

The Heavens 271

Chapter 271: Exposed

The Eighteen Horsemen were able to sweep through the Ji Continent unhindered. Not even a dumbass would believe that there was no one backing them up. Even the strongest of them wasn't in the grand completion stage of the Martial Intent Realm, but they were able to resist the pressure from the combined strength of the three great clans of the Ji Continent and the White Deer Institution.

It was basically an open secret in the Azure Origin World that the Eighteen Horsemen had the support of the Tongyou City. A huge portion of their gains entered the hands of the cultivators of the You Continent. Due to the huge distance between the Ji Continent and the Tongyou City, the Eighteen Horsemen chose to get rid of their goods in the Changfeng City.

Hai Min, who was lying on the roof of the restaurant, could hear the discussion among them. The cape she was wearing allowed her to avoid detection from Yang Zhenbiao and the others. However, she didn't realize that her actions were seen clearly by someone not too far away.

Earlier, if not for the fact that Shang Xia was following closely behind her, he was afraid that he would have lost her in the darkness too.

"What an amazing cape! It managed to hide her aura completely and improve her camouflage!" Shang Xia might be standing further away, but with his divine sense merged with the world around him, he was also able to hear the conversation in the restaurant.

Chen Sanyang's voice came from inside the restaurant all of a sudden. "... If the Tongyou City can't even protect themselves, the Eighteen Horsemen will have to look for a new owner. City Lord Yang Hu is the best choice!"

Zhang Yushu looked at him in shock before turning to Li Tianshou who was laughing happily. He then turned to Yang Zhenbiao who had a look of contemplation on his face before chuckling, "Brother Chen, you kept us in the dark for a long time. Looks like you really understand the thoughts of City Lord Yang. The Changbai Holy Land and the White Deer Paradise seem to have reached a conclusion a long time ago too!"

Liu Yunjia and the others widened their eyes in shock, but they soon suppressed their emotions.

Chen Sanyang waved his hand casually and snorted, "I'm merely a nobody. I won't be able to show my face around City Lord Yang Hu. However, Brother Li's status is admirable. He's the one City Lord Yang is relying on!"

Outside the restaurant, Shang Xia nodded to himself.

As an envoy of the White Deer Paradise, Li Tianshou was naturally able to meet with Yang Hu anytime he wished. The reaction Yang Zhenbiao had earlier was real when he learned about Chen Sanyang's origin. His father didn't tell him any of his plan with Li Tianshou.

The cooperation between them and the cultivators of the Azure Spiritual World could never be revealed. Especially when they were in the You Continent who hated the cultivators of the Azure Spiritual World more than anything else in the world.

Even as Yang Hu's son, Yang Zhenbiao wasn't privy to the information that his father had deals with the members of the Azure Spiritual World.

In any case, Shang Xia didn't think that that was the only problem. The thing he was worried about was the fact that Chen Sanyang had the guts to reveal his identity in front of so many people.

That could only mean one thing. Yang Hu, Li Tianshou, and even Chen Sanyang himself felt that there was no longer a need to hide his identity!

That would also mean that their goals had already been accomplished. Even if they hadn't, they were close to it!

They might not have said who they were targeting, but Shang Xia was sure of it. They were plotting against the Tongyou City!

"The attack on Kou Chongxue... you guys did it?" Yang Zhenbiao's voice rang in the hall once again.

Even though no one replied, Shang Xia could imagine the faces on Chen Sanyang at that moment.

"You guys really killed Kou Chongxue?" A sense of unease could be heard in Qin Yuyuan's voice as he asked.

A soft chuckle left Li Tianshou's lips. "Even if killing a Martial Dipper Realm expert was so easy, how can there be no signs of his death?"

"Since he's still alive, how are you guys courageous enough to plot against the Tongyou City? The Tongyou Institution isn't an easy target to deal with." Yang Zhenbiao muttered. This time, his voice contained no trace of emotion.

Not a shred of fear was left in his heart. Since his father chose to receive the support of the White Deer Paradise and work with the Azure Spiritual World, they definitely came up with a complete plan.

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All he wished to do was to make sense of the entire situation.

The best way would be to ask his father, but since his father arranged for the banquet, he definitely had his reasons for doing so.

Now, he finally understood where his father's confidence originated from. His plan to convince the Eighteen Horsemen to work for himself didn't just originate from capturing their third man in charge and his authority as the city lord.

"Even if Kou Chongxue is still alive, he's probably pacing the gates of hell. He won't be able to affect our plans in the near future. Once we succeed, even a Martial Dipper Realm expert would be crushed to death by the merger of our worlds." Li Tianshou gloated.

"Merger? Do you mean, our Azure Origin World and the Azure Spiritual World..." Yang Zhenbiao had a strong sense of repulsion in his heart. He felt that what they were

talking about was too far-fetched, and it was definitely not something Martial Intent Realm cultivators like them were supposed to be thinking about.

However, there was a voice in his mind telling him that everything he was hearing was exactly what his father intended for him to hear.

The Changfeng City was merely a city in a barren region of the Azure Origin World. His experience and insights were far too lacking when compared to the experts who came from the central continent.

He wasn't the only one. Even Shang Xia found their idea ridiculous. He also discovered a slight movement on the roof of the restaurant. Sighing softly, he knew that those inside definitely discovered her presence now that she had moved.

Silence filled the restaurant where Li Tianshou and the rest were, and it took some time for the commotion to return. Shang Xia could feel two powerful divine senses extending out from the restaurant as they examined the surroundings. One of them was really weird, and Shang Xia immediately identified the owner of the weird divine sense as Chen Sanyang.

Merging his divine sense with the world around him, Shang Xia's presence disappeared.

He might be able to avoid their detection, but he got ready to make his move. The moment Hai Min made her escape, he would lend her his strength.

It came as a surprise when he discovered that she was still lying silently on the roof. It finally hit him. Her cultivation level was too low and she should be unable to feel their divine sense. As such, she had no idea she was already exposed.

When Shang Xia was hesitating to give her a reminder, the divine senses started to extend further around the restaurant. It was as though they failed to find anything close by.

Luckily, Shang Xia was prepared. The divine senses swept across him but failed to discover his presence.

He realized that Hai Min might not have been discovered by the two of them. After remaining still, she seemed to have evaded their senses. Thinking that the person spying on them had already left, the two divine senses extended to look for clues. Sneering in his heart, Shang Xia knew that they wouldn't be able to find anything no matter how far they looked.

Their divine senses might not have discovered him or Hai Min, but that didn't mean that Hai Min was out of danger. Once they sent people up to the roof to take a look, Shang Xia was afraid that even with his assistance, she might not be able to escape.

A booming laughter emerged from the restaurant suddenly. "Brother Tianshou, Brother Chen, I'm really surprised by what you just shared. Who would have thought that I was merely a frog at the bottom of the well. I must have embarrassed myself!"

"Brother Yang, no need to say that! The only reason we knew about it in advance is because of the holy lands behind us. Even if we don't tell you anything, you will probably learn about it soon! Hahaha, you can even say that we overstepped our boundaries by telling you in advance!"

“Oh right, even though Kou Chongxue is out of the picture, the Tongyou Institution is still a force to be reckoned with. They also have the support of the four great clans. Even if we succeed, we’ll have to pay a huge price! I’m not a coward, but my Changfeng City is located close to the Tongyou City! The moment they go crazy and try dragging all their enemies down to hell with them, we’ll be the first to be torn to shreds!”

“Hahaha...” Li Tianshou burst out laughing. “Brother Yang, let me ask you something else first. How do you think we managed to locate Kou Chongxue’s cultivation grounds?”

Qin Yuyuan muttered instead of Yang Zhenbiao. “Wasn’t there a spy who told you? Didn’t the Tongyou Institution clear out the spies of the Rose Party earlier?”

“The Rose Party is made up of a bunch of fools. How could they possibly discover Kou Chongxue’s hiding spot? The only ones who know the secret are in the higher ups of the Tongyou Institution. Even the patriarchs of the four great clans might not know!”

“Hiss...” Sucking in a cold breath, Yang Zhenbiao continued, “Who is it exactly?”

All of a sudden, Shang Xia felt something off. He could tell that those in the restaurant were currently moving about rapidly.

However, Li Tianshou’s voice quickly followed up, “Who do you think is the most likely candidate to enter the Martial Dipper Realm in the Tongyou City?”

“Huh? Are you talking about Ji Wenlong? That’s not possible. Do you think that Kou Chongxue is trying to suppress Ji Wenlong and he’s taking revenge?”

“Hehe, Shang Bo barely entered the Martial Extermination Realm ten years ago. Today, we heard rumors that he entered the fourth layer of the Martial Extermination Realm. He’s comparable to the powerful Ji Wenlong in a few short years of time. If that’s not suppression, I don’t know what is. If Kou Chongxue gave Ji Wenlong the same amount of support, he wouldn’t have just entered the large completion stage of the Martial Extermination Realm.”

“This...”

“Also, do you know why the Tongyou Institution can’t wait to get their hands on the Mysterious Coral World? They definitely know that they can only obtain it after the grand formation loses power completely, yet they chose to enter it before the time came even though they know that it would damage the mysterious world. They waited for close to twenty years, but why would they act so impatiently now?”

“Isn’t it because Liu Jitang... No, could it be because of the rank five advancement formula?”

“Kou Chongxue was unable to bring out the rank five advancement formula, and naturally, they had to make their own plans.

“Wait. Brother Li, did you say that he is unable to take it out? Isn't it because he wasn't willing to do so?”

“Hehe, according to the elders of the holy lands, Kou Chongxue's entry to the Martial Dipper Realm was a tad too suspicious. He might not actually possess an advancement formula. At the very least, he won't have a complete formula! They can't possibly tell that to the world. Once they do, the Tongyou Institution would lose control over the four great clans. Clearly, there's no secret in the world that can be kept forever. The four great clans probably started to make their own plans!”

“So that's the case...”

All of a sudden, three figures emerged from the hall on the second level of the restaurant and charged towards the roof. The moment they did, a terrifying blast ripped across the surface of the roof and the cape on Hai Min's body fluttered in the air. She was exposed immediately!

“Hah! It really is the Tranquil Cape. Speak! Which one of the Eighteen Horsemen are you?!”

Liu Yunjia growled as a giant claw formed in mid air to grab at Hai Min.

Chapter 272: How Many People Do They Have?!

Using the distraction Yang Zhenbiao, Li Tianshou, and Chen Sanyang gave them, the three young masters of the Ji Continent rushed up to the roof.

Hai Min's Tranquil Cape was really too special. The three of them could only personally make their moves when Li Tianshou and Chen Sanyang failed to locate anyone with their divine senses.

The move was indeed useful. The moment they appeared, Hai Min's presence was revealed. In a state of shock, she leaped up to flee.

A grunt left Liu Yunjia's lips and he gathered a huge claw out of heaven and earth qi to grab at her fleeing figure.

Due to her cultivation only being at the Martial Extremity Realm, Liu Yunjia was extremely confident that he would be able to capture her.

Alas, Hai Min's cape fluttered behind her, and she leaped off the roof. Not only did she not fall towards the ground immediately, but she started to soar through the skies like a bat. That wasn't all. She moved faster and faster!

Who would have thought that her Tranquil Cape would possess such frightening properties! Not only did it disguise her presence, but it also allowed her to fly through the air!

Glancing at her, Shang Xia chuckled in his heart. He could tell that the cape was really special, but with her inner qi reserves, she wouldn't be able to sustain her flight for long.

“Hmph! Where do you think you’re going?!” Guo Yuxi roared as he pushed himself off the roof to chase after her.

Evidently, the three of them were familiar with the properties of her cape. They were ready to react the moment she tried anything!

Shang Xia wanted to lend her his assistance by stopping the three of them when she was discovered earlier, but he hesitated slightly when he heard the voices coming from within the restaurant.

“They finally made their move... Hahaha, my throat was getting dry after talking so much.”

“It’s the Tranquil Cape indeed. It’s the only thing that can avoid my senses. However, that person’s cultivation shouldn’t be too strong...”

“Let’s go! Let’s go take a look!”

Footsteps rang through the air as those in the restaurant raced after the three who emerged earlier.

Chen Sanyang’s laughter echoed softly through the air at that moment. “You guys can go ahead. I won’t be joining in the fun. Many thanks for Brother Yang’s generosity tonight. I’ll take my leave.”

