

Doctor 1351

Chapter 1351: Entering the Lake

Upon hearing Wu De's inquiry about Fang Bai, Xia Chenyu first nodded, then shook her head.

"Chenyu, sis, what's the meaning of nodding and shaking your head like that?"

Wu De asked, looking puzzled.

Xia Chenyu said, "Actually, I've been with Fang Bai this whole time. It's just that now... I don't know how he's doing..."

In brief words, Xia Chenyu recounted the events of her encountering Zu Hanjiao alongside Fang Bai to Wu De, then turned and gestured to Li Chenzhou next to her, introducing him: "Taoist Priest Wu, this is Li Chenzhou, Brother Li. He's a friend Fang Bai and I met in the True Martial Realm."

She then motioned toward Wu De and said to Li Chenzhou, "Brother Li, this is Taoist Priest Wu, Wu De. He's a friend Fang Bai and I first met in the secular world."

While talking with Xia Chenyu earlier, Wu De had been secretly observing Li Chenzhou out of the corner of his eye, silently speculating about his identity.

The overwhelming pressure emanating from Li Chenzhou made Wu De feel uneasy, realizing this man's strength far surpassed his own by a great margin.

Under normal circumstances, Wu De would have addressed Li Chenzhou as "Senior." However, knowing the connection through Fang Bai and Xia Chenyu, Wu De felt that calling him "Senior" would diminish his standing among them, making it hard to hold his own in future interactions.

Wu De was adept at capitalizing on opportunities but wasn't one to accept a loss. So, offering a sly grin, he cupped his fists toward Li Chenzhou and said, "Brother Li, a pleasure! A pleasure!"

"Brother Wu, greetings."

Li Chenzhou responded politely, also cupping his fists, showing no air of superiority despite Wu De's cultivation being far below his own.

Earlier, as Wu De appeared, Li Chenzhou had been sizing him up as well, growing increasingly astonished as he observed further.

Although Wu De's cultivation level was merely at the early Universe level—the difference between them as stark as heaven and earth—Li Chenzhou sensed unusually pure Earth Element Qi and Golden Essence Energy from Wu De. Wu De clearly possessed dual attributes of Innate Spiritual Roots: Earth and Gold.

This revelation greatly shocked Li Chenzhou.

Within the True Martial Realm, Martial Artists numbered in the billions, but Innate Spiritual Roots were so rare that only one in millions had them. Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Root Martial Artists, on the other hand, appeared only once in centuries.

Among the multi-attribute Innate Spiritual Root Martial Artists Li Chenzhou had ever encountered, aside from Fang Bai, the only other was now this Wu De.

Martial Artists with single-attribute Innate Spiritual Roots were renowned as Martial Dao geniuses, their future achievements in Martial Dao immeasurable; those with dual attributes were undoubtedly destined for even greater heights.

Thus, despite Li Chenzhou's cultivation level far surpassing Wu De's, Wu De's immense potential assured Li Chenzhou exercised no arrogance in their interaction.

For both sides to recognize one another as equals was an outcome each found mutually agreeable.

"Who would have thought! Who would have thought my brother Fang Bai's cultivation level has now reached the Innate Perfection Realm!"

During their conversation, Wu De learned from Xia Chenyu and Li Chenzhou that Fang Bai had advanced to the Innate Perfection Realm, and he couldn't help but marvel.

Back in the day, when Wu De first met Fang Bai in the secular world, their cultivation levels had been comparable. But over time, the difference between them grew ever larger. Now, Fang Bai was standing atop the pinnacle of Martial Dao in the True Martial Realm, while Wu De could only gaze longingly at a horizon he could never reach.

"Don't worry. Brother Fang has plenty of methods to ensure his survival—he'll be fine! Since he instructed you both to wait by Linghu Lake, just wait here peacefully!"

Having collaborated with Fang Bai several times, Wu De knew Fang Bai well. He was aware Fang Bai would never blindly charge into a deadly fight against a formidable foe. Since Fang Bai had already planned an escape route, he would surely have a way out.

The concerns of Xia Chenyu and Li Chenzhou stemmed from their care for Fang Bai, but they had overlooked his vast array of clever strategies. Even if Fang Bai couldn't defeat Zu Hanjiao outright, escaping unscathed shouldn't be a problem.

After hearing Wu De's reassurance, Xia Chenyu and Li Chenzhou calmed themselves and realized he was right. Fang Bai was an expert in formations; if he could lure Zu Hanjiao into the large-scale formation outside the city, there might indeed be a chance to trap her for a while, granting Fang Bai the opportunity to get away.

With this thought, the pair felt more at ease. Now, all they had to do was wait for Fang Bai to arrive and quickly leave together. Once they were far away, it wouldn't be easy for Zu Hanjiao to pursue them again.

"Taoist Priest Wu, are you also here for the Martial Artist remnants in Linghu Lake?"

Seeing the water stains on Wu De's Taoist robes, Xia Chenyu couldn't help but ask.

Wu De chuckled, "I'm just passing through. I heard there are Martial Artist remnants here, so I thought I'd try my luck..."

"Did you find anything?"

Xia Chenyu asked again.

Wu De shook his head, "Not yet. This Linghu Lake is far too vast, and the remnants are said to be at the lake's bottom—how could they be easy to find? I've been here for several days, but I haven't seen anyone else discover any treasures. Makes one wonder if this talk of lake-bottom remnants is just fabricated nonsense."

Li Chenzhou said, "This Linghu Lake region doesn't seem to have any cultivation resources, yet the Essence Energy here is noticeably denser than other areas. Perhaps this is related to the rumored remnants..."

He glanced at the other persistent Martial Artists still searching for treasures in the lake, feeling somewhat tempted. Turning to Wu De, he said, "Not much else to do—allow me to accompany you into the lake for a search."

Concerned about leaving Xia Chenyu alone on the shore, he added, "Chenyu, why not come with us for a look? There seem to be quite a few female Martial Artists in the lake... maybe you'll stumble upon something."

Given her Innate Fire Spiritual Root, Xia Chenyu had to contend with the natural opposition of fire and water. However, by forming a Fire Primordial Qi shield and avoiding prolonged immersion in the lake, she wouldn't need to worry about her clothes getting soaked.

Meanwhile, among the lake-searching Martial Artists, roughly one-third were female. Some of them left the water with drenched clothes that clung to their curves, entirely unembarrassed.

Xia Chenyu shook her head and said, "Taoist Priest Wu, Brother Li, you both go ahead. I'll wait here for Fang Bai."

Li Chenzhou surveyed the surroundings, seeing that within several hundred meters, there weren't many Martial Artists nearby. Considering Xia Chenyu had some ability to protect herself, she shouldn't face any significant disturbances. He said, "Alright then. If anything happens, use a whistle to signal us."

With that, he and Wu De headed toward the lakeside, chose a suitable spot, and dove into the water. Linghu Lake was deep, with its shallowest points measures dozens of meters and its deepest exceeding several hundred meters.

The intense water pressure at depths of hundreds of meters wasn't something most Martial Artists could withstand, so most only dared to search in shallow areas, avoiding deep zones.

Even for a strong early Universe-level Martial Artist with dual attributes of Innate Spiritual Roots like Wu De, plunging too deeply was highly risky.

However, for someone like Li Chenzhou, whose cultivation was at the Innate Perfection Realm and whose physical resilience was unparalleled, such depths posed no real threat.

Upon entering the lake, Li Chenzhou dove straight toward the deepest parts, releasing his Divine Sense to probe the surroundings.

After about half an hour, Li Chenzhou had nearly expended his Essence Energy but found no abnormalities in the lake bottom. Resurfacing, he saw Wu De waiting with anticipation and silently shook his head.

Chapter 1352: Introducing the Stone Array

The crescent moon curved like an eyebrow, while the stars sparkled like dreamy eyes.

The night scenery around Linghu Lake was breathtakingly beautiful.

The gentle breeze felt like a lover's caress, whispering across one's skin, evoking a sense of indescribable comfort and ease.

By this time of night, most of the treasure-seeking warriors by the lake had returned to the shore, sitting cross-legged to meditate and rejuvenate, preparing themselves to dive into the lake again tomorrow.

A small handful of unrelenting warriors, however, still surged in and out of the lake's waters, hoping to get a step ahead of others and uncover the legendary Martial Artist Relics.

Wu De and Li Chenzhou, concerned about Xia Chenyu's safety, had also returned to the shore for now as the sky grew darker.

"Brother Li, Taoist Priest Wu, it's so late already, and Fang Bai hasn't come back yet. I'm starting to get worried!"

Staring at the vast expanse of night, Xia Chenyu voiced her rising unease, her tone laden with concern, as she turned toward Wu De and Li Chenzhou.

Wu De comforted her, saying, "No need to worry. Brother Fang is now an Innate Expert of perfection. Adding all his formidable techniques into the equation, I doubt someone capable of harming him has even been born yet! But you're right—Brother Fang is facing an extraordinarily strong opponent this time. Naturally, dealing with such a foe takes significant effort."

Li Chenzhou spread his True Essence Wings, soaring upwards before landing atop a nearby towering peak. He cast his gaze toward the dense northern forest, dozens of miles away from Linghu Lake, and after a moment, transmitted his voice down below to Xia Chenyu and Wu De: "The formation set by Brother Fang seems to remain inactive. He likely hasn't lured Zu Hanjiao into it yet. Wu is correct—it takes a lot to deal with someone like Zu Hanjiao. Let's give it some more time."

