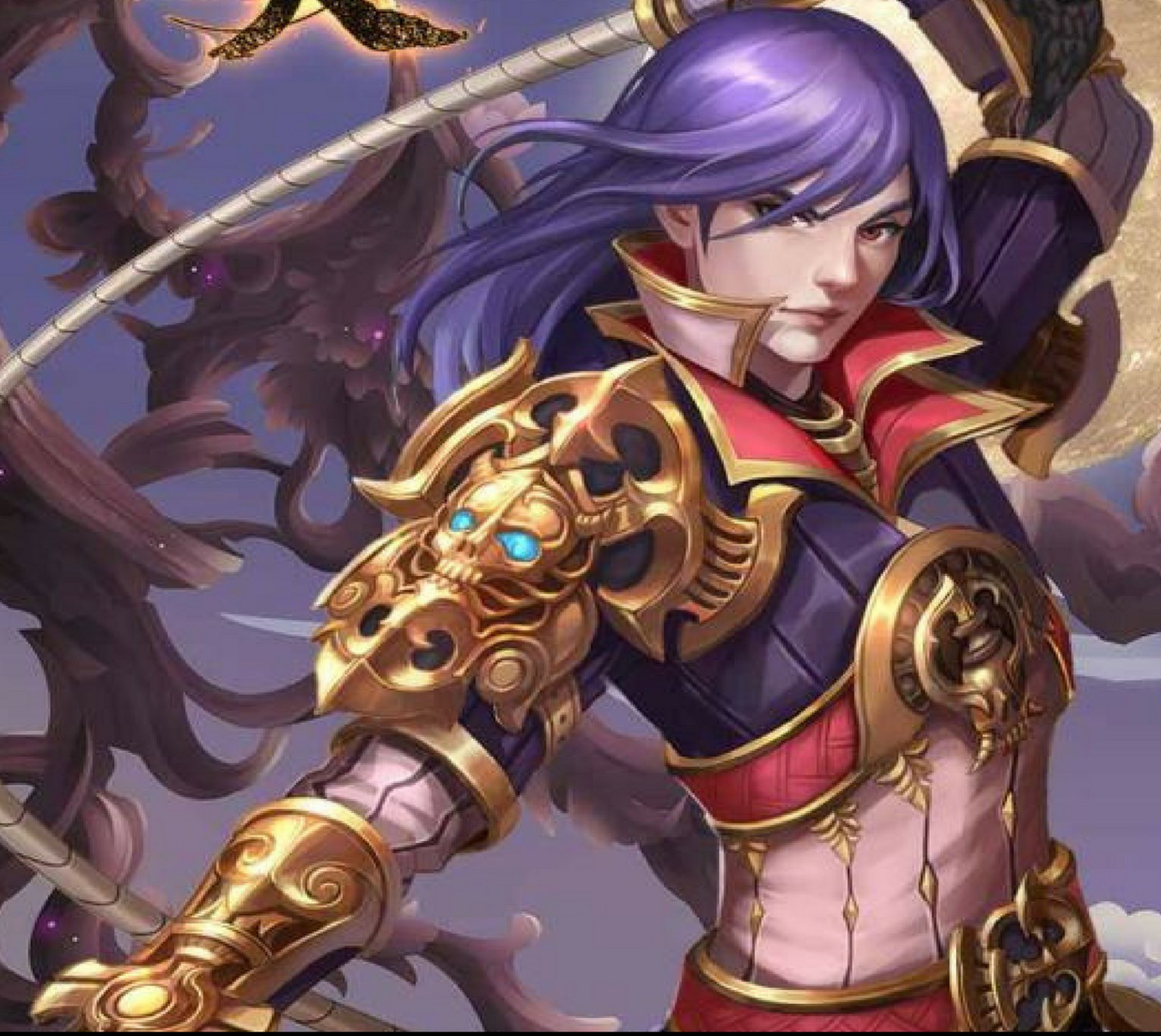

THE AVALON OF 5 ELEMENTS

BOOK 02

Fang Xiang

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The Avalon of Five Elements

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by

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Synopsis

The tens of thousands of universes have merged. The disintegration of spiritual force led to the momentous collapse of the great Cultivation World, a mighty era that had endured through millions of years of history. In the wake of the large-scale invasion of the Wilderness, the Avalon of Five Elements has become the practitioners' last stand.

After a thousand years, a lowly youth, who hailed from the Old Territory, toiled as a laborer for three years in the depths of the Wilderness. He then became an exception and obtained the opportunity to enter the Avalon Of Five Elements for further studies.

Bearing beast-like fighting capabilities and driven by the desire to take control of his life, the youth strived for greater strength and power. Little did he know that he would set off a majestic upheaval.

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Chapter 101: A New Situation

Ai Hui watched coldly from the side. If looks could kill, Duanmu Huanghun would have died many times over. As Lou Lan skillfully stripped Duanmu Huanghun bare, Ai Hui observed without the slightest intention of helping.

To him, Duanmu Huanghun looked no different from a blanched suckling pig. This sort of spare ribs would even be scoffed at by a butcher for its utter lack of flesh.

He cursed relentlessly under his breath.

If Lou Lan left for even a moment, Ai Hui would have stabbed Duanmu Huanghun multiple times already. He had always despised those who were all talk and no action, yet now he was no different from them. Ai Hui was filled with sorrow; if only he didn't need that one hundred million!

"Preparations have been made," Lou Lan said.

Roused from his self-pitying stupor by Lou Lan's words, Ai Hui automatically replied, "Ah...."

There he saw Duanmu Huanghun, stripped to his underwear and lying on the table beside Lou Lan. His body was strangely bright red like a cooked prawn.

Ai Hui looked at Lou Lan oddly. What did he mean by

preparations have been made?

"Does he mean that I can start beating him up?" he thought. "Then why didn't he say so earlier? Lou Lan must still be too inexperienced at these things. What I plan on doing is similar to how a butcher slaughters livestock; there's no need to strip someone bare before killing him. At my current level, I can kill him without spilling a single drop of blood. Afterwards, all we have to do is feed him to the dire beasts, and he'll have disappeared without a trace. Faking a natural death isn't impossible either. All we need are the right materials. Have you prepared these materials, Lou Lan...?"

Just as Ai Hui's murderous intent reached its highest point, Lou Lan began to explain.

"Bangwan's current conditions is more serious than the last time. Luckily, Ai Hui's strength has also improved, so we can still save him. You must be anxious to help since the two of you seem to have a good relationship."

Ai Hui froze, as if a binding curse had been placed on him. The corner of his eye twitched as he asked, "Save him? Me?"

"Yes, Ai Hui's metal elemental energy can stimulate his body and facilitate the movement of his vital fluids," Lou Lan said, continuing honestly, "Lou Lan's elemental energy may not be enough to save Bangwan, but rest assured, Ai Hui is definitely capable of saving him."

To hell with this!

I have to save this ingrate again?

Seething inside, Ai Hui raged internally like a dire beast rampaging through the woods.

“Are you not feeling well?” Lou Lan asked, deeply concerned. Ai Hui wasn’t moving much, and his complexion was abnormal. Lou Lan prepared his eyes for a scan.

Ai Hui raised his head, revealing an incredibly forced smile.

Lou Lan heaved a sigh of relief. “Ai Hui, the technique is exactly the same as before.”

Turning to face the unconscious person lying on the table, his eyes flared with hatred as he asked, “I have to use elemental energy for this?”

“Yes, Ai Hui.” Lou Lan further explained, “Bangwan’s condition is more serious this time around, so Ai Hui must use elemental energy. The force exerted should also be slightly increased.”

“Exert more force?” Ai Hui asked, his lips curving into a grin. “No problem!”

As soon as he finished his sentence, a crisp slap resounded

through the air. A clear imprint of Ai Hui's palm appeared on Duanmu Huanghun's bright red body that still trembled from the impact.

You may have escaped death, but you'll still have to face my wrath. Blame your bad luck for delivering you right into my hands!

Using his palms, Ai Hui rapidly delivered blow after blow at full force.

Enemy, enemy, enemy! Ingrate, ingrate, ingrate!

Duanmu Huanghun's body began to swell up like an inflated balloon as Ai Hui continued to rain relentless blows on him.

This was only his second time unleashing his full strength since the mishap. The first had been during the blind battle at the training ground. Otherwise, extracting silk required him to slow his elemental energy significantly, and his regular trainings were the same as well.

Being able to fully utilize his strength was deeply satisfying.

Recalling his method of using a sword technique to extract silk, his fingers readily moved into position, poised to take action.

The sword technique he previously used had been the result of a sudden inspiration. His subconscious attempt to channel elemental energy into a non-existent sword had yielded surprisingly

remarkable effects.

During silk extraction, Ai Hui could barely feel the movement of his elemental energy due to its incredibly slowed speed. This time, however, his elemental energy was free of constraints and circulated at full power. Ai Hui executed his sword technique and immediately felt the difference.

Bang!

Without warning, the insanely fast elemental energy within his body became torpid.

The sword embryo state!

Ai Hui was taken aback. The sword embryo state that he so painstakingly avoided appeared without warning. And for the first time, he activated it without a sword in hand. There was no mistaking it; he could feel the imposing aura exuding from the exceptionally fine tip of the blade between his brows.

While Ai Hui didn’t know how to describe the aura, the closest word he could think of was “formidable.”

.

Like being in the sword embryo state.

The sword embryo state surely had extensive uses, but it was easy to become reliant on it.

The world in Ai Hui's vision was now completely different. Duanmu Huanghun's skin appeared much thinner, clearly revealing his vital fluids' movements and its chokepoints.

Ai Hui was deeply familiar with the sword embryo state; he had experienced the vast benefits, as well as the suffering it could bring.

Despite that, he was shocked to sense the movement of the elemental energy within his body so clearly.

Ever since his elemental energy had become tightly wound, he could utilize only small amounts of elemental energy with the help of the Sword Rattan Gloves. The purity of this elemental energy, however, far exceeded that of his natal residence. As a result, when circulating at full power, its speed was beyond what Ai Hui could perceive. Only during silk extraction, when the elemental energy was restricted, could he clearly perceive its movement.

The slow circulation of elemental energy was suitable for training, but fighting required swiftness. If the speed of circulation exceeded the agility of one's thoughts, however, the elemental energy could easily spiral out of control.

He knew that the elemental energy wasn't circulating any slower; it was the sword embryo state that was enhancing his processing speed and perception, allowing him to fully capture the

flow of his elemental energy.

Without hesitation, Ai Hui turned his palm into a blade and stabbed his fingers towards one of the blockages within Duanmu Huanghun's body.

Buzz!

Around his fingertips, a faint blade appeared, accompanied by a slight, ringing sound as the blade penetrated Duanmu Huanghun's flesh.

The blockage was immediately cleared.

A demonic glow flashed in his eyes, his fingers rapidly prodding Duanmu Huanghun's entire body.

Buzz buzz buzz!

Piercing sounds rang out incessantly. With each thrust of Ai Hui's fingers, a tiny speck of blood appeared on Duanmu Huanghun's body. As they grew in number, the reddish hue of his body began to subside.

Duanmu Huanghun sluggishly woke up.

As he stared at the vile face in front of him, his body chilled.

This situation felt way too familiar.

He silently closed his eyes. Why was he having this nightmare again? So much time had passed since that incident; surely his mind was stronger than this.

This nightmare must still be haunting him because he hasn't gotten over the incident. He probably just needed to exact revenge on that scumbag.

"Hello, why are you pretending to be dead? Are you trying to be an exhibitionist?"

Duanmu Huanghun grew bewildered. This wasn't part of the script....

"Take note! Including this time, you now owe me one hundred and fifty million!"

Seeing Duanmu Huanghun playing dead rekindled Ai Hui's anger. Unable to restrain himself any longer, Ai Hui viciously smacked Duanmu Huanghun right on the thigh.

As if struck by lightning, Duanmu Huanghun grew addled from the blow.

Chapter 102: Reflection

Ai Hui had no interest in Duanmu Huanghun's frail physique.

Healing Duanmu Huanghun this time had helped Ai Hui notice how much the sword embryo had grown. The sword embryo had become much more sensitive after his elemental energy had become purer.

All of a sudden, Ai Hui realized that the seemingly pointless swordplay manuals weren't as useless as he thought. The techniques in the swordplay manuals had been applicable across many areas, such as silk extraction and the growth of the sword embryo. Even the Gale Bat Blade had proven useful during his blind battle with Zu Yan.

Ai Hui was a realistic person; he wouldn't simply ignore evidence in front of him.

Why were these swordplay manuals that everyone else despised useful for him?

He quickly understood that the key to this was the sword embryo!

Sword manuals became irrelevant following the disintegration of spiritual force.

Long ago, when he had first started reading swordplay manuals,

Ai Hui had wondered if sword techniques could be activated using elemental energy.

He quickly figured out that it was unlikely. Lots of people would probably have already tried something so seemingly simple. The swordsmen of the Cultivation Era were so much more powerful than the elementalists of today, and in pursuit of power, many elementalists would certainly have tried to tap into the learnings of the swordsmen. Besides, there were so many swordplay enthusiasts out there who would do anything to revive the glory days of swordsmanship. Surely they would have attempted something like this, right?

This was definitely the case.

However, the number of swordplay enthusiasts has been on the decline ever since the founding of the Avalon of Five Elements. The value of swordplay manuals had also fallen correspondingly. They were initially sold by the book, then by weight, and nowadays, these manuals were as good as rubbish.

These hard truths reflect the failure of the many attempts at reviving swordplay. But for the entire Avalon of Five Elements to utterly disregard swordsmanship meant that there was a serious underlying problem.

Ai Hui never really understood the reason behind these failures, but his lessons in the Induction Ground, especially his discussions with his teacher, made him revisit the issue.

The stability of elemental energy and spiritual force differed greatly.

Spiritual force was much more dynamic than elemental energy. This can be further explained by drawing parallels to the different states of water. Spiritual force could be said to be akin to water vapor, able to penetrate even the smallest of openings. Elemental energy, on the other hand, was similar to slush—it was difficult for it to pass through such narrow channels.

This fundamental difference was the root of why sword techniques couldn’t be used.

Ai Hui had asked his teacher if it was possible to simply convert elemental energy into spiritual force.

His teacher had laughed upon hearing his idea. Teacher Wang then went on to explain that countless people have tried to do so in the past one thousand years. Everyone knew that converting elemental energy into spiritual force was the key to accessing the inexhaustible teachings and treasures of the Cultivation Era. Anyone who was able to do so would be able to simply tap into this vast resource instead of training with an entirely new system from scratch.

The Cultivation Era was a period of power and riches. The ferocious dire beasts were merely the prey of the cultivators, kept as pets and mounts and sometimes even killed for food. The only reason why the Wilderness had not been conquered was that it wasn’t deemed worthy of being so.

But the experiments had all ended in failure—even those that were undertaken by grandmasters.

Ai Hui had never once thought that this seemingly impossible problem would have anything to do with him.

His main focus was on the sword embryo that appeared to be capable of linking his elemental energy to the swordplay manuals, fanning the embers of this dying art.

All of Ai Hui's attention was focused on reviving more of these embers.

After the strain on his body had subsided, Ai Hui began his next attempt.

As he circulated his elemental energy and formed the sword technique with his hand, Ai Hui experienced the same situation as before. Although he was filled with joy, he remained much calmer this time. Triggering it twice implied that it wasn't merely a coincidence.

Ai Hui had a sudden urge to test some swordplay.

He tried to execute the techniques of many different manuals, but he quickly discovered that he wasn't able to proceed. The spiritual force of the Cultivation Era operated along a different pathway from the current five residences and eight palaces.

Ai Hui was deep in thought. Following the sword manuals didn't seem to produce any results, so what next? The sword embryo might be useful, but how exactly did it work?

He suddenly began to stab the air with the energy blade on his fingers, similar to when he was treating Duanmu Huanghun.

His eyes grew wide in panic.

There was no response!

There really wasn't any response at all!

What happened?

Ai Hui was in disbelief. He attempted the same move many more times but to no avail. Just what was going on? Ai Hui quickly composed himself and thought of possible reasons for this unfavorable outcome. However, no matter what he tried, he wasn't able to enter the sword embryo state again.

He became disappointed when he realized that digging out more secrets from the swordplay manuals wasn't going to be as easy as he had initially thought.

However, it wasn't long before he snapped out of it. Ai Hui was, after all, well accustomed to failure, and this setback wasn't going

to take him down. What's more, this problem was especially complex, and had perplexed many great people before him—it surely wouldn't be solved so easily.

Ai Hui's overworked brain eventually cooled down and he began to reflect on recent happenings. Perhaps he had become more conceited as a result of his smooth-sailing training sessions. Being hailed as a genius must have gotten to his head.

His path was now much clearer.

Ai Hui realized that he was getting ahead of himself. He had just activated his natal residence and was already focusing on the sword embryo.

Whether it was a tiny seed or some kind of treasure, the sword embryo would always be there. His current focus shouldn't be on this hidden, unknown item. What he needed to do now was to proceed steadily with his training and activate his hand palaces.

This was what he should be putting his time and effort into.

Having thought things through, Ai Hui became more focused. He was filled with a sense of tranquility and was no longer distracted.

...

After a good sleep, Ai Hui bade Lou Lan farewell. He left the Vanguard Training Hall and headed for the embroidery workshop.

When Han Yuqin noticed Ai Hui return to being silently engrossed in his training, she inevitably felt relieved. Even Wang Shouchuan couldn't bear to disturb his disciple when he saw him being so focused.

The elderly couple had seen many geniuses who possessed amazing talents, most of whom had ended up losing sight of themselves amidst the praise.

Just as they had begun to worry about Ai Hui, he proved to them through his actions that he wasn't going to lose himself in the adulation. He had realigned his attitude and was now as hard-working and humble as before.

The bandaged youth quietly focused on his training in the steam-filled workshop. The embroidery ladies were initially curious about him but soon became accustomed to this sight. As time passed, the youth had long been forgotten by the embroidery ladies, and it was only when they occasionally walked past the workshop window did they notice the young man inside standing as still as a statue.

A pair of abstruse eyes as deep as the abyss could be seen amidst the mist.

This went on tirelessly, day after day.

Chapter 103: Hall of Nine Tones

After throwing all those nonsensical and distracting thoughts to the back of his mind, Ai Hui's mind was now at peace. All that stuff about Bangwan or his one hundred fifty million yuan didn't matter to him anymore. He wasn't going to waste any more time and effort on that ingrate—it wasn't as if they were related in any way. Ai Hui was stingy with his time and would much rather spend it on those close to him.

Was the ingrate within his intimate social circle? Certainly not.

Only Lou Lan, Fatty, Teacher Wang, Mistress, and Senior Mingxiu were worthy. Everyone else can just go mind their own business!

As for the one hundred fifty million? Hehe, forget about it.

Having grown up in the Wilderness, Ai Hui had witnessed the most extreme of contests for resources. People would fight over mere pennies and would sometimes even engage in battles of life and death over a few hundred yuan.

And some rich kid came along and offered him a hundred million? Other people could afford to be naive, but not Ai Hui.

Lou Lan was the only reason why he was willing to lend a helping hand.

Ai Hui knew how different he was from Lou Lan. He also understood that he would never become as kind as Lou Lan, and he didn't want Lou Lan to become more like him.

Even though he managed to escape the darkness, it had long permeated his entire being. He knew that he would never be able to break away from the constant fighting and killing of his past.

Victory and strength were the only things that made him feel safe.

Lou Lan was different; his passion for this world radiated warmly like the sun.

And Ai Hui enjoyed the sun; he liked the way Lou Lan was. Everything was fine as long as Lou Lan remained happy.

As for that ingrate, he'd better not meet Ai Hui in battle.

By focusing on those that mattered and treating Duanmu Huanghun as an insignificant being, Ai Hui preserved his inner tranquility.

Duanmu Huanghun was, however, not the least bit at peace.

How could he be?

He was resentful that putting down his pride and sincerely

apologizing wasn't enough for Ai Hui. Moreover, he had experienced that nightmare again—what a harrowing experience! He had felt so fearful that he didn’t even know how he had managed to flee from the Vanguard Training Hall.

Duanmu Huanghun only regained his senses the next day.

Fully aware of his circumstances, he felt even more resentful.

How could he have fainted in that alley? How could he have allowed himself to be saved by Ai Hui once again? The scene where Ai Hui had contemptuously asked him for one hundred million yuan was etched deeply in his mind.

Duanmu Huanghun had never been scoffed at to such an extent in his life.

Not even once!

Just like how nobody had ever considered him to be someone who made empty promises. Everyone around Duanmu Huanghun, even adults and his childhood friends, had always regarded him as a respectable man of his words!

Money?

To him, money was insignificant!

Money was just a figure to him. Having his promise disregarded was one thing, but to view it as being worth less than fifty million yuan was a total insult to his character. What's worse was that the other party believed that he couldn't even afford one hundred million yuan.

Fine, he was indeed unable to afford that amount at that point in time.

That scoundrel!

Duanmu Huanghun clenched his fist tightly, his knuckles turning white. His eyes felt like they were capable of spewing fire.

He took a deep breath, slowly releasing his fist. Although he was still filled with rage, Duanmu Huanghun could now restrain it.

He made a decision.

Counterattack!

He was going to counterattack!

He would show that scoundrel just how easy it was for him to make money. He would demonstrate the vast difference between a genius and a piece of trash! He would let him know just how much his promises were worth—that scoundrel could just take his one hundred fifty million yuan and wallow in regret!

Duanmu Huanghun regained his composure, quickly coming up with a plan.

……

Wu Qirong's birthday was finally here; he was finally coming of age. The Wu family had a 600-year history, and even though it wasn't particularly large, it wasn't exactly small either. Although their legacy wasn't as established as those of the founding houses, the family nevertheless had its own estate and a decent sphere of influence.

After six hundred years of painstaking efforts, the Wu family was now flourishing.

Wu Qirong was the eldest son of the Wu family, and his name reflected the great expectations that his elders had of him. He was, however, a mischievous child, and had grown to be a highly sociable person with a vast network of friends. Wu Qirong was bright; he had noticed early on that he couldn't match his elders when it came to hard work.

As such, he had focused on expanding his social network. He was a generous person who was well versed in negotiating his way around others, and he had never offended anyone. These qualities led him to have quite a reputation among the dandy community.

Wu Qirong continued to socialize even when he had come to the Induction Ground. He spared no expense, choosing to host a large

banquet to celebrate his birthday.

One could tell from the venue that the host was a massive spender. The banquet was held at the Hall of Nine Tones, the most luxurious venue in the Induction Ground.

The Hall of Nine Tones was built by Di Xinyuan, a Music Theory Master. When the Induction Ground's administration received news that Master Di Xinyuan intended to return to the Induction Ground, they decided to give him a beautiful, scenic place to honor his return.

The master had been indescribably happy at the gesture and had decided to build the Hall of Nine Tones on this piece of land for his life of solitude. He had once roamed the world, exploring the Avalon of Five Elements, and he had even wandered into the Old Territory. He had picked his nine favorite architectural styles and had built nine entirely different courtyards, and hence the name Hall of Nine Tones.

Once built, the Hall of Nine Tones instantly became the Induction Ground's most valued venue.

Besides being an architectural marvel, the hall played host to musicians that were handpicked and taught by the master himself. The songs they performed were always changing and were all written by Master Di Xinyuan himself.

Ever since the day of its completion, the Hall of Nine Tones had become the favorite haunt of youngsters from the influential

families.

Getting a reservation for the venue was extremely difficult. Not only was it extremely costly, but the place also had strict requirements regarding the identity of its customers. Wu Qirong had spent a tidy sum to buy someone else's reservation.

He had to admit, though, that it was all worth it!

The hall's decor and the exquisite elemental food dishes, coupled with the heavenly music, were simply intoxicating. The look on his peers' faces upon entering the venue gave him immense satisfaction. He was extremely pleased with his purchase!

Just as Wu Qirong was happily content, an icy voice suddenly rang out from the doorway. "Little Wu, why wasn't I notified of your birthday party? You'll have to drink three glasses of wine as punishment."

A lithe figure with an air of aloofness appeared at the doorway.

The guests at the table instantly fell silent.

One of Wu Qirong's playboy mates angrily voiced out, "Who is this atrocious piece of trash—"

Pa!

A resounding slap in the face!

The playboy held his cheek and stared blankly at Wu Qirong, stunned that his friend had actually slapped him.

Wu Qirong, who was behaving all loftily just awhile ago, bent down without hesitation to pour himself three glasses of wine. He downed them all in one breath.

Without putting down the glass, Wu Qirong hastily ran over to the newly arrived guest. He bowed slightly and said, “Brother, you should have told me earlier that you were coming! I would hardly dare to disturb you without hearing from you first. Someone as important as you must surely be very busy, unlike us idle fools who merely spend our time strolling around and playing to our whims.”

Everyone was shocked silent.

‘Qi’ means to initiate, while ‘rong’ means glory or honor. Taken together, his name could be understood as "embarking on the road to glory"

Chapter 104: Demon King

Duanmu Huanghun's sharp gaze swept across the entire hall as he nonchalantly walked towards the seat of honor.

Everyone's eyes were focused on Yu Ziyi who was sitting on that seat. The Yu family was an illustrious family as well, and its prominence was such that even Wu Qirong had to curry favor with Yu Ziyi.

The Yu family had produced three grandmasters throughout its 800-year family history—an average of one every two hundred years. What was more impressive was that the three of them had imparted three entirely different absolute arts to the family.

Outsiders were simply unable to imagine just how vast the knowledge left behind by three grandmasters was.

The Yu family had its roots firmly planted in the Avalon of Five Elements; all of its successive heads of the family were extraordinary individuals. Most of the top-tier influential families of today had been involved in the founding of the Avalon of Five Elements. The Yu family was one of those handful of families who managed to sustain their power till today.

Yu Ziyi was young, but he was ranked high in the Yu family's hierarchy. He was recognized as being immensely gifted and was slated as a possible candidate for becoming the Yu family's fourth grandmaster.

Wu Qirong had spent a lot of effort to curry favor with Yu Ziyi.

Several guests were smiling grimly, unsure of what was about to happen. The Yu family was renowned throughout the Avalon of Five Elements—just who was this new guest who dared to try something like that? Yu Ziyi wasn't exactly known for being amiable or modest either.

He gave off an air of aloofness and arrogance, and his face was cold—he hadn't so much as smiled since the meal started. Those who were familiar with Yu Ziyi knew that he was definitely someone who wouldn't hesitate to fight over the slightest disagreements.

The other party seemed to be someone with a background too. With two tigers in the cage, there was bound to be a good show.

Yu Ziyi pushed his chair back and stood up, his face expressionless.

The guests had become agitated, but they all tactfully remained silent. Yu Ziyi had a profound knowledge of his family's teachings but rarely demonstrated these skills in front of others. The few instances where they had seen bits of his skills had left them feeling bewildered.

The atmosphere was electric as their eyes locked.

The tension at the dining table ran high as the guests continued

to sit in an uncomfortable silence.

Suddenly, Yu Ziyi bowed at the waist and affectionately exclaimed, “Brother Huanghun!”

Everyone’s eyes opened wide, dumbstruck by what they had just witnessed.

Yu Ziyi helped Duanmu Huanghun get seated, warmly saying, “Please take a seat Brother Huanghun. If I knew you were coming, I’d have gone to fetch you!”

Hearing Yu Ziyu address the guest in such a humble manner almost made the others spit out their food. Confused expressions could be seen across the entire table. Was this really the unfeeling and arrogant Yu Ziyu that they knew?

Duanmu Huanghun nodded towards Yu Ziyu. “Your base level has increased quite a bit; it seems like you haven’t been wasting all your time gallivanting.”

Feeling wronged, Yu Ziyu immediately whined, “Brother, your words really hurt! I’ve been hard at work from dawn till dusk, trying to catch up with Brother Huanghun. If not for Little Wu I wouldn’t be out here today.”

“Yes, that’s true,” Wu Qirong hurriedly verified Yu Ziyu’s words. “Young Master Yu has practically been in seclusion these days.”

Duanmu Huanghun sat down in a dignified manner. When he saw that everyone else was still standing up by the table, he said indifferently, “Do sit down.”

Everyone sat down subconsciously as if they had just awoken from a dream.

Some of the more quick-witted guests had begun to deduce Duanmu Huanghun’s identity. The name “Huanghun” was, after all, rather unique. Being in the same social circle made it all the easier, and soon, everyone knew who this godlike person was. They now understood why Wu Qirong and Young Master Yu would behave as such.

Duanmu Huanghun! The top talent in the Duanmu family! The one who had just been accepted by Master Dai Gang as his last disciple!

The Duanmu family was one of the oldest and most powerful families of the Avalon of Five Elements. Members of such families were far beyond the reach of folks lower down in the hierarchy.

While they may not be adept at much, these rich and good-for-nothing playboys were highly social and were privy to all sorts of gossip. Upon learning of his identity, they quickly recalled several fear-inducing rumors about Young Master Duanmu.

Before he had entered the Induction Ground, Young Master Duanmu was notorious for being utterly vicious.

Yu Ziyi was always on edge around Duanmu Huanghun. The Yu Family and the Duanmu Family were related by marriage and were, as such, very familiar with each other.

Yu Ziyi had known Duanmu Huanghun since they were kids. Although Duanmu Huanghun was younger than him, Yu Ziyi was forced to address Duanmu Huanghun as his elder from the moment they first met. However, Yu Ziyi had refused to do so, thus beginning his days of being beaten up.

The only thing that made Yu Ziyi glad was the fact that he wasn't the only one had been beaten up. All the other members of both families, who were of the same generation as them, were beaten up by Duanmu Huanghun as well.

This went on to such an extent that those who were beaten up eventually decided to join hands and attack Duanmu Huanghun. However, despite uniting against a common enemy, they were still beaten badly.

From then on, Duanmu Huanghun was unanimously addressed as Brother Huanghun.

However, that was not all. After that fight, Duanmu Huanghun began to show more interest in training, eventually becoming madly obsessed with it.

Everyone was initially happy that they were no longer oppressed by the Demon King's presence. Little did they know that the true nightmare was about to begin.

Duanmu Huanghun's all-consuming obsession resulted in him thrashing anyone whom he saw not training. Yu Ziyi was once caught by Duanmu Huanghun while he was playing around. Duanmu Huanghun had dragged him in front of his father after giving him a good thrashing.

With a stern expression on his face, Duanmu Huanghun had reported to Yu Ziyi's father, "Uncle Yu, I cannot bear to see Ziyi wasting his time like this, so I beat him up."

Yu Ziyi's father had stroked Duanmu Huanghun's head gently and had said, "You're so sensible, Huanghun! You did the right thing! Please help me give Ziyi a good thrashing if you catch him slacking off again, alright?"

Following that exchange, Duanmu Huanghun had happily returned to his training.

Yu Ziyi was then severely beaten by his father behind closed doors.

That scoundrel Duanmu Huanghun made use of his good looks to cajole the young ladies of other households into keeping watch for him. Oh gosh! Those nightmarish days were simply unbearable. Duanmu Huanghun was adored by the elder generation who saw him as an individual with a penchant for leadership.

In the past, the good-for-nothing youths of the influential families would give all sorts of excuses to avoid going to the

Induction Ground.

Yu Ziyi and the others of his generation were, however, very eager to enter the Induction Ground as soon as possible, praying that they could escape from the demon king as early as two years ahead of schedule.

Their wishes were eventually realized when they finally entered the Induction Ground. Yu Ziyi enjoyed a good two years free from the oppressive reign of the demon king.

Just as he had left those dark days in the past, Duanmu Huanghun had suddenly appeared before his eyes. The very sight of him left Yu Ziyi's face frozen in fear. Thankfully, he had made some progress in the past two years and was able to prevent his legs from trembling. Those horrifying memories suddenly began to surface in his consciousness—he soon realized that this was the year Duanmu Huanghun was going to enter the Induction Ground.

The good old days were over!

All he wanted to do now was escape this place. Why did he even attend this dinner? Duanmu Huanghun had become even more powerful now, and coupled with his greater prestige, he was bound to make life a living hell for Yu Ziyi in the years to come.

Wu Qirong!

You've gotten me in trouble!

Chapter 105: Brother Huanghun's Bet

In this circle of playboys, Brother Huanghun was widely known as the Demon King.

In truth, however, Duanmu Huanghun did not actually have much interaction with this bunch.

Even though, like them, he was not in the least bit frugal, much of his life was dedicated to training. He was not interested in the pursuit of earthly pleasures.

This group of rich playboys had only heard of him and had never met him in person before.

Forget his reputation, who would dare to stand up to him if even someone as powerful as Young Master Yu had to bow?

Duanmu Huanghun always felt at home amongst his companions, doing as he pleased. He raised the glass of wine in his hand and said flatly, "Today is my dear friend Little Wu's birthday. Let's all drink one glass to congratulate him. Bottoms up."

Wu Qirong trembled with excitement. To hear such words from Brother Huanghun was a rare and precious gift! Although he had known Brother Huanghun for many years, Wu Qirong could only observe him from afar. The gap between them was so great that they might as well have been from different worlds. Wu Qirong had always thought of Brother Huanghun as someone destined for

greatness, someone who would someday become a grandmaster or a division head.

He was clear of his station in life. And for just this sentence, he would do anything for Brother Huanghun.

Holding back his emotions, Wu Qirong promptly stood up and raised his glass for a toast. “There is no need for more words. From today onwards, Brother Huanghun shall be my blood brother!”

He lifted his head and swiftly drained the glass.

In the Avalon of Five Elements, everyone developed elemental energy from a young age. What they were drinking was elemental wine, and one cup was enough to give them a rush, making them feel as if the elemental energy within their body was ignited.

Duanmu Huanghun too downed the drink without saying another word.

He rarely drank and practiced restraint in many other aspects of his life as well. Although he seldom met anyone who could rival him, Duanmu Huanghun simply didn’t indulge in these pleasures.

He took pride in his discipline.

The elemental energy within his body was set ablaze, the warmth quickly spreading to his extremities. A red flush spread appeared on his pale face, softening his features and causing him to appear

less aloof.

The others didn't dare to have the slightest hesitation and downed the drink in one gulp as well.

Duanmu Huanghun tugged at his collar and squinted his eyes as he enjoyed the feeling granted by the wine. The flames had spread throughout his entire being, consuming even the fog in his mind.

However, the grievances that he was nursing in his heart made him want to erupt even more violently.

Duanmu Huanghun managed to restrain himself—he did not forget the main reason for his visit. He wasn't some weakling who needed to rely on alcohol to numb himself. He was going to defeat that detestable bastard through direct means.

Yes, he was going adopt the most effective, convincing method available, and that was to wallop that damned Ai Hui until he begged for mercy!

After drinking the wine, the guests had become slightly more restless. Duanmu Huanghun's terrifying, murderous intent soon pervaded the entire dining table, sending chills down their spines as they became silent.

Yu Ziyi shivered the most.

This was just too familiar!

He was all too familiar with this atmosphere. The faint memories of his past began to surface like a school of hungry fish. This was the atmosphere that would arise whenever Brother Huanghun wanted to deal with someone.

Damn it! Why am I so unlucky? Why am I here on one of his bad days?

Yu Ziyi was so nervous that he was on the verge of bursting into tears.

“I came here today to get some ideas from you guys.”

Duanmu Huanghun’s words gave Yu Ziyi a big shock. Gathering ideas from others? He could not help but glance at Duanmu Huanghun. This didn’t seem like Brother Huanghun’s usual style; he was always a lone wolf. Since when did he need others’ help in coming up with ideas?

Sadly, they couldn’t tell if Brother Huanghun was happy or angry.

Nobody dared to make a sound.

Brother Huanghun may have asked for opinions, but did you really think that you have the right to speak up? Don’t be so naive!

Duanmu Huanghun was very familiar with such situations and knew that nobody would dare to speak if he didn't clarify himself further. Getting straight to the point, he announced, "I'm here to get everyone to help me think of ways to earn money!"

What?

Everyone stared in disbelief, wondering if their ears were playing tricks on them.

The almighty and highly-regarded Duanmu Huanghun, the eldest son of the illustrious Duanmu family, was actually asking them for advice on how to earn money?

Big Brother, this joke isn't funny at all...

Even Yu Ziyi's eyes grew wide open in shock as he stared at Duanmu Huanghun—it was as if he had just seen a ghost.

Wu Qirong muttered weakly, "Brother, your matters are certainly more pressing! Here are my savings of two million yuan, Brother..."

Everyone else immediately followed suit, disregarding their heartache, as they offered whatever they had in a show of loyalty. Yu Ziyi, not wanting to fall behind the rest, put on a brave front and offered, "I have five million yuan, Brother Huanghun can have it all!"

Yu Ziyi was crying inside, lamenting the loss of every last cent of his wealth. He did not dare to underreport how much he had; he was afraid that Duanmu Huanghun would easily find out that he was lying through his network of infatuated women in the Yu family. If it came to that, Yu Ziyi would probably end up being skinned alive, if not killed.

Alright, losing five million might be a bit heart-wrenching, but at least it wasn't a complete waste. Besides, Yu Ziyi knew that Brother Huanghun was a prideful person and wouldn’t simply accept handouts.

Frankly speaking, Yu Ziyi had been astonished when Brother Huanghun had started talking about money.

“I thank you all for your goodwill,” Duanmu Huanghun said as he shook his head. “But I’m not looking to borrow money. What I want is to earn money. Okay, let me phrase it in another way—can all of you help me think of ways to make five hundred million yuan?”

Everyone’s eyes grew even wider.

This time, however, nobody made any noise.

The people present had some money on them, ranging from a couple of hundred thousands to a million yuan. Yu Ziyi’s five million was already exceedingly rare.

But five hundred million yuan?

This was not a quantifiable concept.

Yu Ziyi's allowance of five million was probably already the highest. Although the influential families could easily afford to spend five hundred million worth of resources on their youths, they would most certainly not casually give any one of them control of so much.

Yu Ziyi cautiously asked, "Brother Huanghun, did something happen?"

"What happened?" Duanmu Huanghun said as he turned to face Yu Ziyi.

Yu Ziyi nervously replied, "I was intimidated by that fi-five hun-hundred million..."

"Oh, I made a bet with someone to see who could earn five hundred million first," Duanmu Huanghun said calmly. Everyone else heaved a sigh of relief.

Making a bet was a common practice in this circle, and among them, all manners of bets were possible! Five hundred million may sound like an exorbitant amount, but considering Brother Huanghun's status, how could any of his bets be of the same level as theirs?

Only a bet of five hundred million yuan was worthy of someone like Brother Huanghun!

Seeing everyone rack their brains, Duanmu Huanghun's face lit up with satisfaction.

"I spend most of my time training, and as such, I know next to nothing about businesses. I have thus taken the liberty of coming over to consult with you guys. I know that you all know more than I do and that you have more connections and methods as well. Regardless of who comes up with it, I will definitely return the favor."

Duanmu Huanghun's gaze swept across the table. However, his voice suddenly became much deeper, and it acquired a murderous intent.

"If no one can come up with a good idea, then none of you will leave today!"

Chapter 106: Scraps

As Mingxiu strolled towards the embroidery workshop, she couldn't help but smile at the thought of Brother Li Wei's clumsy appearance from earlier. Every few days or so Brother Li Wei would bring some wild animals. In the past, he had brought them over alive, but now they were all roasted and marinated with high-grade honey. Sometimes, he would even bring dipping sauce, and Mingxiu couldn't help but always eat a lot.

Really! How could he offer meat to a girl every time? What if I get fat?

But each time she saw Brother Li Wei's bewildered expression, she couldn't help but eat her fill. Plus, the food tasted great. There was softness within Brother Li Wei's tough appearance; he was a simple man, and chatting with him had soon become the happiest part of her day.

Brother Li Wei would talk about the front line, battles with dire beasts, and the kinds of strange plants that lived within the Wilderness. And on the other hand, she would talk to him about the workshop and her embarrassing childhood stories, making him laugh out loud each time. She, too, would convulse with laughter upon hearing the stories.

She was quite frustrated. She would usually appear to be gentle and quiet, so why did she reveal her true self in front of Brother Li Wei?

They shared many little secrets. For example, only the two of them knew that Duanmu Huanghun was the mysterious naked man. The only thing she couldn't understand was why Huanghun had addressed himself as Bangwan?

Thinking about how Bangwan had fallen into such a pitiable state because of her chase made her subconsciously stick out her tongue. Brother Li Wei had said that Bangwan was definitely being mischievous and had proceeded to tell her about the many bad things he had done when he was in school, which made Mingxiu stare at him with wide eyes.

Mingxiu then talked about the bad things she had done in school as well, stunning Brother Li Wei completely. His expression had made her feel a little proud.

Time flew by when they were together.

As she entered the workshop, she regained focus and went into work mode. She had been assisting her master by being in charge of the workshop for a long time now, and practically managed all work-related matters, whether big or small. Mingxiu always concentrated at work—if one became distracted while embroidering, it was incredibly easy to make a mistake.

Although her master frequently praised her talent, Mingxiu felt she was only just a little more meticulous and focused.

Speaking of talent, Ai Hui was the real deal. Even Brother Li Wei complimented him non-stop and tried so hard to pull him into the

Infantry Division.

"See, there's fog now. It's starting again!"

"How hard-working! Is he a sand puppet? He doesn't seem to get tired."

The shocked voices of the embroidery ladies could be heard throughout the workshop, and Mingxiu knew that they were referring to Ai Hui. She diverted her gaze towards the workroom. Mist rose against the window like a dire beast that had just woken up from a deep slumber and started spitting fog.

Ai Hui had commenced his training for the day.

Mingxiu was moved. Her junior's natural talent was already shocking, yet his diligent attitude far exceeded hers as well. She was in complete admiration.

Other than occasionally visiting the training hall, Ai Hui devoted all his time to practicing his embroidery. Since eating rice wasted too much time, he had previously brought heaps of dried food into the workroom.

Ai Hui had a sand puppet with amazing culinary skills who specialized in elemental food. The dried food was exquisitely made and contained a pretty good amount of elemental energy.

Mingxiu was aware that in the Cultivation Era, there was a group

of cultivators who were known as “bitterness cultivators” as their training was always tedious and tough. From what she observed, if Ai Hui had been in the Cultivation Era, he most definitely would have been a “bitterness cultivator.”

Eating in the workroom, sleeping in the workroom, training right after waking up, eating when hungry, sleeping when tired—the stinky herbal medicinal smell that she considered unpleasant was like a sweet syrup to Ai Hui. Before he had appeared, she had never known how arduous training could be.

Within a short period of time, Ai Hui had become the embroidery ladies’ idol. Actions always spoke louder than words; although he never engaged in much conversation with the girls, his actions had already convinced all of them.

Such perverse perseverance was always highly revered.

In the beginning, Mingxiu had been a little worried that Ai Hui’s health would be damaged. She had some level of medical expertise because of her brother, and with that knowledge, she checked on Ai Hui’s body regularly. However, she had found that he was very healthy, and what she was worried about did not happen.

After a few observations, she realized that Ai Hui had an excellent understanding of his own body’s condition. He would always rest just before reaching his limits, never overexerting himself.

Mingxiu was greatly shocked. She didn’t know how Ai Hui had

done it, but she nevertheless set her worries aside.

What she didn't understand, however, was that recently, the Twilight Silk Ai Hui had been churning out had become shorter and shorter. The recent batches of silk were only a meter long. If it had not been for the fact that each batch's silks were uniform in length, she would've suspected that something went wrong with his training. It seemed more like he was experimenting.

Previously, the money-grubbing look he had on his face after producing a silk that was over ten meters long had greatly irritated Master.

Yet, he had no such look when he was training, and it was apparent that he didn't see the Twilight Silk as money.

Scraps weren't worth much yet his silk steadily grew shorter and shorter. He was losing a lot of money each day. When she thought about how his heart must be aching, she wanted to laugh.

But, while the silks were getting shorter, the quantity was increasing. He had actually managed to use up two Twilight Cocoons in a single day.

The accumulated pile of Twilight Silk that he had pulled out was impressive. In order to prevent wastage, the workshop had been using the silk as sewing thread. Although it was quite a pity to use such a quality material as thread, the Twilight Silk was indeed tough.

Her junior was in trouble, and Mingxiu couldn’t help but feel a bit of schadenfreude.

Ever since Master felt that Ai Hui wasn't passionate about embroidery, her whole countenance had changed—no, she mustn't say that about Master—it was her style of teaching that changed.

All the materials used were recorded and accounted for, and Mingxiu saw the amount Ai Hui owed increase non-stop. At this point, he was going to have to sell himself to the workshop.

Even Master couldn’t do anything about it, but she continued keeping track of the material usage records, not overcharging a single cent.

Mingxiu helped Ai Hui sell a batch of Twilight Silk, and while it wasn’t worth much, it was something. A pity such short lengths were worthless. She sold over a hundred pieces at five yuan each.

“Miss Mingxiu!”

Mingxiu snapped out of her thoughts upon hearing her name being called. When she saw that it was the frequent visitor, Manager Li, a warm smile appeared on her face as she greeted, “Manager Li, long time no see. How’s business nowadays?”

Manager Li was about forty years old and was a sharp-witted man. He hurriedly responded, “Thanks to you, it’s been okay. I have come to buy a batch of Twilight Silk scraps.”

Mingxiu was slightly taken aback. “You’ve finished using the hundred pieces from before?”

“Yes, a new order came in coincidentally.” Manager Li maintained a harmonious smile and continued, “I am thinking of purchasing more this time but am not sure if the shop still has it?”

Mingxiu nodded. “How many would you like?”

“Give me whatever you have.” Manager Li added quickly, “The consumption rate is high and fast. Do you have stock?”

Mingxiu smiled. “Let me check.”

Manager Li said hastily, “Thanks for your trouble.”

However, Mingxiu’s smile disappeared the moment she turned around. She had a pensive look on her face as she strode over the doorstep to enter the hall. She immediately gave an order to the servant girl beside her, “Take a few pieces of Twilight Silk that Junior has pulled. No, I’ll take it myself. Where is the pile?”

Chapter 107: The Usage of Twilight Silk

Mingxiu squatted and started to study the piles of Twilight Silk.

The Twilight Silk that Ai Hui extracted every day was put aside from the others'. At first, there wasn't much, but days later the amount began to increase sharply—especially in the past two days. Ai Hui could use up two cocoons a day, and the amount of silk extracted from two cocoons was staggering.

Mingxiu hadn't noticed anything before, but now, as she looked at the piles of silk, she was greatly surprised.

Two cocoons per day. How could he be so fast? How on earth did he do it?

She hadn't thought about it very carefully before, and it was only now that she realized that this was unbelievable. It meant that Ai Hui's speed of extracting silk was extremely quick—only in this way could he consume two cocoons a day.

Maybe he was silkworm-attributed?

Even the Twilight Silkworm couldn't produce silk as fast as him.

Yet Mingxiu soon noticed something amiss. The color of each pile of silk was slightly different—the longer the time gap was, the more evident the difference in color, and vice versa. The strands of silk produced within the past three consecutive days were almost

of the same color—the color difference was practically unnoticeable to the naked eyes.

She was right! Ai Hui was doing some kind of experiment.

The difference in color of the strands of silk in front of her verified her assumption.

Mingxiu picked up a strand of silk and carefully inspected it. The shop manager's return had made her a bit confused. Manager Li was a shrewd person who was always careful and strict with his daily budget and would never buy something unnecessary. This was the first time that Mingxiu had seen him buy up everything without hesitation.

Unless... unless he believed he was on the advantageous side of the deal.

Mingxiu's mind raced. The Twilight Silk was not widely used, and also, since it was very thin, the requirement for its length was high. Therefore, these short strands of silk were hardly of any use.

Any good embroidery worker had to be very familiar with embroidery materials because the materials used in embroidery were critical. Any difference in materials would change the quality of the fabrics.

Mingxiu hadn't paid particular attention to these strands of silk before. Now, after scrutinizing the silk carefully, she soon became

surprised by what she found.

Ai Hui had no idea that Mingxiu was examining the silk he had extracted. He was totally engaged in training. The change he was going through, in regards to his training, had been much more apparent.

At the very beginning, he had controlled elemental energy with the slowest speed to extract the silk, as instructed by Wang Shouchuan and Han Yuqin.

But after continuously training, he began to gain experience, and he soon made new discoveries.

During his discussions with his master, Ai Hui realized that although Master was equipped with enough theoretical knowledge, he hardly had any hands-on experience. When it came to training, especially to the details, his lack of experience would be exposed.

Moreover, Ai Hui's case was unique. Wang Shouchuan had never met someone like him before.

This was a common problem for all teachers; while they could explain their theories clearly, they seldom talked about the details.

Ai Hui didn't have much training experience either, but he was used to learning through trial and error. After fully understanding the theories through several rounds of discussion with his master, Ai Hui had obtained a vague idea of his physical condition. One

interesting thing he discovered was that the feeling he got—when he passed his elemental energy through his hand palaces—wasn't necessarily intensified along with the slowing down of his elemental energy control.

As he trained, he tried to change the speed of elemental energy to compare the different levels of stimulation to his hand palaces.

That was how he had found the optimal speed to best stimulate his hand palaces.

And this optimal speed was much faster than his lowest speed.

Now, Ai Hui had become very familiar with extracting silk. His elemental energy was like a sword, and when it was spirally infused into the silk at optimal speed, the silk would remain unbroken.

However, when he had just begun to believe that he could extract ten meters of silk per day, reality gave him a severe blow.

At the optimal speed, Ai Hui could extract silk much faster. But when his elemental energy passed through his hand palaces, the stimulation he would feel was so strong that his hand palaces would quiver and break off the silk. That was why the silk Ai Hui extracted was only one meter long.

That was… a lot of money!

Weeping inside his heart, Ai Hui continued his training.

He consoled himself that it was fine. He could always earn more money in the future.

Although the loss was huge, he was glad that the efficiency of his training had been largely increased.

While the optimal speed was much more than before, it was still less than the running speed of elemental energy during fighting. Therefore, it was not yet too heavy a burden for him.

This meant he could raise the density and duration of his training, and in this way, Ai Hui progressed by leaps and bounds.

He could clearly feel the existence of his hand palaces. When elemental energy ran through his palms, apart from little tremors, he could also feel a slight heat in his hand palaces.

Nothing encouraged him more than this.

Nothing could cheer him more than the tangible feeling of his own progress.

And today, Ai Hui could feel that something was different about his hand palaces as soon as he started training. When the elemental energy ran through his palms, it was as hot as a soldering iron, and they shivered much more fiercely than usual.

Therefore, Ai Hui was highly vigilant. He strongly felt that there would be breakthrough today.

But this did not disturb his state of mind, and he continued to unhurriedly extract the silk as usual.

The breakthrough would be naturally achieved when all the conditions were ripe.

Hidden in the fog, his eyes were as calm as water.

Seeing Mingxiu return, Manager Li cracked a wry smile. He knew he had given himself away. He used to think that Mingxiu was gentle and graceful, but he never knew that she was so smart, too.

Mingxiu smiled back at him.

Manager Li cupped his hands and smiled bitterly. “Nothing can escape your eyes.”

He felt a bit upset. He had intended to gain enormous benefits, but this goal now seemed very difficult to achieve.

“I’m flattered.” The smile on Mingxiu’s face disappeared, but her voice was still gentle. Her expression became serious as she said, “The Jade Embroidery Workshop only focuses on embroidery and is not interested in other businesses. You are really talented if you

can put this material into use. It's just that this Twilight Silk was made by Ai Hui. I'm his senior, and I cannot just stand by and watch you take advantage of him. I think you would also prefer cooperation rather than a one-time deal. If we can cooperate, you will have a stable supply of materials, and we can both earn more. Don't you agree?"

Manager Li was filled with admiration. "You are indeed as generous as I expected, Mingxiu. I really appreciate it. Your junior is skilled enough to produce such Twilight Silk. It is as tough as steel wire and is also very sharp. If infused with elemental energy, it can be used to cut through stones. I soaked a piece of ebony vine as thick as a thumb in oil until it became soft, and I made an arrow together with Twilight Silk and gold wire grass. With this arrow, I can pierce a three-inch-thick plate from five hundred steps away."

He told everything about the method and usage of the silk to Mingxiu to show his sincerity. Anyway, since she had already noticed the peculiarity of this Twilight Silk, it wouldn't be long before she found out the usage herself.

Mingxiu's beautiful eyes lit up. She of course knew what this meant. "How much is one arrow?"

"I made ten arrows with one hundred pieces of Twilight Silk, and I sold them all to a customer I'm familiar with at the price of thirty thousand yuan each," Manager Li said proudly.

Mingxiu nodded. "If so, I will decide on behalf of Ai Hui to provide the Twilight Silk to you. In return, you will give him thirty percent of your profits. What do you think?"

Manager Li was slightly surprised. “Really?”

Of all the materials, the most important one was the Twilight Silk. He had been prepared for Mingxiu to ask for fifty percent of the profits—thirty percent was something he would never have expected.

Mingxiu smiled like a spring breeze, and she was about to say something when she suddenly heard a loud, thundering sound.

The ground trembled.

Mingxiu’s expression changed. She had no time to finish her words before she hurriedly rushed towards the workshop.

Junior Ai Hui!

Chapter 108: New Twilight Silk

The colorful smog rose into the sky like a ferocious-looking poisonous serpent with bared fangs.

The workshop had already been razed to the ground. The ashes and smog floating around were indicators to how violent the explosion was.

Ai Hui, with bandages all over his body, was climbing out of the ruins. Although he was blackened by smoke and fire and looked incredibly awkward, he wasn't wounded. Seeing that Ai Hui was fine, Mingxiu sighed with relief.

At that moment Han Yuqin had also heard the loud noise and rushed out. When she saw that Ai Hui was okay, the concern in her eyes disappeared. But the next second a hint of complacency flashed in her eyes, and she sneered at Ai Hui. "Now even your master can't save you, little Ai Hui. Do you know how much this workshop is worth? I spent as much as eight million on it, and I'm still keeping the bill. It seems that you will have to work for me for many years, little Ai Hui."

Mingxiu hesitated for a while, but then she interrupted, "Master."

"Oh, Mingxiu, you are here too." Han Yuqin was glad to see Mingxiu. "You see, Ai Hui just destroyed the workshop. Remember to give him the bill. Don't forget to take into consideration the materials he consumed during his daily training. He cannot leave

before he pays off his bill. Ai Hui, you can learn the double-flow embroidery method further from Senior Mingxiu."

"Er, Master..." Mingxiu braced herself and said, "I think Ai Hui can pay it off."

Han Yuqin was surprised. "How?"

Mingxiu showed a strand of the Twilight Silk that Ai Hui had recently produced. "Please have a look, Master."

"So short? Ai Hui seems to have regressed." Han Yuqin frowned, but the moment she touched the Twilight Silk, her eyes widened. "No, wait. Why is the Twilight Silk like this?"

The hair-thin strand of Twilight Silk was as hard and tough as a steel wire. As an Embroidery Master, Han Yuqin was far more sensitive to materials compared to Mingxiu.

She infused a strand of elemental energy into it, and a flash of silvery light appeared on the silk. She could feel a sharp aura rushing to her eyebrows.

"Why is it like this?" Han Yuqin murmured to herself. She had seen and used countless strands of Twilight Silk but had never seen anything like this.

By this time, Ai Hui just managed to carry himself out of the ruins. He looked really miserable. Except for the bandages, which

were still white, he was either covered with ashes or blackened by smoke.

“What…”

Ai Hui grimaced in pain as he walked towards them. Although he wasn’t injured, he had been hit by a large pot that had dropped on top of him, and he was currently feeling pain all over his body.

Han Yuqin suddenly raised her head. “How did you do it?”

Ai Hui was totally confused.

Mingxiu explained, “Ai Hui, Master is asking you how you had managed to change the nature of the Twilight Silk.”

“I changed the nature of the Twilight Silk?” Ai Hui seemed to be at a loss. “What nature did I change?”

Looking at his expression, Han Yuqin knew he that he hadn’t done it on purpose, so she changed her question and asked Ai Hui how he had circulated his elemental energy. Since she was very experienced, she soon figured it out. Ai Hui's metal elemental energy was pure and sharp. When it was spirally infused into the Twilight Silk, it caused the silk to be further sharpened. Besides, Ai Hui had increased his speed of infusion, which had made the silk more solid. She was greatly surprised that the Twilight Silk had such a property.

She couldn’t help but glance at Ai Hui. Old Wang’s disciple was indeed good at giving pleasant surprises.

Throughout the years since its discovery, Twilight Silk had enjoyed a rich history of usage. The existing types of Twilight Silk had all been discovered long ago, and it now seemed that a new member would join them.

Although the Avalon of Five Elements had a short history and the development of elemental energy had yet to encounter a bottleneck with new discoveries being made every day, it was still an extraordinary achievement for a student of the Induction Ground.

Han Yuqin was much more experienced when it came to materials. At first glance, she could discern the value of this new type of Twilight Silk.

The people of the Avalon of Five Elements were infatuated with new materials. A brand-new material or species usually represented an astonishing fortune, and anyone who could cultivate extraordinary plants like the mirage bean pods would definitely make a great fortune overnight.

That was why so many wood elementalists were keen on cultivating new species.

When she realized her hope had been misplaced, Han Yuqin’s mood turned sour. She glared at Ai Hui angrily and stomped away.

“Why is she…” Ai Hui was at a loss as he turned to Mingxiu.

Mingxiu knew what her master was thinking, but she couldn’t tell Ai Hui. Right at this moment, however, she noticed Manager Li looking towards them, so she called him over. “Would you please come here, Manager Li?”

Manager Li had already approached long ago, but he didn’t dare come closer because of Master Han Yuqin. He had been worried about losing the deal. But when Mingxiu called him, he quickly replied, “Coming!” and immediately ran to them.

Mingxiu introduced Ai Hui to Manager Li. “This is my junior, Ai Hui. Ai Hui, this is Manager Li.”

Ai Hui was confused, but he still greeted Manager Li.

Mingxiu explained, “Manager Li found an excellent use for your Twilight Silk: it can be used to make arrows. From now on, you can provide Twilight Silk to Manager Li with a quality similar to that of the silk you've made recently. Manager Li will give thirty percent of his profits to you. What do you think, Ai Hui?”

Manager Li was aware that this youth was the producer of the silk. Although he looked very young, as the junior of Mingxiu, he was most certainly not an ordinary person. Manager Li ardently watched Ai Hui. Even though he had to surrender thirty percent of the profits, he could get a stable supply in return. This would allow him to produce arrows continuously. The arrows were consumables, and that would be a lot of money.

“Twilight Silk?” Ai Hui shook his head. “I probably won’t extract Twilight Silk anymore.”

Manager Li’s face turned pale.

Mingxiu was also surprised. “Why?”

Ai Hui smiled proudly and raised his hands.

Mingxiu looked at one of his hands, and a moment later, she became completely amazed. “You have activated your hand palace?”

“Haha! Yes!” Ai Hui was thrilled.

“Which one? Left or right?” Mingxiu asked. She had calmed down from her initial shock. Compared to the Twilight Silk and the speed at which he had learned the [Twin Weaving Technique], it wasn’t really much of a surprise that he had activated his hand palace. In her eyes, this was easy for a genius like Ai Hui. She herself had activated her hand palaces such a long time ago that she didn’t even remember what happened properly.

Manager Li was anxious.

Why are you so excited about activating the hand palaces? Why not talk about our business first?

Ai Hui chuckled. “It is for both hands! And at the same time!”

“Good, good,” Mingxiu said admiringly, but then she abruptly changed the topic. “Are you really not considering the business? It’s really generous. Very few people can ignore such a large amount of money. It looks like you aren’t an ordinary person indeed.”

On hearing Mingxiu’s words, Ai Hui’s ears pricked up. “How much?”

Chapter 109: Bunny Hair Arrows

It must be a large sum of money; otherwise, Mingxiu wouldn't have bothered to talk about it. Ai Hui was now as poor as a church mouse. He didn't even remember how much money he owed, and even worse, daily consumables such as Twilight Cocoons, herbs, materials, and manpower were driving up his costs every day.

He strongly felt that training was akin to burning money.

Why didn't he feel so before? Well...that was probably because his previous so-called training was far from the standard.

If so, then life was hard for elementalists, too. Hmmm... maybe not. Not everyone was as poor as him.

If one had too many debts, then they would no longer worry about it. Ai Hui didn't bother to think about his debts further—rather, he didn't dare think about it.

The reason why he had just refused Mingxiu's proposal was that he wanted to study his hand palaces further. Ai Hui was still excited about the fact that both his hand palaces were activated at the same time, and he didn't want to waste time extracting more Twilight Silk. Money? No one cared about money!

Except himself!

Ai Hui's eyes were wide; they were twinkling like stars in the sky.

Mingxiu tittered. Ai Hui's facial expression was pretty much the same as that of a money-grubber. Mingxiu didn't know that Ai Hui was so greedy for money—she only realized it now. Who did he learn it from?

It was a pity that he was Uncle's disciple—Uncle really was poor, but he always held himself aloof. He could accept Master's help with tiny issues, but he would become unhappy if she wanted to spend more money for him.

For so many years, Master had always wanted to financially sponsor Uncle's research, but Uncle never agreed. He would rather do it himself without extra help in his small courtyard filled with waste products.

Uncle was always stubborn, and Master couldn't do anything but give up.

This was his only shortcoming— he would never give in to money, which was respectable but exasperating.

In this aspect, Ai Hui was entirely different. He was always keen for money, and his eyes would light up every time he heard the word "money." Master had complained several times about this to Mingxiu, saying that Ai Hui was wasting his talent and that he was vulgar without any proper plans for his future. And next, she would complain about Uncle, saying he was terrible at teaching his own disciple.

But Mingxiu thought it was all right. Uncle was unyielding like a steel plate; however, a steel plate could be broken. On the other hand, Ai Hui was persistent yet resilient, just like the Twilight Silk he extracted. Every time Mingxiu saw his hard work and thought about his experience, she would sincerely feel admiration. At the same time, though, she couldn't help but feel protective towards him. She herself had nothing to worry about since she was young—she had never experienced or even imagined that kind of life.

"Each arrow is made of ten pieces of Twilight Silk and is sold for thirty thousand yuan. You will provide Twilight Silk to Manager Li, and in return, you get thirty percent of the profit. Manager Li will provide the Twilight Cocoons and herbs." Mingxiu explained everything clearly and concisely.

Thirty thousand yuan for each arrow!

This was daylight robbery!

Ai Hui almost blurted out loud, but the next second, he realized that part of the money would belong to him!

This was daylight robbery! But why not?

He bit his tongue and proceeded to ask the key question. "How many arrows can you sell in one month?"

Manager Li thought for a while before saying, "The ten arrows I made last time have already been sold out. I'm not exactly sure

how many arrows I can sell in one month, but since it's a consumable, I believe we can sell quite a lot although it's not cheap. If we look at the sales records of similar goods, after the market opens up, I think we can sell three to five hundred arrows every month."

Ai Hui's eyes widened with a glittering light. "Five hundred! That is fifteen million yuan, and thirty percent is four million five hundred thousand?"

Manager Li began to sweat. "Not that much. First, we have to consider the cost, including the cost of cocoons, manpower, materials, and the rent for the shop. At least twenty percent of the price goes there. I think Mingxiu can figure this out too." He turned to Mingxiu. "You know I'm not lying."

Mingxiu nodded as she knew that Manager Li was speaking the truth.

"Next, in the beginning, we can hardly sell five hundred arrows. Before the power of the arrow is proved, no one will buy it on a large scale. I'll reach out to my regular customers first, and I estimate that dozens of arrows can be sold out. Once it's accepted by most people, the sales will increase. Earlier on, I think at most we can sell thirty to fifty arrows within a month."

Manager Li was conservative, which was something he had to be. If he exaggerated the possible income but failed to reach the target, then he would get himself into trouble, because the boy in front of him would definitely not let him off easily.

From three or five hundred to thirty or fifty…the gap was big, and the money he could earn was far less than he had imagined.

Ai Hui stared at him with dissatisfaction, but he still told himself, “Anyway, it’s better than nothing.”

“Fifty arrows with a profit of twenty-four thousand for each. Thirty percent is three hundred and sixty thousand yuan.”

Mingxiu told Ai Hui gently, “Don’t worry. There may not be much profit in the beginning, but it’s a long-term business. Besides, it doesn’t require much silk, so it won’t influence your training. I think you can do it.”

“Three hundred and sixty thousand yuan is already a lot of money to me,” Ai Hui said happily.

Yet Manager Li didn’t take him seriously. As the disciple of a master, three hundred and sixty thousand could barely be enough for his pocket money. He quickly replied, “As soon as we open up the market, the sales will increase. By the way, we need to give the material a new name so that no one will know it is actually Twilight Silk.”

“That’s right.” Mingxiu nodded. “You can give it a name, Ai Hui. It deserves a new name. If I hadn’t seen it for myself, I could never have related it to Twilight Silk.”

“Yes, yes. I’ve been making weapons for so many years, but I’ve also never seen Twilight Silk like this,” Manager Li said.

Ai Hui didn’t refuse them. He thought for a while and said, “Let’s call the silk ‘Snow Silver Bunny Hair’ and the arrow ‘Bunny Hair,’ shall we?”

Manager Li was a bit confused at first, but then after a minute, he realized Ai Hui’s intention. He couldn’t help give him a thumbs-up. “That’s smart.”

The name itself wasn’t that smart, but in this way, the customers would think that it was made from the hair of some kind of rabbit. As a result, no one would know that the snow-white, silvery thread was actually Twilight Silk. When he thought of those imitators who would start chasing all kinds of rabbits to find the material, Manager Li couldn’t help but let out a laugh.

This boy was really cunning!

Manager Li made a mental note to be careful and not irritate this fellow. Although Ai Hui didn’t look the part, he was actually very shrewd.

Even Mingxiu couldn’t help but say, “This name is cruel to rabbits.”

Ai Hui chuckled. Neither of them had understood his real intention. The word “bunny” sounded similar to “money.” Once

the arrows were sold and profits were earned, he would be a man with money!

"But can bunny hair be this long?" Mingxiu asked curiously.

"You don't know?" Ai Hui was surprised. "I've seen rabbits with hair much longer than this in the Wilderness. They are very fierce, and they can bite off a chunk from a tree trunk that's as thick as a bowl. They like to eat shrubs, leaves, and meat, and their hair is also pretty much the same as Twilight Silk—it's snow-white with a silvery sheen, but it's much thicker, though."

Looking at Ai Hui's extremely low base level, Manager Li was astonished when he heard that Ai Hui had been in the Wilderness before. None of the disciples of the master seemed to be normal...

The Wilderness...

Mingxiu remembered the various amazing details and weird species of the Wilderness that Li Wei had told her about, and she couldn't help but be enchanted with this mysterious place.

Chapter 110: Mingxiu's Concern

Although Ai Hui hadn't provided more "bunny hair" yet, Manager Li gave him a sum of money as a deposit without any hesitation. He was acting so generous that Ai Hui started to feel worried about whether he was shrewd enough to make money.

No profiteer, no money!

When she recognized the concern in Ai Hui's tone, Mingxiu couldn't help but burst into laughter. "Ai Hui, you are so... realistic. But if you think he is stupid, then you can stop worrying. He has been conducting business with our workshop for many years, and he is a very shrewd businessman. The reason why he is so generous is that we are taking a percentage of profit that is less than what he expected."

"Less than his expectation?" Ai Hui's eyes widened. He seemed to be prepared to rush out and get Manager Li back at any moment.

Mingxiu gave him a glance. "Do you think I'd let you suffer any loss?"

Ai Hui looked embarrassed. "Of course not. I'm not an ungrateful person! And I always really appreciate your help. I'm sure this is good enough for me."

In fact, Ai Hui was actually being sincere. Not even a single word he said was against his true feelings. Mingxiu would always help him as much as she could; sometimes, even Han Yuqin didn't know

what she did. He was clearly aware of this.

If one had a sister, she should be like Mingxiu.

Even Master Han Yuqin, who always wore a fierce look, was actually kind to him. She was only dissatisfied with Ai Hui just because he couldn't be fully engaged in embroidery. She kept mentioning how much money he owed her, but she never hesitated to give him the materials he needed for training. His teacher was a good person, too—even if he was, admittedly, sometimes unreliable and a bit pedantic. He was only good at his theories and knew nothing about the real practice of training. He wasn't perfect at all.

But still, Ai Hui believed that Master was the best teacher, his mistress was the best mistress, and Senior Mingxiu was the best senior he could possibly have in the entire world. They cared about him, they loved him, and they helped him in the best ways they could think of.

He was not an ingrate!

Duanmu Huanghun, who was far away from them, sneezed twice, oblivious to Ai Hui's words.

Mingxiu could feel the sincerity in Ai Hui's words. She smiled and patiently explained, "You'll definitely have a bright future, Ai Hui. So, for you, this business is just the beginning. Of course, I can ask for a higher percentage of profit, but that isn't necessary. Since you are only responsible for providing the Twilight Silk, if

you take away too much profit, Manager Li will not be so enthusiastic. The production, sales, and channel development all depend on him. After a period of time, there will inevitably be conflicts between us. If so, he will either find someone else to counterfeit the silk, or he will start another business himself. But now, since you take only thirty percent of the profit, which is acceptable to any independent business, he won't think he is working for you. Instead, he will regard it as his own business. In this way, he will not fall out with our workshop, and the business can go on for a long time."

Ai Hui nodded. In terms of doing business, he was undoubtedly inferior to Mingxiu, who had been assisting in running the workshop for years.

"Although the proportion of profit we take is not large, your income will accumulate and increase as the business grows. Besides, you can spend more time on training. In the future, you will feel the benefit that a steady income brings to your training."

Ai Hui was moved by Mingxiu's patient explanation, and he replied in earnest, "I'll keep that in mind."

The unruliness and stubbornness in Ai Hui were gone. Instead, right now, he was like a lion that had retracted its sharp claws and teeth—he was as docile as a cat.

Ai Hui then left; Mingxiu didn't ask him to stay. Every student would be extremely excited when they activated a new palace and anxious to try to open up the next one.

She glanced at the workshop, now in ruins, and was about to find someone to clean it up when she suddenly thought of something.

She realized that she had ignored an important question: why did the activation of Ai Hui's new palaces lead to an explosion?

The activation of one's palace would result in different consequences depending on their physical condition, but Mingxiu had never heard of anyone who opened up the new palaces with an explosion.

Explosion…

"Explosion?" Li Wei was surprised to hear what Mingxiu had told him, and he asked, "You mean both of his hand palaces were activated at the same time, and the explosion happened in this process, too?"

"Yes, the workshop was razed to the ground." Mingxiu was a bit worried. "Is there any problem in Ai Hui's training method?"

When it came to this question, Mingxiu thought for a while before she finally decided to ask Li Wei for help. Master was definitely accomplished in embroidery, but she was not very good at basic training. On the other hand, although Uncle was good at basic training, he only knew about the theory, and he had no idea about how to deal with the accidents that occurred during training.

Compared to them, Li Wei was much more experienced.

He was, indeed, experienced. He consoled Mingxiu, “Don’t worry, Xiu. This is not a common phenomenon, but it’s not unprecedented either.”

Mingxiu was relieved when she heard Li Wei. She was most worried about whether the explosion during the activation of both his hand palaces meant that the method of his training was wrong.

Li Wei looked unconcerned as if this was normal, but inside his heart, he was greatly shocked.

Generally, the higher the base level, the more fierce the consequences would be when a breakthrough was achieved. For some elementalists, their breakthroughs could lead to thunder and lightning—maybe even storms and reversed tides.

The students of the Induction Ground seldom made a fierce reaction when their palaces were activated because the elemental energy within them was too scarce to cause any abnormality.

But Ai Hui was different from others because he had the ball of elemental energy which contained more elemental energy than he could control. This was very likely to be the reason for the occurrence of the abnormality.

Although Li Wei didn’t know the reason for the explosion, he was

more interested in what Ai Hui gained in return.

Li Wei had once heard that when these abnormalities occurred when one moved to the next level, there was a possibility that the elementalist would gain something unique. However, this seemed to apply only to high-level elementalists, instead of those who were still in basic training.

Ai Hui had only activated his hand palaces, but this had led to an unexpected explosion. What did this mean to his hand palaces?

Or was he overthinking? After all, this was a saying that usually referred to high-level elementalists. He wasn't sure whether it would apply to students as well.

Li Wei mocked himself. He was almost sure that he was thinking too much just now. But anyway, Ai Hui had potential as he would always do things differently. This was what a potential youngster should do!

Even when he ate noodles, he was different from others!

When he envisioned the scene of Ai Hui eating noodles, Li Wei laughed and said, "If you want to know whether everything's fine, there's a simple method."

Mingxiu was immediately attracted to his words. "What method?"

“Take him out and buy him noodles.” When he saw that Mingxiu didn’t appear to believe him, Li Wei said, “Last time, in the noodle house, I said I would buy him some noodles. He was sitting opposite to me, and he stared at me sincerely and kept saying ‘You're so nice, Li Wei.’ And at first, I was thinking, ‘Okay, this is a good boy.’ But then I was totally shocked when I saw the bill. Do you know how many bowls we ate? Ten! That means he ate nine bowls of noodles himself! That was when I understood why he was so sincere. Yes, he was sincere because the noodles were delicious. So, if you want to know if everything is fine with him, take him to the noodle house. If he cannot have more than five bowls of noodles, then there must be something wrong...”

Mingxiu laughed out loud.

Chapter 111: Unique Hand Palaces

Just now, in the embroidery workshop, Ai Hui had been totally immersed in the happiness that the money had brought him. As a result, as soon as he went back to the training hall, he bragged with Lou Lan for quite a while.

Lou Lan had been distraught these past few days since he had just been separated from Master Shao, and Ai Hui had been so engaged in training that had no time to think about Lou Lan. Therefore, Ai Hui seriously bragged with Lou Lan for a whole afternoon.

But Ai Hui soon realized that bragging for an afternoon was much more tiring than training, and he decided to replace "bragging with Lou Lan" with "training with Lou Lan."

Fortunately, he still had the elemental soup prepared by Lou Lan—it was so delicious that Ai Hui nearly bit his own tongue.

Its delectable taste lessened the pain he was feeling for the one hundred thousand yuan for its ingredients.

In the evening, Lou Lan went back to Master Shao's former residence and busied himself in organizing the things that Master Shao had left behind.

Lou Lan had said that he wanted Master Shao to return to a tidy house in case he came back one day, and presently, he could only think of this way to help Master Shao.

On hearing this, Ai Hui had become silent for a long time. He had felt like telling Lou Lan that Master Shao would never return, but as an afterthought, he felt that Lou Lan also understood this. Lou Lan just desired to do something.

What if he were Lou Lan?

Chewing the grass in his mouth, Ai Hui stared at the sky for ages, lost in thought. The taste of the grass slowly pervaded his mouth, just like the sky that was gradually immersing into darkness.

His mind wandered to the owner of the swordsman school in the Old Territory.

How time flies!

Are you fine in heaven, Boss? I am. And I hope you are as happy as I am now. But if you are not…then find a way out yourself.

Ai Hui laughed out loud, the laughter washing away all his worries.

He picked himself up and began to study his hand palaces passionately. Anything else was left behind for the moment.

He himself hadn’t expected to activate both his hand palaces simultaneously.

The activation order of the eight palaces wasn't fixed, but the hand palaces were usually the first to be activated simply because they were the easiest. However, the inheritance of the unique skills of many influential families usually had a particular requirement for the activation order. For example, the skill [Eyebrow Heart Knife] required the sky palace to be activated first, which was, in fact, the most difficult palace to activate.

Therefore, there were very few successors of [Eyebrow Heart Knife] in each generation, and its inheritance was faced with many interruptions.

Except for the four palaces in the hands and feet, the activation of the other four—the sky, gate, sea, and earth palaces—was incredibly difficult.

However, whether one opened an easier or more difficult palace first, the eight palaces were almost always activated individually. As such, he was surprised by the simultaneous activation of both his hand palaces, but the explosion during the activation had further confused him.

Why did it explode?

The explosion had taken place very abruptly, almost in an instant, and he himself didn't know what happened either. He hadn't realized that his hand palaces were activated until he had climbed out of the ruins and checked to see if he was injured.

Ai Hui's gaze fell on his palms.

The Sword Rattan Gloves were already in pieces. Although the explosion had been very powerful, he was safe and sound, but he was clueless of the reason. Fortunately, the workshop was isolated because of the unpleasant smell of the various herbs used during extraction, and hence, although the whole workshop was razed to the ground, nobody else was affected by the explosion.

However, Ai Hui clearly remembered that the trigger of the explosion was the sword embryo!

At that time, he had been infusing his elemental energy into the Twilight Silk, and he remembered feeling an intense sensation from his right hand palace. Ai Hui had thought that the trembling of the right hand palace would break the Twilight Silk like it had done many times before.

But unexpectedly, the sword embryo, which had always been quiet and still, suddenly moved.

Yes. Ai Hui was sure that it wasn't a figment his imagination. The movement was so obvious—it was like a strong and sudden heartbeat.

And then there was the explosion!

It had occurred all of a sudden and had caught Ai Hui totally off guard.

Everything had happened too fast for Ai Hui to react. All he could remember was the movement of the sword embryo, which he knew was the cause of the explosion. But as to how, he didn't know anything either.

Ai Hui felt a headache coming on.

When he had planted the embryo, he didn't have the slightest idea that it would cause so much trouble, moreover during breakthroughs. This time, he was lucky enough to not be injured in the explosion and somehow open his left hand palace, albeit without warning.

The activation was a good thing, of course. If an explosion could open his third palace, Ai Hui would choose the explosion in a heartbeat.

But the instability of the sword embryo was a bit disturbing. It was unknown when it would break out again. This time, the result was all right, but who knew what it would bring next time?

Ai Hui was frustrated. If he could choose to remove the sword embryo, he would do so without delay.

Compared to the sword embryo, the system of the five residences and eight palaces was mature, and as long as he kept working hard, he would definitely be able to make achievements by following such a system.

But the sword embryo? God knows!

However, the sword embryo could not be removed. Actually, he himself wasn't quite sure how he had managed to plant the sword embryo in the first place, much less remove it.

After thinking for quite a while, Ai Hui still couldn't come up with any good ideas.

On second thought, if it were not for the sword embryo, he would have already died in the Wilderness, let alone train here now.

Thus, Ai Hui became at ease again. If he was aware of all the side effects of the sword embryo, would he still choose to plant it? The answer was yes, because at that time, the only thing he wanted to do was survive.

Yes, at least he was alive.

Alive was good.

Ai Hui mood brightened, and he began to carefully study his hand palaces.

A silver ball appeared in his right palm.

Ai Hui was surprised at how small it was.

The silver ball, which was as small as a sesame seed, was, in fact, his elemental energy. Ai Hui suddenly felt some uncertainty about whether his hand palaces were actually activated because he noticed that his hand palaces seemed to be somewhat different from others'.

The activation of any of the five residences and eight palaces had its own benefit. The fundamental function of the eight palaces was to store elemental energy, and its capacity was much larger than that of the natal residence.

Ai Hui had assumed that his activated hand palaces would share the pressure on his natal residence by storing the elemental energy mass, or at least a portion of the elemental energy.

However, things developed differently and out of his expectations.

When Ai Hui checked his left hand palace, he discovered that there was a small silver ball in it, too.

But he soon uncovered something else.

The silver ball, which was smaller than a sesame seed, was not motionless—it was spinning fast.

After thinking for a while, Ai Hui finally understood the reason. The elemental energy mass in his natal residence had a strong

suction that could attract and absorb all the elemental energy in his body. To prevent itself from being absorbed, the silver ball had to spin fast to offset the suction.

For example, the elemental soup he had just consumed had not yet been fully digested, but its elemental energy had already been absorbed by the elemental energy mass in his natal residence.

The silver balls in his hand palaces, however, were tiny in size, but they contained the only elemental energy of his body that had not been absorbed by the elemental energy mass in the natal residence.

Now, after determining the question, Ai Hui thought of a solution, which was to guide the elemental energy of the elemental energy mass to his hand palaces.

Anyway, he still had to get a new pair of Sword Rattan Gloves.

When he looked at the fragmented Sword Rattan Gloves on his hands, Ai Hui smiled bitterly. He had to ask Mistress for help tomorrow.

He would be scolded again.

Chapter 112: Unification of the Average Minds

The Hall of Nine Tones, Day One.

“Brother, we are talking about five hundred million yuan. It will not be easy to earn. Even if we engage in dishonest practices like collecting protection fees, it will still be impossible. Actually, it would be a feat if we can collect even eight million yuan.”

“Brother Huanghun, it would be difficult to earn at the training halls as well. At present, the maximum cash reward for a competition is five hundred thousand yuan. In order to get five hundred million, you will have to win one thousand fights. At three competitions a day, you will have to fight for a year.”

“Brother Huanghun, if I may suggest, I think that it’s possible for us to resell military weapons as everyone would be able to do it. However, it would be more feasible if we do it externally rather than in the Induction Ground. If news of our activities were to spread, then we will be suppressed.”

“Brother Huanghun, how about you prostitute yourself? No, I am not saying you should sell your body, but instead, you can sell pictures of yourself or something! You are the apple of many girls’ eyes! Bro…Brother Huanghun! I am wrong! I am wrong! Ahhh!”

……

Everyone was engaged in a lively discussion. However, it was impossible for them to resolve the issue of an enormous amount like five hundred million yuan. While some of them were earnest in helping Duanmu Huanghun, the majority of them just wished to free themselves from their obligation.

The Hall of Nine Tones was a unique place in the sense that it did not make any concessions, no matter how reputable a person was.

Sure enough, a worker came after a short while. “Dear customers, we are going to close soon.”

Without a change in expression, Duanmu Huanghun took out a dark gold card, passed it to the worker, and said indifferently, “I need to borrow this courtyard for a few days.”

The worker received a huge shock upon seeing the dark gold card. He immediately broke into a small jog to report to the main person in charge.

Wu Qirong had an ominous premonition. However, since nobody had seen the dark gold card before, they were all clueless to what it was. Everyone’s gaze turned to Yu Ziyi, but he shook his head vaguely, implying that he, too, had never seen it before.

Nevertheless, everyone felt that Brother Huanghun was asking for too much. All of the courtyards in the Hall of Nine Tones were always booked in advance. How was it possible to just borrow it, let alone for a few days?

After a moment, the main manager hurriedly rushed in, and with a humble and respectful expression, he said, “My apologies. We were not aware that we have distinguished guests at our premises. You want to use the Happiness Courtyard? No problem! However, this courtyard may be slightly small. Would you prefer to switch to a bigger courtyard? Our Do Courtyard is larger.”

Both Yu Ziyi and Wu Qirong’s jaws dropped. They were dumbstruck.

The Hall of Nine Tones had nine courtyards in total, which were named after the first five notes of the pentatonic scale (Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So) and the four types of humans emotions (Joy, Anger, Sadness, Happiness).

The Do Courtyard was the best of the nine courtyards. It was never opened for booking to the public. It was only used when there were distinguished guests in the Hall of Nine Tones.

But the Hall of Nine Tones invited Brother Huanghun to the Do Courtyard!

Everyone was flabbergasted!

The next instant, the young masters all started staring at Brother Huanghun impatiently.

Quickly agree to it, Brother Huanghun! Let us experience the legendary Do Courtyard! We’ll be able to brag to people in the

future with pride!

But they did not expect Duanmu Huanghun to shake his head and bluntly say, “Thank you, but I shall pass. It is perfect here.”

The group of playboys howled in grief.

“All right, as you wish, sir” the manager respectfully said. “If you still have any orders, please pull this red string; it is attached to a bell. We will rush over as fast as possible.”

Duanmu Huanghun nodded. “You do not need to have any workers waiting on us. Have a break as per usual. Prepare some rations for them.”

He then cast a meaningful glance at the rest of the young men. “The night is long.”

The manager also looked at everyone, bowed, and respectfully answered, “Yes.”

……

The next day.

Everyone was dispirited and listless. The Hall of Nine Tones had not sent anyone over, and they only received some rations, which were so dry that it was difficult to even put it in their mouths. Yet

Brother Huanghun was eating the rations leisurely as if it was the best delicacy in the world. After he finished the rations on hand, he said indifferently, “The sun is up, let’s continue brainstorming.”

“Brother Huanghun, I have lessons today……”

“Skip them.”

……

“Brother Huanghun, I have to visit my father tonight. My father is very strict……”

Duanmu Huanghun pulled the red string, ringing the bell. Moments later, the manager, who had just received instructions from Duanmu Huanghun, turned around and left the hall.

Two hours later, a square-faced middle-aged man followed alongside the manager.

“You little brat! If you dare spoil Master Duanmu's plans, I will break your legs when we are back!”

……

“Ah ah ah, Brother Huanghun, I..I am not feeling well….”

Bang!

The sole of a foot could be seen on his face. His body became rigid for a moment, before collapsing limply on the floor.

Duanmu Huanghun said expressionlessly, “This is called feeling unwell.”

……

The third day.

Looking at the group of downcast playboys who surrounded him, Duanmu Huanghun felt that he now truly understood the meaning of the phrase “useless people.”

After thinking for three days and three nights, this bunch of incompetent fools could not come up with even a single viable idea.

Yu Ziyi, who was faint with hunger, saw that Brother Huanghun’s expression was becoming more and more displeased. He knew that this signified the imminent eruption of the monster, so he said miserably, “Brother Huanghun, we are talking about five hundred million yuan. Once the value hits a hundred million, it becomes exceedingly difficult to procure. The Induction Ground is a very small place. You would need to be very capable in order to earn that five hundred million yuan.”

Bang!

With one leg, Duanmu Huanghun kicked Yu Ziyi down on to the floor. With a foot crushing Yu Ziyi's chest and a cold, indifferent face, he asked, "Are you saying I'm not capable enough?"

Yu Ziyi trembled. He felt like slapping himself. How could he say the wrong thing again?

"I've thought of something! I've thought of something! Hahaha! I've thought of something! Brother Huanghun, I have thought of something!"

Wu Qirong suddenly jumped up in excitement.

Everyone looked towards Wu Qirong. Tears filled their eyes as they gazed at him full of hope.

After three consecutive days and nights, Wu Qirong appeared tired and disheveled. However, at this moment, his eyes were exceptionally bright. "It would be difficult to use conventional methods to earn that five hundred million. Hence, we have to do something unconventional. Brother Huanghun is a wood elementalist. Have all of you forgotten what a wood elementalist is good at?"

"Healing!"

"Runaways!"

Bang!

A figure was thrown into the air.

Duanmu Huanghun's face was expressionless as he withdrew his leg.

It was true that wood elementalists did not like to be in the battleground, and this was becoming increasingly common—especially in recent years. In the Thirteenth Division, there were two wood-attributed divisions—the Deathgrass Division and the Truewood Division. Runaways weren't prevalent in the Truewood Division as their main focus was on treatment; however, in the Deathgrass Division, there were many situations of discontentment amongst the wood elementalists. Although it was publicized as being due to the stringent selection process, the younger generations of influential families were clear of the truth.

However, the higher authorities of The Avalon of Five Elements weren't pleased.

Duanmu Huanghun looked at the slightly dazed Wu Qirong and replied, "Continue with your idea."

Wu Qirong was jolted awake, and he hurriedly continued, "Wood elementalists are experts in cultivating new varieties of species. I was wondering if we could develop ideas based on this? We don't have to talk about those species like the mirage bean pod, but if it were a tiny species and a relatively practical species, we would be

able to achieve five hundred million yuan much more easily if we were to sell out everything.”

Duanmu Huanghun appeared to be deep in thought. Five hundred million yuan for a new type of material was indeed inexpensive.

“Furthermore, we would be able to help as well. We can help Brother Huanghun and ask around about what type of materials would be more profitable, allowing us to be able to create more relevant items, too. Also, Brother Huanghun’s teacher is a grandmaster wood elementalist and would have conducted a lot of research on this subject. Brother Huanghun’s a genius, so I feel that there is a high possibility of this being doable. If we’re able to produce the item, who would dare to cheat us of our money?”

Everyone’s gaze was fixed on Duanmu Huanghun. This was the most feasible idea thus far.

As usual, Duanmu Huanghun’s face was inscrutable.

But just when everyone was about to give up all hope, Duanmu Huanghun suddenly spoke. With an indifferent voice, he said, “Let’s go to the Do Courtyard.”

Everyone was stunned, and after a moment, they erupted in cheers.

Chapter 113: A Strange Message

Ai Hui had been certain that Mistress would give him a scolding, but he did not expect her to just throw him a new pair of Sword Rattan Gloves without saying a word.

The embroidery workshop did not sell Sword Rattan Gloves, and it was only he who used them.

It was likely that Mistress had spent the whole night weaving it for him.

Ai Hui was touched. Mistress was the perfect example of 'all bark and no bite.' She treated him as if he were her own disciple.

The workshop's ruins had already been sorted out.

However, it was still not suitable for Ai Hui to train in the embroidery workshop, so he took the Sword Rattan Gloves and returned to the training hall.

Ai Hui could only feel the effect of the Sword Rattan Gloves when he trained.

After a deep breath, Ai Hui began.

The Sword Rattan Gloves worked very well indeed. The instant he removed the Sword Rattan Gloves and untied the Blood

Bandage, he immediately felt the trembling of the elemental energy mass within his natal residence, and a slender thread of elemental energy drifted out from it.

However, what made Ai Hui surprised was that the Sword Rattan Gloves were not the reason why the silver balls in his hand palaces rotated at a fast speed.

The fine thread of elemental energy drifted away and entered the hand palace's silver ball, like a tired bird returning to its nest.

Ai Hui's body jolted and both his hand palaces suddenly heated up—it was as if his hands were about to burn. Before Ai Hui could even react, a steady flow of elemental energy started trickling out of the elemental energy mass in his natal residence and into Ai Hui's hand palaces.

The temperature of his hand palaces began increasing rapidly. Ai Hui felt as if his palms were pork knuckles on a hot stove—he had almost jumped up, but he managed to forcibly restrain himself. He could feel the silver balls in his hand palaces expanding rapidly.

Not only was the silver balls' elemental energy increasing, but the balls were also changing in shape. The silver balls began to collapse towards the middle, and gradually, Ai Hui could perceive some development.

Vortex!

The silver balls continued to expand, gradually transforming into a silver vortex.

The silver elemental vortex was continuously growing at a slow speed, and Ai Hui was more than happy with such a change. In general, when a student just activated a hand palace, it was impossible to it fill it up with elemental energy in just a day or two. After all, elemental energy was extremely sparse in the natural world, and even with the aid of elemental food, it would still take time.

Ai Hui's situation was slightly special as his body already had an astonishing amount of elemental energy.

Not only was the elemental energy vortex in both his hand palaces unceasingly expanding, but its elemental energy absorption speed was also constantly increasing. However, Ai Hui soon started to feel that something was wrong. Not only was the absorption speed increasing, but the speed of the elemental energy's circulation in his body was also rising as well. Such a high concentration of elemental energy brought about a burden to Ai Hui.

While the rotation of the elemental energy was not as fast as it was during battle, it had been rotating for an extended period of time, which brought about obvious changes to his body. Ai Hui's muscles started to swell, and he began to tremble. Large droplets of sweat appeared, flowing down in streams.

At the last moment, just before he could hold on no longer, Ai Hui managed to tie a knot on the Sword Rattan Gloves.

The connection between his hand palace and his natal residence was suddenly cut off, granting him immediate relief from the fluster. Ai Hui desperately gasped for breath, as if he had just drowned and had been rescued. With a slackened gaze, he laid straight out on the floor.

After a long moment, his glazed eyes began to recover, and the bright, starry sky soon came into focus.

While he was still panting and his body was weak, his mind was no longer blank. Although he didn't feel like moving even an inch, he still struggled to push himself up. Checking his hand palace, he realized that the elemental energy vortex was rotating automatically, and it had become very stable.

A faint silver glow could be seen through the gaps of the Sword Rattan Gloves.

If he removed the Sword Rattan Gloves, the vortexes, which were emitting the silver rays from each his hand palaces, would be clearly visible.

It was fortunate that the Sword Rattan Gloves blocked the glow, as it would otherwise be too eye-catching. Ai Hui did not like anything that was conspicuous. The more attention-grabbing something was, the easier it would be to become the main target during an attack.

The mass of elemental energy in his natal residence had slightly

decreased in size. While it wasn't a significant difference, it was definitely a good start.

Ai Hui could sense that he was able to recover his energy much more swiftly than before. This was was due to the activation of a new palace; when a palace was activated, various bodily functions would be raised by varying degrees.

According to Teacher's explanation, it was an indicator that his vitality had been strengthened, and the higher the base level, the higher the vitality.

Ai Hui felt that his teacher's description was apt.

He planned to soak in the hot spring in the training hall's backyard, as this would enable him to recover faster. And when he fully recovered, he would be able to resume his training.

Ai Hui suddenly started, and he looked towards the message tree.

A leaf of the message tree was emitting a gentle ray of light.

The young girl from the noodle shop? Ai Hui's spirit lifted. It had been a while since he had received news from that girl; she seemed to have disappeared recently. However, after a moment's thought, Ai Hui felt a tad suspicious. Why would the young girl from the noodle shop send news at such an hour?

Only when he approached the message tree did he realize that the

glowing leaf was not the same leaf that the young girl from the noodle store had shown before.

Who could it be?

Ai Hui was baffled. He didn’t know anyone from the Induction Ground. However, after some thought, he shook his head. He had been taking things for granted; he almost forgot that he was just a lowly janitor.

It should be a friend of the owner of the Vanguard Training Hall.

After he came to this conclusion, Ai Hui decided to leave, and he turned around. Suddenly, though, he had a second thought. It had been twenty years since the owner had last visited the training hall. Ai Hui reckoned that the message came from a friend who had not been in touch for a very long time. But what if it was an emergency? Perhaps he should let the opposite party know that the owner hadn't been back for years.

Ai Hui ran back inside to get a pen. Luckily, Lou Lan was a good sand puppet who loved to learn, and he thus kept a few pens.

He walked towards the luminous leaf and glanced at it curiously. This was his first time using the message tree. The country bumpkin in him was filled with curiosity, and he felt that it was magical.

Eh? Ai Hui frowned. The leaf had only four sentences that did

not make any sense.

“I have no idea who among you are still alive, but I know that no one can stop them. They have already completed the necessary preparations. Everything will change in sixty days. Who will protect the Avalon of Five Elements?”

Ai Hui read it over a few times, but he felt that it didn’t make any sense.

Them? Sixty days later? Everything would change?

Ai Hui, who had been prepared to write, put his pen down. The message made his blood run cold. It looked like the owner of the training hall had low standards—he actually had such an eccentric friend!

And who would be able to protect the Avalon of Five Elements?

Ai Hui was dumbfounded. The Avalon of Five Elements had a very firm foundation, and he had never heard anything about the Avalon of Five Elements being unstable during his time in the Wilderness. And this belief was reinforced when he arrived at the Induction Ground. Compared to the Wilderness, the Avalon of Five Elements was like a paradise; there were no battles, and the environment was secure and peaceful.

After pondering for a while, Ai Hui wrote on the leaf, “Maybe you should see a doctor.”

Looking at the fading letters, Ai Hui felt that the message tree was fascinating.

Ai Hui was satisfied, and he then dashed to the backyard to take a hot soak.

However, a moment after Ai Hui left, the leaf lit up once again.

Chapter 114: Practicum Far From Home

Ai Hui very rarely cared about such eccentric people. Even if there really was a major incident, it would definitely not be him who saved the world. So how did this concern him? He was merely an insignificant and weak nobody.

He continued to immerse himself in his training—only during such practice did he feel that he was fully utilizing his time. He had just activated two palaces, and this base level was nothing much in the Induction Ground, unless he had an absolute art like Zu Yan.

However, his training was interrupted on the second day.

"A practicum far from home?"

Everyone had questions in their hearts as they looked at Teacher Xu. All of them had been called by the teacher.

Teacher Xu explained, "Yes. Every year, we organize a long journey for the whole class. The main purpose is to allow everyone to expand their horizons. I will be leading the team and the school will send a few capable teachers along with us. Two instructors from the Society of Excellence will also be joining us on this journey. We will be going to the periphery zone of the Induction Ground."

While the majority of the students were eager to give it a try, Duanmu Huanghun frowned. "Teacher, may I opt out of such a long journey? I recently have a very heavy responsibility in

training."

Ingrate! Ingrate! Ingrate!

Ai Hui silently scolded Bangwan with these three consecutive words before turning to Teacher Xu with an expectant look on his face. If Teacher Xu agreed, then he would be able to use the same excuse to stay behind as well.

No one objected to Duanmu Huanghun's words. Based on his capability, it was true that such a long journey would not be as effective as his training.

However, Teacher Xu shook his head. "No, Student Duanmu. This is the first time our class is having a collective activity. Everyone has to attend. You are the class monitor and you have to set an example!"

Duanmu Huanghun opened his mouth, but he ultimately decided not to speak up.

After hearing this, Ai Hui had to give up as well.

If Teacher did not allow a concession for that ingrate, then it really would be an impossible task for him. While Ai hui was disdainful of that ingrate's personality, he couldn't help but admit that that ingrate had a higher standing in Teacher's heart than him.

What bad luck…

Since he couldn’t change anything, Ai Hui started planning for the excursion.

It looked like he was going to end up wasting a few days. He should get Lou Lan to prepare some dried rations to help replenish his energy—he would then be able to train while in the camp.

Oh, he also had to make a trip to Manager Li’s to choose a suitable sword. Although the Induction Ground was a safe place, it was better to be prepared. Self-defence skills were a top priority.

Dried rations and a sword. Ai Hui gave a bitter laugh; it was no small expense.

He was only left with around three hundred thousand yuan, and this was only because Manager Li had given him an advance payment. He seemed to never have enough money, and he still owed his mistress a significant amount, which he definitely had to return. Ai Hui didn’t even have the courage to think about the noodle shop girl’s eighty million yuan.

Bunny hair, oh, bunny hair, you have to buck up!

Back at the training hall, Ai Hui passed fifty thousand yuan to Lou Lan to purchase ingredients for the energy-replenishing cake. Thanks to Lou Lan’s elemental soup, Ai Hui was able to quickly recover the night before. The effect of the elemental soup would

last for around three days, weakening with each passing day. Although the elemental soup had a much greater efficiency than the energy-replenishing cake, it was also much more expensive.

Ai Hui then made a trip alone to Manager Li's store.

This was actually the first time that Ai Hui had stepped foot into Manager Li's weapon store. It wasn't far from the training hall; as a matter of fact, Central Pine City wasn't that big of a city.

The dazzling array of weapons displayed on the shelves made Ai Hui starry-eyed.

Looking at Ai Hui's passion, and hearing that Ai Hui was planning to purchase a weapon, Manager Li served him with even more enthusiasm. "Oh, feel free to try. As long as you think it's suitable, I'll give you the best discount possible."

Ai Hui's eyed the various swords on display and started drooling. As someone who had experienced many battles, he had a deeply ingrained love for weapons. To him, a weapon was an important weight in the balance of life and death.

In the Wilderness, he had used the Sword Reed Grass Sword, which was the most basic type of sword. It cost only two to three thousand yuan, equivalent to ten bowls of noodles.

There were many variants of grass swords. High-quality grass swords, though, were not cheap.

At first glance, Ai Hui's gaze fell on a Sawtooth Grass Sword that was worth one hundred and twenty thousand yuan. In the past, he had tried out a similar Sawtooth Grass Sword, but he couldn't afford it then. This Sawtooth Grass Sword was heavy to hold; Ai Hui was exceptionally sensitive towards weapons, and he guessed that the weight was 2.5 times that of the previous Sawtooth Grass Sword. If it were in the past, he would have needed to apply some effort to hold it, but now his power had grown and his body had become much stronger. Such a heavy sword would be an additional advantage for him.

The edge of the sword was dark grey, and the sawtooth was slender, dark red, and exceptionally sharp. Sawtooth grass was a variety bred by wood elementalists, and it required metallic soil to grow. It matured in one year and could be manufactured into swords and blades in the first-stage manufacturing room of the Grass Division. Compared to the Sawtooth Grass Sword, the sawtooth grass blade had a larger variety of uses, and it was also able to exhibit a more abnormal destructive power than the Sawtooth Grass Sword.

The color and luster of sawtooth grass was related to its age; the more mature it was, the deeper the color. If the sawtooth grass was older than ten years, its color would turn black, and it would consequently be extremely expensive.

However, what astonished Ai Hui was the value of the Sawtooth Grass Sword. At a price of one hundred and twenty thousand, it was definitely on the lower side. If it was at the replenishment store in the Wilderness, such a sword would definitely cost around three hundred and fifty thousand yuan.

While Central Pine City was at the rear and not the front line, a price of one hundred and twenty thousand was simply too cheap. Ai Hui bought the sword without hesitation.

The weight of the sword was much heavier than that of usual grass swords, and without a certain amount of strength, it would be difficult to use it. Although it was normal for few students to be able to use such a sword, the low price was slightly out of the norm.

After questioning Manger Li for the reason, Ai Hui was at a loss for words. The reason was that the sword's colour was dull, and hence not popular amongst students, which led to the low price.

Manager Li proceeded to recommend a variant of the grass sword, called 'flaming scarlet,' which he claimed was a best seller. The complete body of the sword was scarlet and it gave off a faint crimson shimmer, like a piece of iron heated in a flame. When waved around, sparks would fly out intermittently. It was like a display of fireworks, extremely beautiful.

This was the first time that Ai Hui had seen such a dazzling grass sword and he was surprised. Upon taking a closer look, his expression changed, as the crimson shimmer of the sword was not hot to touch; instead, it was cold. And the sparks were, in fact, grass seeds.

Manager Li said that the wood elementalists who breed the red grass did not manage to sell any of it in the beginning. The quality

of the red grass was mediocre, so the swords created from it were also of average quality. However, Manager Li had good foresight and he bought over its selling rights. He then brought the swords over to the Induction Ground where it quickly became a favorite. Those experienced swordsmen, who roamed the Wilderness, were not fond of flashy and impractical swords, but the students, who did not engage in real battles, loved them and felt that the Flame Scarlet Grass Swords were very dashing and stylish.

Ai Hui gave a thumbs up.

I like your unscrupulous thinking!

Bunny Hair, I am depending on you now!

After returning to the training hall, Ai Hui unfolded the materials that Teacher Xu had given him, but when he discerned the exact location of the practicum, he was slightly startled.

The Induction Ground used to be the military front, but owing to the expansion of the Avalon Of Five Elements, the Induction Ground ended up as the rear. But its position was closer to the Old Territory, and the expedition's destination was at its fringes.

The Old Territory...

Chapter 115: The Detached Bystander

Holding his Sawtooth Grass Sword, Ai Hui cooly watched on as his surrounding classmates vomited continuously. During his first ride on the Clover Transport Wagon, he, too, had vomited—even more, in fact, than these students, so he did not sympathize with them at all. It was obvious that the wood elementalist controlling the vehicle was being lenient.

Compared to the Three Leaves Bamboo Cart within the cities, a ride on the Clover Transport Wagon was much wilder.

It was wilder in all aspects.

With a tougher stem and leaves, if the clover of the Three Leaves Bamboo Cart was a delicate and tender beauty, the Clover Transport Wagon would be a muscular, iron giant. Grass stems as thick as calves were not easily damaged by swords, and every leaf was like a blade and half the size of a door. As the wagon moved, they produced a scalp-tingling sound.

Not only did the Clover Transport Wagon have to be able to transport enough goods, it had to provide sufficient protection and also had to have a certain flexibility. Colorful plants dotted the outside of the vehicle, and there was a different significance for each flower bud, thistle, and thorn. For example, some could spray a steady stream of toxic vapor to chase away flying dire beasts, helping pave a path of escape for the wagon in desperate situations.

However, the flying dire beasts were resilient, and the effectiveness of the toxins was limited. It was, in fact, the smell of the vapor that would allow the wagon to dodge a bullet—a majority of the flying dire beasts detested the odor.

Although it was a wagon, going in and out of the Wilderness required it to be more flexible and nimble than the Three Leaves Bamboo Cart in the cities. It was similar to a massive but agile and robust man. The wood elementalist controlling the wagon usually loved to gift rookies a tough flight experience.

Ai Hui, however, was enjoying the ride.

The wood elementalist in front had obviously taken care to not overdo it. This level of bumpiness was practically sleep inducing.

Other students were badly battered. Throughout their lives, they had traveled in stable vehicles like the Fiery Floating Cloud and the Three Leaves Bamboo Cart. Where would they have experienced such a wild ride?

Ai Hui took a sideward glance at the ingrate.

The ingrate had been arranged to sit beside him. However, compared to others, Duanmu Huanghun was performing well. He sat motionless on his seat. Although his expression didn’t look too good, he hadn’t vomited.

Ai Hui suddenly noticed that Duanmu’s whole body was tensed

up, so he leaned over and advised him nonchalantly, “Puke if you feel like, don’t hold it back. You’ll feel much better after…”

Wow!

Duanmu Huanghun, who had been resisting all along, instantly felt his throat become dry and itchy—he couldn’t keep it in any longer! Duanmu bent over and let it all out, like a flood breaking through a dam.

“Got vomit on your body? How careless. There’s no place for you to wash up in the countryside. But it’s not a big deal, just smell it for a few days at most.” Ai Hui’s devilish voice sounded from above.

Duanmu Huanghun saw the filth that covered his pants and shirt. His pupils shrank and his mysophobia finally acted up, causing him to puke wildly again.

Ai Hui couldn’t bear to keep looking, and he shifted a little away.

He really didn’t know what Teacher Xu was thinking by teaming this ingrate with him and having them sit together.

How suffocating.

Zhou Xiaoxi glanced over at Teacher Xu and couldn’t help but shake his head. Teacher Xu’s face was pale, and it was evident that he was making an extreme effort to endure. Luckily, they were

traveling within the Induction Ground; if they were heading for the Wilderness, he would definitely not have agreed to babysit these rookies.

Among these people, Ai Hui was the most eye-catching. He was also the only one Zhou Xiaoxi did not have to worry much about.

He could tell from Ai Hui's posture that he was a veteran. His body was relaxed, and he moved up and down along with the wagon's movements. His hands were gripped onto his weapon, and he had a steady gaze, both of which would allow him to respond to any possible dangers. His mind was alert, with his eyes constantly paying attention to his surroundings.

Even an experienced person like Zhou Xiaoxi couldn't find any fault. He thought about what Li Wei had mentioned before, that Ai Hui had worked in the Wilderness as a laborer for three years. Seemed like he wasn't talking nonsense.

It was always better to have at least one reliable person.

"Haha, we're about to reach!" The wood elementalist whistled.

There was a sudden change in the engine's noise as the wagon started to swiftly pull up.

Among the shocked gazes, Ai Hui couldn't help but shake his head. These fellows sure had similar bad habits! Couldn't they do something new?

The raised wagon gave a terrible jerk, and in the next instant, it dove down fast.

The screeching of the wagon drowned the high-pitched screams, but Ai Hui was indifferent to it all. He was only inwardly ridiculing those wood elementalists for not having any creativity.

The familiar feeling of that drop brought Ai Hui back to the time he spent in the Wilderness.

He missed Fatty all the more now. If Fatty were here, he would be talking non-stop; he always became long-winded when nervous.

Ai Hui was the first to jump off as he couldn't stand the smell inside. But the others' legs had turned soft; they were practically rolling and crawling out. Some of the timid girls couldn't even dare to jump, and they had to be thrown out of the wagon by Zhou Xiaoxi.

The wood elementalist was singing at the top of his voice, either in a satisfied or mocking tone, as the wagon whizzed away.

The group of students left behind was similar to helpless sheep within the Wilderness.

Teacher Xu had considered the kids' lack of experience while planning the itinerary. They were merely first-year students and were weak to begin with, so this long journey was purposefully

organized for them to just experience a little.

"We'll rest here tonight and continue tomorrow. First, though, you must all learn how to pitch camp! It is an essential skill, and you will discover its importance upon graduating! Instructor Zhou from the Society of Excellence will guide us on how to do it. He is an elite veteran from the North Sea Division!"

Zhou Xiaoxi didn't decline; this was one of their missions anyway. It was a tradition in the Avalon of Five Elements for seasoned frontline soldiers to return and impart their knowledge to students as it was extremely beneficial to their growth.

Zhou Xiaoxi did not start immediately, but he instead instructed, "Ai Hui, you're in charge of standing guard."

"Okay." Ai Hui nodded as he walked towards the forest, sword in hand.

Zhou Xiaoxi began, "Let's start pitching ca—"

"Why does he get to stand guard?" Duanmu Huanghun interrupted. "Instructor Zhou, shouldn't the strongest go?"

He had been made a fool by Ai Hui earlier and was waiting for an opportunity to get back at him.

"Generally, yes." Zhou Xiaoxi gave an amiable smile. "You think you're the strongest?"

“That’s correct!” Duanmu Huanghun was unwilling to pass his responsibilities. “I’m stronger, and I’ve also learned how to guard. I’m more experienced.”

“Sure.” Contrary to his expectations, Zhou Xiaoxi was straightforward. “Then you shall stand guard, and Ai Hui will pitch camp.”

Feeling that his plan was a success, Duanmu sneered and dashed into the forest, looking for Ai Hui.

Ai Hui did not mind. He had frequently stood guard and knew that it was tougher than ordinary work. He was more than happy to hand it over to Duanmu Huanghun, who was, moreover, willing to handle the job.

Under Zhou Xiaoxi’s guidance, the students quickly learned how to pitch camp and the discomfort from the wagon ride was soon forgotten. Work was now proceeding in full swing.

As the sky darkened and the winds grew stronger, a bonfire was lit.

Ai Hui suddenly raised his head.

Chapter 116: Barrier

Ai Hui heard a faint sound.

He raised his head and looked around, listening attentively.

The bonfire was burning brightly, and the students were recovering from that wild wagon ride. The freshness of it all significantly improved their moods as they settled down around the fierce flames and chatted. Some of the more lively and outgoing students even started singing and dancing. Teacher Xu was also infected by everyone's enthusiasm and could be seen full of smiles.

Ai Hui did not join them, and instead, he quietly sat under a big tree about forty meters away from the bonfire.

A fire in the countryside at night was the most eye-catching target. It was too easy to attract wild beasts.

Ai Hui was aware that the Induction Ground was devoid of violent beasts and that there was an expert like Instructor Zhou to protect them—there wouldn't be much danger in this excursion. However, due to habit, hiding in the dark had already been ingrained as an instinct. He always felt safer that way.

Upon entering the countryside, it was as if Ai Hui had returned to the Wilderness—to the land of cold slaughter. However, he was shocked to find out that he wasn't the least bit repelled by this; he was, in fact, faintly excited. The moment he had stepped into the

forest, he felt like a fish back in water. Perhaps he had been a jungle beast in his previous life.

Humans are ignoble!

Ai Hui mocked himself. It had only been a few good days, and he was already starting to reminisce about the past.

Leaves rustled as the wind swept by, but the ground remained still. There were no sounds of people trampling on dead leaves, no abnormal noises from the bushes, and no sounds of flapping wings breaking through the air.

Was it an illusion?

Ai Hui saw Instructor Zhou standing not far away. He had shown no reaction and was currently bragging about his past military successes, basking in the students' worshipping gazes.

Ai Hui's pursed his lips as they turned upwards to form an arc.

How great!

Yes, this was not the Wilderness. There were no dire beasts, only peace, and tranquility.

Ai Hui shook his head. He was overreacting. He thought back to how he had almost slipped up and killed some people a few times

when he had first entered the Induction Ground; adapting had taken a long time. But being in the countryside easily roused memories of the Wilderness.

This was not the Wilderness.

Ai Hui reminded himself once more. He hadn't done so for a long time.

However, when he thought of the ingrate, Ai Hui felt like gloating. He must be feeling quite satisfied right now!

Duanmu Huanghun was feeling terrible. Not only was the wind at the treetop much stronger than on the ground, but he was also receiving its full bore. He must have had a mental lapse when he had offered to take over guard duty.

Instructor Zhou had explained in detail about the necessary requirements of a sentry.

Duanmu Huanghun had never tolerated half-hearted work, and so he operated according to Instructor Zhou's orders and warnings. For example, he had to always be on alert and pay attention to every single movement in his surroundings.

In the beginning, Duanmu Huanghun did not see much difficulty in it, but as time passed, the uneventfulness of it all made his eyelids grow heavy. The sounds of the trees swaying in the wind were hypnotizing.

Eh? What was that sound?

He suddenly quivered. He seemed to have heard a faint sound, different from the rustling of the leaves.

But when he pricked up his ears, all he heard was the familiar rustling.

Was it an illusion?

Duanmu Huanghun was uncertain; he had just been in a daze.

He collected his thoughts. Although he was inexperienced, he knew the importance of standing guard in areas outside the city. This involved the safety of everyone so he couldn't slack off. Since he was the one who had snatched the job, he had better do it well—better than that bastard Ai Hui at least.

The raging flames of the bonfire eventually calmed down. A day's worth of toil and torment had knocked everyone out, and silence quickly pervaded the camp as the students fell into deep sleep.

Nothing happened throughout the night.

Ai Hui opened his eyes and caught sight of the curling embers of the bonfire under the light of the morning sky.

Zhou Xiaoxi was on patrol when he noticed that Ai Hui had woken up. He nodded as a hint of admiration flashed across his eyes before he continued with his rounds. Bringing a bunch of rookies brought him a lot of stress. Bragging was one thing, but when it came to proper business, he was never careless. He was well aware of the severity of the situation.

An elite indeed!

Ai Hui was full of respect for Zhou Xiaoxi. He was stronger than many elementalists that Ai Hui had seen. As an elite of the Thirteen Divisions, he was on another level from those elementalists of the hunting teams in the Wilderness.

The students gradually started to stir from their sleep, and by sunrise, everyone had awoken. After a simple washing and cleaning up, they were ready to be on their way.

Duanmu Huanghun returned with two clearly visible dark eye circles.

The white-eyed wolf was now a white-eyed husky…

Ai Hui was moved. It wasn't an easy job, after all. He did well!

The team gathered and started to trek towards their next destination.

Listening to his classmates' chit-chat and seeing many of them

take out their packed snacks gave Ai Hui the feeling that they were on a picnic.

Ai Hui and his teammates were somewhat inharmonious, so he stayed at the back of the group.

As they hiked, Teacher Xu was responsible for explaining.

“We are heading for the Old Territory. Many of you have come from there, so, that is to say, we are heading towards your hometown. The Old Territory is not only home to some students, but it is the native place for us all. The construction of the Avalon of Five Elements is closely linked to the Old Territory. They have the same origin, and we are all family. Many of our future students will join the Avalon of Five Elements, too. We are fighting so hard today not just for the Avalon or the Old Territory, but for our future.”

Under the sunlight, the students were engrossed in Teacher Xu’s speech, which was spoken with much dignity.

Zhou Xiaoxi said nothing. He glanced at Teacher Xu before moving forward with his head down.

AI Hui noticed that Instructor Zhou was in low spirits, but he did not know why. At the front line, the barrier between the Avalon of Five Elements and the Old Territory was like an invisible wall, unseen but everywhere.

However, Ai Hui didn’t feel that Teacher Xu’s words were wrong because regardless of whether it was the Old Territory or the Wilderness, the dire beasts were the real, important enemies.

Plus, he respected Teacher Xu a lot. All the teachers within the Induction Ground had opinions about this issue, but few would openly discuss them. Teacher Xu had courage.

