiled. The Dragon Arena had not only absorbed the attacks. It had also absorbed the blazing battle intent and raging killing intent from their battle.

As it turned out, Si Qing had intentionally aggravated them verbally so that he could fight them all alone. It was a part of his plan. And, if he worked together with E Dan and Jia Zhen, then dominating these Golden Core cultivators would be too easy, which was detrimental to the refinement of the Asura Field.

Gu Yanying turned around, and her sharp eyes passed through the various obstructions, spotting a heavy ball of darkness hiding within a dim alleyway, giving off an icy-cold and deathly aura.

If a rat had not unknowingly approached the ball of darkness and died on the spot, even she would have almost overlooked it.

He had come too!

.....

The jungle consisting of twisted roots and a blanketing canopy erupted with flames, carving out a clearing that had been burnt black. The man in black had completely vanished.

The brilliant sunlight fell from above, and the scorching winds dispersed the moist air. Withered branches that were still burning fell down. In a battle among Qi Practitioners, a scarlet talisman was enough to determine victory.

“A good dog doesn't block the way. Just because you're the prince's dog doesn't mean I'm afraid to kill you! HUUU, I can't stay here. I better leave quickly!”

Right when Hua Chengzan was about to continue on her way, she suddenly felt the ground under her feet shudder. Roots that were even denser and more packed than blood vessels in the human body burst out of the earth, squirming around like thousands of snakes and insects. They all reached over and tied her up firmly.

Within the burnt earth, the man in black leapt out, caked in rock and soil. Although he was a little dirty, making him seem rather dishevelled, he was clearly unharmed.

The moment Hua Chenglu unleashed the scarlet talisman, he had used an Earth Submerging talisman, burrowing deep underground and avoiding most of the damage. Although it was only a high grade yellow talisman and he had to find a way to burrow his way back out of the ground, it was exceptionally effective at certain times.

He was still badly shaken. He had never expected Hua Chenglu to be so vicious despite how young she was, directly using a scarlet talisman right off the bat. If his response had been a little slower earlier, he would have been blasted to fine bits. His face twisted viciously. If I let you die easily, I'd no longer be a man!

Hua Chenglu struggled hard, but how could she break free? The roots firmly tied up her hands, such that she could not even access her hundred treasures pouch. She was like a beautiful butterfly stuck in a spider's web.

The man in black walked over before suddenly hearing a violent rumble in the air. It abruptly drew closer, making him raise his head in surprise.

.....

Li Qingshan poured his soul sense deep within the Three Absolutes Calligraphy and saw a wondrous sight he had never seen before. The strokes hovered through the space like a sky full of stars. He had refined many arcane artifacts already, but this was the first time he had encountered something like this.

Sure enough, the Three Absolutes Calligraphy was not an ordinary arcane artifact. It was worth his bit of initiation!

On the snowy, windy mountain, the Three Absolutes Calligraphy shone with resplendent light as he channeled his spiritual qi into the arcane artifact. It started glowing brighter and brighter.

Beneath the snow mountain, the Qi Practitioners were currently confronting one another, clashing with their weapons and glued together in battle. Even if someone noticed the twinkling light at the top of the snow mountain, they would be in no position to pay any regard to it right now.

Battles like this unfolded throughout the entire Dragon Arena. While Si Qing's words made them stir a little inside, they did not immediately throw their lives at one another like Si Qing had wanted. They all held back.

After determining the outcome of the battle, they would utter things like, "Admirable" and "You've gone easy on me." No matter how furious or unhappy with the result they were, they all maintained the principles of the cultivation community on the surface.

As a matter of fact, there were even many Foundation Establishment cultivators who refused to fight Qi Practitioners of other schools and sects in consideration of their status. Even if they took action, they only took their medals. Never would they rob them or kill them. The standard behaviour left behind by several thousand years of peace could not be disrupted by a few words from a certain person.

Si Qing seemed to have made a miscalculation in this aspect. This was not the Dragon province after all. There was not an atmosphere for those bloody battles. Although the cultivators were not exactly righteous, they were not demonic cultivators.