Xia Chenyu nodded, then turned to face the forest north of Linghu Lake, murmuring softly to herself, "Fang Bai, we're all waiting for you! You must come back safely..."

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Among the primordial forest dozens of miles north of Linghu Lake, Fang Bai and Zu Hanjiao were darting rapidly between towering trees that soared high into the heavens.

"Little Brother Fang, where exactly is that Martial Artist Relics you mentioned?"

After sprinting through the forest for a while, Zu Hanjiao couldn't help but ask in a sweet and coy tone.

Having followed Fang Bai out of Spirit Lake City to this dense forest, Zu Hanjiao seized the opportunity while away from Xia Chenyu and Li Chenzhou's interference to unleash her seductive charms to their fullest, subtly probing about the Martial Artist Relics whenever Fang Bai seemed "lost in thought."

Once a Foundation Establishment Expert herself, Zu Hanjiao noticed that the details Fang Bai disclosed about the Martial Artist Relics aligned with the characteristics one might expect. Thus, she became increasingly convinced Fang Bai wasn't deceiving her, her heart thrumming with mounting excitement.

Since falling from the grand Three Thousand Worlds to the humble Three Thousand Minor Worlds, Zu Hanjiao discovered the scarce Essence Energy and cultivation resources here made returning to her peak nearly impossible. The prospect of ever re-entering the Three Thousand Worlds seemed nothing short of bleak, leaving her dejected and resentful.

Over the years, Zu Hanjiao subdued several Innate Experts, forcing them to search far and wide for high-ranked cultivation resources on her behalf. She even attempted to utilize the blood essence of Innate Spirit Root Martial Artists to refine elixirs, all in desperate pursuit of rekindling her power and securing a chance to return to the grand Three Thousand Worlds.

Upon learning from Fang Bai of Foundation Establishment Martial Artist Relics outside Spirit Lake City, Zu Hanjiao was ecstatic. She reasoned that if she could find cultivation treasures within those relics, her hopes of regaining her peak mastery—and her dreams of returning to the grand Three Thousand Worlds—would dramatically increase.

In Zu Hanjiao's judgment, Fang Bai couldn't have described the ruins of a Foundation Establishment Martial Artist in such detail unless he had seen them firsthand. After probing Fang Bai on several traits associated with Foundation Establishment Experts, her faith in his credibility solidified.

Little did she realize that in his past life, Fang Bai's cultivation had begun at the Foundation Establishment stage; discussing its features came as second nature to him, as if planting bait she couldn't help but swallow.

"Uh... don't rush! It's right up ahead, we're almost there!"

Regarding Zu Hanjiao's queries, Fang Bai gave a vague response, thinking to himself that the woman had already taken the bait—she wouldn't abandon the chase now.

Zu Hanjiao, consumed by the lure of the Martial Artist Relics, was willing to enter the trap even if she suspected some deception from Fang Bai.

"By the way, Little Brother Fang, that relic of the Foundation Establishment Expert must hold many treasures, right? Since you've already ventured inside, surely you brought some items out?"

Zu Hanjiao asked playfully as they kept moving.

Fang Bai smiled bitterly, saying, "I did wish to take some treasures, but I couldn't approach the Foundation Establishment expert's remains."

Zu Hanjiao hesitated, her brows raising slightly as she asked, "What do you mean?"

Fang Bai replied, "On the finger of that Foundation Establishment expert, there's a Spatial Ring that surely contains many treasures. But even that ring harbors an intense killing intent. When I tried to get near the remains, I triggered a strand of its killing intent. Had I not prepared in advance, I would've been dead on the spot."

He exhaled lightly and showed an expression of lingering fear.

Zu Hanjiao gasped audibly, her delicate mouth opening slightly in surprise. Her face appeared startled as she said, "You're still daring enough to approach it again? Aren't you worried about being injured by the killing intent?"

Fang Bai replied, "This time round, I'm checking whether the Martial Artist Relics have been discovered by anyone else, and I'm also experimenting with how to neutralize the killing intent of that Spatial Ring..."

Glancing at Zu Hanjiao briefly, he added with concern, "Miss Zu, once we arrive at the relic, you must remain outside the formation and wait. Don't follow me inside, or your life could be in danger!"

"Understood! Thank you for your concern, Little Brother Fang!"

Zu Hanjiao giggled as she replied.

Throughout their journey, Zu Hanjiao had been repeatedly addressing him with honeyed "Little Brother Fang," her voice sugary sweet to the bone. If Xia Chenyu were present, she might silently curse the woman as a "seductive fox spirit" in frustration.

Due to the pure and abundant Essence Energy nurtured by its proximity to Linghu Lake, this primordial forest housed numerous powerful Spirit Beasts. While traveling, Fang Bai and Zu Hanjiao encountered many Spirit Beasts equivalent to human Innate Experts.

Yet, for the current Fang Bai, these Spirit Beasts posed no challenge; they fell one after another with simple gestures.

"Brother Fang is so impressive!"

After each of Fang Bai's kills, Zu Hanjiao would exclaim excitedly, showering him with praises.

"Keep pretending! Soon you'll realize how formidable my formation is!"

Fang Bai sneered inwardly, his thoughts mocking.

A moment later, the dense forest ahead gave way to a sprawling stone forest. The stone array within the forest rose unevenly, its layout seemingly chaotic to the average warrior. However, martial artists acquainted with formations could immediately sense the brilliance of the meticulously crafted Stone Forest Formation.

Being from an esteemed sect of the grand Three Thousand Worlds, Zu Hanjiao had some knowledge of formations. Upon seeing the Stone Forest Formation, she marveled at its complexity and depth. After careful observation, she managed to uncover a method to crack its secrets and couldn't help but feel proud of herself.

"Miss Zu, please wait here while I check inside the formation. I won't be long!"

Standing before the stone array, Fang Bai's eyes gleamed with eagerness. After delivering these words to Zu Hanjiao, he proceeded into the formation hastily.

"Little Brother Fang, don't be so impatient! I'll join you inside!"

Zu Hanjiao appreciated the intricacy of the stone array, believing only a Foundation Establishment expert possessed the skill to craft it. The faint suspicion in her heart now dissolved completely, giving way to uncontrollable excitement. Laughing charmingly, she shifted her form and followed Fang Bai into the array without hesitation.

Chapter 1353: Yin Yang Soul-Snatching Array

Zu Hanjiao stepped into the Stone Array and immediately sensed something amiss.

In the vast space of the Stone Array, apart from the towering stone pillars scattered around, it was bare and desolate. There was no trace of the Foundation Establishment Martial Artist remains that Fang Bai had mentioned.

At the very moment Zu Hanjiao entered the Stone Array, Fang Bai's figure darted out from the exit on the other side of the array.

Soon after, the stone pillars within the array began rapidly shifting, blurring Zu Hanjiao's vision. The surrounding scenery transformed drastically, as though she had been thrust into an endless ancient wasteland.

Black and white clouds churned above in chaotic swirls, forming a colossal Yin-Yang image in the sky. Thunder roared, obscuring the heavens and sun, and Zu Hanjiao stood beneath it, feeling an oppressive suffocation.

Winds howled like knives and arrows, raging around her. Ferocious Spirit Beasts prowled in the shadows, countless Martial Artists roared as they battled fiercely. Her surroundings were littered with skeletal remains and shattered corpses, and dense bloodstains seeped into the ground, painting an apocalyptic hellscape.

Even though Zu Hanjiao was once a Foundation Establishment expert, seeing such horrifying illusions made her heart involuntarily quiver.

"Miss Zu, this 'Yin Yang Soul-Snatching Array' was prepared especially for you. I hope you enjoy it! Hahaha... hahaha..."

Fang Bai's mocking laughter rang out abruptly from outside the Stone Array, filled with ridicule.

"Brother Fang, what are you doing?"

Smart and astute as she was, Zu Hanjiao immediately realized Fang Bai might have seen through her plans upon hearing his words. Her delicate fists clenched tightly, her eyes gleaming with icy light, as she silently ground her teeth in frustration.

Fang Bai sneered, "Miss Zu, I know your strength is formidable... Frankly speaking, I've no intention of provoking you, but I also don't want you to trouble me. I know this Formation won't hold you for long, but it will give us enough time to get far away. From now on, let's simply go our separate ways and stop meddling in each other's lives!"

A deafening rumble was Zu Hanjiao's response; Fang Bai knew it was her attempting to brute-force her way out of the Formation.

"Miss Zu, take your time in there. I'll be leaving now. Farewell!"

With a burst of hearty laughter, Fang Bai's figure disappeared into the dense forest, heading toward Linghu Lake.

"Fang Bai, don't let me catch you! Or I'll flay you alive, rip out your sinews, and grind your bones to ashes!"

As Zu Hanjiao sensed Fang Bai's aura growing fainter and finally vanishing, she realized he had already left. Infuriated, she let out an enraged shriek.

She closed her eyes, refusing to look at the dreadful illusions around her. With her graceful palms in motion, her delicate fists flew as she unleashed her full power to attack her surroundings.

Zu Hanjiao had some knowledge of Formations and knew they must have an Array Eye. If the Array Eye was destroyed, the Formation would collapse.

