

## Grasping 1001

Chapter 1001: Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians

Certainly!

"Is there anyone among you with the Five-Color Medicine Soul?"

Lou Tuo's inquiry prompted many from the Tami tribe to look at Ouyang Nuan.

If memory serves them right, this woman's Medicine Soul... was indeed the Five-Color! Blame it on the Tami tribe's excessive enthusiasm and sincerity; Ouyang Nuan, upon arrival, didn't bother to disguise her Five-Color Medicine Soul, seen by some...

Ning Fan was more cautious and had never shown his Medicine Soul here... But ultimately, Ouyang Nuan's Medicine Soul was exposed here, it was a slip on his part for not warning her. It's his fault.

Fortunately, this exposure didn't seem to lead to any misfortune, but rather made the two Great Da Bi Immortal Emperors who had just arrived deeply apprehensive... Ning Fan noticed this keenly. Upon learning that they had a Five-Color Medicine Soul possessor, Lou Tuo, who initially had a sarcastic tone, noticeably softened his attitude, even showing a hint of fear...

A dignified Immortal Emperor would actually fear the Five-Color Medicine Soul? Ning Fan wasn't sure if he was seeing things. If this were indeed the case, it would be quite intriguing...

"You are the possessor of the Five-Color Medicine Soul!" Lou Tuo Emperor followed the tribe's gaze and noticed Ouyang Nuan, with a flash of gray light in his eyes, suddenly surprised,

"It's true!"

Clearly, he used some secret technique to confirm Ouyang Nuan's identity as a Five-Color Medicine Soul possessor! Another Emperor Bone Spirit similarly used a secret technique, revealing a satisfied smile.

Feeling somewhat tense, Ouyang Nuan pondered if her exposed Five-Color Medicine Soul might cause trouble for Ning Fan. It was her first time facing Immortal Emperor experts at such close quarters, and facing two at once felt like a looming crisis. The little Maoqiu in her arms trembled, like a frightened small beast, exceedingly terrified.

"Don't be afraid, dear sister... From what I know, the Eternal Old Monstrosities of the Great Da Bi tribe treat rare Medicine Soul possessors with great honor; it's their custom. Learning you have the Five-Color Medicine Soul is surely not a bad thing but might make our journey easier..." Burying Moon timely transmitted her thoughts.

The exposure of the Five-Color Medicine Soul isn't a bad thing, but might bring convenience? If that were true, it'd be excellent... Ouyang Nuan breathed a slight sigh of relief.

Lou Tuo Emperor pondered, his face changed unpredictably, eventually revealing a complex expression, addressing Ning Fan in a peculiar tone, "Alright then, since you possess the Five-Color Medicine Soul, consider yourselves distinguished guests of our Great Da Bi tribe. The matter of Punishing Ring can be lenient, reduced from seventy-two penalties to eighteen."

Possessors of rare Medicine Souls are considered honored guests of the Great Da Bi tribe; joining them naturally exempts them from Punishing Ring. If Ning Fan isn't targeted, Ouyang Nuan, Jiuli, and Maoqiu can be exempted, requiring only Ning Fan, Wu Laoba, and Burying Moon to undergo punishment. Each person six penalties, totaling eighteen Punishments. It could be shared among three or solely all borne by one person.

Given Lou Tuo Emperor's animosity towards foreign cultivators, a fair approach like this was already a concession.

Burying Moon slightly eased; merely facing eighteen penalties was bearable, avoiding confrontation with the Great Da Bi tribe.

"Little pervert, seems these Da Bi Immortal Emperors won't make things difficult for us; let's obediently undergo Punishing Ring, allowing us to move conveniently within the tribe..." Burying Moon transmitted her advice to Ning Fan, sharing the Da Bi tribe's treatment of rare Medicine Souls.

Ning Fan nodded, seeing the tribe wasn't actively troubling him, was willing to comply with the laws; eighteen penalties seemed a manageable trial worth attempting.

Not further troubling everyone, Lou Tuo Emperor started official procedures, flipping a jade-like horse bone, sacrificing it to Heavenly One, causing the bone to transform into a ray of light, shooting up into the sky, then manifesting a vision of galloping horses across the steppe, smoke and dust billowing, accompanied by countless fierce horse screams echoing through the Immortal Clouds.

The vision of galloping horses dissipated, followed by the entire steppe violently shaking, opening a chasm from which gray mist emerged, solidifying on the ground, finally forming an extremely ancient altar, enormous with three thousand golden pillars standing, many with golden rings possessing great sealing power.

"This is the Punishing Platform! You should already know, outsiders entering Great Da Bi tribe must undergo Punishing Ring to limit cultivation, carrying it into the Inner Sanctum, thus becoming guests of our tribe. When departing, the ring will dissipate naturally. Destroying the ring privately will be seen as defying our tribe's prestige and lead to extermination by our Five Emperors. Remember this!"

Lou Tuo Emperor explained, urging, "Those wishing to undergo punishment step onto the platform and touch the golden pillars to undergo punishment!"

Though Lou Tuo Emperor, concerned with the Five-Color Medicine Soul, reduced hostility towards Ning Fan's group, his inherent disdain for outsiders prevented amiability in speech.

During those days, Ning Fan's group learned from Tageli about Punishing Ring's procedures, mentally preparing for punishment.

According to the group's plan, the two beasts needn't undergo punishment. Ouyang Nuan and Burying Moon were spared; since punishment could be shared, Ning Fan and Wu Laoba would bear it.

"Who undergoes punishment first?" Lou Tuo Emperor asked expressionless.

"I'll do it! Just me, Wu Xiaoba is enough! This Punishing Platform's dangers are unknown, how could I let my master go first!"

Wu Laoba emerged with an air of righteous indignation, taking steps onto the platform, with a solemn demeanor, feeling the wind's chill. On the surface, it seemed voluntary to relieve his master's burden. Inside, Wu Laoba had his own calculations...

Total eighteen Penalties, splitting between him and Ning Fan. If Ning Fan went first, bearing mere four or five Punishments and descending, Wu Laoba faced remaining thirteen or fourteen—truly unfavorable! Going first grants control, determining how many Penalties to endure! Wu Laoba secretly calculated, knowing the newly ascended Immortal Venerable could endure only twelve penalties, even as the First Calamity Immortal Sovereign could bear more. Wu Laoba, keen with self-interest, refused to partake in any extra Penalty beyond what was necessary!