Sure enough, they're trash from top to bottom. They have no idea what guts and killing intent are. Even after coming so far, these old bastards refuse to kill me. Only that Li Qingshan has got some backbone. Looks like I have to use that move!

Si Qing who danced through the air as a black dragon split off a part of his focus as he clashed with the Golden Core cultivators.

In the Dragon Arena, there was a flash of blood-red light. Throughout the battlefields, the azure skies became coated in a layer of blood-red. The blood-red colour was so weak that even cultivators would struggle to notice anything different when they stared at it attentively.

Suddenly, Li Qingshan opened his eyes, raised his head, and looked at the sky. He only saw thick, frozen clouds and the howling wind and snow. In that moment earlier, the tiger demon suppressed by the spirit turtle and resting in his sea of consciousness let out a deep growl.

Boundless killing intent loomed over, but the killing intent was far too thin and chaotic. There was not a clear source, nor did it specifically target him.

What's that kid Si Qing doing now?

Li Qingshan shut his eyes again as he thought of that, plunging his mind into the Three Absolutes Calligraphy. He had never stopped channelling spiritual qi into the arcane artifact during the process.

The Three Absolutes Calligraphy was like a whale taking in water, greedily accepting his spiritual qi. Only when thirty percent of his sea of qi had emptied out did it stop. Its glow reached the limit.

Li Qingshan was mildly surprised. He was at peak Foundation Establishment, and his spiritual qi surpassed regular Foundation Establishment cultivators. The Three Absolutes Calligraphy was only a mid grade arcane artifact! Before he could think too much about it, he knew the storm was about to arrive from his experience with refining the Cursive Sword Calligraphy in the past.

Sure enough, all of the spiritual qi in the Three Absolutes Calligraphy was converted into sharp sword Qi in that moment, running up against the flow through his meridians and raging violently through his body.

At the same time, in the empty world filled with various brush strokes, the strokes suddenly swelled up and became full like they had been filled with air. They hurtled towards him together with extremely sharp sword intent.

Li Qingshan seemed to see the Five Absolutes Sword Immortal wielding his brush as a sword, waving it around madly after drinking. Although it was almost illusionary, he had absolutely no doubts that if these brush strokes struck him, his soul would definitely suffer severe damage.

Against a pincer attack like this from inside and outside, he would be heavily injured even if he managed to survive if he were a regular Foundation Establishment cultivator.

His body shuddered and his muscles rippled, becoming a hundred times tougher than rock. His shut eyes became scarlet red for a moment. The sword Qi rampaged through his body, but it was unable to burst through the body of the ox demon that was as heavy as a mountain. He forcefully guided them into his sea of qi.

However, they continued to stir up waves in his sea of qi like huge fish. Not only did the sword Qi fail to weaken, but they instead became sharper and swifter after absorbing even more spiritual qi.

If he were a regular Foundation Establishment cultivator, then all he could do was watch helplessly as his spiritual qi was siphoned away before being forcefully ripped apart by the sword Qi. And, before this, his consciousness would already be torn apart by the sword intent. Who would have thought refining a mid grade arcane artifact would hide such terrifying danger?

The Spirit Turtle Suppresses the Seas!

Li Qingshan bellowed inside, and the spirit turtle's daemon core sank down into the sea of qi, suppressing all of the sword qi. The spirit turtle's figure that had directly appeared in his sea of consciousness blocked all of the sword intent.

Originally, he thought he had succeeded already with this, but the Three Absolutes Calligraphy showed no signs of being refined. With a thought, the figure of the tiger demon leapt out, opening its gaping mouth and swallowing all the sword intent.

Success!

Chapter 638 - Incomplete Sword

As the tiger demon swallowed all of the sword intent, the many strokes that contained either vast, profound, heavy, or graceful sword intent gathered towards a single point at the same time, vaguely forming a book. The book detailed a supreme way of the sword, but it turned into nothingness before Li Qingshan could even look through it.

In the end, all of the strokes linked up with one another like building blocks, forming the black body of a sword. It roughly stretched from the tip of the sword to the sword's centre, but it was incomplete.

