

Yuexia responded very well to Han Jingru's straightforwardness. He pulled him aside to pass some messages from the Emperor, which were only meant for Han Jingru to know.

"So secretive... I wonder what the old man is trying to do." Huang Xiaoyong was upset because he wanted to hear the purpose of Yuexia's visit but they moved away to prevent him from eavesdropping.

"Regardless of his agenda, Han Jingru is seemingly free from the control of the Dragon Emperor Palace," Jiang Yingying said. These days, she had learned about the rules and regulations in establishing a sect. *Any establishment must first obtain the approval of the Emperor but Han Jingru did it without the Emperor's knowledge.*

At first, Jiang Yingying was very disturbed by this matter. Now, seeing that the Emperor had sent someone to Xixiang City personally, her worry was no longer valid.

If the Emperor wanted to attack Han Jingru, he

wouldn't person.

“Why?” Huang Xiaoyong obviously needed a lot of guidance and explanation in understanding the big picture, so he asked Jiang Yingying.

“Do you know what is intelligence?” she replied with a question.

“Of course I do. Intelligence is about how smart a person is, right?” Huang Xiaoyong said confidently.

“Unfortunately, it’s something that you lack.” Jiang Yingying felt helpless.

Meanwhile, Yuexia told Han Jingru, “The Emperor has granted you the permission to establish a sect in Xixiang City. In addition, he has the intention to support Jingru Sect.”

“Oh?” Han Jingru smiled. The news came unexpectedly to him as he initially thought that the Emperor would view him as a threat or an enemy. Conversely, he sent someone to bring him a good news instead.

Then again, Han Jingru was no ordinary man. He suspected a hidden agenda.

“I wonder if the Emperor has other requests?”
Han Jingru asked.

“The stronger the sects become, the more powerful the Imperial Court will be. The Emperor would be pleased to see that,” Yuexia conveyed the message.

Han Jingru nodded and agreed in principle. “Any idea what kind of support will Jingru Sect receive?”

“During the infancy stage of your establishment, you might face a shortage of manpower. Thus, the Emperor plans to send some representatives to Jingru Sect and appoint them as sect elders, to help train the disciples. Rest assured that these capable men were carefully hand-picked by the Emperor. I believe they should arrive in Xixiang City soon,” Yuexia shared the plan.

Han Jingru hid his disdain look. *Appoint those men as sect elders? That's equivalent to planting a few spies near me!*

Also, the people are already on their way before I could say yes. It goes to show that the Emperor doesn't want to give me any room to decline him.

What a way to support Jingru Sect!

Han Jingru said calmly, "I thank the Emperor for his good intentions. Since it has been decided, I shall accept the kind gesture. I was having difficulty with this problem but the Emperor has solved it for me. When you return to the Dragon Emperor Palace, kindly thank the Emperor on my behalf."

"This goes unsaid." Yuexia had a sheepish grin on his face.

After their conversation, Yuexia left for the city. He did not notice any changes in Han Jingru's expressions and emotions throughout their interaction. However, he knew that Han Jingru covered it up very well.

It's impossible not for him to understand the Emp

error

Is he only being wary?

I doubt it. He probably just wants to avoid burning bridges before stabilizing Jingru Sect.

“Jingru, what’s wrong?” Seeing a tensed Han Jingru, Jiang Yingying approached him and asked.

Huang Xiaoyong stretched his neck to make sure he could hear every single word.

“The Emperor gave permission for me to establish a sect. He’s also sent some of his people to be the sect elders here to train the disciples,” Han Jingru uttered.

Huang Xiaoyong was dumbfounded.

Such a special treatment! Seems like the Emperor places a lot of importance on Jingru Sect.

“You’re awesome, Master. This way, Jingru Sect is one step above the rest. The other sects can

only dream about getting so much attention from the Emperor.” Huang Xiaoyong was overjoyed.

Jiang Yingying’s reaction was totally different from Huang Xiaoyong’s. She could see through the reason behind the Emperor’s gesture. *Only an idiot like Huang Xiaoyong would think that it’s a good thing.*

“Jingru, did you agree?” she asked.

“What do you mean, Yingying? This is superb. Master won’t be so stupid to reject it.” Huang Xiaoyong could not believe that a clever woman like Jiang Yingying would ask such a dumb question. *This is a good thing for all of us, of course Master has to agree to it.*

Both Han Jingru and Jiang Yingying stared daggers at Huang Xiaoyong. *When will this stupid man ever start using his brain and think?*

“Why? Did I say something wrong?” Huang Xiaoyong asked carefully after sensing anger from the way the two glared at him.

“It’s not wrong to label you as a retard,” Jiang Yingying sneered at him.

“Master, isn’t it a good thing?” Huang Xiaoyong was still perplexed by the situation.

“The Emperor is sending people here to be the sect leaders. Do you think that his main goal is to support me? He’s planting a few spies here to monitor my every move,” Han Jingru explained.

Hearing this, Huang Xiaoyong finally realized that it was not a good thing after all.

If the spies are here, every major and minor happening in Jingru Sect would be made aware to the Emperor instantly.

“Master, he’s such a cunning fox,” Huang Xiaoyong said with gritted teeth.

Han Jingru and Jiang Yingying ignored him for being so slow.

“Jingru, what should we do next?” Jiang Yingying asked.

“Come what may, we’ll face it when it happens. If I reject him now, it won’t be beneficial to Jingru Sect. Sending his private informers here is probably his bottom line. For now, I can only go with the flow and then think of an action plan to get rid of them.” The most reserved method would probably be the safest.

Jiang Yingying agreed. She reminded Huang Xiaoyong, “Watch your speech and action, don’t go around with a loose tongue and get yourself into deep troubles. Otherwise, you’ll be dead before you even know it.”

Huang Xiaoyong chuckled and then asked bashfully, “Yingying, are you concerned about me?”

“I’m just worried that we’ll waste more land space to bury you,” she said indifferently.

Feeling awkward, Huang Xiaoyong pressed his lips and kept quiet.

Han Jingru patted his shoulder. “Considering your skills in picking up chicks, you should stop

trying before you embarrass yourself further.”

“Master, what do you mean by chicks?” Huang Xiaoyong was puzzled.

“Err... There’s nothing I can do to help an empty-headed person like you understand the term.”
Han Jingru felt sorry for him.



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Two days later, the men from the Dragon Emperor Palace arrived.

The news spread like a wildfire throughout all the families and sects.

At Piaomiao Sect.

As soon as Yan Qinghua, the sect elder, found out about it, she went to look for the sect leader, Zhantai Liuyue.

“Madam, bad news.” Yan Qinghua was panic-stricken. Though Piaomiao Sect was not the most powerful sect in the Imperial Court, it was still considered as one of the more prominent sects. The existence of Jingru Sect had captured the attention of the Emperor and was now threatening the status of Piaomiao Sect.

“What’s wrong? You’re a sect elder. Don’t get so anxious over any big or small matter.” Zhantai Liuyue rebuked Yan Qinghua.

“A few days ago, we were speculating about Yuexia’s trip to Xixiang City. Now, we have the

answer.” Yan Qinghua stated.

“Oh, really? What’s it all about? Do enlighten me.” Zhantai Liuyue said.

“The Emperor has accepted Jingru Sect and even appointed a few men as its sect elders to help Han Jingru train his disciples,” Yan Qinghua told her everything.

Zhantai Liuyue’s brows furrowed. She had guessed multiple reasons as to why Yuexia was in Xixiang City but none of her predictions came through.

“Madam, why does the Emperor value Jingru Sect so much so that he’s sending some of the masters from Dragon Emperor Palace to be the sect elders? Henceforth, who can compete with Jingru Sect?”

Zhantai Liuyue kept silent and pondered over the matter.

The Emperor is not a saint. He won't give Jingru Sect any special treatment without a good reason. Since the Emperor was wary of Han J

ingru, he definitely won

“I’m afraid it’s not as simple as it seems,”
Zhantai Liuyue answered.

“Madam, that’s the reality observed. How can it not be so? From my perspective, the Emperor is trying to please Jingru Sect. Sooner or later, all sects will revolve around Jingru Sect.” As much as Yan Qinghua admired Han Jingru, she still felt aggrieved towards the situation.

Every sect works hard to grow step by step and develop into its current glorious state. Piaomiao Sect has gone to great lengths and sacrificed a lot in order to emerge as one of the top three sects.

With Jingru Sect having the easy way and taking shortcuts to elevate its status, it might replace any of the top three sects very soon. It was inevitable for Yan Qinghua to fret.

“The sect elders are people from the Dragon Emperor Palace, right?” Zhantai Liuyue laughed out loud suddenly.

“Madam, why are you laughing? Our sect is at stake.” Yan Qinghua was dumbfounded.

Zhantai Liuyue laughed even harder, for she knew the Emperor’s plan. *It’s not that he values Jingru Sect, but because he didn’t trust it. No wonder he’s placing his own people there.*

“Qinghua, you’re a clever woman. How could you not see it? Zhantai Liuyue asked.

“Am I missing something? The Emperor isn’t trying to please Jingru Sect?” Yan Qinghua did not get it.

“The leaders of Jingru Sect are the trusted aides of the Emperor, sent from the Dragon Emperor Palace. Do you think they will betray the Emperor?” Zhantai Liuyue gave her a clue.

“Of course not.” Yan Qinghua continued, “They would never dare to do it and face his wrath.”

“That’s right. Can you tell his purpose now?” Zhantai Liuyue prompted her.

“Purpose?” Yan Qinghua was still confused.

Zhantai Liuyue shook her head. *The intelligent Yan Qinghua is now acting like a pea-brained woman. Is this because of Han Jingru?*

“Those are the spies that the Emperor placed around Han Jingru. Understand?” Zhantai Liuyue explained directly to her.

Yan Qinghua lifted her head. “Oh right! Those sect elders are actually the Emperor’s informers and they might even override him to a certain extent. The Emperor is being cautious of him.”

Zhantai Liuyue teased her, “I should praise you for taking so long to figure out something so simple.”

Embarrassed, Yan Qinghua gave her a thin smile. “Madam, I was just being careless for this one time.”

“I don’t think it’s just a careless mistake. You were distracted. Are you showing your care and concern for Piaomiao Sect or Han Jingru? Don’t

you think that you owe me an explanation?”
Zhantai Liuyue responded.

“Madam, what are you talking about? Surely, my heart is with Piaomiao Sect. Why would I care for Han Jingru?” Yan Qinghua said without the slightest hesitation. Her infatuation for Han Jingru was not comparable to her relationship with Piaomiao Sect.

She grew up in the sect, trained, became a fighter, and developed into a sect elder. No one and nothing could ever replace her love for the sect.

“I trust you.” Zhantai Liuyue was just poking fun at her and did not expect her to take it seriously.

Zhantai Liuyue also had faith in Yan Qinghua and did not doubt what she said.

“Madam, so this is the perfect plan for the Emperor to kill two birds with one stone, right?”
Yan Qinghua smiled.