"Eighteen penalties, nine each seems equitable. If I endure less than nine, star of misfortune surely has objections, might grow furious... Alas, I, Wu Xiaoba must prove utmost loyalty, enduring at least nine penalties, giving star of misfortune an advantage without being overly disadvantaged... Hmm, let's endure ten Penalties then! Hehe, star of misfortune, I endure ten and you eight, claiming I exerted my utmost, reaching my limit, letting you benefit without complaint..."

Tami tribe was unaware of Wu Laoba's inner schemes.

Being sincere by nature, they saw only the surface, admiring the outsider's loyalty, daring to risk for the master, a man.

Even Tami Sect Leader Tageli was secretly astonished, unable to believe Wu Laoba, who often hoodwinked them, was so loyal...

Wu Laoba reached the platform, cautiously approached the first pillar among three thousand, reaching out to touch, immediately withdrawing, wary, on high alert.

Upon touching, a golden ring abruptly emerged from the pillar, transforming into golden light, entering Wu Laoba's body. Instantly, his cultivation dropped, nearly falling below Eternity's First Tribulation!

Wu Laoba initially showed slight alarm, post introspection, he relaxed lightly, contemplating before attempting the second pillar.

Progressively touching pillar by pillar, his cultivation fell; at the eighth pillar, his cultivation dipped to Peak of Shekong; ninth, Late Stage of Shekong; tenth, Mid Stage of Shekong...

"I endured ten Punishing Rings, cultivation restricted to Mid Stage of Shekong; if I forced, could endure three more rings... but I'm no fool, remaining rings must be left for star of misfortune!"

Wu Laoba refused any loss, externally appearing breathless, biting teeth, feigning intent to approach the eleventh pillar, yet collapsed, visibly spent and failing before reaching.

"Not good! This outsider with surname Wu faces grave punishment struggling even at eleventh ring!"

"Pitiful, lamentable! Look at his condition, clearly drained, yet still struggling to reach the eleventh Punishing Ring—how admirable!"

"Such loyalty!"

"What a display of loyalty and courage!"

Some Tamu Tribe members were worried, having quite favorable feelings towards Wu Laoba and his loyalty, naturally caring more about him.

There were also members of the Tamu Tribe who were moved to tears by Wu Laoba's struggle to rise, and secretly vowed to use him as a model to become faithful and devoted individuals.

Watching Wu Laoba crawling arduously on the Punishment Stage, Ning Fan's lips twitched slightly, secretly transmitting, "Enough acting, come back! I won't let you endure the remaining eight penalties!"

Wu Laoba was startled internally, thinking his small schemes might have been seen through by Ning Fan! He immediately sprang up from the ground, scampered down the Punishment Stage, nodding and bowing to Ning Fan, baffling the Tamu Tribe members, who couldn't understand how Wu Laoba suddenly regained his vigor and vitality.

"Still eight more penalties..."

Ning Fan ignored Wu Laoba and slowly stepped onto the Punishment Stage, just like Wu Laoba, raising his hand to touch the first golden pillar.

Upon contact, the golden pillar began to tremble slightly, a motion akin to life, and a golden ring fell from the pillar, turned into golden light, and entered his body.

Ning Fan's expression shifted slightly, searching within himself only to find that at present, a faintly elusive golden ring was clearly binding his Spirit!

This golden ring has the ability to seal a cultivator's power. Among his powers, the Calamity Blood Cultivation was the highest, and with this ring's restriction, the Calamity Blood Cultivation was significantly limited, almost dropping to the category of Zero Tribulation Celestial Venerate!

"This golden ring seems to be a type of sealing skill used by the Great Humble Ones..." Ning Fan tried to break free from the golden ring but found it extremely difficult to do so, regardless of how the Spirit changed, growing larger or smaller, the golden ring would adapt accordingly. Ordinary True Immortal methods couldn't break the golden ring. Of course, if he used his trump card techniques, he could forcibly break free, instantly restoring his cultivation, so there was no need to worry too much.

No wonder Burying Moon said not to overly worry when trapped by Punishing Ring; clearly, one can break free from this ring restriction whenever needed...

However, according to the Bei Clan's rules, anyone trapped in a Punishing Ring who forcibly breaks free will be seen as challenging the Bei Clan's prestige, triggering pursuit by the Five Emperors of the Great Da Bi. Unless necessary, after entering the Bei Clan, neither Ning Fan nor the others were to destroy the ring and restore their cultivation. The Bei Clan intended for this group of foreign cultivators to remain restricted.

"If complications arise, break the ring and restore cultivation; if not, remain docile, prioritizing the purpose of this trip at all times..."

Ning Fan made his decision, after enduring one Punishing Ring, he then accepted the remaining seven rings, thus completely limiting his Calamity Blood Cultivation, and could only display the power of Divine, Demon, and Devil Cultivation.

Physically, an immediate sense of exhaustion invaded, as Ning Fan had gradually grown accustomed to the power of Calamity Blood. Suddenly being reverted to his original cultivation naturally required a period of adjustment.

Three powers, six penalties, twelve prohibitions... Six penalties were completed, now only needing to establish three achievements to gain complete freedom within the Bei Clan.

After imposing the Punishing Rings, Emperor Lou Tuo chanted spells, transformed the altar back into horse bones, and left without bothering to chatter. Just before departing, he unwillingly clasped his hands in a respectful gesture towards Ouyang Nuan, very courteous, which surprised many Southern Frontier cultivators secretly observing, as Emperor Lou Tuo, known for his hostility towards foreign cultivators, showed such courtesy!

Emperor Bone Spirit saw Lou Tuo's inconsistency and slightly sneered, seeming to disdain Lou Tuo's conduct. As Lou Tuo left, he arrogantly walked past Ning Fan and others without looking sideways, full of Immortal Emperor pride, yet when passing Ouyang Nuan, he showed an exceptionally courteous smile, saying,

"Now that the penalties are completed, this old man shall take his leave now. Since the young friend has arrived at the Great Humble Ones, you are our honored guest. In the future, if in difficulty, you can seek help from me in the Middle State. Naturally, if this old man requires assistance later, I hope the young friend can lend some support..."

This courtesy was directed solely at Ouyang Nuan! In Emperor Bone Spirit's eyes, among these foreign cultivators, only Ouyang Nuan was worthy of his attention, the others were insignificant!

Ouyang Nuan felt uneasy; she had never been treated with such courtesy by an Immortal Emperor. Until Emperor Bone Spirit bid farewell and left, she still couldn't quite recover.

