

A Sword 31

Chapter 31: Qingzhou

“Entrapment Technique?” Ye Guan was confused. He had never heard of that technique before.

Little Pagoda replied, “Indeed. Would you like to learn it?”

“Is it a technique used to rob others?”

“Yes!”

Ye Guan shook his head. “No thanks.”

Robbing others was against his conscience, so he decided to refuse and call it a night.

The next morning, an old man wearing the academy robe of the Guanxuan Academy visited the Siao Residence.

Ye Guan had just gotten out of bed when Fei Banqing suddenly appeared right in front of him. He was stunned and was right about to say something, but Fei Banqing interrupted him.

“Follow me!” she said.

She dragged Ye Guan to the Administrative Hall of the Siao Residence. Song Fu and Siao Shan were also in the Administrative Hall along with an old man dressed in the robe of the Guanxuan Academy.

Ye Guan was slightly baffled.

The old man got up and smiled. “Are you perhaps Ye Guan?”

Ye Guan nodded slightly. "Indeed, Senior, you are?"

That old man laughed and replied, "I am the head of Guanxuan Academy's Department of Ceremonies, Han Xiu. I'm here to invite you to the welcome banquet that will take place the day after tomorrow."

A welcome banquet? Ye Guan froze. He directed a doubtful look at Fei Banqing.

Fei Banqing smiled and explained, "It's a banquet that will be attended by the cream of the crop talents from all three hundred and sixty states. It's held annually, and less than a hundred people are invited every time."

Ye Guan instantly understood what Fei Banqing was trying to say.

Song Fu looked incredibly happy as he stood next to Fei Banqing.

It seemed that the Guanxuan Academy of Nanzhou had never been invited to the Guanxuan Academy of the Upper Realm's welcome banquet before.

And that was why Ye Guan was even more puzzled. Why would they invite me to the welcome banquet?

Song Fu could see that Ye Guan had a lot of questions. However, Ye Guan spoke up first and asked, "Senior, am I the only one who got invited from Nanzhou?"

Han Xiu chuckled and said, "Indeed, you're the only one who got invited."

Ye Guan went silent. He instantly lost interest in attending the welcome banquet. I'd rather stay at home and focus on cultivating. This is just a useless social activity, so I'd rather avoid it if I can.

Song Fu saw through Ye Guan's thoughts and hurriedly spoke, "Little Guan, this is a great opportunity to mingle with the young talents from the other states. You shouldn't refuse the offer!"

Refuse? Han Xiu was slightly taken aback. He finally saw Ye Guan's indifferent expression, and he suddenly recalled the orders he had received, so he hurriedly said, "F-four! Four talents from Nanzhou are allowed to attend!"

Song Fu and the others were stunned. Four? really?

It seemed that Han Xiu was still afraid of Ye Guan's refusal, so he quickly fished out four invitation letters from his storage ring and shoved them into Ye Guan's hands.

"Young Lord Ye, the event starts in the evening on the day after tomorrow. Please don't be late! I'm off, then!" said Han Xiu before turning around to leave as if he were running away.

The scene was so baffling that Song Fu had to ask, "Little Guan, do you know someone from the Guanxuan Academy of the Upper Realm?"

Ye Guan shook his head. He chuckled hollowly and said, "No."

Song Fu frowned. "Then, why?"

Ye Guan muttered, "I have no idea."

Siao Shan chuckled and remarked, "The reason doesn't matter; what's more important is that we got invited!"

Song Fu nodded in agreement and said, "Indeed."

Ye Guan looked down at the four invitation letters in his hand and smiled slightly. It would be boring if he were to go there by himself, but it was a different story if Nalan Jia was with him. Honestly, he only needed two invitation letters.

Why would Sun Xiong and Siao Ge go there, anyway?

Still, Ye Guan decided to look for them to give them an invitation letter.

Siao Ge looked down at the invitation letter and asked, "A welcome banquet?"

Ye Guan nodded and explained, "A representative of the Guanxuan Academy came here and gave me invitation letters."

Siao Ge looked doubtful at Ye Guan's words.

Nalan Jia asked, "Do you know someone from the Guanxuan Academy of the Upper Realm?"

Ye Guan shook his head.

Nalan Jia frowned. "Perhaps someone else aside from us knows that you're a swordsman?"

Ye Guan was silent. There had to be a reason behind the invitation. Ye Guan pondered over it, but Siao Ge pulled him from his train of thought.

"I'm here to tell you guys something interesting."

Ye Guan, Nalan Jia, and Sun Xiong turned to look at Siao Ge. He chuckled and continued. "The representatives of Qingzhou and Yunzhou have already arrived at the city, and they're with the Guanxuan Academy right now."

Ye Guan's curiosity was piqued. "How many representatives did they send?"

"Yunzhou only sent one representative. His name is Zuo Fu. His cultivation base and overall prowess are unknown."

Sun Xiong frowned. "Just one?"

Siao Ge nodded. "Yes, he's the only one."

"It's either Yunzhou has declined massively over the past ten years, or Zuo Fu is extremely talented." Nalan Jia pointed out.

Siao Ge muttered, "I'm convinced that it's the latter. Yunzhou has produced the three Greats, so there is no way they'll allow themselves to be suppressed by Qingzhou over and over again. Zuo Fu must be extremely talented and powerful!"

Ye Guan nodded and asked, "How about Qingzhou?"

Siao Ge replied, "They sent three representatives. Two men and a woman. One of the men is named Ao Han, while the woman's name is Mu Yunhan."

"How strong are they?"

"I have no idea."

Ye Guan frowned.

Siao Ge continued. "However, everyone knows that Qingzhou would always hold their own selection competition to decide their three representatives for the decennial martial contest. I've heard that the competition among the students there is incredibly fierce!"

"They can only send three representatives?" asked Ye Guan.

Siao Ge nodded. "A state in the top ten can only send three representatives, and it's all for the sake of giving the other states a chance. And that is why the selection competition in the top ten states is incredibly fierce."

"I've heard that Qingzhou's selection competition is even fiercer than any other state. I reckon that getting picked as one of Qingzhou's three representatives for the decennial martial contest must be as difficult as ascending the heavens!"

"You said Qingzhou sent two men and a woman, right? How about the other man?"

Siao Ge shook his head and said, "I couldn't find any information about him. He's covered in a veil of secrecy that even I couldn't penetrate. I guess we'll know more about him once the martial contest begins."

"Yunzhou can send three representatives, but they only sent one person to represent them. That is odd..." Nalan Jia muttered.

Siao Ge nodded. "It's strange, but I think Yunzhou is hiding something. Otherwise, their decision to send only one representative won't make sense.

"After all, Qingzhou has been suppressing them for more than a hundred years now. Without a hidden ace up their sleeves, it'll be incredibly difficult for them to win the martial contest.

"However, I think it's unlikely that they'll give up the World Number One plaque without a fight."

Ye Guan's curiosity was piqued. "The World Number One plaque?"

"Yeah. You'll get many different rewards for winning the martial contest, but you'll also receive a plaque emblazoned with the words—World Number One—on it.

"Take that plaque back to Nanzhou, and everyone will treat you like a deity. You'll also become a role model for the younger generation for the next hundred years!" explained Siao Ge.

Ye Guan clenched his fists. His determination to take first place became even stronger than before.

Siao Ge continued. “Actually, the decennial martial contest is just a battle of honor. Qingzhou is trying to defend its honor while other states are trying to prove their honor. In a nutshell, it’s a battle between the cream of the crop youths from each and every state.”

“Have you heard about the talents from the other states?” asked Sun Xiong.

Siao Ge said, “There had always been dark horses every time the decennial martial contest was held, but in the end, Qingzhou had always taken the crown of first place for themselves.

”Qingzhou is indeed a powerful state that truly lives up to the reputation of being the birthplace of the Sword Master. Qingzhou’s strength is so frightening that the other states feel hopeless facing them.”

The Sword Master! It was a name that filled everyone with awe. The Sword Master was the reason behind the peace that the Universe was currently enjoying.

“I really didn’t expect that we would be invited to the welcome banquet. We’ll definitely meet the outstanding talents of Qingzhou and Yunzhou there—Ah, right!” Siao Ge chuckled and said, “We’ve been talking about the talents of Qingzhou and Yunzhou, but do you guys have any idea about the talents of the Guanxuan Academy here?”

The three shook their heads.

Siao Ge continued. “The Chief Student Representative of the Upper Realm’s Guanxuan Academy is a young woman named Luo Zhaoqi, and she’s famous for being the most beautiful woman throughout the Upper Realm!”

Most beautiful woman? Ye Guan made a sidelong glance at Nalan Jia.

Nalan Jia smiled and asked, “Why are you looking at me?”

Ye Guan smiled sheepishly without saying anything.

Nalan Jia turned to look at Xiao Ge and asked, "Is she going to attend the welcome banquet?"

Xiao Ge replied, "Of course, she's going to attend. She's the organizer, after all."

Nalan Jia looked at Ye Guan with a smirk. "I guess you'll see who's more beautiful between us at the welcome banquet."

Ye Guan could only smile awkwardly.

Xiao Ge chuckled at the sight and said, "There's something else we have to remember. The talents of the Profound Sky Clan will also take part in the decennial martial contest. They have four representatives, and their leader is Lu Ke. I've heard that he's the most exceptional talent of the Profound Sky Clan in the last millennium!"

"The Profound Sky Clan will definitely target us during the martial contest. We'll have to be careful of them!" Xiao Ge said.

The Profound Sky Clan... Ye Guan remained calm and said, "It's fine; we'll just get rid of them first during the martial contest."

Xiao Ge chuckled and said, "That's right. We just have to deal with them first."

He then stood up and added, "Anyway, have fun chatting. I'm off to cultivate."

Xiao Ge turned around and left.

"Wait! I'm going with you!" Sun Xiong hurriedly called out and ran to catch up to Xiao Ge.

Meanwhile, Nalan Jia finally noticed the change in Ye Guan's aura.

"You've made a breakthrough?" she asked.

Ye Guan nodded. "Yeah."

Nalan Jia smiled and said, "The martial contest is less than two months away. You must reach the Spacetime Realm before the martial contest starts."

Ye Guan nodded once again. He had to compete against many talents, and he couldn't afford to underestimate them. He was a swordsman, but he wasn't invincible.

Confidence was great, but one couldn't be complacent.

Nalan Jia stood up and said, "I'm going to go cultivate as well. I'll see you on the day of the welcome banquet!"

Ye Guan smiled upon seeing the butterfly hairpin in her hair.

"Okay," he said.

With that, Nalan Jia left.

However, Ye Guan remained standing at the same spot, feeling slightly worried.

He wanted to cultivate as well, but he only had less than two thousand gold spiritual crystals left. He needed more than that to reach the Spacetime Realm. He thought about asking his tutor, but he knew that Fei Banqing wasn't rich.

Nalan Jia suddenly came to a halt. She turned around to look at Ye Guan and asked, "How many gold spiritual crystals do you have left?"

Ye Guan smiled sheepishly and replied, "Two thousand..."

“That’s not a lot...”

“Well—” Ye Guan started.

However, Nalan Jia interrupted him. “Want to go and borrow some?”

Ye Guan was puzzled. “Borrow?”

Nalan Jia nodded and explained, “You can borrow spiritual crystals from the Immortal Treasures Pavilion, but there’s an interest to pay. For example, borrowing 10,000 gold spiritual crystals means that you’ll have to return 10,100 gold spiritual crystals next month. If you borrow 100,000 gold spiritual crystals, you’ll have to pay about 130,000 gold spiritual crystals next month.”

Ye Guan’s face fell, and he exclaimed, “That’s daylight robbery! Who came up with that? That’s too much!”

Little Pagoda didn’t know what to say.

Chapter 32: Wife

I had no idea they offer loans with such a scary interest rate... Ye Guan was at a loss for words. He truly had no idea that Immortal Treasures Pavilion was also a lending institution.

Nalan Jia grinned and asked, “Are we going to get a loan?”

“It’s daylight robbery, so there’s no way we’ll get a loan!” Ye Guan shook his head, but he seemed to have come up with something as he fell into deep contemplation.

He emerged from his thoughts moments later and continued. “Do they buy treasures?”

Nalan Jia asked, “Are you going to sell that pill?”

Ye Guan nodded. Right now, he had an Earth-rank and a Sky-rank demonic beast internal pill. They weren't useful to him anymore, so he could sell them in exchange for gold spiritual crystals. He still had an earth vein, but there was no way he would sell that to the Immortal Treasures Pavilion.

The earth vein is going to the Ye Clan!

Ye Guan was only going to give the Ye Clan the earth vein once they became one of the strongest clans of Nanzhou. After all, an earth vein would bring disaster to a clan if they weren't strong enough to protect it.

"Since you're going to go down that route, then you can also sell the pills you gave me back then," said Nalan Jia. She still hadn't used the two demonic beast internal pills that she had received from Ye Guan.

Ye Guan nodded. "Let's go."

With that, the pair left the Xiao Residence and headed for the Immortal Treasures Pavilion.

The Immortal Treasures Pavilion's branch in this city was located on the busiest street at the heart of the city, and the branch was so large that it took up two hundred hectares of land. Ye Guan and Nalan Jia were stunned upon arriving at the Immortal Treasures Pavilion branch.

How luxurious...

They were standing in front of an Immortal Treasures Pavilion branch, but the building in front of them wasn't like any other building. It was nine stories high, and its doors were wide open.

There was a constant stream of people entering and exiting the building.

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia entered, and a well-dressed woman walked toward them.

"How may I help you?" the well-dressed woman asked with a smile.

Nalan Jia replied, "We're here to sell treasures."

"Please follow me." The well-dressed woman led Ye Guan and Nalan Jia somewhere.

Soon, Ye Guan and Nalan Jia found themselves in a hall filled with people. The people were standing in a queue in front of twelve counters.

Ye Guan was surprised, and he asked, "Are they here to sell as well?"

The well-dressed woman confirmed. "Yes, they're here to sell treasures."

Ye Guan nodded. He seemed to be hesitating as he took out a Sky-rank demonic beast internal pill and said, "Can you take a look at this?"

The well-dressed woman's eyes brightened, and she smiled brightly as well.

"I see. Please follow me!" she said and led the pair over to a private room.

An old man was in the private room, and he was currently examining what looked like a fragment of a scale.