The radiant glow on the Three Absolutes Calligraphy immediately began to subside. Li Qingshan opened his eyes, only to see the scroll was no longer covered in criss-crossing strokes. Instead, it formed an incomplete sword like the sword in his sea of consciousness.

The strands of obstinate and unruly sword qi in his sea of qi automatically merged together. There were now three identical swords, one on the scroll, one in his sea of consciousness, and one in his dantian. They all possessed the essence of calligraphy, painting, and the sword.

So this is what the Three Absolutes Calligraphy originally looked like. The complete Three Absolutes Calligraphy must be depicting a sword, but after being separated, all the brush strokes were split up, which lead to a marvellous combination of strokes like that.

Refining the Three Absolutes Calligraphy is basically even more dangerous than confronting a Golden Core cultivator. If I hadn't practised the Nine Transformations of the Demonic and Divine, I probably would have been done for!

Li Qingshan relaxed the spirit turtle's suppression, and the incomplete sword in his dantian automatically began absorbing spiritual qi again. He was mildly surprised, but he discovered very soon that this absorption could be controlled. And, as it continued, the sword Qi would become sharper.

He could recover spiritual qi very quickly anyway with the Arts of the Boundless Ocean, so he allowed the incomplete sword to absorb spiritual qi. He ingested a pill that could recover spiritual qi and waited to see how far it could grow.

At this moment, he felt a ball of spiritual qi rapidly approach him. The surrounding temperature suddenly plummeted.

Are they finally here?

He raised his head and looked around. A blue ball of ice descended from above, wrapped in a cold current.

However, the strange part was the ice ball did not target him. Instead, it landed far away at the foot of the mountain, kicking up an icy storm and swallowing the space within around a hundred meters.

A Qi Practitioner reacted a little slowly and was sucked in. Immediately, he was reduced to an ice statue before turning into dust. Even the spiritual artifact sword in his hand was not spared.

What powerful coldness.

Li Qingshan travelled through the wind and snow and made his way down, smashing apart the tough ball of ice. He removed a translucent, beautiful snowflake from the very centre. This seems to be a technique of the Ice Couple palace. With how powerful it is, it's definitely from a Golden Core cultivator!

He vaguely recalled seeing a frosty woman on the Soaring Clouds terrace. She was probably the master of the Ice Couple palace, but because she was only at early Golden Core, he had not paid too much attention to her.

Is something happening outside?

Li Qingshan was clueless about Asura Fields, so he was unable to guess the reason behind this. He wanted to send his clone over to take a look, which would also give him an additional card he could use in emergencies. However, the clone was currently refining the water with the Water God Seal, so he refused to take this risk.

Fortunately, the carp he had named as Li'l Red happened to be circling around his clone, asking for pills to eat as it splashed around. He came up with an idea and said, "Open up your mouth!"

Li'l Red immediately opened his huge mouth. His blank eyes seemed to be filled with anticipation.

Li Qingshan sealed off the Water God Seal's aura and left some of his soul sense in there before tossing it into Li'l Red's mouth. "You sure are lucky. Hurry up and swim back to Moon Court lake! If you lose it, hmph, have you heard of a dish called sweet and sour carp?"

Li'l Red opened his huge mouth again as if he wanted to try out the taste of that dish.

Smack! Li Qingshan slapped his head. "That means I'll be throwing you into the pot!"

Li'l Red immediately dove into the water. His figure rapidly shrank to the size of a regular carp, turning into a red smear and swimming towards Moon Court lake.

Right now, the forces of the human cultivators were all caught up in the commandery city, while he had beat up the entire Daemon race of the Ruyi commandery until they feared him. Basically, everyone would be either fleeing or surrendering at the rumor of his arrival in all the regions of water he had refined.

He was unable to think of any ignorant bastard who would be bold enough to intercept and kill his subordinate. After dealing with this, his clone took off, directly plunging into the depths of the clouds and flying towards the commandery city.

Beneath the huge snow mountain, Li Qingshan thought in confusion, Don't those guys want to kill me? Why are they taking so long?