Ning Fan, however, looked a bit serious. The reason why these Bei Celestial Emperors were courteous to Ouyang Nuan seemed not solely due to the Bei Clan's respectful treatment of rare Medicine Souls...

Emperor Bone Spirit mentioned that if he needed help, he would seek Ouyang Nuan's strength... Could it be that these Bei Celestial Emperors require Five-Color Medicine Soul for something and need Ouyang Nuan's assistance?

Emperor Bone Spirit was merely courteous, whereas Emperor Lou Tuo seemed fearful... It didn't seem as simple as seeking Five-Color Medicine Soul...

"If I also reveal Five-Color Medicine Soul, perhaps I could win the attention of these Celestial Emperors, only..."

Ning Fan frowned, unable to grasp the true intentions of these Celestial Emperors. Under caution, he refrained from revealing this matter proactively.

Thus, the two Great Emperors left calmly, without Emperor Lou Tuo troubling foreign cultivators, it surprised many Southern Frontier cultivators, disappointing others who lost the opportunity to weaken the Tamu Clan.

"In this upcoming tribal competition, the Tamu Clan has Shekong Level foreign cultivators assisting, we mustn't be careless..." Some tribes that had long opposed the Tamu Clan grew wary.

"The Tamu Clan now has Shekong, they certainly won't rank last this time, which means for those tribes without Shekong, it's highly likely they'll rank last..." Some weaker Southern Frontier tribes sighed, without Tamu at the bottom, these tribes had great chances of being last, truly unfortunate.

Xianyu Chun's eyes blazed with excitement; he hadn't expected the master he admired could stand so boldly before an Immortal Emperor and withstand Emperor Lou Tuo's power... Truly worthy of being his chosen master!

Thus, as soon as the penalty ordeal was over for Ning Fan and others, Xianyu Chun eagerly hurried to the Tamu Clan to serve Ning Fan with tea and hospitality.

His father did not intervene this time; Emperor Lou Tuo's attitude towards foreign cultivators left the Shepherd Evil Tribe's Chief uncertain. Seeing Emperor Lou Tuo's courtesy towards these foreign

cultivators, letting his son associate with them might not be a bad thing after all. So he let him go, perhaps it was his fortune yet to come.

Regarding Xianyu Chun's eagerness to please, Ning Fan remained indifferent, having no intention to accept a disciple, he soon dismissed Xianyu Chun and went into seclusion for three days to gradually adapt to the sealed cultivation.

With the penalties completed, his and Wu Laoba's cultivations were sealed, now he could only display the powers of Divine, Demon, and Devil Cultivation.

The Ancient God and Ancient Demon Cultivations were both at the peak of the Initiate Realm of Shekong, with the Ancient Demon Cultivation being the strongest, just shy of advancing to the Ninth Nirvana of Heavenly Demon. Such cultivation was enough to aid the Tamu Clan in achieving good results in the Southern Frontier Clan's small competition, though whether they could claim first place in the Southern Frontier was uncertain...

There was still roughly a month before the small competition began, during which time, Ning Fan had no intention of wasting it. After completing the six penalties, he still needed to establish three achievements to exchange for true freedom within the Bei Clan.

To establish achievements, one must go to the borders of the Bei Clan's various continents' Fierce Realms, where tribal tasks could be taken.

Before the South Borderlands Small Competition begins, Ning Fan decided to journey alone to the fringes of the Southern Frontier's Fierce Realm to complete the entry tasks for everyone. According to Tageli, a foreign cultivator has to achieve three instances of human-grade military achievement points, totaling twelve for four people.

On this journey, Ning Fan brought no one else: Wu Laoba's cultivation was just sealed, needing time to adapt, unlike Ning Fan, who naturally adapted quicker being at the Shedding Void Level; Ouyang Nuan stayed in the Tamu Clan to refine the expensive pills from the ancient cultivator's cave to enhance her Medicine Soul's power; and Burying Moon also remained behind, preparing for her rebirth through Corpse Seizing.

Burying Moon's remnants were too fragmented. She planned to find a suitable body for Corpse Seizing but needed to repair her damaged spirit first. She had a unique secret technique to nurture herself during moonlit nights, leveraging the rich medicinal aura here, which Ning Fan didn't need to worry about.

Leaving the Tamu Clan, Ning Fan first visited the Saint Stone Stele. With the Tamu Clan guards withdrawn, he clandestinely attempted to collect the Saint's script, but as expected, he was unsuccessful. Given his current sealed cultivation, even if it weren't sealed, the outcome would be the same. He merely observed the Saint's script up close before departing.

Afterward, Ning Fan diverted his path towards the Fierce Realm border of the Southern Frontier Steppe.

The Inner Sanctum is composed of fragmented continents, with the outermost part of Southern Frontier Steppe adjacent to several Fierce Realm continents. These Fierce Realms are deficient in spiritual energy and overrun with fierce creatures, making them uninhabitable. Yet, because of their many opportunities, numerous Southern Frontier cultivators enjoy venturing into the Fierce Realm for training.

The Xieyang (Evil Sheep) Sect is the clan closest to the Fierce Realm continent on the Southern Frontier Steppe. Southern Frontier clan cultivators often pass through it when entering the Fierce Realm to train.

Inside the Fierce Realm are abundant Spiritual Medicines and numerous fierce creatures. Cultivators who train there generally gain something. Items they can't use themselves are mostly sold in the Xieyang Sect's market.

The Xieyang Sect also has a designated area for posting tasks that cultivators can choose to accept. Tasks include guard duties, patrols, gathering, hunting, and even some special missions.

Task levels are divided into Human, Earth, Sky, and Asura Fourth Rank. Some are issued by Southern Frontier local clans, while others are posted by clans from other continents.

Tulong is the task guard for the Xieyang Sect. Today, as usual, he yawned and lazily guarded his post. It's no wonder he was leisurely; though many cultivators venture into the Fierce Realm to train, few dare to accept tasks since even the lowest human-level tasks involve significant risks, prohibitive even for Enlightenment Old Demons...

Earth-level tasks are all assignments that can influence the Southern Frontier's clan dynamics. Their peril makes Shekong Cultivators dare not accept them lightly, though the rewards are substantial...

As for Sky-level tasks, apologies, but such high-level tasks don't exist in the Southern Frontier; one might have to go to Middle State to take on such assignments.

