

## A Record 281

### Chapter 281: Holy Puppet Sect

On the silver crescent-shaped spirit boat was a three-pavilion that was entirely white in color, looking as if it had been chiseled out of a chunk of jade, and there were also all types of beautiful diagrams and hidden runes engraved upon its surface.

"The first floor had resting chambers that each of you can choose one of. We'll assemble here again in three days, and I'll explain the mission to all of you then. However, I don't know too much myself, and all of the details will be revealed once we get to the Holy Puppet Sect," Qilin 3 said to everyone, then rose up into the air.

With each step that she took through the air, a projection of a snow lotus flower would bloom beneath her feet, forming a staircase that led to the third floor of the pavilion, where she opened the door before stepping inside.

Han Li was looking up at the third floor of the pavilion with a perplexed look on his face.

Qilin 3 was wearing a crimson mask, just like the one worn by Wyrms 3, so she was clearly a higher level member than Transient Guild members with azure masks. Even though he was unable to detect her cultivation base, he had a feeling that there was a very good chance that she was a Golden Immortal.

If this mission really were being led by a Golden Immortal cultivator, then it was most likely going to be a very difficult one, so he had to be very careful.

Right at this moment, he was approached by Qilin 9, who smiled as he said, "I didn't think that you would've also accepted this mission, Fellow Daoist Wyrms 15. It looks like we'll be working together again."

"The reward offered is quite substantial, so I couldn't not be tempted," Han Li replied with a smile.

"This mission is a rather special one. I'm sure you've also noticed that, right, Fellow Daoist?" Qilin 9 asked.

Han Li nodded in response. "You're referring to the circumstances surrounding the mission and the inexplicably high reward being offered, right?"

"Precisely. The puppets created by the Holy Puppet Sect have always been exceptional and possess remarkable spiritual nature, making them extremely popular among many sects. Hence, they're on very good terms with a large number of sects, and I've heard that the sect master of the Spirit Taste Sect and the mountain master of Lurking Armor Mountain share extremely close personal ties with the sect master of the Holy Puppet Sect.

"However, according to my knowledge, the Holy Puppet Sect hasn't turned to either of these sects to ward off the enemies described in the mission. Instead, they've turned exclusively to the Transient Guild," Qilin 9 mused.

"Perhaps the Holy Puppet Sect has encountered some severe trouble on this occasion, so those smaller sects may not have sufficient power to help them. In any case, that's not something for us to worry about. All we need to do is complete the mission for the reward," Han Li replied with a nonchalant smile.

"That's true. In any case, the Holy Puppet Sect is extremely wealthy, so I'm sure they'll be able to afford the offered reward. I've been running a bit short on Immortal Origin Stones recently," Qilin 9 chuckled.

Both of them already had an idea of one another's identities, but neither of them chose to voice their suspicions. Instead, they began to chat about some inconsequential subjects, and there even seemed to have been some type of tacit understanding between them not to discuss the previous mission.

Moments later, the spirit boat began to tremble slightly as all of the runes all over its surface lit up, it set off from the coast of the Ancient Cloud Continent, flying in the southwestern direction.

Everyone on the spirit boat quickly made their way to the first floor of the pavilion before each selecting a room for themselves and going inside.

Qilin 9 also did the same, and it didn't take long before Han Li was the only one left on the deck, looking out into the distance.

The slightly murky seawater near the coastline was crashing against all of the jagged rocks on the shore, sending clumps of white foam splashing in all directions.

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Several months later.

In the southeastern corner of the Infernal Frost Continent was a vast blue sea with rippling waves and a light breeze blowing over its surface.

In the clear, blue sky above, a crescent-shaped spirit boat was rapidly approaching from afar with about a dozen people standing on its deck, peering into the distance, where a gray smudge could be seen on the horizon.

As the spirit boat drew closer and closer, the gray began to expand before its full appearance was finally revealed.

It was a massive ovular island that was riddled with rocks and some sparse vegetation, and even from a very long distance away, one could see the stone halls littered throughout the island.

Around the island were seven or eight smaller islands that surrounded it like guards, and it didn't take long before the spirit boat arrived in the sky directly above the island.

Han Li was standing to the left of the spirit boat next to the railing, peering at the island down below with blue light flashing in his eyes, and he suddenly raised an eyebrow.

He had discovered that the entire island and the surrounding smaller islands were all encompassed under a near-transparent semi-spherical light barrier with wave-like ripples constantly surging over its surface.

All of the giant rocks on the island had been sliced into even and uniform shapes before being piled up along the coastline in a way that appeared to have been completely without rhyme or reason, but was actually meticulously thought out.

For those who weren't proficient in the art of arrays, they would've most likely thought that these rocks had been piled up to form a rather uneven defensive wall, but Han Li could tell that these rocks were the foundation of the array that protected the island, while the surrounding islands were important points in the array.

He directed his gaze toward the smaller island that was nearest to him, and he noticed that at the center of the island was a round pagoda, which was surrounded by a series of wide paths that were interconnected to form an array.

Right at this moment, the island down below suddenly began to tremble violently amid a loud buzzing sound.

Wary looks appeared on the faces of everyone on the spirit boat upon seeing this, and they looked down to find that seawater surrounding the island had begun churning violently as if it had been brought to a boil, sweeping up massive waves that were hundreds of feet tall.

The seawater was relatively clear a moment ago, but it had become quite murky in the wake of this disturbance.

A series of uniform rifts that were each several dozen feet wide opened up on the island, and they continued to expand further and further, slowly opening up the entire island like a box.

Amid the loud rumbling, many large sections of the island began to slowly rise up from the ground into the air before shifting horizontally to reveal the areas down below.

The area of the entire island was instantly significantly increased, and with the sections that were hovering in mid-air, it had turned into a three-tier island.

In contrast with the gray and barren top layer, the two lower layers were lush and vibrant with far more beautiful environments.

Those layers were riddled with forests and rivers, one of which flowed from the second layer to the bottom layer, forming a vertical waterfall in mid-air that presented a uniquely stunning sight to behold.

Even all the Transient Guild members on the spirit boat couldn't help but be surprised by what they were seeing, clearly impressed with the mechanisms set up on the island.

Right at this moment, the protective array above the island flashed, and an opening appeared in its center that was just large enough to accommodate the spirit boat.

The spirit boat passed through the array, then slowly descended toward a white stone plaza on the first level of the island.

After everyone had disembarked from the boat, Qilin 3 stowed it away with a sweep of her hand.

At this point, there were already around a dozen people waiting on the plaza, led by a woman in a blue palace dress. She wasn't very tall, but she had a very curvaceous figure, and even through the thin veil that obscured her face, one could still see the outlines of a set of gorgeous facial features, leaving much to the imagination.

Han Li quickly noticed that the woman was a late-True Immortal cultivator, and her aura was very stable and condensed, indicating that she had already been at the late-True Immortal Stage for many years.

The dozen or so people standing behind her were also True Immortal cultivators, but most of them were only at the early-True Immortal Stage.

There were no particularly noteworthy expressions on any of their faces, but for some reason, all of them seemed to have been harboring hints of concern deep in their eyes.

"You must be tired from your travels, fellow daoists. Please take a rest in the hall, and I'll disclose the details of the mission to all of you soon," the woman in the palace dress said as she extended a slight curtsy.

Qilin 3 nodded in response, and the woman in the palace dress led everyone into the hall.

The terrain around the plaza varied quite drastically, and the entire landscape was riddled with round or square gray stone pillars, upon which were engraved all types of hidden runes and strange lines, while the ground was also covered in complex array patterns.

Han Li could even detect hints of array fluctuation from the antiquated buildings that were concealed among the trees in the surrounding forest.

He wasn't surprised in the slightest to make this observation. Most cultivators who were adept in the art of puppetry also held considerable degrees of expertise in arrays, given that a high level of mastery in arrays was required for puppet refinement.

Back in the Spirit Realm, Han Li had become quite an expert in the art of puppetry, but ever since his arrival in the Northern Glacial Immortal Region, he had constantly been busy with cultivation and hadn't dabbled in the art of puppetry for quite some time.

Now that he had come to the renowned Holy Puppet Sect of the Northern Glacial Immortal Region, he was going to try and find an opportunity to ask about how he could refine a suitable new vessel for Daoist Xie.

However, for now, his priority was to help the sect overcome its current crisis first.

With that in mind, he couldn't help but wonder who their enemies were going to be.

Everyone walked along the plaza for a long while before finally arriving at a slightly antiquated-looking red hall.

During this time, Han Li noticed that the woman in the palace dress had turned around on several occasions, and on every single one of those occasions, her gaze had landed upon the rabbit-masked Bai Suyuan.

After entering the hall, the woman in the palace dress and Qilin 3 sat down onto the two main seats, while the elders of the Holy Puppet Sect and the rest of the Transient Guild members sat down on either side of them.

The servants waiting by the entrance of the hall had already brewed some spirit tea, which was offered to everyone as soon as they sat down.

The translucent green tea was poured into cups, sending clouds of white steam rising up into the air, and the entire hall was filled with a fragrant aroma.

Han Li raised an eyebrow as he looked down into his teacup to find a series of tea leaves that were as green and vibrant as jade unfurling in the water. Furthermore, they were releasing abundant spiritual qi, indicating that this was an extremely high-quality spirit tea.

He was just about to pick up his teacup when he noticed out of the corner of his eye that there were some faint circles of golden patterns on the fingers of their teapot-bearing hand.

He was rather taken aback to see this, and he immediately looked up to discover that these servants were all puppets, despite the fact that appearance and the smoothness of their movements were no different from a normal person, and they were giving off auras that were identical to low-grade cultivators.

The devil was always in the details, and from this alone, Han Li could tell that the Holy Puppet Sect truly did have some unique expertise in the art of puppet refinement, and that only made him more curious about the sect's puppetry techniques.

## Chapter 282: Stationed for Three Years

"Thank you all for coming all this way to our Holy Puppet Sect. Please take a rest and enjoy some spirit tea. I am the deputy sect master of the Holy Puppet Sect, and I will be overseeing proceedings in this defensive battle. I hope that all of you can assist me in the upcoming battle, and all of you will be rewarded if we can ward off the enemy," the woman in the palace dress said.

"We came here to carry out our mission, so don't hesitate to call on us. What my fellow daoists from the Transient Guild and I are most worried about is the current situation of the Holy Puppet Sect, as well as who our enemies are going to be, when they'll be coming, and how many of them we'll have to face," Qilin 3 said in a direct and straightforward manner.

All of the Transient Guild members, including Han Li, turned to the woman in the palace dress upon hearing this.

"To tell you all the truth, I don't have answers to any of those questions," the woman in the palace dress replied with a wry smile after a brief hesitation.

"What?"

"You don't even know who your enemies are? Is this a joke?"

"We have no intention of fighting a battle that we'll know nothing about!"

"If no one comes to attack the sect, does that mean we'll just have to stay here indefinitely?"

Many of the Transient Guild members immediately began to voice their protests upon hearing this, clearly not satisfied with the answer being provided.

Their mission was to protect the Holy Puppet Sect, and the identity of the enemy wasn't explicitly stated, so they were taking a risk by accepting this mission. Of course, they were lured in by the substantial reward being promised, and they were also quite confident in their own powers, but they still had to know who their enemies were so they could weigh up the risks and rewards to devise the best possible strategy.

If the mission were too difficult or dangerous to complete, then they would rather abandon the mission at the cost of having to pay the penalty rather than risk their own lives. Of course, that was only the worst case scenario.



Qilin 3 had disclosed some details of the mission to everyone on the way to the Holy Puppet Sect, but she had left out many key pieces of information, and everyone had thought that all of their questions would be answered upon arriving at the Holy Puppet Sect. However, the deputy sect master appeared to have been completely in the dark as well, and that was naturally not a very encouraging sign.