He could not be bothered with remaining here and waiting for them, and he only possessed half of his spiritual qi now under the absorption of the incomplete sword. Although he was confident he could slaughter them all, even a lion would use its full strength to catch a rabbit, so he might as well walk around and go elsewhere. He could think about it once he recovered his spiritual qi.

In the maze-like formation of the stone forest, eighteen Foundation Establishment cultivators had already gathered together. Someone said impatiently, "Why isn't the fire barbarian here yet?" "Yeah, with his cultivation, he should have arrived long ago!"

The scarred man said, "Looks like he's not planning to converge with us!"

The dwarf said, "The barbarian has no concept of teamwork. We'd do better without him. We're not waiting for him anymore. Let's go!"

"Hmm? The prey has begun to move, and he's moving very quickly. Chase him!"

.....

Hua Chenglu also heard the whistle from the distant horizon. Through the circular clearing in the canopy, she saw greyish-white, house-sized boulders. One of them flew over in their direction.

The man in black's eyes became filled with shock. He could not be bothered with dealing with Hua Chenglu anymore. He used another Earth Submerging talisman and burrowed deep into the ground.

Rumble! The huge boulder smashed against the ground. The ground was like a huge drum that had just been struck viciously, creating a giant crater. A shockwave that spread out in all directions followed. Such power definitely was not as simple as a boulder falling out of the sky. It had been imbued with the powerful spiritual qi of a Golden Core cultivator.

Hua Chenglu was not unlucky enough for the boulder to directly smash into her, but the boulder landed only a few dozen meters away. She felt her body shake as even her bones became numb. The shockwave tore over in an unstoppable manner, sending her flying into the sky.

Only a single boulder failed to strike the ground. Instead, it happened to hurtle towards the great banyan tree in the centre of the sea of trees, caught by the interwoven sun vines and crushed to pieces.

"Ouch!"

Hua Chenglu groaned and sat up in a pile of dead wood. She felt her entire body ache painfully. She removed the protective talisman on her neck; it had already been completely destroyed. If this protective talisman had not automatically activated at a critical time, it would have been horrible.

The ground nearby shifted, and the cultivator in black crawled out. As he laid on the ground, he vomited blood mouthful after mouthful. He had used the same move, but he had miscalculated drastically this time.

The shockwave was merely a wave of air generated from the collision, but the tremors the boulder created possessed the powers of a Golden Core cultivator. By hiding underground, his organs were shaken to pieces, sustaining extremely severe internal injuries.

Hua Chenglu immediately felt like her body had stopped aching. She leapt up from the ground and unleashed a flying blade, swinging viciously towards the man in black's head.

"Haha, go die, you ground beetle!"

"The one who'll die is you!"

Chapter 639 - Live Bait

The man in black rolled against the ground, making the flying blade miss. He had already shoved a pill into his mouth. The flying blade turned around and pressed towards him again.

Roar!

He let out a beast-like growl as his legs erupted with alarming power, rushing towards Hua Chenglu with speed that completely surpassed what Qi Practitioners could possess.

He had consumed a pill that could unleash the potential of his body. It was unavoidable that pills like these came with side effects, but he was forced to use it now that he faced a life-or-death situation. If Hua Chenglu took out another scarlet talisman, his life would be in danger. Meanwhile, he primarily practised the wood element, which specialised in healing and nourishment. He could take his time and recover after this.

Hua Chenglu's mouth opened slightly, taken aback. She no longer wanted to kill the cultivator in black anymore. She kicked off the ground with her slender legs, and she had already rushed into the air. A pair of beautiful wings unfolded on her back as she climbed higher and higher.

The wings were made from overlapping metal plates, a crystallisation of the mechanical arts of mohism. Then she painted them according to her tastes, which made them seem like a pair of real wings.

Regular Qi Practitioners all lacked methods to fly high in the sky. As long as she reached a certain altitude, he could not touch her. However, it went without saying that the pair of wings had come at a lofty price.

The moment she was about to fly out of the sea of trees, her ankle suddenly tightened. A verdant vine had wrapped around it, the spiritual artifact that belonged to the man in black. He tugged hard. "Get down here!"