Under normal circumstances, Zu Hanjiao could expend some time slowly locating the Array Eye and eventually break the Formation.

But her current state of shame and fury left her consumed by anger and an eager desire to kill Fang Bai. In her haste, she attempted to smash through the Formation with brute force.

Little did she know that Fang Bai's Formation grew stronger the more it was attacked. The more violently Zu Hanjiao struck, the more realistic the illusions manifested by the Formation became, further distorting her mind. If she continued, she might fall prey to inner demons, suffer deviation, and see her cultivation level plummet.

Fortunately, Zu Hanjiao was once a Foundation Establishment expert, and her mental resilience far exceeded that of ordinary Martial Artists. After venting her anger wildly for a time, she ceased her reckless attacks.

"What a crafty Fang Bai! Not only did he figure out my cultivation level surpasses his, but he also calmly set up this Formation to ensnare me here... However, even if you flee to the ends of the earth, I will find you and exact my vengeance for today!"

Zu Hanjiao swore bitterly before sitting cross-legged, clearing her mind of distractions. Once the illusions faded from her view, she began closely examining the 'Yin Yang Soul-Snatching Array' and contemplating methods to break it.

Having trapped Zu Hanjiao in the 'Yin Yang Soul-Snatching Array,' Fang Bai knew the Formation could only hold her for three days at most. Thus, after escaping, he didn't dare waste even a moment and immediately flew toward Linghu Lake with all his might to rendezvous with Xia Chenyu and Li Chenzhou.

His figure streaked like lightning, sweeping through the forest and leaping over streams. Within a mere hundred breaths, he had arrived near the agreed rendezvous point with Xia Chenyu and Li Chenzhou.

"Hmm? This other aura feels rather familiar... Could it be Fat Taoist Wu De? Why is he here at Linghu Lake? Could it be for the rumored Spirit Lake Ruins?"

Near Xia Chenyu and Li Chenzhou, Fang Bai also sensed Wu De's Martial Artist aura. Encountering an old friend in a foreign land, he felt both surprised and delighted.

Quickly accelerating his pace, Fang Bai appeared moments later within the sight of Xia Chenyu, Li Chenzhou, and Wu De.

"Fang Bai, we've finally waited long enough for you!"

"It's good to see you safe!"

"Haha... Brother Fang, didn't expect to meet me here, did you? How about that? Surprised or not? Excited or not?"

Xia Chenyu, Li Chenzhou, and Wu De showed joyful expressions as they stepped forward to greet Fang Bai upon his return.

Back when Wu De and others accompanied Fang Bai to Shenwu Continent to search for the Huaxia Sect, their ship was attacked by Madam Linghu. Fang Bai had drawn her away alone to ensure Wu De and the others' safety, allowing them to land successfully and find the Huaxia Sect while Fang Bai's whereabouts became unknown.

Meeting again at Linghu Lake, Fang Bai and Wu De were genuinely elated.

"It's unexpected that most family and friends we knew in the mundane world ended up congregating at the Huaxia Sect!"

Listening to Wu De's account of the Huaxia Sect, Fang Bai felt bittersweet emotions—comforted yet also regretful.

Regretful that among the women he knew in the worldly realm, only Dongfang Rushi and the Dragon Maiden remained missing.

Fortunately, Fang Bai shared a spiritual connection with these women, and if anything had happened to Dongfang Rushi or the Dragon Maiden, Fang Bai would feel a stabbing pain in his heart and sink into melancholy.

Since that feeling hadn't arisen, it indicated Dongfang Rushi and the Dragon Maiden were still safe, which was some solace.

"Let's go! Let's return to the Huaxia Sect!"

Thinking about the family and friends from the mundane world at the Huaxia Sect, Fang Bai's emotions surged, and he was eager to reunite with them.

"Hold on... hold on..."

Wu De hurriedly grabbed Fang Bai as he was about to leave and whispered, "It's said that beneath Linghu Lake lies Martial Artist remains. Aren't you curious?"

Fang Bai sensed the pure and abundant Essence Energy emanating from Linghu Lake, which indeed felt unusual. He couldn't help but feel intrigued and asked Wu De, "How long have you been here? Did you discover anything?"

Rolling his eyes, Wu De retorted, "I arrived only moments before Brother Li and Sister Chenyu. How could I find anything? Think about it—if the Martial Artist remains beneath the lake were so easily found, what would be the point?"

Fang Bai nodded with a chuckle and said, "That's true! The most valuable remnants are often the most concealed, making them hard to uncover. I've heard that the Martial Artist remains below Linghu Lake might have been left by a Foundation Establishment expert. Not sure if it's true."

Wu De rubbed his hands excitedly and said, "Whether true or not, we'll know after exploring! Why don't I go with you?"

Li Chenzhou and Xia Chenyu exchanged smiles, thinking that despite just emerging from the lake moments ago, this Fat Taoist still wouldn't give up on treasure hunting.

"If you want to go, go ahead. I'll stay here with Chenyu."

Seeing Fang Bai's interest, Li Chenzhou waved his hand casually.

"Very well. Whether it takes one or two hours or three to five hours, we'll return regardless of the outcome."

Leaving these words behind, Fang Bai and Wu De plunged into the lake in succession, heading toward its deepest heart.

Chapter 1354: Something Strange Under the Lake!

It is said that there used to be powerful Innate-level Spirit Beasts in Linghu Lake, but ever since Martial Artist Remnants were discovered at the lakebed, those Spirit Beasts have vanished without a trace.

Some believe the Spirit Beasts fled to the nearby deep mountains and dense forests out of fear of being hunted by human Martial Artists.

Without the Spirit Beasts, Linghu Lake has become a place free of restraint for Martial Artists, drawing thousands every day—from Cosmic Level Experts to Innate Experts—dreaming of uncovering the Martial Artist relics hidden at the bottom of the lake and achieving rapid breakthroughs in strength.

"Old Taoist Wu, are you sure no Spirit Beasts remain in Linghu Lake?"

After diving into the deepest part of the lake, Fang Bai suddenly paused his movements and sent a message to Wu De, who was following behind him.

"What's the matter?"

Wu De, knowing Fang Bai wouldn't say such a thing without reason, felt a sudden jolt of unease and immediately stopped swimming.

"When I first arrived at Linghu Lake, the Martial Artists gathered around this area all said so... Earlier, I dived in with Brother Li, and neither of us detected any sign of Spirit Beasts... Brother Fang, did you sense something?"

While responding to Fang Bai, Wu De's nerves began to tighten.

Fang Bai remained silent for a dozen breaths before finally saying, "I seem to have sensed the presence of Spirit Beasts just now... The aura was faint, but I am certain there are Spirit Beasts at the bottom of this lake! Not only that, there's definitely more than one!"

Wu De's face turned pale upon hearing Fang Bai's words. His beady eyes widened as he nervously scanned his surroundings.

But with his current cultivation level, Wu De could only see objects within a hundred meters around him; any further, it was pitch black.

"If you're scared, then go back to the surface! Wait for me on the shore."

Fang Bai turned his head and shot a disdainful glance at Wu De.

Wu De was indeed afraid. He had heard before that the lake housed Innate-level Spirit Beasts. If that were true, and if there were multiple as Fang Bai claimed, it would be quite the predicament.

Even Martial Artists who had mastered Water System Techniques were considerably slower underwater compared to Spirit Beasts of the same level. If a Spirit Beast were to launch a sudden attack from the depths, Fang Bai might have a chance to escape to the surface, but Wu De certainly wouldn't.

Thus, upon hearing Fang Bai's words, Wu De felt his scalp tighten. His first instinct was to immediately surface and flee.

But Fang Bai's disdainful look made Wu De bristle with anger. If he fled now, his lifelong reputation would be utterly ruined. In the future, he wouldn't be able to hold his head high in front of Fang Bai.

"Stop looking at me with that expression... Did I ever say I was scared?"

Seeing Fang Bai's composed demeanor, Wu De suddenly recalled that this guy knew Beast Taming techniques. No wonder he appeared so confident. With his Innate cultivation in perfection, Fang Bai might really have the ability to tame Innate-level Spirit Beasts.

"Hmph, you want me to leave so you can have the treasures all to yourself? Fat chance!"

Wu De rolled his eyes at Fang Bai and snorted.

Wu De thought to himself that one must risk a pawn to catch a wolf. Taking some risks to uncover the Foundation Establishment Martial Artist relics at the lakebed was worth it. If Spirit Beasts did attack, Fang Bai surely wouldn't leave him for dead.

"If you're unafraid, then follow me!"

Fang Bai laughed heartily and resumed diving toward the lakebed.

Wu De gritted his teeth and followed behind.

After diving several hundred meters further, their feet finally touched the muddy lakebed.

The water pressure here was immense, far beyond Wu De's ability to withstand. Earlier, Li Chenzhou had explored here, but Wu De had stayed well away.

This time, Wu De came only because Fang Bai had enveloped him in the True Essence Barrier for protection. Otherwise, Wu De wouldn't have dared step into this area.

"The Spirit Beast aura here seems stronger than it was earlier..."

Fang Bai furrowed his brows, spreading his Divine Sense in every direction as he murmured to himself.

"Where are the Spirit Beasts? I think you're just trying to scare me... Brother Li has the same cultivation level as you. Earlier, when he was here, he didn't notice anything unusual..."