As for Asura-level tasks, even the might of an Immortal Emperor alone can't accomplish them, certainly not in the Southern Frontier!

As Tuolong yawned, the tent flap suddenly lifted, and a man and a woman stepped inside. Upon seeing who it was, Tuolong immediately straightened up and greeted them with an ingratiating smile,

"The two of you are here again? The wind on the steppe is strong; please sit down and have a warm cup of mare's milk tea."

"No need! We didn't come here for tea. Hmm? Is no one accepting our task yet?" The man glanced at the task scrolls hanging and frowned instantly. This man's attire was entirely different from the Dabei Clan, resembling the Four Heavens cultivators, distinguished only by the extremely broad Black Iron Greatsword on his back. Though not handsome, his face was well-defined, exuding a domineering aura from his brow, surrounded by the powerful presence of a Peak of Shekong.

Tuolong murmured the identity of this Greatsword man: Pi Xiong, a Tomb Guardian of the Holy Mountain! It's said he ranks in the top hundred among Tomb Guardians—a significant figure that a mere task guard in the small Xieyang Sect cannot afford to offend!

Seeing the Greatsword man's question, Tuolong dared not be slow and reluctantly replied, "The task you two issued is too difficult: finding ten pieces of Six-Star Nie Mother Stones... You must know, sir, how precious Nie Mother Stones are to Body Cultivation, and even for most of the fierce creatures in the Fierce Realm, they're supreme supplements, often guarded by beasts, and hard to acquire unless entered above Fourth-level Fierce Realm..."

"So until now, no one has accepted my task! Although there aren't many Late Stage of Shekong in the Southern Frontier, a few exist. The reward I offer is quite substantial, yet no one dared to join the task, claiming it's too risky... Could it be your Southern Frontier's Shekong cultivators fear getting injured

before the clan competition and dare not tread on dangerous grounds? Haha, proving once again, the Southern Frontier cultivators are indeed cowards," the Greatsword man sneered.

"If there's truly no one, then let it be. With just the two of us, it may be dangerous, but not necessarily impossible to achieve our goal!" The woman, in a short red leather skirt, with long hair touched with a faint red hue tied loosely with a Flood Dragon's Tendon, had unnaturally pale skin. There was a crimson vermilion spot on her brow, and her beautiful eyes carried a fierce air, making her seem less like a gentle woman and more like a she-wolf of the steppe.

"Fine, another ten days. If still no one takes the task, then it's dismissed!" The man snorted coldly and led the woman away, just as they were about to exit the tent, a white-robed youth pulled open the tent flap and stepped inside.

"His attire..." The red-haired woman's beautiful eyes narrowed.

The Greatsword man similarly became solemn. Such attire, different from the Dabei, could it be...

"Are you also a Tomb Guardian of the Holy Mountain?" the Greatsword man asked Ning Fan.

Based on his knowledge, within the Dabei group, the only ones wearing foreign attire besides the Tomb Guardians of the Holy Mountain were foreign cultivators...

"Tomb Guardian of the Holy Mountain? What's that?" Ning Fan was puzzled; he'd just arrived at the Xieyang Sect task location, and someone was already asking odd questions.

Being attentive, he naturally remembered this novel term, thinking it must be a title from a certain clan or sect of the Dabei group, intending to inquire, but the Greatsword man showed arrogance upon receiving his answer.

"So you are a foreign cultivator, hmm!"

Upon learning Ning Fan was a foreign cultivator, the Greatsword man left without any intent to probe Ning Fan's cultivation and opened the tent flap to leave.

The red-haired woman, however, took a deep look at Ning Fan, but with just one glance, she too left disappointedly.

The Greatsword man harbored animosity toward Ning Fan's race, while the red-haired woman was more open-minded yet equally disappointed in Ning Fan's cultivation.

"His aura is rather discreet, but it appears to be at the peak of the Initiate Realm of Shekong..." The red-haired woman didn't pinpoint Ning Fan's exact cultivation and regrettably left.

If Ning Fan's cultivation were higher, she wouldn't mind Ning Fan's race and would have considered inviting Ning Fan to venture into the Fourth-level Fierce Realm to seek Nie Mother Stones, especially since the Southern Frontier Small Competition was approaching and having a Shekong cultivator present was rare. Unfortunately, as the other party didn't even have Mid Stage of Shekong cultivation, bringing him would be a burden, better not to include...

Come to think of it, this person, as a foreign cultivator, is likely one of the entrants when the Holy Domain opened. The Shekong cultivation he exhibits—is it from before or after the provisions were imposed... If it's the latter, his original cultivation must have been exceedingly high.

Yet even if he was an external Immortal Venerable, he wouldn't count for much more than a local Shekong in the eyes of the locals, so upon exiting the tent, the red-haired woman forgot Ning Fan entirely.

"I wonder, what does that Tomb Guardian of the Holy Mountain refer to..."

Ning Fan also put the two people behind him as he stepped into the tent and approached the task guard, saying, "I'm here to take on a task."

"You're a foreign cultivator?" Tuolong lazily dug in his ear with an indifferent attitude.

A foreign cultivator, are they really so impressive? In the eyes of the Great Humble Ones, they are no different from cows and sheep, of course, if foreign cultivators are strong enough, they would certainly merit a warm reception from Tuolong.

Unfortunately, Tuolong's cultivation is too weak to see through Ning Fan's realm at this moment.

"Yes, I'm here today to complete the three tasks mission."

"Three tasks mission? The tasks here are at the human level, just pick any three to do." Tuolong had no interest in Ning Fan, thinking how come there's another foreign cultivator entering the Southern Frontier Steppe. The Holy Domain that opens once every ten thousand years never has too many slots for outside cultivators, and those daring to enter its inner sanctum are even fewer... This person, I wonder which tribe he has joined. Speaking of this, it wasn't long ago that two Eternal Immortal Venerables joined the Tamu clan, sigh, the Tamu clan's luck is indeed extraordinary, to have Immortal Venerable outsiders joining. This time in the Southern Frontier competition, they won't be at the bottom. I heard the Young Sect Leader even holds one of the Immortal Venerables in great esteem and wishes to take him as a master...

Wait! Could this person be one of the four outsiders of the Tamu clan?

Tuolong had been guarding the task area for years, not knowing much about the information on outsiders, only aware of the two men and two women. Both male Immortal Venerables are men...

Could this person be the Tamu Immortal Venerable!