The well-dressed woman called out, "Elder Fu, we got something good!"

The old man looked up and glanced at Ye Guan and Nalan Jia.

"Let me see," he said.

Ye Guan opened his palm and showed the Sky-rank demonic beast internal pill.

“It’s just a Sky-rank demonic beast internal pill. Why did you bring that here?” the old man said while shaking his head. Afterward, he looked away and continued examining the fragment of a scale in front of him.

The well-dressed woman exclaimed, “Elder Fu, take a closer look!”

The old man frowned. He looked at the demonic beast internal pill with narrowed eyes. He finally noticed something, and his eyes shone sharply before he gasped and exclaimed, “It’s the internal pill of a Lightning Engulfing Beast!”

He snatched the pill from Ye Guan’s hand.

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia glanced at each other, looking puzzled. They weren’t that knowledgeable about demonic beasts, so they couldn’t understand why the old man was so excited.

The old man looked at Ye Guan and asked, “How much are you going to sell this?”

Ye Guan replied, “Shouldn’t you make an offer first?”

Elder Fu stared deeply at Ye Guan and asked, “Where did you come from?”

Ye Guan’s expression darkened.

Damn it, it’s this trick again! Ye Guan could already deduce that the old man would lowball him once the latter discovered that he had come from Nanzhou. After all, Ye Guan was well aware that one’s background was everything in this day and age.

Swoosh!

Nalan Jia suddenly emitted a special aura.

The old man gasped, startled.

“The legendary Holy Spirit Physique! My goodness...” the old man stammered as he stared at Nalan Jia with wide eyes. Moments later, he composed himself and hurriedly instructed the well-dressed woman. “Little Xiu, hurry up and serve tea to our esteemed guests!”

The well-dressed woman scrambled away.

Meanwhile, Elder Fu smiled and gestured. “Miss, please take a seat!”

Nalan Jia nodded and sat next to Ye Guan.

The well-dressed woman returned with two cups of tea.

Nalan Jia gracefully sipped on her tea and casually asked, “I heard that the Immortal Treasures Pavilion conducts their business fairly. That’s why I came here. What is your offer?”

Elder Fu hesitated, but he soon raised his hand and spread out five fingers.

Nalan Jia asked, “Five million gold spiritual crystals?”

Elder Fu stiffened, and he chuckled awkwardly. “Miss, you’re scaring me here. My offer is fifty thousand gold spiritual crystals.”

Nalan Jia snapped. “Can you be more sincere?”

The old man was at a loss for words. He was convinced that Nalan Jia knew why he had to beat around the bush, so why was she getting mad?

Nalan Jia slammed her cup on the table and demanded. “Go higher!”

The old man was silent for quite a while before he said, "I can't go any higher."

Nalan Jia opened her palm, and the Sky-rank demonic beast internal pill flew into her hand. She looked at Ye Guan and said, "Let's go."

Ye Guan nodded obediently, and they stood up to leave.

"Wait!" the old man urgently cried out, "Hang on, we can still talk about it!"

Nalan Jia whipped, looking annoyed. "No, I have nothing to discuss with a devious old man!"

The old man was stunned speechless, but he didn't dare to show his anger.

Nalan Jia not only had the legendary Holy Spirit Physique, but she was also arrogant. The old man deduced that she had a strong backer.

The Immortal Treasures Pavilion was strong, but the power belonged to the Immortal Treasures Pavilion rather than to him. I might lose my life if I carelessly offend her...

Nalan Jia and Ye Guan turned around and were about to leave.

Elder Fu cried out, "Eighty thousand! Eighty thousand gold spiritual crystals!"

Nalan Jia frowned.

Elder Fu chuckled bitterly in resignation. "Miss, that's the best price I can offer you..."

Nalan Jia stared deeply at Elder Fu and said, "Ninety thousand!"

“All right!” Elder Fu said, “Deal!”

He immediately took out a storage ring and handed it over to Nalan Jia. There were ninety thousand gold spiritual crystals in the storage ring. Nalan Jia and Ye Guan were speechless.

Damn, I had no idea that the Immortal Treasures Pavilion could concede...

Nalan Jia put away the storage ring and presented two more Sky-rank demonic beast internal pills to Elder Fu.

“How much are these?”

Elder Fu stiffened and could only make another offer.

Soon, Ye Guan and Nalan Jia emerged victorious from the Immortal Treasures Pavilion with three hundred thousand gold spiritual crystals on hand.

Nalan Jia extended over the storage ring containing the gold spiritual crystals to Ye Guan.

Ye Guan was about to object, but Nalan Jia glared at him.

“Don’t say anything!” she said.

He couldn’t argue with her at all.

“I know you need them as well, Little Jia,” Ye Guan said with a sigh.

Nalan Jia shook her head and said, “I don’t need them anymore.”

“I—” Ye Guan started.

Nalan Jia calmly interrupted. "I'm going to get angry."

Ye Guan helplessly put away the storage ring.

Nalan Jia grinned upon seeing that. However, she suddenly recalled something and glared at him.

"Don't even think about selling your Imperial-rank demonic beast internal pill..."

Ye Guan nodded. "I know!"

Obviously, an Imperial-rank demonic beast internal pill was more valuable than a Sky-rank demonic beast internal pill. Ye Guan would never sell it unless he was truly desperate.

Nalan Jia said, "Let's go!"

Ye Guan glanced at the Immortal Treasures Pavilion behind.

"Businessmen really are clever," he muttered.

Nalan Jia agreed. "They really are clever. In fact, I heard that the founder of the Immortal Treasures Pavilion came from a place called Milky Way. It's a place filled with cunning and devious people, and hierarchy there is strongly enforced."

Ye Guan asked, "Milky Way?"

Nalan Jia nodded and added, "Yes, and it's very far from where we are right now. While I was researching the founder of the Immortal Treasures Pavilion, I stumbled upon some notes about how the founder came from Milky Way. All sorts of people are apparently living in Milky Way; it's a pity that it's too far for us to visit."

Ye Guan nodded, and the pair continued on their journey to the Siao Residence. Upon arriving, they returned to their rooms to cultivate. Ye Guan sighed while staring at the three hundred thousand gold spiritual crystals in front of him. I'm so poor...

Little Pagoda asked, "Are you trying to make a breakthrough into the Spacetime Realm?"

Ye Guan nodded and said, "The martial contest is nigh, and I want to reach the Spacetime Realm by then."

Little Pagoda asked, "Your Royal Sword Art is already extremely fast, but do you want to know how to make it even faster?"

Ye Guan's interest and excitement were piqued. "I want to make my sword even faster, Master Pagoda. Can you please teach me?"

Little Pagoda explained, "Obviously, you'll be capable of manipulating space once you've reached the Spacetime Realm. Your sword will be able to teleport in front of your enemies, and you can do the same as well."

Ye Guan was stunned by the revelation. He had seen Spacetime Realm cultivators in action before, but it was his first time hearing that his sword could teleport as well.

Little Pgoda continued. "That's right. Your sword can travel through rifts in space to appear in front of your enemies. It's like teleportation, but not quite. Anyway, I know of a sword technique that takes advantage of space to deal a lethal blow.

"It's called Instant Death Strike, and it allows your sword to travel through space to kill your target in the proverbial blink of an eye."

Ye Guan eagerly asked, "What rank is it?"

Little Pagoda retorted, "Why does that matter?"

Ye Guan was taken aback.

Little Pagoda explained, "The destructiveness of a technique depends on the mastery of its wielder."

Ye Guan pondered over it and admitted. "I was too shortsighted."

Little Pagoda didn't mind it and said, "You'll be able to execute the Instant Death Strike once you've become a Spacetime Realm cultivator. Of course, it'll be up to you whether you're going to master it or not."

Ye Guan nodded. "All right!"

Little Pagoda continued with its lecture. "The key to reaching the Spacetime Realm is the understanding of spacetime. The Spacetime Realm cultivators whom you have stumbled upon so far have only scratched the surface of spacetime.

"They're Spacetime Realm cultivators, but it doesn't mean that they are truly capable of controlling spacetime."

"Once you've made a breakthrough into the Spacetime Realm, I want you to take a deep dive into spacetime before you attempt to make a breakthrough into the next realm!"

Ye Guan nodded once more. "I understand."

Little Pagoda said, "I happen to have a cultivation manual related to spacetime. It contains insights that your predecessors have recorded about spacetime. Take a look at it."

Ye Guan was thrilled, and he hurriedly exclaimed, "Sure, I'll take a look at it!"

A stream of information inundated Ye Guan's mind like a deluge. Ye Guan's expression turned serious as he processed the knowledge that he had just received.

He sat cross-legged and focused his attention on the spacetime around him.

Spacetime was obviously both space and time.

Spacetime was a combination of the two, but both space and time were their own unique concept. Time was an abstract concept, and Ye Guan couldn't quite wrap his head around it, so Little Pagoda decided to give him insights into space in the meantime.

Space was where matter took form. It sounded simple, but Ye Guan discovered that it was an endless quagmire. Ye Guan pondered deeply about it, and he slowly got engrossed in the concept of space.

The cultivation manual that Little Pagoda shared with him had many notes about spacetime. It taught him how to sense space, touch it and finally, control it.

Ye Guan was deep in his own thoughts, but he soon detached from his train of thought and slowly raised his hand. The space in front of him distorted, and Ye Guan suddenly clenched his fist.

Rip!

A rift in space appeared a few meters away from him, and his fist emerged from it.

He jumped for joy. I didn't expect that manipulating space would be so easy!

Ye Guan started performing the Royal Sword Art using what he had learned, and something strange occurred. The Path Sword blinked across the four corners of the room, and Ye Guan grinned from ear to ear at the sight.

His sword could truly travel through tiny rifts in space; it was teleporting!

Meanwhile, Little Pagoda was stupefied upon seeing Ye Guan's progress from inside the tiny pagoda.

“What an unbelievable talent! Whose talent did he inherit? Did he inherit Master’s talent? No, Master’s talent isn’t as great, and his mother isn’t very big on cultivating. She’s more like an entrepreneur.”

The mysterious voice remarked, “She’s not very big on cultivating, but she has created many worlds throughout the universe! It’s true that she doesn’t enjoy cultivating, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that she lacks talent.”

I almost forgot about that! Little Pagoda didn’t know what to say.

Just then, Ye Guan started scribbling something on a piece of paper.

Little Pagoda was puzzled.

“Why are you writing down the cultivation manual that I shared with you?”

Ye Guan revealed a cheeky smile and said, “I have to share it with Little Jia.”

“It’s an extremely valuable cultivation manual,” chided Little Pagoda.

“She’s my wife, and I’m her—Master Pagoda, do you not have a wife?” asked Ye Guan with a smile.

Little Pagoda was rendered speechless.

Chapter 33: Don't Like It? Let's Fight

It didn’t take Ye Guan that long to write down the cultivation manual that Little Pagoda had shared with him. He immediately rushed over to Nalan Jia’s room.

Little Pagoda’s voice sounded solemn as it said, “He’s not the same as his father.”

The mysterious voice spoke, "They are indeed not the same."

Little Pagoda replied, "His talent is too great, and he's improving by leaps and bounds. I don't think his growth rate is a good thing. I feel like we have to suppress his growth."

"I think you're being a worrywart. I think he's aware of the things that you're worried about as well. We should just focus on the big picture," said the mysterious voice.

Little Pagoda replied, "I agree."

...

Ye Guan soon arrived at Nalan Jia's room.

Nalan Jia was surprised to see him. However, Ye Guan handed a piece of paper over to Nalan Jia before the latter could even speak.

"What is that?" asked Nalan Jia. She was confused as she stared at the piece of paper.

Ye Guan grinned. "Read it."

Nalan Jia received the piece of paper and read it.

Her expression turned serious. "Goodness..."

Ye Guan smiled and explained, "A senior gave me a cultivation manual, and I wrote it down because I think it'll be helpful to you as well."

Nalan Jia skimmed the piece of paper and muttered in shock, "This is terrifying."

The piece of paper contained phrases that overturned what she knew about the Spacetime Realm.

“Cultivate well,” said Ye Guan before turning around to leave.

Nalan Jia’s expression was complicated as she looked at him leave.

“What a mysterious man,” she muttered. Indeed, the more she got to know Ye Guan, the more mysterious he appeared. Nalan Jia seemed to have thought of something, but she quickly shook her head and smiled. Her heart felt warm. The piece of paper in her hand was precious, but his intentions were priceless.

...

Ye Guan had fallen in love with the feeling of moving his sword through space. It couldn’t be helped because attacks using space as a medium of travel were unpredictable. Ordinary cultivators could only hope to dodge them.

If he knew how to use space as a medium of travel for his sword move, he wouldn’t have had to sneak attack Wei Tong.

Ye Guan was now practicing Instant Death Strike, and it was harder to execute than he initially thought. Instant Death Strike was a fully concentrated strike. Needless to say, it would kill his target in an instant.

In other words, mastering Instant Death Strike meant that Ye Guan could easily reap anyone’s life whenever he wanted to do so with his sword.

It was late at night, and Ye Guan was on a hill within the Siao Estate.

Ye Guan’s eyes were closed, and absolute silence surrounded him. All of a sudden, his eyes shot wide open, and a sword nailed a falling leaf into a tree trunk about a hundred meters away from him.

Ye Guan shook his head lightly. “It’s still not fast enough!”

He had just performed the so-called Instant Death Strike. He had gathered all of his divine soul energy to move his sword through a rift in space so that it would instantly appear in front of his target and deliver a fully concentrated strike.

However, Ye Guan felt that it was still not fast enough. I can be faster than that!

Ye Guan trained extremely hard late into the night.

He would rest whenever he got tired, and he would continue once he had slightly recovered. Ye Guan was working hard because he neither had powerful parents nor a powerful family as his backer. He knew that he could only count on himself.

The world was like a boundless ocean with incredibly powerful currents. It was extremely hard to find stability amidst the waves, and riding those waves to shine even brighter than the rest was more difficult than ascending the heavens.

However, Ye Guan remained undeterred, and he worked hard. He worked ten—no, a thousand times harder than anyone else. He was well aware that he could only shine brighter than anyone else through hard work.

Time passed, and the day of the welcome banquet finally arrived.