Of course, Ai Hui could only face it indifferently because he felt that a topic so noble had nothing to do with him.

His own world was very tiny, to the point where it had no room for such large ambitions.

Surviving and becoming strong enough to protect the people he cared about were perfectly sufficient.

Ai Hui’s eyes scanned the surroundings and suddenly landed on a tree stump nearby, causing him to stop in his tracks.

He walked towards it and squatted down.

A white-eyed wolf refers to an ungrateful person (an ingrate).

Chapter 117: Dark Red

“You find anything?”

Instructor Zhou’s voice suddenly sounded from behind him, and before Ai Hui knew it, they were standing side by side.

Ai Hui shuddered. He had not sensed Instructor Zhou move towards him at all. Was this the power of an elite from the Thirteen Divisions? Ever since he had planted the sword embryo when he was in the Wilderness, no one within a three-meter radius could escape his detection.

Ai Hui was in awe, and an intense feeling of desire and motivation grew within him. The elites of the Thirteen Divisions possessed skills that far exceeded those of the elementalists of the hunting teams.

Ai Hui regained his composure and gave his report. “It should be gnawing marks left by a big fellow. The strength of its bite is astonishing. Judging by the tree stump, the creature broke it with a single bite.”

He did not say whether it was a wild beast or a dire beast. While there was only a single word’s difference, both were essentially unalike because of the distinction in the usage of elemental energy.

Dire beasts had existed since the Cultivation Era and were closely related to the Wilderness. They could channel elemental energy. Wild beasts, however, did not have this ability.

Admiration flashed in Instructor Zhou's eyes as he lowered his voice and said, "Be more careful, and don't utter a word."

"Yes." Ai Hui understood what Instructor Zhou meant. Spreading the news would cause unnecessary panic. These students did not have much mental strength.

When Ai Hui turned around, he was met with emptiness. Only when he looked at the front did he see Instructor Zhou standing among the team members over ten meters away. He even gave Ai Hui a wink.

That speed...

Ai Hui was stunned once again.

It wasn't that he hadn't ever encountered an elementalist well known for speed, but when could he have ever seen such noiseless, lightning-like movements? This was the first time!

How did he do that?

Ai Hui pondered over this question at length. He envisioned a few possibilities in his mind, but none seemed possible. Actually, he knew that Instructor Zhou's level was beyond his scope of understanding, but he nevertheless couldn't help but imagine how he would go about doing so if he was at Instructor Zhou's level.

It was Ai Hui's habit to indulge in flights of fancy about questions and doubts involving fighting. When he was stuck with a problem, he would repeatedly try to analyze and visualize possible solutions. This was the residual effect of tossing and turning all night over the sword embryo.

Ai Hui thought about the matter in silence as he accelerated his pace and caught up with the team.

No one was aware of the short exchange between Ai Hui and Instructor Zhou. They were all in high spirits.

Suddenly, someone in the front cried out in alarm, "Quick, look! What's that?"

The group was roused as everyone stopped their discussions and gathered around to inspect.

Ai Hui, however, did not join them. A crowded place was vulnerable to attacks. He moved to the side, creating some space as he stood facing the group, trying to get a clear understanding of the situation.

Ants. Countless ants. They were crawling out in an unending stream from a large hole in the ground, forming a current of ants about three meters wide and two meters long. They were slowly advancing in the direction of the Avalon of Five Elements.

"So many ants! What are they doing?"

“Are they migrating?”

“It’s quite a scary sight.”

“No worries, they are just ordinary ants, not elemental ants.”

……

Everyone was curiously discussing; it was their first time seeing such a sight. They weren't afraid, however, as ordinary ants weren’t dangerous.

“This is not a small ant community,” Teacher Xu explained. “It is not uncommon for ants to migrate. When you all enter the Wilderness in the future, you’ll be able to see many different types of elemental ants, and you all have to be careful. If you see elemental ants migrating in a group, do not provoke them. Don’t underestimate the strength of an ant colony. Even though they are weak individually, they are terrifying when gathered together. Instructor Zhou can share more information with you all.”

Zhou Xiaoxi nodded. “In the Wilderness, when elemental ants migrate, even dire beasts avoid their path. It's best not to provoke creatures like ants and bees that claim victory by their numbers. They are vengeful and will come for you in a group. If you stumble upon them, the best thing to do is to break them up. A lot of medicines are made specially to handle these types of beasts.”

Everyone was amazed; how interesting!

Teacher Xu was pleased. This journey was to expand their horizons, and such a sight could hardly be witnessed in cities and academies.

Zhou Xiaoxi led everybody around the ants. As the ants were moving slowly, they did not hinder the team's movements.

The jungle, which was filled with lush vegetation, was home to an uncrossable river of lava, which marked the boundary between the Induction Ground and the Old Territory.

The lava river flowed out from the ground all year round.

It was said that this lava river was connected to the subterranean Fire Prairie of the Calabash Mountain, but no one had ever seen the flame flowers floating on the river.

Flame flowers constituted a special feature of the Sparking Plain, which was, in fact, a haven for fire elementalists. Amongst a vast, boundless black field stood a single calabash-shaped volcano that touched the clouds. Once in a while, Calabash Mountain would erupt, creating a rain of fire unique to the Sparking Plain. That very rain would cover the desolate black field, forming unique flowers of flame.

Fresh fire-red flame flowers spread over the vast black plain, forming a beautiful, painting-like scenery.

If the lava river originated from the Fire Prairie, then flame flowers should be seen floating on the river. However, since no flame flowers were ever seen in the river, no one believed the legend.

The lava river completely separated the Induction Ground and the Old Territory, and the cities and academies of the Induction Ground were mostly congregated on the other side that was closer to the Avalon of Five Elements. The areas closer to the Old Territory eventually became a wild jungle, filled with lush vegetation and rampaging wild beasts due to a prolonged lack of human activities.

The Induction Ground would regularly dispatch manpower to exterminate the dire beasts while the ordinary wild beasts were allowed to roam and reproduce.

This region gradually become an external classroom for the students within the Induction Ground. The wild beasts here were not very dangerous, making them just suitable for educating the students. The thick jungle also allowed students to learn quite a lot.

There were no dangers on the way, but Ai Hui's group constantly faced many small challenges. Ai Hui felt that the team was advancing at the speed of a snail.

But he did not utter a word and just trained by himself during breaks.

As they approached the lava, the flora started to become richer and more abundant. Ai Hui noticed many plants that could be found in the Wilderness. They were probably initially planted by the wood elementalists of the Induction Ground, but as time passed, these plants had undergone significant changes.

Ai Hui saw sword reeds, but unlike those he'd seen in the past, they weren't enormous and tall. Their leaf blades were narrower, and instead of being dark or ash green, they were dark red in color, exuding a demonic aura.

Was it because they were close to the lava? Most of the plants here were somewhat of a dark red color.

Ai Hui didn't know why, but this kind of dark red made his heart pound.

After Teacher Xu's explanation, Ai Hui understood that this place was not only a training ground for students but also a ground for wood elementalist instructors to transplant all sorts of strange vegetations, letting them grow naturally. But with the existence of so many strange plant species, none of the teachers really knew all about them.

With his sharp senses, Ai Hui sensed human voices coming from not far away.

Ai Hui had a strange expression. They had unexpectedly bumped into another class.

But all of a sudden, he heard a certain voice, and a murderous look immediately filled his eyes.

Damned Fatty!

Chapter 118: Interweave

“You can’t carry it? Hey, let me help you. One thousand yuan per hour? That’s yesterday’s price, it’s so dangerous these days! A moment of carelessness will result in a slip and a fall. I’m fine with falling down as my skin is rough and my body’s thick, but your goods are precious and fragile! If they fall to the ground, you will suffer great losses! Let’s make it clear, you will not receive compensation for damaged goods. If you’re sincere about this, then I will be sincere, too. Since we are classmates, I will give you a reasonable price. Two thousand yuan per hour. It will only cost around twenty thousand yuan a day. This will save you a lot of trouble!”

Fatty’s face was filled with sincerity. The other party’s backpack resembled a small hill, making it very difficult and heavy to be carried. After a slight hesitation, he agreed to Fatty’s offer. Even though it was rather expensive, it wasn’t much to a wealthy person.

The fatty was silently rejoicing. This kind of weight was child’s play.

He happily accepted the money. However, just as he was about to put the money into his pocket, someone’s hand suddenly came from behind and emptied his hand.

Fatty was stunned, but the next moment his pupils shrunk. This feeling...was too familiar! He immediately turned his body around, kneeled down, and hugged Ai Hui’s legs. He started weeping. “Ai Hui, I finally found you!”

“Give us a moment.” Ai Hui forced a smile at the student who had just paid Fatty.

With a blank expression, he lifted Fatty up with one hand; Fatty’s enormous and cumbersome body seemed to weigh nothing in Ai Hui’s hand. The other hand of Ai Hui’s was searching through Fatty’s body, not leaving a single pocket. Ai Hui was too familiar with where Fatty hid his money, and in less than half a minute, he managed to obtain all of Fatty’s stash.

“Where’s the money?” Ai Hui asked coldly.

He had found barely fifty thousand yuan.

Ai Hui did not idle around, and he plucked off a thorny branch from a nearby cluster of thistles. When Fatty saw the densely-packed thorns on the branch, his face turned pale. An interrogation by torture was about to come.

However, he did not dare to struggle. He understood Ai Hui’s temperament very well. The more he struggled, the more he would suffer. He was well aware that Ai Hui’s anger stemmed from the fact that he had previously stolen his money.

“I spent all of it,” Fatty replied honestly. His tone was like a pig that was about to be slaughtered.

“You spent it all?” Ai Hui’s tone was flat. A fearful look flashed

across Fatty's face when he saw the thorny branch in Ai Hui's hand tremble.

Fatty gulped. He knew he had to settle the issue this time around.

"Do you still remember Pockmark? I'm sure you have forgotten; you never spoke a single word to him. I still remember that in the beginning, when I couldn't carry so much, he was the one who helped me. I buried his body. His wife never recovered from her illness. His daughter has reached the schooling age. When Pockmark died, I told him that if I came out alive, I would take care of his family."

The thorny branch in Ai Hui's hand stopped moving.

Pockmark...

A blurry face appeared in a distant memory. Anguish, fear, ink-black nights and icy winds. Fuzzy memories began to surface in his mind.

Ai Hui had a vague image of a laborer that had died very early during their time in the Wilderness. Fatty did not remember wrongly—he had not talked to Pockmark at all. Pockmark was not the only one he had never talked to; in fact, he did not talk to anyone except for Fatty.

"Do you remember Old Wei? That guy who liked to brag? I bet you don't remember him as well. I still remember that when I had

just entered the Wilderness, I was always hungry. Old Wei once gave me some food to eat and told me that I am around the same age as his son. The day he died was a rainy day. It was hard to dig a grave in the muddy soil, which was easily washed away by the rain. It took me half a day to bury him properly. He has two children. The younger one has a terminal illness at the mere age of seven. He knew he wouldn't survive, and hence, he went to the Wilderness. I have sent his family a sum of money. It's not a huge sum, it's only forty thousand yuan. Although I survived, I can't do anything more...

"Do you remember Big Lee...."

The fatty continued to talk endlessly, without getting to the point. Sometimes he talked until he was out of breath, at times he spoke with agitation.

The dumbstruck student who had paid him earlier had long been scared off.

"Duanmu Huanghun! Ahhhhhhh! Am I dreaming?"

"Ahhhh, quick, pick me some flowers!"

Suddenly, young girls' shrieks could be heard from behind the nearby trees.

Ai Hui was shocked speechless.

“Teacher Xu, what a coincidence!”

“Ah, Cui Xianzi, you’re bringing your students on an excursion as well?”

……

“Only the two of us survived, only the two of us survived!”

“…At least we are still alive…”

……

The warm, cordial greetings, the somber memories, they all kept interweaving and appearing in Ai Hui’s mind.

He remained stupefied as if he were in a dream.

……

“While I was burying them, I told them that if I made it out alive, I would take care of their families.

“Why am I still alive? Why….”

……

The spurt of fresh blood, the pouring rain, the dire beasts feasting on corpses—memories kept flashing through Ai Hui's mind. His body suddenly became cold, as if an icy bath had been dumped onto him. He clenched the thorny branch so tightly that his fingers turned pale.

……

"Why don't both our classes travel together? We can take care of each other. With an expert like Instructor Zhou, I can feel relieved."

"That's good, that's good! Cui Xianzi is so beautiful! Are you married?"

……

"I know you have no money and that brings about a lot of inconveniences. I know I have brought you nothing but troubles. However, you're an evildoer, and no trouble can stump you."

……

"Classmate Duanmu, do you have a girlfriend?"

"Classmate Duanmu, do you want to be friends with me?"

……

“I know I started this. I’m a pig! I’m stupid! I’m a useless person! But I’m still alive. Why am I still alive? I can’t stand it anymore, I really can’t stand it anymore…

“Sorry…sorry…”

Fatty was speaking gibberish, and his body was trembling. Emotions were flooding his mind in waves.

Ai Hui suddenly broke free from that ice-cold nightmare and took a few deep breaths. The air was frosty and bone-piercing, but he could feel his body’s temperature begin to rise gradually again.

Yes, that was a dream, a dream that he had broken free from long ago. He had already abandoned the times of darkness and shadows. He was now pursuing the light and the sunshine. He had begun a new life.

He was no longer the Ai Hui of the Wilderness. He was stronger, both mentally and physically.

So…

With a flick of his wrist, the thorny branch began to batter Fatty.

“You can’t get past your conscience, right? You want to be a

hero, right? Then why don't you train harder? Why meddle in other people's business when you're not capable at all? Just because you're alive and they're dead? So what if you're alive? Is it something to be proud of? Goddamnit, how are you still alive? You're not even strong, and you still talk about some goddamn conscience. Do you know you will die sooner or later if you aren't strong enough? What makes you think that you don't need to train? What makes you think that you don't need to become stronger?

"You have no powers and no money, and yet you still meddle in other people's business. You even drag me down along with you. I'm going to beat you to death!

"If he's weak, he will die. If he's weak, he will be poor. But if he's dead, then that's his problem! Is his family pitiful? Who isn't pitiful?

"If you yourself don't want to be a pitiful soul, think of ways to become stronger. Do whatever it takes to gain power!

"You can't hide from it, I can't hide from it, no one can hide from it!"

……

"Instructor Zhou, please take good care of me from now on!"

"Don't worry! Leave it to me!"

Chapter 119: The Garden of Life

The two classes walked together, causing those students who had been bored by the excursion to become intrigued and excited by the new faces.

No one noticed when Ai Hui pulled the badly battered Fatty back to the group.

Most of the girls were surrounding Duanmu Huanghun, chattering non-stop.

Zhou Xiaoxi felt that he had found his goddess in Cui Xianzi. He tried his best to impress her, making her laugh non-stop. In contrast, Teacher Xu was patiently teaching the students who were listening carefully to his lesson.

“The teachers named this area the Garden of Life. Why that name? There are many wood-attributed teachers in the Induction Ground, and everyone knows that they love breeding new species of plants, which then results in a large number of newly bred plants. These plants, however, are not valuable, yet the teachers are unwilling to destroy them. So, they transplant them here. There are so many bizarre plants here now, that even the teachers can’t keep track of them all, which has resulted in us calling this place the Garden of Life.”

“Won’t there be problems? Isn’t it dangerous?” one student couldn’t help but ask.

“Actually, everyone hopes for exactly that.” Seeing everyone’s puzzled faces, Teacher Xu laughed. “I shall let the wood-attributed Duanmu Huanghun explain why to everyone here.”

The bunch of girls acting like a flock of ducks were driving Duanmu Huanghun crazy. He had not been in a good mood to begin with, so if not for the presence of the teacher, he would have already chased them away.

Teacher Xu’s words caught everyone’s attention.

In the other students’ eyes, Duanmu Huanghun was a mysterious figure, so when they heard Teacher Xu say that Duanmu Huanghun knew the answer, they immediately directed their attention to him. They wanted to know if the legendary Duanmu Huanghun knew the answer.

Even Cui Xianzi stopped talking with Zhou Xiaoxi to look at Duanmu Huanghun with interest.

The rowdy girls surrounding Duanmu Huanghun finally quieted down and stared anxiously at him with their eyes wide open.

Duanmu Huanghun felt like a suffocating fish that could finally breathe some fresh air. He gave Teacher Xu a grateful look, then his facial expression turned cold as he answered, “From a wood elementalist’s perspective, having problems with the plants is a good thing, because it means that there is room for more changes and new possibilities. When breeding a new plant species, the more changes there are, the more beneficial it is. I think this is the

scenario all the wood-attributed teachers are hoping for.”

The amount of adoration in those young girls’ infatuated eyes increased significantly.

Duanmu Huanghun ignored these gazes. There was absolute silence in his surroundings.

If this silence could last, Duanmu Huanghun did not mind talking for the rest of the day.

So he did just that; before Teacher Xu could open his mouth, Duanmu Huanghun continued to speak with confidence, “The reason why there are no changes is not that complicated. According to the current theory, elemental energy is the biggest factor that causes changes to occur in plants. The higher the concentration of elemental energy in an area, the more likely changes will occur in the plants there. This explains why there are a lot of mystical plants in the depths of the Wilderness. Even though the Garden of Life is located within the Induction Ground, it is in a place very near the Old Territory, so the concentration of elemental energy there is very low. This is why the likelihood of changes occurring in plants there is also very low…”

Everyone was captivated by Duanmu Huanghun’s words.

Teacher Xu nodded his head repeatedly, feeling especially proud of his student. For a first year student to come up with such conclusion showed a lot about his solid foundation.

Teacher Xu continued from where Duanmu Huanghun stopped, “Classmate Duanmu is correct. The oldest plant in the Garden of Life can be dated back to when the Avalon of Five Elements was established; however, the number of changes occurring in the plants there are becoming less and less, because the concentration of elemental energy is very low. Even those thousand-years-old ancient trees are no exception.”

Ai Hui shot a glance at Duanmu Huanghun, which was caught by Fatty.

Fatty knew Ai Hui too well. From the look on Ai Hui’s face, he knew something was up. He lowered his voice and asked, “You have a dispute with this guy?”

“A small matter,” Ai Hui replied without batting an eyelid. “He owes me some money.”

“He owes you money?” Fatty’s eyes immediately widened as he rolled up his sleeves and rubbed his palms together. “That’s intolerable! He owes you how much money? I will help you collect the debt!”

“One hundred and fifty million yuan,” Ai Hui replied plainly.

Fatty staggered and almost fell down. He could not help but raise his voice, “How much?”

His voice was exceptionally loud in the silence and everyone

turned to look at the two simultaneously.

“One hundred and fifty million yuan,” Ai Hui replied calmly.

Duanmu Huanghun, who was previously filled with arrogance, staggered and almost fell down. Other people may have been baffled when they heard Ai Hui talking about one hundred and fifty million yuan, but Duanmu Huanghun clearly knew what Ai Hui was talking about.

Goddamn bastard!

Blue veins appeared at the back of his hands as he clenched his fists.

“One hundred and fifty million yuan?” Fatty muttered, shocked, “It can’t be, how can someone be so stupid? Is it even possible to owe so much money?”

Duanmu Huanghun almost lunged at him.

Ai Hui noticed everyone’s attention on them and stopped talking. After a while, the other students lost interest and directed their attention elsewhere. Ai Hui and Fatty maintained some distance from the main body of students, walking together at the back.

“Really? One hundred and fifty million yuan?” Fatty asked again, solemnly.

“It’s a lie,” Ai Hui replied plainly.

“I knew it. You almost frightened me to death.” Fatty pat his chest.

“Fatty,” Ai Hui suddenly called out to him.

Fatty knew Ai Hui wanted to say something, just by taking a look at his face.

Instinctively, Ai Hui scanned the bushes and trees around them. Without looking at Fatty, he asked, “How’s your training progressing?”

“I have just activated my right hand’s palace,” Fatty replied weakly. When he heard Ai Hui’s question, he had a bad feeling. Fatty might be very stubborn, but Ai Hui still scared him the most.

Ai Hui was expressionless, but deep down he was shocked.

It appeared that Fatty was far more gifted than he was.

If not for his blessing in disguise and his managing to activate two palaces, Fatty’s training progress would have surpassed his.

“Ai Hui, how about you?” Fatty glanced warily at Ai Hui.

“Left and right hands’ palaces,” Ai Hui replied.

Fatty had an ‘isn’t-it-obvious’ look on his face. It had been like this since the days they were together in the Wilderness. Other than running for his life, there was nothing he was better at than Ai Hui.

“From today onwards, I will be monitoring your training.”

Ai Hui’s tone was cold and without leeway; Fatty’s face filled with anguish. Every time he wanted to open his mouth and say something, he would timidly close it before any words came out. Every time Ai Hui used such a tone to talk to him, he would have miserable days ahead of him.

“You like to meddle in other people’s business, right? Only capable people are qualified to meddle in other people’s business. Those who are not capable would only seek death if they tried.”

Fatty was touched by Ai Hui’s naggy words. He knew Ai Hui wanted the best for him.

Just as Fatty was about to raise his head and declare his determination, Ai Hui suddenly stopped in his tracks.

“Fatty, did you hear something?”

Ai Hui squinted his eyes. Fatty was too familiar with this facial expression of Ai Hui's. Something was wrong. His pupils constricted as he saw Ai Hui's hand silently move towards his sword hilt.

Chapter 120: Strange Phenomenon

Fatty was very experienced. The moment Ai Hui finished speaking, Fatty was already moving towards him. He put up his guard, like an alerted cat.

The main reason why he could survive the many dangers of the Wilderness was because every time Ai Hui gave a warning, Fatty would immediately react to it.

Other people would question Ai Hui's intuition, causing a slight delay in their reaction.

Fatty, however, would not doubt him, and that was why he managed to survive.

Fatty felt that Ai Hui was much more powerful than himself. Ai Hui was the abnormal laborer who had the highest chance of leaving the Wilderness alive. He trusted Ai Hui unconditionally.

Complete obedience!

Whatever Ai Hui wanted him to do, he knew that it would be necessary. Whatever reaction Ai Hui had, he knew that Ai Hui must have discovered something of importance.

When Ai Hui asked him if he had heard anything, he knew right away that Ai Hui must have heard something.

Hence, without any hesitation, he moved closer to Ai Hui. The closer he was to Ai Hui, the safer he would be. Whatever Ai Hui did, he would follow suit.

As swift as the wind, Ai Hui's sword brushed past Fatty's face and penetrated the underbrush behind him.

Swoosh!

Possessing the sword embryo, Ai Hui's senses were extremely acute. Even though the sound was very soft, he could still hear it. It might be hard to sense something through the tip of his sword, but he could still sense what he had struck.

Deep down, Ai Hui quickly confirmed that the thing he had hit had a very small surface area.

The first time he entered the Garden of Life, he had heard a faintly discernible noise at night. At that time, he had still thought that it was a misperception caused by his long absence from the wild; however, today he heard the same noise again.

He withdrew the Sawtooth Grass Sword and positioned its tip right in front of his own face.

"You shocked me!" Fatty came over. "What's that? Eh, there is some blood on the tip of your sword."

Fatty moved nimbly into the underbrush. After a while, he

returned with a dead mosquito that had its wings shattered and body cut in half. “It’s a mosquito.”

Ai Hui saw the blood stain Fatty was talking about. It was a very small drop of blood. When the mosquito was struck by the grass sword, its body exploded and this small drop of blood stained the sword.

Ai Hui was surprised as well. He did not expect it to be a mosquito.

He did not feel relieved just because it was only a mosquito. In reality, the mosquitoes in the Wilderness were rather dangerous, as many of them were extremely poisonous. Once you were stung by a mosquito, you would be in dire straits.

As such, he did not put his guard down just because it was only a mosquito. The thing that surprised him was that faintly discernable sound; he did not expect a mosquito to produce such a weird sound.

“There’s something odd with this mosquito.” The dead mosquito on Fatty’s hand only had half of its body remaining. Its wing was, oddly, dark red in colour. For some reason, even Fatty, who had been through many life-and-death situations, felt a shiver go down his spine. He mumbled to himself, “Why am I afraid?”

Even though Fatty was scared, he still checked the dead mosquito carefully.

In the Wilderness, one could not stand there and do nothing.

Fatty might hide behind Ai Hui when they were engaged in combat, but he would not be sloppy when there was a need for him to do some work.

Ai Hui pulled the tip of the sword close to his nose and took a sniff. There was an odd, sweet smell to it.

He suddenly had an urge to lick it.

“There’s something wrong with this blood.” Ai Hui’s eyes were ice-cold as he put down the sword.

“There’s definitely a problem,” Fatty replied. “Such a small amount of blood should have dried up by now, but take a look, it hasn’t dried up at all. Look at its wing, what do you think of when you see this color?”

Fatty bent down to pull a stalk of grass from the ground, then placed it beside the mosquito’s wing. “Look at this root, isn’t its color similar?”

Ai Hui nodded. The two colors were slightly similar. It was just that the mosquito wing’s color was a bit darker.

“Look at the grass.” Fatty’s eyes were flickering. “The roots are the most red. The color becomes fainter as it goes up the grass and the top half of the grass is dark green. What do you think?”

“The soil!” Ai Hui replied without the slightest hesitation.

The two of them looked at each other before squatting down to begin looking through the underbrush. Ai Hui used the tip of his sword to dig up the roots of the grass. Indeed, he saw red-colored soil, so he did not stop and continued digging. The deeper he dug, the redder the soil became. The soil was so red that it looked like cinnabar.

Suddenly, red-coloured, muddy water gushed out from beneath Ai Hui’s sword. It resembled gurgling blood.

Ai Hui froze and the air seemed to freeze with him. Both Fatty and Ai Hui could see the fear in each other’s eyes. The two of them had seen many scary things before in the Wilderness, but this sight still managed to make their blood run cold.

“Didn’t they say this damned place is safe?” Fatty gulped.

Ai Hui moved the tip of the sword in front of his face. The sword’s tip was dark red, completely stained by the muddy water. He took a careful sniff. It did not smell like mud; instead, it had a faint aroma.

This aroma smelled somewhat similar to the aroma from the mosquito’s blood; however, this one was milder.

They had seen red-colored soil before, but the red color of the soil

before them now resembled the color of blood. Could there be a cinnabar mine here? No, that couldn't be right, cinnabar would not have such a weird aroma. Furthermore, if there was really a cinnabar mine here, the surrounding vegetation would be red in color. Right now, only the roots of the grass were dyed red.

Apparently, this phenomenon had begun quite recently.

This might be the reason why everyone, including Ai Hui, did not notice it at first. From afar, everything looked lush and green.

Ai Hui walked for another ten steps until he came to an area where there was no vegetation, then started digging again.

Fatty trembled in fear and quickly hurried over.

The soil Ai Hui dug up was ash gray in color. Where had the red color disappeared to?

Could it be…

Fatty's face turned ugly.

Without saying anything, Ai Hui walked under a tree and started digging again. Within seconds, blood-like muddy water gushed out from the ground. He then hacked open the tree and found that, within one meter from the ground, the core had turned completely red in color. From the outside, no one would be able to see it.

Fatty and Ai Hui clearly understood that this could not have happened naturally.

“Maybe it’s a kind of blood poison?” Fatty’s trembling voice contained a hint of uncertainty. “It’s cross-contamination. The contaminated plant must have been eaten by a herbivore, contaminating the herbivore in the process. That herbivore was then stung by a mosquito, causing the mosquito to be contaminated as well. What kind of poison is this? This… this is too scary…”

Knowing that there was a sea of blood beneath the boundless, lush vegetation surrounding them, the two trembled in fear.

“We had better get the teachers and Instructor Zhou to come and take a look,” Fatty warned, “because this place is too bizarre.”

Without any hesitation, Ai Hui nodded. “Let’s go!”

The two of them were feeling extremely uneasy.

Suddenly, there was an amazed exclamation coming from up ahead.

“Rabbit, ahh, there’s a rabbit!”

“It’s really a rabbit!”

“Even more so, it’s a rare red-haired rabbit!”

“Woah, such beautiful eyes, they look like rubies! Oh my god, it’s so cute!”

Red hair…

At the same time, Ai Hui and Fatty thought of the red-colored weeds, dark-red mosquito, and the seeping blood-colored muddy water.

“Be careful!”

Chapter 121: Poisoned

Zhou Xiaoxi felt that he had made the right choice by participating in this excursion. He could not shift his gaze from Cui Xianzi. Previously, he still thought that everyone was exaggerating about the benefits of coming to the Induction Ground. However, after today, he changed his mentality and rejoiced.

If he had not taken part in this excursion, how would he have met such a gentle girl like Cui Xianzi?

Women who were stationed at front line were usually more fearsome than the men. Like Li Wei had said, those who carried a sword usually did not engage in petty squabbles.

Only the Induction Ground would have such a gentle, elegant, and beautiful girl like Cui Xianzi.

A place like the Garden of Life would not have many dangers. For an elite like him, who had been to the depths of the Wilderness multiple times, the Garden of Life was like his backyard.

Even so, he did not lower his guard. At the moment when he sensed there was something nearby, he broke into laughter after realizing that it was merely a rabbit.

This rabbit was actually a rare red-haired breed.

Its fur was completely doused in red, and its ruby-like eyes

mesmerized Zhou Xiaoxi. So beautiful.

If he encountered such a beautiful rabbit in the Wilderness, he would definitely not exclaim in admiration. Instead, he would run as far away as possible from it. For such a beautiful creature to exist in the Wilderness, where the survival of the fittest was the most cutthroat, it must be very powerful.

It must be a pet that was released by another teacher, Zhou Xiaoxi thought to himself.

At this point in time, the rest of the students had discovered the red-haired rabbit as well.

The female students started to shriek with excitement.

Some of the more daring students even gathered together to use a stalk of grass to tease the rabbit. Initially, Zhou Xiaoxi was prepared to stop them. However, he soon realized he was making a big deal over a small issue. This was the peaceful Garden of Life, not the perilous Wilderness.

It was customary for students to go on an excursion to the Garden of Life. When Zhou Xiaoxi was still a student, he was filled with curiosity just like these students. Every excursion left him with beautiful memories. All these years, he had never heard of any accidents in the Garden of Life. The injuries that students suffered were mostly accidental, such as sprains.

There was no restriction on catching the wild animals in the Garden of Life as pets.

Many students would capture wild animals as their pets while they were on excursions. Zhou Xiaoxi thought of the grey hedgehog that he caught in the Garden of Life. It accompanied him throughout his student life in the Induction Ground.

He sighed silently.

Perhaps that innocence could only exist in the Induction Ground. After he left the Induction Ground, all he thought about was how to survive and become stronger. The pets that everybody kept for their aesthetics eventually became beasts that aided them in battle.

Good old times.

Zhou Xiaoxi smiled as he looked at the innocent actions of the students.

"Be careful!"

Alarmed cries came from the rear of the main body of students. Zhou Xiaoxi was stunned. He knew one of the voices belonged to Ai Hui.

The other voice... must have belonged to that fatty.

Zhou Xiaoxi had noticed the dispute between the two students previously. However, he did not interfere as he could sense the deep friendship between them.

Because of Li Wei, Zhou Xiaoxi had a good impression of Ai Hui. Even though Zhou Xiaoxi was in a different division than Li Wei, he was impressed by Li Wei's knowledge and character after spending some time with him. Hence, a youth that was highly favored by Li Wei was definitely an extraordinary individual.

The performance from Ai Hui a few days ago made Zhou Xiaoxi see him in a new light.

Could there be something wrong?

Everything seemed normal. The rabbit's nose twitched, and it leaped toward the stem of grass in the student's hand, seemingly interested in it.

At this moment, Zhou Xiaoxi's eye pupils suddenly dilated.

The rabbit suddenly jumped forward and bit the hand of the student.

"Ah!"

The student, who was caught off guard, let out a blood-curdling screech as blood streamed down from her hand. The surrounding students shrieked and fell into chaos.

Zhou Xiaoxi's reaction was extremely fast. He appeared icy faced beside the injured student like a phantom and flicked his finger.

Like an arrow, a stream of air shot out and pierced the red-haired rabbit.

Boom!

Blood splashed everywhere as the stream of air that punctured the red-haired rabbit suddenly exploded. Pieces of its body were launched here and there.

The students immediately screamed in horror as they had never seen such a gory sight.

Zhou Xiaoxi's face turned ashen since he never expected an accident to actually happen. He held up that student's bitten hand. The horrified student was still trembling non-stop. Chunks of the rabbit were strewn all over the place, but its head was still biting the student's hand, refusing to let go.

Its ruby-like eyes were filled with an indescribable frenzy and bloodlust. Its previous docile and adorable look had vanished, making it now look extremely sinister.

Pop!

Zhou Xiaoxi crushed the rabbit's head coldly. The injured student fainted straightaway.

Ai Hui and Fatty managed to catch sight of this just as they arrived. When they saw the situation, their hearts sank.

"What have you discovered?" Zhou Xiaoxi turned his head around and stared fixedly at Ai Hui.

Ai Hui felt as if he was being glared at by a ferocious beast. He was under such great pressure that he was unable to breathe.

He calmed himself and replied, "There's something wrong with the blood, and there's a problem with the vegetation and soil as well."

He knew what to do to convince the others. Without any hesitation, he started to hack a small tree nearby.

The grass sword in his hand shaved off the tree bark with great precision, revealing the core of the tree.

Zhou Xiaoxi's eyes narrowed. The core of the tree looked as if it was soaked in blood.

Ai hui's grass sword kept on digging the soil beneath the tree. The soil that was unearthed looked as red as cinnabar. After a while, the blood-like muddy water flowed out from the soil and a faint fragrance pervaded the air.

Everyone’s face drained to a pale-white. They had never seen anything like this. The students that were timid felt their legs go soft and sat on the ground while trembling in fear.

Zhou Xiaoxi’s face turned white as well. This was also the first time that he had seen something so bizarre.

"There’s something wrong with the rabbit’s blood. It might be blood poison." Ai Hui continued to maintain his composure.

Zhou Xiaoxi sniffed the rabbit blood on his hand and a refreshing fragrance filled his nose. He almost put his finger in his mouth.

"The blood is poisonous!"

Ai Hui’s reminder gave Zhou Xiaoxi a shiver and returned him to his senses. Zhou Xiaoxi felt a scorching feeling on his fingertips and quickly wiped away the blood on his hand. However, the rabbit blood had already seeped into the skin of his hands by then.

Such a scary blood poison!

At the moment, Zhou Xiaoxi was able to keep calm. He confirmed that he had been poisoned.

A red color had already pervaded throughout the body of the fainted student.

Zhou Xiaoxi knew that he was the main pillar of support for the students. Right now, his most important task was to bring these students back to safety.

Without hesitation, he took out a tiny bamboo tube and opened its lid. There were many pine needle leaves with a variety of colors inside.

He took out a red pine needle leaf, which was also known as the distress leaf.

He walked toward a tree and pinned the red leaf onto it like a needle.

The pine needle leaf started to emit a red glow, which brightened and dimmed rhythmically, as if it was breathing.

Suddenly, the red glow started to grow dimmer and dimmer. Eventually, the pine needle leaf fell from the tree.

Zhou Xiaoxi’s heart sank.

Chapter 122: Duanmu's Absolute Art

There were many types of distress leaves. There were maple leaves, gingko leaves, and so on, but pine needle leaves were the most popular type.

Pine needle leaves were small in size and convenient to bring along. A tiny bamboo tube could contain numerous pine needle leaves. Certain features of pine trees could be found in pine needle leaves as well.

Distress leaves were a product invented by wood elementalists. Wood elementalists felt that trees could communicate with each other, and this logic formed the basis for message trees. However, message trees could not be found in the wild.

Hence, the elementalists invented a kind of leaves that could transmit messages through the trees in the wild.

Unlike message trees, the amount of messages that distress leaves could transmit was very limited. However, they were still able to make distress calls. There must be plants or trees nearby for distress leaves to work, so they could not be used in places like deserts or oceans.

Veterans would definitely carry some distress leaves along with them. For this excursion to the Garden of Life, Zhou Xiaoxi had chosen to bring some distress leaves along just in case something happened.

He never expected that something would actually happen. Even worse, the distress leaf failed to work!

He had never encountered a situation where distress leaves failed to function.

When he thought of the scene where Ai Hui dug up the soil, he was sure that the surrounding vegetation was poisoned as well. Zhou Xiaoxi did not quite agree with Ai Hui saying that it might be a type of blood poison. Blood poisons were rarely seen. Like its name suggested, blood poison worked by tainting the blood. However, plants and trees did not have blood. Zhou Xiaoxi had never heard of any plant or tree becoming afflicted with blood poison.

Suddenly, he heard a wave of faint rustling noises coming from afar, and his facial expression changed.

There were many wild beasts surging toward this place!

He saw that Ai Hui’s facial expression had changed as well. However, at this point of time, he did not have time to be impressed by Ai Hui’s sharp sense of hearing. He did not dare to hesitate and made a prompt decision. "Get out of here! We will go back through the same road that we used to get here!"

After finishing his sentence, Zhou Xiaoxi lifted up the fainted student and placed her upon his shoulder. Then, he looked at the terrified students and yelled coldly, "If you run any slower you will get devoured by the wild beasts!"

Even though Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi were very worried, they did not forget their responsibilities and kept on encouraging the students.

"Watch out for the wild beasts and insects! Don’t get bitten by them!" Ai Hui reminded everyone loudly.

Fatty stayed close to Ai Hui. Surprisingly, his plump and huge body was unusually nimble.

Ai Hui’s previous performance unwittingly commanded the respect of everyone.

"Everyone, stay close together, and don’t leave the main group. All the girls move to the middle of the group. Ai Hui and Duanmu Huanghun, both of you will stay at the front of the group. Ai Hui will navigate the road, and Duanmu Huanghun will safeguard him. I will bring up the rear. Teacher Xu will take care of the left flank of the group, and Cui Xianzi will take care of the right flank. The stronger students will keep to the outer edges of the group. Everyone listen to my command. Do not panic. I will bring everyone to safety," Zhou Xiaoxi ordered resolutely.

His tone was calm and collected, displaying leadership and dignity.

Currently, when compared to the other two teachers, the Thirteenth Division’s elite Zhou Xiaoxi brought much more assurance to the students. Even Ai Hui could not help but exclaim

in admiration. Zhou Xiaoxi truly lived up to his reputation of being a front line elite. Such orders of manpower deployment revealed a lot about his experience.

The rear of the group was the most dangerous position, and this position was overseen by Zhou Xiaoxi.

The other two teachers' strength were second only to his. They were positioned on the left and right flanks of the group. Both flanks needed to be taken care of.

The front of the group was the safest as they going back along the same road that they used to get to the Garden of Life.

Duanmu Huanghun was cool-headed. The Grass Hollow was much scarier than this place. He was not a delicate young master. It was just that... he took a look at Ai Hui and felt an indescribable awkwardness.

He actually had to fight alongside with this fellow...

This was ridiculous.

"Let's go," Zhou Xiaoxi shouted. "Everyone, move out!"

Without hesitation, Ai Hui walked to the front of the group. Other students might easily get lost in the woods, but for Ai Hui, it was a walk in a park.

With a humph, Duanmu Huanghun appeared beside Ai Hui.

Even though Duanmu Huanghun hated Ai Hui to the core, he knew the severity of the current situation. The failure of the distress leaf implied that they would not be able to obtain any reinforcements. This would put them in a precarious situation.

He was a wood elementalist and clearly knew how scary blood poison could be.

Furthermore, how could he be outperformed by this scoundrel?

The surrounding rustling sounds were getting louder and louder. Danger was approaching, and fear was growing in the group.

"Everyone, be careful!"

Zhou Xiaoxi roared. Suddenly, white-colored azure wings emerged from his back. The azure wings appeared and exploded with a loud bang, forming wisps of white mist.

In the hands of other elementalists, azure wings were a type of flying equipment. In the hands of a water elementalist, they were a dangerous and deadly weapon.

The wisps of mist swam around him like a school of white swordfish.

Swish swish swish!

The wild beasts were continuously entering the mist. However, once they were in, they were sliced and ground by the razor-sharp mist, resulting in a massive bloodbath.

Now, Teacher Xu also displayed his prowess. Numerous silver light screens appeared around his body, which then formed a silver barrier around the group. The most impressive thing about this barrier was that its elasticity was extremely powerful. Any beast that crashed onto the silver barrier would be bounced back as if it had jumped into a trampoline.

Bang bang bang!

The sounds of collisions were so concentrated that they resembled the pattering of raindrops.

The fact that Cui Xianzi could bring a class out on an excursion showed that she was quite capable as well. A piece of fiery silk appeared mysteriously on her hand. One hundred lifelike birds were embroidered on the the piece of silk.

With a flick of the silk, its surface immediately exploded with a loud boom into a sea of flames.

Numerous chirping blazing birds flew out from the sea of flames

Any incoming beast that was hit by a blazing bird would have its body burst into flames.

Usually, Ai Hui would be captivated by these dazzling attacks. However, he could not care less about them right now.

Suddenly, Duanmu Huanghun, who had been silently beside him the whole time, struck out abruptly.

Green glowing symbols and designs that were usually found on porcelain vases began to appear under Duanmu Huanghun's feet. Numerous dark-green vines came alive and extended outward from the green glow beneath his feet. Like a formless pencil, the vines rapidly drew out graceful and elegant patterns on the ground.

Everyone felt their feet lighten, and their running speed suddenly increased.

Duanmu Huanghun's palms swayed gently in the air. The green vines shot into the air with a terrifying speed, resembling green branches growing and twinning in the air.

Eerie green peonies started to blossom on the vines.

In the blink of an eye, the peonies were fully bloomed. One could hear a faint sigh as a breeze drifted through the air. The petals began to detach themselves from the fully bloomed peonies.

Peony petals drifted and danced in the air, resembling a rain of petals that dyed the sky green.

When the wild beasts were caught in the green rain of petals and came into contact with the green petals, their dark-red bodies were dyed green. At the very instant they were dyed green, their bodies appeared to disintegrate.

The wild beasts that leaped into the mid-air disintegrated into wisps of green smoke before Ai Hui's eyes.

Ai Hui was overwhelmed with shock.

Duanmu Huanghun's face was filled with pride and haughtiness.

Duanmu's absolute art.

[Viridescent Flower]!

Chapter 123: Zhou Xiaoxi's Decision

Ai Hui was shaken by the sight in front of him. His mouth dropped open, and he stood dumbstruck. Not only him, the entire troop was shocked by Duanmu Huanghun's [Viridescent Flower].

Duanmu Huanghun's abrupt emergence was not limited by his young age. Everyone's sole impression of him was that he was a talented genius. They had little understanding toward him or his legacy skills. When Dai Gang took him as his last disciple, it was further ingrained in everyone's mind that Huanghun was a talented genius.

The impact and shock that was brought about by the [Viridescent Flower], which was as pretty as a painting, led to a momentarily lapse within the troops.

It was only at this point that everyone remembered that Duanmu Huanghun was ranked Number 17th in the Induction Ground in terms of fighting strength.

Not only did he possess shocking innate skills, he had valiant capabilities as well.

Fatty's gaze was blank while he mumbled, "I am done for, I am done for. The money is a lost cause. Why did Ah Hui [1] give a loan to such a capable chap... This is ruined. What a huge amount of ruins..."

Duanmu Huanghun's eyes were flickering with a serene

splendor. He strolled idly, yet with lively steps. As green rain droplets splattered, his elongated body was graceful and picturesque. His flawless face radiated confidence, and all his movements were calm and unhurried.

In a flash, the gazes from the young girls became smitten.

Ai Hui was shocked momentarily, but he quickly regained his composure. With a low voice, he shouted, “Let’s walk this way!”

Duanmu Huanghun’s explosive display greatly improved everyone’s morale and pulled everyone away from a state of panic. The students who realized the capability of the group also gradually calmed down. The emphasis on actual combat was a tradition of the Avalon of Five Elements. The students from the Old Territory were slightly lacking, but the students from the Avalon of Five Elements had been trained and educated since young. They had also accepted the notion of actual combat.

When they settled down, their capability would also progressively emerge.

Many female students started to take the initiative to participate. Gradually, the situation stabilized.

The pressure on Duanmu Huanghun was quickly reduced by half. He shot Ai Hui a glance and was secretly surprised. From the beginning , Ai Hui did not display any signs of hesitation along the way. It was a jungle of weeds, and there were no landmarks. How did he do it?

Duanmu Huanghun even had the notion that Ai Hui had been to this plot of forest many times.

Soon, however, Duanmu Huanghun did not have the leisure to pay attention to Ai Hui. He was starting to feel pressured. They had run for at least one hundred miles, but the wild beasts that attacked them along the way did not reduce in number. Instead, they exhibited an increasing trend.

The size of the wild beasts were not large. Their bodies appeared to be a strange dull red, and they were extremely irritable, without any care for their lives or deaths. All these symptoms suggested that they had blood poisoning.

Even the elite Zhou Xiaoxi felt chills at this point in time. Not only would the wild beasts attack them, they were also extremely bloodthirsty. They would even crazily gobble up the blood and flesh from the corpses of their own kind.

The shredded pieces and body parts of the wild beasts had yet to fall on the ground when numerous wild beasts pounced and fought over them.

Those torn body parts and the fresh blood that dripped on the floor would be snatched up by numerous insects that rushed up through the ground and from the bushes, as if they were snatching up delicacies. Zhou Xiaoxi was proud of the fact that he had been through countless of tough situations. No matter how cruel the situation, he was able to face it.

However, what he experienced today made him fearful.

He attempted to use the distress leaf three times during the journey, but to no avail.

Zhou Xiaoxi had an acute sense of distance. They had walked approximately one hundred fifty miles, yet they had not left the infected area.

How extensively had the strange blood poisoning spread? Could it be that the entire Garden of Life had already…

He trembled and did not dare to dwell further.

But, if the entire Garden of Life was infected with the unknown blood poison, he had to make a decision. His gaze swept across the students. After more than an hour of battle, their faces started to show traces of fatigue. Morale was also falling.

If that was the case, they would definitely be unable to leave this place!

He suddenly shouted, “Ai Hui, find a place that is easy to defend, but hard to attack!”

He knew that Ai Hui would understand what he meant.

Ai Hui gave him a glance. Without another word, Ai Hui took the lead and ran.

He understood Zhou Xiaoxi's intention and had to admit that it was the best available option . At their current speed, it would be impossible to escape from the Garden of Life. Instructor Zhou had azure wings, so he could fly back to get support. Even with the added time that the support team needed to fly back to the students, it was much less than the time required for the students to travel out of the Garden of Life.

As long as they were able to find a suitable spot that would be advantageous for their defense, the pressure would be lessened. Furthermore, they would be able to prolong their survival time.

Ai Hui remembered that there were a few exposed boulders not far away. If they could make use of these rocks, it would be a good defensive position. Duanmu Huanghun was astonished. He did not understand why Instructor Zhou trusted Ai Hui when Ai Hui's capability was so low.

He suddenly thought of the first day when they had entered the Garden of Life. Instructor Zhou had asked Ai Hui to stand guard.

Suddenly, Duanmu Huanghun realized that his understanding toward his nemesis was pathetic.

No, in fact, he knew nothing at all.

He observed Ai Hui surreptitiously and immediately discovered many unusual traits. For example, Ai Hui rarely walked in a straight line. Ai Hui's figure was like that of a cheetah when he ran. Also, his grass sword was inverted and placed at the side of his body, making tiny swinging arcs like a pendulum.

Duanmu Huanghun was extremely intelligent. While he did not notice it before, he understood the benefits immediately when he noticed it.

The grass sword could be unleashed immediately when faced with danger.

This chap... was not simple!

In his heart, Duanmu Huanghun was alarmed. He was displeased with himself because he only just realized these unusual traits.

When Zhou Xiaoxi saw the rubble from afar, he was elated. He looked at Ai Hui, thinking that it was a pity that Ai Hui did not possess the water attribute. Otherwise, he would recruit Ai Hui into the North Sea Division. While Ai Hui's absolute base level was not high, much to Zhou Xiaoxi's astonishment, Ai Hui had performed exceptionally ever since they stepped foot into the Garden of Life.

Ai Hui was the first to detect the abnormalities, surpassing even the instructor. Zhou Xiaoxi was an elite from the North Sea, yet he was not as perceptive as a student. He was slightly ashamed.

This was also a form of innate skill.

While natural endowments were innate skills, knowing how to battle and react to complicated situations required talent as well.

A pile of rubble comprised of a heap of black rocks that were about six or seven meters tall was the best defensive position they could find.

The students, who were at the brink of exhaustion, practically crawled and rolled into the rubble.

Zhou Xiaoxi, together with Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi, coordinated and stood at the various high ground spots among the rubble. The towering boulders blocked the wild beasts that were like a rushing tide.

The students finally had a chance to catch their breath and they lay around haphazardly.

“I am going to get support! The two of you will stay guard here!” Zhou Xiaoxi shouted to Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi.

“All right!” Teacher Xu nodded his head without hesitation.

Cui Xianzi shouted concernedly, “Be careful!”

“You must hang in there!” While Zhou Xiaoxi was saying that, he

threw all the rations and medications that he had to Cui Xianzi.

Zhou Xiaoxi gazed deeply at Cui Xianzi for two seconds, as if he wanted to safeguard this memory. He did not know why he was doing this. Was it because of the insecurity in his heart?

How he wished that his world was still the same as yesterday...

When he turned around, his gaze was resolute.

He soared into the air and disappeared into horizon.

Ah Hui is a pet name for Ai Hui.

Chapter 124: Ai Hui's Conjecture

Nightfall was gradually approaching.

The black rocks were sturdy. With the aid of the rubble and by alternating between passively guarding and actively rebuffing the attack of the wild beasts, the situation was finally under control.

"Huanghun, I will take over for you. You should have a good rest." Teacher Xu's voice was filled with concern.

Apart from Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi, Duanmu Huanghun was the third in importance. The amount of time he spent guarding was the same as the two teachers. The rest of the students looked at Duanmu Huanghun with admiring and respectful gazes. Furthermore, Duanmu Huanghun was one of the youngest here, yet he held such great responsibility. How could they not respect him?

"Yes, Teacher," Duanmu Huanghun replied courteously. Even at this point in time, he did not forget his manners.

Jumping down from the rocks, he was exhausted. He found a clean spot among the stones and sat down. Duanmu Huanghun realized that the person resting next to him was Ai Hui only after sitting down.

Had the fellow already made his move? It was a pity he had not seen it.

The intensity of the battle had been at another level. The wild beasts seemed to have gone crazy and came one after another. Guarding was a serious affair as he was holding down the fort, so he had no time to bother with other stuff.

“What do you think of the situation now?” Duanmu Huanghun suddenly asked.

Ai Hui was somewhat surprised and shot a glance at Duanmu Huanghun. He did not expect Duanmu Huanghun to suddenly talk to him.

However, at this point in time, it was not worth it to bring up the previous grievances. Regardless of whether he was willing or not, all of them were in the same boat now. Also, Duanmu Huanghun performed significant deeds and had not proved to be an obstruction. If they were able to make it out alive, Duanmu Huanghun would have played a huge part in making it happen.

The malice Ai Hui felt toward him lessened.

He shook his head. “Disastrous.”

Duanmu Huanghun frowned ever so slightly. “Why is that? Hasn’t the situation stabilized?”

Looking at the situation before his eyes, Duanmu Huanghun felt that the situation had improved. They had a favorable defensive

position and also figured out the pattern of alternating defenders. The available rations and water was also sufficient to last for a period of time.

Where was the danger?

Duanmu Huanghun believed that Ai Hui would not have spoken without thinking.

Just as Duanmu Huanghun's capability had obtained the stamp of approval from everyone, Ai Hui's acute judgement has also obtained the same stamp of approval. Although this result made Duanmu Huanghun uncomfortable, he had to admit that while he was confident of winning in a personal battle, he was indeed lacking in other aspects.

Many times, Ai Hui's experience and skills reminded him of Instructor Zhou.

"Didn't you notice? Those wild beasts that attacked us were herbivores."

While Ai Hui's tone was calm, it was still a shock for Duanmu Huanghun when he heard it.

Recalling the previous battles, the animals that he met with were mostly small animals that fed on plants. He pondered for awhile. "Are you implying that there are even more ferocious wild beasts that were poisoned? Or only those that fed on plants would be

poisoned?”

“The red water underground has a very weak delicate fragrance. If you pull a blade of grass, the fragrance of the grass is more intense than the red water. Do you still remember the red-haired rabbit? The blood of the red-haired rabbit was even more fragrant than the grass. I killed a mosquito previously and the blood from the mosquito was even sweeter and more fragrant than the red-haired rabbit’s blood. What do you think this means?”

“You are implying...” Duanmu Huanghun’s expression became very worried.

“The concentration of the blood poison is increasing progressively,” Ai Hui said straightforwardly. He continued, “Look at those wild beasts that were killed by us. Their corpses were gobbled up cleanly, right? Have you seen a drop of blood on the ground yet?”

“This proves that those wild beasts that were poisoned were very bloodthirsty.” Duanmu Huanghun thought of the most plausible reason.

“No.” Ai Hui shook his head. “They were attracted by the blood poison. I suspect they are transforming.”

“What do you think of the battle ability of these small animals that feed on plants? Did it increase substantially?” Ai Hui continued to ask.

“Very much so.” Duanmu Huanghun nodded his head.

“What has changed them? The blood poison. It enabled them to become stronger. Do you still remember the progressive trend? For the carnivorous wild beasts, the blood poison is more concentrated, so their change would be even greater and more dangerous,” Ai Hui said gravely.

Duanmu Huanghun had actually missed that small detail. A chill that was hard to put in words ascended from his spine, and he shivered.

“For the time being, we still do not know what change it will bring. However, the mosquito i killed previously was also very weak. As such, I suspect that it is possible for the carnivorous wild beasts to have to undergo a transformation period. Thus, the reason why we have yet to meet with these carnivorous wild beasts might be because they have not completed the transformation.”

Duanmu Huanghun’s face turned as white as sheet. “This… This is just your conjecture…”

“If I am not wrong, the wild beasts we are going to encounter subsequently will be harder to deal with.” Ai Hui was as cool as a cucumber, like he was narrating an incident that had nothing to do with him. “I hope my guess is wrong. Otherwise, we can only wish for the early arrival of the support team.”

Duanmu Huanghun stared blankly at Ai Hui. He could not imagine how Ai Hui could be so indifferent to their dire state.

Ai Hui did not take note of Duanmu Huanghun's gaze. He continued to mutter, "Also, why would the wild beasts attack us? And why didn't they attack us previously? Did you notice that the wild beasts would gobble up the corpses of their own kind but would not attack those that were alive. Why was that the case?"

Duanmu Huanghun felt dumbstruck.

He had always thought that he was truly a genius and felt that he had a nimble mind. He was able to think of a reason whenever there was a problem. But now, listening to Ai Hui's consecutive "why's", he felt that his brain was not substantial enough.

Had everyone not walked the same route? Why did the things they saw differ so much?

The expression Duanmu Huanghun had while looking at Ai Hui was like he had seen a ghost.

Every detail that Ai Hui mentioned was something that Duanmu Huanghun had not noticed. Thinking about it closely, every problem seemed to have a profound theory behind it.

At that moment, Duanmu Huanghun saw Ai Hui in a new light. He finally understood why Ai Hui always managed to gain the trust of other people. This fellow's insight was simply too scary. Furthermore, his calm and cool-headed thinking always managed to point directly to the crux of the problem.

Moreover, no matter how bad the situation, Ai Hui seemed to never panic.

For example, if Ai Hui's conjecture was true, then they were going to be in a dire situation. When Ai Hui used his exclusively strange tone, yes that's right, that sort of strange tone that had nothing to do with him. To Duanmu Huanghun, the tone was weird to an extreme degree.

Seems like he was not very worried now…

What sort of weird mindset was this? Duanmu Huanghun, himself, was also rather speechless.

"Ah Hui, it is our turn now."

Fatty's shout broke Ai Hui's train of thoughts.

Ai Hui gathered his senses, grabbed his grass sword, and, together with Fatty, took over Cui Xianzi's post.

Duanmu Huanghun's eyes brightened. He was filled with curiosity toward Ai Hui's battle ability since he had never witnessed it before. Now he would be able to observe it.

At that moment, a long beast howl sounded out from a distant place.

In unison, Ai Hui and Duanmu Huanghun changed their expressions.

Chapter 125: Solution

Ai Hui felt that he really was a jinx.

Upon hearing that long beast howl, he knew that they were at the most critical moment.

The points that he had mentioned to Duanmu Huanghun were not casual opinions but the things that he was most puzzled about. He still had many doubts that he hadn't mentioned, but at this juncture, all of them were unimportant.

Although he was unable to identify the wild beast's type from its howl, he was sure that they were unable to defeat it.

Perhaps only Instructor Zhou could.

He had seen many dire beasts in the Wilderness, and every single mighty dire beast definitely had an imposing manner. Just like people who held high positions, they had gestures and mannerisms that were different from ordinary folk. The law of the jungle was, obviously, even crueler and prevalent in the jungle. Battles between wild beasts were more straightforward, and in order to protect their own territory, wild beasts didn't know what it meant to keep a low profile—the king of the beasts must be cruel, vicious, and warlike. Only then would they be able to achieve success and attain the title of king of the beasts.

Those who managed to survive the law of the jungle had the instinct to fear danger and cower in front of those who were

stronger.

Ai Hui had clearly noticed the panic of the surrounding wild beasts after hearing the beast howl.

And he instantly knew that the distant wild beast was not something they could compete against.

Furthermore, the flock of wild beasts that was rushing up suddenly scattered, as if there was an opening at the other end. They left the rubble and dispersed into the distance.

While there was joy on the other students' faces, Ai Hui's pupils constricted, and his hair stood on end.

Pieces of flesh were scattered on the ground. Those wild beasts had run for their lives without even bothering about the flesh that they initially could not resist. This was the first time Ai Hui had seen such bloody chunks of the flesh on the ground.

There was only one possibility—that ferocious beast was approaching!

Damn it!

The intensified fear stimulated all of Ai Hui's brain's nerves. He knew that they had to quickly come up with a response. It would be too late when the ferocious beast discovered them.

What should he do?

He forced himself to calm down. He repeated to himself that it was not the first time he had encountered such a situation. He had experienced much worse in the Wilderness. Back then, he did not have any support, and the elementalists also did not care if he was dead or alive. However, now, the teachers would not be callous and make him fight his own battles.

How did he hide previously?

Ai Hui jolted. Hide……

Yes!

Hide! Only if they hide would there be a possibility to survive.

Hide…hide… hide…

The wheels in Ai Hui's head spun furiously as he recalled that at the most dangerous juncture, he had covered himself in mud and had hidden in the sludge, thus having a narrow escape.

His gaze swept over the surroundings, but there were only rocks. There was no mud here.

Rocks…

His gaze fell onto the largest one. That rock was about ten meters tall and was slanted at a certain angle. Ai Hui’s eyes brightened as he shouted, "Everyone, hide beneath that piece of rock!"

Everyone looked bewildered.

Duanmu Huanghun’s brain had been filled to the brim with Ai Hui’s predictions when one of them had come true. This had heightened his uneasiness. And when he saw the calm Ai Hui have such an intense reaction, he instantly became alert.

"Move over everyone! Listen to Ai Hui’s commands!" Teacher Xu’s voice rang out. He had also picked up on Ai Hui’s nervousness. In his memory, Ai Hui had never been this anxious.

"Teacher, could you move that piece of rock?" Ai Hui pointed to a horizontal, rectangular rock.

"Let me do it." Cui Xianzi did not question his intentions, and a red satin cloth flew out from her hand and coiled around the rectangular rock like a snake.

Hu!

The rectangular rock flew upwards and was slotted into the bottom of the huge rock, forming an empty, partially closed-off space, like a small shelter.

At that moment, all the wild beasts in their surroundings had vanished. By now, even those with slower reactions could tell that something was wrong.

"Everyone, go in!" Ai Hui urged the students. While the students started to hide in panic, he asked Teacher Xu, "Is it possible to use mud to seal up the cracks?"

"I know how to; I am an earth elementalist." A student whom Ai Hui did not know raised his hand. He continued, "But how do we breathe?"

"Just hold your breath! Speed up! It’s going to be here soon!" Ai Hui replied with an agitated tone.

Ai Hui’s hand that was clutching the grass sword was trembling, but it was barely perceptible. He was in his sword embryo state, and all his six senses had been heightened. But it was also due to this that he was more than able to comprehend the frightfulness of the unknown beast that was approaching their group.

"The thicker the mud, the better it is! It would be even better if it's like a mountain; it would be able to cover us!"

The earth elementalist set about his task immediately. Controlling mud was not difficult to an earth elementalist. The nearby mud and sandstone started to slowly ascend the rectangular rock like an ugly monster wriggling its way upwards.

Ai Hui’s gaze swept over the discarded torn body parts that were near them. He had a sudden idea. "Is it possible to put those torn parts on the topmost layer of the mud?"

Duanmu Huanghun somewhat understood Ai Hui’s intentions.

A blue and white slender rattan flew out from his hand. When it reached the top of a piece of flesh, it suddenly split into ten different blue and white rattans that were even more slender than the first rattan. Each of the slender rattans rolled up a piece of flesh.

Duanmu Huanghun controlled the rattans and brought the flesh to the top of the rock.

When the last crack was sealed, the rattans faded away, and all the torn pieces of flesh lost their support and scattered around the huge rock and sandstones. Darkness engulfed everyone.

The earth elementalist student collapsed on the ground. In order to create a thick layer of mud as Ai Hui had requested, he had exhausted all his energy. From the outside, one could see the tremendous changes that the rubble had undergone. The massive rock that had initially had half its body inclined into the air was now completely buried under the sandstones, forming a small barrow.

"It is here. Do not make any noise."

In the dark, Ai Hui's lowered his voice to deliberately contribute to everyone's tension.

Pa...Da...Pa...Da...

Unhurried footsteps could be distinctly heard in the dark. Everyone's hearts were in their throats.

A dark red wolf appeared at the perimeter of the rubble. Its nose twitched as if it had some suspicion. It was puzzled by the sight in front of him—the barrow that was scattered with huge amounts of flesh.

The atmosphere was filled with the delicate fragrance of blood and flesh.

The wolf soon threw its doubt to the back of its mind. The pieces of flesh in front of it had caught its attention, and it started to greedily devour them. Although the flesh couldn't be said to be the best food, it wasn't too bad either. Previously, the wolf was not considered a powerful wild beast in the Garden of Life, and even after its transformation, it still retained its previous instincts to not waste food.

Beneath its feet, the students who were waiting felt each second to be years.

Goosebumps crawled up everyone's arms upon hearing the crunching of bones coming from the top of their heads.

The blood wolf cleared all the body parts, but it did not have the least bit of contentment. Instead, it became even more hungry.

Suddenly, its eyes lit up with a blood-thirsty glare as it gazed deep into the forest.

A howl sounded out from afar, causing the blood wolf to turn its head. There was now another large beast like it in the vicinity.

It wasn’t sure how that was possible, but right now, it just wanted to have a good meal.

It retracted its gaze, turned around, and headed into the forest.

Chapter 126: I am the Wind of the North Sea

Zhou Xiaoxi was worried sick. He was flying at his highest speed as he knew that the students could not hold on for too long.

Every one hundred kilometers, he would stop and chop down a tree to see if the blood poison had spread to that area. However, every time he stopped to check, his disappointment would only increase. He had already flown halfway through the Garden of Life, but the cores of the trees he chopped down were still red in color.

He could not imagine what was going to happen. He felt fear.

In his eyes, the boundless Garden of Life had become a boundless sea of blood.

The Garden of Life was being corroded by the blood poison. His body was also being corroded by the blood poison. It was like a monster that continuously devoured his elemental energy, making itself grow increasingly stronger.

He clenched his teeth and flew with all his might. However, he soon discovered that his pair of azure wings was becoming weaker and his flying speed was decreasing.

He became dismayed and somewhat mocked himself. If his brothers from his department saw him flying at this speed, they would definitely laugh at him. The day when the Wind of The North Sea, Zhou Xiaoxi, was slower than a tortoise had finally

come.

Like a bird with injured wings, he lost his balance and started to wobble in mid-air, his altitude rapidly decreasing.

As he flew through the canopy of the woods, densely-packed tree branches whipped his body, but he could not feel anything.

When was the last time he flew so low? It should be when he was twelve years old…

An image of a young and immature youth appeared before his eyes. The youth was clumsily wearing a pair of azure wings that was much bigger than the size of his body. It was his father's azure wings. Even in his dreams, he would yearn to soar through the skies like his father.

The first time the youth had put on the azure wings, he had been very nervous. He had pursed his lips and channeled his elemental energy before unsteadily taking off from the ground. But before he could rejoice, he had screamed and crashed into the tree in his backyard like a drunk bird.

The feeling of branches smacking his face then was similar to what he was feeling now.

That youth was filled with ignorance and vision. Those were good old times.

Zhou Xiaoxi's body slammed heavily onto the ground, causing soil and rotten leaves to fly everywhere. A warm and nostalgic smile appeared on his face.

After struggling to pick himself up, he leaned against a tree and took out a bamboo tube from his shirt. He then pulled out a distress leaf and pinned it on the tree trunk.

When he saw the glow of the pine needle dim, he was in a daze for ten seconds.

He carefully closed the bamboo tube and hid it well within his shirt. Without any hesitation, he turned around and started staggering in the direction of the Induction Ground. However, as he moved, he found it to be increasingly difficult to breathe, and his body's temperature was rising. His energy was rapidly reducing as well. All right, he actually did not have any strength left; his legs went to jelly, and he was shaking.

Luckily, Cui Xianzi was not able to see his current pathetic state; otherwise, it would be very humiliating...

The dizziness and the ringing in his ears had sent him into a state of stupor.

He must look very ugly now....

In his daze, he seemed to see Cui Xianzi give him a smile. Suddenly, his legs tripped over a branch, and he fell flat on his

face, causing his forehead to knock against a rock and start bleeding.

This made him a bit sober. With a surge of strength, he picked himself up and struggled forward.

Tumbling, staggering, and dazed.

His body was as red as a cooked prawn; his body temperature was astonishingly high. He could feel an erupting volcano inside his body.

The blood on his forehead was emitting an alluring fragrance.

Sounds of rustling could be heard as several pairs of scarlet eyes began to light up in the nearby underbrush.

Even so, he did not feel fear anymore, just like how he did not know how far he had walked. His dazed eyes were dyed red by the blood dripping from his forehead, causing his vision to be of a similar blood-red.

He could hear his own breathing loud and clear, and his heart was pounding so hard that it resembled a roaring monster. He could feel the world leaving him.

Is this the feeling of death....

He tried to move his lips, but he no longer had any strength. He collapsed onto the ground.

The wild beasts started to approach from all directions. Their scarlet eyes were filled with hunger and desire.

Behind the blood-red canopy, there was the deep, blood-red sky. It was so beautiful. He did not know since when he had loved the sky, but he had always desired to conquer and soar through the heavens.

Who was the one who had told him that the last thought before someone died was the thing that they loved the most?

Such bullshit...

So the thing he loved the most was his bamboo tube? Hahaha....

Next time, he should remember to not close the lid of the bamboo tube so tightly... Okay, there would be no next time.

With shaky hands, he managed to open the lid of the tube and involuntarily spilled the pine needle leaves all over the ground.

Through his blood-filled vision, he could not differentiate the multi-colored pine needle leaves from each other.

His eyes had been rendered colorblind from the blood...

Dark red tears started to flow down his cheeks, but he did not know whether they were blood or tears. The tears fell onto his soil-smudged palms, forming a small, heart-shaped puddle.

Cui Xianzi, you must survive!

He summoned the last bit of strength he had and grabbed a bunch of pine needle leaves. Then, like a beast that was pushed to its edge, he dashed towards the nearest tree!

Bang!

A bunch of pine needle leaves smudged with mud was pinned onto the tree.

He stared blankly at it. There was a speck of light that was becoming brighter and brighter, bit by bit.

He wanted to laugh, he wanted to laugh at the top of his voice! However, he could not make any sound.

This was his distress leaf, and the Induction Ground could track it. The Induction Ground would be able to identify Cui Xianzi's location as his North Sea Token was in the bag of rations and medicine that he had passed to her.

He raised his head with satisfaction. Through his blood-covered

vision, he could see those malevolent wild beasts.

So ugly....

At this moment, he just wanted to yell his name with pride to Cui Xianzi and his dear beautiful sky. He wanted to let the drifting wind carry his name...

I am the Wind of the North Sea!

Then, he fell to the ground, his body stiff, as he faced his beloved sky for the last time.

...

The students had already spent three days in darkness under the mound.

After the ferocious beast had left the last time, Ai Hui had requested Duanmu Huanghun to dig a few more small holes in the mound using his vines.

The amount of oxygen that these little holes could channel was minimal. Fortunately, everyone knew how dangerous it was outside. Even the delicate and petite female students were enduring and persevering at this point.

Outside was total chaos. There were various unknown wild

beasts, and their roars were getting louder and louder.

Everyone was trembling in fear even though they were under the mound.

Their shelter had repeatedly been strengthened over these past few days. Ai Hui was in charge of the students' security while those who were earth elementalists were in charge of controlling the soil and mud to strengthen the mound.

The mound was becoming increasingly thicker, but even after being strengthened, it still could not stop the roars from penetrating.

When will we be rescued?

"Will we survive?" someone asked in the dark.

"We will definitely survive!" Teacher Xu replied with absolute determination. "The Induction Ground will not ignore such an overt situation. Everyone needs to believe in the Induction Ground, and believe in ourselves."

"Teacher Xu is right." Cui Xianzi put in some encouraging words as well. "We need to believe in the Induction Ground. It's quite a long distance between the Garden of Life and the Induction Ground, so it will take some time for reinforcements. However, no matter what, the Induction Ground will definitely not remain indifferent to such a dire situation."

After hearing these words, the students were more at ease.

After speaking, Cui Xianzi became silent in the darkness.

As she thought of Zhou Xiaoxi, her hands involuntarily grasped the bag that he had thrown to her. It had been three days, and there was still no news of that fellow. Could it be that he had gotten into some accident?

When she thought of the blood poison in Zhou Xiaoxi's body, she became more worried.

That frivolous face kept appearing in her mind. When she thought of how his shamelessness had amused her and made her cheerful, a smile involuntarily appeared on her face.

That fellow was much more amusing than the other teachers....

She thought of how Zhou Xiaoxi had pestered her for her contact details and told her that he was going to write letters to her. Such an old-fashioned man. How could he not know that letter-writing is outdated?

By then, if I don't receive any letters from you, you're finished... Humph....

In the darkness, a faint blush appeared on Cui Xianzi's face.

However, in the blink of an eye, all those distracting thoughts transformed back into ones of worry.

When she saw the injured student who was had been knocked out and tied up tightly, she became even more anxious.

No matter what, you must survive!

Ai Hui actually wanted everyone to stop talking. Although they were all keeping their volume low, he still wanted to tell them that a lot of wild beasts had superb hearing.

However, in the end, he did not say anything because he knew that if everyone really maintained total silence, they would all plunge into a mental breakdown.

He was used to being in darkness and was not in any discomfort.

He took a glance at Fatty, who was lying against a rock, sleeping soundly. Actually, the best thing to do in such a situation was to sleep.

However, Ai Hui did not dare to sleep because he wanted to pay constant attention to what was going on outside. His hand never left the grass sword at all.

As compared to other people, he was not really optimistic about

the current situation. He had not slept for three days. He clearly knew what was going on outside.

The situation was deteriorating!

Everyone could hear that the wild beasts' roars were becoming increasingly frequent; however, only Ai Hui was counting the types of roars in his mind.

Twenty-six!

During the last three days, he had heard twenty-six different types of roars. But these ferocious beasts would usually not let out such raging howls.

Every beast would only let out one distinct roar.

He guessed that these roars must contain some kind of special message. But the amount of information he had gathered was far too little. There was no way he could decipher the meaning behind them.

However, there was one thing that he was sure of, and that was that only dangerous beasts would give off such angry roars.

There were twenty-six different types of wild beasts out there, and every one of them was extremely dangerous. Just this fact would make everyone tremble with fear.

Ai Hui knew that the blood poison was beginning to spread. The incubation period of the blood poison had passed, and it was now in its maturity period. The fact that the blood poison had incubated had already been validated.

The student who was bitten by the red-haired rabbit was the one whom Ai Hui had gotten his validation from.

This student's elemental energy had completely disappeared, and his entire body was boiling hot. When he woke up, he was filled with irritation and aggression. If Ai Hui had never broken away from the sword embryo's state and detected these symptoms, roughly half the number of people under the mound would have been injured by this infected student.

The injured student's body was undergoing astonishing changes. For example, his skin had become tougher, his eyes had become bloodshot and were giving off a demonic-red glow, his strength had increased tremendously, and his hair had become thicker. That fellow's hair had also grown a significant length in the past three days.

The wound on his hand had also been fully healed without leaving any scar.

Furthermore, Ai Hui also noticed that this student did not lose his total self-awareness. It was just that he could not control his emotions. It was as if there was something in everyone's body that was provoking him.

For the sake of everyone’s safety, this student was tied up.

Ai Hui was secretly observing the injured student, like how he had observed the dire beasts in the Wilderness.

Ai Hui was most worried about whether the Induction Ground was capable of handling the blood poison that was already in its maturity period.

However, when he thought of the lax garrison in the Induction Ground, he could only laugh bitterly.

Chapter 127: Si Nan's Journal

It was the fifth day. Ai Hui noticed that the movements outside had decreased, and he guessed that the Induction Ground must have taken action.

He made sure to tell this to everyone as he knew that they needed a boost in morale right now. If not for the terrifying roars of the wild beasts outside, there would be people here taking action. However, no one had the courage to go out when they heard those furious roars.

Ai Hui's conjecture significantly raised the spirits of those downcast students. They already had faith in Ai Hui's judgments since the beginning of this excursion.

In such a cramped and dark environment with foul and dirty air, every day was akin to torture.

On the sixth day, Ai Hui and the rest of the students were finally rescued by Li Wei and his rescue team.

When everyone finally walked out of the mound, they felt as if it had been a lifetime. The surrounding terrain had undergone massive changes; the initial lush and verdant forest had been reduced to a barren land with billowing smoke and fumes.

Ai Hui noticed many people pouring red kerosene onto the trees and plants. Behind them was scorched earth; every inch of land had been torched by the burning kerosene. No plants could ever

grow on such a land.

He was in somewhat of a daze.

A few days ago, he had been thinking about how peaceful the Induction Ground was; however, after now seeing the charred land, he felt that he had been too naive.

Ai Hui himself reacted like this, let alone the other students. An ordinary excursion had turned into a terrifying experience.

After coming out of the mound, many students broke down on the spot. Everyone was crying bitterly. At this point, all they wanted was to return to the safety and warmth of their homes.

Ai Hui noticed Li Wei pull Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi to one side. Li Wei told them something, causing Cui Xianzi's face to turn deathly pale, and her body appeared to be on the verge of collapsing.

Upon seeing this, Ai Hui was stunned. Actually, when he did not catch sight of Instructor Zhou after coming out of the mound, he knew that something was wrong.

He was used to witnessing death, but at this moment, he still felt despondent.

Everyone was assigned to a transport wagon and set off homeward. Li Wei did not follow them as he still had a mission to

carry out; there were still lots of people who had yet to be found. A total of five classes had gone on this excursion, but only two classes—Ai Hui's class and Fatty's class—had been rescued. One class had been confirmed dead, and the remaining two were still missing.

After going missing for so many days, their chance of surviving was minimal.

Yet, no one wanted to give up. Li Wei was greatly encouraged after finding Ai Hui's and Fatty's classes.

When Ai Hui heard that there were still two classes missing, he felt even more downcast. Those of the Wilderness were always mentally prepared for death. Surviving was a gift conferred by the gods, and everyone was apathetic to death.

However, the Induction Ground was like heaven, peaceful and safe. Ai Hui used to think that the Induction Ground was the best place in the world, and he had even thought about how nice it would be if he got to stay in the Induction Ground forever.

Li Wei patted his shoulder and told him to go back and have a good rest.

On the transport wagon, no one had the mood to talk. Sobs could be heard everywhere. Cui Xianzi was seated on one side, staring blankly into space as if her soul had left her body. Her face was as pale as paper, and her hands were clenching onto Zhou Xiaoxi's bag.

Ai Hui wanted to console her, but he did not know what to say. The death was so sudden, and she did not even have the chance to bid farewell.

Ai Hui, who had always thought that he was used to death, could not help but look down.

As he gazed downwards from the sky, he could see that the jade-green sea of trees had disappeared. The charred ground was like an ugly scar that stretched into the smoky horizon. Fire extended towards the distance, devouring everything in its path.

The poisoned student was put on an emergency transport wagon as he needed urgent medical treatment.

However, Ai Hui felt that the chance of that student surviving was not high. He had never seen such a strange type of blood poison. That poisoned student's body had undergone terrifying mutations.

For some reason, the blood poison seemed somewhat familiar to Ai Hui. He remembered reading about something similar in a journal.

But when he tried to think about it, he could not remember any details.

When Ai Hui finally glimpsed Central Pine City, he was suddenly overwhelmed with emotions.

It was just that...

Central Pine City was still the same, prosperous and peaceful. It looked as if nothing had happened.

At this moment, someone noticed that the transport wagon was not flying in the direction of Central Pine City.

“Where are you taking us?”

“I want to go home!”

“Let us down!”

The students started to become agitated. Their mental states had already been pushed to the brink of collapse, and when they saw that the transport wagon was taking them to another place, they all went frantic.

Ai Hui observed quietly from one side. When he saw that Central Pine City was not heavily guarded, he roughly understood what was going on.

The Induction Ground had instituted a lockdown on information.

“Teacher Xu, please cooperate with us,” an elementalist said

solemnly. “To prevent the spread of the poison, all of you will have to be quarantined for a period of time. Everyone, please try to understand. This is for the sake of everyone’s safety and for all of you.”

Teacher Xu’s face turned ugly. He didn’t expect to be quarantined just after escaping from that hellhole.

But the dead-serious look on the elementalist’s face told him that it was an order from the goddamn higher-ups.

He was clear about the Induction Ground and the higher-ups’ ways of handling such situations.

So he had no choice but to console the students. He knew that if he let the students carry on stirring up trouble, things that he did not want to see might happen.

“You want to put a lockdown on information?”

Duanmu Huanghun suddenly asked. That elementalist’s facial expression slightly changed as he glanced at Duanmu Huanghun. However, he did not disagree, and instead replied plainly, “It’s for everyone’s sake. This is such an enormous catastrophe. Who will be responsible if it creates unnecessary mass hysteria?”

“Why don’t you disperse everyone?” Duanmu Huanghun replied, meeting the elementalist’s gaze head-on. Without any fear, he asked coldly, “Have you not thought about what will happen if you

lose control of the situation? How many people will be implicated?”

“We will not lose control of the situation.” The elementalist was aware of Duanmu Huanghun’s identity and was careful with his tone. “We have already found a way to deal with this poison.”

“You figured out a way to deal with the poison?” Ai Hui suddenly opened his mouth and asked.

Initially, the elementalist had not wanted to divulge anything. However, after seeing the agitation of the surrounding students and that Duanmu Huanghun was staring coldly at him, he decided to reveal a bit of information. “Yes, we found records of a similar poison in the journal of a deceased wood elementalist. The Induction Ground gathered the most powerful wood elementalists in the city and discovered a way to counter this type of poison. This whole situation was an accident.”

“Accident?” Duanmu Huanghun felt that he had heard a huge joke. It was obviously an enormous disaster, where so many people had died, but this fellow was saying that it was just an accident?

“Yes. There is a clear record of the formula of this type of poison in the wood elementalist’s journal. Right now, we are performing tests, but from the looks of it, things are proceeding very smoothly.”

The elementalist was brimming with confidence as he replied to Duanmu Huanghun.

……

Ai Hui and the rest were brought to a manor that was roughly forty kilometers from Central Pine City. When they just reached, they were immediately questioned by a few elementalists. It was evident that the security was extremely tight.

“I hope everyone can stay here at ease. If everything goes smoothly, all of you will be back in Central Pine City very soon. Please surrender all the various types of leaves you have with you. There will be severe consequences for anyone who tries to communicate with outside world without permission. If everyone can cooperate with us, the Induction Ground will compensate for the losses you suffered during this period of time.”

The elementalist then hurriedly took off.

“Let’s find a place and sleep,” Ai Hui told Fatty.

In order to be aware of what was happening outside the mound, Ai Hui hadn’t closed his eyes and had stayed in the sword embryo’s state for six days straight. When he finally loosened his grip on the sword hilt, weakness and fatigue flooded him like a tsunami.

He casually found an empty room that had a bed and fell asleep the moment he laid on it.

Meanwhile, Fatty stood guard at the door. He had slept day and

night when under the mound, and he now felt as if he could go for days without sleep.

……

In a heavily-guarded basement in the Induction Ground.

The powerful wood elementalists of the Induction Ground had all gathered here. At this moment, they were studying an ancient journal, whose rotten pages revealed its unknown age.

This was a four-hundred-year-old journal that was left behind by a wood-attributed teacher named Si Nan.

In this journal, he had recorded his lifetime's research and knowledge in detail.

In the course of his research, he had discovered a special phenomenon: except for blood-refined artifacts, all artifacts from the Cultivation Era had now become scraps.

He had collected a few pieces of blood-refined artifacts, and after carrying out experiments on them, he had discovered that they had the ability to self-repair. No one in current times knew how to use these artifacts, but they had not degenerated like the others.

They were well preserved.

This unique phenomenon had aroused Si Nan's interest. He had proceeded to study many blood-refining manuals of the Cultivation Era and had discovered that blood-refining was entirely different from those mainstream training methods of the Cultivation Era.

Blood-refining was an ancient training method. Reportedly, it originated from the blood sacrifices that humans had made to the Heaven and Earth when they were just created.

Si Nan had combined the knowledge he had obtained from his research on blood-refining with that of wood elementalist's plant breeding.

He hoped to breed plants that possessed the powers of blood-refining, and he put in a great deal of effort to breed a lot of plants. However, he did not succeed, even until his death.

After he had passed away, his student had discovered a significant amount of premature plants while tidying up his life's works.

His student could not bear to destroy his teacher's life's work, but he was too busy to take care of them, so he transplanted these plants to the Garden of Life.

And that student had recorded this incident in his diary.

After this disaster had broken out in the Garden of Life, someone

had remembered Si Nan's journal during the initial investigation. Most of the teachers would donate their life's research and findings to the Induction Ground after they died, and other teachers had the right to read and study them.

There was more than one person who had read Si Nan's journal. Many wood elementalists that were gathered here today had also thought of this journal after hearing about the blood poison.

This was what encouraged the Induction Ground the most—they had found the key to the problem.

Chapter 128: The Fatty's Unique Skill

Ai Hui woke up with a splitting headache.

He had a dream. He dreamt that the recent event was a dream. And after he woke up from the dream within his dream, he was back in the Wilderness, where an elementalist had asked him why he had not finished his work.

"Are you awake?"

Fatty's voice brought him back to reality. He turned around and saw Fatty squatting at the door, crunching on a piece of malt candy. If the malt candy were replaced with a bone, Fatty would look exactly like a plump guard dog.

Dog…he doesn't look like a dog…pig suits him better…

He had persuaded Fatty to stop eating so many candies numerous times, but this fellow would always just turn a deaf ear.

He did not know where and how Fatty hid his malt candies. No matter the location or the time, he could always get out a piece of malt candy. It must be his unique skill.

Ai Hui's body was drenched in sweat, and he felt terribly uncomfortable. "I need to find a place to bathe."

The moment he started talking, he was shocked by his hoarse voice.

“What happened to your throat?” Fatty turned around, his face filled with concern.

Ai Hui shook his head and did not say anything else. He hung his sword on his waist and walked out of the room. The dazzling sunlight shone upon his face, preventing him from opening his eyes. He subconsciously squinted and used his hands to block the glaring daylight.

After observing his surroundings, Ai Hui realized that this place was not a manor but an army camp. From the look of it, this army camp was rather old. Was it possible that this manor was remodeled from an abandoned army camp?

When he noticed a guard standing nearby, Ai Hui walked straight towards him and asked, “Is there a place for bathing?”

A trace of disdain flashed across the guard’s eyes as he took a glance at Ai Hui. He was reluctant to waste his words and pointed a finger in the direction of the courtyard.

“Thank you.” Ai Hui nodded and walked in the direction of the guard’s finger.

“Wait for me!”

Fatty shouted from behind. With nimbleness that did not match his body size, he appeared beside Ai Hui. Ai Hui had long become accustomed to Fatty's cowardice; when they were in the Wilderness, Fatty would always follow wherever he went, just like now.

Luckily, Fatty was timid in nature; if not, he would not have survived until now.

As they reached the courtyard, Ai Hui discovered a corridor, and after walking through it for awhile, they finally saw a small pond.

The size of the pond wasn't really that big; however, its water was clear and rippling.

Plop! Ai Hui jumped into the pond and was prepared to take a relaxing bath.

He sighed. How nice would it be if he was in the training hall now! A massage session from Lou Lan would get rid of all his weariness and fatigue.

Lou Lan was still the best...

He wondered how Lou Lan was doing.

"Ai Hui, I'm coming!"

Fatty yelled and jumped straight into the pool.

Ai Hui let the water splash onto his face as his eyes twitched. This bastard...

Within seconds, the already small pond had lost half the amount of its water. Ai Hui suddenly wished that he could kick Fatty out of the pond.

.....

After taking a bath, Ai Hui finally felt much better. His splitting headache had been mostly relieved. Headaches, however, weren't an unusual occurrence to him—whenever he used the sword embryo for an extended period of time, he would have a headache. Yet he never paid it any mind as it would always disappear after some time.

This time, if not for the sword embryo, he would have died.

After finishing his bath, Ai Hui walked to the steps and settled down. He casually plucked a blade of grass and was about to put it in his mouth when he suddenly stopped and scrutinized it. When he discerned that there were no signs of a red color, he placed it near his nose and smelled it. It was only after perceiving that there was no faint fragrance to it that he felt relieved, and he then put it in his mouth and began to chew.

He propped his hands behind his head and basked in the sunlight

while chewing his blade of grass.

What was Lou Lan doing now? How was Master, Mistress and Senior Mingxiu? When he remembered seeing that Central Pine City looked normal as usual when they flew past it, he was more at ease.

He felt that he was worrying for nothing. Mistress and Senior Mingxiu were so powerful; why would he need to worry about them?

Lou Lan was a sand puppet; no one would deliberately target him…

Crunch. Crunch.

The sound of someone crunching malt candies came from Ai Hui's side. Ai Hui's thoughts suddenly disappeared, and he then involuntarily laughed at his previous melancholy.

The heat from the sun was intense. After lying in the sun for only a short moment, Ai Hui's shirt was already drenched in sweat.

He stood up and gave Fatty a harsh kick.

Fatty opened his groggy eyes and looked blankly at Ai Hui.

"Wake up and start training now," Ai Hui instructed.

“Training?” Fatty was in a daze. After a while, he collapsed back onto the ground. “Such beautiful sunshine, let me sleep a bit more.”

However, Ai Hui didn’t say anything and used one hand to pull Fatty up, dragging him to a nearby empty training hall. “Don’t think that I’ve forgotten about the debt you owe me. Do you think you can get away with stealing my money that easily? From today onwards, I’m your creditor. You will only have your life back the day you return me my money. And to prevent you from dying accidentally and from me being able to get my money back, I will be supervising your training.”

Ai Hui stopped talking as he felt his throat become uncomfortable after speaking so many words in a single breath.

Fatty’s face was filled with fear. He knew how terrifying Ai Hui’s training routine was.

The training hall was empty. The sun was so scorching hot that Fatty felt that the bath he took earlier was a waste.

“Show me what you can do.”

When Fatty heard this, he shivered with fear. But just as he was about to open his mouth and plead, Ai Hui’s fist was coming straight at him.

Fatty instinctively dodged to the side. His movement was unusually graceful and agile, similar to a fat cat.

Ai Hui's fist grazed the side of his face, sending undulations through its layers of fat. Fatty's eyes widened as a shiver ran down his spine.

This...this fellow is for real!

If that punch had landed squarely on his face, it would now be swollen like a pig's head.

"Ai—Ai Hui.....if—if there's anything wrong, we can talk about it. It's...it's not worth to risk our brotherly relationship for such a small amount of money..."

Fatty's voice was trembling. He resembled a madman as he dodged Ai Hui's punches left and right.

"You have become more adept at dodging."

From the corner of his eyes, Fatty noticed a glint flicker through Ai Hui's eyes. A shiver ran down his spine once more—he was all too familiar with this expression! Right now, Ai Hui was in an extremely dangerous mood.

"Spare me, spare me, Ai Hui! Let me off, please! I know I was wrong, I really know I'm wrong!" Fatty wailed desperately.

Ai Hui's face remained expressionless, but he started to throw his punches faster. Although he had never learned boxing before, his punches were extremely rapid and precise, similar to torrential rain. Initially, he had just wanted to see Fatty's progress, but after his first few punches hit nothing but air, he became more enthusiastic in attacking.

Fatty looked extremely pathetic as he rolled and crawled around, trying to escape. However, he still managed to dodge Ai Hui's punches, and it was as if there was lubricant all over his body.

Last time, Fatty would not have been able to perform at such a level. It appeared that he had made significant progress.

Ai Hui's punches kept missing their target. However, the more surprised he became at Fatty's improvement, the more earnest he became with his attacks. Even though he was no good at boxing, the continually failed attacks stirred up his battlelust.

Once Ai Hui really became serious, his punches slowed down.

Fatty was like a cat which had its hair standing on end as if it had sensed an incoming storm.

At this moment, Ai Hui sensed something amiss with his body—it was as if he had entered the sword embryo's state!

In the past few days when he was under the mound, Ai Hui did

not dare to let go of the grass sword lest he leave the sword embryo's state.

It had been a while since he had continuously held on to the sword for six days and nights. Ever since he had discovered that it was easy to develop an unhealthy dependency on the sword embryo, which, in turn, would damage his actual skill level, he had tried his utmost to prevent himself from entering the sword embryo's state.

What had happened under the mound was an emergency. At that time, he could not care about whether or not he would develop a dependency on the sword embryo.

Previously, when Ai Hui had just woken up, he had assumed that his splitting headache was a side effect of entering the sword embryo's state for a prolonged period. However, at this moment, Ai Hui realized that he was getting more and more used to the sword embryo's state. He was finding it easier to enter it as well.

Instead of punching, Ai Hui used his fingers as a sword and brandished it casually.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Those swooshing sounds would cause one to prostrate with fear.

Fatty was like a puffed-up, frightened fat cat. He felt the approach of danger and quickly maneuvered his body. However, to

his horror, no matter how he maneuvered his body, he could not completely dodge Ai Hui's seemingly relaxed sword fingers.

From those fearful swooshing sounds, Fatty knew that if he got hit, the result would be miserable.

Just as Fatty was about to be jabbed by Ai Hui's swordplay, he suddenly rolled onto the ground, and his right palm shot out a jet of scorching hot flames.

Voom!

Like a fat rat, Fatty quickly turned around and scurried away. He was abnormally fast.

"This is quite interesting!" Ai Hui's eyes lit up; he had never seen such a move before.

It reminded him of fireworks. Fatty had always been proficient at sneaking and escaping. With the addition of this move, his escaping skills could be said to be matchless.

This was Fatty's typical style!

Even the moves he had learned in the Induction Ground were used for escaping.

"We can talk about it nicely, Ai Hui. After all, we are brothers.

Why let such a small amount of money injure our brotherly love? A money-minded world is cold and disappointing! Don't worry, once I go back and save enough money, I will immediately return the money to you!" Fatty fawned over Ai Hui, continuously bowing and making promises.

"Go back and save enough money? Fatty, if I'm able to find you after you go back, I would be as fat as you!" Ai Hui sneered.

"The one with the surname Ai! If you're capable enough, kill me then! Today, we shall break all ties. I..." Fatty was enraged.

Too lazy to be bothered with him, Ai Hui suddenly surged forward.

"Ahhh, dammit!" Fatty's facial expression changed. He immediately turned around and started to flee.

Even though he was fat, he ran very fast. And as he ran, his palm continued to shoot out flames.

With his body slightly crouched, Ai Hui drew his Sawtooth Grass Sword and dragged it behind him. He stomped his right foot heavily on the ground, and his body leaped towards Fatty like an arrow that had been released from a bow.

Ai Hui did not train his [Copper Skin] for nothing; the force generated from his right leg was extremely great. His ankle dug deep into the soil, causing crushed rocks to shoot backward as he

continued to shoot forwards.

Bang!

The sound generated was so loud that even the guard standing far away had a surprised look on his face.

It was rare to see students from the Induction Ground who had mastered the body-tempering skill [Copper Skin].

Every step Ai Hui took was generating immense power. He was like a heavy bull that was dashing forward madly, causing the earth to quake and the mountains to shake.

Fatty's face became ashen when he looked back.

"Damn it!"

The distance between them was rapidly decreasing, and the glint in Ai Hui's eyes was much colder than the grass sword in his hand.

Suddenly, Fatty pointed his right palm outwards and shot out another massive jet of blazing flames.

His body made a sudden sharp turn in the air, and like a rubber ball, he bounced and darted in another direction.

Fatty heaved a sigh of relief. This was a time-tested move; the faster he ran, the better this move worked. Previously, he had purposely increased his speed just to enhance this move's effect.

Ai Hui definitely could not catch him!

Fatty was filled with satisfaction. He turned around and was prepared to see Ai Hui fail to stop and be thrown out of the training hall.

However, when he took a closer look at Ai Hui, he was momentarily stunned.

Like a huge bat, Ai Hui was flying in a weird arc-like trajectory through the air and was swooping directly towards him.

He had…seen a ghost!

All Fatty could think of were these three words: to be continued.

Chapter 129: As Seen by Duanmu

Duanmu Huanghun was sleeping when he suddenly heard some activity outside. Fatty's voice pierced his ears like demonic music.

Talking about debts again!

In his semi-conscious state, the voices plucked at the delicate strings of his sanity, making the corner of his eye twitch wildly.

Just what was this Ai Hui up to? Going around collecting debts? Is he a loanshark?

Duanmu Huanghun pulled the sheets over his head in an attempt to block the noise. He decided to restrain his curiosity and stay inside—he'd only be asking for trouble if he went out now.

It hadn't been easy for them to finally get to safety, so why were these people not resting?

Duanmu Huanghun was determined to continue sleeping in a bid to repair his damaged psyche. The six days that they were trapped in the mound felt like a nightmare. Although he had appeared to be very calm during those six days, he had actually been terrified. The tension only began to subside after they returned to safety, but by then the post-trauma stress had started to kick in.

Duanmu Huanghun had felt very muddled throughout the next few days. He had slept lightly and was awakened by even the

slightest noise. He would have nightmares all through the night, sometimes waking up from one in fear, unable to discern if he was really awake. Consecutive days of poor sleep left Duanmu Huanghun severely dispirited and devoid of energy.

He wasn't the only one experiencing this; the others were going through the same as well. Even Teacher Xu went about with a dazed expression on his face.

However, Duanmu Huanghun was unable to go back to sleep as the noise outside was simply too loud. Having had enough of it, he promptly erupted in anger, jumping off the bed and dashing towards the door.

What are these two jokers trying to pull? Can't they just let the rest of us have some peace?

When he rushed out of the room, he saw two figures drenched in sweat, standing in the middle of an empty training ground.

"Two hundred sets of Fluttering Butterfly Steps! If you can't complete it, I'll thrash you!"

"No, please. Please spare me, Ai Hui. Duanmu Huanghun owes you one hundred and fifty million yuan, yet he's allowed to sleep peacefully. I owe you so much less so please stop torturing me..."

Upon hearing this, Duanmu Huanghun felt the urge to quickly return to his room.

This is too…humiliating!

His face turned bright red. That despicable scoundrel had been going around and smearing his reputation! How hateful! Duanmu Huanghun wasn't sleepy anymore—all he felt was an overwhelming impulse to go out and fervently earn money.

How was he going to reclaim his reputation if he couldn't pay up this one hundred fifty million yuan?

Duanmu Huanghun glared intensely at Ai Hui.

"It's three hundred steps now. I don't want to hear any more nonsense coming out of your mouth!"

Ai Hui's words made the Fatty explode with anger. An unyielding and enraged expression was plastered across his face as he leaned forward, ready to confront Ai Hui.

Duanmu Huanghun looked on in disdain.

Does he really think that everyone's going to just listen to him? Humph. Even a teacher wouldn't say something this fierce. How can he treat his friends with such disrespect? A civil war was bound to erupt at this rate.

Looks like there's going to be a show! Duanmu Huanghun was

taking delight in the impending disaster.

Ai Hui remained expressionless and said, “Come at me if you dare.”

However, Fatty stared at Ai Hui with rage and suddenly barked. “Woof!”

“Weren’t you all full of gusto earlier? Weren’t you going to play the hero? Come on, say something vicious to my face!”

“Woof!”

“Don’t dare to argue anymore? Tsk tsk, where’s your backbone? Are you terrified now? A hero! Weren’t you acting all brave a moment ago? Where has that bravery gone?”

“Woof! Woof! Woof!”

“Bark again and you’ll have to do five hundred more steps!”

Fatty hopped away from Ai Hui like a bouncy ball of meat, glaring angrily at him the whole time.

“……” Duanmu Huanghun was at a loss for words.

Out of the corner of his eyes, Ai Hui noticed Duanmu Huanghun

standing under the eave. He was suddenly reminded of the “fellow who owes you a hundred and fifty million” that Fatty had spoken of earlier.

One hundred and fifty million yuan!

Ai Hui was greatly annoyed by that damned ingrate!

He turned his head away and started his own training.

Ai Hui was keeping an eye on Fatty’s training because he didn’t want him to die so easily. It was okay to be weak if he hid well, but Fatty was weak and loved to meddle in others’ affairs. Fatty may be a cheap person, but Ai Hui didn’t want him to die. After all, who was going to return Ai Hui the money if he did?

He was all too familiar with Fatty’s character. That guy was lazy, timid, and looked really sleazy. In actual fact, however, he was a sentimental person who always tried to be on good terms with everyone.

Ai Hui never knew that Fatty had done so many things behind his back, but he was aware that Fatty had come to the Induction Ground to look out for him.

Ai Hui knew that he couldn’t change Fatty’s character; he just didn’t want him to die.

Being stronger should help him even when he’s running for his

life.

Ai Hui had always felt that he was more selfish than Fatty. He would always look out for himself first and find a path that was suitable for himself before proceeding with something.

If Fatty was killed by someone, Ai Hui would definitely seek revenge. If the killer was too strong, then perhaps he would train for a few years before seeking revenge. But if the other party was so much more powerful that Ai Hui felt that there was no chance of winning, he would put his utmost effort...to burn incense and pay his respects.

Ai Hui was supervising Fatty's training because he wanted to train as well.

He was killing two birds with one stone.

After resting, Ai Hui immediately began his training preparations. There was no time to waste. The six days spent in the mound may have been the most terrifying event of the other students' lives, but to Ai Hui, it had only helped him understand that life in the Induction Ground was no fairy tale either.

Life in the Induction Ground was amazing, but there was an unrealistic quality to it that always made Ai Hui wonder if he was just dreaming. The recent incident had lifted a veil from his eyes, serving as a timely reminder of the potential dangers that lurked about even in the Induction Ground. This was the reality that had eluded him.

Not only did the danger not make him panic, but it had also helped him find inner peace.

No matter how perfect his life in the Induction Ground would appear, it wasn't a life that Ai Hui was used to. He had always felt a nagging uneasiness. Now that the Induction Ground had become more dangerous in reality, he was back to a familiar way of life. He truly felt comfortable in his new surroundings.

Ai Hui quickly adapted to the changes since it was an experience he was already familiar with. In the Wilderness, he would always train whenever he had time.

This manor had once been an army camp, so it had excellent facilities for training. It would be a waste to not practice in such an excellent location, especially since he had so much free time.

Ai Hui was very mindful of his time and would never tolerate wasting it.

Furthermore, exchanging blows with Fatty gave Ai Hui a surge of motivation.

Fatty had only activated his right hand palace but was able to execute recoil and drifting techniques quite beautifully. Ai Hui had specially asked Fatty about this, and he learned that Fatty had grasped the techniques on his own through repeated attempts. Learning how to escape more effectively had always been Fatty's biggest priority when it came to training.

Ai Hui approved of Fatty's thinking.

His own thirst for more power stemmed out of his desire to survive. Fatty's focus on escaping was also for survival. The two of them were, in essence, pretty similar.

Beating Fatty in those last few rounds helped Ai Hui understand Fatty's thought process. Besides that, he also discovered some changes within himself.

The sword embryo seed's transformation.

During the six days spent in the mound, Ai Hui had never once let go of his sword and was constantly in the sword embryo's state. At that point in time, his focus was on self-preservation, but he now realized that activating the state for six days had caused the sword embryo to undergo a change.

His sixth sense had become even sharper than before. Even when he wasn't in the sword embryo's state, Ai Hui's sixth sense was now as keen as it was in his previous sword embryo's state.

If he were to wield a sword now…

Ai Hui lifted his sword and slowly closed his eyes.

He felt as if the grass sword had become an extension of his body.

He was able to feel the ambient temperature and airflow around the sword through the sword itself—this was something that he couldn't possibly have done before.

As Ai Hui started to circulate the elemental energy within his body, he was amazed to discover that the grass sword in his hand had an extremely high affinity with his elemental energy. Before Ai Hui could fully grasp what was happening, his elemental energy was already pouring into the grass sword.

The sawtooth grass sword in Ai Hui's hand started to faintly glow. The understated shine of this grass sword meant that it wouldn't reflect much light when brandished, something Ai Hui liked very much as it gave him an advantage when fighting at night. His biggest concern wasn't how dazzling or brilliant a sword was, but whether it could pierce his enemy.

This time, however, the faint glow emerging from the grass sword could be seen even under the strong sunlight.

Ai Hui discovered that he could actually sense that the grass sword had a saturated feeling to it, but he was unsure why.

It was similar...it was similar to the feeling he had at the noodle shop when he ate ten bowls of noodles in one go.

Can a sword feel full?

Ai Hui couldn't help but laugh, but the feeling was very sharp

and distinct. Like a big fellow who needed to take a stroll after eating a lot, Ai Hui subconsciously thrust out the sword in his hand.

One stroke after another.

Every stroke was simple and unadorned.

Ai Hui soon noticed that the sword's point was experiencing some sort of resistance—it felt as if he was stabbing the sword through water.

This feeling became more and more intense with each stroke becoming ever more laborious. The sun at noon was ferocious, and Ai Hui's forehead was now drenched in sweat. Beneath the bandages, his muscles were all trembling.

Standing under the eave, Duanmu Huanghun blankly watched the two of them dripping with sweat under the scorching sun.

These two people...

He initially thought that Ai Hui was only tormenting Fatty on purpose to vent his anger. Duanmu Huanghun didn't expect Ai Hui to actually start training as well.

He didn't anticipate this at all.

The harrowing experience in the Garden of Life was like a recurring nightmare, draining him of his vitality. Being placed here under quarantine only made his imagination run wild, causing him to become even more uncertain of what was going to happen. Under such circumstances, how could anyone possibly still want to train?

It wasn't just him—the other students were the same. Everyone was dispirited and listless, clearly still affected by the traumatic incident.

Yet these two jokers had already started training…

The midday sun was so vicious that it was hard to even open one's eyes. The rest of the students were hiding in their dark, shady rooms while Ai Hui and Fatty were busy with their practice in the otherwise empty training ground.

Duanmu Huanghun thought of just how much they were sweating.

Fatty's entire body was drenched with sweat—it was almost as if he had just gone for a swim. His clothes were completely soaked and were clinging onto his body.

Ai Hui was experiencing the same thing; the grass sword in his hand felt like it weighed a ton. Every stroke of his sword had substantially slowed down, and even Duanmu Huanghun could see that Ai Hui was using every last ounce of his strength.

Duanmu Huanghun snapped out of his daze feeling ashamed of himself. He was so frail when compared to them!

Just as he was about to return to his room to start practicing, he glimpsed Ai Hui's figure out of the corner of his eyes. Duanmu Huanghun's body immediately froze as his eyes opened wide.

Chapter 130: A Flash

Ai Hui had no idea that someone was secretly observing them, but he wouldn't really care even if he knew.

He was exceptionally focused right now; all his attention was on the grass sword in his hand.

Never had he imagined that there would come a day when he could experience the world through the "eyes" of a sword. He felt as if he had possessed the grass sword, turning it from an inanimate object into a living thing.

If he hadn't bought it from Manager Li's shop himself, Ai Hui would probably have thought that this grass sword was some kind of legendary weapon.

Back when he was reading swordplay manuals in the swordsman school, Ai Hui would often chance upon passages discussing the mythical sword souls. These were, of course, legends of old, and now that the swordsmen were long gone, there was no longer anyone who could verify such things.

Ai Hui had treated these passages as mere stories.

The cultivators of the past had left behind many bizarre accounts, but even those were no match for the seemingly exaggerated topics of the swordsmen. He had read accounts of swordsmen who were too embarrassed to even leave their homes without first achieving a certain skill level.

Ai Hui was initially astonished by the things he had read, but the sheer number of such accounts soon left him numb. Yes, indeed, today you put out the sun, tomorrow you shattered the moon, and the day after you could only destroy the stars. Oh, did you say that there were too many stars?

The more he read, the more accustomed he became to these oddities. Eventually, these stories no longer made him feel any shock or surprise.

But, today, the grass sword he was wielding seemed to be alive. The feeling wasn't particularly intense, but it was exceptionally clear. Could it be that swords really were alive?

Ai Hui was still unsure.

Every swordplay manual would mention at least once that swords had essences within them. What they meant was that every sword, when cast, was bestowed with its own spiritual characteristics.

Sword essences varied in strength, and some were even able to grow along with their owners, further evolving into sword spirits and sword souls.

Since this was written in practically all the swordplay manuals, Ai Hui believed that it wasn't all nonsense and might have been actually true during the Cultivation Era. But the times had since changed, with elemental energy becoming dominant after the

disintegration of spiritual force. Now that even the swordsmen were gone, how could there still be sword essences?

Ai Hui suppressed these distracting thoughts and executed a simple sword stroke.

He had read countless swordplay manuals and had an understanding of swordplay that few today could match. His actions were accurate and well-controlled.

When he had just planted the sword embryo, the only literature that he could seek help from were the swordplay manuals. Strangely, it was the low-level manuals that were of use to him. The more advanced the manual, the less applicable they were.

Brandishing a grass sword was usually effortless for Ai Hui.

Today, however, this feat could hardly be said to be effortless.

Ai Hui seemed to have become one with the grass sword; he felt as though he was bound by the surrounding air. He was not accustomed to this restrictive sensation, and Ai Hui felt like he was trapped under water, repressed by forces all around him.

He knew that this was merely an illusion, but the experience was too intense.

Thrusting the sword just a little bit faster made it feel as though he had slammed into a large wave, causing the blade to wobble.

Ai Hui had no choice but to increase his effort as each stroke became heavier than the last. His muscles were bulging and trembling from the effort, like a heavy-duty belt driving a huge wheel.

Ai Hui's sword strokes slowed down as the sword became heavier and the air resistance increased.

Beads of sweat rolled down Ai Hui's body as his muscles continued to churn out massive amounts of power. All of a sudden, he felt as if he had finally pierced through that invisible resistive force.

With a sudden jolt, the grass sword in his hand spontaneously emitted dazzling rays of light. Its brightness was so intense that not even the scorching midday sun could mask its brilliance.

The light that had burst forth from the grass sword blinded Ai Hui. He noticed that the grass sword had become much lighter.

A loud boom followed!

A powerful earth-rending force sent Ai Hui flying through the air before he could even react.

The massive blunt force left Ai Hui thoroughly concussed, his ears ringing. An unknown amount of time had passed before he heard Fatty's anxious voice coming from what seemed like quite a

distance away. “Ai Hui…Ai Hui, are you all right? How are you feeling?”

The surreal sounds gradually became clearer as Ai Hui’s pupils began to focus.

Fatty anxiously let out a stream of words. “Ai Hui, can you not scare me like that? What kind of training is this? It looks more like you’re committing suicide! Here I had thought that you became more tranquil, but it seems like you’re as violent as ever—no, you’re even more violent now. I don’t get it, aren’t you doing just fine? What’s more, I’m the one who owes money, not you…”

Fatty’s long-winded nagging reminded Ai Hui of their time in the Wilderness.

His whole body was unbearably numb—an aftereffect of that enormous impact he had just suffered. Although it had disrupted the flow of his blood and qi, it could heal in moments. After ten seconds, he finally recovered some movement, and he struggled to stand up.

He spat out the sand in his mouth, still feeling dizzy.

What… just happened?

Ai Hui’s gaze fell onto where he had previously stood. What he saw shook him deeply, his reaction similar to a deer in headlights.

A large pit, which was six meters in diameter and three meters deep, appeared where he had last stood.

Duanmu Huanghun stared blankly at the pit. Not even the sudden influx of figures and noise could rouse him from his daze.

“What happened? What’s going on?”

“Did a wild beast get in?”

“Wasn’t this place supposed to be safe?”

“Heavens…what just happened here?”

The commotion brought even more students out of their rooms. Everyone was still on edge from the incident in the Garden of Life, and they were all easily startled. That massive blast had definitely thrown their instincts into overdrive.

The guards in the area soon came over to investigate.

“What a large pit!”

“What is going on? Did a wild beast attack?”

“Did anyone witness the events that transpired?” asked a man, who appeared to be the head of the guards.

“I—I—I....” stammered the guard that gave Ai Hui directions.

“What is it?” the head asked softly.

The guard gulped and replied, “One of the students was practicing when suddenly...”

“A student was practicing?” the head responded with suspicion. He glanced at the large pit in the training ground. “Do you mean to say that this deep pit was the result of a student practicing?”

Everyone else was filled with disbelief. How could a student possibly create such a huge pit?

“What he said was true,” said Duanmu Huanghun out of nowhere. He inevitably stared at Ai Hui’s dazed face, unable to calm down.

He now realized just how wrong he was to have underestimated Ai Hui.

Duanmu Huanghun could understand why the head guard wasn’t convinced. He probably wouldn’t believe it if he hadn’t seen it himself either. His [Viridescent Flower Dance] was unpredictable and vicious, but creating a pit this large would take up every last shred of his strength.

Causing an explosion like this didn't actually require skill. What was more important was the quality of one's elemental energy.

Fire elemental energy was the most explosive of them all, but to create a pit of this size would still require the activation of at least four palaces. Students with an affinity for other elements would probably need something upwards of six palaces to achieve the same effect.

Ai Hui here wasn't using fire elemental energy but the non-explosive metal elemental energy!

What's more, he had only activated two palaces.

Duanmu Huanghun had already found it hard to believe that Ai Hui could activate two palaces in such a short time. After all, that guy had such a pathetic aptitude.

Although terribly shocking, Duanmu Huanghun could still accept it. When it came to training, elementalists with poorer aptitudes could at times have sudden bursts of progress.

This sight in front of him, though…

It was completely beyond his understanding.

The head guard recognized Duanmu Huanghun, especially since he was the only person here that required extra protection. He nodded towards Duanmu Huanghun. Now that he knew his

subordinate was telling the truth, an intense feeling of curiosity arose within him.

Could it be that... there was another genius among them?

He slowly walked towards Ai Hui, inspecting the pit as he went past it. It was only upon closer inspection that he fully realized the complete magnitude of the blast.

The head guard's expression turned grave. He'd probably be dead from an impact this powerful.

"Young man, how may I address you?" the head guard asked amiably.

Ai Hui had regained his composure by then, and his eyes were glowing with a strong luster. He had sensed immense changes within his body and couldn't wait to resume his practice.

"My name is Ai Hui," he answered hurriedly. "Can you lend me a sword?"

His Sawtooth Grass Sword had been completely destroyed. All that was left was the hilt that Ai Hui was holding on to. The thoughts in his head urged him to get on with his practice, distracting him from feeling sorry for the loss of his sword.

The head guard was stunned for a moment, but he quickly responded, "No problem!"

He turned around and shouted, “Someone toss me a sword!”

One of the guards brought his sword forward, and the head guard grabbed it and handed it over to Ai Hui. His tone was friendly as he instructed, “Use it as you please, Ai Hui. Everyone else, kindly step away from the immediate area.”

He was experienced enough to notice that Ai Hui had just had a revelation. He knew that it was horribly annoying to be disturbed at times like these. After all, inspiration seldom knocked twice.

Ai Hui sincerely thanked the head guard.

Everyone kept quiet as they looked on curiously. Seeing Ai Hui all ready to start anew kept them fixated. They might have missed his performance earlier but not this next attempt!

Ai Hui couldn’t be bothered about the onlookers. He took the sword and began to assume the same stance as before.

Duanmu Huanghun stared at Ai Hui with his eyes wide; he recognized the same stance from before. Was Ai Hui going to repeat that move? He focused hard, afraid he’d miss any details.

All he had seen before was an exceptionally brilliant burst of light that had obscured Ai Hui’s silhouette.

Right after that came the earth-splitting sensation.

This time, he had to see the technique that enabled a student with only two activated palaces to generate such explosive strength.

Everyone, not only Duanmu Huanghun, kept their eyes peeled and held their breaths.

Chapter 131: Elemental Energy of the Sword

Sword in hand, Ai Hui prepared to strike.

Twenty minutes passed, but Ai Hui remained in that same stance, not moving one bit.

Several students soon became impatient and prepared to leave.

“What is he trying to do? He’s obviously making it unnecessarily complicated!”

“Let’s go!”

The majority of the students left the training ground, leaving only a handful behind. Those who remained began to sit in clusters, chatting under the shade.

Ai Hui’s explosion had shocked the students greatly.

The shock, however, seemed to clear up the fog in the students’ minds, rousing them from their distracted state. After all, they were young people whose minds could easily be taken away from their worries.

Although the shadows of the incident still lingered in their minds, the students were already becoming more cheerful. Teacher Xu was slightly embarrassed that he, himself, was stuck in

a daze and unable to monitor the condition of his students. If not for Ai Hui's distraction, the rest of them would probably still be in shock.

He heaved a sigh of relief, placing his gaze on Ai Hui. Teacher Xu had many misgivings.

He was well aware of Ai Hui's situation. He knew that Ai Hui had a weak aptitude but was very hardworking and polite. Seeing the large pit in the ground left him bewildered.

Was that sword-wielding young man really the untalented Ai Hui that he knew?

To Teacher Xu, Ai Hui was now a figure shrouded in mystery. Many details from the incident at the Garden of Life spontaneously surfaced in his mind. Teacher Xu remembered how Ai Hui had demonstrated respectable strength.

Only two of his students were taken in by other teachers as disciples. One was Duanmu Huanghun, while the other was Ai Hui.

He glanced at Duanmu Huanghun, who was observing Ai Hui attentively. Teacher Xu smiled to himself, noting that Ai Hui would make a fine rival for Duanmu Huanghun.

Ai Hui did not pay attention to what was happening in the periphery. He had regained his composure after receiving the sword, channeling his attention toward the changes in his body

and sorting out the waves of ideas that had washed upon his mind.

His eyes were getting brighter.

Ai Hui made a sudden movement.

Teacher Xu saw Duanmu Huanghun shiver slightly.