Qilin 9 and the others weren't saying anything, but all of them were looking expectantly at Qilin 3, waiting for her to speak up.

As for Han Li, his expression remained unchanged, but he was also feeling rather speechless.

However, prior to setting off, he had evaluated the power of the Holy Puppet Sect, and his conclusion was that even if there were Golden Immortal Stage beings among the enemy invaders, given his current power and abilities, he would've still been able to ensure self-preservation, so he was one of the few Transient Guild members present who remained calm and collected.

"Please remain calm, everyone. All of us have already accepted this mission, so our priority should be to consider how to complete it as best as possible. Of course, if you want to withdraw now, you can do so, but according to the guild's rules, you'll have to pay a penalty of three times the Immortal Origin Stone reward being offered," Qilin 3 said in an unhurried manner.

Her voice wasn't very loud, but it carried an innate sense of authority, and all of the Transient Guild members who were raising complaints exchanged a few glances upon hearing this before falling silent.

"Deputy Sect Master, while it's true that we accepted this mission for the reward on offer, so we're bound by duty to complete it, but there's only so much that we can do. If you do not know who your enemy is, then I presume your sect must've made ample preparations, right?" Qilin 3 asked as she turned to the woman in the palace dress.

"Please bear with me, I'm not intentionally trying to withhold any information. Instead, I truly don't have the answers to your questions. Our sect only learned through some reliable avenues not long ago that some forces were being assembled to target our Holy Puppet Sect. Our sect master is currently on another continent and unable to get back in time, and that's why I've turned to recruiting external allies.

"I've already stated in the mission that all you need to do is help our sect weather this storm, and the mission duration is three years. During this time, all of you are free to cultivate in our sect as you please,

and even if no enemy invasion occurs during those three years, you'll still receive your rewards in full," the woman in the palace dress explained.

The expression of all of the Transient Guild members eased slightly upon hearing this.

"Additionally, our sect may be small, but it's been standing for many years, and it certainly won't be brought down easily. Even though we do not know who our enemies are going to be, if they dare to invade, then we'll be sure to give them a good taste of our sects countless restrictions, and arrays, and puppets.

"Having said that, excessive confidence is never a good thing, so as a safety precaution, some of our sect's core disciples have already been evacuated, and all of the 3,000 or so sect members who remain on the island are ones who have vowed to defend our sect with their lives," the woman in the palace dress continued.

Han Li nodded in response with a contemplative look on his face upon hearing this. It was no wonder that he hadn't seen many cultivators on such a large island.

"How many of those 3,000 sect members are True Immortal cultivators?" Qilin 9 asked.

Everyone else immediately turned to the deputy sect master as well, and it was clear that they were also very interested to hear the answer to this question.

This was a very understandable reaction. In battles of this level, Golden Immortal cultivators were going to be the most powerful beings on the battlefield, but they were often subjected to many restraints, so more often than not, the number of True Immortal cultivators that each side possessed was the main factor that decided the outcomes of the battles.

"At the moment, we have over 30 True Immortal cultivators. Aside from these elders with us right now, there are also some other elders who are stationed at key points on the islands, and I'm sure you'll be meeting all of them in due time," the woman in the palace dress explained.

The Holy Puppet Sect wasn't a first-rate sect, and it naturally couldn't compare with the Blaze Dragon Dao, so it was already quite remarkable that it had a Golden Immortal Stage sect master and over 30

True Immortal Stage elders. Among sects of the same caliber, it had to have already been considered to be quite the powerhouse.

"In that case, in addition to all of our Transient Guild members, there are at least 50 True Immortal cultivators on the island. With such a formidable lineup and the whole host of restrictions and defensive measures set up on the island, we should be well-equipped to deal with most enemy invasions," Qilin 3 remarked.

Her words instantly instilled a sense of reassurance into the hearts of most of the Transient Guild members present. After all, she was the leader of this mission, and her crimson mask reflected both her power and her status in the Transient Guild. Many of the Transient Guild members present had worked with crimson-masked members in the past, so they were aware of just how formidable and experienced those higher-ranking members were.

Hence, her judgment was one that everyone was willing to support.

Han Li didn't share the same sentiment. Instead of trusting in the judgment of others, he was placing his trust in his own power.

"Alright, so the mission objective is clear: all we have to do is protect the sect for three years. If you wish to withdraw from the mission, this is your final chance to do so," Qilin 3 declared.

At this point, the commotion had already died down. Most of the Transient Guild members had already committed themselves to seeing the mission through for the sake of the reward, and the hesitant minority ultimately also decided not to withdraw.

"Very Good," Qilin 3 remarked with a slight nod, then turned to the woman in the palace dress again as she asked, "Is there anything in particular that we need to do?"

"All of our sect's elders are stationed on this island, so we're stretched a little thin when it comes to defense of the other eight islands. At the moment, there's only a single True Immortal cultivator or some Grand Ascension cultivators stationed on each of those islands. Hence, we'll be requiring your services in assisting with defending those islands," the woman in the palace dress replied.

All of the Transient Guild members' expressions changed once again upon hearing this.

"If we don't have enough numbers, then why don't we focus all of our forces on defending this island and simply abandon the other islands, then reclaim them once the crisis is over?" Qilin 9 asked, raising a question that was shared by everyone.

The main island was clearly the likeliest focal point of the enemy attack, so everyone couldn't help but feel a little suspicious about this arrangement.

However, Han Li didn't feel this to be strange in the slightest. Essentially, they were like mercenaries to the Holy Puppet Sect, so they were naturally going to be stationed on the front lines. There was no way that they could just expect to nestle down in cozy bunkers on the main island and earn such a massive reward.

Of course, the deputy sect master definitely had other reasons for making this arrangement as well.

"To tell you all the truth, the eight array islands form the most formidable defensive line of our sect, and if we can keep them defended, then we'll be able to maintain an upper hand over the enemy to a certain extent. Hence, those islands require extra protection. Besides, even if I were to assign all of you with the task of controlling all of the arrays and restrictions on the main island, you may not necessarily be up to the task," the woman in the palace dress explained.

Everyone was enlightened upon hearing this.

"There are 16 of us in total, how do you plan to distribute us?" Qilin 3 asked.

The woman in the palace dress seemed to have already anticipated this question, and she replied, "Out of the eight array islands, only one is being defended by two True Immortal Stage elders, while the other seven islands will all require extra reinforcement. As for how everyone is to be distributed, I'll leave that up to you, Fellow Daoist Qilin 3."

After some contemplation, Qilin 3 said, "In that case, all of you can form groups of two and pick an island to defend, while Qilin 11 will remain on the main island with me."

Everyone immediately accepted this arrangement with no objections, including Han Li, but his heart stirred slightly upon hearing this.

It seemed that Qilin 3 was going out of her way to look out for Bai Suyuan, so could it be that she was aware of Bai Suyuan's true cultivation base? Alternatively, could it be that the two of them knew each other outside of the Transient Guild?

With that in mind, a bold theory about Qilin 3's identity began to take shape in his mind.

Right at this moment, a familiar voice rang out in Han Li's mind. As it turned out, Xiong Shan had reached out to him through voice transmission.

"How about you and I form a team to defend one of the islands, Fellow Daoist Wyrms 15?"

"I was just about to propose the same thing."

Having previously worked with Qilin 9, Han Li was naturally aware of his power, and he was more than happy to accept this arrangement.

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A few minutes later, everyone emerged from the hall in teams of two before being led toward the surrounding islands by the elders of the Holy Puppet Sect.

"Let's go, Fellow Daoist Wyrms 15," Qilin 9 said as he approached Han Li, to which Han Li nodded in response without saying anything.

With that, the two of them were led toward the southwest by an elderly man with a white beard.

Chapter 283: Ancestor of the Bai Clan

Shortly thereafter, Han Li's trio arrived in the air above a circular island before descending toward it.

The island wasn't very large, with a radius of only several hundred kilometers, and the only noteworthy landmarks on it were several short mountains and a small lake, giving it a slightly barren appearance.

Some sparse red buildings could be seen on those mountains and beside the lake, and the ground at the central area of the island was quite uneven, riddled with troughs that were each around 10 feet wide.

These troughs were interconnected with one another to form a complete set of patterns, at the center of which stood a round white pagoda that was around 1,000 feet tall with the same patterns engraved on its surface.

The old man with the white beard led Han Li's duo to the pagoda, which was surrounded by over 100 cultivators that were split up into three teams to patrol the area in shifts, and all of those cultivators stopped in their tracks to extend respectful salutes at the sight of the old man.

At the entrance of the pagoda was a semi-transparent light barrier, and the bearded old man pulled out a Holy Puppet Sect badge to release a burst of white light. Only then did the light barrier fade away, granting the trio entry.

Only after entering the pagoda did Han Li come to discover that it was larger than it appeared on the outside.

The entire interior of the pagoda was hollowed out, and there were around a dozen massive water-droplet-shaped runes engraved onto the surrounding walls. At the center of each rune was embedded a translucent blue spirit stone, all of which were high-grade spirit stones or above.

All of the runes on the walls were connected to a square stone platform that was around half the height of a grown man situated at the center of the pagoda on the ground. There was an array plate engraved onto the platform's surface, and it was giving off a gentle white glow.

Around the stone platform were eight shorter stone platforms situated right up against the walls, upon each of which sat a Grand Ascension cultivator. All of these Grand Ascension cultivators were seated with their legs crossed and their eyes closed, displaying no reaction to the arrival of Han Li's trio.

Beside the main stone platform was a young man dressed like a lumberjack. He seemed to have also been a Grand Ascension cultivator, and at this moment, he was staring at the array plate with his brows tightly furrowed and a rather dazed look on his face. Only upon sensing the arrival of Han Li's trio did he return to his senses before asking, "What are you doing here, Elder Chu? Aren't you overseeing the restricted area behind the mountain?"

"Elder Qi, these two fellow daoists are allies recruited by our deputy sect master. They'll be stationed here with you, and I was instructed to bring them here," the bearded old man replied.

"I see," the young man replied with a nod.

With that, the bearded old man departed, while the young man extended a salute toward Han Li's duo as he said, "My name is Qi Heng. May I ask your names, seniors?"

"I am Qilin 9," Qilin 9 replied as he pointed at the number on his mask.

Han Li also responded in kind. "I am Wyrn 15."

He had actually already been looking at this young man for quite some time, and he felt a very faint sense of familiarity at the sight of him, but he was unable to recall whether they had ever met before.

The three of them briefly exchanged some small talk, following which Qi Heng said, "There are some vacant cave abodes beside the lake on the island that the two of you can stay in. During your time here, you can go anywhere on the island as you please, but do take care not to trigger any of the restrictions. I still have to keep an eye on things over here, so I won't accompany you to the lake."

Han Li's duo nodded in response, then departed from the pagoda to make their way to the lake together.

In the end, they intentionally chose cave abodes quite far away from one another's, with one situated to the west of the lake, while the other was in the east.

The eastern side of the lake was slightly more abundant with vegetation, and a courtyard with red walls and black roof tiles was situated there. Upon arriving at the entrance of the courtyard, Han Li discovered that there were runes engraved onto the gates, clearly indicating that there were restrictions set up here as well.

However, the fact that Qi Heng hadn't accompanied them here indicated that they should've been able to bypass these restrictions without assistance. With that in mind, he made his way over to the gate before pushing on them, and sure enough, they swung open without posing any resistance.

Upon entering the courtyard, Han Li discovered that its furnishings and layout weren't much different from mortal courtyards, but there were some tiny arrays littered throughout the courtyard in discreet places.

For example, there was a small cleansing array beneath the stone table at the center of the courtyard, and it would be activated on its own every once in a while to clear up all of the dust and the fallen leaves and branches in the courtyard.