It was already afternoon, so Ye Guan went back to his room and got ready before heading toward Nalan Jia's room.

"Give me a moment," said Nalan Jia from her room.

Ye Guan stepped aside and waited next to the door.

He was wearing a white robe, and his tall figure made him look like a javelin. His complexion was fair and smooth, and his features were sharp and distinct. He was smiling faintly, which made him look cool and elegant.

A scented sachet was hanging from his waist.

The door finally opened, and Nalan Jia emerged. Ye Guan fell into a daze upon seeing her.

Nalan Jia was wearing a snow-white dress. Her eyebrows were delicate yet sharp, while her features were exquisite and flawless. Nalan Jia resembled a fairy as she walked over to Ye Guan.

Ye Guan was rendered speechless by her beauty, but he still noticed that she was wearing a butterfly hairpin.

Nalan Jia walked up to Ye Guan and smiled at him. "Let's go."

Ye Guan smiled and complimented her. "You look really beautiful today."

Nalan Jia blinked and asked, "Really?"

Ye Guan nodded.

Nalan Jia's lips curled up. "Let's see if that will hold true once you've seen Lady Luo Zhaoqi," she teased.

Ye Guan froze.

Nalan Jia grinned at the sight and chuckled before exclaiming, "Let's go!"

The pair walked over to the main gate of the Siao Residence. Sun Xiong and Siao Ge were already waiting for them, along with Fei Banqing and Song Fu.

"Be careful," said Fei Banqing.

Ye Guan nodded. "Okay."

Ye Guan, Nalan Jia, Sun Xiong, and Xiao Ge got into a carriage and headed to the Guanxuan Hall of Ceremonies.

Fei Banqing stared at the departing carriage and muttered, "I'm slightly worried."

"Are you worried about Ye Guan?" asked Song Fu with a smile.

Fei Banqing nodded.

Song Fu smiled gently. "Don't worry. He's a reasonable individual, and I don't think he's going to be at a disadvantage compared to the geniuses there."

Fei Banqing shook her head and smiled. "You're right."

...

Soon, the four talents of Nanzhou arrived at the Guanxuan Hall of Ceremonies.

It was an understatement to say that the hall was grand and luxurious because the front facade alone was decorated with all sorts of expensive decorations.

There were many people heading into the hall, but it seemed that only a hundred people were invited this time as well.

Those who had been invited could be considered the cream of the crop among the talented individuals throughout the three hundred and sixty states.

The four talents of Nanzhou presented their invitations and entered the hall.

The hall was spacious and could easily accommodate a few thousand people. There was a massive stone stage in the middle of the hall, and it seemed to be at least thirty meters in length and wide. There were round tables below the stone stage.

Siao Ge chuckled. "I think I still haven't told you guys, but the tables of each invitee have been carefully decided and arranged."

Ye Guan, Nalan Jia, and Sun Xiong looked at Siao Ge.

Siao Ge smiled and explained, "The farther you are from the stage, the lower your status is in the eyes of the Guanxuan Academy. By default, Qingzhou's table has always been the closest to the stage along with Yunzhou."

Sun Xiong shook his head and remarked, "We truly are living in a pragmatic world..."

Siao Ge glanced at Sun Xiong and smiled. "Indeed, we're living in a pragmatic world. The more benefits or value you bring, the more highly regarded you are. That is just how the world works..."

Sun Xiong nodded. "Yeah."

Siao Ge turned to look at the others and said, "Let's find our table."

The group looked around, but they couldn't find their table.

Nalan Jia pointed at the table near the stage. "Look over there!"

Siao Ge turned to look at where Nalan Jia was pointing, and his expression abruptly froze over. It turned out that they were assigned a table on the same row as Yunzhou.

The group was shocked, and they looked at each other in confusion.

Siao Ge asked, "Why are we assigned that table?"

Ye Guan shook his head and said, "I don't know."

Siao Ge's expression turned solemn as he said, "They have basically pushed us down into a pit of tigers. Who arranged the tables? Are they mad at us?"

Sun Xiong's voice was somber as he asked, "Are we going to go there?"

Siao Ge glanced hesitantly at Ye Guan.

Ye Guan was calm as he said, "Of course, we're going there. They gave us that table, so it's our right to sit in front of that table?"

"I'm afraid of creating enemies..." Siao Ge muttered.

Ye Guan smiled at him and said, "If a table is enough to frighten us, should we really aim for first place?"

With that, Ye Guan walked toward their table, seemingly unafraid. Ye Guan was well aware that against those arrogant but talented, one had to remain steadfast and unafraid. If I show them that I'm a pushover, they're definitely going to bully me. They're going to gang up on me!

Nalan Jia smiled and followed behind Ye Guan. Siao Ge chuckled before chasing after them. Sun Xiong couldn't sit on the floor, so he followed after the three.

All eyes were on Ye Guan and his group as they walked over to their table, and those eyes widened in shock upon seeing the plaque on the table.

Nanzhou Guanxuan Academy? Nanzhou?!

The faces of every invitee in the hall turned strange.

Nanzhou has always been at the bottom of the rankings, right? Qingzhou is on the first row, and it's not strange that Yunzhou is on the second row, but why is Nanzhou on the same row as Yunzhou? What's going on?

The invitees showed many different expressions—some were confused, some were curious, and there were many who were unhappy.

Siao Ge looked around and smiled. "They're looking at us."

Ye Guan sipped on his cup. "Let them."

Siao Ge smiled. "My instincts are telling me that there's going to be trouble."

Ye Guan remained calm as he said, "Don't create trouble but don't be scared of trouble."

Siao Ge laughed. "Indeed."

A man with his hair tied back into a ponytail walked into the hall. He was clad in a simple cotton shirt and pants, and he was wearing a pair of straw sandals.

He looked very shabby for the occasion that several people in the hall even ridiculed him as he entered.

However, the mocking smiles of those people soon froze over, and it was all because the man in a ponytail walked over to the table next to Ye Guan and his group.

It was clear that the man in a ponytail was Zuo Fu from Yunzhou, sobering everyone up.

The reigning second place—that was how everyone evaluated Yunzhou. However, they weren't mocking Yunzhou for being the reigning second place. After all, it was incredibly difficult to maintain one's ranking every time the martial contest was held.

Zuo Fu sat and turned to a maidservant.

"A cup of water, please," he said.

The maidservant hurriedly poured him a cup of water.

Zuo Fu retrieved a biscuit and started eating it, seemingly treating everyone else as air.

Ye Guan's expression was solemn as he looked at Zuo Fu. He couldn't feel Zuo Fu's aura at all.

However, Ye Guan wasn't alone. Everyone else was also trying to assess Zuo Fu.

Yunzhou had always sent three representatives, but they only sent one representative for this decade's martial contest, which was abnormal.

Meanwhile, a woman and a man entered the hall. The man was tall and burly. The muscles on his chest and arms were bulging, and he looked impressive overall.

The woman was wearing a simple cyan dress, and her long hair was draped over her shoulders. She was holding a long saber in her slender hand. Her gaze was cold as the snowfields of winter, and they were completely devoid of emotions.

The woman walked over to the first table with the man. Qingzhou!

The entire hall was so silent that one could hear a pin drop.

Ao Han and Mu Yunhan!

Ao Han glanced at Zuo Fu before making a sidelong glance at Ye Guan's group. However, Mu Yunhan was only looking at Nalan Jia.

Siao Ge turned to Ye Guan and muttered, "One of them is still missing..."

Ye Guan was about to say something when a woman slowly sauntered into the hall.

Everyone's eyes lit up upon seeing the woman. The woman was wearing a red top with a purple shawl, and her chest was so bountiful that it seemed like it would burst out of her clothes anytime soon.

The woman was wearing a light green skirt that accentuated her figure, and the way she walked was aesthetically pleasing. Her eyes were as clear as a placid lake, and her gaze was determined and steady. She was also giving off a noble and elegant aura.

Overall, she had the figure of a devil but the visage of an angel.

No other woman in the hall aside from Nalan Jia could compare to her beauty. She was none other than Luo Zhaoqi, the Chief Student Representative of the Upper Realm's Guanxuan Academy.

Nalan Jia suddenly asked, "Am I more beautiful or is she more beautiful?"

"Well—" Ye Guan started.

However, Nalan Jia interrupted. "Be honest!"

Ye Guan pondered over it seriously before responding, "She's very beautiful. Her looks are comparable to yours, but her beauty has nothing to do with me?"

"How about my beauty? Does it have anything to do with you?" asked Nalan Jia.

Ye Guan nodded. "Of course, you're my lover, after all!"

Nalan Jia stared blankly at the response, but she soon revealed a bright smile. She was so happy that she couldn't help but let out an angelic chuckle. The moment she chuckled, the hall seemed to have been dyed in her colors.

Under everyone's gaze, Luo Zhaoqi slowly walked onto the stage. She swept her gaze across everyone and smiled. "On behalf of the Guanxuan Academy, I would like to welcome all of you to the Upper Realm."

A man suddenly stood up and bowed slightly toward Luo Zhaoqi. He smiled and said, "Student Representative Luo, my name is Lu Ke, and I'm from the Profound Sky Clan. I have something to say."

Luo Zhaoqi looked at Lu Ke and smiled. "Please speak."

"Qingzhou's table is on the first row, and it's fine. Yunzhou's table is on the second row, and it's fine as well." Lu Ke's smile deepened, and he pointed at Ye Guan's group before continuing. "However, I cannot accept seeing Nanzhou on the second row along with Yunzhou!"

Luo Zhaoqi's eyes narrowed. Meanwhile, Ye Guan placed his cup on the table and looked at Lu Ke.

"Don't like it? Let's fight," said Ye Guan.

How straightforward and direct!

Everyone was stunned.

Chapter 34: I Just Don't Like You

A challenge? Everyone was stunned.

No one expected Nanzhou's Ye Guan to be so arrogant. To think that he would outright challenge him...

Lu Ke's face soured. He also didn't expect Ye Guan to react that way. Damn it! Just how reckless can you be? Why are you challenging people just like that?!

He wasn't planning on fighting Ye Guan. He just wanted to stir up some trouble and make everyone Ye Guan and his group the public enemy. In addition, he wasn't the only one who was unhappy. Everyone else was unhappy as well.

Why is Nanzhou seated in the second row?

He decided to speak out and make everyone point their spears at Nanzhou. However, he didn't expect that Ye Guan would challenge him outright.

It was such a ballsy move that threw Lu Ke's plan for a loop. Now, everyone was looking at him. If I don't like it, then we should fight. How can it be that easy?

Luo Zhaoqi stared at Ye Guan with interest. Nanzhou wasn't qualified to attend the welcome banquet. However, she suddenly received an order from above to invite Nanzhou and make them sit in the second row.

Naturally, Luo Zhaoqi was curious about Ye Guan and his group, and she grew even more curious when Ye Guan challenged Lu Ke outright.

Ye Guan slowly walked toward Lu Ke under everyone's gaze. "You don't like it? Let's fight! If it's not exciting enough for you, we can go for a deathmatch."

A deathmatch! Everyone reeled in shock. He's risking it!

Lu Ke's expression turned ugly. Lu Ke became uneasy upon witnessing Ye Guan's arrogance, but he knew that he couldn't back down.

If I back down, what will they think of me?

Ye Guan definitely has something up his sleeves, and that is why he's so arrogant. What should I do?

Lu Ke looked up at Luo Zhaoqi. At this point, only the Chief Student Representative of the Upper Realm's Guanxuan Academy could put a stop to all this.

Luo Zhaoqi smiled and betrayed Lu Ke's expectations by saying, "Our Guanxuan Academy will provide the venue for free if you accept his challenge, Lu Ke."

Lu Ke's expression worsened, and everyone's gaze fell on him.

The others were unhappy as well, but they didn't dare to express it. There was a moment of silence.

"I was too hasty. The academy must have a reason for arranging the seats this way." Lu Ke shattered the silence with a smile. He turned to Ye Guan and clasped his hands. "I have no ill intent, Brother Ye. My apologies."

Everyone looked at Lu Ke, but they stared at him in appreciation rather than mocking him. They acknowledged Lu Ke as someone who knew when to advance and when to retreat. They were convinced that he would achieve great things in the future.

Ye Guan gazed at Lu Ke and responded, "I forgive you. Be careful and don't repeat that mistake. Be a good boy from now on."

With that, he turned around and returned to his seat.

Lu Ke stared blankly at Ye Guan while everyone else struggled to contain their laughter.

Siao Ge said to Ye Guan, "He's definitely going to try something."

Ye Guan was calm as he replied, "It's fine."

Siao Ge was stunned, but he eventually smiled and remarked, "Brother Ye, you really are confident, hahaha!"

Ye Guan smiled and shook his head.

Ye Guan was well aware that there would always be stronger people out there. In his eyes, people should be humble. However, Ye Guan's personality and principle had always been to beat people up if they dared to stir up trouble against him.

The chances of winning didn't matter. It would be embarrassing if he didn't dare to fight those who were barking in his front yard. Life was difficult enough, so why would he put up with those who were trying to make his life even more difficult?

Luo Zhaoqi smiled. "Starting tomorrow, my Guanxuan Academy will be open for everyone to cultivate. My Guanxuan Academy has thirty-six trial towers with unique trials. You can choose to cultivate in any of them, but you have to pay the corresponding fee."

The people in the hall were thrilled to hear that the Guanxuan Academy would open their cultivation grounds for outsiders like them. It had been one of their problems since they arrived in the city.

The city had no suitable cultivation grounds for them, and they had been itching to cultivate properly. After all, the decennial martial contest was only about two months away.

Two months wouldn't seem like a long time to other people, but they were extraordinary talents who could improve by leaps and bounds in just two months. In addition, the cultivation grounds they could access from tomorrow onward were on the Upper Realm.

It couldn't compare to the cultivation grounds that they had in their state.

Ye Guan was delighted as well because the Siao Residence didn't really have a decent cultivation ground.

Luo Zhaoqi's news was fantastic.

Luo Zhaoqi added, "I'm not done yet. There's another piece of fantastic news that I'm sure everyone will like. The prizes for the top three cultivators have been made more bountiful, and the first placer will receive a mysterious prize."

A mysterious prize! Everyone's interest was piqued.

Luo Zhaoqi swept her gaze across everyone and smiled.