Teacher Xu quickly reacted, turning to look at Ai Hui. Indeed, Ai Hui had stood up.

The head guard was more experienced than the other two when it came to such situations. Despite Ai Hui remaining utterly motionless, the head guard was not impatient. The moment Ai Hui made a move, the head guard immediately opened his eyes wide to avoid missing anything important.

These spontaneous and rare moments of epiphany were extremely important for practitioners. It was also immensely beneficial for spectators to observe such moments, especially since they did not occur that often.

Thus, the head guard was very patient.

Ai Hui's attention was focused on the space in front of him.

He formed a seal with his left hand before slowly raising the sword with his right.

Like an elderly lady, his moves were executed extremely slowly. A wisp of elemental energy flowed out from the mass of elemental energy within his natal residence, attracted by the movement of his sword. The grass sword in his hand was like a delicious piece of meat, enticing the elemental energy in his body to flow.

Ai Hui's sword strokes were deliberately unhurried. Following his movement, the elemental energy within his body felt like a wild horse tugging forcefully at its reins, slowly surging forward. It entered his right hand palace before moving into the grass sword. At that instant, when the elemental energy poured into the grass sword, the resonance between the sword embryo and the grass sword soared abruptly.

Right at that very moment, the sword embryo between his brows started to throb.

It appeared to throb rhythmically, like a pulse. The throbbing was not quick, but it felt like something was repeatedly hammering his mind.

Ai Hui restrained his mind, ignoring the throbbing of the sword embryo. His focus was on maintaining the speed at which he channeled the elemental energy as he continued with his patient sword strokes.

Dong, dong, dong!

Like a noiseless drum, the throbbing pulsed on intensely.

The elemental energy within the sword appeared to heed his call, flowing one round through the grass sword before returning to his body.

Ai Hui was ecstatic as he confirmed his theory. The accident earlier enabled him to have a deeper understanding of the sword embryo. He was able to sense the grass sword attracting the elemental energy within his body, and he then noticed the sword embryo attracting the elemental energy back from the grass sword.

The explosion had occurred because he had failed to control the speed at which the elemental energy flowed. The sudden influx of excessive elemental energy into the sword was responsible for the subsequent explosion. From within this mess, Ai Hui managed to identify the sword technique as the sword embryo's trigger.

This was something new.

The amount of elemental energy that Ai Hui had back when he first started practicing swordplay techniques was pathetic. Despite that, he had always practiced infusing the grass sword with elemental energy. However, it was only recently that he began to circulate the elemental energy within his body as he practiced swordplay.

Ai Hui knew he had struck the jackpot when the elemental energy slowly flowed back into his body!

The elemental energy that had returned was transformed!

The sharpness associated with the elemental energy in his body became even richer. Ai Hui did not know how to describe this particular flavor, but the first thing that came to mind was the flavor of a sword.

Ai Hui had previously been unable to refine the elemental energy that he obtained from the Suspending Golden Pagoda. In addition to its harsh nature, elemental energy from the pagoda was at a much higher level than the energy he possessed.

Due to its powerful attractive force, the huge mass of elemental energy within his natal residence made it difficult for Ai Hui to control his elemental energy.

Ai Hui was indescribably happy to discover that the elemental energy which had circulated back from the grass sword was much easier to control. The energy that returned from the sword had a different nature and was no longer affected by the attractive force of the elemental energy mass. Attraction would only occur between elemental energies of a similar nature.

The elemental energy that returned to his body embarked on one Circulatory Cycle Revolution on its own.

He noticed the sword embryo absorbing a portion of the elemental energy as it flowed past the space between his eyebrows. While surprised, Ai Hui was not thrown off by this as he continued to execute his dance with the sword.

About 20% of the elemental energy was absorbed by the sword embryo.

He heaved a huge sigh, relieved that the sword embryo was not consuming much more of his elemental energy.

Strands of elemental energy continued to flow from his natal residence into the grass sword before returning to his body to perform one revolution of the Circulatory Cycle. A portion of this new energy was absorbed by the sword embryo while the remainder was stored within his right and left hand palaces.

The two pathways ran parallel to each other without conflict.

After short a while, Ai Hui's left and right hand palaces started to swell up. Ai Hui knew that he was reaching his limits. He understood that training was about steady, incremental progress and that overtraining would lead to undesirable consequences.

The activation and expansion of each palace was, in essence, a gradual process.

Upon seeing this, he immediately prepared to stop. Although he had yet to figure out what exactly the sword embryo was, he now had a vague idea.

Anything that had to do with swords seemed to elicit some reaction from the sword embryo.

A sudden urge rose up within him. He had only been executing plain sword strokes, so what would happen if he were to perform a sword technique in its entirety?

The sword seemed to hear his thoughts as he began to perform a sword move exactly as described in one of the manuals.

This move was simple enough. It was the [Gale Bat Blade] that he was familiar with.

The [Gale Bat Blade]'s characteristic feature was its non-linear movement. Every sword stroke moved in a distinct arc, slicing through the air at an angle before bouncing off suddenly, like a stone being skipped across water.

Ai Hui had previously used this move to change his direction in midair.

Ai Hui had studied the [Gale Bat Blade] more than the other moves because being able to change direction in mid air was a very useful ability. The arc traces left behind by the grass sword looked like the sweeping wings of the gale bat.

The sword embryo became more and more agitated as Ai Hui danced around with the sword in hand, vibrating like the plucked strings of a zither.

The elemental energy stored within his hand palaces also began to stir.

Ai Hui's moves were increasing in speed.

Within his body, the elemental energy appeared to be boiling over as it ceaselessly bubbled over the edge.

Duanmu Huanghun was taken aback when he sensed a keen aura emanating from Ai Hui. It was as though Ai Hui had transformed into a legendary sword that was capable of emitting a sharp and piercing cold.

The Ai Hui standing in the training area was not the one that Duanmu Huanghun recognized.

Teacher Xu was startled by the sight as well. Logically speaking, Ai Hui's aura appeared to be in line with the characteristic nature of metal elemental energy. Yet, even with his profound knowledge, Teacher Xu had never encountered something like this before.

The gracefulness of Ai Hui's sword dance reminded Teacher Xu of the swordsmen. With the decline of swordplay, however, most of the so-called swordplay masters of today were really just a bunch of performers.

Afraid that Ai Hui was walking down the wrong path, he decided to discuss the matter with him later.

The head guard looked on in awe as he experienced the sharp, piercing sensation. Ai Hui's aura also possessed a potent aggressive

intent which stabbed at the head guard's mind with an indescribable edge.

He was fond of this imposing aura, noting that someone like this would definitely make an excellent vanguard.

Duanmu Huanghun was the only person in this class who had some importance. The guards were not asked to keep an eye out for any of the other students, meaning that their families did not have much influence. Perhaps he could consider roping Ai Hui in?

Completely oblivious to the thoughts and feelings of the others, Ai Hui felt himself losing control of the elemental energy that was boiling within his body. Sensing danger, he subconsciously truncated the sword move.

The sizzling elemental energy abruptly turned cold, like a large wave suddenly losing all of its might and directly collapsing onto the sand beneath it.

Ai Hui experienced an acute pain coming from both his hand palaces. Bright red blood oozed out from beneath the skin of his palms.

All traces of his performance had vanished completely.

Ai Hui returned to being the average young man that everyone knew, as if everything that happened was just an illusion.

Right before the blood dripped off the edge of his palm, the snow white bandage on his arm shot forward like a snake to intercept it.

The drop of blood disappeared upon contact with the bandage.

As if they were unsatisfied, the bandages on both his arms wound themselves up toward his palms. In an instant, not a single trace of blood remained.

The Blood Bandage then automatically returned to its original state.

Ai Hui looked at his hands, completely dumbfounded.

Chapter 132: The Premature Disappearance of Elemental Energy

“This is indeed a very unique and potent blood poison.”

The person speaking was Qiao Hua, the first teacher to think of Si Nan’s notebook.

There were thousands of teachers who were wood elementalists in the Induction Ground and they were divided into different sections. The sections varied greatly in terms of standards. Of the top 10 wood element teachers in the Induction ground, Qiao Hua was the youngest.

His achievements at such a young age led many to consider him as someone who could be well on track to match up to Dai Gang.

Qiao Hua had bright eyes and a confident demeanor. He gave off a vibe of being capable and experienced, but he was not pedantic like the average teacher. He did things decisively and never procrastinated.

Many problems that others could not solve were often solved perfectly by him.

Over time, he won the trust of everyone around him.

Qiao Hua had immediately sought out Si Nan’s notes when they

came to mind. He found many corresponding theories within these notes, then quickly started forming a group of recognized wood elementalists. The group's aim was to comb through Si Nan's notes, find all the relevant theories, and devise ways to counteract the poison.

The Induction Ground responded promptly, gathering the most outstanding wood element teachers to help him.

In addition, the Induction Ground had specially dispatched extra manpower to capture some poisoned animals. Their combined efforts helped Qiao Hua live up to his expectations, and he soon found what he needed.

"This particular blood poison is very fragile in its initial stage, making it the most vulnerable at that time. However, we have obviously already missed this opportune period. First, it takes about ten days to infect a plant. Then, it begins to spread at an impressive speed via plant pollen and spores. The climate is partly responsible for the massive outbreak this time, as the flowering season further increased the rate at which the virus spread."

Qiao Hua explained confidently to the elders of the Induction Ground. His speech was convincing and assuring.

"It is also capable of infecting the moisture within the soil, which is why the ground appears blood red when dug up. As of now, we have not found evidence of deeper penetration. If the groundwater deep underground becomes infected, then we're finished. Fortunately, the worst scenario has yet to happen."

Qiao Hua's voice reverberated throughout the conference room, enthralling everyone within.

"The most formidable aspect of this poison is its unique ability to mutate. After infecting a plant, the blood poison becomes much more toxic. Once the infected plant is ingested by herbivores, such as rabbits, the poison changes again, becoming several times more potent. If the infected rabbit is then eaten by a wolf, the toxicity of the blood poison once again multiplies. Every round of infection sees its toxicity multiplied even further, making the poison very frightening."

A commotion began to stir among the elders, their faces revealing feelings of surprise and fright. They had never heard of such a strange and terrifying blood poison before.

Teacher Qiao Hua starting speaking in a graver tone, "If only the terrors of this blood poison stopped here, but the truth of the matter is that we have found something even worse about it. Research on the injured student has revealed that elemental energy is even better than flesh in encouraging the poison's mutation. Elemental energy appears to be the blood poison's preferred nutrient. A small amount of elemental energy is enough to alter the nature of the poison. Because it devours elemental energy frantically, any elementalist who is infected will quickly lose all of his elemental energy to the poison. The greater the toxicity of the poison, the more efficiently it spreads throughout the body. After the body has been drained of elemental energy, the elementalist will ultimately become just a blood human."

The conference room went quiet for a moment before abruptly exploding with noise.

“Has this been proven? How can such a blood poison possibly exist?”

“Are you exaggerating?”

“This is impossible!”

Unable to accept this answer, the elders were extremely agitated.

Qiao Hua calmly watched the agitated elders without uttering a single word. The elders gradually quieted under Qiao Hua’s unperturbed gaze.

The conference room became silent again.

Qiao Hua slowly opened his mouth to speak, “The truth may be hard to accept, but it has indeed been experimentally verified. We brought a vial of the blood poison to a prison that houses death row inmates and came to this conclusion only after infecting three of them with it.”

“Did all three of them die?”

“None of them did,” Qiao Hua replied, shaking his head. “This type of blood poison isn’t fatal, so it won’t kill you. All it does is

frantically absorb and devour every last drop of elemental energy within your body as it grows stronger. The most despairing thing is that the process is irreversible. In other words, anyone who is poisoned will inevitably end up as a blood human, someone who is unable to develop or utilize elemental energy. It is my duty here to highlight that if it cannot be kept under control, this blood poison will be the downfall of the Avalon of Five Elements and the system of five residences and eight palaces, in a vein similar to the collapse of the cultivators' system. The only difference being that the Cultivation Era ended due to the disintegration of spiritual force."

A deathly silence washed over the frightened elders.

After a long pause, one of the elders anxiously muttered, "How can such a vile blood poison exist? Is this heaven's will?"

Several other elders revealed expressions of realization for they too had the same thoughts.

"This is not heaven's will!" Qiao Hua exclaimed firmly, his gaze so sharp that nobody dared to look at him directly. "If this is heaven's will, then heaven has also given us the key to destroying it in the form of Si Nan's notes. We have sorted out everything from his notes and, based on his theories, have found the ingredients required to eliminate the blood poison. We won't be able to treat and cure someone who has already been infected, but we can can eliminate the blood poison itself."

Everyone's spirits were uplifted. The elders raised their heads and looked at Qiao Hua.

Qiao Hua continued confidently, “We have already made the medicine for counteracting the blood poison. If we can find the tree that produces this blood poison, we’ll be able to kill it using this medicine. From there, the medicine will enter the blood poison’s system, working to destroy its fundamental structure from within. Drawing inspiration from the blood poison, we have formulated the medicine such that it spreads just like the blood poison. The difference is that the medicine’s best growth medium is the blood poison, so it should not theoretically cause any harm to us elementalists.”

Qiao Hua’s words rang out loud and clear as the elders gave him an enthusiastic round of applause.

Chapter 133: Danger Arrives

It was not until the sixth day after obtaining the sword elemental energy that he noticed the strange atmosphere in the camp.

The atmosphere in the camp had become tense, and the guards who were originally in charge of monitoring them had been frequently transferred. On the seventh day, Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi were also hastily mobilized and had yet to return.

Ai Hui meticulously counted the number of guards, concluding that their numbers were constantly declining. By the tenth day, the headcount had been reduced to a quarter of the initial number.

Fatty had always had an innate sensitivity toward danger. He also quickly picked up that something was amiss.

What should we do, Ai Hui?" Fatty asked, deeply worried. "I have a feeling that something bad is going to happen."

Just as Ai Hui was about to console him, a shrill scream from one corner of the manor rang through the air.

The two of them looked at each other.

All of the students immediately rushed out of their rooms. The guards, also alarmed by the scream, dashed over and questioned, "What's going on?"

At that very moment, Ai Hui's keen eyes spotted the figure of a dark-red wild beast atop the perimeter wall. His expression turned to one of shock as he exclaimed, "On the wall! Blood fiend!"

Ai Hui could see clearly that it was a blood rabbit. Its appearance, however, was a far cry from the one which they had first encountered.

The blood rabbit was almost as large as a wolf, with ears that were short and pointy unlike a typical rabbit. Its deep maroon-colored fur was as thick and hard as palm fiber. Lined with bulging veins and solid muscle, its hind legs were stronger than its front legs, though they were also robust. A sharp-looking head and even sharper teeth further complemented its menacing look.

Beyond all of that, however, the most terrifying part of the rabbit were its eyes.

Those demonic eyes stared at them like a predator.

The blood rabbit jumped off the wall with its powerful hind legs, becoming a red shadow dashing through the sky.

One of the guards who was standing near the blood rabbit failed to react in time and his throat was ripped out by the beast. A fountain of fresh red blood spurt out of his neck, spraying onto the blood rabbit's body. Looking satisfied, the rabbit shook its entire body and absorbed the fresh blood into its fur.

An eerie crimson luster coated its dark red fur.

Everyone was deeply frightened, and a few of the more timid girls started screaming. When had they ever seen such a gruesome and bloody scene? They were just typical students who were living a comfortable and peaceful life.

The guards charged forward, cursing under their breaths.

Ai Hui suddenly shouted loudly, “Fellow students, please move toward Duanmu Huanghun! Quickly!”

Duanmu Huanghun’s face was as pale as a sheet. He too had never experienced something so gruesome. Luckily, he had greater mental fortitude than the average student and was still able to maintain his composure.

Hearing Ai Hui’s announcement surprised him a bit, but he promptly responded, “All students, move toward me!”

The frightened students were momentarily roused from their petrified states as they hurriedly rushed toward Duanmu Huanghun. Duanmu Huanghun had gained recognition for his strength during the escape from the Garden of Life. Since Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi were not around, Duanmu Huanghun was the strongest among them.

Without hesitation, Duanmu Huanghun used his [Viridescent Flower]. Branches shot out from beneath his feet, spreading all

around them.

He knew just how sharp Ai Hui was.

When they were hiding in the mound, Ai Hui was somehow aware of what was going on outside. Duanmu Huanghun felt a bit freaked out by how keen Ai Hui's senses were. Knowing that Ai Hui was not someone who enjoyed taking the initiative to speak, Duanmu Huanghun deduced that the current situation must be highly dangerous.

Ai Hui was very familiar with the attack pattern of wild beasts. Seeing the blood rabbit swagger and taunt the guards into charging forward made Ai Hui suspect that there were others lying in ambush.

Wild beasts were not stupid.

Ai Hui saw a red flash streak across his field of vision.

He slashed his grass sword out without thinking.

Over the past several days, Ai Hui had incorporated many sword techniques into his training sessions. During these sessions, Ai Hui realized that his sword techniques were getting more and more potent as he practiced his execution to perfection. The sword embryo's response was also getting stronger and his training of elemental energy was more efficient.

After so many days of practice, Ai Hui's elemental energy had advanced quite a bit, becoming much deeper. In the past, each of his hand palaces was only the size of a green bean. They had since grown to the size of a broad bean. Even Ai Hui was surprised at his speedy improvement.

Besides having an improvement, Ai Hui had also become more familiar with sword techniques.

Ai Hui first started practicing sword techniques back when he was still in the Wilderness. After developing his first shred of elemental energy, his focus shifted toward further training.

He had recently spent copious amounts of time and effort to sculpt his elemental energy using sword techniques. As a result, his familiarity with the sword increased tremendously.

His vast improvement could be seen in this stroke that was as fast as lightning yet completely silent.

Ding!

The sound of metal striking stone reverberated through the air.

Ai Hui felt a tremendous force against the sword's blade. Rather than resisting the impact, he borrowed its strength and took several steps back.

He was not particularly jolted by this since raw strength had

always been the wild beasts' strong point. Ai Hui's [Copper Skin] might make him stand out among the students, but even the most common wild beasts in the Wilderness were stronger than him.

Of course, victory was not determined by brute strength alone.

Humans, who were not as strong as wild beasts, had always been the winning species.

Ai Hui bent his legs, lowering his body slightly like a coiled spring. His gaze was stone cold and his face expressionless while the tip of his sword circled in a small arc.

His eyes were locked onto the blood fiend that was a short distance away.

It was a blood snake, more specifically a blood krait. Blood-red spots, reminiscent of red flowers, covered the snake's silver body. Its eyes looked like blood-colored glass, with a sparkle that made it appear much lighter than the blood rabbit's eyes.

According to what Ai Hui had surmised from the incident in the Garden of Life, the darker the color of the blood fiends' fur and eyes, the more potent the blood poison. However, carnivorous wild beasts were much more dangerous than herbivorous ones.

Ai Hui scanned the snake's body, noting that his attack had only left a single white spot on the snake's otherwise unblemished body.

His heart quivered with anxiety as he realized that the blood snake's skin was almost as tough as some of the weaker species of dire beasts. A short while ago, these blood fiends were still just normal wild beasts. The speed at which they grew stronger was truly frightening.

Given more time...

Ai Hui's pupils contracted as his killing intent surfaced.

His gaze was fixed squarely on the blood snake in front of him. Nearby, the intense battle between the guards and the blood rabbit seemed to fade out of existence as Ai Hui focused all of his attention on the impending battle against the snake.

As if it had sensed Ai Hui's killing intent, the blood snake suddenly raised the upper half of its body. Its red, glassy eyes locked onto Ai Hui, completely devoid of emotion.

And so, the confrontation began.

Duanmu Huanghun was flabbergasted to see Ai Hui confronting the blood snake.

His impression of Ai Hui had already changed drastically from when they were in the Garden of Life. Ai Hui's acute sixth sense, coupled with his experience and decisiveness, were what made Duanmu Huanghun feel taken aback.

As for his fighting abilities, Duanmu Huanghun felt that they were not particularly impressive.

In that moment however, Duanmu Huanghun felt his pupils contract in response to Ai Hui's killing intent.

Duanmu Huanghun, himself, possessed exceptional strength. Thus, he had a greater understanding of things like auras and intents when compared to the average student. These were not illusory ideas but actual phenomena.

Experts who possessed advanced knowledge in combat were often able to pinpoint their opponents' strengths and weaknesses. Because they had the sufficient abilities and methods to alter the circumstances in their favor, these experts remained composed and acted as the situation required without a moment's hesitation. Accordingly, their demeanor on the battlefield naturally allowed them to exude an intent or aura that vastly differed from the majority.

Duanmu Huanghun never expected Ai Hui to have such an imposing presence.

This guy was pretty good at swordplay...

He thought back to Ai Hui's first strike against the snake while his eyes remained focused on the current situation. Feeling annoyed, he wondered if Ai Hui had been hiding his true abilities all along. The other students were also gawking at Ai Hui, having

the same thoughts as Duanmu Huanghun. They had been under the impression that Ai Hui reminded them to stick to Duanmu Huanghun so that they could all use him as a protective screen.

Little did they know that Ai Hui had been planning to engage the blood snake.

Fatty was extremely anxious.

Ai Hui maintained his composure and remained completely unperturbed. He suddenly lowered his sword, prompting the blood snake to spring at him.

A red blur streaked toward Ai Hui at an alarming speed!

Ai Hui's eyes lit up at the sight of the snake advancing, satisfied that his bait had worked. He was experienced in dealing with wild beasts and knew that they were especially susceptible to feints.

The red blur might be fast, but Ai Hui was well prepared. Ai Hui swiftly accelerated the grass sword forward in a thrusting motion.

The grass sword in his hand was a military-grade weapon that belonged to one of the guards. Grass swords used in the military were of excellent quality and were way better than the sawtooth grass sword that he had bought.

Its blade was constructed with steel wood and heavy reeds, making it extremely hard and resistant to damage. These swords,

however, were very heavy and not suitable for use by students as a consequence. Its weight was just right for Ai Hui, who was not just any other student.

Infusing elemental energy into the sword made its edges glow with a cold, pale light that possessed an oddly penetrating feel to it.

The red and white flashes collided.

Ding!

A ear-splitting sound even sharper than the one before pierced through the air.

The blood snake retreated at an even faster speed. It dug into the ground, leaving a small hole behind.

Ai Hui's arm was so sore that he was almost unable to lift his sword. The blood snake's second strike was much stronger than the first. Even Ai Hui, who had developed the [Copper Skin], could not handle the attack.

A red flash flew out of the small hole, once again charging toward Ai Hui.

The blood snake was visibly injured this time, its forehead sporting a deep gash. Ai Hui had used up practically all of the sword elemental energy stored within his hand palaces to execute his previous attack.

Charging through the air at an impossible speed, the blood snake bared its gleaming fangs.

Duanmu Huanghun noticed that Ai Hui's right arm had weakened and that he was probably no longer able to fight. He had not expected Ai Hui to have such a confrontational fighting style, trading intense blows with the opponent without first testing the waters.

Surprised by the turn of events, Duanmu Huanghun was unable to provide support!

Damn it!

Was this guy trying to die? Had he not thought of his next move? Was he crazy?

Duanmu Huanghun was stunned when he caught sight of Ai Hui's grass sword.

Chapter 134: Sword Ray!

Ai Hui did something Duanmu Huanghun absolutely did not expect. He passed the sword over to his left hand.

Left hand!

Duanmu Huanghun's eyes opened wide, as if he had seen a ghost.

Ai Hui's left hand held onto the sword skillfully, not at all unfamiliar with it. Strike!

Elemental energy poured into the sword's body, a faint shimmer soon covering the sword. With a humming vibration, the grass sword transformed into a cold ray of light.

The light reflected on Ai Hui's face, highlighting his indifferent expression and chilling eyes. It was as if he had become a completely different person who emitted a blinding glow of stern danger. What a great display of ability!

False move, luring move, killing move!

Whether it was the slight heaviness from before or the sword's relentless first blow, they were building up to the sword that Ai Hui now gripped with his left hand.

His muscles were engaged to their limits, and the bandage on his

left hand had unbound at an unknown point in time. The white clouds, driven downwards by the rapid streams of airflow, funneled from the sky as an impressive finale for this austere sword ray.

Ai Hui held nothing back, placing his faith in the heavens.

The devilishly red light and the chilly sword ray intertwined in the sky once more.

With exact precision, Ai Hui thrust his sword into the wound on the blood snake's forehead.

There was no sharp, piercing ring; instead the muted sound of a sharp blade slashing across leather was heard.

The bone-chilling sword ray slashed through the center of the blood snake's body, splitting it into two. The fresh blood and minced meat were like red, drizzling rain, yet before it fully dispersed, they were absorbed by the blood bandage in a flash.

Clap.

The remaining chunks of the snake's body flew in a straight trajectory towards the students before plopping onto the ground not far from them.

The students remained dumbstruck by this swift yet hair-raising display and had yet to regain their senses.

Duanmu Huanghun had received an even greater shock. The so-called sword masters he had seen in the past were all appearance and no substance. The sword moves they demonstrated had focused only on aesthetics.

But Ai Hui's strike had been extremely sharp.

Could it be that this fellow really was a dark horse? No, Duanmu Huanghun inwardly rejected this thought; he had better insight than most, and it was an unalterable fact that Ai Hui only had two opened palaces. Swordplay wasn't an absolute art. While the moves were skillful, they weren't uncommon.

Everything was ordinary, so why was the result so sharp and stunning?

After some more thinking, Duanmu Huanghun's shock dissipated with his increased understanding, but the surprise nevertheless remained.

First was the imposing manner. From beginning to end, Ai Hui remained calm, showing no signs of weakening; he held clear confidence regarding the battle from the start. This led to his ability to control the flow of the battle. Also, his left hand's swordplay had been unexpected. Even if he himself had been the opponent, he would have been struck by Ai Hui.

Simply put, Ai Hui utilized everything he had on-hand to produce such a startling result.

This fellow… was made for battling!

Duanmu Huanghun narrowed his eyes, a competitive spirit rising from within his chest.

The two of them were rivals to begin with. Ai Hui looked unfavorably upon Duanmu Huanghun and vise versa. This bastard actually turned out to be a battling genius, but so what? When it came to absolute base levels, these battle skills and determination were negligible.

Duanmu Huanghun's thoughts were lofty; in this aspect, he had sufficient confidence. But Ai Hui's splendid performance made him see what he lacked. He had greater elemental energy and his [Viridescent Flower] was not something swordplays could compete with, but in terms of battle experience, he was far behind Ai Hui.

He had already decided that after this journey, he would train in real combat.

To be defeated by this bastard was absolutely unacceptable!

Fatty squatted down to study the corpse.

"Discover anything?" Ai Hui asked from behind.

Without turning around, Fatty responded, "I'll have to inspect it

a bit more. It's something new after all; if we can find useful information, we'll be rich!"

As he spoke, he wrapped up the two pieces of the snake's body.

Ai Hui was more than familiar with Fatty's money-grubbing personality. He even extracted two grams of oil from mosquitos before, so why would he let this blood snake go? Ai Hui ignored Fatty and did a sweep over everyone else. Seeing that they were all safe and sound, he diverted his gaze towards the guards.

The other students looked at Ai Hui with more respect. To be able to eliminate a blood snake so cleanly gave Ai Hui's image a large boost.

A cruel, harsh environment was best at toughening people up. The fact that no one had screamed this time was a sign of improvement as well.

But in Duanmu Huanghun's eyes, there was no trace of reverence, only strong battlelust.

Despite that, Ai Hui's gaze swept across his face as if looking past air, causing Duanmu Huanghun's face to darken.

Damn it!

Looked down by this fellow again!

Ai Hui was not in the mood to consider Bangwan's feelings. During his observations, he mulled over an issue—the manor was outside of Central Pine City, far away from the Garden of Life, but a blood fiend had actually appeared here.

His face turned ugly just thinking about it.

Before long, under the guards' attacks, the blood rabbit also perished. This showed Ai Hui that the guards were physically and mentally weak. Despite their advantage in numbers and greater strength, they were all bitten and infected by the blood poison, and some were timid. Only after some time passed did they finally manage to end the battle.

Ai Hui couldn't help but shake his head. The guards of the Induction Ground were too used to working in peaceful environments and were lacking in standards.

The guards cheered while the students heaved sighs of relief.

Ai Hui shouted suddenly, "Let's get out of here!"

His voice caught the students' attention, surprising them. They did not expect Ai Hui to say something like this. Only Duanmu Huanghun had a pensive look on his face. With his understanding of Ai Hui, this bastard must have found something.

A middle-aged guard stood and retorted gloomily, "Imp, don't

stir up trouble!”

Ai Hui remained unmoved. “Blood fiends have appeared here, so the blood disaster must have already spread to this region. It’s no longer safe here. It’s best that we return to the city.”

The middle-aged guard laughed mockingly. “Two blood fiends got you so scared. Relax, they got us because we were unprepared. As long as we prepare ourselves, no number of blood fiends can threaten our safety.”

“You can’t guarantee that,” Ai Hui said coldly, ignoring the middle-aged guard’s ashen face. “Once the blood fiend bites, you get poisoned, and the moment one appears, more will flood in in no time.”

“Shut your trap! Stop scaring people! Where are the rest? There are only two!” the middle-aged guard said in a fury. If not for the fear instilled in him from Ai Hui’s earlier performance when slaying the snake and the risk of causing a backlash, he would have taken Ai Hui down.

“Incubation period,” Ai Hui said, continuing icily, “and the injured students flared up after a few days. When the blood poison really erupts, it will be too late for us to leave!”

The students immediately became restless, their expressions changing greatly. They clearly remembered the day-to-day changes that had occurred in the injured students.

Duanmu Huanghun's expression similarly shifted. He was acutely clever, understanding easily the truth in Ai Hui's words.

It did not occur to him immediately since he was merely a student who was used to listening to the teachers' judgments.

Ai Hui, however, had to judge and decide for himself in all matters, both big and small. In the Wilderness, the elementalists did not care about the well-being of the laborers. If they wanted to survive, there was not a single moment in which they could lower their guards.

By this point, the middle-aged man had become frantic from Ai Hui's words.

He was helpless amidst the students' uproar. Plus, that imp's word had even swayed him a little—and not just him, but the other guards were uneasy now as well.

The head guard, of all people, had to be away at this moment, so everyone was waiting on him to make a decision.

"You guys know who I am. If something were to happen to me…." Duanmu Huanghun said suddenly, gazing at the guards as if harboring evil intentions. While he did not state it aloud, even a fool could hear the threat in his voice.

The guards' faces changed.

Duanmu Huanghun's identity had been stressed to them over and over again. If something happened to the young master of the Duanmu household while under their care, his family would not let them off. Their own families could be implicated as well.

"Old Wang, let's go. We'd better enter the city!"

"Yeah, if this blood poison breaks out, who would come save us in this desolate place?"

"It's no big deal. We're in charge of supervising them, and no one said anything about not entering the city. We can just supervise them there!"

These words made Old Wang's eyes light up. What he said made sense—supervising them in the city was no different!

"Go! Let's enter the city!"

Many people had been sent away these past few days, so all of the transport wagons had flown away, leaving not one remaining.

This meant that they had to return to Central Pine City by foot. Fortunately, the manor was only about forty kilometers away from the city.

This short distance meant nothing to Ai Hui. He had to travel even further to reach the Suspending Golden Pagoda.

Ai Hui wasn't careless and used every second available to recover his elemental energy. Much of it had been consumed while dealing with the blood snake. If anything were to happen on the way back, he would have no way of fighting back, and though there were the guards and Duanmu Huanghun with him, Ai Hui wasn't willing to leave his life in the hands of others.

As he walked, he gesticulated with the grass sword, leading the embryo's pulses to generate sword elemental energy.

The surrounding people gave Ai Hui weird looks.

Was this fellow convulsing?

Old Wang looked on diffidently. Luckily, he did not take action earlier; this fellow was so strange. Convulsing while walking... If he muttered under his breath as well, he would resemble a medium doing a dance to lure the spirits.

Ai Hui did not care about what they thought. Embarrassment meant nothing as long as he could regain his elemental energy quickly.

Everyone felt fragile inside; slightly afraid, they were on the verge of breaking into a run.

Such a speed wasn't worth mentioning to Ai Hui who came from a laborious background. Operating the sword while walking,

however, was a foreign experience.

At first, he couldn’t seem to quite catch the rhythm, and his moves were consequently clumsy. But as he gradually grasped the technique, he soon found something different.

Chapter 135: Insects

Because he was utilizing the sword while sprinting, Ai Hui had to maintain balance which meant he was unable to lean forward. His upper body remained still while his lower back was like an extremely elastic and tough spring. The sword in his hand had to adjust and follow the movement of his body's rhythm and tempo.

This matter only concerned the center of gravity; what was more difficult was the issue of breathing.

Controlling his respiration was much more difficult when sprinting as opposed to standing still. As an old hand at this, Ai Hui knew very well that if the operation of elemental energy was the essence of an elemental energy attack, then breathing was the foundation of any attack.

This included the most basic rapier. Strict breathing control was a requirement, and if the breaths did not synchronize with the swordplay, then not only would the power be lacking but injuries would also ensue.

Of course, for Ai Hui, there was a more serious consequence, which was that he would be unable to generate sword elemental energy.

As Ai Hui gradually grasped the technique, he began to realize its benefits.

The sword embryo's pulse was stronger than before.

The most immediate benefit was the increased rate of sword elemental energy production.

The newly generated sword elemental energy flowed from the grass sword in his hands then back into his body to initiate the Circulatory Cycle Revolution. Twenty percent of the energy was absorbed by the sword embryo, and whatever remained re-entered Ai Hui's hand palaces after one circulation cycle.

Ai Hui's hand palaces, which had started off empty, charged quickly and gradually became full.

But Ai Hui did not stop there. He continued circulating until his hand palaces began to swell and ache. For every palace that he opened up, he became stronger with each training, like a small pond expanding into a lake.

In the process, developing his constitution played a key role.

People with good constitutions, like Bangwan, were like ponds surrounded by marshes—expanding into lakes was fairly straightforward.

On the other hand, people with weak constitutions, like Ai Hui, were like ponds in the middle of the desert. It was much more challenging for them to expand into lakes.

But things were never fair when it came to training; Ai Hui did

not mind this at all. People with the time to complain were better off training instead.

Ai Hui no longer intended to resist the sword embryo state since he was now able to control his awareness within, meaning his psyche and strength had improved. Previously, he had been like a toddler waving a heavy axe around, but now that the toddler had grown up, he could wield the hefty weapon.

Ai Hui ended his training and casually plucked a grass straw from the roadside. Its stem was faintly red, causing Ai Hui's expression to darken.

Placing it before his nose, Ai Hui smelled a familiar, faint, and delicate fragrance—the temptation of the devil.

Throwing it aside, Ai Hui's expression returned to normal, but there was now a dimness within his heart. He could see in the distance the faint outline of Central Pine City. The quiet and peaceful city remained completely unaware of the imminent danger.

The noisy training halls bustling with activities and the flourishing night lights that filled the streets... Would they still be there in the future? The tranquil mornings he had experienced—waking up to warm sunlight against the cool air and the sleepy, droopy eyes of those fellows as he smelled the sweet pastries' rising steam—would he still wake up to these?

Ai Hui was in low spirits. He sighed inwardly, as if all that was

beautiful was slowly fading away.

He shook his head, feeling that he was being a bit unreasonable. Only a few good days had passed, and he was already corroded by the easy comfort.

To be born in suffering and hardship and to die in peace and happiness—made sense.

Ai Hui regained his vigor. No matter how terrible, it wouldn't be worse than the Wilderness, right?

He rid himself of distracting thoughts and thought back to the Blood Bandage that had snatched up the blood snake's meat. He did not inspect it at the time, the intense situation not allowing him to. He quickly turned his attention to it.

It was white as snow, without any visible marks.

Ai Hui was stunned. He rummaged through the Blood Bandage but still there was nothing.

Where did it go?

He thought about the time when blood had seeped out of his palms, only to be absorbed by the bandage.

Could it be that the bandage was devouring blood?

He recalled his mistress' words. The Blood Bandage was an artifact of the blood sects back in the Cultivation Era. Blood sects... just from their names, it was obvious that they were related in some way to blood, so when the bandage had absorbed his blood, Ai Hui had not been too surprised.

But the blood snake's meat was poisonous. Would there be an issue now that the Blood Bandage had absorbed it?

Ai Hui started laughing involuntarily. He had actually thought of the bandage as a living object. What issue? Diarrhea?

Imagining the bandage having diarrhea... He simply couldn't picture it...

He decided to leave this tough problem to Lou Lan and let him interpret it.

His upturned lips disappeared in a flash and the next moment, with a tremble of his ears and a cold light flashing across his pupils, he shouted, "Something's wrong!"

Everyone tensed up.

Duanmu Huanghun had been paying attention to Ai Hui all this time. Without mentioning anything else, the smallest sign of trouble, no matter how small, never went undetected by this bastard. Duanmu Huanghun had no idea how he did it, but Ai Hui

had clearly displayed this ability in their previous escape.

With his clear vision, Duanmu Huanghun did notice the faint red color of the grass blade Ai Hui had picked up, causing his expression to change slightly as well.

He rejoiced inwardly, thankful that they had already left the manor.

Although Ai Hui was a bit of a scoundrel, he had a nose sharper than a dog's.

Upon hearing Ai Hui's warning, he became highly focused and inhaled deeply. "Those under two palaces, stay close to me. Those above, get ready to attack, but be careful not to stray too far from my protection zone."

The teachers were not around anymore. As the strongest within the group, Duanmu Huanghun was obligated to take up the duty.

Ai Hui looked over at Duanmu Huanghun with surprise. He did not expect this ingrate to assume responsibility.

The students had complete faith in Duanmu Huanghun and upon hearing his command, they immediately got into their respective positions. The process was chaotic and the formation messy, but they nevertheless accomplished the task.

Duanmu Huanghun slowly found himself getting accustomed to

the role. Since young, he had been called Brother Huanghun because of his experience in leading a fight team.

“Be aware of the distance, don’t go too far.”

“Support each other.”

“Don’t stop, we’re not far away from Central Pine City.”

……

He was a perfectionist with a haughty personality. Once he began something, he would do it to the best of his abilities.

Ai Hui observed as the ingrate instructed the students who were giving their best efforts to cooperate. They then stood still and calm, waiting quietly for the nearby blood fiends. Fatty carefully positioned himself beside Ai Hui like a fat cat facing off against a large enemy.

Rustling noises, amplified in Ai Hui’s ears, sounded from the underbrush. He inhaled sharply before shouting loudly, “They’re here!”

Before he finished speaking, the grass sword in his hand unexpectedly thrust forward.

The sword ray from Ai Hui’s grass sword struck a fist-sized

spider.

The spider's back was covered densely in dark-red streaks and its eyes were bloodshot. The sight made everyone shiver.

Clank!

A clanging, metallic sound pierced the air as the spider's body froze rigidly before diving into the underbrush with an even faster speed.

Ai Hui's expression changed slightly. His sword stroke did not break the spider's carapace!

He had a rather sound understanding of spiders. He had seen all sorts in the Wilderness. While the spiders were highly toxic, their most fearful trait was their ability to ambush noiselessly with fatal attacks. But they were never known to have a solid defense.

That blood spider had evidently undergone some sort of mutation. To withstand his strike without breaking, its carapace must have been extremely resilient.

An assortment of insects with red patches on their bodies began to surface from the underbrush.

Duanmu Huanghun's [Viridescent Flower] was fully utilized. The green vines wrapping around the branches moved ceaselessly, creating a blurry, green shadow. The insects crashed into them, as

dense as raindrops.

The soft, wound-up vines and branches diminished, but they effectively trapped the insects' attacks.

Awoken from their stupor, the other students hurriedly launched their own attacks.

The next moment, an array of colored lights flashed as dense as droplets—blaze, ice, quicksand, and vines.

Ai Hui couldn't stop from shaking his head. Their moves seemed flashy, but they were of limited use when targeting these blood insects which were once weak and frail but now extremely difficult to deal with.

The spider previously struck by Ai Hui reappeared and lunged at him, spitting out a red light midair.

Ai Hui, who was getting ready to swing his sword at the spider, was caught off-guard by its move. He knew the situation was amiss, and his pupils constricted. His power was almost used up!

Suddenly, a strong force tugged his body away from the red light, causing it to miss him by a tight margin.

It was Fatty, who had been alert all along. Upon noticing that something was wrong, he had hurriedly pulled Ai Hui aside.

A loud cry sounded from behind Ai Hui—a guard had been hit by the red light. It transformed into a crimson spiderweb upon touching his body, trapping him tightly within.

Before Ai Hui had time to assist, the guard was quickly drowned in a wave of insects crowding around him. In the blink of an eye, only a pile of white bones was left, not even a bit of flesh to be seen.

Ai Hui's hair stood on end. He noticed that the red patches on the insects had become brighter and larger.

Flesh made the blood fiends stronger?

In the Garden of Life, Ai Hui had already noted the blood fiends' frenetic attacks but failed to understand the reason behind it. Now he finally knew why. Like how elementalists hunted dire beasts, the blood fiends, too, saw them as delicious food that could make them stronger.

"Don't get entangled! Leave quickly!" Ai Hui bellowed while advancing with all his might. Fatty began to move as well, following closely behind.

Duanmu Huanghun reacted as well. "Follow up! Charge!"

The guards were scared out of their wits. With four men down, they had incurred the most damage. While Duanmu Huanghun

and the others were weaker, they had experience from the Garden of Life and knew the characteristics of the blood fiends. And most importantly, they trusted Ai Hui's judgments completely.

The guards, on the other hand, were skeptical of Ai Hui's warning and hence reacted half a beat slower. This, coupled with their lack of experience in dealing with blood fiends, had devastated them.

Like a swarm of bees, everyone charged towards Central Pine City.

Chapter 136: Back to the City

Despite having been affected by the blood poison and undergoing shocking changes, insects were, after all, still insects. While they could be as fast as lightning, they were unable to sustain that speed for long distances. Ai Hui and his fellow students ran with all their might and gradually shook off the swarm.

Forty kilometers was not a long distance. Under the looming threat of death, everyone exerted all their strength and even the weakest girl moved as quick as lightning.

When the city gates of Central Pine City came into view, almost all of the students fell to the floor and cried tears of joy.

Looking at the heavily guarded city gates, Ai Hui knew that something serious had happened, otherwise the entrance would not be so heavily guarded. It was as if they were awaiting the arrival of an enemy. He felt worried. Was Lou Lan all right? Master, Mistress, and Senior Mingxiu should be fine too, right?

The day he returned, he flew over Central Pine City. When he saw how quiet it was, he felt an immense sense of peace, despite having just escaped death. Now, he became worried when he saw such tight security.

He had more people to worry about now.

Ai Hui laughed mockingly at himself. Before, he had been alone in the world, with nothing to tie him down. Even if he'd died, he

wouldn’t worry about whether or not he’d be buried. He could have still taken pleasure from being decomposed by artillery shells.

Once Fatty saw that it was safe, he started to chew on malt candy without a care in the world. Hearing the familiar crunching sound, Ai Hui shook his head helplessly. Fatty sure did not waste any time.

Fatty had saved him once again. It was hard to calculate such a debt.

Thank goodness they had the easily identifiable Duanmu Huanghun. The guards recognized him with a single glance and quickly allowed the students to pass through.

Back in the familiar Central Pine City, everyone relaxed immediately. After escaping death twice, they didn’t need to put on a brave front anymore. For many of them, their tears started to flow and they gathered together to sob quietly. Only with this were they able to release their fear. Only with this were they able to calm their thoughts of their homes, their parents, and the family members that they had missed.

Ai Hui looked at the other students in silence. He gave a soft sigh; they were just a bunch of kids.

He had already forgotten that he was not that old either.

Fatty stopped crunching on his malt candy. He was slightly dazed

because of everyone's sobbing.

There were those with a tougher temperament as well. A lanky male student walked up to Ai Hui and said sincerely, "Ai Hui, thank goodness for you. If not for you, all of us would not have been able to make it back home. My name is Jiang Wei. Do let me know if you need any help in future, don't feel shy to ask me!"

His name had the demeanor of a general in the olden times. He was a student from Fatty's class and was quite capable. Like Ai Hui, he was a metal elementalist and his speciality was archery. Ai Hui had seen him perform before and he was extremely good.

Ai Hui replied without an ounce of modesty, "Do not worry. I definitely would not be modest about asking you for help."

Jiang Wei laughed heartily. He was appreciative, feeling that Ai Hui was without airs and not at all a hypocrite.

Suddenly, many people came up to thank Ai Hui. Thanks to Ai Hui's warning, they were able to narrowly escape death twice. Without Ai Hui, it was likely that none of them would have made it back alive.

With Jiang Wei alone, Ai Hui's behavior was still as per normal, but with so many people conveying their thanks, he became flustered. This was his first time experiencing something like this.

At the side, Duanmu Huanghun jealously said, "If all of you are so

thankful, why don't you show it by giving him money."

Ai Hui shot a flabbergasted glance at that ingrate; he had managed to guess Ai Hui's thoughts, as in that moment, he had thought the same thing.

"How could you say that, Student Duanmu!" a girl said angrily. She stood up and continued, "Can Student Ai Hui be such a person?"

Ai Hui nearly said, "Yes, yes I am."

"Student Duanmu, how could you misunderstand Student Ai Hui like this?" Another girl also stood up to express the injustice.

Duanmu Huanghun felt extremely wronged and pathetic. He wanted to say, "Isn't that the case? Ask him if you do not believe it," but after seeing everyone's furious expressions, he could only say that he was joking. Only then, everyone's anger appeased.

Of course, everyone should also be thankful to Duanmu Huanghun. His [Viridescent Flower] had saved many of their lives.

The words that were at the tip of Ai Hui's tongue were forcibly pushed back. But then, on second thought, this wasn't right. Clearly that ingrate knew that giving money was the most practical. The dispute due to the two promises from before was clearly meant to deceive him.

Ingrate!

The look Ai Hui gave Duanmu Huanghun became increasingly unfriendly. Indeed, his character was disdainful!

After living in peace for so long, they needed more time to react to dangers; unfortunately, in times of crisis, time was the thing they usually lacked the most.

Ai Hui shook his head. He was merely a nobody. All of these big events were of no concern to him. What was of concern to him was getting his hands on a big bowl of noodles.

He brought Fatty back to the training hall and they had yet to enter the door when Ai Hui shouted at the top of his lungs, “Lou Lan! I am back!”

Lou Lan, who was sweeping the training hall, stopped and tilted his head to look at Ai Hui. Surprised, he said, “Welcome back, Ai Hui!”

“This is Qian Dai, also known as Fatty, my best buddy.” Ai Hui pulled Fatty over to do the introductions, after which he faced Fatty and said proudly, “This is Lou Lan, my sand puppet!”

With a bang, Lou Lan transformed into two words, “Welcome Fatty!”

“Wow, this is interesting!” Fatty smiled until the crinkles on his

face trembled and he eagerly ran over and said, “Have some sweets, Lou Lan. Can you change again?”

Lou Lan took the malt candy and threw it into his mouth. Crunch, crunch. That image was an exact replica of Fatty. “This consists of malt. Fatty, what should Lou Lan transform into?”

What should he transform into? Fatty frowned and pondered.

“Transform into a bandage having diarrhea.” Ai Hui suddenly interrupted. He threw out the hardest request he could think of while they had been on the road.

“Bandage having diarrhea……”

Lou Lan and Fatty looked dazed.

After accomplishing his evil scheme, Ai Hui announced that he was going to the embroidery workshop and left with a breeze.

At the workshop, he saw that Senior Mingxiu and Mistress were safe and sound. To his surprise, Master was also actually there. Master looked like he had aged a lot and Mistress also looked more frail. Ai Hui was touched; he knew that they had been worried about him.

Upon seeing him, everyone became agitated, especially Master, who looked as happy as a child.

They only managed to calm down from the joy of reuniting after a long moment.

Ai Hui recounted in detail what he had experienced.

Wang Shouchuan sighed and said, “It’s hard to believe that there’s such a peculiar blood poison in this world. Who knows which wood elementalist came up with it. It’s going to be a complete mess this time, you should not run about and just stay in the city instead. After all, Central Pine Academy is here. With the teachers’ strength, I would be more at ease.”

Senior Mingxiu gave an unhurried explanation and Ai Hui learned what had happened recently.

A few days ago, someone came down with a weird illness. After getting Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi to examine, they diagnosed the person with a blood poison infection, and against their expectations, over the next few days, more cases of blood poisoning appeared. They only realized afterwards that it was being caused by a group of blood rats which had made its way into the city through an abandoned sewer.

Thankfully, the blood rats had not fully mutated and were not very strong, so they were easily destroyed, but many people had already died by that point.

The crisis that Central Pine City had faced led to panic occurring at the slightest movement. Emergency measures were imposed on

the city and the whole place was probed for possible dangers.

Those who were infected were sent to an isolation bay for observation.

Ai Hui could not help but become speechless after hearing the news. Previously, he had already thought that if there was a blood poisoning epidemic, the situation would become very dire. He could not believe that what he had worried about the most had already happened, and not in a city that was near the Garden of Life, but in Central Pine City instead.

If Central Pine City was in such a state, then he reckoned that it was no better in the other cities.

The blood poison was too frightful!

After thinking about it, however, he guessed that it was normal for the Induction Ground to have such a slow reaction. It was likely that everyone was still at a loss as to what to do about the situation.

Master's only worry was Ai Hui; he only let go of it after seeing Ai Hui back in one piece. He felt that ultimately, the city was a safer place to be. There were enough people and the teachers each had a different absolute art. It would not be easy for the blood fiends to invade this city.

Ai Hui did not refute, but only answered, "Disciple had some

thoughts after escaping from death. I feel that my contingency plans are lacking, and I would like to learn some new moves."

Wang Shouchuan thought so too. While he felt that it was safe in the city, at times like this, self-defense moves were the most important. In the past, he had wanted Ai Hui to grow step-by-step instead of learning techniques hurriedly, but now that the situation had worsened, he could not afford to be learning so leisurely.

"Master has been thinking of this too. What sort of moves would you like to learn?"

Ai Hui replied, "Disciple would like to learn some sword moves."

"Sword moves?" Wang Shouchuan was not the least bit surprised. He had long realized that Ai Hui had a passion for the sword. He thought for a while before saying, "Swordplay has been in decline for a long time. There were very few people practicing it, so few legacies could be formed and passed on to future generations. The same could not be said for absolute arts, so a legacy would not be a problem."

Ai Hui was at a loss as to what to do. Those arts that could be called legacies definitely had something extraordinary to them, but this way, he would have to give up on the sword embryo. If it was in the past, Ai Hui would not hesitate, but now his sword embryo was getting better. Moreover, it would be a pity if he did not use his unique sword elemental energy to practice sword moves.

Mistress spoke up and said laughingly, “I have an absolute legacy. If Little Ai Hui is willing to learn, Mistress can teach him everything.”

A vision of himself floated into Ai Hui’s mind; countless bright needles danced around him as he grasped an embroidery needle, then he turned around and smiled sweetly. He suddenly felt cold and could not help but tremble.

Looking at Ai Hui’s state, everyone laughed heartily. Even Han Yuqin convulsed with laughter and was not at all angry.

Ai Hui thought carefully and made up his mind. “Disciple has decided to expand and work on his sword moves.”

After making that decision, he felt surprisingly at ease. He had the sword embryo within his body and training required the brandishing of sword moves. Elemental energy was also a part of sword elemental energy. If he did not expand the development of his sword moves, what area should he expand on?

He was not someone who was overflowing with talent. It would be like courting death if he wanted to be greedy when he had a terrible aptitude.

Wang Shouchuan and Han Yuqin gave each other a glance and saw the tell-tale signs of a smile in each other’s eyes.

“Mistress and I had long predicted this.” Wang Shouchuan did

not bother to conceal his approving expression and laughed. “Every major event that you have encountered was decided with the sword. Mistress and I both feel that you should learn swordplay.”

“So what if swordplay is in decline?” Han Yuqin continued haughtily, “Was Mistress’s embroidery not invented by herself? Maybe our Little Ai Hui would be the first Swordplay Grandmaster in the future!”

Mingxiu took out a wooden box and said smilingly, “Master and Mistress had long taken care of it. Junior, quickly open this box and take a look.”

Suddenly, a warmth which he had never experienced before engulfed Ai Hui, and he was momentarily caught off guard.

Chapter 137: To Get Rich!

Inside the wooden box, there was a silver pill placed on top of a black velvet cloth.

"This is the sword pill." Wang Shouchuan could see that this was the first time Ai Hui had seen one and explained, "Disciple, you are familiar with the ancient swordplay manuals and you should know about the sword pill; however, the sword pill is now drastically different from the sword pills from the Cultivation Era. This sword pill is an object used to seal up swordplay. Using the finest liquid gold from the Silver Mist Sea and the Inverted Sky Palace Technique, the sword pill was created with the knowledge of swordplay branded within. For brilliant legacies, there were many subtle things that could not be put in words, so using the sword pill, future students were able to comprehend these subtleties. The Inverted Sky Palace Technique was learnt through ancient bamboo strips and many of the movements of metal elemental energy were sealed through this method."

The first part left Ai Hui baffled. He knew about the Silver Mist Sea; it was part of the Avalon Of Five Elements and also the land of metal elementalists. While he did not know what the Inverted Sky Palace Technique was, it sounded very impressive.

But once he heard 'bamboo strips', Ai Hui understood in a flash.

The swordplay manuals were mostly recorded on bamboo strips and Ai Hui had gone through a countless number of them. As of now, the bamboo strips were already torn and tattered, he reckoned that they would disintegrate in another century.

During the Cultivation Era, the bamboo strips were usually passed down after a period of ten thousand years.

Wang Shouchuan instructed, “Place the sword pill in your hand and insert some elemental energy into it.”

Ai Hui did as told. He took the silver sword pill from the wooden box and placed it within the hollow of his palm. The sword pill was not big as it was only slightly large for a pill.. Ai Hui carefully inserted a thread of elemental energy into it.

A brilliant ray of light was abruptly set off from the sword pill on his palm. Within the ray of light, there were constantly flickering silhouettes that were holding on to swords and practicing. They were like flickering lights and passing shadows, gone as quickly as they came.

Ai Hui was attracted to it immediately.

The movements of the silhouettes were as fast as lightning, and they dazzled and confused him. Suddenly, a violent movement was aimed at the space between his brows.

Ai Hui jumped in shock, but he soon felt an immense happiness. He had seen many sword manuals, but their correct interpretations had long gone with the passing of time. He could only make use of the words and diagrams to reconstruct the movements.

With an anxious tone, he asked, “Master, what sort of swordplay is in this?”

Wang Shouchuan and Han Yuqin laughed upon seeing Ai Hui’s impatient expression. Ai Hui had always displayed a maturity beyond his age, so it was rare to see a childish side of him. While the couple liked the the steadfast and mature Ai Hui, they also wished to see him be like an ordinary teenager, carefree and high-spirited. To them, the youthful period was the best time to be.

“There’s no name. It has three scattered sword moves,” Wang Shouchuan recalled fondly. “This was left behind by an old friend of mine. He was called Cheng Rou and was an odd talent with a vast range of interests, dabbling in everything. He was a rare Complete Elementalist and bore the Five Elements. It was difficult to train to be a Complete Elementalist, but he was a gifted and passionate learner. As long as he put his mind to it, he would be able to master anything, but he did not have a fixed temperament and was very carefree. There was a period of time where he developed an interest in swordplay and told me that he wanted to invent a set of swordplay.”

Ai Hui and Mingxiu paid close attention, like they were listening to a story.

Recalling the past, Wang Shouchuan sighed and said, “He took seven days to invent these three sword moves. I witnessed how he did it and his talent was astonishing. To date, I had never seen a talent who was able to surpass him.”

Han Yuqin coldly snorted. “What a pity he wasted his talent. Little Ai Hui, do not learn from him. A jack-of-all-trades is a master of none.”

Ai Hui muttered to himself that this Senior Cheng Rou must have offended Mistress in the past. While he had such opinions, Mistress still made sense and Ai Hui agreed from the bottom of his heart. While Cheng Rou was willful, he was still a genius, whereas Ai Hui was just an average chap. Only when he fought to the death for something would he then be able to make some progress.

Wang Shouchuan laughed, but did not rebut, then continued, “After three moves, he said that his creativity and inspiration were used up and did not continue. These three moves were too scattered to be made into a system and could not be formed to pass on to future generations. As such, he just randomly threw it to me.”

“Humph! You are treating it like a treasure when it is someone else’s trash!” Again, Han Yuqin gave a cold snort.

At this point, Ai Hui was one hundred percent sure that Senior Cheng Rou had offended Mistress, and that the offense had been a huge one.

Again, Wang Shouchuan did not get angry. He just gave a laugh and continued, “I did not imagine there would be a day where I would bring it out again. While these three moves are scattered, the impact is still pretty good. The design is elaborate and would be suitable for you to learn. Take it and slowly analyze it. Learn as much as you can. The usage of the sword pill is very easy; just like

what you did just now, use your elemental energy to activate the sword pill and you will be able to see the images. When you have familiarized yourself with the posture, pace, and movements, place the sword pill at the Sky Palace between your eyebrows which supplements the visuals. The sealed intentions of the sword pill will appear in your mind and you will be able to experience their true interpretations. Remember, you must first be proficient in the movements. Once the seal of the sword pill is broken, the true intentions will only be preserved for a short period of time."

"Thank you, Master!" Ai Hui carefully returned the sword pill to the box.

Everyone could not help but smile when they saw Ai Hui looking at it like it was a treasure.

"Junior made a small fortune recently," said Senior Mingxiu, smiling. "The havoc created by the blood fiends led to a terrible situation. Junior's Bunny Hair Arrows performed exceptionally well and were considerably effective in dealing with the blood fiends. All the Bunny Hair Arrows from Manager Li's store have been sold. While at twenty thousand yuan per arrow, the price was not comparable to the market price of thirty thousand yuan; however, the large quantity sold still brought about a profit. Manager Li was as busy as a bee and spent his days manufacturing the Bunny Hair Arrows. I reckon Junior will have an income of millions of yuan."

Mistress said cheerfully, "That's good! I finally see some positive development towards my eight million for the workshop."

Ai Hui was slightly embarrassed.

Senior Mingxiu instructed, “Junior, make a trip down to Manager Li’s store later. His hair has gone gray from waiting. There was a huge demand for the Bunny Hair Arrows, and he’s worried about the problem of the Bunny Hair now.”

“I will make a trip down later.” There seemed to be countless small money signs flying in Ai Hui’s eyes.

He suddenly thought of the issue of the Blood Bandage and asked, “Mistress, do you still remember anything about the Blood Bandage?”

Han Yuqin did not expect Ai Hui to mention the Blood Bandage and astoundedly responded with another question, “Did something happen to the bandage?”

Ai Hui hurriedly replied, “No, it is not a problem. I am just curious about the strange material.”

He wanted to keep the matter of the bandage devouring flesh under wraps, or else they would worry again.

Han Yuqin frowned and pondered before shaking her head. “I have no recollection. Someone gave it to me in the past. At that point, I thought that the material was very special, so I kept it as I had never seen such a material before.”

Ai Hui was somewhat disappointed, but he was not surprised. He instructed his Master and Mistress to take note of their safety, but he ended up leaving under Mistress's disdainful gaze. With Mistress keeping watch at the workshop and Senior Mingxiu, who was also highly skilled, with her, Ai Hui also felt that his worry was uncalled for.

The embroidery workshop was exceptionally busy, just like before. It was like a completely different world when compared to the outside.

After leaving the embroidery workshop, Ai Hui ran straight to Manager Li's store.

When Manager Li saw Ai Hui, the look he gave him was as if he had just reunited with a long lost relative. "Goodness! My boy, you are finally here! I had been to the embroidery workshop a few times and they said that you had not returned. Oh my, my heart was in a mess, the world is in a disorganized state now. Although your abilities are exceptional, you still have to be careful! Our future is vast and paved with riches. We should avoid unnecessary risks."

Nearing the end of his speech, Manager Li's tone was sincere and earnest.

Ai Hui joyfully gestured, saying, "Then I am counting on Manager Li to make more money on my behalf."

When he heard 'money', Manager Li brightened up. "I have been

waiting for you! Our Bunny Hair Arrows were being commandeered at twenty thousand yuan each. After deducting the manufacturing costs of six thousand yuan, we still have a profit of fourteen thousand yuan per arrow. Guess how many we sold?”

Ai Hui too, brightened and said, “Five hundred?”

Manager Li gave Ai Hui a disdainful gaze.

Ai Hui was ecstatic now. “One thousand?”

“Confidence! Confidence! Where is your confidence? Why can’t I see it?” Manager Li pretended to be displeased.

Ai Hui trembled. “Could it be two thousand?”

Manager Li’s expression was proud as he extended three fingers. “Three thousand!”

Ai Hui’s eyes almost popped out.

“Three thousand!” Manager Li’s saliva was flying out as he spoke, “Do you know how long I have not slept? Because of these three thousand arrows, I put my life at risk. I spent days and nights on them. Wow, that pain, oh, that tiredness; I was so tired that I could not straighten my back. Do you think it was easy considering my old age? My boy, looking at how much effort I put in, would it be possible to …”

Ai Hui's eyes, which were almost popping out, suddenly became alert like a starving cat's on a dark night. They flickered brilliantly with golden, shiny rays. Without a second word, he interrupted Manager Li, "No! Divide the money! Divide the money now!"

He would be able to get seven million yuan for one thousand arrows. Three thousand arrows meant twenty-one million yuan.

Twenty-one million yuan!

This was an amount he did not dare to think about in the past. He should first repay Mistress the eight million for the embroidery workshop. After adding up the miscellaneous expenses, he reckoned it would be ten million yuan.

He would still have eleven million left over. Oh gosh, so much money, why was his heartbeat so fast……

"Divide, divide, divide!" Manager Li nodded his head, and without a second word, he took out a delicate money card that was printed with the Avalon Of Five Elements logo.

So advanced!

Ai Hui took the money card. He had seen people using it before, but this was the first time he would use one. This money card was nameless, so Ai Hui needed to imprint on the card. He carefully injected a thread of elemental energy and a small silver sword

appeared on the bottom right corner of the black money card.

“Oh, swordsmanship, you have taste! No wonder I felt that you were extraordinary,” Manager Li repeatedly praised.

The money card could distinguish the attribute of elemental energy and form different kinds of seals. Everyone’s elemental energy imprint differed according to their attributes and trainings.

Ai Hui’s mind stirred and the amount appeared on the face of the black card. Indeed, it was twenty-one million!

He made it! He made it! He made it!

Bunny Hair was indeed a great name!

In a flash, Ai Hui became extremely agitated. He has never had so much money before.

“After I learned that my boy practiced swordsmanship, I kept a lookout for swords. Good things come to those who wait, and I finally managed to receive a good sword. Do you want to take a look? This is indeed a good sword. Now that the world is in such a disorganized state and there is no army for support, it is very dangerous.”

Manager Li was all smiles. His appearance then was indeed the perfect example of a profiteer.

Chapter 138: Dragonspine Inferno

After repaying the money he owed to Mistress and making some calculations, he would be left with just two hundred and sixty thousand yuan.

But looking at Manager Li's facial expression, Ai Hui guessed that the sword he had was an extraordinary sword. Otherwise, he would not look so smug. It would be a lie if Ai Hui said he was not curious; being an experienced veteran, Ai Hui knew the importance of a good weapon. He was still using a borrowed military-grade grass sword from the manor's guard after his Sawtooth Grass Sword was spoilt.

Ai Hui could not contain himself and said, "Do not try to fool me using an ordinary weapon."

While Master and Mistress felt that the situation would not worsen, Ai Hui was still worried. The eruption of the blood poison epidemic was too ferocious and it did not help that the response from the Induction Ground was too slow. Ai Hui had an extremely acute sense for danger after struggling in the Wilderness for such a long period of time.

The infected insects they had encountered while running back to the city only increased Ai Hui's worries. Based on his predictions, it would be a matter of time before the large carnivorous animals finished their transformation. The situation then would be far worse than now.

In the barrow, the beast howl they had heard was loud enough to cause tremors, and the fear that had caused him was still present in his heart. He had seen many dire beasts and their ordinarily imposing manners did not have any effect on him, but when he had heard the beast howl from outside the barrow, he could not help but become extremely fearful and scared..

He did not know if anyone in Central Pine City would be able to deal with them.

Furthermore, Ai Hui did not have high hopes for the support team from the Avalon of Five Elements. There were so many cities in the Induction Ground; who would be able to save them all?

If this was a conspiracy, Ai Hui was completely in awe of the conspirator. The Induction Ground was the most peaceful place with the least security measures. If the Avalon of Five Elements was a huge, violent beast, then the Induction Ground was its soft abdomen. It was a wide district and had few restrictions. Even if you stirred up any trouble, it probably would not catch the attention of anyone important. The Induction Ground only had weak students and teachers that lacked experience.

The Thirteen Divisions of the Avalon of Five Elements was stationed near the frontline of the Wilderness, so Central Pine City would need time for them to reach the city.

Ai Hui felt like a shadow was being cast over his heart. Who would design such a conspiracy? What could they gain from this plot?

The most suspicious person might be a teacher with a screw loose in his head. He would probably torment them with such a vicious plot and finish them off.

He had many conjectures and they were both good and bad, but he reckoned it was going to be a long time before they were able to make use of them to make any judgements on the situation. Everyone would be living in danger. The time before the Thirteen Divisions came to provide their support would be the hardest period to go through, and also the most critical.

They had to get through this hurdle first.

Ai Hui resolved not to worry about money. He could only use the money if he survived.

“Of course it’s not an ordinary sword.” Manager Li’s smile was similar to a Buddha’s. Ai Hui’s tone was fitting for a disciple under a Master. Thinking back to the time when he had borrowed two hundred thousand to purchase the grass sword, his eyeballs had almost popped out of their sockets in shock. It was the first time he seen a disciple in such dire straits.

Manager Li walked into a side room and soon came out holding a long and narrow sword case.

The sword case was fully coated in black. There were patterns of red water caltrops on the top of the case and each of the four corners had drawings of a bat. Ai Hui had familiarized himself

with the sword manuals and knew that the bat was the most commonly seen decorative symbol in the past. It implied good fortune.

Upon opening the sword case, a beautiful longsword could be seen within.

At first glance, Ai Hui already thought that it was pretty. The black body of the sword did not have any sheen and looked like some sort of timber. There were seven small, shiny water caltrop crystals that were a fiery red on the ridge of the sword. It looked like it was encrusted with red rubies. It also looked like the protruding stiff bones on the back of the Swordback Dragon dire beast from the ancient times. Both sides of the sword were a faint, dark red. It appeared to have irregular wave patterns which were gathered on the sharp end of the sword.

Ai Hui's eyes lit up and he took the sword out carefully.

"This sword is named Dragonspine Inferno. It was grown!" Manager Li announced.

"It was grown?" Ai Hui exclaimed.

With a smug expression, Manager Li replied, "Look at the seven red crystals. They are not just any crystals, but are the artifact remnants that were fished out from the Silver Mist Sea. They are the remnants of a spiritual sword from the Cultivation Era."

“What artifact remnants, do not try to fool me,” Ai Hui countered with disdain, “Do not take me for a fool because I am young. It’s just sea slag (waste from the sea) and you talk as if it’s very high-end.”

Yes, some people called them treasures of the sea, but most called them waste from the sea.

The Silver Mist Sea was part of the Avalon of Five Elements and, together with the land of the metal elementalists, was collectively known as the Silver Mist Sea. In reality, the real Silver Mist Sea was actually the core of a man-made sea, or rather, it was a big, artificial lake which had already existed since the early establishment of the Avalon of Five Elements.

The aim of establishing the Silver Mist Sea was to obtain help from the metal elementalists.

At the time, spiritual force had dissipated and became extremely rare, while elemental energy had just been discovered. In order to obtain help from the metal elementalists, the elders thought of a foolish idea. They transported countless treasure-infused flying swords which no longer had any spiritual effects into the middle of the valley.

All those treasure-infused flying swords were mostly created by those with metal attributes. As time passed, the metal elemental energy began to flourish and the density of the metal elemental energy was like a silver mist. Before long, the top of the valley was filled with the silver mist and henceforth, it had been called the Silver Mist Sea.

From the start until now, the expansion of the sea in the Silver Mist Sea had been unceasing.

It was hard to determine how much the Silver Mist Sea had expanded. It was much bigger than in the past and the boundary could not be seen. It truly lived up to the term ‘sea’ now. Until now, every year, many elementalists would enter deep into the Old Territory to look for unknown paradises, and they would end up bringing back carriages full of treasure-infused flying swords which no longer had any spiritual effects. In addition, amongst those would be huge amounts of metal attributes from the smelted metal.

Following the flourishing of the metal elemental energy, the original treasure-infused flying swords became crisp in exterior. The metal elemental energy was strong and acidic, so coupled with the constant erosion caused by the fine Silver Mist, the crisp exteriors of the treasure-infused swords were constantly being turned into ashes.

But there were always some objects that were hard for the silver mist to erode. These objects would lie quietly beneath the Silver Mist Sea and were called sea slag. They were sediments left behind by the Silver Mist Sea.

The sea slag had many different oddities and most of them were from unknown origins. The training equipments used in the Cultivation Era were broad, extensive, and complicated, using many different materials. Even if anyone knew their origins, the sea slag would still not be useful as, following the dissipation of

spiritual force and the emergence of elemental energy, those objects underwent huge changes in their initial attributes.

But given that they were able to withstand the silver mist's erosion, sea slag definitely had extraordinary features. Following the opening of the Silver Mist Sea each month, these bits of sea slag would be pushed into the river channel. As a result, it led to the creation of a group of people who would fish out the sea slag at the river bank for a living.

Using sea slag was like taking a gamble. Once you found a suitable purpose for it, it would be akin to winning the lottery; however, most of what they found were objects which served little purpose.

Even though Manager Li was caught in his lie, he was not at all ashamed and instead praised Ai Hui, "My boy is indeed experienced and knowledgeable! It was by a coincidence that my friend received the artifact remnants, no, sea slag. Seven of them, just the right amount! It was rare that they all originated from the same object, so he decided to make a weapon out of them and immersed them in the bud of a Devil's Plant of Twilight Sandal Wood."

Ai Hui laughed coldly. "So, he wanted to grow a heavy weapon initially, but unexpectedly, a sword grew instead? And because there are few practicing swordsmanship, coupled with the fact that this sword is heavy, you are unable to sell it. Am I right?"

When he heard Old Li mention the Devil's Plant of Twilight Sandal Wood, he knew the intention of the opposite party, which

was to grow a heavy weapon. Given the current popularity of vegetation weapons, using plants as a fetus and then growing a weapon out of them was one of the most mainstream methods used.

Embarrassed, Manger Li replied, “I had not started selling and immediately thought of you. How could the Sawtooth Grass Sword be worthy of you? This Dragonspine Inferno would be a perfect match!”

“I am buying that sword,” said Ai Hui straightforwardly.

Manager’s Li had a joyful expression while he gave a thumbs up. “That’s the way! This should be the way a disciple under a master acts! This isn’t the least bit expensive, my boy…”

Without waiting for Manager Li to set a price, Ai Hui interrupted him and said coldly, “Old Li, you made quite a fortune this time. I took a thirty percent cut while you took seventy percent. I did not even get half of what you made, wasn’t it?”

Manager Li had an ominous prediction after hearing that sentence. “But we made a deal previously!”

“That’s right, we made a deal!” Ai Hui waved his hands around and continued gravely, “You are still operating a business right? It’s so difficult to produce the Bunny Hair. If any mishaps happened to me, what would happen to your business? Shouldn’t you invest in ensuring the safety of your partner? If you are unwilling to invest, take it that I did not say anything. I will still

pay whatever price you set. But you are operating a business after all; there are bound to be mishaps sometimes."

Upon hearing that, Manager Li almost wanted to kneel down. With a passionate expression, he clapped his chest heartily. "My boy, your words hit close to heart! Such a sword deserves a hero and only a hero like my boy here would be able to match this sword. I thought of you when I saw it. Come! Hold on to the sword. It is just a little gesture on my part. My boy, one word of advice from an elder brother, safety is first. We were able to make a huge profit on just the Bunny Hair Arrows. For the sake of huge amounts of money, you must take note of your safety."

What else could he say? Manager Li was practically crying when he said the above. He thought he would be able to take advantage of Ai Hui, but who knew Ai Hui was even more cunning.

He was unable to ward off such a practical threat.

Thank goodness he bought the Dragonspine Inferno at a low price. Swords were usually hard to sell, let alone such a heavy sword.

Upon thinking of the money he made, however, Manager Li immediately became clear-headed. He was indeed confused. How could he make such a rudimentary mistake? He should curry favor with the chap in front of him!

He had a better understanding now. While Ai Hui was Mingxiu's junior, he was more flexible and invasive in his methods, making

him harder to deal with. It was a joke that he once thought of Ai Hui as a novice, someone who was not updated with the affairs of the world. Thank goodness he came to see the truth early on.

"Then I am going to accept this sword. I should not be unappreciative of your intentions." Ai Hui patted Manager Li's shoulder and continued, "Old Li, you should concentrate on working steadily at something in terms of investment."

Manager Li's knees almost buckled after hearing those words.

Concentrate on working steadily...

Gangster! What a gangster! And Ai Hui could still say it in such a righteous way till he was unable to reject him!

Was this guy really a disciple under a Master? How could he have the air of a hooligan from the marketplace?

Both of his eyes were brimming with tears while he said from the bottom of his heart, "Yes, yes, yes, working steadily, working steadily!"

"How is it? Do you still have sufficient Bunny Hair?" Ai Hui saw that he had accomplished his mission and decided to top the icing on the cake.

Manager Li jolted and looked at Ai Hui anxiously. "It is almost used up. The main issue is that the length of many of the Bunny

Hairs is not suitable. I am only able to wait for your assistance."

Ai Hui pondered before answering, "Prepare the Twilight Silkworm, herbs, iron cooking pot, and whatnot and send it over to my place. Afterwards, send someone to collect the Bunny Hair daily."

Manger Li was long awaiting those words from Ai Hui. Without a second word, he said, "The things have long been prepared. They will be sent over now!"

Ai Hui: "……"

Sea slags = Artifact remnants

Chapter 139: Chime of the Sword and Weapons

AI Hui happily carried the Dragonspine Inferno in his hand.

What a good sword!

The sword was as heavy as one hundred kilograms. The Devil's Plant of Twilight Sandal Wood was a material used to make heavy weapons. Its density was the highest, so the sword grown from it was extremely heavy. If Ai Hui had not developed [Copper Skin], he would hardly be able to lift the sword. Even now, when he tried to swing the sword, he could still feel its heftiness.

Even if it had lacked edges and was used to hit the enemy as a club, the bones of the enemy would all be broken.

Excellent!

To Ai Hui, the fiercer the weapon was, the better he could utilize it. His skills were not systematic. Therefore, he might not be able to make the optimal use of certain good weapons that possessed a specific effect. Only the crude and simple weapons like this suited him the best.

Moreover, he had not paid anything for the Dragonspine Inferno.

A free weapon was undoubtedly a good weapon, even if it was a

grass sword.

The swinging the one hundred kilogram sword produced a deep and scary whistling sound.

If not for the fellows following him, Ai Hui would have already tested this sword. He reminded himself that he was now a rich man, and a rich man should behave with grace.

Pushing open the gate of the training hall, Ai Hui's nose twitched before he said anything, and his eyes immediately widened.

The smell of food! Elemental soup!

Rushing inside, Ai Hui suddenly saw a fat guy licking the bottom of a bowl. Instantly, evil thoughts flooded into his mind.

Yet, he had not immediately revealed his fury. Instead, he smiled at Fatty wickedly and noted this in his mind. Even if Fatty was his pal, there was no way he would not mind Fatty taking his elemental soup.

"Ai Hui." Lou Lan's eyes brightened when he saw him.

Lou Lan then noticed the fellow behind Ai Hui who was carrying a big pot and herbs. Golden light was shining in Lou Lan's eyes. "Noctilucent Grass, Poria Water, Bamboo Stone, and Bian Fish Eyes. So many herbs. Are you going to peel Twilight Silk, Ai Hui?"

Ai Hui was not surprised at Lou Lan's knowledge. Lou Lan was skilled at medical treatment, so it was not odd for him to be familiar with all kinds of herbs.

"Yes. You also know this?" Ai Hui asked the fellow to put down all the materials while talking to Lou Lan.

"I don't know much, but the principles are similar. By the way, Ai Hui, this formula was not good enough."

The fellow was unhappy to hear this and said, "Not good enough? That's impossible. This is the standard formula to soften Twilight Cocoons."

"Shut up!" Ai Hui looked at the fellow with an unfriendly gaze.

Ai Hui had always been partial to his friends and would not allow anyone to say anything bad about them.

Lou Lan replied honestly, "If the ratio of the formula is adjusted, it will be more effective."

The fellow wanted to refute when he felt something heavy on his shoulder. Turning his head, he saw Ai Hui's clouded face, the Dragonspine Inferno at his throat, and did not dare to say another word.

Ai hui glanced at him, took back his Dragonspine Inferno, and said lightly, “Put down the materials and leave.”

The fellow felt as if he was granted amnesty and left in dejection.

Ai Hui turned to Lou Lan and cracked a smile. “I will leave the herbs to you then, Lou Lan.”

Lou Lan was very happy that he could help Ai Hui. “No problem. Just leave it to me!”

Then he began his work.

At that point, Fatty had finished drinking the soup and joined them. “I still cannot understand your intention, huh? But I think Lou Lan is definitely a good sand puppet. Where did you buy it? I want to buy one even if it costs me my whole fortune. It is rare to see such a good sand puppet.”

Seeing Fatty’s satisfied expression, Ai Hui smiled grimly in his heart, but kindly said to him, “How does the soup taste?”

“Delicious!” Fatty’s eyes lit up. “I never tried any soup as delicious as this before. Is this elemental soup? It’s so great! My body gets warm after just one sip. If I could have one bowl of this soup every day, I’ll die without any regrets.”

One bowl every day…

Ai Hui was so irritated that he burst into laughter. “How dare you think of that. How much is the soup, Lou Lan?”

Lou Lan tilted his head and said, “That soup is called Oil Under Fire, which best fits his fire attribute. The cost of the materials is one hundred and seventy thousand yuan. It is beneficial for his training.”

One hundred and seventy thousand yuan...

Ai Hui’s face froze, regretting that he did not remind Lou Lan of this before leaving. Lou Lan was just too honest.

Fatty smacked his lips to recollect the aftertaste of the soup. “No wonder it tastes so good. This is an expensive delicacy. Delicious!”

Seeing Fatty’s annoying face, Ai Hui’s eyes were cold. “The one hundred and seventy thousand yuan is on you. Didn’t you hear what Lou Lan said? Hurry up and start training now. Haven’t you finished practicing the [Fluttering Butterfly Steps]? Then the next is the [Dancing Flower Steps]. You should have the strength to do five hundred sets, since you just finished the soup.”

“Five hundred sets?” Fatty’s eyes widened as if he had heard some horrifying news.

“Not enough?” A warm smile appeared on Ai Hui’s face. “Then two hundred more.”

“Seven hundred sets of the [Dancing Flower Steps]? I don’t think that’s enough for him to totally absorb the soup,” Lou Lan said honestly.

“How about nine hundred? Okay let’s just round it to one thousand.” Ai Hui asked Lou Lan with a smiling face.

“That’s more or less enough.” Lou Lan nodded.

Ai Hui noticed Fatty’s shivering legs and smiled grimly in his heart, but his face became more amiable. “What if the training is not finished? Lou Lan, do we have any punishment that does not harm the body, but is still effective?”

Tilting his head, Lou Lan thought for a while and said, “So you are referring to mental punishment instead of physical punishment? I think one such method is to forcibly immerse someone’s face in water until the person almost drowns. This was used to torture prisoners before. The suffocating and dying experience is very impressive.”

“That’s a good idea,” Ai Hui said in admiration.

Not only his legs, but every part of Fatty was shivering now. He looked at Lou Lan as if Lou Lan was a devil who had just climbed out of hell.

What a vicious sand puppet…

Then, Ai Hui delivered the final shot casually. “You will know how that feels if you cannot finish one thousand sets, Fatty.”

Fatty’s face was as pale as ashes. He whined as he crawled his way over to the training area without hesitation, like a bear with an arrow in its hip. He knew Ai Hui would carry out the threat, and he did not want to experience it at all.

Seeing that Fatty left, Lou Lan began to adjust the proportion of the herbs. Ai Hui had to admit that the way Lou Lan dealt with the herbs was delightful to watch. It was as smooth as drifting clouds and flowing water.

Lou Lan is my pride!

Ai Hui felt at ease leaving all these materials with Lou Lan and departed by himself.

He was finally able to study the sword pill that his teacher gave him as well as the Dragonspine Inferno.

Just now, when he was with Manager Li, Ai Hui could only try to feel the sword in his hands instead of studying it carefully.

Hum! As elemental energy was infused into the Dragonspine Inferno, the sword trembled slightly. His hand felt the vibration and almost dropped the sword on the ground. The Dragonspine Inferno was heavy indeed. Even the slightest tremble could

produce an amazing force.

The low and deep vibration was like the breathtaking growl of the Swordback Dragon.

The chime of the sword! This was a pleasant surprise and a good omen for Ai Hui because it indicated that his elemental energy synergized with the Dragonspine Inferno. Ai Hui guessed that this might be because his elemental energy was sword elemental energy.

Having figured this out, Ai Hui calmed down and began to feel the change of the flow that his elemental energy was going through within the sword.

As the elemental energy flowed in the sword, he immediately knew the difference.

The flow of the elemental energy was smooth and lubricated, making the flowing itself an enjoyable process. Ai Hui could not resist praising the sword again. Simply judging from the flow, it was far better than the grass swords he had used before. The sword was heavy, but as the elemental energy was now infused into it, it seemed to become much lighter. As a result, it was a bit easier for Ai Hui to wield it.

With the elemental energy circulating, the blade of the sword became dark red, and the color slowly pulsed as if it was alive.

He tried to touch the Garnet Prismatic Crystal in the sword with the elemental energy. Like a clay ox thrown into the sea, the energy was absorbed into the abyss and disappeared. He knew that this was because the amount of elemental energy he had was too small to activate the prismatic crystals, so he stopped.

His level was still not high enough. Ai Hui shook his head.

The Dragonspine Inferno was indeed a good weapon. For ordinary elementalists, they would have to spend a considerable amount of money to get such a weapon. Ai Hui believed that he would not have to worry about his weapon for a long period of time.

Nowadays, there were various kinds of weapons, but most of them were long-range weapons.

Elementalists tended to fight using sand puppets. For themselves, they either chose self defense or concealment.

There were many weapons designed for wood elementalists, but a pure elementalist usually fought with their particular Grass Seed Fruit. Metal elementalists had two divisions that had totally different styles, the Sky Edge Division and the Infantry Division. The former mainly used sabers, bows, and spears, while the latter mostly used heavy weapons.

It was thought-provoking to note the fact that swordsmanship, which had once been mainstream for thousands of years, had declined and was replaced by the saber, which had never been

dominant before.

Yet, the reason was not difficult to understand. Swordplay was complicated and could not be supplemented by spiritual force. People mainly used swords for stabbing, so the lethality was limited. In comparison, sabers were simpler to use and people mainly used then to chop or hack. During the era of elemental energy, the lack of spiritual force was less important, while the advantages due to simplicity and power were amplified.

The rise of archery was also because of these changes over time. It was now the most powerful long-range weapon and the easiest to learn. Archery practitioners included elementalists of all attributes. This indicated its popularity.

The weapon of the fire elementalist was usually similar to a calabash. It contained Earth Fire Lava which was collected from deep beneath the Sparking Plain and had been refined many times. Ai Hui once saw a fire elementalist carrying a wine jar about his height that was filled with the Earth Fire Lava.

There were many benefits to traveling with a fire elementalist. For example, if you went somewhere cold, you could stay warm because you had a human-shaped stove. What was more convenient was cooking, because you could simply cut raw meat and put the slices on the wine jar to grill them. Those who had high criteria for food would brush the meat with oil and add spices, but this depended on whether you could get along with the fire elementalist.

In this scenario, if a wood elementalist joined, then it would be a

perfect team. A wood elementalist could find many weird plants, fruits, and mushrooms that you never knew about before. Eating these together with the meat would make it delicious and less greasy.

Other weapons like the whip also had its enthusiasts, especially among wood elementalists, because it could complement well with their vines. However, the whip was regarded as a weapon with a minority of wielders. Another popular weapon among the minority was the flying knife, which was typically used by some water elementalists. They knew how to fly, so it was easier for them to control the path of the flying knife, which could be very tricky sometimes.

Most water elementalists used azure wings as their weapon. Azure wings were developed from flying equipment used in the early years and evolved into a weapon that integrated offense and defense.

When it came to the water elementalists, a very unpopular weapon had to be mentioned, which was the javelin. The heavy javelin would be accelerated through a sharp dive and then thrown with elemental energy by the water elementalists. They had killed numerous wild beasts using this method, making the javelin their most powerful and favorite weapon.

Alright, swordsmanship had indeed declined, but it was what Ai Hui was good at.

Ai Hui took out the sword pill.

Chapter 140: Team Leader Shi Xueman

Other than the swordplay manuals, this was the first time that Ai Hui had studied a record of swordsmanship. Actually, what was written in the swordplay manuals was not exactly swordplay, but rather sword moves.

There were big differences between swordplay and sword moves.

The nature of sword moves was the ‘move’, or the change of the spiritual force, and the sword was only a carrier. The nature of swordplay, however, was the skill to wield a sword. This was also the reason why the sword declined as a weapon. In the early stages of the development of the sword moves, swordplay was a basic training subject for all swordsmen. During the Cultivation Era, swordsmen had not had to start with swordplay because the sword was not necessarily controlled by the hands.

The use of spiritual force could send the sword flying for thousands of miles and was what swordsmen practiced.

Yet, due to the unexpected disappearance of spiritual force, people had to control the sword with their hands again. Only by that time had they realized that they were no longer able to use the sword.

In terms of chopping and hacking, swords were less powerful than sabers and axes. In terms of stabbing, they were not as good as spears.

Currently, this was the embarrassing status of swordplay. While, the elimination of species was selected by nature, the elimination of swordsmanship was selected by time. Ai Hui was unaware of any profound theories, but he was well versed in the limits of swordsmanship due to his abundant experience in fighting.

If it were not for the sword embryo and its subsequent changes, he would not have chosen swordplay.

Thanks to the sword embryo, he developed his own advantage. Although he had no way of knowing if this would be advantageous in the future, he had decided to place his future on the sword simply because of what he could obtain now. Others might think he was too careless in making such an important decision for his future, but Ai Hui disagreed.

What meaning would the future have to a person like him who had nothing at all? His life was worth nothing, so it was needless to talk about his future. Therefore, to him, even the slightest advantage was valuable.

He slowly infused his elemental energy into the sword pill.

The sword pill began to shine again, and a figure appeared in the light.

Ai Hui watched carefully this time. The faster he infused the elemental energy, the more rapidly the figure move and vice versa.

His teacher said there were three independent moves with their own names. The first one was named the [Crescent Moon], the second [Dust Fall] and the third [Night Epiphyllum]. None of the names were related. That was why Cheng Rou thought they were a mess. Actually, Ai Hui had not seen an interrelation between them either.

Having watched carefully from the beginning to the end, Ai Hui realized that there was only one move he could learn now among the three moves.

It was the first one, the [Crescent Moon].

This was because the [Crescent Moon] was the only move that merely required the hand palaces. Both of the other two moves had a higher criteria in the base level and involved the activation of more palaces. The [Dust Fall] technique demanded the activation of the hand palaces and the earth palace, which was not easy to open. Ai Hui would be hard pressed to accomplish this within a short period of time. Meanwhile, the[Night Epiphyllum] was even more complicated. Apart from the four palaces of the hands and feet, the sky palace was also needed to be activated.

Ai Hui was a bit disappointed at first, but on second thought, he was satisfied as he knew very few masters would bother to create a set of swordplay for beginners.

The [Crescent Moon] alone was sufficiently complicated for him to learn.

This was the most complicated move he had ever encountered. The moves he previously learned were simple and brutal, like the [Arching Fish Back]. Although he had not really started, he had already gained a lot simply by watching the three moves in the sword pill. This experience was amazing and really eye-opening for Ai Hui.

The first thing he noticed about the three moves was their elaboration in an all-round way. The flowing route of the elemental energy, for example, was complicated and carefully designed. Moreover, the flowing speed of the elemental energy was not constant either, but was sometimes fast and sometimes slow.

Additionally, the coordination of the breath and the body was also required.

In other words, the move would only be unleashed when the elemental energy and breathing were coordinated with the movement.

The perfect combination of these three factors could lead to the most powerful execution of the moves.

The countless details were so complicated that it almost took Ai Hui's breath away.

The difficulty in practicing the [Crescent Moon] was already beyond Ai Hui's imagination, but it would be even more difficult to use this move in actual combat because, in a real fight, the environment was more complicated and tougher. Furthermore,

the fighter would have to consider how to grasp fleeting opportunities while simultaneously dealing with the obstruction and interference of the opponents.

Based on his fighting experience, Ai Hui preferred simpler moves which were easier to use. However, he was also aware of his weakness, which was the lack of a powerful finishing move.

The three independent moves in the sword pill could become his finishing techniques.

Although he had not yet learned the move, he could already feel its power.

His teacher was right. Cheng Rou was definitely a true genius.

Admittedly, Ai Hui had gained something from the swordplay manuals. Although his training no longer depended on the swordplay manuals, he had developed his own understanding of swordplay under the influence of the manuals which contained the wisdom of numerous cultivators spanning thousands of years.

The three moves of the sword pill were featured with detail. All the energy within the body was allocated elaborately, then converged, and finally burst out.

This was awesome.

With eyes lit up, he calmed down from the excitement and began

to study carefully.

The sky outside Central Pine City.

A transport wagon roared past. The students in the wagon were sitting quietly.

“It’s my pleasure to fight with all of you. My name is Shi Xueman, and I’m the team leader. I hope we can get along well and complete the mission smoothly. This will be your graduation examination.”

If Ai Hui were able see the scene, he would be amazed because the person who was speaking was the same as the lady from the noodle house.

Shi Xueman was in a white battle suit looking bright and brave. Her black hair blew in the wind, and her splendid face was like a perfect painting.

Yet, since she was the top goddess as well as the top Goddess of War, no one dared to show an obscene expression. The number of men who dared to pursue her was definitely less than the number of men who had been defeated by her.

Shi Xueman looked solemn and her eyes were cold. Her intangible aura stimulated everyone’s nerves.

The students realized how powerful this lady was.

“You are all very familiar with the current situation. The blood catastrophe broke out suddenly, and the Thirteen Divisions could not provide assistance within such a short period of time. What we were worried the most about was the area for the younger students, who are less powerful and are not able to resist. As for the guards of each city, I’m sure you are familiar with their ability.”

Some students laughed out loud.

Underclassmen students usually regarded the guards with reverence, but the upperclassmen, who were experienced in actual combat due to daily tasks, never thought highly of them. Plus, all of the students in the transport wagon were the best of the best, so they had undoubtedly surpassed the guards in terms of overall fighting skills.

Shi Xueman continued her speech as if she had not heard their laughter, “This is an abrupt case, but I believe you will not flinch. I know that none of you need to worry about your graduation, but since the Induction Ground has assigned such an important task to us, I’m sure that no one wants it to end in failure or disgrace their family.”

Hearing the last sentence, some students who were lounging just now sat up straight, and their look became serious.

Shi Xueman’s eyes were cold. She glanced at the students and said, “This is a special mission that concerns the lives of millions of

people. I believe you have heard about the blood poison, but I would like to remind you that it is even more horrible than you imagined. This is a mission that is different from what you have been through before. As your team leader, I have three requirements for you."

"First of all, I hope you can follow orders and pool our efforts together. Second, be alert to dangers since anything can happen in the blood disaster zone..."

Some students became impatient. Although Shi Xueman was well-known indeed, they were also not nobodies. It had not felt good to be lectured by a female team leader.

Besides, they thought Shi Xueman was exaggerating the danger and making a fuss out of a casual order. The blood catastrophe was already under the control of the Induction Ground. All of them were from well-known families, so they all knew that the Induction Ground had found the solution to dealing with the blood catastrophe.

As a result, they regarded the mission more as a field trip so that they could have a better curriculum vitae before graduation which would justify the important positions they were going to take.

Yet, this stupid woman took it too seriously.

"Stop nagging!" said a male student who looked doughty as he snorted without looking at her. "You are just a team leader..."

Without warning, a beautiful hand appeared in front of him out of nowhere. He was greatly frightened but had no time to react before the sinewy rattan, which was as tenacious as steel wire and used to secure his body, was abruptly parted and he was dragged away from his seat.

When he realized what had happened, he had already been thrown out of the transport wagon.

“Ahhhh…”

The scream sounded farther and farther away. Everyone in the wagon swallowed nervously, and their expressions changed. Those who had been unsatisfied just now immediately became silent.

No one expected Shi Xueman to be so direct and rude, or so ruthless. All of the students were frightened.

Fortunately, the transport wagon was flying in a relatively low altitude.

Still, the injury must be severe.

This woman was more horrible than they had expected…

“I will report Li Hai’s case to the Induction Ground, and I’m glad to meet with his parents if needed.” Shi Xueman was as serene as a real lady and lacked any murderous countenance. As she ran her fingers through her hair, every movement was the embodiment of

grace and beauty.

No one dared to look at her or say a word.

Only now had they remembered that this goddess surpassed them not only in terms of fighting skills, but also in terms of family background. As for the bitter experience today, Li Hai could only bear it because the Li Family clearly dared not bother the Shi Family. However, if Shi Xueman complained to Li Hai's parents, he would definitely be punished.

This... this was unfair!

The students were angry and sad.

Shi Xueman felt the transport wagon begin to land, so she sat up straight with her expression becoming serious.

The transport steadily stopped on the ground.

"Disembark!" she ordered coldly.

Like a heroine, she was the first to neatly jump out of the wagon as her long black hair fluttered in the sunshine.

Chapter 141: New Arrows

The difficulty for learning【Crescent Moon】was much higher than Ai Hui had expected.

Although it only involved two palaces, Ai Hui tried for a long time but still could not find a way to start. Thanks to his frequent discussions with his teacher, his horizons had been greatly broadened. Wang Shouchuan was good at working with theories and often discussed them with Ai Hui, even though he knew Ai Hui was only a beginner.

In fact, moves involving only two palaces were mostly basic moves. They were simple and easy to learn, but had limited power. Since not much elemental energy was needed, the flowing route was simple too. As a result, such skills could not involve many changes.

It was like cooking. If the cook had only two ingredients, he would have very few choices in how to use them, and therefore could not prepare complicated dishes.

That was why he believed that Cheng Rou, who could create the skill of【Crescent Moon】within the hand palaces, was definitely a genius!

Since it only involved two palaces, the requirement for elemental energy was not high, but the techniques it involved were not simple at all.

It was very complicated!

The first thing Ai Hui needed to do was to make a stable string between his hand palaces. This alone was a high-level technique and could not be achieved easily by beginners.

When Wang Shouchuan gave him the sword pill, he did not expect Ai Hui to master the skills in a short period of time. He just wanted to show Ai Hui what real swordplay was, so that he could have a target in the future.

But Ai Hui did not want to give up at all. The techniques were complicated, but still achievable.

Yet he was still forced to stop because of the many other things he needed to do, such as peeling the Twilight Silk.

Lou Lan had finished adjusting the proportions of the herbs. The iron-like Twilight Cocoons were softened.

Was there anything Lou Lan could not do? He could braise soup, make elemental food, heal wounds, do massages, make up prescriptions, and soften cocoons...

Who dared to speak ill of such an excellent sand puppet!

Ai Hui said, “Lou Lan, you are brilliant!”

Hearing his praise, Lou Lan laughed happily and his eyes became like crescent moons. “Keep going, Ai Hui!”

A flag of sand suddenly appeared in Lou Lan’s palm. The sandy surface of the flag had two hollowed-out words: Keep Fighting! Lou Lan cheered as he waved the flag.

Ai Hui laughed out loud.

Once again, Shi Xueman came back to Central Pine City. Seeing the empty streets, she felt really unfamiliar with the city that she had visited many times. This was her first time seeing the streets so empty.

It seemed that the situation was worse than she had expected.

This was the first time for her to be a team leader. She must complete the task perfectly!

She encouraged herself quietly.

It was not long, however, before she realized that she was absolutely wrong. The obstacle she had encountered was unprecedented.

“I know, I know. You can trust us. We are able to protect Central Pine City. More guards were assigned to us and now we have plenty of people. You can take a rest in Central Pine Academy or have a talk with the freshmen. I believe you will have a happy time

there. If we need any help, I will turn to you first."

The officer in Central Pine City was polite, but refused their offer of help. In his eyes, these students were sent here to have it easy. Ask them to help? Stop kidding. If any of them got injured, he would have great trouble. By that time, it would be lucky enough if he only lost his job.

Every one of them was like a statue of Buddha. They only needed to sit there and enjoy themselves.

Seeing her teammates' cheerful expressions, Shi Xueman felt depressed in her chest.

Not because of her ample chest!

In Central Pine Academy.

"Welcome to Central Pine Academy, elites of the Induction Ground. This is the first time that Central Pine Academy has witnessed so many geniuses. Our humble academy is honored by your presence. You can stay here and we will arrange the best accommodation for you. Feel free to tell us if there is anything you need. Please help yourselves while you are here. We would also really appreciate it if you could have a chat with and give some pointers to the new students here when you have the time."

The dean of Central Pine Academy was enthusiastic.

“Sorry to interrupt.”

“No problem!”

“What are your training facilities like? I don’t really care about accommodations; the training facilities are more important.”

By this time, Shi Xueman had realized that none of her fellows took the mission seriously.

She was the one who had been too naive.

She was silenced. Maybe it really was a trip to have it easy.

She had thought that Central Pine City was threatened with a growing crisis, but there actually seemed to be no crisis at all.

She had been too sure of herself.

Shi Xueman sneered at herself and felt very bored. She refused the academy’s invitation and chose to live in the Shi Clan Training Hall.

If it were peacetime, the dean would try his best to ask her to stay, but at this time, he earnestly wished she could leave. Although Central Pine City was safe for the moment, it was still more dangerous than it used to be. He would be responsible if anything happened to her in Central Pine Academy.

If she stayed in the Shi Clan Training Hall, however, then it was none of his business.

He even hoped that Shi Xueman could bring all her teammates to the Shi Clan Training Hall; but of course, Shi Xueman could not bother to care about them.

Vanguard Training Hall.

Ai Hui looked at the Twilight Silk he had peeled. The new Twilight Silk seemed a bit different from before; the silver gloss was like snow and frost. No matter how he put it, it was as straight as an arrow.

“It seems that the silk is harder than before,” Ai Hui murmured. He infused some elemental energy into it and a needle-thin light appeared at the end of the Twilight Silk.

Ai Hui held the silk carefully and stabbed the edge of a pot lightly. It immediately pierced through and made a hole.

Ai Hui thought happyily, “This is a great progress.”

The liquid Lou Lan had made was really different, and Ai Hui also suspected that it might have something to do with the change in his elemental energy; it had become sharper than before. The change in his elemental energy might have lead to the change in the silk he peeled.

Ai Hui gave the silk to the fellow who came to pick it up and said, “Ask your boss to try the new Bunny Hair.”

The fellow took away the half-filled box of silk carefully. He was a distant relative of Manager Li. Last time he had spoken too much and was then scolded by Manager Li when he returned. Since then, he had become much more polite.

Anyway, Ai hui only cared about whether or not the quality of the silk was better, and whether or not there would be more money.

It was not long before someone came to the training hall. It turned out to be Manager Li; he was paying a visit himself.

Manager Li was glowing with delight and laughed out loud just as he stepped into the training hall. “Ai Hui, you are as extraordinary as I expected. I’m really astonished at what you’ve made. The Bunny Hair is way better than it was before. This is great!”

Ai Hui was surprised. “Old Li, why did you come in person?”

“I have to,” said Manager Li, “Your amazing achievement has astonished me. It’s too exciting for a coward like me. I can see your composure, so you must be very confident now.”

“You already have the test result?” Ai Hui became excited too.

Manager Li licked his lips and said, “The old Bunny Hair Arrows could pierce a three-inch thick plate from five hundred steps away. We just made ten arrows with the new Bunny Hair. Guess what the result was.”

Ai Hui, who was eager to know the result, almost slapped him in the face. It was annoying to tantalize him at this moment. He told himself to keep calm, but still couldn’t help staring at Manager Li before saying, “Just say it.”

Manager Li’s shrewdness appeared in his eyes. He gestured as he spoke, “It can pierce a five-inch thick plate from five hundred steps away or a three-inch thick plate from one thousand steps away.”

Ai Hui was surprised. He knew that the quality had improved, but didn’t expect it to be so obvious.

The next question he thought to ask was, “What’s the price for the new arrows?”

“One hundred thousand Yuan for one arrow.” Manager Li replied without hesitation.

Ai Hui asked, “Will it be too expensive?”

“This is the price Central Pine City offered for expropriation,” Manager Li said proudly. “If put up for sale on the goods shelf, it can be sold at one hundred and fifty yuan for one.”

Ai Hui was stunned and murmured, “How many people can afford to buy it?”

The Sawtooth Grass Sword he’d bought last time was only one hundred and twenty thousand yuan, which was less than the price of one new arrow. The arrows were consumables. How much money would they be willing to spend on arrows that were so expensive?

Manager Li snorted. “This is expensive? No! It's already cheap enough, since in the Induction Ground there are few big customers. For example, one Blue Blood Arrow provided to the frontline fighters costs five million yuan. This depends on how you look at it. How valuable is a wild beast? The most common beasts are worth tens of millions of yuan. For larger beasts, they can cost hundreds of millions of yuan. There is no ceiling in terms of price, and sometimes you cannot buy what you want even if you are willing to pay. The life of the elementalists who dare to hunt ferocious wild beasts is worth far more than five million yuan.”

Ai Hui was shocked. Now he knew that the hunting groups he used to follow before were of low level. He never saw an elementalist who would use arrows that cost hundreds of thousands of yuan.

“Don’t think it’s expensive. You cannot buy Blue Blood Arrows whenever you want. You need to place an order in advance, and the minimum order quantity is one hundred. They don’t sell to retail customers. In comparison, what we are doing is only small business.”

Manager Li sighed, but when he saw Ai Hui's astonished face, he was afraid he would influence Ai Hui's enthusiasm and quickly added, "But you are still young, and you have already created the Bunny Hair. You might be able to outperform them in the future. Besides, maybe you can further improve the Bunny Hair, and when you achieve that, we can both become rich…"

At first Manager Li only intended to console Ai Hui, but he unexpectedly convinced himself and was getting more and more excited, as if the Bunny Hair Arrows were already being sold at the price of five million yuan for one.

Fatty, who was practicing the Dancing Flower Steps not far away from them, tried hard to hear what they were talking about. He heard them mention something about money and became so curious that he almost rushed to join them.

"Two hundred and sixty-two. Keep practicing, Fatty!"

Lou Lan encouraged him loudly and ran past him.

Fatty was scared and almost twisted his ankle. He watched Lou Lan resentfully as he ran far away.

What a vicious sand puppet!

Fatty calmed down and didn't dare to stop. He knew Ai Hui would do what he said. If he could not complete the assignment, he would be unable to escape the punishment.

No one knew Ai Hui better than he did. Ai Hui was cold, ruthless, and as hard as a nether millstone.

Once Ai Hui made up his mind, begging meant nothing to him.

Fatty could only avenge himself on the floor tiles under his feet.

He stepped on the tiles hard thinking,“If you won’t let me join you, then I’ll break every tile in your training hall!”

Chapter 142: Sang Zhijun

In the nearly empty training hall, a figure was practicing hard. Sweat poured down from her face like raindrops.

Watching Shi Xueman's training reminded Yong Zheng of the past, which made him smile subconsciously. Shi Xueman had almost the same characteristics as her father.

She was brave, self-disciplined and responsible, just like her father.

He now somewhat understood why the family spent so much on Xueman. From their perspective, Shi Xueman was definitely the best candidate from her generation to assume responsibility of the family from her father.

Nonetheless, Yong Zheng somehow felt pity for her.

He saw how much his friend had sacrificed to raise the family to what it was now. Shi Xueman was a girl. It would only be more difficult for her to achieve the success her father had once attained.

After an almost desperate training session, Shi Xueman's frustration was greatly relieved.

Although there was no task, she consoled herself by thinking it was good that she could spend time in the training hall.

“Miss.”

Yong Zheng greeted her. He refrained from telling her what he was thinking. Instead, he simply kept it deep in his heart. People were different. He, himself, was an indolent person, which was why he was living a life like this. Only once had he seen Shi Xueman’s father shedding tears. It was the regret and anguish due to a failure.

The man who regarded success as his life was as unyielding as the hardest stone. The only way to beat him was to totally destroy him, like smashing stones into sand.

“Uncle Yong Zheng.” Shi Xueman forced a smile and could not help asking, “How on earth is Central Pine City now?”

They were really the same kind of person.

Yong Zheng smiled in his heart, but nothing could be seen on his face. He simply replied, “There were accidents some time ago. Fortunately, measures were taken in time. A class of students escaped from the Garden of Life, and they had some basic knowledge of the blood poison, so it prevented disaster. After that, many teachers from Central Pine Academy arranged detailed inspections all over the city to eliminate the hidden dangers. Meanwhile, many earth elementalist teachers reinforced the defense of the city. As for the magistrate court, they assigned more guards for day and night patrols. For Now, there should be no problem.”

Shi Xueman was a bit depressed. At first she thought that the magistrate court and Central Pine Academy were perfunctory, but now she knew that was because everything was fine at this moment.

After being depressed for a few seconds, she cheered up again.

Originally, she was depressed because she was fully prepared to welcome a rough fight, but when she heard what the dean said, she felt she had been fooled. Now, she was happy to know that the city was truly safe, although this would make her look stupid for the mission. Still, it was something to cheer for, since there had been enough people killed in the blood catastrophe.

She could at least relax and do whatever she wanted.

Maybe because she was free from anxiety, Shi Xueman now felt hungry.

She decided to go to eat beef noodles!

She said goodbye to Yong Zheng, took a shower, and went out.

As she walked past the blind battle training halls, she was reminded of their popularity in the past. Due to the blood catastrophe, most of the travel to the Induction Ground was now stopped. Currently, it was impossible to fly between each city like before, and it would remain this way for a short while.

Most of the previous participants of the blind battles were students from other cities. As a result, there were few visitors now.

In addition to the training halls, almost all stores were suffering from poor business too. Seeing the depression, Shi Xueman sincerely hoped that the blood catastrophe would end as soon as possible. It broke out recently, but had shown how destructive it could be.

The only exception was probably the weapon shop because many people liked to buy weapons in times of crisis.

Unexpectedly, Shi Xueman met someone she knew.

It was Sang Zhijun. Except for Shi Xueman, she was the only girl in the team.

“Xueman!” Sang Zhijun was delighted to see Shi Xueman. She waved to her and said, “Come here!”

Shi Xueman was a bit surprised. “What’s up, Zhijun?”

She was not very close with Sang Zhijun. They were not from the same branch academy after all, and they only knew each other because of the mission. As they were the only girls in the team, however, they were quite familiar with each other.

After getting to know her for some time, Shi Xueman thought Sang Zhijun was an easygoing, elegant,l and modest girl. She seldom saw such a delightful expression on Sang Zhijun's face.

Shi Xueman hurriedly walked to her.

"Can I borrow some money?" Shang Zhijun seemed a bit frustrated. "I thought this was a remote place, so I didn't bring much money. Now I don't have enough money."

"Of course. How much do you want?" Shi Xueman agreed at once, since she had the same experience of forgetting to bring any money to pay the bill before. It was a really awkward and very poignant experience for her.

"Twenty million yuan first." Sang Zhijun said.

She Xueman was startled, "Twenty million yuan? What are you going to buy?"

The first thought that came to her mind was that Zhijun was being swindled. In this small city, where a bowl of beef noodles cost only one hundred and fifty yuan, what could be priced at twenty million yuan? Zhijun must have been ripped off. Shi Xueman became angry and decided to argue with the merchant.

Sang Zhijun knew what Shi Xueman was thinking when she saw her frowning and said, "Relax, I am not being cheated. I just came across something good."

In response to Shi Xueman's suspicious look, Sang Zhijun gave her an arrow and said, "Have a look."

An arrow?

For twenty million yuan? This was definitely cheating!

Shi Xueman took the arrow suspiciously. Archery was not in her training regimen, but she knew some basic knowledge about it. The arrow seemed fine, but she still could not understand how an arrow could cost twenty million yuan. Yet, she also knew that Sang Zhijun was not a fool, so she asked, "Sorry Zhijun, I don't really understand. Is this arrow special?"

Sang Zhijun explained, "Yes, its penetrating power is strong. I just tried. Without elemental energy, it can pierce a three-inch plate one thousand steps away, or a five-inch plate five hundred steps away."

Shi Xueman's eyes widened. She knew a little about archery, but she knew what the results meant.

Looking around, Sang Zhijun confirmed that no one was near them before she said in a low voice, "I have also tested and found that metal elemental energy can enhance its effect."

Shi Xueman understood at once. The data Zhijun just told her was the power of the arrow without elemental energy. If infused

with elemental energy, it would be more powerful, especially when the attribute of the elemental energy matched it.

Sang Zhijun's physique was of the metal attribute, so the arrow was just right for her.

It was out of Shi Xueman's expectation that Central Pine City had such excellent treasures. She had been here many times, but this was the first time that she discovered that the stores here had high-grade goods to sell.

"How many are you going to buy?" she asked, as she realized Zhijun was not just buying one arrow.

Sang Zhijun was exciting and said in a low voice, "We could not have possibly come at a better time. This arrow was just invented today. The price for one arrow is one hundred and fifty thousand yuan. It's not expensive."

"One hundred and fifty thousand yuan each? Not expensive indeed." Shi Xueman said without hesitation, "I have some money. You can take it all."

The importance of the arrow to an elementalist who practiced archery was beyond doubt. The popularity of archery had raised new demand for arrows, and there were now people who worked as specialized arrow producers.

Nowadays, you could find arrows in almost all weapon shops, but

it was still difficult to find good arrows. It was very fortunate to encounter an arrow that suited the user.

Shi Xueman understood what Zhijun was thinking. She would stock up on these arrows now because they were consumables, and she might not be able to get more when hers were used up.

“I have ten million yuan and together with your twenty million yuan, I’ll have thirty million yuan total. If so, I can buy two hundred arrows. It will be enough for me to use for a while.” Sang Zhijun was grateful. “They have just created this arrow and haven’t released it into the market. Besides, they don’t have enough in stock, so I’ll have to wait. two hundred arrows! They will have to work hard for quite a while.”

Sang Zhijun went into the store to negotiate with the shopkeeper while Shi Xueman looked around by herself.

It was unexpected for a store that seemed so ordinary to have such wonderful arrows to sell. Shi Xueman was looking forward to finding some other first-grade goods.

After looking over everything on the shelf, Shi Xuewan was disappointed.

None of the goods could impress her.

Sang Zhijun came out happily with ten arrows in hand. Apparently, the arrows had just been made.

“What’s its name?” Shi Xueman asked casually.

Sang Zhujun answered in a good mood, “The name is weird. It’s called Bunny Hair. I learned about this arrow from the magistrate court. They acquired some before, but theirs are only half as powerful as this one. They bought them at the price of twenty thousand yuan each, and in the market it was sold at thirty thousand yuan. So, I decided to have a look here in the store. Surprisingly, they just invented the new arrow which was more powerful. I’m so lucky.”

Since she would not be willing to use them during daily training, two hundred “Bunny Hair” arrows were enough for her to use for a long time.

“Not expensive indeed.” Shi Xueman said, “It’s not easy to find such a powerful arrow.”

The power was merely doubled, but the price was five times higher. Yet, this was no surprise to Shi Xueman. She knew that after the power reached a certain level, any increase would cost a lot of effort. Therefore, the price would be much higher.

“Xueman, you have to buy me dinner.” Sang Zhijun looked delicate and touching. “I have no money now. I’ll have to depend on you.”

“No problem! I’ll buy you everything.” Shi Xueman smiled. “Let’s go to eat beef noodles. I know an old noodle house here

which is very famous."

Shi Xueman was a cold beauty in the eyes of boys, but to girls, she was like a warm and reliable big sister.

"You seem to be very familiar with this city?" Sang Zhijun followed her and asked curiously. To her, Shi Xueman did not look like the kind of person who would eat beef noodles in the small restaurants.

"Yes," Shi Xueman replied, "we have a training hall here, and I've been here several times."

The smell of beef made Shi Xueman hungry.

She walked in the noodle house like a regular and called, "Two bowls of beef noodles and a beef dish please."

The owner of the noodle house answered, "Okay." When he looked up, he saw two unfamiliar female customers, and the one who was speaking was extraordinarily beautiful. If she had come here before, it would be impossible for him to forget her.

"Please have a seat. The noodles will be served soon."

Although he felt confused, he still asked them to take a seat.

Sang Zhijun looked around curiously behind Shi Xueman, but

soon she was attracted by a weird sound.

“Fatty! How can you eat so much?”

“Two bowls less than you, okay?”

“It is you who owes me money. How can you eat this much? At least four bowls less than me!”

“Ai Hui, don’t you remember that I left the last steamed bun for you that time? You cannot be so ruthless. At least let me have enough noodles.”

“That makes sense. You can continue, and if you can give me five reasons, I’ll let you eat more. Hmmm, yes, go on... yes, you are right... Hmmm, excuse me, I want one more bowl of noodles please!”

“Ai Hui, you are so cunning!”

Chapter 143: Money Losing Deal

Shi Xueman was surprised to see Ai Hui.

It seemed as if she came across this guy every time she came to the noodle house.

Instead of saying anything, however, she just found a seat casually and Sang Zhijun sat beside her.

Sang Zhijun had never been to such a small restaurant and so was very curious. The boys sitting not far away from them were making a lot of noise and the smell in the air made her very hungry.

The table in front of them was cluttered with tall stacks of empty bowls. Sang Zhijun felt speechless seeing how much the two boys had eaten. She had never before seen anyone eat like them; all men she knew were restrained, elegant, and gentle while eating.

This was a new experience for her.

What surprised her the most, however, was Shi Xueman. In her eyes, a goddess would never come to this kind of restaurant. In fact, not only boys, but a lot of girls also regarded Shi Xueman as a goddess.

Shi Xueman noticed that Sang Zhijun was looking at her and could roughly guess what she was thinking. She simply smiled and

didn’t explain further.

The two boys who were busy eating didn’t notice the presence of other people at all.

Fatty finally returned to reality and said, “This is great! This is what life should be! Ai Hui, how did you find this restaurant? It’s amazing! I have made up my mind!”

Fatty’s sudden, loud voice gave Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun a good scare.

Ai Hui didn’t have any expression at all. He continued to eat his noodles and said without raising his head, “Made up your mind to pay your debt?”

Fatty replied, “No, of course not. I’ve decided to stay with you. I have looked into it, and in the second year in the Induction Ground, I can apply for a branch transfer provided the branch college is willing to accept me. You see, I am working so hard these days and I’m sure your branch college will be more than willing to accept me.”