Tuolong shivered, then shook his head in self-mockery, thinking no, no, if this person was indeed an outsider Immortal Venerable, he would surely have an Immortal Venerable's pride. Just now, the two Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians treated Ning Fan with some disregard, yet Ning Fan wasn't angry. If he were truly an Immortal Venerable, even as an outsider, he should have a stronger character, there would be some dissatisfaction!

"This person mustn't be the Tamu clan's Immortal Venerable. I, Tuolong, have seen countless people, and never seen such fair-skinned Immortal Venerables." Tuolong touched his own exposed, black and thick chest muscles, glanced at Ning Fan, clicking his tongue regretfully, feeling pity for Ning Fan's lack of manliness.

Ning Fan was filled with black lines, first two inexplicable men and women, followed by a chest-touching guard... Are all Dabei clan cultivators so inexplicable?

It was rumored that the minds of Great Humble Ones were mostly problematic, uncertain about the previous pair, but this chest-touching guard was probably not a normal person...

His gaze swept over the hanging tasks, Ning Fan nodded frequently. There were a total of 77 human-level tasks here, some involved finding Spirit Medicine over five million years old, others involved hunting Fate Immortals and Enlightenment fierce beasts, and some were patrol, guard tasks, like guarding Spirit Ore veins in level one fierce realms or patrolling Fire Valley in level two fierce realms... These guarding tasks mostly have a century duration, extremely time-consuming, Ning Fan naturally wouldn't undertake them.

Excluding these guard tasks, there were still 51 human-level tasks available to take. For Ning Fan possessing the Treasure-searching Compass, even with strong interference in the Holy Domain's inner sanctum, he could use the Treasure-searching Compass to find heavenly treasures in small areas, making the medicine-seeking tasks very easy, and hunting tasks posed no difficulty, he could complete them with a wave of his hand.

Compared to these simple tasks, the task rewards were very generous!

The rewards for human-level tasks were basically Medicine Soul Stones! And any random human-level task had rewards over ten thousand pieces!

Originally, Ning Fan only needed to complete 12 human-level tasks to achieve the three tasks mission, but now, wanting all the Medicine Soul Stone rewards, he didn't mind completing all the simple tasks that he could easily handle...

Hmm? Earth-level tasks aren't difficult either? Hunting beasts at the Initiate Realm of Shekong, finding Corpse Master's corpse pills at the Mid Stage of Shekong, finding ten pieces of Six-Star Nie Mother Stone...

"If the task undertaken can't be completed, is there a penalty?" Ning Fan asked.

"No!" Tuolong shook his head and sighed. This person certainly can't be an Immortal Venerable, if he were, would completing human-level tasks still fear inability to avoid punishment?

"Since there is no penalty... aside from the guard-type tasks, make a copy of all remaining human-level and earth-level tasks for me."

"Wha... what!"

Tulong was astounded.

This person was either joking or... had extremely terrifying cultivation, able to complete all tasks here at once!

"May I ask which clan you are from? This needs to be registered." Tulong swallowed, asked after making copies of all tasks.

"Tamu clan."

Ning Fan responded, took the task copies, and walked out of the tent, flying into the sky, toward the nearest Fiendish Domain Continent.

Tulong sucked in cold air, still able to guess the person's identity. Reflecting on the previous cold treatment, he grew anxious, if this person was indeed the Tamu clan Immortal Venerable, not just his cultivation deserved reverence, his other identity demanded even greater respect!

Could this person be the one the Young Sect Leader wishes to take as a master!

If the Young Sect Leader were to know I slighted his master, would he flay me alive!

"Hiss! Forgot to give this person a positioning compass! The fierce realm's magnetic forces are unusual enough to limit spirit sense, without a compass, even with profound cultivation, it's dangerous. If accidentally entering a high-level fierce realm... it might be a one-way trip..."

Tulong gritted his teeth, eventually deciding to report this matter to the Young Sect Leader.

Ning Fan certainly wouldn't care about a mere Tuolong. Upon entering the Fiendish Domain Continent, he discovered the bizarre magnetic interference, limiting the spread of his spirit sense.

But it didn't matter, his Heaven Prying Rain Technique was strong enough, the Treasure-searching Compass was mysterious, even under restrictions, he wouldn't be heavily limited, still able to move freely here without losing his way.

And unexpectedly, as soon as he entered this Fiendish Domain Continent, he found something that sparked a slight interest.

It was an hidden vein localized by the Treasure-searching Compass!

"Is this a... Nie Mother Stone? The quality isn't high, should be a defective piece among the one-star series... but this quantity is excessively substantial."

Ning Fan stood outside a Nie Mother Stone vein, his gaze slightly focused. If his perception was correct, in this unique Great Humble Ones ore, there was an exceptionally pure Body Refinement power, enough to enhance the realm of body cultivation...

His Ancient Demon Cultivation had reached the peak of the Eighth Nirvana of the Heavenly Demon, merely a step away from the Ninth Nirvana. If absorbing the Nie Mother Stone here, could it perhaps break through to the Ninth Nirvana of Heavenly Demon...

Roar!

Yet it was a series of strange roars carried by a yin wind, suddenly emanating from the mine tunnel...

Chapter 1002: Muddy Waters

The Yin wind carried a putrid smell, vaguely toxic enough to harm some Void Fragmentation cultivators, but naturally unable to hurt Ning Fan.

The rattling sound of iron chains followed, and then burst out over a dozen Corpse demons with bluish, hardened skin, their limbs shackled by chains made from extraordinary ore material, though long rusted and broken, indicating their great antiquity.

"Yet more of these Corpse demons..."

These Corpse demons were nearly identical to the ones used in battles between the Tamu Clan and the Evil Sheep Sect, all demonized after the death of Masters poisoned by expensive pills. The only difference here was the eerie trace of faint Buddha Light on the Corpse demons in this mine.

Ning Fan keenly noticed that this Buddha Light was not due to any Cultivation Technique practiced by the Corpse demons while alive, but was a result of absorbing the Body Refinement power of Nirvana Mother Ore in this mine.

During his time in the Tamu Clan, Ning Fan briefly studied their script, and with the Master's photographic memory, he may not be too proficient, but it suffices to understand the ancient texts of the Dabei Clan.

He had perused the classics of the Tamu Clan and recognized many Spiritual Medicines and ores unique to them, naturally gaining some understanding of Nirvana Mother Stone. In the Dabei Clan, Nirvana Mother Stones were among the scarce Body Refinement materials, containing a Body Refinement power known as Nirvana Mother Qi, which could even be used to cultivate various Buddha cultivators' Divine Skills.