“Ahh!” Hua Chenglu screamed and fell out of the sky. A thick, powerful hand gripped her slender neck firmly.

“Why don’t you keep running!?” The man in black smiled viciously. His face was bulging with veins, which made him seem terrifying. A great difference existed in their cultivation and experience in the first place. After consuming the pill that unleashed the potential of his body, the man in black possessed a crushing advantage.

“If you kill me... my elder brother won’t spare you!” A sliver of pain appeared on Hua Chenglu’s beautiful face, but her gaze was as stubborn as ever.

“Kill you? Don’t worry, I can’t bring myself to part with you just yet! I’ll find a secretive location and process you slowly. We still have ten days! By the time your elder brother finds you, you’ll already be a corpse and completely bare!”

Hua Chenglu could not help but become afraid. If that was the fate awaiting her, she would much rather die right now. Was he really a cultivator?

“Big brother, where are you?”

“Cough cough, your actual brother isn’t here, but there is a big brother Li!”

At this moment, the man in black heard a voice from behind. Hua Chenglu’s eyes suddenly lit up. “Big brother Li!”

The man in black suddenly turned around and saw the speaker. He was a large, tall, young man, who currently stared at him like he was a corpse. His face immediately changed. “L- Li Qingshan... don’t come over, if you come over, I’ll...”

Before he could finish, he saw a flash, and Li Qingshan had already arrived before him. He casually smacked the man in black’s shoulder, and he immediately collapsed on the ground like his bones had vanished from his body.

Hua Chenglu also fell down with him, almost hitting the ground, but Li Qingshan managed to catch her by the waist. He asked in concern, “Are you alright?”

Although her protective talisman protected her, the blow from the boulder earlier still caused her some injury. However, amidst a nerve-wracking battle, she was in no shape to tend to them. Now that the threat was eliminated and her mind eased up, her body began to ache all over again.

Only when water spiritual qi channeled out from Li Qingshan’s hand did she feel much better. She coughed dryly and rubbed her neck. “I was almost in trouble. Fortunately, you made it in time, big br-commander Li!”

“How’d I become commander so quickly?” Li Qingshan smiled. He had become acquainted with her very early on. Although they did not have much contact back then, he did have a very good impression of her. Now that the young girl of the past had become a great beauty, he could not help but sigh over the passage of time.

“If you don’t mind my cultivation being too weak, I’ll just continue calling you that then!”

Hua Chenglu stuck out her tongue, a little embarrassed. The current Li Qingshan could no longer be compared to the past. An invisible chasm existed between their cultivations, while their identities and statuses were already worlds apart. Seeing how he still remembered their old relationship and did not look down on her, she was delighted. She asked in confusion, "Big brother Li, how did you know I was here?"

It was not a coincidence that Li Qingshan had shown up here. In order to recover his spiritual qi as fast as possible, he had specially come looking for the great banyan tree, planning on collecting some tree sap to drink like the dwarf. He happened to hear Hua Chenglu's cries, so he rushed over.

"So it's here. Fortunately, you came, or who knew what would have happened," Hua Chenglu said, still badly shaken. Then she became furious and sent her flying blade towards the man in black who had collapsed on the ground.

"Hold on! I still have a use for him!" Li Qingshan grabbed her flying blade and removed the hundred treasures pouch from the man in black, as well as two medals. He tossed them to Hua Chenglu. "Compensation for the mental harm this bastard has caused you."

With a wave of his hand, a white cloud descended slowly. It was filled with people, and from how they were dressed, they were all Si Qing's subordinates. There were a dozen or two of them. Although none of them moved, they were all still alive.

These were the prisoners Li Qingshan had captured along the way. He casually tossed the man in black into the pile and said in thought, "This should be enough!"

Hua Chenglu asked in surprise, "Big brother Li, what are you doing?"

"Feeding the tree!"

"Feeding the tree?"

"I should say feeding the vines to be more accurate. It's quite a long story, so I'm not going to bother with explaining myself. I'm going to go, so you better go and converge with everyone else!" Li Qingshan stepped onto the cloud. Hua Chenglu grabbed him by the sleeve. "Big brother Li, can I come with you?"