Li Tianshou’s voice came soon after. “Oh? Brother Chen, are you going to meet your fellow comrades?”

“Hahaha, Brother Tianshou, you’re right. Tomorrow, an elder from my side will be coming over. I have to welcome him at the city gates.” Chen Sanyang chuckled.

Yang Zhenbiao smiled after hearing what they said. “Since that’s the case, I hope Brother Chen has a good rest tonight. Farewell.”

“Farewell!” Chen Sanyang bade his farewell to Yang Zhenbiao and Qin Yuyuan before turning to Li Tianshou again. “Brother Li, I hope you can be careful with the thing I asked you to investigate. It’s extremely important and if you receive any news on Yu Cangze, please inform me as soon as possible. Not only will this benefit my holy land, but you will also stand to gain a lot too!”

“Brother Chen, rest assured. I’ll do my best.” Li Tianshou muttered.

When they were done talking, Shang Xia decided to assist Hai Min. Dropping into the alley beside him, he raced in the direction she fled.

With the help of her Tranquil Cape, Hai Min might be able to fly for some time, but the properties of camouflage were gone the moment she took flight.

She wasn’t able to fly very far anyway. By the time she landed, the distance between her and the three young masters was merely tens of feet!

The Changfeng City might not be as powerful as the Tongyou City, but their security forces weren’t there for decoration either. With the commotion they caused, Yang Hu’s troops quickly started their encirclement.

Without a way to hide, Hai Min wouldn't be able to shake off the three of them. There were also soldiers from the city blocking off some of her escape routes. Seeing as she was about to be completely surrounded, she made a last ditch attempt to use the buildings around her as cover while running through a small alley.

She chose to run in a direction opposite of the courtyard. She found herself unwilling to put her daughter and the kind hunter who helped her in danger.

However, her decision caused the distance between herself and those chasing her to shorten. In an instant, she threw herself into a dangerous situation. As she ran desperately through the streets with the three of them hot on her heels, none of the four discovered a figure racing towards them at a terrifying speed.

It didn't take long for the mysterious figure to arrive alongside them.

Raising his hand, Shang Xia's bow appeared. When he saw their nimble movements, Shang Xia revealed a bitter smile. He wasn't confident he could hit them accurately at the speed they were moving.

Helpless, he could only retrieve his bow. In its place appeared the Jade River Sword.

After entering the Martial Intent Realm, Shang Xia's cultivation increased like a rocket. He could tell that his Origin True Qi was getting overly tyrannical. When he just entered the Martial Intent Realm, a low-grade weapon could still allow him to show off his full strength.

He discovered that ever since his divine sense transferred a second time and he became stronger, low-grade weapons wouldn't be able to last long in his hands.

Even though Shang Xia had quite a few graded weapons, he hadn't reached the point where he could waste them however he liked.

Since he destroyed the Waning Moon Spear when he was ambushed in the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range, he didn't wish the same fate to befall his Jade Creek Sword.

Even though the Jade River Sword might cause his identity to be revealed, he couldn't care less.

From Shang Xia's estimations, Liu Yunjia was the strongest of the three young masters from the Ji Continent. His Deep Leaping Steps were extremely useful when it came to weird terrain like the one they were traveling in as he could leap up on roofs and back down onto the streets as he pleased. A huge reason behind Hai Min being unable to shake them off was because of him.

A frosty light flashed in Liu Yunjia's eyes when he thought about how they would be able to capture another one of the Eighteen Horsemen.

"Not good!" With his eyes widening slightly, he yelled to warn the others. As a genius specially nurtured by his clan, he was no weakling. He was also extremely sensitive to danger.

His body was in the air when he made a strange twist. He managed to land on the roof of a building on his left before unsheathing two short blades.

He slashed horizontally, and the sound of metal scraping against each other stabbed into the ears of those present. Sparks flew through the air as a black figure shot past Liu Yunjia.

Liu Yunjia discovered that his blades were reacting strangely after the exchange. One of his blades became a hundred times heavier and the other turned strangely light. His movement was affected as half his body sank downwards while the other half pulled forward, causing him to lose his footing.

He felt like his body was about to be torn in half, but that wasn't all. He seemed to lose control over his inner qi and his inner organs jolted violently.

Grunting fiercely, the metallic taste of blood filled his mouth.

He couldn't believe it. He was injured from a casual exchange with the other party!

"Be careful!" He warned his companions behind him, but he discovered that his voice had turned completely hoarse from the blood rushing up his throat when he spoke.

Liu Yunjia might be in a bad state, but Shang Xia was equally as shocked. He discovered that his opponent wasn't as useless as he had thought. One had to know that Shang Xia had launched a sneak attack earlier. He half expected to critically injure Liu Yunjia, but the other party only suffered some inner injuries. It was a remarkable feat in Shang Xia's eyes.

However, he didn't falter because of that. He moved quickly through the air. Liu Yunjia was able to receive his strike earlier, but that was it. He couldn't see Shang Xia's facial features and he could only warn his friends to be careful.

As Shang Xia's figure disappeared into the night, a whistling sound tore through the air as the Jade Creek Sword made its appearance. This time, the sword slashed towards Zhang Yushu.

In order to prevent his Origin True Qi from tearing the weapons to shreds from the inside, he used his divine sense to control the sword.

The art of controlling his sword! It was the same technique he scoffed at when someone used it against him during the raid of the Shang Clan's convoy when he returned to the Tongyou City from the battlefield between the two worlds. However, Shang Xia was an expert at the Martial Intent Realm now! His divine sense experienced its second transformation, and it could bring out a terrifying effect when used to control the sword.

After all, the essence of a sword controlling art was the power controlling the sword itself. Transforming essence to qi, training qi to achieve the divine... Shang Xia's sword techniques reached a frightening level! The state of man and sword as one was easily achieved.

Now, becoming one with the sword not only involved using his qi to create a connection with his sword. His divine sense came into play, and the sword could even influence the heaven and earth qi in their surroundings!

A strange cry came from Zhang Yushu, and an intricately crafted copper hammer appeared in his hand. He slammed it down at the incoming streak of light.

"Bang!"

With a loud blast, the Jade Creek Sword was sent flying into the night sky.

Zhang Yushu might have deflected the attack, but he wasn't able to remain unaffected. He flew through the air as waves of pain swept through his body.

“There’s an ambush! There’s more than one of them!” Zhang Yushu gasped in between breaths. The instant the words left his lips, the snap of a bowstring echoed through the skies.

“Whoosh...” An ordinary-looking arrow appeared in front of Guo Yuxi’s sights.

A mace appeared in Guo Yuxi’s hand as he smacked it down at the arrow. With a small explosion, the arrow burst into pieces.

Guo Yuxi took several steps back due to the backlash, but he sighed. “The archer is a lot weaker than the other two. We don’t know who our opponents are, and we should regroup and wait for reinforcements.”

The three of them seemed to have worked together before and they came to a tacit understanding. They gathered closer to each other in an instant.

With their backs to each other, they faced their surroundings with cautious expressions. They didn’t know where the next round of attacks would come from.

They clearly misjudged the situation. When Yang Zhenbiao, Qin Yuyuan, and Li Tianshou arrived and no other attacks came, they discovered that they were duped.

The attacks they suffered earlier was probably an attempt to help the user of the Tranquil Cape escape. However, the three of them acted as though they were about to face a huge battle. Feeling that they had turned into a laughing stock in the eyes of their enemies, anger surged through their hearts.

Hai Min didn’t know who helped her to escape, but she made a huge detour around the city in order to be safe. After ensuring that there was no one on her tail, she returned to the courtyard.

By the time she returned, she discovered that her daughter was still sound asleep. The young hunter seemed to be in deep sleep too, from the deep breaths he was taking.

Getting back into bed, Hai Min discovered that she was unable to fall asleep. All she could think of was the conversation she overheard.

Chapter 273: Goal

When Li Tianshou and the rest arrived with several other experts in tow, they saw how the three young masters were huddled together ready to face a huge enemy.

After hearing a simple explanation from the three of them, Qin Yuyuan frowned and ordered for a lockdown of the city immediately. He turned to them and frowned, “Does this mean that the other members of the Eighteen Horsemen have entered the city?”

However, Li Tianshou shook his head slowly and muttered, “No... That’s not right. According to our intelligence, none of the Martial Intent Realm cultivators of the Eighteen Horsemen uses the sword!”

“Brother Tianshou, one can use a different weapon when mounted. They might not be known to use the sword when they’re riding, but that doesn’t mean that they can’t use the sword in close-quarters combat. Moreover, most of the Eighteen Horsemen were students of the Tongyou Institution. In order to avoid suspicion and to prevent

us from guessing their identities, they might have used a different weapon to cover their tracks." Yang Zhenbiao muttered.

However, Liu Yunjia shook his head to reject Yang Zhenbiao's deduction the moment he spoke. "No. Young city lord, you make sense, but the two swordsmen who attacked us used extremely weird techniques. One of them even used a sword controlling art. The Tongyou Institution would never teach them stuff like that."

Guo Yuxi continued, "Brother Liu is right. Moreover, there's one other archer in their ranks and even though they're weaker than the other two, they're still a Martial Intent Realm expert. Even if the members of the Eighteen Horsemen manage to change their weapons to hide their fighting style, they can't possibly train to be an archer without anyone noticing. None of the Eighteen Horsemen are known to be archers anyway."

"There's one more thing..." Zhang Yushu muttered. "Even though they only exchanged one move with each of us, all of them were using graded weapons. The Eighteen Horsemen might not possess so many treasures they're not known for using anyway!"

"Who the hell can it be then?" Yang Zhenbiao frowned.

His grumblings were met with a chuckle from Li Tianshou. "All of them are from the great families of the Ji Continent. They won't be wrong on such matters. With their insight, they should know a lot of techniques regarding cultivators in the area too. If they find the sword technique foreign, the users might not be anyone from the Ji or You continents!" Pausing for a second, he continued, "... If they're good swordsmen and they're currently in the You Continent, could they be members of the Jianmen Institution?!"

Everyone stared at him in shock. However, Li Tianshou waved his hand casually to dispel their doubt. "I'm merely speculating. There's no need to take me seriously. After all, there's no evidence."

"If that's the case, I'll send my men to check. Regardless if it's the Eighteen Horsemen or the members of the Jianmen Institution, they'll have to abide by the rules of my Changfeng City now that they're here." Yang Zhenbiao growled.

It didn't take long for him to send out several experts to investigate the matter. As the people he sent out scattered through the city, it was destined for the city to be in for a sleepless night.

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After passing down his orders, Yang Zhenbiao handed over the reins to Qin Yuyuan before rushing back to the City Lord Manor to meet with his father, Yang Hu!

Yang Hu looked like a typical cultivator from the You Continent. He was extremely well-built and his face was pretty much a square. A trace of viciousness flashed through his eyes, and the violent air he was emitting couldn't be hidden. Because of his position as the city lord of the Changfeng that stood between the You and Ji continent, the members of the Ji Continent gave him the title of the Tiger of the You Continent. At the same time, he was also known as the Changfeng Monarch.

Due to his increase in age, he looked like a middle aged man whose pot belly was starting to form. Even so, it only served to promote his prestigious and mighty aura.

Yang Hu wasn't surprised that his son came running to see him in the middle of the night.

When Yang Zhenbiao walked into his room, he spoke slowly, "So, how was the banquet tonight?"

"This... There were some surprises, but I gained a lot." Yang Zhenbiao explained the happenings that went down earlier. When he ended with the part about the spy and how the three young masters of the Ji Continent were obstructed, he told Yang Hu about Li Tianshou's suspicion of the Jianmen Institution.

Sighing softly, Yang Hu maintained his calm expression. "Now that Kou Chongxue has been ambushed a second time and his life and death remains unknown, the Tongyou City is going to face enemies from inside and out."

Yang Zhenbiao thought about what Yang Hu said for a second before asking, "Father, our city is filled with people of different backgrounds. There are those from the Tongyou City, White Deer Paradise, Ji Continent, Rose Party, and other factions. You have always acted impartially in the past. Did you choose to work with the White Deer Paradise because of this?"

Yang Hu glanced at him from the corner of his eye and a deep light swam within. "You can say so, but that's not truly the case."