Wu De muttered under his breath.

Fang Bai replied, "You should know that among Martial Artists of the same cultivation level, none can match me! Even Brother Li! What I can sense, Brother Li may not be able to!"

Wu De fell silent.

Having known Fang Bai since their days in the secular world, Wu De was well aware of Fang Bai's extraordinary talent. His ability to challenge higher levels was nothing short of monstrous. At the same cultivation level, even Li Chenzhou wouldn't be his match.

However, they were now at the deepest section of the lakebed, hundreds of meters underwater. If Spirit Beasts launched an attack here, escaping would be exponentially more difficult for the two of them.

Wu De once again felt the urge to retreat and stammered, "Brother Fang, shouldn't we... head back to the surface for now?"

Fang Bai ignored him, his expression gradually growing serious.

"There's something unusual... beneath the lakebed mud..."

Fang Bai murmured, his eyes suddenly lighting up as he exclaimed, "I've figured it out!"

Wu De jumped in shock and said, "Could you not startle me like that? What have you figured out?"

Fang Bai's eyes burned as he pointed at the mud below them and said to Wu De, "What if I told you there's a Spirit Beast beneath this mud... would you believe me?"

"A Spirit Beast beneath the mud? You're joking, right? Hahaha... Hahaha... Haha... Ha... Ha..."

Wu De laughed loudly at Fang Bai, but as his laughter dwindled, a troubling thought came to mind and his chuckles grew weak and eventually ceased.

"Are you saying..."

Seeing Fang Bai's solemn expression, Wu De's throat dried up, his heart pounding wildly.

"If my guess is correct, the Martial Artist relics lie beneath this lakebed, and the Spirit Beasts... are inside them."

Even though Wu De had considered this possibility, it was still difficult for him to grasp. "This... this... how is that possible?"

Linghu Lake had existed for countless millennia, its bottom filled with deep sediment. What kind of Martial Artist would have the ability to construct a sanctuary beneath the lakebed mud?

And how would Spirit Beasts even gain access to a cultivation retreat buried under the mud?

It was said that the owner of the Martial Artist relics in Linghu Lake was a Foundation Establishment Expert. Could a Foundation Establishment Expert's powers truly reach such heights?

Staring at Fang Bai in a daze, Wu De's thoughts became a chaotic mess.

"Perhaps, when the relics were being built, Linghu Lake didn't exist. Later, a dramatic change in the world shifted the terrain of the relic site, forming the current lake. As the relics were submerged by water over the ages, they gradually became buried deep beneath sediment..."

While Wu De remained in a stupor, Fang Bai didn't waste any time. As he spoke, the Spatial Ring on his left hand flickered faintly, and the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade appeared in his grip.

"Huff..."

"Huff..."

"Huff..."

Fang Bai swung the blade, sending three arcs of crimson blade energy surging out from its surface, forcefully slicing through the lake water and landing on the thick mud below.

Chapter 1355: The Leeches

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

...

Fang Bai's Blood-Drinking Mad Blade slashed powerfully through the inky black lake water like an enormous axe that could split heaven and earth, striking the muddy lakebed.

At once, mud splattered everywhere, black water spread out, and the lake within a radius of tens of meters became utterly murky.

A moment later, as the water regained some clarity, Wu De squinted to take a closer look. He saw that the mud on the lakebed ahead had been completely cleared, revealing a thick slab of stone several meters wide.

"This...this is..."

Wu De froze again, staring at the massive stone slab with eyes brimming with shock and excitement.

What shocked him was that this thick stone slab was clearly the rooftop of a colossal building.

What excited him was the possibility that this enormous structure might be the fabled Martial Artist Relics.

"Move!"

As Wu De stood there dumbfounded, Fang Bai's urgent shout suddenly echoed beside him, immediately accompanied by an overwhelming surge of dark currents.

"A spirit beast attack!"

Wu De's thought had barely registered when he felt his collar tighten; a force yanked his body upward toward the lake surface, propelling him dozens of meters in an instant.

Wu De realized that the one pulling him was Fang Bai.

As his body surged upward, Wu De instinctively glanced down. He saw, less than five meters beneath his feet, a massive shadowy creature rushing toward him with its gaping, blood-red maw. The stench emanating from its mouth was dizzying and nauseating.

The lake water churned and bubbled furiously, as if boiling, in the wake of the creature.

A single glance was enough for Wu De to confirm that this monstrous entity was a highly poisonous and devastatingly powerful spirit beast!

"Damn it! It's the Purple-Striped Venomous Leech! Fang Bai, faster...go faster!"

As soon as Wu De recognized the creature's full form, his scalp crawled, and he let out a panicked wail.

According to ancient texts from the True Martial Realm, the Purple-Striped Venomous Leech was among the most toxic spirit beasts in existence, typically no larger than three feet.

And the larger the leech, the stronger its combat ability and the deadlier its poison.

The Purple-Striped Venomous Leech before Wu De was over three meters long. Its colossal size was unprecedented.

"Fang Bai mentioned sensing the aura of an innate-level spirit beast earlier. It must be this Purple-Striped Venomous Leech!"

Wu De thought to himself.

He was certain that, with his cultivation level, if this enormous leech caught up to him, even a hint of its toxin would likely corrode his body instantly, reducing him to a mess of bloody bubbles.

The Purple-Striped Venomous Leech's body was extremely flexible and possessed extraordinary regenerative capabilities. Even if it were cut in two, it could quickly regenerate a new body.

The best way to destroy a Purple-Striped Venomous Leech was to incinerate it with fierce flames.

However, the leech dwelled deep underwater, where water naturally countered fire, making such a strategy nearly impossible.

"We're done for!"

Some dozen meters further upward, Wu De saw the Purple-Striped Venomous Leech closing in rapidly, its maw almost grazing his toes. It seemed ready to swallow him whole at any moment. Wu De was scared out of his wits and screamed even louder.

"You lousy Taoist, if you scream like that again, I'll throw you straight into the leech's mouth!"

Fang Bai spat furiously, and with his left hand gripping Wu De's collar, he hurled him upward with immense force.

With nearly all his strength poured into the throw, Fang Bai's immense power hurled Wu De upward like a cannonball toward the lake surface.

As his body shot upward uncontrollably, Wu De finally understood that Fang Bai was saving him. Overcome with joy, he began circulating his cultivation technique, further accelerating his ascent.

In just a few moments, there was a loud splash, and Wu De's squat figure broke through the lake surface, sending waves scattering.

"That brat Fang Bai has plenty of tricks up his sleeve for escaping, but this Taoist doesn't! I'm out of here first!"

Once above water, Wu De tread the waves briefly before quickly reaching the lakeshore.

"Kill!"

Deep underwater, as Wu De escaped, Fang Bai reversed his stance, gripping the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade with both hands. With a shout, he swung fiercely at the Purple-Striped Venomous Leech that had surged out from the submerged building and was pursuing him.

To his surprise, the Purple-Striped Venomous Leech was exceptionally agile and incredibly fast, dodging Fang Bai's strike with ease.

"So, it's an innate spirit beast at the peak of perfection. No wonder it can dodge... But let's see how you'll evade this!"

Fang Bai's eyes gleamed with determination, his fighting spirit surging. With a cold snort, he unleashed three consecutive strikes, each forming blade arcs that exerted immense pressure over a radius of more than ten meters. The knife energy churned the lake water into three massive vortices.

Fish, weeds, and even rocks from the lakebed were sucked into the whirlpools and instantly pulverized.

Fang Bai had attained cultivation at the perfection level of innate realm. While he couldn't yet contend with Foundation Establishment experts like Zu Hanjiao, he was more than capable of dealing with an innate spirit beast of the same rank.

Moreover, Fang Bai was aware that hidden beneath the mud and the submerged structure were at least five other Purple-Striped Venomous Leeches of comparable strength, likely forming a family.

Fang Bai's guess was correct. Beneath Linghu Lake, within the Martial Artist Relics, lay an entire family of Purple-Striped Venomous Leeches. A few centuries ago, upon discovering the lake, they had submerged themselves here, devouring other spirit beasts in the lake and claiming it as their territory.

Later, upon uncovering the Martial Artist Relics beneath the muddy lakebed, the leeches took residence within, coiling around various treasures and cultivating by absorbing essence energy.

Typically, when martial artists came to Linghu Lake seeking treasures, the leeches ignored them as long as they didn't detect the relics buried beneath the mud.

This was precisely why countless martial artists had visited this lake over the past century without ever realizing spirit beasts lurked within.

But Fang Bai's clearing of the lakebed mud exposed the Martial Artist Relics, provoking the hidden Purple-Striped Venomous Leeches into action.

The first to attack Fang Bai and Wu De was the leech that had burst out first.

That Purple-Striped Venomous Leech had never anticipated that the humans it had always viewed as prey would not only refuse to flee but would retaliate with such ferocity.

The first slash from Fang Bai's blade had already taught the leech a harsh lesson, and the subsequent three-strike combo caused it to instantly reconsider its approach.

However, the area of impact from Fang Bai's three consecutive strikes spanned over ten meters, blocking the leech's escape routes entirely.

With no choice left, the Purple-Striped Venomous Leech twisted its body and frantically dove toward the lakebed, hoping to leverage its underwater speed to escape Fang Bai's blood-red blade arcs that struck terror into its core.