“Pay your debt first.” Ai Hui sounded emotionless and focused on his noodles, as if all his passion had been exhausted in his effort to distract Fatty just now.

Fatty glared at him in fury. “Why are you so realistic now?”

“So you are saying that you won’t pay your debt?” Ai Hui ignored his question.

“I am going to pay…” Fatty didn’t dare to admit otherwise and decided to convert the topic of their conversation. “Ai Hui, when do you think the blood catastrophe will come to an end?”

The first thing that came to Shi Xueman’s mind when she saw Ai Hui was not his debt or whether he had found the person she was looking for, but was the message tree. The tree was so old that she could not even trace its origin.

It was impossible for such an old message tree to not be registered, and she had seen for herself that the tree was healthy with no diseases or infections.

After the outbreak of the blood poison, all these thoughts were left behind. She only remembered the message tree after seeing Ai Hui.

To learn more about the tree, she had even asked her family to help investigate the Vanguard Training Hall. They had searched the entrustment in the Mission Hall of Central Pine City and learned that the owner of the training hall was called Heng Bingfeng; it was a name no one knew anything about.

This was all the information she could get. Apart from this name, no information could be found, not about the message tree or Vanguard Training Hall.

She had also asked her grandfather, but he hadn't known anything about this name either.

When she saw Ai Hui, she couldn't help thinking about this investigation.

Then the boys' conversation about the blood catastrophe caught her attention. Sang Zhijun showed a look of disapproval; she had seen so many boys who loved to talk big.

The noodles were served just at that time. Shi Xueman began to eat her noodles, but she also continued paying attention to the boys because she wanted to hear what Ai Hui would say. In her eyes, although Ai Hui was not impressive, he was bold,cautious, and had his own opinions.

"End?" Ai Hui paused for a while. "It will not end soon."

At first, Fatty had just wanted to change the topic; he hadn't expected to hear such an answer from Ai Hui. He thought for a second, then asked, "Why? It's only blood poison. I think the Induction Ground is powerful enough to find a solution soon."

Fatty had confidence in the Induction Ground, just like almost everyone else. The Induction Ground was an enclosed area without complicated conflicts between factions. It possessed strength and the people here were united as one.

Its most significant feature was its strength. Since the Induction

Ground was cut off from the outside world, the environment here was relatively pure. As a result, many masters and well-known people liked to live in seclusion here.

Besides, there were researchers who studied weird things, countless schools, various new theories, and learned teachers.

How could the blood poison get the better of the Induction Ground that had such strength?

At first, Fatty didn't quite believe Ai Hui. If it were another person who had said this, Fatty would have given a snort of contempt, but since it was Ai Hui, although Fatty was still muttering something, he began to believe it in his heart.

"I don't know." Ai Hui didn't raise his head and continued to eat the noodles, then said unclearly, "I just have this kind of feeling. What is coming is not good, and it's coming with menace."

"What is coming is not good. It's coming with menace," murmured Fatty, then felt an overwhelming sense of danger.

What is coming is not good. It's coming with menace.

Shi Xueman was also thinking about what Ai Hui had said.

Since Sang Zhijun had regarded them as two bombastic guys from the very beginning, now that she heard this completely unreasonable reason, she further believed that her initial

judgment had been correct.

As a girl, she had been a bit scared of the blood poison all along.

She didn't want to hear them talk about this topic any more, but was too shy to ask them to stop. After thinking for a while, she said, "Thank you, Xueman. If it were not for you, I would have been unable to buy the arrows."

Shi Xueman recovered from her contemplation and smiled. "It's not a big issue. Don't mention it."

"I never thought that I could find such excellent arrows in Central Pine City." Sang Zhijun seemed excited. "Although the name is a bit weird. Bunny Hair Arrows... Anyway, I have known for a long time that the Induction Ground has many undiscovered talents, even in the small cities. This trip has been so rewarding."

"Yes, it's also because you are lucky." Shi Xueman was happy for Sang Zhijun too. Not every family was like hers and could spend as much as possible on one child, regardless of costs.

Every family had strict rules on the spending of their young generation, unless the person in question was almost sure to be the successor of the family. The longer the history the family had, the more strict the rules would be.

If you want to get more, you will have to stand on your own feet.

In the families that had many children in one generation, graduation from the Induction Ground meant the start of competition. Under similar investments, the ones who could win the competition were more likely to play an important role in the continued extension of the family.

Even if some of them were not eager to be the successor, their rights and obligations were always equal and the investments of the family on them was never unconditional. They knew sometimes that they needed to obey the requirements of the family.

Such as making connections through marriage.

They were like ropes on which their family had spent a lot of resources and money to polish, then make into a part of the family's net of interest.

If they wanted to get rid of their family's restrictions, there was no other way but to bring more interest to the family.

So if a girl like Sang Zhijun didn't want to go through with the marriage arranged by her family, she needed to be extraordinarily hard working in order to prove her value. If she was in a high position as a head of a clan and could bring more benefits to the family than what the marriage would bring, the cunning elders of the family would then know and choose the greater benefit.

But this was definitely a more difficult way.

Smart children of the big families never gave up working hard. They would be more and more independent and assiduous, and try their best to show their talent and ability. They were clearly aware that was how they could get freedom.

As long as you could reach the peak, you could do whatever you liked.

Even if you could not reach the peak, the more freedom you had, the better.

Sang Zhijun was going to graduate soon and then she would be faced with such problems. This was why she was so cheerful. If wars were not too frequent, the two hundred Bunny Hair Arrows were enough for her to use for two years on the frontline

Even if she had to join the hunting team in the Wilderness, the two hundred Bunny Hair Arrows could play an important role.

Seeing this, Shi Xueman believed Sang Zhijun was a clever girl who knew to start preparing from early on. Compared with the more mature girls, the boys on their team were amazingly simple.

“It’s just, the total price of thirty million yuan is a bit too high for me.” Sang Zhijun looked upset. Her family would never give her so much money.

“You won’t need the money in the short run,” Shi Xueman said gently.

Sang Zhijun smiled and responded, “Don’t worry, I always save money because It makes me happy to have a lot of money on hand. This is the first time that I have to spend so much money, so I’m feeling a bit guilty.”

Now Shi Xueman began to have a completely new appraisal of her. A girl who loved to save money didn’t hesitate to buy so many Bunny Hair Arrows. With such boldness and courage, she was definitely not an ordinary girl.

Bunny Hair…

Hearing these words, Ai Hui paused for a while and became filled with joy. Of course he was happy to hear his arrows being praised, even if he was only responsible for providing the silk.

Wait!

Thirty million yuan!

That girl bought thirty million yuan worth of Bunny Hair Arrows!

Ai Hui’s eyes were fixed on her. He wished he could rush to Manager Li to tell him what he had heard. Thirty million yuan’s worth of Bunny Hair Arrows. She was really rich.

Hearing the two girls talking, Fatty looked up and was stunned at once. He murmured, “A…Ai Hui, so pretty…”

Pretty?

Ai Hui’s eyes could only see money now. He looked up and said carelessly, “Which one are you talking about?”

“Both.” Fatty’s eyes lit up.

Ai Hui slapped him on the back of the head and said, “The one who paid was pretty. Do you understand?”

Whoever was the one to praise the Bunny Hair arrow was prettier.

Ah, no, whoever bought thirty million yuan’s worth of Bunny Hair Arrows was prettier.

Fatty glared at Ai Hui and said, “You are bullying me because I don’t have money.”

“Yes!” Ai Hui nodded. “Or you pay me back the debt.”

Fatty did not dare to say anything.

Ai Hui told him sincerely, “Fatty, remember, money is

everything. If you don't have money, you cannot even buy a bowl of noodles. Last time in this noodle house, I met a girl who didn't take money with her, and in the end I had to pay for her. You know what? If you see any girl who doesn't bring money with her, you should run away from her as far as you can go."

"Why?" Fatty was confused.

"Because that's a skank. If you pay for her, you are dead," Ai Hui said with bitter hatred. "I paid one hundred and fifty yuan for the noodles, but I ended up owing her eighty million yuan. This is a money-losing deal."

"Eighty million yuan..." Fatty was dazed. The number was too large and he could not respond.

Sang Zhijun noticed Shi Xueman's weirdness and asked with deep concern, "Xueman, are you alright? You don't look well. Are you feeling uncomfortable?"

Chapter 144: Ambush And Oversight

Shi Xueman’s face turned ashen.

Money-losing-deal…

She had never thought that she would one day be called a money-losing-deal.

Damn it!

Even though she tried her best to act as if nothing happened, her facial expression showed otherwise. She took in deep breaths of air and restrained her anger. In front of Sang Zhijun’s concern, she forced a smile and said, "I must have trained too hard."

On the other side, Fatty suddenly responded, "So you owe a debt of eighty million yuan?"

Ai Hui suddenly felt the noodles become tasteless, and he stopped eating. With an irritated tone, he replied, "Why do I feel that you’re somewhat rejoicing at my misfortune?"

"No, no, no!" Fatty shook his head like a rattle-drum. "It’s not just somewhat—I’m really rejoicing! Ai Hui, you actually owe someone eighty million yuan, hahaha! Ai Hui, let me tell you this seriously, we are both debtors and we should be in harmony and not criticize each other…."

"I will clear my debt very soon." Ai Hui cast a look of disdain at Fatty. He then glanced at Sang Zhijun, who appeared to him like a god of wealth, dazzling with golden light.

Whoever bought the Bunny Hair Arrows must be a rich person!

Fatty humphed and remained silent. Ai Hui, however, had become sick of Fatty's facial expression. "Two more sets of lunges when we're back home later!"

"Hey, hey, hey, the one with surname Ai, are you trying to take revenge by doing this?" Fatty was enraged.

"Why don't you pay for the bill, then?" Ai Hui sneered as he played his trump card.

Fatty immediately shut his mouth. At this moment, he understood what living under someone else's roof meant.

A cold glint flashed across Shi Xueman's eyes as she sneered in her mind.

You even have the money to eat beef noodles—it seems that you're rich now!

"That's not right, Ai Hui." Fatty suddenly thought of another question, and a puzzled look appeared on his face. "Are you referring to a girl just now?"

Girl? Woman?

In Fatty’s memory, Ai Hui’s world was all about fighting, training, weapons, and money. Weapons were for the sake of improving his fighting capabilities, and money was for the sake of better training. Actually, in the end, it was all about fighting and training.

This fellow was a legitimate cold-blooded killing machine.

"That’s right." With his head lowered, Ai Hui was engrossed in settling the bill with the owner.

"Wow, I really can’t tell...you’ve been enlightened after you left the Wilderness!" Fatty was astonished. "You actually paid for a girl, but why don’t you pay for me?"

Ai Hui raised his head and glanced at the owner before gesturing to the heap of bowls in front of Fatty. "He’s paying for himself."

Fatty immediately became terror-stricken and gave a hollow laugh. "Help me please, help me. We will pay together, we will pay together."

Ai Hui lowered his head again and returned to calculating the total cost of the noodles. That damned Fatty, he ate so much!

Suddenly, Fatty sighed ruefully. "There's only both of us left. If I can see you, Ai Hui, get together with a girl, I will die without any regrets."

Ai Hui's hands trembled as he continued counting the money. Without raising his head, he replied coldly, "Return me my money first before you die."

Damn it, he had miscounted.

After flustering over the bill for a few times, Ai Hui finally settled it.

At this point of time, Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun finished their meals as well. The jubilant Sang Zhijun had almost finished an entire bowl of noodles. After she had finished eating, she noticed that Shi Xueman did not eat much and felt a bit embarrassed.

By the time Ai Hui and Fatty walked out of the noodle house, night had already fallen.

Due to the blood poison catastrophe, almost all the stores on the street were closed. It was barely nighttime, but the street looked as if it was already midnight. The deep darkness of the night seemed to be devouring all light and warmth. Even the light lamps on the street seemed to be somewhat dimmer.

Such a gloomy scene....

After staying in the Central Pine City for so long, this was the first time Ai Hui saw the night street being so empty and cold

If Central Pine City that was so far away from the Garden of Life was so greatly impacted by the blood poison, then what was the state of those cities and towns that were close to the Garden of Life?

The formerly lush and verdant forest had now become a barren land; the large pieces of scorched land resembled ugly scars. From afar, one could see surging black fumes rising above the horizon.

The scene of that day he had been rescued from the Garden of Life had left an incredibly deep impression on him.

That had fully and vividly displayed the might of the Induction Ground. They wanted to quickly destroy the blood poison even if it meant using the most brutal of ways to achieve it. Sometimes, Ai Hui couldn’t help but wonder how such a powerful entity like the Induction Ground could not handle a mere blood poison?

Like a persistent haze, the uneasiness lingered in his mind.

Ai Hui believed that the Induction Ground would definitely find a way to handle the blood poison. Perhaps the only thing he had to worry about was the Induction Ground’s efficiency. The reason why he was feeling uneasy might be because of the appearance of the blood poison inside Central Pine City.

Ai Hui silently shook his head and tried to ignore these distracting thoughts. He was just a nobody; why should he worry so much? He should make good use of his time and train harder.

Behind him, Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun left the noodle house as well.

All right, he would have to make a trip to Old Li's shop tomorrow. How much money will he make from such a huge business deal?

After settling his mistress's debt, Ai Hui's cash on hand had reduced significantly. Even though Senior Mingxiu had assured him that there was no rush in repaying the debt, Ai Hui still paid her back the full amount of money he owed.

He already owed a lot to his mistress. If he had no money, then he could not do anything about the debt. But if he earned money and still did not settle his debt, then what would that say about his character?

Luckily, tonight he met a rich person; he would make a profit.

The overjoyed Ai Hui cast a glance at Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun. How could he not notice such wealthy clients?

Suddenly, Ai Hui's eye pupils shrunk, and he yelled solemnly, "Be careful! Behind you!"

Sang Zhijun was stretching her back. The bowl of noodles she had just eaten was too delicious. Suddenly, she heard a yell from ahead, and a blank look flashed upon her face.

Shi Xueman's attention was still on that damned fellow. How dare he call her a money-losing-deal? She would never let this matter rest! And because of this, she noticed Ai Hui's eye pupils shrink, and at that moment, she went on high alert.

Furthermore, due to her previous encounters with Ai Hui, she was aware of his sharp senses.

Without any hesitation, Shi Xueman, being one of the top students in the Induction Ground, displayed a superb reaction speed at this critical moment.

She pushed the bewildered Sang Zhijun to the ground, and her other hand simultaneously released a cloud of mist.

The palm-sized cloud of mist exploded violently.

A ring-shaped wall of water vapor extended outwards with a loud bang.

The seemingly weak wall of water vapor was sizzling furiously, displaying terrifying might.

Behind it...

She Xueman remained remarkably cool-headed. Ai Hui's warning had zoomed past her mind with a lightning speed. At the instant she released the cloud of mist, both her legs were already pinned to the ground as she flung Sang Zhijun towards Ai Hui with one hand.

Thump! Pfff!

These two sounds could be heard at the same time. A shiver ran down Shi Xueman's spine.

The first sound was somewhat muffled. Clearly, it was produced when the attacker had slammed itself against the wall of water vapor. The second sound was produced when the attacker's attack hit the ground; it had landed on the spot where they were standing previously.

Shi Xueman was appalled.

She was well aware of how powerful the wall of water vapor was. The wall of water vapor could easily bounce off an elephant and send it flying a few hundred meters away.

The attacker had actually slammed against the wall and could still attack them afterward.

Terrifying...

When Sang Zhijun stood up and saw the deep scratches on the spot where they had previously been standing a few moments ago, her expression changed drastically.

Shi Xueman was much calmer, but she still felt a lingering fear. If she had been slightly careless, both of them would now be terribly injured.

She looked around and did not discover anything, so she raised her head and looked at the sky. The pitch-black night sky seemed to devour all light.

"What was that just now?" she asked Ai Hui.

Ai Hui was shocked when he heard a seemingly familiar voice. However, he did not think much about it; after all, the danger was not over yet. He put his hand on his sword hilt and replied solemnly, "It’s a bat, and there’s a few of them. They must be infected with the blood poison."

"Bats?" Shi Xueman’s expression changed slightly. "How did they get in?"

Due to the appearance of flying insects that had been infected with the blood poison outside the city, Central Pine City had purposely strengthened its air defense—its defense could now be said to be very tight.

None of them had expected that Central Pine City, which they

thought was well-fortified, had let in a bat.

Ai Hui clutched his sword's hilt. The cold sweat on his back had already drenched his shirt. This was the first time he could not identify the location of his enemy while he was in the sword embryo's state. He licked his lips and warned them. "Be careful, they haven't left yet."

Shi Xueman's expression changed drastically as she awaited the enemy's strike.

The previously bewildered Sang Zhijun had calmed down as well. She removed the lock of golden silk that was tied around her wrist, and with a flick, it transformed into a golden longbow.

This was the first time Ai Hui had seen such a unique bow, and he could not help but take a second look.

The bow was made up of countless intertwining threads of golden silk, causing it to look more like a piece of art than a weapon. It was slim and magnificent.

Sang Zhijun, who had now calmed down, drew three Bunny Hair Arrows.

In a time of crisis, she did not hesitate in the slightest and was extremely decisive.

Shi Xueman did not unleash her azure wings; they would be

useless as her opponent was a bat that naturally specialized in flying. Furthermore, the sky was dark, and she did not want to put herself in a disadvantageous position.

A faintly discernable cloud of air was gathering in her palms.

"Shouldn’t we request for help first?" Fatty said weakly while hiding behind them.

Ai Hui was focused on the space of air ahead of him. As he scanned his surroundings, he replied, "No. If we request for help now, this place will become chaotic. A chaotic scene will be advantageous to those blood bats. And if they have an advantage, we will not leave this place alive today."

Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun both agreed to Ai Hui’s words.

Just now, if not for Ai Hui’s warning, they would have already been struck by the bats. Bats were the assassins of the dark—if they missed their attacks, they would flee, hide in the dark, and wait patiently for the next chance to strike again.

A chaotic environment would provide many such chances to the blood bats.

Sweat was dripping down Ai Hui’s forehead, but he still maintained his composure. He could sense a few strands of a very weak aura drifting around. Previously, he had managed to give a warning not because he had sensed the blood bats, but rather

because he had seen a red glow flash across the night sky.

Ai Hui had managed to take a good look at them. They belonged to the blood-red glowing eyes of a bat.

Chapter 145: Bring It On!

Bats were outstanding predators, and they were one of the many dire beasts that Ai Hui did not wish to encounter in the Wilderness. Of course, there were many dire beasts that he did not want to encounter.

“Everyone, stick together.”

At this point of time, Ai Hui did not care about whether or not they were familiar with each other.

Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun were not unreasonable individuals. Shi Xueman knew Ai Hui rather well, and Sang Zhijun was a straightforward person. If not for Ai Hui’s warning just now, they both would have died.

Both of them were on their guard as they moved slowly to Ai Hui’s side.

The terrifying claw marks on the spot where they had been standing previously made them tremble with fear. They were so close to death.

The hand with which Sang Zhijun was holding her Golden Silk Longbow was trembling involuntarily.

Even Shi Xueman, who had reacted to the situation calmly, felt a lingering fear hit her like a sweeping tsunami after she now

managed to catch a breath. She could feel her legs wobbling.

Shi Xueman had always emphasized on improving her real-life combat capabilities, and she had—on numerous missions. However, she had never experienced such a terrifying situation. Just a moment ago, she had an actual close brush with death.

Right now, she felt that the lofty aspirations she had on the transport wagon were so childish and ridiculous. In a real life-and-death battle, how much of her combat capabilities could she execute? Fifty percent? Perhaps thirty percent? She may even be killed by the blood fiends while standing frozen in a spot, staring into blank space and not knowing what to do.

So far, she and Sang Zhijun had not been able to sense the slightest bit of the bats' aura. If not for the deep claw marks on the ground, she would have thought that what she saw earlier was an illusion.

It's a pity that it's not an illusion.

Her gaze automatically shifted towards Ai Hui.

Ai Hui was no better than them. His body was slightly crouching, his right hand tightly holding on to the sword hilt of the Dragonspine Inferno. His body was a motionless statue. A bead of sweat meandered down from his forehead to his chin before dripping to the ground.

The dusky street lamps looked especially lonely in the utterly quiet street. The sounds of dripping sweat and heavy breathing could be clearly heard.

However, for some reason, when Shi Xueman saw Ai Hui's tense body, her anxiousness was alleviated.

Beads of sweat slid under his flickering eyelashes, and his eyes looked as calm as still water—one could not discern his feelings. Yes, it was that gaze that made Shi Xueman feel more at ease.

His gaze did not contain the slightest trace of a fluster.

Shi Xueman felt that her performance was terrible. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. When she opened them, her confidence and fighting spirit had returned.

Sang Zhijun calmed down very fast as well.

Indeed, Ai Hui was not flustered, but he was very nervous. His mental state was taut, and his entire body was like a string that was tightly stretched.

His inability to track the bats' location was giving him an immense pressure, the likes of which he had never experienced before. From the day he had successfully planted the sword embryo's seed, nothing in his surroundings could avoid the sword embryo's discerning eye.

What happened today was a first. He was engulfed with tremendous pressure.

What should he do?

Ai Hui's first reaction was to flee. However, his rationality told him that this would be the wrong decision. No matter how fast he ran, he could not outrun the bats in the sky. The bat that had attacked them just now was extremely fast, so fast that Ai Hui's eyes could not catch it. All he had seen was a blood-red colored blur.

These blood bats were far more powerful than the blood insects they had encountered outside of the city!

Bats were carnivores....

This thought flashed through his mind.

What should he do?

Previously, he had rejected Fatty's suggestion to call for help as he had sensed that the bats in the sky had already locked onto them.

Ai Hui did not know how they became the targets for the predators. It really was unlucky, given that Central Pine City was huge. He continued to rack his brain for a way out.

The sensing ability of the sword embryo had already reached its limit...

Eh? Limit!

Suddenly, Ai Hui thought of the times when he would absorb a strand of elemental energy during his training.

With a jolt, he directed a strand of elemental energy towards his glabella.

When the strand of elemental energy reached the glabella, the fidgeting sword embryo absorbed it completely without any hesitation.

Ai Hui could feel the range of his perception expand significantly. In the sky above his head, a faint-looking shadow became clearer in his vision. A bat was noiselessly flying through the air. Every few seconds, it would produce an invisible whirlpool of air current to jumble and hide its aura.

It was only at this moment that Ai Hui realized that there was only one bat. All the other auras created by it was to confuse its enemy and hide itself. Ai Hui had also not expected that while this bat was swirling in the air, its eyes were closed.

Such a powerful bat!

Ai Hui smacked his lips. Once these wild beasts were infected with the blood poison, they would become much more powerful.

“There’s only one bat, and it’s swirling above our heads.”

Ai Hui said with a low voice. His focus was locked on to that blood bat.

Everyone felt a shiver run down their spines.

At this moment, Ai Hui felt his senses gradually become blurry. He cursed in his heart. Without any hesitation, he directed another strand of elemental energy to his sword embryo, and his senses immediately became clear again.

“It’s two hundred meters above us.” Ai Hui quickly gave a specific height of the bat from the ground.

Sang Zhijun was flabbergasted and involuntarily stared at Ai Hui. This fellow could actually determine how high was the bat from the ground. Such a powerful fellow, why had she not heard of his name before? She was trained in archery. To be an archer, one had to develop their eyesight. Sang Zhijun had always possessed extreme confidence with regards to this aspect, but now, even when she widened her eyes, she still could not discern the bat.

The blood bat’s body perfectly blended into the darkness, and its flight through the air did not produce any sound; it was completely silent like a ghost.

She did not know how Ai Hui tracked the bat's location.

"What should we do then?" Shi Xueman asked softly.

"If I lure it down, are both of you confident in killing it?" Ai Hui replied as he licked his lips.

Since they could not escape, they could only kill this bat.

And it must be now.

Currently, Ai Hui was unceasingly expending his elemental energy as his perception was locked on to the blood bat. But once his elemental energy was used up, they would end up in a defensive position.

The battle must be finished before his elemental energy was depleted. There was no other choice.

Ai Hui quickly and accurately determined the situation.

"I'm not confident."

When Shi Xueman said these words, she felt so ashamed that she wanted to find a hole and hide. The other party used himself as a lure to create a chance for them, and all the danger was solely upon him. And in such an extreme situation, she could not even dare to

say that she was confident.

That's right, she actually did not dare to say she was confident. Previously, when the blood bat had slammed itself against her wall of water vapor, she had realized its strength.

Sang Zhijun was shocked at Ai Hui's courage. She felt disbelief. She used to think that this kind of scene would only appear in storybooks that depicted heroes. Who would actually sacrifice himself as a lure? How stupid would that be?

She never expected herself to witness this scene today. If it were some other person, then she would think that it was because of her and Shi Xueman's beauty. However, it was definitely not the case for the fellow in front of her, because he had never even taken a serious look at them from the beginning.

Are there really fools who would sacrifice themselves for others in this world?

It seems that there is....

Ai Hui did not know Sang Zhijun's thoughts on his suggestion. And even if he did, he wouldn't care. At this crucial moment, who would care about a girl's rubbish thoughts when he did not even know her?

He was only aware that this could not drag on for any longer. He had already depleted one-fourth of his elemental energy, and the

longer he persisted, the more unfavorable the situation would become for him.

The sword embryo was like a black hole that kept on devouring his elemental energy!

“Even if you don’t have confidence, you have to do it.” Ai Hui’s tone was resolute and decisive, but his facial expression remained calm.“Both of you, get ready.”

At this moment, Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun became nervous. Both of them knew that their attacks would determine Ai Hui’s fate. They, too, were now engulfed with tremendous pressure.

“But….” Sang Zhijun’s face turned pale.

“There’s no but!” Ai Hui interrupted her. There was no time to waste.

He was also very nervous. Both of their behaviors did not give him any sense of security, making him think about whether this was a stupid decision. However, he tried to restrain his nervousness and irritation. If possible, he would definitely not want to put his life in the hands of two strangers.

However, right now, he had no other choice.

There was no point in thinking about the impossible.

Ai Hui's gaze regained its calm and coldness. Even his voice contained a tinge of indifference; he spoke as if the situation had nothing to do with him. "We only have one chance to strike."

After finishing his sentence, he did care about the both of them anymore and turned to Fatty. "Be careful."

Fatty knew what Ai Hui meant. Ai Hui was trying to say that if the situation turned for the worst, Fatty should quickly escape by himself. Fatty didn't say anything; he only nodded his head, signaling that he knew what to do. He was acting way more level-headed than both Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun.

"If we fail, the three of you have to run in three different directions," Ai Hui reminded them. The two girls were rookies, and he had no choice but to remind them of this basic knowledge.

Seeing that Ai Hui had a thorough arrangement, Shi Xueman's anxiousness disappeared. Her eyes became determined as she replied with a serious tone, "I will do my best."

The sparkling and translucent pearl that hung on her wrist suddenly trembled, resembling a shaky dewdrop on the tip of grass in the morning. With a flick of her snow-white hand, the glistening pearl broke off from the string and rolled along her wrist and into her palm.

With a flick of her slender middle finger, the pearl was lodged in between her thumb and middle finger.

“Me too.” Sang Zhijun bit her lips.

She tossed the arrow quiver that was hung onto her waist to the ground. Her hand was holding on to three Bunny Hair Arrows, and her legs were wide apart as she stood like a tree, tall and upright.

Without raising his head to look at the bat, Ai Hui took a step forward.

The blood bat in the sky moved.

At this point in time, he finally confirmed that the bat was locked on to him. Among the four people, he was the only one who was locked on to by the bat. Could it be that the blood bat had sensed the aura of his sword embryo as well? Bats did not require their eyes to look at things; rather, they used their senses and echolocation.

Ai Hui quickly dismissed the distracting thoughts in his head and focused on the space of air before him.

Suddenly, he dashed forward—it was as if he could not take the pressure anymore and wanted to flee.

Ai Hui was unsure whether the blood bat in the sky would fall for his trap. Now, however, he did not want to think about anything else.

Almost instantly, he could sense the blood bat above him begin to swoop downwards silently.

It’s coming.

In the darkness, Ai Hui grinned sinisterly as he tightened his grip on the Dragonspine Inferno.

Bring it on!

Chapter 146: Unleash The Sword

The deep darkness of the night was its best cover.

Its wingspan was more than one meter. Its dog-sized black-colored body was striped with blood-red streaks, resembling the color of cooled magma. One would not be able to sense its presence in the dark night.

Its eyes were tightly shut, and it displayed an incredible calmness. The sound waves that it emitted covered the entire street.

Its target was that human who gave off a unique aura, a dangerous aura, which it could sense coming from his body. Its underdeveloped intelligence did not allow it to understand what exactly was going on. Its killing instinct and strengthened body, which were several times stronger than before, may be the reasons why it was doing this. Its unique flying techniques resembled a whale swimming in the depths of the ocean, making no noise at all.

The target wanted to escape. This was something that it commonly encountered.

Its diving speed was extremely fast; the distance between the two parties began to rapidly decrease. Halfway through its dive, it increased its speed abruptly. Its previously closed eyes started to open, revealing a pair of dark red eyes that looked like pieces of glowing iron. Its expression became sinister, and its sharp, snow-white teeth produced a hissing sound in the wind.

Suddenly, its target stopped running and turned around.

Escaping was a stupid thing to do, but putting up a resistance would be even more stupid. It could feel the blood boiling within its body, and its bloodthirsty killing intent stimulated it even more.

It continued to increase its speed.

Even though Ai Hui, who had placed all his attention on the blood bat, was mentally prepared, he was still frightened by the blood bat's speed.

Too fast!

The eyes of the blood bat created a blur of demonic-red glow in the air. Its speed was so fast that Ai Hui's eyes could not keep up with it.

The scarier part was that the sound of the wind it produced was very soft—it only produced a low, snake-like hissing sound as it dived.

This defied Ai Hui's logic. From what he knew, the faster a beast flew, the louder the sound it would make. Arrows behaved similarly as well; the more the power of a flying arrow, the louder it would be.

However, the diving blood bat barely made any sound.

And the frightening thing was that it was still increasing its speed!

It doesn't make sense!

An urge to flee arose in Ai Hui’s mind. He felt that his idea was too naive. How could those two girls keep up with such terrifying speed?

He forcibly restrained the fear in his mind. At this point in time, he would have no chance of surviving if he escaped. How could his legs outrun something that could fly?

Moreover, the speed of this beast had surpassed that of any arrows he had ever seen!

When Ai Hui realized that there was no way he could escape, he calmed down. Just like before, when he knew he had no other options, all distracting thoughts disappeared immediately.

He held his sword hilt.

The grip of the Dragonspine Inferno felt very hard and rough. The rope grip of the sword was made by him; after staying in the embroidery workshop for so long, making a simple rope grip wasn’t too difficult.

The rope grip was rather fitting for his hands as well.

For some unknown reason, whenever Ai Hui placed his focus on the sword, his mind would calm down immediately.

He remembered that a lot of swordplay manuals had discussed how a swordsman should treat his sword. Some manuals even stated that swordsmen should craft their own swords, and the whole crafting process should be done by them alone.

After the crafting was completed, the swordsmen should start a long process of nurturing their newly-crafted swords.

Other types of cultivators often changed their weapons, but swordsmen would not do that; most of the swordsmen had at most five swords in their entire lives. It was not rare for those swordsmen, who never changed their swords even once in their lives, to develop an ordinary sword into a legendary one.

Ai Hui felt that it was incredible that his mind could still be distracted at this point in time.

He did not have the slightest bit of nervousness or fear—it was as if all the danger had been resolved all of a sudden.

Holding the sword, he could a perceive a sensation from the sword hilt. His mind was tranquil. The previously restless sword embryo had also become calm and vigorous.

Ai Hui was emotionless. He slightly crouched, hind leg and elbows bent, as he pressed the sword hilt against his chest; the tip of the sword was pointing towards the sky. The body of the sword was so black that it did not even reflect a bit of light. The seven dazzling pieces of red crystal resembled seven mysterious islands that floated out on the dark sea.

His movements were relaxed, without any signs of danger or vigor.

A silver color extended outwards from the roots of his hair. His eyes remained indifferent and as calm as still water.

His inner mind was extremely tranquil.

Even the faint hissing sounds had disappeared. The sword, which weighed around one hundred kilograms, was firm and steady in his hand, motionless like an unmovable boulder. He could feel the light drafts brush past the tip of his sword as it sliced through the air—it felt as if a river was flowing through his sword.

Ai Hui was channeling his elemental energy into the sword embryo, continuously expanding and extending his perception.

Suddenly, however, the experience became different. He could feel the range of his perception begin to shrink, and it continued until he could only perceive his sword. He could now clearly see and feel every fine crack and impurity on the seven pieces of red crystal.

This kind of feeling was extremely wonderful.

Not far away, Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun were shocked upon witnessing the huge transformation in Ai Hui's aura with their own eyes.

Especially Shi Xueman, even though she had seen Ai Hui fight before. She could still not forget that magnificent and dazzling sword move from that day; it was the most breathtaking sword move she had ever seen in her life. And, from then onwards, she had been impressed by Ai Hui's swordsmanship.

But that was all.

In an era where swordsmanship was irrelevant, even if one's sword skills were impressive, it wouldn't matter much.

From the day the Avalon of Five Elements was established, there had not been a single Grandmaster Swordsman. Even most of those so-called Master Swordsmen were frauds who self-conferred their titles themselves.

However, at this moment, Ai Hui was showing her an entirely different perspective on swordsmanship.

There was no luster, there was no resplendence. Ai Hui was like a statue, a boulder, a still lake.

Since young, Shi Xueman had encountered many experts, and she was well versed with their characteristics. She knew that the calmer an expert was, the more destructive the storm brewing in him would be.

Shi Xueman did not dare to look on anymore. The statue-like Ai Hui was emitting an indescribable attractive force, charming people and captivating souls.

She did not forget her responsibilities. They had only one chance, and if they made a mistake, Ai Hui would perish on the spot. Shi Xueman's back was shrouded in a faint surging mist, the result of her channeling her water elemental energy to the limit. She was trying her best to lock onto the swooping blood bat, but no matter how hard she tried, she wasn't able to do it.

It was simply too fast!

The blood bat opened its eyes, and Shi Xueman could see a blur of demonic red glow. However, even when she tried her best, she barely managed to catch its afterimage.

Sang Zhijun subconsciously bit her lips until they bled, and her forehead was dripping with sweat.

She could not lock onto the blood bat as well.

Just when Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun were at their wits end, Ai Hui suddenly unleashed his sword.

This strike was very slow and light—it looked as if Ai Hui unleashed this attack with zero effort.

The lightning-fast streak of demonic red glow and Ai Hui's sluggish sword strike provided an enormous visual contrast.

Shi Xueman indescribably uncomfortable upon witnessing it; however, her eyes and attention had been involuntarily captivated by Ai Hui's strike.

The moment the tip of the sword made contact with the demonic red blur, the sluggishness and extreme speed converged.

The dark red claw and the black-colored sword tip seemed to have frozen in time.

Shi Xueman could not describe the awkwardness of this scene. She felt dizzy and nauseous; her chest felt tight, and she was suffocating. She was so sick that she wanted to vomit, and beside her, Sang Zhijun's body swayed, and her face also became pale-white.

Boom!

The violent explosion sent shivers down everyone's spine.

A visible ring-shaped billow of air exploded outwards from the

point of contact between the sword's tip and the bat's bloody claws.

Ai Hui's face suddenly became flushed, and it looked as if he was drunk. He gritted his teeth and appeared to say something, but no sound came out from his mouth as he flew through the air, forming an arc in the sky. He proceeded to crash into a nearby wall, causing the entire structure to collapse with a loud rumble.

The blood bat appeared before Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun for the first time. Its body was striped with dark-red streaks. However, at this point in time, its sinister-looking face was in a daze.

Shi Xueman endured the pain in her chest as she knew the crucial moment had arrived. Without hesitating, she channeled all her elemental energy into the pearl between her fingers and shot it out with a flick of her finger.

With a flash of luster, the pearl in Shi Xueman's hand disappeared. She then collapsed as if she was drained of all energy.

On the other side, Sang Zhijun's face was pale, but her eyes were filled with an imposing battlelust. The Golden Silk Longbow in her hand looked like a crescent moon with the three Bunny Hair Arrows placed upon it. Even though her fingers were clenching the fletchings of the three arrows separately, the arrow heads were in contact with each other.

The three Bunny Hair Arrows gave off a faint silver glow with a sharpness so unequaled that Sang Zhijun was pleasantly surprised.

Clink!

The three Bunny Hair Arrows merged in mid-air and materialized into a dazzling silvery light.

Compared to Shi Xueman, Sang Zhijun was worse off. After putting all her energy into that attack, she retreated several steps before her legs gave way, causing her to fall down on her backside.

Shi Xueman's pearl struck the dazed blood bat, and as soon as it made contact with the blood bat's body, it disintegrated into a tiny cloud of mist which seeped into the bat's body.

The blood bat froze. Both the water and blood cells in its body were beginning to frantically rush towards the tiny cloud of mist. However, it looked as if its body was trying to devour the cloud of mist, which was filled with concentrated elemental energy.

At this moment, the blood bat was in the perfect position to be struck.

The silvery light shot out from Sang Zhijun's bow effortlessly hit the blood bat's head.

The silvery light suddenly blew up, causing the bat's head to explode into countless fragments.

Its headless body was bubbling with water vapour—it was as if it was dumped into boiling water. The previously strong metallic skin had lost its luster and had dried-up.

Its body crashed to the ground with a resounding bang.

A plump silhouette pulled Ai Hui to one side.

The instant Ai Hui had been sent flying backward, Fatty had already rushed forwards to catch him.

Ai Hui had fainted.

Without saying anything, Fatty carried the dusty Ai Hui on his back and dashed frantically in the direction of the training hall.

“He doesn't even bother to say goodbye, really...” Sang Zhijun muttered as she sat on the ground, staring blankly at Fatty’s retreating back.

“He must be anxious to save his friend.” Shi Xueman had regained a little of her strength, and she helped Sang Zhijun up from the ground.

“What should we do now?” Sang Zhijun was exhausted, and her face was dazed.

“Request for help.” Shi Xueman said, releasing a distress signal.

She cast a glance in the direction that Fatty had disappeared into and felt a bit worried. How was Ai Hui's injury?

His direct collision with the blood bat had been truly amazing...

He must be fine!

Chapter 147: Who's Ai Hui?

The infiltration of the blood bat shook the entire Central Pine City.

Everyone had assumed that Central Pine City's defense was impregnable, but reality had shown otherwise. Moreover, it was Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun who had encountered the danger this time.

If any mishaps had happened to the both of them, the entire Central Pine City would have borne the blame, and the consequences would have been devastating.

Immediately after the incident, both the magistrate court of Central Pine City and Central Pine Academy sent their representatives to visit them. However, these representatives were stopped by Yong Zheng, whose face was furious. When he had discovered that Shi Xueman had almost met with a mishap, he had become terror-stricken.

Not only was Shi Xueman the affirmed third-generation successor to the clan, but she was also the daughter of his good friend. If anything were to happen to her, he would not be able to forgive himself.

When he was dealing with the visitors, he was very rude and blunt.

Even though Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun were still recovering

from their injuries, both of them handed detailed reports on the blood bat's fighting capabilities.

In these two reports, there was enough evidence to show the frightening formidableness of the blood bat.

For example, the report had mentioned how Shi Xueman was forced to use a precious artifact like the Verglas Mist Pearl.

The Verglas Mist Pearl had cost more than thirty million yuan, and it had been given to her by her father as a birthday gift when she was twelve. When everyone read this report and saw the three words "Verglas Mist Pearl," their eyes popped out of their heads. They then all agreed ruefully that the Shi Clan was truly rich and powerful.

The Verglas Mist Pearl was a water elemental artifact that was extremely pure in nature.

Only under very special conditions could some of the colored clouds in the Palette Cloud Village produce Verglas Mist Pearls. These artifacts were exceedingly rare.

Could produce the Verglas Mist Pearls. These artifacts were extremely rare.

Everyone clearly knew that Shi Xueman would never use the Verglas Mist Pearl unless it was a life-and-death situation. No one would actually use it. Furthermore, one had to use the high-level

skill [Avalokiteshvara Seal] to utilize the Verglas Mist Pearl.

Avalokiteshvara was an ancient god and was not well known. This, too, said a lot about the long history of the Shi Clan.

The Shi Clan had more than one absolute skill. The absolute skill that Shi Xueman practiced was called [Hydromancy], a profound and complex skill. As for hand-sign related absolute skills, there were the [Avalokiteshvara Seal], [Lament of Lute], [Rain of Musa], [Ripple], etc. and all of these were well-known.

The moves that Sang Zhijun had used were also extraordinary.

The Sang Clan did not have many absolute skills—only one, in fact, and it was known as the [Arrow Fusion Technique]. This skill fused multiple arrows together into one arrow.

Sang Zhijun could fuse three arrows into one.

The three-into-one arrow technique was an important skill of the Sang clan. Only those disciples who could fuse three arrows into a single one were qualified to travel on their own, and this showed a lot about Sang Zhijun's capabilities. This incident also gave people a new evaluation of her abilities.

Shi Xueman's [Avalokiteshvara Seal] and Verglas Mist Pearl, and Sang Zhijun's [Arrow Fusion Technique]……such fighting capabilities were enviable and displayed both might and wealth. How could that formidable blood bat not be destroyed by them?

However, both Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun stated in their reports that they did not play a pivotal role in the victory over the blood bat.

The key to the victory had been a student named Ai Hui.

Ai Hui had been the first to discover the blood bat, allowing them to make a narrow escape from death. Ai Hui had been the one to sense that the blood bat had not yet left and was swirling around in the sky. Ai Hui had been the one to determine that there was only one blood bat. Ai Hui had been the one to take the initiative to use himself as bait. Ai Hui's peerless swordsmanship had stopped the blood bat's lightning-fast diving attack, giving Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun the golden opportunity to strike.

Ai Hui, Ai Hui, Ai Hui....

"Who's Ai Hui?"

The dean of the Central Pine Academy waved the two reports in his hand as his gaze swept across the teachers who each led a class of students.

Everyone looked at each other, but no one knew who he was.

"No one actually knows who's Ai Hui?" The dean's face turned gloomy at once.

The room was in absolute silence as no one had heard of this name before. Where did this fellow pop out from? All the teachers present had never heard of a student called Ai Hui.

“Is he from your class?”

“No, my class doesn’t have such a student!”

“He isn’t from my class as well!”

After a round of questioning, everyone quieted down.

“Is he from Teacher Xu’s class?” someone suddenly asked upon noticing that Teacher Xu was not present.

“It can’t be.”

Everyone was already jealous of the fact that Teacher Xu’s class had Duanmu Huanghun. How could it be that his class had one more genius? Everyone still thought that they misread the reports just now. If Ai Hui’s name were to be replaced by Duanmu Huanghun’s name, eh, that would make more sense!

Fortunately, everyone knew that Shi Xueman was aware of who Duanmu Huanghun was, and hence, she would not make such a mistake.

“Teacher Xu has gone to the Garden of Life,” someone quickly

reminded. Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi had gone to the Garden of Life, but no one was clear on their mission's specifics.

Eventually, everyone was able to come up with a solution. Teacher Xu might not be here, but there was still Duanmu Huanghun. They could simply ask him.

The magistrate office.

"Who's Ai Hui?"

A burly man, who was leaning against a chair behind a long table, asked lazily. He was the mayor of Central Pine City, Wang Zhen.

Everyone looked at each other in dismay as they could not answer this question.

"Investigate! Go and investigate now!" Wang Zhen swung his massive hand. "I want to know everything about him!"

"Yes!"

Vanguard Training Hall.

"Is he really okay? If he's okay, then why isn't he awake?" Fatty was worried as he stared at the unconscious Ai Hui.

Even though Ai Hui was unconscious, his hand was holding tightly on to his sword. Previously, Fatty had tried to pry the sword free from Ai Hui's hand, but no matter how much force he used, Ai Hui would just not let go of it.

"Lou Lan also doesn't know why Ai Hui hasn't woken up yet," Lou Lan tilted his head as his eyes flickered with a yellow glow. "The elemental energy in Ai Hui's body is currently being channeled, so don't worry, Fatty. Right now, he's in good condition—much better than before."

"That's good, then," Fatty tried to restrain himself from worrying too much. He could only tell himself to believe in Lou Lan.

Ai Hui's body was undergoing a tremendous transformation.

The force of the collision with the blood bat was so immense that it had exceeded what Ai Hui's body could take. If not for his sword embryo, which had saved him in the nick of time, and the timely unleash of his potential that had enabled him to execute that unexpected sword move, he would have been reduced to a heap of meat pulp.

However, the blood bat's devastating attack could still deal severe damage to Ai Hui's body. The force from the impact had penetrated into the depths of his body.

Under such a huge impact, the elemental energy ball in Ai Hui's body collapsed like a crushed snowball.

The terrifying external force directly destroyed the attractive force of the elemental energy ball.

The collapsed elemental energy was wreaking havoc in Ai Hu's body. Some of the energy surged into the Dragonspine Inferno that Ai Hui was grasping. At first, the sword embryo in Ai Hui's glabella had been dispirited and listless as it was severely injured. However, the sword embryo had suddenly become energetic, resembling a shark that smelled blood.

The collapsed elemental energy immediately became its best nourishment.

Even though Ai Hui was still unconscious, the sword embryo was channeling itself spontaneously.

Elemental energy steadily flowed through Ai Hui's hand into the Dragonspine Inferno before flowing back to Ai Hui's body. The nourished sword embryo quickly regained its energy and began strengthening rapidly.

If Ai Hui were awake, he would be surprised at the growth of his sword embryo. The surprisingly powerful sword move that Ai Hui had executed to stop the blood bat had greatly stimulated his sword embryo as well.

The elemental energy from the elemental energy mass was continuously converting into sword force.

The amount of elemental energy entering the Circulatory Circle Revolution kept on increasing, enhancing its efficiency. Meanwhile, the sword force channeling in Ai Hui's body was surging violently, like a tidal wave that was made up of countless razor-sharp swords. It cleansed his body continuously; every place it passed through was purified and destroyed.

Ai Hui's body trembled as the palace in his left leg activated. As soon as it activated, it was completely filled with the surging sword force. If Ai Hui were awake at this moment, he would faint due to the intense pain.

More and more sword force surged through his body.

When the sword force entered the palace in Ai Hui's right foot, his right foot trembled. The palace in his right foot was activated as well!

As soon as the palace was opened up, the sword force gushed in frantically.

Both of Ai Hui's legs were trembling violently. The shoes on his feet were wrecked by the sharp-edged sword force.

However, this was just the beginning. More and more elemental energy was steadily entering the Circulatory Circle Revolution.

At this point of time, Lou Lan couldn't just sit there and do

nothing. If the energy were solely entering his feet, there wouldn't be much of a problem; however, if the energy gushed into any one of his earth, sea, gate or sky palaces and created a problem there, the damage done would be irreversible.

"Fatty, hurry and beat him up!" Lou Lan urged.

"Huh!" Fatty was stunned.

……

The magistrate office.

"Got it, we have obtained the information on Ai Hui through the Commission Hall!"

"He lives in the Vanguard Training Hall. This subordinate has already located the specific address!"

"Where's my uniform? Where's Master's uniform? Quickly find it for Master now! Let us go to the Vanguard Training Hall!" Wang Zhen stood up and yelled as he felt energized all of a sudden.

Central Pine Academy.

Duanmu Huanghun was baffled when he heard the teachers yelling his name. But when he heard the name "Ai Hui," he returned to his senses and said, "That's right, he's from my class."

He tried to remain calm.

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief; they finally found the class which Ai Hui belonged to.

“Do you know where he lives?” the dean asked solemnly.

Could it be that this fellow committed a crime? Duanmu Huanghun rejoiced secretly. He could not conceal the smile on his face no matter how hard he tried, and without any hesitation, he replied, “Yes.”

“You shall lead the way!” the dean demanded ferociously.

Seems like he has committed a big crime. Duanmu Huanghun sneered in his mind.

Vanguard Training Hall.

“I really have to beat him up?” Fatty was hesitating.

“Yes, and use more strength!” Lou Lan was encouraging Fatty. “The harder you beat him, the faster he will recover!”

“Really, Lou Lan, you’d better not be lying to me!” Fatty said.

“Lou Lan doesn’t lie.” Lou Lan shook his head.

“When Ai Hui wakes up, Lou Lan, you have to be my witness,” Fatty said, evidently still hesitating.

“No problem.” Lou Lan nodded.

A sinister smile appeared on Fatty’s face. He dragged Ai Hui to the training ground and tied him to a wooden stake.

The one with the surname Ai, you’re finally in my hands! Today, we shall settle all the grudges between us!

Thump! This punch is for the lunges you made me do!

Thump! This punch is for the flutter kicks you forced me to do!

Thump! This punch is for you eating one more bowl of noodles than me!

Thump! This punch is for that other extra bowl of noodles you ate!

Thump! Thump! Thump!

As Fatty’s punches bombarded Ai Hui’s body like a rainstorm, he felt an indescribable comfort. It was his lifelong dream to bully Ai

Hui! All along, he had been under Ai Hui's tyrannical abuse.

Today, I will let you know that Fatty is also a hero!

What makes you think that you can eat two more bowls of noodles than me?

I will beat you until your head is swollen!

I will beat you until your body is as swollen as mine...

However, as Fatty continued beating Ai Hui, he soon felt that something wasn't right.

"Lou Lan, I'm almost done, you want to give it a try?" The perspiring Fatty turned around and asked Lou Lan while gasping for air and beating Ai Hui wildly at the same time.

"Fatty, hang in there!" Lou Lan shook his head furiously like a rattle-drum.

Why does he shake his head so furiously?

Fatty felt uneasy.

Chapter 148: Mayor Wang Zheng

Punch after punch—after several rounds of this, Ai Hui remained unconscious. Fatty's vigilance was put to rest.

"It seems I thought too much. I better make use of this once-in-a-blue-moon opportunity to teach Ai Hui a lesson. I even have Lou Lan as my witness; the gods are really helping me this time! Hahaha!" Fatty sneered.

Thump thump thump!

Suddenly, Fatty felt his fists become numb. Taking a glance at Ai Hui, he was immediately startled. "Ahh! Why did he suddenly become fatter?"

Ai Hui's body had become bloated and deformed like a swelled balloon.

"There's too much elemental energy in his body. Right now, we're using this method to ease the pressure in his body," Lou Lan explained. "Lou Lan has to monitor the status of the elemental energy in his body, so I will have to leave the beating to you, Fatty."

"No problem, leave it to me! I'm the best at easing pressure!" Fatty chirped.

Thump thump thump!

“The elemental energy is accumulating in his left cheek!”

“Right cheek!”

“His chin!”

Lou Lan’s glowing yellow eyes flickered constantly as he instructed Fatty on where to hit. By the time Fatty saw that Ai Hui’s head had been beaten into the shape of a pig’s, he felt accomplished.

“Fatty, use more strength!” Lou Lan instructed.

“Okay!” Fatty’s punches became heavier.

Time passed bit by bit, and Fatty was now drenched in sweat, unable to remember how many punches he had thrown. Ai Hui’s face was changed beyond recognition, and his body had swelled up by approximately two to three times.

If Fatty were to meet the current Ai Hui on the street, he definitely would not have recognized him.

However....

Fatty’s arms were so sore that he could not lift them, and his entire body was drenched in sweat. His throat was burning, as if

molten lead had been poured into his mouth. It seemed as though he would stop breathing right there and die of exhaustion. Gasping for air, he asked, “Lou Lan… it’s… it’s nearly done, right? I have… I have no more strength!”

“Fatty, endure a bit more. It will be done soon.”

Lou Lan’s glowing yellow eyes flickered as he stared fixedly at Ai Hui’s body, observing the flow of elemental energy in his body with care.

“Shoulders!”

“Thighs!”

……

Lou Lan continued barking out commands, but Fatty’s body felt numb, his energy completely expended. He had yet to notice that his fists were swollen like steamed buns. Punching Ai Hui’s body had become similar to punching a porcupine.

Buzz buzz buzz!

Traces of razor-sharp elemental energy were emitting for Ai Hui’s pores continuously, making him remarkably like a thorny porcupine.

“Fatty, use more strength!” Lou Lan yelled.

Fatty vaguely perceived a commotion in the alleyway, but at this moment, the entirety of his attention was focused on Ai Hui, and he could not hear clearly.

“Lou—Lou Lan... I can’t do it anymore!” Fatty was shedding tears. He felt as though he would collapse from exhaustion at any time. How many punches had he thrown today? He must have thrown a lifetime’s worth.

“Fatty, persevere! It is a crucial time now!”

Lou Lan encouraged Fatty, his eyes never leaving Ai Hui’s body for even a split second. The flickering of his yellow eyes had become a blur. The amount of elemental energy in Ai Hui’s body was terrifying. Lou Lan could not understand why there was so much. How was it possible for Ai Hui to have remained safe and sound until now? If it were anyone else, they would have already exploded from the abundance of elemental energy!

The situation was at a critical point.

The two palaces in Ai Hui’s legs had opened, allowing his condition to improve momentarily. Despite that, however, the palaces in his limbs were being flooded and expanded brutally by the sword force. The speed of the palaces’ expansion could not catch up to the amount of elemental energy that was flooding in.

The forceful expansion of the palaces would damage the body severely. Lou Lan had many ways to deal with the damage done to the palaces in Ai Hui's limbs, and so it was not too great of an issue. For the earth, sea, gate, and sky palaces to sustain injuries, however, the situation would become troublesome.

This was why the elemental energy in Ai Hui's body had to be drained.

Punching Ai Hui's body allowed some of the elemental energy in his body to be released. Throughout the whole process, Lou Lan had to monitor the elemental energy in his body to see if they over-accumulated in a certain area which would damage Ai Hui's body. As such, he needed Fatty to carry out the punching.

Lou Lan had previously been worried that Fatty would not have enough energy. He never expected that Fatty would instead have so much energy left and punch with such force.

Such a good brother!

Lou Lan was praising the fatty in his heart. He was putting in all of his effort—only a true brother would sweat and toil so for his friend.

The fatty was really a good guy.

On the other hand, Fatty was unaware of Lou Lan's admiration. He was on the verge of tears. Both of his fists were swollen, and

every punch he threw was a torture. Why did he have to be the one to beat Ai Hui up? Was he punishing Ai Hui or himself?

Lou Lan, I want to train now!

Flutter kicks! Lunges! Anything will do!

One hundred sets, five hundred sets.... Any number of sets will do!

Fatty lamented sorrowfully as tears streamed down his cheeks.

Puff!

Fatty felt something amiss with his punch. It felt as though it had landed on a heap of cotton.

“Fatty, be careful!”

What’s there to be careful about....

The dazed Fatty failed to react in time. As if a dashing wild beast had crashed into him, his body flew backwards like a cannonball.

It finally ended....

Lou Lan became anxious. Ai Hui had reached the most critical

stage!

…

The dean did not expect to encounter Wang Zhen in the alleyway. He scowled. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m here for whatever you’re here for.” Wang Zhen smiled cheekily.

“Ai Hui is a student of Central Pine Academy.” The dean’s face became gloomy. “Since when did the mayor begin to interfere in the business of our academy?”

For quite some time, Wang Zhen and the magistrate office had held little presence. Central Pine Academy was the most important organization within Central Pine City and as a result, undertook many of the city’s important roles. By contrast, the duties of the magistrate office were few and far between. In the Induction Ground, the academies held higher positions than the magistrate offices. As such, when the dean saw Wang Zhen, he felt not the slightest bit of fear.

“Student Ai Hui lives and studies in Central Pine City. As the mayor of this city, it’s only natural for me to care about him,” Wang Zhen replied lazily.

“All of you back off. I have something to discuss with the mayor in private,” the dean suddenly told his subordinates.

“What are you trying to do?” the dean lowered his voice and asked Wang Zhen.

Wang Zhen withdrew his smile and replied, “I just don’t want anything happening to Central Pine City in my hands.”

“Don’t listen to the rumors. The Induction Ground has already contained the situation.” The dean’s eyes flickered.

“If that’s the case, then why would you, the dean, come here?” Wang Zhen sneered.

“If that’s the case, why would you, the dean, would come here?” Wang Zhen sneered.

The dean had met the mayor on a few prior occasions, but this was his first time discovering that he was not a pushover. Being mayor of the Induction Ground was not an easy job. The Induction Ground by nature was autonomous, cut off from the rest of the world, and the mayors of the cities here were known to sulk. This was because the power and authority of each city lay in the hands of the respective academies instead of with the mayor. Furthermore, the Induction Ground had always enjoyed strict security, and so the mayors within the cities had nothing much to do.

Those who were willing to become mayors in the Induction Ground were usually retired civil servants or those ambitionless, spineless scumbags.

“Does the mayor feel that the situation is getting out of hand?” the dean asked directly.

“Yes, the situation is extremely critical now.” Wang Zhen nodded solemnly.

He had always wanted a chance to communicate with the dean; however, he knew that the dean would not listen to him. Despite being mayor, he held very little power, and the teachers within Central Pine Academy would not listen to his commands.

“How is that so?” The dean understood the seriousness of the situation. He wanted to be responsible for Central Pine City as well, and so the two held no conflict of interest.

“I don’t know what the Induction Ground is planning. So far, however, the blood poison catastrophe has not been controlled, and the situation is worsening instead,” Wang Zhen replied. “The appearance of the blood bat is enough to throw everyone into a state of panic. And if I’m not wrong, the Induction Ground has yet to find out how the blood bat infiltrated the city.”

The dean’s pupils contracted at this.

Noticing the dean’s reaction, Wang Zhen continued calmly, “I can roughly guess the solution you have come up with. Is it the Chiming Dandelion? Am I right?”

The dean was mildly surprised by Wang Zhen's guess, but replied easily, "Anyone could have made this guess."

The Chiming Dandelion was a plant that wood elementalists had bred long ago, used mainly for security purposes that developed to adopt advanced measures. Tiny dandelion seeds could float in the air for some time, and when used in large amounts, they formed a nearly impregnable security warning system.

At any security breach, these extremely miniscule seeds would give off chiming vibrations, immediately notifying the wood elementalists in charge of security.

"I hope to be in charge of the city's defense. I have some experience with regards to this aspect. And even though I'm not some powerful individual, I did serve ten years on the front line." Wang Zhen gazed at the dean and revealed what was under his left trouser without any hesitation.

A roughly-made metallic leg.

The dean was rendered speechless, and a tinge of respect flashed across his eyes as he asked Wang Zhen, "When did you get injured?"

"Ten years ago," Wang Zhen replied unconcernedly.

"I can hand over the defense of the city to you; however, I will be keeping an eye on you,"

“No problem,” Wang Zhen agreed wholeheartedly.

Both of them heaved a sigh of relief in unison. Wang Zhen’s main objective had been fulfilled and the dean could remove himself from this tangled mess.

The dean then signaled for his subordinates to return and instructed, “From now on, the mayor will be in charge of the city’s defense. All of the teachers and students will have to cooperate with him.”

“Let us go in.” The dean smiled.

“Please!” Wang Zhen gestured for the dean to enter the training hall.

The door to the training hall was wide open. Both of them stepped over the doorstep, and at that very moment, a shadow flew towards them at high speed.

Both of them were shocked.

Wang Zhen’s reaction was faster. Without hesitation, he lifted his left leg and gave a vicious side kick. He underestimated the impact of the incoming shadow, however, and was knocked flying backwards. Luckily, the dean was able to catch him, preventing any humiliations.

Upon landing, his legs nearly gave way, causing him to kneel on the spot.

Such a powerful impact.

Taking a closer look at the person, they became anxious. Could this individual be Ai Hui?

With a resounding crash, Fatty landed heavily on the ground, causing it to tremble and filling the air with dust clouds.

In shock, Wang Zhen and the dean exchanged looks.

At that very moment, a shout came from the courtyard, “Ai Hui, unleash your sword!”

Ai Hui... unleash your sword?

Both of them heaved a sigh of relief. It seemed the person before them was not Ai Hui.

Wait!

Unleash your sword?

A sudden powerful and chilling aura erupted from within the courtyard.

The youth, shrouded in scorching white light and tied to a wooden stake in the courtyard, slowly opened his eyes.

His eyes were ice-cold but abstruse. As his eyes slowly opened, he resembled an ancient beast that had awoken from its slumber of thousands of years trapped under a mountain.

The expressions of Wang Zhen and the dean changed drastically!

Chapter 149: Crescent Moon

Threads of elemental energy bubbled relentlessly from Ai Hui's pores, creating a ring of dazzling light.

Ai Hui's mind was blank.

The sword force in his body was as boundless as an ocean which was, at this point, rumbling with a fury. In the midst of the storm, Ai Hui's mental state was a helpless leaf constantly rolled about by the waves, falling, and being torn into pieces before finally being engulfed by the ocean.

Fatty's continuous beatings had facilitated the sword force within Ai Hui's body to actively penetrate outwards. Under normal circumstances, the elemental energy would not have been able to do this. Furthermore, due to his training, Ai Hui's skin was like copper, more tough and durable than an average student's. Thus, it was more difficult for the elemental energy to leak out of his pores.

Fatty's constant "efforts" had finally paid off. Vast amounts of elemental energy bubbled out from within Ai Hui's body like steam.

Once the elemental energy was drained away, the pressure within Ai Hui's body lessened. This allowed Ai Hui's unstable mental state to finally have a breather and regain an ounce of clarity.

"Ai Hui! Use your sword!"

Lou Lan’s reminder was like an explosion in Ai Hui’s mind but also seemed to be coming from the opposite end of the sea.

Use my sword?

In the midst of his confusion, a sword technique came to mind with lightning speed.

Within his elemental energy that was vast as an ocean was a slender bowstring that connected Ai Hui’s left hand palace to his right hand’s palace. The elemental energy cord with which he had always had difficulty was completed with ease while Ai Hui had been unaware.

At the moment of the elemental energy cord’s completion, the elemental energy bubbling out of Ai Hui changed abruptly.

Instead of leaving him, it surrounded Ai Hui’s surroundings while rotating at high speeds.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh!

It was as though there were countless sharp small swords flitting about speedily in the air. The stake and ropes that had initially tied him down became fragmented and of different lengths. They hovered in the air in segments, as if supported by an invisible hand. Constant cuts were made on the brick flooring beneath Ai

Hui's feet by the sword, and chunks of brick flew wildly.

Within Ai Hui's body, the roaring of the elemental energy ocean stopped preemptively the moment the elemental energy cord was completed.

Time seemed to have come to a standstill.

As if Ai Hui had practiced it countless times, he was familiar with the move in its entirety. The Dragonspine Inferno, which had never left his hand, was placed horizontally before him. Together with a single stride, he swung the sword.

The Dragonspine Inferno, which weighed one hundred kilograms, was as lithe and agile as a skipping stone on water.

The elemental energy that had been dammed in Ai Hui's body rushed like the flowing waters of a dike and into the Dragonspine Inferno in Ai Hui's right hand.

Buzz!

As a spring vibrates with flicked, the deep thrumming of the Dragonspine Inferno gave rise to a slight tingle. A sheen of dazzling light appeared on the black body of the Dragonspine Inferno.

A crescent culminated on the sharp end of the sword, disappearing within moments.

The expressions of the dean and mayor changed after being exposed to Ai Hui's imposing manner. The dean was especially shocked. How could he have been ignorant of such a brilliant student at his school? Such an explosion of aura was not something easily surpassed. Even the top genius of Central Pine Academy, Duanmu Huanghun, would find it difficult.

How could a student have such an imposing air?

Wang Zhen, too, was incredibly amazed, but for different reasons from the dean's. When he received Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun's reports, he did a thorough background check on Ai Hui. There was nothing about him that he did not know. Ai Hui had been born to a life of hard work, staying in the Wilderness for three years. An exception was made, allowing him to enter and train in the Induction Ground. He achieved the base level of two palaces and was also a disciple of Wang Shouchuan. Even Ai Hui's hand in the Bunny Hair's profit was not absent from Wang Zhen's knowledge; he had done an incredibly detailed investigation.

What made him deeply respect Ai Hui, however, was actually the fact that not only did Ai Hui survive two encounters with the blood beasts, but also that he played a pivotal role in the group's successful escape. Aside from Shi Xueman's and Sang Zhijun's reports, Wang Zhen had also seen the reports from Teacher Xu and Cui Xianzi. Both of them also mentioned Ai Hui as the one to have first realized that something was amiss.

Ai Hui seemed to have an extraordinary intuition towards the blood poison. It also happened to be the main reason behind

seeking him out.

But all of the intelligence he received failed to mention that Ai Hui had such an uncanny capability for swordplay!

Was this truly two palaces? How could such frightening waves of elemental energy result from just two palaces? It most certainly had to belong to at least seven palaces! Could it be that this chap was concealing his talent?

He would not have been so shocked if it were simply the waves of elemental energy. The moment the tip of the sword transformed into a crescent moon, his facial muscles trembled involuntarily. Such awe-inspiring swordplay gave him goosebumps.

The sword seemed to head straight for his glabella; with the sword's next movement, it would even pierce him.

Both Wang Zhen and the dean reacted immediately.

Wang Zhen suddenly held a stained knife. His aura underwent a transformation, as though he had become another person. Even his height seemed to have increased. His bearing was indescribably fierce and severe. He wordlessly brought down his knife in a single stroke, its gleam similar to an inverted waterfall.

The dean's wide sleeves emitted large amounts bubbles like the ones blown by soapy water. Under the sunlight, they reflected a myriad of colors, dancing alongside the wind in a dream-like

sequence.

The crescent which had disappeared from the tip of Ai Hui's sword appeared before them as if out of thin air. It intersected with the gleam from Wang Zhen's knife.

Like fragile porcelain, the crescent silently shattered into a multitude of fragments.

Wang Zhen's expression changed slightly, and he immediately held his knife horizontally and exerted his left palm outwards.

Bang!

The shattered crescent suddenly transformed into numerous sword gleams and enveloped the entire courtyard.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh!

The sword ray collided with the bubbles. They popped as though pricked by a needle, bursting immediately. However, the dean's billowing sleeves seemed to be a bottomless pit, gushing out colorful bubbles in a relentless torrent.

The spheres increased in number, covering the dean from view.

The sword gleam, which had been aimed at Wang Zhen, now seemed to have hit an invisible barrier and set off rippling waves.

A glint of the sword beam shot towards Duanmu Huanghun. Waking up from his stupor, he immediately used his [Viridescent Flower]. A circle of branches materialized around him, and the sword gleam collided into the branches. With a tremble, Duanmu Huanghun successfully blocked the sword gleam, but there was not a trace of celebration on his face. His gaze was instead fixated on the [Viridescent Flower]'s branches that were slowly rotating around him.

The small pinhole on a single leaf was extremely blinding.

How could it be....

He almost could not believe his eyes. From the moment he entered the training hall, the impacts came in wave after wave. The Ai Hui in front of him felt like a stranger.

He had recently improved tremendously, with the encounter in the Garden of Life and the bitter battle outside of the city serving as stimulation. He was already talented, but with the threats of death, he was able to fully exploit and expand his talent and capability.

Three days ago, he managed to activate the fifth palace, known as the earth palace.

The implication was that he was entering the territory of greater skills. With each activation of the four palaces—earth, sea, gate, and sky—the strength would increase by leaps and bounds.

Although everyone's constitution was different, in general, the earth palace could store 1.5 times more elemental energy than the hand palace. Additionally, the activation of his earth palace enabled him to practice moves from the [Viridescent Flower] that he had been unable to previously.

Thus, his strength increased tremendously, and he was pleased beyond expectations.

But that was before today. The waves of elemental energy that Ai Hui emitted sent chills to his heart. Duanmu Huanghun was certain that he would be unable to produce such frightening vibrations even with a base level of five palaces.

And that sword move....

Just one move from Ai Hui had forced the dean and the mayor into such a situation. This far surpassed any knowledge Duanmu Huanghun had of Ai Hui.

Duanmu Huanghun was clear about his capability. While he shot into fame after just one battle, he immediately became low-key and restrained afterwards. He knew that his brilliant results happened only because everyone was unfamiliar with him, unfamiliar with his [Viridescent Flower].

In the end, he had been a freshman with the base level of four palaces. Once everyone familiarized themselves, they would be able to think of ideas to counter him.

Base level was a weakness that he could not avoid. While it required talent, it also needed time and patience.

However, Ai Hui seemed to have skipped the latter requirement.

From the activation of his natal palaces to both of his hand palaces, and now... How many palaces had he activated to produce such strong elemental energy waves?

And that unnerving yet grand sword move. Was it an absolute art? Didn't they say that swordplay was in decline? How could such impressive swordplay be in decline?

His own rapid improvements were supported by several reasons. He was gifted with talent and imparted with an absolute art. His family was rich, and with external triggers, there was nothing strange about his tremendous improvement.

Yet he could not comprehend Ai Hui's improvement. There was no reasoning he could see behind it. His skills were nothing extraordinary, he was poor, and he was also older. How could he ever understand why that fellow's improvement was greater than his?

While the bubbles seemed powerless as they would burst upon contact, the volume was simply so much that it seemed limitless. All of the sword gleams were forcibly blocked by them. With the exception of Duanmu Huanghun, everyone was sheltered and protected behind him.

"This feels good!"

Wang Zhen burst into laughter for a long time, containing a whole ten years' worth of battle intent. His hair and beard fluttered around him, and his gaze was bright and animated. Holding onto the rusted knife, he was in high spirits.

"Central Pine Academy had a concealed talent! I cannot believe that there's such an expert here! Ai Hui, show me all that you've got. Let's have a hearty battle!"

Wang Zhen's thundering voice left a buzzing sound in everyone's ear.

He raised his blade and approached Ai Hui. Each stride was large, pressing into the hearts of those present. Even the floor trembled.

Duanmu Huanghun's pupils constricted while the expressions of the other teachers changed. Nobody could have expected the inconspicuous mayor to have such violent capabilities and strength.

"Ai Hui, could it be that you have lost your guts?"

Wang Zhen roared loudly and took a leaping step.

In midair, Wang Zhen's vigor was at its peak, and he felt an indescribable contentedness. He was all fired up.

No one would be able to block this move!

Eh?

Ai Hui, who was below him, fell face down like a blockhead, unconscious.

At his side was Lou Lan, thoroughly relaxed. He had exhausted all of his sand core’s elemental energy. His eyelids grew heavier and heavier as he mumbled deliriously, "Lou Lan is tired...."

Wang Zhen landed back on the floor with a stiff expression.

The dean, who had just finished dispersing the bubbles, was dumbfounded.

Ai Hui, unconscious. Fatty, unconscious. Lou Lan, unconscious.

This...

Chapter 150: Blood-red Ripple

“It should be around here. Search carefully, everyone.”

Qiao Hua’s voice was hoarse and his appearance disheveled, but he still exuded a sense of confidence and good spirits. His gaze kept its confidence and steadiness while his face had a morbidly excited red blush. Only the corners of his eyes displayed his fatigue.

Everyone knew that Qiao Hua was bearing a heavy burden.

The blood catastrophe situation was rapidly deteriorating. There were sightings of blood fiends in many cities. Due to the emergency, the ones deeper in the Garden of Life were pressed by a heavy atmosphere. Even the areas that had been burned still had blood-red sprouts growing from the charred ground. The blood plants had a resilient vitality, instilling fear in everyone.

The blood fiends were getting stronger. Just seven days ago, they were hit by a sneak attack from a blood wolf, causing three deaths and six injured. This was the first instance of severe injuries and death received since they entered the Garden of Life. The blood wolf was a strong but cunning dire beast that quickly became everyone’s nightmare. Since then, the troop had become startled by the smallest things.

Their caution, however, did not improve their situation. They began to suffer continuous attacks from different blood fiends, increasing the number of casualties. This further strengthened their belief that they were traveling in the correct direction.

Qiao Hua continued to command them deeper into the Garden of Life while praying for divine intervention.

The burdens in Qiao Hua's heart increased, but he continued to encourage himself, saying that this was the best option to take. As long as they discovered the first blood tree, they would be able to find a solution.

The blood poison could not be dealt with using ordinary ideas, which was evident from the blood grass that was growing from the charred soil. They sprouted at an astonishing rate. Only a few days had passed, and the blood grass had already grown past their kneecaps.

The fire, intended to prevent the spread of the blood poisoning, aided it in becoming stronger instead.

Qiao Hua examined the newly grown blood grass and realized that the blood poison in them was slightly different from the one gathered in his initial investigations.

Layers upon layers of transformations had taken place, and the blood poison became increasingly formidable—to the point that Qiao Hua experienced fear.

He did not express his worries and fears, knowing that the troop's morale was undergoing some subtle changes. Everyone was tense and strained as they had yet to find the blood tree left behind by Si Nan. Furthermore, the continuous escalating attacks by the

blood fiends and the loss of their people made their confidence in Qiao Hua waver.

The loss of confidence and intensifying insecurity made them extremely weak.

Qiao Hua's resolute nature showed itself; he did not have the least bit of hesitation and held on to his determination. He believed his conjecture was correct and was not the least bit swayed.

Everyone dispersed to seek out the potential target.

Si Nan's notes were decades old; since his time, there had been many changes in the Induction Ground. Even the geological landscape had noticeable differences. Furthermore, the notes had been organized by Si Nan's students, and so many details were indistinct and unclear.

After analyzing the notes, Qiao Hua had jotted down a few potential locations.

Most of the people were in low spirits and were not encouraged by Qiao Hua's words since their previous searches had proved to be fruitless. Everyone maintained their patience out of respect for Qiao Hua's high rank. Their tolerance, however, was running thin. Some of the troop members were starting suspect whether Si Nan's notes were real.

“Found it!”

An agitated voice suddenly rang out, and everyone involuntarily paused in their movements. After a moment of silence, they erupted in cheers.

Everyone rushed towards the loud shout.

Qiao Hua’s knees went soft. He no longer cared about his image and plopped butt-first onto the ground. He looked utterly exhausted. He did not think that their journey would have been met with so many mishaps, nor did he predict the blood poison to have worsened so rapidly. The burden he shouldered had been heavy beyond expectation.

The blood catastrophe had worsened with a swiftness outside of anybody’s expectations, even Qiao Hua’s. There were rumors of displeasure from the elders who had been persuaded by him.

The winner takes all while the loser is left with nothing.

If he could successfully resolve the blood disaster, then he would rapidly become the hero of the Induction Grounds—no, of the entire Avalon of Five Elements. To him, this was critical. As long as he succeeded, his population would be elevated to unprecedented heights.

Always, he had hoped and longed for such a chance. His ambitious nature had been stirred since long ago.

They finally found it....

As long as they found the blood tree, he was halfway to success. This implied that there would be a feast for them soon.

It would be one of celebration, the best reward he could ever get. The courage he invested would soon reap numerous rewards. He could almost envision his name in the river of history, praised by millions of people.

He did not know where he got the strength from, but he stood and walked towards the group of people.

The crowd automatically parted to form a path, like the welcoming of a crowned victor.

With a steady pace, Qiao Hua held his head up high. The gazes that turned his way were no longer filled with doubt and suspicion but instead were of adoration and respect. Finding the blood tree was evidence of Qiao Hua's correct theory.

They all believed that they would soon witness the destruction of the blood disaster. Most of them were overcome with emotion.

Qiao Hua did not let the success go to his head. Instead, he calmed himself and approached the blood tree. After regaining his absolute tranquility, he inspected the blood tree carefully.

After four hundred years of growth, the sapling had grown into an ancient tree of the firmament.

Not an inch of grass grew within a perimeter of fifty meters.

The top of the tree was thick and scarlet red like the evening maple in late autumn; it was breathtaking. Qiao Hua, however, did not raise his head. His gaze was fixated on the black streaks on the tree trunk.

The dull-red tree trunk was covered with black patterns like a totem from the ancient times. It exuded an indescribable gloom and evil.

“Teacher, what is this black decorative design?” Qiao Hua’s student gathered up his courage and asked.

“Blood traces.” Qiao Hua did not move his gaze. His finger ran lightly across the black patters as he continued, “During the Cultivation Era, it was a taboo in blood-refinement. Very few know about this now. Senior Si Nan’s extensive knowledge in blood-refined techniques was startling.”

The people’s expressions changed to one of admiration. Teacher Qiao was indeed erudite.

In their eyes, blood-refined techniques were mysterious and unfamiliar. Much of their understanding about the subject touched only upon objects used during the techniques.

To them, the teachers who pursued research in the bizarre such as objects of blood-refinement were like valuable. The rusty entrance was locked and covered with gray dust—a treasure left behind by the Cultivation Era. It could be worth less than a penny, or it could change the world.

To date, this door remained locked tight, and nobody had managed to open it.

While blood-refined objects were not destroyed, nobody was able to use or find anything wondrous about them. The long history and experience left behind by the Cultivation Era was unimaginable for the people of the Avalon of Five Elements after all. Even objects left behind by the mysterious and neglected blood-refined technique were not rare to see.

Apart from Ai Hui's Blood Bandage, which was made of a special material, most of the objects were considered useless and placed in a corner to collect dust. Only those with special uses were kept.

Everyone held their breath, not daring to exhale.

Qiao Hua's expression became bewitched. The more he understood, the more he sensed the coordination, power, and beauty in the blood traces on the tree trunk. It was as though he gazed into the sea of history of the Cultivation Era. In this humble corner was a fascinating blood-colored cloud that while not formidable, had never been destroyed or gone extinct.

What an era that people would yearn for!

Qiao Hua's thoughts wandered far and away. He could not imagine the vastness of the Cultivation Era. To think that the blood-refined techniques, fit only to be on the sidelines, had not yet gone extinct. And it set off such shocking waves.

He remained in a befuddled state for a moment before regaining his senses. Strength and confidence returned to his body once more.

Perhaps blood-refined techniques used to be formidable, but now the times had changed. It was an era of elemental energy, and it was his era.

"Number seven medicine!" he confidently said to his students.

The rattan basket that was being carried by a student suddenly wiggled, and the sticks forming the basket separated to expose the contents within. In it were flower pods hanging from rattan sticks, and each pod was labeled with a number.

Finding the number seven flower bud, he inserted a thread of elemental energy.

The flower bud slowly blossomed. Inside, a crystal-clear bamboo joint containing a black liquid appeared before everyone. It was difficult to breed crystal bamboo joints as their rate of growth was slow. As such, they tended to be on the pricier side and were used

to store precious medications.

The student gingerly took out the crystal bamboo joint. The black liquid medicine inside was like black lava. Even with the bamboo joint containing it, everyone could feel the heat waves.

Qiao Hua's confidence was not without basis. He had thoroughly studied every detail in Si Nan's notes to purposefully creating several types of liquid medicines for different contingencies.

For now, the situation was still within his control, and he was sufficiently prepared.

"Everyone, retreat by fifty meters," he commanded gravely.

Without any objections, everyone quickly retreated by fifty meters. They widened their eyes, afraid to miss out on any details. This would surely be an unforgettable moment in their entire lives.

The fearful blood disaster was finally going to meet its end.

Qiao Hua took a deep breath and surprisingly felt slightly nervous. After careful consideration, he was confident that he had considered all aspects. His gaze became determined.

He cautiously removed the cap of the crystal bamboo. An unpleasant odor gushed out. Without a change in expression, he overturned it along the blood traces on the tree trunk.

The last drop of black medicine dripped out from the crystal bamboo and permeated through the tree trunk.

Qiao Hua had a relieved expression. The medication that he came up with was the bane of the blood poison. It could be considered to be another form of toxin that would directly counteract against the blood poisoning. It would spread in the same way, and there was no escape for anything already infected.

The branches exhibited signs of blackening. Qiao Hua became excited; it was going to start!

The black color began to spread, and the leaves fell in succession. All around them, the blood-red leaves descended and swirled like falling snow. Qiao Hua gave a hearty laugh.

Oh, what a pretty sight!

In a flash, the ancient tree was barren without any leaves on it.

Qiao Hua was pleased with himself when out of the corner of his eyes, he caught sight of a dried-up twig. His pupils constricted, his expression frozen in place.

A newly grown sprout that was even more sparkling with a brighter red tint.

W……Why……

He stared blankly at what had been bare branches that were now filled with new sprouts that were blood-red and growing at an astonishing speed.

In the blink of an eye, the treetop was completely filled, similar to a bewitching sea of blood.

Without warning, the blood-red grass fifty meters away began to grow rapidly. In the midst of the surprised shouts and screams, it was like a paranormal beast with its ferocious maws wide open.

The blood-red ripple expanded outwards at an alarming speed.

Chapter 151: Reward

Long black hair flew in the wind.

A young lady casually sat on a rock on top of a summit. She paid no attention to the fact that she was sitting on a high overhanging cliff. Her red maxi skirt fluttered with the wind, akin to a blooming rose, yet also appearing like a ball of fire.

On her delicate oval face, her eyes were closed. She raised her chin slightly to enjoy the incoming breeze. Her slender and fair feet extended from under her fire-red skirt. She playfully swung her feet in the air, as if playing a touching song.

Suddenly, her eyes opened, and she turned her head slightly.

A hint of a smug smile emerged, and she let her charming gaze wander.

It was starting.

Like a perfect masterpiece, she stretched her fair-as-snow arm. Her murmurings were languid, yet enticing. It was like a siren's call.

After she finished stretching, she suddenly exclaimed slightly, "Blackie has not returned since it went out to hunt for food five days ago."

Could it be that Blackie met with some mishap? She did not think this was likely. Blackie was able to fly high and was as fast as lightning. Even if it did meet with danger, it would be able to escape easily.

Still, she decided to head down the mountain to look for Blackie. It would not be an easy task for her to nurture another talented blood fiend like Blackie.

With the tip of her foot, she tapped lightly on the rock. Like a blazing phoenix, she flew off the cliff.

Ai Hui woke up in a daze.

It was like he had just had a bad dream where he was continuously beaten up like a sandbag.

It had been a while since he had such nightmares.

Thankfully, he woke up and realized that he was safe and sound. He gave a sigh of relief and sat up in one motion. Where were Lou Lan and Fatty? Ai Hui walked out of the room while stretching. He retreated when he saw Lou Lan's reflection in the training hall.

Hey, why was his head so painful? It must be that he had not fully recovered. He needed more rest!

"Ai Hui! You are awake!"

Ai Hui's halted his movement, and his expression froze upon hearing Lou Lan's joyous voice.

"Ai Hui, do you still feel unwell? You have fully recovered from your injuries! Lou Lan is brilliant, right? Fatty put in a lot of effort too. He was terrific! Congratulations Ai Hui, you have activated four palaces!"

Lou Lan rattled on in a single breath.

Ai Hui thought to himself, "Lou Lan was good at everything, but he does not know how to read people's facial expressions. How could it be that I have recovered? Would I recover so easily from an eighty million injury?"

The girl from the noodle store did not bother to hide her mocking gaze. Ai Hui laughed and said, "It has been a while!"

"Weren't you hoping that I would never appear?" the girl from the noodle store hissed and her tone was cold.

"How could that be?" Ai Hui laughed a guilty laugh.

The girl from the noodle store did not give him a chance and cut straight to the point. "Tell me, when are you going to pay me back?"

The girl from the noodle store was not in a good mood today. Could it be that someone offended her? Someone actually dared to offend such a violent girl? Their courage is seriously admirable!

Ai Hui muttered in his heart, but he smiled and said, “I am rather short on cash recently…”

The girl from the noodle store smiled insincerely while saying, “When are you not short on cash?”

Ai Hui was pissed off. You can kill me but you should not insult me. What do you mean… Nevermind!

“I have no choice, I am a poor man. Young girl… young lady, could you lower your standards and extend the deadline? Give me some more time, or else could I pay part of it first?” Ai Hui remembered his Bunny Hair Arrows. Had they not just been sold for thirty million?

His share was quite significant, and he could use it to return some of the debt first.

Thinking of the Bunny Hair Arrows, Ai Hui straightened his back. He was about to become someone rich! That amount of money was nothing!

If this pace continued, it would not take long for him to give back the eighty million.

“If you are going to repay, pay it in one lump sum!” the young girl from the noodle store replied coldly.

Ai Hui’s back suddenly softened. “Who made you angry? Don’t be angry. Vent your anger and it will be all right. You will feel better after beating someone up. Come Fatty, let this sister beat you up to vent her anger!”

“I would be appeased if you allowed me to bash you up.” The young girl’s eyes twinkled coldly, and her tone was terrifying. “Tell me, if I ate a bowl of noodles belonging to you and paid eighty millio, wouldn’t I be like a skank?”

Ai Hui’s eyes twitched. He knew the extent of the young girl’s wrath. His bones would definitely shatter if she were to beat him. He laughed dryly. “Fatty has more meat and would feel nicer . My bones are hard and would be feel painful. Otherwise, Lou Lan would be good too. You could even replenish your energy by having Lou Lan cater to your needs! Having said that, how could you say that you are a skank. Furthermore, this eighty million is not a matter to be treated lightly. I will return you the money, but I need some time as well.”

Fatty stared incredulously at Ai Hui’s terrified expression. Was this the same cruel, unfeeling, slaughter-machine that he knew Ai Hui to be? Why did this scene seem so familiar? A sense of understanding swept over his mind. Indeed, only money could cause such turmoil. Even Ai Hui was unable to avoid such a matter.

Hold on… Was it true that Ai Hui had an eighty million debt?

Fatty was dumbfounded, dumbfounded by the shockingly cruel reality.

At this moment, a knocking sound was heard through the door.

Ai Hui exhaled deeply. No matter who it was, this person came at just the right time. It was a good person, a savior!

“Who’s there!” he shouted at the top of his lungs as he ran over to open the door enthusiastically.

His expression immediately became crestfallen and his tone became cold. “What are you doing here?”

Ingrate!

Duanmu Huanghun was also in an awkward situation. He wanted to punch Ai Hui when he saw his face, but he restrained himself. If not for the fact that he bore a heavy responsibility, he would rather die than visit Ai Hui.

“Matters related to the institution and the magistrate court.” Duanmu Huanghun did not bother to keep his tone civil.

Ai Hui snorted and opened the door widely.

Upon seeing Duanmu Huanghun, Lou Lan greeted him

enthusiastically, “Student Bangwan.”

Hearing those two words, Duanmu Huanghun trembled. To him, these two words were a nightmare.

When his gaze fell on the young girl from the noodle store, his pace became even more sluggish, and he could not help but tremble.

Ai Hui’s flame was actually here!

That girl with strength off the charts, the girl who was as fierce as a wild beast was actually here. At that moment, he only wanted to run! Previously, when he exchanged blows with Ai Hui’s flame, he could not even retaliate. He was completely suppressed by her and had experienced the most painful defeat of his life.

Suddenly, he felt that he had walked into a lion’s den. Everyone’s gaze was like a tiger watching its prey.

“Say it. What’s the matter?” Ai Hui only wished for the early departure of this person.

Looking at Ai Hui’s face that deserved a spanking, Duanmu Huanghun’s anger rose, but looking at that woman who was standing close by, that anger disappeared without a trace.

“As you were helpful in defeating the blood fiend, the institution and the magistrate court would like to reward you. They sent me

here to check on your opinion.”

Duanmu Huanghun’s face was impartial. He had a headache when he received the assignment. Truthfully, his feelings were complicated when he saw Ai Hui today.

He had seen with his own eyes how Ai Hui impressively executed his sword moves. The Dean and the Mayor both praised him, while those teachers who followed them were also amazed.

There were even some who thought that Ai Hui could be a swordplay master in the future.

Duanmu Huanghun felt pressure, tremendous pressure. Ai Hui was catching up to him with a speed that he could not comprehend. The distance between Ai Hui and him was getting shorter. He had also discovered that Ai Hui was better at adapting to dangerous situations. When everyone was at a loss, only Ai Hui managed to come up with a solution.

Reward!

Ai Hui brightened up in a flash. “How would they reward me?”

“This would depend on your needs. It could be absolute arts or weapons and defensive gear. You can slowly reflect and consider.” Duanmu Huanghun secretly thought to himself that he would give Ai Hui the one with the worst quality.

“Money!” Ai Hui said defiantly, “If they want to reward me, reward me with money!”

Duanmu Huanghun could not contain himself and reminded Ai Hui, “You better choose a few imparted skills or special defense equipments or even elemental ingredients.”

While Ai Hui brought about a huge amount of stress to him, his pride did not allow him to use such low methods to slow down Ai Hui’s progress.

Victory must also be achieved fairly and honorably.

I will not lose to you!

Duanmu Huanghun felt relieved after resolving his internal turmoil. He laughed involuntarily. It seemed that he had been possessed recently. How could he have such thoughts. Although Ai Hui had improved tremendously, Duanmu Huanghun was still superior.

He knew that it was due to the sword move. Seeing that sword move shocked him like never before, which led to his recent imbalanced mentality.

Seeing Ai Hui’s indifference, he continued in a light tone, “In the current situation, whether it is the academy or the magistrate court, they would not have so much money. That is because much of their money would be used to replenish and purchase supplies.

You should think about unobtainable or expensive items that you wanted in the past. Think this over carefully."

Ai Hui was taken aback as he sensed that Duanmu Huanghun was serious.

"He said it perfectly."

The young lady from the noodle store abruptly interrupted.

Ai Hui became prudent and cautious. The young lady from the noodle store was wealthy and respectable, so she definitely knew more of the world than a country bumpkin like him. He face-palmed. He could also ask Teacher and Mistress for their inputs and suggestions.

"Give me a second."

Having said that, he rushed out of the training hall.

Fatty and Lou Lan were conversing, which left just Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun alone. Duanmu Huanghun felt extremely awkward.

"May I dare ask young lady's name?"

Duanmu Huanghun decided to break the awkward silence. He was extremely curious about Ai Hui's old flame. Her capability was

deep and unmeasurable. While there were many reasons as to why he was suppressed that night, the main reason was because he did not have much confidence in defeating his opponent.

For a student to be able to threaten Duanmu Huanghun, she was definitely not a nameless nobody to be taken lightly.

Could it be that she was not a student?

Thinking of Senior Mingxiu, another woman in Ai Hui's life, Duanmu Huanghun trembled. She was also a nightmare.

Why were the women around Ai Hui so frightening?

Shi Xueman treated Duanmu Huanghun indifferently. In her eyes, Duanmu Huanghun was just a little boy, and she did not think highly of him. Her expression was composed, then she smiled and said, "He usually calls me 'skank.' "

Duanmu Huanghun: "..."

Fatty, who was not far away, exclaimed, "This... I seemed to have heard of this!"

"Hehe, I had heard of it too."

Shi Xueman laughed lightly. Her laugh was as cold as the winter tide.

Chapter 152: The Dangerous Young Lady

“Teacher has heard about what happened during the past two days and was about to pay you a visit. Do not take anything from the Institution except for the [Big Dipper]. Remember the test we took? Within your eight palaces, there are seven strong palaces. We should not waste your innate skills. Teacher did not anticipate that you would improve so quickly! You gave us a shock by having a breakthrough to the fourth palace so quickly. Remember, only ask for the [Big Dipper]! You will know the reasoning behind this after you have received the [Big Dipper].”

“Teacher and Mistress are not familiar with the Magistrate Court and we do not know what they have, but your fellow classmate was justified in saying that it would be too derogatory to ask for money as a form of reward. Disciple, you should not fall into the trap of money. Don’t you have a sand puppet that is an expert in making elemental food? You could request for ingredients to make elemental food. You have already made a breakthrough to your fourth palace, so you need to prepare for the fifth palace. The earth palace, sea palace, gate palace, and sky palace have a much higher difficulty level than the left hand palace, right hand palace, left leg palace, and the right leg palace. You need to start preparation early. This is a good sword, so you are not lacking weapons. In terms of defensive equipment, you have the Blood Bandage. With that, it would be hard to harm you with just blades and swords. Though it is on the ugly side, the Blood Bandage does not have any negative traits. Oh yes, your senior prepared a pair of shoes for you. This pair of shoes will enable you to run faster. Disciple, the ways of the world are evil. If you are caught in any dire situations, remember to run quickly without hesitation. Run as far as you can. Do not worry about us, just look after yourself first...”

Teacher’s endless chatter was reverberating in Ai Hui’s mind. He was touched and felt that he had the best teacher, mistress, and senior in the world.

He had just exited from the embroidery workshop. His speed was exceptionally fast, like he was flying.

He wore a pair of white shoes on his feet. The workmanship was extremely delicate and was made by his Senior Mingxiu. As Ai Hui’s base level was still low and he could not use top-quality materials, Senior Mingxiu’s skills were exquisite. Under her perfect workmanship, she was able to produce a pair of remarkable shoes using just normal materials.

Ai Hui felt that his body was as light and lithe as a bird.

Drifting Cloud Boots. The main body of the boots were made using the Thousand Drift Cloud from Palatte Cloud Village. The Thousand Drift Cloud was a commonly seen water elementalist material and had a vast usage. This pair of shoes brought out the lithe characteristic of the Thousand Drift Cloud brilliantly. Ai Hui’s speed and agility were tremendously increased.

Regardless of whether it was in a battle or to escape, these shoes would be able to perform many functions.

Ai Hui did not think that running away was a disgraceful thing to do. As long as the situation did not seem right, he would run without a second thought. His life was his and was more important than anything.

The elders were indeed more experienced. Teacher's suggestions were very much on point. His previous thoughts were too simple.

The only regret he had was that his hopes of having money were dashed.

Oh money. Oh money...

Ai Hui sighed while running madly. The Drifting Cloud Boots were very comfortable, but he needed to adjust and familiarize himself with them before increasing the speed and flexibility. After this acclimation period, he would be able to perform outstandingly during battle.

When he walked passed the noodle store, he thought about the thrilling encounter when battling with the bat. He had been really lucky during that battle. Even now, he was still unable to understand how he managed to block the blood bat.

He had not expected to be able to benefit from the battle. While muddled, he had managed to survive and advance to four palaces. Even the elemental energy ball in his natal residence disappeared without a trace. In the confusion, he even obtained a reward.

What a pity they did not offer cash rewards directly!

While Ai Hui was feeling resentful, he suddenly noticed a young lady in a red skirt squatting at the scene of the previous battle.

The collapsed fence was already repaired and looked as good as new. The blood stains on the ground were also swept and cleaned.

The young lady seemed to sense Ai Hui's gaze and looked up, casting her gaze toward him.

The sword embryo between his eyebrows trembled as Ai Hui became distracted.

The young lady's red clothes were fiery and alluring. Ai Hui did not know how to describe her beauty. She squatted in the middle of the street and gave off a pitiful vibe. Even the shadow beneath her legs seemed to be darker than usual and more dull.

Despite being under the warm sunlight, no warmth was added to her figure. Even though her clothes were as red as fire and she was as pretty as a fairy, it seemed that she was enveloped by a faint layer of black fog. This was a darkness that could not be penetrated by sunlight.

However, there was nothing when Ai Hui looked at her closely.

The young lady suddenly laughed sweetly, like a bright flower blooming in the darkness. "Am I pretty?"

Ai Hui regained his senses and looked around. He pointed to himself uncertainly. "Are you asking me?"

“Yes.” The young lady in red walked toward Ai Hui while smiling.

Ai Hui, who previously still thinking about money, replied straightforwardly, “My standard is different from others’. Give me one hundred yuan, I will say you’re pretty. Give me five hundred yuan, then I will say you’re very pretty. Give me one thousand yuan, I will say you’re as pretty as a fairy!”

The young lady who walked in front of Ai Hui paused and suddenly laughed sweetly. “Looks like I am as pretty as a fairy.”

Ai Hui went cross-eyed while a sweet fragrance was blown along with the wind. He was suddenly holding on to something.

Ai Hui was startled and did not manage to clearly see her actions.

“Although it might be difficult, I hope to meet you again. All the best!”

Her enticing voice floated along with the wind.

When he regained his senses, there was no trace of the young girl. He looked downward and saw that he was holding on to more than a thousand yuan. He could not help but laugh. However, his expression quickly dulled.

When the young lady in red rushed toward him, his sword embryo had not managed to react in time.

What a scary woman!

Ai Hui took a long time before snapping out of his daze. He laughed bitterly. He was just randomly walking along the street when he met a woman with unfathomable capabilities. Was he considered lucky or unlucky?

Ai Hui pondered and decided that he was unlucky. Whenever he met women with unfathomable capabilities, they were not kind souls. The young lady from the noodle store was a good example.

Thinking of the young lady from the noodle store, then looking back at the one thousand yuan in his hand that was given by the young lady in red, Ai Hui had an ominous prediction.

The loneliness and darkness from the young lady in red led Ai Hui to think back to the three years he spent in the Wilderness. He somewhat understood why he was moved by her temperament. It was the despair and fear of the weak and puny in times of distress.

He shook his head. He kept the money and hoped that he would not see her again.

He had already stepped out of his dire straits and bid goodbye to darkness.

One thousand yuan was also an unexpected fortune!

In the past, few frequented the magistrate court. These days, traffic was heavy because there were countless streams of people entering and leaving, causing it to be very crowded. When Wang Zhen took over the city, his rich experience allowed him to rapidly gain the trust of everyone. Then, the magistrate court became the heart of Central Pine City.

Wang Zhen, who was always composed, looked ashen at the moment. Next to him, the dean's face was as white as paper. His hand, which was holding on to the report, was trembling uncontrollably.

"Failed? How did it fail? Didn't Qiao Hua say he could become a wood elementalist for Dai Gang?"

The dean's murmurs had a slight tremor. His gaze was blank and filled with despair.

Wang Zhen's lips were trembling. He wanted to have a sip of tea to calm himself, but his hand was trembling too badly and the tea spilt over. He was someone who had experienced battle. He knew the failure of Qiao Hua's plan would bring about a catastrophic disaster and was also a fatal turning point.

The incident of blood poisoning had become a blood catastrophe.

It was the epitome of catastrophe!

Due to the failure of Qiao Hua's plan, there were zero survivors

among the entourage. The blood catastrophe worsened, and the new blood poisoning was more dangerous and violent. The rate at which it spread was even scarier…

The Garden of Life, which had been reduced to scorched earth, was once again covered by blood grass that grew at an insane pace. The Garden of Life had become a sea of red, like a blood ocean without any boundaries.

Those elementalists in the air could clearly see how the blood ripple spread. It had now become a crazy red wave and was sweeping across the Induction Ground at an astonishing speed.

The Induction Ground, no, the whole Avalon of Five Elements was facing a catastrophe like never before. How many of them would be swallowed up by the scary blood wave? He had no idea, but he knew that the amount would be high. Perhaps the number would be greater than those who died at the front line.

Wang Zhen's unfocused gaze started to regain some focus. His tenacious spirit from being a veteran started to emerge.

He had never encountered such a difficult and desperate moment. Even when he had broken his leg, he had not been in so much despair. Yet, he knew that he needed to take action or else they would be like sitting ducks.

"When will the blood wave arrive at Central Pine City?" he asked suddenly.

The dean replied with a pained expression, “The day after tomorrow.”

“Okay, buck up. It is not the time for despair yet,” Wang Zhen said gravely. He did not dare to imagine the cities that the blood wave had swept across. He steadied himself and continued, “The blood wave will arrive the day after tomorrow. Given the pattern of how the blood fiends changed previously, they would still need an average of five to seven days to transform again. In that case, we have seven to nine days of preparation time. By now, the higher-ups must have already received the news. They will make arrangements and rush to our rescue. The fastest we can expect to receive some support should be in fifteen days’ time.”

After hearing Wang Zhen’s analysis, the dean’s eyes regained some liveliness. He continued, “This means we just need to hang on for around a week and we will be able to get support. Furthermore, Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun are in Central Pine City. The higher-ups would definitely think of a way to send support immediately. ”

“Yes!” Wang Zhen waved his fist around vigorously. “We only need to endure for one week. We have so many teachers and students here. There are many training halls in the city and guards in each training hall. These are all sources of strength. However mighty the new blood fiends might be, I believe there’s a possibility that we can endure for a week.”

The dean sighed deeply in relief. “Yes, yes, yes. There’s hope. There’s hope.”

A glimmer of light flickered in Wang Zhen's eyes. "It is possible that people have already received news of Qiao Hua's failure. We have to control the situation immediately and make use of all the manpower we have. Since nobody will be able to escape, it might be a good thing if they are aware of this danger early on."

The dean clenched his teeth and said, "I will gather some teachers to impart some practical, but impactful, moves. While we do not have much time, any gain in strength, no matter big or small, would be beneficial."

Wang Zhen was surprised by the dean's courage. This course of action might result in consequences that he would be held responsible for. The Induction Ground had strict control over the imparting of moves at institutions. Apparently, the dean no longer cared about regulations at this juncture.

Wang Zhen nodded his head. "This would be for the best! We need to control all the elemental food. We need to prepare for the worst."

"All right!" The dean nodded his head fiercely. "I will gather the students."

At that moment, a mournful alarm was heard. An elementalist rushed in with a panicked expression. "Superior, there are blood fiends! There are many blood fiends!"

Their expressions changed drastically.

Chapter 153: The Original Inheritance and the Pact

A siren rang out while Ai Hui was on his way back to the training hall. Troops of anxious elementalists were patrolling the streets, reassuring everyone that things were under control and that they should stay at home as much as possible.

Ai Hui had a bad feeling about this. He could feel that the elementalists' were tense like he had never seen before.

He kept his head down, silently passing through the streets and headed toward the Vanguard Training Hall.

Both the noodle shop girl and Duanmu Huanghun had already left.

Fatty's face was filled with panic, but seeing Ai Hui allowed him to relax and heave a sigh of relief. He asked, "What's happening outside? Why does it seem so chaotic?"

"I have no idea," Ai Hui said, shaking his head. "Something big must have happened."

"Is there anything Lou Lan can help with?" Lou Lan chimed in with his head tilted.

Ai Hui let out a short burst of laughter upon seeing Lou Lan's

cute actions before replying, “Not for now, but I’m sure we’ll need your help soon enough.”

Fatty knew Ai Hui like the back of his hand. He already knew that something was amiss from the moment he saw Ai Hui’s expression. “Is the situation really that bad?” Fatty asked.

“I can’t say for sure yet,” Ai Hui replied flatly. He knew that he would not be able to stay out of it this time.

The reward he received came with certain expectations. Moreover, Ai Hui knew that the city’s strength was considerably limited. The teachers may be powerful, but their pitiful combat experience hardly qualified them as competent fighters.

His worries about the blood poison incident worsening appeared to be coming true.

“Why are you still standing here?” Ai Hui asked while glaring at Fatty. “You should be training!”

Fatty could see that Ai Hui was in a foul mood. Dejected, Fatty silently retreated to a corner to train.

“Don’t worry Ai Hui, Lou Lan will definitely help you!” Lou Lan cheered.

Ai Hui smiled and thanked Lou Lan.

Considering the Induction Ground's sluggish response, it was not exactly surprising that the situation had worsened.

If the situation continued to deteriorate, there would be nowhere to escape to. Based on their current strength, they would likely end up as food for the blood fiends once they left the city. Furthermore, his master and the others were still here. It was impossible for Ai Hui to sit back and watch as they succumbed to the disaster.

He was suffering from all these agonizing thoughts.

He was still too weak. The thought of facing the blood poison disaster with his meager power made him feel utterly insignificant. Ai Hui was not even certain that he could contribute much to the city's defensive efforts.

After all, what could a student who had only recently activated four palaces accomplish?

These unbearable thoughts were suffocating Ai Hui. He had been a free spirit in the Wilderness, where his only concern was his own survival. Now, he was tied down by the lives of so many others whom he wished to protect: Master, Mistress, Senior Mingxiu, Lou Lan, and Fatty.

He took a deep breath to dispel the wild thoughts flooding his mind and started to train.

Having just activated both of his foot palaces, he had yet to properly analyze them.

Ai Hui was soon deeply immersed in his training.

The sky began to darken as time quietly passed. A student hurriedly rushed over to inform Ai Hui that he was to return to the academy immediately.

Ai Hui did not hesitate in the slightest.

Upon reaching the academy, he was summoned to the dean's office.

The dean looked as if he had aged ten years, and the hair along his temples had grown white. He smiled at Ai Hui and said, "Student Ai Hui, you have given me a big surprise. I shall get straight to the point of why I've called you here today. The first thing I'd like to settle is your reward. Student Duanmu should have already spoken to you about this. Feel free tell me what you have in mind as a reward, even things such as inherited knowledge, elemental food, or equipment. Of course, it has to be something that the academy can provide."

Ai Hui replied without delay, "Dean, I hope to learn the [Big Dipper] technique."

"[Big Dipper]?" the dean asked, a little surprised. "This must be

your teacher's idea. It looks like he's been guiding you well. The [Big Dipper] is Central Pine Academy's greatest inheritance and, although it isn't a lost skill, it still has its distinct features. Learning it is no mean feat since studying the [Big Dipper] requires the trainee to have seven strong palaces. Oh, I'm so muddleheaded. Old Wang must have already tested your constitution before encouraging you to ask for the [Big Dipper]. He just loves to study such things."

The dean solemnly shook his head, appearing to remember something from his past.

He walked toward the bookcase, pressing his palm on it. A complex pattern of light emerged along the bookcase, dazzling Ai Hui. The next moment, different-colored balls of light appeared all over the bookcase in a picturesque fashion, each one about the size of a fist.

The dean retrieved a ball that looked like a dark nebula. The lump of black vapor in his hand was scattered with tiny dots of light and was extremely eye-catching. Ai Hui came to a sudden realization that every one of these balls of light contained an inheritance.

His gaze fell on the nebula. Could this be the [Big Dipper]? How is this thing accessed?

Having never seen something like this before, Ai Hui was filled with curiosity and anticipation. Ai Hui thought of himself as a country bumpkin without much experience.

The dean noticed Ai Hui's nervous anticipation and laughed. He was reminded of his younger days, back when he first laid eyes on an inheritance. The sense of nostalgia invoked by this memory seemed to have cleared up his mind quite a bit.

"Put your hand on it," instructed the dean.

Ai Hui carefully placed his hand on the nebula in the dean's hand.

"Circulate your elemental energy," the dean continued.

Ai Hui carefully circulated his elemental energy. A bright flash appeared in front of his eyes and he appeared to have been dragged into a void. Packed together in dense clusters, stars were all around Ai Hui.

The star-filled sky suddenly began to revolve.

The star-filled sky swirled into rings of light, drowning Ai Hui within. After an indeterminate amount of time, seven stars emerged from the light rings, tracing out the shape of a ladle. The ladle rotated and expanded in front of Ai Hui's eyes, appearing to fly toward him.

It was quite a while before Ai Hui awoke from the trance-like state with a violent jerk.

“How does it feel?” the dean asked, smiling.

Ai Hui hesitantly replied, “It’s not easy to describe. It feels as though I’ve gained some knowledge, but I really can’t say for sure. Dean, is this the [Big Dipper]?”

“Yes, indeed,” the Dean answered, nodding his head in affirmation. “This isn’t just the [Big Dipper], it’s the original [Big Dipper].”

“What do you mean by ‘original’?” Ai Hui was confused.

The dean patiently explained, “The original [Big Dipper] is the primary source of this inheritance. In accordance with academy regulations, legacies and skills that are passed on to students are done so via copies. In addition to the details of the inheritance, the primary source also contains some of the creator’s experiences and realizations, making it extremely valuable. You’ll soon come to realize that every round of replication results in more information being lost from the original. Inheritance skillsets that are sold on the market tend to be very inferior copies. So, do you think you’ve got a good deal?”

The dean was amused by Ai Hui’s look of amazement.

“Definitely,” Ai Hui replied as he attempted to keep his facial expression in check. He looked up at the dean and continued weakly, “Although, why am I feeling guilty? I guess there’s no such thing as a free lunch…”

“You didn’t even falter after experiencing a surprise this huge. With such mental fortitude, old Wang has indeed taken in a good student.” The dean was all smiles as he proceeded with his instructions, “I’ll now continue with the other matter at hand.”

After Ai Hui gave the situation some serious thought, he realized there was definitely something he had to do to earn such a reward. Given his current ability, Ai Hui was definitely not capable of resolving any major issues for the dean. He would most likely be asked to deal with some minor concern.

The dean paused for a moment before speaking, “You’ll be cooperating with Shi Xueman and the others from now on. Shi Xueman, Sang Zhijun, and you will be working hand in hand. I believe that you three are already quite familiar with one another. This group, which the three of you will be a part of, is relatively stronger than the other groups and will thus be assigned several missions.”

Ai Hui quietly waited for the next part.

“You have rich combat experience. I’ve looked through your file and noted that you’ve previously stayed in the Wilderness for three years. It’s no mean feat for a laborer to survive the Wilderness. I’d say that you have the most combat experience in the entire academy. Shi Xueman is the leader of the other team, of which I have no control over. You’ll be the leader of a new team, taking charge of several outstanding students that will be handpicked by me. Duanmu Huanghun will be your deputy. Both of your teams will operate together as a group.”

Ai Hui continued to remain silent.

“If, and I’m only saying if, the situation becomes critically dangerous, I hope that you will guarantee Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun’s safety. Do you understand what I mean?” The dean spoke solemnly, his gaze set on Ai Hui.

Ai Hui did not avoid the dean’s gaze as he calmly replied, “Do you mean to say that the others are disposable as long as Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun survive?”

“That’s right!” exclaimed the Dean. Ai Hui had taken the words right out of his mouth, relieving him of his apprehensions. “Perhaps the situation won’t degrade to that point. We’re definitely the first city in line for reinforcements, so there’ll be support coming to join us.”

“Because of them?” Ai Hui asked.

“Yes,” said the dean while nodding his head. “Life is often unfair. The lives of some are worth more than others. Although such things are better left unsaid, this is the truth of the matter. If something happens to the two of them and the reinforcements get wind of it, everyone here will be knee deep in sh*t. Your wealth of experience, mature disposition, and outstanding swordplay reflect your potential. While these may not necessarily be useful, I’m still willing to place my bet on you. For all we know, you might just give me a pleasant surprise.”

“I accept this mission.”

Ai Hui's straightforward reply startled the dean. It made the carefully chosen words of his speech appear to have been for nought.

The dean was happy to know that he picked the right person.

"However, I have two conditions."

The dean was again taken aback by Ai Hui's audacity. Surprise turned to admiration as he responded, "Say it, if it is within my means."

"First, as the leader I'd like to pick the other members myself. Everyone in my team will have to obey my orders unconditionally, even Duanmu Huanghun."

"This, I agree with," the dean swiftly answered.

"Second, I need a few spots in the first batch of people to be evacuated once the reinforcements arrive."

The dean was gobsmacked. He scrutinized the young man standing in front of him.

Dark, clear, and calm, Ai Hui's eyes were as deep as the ocean.

After a moment's hesitation, the dean asked, "How many spots

do you need?”

”Me, my teacher Wang Shouchuan, his wife Han Yuqin, Senior Mingxiu, my good friend Qian Dai, as well as my sand puppet Lou Lan.”

The dean heaved a sigh of relief, “You do not need to worry about those 3 from the Jade Embroidery Workshop as they have already been allocated evacuation slots. Adding you in won’t be a problem either, which means you only need an additional 2 spots. All right, you’ve got yourself a deal.”

Ai Hui responded with his own sigh of relief. “Deal.”

The two stood there as they exchanged glances and smiled.

Chapter 154: Recruiting Members

“Dean, regarding that siren earlier, did something happen?” Ai Hui took the initiative to ask.

The dean suddenly didn’t look too well, but he remained composed and answered with a reassuring smile, “Nothing much. Our lookouts were too anxious upon spotting a few blood fiends close to our defensive perimeter, so they sounded the alarm.”

From the dean’s voice, Ai Hui could hear that he was dissatisfied with the city’s elementalists. He regretted letting the Society of Excellence’s instructors leave; he would have insisted for Li Wei to stay back if he had known that the blood disaster would spread to Central Pine City.

Compared to soldiers who had served ten years ago, the elites from the current Infantry Division felt much more dependable.

Ai Hui felt slightly relieved.

The dean didn’t say much else besides telling him how to collect his reward from the magistrate court and to pick out his team as soon as possible. Shi Xueman’s team would then be able to join up with his. The dean had many other matters to take care of, he hadn’t intended to spend so much time on Ai Hui’s issue since it was merely a last minute decision. Wang Zhen was his biggest hope.

Never before had the dean imagined that he would pin this much

faith in a student. Moreover, this was only his first time meeting Ai Hui.

Perhaps many years down the road he'll look back and remember how panic-stricken and desperate he was. Like a drowning man, he'd gladly grab onto anything he can find. Although, he could not deny that Ai Hui was different from any other student he had ever met.

This youth, who wasn't exceptionally powerful, had a certain air about him. His eyes were as calm as the deep sea, unaggressive and restrained. He had a maturity and mellowness that you would often find only in those of middle age, and only in individuals who had a wealth of worldly experience. It was difficult to ascribe such a manner to a youth of only 16.

When serious, he would become as keen as a knife's edge.

He had, generally speaking, an aura of elegance.

Ai Hui bade farewell to the dean and walked through Central Pine Academy.

To prevent the blood poison from spreading, the trees in the academy's garden had to be cut down. Trees that were hundreds of years old were not spared either, and their roots were thoroughly destroyed for safety. Playful and joy-filled scenes under those great trees were now only distant memories, and the campus once filled with lush greenery had become utterly bare, like a battlefield devoid of life.

The young, tender faces of the students were riddled with signs of panic, their eyes filled with fear and confusion. Several teachers were delivering announcements while flying over the academy grounds, using elemental energy to project their voices all around the school. The announcements made known the administration's decision to make a set of skills available, which were, in the past, only taught to those with additional contributions. A group of teachers was organized to impart these skills in the hope that it will aid the students in fighting the blood poison.

It looked like things had really gone south.

Ai Hui's mood was inexplicably low. Central Pine City was the safest and most peaceful place he had ever known. It was a place filled with sunshine, dreams, and vigor—the complete opposite of what he had encountered in his past. Here, there were no massacres, no chilling nights, and no need to be on guard all the time. He remembered how much he had wanted to just stay in Central Pine City forever.

This was the world he had yearned for in his dreams.

Was it now time to wake up from this dream?

Ai Hui was devastated.

"Disciple!"

Teacher Wang was panting hard as his voice dragged Ai Hui out of his emotional state. The grief and sadness he had just experienced were quickly buried deep within the recesses of his mind. Raising his head in surprise, Ai Hui called out, “Teacher!”.

“I’ve finally found you,” Wang Shouchuan said as he tried to catch his breath. He was drenched in sweat. “Everyone was worried about you when we heard the siren. The situation doesn’t look too good. How did the blood catastrophe end up like this? Has it actually worsened this much?”

Wang Shouchuan looked around as he spoke, his eyes filled with sentiment. He had been a teacher in Central Pine Academy for twenty years, and he had deeply-rooted feelings for the school. It wasn’t hard to imagine just how much this desolate sight upset him.

He effortfully suppressed the throbbing heartache and told Ai Hui, “Follow me to the embroidery workshop. We’ll weather out the storm there with your mistress. With her around, nothing bad can happen! All these blood insects aren’t even a match for her soles.”

Wang Shouchuan spoke highly of his partner, describing her as though she was a valiant general capable of crushing all opposition.

Ai Hui did not tell him about his agreement with the dean, and instead, he shook his head and replied, “Your disciple humbly wishes to contribute whatever he can to help fight against the disaster. In the face of calamity, should one not calmly resist?

