

Doctor 991

Chapter 991: Lend Me The Iron Rod!

Fang Bai and Tu Hu fought their duel without resorting to any underhanded tactics, in a straightforward and honorable fashion. Losing was losing, and winning was winning; they would not feel regretful or bear grudges against each other.

Senior Sister Huang described their battle as a gentleman's duel.

The four team members standing behind Tu Hu had initially looked down on Fang Bai, thinking that Fang Bai battling Tu Hu was simply masochistic. They even mocked and belittled Fang Bai in various ways.

However, when Fang Bai released an aura comparable to Tu Hu's, the four of them were immediately silenced, filled with unease, and feared that they had offended Fang Bai.

It was predictable that after this trial was over, Fang Bai, just like Tu Hu, would become a core disciple of Bitao Martial Academy.

The four behind Tu Hu were Inner Court disciples, and both in terms of strength and status, a core disciple was much higher, not something they could compare with.

Thus, if Fang Bai wanted to deal with the four of them in the future, he would surely be able to make them regret it.

Right now, they could only hope that Tu Hu would defeat Fang Bai in the current duel, dampen Fang Bai's sharpness, and instill some fear in him—fear of Tu Hu's face—so that he wouldn't dare to easily find trouble with them.

"Junior Brother Fang, where is your weapon?"

Faced with Fang Bai, who was difficult to see through, Tu Hu did not dare to be the slightest bit presumptuous. He slowly drew his long saber that he carried with him, the tip pointing obliquely at the ground, and asked in a solemn voice.

"A weapon, you say... Ah, I was in such a hurry when I came that I forgot to bring it!"

Fang Bai came up with an excuse casually and spread his hands as he spoke.

In Fang Bai's Spatial Ring, there were several Spiritual Artifacts, including the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade, but since he had come to the True Martial Realm, he had never encountered an opponent worth using the Spiritual Artifacts on, so they had all just been lying in the Spatial Ring.

It was only occasionally, when he was in a secluded place with no one around, that Fang Bai would take out the Spiritual Artifacts to practice a bit and prevent himself from getting rusty.

For an opponent like Tu Hu, who wasn't on the same level at all, Fang Bai didn't bother to use the Spiritual Artifacts, hence he gave a random excuse.

"Forgot to bring it?"

Tu Hu's face darkened.

A Martial Artist's weapon could be held in hand, hung at the waist, tied on the back, or hidden inside clothing.

Weapons hidden inside the clothing were mostly flexible weapons, and were generally wound tightly around the waist.

Tu Hu hadn't seen Fang Bai's weapon and had thought he was carrying a flexible weapon, but he hadn't expected the guy to have not brought one at all.

You see, a suitable weapon could enhance a Martial Artist's battle power, and in times of life and death, it equated to a few more chances of survival.

Therefore, the first thing Bitao Martial Academy disciples did before going on an expedition was to carry their weapons.

Someone like Fang Bai, who dared to venture into the mountains having forgotten their weapon, was indeed an oddity.

"Shall I borrow a weapon to use?"

While saying this, Fang Bai turned his head to look at Huang Miao and others, eventually settling his gaze on the iron club in Liu Liehu's hands.

"Liehu, lend me your iron club for a moment!"

Fang Bai gestured with his hand, signaling Liu Liehu to throw the iron club over.

Fang Bai knew that Martial Artists like Tu Hu had a sense of pride in their hearts. He had proposed using weapons for the duel, and if Fang Bai were unarmed, it would be taken as an insult.

Disdaining to use his own Spiritual Artifact and wanting to show respect for his opponent, Tu Hu, Fang Bai thought of borrowing Liu Liehu's iron club temporarily.

"Actually... my weapon is an iron club as well, much like Liehu's!"

Fang Bai smiled as he spoke to Tu Hu.

The reason why Fang Bai explained it this way to Tu Hu was to tell him: Although I borrowed this iron staff, it will not affect my combat strength. Our duel is fair.

Despite this, Tu Hu's brows still furrowed slightly, feeling somewhat displeased.

In Tu Hu's view, since he had chosen to use a long blade, he was prepared to fight Fang Bai with all his strength.

However, the fact that Fang Bai had borrowed someone else's weapon for the battle made Tu Hu feel underestimated, thinking that even if he defeated Fang Bai, the victory would be somewhat honorless.

But upon further thought, Tu Hu let it go.

How could a young yet so powerful martial artist like Fang Bai not possess a bit of pride and arrogance?

If it were himself, he probably would have been even more excessive than Fang Bai, right?

Perhaps Fang Bai believed that with a weapon he'd casually borrowed, he could still defeat an opponent like him?

With these thoughts in mind, a wry smile involuntarily crossed Tu Hu's lips.

"You're not using your own weapon, so your combat strength will inevitably be affected. I don't want to take advantage of you... How about this, if I can't beat you within fifty moves, I'll admit defeat!"

Tu Hu declared loudly, his tone exuding a certain arrogance, feeling that only in this way would it be a truly fair duel.

Fang Bai didn't beat around the bush either and signaled, "Good, let's decide the winner in fifty moves!"

"Everyone, step back!"

Tu Hu turned around and shouted at the four members of his team.

"Senior Sister Huang, you guys step back a bit too!"

Fang Bai looked back at Huang Miao and the other four, instructing them.

Tu Hu had defeated Zhou Tong, ranked eighth on the core disciples' combat power list, demonstrating strength beyond ordinary core disciples; Fang Bai, too, had released a martial artist aura not weaker than Tu Hu's.

Thus, the showdown between Tu Hu and Fang Bai was tantamount to a clash between two great core disciples. Once they started fighting, the destructive power would be considerable.

Both members of Tu Hu's team and Huang Miao's team were well aware of this, so upon hearing the shouts of Tu Hu and Fang Bai, they all drew back, leaving a large open space in the middle.

"Junior Brother Fang, make your move!"

Tu Hu's eyes glinted sharply, his voice thunderous as he shouted. True Yuan flowed around his body, his thick black hair flew about, and his blood-stained clothes fluttered fiercely.

He had entered a peak battle state, with the blade pointing diagonally to the ground, ready to strike at any moment. The martial artist aura transformed into an intangible pressure, rapidly bearing down towards Fang Bai.

Wherever the pressure reached, all the flowers and grass tightly clung to the ground.

Although Huang Miao and the others were several meters away from Fang Bai, they too felt the invisible pressure from Tu Hu. The pressure made their breathing difficult, their blood and energy stirred chaotically, and they had to circulate their own True Yuan to counter it, which made them feel a bit better.

"Core disciples, truly formidable!"

The fact that Huang Miao and the others, standing outside the duel area, felt such immense pressure was telling of what sort of pressure Fang Bai must be facing off directly against Tu Hu.

Of course, if Fang Bai couldn't even withstand Tu Hu's pressure, there would be no point in continuing their duel.

At first, Huang Miao and the others were somewhat worried, but after seeing Fang Bai's figure, still standing straight and tall, they relaxed.

If Tu Hu's pressure was like waves continuously crashing over, then Fang Bai was like a small island in the sea, unmovable no matter how the waves lashed at it.

Chapter 992: Suppression

At this moment, Tu Hu resembled a ferocious tiger baring its sharp claws and fangs, poised to pounce, ready to select a victim to devour.

But Fang Bai, faced with this fierce tiger, remained calm and collected. With one hand on the iron rod thrown by Liu Liehu, he walked leisurely around Tu Hu, apparently looking for the best opportunity to strike.

In the eyes of Huang Miao and the others, there seemed to be no flaw in Tu Hu's entire presence. It would not be easy for Fang Bai to launch an attack and thereby gain the upper hand.

However, in Fang Bai's eyes, Tu Hu was full of vulnerabilities. If Fang Bai wished, he could take Tu Hu down with a single strike.

Of course, Fang Bai had no grudge against Tu Hu and naturally wouldn't put him in a life-or-death situation.

Additionally, Fang Bai didn't want to draw too much attention. If he were to win the duel against Tu Hu with a single strike, such an outcome would certainly make him famous at Bitao Martial Academy, but he would lose the peaceful, low-profile life and the unbounded freedom. Soon enough, disciples would come knocking on his door in an endless stream, seeking mentorship, making it difficult for him to have any personal space of his own.

Since Tu Hu had proposed to determine the victor within fifty moves, Fang Bai planned to fight him for fifty moves and to narrowly "win" in the final moments.

"Senior Brother Tu, watch out!"

After circling around Tu Hu a few times, Fang Bai suddenly shouted. His iron rod swung out, Sweeping Past Tu Hu's waist.

With that swing, Fang Bai's rod carried a robust surge of True Essence Force, immense in strength and ferocious in power. With thousands of pounds of force crashing down, even Tu Hu did not dare to directly confront its edge and dodged away.

But by dodging, he lost the initiative and was thrown into disarray by a series of violent attacks from Fang Bai, teetering on the brink of danger.