“You’re getting smarter now. The Emperor schemed it well. When everyone thought that

Jingru Sect had challenged his authority, he turned it around and placed his informers in Jingru Sect as leaders. This is to declare that Jingru Sect is still under his control,” Zhantai Liuyue uttered.

“Madam, when should we pay Jingru Sect a visit since it’s been acknowledged by the Dragon Emperor Palace?” Yan Qinghua posted a question.

“You can’t wait to see him, can you?” Zhantai Liuyue giggled.

Yan Qinghua nodded. “I really want to see if he’s truly that awesome and find out if he looks just like the sketches in the album.”

Zhantai Liuyue had the same thought. Prior to this, she was indecisive about paying Jingru Sect a visit, so as not to upset the Dragon Emperor Palace. Now that things have changed direction, all of her worries were gone.

We can now bring forward the visit.

“It’s not time yet. Let’s wait till the opening day. Surely, Piaomiao Sect will be there,” Zhantai Liuyue shared her plan.

After meeting the future sect elders in Xixiang City, Han Jingru locked himself up in his room.

Facing the Emperor, Han Jingru could not oppose him directly. He could only take it in his stride for now. Fortunately, the few sect elders were very humble and they did not make Han Jingru feel uncomfortable.

Subconsciously, Han Jingru touched his arm. To his horror, he quickly rolled up his sleeve.

The Ruby-eyed Python went missing!

“Darn it, I forgot that I’ve given that fellow a few days of free time to roam around. Now, I don’t even know where did it go,” Han Jingru mumbled.

Han Jingru had gotten so used to the presence of the Ruby-eyed Python on his arm. When it was not around, he felt as if something were missing, and would think about it fondly.

Half a month later, an unprecedented turmoil broke out in the Dark Forest. Nobody knew what happened. Countless familiars wailed and roared in pain, sending the entire Xenos into a state of tension. The situation seemed like a complete mayhem, causing everyone to stay in fear and trepidation.

Many people formed their own conjectures and multiple versions of speculations started circulating within the Three Nations.

Some said that two strong familiars were at war with each other and it gave rise to a turmoil in the Dark Forest.

Some said that a fighter, from the Pinnacle Stage charged into the forest with the aim to tame a powerful familiar. He ended up brawling with it.

Another rumor had it that the familiars were

unwilling to stay within the Dark Forest and wanted to flee from the imprisonment. Such speculation caused many to be panic-stricken. Had the familiars left the forest, it would create a devastating impact on the Three Nations.

No one was able to sum up the number of living familiars in the Dark Forest. Yet, the people of each nation were aware of their unstoppable power. Their combined forces could easily destruct heaven and earth.

“Yi Qingshan, you’re the only one who has been to the Dark Forest recently. What did you do there?” Fei Ling’er interrogated Yi Qingshan at an inn located in Xixiang City.

The Dark Forest has been dormant for a few hundred years. Chaos like this would not happen out of the blue. She highly suspected Yi Qingshan of breaking a certain balance in the Dark Forest, resulting in the current state of tumult.

“I... I didn’t do anything. This has got nothing to do with me.” Yi Qingshan had a guilty

conscience.

“The way you lied was very convincing indeed. If you insist on not telling me the truth, will you bear the consequences when the situation goes out of hand?” Fei Ling’er said furiously. Only when she had found out the full truth, she could think of a solution to try and control the state of affairs in the Dark Forest.

There’s hearsay about the familiars wanting to break free from the prison cell. This sounds quite impossible because of the super-tight security formation surrounding the Dark Forest. It was collaboratively done by many masters in the past generations. The strength of the formation is supposed to be unbreakable by any human or familiar. Then again, there’s no 100% guarantee that it won’t happen. After all, the formation has been in existence for many years now.

If someone ever attempts to break the formation, its strength might be affected.

“I swear I didn’t do anything that might have broken the formation. What benefit will I get if

the familiars leave the Dark Forest?” Yi Qingshan said helplessly.

“Why are you in a mess? When you were in the forest, what kind of familiar did you see?” Fei Ling’er continued asking him more questions. *Yi Qingshan has reached the Pinnacle Stage, he won’t be in such a predicament if he was met by an average familiar. Even if a high-level familiar appeared before him, he’s more than able to escape without a fuss.*

Looking at the quandary he’s in after leaving the Dark Forest, he must have faced some challenges.

“I... I think I might have met the Qilin,” Yi Qingshan said while lowering his head.

“Qilin!” Hearing the two words, Fei Ling’er widened her rounded eyes in disbelief. “How is that possible? Isn’t the Qilin asleep in Mount Xenos? Why did it wake up all of a sudden?”

Qilin was a divine familiar, the most impressive existence in Xenos. There had not been much

information about it in Xenos. According to some records, Qilin would sleep for a thousand years once it entered into a deep sleep. Had there not been something alarming, it would not have simply awoken.

“I don’t know why either. Shortly after I’ve entered the Dark Forest, I discovered many bones of familiars. I felt strange about it and started following its direction to find out more. I stopped when I almost reached Mount Xenos. Do you know what did I see?” As Yi Qingshan tried to illustrate his experience, he recalled the horrible sights he had seen. His eyes were filled with extreme fear.

“What?” Fei Ling’er asked in a low voice.

“The Qilin sat nonchalantly on top of Mount Xenos. At the foot of the mountain, legions of bones were found. It has consumed all the familiars, even... even the white ape is dead.” Yi Qingshan spoke about what he had witnessed.

Fei Ling’er gasped. *Besides Qilin, the white ape is the other powerful familiar that the humans have some knowledge about*

t. Now that it

“Did you startle it?” she asked.

“Of course not. I was so scared, so I kept running. That’s why I looked like a hot mess when you found me. If I’ve upset it, do you think that I can still be alive?” Yi Qingshan responded.

Fei Ling’er nodded. *True. If he has disturbed the Qilin, he would be dead by now.*

But why did the Qilin wake up from its deep sleep?

“Something must have happened in Xenos, which we don’t know yet. Otherwise, Qilin would not have been woken up. We need to investigate further.” Fei Ling’er concluded.

“Actually, I have a suspicion,” Yi Qingshan said weakly.

Fei Ling’er glared at him. “Say it, quick! Don’t keep me in suspense.”

“Yes, yes, yes. I predict that another greater familiar has appeared in the Dark Forest, one that we don’t know. This familiar threatens the status of the Qilin. Hence, it woke up to defend its position. This explains the havoc in the Dark Forest, the aftermath of the battle between two exceptional familiars. One thing I can’t figure out is which kind of familiar could be an equal to Qilin.” Yi Qingshan shared his perspective.

It’s hard to determine if Qilin was awakened by an external threat. However, there might be some truth in the battle of two powerhouses as described by Yi Qingshan. The reality observed confirms that the uproar in the Dark Forest would not have been caused by Qilin alone, unless it’s found itself a worthy opponent.

“If that’s the case, it might be good news to us.”
Fei Ling’er had a lightbulb moment.

Yi Qingshan shook his head as he shared a completely different viewpoint from hers. “Don’t you know that when two divine familiars fight, the formation might be destroyed? Once that happens, there will be no more barrier restricting

the familiars in the Dark Forest. I'm afraid the Three Nations will be exterminated sooner or later.”

He has a valid concern. Fei Ling'er felt distressed. Whatever that's happening now has surpassed our abilities and gone beyond our control.

No one is omnipotent, albeit having reached the Pinnacle Stage. The dreadful feeling of being incapacitated is no different from a weakling.



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“I just realized that there’s nothing fancy being in the Pinnacle Stage. When faced with a divine familiar like the Qilin, we are of no difference from ordinary civilians,” Yi Qingshan sighed. That was the first time he felt so helpless after being a Pinnacle Master, especially when he was reminded of his terror-stricken experience with the Qilin.

“Follow me to the Dragon Emperor Palace, I want to inform the Emperor,” Fei Ling’er stated.

“Is that helpful? Even if the Emperor knew about it, he wouldn’t have the ability to stop this,” Yi Qingshan rebutted. *We can only sit and wait, unless someone is able to kill the Qilin and resolve this crisis.*

This is rather impossible! I doubt if an Alpha Stage fighter could take on a divine familiar.

“There must be a way if we don’t want to die. Be good and stay in Xixiang City if you don’t want to go with me.” Fei Ling’er did not believe in fate. She would not give up before trying, no matter how slim the chances of success in any

undertaking.

“Alright, I’ll go with you. Why should I stay here if you’re gone too?” Yi Qingshan replied.

Once decided, both of them left Xixiang City without further delay.

Over at Ximen residence, Ximen Jin was standing outside of Han Jingru’s bedroom.

He had checked all of the items in the restricted area. There were quite a number of legendary items; some of them were previously owned by the Bailing family.

He still had no clue how Ximen Chang obtained them. He was very certain, however, that those treasured objects were definitely of immeasurable worth. Each and every piece was collected by the former patriarchs; one by one, through the years. His responsibility was to protect them properly.

“Don’t tell me you’re renegeing on your word?”
When Han Jingru opened the door and saw Ximen Jin, the first thing that crossed his mind

was the leg bone.

“You must be joking, Mr. Han. I won’t claim back what I’ve gifted you.” *Regardless of how much I miss having it, I won’t think about getting it back, neither do I dare to think about it.*

“Then, what are you doing here?” Han Jingru asked.

“The two people that you asked me to spy on have left Xixiang City,” Ximen Jin informed him.

Since the day Fei Ling’er arrived in Xixiang City, Han Jingru ordered Ximen Jin to arrange for his subordinates to monitor their every move closely. This was because Fei Ling’er had too many secrets which intrigued Han Jingru.

He felt rather odd that she left without doing anything.

“Are you sure they left?” Han Jingru wanted to confirm.

“That’s right. My people are still tracking them,”

Ximen Jin answered.

“Alright, I got it. You can go now.”

“Sure.”

After shutting the door; Han Jingru thought about all of the unanswered questions and frowned. *Fei Ling'er made a trip to Xixiang City but left without doing anything? Or did she do something but we didn't notice?*

He could not shake off the feeling of uneasiness.

Just then, someone knocked on the door. Hearing its rhythm, Han Jingru could recognize that it was Jiang Yingying, so he went ahead and said, “Come in.”

Looking exhausted, she pushed the door open and walked in. She had been working non-stop on all affairs in the sect.

“You’ve done a lot,” Han Jingru felt sorry for her. *I’ve been so used to delegating all the tedious administrative tasks and other miscellaneous to Jiang Yingying and Huang Xiaoyong.*

“Jingru, have you heard of the recent events in the Dark Forest?” Jiang Yingying asked.

He nodded. It had been quite a big news with everyone talking about the many versions of what might have happened, so he had also heard a thing or two.

Han Jingru had his doubts on this matter. *The destruction in the Dark Forest happened after the Ruby-eyed Python left. Are they connected?*

He could only take a wild guess for now as no one knew the truth.