Having escaped from the Garden of Life, I have a better understanding of the blood catastrophe than most people. Don't worry, Master, I'll hurry back to the embroidery workshop if things truly get out of hand."

The determination in Ai Hui's eyes gave Wang Shouchuan a great headache. This disciple of his was excellent in many ways, but he was such a stubborn individual. Nobody could shake his resolve once his decision was made.

Moreover, his disciple's way of thinking wasn't wrong. Assuming responsibility instead of escaping in such times was indeed a precious quality. Wang Shouchuan was conflicted. He didn't want his disciple to be a coward, but he feared for Ai Hui's safety as well. He thought about it for a moment before asking, "What do you plan to do?"

"The administration intends to organize a team of elite students with me as the leader. Duanmu Huanghun is also a part of this. We'll be working together with Shi Xueman's team." Ai Hui continued, "I have also absorbed the original [Big Dipper], and I need to process this inheritance as well."

"The dean gave you the original [Big Dipper]?" Wang Shouchuan asked in disbelief. "Has he gone mad?"

It took Wang Shouchuan a whole ten seconds to regain his composure, his displeasure betrayed by the deep frown on his forehead. "The dean's move reveals that he has abandoned all backup plans, meaning that the situation is much worse than I had imagined. You must be careful and escape to the embroidery

workshop at the first sign of trouble, do you understand? I need to go back and make preparations with your mistress. The way things are, I wouldn't be surprised if the embroidery workshop becomes conscripted as well."

His master left with a heavy heart. However, hearing the names Duanmu Huanghun and Shi Xueman consoled him a little, as he knew how highly the dean regarded those two.

Ai Hui set off to find Duanmu Huanghun without any further delay.

There was no time to dwell on past grudges.

Duanmu Huanghun was still slightly embarrassed to see Ai Hui, especially since he had to be his deputy. If someone had brought up something like that before the calamity, he'd definitely have dismissed that person as insane. Now, however, he was clearly aware that Ai Hui was much more suited for the role of a team leader. Ai Hui had played a pivotal role in the past two escapes from the blood fiends' clutches.

Although he was a bit vexed, Duanmu Huanghun spoke calmly. "Give me the list of names and I'll gather the members."

Ai Hui went straight to the point. "You, me, Fatty, Lou Lan, Jiang Wei, and Wang Xiaoshan. We shall assemble at the Vanguard Training hall."

Duanmu Huanghun furrowed his brows. He had assumed that Ai Hui would select students with exceptional abilities and not this motley crew. Jiang Wei was pretty capable, but Wang Xiaoshan, the earth elementalist who had built the mound in the Garden of Life, was mediocre. He had never seen Fatty demonstrate anything before, but he knew there was nothing special about him either. At least Lou Lan was a good pick as his healing ability would definitely come in handy.

Ai Hui knew what Duanmu Huanghun was thinking and directly asserted, “Do you think the number of activated palaces will matter in front of the blood fiends?”

Duanmu Huanghun was at a loss for words. There would indeed be no significant difference if they were facing larger blood fiends.

Ai Hui glanced at Duanmu Huanghun and said, “We will not be handling dangerous missions. The elementalists, teachers, and training ground personnel will be around to take those. To be precise, we’re just here as a backup, dealing with smaller things like blood insects. Furthermore, we’ll be working with Shi Xueman’s team. They’ll be the ones going up against the stronger blood fiends. That’s why trust is more important than ability for our team.”

Duanmu Huanghun wasn’t comfortable being told that his role wasn’t particularly important. For a genius, being overlooked was a difficult pill to swallow.

He knew, however, that Ai Hui was merely stating facts, and that the things he said made sense.

“If you insist, I have no objections,” Duanmu Huanghun said expressionlessly. “I’ll perform my role as your deputy as required.”

It took a lot out of him to say the word “deputy.”

Since when had Brother Huanghun ever been someone’s assistant?

Since when had Brother Huanghun ever been slighted by others?

Having experienced a series of disturbing events up till now, Duanmu Huanghun felt extremely discontent. He couldn’t find an outlet to vent his frustration.

He may be a prideful individual, but he wasn’t someone who made a fuss out of everything. Things that he had to bear with gritted teeth only served to trigger Duanmu Huanghun into action.

“I’ll definitely surpass you in every way!” Duanmu Huanghun swore to himself.

Ai Hui was unaware of the vows that Duanmu Huanghun was silently swearing, but it wasn’t as if he’d give a hoot if he knew. He looked Duanmu Huanghun in the eye and said, “Let’s begin.”

Duanmu Huanghun went off to find Jiang Wei and Wang Xiaoshan while Ai Hui headed towards Manager Li’s shop.

……

AI Hui was flabbergasted when he saw Manager Li. He exclaimed, “What happened to you, Old Li?”

Manager Li’s hair had all turned white as though he had aged rapidly.

Manager Li laughed bitterly and avoided his question. “I was just about to look for you; we have to settle the money for the Bunny Hair. Bunny Hair Arrows have been selling like hotcakes, and I can hardly keep up with the demand. Here’s twenty million, keep it safe. If nothing happens over the next ten days, you can come over to settle the bill again.”

Ai Hui kept the money, but strangely, he didn’t feel any happiness upon receiving it.

“Old Li, are there any more Bunny Hair Arrows in the shop? Please keep some from the next batch for me.”

Manager Li happily agreed. “No problem.”

Ai Hui continued to ask, “Are there any more heavy shields in the store?”

“Heavy shields?” Manager Li responded with a nod. “Almost all

of the arms have been expropriated by the magistrate court. All I have left are some of this second-hand heavy equipment from years ago. I haven't been able to sell them because they're too heavy. Come take a look, you can have whatever you like since they're not worth much anyway."

Ai Hui followed Manager Li to the storehouse where he really saw a bunch of rusty second-hand heavy gear. Ai Hui picked out an ironwood shield weighing over 150 kilograms. He brushed off the dust and polished off the rust, revealing a shield as sturdy as a wall. It was incredibly solid, truly an excellent find.

Ai Hui thanked Manager Li before lugging the ironwood shield back to the training ground.

The Dragonspine Inferno he was carrying on his body weighed 110 kilograms. In addition to that, he was lugging the even heavier ironwood shield which weighed about 170 kilograms, a combined weight of 280 kilograms. Carrying such heavy items thoroughly exhausted Ai Hui, reminding him of his days as a laborer in the Wilderness as he panted heavily.

After much effort, he finally managed to carry the shield back to the training ground. As he entered, he heard Lou Lan cheering, "Ai Hui is back!"

Before Ai Hui could put the shield down, however, he heard Fatty frantically shout, "Come quickly, take a look at this!"

Chapter 155: Message Tree

Come quickly and take a look?

Ai Hui put the shield down and asked, “You’re done with your training?”

Fatty sluggishly answered, “Is anyone ever done with their training? Come quickly, some of the leaves on your message tree are glowing, someone has sent a message. Wow, this is really advanced, I’m really excited to be able to see something so advanced. Please understand that it’s the first time a country bumpkin like me has seen something like this.”

Message tree?

Ai Hui paused for a moment, suddenly recalling the nonsensical words that had previously appeared on one of its leaves.

“I have no idea who among you are still alive, but I know that no one can stop them. They have already completed the necessary preparations. Everything will change in sixty days. Who will protect the Avalon of Five Elements?”

Ai Hui remembered the message clearly. He had attempted to understand this seemingly nonsensical message several times but to no avail.

He had felt that the other party was abnormal and should totally

see a doctor. Until now, he had thought that the message was just a prank and had buried it somewhere in the back of his mind. However, hearing Fatty mention the message tree reminded him of that message, which he now saw clearly in his head.

Everything will change...

Ai Hui inevitably thought of the blood catastrophe. It was most certainly a catastrophe capable of being called an 'incredible change.' Hadn't Central Pine City and the Induction Ground both already changed drastically?

Wait a minute! If the blood catastrophe was what the other party was referring to...

"No one can stop them" seemed to indicate that the blood catastrophe was set in motion by some people. Ai Hui let out an angry hiss. He had also once thought that this might have been the case.

The blood poison needed a period of incubation before it could complete its metamorphosis. The Garden of Life was undoubtedly a good choice. Nobody would notice anything different in a forgotten area flooded with all sorts of strange vegetation. Besides the students that went there for excursions, the Garden of Life was desolate and uninhabited. Moreover, there were no powerful dire beasts out there, only wild beasts. Perhaps the blood poison was extremely weak in its early stages?

The Garden of Life could be said to be an excellent breeding

ground for the blood poison, and it had allowed the poison to continuously spread and transform the blood beasts.

It was already too late by the time the blood poison started to break out. What's worse was that the Induction Ground did not have any stationed troops from the elite Thirteen Divisions at the time, thus causing them to be unable to adapt quickly enough to fend off the sudden outbreak.

The number of coincidences made Ai Hui think that the blood catastrophe was planned, but he promptly dismissed the thought after feeling that he might be too paranoid. Who would deliberately make such a blood poison? What good would it do for them? Ai Hui could not think of a good reason.

But what if the other party really was referring to the blood catastrophe?

Ai Hui hesitated for a moment, juggling the strange message around in his mind.

"I have no idea who among you is still alive" implied that there was a group of people—maybe his friends? It didn't seem like it though, perhaps it was a group of sorts? "Is still alive" implied that this group of people was either very old or trapped in dire circumstances. Either way, they were people facing death.

Does the "them" in the message then refer to the people who initiated the blood catastrophe?

The thing that didn’t add up was the “60 days” mentioned in the message. Ai Hui had gone on the excursion the next day after receiving the message. The blood poison incident had also come shortly after.

It had been 32 days since Ai Hui had received the strange message, which meant that the blood catastrophe had started 28 days after the message.

The sender must have postulated incorrectly.

Or was he not talking about the blood catastrophe?

“Everything will change” probably meant that the event would create an impact large enough to alter the Avalon of Five Elements. “Who will protect the Avalon of Five Elements?” insinuated that the change wasn’t going to be a good thing, it was more likely a calamity.

It was this last sentence that led Ai Hui to think of the blood catastrophe. He couldn’t think of any other event that had the ability to drastically change the Avalon of Five Elements.

But if it, indeed, referred to the blood catastrophe, the timing was an issue.

“Ai Hui, why are you daydreaming?” Fatty asked as he walked over, deeply concerned. “Are your injuries still not healed? Lan Lan, quickly give Ai Hui a check up.”

“No problem!” Lou Lan replied, his eyes flashing. “Ai Hui is very healthy!”

Ai Hui snapped out of his thoughts, mocking himself for overthinking and being paranoid.

But wait....

Ai Hui pointed at Lou Lan and questioned Fatty, “What did you call him?”

“Lan Lan,” Fatty answered matter-of-factly.

Ai Hui shivered, clearly grossed out. “Lan Lan? Please don’t give me goosebumps. Lou Lan is my sand puppet, you’d better not mangle his name.”

Fatty innocently replied, “What about Lou Lou?”

“Why are you not called Dai Dai, then?” Ai Hui could barely spit out those two words.

“Oh, you know my childhood nickname!” Fatty exclaimed with his eyes opened wide in surprise. “I’ve never told you this before!”

Ai Hui couldn’t be bothered to continue talking. He pointed to the ironwood shield on the floor. “This is for you.”

Fatty looked at the ironwood shield lying on the floor, dazed by its great thickness. “Ai Hui, are you sure about this? I’m supposed to use this? Ai Hui, I haven’t seen you for just a few months, and you’ve already forgotten my light and graceful fighting style?”

“Light and graceful? I think you mean hit and run?” Ai Hui sneered and pressed on without giving Fatty a chance to rebut. “I need someone to wield a shield, and I think you’re the most suitable person to do it. We can’t waste all that flesh, now can we?”

Fatty replied anxiously, “This is all fat…”

Ai Hui swiftly interrupted, “Are you doing it? Return me my money if you aren’t going to do it!”

Fatty slumped his body and pleaded, “Ai Hui, we’ve been brothers for so many years…”

“You still need to return the money!” Ai Hui said bluntly. “If you cannot afford to pay up then you’d better be my shieldman. You’ll be well fed with noodles and meat, and you can even play with Lou Lan.”

Lou Lan morphed into three words—“play with you”—that flitted about.

“Lou Lan is such a good boy,” Ai Hui said, smiling at Lou Lan

with the warmth of spring. But an expression as cold as winter immediately took over his face when he turned to Fatty. “You’ve played with this before, time to pick it up again,” he ordered.

Fatty’s head hung low as he marched unsteadily towards the ironwood shield. The overly-dramatic Fatty looked as if he was part of a funeral procession.

Ai Hui ignored him and instructed, “Lou Lan, make sure he completes all three hundred sets of shield raises. No dinner for him if he misses even a single set.”

“The one with the surname Ai!” Fatty shouted through clenched teeth. Gone was the Fatty who was filled with despair, he was now a raging brown bear.

“No problem! I will not miss a single count!” Lou Lan said happily, clearly excited to be of help to Ai Hui.

With a bang, Lou Lan morphed into three ‘zeroes’ and started to count.

Seeing Lou Lan’s new form, Fatty’s expression changed to one of dread. Using a flattering voice, he promptly whispered, “Lan Lan, think of all the fun we had just now, aren’t we good brothers? Good brothers should help each other out. Come on, help me count a few free sets and I’ll play with you in the future.”

Fatty immediately noticed the sand figures changing swiftly,

making him beam with joy.

Bang!

The numbers suddenly returned to zero.

Fatty was stunned.

“Add another hundred sets! That’s four hundred sets together! Miss one set and there’ll be no food for you!”

Ai Hui’s voice boomed from behind. Fatty trembled as Lou Lan displayed “400.” As if he was afraid that Fatty couldn’t see it clearly, Lou Lan doubled the size of the numbers and brought it right in front of his eyes. The sand counter then reset to “000.”

“They’re all in this together… crooks working hand in glove with one another.”

Fatty ranted on as he brandished the shield.

Ai Hui took a glance at Fatty and smiled. Ai Hui knew best just how lazy this fellow could be. He would definitely not stand if he could sit, and he definitely wouldn’t sit if he could lie down. One of these days, he would succumb to his laziness.

All men must die eventually.

Nobody would have cared if Fatty had just died quietly somewhere, but it was just his luck to have bumped into Ai Hui.

Ai Hui had a premonition that the blood catastrophe had only just started. The blood beasts outside of the city were growing stronger, while the situation within Central Pine City was worsening. Without the Thirteen Divisions, the only people they could depend on were the teachers, students, and the guards of the training grounds. Was this really enough to repel the beasts?

Ai Hui wasn't sure, but he knew that Central Pine City was no longer the peaceful city he once knew. It was now a battlefield.

Everyone needed to fight for their own destiny.

Ai Hui knew that Fatty was a coward who would flee at first sight of danger, so he did not mention much else. However, the blood poison had already spread to the Induction Ground, so where could they flee to?

There was nowhere to run.

Ai Hui looked at the message tree and saw one of its leaves glowing as if it was breathing. It was the same leaf as before.

Ai Hui grabbed a pen from his room before walking towards the tree.

Somehow, he found himself unusually nervous.

He felt as if a riddle was about to unravel before his eyes.

“Are you still alive?”

Ai Hui read the four words several times. He thought about his experiences over the past few days, which now felt like an eternity ago. To be honest, the battle at the Garden of Life hadn’t had much of an impact on him. He was, after all, not new to this game. He might be weak, but he was experienced in combat.

Witnessing the drastic changes that befell Central Pine City was what truly affected him.

A dreamscape was shattered.

Ai Hui could sense the sender’s urgency, so he lifted his pen and began to write.

“I’m still alive.”

He stared at the black ink fading into the leaf, reminding himself to be as patient and calm as he used to be while hunting dire beasts in the Wilderness.

A short while later, the leaf on his hand lit up again. “Thank the heavens you’re alive! Can you tell me where you are now? How is the Avalon of Five Elements doing?”

Ai Hui pondered over what to reply before putting his pen to the leaf.

“Are you referring to the blood catastrophe? The situation has gone out of control, with the Induction Ground being dragged into it. Who are you?”

Being cautious, he didn’t reveal his location. He had no idea if the other party was well-intentioned or malicious, trustworthy or otherwise. Also, if the “you” that was mentioned in the first message referred to a group, they would very likely be enemies with the people who unleashed the blood poison.

Ai Hui remembered the noodle shop girl telling him that this message tree was ancient.

He had a feeling that this message tree had a complicated past. The people and circumstances that were entwined with it were definitely not minor characters like himself.

He had no interest in becoming a part of such matters.

All he wanted to do was survive—to make it out of this blood catastrophe alive. He was just like everyone else, desperately grasping at straws to prevent himself from drowning.

Ai Hui was a little distracted. How would the other party reply? Is the blood catastrophe really man-made? Why? Why would

anyone do such a thing?

He patiently waited for an answer.

The reply took a bit longer this time.

Ai Hui came back to his senses as the leaf began to glow again.

Had fate finally revealed its hand?

Chapter 156: Conflicts

“I am just an old prisoner. Ah, so it turned out to be the Induction Ground. Although I have known for a long time that the catastrophe is coming, I still feel sorrowful after your confirmation. If you are trapped in the blood catastrophe, please be reminded that you must not touch any blood, because not only wounds but any skin exposure to the Blood of God will get you infected.”

Ai Hui’s eyes were burning when he saw the words “Blood of God.” It really was funny—the blood poison, which had caused countless disasters and deaths, was actually called the “Blood of God.” What kind of “god” could be so evil?

“Blood of God?”

“The masterpiece of the insane, the perfect combination of a blood-refined sect from ancient times and the wood elementalists of the Avalon of Five Elements. The Blood of God can be traced back to a hundred years ago, where they had already been secretly studying it for fifty years. It wasn’t until thirty years ago that we had finally noticed their dirty tricks, but it was too late. They had become very powerful and had long been eyeing us. We had failed.”

Ai Hui was about to ask “Who are they, and who are you?” but he restrained his curiosity. Once he knew the answers to those two questions, he would be officially involved in their conflict, which may bring him many troubles.

All he desired was to be alive and live a quiet life. He didn't want to be involved in any conflicts.

So, instead, he asked, "Last time, you said that everything will change in sixty days. What did you mean?"

"I only know that they have a big plan, but I don't know the details. They have been planning for a long time, and the blood catstrophe is only the beginning."

This answer made Ai Hui more unwilling to get involved. It was clear now who played their cards better. The enemies could devote themselves to study for one hundred years, arrange everything delicately, and also leave room for maneuvers. The old prisoner's side, on the other hand, only noticed the abnormality after fifty years and were caught due to their carelessness. And they still didn't know much about their enemy.

Suddenly, Ai Hui heard some noise outside.

He quickly wrote on the leaf, "Someone is coming."

Then he left as if nothing had happened. He didn't know why, but intuitively, he believed it was better to not tell others about the message tree.

At first, Ai Hui had thought that Duanmu Huanghun was coming back. However, he paused when he saw the faces of the comers.

There was a ponytailed girl in a white-blue armor, and she was heavily armed. Her pretty but cold face attracted everyone's attention, and her awe-inspiring eyes were as pure as untouched crystal.

What impressed Ai Hui the most was the spear in her hand.

He could not tell what the snow-white spear was made of, but it was surrounded by a white cloud, and the tip was as shiny as the water of a lake.

The white-blue armor was delicately made. The texture of the blue part was crystal-like and as clear as the sea, while the white part was like the snow or the clouds. It looked light and handy without the heaviness of ordinary armors, and Ai Hui could tell at first glance that it must be expensive.

The girl's waistline was outlined by the armor, and with her ponytail hanging down almost to her waist, she looked agile and fresh.

Hmm, this girl seemed familiar...

When Ai Hui saw the inimitable Golden Silk Longbow, he suddenly realized that they were the two who had fought against the blood bat with him that night. Girls would be totally changed in different attire. Oh! He suddenly remembered that one of them was Shi Xueman and the other was Sang Zhijun.

Wait…Shi Xueman?

She was Shi Xueman?

Ai Hui's jaw dropped as he stared at the vigorous girl blankly. Only then did he realize that the Shi Xueman that the Dean had told him about was that Shi Xueman!

Ai Hui was not a green hand who had just come to the Induction Ground. He had heard of the goddess' name before.

The blood bat had died a worthy death, Ai Hui thought. He knew who he was, and it was already beyond his capacity to resist an attack of the blood bat. It seemed that he should thank this pretty girl. It was because of her excellent fighting skills that he was still alive.

When Shi Xueman noticed Ai Hui's stunned face, she didn't show any expression, but in her heart, she felt complacent. However, the next second, she remembered that she was what this guy called "a skank," and the complacency disappeared. Her face darkened, and she said coldly, "Come in, everybody."

Ai Hui felt a bit weird. The girl seemed unhappy?

And she glared at him?

Why? He didn't remember ever offending her before.

Ai Hui shook his head. He suddenly felt that it was funny that he had thought that he could understand females. It was okay, though. He wasn't alone. Fatty, for sure, could not understand them either.

Fatty...

Ai Hui suddenly turned and saw Fatty, who was taking a rest. With a darkened face, he said, "Lou Lan, one hundred sets more for Fatty."

Fatty's face quickly turned pale, and he returned to continuing to wave the shield ruefully.

Sang Zhijun was puzzled as she watched the two standing in front of her. Xueman had been in good mood on her way here, and Ai Hui had also seemed fine when they had just arrived. Why did both of them suddenly become so unpleasant?

Then, a group of people walked into the training hall, the sight of which caused Ai Hui to feel dizzy.

They were all in magnificent and glaring equipment, the colorful lights of which dazzled him. They were like human-shaped shelves with various shining equipment was on display.

Red, orange, yellow, green, cyan, blue and purple...They should be named 'the group of the rainbow.'

They were rich indeed…

Ai Hui was stunned. Prodigal kids! He didn't need to look back to know that Fatty must be as astonished as he was because Fatty would always be like this whenever he saw something expensive. So, without even looking at Fatty, he shouted, "If you are lazy again, I'll add a hundred sets more."

Fatty was so frightened that he almost lost some weight, and he immediately continued to practice. He felt Ai Hui to be much more frightening than before.

Ai Hui's eyes were clear, and he immediately noticed the unfriendly gazes of the colorful guys.

Everyone looked at Ai Hui up and down maliciously but did not find anything special. They had been unwilling to follow even Shi Xueman's lead, much less this unknown guy.

But Shi Xueman outperformed them both in terms of fighting skills and family background, so they had to obey.

But Ai Hui—just who was he?

These guys were all very proud, and some of them were even preparing to give Ai Hui a good beating.

Ai Hui knew what they were thinking as soon as he saw their expressions.

He didn't understand females indeed, but he knew very well what men thought. Ai Hui snorted in his heart.

If it were not for the escape quota, he wouldn't bother to care about them.

"Fatty, you can stop practicing for a while. Come here."

On hearing Ai Hui's words, Fatty happily ran to him at once with the shield in his hand.

Shi Xueman also noticed the unfriendly environment, and her eyes became cold. At first, she had wanted Ai Hui to join her team, but with the consideration that the other teammates might reject him, it was finally decided that Ai Hui would lead another team.

Her father once told her that if there was one thing she was not good at, then she should leave it to someone who was—especially when the situation was important.

She knew of Ai Hui's ability very well. Although he may not be the best fighter, he could be the best leader.

Shi Xueman displayed her attitude clearly. "It is my suggestion to follow Ai Hui's lead. Do you have any objections?"

Sang Zhijun said without hesitation, “I agree.”

“I don’t. If it’s you, Xueman, I’m fine with it. But why does this unknown guy suddenly become our team leader?”

It was out of Shi Xueman’s expectation for the first one to object to be He Qiuming, whom she had always regarded as a sedate member of the team.

If Li Hai was a disorderly guy because of his family background, then He Qiuming was a person who was always responsible in his behavior. His objection made her realize that her suggestion might have been a bit reckless.

“That’s right. How can such a small potato ride on our back and piss and sh*t on us?” Li Hai’s rudeness made everybody frown.

“I don’t agree either!”

“Neither do I!”

Six members out of eight were against the suggestion.

Duanmu Huanghun didn’t expect to see such an embarrassing scene when he had just entered. Meanwhile, Jiang Wei and Wang Xiaoshan, who were standing beside him, were full of anger.

“A Hui, let’s do it ourselves. Why do we have to team up with them?” Jiang Wei gazed at them with hostility.

“Yes, why do we have to?” Wang Xiaoshan also agreed with Jiang Wei.

Both of them had escaped from the Garden of Life with Ai Hui all the way, and they admired him from the bottom of their hearts. Now, their blood was boiling when they saw the contempt the others had for Ai Hui.

Shi Xueman felt a headache coming on; she hadn't expected her first proposal to be strongly opposed by both sides.

There were things in the world that before you really experienced, you would not know how naive you were.

“It’s okay.” Ai Hui appeared to be at peace. “I think the overall capacity of your team is good enough. Then will you six make up a team, and let the two girls join our team because we are a bit weaker?”

Fatty, who was standing beside Ai Hui, felt heart tremble when he heard his words. Ai Hui was becoming more and more insidious. It was clear that he didn’t bother to care about those guys.

Fatty was right—Ai Hui was more than willing to leave them aside. They had nothing to do with him. He clearly remembered

that the dean had asked him to guarantee the safety of only two people—one was Shi Xueman, and the other was Duanmu Huanghun.

As to the others...

It was none of his business.

“No!”

The six boys all disagreed. Shi Xueman was their goddess, and Sang Zhijun was also very pretty. They were the only two girls in their team. How could they surrender so submissively? Did he think they were so stupid?

Even He Qiuming, who was relatively good-tempered, felt furious upon hearing this suggestion.

Now, Ai Hui knew what the dean was thinking. It was all bullshit when he asked Ai Hui to lead them. All these guys were so supercilious that they would not even obey the dean. How could he expect them to listen to his commands?

What the dean actually wanted him to do was clean up the mess they left behind, and protect Shi Xueman in times of emergency.

Clean up the mess...

“Or why don’t you tell me your suggestion, and let’s have a nice discussion?”

Ai Hui smiled as he walked towards them, and Fatty followed him flatteringly with the shield in his hand. He was staring at their equipment with admiration, and it seemed like he was resisting the temptation to touch it.

A light flashed in Shi Xueman’s eyes. She had a vague premonition that something was about to happen.

Meanwhile, Duanmu Huanghun’s heart trembled; he was one hundred percent sure that something was going to happen.

And where was Lou Lan?

A person who is new to or inexperienced at a particular activity; a novice.

Chapter 157: Beat Down

Looking at Ai Hui's friendly face, Li Hai displayed his unabashed contempt and scorn. "Haha! He is just a jellyfish! How can such a guy lead us?"

Then, when he saw Fatty, who was gazing at him with eyes full of admiration, he couldn't help but sneer. "Poor wretch! Never seen this before, huh? Come on; I'll let you touch it. I bet you have never seen such high-level equipment in your whole damn life. Hahaha!"

Seeing the veneration in Fatty's eyes, Li Hai laughed out even more wantonly.

He Qiuming was more or less relieved. He was worried that if Ai Hui had also insisted, Shi Xueman would be unable to solve this embarrassing problem. If they were on opposing sides, it would be tough for them to fight against Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun, too. Moreover, even if they really did not need to fight, if Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun were willing to follow that guy, there was nothing they could do.

Now, it seemed that it was not yet the worst situation.

He Qiuming glanced at Shi Xueman, whose face was inscrutable. It appeared that she was not very attached to that guy; otherwise, Shi Xueman, who was usually so irritable, would have already initiated a fight.

But why did the goddess have such a strange expression?

Ai Hui was speechless when he witnessed the response of the guy in front of him. He has so close to him, but that guy was still looking at girls with such fascination. Guys like this would have died a thousand deaths on the battlefield. Clean up their mess? Stop kidding...

“What suggestion do you have...”

Before he could finish his sentence, He Qiuming suddenly felt his vision blur, and before he could even react, his abdomen was heavily attacked. His expression suddenly froze.

His gaze was fixed on Ai Hui as if he still could not believe he was attacked.

Ai Hui could feel the fluctuations of elemental energy on the silk clothes. Evidently, He Qiuming’s clothes had either high protection capabilities or other unique functions.

If it were the Wilderness, he would have killed him without hesitation.

What a pity...

Although Ai Hui didn’t use his elemental energy at all, the punch was still powerful. He Qiuming’s body was arched like a shrimp. He wanted to say something, but no words could come out.

Meanwhile, Fatty, who had been fascinated by the armor just now, suddenly had a change in expression. His fingers shot to the slits of Li Hai's armor, and he abruptly grabbed it and lifted Li Hai's body, which was massive and tall, with one hand, like a furious brown bear.

Sensing his feet leave the ground, Li Hai was dumbstruck, and his unruly laughter abruptly stopped.

Fatty grabbed the shield with the other hand and clapped his hands hard, causing Li Hai to heavily dash against the wall-thick Ironwood Shield. A muffled sound could be heard.

After such a strike, Li Hai was limp and feeble, and Fatty threw him away like a rag.

"You are looking for trouble!"

"What are you doing?"

"Are you crazy?"

The other four panicked and cried out in reproach at almost the same time.

Idiots!

Ai Hui didn't even want to make a comment. These fellows were just threatening in manner but cowardly at heart. It truly was hilarious that their first reaction towards an attack was to reprimand instead of to fight back.

In the blink of an eye, Ai Hui flashed to another person who stood nearby.

Staying so close to one's enemy without any self-protection was tantamount to suicide. The closer the distance was, the lesser the time the opponent had to react, which was obviously more advantageous to Ai Hui.

Ai Hui rapidly invaded into the other guy's field of vision, causing him to scream and step back subconsciously. However, he was now somehow trapped, and he lost his balance and fell backward. He struggled to stay steady, but the next second, he saw Ai Hui's leg smashing towards him from high above like a hefty axe.

No!

He subconsciously crossed his arms in front of his face for self-protection. His elemental energy was surging within his body.

With a frightening whistle, Ai Hui's leg smashed onto his arms heavily.

Bang!

The guy was like a floating gourd ladle that was suddenly attacked and sank into the water.

His arms were aching, and under the tremendous force, his back hit the floor hard. Severe pain shot through his body as his mind went blank.

A wisp of sand slipped away from his feet.

It must be admitted that there were some people in the world who could become friends quickly. Then, they would gradually become more and more alike before beginning to act harmoniously in collusion with each other.

For example, Lou Lan, who initially knew nothing about combat, had perfectly copied Ai Hui's fighting style within such a short period of time. When Ai Hui had been walking towards the boys, Lou Lan had already transformed into a wisp of sand and had crept like a snake in the grass.

The other three students wanted to keep away from Ai Hui, but they found their ankles to be already tangled by the sand.

The sand was not very powerful, but at this point in time, it played a pivotal role.

The Ironwood Shield that Fatty was wielding was like a thick and solid wall. In such a narrow area, the whistling shield could cover

all the three guys, whose faces immediately turned pale.

Almost by instinct, they used their best defensive moves.

There was no cooperation between them. Everyone was defending independently, and they evidently had no trust in the others. If any one of them were to put up a fight with Fatty, however, he might be able to win some buffer time for the other two.

When Ai Hui was at the dean's office, he had been considering how he could lead the two teams well. Now, though, he did not want to take them with him at all.

The only thing in his mind was to get rid of them.

In the growling whistling sound of the shield in Fatty's hand, Ai Hui arched his back and rushed forward like a ghost to the student standing farthest from him, who was protected by three flames that kept circling around him.

Between the flames. Ai Hui stabbed at him with his Dragonspine Inferno, like a snake in the dark.

Just as the Dragonspine Inferno was about to get him, the flames suddenly exploded, and everything was shrouded in a dazzling light.

Ai Hui could see nothing but white light. In the midst of the

student’s scream, he stepped forward, and with a powerful jerk of the Dragonspine Inferno, Ai Hui hit him as if the Dragonspine Inferno was a whip.

The student gave out a shrill cry and flew backward across the air.

The sudden flash temporarily blinded everyone, yet the gap in the strength of the two sides had already determined the result of the fight.

Fatty didn’t withdraw. In such a circumstance, the power of the shield was not influenced at all.

And when Ai Hui whipped the student with his Dragonspine Inferno, he had heard his scream, and at that moment, the whistle of the Ironwood Shield and the scream of the student revealed their location.

They were behind him!

Without any hesitation, Ai Hui stepped hard on the ground and jumped backward like a flying arrow.

The moment he felt his back touch something, he used [Arching Fish Back] boldly.

An overwhelming power passed from Ai Hui’s back to the one behind him.

Ping!

Something broke into pieces like glass, and he could feel the absence of any resistance. He then slammed into the other guy's body.

Pang!

There was a muffled sound, and the guy was hit by a strong force—it was like hitting a beast running wildly towards him, and he was flung away. Ai Hui didn't need to check to know that he had lost consciousness. The [Arching Fish Back] could create a significant dent in the walls of the Suspending Golden Pagoda, and Ai Hui was not sure if he himself could bear the entire force of the [Arching Fish Back] he just used without being injured.

Anyways, as long as Lou Lan was here, any injury could be healed. It would be alright as long as nobody was dead. As for possible revenge in the future, Ai Hui didn't want to spare time to think about it.

He wasn't even sure whether he could leave Central Pine City alive, so for the moment, he did not want to think about what would happen in the future.

Bang!

The deafening crash of metal was piercing to the ears.

Suddenly, Ai Hui felt sympathetic toward the student who confronted Fatty with his Ironwood Shield which was 175 kilograms.

As one of only two survivors out of two thousand people who escaped from the Wilderness, Fatty definitely had his own particular advantages.

He was timid and vigilant. As long as there were any signs of danger, he ran away faster than anyone else.

And the other advantage was his incredible strength—one could compare in anything with Fatty but strength. If it weren't for his massive strength, how could he earn his living by helping others carry things, or how could he carry the unconscious Ai Hui on his back and keep running with the hunting group for days?

Fatty used to use the shield when they were in the Wilderness. This had been impressive to Ai Hui. It was a pity that Fatty was cowardly, or he could be a natural born shield bearer.

But whether he was a coward depended on who his enemy was. When faced with elementalists and wild beasts, Fatty was, of course, a coward. But it wouldn't have been possible for him to escape the Wilderness if he didn't even dare to fight against these students. There had been many battles in the Wilderness where they could not hide.

Ai Hui believed that Fatty was definitely not afraid of these guys.

They were just prodigal kids, who only dared to bully the weak but fear the strong.

As he expected, Fatty became excited during the fight.

Bang—Bang—Bang!

The crashes became louder and louder.

By now, the white light had dispersed, and Ai Hui's vision had returned to normal. He saw the last student staggering around like he was drunk.

He said peacefully, "Okay, Fatty, enough."

The ruthlessness in Fatty's eyes dimmed down. He had just been like a furious brown bear, but now, he laid down on the ground like a dead dog.

"Oh...this is so tiring. I can't feel my arms. Ai Hui, I can't move now. Let me have a rest."

But, even at this time, he didn't throw his shield away.

Seeing the dizzy student stumble involuntarily, Ai Hui acted as if he didn't hear what Fatty said and asked Lou Lan, "Lou Lan, how many sets are left for Fatty?"

“Three hundred and twenty-two.” Lou Lan instantly returned a precise number.

Ai Hui said, “Guarantee that he finishes all the sets, or he cannot eat anything.”

“No problem, Ai Hui!” Lou Lan answered happily.

Fatty was so angry that he jumped up from the ground, “The one with the surname Ai! I just fought along with you, and now you are kicking down the ladder! I’m so disappointed. How can you…”

“We will have our meal in one hour.” Ai Hui reminded Fatty.

“You!” Fatty got so furious that when he noticed the staggering student nearby, he rushed forward and slapped him away with his shield to vent his rage. Then, he reluctantly turned back to practice in anger.

“Keep going, Fatty!” Lou Lan shouted.

Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun stared blankly at the students lying on the ground in disarray.

There was dead silence; as Fatty wielded the shield, only the sound of the wind could be heard.

Chapter 158: Ai Hui's Way

Shi Xueman and the others were stunned while Jiang Wei's and Wang Xiaoshan's faces were ashen. Although they didn't like those guys either, never once did they think about attacking them.

With their family background, it was best not to irritate them.

Duanmu Huanghun had some knowledge of Ai Hui's characteristics; he knew Ai Hui would never allow himself to be trampled upon. But what he didn't expect was that he would choose such a straightforward method.

What was more surprising was that in a two-versus-six fight, Ai Hui and Fatty ended it so quickly and neatly. Admittedly, it was a sneak attack, but everyone here was nevertheless astounded.

If he had been the one to be attacked by Ai Hui just now, would he have have been able to escape? The more Duanmu Huanghun thought about it, the more fearful and vigilant he became against Ai Hui—because he knew that if it were him, he would have been hardpressed to survive as well.

Sang Zhijun was similarly stunned. She glanced at Shi Xueman, remembering the scene where she threw Li Hai out of the transport wagon. She thought to herself that the means of these two were amazingly similar. At the time, she thought Shi Xueman to be violent enough. Now she knew that Ai Hui was more violent. No, it was not violent. It was better described as ferocious.

The next moment, however, she became a bit worried. These guys were beaten so harshly and would not let him off easily. Did he ever consider the consequences?

Shi Xueman suddenly spoke up, “Do you think they will obey your command this way?”

Ai Hui was squatted on the ground, tying up the unconscious guys with ropes. He answered without looking up, “Obey my command? Why?”

Shi Xueman was surprised. “Then what are you doing?”

“I just don’t want them to hinder us,” Ai Hui said lightly.

No one understood why Ai Hui was so cruel if all he wanted was for them to not impede the team.

“Then what are you going to do?” Duanmu Huanghun asked. He knew a bit more about Ai Hui than the others, and he guessed the Ai Hui’s method would be different from their expectations.

“Tie them up tight,” Ai Hui replied casually while tugging at the ropes, “and find somewhere to lock them up. I’ll let them out when we finish.”

Everyone was startled by this answer.

“D-do we have to do this?” Wang Xiaoshan stammered.

They did have their conflicts and disagreed with each other, but was it necessary to lock them up? Ai Hui’s method seemed too extreme.

Shi Xueman also tried to persuade him. “I think we can talk them into it. I believe they’ll come to see the big picture.”

“Then what if they stab us in the back, or refuse to cooperate with us and cause great losses?” Ai Hui continued without slowing down.

Sang Zhijun quavered, “Will they really do this…”

Tightening the rope, Ai Hui said calmly, “For many things, there is no second chance. Don’t leave any hidden dangers to yourself. It’ll be for the best, for both of us, if they stay here quietly until we are out of danger.”

Everyone shivered. Ai Hui didn’t mention what would happen if they didn’t stay here quietly.

Duanmu Huanghun’s astonishment turned to admiration. He now understood vaguely why he always lost to Ai Hui; it was because he was not as resolute.

Of course, if Ai Hui knew what he was thinking, he would disagree.

“If I’m not mistaken, I have absolute control, right? Then my first command is to tie them up and lock them in the wood house.”

“Will the academy or magistrate court take actions against us?” Jiang Wei was a bit worried as well.

“No, they’re more than willing for us to do so.” Ai Hui’s tone became cold. “I don’t want to explain anymore. Now you have two choices—to accept or to refuse.”

Unexpectedly, the first to speak was Duanmu Huanghun. He said emotionlessly, “Useless people should stay in the wood house.”

He wanted to teach them a lesson from the start. In his heart, the first one qualified to question Ai Hui’s command was Shi Xueman, and the second was himself. How dare these guys jump out to oppose Ai Hui while knowing that both he and Shi Xueman had agreed?

Jiang Wei and Wang Xiaoshan looked at each other before hurrying to do as Ai Hui commanded.

Sang Zhijun laughed. “Actually, we’re glad to do so.”

Shi Xueman snorted. She felt uncomfortable with Ai Hui’s attitude, but since it was her own proposal… she had to stick to it.

She walked towards one of the unconscious figures and picked him up.

After finding a wood house, they threw the six tightly trussed students into it, going so far as to gag them to prevent them from calling out for help.

“How will they eat?” Shi Xueman asked.

Ai Hui casually said, “They’ll be able to eat when we come back. Don’t worry, it’s not so easy to die from starvation. We can just leave them some water.”

Sang Zhijun reflexively asked, “And what if we don’t come back?”

Ai Hui glanced at her, then said lightly, “That means we are dead.”

A chill rose in everyone’s hearts, and their gazes at Ai Hui were now filled with fear.

Only then did they realize how heartless and cruel he was despite their similar ages.

Shi Xueman was greatly shocked, doubting whether she ever knew the person in front of her. Was this the same person who paid her bill at the noodle house and tried to please her due to the eighty million debt he owed her?

Just what kind of person was he? What did he go through? Shi Xueman's curiosity towards him was roused.

Everyone was quiet, including Duanmu Huanghun. Proud as he was, at this moment, he appeared solemn. The people present felt as though they were a flock of sheep while Ai Hui was a dangerous beast used to the life and killings of the wild.

Now they were sure that Ai Hui did not care about the retribution of the students or their families. They even suspected that if they were not present, Ai Hui would have already killed the six people quietly.

Ai Hui noticed the fear in their eyes, but he didn't care.

What they were thinking or whether it would lead to their estrangement—he did not care. If not for the escape quota, he would not have wanted any connection with them.

Walking out of the wood house, he saw that Fatty was still practicing.

"I have something to tell you in advance." Ai Hui paused to think for a minute before continuing, "The situation might be worse than you think."

He noted the anxious and doubtful looks on their faces and said firmly, "Worse than whatever you can imagine. We'll be faced

with many dangers more precarious than what we experienced in the Garden of LIfe or even the blood bat. I hope we can leave here alive."

"Really?" asked Wang Xiaoshan, who was the most fearful one of those present. His face was pale.

As Ai Hui was about to speak, they heard a loud explosion in the distance, and the earth began to quake.

Duanmu Huanghun's face paled. "That was from the city gate!"

They then saw many elementalists flying to the city gate from all quarters. Despite their high elevation, Ai Hui and the others could read the panic on their faces.

They began to feel anxious as well.

But Ai Hui remained calm as before. He noticed Lou Lan and the number that he had transformed into which indicated that Fatty was done with practice. Staggering out with the ironwood shield as his stick, Fatty was soaked with sweat, looking as though he had just climbed out of a pool. His heavy breathing sounded like bellows, and his eyes were wide as he glared at Ai Hui.

Ai Hui smiled.

"Ai Hui, Fatty has finished," Lou Lan said happily.

Ai Hui nodded. “Good. It’s time to have some food.”

Hearing what Ai Hui said, Fatty’s anger turned into weariness and hunger. He plopped onto the ground and shouted, “Oops. I need to eat more. I’m dead tired. Water, Lou Lan, I need water!”

Lou Lan took out some of the solid food that he had prepared. Ai Hui said, “Let’s all have some.”

Shi Xueman couldn’t help asking, “Don’t we need to help them? If the city gate falls, then we’re all doomed.”

While eating, Ai Hui said, “The city gate already has the best defense. If it’s about to fall, then there’s nothing we can do to help.”

Shi Xueman wanted to retort but realized there was nothing she could say; she knew Ai Hui was right. The mayor had already assigned guards and teachers to key areas for the city’s defense, and the city gate was the topmost priority. Compared to them, the six people here were a drop in the ocean.

“Actually, the best choice for us is to stay in the training hall.” Ai Hui glanced at Shi Xueman. He was wondering if he could knock them out if he launched a sneak attack. The dean only wanted Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun to be alive anyway. He would not care whether they were conscious or not.

But it seemed this plan would be hard to achieve. The fighting skills of Shi Xueman, Duanmu Huanghun, and Sang Zhijun were all upper-tier. If he could not defeat them in one go, he would be beaten down for sure.

“So we hide here like cowards and watch them die without doing anything?” Shi Xueman watched Ai Hui coldly. If she could kill Ai Hui with her eyes, then Ai Hui would have died a thousand deaths.

She began to doubt the wisdom of her suggestion to give Ai Hui the right to lead. He was too sophisticated.

The others remained mute with frightened expressions, but they did not agree with him either. Only, they did not dare to oppose due to his imposing manner.

You are all just too naive and enthusiastic, Ai Hui thought to himself.

“You’re right.” Unexpectedly, Ai Hui admitted his mistake at once. “Let’s go to the magistrate office to get some equipment. I’ll collect my reward as well.”

Fatty was speedily stuffing food into his mouth. He seemed without emotion, but inside, his mind was turning rapidly. He knew that there must be something that Ai Hui wasn’t saying!

He knew Ai Hui too well. If he admitted his mistakes quickly, then either he knew he was wrong, or he did it with a motive in

mind.

The others were eating the food silently.

Shi Xueman didn't expect Ai Hui to admit his mistake so quickly. To ease the tension, she praised, "This tastes pretty good."

"Lou Lan made it. I'm afraid we won't have time to cook, so I asked Lou Lan to make more. It should be enough to last us several days," Ai Hui said.

Lou Lan, who was standing next to Ai Hui, smiled happily, his eyes behind the pale mask becoming like crescent moons.

Everyone was surprised to find that Lou Lan was able to cook. From his outstanding performance in the fight just now, they assumed Lou Lan to be a combat sand puppet; they didn't know he would also be good at household skills.

But Shi Xueman noticed something else and could not help but look at Ai Hui.

He began to prepare for this long ago?

He really was a mysterious guy.

At that moment, Ai Hui suddenly gestured for them to keep quiet.

Chapter 159: The Warehouse of the Magistrate Court

The others still eating were startled by Ai Hui's gesture.

Fatty was the first to react and immediately grabbed the shield. With his eyes widened and mouth full of food, he resembled an alert frog.

Only then did the others realize something had happened. They knew Ai Hui and were confident in his detection ability.

Ai Hui abruptly lied on his stomach and pressed his ear to the ground.

"The earth is quaking," Ai Hui said in a low voice.

His behavior made everyone else nervous.

"What's causing it?" Jiang Wei asked. On the surface, he was tall and impressive with long arms and legs, and his fighting skills were excellent. But among this group of people, he didn't feel confident at all, like an ordinary soldier.

"It's hard to say." Ai Hui explained, "Maybe it's due to the migration of so many beasts, or perhaps something is moving underground within a certain distance. Hmm, I think it's most likely the beasts. Are they going to attack the city?"

Confused, Ai Hui stood up.

The rest felt relieved. They came to the mission believing it no different from the previous ones, but over the past several days, they became more nervous. Now they finally understood Ai Hui's range of detection as none of them had felt any trembles yet.

Duanmu Huanghun lay down and placed his ears on the ground as Ai Hui did, listening carefully. He heard nothing.

Fatty snorted when he saw Duanmu Huanghun's attempt. How could he compare himself with Ai Hui? It would only lead to disappointment.

"Finished eating? If so, let's go to the magistrate court now," Ai Hui said as he stood up.

They weren't in the mood to eat anyway. Hearing Ai Hui's words, they quickly stood and went after him. The group drew the eye, especially the trio—Duanmu Huanghun, Shi Xueman, and Sang Zhijun—who were equipped with gorgeous equipment indicating their wealth and social status.

As soon as they entered the streets, they realized that compared to when they first arrived, something had changed.

Nearly everyone on the streets was armed, nervous, and in a hurry to depart.

They arrived at the heavily guarded magistrate court. Lookout posts were situated, and many elementalists were on aerial patrol.

Fortunately, a few guards recognized Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun and immediately let them pass. Seeing a guard who looked familiar, Duanmu Huanghun approached him and after talking for a minute, returned with a somber expression.

“The number of blood fiends outside rose sharply, and some initiated an attack on the city wall this morning. At first, it wasn’t as fierce, but then the intensity began to increase. Just now, the city gate was charged, and twelve people died.”

Their faces paled when they heard what Duanmu Huanghun had to say. This was the highest number of casualties since Central Pine City decided to defend.

They couldn’t help but look at Ai Hui. Hearing what he said, they held some doubts, but now they were completely convinced that the situation was worse than they initially expected.

Suddenly, someone shouted, “Earth elementalists! Any earth elementalists? There are fissures in the city wall!”

Several earth elementalists followed him out in a hurry.

Their anxiety worsened. They were only students, after all, who had never experienced such severe conditions. Shi Xueman and

Duanmu Huanghun were both well-known talents chased after wherever they went, but at this moment, their insignificance was made acutely known to them.

“Let’s go inside.” Ai Hui said nothing more.

His voice brought everyone back from their thoughts and into reality. Every one of them felt apprehensive, stretched like a taut string—all except Ai Hui, who seemed as calm as usual. His composure settled their nerves.

Sang Zhijun couldn’t help asking, “Aren’t you afraid, Ai Hui?”

“I am,” he answered.

This was out of their expectations. They thought Ai Hui would say something along the lines of, “Why? There’s nothing to be afraid of.”

Confused, Sang Zhijun said, “But you don’t look like you’re afraid.”

Ai Hui replied without looking back, “You won’t be so nervous either when you’ve been through more battles.”

Shi Xueman snuck a glimpse at Ai Hui. Under the sunlight, his face seemed serene and indifferent, somehow calming her. Perhaps this was the difference between a veteran and a rookie.

They could not find the mayor since he was too busy. An officer received them instead and brought them to the warehouse.

“The materials in the city have been gathered for unified allocation. The mayor has informed me of your special status. Each of you may receive one set of equipment, and Ai Hui one more as his reward. By the way, it seems that some members are missing?”

Shi Xueman and the others looked embarrassed.

Duanmu Huanghun was the one to answer indifferently, “They didn’t bother to come.”

The officer didn’t say anything, but he was displeased to hear this. However, he understood that children from noble families had had luxurious equipment. It came as no surprise that they looked down on the equipment here.

Despite that, he quietly remembered the names of those who didn’t come. They had better not come to beg anything from him one day.

Everyone looked at Duanmu Huanghun with strange expressions. Even Ai Hui was surprised this time.

What an insidious guy!

But Ai Hui was confused. Why did he glance at me, he wondered.

In Duanmu Huanghun's mind, he always lost to Ai Hui simply because he was not ruthless enough, and he was determined to change it. How could he lose to Ai Hui? Even in terms of ruthlessness, he had to win over him!

Hearing that there would be equipment for all of them, Fatty became excited. Sure enough, it was promising to follow Ai Hui, even allowing him to choose any equipment from the warehouse of the magistrate court.

Jiang Wei and Wang Xiaoshan were also very happy.

In comparison, Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun kept their calm. Truthfully, they agreed with what Duanmu Huanghun had said just now, but in order to not be blacklisted, they pretended to choose their equipment carefully.

Ai Hui didn't pay attention to the others. He only told Fatty, "You are a shieldman. Don't choose any irrelevant stuff!"

He knew Fatty too well. Without limits imposed, Fatty would gravitate towards the most expensive one.

"Shieldman?" The officer who brought them in couldn't help praising Fatty when he saw his hill-like, strong figure. "What a good shieldman! We happen to have a set of armor for that role!"

The officer brought them to a set of bronze armor.

“This is called the Steady Mountain, which alludes to the phrase, ‘as steady as a mountain’. Its weight is as high as two hundred eighteen kilograms.”

Jiang Wei and Wang Xiaoshan, and even Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun were astounded at this frightening number.

The officer was pleased to see their expressions. It vexed him to hear that those highborn kids dared to look down upon this warehouse. Now that he saw the amazement on everyone’s face, the officer felt at ease, more comfortable than when eating elemental food. He began to explain without end.

“Although it looks ordinary and wasn’t made by a well-known craftsman, it is definitely a rare armor of superior quality. The first time the mayor laid eyes on it, he praised it and even tested a saber against it himself, only to find that the saber could not break it. At the time, the mayor asserted that only a person born with amazing strength would be able to wear it. Do you want to give it a try?”

From the very beginning, Fatty’s eyes were glued onto it.

After experiencing life and death, he knew that for a shieldman, such heavy armor could greatly increase chances of survival. Moreover, he was experienced enough to know that he would never be able to afford such an armor.

“Yes, I want this one,” Fatty said without hesitation.

Then without seeking help from the others, he grabbed it with one hand and began to equip it clumsily.

When he finally finished, the others gasped in surprise.

He was already as strong as a hill, but now with the Steady Mountain, anyone who saw him had to bear a heavy pressure. Even the shadow he cast seemed thicker than before.

Excited, Fatty strolled around the room. It seemed as though the armor weighing two hundred eighteen kilograms had no influence on his movements at all.

Yet without warning, he began to wail loudly, tears streaming down his face.

This was his first time having armor.

The laborers in the Wilderness had no armor or protection, which was a major reason behind their deaths. With their meager earnings, it was impossible for them to buy such expensive equipment. They were used to facing the sharp claws and tusks of wild beasts without any protection.

Now he was bundled up within the armor. The unaccustomed sense of safety made him cry aloud.

And the cry stunned everyone else.

But Ai Hui understood Fatty's feelings. He patted him on the armor and said, "Take care of the armor. Don't lose it."

"Sure," Fatty replied. He stopped crying and said earnestly with a nasally voice, "I won't."

This was the most expensive armor he had ever owned. He would never lose it, no matter what.

Holding a heavy shield weighing 175 kilograms in one hand and wearing a heavy armor of 218 kilograms, Fatty could still walk around as usual. The rest could hardly move their eyes away from him. They used to regard Fatty as a useless person, but this visual impact now changed their perceptions.

"Everybody, choose your equipment now," Ai Hui said.

The others began to search for what they wanted.

Ai Hui also began to think about what equipment he would need. His current weapon was the Dragonspine Inferno, which he would not need to change for a while. The Drifting Cloud Boots were also the best shoes he could have. Moreover, the Blood Bandages were good protective equipment that would not influence his agility.

And with Fatty as his shieldman, he didn't place high requirements on his own protection.

"Do you have anything like azure wings that I can use?" Ai Hui asked.

The warehouse officer immediately understood. "You mean the kind of equipment that enables you to fly? I think you can only use the cloak."

"Cloak?" Ai Hui's eyes brightened.

The officer quickly found one and said, "We pay attention to what students need, too. Your elemental energy is of the metal attribute, right? Here's one you can wear. It's called the Golden Wind. It enables you to fly by erupting metallic wind."

"Then that's it," Ai Hui said without hesitation.

Apart from the cloak, Ai Hui was allowed one more, but he didn't know what he wanted either. Therefore, he decided to make a sweep around the warehouse.

Chapter 160: Red Dust Sword Box

The warehouse of the magistrate court was not large and it lacked in equipment. Shi Xueman and others might regard it as shabby, but it was definitely a treasure trove to Ai Hui.

He walked slowly past the shelves and obsolete boxes. From time to time, he picked up the dusty equipment in his hand to take a closer look. He did not care about the dust. When he was unfastening armor in the Wilderness, the armor sets were likely to be covered with residue such as blood, flesh, or bone powder.

Duanmu Huanghun was observing Ai Hui secretly. Seeing what Ai Hui was doing, he encouraged himself to take one of the shabby weapons and kept telling himself that he must do better than Ai Hui.

He would not lose to Ai Hui in any aspect!

However, as a mysophobiac since was young, Duanmu Huanghun found it really sickening.

Holding the idea that he must beat Ai Hui, Duanmu finally made up his mind. He chose a bag of grass seeds called Shackle. These seeds, after activation by elemental energy, would form a rattan garland that rapidly contracted to lock the target when it touched the target. It earned its name since it was very sturdy like a shackle and its target would be hard pressed to escape.

Shi Xueman chose some Water Candles, which were common

consumables for water elementalists and could be lit up with water elemental energy. The light was invisible to the naked eye, but was able to scatter elemental energy to create a dazzling illusion. Sang Zhijun picked a quiver of arrows called String & Woodwind, a type of uncommon rhythm-based arrows.

Wang Xiaoshan chose a pair of khaki gloves with the name of Mud Gloves to help him control mud and earth. Actually, Wang Xiaoshan was not feeling very confident and had no idea why Ai Hui chose him, especially when he saw the other members who were all people he looked up to before. He had a clear estimation of himself and knew that his only strength was controlling earth. That was why he chose this equipment.

Jiang Wei picked a big bow called Stone Mountain.

Sang Zhijun's Golden Silk Longbow was thin and gorgeous, while Jiang Wei's Stone Mountain was massive and solid. It was a typical heavy bow, with its length almost the same as his height.Only a tall man with long arms would bring out its true potential. Jiang Wei was surprised and happy when he saw it. He had always been looking for such a big bow and had not expected to come across one here.

Everyone except Ai Hui had chosen their equipment.

"You all have very good taste." The officer standing beside them spoke highly of them, though he was also loath to give away so many good things. "Most items here belong to the private collection of the mayor. He was obsessed with equipment, which is why the warehouse is so large today. Everything you picked was

really good stuff."

Ai Hui caught sight of a square box. It seemed a bit familiar to him. He felt as if he had seen it somewhere before.

The box was dusty. He picked it up and blew away the dust. Then, the real appearance of the box could be seen. It was black and made of a kind of black metal. There was a lock catch on one corner, which could be used to hang it on a belt. The box could be opened from one side, but it was so deep and dark inside that it was hard to clearly see its contents.

The officer noticed the box in Ai Hui's hand and introduced it. "This is an old-fashioned sword box with three small swords in it. When you dance with your sword, they will fly out from the box and dance together. It's not very useful. The craftsman who made it fancied the ancient swordsmen, but when he realized that he could not control the swords, he just put it aside. The Mayor found it interesting, so he bought it with 100,000 yuan."

Ai Hui then realized why he felt it was familiar. It turned out to be a sword box. He had read about it in the swordplay manual, but this was the first time that he had seen one in real life.

"100,000 yuan?" Fatty shook his head like a rattle-drum. "Nothing good would be so cheap. Ai Hui, you'd better choose something else."

Ai Hui paid no attention to him but turned to ask the officer. "Can I have a try?"

The officer had no reason to stop him, so he just said, “Be careful. There are many items around.”

The others dispersed in curiosity, including the warehouse officer. He had followed the Mayor for many years. After it was bought, the sword box had been stored in the warehouse, and no one ever touched it. The mayor, himself, had already forgotten its existence.

It was a pity that Ai Hui was not there when the sword box was purchased. He did not have a chance to see how the craftsman played with the swords nor how to use the sword box.

Ai Hui placed the sword box at his waist carefully. Although he never saw a sword box before, he knew a lot about them.

Next, he calmed down and began to concentrate his attention. With a flick of his right hand, the Dragonspine Inferno was drawn out.

The low chime thrilled everyone around. Apparently, the sword was very heavy.

At that moment, three rays of red light jetted out from the box. They flew around Ai Hui like three fish.

Only then could the others see the red light clearly. They were three small swords and were flying at a very high speed.

The swords were as small as a palm and as wide as two fingers. They were translucent and delicately made.

The others were amazed. This was the first time that they had seen such a light and flexible weapon.

Ai Hui did not stop. With another flick of the wrist, he began to practice the sword moves he knew. He had learned all these sword moves from the swordplay manuals, but these techniques had long since lost their efficacy. To find useful moves from the manuals was like looking for usable material within a pile of trash.

Some were partial techniques or even half of a movement. Others were breathing methods and tips to utilize strength. The withered parts of the ancient swordplay manuals were of no value at all.

It was easy to imagine how fragmentary and unsystematic the knowledge was.

Therefore, Ai Hui's movements were fragmented, ugly, and uncomfortable to watch. Sometimes the first half was elegant and graceful, but then it abruptly became rigid and ferocious. The pause and gap in between were palpable.

It was like feeling tightness in the chest. The obvious pause and transition disrupted everyone's breath.

They could not believe their eyes. Such ugly sword moves were

really executed by the swordplay talent Ai Hui?

More surprisingly, the three red swords became more energetic, like sharks that sensed the smell of blood. They circled around the Dragonspine Inferno in Ai Hui's hand. The red sword lights interweaving in the sky were very beautiful.

Ai Hui's figure was indistinct in the red light of the swords.

A red sword beam, which was as thin as a hair, flashed across Duanmu Huanghun's vision with a slight buzz, like a sharp knife cutting a thin paper, and then disappeared in an instant.

They finally knew why the craftsman said he could not control them—they were too fast.

They flew so fast that the naked eye could hardly discern them.

Both Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun could only see the interlaced red lights in front of them. The black heavy sword was moving slowly, yet the small red swords were as fast as a flash of light and as flexible as fish. The weapons were in sharp contrast, but those who were watching felt an astonishing harmony, as if that was how they should be.

Ai Hui was immersed in a peculiar feeling.

The sword embryo seemed to be extremely excited. The three small swords were like its new toys. As Ai Hui's sword embryo

state became more developed, he could feel many things more clearly than he used to.

Ai Hui was also excited. This was a novel experience for him too.

The Dragonspine Inferno had a special attraction to the small swords. That was why they orbited around Ai Hui. Such attraction was unique. Once the swords became too close to Ai Hui, the attraction would decline and even transform into a repulsive force. However, once they were repulsed a sufficient distance, the attraction would increase. It was like an invisible spring that linked them together and prevented them from flying too close or too far away.

The small swords only flew within the area around Ai Hui.

Since the small swords were flying very fast, the attraction constantly changed. Therefore, the flying paths of the small swords were totally irregular.

The dazzling red light interweaved, waned, and waxed to create a wonderful scene.

“It’s beautiful.” The warehouse officer could not help gasping in admiration. “No wonder the mayor bought it with 100,000 yuan. It’s interesting.”

The others nodded. They were thinking the same.

It was interesting indeed, but it was better not to take it as a weapon. What was the use of swords that could not be controlled in a battle? They might even hurt teammates.

The Dragonspine Inferno slowly drew a half circle in the air like a writing brush with thick ink.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh!

The red lights flew back to the sword box like birds returning into the nest in the evening.

Ai Hui also slid the heavy sword back into his scabbard. His eyes that were as bright as stars gradually became dim and calm as usual. “I’ll take this sword box,” he said.

Everyone was surprised.

Fatty reminded him anxiously, “Ai Hui, 100,000 yuan. It’s only 100,000 yuan. Don’t waste your chance.”

Shi Xueman also said, “The swords were indeed splendid and gorgeous, but they are not good weapons and can easily hurt your teammates. Why not choose another one?”

Ai Hui shook his head. “This sword box fits me the best. Don’t worry, I won’t use it before I’m proficient in controlling it.”

“Are you sure you want to choose this sword box?” The warehouse officer also reminded him, “Once you walk out of the warehouse, you cannot go back on your decision.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Ai Hui said decisively.

“Okay,” the warehouse officer said, “its name is on the box. It’s called Red Dust.”

“Red Dust?” Ai Hui repeated. He could feel the profound meaning the name contained and nodded. “It's a good name.”

Although they did not know why Ai Hui insisted on choosing Red Dust, they would not stop him as long as he did not hurt his teammates.

The group had just walked out of the warehouse when they heard a loud boom. Everyone’s expression changed.

“It’s the north gate!” Duanmu Huanghun’s face turned pale.

The main gate of Central Pine City was the south gate, and the north gate was much smaller. As they expected, a cloud of smoke and dust rose from the north gate. The shrill alarm could be heard all over the city, and the elementalists all rushed to the north gate in a frenzy.

It was the south gate that was attacked, but the chaos were fiercer at the north gate now.

This reminded everyone of one word: diversion!

They looked at each other and saw the incredulity in the others' eyes. Could blood beasts be so clever?

The elementalists in the sky were in great turmoil.

"Plug the hole! Earth elementalist! We need earth elementalists!"

"Damn it! Blood beasts have rushed into the city!"

"Plug the hole first!"

…

Their hearts sank. No one expected that the situation would worsen at such a rapid speed.

"Back to the training hall. Come on!" Ai Hui said in a low voice. He was the first to rush to the street, and the others followed him in a hurry.

Chapter 161: Encountering Danger

The streets were in chaos.

Individuals with no combat experience could usually maintain order during peacetime, but when catastrophes broke out, this false sense of order would break down in an instant.

Everyone was feeling uneasy as they followed behind Ai Hui.

On the contrary, Fatty, whom everyone previously thought was an useless bum, was holding a huge shield and striding beside Ai Hui while scanning his surroundings with a vigilant look on his face.

“Won’t it be safer if we remain here?” Wang Xiaoshan asked weakly.

“Nowhere is safe,” Ai Hui replied without turning his head while maintaining his walking speed. “If they were the Thirteen Divisions, I would definitely endorse the idea of staying there. However, they aren’t. If the situation turns for the worse, a moment of carelessness will cause them to crumble under pressure. Do you want to know how it feels to be squeezed and trampled on by a panic-stricken crowd? You don’t want to know. Furthermore, they have a lot of people, making them a huge target that is easily targeted by the blood fiends.”

“You’re so confident?” Duanmu Huanghun’s eyes flickered.

Deep down, he already acknowledged Ai Hui's capabilities, but what Ai Hui just said obviously belittled those guards.

"I think it makes sense," Jiang Wei agreed with Ai Hui. "The quality of the guards is really low. Even now, they still can't catch that naked pervert. Reportedly, they were even being toyed with by that boy, causing several guards to be injured. I think it's better that we depend on ourselves. Eh? Ai Hui, why is your facial expression so weird?"

Duanmu Huanghun's eyes began to twitch. He felt as if he was being stabbed several times in his heart and bleeding non-stop.

Shi Xueman also thought back to the scene from that night. That was the first time she saw Ai Hui's swordsmanship. The last sword move that he executed was peerlessly magnificent. That scene was etched deeply in her mind.

When she thought about it now, she could not help but exclaim in admiration.

As for the perverted naked boy, Shi Xueman did not really have a deep impression of him. On the other hand, she was more and more amazed by Ai Hui.

Previously, when she saw Ai Hui using the [Arching Fish Back] during his fight with He Qiuming and his team mates, she thought of her first blind battle. That was the only time she used the [Arching Fish Back] in an actual combat setting and she was

subsequently defeated. After she saw Ai Hui's [Arching Fish Back], she was blown away. If her [Arching Fish Back] was of the same level as Ai Hui's, she would have obtained victory in that blind battle!

Unfortunately, she had not found that mysterious fighter yet, which left her disappointed and frustrated.

"I only remember that the perverted streaker's complexion is rather fair..."

Immense shame engulfed Duanmu Huanghun. His face was burning with anger. At this point in time, he wished he could find a hole and hide in it.

"Ai Hui, have you seen this pervert before?" Jiang Wei asked excitedly.

"Yeah, that incident happened right at the alley outside the training hall," Ai Hui replied. Initially, he did not want to talk much about it, but when he thought of Duanmu Huanghun still owing him 150,000,000 yuan, he changed his mind and continued his insults. "I have never seen such a perverted fellow in my life. He did not have a single piece of cloth on his body. Everyone on the street was shocked at that sight. Numerous eyes..."

Duanmu Huanghun's face darkened.

Shi Xueman cast a glance at Ai Hui. Since when had this fellow

became so talkative? The only thing that surprised her was that Ai Hui had not mentioned his stunning sword move at all. All he talked about was that perverted naked guy.

Not bad, he was not a pompous and conceited fellow after all.

She had encountered a lot of young talents and all of them kept on bragging to her about their capabilities and glorious expertise. She was extremely disgusted by such haughtiness.

She turned around and suddenly noticed that Duanmu Huanghun was looking unwell. She could not help but ask with great concern, “What’s wrong? Are you feeling unwell?”

Both of their families had close ties with each other, and both of them knew each other from childhood as well. However, they were not really close friends. Shi Xueman was older than Duanmu Huanghun and she treated him like a little brother.

Duanmu Huanghun froze. After a while, he forced a smile and replied, “Everything’s fine, Sister Xueman.”

At this very moment, a shriek suddenly came from ahead.

“What’s that?”

“Oh my god, it’s a blood fiend!”

“Be careful!”

“Run!”

There were numerous people who were in hysteria on the street in front of them. The crowd ran toward Ai Hui’s group, resembling an incoming flash flood. Many people fell onto the ground and were trampled, but no one dared to stop running. There were also a lot of people who tried to escape through the air, yet these people crashed into each other within a few meters after taking off since there were too many people trying to fly at the same time. Their bodies lost control and fell to the ground.

At this point in time, it would be deadly for people to fall down as they would be instantly drowned by the crowd.

Everyone’s facial expression changed drastically. Without any hesitation, Ai Hui instructed, “This way!”

He was the first one to run into an alley nearby. The others seemed to wake up from a dream and quickly followed him.

Boom!

The sound of the ground trembling, the numerous shrieks and cries, and the surging tide of people whizzed past behind them like a furious tsunami.

Everyone, including Shi Xueman, ran through the alleyway in a

hurry. Their faces had turned pale-white. Wang Xiaoshan thought of the question he asked Ai Hui just now and felt a shiver went down his spine. A person is so insignificant when he or she is faced with a tide of hysterical people.

At this moment, it felt like the end of the world was upon them.

They frantically ran through the alley. The wriggling and winding alleyway became the best screen for them, shaking off the terrifying flood of people behind them.

They stopped after running for several kilometres.

Upon seeing everyone's pale-white faces and the deep fear in their eyes, Ai Hui sighed silently. He clearly understood the rookies' feelings. The scene today would appear in their nightmares for a very long time.

The fatty simple-mindedly popped a piece of malt candy into his mouth as soon as he got the opportunity. His performed the best in this situation.

Duanmu Huanghun, Jiang Wei, and Wang Xiaoshan were pale faced. Everyone was panting heavily, like a fish that was about to suffocate.

Sang Zhijun and Shi Xueman were the most affected. Sang Zhijun's eyes were slightly red and her entire body was shivering involuntarily.

Shi Xueman did not look well either. Ai Hui noticed that the hand that she was holding her spear with had turned pale. However, she managed to calm down gradually.

Actually, they performed better than Ai Hui had expected.

Duanmu Huanghun and the other two had been through two battles in the Garden of Life, and as such, their ability to deal with such situations had improved a lot. As for Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun, they had killed the blood bat with Ai Hui. Therefore, they did not have much of a problem either.

Ai Hui could not help but rejoice over his decision to kick the other six people out of the group.

“We need to find out where we are now.” Ai Hui took a look at his surroundings and felt a headache. He was unfamiliar with his location.

He was actually lost…

Ai Hui wanted to put a stalk of grass into his mouth, but he resisted. He did not know whether or not the blood poison had infiltrated the city.

“This is Amber Lane” The voice belonged to Duanmu Huanghun. Other than his pale face, he looked rather normal.

“Are you sure?” Ai Hui looked at him doubtfully.

“I’m sure,” Duanmu Huanghun replied. For the sake of finding you to bring you back to class, did you know that Brother Huanghun searched through the entire Central Pine City?

Eh? After having an agitated thought like this, Duanmu Huanghun did not seem nervous anymore…

“This place is rather close to the training hall. Go straight, turn left, and walk through Pine Lane. After walking past five streets, we will turn onto Cloud Lane. After walking past another three streets, we will reach the training hall.”

Everyone was stunned by Duanmu Huanghun’s words.

“You’re so familiar with the area?” Ai Hui still remained doubtful.

“I have a photogenic memory,” Duanmu Huanghun replied expressionlessly.

So this fellow has a poor sense of direction! Duanmu Huanghun thought laughingly to himself. I finally found your weakness, Ai Hui!

Suddenly, Duanmu Huanghun’s eyes widened as the image of a jet-black sword tip rapidly magnified in his eyes.

Murder...

His brain could only think of this word before he heard a loud clank. The deafening sound of a collision exploded beside his ear, throwing his mind into a daze.

“Everyone, be careful!”

Ai Hui yelled to warn everyone. A powerful force erupted through the tip of the Dragonspine Inferno and into Ai Hui, pushing him back several steps.

A half-meter tall blood mantis flew up and stood atop a nearby wall. Its dark red eyes were staring coldly at Ai Hui.

Its sneak attack had actually been blocked.

The pair of scythe-like front claws were slicing in mid-air and produced a sound that would make people shiver in horror. With a flap of its wings, it became a red streak and pounced toward everyone.

Shi Xueman suddenly took a step forward and stabbed her snow-white spear into the red streak that was flying through the air!

A snow-white spear glint collided with the two streaks of red-colored scythe glint. Shi Xueman staggered, and before she could

react, the demonic red-colored scythe glint appeared before her eyes once more.

The spear in Shi Xueman's hand abruptly twisted and ts body distorted to block the incoming attack from an impossible angle.

Shi Xueman had underestimated the blood mantis's strength and speed. She could not control her body in time and flew backward.

The demonic red-colored scythe glint appeared before her all of a sudden.

Her heart sank.

At this critical moment, a black sword suddenly sprung out from under her arm, behaving like a python that lunged out from the underbrush.

Clank!

Ai Hui's arm was sore and he almost lost control of the sword, but he still managed to block off the incoming attack! He quickly put his left arm around Shi Xueman's waist and both of them flew backward from the impact.

Before they even landed on the ground, Ai Hui yelled, "Fatty!"

Fatty and Ai Hui were well-coordinated. Like an angry grizzly

bear, Fatty roared, raised his shield in front of him, and made a ferocious lunge at the blood mantis.

The blood mantis's claws began to rain down on the heavy iron shield.

The fatty tightened his core and resisted the torrential attacks with his shield.

At this moment, the others returned to their senses and joined the fight.

Duanmu Huanghun's [Viridescent Flower] conjured up several vines that shot out from all directions and wrapped around the blood mantis.

Sang Zhijun's Golden Silk Longbow was shooting arrows at the blood mantis in rapid succession.

However, all these attacks failed to work. Duanmu Huanghun's [Viridescent Flower] was completely useless. The blood mantis was lightning fast. It could even fly at an extremely low altitude, constantly creating afterimages to confuse his enemies. There were a few times where Duanmu Huanghun's vines had wrapped around the blood mantis's afterimages instead of the real body. Sang Zhijun's rapid fire had been stopped as well.

The usually unavoidable arrows were destroyed with one swing of its claws.

Mantises were naturally gifted in executing sword moves with their scythe-like claws. In the Wilderness, mantises were widely feared. The blood mantis's strength exceeded everyone's expectation. From the beginning, it was on the winning side of the battle.

Jiang Wei's heavy bow and Wang Xiaoshan's attacks were completely ineffective. They simply could not keep up with the blood mantis's speed.

Upon seeing that the situation was getting out of hand, Ai Hui made a weird maneuver in the mid-air before landing on the ground. Like a whip, the arm that he held Shi Xueman with swung forcefully, throwing the latter through the air. "Attack it!"

After throwing Shi Xueman into the air, Ai Hui crashed into the ground and groaned.

Upon hearing Ai Hui's groan, Shi Xueman, who was already embarrassed by the previous exchange, suddenly returned to her senses. A killer instinct arose in her eyes. After she finished adjusting her posture in mid-air, her elemental energy frantically surged into the snow-white spear in her hand!

Chapter 162: Bitter Battle

Her long black hair was drifting in the wind and her eyes were as cold as frost. The blue-armored Shi Xueman was flying.

The blood mantis could sense that danger was coming. It erected its feelers and pulled back the top half of its body, then positioned its scythe-like claws to protect its front. It compressed its sturdy and powerful lower limbs like springs, preparing to pounce forward at any moment.

Accompanied by a deafening whizzing sound, the snow-white spear pierced towards the blood mantis's head.

A demonic red glow suddenly erupted in the blood mantis's eyes. Its scythe-like claws, which had been storing energy in preparation for an attack, lunged forward, forming a red streak that struck fear into everyone's hearts.

The white streak of light and red streak of light collided head-on. Just as everyone thought that it would be a head-on collision, the spear in Shi Xueman's hand suddenly disintegrated into a cloud of white mist.

The sudden change in Shi Xueman's attack caught the blood mantis unprepared.

The white mist engulfed the blood mantis, causing its attack to miss. The blood mantis sensed that something was wrong.

It spread its wings and prepared to escape from this weird mist; however, at that moment, its thin, red-colored wings seemed to be covered in a thick, glue-like substance. No matter how hard it tried, it could not fly.

Shi Xueman's unimaginable attack had reduced the blood mantis's lightning-fast speed significantly, giving everyone the opportunity to strike back.

Sang Zhijun's arrows rained down on the blood mantis like a torrent. The blood mantis did not have the slightest bit of fear with regards to the incoming arrows and began to thrust its scythe-like claws forward.

Tink, tink, tink!

A melody suddenly resounded amongst the densely-packed collisions. The blood mantis's body froze.

The Melody Arrow that Sang Zhijun had secretly hidden within the rain of arrows began to work its magic.

Jiang Wei's muscles tensed up, revealing the veins on his arms. The bowstring of the Stone Mountain Bow, which was as tall as he was, had been pulled back so far that the bow resembled a full moon. The Stone Mountain Bow required unique, heavy arrows to be effective. The Wolftooth Heavy Arrow loaded on the bow was solid and thick, only a tad smaller than a javelin.

All of his elemental energy was channeled into the Wolftooth Heavy Arrow. He knew his strengths and weaknesses well. If the others were finding it so hard to launch a successful attack, then his normal attacks would definitely not work.

There was only one chance for him to launch an all-out attack.

Boom!

With a loud, metallic boom, a dazzling beam of light instantaneously appeared before the blood mantis.

The somewhat dazed blood mantis continued to display its powerful fighting abilities. At the critical moment, it raised its left claw in front of its body.

Clang!

The sound resembled the impact of a battering ram crashing against an iron city gate, sending shivers down everyone's spines.

The powerful impact sent the blood mantis flying backwards. Its lower limbs were trying to hold on to the ground, leaving two deep claw mark tracks gouged into the ground. It flew back approximately seven meters before it could stabilize itself.

Everyone was overjoyed when they saw that the blood mantis

was in a shaky and miserable state. Its left claw was broken, revealing a frightening wound that was bleeding non-stop. The red-colored armor on its body was densely filled with pin-sized holes. These holes were created by Shi Xueman's cloud of mist.

The cloud of mist in the air started to shrink rapidly, transforming back into the snow-white spear and returning to Shi Xueman's hands.

At that moment, Ai Hui picked himself up from the ground where he had fallen, hard.

Upon seeing the wound on the blood mantis, his face did not show any sign of joy. He could only yell, "Be careful!"

In the Wilderness, dire beasts that were severely injured would have one of two reactions. They would either turn and run away, or they would become even more aggressive. The more powerful a dire beast was, the more likely it was to adopt the second reaction. That was because stronger dire beasts had been through more killings and were more ferocious; they definitely would not easily give up a fight. Right now, the blood mantis did not show any signs that it would escape!

Just as Ai Hui finished yelling, the blood mantis flapped its wings and slowly flew up into the air.

Ai Hui's facial expression changed. He just remembered another strength that the blood mantis possessed: low-altitude flying, also known as treetop flying. Treetop flying involved flying at high

speeds while staying below the height of the treetops, which was around ten meters.

Insects were the ones that usually specialized in low-altitude flying. Their flying speeds were not fast, but they were extremely agile, making them “treetop assassins”.

In contrast, birds belonged in high-altitude zones. The more ferocious a bird was, the higher it would fly. Some large-scale beasts could even stay in extreme-altitude zones for an entire year without flying back down even once.

Elementalists’ azure wings were of a similar nature to those of the birds; they were more suitable for high-altitude flying. Maneuvering in dense jungles was not the azure wings’ forte...

Ai Hui choosing the cloak, Golden Wind, was for this reason; for the city which was densely packed with buildings, low-altitude flying would be more suitable. His [Gale Bat Blade] could also exhibit a similar effect, but the [Gale Bat Blade]’s flying path was more predictable as it could not make as many maneuvers as the cloak.

Although this was the case, damn it, he had just gotten the cloak and had not even had the chance to use it once.

Before he could make any moves, the hovering blood mantis surged forward.

A red flash appeared before everyone's eyes; however, to their surprise, the blood mantis was not flying towards them, but to a wall nearby.

In an instant, Ai Hui knew what was going on. His facial expression changed drastically as he snarled, "Left side!"

Fatty was well-coordinated with Ai Hui. Without any hesitation, he dashed towards Ai Hui's left side and raised his heavy shield.

When the blood mantis reached the wall, it used its powerful lower limbs to give the wall a kick.

Boom! The powerful impact from the kick sent the bricks in the wall flying everywhere. The blood mantis's speed was greatly increased, so much so that its form could no longer be caught by human eyes.

A demonic red scythe glint landed on Fatty's shield like a meteor.

Boom!

Fatty, who was wearing a heavy armour and holding a heavy shield, flew backwards and crashed into a fence. He looked like a kicked ball.

The recoil that the blood mantis received was also harsh. It flew back as if it was being tugged by a string tied to its back. Its body suddenly drifted up into the air and started swaying like a

drunkard.

Everyone was shocked by the might of its attack. With the heavy armor and shield, Fatty weighed up to a few hundred kilograms. They had also seen Fatty's God-given strength in action, but one strike from the blood mantis had still sent Fatty flying off.

Such terrifying power from one strike...

Even Shi Xueman, who was the most powerful among them, had her face turned deathly white. The strength of this blood mantis struck her deeply with fear. At that moment, her first reaction was to look for Ai Hui.

She did not know since when Ai Hui had become the person she subconsciously sought help from. It might have been because of his calm and easygoing attitude, or his unwavering confidence.

Anyways, where was Ai Hui?

Her eye pupils abruptly constricted. Unexpectedly, Ai Hui was below the blood mantis!

Ai Hui was extremely focused at that moment. The sword embryo in his forehead was throbbing intensely, as if it was going to jump out at any moment.

The blood mantis's strength had almost reached the level of a dire beast. If Ai Hui was to encounter such an enormous monster

in the past, he would have immediately run away as far as possible. It was a joke for the few of them to deal with a monster that was at the same level as a dire beast.

Now, however, where would they run to?

The entire Central Pine City was surrounded by blood fiends, where could they possibly run to?

The only way for them to survive was to go all-out and fight.

He had watched countless dire beasts being hunted and he had survived a close encounter with one before; however, in this dangerous situation, he still trembled with intense fear. It engulfed his entire body, stimulating every muscle and nerve, causing them to tremble involuntarily.

Actually, he knew that he wasn't someone who treated death nonchalantly. He was actually very timid and scared before the prospect of death. Nevertheless... nevertheless, at this moment, Ai Hui forced himself to be cool-headed.

He became so calm that not a single emotion ran through his mind.

Only by staying calm could he find a way to survive.

He must survive.

He was emotionless. All he could see was the swaying body of the blood mantis above his head. He could see that the previous impact had opened up the blood mantis's wound even more, causing its bleeding to be more severe. He could smell the unique fragrance of the blood poison in the air. He could see that the stiff and rigid body of the blood mantis was recovering rapidly.

Shi Xueman was filled with intense embarrassment. Since when had he gone over?

Her teammate was fighting with an all-out effort, and yet, she was so scared that she had lost all of her fighting spirit. An imposing figure appeared in her mind. If her father were to see this scene, he would be very disappointed in her....

The intense feeling of embarrassment and her sense of responsibility were burning her like a scorching flame. The fear in the girl's eyes disappeared and was replaced by determination.

Traces of white-colored mist emitted from her back. They kept on extending and wafting through the air.

The mist at her back was nimble and graceful, swaying slowly like how plants swayed in water.

With a twist of her body, she looked as though she had just broken out from shackles which had been binding her, and disappeared in an instant.

The next moment, she appeared before the blood mantis and stabbed her spear towards its eyes.

The blood mantis sensed that danger was coming and started hissing. Its scythe-like claw swept through the air and blocked Shi Xueman's attack.

The blue-armored girl that was drifting in the mist had a determined look on her face. Her attacks got faster and faster.

The blood mantis tried its best to fend off the attacks, but it still got stabbed eventually. Two more bloody holes appeared on its body, causing it to turn even madder.

Suddenly, Shi Xueman, who was about to land on the ground, noticed that there was a green glow on the blood mantis's head. Without any hesitation, she channeled the elemental energy in her body and disappeared, reappearing in the next moment on the other side of the blood mantis.

She channelled all of her elemental energy into her spear. Synchronizing her body with her spear, she thrust it forward!

This thrust was extremely powerful. A ruthless look flashed across the blood mantis's eyes, and without showing any signs of dodging, it lunged its claws forward!

A red-colored scythe glint landed viciously on the power-

concentrated spear tip.

Boom!

Shi Xueman fell, whizzing down through the air. She looked as if she had been struck by lightning.

It did not go well for the blood mantis either. All the wounds on its body ruptured, causing blood to spurt out from them. Its body began to sway again and its head was slightly lowered.

At this point in time, the green glow on top of the blood mantis's head started to form numerous green flower patterns that wrapped around its body.

Pop, pop, pop!

Light and compact explosions could be heard within those patterns, following which, many black-colored shackles were expelled explosively from the patterns. Once these shackles made contact with the blood mantis, they automatically shackled its body parts.

The shackles had tightly bound all the joints of the blood mantis.

Duanmu Huanghun had thrown an entire packet of Shackle Seeds into his [Viridescent Flower]. His face turned pale-white and his body swayed, following which, he collapsed to the ground. After activating so many Shackle Seeds, the elemental energy in

his body had been completely depleted.

At that very moment, Ai Hui took action.

The immensely heavy Dragonspine Inferno in his hand felt weightless to him. The intense fear and desperate desire to survive pushed him into a state of extreme focus. Every single trace of elemental energy in his body was pristine and pure.

They flowed like a river, changing form and direction irregularly. Two elemental energy cords flowed into his left and right hands' palaces respectively.

The elemental energy cords began to vibrate lightly.

[Crescent Moon!]

Chapter 163: Returning to the Training Hall

At that moment, the ringing of the sword resembled a sound out of nature.

The vibrating Dragonspine Inferno completely sapped the elemental energy in Ai Hui's body in an instant and accurately pierced through the blood mantis's wound. A sword glint that resembled a crescent moon exactly erupted from the tip of the Dragonspine Inferno. The magnificent crescent moon frantically destroyed the inner organs of the blood mantis. It was a crescent moon of death.

Its muscles, bones, blood vessels, and everything else were completely shattered.

The crescent moon pierced through the blood mantis's body and made its way to its head.

Pop!

The crescent moon erupted out of the blood mantis's head.

The blood mantis's body froze as it lost all of its life force.

The whole process seemed very long, but in reality, it only took a short period of time. Ai Hui finally removed himself from the state of extreme focus. His entire body was sore and weak, as if he had been submerged by surging tidewater.

They had won.

He burst into laughter and collapsed freely towards the ground.

At that moment, his body tightened and a white-colored bandage shot out from his shirt to lunge towards the blood mantis.

Ai Hui's laughter stopped. The Blood Bandage!

Like an agile white python, the snow-white bandage wrapped around the blood mantis which had been mangled almost beyond recognition. In the blink of an eye, the bandage had tightly wrapped itself around the blood mantis, like a mummy.

The unforeseen event left everyone in shock.

The recovered Jiang Wei was able to catch Ai Hui, who was about to make contact with the ground. Wang Xiaoshan pulled Fatty out from the wall debris while Sang Zhijun pulled Shi Xueman out from more debris nearby.

Duanmu Huanghun was bent down and holding his knees. He was panting very heavily.

Ai Hui looked around his surroundings. Even though everyone looked miserable, he was overjoyed that they had managed to survive.

Thump. The blood mantis collapsed to the ground heavily. The bandage released itself from the blood mantis's body and returned to Ai Hui.

The bandage automatically withdrew back into Ai Hui's shirt and wrapped itself around his body. At that moment, a wave of heat energy gushed into Ai Hui's body and he immediately felt refreshed. It was as if his body had regained its energy.

He was very surprised. He did not know that the bandage had such a use!

Previously, he had known that the bandage could devour blood and flesh; however, this was the first time that he had received heat energy from it. He felt revitalized, as if he had recovered to his usual state. At the same time, however, he knew that this was a misperception. There was no elemental energy in his body. Usually, when an elementalist's elemental energy was depleted, he would feel extremely weak. For a student like Duanmu Huanghun, who had a delicate body and focused his training on elemental energy, the fatigue would be more severe and obvious. For Ai Hui, who focused his training on body-tempering, it would be much better for him even though he would still feel tired.

What was the wave of heat energy if it was not elemental energy?

Ai Hui was puzzled as he got down from Jiang Wei's arms.

Jiang Wei was staring at Ai Hui in shock. Previously, Ai Hui had

been gasping for air, but now, he suddenly seemed to have recovered and left Jiang Wei's hands as if nothing had happened.

"We have to leave this area immediately."

Ai Hui took a glance at everyone. Shi Xueman's face was pale-white and half her body was leaning on Sang Zhijun. Her eyes, however, were still flickering, blazing with flames.

This girl had developed battlelust...

The so-called "battlelust" referred to a state in which one developed a strong desire for fighting and killing. In this state, one could exceed the limits of his or her fighting capabilities. Ai Hui had seen many male elementalists that had developed battlelust, but this was the first time he had seen such a ruthless and violent woman.

The easier one developed "battlelust", the easier it would be for him or her to overcome the mental barriers of fighting and killing. Eventually, these people would enjoy engaging in combat. This was a remarkable trait for one to have. Those who had this trait were normally filled with fighting spirit and determination.

Beneath that icy, beautiful face was boiling blood that was filled with battle fervor.

Ai Hui couldn't help but take a second glance at Shi Xueman. She was indeed the best female student.

She was able to go all-out on the blood mantis and entered a state of bloodlust during her first real combat. He had never seen such a ferocious girl! In fact, Shi Xueman was much more powerful than most of the hunting units' elementalists whom he had seen.

Fatty was lying on the ground and groaning while having a half-dead look on his face; however, Ai Hui heard the crunching sound of Fatty eating his malt candies and felt relieved. This fellow was alright.

Duanmu Huanghun had a tired look on his face, but when he saw Ai Hui looking at him, he humphed and acted as if he was alright, then stood up.

"Aim before you throw the Shackle Seeds, they're very expensive." Ai Hui's voice rang across his ears.

Duanmu Huanghun's facial expression froze.

After stabbing Bangwan with his words, Ai Hui's gaze fell upon the blood mantis on the ground. All of the blood mantis's blood and flesh had been devoured, leaving an empty shell on the floor.

The bright-red shell looked as if it was made out of red crystal.

Ai Hui walked over and picked up the blood mantis's shell. Since the flesh and tendons had been removed, it was very easy to break it apart. Ai Hui skillfully broke the shell into pieces and gave one

piece each to everyone in the group.

Upon seeing the confused look on everyone's faces, Ai Hui explained, "This shell still contains the aura of the blood mantis. By carrying a piece with us, we can hide our auras and make the other blood fiends think of us as their kind."

If it was other people who said these words, everyone might be skeptical, but it was Ai Hui who had long gained their trust.

Everyone took a piece of the blood mantis's shell and under Duanmu Huanghun's direction, were able to arrive at the training hall safely.

The alleyway outside of the training hall did not show any signs of damage, implying that the blood fiends had not visited the place yet. Upon knowing this, everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

When everyone saw Lou Lan, because of their tension and anxiety, they collapsed all over the place.

Lou Lan quickly tended to everyone's wounds.

Ai Hui chose a few pieces of shell and placed them at the entrance and various corners of the training hall. He hoped that the aura of the blood mantis would ward off other blood fiends. He did not know whether or not it would work, but he was willing to try anything in this desperate situation.

After receiving treatment from Lou Lan, Shi Xueman had more or less recovered. She walked towards Ai Hui and sat beside him to ask, “What’s up with your bandage?”

After going through a life-and-death battle together with Ai Hui, Shi Xueman became more friendly.

Ai Hui felt that the way Shi Xueman treated him now was as if both of them had known each other for a very long time; however, he did not feel the same way.

“It’s an ancient blood-refined artifact that was given to me by my mistress. I don’t know what happened either.” Ai Hui removed the bandage and passed it to her. “It used to be a piece of Blood Bandage that was torn in half by my mistress. There was a time when I spilled my blood onto it and the blood was absorbed in an instant. After it absorbed my blood, it became snow-white. Can you help me take a look and see what’s wrong with it? It scared me as well.”

Shi Xueman took the bandage and observed it carefully for a long time. She looked surprised and said, “Such a weird bandage.”

Since she was younger, she had come across a lot of artifacts, and hence, she knew a thing or two about them. She could not, however, see what was unique about the bandage. Other than it being tattered, there was nothing special about it, although she did see with her own eyes how the bloody bandage had devoured the blood and flesh of the blood mantis. It had frightened her. She quickly passed it back to Ai Hui.

“What shall we do now?” Shi Xueman asked and looked at Ai Hui.

After having some rest and replenishments, the others had regained much of their elemental energy. Upon hearing Shi Xueman’s question, all of them gathered around.

Any amount of arrogance that anyone might have had prior to the battle today had been erased. It took so much effort from everyone to barely defeat a blood mantis. Furthermore, there was so much luck involved in the battle that if they were to fight the blood mantis again, none of them had the confidence that they could defeat it once more.

They were at a complete loss and felt that their future was bleak.

Only Ai Hui and Fatty remained as calm as usual. For those who had walked out of the darkness, whatever happened recently was merely a cloudy day.

“These next few days, we will try to avoid crowded places. Right now, it is the most chaotic period of time. We don’t know how many blood fiends have infiltrated the city and whether or not the breaches on the walls have been repaired. These issues are not something that we can care about or resolve. The only thing we can do now is to improve ourselves and learn how to fight in real combat. This is a race and those who are slow will be eaten.”

Ai Hui’s tone was so cold that it sent shivers down their spines.

Everyone remained silent. They found it hard to accept such a cruel reality.

“Can’t we fend off the blood beasts?” Shi Xueman suddenly raised her head and asked.

“Only if you’re a Grandmaster, then it might be possible.” Ai Hui cast a glance at her. That absolutely beautiful face contained a tinge of worry and anxiety. He then continued bluntly, “You’re not a Grandmaster, I’m not a Grandmaster, and all of us almost got killed by a blood mantis. Don’t do things that are not within your limits. Other than losing your life, you’re also going to implicate the rest of us.”

“What if everyone unites together and fights them?” Jiang Wei asked doubtfully.

“Perhaps it might work.” Ai Hui unexpectedly nodded his head, but his tone changed the next moment. “Who’s going to do it? There has to be a hero to do that. You? Me? The mayor? Alright, let’s hope that the mayor is that hero.”

Everyone was depressed, but they knew that what Ai Hui said was right. No one felt that the mayor could do this. Even though Wang Zhen had been the mayor of this city for ten years, they had never even seen this man.

Shi Xueman raised her head again, and this time, she had serious look on her face. “Nevermind, we can’t afford to care about the

others. What matters most is that we survive."

"We need to endure for a period of time and wait for the Thirteen Divisions' reinforcements. I'm sure all of you know about the Thirteen Divisions' situation. If you want to survive, you have to live at least until then. Reflect on the battle today."

After Ai Hui finished speaking, he did not care about them anymore and walked to one side by himself.

He had a lot of things to do. Until now, he had yet to read the original copy of [Big Dipper] that he got from the dean.

He also needed to familiarize himself with the Golden Wind and the Red Dust.

As compared to the last time when Ai Hui accidentally executed [Crescent Moon], today's situation had not been too different as there had been a lot of luck involved in the end. On the other hand, he could feel that there were some positive developments as he had observed and learned from every single detail of the sword move.

He felt that if he did not have enough time to train, how would he have the time to chit-chat with everyone?

During today's battle, whether it was Shi Xueman or Duanmu Huanghun, all of them had committed a lot of stupid mistakes; however, he did not criticize them. Both of them were geniuses and were smarter than him. They would learn how to coordinate

during a fight after just a few more battles.

If they accidentally died before they learned how to engage in combat properly, then so be it.

Thanks to the blood mantis, Ai Hui was able to realize that the situation was far worse than what he had expected it to be. The blood mantis had been extremely powerful and was far stronger than the blood fiends that they had encountered in the Garden of Life and Central Pine City. It was on a completely different level.

It made him think of the days when they had hidden beneath the mound while matured blood fiends roared outside.

After reminding Lou Lan to supervise Fatty in his training, Ai Hui immediately dove into a crazy training routine.

His intense uneasiness made him more focused.

He was also deeply captivated by the [Big Dipper].

Lou Lan was squatting in front of the red crystal-like shells that Ai Hui and the rest had collected. The eyes on his pale-white mask were blinking excitedly, showing deep interest.

Chapter 164: The Coming Of The Blood Tsunami

The afternoon sun was intensely hot, yet it could not bring the slightest bit of warmth to Wang Zhen and the dean, who were both high up in the sky.

The cracks in the north gate had been repaired. However, the city had already been invaded by a lot of blood fiends. Since the incident happened too abruptly, the unprepared populace had caused a very massive and severe trampling accident, causing the deaths of many people. Wang Zhen immediately ordered a cleanup operation of the blood fiends in the city. Initially, the operation went rather smoothly. Then, they encountered a two meter-long blood centipede which killed approximately 30 people.

If Wang Zhen and the dean had not managed to arrive at the scene in time, the rest of the elementalists would have been killed on the spot.

Currently, all of Central Pine City was low in morale and its people were in a state of anxiety.

“Things are not going as planned.” The dean’s voice contained a tinge of dissatisfaction. He placed high hopes on Wang Zhen, but the first day Wang Zhen took over the defense of the city, there was already an accident. Previously, they thought that the blood fiends’ maturity period would take about five to seven days. However, the blood centipede’s fighting capabilities showed otherwise, striking fear in the dean’s heart.

“My dean, this is a battlefield. Accidents happen anytime and anywhere on a battlefield.” Wang Zhen sneered.

“Yes, you’re right. There are definitely accidents on a battlefield, but for a time window of 15 days, we let the blood fiends infiltrate the city on the first day. What can you say about that? My mayor,” the dean replied sarcastically.

“Naturally.” Wang Zhen nodded his head calmly. “This shows that the enemies are much stronger than what we expected them to be. This also shows that we are much weaker than what we expected ourselves to be. There’s nothing too terrible about this. Committing a mistake on the first day is much better than committing a mistake on the last day. At least we have the time to make improvements, even though the improvements might not work.”

The dean was speechless. He knew that the current situation could not be blamed on Wang Zhen. At this point of time, he hoped for a hero that could create miracles, but that person clearly was not Wang Zhen. He had to eventually pull himself out of the unrealistic fantasy and return to the cruel reality.

“What can we do now?” the dean asked, trying to calm his tone down.

Wang Zhen’s facial expression returned to normal and he replied, “Right now, we have to quarantine those people who are afflicted with the blood poison. We still do not know whether or not they

can be saved. If we let them howl in anguish in the city, it will deal a huge blow to the overall morale. Next, we will organize student groups to carry out the cleanup operation of the blood fiends in the city."

"We are involving the students so early?" The dean was astonished.

"Yes," Wang Zhen replied solemnly, "the blood catastrophe is much worse than what we expected it to be. Let them get used to it. The subsequent phase of the catastrophe will be even more grim."

The dean trembled in fear.

"It's coming!" Wang Zhen's voice contained a rarely seen tinge of panic.

The dean quivered and raised his head involuntarily. He saw something that he would never forget for the rest of his life.

The bloody skyline at a distant mountain suddenly thickened. Then, a surging blood tsunami swallowed the mountain like an enormous black hole.

One by one, the mountains were swallowed by the blood tsunami.

The dean could feel a chilly wave shooting up his legs. Even

Wang Zhen, who had seen countless terrifying scenes on the battlefield, turned deathly-white at this moment.

Furthermore, both of them were in the sky and could see what was going on clearly.

Everywhere the blood tsunami passed through, various blood plants would grow frantically. These plants continued to grow upward. In the blink of an eye, the lush and verdant forests were dyed blood-red. Rocks and boulders were covered in bright red moss. Not a single mountain could withstand the blood tsunami. It was swallowing up everything.

The rapidly growing plants caused the forests to grow denser and thicker. One would not be able to see the ground from the sky anymore and all he or she could see was a boundless sea of blood.

In the face of a world-changing force, mankind was incredibly insignificant.

At this moment, those who saw the incoming blood tsunami had only deep fear and despair in their eyes.

The distant blood tsunami, the sounds of plants frantically growing, and the whizzing currents of blood swallowed up everything before their eyes. Such crazy, boundless, and terrifying power did not belong to any man. Only gods had such power.

Everyone’s face was ashen, including Wang Zhen’s.

Everything outside of Central Pine City was changed beyond recognition. The mountains, rivers, and hills had completely disappeared. The previously 10 meter-tall trees had now become more than 50 meters tall. The branches and leaves had completely transformed, looking like an alien plant. Bristlegrass, which normally only grew to knee level, had now grown to more than six meters tall. The grass had become stronger and more sinister. Sword reeds had grown more than 20 meters tall, but their biggest change was that they became wider. The sawtooth edges of their leaves had become thicker and sharper. If one had not seen the way they transformed, he or she would not be able to identify them as sword reeds.

Everything changed.

All one could see was the sea of blood. The most noticeable entity in this vast sea of blood was Central Pine City. The city was like a small lonely island.

Suddenly, Wang Zhen realized something was wrong.

“It’s so quiet.” The dean’s murmur exploded in Wang Zhen’s ears like a thunderclap.

He finally realized what was wrong.

The blood sea outside of the city was dead silent. Not a single sound could be heard. The surging waves of the blood tsunami had disappeared, leaving a vast sea of blood here.

There were no insect cries, roars of beasts, or birds' chirpings. There were no sounds at all.

The silence made one's hair stand on end.

Where were the blood fiends?

An intense uneasiness engulfed Wang Zhen's mind. He kept on looking around, trying to find signs of blood fiends. However, his line of sight was blocked by the thick and dense forests, causing him to not be able to see anything.

What exactly was the blood tsunami? Where were the blood fiends? What was going on under the sea of blood?

Countless questions were spinning in his head. Like an invisible hand that tightly gripped his throat, an indescribable fear choked and suffocated him.

Dead silence. Boundless dead silence.

Even the intense afternoon sun could not bring any vitality to this dead silence. It was natural for anyone to feel fear upon facing such dead silence and this blood sea.

The thick city walls could not bring them any sense of security. Currently, Central Pine City was like a lone island in the midst of

deathly blood sea.

Wang Zhen was terrified. He knew that this silence was the calm before the storm. Something had to be brewing in the blood-colored forests outside. He did not know what was it, but he knew it would be something horrifying.

“Old Yu, bring some people with you and go out of the city to check it out. Bring the telepathy lotus as well.” Wang Zhen looked at his subordinate that had followed him for many years and hardened his heart.

Old Yu’s previously anxious face calmed down instead. “Help me take good care of my son.”

“Okay.” Wang Zhen bit his lips. He lacked the courage to say anything else.

If people were to leave the city at this point of time, they would have little chance of surviving. No, they would have zero chance of surviving.

Without wasting time, Old Yu picked five people. All of them were veterans from the front line in the past. Their hairs were grizzled and white, while their wrinkled faces looked peaceful. Without hesitation, they bowed to Wang Zhen.

Wang Zhen had taken care of them for many years. If not for the mayor, aged and feeble men like them would lead a difficult and

miserable life.

The group of aged and thin figures disappeared into the sea of blood.

Chapter 165: The Mantis Vest

The training hall had been very peaceful today.

Everyone was immersed in their training, and other than Fatty, whom Ai Hui needed to supervise, everyone else was fine. Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun were able to quickly come up with specialized training routines that focused on their respective needs, which were much better than usual and conventional practice.

Upon seeing this, Ai Hui could only sigh. Geniuses were truly a bunch of freaks.

He didn't know that, in the eyes of others, he himself was a freak as well.

He was steadfast, focused and did everything with overwhelming confidence. Furthermore, whenever he encountered perilous situations, he would remain completely calm, and he was always meticulous with his actions, causing everyone to be at ease.

Within a short period of time, he had gained the trust and confidence of all.

Not everyone who had survived the Wilderness could do this. Take Fatty, for example. He, too, had survived the Wilderness, yet he looked and behaved like a bum.

Ai Hui was a freak, and even his sand puppet was a freak.

They were all very knowledgeable and had seen many sand puppets before, but they had never encountered one that was so smart and intelligent. There was nothing that Lou Lan could not do, and he would give everyone the feeling that “Lou Lan is very happy” in whatever he did.

Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun were both charmed by Lou Lan; they really liked him.

Lou Lan turned himself into a sand-made saw and started happily sawing the blood mantis’s empty shell into palm-sized pieces. Lou Lan then transformed into a mini sandstorm that sucked them all in, and after a while, the sandstorm “spat” out a heap of polished and glossy red pieces of mantis shell.

When Lou Lan used these polished red shell pieces to craft a vest and passed it to Ai Hui, Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun turned green with envy. They looked as if they wanted to snatch the vest from Ai Hui.

However, honestly, Lou Lan’s craftsmanship could be said to be exceptional. Every shell piece was like a ruby that had been meticulously polished. Even Shi Xueman—who was used to seeing all kinds of jewels since a young age—exclaimed in admiration.

“Thank you, Lou Lan!”

Ai Hui was pleasantly surprised. The reason why he had brought back the blood mantis' shell was that he felt it would be a rather good material. Not only was it very light, but it was also very tough —these features were what made them suffer during their fight with the blood mantis. Ai Hui, who was immersed in his training all day long, did not have any time to waste. He did not expect Lou Lan to give him such a surprise.

"You're welcome, Ai Hui," Lou Lan replied happily.

"What a fantastic sand puppet." Sang Zhijun could not help but feel sour. Lou Lan completely overthrew her understanding of sand puppets; this was the first time she had seen such a smart sand puppet like Lou Lan in this world.

"Train faster." Even though Shi Xueman was envious, she could still restrain her emotions. She had already made up her mind to buy a sand puppet like Lou Lan in the future.

Suddenly, everyone heard the rapid approach of a strange sound of crashing waves. Moments later, though, the sound could be heard going away from them rapidly again. It was as if a tsunami had just hurtled past them.

Everyone stopped what they were doing.

"What is that sound?" Wang Xiaoshan asked weakly.

No one answered him. Everyone looked bewildered as they had

never heard such a sound before.

"It's coming from the outside of the city." Ai Hui listened attentively to the sound as a solemn look appeared on his face.

"Shall we go and take a look?" Shi Xueman looked at Ai Hui and asked.

Ai Hui thought for a while before shaking his head. "I don't think so. We better hurry up and focus on our training. Even if something happens outside, I don't believe that it's something that we can resolve."

Everyone had the same thought. The battle with the blood mantis had made them realize how weak and delicate they actually were.

……

Wang Zhen was waiting anxiously. In front of him, six bowls of water were lined up on a table.

Inside every bowl of water was a floating black-colored lotus seed—the telepathy lotus seed. Its scientific name was "Yin and Yang Telepathy Lotus Seed," and they were created and bred by a lotus-loving wood elementalist. At that time, a lotus that was half-white and half-black had appeared in his lotus pond, and there were two lotus seeds—one black, one white—in it. He had been fascinated by it, and hence, he had started to cultivate it with great care.

Ten years ago, when the Yin and Yang Telepathy Lotus first appeared, it merely existed to be looked at and appreciated by people.

It was only until one day that the wood elementalist accidentally crushed one of its seeds and discovered the magical property of the telepathy lotus seeds.

If Old Yu crushed his telepathy lotus seeds, the telepathy lotus seeds in the bowls of water would be crushed at the same time and broadcast moving visual images of the surroundings of the lotus seed that had been crushed.

The image would only last for around two minutes.

The telepathy lotus seeds were quickly utilized in the battles in the Wilderness, and they demonstrated great versatility. The ability to receive moving visual images from the front line was greatly valuable to the commanding officers.

The telepathy lotus seed naturally had its weaknesses as well. For example, it could not be used for more than a distance of one hundred miles, and the time of the visual images it could broadcast was very short. However, they were very cheap and were easily bred, making them very versatile.

Everyone was silent. The world-changing power that the blood tsunami had displayed had struck fear and despair into everyone’s heart. They did not know how to fight against such a formidable

and nerve-racking opponent—they simply couldn't think of any solutions. The back view of the six old men walking towards their deaths added a touch of sorrow and despair to the entire situation.

The passing of time was slowed down by the dead silence.

Time passed slowly, and the lotus seeds in the bowls of water still hadn't shown any signs of movement. Wang Zhen was becoming increasingly impatient.

An hour soon passed.

Wang Zhen's facial expression had returned to normal. It had already been an hour, and it was very likely that Old Yu and the rest had died. After regaining his composure, his thought process became much clearer.

"There are two possibilities. The first is that Old Yu and the rest were killed before they could crush the telepathy lotus seeds. The second possibility is that the blood sea can disconnect the telepathic connection between the telepathy lotus seeds," Wang Zhen muttered to himself.

The dean's face was pale. He was rather powerful, but he had never been to a battlefield before.

Wang Zhen cast a glance at the dean and laughed bitterly. To maintain meritocracy, the Induction Ground would never choose anyone from the Thirteenth Division or the influential families to

become the dean. All the deans came from an average background and had never been to the front line; they were only specialized in the field of education. And because of these academic-oriented deans, the Induction Ground became a hub of education that contained a broad range of schools of thought.

However, everything had its pros and cons.

Ever since the catastrophe broke out in the Induction Ground, these well-educated teachers and deans had been clumsy, slow-reacting, and panicky.

Wang Zhen regretted that he never paid enough attention to training soldiers in the last ten years. When the blood catastrophe struck, he suddenly discovered that he did not have any capable men to rely on. He now had to pay the price for wasting so much time during the last ten years.

Not only the Induction Ground, but the entire Avalon of Five Elements had its sense of danger derived solely from the front line in the Wilderness. Everyone had to now pay the price for being careless and shortsighted.

If the current catastrophe was man-made, the mastermind had definitely picked the weakest area of the Avalon of Five Elements to plot against...This blood disaster was truly disastrous. It was the heaviest loss the Avalon of Five Elements suffered ever since it was established.

After digesting the bitterness and regret, a determined look

appeared on Wang Zhen's face. "I need to send someone in to clearly discern what's going on inside."

"Who are you going to send?" The dean was at a loss.

Wang Zhen racked his brain and tried to think of a candidate who could handle this mission. The more dangerous the mission, the higher the expectations he had for the candidate. Those who were mentally weak and inexperienced would collapse even before the mission started.

He wanted to do it himself, but he knew that if anything were to happen to him, then Central Pine City would not have anyone who could take charge of the entire situation, and it would immediately collapse.

"We will start a recruitment drive." He thought aloud, "There are definitely some people who specialize in reconnaissance in the multitude of training halls and workshops in this city. The problem is how should we persuade these people to go? They have no obligation to die for us."

"What do you need?" The dean understood at once.

Right now, the more capable individuals in Central Pine City were members of the various training halls. Anyone who could become referees or guards in the training halls were more or less capable, and most of them had joined hunting units before. After they became older and wanted a stable life, they chose to work in training halls.

However, even though these people were veterans, they would not accept Wang Zhen's mission easily.

Wang Zhen sighed. "We will take care of our respective sides. I will provide the money, the valuable equipment, and supplies. You will provide absolute arts and the like."

"Yes!" The dean agreed swiftly. He had already given out the original copy of [Big Dipper], and as such, he did not care about giving out other absolute arts and valuable manuals anymore.

……

The elementalists in the sky kept yelling and publicizing the recruitment drive.

It was at this moment that Ai Hui and the rest understood what was going on.

"I wonder what the situation is outside? How come there's a blood tsunami all of a sudden?" Sang Zhijun's face was filled with worry.

It wasn't only her—everyone was deeply troubled as well. Ever since the onset of the blood catastrophe, the situation had continued to worsen, causing the uneasiness in everyone's heart to continuously grow.

Fatty noticed Ai Hui's gaze and asked doubtfully, "Ai Hui, don't tell me you want to go?"

"Yes. The dean and the mayor have put in all they have this time around." A glint was flickering in Ai Hui's eyes.

Ai Hui's reply shocked everyone.

"No! It's too dangerous!" Shi Xueman vetoed without even a second's thought.

"Yes, I agree. Ai Hui, didn't you just say that we will not be capable of resolving anything that happens outside?" Sang Zhijun started to persuade Ai Hui as well.

Duanmu Huanghun had a confused look on his face as he stared at Ai Hui. He did not know why Ai Hui suddenly had this notion—such a rash decision wasn't his style at all.

"What do you have your eye on this time?" Fatty asked directly. He still knew Ai Hui the best.

"Dire beasts' meat, elemental food," Ai Hui replied bluntly.

Everyone was infuriated by Ai Hui's response. They could understand if the reward was some absolute art, but elemental food? Since when had they lacked elemental food? Elemental food was the most commonly-seen thing to them.

“There’s too little time, and we need to increase our fighting capabilities. The best solution to this problem is elemental food. Lou Lan is very good at making it. During this period of time, things like dire beast meat are hard to come by. They are priceless, and they are excellent for making elemental food,” Ai Hui continued.

Shi Xueman still disagreed with him. “I agree with you that we need to improve our fighting capabilities as soon as possible. However, it’s still too dangerous. We don’t need to be so anxious about it.”

“Actually, there’s nothing dangerous about it,” Ai Hui explained.

No one believed his words.

Ai Hui pointed to the mantis-shell vest on his body and continued to explain, “I have this—its aura will conceal my aura. If I’m careful, there shouldn’t be much of a problem. Haven’t you all realized that from yesterday till today, there hasn’t been any blood fiend near us? I feel that it’s not too big of a risk and that it’ll be worth it.”

Everyone was astounded. It turned out that Ai Hui had already considered every factor.

“I will accompany you.” Shi Xueman stepped forward bravely.

“Do you know how to carry out an infiltration?” Ai Hui asked doubtfully.

Shi Xueman rolled her eyes.

“Everyone, wait for my return.”

Chapter 166: Panic in the Blood Forest

Brave men will emerge when the reward is good.

When the magistrate court and Central Pine Academy simultaneously brought out enticing rewards, the number of elementalists coming forward to register increased significantly. Wang Zhen heaved a sigh of relief. The unusual change in situation outside the city had made him extremely uneasy.

Still, he was surprised to see Ai Hui's name; it had left a deep impression in his mind. He wrinkled his brows. This little fellow was most likely still a student.

He compulsively wanted to overrule it but then recalled the dean's assessment of Ai Hui—that he was the most mature student he had ever met, clear about his goals, and lacking in juvenile impulsivity. Wang Zhen then thought about Ai Hui's experiences in the Wilderness as a laborer. Perhaps that fellow had something unique that he did not understand.

This was not surprising. Laborers who managed to survive the Wilderness had to have something extraordinary about them.

Wang Zhen collected his thoughts. Right now, there was nothing more important than getting information about the blood forest.

The dean had already arranged for the teachers to lead students in purging the blood fiends within the city. According to Wang Zhen's plan, the entire city would be divided into twelve regions,

each handled by a division of teachers and students.

A few battles had already broken out today, with numerous casualties.

The dean had approached him, hoping to change the plan before being firmly denied. Wang Zhen's wish was for everyone to gradually adapt through this low-intensity battle. In the process, lives would inevitably be lost, but he had no other choice. Only through this could everyone be prepared to fight in more strenuous circumstances. At the very least, if that time should come, they would not crumble and scatter.

Ai Hui did not wear the mantis vest on the outside; he understood the logic behind hiding one's wealth.

After receiving the telepathy lotus seed and movie bean, he departed from the city alone. The number of participating elementalists was not small. Some grouped in threes or fours, while others decided to move independently as Ai Hui did.

Everyone's eyes gleamed brightly in their vigilance. One look and Ai Hui could tell that they were all seasoned warriors with rich experience. His eyes lit up; it was his first time seeing so many veterans within the city. Be it the magistrate court's guards or the teachers in Central Pine Academy, they were all rookies when it came to real combat.

Old hands were indeed different!

Ai Hui was confident in this operation.

With so many people participating, the investigation shouldn't be a problem this time. This was good for the guards in Central Pine City. Plus, having a large crowd would distract the attention of the other blood fiends.