Fang Bai's iron rod, about two meters long, stirred up a small Storm in its wake, encompassing both himself and Tu Hu within a three-meter radius.

Flowers and grass on the ground were uprooted by the fierce and sharp gusts, swept into the air, flying chaotically everywhere.

Although Huang Miao and others were already quite distant from Fang Bai and Tu Hu, they could still feel the gusts of wind on their faces, causing a tingling sensation on their skin.

"Who would have thought that Junior Brother Fang was so powerful! He is truly a crouching tiger, hidden dragon! I underestimated him before."

Huang Miao, watching Fang Bai move like a ghost and attack like a storm, couldn't help but mutter to himself, with shock written all over his face.

"After this experience, Junior Brother Fang will be able to join the ranks of the core disciples. Previously, Senior Brother Tu defeated Zhou Tong, the core disciple who was ranked eighth in combat power. If Junior Brother Fang can defeat Senior Brother Tu, then his ranking among the core disciples will be even higher!"

Hou Ziping's eyes shone with excitement as he spoke.

He knew Fang Bai from earlier days and had a close relationship with him. The higher Fang Bai's achievements in Martial Dao, the stronger the backing he would have, and nobody in Bitao Martial Academy would dare to bully him.

"Brother Fang is sure to win this duel!"

Liu Liehu watched the ongoing fierce battle between the two, exclaiming with exhilaration.

At this point, Fang Bai and Tu Hu were clashing continuously in midair, with iron rod and long sword colliding, producing crisp metallic clangs and sending sparks flying. In the blink of an eye, they had already exchanged more than a dozen moves.

From the moment the two began clashing, Fang Bai had always been the aggressor. His assaults were like relentless waves, each one stronger and faster than the last.

In contrast, Tu Hu fell into a passive defense right from the start. Although he tried several times to reverse the situation, all attempts ended in failure, suppressed by Fang Bai's rapid and forceful onslaught, so much so that it frustrated him to the point of wanting to spit blood.

Their movements were faster than lightning; even a strong martial artist like Huang Miao could no longer distinguish which was Fang Bai and which was Tu Hu with her naked eyes.

Liu Qingqing, who possessed an Innate Spiritual Root and had cultivated the Martial Arts Techniques imparted by Fang Bai, sensed a resonance with him. Although she could not see Fang Bai's silhouette clearly, she could sense that Fang Bai's aura was becoming stronger and steadily surpassing Tu Hu, with joy already apparent at the corner of her eyes and brows.

"Ah!"

"Ah!"

"Ah!"

...

With every block of Fang Bai's iron staff, Tu Hu's long knife would emit a mighty roar, as if to vent the pent-up emotions in his chest.

His roars were laced with the force of True Essence, thundering like an explosion, causing Huang Miao and others watching from a distance to feel their eardrums tremble and their blood surge, forcing them to circulate their own True Essence in order to neutralize the impact of the sound waves.

In past engagements with opponents, whether Tu Hu won or lost, the fight would always be extremely satisfying. However, this duel with Fang Bai left him feeling incredibly stifled.

That's because Fang Bai's combat strength seemed to be slightly stronger than Tu Hu's, constantly suppressing him, but with Tu Hu exerting all his strength in defense, defeating him quickly was not an easy task.

Likewise, the prospect of Tu Hu counterattacking to overcome and win against Fang Bai seemed slim.

Thus, the duel between them had turned into a prolonged struggle.

Tu Hu had declared that if he could not defeat Fang Bai within fifty moves, he would accept defeat, and the carcasses of the Antlered Silver Lions would belong to Huang Miao's team.

Normally, winning or losing a duel between Martial Artists was a common occurrence, but what troubled Tu Hu was that losing to a direct disciple of the Martial Academy would still be honorable—a defeat worth boasting about.

But losing to Fang Bai, a disciple from the Inner Court, would likely damage the reputation he had built after defeating the Martial Academy's core disciple Zhou Tong.

"Senior Brother Tu, it's been over forty moves already!"

While Tu Hu was gritting his teeth and countering Fang Bai's offense, suddenly a member of his team loudly reminded him.

"Forty moves already?"

Tu Hu was alarmed, realizing that according to the fifty-move agreement he had with Fang Bai, there were only ten moves left. Within these ten moves, if he couldn't break free from the passive situation and counterattack Fang Bai, he would have to leave with his team members in dejection.

"I cannot lose this duel! No matter what, I must gamble everything!"

A sharp gleam crossed Tu Hu's eyes, and his expression revealed a resolute and decisive demeanor.

"Pfft!"

A mouthful of blood suddenly sprayed from Tu Hu's mouth, then disappeared into the storm that was whirling up around the continuing clash of their duel.

"This Tu Hu, to win against me, is actually willing to suffer lasting damage to stimulate his body's potential. He's really going all out!"

Fang Bai frowned seeing Tu Hu spitting out blood.

But neither party in this duel wanted to lose—the stakes were too high.

Although Fang Bai did not look back, he knew that Huang Miao and the others behind him were surely watching, and they also had high hopes for him.

The outcome of this duel was tied to the ownership of the Antlered Silver Lions, and obtaining their antlers would mean exchanging them for a substantial amount of cultivation resources.

Just as Tu Hu and his team were exceedingly eager for the antlers of the Antlered Silver Lions, so were Huang Miao and her companions.

Chapter 993: Who Wins and Who Loses?

After spewing out a mouthful of blood, Tu Hu's strength surged in an instant, drastically changing his momentum.

"Kill!"

With a low roar, Tu Hu fiercely swung his long blade, colliding once again with the iron staff that Fang Bai was smashing toward his face.

Amidst the deafening roar of metal, Fang Bai's body was shockingly sent flying backward.

Stimulated to unleash his body's potential, Tu Hu's facial features were somewhat distorted, his expression fierce, and his eyes were filled with blood vessels, indicating he was in an extremely excited state.

At this moment, Tu Hu gave off the feeling of a ferocious tiger that had been trapped for a long time and suddenly broke free from its bonds, his whole body emanating a wild aura.

The side effects of forcefully activating one's potential included bodily exhaustion and total helplessness after a hundred breaths, and it might even affect future cultivation. Tu Hu paid this price to finally break free from the awkward situation of being suppressed by Fang Bai, successfully repelling him.

"Kill!"

Seeing Fang Bai repelled by his blade, Tu Hu became even more exhilarated, letting out another roar.

He wanted to follow up on the momentum of repelling Fang Bai, pursue the attack, and gain the upper hand, endeavoring to defeat Fang Bai within the final ten moves.

Amidst the roaring, Tu Hu dashed forward, closing in on Fang Bai like a shadow following a form, leaped up, and with both hands holding his blade, executed a downward chopping motion.

Whether it was Fang Bai just before or Tu Hu now, the two, when attacking, both adopted a simple and brutal approach, with the long blade and iron staff going straight for each other, clashing head-on.

Such a fighting style consumed a great deal of True Yuan. If the duel were between two martial artists of equal strength, then the victory would come down to which one had a more profound reserve of True Yuan — whoever could last to the end would be the victor.

However, Tu Hu now only had ten moves he could use, unable to engage in a war of attrition with Fang Bai. If he could not defeat Fang Bai within ten moves, then all his previous efforts would have been in vain.

Therefore, in these last ten moves, Tu Hu had to put forth all his strength, leaving nothing in reserve.

Tu Hu's cultivation was based on Golden Attribute Martial Arts Techniques. As he cleaved downwards from the air, all his True Yuan was channeled into his blade, which faintly glowed with a golden brilliance.

Tu Hu's long blade, forged from Hundred Refined Fine Steel, sharp enough to slice through hair with a blow, emitted a fierce, whistling howl when filled with True Yuan, giving one the impression that it could cut through anything, leaving nothing unbroken.

"Fantastic!"

"Senior Brother Tu is mighty!"

"With this blade, even a Direct Disciple wouldn't dare to take it head-on, right?"

"If Fang Bai can take this blade, I'll change my last name from Sun!"

"Senior Brother Tu is certain to win!"

...

Seeing Tu Hu's one blade, fierce as a rainbow, chopping down toward Fang Bai's head, the four members of Team Tu Hu couldn't help but shout in excitement, their faces unable to conceal their thrill.

In their eyes, even if Fang Bai could barely handle this blade, he would inevitably be injured.

And between two martial artists of equal strength, the injured party's combat abilities would definitely decrease, and if the fight continued, defeat was certain.

This blade might become the turning point for Tu Hu's counterattack and victory.

Huang Miao and her three comrades stood at a position, even though they were quite far from the two dueling individuals, they could still feel the might of Tu Hu's strike and were all wearing worried looks, their hearts hanging in suspense.

Even Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu, who had absolute confidence in Fang Bai, were somewhat tense as they widened their eyes to see Fang Bai seemingly petrified by Tu Hu's strike, unsure if he could withstand it.