A look of confusion flashed across Yang Zhenbiao's face. "Please enlighten me."

A strangely wise expression could be seen on the otherwise rough and simple Yang Hu's face. He muttered, "In the past, we were able to remain neutral among all the different factions. My capability is only a small part of the reason. The main reason is that all the different factions require a buffer between them. Now that the balance is broken, we have to choose a side no matter what. Since the White Deer Paradise is the one with the largest advantage right now, we have to take their side."

"Is this because of the cooperation between the White Deer Paradise and the Changbai Holy Land?" Yang Zhenbiao recalled the scene in the restaurant earlier and asked.

"Hehe." A mocking smile could be seen on Yang Hu's face. "There's more than that. Kou Chongxue offended too many people. Why else do you think he was ambushed the first time?"

Yang Zhenbiao frowned. "Kou Chongxue might be powerful, but why would he offend the entire world?"

"A Martial Dipper Realm expert is more than capable of suppressing an entire part of the Azure Origin World by himself. Moreover, Kou Chongxue isn't an ordinary Martial Dipper Realm expert. He has already escaped the control of those holy lands..."

"Control? Why would Martial Dipper Realm experts be controlled by anyone?" Yang Zhenbiao couldn't help but interrupt."

Yang Hu waved his hand to indicate for Yang Zhenbiao to finish listening and he continued, "... We'll talk about that later. All you need to know is that Kou Chongxue's cultivation level might not be the highest in our Azure Origin World, but the prestige he has far outranks anyone else. As such, many people have been jealous of him for a long time."

"That's the reason a lot of powers in our Azure Origin World want Kou Chongxue dead... The White Deer Paradise is one of them, and that's why we chose to side with them. Is that it?" Yang Zhenbiao muttered.

Yang Hu burst out laughing. "Let me ask you something else. I built up the Changfeng City after so many years. If I disappear one day, do you think you and your brothers can protect my creation?"

"Why would you ask something like that?" Yang Zhenbiao frowned.

"Just tell me if you're confident of doing it." Yang Hu grunted.

Beads of sweat started forming on Yang Zhenbiao's forehead. "Without a Martial Extermination Realm expert..."

Yang Hu nodded his head in gratification. "At least you're not delusional. You need to know that our Yang Family doesn't possess a proper rank four advancement formula. The only reason I advanced in the past was because I ran into a completed set of advancement medicine and a stray extermination origin. Do you know what this implies for our family?"

Yang Zhenbiao lowered his head slowly. "In the future, it won't be possible for me to enter the Martial Extermination Realm."

"Your brothers aren't as talented as you. You're hardworking, but I can't say for sure if you can enter the Martial Extermination Realm in the future." Yang Hu sighed.

"I'm sorry. I will have to disappoint Father."

"Nonsense. Talent is determined at birth. There's nothing to be disappointed about. However, a rank four advancement formula is the true mark that one has become a large power in this world. If we manage to obtain a complete rank four advancement formula, we can still protect our foundations without a Martial Extermination Realm expert." Yang Hu muttered.

Yang Zhenbiao finally realized what Yang Hu was saying. "Are we working with the White Deer Paradise because they're giving us a rank four advancement formula?"

Yang Hu smiled and nodded. "Do you know what their initial condition was?"

Seeing how Yang Zhenbiao was shaking his head, Yang Hu explained, "They promised to assist me in my breakthrough to the Martial Dipper Realm and to replace Kou Chongxue as the spokesperson for the You Continent!"

"Martial Dipper..." Yang Zhenbiao nearly yelped out loud.

Yang Hu snorted. "A set of rank five advancement medicine cannot compare to a rank four advancement formula in my eyes!"

“Father, you... You did this for our family!” Yang Zhenbiao widened his eyes in shock.

“Alright. You just need to know where our bottom line is.” Yang Hu sighed.

Lowering his head respectfully, Yang Zhenbiao asked another question. “What about the Eighteen Horsemen? Do you have any other instructions for me?”

“Since we already promised them, handle it accordingly.” When he was done speaking, Yang Hu waved his hand to dismiss his son.

Not too long after Yang Zhenbiao had left, Yang Hu stood in front of his window and stared into the night sky. He raised his head all of a sudden and snorted, “Since you’re already here, why don’t you show yourself? Help yourself to a cup of tea.”

A soft chuckle drifted in the wind and a figure emerged from behind a huge boulder. The figure wore a velvet cap on his head and he quickly approached Yang Hu’s room.

Glancing at the newcomer, Yang Hu snorted. “Heh. I didn’t think members of the Rose Party would dare to show yourselves at this point in time. How many Martial Extermination Realm members do you even have left?”

“What’s the problem, City Lord Yang? Are you afraid that our connection will be exposed and you’ll draw trouble to yourself?” The person chuckled in amusement.

A sneer appeared on Yang Hu’s face and he continued, “I’m just curious. Now that all eyes are on my Changfeng City, where did you find the courage to show up? Hmph, with the shitty reputation of your Rose Party, I bet you want to fish for a piece of the pie like the others.”

“You...” Suppressing his rage, the newcomer snorted, “Don’t forget. We had many dealings with each other. If I choose to reveal this matter to the Tongyou City...”

Yang Hu roared with laughter before the person could finish. “There are too many powers looking to work with me now. Who do you think you are? Your Rose Party is merely a bunch of ragtag fools now. Go ahead, report me to the Tongyou City! Do you want me to provide you with a bunch of the crimes we committed together?”

The person who came could no longer suppress their anger. Glaring at Yang Hu, he no longer bothered with the pleasantries or threats, “City Lord Yang, all I want is to receive an answer from you today.”

“Sure. All I ask for in return is for you to answer my question.”

“Deal.”

After the two were done, Yang Hu reached out his hand to shake hands with the other party.

With the transaction sealed, the member of the Rose Party muttered, “From what we know, the Changbai Holy Land of the Azure Spiritual World is hunting down some guy called Yu Cangze. He’s suspected to be a spy our Azure Origin World planted in the Azure Spiritual World. Do you know who he is?”

Yang Hu thought for a moment and a frown appeared on his face. "I heard of him recently and have no idea who he might be. However, he's definitely someone from our world if he's being hunted down by the Changbai Holy Land. Moreover, he's likely to have returned to our world."

"Heh. God damn White Deer Paradise and Changbai Holy Land... As they say, steal a hook and they'll hang you like a common criminal. Steal the whole country and they'll make you a prince... Looks like they're going big on this one!"

A trace of sorrow could be heard in his voice, but he managed to regain his clarity quickly. "It's your turn. Ask what you want."

Yang Hu thought for a second before throwing out his question. "Did your Rose Party take part in the second ambush on Kou Chongxue?"

"Nope. I don't know how many people took part in it anyway." The member of the Rose Party sighed.

"Wait. Even you don't know?" The member of the Rose Party threw the question back at Yang Hu.

Sinking into silence, Yang Hu fell deep into his thoughts. He only snapped back to attention after hearing a soft cough from the other party and he sighed, "Alright. You can leave now."

Chapter 274: On the Trail

The news of an assassination attempt on the young city lord quickly swept through the city. The night was bound to be a sleepless one.

Perhaps it was because of the direction Hai Min escaped in, the guards were sent in a completely different direction from the little courtyard they were in. They only arrived at Shang Xia's courtyard in the morning.

Amidst a series of rapid banging, Shang Xia opened the gates to the courtyard while yawning loudly. The moment the gates opened up slightly, two guards at the Martial Realm rushed inside.

"Are you the only one here?" The two guards glared at Shang Xia with a frosty gaze. One of them asked while the other examined the courtyard closely.

Shang Xia seemed to be frightened by their ferocious demeanor and he stood rooted to the ground with his mouth wide open in shock.

At that moment, a soft creak came from the main room and Hai Min pulled the coat Shang Xia bought for her tightly over herself before walking out. "Honey, Who is it so early in the morning? Why..."

Before she completed her sentence, she saw the guards standing in the middle of the courtyard and she retreated in apparent fear. She took several steps back, and she wanted to close the door, but one of the guards growled, "Are the two of you new here? This courtyard belonged to someone else before..."

An innocent cry came from behind Hai Min just as the man spoke. "Mummy, I'm hungry! I wanna eat dumplings!" Yuanyuan muttered while rubbing her eyes and her tiny head poked out from

behind Hai Min's legs. Discovering the guards standing in their courtyard, Yuanyuan looked up at Hai Min and asked, "Who are they?"

Grabbing Yuanyuan, Hai Min quickly pulled her back into the room.

After seeing the little kid, the guards seemed to have their suspicions dispelled. They turned back to Shang Xia with a much friendlier attitude and explained the situation. "There have been some suspicious activities going on in the city recently and everyone is on guard. If you discover anything strange going on, do notify the guards immediately."

"Of course, of course." Shang Xia replied before sending them off respectfully. He went out after to get dumplings for Hai Min and Yuanyuan.

Halfway through their breakfast, Hai Min turned to look at Shang Xia. "A few of my relatives will be visiting us later."

Shang Xia didn't even raise his head while eating. "You'll have to host them on your own then. I'll have to leave the city today to hunt. Otherwise, our family will run out of money in a few days."

Hai Min stared at Shang Xia in shock when she heard what he said. Blood rushed to her face and she felt it heating up slightly. However, she heard what he said about going out to hunt and she muttered, "You... You have to be careful when you go out hunting..."

Yuanyuan tilted her head to the side and she asked with her mouth full, "Mummy, is this my daddy? You said that daddy will buy me lots of good food when he returns! He'll buy me toys and play with me too! Is that true?"

Hai Min's eyes turned red after hearing what her daughter said, and she immediately lowered her head.

Shang Xia noticed the change in Hai Min's mood and a sense of mischief filled his mind. He turned to look at Yuanyuan and he laughed, "Why don't you call me daddy?"

Coughing once, Hai Min turned to stare at Shang Xia with a strange look on her face. However, Yuanyuan was elated. She yelled happily, "Hehe! I'll call you daddy when you bring back a little rabbit for me!"

"Finish your food! Don't talk nonsense!" Hai Min snapped at Yuanyuan before lowering her head in embarrassment. She didn't dare to look at Shang Xia anymore.

Glancing at the blushing Hai Min, Shang Xia laughed. "Alright. I'll bring you a rabbit."

After he spoke, he couldn't help but lock pinkies with Yuanyuan.

...

After the incident in the morning and when he was done with breakfast, Shang Xia left the city the moment the gates opened.

He slung a new quiver of arrows on his back as he headed straight for the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range.

Not too long after Shang Xia entered the mountains, Chen Sanyang left the city on his Scarlet Scale Horse and headed south.

Chen Sanyang moved quickly, and he crossed the mountain pass quickly. He entered the only route leading into the heart of the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range.

Going in close to a hundred miles, Chen Sanyang made a sharp turn to arrive at another patch of forestry. After traveling deeper and deeper through the forest up till the point where his horse could no longer advance, he continued the rest of the way on foot. Securing his mount to a nearby tree, he rushed through the forest and disappeared in the blink of an eye.

When he disappeared, his mount suddenly released a loud neigh and stomped hard on the snow below.

Shang Xia's figure arrived beside the horse, and he gently stroked the creature's back. Calming it down slightly, he turned to look in the direction where Chen Sanyang disappeared.

As a chilly breeze swept through the land, Shang Xia's figure disappeared from where he was a second ago.

Chen Sanyuan traveled deeper and deeper into the mountain range, and even though he didn't know where he was anymore, he had his general sense of direction. A triangle-shaped flag appeared in his hand all of a sudden.

The bright orange flag started to flutter as Chen Sanyang sent some of his inner qi into it. It started to point in a certain direction of the mountain range.

A look of joy appeared on Chen Sanyang's face and he quickly ran in the direction it was pointing to.

Not too long after he had left, Shang Xia appeared in the place he once stood. He leaped up into a tree to look at where Chen Sanyang was running towards. His expression turned extremely serious.

Chen Sanyang didn't notice that he was being followed as he traveled in the direction indicated by his flag, and it didn't take long before he arrived before the spatial barrier separating the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range and the battlefield between the two worlds.

Walking along the barrier for dozens of miles, the flag in his hand showed some signs of reaction. It pointed straight at the barrier before him. As if he was already expecting such a response from the object, Chen Sanyang heaved a sigh of relief.