When it came to understanding blood fiends, Ai Hui was better off than most. Since his time in the Garden of Life, he had been secretly observing them and their changes.

For example, the blood mantis was much stronger than the previous blood fiends. There were differences in its body characteristics as well. The blood fiends of the past had blood-red bodies, but the carapace of the blood mantis lacked the strong red hue and even appeared translucent. Its defense had risen as well.

Most elementalists had dismissed these subtle changes, but Ai Hui caught and remembered them.

The blood fiends were becoming stronger, yet even now, nobody knew the method behind their complete transformations and what advantages came with it.

He hoped to find a pattern in the blood fiends' metamorphoses.

As Ai Hui exited through the city door, the blood forest came into view, and he momentarily lost his spirit. The changes were beyond recognition.

With a quick scan across, the devilishly bright red expanse seemed boundless. The formerly azure skies were now contaminated by a dull layer of crimson—it was eerily frightful. The towering, dense, and thick forest… it was like an impenetrable wall of red, blocking out all attempts to peer inside as though concealing a terrifying secret.

Ai Hui stood in a daze for a few good minutes.

His hair stood on end, and a chill ran through his body. He simply could not imagine the force that could create this insanely warped sight before his eyes.

He finally understood why the mayor wanted to spend so much time and effort to obtain the secrets within the blood forest.

Seeing everything, his thoughts were exactly the same as the mayor's. Something frightening was definitely brewing within the forest.

They must find out!

Ai Hui inhaled deeply to warm his cold body. The fear in his eyes receded slowly, his pupils regaining their cool, dusk-blue color.

He stepped forward and advanced firmly towards that towering, blood-red "city wall."

Ai Hui knew the region well; it was the path he took to reach the Suspending Golden Pagoda. After walking here countless times, he naturally became familiar with it. Yet even then, the sight before him was extremely foreign now. What happened to the pagoda? This thought flashed across his mind before he re-focused fully on what was before him.

He stopped at the edge of the forest.

Dense weeds, about two meters tall, obstructed his path. The leaves were like swords, and the red edges were fine and piercingly sharp, reminding Ai Hui of the fangs of dire beasts.

Ai Hui could no longer recognize what breed they once were.

The other elementalists entered by flying, but Ai Hui did not do so. Blood fiends were sensitive to elemental energy, so flying would easily alarm them. Of course, master elementalists were strong and had their own methods of handling them, so he didn't worry. He was of a lowly position; it was of no use to say anything, and he wasn't someone to meddle in others' businesses anyway.

After finding a more covert location, he took off his jacket, revealing the red mantis vest underneath.

Ai Hui brushed the weeds aside with his Dragonspine Inferno and unhesitantly felt his way in. The brush was thicker than he thought because ten meters in, still all he saw were weeds. The red plants were tough, and parting them took a lot of effort. With his sword, he sawed off a small section. The leaf snapped, and fresh

red juice oozed out with a familiar, sweet fragrance. Ai Hui noticed that the smell had become more concentrated.

After a few minutes, the color of the cut leaf dulled before withering into a gray. A light touch, and the leaf scattered into ashes.

Ai Hui was painstakingly careful to avoid getting the juice on himself. He was suddenly reminded of Zhou Xiaoxi and felt pity. He couldn’t help but sigh. Such a strong elementalist, elite of the Thirteen Divisions, and he died so unreasonably.

Advancing, the lush weeds became more sparse about a hundred meters in. Recalling the topography from before, he knew the way into the forest was just in front.

Ai Hui warily pinched and broke a telepathy lotus seed into pieces.

Nothing happened.

A haze passed through his eyes. Indeed, the telepathy lotus seed had disconnected, verifying one of the magistrate court’s conjectures. Fortunately, the court had considered this and specially provided movie beans for them. Compared to the ones used by the training hall, this one was for military use. Recording images no longer required the cumbersome pod, and the visuals were clearer.

He prepared the movie bean before continuing forward. Everything was going smoothly so far. While there hadn't been any results, the same could be said for accidents as well.

As the surrounding weeds became increasingly sparse, towering trees began to appear before him.

He was dumbfounded.

Over fifty meters in height, the towering trees were so thick that several people would be needed to span the trunk's circumference. Misshapen tree tumors and strips of twisted vines filled it, seeming to wind around the trunk but also somehow embedded within. The foliage was thick like felt, covering the sky completely. Roots hung down like that of a banyan tree, their ends deeply secured into the ground.

Suddenly, a blood-curdling screech sounded from the front.

Ai Hui quivered.

He carefully parted the roots before bursting forward full-speed.

Countless hanging roots from a tree had coiled themselves around an elementalist, his skin pricked by small, fine needles.

The following scene changed Ai Hui's expression greatly and sent a chill down his spine.

The tree roots became clear, and the blood-like red juice pumping within flowed into the elementalist's body continuously. The elementalist's shrieking came to a sudden stop. His panic-stricken face slackened, and he looked on in relish with a drunken expression. His body was like a fully-inflated balloon, while his veins were fully visible in the skin that was now transparent.

The towering tree let out a crashing rumble.

Ai Hui felt his blood run cold. He became aware of the whole tree trembling. The vines around the trunk became translucent as well, like human veins through which red juices flowed. The tumors on the trunk seemed to come alive as well, like many distorted and terrifying faces.

Until now, Ai Hui had assumed he had already experienced the worst the Wilderness had to offer, but he was proven wrong. He had been ridiculously wrong.

He pinched the movie bean with trembling hands that exposed his current dread.

He breathed deeply, continuously, in an attempt to control and calm his state of mind.

No need to look; there wasn't any hope left for that elementalist.

And Ai Hui, with his sharp senses, realized the astonishing

changes occurring in the elementalist's body.

Wild animals became blood fiends from the blood poison's infection. What about humans? Would they become…

Blood people?

Ai Hui couldn't help but shiver.

Could such a monster still be called human? Completely transformed blood fiends did not lose consciousness—rather, they became stronger and more agile. What about blood people? What would become of them?

Ai Hui's fear heightened. Blood fiends were already frightening enough to send them fleeing.

If blood people… with the intelligence of a human and the body of a blood fiend…

Ai Hui suddenly thought of the blood poison's name—God of Blood. Were they trying to create another variant of human?

No, impossible!

No one could do it!

Ai Hui's body turned cold as aggressiveness emerged in his eyes. He held on to an additional smallsword before throwing himself forward with all his might.

Bang!

The elementalist's brain exploded, red juice spraying high like a fountain.

Whatever juice ended up on the tree trunk or leaves was absorbed immediately.

The tightly coiled roots loosened, dropping the pale, lifeless corpse on the ground.

Ai Hui relaxed a little.

"Tell me, you killed one of my subordinates. How are you going to compensate?"

An indistinct voice echoes in his ears without warning. A faint fragrance entered Ai Hui's nostrils and a warm breath landed on his neck.

Ai Hui's pupils shrank as the hairs all over his body stood on end.

Chapter 167: Reunion

Thanks to the sword embryo, Ai Hui had long become accustomed to having control over the surrounding movements. His six senses were sharper and better than most master elementalists'. Even the high-altitude, noiseless blood bats could not escape him.

But the voice behind him was like a ghost appearing from nowhere.

He detected nothing until he heard it.

He was shocked, but his real-life combat experience benefited him at such a time. Before his brain had time to process the situation, he had already launched his Dragonspine Inferno behind him out of instinct.

But it was empty. The Dragonspine Inferno caught nothing.

"So it's you, One Thousand Yuan boy." A lady's sweet, sticky voice sounded from before him.

Ai Hui raised his head. He knew not when, but a woman dressed in red smiled at him while standing on the branch that had entrapped the elementalist. She sat down easily, her red dress like a waterfall.

"It's you!"

Ai Hui was utterly shocked. It was the same lady in red whom he had met in front of the noodle shop.

"Seeing an old friend makes me so happy." She looked Ai Hui up and down with excitement. "Those who came before were either old or ugly; you look the best. See, you didn't pay me, but I said you're pretty."

Ai Hui's mental state was highly tense. The lady in red had unfathomable powers. Plus, it seemed…

His gaze fell on the branch below her. The tree roots which had been so wild before were now quiet and placid. But recalling how they had sucked that elementalist dry earlier, the sight before him frightened him still.

His throat dried up and his heart pounded increasingly fast, but he forced himself to remain calm. "Who are you?"

"I'm a beauty!" the lady answered matter-of-factly before blinking. "Didn't you say that? Beautiful as a fairy."

She then shook her head, feigning sadness. "Men are heartless, forgetting what they've said just a few days prior? Indeed, if you want to trust a man's words, you might as well believe that there's a ghost in this world. Spending a thousand yuan is useless!"

Finishing her sentence, she was unable to restrain a smile.

Ai Hui did not relax in the slightest. The tree roots remained still and the surrounding forest was quiet, but the pretty and flirtatious lady before his eyes was immeasurably powerful. Her laughter tinkled like silver bells, reverberating around the woods.

“You planted the blood poison?” Ai Hui swallowed his saliva and kept his cool.

“I’m not that capable.” The lady looked Ai Hui up and down again before continuing, “Blackie died in your hands, right? I smelled his scent on your body earlier.”

“Blackie?” Ai Hui opened his eyes wide and dared not loosen up.

“The blood fiend baby that I’m keeping. It’s a very powerful bat.” The lady was doubtful. “How strange. You’re not that strong, so how did you kill Blackie?”

Ai Hui’s scalp started to feel numb. He finally understood why he met her in front of the noodle shop. She was trying to track down that blood bat!

“Whatever!” The young lady stretched. “You killed Blackie, so you must be more powerful. I only like powerful things! Plus, how interesting—beautiful as a fairy! I feel so shy! Don’t worry, follow me in the future, and I’ll let you have a good life.”

Interesting… it was his first time being called interesting.

Ai Hui was not happy at all. Instead, he was trying to find an opportunity to escape, but the situation was not in his favor.

Her power was unpredictable. He was unable to detect her presence even when she was close by. The same was true for when she flew up to the branches. Moreover, the surrounding roots and vines did not affect her, but they were fatal to him.

Then the dense weeds, thick like walls, were natural obstructions blocking his path.

On his way here, he had carefully avoided the weeds' serrated edges when pushing through. The moment he got cut meant a dead end for him. There was absolutely no antidote for the blood poison at this point.

The hope for a direct and successful escape was very slim.

As for any regrets he had over his decision to risk his life like this, it was meaningless to think of it now.

He was thankful only that the lady did not attack him directly. Perhaps she had insufficient experience, perhaps it was deliberate, or perhaps it was a game to her. No matter the reason, stalling for time was a good option in his current situation.

There was no lack of strong elementalists this time. If they happened to pass by, he could take the chance to escape.

All right!

Ai Hui's mind was turning rapidly, but his face showed no sign of it. Rapidly formulating a plan, he initiated, "Why are you guys doing this?"

"Why?" The lady in red asked naively, "Then why are you training?"

"To control my own destiny," Ai Hui responded.

"Control your own destiny?" The lady in red gave a blank stare but soon started laughing happily. "I like this saying! Indeed, you're worthy of being my subordinate. How interesting."

"And you guys—why?" Ai Hui asked in a low tone.

"Only God can control his own destiny." The lady in red looked Ai Hui over again, her gaze flickering. "How can ordinary beings struggle free from fate's stocks and chains? Of course, they can choose a better lock. For example, becoming my underling will ensure a bright future. Think about it? I like it when people act according to their wishes!"

"And then I'll be sucked dry like him?" Ai Hui replied coldly while pointing at the desiccated corpse on the ground.

“You killed him.” The lady’s smiling face was like a flower. Seeing Ai Hui’s look of disbelief, she continued unhurriedly, “Although he was trapped, it was actually his good fortune. Do not look down on these bloods. They are the spiritual essence of countless blood insects and beasts, and maybe a thousand or ten thousand of them entered his body. Don’t you think that’s good fortune? If he had survived, his strength would have increased exponentially, much faster than your training. Are you moved? Do you want to control your own destiny? How can you do it without power? I can give you power—much more than what you have now! How about it? Are you moved?”

Hearing this, it was as if raging waves had hit his chest. He was no longer able to remain calm. “You guys swallowed all of the blood insects, treating them as nutrients, and gather them into a human body....”

“A human body? No no no!” The lady in red shook her head like a rattle-drum. “No one can endure the power of so many blood insects. Even God can’t do it. Humans mustn’t be so greedy!

“Maybe you have the gift!” She sized Ai Hui up before continuing, “I’ll let you try later, don’t worry. I’m very generous. If you want it, I’ll give it to you.”

The lady gave a charming expression and winked at Ai Hui.

Ai Hui finally understood why the forest was so deathly still and silent. He felt a chill in his body, an incorporeal hand firmly strangling his throat.

The events currently unfolding completely subverted all of his knowledge.

Clap!

A sound like that of a watermelon splitting suddenly rang out from deep within the forest.

“Hey, these people have such weak essence.” The lady was clearly displeased. “They can’t even endure such little blood spiritual force? Useless. God wouldn’t even want such rubbish. The greatest contribution trash can make is to become nutrition for a genius. Sigh, there’s enough nutrients but not enough talents. Hey, are you a genius?”

Ai Hui sharply inhaled in an attempt to restrain the throbbing of his heart.

That exploding sound couldn’t have been an elementalist who had failed to endure the infusion of blood spiritual force....

Wait!

Blood spiritual force!

Ai Hui soon grasped the crux of the matter. Blood spiritual force —spiritual force! Having disappeared for over a thousand years,

the once-resplendent and magnificent spiritual force had actually reappeared....

This isn't real....

"Spiritual force, you said?" Ai Hui asked hoarsely. His state of mind was utterly unguarded at this point. He even forgot about escaping.

Because of spiritual force.

He knew what its reappearance meant.

His sword techniques and secrets could be of use. The countless sword manuals he had read that were covered in grime and regarded as rubbish could be useful again. Their dust-covered brilliance, scattered into years of legends and folklores, would reemerge on this land.

The extinct cultivators would reclaim their world. Be it the Avalon of Five Elements or the Wilderness, neither were worth mentioning in front of them. No one would be able to stop the cultivators.

Impossible...

"Yes." The lady smiled. "Looking forward to it? Cultivation is becoming a long-forgotten term. Look, we're finally able to recover our legacy. How about it? Are you all fired up? Probably getting

impatient....”

All of a sudden, with great strength, Ai Hui charged towards Central Pine City like a launched arrow.

“Men are full of empty words!”

The indistinct voice travelled from behind Ai Hui. Her breath was fragrant and stuck close to his body.

A cold ray flashed past Ai Hui’s eyes. Without a sound, the Dragonspine Inferno struck backward from his left underarm.

Fell through again!

Damn it!

Things were not looking good. Without waiting for Ai Hui to turn around, the voice sounded once again from the back of his neck.

“Know why I’m talking to you for so long? So much trash is bothersome enough, so I’m just waiting for these trees to recover, and I can prepare a big meal for you. Am I not especially nice to you?”

Without warning, Ai Hui braked and with the power of both legs, lunged himself backwards with all his might.

[Arching Fish Back]!

But it was once again fruitless. Ai Hui's heart dropped.

The voice came from behind his neck again. The lady stuck onto him, her puffs of breath landing just above his ears.

"Although I like it when people act according to their wishes, if they can't do it, I find it tasteful to force myself upon them too. One Thousand Yuan boy, I will make you comfortable."

Ai Hui's body tensed as suddenly, his body was bound by the root-like objects. The immense force made his body lose all control, and with how tightly he was wrapped, he felt himself losing consciousness.

.

Was he going to die?

Or become a monster?

Ai Hui's limbs were ice-cold.

Chapter 168: Blood Refinement

All was black before Ai Hui's eyes. His whole body was tightly tied up and he felt like a dumpling. Even his mouth was tightly bound. Luckily, his nose was not completely blocked or else he would have suffocated. That would have been depressing.

He felt like he had soared up into the clouds and was flying amongst them, floating unsteadily as he rose and fell.

Was this how flying felt?

It wasn't actually a wonderful experience.

Initially, panic and dread had occupied his mind and body, but as time passed, he struggled free from the fear. As the fear lessened, so did the panic. Panicking wasn't useful at all since it would not loosen the vines wrapped around his body.

During his three years in the wilderness, the biggest change Ai Hui had undergone was learning how to fight with his all despite the danger he may be in; if he could not alter the situation, he just had to face the problem with a calm and collected mind. Every day was like a roulette on a gambling table. No one knew what would happen in the next second, so whether or not you were willing and whether or not it was alterable... you would have to face the result eventually.

Supposing ignorance was commonplace, what one sees is merely a watery reflection on the surface. In that case, only when

undisturbed can one see more clearly.

Having calmed down, Ai Hui's brain recovered from its frozen state and his thoughts started spinning once again. Every sentence from the conversation he had just had with the lady in red re-emerged in his mind. He suddenly felt that what she had said was fragmented and dishonest.

If the so-called blood spiritual force really was spiritual force, then they had no need to resort to these tricks. A blood catastrophe was completely unnecessary.

Cultivators had many advantages over elementalists.

The lady in red and her fellows had killed so many people, enough to cause terror in the populace; however, at the same time, they had created countless nemeses who were now seeking vengeance. Threats were a weapon for the weak. The truly strong would have no need to talk; they would simply crush their opponents.

If this group of people were really so strong that they were superior when compared to everyone else, then there should have been no need to create such a dramatic bloodbath.

There was a ninety percent chance that the lady in red was lying.

Beautiful ladies are indeed liars, Ai Hui cursed silently. Unable to resist, he decided to give the lady in red a name to express his

disdain.

What to call her? Oh, how about One Thousand Yuan? Need “One Thousand Yuan”! Pfft, what’s the use of being pretty? She was only worth one thousand yuan anyway!

Ai Hui drew circles and cursed non-stop in his heart, but his brain did not stop thinking.

It looked like the blood wave was caused by One Thousand Yuan and her group in order to create a batch of powerful soldiers. Currently, this method had proven to be greatly flawed since it had extremely high requirements for the test subjects.

All the elementalists had failed.

He wasn’t sure if even he could succeed. Okay, he probably couldn’t. He wasn’t that gifted.

How pathetic. He was going to become a firecracker, explode into meat dregs, and die without an intact corpse. So ugly…

So, what if he did succeed? He would become an evil monster. How could he bear killing Fatty and the rest? Fatty and Bangwan owed him so much money too, it would be such a loss. Oh wait, he still owed the noodle shop lady eighty million yuan. Forget it, a monster had better prospects…

Disorganized and scattered thoughts filled his brain.

He was even more pessimistic when it came to Central Pine City's future.

What if One Thousand Yuan used this kind of method to create a whole bunch of blood fiends? Not many were needed, trouble ensued even if only ten tiny, weak insects combined their strength.

Yeah, he had probably reached the depths of the forest by now.

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

The gentle voice of the lady in red sounded like the eerie sneer of an executioner to Ai Hui's ears.

He was going to leave this world without becoming an elementalist after all!

He ridiculed himself for wanting to control his own fate. His so-called dreams were about to die.

Okay, it would be considered a blessing if he could just live for a few more years. A tiny small-fry like him had no rights to complain, right? It was destiny, huh... he could only accept his fate and surrender his life!

Please loosen the vines gripping my mouth...

Hey, hey, hey, I'm about to surrender. One Thousand Yuan, oh, no, beautiful fairy, I'm going to surrender...

Beautiful commanding officer, your loyal subject is here...

Hey, hey, hey...

The lady in red did not read his thoughts. "I find you interesting. You must be different from the other bunches of trash, so I prepared a big meal for you. You'll enjoy it very much. When you get used to the taste of blood spiritual force, you'll know why it's a world delicacy. Be good, it won't hurt at all."

Using her gentle fingers, she pulled a tree root as thick as a thumb over to Ai Hui and stuck it into the hollow of his left palm.

Ai Hui's body stiffened and an intense pain made him blank out.

He'd had no time to react. The red, hot-as-lava juice entered his body ceaselessly through the wound. He wanted to struggle, but was unable to move at all. He wanted to shout, but not a single sound came out.

The seemingly boneless, soft white palm grabbed Ai hui's right hand. Seeing the tightly held sword, she tried to take it away. Who knew that Ai Hui's grip was so strong. She was unable to take the sword from him no matter how hard she tried.

"I like stubborn people." The young lady laughed and said, "The

more stubborn, the more suffering they'll feel. Blood spiritual force is the best wine and pain is the best accompanying dish. The more you taste, the more pain you experience. My first subordinate is indeed different from the rest. Such happiness."

Pop.

Another tree root was stuck into the back of Ai Hui's right hand.

The lady in red looked at Ai Hui, who was tightly bound, with great satisfaction. Countless tree roots swarmed in from all directions, like snakes lured by the smell of fish, towards Ai Hui.

Each surrounding tree was taller and more solid than the others. The more roots they had, the more concentrated the tumors on the trunks were. The tumors seemed to take the form of human faces and started turning and twisting.

"I'm really looking forward to it."

More and more tree roots started pricking Ai Hui's body and a steady flow of fresh red juice entered within him. Ai Hui's body twitched uncontrollably and eventually became still, like a senseless corpse.

Time passed slowly. An hour went by and Ai Hui still showed no signs of bloating.

The lady in red was beyond pleased. She muttered to herself,

“Indeed, I’ve picked the right subordinate.”

She appeared to be admiring her best work of art.

Suddenly, movements were detected from far away and her expression changed, but then quickly returned to her usual pretty and flirtatious face. She wrinkled her brows slightly and pouted her rosy lips. “How annoying, finding trouble at such a time.”

Nevertheless, she got up and took a last look at Ai Hui, who was wrapped and bound tightly by countless tree roots.

She crooked her head and thought for a while before disappearing in a flash.

Having flown over ten meters, she came to a stop in front of a big tree. It had dense tree roots and a suspended rattan ball.

The lady revealed a hurt expression, but still clenched her teeth and slashed across the roots supporting the rattan ball. The dense roots broke without a sound and the ball fell to the ground.

The lady flew over and landed in front of it, then peeled it open carefully.

A mastiff dizzily crawled out from inside.

This mastiff was big, around the size of a young horse. The soles

of its feet were blood red and its claws looked like they were dyed the same color. The fresh, blood-like red extended upwards from its claws in a meandering design before forming complicated patterns on and throughout its ash-gray body.

The mastiff's eyes were like red rubies, pure and sparkly.

It bared its fangs, displeased by the disturbance; however the moment it saw the source of the disturbance, it lay on the ground obediently.

The lady in red felt some heartache. The mastiff was only half complete. Disrupting its blood refinement process like this meant that it would be difficult for the wolf to be strengthened in the future.

She quickly recovered from it however. No matter how gifted a blood fiend was and no matter how much refinement it underwent, it would never be on par with a human. There were too many things a blood fiend couldn't do.

"Greenie, come here." She waved her hand and floated towards where Ai Hui was.

The mastiff gave a low howl and followed closely behind.

The half-complete, blood-refined mastiff had gotten quite a lot stronger, satisfying the lady in red. Its huge body made no noise while it sprinted as fast as lightning.

In this blood forest, the mastiff's power wasn't something average elementalists could fight against.

"Greenie, guard him. You can kill whoever comes close." The lady in red instructed the mastiff while pointing at Ai Hui, who was suspended in midair.

It let out a whimper and licked the lady's palm.

"Be good, Greenie. When I'm done settling the problem, you can continue your blood refinement." The lady in red caressed its head with much tenderness.

Having said that, she flew up and away.

She was incomparably fast; a red blur flashed across the sky as she flew by.

The mastiff laid down below the suspended Ai Hui.

Ai Hui felt as if he had fallen into lava; his whole body was burning. The tremendous pain washed over his whole body like the tide. The torment was so intense and distinct that it was like a purgatory he couldn't escape.

The red-hot lava-like juice was naturally fond of elemental energy. It charged from all directions to wrap tightly around Ai

Hui's recently activated limb palaces and natal residence.

Ai Hui's elemental energy was slowly swallowed up as the red juice seeped into every single piece of flesh within his body. Every bit of elemental energy was its prey.

It was like elemental energy's mortal enemy. It existed to destroy elemental energy and the five residences and eight palaces.

Ai Hui's limb palaces and natal residence started to crumble bit by bit.

The leg palaces lost ground, followed by the hand palaces. Intense anguish and despair enveloped Ai Hui. The price he had paid, the time and effort he had put in to activate the residences and palaces, and his dream were slowly being swallowed by the red juice right before his eyes.

The indignation...

When his natal residence was drowned in the red juice, an unprecedented hopelessness devoured Ai Hui. At this moment, his heart's despair far exceeded any physical pain.

He had fallen into the darkest abyss, where not a trace of sunlight or hope could be felt. Only boundless and profound gloom and cold pervaded.

Just die like this, he said to himself.

Chapter 169: Go to Hell!

Ai Hui's mind was in a state of disarray as his body was thrown into chaos. Nothing was left of the hand and leg palaces that he had worked so hard to develop. Within his body, the rest of the palaces which had not yet been activated were also being destroyed as the blood poison permeated deep into his muscles and bones, thoroughly changing their structure and composition from within.

His entire body became afflicted with the blood poison. Every last part of him, both internal and external, was triggered by the blood poison into undergoing a raging, clamorous transformation.

There was, however, one spot which remained completely calm amidst the chaos his body was experiencing - the sky palace between his brows.

The blood poison was viciously potent, quickly overcoming his natal residence and activated limb palaces. Only his sky palace remained as stable as a rock. Blood-red traces surfaced on Ai Hui's face, spreading to his tightly shut eyes.

The space between his eyebrows remained unaffected.

The sky palace remained impenetrable as the blood poison surged, surrounding it completely.

Blood-red traces appeared and vanished on different parts of his body, as if red bugs were congregating and scattering as they ran around.

The mastiff raised its head and looked at Ai Hui before letting out a couple of envious howls, after which it lazily lay back down on the ground.

Several kilometers away from where Ai Hui was held.

The lady in red looked at the wretched-looking man in front of her with a frown. “How did you end up like this?” She berated.

The man was around forty-years-old and had a distressed look on his face. He looked like an honest, down-to-earth farmer with messy hair and a body littered with scars.

“Met with stiff resistance.” The man laughed bitterly as he spoke.

“Powerful people?” asked the lady, her pupils contracting. “A Grandmaster?”

“If there had been a Grandmaster you wouldn’t be seeing me here,” said the man, clearly in pain. “I was unlucky, running into a group of elites from the Thirteen Divisions during my blood refinement. I killed a couple of them, but there was one that was particularly hard to handle.”

The lady in red heaved a sigh of relief. “As long as it wasn’t a Grandmaster.”

They were at their most vulnerable during blood refinement, as it caused their strength to fall drastically. Meeting enemies during this period would spell disaster.

She calmly asked, “You’re still going to continue with blood refinement?”

The same pained expression never left the man’s face. “I don’t really have a choice. I have to spend more time and effort since I’m not as talented as you are.”

While the two appeared to chat familiarly, they were constantly on guard, keeping some distance between each other.

Both of them were from the same faction, but were otherwise hardly related. They were teammates as well as rivals. The lady in red wasn’t expecting the man to persist with blood refinement.

Blood refinement was a risky endeavour and every step taken must be done with the utmost care. It was, in a sense, like walking on thin ice. Since they were essentially just beings of flesh, there was a limit to how much blood refinement their bodies could take. This was especially the case with the Blood of God, which was potent beyond compare. Blindly partaking in blood refinement would only result in death by fulmination.

Amidst the blood disaster, Blood of God could easily be obtained. Its power was as vast as the ocean. Rather than blind refinement, control was the key to handling it.

The man in front of her was Tian Kuan. Since they had first met and until now, she had never seen a different expression on his face. It was the same pained expression day in and day out. He was the oldest and least talented among them. Nobody knew why he was chosen and nobody seemed to think highly of him.

Nobody had expected him to last this long, to still be standing after so many others had been eliminated. Tian Kuan was one of the six who managed to persist through the many rounds of blood refinement.

By that point, the others had learned to stop belittling him. After all, every one of the six were impressive individuals who had had to step over countless corpses to get this far.

The lady in red hadn't thought that Tian Kuan would actually incorporate Blood of God into his body.

Since the six of them had all long reached their limits, they would have to train and further increase those limits before they could continue with subsequent rounds of blood refinement. Fervently proceeding with training carried insanely high risks, which was why the others were instead planning to use the Blood of God to create new subordinates first.

Tian Kuan's actions were simply insane!

The lady in red decided that she had to re-evaluate Tian Kuan. Overly zealous individuals either died at the hands of their zeal or went on to have shocking achievements.

“You could always capture some students or wild beasts,” the lady in red said flatly. “Perhaps then you won’t end up all desolate again.”

“Forget it,” rejected Tian Kuan with a shake of his head. “I’m used to working alone.”

The lady in red looked up at the sky and said, “Here come your little maggots.”

The sky above the sea of blood had become slightly more dangerous due to the increasing numbers of blood-refined avians. As more of them appeared, the elementalists would have to take greater caution before soaring into the skies above the Induction Ground. For now, however, the number of blood-refined avians was still relatively low and did not pose that much of a threat to elementalists who were using the azure wings.

The skies were still safer than the forest below.

The lady in red kept her calm gaze on the approaching elementalists. A few elites from the Thirteen Divisions weren’t a threat to her. If Tian Kuan hadn’t been engaged in blood refinement, he’d have easily been able to handle these maggots as well.

“You owe me one,” said the lady in red casually.

“Although I’d much rather not, I don’t think I have any other choice,” answered Tian Kuan. “Why can’t they just let me practice in peace?”

“You only have yourself to blame,” said the lady in red with a sneer. “Do you really intend act alone forever? Are you sure you can keep going by yourself?”

“I’m used to being alone,” Tian Kuan said flatly. “Furthermore, such power is better kept to myself.”

“You can’t possibly use up that much Blood of God by yourself.”

“Interacting with others takes too much effort.”

“Don’t mess up the grand plan.”

“Don’t worry, I don’t intend to die.”

The two of them tactfully cut the conversation short, neither could go on with it. The lady in red couldn’t understand how Tian Kuan could possibly attempt to absorb something so powerful on his own. She became more guarded against Tian Kuan, noting that he was someone who simply couldn’t trust others.

She would never have trusted him anyway.

Bloodshed and betrayal were the keys to survival for the

remaining six.

The lady in red stopped trying to convince him. The two of them weren't exactly close to begin with. Besides, being able to survive until now meant that all of the six weren't normal at all. How could she expect any one of them to not have their own quirks?

Li Wei pressed on with all his might as flames of hatred burned hot within his eyes.

His comrades had sacrificed themselves to see this mission through, leaving Li Wei as the sole survivor. He felt an incomparable sorrow deep within his heart. Despite having become accustomed to death over his years out on the frontlines, this was the first time he had experienced the loss of an entire squad. His comrades' sacrifices were definitely not in vain, as they had rained hell on their enemies.

Li Wei had a death wish. He wasn't afraid of dying as long as he could slay every last one of them!

His skin possessed a metallic luster, making the exposed parts of his body look like they were cast out of iron. Some of the white marks that lined his entire body were faintly stained with blood, a remnant of the tragic battle he had just survived.

The sturdy, bronze-colored azure wings spread wide open. While the Copper Bone Bird wasn't particularly fast, the majestic wings enhanced Li Wei's presence while his murderous intent permeated the air around him. He looked just like an ancient god of war, as

described in the legends of old.

“What an impressive aura!” The lady in red’s eyes lit up in excitement. She couldn’t help but call out in praise, “I didn’t expect such a heroic-looking figure to be in the Infantry Division. I imagined that you were all just lumps of dull metal.”

With his usual pained expression, Tian Kuan said, “Enough with your wild thoughts and quickly finish him. We shouldn’t let him live since he managed to injure me.”

The lady in red felt it was a pity that she had to kill him, but Tian Kuan had anticipated her thoughts and left her with no other choice. It wasn’t worth offending Tian Kuan over an elite from the Thirteen Divisions. Since the two of them were of equal standing, a favor from him was like having a valuable ally.

Alright, since you’re giving me the chance to earn a favor, I’ll grant you a straightforward death.

The lady in red lunged forward, appearing to turn into a wisp of red smoke. The speed with which she charged towards Li Wei made it impossible to pinpoint her location at any given moment.

Li Wei was surprised to discover that his target had an ally.

Pressed for time, he immediately reacted by sending a crushing blow in the direction of his opponent. His palm, suffused with metallic luster, surged forward like an advancing tank.

“Not quite skillful enough.”

The lady in red giggled as she appeared behind Li Wei.

A soft, delicate palm pressed silently onto Li Wei’s back.

Li Wei’s pupils dilated rapidly. A tremendously violent force erupted from behind him.

Pop!

He spat out a mouthful of fresh blood. Knocked out of the air by what felt like a large hammer, Li Wei fell towards the ground like a whistling meteorite.

A sinister smile crept across Tian Kuan’s mouth, completing the malevolent look on his face.

He froze when he saw Li Wei’s figure appear out of nowhere, growing larger by the second.

Li Wei’s hate-filled eyes burned with satisfaction. He grinned, revealing two rows of snow white teeth stained with streaks of blood.

Li Wei had known that he was in trouble the moment he laid eyes on the lady in red. Despite that knowledge, he had had no

intention to retreat whatsoever.

He clasped his hands together and raised them high above his head like a hatchet, ready to strike. A brilliant silver light shrouded his clasped hands as every last bit of elemental energy he had left was channeled into them. The metallic luster that coated his skin became even more dazzling, appearing more like a coat of silvery liquid.

“Go to hell!”

With that cry of rage, Tian Kuan’s terror turned into despair and the lady in red’s face turned ashen.

Tian Kuan’s despair instantly transformed into ruthlessness. A blood red pattern appeared on his forehead like a banner.

The lady in red stared at Tian Kuan in disbelief.

The ever distressed-looking Tian Kuan had practically transformed into a different person. His aura was definitely not the same as before. Tian Kuan’s usual hunched back was replaced by an upright posture and his skin was washed over with a warm glow. He had transformed from a farmer into an elegant prince.

His lips curved into a sinister smile.

Lightly stretching out his arms, Tian Kuan gracefully resisted the war god’s silver hammer with his palms.

The sneer on Li Wei's face was frozen solid in shock.

The silver glow in his hands exploded, unleashing a powerful blast with the force of a thousand suns.

The explosion sent the now unconscious Li Wei flying through the air like a ragdoll. He had lost both of his arms in that final attack. Blood dripped continuously from his tattered sleeves, scattering throughout the air.

"I'm going to kill you!"

Amidst the heat of the explosion, Tian Kuan's hysterical cry pierced through the air.

A figure dived down from above the clouds, catching Li Wei with amazing accuracy before soaring back up above cloud cover with unprecedented speed.

The lady in red subconsciously moved, but stopped herself upon remembering the blood marks between Tian Kuan's eyebrows.

Then she suddenly felt a terrifying disturbance and the color drained from her face.

That location… it was where she had come from!

Chapter 170: The Sword Embryo and the Bandage

The sword embryo's throbbing felt like an endlessly beating heart.

The complex pattern of blood traces was rapidly shifting over Ai Hui's entire body like a swarm of poisonous ants. Large quantities of blood poison were transforming Ai Hui's body from within, and a faintly sweet scent wafted from his body.

A violent, murderous power was steadily produced by his blood-transformed body.

Blood traces from all over his body began to compress, aggregating towards the space between his eyebrows. They became sleeker and more elegant, with increasing activity. As they surrounded a blank space between his brows, they took on the shape of diminutive flames.

The blood traces seeped towards his brow, appearing as a thin, crimson layer on Ai Hui's skin. The sweet scent became thicker.

As if covered by a thick bloody paste, the sword embryo's activity slowed.

An unceasing torrent of blood poison flowed more furiously from within the tree roots.

As soon as the new blood traces appeared on Ai Hui's body, they quickly rushed towards the space between his brows. It was as though a powerful magnet resided there, attracting them.

At that moment, the inactive bandages on his arms noiselessly coiled its way around Ai Hui's body. As if controlled by invisible hands, the Blood Bandages worked in synchrony, with one end wrapping down from his forehead and the other starting from his feet. Layer by layer, he was tightly wound, and in the blink of an eye, Ai Hui's entire body was bundled up tightly like a dumpling. Interestingly enough, the Blood Bandages deliberately avoided wrapping the tree roots.

A single blood trace appeared on Ai Hui's palm, penetrating through his skin and surfacing on the outside of the bandage.

As if it had a life of its own, the blood trace moved along the bandage towards his forehead.

It seemed like nothing had changed.

The blood trace became duller upon moving past Ai Hui's elbow.

Extremely fine veins appeared along the bandage, absorbing blood from the blood traces as they moved along; their bright red color gradually faded until they turned gray.

The sword embryo that had almost been overcome by the immense pressure from the blood traces sprang back to life upon

sensing that victory was now possible. It momentarily paused all activity when the blood traces surfaced on the bandages before restarting its throbbing pulse one second later, speeding up to an even higher level of activity than before. The cold, frigid sensation of metal pervaded the air atop Ai Hui's brows.

At the same time, an attractive force was present.

Droplets of colorless light were extracted from the blood traces, amassing into a glinting needle mid-air before penetrating back into Ai Hui's body. A soft sword cry rang out from the point of entry.

The blood traces had lost all luster as well as color.

While moving along the Blood Bandage, the blood trace's color began to dull, and by the time it reached his shoulders, nothing was left of the bright red that once illuminated it.

The ashen remnant then became a thin wisp of smoke, dispersing in the air and vanishing from the bandage.

Ai Hui's mummified body was heavily emitting gray smoke.

In contrast to the blood poison's sweet scent, the gray smoke had a raw, fishy odor. Upon contact with it, the tree's blood-red leaves rapidly turned to ash.

The thick shroud of smoke engulfing Ai Hui looked like a gray

cocoon from afar.

Looking up, the mastiff grew suspicious. The transformation occurring had proceeded well beyond its understanding, but it seemed to sense something monstrous lurking within the cocoon of gray smoke. A primal fear rose from within it.

It retreated a few steps, scanning around for further signs of change. Ascertaining that all else was fine, the mastiff lazily relaxed on the ground once more.

A while later, Ai Hui drowsily regained consciousness.

He had been awoken by an unusual sound. It was rather unfamiliar yet strangely familiar as well. Listening intently, he finally recognized the sound of a sword being unsheathed, only he had never before heard of a sword being unsheathed for such an inordinate amount of time.

Was he dreaming?

He often had such dreams back in the swordsman school. He would dream of tall, exquisite palaces that reached into the clouds, of swordsmen who could fly on swords, or of majestic mountains that cast their shadows onto heavenly sword formations, as well as all manner of interesting spiritual beasts…

He would dream of mystical swordplay manuals, the flying swords of legends—even dreaming of those figures who once

dominated the entire world.

It had been a while since he had such bizarre dreams. The naive and curious minds of the young would inevitably be eroded by reality and time.

The mental state of humans were associated with time and even more closely with experiences. Ai Hui had never experienced a childhood filled with imagination; instead, he had lived an unimaginable life.

Ai Hui's first reaction to the unceasing sounds was to think that he was dreaming.

He soon realized that he wasn't in a dream, however.

The sword embryo's throbbing was more forceful than he had ever experienced. It emitted a ceaseless cry, and he could feel the muscles in his body resonating along with it.

The darkness before his eyes perhaps played a role, but Ai Hui noticed that he was acutely sensitive to bodily sensations. He could feel a stream of energy swimming around his body like a large school of fish, and strands of it seemed to resonate with the sword embryo, trembling slightly with each pulse.

Ai Hui was startled by this sensation. What is that?

Never before had he experienced such energy strands. He could

sense the power contained within them, but it was completely different from anything he had ever encountered.

Well, Ai Hui quietly mocked himself, he hadn't exactly experienced other kinds of power either.

But he was certain that this torrential energy was vastly different from the elemental energy he had been developing. Could it be a new kind of elemental energy?

Ai Hui was uncertain. In matters of elemental energy, he had only recently graduated from being a complete rookie.

There existed too many kinds of elemental energy that he had yet to see.

Now was not the time to think about such things, however; he had to find a way to escape.

Finally sober, Ai Hui attempted to struggle his way out but soon realized that he had lost all control over his body. He could not move an inch.

Ai Hui remained composed. He had, after all, been through scenarios far worse than this.

He repeatedly encouraged himself—there had to be a way out.

He started by inspecting his body closely, becoming increasingly bewildered as he went on.

It wasn't surprising that the five residences and eight palaces within his body were completely wrecked; he still had an impression of what had happened before losing consciousness.

Were these strands of energy a part of the blood poison?

No, the blood poison was much more impetuous, more unrelenting. But the strands of energy flowing through his body were mild, even when compared to the metal elemental energy he had personally developed. These energy strands clearly originated from outside his body, outside....

Ai Hui suddenly realized that he was wrapped in the Blood Bandage. How strange, he thought, as his consciousness effortlessly slipped into the Blood Bandage.

He felt as if he had entered a different dimension, one filled with the scent of blood.

A thick sea of blood stretched as far as his eyes could see. Immense waves rose up across the violent sea, as if a monster had awoken from deep within to taste the air with its tongue.

Across the sky, streaks of blood traces flowed like rivers of blood.

Every time a tongue of blood lapped at the sky, glowing essences

from the blood traces were dragged down like a waterfall. Ai Hui's heart started palpitating. He felt his mind quiver at the strange, bloody sight, and he had to fight to maintain his consciousness.

Seeing the blood essences made him extremely uncomfortable; he did not like it one bit.

The blood traces in the air started to fade.

In his mind, the past forms of Blood Bandages flashed. He further affirmed that the Blood Bandage was an artifact from the Cultivation Era. It was truly a time of unimaginable power when even a nameless, tattered piece of cloth could possess godly powers.

Witnessing the blood traces' transformation, Ai Hui finally understood where the strands of energy came from.

The Blood Bandage had extricated the blood essence from the blood poison, allowing the sword embryo to then draw closer the energy remaining in the blood poison.

Ai Hui recalled the words of the lady in red.

Blood spiritual force.

He had promptly dismissed her words as a lie, thinking this so-called blood spiritual force had to be similar to spiritual force only in name.

But what if the blood poison was truly blood spiritual force?

Thinking this triggered his memories, and the phrase “blood refinement” surfaced from his memories.

If the blood poison truly was blood spiritual force, then it had to be closely related to blood refinement. How had the Blood Bandage been able to absorb the reddish blood essence? As an artifact from blood sects, it had to be capable of devouring objects related to blood.

Many swordplay manuals mentioned blood-refinement techniques as well as the blood sects that had been considered heretical during the Cultivation Era due to their cruel practices. They often used spiritual beasts in their trainings, or in more extreme cases, human sacrifices. For many years, blood sects were seen as those dabbling with demonic forces, untolerated by orthodox sects.

The Blood Bandages had to be devouring the blood-related components from the blood poison.

Subtract the blood-related components from blood spiritual force and what do you get?

Ai Hui had a tremendous revelation.

Spiritual force!

This answer left him stunned for a good few minutes. Never in a million years did he imagine that he would come to such a conclusion, but he simply could not think of any other answer.

Spiritual force, it's really spiritual force! The force that led to the blossoming of the Cultivation Era, the force that had supposedly vanished from this world.

Ai Hui was exhilarated.

He was no longer able to remain calm. The glory of the Cultivation Era was still deeply imprinted in everyone's mind. With this spiritual force, he could undoubtedly execute all of the mythical sword techniques found in the manuals of old.

Ai Hui forced himself to calm down.

Regardless of the spiritual force's power, he was still in a precarious situation.

He attempted to activate a sword seal, hoping to escape through such means. However, he soon realized his naivety. The spiritual force within his body had a mild reaction, but he quickly found that he had no means of circulating it. After all, Ai Hui had never nurtured the channels required to utilize spiritual force. The cultivators had a strict system comprised of spiritual force, its corresponding channels known as meridians, spell seals, and lastly, one's sword. If any one of these components were missing, nothing could be achieved.

Ai Hui laughed bitterly before regaining his composure. He reminded himself once more that he had survived far worse than this.

Levelheaded, Ai Hui began to explore ways to utilize this spiritual force.

Chapter 171: The [Big Dipper] Predicament

The authenticity of this “spiritual force” was questionable since this was, after all, purely Ai Hui’s deduction.

Regardless, the most pressing issue now was to figure out how to make use of it.

It was a pity that his five residences and eight palaces had been destroyed.

Prior to becoming unconscious, Ai Hui had been devastated to see his efforts and dreams ruined. Waking up now, however, his feelings of disappointment had faded substantially, leaving only survival instincts ablaze.

No, the five residences and eight palaces were not completely destroyed. There was one that remained intact—the sky palace, which housed the sword embryo.

He would be thinking of ways to repair the other seven palaces, but that was only if his natal residence had not been destroyed. That was the foundation for the system of five residences and eight palaces as well as the basis for nurturing elemental energy. As long as the foundation was intact, there were ways to fix the rest of the system. But the destruction of his natal residence meant that there was no way of restoring the other seven palaces.

Hang on, the rest of the seven palaces....

A thought formed hazily, and he couldn’t quite make it out.

Seven palaces… seven palaces….

Ai Hui racked his brains before finally realizing what he had been reminded of.

Didn’t the [Big Dipper] require seven palaces?

A sudden surge of inspiration led him to the answer; it was indeed the [Big Dipper]. Having only recently acquired the technique, Ai Hui had yet to carefully examine it. The [Big Dipper] he received was the original version left behind by its creator, containing all of his experiences and a massive amount of information beyond Ai Hui’s comprehension.

He hadn’t thought to use it so soon, originally intending to digest more of the information before taking that final step.

Nobody would rush to utilize an original inheritance. It was a waste of the precious knowledge contained within, and it was also exceedingly dangerous to do so.

Anyone with some semblance of common sense would understand the principle of taking things one step at a time. To receive such tremendous knowledge as a greenhorn was analogous to a traveler dying of thirst throwing himself against enormous waves. Not only would he be unable to quench his thirst, he would

end up drowning as well.

But time was a luxury he could no longer afford. He was at the crossroads between life and death.

There was no time to hesitate, nothing further to consider.

Without further deliberation, Ai Hui's mind delved into the [Big Dipper]. The feeling was akin to piercing the surface of a ball of water.

What came out, however, was not a stream of knowledge but a raging torrent of information. Ai Hui was unable to react in time and became overwhelmed.

He soon fell into a trance-like state.

A flood of specious arguments, paradoxical thoughts, and familiarly unfamiliar feelings engulfed his mind. After what seemed a long period of time, his consciousness emerged from what had been another person's world and drifted along like a wilted leaf upon a vast ocean.

While his consciousness was exploring the [Big Dipper], the strands of energy flowing through his body were stirred up.

The once peaceful flow began to surge ceaselessly.

While Ai Hui was in a trance-like state, the sword embryo within his sky palace also became active.

Its throbbing slowed in tempo but grew in strength. It pulsed like a bass drum, booming steadily and causing the energy strands within his body to quiver with each beat.

The “spiritual force” began to move from his lungs, completing one Circulatory Cycle Revolution before seeping through his arm and into the Dragonspine Inferno. It then proceeded to flow back into his body.

If Ai Hui was conscious, he would have been shocked to discover that this “spiritual force” circulated through the same route as the elemental energy.

The returning “spiritual force” possessed a sharp flavor and was completely absorbed by the sword embryo.

As the sword embryo grew in size, the sharp beats became even more pronounced.

Once it reached the size of a soybean, the sword embryo halted its expansion but not the absorption of “spiritual force.” On the surface, a faint pattern appeared where the sword embryo was located, and as it continued to absorb the “spiritual force”, the pattern became more distinct and refined, ultimately culminating into the shape of a longsword.

Only after the mark of the longsword appeared did the sword embryo halt the absorption of “spiritual force”. The sharp aura shrouding the sword embryo quickly became more restrained as the sword embryo whirled about within the confines of the space between Ai Hui’s eyebrows until it looked just like an ordinary seed.

The returning “spiritual force” still flowed through the sword embryo, but it appeared to have lost all interest. As the Circulatory Cycle Revolution continued, the outflow of “spiritual force” from the sword embryo was now equal to the “inflow.”

There was an increase in the amount of “spiritual force” entering the Circulatory Cycle Revolution. With each revolution, the “spiritual force” passed through the sky palace as well as the sword embryo.

And each time it passed through the sword embryo, the “spiritual force” became thicker and its razor-sharp flavor enhanced. The Circulatory Cycle Revolution gradually slowed.

After countless revolutions, the “spiritual force” had become as viscous as magma. Imbued with a dense sword intent, the “spiritual force” flowed slowly back into Ai Hui’s lungs. It moved along the inner walls of his lung residence and covered the entire area with a thick layer of “spiritual force.” The constant influx of “spiritual energy” accumulated within and thickened the inner walls.

With each Circulatory Cycle, the thick “spiritual force” passed through the sword embryo and accumulated a stronger sword

intent. The thickening layer of “spiritual force” silently transformed Ai Hui’s lungs.

The “spiritual force” seemed to have a naturally nourishing effect for flesh and blood. A portion of it penetrated the inner walls of Ai Hui’s lungs and began to grow with the force of life. Once Ai Hui’s dilapidated lungs were fully saturated with “spiritual force,” they began to steadily rejuvenate.

The sword intent embedded within the “spiritual force” was also absorbed by his lungs.

After its destruction, his lungs had been like bellows riddled with holes, but now that they were repaired, the bellows were once again capable of generating air flow. Ai Hui’s breathing caused his lungs to rhythmically expand and contract, increasing the speed at which the sluggish “spiritual force” was flowing.

His left hand’s palace was repaired at the same slow pace. Soon enough, the palaces in his right hand, left foot, and right foot were also restored to their original states as they similarly absorbed the sword intent.

Unlike the palaces within his four limbs, Ai Hui’s gate, earth, and sea palaces had never been activated. Even so, the potent blood poison had thoroughly spread to every part of his body, bursting into his three unactivated palaces and destroying them as well. The blood poison had evidently done him a huge favor.

The “spiritual force” entered the three palaces in accordance

with the Circulatory Cycle Revolution, flowing along the damaged areas and thoroughly coating them.

The gate, sea, and earth palaces were like three damaged reservoirs being patched up by the “spiritual force.” Never would Ai Hui have imagined that his gate, sea, and earth palaces would be activated in this way.

This was likely a great example of the rise after the fall.

Once the seven palaces were fully formed, Ai Hui’s body convulsed.

He had been floating about, bobbing up and down within the vast sea of someone else’s world like a duckweed without roots. And then without warning, the floating duckweed began to take root, the familiar experiences and information finally finding an inlet. The body that had been unfamiliar one moment became familiar the next.

After activating the [Big Dipper]’s inheritance, a tremendous wave of information and past experiences had crashed directly against his mind, knocking him senseless. What was more frustrating was his lack of seven palaces—without it, the knowledge couldn’t be absorbed.

It was similar to having sudden realizations about swordplay without having a sword on hand. The torrent of understandings and past experiences were stoppered without outlet, further clogging his mind.

It wasn't until the "spiritual force" miraculously repaired his natal residence and seven palaces that the deluge of past realizations and experiences found their resting ground.

If Ai Hui were to regain consciousness now, he would be shocked to discover that his seven palaces were vibrating at the same frequency.

The intensity of the vibrations increased, provoking the "spiritual force" within his body to enter state like boiling water.

Ai Hui's consciousness was restored amidst these vibrations. He immediately felt as though he would explode!

The "spiritual energy" within his body was entering a state of overflow as the seven palaces' synchronised vibration caused the "spiritual energy" to gush.

A terrifying presence seeped from Ai Hui's body.

The mastiff raised its head, uneasily clawing at the ground with its front paw. It stared at the mass of gray smoke and uttered a low and ferocious growl. It could sense something amiss.

Ai Hui's aura was slowly growing in strength.

Like startled snakes, the bandages wrapped around Ai Hui's body

hastily returned to their original positions with a whoosh.

The tree roots that stabbed into Ai Hui's body turned to ash, revealing Ai Hui who looked good as new without a single scratch to be seen on his body.

[Big Dipper]...

Ai Hui finally understood in part why the [Big Dipper] required seven strong palaces. By the time he had snapped out of his thoughts, it had already been too late. And while the past realizations and experiences contained within the [Big Dipper] inheritance were partially eroded from time, they were still immensely powerful.

Before he could even react, his instinct had already taken control from his entire body.

The seven palaces vibrated more intensely while his aura strengthened at an insane rate.

The mastiff stared with horror at the mass of gray smoke. It unwillingly feared and revered the aura that was emitted from within the smoke.

Its ferocious snarling had long turned into frightened whimpering, and its limbs were quivering in fear. The mere presence of whatever was within the smoke was terribly suffocating, completely suppressing the mastiff. Even the blood

traces on it began began to destabilize.

Ultimately, fear overcame its obedience to directives as it quickly escaped.

Far away, the lady in red turned pale with shock. Equally far but in the opposite direction, Central Pine City was shaken as well.

The mayor and the dean immediately took to the skies and were soon followed by all elementalists in the city who had azure wings. Aghast, they stared into the depths of the blood forest.

Shi Xueman was filled with fear as wel.

The terrifying presence was like a ferocious beast that crawled out from the depths of time, bearing power that was as awe-inspiring as it was frightening.

The intensely stifling atmosphere clung heavily onto everyone.

In the depths of the forest, Ai Hui's muscles were convulsing wildly within the cloud of gray smoke. Suspended midair, he felt as though he was about to explode.

The [Big Dipper] was formidable and violent, but it was the "spiritual force" within his body that made things much worse.

If it really was spiritual force...

Ai Hui forced his eyes open. He was already at his limit, and intense rays of light were practically spilling out from his eyes. If spiritual force was truly within his body… exactly how many times stronger than elemental force was it?

Damn it, I've never learned this in class! The teachers never taught this!

Ai Hui clenched his teeth, coming up with a plan to use the simplest and most brutish method to release the overflowing "spiritual force" within his body.

Ai Hui adjusted his posture midair, facing his back towards the ground while clutching his sword against his chest. Like a meteor falling from the heavens, he threw himself towards the ground with heavy force.

With this posture and the spiritual force's strength, how much power would be unleashed from executing the [Arching Fish Back]?

The wind whistled in his ears.

Ai Hui's eyes widened as a single thought filled his head.

Damn it, something I haven't learned again….

The moment he felt something against his back, his body instinctively arched. The violently surging “spiritual force” rushed to his back.

The crude move that he had practiced countless times—

—— [Arching Fish Back].

A tremendous explosion burst forth.

Chapter 172: A Giant's Back

Driven by his overwhelming anger, Ai Hui expelled from his body the "spiritual force" that bloated him into the ground. His entire body felt an indescribable relief at once.

Boom!

The earth shook and the mountains trembled.

The ground directly beneath him was immediately reduced to a fine powder. The surrounding soil arced into the air, blasting in all directions. Everywhere else around him was in complete chaos.

More fatal was the mass of gray smoke that exploded without warning.

Accompanied by a terrifying hiss, the gray cloud burst through the area like a hurricane.

The gusts of air was a sickle of the grim reaper, withering and killing all that it passed.

The mastiff broke into a run. The gray cloud behind it was a monstrous tsunami, crushing everything in its way.

One after another, rattan balls flew across the mastiff's field of vision. Already possessing a trace of self-awareness, the mastiff

knew that each rattan ball contained a blood fiend like itself.

A gray tint diffused like an ugly and dreadful mold over the rattan balls. The breathing inside them became increasingly weaker until they disappeared altogether.

One of the blood fiends inside a rattan ball seemed to sense the danger and attempted to break out. But as the gray cloud swept past, its body suddenly froze as the ash-gray spread over its body. When the last vestiges of red were overtaken—bang!—the blood fiend exploded into a cloud of gray dust that scattered through the air.

The fear in the mastiff's eyes grew deeper. As the blood traces on its body began to crack and a red glow appeared underfoot, its running speed inexplicably increased.

From overhead, the circular, gray cloud could be seen spreading outward in ripples of death that expanded without end in the sea of blood.

Not a single area of the red valley was spared from the immense and terrifying circle of death that was now more than ten kilometers in radius.

In the center of the gray circle of death was a pillar of gray smoke that reached into the skies. It was congealed without sign of dissipating and resembled an enormous gray dragon that bared its fangs and brandished its claws.

The mastiff had escaped all the way to the mountain peak, its body drenched in blood. Fresh blood continued to ooze from its skin, making it look like a bloody wolf. It panted heavily and stared firmly at the figure that climbed its way out of the soil from the middle of the gray valley.

Fear, there was only fear in its eyes.

The pillar of smoke that resembled a gray dragon rose straight into the sky, becoming the backdrop of that figure's frail back. At that moment, from the mastiff's perspective, that figure was a grim reaper who had just climbed out of a hellish swamp to arrive in this world.

Ai Hui felt dizzy and weak as he picked himself up from the ground. The soil beneath his feet had become a powder, with texture smoother than flour's.

He surveyed his surroundings with a blank look on his face.

The dense, blood-colored vegetation had disappeared, replacing his surroundings with the gray wilderness. All plants had been reduced to thick piles of gray residue, as if burned and reduced to ashes.

Only now did Ai Hui realize that he stood in a valley.

Were all these caused by him?

He could not believe his eyes. After a second-long daze, he jumped up and broke into a run.

Why wouldn't he flee now while One Thousand Yuan was away? Should he wait for her to come back before starting his escape?

The fighting capabilities of One Thousand Yuan were enigmatic and unpredictable. He definitely did not want to encounter her again.

Ai Hui began to notice some changes in his body, the most obvious being his running speed which was much faster than it had been in the past. The forest was deathly silent, sending a shiver down Ai Hui's spine.

He did not want to stay an extra second in this godforsaken place.

Once he oriented himself in the right direction, he ran with all his might. He was pleased to encounter not a single blood fiend on his sprint through the forest. When he thought of how One Thousand Yuan was able to amass the power of blood fiends, however, he trembled in fear and sped up.

In the skies above Central Pine City, the mayor and the dean were observing the distant pillar of smoke with ashen faces. Not only them, but the faces of the elementalists behind them had similarly drained of all color. Central Pine City was in a state of hysteria.

The explosion just now resembled thunderclaps that rattled the earth and shook the mountains. The entirety of Central Pine City had felt it.

“I wonder which expert did that?” The dean gulped his saliva anxiously, a hopeful look flickering in his eyes.

If there was an expert that took action, they were saved. There was one in Central Pine City, but he was an embroidery expert, not a fighting one.

Given that there were a few youths of nobility in the city, it was not surprising for an expert to show up and save them.

Wang Zhen appeared calm, but the fear in his eyes revealed the uneasiness within. “If there’s an expert passing by that area, then he will definitely come here as well. We’ll find out soon enough.”

He was not as optimistic as the dean.

His mind was filled with images brought back by the scouts who had been in the forest beyond city limits. So far, only three scouts had returned, and only one managed to successfully deliver the images. The elementalists who had signed up for this mission numbered forty-six.

Of the forty-six people, only three survived. Wait, four people survived.

Wang Zhen spotted a figure, vaguely familiar, running out from the forest. Soon enough, Wang Zhen identified him as Ai Hui, the young fellow with remarkable swordsmanship.

He noticed that Ai Hui was covered in grime and dirt, appearing extremely pathetic. He seemed to have suffered a lot, but since he was able to survive and return, his luck was rather good.

When Ai Hui dashed out of the forest and saw the city gate of Central Pine City, he almost cried tears of joy.

Soon, an elementalist came from the city to receive him. “Did you manage to succeed? Where’s the movie bean?”

“Movie bean?” Ai Hui laughed bitterly. “I wasn’t able to record anything; I was busy running for my life.”

The goddamned One Thousand Yuan!

If not for that goddamned girl, he would have completed his mission. But he was so busy running for his life from One Thousand Yuan, how could he have had the time to use the movie bean? When Ai Hui recalled the events, however, he felt that it had not been an easy task for him to survive. His regret at not using the movie bean then lessened significantly.

The elementalist’s disappointment was displayed openly. He flew towards the mayor while shaking his head. The information he obtained from Ai Hui regarding the situation inside the forest did

not differ much from the other survivors' accounts.

The elementalist still passed Ai Hui his reward. The mayor had really paid a hefty price for nothing....

The reward was exceedingly generous. When Ai Hui saw the contents, his previously gloomy face brightened instantly. The reward nearly met all of their requirements.

Wang Zhen knew from experience that the more deaths there were, the more generous the reward had to be. Otherwise, who would sign up next time?

Upon returning to the Vanguard Training Hall, Ai Hui received cheers from Shi Xueman and the others. From the day of his departure, they had been frightened and anxious, and though it had only been for a short period of time, they felt as though a year had passed.

When they saw Ai Hui safe and sound, they finally laid their worries to rest. Shi Xueman, Duanmu Huanghun, and the others suddenly realized that Ai Hui had naturally become their indispensable pillar of support.

Fatty, who was training hard off to the side, wanted to come over to join them as well, but Ai Hui gave him a hard stare and yelled, "Continue your training! Don't stop!"

Fatty's face drooped immediately.

“What’s going on outside? What happened just now?” Duanmu Huanghun could not help but ask. He was curious and worried.

His query immediately caught everyone’s attention. They were all frightened by the events happening outside the city.

Shi Xueman noticed the grime and dirt on Ai Hui’s body. Though he was not injured, she could tell that he was exhausted. She said concernedly, “Go and rest first. We’ll talk again after your rest.”

Duanmu Huanghun felt somewhat embarrassed and agreed with Shi Xueman.

Ai Hui was indeed weary. The whole day had been a complicated and ever-changing experience with multiple struggles with death. Now that he had survived the calamity, exhaustion surged through his body like a flood to the point that he could not keep his eyes open.

After saying goodnight to everyone, he returned to his room and fell asleep immediately.

.....

In the sky above the valley.

When the red-dressed girl rushed to the scene and saw the gray

valley below her, her face turned ashen, and she clenched her fists tightly. She did not register the pain of her nails digging into her flesh.

All of her efforts, all gone.

Besides the mastiff she had been forced to interrupt, every outstanding blood fiend she had found nearby were in this valley.

To ensure security and secrecy, she chose this valley to carry out the blood refinement. She had an exacting nature that kept her from approving of most blood fiends around her, and so her standards for choosing them were high. In order to search for these blood fiends, she had spent an inordinate amount of time and energy.

However, right now, nothing was left.

Gradually, her anger cooled. She knew clearly that fellow's capability. He could not have caused all of this.

She disliked the aura being emitted by the imposing and congealed pillar of gray smoke before her.

It came from not only the pillar of smoke but also the entire valley, and she loathed it.

She landed on the ground and lowered her body to observe the gray residue beneath her feet.

They weren’t ashes, she thought to herself.

For unknown reasons, she found this gray residue somewhat familiar, but still she hated them, more than she found them familiar in fact.

The surface of the entire valley appeared as though it had been plowed. With a solemn look, she approached the pillar of smoke. She clearly remembered that this was where she had carried out the blood refinement for that fellow.

She stopped in her tracks, noticing something strange beneath her feet. She lowered her body once more and grabbed a handful of soil. Her expression changed.

No gravel, stones, or anything solid—the soil in her hand was so smooth that it resembled flour.

She recalled that terrifying wave of energy. That surging force must have been directed towards the ground.

She could not imagine what kind of attack would cause this to happen. The sedimentary layer in the valley was not thick, and beneath it was a layer of hard rocks.

Suddenly, s he brandished her long, red sleeves.

Whoosh!

Howling gales swept through the valley, sweeping up the soil and gray residue into the sky.

The red-dressed girl expressionlessly brandished her sleeves continuously. Layer after layer, the soil left the ground, revealing the earth's crust before her.

Seven meters below the surface, there was an extensive hollow in the solid granite layer.

And in the middle of that hollow was a long trench nine meters long, scored with sections of deep gashes.

It was a back's imprint of the spinal column, and the varying indentations on the left and right of the trench were the back muscle imprints. They were extremely clear despite being engraved on a layer of solid granite seven meters below the surface.

The red-dressed girl was dumbstruck. She had thought it to be an ultimate move related to fists or legs.

It was actually the back....

What sort of move related to the back could hold such power?

A flurry of questions ran through her mind before she finally settled on one.

Who exactly was this fellow?

Chapter 173: The So-Called Master

Central Pine City was bound for disappointment. They had waited for a long time, but no master had arrived.

The dean looked down, revealing an unconcealed disappointment.

Wang Zhen was disappointed as well. However, his facial expression looked extremely calm. He glanced at the dean and said deeply, “Let’s go. We need to study the movie bean that was brought back and see what the situation is inside.”

The dean got ahold of himself and forced a smile.

In order to obtain this movie bean, they had suffered such a huge loss. Its value was immeasurable.

All the reputable and powerful individuals were gathered for this meeting. Wang Zhen clearly knew that if he could not get their support for the subsequent battles, Central Pine City would have no chance of surviving.

The enormous meeting room was fully packed, but at the moment, there was dead silence in the room.

The faces of those who participated in the meeting were pale-white. They were looking at the video on the screen with fear. It was as if a noose was tied around each of their necks, causing them

to have breathing difficulties.

Those hideous and sinister plants looked as if they were from another world. No, they were from hell.

The thick hanging roots of the trees resembled gigantic blood vessels. One could even see blood pumping and flowing within them.

A wave of alarmed cries swept across the meeting room. Involuntarily, some people even stood up in trepidation.

“Oh my god, what’s that?”

“Is it blood inside them? That’s too scary! Is this even considered a tree?”

Even the wood elementalists, who were used to seeing various weird plant species, had their faces blanch. Their eyes contained nothing but fear. It was almost like they could smell the strong and nauseous odor of blood just by watching the video. They could not understood why the plants outside of the city had become such monstrosities.

When everyone saw the densely-packed hanging roots rise up like a bunch of snakes and bind an elementalist, a cold shiver went down their spines.

A few chairs flipped over. Those who fell to the ground were

trembling nonstop with fear.

No one was laughing at these people because everyone was staring fearfully at the screen with their eyes wide open. Everyone finally understood why they suffered such a huge loss.

Initially, the elementalist that was bound by the hanging roots was struggling with all his might. However, as the red-colored liquid started to pump into him, his struggling became increasingly weaker. A red flush appeared on his face and his gaze became trance-like, as though he was enjoying the process. Unexpectedly, his mouth broke into a smile, a smile that displayed extreme pleasure and satisfaction.

The red liquid that flowed through the densely-packed hanging roots that were inserted into the elementalist's body glowed with a red fluorescence. As the glow reached his face, his smile became indescribably weird and sinister.

Everyone's heart stopped beating, as if their hearts were being tightly gripped by an invisible hand.

Their minds were blank and their hair stood on end. They had even forgotten to breathe.

Pop!

The sinister smile suddenly exploded in front of them on the screen. Everyone was dumbstruck. When they returned to their

senses, they saw brain matter and blood strewn all over the place.

Blargh…

Nearly half of the participants in the meeting covered their mouths and puked without pause. The entire meeting room was filled with the odor of vomit. However, at this moment, no one cared anymore. Those who did not puke stared blankly at the screen with deathly white faces. Their hands and feet were unconsciously trembling.

A lot of people wanted to escape from the meeting room, but their legs would not listen to them.

Wang Zhen had a solemn look on his face. He did not mock these people's reactions at all.

When he first saw this segment of the video, his reaction was not much better than everyone else's. He thought that nothing could frighten him since he, himself, had experienced bloodshed and numerous battles.

He had not realized how wrong and naive he was until today.

"Let's switch to a new meeting room," Wang Zhen told his subordinate.

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There was absolute silence in the new meeting room.

These reputable individuals were covered in vomit. Each of them was holding a cup of hot water, as if it would make them feel better. They were in despair and their faces were ashen.

“From what we observed, this should be the way they transform. Take note of the bulges on the tree branches. Did all of you notice that there are many bulges? When the hanging roots move, these bulges move as well. The wood elementalists who are studying this phenomenon think that these bulges are created when devouring blood fiends or blood insects. To be precise, the smaller and weaker blood insects will act as nutrients for the larger and stronger blood fiends’ transformation. This conjecture can be proven by the fact that our scouts did not discover any blood fiends or blood insects on their trip outside of the city.

Only the mayor’s voice resounded through the dead silence of the meeting room.

“Right now, it’s extremely possible that a batch of even more powerful blood fiends or blood insects are being created. That means, from now onward, we will encounter stronger blood fiends. Our situation will be even more challenging. The time that we will be tested is arriving soon,” Wang Zhen looked around the room and announced.

“Can’t we run away? Travelling on the ground might be hard, but what about escaping through the sky?” someone asked feebly.

“Where can we run to then?” Wang Zhen questioned back. “How big is the Induction Ground? Can we really fly out of here? Furthermore, we might encounter flying blood fiends. Don’t forget about the blood bat from before. If we lose the city walls, how long do you think we can last?”

The person who asked that question was dumbstruck. After some commotion, the room returned to its state of absolute silence.

The meeting was very successful. Wang Zhen’s suggestion garnered everyone’s support. They all knew that their individual powers did not matter at this crucial juncture. They could only unite and work together.

Upon seeing that everyone left the room in despair, the dean could not help but say to Wang Zhen, “By behaving like this, you will cause panic.”

Actually, the dean did not support the idea of letting these people watch the scary video. He knew how mentally weak these people were.

Wang Zhen did not seem to care. “If they panicking, let them. At this point in time, only panic can make them abandon those impractical thoughts. Otherwise, do you think they would put in the effort to fight against the enemy?”

The dean knew Wang Zhen was right, but he was still worried. “Panic will make them crumble easily.”

Wang Zhen turned his head abruptly and replied, “Do you know what you should do to survive on a battlefield? Don’t think too much and move forward. Those who crumble easily are fated to die. Who can do anything about that?”

The dean was silent.

At this moment, both of them noticed that two people were walking toward them. They were Han Yuqin and Mingxiu from the Jade Embroidery Workshop.

“Good afternoon, Master Han,” Wang Zhen and the dean greeted at the same time.

For those who became masters, people would add the title “Master” to their surnames as a form of respect.

Any master, regardless of their field, enjoyed an extraordinary status. Whether one was a dean or a mayor, he or she had to display a certain level of respect toward a master.

Even though they wished that Han Yuqin was a combat master and not an embroidery master,, they would not treat her with less respect at the current time.

Regardless of the field, a master had an extremely deep understanding of elemental energy. Naturally, Han Yuqin’s fighting capabilities would not be comparable to a combat

master's. However, her fighting capabilities would still be superior to an average elementalist's. An average elementalist's understanding of elemental energy could not be compared to a master's.

Even her disciple, Mingxiu, had rather terrifying fighting capabilities. Mingxiu was from a noble family. Her family had many talents and she had a very powerful elder brother. Previously, during the naked streaker incident, the fighting capabilities that Mingxiu displayed were so powerful that she struck fear in everyone's heart.

Han Yuqin and Mingxiu came here as the representatives for the Jade Embroidery Workshop. Wang Shouchuan did not come.

Wang Zhen admired them in silence. While one was old and the other young, these two women were still much more calm and composed when compared to the others, though they still looked somewhat afraid.

"Good afternoon dean. Good afternoon mayor," Han Yuqin greeted them back. She then sighed. "I didn't expect the situation to worsen to such a critical state. Mayor, you're right. Everyone needs to unite and work together if we want to possibly survive this ordeal. Mayor, feel free to use anyone from the Jade Embroidery Workshop, including Mingxiu and I. If you need us to do anything, feel free to tell us."

"Mayor, feel free to let us know if there's anything we can help with," Mingxiu added.

Wang Zhen was overjoyed at the good news and bowed. “Thank you Master Han and Miss Mingxiu!”

Previously, he did not dare to request help from the Jade Embroidery Workshop. How could he request for an embroidery master to fight on a battlefield? This would be disrespectful to her and he did not have the balls to do so. It was the same regarding Miss Mingxiu, he did not dare to ask her due to her status.

Right now, with the approval from both of them, he seemed to have gained two powerful allies.

“Mayor, you’re too courteous.” Han Yuqin continued to say, “I’m a complete stranger to fighting on a battlefield. However, if it’s about defending a city, I might have some ideas.”

Wang Zhen was surprised at these words, but he quickly said, “Master Han, please elaborate.”

Han Yuqin thought for a while before replying, “The first thing I can think of is a spell formation previously mentioned by my husband. The art of spell formation has long since vanished along with the Cultivation Era and I’m not proficient in it. However, the logic applied should be the same. If there’s a workable spell formation now, it would be [Elemental Energy Distribution-Connection Formation]. It’s somewhat similar to embroidery. The only difference is that we would treat the sky, earth, mountains, and rivers as the ‘cloth.’ The sky, earth, mountains, and rivers might be too vast, but if we treat the city as the ‘cloth,’ I might be

able to do it.”

Wang Zhen was stunned. He was looking blankly at the calm-looking Han Yuqin.

Treating the city as “cloth”... Was this the lofty quality of an embroidery master?

Currently, Han Yuqin’s petite and aged stature became imposing in his heart.

“Master Han, please give it a try!” He submitted willingly to her and bowed deeply.

The dean was also convinced and bowed. “Master Han, please give it a try!”

.....

Outside of Central Pine City.

The red-dressed girl looked at the rattan balls that were hanging on the tree in front of her. She specially found this batch of blood fiends from up to 100 kilometers away. This time around, she did not care about the quality of the blood fiends, but rather the quantity.

The turn of events in the valley had completely disrupted her

plan. Central Pine City was no longer her ideal choice.

She was not Tian Kuan.

She did not have much time to waste. Otherwise, she would not be able to catch up and would lag behind everyone else.

However, she refused to forgive herself for leaving without doing anything.

As such, before she left, she prepared a huge present for Central Pine City.

She flew up in the sky and looked at the distant Central Pine City. The image of a young man appeared in her mind, and she bewitchingly smile. “I will be back for you.”

She turned around and disappeared, like a wisp of ethereal red smoke.

Chapter 174: The Blaze Of The Winter

It was extremely pleasing to have a moment of enjoyment in the midst of critical danger and a moment of rest in the midst of bustling preoccupation.

Lying in the hotspring, Ai Hui's face was filled with pleasure and enjoyment. There were no clouds, so twinkling stars completely covered the vast night sky. Such rarely-seen good weather. Ai Hui was facing the sky and his body was totally relaxed, floating on the water like a piece of wood.

Ai Hui sighed silently. He did not know whether or not he could see such an enchanting night sky in the future again. Even if he could, he might not be as tranquil as he was now.

After the joy of surviving the calamity gradually disappeared, he realized that the situation he was in had not changed much. He knew much more and became more worried. When he heard Shi Xueman and the rest discussing about when the blood catastrophe would end, a bitter smile appeared on his face.

End...

If it was a natural disaster, he would not spend much time contemplating even if the situation was very dire. However, the blood catastrophe was a man-made disaster. This was a conspiracy that had been prepared and plotted for a long time. The conspirators behind the scenes had planned meticulously for a war.

Between the two sides of the war, one side was well-prepared and the other side was ill-prepared. Even an outsider like Ai Hui could sense that the outcome of the war was obvious.

His thoughts were drifting.

The dying scene of the elementalist exploding in the forest appeared in his mind. If One Thousand Yuan was not so picky and had not pumped so much blood poison in them, would they have survived? Using this method, could she create an army of... hmm, what should they be called? Blood men? Snowmen? (A lame joke, snow and blood sound the same in Chinese)

Oh, they would most likely be called blood elementalists.

If he encountered a large group of blood elementalists in the future... all he could do was surrender!

It was best not to provoke beautiful women...

Ai Hui's thoughts drifted extremely far away.

One Thousand Yuan did not seemed to be bullsh*tting about the blood spiritual force. Even though he had not confirmed whether or not it was "spiritual force," he felt that his body was alright at least.

The [Arching Fish Back] had completely exhausted the “spiritual force” in his body. Previously, he was still worried that his five residences and eight palaces, wait no, the seven palaces would have problems. His lungs and the seven palaces had been utterly damaged by the blood poison. There were some parts where flesh was starting to grow back and recover. However, most of the damaged parts were healed by the “spiritual force”.

Using an analogy, this “spiritual force” was like a magical glue, while Ai Hui’s lungs and seven palaces were like dilapidated houses. Right now, a thick layer of magical glue had been applied on these houses. By doing this, the walls of these houses were renewed. The previously leaking houses were no longer leaking.

Currently, Ai Hui was most worried about how long this magical glue would last and whether or not it was reliable.

Even if it was not reliable, there was nothing he could do now.

He had already gotten Lou Lan to examine his body. Lou Lan felt that what was going within his body was a miracle. He admitted he would not have the capability to repair such devastating injuries, and he was sure that not even masters could do it. However, he was still optimistic toward Ai Hui’s conditions.

All right, actually there were not many times that Lou Lan was not optimistic....

Ai Hui soon put down his worries. Even though there might be hidden dangers within his body, he was at least completely all

right now. Not only that, he had also opened up seven palaces, and his fighting capabilities had advanced by leaps and bounds.

He did not even know whether or not he would live past tomorrow, so why should he think so far ahead?

Suddenly, Ai Hui's nose twitched and his eyes widened as he collected his thoughts.

Lou Lan's elemental soup!

All his worries were immediately thrown away. Ai Hui almost scrambled out of the hotspring, put on his clothes, and rushed to the front courtyard. He remembered when he first came back to the training hall, he had thrown his rewards to Lou Lan.

Wang Zhen was generous with the rewards as he wanted people to continue signing up for his missions. As such, there was a lot good stuff among Ai Hui's rewards.

When Ai Hui was signing up for the mission, he chose elemental food ingredients. Thus, all of his rewards were related to the ingredients of elemental food. These ingredients were so valuable that Ai Hui did not even dare to dream about having them in the past.

For example, there were two fiery-winged snake eggs. Their specification was three years, which meant that they had been stewed under lava and absorbed the underground heat for three

years. The fiery-winged snake was a kind of extremely vicious and poisonous dire beast. It could fly and its senses were exceptionally sharp, making the process of stealing its eggs very difficult.

There was one hind leg of herb-cured heavenly-eyed yak. The heavenly-eyed yak was an extremely powerful dire beast. Its hind legs were the strongest part of its entire body, which were considered the most important part as well. The hind legs were marinated using the herbs that were meticulously prepared and mixed. Next, they were air-dried and could last for 100 years. As the cured hind legs aged with the years, the infusion between the meat and the herbs would become stronger, improving the quality of the meat.

As for the fragrant lotus golden toad, it was first prepared by sedating the golden toad using a special method and put inside a lotus flower that had bloomed. Then, elemental energy was used to close up the lotus flower, wrapping up the golden toad. The golden toad would enter a state that was similar to hibernation. Its toxicity would be absorbed by the lotus flower as time passed. The water elemental energy of the lotus would gradually seep into the golden toad as well. It would take at least six months to produce a fragrant lotus golden toad.

There were a lot of other valuable ingredients included as well...

Regardless of the types of ingredients, all of them were extremely expensive. Even Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun were stunned by the ingredients.

Lou Lan was a connoisseur in this aspect and gave a reasonable

estimation of the cost of these ingredients. The total price of just these three ingredients alone was estimated to be at least 10,000,000 yuan.

Everyone's attention was caught by the fragrance of the elemental soup. All of them stared blankly at Lou Lan when he brought out a huge cauldron of soup.

It was far too tempting!

After taking in a sniff of the unique fragrance, everyone became hungry.

Those who were thin-skinned, like Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun, tried to hold themselves back. However, one could see that their throats were gulping nonstop. Those who were thick-skinned, like Jiang Wei and Wang Xiaoshan, had already gathered around the cauldron. Fatty looked even more unsightly with his saliva drooling all over the place.

Ai Hui dashed forward like an arrow.

"Everyone has a share!" Lou Lan chuckled.

Shi Xueman was extremely jealous of Ai Hui. How come this fellow had such a perfect sand puppet? Could the food from her home even be compared with Lou Lan's elemental soup?

Gurgle gurgle gurgle. Her stomach kept on growling. A flush of

embarrassment appeared upon her face.

In front of Lou Lan's unrivalled elemental soup, everyone looked extremely obedient. All of them held an empty bowl in their hands as they waited anxiously for their turn to get the soup.

It was unknown when exactly Lou Land had become a chef. He was wearing a huge apron and a chef hat while holding an enormous ladle, making him look extremely imposing!

The first bowl belonged to Ai Hui. When Ai Hui got his share of soup, he immediately drank it with a silly smile on his face.

When the rest heard Ai hui's slurping, they began to gulp their saliva frantically. Brother, can't you be more quiet? Do you have any dining manners? Why is the soup being distributed so slowly?

Those who had received their shares of soup eagerly ran to one side and started drinking it.

Even Shi Xueman, a goddess who was refined and raised from a strict family background, took a big bowl of soup and squatted on the floor like a country bumpkin to drink her soup. She did not even bother to use chopsticks or care whether it was too hot. Mouthful by mouthful, she slurped the soup, completely disregarding her image.

It was too delicious!

Standing at end, Fatty could already form a sea with his saliva.

“Lou Lan has prepared something special for Fatty!

Lou Lan brought out a pot of bright red soup from nowhere and passed it to Fatty.

Fatty was stunned. The soup in front of him did not have a single piece of meat or a whiff of fragrance. It was not even producing steam. However, upon taking a second look, he could smell a whiff of fragrance. Whoa... the stewed meat... The meat had stewed for so long that it was going to melt soon. If he was to take a bite of it...

Gurgle!

He swallowed his saliva, pointed toward the inside of the huge cauldron, and said weakly, “I want to drink that.”

“Fatty’s body constitution is different from everyone else. He does not need to strengthen his body. What he needs is to strengthen his fire elemental energy. This was specially and carefully prepared by Lou Lan. It costs more than 5,000,000 yuan,” Lou Lan explained.

5,000,000 yuan....

“Five million yuan?” Fatty’s eyes widened as his body trembled.

“Yes, there are two fiery-winged snake eggs in it!” Ai Hui affirmed.

“Drink! I will finish it all!” Fatty replied without any objections.

5,000,000 yuan worth of soup! He must definitely finish it!

Fatty picked up the pot and started gulping the soup. The soup was smooth and did not taste bad at all. God d*mnit, one mouthful of this soup cost at least 10,000 yuan…

10,000 yuan, 10,000 yuan, 10,000 yuan….

Fatty put down the pot unsteadily. Even someone like him, who could eat and drink a lot, had a dazed expression after downing the entire pot of soup in one go.

Now you know how good I am! Fatty was somewhat pleased with himself. Usually, Lou Lan would only give Ai Hui such look of admiration.

Hahaha, you have finally witnessed what I am capable of!

Fatty burped and a blank look suddenly appeared on his face.

“Amazing!” Lou Lan’s tone was filled with amazement. “Fatty, you can actually finish the entire pot of Dragon Soup in one sitting. You’re really amazing. Lou Lan had thought that you would need

one week to finish it.”

Shi Xueman, who was contemplating whether or not to lick the bottom of the bowl, was stunned when she heard the two words “Dragon Soup.”

Not only her, even Duanmun Huanghun and Sang Zhijun simultaneously stopped what they were doing and looked at Fatty in wonder.

Ai Hui looked at everyone’s reaction and took a look at Fatty. Fatty was in a daze. Ai Hui could not help but ask, “Lou Lan, what’s Dragon Soup? It’s name sounds rather imposing.”

“Ai Hui, it’s a kind of soup that’s specially for fire elementalists. It uses fiery-winged snake eggs as the main ingredient, with the addition of 12 different types of heavenly fire peppers. It’s a special type of elemental food. Most people feel it’s actually a type of elixir. If it’s considered as an elixir, it’s name would be10 Oil Drops, which implies that one can only drink 10 drops of it in one sitting. It’s extremely beneficial to fire elementalists, but not a lot of people dare to drink it. That’s why I said Fatty is really amazing!”

Fatty’s body felt like it was boiling. His body became bright scarlet, resembling red hot chili peppers. Even his hair turned red.

“As for why it’s called Dragon Soup, it is because dragons can spit fire.Dragon Soup is extremely stimulating. If one finishes it, he or she can spit out fire easily. Of course, Lou Lan doesn’t think this is

a good name since there are many kinds of dragons. Fire-spitting dragons are only one of the many types....”

Burp. Fatty burped again.

Boom!

A stream of blazing fire shot out from Fatty’s mouth for a distance of more than two meters!

Everyone was flabbergasted.

“Don’t worry Ai Hui, the Dragon Soup is safe and will not cause any damage to the body. To make it easier for him to drink, Lou Lan has used a special method to brew it. It’s as smooth as water when one drinks it at first. Of course, the stimulating effect that comes later will be very obvious. Lou Lan thought of the Dragon Soup only after I saw the fiery-winged snake eggs. Luckily, the heavenly fire peppers are easy to obtain. It’s a pity that I couldn’t get the spiciest chilli: Rosy Cheeks, and only got the third spiciest: Lava, the sixth spiciest: Jealousy and the eighth spiciest: Anger. Lou Lan wrote down all of this information. I will prepare a better Dragon Soup for Fatty in the future!”

Burp, boom!

Burp, boom!

Boom boom boom...

The chill of the night was dispelled.

Fatty, you are the blaze of the winter!

Chapter 175: Seven Palaces!

Fatty resembled a lighthouse that would never extinguish its light. He kept spitting out flames, shining a dazzling light upon his figure towering in the darkness.

After sympathizing with Fatty, everyone hurriedly went back to training.

Shi Xueman was somewhat shocked with the surging elemental energy in her body. She had a greater understanding of elemental food than the average individual because she frequently consumed it.

Whether it was fiery-winged snake eggs, heavenly-eyed yak, or fragrant lotus golden toad, they were all dire beast-based ingredients; however, among the levels of dire beast-based ingredients, they were still considered to be entry-level ingredients.

The difference in quality between dire beast-based ingredients heavily affected their efficacy and cost.

The Avalon of Five Elements had stringently differentiated not only the level of dire beast-based food ingredients, but all of the materials which were dire beast-based. There were a total of eight levels: Heaven, Earth, Mysterious, Gold, Universe, Eternity, Flood, and Desolate.

Other than the rarity of the dire beasts from which they were

derived, the preparation methods of the ingredients also played an important role in determining their quality level. Unique, skillful, and meticulous preparation methods could greatly increase the quality level of certain ingredients.

Central Pine City was just an average, small city in the Induction Ground. There were thousands of cities like it in the Induction Ground. Small and isolated cities that were located in the safest areas at the rear of the Induction Ground had little need for high-level food ingredients.

The magistrate's office's reserve contained mostly dire beast-based materials; as such, it was natural for Ai Hui to receive so many valuable dire beast-based ingredients.

Nevertheless, the beneficial effects of the elemental soup were... surprisingly outstanding!

Shi Xueman was extremely surprised. This proved that the elemental soup had retained at least fifty percent of the beneficial effects of the ingredients used. Such outstanding effects could only be achieved with a high utility rate of the ingredients.

She knew that such a top-quality elemental soup was hard to come by.

Currently, instead of being jealous of Ai Hui for having Lou Lan, she was curious about Lou Lan's background. Even those elementalists who were skilled in preparing elemental soup would find it hard to produce such top-quality elemental soup. It would

take extraordinary individuals to produce such a result.

Lou Lan's background was not that simple after all.

She did not, however, want to pursue an answer just to satisfy her curiosity. Asking about someone else's background was extremely rude and considered a taboo.

After drinking such outstanding elemental soup, the most important thing for her to do now was to train and absorb the nutrients of the soup. Such top-quality elemental soup was extremely beneficial for students who were in the middle of training.

Everyone was focused on their training except for Fatty... Shi Xueman could not help but cast a sympathetic look in his direction. Indeed, not a single one of Ai Hui's friends was normal...

She cast an involuntary glance at Ai Hui and was stunned.

Such a weird posture!

Ai Hui was neither in bow stance nor horse stance. He was holding his sword with one hand with his elbow pointed down and his sword pointing up, forming a straight line between his glabella and the sword.

Shi Xueman's eyes were sharp and she immediately noticed that the tip of Ai Hui's sword was synchronized with his breathing in

some mysterious way.

What inheritance was this?

She was very curious as she had never seen such a unique posture. Perhaps it was some sort of swordsmanship training method?

Suddenly, Shi Xueman discovered that her understanding towards swordsmanship was pathetic. She could not be blamed for her lack of understanding; after all, swordsmanship was really outdated and there were not many swordsmanship inheritances that were distinctive.

She was no longer in a hurry to train after her interest was piqued.

In terms of elemental energy reserves, she and Sang Zhijun had the most among everyone here. Furthermore, they were graduating soon. The Induction Ground's criterion for graduation was very simple; all they had to do was attain Eight Palaces Completion.

She was just one step away from attaining it.

Among these people, she and Sang Zhijun had benefitted the least from the dire beast-based elemental soup.

Previously, during the battle with the blood mantis, she had felt

that she would soon make a breakthrough.

When she suddenly saw the unique and seemingly powerful swordsmanship inheritance from Ai Hui, she became extremely curious.

As compared to the level of curiosity that she had for Lou Lan, the level of curiosity she had for Ai Hui was a hundred times greater. She saw with her own eyes how Ai Hui had blocked the blood bat's attack. She had also personally experienced how a guy who had activated only four palaces could become the leader of their group.

She decided to observe him carefully.

Ai Hui did not know Shi Xueman was secretly observing him. At the moment, he was focusing entirely on his training.

His body's condition was neither good nor bad; he was unable to even gauge his condition accurately.

He had accidentally activated seven palaces and this was a huge boost to his strength; however, his lungs and the seven palaces that were being repaired by the "spiritual force" did not seem to be too secure. Other than fusing with his lungs and the seven palaces, the rest of the "spiritual force" had been expelled and directed towards the ground by using [Arching Fish Back].

Ai Hui was worried about whether or not the "seventh palace"

would work.

His lungs and seven palaces had been repaired by the “spiritual force”, not elemental energy. It was still unknown whether or not he could continue to develop his elemental energy.

Very soon, Ai Hui realized that he had worried for nothing.

As he breathed, the elemental energy from the elemental soup steadily flowed into his limbs and bones, nourishing his blood and muscles. Lou Lan had definitely considered the injuries in his body when cooking, as Ai Hui realized that the injuries within his five residences and eight palaces had healed significantly.

Ai Hui was more surprised by his sword embryo. This time, his sword embryo did not absorb any elemental energy during the Circulatory Cycle Revolution.

Weird! Did the sword embryo’s nature change?

Ai Hui just could not figure out what was going on. Previously, his sword embryo would seize any opportunity to absorb elemental energy, but now, it suddenly did want to come into contact with any. Ai Hui was puzzled by this. Could something have happened to the sword embryo as well?

As Ai Hui proceeded with the Circulatory Circle Revolution, what he had been worried about did not happen. Since the sword embryo did not try to absorb any of the elemental energy, his

Circulatory Circle Revolution proceeded smoothly. The palaces were filling up faster than usual.

Shi Xueman noticed that the Dragonspine Inferno suddenly gave off a faint glow, looking extremely striking in the dark. She became even more curious.

Suddenly, she cast a glance at Duanmu Huanghun, as if she had sensed something.

Duanmu Huanghun's sea palace was emitting a green glow.

He was truly the most exceptional genius of the Duanmu clan's younger generation!

A first-year student that had already activated the sixth palace. With the Duanmu clan's absolute skill [Viridescent Flower], Duanmu Huanghun was powerful enough to challenge his seniors. If the Induction Ground still retained the ranking system next year, Duanmu Huanghun would shock everyone.

Then again, when Shi Xueman considered when the blood catastrophe might end, she laughed bitterly to herself.

Duanmu Huanghun was burning with motivation. He was a prideful individual and could not stand being overshadowed by Ai Hui. At this time, his levels of focus and diligence had reached an unimaginable high. Furthermore, the last few real-life combats and struggles between life and death had benefitted him greatly.

A so-called genius was a freak that would advance by leaps and bounds when life put some pressure on him or her!

Shi Xueman sighed and shifted her gaze. She was not interested in Duanmu Huanghun at all. The one she was interested in was Ai Hui.

At first, Ai Hui's left hand palace lit up. Then, his right hand palace lit up as well, followed by his left foot palace and then, after a while, his right foot palace.

He had actually activated four palaces!

Shi Xueman gasped in surprise. The first time she had seen Ai Hui, he had just activated his natal residences. Now, he had already activated four palaces.

That was barely half a year ago. Even though he was not as talented as Duanmu Huanghun, he was not as bad as what his profile had portrayed.

Suddenly, Ai Hui's earth palace began to give off a faint glow.

Shi Xueman was dumbstruck. This was... the fifth palace!

She was at a loss. Activating four palaces in half a year was rather fast, but he still could not be considered a genius. Everyone knew

that the four palaces in the limbs were the easiest to activate. The difficulty would increase significantly once one reached the palaces of earth, sea, gate, and sky.

Ai Hui had actually activated the fifth palace!

Could... this fellow be a genius comparable to Duanmu Huanghun?

“Oh my god!” Sang Zhijun softly gasped in surprise. Her face was filled with incredulity.

Shi Xueman also exclaimed in surprise, but after taking a closer look, she completely freaked out.

Meanwhile, Duanmu Huanghun, who had just activated the sea palace, was overjoyed. After activating the sixth palace, the number of moves he could use from the [Viridescent Flower] had greatly increased. The thing he cared about the most was Ai Hui! The reason why his fighting capabilities were weaker than Ai Hui was the great disparity between their respective amounts of actual combat experience. Since he could not compensate for the lack of actual combat experience, he would try to overtake Ai Hui in other areas!

Base level!

After activating the sixth palace, the power of the [Viridescent Flower] rose sharply. Even if his actual combat experience lost out

to Ai Hui's by a huge margin, he could use just his base level to increase his fighting capabilities and defeat that scumbag!

After relieving his concern, the following carefree feeling made Duanmu Huanghun want to just look up at the sky and let out a hearty laugh.

At that moment, he heard Sang Zhijun's alarmed cry and involuntarily opened his eyes.

As soon as he opened his eyes, a figure holding a sword appeared before him. One, two, three... six!

Duanmu Huanghun's head spun as if someone had whacked his head with a bat. Somewhere in his blank mind, a voice roared. It can't be!

After being dazed for nearly half a minute, he finally came to his senses. The first thought to come to his mind was that he had miscounted.

He decided to count again. One... Two... Three... Four... Five... Six...

There really were six...

Then at that moment, Ai Hui's gate palace faintly lit up.

...Seven... how come there's one more? Duanmu Huanghun felt like he was going crazy.

While Ai Hui's gate palace was flickering with light, there was a dead silence in the training hall except for the sound of Fatty spitting out flames.

At that moment, everyone was gaping at Ai Hui in silence.

The way they stared at Ai Hui was as if they had seen a ghost.

Duanmu Huanghun's trembling fingers could not help but start to count again. Seven palaces. There were really seven palaces!

He stared blankly at Ai Hui.

Sang Zhijun had her mouth wide open and looked like a frightened quail. She had completely lost her usual ladylike demeanor.

Shi Xueman was also frightened by what she saw. She was really frightened. She had been a genius ever since she was young and had also been surrounded by various other geniuses. Despite that background, she was frightened by the sight currently in front of her.

She had known Ai Hui far longer than Sang Zhijun. She clearly knew how low Ai Hui's starting point had been.

As a result, the scene before her eyes gave her a far stronger sense of surprise and terror compared to the others.

It defied logic!

The seventh palace! How could he have activated the seventh palace?

For a genius like Duanmu Huanghun, whose family had plenty of knowledge and wealth, it was not unusual for him to activate the sixth palace in his first year; however, for a poor kid who had not even learned how to train before entering school and who had just barely activated his natal residences half a year ago, it was incredible for him to have activated the seventh palace...

That's right! It's the seventh palace!

Right now, she wanted to grab Ai Hui by the collar and asked him what miracle drugs he had taken!

After a while, the horrified Shi Xueman, who had been completely overwhelmed by the lack of logic in Ai Hui's feat, suddenly quivered. This fellow had not stopped yet!

Her chest tightened.

No, it can't be. It can't be possible that this freak was going

straight for the Eight Palaces Completion!

If someone had narrated this scene to her in the past, she would have felt that it was an extremely funny joke. Right now, however, she did not dare to laugh at all.

This guy was a freak. A never-before-seen, extremely ferocious and formidable freak.

Everyone’s gaze was on Ai Hui.

No one had noticed that the scorching red-colored spots of light on the fiery-red body of the fire-spitting Fatty were slowly lighting up, resembling volcanic lava...

Chapter 176: The Danger from Beneath

Pop.

The faint sound of a rupture broke the silence in the forest. The soil on the ground flipped open and a fist-sized red-colored ant crawled out, follow by another blood ant. The soil flipped open repeatedly and a constant stream of blood ants began crawling out.

Ants, which built their nests underground, were not devoured by the hanging roots to become ugly tree bulges during the outbreak of the blood tsunami. On the contrary, they became stronger as they gnawed on and ate the underground tree roots. Then the ants started to devour each other, causing their previously huge number to diminish greatly.

The blood ants were the true victors of this devastating massacre. There was a huge difference between their current fighting capabilities and their former fighting capabilities.

Perhaps even the lady in red had not expected that the ordinary-looking ants would be the first to complete their transformation. They had not even been numbered among the blood fiends and blood insects that she had prepared.

The feelers on their heads trembled as they traversed through the forest. Their travelling speed was extremely fast and they maintained an orderly group. A single ant colony was made up of a few hundred ants, resembling an orderly army.

Different ant colonies kept a certain distance between each other. Instead of merging together, the ant colonies were hostile and took precautions against one another.

They crawled out of the forest and the silhouette of Central Pine City appeared before their eyes.

The concentrated aura of the elemental energy being emitted from the city sent a wave of commotion through the blood ant colonies. They were like red-colored tidal waves. They marched towards Central Pine City under the cover of night.

In each colony, the ant that led the rest was the biggest in size. Its body was also a deeper red compared to the others. Its feelers swayed non-stop.

When they were to about to reach Central Pine City, they suddenly stopped and started digging into the ground. They did it easily, as if the soil was as soft as biscuits.

The red-colored tidal wave disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Ai Hui slowly opened his eyes and was greeted by everyone's surprised gazes and gasps.

Luckily... he did not activate the eighth palace...

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief at the same time.

“Is there something on my face?” Ai Hui looked puzzled. “Why are all of you looking at me like that?”

At this point of time, the horizon was speckled with light particles. Dawn was coming.

Just as Shi Xueman was about to inquire about Ai Hui’s circumstances, a deafening emergency alarm suddenly resounded throughout the entire city.

Everyone was shocked.

“It’s from the east gate!” Duanmu Huanghun cried.

Before anyone could turn towards the east gate, an emergency alarm rang from the west gate as well, followed by emergency alarms from the north gate and south gate.

Everyone looked at each other in dismay. They could see the terror in their eyes. The emergency alarms at all four gates had suddenly sounded at the same time. Did that mean that the city was surrounded by blood fiends?

“Ants! They’re coming from beneath the ground!”

“They are digging through the foundation of the city walls!”

“Earth elementalists! Where are the earth elementalists? Faster, stop them! The city stabilizers are being bitten off!”

“Damn it! They can’t be stopped! What kind of ants are they?”

……

Through the message tree, a detailed report from the front lines appeared on Wang Zhen’s desk almost immediately.

Wang Zhen’s face was pale-white. He had not expected the first wave of blood fiends to come from beneath the ground. The most powerfully defended area of every city was its ground. To prevent the blood fiends from carrying out an underground invasion, incredibly thick city stabilizers had been laid beneath the ground in every city.

The city stabilizers were made of a kind of extremely strong and stable stone. Every piece of city stabilizer was at least nine meters thick and would be placed beneath the city ground without neglecting a single area. The city stabilizers had one more special characteristic; after ten years, the city stabilizers would fuse together, becoming one whole.

It was as if the entire city’s underground was covered with an impregnable coating. The city’s drainage system was built upon these city stabilizers.

There were very few cities that were invaded by dire beasts from

underground.

Wang Zhen had not at all expected that the first wave of attacks would come from beneath the ground. He had not had a lot of manpower or resources to begin with and had used almost all of them on guarding the city walls and defending against aerial attacks.

He was caught unprepared.

Fortunately, he was able to quickly calm himself down. He did not have many earth elementalists with him and not many of them were powerful. Hence, even if he knew that the blood ants would be invading from underground, there was not much he could do about it.

Just like the elementalists that had first discovered the blood ant invasion, the earth elementalists took immediate action, but they simply could not stop the blood ants.

“Announce to the entire city to pay attention to the ground.”

Wang Zhen gave the order in a low voice.

“Doing that will make us lose control of the situation!” The dean had heard what was going on and rushed over. His face was pale.

“The situation has never been under our control.” Wang Zhen waved his hand.

The dean was speechless.

Elementalists flew through the sky above Central Pine City while repeatedly announcing Wang Zhen's order.

"Beneath the ground?"

Ai Hui looked solemn as an elementalist flew overhead.

"Aren't there city stabilizers beneath the ground?" Jiang Wei's face was filled with incredulity. "Don't tell me the blood ants can even bite through the city stabilizers? Are they even really ants?"

Everyone else's faces paled.

"Everyone, be careful." Ai Hui reminded them.

At that moment, a blood-curdling scream came from the alleyway. Everyone jumped to their feet.

Ai Hui's facial expression changed and he hand-signalled Shi Xueman to retreat. At first, when Shi Xueman saw Ai Hui's hand signal, she was stunned; however, soon after, she floated up into the air and hovered backwards slowly while holding the snow-white spear in her hands. Wisps of mist began to gather around the spear.

Duanmu Huanghun spread his fingers wide as the elemental energy within his body began to charge up.

Sang Zhijun took out her Golden Silk Longbow, looking somewhat anxious.

Jiang Wei had already loaded a heavy arrow onto his huge bow.

At that moment, Wang Xiaoshan could sense the presence of blood ants as well. He really had to give it to Ai Hui. As an earth elementalist, he had not been able to sense anything beneath the ground previously, and yet, Ai Hui had sensed the blood ants.

Lou Lan was the only one who was not nervous. He stood behind Ai Hui, looking somewhat eager to fight. The last time he had fought alongside Ai Hui was during the fight with Zu Yan. Since then, Lou Lan's combat skills had improved greatly!

Pop!

A red streak shot out of the ground and lunged towards the hovering Shi Xueman with an extremely fast speed.

The prepared Shi Xueman remained calm. The snow-white spear in her hand suddenly struck out.

Driven by an invisible force, the mist surrounding the spear started to whirl around the spear's body at a terrifying speed, resembling a tornado. Accompanied by a vibrating screech, a

snow-white spear glint pierced towards the blood ant.

Clank!

The deafening sound of the collision was so loud that it struck pain into one's eardrums.

The force from the collision passed through the tip of Shi Xueman's spear, causing her to float gracefully into the sky as if there was a steel wire pulling her from behind.

The lightning-fast red streak suddenly came to a stop. The blood ant was frozen in mid-air.

A tinge of happiness flashed in Ai Hui's eyes. He almost yelled, "Nice!" at this scene.

This spear move of Shi Xueman's was indeed beautiful. Her counter-attack had cancelled out the blood ant's lunging attack and successfully froze its body in mid-air, displaying exceptional spear techniques and an excellent control over her strength.

Shi Xueman was truly worthy of her reputation.

Ai Hui was exclaiming in admiration in his heart, but the sword in his hand did not slow down at all.

He heard a snapping sound. Jiang Wei's heavy bow! Suddenly, Ai

Hui hit upon an idea and flipped his Dragonspine Inferno around to use the side of its blade as a bat.

Ai Hui accurately smacked the blood ant on its side. At the same time, Jiang Wei's Wolftooth Heavy Arrow whizzed through the air and struck the blood ant from the other side.

The two attacks struck the red ant from opposite directions at the same time, one from the left side and one from the right.

Clang!

Ai Hui felt an extremely powerful wave of energy surging through his sword and into his hand. His palm became so hot that he could not even hold the sword hilt properly. He did not resist the energy and conveniently used it to propel himself into flight.

The combined attack from the two of them was indeed potent!

Before the blood ant could react, it was hit by the Wolftooth Heavy Arrow and exploded into smithereens.

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief. The battle had gone much smoother than what they had expected. The blood ants were just as powerful as the blood mantis that they had fought last time; however, this time around, everyone's strength had increased significantly and their attacks were much more coordinated.

Ai Hui's facial expression suddenly changed drastically. "Be

careful, there're still more!"

Pop, pop, pop!

Streaks of red light shot out from the ground like red-colored arrows.

Everyone's facial expressions changed drastically.

"Lou Lan, protect Fatty!" Ai Hui yelled urgently. His body was fully stretched in mid-air. The Dragonspine Inferno in his hand materialized into a dark shadow that struck an incoming blood ant.

The blood ant flew backwards and slammed heavily into the wall, leaving a fist-sized hole.

The Dragonspine Inferno was brandished gracefully through the air, displaying excellent precision and accuracy.

Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh. The daggers in the Red Dust Sword Box automatically flew out and wound around Ai Hui's body.

Almost everyone was being attacked by blood ants.

Duanmu Huanghun flipped his palms and the glowing green light between his fingers began to bounce actively. Even though he was nervous, he was more cool-headed than he had been during the

previous battle. Glowing green flowery patterns started to form and twirl under his feet, followed by green vines which shot out of the patterns.

Pow!

His attack accurately struck one blood ant.

Another crisp sound came from behind him. A green vine that had just struck a blood ant withdrew back into the glowing patterns.

Duanmu Huanghun was gaining confidence. After activating the sixth palace, the powers of the [Viridescent Flower] indeed rose sharply!

The confident Duanmu Huanghun became increasingly calm. His fingers were spread open, resembling blossoming flowers. Green flowers hovered around his slender figure, displaying an indescribable confidence. He looked like a character that was part of a beautiful painting.

In mid-air, the mist was rising and curling behind Shi Xueman's back. The spear in her hand was like a tornado, sucking in the red ant and completely shredding its red-colored body.

Within the bright snow-white tornado were the sounds of numerous sonic booms.

Boom!

The red ant exploded into a cloud of blood mist. The tornado disappeared instantly, leaving not the slightest bit of the red ant's remnants.

Jiang Wei, Sang Zhijun, and Wang Xiaoshan formed a triangular formation. They knew their combat skills were limited and could not be compared to the other formidable trio.

Sang Zhijun's Golden Silk Longbow was shooting at an incredibly fast speed. The arrows shot out were getting increasingly quicker. Instead of going for a one-shot-one-kill, she was trying to hit the blood ants with continuous arrows. Shi Xueman's previous attack had given her this inspiration. Even though she did not have Shi Xueman's strength, she could strike the blood ant with continuous arrows to slow it down, creating an opportunity for Jiang Wei to strike.

Snap!

Every time there was a blood ant which had been slowed down, Jiang Wei's Wolftooth Heavy Arrows would whiz through the air and hit it.

At such a short range, the power of Jiang Wei's heavy arrows was really devastating.

Every shot blew up a blood ant.

Wang Xiaoshan kept channeling his earth elemental energy to pile up the soil beneath the trio. After a while, a rough-looking soil-made target board appeared beneath them.

The situation was extremely chaotic.

Lou Lan, who was guarding Fatty, had been eager to fight for quite a while; however, not a single blood ant had attacked them.

He glanced around with a blank look on his face.

Why aren’t the blood ants coming at me?

Chapter 177: [Big Dipper]

The flames that Fatty spewed made Lou Lan's silhouette look extremely lonesome.

Yet, the battle going on within the training hall was very intense.

At the start, Ai Hui did not dare to relax too much. He had not adjusted to his new level of seven palaces and did not know how to efficiently utilize them in battle. Plus, he still felt some fear. He was afraid that overexerting the seven palaces, which were mended by the "spiritual force," would cause them to fall apart.

Fortunately, the situation was highly heated, which quickly made his fear vanish into thin air.

It was a matter of life and death, how could he afford to think too much?

Be it in size or strength, the blood ants paled in comparison to the blood mantis. However, there were simply too many of them. Just looking around, there were at least 100 ants crawling about in the training hall.

Their speed was fast, even faster than the blood mantis. They were like red arrows. Move any slower and they would strike. Also, they were very good at cooperating and pounced on their prey from all different directions.

Ai Hui was flustered at first, but soon enough, he found the trick to deal with the blood ants.

The blood ants had great speed, but lost out in size. Their strength was far below the blood mantis.

The Red Dust Sword Box gave Ai Hui a huge, pleasant surprise. He was unable to control the Red Dust daggers that well, but since there were just too many blood ants, he did not really require much precision.

The red light surrounded Ai Hui. It was very sharp and left a wound on the blood ants' bodies the moment they touched it.

On the contrary, the heavy Dragonspine Inferno in Ai Hui's hand was slow-moving.

Ai Hui realized that it was difficult to kill the blood ants if he met force with force. They were very tenacious and would quickly crawl up and join the next attack wave if they were swatted away.

Blood fiends had very tough bodies. Even if they were small and weak like ants, they were still difficult to handle.

Ai Hui could only lament about the power of the blood poison. Without exception, wild beasts and insects underwent major changes when poisoned. It was clear that the existence of the blood poison was in defiance of the natural order. The God of Blood... what a horrifying thing!

As a seasoned veteran, Ai Hui realized that using brute force was not efficient enough, so he needed another strategy. They won in numbers. He would not be able to weaken their advantage if he did not find a more effective combat method. Over time, his strength would only reduce, and he would sink into a precarious situation.

He quickly noticed that Jiang Wei and the others were in an increasingly terrible situation. They were weaker and not as strong in close quarters combat. He had to assist them as soon as possible. With no time to think, he dashed toward the three of them and shook the Dragonspine Inferno in his hand.

As he prepared to mobilize the elemental energy within his body, the seven palaces vibrated simultaneously.

Caught off guard, the Dragonspine Inferno in Ai Hui's hands stopped moving momentarily, but his eyes were wide open.

[Big Dipper]...

An indescribable familiarity surfaced from within Ai Hui's body. The simultaneous release of elemental energy from the seven palaces combined these seven infinitesimal elemental energies into one.

Bzz!

Like the sound a bamboo splitting and swinging in midair, there

was suddenly a strong suction force generated from within the center of the circle drawn by the swing of the heavy sword in Ai Hui's hand. The surrounding blood ants began to gravitate to it.

Like a stone on the riverbed that was visually distorted through the rippling waters, the bodies of the blood ants inside the sword circle were similarly deformed.

Clap, clap, clap.

A few blood ants simultaneously exploded.

The scene before Ai Hui's eyes made him jump in shock and even caused him to fall into a short daze.

The [Big Dipper] technique… was actually this powerful!

This was the second time he operated the [Big Dipper], and he had a sudden urge to thank the mayor. Even though it was a transaction, the original version of the [Big Dipper] that the mayor bestowed upon Ai Hui was supremely helpful. Previously, in the blood forest, he had activated it without hesitation when in critical danger.

He could not remember much, but he was very clear about the fact that the [Big Dipper] had saved his life.

From a learning perspective, his impetuous activation of the [Big Dipper] was undoubtedly a big waste, but he had no regrets at all.

Without the [Big Dipper] and relying on just the [Arching Fish Back] would not have allowed him to mobilize such enormous “spiritual force,” Without expending such a huge volume out, he would have exploded.

After being dazed for a short while, Ai Hui suddenly became excited.

The [Big Dipper] was actually this powerful!

Although the traditions passed on by the Avalon of Five Elements were few in comparison to the number of swordplay manuals left by the Cultivation Era, after more than 1,000 years of development, they were pretty impressive in both the quality and quantity. After all, in the Cultivation Era, cultivators did not have mortal enemies, while the Avalon of Five Elements had never stopped battling the Wilderness.

War was a huge stimulation for the spread of knowledge.

All kinds of knowledge had been imparted. Some pertained to fighting styles and elemental energy operation while others involved training methods and a jumble of everything.

The [Big Dipper] focused on the operation of elemental energy. There were no moves.

Coined as the most powerful technique, the [Big Dipper] naturally had its own unique properties.

Generally speaking, operation of elemental energy abided by the “from near to far” rule. For example, the sword moves Ai Hui used usually activated the hand palaces first since they were the fastest. If both hand palaces consumed more elemental energy, the elemental energies from the other palaces would steadily flow to the hands.

The [Big Dipper] was different however. Its elemental energy operation was very unusual.

Whether Ai Hui used his hands or legs or head, whether this technique required strong or weak elemental energy, it needed a simultaneous mobilization of elemental energies from seven palaces.

Seven palaces moved as one. They released seven elemental energies together to combine into one outstanding elemental energy.

Basically, the [Big Dipper] was very complicated, but it consumed the same amount of elemental energy and yet increased the power of another move by a huge margin. If an enemy attacked with elemental energy, the [Big Dipper] would distribute the power of the attack between all seven palaces, which allowed each palace to simultaneously endure the same amount of dispersed force and greatly reduced the chance of sustaining an injury.

The [Big Dipper] had its flaws of course. Its requirements demanded a lot from its users.

Users had to have seven strong palaces to attain resonance. Then, they had to be capable of unleashing seven elemental energies simultaneously. If the seven palaces varied in strength, the energy released would naturally vary in speed.

Having seven strong palaces was a very difficult condition to fulfill, and the majority was ruled out. This was why the [Big Dipper] was powerful, yet not well-known, and why Wang Shouchuan wanted Ai Hui to learn it.

Other than mandating excellent physical fitness, a superb control over elemental energy was also required. The process of seven elemental energies combining into one within the body had to be completed within a short period of time, which was very difficult to achieve without outstanding energy control.

A high level of control...

Something clicked in Ai Hui's brain–embroidery!

Just like the [Big Dipper], the complex and meticulous embroidery process required a precise control over elemental energy.

Teacher had long since set his eyes on the [Big Dipper] and had made preparations for Ai Hui from the start. What teacher did not expect was for the mayor to give Ai Hui the original version of the technique!

At this point, Ai Hui finally understood. No wonder he had such few issues mastering the [Big Dipper]. Be it attaining resonance between the seven palaces or combining the seven elemental energies into one, they all went pretty smoothly for him.

The edge formed by the convergence of elemental energies was extremely sharp. The sword ray swept over a few blood ants, splitting them in half.

Jiang Wei and the guys were in a dire situation. They looked battered and exhausted.

Ai Hui was quite far away from them. He took a deep breath and dashed a few steps forward while using a sword-made screen to protect himself. The fearless blood ants threw themselves at Ai Hui and landed on the screen, bursting into tiny flames.

Ai Hui's body was in a half arch. He ran like a cheetah and, when he landed his last step, theDragonspine Inferno gathered the sword screen that filled the sky and thrusted it forward.

Sss!

At the end of the Dragonspine Inferno, a white ray lit up suddenly. It extended along the sword blade, across Ai Hui's palm, wrist, arm, and finally to his whole body.

Ai Hui's entire body was engulfed in the plane of the blade ray.

He was like a bat, drawing a strange arc across the sky.

[Gale Bat Blade]!

Limbs of the marching blood ants were severed upon touching the blade ray.

Sang Zhijun drew her Golden Silk Longbow unceasingly, and the arrows were launched like a storm. She was utterly focused and had full confidence in her bow mastery. All kinds of harsh training and evaluations were nothing to her. She could release seven arrows in a second and hit the bullseye every single time.

At she beginning, she was a little nervous and missed a few shots. Soon enough, however, she steadied her feet and had not missed again. She worked well with Jiang Wei and they fought well. They managed to slay 16 blood ants together.

What she did not expect, however, was that the blood ants did not seem to decrease in numbers.