"You have been training for decades, but the upcoming martial contest alone is enough for any of you to rise to fame. On behalf of the Guanxuan Academy, I wish you all the best, and I hope that all of you will achieve your desired ranking. Let's make ourselves, our families, and our clans proud!" she said.

Soon, the hall was filled with music, and maidservants walked into the hall while carrying dishes of delicious food. Luo Zhaoqi walked down the stage while a group of beautiful ladies walked onto the stage and started dancing.

Ye Guan shook his head with a smile. It seemed that the Guanxuan Academy really knew how to have fun.

Some of the men started inviting the ladies to dance.

Siao Ge also went to find and invite a lady to dance. The lady didn't reject him, and they started dancing.

All of a sudden, a man appeared in front of Nalan Jia. He bowed and smiled. "May I take—"

Nalan Jia shook her head and turned to look at Ye Guan. She smiled and rejected the man. "I'm his fiancée."

The man smiled. He looked like he didn't mind it as he said, "It's just one dance."

Ye Guan interrupted. "Why don't I dance with you?"

The man's expression stiffened.

Ye Guan stared at the man and said, "Is it because I'm a man that you don't want to dance with me?"

The man could only leave after being berated by Ye Guan.

Ye Guan turned to look at Nalan Jia and asked, "Do you know how to dance?"

Nalan Jia shook her head.

Ye Guan smiled and suggested. "Why don't we walk around?"

Nalan Jia nodded. "All right!"

They stood up and were about to leave the hall, but their eyes captured a man approaching Mu Yunhan.

Mu Yunhan merely glanced at the man before looking away.

"Get lost," she spat coldly.

The man froze, but he quickly left without saying anything.

Mu Yunhan was from Qingzhou, and he couldn't afford to offend Qingzhou's representative.

However, the man wasn't the only one who couldn't afford to offend Qingzhou. The entire Upper Realm also couldn't afford to offend Qingzhou, while the Zhongtu Divine Continent had to be respectful to Qingzhou.

After all, Qingzhou was the Sword Master's birthplace.

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia exchanged glances before heading out.

Lu Ke seemed to be deep in his thoughts as he stared at the two.

It was already night outside, and the sky was filled with stars. The bright moon was also hanging overhead.

The pair slowly strolled down a trail, and the light night breeze felt cool on their skin.

Nalan Jia suddenly blurted out. "That Zuo Fu isn't simple..."

Ye Guan nodded. He had been paying attention to Zuo Fu as well, and Ye Guan noticed that Zuo Fu never paid any attention to anyone. He was focused on eating his snack.

Zuo Fu seemed like a recluse, and Ye Guan knew that people like him were the scariest type of people out there!

"Mu Yunhan is a saber cultivator. She's reserved, but her saber contains immense power. The appearance of her saber in her hand alone is enough to intimidate those with weaker hearts," said Nalan Jia. She paused for a few moments before emphasizing. "She's very strong!"

Ye Guan nodded. "I felt that as well..."

"Ao Han is a physique cultivator. Swordsmen and physique cultivators are extremely difficult to handle. Swordsmen possess powerful offensive prowess, far more powerful than others of the same realm, and their swords can pierce almost anything.

"On the other hand, physique cultivators are scarier than swordsmen if one wasn't strong enough to break their defenses. They're basically undefeatable as long as their defenses are up..." said Nalan Jia.

Ye Guan chuckled without saying anything.

It seemed that Nalan Jia wasn't done just yet as she continued. "Qingzhou still has a representative that we haven't seen yet, and it seems that he's more powerful than the two representatives we have seen so far."

Nalan Jia turned to look at Ye Guan and asked, "Are you still aiming for first place?"

Ye Guan nodded.

Nalan Jia didn't look away. She continued staring at him without saying anything.

Ye Guan smiled softly and explained, "If I'm not going to fight, then I won't aim for anything. However, I will be fighting in the contest, so I have to aim for first place! I've never thought that I'm invincible, but I don't think I'm worse than others."

Nalan Jia grinned at him. "I'll fight with you, then."

Ye Guan smiled. "Sure!"

The two of them continued walking in silence.

Ye Guan eventually broke the ice and said, "Little Jia, I have this burning question about your Holy Spirit Physique. Is it true that you'll never face any bottlenecks?"

Nalan Jia nodded. "Yes."

Ye Guan's voice turned solemn as he said, "Does that mean you can keep going high and higher without stopping?"

Nalan Jia smiled at him and replied, "I decided to stop making any progress for now."

Ye Guan was confused. "Why?"

Nalan Jia explained, "The cultivation manual you gave me made me understand that I have to thoroughly understand each realm. Otherwise, my foundation will be shaky. My cultivation base is higher than yours, but I'm not confident that I can beat you."

Ye Guan was silent.

Nalan Jia added, "My foundation has to be strong."

Ye Guan nodded. "Indeed. A cultivator's foundation has to be strong, so I guess that's the drawback about multiple breakthroughs in a short period of time."

"Yup, and it's all thanks to the cultivation manual that you shared with me. If it hadn't been for it, I would still be engrossed in the thrill of breaking through realms."

"I would have naturally become even stronger than I am right now, but my foundation would have been considerably shaky," said Nalan Jia with a smile.

Ye Guan smiled as well and said, "I guess we have to work hard together."

Nalan Jia's smile deepened. "Yes, let's work hard together."

The atmosphere between the pair was warm and peaceful as they walked slowly into the distance beneath the moonlight.

“Ye Guan!” A voice echoed from behind them.

Suddenly, Sun Xiong ran over. “Ye Guan!”

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia turned around and saw Sun Xiong running over toward them.

Sun Xiong reached them and said in a solemn voice, “You should go back to the Hall of Ceremonies. Xiao Ge is about to go onto the Life or Death Stage with Lu Ke.”

Ye Guan was stunned. “Why?”

Sun Xiong’s expression turned ugly. “Lu Ke stole Xiao Ge’s dance partner right in front of him, and his dance partner chose Lu Ke over Xiao Ge to intentionally humiliate him... damn it! It was clearly a trap by that trash, Lu Ke!”

“Are they already on the Life or Death Stage?” asked Ye Guan.

Sun Xiong replied, “No, but they’re heading over right now.”

Ye Guan’s eyes narrowed. “Let’s go!”

With that, Ye Guan rushed over to the Hall of Ceremonies, and Nalan Jia followed after him without saying anything. They arrived just in time to see Xiao Ge and Lu Ke walking toward the Life or Death Stage.

Siao Ge’s previous dance partner was standing next to Lu Ke.

Lu Ke smiled at Ye Guan. “Young Lord Ye, this is a fair challenge. Don’t be a busybody—”

Ye Guan abruptly vanished. Lu Ke's expression changed drastically. He didn't expect that Ye Guan would attack him outright. He was caught off guard and could only try to defend himself. However, Ye Guan was much faster than him.

Pak!

A loud and crisp sound echoed. Ye Guan's slap sent Lu Ke flying.

Everyone was stunned.

"Ye Guan!" Lu Ke glared sinisterly at Ye Guan.

Ye Guan stared coldly at Lu Ke and explained, "There's no particular reason behind that slap. I just don't like you. Don't like it? Let's fight!"

Everyone was rendered speechless.

The lady next to Lu Ke spat coldly. "Ye Guan, who do you think you are? We're in the Hall of Ceremonies. You're disrespecting Lady Luo and the Guanxuan Academy by making a move here. Are you—"

Nalan Jia abruptly vanished.

Pak!

A loud and crisp noise reverberated throughout the hall, and the lady was sent flying away by Nalan Jia's slap.

Nalan Jia stared indifferently at her and explained. "There's no particular reason behind that slap. I just don't like you. Don't like it? Let's fight!"

The scene left everyone utterly flabbergasted.

...

Chapter 35: His Grandfather!

The people in the hall were looking at the commotion. They didn't expect that the two of them would have another argument. They were also caught off guard by the fact that Ye Guan and Nalan Jia were strong, even though they were from Nanzhou.

Lu Ke's expression turned hideous. He glared in fury at Ye Guan. He didn't bother saying anything as he reached out with his hand toward Ye Guan.

The space in front of Ye Guan distorted, and a hand emerged from a rift in space.

However, Ye Guan was nowhere to be seen by the time the hand emerged from the rift.

Lu Ke's pupils shrank, and he hurriedly placed his left hand over his chest.

Boom!

There was a muffled bang as Lu Ke was sent flying by more than thirty meters. He crashed to the ground. He was about to stand up when Ye Guan suddenly appeared in front of him and stepped on his chest.

Pah!

Lu Ke coughed out blood. He glared at Ye Guan and taunted. "Kill me!"

Everyone looked at Ye Guan.

Kill?

They were in the Hall of Ceremonies rather than on the Life or Death Stage.

It wouldn't be good if someone were to die here.

"Young Lord Ye!" A voice echoed, and it came from Luo Zhaoqi. She looked at Ye Guan with a smile and reminded him. "Please don't break the rules..."

She sounded gentle, but it was clear that she was demanding Ye Guan to stop.

After a few moments of silence, Ye Guan looked at Lu Ke.

"What did you say just now?" he asked.

Lu Ke smiled crookedly at Ye Guan and taunted. "Kill me!"

Ye Guan lifted his leg and stomped Lu Ke's throat.

Crack!

Lu Ke's eyes widened as he took his last breath.

The spectators' faces changed instantly. Ye Guan's murder of Lu Ke was a blatant disrespect to Luo Zhaoqi and her status as the Chief Student Representative.

Luo Zhaoqi was no longer smiling.

Ye Guan turned to look at her and bowed slightly before saying, "Student Representative Luo, I didn't mean to offend you and the academy, but... you saw it as well! He asked me to kill him, and I simply obliged!"

The crowd's faces stiffened.

Luo Zhaoqi wordlessly stared at Ye Guan.

However, Ye Guan remained extremely calm beneath her gaze.

She walked up to Ye Guan and smiled before saying, "Indeed. I saw it myself as well, so let's forget about this matter then, Young Lord Ye!"

She waved her sleeve, and Lu Ke's corpse was reduced to ashes before being swallowed by a tiny rift in space.

Luo Zhaoqi's movement looked casual, but she reduced Lu Ke's corpse into ashes in the proverbial blink of an eye and opened a tiny rift in space to dispose of his cremated remains.

The display of might caused everyone's faces to change slightly.

One thing was for sure—Luo Zhaoqi was extremely powerful! They stared at her with awe. It seemed that the Chief Student Representative of the Upper Realm's Guanxuan Academy wasn't just a mascot.

Meanwhile, Ye Guan remained unperturbed.

Luo Zhaoqi swept her gaze across everyone else and smiled.

"Please have fun, everyone. If someone dares to stir up another trouble, then don't blame me for taking matters into my own hands!" she warned.

Luo Zhaoqi glanced at the lady next to Lu Ke earlier and said, "The Profound Sky Clan is disqualified from participating in this decade's martial contest, and they are also not allowed to participate in the next martial contest."

The lady's face was beyond pallid. The crowd threw sorry gazes at her. The Profound Sky Clan was done for. They were doomed because the fact that they had been disqualified from participating in this decade's martial contest and banned from participating in the next meant that they would lose a ton of resources.

Luo Zhaoqi finally left.

Ye Guan and his group lost all interest in the welcome banquet, and they decided to leave together.

Meanwhile, Luo Zhaoqi was seated in another hall and was taking a sip of tea.

An old man was seated opposite her, and he was none other than the Courtyard Chief of the Hall of Ceremonies.

Luo Zhaoqi smiled at him and asked, "Chief Li, was it the Academy Chief who told you to invite Young Lord Ye?"

Chief Li nodded. "Indeed."

Luo Zhaoqi remained smiling without saying anything.

Chief Li asked, "Little Qi, did you sense anything weird about him?"

Luo Zhaoqi was quiet for a while before saying, "He was hiding his strength."

"How much?"

“At least sixty percent...”

Sixty percent?! Chief Li went silent. Ye Guan actually managed to kill Lu Ke, a Spacetime Realm cultivator, with just forty percent of his true strength? In that case, he truly couldn't be underestimated.

Luo Zhaoqi added, “I think I'm mistaken. There's no way the Academy Chief would give him preferential treatment if he were only hiding sixty percent of his strength. I think he was hiding at least eighty percent.”

Eighty percent! Chief Li's pupils shrank. The idea that Ye Guan killed Lu Ke with just twenty percent of his entire strength was absurd.

Luo Zhaoqi revealed a contemptuous smile. “I'm more concerned about Zuo Fu.”

Chief Li was slightly confused. “Zuo Fu?”

Luo Zhaoqi nodded and explained, “I think he's the most mysterious out of everyone in the banquet.”

“How is he compared to that individual from Qingzhou?”

“I don't think it's fair to compare the two of them to each other because that individual from Qingzhou is rumored to be the third most talented individual in all of history!”

Chief Li asked, “Third? Who are the first and second?”

Luo Zhaoqi picked up her teacup and took a sip before saying, “The Sword Master and An Guoshi.”

Chief Li's expression stiffened.

Luo Zhaoqi chuckled and continued. "I have to say that it's truly unfortunate to be born in the same generation as that individual from Qingzhou. Forces from the Zhongtu Divine Continent are even keeping an eye on him..."

"Really?" Chief Li asked.

Luo Zhaoqi nodded, "They even sent someone down to come and escort him. The moment he gets first place in the contest, I reckon that they'll immediately bring him over to the Zhongtu Divine Continent."

"Why are they in such a rush?"

"I've heard that it's somewhat related to the Destiny Contest, but I'm not sure about the specifics. They decided to take that individual from Qingzhou with them."

Chief Li shook his head and sighed. "In that case, we can say that the results of the upcoming martial contest have already been decided."

Luo Zhaoqi remained calm as she said, "The Immortal Treasures Pavilion has predicted that Qingzhou will come in first while Yunzhou will come in second."

Chief Li asked, "What about Nanzhou?"

Luo Zhaoqi smirked and replied, "From what I've seen today, I think they'll be in the top ten."

"That's a pretty good result! Nanzhou's ranking has always been rock-bottom all these years." Chief Li nodded and paused before saying, "What are your thoughts on Ye Guan?"

Luo Zhaowei was silent for a few moments before she responded, "He's talented, but he's too impulsive. He also seems ignorant about when to hide his true feelings... I think it'll be difficult for him to achieve great things!"