Inside the hall was a pair of servants, one male and one female. Both of them appeared to have been quite young with delicate skin and rosy lips, presenting a very pleasant sight to behold, but Han Li could tell just from a single glance that they were just puppets rather than living people.

They were just a pair of servants, so they naturally weren't puppets of a particularly high caliber, but there were still some unique aspects in the way that they were crafted that were quite intriguing to Han Li.

He was already quite an expert in the art of puppetry, but most of his knowledge in this field had been accumulated in the Spirit Realm. The puppets of the Immortal Realm were quite different from those of the Spirit Realm both in terms of the materials used and the craftsmanship, so this was a good opportunity for him to learn some new things.

After all, if he wanted to restore Daoist Xie to its former state, his current puppetry expertise most likely wasn't going to be enough.

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Over two years passed by in the blink of an eye.

During this time, everything was quite peaceful in the Holy Puppet Sect, and no enemies showed up. However, the entire sect was still in a state of high alert, but the mindsets of all of the Transient Guild members had already somewhat changed.

Han Li and Qilin 9 were walking side by side on the small path along the lake, making their way toward the nearby mountain.

"It's been over two years, yet nothing has happened. Perhaps we'll be able to complete this mission with unexpected ease, Fellow Daoist Wyrn 15," Qilin 9 said in a relaxed voice with a smile on his face.

"It would naturally be ideal if the rest of the mission duration can pass by just as peacefully," Han Li replied with a smile of his own as he took a glance up at the clear, blue sky.

During these past two years, he had explored every single inch of this entire island, tracking down all of the hidden arrays and puppets before carefully examining them multiple times.

He would also occasionally go to the round pagoda to observe the runes on its surface. As a result, he had become quite familiar with Qi Heng, and the two of them would discuss some matters related to puppetry from time to time.

Qi Heng's cultivation base wasn't particularly advanced, but he was quite an expert in the art of puppetry, and he was happy to speak to Han Li, but he was extremely tight-lipped when it came to any matters that were related to the secrets of the sect.

Meanwhile, in a secret chamber on the main island of the Holy Puppet Sect.

The deputy sect master was seated on a stone chair in a blue palace dress. The veil on her face had been removed to reveal her gorgeous features, and there was a gentle look in her eyes.

Seated before her was none other than Bai Suyuan, but she had removed her rabbit mask as well to face the deputy sect master in her true appearance.

"Suyuan, you may think that I'm cruel for abandoning our clan, but I have my reasons. Ever since I left the Blaze Dragon Dao and the Ancient Cloud Continent, I had cut all ties with everything there, and I haven't been back even once all this time," the deputy sect master said with a hint of apology in her voice.

"If you've cut off all ties, then why did you send someone to come after me?" Bai Suyuan asked in an indifferent voice.

It had been revealed to her that this woman was none other than her ancestor, Bai Fengyi, but she couldn't bring herself to feel any intimacy toward this person. Whenever she thought of how her grandfather had been killed by that heavenly devil so she could escape, she would find herself struggling to forgive Bai Fengyi for abandoning their clan.

If Bai Fengyi hadn't disappeared without a trace, perhaps she would've been able to save their clan and prevent all of the tragedies that had ensued.

Right at this moment, Qilin 3, who was also present in the room, heaved a faint sigh. "Fengyi is not to blame for all of this. The circumstances that led to her departure all those years ago were very complicated, and as her mistress, I should bear the brunt of the blame."

Just like Bai Suyuan, she had also removed her Transient Guild mask to reveal her stunning features, and she was none other than one of the 13 Golden Immortal Stage dao lords of the Blaze Dragon Dao, Yun Ni.

"Mistress..."

Both Bai Fengyi and Bai Suyuan called out in unison.

"How foolish you are, my disciple. You thought that the two of us would come together after you left, but you failed to account for the fact that he's a bastard and a coward. I asked him to come with me to help you on this occasion, but he said that he didn't know how to face you and didn't dare to come and see you," Yun Ni said with a wry smile.

"That does seem like something he would do," Bai Fengyi chuckled.

"Who are you talking about, Mistress?" Bai Suyuan couldn't help but ask.

"He was once a dashing and handsome immortal, but now, he's nothing more than sloppy old drunkard, so there's no need to waste our time talking about him," Yun Ni scoffed, but there was the faintest trace of a smile playing on her lips as she spoke.

Despite what she's saying, she still can't help but smile whenever she thinks of him. Looks like Mistress's feelings toward him haven't changed at all, Bai Fengyi sighed to herself upon seeing this.

"By the way, it's already been over two years, yet nothing has happened. Could it be that something's changed?" Yun Ni suddenly asked.

"The information that we received is definitely reliable. I fear that the longer the enemy spends in preparation, the more ferocious their assault will be when they do finally come," Bai Fengyi replied as her brows furrowed slightly.

"If they happen to attack exactly a year later, you most likely won't be able to assemble so many True Immortal cultivators on such short notice, even through the Transient Guild. What will you do then?" Yun Ni asked.

"Our sect master should be back by then, and with his cultivation base and that immortal puppet, we should be able to deal with this crisis even without the assistance of the Transient Guild," Bai Fengyi replied.

Yun Ni nodded in response, and she was just about to say something when her expression suddenly changed slightly.

Immediately thereafter, a resounding boom rang out, and the entire secret chamber began to tremble violently.

Yun Ni and Bai Fengyi exchanged a glance, and the former immediately put on her Transient Guild mask. Bai Suyuan hurriedly did the same upon seeing this, and the three of them rushed out of the secret chamber together.

## Chapter 284: Another Hidden Force

The weather was originally quite clear and fine, yet all of a sudden, a vast blanket of dark clouds suddenly converged in the sky above the main island of the Holy Puppet Sect. The dark clouds stretched for thousands of kilometers, and they descended to such a low altitude that they had virtually come into contact with the sea down below.

All of a sudden, it was as if night had descended upon the island, and gusts of howling wind swept over the sea, raising massive waves.

Yun Ni's trio arrived on the plaza outside the secret chamber to find that the dark clouds up above were churning incessantly with lightning flashing within them, and there were several dozen massive golden and black spirit boats that were laden with people hanging in the sky, resembling a series of floating fortresses.

In contrast with normal flying spirit boats, every single one of these spirit boats was carrying a black platform that was over 100 feet tall, upon which were engraved all types of runes, giving them the appearance of altars.

Bai Fengyi's expression changed slightly upon seeing this, and she swept a hand through the air to summon a stone slab array plate, then swiped a finger over it a few times as she instructed, "Activate all restrictions and prepare for battle!"

As soon as this instruction was issued, a sharp screeching sound rang out across the entire main island and the eight surrounding islands.

Immediately thereafter, the spirit patterns on all of the gray stone pillars on the island lit up, and all of the arrays engraved onto the ground and the buildings on the entire island were also activated.

Bursts of loud rumbling rang out as the entire main island began to tremble violently, and its terrain began to undergo drastic changes.

A dense cloud of smoke rose up from the peak of the tallest mountain on the island, and the entire mountain summit slowly descended into the belly of the mountain to reveal a massive hole. Hundreds of flying boats that were riddled with golden spirit patterns rose up out of the hole in unison, hovering in mid-air in anticipation for battle.

At the bend in the river, the flow of water was drawn below the island by a massive passageway that had suddenly appeared, and bursts of golden light emerged on the riverbed as a series of massive turtle-like puppets were revealed. The runes on the bodies of these puppets began to glow with dazzling radiance while releasing bursts of formidable water-attribute spiritual power fluctuations.

In the forest on the second level of the island, the sound of snapping trees rang out incessantly as a series of tiger and leopard-like puppets rushed out into the open. Every single one of these puppets was around 10 feet tall, and they assembled themselves on the edge of the second level of the island as they roared soundlessly up at the sky.

Several True Immortal Stage elders flew onto the plaza from all parts of the island, and each of them was followed by several dozen disciples and hundreds of humanoid puppets.

Some of the important areas on the island had also come under the protection of armies of disciples and puppets, led by more True Immortal Stage elders.

Within a span of no more than 10 seconds after the first sign of disturbance, all of the restrictions on the main island had been activated, and everyone was prepared for battle.

Meanwhile, the sea around the main island was churning violently while swirling around the eight smaller islands, forming a series of massive vortexes.

White light was glowing radiantly within the vortexes, and the white pagodas standing on those islands resembled beacons on the surface of the sea, releasing halos of dazzling light that illuminated the entire surrounding area.

Han Li and Qilin 9 had already returned to the plaza outside of the pagoda and were standing among the Holy Puppet Sect cultivators stationed on the island.

Blue light was flashing in Han Li's eyes as he looked up at the dark clouds in the sky, and he could clearly see some humanoid figures standing above the clouds.

These people all had pieces of black cloth concealing their faces, and they were dressed in black cloaks rather similar to the one that Qilin 9 was wearing. However, there was golden golden embroidery on the edges of their sleeves and collars, and there was a cross-shaped design emblazoned on each of their chests.

This design was not unfamiliar to Han Li as he had previously seen it on the Ubiquitous Pavilion badge that he had obtained from Ping Yaozi.

"I didn't think we'd be facing people from the Ubiquitous Pavilion," Han Li murmured to himself.

"Strictly speaking, they're not from the Ubiquitous Pavilion. Instead, they were merely assembled by the Ubiquitous Kill Order," Qilin 9 corrected.

"Oh? What do you mean by that, Fellow Daoist Qilin 9?" Han Li asked with a puzzled expression.

"As one of the most powerful hidden forces in the Northern Glacial Immortal Region, the Ubiquitous Pavilion is actually rather similar in nature to our Transient Guild, except they mostly focus on the fields of intelligence and assassination. Furthermore, the missions that they accept and release are open to everyone, not just members of the organization.

"In other words, anyone can release missions as long as they have enough money, and anyone can accept their missions as long as they're confident in their own powers. Anyone that releases or accepts a Ubiquitous Pavilion mission counts as an elementary member, so their organization isn't as strict and rigorous as our Transient Guild. As a result, its internal relations are far more complicated and convoluted," Qilin 9 explained.

"So you're saying that even Transient Guild members could release and accept Ubiquitous Pavilion missions, and that these people were assembled by something called a Ubiquitous Kill Order?" Han Li asked.

"That's right. The Ubiquitous Kill Order is an order that's issued to eradicate an entire sect or clan, and it's very expensive to release. It gathers power from an entire immortal region to target a sect or clan, and all those who participate in the mission will be able to keep all of the spoils that they reap during the eradication operation without any fear of repercussions," Qilin 9 explained.

Han Li was enlightened upon hearing this. The most fearsome thing about such an order was how much allure it posed to the enormous number of itinerant cultivators in an immortal region, particularly those who were at or below the Grand Ascension Stage and were stuck at bottlenecks, but were also lacking in cultivation resources. If they didn't do anything, their lifespans would eventually run out anyway, so it made sense for them to take risks and grasp onto any opportunities that they could.

Once people like them accepted a Ubiquitous Pavilion mission, their identities would be protected by the Ubiquitous Pavilion, and that allowed them to act without any inhibitions, so they were often far crueler and more brutal in their assault against the sect or clan that they were targeting, both to secure more cultivation resources and to vent the resentment and envy that they harbored toward these establishments.

Throughout its long history, the Holy Puppet Sect had accumulated an astronomical amount of wealth just from selling puppets alone, making it an extremely alluring target for these desperate cultivators.

While the two of them were speaking with one another, the ground beneath their feet suddenly began to tremble violently, and the troughs in the ground were quickly being filled with white light that was flowing like molten silver.

Bursts of rumbling rang out from beneath the entire island, and a circle of massive rifts began to appear on the ground surrounding the plaza, separating the area around the pagoda from the rest of the island.