Looking around him cautiously, Chen Sanyang pretended as though he was taking a casual stroll around the forest before returning to his original spot.

Since the time he left the city, Shang Xia had been following him, unnoticed.

Standing before the spatial barrier, a small gourd appeared in Chen Sanyang's hand. Popping open the seal to the cork, several items dropped out.

Shang Xia had seen the formation masters of the Tongyou Institution in action, and he could tell what those items were used for. Indeed. Chen Sanyang placed those items in various spots around him with practiced ease before carving runes in the ground below.

After everything was done, he heaved a sigh of relief before stabbing his flag into the middle of the formation.

Sending his inner qi into the orange flag, the runes he carved into the ground earlier started to light up as the items rose into the skies.

A ray of orange light emerged from the center of the formation, shooting into the grayish spatial barrier up ahead. It tried to split the barrier down the middle.

Hiding behind a tree fifty feet away from Chen Sanyang, Shang Xia noticed everything that was happening. After his divine sense transformed a second time, the range he could extend it to increased to slightly over fifty feet.

After merging his divine sense with the world around him, Shang Xia wasn't afraid that Chen Sanyang could discover him.

As the orange beam tried to widen the crack it made in the barrier, Chen Sanyang's face turned deathly pale. It was clear that the consumption of his inner qi wasn't enough for him to sustain the formation he created. If Shang Xia made his move then, Chen Sanyang would be dead beyond doubt.

When Shang Xia was still hesitating about whether to make his move, another beam of orange light came from the other side. Several shadows appeared as they made their way through the barrier.

Even though Shang Xia had his guesses, he was shocked to the core when he saw them crossing the spatial barrier.

It was too late even if he wished to make his move. A powerful divine sense swept through the area and Shang Xia knew that it belonged to a Martial Extermination Realm expert.

After his initial sense of panic, he quickly suppressed his emotions. He discovered that the divine sense didn't possess any sense of malice. Instead, it was merely a probe of his surroundings.

Failing to discover Shang Xia's presence, the divine sense soon disappeared. However, he decided to retreat immediately!

Back then at Kou Chongxue's secret cultivation grounds, Shang Xia experimented with his divine sense. Not even Shang Lubing could discover his presence when he merged with the world around him.

Shang Lubing might not be able to tell who was spying on him, but he could tell that a divine sense was observing him. If Shang Lubing was able to tell, it only made sense that the newcomer would notice the stray divine sense too.

He had to leave as soon as possible. At the very least, he had to be gone before the other party emerged from the spatial barrier. Only then would he be able to ensure his safety.

Very quickly, the orange beam formed a door on the spatial barrier and Chen Sanyang forced himself to his feet and arranged his clothes despite his haggard appearance. He bowed deeply. "Disciple Chen Sanyang greets Elder Liang!"

"Hmph!" A snort boomed through the air as an old man with thinning white hair stepped out from the orange door. "Little Brat Chen, you messed up!"

Chen Sanyang's originally pale face turned a shade whiter, but he didn't know what he did.

The elder didn't bother to speak to him any longer and his gaze swept across the dense forestry around them. A loud roar escaped his lips. "I wonder which expert is playing tricks on me? I am Liang Shuangren of the Changbai Holy Land and I hope you can show yourself!"

Chapter 275: Encounter

“... I hope you can show yourself!”

Even though the elder of the Changbai Holy Land sounded polite, his divine sense terrorized the region around him. A terrifying storm swept through the forest around him.

There was no doubt about it. Liang Shuangren detected Shang Xia's divine sense. However, he couldn't tell who or where the person was, and he could only force Shang Xia to show himself with such a method.

Luckily, Shang Xia made his decision to leave quickly. He ran away the moment he felt the divine sense of a Martial Extermination Realm expert.

Due to the fact that he had to maintain his stealth, Shang Xia kept his state of fusion between his divine sense and the world around him. His speed was greatly affected. Of course, hiding his presence and aura didn't mean that no one would be able to discover him if they caught sight of him. As such, he had to run under the cover of the dense trees in case anyone saw him.

When Liang Shuangren rampaged around earlier, Shang Xia barely got out of his attack radius.

A strong gust of wind came from behind him, and despite the distance between them, Shang Xia felt his inner organs shaking and his inner qi flowing irregularly.

That didn't affect his decision to escape though. He knew that he had to continue his escape even if his internal injuries would get worse. He circulated his inner qi and pushed his Irregular Steps to the limit. His figure turned into a blur and he disappeared into the forest.

“Elder Liang...” Liang Shuangren wanted to look for the little rat himself, but he was stopped by a yell from behind.

The energy storm he created earlier not only destroyed the area around him, but it almost affected the formation laid down by Chen Sanyang. The youngster couldn't help but yell in fright to stop Liang Shuangren from causing more damage.

Raising an eyebrow in surprise, he looked towards the forest before grunting slightly. A trace of reluctance could be seen on his face.

He chose not to give chase?in the end. Instead, he waved his hand and a huge barrier appeared around them to prevent anyone else from spying on them.

The orange door on the spatial barrier stabilized, and three other experts from the Azure Spiritual World emerged.

“Brother Liang, what's with the huge disturbance?” Someone else asked, but they also stared in the direction where Shang Xia escaped.

That was clearly another Martial Extermination Realm expert!

Even though Shang Xia had already left their radius of detection, the two experts could still tell many things from the faint traces he left behind.

“Strange... A Martial Intent Realm cultivator had the ability to avoid my divine sense. I wouldn't have detected him if not for his low cultivation level...” Liang Shuangren snorted softly.

The middle aged Martial Extermination Realm expert who just emerged frowned. “Do you mean that the person's divine sense possesses some strange properties?”

“Too bad he escaped.” A trace of disappointment could be seen in Liang Shuangren's eyes as he sighed.

“Brother Liang, we cannot stay here for long. We definitely alerted the members of the Azure Origin World since we weakened the barrier. Not to mention the fact that someone noticed our entry. In order to avoid trouble, we have to leave this place.” The middle aged man who just emerged muttered.

Glaring at Chen Sanyang who was half dead from the energy expenditure, Liang Shuangren growled, “Brother Youshang is right. Even though the threat of Kou Chongxue has been dealt with and the risk of crossing the spatial barrier has been reduced. However, the number of Martial Extermination Realm experts here is no joke.”

Youshang chuckled in amusement, “Haha, if Kou Chongxue was still around, we wouldn't risk crossing the spatial barrier.”

As the two of them conversed, the last two Martial Intent Realm cultivators emerged from the orange door. Liang Shuangren pressed his hand downwards, destroyed all signs that they laid down a formation there and sank the entire area around them by three inches.

Getting Chen Sanyang to lead the way, Liang Shuangren continued, “Then again, the situation isn't as bad as it seems. Kou Chongxue is nowhere to be found, and the Tongyou Institution is busy moving the mysterious world. The spatial barrier is basically unprotected right now.”

Youshang shook his head and muttered, “Brother Liang, we cannot be careless. This is the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range. The You Continent isn't the only one that borders it. The experts of the Ji and Qing Continents might be paying attention to this place.”

Liang Shuangren roared with laughter. “Looks like Brother You is pretty familiar with the Azure Origin World too. However, you might not know that the true powerhouses of our worlds have already reached an agreement. The one working with our Changbai Holy Land is the White Deer Paradise of the Ji Continent.”

A look of realization appeared on Youshang's face and he burst out laughing, “So that's it! Looks like I haven't been keeping myself updated these few years!”

“Brother You, there's no need to say something like that. Even in our Changbai Holy Land, not many people know about this matter. If not for the fact that I have an important matter to deal with personally in the Azure Origin World, they might not have told me anything too.” Liang Shuangren explained.

Youshang chuckled in response, “I have to thank Brother Liang regardless for bringing me along to widen my horizons!”

“Naturally. After all, I need your help.”

“Anytime! Hahaha...”

“Hahaha...”

...

After running tens of miles through the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range, Shang Xia finally heaved a sigh of relief after ensuring that no one was after him.

At the same time, he celebrated silently. If not for the fact that the Martial Extermination Realm expert on the other side was held back by something, Shang Xia would have died a thousand times over if he decided to give chase. After all, the Martial Extermination Realm expert traveled a lot faster than him.

He felt that he was too careless. He should have done something the moment he discovered Chen Sanyang was setting up the formation. It didn't matter if it involved killing Chen Sanyang or destroying the formation, he could have done either easily!

Even though he managed to keep his life, he already alerted the enemies to his presence. It would be basically impossible for him to track them down again or to learn of their plans.

Helpless, Shang Xia could only leave.

Noticing the time, he felt that he would be able to return to the city before dusk fell even if he took it a little slow.

Hiding his aura, Shang Xia merged his divine sense with the world around him. He needed to pretend like he was an ordinary hunter in case the Martial Extermination Realm experts of the Azure Spiritual World went crazy and swept through the region looking for him. In his current state, they wouldn't be able to discover his true strength unless they got up close and personal.

Weaving through the mountain range with his bow in hand, he managed to practice his archery by sniping two prey.

As the sun started to set, he caught sight of the Changfeng City in the distance. When he prepared to make the journey back, he heard a familiar cry in the skies.

Widening his eyes in shock, a look of unbridled joy appeared on his face as he looked into the skies.

He failed to see anything other than an endless sea of blue, and the cry he heard earlier seemed to be a mistake. With confusion flashing in his eyes, he whistled loudly.

He didn't know if it was what he thought it was, but he waited patiently as his whistle echoed through the mountain range.

The familiar chirp came from a distance after some time, and it became much clearer than before. A little black dot appeared in his sight, but it enlarged rapidly as it flew towards Shang Xia.

In the blink of an eye, Shang Xia could make out the shape of a bird. He could basically confirm that the little bird flying towards him was Yan Ni'er, and he quickly caught sight of four smaller birds flying behind her.

Yan Ni'er discovered Shang Xia's presence too, and she started circling overhead. Releasing loud cries from time to time, she seemed to be asking him why the hell he was so far away from home.

Like their mother, the four little birds did the same.

However, their cries were a lot more chaotic and they seemed to be peppering him with other random questions.

Waving his hand towards the air, Yan Ni'er rushed down towards him and perched obediently on his shoulders. Yan Lei followed closely behind and rushed into his palm.

Shang Xia knew what that meant, and a ball of reddish-gold lightning quickly appeared in his hand. "Hehe, you crafty little bird..."

Diving into the ball of lightning, Yan Lei bathed in it happily. The three other younglings absorbed the remnant lightning in the air as they didn't have the same tyrannical Lightning Bird bloodline as Yan Lei, but their gains weren't small either.

Shang Xia chuckled in amusement and looked at Yan Ni'er while maintaining the ball of lightning in his hand. "Did they send you out to look for me?"

"Chirp, chirp!"

"Did the clan receive any news about the situation in the Tongyou City?" Shang Xia asked, but he discovered that he went a little overboard. After all, what was the bird supposed to say?

Who would have thought that the little bird would clap her wings once before extending one of her legs forward.

Shang Xia finally noticed that there was a tiny letter on it.

Retrieving it carefully, Shang Xia unfurled the tiny letter that was barely an inch in length. He saw countless words scribbled on it...

...

As night fell, Shang Xia lugged a fat deer towards the city gates. There were also three grouses strapped to his belt as he arrived before the gates closed for the night.

Even though the deer was close to a hundred pounds, its value was far from the bear skin he brought the first time. He only managed to sell it for two pieces of silver essence.

He sold two of the grouses for fifty copper boards and brought the last one back to his courtyard.

As he approached the courtyard, he saw Hai Min sending off two people.

The three of them exchanged several words before Hai Min caught sight of Shang Xia.

The two she was talking to followed her gaze and stared at him too. Their gazes were sharp and they examined him from head to toe. They thought that they had managed to see through the man, but it went without saying they couldn't.

Shang Xia maintained his neutral expression as he approached the courtyard, as though he didn't notice their probings in the slightest. When he arrived, he smiled at Hai Min. "These must be your relatives. Why don't you introduce us to each other?"

Chapter 276: News

Shang Xia had a pretty good gauge of how strong the two of them were the moment he saw them earlier. The younger one who looked to be in his twenties was as strong as Hai Min, and he was in the Martial Extremity Realm.

The other member who was in his thirties seemed to have condensed his divine sense. However, he was clearly not as strong as Shang Xia. His divine sense barely completed its first transformation.