But Fang Bai's nearly full-strength three-strike combo wasn't something the leech could shake off so easily.

The leech's speed was impressive, but the blade arcs moving through the water were even faster.

"Splat!"

"Splat!"

"Splat!"

Three muffled booms echoed, and the Purple-Striped Venomous Leech's body was sliced into four segments by the blade arcs.

Large quantities of dark purple blood flowed from the leech's wounds, swiftly spreading through the surrounding waters.

The dense toxins contained within the purple blood corroded the lake water, causing rapid bubbling sounds as gas bubbles continuously surfaced. As the bubbles burst, they released wisps of poisonous fumes that drifted into the air.

Chapter 1356: The Martial Artist Remnants Behind the Stone Door

After the Purple-Striped Leech was severed by Fang Bai's three continuous slashes, the remaining three pieces fell into the lakebed mud, with the part near its head floating in the water, wriggling slowly.

Within just a few breaths, the wriggling body of the Purple-Striped Leech stopped bleeding, the wounds healed, and it began to rapidly grow at a speed visible to the naked eye.

The Purple-Striped Leech's powerful self-healing ability was evident from this.

However, Fang Bai had seen countless spirit beasts in his past life, many of which had self-healing abilities even stronger than the Purple-Striped Leech. As such, he wasn't surprised.

The reason Fang Bai didn't immediately eliminate the Purple-Striped Leech was that he wanted to use the dense spiritual energy and strong venom in its purple blood to continue tempering the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade, thereby enhancing its grade and power.

A large amount of purple blood that had spread into the lake water was absorbed by the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade in Fang Bai's hand, causing the completely crimson blade to faintly emit a few eerie purple glows.

Seeing the Purple-Striped Leech seemingly reborn, its body restored, Fang Bai was not alarmed but delighted, thinking that he could use the blood of this leech to thoroughly temper his Blood-Drinking Mad Blade today.

The Purple-Striped Leech, relying on its nearly immortal body, launched another attack on Fang Bai, who faced it without mercy, raising his blade to engage in battle.

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

...

More than a hundred meters below the lake, the over-ten-meter-long Purple-Striped Leech kept charging at Fang Bai, intending to devour him.

However, Fang Bai continuously wielded his blade, one crimson and bloody blade aura after another detached from the blade, weaving into a net that slashed at the Purple-Striped Leech's body.

The blade aura Fang Bai wielded contained robust and unmatched, sharp and piercing Golden Essence Energy, repeatedly cutting the Purple-Striped Leech into multiple segments.

The Essence Energy spreading expansively in all directions whipped the lake water within a dozen meters into a rapid whirlpool, forming a massive vortex above Fang Bai's head on the lake surface.

In the dark night, looking at that whirlpool on the lake, it was like a black hole in the starry sky, seemingly capable of devouring everything, giving off a chilling sensation.

"Fang Bai and that spirit beast are fighting fiercely! I heard from Fang Bai that the spirit beast is comparable to a human Innate perfection-level expert. It's truly terrifying..."

Wu De, who had messily escaped back to the lake's edge, stood shoulder to shoulder with Li Chenzhou and Xia Chenyu, and said with lingering fear upon seeing the massive vortex formed on the lake surface.

Li Chenzhou said, "A spirit beast comparable to a human Innate perfection-level expert has combat power superior to mine. But Fang Bai should be able to handle it!"

"The problem is... Fang Bai said that there might be more than one equally powerful spirit beast at the bottom of the lake..."

Wu De said with a wry smile.

As he spoke, Xia Chenyu's delicate eyebrows immediately furrowed, and she looked worried.

"That would be troublesome..."

Li Chenzhou's expression also became serious.

"I will go help him!"

In her urgency, Xia Chenyu summoned the Dragon and Phoenix Twin Swords, ready to leap into the lake.

"You going will only be a burden to Fang Bai!"

Li Chenzhou said sternly, his figure whisking away, treading on the lake's surface waves rapidly toward the center, his voice carrying back from afar: "Brother Wu, take good care of Chenyu!"

"Let's just stay put here, shall we?"

Seeing Li Chenzhou's figure disappear under the lake's surface, Wu De said to Xia Chenyu: "For two Innate perfection experts, dealing with a few spirit beasts will certainly not be a problem! Even if they couldn't defeat the spirit beasts, their escape skills are top-notch and they can surely get away!"

He paused, suddenly slapped his forehead, and laughed heartily: "We both forgot something! Brother Fang is skilled in the Beast Taming Art; spirit beasts of the same realm are no match for him?"

Hearing Wu De's words, Xia Chenyu remembered Fang Bai's formidable Beast Taming Art and thought that three to five spirit beasts of the same realm really might not be able to harm him, and she couldn't help but sigh in relief.

Li Chenzhou, with a spear in hand, rapidly descended to the bottom of the lake, and within a few breaths, saw Fang Bai fighting alone against five Purple-Striped Leeches.

The five Purple-Striped Leeches, each equivalent to a human Innate perfection realm, were frantically attacking while surrounding Fang Bai, causing the surrounding lake water to churn violently, and the color of the water turned entirely purple.

Fang Bai, standing among them, seemed even unable to stabilize his own form.

However, the seemingly small Fang Bai erupted with enormous power. With the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade in hand, he dashed left and right, fighting fiercely, rendering the five frantic Purple-Striped Leeches unable to do anything to him for the moment.

While Fang Bai was joyously engaging in battle by using the blood of the leeches to temper the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade, he suddenly sensed Li Chenzhou's aura, gave him a glance, and shouted, "Brother Li, no need to rush to help, let me fight for a bit longer!"

Li Chenzhou, knowing that Fang Bai would be fine for a while, nodded with a smile.

"By the way, Brother Li, I've found the Martial Artist Remnants at the bottom of Linghu Lake, right beneath our feet! You can have a look down there first... but if it's truly something left by a Foundation Establishment expert, unless you are absolutely sure, it's best not to touch it!"

Fang Bai loudly added.

Li Chenzhou's heart stirred, and focusing his gaze, he looked at the lake bottom beneath him, indeed seeing a tall, wide cave, which upon closer look, turned out to be a massive open stone door.

A wisp of spiritual energy was spilling out from inside the stone door, pure and intense, far exceeding Li Chenzhou's expectations.

There must be treasures inside the stone door!

Li Chenzhou's eyes gleamed with a hint of delight, and with a forward thrust of the spear in his hand, he assumed a defensive stance and leapt inside the stone door.

Beyond the stone door, a vast expanse suddenly opened up before his eyes, a grand plaza spanning dozens of acres.

The ground of the plaza was entirely paved with high-quality Water Element Stones, and at the center stood a stone statue, which judging by the attire and features, seemed to depict a middle-aged woman of no ordinary looks.

The statue was also carved from Water Element Stone, with flowing garment ribbons and vivid expressions, lifelike, at first glance as if possessing life itself.

In the left hand of the statue was a slender black long sword, even though the sword was hidden in its sheath, a soaring sword aura could still be sensed pervading in all directions.

Li Chenzhou knew that the black long sword was a Supreme Spirit Weapon, its grade far surpassing the sword in his hand, his eyes lit up brightly, filled with excitement.

However, Li Chenzhou also understood that, with his cultivation level, even if he obtained that black long sword, he might not be able to wield it, and if he forced its use, he might end up harming himself instead.

This was like a peerless treasure sword falling into the hands of a child without enough strength, the sharp treasure sword not only failing to enhance the child's abilities but instead injuring him.

Deterred by the black long sword's killing qi, Li Chenzhou dared not get too close to it, instead watching from afar.

On the opposite side of the plaza were two massive stone halls built with Essence Stones.

The stone hall on the left housed items like stone beds and stone tables, evidently used for living and resting.

Inside the stone hall on the right, a furnace cauldron and many bottles and jars could be seen, which should be the Alchemy Room.

Inside the Alchemy Room, there were also some wasted medicinal residues and spiritual herbs unfamiliar to Li Chenzhou's knowledge.

A few Space Rings were placed on a small stone table beside the furnace cauldron, seemingly inconspicuous, but Li Chenzhou knew that within those Space Rings might be cultivation resources that far exceeded his expectations.

Chapter 1357: Inside the Stone Statue

The two massive stone halls emanated an overwhelming pressure. Standing before them, Li Chenzhou felt as though he were facing a ten-thousand-foot mountain.

And he himself, seemingly nothing more than an ant at the foot of the mountain.

The might of a Foundation Establishment Expert was evident from the black longsword held by the stone statue in the square, and these two stone halls before them.

Before meeting Fang Bai, Li Chenzhou had believed that he had already reached the pinnacle of Martial Dao in this world, standing as one of its strongest beings.

It was only after befriending Fang Bai that Li Chenzhou learned from his words that the vast True Martial Realm was merely one among the Three Thousand Minor Worlds.

And beyond the Three Thousand Minor Worlds lay the higher planes known as the Three Thousand Major Worlds.

Supposedly, in the Three Thousand Major Worlds, Innate Experts were considered the lowest tier of martial artists, while Foundation Establishment Experts were merely beginning their journey.

Li Chenzhou was filled with yearning for the Three Thousand Major Worlds described by Fang Bai, convinced that it was the true destination for martial artists.

Although Foundation Establishment Experts ranked low in the Three Thousand Major Worlds, in the True Martial Realm, they were supreme, unmatched existences.