“I heard another version today. The formation surrounding the Dark Forest is on its verge of being completely destroyed. It won’t be long before a large number of familiars escape the forest. To us, this may be a good thing,” Jiang Yingying reported. *The ultimate reason we’re here in Xenos is to remove the threat it has on the earth. If those familiars were to leave the Dark Forest, they would inevitably ruin the power of Xenos. With that, we can achieve our objective.*

“But we haven’t found a way to leave Xenos, so this isn’t entirely a good thing,” Han Jingru reminded her.

“This is what I want to talk to you about. Shall we try searching for the Dimensional Tunnel?” Jiang Yingying made a suggestion.

“I’ve thought about this a long time ago. We don’t have a single clue yet. This is definitely not something that can be done overnight. We can watch it happen, but we oughtn’t let the formation be ruined because of us.” He had guessed what she wanted to say next. *She wanted to assist the familiars in destroying the formation. If that happens, greater destruction would take place.*

There are many more civilians in Xenos. Han Jingru would never allow ruination to befall mankind due to personal reasons.

If it were not an absolute last resort during desperate times, he would not bring chaos to

others in order to complete his own mission.

“Jingru, is my idea too selfish?” Jiang Yingying asked while dropping her head.

“No, I can understand where you’re coming from. However, you must know that if we bring harm to the civilians here, we’re of no difference to Xenos when it invaded Earth and carried out a massacre. As much as we aren’t saints, we can’t be sinners either,” Han Jingru advised her.

Jiang Yingying heaved a long sigh. “Jingru, there’s another thing I want to update you on. When I spoke with a sect elder today, I found out that there’s a strange master from Xia Nation, a woman with a child, to be exact. I heard that no one could challenge her in Xia Nation. Some even deduced that she has achieved the Alpha Stage. If all of these claims were true, then this woman would be a significant threat to your plans.”

“Seems like you’re getting along very well with the sect elders huh?” Han Jingru chuckled.

“Know your enemies and know yourself. Everything that we do under their nose is reported directly to the Emperor on a daily basis, so I, too, want to inquire about the Imperial Court,” Jiang Yingying replied.



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“Wow, where did the innocent girl from back then go? You’ve become quite the cunning young lady,” Han Jingru said mockingly.

At the sight of Jiang Yingying’s annoyance, Han Jingru quickly said, “But this information is actually really useful. After all, we’re not aiming solely at the Imperial Court. If an Alpha Stage fighter suddenly showed up in Xia Nation, it would be a big mess.”

“Jingru, why don’t you just chat her up? An attractive guy like you could easily get her on our side. With an Alpha Stage fighter like that fighting alongside us, things would be much easier,” Jiang Yingying said with a giggle. She wasn’t just a doormat lying there for anyone to tease or mock. An eye for an eye, as they used to say.

Han Jingru smiled bitterly at the casual dig and replied, “Didn’t you say she has a kid? Do I look like the type to become someone’s stepdad?”

“So what? Xiang can have another sibling! Isn’t that great?” Jiang Yingying said matter-of-factly.

“Jiang Yingying, are you sure you’re on our side? If Yimo heard about this, she’d beat me to death,” Han Jingru said helplessly. There was no way a third party could ever come between him and Su Yimo. If that ever happened, Han Jingru would need to go back to sleeping with one eye open.

“Of course I am! Besides, we aren’t even on Earth. It’s not like Yimo will know what you do over here,” Jiang Yingying giggled.

“Are you trying to blackmail me right now?” Han Jingru asked in an especially solemn tone.

Jiang Yingying wasn’t affected in the slightest. She didn’t even blink an eye at Han Jingru’s sudden seriousness. “How could I? I’m your sister, after all. Of course I’d help you keep this sort of secret. However, that’s not to say it won’t come in handy in the future. Just make sure you don’t do anything to piss me off anytime soon.”

“Is everything done with the sect? Do you perhaps have a lot of free time on your hands?” Han Jingru said mildly.

Jiang Yingying didn't reply, immediately taking off after that subtle threat.

One day later, Fei Ling'er and Yi Qingshan rushed back to the Dragon Emperor Palace.

Returning to the Dragon Emperor Palace from Xixiang City was not an easy task. If they weren't Pinnacle Masters, they would not have been able to do such a thing.

"I'm exhausted. What's the rush?" Yi Qingshan panted heavily. If even a body like his was so badly affected by the journey, it certainly must have been a taxing one.

Fei Ling'er didn't look too rosy either. They were just making a rushed journey, but the amount of effort it needed was no different from fighting a battle.

"Quit blabbering and go see the Emperor with me," Fei Ling'er said in a cold voice. She was tired too, but there was nothing she could complain about when something like the issue of the Dark Forest was out there.

When the two of them appeared at the Dragon Emperor Palace, the soldiers stood down automatically. These were the Emperor's soldiers after all, so it was no surprise that they'd recognize Fei Ling'er. Also, she had complete access in and out of the Dragon Emperor Palace at all times.

The Emperor looked as if he had been waiting for them for a long time.

“Did you rush back because of the news about the Dark Forest?” The Emperor asked.

“Yes. Do you know what's happened recently about that?” Fei Ling'er cut straight to the chase.

“Based on the news that the border guards reported back to us, there was a huge war in the Dark Forest. However, we still don't know what the cause of the war was,” the Emperor said. He glanced at Yi Qingshan, curious about the new face.

“Your Majesty, this is Yi Qingshan, Xia Nation's Pinnacle Master,” Fei Ling'er introduced Yi

Qingshan to the Emperor automatically after seeing his interest.

The Emperor was surprised. He had heard of Yi Qingshan before, but he hadn't imagined for Yi Qingshan himself to suddenly show up in the Palace.

“Mr. Yi, what an honor for you to make an appearance in our Palace. I apologize for not being able to properly welcome you,” the Emperor said politely.

Yi Qingshan knew this was all just the usual small talk and replied just as politely, “Don't worry about it. I hope I'm not intruding.”

“Your Majesty, Yi Qingshan discovered some things when he passed through the Dark Forest. I'll let him tell you about it,” Fei Ling'er said. Yi Qingshan was a better candidate since he had personally experienced it.

“Please enlighten me, Mr. Yi,” the Emperor said.

Yi Qingshan explained everything he had gone

through in the Dark Forest. At the news of the Qilin having awoken once again, the Emperor went pale.

As the Emperor, he was more than aware of what the Qilin's awakening meant. He was also very much aware of what something as terrifying as the Qilin could do to Xenos.

The moment the Dark Forest's protective barriers disappeared, the Qilin would be out and about and the whole of Xenos would be in immense danger.

"Mr. Yi, are you sure you actually saw the Qilin?" the Emperor asked.

"I may not be as young as I used to be, but I know for certain that it was the Qilin I saw. If Your Majesty doesn't believe me, you can send some of your own men into the Dark Forest and see for yourself," Yi Qingshan said unhappily at the sight of the Emperor's disbelief.

The Emperor's expression darkened. He didn't know for sure if sending people into the Dark

Forest would earn him a glimpse of the Qilin, but he did know that they wouldn't come back alive. The Dark Forest wasn't exactly a utopia. Even Pinnacle Masters didn't dare to step into the Dark Forest if they didn't absolutely have to, let alone anyone below that level.

“Based on one of the Imperial Court's scriptures, the Qilin's awakening symbolizes the end of Xenos. Its only foe is the Dragon Master, but the scripture did not mention whether this was a man or a creature.” Despite this being one of the Imperial Court's secrets, the Emperor couldn't keep it under wraps in this situation.

“The Dragon Master?” Fei Ling'er had never heard of such a thing. She glanced at Yi Qingshan, but he shook his head in confusion.

“This scripture has existed for over a thousand years. In the entirety of Xenos, it's possible that I am the only one who knows of this legend,” the Emperor explained.

“What else did the scripture say?” Fei Ling'er asked.

“The scripture only mentioned about the Dragon Master being the only way to put the Qilin back to hibernation and not much else,” the Emperor replied.

“We don’t even know what or who the Dragon Master is. What should we do?” Fei Ling’er asked helplessly. They couldn’t possibly settle this disaster with such meager information.

“There are a lot of scriptures in the Imperial Court’s archives. I’ll go through all of them as quickly as possible. If there is anything in there to do with the Dragon Master, I’ll inform you two at once,” the Emperor said.

Fei Ling’er nodded. She refrained from asking to visit the Imperial Court’s archives herself because she knew it was the Emperor’s private grounds. Even as a Pinnacle Master, she didn’t have clearance to enter.

“That would be very much appreciated. I have a feeling that the Dark Forest’s barriers won’t be able to hold for much longer,” Fei Ling’er said.

Fei Ling'er may have been a nomad, but in the Dragon Emperor Palace, she had her own house. This was a gift from the Emperor himself, but Fei Ling'er could count on one hand the number of times she had actually lived in it.

At first, the Emperor had gifted her the house because he hoped she would be able to put down her roots near the palace. Sadly, this hadn't exactly worked on her.

After all, Fei Ling'er was a Pinnacle Master. Something like a house was of no real interest to her.

“Do you think he'll actually be able to find anything about the Dragon Master?” Yi Qingshan asked Fei Ling'er in the gazebo of the house.

“Come to think of it, I barely lived here. I didn't know the environment was this nice,” Fei Ling'er replied. It wasn't an answer, but she really was genuinely admiring the environment of the place. Back then, she never had a chance to really experience this place in its entirety. Now that she was forced to stay, she finally realized the

Emperor's detailed intentions.

“I don't think it's possible. Neither you nor I have heard of this Dragon Master before, so there must be barely any information on the subject.” Yi Qingshan decided to answer himself at the lack of a proper response from Fei Ling'er. After all, he had lived for hundreds of years. He had never heard of this 'Dragon Master' in all that time.

“I have a feeling. It's kind of a weird one,” Fei Ling'er said.

“Do you think Han Jingru has something to do with the Dragon Master?” Yi Qingshan asked.

“You probably have thought so too, right?” That certainly was what Fei Ling'er was thinking. Han Jingru came in like a wrecking ball, and it was hard to imagine that he wasn't the bearer of some serious mysteries. If he was the legendary Dragon Master, then it seemed like fate for the Qilin to arise right now of all times.

“I did at first, but after all, we don't know if the Dragon Master is a man or a beast. I wouldn't

dare to assume so quickly. After all, there are only two other fighters right now and apart from Han Jingru, there's also that woman from Mount Jingwu. I'd actually bet on that woman being stronger than Han Jingru," Yi Qingshan said.

Fei Ling'er didn't argue and simply nodded. "That's possible too. However, only time can prove everything."

"I'm just afraid that we won't have that time. The Dark Forest's formation won't hold for much longer. The moment they break, the whole of Xenos will be in serious trouble," Yi Qingshan said helplessly. The image of the whole of Xenos coming to an end sent chills down his spine.

He may have been a Pinnacle Master, but he was just as scared as anyone else in the face of something as strong as the Qilin.

His fear had nothing to do with his capabilities. However, the longer he lived, the more afraid he would be of death.