The two of them had no idea that their strength had been exposed to the other party and they continued to size him up as he approached.

Shang Xia couldn't be bothered with the two of them and he addressed Hai Min directly. "These must be your relatives. Why don't you introduce us to each other?"

Hai Min's face turned red and her voice was barely louder than a mosquito's buzz. "This... This is my Fifth Uncle, Uncle Cen. That's my Ninth Brother, Brother Huang."

Shang Xia raised the grouse in his hand and kept the grin on his face as he replied, "Oh! So it's Fifth Uncle and Ninth Brother. You must be tired from traveling. I managed to get something good on my hunt today. If you don't mind, please join us for dinner."

The older gentleman's gaze turned softer and he chuckled in amusement, "That's alright. We won't be staying for dinner. Thirteenth Sister likes the tranquility here. Since she doesn't mind living here, please take care of her."

"Of course!" Shang Xia laughed.

Nodding his head slightly, Uncle Cen turned to address his companion. "Let's go."

A trace of anger could be seen on the face of the younger man when Shang Xia appeared, and when he was called away, he growled into Shang Xia's ear, "If you fail to take care of the two of them... Hmph!"

"Hey!" Uncle Cen's voice rang through the air once again. An unmistakable trace of authority could be heard in his voice. "Keep up. We're leaving!"

Shooting one last glare at Shang Xia, the young man turned to run after Uncle Cen. Shang Xia's expression remained friendly from the start to the end. He seemed extremely welcoming to both of them.

Uncle Cen's voice rang through the air as the two of them disappeared into the distance. "If you run into any trouble, you know where to find us."

Shang Xia's gaze landed on Hai Min and he saw her complicated expression.

Shang Xia chuckled in amusement. "Let's return. It's getting late."

"Oh." Hai Min lowered her head coyly before stepping away from the entrance.

Yuanyuan's head popped out of the entrance at that moment. She leaped up and down when she saw Shang Xia and she pointed at her cloth tiger he was holding in his arms. "I want that, I want that!"

He handed the toy he bought for her when he was making his way back earlier before holding out a pouch that held two pieces of silver essence over to Hai Min. "These are my earnings for the day. I also brought back a grouse for dinner."

When she was thinking about whether she should accept the pouch, she noticed the smile on Shang Xia's face. She reached out to take it and she giggled. "We should be able to use this for a long time. You won't have to head out to hunt for the time being. It's getting dangerous out there due to the worsening weather!"

Shang Xia raised the bow in his hand before placing it on his shoulders. He laughed, "There's nothing to worry about. With this bow in hand, I won't be afraid if I meet a huge bug on the way!"

She couldn't help but chortle at his antics. "You're not taking this seriously! Hmph!"

Realizing something was wrong with the way she spoke to him, her face flushed red and she lowered her head to avoid looking into Shang Xia's eyes. Oh no! Isn't this how couples usually talk to each other?! What's wrong with me?!

Shang Xia didn't seem to notice her fluctuating emotions as he entered the courtyard. "Hey, can you get me a basin of hot water? I'll clean this bird up and we'll have it for dinner tonight."

After he was done, he took out a tiny bag from his sleeves and dangled it in front of Yuanyuan. "Hey, look at this. Do you want some?"

"Sesame sweets!" Yuanyuan's eyes lit up and she picked a piece of candy to pop it in her mouth. "Thank you, uncle!"

She took out another piece from the bag and handed it over to Shang Xia. "Uncle, have one too!"

After Shang Xia took it, Yuanyuan grabbed another piece and ran over to Hai Min. "Mummy, have one too!"

...

The two cultivators who left earlier appeared on a rooftop not too far away from Shang Xia's courtyard. They looked at Yuanyuan who was bouncing about in joy and looked at each other.

A soft sigh eventually escaped Uncle Cen's lips. "Let's go."

The two of them finally disappeared this time. The moment they did, Shang Xia, who had just bled the grouse out and was planning to pluck off all its feathers, turned to stare at where they were standing. Content that they were really gone, he plucked out the prettiest feathers on the bird before handing them over to Yuanyuan.

As the two of them made their way back to the inn they were staying in, Uncle Cen asked, "Do you think you can give her that type of life? Are you willing to live like that?"

Brother Huang's expression fluctuated violently and he growled, "We... No... We have to leave no traces wherever we go. Living happily with no restraints. That's how we're supposed to live."

A soft sigh escaped Uncle Cen's lips. "Yeah. That's the life we're supposed to lead. However, not everyone is willing to live that way."

“Uncle Cen?!” Brother Huang frowned.

Uncle Cen waved his hand and a look of loneliness appeared in his eyes. “Let’s head back to gather the others. We’ll come up with a plan to save Third Brother before doing anything else.”

“That’s my point exactly! Is she going to stay out of this completely?! That’s her...”
Brother Huang groaned.

Pulling out a piece of cloth from his sleeves, he sighed, “Do you know why I took this away from her?” He didn’t wait for a reply as he continued his explanation. “If I’m not wrong, she was planning to use the Tranquil Cape to launch a rescue attempt herself.”

“This... Won’t she be sending herself to death if she tries to do it alone? She’s a mere Martial Extremity Realm cultivator. How can she save him under the eyes of Yang Hu?”
Brother Huang gasped. His expression changed when he saw the look on Uncle Cen’s face. “You took it away because you didn’t want her to risk her life... Why would she try something like that? Why won’t she wait for us? She would rather risk it all to save him than to trust and wait for us...”

Uncle Cen sighed without saying anything more.

After a long, silent journey back to their inn, Brother Huang finally broke the silence. “Uncle Cen, were there some of us who are unwilling to save Third Brother?”

“That’s not all.”

Widening his eyes in shock, Brother Huang couldn’t believe what he just heard. “What do you mean?!”

Before Brother Huang could say anymore, Uncle Cen explained, “Yang Hu has been trying to pull us over to his side for a long time. Now that he captured Third Brother and held him in the city, it’s probably a plot.”

Brother Huang’s expression sank once again. “Is that why Thirteenth Sister doesn’t trust us? She’s afraid that Third Brother was caught because some of us sold him out?”

Uncle Cen lowered his head and sighed. “Only the eighteen of us knew where Third Brother was headed that day.”

“That doesn’t mean that we’re behind this! Changfeng City belongs to Yang Hu anyway! His foundations here are deep! Isn’t it possible that Third Brother exposed himself on accident and was captured by Yang Hu?”

Uncle Cen shook his head and remained silent. He was clearly unwilling to continue arguing.

Raising his eyebrows all of a sudden, Brother Huang seemed to have thought of something. “Uncle Cen, wasn’t there someone supporting us in the dark? Why don’t we get them to appear?”

A strange look appeared on Uncle Cen’s face and he muttered, “Haa... They can’t even take care of themselves now, much less us. Otherwise, Yang Hu would just be a speck of dust in our eyes. Actually, I have always suspected that Yang Hu has been targeting us because of our hidden relationship.”

“So... That’s why Thirteenth Sister suspects that one of us has been converted to Yang Hu’s side!”

“We have been causing chaos in the Ji Continent all these years. If our backer falls, we’ll be hunted to the ends of the earth. Those in the Ji Continent won’t let us go.” Uncle Cen muttered.

A sneer left Brother Huang’s lips. “Heh. Even if we’re abandoned by our backer, does Yang Hu really think that he can protect us with his meager power? The Changfeng City is nothing in the face of the Ji Continent!”

Thinking about it for a second, Uncle Cen whispered, “At least he’s someone from our You Continent...”

A frown formed on Brother Huang’s face. He seemed to have understood something. He might have grown up in the Ji Continent, but his father and ancestors were from the You Continent.

...

In the Shang Clan Manor in the Tongyou City...

A month ago, Duan Hong managed to successfully craft the low-grade spear. Now that the Shang Clan nurtured their own master blacksmith, the distance between them and the other three great clans drew even closer.

However, the spear remained ownerless as Shang Xia’s whereabouts was still unknown.

No matter how hard the Shang Clan tried to look for clues on Shang Xia in the past month, they returned empty-handed. With the increasing attention they were placing on the moving of the Mysterious Coral World, no one had the time to focus on their manhunt any longer.

Yan Qi was the only one who was dealing with the matter seriously. Even though Shang Xi wanted him to give her a report on his progress every day, she had too many things to take care of. The reports he gave her only served to add to her stress.

Shockingly, Yan Qi would also receive letters from Shang Jian from time to time. Those letters would state the locations of where Shang Xia could be hiding and some suggestions on what Yan Qi could do.

Shang Jian was busy enough, but from the letters, Yan Qi could tell how much Shang Jian cared for this nephew of his.

That changed Yan Qi’s perspective towards Shang Jian. At the very least, the impression of Shang Jian became much better than Shang Yang who had his eye on Shang Xia’s spear during the crafting phase.

One fine night, Yan Qi suddenly realized Yan Ni’er and her children weren’t back yet. The birds would set out at specific intervals of time, and they would return every few days to take a break. They had never been late and their absence caused no small amount of panic to run through Yan Qi’s mind.

Just as he was about to make a report to Shang Xi, he discovered a silver streak shooting through the air. Yan Ni’er had returned!

Chapter 277: Hidden Nest

The Shang Clan Manor was located in the city center. That point alone spoke volumes about their authority and power.

Even though Shang Xi was rushing as fast as she could, she had to pass through several courtyards and a small garden.

As she passed through the garden, a shadow emerged from behind a rock formation and it shot towards her.

“Seventh Sister, watch my spear!” A crimson light tore through the air before appearing in front of Shang Xi in the blink of an eye.

“I don’t have time to play with you! Stop messing around!” Shang Xi’s mood was in the gutters to begin with. She became more irritated now that someone was playing around with her.

A pair of knives appeared in her hands and a frosty light emerged from them to slash at the tip of the spear. A frightening blade light was sent flying into the rock formation at the side.

As a surprised yelp came from behind the rock formation, Shang Yang’s figure emerged.

The moment he appeared, the rock formation was sliced straight through. The cut surface was perfectly smooth, like a mirror.

“Seventh Sister, we’re just exchanging pointers. There’s no need to be so heavy handed...” Shang Yang looked at the smooth surface of the rock formation and grumbled softly.

Who would have thought that Shang Xi’s gaze would land on the spear in his hand at that moment.

“When did you get your hands on this spear?” Her voice turned deep, and she was like a volcano about to erupt.

Jumping in fright, Shang Yang explained, “Please don’t misunderstand. It just came back from the institution after they upgraded it to a mid-grade weapon. I wanted to play around with it and borrowed it from Duan Hong. I’ll return it once Nephew Xia comes back!”

A smile returned to his face soon after. “Why would I fight with my nephew over a weapon?”

Nodding slowly, Shang Xi reached one hand out and muttered, “Alright, you can hand it over then.”

“What... He’s back?” Shang Yang gasped.

With a flick of her wrist, one of Shang Xi’s blades flew towards him. With no time to react properly, he could only raise his hands to protect his face.

Shang Xi’s figure blurred and appeared right in front of Shang Yang. She grabbed the spear from him before he knew what was happening.

“Seventh Sister, you actually sneak attacked me...”

Shang Yang couldn't finish his sentence when Shang Xi strolled away without even turning her head. "Heh, we're even now."

"Hmm..." Closing his palm to realize that the spear was already gone, he could only stare at Shang Xi's leaving figure with a sad expression on his face.

...

Shang Xi handed Shang Ke a letter with a solemn look on her face.

Even though he barely glanced through it, he tightened his grip on the letter. "Who else knows about the contents of this letter?"

"Yan Qi looked for me the moment Yan Ni'er returned. I told him to keep it a secret. As of now, the three of us are the only ones who have read this letter." Shang Xi whispered.

When Yan Ni'er returned with news on Shang Xia, the two of them felt a huge weight lifted off their chests. They nearly burst into celebration at the discovery. However, when they read the letter he wrote, they couldn't help but rein in their emotions.

Getting to his feet, Shang Ke muttered, "Alright. The implications of this letter are huge. I have to look for Ji Wenlong immediately. You'll stay in the clan for now."

"Fifth Uncle, if what Little Xia said is true, looking for Ji Wenlong..." Shang Xi mumbled.

"Relax. You don't have to worry about this. I might not return for quite a while. Work with Shang Jian and take care of the clan in my stead." Shang Ke smiled.