Plus, she was starting to get tired. Jiang Wei's power consumption was even higher since he was using a heavy bow. She could even hear Jiang Wei's breathing getting heavier.

The arrow target formed by Wang Xiaoshan offered more of a psychological comfort since the actual protection it provided was quite limited.

Within her field of vision, all she saw was a frighteningly dense collection of intertwined red shadows.

An intense feeling of powerlessness emerged from within.

“Persevere!”

The shout was like a thunderclap that rang in her ears. She quivered and instantly became more clear-headed.

She turned around and saw a figure covered in sword light entering her view and leaving many scattered shadows.

A low whistle seemed to ring out from below.

A white sword ray divided the world within her view into two, while the criss-crossed red threads were like frail spiderwebs in comparison.

The ray grew bigger and bigger, like a storm sweeping across the training hall.

The blood ants were swept up by Ai Hui’s sword ray. Plop plop plop! Like torrential rain, many were flung onto the perimeter walls, leaving only tiny empty spaces on it.

Other blood ants were intimidated by Ai Hui’s strike, and a short silence fell over the scene.

A blood-curdling screech was heard from the alleyway. It was weak and almost hollow. The sounds of bone-breaking and chewing never stopped. It was so distinct that everybody's expression changed altogether. The fates of those in the alleyway was clear. There was no need to think.

The bodies of those in the training hall grew cold, but fury took over shortly. Boundless anger.

A baleful gaze emerged from the eyes of the blood ants lying on the ground. Rise again!

This was a death match. A battle without a retreat route. It would only end with the collapse of one side.

Chapter 178: You Do It

Ai Hui shielded the three of them before withdrawing to Fatty's side.

He noticed that the blood ants did not like being close to Fatty. Seeing Fatty shooting flames so diligently made Ai Hui think. Could it be that the blood ants were also afraid of fire?

That was a good thing.

Jiang Wei was almost completely exhausted. His heavy bow was astonishingly fatal, but also consumed an astonishing amount of energy. Sang Zhijun had some strength left, but her Golden Silk Longbow lacked sufficient power unless she used a special kind of arrow or technique. Even then, it was quite ineffective when facing the densely packed blood ants.

Wang Xiaoshan sat paralyzed on the ground. He was the weakest amongst these people.

Indeed, the blood ants did not attack Jiang Wei and the other two. Seemed like his guess was correct. Fatty's flames were useful in restraining the blood ants. Good one, Fatty! Be at ease, shoot on!

Ai Hui looked at Fatty in admiration before shouting, "Lou Lan! Follow me!"

"Coming!"

Eager to act, Lou Lan called back loudly before turning into a sand cloud and reforming by Ai Hui's side.

Underneath her fluttering hair, Shi Xueman's eyes were bloodshot. Her blue and white armor was streaked with blood poison and dust. The spear in her hand was like a frantic, furious wave.

The skill that she practiced was [Hydromancy], which was known for its variation. It was not a spear technique.

Because of her father, she had a unique fondness for spear mastery and had been training with dedication from a young age. The cloud-like, untainted spear was a gift from her father, from when she turned 10. He had it sent over to the house from the front line.

Its name was Cirrus.

At that time, her father had killed a humpback cloud whale, and after it decomposed, he selected the straightest and most beautiful bone to use as the spear's body.

Humpback cloud whales were dire beasts that lived high up and deep within the blue dome of heaven. Their enormous bodies stretched over a few miles and were entirely snow-white, like white islands flying in the sky. It was easy for people to mistake them as floating clouds.

They had outstanding flying abilities, did not tire, and searched for sea clouds throughout their lives. They fed on these sea clouds as well as the dire beasts that lived within these layers of clouds.

Generally speaking, humpback cloud whales did not leave the deepest part of the sky and did not initiate attacks on elementalists. Only rarely did they appear at low altitudes and destroy everything in sight.

When that happened, a catastrophe would follow.

Bones of these cloud-eating humpback cloud whales emitted silky threads of mist.

The pure, crystal-like spearhead was a result of her father's masterpiece, which also caused a sensation the Avalon of Five Elements.

Near her father's military encampment was a lake named Blue Sapphire. The scenery was beautiful and he liked to train by the lakeside. Every day, he would carry a pail of lake water, pour it into a water tank, and use his elemental energy to compress it to its limit.

The next day, he would continue pouring another pail of water in and compress it. The clear, dark blue lake water would become tougher and tougher with each compression.

After three years and 1,000 more pails of lake water, he created a huge blue crystal half the size of a person. It was a novel material, an ingredient wholly created by him. Because it was heavy and the color of the sky, it was named Firmament Iron.

This development caused huge commotion as countless people were willing to spend huge amounts of money to purchase a small piece of it, but they had all been rejected by her father. Since the blue crystal was imperfect, he kept on polishing and grinding it until only a small piece remained. This piece, perfect in his eyes, then became the spearhead of the Cirrus.

Be it the humpback cloud whale bone or the blue crystal, they were all of the best quality. The moment the Cirrus was forged, it became one of the top water type weapons in the Avalon of Five Elements.

Even when blood was shed everyday, Cirrus remained untainted. No matter what, it was always encouraging to Shi Xueman. She could sense her father's hopes through it. In her heart, he was like a guardian angel protecting everybody.

She hoped to emulate her father, selflessly helping and safeguarding people.

The subsiding of the anguished wailings from outside, coupled with the noise of the blood ants chewing, deeply provoked her. She was beyond angry.

Indeed, she knew why she was so furious.

She used to be proud of her abilities and strongly believed that she could be like her father, but when danger struck, she was unable to protect everyone like her father. Even she, herself... had become someone else's burden.

At this point, the young water elementalist was like a ball of fearless, raging flame.

Shi Xueman powered up, immediately allowing Ai Hui to feel less pressured. He could not help but to look at the madness that Shi Xueman displayed. What a ferocious woman, he thought to himself.

She was practically a wild beast in human form!

When compared to Shi Xueman, Duanmu Huanghun was not as violent. In fact, he seemed unhurried. His performance was completely different from a few days ago. While he was not as efficient as Ai Hui, he basically had not missed.

The breathtaking [Viridescent Flower] in his hand slightly stunned Ai Hui.

This was not the first time Ai Hui had seen that thankless wretch's [Viridescent Flower], but in the past, it had been no different from that ingrate's personality. It looked impressive, but was actually worthless.

To Ai Hui at least, the skilled had looked flashy, but was weak and insignificant.

Today, however, the [Viridescent Flower] that the ingrate wielded was completely different. One word: deceitful!

Damn deceitful!

It appeared out of nowhere and disappeared to nowhere. It started to attack from the left, but out of nowhere, the branches moved to the right. Extremely deceitful!

This fellow had been enlightened!

He had a bad personality, but his brain was not bad at all.

Soon, Ai Hui witnessed the power of the [Viridescent Flower]. It changed unpredictably and could attack from practically all angles. Plus, it could cover quite a large area.

If only this fellow knew how to cooperate…

This thought flashed across Ai Hui's mind. Duanmu Huanghun's [Viridescent Flower] looked soft, but was deceitful, stealthy, and had a large area of effect. It was simply made for team play.

"Ingrate! Cooperate!" Ai Hui shouted.

Ingrate... Damn that bastard! How dare he call him an ingrate in front of so many people!

Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!

The inner rage boiled like lava within his chest and rose up violently, but when it reached his mouth, all that came out was, “How... how do I cooperate?”

Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!

Why had he said something like this? Duanmu Huanghun’s skin reddened from anger.

“Bangwan, Lou Lan will cooperate. We can do it like this.”

Like a sand cloud floating in the sky, Lou Lan transformed into a fine trip wire. Caught off guard, the blood ants swarming Ai Hui crashed and stumbled onto the ground where Ai Hui stood.

Brush!

A sword ray then swept up from the bottom, splitting them in half.

“And this!”

He had not finished talking when a sand screen appeared in front of a bunch of charging blood ants, blocking their line of sight. However, how could such a thin sand screen obstruct their path?

Bang, the blood ants broke through the screen fiercely.

Yet, what welcomed them was a sword ray.

“And this!”

“This!”

“This!”

…

Duanmu Huanghun was struck dumb by Lou Lan’s demonstration. There were so many moves. While none were very formidable, they effectively subdued the blood ants.

Ai Hui was even more powerful. Any deviation and it was as if his sword ray was a shark smelling blood or a creditor smelling money…

Damn it! Why did he think of a creditor…

Duanmu cursed inwardly, but was unable to deny that Ai Hui and

Lou Lan’s teamwork was shockingly well-coordinated.

Ai Hui was already very efficient to begin with. The Dragonspine Inferno in his hand never once stopped. It slashed up in successive arcs, one after another, and a low vibrating sound continued to ring as the blood ants in the path of these curves were continually crushed.

Were they… butchering chickens?

Within a short period of time, the corpses of the blood ants on the floor increased by more than 10. Lou Lan’s various moves were strange but unblockable, and Ai Hui’s ability to react was commendable. There were no misses at all.

What puzzled Duanmu Huanghun was that an earth elementalist was actually powerful enough to create such a treacherous sand puppet? Had he missed out on the latest news about wood elementalists?

Then again, it did not seem that surprising. Only such a deceptive sand puppet would collude with that damned bastard. Birds of a feather flock together.

And he used to think Lou Lan was a pleasant sand puppet!

Duanmu Huanghun’s face was gloomy, and he laughed grimly. I have seen through your disguises!

I, Duanmu Huanghun, straight up will not be associated with you filthy creatures!

“Understand? Know how to do it? Come try!” Ai Hui asked aloud while waving his sword.

Duanmu Huanghun remained unmoved as he sneered.

“You can’t even learn this?” Ai Hui was somewhat shocked by Duanmu Huanghun’s lack of comprehension. Was this fellow really a genius?

Heh heh, how stupid of you to use such lousy reverse psychology on me! Duanmu Huanghun laughed sarcastically to himself.

“Lou Lan, let’s do it one more time, he’s slow to understand.” Ai Hui decided, without a choice.

Heh, you think I’ll fall for your trick? I’ve seen through you guys! Duanmu Huanghun thought to himself as he continued grinning.

“No problem. I’m coming! Bangwan, look closely. It’s all right if you don’t get it the first time, I can continue demonstrating!” Lou Lan shouted encouraging.

“We can do this!”

“This!”

“This!”

……

“Do you get it? Don’t feel discouraged! I’ll do it again… Eh, no more blood ants?”

Duanmu Huanghun, who was no longer able to hold it in and was going insane, yelled out, “Enough! Let me!”

Clap, clap, clap.

Blood ants ceaselessly jumped over the fence from the alley. Having finished their meal outside, they were lured by the thick bloody smell from inside the training hall. In the blink of an eye, the fence became a bright red sheet, while the vicious glare of the densely pack blood ants made everyone’s hair stand on end.

Ai Hui was stunned for awhile, but when he recovered, he quietly retreated a few steps behind Duanmu and whispered, “You do it.”

“…”

Chapter 179: The Brave One Wins!

Shi Xueman, who was in midair, started bursting out in laughter. She had witnessed all that happened below and was simply unable to hold it in.

All the anger, self-reproach, and guilt that were devouring her flew out of the window in an instant. Freed from those terrible emotions, she became very relaxed and felt that she must have been possessed earlier.

Had she not already known from the start that she would not be like her father? It was just that the daily praises and flattery had fed her ego and made her arrogant.

Her eyes cleared and her irritable heart calmed.

The path she wanted to follow was endless, and at that unattainable, distant end stood the blurry, yet majestic, view of her father's back. He was like a big mountain, attentively watching her unsteady steps.

Her father must have slashed through countless thistles, thorns, and ferocious beasts before reaching that point. He must have crossed over vast bodies of water, passed through violent storms, and endured the bone-chilling cold of boundless glaciers. Furthermore, he withstood bone-piercing loneliness, carried deep scars all over his body, and travelled alone before arriving at the peak.

How could her hardships count for anything?

Her heart became placid.

Looking at everyone’s warm and gentle smiles, she felt thankful and happy to have such comrades.

Shi Xueman’s laughter was exceptionally clear amid the silence brought about by fierce gaze of the closely packed blood ants’.

Duanmu Huanghun’s face flushed. He felt so ashamed and wished there was a hole for him to hide in. Why was he always the one feeling embarrassed when associated with Ai Hui?

Why…

Before finding a clear answer to this question, the blood ants on the wall suddenly rose.

Like a troop of archers shooting earth-shattering red arrows from a distance in an open field, Duanmu Huanghun only felt things darkening in front of him as the ugly and malevolent appearance of the blood ants magnified before his eyes.

“Let me help you!”

Shi Xue Man's voice sounded in Duanmu Huanghun’s ears like a beautiful melody of nature, and his spirits were slightly shaken.

Ever since he was young, he knew that sister Xueman was extremely powerful, so every time he met her, he was very honest. The earlier battle illustrated this. Shi Xueman fought the blood ants alone and was not at all inferior.

However, he still underestimated the power of Shi Xueman.

What Shi Xueman did next frightened everyone. Not only did she not retreat, she took the initiative and charged toward the incoming blood ants.

Sh was like a snow-white humpback cloud whale that charged relentlessly toward a shoal of fishes.

White clouds surged from the spear's body like fierce solid canes, whipping the incoming blood ants ruthlessly and creating sharp hissing sounds.

Clap!

The sound of unusually concentrated and loud explosions combined together. Those with slightly weaker hearing heard only a single boom as the rain of red arrows caused over ten explosions of blood.

This spectacular scene immediately shocked everyone, including Ai Hui. His mouth gaped wide and disbelief was evident on his whole face as he looked at the domineering blue and white figure in the training hall.

Was this girl really a water elementalist…

He would not feel surprised if Shi Xueman was a fire elementalist. Or a metal elementalist. Brother Li Wei and the guys from the infantry division were good at fighting head-on. Such fierce earth elementalists, although quite rare, were also acceptable.

From the start, earth elementalists were a little sly. Wood elementalists, on the other hand, were gentle and reserved. Seeing that thankless wretch put on airs was the best example.

Yet, who was the gentlest of them all? Water elementalists, most definitely.

This was determined by the characteristics of water elemental energy. It was soft and easily mutable. It could change between water and cloud, cloud being the softest matter.

Shi Xueman’s attack, however, was overbearing and unyielding. Ai Hui conceded defeat.

Ai Hui had heard a saying that women were made of water. Now, he finally realized that this so-called water was certainly molten iron.

None of the women he had met were gentle.

8,000,000 yuan lady was incredibly ferocious too, probably comparable to Shi Xueman, the iron lady. One Thousand Yuan looked feeble, but was much more dangerous than the other two. When Ai Hui escaped the previous time, he made up his mind to run if he ever met One Thousand Yuan. The further the better.

Ai Hui was shocked. There was no need to mention the others, even Duanmu Huanghun had momentarily forgotten about his [Viridescent Flower].

Suddenly, Ai Hui noticed that the actions of her body were abnormal and opened his eyes even wider.

Iron lady seemed to have made a breakthrough... No way...

Everyone else's attention was quickly drawn to Shi Xueman's increasing elemental energy movements. Their faces were mixed with shock and joy. All of them had their eyes opened as wide as possible, in fear of missing any details.

Sss!

The spiraling, water plant-like clouds on Shi Xueman's back, the surrounding dispersed clouds, and the clouds emitted by the spear entered her body suddenly, like a whale inhaling air through its blowhole.

Shi Xueman's exaggerated body movements from earlier immediately disappeared without a trace. She floated in the air as

if unconscious, her body motionless.

A strange hint of color flashed across Ai Hui's eyes. He had a keen sixth sense and could feel the elemental energy within this iron lady's body. It was operating at an astonishingly crazed speed.

All at once, the blood ants that were flying everywhere started hissing at Shi Xueman.

Ai Hui's expression changed. Iron lady was in danger!

"Be careful!"

Even before finishing his warning, Ai Hui flew toward Shi Xueman like a frostbitten sword ray!

The others came to their senses abruptly and all their expressions suddenly changed. Duanmu Huanghun flew at Shi Xueman without the slightest hesitation. Each time he stepped upward, a mass of bluish-white cloud emerged under his feet at the highest point of his stride. He traveled on these clouds and continued ascending, as if he was walking up a flight of stairs.

The Golden Silk Longbow in Sang Zhijun's hand was nocked with three valuable Bunny Hair Arrows.

Already exhausted, Jiang Wei gathered whatever energy he had left to fire his arrows.

Thud thud thud!

Like raindrops, the number of blood ants that crashed to the ground quickly increased. Their eyes flickered with greed. The elemental energy brewing within the body suspended in the air was like heavenly food, and they were deeply attracted.

These blood ants were not very smart. Previously, they were cooperating, but they had completely forgotten to do so at this point. All they could think about was pouncing on Shi Xueman.

Ai Hui was the fastest, appearing by Shi Xueman's side first. His view darkened as densely packed blood ants threw themselves over from all directions, practically blocking his visual field. He felt the weight of great despair, as if he was being crushed by Mount Tai.

Before, the blood ants attacked in a coordinated manner, but now they had completely discarded this method. They dashed toward Shi Xueman and Ai Hui without any sort of plan, which actually made it difficult for Ai Hui to find an outlet.

The ingrate was slower by half a beat...

Ai Hui, who was forced to desperation, felt a sense of calm instead. Faced with such chaotic attacks, any intention of retreat would only remove the last chance of survival.

He had already adjusted his posture when dashing to Shi

Xueman. He was like an octopus, sticking himself to the iron lady's back. He sprang at her with great strength, causing both of them to dive down toward the training hall’s perimeter wall at a very fast speed. Dense red shadows followed closely behind.

From behind, the sound of sharp hissing fell incessantly on their ears.

Ai Hui wrapped his limbs around the iron lady. His chest hurt badly from pressing so tightly against her armor. Unfortunately, he would have to use his legs later... At the moment, he could only use his arms to hold her to his chest as his legs coiled around her thighs.

What was this iron shell... Was there a need for it to be so hard?

His chest was going to be injured at this rate...

Luckily there was no armor on her thighs. He could not tell previously, but her thighs were pretty soft... They felt good on the hands... No, legs...

Ai Hui saw nothing except for the wall that was quickly increasing in size. There was no warmth, only cold. The moment they hit the wall, blood red flashed across his ice-cold pupils.

The brave one wins!

The legs he wrapped around Shi Xueman’s thighs abruptly

sprang up. Keeping a small distance between his legs and her body, he stomped onto the wall heavily.

Boom!

It was as if the wall was hit by a cannon. A storm of countless bricks broke off and flew toward the alley.

Ai Hui borrowed this force, increased his speed, and flew backward!

Alarmed cries rang out from behind!

Those witnessing the scene admired Ai Hui's fast reaction, which saved Shi Xueman's life. They had expected him to carry her along and dodge the blood ants in order to survive.

No one had expected that he would spring back and charge toward the whole group of blood ants. Was this not a deathwish? They had yet to digest Shi Xueman's impulsive behavior from earlier, and now, the usually cool-headed Ai Hui also acted so reckless!

Nobody could remain calm at that point. Sang Zhijun shot the [Bunny Hair Arrows] without hesitation. They formed a fine rain-like silver light, which landed amid the group of blood ants. Indignation appeared on Jiang Wei's face. He used his last bit of energy to fire three consecutive heavy arrows. Duanmu Huanghun had no time to worry about the others. He clenched his teeth so

hard that they were about to be crushed. Countless viridescent flowers shot out from his surroundings, like a flowery storm flying into the ant swarm.

Half of the closely packed blood shadows disappeared!

But... As their eyes about to explode, everyone present witnessed Ai Hui and Shi Xueman being swallowed up by the crimson shadows.

The seven palaces within Ai Hui's body jolted before a rush of elemental energies surged up from his palaces to combine into one. A small trickle of blood spilled out from the corner of his mouth. He had just recovered from the previous injuries and was about to get hurt again. Why am I always the unlucky one...

He did not hold back and directed all of his elemental energy to flow into his back.

Come on!

[Arching Fish Back]!

A noiseless, raving storm exploded in Ai Hui's chest, but his eyes maintained their same azure color.

Bang!

Ai Hui felt himself knocking against aroaring, furious wave. The immense collision struck him senseless.

Filled with much grief and indignation, Duanmu Huanghun and the others suddenly heard a loud sound, before witnessing the densely packed blood ants explode. They suddenly erupted, and their bodies flew in every direction.

Then, they saw the unstoppable Ai Hui and his bloodstained back.

Ai Hui lost control and spat out a mouthful of fresh blood, which coincidentally landed on Shi Xueman's neck.

It was quite a pity for such a long white neck to be stained with blood. It was not as pretty anymore...

Dazed, Ai Hui's senses were somewhat fuzzy. He did not even feel the lady in his arms rapidly soaring.

Chapter 180: Why isn't it a Treasure Chest!

Shi Xueman slowly regained consciousness.

Having a breakthrough in the midst of battle had caught her off guard and she'd almost lost her life. Every elementalist yearned for a breakthrough, but because unpredictable situations could easily arise, it became very important to be prepared for one.

Knowing this, it became obvious that Shi Xueman lacked experience. There were signs which would present themselves whenever a breakthrough was near, but only seasoned elementalists would recognize them and prepare for it.

Gradually recovering, Shi Xueman felt the strange condition of her body even before opening her eyes.

Her limbs were bound tightly by someone from behind. She was unable to move an inch.

That was...

She fell into a short daze. This familiar feeling triggered a certain memory that she had tried so hard to forget. It came back to her now, clear and distinct.

In the dark, every single detail was so clear, as if it happened just yesterday. That indescribable feeling of shame and humiliation was like an electric current circulating throughout her whole body,

causing her to tremble uncontrollably.

She'd thought she had already forgotten that event, but when a similar scene played out, the familiarity enveloped her senses once again.

Time had not reduced the pain and humiliation. Instead, it had thickened the emotions involved, like a cup of water turning into alcohol.

Having just experienced a breakthrough, Shi Xueman's three energies were at their strongest. The resurfacing of these intense emotions from the deepest part of her mind led to an unprecedented eruption of fury.

Still in the air with her eyes shut, Shi Xueman grabbed her spear with one hand. The elemental energy within her whole body boiled. It looked like she was about to channel all of her rage into this spear!

This fanciless spear!

Cirrus vibrated and started humming. Turbulent clouds erupted and flew out of the spear's body with a hiss, like an enormous white whale loudly advancing.

Blood ants that came into contact with the clouds burst upon touch, just like fragile bubbles!

Numerous blood flowers blossomed at the same time. The ball of clouds was like a white cloth that made the sea of blood flowers look especially tender and beautiful. This beautiful picture did not last long, however, for the blossoming flowers shook and shattered into a blood fog that was swept away by the stirring air, disappearing without a trace.

Boom, boom, boom!

The whale-like cloud ball, as if making up for its prior negligence, advanced with unstoppable force and pulverized everything in and along its path without holding back.

The wall Ai Hui had made a hole in shattered into fine powder immediately. The formidable cloud ball rushed past the alley and went straight for the opposite wall, causing broken fragments to fly everywhere.

The earth quaked, mountains shook, and the sky rumbled. It was like the monsters were far away.

Duanmu Huanghun and the rest were struck absolutely dumb by the change of events. Ai Hui and Shi Xueman had been in crucial danger just a moment ago, but in the blink of an eye, every single blood ant in the training hall was destroyed.

The twists and turns from start to finish had Duanmu Huanghun and gang gasping for breath.

This attack had consumed more than half of the elemental energy within Shi Xueman's body. She opened her eyes and her anger greatly dissipated. Having vented most of her raging emotions, she regained her composure.

The falling objects within her field of vision reminded her that she wasn't done yet.

A few blood ants were left struggling to escape this scary training hall.

So, blood fiends also feel fear, Shi Xueman thought to herself.

Wait!

Her face darkened immediately upon realizing that the guy on her back had yet to release her, but the bloody smell on her neck softened her expression.

She wasn't completely unaware of what had happened.

Ai Hui had merely been trying to save her life. He'd gotten injured pretty seriously and was unconscious.

Her anger quickly subsided and was replaced with reproach and regret. Ai Hui had just saved her life and yet all she did was blame him, how ungrateful. Calming down, she also became shocked at her overly intense reaction. Her body had subconsciously acted out of instinct rather than careful consideration.

Although she was unwilling to admit it, all that had happened was enough to prove that her fateful blind battle had been etched deeply into her heart and mind.

She pushed the bottom of the spear against the ground to stabilize herself and prepared to removed Ai Hui from her back; however, she was surprised to find that she couldn't pull his hands and feet apart.

Ai Hui had fallen into a coma, but his limbs were still wrapped tightly around her body with shocking strength. Shi Xueman had heard stories from the front lines before. Some soldiers had gotten their bodies tangled with the enemies' corpses and were unable to separate themselves. She had been skeptical in the past, but who knew that she would now experience it for herself.

What a clingy fellow…

Shi Xueman felt both admiration and vexation.

In such a situation, she might cause damage to his body if she were to forcefully remove him. His joints could easily be broken.

But he… looked so unglamorous right now…

Because everyone was looking at her with their mouths and eyes wide open, her face blushed a deep red.

“I’ll… I’ll go in for a bit.”

Face almost burning up, Shi Xueman dashed into a room inside the training hall immediately after finishing her sentence, like a bunny whose butt was being roasted.

The sudden return of peace allowed everyone to finally release all of their tension. They were long exhausted and started plopping themselves all over the ground. Only Sang Zhijun bothered thinking about her image as a woman and reluctantly sat on the ground.

“Never thought we’d survive.”

Wang Xiaoshan said in a somewhat nervous manner with a half smiling, half crying expression.

No one said anything as they were all enjoying this precious calm.

The intensity of the battle made everyone unwilling to recall its details. At many points, they had expected to die right there and then; yet, there was no joy after the calamity since they knew that the blood catastrophe had just started.

Intense sounds from a faraway battle made their way into the training hall as flames and smoke rose amidst the sunlight.

Even though it was so far away, they could still see it.

The sky brightened up but the light emitted by the rising sun no longer carried warmth, but oozed horrifying coldness and death.

A new day of killing had started just like that.

Sang Zhijun gazed absentmindedly at the black, rising smoke from far away as it floated along with the wind like a black armband in a funeral.

She muttered, “I wonder how many are going to die this time?”

No one knew the answer.

Jiang Wei’s expression changed slightly at the sudden thought of the few people in the woodshed. “How are those in the woodshed doing?”

Everyone looked at each other in dismay, a bad feeling rising within their chests.

Lou Lan opened the door to the woodshed and they were welcomed by a choking smell of blood. Their hearts skipped a beat.

Nothing was left in the woodshed except for traces of blood, bits and pieces of flesh, and bone dregs. Everyone could guess that the blood ants must have smelled humans in here and had themselves a feast.

Sang Zhijun dashed out, held onto the wall, and started puking violently.

Jiang Wei and Duanmu Huanghun maintained their calm even though their faces did not look too good. They exchanged looks and understood each other's intent. No matter what, they must hold it in.

Sang Zhiju vomited for a short while before stopping. While her face was as pale as before, she felt better emotionally. "It's for the better, death ends all one's troubles."

The terrifying blood disaster, nightmare-like battles, and the struggles between life and death made these weak students grow speedily. Their mental strength had improved greatly.

This was the survival instinct. Regardless of origins, the desire for life was the most primitive instinct. During this disaster, compassion, sympathy, fear, and hesitation would only lead to tragic endings.

They were lucky to have survived the past few battles. They had been given time to understand and adapt accordingly.

They were all smart people. They knew where this luck had come from.

The blood stains on Ai Hui's back had everyone all tensed up.

Such a wound could be infected by the blood poison.

If Ai Hui became infected…

Everyone shuddered at the thought of it. All at once, their gazes fell upon the room into which Shi Xueman had dashed earlier.

The light inside the room was dim and Shi Xueman had closed the door. She did not have a choice since she was forced into an ugly position and had no courage to show herself to everybody.

Because she was sitting on the ground, Ai Hui looked as if he was hugging her from behind, his legs still wrapping around her thighs.

Although he had saved her life, she still wanted to break all of his limbs.

Okay, she'd better shift his legs slowly and carefully. His grip was too tight, so she was unable to stand up straight, leaving her with no choice but to remain seated.

So that she would not hurt Ai Hui, she channelled a small amount of elemental energy into her fingertips and used them to provoke Ai Hui's tensed leg muscles. This was the only harmless method she could think of for now.

Ai Hui had a dream.

In that dream, he and Fatty were hugging a piece of tree trunk, struggling in the middle of a big storm at sea. Lou Lan was in the middle.

The monstrous waves were like many overhanging cliffs, constantly rising from the ground, tilting forward, and collapsing, effectively burying them.

Everyone was hugging onto the block of wood, hanging for dear life without loosening their grip.

Fatty said, Ai Hui, I can't do this anymore, I'm out of strength.

He then responded, Fatty, persevere!

Fatty was losing consciousness and said, Ai Hui, it's good for me to die in the ocean. When you burn ritual money, just choose any beach since all of the waters are linked. I'll definitely receive it.

Lou Lan then said, Fatty, don't you worry. If you die, I will burn money, chilli and even trainning programme schedules, one book each year.

Fatty replied, it's alright, I don't want to die now.

Just as he finished, a wave smashed them into the sea. He laughed until tears spilled out and mixed into the sea water.

They floated up to the water's surface.

Lou Lan said, Ai Hui, I can become a treasure chest and keep everyone inside. You can grab onto it, swim to the shore, and save everyone. Muddle-headed Ai Hui realized he was lying on the beach, tightly holding onto a treasure chest.

He had no idea why the treasure chest was covered in a layer of armor. The armor looked familiar. Wasn't this iron lady's armor? Could it be that she was inside too? The armor was fastened very securely, but it wasn't a problem for Ai Hui. He had loosened countless armors which had been even tighter.

Ai Hui suddenly jerked a little, giving Shi Xueman, who was controlling her elemental energy carefully, a shock, but it quickly turned into joy. Was he coming around?

"You're finally awake..."

Her words fell as her expression and body stiffened.

In dreamland, Ai Hui peeled open the armor. It wasn't a treasure chest, there was another layer! He got worried instantly and increased his speed to undo the second layer.

Eh what was this?

Why wasn’t it a treasure chest!

Furious, Ai Hui grabbed...

Chapter 181: Target Locked!

Suddenly, a sky-piercing scream caused Ai Hui and everyone else's faces to change. It was Shi Xueman!

Were there blood fiends in the room?

Without considering, a few people sprang up and appeared in front of the room as quick as lightning.

Bang!

The door was forced open.

In the center of the room, Shi Xueman was lying on the ground in a daze while Ai Hui could be seen in a defensive posture in the corner. He gazed around non-stop, seemingly at a loss.

"What happened?" Sang Zhijun asked urgently.

The others had their eyes set on those two.

"I don't know." Ai Hui shook his head calmly. "I just woke up, heard iron lady screaming, and thought there was an enemy attack."

He had just been dreaming...

Ai Hui was much more clear-headed now. He vaguely remembered himself opening the treasure chest in his dreams. He had finally loosened the outermost armor but was awoken by iron lady's shriek. He'd thought that there was an attack and subconsciously created distance between them, preparing to defend.

Those present collectively shifted their gazes onto Shi Xueman.

"Nothing... nothing much." Shi Xueman forcefully squeezed a smile onto her face and said, somewhat absent-mindedly, "Maybe I've been feeling too nervous."

Everyone simultaneously heaved a sigh of relief. Upon hearing her words, Ai Hui did so too.

"Ai Hui, how's your back injury?" Jiang Wei asked, voice full of concern.

"Back injury?" Letting his guard down, Ai Hui stood up and stretched his limp and painful limbs. They did not feel like his own. He shook his head, saying, "I have the bandage and am not hurt."

He turned around and indeed, the bloodstains were completely gone. Everyone was utterly shocked. If not for the closely packed holes in his shirt, they would've thought that the bloodstains had just been their hallucination.

But the fact that Ai Hui was unharmed allowed them to finally stop worrying and be thoroughly relieved. Ai Hui was their pillar of support. If something were to happen to him, no one would know where to go or what to do next.

“Let’s grab this opportunity to catch some rest.” Ai Hui regained himself.

The others nodded one after the other before dispersing. The battle had completely drained all of their elemental energy. After all that tension and fear, all they were left with was an unprecedented fatigue.

Ai Hui also got ready to meditate. He wanted to check himself for internal injuries.

He noticed that Shi Xueman was not moving at all and asked out of concern, “Are you okay?”

At this point, Shi Xueman had already calmed down and there was neither joy nor anger in her face. “I’m fine.”

“Rest while you can, the blood fiends may appear any time.” Ai Hui reminded her.

Shi Xueman nodded and changed the topic. “You called me iron lady earlier?”

Ai Hui's stern face turned sluggish. Not good, I'm dead! Why did I spill my thoughts out? I can't wait to run from this ferocious woman so why did I provoke her? Am I not digging my own grave?

How... how...

AAi Hui's brain was spinning fast although there was no change in his expression. Calm and collected, he said, "You heard wrong. I said blue-white sweet lady."

"Oh yeah?" Shi Xueman gave Ai Hui a half-smile.

Her response gave Ai Hui the chills but he knew for sure that he wasn't going to admit it. With a fixed look, he questioned her back, "Any problem?"

"You think I'm sweet? Shi Xueman asked while giving Ai Hui that same strange look.

Now he had goosebumps and the hair all over his body stood on end. Having experienced countless near-death situations, Ai Hui displayed his strong mental strength. At a time like this, he had to maintain his composure.

If he did not persevere, iron lady would most definitely show him what iron was!

His mind worked quickly. To be honest, he did not feel that "sweet lady" could ever be associated with Shi Xueman, but he'd

said it somehow, so he had to reconcile these two no matter what!

How...

A divine light flashed past his mind as he became determined instantly. At ease, he said naturally, “You’re a water elementalist, which reminds me of the clouds and spring water on the mountains. As people from the Old Territory always say, water from mountain springs is a little sweet.”

Red took over Shi Xueman’s half-smiling face.

Seeing that, Ai Hui seized the opportunity to end the conversation. “Sigh, just pretend I didn’t say anything. I’m going to check my condition.”

Got to stay far away from iron lady!

Ai Hui walked out with his default, calm expression even though he was more than eager to exit the room.

Jiang Wei informed him that the few fellows in the woodshed had become bone dregs. Ai Hui nodded without saying anything. He barely had time to care about his own life, so needless to say, he did not bother about those fellows’ deaths. If even Jiang Wei and Sang Zhijun could be calm about it, it wasn’t something worth mentioning to Ai Hui.

Wonder how many were going to perish today.

Sitting under the message tree, Ai Hui took a long, deep breath. He only just realized that saying those two lines caused a layer of sweat to form all over his body.

However, at least he was able to fool her. Good that it had passed, good that it had passed...

Inside the room, sunlight shone in from the windows. Dust drifted around in the pencil-straight light ray. There was an indescribable peacefulness.

With the flickering of the light, Shi Xueman's slightly closed eyes were like that of a hunter who had found a long-awaited prey. The hunter whispered in a bitingly-cold manner, "Finally found you."

The dull ache in her chest reminded her that everything that had happened wasn't an illusion. No one who had come into the room had noticed that a few of the buckles on her armor had been unlocked.

History was always strikingly similar.

She knew now why her reaction had been so intense when Ai Hui wrapped himself around her body. It wasn't just because of that unforgettable incident, but rather, even before she learned the truth, her subconscious mind had already noticed the similarities between the two experiences. It made her 100% certain that Ai Hui was, in fact, the guy from the blind battle. It was because of the way he had unbuckled her armor... it was precisely the same.

The same moves, and that abominable grip…

Her face was flushed red once again. She clenched her teeth. There was no need to check, she knew there would be ten fingerprints!

Ten… Five more than the previous time!

Vile! Damn it!

The rage within her chest surged. She couldn’t wait to finish that damned fellow off with her spear.

No, that’d be too easy on him!

There were angry flames burning in her eyes. How humiliating for her to go through the same degradation twice. She wanted Ai Hui to repay her a thousand times over!

That’s right, just like that!

Shi Xueman was beyond determined. She made a vow in her heart to never forget this moment.

The rage within her chest subsided as a smile appeared on the corner of her lips. She did lose a lot this time, but she had finally locked onto her target. As long as she was clear about the target,

she had plenty of ways and means to deal with him.

The most important thing right now was to survive this blood disaster.

How could she let Ai Hui die? After all, he was her savior. Of course, some favors had to be returned. She could slowly get her revenge... Heh heh, mountain spring water, I'll let you know how sweet it is...

Shi Xueman's fighting spirit was at an all-time high. She was excited.

Under the message tree, Ai Hui carefully checked himself for internal injuries. What relieved him a little was the fact that his seven palaces were still intact. This was the thing he was most worried about. After all, the palaces had been destroyed once and then restored. He wasn't sure if they could endure such great pressure.

While he had been operating the [Arching Fish Back] defense, he had also been using [Big Dipper], so the impact of the attack had been distributed evenly between the seven palaces.

It seemed now that the seven palaces were more reliable than he had imagined.

Now certain that he was unhurt, he did not stop. He stared blankly at the message tree for a while before searching for a brush

and writing on a leaf.

“Since the blood wolves, the bloodshed has become more severe. The forest outside the city has become the nest of the blood fiends. The forest can devour the weaker blood fiends and channel their power into a particular blood fiend to create an even stronger one. This is called blood refinement. The whole city was attacked. We encountered two groups of blood ants. Fortunately, we are still alive.”

Ai Hui did not know why, but he wanted to tell the fellow that called himself a prisoner. He wanted to tell him about almost losing his life and the flaming city. He wasn’t afraid, but felt an indescribably bleak sadness.

He wanted to write a little something, say a little something.

Whatever secrets or advice about not provoking the Blood of God were forgotten. Perhaps they would all die here today, who could care so much?

Looking at his slowly fading handwriting, Ai Hui became lost in thought.

He regained his spirits. He hadn’t died, had he?

He thought about the dream he’d had. He was still encouraging Fatty not to give up on his life… Eh? Fatty?

The sounds of fire spraying landed in his ears, and he found Fatty with much ease. Fatty was like a flamethrower, never knowing the meaning of being tired. He was still tenaciously shooting flames.

Suddenly, Ai Hui thought about a certain scene from the earlier battle.

Fatty was completely unharmed... and he was shielding Jiang Wei, Sang Zhijun and Wang Xiaoshan...

A light flashed past his eyes. Correct, the blood fiends had attacked those fellows in the woodshed, attacked everyone except for Fatty!

Could it be that there was something on Fatty that they hated?

If they could find out what, wouldn't they be able to restrain the blood ants and make them avoid people?

Ai Hui's mind shook!

The first thing he thought about was the flames. A lot of wild beasts had the instinct to fear fire. Could it be that blood ants hated it too?

No! The guys in the woodshed were fire elementalists, but they too were eaten and reduced to bone dregs. Even the equipment containing fire elemental energy was swallowed up cleanly by the blood ants.

If it wasn’t fire then what was it?

Could it be… chilli?

Ai Hui asked Lou Lan in a loud voice, “Lou Lan, besides flame-winged serpent’s egg and chilli, what else was in the dragon soup that you gave Fatty?”

“Starsword grass, triangle fennel, and soft wood powder.” Lou Lan answered precisely.

They were commonly seen ingredients. Ai Hui was all the more convinced by his conjecture. He asked urgently, “Do we still have chilli at home?”

“There’s some left.” Lou Lan looked puzzledly at Ai Hui.

Ai Hui was overjoyed and said hurriedly, “Take them all out!”

“No problem, Ai Hui.”

Chapter 182: Heavy Losses

No matter how they looked at it, what Ai Hui was doing seemed completely unorthodox. Seeing his serious expression however, helped them to accept it without so much as a squeak. The past few battles had given them a taste of just how far behind Ai Hui they were, and as such they were now less doubtful of his actions.

Lou Lan brought out all the remaining chili.

Chili was a commonly found cooking ingredient that was especially enjoyed by fire elementalists.

During the Cultivation Era, the cultivators led simple lives and enjoyed light and elegant dishes. They ate things like spirit grains and drank spirit tea. Those who were more affluent ate spirit food that had been nurtured for extended periods of time, usually upwards of ten thousand years. Such foods were not just highly potent, they were also symbols of wealth and power.

The newly founded Avalon of Five Elements only had a history spanning one thousand years, even less if one began counting from when they first achieved an advantage over the Wilderness. People living in the Avalon of Five Elements were more interested in the practical value of the food they ate. Elemental food, for instance, was an important part of any elementalists' training regime. Potency was the most highly regarded aspect of elemental food.

The popularity of elemental food was what spurred the wood elementalists to focus more of their efforts on selectively nurturing

ingredients. Chili was an example of a successfully nurtured ingredient.

Chilies contained an abundant amount of fire elemental energy. While not considerably powerful, the fire elemental energy found in chili was unique in that it could greatly increase the liveliness of the fire elemental energy within a fire elementalist's body.

Fire elemental energy was the liveliest among the five types of elemental energy. Liveliness was a crucial part of fire elemental energy, so much so that the flames created from livelier fire elemental energy burned hotter. If it was an endothermic flame being formed, then its temperature would be much lower.

The wood elementalists had spared no effort in breeding chilies, creating a wide variety of exceptional species.

Each chili pepper from the Lava species was only the size of a pinky and was slightly curved. Its neatly arranged seeds could be seen through its crystalline red body. Every once in awhile, one of its seeds would release a jet of flame that surged around the cavity within the chili pepper's body.

Of course, such chilies couldn't simply be eaten on a whim.

Although the elemental energy contained within chili had many benefits, it was highly irritating and posed a serious challenge to the person eating it. The more outstanding the species, the more potent and irritating its elemental energy. After many rounds of selective breeding, wood elementalists had been able to take its

“spiciness” to a whole new level. At that level, spiciness was no longer just a taste, but an experience.

Anyone who took on the challenge would feel as though their entire body was on fire. They would feel as though flames were spurting out of every single pore on their body, as if they had fallen into a pit of magma or burned at the stake.

Such advancement had also elevated chili’s status from a common ingredient to one that was specially used by fire elementalists. Only fire elementalists could withstand such a terrifying form of elemental energy. Nowadays, there existed certain species of chilies that were rarely eaten even by fire elementalists. Under the perverse dedication of the wood elementalists, quite a number of common food ingredients had undergone extreme transformations.

Using chili to suppress the blood ants was no joke.

In the Wilderness, Ai Hui had done and witnessed even weirder things. From smearing sludge on one’s body to hide bodily scents, to using plant juices as poisonous insect repellent, he had experienced them all.

What’s so strange about using chili?

Lou Lan squatted beside Ai Hui and asked curiously, “Does Ai Hui have a sudden craving for chili?”

“Nope,” replied Ai Hui without lifting his head. “I suspect that the blood ants have an aversion to the smell of chili.”

“Really?” Lou Lan asked, suddenly interested.

“I’m not sure, but we won’t know until we try.” Ai Hui examined the chilies, quickly noticing a problem. All of the slightly different looking things in front of him were chilies. There were green ones, yellow ones, red ones, and even black ones! Some were large and some were tiny, some were of odd shapes as well.

Were the blood ants averse to all kinds of chili or only specific types?

Forget it, let’s just try them out first.

Ai Hui took out a few of each type of chili and began to grind them up separately. A rich, spicy smell pervaded the air as he crushed the chilies into powder form. Tiny tongues of flame could occasionally be seen among the powdered forms of species such as Lava.

He spread the chili powder in a circle around the training ground. In order to test how effective each type of chili was as a repellant, he marked down the location of each different kind. Lou Lan went down into the basement to sprinkle chili powder as well.

The blood ants weren’t powerful combatants on their own, but they had strength in numbers and often moved in swarms. They

were adept at ambushing from underground as well.

Ai Hui was exhausted after finishing the whole business with the chilies.

He didn't sit down, but began to complete one Circulatory Cycle Revolution while remaining in his sword stance. He relished finally having the chance to meditate.

He had done all he could, the only thing left to do was wait.

Every part of his body ached as an overwhelming tiredness washed over him, but he couldn't fall asleep just yet. Keeping himself awake, Ai Hui persevered with the Circulatory Cycle Revolution.

His bodily aches, exhaustion, the wind, and the faraway sounds of battle receded from his mind like an ebbing tide. The world around him slowly faded away as his focus remained squarely on the task at hand. All that was left was an inner tranquility, the circulation of his elemental energy, and the throbbing of the sword embryo.

The mayor's residence.

Wang Zhen had a grave expression as he listened to his subordinate's report.

"… The situation at West Second Street has been stabilized. Upon

arrival, we found around two hundred and seventy dead and one hundred and twenty injured. The number of people missing is still undetermined. We have mobilized the residents to begin efforts to eradicate the remaining blood ants. As of now, West Second Street has been purged, but because the sealing stone has been damaged, it is difficult for us to redeploy underground defenses. I have already given orders to set up early warning systems, as well as arranged for the injured to be quarantined and overseen."

"The situation on Wave Street is critical, with more than five hundred blood ants belonging to more than four swarms on the attack. Despite our resistance, pretty much the entire street has been destroyed. The number of deaths is catastrophic... We only managed to save sixty-four people. Twenty-four of those saved were injured and arrangements have been made to send them to quarantine. We've suffered heavy losses and can no longer continue with the operation. May I suggest that we assemble a team of students from Central Pine Academy to assist with a sweep of the area, to ensure that none of the blood ants remain?"

.....

The air around them seemed to congeal as the mood became incredibly sullen. Hearing more of the depressing, bloodstained figures eventually numbed them from the initial terror. They had lost almost a third of the districts within Central Pine City within such a short span of time.

After a long day of firefighting around the city, the dean was visibly tired. Having led a comfortable life, when had he ever experienced such intense combat? Although, he didn't exactly

have a choice either.

Nowhere to run, everyone knew that there was nowhere to run.

Losing almost half of their personnel to death or injury was a hard pill to swallow. Only elites were capable of standing in the face of such adversity on the battlefield.

But it wasn't as if these people had become elites overnight. They were simply driven to fight by the fear of dying at the hands of the blood fiends. Fighting was the only way forward.

The dean slowly opened his mouth to speak, his voice hoarse. "The situation in Central Pine Academy is slightly better. The teachers have experienced a greater number of casualties than the students. We've lost slightly more than one hundred students, with an overall loss of over twenty percent of the academy's headcount."

A weak smile crept onto Wang Zhen's lips. The teachers were much more important than the students. To him, the students were too weak to be of much use, especially when compared to the teachers. He was certain that the teachers would be able to easily unleash their true powers with a few more battles under their belts.

"Why such a large number?" He couldn't help but ask, thinking about the much greater number of casualties among the teachers.

“They are teachers,” the dean croaked on. “None of them will simply stand and watch while their students are eaten.”

A flash of rage lit up in Wang Zhen’s eyes. “They’re too soft-hearted!” he hissed angrily.

“They are teachers,” the dean replied while returning Wang Zhen’s fiery gaze. Raising his voice slightly, he continued, “Not soldiers.”

Central Pine Academy wasn’t a particularly prestigious academy. Teachers were rarely transferred into or out of the academy, and as such, many of them had worked with the dean for many years. They had become more like friends rather than colleagues.

The number of deaths he had received news of and witnessed first hand that day alone was more than the number of funerals he had attended until now. The sorrow he felt was terribly overwhelming.

In all his years of teaching, some things had long been inscribed into his bones.

He was a practical man, looking out specially for Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun due to their importance, but when he sees students being attacked, notices them trembling before the blood ants, and sees their fear-stricken faces, he would still rush forward to protect them.

They were, after all, just a bunch of children.

He knew that such acts weren't rational at all, that he should be using his elemental energy in more important situations, and yet…

This is probably why he's still only the dean of such a small academy. The dean laughed in his heart, resigned to his fate.

Wang Zhen kept quiet, realizing his mistake. While the teachers' actions appeared very silly and naive to him, he couldn't help but admit that they were highly admirable.

"I'm sorry, where are my manners. The students will be proud of them." Wang Zhen apologized sincerely with a bow.

"It's okay, you must be under a lot of pressure as well," the dean responded empathetically. "What's the plan now? Is there any news from Master Han's side?"

Wang Zhen regained his composure and said, "A map of the entire city has been sent to the embroidery workshop. Master Han has gotten in touch to tell us that they have begun studying it." The dean nodded and commented, "No one else has done this before, so there's no point of reference. Only Master Han has the mettle and confidence to take on such a challenge."

"That's also why we can't just pin all our hopes on Master Han," Wang Zhen replied resolutely. "We need to reclaim the areas taken over by the blood fiends before Master Han completes her

preparations. I plan to mobilize every able person, including the students, for this battle."

"Why?" asked the dean, his face drained of color. "How many more will have to die? They're not strong enough, we'll only be sending them to their deaths!"

Wang Zhen calmly looked at the dean and said, "There are two reasons for this. First, we're low on manpower so everyone has to take part. Everyone will be fighting to the death, so it makes no difference. Second, some of the blood ants have already completed their transformation."

"Transformation?" The dean's face turned ashen.

"Our elemental energy seems to be the catalyst for their transformation. So far we've only met one fully transformed blood ant, but we had to sacrifice a lot of people to take it down. We've also killed another three blood ants in the midst of transforming that appeared to be in a state of hibernation. It is still unknown if their transformation has anything to do with eating people, but considering that it's not an isolated phenomenon, things might get worse if we continue to wait. If more blood ants complete their transformation, our circumstances will become even more dire. That is why I am prepared to send every last elementalist and student out on a full-scale assault to reclaim every one of the districts that we have lost, as well as to kill every last one of these damned blood ants!"

Wang Zhen looked extremely ferocious.

Chapter 183: Communication

Ai Hui meditated for much longer this time. By the time he finished, it was already dusk. All traces of exhaustion vanished from his body, a testament to the efficacy of entering a meditative state while wielding the sword. Previous Circulatory Cycle Revolutions were driven only by his lungs, but now the sword embryo enhanced its movements as well.

The sun set over the horizon, signaling the end of another day.

The morning's massacre lay fresh in everyone's minds. A lingering fear hovered over the edges of their conscious minds like a dissipating column of smoke.

At the very least, they were now much calmer than they had been in the morning.

The good news was that Jiang Wei and Wang Xiaoshan managed to simultaneously achieve a breakthrough.

When comparing base levels, Jiang Wei was much weaker than Sang Zhijun. In terms of fighting prowess, however, they were equals.

Sang Zhijun trained in the [Arrow Fusion Technique]. While formidable, the technique expended large amounts of elemental energy, and though she was close to achieving Eight Palaces Completion, she remained an amateur when it came to the [Arrow Fusion Technique]. Despite her ability to fuse three arrows, she

could only use it a couple times.

The Golden Silk Longbow's advantage was in its firing speed, but conversely, this made the shots weaker. Compared to the arrows fired from Jiang Wei's Mountain Bow, the ones released from Sang Zhijun's Golden Silk Longbow were considerably weaker. With increased base levels, they would eventually encounter and use a wider variety of elemental energy skills to cope with depletion. These skills would complement the Golden Silk Longbow, allowing its wielder to overcome the inherent loss of power while gaining an edge with its increased firing speed.

But for now, Jiang Wei was more effective in his role.

Breaking through to the fifth palace was a significant advancement.

Ai Hui thought highly of Jiang Wei.

Jiang Wei was down-to-earth, diligent and dependable. All he needed to ensure a bright future was a powerful legacy.

Compared to Jiang Wei, Wang Xiaoshan did not hold as much of a presence, and so the activation of his third palace came as a surprise to Ai Hui.

Ai Hui never intended for Wang Xiaoshan to play much of a role in battle, having other plans in mind.

He needed Wang Xiaoshan to maintain the walls. The perimeter partitions destroyed earlier were already fixed by Wang Xiaoshan. Back in the Garden of Life, Ai Hui noticed that although he was lacking in base level and courage, he was highly imaginative in his use of mud. Only later did he discover that Wang Xiaoshan came from a line of masons, which counted as a type of inherited knowledge.

The newly repaired wall was completely different. Densely packed stone barbs lined the entire wall, making it seem as though it had grown thorns. Wang Xiaoshan had also taken into account the blood fiends' destructive powers and rebuilt the walls with greater width and height than before.

Sang Zhijun and Shi Xueman lamented the terrible aesthetics of the new training ground.

The entire place had completely transformed under Wang Xiaoshan's liberal use of his creativity.

Lou Lan held an interest in Wang Xiaoshan. Although the latter was not as skilled at controlling earth elemental energy, he was exceptionally adept at building. The complex structures of the rebuilt perimeter walls made it less pleasing to the eye, but the walls were much stronger than before with the new additions.

Bangwan attacked the wall with his [Viridescent Flower] at full power but only managed to dislodge a small chunk of the wall about half a meter across.

Everyone had a whole new level of respect for Wang Xiaoshan.

The original perimeter wall would have instantly collapsed under such an attack.

In addition to this, Wang Xiaoshan constructed more robust battlements across the wall specifically for Jiang Wei and Sang Zhijun to allow them greater protection.

Wang Xiaoshan was in a state of frantic energy, ignoring everyone around him. He had transformed into a different person altogether.

Focus was a mystical force. It granted charisma to those who lacked it, increased the stature of a meek individual, and allowed even the most ordinary of individuals to stand out from among the crowd.

Fatty was single-mindedly focused on spitting out flames as well.

“Will Fatty be all right if he continues like this?” Ai Hui asked Lou Lan, a little worried.

A familiar yellow light flashed in Lou Lan’s eyes as he gave Fatty a full-body scan. He said, “Don’t worry, Ai Hui, he’ll be fine. Fatty’s condition is extremely favorable. He has already completed his third palace, and continuously spitting fire has increased the liveliness of his fire elemental energy by a good amount. The fire elemental energy in his body has begun to stabilize and should be

finished in about three more hours.”

His third palace… Such amazing speed!

Jiang Wei and Wang Xiaoshan had also achieved breakthroughs. Ai Hui recalled how difficult it had been for him to activate a single palace. Using up ten million yuan worth of ingredients had indeed been worth it considering the breakthroughs it had helped to trigger. Surely you receive what you pay for.

It was no wonder those children from influential families had such high base levels.

Ai Hui, who was experiencing mild heartache, moved over to where Duanmu Huanghun was standing and curiously asked, “Why is your base level so low? Can’t you activate more palaces by eating more elemental food?”

Duanmu Huanghun looked over at Ai Hui with disdain and snorted loftily. “What do you know! Coveting shortcuts will result in weak foundations, making it difficult to become a Grandmaster.”

Sang Zhijun explained further, “Using elemental food to increase one’s base level isn’t difficult, but it’s not all rainbows and sunshine either. Classmate Duanmu has far-reaching ambitions and with his innate talent, he has no need for such shortcuts.”

Sang Zhijun went on to highlight the many nuances of using

elemental food. Geniuses from influential families like Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun normally consumed elemental food to aid in nurturing their foundations rather than to increase their base levels.

Apart from this, a large number of absolute arts required a solid foundation, and so rushing to increase base level was not always best. The more effort spent on accumulating elemental energy eventually meant more benefits.

Ai Hui finally understood. He did not, however, care much about these pitfalls. He wasn't sure if he would even live to see tomorrow, so why would he concern himself over such things? Hidden side effects were a problem for the future Ai Hui. For now, increasing his base level was the best way to increase his chances of survival.

Grandmaster? That wasn't something he had even considered before.

"Oh, so you wish to become a Grandmaster?" Ai Hui questioned as he circled Duanmu Huanghun, clicking his tongue.

Duanmu Huanghun arrogantly harrumphed, speaking disdainfully, "What would a brambling know of a swan's aspirations!"

"Then why did you eat so much last night?" Ai Hui asked tauntingly, raising his eyebrows. "Hypocritical! Don't think I didn't see you licking the plate!"

Duanmu Huanghun was stunned. A red flush quickly crept over his face and up to his ears. He felt so embarrassed that he wanted to find a hole in the ground to hide in.

To him, licking the plate was too....

Nearby, Shi Xueman had an embarrassed look on her face as well. The soup was so delicious that she too had almost licked the bowl clean.

A leaf on the message tree lit up, drawing Ai Hui's attention away from his plans to relentlessly humiliate Duanmu Huanghun.

Likely because he was well-rested, Ai Hui was in a much calmer state of mind than he was in the morning. He approached the message tree and glanced over the glowing leaf.

"I apologize that I managed to see your message only now, but I am even more remorseful that I do not know how to help you. Blood refinement allows for the creation of extremely powerful warriors known as apostles. As far as I know, there are six, and the Blood of God flows within their bodies. You must be exceedingly cautious when meeting them and attempt to flee as soon as possible. Could you perhaps describe what blood refinement is like?"

Blood apostles... a red figure surfaced in Ai Hui's mind.

One Thousand Yuan….

Ai Hui laughed bitterly in his heart. There were only six of them yet he had already met one. Such luck.

He thought for a while before writing.

“I’ve already encountered one of them, a lady, and almost lost my life. The trees outside the city have become exceptionally large, and in numerous roots that hang from the trees resembling blood vessels, a blood-red fluid flows. I was bound by these roots which then pierced into my skin. I felt an extreme burning sensation throughout my body and soon lost consciousness. Thank the heavens that I’m still alive, though I have yet to fully understand what’s going on.”

A reply came swiftly after. Ai Hui could sense the old man’s agitation.

“I’ve got it! They’re using the root channeling technique! Forgive my loss of composure, but we’ve never received concrete reports regarding the blood poison before. The root channeling technique allows plants to link and channel substances. It’s an unorthodox wood elementalist legacy. As for the fluid within those roots, I do not know yet.”

Ai Hui was momentarily distracted. This was his first time hearing a deduction regarding the Blood of God. These were the sort of messages that could possibly be of help to him.

He quickly jotted down all of his observations.

“There were many burrs on the trees that came to life once the roots pierced into an elementalist. These tumors writhed non-stop when active, resembling a face twisting its features. Blood refinement appears to require much from its target. I’ve seen elementalists who could not endure it and exploded.”

“Tree burrs? They might be devouring spirits, parasitic spirits, or confined spirit faces of the ancient blood refinement methods. Blood refinement has high requirements with regards to constitution. The number of blood fiends that operate in groups, such as blood ants, will start to decline as time passes. The blood fiends you face later on will be much stronger, but they act on their own.”

Ai Hui heaved a sigh of relief upon reading that bands of blood fiends would decrease. Facing stronger blood fiends, however, was going to be another headache.

“It seems like blood ants are sensitive to chilies, but we have yet to verify this conjecture. After consuming Dragon Soup, one of our friends began to spit flames and the blood ants appeared to avoid going near him. Blood ants aren’t afraid of fire elemental energy, so does anything else come to mind?” Ai Hui wrote his reply.

“Yes, it does bring some ideas to mind. You can try mixing chili with firethorn stones or black-branded flames, or maybe even red sulphur and see if they have any effect on the blood ants.”

Ai Hui finally received a reply that he had hoped to see. He was itching to give it a go.

Struck by a sudden thought, he penned, “I heard them mention blood spiritual force.”

“Blood spiritual force? Really? Are you sure? This is impossible! Nobody should be able to create blood spiritual force. The ancient blood sects couldn’t do it, and there’s no longer any spiritual force left in this world. How is it possible to turn elemental energy into spiritual force? No, could it be that adding elemental energy to blood creates spiritual force? How does that work? I need to think about it, this is simply too shocking!”

Ai Hui could sense the extent of the old prisoner’s agitation and confusion, but he didn’t mock him. Hearing the three words “blood spiritual force” for the first time had left him in a state of utter shock as well.

Spiritual force, the key to unlocking the vast treasures of the Cultivation Era!

He shook his head, halting his wild thoughts before they got out of hand. He was more interested in the old man’s other suggestion.

After his communication with the old man this time around, Ai Hui confirmed two conjectures. He was now sure that the old man was a sworn enemy of the Blood of God, and that his group had intensely studied it in order to deal with it. Although the old man’s group didn’t have a concrete understanding of the situation with

the Blood of God, they knew quite a bit about the organization behind it.

Under the curious gazes of the others, he carefully plucked the leaf off of the tree branch and hung it around his neck.

“Lou Lan, do we have firethorn stones, black-branded flames, and red sulphur at home?”

Chapter 184: City-wide Mobilization Order

Slightly surprised, Shi Xueman stared at the message tree.

She had no idea who Ai Hui was communicating with but didn't pry. What astonished her was the message tree's ability to communicate with someone who was outside of the city limits. Then again, this wasn't some ordinary message tree but rather a specimen of the first generation.

Communication between Central Pine City and the outside world was nearly completely broken. The only message tree still fully active within the city was the one in the mayor's residence. She had used it to communicate with her family after the outbreak of the blood disaster.

"May I use this message tree?" Shi Xueman suddenly asked.

Ai Hui waved his hand without looking and replied, "Go ahead."

Shi Xueman found it laughable that a leaf from her own message tree was hanging on this one. Ai Hui would probably never guess that Shi Xueman was actually "a bad deal."

A bad deal....

Shi Xueman's amused expression became a grimace as she hung up a new leaf in place of the one she previously put up. She thought of her doting grandfather who must be racked with worry

and came close to tears.

Reminding herself that she was much stronger than before, she kept her emotions in check and penned her message on the leaf.

Just as she finished writing, the dean flew into the alley.

The dean was shocked to see the completely transformed yard that was littered with the corpses of blood ants. Even more remarkable was the team, especially Ai Hui. It had only been a few days since the dean last saw him, yet already seven palaces were activated!

Was Ai Hui a genius that he had overlooked?

The dean was flabbergasted. In all his years as dean, he had never once met such a freak.

“Seems like the fight went well. And to think I was worried about your safety. Hmm, weren’t there more of you?” the dean asked as he noted the numbers that didn’t add up. He recalled Shi Xueman’s group had more members than just herself and Sang Zhijun.

“The blood ants....” Sang Zhijun replied in a sad tone.

Shi Xueman’s eyes were slightly bloodshot while Duanmu Huanghun quietly looked down.

Ai Hui stared fixedly at them. These guys had some top-notch acting skills.... Even someone as dumb as the ingrate could perform so well!

No matter their incompetence or mediocrity, pretense was indeed the natural ability of the younger generations of influential families. In the harsh and backstabbing world of the rich and influential, pretense was essential for survival.

Those at the top of the families existed above all other authority and rules, free to act as they pleased. But before they could reach such a level, the younger members could not escape the shackles of their environment.

The dean sighed deeply. A quick survey of the piles of blood ant corpses littering the ground was enough for him to visualize the bitter fight that must have taken place. Fortunately, Duanmu Huanghun and Shi Xueman were safe and sound.... The number of deaths he had witnessed had served to numb his emotions. After seeing a number of powerful teachers fall before him, what were a few students' deaths?

Was he going to survive this catastrophe? The dean was deeply pessimistic of his chances.

He equally doubted their chances of surviving until reinforcements arrived.

But still he did not forget his duty as the dean. No matter his pessimism, he could not pass that feeling on to the students. The

dean began to encourage and console them, “Let’s all perk up and not let our imaginations run wild. There are still battles to be fought.”

“How is the situation within the city?” Shi Xueman took the initiative to ask.

The dean hesitated for a moment before deciding not to sugarcoat it. “The situation is terrible. We have lost control of almost one-third of our land. What’s worse is that the blood ants have started to transform.”

“Transform?” Ai Hui and Duanmu Huanghun asked in unison.

“Yes, we suspect that elemental energy is what’s driving the blood fiends’ transformation.”

Ai Hui slightly trembled after hearing this. He understood more than his peers about the blood fiends. Back in the Garden of Life, he had drawn the same conclusions after observing their sensitivity to elemental energy. In other words, elemental energy was highly attractive to these blood fiends.

Blood of God; blood refinement; using elemental energy as food; transforming after devouring elementalists….

A chill ran up his spine. Was the Blood of God really trying to destroy the Avalon of Five Elements? Did they consider all other elementalists as prey?

Noting the shock and concern on his allies' faces, he realized that telling them all he knew about the blood disaster would only serve to frighten them further.

He decided to keep every last word about it to himself.

Would revealing his knowledge help them in escaping from Central Pine City? Would it help them survive this danger? No.

On the contrary, he would be opening Pandora's Box if he told them any more. Even if he managed to get out of this alive, there would be no end to his troubles and likely face incarceration and repeated interrogations. And since the higher-ups would not be satisfied with answers obtained via gentle questioning, they would definitely turn to crueler methods of torture to ease their worries.

Even if he somehow managed to survive all of that and become a hero, the Blood of God would most certainly seek revenge on him.

Truthfully speaking, between the Blood of God and the Avalon of Five Elements, Ai Hui regarded the former more highly. Despite their weak appearance, the plans they hatched were far beyond those of the Avalon of Five Elements. Even now, the Avalon of Five Elements had yet to fully comprehend the current situation.

When an underground organization with hundreds of years of deliberations finally decides to act, their preparations must surely be complete.

The old prisoner mentioned that the Blood of God had six god apostles, and Ai Hui believed this to be true. Whether or not there were only six, however, was something he was unsure of.

If captured by One Thousand Yuan again, he was probably better off surrendering....

And if he wasn't good enough to become a blood elementalist, then he'd just have to accept that fact. Ending up dead was still better off than living a wretched life. Ai Hui decided to find some time to have a talk with Fatty about it.

Ai Hui maintained a straight face while his mind worked.

He would only divulge these thoughts to Fatty and Lou Lan.

"If so, we'll need to take back all of the lost areas and eliminate every last one of those blood ants that continue to transform," Shi Xueman said gravely.

The dean was secretly pleased to see Shi Xueman's resolute expression as she said these words. She was truly Shi Beihai's daughter.

"Indeed, that is the mayor's opinion as well. We must reclaim the lost areas at all costs before the blood ants transform. Everyone will be involved in this operation, even students and residents. I'm here to inform you guys of this operation, and someone else will

come by later to brief you on your mission. This is a city-wide mobilization order!”

“Yes!” Shi Xueman answered, stiffening her body and giving a salute. “We accept this order!”

She wasn’t the only one doing so. Duanmu Huanghun, Sang Zhijun, and Jiang Wei saluted the order as well. In the Avalon of Five Elements, ordinary citizens were normally not involved in operations. As such, a city-wide order signalled just how dangerous the situation had become.

Ai Hui and Wang Xiaoshan didn’t perform the salute. Coming from the Old Territory, they weren’t accustomed such formalities.

“I’ll tell them to try their best to avoid splitting the few of you up,” the dean said as he looked over the blood ant corpses again. “After being together for some time, you guys must have built up a rapport with one another. We’ll instead send some students to reinforce your group, so please look out for them.”

The dean’s gaze landed on Ai Hui, knowing that he was the core member of this group.

Shi Xueman suddenly blurted out, “Since a city-wide order is in effect, and we’re currently in a state of war, are we allowed to act according to martial law on students who disobey orders?”

The current members had full faith in Ai Hui’s orders, but the

newcomers might now. She didn't want to bring up something like this so soon after witnessing their comrades' deaths, but it was crucial to set the record straight. In times of peace, a lack of solidarity affected only relationships, but in times of war, it could potentially lead to their deaths.

Everyone else looked at the dean.

The dean was taken aback. He wouldn't have found it strange if Ai Hui had been the one to ask this. From their conversations, the dean found that Ai Hui was not easy to deal with; the boy simply wouldn't compromise without a bargain. The one asking this now, however, was Shi Xueman, which meant that Ai Hui had already won the trust of Shi Xueman and the others.

He was quite something… this fellow.

The dean had no idea how Ai Hui had managed to accomplish this, but his evaluation of the boy was raised by quite a bit. Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun were, after all, not well-known for their easygoing personalities.

"Definitely! Deserters are to be executed, and no one is exempt from this," the dean instructed.

Everyone tensed upon hearing the words "deserters" and "executed." These words reflected the graveness of the situation and foreshadowed the slaughter that was soon to follow.

“I require some additional supplies,” Ai Hui informed, breaking his silence.

The dean sighed. “I’ll try my best to get what you need.”

With a city-wide mobilization order passed, even individuals like Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun had to charge ahead. Anyone caught retreating would be severely punished, possibly implicating their entire family.

The dean had no say in this matter since the authority to pass such an order lay solely in the hands of the mayor. There was no longer much of a choice either, considering their bleak circumstances.

If Shi Xueman and the rest perished as a result of the city-wide mobilization order, nobody would blame the city or the academy because it would be considered an honor. It was a good thing for the dean as well, to no longer have to protect Shi Xueman and the others.

Seeing the blood ant corpses reaffirmed this feeling.

Keeping the students away from the fight was not much different from sending them straight to their deaths. Even if they knew of their impending deaths, retreat was no longer an option for anybody.

How many students were going to die? The dean didn’t dare to

think too deeply on it.

He had picked a number of talented students to be placed under Ai Hui's care. He wasn't sure what would come of this, but he wanted to leave some hope for Central Pine Academy's future.

Ai Hui was a student as well and would hopefully look out for them.

"Are my master and mistress okay?" Ai Hui asked.

"Don't worry. The embroidery workshop is a key protection site."

The dean's words allayed Ai Hui's worries.

Soon after, the dean brought over roughly 100 students, each and every one of them handpicked.

Ai Hui recognized most of them as the brightest of Central Pine Academy.

He glanced at the dean who had unexpectedly placed such confidence in him.

"I leave them in your hands," the dean announced tiredly. "As for the resupplies you requested, you'll have to make a trip down to the stores. They've agreed to your request, but resources are

very limited.”

Nobody could have imagined the future achievements that would come from these sad and frightened youths gathered in this courtyard.

Chapter 185: Huo Yuanlong

“… His stone-cold eyes looked at us as though we were lambs sent to be slaughtered. He was supposedly one of the students from the academy, but I was pretty sure that his name had never appeared on the top two hundred lists. Perhaps he had some unique capabilities? Who knew! Regardless, he appeared to be a cold-hearted person, like someone who might send us to our deaths. I wished that the one leading us was the respectable Shi Xueman and not this nameless person.”

—— Taken from《Huo Yuanlong’s Diary》

The tender youths standing in front of Ai Hui reminded him of the coolie that he had been three years ago.

Without any trace of elemental energy, coolies out in the Wilderness were just like paper dolls and were meant to be treated as cannon fodder. In the face of the blood disaster, these relatively formidable yet inexperienced students were not much stronger than the coolies out in the Wilderness. They were pretty much just cannon fodder as well.

Winning with numbers alone wasn’t going to be possible anymore. Now was the time for experts to shine.

A Grandmaster would be much more useful than everyone in Central Pine City combined. If the city had just a Grandmaster, they probably would have escaped by now.

It was a pity that there weren't any in Central Pine City.

Besides making use of numbers, the city had no other tactics available. It was as though the humans were mimicking the blood ants' use of group tactics. In today's Central Pine City, humans were not much better than beasts.

Newly formed groups of one hundred people each were gathered on the streets. The leaders were shouting at the top of their lungs and waving their arms in an attempt to drum up the troops' morale.

Ai Hui could see the fear hidden beneath their impassioned faces.

Chaos and despair filled the air as the darkness of night engulfed the black smoke that was rising everywhere.

Collapsed walls and houses blocked parts of the streets while bricks were strewn all over. Dried bloodstains were everywhere and the air reeked strongly of blood and smoke. The jack-o'-lanterns that neatly lined both sides of the streets were now badly damaged and scattered about, making the street sides look like combs with missing teeth. The remaining lanterns radiated a haunting, feeble glow, casting shadows throughout their street. Central Pine City had undergone a drastic change.

He had never seen anything like this, not even in the Wilderness.

At the warehouse, Ai Hui queued for half an hour before he

managed to meet the frantic officer-in-charge. The officer immediately recognized Ai Hui, who had left a deep impression the last time they'd met.

"Hardly anything good is left, although you can pick out two items. I'd advise you to hurry."

The officer gestured towards the long line.

Ai Hui knew he didn't have the time to slowly saunter in and pick out items. He directly replied, "Alright. I'll need a weapon for a fire elementalist, something like a fire jug."

"For that fatty?" the officer asked. The officer's memory seemed to be very good, but he remembered Fatty because he too had left a deep impression when he'd put on the Steady Mountain.

"That's right," Ai hui answered, nodding.

"Ha, you guys are in luck," said the officer, laughing. "There're no more fire jugs, but we do have a fire vat. Nobody has taken it because it's so heavy, but I think it's very suitable for him."

The officer brought Ai Hui to a corner of the warehouse and pointed to a huge vat that was almost as tall as he was. Ai Hui instantly understood why nobody wanted to use it, it was simply too big. The vats that fire elementalists used were more expensive the smaller they were. Fire gourds were one of the smallest types but were very expensive, so most fire elementalists used fire jugs.

Standing before Ai Hui was practically a wine jar.

“Is it useful?” Ai Hui asked skeptically.

“Of course,” the officer replied matter-of-factly. “It may be huge, but it’s good stuff. Besides being a little bit heavy, it doesn’t have any other shortcomings.”

Ai Hui almost rolled his eyes at the officer. Being heavier and larger were huge shortcomings. He pictured Fatty donning the Steady Mountain armor, raising the tower shield, and lugging this huge vat on his back. This getup would be a bit too... indescribable!

“This is really something good!” the officer exclaimed discontentedly as he noticed Ai Hui’s skeptical look. “The artisan who made this had intended to create a Heaven-grade weapon, but ultimately failed. He then used its core to forge this fire vat. If you look carefully you can see an inscription on it, it’s not something I made up.”

He pointed to the fine print on the side of the vat.

If it was someone else who had suspected him like that, he would’ve thrown that person out long ago; however, he remembered Ai Hui and understood that the two of them must be quite capable to have survived until now.

Upon hearing that it was a product resulting from a failed

Heaven-grade weapon, Ai Hui immediately agreed. “I’ll take it!”

Heaven-grade weapons were high-grade arms created for elementalists to use. In order to distinguish them from treasures of the past, they were named as such because they were created in the Avalon of Five Elements.

Shi Xueman’s spear was one such weapon.

Heaven-grade weapons possessed mystical powers and were able to greatly enhance an elementalists’ fighting prowess. Wielding these weapons was, however, highly taxing on the user, usually requiring at least the completion of eight palaces. In other words, one pretty much had to be a full-fledged elementalist to use one.

Shi Xueman was unable to unleash even one percent of her spear’s true power.

The materials required for forging a Heaven-grade weapon had to be of the highest quality. This was why Ai Hui immediately agreed to take the vat after hearing that it had been created from a failed Heaven-gradel weapon.

The complex techniques and high-quality materials required to forge a Heaven-grade weapon were the reasons why their prices never fell. Ai Hui had seen many great elementalists in the Wilderness, but had only seen a handful of them wielding Heaven-grade weapons.

The warehouse officer was satisfied with Ai Hui's quick answer. "What else do you need?" he asked.

"Spiderweb Iron Pellets, Wolftooth Heavy Arrows, and chillies."

"Spiderweb Iron Pellets? For Miss Sang? She should be able to use them considering her ability with the bow." The officer nodded. "There are around two hundred or so of them left, you can take them all. Trust you guys to think of something so unorthodox."

Spiderweb Iron Pellets were about the size of a thumb and didn't look very different from ordinary iron pellets. As their name suggested, the Spiderweb Iron Pellets, however, contained highly compressed spider webs within. Triggered by elemental energy, the spider web within each pellet would expand upon impact and restrain the target.

The officer was truly an experienced individual. Ai Hui had indeed requisitioned the pellets for Sang Zhijun. Although Sang Zhijun was more skilled with a bow than Jiang Wei, her fighting strength lagged behind his. As such, Ai Hui had thought of using these pellets to maximize her utility, but hadn't expected the warehouse to actually still be stocked with them.

The use of Spiderweb Iron Pellets was uncommon because spider webs weren't particularly tough. They wouldn't be so cheap if they had more restraining power.

Ai Hui didn't really care about this since he only intended to use

them to confuse the enemy.

“I can only provide you with two quivers of Wolftooth Heavy Arrows,” said the officer, then swiftly continued upon seeing Ai Hui’s intention to retort, “A lot of people still need these. I’m already looking out for you guys by giving two quivers’ worth, the others are only being given one.”

“Alright, I’ll take whatever I can get.” Having seen the long line at the door, Ai Hui accepted his explanation.

“We don’t have any chillies in the warehouse.” The officer was a bit puzzled by the request. “Why do you need chillies? What a strange request! I’d suggest that you buy some from the spice shops since it’s rare for people to stock up on chillies. I’m sorry, but the mayor prefers sweet foods over spicy ones.”

Ai Hui was disappointed that he couldn’t get the chillies.

The officer had already left to tend to others. Knowing that he couldn’t get anything more, Ai Hui dragged the huge wine vat out of the warehouse.

Those who were still queueing up cast sidelong glances at Ai Hui.

The students gathered in the Vanguard Training Hall had just undertaken one round of gruelling training and were enjoying a well-deserved break.

Shi Xueman was the one leading the training since Ai Hui had no interest in looking after this group of students.

Her power and prestige were common knowledge among the students, allowing her to quickly win over their trust.

She had secretly read many of her father's books from a tender age and was, as such, better versed in military tactics than the others.

When Ai Hui had handed them over to her, Shi Xueman had felt a hint of excitement. She finally had the chance to practice what she had been learning since she was young.

The only thing that she was slightly unhappy about was her assistant. She'd wanted Duanmu Huanghun to be her assistant, but Ai Hui assigned Jiang Wei to the role instead.

Stealing a glance at Jiang Wei, she had no choice but to admit that Ai Hui was a better judge of people than her.

Jiang Wei wasn't as outstanding as Duanmu Huanghun, but he was calm, dependable, patient, and meticulous. Without Jiang Wei's help, Shi Xueman would have been flustered.

Duanmu Huanghun was completely immersed in his own practice.

He wasn't particularly willing to help out with the students'

training; his dream was, after all, to become a Grandmaster.

In the past, he hadn't been sure of his aim in life. Experiencing these cruel battles and facing death had made it much clearer to him – he wanted to become a Grandmaster, and not just any grandmaster, but the strongest grandmaster ever!

A depressed mood pervaded the atmosphere during the break. Everyone was apprehensive about the future and a little terrified of the battles to come.

Fear and confusion made the students restless.

"Why do we have to listen to Ai Hui's orders?" Huo Yuanlong asked, just loud enough for everyone around to hear.

He had done it on purpose. Having consistently been among the top ten students in the academy, he was unhappy that he had to listen to the orders of a first-year student. It was fine if someone like Duanmu Huanghun was the one in charge, but not if the leader was an unknown like Ai Hui.

Huo Yuanlong had secretly observed Ai Hui earlier while the dean had been speaking. He didn't see anything special about Ai Hui.

The only thing that had left an impression on him was Ai Hui's cold gaze. This gaze was, however, also the reason why Huo Yuanlong was so annoyed. Huo Yuanlong simply couldn't stand

being sized up by an unknown junior with such an indifferent gaze.

Shi Xueman furrowed her brows, Jiang Wei was roused from his rest, and Sang Zhijun shot a glance over upon hearing this. A grin crept onto her lips as she strummed her bowstring like an instrument.

The atmosphere was heavy.

Some of the students urged, “Yuanlong, mind your words!”

Huo Yuanlong stiffened his neck and raised his voice. “Did I say something wrong?”

Duanmu Huanghun’s was displeased that his practice was interrupted.

“I’m willing to listen to Miss Shi and Huanghun’s orders, but who is Ai Hui to command us?” Huo Yuanlong exclaimed.

His words resonated with the thoughts of many others, causing an uproar.

“Yes, only Miss Shi and Huanghun are qualified!”

“Who is this Ai Hui? Where did he come from?”

……

“Enough!” Shi Xueman commanded. She walked towards Huo Yuanlong with Cirrus in hand, her expression solemn. “You, fall out. Fifty strokes for causing trouble!”

Huo Yuanlong’s face completely drained of color. He couldn’t understand why Shi Xueman was siding with Ai Hui.

Fifty strokes… He trembled and hurriedly called out to Duanmu Huanghun for help. “Huanghun, don’t you have anything to say?”

“I do,” Duanmu Huanghun replied as he walked over.

Huo Yuanlong was filled with relief upon hearing Duanmu Huanghun’s words. “Exactly! Tell them what you think, Huanghun. Everyone will listen to you.”

“It’s really quite simple.” Duanmu Huanghun sneered, revealing a set of snow-white teeth. “I’ll personally mete out these fifty strokes.”

Chapter 186: Minute Arc Stab and Hilt Mist Combined

When Ai Hui returned, he saw Duanmu Huanghun whipping a student.

Oh, that student seemed familiar.

Ai Hui did not have much interest in these people, so he took one look before retracting his gaze. His treatment of Shi Xueman and the others differed vastly from his attitude toward this new batch of students.

He was a realistic person, unmistakably realistic.

After leaving the students to Shi Xueman and Jiang Wei, he had no intentions of interfering with their matters at all. His time was far too precious to be wasted on them. He passed the [Spiderweb Iron Pellets] to Sang Zhijun and put the huge vat down before beginning his own practice.

Ai Hui swiftly slipped into a meditative state.

He was not completely familiar with his current state of seven palaces and disliked how it felt. The amount of elemental energy in his body was significantly less in the past, but at least he was able to unleash its full power. Although he had a lot more elemental energy now, he was unable to bring out 100% of its power.

He felt that this was a waste, and waste was something he absolutely loathed.

Everyone's attention was drawn to Ai Hui when he walked into the training hall. Some of the students looked at him with disdain while others looked on pensively or with curiosity. Duanmu Huanghun spared no mercy in meting out Huo Yuanlong's punishment, resulting in the poor fellow passing out before the 50 strokes were completed. Having learned from Huo Yuanlong's mistake, the rest of the students ceased with their complaints.

Shi Xueman and Duanmu Huanghun's determined attitudes came as a shock to the students.

Ai Hui ignored everything and continued with his seemingly unorthodox training. The number of disdainful and contemptuous stares increased as he proceeded with his swordplay related practice.

It was swordplay…

Many of the curious students could not help but reveal their disappointment when they saw him practicing something that had no future.

Ai Hui was not practicing the three skills he obtained from his master's swordpill, but was instead honing the diverse moves that he had developed on his own. The three skills from the sword pill required complex patterns of elemental energy circulation. [Crescent Moon] was the simplest of the three, but was still highly

complex. Attempting to practice the three sword pill skills was tantamount to fetching water with a bamboo basket.

In addition, Ai Hui realized that continuous ordinary attacks were much safer and more effective than powerful killing blows when it came to handling enemies that attacked in swarms.

The elemental energy within his body had become much stronger than before. His fragmented sword techniques were not quite the same anymore.

The sword embryo had experienced an even greater change.

In the past, the sword embryo would become active whenever he practiced swordplay. Ever since it became stronger, however, the sword embryo appeared to have become quite a bit more reticent. It was like a wild beast who had just eaten its fill and was dozing off in Ai Hui's sky palace.

If not for Ai Hui's sharpened sixth sense, he would definitely have thought that something was wrong with the sword embryo.

Although the sword strokes that Ai Hui practiced were fragmented and constantly changing as a whole, each individual stroke was very well-executed because he had spent a lot of time refining and practicing every single move.

He thrust the Dragonspine Inferno forward in a tiny arc. The movement of the sword was similar to a seabird skimming across

the surface of the water.

He had adapted this move from one of the killing techniques he found in a swordplay manual. Ai Hui felt that this half of the killing technique was especially useful. This [Minute Arc Stab] made the sword thrust forward in an extremely tiny arc such that the opponent only saw the blade as moving straight forward.

The sword embryo suddenly jolted.

Hmm?

Ai Hui was taken aback, but he was a bit unsure of what he felt. The sword embryo's throbbing was sometimes orderly, but also highly irregular other times.

He tried the [Minute Arc Stab] again, but the sword embryo remained inactive this time.

Ai Hui decided to ignore the sword embryo and continued to practice his self taught sword techniques. The habitual sword strokes allowed him to become more familiar with the elemental energy within his body.

The heavy Dragonspine Inferno felt weightless in his hand. One of the benefits of his enhanced elemental energy was the increment in his already hefty strength. Ai Hui became more and more immersed in his training and began to practice some more difficult moves. Moving the sword's hilt rapidly while maintaining

the exact same position of the blade tip, he successfully created six distinct afterimages of the sword hilt.

This move was called [Hilt Mist] and was one of the training methods of the ancient swordsmen. Being able to maintain the sword tip in the same position while rapidly shifting the hilt was an indicator of a nimble wrist and implied excellent control. Outstanding swordsmen were capable of moving the sword hilt in any direction and were not restricted to only left and right shifts. The rapidly shifting sword hilt looked like an illusory mist, which was how the technique gained its name.

[Hilt Mist] was used as an assessment tool by many ancient sword sects.

Prior to this, Ai Hui had been unable to successfully execute the [Hilt Mist]. He was not expecting to achieve something like this, but was glad he attempted the move on a whim.

The quiet sword embryo throbbed again.

Hmm?

Ai Hui's surprise faded as his attention was grabbed by the sword embryo. The two times it had throbbed set off something in Ai Hui's mind.

He attempted the [Minute Arc Stab] again, but the sword embryo refused to budge. He then performed the [Hilt Mist], but the sword

embryo still remained stationary.

Why was this happening?

Ai Hui lifted the Dragonspine Inferno and stood still, deep in thought. He could not make sense of the sword embryo's current activity, but his many past experiences with it had vaguely drilled its rhythm into his heart. The sword embryo was sensitive to all actions related to swords, ranging from the first time he picked up the Dragonspine Inferno to when he executed sword techniques.

All of a sudden, Ai Hui instinctively performed the [Hilt Mist]. Just as the Dragonspine Inferno's hilt reached Ai Hui's most comfortable position, the sword tip swiftly lunged forward in a tiny arc. It was the [Minute Arc Stab]!

Almost simultaneously, the sword embryo between his brows throbbed vigorously.

The Dragonspine Inferno in his hand immediately lit up, leaving a bright trail in the air.

The sword's bright streak shot across the air like a meteor falling through the heavens. The students who were secretly watching Ai Hui were astonished.

What kind of swordplay was that?

The luster hanging in the air was highly condensed and refused

to disperse. It was not particularly awe-inducing, but its lack of elemental energy was somewhat surprising.

Shi Xueman was also attracted to the streak of light left behind by Ai Hui's stroke. She could not figure out how Ai Hui was able to create it without using elemental energy

None of his moves involved the use of elemental energy and as such, should be unable to produce any radiance. This was a commonly known fact. The other students suspected that Ai Hui had used very miniscule traces of elemental energy, but Shi Xueman was sure that there had been none in that sword stroke.

Duanmu Huanghun stared blankly at Ai Hui.

Ai Hui was extremely excited!

He had invented a move by himself and had not used an ounce of elemental energy, yet a sword beam was produced!

He had no idea how it happened, but he was very sure that he had just executed an extremely remarkable sword stroke. He did not stop to admire it for long, instead beginning his next attempt at combining the [Hilt Mist] with the [Minute Arc Stab]. There was no sword streak produced this time, but he was not discouraged. He noted that he had failed to grasp the correct timing on the last attempt.

Ai Hui practiced repeatedly.

The sound of his sword piercing the air rang out incessantly, and he soon became completely absorbed in his practice.

Some of the students started looking at Ai Hui in a different light. Focus was an attractive, respectable quality. Being able to focus and completely immerse oneself in the task at hand was something worthy of respect and was especially remarkable when done under the watchful gaze of others.

The black Dragonspine Inferno cast a dark shadow as it streaked through the air. The dark red edge of its blade, together with its seven inlaid jewels, added a blood red smudge to its afterimage. The sight was strangely reminiscent of Central Pine City's night sky, filled with the scent of blood.

Ai Hui tirelessly brandished his sword.

A streak of light suddenly lit up the air where the Dragonspine Inferno's path had just passed through. Like a shooting star streaking across the night sky, it soon vanished without a trace.

Sighs of pity were heaved in unison.

Another streak of light appeared a while after, and soon, the night sky was filled with more and more of these "shooting stars."

The bright sword streaks which passed swiftly into oblivion pierced the evening curtain one after another. The onlookers were

practically witnessing a meteor shower.

The training ground had become completely quiet as the onlookers were moved by this magnificent sight. Perhaps they were simply moved by the streaks of light that lit up the night sky or perhaps witnessing the birth of a completely new sword skill stirred up something within them.

Perhaps it was neither of those, but instead the sweat-drenched, joy-filled face that followed each streak of light.

This expression, filled with pure unadulterated joy, was utterly dazzling among the sad fearful faces of the students. It was eye-catching, attractive, and brought hope.

Duanmu Huanghun continued to stare blankly at Ai Hui, his mind slowly drifting.

Something stirred deep within his soul as the scene before him was seared into his memory. Something told him that he would never forget this moment. He was looking at an indomitable spirit, one so powerful that it could persist even in the darkest of times.

Duanmu Huanghun lacked the words to fully describe his experience. He saw an indistinct figure towering over the landscape at the end of a long winding road, a road that stretched out all the way to the horizon from behind Ai Hui's silhouette.

Was this a Grandmaster?

Yes, definitely!

Stuck in his daze, Duanmu Huanghun confidently answered himself. A grand sense of purpose rushed through his veins, reaching every corner of his body and causing him to shudder involuntarily.

Was this not his aim? To tower over all living things! To rise to the summit!

That awe-inspiring, fear-inducing silhouette.

To become an indomitable figure, one must first forge an indomitable spirit. I shall become the embodiment of power itself!

Duanmu Huanghun had never experienced such clarity in his thoughts.

Death was still terrifying, but it no longer controlled his mind the way it used to. He was no longer a puppet being strung along by death.

All tension was released from his body as the invisible shackles that weighed him down vanished.

The flourishing life force within his body caused the elemental energy inside his body to undergo a mysterious transformation.

Duanmu Huanghun remained motionless while he enjoyed the peace and relaxation of the moment.

Shi Xueman noticed something different about Duanmu Huanghun.

The Duanmu Huanghun she had known until now was a truly brilliant individual, but was overly cautious and restrained. His mind was weak and his spirit easily bent. He had the arrogance of a genius, but lacked the assertiveness of one.

She could not believe that he had achieved a breakthrough so quickly...

Ai Hui caught hints of a miraculous change occurring nearby, but was too caught up in his own thoughts to bother with it. After all, he had just created a new sword skill by combining the [Minute Arc Stab] and [Hilt Mist].

After all these years of digging through rubbish, Ai Hui finally found a way to turn trash into treasure!

He pushed the windows open, revealing a courtyard piled with rubbish. In his eyes, however, he saw a mountain of gold.

Chapter 187: Manager Li and Bunny Hair Arrow

It took Ai Hui two hours to break free from his trance.

He sat motionless on the ground, giggling. He looked battered and exhausted and his whole body was thoroughly soaked. His face and scalp were covered in sweat and his upper arms were so tired it was as if they were paralyzed.

Two hours had resulted in two moves. They were all simple strokes, nothing complicated. The combination of the [Minute Arc Stab] and [Hilt Mist] was already considered more complex. There was another inclined move, but the only change lay in its angle. He tried almost all the angles a few times before finally finding the optimal one. He named the combination of [Minute Arc Stab] and [Hilt Mist] as [Misty Strike] and the inclined move as [Oblique Slash].

The change that had occurred in those two moves were so great that even without the sword embryo's heartbeat, Ai Hui could still feel their wholesome change.

The old strokes were now like dance moves, graceful, yet full of power. Sword manuals without spiritual force were like fishes without water. Whether willingly or not, they had long become useless; throwing fishes into the river also led to a dead end.

A change in the environment meant that a lot of things had to be redone.

No matter how splendid Ai Hui's swordsmanship had once been and no matter how many swordplay manuals were left behind, it was difficult for them to fit into this era without some alterations.

Ai Hui still had not found out the reason behind this. A slight alteration would cause the nature of a sword move to change completely.

Perhaps there was a resonance between the sword and elemental energy?

No idea.

But he knew that he had found the key to solve what the sword techniques lacked.

There were still many sword moves waiting for him to explore and change. He had ample time to search and understand them, so that was a good start. In the past, he had improvised and used the [Gale Bat Blade] technique, but this time he was going to take it a step further. He had seen countless sword manuals and despite having no idea how to practice them, he knew how the cultivators had done so during the Cultivation Era.

The [Smoke Meteor] and [Oblique Slash] made him realize that all the sword moves had to be changed starting from the most basic strokes in order to adapt to the elemental energy era.

This was his greatest reward for the night.

He never would have thought of this if he hadn't been struck by a brainwave. There were some sword moves that possessed formidable power even without operating any elemental energy.

He thought about how he had to come up with a resounding name for this swordplay series when he was done perfecting it.

For now... he completely did not feel like touching it!

He lay on the ground, gazing up at the pitch-black sky.

Fatty felt himself dreaming a long dream. He dreamt that he was swimming in a boundless lava river. Swimming and swimming for god knows how long, but never escaping the fire sea.

Muddle-headed, he opened his eyes to find Lou Lan, whose face was almost completely covered by a mask, blocking his view.

"Fatty, you're really amazing!" Lou Lan exclaimed in admiration, his eyes shining. "The result was outstanding. Congratulations Fatty, four palaces! Seems like the effectiveness of the dragon soup has something to do with the number of times one consumes it. Yeah, I'll have to note this down. Please don't worry, Fatty. I'll definitely do more research and brew an even better dragon soup!"

Loss was evident in Fatty's face. Upon hearing the words "Dragon Soup", he couldn't help but shiver. He finally

remembered what he had been doing before he lost his memory.

Snapping out of it, he looked at Lou Lan as if he had seen a ghost. He shook his head bluntly and replied furiously, “Lou Lan, I’m never drinking your soup again. I still want to live.”

“Why? Dragon soup isn’t toxic. Although it gets less effective over time, it is still very useful. It can raise your level within a short period of time. You can definitely open up your fifth palace with another bowl,” responded Lou Lan with confidence.

Another bowl…

Just thinking about that frightening experience made him tremble again. He would drink a second bowl over his dead body.

Just then, someone staggered in, their body covered in blood. Seeing who it was, Ai Hui jolted up!

“Manager Li!”

Manager Li’s body was covered in blood and he was carrying a pouch. Seeing Ai Hui, radiance filled Manager Li’s empty eyes. “Brother…”

Having endured until this point, he was already completely exhausted. His legs went soft, causing him to plunge forward.

Ai Hui suddenly sprang over with a large stride and held onto Manager Li. He then saw that Manager Li was almost eaten clean. Bones were exposed all over his back, making Ai Hui speechless.

“These are Bunny Hair Arrows…” Manager Li looked at Ai Hui and smiled, grief and regret evident in his expression. “Pardon me, I can’t settle the accounts anymore…”

Manager Li opened his eyes wide as his last wisp of spirit dissipated and he stopped breathing altogether.

Ai Hui held onto him, as motionless as a statue.

Emerging out of his daze after a while, sorrow was missing from his face. He freed one hand to retrieve the pouch in Manager Li’s arms. There were twenty Bunny Hair Arrows inside. After putting them on the ground, Ai Hui carried Manager Li on his back, turned around, and walked deep into the garden.

Ai Hui was momentarily brought back to the Wilderness, where he had witnessed comrades around him collapse one after the other. Profound helplessness and despair enveloped him.

He started digging without a word. He had never helped Fatty out in the past when Fatty had buried their teammates.

Actually, the relationship he’d had with Manager Li wasn’t very close or anything. They were merely business partners. The Dragonspine Inferno in his hands lifted lumps of earth with each

swing.

So, why was he sad?

There was nothing to be sad about. Everyone would die someday, and he might even be next; who was going to dig his grave when that time came? Okay, so nothing mattered after death. There was no difference between being buried or eaten by blood fiends.

By the end of the burial, Ai Hui was back to his normal state of mind. He was used to seeing people leave this world.

“Are you okay?” Shi Xueman walked over to his side, concern evident in her voice.

“Yeah.” Ai Hui answered with his usual expression.

Changing the topic, Shi Xueman asked, “You left the students with me. Isn’t that kind of irresponsible?”

“Why do I have to be responsible?” Ai Hui responded.

Ai Hui’s hoodlum behavior ticked Shi Xueman off. “So you were just bullshitting the dean?”

“I only agreed to let them follow.” Ai Hui continued matter-of-factly, “If I have to be responsible, the president has to take more blame.”

Shi Xueman did not know whether to laugh or cry. She stared into Ai Hui's eyes, unable to fathom that this scoundrel before her was the same guy that had led them during the battle!

Okay, to be honest, this guy's splendid performance over the past few days had confounded the image she'd had of him.

He'd paid the bill for a female classmate but was so adamant about her returning the money…

He owed eighty million yuan but had the guts to call people money-losing deal…

Money! Losing! Deal!

These three words floated across Shi Xueman's eyes. Veins on the hand holding Cirrus throbbed as she wanted so badly to stab three holes into his body!

Impulse was the devil… this was the real face of this fellow.

Cooling down, Shi Xueman questioned, "Don't tell me you have no advice for them?"

"My suggestion? Try hard to stay alive." These superfluous words came out of Ai Hui's mouth as he kept a serious face.

Shi Xueman no longer wanted to reason with him. She said simply, “Give Zhijun to me too.”

“As long as she agrees.” Ai Hui replied indifferently, throwing the bloodstained pouch to Sang Zhijun. “Use them wisely!”

Sang Zhijun caught it before reassuring him in all seriousness, “I will!”

Actually, witnessing Manager Li’s death was a big blow to her.

Shi Xueman walked towards Sang Zhijun without giving Ai Hui a single look. She couldn’t read him sometimes. After calling him a scoundrel, he actually became all generous by gifting Sang Zhijun twenty Bunny Hair Arrows. Shi Xueman had seen how Sang Zhijun bought her Bunny Hair arrows and knew how expensive they were. Sang Zhijun couldn’t even bear to fire them if not for emergency use.

And he had given her twenty arrows just like that.

Yet he wouldn’t let one hundred and fifty yuan go… what a weird fellow.

Okay, these were not important. What was important was the fact that he dared to call her “money-losing deal”!

Every step that she took carried murderous spirit.

Initially quite surprised by Ai Hui, the students were utterly shocked by now and their eyes were wide open. They glared at him, clearly infuriated by his careless words from before.

Towards Shi Xueman's invitation, Sang Zhijun agreed quickly. She was a smart woman and knew herself well. In order to be of greater value to the team, she had to be put in an auxiliary position.

"What an amazing lady!" Fatty, now clear-headed, walked over to Ai Hui's side and commented in a low voice.

Ai Hui looked Fatty up and down before saying, "Not bad, four palaces. I have something expensive to give you!"

Upon hearing the word "expensive", Fatty's eyes shone. "I knew you wouldn't forget your own people! What is it?"

Ai Hui pointed to the half-a-man tall vat in the garden. "There, a fire vat used specially by fire elementalists."

At Ai Hui's words, Fatty's face lit up. A fire vat was one of the weapons used commonly by fire elementalists. Usually the vat would be filled with earth-fire lava broth, which not only was helpful for everyday training but was also a highly formidable, powerful weapon in times of battle.

"Fire vat... is it too early?" Fatty asked, eyes bright as he rubbed

his hands, slightly embarrassed. When he finally saw the huge vat in the garden, his face stiffened up. “Ai Hui, you meant this vat?”

Fatty was frightened by the volume of this vat. The Steady Mountain heavy armor on his body coupled with the Ironwood Shield was about sixty pounds, and the big vat before his eyes looked at least two hundred and twenty pounds... And there was the three-hundred-and-thirty-pound lava broth...

For a moment, Fatty felt that his life was bleak.

“Don’t want it?” Ai Hui gave Fatty a look before adding, “Just as well. This fire vat was originally made to be a Heaven-grade weapon, but became a failure because it was too big. I was actually worried that it would affect your speed.”

Hearing that the material used to make it was worthy of a Heaven-grade weapon, his small eyes quickly brightened up. “I want it! Who said I don’t want it! It suits me too well! No one else would have a use for it. It’s no wonder the material seems different...”

Fatty’s whole face was almost squashed flat against the outer wall of the fire vat. He was completely enchanted. He got even more excited after seeing the inscription on the vat.

An elementalist descended from the sky. “Who’s Ai Hui?”

“I am.” Ai Hui stood up.

“Please get your team ready and assemble at the intersection of Soundwave Street and Brightflower Street at six o’clock. The target of attack and sequence will be arranged for you. Latecomers will be dealt with by martial law.”

The elementalist ordered expressionlessly, not revealing any emotion. Finishing up, he turned around and left in a hurry

The atmosphere instantly became grave and stifling.

Chapter 188: Attack

Intersection of Soundwave Street and Brightflower Street.

“Lou Lan, how do I look?” Fatty asked Lou Lan while striking different poses.

Wearing the Steady Mountain heavy armor made him look like a moving fort. He held the door-like Ironwood Shield in his hand and carried the big fire tank, an even more eye-catching weapon, on his back, effectively becoming a focal point.

“Very powerful!” Lou Lan was generous with his praise. “Fatty is gifted with great strength. I can make you some turtle dragon miracle soup to unleash your potential. It is extremely effective.”

At Lou Lan’s mention of soup, Fatty’s face turned ugly. He shook his head hurriedly. “Lou Lan, I’m not falling for your trick!”

They arrived half an hour before the scheduled time.

The wide intersection was already filled with groups of troops awaiting orders. They were going to be attacking in the same wave as Ai Hui and his team.

Holding onto Cirrus, Shi Xueman walked beside Ai Hui and said in a low voice, “The situation is looking bad. I asked around and the damage is disastrous. Many teams were dispatched but only a few came back safely. Our advancing speed is not ideal, only half

the street is reclaimed.”

“This is just throwing lives away.” Jiang Wei commented helplessly.

“What do we have other than our lives?” Duanmu Huanghun responded.

Duanmu Huanghun’s words hit the nail right on the head, leaving everyone in silence.

Suddenly, a commotion sounded from up front.

“Help me! I don’t want to die! I don’t want to die! Save me…”

“I want to go home… I want to go home… Hu hu… Mother…”

……

The attack teams in the previous wave were retreating from Soundwave Street and only twelve fighters remained. They looked dazed, their gazes vacant with bodies covered in blood stains. Worse, the wounded were lying on rattan stretchers dragged by sand puppets. They were badly injured and some body parts were missing, exposing large amounts of flesh. Some curled up and quivered in pain, letting out blood-curdling screams and howls. Some lay motionless with a lifeless expression on their faces. It was as if their bodies had no soul, not even a tiny murmur or whisper was heard.

Those awaiting battle became restless. Their faces were all tensed up and their bodies trembled uncontrollably. Fear and dread spread like ripples.

“They’re throwing our lives away! They’re trying to kill us!”

Someone within the crowd shrieked agitatedly, dashed out from the formation, and ran far away.

He was extremely fast. As he was about to disappear around the corner of the street, an arrow suddenly appeared in his chest out of nowhere. He staggered a little, staring at his chest blankly, unable to make a sound. All the strength left his body and he lay paralyzed on the ground.

Everyone was shocked by what they had just seen. The spacious road was filled with a deathly stillness.

“Deserters will not be pardoned!”

The imposing, deep voice rang in the sky and echoed within the hearts of those present. They were struck dumb. Immediately, all the commotion was constrained.

"This person fled just before the battle and will be reported directly to the chief association. All rights and privileges enjoyed by his immediate family members will be taken away and the whole clan will be severely punished. I advise everybody here not

to depend on luck. Those who died fighting are honorable and those who withdraw will live in perpetual shame. Think carefully!”

The elementalist spread open his azure wings and stood proudly, face expressionless.

Ai Hui looked up and made eye contact with the man, unable to restrain the astonishment he felt. That shot was so amazing. It had appeared on the runaway’s body even before he managed to see it.

He was totally unable to detect the trajectory of that arrow!

That meant that he would also be unable to dodge that arrow.

He quivered inwardly. The satisfaction he’d gotten from understanding [Misty Strike] and [Oblique Slash] flew out the window. He sent a deep look towards the elementalist before retracting his gaze.

Like Ai Hui, Duanmu Huanghun looked up towards the sky. The shock he felt was even more intense, his gaze filled with unconcealable heat and thirst.

“The move in [Heaven Bow] should be [Scarless Heaven Bow].” Shi Xueman glanced at the elementalist in midair. “A bow-related inheritance passed down within the Sky Edge Division. He must have served in the Sky Edge Division.”

She knew the Thirteen Divisions better than anyone else.

“Ignore him,” said Ai Hui before adding, “Are we attacking from Soundwave Street or Brightflower Street?”

“Soundwave.” Shi Xueman snapped out of it and answered hurriedly. She had long forgotten about finding trouble with Ai Hui.

She couldn’t be as heartless as him. Having a hundred students placed under her supervision was tremendously pressuring. She felt even more tense after seeing the plight of the last wave of fighters.

Idle theorizing gave her no sense of security at this point. She saw the fear in her teammates’ eyes and felt even more uneasy. She suspected that they might undergo a mental breakdown first.

The current situation was everything that the books warned against. The leader was a rookie and the team was made up of rookies who lacked training and morale. There was also a lack of understanding between the commander and soldiers…

Her only sense of security came from Ai Hui, who had been expressionless all this while, so she hurriedly snapped out of it upon seeing that he wanted to have a battle discussion. Earlier, he’d looked so unconcerned that she’d wanted so badly to prick him.

“Anyone familiar with Soundwave Street?” asked Ai Hui.

“Let me ask around.” Jiang Wei turned and walked amongst the team, quickly bringing out a member. It was Huo Yuanlong, who had already suffered fifty whips. “He’s very familiar with this area.”

“Let’s hear about the situation at Soundwave Street,” said Ai Hui directly.

“Why must I tell you?” Huo Yuanlong glared at Ai Hui as a cold smile formed on his lips, anger flickering in his eyes.

Oh no, Shi Xueman thought to herself.

“Because you don’t want to die.” Ai Hui looked him straight in the eye, continuing frankly, “I don’t care what happened earlier. If you don’t co-operate, I will make you stand at the frontline.”

“You’re threatening me?” Huo Yuanlong snarled. He was about to burst with rage.

Huo Yuanlong’s bellow caught everyone’s attention. Even the team beside them looked over, gloating.

“That’s right.” Surprisingly, Ai Hui did not deny it but coolly admitted it instead.

The anger within Huo Yuanlong disappeared without a trace, as if a bucket of ice water had been poured over his head. Ai Hui remained expressionless and his tone was as calm as ever, as if he had just been talking about ordinary matters.

Huo Yuanlong suddenly felt a little intimidated. This unusual calmness scared him.

No raising his voice, no anger, no clenching his teeth, and no unnecessary menace. He had a feeling that Ai Hui would do it.

Ai Hui's answer had quieted the whole crowd.

"How... dare you?" Huo Yuanlong did not detect the slight tremble in his own voice.

"I'm the leader of this team. If you disobey my orders you will be dealt with by martial law. That arrow earlier? Martial law." Ai Hui replied steadily and emotionlessly.

The students felt a chill in their hearts when they saw the complete change in Ai Hui's gaze.

Ai Hui's words were calm, bare, and raw, without reasoning and without trying to convince them. He was merely narrating a simple fact.

An ice-cold, unsentimental fact.

Huo Yuanlong was now totally afraid. In fact, he felt relieved when Ai Hui finally spoke. He swore to himself that he would leave this scary fellow once the catastrophe was over.

Ai Hui questioned him thoroughly, asking which houses had how many rooms, how big the gardens were, and so on. Huo Yuanlong could not answer many of the questions.

Huo Yuanlong returned to the team after answering whatever questions he could. No one mocked him. They kept quiet out of fear as well. The students couldn't help but avoid Ai Hui's gaze as they did not dare to look him in the face.

Unlike what Ai Hui had thought would happen, no elementalist came over to allocate a specific attack position for them. Their only requirement was to advance forward as much as possible, destroying all the blood ants they saw.

Such a simple and crude command displeased Shi Xueman. "Swarming in like bees is no different from seeking death. Why is there no concrete plan?" After speaking, she felt that complaining was useless. Even if they had a plan, her teammates would absolutely fail to carry it out.

Truth be told, they were cannon fodder. Cannon fodder used to drain the blood ants' energy.

Duanmu Huanghun was right. Other than cannon fodder, Central Pine City had nothing. Shi Xueman believed that with her

position in the mayor's eyes, there were no other employable methods.

"You guys are up! Start attacking!" Instructed the elementalist in midair.

Each team hesitated before moving towards Soundwave Street.

"Let's head to the gate of that shop facing the street." Ai Hui pointed out.

Fatty held the heavy shield and walked at the forefront. His overall weight was astonishing. The earth quaked and the mountains shook as he walked. Even the elementalist in the sky was astounded.

There was no morale boosting cheer, no shouting, and no vehement emotions. Each team cautiously advanced forward along the wide street.

The elementalist in the sky wasn't impatient, but when he noticed Ai Hui's team, he couldn't help but feel surprised.

Ai Hui's team did not advance along the street and appeared by the fence surrounding a shop on the right side of the road instead.

The elementalist seemed rather interested. He recognized Shi Xueman and the rest. While they had little experience, this small team's strength lay in its students. Not bad at all.

But he also knew that the students were all cannon fodder. The ones which weren't expendable were the elementalists conscripted by their respective training halls and placed into small teams. They were honing their strength for the big push. Only after the ants had been sufficiently dealt with would it then be time for the main force to enter.

Nevertheless, this small team was actually quite interesting.

Shi Xueman and the rest were unable to make heads nor tails of Ai Hui's order. The other teams were a distance away from them by now. They looked at Ai Hui, waiting for him to answer this riddle.

"Any way to raze this to the ground?" Ai Hui asked Wang Xiaoshan.

Wang Xiaoshan did not understand what Ai Hui was up to, but it wasn't difficult for him to do so. He had great knowledge of all kinds of building structures. This shop was built normally and could easily be demolished if they could just find a few key nodes.

"I'll try."

Wang Xiaoshan did not dare to over-deliver. He was a little afraid of Ai Hui.

Chapter 189: Ai Hui's Method

Wang Xiaoshan moved quickly and placed both hands on the ground, channeling earth elemental energy into the shop.

Boom! Several explosions sounded simultaneously from within the shop, and the once-intact shop crumbled like crisp crackers.

Shi Xueman lightly waved her bare hands to clear the dust raised by the shop's collapse. Her vision returned, and indeed, the shop was now in ruins.

"How amazing!" Fatty exclaimed sluggishly, his mouth wide open. "Xiaoshan, how did you do that?"

Slightly flustered, Wang Xiaoshan stammered, "Very simple. Each building has some key... nodes, uh, you just have to find and blow them up at the same time to destroy it... and make use of the building's weight...."

Wang Xiaoshan's description was rather incoherent, but this time, no one underestimated him.

Destroying this shop wasn't a big feat; anyone present could do it, but few could accomplish it as cleanly as Wang Xiaoshan did. Without any large fragments to be seen in the rubble, it could be said that the building was completely shattered.

An unusual look flashed across Shi Xueman's eyes.

She felt it strange when Ai Hui chose Wang Xiaoshan for the task. Simply said, his skills were lacking, even moreso when compared to the rest of the team. But the scene before her drove her to speculate that perhaps Ai Hui had already been aware of Wang Xiaoshan's potential?

She found this unfathomable.

Ai Hui himself was slightly shocked. Wang Xiaoshan's move was simply too beautiful. This fellow was a bigger underdog than he was!

"Well done!"

Ai Hui gave Wang Xiaoshan a big thumbs up.

Receiving Ai Hui's praise, Wang Xiaoshan blushed a deep red, so moved that he did not know where to place his hands. These past few days, he'd been under tremendous pressure. As the weakest link in the group, he was timid and couldn't help much in battles, and whenever it was time to fight, he trembled uncontrollably.

He was downcast, not understanding why Ai Hui had selected him, and as the danger grew, he became afraid—afraid that he would be abandoned by his teammates. No one would care for him unconditionally if he wasn't able to prove his worth and assist the team during difficult situations.

It was his first time receiving a compliment from Ai Hui. It stirred him up greatly, as though he had just taken an alcoholic shot.

Wang Xiaoshan performed better than expected and was of great help to Ai Hui's plans. Nevertheless, he continued to instruct calmly, "Fatty, walk in front. Wang Xiaoshan, follow him. Continue tearing down the shops while advancing slowly, and beware of blood ants."

Shi Xueman briefly lost her train of thought before she asked, "We're tearing them down to move forward?"

She was completely baffled by Ai Hui's outlandish strategy, and it wasn't just her—everyone else was puzzled as well.

"The building structures are complex, making them good hiding places for blood ants to launch sneak attacks. It will be disadvantageous for us," Ai Hui explained.

Shi Xueman straightforwardly asked, "Then why don't we follow the rest of the teams and advance along the street path?"

Ai Hui looked at Shi Xueman as if he was talking to a fool. "That will cause us to be attacked from both sides."

"Logical, but..." Shi Xueman was at a loss. She acknowledged that Ai Hui was making a lot of sense, but to tear down the houses in order to advance... This sort of method was unheard of! In all of

the books of war that she read, she had never come across a similar military strategy.

Ai Hui couldn't be bothered with her and instead, followed closely behind Wang Xiaoshan. Doing so brought about many gains. For example, the collapsing buildings would alarm the blood ants, leading them to reveal their locations. Also, a wide terrain allowed rookies to better display their skills, which Ai Hui had doubts about anyway.

More importantly, as cannon fodder, they shouldn't be thinking about claiming credit but how to protect themselves on the battlefield instead.

Boom!

Yet another building crumbled.

Everyone advanced through the ruins, but by now, the few teams ahead of them had already taken a substantial lead and disappeared without a trace.

Nevertheless, Ai Hui continued moving forward at a comfortable pace. As they progressed, all that they left behind was a field of ruins.

Wang Xiaoshan became increasingly skillful. Within ten minutes, he had already torn down more buildings than his father, and his control became more precise which brought about even more

outstanding results.

Seeing the buildings collapse in front of his eyes filled his heart with a sense of accomplishment.

Chi chi chi!

Rows of red shadows shot out from the dust and pounced on Ai Hui and the team.

One row knocked against the heavy shield in Fatty's hands. A smothered boom rang out, causing Fatty's body to sway. Both he and Wang Xiaoshan were so afraid of death that Fatty shielded himself securely with Wang Xiaoshan hiding closely behind him.

"Careful!"

Shi Xueman let out a shout while blocking three blood ants with her Cirrus.

The students were disordered, losing their heads out of fear as they screamed incessantly.

Ai Hui shook his head but ignored the chaos. If they couldn't break their way past this level of difficulty, they would be in worse trouble later on.

With the Dragonspine Inferno, he executed a sudden [Oblique

Slash]. A faint light glimmered on the sword body as it accurately struck a blood ant. Upon closer inspection, Ai Hui saw that the cut had left a clear wound on its body.

Ai Hui was slightly startled. Before, it was difficult for him to leave a mark on a blood ant without operating his elemental energy.

With growing confidence, he continued attacking without retreat and performed another [Oblique Slash] with the Dragonspine Inferno.

The move was simple and did not cover a wide range, but Ai Hui's agile steps compensated for its weaknesses.

His consecutive hits slowed the ant down, but the malice within its body fueled its dogged attacks on Ai Hui.

Ai Hui's hilt seemed to transform into a cloud of smoke and from it shot a sword ray.

[Misty Strike]!

The ant's body was cleaved in two by the Dragonspine Inferno and fell through the dust.

Soon after, Ai Hui's gaze was quickly caught by Duanmu Huanghun, and his eyes displayed astonishment.