...

Ye Guan and his group left the Hall of Ceremonies and made their way to the Siao Residence. On the way, Ye Guan looked at the sulking Siao Ge and laughed.

“Are you still upset?” he asked.

“I just didn’t expect that she’s from the Profound Sky Clan...”

“Well, it has become clear that she had ulterior motives when she approached you, so I think you should stop sulking over it. It’s not worth it to lose sleep over someone like that,” said Ye Guan.

“Yeah, you’re right.” Siao Ge nodded.

Ye Guan continued. “The Profound Sky Clan has suffered a great loss, and I don’t think that they’ll let this matter slide.”

Siao Ge laughed and said, “Don’t worry, they won’t dare to do anything to us before the martial contest starts. Otherwise, they’ll be making an enemy out of the Guanxuan Academy. They’ll never do something like that.”

Ye Guan nodded in agreement. “We still have to be cautious.”

Siao Ge said, “Yeah. Anyway, I’m going to the Guanxuan Academy tomorrow and cultivate in their trial tower. I’m sure the trial towers there are better than the trial towers we have on the Lower Realm.”

“Sure, have fun.” Ye Guan chuckled before asking, “Are you sure that both of you don’t have anything else to do tonight?”

Siao Ge was stunned by the incomprehensible question, but his expression soon darkened. Damn it! This bastard is trying to chase us away!

However, he could only glare at Ye Guan before turning to look at Sun Xiong.

“Sun Xiong, I need your help with something. Come with me!” he said.

Sun Xiong glanced at Ye Guan and Nalan Jia before nodding. He was a bit naive, but he wasn’t ignorant. Soon, the two of them disappeared, leaving Ye Guan and Nalan Jia by themselves.

Nalan Jia chuckled and broke the silence. “My intuition is telling me that the reason you didn’t care about offending Chief Student Representative Luo was that you’ve already offended her.”

Ye Guan remained calm and said, “I don’t really care.”

“Is that so?”

“Why would I care what she thinks of me?”

“She’s the Chief Student Representative of the Upper Realm’s Guanxuan Academy!”

Ye Guan shook his head and said, “Her status does not matter to me. I will not beg for her attention, and I don’t need her help as well. She looks amiable, but she’s actually very prideful. I think she’ll look down on me if I were to lick her boots.”

Nalan Jia smiled. She was about to say something when Ye Guan shook his head and interrupted. “Let’s not talk about her anymore! I don’t want to talk about another woman while I’m with you.”

Nalan Jia’s smile deepened.

The pair walked slowly toward the Siao Residence while talking about trivial matters, and it was a heartwarming night overall.

Upon arriving at the Siao Residence, Nalan Jia returned to her room, while Ye Guan left and went straight to one of the Guanxuan Academy’s trial peaks. He didn’t want to waste even a second of his waking hour; he decided to go ahead and cultivate.

He soon arrived at his destination. The Upper Realm's Guanxuan Academy had thirty-six trial peaks, and each of them was unique.

Ye Guan pondered over it for quite a while before he decided to choose a trial tower suitable for honing one's comprehension of spacetime.

The trial tower allowed Ye Guan to not only comprehend spacetime but to comprehend spacetime manipulation, spacetime gravity, spacetime density, and spacetime power as well.

Ye Guan chose to work on spacetime gravity.

His goal was to train on his Instant Death Strike under the influence of heavier gravity.

Ye Guan soon arrived in front of the trial tower that he had chosen and saw that it was the same as the trial towers on the Lower Realm. It had nine floors as well.

The first floor had an additional layer of gravity acting on it, while the second floor had two additional layers of gravity acting on it and so on. The highest floor—the ninth floor—had nine additional layers of gravity acting on it.

Ye Guan handed over the gold spiritual crystals and entered the first floor.

He instantly felt heavy as an invisible force bore down on him. He summoned a strand of sword energy with a thought and sent it flying. He immediately noticed that the strand of sword energy was flying slower than usual.

It was definitely because of the difference in gravity...

Ye Guan grimaced before practicing his sword techniques under these special conditions. He trained like a crazed madman. He executed his sword techniques over and over again until he was completely exhausted.

Ye Guan repeated the same routine until he got used to the spacetime gravity on the first floor. His sword energy could now travel at the same speed outside, so Ye Guan decisively entered the second floor.

Time passed by slowly, and on the fifth day, Ye Guan had already arrived at the fourth floor.

However, his expression fell the moment he entered the fourth floor. The fourth floor had four additional layers of gravity compared to the outside world. If he had gone straight to the fourth floor, he wouldn't have been able to move even an inch.

He took deep breaths and slowly mustered his sword energy. Ye Guan had recently discovered that cultivating under pressure also improved his concentration and mental power.

In the beginning, it took a huge toll on him, and his sword energy had become much slower compared to the outside world. Today, it was still the case, but Ye Guan was adapting quite rapidly to the gravity in the tower.

He was getting faster and faster, and he was improving slowly but surely.

Little Pagoda's voice echoed in the tiny pagoda.

"This brat really reminds me of someone!" it said.

The mysterious voice guessed, "His father?"

Little Pagoda said, "No, his grandfather!"

The mysterious voice went silent.

Little Pagoda continued. "He's not as extreme as his grandfather, but his level of perseverance and determination is almost similar to his grandfather's."

After a few moments of silence, the mysterious voice said, "I feel like you shouldn't scare him too often and make him believe that he's truly an illegitimate child. I think he's going to be in danger at this rate.

"Just look at how hard he's trying to become stronger as soon as possible... my heart is aching just looking at him."

Little Pagoda retorted, "Do you really think that what he's going to face in the future is more dangerous than making him think that he's an illegitimate child?"

"Fine, then scare him even more! Scare him but don't scare him to death!"

Little Pagoda didn't know what to say.

Chapter 36: Go On!

Cultivation was a lengthy process. It had already been a month since Ye Guan started training in the tower. He was currently on the sixth floor, and there were an additional six layers of gravity acting on the sixth floor.

The sixth floor made Ye Guan feel as if he were carrying the entire weight of a mountain on his shoulder. His breathing grew ragged. He even found it difficult to breathe, but he persevered.

No pain, no gain! Ye Guan cultivated with that mantra in mind.

Without hard work, how could he expect a reward? The process was tough, but the sense of achievement he would feel whenever he managed to reach a goal despite the hardships was addicting.

Ye Guan had to spend three full days before getting used to the gravity on the sixth floor, and he could finally start practicing his sword arts once more.

He was focusing on speed, but Ye Guan knew that the power of his attacks would also improve if they became even faster.

He was well aware of the time constraints, so he decided to become an expert in the field of speed. I'll become as fast as possible!

Three days later, Ye Guan completely acclimatized to the spacetime gravity on the sixth floor, and the speed of his sword was now equivalent to its speed in the outside world.

Ye Guan sighed and sat down.

He rested for two hours and decided to head to the seventh floor.

The gravity on the seventh floor was only slightly stronger compared to the sixth floor, but the pressure was immense. Each breath of air made him feel like there were needles going through his lungs, and he almost collapsed.

Ye Guan's expression soured. Goodness, it seems that it really becomes more absurd the higher I go.

Just then, Little Pagoda's voice rang in his head, "This is pretty much your limit with your cultivation base. I suggest you stop here."

Ye Guan took as much air as he could into his lungs and asserted, "I want to test my limits!"

A determined light flashed in Ye Guan's eyes as he pulled out his sword. As expected, his sword was significantly slower here compared to on the sixth floor and in the outside world.

Ye Guan performed one move, and he broke out into a bucket of sweat once he was done performing it. However, he wiped the sweat off of his face and continued his training.

The more sword moves he performed, the faster his sword moves became.

Ye Guan wanted to go beyond his limits.

Four days later, Ye Guan had become noticeably faster than before, but there were only twenty days left before the martial contest.

Ye Guan seemed like he had no intentions of leaving the tower anytime soon as he continued to train on the seventh floor.

He achieved a commendable result. The speed of his sword move was slowly catching up to the speed of his sword moves in the outside world. Evidently, he was starting to get accustomed to the spacetime gravity on the seventh floor.

Soon, Ye Guan's sword on the seventh floor was finally as fast as his sword in the outside world. He collapsed, utterly exhausted. Then, he burst out into a fit of hysterical laughter while on the ground.

Success! I went beyond my limits!

"It feels great, right?" Little Pagoda suddenly asked.

Ye Guan grinned. "It feels awesome!"

Little Pagoda asked, "Are you going to the eighth floor?"

Ye Guan asked back, "Why not?"

Afterward, Ye Guan took a good rest.

Two hours later, he stepped onto the eighth floor.

As usual, the powerful spacetime gravity bored down on Ye Guan. However, his expression didn't turn ugly. He was excited to take on another challenge.

Ye Guan trained like a madman once again, and he performed his sword moves one after another. His rate of progress was surprisingly faster here compared to his progress on the seventh floor, and on the tenth day, he had completely acclimatized to the spacetime gravity on the eighth floor.

Ye Guan was stunned upon reaching the ninth floor, and it was because the spacetime gravity on the ninth floor was exactly the same as that on the eighth floor.

What is going on?

A shining door manifested in the distance, interrupting Ye Guan's train of thought.

Ye Guan's heart started to beat even faster from the adrenaline.

Perhaps there will be a sparring?

The shining door opened, and a phantom emerged from the door.

It was carrying a sword.

A swordsman! A wave of exhilaration struck Ye Guan, and his eyes flashed in excitement. The phantom was a Spacetime Realm cultivator as well.

The phantom pulled out its sword, and there was a flash of light.

Ye Guan's eyes narrowed, and he instinctively sidestepped. He managed to dodge the phantom's attack by a hair's breadth.

Ye Guan quickly retaliated by creating a sword made out of sword energy and swiping it at the phantom.

Shrieeek!

The air shrieked as Ye Guan's sword energy tore through it, but the phantom could no longer be seen.

It's fast! Ye Guan's heart tightened in disbelief.

The phantom in the distance flickered and split into many afterimages.

Ye Guan's pupils constricted, and he went beyond pallid. He didn't expect that the phantom would be extremely fast. Ye Guan thought about running away, but the phantom's sword was already in front of him before he could even move.

The phantom's sharp sword dug half an inch into his skin. Fresh blood was drawn, but that wasn't the only wound Ye Guan ended up suffering. A few seconds later, tiny wounds appeared all over him, drenching him in his own blood.

At the sight, the phantom stopped and slowly disappeared.

The trial towers were meant to help the students cultivate and practice their techniques, so there was no way a phantom would kill a challenger. It would be weird if the Guanxuan Academy allowed their students to die in the middle of training.

Ye Guan stood rooted.

Little Pagoda asked, "Were you surprised?"

Ye Guan shook his head and answered, "No. I'm just regretful that I didn't immediately go all out and even beyond that."

Ye Guan decided to go down to the eighth floor and sprint back up to the ninth floor.

As expected, the phantom emerged to face him once again.

Ye Guan didn't hesitate and decisively pointed with his finger.

A sword suddenly manifested in front of the phantom, but the latter vanished before the sword could move.

Swoosh!

The sword ruthlessly sliced through the air.

Meanwhile, the retreating phantom went on the offensive. It moved like water and approached Ye Guan. However, Ye Guan saw through the phantom's movement, and he sidestepped in time. Unfortunately, the phantom's sword abruptly changed directions in mid-air, and it drew a bloody line on Ye Guan's neck.

He failed. Ye Guan was silent as the phantom vanished.

"Master Pagoda, why did it feel like it outsmarted my outsmarting?" exclaimed Ye Guan.

Little Pagoda corrected him. "No, it wasn't that complicated. It was just much faster than you. Once you get used to that phantom's speed, you'll be invincible against cultivators in the same cultivation realm as you."

Ye Guan closed his eyes and pondered over it.

"What's the point of being invincible against those in the same cultivation realm as me? I want to be invincible against those above me as well! I want to be stronger than anyone else!" said Ye Guan.

There was a moment of silence, and Little Pagoda eventually said, "Fight it more."

With that, Ye Guan went down to the eighth floor and sprinted back up to the ninth floor. The phantom emerged to face him, and Ye Guan immediately attacked the phantom.

Ye Guan's attacks were truly fast, but his reaction speed was significantly slower than his attacks.

His sword struck nothing but empty air once again, and the phantom practically teleported in front of him. Ye Guan successfully dodged the phantom's first attack, the second, and the third...

Squelch!

The phantom's sword dug half an inch into Ye Guan's chest.

The phantom soon vanished after doing its job. Ye Guan stood unmoving for quite a while before he eventually turned around and went down to the eighth floor before going back up to the ninth floor.

Let's do this again!

Ye Guan repeated the routine multiple times, and he would always stand up to challenge the phantom once more every time he failed.

Just like that, ten days passed. The first time he stepped onto the ninth floor, Ye Guan couldn't even dodge the phantom's attacks, but now, he was capable of dodging at least a few dozen attacks.

There were only seven days left before the martial contest.

Ye Guan was thrilled as he trained in the trial tower. His fights were a whirlwind of movements, and it was indeed exciting. After each fight, he would reflect on his mistakes and make sure to work on fixing them in the next fight.

Ye Guan was practically a new and improved version of himself compared to his previous fights.

Three days passed, and Ye Guan could finally stand toe-to-toe against the phantom.

Their swords would produce resounding clangs in every collision, and each of their movements was calculated with precision. The two cultivators were fighting without holding back. The tiniest mistake would decide the victor between the two.

The two fought for two days straight, and the sound of metal clashing against metal had never ceased during the past forty-eight hours. Unbelievably, they were still at their peak despite the long hours of fighting.

On the third day of their nonstop battle, the phantom made a mistake, and Ye Guan immediately took advantage of it. His sword drew a beautiful arc in the air, creating a mesmerizing display of art and brutality as it drew a long cut on the phantom's back.

Thwack!

The phantom abruptly stopped moving. Moments later, the phantom raised its sword to its forehead and bowed toward Ye Guan. It faded away shortly afterward, leaving Ye Guan in the desolate silence of the ninth floor.

Ye Guan couldn't celebrate his victory at all, and there was a solemn atmosphere throughout the ninth floor.

Just then, the shining door in the distance started vibrating, and a woman soon emerged from the door.