Immediately thereafter, this isolated area was rapidly elevated by several thousand feet.

Han Li rose up into the air before casting his gaze toward the island to find that the entire central area of the island had risen up from the rest of the island, having transformed into a massive stone puppet.

The puppet resembled an enormous warrior that was constructed from a material that resembled white jade, but was as hard as steel, and it was wielding a giant silver saber that was several thousand feet in length and was riddled with spirit patterns that were giving off astonishing sharp fluctuations.

The same thing had taken place on all of the other array islands, and some of the giant puppets resembled primordial giant apes, some resembled giants clad in stone armor, and some were similar in appearance to massive wolves. In any case, all of them had different forms, and in addition to that, the colors and shapes of the spirit patterns on their bodies were also different.

Some were dark yellow and formed circles around the torso of the puppet, some were crimson and draped over the arms and body of the puppet like strips of red silk, and some were black and emblazoned on the chest of the puppet like tattoos.

At this moment, there were three figures standing side by side on an inky-black spirit boat high up in the sky within the dark clouds.

One of them had an extremely long and deep scar on their face, running across the left side of their forehead to their right eye, then down their cheek, where the rest of it was concealed by the black cloth covering their face.

To their right was a young man with a slender build and a sword strapped to his waist. Half of his face was also concealed behind a black cloth, but the skin on the exposed half of his face was as fair as jade, and beneath his bushy eyebrows was a pair of bright and piercing eyes.

Both of them possessed incredibly formidable auras that indicated that they were Golden Immortal cultivators.

The third figure was a burly man with a slightly yellow complexion. He was standing at close to 10 feet tall, and even though he was wearing a hooded cloak, a dark azure metallic gleam could be seen in front of his forehead, indicating that he was wearing some type of metallic headgear.

He was only at the pinnacle of the True Immortal Stage, yet he was able to stand alongside this pair of Golden Immortals, and that was a clear indication that he was no ordinary True Immortal.



"Are you satisfied with the arrangements made by our Ubiquitous Pavilion, Fellow Daoist Lu Ji?" the man with the scar on his face asked as he turned to the fair-skinned young man beside him.

"I paid such a heavy price to employ the services of your Ubiquitous Pavilion precisely because of your organization's vast influence, but I'm still quite surprised that you were able to gather so many people. Having said that, aren't the cultivation bases of these people a little too varied? How much power could such a ragtag bunch of cultivators possibly possess?" the young man by the name of Lu Ji replied.

While it was true that these spirit boats were carrying 2,000 to 3,000 cultivators, there were only fewer than 50 True Immortal cultivators among them, while the rest consisted of Grand Ascension cultivators and even quite a large number of Body Integration and Spatial Tempering cultivators, so it wasn't incorrect to refer to them as a ragtag bunch.

"These people are all itinerant cultivators, and all of them had to fight their way up the ranks to get to their current cultivation bases, so among those of the same cultivation base, there's no way they'd be inferior to these weaklings of the Holy Puppet Sect who only know how to make puppets," the man with the scar on his face replied with a smile.

"I don't believe this is the right time to be chatting among ourselves, fellow daoists. I've come to the Ancient Cloud Continent with a mission from my master, so let's finish things here as quickly as possible, Fellow Daoist Xue Han," the yellow-faced man suddenly said.

"There's no need to be in such a hurry, Fellow Daoist Zhong Luan. We've only done some light probing up to this point. Now that they've revealed all of their defenses and we can confirm that their defensive measures are identical to what's laid out in the intelligence that we've collected, we can proceed according to our original plan. However, don't forget what we agreed on earlier once we get into the Holy Puppet Sect," the scar-faced man by the name of Xue Han chuckled.

"Rest assured, Fellow Daoist," Zhong Luan replied in an indifferent voice.

## Chapter 285: Breached Array

The scar-faced man by the name of Xue Han slowly turned around upon hearing this, then ordered, "Get into formation and attack!"

The group of figures behind him gave a collective affirmative response before flying away, and it didn't take long before all of the dozens of spirit boats hanging suspended within the dark clouds to abruptly swoop down.

At the same time, they were moving in all directions, forward, backward, to the left, and to the right, as if they were soldiers adopting their positions in a pre-set formation, and all of the spirit boats quickly arranged themselves into a ring-shaped array.

Immediately thereafter, a burst of thunderous chanting rang out, and the dozens of black platforms on the spirit boats began to tremble in unison. The golden patterns engraved upon them also lit up with dazzling radiance while giving off powerful energy fluctuations.

A resounding boom rang out as all of the platforms on the spirit boats shuddered in unison, following which a golden pillar of light erupted from each of them directly into the sea of dark clouds up above.

The sea of clouds instantly began to churn violently with traces of golden light shimmering within them, immediately following which an enormous projection of a round plate appeared. The projection was over 10,000 feet in radius and was riddled with strange patterns that were radiating dazzling golden light.

All of a sudden, a burst of rumbling that resembled a string of thunderclaps rang out, and the entire sea of clouds began to surge like boiling water.

A series of giant millstone-sized fireballs shot out of the projection with scorching golden flames burning on their surfaces, then came crashing down toward the main island of the Holy Puppet Sect and the eight islands around it.

Thousands of golden fireballs were crashing down with long fiery tails behind them, resembling an almighty meteor shower.

It was as if the entire sky had been set alight with golden radiance, and even the dark clouds had been given a golden lining.

However, all of these fireballs were stopped cold in their tracks close to 100,000 feet above the main island, as if they had suddenly crashed into an invisible wall, and they exploded violently to send countless golden sparks flying in all directions.

As the explosions rang out one after another, a near-transparent semi-spherical light barrier was revealed. Azure light was flashing over its surface, and the constant barrage of exploding fireballs were sending ripples surging incessantly over the light barrier.

One massive crater after another appeared on the light barrier, only for it to bounce back and revert back to its original form amid flashes of azure light, and it was able to keep itself intact against the barrage of fireballs.

On the plaza on the main island of the Holy Puppet Sect, everyone was looking up at the sky with tense expressions.

"They won't be able to keep up an assault this ferocious for too long. How much longer can your defensive array last?" Yun Ni asked as she stood beside Bai Fengyi.

Bai Fengyi considered the question for a moment, then replied, "If this is all that we have to deal with, then we shouldn't have any problems. However..."

Before she had a chance to finish her sentence, the spirit patterns on the massive plate projection within the dark clouds faded, and the storm of golden fireballs subsided.

That's it?

Everyone was rather perplexed by this turn of events.

However, the golden plate projection then immediately began operating once again, and this time, it was releasing even larger golden fireballs that were falling twice as fast as before, building up tremendous downward momentum.

A resounding boom rang out as the golden fireball came crashing down.

The defensive light barrier shuddered violently as an enormous indentation appeared on its surface, and as opposed to light ripples, there were now turbulent waves surging over the light barrier.

Before the light barrier had a chance to recover, several hundred more golden fireballs came crashing down in rapid succession, and the entire light barrier was completely warped, looking as if it were going to collapse at any moment.

"It looks like the array won't be able to last much longer. Once the battle begins, I'll only be able to take on one of the two enemy Golden Immortals. What are you going to do about the other one?" Yun Ni asked.

"I'll think of a way to keep the other Golden Immortal at bay. Our cultivators and puppets outnumber them, so if we can quickly kill as many of their True Immortal cultivators as possible, we'll be able to severely dent their morale," Bai Fengyi replied.

"Indeed. These people have banded together solely for profit, so if we can force them onto the back foot, they'll immediately fall apart like sand. Hence, we have to go all-out from the outset and crush them from the get-go. Only then will we have a chance of securing victory," Yun Ni said.

Bai Fengyi nodded in response, then summoned an array plate before issuing a series of verbal instructions into it.

On the spirit boat high up in the sky, Xue Han was looking down at the array on the island with a hint of surprise on his face. "This array is more sturdy than I anticipated. Fellow Daoist Lu Ji, looks like we'll have to trouble you to do the honors."

Lu Ji offered no reply, merely nodding silently in response before flying out of the spirit boat, where he hovered in mid-air.

He then removed the silver longsword that was strapped to his waist, holding the scabbard in one hand while gently sweeping the index and middle fingers of his other hand over the hilt of the sword.

A sharp clang rang out as the silver longsword flew out of its scabbard before rising up toward the dark clouds above.

A circle of white sword qi that was visible even to the naked eye began to swirl around the sword in a frenzy, instantly piercing a giant hole with a radius of several thousand feet into the dark clouds in the sky.

A ray of bright sunlight passed through the hole, illuminating the entire area around Lu Ji and making him resemble a majestic sword immortal. The eyes of everyone down below were unconsciously drawn to him, and Han Li was also looking up at the massive hole in the clouds while standing next to the giant stone puppet on the island that he and Qilin 9 were stationed on.

The sword had risen up, but it hadn't descended.

The phenomenon created by the rising sword wasn't actually all that astonishing, but given Han Li's expertise in swordsmanship, he was able to see some things that others couldn't.

The concentration and sharpness of the sword qi around the flying sword were unlike anything he had ever seen before, and he had a feeling that once the sword did fall, it would do so with devastating effect.

Sure enough, mere moments later, dazzling silver light erupted within the dark clouds, and a string of loud sounds that were different from thunderclaps rang out as a menacing aura began to emanate through the air.

Blue light flashed within Han Li's eyes as he cast his gaze toward the sky, and he discovered a streak of pristine white swordlight that was over 10,000 feet in length standing among the clouds like a massive mountain.

Streaks of sword qi were surging around it in a frenzy, and bursts of rumbling resembling what one would hear in an avalanche were ringing out incessantly.

In the next instant, the streak of white swordlight descended like a snow-covered mountain crashing down toward the sea of dark clouds.

The layers of clouds melted away like snow and ice in the face of the swordlight, and a massive opening that was over 100,000 feet wide quickly emerged.

The streak of swordlight looked as if it were going to slice the entire heavens apart, and it descended with unstoppable force toward the light barrier down below, which was already severely warped from the barrage of fireballs.

An earth-shattering boom rang out as an enormous indentation appeared in the defensive light barrier, quickly stretching to several thousand feet in length before elongating even further.

The light barrier was already close to being a spent force, and it was unable to revert back to its original form, exploding violently and disintegrating into countless specks of light.

However, the massive streak of swordlight that had destroyed the light barrier was barely slowed down as it continued to descend.

All of a sudden, a burst of dazzling white light erupted into the heavens from the main island, and an enormous white snow lotus flower projection appeared, clashing against the swordlight tens of thousands of feet in the sky to result in a violent explosion.

Bursts of powerful shockwaves instantly erupted in all directions, sweeping up enormous waves in the surrounding sea within a radius of thousands of kilometers.

All of the cultivators assembled by the Ubiquitous Pavilion on the dozens of spirit boats in the dark clouds erupted into excited cheers at the sight of the defensive array being broken, and their eyes were glowing as if they could already see the countless spirit stones waiting for them to plunder.

"Now that the defensive array has been destroyed, how much you can plunder from the Holy Puppet Sect will be up to you, fellow daoists," Xue Han cackled.

As soon as his voice trailed off, countless figures instantly sprang down from the black spirit boats in the dark clouds, and they swooped directly toward the main island down below like a flock of starving crows.

However, right as they were approaching the island, the spirit patterns on the bodies of the eight giant puppets situated around the main island suddenly lit up.

Pillars of light of different colors that were hundreds of feet thick erupted out of the pagodas on top of the giant puppets' heads before converging toward the main island, where they came together to form a colorful light barrier that encompassed the entire island.

The hundred or so Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators who were charging at the forefront hurriedly tried to stop themselves in their descent, but were unable to arrest their own momentum and crashed straight into the light barrier.