"Worrying is useless. If such a thing is fated to

happen, then we can't stop fate in its tracks." Fei Ling'er seemed to have accepted it. To her, there was no need to be so worried about something that would happen anyway. All she could do was try and delay it for as long as possible.

"If that's really going to happen, then we'll be on the battlefield. Aren't you afraid of the Qilin?" Yi Qingshan asked. As Xenos' Pinnacle Masters, they would be on the frontlines in the face of any danger their world faced. Against something like the Qilin, they had no other choice but to sacrifice themselves.

"The whole of Xenos will be destroyed in the face of the Qilin. Can we really do anything apart from facing it? Are you going to run and hide? Even if you do manage to hide, you'll still end up dying. Would you want to be shunned by the people before your death?" Fei Ling'er asked.

Yi Qingshan knew that going into hiding at a crucial moment like this would certainly ruin his name for the rest of his life. It wasn't like he could completely escape anyway. Once the Qilin left the Dark Forest, it would manage to find him

no matter where he was.

“Do you remember that thousand-year legend?”
Yi Qingshan asked.

“Thousand-year-legend?” Fei Ling’er asked in confusion. “What exactly are you talking about?”

“The Ether Realm,” Yi Qingshan said.

Fei Ling’er widened her eyes in realization. “Are you planning on entering the Ether Realm?”

Yi Qingshan nodded. “Yes. As long as I can find the Dimensional Tunnel, then we can avoid the destruction that the Qilin will bring. Didn’t they think of using that method a thousand years ago when the news of the Qilin awakening came to be? That was their plan for leaving Xenos.”

Fei Ling’er shook her head. “No. Back then, Xenos was strong because of its Three Nations. We can never compare to that today. How could we possibly accomplish something now that we couldn’t even accomplish back then?”

Yi Qingshan knew this as well as she did. He had gone through all of the information about entering the Ether Realm in an attempt to look for the Dimensional Tunnel so he could check out the Ether Realm. After all, he was already a Pinnacle Master. There was already nothing left for him in Xenos.

“Yes, Xenos will suffer greatly. However, the Ether Realm will too. Based on the records, they lost a lot of fighters as well. In the last thousand years, Xenos hasn’t gotten a break, and the Ether Realm suffered the same. In fact, they might be in a tougher situation than Xenos is. Still, this is a good chance. As long as we can find the Dimensional Tunnel, we can escape death,” Yi Qingshan said.

He wasn’t very confident against the Qilin. Countless fighters had fallen to set up the formation of the Dark Forest and send the Qilin into hibernation. As of today, Xenos did not have enough fighters to complete such a task. Running away was the only means of escape Yi Qingshan was sure of.

“You’re not wrong, but don’t forget about who ran Xenos back then. Even he couldn’t manage to complete such a thing. He was blasted to smithereens. How could you do it?” Fei Ling’er asked.

Yi Qingshan inhaled sharply at the sound of him — the only Alpha Stage fighter in the history of Xenos. There was no way to determine what stage that man had reached as of now, but in the records, he was the only man who could command the three armies. In the records, he had certainly failed.

“He wasn’t blasted to smithereens. His remains fell into Xenos. Even the remains of someone like him are immensely powerful. I’ve been trying to find them for years, but it’s like trying to find a needle in a haystack. I haven’t heard anything about them yet,” Yi Qingshan said with a sigh. The Holy Chestnut was what helped Pinnacle Masters breakthrough and reach the Alpha Stage, but it wasn’t the only way. To Yi Qingshan, if he managed to find that man’s remains, then it could be another way to break through the Alpha Stage too. However, this was

in no way easier than getting his hands on the Holy Chestnut.



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“Actually, I’ve been doing the same thing too,” Fei Ling’er told Yi Qingshan honestly. After all, it was a way to achieve the Alpha Stage. As a Pinnacle Master herself, breaking through to the Alpha Stage was pretty much their only goal.

“Did you ever find anything?” Yi Qingshan asked. He wasn’t so easy to deal with himself. He had opened up to Fei Ling’er in hopes of Fei Ling’er being able to open up to him as well. Since both of them were Pinnacle Masters, he couldn’t possibly be unaware of what Fei Ling’er was up to.

“No,” Fei Ling’er shook her head. “Just like you, I came back empty-handed. I couldn’t find even a drop of information.”

Yi Qingshan wasn’t surprised. After all, the remains had fallen among Xenos and weren’t exactly something very glamorous or eye-catching. It wouldn’t be an easy task to find any of it.

“Trying to break through to the Alpha Stage is starting to sound like a madman’s tale,” Yi

Qingshan said.

“That’s not true. There’s still the Holy Chestnut,”
Fei Ling’er said.

Yi Qingshan started laughing out loud. Of course he knew the Holy Chestnut existed, but how could they possibly get their hands on such a thing? Besides, with the situation going on with the Dark Forest, no one would dare to go look for the Holy Chestnut.

“Fei Lingsheng, are you crazy? The Holy Chestnut is in the Dark Forest, after all. In fact, I can guarantee that it will be right next to the Qilin. Does that sound like we have a chance to even catch a glimpse of it?” Yi Qingshan said helplessly. Looking for the Holy Chestnut was practically asking to get killed.

Besides, they didn’t dare to step into the Dark Forest even if the Qilin was still asleep. If they weren’t careful, they might die.

“Who said there was only one Holy Chestnut?”
Fei Ling’er quipped. She remembered what Han

Jingru had told her:

Fei Ling'er remembered this very closely. In fact, she had a feeling that Han Jingru was not kidding. If he were, he wouldn't have auctioned off something that valuable.

Yi Qingshan stopped smiling at the sound of that. "I heard that someone was auctioning off a Holy Chestnut in Fengshang City. What do you know about that?"

"Han Jingru was the one who was auctioning off the Holy Chestnut. He even told me that he had more than one Holy Chestnut," Fei Ling'er said.

Yi Qingshan's gaze darkened with murderous intent. The moment he heard that, he immediately thought of killing the man and taking over his goods. After all, if he killed Han Jingru, then the Holy Chestnuts in Han Jingru's possession would belong to him.

"Are you telling the truth?" Yi Qingshan asked in a deep voice.

Fei Ling'er could tell what Yi Qingshan was thinking at the sight of his expression. "Don't forget about how strong he truly is. We aren't even close to figuring out his true potential. If you really do want to kill him, you'd better make sure you can actually do it. Don't kill yourself trying to kill him."

Yi Qingshan immediately woke up at the sound of that. Killing Han Jingru for his Holy Chestnuts was not such an easy feat. If he wasn't careful, he might die by Han Jingru's hands. That was definitely something he wanted to avoid.

"Do you trust him? Does he really have Holy Chestnuts?" Yi Qingshan asked.

Fei Ling'er thought about it before replying, "Yes. Besides, he has no reason to lie to me."

Yi Qingshan frowned in worry. "If he can get his hands on Holy Chestnuts so easily, who could he possibly be? What stage is he at? Is the Dark Forest like his backyard or something?"

"That's why I thought he had something to do

with the Dragon Master,” Fei Ling’er explained. She wouldn’t have related the two of them for no reason. The Holy Chestnut was a very big reason.

Both she and Yi Qingshan knew very well how hard it was to get the Holy Chestnut, and the fact that Han Jingru had more than one was proof that he went to the Dark Forest before. He had probably gotten the Holy Chestnut from some strong familiar.

“That’s actually possible. Could he be the one who ends up saving Xenos?” Yi Qingshan said.

Fei Ling’er wasn’t really sure yet, but even if Han Jingru weren’t the Dragon Master, he would be an immense help to their cause with his incredible abilities. Getting on Han Jingru’s good side was one of her top priorities for now.

Sadly, Han Jingru was still too wary of her. Trying to get Han Jingru to trust her was truly a difficult task.

“Han Jingru will probably open his sect soon, right? Too bad, we won’t be able to see it,” Fei

Ling'er said in disappointment.

“So what? It’s not like he’ll welcome you, anyway.” Yi Qingshan chuckled. He had only met Han Jingru once, but he felt how Han Jingru had his guard up around Fei Ling'er. Fei Ling'er not showing up was more beneficial to Han Jingru.

Fei Ling'er glared at Yi Qingshan and said, “It’s not like I’m welcoming you right now. When are you planning to leave?”

Yi Qingshan had very thick skin to boot. He said shamelessly, “With our current situation, it’s not like I can leave. The Dark Forest is so dangerous. I’d die the moment I stepped in.”

“I can ask the Emperor to open up the War Path for you so you can leave properly,” Fei Ling'er offered. The War Path was a path on which battles happened very often. Apart from the Dark Forest, the War Path was the only way that one could pass through the Three Nations. It wasn't usually open to just anyone. It really only came in handy whenever there was a war or a battle.

Yi Qingshan shook his head. “That path is practically a constant warzone. It’s not just bloody, it’s creepy and gloomy, too. I don’t want to pass through something like that.”

“So even a Pinnacle Master like you finds that creepy? Are you trying to make yourself the laughing stock of Xenos?” Fei Ling’er scoffed.

Yi Qingshan didn’t seem bothered by Fei Ling’er’s joke. On the contrary, he was smiling widely. “Who would believe such a thing? I am a Pinnacle Master after all. Who would dare to laugh at me?”

“Did you manage to reach the Pinnacle Stage through your shamelessness?” Fei Ling’er said disapprovingly. She was too lazy to waste her time on Yi Qingshan and straightaway returned to her room.

Yi Qingshan stayed in the gazebo. He was still thinking about how Han Jingru owned Holy Chestnuts. He had given up on attacking him and stealing the Holy Chestnuts, but it didn’t mean he had given up on getting those Holy Chestnuts

entirely.

To Yi Qingshan, breaking through the Alpha Stage was his ultimate goal. Since he finally managed to get his hands on something akin to a chance, he still wanted to try.

“Han Jingru, just you wait. Those Holy Chestnuts belong to me. I will get my hands on them no matter what,” Yi Qingshan muttered to himself with gritted teeth.



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Jingru Sect.

This was the day when the school officially opened and Han Jingru, the founder, finally appeared on Mount Phoenix.

The hundreds of disciples in the sect finally saw their Master and these children of poor families all looked at Han Jingru with admiration.

For them, although Han Jingru was young, he was the person who gave them the opportunity to change their destiny just like a god. At this moment, the disciples knelt on their knees, expressing their utmost respect for him.

Although Han Jingru was not used to having so many people bow on their knees to him, he did not stop them. After all, he was the Master and these people were all his disciples. It was only reasonable for them to worship him.

“Jingru, Piaomiao Sect is here,” Jiang Yingying walked up and informed him.

This was the first sect to pay a visit. Han Jingru

was a little surprised as he thought that the existing sects within the jurisdiction of the Imperial Court would not come to congratulate him.

“Master, this Piaomiao Sect is very well-known in the Imperial Court, and it is said that this sect comprises only stunning beauties and does not accept male disciples,” Huang Xiaoyong was drooling as he explained to Han Jingru.

Han Jingru was not really interested in any women so he simply replied, “Wipe off the saliva from the corner of your mouth. Don’t embarrass me.”