Thus, when Li Chenzhou learned of the ruins of a Foundation Establishment Expert at the bottom of Linghu Lake, he was deeply tempted.

It was predictable that every item within these ruins would be treasures coveted by Innate Experts, capable of elevating anyone's strength to a higher level.

Li Chenzhou's gaze fell upon the array of vials and jars inside the right-side stone hall, his heart ablaze.

These were elixirs crafted by a Foundation Establishment Expert, and Li Chenzhou thought to himself: If I could obtain them, perhaps the Foundation Establishment Realm might not be beyond my aspirations.

Excitement spread across Li Chenzhou's face as he took step after step toward the right-side stone hall. Once he crossed the threshold, the elixirs and spiritual medicine inside those vials and jars would belong to him.

"Watch out!"

Fang Bai's voice suddenly rang out from behind Li Chenzhou.

Li Chenzhou froze in place and turned his head back, seeing Fang Bai dashing through the stone gate toward him.

Li Chenzhou had not expected Fang Bai to arrive so quickly, and seeing that he was unharmed, he felt a rush of joy in his heart. He asked, "Did you take care of those leeches?"

"Yes. They're taken care of," Fang Bai replied.

Landing beside Li Chenzhou, Fang Bai glanced at the stone hall before them, letting out a soft sigh. "Lucky I came early; otherwise..."

Li Chenzhou's gaze tightened as he looked toward the stone hall thoughtfully, asking, "You mean... there's danger inside the stone hall?"

Fang Bai replied, "No, the danger lies outside the stone hall..."

As he spoke, Fang Bai wielded his Blood-Drinking Mad Blade, slashing out a blade ray toward the two stone pillars flanking the stone hall's entrance.

The two pillars, forged from high-grade Essence Stone, were as thick as an adult's waist, with Essence Energy swirling around their edges.

"Buzz!"

When Fang Bai's blade ray reached about a zhang away from the stone pillars, a soft hum emanated from them. A dazzling light burst forth, and an intense lethal energy shot from the pillar's surface to meet his blade ray.

The collision of the two rays of condensed Essence Energy revealed the stark difference in strength: Fang Bai's blade ray, capable of effortlessly slaying an Innate Expert at the peak of perfection, crumbled completely under the fierce energy released by the pillars.

The remnant of that lethal energy surged forward unabated, slashing toward both Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou.

Before the energy even fully arrived, Li Chenzhou's face contorted in shock and his expression drastically changed, as an aura of impending death engulfed him.

For the first time in his life, Li Chenzhou was so close to death. As the intense energy amplified explosively in his vision, the pain on his skin made it feel as though it would rupture, his body seemed on the brink of being torn apart. Despair consumed his heart, leaving him utterly bereft of resistance.

"Retreat!"

Fang Bai let out a thunderous shout akin to a bolt from the blue. Immediately, Li Chenzhou felt his body being pulled back several zhangs before being shifted several more zhangs to the left.

These movements happened in a flash, faster than Li Chenzhou could fathom.

The three blade rays were Fang Bai's execution of the Mad Blade's three forms in rapid succession, although they still could not entirely halt the advancing lethal energy. Nevertheless, they greatly slowed its speed and force, allowing them to narrowly dodge its strike.

"Brother Fang's strength... just how powerful is it!"

Narrowly escaping death, Li Chenzhou looked at Fang Bai with a complex expression in his eyes.

Li Chenzhou had previously thought that Fang Bai's cultivation level, though stronger than his own, would not surpass him by much.

But in observing how Fang Bai single-handedly fought off five Purple-Striped Leeches earlier and then rescued him from the lethal energy just now, Li Chenzhou surmised that even if four or five versions of himself combined forces, they still might not be a match for Fang Bai wielding the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade.

Soon after, Li Chenzhou's thoughts turned to Zu Hanjiao, that woman whose strength was formidable enough to even make Fang Bai dread her presence. Thinking about it sent chills down his spine.

Fang Bai sheathed the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade into his Spatial Ring and said, "Many experts, in anticipation of their eventual fall, choose remote and hidden locations as their burial sites. They also set up strict defensive arrays around such places. Since this ruin at the bottom of the lake belongs to a Foundation Establishment Expert, how could it possibly be unprotected by formations?"

He patted Li Chenzhou's shoulder and added, "Brother Li, before entering the Martial Artist Remnants, I warned you not to touch anything inside... You acted impulsively back there!"

Li Chenzhou smiled bitterly and said, "Seeing the treasures inside the stone hall earlier, I became too excited and forgot your words... Brother Fang, if not for your timely intervention, I might have already lost my life and head."

Recalling the sheer power of the lethal energy released from the stone pillar, Li Chenzhou still felt lingering fear.

Having been saved by Fang Bai this time, Li Chenzhou considered himself to owe Fang Bai an immense favor; nevertheless, given the bond between the two, there was no need for formal thanks. He simply kept this debt in his heart, waiting for the opportunity to repay it in the future.

"We shouldn't rush to enter the stone hall for treasures just yet..."

Fang Bai walked slowly around the square, before finally stopping in front of the stone statue, focusing his gaze on it.

"This statue... there's something unusual about it?"

Li Chenzhou approached Fang Bai's side and, seeing a faint smile appearing on his face, couldn't help but ask.

"Indeed..."

Fang Bai pointed to the stone statue and said, "Within this statue lies the remains of the fallen Foundation Establishment Expert..."

"What?!"

Li Chenzhou was astounded; he had never imagined that the statue itself concealed the body of a martial artist.

"The clothing and appearance of this statue likely depict the fallen martial artist as they were in life. However, given the cultivation environment of the True Martial Realm, reaching the Foundation Establishment Realm would be exceedingly unlikely. This person must have originated from the Three Thousand Major Worlds..."

Fang Bai mused inwardly.

In his previous life, Fang Bai had embarked on his Martial Dao cultivation journey from the Three Thousand Major Worlds, step by step ascending to the peak of the Immortal Emperor. He was intimately familiar with the sects and clans of the Three Thousand Major Worlds. Yet as he furrowed his brow in deep contemplation, he could not recall which sect within the Three Thousand Major Worlds had attire matching that of the fallen martial artist.

"Perhaps this martial artist belonged to some unranked minor sect or faction from the Three Thousand Major Worlds!"

Fang Bai thought to himself.

Chapter 1358: Great Cauldron Establishes Authority

"What grade is that sword?"

Li Chenzhou, knowing that Fang Bai was well-informed, pointed to the black-sheathed long sword in the hand of the stone statue ahead and asked.

Fang Bai, seeing his fervent gaze and clear longing for the sword, smiled and said, "Brother Li, that sword is a water-attribute spiritual artifact, while you cultivate fire-system martial arts techniques. If that sword were in your hands, you would be unable to unleash even half of its power. It would be a complete waste!"

Li Chenzhou replied, "Even half its power would be fine. At least it's better than the spear I'm using now!"

Fang Bai said, "Brother Li, leave the sword to me. I plan to give it to someone! Hmm, if I get the chance later, I will craft a spiritual artifact for you that's even more powerful than this sword and perfectly suited for your use. How about that?"

Although Li Chenzhou greatly desired the sword, since Fang Bai had spoken like this, he couldn't outright refuse. He casually asked, "Who do you plan to give it to?"

Fang Bai replied, "A friend..."

Li Chenzhou suddenly understood, his face breaking into a knowing smile as he said, "Planning to give it to that girl Chenyu, aren't you?"

The value of a sword used by a Foundation Establishment expert was beyond measure. Unless it was someone you were extremely close to, how could Fang Bai bear to give it away?

Thus, Li Chenzhou immediately thought of Xia Chenyu, who had always been by Fang Bai's side.

Li Chenzhou could see that, while Fang Bai and Xia Chenyu hadn't crossed the final line in their relationship, their bond was closer than that of most martial partners in the world—saying they were spiritually connected wouldn't be an understatement.

It was only fitting for Fang Bai to gift something precious to his woman.

Fang Bai laughed heartily and said, "Chenyu, like Brother Li, also has an Innate Fire Spirit Root, so that sword wouldn't be suitable for her either. I'm planning to give it to another friend."

"Got it!"

Li Chenzhou chuckled and remarked, "A genius like you, Brother Fang, bound to have many women beside you... This other friend you mentioned is probably an extraordinary lady like Chenyu, isn't she?"

"Close enough,"

Fang Bai didn't deny it, smiling as he nodded.

Just now, Fang Bai had quickly pondered through his confidantes—Dongfang Rushi, Baili Mingyue, Linghu Qianjiao, and Linghu Baimei—all of whom possessed Innate Water Spirit Roots.

Among them, the Linghu sisters had even more astonishing physiques, combining dual water and fire attributes within their Extraordinary Holy Bodies.

The sword would be far more powerful in the hands of any of the four women than it would be with Li Chenzhou, perfectly maximizing its potential.

"Alright, the sword is yours. But... are you confident you can acquire it?"

Li Chenzhou gazed toward the black-sheathed long sword, sensing its overwhelming killing intent emanating from within the sheath. He couldn't help but feel a deep, instinctual tremor of unease.

Li Chenzhou knew that the killing intent within the black-sheathed sword, similar to the stone pillar before the stone hall on the right, was extremely potent. Attempting to approach recklessly could result in fierce retaliation.