Thus, it wasn't hard to fathom why these Corpse demons bore faint Buddha Light.

Corpse demons in this mine didn't possess high cultivations, most were only in the Void Refinement or Void Fragmentation realm. Ning Fan opened his mouth and spewed out Black Dragon evil fire, incinerating all Corpse demons into ashes entirely. After his cultivation weakened, Ning Fan's current mana couldn't wield the heavy Reverse Sea Sword of seven stars! So, the Eleven-Flavor Demonic Fire had become his ordinary attack method.

Having eradicated the Corpse demons, Ning Fan stepped into the mine, a hidden mine within a spatial Formation in a first-level Fierce Domain. Even Shedding Void Stage cultivators passing by couldn't necessarily discover this ore vein, but it naturally couldn't escape Ning Fan's discerning eyes.

The Treasure-searching Compass showed an extremely dense cluster of light points, heralding the tremendous reserve of Nirvana Mother Stones here. According to Ning Fan's estimation, with the completion of mining, at least ten thousand pieces of one-star Nirvana Mother Stone could be harvested from here.

One star is the lowest rank of Nirvana Mother Stone; the quality of this vein is not too high. Occasionally, there are some two-star Nirvana Mother Stones, but they are never too many.

Mining stones is extremely time-consuming; naturally, Ning Fan didn't plan to waste time here but directly approached deeper into the mine, crouched down, placed a palm on the uneven icy ground, and began directly absorbing the Nirvana Mother Qi from this vein! Such a direct and brutal act might inflict irreversible damage to this ore vein, but Ning Fan wasn't concerned about that.

One breath, two breaths, three breaths... cracks began to form in the mine's stone walls, and then weathered, and after a hundred breaths, they collapsed with a roar.

Disappointed, Ning Fan emerged from the ruins of the mine; even after absorbing the Mother Qi of over ten thousand pieces of one-star Nirvana Mother Stone, it barely advanced his Ancient Demon's refined Body Cultivation a minuscule amount, still failing to break into the Ninth Nirvana of Heavenly Demon, quite regrettable.

It's known that the Mother Qi of over ten thousand pieces of one-star Nirvana Mother Stone is enough to create a Fate Immortal level Body Cultivator, yet it still wasn't enough for Ning Fan to break into the Ninth Nirvana of Heavenly Demon, showing how extraordinarily difficult it is.

"Enough, if one ore vein isn't sufficient, I can absorb others, I'll eventually break through the Ninth Nirvana. With my Treasure-searching Compass in hand, as long as there are other hidden ore veins in this Fierce Domain, they won't escape my search..."

Leaving this mine, Ning Fan continued manipulating the Compass, seeking treasure, hunting beasts in the first-level Fierce Domain. Fierce Domain Continent is divided by danger level into ten levels, with level one being the weakest, naturally explored by many, and what's visible has mostly been plundered, yet Ning Fan, utilizing the Compass's power, still found a few hidden spots, discovering plenty of Spiritual Medicine, Immortal Material, and even an obscure Buddha cave, an ancient Buddha cultivator's cave abode left here.

Inside were recorded texts, now Ning Fan could understand these writings. Among them, he discovered some intriguing matters.

Such as "... Holy Mountain wager, undecipherable triumph, ancient stone seated, ten thousand chants decayed..." phrases.

Or "... Saint's soul dispersed, mountain changed by legacy, containing secret pills. Those who deservingly open the mountain get the pills, those undeserving enter the tomb without a path..."

Several texts mentioned "Holy Mountain." According to these writings, the Dabei Clan has a sanctuary named Holy Mountain, transformed by a Saint's leftover will. Within the mountain are hidden valuable pills, all forged by the Saint during their lifetime, extraordinary...

These texts naturally prompted Ning Fan to recall what the giant sword man said about the Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians; Holy Mountain is the sacred ground of the Dabei Clan, yet not everyone within the clan knows of its existence. At least the Tamu Clan's cultivators know not what Holy Mountain is, perhaps Tageli knows, yet he hadn't shared with Ning Fan, presumably keeping clan secrets...

However, concerning Ning Fan, secrets of Holy Mountain weren't of his interest. His primary concern was seeking the Jiuli Ritual Vessel. These texts indeed contained records about the offering vessels, surprising Ning Fan.

"... After the Saint's death, the legacy transformed into the mountain, the good corpse sought various tribal offering vessels to dedicate them to their master. The evil corpse stole all the vessels, wanting to ruin Holy Mountain but unable to enter, ultimately agreeing to a wager, dividing realms for governance..."

The writings state that the Herb-gathering Sage cultivated Good and Evil Corpses before ascending to Saint through slaying three bodies. After the Saint's death, Good and Evil Corpses quarreled, the Good Corpse sought numerous tribal offering vessels hoping to dedicate the Herb-gathering Sage, but the Evil Corpse seized all vessels, refusing to let the Saint receive dedication after death...

According to the texts, the so-called tenth-level Fierce Domain was the land of the Saint's Evil Corpse, while the Dabei Clan and Holy Mountain were territories of the Good Corpse...

Ning Fan slightly furrowed his brow; the tenth-level Fierce Domain was the land of the Saint's Evil Corpse, the offering vessels sought by the Good Corpse mostly snatched by the Evil Corpse; if among the seized offering vessels lies the Jiuli Ritual Vessel, then is the weapon of the Jiuli Clan truly within the Evil Corpse's land — the tenth-level Fierce Domain?

Furthermore, after the Saint's death, did their Good and Evil Corpses persist to this day, or have they vanished amidst the eternal stream of time? Should they still live, then this Dabei Clan, tenth-level Fierce Domain, might well be extraordinary, with the presence of Good and Evil Corpses of a Saint... It's not an impossible notion.

Thinking of the Immortal Emperor slaying Good and Evil Corpses, possessing powers of Ancient Great Cultivators respectively, the Herb-gathering Sage's Good and Evil Corpses, if truly alive today, perhaps wouldn't be weaker than the Immortal Emperor's Good and Evil Corpses...

"These ancient symbols are ultimately limited. To truly locate the Offering Vessel of Ancient Demons, I still need to gather more intelligence. Fortunately, I have plenty of Medicine Soul Stones, and once I complete the task here, I'll have even more. This way, I can stay at the Supreme Pill Sacred Domain for much longer..."