From the foot of Mount Phoenix, Zhantai Liuyue and the others came with a big gift. In addition to the sect elder Yan Qinghua, there were more than a dozen disciples following behind them.

It must be mentioned that Huang Xiaoyong’s statement was accurate. The dozen or so disciples could indeed be described as stunningly beautiful. Any man who saw so many beautiful women coming together would not be unmoved.

When Han Jingru first saw them, he was also amazed at their beauty but that was all.

To him, these women were beautiful and the visual impact of these beauties standing together was astounding as if seeing a group of top models from all over the world standing on the stage. His feelings stopped at that and he did not have any fantasies of being intimate with them.

“Master, Han Jingru is more attractive than in the picture album in person. I didn’t expect it.” Yan Qinghua suppressed her eagerness. She had imagined what it would be like meeting Han Jingru countless times in her mind. At some point, she even thought that her high expectations might turn into disappointment. Yet, when she first caught sight of him, she knew that she would not be disappointed.

Zhantai Liuyue was also taken by surprise. Han Jingru’s physical appearance was indeed beyond her expectations. The artist did not deliberately modify his appearance but the power of the brush could not fully bring out his charisma.

“Please don’t act like you want swallow him alive. After all, you are an elder of Piaomiao Sect. Don’t put our sect to shame,” Zhantai Liuyue reminded her in a low voice. She had no intention of letting their sect lose all dignity because of Yan Qinghua.

“Don’t worry. I wouldn’t do anything shameful in front of him,” Yan Qinghua replied.

At this moment, Han Jingru walked up to Zhantai Liuyue and instinctively stretched out his hand, saying, “Madam Zhantai, I didn’t expect you to come here. I am really flattered.”

On the way here, Huang Xiaoyong had briefly described to Han Jingru about Piaomiao Sect. Hence, he knew the name Zhantai Liuyue.

However, his handshake was a bit odd to her for the etiquette of earth did not apply to Xenos.

Furthermore, she did not understand what Han Jingru was trying to do.

“Jingru, shaking hands is not practiced here,”

Jiang Yingying whispered to Han Jingru to remind him.

Only then, did Han Jingru come to his senses and quickly he withdrew his outstretched hand before he said, “Madam Zhantai, let me show you around.”

Zhantai Liuyue nodded and said softly, “The environment in Jingru sect is like a fairyland. Master Han really knows how to select a good location. I would certainly love to explore this beautiful place.”

Han Jingru did not care much about these civility words. Indeed, Phoenix Mountain was a beautiful place but it was not top-notch in Xenos.

At the top of Mount Phoenix, one could almost see all the beautiful scenery nearby. When Han Jingru and Zhantai Liuyue stood together, he could not help thinking about Genting.

The scenic beauty here was more beautiful than Genting by far but the emotions that it brought to him were lesser than how he felt on Genting.

That was because Su Yimo was with him at that time.

For Han Jingru, the surrounding landscape was incomparably beautiful as long as Su Yimo was with him. Nowhere on earth or in heaven could compare with their moments together.

“Master Han, have you heard about the Dark Forest?” Zhantai Liuyue asked. Almost all the Three Kingdoms had received news about the recent turmoil in the Dark Forest. The Piaomiao Sect was naturally no exception, so the purpose of her visit was to find out Han Jingru’s views on this matter, besides seeing what he looked like in person as compared to the picture album.

“I have heard, but I don’t know much about the Dark Forest, so I can’t guess what happened.” Han Jingru replied though he vaguely felt that this matter was related to the Ruby-eyed Python. Even if it were true, he could not tell her about such an important matter.

He was not someone who would throw caution to the winds in the presence of a beautiful woman.

The only person he could really be truthful to and honest with was Su Yimo. He was totally transparent and without secrets from her.

“Is that true?” Questioningly, Zhantai Liuyue looked at Han Jingru. It was obvious that she doubted his words.

Han Jingru turned around and gazed at Zhantai Liuyue as he asked, “Madam Zhantai, do you have alternate opinions?”

“Master Han, I heard that you auctioned the Holy Chestnut in Fengshang City while Dark Forest is the only place where the Holy Chestnut is produced. If you hadn’t been there, how could you get the Holy Chestnut? In other words, since you have been to the Dark Forest, how could you not know about it?” Zhantai Liuyue raised a series of questions and it was obvious that she was very interested in this matter.

“Madam Zhantai, it does seem that your trip here is not just to congratulate me,” Han Jingru spoke plainly.

Zhantai Liuyue was taken aback when she noticed the coldness in Han Jingru's gaze. She was accustomed to being treated with special consideration because of her beauty. Any man would treat her with generosity and that included the Emperor from whom she had enjoyed special favors.

Han Jingru was cold toward her, like an iceberg, and totally oblivious to her charm. This was something she had never expected.

“The unrest in the Dark Forest threatens the entire Xenos. Master Han, as the Master of a sect, don't you care about this matter?” Zhantai Liuyue asked.

“The sect has only just been established and Madam Zhantai is rather quick in putting pressure on me. This is not good, is it?” Han Jingru asked blandly.

“Isn't this the responsibility of being a fighter? The Dark Forest has threatened Xenos for thousands of years. If Xenos could successfully migrate thousands of years ago, perhaps the

people here would not face this crisis.”



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Migrate!

Hearing this word, Han Jingru's expression changed. His instincts told him that this migration was related to the invasion of the Earth.

When Han Jingru decided to rule the entire Xenos, the reason they invaded Earth was no longer important. Nevertheless, he still hoped to know more about this when given the opportunity.

Firmly getting a grip on himself, Han Jingru asked Zhantai Liuyue casually, "How much do you know about the migration?"

Zhantai Liuyue shook her head and said, "I don't know much. The migration seemed to be related to the Dark Forest. According to legend, there is a powerful familiar sleeping in the Dark Forest. Once it wakes up, the entire Xenos will be destroyed."

A powerful familiar!

Is it possible that the changes in the Dark Forest

are caused by this powerful familiar?

“However, Xenos was not destroyed even though there was no successful invasion,” Han Jingru said.

Zhantai Liuyue heaved a long sigh and smiled sadly. “In order to trap the powerful familiar, the major fighters of that time created a formation in the Dark Forest and this formation consumed countless lives of the fighters. If it weren’t for them, Xenos would have disappeared long ago.”

Countless fighters lost their lives?

Xenos’ invasion of the earth in the past also caused countless fighters to fall.

Han Jingru still remembered Mr. Yi telling him that there used to be thousands of Platinum rank fighters in the Apocalypse but now there was only a handful of them. This scarcity was caused by Xenos.

Unexpectedly, when the invasion failed, Xenos too paid a high price for their actions.

“Other than these, do you know anything else?”
Han Jingru continued asking.

“To know the details, I’m afraid you have to go to the Dragon Emperor Palace where some secret scriptures that recorded the Day Of Destruction are kept, but only the Emperor is the only one qualified to look up these secret scriptures,”
Zhantai Liuyue said.

“You have coined the term Day Of Destruction for that event?” Han Jingru observed.

“There were a lot of Pinnacle Stage fighters at that time but after so many years, there are no more than five Pinnacle Masters in the entire Xenos. What other term can we use if not Day Of Destruction?” Although Zhantai Liuyue did not live in that era, she could imagine what devastation the Dark Forest caused to the world of Xenos through these bits and pieces of information. That scene, was absolutely catastrophic.

Countless fighters fell in the Dark Forest. This was a tragic situation that ordinary people simply

could not imagine.

“I heard that above Pinnacle Masters, there exists the Alpha Stage. Was there no Alpha Stage in those days?” Han Jingru was full of curiosity.

Zhantai Liuyue shook her head and explained, “Whether the Alpha Stage exists or not is just a guess but there was once a person who was suspected of being in the Alpha Stage. However, the true situation is unknown.”

“Can you tell me more about this Alpha Stage?” Han Jingru asked.

“It looks like you are already planning to reach for the Alpha Stage, aren’t you?” Zhantai Liuyue asked as she raised her eyebrows. What she meant was to test what stage Han Jingru was at. People who were interested in the Alpha Stage must have reached the Pinnacle Stage.

Although many had speculated that Han Jingru was a newcomer in the Pinnacle Stage, this had not been confirmed by anyone. In addition to checking out the difference between the real Han

Jingru and the picture album, Zhantai Liuyue had come on this trip, to figure out what stage he was at. At this moment, the opportunity had presented itself.

“You want to find out if I have reached the Pinnacle Stage?” Han Jingru said with a smile.

Now that he had said it so clearly, Zhantai Liuyue felt that she need not be hypocritical, so she said truthfully, “Now the entire Imperial Court, including the Emperor, is guessing what stage you’re at. Of course, I am curious too. The battle of The Elite 28 was the talk of the Imperial Court. Who could defeat the Elite 28 if not a Pinnacle Master? Even Zhong Qishan surrendered to you. This can only be done by the strongest Pinnacle Stage fighter.”

Han Jingru had never really understood what stage he was at because he was not familiar with the stages in Xenos at all. Thus, he did not know how to gauge his current stage.

Since Zhantai Liuyue had said so, Han Jingru took advantage of the situation.

At times, it was necessary to be humble but at this moment, Han Jingru did not mind elevating himself.

“Since you know that only the fighters at the Pinnacle Stage can do it, do you still need to ask me?” Han Jingru smiled.

At these words, Zhantai Liuyue’s pupils instantly enlarged.

Although many had speculated that Han Jingru was at the Pinnacle Stage, the feeling was completely different when he said this himself.

For hundreds of years, Fei Lingsheng was the only one in the entire Imperial Court, it was totally unexpected that another Pinnacle Stage fighter would suddenly turn up out of nowhere.

“According to legend, in order to reach the Alpha Stage, the candidate needed to attract Heavenly Correction which purifies the soul and spirit besides an amazing level of skill. Only then can the person enter the Alpha Stage. The reason why this stage cannot be confirmed is because in the

historical records, a Heavenly Correction had never happened in the Xenos world.” After Zhantai Liuyue got the answer she wanted, she explained it to Han Jingru.

These words reminded Han Jingru of the phrase, overcoming the catastrophe!

Overcoming the catastrophe was a very dangerous undertaking. If one failed to endure the Heavenly Correction, one would be totally annihilated without any remains.

“A Pinnacle Stage fighter who reaches the Alpha Stage can extend his life for up to a thousand years. Is this person who has the strength of the gods still alive now?” Han Jingru asked.

“If he is still alive, I am afraid it would have proven to the world whether the Alpha Stage really exists. During the invasion, he was seriously injured and even his skull was left in the Ether Realm.”

“When the fighters of Xenos sealed the Dark Forest, thousands of fighters used their blood to

forge a large formation, but they were countered by the familiar, Qilin. The original formation was almost impossible to maintain, but at that crucial moment, a headless warrior appeared and fought the Qilin. If he hadn't used his last energy to delay the Qilin, the current Xenos would probably not exist anymore.”

After Han Jingru listened to these words, he thought that it was absurd.