Shang Xi raised both her eyebrows and asked, "Why don't we wait for the kid to return before doing anything else?"

A bitter laugh escaped Shang Ke's lips. "I'm afraid he won't be able to return for some time. Moreover, the Tongyou City has turned into a nest of thieves. It will be extremely dangerous for him to return now."

With her expression changing, she wanted to ask another question but Shang Ke left before she could say anything.

Staring blankly into space for some time, a look of concern eventually formed on her face. Seemingly having made her decision, she turned to leave.

As soon as she left the room, she noticed Shang Yang waiting for her.

"Seventh Sister, did you guys find Little Xia?"

"You're not allowed to mention anything about this matter. Do not say anything to anyone!" Shang Xi sighed without looking at him.

He wanted to say something when she walked past him, but she spoke before he could utter a word. Stopping dead in her tracks, she turned to stare at him. "Oh, I heard that your family is currently in

the Changfeng City right now. Your wife comes from a prominent family in the Ji Continent. Is she part of the three great families?”

Shang Yang didn't know why she would bring that up suddenly, and he muttered casually. “My father-in-law comes from the Li Family. They're not as powerful as the three great families, but they have a connection to the White Deer Paradise. One of their family members is a direct disciple of the White Deer Paradise, and the family is relying on his influence to expand their power. In the past, I managed to benefit from their connection.” A trace of pride could be seen in his eyes when he spoke about his wife's background.

Nodding slowly, Shang Xi's expression became a little more complicated when she looked at him. However, she didn't stay for long. She turned to walk away.

Shang Yang raised both his eyebrows as he looked at her leaving figure. He found it a little weird that she would ask about his wife's family.

However, a 'flash of inspiration' struck him. His Seventh Sister was coming of age too. She was around the same age as the member of the Li Family who was a direct disciple of the White Deer Paradise. Could she be interested in the other party?

Even though the member of the Li Family who was a direct disciple of the White Deer Paradise had extraordinary status, Shang Yang felt that his Seventh Sister was a suitable match for him. After all, she was a strong cultivator and their Shang Clan could be said to be a powerhouse in their own right. The more he thought about it, the more he felt that Shang Xi was a good match for the other party.

If that was truly the case, he felt that it was time for him to pull some strings on the Li Family's side to get the two of them together.

If things were to progress smoothly, not only would he be able to help Shang Xi, their Shang Clan would be able to form a closer relationship with the White Deer Paradise. That alone would increase their influence and prestige.

Thinking up to that point, Shang Yang's heart burned with anticipation. He wanted nothing more than to rush to the Changfeng City to discuss the matter with his wife.

...

When Shang Ke arrived at the institution to meet Ji Wenlong, he saw Yu Chengjin leaving in a huff.

A helpless sigh escaped Ji Wenlong's lips when he saw Shang Ke. “Because of the Mysterious Coral World's close proximity to the spatial tunnel, the spatial barrier around our institution is weakened severely. It's especially obvious around the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range and there are countless freaks traveling to and fro each day.”

A chuckle left Shang Ke's lips. “Didn't we already account for that? What's the matter, did the Jianmen Institution send someone to negotiate with you?”

“Hmph, they're not the only ones. The other institutions are of the same stance. In order to prevent us from turning into a holy land, they're pulling out all the stops. They even hinted to us that we might not be able to protect ourselves in case things go out of hand.” Ji Wenlong growled.

Shang Ke's expression sank instantly. "Are they threatening us?"

Ji Wenlong glanced at him once, and his expression turned solemn. "They might not have stated it outright, but that's basically their idea."

"Hmph. They're outsiders at the end of the day. Luckily we already planned for this to happen. No matter what, we can't expect them to fight to the death when facing our enemies. It's good enough for them to share a little of the pressure we face." Shang Ke snorted.

"Looks like the worst-case scenario has happened..." Ji Wenlong sighed.

Shang Ke changed the topic all of a sudden. "Didn't it all happen because of the ambush on Patriarch Kou? His whereabouts are unknown, and every single power is doing everything they can to find him. Because of that, the other institutions are reevaluating their choice of supporting us. Oh right, has there still been no news from Patriarch Kou?"

Shaking his head, Ji Wenlong seemed to have realized that Shang Ke seemed to have come with a purpose. "Oh right, why are you here today?"

Revealing a bitter smile, Shang Ke handed the letter from Shang Xia over to Ji Wenlong. "I have bad news. We're facing problems from inside and out."

A similar smile appeared on Ji Wenlong's face when he read the contents of the letter. When he was done, he turned it to ask to prevent the contents from leaking before sighing helplessly, "Regardless, it's good that the kid is alive."

"What should we do about the situation in the Changfeng City? From his description, the White Deer Paradise has chosen to collude with the Changbai Holy Land in the Azure Spiritual World. If Yang Hu chooses to side with the Ji Continent, you know the implications it will bring!"

Ji Wenlong muttered softly, "Yeah... The Changfeng City's attitude will certainly affect our plans..."

"It's too bad we have to remain in the city. Otherwise, Yang Hu wouldn't dare to betray our You Continent even if he had balls of steel." Shang Ke growled.

Turning to stare at Ji Wenlong all of a sudden, he asked, "What other arrangements do we have outside?"

"What else can we do? Ever since Patriarch Kou was ambushed, the Changfeng City refused any communication with us. It's been two months since their last report. I'm afraid that all our people in the Changfeng City have been suppressed by Yang Hu."

Noticing the sunken expression forming on Shang Ke's face, Ji Wenlong couldn't help but add, "Alright. I'll give you an address. The kid can try his luck there. If he manages to help us out, it'll be an unexpected surprise. However, tell him to keep himself safe. He definitely cannot compromise himself to carry out the plan."

Writing down a place on a piece of paper, he added a line or two that was coded in a secret language before handing it over to Shang Ke.

Looking at whatever Ji Wenlong wrote, Shang Ke kept the piece of paper in his sleeves before turning to walk away.

Before he left, he turned around and asked, "Is there really no news about Patriarch Kou?"

Ji Wenlong sighed while shaking his head.

A trace of suspicion flashed across Shang Ke's face as he turned to look outside. He muttered to himself, "Hmph... Why do I feel like all of you are hiding something from me?"

...

As dawn broke the next day, it marked the start of the third day Shang Xia had arrived in the Changfeng City. Two months had passed since the ambush on Kou Chongxue in the depths of the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range.

Yuanyuan got up bright and early only to notice her Uncle Xia standing under the tree in the courtyard deep in thought.

Waddling over to his side, she tilted her head to the side and mumbled, "Uncle, what are you looking at?"

Shang Xia lifted her high into the skies before laughing loudly, "I was thinking if I should make a pretty little nest in the tree so that cute little birds can rest here!"

"Will there be birds in the winter? Will they be my neighbor?" Yuanyuan wondered out loud.

Chuckling in amusement, Shang Xia replied, "Of course they will. Little Yuanyuan is so cute that they'll definitely like you too!"

The little lass beamed happily before wriggling free. She ran back into her room in excitement, "Mummy, Uncle said that cute little birds will come over to be my neighbor!"

Chapter 278: Scarlet Star Spear

Even though Hai Min said that there was no need for Shang Xia to go out hunting anymore as the money he earned previously would be able to last them a long time, Shang Xia still found an excuse to leave the city.

Emerging from the city gates, Shang Xia ran straight towards the location where Chen Sanyang opened up the gap in the spatial barrier the day before.

Since they came the day before, it didn't make sense for them to remain exposed. They would have left in order to not run into any trouble.

The reason he went was because of the way Chen Sanyang set up the formation the day before. He felt that the runes could serve as inspiration for him to craft talismans, and he decided to take the risk to return.

There was also a trace of hope that the other party would leave traces that he could use to trace them back to where they were going.

Of course, Shang Xia didn't forget about how three Martial Intent Realm experts of the Azure Spiritual World ambushed him when he left Kou Chongxue's cultivation grounds previously. He wasn't able to kill them all then, but he would take his revenge one day.

Naturally, he was destined to be disappointed. Other than a flat crater, he failed to discover anything else.

What surprised him even more was the lack of experts present at the scene. Whenever the spatial barrier was opened, energy fluctuations would alert experts in the surroundings. In the past, countless Martial Extermination Realm experts would be sent over to investigate the disturbance. Now, not a single one could be seen!

After looking through the whole area, Shang Xia discovered that no one else came! He was the only one who arrived after the traces of the spatial barrier opening formation was wiped!

He wondered when did the members of the Azure Spiritual World start behaving so brazenly in their Azure Origin World. Was it possible that the opening of the spatial barrier wasn't discovered because it was weakened?

When Shang Xia planned to track those who came the day before down, he discovered that he made a fatal error. A strange divine sense filled the region and it tried to lock on to him.

It was another Martial Extermination Realm expert!

The strange divine sense could only belong to someone from the Azure Spiritual World! The person who arrived wasn't an expert from their Azure Origin World!

Shang Xia's heart sank as he started running in the opposite direction he discovered the divine sense.

He finally realized his mistake. Clearly, the opposing party wasn't willing to expose Chen Sanyang. Chen Sanyang might have brazenly revealed his identity to Yang Zhenbiao and Qin Yuyuan, but that was because they were all on the same side. When they discovered the presence of the person who secretly followed Chen Sanyang, they knew that they miscalculated.

No matter what, they were in the You Continent. Yang Hu and several others might be siding with the Ji Continent, but they couldn't be sure of the attitudes of everyone else. The moment Chen Sanyang's identity was revealed, Yang Hu's collusion with the Ji Continent and Azure Spiritual World would be discovered. If anyone started stirring trouble, the Changfeng City would be thrown into chaos. Their plan would most likely be affected.

Due to that reason, they had to know who the person tracking Chen Sanyang the day before was.

When Shang Xia thought deeper into it, he pushed himself to the limit as he escaped. With the cover of the trees around him and the special property of his divine sense, he managed to avoid the detection of any divine sense.

If a Martial Extermination Realm expert wishes to locate him, they could only do so with their sight. Because of that, he earned another chance to run away.

Running for more than an hour, Shang Xia only stopped when he discovered that he couldn't feel the strange divine sense any longer. Heaving a sigh of relief, he started to circulate his inner qi to recover some energy.

The desperate escape attempt drained him no less than the huge battle he had in the depths of the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range when he was ambushed previously.

After escaping from Martial Extermination Realm experts from the Azure Spiritual World twice in two days, Shang Xia felt a sense of pride.

Using four whole hours to restore himself to his peak state, he hid his aura again. It didn't take long for him to return to his appearance as an ordinary hunter.

He used the time to practice his archery skills and shot several preys before the sky started to turn dark. Only then did he leave the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range.

Along the way, he stood at the spot where he found Yan Ni'er the day before. According to her speed, it should be more than enough time to make a round trip back to the Shang Clan Manor if she rushed the whole way.

Indeed. It didn't take long for him to hear the familiar cry in the skies.

With Shang Xia's constant care, Yan Ni'er was no longer the same Mutated Rain Swallow he captured when he entered the battlefield between the two worlds. Her speed reached a terrifying level, and it was starting to be comparable to the Lightning Bird who refused to leave the battlefield between the two worlds.

A silver streak flashed in the air and Yan Ni'er landed on Shang Xia's shoulders.

Very quickly, he discovered a small cloth bag hanging on her leg.

Raising both his eyebrows in shock, he didn't understand what was so important they had to entrust Yan Ni'er to bring it with her despite her small stature. When he opened the bag up, he was shocked to discover an Embroidered Cloud Case.

Their actions were risky indeed. The Shang Clan only had three Embroidered Cloud Cases in total. Shang Xia brought back two from the Coral Forest, and he kept one for himself. He gave the one he obtained from Zhu Ying to his aunt, Shang Xi! After all, she was the spokesperson for the clan other than Shang Ke. Her Embroidered Cloud Case was only a cubic feet large. It seemed a little lacking in Shang Xia's eyes.

As such, there were four Embroidered Cloud Cases in the Shang Clan at that moment and one on Shang Xia. Now, they sent another one to him! That wasn't all. They hung it on a bird to send it over! If Yan Ni'er ran into trouble on her way over, the Shang Clan would lose out big time!