"Brother Fang, give it your all!"

Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu almost simultaneously shouted out in support.

Then, they saw that Fang Bai actually turned his head to look their way, the corners of his mouth even bearing a trace of a smile.

"At this critical juncture, this Junior Brother Fang still has the leisure to get distracted and even manage a smile; I really don't know what to make of him!"

Huang Miao also saw Fang Bai turning to smile and was stunned, feeling utterly helpless.

Compared to the members of the two teams watching the duel, Tu Hu had strong confidence in his own strike.

After releasing this slash, Tu Hu knew this was the most pinnacle strike he had produced in his life.

At least before his cultivation level advanced, it was impossible for him to slash out with such power again.

Even if he was facing a direct disciple, Tu Hu believed it would not be an easy task for the opponent to receive this strike of his.

Although Fang Bai had previously concealed his true strength, revealing formidable power, Tu Hu did not believe he had reached a level where he could be discussed in the same breath as a direct disciple.

After all, in Tu Hu's perception, even if Fang Bai, like himself, had cultivated a technique that could hide a martial artist's aura, he should only be able to conceal a fraction of that aura. If Fang Bai's cultivation level had reached the realm of a direct disciple, even if he himself could not sense it, could it still be concealed from the upper echelons of the Martial Academy?

Therefore, Tu Hu thought that the strength Fang Bai was showing at this moment was his genuine power, and as long as nothing unexpected happened, victory would belong to him.

"What is this guy looking at? Isn't he being a little too self-confident?"

Tu Hu, high in the air, looked down at Fang Bai and saw that just as his long saber was about to strike, Fang Bai actually turned his head to look at Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu. Tu Hu couldn't help but feel both annoyed and amused.

Tu Hu was never a person to show mercy, especially during a duel with another martial artist, he would never hold back.

Fang Bai's sudden distraction, although it was just a brief moment, to Tu Hu, who was adept at seizing battle opportunities, this was a huge opening.

Tu Hu's saber continued to chop down, the force seeming even stronger and the momentum appearing even fiercer.

However, just as Tu Hu's long saber was about to fall onto Fang Bai's head, a thought suddenly flashed through his mind, causing a moment of hesitation in his heart.

Fang Bai possessed a dual attribute innate spiritual root and was highly valued by the upper tiers of the Martial Academy, clearly one of the individuals they intended to focus on cultivating in the future. Although it was common for groups of Bitao Martial Academy disciples to enter the mountain for training, allowing competition and attacks between various teams as long as no lives were taken, there was still a problem.

The critical issue now was that Fang Bai was not an ordinary disciple of the Martial Academy. If Tu Hu caused serious harm to Fang Bai and upset the academy's high echelons, it would be a loss not worth the gain.

In an instant thought, the slashing edge of Tu Hu's saber deviated slightly to the left, its target shifting from Fang Bai's head to his shoulder.

A saber strike to the shoulder would most likely result in an injury, not endangering life, and with three to five months of rest, he could mostly recover to his original state.

But if the saber's edge slashed down on the head, that could potentially be fatal.

Fang Bai turned his head for a glance at Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu, then swiftly turned back, lifting his head and squinting his eyes, watching as Tu Hu's figure, diving down like a large eagle from high above, rapidly enlarged in front of his eyes.

As Fang Bai's gaze met Tu Hu's, coincidentally Tu Hu from the air was also looking down at him, their gazes colliding in the moment the long saber met the iron rod, sparking a shower of sparks.

Chapter 994: Collision

At the moment their gazes met, Fang Bai saw in Tu Hu's eyes the excitement and pride exclusive to a victor.

Yet, what Tu Hu saw in Fang Bai's eyes was the calmness and confidence possessed by the strong.

"At this moment, shouldn't he be showing a flustered and uneasy expression? Does he think he can withstand my strike?"

Doubting his own eyes because of Fang Bai's unusual reaction, Tu Hu felt an ominous premonition rising within him.

But now, suspended in midair, his peak strike fueled by his vital energy had already been executed, a scene reminiscent of an arrow no longer able to return to its bow.

"Kill!"

Tu Hu roared once again, bolstering his own courage.

Tu Hu knew that the outcome of this duel hinged mainly on this strike.

If Fang Bai couldn't withstand the strike, he would inevitably be wounded, and in the subsequent moves, Tu Hu was confident he could render Fang Bai powerless and defeat him completely.

But if Fang Bai could block the strike unscathed, Tu Hu's confidence would take a significant hit, leaving him almost no hope of defeating Fang Bai.

"Junior Brother Fang, unless you possess Heaven Level Perfection in cultivation and a strength comparable to a direct disciple of the Martial Academy, you cannot withstand this strike!"

Tu Hu thought to himself.

In the distance, the four members of Tu Hu's team widened their eyes and slightly opened their mouths, poised to cheer, seemingly awaiting the moment of victory.

Meanwhile, Huang Miao and the others, out of nervousness, chose to temporarily close their eyes, daring not to watch.

Tu Hu and Fang Bai, one in motion and one still.

Tu Hu, like a tiger descending the mountain, represented motion; he soared, chopping down with his long sword, as swift and formidable as thunder.

Fang Bai, however, stood like a statue, representing stillness; he gripped his iron staff, stood upright, and remained silent, yet he exuded an aura of imposing authority without anger.

Facing the long sword that Tu Hu slashed down towards him, Fang Bai's expression remained unchanged, quiet and indifferent, until the long sword was about three feet from his head when he finally reacted.

"Whoosh!"

Fang Bai swung his iron staff upward from below, meeting Tu Hu's long sword, creating a scorching gust of wind that swept around, affecting the surrounding air and causing it to fluctuate.

The staff traced a faint red gleam through the air, indicating that Fang Bai had infused fire-attribute True Yuan into his staff as he swung it.

The Golden Attribute True Yuan that Tu Hu infused into his long sword made his air-chopping strike even more sharp and unstoppable, possessing a momentum that nothing could withstand.

The Fire Attribute True Yuan in Fang Bai's staff filled his swing with a violent and scorching essence, giving it a heart-pounding destructive power.

As Fang Bai and Tu Hu possessed similar cultivation levels, the Golden Essence Energy and Fire Essence Energy they released were equally powerful.

When Fang Bai initially entered the Bitao Martial Academy, he revealed his Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Root of water and wood; him now channeling Fire Essence Energy into his staff was not surprising at all.

However, Tu Hu sensed a hint of danger from the iron rod that Fang Bai wielded against him.

At this moment, Tu Hu's attack was unstoppable, like spilt water that could not be gathered again. Even though he knew danger lay ahead, he had no choice but to stubbornly bring down his blade.

"Bang!"

The long blade struck the iron rod, and surprisingly, instead of the crisp clashing of metal, it sounded more like a collision between two streams of True Essence.

In fact, at this moment, what would determine the outcome of the fight was no longer the weapons but the depth of True Essence each wielded.

To defeat Fang Bai, Tu Hu did not hesitate to spit out his blood essence to stimulate his body's potential, firmly believing that this peak-level strike would cause Fang Bai significant injury and secure his victory.

Furthermore, Tu Hu's long blade, forged from Hundred Refined Fine Steel, was exceptionally sharp and incredibly tough, having been tested in numerous battles without any damage, which gave Tu Hu great confidence.

On the other hand, the iron rod that Fang Bai borrowed from Liu Liehu, though also made of fine steel, was evidently inferior to Tu Hu's blade.

During their intense fight, the weapons struck each other dozens of times. Tu Hu's blade remained sharp, but Fang Bai's iron rod was left with several deep marks.

Tu Hu even felt confident that with this strike, Fang Bai's iron rod could very likely break into two useless pieces.

After the clash of True Essence, Tu Hu's team of four, along with Huang Miao and others, all quickly looked toward the two fighters, eager to know the outcome.

Contrary to many people's expectations, Fang Bai actually withstood Tu Hu's domineering strike without apparent injury.

However, Fang Bai looked somewhat disheveled; his face was flushed red, a result of the surging blood and Qi within his body, indicating that although he had caught Tu Hu's strike, it was far from easy.

Perhaps if Tu Hu's strike had been slightly stronger, Fang Bai might have been forced to cough up blood.

Fang Bai's feet, having borne the brunt of Tu Hu's descending strike, were buried below the ground, and from his feet, the ground cracked outward several meters.

This demonstrated the incredible power of Tu Hu's strike.

Most alarmingly, Fang Bai's iron rod was chopped into two pieces by Tu Hu's strike, each half now held in each of Fang Bai's hands.

Luckily, after cutting through the iron rod, Tu Hu's blade lost its momentum and posed no further threat to Fang Bai; otherwise, Fang Bai would surely have been severely injured.

As for Tu Hu, although his blade had cut through Fang Bai's rod, it also suffered a recoil of True Essence from the rod, causing him to flip backward in the air.