Aside from several True Immortals who were able to summon protective treasures in time and were only sent flying upon crashing into the light barrier, all of the other cultivators were instantly reduced to ashes, leaving only acrid plumes of black smoke in the air.

This second defensive barrier had stopped all of the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators cold in their tracks, and they quickly spread themselves out in all directions with wary looks on their faces.

Right at this moment, Bai Fengyi commanded, "Engage the enemy!"

Streaks of light rose up from all over the surrounding islands as countless figures sprang up into the sky around the colorful light barrier, charging directly toward the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators.

They were immediately followed by several hundred mechanical flying boats that hurtled directly toward the black spirit boats up above. In the meantime, some of the important locations on the islands were still being guarded by some cultivators and puppets in case of sneak attacks.

"I'm going ahead," Yun Ni said to Bai Fengyi, then rose up from the main island.

Bai Fengyi turned around to take a glance at Bai Suyuan and the others with a complex look in her eyes, then instructed, "Make sure to stay here and don't go anywhere."

After that, she also rose up into the air behind Yun Ni.

High up in the sky, Lu Ji was looking down to find a massive snow lotus flower projection rapidly ascending toward him from down below.

His expression remained unchanged as he raised a hand up high before making a beckoning motion, and a silver longsword swooped down from the giant hole in the dark clouds before landing in his grasp.

## Chapter 286: Imminent Battle

"You've saved me the trouble of coming after you," Lu Ji remarked in an indifferent voice, then raised his silver longsword before taking a step forward, upon which he instantly vanished from the spot.

Immediately thereafter, countless streaks of swordlight crashed into the petals of the oncoming snow lotus flower projection, with thousands of clashes taking place in an instant. An ear-splitting screeching sound rang out from the clashing swordlight and flower petals, while the nearby space trembled violently.

"I'll see you on the island, Fellow Daoist Xue Han," Zhong Luan said, then flipped a hand over to summon a long black saber before jumping straight down from the black spirit boat, plummeting directly toward the nearest island puppet.

"I'm sure that won't take too long," Xue Han murmured to himself as he swept a sleeve through the air, and a palm-sized golden ring flew out amid a flash of golden light.

The golden ring then rapidly swelled in size to a diameter in excess of 1,000 feet before hovering in mid-air.

Xue Han then chanted an incantation, and dense layers of runes instantly appeared on the surface of the giant golden ring, releasing rays of yellow light and bursts of formidable law fluctuations.

A string of dull thuds rang out within the space encompassed beneath the golden ring, and it was as if a burst of invisible pressure had isolated the area and was forcefully compressing the air down below.



A deep indentation that corresponded with the golden ring also appeared on the surface of the colorful light barrier down below, and it began to tremble unsteadily amid a burst of incessant buzzing.

Xue Han let loose a loud roar as he thrust a palm forcefully downward, and a long rift was instantly torn open on the light barrier, making it appear as if it could collapse at any moment.

Right at this moment, a streak of blue light hurtled rapidly through the air from down below, then struck the giant golden ring in the sky with a loud clang.

The golden ring shuddered violently upon being struck by the streak of blue light, and yellow light that it was releasing also began to sway in an unstable manner. As a result, the pressure on the light barrier down below was significantly alleviated, allowing it to return to its original form.

Xue Han's expression darkened slightly upon seeing this, and he looked down to find a beautiful woman in a palace dress rising up toward him while wielding a shimmering blue sword, and she was accompanied by a young daoist priest in a gray daoist robe.

There was a silver gourd strapped to the daoist priest's waist and a golden horsetail whisk held in his hand. His appearance was no different from that of a normal human, but in reality, it was an extremely life-like high-grade puppet.

"A faux immortal puppet, I see," Xue Han chuckled as he licked his own lips.

He then made a beckoning motion with one hand, and the golden ring flew back to him before fitting itself around his wrist, following which he turned and flew directly toward the woman and the young daoist priest.

Meanwhile, the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators had already spread themselves out, and they were flying toward the surrounding array islands rather than continuing to charge at the colorful light barrier.

At this point, they had already noticed that the light barrier seemed to have been connected to the giant puppets around the main island, so if they were to vanquish these puppets, then the light barrier would automatically be unraveled.

However, the cultivators of the Holy Puppet Sect naturally weren't just going to allow them to do as they pleased, and they had already risen up into the air to oppose the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators.

A fierce battle instantly ensued.

The majority of the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators were itinerant cultivators, so their powers and abilities were all quite varied.

In the northwest, one of the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators opened up a spirit beast pouch to release several dozen strange-looking ferocious beasts, each of which was close to 1,000 feet in size, and they immediately pounced onto the army of puppets being controlled by the Holy Puppet Sect cultivators down below.

In the southeast, someone summoned a giant black flag that was over 2,000 feet in size, and the flag released gusts of inky-black yin wind that instantly stripped the flesh from the bones of many low-grade Holy Puppet Sect disciples.

In the southwest, someone opened a white bone box to release a swarm of countless golden hornets that began attacking the Holy Puppet Sect cultivators with their highly toxic stingers.

In contrast, the powers and abilities of the Holy Puppet Sect disciples were far less varied, but they were determined to defend their sect with their lives, and with the army of puppets on their side, they far outnumbered the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators, so they were able to gain the upper hand for now.

High up in the sky, all of the black spirit boats dispersed as the golden patterns on their surfaces began to glow radiantly, and a series of golden spears that were several dozen feet thick shot out of the giant holes on the undersides of the boats before raining down amid a sharp screeching sound.

The hundreds of mechanical flying boats that had already risen up into the sky also began to glow brightly as the circular array at the center of each of the boats flashed with red light, releasing a relentless barrage of crimson fireballs the size of millstones. These fireballs converged in mid-air to form a fiery storm to oppose the oncoming golden spears, and a string of deafening booms rang out as the fireballs clashed against the golden spears.

Golden light and crimson flames erupted in all directions, plunging the entire sky into a state of complete chaos.

While the battle was raging in the sky, a fierce skirmish was taking place down below as well.

Some of the Ubiquitous Pavilion were locked in battle against Holy Puppet Sect disciples and puppets, while others were charging toward the eight giant puppets, led by True Immortal cultivators, aiming to destroy the puppets so that the light barrier that was protecting the main island would be unraveled.

The hundred or so Holy Puppet Sect cultivators who were standing on the giant puppet on the southwestern island were all holding a series of golden and silver talismans tightly in their hands while looking up at the sky with tense expressions.

This was the island where Han Li and Qilin 9 stationed, and the latter was peering into the distance as he said, "There are over 200 cultivators coming to our island, three of whom are True Immortal cultivators, while the majority of the rest of them are below the Grand Ascension Stage."

"You and I can take care of those three True Immortals, while the Holy Puppet Sect's cultivators deal with the rest," Han Li proposed.

"My thoughts exactly," Qilin 9 replied with a nod.

With that, the two of them didn't waste any more time with words before launching themselves up toward the approaching Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators.

A chorus of incantations rang out as numerous talismans flew up into the sky from the top of the giant puppet's head, and puppets of all types of shapes and forms flew out of the talismans amid flashes of bright light.

The army of puppets was followed closely by the Holy Puppet Sect cultivators.

Among the three True Immortals from the Ubiquitous Pavilion, one of them was a burly and imposing young man, while to his left was a thin old man that was quite a bit shorter in stature, and to his right was a voluptuous woman, the type that Elder Hu Yan would've referred to as possessing big tits and a big arse.

As soon as the old man spotted Han Li and Qilin 9, his brows immediately furrowed slightly as he cursed to himself under his breath.

"What's wrong?" the burly young man asked.

"Those two are fellow Transient Guild members, and they're both azure mask members. What terrible luck," the thin old man replied.

"I recall hearing you speak about the hierarchy of your Transient Guild, and you told me that all of the guild's azure mask members are quite formidable. It looks like we're in for a rough battle," the burly man remarked.

"I'm starting to get a little scared after hearing that," the voluptuous woman chuckled. "In any case, I definitely don't want to take on either of them on my own."

"The one with the cow mask seems a little weaker. I'll take care of him by myself and leave the other one to you two," the burly man decided.

"Alright, we'll do as you say," the thin old man immediately agreed, and the voluptuous woman had no objections, either.

As the two opposing forces reached within 10,000 feet of one another, all of the cultivators below the True Immortal Stage made a conscious effort to distance themselves from the True Immortal cultivators before commencing their battle.

Meanwhile, the burly man flew directly toward Han Li, while the thin old man and the voluptuous woman charged toward Qilin 9, one from the left and one from the right.

Qilin 9 gave a cold harrumph as he rose up further into the air, opening up some distance between himself and Han Li as he met his assailants head-on.

While he was still several thousand feet away, the burly man abruptly flicked his wrist through the air, sending a streak of black light flying out of the palm of his hand directly toward Han Li.

The streak of black light then swelled drastically in size, transforming into a massive black ax the size of a small mountain in the blink of an eye before crashing down toward Han Li.

Even before the ax had reached Han Li, a ferocious gust of wind was already sweeping toward him, forcing all of the surrounding air to either side while threatening to slice the very space apart.

Han Li was caught slightly off guard, not expecting his opponent to unleash such a ferocious attack from the get-go, but that didn't hamper his reaction speed at all as a layer of golden scales appeared over his arm, and he clenched his hand into a tight fist before swinging it forcefully into the blade of the ax.

A resounding boom rang out as a gust of fierce wind swept through the air in all directions.

Han Li was forced down by over 1,000 feet before stomping his feet forcefully into the air below to stabilize himself.

Meanwhile, the giant ax was sent flying back, and it reverted back to its original size before being caught by the burly man, who also stumbled back a few steps involuntarily from the tremendous momentum that the ax carried.

"I didn't expect you to also be a Profound Immortal," the burly man exclaimed.

Han Li paid no heed to him as he made a hand seal while chanting an incantation, and his Heavy Water True Axis instantly appeared before him, giving off powerful water law fluctuations.

"Go!" he commanded, and the Heavy Water True Axis began to rapidly revolve in mid-air, transforming into a black blur as it hurtled directly toward the burly man.

The Heavy Water True Axis was traveling extremely quickly, reaching the burly man in the blink of an eye.

The burly man's expression changed slightly seeing this, and he grabbed onto the shaft of the ax with both hands before holding it in front of him like a shield.

This ax had been refined using many types of precious ore and earth-attribute materials, and there were also many bolstering runes engraved onto its surface, making it an extremely formidable treasure that was no less sturdy than a top-tier defensive treasures, so he was confident that he would be able to block this attack.

## Chapter 287: Two VS Three

The Heavy Water True Axis reached the giant ax in the blink of an eye, and a Water Dao Rune on the axis released a burst of water law powers amid a flash of blue light as it crashed into the ax with unfathomable power.

The spirit patterns engraved onto the ax instantly lit up, only to quickly break apart, immediately following which the entire ax itself also shattered into countless pieces.

A stunned look flashed through the burly man's eyes upon seeing this, and a burst of light instantly appeared on his chest, forming a yellow array projection that managed to keep the Heavy Water True Axis at bay.

Han Li's brows furrowed slightly upon seeing this.

Through his spiritual connection with his Heavy Water True Axis, he could sense that it was as if the axis had fallen into a swamp, and all of its power was stripped away.

He immediately increased his immortal spiritual power output, and a resounding boom instantly rang out as the burly man felt a burst of mountainous pressure crashing into chest.

Even though the immortal talisman on his chest had nullified most of the power of the Heavy Water True Axis, it was still too much for him to bear, and he was sent flying back through the air with blood gushing out of his mouth.

Meanwhile, Qilin 9 was locked in a fierce battle against the other two True Immortal cultivators.