Ye Guan was surprised because she could recognize the woman. She was the same woman who had emerged from the shining door on the ninth floor of the Guanxuan Academy of Nanzhou's trial tower.

The woman was the perfect example of grandeur as she walked over to Ye Guan with a sword sheath on her back.

Ye Guan asked, "Senior?"

The lady woman smiled and said, "I didn't expect to meet you again so soon! Congratulations, you surpassed yourself!"

Ye Guan asked quizzically, "I surpassed myself?"

The woman replied, "That's right! I designed this floor myself, and the phantom you fought was you. It represents your limit, and defeating it means defeating yourself. You have surpassed yourself, so I guess you've become a Sword Emperor!"

A Sword Emperor? Ye Guan was stunned.

The woman blinked in confusion and asked, "Are you not happy?"

Ye Guan asked, "Senior, is there any reward?"

Sword Emperor? Can I eat that? It's just a title.

If it were Sword Immortal rather than Sword Emperor, Ye Guan reckoned that he would be more excited.

A reward! The woman shook her head and chuckled. "You brat!"

She flipped her palm over and revealed an emblem.

Ye Guan's expression darkened, and he asked, "Can you give me some money instead of this?"

The woman pondered over his question, but she ended up apologizing. "I'm sorry, but I can only give you an emblem. The emblem is the reward rather than cultivation manuals or even money. Anyway, I really didn't expect that you're poor enough to choose money rather than this emblem!"

Ye Guan stiffened.

The woman continued. "This emblem is extraordinary. It represents the conqueror of a trial tower. It is an honor to possess this emblem!"

Ye Guan was silent.

He didn't need the glory that came along with the emblem—he needed money!

The woman felt helpless as she explained, "This emblem will prove useful to you in the future. Trust me; this emblem is priceless."

Ye Guan could only sigh.

He accepted the emblem and said, "Senior, can I make a suggestion? I suggest you change the rewards of your next towers to money or cultivation manuals. Emblems... they can't be exchanged for meals or cultivation resources!"

The woman was stunned.

Ye Guan seemed dissatisfied, but he still expressed his gratitude.

"Anyway, I would like to express my gratitude to you, Senior!"

The woman finally recovered, and she proceeded to smack his head before bursting into a peal of laughter, "Work hard, I'm looking forward to the day of your arrival at the Main Academy!"

With that, she disappeared.

Ye Guan shook his head and sighed before turning around to leave.

He was excited to head outside and find out how normal gravity felt compared to the gravity on the ninth floor. Ye Guan was also certain that he had grown tremendously stronger than before. I'm so excited to go outside!

Just then, Little Pagoda spoke, "You would have easily killed that phantom if you had used the Path Sword."

Ye Guan shook his head and said, "I didn't want to use it."

Little Pagoda asked, "Why?"

Ye Guan said, "If I were to keep relying on external tools, I would eventually lose sight of my true identity. I'll lose confidence in my own prowess, and I'll eventually become afraid of fighting others without external tools!"

Little Pagoda didn't say anything in response.

Chapter 37: Under Three Swords, I'm Invincible!

Ye Guan felt as light as a feather upon leaving the trial tower, and it took him quite a while to get used to the gravity in the outside world. He was also thrilled to discover that he could move ten times faster in the outside world.

His sword had also become ten times faster than before. He could finally kill someone in an instant—he could kill them in the blink of an eye! Ye Guan closed his eyes. Was he already at his limits?

No, Ye Guan felt that he could still become faster. Unfortunately, his current speed was the limit of his understanding of spacetime. He turned around to look at the trial tower behind him, feeling slightly emotional.

Little Pagoda asked, "What's wrong?"

"I often feel like I've hit my limit, but when I put in the effort, I realize that I can still grow stronger by working even harder," said Ye Guan. He paused for a few moments before asking, "Master Pagoda, does someone's potential really have a limit?"

"Some have limited potential while some are limitless," replied Little Pagoda.

Ye Guan chuckled. "I see..."

"I'm not trying to discourage you here, brat, but I've seen too many talented and hardworking people. I'm just trying to say that you must never become complacent.

"I want you to remember that there are always stronger people out there," said Little Pagoda.

"I understand." Ye Guan nodded before asking, "Master Pagoda, were you once an extremely powerful existence?"

Little Pagoda calmly replied, "I was okay."

Ye Guan blinked. "Okay?"

Little Pagoda said, "Under three swords, I was invincible. Above three swords, it was one-for-one."

The mysterious voice didn't know what to say.

Ye Guan's curiosity was piqued. "Three swords?"

Little Pagoda answered, "It's another story for another time!"

Ye Guan had more questions, but a woman was walking toward him.

He was taken aback to see that the woman was Luo Zhaoqi!

Luo Zhaoqi walked over to Ye Guan and smiled before asking, “Young Lord Ye, did you just come out from the tower?”

Ye Guan nodded and asked, “Lady Luo, did you come here to cultivate?”

Luo Zhaoqi smiled and replied, “Yes.”

Ye Guan smiled as well and politely said, “Then, I shall not keep you busy. I’m taking my leave, goodbye!”

With that, he started walking away.

“Young Lord Ye, wait!” Luo Zhaoqi called out to him.

Ye Guan turned around.

Luo Zhaoqi was still smiling as she asked, “May I ask what floor you managed to reach?”

“The ninth floor.”

Luo Zhaoqi was stunned. She soon composed herself and shook her head.

“Since Young Lord Ye doesn’t wish to tell me the truth... forget I asked,” she said.

Ye Guan stared at her for quite a while before saying, “Goodbye, then.”

With that, he left the trial peak.

Luo Zhaoqi stared at his departing back and frowned slightly. Ninth floor? Impossible!

She had never been able to escape the clutches of the eighth floor, and she was aware of just how terrifying the gravity was on the eighth floor of the trial tower.

In other words, acclimatizing to the gravity on the ninth floor was like ascending a towering, vertical mountain—it was an extremely difficult task.

Luo Zhaoqi was convinced that Ye Guan simply didn't want to tell her anything. With that thought in mind, she walked away and entered the trial tower.

...

When Ye Guan returned to the Siao Residence, Siao Ge, Sun Xiong, and Nalan Jia were still busy with their cultivation. It wasn't strange because there were still three days before the martial contest.

Fei Banqing suddenly appeared in front of Ye Guan. She examined him from top to bottom and asked, "Are you done cultivating in the tower?"

"Yes."

"How much progress have you made?"

"A lot!"

Fei Banqing was taken aback. "A lot?"

"Yes," Ye Guan said with a nod.

“Great,” Fei Banqing nodded before asking, “Are you aiming for the top ten?”

Ye Guan blinked and said, “I’m aiming for first place.”

Fei Banqing shook her head and smiled, “I wasn’t serious, you brat. Don’t be too pressured; getting into the top ten is enough. You’re going to break the record of our Guanxuan Academy by getting into the top ten.”

Ye Guan smiled and replied, “I’ll do my best.”

“Great!” Fei Banqing said. “Do you know how the contest is going to be held?”

Ye Guan shook his head and replied, “No, I don’t.”

“The martial contest will be split into three rounds. The first round will eliminate the majority of the participants. It is an endurance test, and those capable of lasting for an hour will enter the second round. The first round’s goal is to eliminate eighty percent of the participants.”

Ye Guan frowned. “Eighty percent?”

Fei Banqing nodded and said, “Yes. For most people, the martial contest is a ticket back to their hometowns.”

“The second round is ruthless because you have to survive in the Endless Demon Domain,” said Fei Banqing.

“The Endless Demon Domain?” asked Ye Guan.

Fei Banqing nodded and explained, “The Endless Demon Domain belongs to the Demon Realm, and it’s a domain filled with many different powerful demonic beasts.

"A hundred participants entered the domain in the previous martial contest, but less than twenty of them emerged at the end of the contest. The Endless Demon Domain is a ruthless and dangerous domain. There's a high chance that you'll die there."

Ye Guan nodded slightly and asked, "What about the third round?"

"The third round is even more ruthless, and the objective is to capture a flag in a wasteland. The wasteland has ten flags, and each flag represents a placing.

"The flag in the middle of the wasteland houses the first-place flag. On the right and left of the first-place flag are the second-place and third-place flags, respectively. A state can only capture one flag," explained Fei Banqing.

"Retrieve the token that corresponds to the ranking that you want to achieve in the martial contest," said Fei Banqing.

Ye Guan nodded slightly. "I understand."

Fei Banqing nodded and continued. "The third round is ruthless because there are no holds barred. The participants can use any method to get what they want."

"You can use any spiritual artifacts. You can also summon powerful demonic beasts, but you need to have established a contract with those beasts before you are allowed to bring them with you."

"Really?" asked Ye Guan. He was surprised by the revelation.

Fei Banqing explained, "The third round will test not only your strength as an individual but also your arsenal, your family background, and your backers."

Ye Guan fell into silence.

"Wouldn't that be unfair for some people?" he asked hesitantly.

“Do you really think that this world is fair?” retorted Fei Banqing.

Ye Guan went silent once more.

Fei Banqing saw that and continued. “There’s a quite popular saying from the Sword Master: ‘Spiritual artifacts and treasures, family background, and backers are also part of a cultivator’s prowess.’”

Ye Guan and Little Pagoda were rendered speechless.

The mysterious voice couldn’t help but ask, “Did he really say that?”

Little Pagoda replied, “What do you think?”

The mysterious voice went silent.

Meanwhile, Fei Banqing added, “This world is unfair, and your existence is unfair as well. It’s unfair that you have a sword dao inheritance while they do not. Qingzhou has many trump cards up its sleeves, and it’s unfair. Why do they have trump cards while you do not?”

Ye Guan nodded and muttered, “I see...”

Fei Banqing smiled and said, “I was serious when I said that getting into the top ten is good enough. Don’t force yourself to go against Qingzhou. It’s important to be alive more than anything.”

Ye Guan’s heart became filled with warmth.

“Yes, I understand,” he said, reassuring her.

Just then, Nalan Jia walked over to them.

Fei Banqing smiled upon seeing her. "Little Jia!"

Nalan Jia bowed slightly and said, "Teacher!"

Fei Banqing examined her as well and asked, "How do you feel?"

"I feel awesome."

"Great!" Fei Banqing smiled.

She flipped her palm open, and two white jade bottles appeared in front of Ye Guan and Nalan Jia.

Ye Guan asked, "Tutor Fei, what are these?"

Fei Banqing explained, "They contain Sky-grade pills. I'm sorry, but the academy's finances are tight. We can't afford to give you better pills or a spiritual artifact."

Ye Guan peeked at the pills in the jade bottles.

"Tutor Fei, these pills are good enough," he said.

With that, Ye Guan and Nalan Jia stored the jade bottles away.

Nalan Jia smiled and said, "Teacher, you should get ready. Our Guanxuan Academy will become famous in the martial contest!"

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia left.

Song Fu appeared next to Fei Banqing. He stared at the departing figures of the two students and muttered, "They're extremely talented. It's a pity that our academy is too impoverished to give them better pills or even an artifact."

Fei Banqing replied, "They'll step onto a much better stage for their growth once the martial contest is over."

Song Fu nodded, but he was also unwilling to part with Ye Guan and Nalan Jia. It had taken them many years for them to produce two heaven-defying talents.

Unfortunately, Song Fu and Fei Banqing were also aware that those two would only lose out if they were to stay in Nanzhou.

Talent wasn't good enough in this world...

Family background, backers, and an excellent stage to stand on were also necessary. Fei Banqing was aware of that, so she said, "Their family backgrounds aren't that great, so we can only allow them to step onto a better stage."

Song Fu nodded in agreement.

...

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia slowly walked through the garden.

Nalan Jia asked, "How much progress have you made?"

"A lot!" replied Ye Guan.

Nalan Jia blinked and asked once more, "How much?"

“I’ve improved by leaps and bounds,” said Ye Guan.

Nalan Jia shook her head and smiled.

Ye Guan asked her, “What about you? How much progress have you made?”

Nalan Jia almost immediately replied, “A lot!”

The two stared at each other for a moment before laughing at the same time.

The pair continued their stroll while chatting and laughing together as the sun started to set above them. There was a warm and peaceful air between them.

Time passed by, and the day of the martial contest finally arrived. On the daybreak of the martial contest, a loud noise echoed throughout Shang City. The talents from all three hundred and sixty states took to the skies and headed for Yun City.

Hundreds of people soared into the sky at the same time, creating a surreal view.

The four representatives of Nanzhou’s Guanxuan Academy—Ye Guan, Nalan Jia, Sun Xiong, and Siao Ge—were among the many people in the sky. Soon, more than a thousand people pierced the clouds and arrived in front of Yun City.

The walls of Yun City were more than thirty meters high and hundreds of meters wide. The gates were just as tall as the majestic walls, and they gave off a magnificent and imposing aura.

Everyone excitedly gathered in front of the city gates.

All of a sudden, a massive crystal orb rose and hovered over the city.

“Look! Isn’t that a Cloud Projection Orb?”

At the same time, a massive curtain hovered in the skies above the Guanxuan Academies of the three hundred and sixty states. It wouldn't take a genius to deduce that the martial contest would be broadcasted live to every Guanxuan Academy throughout the three hundred and sixty states.

Luo Zhaoqi appeared in front of the city gates. She swept her gaze across everyone and smiled before saying, "Everyone, welcome to the Guanxuan Academy! I am here to declare the start of the martial contest!"

Her words rang loud and clear, and the city gates behind her slowly creaked open.

...

Chapter 38: Hero Worship

The city gates were finally opened, and the crowd rushed into the city.

The entire city was empty, and there weren't any buildings.

Ye Guan and the others were excited as well.

The martial contest was held only once every decade, and it would be broadcasted live across all three hundred and sixty states.

Ye Guan lifted his head to look at the Cloud Projection Orb. The Ye Clan of Nanzhou had to be watching the martial contest as well.

Luo Zhaoqi appeared once more.

She smiled at everyone and said, "You have trained hard over the past ten years, and it is about time you make your name known to the world. Ladies and gentlemen, fight for your family, fight for yourself, and fight for honor! All the best!"

Luo Zhaoqi turned around and left.

Fight for your family, fight for yourself, and fight for honor!

Everyone's blood started to boil in excitement.

What were they hoping to gain from cultivating for so many years?