Unnoticed by others, after landing, Tu Hu's grip on his blade was slightly red and trembling, his face showing a flicker of pain.

On the surface, it seemed that Tu Hu, by splitting Fang Bai's rod and forcing Fang Bai's feet into the ground, had completely gained the upper hand, but only Tu Hu knew that he too had suffered significantly.

The moment Tu Hu's blade connected with Fang Bai's iron rod, a scorching force transmitted from the rod to the blade and then surged into his palm. He tumbled several times in midair before he could dissipate that sudden surge of searing, potent True Essence.

Upon landing, Tu Hu suddenly felt intense pain in the palm holding the blade, as though he was clutching not the hilt but a piece of steel glowing red-hot with fire.

Had Tu Hu not been incredibly strong and resilient far beyond ordinary people, he could not have endured the intense heat and would have thrown the blade away.

Tu Hu realized that this searing force of True Essence was the Fire Elemental Qi released by Fang Bai. Realizing that his own indestructible Golden Essence Energy had neither inflicted injury on Fang Bai nor blocked the invasion of Fang Bai's Fire Elemental Qi, Tu Hu grew even more wary of Fang Bai's capabilities.

Chapter 995: Senior Brother Tu Has Gone Mad!

Seeing that Fang Bai's face had merely turned red and he was not injured, Huang Miao and others who had been anxiously watching him all quietly breathed a sigh of relief.

On the contrary, the four members of the Tu Hu team were somewhat discouraged and disappointed.

The members of the Tu Hu team had believed that Tu Hu's nearly perfect slash could have decided the outcome of the duel, but to their surprise, Fang Bai miraculously withstood Tu Hu's blow.

This was unexpected by most people present, including Tu Hu himself.

However, what still gave the Tu Hu team a glimmer of hope was that Fang Bai's iron staff had broken, and without the aid of his weapon, Fang Bai's combat effectiveness was sure to be greatly reduced, putting him at a disadvantage in the upcoming duel.

If Tu Hu continued to press the attack, there was still a chance to defeat Fang Bai.

"Senior Brother Tu, Junior Brother Fang's weapon is broken, just push harder and you'll defeat him!"

A member of the Tu Hu team screamed hoarsely.

For them, Tu Hu defeating Fang Bai meant that the carcasses of dozens of Antlered Silver Lions would belong to their team, allowing them to cut off the antlers and exchange them for a large amount of cultivation resources.

The antlers of these Antlered Silver Lions, which had lived three to four hundred years, could be exchanged for a considerable amount of cultivation resources, enough to support the cultivation of the five members of their team for many years.

Cultivation resources are to martial artists what money is to ordinary people, an essential commodity. To obtain these resources, countless sect disciples and individual cultivation martial artists in the True Martial Realm were even willing to risk their lives to fight and vie for them.

If Tu Hu lost the duel, it would mean handing over a large amount of cultivation resources to Huang Miao's team, which was very hard for the members of the Tu Hu team to accept.

So they pinned their hopes on the last few moves of Tu Hu's offensive.

Fang Bai's iron staff was broken defending against Tu Hu, and as long as Tu Hu maintained the same powerful momentum as before, there was a possibility he could defeat Fang Bai in the final few moves.

"Brother Fang, come on! Hold on!"

"Junior Brother Fang, only nine moves to go, if you hold on, we win!"

"Junior Brother Fang, whether dozens of Antlered Silver Lions carcasses will be ours or not, it all depends on you now!"

"Brother Fang, keep it up!"

Huang Miao and the other three also began to loudly cheer and encourage Fang Bai.

According to the agreement between Fang Bai and Tu Hu, as long as Fang Bai could withstand fifty moves without defeat, then the carcasses of the Antlered Silver Lions would still belong to their team.

Fang Bai's resistance to Tu Hu's slash just now had given Huang Miao and others strong confidence.

Even though Tu Hu and others were coveting the antlers of those Antlered Silver Lions, Huang Miao and others were equally unwilling to give them up.

Tu Hu had given hope to his team, and Fang Bai had also shown Huang Miao and others an opportunity.

"I won't give up until the end!"

Tu Hu clenched his teeth in silence, rallied his True Yuan, and surged forward abruptly, the tip of his knife aimed straight at Fang Bai's chest.

Although Tu Hu had stimulated his body's potential, the peak state could only be maintained for a few dozen breaths, so he needed to defeat Fang Bai within these few dozen breaths; otherwise, his combat power would quickly decline, leaving no chance.

Essence Energy circulated crazily within Tu Hu's body, like the great Yangtze River, surging and roaring ceaselessly. His movement technique was so fast that one moment he was several yards away, and the next he had already appeared in front of Fang Bai.

His long sword was nearly touching Fang Bai's chest; it seemed like in the blink of an eye, it could pierce through Fang Bai's body, reaping away his life.

Of course, even if Tu Hu had the opportunity to kill Fang Bai, he wouldn't dare to deal such a heavy blow under the watchful eyes of the crowd. However, inflicting a serious injury on Fang Bai was still within his abilities.

Huang Miao and the others all knew Tu Hu would definitely launch another offensive against Fang Bai, but Tu Hu's speed was simply too fast. It was so rapid that by the time his long sword nearly made contact with Fang Bai's chest, only then did Huang Miao and the others react.

Apart from Fang Bai, no one at the scene could see clearly how Tu Hu moved before he arrived in front of Fang Bai.

"Ah!"

Seeing Tu Hu's long sword about to penetrate Fang Bai's body, Liu Qingqing's face lost color, and she couldn't help but let out a cry of alarm.

The movement technique Tu Hu used was one he had come across by chance during his travels and had learned, exquisitely unmatched. Now, at the peak of his combat powers, he was taken aback by his own astonishing speed.

After his surprise came delight.

"Junior Brother Fang, I'd like to see how you can dodge this strike!"

Tu Hu thought to himself.

Tu Hu could already sense that the tip of his sword had broken through the thin layer of Essence Energy shield surrounding Fang Bai, about to pierce into his flesh and blood.

Of course, Tu Hu's intention wasn't to kill but to render Fang Bai incapable of fighting. Therefore, he held back his strike slightly, intending to halt it after piercing only a few inches into Fang Bai's body.

"Whoosh!"

The sound of clothes tearing through the air rang out. Tu Hu's vision blurred, and the Fang Bai who had been before the sword tip disappeared like a ghost, leaving only an afterimage in his place.

The afterimage was a result of Fang Bai moving so quickly that Tu Hu's eyes couldn't keep up with the movement.

"Where did he go?"

Tu Hu was stunned for a moment, then instinctively turned his head to look behind. Sure enough, Fang Bai was standing two yards away, still holding the two pieces of the broken iron rod.

Fang Bai was looking at Tu Hu, a mocking smile playing on his lips.

That mocking smile deeply wounded Tu Hu's pride. He roared, not caring any longer about how many moves it took, and began launching wave after wave of frenzied, powerful attacks against Fang Bai.

Tu Hu couldn't understand what kind of movement technique Fang Bai had just used, one that was even faster than the technique he had acquired by chance, allowing him to narrowly dodge that strike.

Tu Hu's hard-earned confidence nearly shattered after Fang Bai dodged his second attack, but he still relied on the lingering power from tapping into his potential to launch a fierce onslaught against Fang Bai.

Tu Hu's attacks were like raging torrents, each strike faster and more ferocious than the last, with each bearing lethal intent and showing no mercy.

"He's gone mad... Senior Brother Tu has gone mad..."

Seeing this, Huang Miao and the others were both shocked and angry.

They could tell that Tu Hu had become near-maddened, fixating only on defeating Fang Bai and neglecting all other concerns.

If Fang Bai made even the slightest misstep, he could become another victim beneath Tu Hu's blade.

Although Huang Miao and the others were anxious, they knew their own strengths were insignificant. Intervening would not only be futile but might also bring harm upon themselves.

Dozens of breaths later, Tu Hu's offensive began to slow and weaken; his bravery was surplus to his faltering strength, a clear sign that his peak period of released potential had passed, and he was now declining.

"Senior Brother Tu, it's been eighty moves. Aren't you willing to admit defeat yet?"

Fang Bai's voice suddenly exploded next to Tu Hu's ear. Tu Hu jolted, abruptly returning to clarity from his frenzied state.

Chapter 996: Help Out

"Already... eighty moves?"

Tu Hu stopped his assault, his eyes widening as he stared at Fang Bai, standing several feet away and out of his attack range, muttering to himself, his face filled with confusion.

He then turned his head to look at the four team members standing behind him, his eyes filled with inquiry, as if seeking confirmation from them about whether what Fang Bai had said was true.

The four team members looked at each other, none speaking, but their faces conveyed their frustration and disappointment, giving Tu Hu his answer.

"I understand, I understand..."

Tu Hu said bitterly, a flash of pain and reluctance sweeping across his eyes.