"Hmm? There might be danger if you come with me!" Li Qingshan said. Who knew when those people would rush over to kill him.

"I'm not afraid. I'm begging you!" Hua Chenglu brought her palms together and pleaded.

"Fine then. Get on!"

Li Qingshan thought about it and felt it was rather unsuitable for Hua Chenglu to cross through so many battlefields alone. He had seen along the way that the battles between the cultivators had suddenly become extremely intense. He had to collect the tree sap as quickly as possible before sending her over to Liu Zhangqing.

He let Hua Chenglu onto the cloud and flew over to the great banyan tree. Collecting tree sap was anything but easy. He had to pass through the crazy sun vines first.

However, as a cultivator, he was not exactly faster than the dwarf in terms of speed. He was much larger and taller too, which only made it even more difficult to maneuver between the sun vines. Moreover, he did not have a good understanding of the attack patterns of the sun vines yet, so he refused to make an attempt rashly, just in case he accidentally used his powers as a daemon and gave himself away.

As a result, he came up with this idea. He would use these people as bait to draw away the attacks of the sun vines, and then he would strike while they covered him.

Hua Chenglu gasped. "So big!"

"Throw this guy over and see what happens!" Li Qingshan picked up the man in black and handed him to Hua Chenglu. He wanted to test out how responsive the sun vines would be, and this would basically be letting her kill her enemy with her own hands!

The man was immobilised, but his eyes were filled with fright. He obviously understood the terror of the sun vines.

"Is this feeding the tree?" Hua Chenglu lifted up the man in black happily before lowering him again. "Can you climb a little higher with the cloud?"

"Why?"

"There are trees underneath to soften his fall. I'm afraid he won't fall to his death!"

"Haha, don't worry. He's guaranteed to die. If he survives, you can just toss him again!"

Hua Chenglu adjusted the man in black's position so that he faced the tree. With a yelp, she tossed him towards the great banyan tree as hard as she could. After all, she was also a cultivator. Even though she was only a Qi Practitioner, tossing out something that weighed a few dozen kilograms was still very easy. The man in black hurtled towards the tree.

Swish! A sun vine as thick as an arm pierced him immediately, wrapping around him a few times and reducing him to a dried corpse in the blink of an eye.

Hua Chenglu covered her mouth. Never did she expect the vines to be so powerful, and it had only been a relatively thinner sun vine that had responded earlier. The huge sun vines that wrapped around the tree trunk like dragons did not even move. It was as if they could not be bothered with such small prey.

"That's a little unideal!"

Li Qingshan rubbed his chin in thought. Suddenly, he came up with an idea and picked up a prisoner, tossing him out. He threw out the person even slower than Hua Chenglu. The prisoner in the air let out a roar of despair and circulated his true qi desperately, wanting to escape in the opposite direction.

When Li Qingshan threw him out, he released the seal on him as well.

Immediately, over a dozen sun vines responded. One of them was as thick as Hua Chenglu's waist—of course, it was only so thick, but it was still an improvement.

"I see!" Li Qingshan smiled and kicked the cloud, springing all the people into the air. He struck out several times, sending them off in different directions while releasing their seals. They knew they were

probably done for, but all of them put up a fervent struggle before impending death, circulating their true qi at full strength.

Several hundred sun vines began to dance about madly. Li Qingshan was about to charge in when he heard a bellow from behind, "Li Qingshan!" When the first syllable had been yelled out, the voice was still far away, but it had already pressed to five kilometers away by the last.

Li Qingshan looked back. The Foundation Establishment cultivators from the marquis' estate had arrived. Seeing how Li Qingshan was using their subordinates and disciples as live bait to feed the golden vines, they were all furious.

The dwarf used a movement talisman and shot off towards Li Qingshan as a streak of light. He could tell what Li Qingshan was planning at first glance. He could not allow him to collect the tree sap and recover his spiritual qi.