They wanted to become famous and profit from the martial contest, but they all had the same goals down the road—they all wanted to be free and live for a long time.

The excitement of the crowd boiled over. They couldn't wait to achieve something in the martial contest and become a hero of their own states.

Who wouldn't want to make a name for themselves? Who wouldn't want to be the subject of everyone's admiration? They all wanted to be famous, and today was the day they would become one of the most famous people in the world!

The clouds above them parted, and a terrifying pressure bore down on them.

Thud!

A hundred people were forced to their knees right there and then. Everyone's faces changed. The overwhelming pressure was like a bucket of cold water that extinguished everyone's excitement out of the blue.

If they wanted to become famous, they would have to show people that they were worthy of admiration.

Those who were forced to their knees couldn't get up at all. Out of the remaining people that were still standing, many of them looked like they were having difficulty resisting the pressure. Soon, more people collapsed to the ground.

Ye Guan remained calm. He couldn't feel anything at all. Nalan Jia and Xiao Ge looked calm as well, but Sun Xiong seemed to be having some trouble.

However, it seemed that there was more where the pressure had come from because it got even heavier, demoralizing those who thought that they had a chance of surviving the first round.

They despaired and collapsed to the ground.

The weaker ones were pinned to the ground, and they forfeited upon realizing that they couldn't resist the pressure at all. Upon forfeiting, a mysterious force teleported them away to a safe location.

The number of people who were still standing dwindled as time went by.

Ye Guan glanced at Mu Yunhan and Ao Han. They were calm, seemingly unaffected by the pressure. A young man wearing a brocade robe was standing in front of them with his hands behind his back.

His eyes were closed, and he looked like a meditating monk.

Many people were looking at him, and it seemed that he was the mysterious talent of Qingzhou.

Ye Guan looked away and observed Zuo Fu.

Zuo Fu's eyes were shut. His hands were hidden in his sleeves, and he was chanting in an ancient language while giving off a mysterious aura.

All of a sudden, Zuo Fu opened his eyes and looked at Ye Guan.

Ye Guan was stunned.

The mysterious young man from Qingzhou also opened his eyes to look at Ye Guan.

Ao Han also looked at Ye Guan and asked, "An Mu, is there something wrong?"

A Mu closed his eyes once again and replied, "It's nothing."

Meanwhile, the number of participants continued to dwindle. It hadn't even been half an hour since the first round started, but there were only less than a hundred people remaining.

The first round was truly ruthless but effective. The first round eliminated those who would definitely be eliminated down the road for being too weak, so it essentially saved everyone's time.

Ye Guan closed his eyes, and he was still completely unaffected by the powerful pressure. He wasn't daring enough to say that his willpower was unmatched, but he was as sturdy as a boulder.

It would take more than this pressure to disturb him.

Siao Ge and Nalan Jia were still doing well, but Sun Xiong was visibly struggling. It wasn't strange because he was the weakest of Nanzhou's representatives. However, he was still trying his best because he didn't want to return to Nanzhou so soon.

Time went by, and more people collapsed to the ground.

Those who were still standing were pretty much the cream of the crop. To some people, every second felt like a year because the pressure was getting stronger as time went by.

The faces of some participants turned pale, and their foreheads were soon covered with sweat. They were trying their best to hold out. This was a once-in-a-decade opportunity, so they weren't going to give it up so easily.

Giving up meant abandoning the chance to become a student of the Upper Realm's Guanxuan Academy as well as abandoning the chance to go to Zhongtu Divine Continent.

If one wanted to go to the fabled Zhongtu Divine Continent, one had to be a student of the Upper Realm's Guanxuan Academy before anything else. However, the Upper Realm's Guanxuan Academy would only accept the cream of the crop.

One had to prove their worth to be enrolled!

The participants were aware that this might be their one and only chance to prove their worth. The further they got into this martial contest, the higher their chances of being accepted by the Upper Realm's Guanxuan Academy.

Time ruthlessly passed by, and the mysterious pressure finally disappeared.

Those who were still standing let out sighs of relief, and they soon beamed in excitement because they clearly passed the first round.

Ye Guan looked around and saw that there were only eighty-two participants remaining. There were more than a thousand of them, but now, there were only eighty-two participants.

He had to admit... the elimination rate was terrifying.

Soon, Luo Zhaoqi appeared once again. She was wearing a long red dress that made her look like an alluring scholar. She immediately attracted the eyes of the men who were watching the martial contest at the moment.

She swept her gaze across everyone and smiled. "Congratulations on passing the first round! I believe that your loved ones in your hometowns are already celebrating your achievement."

The participants looked up at the Cloud Projection Orb. Their loved ones were definitely watching them right now.

Ye Guan looked up and stared at the Cloud Projection Orb as well. A group of students in Nanzhou's Guanxuan Academy erupted into cheers.

"Ye Guan! He's looking at us!"

Ye Xiao was also looking at Ye Guan. He couldn't help but start trembling when his gaze met Ye Guan's gaze. He held Ye Nan's hand tightly, and his voice was trembling as he muttered, "It's Little Guan! Look, it's Little Guan..."

Song Ci had personally gone over to Ancient Desolate City to escort the Ye Clan to the Guanxuan Academy. Ye Guan, Siao Ge, and Nalan Jia were Nanzhou's greatest rays of hope, so their families were treated with the utmost respect.

"Yes, I see it! It's Little Guan!" Ye Nan exclaimed in excitement.

The members of the Ye Clan were also thrilled to see Ye Guan.

The calm and reserved Second Elder was even grinning while staring at the projection above them.

Ye Guan wasn't just representing Nanzhou's Guanxuan Academy but the entire Ye Clan as well.

Meanwhile, Ye Guan looked away and smiled. He knew that the Ye Clan was watching him right now. He took a deep breath and decided. I'll fight! I'll fight for first place! Why should the first place belong to Qingzhou? Are they entitled to it because Qingzhou is the birthplace of the Sword Master? So what?

Ye Guan respected the Sword Master and even regarded him as his role model, but he believed that fear and respect were two different things. He could respect someone, but he didn't have to be afraid of that someone.

Fear would make one treat a certain someone as if they were a god. Hero-worshipping a certain someone would become an obstacle in one's own path because one would surely treat their god's words as gospel.

Ye Guan's thoughts gave him a newfound understanding, and he started to relax.

Moments later, the Path Sword within him quivered ever so slightly, and a strand of sword intent threatened to flow out of him.

Ye Guan's expression abruptly changed. He hurriedly suppressed the sword intent, and it gradually calmed down. However, Ye Guan could vividly feel that the sword intent within him had become even stronger than before.

Ye Guan was baffled, and he couldn't help but ask, "Master Pagoda, what happened just now?"

Little Pagoda explained, "The strength of a swordsman's sword intent depends on their mental state. A mental breakthrough means that your sword intent will become even stronger, which will make you a stronger swordsman overall.

"Anyway, congratulations! You've become a more powerful swordsman. If I were to gauge you using the sword cultivation realms, I'd say that you're a half step away from becoming a Sword Saint."

Ye Guan frowned and asked, "I'm a half step away from becoming a Sword Saint? What are the sword cultivation realms?"

"Swordsmen are given titles according to their sword cultivation realm—Sword Apprentice, Sword Cultivator, Sword Exalt, Sword Emperor, Sword Saint, Sword Immortal, Great Sword Immortal, and finally, Sword Sovereign.

"The Tianyun Sword Sovereign you've mentioned is a Sword Sovereign. Honestly, she's strong enough to be considered beyond a Sword Sovereign, but the peak of the sword cultivation realms is Sword Sovereign," explained Little Pagoda.

Little Pagoda paused before continuing. "Of course, a Sword Sovereign is just a title, and it doesn't mean that they're the strongest cultivators out there. There are a few powerful swordsmen that do not care about such titles at all."

Ye Guan was agitated. “Master Pagoda, since I’m already half a step away from Sword Saint, doesn’t that mean that I’m progressing too quickly? Sword Immortal is the next one after Sword Saint, right? That means I just have to reach the next realm, and I’ll become a Sword Immortal—a Sword Immortal!”

Little Pagoda was silent for quite a while before it said, “It’s just a title. Don’t get carried away!”

However, Ye Guan was still agitated. “Master Pagoda... I think I stand a chance at becoming a Sword Immortal!”

Little Pagoda immediately went silent. It wanted to say more, but the mysterious voice warned it.

“Stop talking! You should give him some hope to fuel his ambition,” said the mysterious voice.

Little Pagoda obliged and went silent.

Ye Guan was thrilled. Sword Immortals were legendary figures, but he actually stood a chance to become a Sword Immortal? How could he not be excited about it?

Siao Ge glanced at Ye Guan and saw the latter’s excitement.

What is going on? We just passed the first round, so what’s up with Brother Ye? Why is he so excited?

Meanwhile, Luo Zhaoqi’s voice echoed. “After a short break, we will teleport all of you to the Endless Demon Domain. Your task is simple—cross the Endless Demon Domain and reach the endpoint to pass the second round.”

Luo Zhaoqi swept her gaze across everyone and warned. “A friendly reminder—the demonic beasts in the Endless Demon Domain have an appetite for humans. Be extra careful if you come across one.”

Everyone’s expression turned grim. The ruthless first round made it clear to everyone that the difficulty of the martial contest couldn’t be underestimated.

The teleportation arrays spurred into action.

Nalan Jia pulled Ye Guan and said, "Come here!"

Ye Guan walked over to the teleportation array in front of Nalan Jia.

"A teleportation array can only bring two people away, and it'll drop you off at a random location," Nalan Jia explained. She turned to look at Xiao Ge and Sun Xiong before saying, "Let's find a way to group up later."

Xiao Ge nodded and said, "Be careful!"

The teleportation arrays activated, teleporting everyone away.

Chapter 39: Manners

An unknown amount of time passed before Ye Guan finally opened his eyes.

He felt slightly dizzy as he looked around.

There was a lake in front of him, and there was a mountain range just behind the lake. A towering flag pole could be seen at the end of the mountain range, and at the end of the flagpole was the flag of the Guanyuan Academy.

It seemed that the flag was the endpoint, and reaching the endpoint was their task.

Nalan Jia next to Ye Guan said, "This place isn't simple."

Ye Guan looked at the flag and pondered over flying directly toward the flag.

However, a shrill, miserable cry interrupted Ye Guan's train of thought.

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia looked toward where the voice had come from and saw a young man plummeting to the ground. A flying demonic beast seemed to have attacked him. The demonic beast's physique was like a hawk's, but it was as huge as a bull. It had two wings that let out bursts of air every time it flapped its wings.

It was an Earth-rank demonic beast. However, the issue was that there wasn't just one Earth-rank demonic beast but hundreds of them!

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia looked at each other. They shook their heads and smiled. Flying toward the flag wasn't an option.

Ye Guan was confident that he could shake off the demonic beasts if he were to use his sword, but it was still too early for him to reveal his trump card.

"I guess we can only walk," said Ye Guan.

Nalan Jia nodded in agreement.

The pair soon arrived at a riverbank. They were about to jump over to the opposite side, but Ye Guan frowned and pulled Nalan Jia back.

"Wait!" he exclaimed.

Nalan Jia looked at the grim-looking Ye Guan. The latter pulled her behind him, and the ground in front of them suddenly burst open. Moments later, a black figure rushed toward them.

The figure was so fast that it was basically invisible to the naked eye.

Bang!

Ye Guan's attack was incomparably swift as well, and he managed to hit the black figure, sending it flying away.

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia finally saw the black figure's appearance. It was a demonic beast that looked like a mouse. It was covered in tiny wings, and it only had one eye.

Nalan Jia muttered, "It's a Shadow Mouse! It's an Earth-rank demonic beast, but it's even more terrifying than Sky-rank demonic beasts because it's extremely fast!"

Ye Guan stared intently at the shadow mouse, and the shadow mouse examined him as well. In the end, the shadow mouse turned around, leaving only its afterimage as it disappeared into the distance.

The shadow mouse left after judging that it was no match for Ye Guan. Demonic beasts weren't idiots, and they wouldn't fight others to the death if they could afford to avoid such a battle.

"We really have to be careful..." Ye Guan muttered. He initially thought that he was capable of easily traversing the Endless Demon Domain, but Ye Guan finally realized that his mindset was dangerous.

Ye Guan would have underestimated the danger of the Endless Demon Domain if he hadn't realized that his mindset was dangerous. Even lions would use all their might while chasing a rabbit, so what right did he have to hold back?

Nalan Jia said, "I'm afraid that the demonic beasts here are Earth-rank demonic beasts at the very least."

Ye Guan agreed and said, "I think there are plenty of Sky-rank demonic beasts here as well."

The pair stared at each other.

Ye Guan said, "I wonder where Siao Ge and Sun Xiong are right now."

"I think we should just explore for now and hope that we'll stumble upon them."

Ye Guan nodded, and the pair continued on their journey.

Soon, they entered the mountain range that they saw upon arriving at the Endless Demon Domain. They walked into a dense forest, and Ye Guan frowned. The forest was deathly quiet —it was so quiet that there was definitely something wrong with it.

Ye Guan stopped in his tracks and looked around. A thirty-meter-long green snake suddenly lunged toward him from above, but it abruptly stopped before reaching Ye Guan. A strand of sword energy pierced its head before it could get close enough.

Rustle!

The dense forest abruptly got noisy. Nalan Jia looked around and saw green snakes everywhere.

Ye Guan muttered, “I think we entered a snake forest...”

The snakes slithered toward them while hissing menacingly.

Nalan Jia leaned on Ye Guan.

Ye Guan turned to look at her and saw her pallid look. He blinked once and asked, “You’re scared of snakes?”

Nalan Jia nodded in response.

Ye Guan held her hand tightly and reassured her. “It’ll be fine!”

With that, Ye Guan swept his gaze across the countless snakes and saw a dark purple snake amidst the green snakes. The dark purple snake realized that Ye Guan was staring at it, so it let out a strange hiss.

Moments later, the slithering snakes flew toward Ye Guan and Nalan Jia.

Ye Guan snapped a tree branch from the nearest tree, and a whistling sound echoed as the tree branch flew toward the dark purple snake's head.

The dark purple snake hurriedly opened its mouth and shouted, "Stop!"

Ye Guan was taken aback.

It knows how to speak the human language? Could it be that it's a snake king?