The voluptuous woman was wielding a purple whip with purple bars all over its surface. The whip was giving off a metallic gleam, and as she flicked her wrist through the air, the whip transformed into countless whip projections that lashed out at Qilin 9 from all directions.

Qilin 9 was wielding an antiquated golden sword that he was swinging through the air with tremendous power, unleashing countless streaks of golden swordlight that sliced the oncoming whip projections into shreds.

There were nine stars that were glowing brightly on the blade of the sword, forming a secure barrier of dazzling light around him.

Right at this moment, a burst of black light suddenly flashed past behind him, and a thin figure sprang out of thin air in a completely silent manner. The thin figure was wearing a set of sharp silver claws on each hand, and he plunged those claws straight into the light barrier around Qilin 9's body.

The runes on the silver claws lit up as the thin old man brought his hands apart in a forceful motion, tearing a gash into the light barrier.

A vicious look flashed through his eyes as he suddenly opened his mouth, and a burst of black light appeared inside his oral cavity before a dark green needle treasure shot out from within, piercing directly toward Qilin 9's heart from behind.

Qilin 9 had been trying to keep tabs on the thin old man this entire time while facing the voluptuous woman, but he was still unable to detect his assailant until it was too late.

"It's time for you to die!" the old man cackled with a cold gleam in his eyes.

However, right as his voice trailed off, a burst of golden light suddenly appeared behind Qilin 9, and a square-shaped antiquated golden mirror appeared.

A faint clang rang out as the flying needle struck the surface of the mirror and was instantly repelled.

Immediately thereafter, a thunderous roar rang out from within the mirror, and a sense of foreboding welled up in the thin old man's heart upon seeing this.

He immediately opened his mouth to recover his flying needle, then shot back in retreat.

All of a sudden, a burst of light flashed over the golden mirror, and a giant golden tiger with fiery red stripes all over its body pounced out of the mirror with its cavernous mouth wide open, biting down upon the thin old man.

In response, the old man flicked a wrist through the air, and the thin green string flew off from around his wrist before transforming into a massive azure python that pounced at the giant tiger before winding itself around the tiger's body.

Meanwhile, the old man retreated back to the voluptuous woman's side several thousand feet away as he complained, "This guy's a real pain to deal with. I should've chosen the guy with the cow mask."

As soon as his voice trailed off, he heard an agonized howl, and he hurriedly turned around to find the burly man having his chest stomped on by Han Li, sending him plummeting down toward the sea below like a rucksack.

Immediately thereafter, Han Li also swooped down toward the surface of the sea as a streak of azure light.

"Looks like neither of them are easy opponents. If we don't go all-out, not only will we not be able to plunder anything from the Holy Puppet Sect, we could easily lose our lives here," the thin old man said in a grim voice.



"We do indeed have to get serious. Please hold him off for me while I... get changed into something more comfortable," the voluptuous woman said with a seductive smile.

The thin old man couldn't help but shudder at the sight of her smile, and he swept a sleeve through the air to summon a large yellow flag, which he grabbed onto with both hands before charging toward Qilin 9.

At the same time, a vicious look appeared in the voluptuous woman's eyes as she slid down the collar of her robes to reveal a shoulder, followed by a section of her arm, where a slender woman in a red dress was tattooed. The woman was holding a lute with a peculiar smile on her half-concealed face.

This tattoo wasn't just a cosmetic accessory. Instead, it was a powerful treasure that was crafted from human skin. She had been nurturing it with her own flesh and blood this entire time, and she was only willing to use it now as she had identified just how perilous this situation was.

She began to chant a peculiar incantation, and the tattoo of the woman on her arm suddenly became rather blurry, as if all of its colors were spreading and fading.

At the same time, the skin on her arm began to take on a red coloration, and what appeared to have been a rash quickly appeared before spreading over her entire body.

The woman let loose a pained groan as the black cloak that she was wearing gradually faded, and she transformed into the woman in red that was tattooed on her arm. In the wake of her transformation, her cultivation base had been elevated from the mid-True Immortal Stage to the late-True Immortal Stage.

With a flick of her wrist, a crimson oil paper umbrella flew out of the palm of her hand amid a flash of red light, then opened itself up in mid-air before flying toward Qilin 9.

The woman also drifted through the air behind the umbrella as she said in a cold voice, "We have to put an end to him as quickly as possible."

Right at this moment, a resounding boom rang out from the sea down below, and a massive wave erupted upward, following which a figure flew out of the water, rising several thousand feet up into the air before drawing to a halt.

It was none other than Han Li, and his Heavy Water True Axis was revolving in mid-air behind him.

Immediately thereafter, a golden figure also erupted out of the water, and it was none other than the burly man that Han Li had just sent plummeting into the sea. At this moment, it was as if a layer of golden paint had been applied to his entire body.

At this moment, golden blood was pouring out of all of his orifices, and he was sorely regretting his decision to challenge Han Li on his own.

He had been forced to devour the Golden Rot Pill that he had cherished for many years, and only then was he able to withstand Han Li's barrage of ferocious attacks.

He had no idea what that black wheel treasure of Han Li's was. It was clearly a water-attribute treasure, but it was incredibly heavy, as if it contained an entire ocean.

With a flick of his wrist, a white bone shard appeared on the palm of his hand. There were some peculiar crimson patterns engraved onto the surface of the bone shard, and they were giving off faint energy fluctuations.

A hesitant look appeared on the burly man's face as he looked down at the bone shard in his hand.

Meanwhile, Han Li was hovering in mid-air with his Heavy Water True Axis continuing to revolve incessantly behind him.

He took a glance at Qilin 9 to find that he was gradually being forced onto the back foot by the woman in red and the thin old man, and a slightly grim look appeared in his eye as he turned his gaze back to the burly man.

The burly man's heart immediately jolted slightly upon seeing this, and the hesitation in his eyes faded entirely as he brought his palms together, holding the bone shard in between them as he began to chant an incantation.

Wisps of smoke began to billow out from between the palms of his hands as the bone shard was set alight, transforming into an azure fire lotus flower that shot forth through the air.

This flame was known as the Phosphorus Bone Flame, and it was an extremely rare flame that could only arise under a set of extremely rigorous special conditions. Furthermore, it could only be stored in specially made bone shards of high-grade demon beasts. It was an extremely formidable flame, but it was also a disposable item that could only be used once, and that was why he had been so hesitant to unleash it.

The burly man thrust both palms forcefully through the air, and the fiery lotus flower drifted toward Han Li at a deceptively fast speed, reaching no more than 1,000 feet away from him in the blink of an eye.

All of a sudden, balls of azure flames erupted from the fiery lotus flower before hurtling toward Han Li in a frenzy.

Han Li naturally wasn't going to allow those flames to come into contact with his body, and the Heavy Water True Axis had already positioned itself in front of him at his behest.

He began to chant and incantation, and a burst of black light erupted out of the axis as it hovered in front of the fiery lotus flower like a huge black shield.

However, even after coming into contact with the Heavy Water True Axis, the Phosphorus Bone Flame wasn't snuffed out. Instead, it quickly enveloped the entire axis while releasing a scorching aura.

Han Li could feel a burst of extremely strange power surging through his Heavy Water True Axis, and it seemed to have been causing the heavy water to evaporate, reducing the weight of the axis as a result.

The weight reduction was virtually negligible, but Han Li's heart still jolted slightly upon detecting this. If he didn't clear away these azure flames as quickly as possible, he didn't know what other impact it was going to have on his Heavy Water True Axis.

With that in mind, he extended a hand forward, and a tiny fiery silver figure took shape on the palm of his hand. It turned around to give him a wide smile, then skipped down from his hand and transformed

into a wave of silver fire that swooped onto the Heavy Water True Axis to intertwine itself with the Phosphorus Bone Flames.

The silver and azure flames intertwined on the surface of the axis, and to the Phosphorus Bone Flame's credit, it was able to temporarily hold its own against the Essence Fire Raven, with neither one able to devour the other.

## Chapter 288: Saved in the Nick of Time

While the Flame of Essence and the Phosphorus Bone Flame were locked in battle against one another, Han Li made a hand seal with one hand, then produced an azure longsword with a flick of his wrist, and he emerged from behind the Heavy Water True Axis before charging directly toward the burly man.

The burly man immediately switched to a different hand seal upon seeing this, and balls of azure flames erupted out of the fiery azure lotus flower before hurtling toward Han Li.

In response, Han Li slashed his longsword through the air, unleashing a string of sword projections that bloomed like a lotus flower in front of him to repel the azure fireballs.

This flame was supposed to have been extremely sticky, as evidenced by the fact that it was able to instantly cling to the Heavy Water True Axis, but it was unable to adhere to the azure longsword at all, much to the burly man's surprise.

He gritted his teeth before expelling a mouthful of blood essence, then pointed a finger at it, and the ball of blood essence instantly transformed into a cloud of blood mist that vanished into the fiery azure lotus flower in a flash.

The fiery lotus flower instantly began to rapidly revolve, and all of its petals trembled before shooting through the air, transforming into a series of fiery azure blades that swept toward Han Li in an all-encompassing wave.

Han Li made a hand seal with one hand in an unhurried manner while slashing his sword through the air with his other hand, instantly releasing countless massive sword projections that shot forth toward the burly man.

The wave of sword projections appeared to have been quite chaotic, like a disorganized army with no general, hurtling through the air in a seemingly haphazard fashion, but somehow, they were able to keep all of the fiery azure blades at bay.

For the second time, a hint of foreboding welled up in the burly man's heart, and he decided that it was too much of a risk to continue this battle. With that in mind, he switched to a different hand seal before clapping his hand together.

A resounding boom rang out as the fiery azure lotus flower swelled to several times its original size, following which all of its petals exploded violently, creating a sea of azure flames that swallowed up the entire wave of sword projections.

All of a sudden, the entire sky was filled with sword projections and azure flames, sending waves of scorching heat and an aura of unmatched sharpness erupting in all directions.

After doing all of this, the burly man brought his index and middle fingers together without any hesitation, and a golden talisman was set alight between his fingertips, following which he vanished from the spot amid a flash of golden light.

However, a massive azure longsword then suddenly appeared out of thin air several dozen kilometers away, and the burly man within the streak of golden light struck its blade with unerring accuracy, instantly slicing his body into two.

Immediately thereafter, a purple nascent soul that was identical in appearance to the burly man emerged from his body before flying away with a terrified look on its face, only to be caught in a large silver net before it was able to get very far.

A burst of crackling rang out as the nascent soul was zapped into a plume of smoke that was blown away by the wind.

Even in the instant right before he died, the burly man had no idea how Han Li had been able to cover a distance of dozens of kilometers in the blink of an eye to intercept him.

As it turned out, it was very simple. In the instant that the burly man detonated his Phosphorus Bone Flame, Han Li had already activated his Reversal True Axis ability to enhance his own speed, allowing him to cover a vast distance in the blink of an eye.

Han Li swept a sleeve through the air to stow the azure longsword away, then made a beckoning motion toward the burly man's corpse, and the man's storage bracelet and storage ring quickly flew into his grasp.

After taking a moment to inspect the contents of the storage treasures, he was very pleased to find that he had made a very good haul, and he stowed them storage treasures away before flying back toward his Heavy Water True Axis.

Without the support of the burly man's immortal spiritual power, the Phosphorus Bone Flame was no match for the Essence Fire Raven and had already been devoured. At this moment, the Essence Fire Raven was in its miniature humanoid form, and it was seated on the Heavy Water True Axis while swinging its little legs back and forth with a blissful look on its face.

Upon spotting Han Li's return, it immediately reverted back into the form of a silver fire raven before flying toward him.

Han Li smiled as he raised an arm so that the fire raven could fly back into his sleeve.

He then turned his gaze toward the giant puppet to find that both the Holy Puppet Sect and Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators there had already suffered severe casualties.