Suddenly, he staggered back a few steps, his strength seemingly drained from him as he collapsed softly to the ground, falling into unconsciousness.

Fang Bai frowned slightly, knowing this was a manifestation of the side effects from Tu Hu pushing his body's potential, and added to his failure to defeat him within fifty moves, it had dealt a severe blow to his spirit, causing him to faint on the spot.

Tu Hu's failure meant his team would miss out on the corpses of the several dozen Antlered Silver Lions. Although his four team members were very disappointed, they knew Tu Hu had done his best.

It was just that Fang Bai was too strong, managing to withstand the fifty powerful moves Tu Hu unleashed after tapping into his body's potential.

This was enough to show that under normal circumstances, Fang Bai's strength was no less than Tu Hu's, perhaps even slightly stronger.

This made the four team members of Tu Hu's group respect and fear Fang Bai, seeing him in a new light.

"Senior Brother Tu, wake up!"

Seeing Tu Hu unconscious, his four team members' faces changed dramatically, and they rushed to check on him.

Some shook Tu Hu's body and shouted loudly, trying to wake him.

Others took out elixirs meant for treating injuries, intending to help him swallow them.

Without the captain Tu Hu's gallant charge through trials and tribulations during this mountain training period, reaching the core area of the Bitao Mountain Range would have been impossible; hence, he had earned the respect of his team members.

Despite not defeating Fang Bai and despite their disappointment, they didn't dare to express any dissatisfaction or complaints towards Tu Hu.

First, although Tu Hu was defeated, he still possessed the strength of a core disciple, not someone they, as disciples from the Inner and External Courtyard, could afford to offend.

Secondly, they were in the core area of the Bitao Mountain Range, potentially facing attacks from spirit beasts or challenges from other cultivation teams at any moment. Without Tu Hu, they would face great danger, and whether they could safely leave this region was uncertain.

Therefore, Tu Hu's unconsciousness threw them into a panicked state, with some team members even regretting their greed for the Antlered Silver Lions' corpses and having encouraged the duel with Fang Bai.

"Great! Brother Fang won this battle!"

Liu Liehu jumped up excitedly, touching the antlers of the Antlered Silver Lions hanging at his waist, relieved that they were safe.

"Brother Fang is really incredible! When Senior Brother Tu boosted his physical potential, and his strength greatly increased, I was actually a bit worried for Brother Fang!"

Liu Qingqing said with a beaming smile.

Dozens of Antlered Silver Lions' corpses had been preserved, representing a large acquisition of cultivation resources in the future. Naturally, Huang Miao and Hou Ziping were very happy.

Yet their age was greater than that of Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu, and their dispositions were relatively steady. Such happiness didn't show on their faces, to avoid causing further dissatisfaction among Senior Brother Tu's team members.

Neither Huang Miao nor Hou Ziping could predict whether Senior Brother Tu would harbor resentment against them after this incident, and possibly seek retaliation. To prevent such an event, they decided to lean on Fang Bai as their support.

The facts had proven that Fang Bai's strength was no less than Senior Brother Tu's, and given Fang Bai's aptitude, his future achievements in Martial Dao were surely going to surpass those of Senior Brother Tu. As long as Fang Bai was willing to protect them, Senior Brother Tu couldn't touch them.

"Keep harvesting the antlers from the Antlered Silver Lions—once you're finished, we'll set off. I'm going over to check on Senior Brother Tu."

Fang Bai spoke and walked toward where Senior Brother Tu and his companions were.

The faces of the four members of Senior Brother Tu's team slightly changed. They simultaneously stood up, gripped their weapons tightly, and with True Yuan flowing within their bodies, they watched the approaching Fang Bai nervously and vigilantly as if facing a formidable enemy.

"Junior Brother Fang, what are you trying to do?"

"Murder stops short of the deed, Senior Brother Tu is already unconscious; what more do you want?"

"The sect has rules: fighting among fellow disciples is allowed, but fratricide is forbidden."

"If you harm Senior Brother Tu again, we'll go all out against you!"

The four members of Senior Brother Tu's team loudly said in a threatening yet fearful tone.

"Don't be nervous, I'm here to help Senior Brother Tu."

Fang Bai spread his hands, revealing a harmless smile, and then squatted beside Senior Brother Tu under the watchful eyes of the four team members.

He extended his right hand, his palm lightly touching Senior Brother Tu. The Wood Element Qi slowly circulated, and a faint Green Glow moved from his palm into Senior Brother Tu's body.

That trace of Green Glow was extremely pure Wood Element Qi from Fang Bai's Dantian and was particularly effective in stimulating life potential, perfectly suited to replenish the life potential that Senior Brother Tu had exhausted by forcibly enhancing his strength.

"Don't worry—Senior Brother Tu will wake up after a hundred breaths."

Fang Bai exhaled softly and stood up, then glanced thoughtfully across the face of one of the members of Senior Brother Tu's team before turning and walking away briskly.

The team member swept by Fang Bai's gaze was Shi Gang from Shi Village. Ever since Liu Qingqing had revealed Shi Gang's identity to Fang Bai, Fang Bai had taken notice of him.

Liuhu Village and Shi Village were sworn enemies. While in Liuhu Village, Fang Bai had severely punished Shi Village's Martial Artists, and this news had already reached Shi Gang, who was at Bitao Martial Academy. This made Shi Gang grow to intensely hate Fang Bai, constantly thinking of revenge.

Watching Fang Bai's retreating silhouette, Shi Gang's hand gripping his weapon tightened suddenly, his eyes revealing a mixture of malevolence and resentment.

Although Fang Bai had walked away and had his back to Shi Gang, his Divine Sense emanated outward, enveloping everything around like he had eyes everywhere. The malevolent expression on Shi Gang's face couldn't escape his scrutiny.

"Shi Gang's heart is already filled with hatred. However, he's not even on the combat power list among the Inner Court disciples, so his strength isn't strong. I'm naturally not afraid of him. Both Qingqing and Liehu are wearing Defense Spiritual Artifacts that I gave them, so they needn't fear any schemes or troubles he might cause."

Thus thought Fang Bai, as he retracted his Divine Sense.

When Fang Bai had moved away, the members of Senior Brother Tu's team closely examined the still unconscious Senior Brother Tu. They noticed his originally pale and colorless face was becoming rosy and his weak breathing rapidly strengthening. Realizing Fang Bai had not deceived them, each of them breathed a sigh of relief.

Chapter 997: Why Not Dare?

Fang Bai walked up to Huang Miao and her three companions, a smile playing at the corner of his mouth as he watched them wave their weapons, slicing off all the antlers from the dozens of Antlered Silver Lions and hanging them at their waists.

After harvesting the most valuable antlers from all the Antlered Silver Lions' corpses at the scene, Huang Miao and the other three gathered around Fang Bai with beaming smiles.

"Junior Brother Fang, once we exchange these for Cultivation Resources, each of us will give you half of our share," Huang Miao said to Fang Bai with a laugh.

Without Fang Bai, they could not possibly have obtained so many precious antlers. That's why Huang Miao proposed to give Fang Bai half of the Cultivation Resources they would exchange later, a suggestion that the other three unanimously agreed upon.

After all, their haul of so many antlers was almost entirely thanks to Fang Bai alone; even if they gave him half, they still benefited greatly.

Fang Bai smiled, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Liu Liehu ran over to the two halves of the iron rod that Fang Bai had discarded, picked them up, and said regretfully, "I found this iron rod very handy to use. I never expected that it would be in two pieces thanks to Senior Brother Tu's sword. Well, I'll take the broken rod back and have someone forge it again later."

"Your iron rod was destroyed by me; I'll give you a better one later," Fang Bai said, patting Liu Liehu on the shoulder.

Liu Liehu's iron rod was made of ordinary steel. While it seemed formidable, it was prone to damage when faced with weapons made from Hundred Refined Essence Steel. In the clash between Fang Bai and

Tu Hu, as the sword and rod struck each other, the rod was not only deeply scarred but eventually snapped in half.

Fang Bai was now capable of refining Spiritual Artifacts, and he planned to forge a rod-shaped Spiritual Artifact to gift to Liu Liehu in the future, which would greatly enhance Liu Liehu's combat ability.

The iron rod had been with Liu Liehu for many years, and now that it was snapped in two, it was impossible for Liu Liehu not to feel distressed. Hearing that Fang Bai would give him another rod in the future, Liu Liehu immediately cheered up. Knowing Fang Bai's reputation for generosity, whatever he was to give would certainly not be subpar.

"Junior Brother Fang, how is Senior Brother Tu doing?" Huang Miao glanced toward Tu Hu's team and casually asked.

"There's no serious damage; he'll come around soon," Fang Bai replied.

"That's good to hear." Huang Miao let out a sigh of relief, a smile forming on her face, thinking that as long as Tu Hu was fine, the grudges between the two sides wouldn't deepen too severely, leaving room for future reconciliation.