As long as he kept him busy for a moment, he could stop him right before the great banyan tree and cut off all of his escape routes. If he tried barging in recklessly, then all the dwarf had to do was interfere with the movement patterns of the sun vines a little, and he would not be emerging again. This was a move he had learnt from the duel last time.

Li Qingshan never expected them to arrive at such an inconvenient time either. He frowned slightly, grabbing Hua Chenglu and rushed towards the great banyan tree.

The dwarf lit up with delight and cursed, "Idiot!" He was about to interfere with the sun vines a little, only to see a strange sword suddenly appearing in Li Qingshan's hand, being swung at him from afar.

The sword qi that absorbed half of Li Qingshan's spiritual qi flowed from his dantian to his arm. Then it headed to the Traitorous Demon sword, becoming even sharper before whistling towards the dwarf.

"Do you think a move like that is effective against me?" He was about to dodge when he felt a terrifying sword intent directly enter his sea of consciousness, making him seize up for a moment. He experienced life-threatening danger. He activated his protective arcane artifact instinctively and brought his dagger before him to block.

Chapter 640 - Eating the Tree

After slashing out, Li Qingshan rushed towards the great banyan tree without looking back. A few sun vines swept towards him, but he hesitated with the Traitorous Demon sword in his hand. He did not lash out. Two streams of water sprayed out from the soles of his feet like two elongated tracks. He abruptly turned and slid to one side with the momentum.

Hua Chenglu could hear the sun vines whistling past her ears. She glanced behind at the group of almost twenty Foundation Establishment cultivators in pursuit, and her heart leapt into her throat. Only now did she understand what he meant by she might be in danger if she came with him.

This was not simply danger. This was basically almost certain doom.

Although he had erased his aura, over a dozen sun vines still swept over, almost completely sealing off his path forward and only leaving a gap the size of a skylight. The small dwarf could pass through it with ease, but he was in trouble.

“Hang onto me tightly!”

Hua Chenglu felt her waist tighten, having been grabbed by his large hand. She went from being carried on his side to being carried in his arms. His other hand passed by her perky bottom and grabbed her legs. Before she could even think about it, she clung onto him firmly out of instinct, pressing her face against his chest and becoming wrapped in a strong, masculine smell.

Li Qingshan took a step back and waves surged from under his feet. The two of them were vertical, with their heads forward and legs back, spinning as they passed through the skylight-sized gap by a hair's breadth.

Thump! Hua Chenglu heard a rumble before realising that was the sound of his heartbeat. Compared to her jittery little heart that was beating frantically, his heartbeat was powerful and calm. Even when facing such terrifying danger, it did not become flurried at all.

Her nervous and terrified feelings calmed down as a result. She did not regret following him at all, because she was confident that no matter what danger she faced, this man would be there to protect her.

Suddenly, she remembered that when they first ran across one another by chance, he had stood forward in front of her without hesitating at all, facing the undefeatable West Gate Granny. She had forgotten how she felt back then. Thinking about it now, she seemed to have missed something for all these years, which left her a little lost.

Li Qingshan had faced danger countless times already, so something like this was truly nothing. With the Wave Treading Form and the arcane artifact shoes, he constantly maneuvered about, overcoming each obstacle and arriving next to the great banyan tree in the blink of an eye.

Up close, it did not feel like a tree, but an unbelievably wide and tall wall made of wood. The iron-grey tree bark was covered with wrinkles, giving off a tough and heavy feeling. He was not too worried whether the Traitorous Demon sword could cut through the bark. After all, even the dwarf had managed to do that.

However, just to be safe, he still used the evil eye on the hilt, observing the “points of weakness” in the wooden wall. As the evil eye let out a ring of strange light, he immediately saw something different. He could not help but be mildly surprised. He discovered many dark, circular markings under the bark.

The bark seemed to be hollow underneath. Were there boring insects in the tree?

Without any time to consider whether one of the Ten Daemon Kings, the Great Banyan Tree King, would suffer from insect problems, he glanced back. Si Qing's lackeys had already pressed over. When he made his way out again later, if he could not tear through them in a single stroke, then he would be caught in a pincer attack from the sun vines. If he were alone, then so be it, but the problem was he had to take some small baggage, Hua Chenglu, with him.