How could someone without a head battle with the Qilin? It sounded like a tall tale.

Nevertheless, the part about the head being left in the Ether Realm reminded Han Jingru of the skeleton he got. Could it be related somehow?

“You seem to be making up a myth,” Han Jingru was rather speechless.

“These incidents do not have real evidence to prove them at all. They are all told around the world, and many children listen to them as stories.” Zhantai Liuyue continued.

Han Jingru turned around and looked at Zhantai Liuyue. Quite unexpectedly, this pretty woman was mocking him in a very quaint way.

“You are saying that I am childish, aren’t you?” Han Jingru laughed as he asked.

Zhantai Liuyue shook her head signifying that she did not think so. “If you want to know the truth about all these things, you can find out after a visit to the Dragon Emperor Palace.”

“This is the second time you suggest that I go to the Dragon Emperor Palace. I know that even a Pinnacle Stage fighter is afraid of the Emperor wherever they are there. Although I don’t know the reason, I can guess that there must be something in the Palace that enhances the realm of the Emperor and with this kind of enhancement, even the Pinnacle Master is no match. Can I put it that you are sent by the

Emperor and you just want me to go to the Dragon Emperor Palace to be killed?” Han Jingru had no doubts and he said this very plainly.

He had every reason to suspect that Zhantai Liuyue. After all, she had mentioned the Dragon Emperor Palace twice and she had aroused his curiosity on both times. Wasn't this an attempt to lure his interest?

Coupled with the Emperor's power inside the Dragon Emperor Palace, it was understandable that Han Jingru would have such suspicions.

Zhantai Liuyue was puzzled and she asked, “Why do you think it's a trap? Why would I want you to die in the Dragon Emperor Palace?”

“My existence has threatened the emperor. Is it illogical that he wants to get rid of me?” Han Jingru said with a smile. He was very aware of the oppression by the Bai Ling family in the past. It was precisely because the Bai Ling family was becoming too powerful and posed a threat to the Emperor that they were destroyed. If he could do this then, he would certainly do it again.

The formation of Jingru Sect was certainly a threat to the Emperor. Even though all seemed well at this point on the surface, the Emperor would definitely take action someday.

Hearing this, Zhantai Liuyue could finally understand that Han Jingru's suspicion was indeed reasonable and logical.

"I guess, the Emperor definitely wanted you to die before this. After all, you killed his men, but now, it may not necessarily be the case," Zhantai Liuyue said.

"Go on, let me see what other stories you can make up," Han Jingru said softly.

"The disturbances in the Dark Forest are probably related to the Qilin. If it really wakes up, a fighter like you is a powerful helper against this familiar and the Emperor would surely not kill this helper," Zhantai Liuyue assured.

"A flawless explanation indeed, but I still don't trust you," Han Jingru said with disdain.

“Why?” Zhantai Liuyue looked at Han Jingru in a puzzled manner. Although she was really not sent by the Emperor, there were very few ways for her to prove herself. If Han Jingru could not trust her under such circumstances, there was no way she could clear the suspicion.

“A beautiful woman’s words are not trustworthy,” Han Jingru replied.

Zhantai Liuyue was stunned. She could not believe that this was the reason why Han Jingru did not believe her.

On the other hand, he did think she was beautiful which was a good thing.

Zhantai Liuyue was not attracted to ordinary men but after seeing Han Jingru’s picture album, she felt infatuated because there were very few people like him in Xenos. Being such a rare existence, he naturally aroused an intense emotion in Zhantai Liuyue.

“Do you think I’m pretty?” Like shining stars, Zhantai Liuyue’s eyes twinkled as she gazed at

Han Jingru, hoping that the answer would be favorable.

“Certainly,” Han Jingru replied but added while shaking his head, “though not as pretty as my wife.”

“Your wife?” Zhantai Liuyue was taken aback. She had not expected Han Jingru to have been married.

“Well, I also have a lovely daughter,” Han Jingru said.

Zhantai Liuyue felt an emptiness in her heart, as if she had suddenly lost something.

But then again, it’s not a big deal for a man to have more than a wife in Xenos. After all, polygamy was a common practice in Xenos, especially in those powerful families.

“You have aroused my curiosity about what your wife looks like. I wonder if I will have the chance to meet her this time?” Zhantai Liuyue asked as she was not convinced that someone was better

looking than her. In the entire Piaomiao Sect, she was considered a top-notch beauty. Suitors from numerous sects, even people from big families, wooed her, so she was very confident with her appearance, which made her a little reluctant to admit defeat. That was why she wanted to meet Han Jingru's wife.

“I want to see her too, but unfortunately it's not time yet.” Han Jingru's eye were filled with disappointment. Every time he thought of Su Yimo and Han Xiang, his mood changed very obviously.

After all, these were the two most important people in his life, but he could not be with them now.

Before Zhantai Liuyue could ask any more, Han Jingru said, “May I excuse myself? I need to return to the school as it is opening day and I have many errands to run. I am needed back there.”

Zhantai Liuyue replied, “Please go ahead. I am staying on at Xixiang City so if you have any

questions, please come to see me any time.”

Han Jingru did not continue the conversation but turned around and left.

A tinge of feminine ego flashed over Zhantai Liuyue's countenance. She was totally surprised that Han Jingru did not fall for her beauty at all, something that she had never experienced before as every man she ever met had been mesmerized by her beauty. No one had been indifferent like Han Jingru.

“Are you putting on a show in front of me or are you really oblivious of my beauty? I will find out soon enough. This is but a man's natural reaction and I doubt you can look at a beautiful woman without being aroused.” Zhantai Liuyue mumbled to herself.

After that, Han Jingru returned to the sect. Actually, he did not have any serious business to attend to. As the person in charge, he had already delegated all affairs to Jiang Yingying and Huang Xiaoyong. Hence, they were both very busy now. On the contrary, he was relaxing and had no

intention of lending a hand.

In his spare time, Han Jingru calmed down and pondered over the story told by Zhantai Liuyue. From his point of view, the authenticity of the story was doubtful, especially the appearance of the headless warrior, which sounded absurd.

However, Han Jingru was curious about the Alpha Stage fighter and the Qilin in the Dark Forest.



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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The last time the Qilin had awakened, it resulted in the deaths of almost every Cultivator in Xenos. If this recent commotion in the Dark Forest is indeed related to the Qilin, then history will most likely repeat itself... As if having to deal with The Three Nations wasn't bad enough, now I have to worry about the freaking the Qilin as well... On top of that, I don't even know where my Ruby-eyed Python is! I wonder if it returned to the Dark Forest... If it did, there's no way it'd survive an encounter with the Qilin...

“You're not gonna end up dead in the Dark Forest, right?” Han Jingru said worriedly.

It was already evening by the time Huang Xiaoyong and Jiang Yingying were finally able to find Han Jingru and report everything they had arranged that day.

Despite having done nothing the entire day, Han Jingru was yawning as he listened, much to their chagrin.

Of course, being his disciple, Huang Xiaoyong didn't dare reprimand him for it.

Jiang Yingying too, understood that he wasn't the type to take interest in such things and was simply listening as a form of standard procedure.

“Alright, you two head back and get some rest now. No need to report these to me next time, okay?” Han Jingru told them.

“We haven't been able to recruit a single competent fighter, Master. What should we do?” Huang Xiaoyong asked. *Although there are hundreds of disciples in the Jingru Sect, most of them don't even qualify as Cultivators and are of no benefit to the sect! We're gonna have to attract some powerful fighters if we hope to strengthen it!*

Han Jingru frowned all of a sudden. He had detected a very familiar aura approaching him, but it felt really weak.

“Go get some rest, you two. I've still got some business to attend to,” Han Jingru said sternly and walked out of the room, leaving a confused Huang Xiaoyong behind.

“What business could he possibly have this late at night?” He asked.

“He’s your master, man. His business is none of your concern.” Jiang Yingying replied.

Huang Xiaoyong paused for a moment and broke into a lecherous grin. “Say, do you think he’s gone to hook up with girls from the Piaomiao Sect?”

Jiang Yingying shot him a fierce glare. *Good grief, is sex all this guy can think of? That might be the case with any other guy, but I know Han Jingru would never do such a thing!*

“Is that what you want to do?” She asked.

Huang Xiaoyong was about to nod instinctively, but quickly stopped himself and shook his head instead. “As if I’d be interested in those boring women! You are the only one I devote my heart to, Yingying!”

Jiang Yingying rolled her eyes in disgust when she heard those mushy words from him.

Meanwhile, Han Jingru had made his way down the mountain and felt his heart ache when he found his Ruby-eyed Python barely breathing in between some rocks.

It was severely injured and was bleeding from the wounds all over its body.

He quickly picked it up and carried it in his arms all the way back to his room.

After carefully setting it down on the bed, Han Jingru shot it a disdainful look as he said, “I give you a few days of freedom and you pick a fight with the Qilin? You got a death wish or something, buddy?”

He couldn't think of anything else that could do this much damage to the Ruby-eyed Python. In addition to that, the timing of the commotion in the Dark Forest matched that of the Ruby-eyed Python's departure as well.

The Ruby-eyed Python stuck out its tongue in response.

“The Qilin must be pretty strong if it did this to you, huh? Well, considering how you’re still alive, I’d say you did a great job too!” Han Jingru let out a sigh. *It cost the lives of almost every Cultivator in Xenos just to seal Qilin away, which goes to show just how powerful it is. With that in mind, the fact that the Ruby-eyed Python survived an encounter with it should also show how tough it is. Unfortunately, the power difference between the two is simply too huge...*

The Ruby-eyed Python had ventured into the Dark Forest in hopes of bringing Han Jingru some Holy Chestnuts, but ended up running into the recently awakened the Qilin along the way.

A huge fight broke out, but the Ruby-eyed Python managed to escape from the battle as the Qilin had yet to regain its full strength after waking up from a thousand year slumber.

After all, the Qilin was an ancient familiar, and its power was practically unparalleled.

Although Han Jingru was still unable to confirm if the Qilin had awakened, it was highly likely to

be the case, much to his dismay as he didn't want to die in Xenos.

Su Yimo and Han Xiang are still waiting for me on Earth, so I really can't afford to die here.

However, taking out the Qilin would prove to be a near impossible task for me at my current level...

In order to take that beast down, I'll need to have a better understanding of what happened in the past. Looks like I'm gonna have to make a trip to the Dragon Emperor Palace, then.

Zhantai Liuyue may be right about the Emperor not coming after me now, but I mustn't take this for granted either. He is an emperor feared by even Pinnacle Masters, after all...

The Ruby-eyed Python had very strong regenerative abilities and had practically healed all of its external wounds by the next morning. However, it was still very weak and would require quite some time to fully recover.

Being unable to help out with the recovery process, Han Jingru decided to leave it alone and went to see Huang Xiaoyong instead.

“Do you know where Zhantai Liuyue lives?” He asked.

Zhantai Liuyue was the most beautiful member of the Piaomiao Sect. Her position as Master of the sect made her a great match for Han Jingru, so it was only natural that Huang Xiaoyong would get the wrong idea when he asked about her the first thing in the morning.