With Ning Fan's cultivation, it didn't take long for him to plunder an entire first-level Fierce Domain Continent. Then he moved on to loot some nearby first-level continents before venturing deeper into the second-level Fierce Domain.

Occasionally, he would encounter some Dabei Cultivators training in the Fierce Domain, but Ning Fan bypassed them without a word.

The good stuff in the lower-grade Fierce Domains is sparse. It was already rare to find a low-grade Nirvana Mother Ore vein earlier, and he found no more hidden veins after that. The visible veins he did find had already been mined, with not much Nirvana Mother Stone left, and all of poor quality. Ning Fan also scoured more than ten second and third-level continents without finding many hidden places. The secretive Ancient Cultivator's Cave Abodes he occasionally entered were already emptied... However, he did complete quite a few tasks along the way.

Of the 51 Human-rank Missions, he had completed 47, and of the 11 Earth-rank Missions, he had completed 4.

Most of the remaining tasks required entry into the Fierce Domains above the fourth level to be completed. For Shekong Cultivators, the fourth-level Fierce Domains were already extremely dangerous. There were few who dared to enter on the Southern Frontier Steppe.

Ning Fan was naturally unafraid. With his skills, he was far beyond mere Shekong Cultivators. Upon entering the fourth-level Fierce Domain, the Treasure-searching Compass immediately displayed several secretive glowing spots. Evidently, the higher the level of the Fierce Domain, the more undiscovered secret places there are, and the more hidden treasures await...

As soon as he stepped into a fourth-level Fierce Domain, he was locked onto by several aggressive auras. It wasn't the local Fierce Beasts or Corpses that targeted him, but living people.

Soon, four black dots swiftly flew over from the horizon, landing around Ning Fan. These four were dressed in a bizarre fashion, different from the nomadic attire of the Dabei clan, and unlike the outsider's outfit of the Giant Sword Man; they wore black armor suffused with Demonic Qi. Though their cultivations were not particularly high, all at the Enlightenment level, the four Black Armored Cultivators seemed to instill considerable fear in the local Fierce Beasts and Corpses alike, deterring them from making any moves.

"Are you a Tomb Guardian of the Holy Mountain, or an outsider?"

The four black guards noticed Ning Fan's outsider attire and immediately asked in a somber tone, with killing intent subtly revealing itself, suggesting that they would attack if Ning Fan answered incorrectly.

Ning Fan was not afraid of the four Enlightenment-level cultivators and replied calmly, "I am an outsider."

Though he had friendly intentions towards the Dabei clan, if these cultivators attacked him, he would retaliate. With his skills, he could silently eliminate four Enlightenment-level Dabei cultivators in this desolate area, leaving no trace of consequence.

"Ah, an outsider," remarked the four Black Armored Cultivators, their killing intent subsiding. It seemed only if Ning Fan answered as a Tomb Guardian they would attack.

Though their tone held a tinge of disdain towards outsiders.

One of the cultivators took out a bone Magic Artifact to confirm that Ning Fan indeed had the Punishing Ring within him. They no longer paid him heed and turned to leave.

Ning Fan frowned slightly, it seemed these four Black Armored Cultivators were not from the Dabei clan...

After the four left, Ning Fan began searching this fourth-level continent, completing small tasks casually while continuing to search for Nirvana Mother Ore veins.

He did, in fact, find a Two-Star Nirvana Mother Stone vein, although it wasn't large, containing about a thousand pieces. As before, Ning Fan absorbed all the Nirvana Mother Qi from the vein, but to his disappointment, it wasn't enough to break through to the Nine Nirvana Heavenly Demon.

The root of the issue was that the Two-Star Nirvana Mother Stone was too low-grade.

Ning Fan continued to scour the other fourth-level Fierce Domain continents. During this time, he discovered three more hidden veins, two Three-Star veins, and one Four-Star vein.

Having drained these veins, Ning Fan found his bottleneck for the Heavenly Demon Nine Nirvanas had loosened. He was nearly ready to break through, but something still felt missing, something crucial...

"Just a bit more...this is something beyond just cultivation..."

After some thought, Ning Fan decided to continue searching the fourth-level continents for Nirvana Mother Ore veins. During this period, two more groups of Black Armored Cultivators questioned him, leaving promptly upon learning he was not a Tomb Guardian of the Holy Mountain.

Ning Fan had nearly scoured all the fourth-level continents near the Southern Frontier Steppe, finding no more ore veins.

Just as Ning Fan was about to decide to venture deeper into a fifth-level Fierce Domain continent, the Compass reacted violently over a particular fourth-level continent.

"What is this..."

Ning Fan's eyes lit up.

This particular fourth-level continent harbored a Nirvana Mother Stone vein, and its grade was not low at all. By Ning Fan's estimation, it was at least a Five-Star vein, possibly containing even some Six-Star Ore Stones!

"Speaking of which, I happen to have an Earth-rank Mission requiring ten Six-Star Nirvana Mother Stones..."

Ning Fan reviewed the Earth-rank Mission subsection, musing over it. Ten Six-Star Nirvana Mother Stones greatly aid in Body Refinement, but the task's rewards were also quite generous. For Earth-rank and above missions, the reward was often not Medicine Soul Stones, but this particular mission's reward was a stalk of Innate Soul-Nourishing Spiritual Medicine!

And it's something Ning Fan hadn't obtained yet!

An Earth-rank mission, the reward turned out to be Innate Spiritual Medicine, which should be said to be very generous. This indicates the person issuing the mission has a significant background, can easily produce Innate Spiritual Medicine, and desires the Six-Star Nirvana Mother Stone greatly, otherwise such a reward wouldn't be offered...

However, it's regrettable that the tribal competition is approaching, and this task is extremely dangerous. The Shekong cultivators of the Southern Frontier Steppe dare not take risks for Innate Spiritual Medicine...

According to the understanding of the Dabei people, Six-Star Nirvana Mother Stones are often guarded by extremely fierce creatures, even Shattered Thought cultivators find it difficult to obtain them. Although the task offers high returns, the risks are equally high, and one careless step can lead to demise...

Even that self-assured Giant Sword man firmly believes that without the cooperation of three Late Stage or Peak Shekong cultivators, obtaining the Six-Star Nirvana Mother Stone in this area is impossible...

"This task is not bad, thus obtaining six different types of Innate Soul-Nourishing Spiritual Medicines..."

Ning Fan raised his hand to tear open the spatial formation at this location, entering a hidden space inside. The space was heavily filled with Yin energy, still being a mine but the entire mountain was sealed within this space.