There were several Ubiquitous Pavilion Grand Ascension and Body Integration cultivators that had snuck away from the battle before flying toward the giant puppet, hoping to destroy it so that the light barrier encompassing the main island would be unraveled.

However, before they could even get close, the giant puppet suddenly swiveled its body to face them, and the runes on its giant silver blade lit up before releasing gusts of fierce wind that swept directly toward the oncoming intruders.

The gusts of wind were carrying countless blades of wind, and it swept up the nearest few Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators in the blink of an eye.

Those cultivators hurriedly summoned their protective treasures, but they were only able to keep the blades of wind at bay for a few moments before their bodies were torn to shreds, while their nascent souls were only just barely able to escape.

Seeing as the giant puppet was able to protect itself just fine, Han Li began flying over to Qilin 9 with his Heavy Water True Axis trailing along behind him.

At this point in the battle, the situation had become quite dire for Qilin 9.

After transforming into that woman in the red dress, not only had the voluptuous woman had her cultivation base elevated, even her abilities had undergone a drastic change.

Furthermore, that red oil paper umbrella of hers was extremely troublesome to deal with, able to release thin red threads down upon anyone situated under it, and if one were to be ensnared by those red threads, their immortal spiritual power circulation would become very sluggish.

Thankfully, the dazzling light radiating from his nine star golden sword had formed a protective barrier around him to keep the red threads at bay, so he was able to remain largely unaffected.

At this point, the golden tiger that had been released from the antiquated golden mirror was already riddled with wounds, but it was still constantly prowling by his side, protecting him from any potential sneak attacks from his two assailants.

The giant azure python released by the thin old man earlier had already been torn to shreds by the golden tiger, and it was clear that he intended to claim the golden mirror to make up for that loss after Qilin 9 was killed.

"We have to end this now!"

The woman in red had already noticed that Han Li was approaching, and a hint of killing intent flashed through her eyes as she encircled her arms in an embracing motion to summon a crimson lute that was as translucent as jade.

She began to gently strum the strings of the lute, producing a sound that immediately made Qilin 9's skin crawl.

It wasn't because the sound was extremely unpleasant. Instead, it was a very crisp and clean sound that was very pleasing to the ears, but as soon as the woman began playing the lute, the oil paper umbrella above Qilin 9 suddenly swelled to twice its original size.

The crimson threads trailing down from the umbrella were also becoming denser, and they were pouncing at him like a nest of spirit snakes, moving at several times their original speed.

At the same time, the thin old man had also sprung into action. He raised a hand to release a three-colored ring, which flew through the air before transforming into countless three-colored ring projections to ensnare the golden dragon.

Meanwhile, the thin old man himself appeared above Qilin 9 in a wraith-like manner, then swept a sleeve through the air, sending a streak of dazzling swordlight that was over 100 feet in length sweeping down toward him.

Qilin 9 had no choice but to divert the golden mirror away to ward off the oncoming streak of sword light, but as a result, his back was left unguarded, and several red threads pierced into his shoulder and back in quick succession.

As soon as the red threads pierced into his body, they immediately began to sprout branches that burrowed into his flesh like the roots of a plant.

Qilin 9 immediately felt a numb sensation spread through his shoulder and arm, and even more alarmingly, his immortal spiritual power had become extremely sluggish.

Right at this moment, he spotted a black shadow hurtling toward him out of the corner of his eye, and right as he was about to use a life-saving talisman to save himself from this dire situation, a glowing



black wheel flashed through the air in front of him inches away from his chest to shield him from the oncoming dark green dagger.

Immediately thereafter, a figure arrived by his side in the blink of an eye, and with a sweep of their sword, all of the red threads that had burrowed into his body were instantly severed.

Those severed threads quickly turned a lifeless gray color like vines that had been stripped of their nutrients, and Qilin 9's immortal spiritual power circulation returned to normal.

"I owe you one, Fellow Daoist!" Qilin 9 said in a solemn voice as he took a glance at Han Li.

"Let's focus on taking care of these two before we talk about anything else," Han Li said.

Qilin 9 nodded in response, and he flexed his shoulder to find that the numb sensation from before had already completely faded.

Meanwhile, the thin old man and the woman in red had also convened together, and as they exchanged a glance, each of them could see their own astonishment mirrored in one another's eyes.

They had deemed Han Li to have been the weaker one of their two opponents, yet not only had he just slain their companion in a very short time, he had also managed to ward off both of their attacks on his own, seemingly with ease.

"I'm not staying around to fight a losing battle," the thin old man sighed, then immediately sped away as a streak of light without any hesitation.

"Sly old bastard..." the woman in red cursed under her breath.

Having used that human skin tattoo treasure, she had already severely depleted her immortal spiritual power, and she had thought that at the very least, she and the thin old man would've been able to kill Qilin 9 to reap some spoils, but their plan had been foiled by Han Li.

With the thin old man fleeing for his life, she naturally wasn't going to stay and take on Han Li's duo on her own.

Thus, the red oil paper umbrella suddenly flew back to her at her behest, then carried her away at an incredible speed.

#### Chapter 289: Negotiations Falling Through

Qilin 9 was furious, and he was naturally unwilling to let his two assailants get away. "You think you can just attack me as you please, then leave when you see fit?"

As soon as his voice trailed off, he flipped a hand over to produce a golden talisman before waving it through the air, and the talisman immediately burst into golden flames, which transformed into an expanse of light that enveloped his entire body.

Immediately thereafter, he vanished from the spot without any warning, and through his spiritual sense, Han Li was able to detect that he had teleported to several thousand kilometers away to intercept the woman in red.

He then cast his gaze toward the direction that the thin old man was fleeing in with a hint of mockery in his eyes.

In the next instant, he withdrew his Heavy Water True Axis back into his body, following which arcs of silver lightning emerged around him, then erupted all around him to form a lightning array that was around 10 feet in radius in the blink of an eye.

Tens of thousands of kilometers away, the thin old man was flying through the air above the Thunderstorm Sea with his entire body enveloped in a murky layer of light.

"That was some terrible luck! Why did I have to run into those two freaks? If I hadn't escaped when I did, I would've died back there!"

All of a sudden, the old man's brows suddenly furrowed tightly, following which he drew to an abrupt halt before shooting back over 10,000 feet in retreat.

A burst of loud rumbling rang out in the sky ahead of him, and a vast expanse of lightning emerged out of thin air before transforming into a circular lightning array.

Countless arcs of lightning flashed incessantly amid a rumbling thunderclap, following which the lightning faded to reveal none other than Han Li.

"I've already made up my mind to take no further part in all of this. Seeing as we're both members of the Transient Guild, would you be able to let me go this time, Fellow Daoist?" the old man implored.

Han Li was in no hurry to strike, and he smiled as he replied, "There's no personal vendetta between us, so I'm not interested in a fight to the death, either, but you almost killed my companion just now, and I can't just let things slide. Shouldn't you be leaving something behind as compensation?"

"In that case, how do you want to settle this?" the thin old man asked as he raised an eyebrow.

"If I'm not mistaken, that's a 30,000-year-old Thistle Spirit Flower that I'm sensing on you, right?" Han Li asked with a smile.

Back when the trio of Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators first arrived on the island, Han Li had already sensed that the thin old man was carrying 30,000-year-old Thistle Spirit Flower thanks to his enormous spiritual sense, and right there and then, he had decided that this was something he was definitely going to secure as the stamen of the Thistle Spirit Flower was one of the ingredients listed on his dao pill recipe.

The thin old man's expression instantly darkened slightly upon hearing this.

He was indeed carrying a Thistle Spirit Flower on his body, and due to the fact that it was a live specimen, he couldn't put it in his storage bracelet. On top of that, he had obtained the flower not long before coming on this mission, so he had temporarily stored it in a special jade box.

However, he had already cast several seals onto the jade box, so no one should've been able to detect it.

Could it be that this man possesses spiritual sense superior even to that of a Golden Immortal?

The old man's heart jolted slightly as this thought occurred to him, but he then dismissed the notion.

Han Li's aura suggested that he was only at the mid-True Immortal Stage, so in the old man's eyes, there was no way that his spiritual sense could've been so formidable. Instead, he was most likely carrying some type of special treasure that allowed him to detect spirit medicines.

With that in mind, the old man swept his spiritual sense through the surrounding area to ensure that there was no one else nearby, then unleashed his enormous aura in full force as a cold smile appeared on his face. "You're biting off more than you can chew, Fellow Daoist! Do you really think you can just walk all over me as you please?"

Han Li had already identified that the one among the trio with the highest cultivation base wasn't that burly man at all, nor was it that voluptuous woman. Instead, it was this sly old man who had been concealing his true power this entire time.

Instead of attacking Han Li right away, the old man had initially tried to avoid a battle by putting on a façade of weakness, so it was clear that he was someone who held no regard for his own dignity and prioritized survival and profit above all else.

If he had been willing to give up his Thistle Spirit Flower, Han Li would've naturally been happy to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, but seeing as the negotiations had fallen through, a battle was unavoidable.

There was no one else present, and Han Li was confident that he would be able to take down his opponent in a one-on-one battle.

With that in mind, he made a hand seal with both hands, and his Heavy Water True Axis instantly appeared behind him amid a flash of black light, then rose up while revolving rapidly before hurtling toward the old man at his behest.

A series of black ripples that were visible to the naked eye spread through the air in the wake of the axis, and it was as if they were threatening to tear the very space apart.

The thin old man spread his hands open to summon a three-colored ring upon seeing this, and the ring transformed into a vast expanse of ring projections that sped toward the Heavy Water True Axis.

However, the Heavy Water True Axis was far heavier than he imagined, and it was able to tear through the countless layers of ring projections with unstoppable force before crashing into the ring itself with a loud clang.

The three-colored ring was only able to hold itself intact for an instant before exploding into pieces, and the thin old man shuddered from the backlash as an unnatural flush appeared on his face.

At the same time, he made a grabbing motion with one hand, and a large yellow flag that was over 20 feet in length appeared in his grasp.

The image of a vast desert with three suns hanging above it was emblazoned onto the flag, and it was giving off a parched and scorching aura.

The old man took a step forward with his hands clenched tightly around the flag's shaft, then swept the flag forcefully through the air.

The surface of the flag rippled as a vast expanse of yellow sand surged forth in a frenzy, sweeping toward Han Li in an all-encompassing wave that inundated everything within a radius of close to 100,000 feet.

Han Li's eyes narrowed slightly as blue light flashed within them, but he was still unable to see his surroundings clearly. He felt as if he had been swallowed up in a sandstorm that was severely limiting both his visibility and his spiritual sense, rendering him unable to detect his opponent's location.

Right at this moment, the old man's voice suddenly rang out from behind him. "Have a taste of my Three Sun Pass!"

As soon as Han Li turned around, he immediately spotted three balls of dazzling white light hurtling rapidly toward him from three different directions, releasing waves of scorching heat as they raced through the air.

His brows furrowed slightly upon seeing this, and he was just about to take some evasive measures when he suddenly noticed that he was unable to move.

He looked down to find that a layer of white crystals had crept over his calves without his detection, and it had frozen him to the spot like a layer of ice crystals.

Immediately thereafter, the same material began to appear over his shoulders, arms, and chest, and it was rapidly spreading over the rest of his body.

Upon closer inspection, he discovered that these were countless tiny grains of translucent sand that had been scorched into a semi-transparent crystalline material by the three suns. The material quickly spread to his neck, immobilizing his entire body.

Han Li was alarmed by this turn of events, but he didn't panic. Azure light surged over his body, and he was just about to break free from the crystalline material when he spotted the thin old man abruptly appearing beside him, plunging a green dagger toward his glabella.