“You sure are amazing, Master! Congratulations on hooking up with the Master of the Piaomiao Sect!” Han Jingru exclaimed with a lecherous grin.

“Screw you, Xiaoyong!” Han Jingru scolded him.

“Screw me? B-But I don’t swing that way, Master...” Huang Xiaoyong stammered nervously in confusion.

It took every ounce of willpower Han Jingru

could muster to refrain from hitting him. “I’ll kick your a** if you give me that crap again!”



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Huang Xiaoyong saw that he was angry and kept quiet as he brought Han Jingru to Zhantai Liuyue's quarters.

“This is where she lives, Master. Now, if there is nothing else, I'll be on my way.” Huang Xiaoyong whispered.

I'm pretty sure that pervert Huang Xiaoyong is having indecent thoughts about me and Zhantai Liuyue... While it wouldn't really be a problem for me as Su Yimo isn't here in Xenos, I really don't want this misunderstanding to worsen...

“No, I want you to come with me,” Han Jingru said.

Why would Master bring me along on a private meeting? Huang Xiaoyong wondered as he watched him knock on the door.

As tempting as it was to ask, Huang Xiaoyong knew he would probably get a beating and decided against it.

It was believed that women were at their ugliest

upon waking up, which made it a perfect time to judge their true beauty.

However, Zhantai Liuyue looked just as beautiful as ever when she opened the door. Her eyes were like the abyss, captivating those who looked into them, and the saliva flowing from the corner of Huang Xiaoyong's mouth was proof of her charm.

“Master Han? Have you come to evict me this early in the morning?” She asked.

Huang Xiaoyong spoke up before Han Jingru could even respond, “There’s no way my Master would kick you out! You are welcome to stay in Jingru Sect for as long as you like, Madam Zhantai!”

Zhantai Liuyue smirked. *Yes, that’s exactly how men should treat me!*

She then turned towards Han Jingru and saw that he was completely unfazed. In fact, he wasn’t even checking her out at all.

“Thank you, Sect Elder Huang,” Zhantai Liuyue said with a smile.

“Don’t mention it! In fact, it’s a good thing for the Jingru Sect that you’re staying here...”

“Ahem!” Han Jingru cleared his throat. He couldn’t stand seeing how Huang Xiaoyong was acting like a crazy fanboy.

Realizing it was not his place to speak, Huang Xiaoyong was quick to shut up and take a step back.

“May I ask the purpose of your visit, Master Han?” Zhantai Liuyue knew he wouldn’t have come this early for no reason.

“I would like you to come to the Dragon Emperor Palace with me, Madam Zhantai,” Han Jingru said.

Zhantai Liuyue raised an eyebrow in surprise.

I know he must’ve decided on going there to find out more about the Qilin after hearing its legend, but I didn’t expect him to invite me along...

“Master Han, you do know that bringing me won’t save your life should the Emperor wish to take it, right?”

“You have misunderstood my intention. I would never put you in danger like that. I was hoping that you would be able to offer me guidance with your vast degree of knowledge. That is why I am inviting you on this journey, Madam Zhantai,” Han Jingru explained.

That reason sounds a little far-fetched... Could it be that he only looks decent on the surface and is actually a pervert who’s using this as an excuse to get close to me? If that’s the case, I’d say he’s doing a damned great job at hiding it! They say a person’s eyes never lie, but what about his?

Zhantai Liuyue thought as she eyed him from head to toe.

“I know what you’re thinking, Madam Zhantai, and I assure you it’s definitely not the case. I have no other intentions apart from what I have

just mentioned,” Han Jingru continued.

That came as a huge blow to Zhantai Liuyue’s ego and angered her greatly. “Why should I go with you, huh? I’m the leader of the Piaomiao Sect, not your little errand boy!”

Han Jingru let out a sigh. *Women sure are terrifying creatures regardless of the world we’re in... Nothing good ever comes out of offending them... I’d better resolve this before it escalates into further conflicts between the two sects!*

“Rest assured that I will make it worth your while, Madam Zhantai.”

“You think you can bribe me that easily?” Zhantai Liuyue said disdainfully. She had made up her mind to refuse his request regardless of his offer.

However, whatever resolve she had was gone when Han Jingru offered her a Holy Chestnut.

No one was able to resist the temptation of the Holy Chestnut, not even the Pinnacle Masters.

“Master Han, I...” Zhantai Liuyue couldn’t help but drop her jaws in shock.

“Madam Zhantai, this Holy Chestnut is all yours if you are willing to help me out.”

Zhantai Liuyue began breathing heavily upon hearing that.

I didn't expect him to offer me a Holy Chestnut! How am I supposed to refuse him? In fact, is it even possible to refuse him at all?

“You’ve got to be kidding me, Master Han... You can’t seriously be offering me something that valuable, right?” Her tone was filled with doubt and uncertainty. *This has got to be a joke! Who on earth would possibly give up a Holy Chestnut so easily?*

Huang Xiaoyong had a faint smile on his face as he watched on from the side. He had known about the existence of Holy Chestnuts a long time ago, but he didn’t really know what it was at the time. As a result, he didn’t really think much of it when Han Jingru gave him one. It wasn’t until he

arrived in Fengshang City that he learned more about it and realized its true value.

Haha, Zhantai Liuyue is reacting the exact same way I did back then. Well, that's just how unpredictable my Master is!

“Is this Holy Chestnut not good enough for you, Madam Zhantai?” Han Jingru asked with a smile.

At that moment, Zhantai Liuyue had cast aside whatever remaining ego and pride she had. *This Holy Chestnut will make up for all of my losses!*

“I’ll do it, Master Han! When do we depart?”



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Her final decision came as no surprise to Han Jingru as he knew no one could resist the temptation of the Holy Chestnut, even if she was the master of the Piaomiao Sect.

“Why are you suddenly going to the Dragon Emperor Palace, Master?” Huang Xiaoyong asked curiously after leaving Zhantai Liuyue’s quarters.

“To do something really important.”

Han Jingru didn’t want to go there at first but decided after a whole night of thinking that the trip was indeed necessary.

Given how powerful the Ruby-eyed Python is, normal familiars wouldn’t even be able to hurt it at all! Therefore, it’s highly likely that the Qilin has been awakened in the Dark Forest, and we will have to face it eventually. Rather than just sitting around, it’s better to gather more information so I can formulate a better strategy to combat it!

Meanwhile, Yan Qinghua was shocked when

Zhantai Liuyue told her about Han Jingru's plans on going to the Dragon Emperor Palace.

“Madam, is there something going on between you and Master Han?” she whispered. Yan Qinghua had a crush on Han Jingru and had been dreaming about him ever since she got that picture album. Now that she had seen him in person, she found herself falling even harder for him and feared that Zhantai Liuyue would win his heart over.

“What are you talking about? There's nothing between us!” Zhantai Liuyue exclaimed.

“Then why are you two going to the Dragon Emperor Palace together?” Yan Qinghua asked in confusion.

“It's probably about what happened in the Dark Forest recently. I think he wants to have a look at the scriptures stored in the Dragon Emperor Palace, but he doesn't know much about the legends, so he's bringing me along to guide him on anything he doesn't understand.”

“Do you think the Qilin has awakened?” Yan Qinghua asked nervously. All of Xenos would be in danger if it did, and that was something she feared the most.

Zhantai Liuyue shook her head in response. *I don't want to jump to conclusions until I have solid evidence, and this trip to the Dragon Emperor Palace might just help uncover that mystery.*

She had been wanting to find that out as well, so not only was making that trip with Han Jingru in line with her personal interests, but it also gained her a Holy Chestnut in the process.

“This trip to the Dragon Emperor Palace might help us find out if the recent unrest in the Dark Forest has anything to do with the Qilin,” Zhantai Liuyue said sternly.

“Madam, that's not the only reason you agreed to his request so easily, is it? Be honest, do you have feelings for him?” Yan Qinghua stared at her cautiously as if she had underestimated her before.

“I do have my reasons for it, but it’s not because I have feelings for him,” Zhantai Liuyue said with a wry smile. She still found it hard to believe that Han Jingru would trade a Holy Chestnut for her help.

“What reasons?” Yan Qinghua asked curiously.

Zhantai Liuyue whipped out the Holy Chestnut and said, “This is what he’s offering in return.”

“A H-H-Holy Chestnut?” Yan Qinghua was dumbfounded.

“That’s right, and he’s giving me this just to go to the Dragon Emperor Palace with him. How am I supposed to refuse an offer like this, right?”

Zhantai Liuyue chuckled at the thought of how she had sworn to refuse his request, only to have it all be for nothing when presented with a Holy Chestnut.

Yan Qinghua’s chest was heaving so much from hyperventilating that Huang Xiaoyong would probably flood the village with his drool if he saw it.

“If I recall correctly... he sold a Holy Chestnut at an auction in Fengshang City, right?” Yan Qinghua asked. *It’s such a rare item that being in possession of one was enough to shake the Imperial Court, and Han Jingru still has more after selling one off?*

Zhantai Liuyue let out a deep sigh. “Yeah, who would’ve thought he’d still have one with him?”

“Do you think he might have more?” Under normal circumstances, Yan Qinghua wouldn’t have even considered such a possibility. With Han Jingru, however, pretty much anything was possible.

Zhantai Liuyue smiled wryly. *As much as I hate to believe it, what she said is indeed possible. I mean, why else would he just give up a Holy Chestnut so easily?* “Maybe he is so generous because he doesn’t need it.”

“Madam, does this mean you’ll be able to reach the Pinnacle Stage?” Yan Qinghua asked.

While it wasn’t likely that a Holy Chestnut would

help an Eighth Stage Cultivator like Zhantai Liuyue ascend to the Pinnacle Stage, it did provide her with a significant advantage and unlock a lot of possibilities that weren't available before.

“I'm not sure. Look after the others in the sect while in my absence, okay? Make sure they don't get into any conflicts with those from the Jingru Sect,” Zhantai Liuyue instructed.

“Don't worry, Madam. There's no way I'd let that happen! Last thing I'd want is to make Master Han my enemy!” Yan Qinghua reassured her.

“Look at you... you really like him, huh?” Zhantai Liuyue asked curiously.

Yan Qinghua nodded profusely. She remembered the scene from Han Jingru's battle with The Elite 28 down to the tiniest details, and he was all she could think about every day.

“Yeah, and I'm confident in winning his heart over as long as you don't compete over him with me!” she said with a chuckle.

While I can understand why she'd fall in love with Han Jingru, I can't help but worry that heartache is all that awaits her... I mean, that guy is completely unfazed by me! Unlike other men, his lust for women is completely out of this world!

“I heard he's already got a wife and daughter, so I would suggest that you don't get your hopes up,” Zhantai Liuyue advised her.

A wife and a daughter?

Yan Qinghua froze upon hearing those words, but quickly returned to her usual self again. “So what? I can just be his mistress and he'd still be mine!”