Holding the Embroidered Cloud Case in his hand, he could tell that it was the one Shang Xi used to own before. Inspecting the items within, a look of joy appeared on his face.

Several items appeared in his hand, and several clicking sounds could be heard as the items that emerged started to connect to each other. Eventually, a six feet long pole was formed.

A final item emerged from the Embroidered Cloud Case, and it was the tip of a spear with scarlet runes all over its surface. The tip of the spear spun in the air once before connecting to the six feet pole with a loud 'clack'! A seven feet long spear stood tall before Shang Xia.

Shockingly, that wasn't a low-grade weapon he commissioned Duan Hong to create! The spear was upgraded by a blacksmith of the Tongyou Institution, and it was a mid-grade weapon!

Wrapping his palm around the spear, Shang Xia felt a sense of familiarity with it. He felt that the Origin True Qi in his body was trembling in excitement and the urge to display the moves he comprehended from his understanding of the Providence Spear Art filled his heart.

Finally suppressing his raging emotions, Shang Xia took out another letter that Shang Xi wrote personally.

She wrote about the origins of the spear, but due to the lack of Heavenly Spotted Metal, they were unable to raise it up to a high-grade weapon.

“Hah. She said that the spear hasn’t been given a name. From the runes on the tip of the spear and the faint red coating, let’s call it the Scarlet Star Spear!” Shang Xia muttered.

He sent some Origin True Qi into the spear and the tip was covered with a soft glow. There were sparkles of light coming from the tip of the spear too, and they seemed to resemble stars in the night sky.

After reading the letter Shang Xi sent, he was brought back to reality by the chaotic chirping in the air above.

Raising his head, he noticed four little birds chirping loudly in the air. They were clearly sending him a warning!

With their speed, they were much slower than Yan Ni’er who arrived first. That was understandable as Yan Ni’er raced over with her fastest speed in order to look for Shang Xia. The four birds that came later discovered someone hiding in the surroundings!

Luckily for Shang Xia, they discovered his presence. After all, he failed to detect anyone!

Yan Ni’er rose into the skies again as she shot towards the forest where the stranger was located.

Shang Xia pulled on his bowstring as he sent his Origin True Qi into the weapon.

Releasing the bowstring, a sharp whistle tore through the air and pierced through a giant tree. Splinters flew through the air as the trunk of the tree burst into pieces.

Those splinters contained a lot of energy as they ripped through the area, leaving a trail of destruction.

The four little birds were smart too. The moment Shang Xia released his attack, they flew into the air.

Yan Ni’er soared high into the skies before diving down at her target.

“Interesting!” A snort came from somewhere in the forest.

With his pupils constricting, Shang Xia discovered that his previous attack wasn’t able to injure the person in the slightest.

“Yan Ni’er, get back!” He pulled his bowstring again, but this time, he no longer used an ordinary arrow. Instead, a metal arrow appeared on his bow.

Yan Ni’er was smart enough to realize that she wouldn’t be of any help against an opponent of that level and she soared high into the air after Shang Xia’s warning.

Releasing his bowstring, another arrow ripped through the air.

A powerful energy wave emerged from the forest at that moment and it went straight for Shang Xia.

The familiar feeling allowed Shang Xia to determine the person hiding in the forest.

It was the Martial Extermination Realm expert who discovered him earlier! He located Shang Xia!

A loud explosion rang through the forest as his arrow tore through another tree. As soon as that happened, a terrifying aura rushed towards him.

With a flip of his wrist, the bow disappeared. Grabbing his Scarlet Star Spear beside him, Shang Xia stabbed towards the person who just appeared.

“Die!”

Chapter 279: The Fifth Move

“Die!” It was too late to run. The only thing Shang Xia could do was fight.

With the mid-grade Scarlet Star Spear in his hand, Shang Xia unleashed his strongest skill against a Martial Extermination Realm expert.

It was also the move he comprehended in the Thousand Leaf Mountain Range but had no spear to practice with.

The fifth move he created from his comprehension of the Providence Spear during his seclusion, Woundless Spear!

Five spots of starlight emerged from the tip of the spear, and a gash appeared on Shang Xia’s left shoulder. A stream of blood trailed down his arm.

The Martial Extermination Realm expert of the Azure Spiritual World who had entered Shang Xia’s attack range discovered the frightening fluctuations of heaven and earth qi. His expression changed drastically and he used some sort of special movement skill to retreat several feet backwards.

By the time he stabilized himself, he discovered that there were five huge wounds on his left hand.

Despite them being external injuries and the blood he was losing couldn’t be compared to the injury Shang Xia suffered from the backlash from his strike, he was shocked nonetheless. He was a Martial Extermination Realm expert! However, he was injured by a cultivator at the Martial Intent Realm!

He was a proper Martial Extermination Realm expert who possessed an extermination origin. Examining Shang Xia from head to toe, he shrugged his left shoulder to reveal his extermination origin. As soon as it emerged, the wounds on his arm closed.

“You... What spear technique is this?!” After suppressing his fright, a trace of admiration could be heard in his voice.

Shang Xia withdrew his spear slowly and he spoke casually, not minding that his opponent was a Martial Extermination Realm expert from the Azure Spiritual World. “Providence Spear Art, Woundless Spear.”

“Providence?” Looking at the injuries on his arm that had healed, he turned to look at the wound on Shang Xia’s shoulder. “What an amazing Woundless Spear...”

Shang Xia didn’t know if he was mistaken, but he thought he heard a trace of admiration from the other party. Even so, he didn’t dare to be careless. “The Changfeng City is right there. If you leave me with no other choice, I can only choose to fight to the death. Let’s not waste any more time.”

Even if their cultivation realms differed by one huge level, a Martial Intent Realm cultivator would be able to cause a huge disturbance.

Of course, Martial Extermination Realm experts would be able to raise even larger waves. Ordinarily, a Martial Intent Realm cultivator would be taken care of as long as the Martial Extermination Realm expert wills it. However, this Martial Intent Realm kid was clearly different.

They might have only exchanged one move, but Shang Xia had proven his strength!

He might not be a match for the Martial Extermination Realm expert from the Azure Spiritual World, but it wouldn’t be a problem for them to fight for a while.

If that happened, the powers in the Changfeng City would definitely take notice and the Martial Extermination Realm expert of the Azure Spiritual World would be revealed!

To put things simply, Shang Xia was basically betting that the other party wouldn’t want to be exposed.

Of course, that was the only thing Shang Xia could do. Turning his back to a Martial Extermination Realm expert to run away was a surefire way to get killed.

He was betting on the fact that the Martial Extermination Realm expert wasn’t clear about the situation in the Azure Origin World. From the look on the other party’s face, it seemed like he lucked out.

Glancing at the Changfeng City, a strange look of amusement could be seen in his eyes. His gaze paused on Shang Xia for an additional second before the Martial Extermination Realm expert of the Azure Spiritual World turned to leave.

Only after the figure of the Azure Spiritual World’s Martial Extermination Realm expert disappeared into the forest did Shang Xia’s taut nerves relax.

The person who came was one of the two Martial Extermination Realm experts who was brought over by Chen Sanyang the previous day. However, Shang Xia left before he arrived.

A soft chirp from the air above brought Shang Xia back to reality. He stretched out his hand and Yan Ni’er quickly perched on his shoulder.

“Are you able to follow that person?” Shang Xia whispered.

A long cry from Yan Ni’er told Shang Xia that she found it possible.

Thinking about it for a moment, Shang Xia continued, “Alright, follow him. Stay as far away as possible and locate their hiding spot. However, you need to be careful. Stay safe and protect yourself. If anything goes wrong, run!”

“Chirp, chirp!” Yan Ni’er flapped her wings and shot into the skies. Turning into a gray streak, she quickly disappeared into the skies.

Now that he had seen her speed up close, he discovered that he had underestimated how fast she flew.

From the looks of it, even Martial Extermination Realm experts would have to eat her dust if she flew at full speed.

Moreover, she was an aerial creature to begin with. She could fly for a long time. Martial Extermination Realm experts might be able to soar through the skies, but they would have to take a break at some point.

That was precisely the reason Shang Xia was willing to get her to track down the Martial Extermination Realm expert of the Azure Spiritual World. He believed that she was smart enough to protect herself too.

There was one other thing. After the short exchange, Shang Xia knew that he couldn’t remain there for much longer. Arranging the gains he obtained from his hunt, he quickly got ready to return. After all, he had to get back before the city gates closed!

Along the way, he didn’t forget to forage for branches and trees to make a makeshift nest for the four little birds. When he was done, he called for the four of them to bring them with him.

Just like that, his appearance returned to that of an ordinary hunter. The longbow was slung to his back, and a quiver of arrows hung on his waist. There was a rabbit and a hairy fox strapped to his waist as he dragged them back to the city. He hugged a nest that he covered with a piece of cloth and he headed back without much misfortune.

When he returned, he sold the rabbit and fox for some money before buying some food. Arriving in his courtyard, he handed the bag of sesame sweets he bought for Yuanyuan who bounced away happily. However, she quickly returned when Shang Xia placed the nest carefully on the ground. Under her curious gaze, he took off the cloth to reveal four cute little birds. The little kid jumped in joy.

Even though the four birds were Mutated Rain Swallows, their growth didn’t happen too quickly. The largest among them, Yan Lei, was barely bigger than an ordinary swallow.

As for whether their appearance in the winter would cause some sort of commotion, Shang Xia had no idea. Naturally, the little girl wouldn’t find it weird either. She stared at the birds happily.

Surprisingly, she rejected Shang Xia’s suggestion of placing the nest on the tree in the courtyard. Instead, she decided to personally construct a nest for them with a random basket she found before placing it near the window of her room.

As Yuanyuan went to look for materials to build a new nest, Hai Min approached Shang Xia and muttered, “Thank you.”

Raising both eyebrows, Shang Xia turned to stare at her.

“Yuanyuan has never enjoyed such a peaceful life. She hasn’t been so happy either. In the past, she would never wait at the entrance in anticipation for anyone to come back.” Hai Min explained.

“It’s important for one to have a happy childhood...” Shang Xia chuckled in response.

Clearly, Hai Min didn’t expect him to say something like that and she was visibly stunned for a good minute.

The laughter coming from Shang Xia’s lips didn’t stop. “What are we eating tonight? I spent quite some time hunting today and I’m getting hungry!”

With her face flushing red, Hai Min muttered, “It’s ready, it’s ready! Light the lamp and we’ll be able to eat.”

Shang Xia looked at Hai Min who was walking back to the kitchen and smiled. “Looks like you’re enjoying this type of life too...”

Hai Min’s figure froze for a second, and she lowered her head slightly. Her footsteps became much more hurried.

With her back towards him, Shang Xia failed to see the gentle smile that appeared on her face.

...

As the darkness of night fell, silence returned to the courtyard.

Shang Xia, who had been in deep sleep, opened his eyes suddenly. Extending his divine sense to cover the rest of the courtyard, he discovered that Hai Min and Yuanyuan were fast asleep. Getting off his bed, he lit his lamp.

When he received the Embroidered Cloud Case earlier, he only took out the spear. He didn’t examine the rest of the contents carefully.

The first thing he took out this time was a letter Shang Xi penned personally.

There were three important points in the letter.

The first was the Scarlet Star Spear. She explained that after Duan Hong completed its refinement, the Tongyou Institution agreed to raise it to a mid-grade weapon. It was made for Shang Xia, and the weapon complemented him perfectly.

The second point was to remind him not to expose his identity in the meantime. He shouldn’t return to the Tongyou City too due to the dangerous journey he would have to take.

Even though Shang Xi didn’t state it explicitly, Shang Xia could tell that the Tongyou City was in trouble. Many different powers had their eyes on the city, and they were facing trouble from both inside and out.

If he insisted on returning, he would most probably be captured by outsiders to become a bargaining chip they would use to threaten the Shang Clan with.

Without a doubt, a terrifying storm was about to hit the Tongyou City. Everything originated from the Tongyou Institution’s plan for the Mysterious Coral World. Moreover, Kou Chongxue’s disappearance only served to cause the institution to sink into an even more dangerous situation.

The ambush on Kou Chongxue was a topic of debate, and no one was certain of his assailants. There were even rumors spreading that the second ambush on Kou Chongxue was a joint scheme from those inside the city with other powers.