"What shall we do next? Where do we go?" Hou Ziping asked.

Huang Miao and the Liu siblings all looked at Fang Bai, waiting for him to decide.

Fang Bai looked up at the distant undulating mountain ridges and said, "Deeper into the Bitao Mountain Range, there are certainly more treasures to be found. But if we continue forward, we are likely to encounter Spirit Beasts even fiercer than the Antlered Silver Lions. Are you still willing to go on?"

"I'll follow Brother Fang! As long as Brother Fang moves forward, even if ahead lies a dragon's pool and a tiger's den, I will follow!" Liu Liehu said loudly, slapping his chest vigorously.

"Yes, wherever Brother Fang goes, that's where we'll go!"

Liu Qingqing nodded vigorously.

The siblings had always been Fang Bai's most loyal followers, even if it meant braving life-threatening dangers, they were willing to take the risk with Fang Bai.

Huang Miao and Hou Ziping exchanged glances, then said in unison, "If Junior Brother Fang dares, why shouldn't we?"

Their five-member team had faced many dangers together on their journey, forging a deep friendship. Especially after Fang Bai had revealed his astonishing strength, their team's confidence soared to unprecedented heights, and they were less afraid of the unknown risks ahead.

They also knew that the further they went, the greater the risks—but also the greater the opportunities. If they could harvest a middle-grade Spiritual Medicine or hunt a mid-tier Spirit Beast, it would be far more valuable than the dozens of Antlered Silver Lions' antlers they had previously collected.

It was said that a mid-tier Spirit Beast's body contained a Spirit Core, the essence of the beast, extremely valuable and with marvelous effects in both Alchemy and Artifact Refining when added to the process.

And middle-grade Spiritual Medicine could be used to make middle-grade Elixirs.

In the True Martial Realm, even low-grade Elixirs were a rare and expensive Cultivation Resource, let alone middle-grade Elixirs?

While Martial Artists were numerous in the True Martial Realm, it was exceedingly rare to find an Alchemist with the dual attributes of fire and wood, truly a one in a million occurrence.

Such scarcity was why Alchemists held such lofty status in the True Martial Realm and were coveted by all powers.

Among the already rare Alchemists in the True Martial Realm, the vast majority could only concoct low-grade Elixirs. Those capable of making middle-grade Elixirs were as rare as phoenix feathers and unicorn horns, and most chose to live in seclusion, indifferent to worldly affairs.

For common Martial Artists, seeking a middle-grade Alchemist to make a middle-grade Elixir was more difficult than ascending to the heavens.

This illustrated the immense value middle-grade Elixirs held in the True Martial Realm.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the appearance of any bottle of middle-grade Elixir could provoke the greed and attention of tens of thousands of Martial Artists and even spark a bloody conflict.

Therefore, every time a disciple from Bitao Martial Academy went into the mountains for cultivation training, their greatest hope was to harvest a middle-grade Spiritual Medicine or hunt a mid-tier Spirit Beast.

However, a mid-tier Spirit Medicine was usually guarded by a mid-tier Spirit Beast, making it a daunting task to obtain the medicine without dealing with its fierce protector.

Moreover, middle-grade Spiritual Medicine typically grew in the core area of the Bitao Mountain Range, where the greatest number of mid-tier Spirit Beasts resided. Even someone as powerful as Ren Jingbo, the Grand Martial Artist of the Bitao Martial Academy, did not dare to tread lightly in that area.

For Bitao Martial Academy disciples teaming up for mountain training, even with ten members working together, hunting a mid-tier Spirit Beast was fraught with difficulties. It all depended on luck. One wrong move, and they might end up as a feast in the belly of a mid-tier Spirit Beast, their lives lost.

Hence, stumbling upon middle-grade Spiritual Medicine by chance was a more realistic hope than actively hunting a mid-tier Spirit Beast.

Due to the unknown risks ahead, Fang Bai took up the lead with Huang Miao and Hou Ziping covering the rear, keeping Liu Qingqing and her brother Liu Liehu safely in the middle.

With his Divine Sense, Fang Bai could detect Spirit Beast trails within a two-thousand-meter radius. Along the way, he discovered several mid-tier Spirit Beast lairs and led the group on detours to avoid entering the beasts' territories, preventing several potential battles.

It wasn't that Fang Bai feared those mid-tier Spirit Beasts; he simply didn't want to clash with them in front of people like Huang Miao. Doing so would force him to reveal stronger Martial Arts Techniques, surprising Huang Miao and others, and making it difficult to continue living inconspicuously at Bitao Martial Academy.

Fang Bai's current plan was to collect five middle-grade Spiritual Medicines without engaging mid-tier Spirit Beasts and return to Bitao Martial Academy.

If other cultivation teams knew of Fang Bai's intention, they would surely think Fang Bai was insane.

Other teams would feel blessed to obtain just one middle-grade Spiritual Medicine together. For Fang Bai to want his team members to each have one was dreamlike to other teams.

However, Fang Bai was full of confidence about it.

Chapter 998: Shi Gang's Secret

The terrain of the Bitao Mountain Range was low around the edges and higher in the middle, particularly the central region of the mountain range's core area, which consisted of eighteen towering ice peaks. Each ice peak reached tens of thousands of feet into the sky. From a distance, they looked like crystal-clear ice swords piercing the heavens, thrusting straight into the clouds with unparalleled majesty.

Clusters of snow-white clouds encircled the middle of the ice peaks, and occasionally, huge birds could be seen darting between the clouds and the mountains.

These giant birds were also a type of Spirit Beast, with incredibly fast flight speeds. With a single flap of their wings, they could soar a hundred yards, exuding a powerful and fierce aura.

From their high vantage point, they had a broad view and could easily spot any movement on the ground below.

Fang Bai's Cultivation Team, which had reached but dozens of miles from the central region of the core area, had already caught sight of the cloud-veiled colossal ice peaks and felt the pressure they exerted.

"Those eighteen ice peaks are the forbidden area within the core region of the Bitao Mountain Range, and also the Forbidden Zones of Life for humans. In the nearly ten thousand years since the Bitao Martial Academy was established, no Cultivation Team has ever dared to ascend any of the ice peaks; at most, they would make a round trip around the periphery of the eighteen ice peaks."

Huang Miao raised her hand, pointing towards the eighteen ice peaks dozens of miles away.

"What magnificent ice peaks! Ordinary martial artists probably couldn't climb them at all, could they?"

For Hou Ziping, who was seeing the legendary eighteen ice peaks for the first time, there was a mix of excitement and exhilaration. Even if he could not scale the peaks this time, when he returned to the Bitao Martial Academy, he would have the capital to boast to his fellow disciples.

After all, just being able to come here and witness the magnificence of the eighteen ice peaks was an achievement worth taking pride in.

Huang Miao said, "It's said that the temperatures at the summits of the eighteen ice peaks are so low that they're unbearable, and even formidable birds dare not fly over the tops. Otherwise, their wings will freeze, rendering them unable to fly. And human martial artists, even those powerful enough to reach the Desolate Level Realm, can't withstand the chill at the mountain tops and dare not linger there. Us martial artists of the Heaven Level Realm would probably struggle to bear it even at the foot of the eighteen ice peaks!"

Liu Liehu, upon hearing Huang Miao's words, felt a chill creep over him and instinctively tightened his neck, saying, "In that case, let's just wander around the periphery of the ice peaks, better to avoid getting too close and being frozen into popsicles!"

"Liehu, don't speak nonsense! Only speak auspicious words!"

Liu Qingqing lifted her right arm, extended a delicate finger, and lightly poked Liu Liehu, scolding him in a charming voice.

"Got it."

Liu Liehu scratched his head and chuckled with a silly smile.

The five of them were preparing to move towards the ice peaks and investigate closely around them, to see if they might discover any treasures. Suddenly, however, they heard the roar of Spirit Beasts from behind.

"What's going on?"

Huang Miao and the others were startled and turned their heads in the direction of the roaring.

Even Fang Bai was a bit surprised, furrowing his brow slightly.

The five of them had traveled all the way from the Stone Forest, and although they had encountered some Spirit Beasts along the way, they had cleverly avoided them under Fang Bai's leadership. Especially within the dozens of miles approaching the ice peaks, they had nearly seen no signs of Spirit Beast activity on the ground.

Just moments ago, when they had set eyes upon the ice peaks, Fang Bai had specifically released his Divine Sense to probe the surroundings within a two-thousand-meter range, only to find no trace of any Spirit Beast presence.

Unexpectedly, a surge of Spirit Beasts erupted from nowhere, roaring as they charged in their direction.

From the cacophony of roars, it was clear that not only were there many Spirit Beasts attacking fiercely, but their target was also Fang Bai's Cultivation Team.

The roar of the Spirit Beasts thundered like rumbling lightning, their galloping hooves trembled the ground, signaling their rapid approach.