He made up his mind. He was going to be in danger anyway, so he might as well go in, take a look, and satisfy his curiosity. He swung the Traitorous Demon sword around and dove head-first into the great banyan tree with Hua Chenglu.

The wooden wall caved in, forming a circular hole. It extended inwards endlessly, where the surface was extremely neat and smooth.

A ray of light suddenly illuminated the dark space. The two figures that embraced one another firmly rushed into the darkness with the light.

Li Qingshan caught his footing and looked around. The bark of the great banyan tree was alarmingly thick, almost reaching ten meters, and it was filled with extremely dense spiritual qi.

If it were not for the strange ability of the Traitorous Demon sword, he would have never discovered the hidden hole inside no matter how powerful his soul sense was, much less reach the hole in a single stroke. He would not be able to avoid the tragic fate of running into the tree.

However, he had made it in here at last. Li Qingshan exhaled and discovered Hua Chenglu was still clinging onto him firmly. He could not help but smile. "Hey, you can let go now!"

"Ah!" Hua Chenglu let go in a hurry. Her face was bright red. Her heart that had calmed down after so much difficulty began to thump violently again, but not out of fear. She feigned calmness by looking around, and her eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness, only to find a long cave leading off to who knows where!

"Are we in the tree?"

"Yeah!"

The ray of light suddenly began to vanish. Li Qingshan turned around, only to see the tree bark close up at an alarming rate, healing perfectly very soon. Complete darkness set in.

Hua Chenglu could not help but inch a little closer to Li Qingshan. Li Qingshan smiled. "Come, I'll give you something nice to eat!" He picked up the tree bark that resembled a pillar from a buddha's hall. It gave off an extremely refreshing smell.

"The tree?"

Hua Chenglu extended the tip of her tongue hesitantly and licked it gently. Immediately, wood spiritual qi surged into her body. A faint taste filled her mouth, and the hidden injuries from the battle rapidly recovered. She could not help but lick it a few more times.

"You could just break off a piece. When are you going to lick it until? Here!" Li Qingshan could not help but laugh aloud, breaking off a piece and passing it to her. However, her demeanour earlier truly was very enchanting.

Hua Chenglu also realised her actions earlier were rather inelegant, which made her cheeks burn. She accepted the wooden piece and shoved it into her mouth, biting down hard before exclaiming in pain. She clutched her cheek and stamped her foot. "You're bullying me! How am I supposed to chew something so tough?"

"Then just suck on it slowly!"

Li Qingshan laughed. He found the topic of the conversation to be very interesting, going from licking to biting to sucking. He gazed at her pink, glossy lips and wondered who would be fortunate enough in the future.

Hua Chenglu was no longer a child. She had spent plenty of time in the Parlour of Clouds and Rain too, so how could she not notice the teasing words he said? If another man had spoken to her like that, she would have lost her temper long ago, but she was unable to get angry at him.

She said in discontent, "Big brother Li, you're so inappropriate. So much for calling you big brother. When I get back, I'll tell big sister Qiongzhi and my elder brother!" That was what she said, but even if Hua Chengzan and Han Qiongzhi interrogated her, she would never tell them this.

"Alright, alright, alright. It's all my fault. It's just like what they say, a friend's sister is off limits!"

Li Qingshan carried the pillar of bark and casually broke off a piece, shoving it in his mouth and chomping away. The bark was very tough, but it was not tougher than his teeth. The grassy scent hid hints of sweetness, which made it feel a little like eating sugar cane. He chewed until it ran out of taste and spat it out before breaking off another piece. The spiritual qi in his dantian suddenly began to recover much faster.

He took out the Three Absolutes Calligraphy again and condensed another strand of sword Qi in his body, allowing it to freely absorb his spiritual qi and grow stronger. He thought, Just half of my spiritual qi has already made it so impressive. If it takes all of it, then wouldn't that mean it can even kill Golden Core cultivators?

Hua Chenglu saw how delighted he was with eating the bark. She shoved another piece into her mouth and muttered ambiguously, "Hmph, as long as you know!"