As Shang Xia was also affected by the ambush, many people would try to look for him to gain information about Kou Chongxue regardless if he knew anything or not. That was also an important reason for him to keep his identity a secret.

Once he was captured, his fate was sealed. It didn't matter if he managed to lie his way through their interrogation or if he told them the truth about how he didn't know anything. Once they were done, death would be the only thing waiting for him.

Shang Xia's desire to remain hidden became stronger after reading Shang Xi's letter.

Luckily for him, no one would ever think that the legendary Thousand Illusion Young Master who had an impressive battle record in the Tongyou Institution would become an ordinary hunter! If that wasn't a good enough disguise, having a three year old daughter and a wife should be good enough. Who in the right mind would think that an ordinary hunter with a cute little daughter would be a mere eighteen year old young master of the Shang Clan?!

Realizing that his identity wouldn't be revealed for quite some time, Shang Xia finally read the final matter his aunt wanted to tell him.

Because of his warning that Yang Hu was working with the Ji Continent and that the White Deer Paradise was in cahoots with the Changbai Holy Land of the Azure Spiritual World, those in the Tongyou City would be able to take appropriate measures. They knew that Shang Xia would be an invaluable asset in the Changfeng City and Shang Xi informed him about a secret code he could use to connect with the members of the Tongyou City. She told him the location of a place where he could obtain assistance, but she ended off by telling him not to make rash moves.

No matter what, the entire situation was shrouded in mystery. There were peak level experts in the Martial Extermination Realm from the various powers in play, and a Martial Intent Realm cultivator like him wouldn't be able to decide the situation alone.

When he was done with the letter, he discovered that his aunt also placed several sets of equipment used to craft talismans in the Embroidered Cloud Case.

With his ability as a second rank Talisman Master, he would be able to create some useful talismans that might assist him with the shitstorm that was about to unfold soon.

Chapter 280: Mister Bu

When dawn broke the next day, Shang Xia greeted Hai Min before telling her of his decision not to head out of the city. He chose to take a break to stroll around the city.

When the sun was directly overhead, Shang Xia decided it was time to carry out his plan. He headed towards a forge in the southern part of the city.

According to Shang Xi's letter, the forge was a front used by the spies of the Tongyou City. However, Shang Xia could also tell that Shang Xi had learned of the location recently. From the way she put it, their Shang Clan didn't seem to be in charge of operations there.

Shang Xia didn't find it weird that he was getting such information now. When he sent Yan Ni'er back with his report on the situation, he was sure that the clan passed the information to the Tongyou Institution. Most of the spies and foundations the Tongyou City had in the Changfeng City were operated by the Tongyou Institution. From their willingness to send Shang Xia over to the forge, they should be certain that it hadn't been compromised.

Since the Changfeng City was working with the White Deer Paradise, Shang Xia was sure that the city lord had weeded out most of the spies placed by the Tongyou Institution. He felt that there were only two reasons the forge hadn't been exposed. One of them was because the forge was too well hidden and managed to evade detection. The second reason was because the spies there hadn't been activated. Now that he was sent there, he might be the one bringing the institution's instructions to start their operations.

The more he thought about it, the more important the secret code he received seemed. Reciting it over and over in his head until he couldn't be more familiar with it, he stepped through the entrance.

The cultivators who resided in the You Continent faced tough battles often and it wasn't an exaggeration to say that all of them were as tough as nails. The weapons they used were evidence of that. There were countless large blades, spears, broadswords, and giant axes hanging on the wall. They weren't second-rate garbage either. They weren't graded weapons, but they were of good quality.

Seeing how Shang Xia had entered, an attendant who looked more like a blacksmith approached him. A trace of a smile could be seen on his face and he greeted, "Greetings, customer, do you see anything you like? Feel free to take your pick. Our forge is one of the best in the city.

Looking around casually, Shang Xia heard the sound of hammering coming from the back. He felt heat waves battering against him, and he asked casually, "Is the resident blacksmith in? I wish to meet him."

Widening his eyes slightly, the attendant started to size Shang Xia from head to toe. "Why do you wish to meet my master?"

Coughing lightly, Shang Xia introduced himself. "Please tell him that an old friend from the You Continent is here to meet his third brother. Please convey my exact words to him."

Glancing at Shang Xia suspiciously, the attendant ran into the back.

Knowing that it would take some time, Shang Xia started to walk around the shop. Picking up several arrows here and there, he examined their quality.

After a short while, the curtains that separated the back from the front of the shop rustled. An old fellow whose body was steaming from the heat walked out and chuckled, "Customer, are you interested in buying arrowheads? Or are you planning to buy ready-made arrows?"

Tossing the arrows in his hand back into the pile, Shang Xia laughed, "I need a bundle of arrows and it would be great if they were made entirely of essence metal. Oh right, old man, how many times would you hammer ten pounds of essence metal?"

Narrowing his eyes slightly, the old blacksmith didn't reply instantly. He examined Shang Xia from head to toe again before muttering, "Reputation is of utmost importance to us. To temper ten pounds of essence metal, I'll need to hammer it 3600 times exactly."

Nodding slightly, Shang Xia continued, "Do you use a large hammer or a small one?"

"600 strikes with a large hammer, 3000 strikes with a small one." The old blacksmith replied.

Shang Xia continued, "I wish to order a piece of metal essence that has been struck 900 times with a large hammer."

The old blacksmith replied solemnly, "You need to wait three days."

After their conversation, both sides entered a state of silence.

Eventually, Shang Xia broke the silence. "Old man, did I go wrong somewhere?"

"I've been here for more than 20 years. If not for your presence today, I'll have to bring that prompt to the grave with me." The old blacksmith sighed.

Shang Xia couldn't help but turn serious. Bowing respectfully, he asked, "Are you the person I am supposed to meet here?"

"No. That's somebody else. Go back for today and wait. Come back tomorrow at noon." The old blacksmith muttered.

Nodding slowly, Shang Xia turned to leave. However, he seemed to have remembered something. "Old man, did you say that you had complete arrows here?"

...

After shopping for half a day, Shang Xia basically covered the entire city. At the same time, he burned the layout of the city into his mind.

Shang Xia took special note of the City Lord Manor. He made one complete round around the manor to inspect anything of interest to him.

The day was always short in the winter. By the time he was done with his scouting, the sun was about to set. He went to pick up a bag of rice cakes, half a pound of sauced beef, a roll of rope and some wooden boards. He planned to make a swing in the courtyard for Yuanyuan after dinner.

As night fell, the main street of the city was the only place filled with activities. Other than that, the rest of the city was quiet as could be.

Near midnight, Shang Xia woke up once again. He heard a soft whistle coming from outside.

It didn't take long before he noticed Hai Min emerging from her room to speak with someone outside. During their conversation, the two seemed to have reached some sort of disagreement. They quarreled in low voices, but Shang Xia was able to hear several interesting words they used in their argument. He heard stuff like 'Tongyou Institution', 'rescue', 'identity', and 'submission'.

It didn't take long for the argument to end as the person who intruded into the courtyard left after the time it took to boil a pot of tea.

After the person left, Hai Min was visibly affected. She returned to her bed, but Shang Xia's divine sense allowed him to notice that she was unable to fall asleep as she tossed and turned about in her bed.

Waking up bright and early, Shang Xia finished the swing he planned to complete the night before. When Hai Min emerged from her room, pointed out her obviously exhausted state. "Didn't you sleep well last night? Well, there's not much to do in the winter anyway. You should go back to bed after we have breakfast."

A gentle smile appeared on her face despite her gloomy feelings. She asked, “Are you going to hunt today?”

“Relax. Everything will be fine.” Shang Xia didn’t answer the question as he patted her shoulders suddenly.

She instinctively wanted to dodge his unexpected gesture, but she forced herself to stand still eventually. When Shang Xia’s hand landed on her shoulders, her face flushed red.

Shang Xia could feel her body trembling slightly and he took his hand off after a short while. His gaze turned to Yuanyuan who just woke up and he waved at her before leaving the courtyard.

The first thing he did was to head over to the forge. The day before, he learned that the old blacksmith was called Wu Ji, and the old man greeted him as soon as he entered.

“There’s a forest ten miles west of the city. The person you wish to meet will see you there.” The old blacksmith said.

After purchasing 30 ordinary arrows from Wu Ji, Shang Xia placed them into his quiver that contained 20 metal essence arrows before leaving through the southern city gates.

Walking a distance away from the city gates, he started traveling west.

It didn’t take long for him to discover the patch of forest Wu Ji told him about.

Holding the bow in his hand, he entered the forest.

“What prey can you hunt in this small forest?” A voice came from behind and shocked Shang Xia.

Turning around abruptly, Shang Xia saw an expert who was clad in gray robes. The expert sported a short beard, and he was barely ten feet away from Shang Xia.

There was no doubt about it. He was a Martial Extermination Realm expert!

Raising the caution in his heart to the maximum, Shang Xia gasped silently. He wasn’t overestimating himself, but he knew that no one under the Martial Extermination Realm would be able to hide from his divine sense, much less get so close to him.

Anyone who could do something like that either had a treasure like the Tranquil Cape, or was a powerful expert in the Martial Extermination Realm.

The only thing that shocked Shang Xia was the fact that the Tongyou Institution actually hid a Martial Extermination Realm expert in the Changfeng City!

One had to know that Martial Extermination Realm experts weren’t cabbages that grew by the side of the street. Even in the holy lands, they were existences who were respected elders!

Composing himself, Shang Xia cupped his fists. “I greet senior!”

“Grandson of Shang Bo. It’s no wonder you would look for me for protection. Brat, you were the last person to see Lord Kou. The moment your identity is revealed, hehe...”

A strange look appeared on Shang Xia's face after hearing what he said. "Senior, are you misunderstanding something? I'm not here to seek your protection."

"Then why did you look for me?" The expert was visibly confused.

Shang Xia explained everything he saw the other day and he also talked about the possible situation in the Tongyou City.

He didn't expect the Martial Extermination Realm expert to reveal a strange look on his face the more Shang Xia explained.

When he was done, Shang Xia realized he forgot an important matter and he asked, "I wonder how I should address senior?"

"You can call me 'Mister Bu'." The expert replied after thinking for a moment.

Nodding slowly, Shang Xia continued, "So that's basically the current situation. The Tongyou City should have their hands full at the moment. Otherwise, they wouldn't ask me to look for you. I wonder what Mister Bu has planned?"

"This old man might have hidden myself for the past twenty years, but I still know a thing or two that goes on in the Tongyou City. Hmph. All of them are too hasty. They wish to swallow the Mysterious Coral World for themselves. I'm afraid their plan is to hide in their tortoise shell the moment they succeed, avoiding the pressure of the outside world. It's a shame their shell hasn't hardened enough for them to carry out their plan." Mister Bu muttered.

Shang Xia couldn't help but gasp in fright. He realized that the person before him was probably an old acquaintance of Kou Chongxue and Shang Bo. Since that was the case, he was probably familiar with the institution's plan.

He could also tell that the old man sounded a little angry when he was speaking about the Tongyou City earlier. However, that made sense. He was made to lay low in the Changfeng City for twenty years! It was no wonder he was pissed.

Shang Xia wondered what reason they used to convince such a powerful expert to hide in the Changfeng City for twenty years, but he snapped back to reality when Mister Bu continued talking. "So... The Tongyou City sent you to look for me to deal with Yang Hu?"

Shang Xia thought about it for a second and realized that was basically the gist of it. The matter between the collusion of the White Deer Paradise and the Changbai Holy Land was a whole other matter altogether. Currently, the largest problem came from Yang Hu. It wasn't wrong to say that dealing with him would settle a lot of problems.

Seeing as Shang Xia was starting to nod, Mister Bu sneered in contempt. "Do you think the two of us are enough to stop Yang Hu who has governed this city for close to twenty years? Brat, are you dreaming?"

Shang Xia raised his eyebrows in shock. "You've been hiding here as long as Yang Hu has been in charge of the city! Shouldn't you have developed some sort of hidden power or trump cards to deal with him? What the hell..."

Naturally, he swallowed his thoughts before they escaped from his lips. He quickly changed his phrasing. “I wonder what suggestions Senior Bu has...”

Glancing deeply at him, the Martial Extermination Realm expert seemed to have seen through his thoughts. Of course, he wasn't planning to call Shang Xia out. He muttered, “Follow me. There might be something interesting going on nearby.”