Duanmu Huanghun's [Viridescent Flower] always displayed dazzling transformations, but Ai Hui felt it came with a sense of softness. This time, however, Duanmu Huanghun's [Viridescent Flower] was dynamic as always, but the softness was absent, replaced by gloom and abstruseness.

When the viridescent flowers made contact with the blood ants, thorns grew out to pierce the eyes. And as the ants stiffened, flowers bloomed from their red bodies, becoming a colorfully auspicious viridescent flower ant.

Ai Hui trembled inside. [Viridescent Flower] was really demonic.

Duanmu Huanghun casually retrieved his viridescent flower as if there was no one else around. He gave Ai Hui a faint smile without caring to conceal the battlelust in his eyes. His vigor was astonishing, and it was as though he had become another person, his energy completely renewed.

"How do you intend to return the money?" Ai Hui caught Duanmu Huanghun by surprise.

Duanmu Huanghun froze, his smile turning rigid.

"Public morals are really degenerating each day. You're in debt and still have the cheek to act all holy. Aren't you shameless?"

Ai Hui muttered to himself, failing to notice the popping veins on

Duanmu Huanghun's face. He spun on his heel and left only a silhouette of profound mystery.

He forgot that he still owed someone eighty million yuan.

It was a pity that his creditor was busy at the moment. Five ants flew out and three were tossed away by Shi Xueman's Cirrus. She did not, however, deal with them on her own but instead threw them to the team.

"Stay calm, don't panic!"

"Maintain distance!"

"Co-operation, teamwork!"

……

Shi Xueman, Sang Zhijun, and Jiang Wei each led a group to deal with a blood ant. They did not kill it directly but allowed the students to do so. Shi Xueman understood that if they did not allow these students to face and deal with an attack soon, their losses would be disastrous.

Ai Hui witnessed the clumsy and messy scene before him, and he shook his head. Without any urging, he decided to train his sword skills off to the side.

After killing a blood ant, the battlelust within his body was surging, but there was no outlet to release it, so his only option was to train.

Duanmu Huanghun similarly did not bother with the rest. With his eyes shut tightly, he sat cross-legged on the ground, the viridescent flower pattern on his lower abdomen circulating non-stop.

“Bangwan seemed to have changed a lot,” Lou Lan commented quietly.

“Yeah, he’s become fiercer, toward himself as well.” Fatty touched his chin before continuing ruefully, “But no matter how ferocious he is, there’s no point since he owes money. Look at me. I used to be a hero who charged my way out of the hell-like Wilderness. But see what happened in the end. Negligence turned me into Ai Hui’s debtor, and I can only be his waterboy for now. Money is a hero’s guts!”

Wang Xiaoshan, who was observing the chaotic scene, couldn’t help but say, “Shi-goddess is a good person.”

Anyone with eyes could tell that Shi Xueman was only doing this to give the students an opportunity to adapt to battle conditions.

Her efforts did not go to waste after all.

The once noisy scenes steadily calmed. Huo Yuanlong and his

friends, with their commendable strength and talent, shined among the students of Central Pine Academy. Highly ranked students naturally had more opportunities to compete and learn from each other on a daily basis. The battles weren't fought with real weapons, but it allowed them to restore their standards by overcoming psychological barriers and regulating their disjointed actions.

Shi Xueman heaved a sigh of relief, fine beads of perspiration on her forehead. Leading her team seemed more tiring than fighting her own battle.

But she had to do it. The following battle would only become more intense and cruel. The students, too, had to undergo the probation period that the few of them had gone through.

The weak would be eliminated. It was an unchangeable fact.

Ai Hui stopped and looked over the breathless students. "Continue forward."

"Can we rest for a little while?" a student shouted.

"I don't want to be executed by martial law under the charge of passive resistance," Ai Hui said while looking up.

Everyone turned to find an elementalist approaching them from the sky. They swallowed any remaining words before they left their lips.

Shi Xueman took the lead. “Let’s go.”

She knew the higher-ups would tolerate the time taken to adapt but never passive resistance. Any sign of this happening would cost them their lives, right there on the spot.

Ai Hui and his team pushed forward at a slow but steady rate.

Shi Xueman quickly experienced the benefits of Ai Hui’s method. They did not encounter many ants, most likely due to the earlier teams’ clean-up operation. Whatever blood ants left over gave the rookies a chance to learn. It couldn’t be more optimal. It would also be a nightmare if they were to get raided by these ants while retreating.

Blood ants appeared once more from the front, but this time, the students’ responses were much better.

They were also trying hard to adapt.

Nobody wanted to die.

Chapter 190: The A-1 Unit

“Since the first day of battle, I have been posted to Soundwave Street and Brightflower Street to supervise the battles. The students’ performance is atrocious. We have suffered terrible losses, and yet, we have dealt little damage to the blood ants. Among the slew of bad performances, nothing is more promising than the unit numbered A-1, which contained a number of the student body elites such as Ai Hui, Shi Xueman, Sang Zhijun, Duanmu Huanghun, and some others. They are the most outstanding students of Central Pine Academy. Reportedly, the mayor and the dean had a disagreement over the use of the A-1 unit. The dean did not want his best students to die in a battle of attrition doomed to yield high casualties. The mayor argued that everyone in the city had to participate in the battle and give their best efforts, no matter the insignificance. Eventually, the mayor managed to convince the dean, and fortunately, the A-1 unit was dispatched to the conflict zone under my supervision.”

……

“I have finally met the A-1 unit that is most talked about in the magistrate office. The leader for this unit is Ai Hui. He is the one who discovered the blood bat’s infiltration and assisted Shi Xueman and Sang Zhijun in eliminating it, thereby achieving a meritorious service and the magistrate office’s attention. Surprisingly, he is not the one commanding the unit. This role has fallen into the hands of Shi Xueman. If I had not witnessed it with my own eyes, I would not have believed that Shi Xueman, Duanmu Huanghun, and the others would obey his commands completely. His performance has caught my attention.”

……

“Unlike other units that advanced using the streets, the A-1 unit proceeded down the west side of Soundwave Street. that side is packed with houses, shops, and residents. Like a bulldozer, they destroyed the houses, razing them to the ground and advancing by stepping over the ruins. They went on like this by repeating this process. Honestly speaking, it is the most unprofessional and foolish advancing technique I have ever seen. After a while, however, I was made to admit that it was brilliant. Though the A-1 unit’s performance was lacking, they have capable individuals upon whom they can rely on. Shi Xueman’s leadership is terrible, but she’s extremely courageous. She also possesses a strong sense of responsibility and loves to help her teammates. At times, she seems more like a leader than Ai Hui.”

……

“The A-1 unit’s advance was slow and steady, and the unit members displayed signs of adapting to combat. Shi Xueman boosted the morale of the unit greatly. It appears that though she is inexperienced and not good with words, her strong sense of responsibility propelled her to give her utmost in helping her teammates. If she can survive this catastrophe, she will become an outstanding leader in the future. In contrast, Ai Hui was cold and looked on without helping his teammates. It was as if he had nothing to do with the battle. As the leader of the A-1 unit, I would give him zero points, though I do admit his swordsmanship is exquisite.”

……

“There are a few units on the verge of destruction, and their performance was pathetic. The A-1 unit continues to advance, but they are beginning to encounter troubles as well. The number of blood ants is increasing. I predicted that they would suffer great losses like the previous units, but I have underestimated Ai Hui; he came prepared.”

----- <<The Blood Battle of Central Pine City>>

With an overpowering rumble, the house collapsed, filling the air with smoke and dust. Before Duanmu Huanghun could wipe the dust off his body, a deafening noise pierced his ears.

A shiver swept down Ai Hui’s spine. He instantly sensed that there were more than fifty blood ants in the area, the largest wave they had encountered in this battle so far.

“Lou Lan!” Ai Hui yelled gruffly.

“Lou Lan is coming!” Lou Lan cheered.

The leaves covering the enormous fire vat on Fatty’s back were peeled back with lightning speed. Lou Lan then transformed into a sandy watering can and dipped half of his body into the fire vat. The long spout of the watering can extended over Fatty’s head and pointed towards the front.

Splash!

Torrential red mist began spraying over a large area.

The overwhelming scent of strong chili immediately pervaded the air, dousing the blood ants that had just shot out in a red chili concoction. Ai Hui became nervous. Using chili against the blood ants was purely his conjecture, unsupported by data.

Instead of thinking about failure, his gaze fixated on what was going on ahead. His muscles strained, and the Dragonspine Inferno in his hand was in its optimal position; he resembled a beast that waited to pounce on its prey.

The blood ants doused in the chili concoction mist suddenly fell apart, descending into chaos. Terrifying shrieks sounded and startled everyone.

Everyone except for Ai Hui.

The chilli concoction in Fatty's fire vat was specially concocted by him and Lou

A vicious light flashed across his eyes as he lunged forward. His Dragonspine Inferno swept up a cloud of fog before materializing in a streak of radiance.

[Misty Strike]!

Accompanied by an indiscernible buzz, the dazzling Dragonspine Inferno hit a blood ant with a piercing blow.

Bang!

Ai Hui's readied attack had astonishing destructive power. The blood ant exploded midair into a cloud of bloody mist.

With a slight twist of his feet, Ai Hui jumped through the air at an angle over the cloud of blood. Taking advantage of the momentum, he swiveled his sword and used the from from his momentum to execute an [Oblique Slash].

His move landed accurately on the blood ant's neck and effortlessly beheaded it.

Only then did Duanmu Huanghun and the others realize what was going on.

Shi Xueman and her team began their attack against the oncoming wave of frantic blood ants. As of now, the students' coordination was passable—not the best, but better than before. The unit was divided into three groups, each led by Shi Xueman, Jiang Wei, and Sang Zhijun respectively.

Everyone realized this was an opportunity to attack, and they all rushed forward. The blood ants that had just escaped the chili concoction mist descended into a panic, and in the blink of an eye, more than twenty of them were killed. The disquieted blood ants

soon returned to their senses, however, and lunged towards Ai Hui and his unit in waves.

The scene of the fight descended into chaos.

Seeing the disorderly situation, Lou Lan halted his movements; the chili concoction would harm the students as well, and though it was not deadly, it could possibly disrupt their momentum. They already struggled to coordinate with one another. If they were to be hit by the chili concoction as well, Lou Lan did not know how many students would survive this fight.

The battle had begun in earnest.

The students quickly found that this battle was completely different from the ones before. All they could see were the streaking after-images of blood ants all around them, which sent them into a panic. Screams and roars penetrated the air, and their previously acceptable coordination collapsed in an instant like fragile biscuits. Casualties accrued.

Some people clutched their throats as they collapsed onto the ground, struggling as they gasped in pain.

Others rolled frantically on the ground, their bodies bloody and mangled.

Shi Xueman’s eyes were red. She tightly pursed her lips and darted back and forth. Her spear was like a moving cloud,

reinforcing students at a disadvantage. Even so, she could not stop the students from collapsing one after another.

The two most dazzling individuals on the battlefield were Ai Hui and Duanmu Huanghun. Ai Hui's sword glinted crisply and sharply with abnormal deadliness. Very few blood ants could survive to escape his sword. Flying around him were the Red Dust Daggers that carved numerous streaks of sword traces into the air.

Duanmu Huanghun was another distinguished individual on the battlefield.

His [Viridescent Flower] had become more complex and unpredictable. Under his feet, patterns of glowing vines, clouds, and lotuses were scattered and blossomed over his hands. He stepped on air and ascended into the sky, and from time to time, green flowers drifted around his body in a phantom-like image.

Fatty stood off to one side. His speed was slow, so when facing the fast and nimble blood ants, he remained passive. His shield was like a wall, however, and his armor resembled a mountain. Wang Xiaoshan stood behind him while Lou Lan transformed into a swirling sandstorm that surrounded them and ground the blood ants to smithereens. As for the ones that made it through the sandstorm, they were faced with Fatty's heavy shield.

The battle became increasingly intense, and from the midst of the smoke and dust, the occasional blood ants were blasted out.

Duanmu Huanghun had killed more than ten blood ants in one

go, but as the elemental energy in his body began to deplete, his efficiency dropped and forced him to slow down his attack speed. He retreated to a less conspicuous position.

Thirteen!

He was thoroughly satisfied with himself. Compared to previous battles, his performance today was brilliant. After coming to know more about himself, he conquered his fear and underwent a complete transformation. Even the style of his [Viridescent Flower] had unmistakably evolved. It maintained the same complexity, but it now focused more on killing power, making it intensely ruthless.

With less pressure on him, his gaze shifted involuntarily towards Ai Hui. He was quite satisfied with his performance today and so felt confident that it was on par with Ai Hui's.

Eh?

Ai Hui's attacks followed a certain pattern, the same two moves. However... his attacking rhythm did not seem to vary at all....

How is it possible? Doesn't he feel tired? Doesn't he use his elemental energy?

Duanmu Huanghun felt incredulous.

Ai Hui was extremely focused. He needed to face four blood ants at once which didn't allow him any time for distractions. In such

an intense battle, it was not enough to rely solely on [Misty Strike] and [Oblique Slash]. He had to use elemental energy several times, and in some situations, he needed to dodge, unable to use either [Misty Strike] or [Oblique Slash], and sometimes block.

[Oblique Slash] and [Misty Strike] both had their own unique characteristics. [Oblique Slash] could be executed quickly, but it was highly dependent on angles and the attack range was narrow. Fighting stance could make up for these weaknesses, but such an intense battle greatly limited his options.

[Misty Strike], on the other hand, had great attack power, but its execution time was long. Ai Hui could only use this move when the time was right and normally employed it once per strike.

And like [Crescent Moon], these moves consumed large quantities of elemental energy, discouraging Ai Hui from using them too often.

Once his elemental energy was depleted, death was the only way out for him.

Sixteen.

Ai Hui did not know how many more blood ants were left. He forced himself to focus and pushed his mind to think of ways to use his [Oblique Slash] and [Misty Strike] to attack the blood ants.

He felt himself becoming more adept with these moves, but his

physical and elemental energy were gradually diminishing.

Twenty-two.

Ai Hui started to pant. He could feel the Dragonspine Inferno in his hand getting heavier. Fortunately, the blood ants were becoming sparser.

The remaining students acclimated to engaging in combat after their cruel “baptism.” Clearly, they had improved.

“A-1 unit, you can retreat now.”

The voice of the supervising elementalist resounded from the sky behind them, resembling a sound of nature.

His mind rejuvenated, Ai Hui spoke quickly, “Myself, Shi Xueman, Duanmu Huanghun, and Sang Zhijun will take care of the rear. Jiang Wei, lead everyone out of the battleground and retreat as quickly as possible. Lou Lan, prepare the chili concoction and retreat one hundred meters. Provide support to us later.”

“No problem, Ai Hui!” Lou Lan quickly drew the chili concoction and sprayed it over the ground as he retreated.

The rest of the students left the battleground one by one. Behind them were nothing but ruins.

“There’s one last thing we need to do,” Ai Hui suddenly said to those who remained.

Chapter 191: War Trophy

One more thing to be done?

Everyone was confused as they waited for Ai Hui’s next order.

"We have to capture a blood ant alive," Ai Hui spoke rapidly as he brandished his Dragonspine Inferno continuously and surged towards a blood ant. "Listen to my commands."

There was no time to waste on the battlefield. It didn’t take long before the remaining blood ants pressed down on Ai Hui and the others.

"Run!"

Ai Hui turned around abruptly and started running.

Upon seeing this, everyone followed suit and ran without hesitation.

The blood ants pursued behind them tightly. With their low intelligence, they based their actions on instinct, so as soon as they saw Ai Hui and the others running away, they went after them with lightning-like speed!

Mist drifted from Shi Xueman’s back, and her speed increased sharply. She brushed past Ai Hui, leaving him far behind.

Sang Zhijun resembled a lithe and agile bird with her clothes fluttering in the wind as she similarly blew past Ai Hui.

"Come on." She smiled at Ai Hui.

From under Duanmu Huanghun's feet, a glowing green flower pattern was spinning. He flew through the air as if running on a level road. At first glance, he didn't seem fast, but he gradually bypassed Ai Hui. Without looking back, he gave a cold sneer. "Ahh...."

Ai Hui was dumbstruck. He had become the last one.

Behind him, the blood ants were pursuing him relentlessly, and in his ears sounded the incessant hissing. He trembled in fear and dashed forward frantically.

It was at this point in time that he realized his weakness. He never learned an escaping technique! He was relatively fast in short distances, and this was why no one had noticed until now that Ai Hui's running pace was neither nimble nor fast.

And so when the running distance was pushed to a hundred meters, his weakness revealed itself.

His base level had risen too quickly, exposing his many shortcomings. Compared to Shi Xueman and the others who had a balanced growth, Ai Hui was clearly unbalanced in his

developments. All his time was spent on sword moves; he had to find a chance to learn a few escaping techniques. He placed great importance on anything that would ensure his survival.

He undoubtedly had to learn how to use azure wings in the future....

This bunch of fellows... was too much!

Ai Hui felt the blood ants behind him approaching closer and closer, and so he exerted all of his strength into running as quickly as possible.

Like a drill, his right leg dug into the rubble-filled ground. Boom! The ground under his feet suddenly exploded, sweeping up a tidal wave of dust that reached a height of three meters.

Making use of this explosive force, Ai Hui's speed rose sharply.

He flitted forward at an extreme speed. His left leg behaved like a drill once more, digging ferociously into the ground.

Boom! Dust diffused into the air.

Ai Hui was akin to a heavy beast. He surged forward frantically, and with every step, he stirred up towering waves of rubble.

The students watching from afar were stunned at the sight. Shi

Xueman was fast as lightning while Sang Zhijun was lithe and agile. Duanmu Huanghun flew gracefully through the wind. And as for Ai Hui, there were no techniques involved in his sprinting. His violent and imposing manner while running was driven by his capricious mule-headedness.

With every step he took, the ground quaked and the mountains shook.

In a blink of an eye, he covered a distance of one hundred metres.

"Lou Lan!" Ai Hui yelled.

"Lou Lan is coming!" Lou Lan cheered as he shot out the chili concoction in his hands, creating an immense cloud of red mist.

Like a cannonball, Ai Hui landed headfirst into the topsoil behind Lou Lan. Boom! The soil flew up into the air from the powerful force.

Ai Hui managed to use this momentum to change his direction before he then roared, "Get ready!"

The blood ants emerging from the curtain of dust and soil were doused in the chili concoction, and chaos descended once more. This time around, however, they continued to instinctively fly towards Ai Hui and the rest.

Ai Hui flipped his sword and used the side of the blade to strike

one of the incoming blood ants.

It arced towards Shi Xueman.

"Stop the ant!"

Shi Xueman spun Cirrus in her hand lightly, and a cloud of mist engulfed the blood ant, slowing it down as if in a pit of quicksand.

"Use [Viridescent Flower] to tangle it up!"

"Use your arrows to stop the rest of the blood ants from advancing!"

By now, Duanmu Huanghun had nearly used up all of the elemental energy in his body, yet he forced himself to channel the last strand still available. A green vine shot out and lightly tangled up the blood ant from within the cloud of mist.

Meanwhile, Sang Zhijun’s Golden Silk Longbow explosively shot out numerous dazzling streaks of light, stopping the other blood ants from advancing.

Ai Hui leapt into the sky and surged towards the blood ant that was engulfed in the cloud of mist.

"Withdraw your spear!"

Upon hearing Ai Hui’s command, Shi Xueman withdrew her spear without any hesitation.

As soon as Cirrus’ suppression was lifted, the blood ant became agitated. The green flower vine executed with the last of Duanmu Huanghun’s elemental energy also loosened bit by bit.

Just as the blood ant was about to escape from the vine, a snow-white bandage suddenly shot down from the sky.

The snow-white bandage rapidly wrapped around the blood ant, and in the blink of an eye, the blood ant was firmly tied up with only its head revealed. With its body unable to move a single inch, the agitated blood ant could only stare ahead blankly. Though its mouth continued to gnash, it wasn’t able to bite into anything. Every joint in its body, except for its neck, was tightly bound.

Ai Hui looked on with satisfaction at his work, the mummified ant.

Carrying his war trophy, Ai Hui yelled happily, "Run faster!"

Shi Xueman remained the fastest one, while Sang Zhijun was as graceful as ever. Only Duanmu Huanghun, who had lost all remnants of elemental energy, could no longer fly elegantly like before. He could only frantically run on the ground now.

"Despicable!" Duanmu Huanghun was fuming with rage.

The beast-like Ai Hui kicked sand all over Duanmu Huanghun's face as he zoomed past him. The sound of a cold sneer could be heard, "Ahh...."

After chasing them down for several meters, the rest of the blood ants turned and retreated. Even with their low intelligence, when they saw the densely packed humans at the entrance of the street, they knew it was not a good decision to continue forward.

Several units had gathered at the street entrance, preparing to launch the next wave of attacks.

They had witnessed the battle carried out by Ai Hui and his unit with their own eyes and were aroused into excitement. When the last person from the A-1 unit arrived safe and sound, they broke into thunderous cheers; every one of their gazes were aimed at the A-1 unit with the utmost respect.

"I believe all of you can see that the blood fiends are not victorious. As long as we are courageous and united, we can drive them away from Central Pine City!"

The supervising elementalist arrived just in time to encourage everyone.

The morale of the units rose sharply!

The blood ants were certainly powerful, but the students knew that they were not undefeatable. Only, they were affected by the

combat and the fear of the unknown.

When the supervising elementalist noticed Fatty with his enormous fire vat, he couldn’t help but do a double-take. His appearance was indeed unique.

As he approached the large fire vat, he was greeted by the strong scent of chilies. Surprised, he asked, "Chilies?"

"Yes, sir," Ai Hui replied.

"The blood ants are scared of chilies? Wow, I never thought of that. How did you come up with that?" The elementalist was extremely surprised.

Ai Hui recounted the incident of Fatty and the Dragon Soup. When the elementalist heard that he had finished an entire cauldron of Dragon Soup in one go, he couldn’t help but stare at the fatty as if looking at a ghost.

Ai Hui’s recounting of the event was clear and concise, drawing a satisfied expression from the elementalist.

"I will report this to the mayor. If it’s proved to be effective, all of you will be rewarded for your meritorious service to the city."

Ai Hui expressed his gratitude, "Thank you, sir."

Duanmu Huanghun and the others were somewhat disapproving of Ai Hui's attitude towards the supervising elementalist. To them, the elementalist was insignificant in their eyes, but it was different for Ai Hui. Coming from a laborer background, there was nothing wrong with addressing the supervising elementalist as "sir."

The supervising elementalist was extremely pleased with Ai Hui's attitude. "How about this live blood ant? Do you want to hand it over to the higher-ups? You can add it to the meritorious services you've accumulated."

"We have some ideas and would like to experiment with it," Ai Hui explained.

"That'll work too." The elementalist was not surprised, nor did he try to confiscate the blood ant. He could see that Ai Hui had his own plans for it, and this was a good thing for him. The more meritorious services rendered by Ai Hui and the rest, the more rewards he himself would receive as well.

"This is a special period of time, and all of your contributions will be regarded as meritorious services for the Avalon of Five Elements. As for the battle evaluation, I'll give you all the highest marks possible. If you can survive this catastrophe, they will be of great help to whichever job you apply for. I hope all of you avoid becoming complacent and continue fighting. Now go back and rest. I'll notify you again for the next wave of attacks."

Finishing his sentence, the supervising elementalist did not pay anymore attention to them and moved on to give orders to the other units.

"This time around, our target is east of Soundwave Street. All of you have seen the A-1 unit’s battle tactics—you will now follow that. Don’t walk in the middle of the streets. Now, tear down the buildings!"

"Yes!"

Uneven voices resounded through the air.

"Let’s go."

Ai Hui led his unit towards the training hall, and the rest silently followed him one by one. After going through the most devastating battle of their lives, they were physically and emotionally exhausted.

When the unit passed by a location where the supervising elementalist could no longer see them, Ai Hui suddenly asked, "Lou Lan, are there any spice shops in this area?"

"No." Lou Lan shook his head and then asked, "Ai Hui wants to buy chilies?"

"Buy? Are the shops even open? The entire city has mobilized." Ai Hui lowered his volume and said, "The higher-ups are going to verify the chili method soon. Do you think we’ll still be able to get chilies?"

"Are you saying that we should have a hoard of chilies before the mayor takes action?" Duanmu Huanghun was the first to react.

"That's right." Ai Hui gave a look that said 'Ingrate, you're indeed unscrupulous' before he continued, "The higher-ups will definitely expropriate all of the chilies. When that day comes, it'll become very difficult for us to advance in the battles without them."

Everyone nodded in consensus. The chili concoction had played a key role in the battle this time. Without it, they would have suffered many more casualties.

"Is this okay?" Shi Xueman was indecisive. Since young, she'd been a well-behaved girl. How could she do such a cunning thing?

"Then we'll have more deaths the next time," Ai Hui replied bluntly. "What do other people's deaths have to do with us? We care for our own people first before we care about the others!"

When the members of the unit saw Ai Hui's expression, their attitudes towards him changed immediately. Even the few troublemakers like Huo Yuanlong, who previously refused to accept Ai Hui as his leader, felt his animosity towards the latter reduce significantly. A leader who cared for his members was a good leader.

"Fine!" Shi Xueman clenched her teeth and a shiver went down her spine.

"Ai Hui, I know the locations of a few spice shops." Lou Lan’s eyes were glistening. "We can go try our luck."

"Everybody, hang in there. The sooner we finish this task, the sooner we can rest peacefully."

Ai Hui spoke softly, appearing as if he had several years of experience as a seasoned bandit chief.

Chapter 192: Shouchuan, Can You Help Me?

The spoils of war were plentiful, and Fatty's large fire vat was now completely filled with various kinds of chilies. Eventually, Ai Hui had to stop everyone from taking any more.

"Once these chilies are verified to work against blood ants, they'll become an important war commodity. Since we came up with the idea, the higher-ups will turn a blind eye to us taking some, but if we take too many, it'll affect the overall situation, and they'll take issue with us."

Hearing those words, the rest nodded in agreement, thinking that Ai Hui was indeed thoughtful.

Shi Xueman was astonished at Ai Hui's experience. It appeared that this was not his first time carrying out such a shady action.

Duanmu Huanghun snorted in disdain at Ai Hui's timidity. Why would the magistrate office make trouble for them over such a small amount of chilies?

When the unit finally returned to the training hall, it became obvious that their method of sprinkling chilies around the training hall did work as there were no signs of blood ants anywhere. This made them feel rather relieved.

The moment they reached the training hall, everyone collapsed all over the place. Their exhaustion went bone-deep, their minds and bodies overwhelmed by the ravages of this battle. Even though

the A-1 unit had the best battle results out of all the units, they still suffered high casualties, losing sixteen men total. There were another three who were injured and quarantined because so far, there were no remedies for injuries related to the blood poison.

It was torturous for them to watch their fellow peers have their necks savagely bitten by the blood ants as they fell to the ground with their eyes wide open.

The students sitting slumped on the ground were extremely downcast. They struggled to hold back the tears in their soulless eyes. It was as if they were living in a nightmare.

A single thought was at the forefront of their minds, and that was to sleep. They hoped that upon waking up, they'd find that it had all been a dream.

When they closed their eyes, however, all they saw were their dead comrades.

"Make good use of this time to carry out the Circulatory Cycle Revolution. Whoever has not recovered their elemental energy completely by the time we're due for the next battle will be put on the front lines." Ai Hui's cold voice rang in everyone's ears. Hearing this, shivers crawled down their spines, and they quickly sat up to do as he said. With the respect garnered from his performance, no one dared to question Ai Hui's authority.

Besides respect, there was fear as well.

Ai Hui’s rapid adaptation to combat and his calmness towards life-and-death situations had struck fear into these soft and immature students. They knew without a doubt that if they did not do as they were told, he would definitely be callous and send them to their deaths.

Shi Xueman, who’d been ruminating over how to encourage everyone, suddenly realized that the problem was easily solved with Ai Hui’s words.

She thought pensively, "So it can be resolved like this! Give the unit members a clear directive and make them busy. This way, they won’t have time to let their imaginations run wild."

Shi Xueman glanced at Ai Hui, admiring him yet feeling depressed at the same time.

Compared to this fellow, she was still far behind....

She was deeply dissatisfied with her performance today. Whenever she encountered a problem, she’d been at a loss, not knowing what to do. If not for Ai Hui, the number of casualties would have been much higher. In fact, she wouldn’t be surprised to see the entire unit wiped out. It seemed that every time she saw this fellow, she inevitably became gloomy.

It all started from that blind battle.... Shi Xueman suddenly looked unwell.

"What’s there to daydream about? Hurry up and start your Circulatory Circle Revolution!" A reprimanding voice suddenly came from above her head.

"Yes!" Startled, Shi Xueman subconsciously stood and gave a bow.

When Shi Xueman turned around and realized that the voice belonged to Ai Hui, she was enraged and tempted to give him a good beating.

But she breathed in and calmed herself. There was nothing to be depressed about. She thought, "I have to pick myself up and not lose out to this a*shole."

For some unknown reason, she could not stand being looked down on by Ai Hui.

.....

Ai Hui did not rest or carry out the Circulatory Cycle Revolution; he had many other things to do.

He threw the blood ant at Lou Lan and said, "Lou Lan, try and see what kind of chilies are more effective against our cute baby ant."

"Okay, Ai Hui." Lou Lan caught the blood ant, and his eyes flickered with a yellow light. He was intrigued by Ai Hui’s suggestion. Until now, the mummified blood ant was the first

blood fiend to have been captured.

It was only because of Lou Lan that Ai Hui had thought of capturing a blood ant to study it. Given Ai Hui's capability, killing one was no problem, but asking him to study them was impossible.

Ai Hui walked to the message tree and took off the leaf from his neck and hung it on the tree branch. When the leaf and the tree branch were connected, he wrote, "It has been confirmed. Blood ants do not like chilies."

After a pause, he added one more line, "Even though they are both red."

As soon as he finished writing this sentence, he felt content and more relaxed. Happiness was not determined by what was happening around you but rather by what was happening within you.

"We've captured a blood ant alive and will carry out some tests to see which formulation will work best against it. Do you have any suggestions? Everyone in the city must participate in the battle against the blood ants. We've just come back from one. A batch of blood ants that have finished one round of transformations was found in the city but luckily, we did not encounter them. Some feel that the main reason behind the blood ants' transformation is their desire to devour elementalists."

Once he finished writing his message, he sat below the message tree and stared blankly into space.

After a while, the leaf lit up.

"My dear friend, I'm so glad that you're still alive. Do the blood ants repel the chilies or do the chilies repel the blood ants? I need you to test it out. I'm more concerned about the reason behind the blood ants' transformation. Perhaps you can try feeding it a piece of dire beast meat. If it does not like it, then I think your reasoning may be valid: blood ants, or blood fiends, desire the elemental energy developed by elementalists."

Almost immediately, Ai Hui yelled, "Lou Lan, feed a piece of dire beast meat to the blood ant!"

"Yes, Ai Hui," Lou Lan replied. After a while, Lou Lan said, "Ai Hui, it does not seem too interested in the dire beast meat.'

Ai Hui's throat was dry and his limbs were trembling slightly.

This was the worst answer possible.

If the elemental energy of an elementalist was the main criteria for the blood fiends' transformation, then that implied that a blood fiend's prey was an elementalist. Devouring them made a blood fiend more powerful.... Alternatively, one could also say that if a blood fiend wanted to become more powerful, it needed to devour elementalists. It could only be imagined how frantic the blood fiends were in hunting them down.

With such a large number of blood fiends, how many of them would complete one round of transformation? The blood fiends would become increasingly stronger while the Avalon of Five Elements would become increasingly weaker. It could be theorized, then, that there would be many elementalists joining the ranks of blood elementalists for this reason.

Furthermore, there was also the Blood of God.

Or should he himself join the ranks of blood elementalists and bootlick the Blood of God? That future seemed brighter than the Avalon of Five Elements'! Furthermore, with his relationship with One Thousand Yuan, he might even obtain a pretty good position.

Ai Hui sat in a daze, not saying a single word.

After an unknown period of time, he returned to his senses and calmed down. He then wrote on the leaf, "It's been confirmed. The blood ant is not interested in the dire beast meat. It seems the future of the Avalon of Five Elements is bleak. What good suggestions do you have? For example, maybe I should become closer with the Blood of God? Or anything you can suggestion for my next round of battle?"

After a while, the leaf lit up.

"My dear friend, don't be too pessimistic. The Avalon of Five Elements was built upon a series of wars, not a soft and loose desert. Its history is short, not yet entering its twilight. The smell of blood and smoke has not yet been forgotten. All right, this is all

nonsense. Honestly speaking, we have no other choice. If you encounter the transformed blood ants, you must run away. If you fail to escape from them, take note of the blood traces on their bodies. Their weaknesses definitely lie there, though I don't exactly know why that is so. Good luck."

Ai Hui laughed bitterly to himself and took down the leaf and hung it around his neck.

Blood traces?

Ai Hui furrowed his eyebrows. What the hell was that?

He shook his head and tossed aside the negative thoughts. Let nature take its course. The other party was right; they had no other way.

When Ai Hui remembered One Thousand Yuan, he trembled in fear. She was indeed beautiful, but her heart was as poisonous as a python. Even if One Thousand Yuan requested that he switch sides, he would not do it. That woman was too evil. And remembering the mysterious blood refinement and how those elementalists had exploded, he felt deeply disturbed.

The Blood of God was a bunch of lunatics, horrifying lunatics.

Ai Hui did not dare to switch sides to a bunch of lunatics.

Ai Hui began his unique Circulatory Cycle Revolution during

which the sword embryo became more active. It throbbed in a slow and orderly rhythm, both strong and sturdy, each throb producing a deep and powerful echo within his brain.

.....

The Jade Embroidery Workshop.

Wang Shouchuan looked haggard. With an unconcealable look of weariness on his face, he said, "You really know how to bullshit. Treat the city like a piece of cloth, who has even done it before? You're already so old. How come your temperament has not dampened yet?"

Surprisingly, Han Yuqin had no retort. She even took the initiative to pour him a cup of tea. With a demure tone, she said, "Thank you for your hard work."

Treat the city like a piece of cloth. Indeed, no one had done it before. It was, after all, an idea inspired by the formation her husband had spoken of.

"There's nothing difficult about it. I'm just afraid that you'll embarrass yourself. If you can't fulfill your promise and humiliate yourself, won't you be angry? Furthermore, what's so special about formations? They belong to the trash bin of history." Wang Shouchuan laughed.

He did not understand why his wife would bring him

unnecessary troubles, especially such a dangerous task.

"I know you're worried about me, that something might happen to me. Both of us already have one foot in the grave after all. I've been married to you since I was twenty years old, and we've never parted since. The furthest we've ever distanced ourselves was a few streets away. I don't have many regrets in this life of mine. Even if I die now, I will rest in peace." Han Yuqin looked at Wang Shouquan with tears welling up in her eyes. "But what about Mingxiu and Ai Hui? It's not possible for them to die with us. Mingxiu is my favorite disciple, and Ai Hui is your first disciple. I don't care about other people in the city, but I don't want Mingxiu and Ai Hui dying in Central Pine City."

Wang Shouchuan was stunned.

"The entire city has been mobilized, and Ai Hui has already been to one battle. The results were rather good. Mingxiu is scheduled to be in one of the last few units to set off. Ai Hui can hold his own in battles; this kind of violent scenario is perfect for him. But he's still young. If the catastrophe drags on for any longer, he won't be able to take it either, and it's even worse for Mingxiu. Shouchuan, can you help me?"

Wang Shouchuan looked at the wrinkles that over the years filled the corners of his wife's eyes. When he saw her gentle and soft gaze, he was taken back to several decades ago.

That young lady was looking at him in a similar way and asking him a question in a similar tone.

"Shouchuan, can you help me?"

She had always been like this, stubborn and determined, never even discussing things with him beforehand.

Chapter 193: Rewards

Six people made breakthroughs in their base levels.

Shi Xueman, who had just completed her Circulatory Cycle Revolution, was observing the rest of the students closely. Upon seeing the six break through to the next stage, she was rather happy. The battlefield was the best classroom. Nothing could stimulate one's potential better than the pressure of death.

Her joy did not last long because she had too many things to do.

Her lousy performance during the battle had not caused her to lose confidence and give up. The sense of failure was a rather unfamiliar feeling for her. Even so, she did not think of giving up. After calming down, she recalled certain details from the battle and developed a new understanding of the things she had learned in the past

The evidence had proven that she was not a genius in terms of combat techniques.

She reached out to Jiang Wei, Sang Zhijun, and some of the students to summarize the losses they had suffered during the battle. Since she could not be a hero that saved everyone, she could only discuss the issue with the others. By helping everyone, everyone simultaneously helped her.

When everyone saw their eminent goddess reaching out to them for a discussion, they became abnormally enthusiastic and active,

as if they were pumped with caffeine.

When Ai Hui, who had just completed his Circulatory Cycle Revolution, saw the bustle, he sneered in his heart. The more beautiful a woman was, the more dangerous she was. Someday, all of you will understand this!

He sat down and started to recall his merits and demerits during the battle.

He had too few moves. Having just the [Oblique Slash] and [Misty Strike] were not enough and limited his offense in many ways. As for escaping techniques, he would have to wait until he attained the Initial Completion before he could obtain a pair of azure wings. No matter how fast one ran on the ground, he or she would still be slower than someone who was flying through the air.

When Ai Hui thought of escaping techniques, he thought of the [Golden Wind Cape] and then he felt a pain on his back. When the training hall was attacked by the blood ants, he used the [Arching Fish Back] against the ants and completely destroyed the [Golden Wind Cape] in the process. After all, the cape was not as sturdy as the [Blood Bandage].

If not for the [Blood Bandage], Ai Hui would be severely injured.

At this moment, Ai Hui sensed something and raised his head involuntarily. A few elementalists had arrived in the sky above the training hall. Ai Hui found some of them to be rather familiar. One of them was the guard of the mayor. Another one, whom Ai Hui

was the most familiar with, was the officer in charge of the warehouse.

When all of them landed on the ground, Ai Hui quickly went forward to greet them. The rest of the students gathered as well.

The moment the warehouse officer saw Ai Hui, he smiled. "I knew all along that your group was different from the rest. I was correct indeed."

"Thank you Sir for taking care of us," Ai Hui replied with sincerity. The warehouse officer had been taking good care of them, giving them all the good stuff. Ai Hui, who had experienced both the warmth and chill of mankind, did not take this for granted. For whatever reason, this person had been kind to them. Ai Hui felt that he still had to thank the officer.

The warehouse officer was very happy as they now had a much closer relationship than before. He winked at Ai Hui, but did not say anything else.

A stern-looking officer then began to talk, "Due to the outstanding performance from the A-1 unit, the mayor has decided to give everyone a letter of commendation and unique rewards. Every student will get 100 Heaven Merit Points. Ai Hui, Shi Xueman, Duanmu Huanghun, Sang Zhijun, Qian Dai, Jiang Wei, and Wang Xiaoshan will be rewarded with 200 Heaven Merit Points each. This reward had been submitted to the Elders through the message tree and has already been approved.

Other than Ai Hui and Fatty, everyone was overjoyed.

Heaven Merit Points?

Both of them looked at each other and saw disapproval in the other's eyes. At this critical stage, why would they even bother to use such imaginary and useless merit points to reward everyone? Reward them with something more practical!

"Other than that, each person will be given two portions of revitalizing powder and one piece of Central Pine Armor."

Ai Hui knew that revitalizing powder was a more practical item. It allowed an elemental energy-depleted elementalist to recover a portion of his or her elemental energy within a short period of time. However, one could not take it too often as it would cause side effects to the body.

What the hell was a piece Central Pine Armor?

It was as if the warehouse officer had expected everyone's misgivings, so he started to explain, "The Central Pine Armor is a new armor that we have recently developed. Its most unique characteristic is that it can prevent blood poison from accidentally splashing onto you and protect you from its harmful effects. This armor has not been forged in large quantities yet. The mayor eventually decided to provide you all with this armor. Right now, all of you are the pioneer users of this armor."

When everyone heard that the armor could protect them from the blood poison, they became high-spirited. Right now, this armor was undoubtedly the most important tool that they needed.

The battlefield was extremely chaotic and a moment of carelessness would result in them being infected with the blood poison. Furthermore, the blood poison was extremely corrosive toward their gear and equipment. The blood poison was the main factor that everyone feared when they faced a blood fiend. Even though the Central Pine Armor could not completely resolve this problem, it still provided everyone with a sense of security.

The greenish-grey, tree bark-like Central Pine Armor emitted a faint pine fragrance. The armor was not good-looking and one could clearly see that it was made in a rush from its roughness. However, at this point of time, even Duanmu Huanghun, who was a picky individual, equipped the armor on his body immediately.

The most bizarre looking part of the armor was its helmet, or rather, a conical hat that was made up of tree bark. The edge of the conical hat continuously emitted a faint light smoke, forming a smokescreen that completely covered the head of its wearer. When Ai Hui put on the helmet, he was surprised to discover that his vision was not affected by the smokescreen at all. He could still see as clearly as usual.

"This smokescreen can block low-impact objects, like sprayed blood. The best benefit is that it will not affect your vision at all," the warehouse officer explained. "Other than this armor, the mayor also asked me to pass on a batch of elemental food ingredients to all of you. Even though these ingredients are not

dire beast-based, they are considered the best ingredients in the warehouse."

He laughed bitterly. Meanwhile, Central Pine City's warehouse was not affluent. Currently, just rewarding the students with these items almost emptied the entire warehouse. Even though the officer thought highly of Ai Hui and his comrades, he was surprised that the mayor would spend so many resources on these youths.

"Help us relay our heartfelt thanks to the mayor," Shi Xueman interjected and gave a slight polite bow.

"Rather than thanking him verbally, I think the mayor wants all of you to be role models that encourage everyone else and help them regain the courage that they have lost," the officer replied sternly.

"We will try our best," Shi Xueman answered solemnly.

"We will definitely try our best." Ai Hui nodded his head.

A look of satisfaction appeared on the faces of the elementalists. One of them started to talk again, "Thanks to your demolish-and-advance tactic as well as the discovery of the efficacy of the chillies against the blood ants, our advancing speed has increased greatly. Given the current speed, we hope to clear up all the blood ants by sunset tomorrow. This is also why the mayor decided to reward all of you so handsomely.

The sudden good news resulted in thunderous cheers of joy from everyone. The dark clouds that engulfed their minds had been significantly cleared. It was as if everyone had seen the dawn of victory.

Smiles appeared on the elementalists' faces as well. Then, they reminded once more, "Have a good rest. All of you have to launch another wave of attacks tomorrow."

After completing their task, the elementalists flew up into the sky and returned to the mayor's residence.

"The rewards this time around are really bountiful." A smile appeared on Sang Zhijun's face. "200 Heaven Merit Points. I never expect to earn 200 hundred Heaven Merit Points in such a short period of time."

"What are these Heaven Merit Points?" Ai Hui could not help but ask. "Can they be exchanged for money?"

Ai Hui's words made immediately everyone roll their eyes.

"Oh my god, this is the first time I have heard of someone that wants to exchange Heaven Merit Points for money! If they could be bought with money, I would definitely buy all of your Heaven Merit Points at any cost" Sang Zhijun's face was filled with incredulity.

"Country bumpkin!" Duanmu Huanghun sneered as he cast a

disdainful glance at Ai Hui.

Even Shi Xueman almost could not stand the phrase "exchange for money."

Ai Hui did not care about how Duanmu Huanghun looked at him. When he saw everyone’s reaction, he quickly realized that the Heaven Merit Points were much more valuable than money.

Much more valuable than money!

Ai Hui’s eyes immediately lit up and he asked, "Come, let’s talk about the Heaven Merit Points? What uses does it have? How do I use it?"

Sang Zhijun quickly replied, "The Heaven Merit Points are the highest ranking merit points in the Avalon of Five Elements. The entire Avalon of Five Elements, including the small towns and villages, follow the merit point system. The merit points represent your contributions. The amount of merit points you have will determine your status in society. For example, Central Pine City has its own type of merit points, the Central Pine Merit Points. The Fire Prairie uses Fire Merit Points, the Palette Cloud Village uses Water Merit Points, the Yellow Sand Corner uses Earth Merit Points, the Jadeite Forest uses Wood Merit Points, and the Silver Mist Sea uses Metal Merit Points. Of course, the most valuable type is the Heaven Merit Point as it represents the contribution you made to the entire Avalon of Five Elements."

"They seem like different flavors of smoked meat. So how do I

use them?"

"Smoked meat... Whether you are finding jobs or pursuing promotion, these merit points play an important role. Without enough merit points, you can’t get certain positions that you’re looking for. The most important use for merit points is to purchase resources. You can use them to buy various artifacts, materials, inheritances, and even absolute arts."

"You can buy absolute arts with them?" Ai Hui was shocked.

"Of course! As long as you have enough merit points, you can buy many absolute skills."

"Aren’t the various absolute arts heavily protected by their respective clans and families?" Ai Hui did not seem to understand.

"That’s right. However, there will be times when these clans will request the Elders for extraordinary artifacts, medicines, etc. If they have enough Heaven Merit Points, they can buy them directly. But what if they don’t? You can't obtain Heaven Merit Points through monetary means. The only way is through trade, but what do you use to trade for them?"

"You can convert artifacts and absolute arts into Heaven Merit Points, then buy whatever you need," Sang Zhijun explained.

"That’s good! This can be a lucrative business!" Fatty yelled in excitement. "We decide the price of the resources, and we are the

only ones with Heaven Merit Points. There are really a lot of business opportunities in this place. This is absolutely a profitable business!"

Ai Hui cared more about the other problem. "Don't the clans worry about their absolute arts being leaked to outsiders?"

"Usually, it's only during critical moments that these clans would trade their absolute arts away. Otherwise, why would they do it?" Shi Xueman interjected. She knew a lot more about these prestigious families. "Furthermore, absolute arts are first-rate inheritances. What is an inheritance? An inheritance is an art that's passed down through the generations. Every clan in their right mind would keep on improving their absolute arts. This is done to ensure that their future generations would surpass the older generations. If they can't achieve this, they will decline as time passes. If they can achieve this, why would they be worried about their absolute arts being leaked to outsiders? Most of the time, the absolute arts that are traded for Heaven Merit Points are outdated versions. Some are even as old as the establishment of the Avalon of Five Elements. Their powers are much weaker than the current versions."

It was at this moment that Ai Hui realized what was going on. "I see. If what you said is true, why would people buy outdated absolute arts?"

"Even if the absolute arts are outdated, they are still absolute arts. Furthermore, developing a new absolute art depends on one's innate capability and enlightenment," Shi Xueman replied coldly. "Of course, if you're gifted enough, you might even come up with

your own absolute art while you’re sleeping."

What a joke!

When Ai Hui realized he only had 200 Heaven Merit Points, but was already thinking of buying absolute skills and looking down on outdated absolute skills, he could not help but laugh.

Chapter 194: Casualties And Hidden Dangers

"Let’s think about it practically. What can we buy with 200 Heaven Merit Points?"

"There ought to be a lot of stuff that we can buy. This is the first time we’re getting Heaven Merit Points. What’s with that look?"

"Think about it. That’s provided we can survive this catastrophe. Therefore, it’s pointless to talk about this. Why not we buy some dry goods?"

"That’s provided the mayor has enough of them."

…

Shi Xueman’s explanation on absolute arts roused Ai Hui.

The dazzle of genius was like a blossomed flower. The knowledge that was built upon generations of hard work was absorbed silently by the roots of the flower. Surpassing the older generations was a form of respect to their ancestors. It represented the confidence and courage of the new generation.

It felt gratifying to have an absolute art be passed down and studied for generations.

Ai Hui was envious as he continued his seemingly fruitless training. All right, there was no one to lead him and the process was rather lonely, but he had no limitations and could do whatever he wanted.

This should be how a pioneer felt. The feelings of solitude and helplessness were coupled with a heroic spirit.

Ai Hui broke into a laughter. The feeling of depicting himself as a supreme individual was rather encouraging.

Shi Xueman cast a glance at him, not knowing why he was laughing. However, when she saw Ai Hui had started to practice his swordplay, she withdrew her gaze and focused on the discussion with the other students.

Her notebook was densely-packed with notes taken from the fruitful discussion. Most of these notes corresponded to the information that she read in books related to art of war. Everyone gave her heaps of praise as they felt that she was a natural born leader. She felt very embarrassed by these words. The previous battle had made her realize that having theoretical debates was pointless.

As the discussion went in-depth, a series of terrifying training routines were drawn up.

There was going to be another battle tomorrow. Without hesitation, everyone began practicing.

In the students' hearts, Shi Xueman and Ai Hui were completely different from each other. For Ai Hui, his authority caused everyone to fear him and to have confidence in him at the same time. For Shi Xueman, everyone trusted her like a friend.

"Fatty, why are you not training?" Lou Lan shouted.

Fatty, who was sleeping soundly in one corner, woke up feeling terror-stricken.

"Lou Lan, supervise Fatty. 200 sets of sprinting!"

Ai Hui's cold voice resounded through the air.

"No problem, Ai Hui," Lou Lan replied cheerfully.

"Lou Lan, why do you have to do this to me?" Fatty sobbed with a frowning face.

"Fatty, Lou Lan is doing this for your own good," Lou Lan replied lightheartedly.

Poof.

Lou Lan conjured a sand-made whip and started brandishing it. "Fatty, 200 sets!"

.....

The mayor’s residence.

"... Currently, the battle results are remarkable. Our advancing speed has far exceeded what we anticipated before the start of the battle. Tomorrow, it’s even possible that we do not need to activate all of our elite units. However, note that we have encountered three completely transformed blood ants today. They have caused us heavy casualties. It has been estimated that the number of transformed blood ants will increase tomorrow. The recommended offensive for tomorrow is to place elite elementalists at various blocks of the streets beforehand to handle any possible dangers."

"... The total number of deaths today amounts to 5,721. The total number of injured individuals amounts to 1,655. These individuals have been quarantined. The casualties are devastating. The fighting capabilities of the students and residents that survived have increased sharply. Note that the number of people that we have quarantined has reached 3,100. Our doctors have not found a remedy for the blood poison. There are already 26..."

The voice was trembling as it read out the chilling numbers. Each number was equivalent to a human life.

"26 what?" the mayor raised his head for the first time and asked with stern voice.

"These individuals have their bodies undergo huge changes.

Their muscles become thicker and harder, their hair become denser, and their powers become terrifyingly strong. The elemental energy in their bodies are devoured by the blood poison and transformed into an unknown force. This mysterious force is the main culprit for the transformations in their bodies. However, it also bestows unique powers to them at the same time. We have a few wood elementalists that were almost killed by them."

"The Elders Guild has been studying this kind of force. It has an inextricable link with the blood refinement methods from the Cultivation Era. Blood sacrifices, underworld, soul-refinement, zombies, etc. Blood-refinement is viewed by the living as the power of death. The transformation of one's body caused by the blood poison is known as beastification. Currently, the Elders Guild has not found a cure for it."

"Beastification..." This was the first time the mayor showed fear in his eyes.

On one side, the dean's face was already filled with terror.

There was an absolute silence in the hall.

"Right now, the problem is what do we do with the 3,100 quarantined people if the beastification can't be stopped?"

Gasping in horror, everyone's heart stopped beating. There was a dead suffocating silence in the hall.

....

The Vanguard Training Hall.

This time around, Ai Hui's luck was not as good. After one night of trial and error, he did not develop any new moves, like a fishing boat that returned with an empty net from a fishing trip.

Ai Hui was not discouraged as this was normal.

He raised his head. The moon was bright and the amount of stars in the night sky were sparse. The courtyard, however, was filled with intense heat.

Fatty was fully-armored, his hands were holding a heavy shield, and there was a huge fire vat on his back. He let out a boar-like roar as he sprinted forward with all his might. If this was in the past, Ai Hui would have found it unpleasant to hear. However, at this point of time, it sounded rather refreshing.

On the other side, Shi Xueman led everyone in trying out different training routines. Jiang Wei's stern shouts and Sang Zhijun's cold taunts could constantly be heard. The young and tender faces of the students were filled with focus and sweat. For the sake of surviving, no one was complaining.

For some unknown reason, Ai Hui felt slightly touched.

This place was different from the Wilderness. In the Wilderness,

one would never see this kind of focus and struggle for survival. He mostly saw numbness, emptiness, and fear from the people in the Wilderness. They were waiting for death to come.

In this place, no one was willing to resign to death. Perhaps it took strength or the determination to preserve one's dignity in order to defy a doomed fate?

Okay, I am becoming more and more melancholic. It seems I'm not tired enough.

Ai Hui started stretching his limbs. When he felt that he had regained most his energy, his facial expression became solemn once more.

He wanted to try to use the [Big Dipper] to execute the [Misty Strike] and [Oblique Slash]. What would the outcome be?

The seven palaces in his body trembled together, each simultaneously releasing a strand of elemental energy. The seven strands of elemental energy merged together and entered his arm. However, by the time this happened, he had already finished executing the [Oblique Slash].

The channeling speed of his elemental energy was too slow.

Ai Hui stopped what he was doing. It was easy to identify where it went wrong when he recalled every single detail. He was still not accustomed to the elemental energy channeling method of the [Big

Dipper]. For his other moves, their elemental energy channeling methods had always been simple and straightforward. The only complicated one belonged to the [Crescent Moon] technique.

After realizing what the problem was, Ai Hui continued to channel his elemental energy and brandish his sword.

Fail, fail, fail...

Like a stone statue, Ai Hui's face did not move a single iota. He kept on executing the [Oblique Slash], behaving like an emotionless sand puppet.

Upon seeing this scene, the students would always cast an involuntary glance at Lou Lan.

"Faster Fatty! Come on!"

"Fatty, you can do it!"

"Fatty, if you run any slower, I will make you drink the Dragon Soup!"

...

Lou Lan's encouragements were fanciful and surging with fervor.

They were the most bizarre duo of master and sand puppet. The master behaved more like a sand puppet than his sand puppet, while his sand puppet behaved more like a human than the master.

Fatty would definitely agree with this statement. After finishing 200 sets of sprints, he collapsed onto the ground. His sweat began forming a small puddle beneath his body. His heavy panting rubbed against his throat, as if he would produce sparks from his throat at any moment. His mind was blank, which signaled that his body was reaching its physical limit.

Lou Lan brought out a pail of water and a bunch of straws appeared out of thin air in his hand. Next, he put one end of the cluster of straws into the pail of water and the other end into Fatty's mouth.

"Fatty, good one! Take a break. Lou Lan needs to start working as well."

Lou Lan had already found the chili formulation that the blood ants hated the most. For a sand puppet that was well-versed in cooking and medicine, as long as he was working in the right direction, he would be able to determine the most suitable formulation with abnormal accuracy.

The battle would start after dawn. Lou Lan needed to make enough of his brand new chili concoction.

He had to work hard to help Ai Hui!

Lou Lan raised his small fist in determination.

Gurgle gurgle. The level of water inside the pail was decreasing at a visible rate.

Fatty was finally able to breathe as he struggled to sit up. Just as he was about to start whining, he saw Ai Hui brandishing his sword emotionlessly, so he quickly shut his mouth.

No one understood Ai Hui's ruthlessness more than Fatty. The scariest part of Ai Hui was his ruthlessness. He was even ruthless to himself, repeatedly punishing and torturing himself. The level of Ai Hui's training was extraordinary.

For a person who was so heartless to himself, how vicious would he be toward other people then?

Better not provoke Ai Hui!

This was the conclusion that Fatty came up with after following Ai Hui for so many years. As such, Fatty could only clench his teeth and endure with regards to Ai Hui's expectations for his training. He did so because he knew that enduring the pain of Ai Hui's training was better than experiencing the pain of Ai Hui's beatings if he failed to complete the training. That fellow would definitely not sympathize with Fatty.

His nose suddenly started twitching.

Such an alluring fragrance... It smelled familiar, but he could not tell what it was...

Fatty propped himself up from the ground and followed the smell.

Bang.

He was frightened by the sudden noise. After a while, there another bang rang out.

What the hell was Lou Lan doing?

He was filled with curiosity. When he walked closer, he saw Lou Lan burning a thorny fist-sized green rattan ball.

Bang. The thorny ball suddenly exploded. Accompanied by scarlet flames, a cloud of glittering red powder sprinkled out.

The fragrance belonged to this glittering powder.

"Lou Lan, what are you doing?" Fatty could not resist gulping.

"Refining the chili powder and chili fire oil," Lou Lan replied without raising his head.

His hands were moving nonstop. He opened the thorny green

ball, put in a chilli, closed it up, and lit it up.

Bang. The thorny ball exploded and a cloud of glittering red powder cascaded through the air with blazing flames, landing in a hollow purple bamboo tube.

"I'm putting the chili into a hollow cocklebur and igniting it. The wood elemental energy from the hollow cocklebur will then seep into the chili. Wood feeds fire. The chili's fire elemental energy will be further stimulated, and the explosive power will crush the chili and its seeds into powder. From there, we can collect the limited chili fire oil. Fatty, look at the scarlet flames. That's the chili fire oil which we will collect using the flaming purple bamboo tube. The flaming purple bamboo tube's dual natures of fire and wood will feed off of each other. Not only can it hold the chili fire oil, but it also has an intoxicating effect. It's a pity that we don't have enough time..."

Like the paw of a cat, a fat meaty hand reached out silently and grabbed the purple bamboo tube.

Lou Lan was stunned when he turned around.

Fatty was gulping the liquid inside the bamboo tube. When the last drop of chili fire oil that, accompanied by a streak of flames, landed in his mouth, he unwillingly put down the bamboo tube and uttered his catch phrase.

"Another bowl?"

Chapter 195: Fire Enhancing Soup

Another bowl?

Lou Lan was stunned. Fatty was stunned as well.

Wait... did he just drink... chili fire oil? Chili! Fire! Oil!

Fatty's eyes widened abruptly. A blazing flush could be seen extending from his neck upward. His fingers crooked involuntarily as they ended up grabbing nothing but air, resembling someone who was drowning and struggling to stay alive.

He looked at Lou Lan with agony on his face as he felt lava surging through his throat. This resulted in him crying while speaking unclearly. "Rou Ran..."

"Fatty, wait for me!" Lou Lan exclaimed before he turned around and dashed into his room.

Sitting alone on the ground, Fatty wanted to cry, but there were no tears coming out from his eyes. He had realized how stupid he was. Every second was torture to him. Rather than cold tiles, the floor beneath his butt felt like a volcanic crater. His body was burning. Indeed, he felt like a roasted pig now. His entire body was surging with flames.

Fatty never thought that he would one day see flames flowing under his skin.

But now he had seen it.

Flames were seeping out of the pores of his skin, resembling red flaming snakes that slithered across his skin.

Fatty took off the armor on his body in a hurry. The shirt he wore had already been set aflame.

A bowl of clear liquid that was emitting a tinge of frost appeared before him.

At this moment, Fatty was filled with gratitude toward Lou Lan. Lou Lan was such a nice sand puppet. He was always reliable at such critical moments. Fatty did not even bother to thank Lou Lan before taking the bowl and gulping down the liquid.

A chill went right through his body!

Fatty felt that the temperature of his skin dropped almost immediately. He squinted his eyes, feeling so relieved that he wanted to start moaning. However, he suddenly realized that his vision became somewhat brighter. Eh? What was glowing?

He opened his eyes and his face froze.

Voom, voom, voom!

The slithering flame snakes on his skin had become blazing infernos. They shot out from his skin, resembling a stove fire that had been stoked. The augmented and intense heat caused his clothes to burn and vanish in a puff of smoke.

The soothing frosty feeling had disappeared. He felt as if a volcano was about to erupt within his body.

Grasping at his last bit of hope, Fatty asked with a trembling voice, "Wasn't... wasn't that water?"

"Nope," Lou Lan shook his head and replied with a serious tone, "that was the Fire Enhancing Soup that Lou Lan specially brewed for Fatty. The fire attribute of the chili fire oil is much stronger than the Dragon Soup's. Furthermore, its penetrability is stronger than the Dragon Soup's as well. Not only can it penetrate through your skin, it can also penetrate through the deepest regions of your body. Therefore, the chili fire oil has always been viewed as an excellent enhancer that boosts fire elemental energy. It's a treasure to fire elementalists..."

Boom!

The flames on Fatty's body intensified explosively and formed a gigantic fireball. His mind blanked.

"There are very few people who dare to drink the chili fire oil directly. The concentration of fire elemental energy in the refined chili fire oil is 22 times stronger than the chili's. After the stimulation from the cocklebur, this factor can increase up to 25

times. Fatty, you're really brave! No wonder you can finish a cauldron of Dragon Soup in one go. Of course, if you can drink the chili fire oil directly, the Dragon Soup is definitely a piece of cake for you. To make sure that you can efficiently absorb and utilize the fire elemental energy in the oil, Lou Lan has specially prepared the Fire Enhancing Soup. There are 17 kinds of herbs and ingredients in it. The clear and ice cold Fire Enhancing Soup can only be brewed through precise and perfect mixing of these ingredients. Furthermore, the grade of the soup is limited by the ingredients' quality and has reached only 72% of its potential..."

Boom!

Something seemed to have exploded within the fireball, causing the flames to intensify. The size of the fireball suddenly increased twofold.

Lou Lan's eyes flickered rapidly as he continued, "Sand core, begin the recording. The research on chili fire oil, scene one. One minute and 46 seconds after consuming the Fire Enhancing Soup, the respective fire elemental energy in the chili fire oil and Fatty's body have harmonized perfectly! The temperature of the flames are increasing, the degree of the flames' purity is high, and they have been burning for 34 seconds. The fire elemental energy is beginning to stabilize, stabilize... stabilize... Oh, Lou Lan almost forgot about the task that Ai Hui gave him. Lou Lan needs to continue preparing the chili concoction. Fatty, all the best!"

Lou Lan hastily went back and resumed preparing the chili concoction. The chili fire oil that he had just extracted was consumed by Fatty. This meant that he needed to start again from

scratch. Time was very limited and he needed to increase his speed in order to not delay Ai Hui's plan.

"Such a powerful fire elemental energy undulation!"

"Oh my! What's going on inside? How come there's such a terrifying fire elemental energy undulation coming from within?"

"I just saw that Fatty went in."

"Fatty is fire-attributed? Isn't he a shield bearer? A fire elemental shield bearer?"

"He's definitely fire attributed. You forgot about his fire vat."

...

It was as if Duanmu Huanghun was able to look through the wall. A shiver went down his spine. Such powerful fire elemental energy undulations should not be released from the body of an Induction Ground student.

Fatty....

He had never taken a serious look at Fatty before. In his vague memory, Fatty was nothing more than an overweight brute that spouted fire for an entire night. Nothing about Fatty left a deep impression on him.

However, the display of such powerful fire elemental energy waves was enough to show that Fatty was not someone to be looked down upon.

Duanmu Huanghun cast a glance at Ai Hui. All of this fellow's friends seemed to be extraordinary.

So what? Duanmu Huanghun was still the best!

With a proud look on his face, Duanmu Huanghun scoffed and withdrew his gaze. There was no time for him to waste on these insignificant matters. He would not be swayed by these distractions. He truly believed he was a genius that was going to become a Grandmaster in the future. No matter what other people did, it had nothing to do with him.

There was only one person who was worthy for Duanmu Huanghun to spend his time observing.

With intense fighting spirit in his eyes, Duanmu Huanghun looked at Ai Hui, who was practicing his swordplay and gave a cold humph. He then withdrew his gaze and continued practicing his [Viridescent Flower]. Being recognized as the premier genius of the Duanmu c, he began training the [Viridescent Flower] earlier than anyone else. It was as if he was born for this mysterious and complicated absolute art.

From the initial vine patterns to the recently developed cloud and lotus patterns, he had progressed extremely fast.

Time passed silently.

.....

The two sides of Soundwave Street had been almost completely razed to the ground, having just around 10 shops still standing. The resistance from the blood ants had become extremely fierce. Every deployed team returned with only half of its member surviving.

Looking slightly distracted, the supervising elementalist observed Soundwave Street. This was the most brutal and devastating battle he ever experienced in his life. It was as if he had been through purgatory. He could not remember clearly how many students had died on Soundwave Street. If it was any other period of time, the Avalon of Five Elements would never send so many youngsters to the battlefield.

However, no one could escape from this catastrophe. No one could save these students except themselves.

The only thing that gave him hope and confidence was that the situation was turning for the better.

No one had a happy-go-lucky attitude in them anymore as battle would terminate the weak. Compared to the previous battle, where the students displayed disorder and weakness, the performance of the students today had greatly improved.

"Have you heard about it! 100 Heaven Merit Points! Everyone in the A-1 unit was rewarded with 100 Heaven Merit Points!"

"The core members were rewarded with 200 Heaven Merit Points each!"

"Oh my god! 200 points?"

"I don't even know whether or not I could earn 100 Heaven Merit Points in my lifetime?"

"Hehe, you should rephrase your statement. Can you even earn any Heaven Merit Points in your lifetime?"

...

The supervising elementalist broke into laughter. He had to admit that the mayor's move was masterful. Using strict and cold military laws at first, and then followed by generous rewards. Even the supervising elementalist himself was envious of the 100 Heaven Merit Points.

This was really a huge reward.

It was extremely difficult to earn Heaven Merit Points, which made them astonishingly valuable.

Wang Zheng had not become the mayor after retiring as an

injured veteran by making use of his connections. Instead, he had accumulated 500 Heaven Merit Points, granting him the qualification to be one of the mayoral candidates. The selection process for the important positions in the Avalon of Five Elements placed a huge emphasis on Heaven Merit Points. Only those who had a certain amount of Heaven Merit Points would be selected.

100 Heaven Merit Points were enough to motivate someone to sacrifice his or her life. Most people would not be able to earn this many Heaven Merit Points in their lifetimes.

Not only were the students motivated, but even the elders in the city were enticed by the rewards and signed up for battle.

Heaven Merit Points would give one the chance to be healed by the top-notch divine physicians of Avalon of Five Elements, allow one's descendants to enter the best school and enable one to obtain more life opportunities.

All of them had forgotten about the dangerous nature of the blood ants.

If one was to die in the battlefield, his or her family members could claim the Heaven Merit Points.

"They're coming! They're coming!"

"It's the A-1 unit!"

"Such a weird-looking armor. It is terribly ugly and looks like tree bark."

"What do you know? That’s the newly-created Central Pine Armor! You won’t get it even if you want it! The mayor specially allocated this armor to them first."

"Isn’t this too unfair?"

"This is called capability!"

…

When Ai Hui and his counterparts walked on the street, they immediately become the focal point of everyone on the street. Since when had they ever been looked at in such a way by so many people? All of them felt uneasy.

Luckily, the smokescreen from the helmet of the Central Pine Armor covered their faces, preventing the onlookers from seeing their facial expressions.

The supervising elementalist descended from the sky.

Ai Hui walked forward and bowed. "The A-1 unit is here to report for duty. We are awaiting your orders, Sir!"

"There’s still 20 minute before the next wave of attacks. All of

you can take a rest first," the supervising elementalist also replied politely.

With 100 Heaven Merit Points in their hands, these students did not want to die. After they graduated from the Induction Ground, a lot of opportunities would be opened up to them. No matter what jobs they pursued, they were already ahead of everyone else in the rat race.

"Yes," Ai Hui replied politely.

"Eh, where's that big fellow with the gigantic fire vat on his back?" the supervising elementalist asked upon noticing that Fatty was not present. Fatty's physical appearance was extremely distinctive.

"He just had a breakthrough in his base level and has not stabilized yet. Hence, I did not bring him here," Ai Hui explained.

Spouting fire should be considered a breakthrough. The fact he had not finished spouting fire meant that he had not yet stabilized.

Ai Hi thought to himself. The absence of Fatty had impacted them significantly on the battlefield. The task of protecting Wang Xiaoshan thus fell onto Duanmu Huanghun's lap.

Duanmu Huanghun was not happy at this decision. However, he could not do anything as Ai Hui could shut him up with one sentence: "Who killed more blood ants during the last battle?"

The number of blood ants Ai Hui destroyed during the previous battle was far more than the amount Duanmu Huanghun had killed. Hence, how was it possible to assign the person with the strongest fighting capabilities as the caretaker?

Duanmu Huanghun’s face was gloomy and his body was emitting killer intent. He looked as if he did not anyone to get too close to him. Wang Xiaoshan was standing beside Duanmu Huanghun with a pale-white face, but did not dare to wander too far from him either.

At this point of time, a blood-curdling screech sounded from street.

The supervising elementalist turned his head abruptly and his facial expression changed drastically. "Blood-traced ant!"

A red streak surged toward them with lightning speed.

Chapter 196: Blood-traced Ant

The red figure was astonishingly fast, but so was Ai Hui's reaction. He swiftly sidestepped and slashed with his Dragonspine Inferno, which was emitting a faint light as it collided impactfully with the red blur.

Clank!

Ai Hui jolted, as if struck by a thunderbolt. A heavy force swept through the sword, and he felt as if he held in his hand a hot soldering iron.

Ai Hui gave a stifled groan and gripped the sword hilt tightly as his body flew backward uncontrollably.

Ai Hui's slash had slowed the red figure down considerably, allowing him to see it clearly for the first time.

It was as large as a dog, which was heftier than most ordinary blood ants were, and the red carapace was marked with messy but mysterious black stripes.

When he spotted the stripes, Ai Hui's first impression was of danger. He didn't dare to look at it any longer, or else risk having his mind and spirit drawn into it!

The supervising elementalist reacted with a furious roar, and with the string of his longbow as a blade, he slashed at the blood-

traced ant. The string trembled slightly and transformed into a light blade with a dazzling illumination. A sharp and piercing aura was released on the entire area as if a peerless saber had been unsheathed.

Someone received Ai Hui from behind—it was Shi Xueman.

As soon as they landed on the ground, Ai Hui shouted anxiously, "Everyone step back!"

Ordinary students were of no help in a battle of this scale; instead, it was more likely that the ant would take advantage of them. The frightened students' faces were pallid. Even Ai Hui was knocked back by one strike from the ant. How terrifying was this monster?

Just as the light blade was about to land, the markings on the ant brightened without warning. Boom! A dazzling, bloody light pierced the air.

The supervising elementalist was shocked to see the light blade in his hand sink into the midst of a muddy blood sea, its power sharply collapsing.

The bloody light went straight for his eyebrows. It was like a violent, surging wave of a blood sea that would soon devour him.

With a slight shift in his expression, the elementalist's rich combat experience saved his life. He loosened his grip on the bow

and slapped it. By using the elastic momentum, he ricocheted backwards.

With irritation, he realized that the blood-traced ant was far tougher to deal with than he originally thought. He wouldn't let himself get into such a disadvantageous position again.

He had underestimated the enemy!

In that moment, he noticed a pair of cruel and ruthless eyes that was fixated on him with a bloody light.

Whoosh!

His expression changed upon seeing the ant become a bloody blur.

From behind him, a snow-white spear shot out silently.

Clank!

Cirrus accurately struck the ant. Shi Xueman stifled a groan, but she was well-prepared and dispersed most of the force with the spinning spear. Without retreating, she advanced and stabbed the blood-traced ant with the swiftly rotating spear as the tip of the spear howled viciously.

After receiving Ai Hui, she realized the ant's astonishing strength

that belied its small size. It shocked her to know that Ai Hui was disadvantaged in a confrontation of strength.

The blood-traced ant parried, and suddenly three reflections appeared from the sky. The sudden change left no time for Shi Xueman to think, and her Cirrus stabbed into one of them.

Feeling the emptiness at the end of the spear, Shi Xueman knew she'd been fooled.

With arrow-like precision, a crimson figure emitting a bloody gleam arrived in front of Shi Xueman with its red-and-black mandibles like blood-stained scissors.

Shi Xueman felt her blood freeze. She was certain those scissor-like mandibles would easily shear off her thin neck.

At that moment, a glare like a shooting star darted past her neck and precisely hit the mandibles.

[Misty Strike]!

With a thunderous crash akin to the sounds produced by collision of saber and spear, the blood-traced ant trembled and rebounded backwards.

Ai Hui then retrieved the longbow and threw it to the supervising elementalist.

Shi Xueman landed on the ground, her heart still fluttering with fear. She felt at that moment just how close to death she had been. Her hand which held the spear trembled non-stop.

"Stop dreaming!" Ai Hui's reproach brought Shi Xueman back to reality.

Her face turned red.

Suddenly, the twangs of bows sounded from behind, one after another.

They came from Jiang Wei's heavy bow, Sang Zhijun's [Arrow Fusion Technique], and most powerful of all, from the supervising elementalist's longbow. He had a brush with death just now, and this was his furious revenge. He released his bowstring with a slight delay behind the other two's, right as the ant lost control of its body.

The string rang with a thunderous noise as his elemental energy fluctuated powerfully and burst out.

The entirety of Soundwave Street was bathed in the silvery light.

This there, there was no howling to be heard. The Sky Edge Arrow, despite its delayed release, reached the target first.

The ant's bloody light burst out once more.

The Sky Edge Arrow faltered slightly, but the bloody light was split open, no longer able to withstand the sharp, silvery light. Just as the ant was about to be pierced by the arrow, a shocking event unfolded.

The blood-traced ant rolling in the air suddenly ejected several red streams from its expansive abdomen.

It changed trajectory, narrowly avoiding the Sky Edge Arrow.

Jet streams continued to eject from its pores, allowing it to dodge strangely like a marionette attached to strings.

All of Sang Zhijun's and Jiang Wei's arrows missed as well.

Everyone was stunned by the change of events. Only now did they notice the pores on the ant's abdomen where the red streams had been ejected.

Puff! Puff! Puff!

By ejecting the air currents, the ant regained its balance and steadily landed from the sky.

The emotionless compound eyes stared at the figures in front of it, realizing that they were more difficult to deal with than its

previous prey.

Soundwave Street was deadly silent.

They were still stunned at the blood-traced ant's fighting capability. The killing moves had appeared in an instant, and some students were still unable to comprehend what had come to pass.

Too fast!

The ant faced Ai Hui and others and began to retreat slowly.

The supervising elementalist, still mired in shock, didn't issue an order to pursue and attack. He'd been determined to win with his final attack, but the ant managed to escape so easily that he still could not believe it. In the midst of his deep-seated fear, he didn't know how to proceed.

Ai Hui stared at the ant fixedly.

When the blood-traced ant began to retreat, a peculiar light flashed in his eyes. With his fighting experience from the Wilderness with all kinds of beasts and wild creatures, he knew their patterns well. From the ant's withdrawal, he guessed that it was tired.

He became more certain of his speculation when he saw that the stripes on its carapace had dimmed. Therefore, he was resolved.

"Get ready!" Ai Hui said calmly.

Everyone else was surprised and couldn’t help but look at Ai Hui.

Unmoved by the stares, he said, "I’ll take point with Shi Xueman. Duanmu Huanghun and Lou Lan, follow us from ten steps away. Sang Zhijun and Jiang Wei, keep a distance of fity steps from us. Sang Zhijun, be ready with your Bunny Hair Arrows. Lou Lan, prepare the chili concoction."

Shi Xueman settled at Ai Hui’s side without hesitation before exchanging a glance with him.

"What we need to do is defend and entangle it," Ai Hui said in a low voice.

"No problem." Shi Xueman nodded.

They approached the blood-traced ant slowly but firmly.

The ant didn’t expect that they would dare to close in and immediately became ferocious. It angrily flapped its membranous wings which hummed with a harsh and unpleasant sound.

Ai Hui laughed. "It's tired."

Shi Xueman didn’t know how Ai Hui made that judgment, but

there was no doubt in her mind. Her grip on Cirrus was tight and her steps were firm.

Lou Lan immediately transformed into a sandy spraying cart with a long spout that pointed towards the ant.

Lou Lan's transformation elicited some exclamations.

Transformation was a common and useful skill in sand puppets, but normally, they turned into lions, tigers, or traps at the most. To see Lou Lan changing into a spraying cart....

How eccentric was the earth elementalist who created it?

Walking beside the spraying cart, Duanmu Huanghun was a bit distressed. Why did Ai Hui have such a strange sand puppet?

He narrowed his eyes. Although he didn't participate in the confrontation with the blood-traced ant, he attempted to find methods to deal with it. On the surface, he seemed to be strolling idly and calmly, but a hidden thin and green twig appeared at his finger, circling flexibly like a small green snake.

The ant became more restless with the addition of Lou Lan and Duanmu Huanghun.

When Jiang Wei and Sang Zhijun began to follow as well, the ant calmed down and continued its retreat.

Seeing this, the supervising elementalist felt ashamed of himself. Even a student yet to graduate from the Induction Ground could do better than he did.

With years of idle living, his courage had eroded.

He breathed deeply, filling his body with elemental energy that exuded into the air around him. The bow in his hand suddenly shined with a bright luminescence, the gleaming, silvery light turning the ordinary longbow into a peerless treasure that was astonishingly imposing.

The blood-traced ant stopped its retreat. It sensed the danger that came with being targeted by its attackers and instinctively realized that if it withdrew any further, it would be jeopardized.

The elementalist's hair and beard drifted as he slowly pulled back the arrowless bowstring. On it converged a silvery light that gradually took the form of an arrow, and his imposing aura became more apparent.

The blood-traced ant on the ground could sense the dangers it faced. Its black marks shined once again with a bloody red light that encompassed its body so strongly that others couldn't clearly discern its body anymore—all except for an emotionless and clear pair of eyes that seemed able to pierce into one's deepest fears and cowardice.

The red light eroded the ground beneath it, making it soon

collapse into a pit. The blood-traced ant remained suspended over it.

Shi Xueman could not help but look up, but Ai Hui remained unmoved and stared at the blood-traced ant.

Bang!

The twang of a released bowstring came from the sky.

A silvery arrow streaked down from the sky, leaving behind it a trailing light.

Sky Bow – Light Binding Arrow!

Meanwhile, Ai Hui shouted loudly, "Lou Lan!"

Before he finished calling out, he had already stamped on the ground and bravely advanced with his sword.

Chapter 197: Blood Crystal

Although the beam of light was thin, it had devastating destructive power. Compared to it, the bloody light surrounding the ant was like fragile paper and was immediately pierced. The beam shot straight into the back of the ant, penetrating through it and out of its abdomen. Afterwards, there was a narrow yet deep hole left behind in the ground.

The blood-traced ant's shrill scream resounded through the air. The bloody light stirred violently like water, and its cold, compound eyes turned scarlet.

A cloud of red mist erupted from Lou Lan's spraying pipe. Though most of the mist evaporated upon contact with the bloody light, a small amount managed to bypass the light and reach the back of the ant.

The pepper water made with the new formula did not smell as spicy as before, but it was more effective.

With this attack, the ant began to roll frantically on the ground, tossing sand and detritus in all directions. Under its devastation, the rigid ground underneath it was fragile. Its eyes scarlet, blood from its abdominal wound spilled out and spread the sweet and fragrant smell of blood poison into the air.

In a flash, Ai Hui flew past the flying sand and detritus, the Dragonspine Inferno trembling slighitly in his hand.

His concentration was at its peak, and everything in his vision seemed to slow. He could even clearly note the trajectory of the detritus flying past his cheeks.

The rage in the blood-traced ant's eyes was dying down, which indicated that the pepper water was losing effect.

There was an insufficient amount of pepper water, and even less reached the ant. Despite that, he felt fortunate that it worked. After all, the blood-traced ant was far larger than an ordinary blood ant.

The world around him was clearly reflected in Ai Hui's mind. He knew he had only one chance.

[Big Dipper] was fully activated, and the elemental energy in his body was flowing at an unprecedented speed. The strand of elemental energy immediately took shape between his hand and foot palaces.

[Crescent Moon]!

Ai Hui used his most powerful killing move without hesitation.

A sword ray like moonlight flew out from his Dragonspine Inferno.

As soon as Ai Hui's strike hit the ant's body, nearly half of its back was cleaved off.

But it was not dead yet. Its bloody body dashed recklessly towards Ai Hui, driven mad from the severe pain of losing half of its back.

Seeing the ant rushing at him, Ai Hui used his tiptoes to retreat rapidly.

Ai Hui was fast enough, but he still smelled a sweet fragrance and watched as a bite rapidly came at him.

At that moment, a green twining twig extended from the ground and suddenly appeared in front of the ant.

In its mad dash, the ant was unprepared and lost its balance. Instead of rushing towards Ai Hui, it was rolling towards him now.

Good chance!

Ai Hui's eyes lit up. The ingrate was making good progress. The trip was a small trick but proved effective with its timing. He grasped the chance and halted his retreat. Instead, he slashed at the rolling ant that approached him with the Dragonspine Inferno in his hand.

A snow-white spear shot at the ant with an imposing aura, like a white whale breaking the surface of clouds.

Shi Xueman shoved her Cirrus into the ant with amazing power before Ai Hui was able to.

Puff!

The spear once again pierced the blood-traced ant.

Nevertheless, Ai Hui's expression twisted as he realized that the situation was not as good as they thought.

The ant, regardless of its injuries, hung onto the now-bloodstained white spear and crazily rushed at Shi Xueman. The scissor-like mandibles emitted sounds of sharp winds as they readied to bite into Shi Xueman's arm.

Despite Shi Xueman's adaptations to combat, she didn't expect that even after incurring deadly injuries, the ant would still be able to attack them ferociously. Her face paled.

Bang!

In a flash of inspiration, Ai Hui's slash became a slap. The Dragonspine Inferno was used as a stick and impacted the mandibles with great force.

Sparks flew in every direction!

Hand trembling, Ai Hui tightly gripped the hilt of the sword that

almost ricocheted. Under the rebound’s power, he gave a muffled groan while he was sent flying backward. He originally intended to take advantage of the ant with a slash, but never did he expect for it to become a direct confrontation of power. He lost control of his body and was thrown into the sky.

Just as he was about to hit the ground, the spraying cart rushed to him.

"Ai Hui, Lou Lan is here!" Lou Lan said happily. As soon as Ai Hui heard this, his body immediately relaxed.

The spraying cart transformed into a sand net that caught Ai Hui precisely.

The sand net then turned into a palm that placed Ai Hui at the helm of the cart, which had previously been a spraying pipe.

The ant, on the other hand, was like a ball hit by Ai Hui and slid out of the Cirrus.

Shi Xueman was dumbstruck. She stared blankly at the blood-traced ant that was getting farther and farther away in the sky.

The spraying cart carried Ai Hui closer and stopped beside Shi Xueman, who was still absent-minded. Ai Hui said lightly, "Don’t get too close to a dying beast unless you want to die with it."

As soon as he saw Shi Xueman’s spear pierce the ant, he’d

realized it was far from good.

Whether human or beast, the final attack before its dying breath was always the most ferocious and powerful because it carried the combined force of its hatred and desperation.

Then, turning his head, Ai Hui spoke highly of Duanmu Huanghun, "Hey ingrate, your move was really tactful."

Duanmu Huanghun’s face froze.

Ingrate....

He must’ve said that so loudly on purpose!

Duanmu Huanghun at once felt as though everyone was staring at him.

Damn it! Bastard!

Anger grew in Duanmu Huanghun, his blue veins standing out starkly against his temples. He wanted to rush at Ai Hui and bash his head with a brick many times, but as soon as he remembered that he really owed money to this bastard, he struggled to restrain his impulses.

He was a perfectionist, and he couldn’t bear a stain like this in his life. He had no problem starting a fight without any reason since

he had done so many times, but he could never beat up a person to whom he owed money.

He hardened his resolve. As soon as he left this place, the first thing he'd do is pay off his debt.

And the first thing after that would be to beat this bastard to death.

Definitely! Undoubtedly!

Duanmu Huanghun clenched his fists tightly and visualized Ai Hui kneeling in front of him, wailing and whining bitterly. He immediately felt more at peace.

The supervising elementalist descended from the sky, and as soon as he landed, he staggered slightly.

His elemental energy was nearly consumed from the Light Binding Arrow.

"You've made another contribution." He glanced at Ai Hui, who had displayed courage and accurate timing in this battle. This student had managed to outperform him, a veteran.

Recalling that Ai Hui used to be a laborer in the Wilderness, he couldn't help sighing for him.

He believed Ai Hui was born for fighting.

Troubled times were a disaster for most, but for a small number of people, it was the best stage.

They were born for this era.

That was the feeling Ai Hui gave him.

Thank you, sir, for your support," Ai Hui said with deep respect.

The light arrow carried a power that Ai Hui had never witnessed in his life. So long as it hit a critical point, the enemy was guaranteed to die. He remembered the inheritance of Sky Edge Division that Shi Xueman had once told him about and realized the power of the Thirteen Divisions that was beyond his expectations. He suddenly gained confidence. If an ex-serviceman of the Thirteen Divisions was so strong, how amazing would the fighting capability of the elite force be?

The powerful Thirteen Divisions against the Blood of God. They had a chance to win against them.

Perhaps the future of the Avalon of Five Elements was not as dim as he imagined.

He caught sight of the blood-traced ant in the distance. It sported fatal injuries but continued to twist bitterly on the ground. Everyone was amazed at its tenacious vitality. A sweet and

extraordinarily tempting smell lingered in the air. Although the students were aware of the blood poison’s terror, they still became eager when they smelled the fragrance.

Devils always walked together with temptation.

Ai Hui and his teammates waited to approach it until they were certain it was dead and unmoving.

The ant’s blood clotted, and the fragrance in the air gradually dissipated.

"Ai Hui, the blood clot is becoming solid," Lou Lan said. A yellow light shined in his eyes.

Solid?

They were all surprised. Ai Hui found a small wooden stick and poked the clot with it.

Sure enough, the blood clots had completely solidified.

"It’s crystallization," Lou Lan said.

"Crystallization? What’s that?" Sang Zhijun asked.

"The nature of the blood clot is changing into a crystal," Lou Lan

explained.

They could see that the clot was turning into a dark-red crystal that finally became as clear as a gem. Ai Hui knocked on it with the stick, producing a sound as if hitting against glass.

"Is it poisonous?" Ai Hui asked Lou Lan.

"No." Lou Lan shook his head.

Ai Hui’s eyes lit up and looked at the body of the blood-traced ant as if it was a dead dire beast. To him, this was a hill of gold. During his time in the Wilderness, he was fighting against dire beasts for the majority of the time, and each part of a dire beast was useful, including the hair, fur, flesh, bones, tendons, and organs.

In other words, there was not a single part that could not be exchanged for money.

Would the body of a blood fiend be of similar value?

Look at how clear the blood clot was! It had to be expensive.

"Sir, can we take the blood-traced ant’s body back for further study?" Ai Hui took the initiative.

The elementalist couldn’t help but laugh. "This is a blood crystal. We’ve found similar things after killing other blood-traced ants.

Only they have blood that crystallizes, not the ordinary blood ants. The mayor’s residence has been studying it for some time, but the results show that it has nothing to do with our elementalists. The carapace of the blood ant is solid but becomes soft after its death, and the same with its bones and muscles—they easily become broken once the ant dies."

"Let us have a try, sir. Can we take it?" Ai Hui asked insistently.

"You can take it all." The supervising elementalist smiled generously. "We don’t know how to use it anyway. Don’t worry, after crystallization, the blood of the blood-traced ant is no longer poisonous. Maybe you’ll find a way to utilize it."

At once, Ai Hui said, "Thank you, sir," and quickly collected the blood crystals on the ground.

After retrieving all of them, he ordered the team to step forward. During the battle, the elementalist and Ai Hui were the ones to use the most energy, while the others were still hale. The supervising elementalist also remarked that there would only be one blood-traced ant within an area.

A blood-traced ant was like the king of an ant colony, and a king would always be lonely.

Shi Xueman commanded the team to continue tearingdown the houses.

To all onlooking students, the performance of the A-1 unit was shocking.

Chapter 198: Ordinary and Brilliant

"Prepare yourselves!" Shi Xueman ordered.

They were not sure whether or not the solution they had thought of last night would work, but they would give it a try anyway.

Sang Zhijun looked nervous. Jiang Wei seemed calm and collected, but his hand that tightly clutched his bow revealed the tension in his heart.

Unexpectedly, they didn’t step forward.

Wood-attribute students began to spread seeds of different colors on the ground, then rattans sprouted out of the earth and began to grow crazily. Water-attribute students placed misty clouds while earth-attribute students made quicksand in the interspace zones. In this way, the team was connected together and a net was created with many obstacles. The moves were not powerful, but they covered all the areas the team occupied.

After they were done, only twenty people were left while all the others turned back and walked out of the pitfall area.

Shi Xueman was not far from the shops. She gestured to Wang Xiaoshan, who immediately destroyed all the nodes of the shop.

With a loud boom, the shop collapsed, generating substantial amounts of dust in the air.

Chuu… Chuu… Chuu…

Dozens of red figures were ejected from the smog. They noticed Shi Xueman first and rushed towards her.

Shi Xueman was well prepared. She turned back and dashed into the pitfall area without hesitation, followed closely by the blood ants running after her.

Unexpectedly, the blood ants were completely in shambles.

The pitfall areas were very hard to deal with for the ants. Obstacles of different attributes were mixed up, each of which had a totally different kind of resistance. For the blood ants that were amazingly fast, even a small force could lead them astray.

Those left in the area were the twenty people who were the most powerful. They didn’t seek to fight actively and only needed to keep the ants in the pitfall.

Sang Zhijun and Jiang Wei were leading nine archers. Once Sang Zhijun’s Spiderweb Iron Pellets were shot out and entangled a blood ant, Jiang Wei’s heavy arrow would come together with another nine arrows and the blood ant in the middle of the spider web would be shot into a hedgehog.

They were not attacking hastily. The fast speed of Sang Zhijun’s shot now gave full play to its effect. Meanwhile, she was also

taking on the overall control. She would shoot a String and Woodwind Arrow wherever there was danger.

The String and Woodwind Arrow was not lethal, but it was effective to disrupt the attack of the enemies.

Together with the others, Shi Xueman had carefully analyzed all of the problems exposed in yesterday's battle and discussed how to solve them. Today's arrangement was the result of their discussion. She knew she was only a rookie, so it was better to let everyone join the discussion. This way, they would also know clearly what they needed to do.

At first, they had been a bit reserved and unfamiliar with each other, but as time went by, their cooperation improved greatly.

What's more, since this was the second time for them to be on the battlefield, they had overcome the fear in their hearts and gradually gotten used to fighting.

The students' efficiency and confidence had both been greatly improved.

Shi Xueman felt happy from her heart. There was nothing more cheerful than seeing the discussion that she had initiated by herself go smoothly.

She had almost been killed just before, but now she was fully enjoying the wild fighting and became the most eye-catching

existence.

Even the ugly Central Pine Armor could not hide her elegant and valiant figure. With Cirrus in her hand, she fought freely on the battlefield as if there was no resistance. As for the details of the pitfall, it was engraved in her memory and did not influence her at all.

Each strike was mighty and powerful. Besides, as her control over her strength had improved, she could now maintain her elemental energy within her body very well. The blood ants that were struck down by her Cirrus all ended up exploding into a cloud of blood mist.

Duanmu Huanghun was standing out of the pitfall area and practicing his [Viridescent Flower] at ease.

He was good at control, but how could he willingly become a supportive player?

When did you see Big Brother Huanghun as someone else's assistant?

That wouldn't help him defeat Ai Hui!

His eyes were cold. The green twine twigs appeared and disappeared mysteriously in the pitfall area. The continuous fighting had a huge impact on him. At first, although his [Viridescent Flower] could dazzle the eyes of his enemies, it had

not been very lethal. Thus, he had intentionally practiced in order to improve its lethality while maintaining its gorgeous appearance.

Perfect talent must possess a perfect absolute art!

The aloof and proud temperament, magnificent and lethal attack, unruffled stroll, and incomparably handsome face constituted an attractive picture. Many female students had forgotten that they were still in danger. They couldn't help holding their breath and staring at Duanmu Huanghun.

Shi Xueman was invincible, Duanmu Huanghun was proud and gorgeous, Sang Zhijun was at ease, and Jiang Wei was well-ordered in the battle. Their perfect cooperation was eye-catching. Even the supervising elementalist was stunned at the fighting prowess of each of the kids on the battlefield.

Ai Hui was also surprised at their performance.

Although there was still some immaturity, it was much better than yesterday. At least they were more composed when facing the blood ants.

And he could tell that the tactics had indeed been arranged with a lot of thought.

He didn't know that the Iron Lady in blue and white was very talented in this aspect.

As a girl, she was valiant indeed. Seeing the blood ants that had exploded into blood mist, Ai Hui felt a bit frightened. If he had never seen Iron Lady's face before, then judging only from the fight, he might have thought that the figure in the Central Pine Armor must have been a muscular and brawny woman.

Females nowadays were becoming more and more powerful. The "money-losing deal" could easily defeat himself with One Thousand Yuan and now the Iron Lady in blue and white was more skillful than he'd expected. At first Ai Hui wanted to ask Iron Lady to give him some compensation for saving her life so many times. It shouldn't be for free!

She should thank him with money!

Besides, he'd heard that her family was wealthy...

But now, seeing the ferocious performance of Iron Lady, Ai Hui wisely gave up the idea. Apparently, he could hardly resist her attack with the spear.

"Good job, Miss Shi!"

"Good job, Bangwan!"

"Good job, Miss Sang!"

"Good job, Jiang Wei!"

...

Lou Lan who was standing beside Ai Hui never stopped marveling at their performance. Ai Hui had been upset at the loss, and now hearing what Lou Lan said, he became more agitated and suddenly turned his face to glare at Lou Lan.

Lou Lan abruptly shut up. He shrugged and kept silent for a while, then stammered, "Ai Hui is the best of all!"

Ai Hui, who had been angry just now, immediately became cheerful. He patted his head and praised him. "I really like your honesty, Lou Lan."

The teammates were cooperating very well and soon destroyed the blood ants in the last few shops. When the last blood ant was killed, the crowd in the street burst into cheers.

In Wang Shouchuan’s room.

All kinds of books were scattered on the floor. Wang Shouchuan’s hair was white and in a mess, and his eyes were red. He was murmuring like he was in a nightmare. "How? How? Spell formation... spell formation..."

"This is impossible!"

"Elemental energy cannot reach that place..."

"She can’t do that at her current base level..."

"Ahhhh, how can I make it?"

...

He fell on the floor and looked blankly at the ceiling. He felt he was a total failure. He had accomplished nothing in his life and couldn’t even help Yuqin to realize her last hope.

He was immersed in strong feelings of weakness and despair.

These days he hardly had any rest and was now overwhelmed with fatigue.

He dreamed about the first time he’d met Yuqin and the first time he’d spoken to her. In his dream, he kept talking to Yuqin about his discoveries. They got married and...

Numerous scenes kept circling in his head. He had already forgotten where he was.

"Shouchuan, I need your help."

Yuqin’s ardent voice suddenly came into his mind and woke him

up. He sat up on the bed. A gust of wind blew in and he felt cold. Only then did he realize that he was drenched in sweat.

He unintentionally glanced in the mirror and was dumbfounded by what he saw. His grey hair had all grown white and his wrinkled face looked unhealthy and red.

Maybe he would die together with Yuqin.

Suddenly, Wang Shouchuan felt relieved. He finally knew what he was most afraid of – rather than death, what he was really afraid was life without her.

He knew he didn't have many years left to live, but there was no more fear in his heart.

"Yuqin, I'll help you!"

Wang Shouchuan's turbid eyes suddenly lit up. He seemed to have gone back to his years of fearlessness. Youth and vigor were once again infused into his old body and inspiration began to gush out.

He sat at the table and wrote something like crazy.

Soon he had used up several pieces of paper. On the papers were his delicate designs. His burning life was the most magical ink that endowed the brush with glory. It was like the first ray of sunlight to shine into the darkness. It rose up into the sky and illuminated

his ambitions in the quiet first half of his life together with the knowledge he had accumulated after days and nights of hard work. With light and heat, it wrote down his name in the sky of history.

He felt that he was covered in the light and was full of energy.

This was the best time he'd ever had. It came late in his life together with his loved one's request.

What a coward! He didn't have the courage to live alone. He only dared to die with his beloved woman.

He didn't sleep, rest, or feel tired. More and more paper, which was with his body temperature and conveyed his love and ambition, was piled up in front of him on the table.

Day and night, he didn't eat, drink, or rest for a second.

When he finished the last paper, he smiled. Then he reorganized the papers, folded them, and put them carefully in a metal box. His movements were very gentle, as if the papers in his hands were the most valuable treasure in the world.

To him, yes.

He closed the box and pulled the rope on his table. The guard outside heard the bell and quickly came in. All of Wang Shouchuan's materials were in his study. The Mayor specially sent someone to protect him and accompany him to where he lived.

The guard was astonished to see Wang Shouchuan. He looked withered and his hair was all white.

"Send it to the Jade Embroidery Workshop."

His voice was hoarse and dry. He was too exhausted to say one more word.

The guard suddenly saluted Wang Shouchuan with great respect.

He knew the importance of the box, so he immediately spread his Cloud Wings and flew to the Jade Embroidery Workshop.

Wang Shouchuan stared at the figure moving farther and farther into the sky. The light in his eyes gradually disappeared.

His wrinkled hands held the doorframe tightly and his grey and cloudy eyes filled with stubbornness; Wang Shouchuan stood still and didn’t fall down.

He said to himself with a smile.

Don’t worry. I will wait with you until the last second... How can I let you leave alone?

Chapter 199: Yan Hai

Yan Hai stood in the distance and stared ardently at Ai Hui while he was collecting the blood crystals scattered on the ground.

Central Pine City's study on the blood crystals had produced no useful discoveries. As a result, Yan Hai managed to get some blood crystals effortlessly. After taking four blood crystals, he found that the blood spiritual force within his body increased sharply. He now felt like he had infinite power.

As long as he could get a few more blood crystals, he was confident that he could achieve a breakthrough.

Unconsciously, he touched the scar on his left hand. It was a long scar that stretched from his wrist to his elbow. Back then, his whole left arm had almost been disabled, but fortunately, thanks to the unique techniques of the organization, it had recovered perfectly.

He had been with the organization for a long time and once ran for the god apostles. Unfortunately, he was eliminated at an early stage; however, thanks to this early elimination, he was still alive. He'd heard that in the later stages, all the participants had been killed by the six god apostles.

This had also offered them a chance.

He'd accepted the mission to go undercover in the Induction Ground. He hadn't chosen the metropolises because he'd known

that he was not powerful enough. With his meager ability, he could have done nothing in those cities. Here in the Induction Ground, however, he might have some opportunities.

The organization's supernatural power was beyond his imagination. He was easily assigned to the Induction Ground with a perfect fake identity. Never once did anyone suspect him.

Five years had passed.

It was so long that he had almost forgotten his real identity, until the breakout of the blood disaster.

Unexpectedly, the blood disaster started from the Induction Ground. He was thrilled and delighted, as he knew that it was a one in a million chance for him.

The five years had not been an easy time and he had been too impatient to just wait. His assumed identity was a wood elementalist. To acquire the Blood of God for daily training, he'd secretly planted some blood plants in his back room. As the results of earlier studies performed by the organization, the plants could only provide low-quality Blood of God.

Therefore, his progress in training had been very slow.

The outbreak of the blood disaster had largely boosted his training and now he was slavering after the blood crystals. Having taken several blood crystals, he saw his blood trace begin to

agglomerate. As long as the agglomeration could be completed successfully, he could become a formal member of the organization instead of a peripheral.

He had to think up a solution.

He knew of Ai Hui. In the current Central Pine City, few people didn't know of him. As the mayor kept advertising the brilliant achievements of the A-1 Unit, the team members, including Ai Hui and Shi Xueman, had become well-known. Even the Vanguard Training Hall was no longer a secret.

People admired the huge rewards they got and worshipped their achievements and fighting skills.

Ai Hui seemed to feel his gaze and turned towards him. Yan Hai immediately lowered his head. When he looked up again, Ai Hui's attention had already returned to the battlefield.

Not in the mood to watch their fight, Yan Hai lowered his head and left quietly.

He'd just seen Ai Hui's amazing fighting skills and knew that he was definitely not Ai Hui's match, but that didn't mean that there was nothing he could do. Although his blood trace hadn't fully agglomerated, thanks to the unparalleled techniques of the organization, he possessed some unique capacities.

He walked fast. It would not be long before the battle came to an

end, after which Ai Hui and his teammates would return to the Vanguard Training Hall. If he could not make it to the Vanguard Training Hall before them, his plan couldn't be carried out.

He walked past the ruins and the empty streets. Now this city was either in battle or in ruins. He could see hardly any people on the streets.

The smoke rising from the ruins made the scene more desolate and unfamiliar.

Yan Hai gave it a glance. He had been living in this small city for five years and had never seen anything like this before. The cause of all the aftermath was what he was going after. While thinking of these things, he felt a bit uncomfortable in his heart.

But these emotions were meaningless. He soon forgot about them.

Everyone had to live for themselves. Who could care so much?

His gaze became crazily ardent again. This was only a temporary pain!

Only death could bring new life. Only by burning everything could he destroy the ungodliness in the world.

And only by destroying the decayed Avalon of Five Elements could a real, new empire be built.

He had spent five years here and was very familiar with the city. It didn't take him much effort to find the Vanguard Training Hall.

As soon as he arrived, he was stunned to see the totally different Vanguard Training Hall which had become like a hedgehog-shaped fortress. Then he remembered that there was an earth-attribute student in Ai Hui's team and that this new appearance was likely to have been made by him.

He listened for a while at the door and confirmed that no one was in the training hall. A complacent smile appeared on his face and he took a soybean-sized seed out of his pocket.

He was disguised as a wood elementalist because that was what he had been before joining the organization. Although he hadn't made much progress in terms of blood training over the past five years, he'd still figured out some usages of the blood spiritual force.

The seed in his hand was the fruit of his hard work.

The green surface of the seed was touched with a thin red streak. It was a fescue seed that he'd modified using blood spiritual force. Fescue was a common kind of grass with strong reproductive abilities. It could be seen almost anywhere as long as there was soil. This kind of grass had a strong vitality and could take root and grow even in the gaps between bricks or on roof titles.

The reason why he'd chosen fescue was that it was

inconspicuous. No one would notice if there was one more fescue in their yard.

He threw the fescue into the courtyard of the training hall.

Fatty had a long dream in which Lou Lan said that bathing in the lava could train his fire elemental energy, so Ai Hui kicked him into the lava at once.

……

And then he kept bathing…

Then he woke up from his dream and felt soreness all over his body, like he had really been bathing for a long time.

Breathing heavily, Fatty looked around and was relieved only when his saw that it was his own room. Good thing that there was no lava river!

He thought it was sad that the reason why he'd had such a dream must have been because of how the cold-blooded training maniac Ai Hui was giving him too many training tasks every day, which made training a haunting memory for him.

…

Wait… no…

Fatty noticed the hollow cockleburs on the floor and suddenly remembered what he'd done. His face turned pale at once.

He'd drunk the chili fire oil!

...It was frightening that he'd dared to drink the chili fire oil.

Fatty was shocked with himself, but the next minute he began to feel proud about it. This proved that he was a real man. He made up his mind that, in the future, if he made a bet with Ai Hui, he would bet on nothing but drinking chili fire oil.

Ai Hui would definitely not dare to do so.

Fatty was proud that he could win against Ai Hui in some aspect. His whole life was now full of sunshine.

When he strutted out of the room, he was surprised to see nobody in the courtyard. Where was everybody? Fatty's expression changed. Did they go out to fight without him? How long had he been sleeping?

He hastily rushed to his heavy shield on the weapons shelf. All he knew was that if Ai Hui had any accidents, he would fall on hard times.

He grabbed the heavy shield with his big palm and was about to

rush out when he felt that the shield seemed to be lighter than before.

Right at that moment, something fell on his head.

What?

Fatty felt weird and looked around. There was nothing on the floor. Then, was it on his helmet? He took down the Central Pine Helmet from his head and saw grass on it – it was fescue, a common kind of grass.

How could a bit of grass fall on his head? It should have been something like a stone, not a bit of grass.

Fatty was confused. When he was about to pull it out, a flower grew from the grass. Fatty was stunned again. How amazing it was to see a weed blossom just before his eyes at a speed he could see.

Moreover, in the middle of the flower there was the pattern of an eye.

Eye?

Fatty's eyes lit up. Maybe this was a mutated fescue. This made sense to him. Fatty had been with Ai Hui in Wilderness for years and had seen countless plants, but none of the fescue had been like this.

Plants that had mutated were always valuable. Wood elementalists loved to collect and purchase mutated plants with which they could cultivate new species.

Good! Anything that could be sold for a good price was good!

Then Fatty became a bit upset. Since they were currently in a blood disaster, nothing could be sold for a good price.

Hmm? Why was the eye moving?

Fatty and the eye on the fescue looked at each other and both of them were stunned.

This made Fatty's flesh creep and he immediately realized what had happened. Throwing away the helmet in his hand, he dashed out of the training hall.

Yan Hai stood outside of the Vanguard Training Hall, confident in himself. As soon as the seed fell on the ground, it would take root and sprout. As he'd expected, it did not take long before he could feel the seed begin to grow. Then after a while, feeling the weak fluctuation, he knew the fescue had blossomed.

The blood spiritual force began to flow to his right eye, in which his vision turned all red. After a minute, the redness faded away and what he could see in front of him was a brand-new sight.

Yet in his sight there was a person’s big, fat face, and this guy was looking at him with agitation.

What happened?

Yan Hai paused for a while, then realized that someone was in the training hall! Damn it! Right at this second, he and Fatty looked each other in the eye and he clearly saw that the guy over there was like a cat that had sensed danger and stood its hair on end.

No!

Yan Hai’s face turned pale. He couldn’t care too much and immediately turned back to run out madly.

"Stop!"

Fatty’s growl came from behind. Yan Hai didn’t dare to look back and ran even faster.

With the heavy shield and the armor, Fatty could not move fast and the distance between the two became farther and farther. Rage rising in his heart, Fatty threw away the shield in his hand and put his fists behind his back.

Boom!

Roaring fire erupted from his fists. It was fiercer than he'd expected.

He felt like he'd been thrust forward by a wagon. Under the huge force, his head and neck were thrown back and his body was directly lifted up from the ground and pushed to the end of the lane at an incredible speed.

Fatty's fat face went pale.

……

The fire and the speed… were a bit weird…

There was nothing he could do but watch the guy's back get closer and closer. Without any reaction, he bumped into him like an out of control, fully-loaded transport wagon.

Chapter 200: Painful Truth

At the Vanguard Training Hall.

Fatty was vividly telling them what had happened.

"... I immediately realized what happened–someone was out there. It must be a thief! I shouted loudly and rushed out. The thief was running to the entrance of the lane, so I just threw away the shield and ran after him. Since he was running extraordinarily fast, and I had no time to take off my armor, I decided to use my [Deadly Fire Dash], the speed of which, you know, is superb... But the thief was very cunning. He bounced himself away with the force of my collision. Then, I was tripped by a stone and fell on the ground. Humph! That guy must be having a hard time too. His bones must have been broken..."

"That means you didn’t catch him?" Lou Lan winked.

"I did," Fatty said seriously and shrugged, "and then he escaped."

...

Ai Hui did not hear their conversation, but stared at the fescue on the helmet. He knew somethings about plants, but had never seen a fescue like this. He put the grass beneath his nose and smelled slight fragrance.

He looked grave.

When he heard Fatty mention a thief, the first thing he thought about was whether the message tree was being targeted. The origins of both the message tree and the old prisoner were mysteries. As mortal enemies, the "Blood of God" group was very likely to be covertly looking for them.

Maybe there were undercover spies from the Blood of God in the city?

"Anything unusual?" Shi Xueman walked to his side.

The smile on her face indicated her pleasant mood. The fighting today was smoother than she expected. More importantly, no one died or got injured, which made her very delighted.

"No." Ai Hui shook his head. "There’s the smell of the blood poison, but it’s not strong."

He passed the fescue to Shi Xueman.

The spread of blood poison was already hard to resist and had created the large population of blood ants. Splashes of poisonous blood could easily and severely infect nearby plants. The mayor had sent people to eliminate the infected plants, which led to the elimination of all plants at a later stage.

Thanks to the quick response of the mayor, the spread of the blood poison was now much slower than in the wild.

Consequently, this slower propagation led to less severe disasters.

Shi Xueman took a glance and saw nothing special either.

Ai Hui was afraid that the fescue carried the blood poison and asked Fatty to incinerate it.

"Great progress, huh! Six palaces already?" Ai Hui looked at Fatty up and down and was a bit surprised.

"That’s because I’m talented!" Fatty tried to pretend to be calm, but the smile on his face and his narrowed eyes exposed the complacency in his heart.

"Good!" Ai Hui said admiringly and turned to Shi Xueman. "It seems that he hasn’t adapted to his current state. Any idea how to help him?"

Ai Hui knew that Shi Xueman was experienced in this aspect. She was better than the others here in terms of training knowledge.

"No one can adapt instantly," said Shi Xueman before giving a rational suggestion. "I did see similar cases before. After one spends some time at their new level, he or she can get adapted naturally. For now, I suggest that Fatty undertakes some specially designed training, such as covering the surface of a shield with flames and keeping it steady for as long as possible–at least two minutes."

Ai Hui believed it was a good idea. Fatty's advantage was his strength. If the shield he used was aflame, it would definitely be a great help to them.

"Lou Lan, watch Fatty. 200 sets of [Flaming Shield]," Ai Hui said.

"No problem, Ai Hui!" Lou Lan replied cheerfully.

Fatty's heart shivered and he screamed, "Ai Hui, why don't you just kill me? 200! How can I have so much elemental energy?"

Lou Lan said happily, "I have an idea! You can eat more hot peppers. You are sensitive and have a high affinity to fire elemental energy. You can replenish your elemental energy by eating hot peppers. This can improve your physique too. We have enough hot peppers in store."

Fatty glared at Lou Lan like he wanted to kill the sand puppet with his eyes and said woefully, "Lou Lan! Why do you always set me up! The Fire Enhancing Soup, the Dragon Soup, and the chili fire oil... I, I..."

Ai Hui stopped Fatty from howling and said decisively, "Good. Let's just do it this way. Lou Lan, 200 sets."

"No problem, Ai Hui!" Lou Lan took the mission happily.

Leaving the howling Fatty behind, Ai Hui walked to the message tree and connected the leaf hanging around his neck back to the

tree. He thought for a while, then began to write something down.

"I'm grateful to be able to contact you. We just killed a blood-traced ant today. Its blood traces were very vague. What's special is that its blood can crystallize, and we call the gem-like product blood crystal. For the moment, we don't know if it's of any use. The bad news: someone seems to be following us."

He sat under the tree and waited for the other's reply.

From time to time, the light of breakthrough appeared among the students who were in training. Nothing could train people or unleash their potential like a real fight.

Ai Hui, who was sitting under that tree, did not attract their attention. He had done this many times, and they were already used to it.

"I'm glad to know that you are still alive. The blood traces of blood fiends is directly related to how strong they are. The clearer the blood traces are, the stronger they are. As to the blood crystal, I think I know. To a blood elementalist, the blood crystal is like elemental food to us or the spirit stone of the Cultivation Era. It contains an abundant amount of blood spiritual force that can greatly improve the training speed of blood elementalists. I suspect that the reason why the blood fiends were created is to provide blood crystals. I have not tested it before, so I cannot tell you if an elementalist can use blood crystals. If someone is watching you secretly, you need to contact me less. Please protect yourself. It is not possible for the blood disaster to end within a short period of time. Only by staying alive can you have the chance to do

anything."

Ai Hui read it carefully. Then, he picked up the leaf and again wore it around his neck.

His movements were at ease and he looked just as calm as usual, but he was actually so shocked that his heart was like a stormy sea.

The conjectures of the old prisoner stunned him, but his mind told him that maybe this was the real purpose of the Blood of God.

Producing the blood plants was for the blood training of the blood fiends, which could produce blood crystals. Therefore, whether it was blood fiends or blood plants, they were all materials to make blood crystals.

Oh, elementalists were also included...

Blood ants ate elementalists to transform, after which the blood traces appeared and they grew into blood-traced ants which could produce blood crystals.

Ai Hui felt chilled. He sensed that he had just lifted the veil of the disaster and saw the frightening truth underneath.

How crazy and cold-blooded were they to have such horrible ideas and to create such disastrous blood poison.

He sat on the floor, looking absent-minded.

"Are you okay?" Shi Xueman was concerned.

Ai Hui had been sitting blankly under the tree for about 10 minutes, which attracted her attention. She had never seen such an expression on Ai Hui's face before. It was a combination of fear, loss, and unease.

Ai Hui was brought back to reality. "It's nothing."

Then he suddenly asked, "Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid?" Shi Xueman paused for a while. "Yes, I was at the very beginning. Now, I'm much better. It's useless to be afraid. It's a life-or-death fight anyway. I don't need to think too much."

Ai Hui was suddenly enlightened and discarded his fear.

Yes, it was a life-or-death fight from the very beginning. Maybe they were regarded as materials, but so what? The enemies were strong and crazy, but so what?

Give up fighting and surrender? Leave themselves at the mercy of the enemies and wait to be killed?

There was no difference!

Ai Hui patted Shi Xueman’s shoulder unconsciously and said, "Iron Lady has an iron heart."

Shi Xueman’s body froze when Ai Hui put his hand on her shoulder, but after hearing his words, her face turned dark.

Iron Lady...

Ai Hui also realized what he said. He laughed embarrassedly and ran away as fast as he could.

.....

In the Jade Embroidery Workshop.

Han Yuqin read through the draft carefully.

It was completely quiet in the workshop. The mayor and the dean sat in front of her, not daring to make the slightest noise.

She caressed the paper as if it was her husband’s face. Every letter on the paper was the fruit of his sweat and blood, and they shined brightly in her eyes.

She was a bit crazy.

Why was she attracted by him? Why couldn’t she move her eyes

away from him? Why did she give herself to him? Why had she never regretted her decision even though he had been ordinary throughout his life?

The reasons were in each letter of this draft.

She read every word of it carefully, then passed it to the mayor. "Just do as it says."

Her voice was calm, but indubitable.

"No problem!"

Mayor Wang Zhen and the dean agreed at the same time. Master Han was now their last hope.

Wang Zhen added, "Please feel free to let us know if you need anything."

"I’m afraid it will take a long time to make all the things that are required." Han Yuqin replied calmly, "I will also need to isolate from the world to become well prepared. Please notify me after all the key points are arranged."

"Yes." They walked out of the room at once.

"Mingxiu, I will now enter isolation. You will watch over for me," Han Yuqin said.

"Yes, master," Mingxiu said softly. She felt a bit uneasy for no reason.

Wang Zhen and the dean flew back to the mayor’s residence at the fastest speed and could not wait to read the draft. After finishing, their faces lit up.

"Wonderful design! This is absolutely wonderful! Unbelievable! Really unbelievable! Shouchuan is a great talent." The dean was too excited to talk in complete sentences. There were many details that he did not really understand, but he knew the plan was very likely to succeed.

Although Han Yuqin had previously promised them, they had just regarded it as another doubtful attempt, which was barely better than nothing. They did not have high hopes for it.

Only after they saw the draft did they realize that this plan was promising!

There was nothing more exciting than hope amid despair.

The dean calmed down from his excitement. He stared at the complicated design on the paper and was a bit concerned. "I’m not sure whether we can make all these. They are all too complicated. Let’s ask the craftsmen?"

"We have to!" Wang Zhen said decisively. "Call all the craftsmen

together. We don’t have much time, so we will do it as fast as we can!"

All of Central Pine City was embroiled in hard work.