The Snake King glared at Ye Guan and said, "The two of you can pass!"

The Snake King was aware that the human was being merciful. After all, the tree branch that the human had thrown toward it was capable of decapitating it.

The snakes around Ye Guan and Nalan Jia slithered away.

Ye Guan made a sidelong glance at the Snake King before turning around to leave.

However, Ye Guan seemed to have recalled something. He stopped in his tracks and asked, "Are there any dangerous places up ahead?"

The Snake King wordlessly stared at him.

Ye Guan flipped his palm over, and a storage ring floated toward the Snake King. There were a thousand gold spiritual crystals in the storage ring.

The Snake King examined the storage ring and said, "Give me another one thousand gold spiritual crystals, and I'll let my subordinate guide you through this forest on a safe path."

Ye Guan was silent for a few moments before asking, “Are you really trying to bargain with me?”

The Snake King calmly replied, “I would have defeated you if I were strong enough to do so. Unfortunately, I’m not strong enough, so I decided to just earn some money. What? Is there something wrong with that?”

Ye Guan shook his head and said, “No.”

It seemed that he truly couldn’t think that demonic beasts were dumb just because they were beasts. Ye Guan decided to give another storage ring to the Snake King, and a tiny snake flew toward Ye Guan and Nalan Jia.

The Snake King instructed. “Follow that snake.”

Ye Guan nodded.

They followed the tiny snake deep into the forest. They managed to successfully avoid the territories of many demonic beasts, which saved them a lot of trouble.

Demonic beasts were territorial creatures, and trespassing on their territory meant that one was challenging them. The tiny snake guided them faithfully on a safe path.

Soon, the three arrived in front of a canyon. The canyon was between two majestic mountains that were thousands of meters tall.

The tiny snake came to a halt.

The pair turned to look at the tiny snake, and it explained, “The territory up ahead belongs to the black bears. They have always been our archenemies, and they’re definitely going to attack you if they catch a whiff of my scent with you. You’ll have to continue down the canyon on your own.”

Ye Guan nodded slightly.

He flipped his palm over, and a storage ring floated toward the tiny snake.

“Thank you,” said Ye Guan.

The tiny snake examined the storage ring and saw that there were a hundred gold spiritual crystals inside of it. It blinked and said, “The Bear King was once a student of the Guanxuan Academy, and it is a huge fan of human decorum. Perhaps it won’t give you a hard time if you’re respectful enough.”

Ye Guan smiled and thanked the tiny snake once more.

The tiny snake thanked him for the tip. It put the storage ring away before leaving.

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia looked at each other. They shook their heads and smiled.

“I suddenly feel like snakes aren’t that scary anymore!” said Nalan Jia.

Ye Guan laughed. “Indeed!”

The pair soon entered the Black Bears’ territory.

Nalan Jia muttered, “The harmonious relationship between the demon race and mankind is all thanks to the Sword Master. He unified the entire universe during his era, and he restored peace before establishing a new order. If it hadn’t been for him, I wonder just how chaotic our world would have been.”

Ye Guan nodded slightly. He had learned a lot about the Sword Master since he enrolled at the Guanxuan Academy, and he also learned that the Sword Master was indeed the reason why mankind could live in harmony with the other clans.

The Sword Master had unified all hundred clans under the same banner by himself! The clans had to follow the Guanxuan Law. Conflicts could never be avoided, so there were still some skirmishes between clan leaders.

However, a large-scale war had never happened since the Sword Master united the clans.

Ye Guan seemed to have thought of something, and he decided to ask, “Master Pagoda, are you familiar with the Sword Master? I mean, are you acquainted with him?”

Little Pagoda replied, “Yes.”

Ye Guan was thrilled. “Master Pagoda, you must have been extremely strong when you were in your prime! I didn’t expect that you’d be acquainted with the Sword Master...”

Little Pagoda was rendered speechless.

However, Ye Guan wasn’t done just yet as he asked, “Master Pagoda, may I ask why you told me not to take him as my role model?”

Little Pagoda replied, “I didn’t mean it that way. I was trying to say that you should take it slow. Don’t bite off more than you can chew, do you understand?”

Ye Guan nodded, “I understand!”

Rumble!

The ground suddenly trembled, and a massive black bear appeared in front of Ye Guan and Nalan Jia. The black bear was so huge that it seemed bigger than three bulls combined. It was giving off an imposing aura as it stood in front of the pair.

It was a Sky-rank demonic beast!

Ye Guan's expression turned grim upon realizing that there were hundreds of black bears—hundreds! A few black bears weren't Sky-rank black bears, but there was no way Ye Guan could handle them all at once.

However, demonic beasts always travel in groups, so it wasn't really strange that hundreds of black bears had emerged to stand in front of them.

Ye Guan erased his unnecessary thoughts and bowed toward the biggest black bear.

"We have mistakenly trespassed on your precious land. Please forgive us, Bear King," said Ye Guan.

A black bear next to the Bear King roared at Ye Guan. "Humans...!"

The Bear King turned around and slapped the black bear.

Pa!

The black bear flew away, rendering the other black bears speechless.

The Bear King coldly scolded, "What are you yelling for? Haven't I taught all of you before? Have some manners—have some manners!"

Afterward, the Bear King turned to look at Ye Guan.

It bowed slightly and said, "Young Lord, we're pleased to have you here in our humble abode."

Ye Guan was rendered speechless, while Nalan Jia's shoulders trembled ever so slightly as she stopped herself from laughing.

Ye Guan smiled slightly and said, "I've heard that the Bear King is well-read and well-mannered, and it seems that the rumors are true!"

The Bear King blinked and asked, "The people outside... they know me?"

Ye Guan nodded. "Yes!"

The Bear King boisterously laughed and said, "They speak too highly of me!"

Ye Guan took out an ancient book and extended it over to the Bear King.

"Bear King, this book belongs to the Guanxuan Academy. It's not a book on martial arts, but the Sword Master himself wrote the contents of this book.

"I learned a lot from it, and I have decided to give this book to you because it seems that we have quite an affinity with each other," said Ye Guan.

The Bear King hurriedly accepted the ancient book and said, "Humans—Ah, Young Lord, you're too kind!"

It took out a Sky-Grade demonic beast internal pill and extended it over to Ye Guan before saying, "A kind gesture must be returned. Please accept this Sky-grade demonic beast internal pill from me."

Ye Guan and the black bears were rendered speechless.

Chapter 40: Fury

Ye Guan was silent as he stared at the Sky-grade demonic beast internal pill in front of him.

It's too precious. How can I accept a Sky-grade demonic beast internal pill for a book?

Ye Guan shook his head slightly and said, "Bear King, this pill is too precious!"

The Bear King smiled. "You don't want it?"

Ye Guan shook his head and explained, "I gave you the book because I wanted to do so. A Sky-grade demonic beast internal pill is simply too valuable to be exchanged for a book. It would be immoral of me to keep it."

Ye Guan was moved by the offer because a Sky-grade demonic beast internal pill was still quite valuable. However, Ye Guan had never been the type to take advantage of the kindness of others.

The Bear King looked at Ye Guan for a moment before smiling. "Human, you're different! You don't treat me like a fool like other humans do."

Ye Guan froze.

"I will be keeping this book, then." The Bear King chuckled. It raised its paw and said to the other black bears, "Let them go."

The black bears made a path for the pair.

"Thank you," said Ye Guan with his hands cupped in front of him before taking Nalan Jia away.

The Bear King called out to Ye Guan. "Human!"

Ye Guan turned to look at the Bear King.

The Bear King smiled and said, "The territory of the Heavenly Wolf Clan is up ahead. You should go around and avoid them."

Ye Guan smiled. "Thank you!"

Nalan Jia surreptitiously glanced at the black bears and saw a boulder. Nalan Jia's brows furrowed when she saw several human corpses behind the boulder.

Meanwhile, a black bear next to the Bear King asked, "Bear King, why did you let them go?"

The Bear King was staring into the distance. It didn't bother to turn and look at the black bear before saying, "He's also attempting to cross the canyon like the others, but he is different from them. He didn't treat me like a fool."

"Is it really just because of that?" asked the black bear, seemingly unconvinced.

The Bear King calmly explained, "He didn't get scared, even though he was standing in front of our entire clan. He spoke respectfully and calmly. People like them tend to have trump cards up their sleeves.

"So I decided to approach him differently and create good karma between us rather than risk mutual destruction. Who knows? Perhaps the good karma we have established will prove useful in the future."

With that, the Bear King looked down at the black bear and continued. "Humans, bears... it doesn't matter. We must know how to adapt and read the air. We cannot act rashly and do things without thinking."

The black bear nodded in response and said, "In other words, if they can be beaten, fight them. If not, befriend them. Did I get it right?"

The Bear King boisterously laughed. "You got it!"

...

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia left the canyon and listened to the Bear King's advice to go around.

"That Bear King was extraordinary.." said Nalan Jia.

Ye Guan smiled and said, "An ordinary being cannot become the king of a clan."

Nalan Jia smiled as well and said, "I thought you would accept the internal pill."

Actually, Nalan Jia wanted to accept it, but Ye Guan beat her to the chase and rejected the offer.

Ye Guan shook his head and explained, "Those who chase petty gains tend to lose even more. I also don't think that it's a good thing to exploit others."

Nalan Jia nodded slightly. "I agree."

Ye Guan looked around and muttered, "I wonder how Xiao Ge and Sun Xiong are right now..."

He was slightly worried about them. The Endless Demon Domain seemed like it truly had an endless amount of Sky-rank demonic beasts. The demonic beasts were gathered in clans as well.

An encounter with an entire demonic beast clan was enough to bring despair to anyone, and even Ye Guan would have no choice but to retreat if hundreds of bears were to surround him.

I'm not afraid of one-on-one battles but against a group of demonic beasts? I'm honestly a bit scared.

Just then, Nalan Jia spoke, sounding serious, "I'm afraid that not many of us can pass this round."

Ye Guan nodded in agreement. "Indeed, this round is a bit too difficult."

Nalan Jia shook her head and said, "I've heard that the Zhongtu Divine Continent is even more ruthless."

Ye Guan was curious. "What do you mean?"

Nalan Jia turned to look at Ye Guan and asked, "Do you know how many people they'll accept from the Upper Realm after this contest?"

Ye Guan shook his head.

Nalan Jia exclaimed, "One!"

Ye Guan was shocked. "They'll only accept one person?"

Nalan Jia nodded. "Rumor has it that they're going to accept only the champion of this martial contest."

Ye Guan fell silent. The Zhongtu Divine Continent would only accept the champion of the martial contest. Ye Guan had to admit that it was too extreme.

However, it seemed that Nalan Jia wasn't done dropping bombshells as she said eagerly, "That's nothing! I've heard that the acceptance rate of the Main Academy is even more abysmal than the acceptance rate of the Zhongtu Divine Continent itself."

"It's extremely difficult and even nigh impossible for people at the bottom to climb up the ranks," Nalan Jia said and shook her head.

Ye Guan smiled softly at her and said, "And that is why we have to work even harder. After all, we don't have a strong family background to support us."

"Yup!" Nalan Jia smiled and exclaimed, "Let's work hard together!"

Ye Guan nodded, and the pair picked up the pace. Soon, the two had made it around the Heavenly Wolf Clan's territory. They were getting closer and closer to the Guanyuan Academy's flag.

Ye Guan looked up at the mountain and smiled.

“We’ll be there once we cross that mountain,” he said.

Nalan Jia nodded, and they started moving even faster.

The pair were worried about Xiao Ge and Sun Xiong, but they had no choice but to keep on traveling toward the flag. Finding the two within the vast mountain range was like finding a needle in a haystack.

Soon, the pair arrived at the summit of the mountain, and they were only a few kilometers away from the flag.

They were all smiles as they continued on their journey toward the flag. However, a boisterous peal of laughter forced them to stop in their tracks.

“Hahaha, there are two more!”

Ye Guan and Nalan Jia turned and saw a tall bearded man clad in a black robe walking toward them with a vulgar look. The crazed glint in his eyes made it obvious that he wasn’t approaching the pair with good intentions.

The bearded man’s eyes lit up when he clapped eyes on Nalan Jia. He grinned and exclaimed, “What a beautiful woman! I’ve never seen such a beautiful woman before. Tsk, tsk, tsk...”

Ye Guan stared deeply at the bearded man. The bearded man was a demon rather than a human being, and he was a Sky-rank demon at that.

The bearded man stared at Nalan Jia while grinning. “You two should be Ye Guan and Nalan Jia. Someone paid me a lot to get rid of you two, but I didn’t expect that Lady Nalan here would be so gorgeous. I think even an eunuch will be attracted to her!”

Swoosh!

The bearded man’s pupils constricted upon seeing Ye Guan charging at him.

What a frightening speed! He could only raise his arms to protect his head.

However, Ye Guan's target was his family jewels.

Pak!

"Aaaaaargh!" The bearded man's miserable cry filled the air, and no one could blame the bearded man for letting out such a miserable cry. After all, Ye Guan's attack was so powerful that even a child could deduce that at least an egg had cracked.

The bearded man inadvertently reached out for his family jewels.

Ye Guan immediately took advantage of that opening to punch the bearded man's throat.

Boom!

The bearded man should have been sent flying by the attack, but Ye Guan grabbed the bearded man's ankle and slammed him to the ground.

Boom!

The impact was so powerful that it created a human-shaped crater in the ground.

Ye Guan loomed over the bearded man and said, "I thought that demons like you would have basic decency, but it seems that I was mistaken."

The bearded man glared hatefully at Ye Guan and roared. "Look around you!"

A group of demons had unknowingly surrounded Ye Guan and Nalan Jia. Ye Guan glanced at them once and deduced that there had to be hundreds of demons in the group.

The bearded man smiled sinisterly and said, "Kill me, and my Barbarian Clan will tear the woman you love into pieces!"

Ye Guan grinned at the bearded man. "Is that so? Then, I'll wipe the Barbarian Clan off the face of the earth today!"

Boom!

There was a loud noise and a grotesque sound as Ye Guan's punch shattered every bone in the bearded man's body.

The bearded man roared furiously, "Kill him! Kill him! Leave the woman behind..."

The barbarians rushed to attack Ye Guan.

Ye Guan glared murderously at the demons charging toward him, and a faint red color dyed the corners of his eyes.