It was extremely common for women in Xenos to have such mindsets, so Zhantai Liuyue didn't bother saying any further.

Meanwhile, at the Dragon Emperor Palace.

After spending two days going through the scriptures intensively, the Emperor summoned Fei Lingsheng and Yi Qingshan once again.

The two of them noticed how haggard the Emperor looked when they arrived before him and figured he must have been going without any sleep in the past two days. However, the look on the Emperor's face suggested that he had nothing but bad news.

“I've gone through the entire archive. Although there have been many mentions of the Dragon Master, not much is explained about it, so I wouldn't count on using it to take out the Qilin.” The Emperor let out a sigh.

That outcome came as no surprise to Fei Lingsheng as she knew the Dragon Master was just a rumor, to begin with. With no one being able to confirm its existence, there wouldn't be much documentation about it.

“It looks like we'll have to find another way,

Your Majesty,” Fei Lingsheng said.

“It’s been a few thousand years since the Qilin’s previous awakening. Does Your Majesty remember how Xenos handled it back then?” Yi Qingshan asked.

The Emperor looked towards Yi Qingshan. “Are you referring to the invasion of Ether Realm or the use of a Magical Field?”

“Given the strength of the Cultivators in Xenos these days, I think it’s safe to say that we can forget about using a Magical Field,” Yi Qingshan replied.

It was obvious that he was implying they should invade Ether Realm, but the Emperor shook his head at that idea.

We have failed to invade Ether Realm, even though Xenos was at its strongest back then. How could we possibly do that when we’re so much weaker now? Besides, the location of the Dimensional Tunnel has long since become a secret. All rumors claim that it is located in Mount Xenos, but that place is off limits now that the Qilin has awakened...

“Xenos isn’t as strong as it once was...”

“Ether Realm isn’t getting any stronger either, so I think we might stand a chance,” Yi Qingshan said.

“The entrance to Ether Realm is located in Mount Xenos. I’m assuming you have some sort of plan apart from sending our men to their pointless deaths?” The Emperor asked. *Getting anywhere near Mount Xenos is impossible with the Qilin occupying the area. Anyone with half a brain would know that, so Yi Qingshan must have an idea in mind.*

“A diversion, Your Majesty. All we have to do is lure the Qilin away from Mount Xenos long enough for us to find the entrance,” Yi Qingshan replied.

“And how do you suggest we do that?”

“Through the use of the Imperial Court’s Beast Battalion. We can have the Beastmasters distract

the Qilin and keep it busy for us,” Yi Qingshan explained.

There was a cold look in the Emperor’s eyes as he let out a faint smile. “Are you trying to weaken my forces even further by having the entire Beast Battalion annihilated?”

“Does Your Majesty think the Beast Battalion would be able to hold the Qilin off if it were to break through our defenses? How many more lives would be lost, then?” Yi Qingshan shot back at him.

The Emperor was well aware of the threat the Qilin presented, but he simply couldn’t bring himself to make such a huge sacrifice for something so uncertain.

Moreover, the Emperor was also starting to grow suspicious of Yi Qingshan. *First, he claims to have witnessed the awakened Qilin with his own eyes, and now he’s proposing to have the Beast Battalion act as a diversion? All of this just feels like a part of his plan to weaken the Imperial Court’s defenses! In fact, I’m even starting to wonder if this is an act of conspiracy from the Xia Nation...*

“It would appear that you have ulterior motives for entering my kingdom, Yi Qingshan. I will provide you with a clear path, so please return to Xia Nation as soon as possible.” The Emperor ordered coldly.

Realizing that the Emperor had gotten the wrong idea, Yi Qingshan said, “Does Your Majesty doubt my claims of sighting of the Qilin? I swear upon my name that I am telling the truth or I shall die a horrible death!”

The Emperor frowned. *Swearing an oath like that is no joking matter, especially for Cultivators... Am I really just overthinking things here?*

Yi Qingshan continued, “Think about it, Your Majesty. Why would a Pinnacle Master like myself get involved in the battle between the Three Nations?”

Thinking it was probably just a misunderstanding, the Emperor nodded in response.

At that moment, the Emperor's trusted aide came over to his side and whispered beside his ear, "Your Majesty, Han Jingru and Zhantai Liuyue have departed from Xixiang City together."

"Where is he going?" The Emperor asked. He had his men monitor Han Jingru and was therefore able to keep track of his whereabouts at all times. This man leaving Xixiang City was considered a major incident, so word about it got to him fairly quickly.

"We don't know for sure just yet, but it's likely that he's headed for the Dragon Emperor Palace," replied the trusted aide.

The Emperor narrowed his eyes. *Why would Han Jingru be coming here now? Well, I suppose there really isn't anywhere else he could go...*

"Fei Lingsheng, does Han Jingru know what happened in the Dark Forest?"

"Word about it has spread across the Three Nations, so it wouldn't be a surprise if he has heard of it. However, only those in the Imperial

Court know about the Qilin,” Fei Lingsheng replied.

She then followed up with a question out of curiosity, “Is something the matter, Your Majesty?”

“Han Jingru has left Xixiang City together with Zhantai Liuyue. We are unsure of their reasons for doing so, but their destination appears to be the Dragon Emperor Palace.”

Han Jingru is coming to the Dragon Emperor Palace? It is indeed strange for him to be coming here at this time, but how would he know about the Qilin?

Fei Ling'er frowned at the thought of that and looked towards Yi Qingshan.

“I haven't been in contact with him at all! Even if he has heard about the Qilin, it couldn't have been from me!” He shook his head as he denied it.

Fei Ling'er nodded. *Yi Qingshan has been with me the whole time w*

hile we were in Xixiang City, so it

“Maybe it’s got something to do with Zhantai Liuyue, since he’s bringing her with him and all.” She guessed.

“Is it just the two of them?” Yi Qingshan asked.

“That’s right. Whatever his reasons are for coming here, we’ll all find out when he gets here. Besides, I’ve been wanting to meet him for a while now,” the Emperor said.

An idea began to form in Yi Qingshan’s mind.

Han Jingru leaving Xixiang City has presented me with the perfect opportunity to get my hands on the Holy Chestnut without the need for a direct confrontation! All I have to do is use his weakness against him, and everyone knows it’s none other than Jiang Yingying!

Despite having only met Han Jingru once, Yi Qingshan had conducted a thorough research and knew pretty much everything about him in Longyun City.

He was well aware of Han Jingru's efforts in finding Jiang Yingying, who turned out to be his younger sister.

Given how much he cares about her, he'd definitely give up the Holy Chestnut for her safety!

Later that night, Yi Qingshan concealed his presence and snuck out of the Dragon Emperor Palace.

As Fei Ling'er had her guard down around him, she didn't even notice he was gone until she knocked on his door the next morning.

She realized something was amiss when she didn't hear a respond and kicked the door open, only to find an empty bed in the room.

"I can't believe he ran away!" Fei Ling'er closed

her eyes and focused her energy in an attempt to locate Yi Qingshan, but to no avail.

Because the two of them were on a similar power level, there was no way for her to detect his presence if he were to conceal it.

“Damn it, where have you gone?” Fei Ling’er muttered worriedly under her breath. *I don’t know what he’s up to, but I have a bad feeling about this...*

A fight was bound to break out between them if Yi Qingshan did anything foolish within the Imperial Court, and that was something Fei Ling’er didn’t want.

However, there was nothing she could do to stop him without knowing his intentions nor his whereabouts.

In the meantime, Han Jingru and Zhantai Liuyue were taking a break in a town nearby.

They had been taking their time with their journey, enjoying the scenery as they made their

way towards the Dragon Emperor Palace.

Due to a lack of industrial pollution in Xenos, Han Jingru found every part of it as beautiful as paradise. *Man, I wish I could bring Su Yimo and Han Xiang here... We could start a whole new life here, free from the hustle and bustle of the city...*

“What’s on your mind?” Zhantai Liuyue was very curious as to what he was thinking about when she noticed him spacing out.

Of course, Han Jingru couldn’t tell her the truth as exposing his true identity could bring him all sorts of unthinkable trouble.

“I was just wondering how strong the Qilin really is,” Han Jingru said while taking a sip of his tea.

Zhantai Liuyue shook her head. “I wouldn’t even bother worrying about that if I were you. All you need to know is that even the Pinnacle Masters are no match for it. I think you’d have to at least be in the Alpha Stage to at least put up a fight!”

The Alpha Stage, eh? While I can’t imagine what it’s like, the Ruby-eyed Python’s injuries are a testament to the Qilin’s strength...

“Will Xenos really be doomed if we fail to put Qilin back into slumber?” Han Jingru asked curiously.

“According to legend, the Qilin is a malevolent and bloodthirsty beast that loves to eat human flesh. While Xenos won’t be destroyed in the event that the Qilin is freed, all of us humans will.” There was a trace of fear in Zhantai Liuyue’s eyes. She was afraid that no one would be able to stop the Qilin, and that she would eventually come face to face with it.

Just thinking about it is scary enough... I can't imagine actually seeing it before my own two eyes...

“But those are all just legends, aren’t they? Have you ever considered the possibility that the truth isn’t exactly like that? Maybe the Qilin isn’t the vicious monster you make it out to be. Maybe it’s only killing humans because they have disturbed its peaceful slumber.” Although Han Jingru’s words totally refuted the claims regarding the

Qilin, his theories weren't invalid. After all, humans were the ones who startled the beast and spread the rumors about it.

“Even so, its very existence is a threat to all of humanity! We can't be betting everyone's lives to test if it's actually malevolent and bloodthirsty now, can we?” Zhantai Liuyue asked.

Han Jingru nodded in agreement. *That is indeed too large a price to pay for everyone. Killing the beast while it is still weakened should be our primary objective right now.*

“Have you gotten enough rest?” He asked.

Zhantai Liuyue nodded. Traveling long distances on foot was actually a piece of cake for an Eighth Stage Cultivator like her, so that rest was completely unnecessary. The only reason she chose to take a break was so she could spend some more time with Han Jingru and get to know him better.

Right as the two were about to leave, a group of men showed up and had both of them

surrounded.

Han Jingru smiled at one of them and said, “So this is why you left in a hurry earlier, eh? To get reinforcements?”

“Are you sure you can handle such a pretty lady all by yourself? How about you hand her over and we’ll take some of that burden off your shoulders?” the man replied shamelessly.

I know beautiful women and trouble often come hand in hand, but these guys are either ignorant or suicidal if they’re thinking of making a move on Zhantai Liuyue! The strongest ones in the group are in the Fourth Stage. While that may seem impressive to the common folk, they’re up against two Sect Leaders here!

“They seem to be fans of yours, Madam Zhantai!” Han Jingru said with a chuckle.

The men were visibly shocked when they heard him call her “Madam”.

Sect Leaders are usually formidable opponents,

but there are also many who establish sects simply for the sake of that impressive title! She

“Which sect are you from, lady? Maybe I’ll join your sect, hmm?” The leader of the gang asked as he ogled Zhantai Liuyue from head to toe.



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