Acquiring the sword successfully would not be an easy task for Fang Bai.

Yet seeing the composed confidence emanating from Fang Bai, Li Chenzhou couldn't help but wonder if this young man had some hidden trump card yet to be revealed.

"Brother Li, step back further. Don't get injured by the sword intent later!"

After saying this, and seeing Li Chenzhou retreat dozens of meters, Fang Bai then formed a defensive Qi shield and slowly began walking toward the stone statue.

"Fang Bai, if you have any moves, use them quickly! Otherwise, when the killing intent in the sword erupts, it might be too late!"

As Fang Bai got closer to the stone statue, less than ten steps away, Li Chenzhou's nerves were stretched taut.

Fang Bai continued his steady pace, unwavering as he advanced. When he reached two meters away from the stone statue, he could sense that the killing intent from the black-sheathed sword had intensified sharply. He knew that if he took another step or two, the murderous aura within the sword sheath would be triggered.

"Mad... This guy is mad..."

Seeing Fang Bai already stepping into an extremely perilous range without showing any sign of preparatory measures, Li Chenzhou stared wide-eyed, mumbling to himself in disbelief.

Just then, a green glow suddenly flickered before Li Chenzhou, and a man-sized blue-green cauldron appeared out of nowhere.

In the same instant that the green cauldron emerged, Fang Bai's figure disappeared into it.

The blue-green cauldron radiated an ancient simplicity, its presence vast and majestic. A sweeping, primal pressure emanated from within the cauldron, suffocating Li Chenzhou.

The fierce killing intent emerging from the black-sheathed sword was significantly suppressed under the cauldron's mighty aura.

"Brother Fang, where did you find that huge cauldron?"

Staring blankly at the colossal green cauldron, Li Chenzhou's expression became one of utter astonishment. He couldn't help but feel that, compared to the cauldron, the black-sheathed long sword seemed trivial.

The black-sheathed sword, a treasure belonging to a Foundation Establishment expert, was definitely extraordinary. Yet it was firmly suppressed by the green cauldron Fang Bai summoned, indicating that the cauldron was of a far superior grade—its power vastly surpassing the sword.

The longer Li Chenzhou interacted with Fang Bai, the more he felt that the man harbored countless secrets. Previously, he believed he understood Fang Bai rather well. Now he realized that Fang Bai remained elusive and inscrutable.

The blood-red long blade Fang Bai had wielded earlier, as well as the massive green cauldron before him now, were undoubtedly high-grade spiritual artifacts. He couldn't fathom where Fang Bai had obtained them or how he had managed to master their use.

What Li Chenzhou couldn't know was that the green cauldron was the Five Elements Origin Qi Cauldron, which Fang Bai had acquired in the mortal realm. He had brought it out now specifically to shield himself from the sword's lethal aura.

In Fang Bai's eyes, the Five Elements Origin Qi Cauldron far surpassed even celestial-grade spiritual artifacts. Although its full potential had yet to be unlocked, it was more than sufficient to protect against the killing intent left behind by a Foundation Establishment expert.

With such confidence, Fang Bai dared to attempt the retrieval of the black-sheathed sword.

"Move!"

From within the Five Elements Origin Qi Cauldron, Fang Bai let out a short command before the cauldron hurriedly surged toward the stone statue. In an instant, it arrived before the statue, mere inches away from the black-sheathed sword.

"Whoosh!"

"Whoosh!"

"Whoosh!"

...

The sword intent contained within the black-sheathed sword finally erupted.

In a flash, seven strands of sword intent burst forth, slashing simultaneously in rapid succession toward the Five Elements Origin Qi Cauldron.

"Clang!"

"Clang!"

"Clang!"

...

The sharp ringing of metal reverberated like rain. Li Chenzhou clearly understood the power of these seven strands of sword intent—each one was capable of easily killing an Innate Perfection-level expert. If struck consecutively, even the mighty green cauldron might suffer damage.

As the ringing finally subsided, Li Chenzhou focused his gaze on the Five Elements Origin Qi Cauldron and sharply inhaled in disbelief.

The seven strands of sword intent—which could cleave through metal and destroy anything, and were capable of effortlessly killing Innate Perfection-level cultivators—had failed to leave even the slightest mark on the cauldron.

"What an amazingly solid cauldron!"

Li Chenzhou couldn't help but exclaim loudly in admiration.

Fang Bai maneuvered the Five Elements Origin Qi Cauldron forward again. Seeing the black-sheathed sword showing no more reaction, he realized its killing intent had been fully triggered earlier. Joy filled Fang Bai's heart.

Chapter 1359: Ink Jade Sword

The black-sheathed long sword without killing intent no longer posed any threat.

Fang Bai leapt out from the Five Elements Origin Qi Cauldron, stood before the stone statue, reached out to grip the hilt of the black-sheathed long sword, and slowly drew it out.

"Buzz!"

With a delightful dragon's hum, a pitch-black, ink-like three-foot sword appeared before Fang Bai's eyes.

Though the sword had lost its intense killing intent, as an existence surpassing high-level spiritual artifacts, the pressure it emanated was far beyond what an ordinary martial artist could withstand.

Even Li Chenzhou, an Innate Perfection expert, stood intimidated by the ink-black sword's released pressure, unable to approach closely, forced to observe from a distance of one zhang.

"Brother Li, earlier you asked about the grade of this sword. Now I tell you, this is a Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact!"

Fang Bai carefully examined the ink-black sword in his hand and spoke casually.

"A Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact... an existence surpassing high-grade spiritual artifacts?"

Li Chenzhou had previously only known high-grade spiritual artifacts to be the strongest in the True Martial Realm. The term "Holy Grade" was something he was hearing for the first time.

Fang Bai nodded and said, "Yes, above high-grade is Holy Grade! However, even Holy Grade artifacts are divided into high, medium, and low levels. This sword belongs to the low-level category among Holy Grade Spiritual Artifacts."

"That's not bad at all..."

Li Chenzhou muttered to himself and then looked at Fang Bai like he was looking at a monster, asking, "You're only in your twenties—how do you know so much?"

Fang Bai chuckled and replied, "During my past training, I had the fortune of discovering an ancient ruin from a long-lost expert and read several ancient texts there. Those texts contained many records about the Three Thousand Worlds, so I know more than others..."

"Where are those ancient texts now?"

Li Chenzhou's eyes lit up as he became visibly agitated and asked urgently.

He was filled with curiosity about the Three Thousand Worlds described by Fang Bai and yearned to learn more.

"They're not martial arts techniques anyway—I discarded them after reading..."

Fang Bai stopped talking when he saw Li Chenzhou's expression turn as if he was on the verge of exploding, and then he smiled while pointing to his head, saying, "But the content recorded in those ancient texts—I remembered them all! I'll share them with you slowly, Brother Li, later."

Despite this, Li Chenzhou still stomped his foot and sighed, "You... You... Sigh! What can I even say to you? Though those ancient texts aren't martial arts techniques, they're priceless treasures for martial artists of our realm!"

Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou were both Innate Perfection experts, and they had already reached the peak of Martial Dao in this world.

According to Fang Bai, if their cultivation realm were to break through further, they would have to leave the True Martial Realm and head to the Three Thousand Worlds.

But Li Chenzhou's understanding of the Three Thousand Worlds was nearly nonexistent. If he could have read the ancient texts described by Fang Bai, he could have gained a clearer understanding, ensuring he wouldn't be entirely clueless if he ever had the opportunity to enter the Three Thousand Worlds in the future.

Fortunately, although Fang Bai discarded the ancient texts, he still remembered their contents, so Li Chenzhou could ask him for information at any time.

"So this sword is called 'Ink Jade Sword,' and its owner was a Foundation Establishment expert from the Three Thousand Worlds who had perished here over a thousand years ago..."

Fang Bai's Divine Sense penetrated the ink-black sword in his hand and quickly obtained some information about the sword.

"How do you know that?"

Li Chenzhou felt strange hearing Fang Bai confidently share the identity and background of the Ink Jade Sword's owner.

"The sword told me, naturally."

Fang Bai smiled and held up the Ink Jade Sword in his hand.

Seeing Li Chenzhou's puzzled expression, Fang Bai continued, "This Ink Jade Sword, though a low-level Holy Grade artifact, has developed an 'Artifact Spirit.' Although the spirit is weak, it can still retain some information about its owner..."

"Wait... What is an Artifact Spirit?"

Li Chenzhou only knew about spiritual artifacts and had never heard of an "Artifact Spirit," so he couldn't help but ask.

Fang Bai then realized that discussing Artifact Spirits with Li Chenzhou was somewhat advanced, understandably confusing Li Chenzhou.

In Fang Bai's previous life in the Three Thousand Worlds and even the Immortal Realm, spiritual artifacts were classified into numerous grades, but whether low or high-grade, they often developed "Artifact Spirits."

Ordinary spiritual artifacts were lifeless objects and merely functioned as auxiliary weapons for attack and defense.

However, spiritual artifacts with "Artifact Spirits" were akin to possessing intelligent life; they could attack and defend under their owner's control and autonomously retaliate against threats to safeguard their owner.

The "Artifact Spirit" of a spiritual artifact functioned as the artifact's mind, residing within the artifact and taking various forms.