"Run! Use your movement techniques at full speed towards Ice Peak! I'll cover the rear!"

Fang Bai suddenly shouted with urgency, propelling Huang Miao and the others into action.

Without time for thought, they did as Fang Bai instructed, circulating True Yuan, using their movement techniques to desperately head in the direction of Ice Peak.

Fang Bai followed behind the four of them, also hurtling toward Ice Peak.

However, within the rugged mountains, the speed at which human Martial Artists could traverse was no match for the Spirit Beasts born of this land. Huang Miao and the others had only advanced about five li when the pursuing group of Spirit Beasts had already covered ten li and were rapidly closing the distance.

Although Huang Miao and the others did not look back, they could sense the Spirit Beasts drawing near. What frightened them even more was that the number and strength of this group of Spirit Beasts were even greater than the dozens of Antlered Silver Lions that had surrounded them in Stone Forest.

"It's unavoidable now, we're done for!"

When they were still several li from the eighteen Ice Peaks, Huang Miao and the others could even hear the heavy breathing from the nostrils and mouths of the Spirit Beasts behind them.

It was at this moment Fang Bai's Divine Sense scanned the area and spotted among the group of Spirit Beasts chasing them, a Martial Artist sitting upon one of the Spirit Beasts, emitting a strange howling sound.

"It's actually him? I didn't expect this guy to know Beast Taming Technique!"

Fang Bai's Divine Sense locked onto the sitting Martial Artist, his eyes gleaming, a trace of surprise crossing his features.

The Martial Artist, around forty years of age, wore the attire of an Inner Court Disciple of Bitao Martial Academy, with a gaunt face and sinister eyes, holding a zhang-long steel spear – it could be no one other than Shi Gang from Shi Village.

At this moment, Shi Gang, with his steel spear slanting towards the sky, perched atop a huge Fire Cloud Leopard, his shrill and rapid howls commanding the hundreds of surrounding Spirit Beasts to charge in the direction of Fang Bai and his companions.

The Spirit Beasts swept forward like a wild wind, rapidly closing the gap toward Fang Bai and the others.

When they were nearly a thousand meters away from Fang Bai and his companions, Shi Gang steered the Fire Cloud Leopard beneath him onto a low hill, coldly surveying their position from afar as Killing Qi billowed about him.

At this time, Shi Gang stood tall and proud, radiating an air of arrogance and might, far from resembling an Inner Court Disciple with merely a mid Heaven Level Cultivation Level.

"The true strength of this Shi Gang is actually Heaven Level Perfection, on par with the Personal Transmission Disciples of Bitao Martial Academy. I had not used Divine Sense to probe him before, and he has managed to conceal himself. It seems he has not only cultivated a technique that can hide his Cultivation Level but has also done so very skillfully. However, he hasn't manifested Divine Sense, so how is he controlling the Spirit Beasts? Could it be with the help of some Spiritual Artifact?"

As Fang Bai pondered this, his Divine Sense carefully probed the man again and indeed noticed a black jade pendant hanging from his chest.

With each strange howl from Shi Gang's mouth, the black jade pendant hanging around his chest flickered faintly bright, releasing a strand of Divine Sense imperceptible to ordinary Martial Artists. This strand of Divine Sense spread out in all directions, controlling the hundreds of Spirit Beasts.

Chapter 999: Attack of the Hundred Beasts

"Apparently, Shi Gang had once studied some low-level Beast Taming Scripture and, with the help of the divine sense contained within the spiritual artifact on his chest, he was able to control the spirit beasts. I don't know where he obtained that spiritual artifact, but since it contains divine sense, it is clear that its owner was also a mighty power who had developed divine sense."

Fang Bai continued to probe Shi Gang with his divine sense and discovered that Shi Gang's ability to control spirit beasts was not reliant on his own cultivation level, but rather due to external forces.

From this, it could be concluded that Shi Gang had had a significant opportunity, which allowed him to obtain the jade token, learn the Beast Taming Scripture, and enhance his strength.

Shi Gang's current cultivation level was at Heaven Level Perfection, strong enough to stand on equal footing with Direct Disciples from the Bitao Martial Academy such as Ouyang Jian and Shen Yulin, except that he was reserved by nature and had never revealed himself.

Although Tu Hu had previously concealed his cultivation level as well, he fell far short when compared to Shi Gang.

It could be said without exaggeration that three to five Tu Hus would not be a match for one Shi Gang.

Fang Bai had met Shi Gang during this particular mountain expedition; before this, he had encountered Shi Gang twice but had never interacted with him.

The first time Fang Bai saw Shi Gang, there had been a conflict between the Tu Hu Cultivation Team and the Zhou Tong Cultivation Team, and Shi Gang had hidden himself within his team, keeping a very low profile. Fang Bai had not intentionally used divine sense to examine him closely, assuming he was just an ordinary member of the Inner Court and had not taken notice of him.

The second time he saw Shi Gang was not long ago near the Stone Forest, when Fang Bai and Tu Hu were vying for the bodies of dozens of Antlered Silver Lions. At that time, Shi Gang was energetically cheering on Tu Hu from behind, and Fang Bai still did not pay him much attention.

What Fang Bai did not expect was that during this third encounter with Shi Gang, the man would reveal his sharp fangs, showcasing his extraordinary strength by driving tigers and leopards to attack using the spirit beasts.

"This Shi Gang has hidden his capabilities deeply; even the upper echelons of the Bitao Martial Academy probably don't know his true strength, do they? If I hadn't used divine sense to carefully investigate, I would have also been kept in the dark."

Fang Bai thought to himself.

Fang Bai's divine sense was capable of enveloping an area of two thousand meters, allowing him to easily detect any of Shi Gang's movements.

In contrast, the divine sense emanating from the jade token that Shi Gang relied on could only scan an area of several hundred meters.

Shi Gang believed that all he was doing was concealed from the divine and the mortal, not knowing that Fang Bai was well aware of it.

When Fang Bai, along with Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu, had first joined the Bitao Martial Academy, Shi Gang had set his sights on them. At that time, Shi Gang had just received news that the martial artists from Shi Village had been severely injured by those from Liuhu Village, and so he harbored resentment towards Fang Bai and the others, beginning to plot revenge.

In the Bitao Martial Academy, Shi Gang had been unable to find the right opportunity to make his move. However, this mountain expedition had given him a perfect chance.

Shi Gang, believing himself to be strong and knowing the secret techniques to control spirit beasts, thought that in the secluded depths of the Bitao Mountain Range, he could completely annihilate Fang Bai and the others without anyone knowing.

Before entering the mountain, Shi Gang had joined the Tu Hu Cultivation Team, and later encountered the Huang Miao Team by chance twice in the mountains, yet he had not found the best opportunity to strike.

Near the Stone Forest, while Fang Bai and Tu Hu were fighting over the bodies of the Antlered Silver Lions, Tu Hu eventually lost and passed out due to the after-effects of activating his hidden potential. After Fang Bai and his group left the scene, Shi Gang also quietly separated from the Tu Hu Team and followed them.

However, Shi Gang was a very cautious person. He maintained a considerable distance from Fang Bai and the others to avoid detection, a distance that also extended beyond the range of Fang Bai's divine sense. Therefore, Fang Bai did not notice Shi Gang following them.

Seeing Fang Bai and his group approaching the mysterious Ice Peak Forbidden Area of the Bitao Mountain Range and thinking that this region might contain treasures, Shi Gang, unable to restrain himself any longer, began to summon spirit beasts from all directions and launched an attack on Fang Bai and his companions.

While Shi Gang himself, riding on the Fire Cloud Leopard, followed leisurely behind, ready to watch Fang Bai and the others be devoured by over a hundred formidable spirit beasts.

"Those who provoke the martial artists of Shi Village never end well! Fang Bai, Liu Qingqing, Liu Liehu, the three of you can wait to die! Senior Sister Huang, Senior Brother Hou, why did you remain so close to Fang Bai and his team? Now, you can only be buried alongside them!"

Shi Gang's eyes coldly fixated on the direction where Fang Bai and his group were located. He clenched his teeth and spoke with a hateful expressionless face.

In his view, even if the five people in Huang Miao's team could compete with a Desolate Level Martial Artist, they couldn't escape from being attacked by the hundreds of fierce spirit beasts under his control.

Hundreds of various spirit beasts, under the control of Shi Gang, roared madly as they charged towards Fang Bai and the others. Each of them was massive and their presence impressive. Their paws stomped on the ground as they ran, causing the earth within miles to tremble.

Compared to the several dozen Antlered Silver Lions they had encountered near the Stone Forest, these spirit beasts were more numerous, more powerful, and obviously more vicious.

Huang Miao, Hou Ziping, Liu Qingqing, and Liu Liehu exerted all their strength to hurry forward. Ahead of them was the area known as the Forbidden Zones of Life, the Eighteen Ice Peaks.