He gave a cold harrumph as a hint of golden light flashed through his eyes, and he released a burst of tremendous spiritual sense to encompass the entire surrounding area in a radius of several dozen kilometers.

The thin old man had already reached Han Li, but he noticed that a circle of extremely tiny runes had appeared around each of Han Li's pupils, and he reflexively slowed down as a safety precaution.

Right at this moment, Han Li's voice rang out with the volume of an enormous gong being struck. "Let heaven and earth be cleansed!"

His words were like an almighty decree, and all of the yellow sand immediately subsided. Even the dark clouds hanging in the sky had vanished, and it was as if the entire area really had been cleansed.

"Impossible!" the thin old man exclaimed with an astonished expression as he hurriedly darted back to open up some distance between himself and Han Li.

"Let heavenly fire descend!" Han Li declared, and a streak of white light descended upon him from the heavens, transforming into a burst of silver flames that enveloped his entire body.

"This is impossible! Not even a Golden Immortal can speak things into reality as they please! Who are you? Take the flower!" the thin old man yelled in a horrified voice while continuing to dart back in retreat?

A cold smile appeared on Han Li's face as he scoffed, "Don't you think it's too late to be saying this now? Let there be lightning!"

In the next instant, a vortex of dark clouds appeared in the sky out of thin air, and lightning was flashing incessantly within the vortex amid a string of rumbling thunderclaps.

All of a sudden, a bolt of blue lightning that was as thick as a water vat came crashing down upon the thin old man from above.

The old man hurriedly dodged to the side, yet he had only just barely evaded the first bolt of lightning when countless more came crashing down from the heavens like a relentless storm, cutting off all avenues for escape or retreat.

At this point, the old man was so shaken up that he had completely lost all will to fight, and as he continued to evade the bolts of lightning that were falling from the heavens, he had also summoned a golden talisman, which he was planning to use to facilitate his escape.

However, right at this moment, Han Li abruptly vanished from the spot, only to appear behind the old man without any warning in the next instant, and a layer of golden scales appeared over his arm as he plunged his hand straight through the old man's heart.

The golden light in his eyes then gradually faded as he withdrew his spiritual sense, and all of the blue lightning in the sky vanished to reveal the yellow sandstorm that had been raging this entire time.

"It was all an illusion..." the thin old man murmured to himself with a wry smile as the light in his eyes gradually began to fade.

However, a burst of golden light then erupted out of his glabella alongside a burst of powerful energy fluctuations.

At this point, the old man knew that he wouldn't be able to escape, and he had decided there and then to detonate his own nascent soul.

A cold gleam flashed through Han Li's eyes as a burst of silver light erupted out of his arm amid a loud thunderclap, and the eruption of silver lightning instantly destroyed the old man's nascent soul, following which his body fell completely limp and lifeless.

Chapter 290: Observation

Han Li's expression eased slightly upon seeing this, but at the same time, he was gasping for air.

It seemed that he had just made short work of his opponent, but in reality, the situation had been far more perilous than it had appeared. The layer of crystalline material that had trapped him was extremely resolute, and even with his tremendously powerful physical body and immense immortal spiritual power, it would've taken him at least five seconds to break free, which would've been more than enough to spell his demise.

If the old man had gone through with his attack, then Han Li would've been a sitting duck. While it was true that his physical body was immensely powerful, there was no way that his glabella would've been able to withstand a direct blow, and if his physical body had survived that attack, he would've most definitely suffered extremely severe injuries.

Hence, as a last gasp Hail Mary, he had unleashed his Mantra Domain ability to sow doubt into the heart of his opponent. After that, he had brought down that illusory streak of heavenly fire to act as a smokescreen for the Essence Fire Raven, which emerged to free him from the layer of crystalline substance while also convincing the old man that he truly did have the power to control everything in this space.

At that point, the old man had already completely lost his bearings, and Han Li pounced on the opportunity, using his Reversal True Axis ability to deal the killing blow.

It seemed that all of these True Immortal cultivators had some trump cards up their sleeves, so he would have to be more careful when facing them in battle from now on.



With that in mind, Han Li raised a hand, and a burst of azure light swept out of his sleeve before enveloping the old man's body so that it wouldn't fall into the sea. After that, he consumed a restorative pill, then sat down to meditate.

At this point, only fewer than 40 of the Time Dao Runes on his Mantra Treasured Axis had been recovered, and using the Reversal True Axis in succession had severely taxed both his body and his immortal spiritual power.

A short while later, he reopened his eyes and cast his gaze toward the body of the thin old man, and after some brief searching, he found a long green jade box and an azure tiger mask tucked under the collar of the old man's robes.

There were several golden and purple talismans adhered to the jade box for the purpose of concealing the aura of the spirit plant inside, and Han Li tore the talismans away before opening the box to reveal a purple spirit flower with its roots still completely intact.

The entire flower was brimming with spiritual qi, and just its aroma alone was enough to instill within him a soothing sense of relaxation.

It's not quite old enough to be used, but it certainly is a Thistle Spirit Flower that's over 30,000 years old.

The Thistle Spirit Flower was an extremely rare spirit plant that contained a hint of law powers, and even its seed wasn't something that could be found in the Transient Guild, so it was certainly a pleasant surprise for Han Li to have secured one on this mission.

If it weren't for the sake of this flower, he wouldn't have bothered to come after the thin old man at all. His mission was solely to protect the Holy Puppet Sect, and he certainly didn't care if any of the invaders were to escape.

After closing the jade box, he placed the removed talismans back onto it as well, then added a couple of golden talismans of his own before carefully tucking it away under the collar of his robe.

After that, he took a closer look at the azure tiger mask to find that it bore the number "11", which was the same as the number on Bai Suyuan's mask, indicating that he wasn't a cultivator from anywhere near the Ancient Cloud Continent.

Han Li was just about to destroy the mask when a thought suddenly occurred to him, and he decided to preserve the mask and stow it away instead.

After that, he also took the old man's storage bracelet, as well as that yellow flag and his other treasures, then flew back toward the island.

It hadn't been very long since he left the island, and the battle nearby was still raging.

However, Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators had somehow added around a dozen more Grand Ascension cultivators to their ranks, and due to the absence of Han Li and Qilin 9, they were able to completely dominate the Holy Puppet Sect cultivators, who were on the verge of being wiped out.

Han Li was able to assess the situation from afar with his spiritual sense, so as soon as he arrived on the scene, he immediately charged into the fray, killing all of the Ubiquitous Pavilion Grand Ascension cultivators in a matter of moments, and all of the other Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators immediately fled the scene in a blind panic.

All of the Holy Puppet Sect cultivators had thought that this was where their lives were going to come to an end, and they were ecstatic to see Han Li reversing their fortunes with ease. Their morale was instantly elevated to unprecedented heights, and they lashed out at the remaining Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators to completely drive them off the island.

Meanwhile, Han Li flew over to the giant puppet, then looked around to find Qilin 9 flying back to the island from afar. Along the way, he slew several dozen Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators, then quickly arrived beside Han Li.

He was carrying multiple injuries, and his clothes had become quite tattered, clearly indicating that he had just endured a rough battle as well.

"That woman had quite a few tricks up her sleeve. In the end, I was able to destroy her physical body, but her nascent soul managed to get away," Qilin 9 said in a slightly disappointed voice.

"If she had so many tricks up her sleeve, then surely she would've been quite wealthy as well, so you must've reaped some substantial spoils, right, Fellow Daoist Qilin 9?" Han Li asked with a smile.

"She did have some treasures and materials, but nothing all that valuable," Qilin 9 replied in an ambiguous manner to gloss over the subject.

Right at this moment, a resounding boom suddenly rang out from the sea toward the east, causing the nearby space to tremble violently.

Immediately thereafter, the colorful light barrier above the main island flashed a few times before disintegrating into countless specks of light that then faded into nothingness.

The glowing pagoda beside Han Li and Qilin 9 also flashed a few times before it completely dimmed.

"It looks like the Ubiquitous Pavilion has come extremely well prepared. We've managed to guard our island, but some other islands have fallen," Qilin 9 sighed.

"The situation is looking a little trim," Han Li replied with a nod.

"Do you think we should do something, Fellow Daoist?" Qilin 9 asked.

"I don't recall receiving any instructions other than to protect this island," Han Li replied.

"That's exactly right! We've been tasked with protecting this island, so it would be wise for us not to leave our post and just observe the battle for now," Qilin 9 chuckled.

Han Li gave an ambiguous nod in response, then cast his gaze toward the main island with blue light flashing in his eyes.

All of the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators were ecstatic to see that the light barrier encompassing the main island had disappeared, and they took a moment to reorganize their ranks before converging toward the main island.

That was the foundation of the Holy Puppet Sect, so if they wanted to reap the best spoils, then that was the place that they had to go.

After a brief respite, the battle continued at an even higher degree of ferocity than before.

A string of deafening booms instantly rang out across the sky above the main island, and even the main island itself was trembling incessantly in the wake of the powerful clashes taking place above it, looking as if it could collapse at any moment.

Due to the uneven distribution of forces on the battlefield, some of the parts of the defensive line where the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators had a numbers advantage were quickly overwhelmed, and the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators there immediately swooped down toward the main island.

Some of the bolder individuals among them had gone straight past the outermost level of the island and descended onto the second and even the third levels of the island.

However, all of the restrictions and traps laid out on the island were quickly triggered, and all of the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators that had stormed recklessly onto the main island were instantly met with a ferocious barrage of attacks.

Meanwhile, the black spirit boats in the dark clouds up above were also beginning to rapidly descend toward the island.

As for the mechanical boats that had been attacking them earlier, their defenses were too frail, and their attacks were lacking in variety, so they were only able to destroy two of the black spirit boats before all of them were wiped out.

Two of the black spirit boats were descending toward a wide river on the main island, yet before the pair of spirit boats had even landed on the surface of the water, the river down below had begun churning violently as if the water had been brought to a boil.

Right at this moment, around a dozen incredibly thick black chains shot out of the river, clanging loudly as they hurtled toward the pair of black spirit boats. The massive metal anchors attached to the ends of the chains easily passed through the protective barriers around the boats before plunging straight into the boats themselves.

Immediately thereafter, the sound of grinding gears rang out from the riverbed down below, while the two spirit boats shuddered violently as all of the runes on their surfaces lit up at once as they attempted to rise up with all their might to struggle free from the chains.

All of a sudden, a layer of blue light appeared over the chains, and countless tiny runes emerged from the blue light, releasing a burst of tremendous power that fused the chains and the entire river into one. It was as if the entire river were dragging down the pair of spirit boats rather than just the dozen or so chains.

The sound of mechanical grinding continued to ring out as the pair of spirit boats were slowly brought down further and further before falling into the water, where they exploded into pieces with an almighty boom.

Not far away, around a dozen turtle puppets had assembled themselves into a line, and the spirit patterns on their shells were glowing brightly as they raised their heads up high, releasing pillars of blue light out of their mouths toward the descending spirit boats and Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators up above.

The entire island had been plunged into a state of complete chaos, and all of the Holy Puppet Sect cultivators that were fighting in the air immediately descended to reinforce the main island.

Several dozen Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators had appeared on the plaza on the main island, and they were led by a pair of True Immortal cultivators as they engaged the Holy Puppet Sect cultivators on the island in a fierce battle.

Bai Suyuan's cultivation base wasn't very advanced, and at the moment, she was hanging back in the crowd, holding a silver longsword in one hand and a life-saving talisman given to her Yun Ni in the other as she inspected her surroundings with a wary expression.

As soon as the battle ensued on the main island, even more puppets began to enter the fray, and as a result, the Holy Puppet Sect forces were suddenly vastly outnumbering the Ubiquitous Pavilion cultivators, making it appear as if the tide were about to turn.