For example, Fang Bai's Blood-Drinking Mad Blade was a Supreme Spirit Weapon, and its "Artifact Spirit" appeared as a blood-soaked, suffused-with-evil-aura burly man.

Of course, the burly man wasn't composed of flesh and blood but was formed by the accumulated spiritual energy absorbed by the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade over many years—a kind of incorporeal manifestation.

However, Fang Bai knew that if a martial artist nurtured the artifact spirit with their spiritual energy and blood essence diligently, the artifact spirit could eventually transform from incorporeal to physical, possessing intelligence akin to humans and even living independently in human form for a period.

Still, to successfully claim ownership and master a spiritual artifact with an "Artifact Spirit" was a challenging endeavor.

Every spiritual artifact typically had formations etched into its surface to enhance its power and protect itself.

The higher the artifact's grade, the more intricate and difficult-to-decipher its formations were.

For a martial artist to claim a spiritual artifact as their own, they first had to decipher the formations etched on the artifact before suppressing and subjugating the artifact spirit with their Divine Sense, erasing all marks left by the artifact's previous owner, and thus achieving full ownership of the artifact for their use.

In other words, proficiency in formations and immense personal strength were the two essential prerequisites for claiming ownership of a spiritual artifact—both equally vital.

Fang Bai briefly explained the matter of Artifact Spirits, and Li Chenzhou listened with glowing eyes, brimming with excitement, and exclaimed, "I never imagined the Martial Dao World to be so vast and complex! Hearing you talk, I now realize how shallow and laughable my previous knowledge and abilities were."

After pausing, he solemnly said to Fang Bai, "If one day you find a way to enter the Three Thousand Worlds, be sure to take me along!"

Fang Bai nodded in agreement.

Though Fang Bai was skilled in formations, his Divine Sense wasn't strong enough, so after easily deciphering the formations on the Ink Jade Sword, he spent considerable effort subduing its "Artifact Spirit."

Soon after, Fang Bai erased all marks left by the Ink Jade Sword's previous owner and re-engraved formations onto its blade, officially claiming it as his own.

"A Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact not only allows for remote attacks through Divine Sense control but also has another benefit..."

Fang Bai said this as he tossed the Ink Jade Sword into the air, then leapt up, placing both feet atop the sword.

Chapter 1360: Divide Resources

"Let's go!"

Fang Bai shifted his focus slightly, let out a light shout, and gently stomped the ground.

The Ink Jade Sword emitted a dazzling black gleam, slicing through the air with a sharp "swoosh," creating a long, dark shadow as it carried Fang Bai's body into flight.

"This... is sword flight?"

Li Chenzhou raised his head, watching Fang Bai glide and hover in the air atop the Ink Jade Sword. Amidst his envy, he couldn't help but regret.

If he'd known the Ink Jade Sword had such an astonishing capability, he certainly wouldn't have surrendered the sword to Fang Bai so easily earlier.

Once Fang Bai had thoroughly enjoyed his sword-flight experience, he leaped back to the ground and casually stored the Ink Jade Sword in his Space Ring. With a cheeky grin, he said to Li Chenzhou, who was visibly disgruntled, "Brother Li, stop fixating on that sword! The cultivation resources inside that stone hall over there will be much more beneficial for you!"

He gestured toward the stone hall on the right side of the square.

Li Chenzhou snorted, "I won't fight you over the Ink Jade Sword. But let's stick to the deal—we agreed that I get first pick of the cultivation resources in that stone hall."

Fang Bai had scored the Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact, the Ink Jade Sword, essentially hitting the jackpot, so Li Chenzhou felt he ought to claim some benefits himself.

The cultivation resources inside the stone hall on the right were left behind by a Foundation Establishment Expert, so their grade and rank were undoubtedly high. Perhaps these resources could offer insights into even higher Martial Dao realms.

In fact, for Li Chenzhou, the value of the cultivation resources inside the stone hall far exceeded that of the Ink Jade Sword Fang Bai had obtained.

After all, the Ink Jade Sword, though a Holy Grade Spirit Artifact, couldn't be wielded effectively by someone of Li Chenzhou's current cultivation level, so its full power couldn't be unleashed.

As Fang Bai had just pointed out, the Ink Jade Sword in his possession amounted to a waste of potential.

Rather than that, it would be far better to use those high-grade cultivation resources to enhance his cultivation level, fortify his Martial Dao foundation, and pave the way for greater advancement.

"Fine, Brother Li can pick first!"

Fang Bai made no effort to compete with Li Chenzhou, nodding with a smile.

Inside the stone hall on the right side of the square, there weren't many pre-made elixirs; the majority were instead spiritual herbs.

Li Chenzhou prioritized the already crafted elixirs, while Fang Bai, being an Alchemist, naturally preferred the spiritual herbs.

The dozens of elixirs already crafted were far fewer compared to the potential dozens of bottles Fang Bai could refine from the spiritual herbs, so there was no need for him to compete with Li Chenzhou.

The two walked up to the stone hall containing the cultivation resources. Fang Bai used the same method he had employed earlier with the Ink Jade Sword to dispel the hidden killing intent within the stone pillars flanking the hall entrance.

"I'm taking all these elixirs!"

"These Essence Stones will be split 60-40—six for me, four for you!"

"These Beast Cores will be split 60-40—six for me, four for you!"

"As for these spiritual herbs... fine, you take all of them! Once you've refined them into elixirs, remember to share some with me!"

"These Spatial Rings... the spatial formations on them are beyond my skill to break. I'll hand them over to you for now. If you can decipher them, let's split the cultivation resources inside evenly—50-50!"

...

After clearing out the killing intent stored within the stone pillars and verifying there was no danger, Li Chenzhou rushed into the stone hall with great enthusiasm and began ransacking everything in sight.

The cultivation resources inside the stone hall were all of Holy Grade. Though considered lower-tier among Holy Grades, they were priceless treasures for someone of Li Chenzhou's cultivation level as an Innate Perfection expert.

Li Chenzhou, usually calm and composed, found it impossible to remain steady as he laid eyes on the resources inside the stone hall. He feared Fang Bai might fight him for them, so he grabbed whatever caught his eye with the frenzy of a tiger seizing its prey, taking far more than half of what was available.

Excluding the spiritual herbs and Spatial Rings.

Li Chenzhou lacked expertise in alchemy and formations, so he had no choice but to "grudgingly" hand those items over to Fang Bai.

"Let's check out the stone hall over there!"

After dividing the resources in this hall, the two headed to another stone hall directly across.

This stone hall served as the living quarters and cultivation space of the fallen Foundation Establishment expert and was similarly protected by a formation.

Once Fang Bai dismantled the formation in front of the hall, Li Chenzhou, as expected, was the first to rush inside.

"These cultivation techniques... all Holy Grade... they're all Holy Grade... there's even a fire-based cultivation technique... haha... this is a windfall... hahaha..."

In the stone hall, which was extremely sparse and modest, there was only a table and a bed within its spacious interior. The first thing Li Chenzhou noticed upon entering were several scrolls arranged atop the table.

These scrolls emitted a faint aura of Essence Energy. When unfurled, densely-packed lines of text written on them revealed intricate and profound cultivation techniques.

The fallen Foundation Establishment expert had been practicing water-based techniques, so most of the scrolls consisted of water system techniques. However, Li Chenzhou managed to find one fire-based technique among them, presumably a collected treasure of the expert. Overjoyed, he couldn't resist laughing aloud.

Cultivation resources could enhance a martial artist's cultivation level and physical body, but cultivation techniques allowed a martial artist to fully utilize their strength.

While cultivation resources were indispensable to martial artists, suitable cultivation techniques were also crucial. Lacking either would greatly compromise a martial artist's overall power.

"I'll keep this fire-based technique; the rest are yours."

Li Chenzhou secured the scroll containing the fire system technique and pushed the remaining ones toward Fang Bai, reluctantly.

He planned to keep the fire-based technique for himself, but the other scrolls, comprising water-based techniques, weren't of much use to him.

That said, Holy Grade techniques were far superior to high-quality ones and would undoubtedly drive Innate experts in the True Martial Realm to madness if they got their hands on them. If the scrolls were sold at the Martial Artist Trading Market, they'd fetch an immense amount of top-tier cultivation resources.

However, Li Chenzhou knew that these Holy Grade techniques were priceless treasures. Naturally, he wouldn't foolishly exchange them at the market for resources and preferred to hand them all over to Fang Bai.

Li Chenzhou was aware of Fang Bai's many romantic entanglements and figured these cultivation techniques might help him win favor with his companions.

The last thing he expected was Fang Bai's dismissive wave and reply, "No thanks."

"No thanks?"

Li Chenzhou was stunned and said, "These are Holy Grade techniques!"

"So what if they're Holy Grade? I've got plenty myself!"

Fang Bai pointed to his own head.

Li Chenzhou suddenly remembered Fang Bai's unique fortune and encounters with Foundation Establishment expert relics in the past. Of course, Fang Bai wouldn't be interested in these techniques since he likely already had many similar ones.

Little did he know, Fang Bai's mind housed thousands of cultivation techniques inherited or self-created in a prior life, most of them far beyond Holy Grade, rendering the scrolls irrelevant in Fang Bai's eyes.

"If you don't want them, I'll keep them."

Li Chenzhou didn't hold back, gleefully storing away the cultivation techniques. He was already scheming to visit a nearby major city to exchange them for needed cultivation resources.