Although the Eighteen Ice Peaks were legendary and perilously mysterious, with over a hundred large spirit beasts pursuing them, once caught by those beasts, they were likely to become their prey.

Rather than that, they preferred to dash into the Ice Peaks to temporarily find a place to hide and contend with the spirit beasts.

As for the dangers within the Eighteen Ice Peaks, that was no longer under consideration for Huang Miao and the others.

The four of them fled ahead, creating a distance from Fang Bai, who stayed behind so that he could potentially intercept the spirit beasts at a crucial moment.

Deep within the Bitao Mountain Range, truly a paradise for spirit beasts, even the most complex terrain was like flat ground to them, easily traversed.

When they were still several miles away from the Eighteen Ice Peaks, Huang Miao and his group were nearly exhausted, their speed significantly reduced.

Yet the chasing spirit beasts behind them were still full of energy and extremely agitated, showing no signs of fatigue.

The distance between the spirit beasts and Fang Bai's team had narrowed to less than two miles.

At this rate, even before reaching the Ice Peaks, they would be caught by the spirit beasts.

Once they fell into the siege of the spirit beasts, the consequences would be unimaginable.

Just as Huang Miao and the others were about to stimulate their body's potential to increase their speed, Fang Bai's voice suddenly rang out in their ears.

"Don't be rash! Look up!"

Fang Bai's voice clearly reached the ears of Huang Miao and the others.

Upon hearing this, they looked up at the sky, instantly gasping in shock.

Some flying creatures that were originally circling in the clouds around the Eighteen Ice Peaks, for some reason, had gathered together and then plunged downward at an extremely fast speed from thousands of meters in the air towards them.

Chapter 1000: White-Headed Eagle

In the Bitao Mountain Range, the most formidable Spirit Beasts were not those that ran on the ground, but those that flew in the sky.

Those giant flying creatures, with their sharp beaks and talons, could overlook a radius of dozens of miles from ten thousand meters high. Once they spotted their prey, they would swoop down and launch a fierce attack, which was almost impossible to guard against.

At this moment, there were more than a hundred of such birds diving down from the sky, their number comparable to that of the Spirit Beasts chasing after Fang Bai and his companions.

These flying creatures had bodies covered in black, except for a few white down feathers on the top of their heads, earning them the name White-Headed Eagles. They belonged to a particularly formidable category among the flying Spirit Beasts.

These White-Headed Eagles were all fully grown, with lifespans mostly around four hundred years. They were huge in size, with wingspans of more than ten meters wide. Their dive was so overwhelming it could cover the sky and block out the sun, creating an astonishing momentum.

Huang Miao and the others looked up at the descent of the dark swarm of White-Headed Eagles, bringing with them a terrifying presence. They stood there, wide-eyed and motionless, not daring to make a move.

In the blink of an eye, the White-Headed Eagles flew right above their heads, then whooshed past, hurtling toward the hundreds of Spirit Beasts chasing from behind.

"Phew..."

Huang Miao and the others breathed a sigh of relief, now realizing that the White-Headed Eagles' target was not the five of them, but the hundreds of Spirit Beasts that were pursuing them.

"I've heard that White-Headed Eagles are extremely fierce carnivorous Spirit Beasts with a strong propensity for attacking, but why did they let us go and attack their own kind? That's really strange," Huang Miao muttered to himself with a face full of surprise and puzzlement as he turned his head to watch the hundred White-Headed Eagles that had just swooped past overhead.

Hou Ziping said, "It is very strange. But as long as they don't come to attack us, we should be grateful."

Liu Liehu asked, "Should we continue forward and enter between those Ice Peaks?"

"It's very cold there. If we get too close, we might not be able to withstand the chill."

Liu Qingqing was blessed with an Innate Water Spirit Root. Her sensitivity to rain, ice, and snow was many times keener than that of an ordinary Martial Artist. Although she was several miles away from the massive Ice Peaks, she could still feel the wisps of bitter cold emanating from them.

Being able to sense the cold from miles away, one could only imagine how low the temperature would be in the areas surrounded by the Ice Peaks.

Liu Qingqing, with her Innate Water Spirit Root, naturally had no fear of rain, ice, and snow. In fact, she felt a natural affinity for them. If she were among the Ice Peaks, even the lowest temperatures would not affect her. What worried her was that her brother, Liu Liehu, and the others might not endure the cold's invasion.

Huang Miao looked back at Fang Bai, who was falling far behind, and said, "Junior Brother Fang hasn't arrived yet; let's wait for him here. I also feel that there seems to be unknown dangers lurking between those Ice Peaks, so we shouldn't rashly enter."

So the five of them moved to the side and waited behind a towering tree that soared dozens of feet high.

The hundred Spirit Beasts that pursued seemed to be on the verge of catching up to Fang Bai and surrounding him when the White-Headed Eagles unsuspectingly swooped down from the sky, launching a ferocious attack on them.

Two different types of bloodthirsty, ferocious Spirit Beasts soon became entangled in a fierce battle.

The white-headed eagles in the sky and the spirit beasts on the ground were roughly equal in number, essentially a one-on-one situation. However, in terms of individual combat strength and synchronized coordination, the white-headed eagles, which could freely soar in the air, were obviously a cut above.

Within just a dozen breaths, more than ten of the spirit beasts on the ground had been wounded by the white-headed eagles' sharp talons like knife edges, their skin turned inside out, blood streaming, and their roars unceasing.

Initially, under Shi Gang's control, those spirit beasts had been pursuing Fang Bai as their target. Unexpectedly, they were suddenly attacked by the white-headed eagles on the way, thus thrown into disarray, each fending for themselves. Who would still care about Fang Bai's life or death?

Shi Gang, who was riding a Fire Cloud Leopard and standing on a distant hillside controlling the spirit beasts, had a dark expression on his face.

He had been full of confidence, believing that under the attack of hundreds of spirit beasts, Fang Bai and the others were as good as dead. However, he couldn't have anticipated that a group of "uninvited guests" would appear midway and ruin his plan.

Watching his controlled spirit beasts being overwhelmed by the white-headed eagles, and with more than half already injured, Shi Gang was shocked, angry, annoyed, and anxious. He couldn't understand why those white-headed eagles would suddenly go crazy and attack their own kind.

However, Shi Gang quickly noticed something strange, and a look of surprise and suspicion crossed his face.

Those white-headed eagles, seemingly crazed and fearless in the face of death, were attacking with a certain pattern. This was clearly the result of being controlled.

"Who is covertly controlling the white-headed eagles and acting against me?"

Shi Gang's gaze swept around as he stimulated the divine sense contained within the black jade pendant hanging from his chest, carefully searching for the other party's whereabouts.

Yet, despite searching the area within several hundred meters, he found nothing. It was evident that the location of the person secretly controlling the white-headed eagles lay beyond the scope of Shi Gang's divine sense.

This situation implied that the person covertly controlling the white-headed eagles not only understood the way of beast taming but also had a greater range of divine sense than Shi Gang, capable of influencing the white-headed eagles from a further distance.

Shi Gang knew that he was not a match for this hidden adversary in the way of beast taming. The hope of killing Fang Bai and the others by relying on spirit beasts had grown unlikely.

Shi Gang had originally prepared to personally take action if his control of the spirit beasts to kill Fang Bai and others failed, thinking that his true cultivation level of Heaven Level Perfection, comparable to a direct disciple, would still make taking down Fang Bai and the others no problem.

But now, the unknown individual hiding in the shadows controlling the white-headed eagles made Shi Gang hesitate.

Shi Gang did not know who the person controlling the white-headed eagles was, nor did he know whether the opponent's strength was stronger or weaker than his own. In a situation where the enemy lurked in the shadows while he was exposed, he dared not rashly make a move.

This opportunity was rare, and if he couldn't kill Fang Bai and the others, it would raise the alarm. Finding another suitable chance to make a move would be far more difficult.

Watching the increasing casualties of the spirit beasts he controlled, and as the divine sense within his chest pendant gradually weakened, Shi Gang hesitated for a moment before finally severing the divine sense and giving up control of the spirit beasts.

The beasts that were being controlled suddenly awoke from their frenzied state, only to find themselves under the ferocious assault of a flock of white-headed eagles, covered in wounds and having no desire to continue fighting, they began to flee in all directions.

The white-headed eagles did not pursue their victory. After Fang Bai withdrew his divine sense and severed his control of them, they circled in the air for a while before flying back into the clouds surrounding the distant Ice Peak.

"The person hidden in the shadows is obviously helping Fang Bai and the others. For me, he is an enemy, not a friend!"

Shi Gang jumped down from the Fire Cloud Leopard, letting it flee, and then, looking up at the flock of white-headed eagles returning to Ice Peak, his gaze dark and intense, his brows deeply furrowed, he pondered how to find the person lurking in the shadows.