Outside the mine, there were many bones, some wearing nomadic attire, and others dressed as foreign cultivators. They were bones from many years ago, crumbling into dust upon touch...

"The Yin energy here is heavy, but the strange thing is, this mine seems unlike other mines I've seen, there's no Corpse occupying it... no, it's not having no Corpse, rather the Corpse here is extremely good at hiding!"

Shattered Thought Early Stage...

With Ning Fan's Rain Technique perception, he directly sensed the Corpse's cultivation level here. Just as he was about to sense the hidden position of the Corpse, a sudden Yin wind inexplicably appeared from behind.

Having walked from the mountain of corpses and bloody mist, Ning Fan's reaction is exceptionally swift. Before the shadow behind could assault him, his body transformed into a beam of golden light, instantly leaping, appearing a hundred steps away in a flash, easily avoiding the sneak attack.

Clacking, clacking, clacking...

The one sneak attacking Ning Fan was a plump Corpse, with every movement, the chains on its body collide, making sounds.

This Corpse was expressionless with no emotions, missed its strike, directly pouncing towards Ning Fan head-on.

Ning Fan wasn't flustered, opened his mouth and spat out the Twelve-Flavor Demonic Fire, causing the entire space to echo with the sound of wind and thunder. Under the extension of the demonic fire, it turned into a vast sea of fire, swallowing the Corpse within.

The Corpse had extremely low spirit awareness, did not evade, let the demonic fire burn completely, suddenly emitted ten thousand rays of Buddha Light, astonishingly withstanding the damage of the demonic fire, explosively charged out from within the sea of fire.

This was somewhat impressive!

Although due to Ning Fan's limited cultivation, the power of the demonic fire was greatly reduced, that was still the Twelve-Flavor Demonic Fire, a high-ranked one, not a mere Shattered Thought Early Stage could easily withstand. But this Corpse simply with the addition of Buddha Light, directly resisted the demonic fire with its physical body without damage, which sufficiently proved its terrifying physical body.

The Corpse's cultivation level, even though it hasn't entered the Mid-Phase Shattered Thought, it's probably not much different!

As soon as the Corpse got close, it immediately fiercely swung a punch, the power of a punch instantly shook the heavens and earth, causing the entire space to become unstable. Ning Fan was not afraid, he was a half-step into the Ninth Nirvana of Heavenly Demon Ancient Demon, if the opponent wants a physical confrontation, why should he fear!

Bang!

A punch collided, emitting the sound of metal clashing, sufficiently indicating the toughness of the two sides' physical bodies. A strong force spread, Ning Fan retreated ten steps, the Corpse similarly retreated ten steps.

Relying on the protection of Buddha Light, the punch colliding, the Corpse almost wasn't damaged, yet Ning Fan's fist bone was shattered. In terms of physical strength, Ning Fan was comparable to this Corpse, but the Corpse's Buddha Light Divine Skills were very formidable, otherwise, the Corpse should also suffer some injuries.

Fortunately, on Ning Fan's fists, black fire burnt instantly, within the black fire, the injured wounds were almost instantly healed, and he once again collided fists with the Corpse!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Ning Fan wasn't unable to take out a more powerful trump card, to instantly kill the Corpse here, it's just that after all, he was an Ancient Demon, having the pride of an Ancient Demon in his bones. When the physical gap isn't large, if he can't rely on his Ancient Demon body to oppress the opponent, he wouldn't be a true Ancient Demon!

Moreover, in this series of collisions, Ning Fan unexpectedly discovered, the difficulty with breaking through the Ninth Nirvana Heavenly Demon was always just lacking a bit, was gradually filling.

"So this is it..." Ning Fan had an epiphany.

The Ancient Demon lineage loves slaughter, is natural war fanatics, what he lacks isn't the gap in cultivation level, but the necessity to breakthrough in combat.

This breakthrough must not rely on external forces but requires fighting with one's physical body to sharpen, to open this last bottleneck!

So even though Ning Fan had more powerful means to eliminate the Corpse, he was not in a hurry. Instead, he chose to engage in hand-to-hand combat with the Corpse here, fighting until the space shattered. Ning Fan even forgot that his original purpose for coming to this space was to collect the Five-Star and Six-Star Nirvana Mother Stones.

This battle lasted three days. During these three days, his Ancient Demon Bloodline seemed to burn, and he could feel each day bringing him closer to the Nine Nirvana Heavenly Demon realm.

Although the Corpse's defense was strong, ultimately, in the fierce battle, its wounds gradually worsened. Ning Fan, on the other hand, every time he was injured, was rejuvenated through the flames. Consequently, as the Corpse became more seriously wounded, Ning Fan maintained his full strength. With this balance swinging in his favor, Ning Fan eventually used his physical body alone to kill the Corpse!

And at the moment of killing the Corpse, Ning Fan completely broke through to the Ninth Nirvana of the Heavenly Demon!

Defeating an early-phase Shattered Thought isn't a major event for Ning Fan anymore, but to do so using only his Ancient Demon Body, without using his Calamity Blood Cultivation, without resorting to any magical treasure, without the power of Divine, Demon, and Magic Yin and Yang's traces of Dao laws, was a rare achievement.

"So this is the power of the Ninth Nirvana of the Heavenly Demon!"

With the breakthrough naturally achieved, Ning Fan felt a terrifying increase in his physical body's strength. If, before the breakthrough, it took him three days of hard battle to defeat the Corpse, after the breakthrough, he had the confidence to solve it within two hours!

Once the battle ended, he only realized in hindsight that he had actually shattered the space here. The previously intact ore mountain had long since fragmented, with debris floating in the dark void...

This saved him the trouble of mining.

From the countless fragments, Ning Fan selected ten pieces of Six-Star Nirvana Mother Stones and collected them, while all the other ores were taken for refining and absorption.

Because the quality of the Nirvana Mother Stones here was high, refining them took quite a lot of time. It took over twenty days to complete the refinement. The effects were also quite noticeable. Supported

by the Nirvana Mother Qi, Ning Fan not only stabilized the Ninth Nirvana of the Heavenly Demon's cultivation but also slightly advanced his Ancient Demon cultivation, nearly making a one percent progress toward the Tenth Nirvana.

This progress was very significant, considering that an ordinary ancient demon would require over ten thousand years of rigorous cultivation to achieve such an advancement. This demonstrates just how helpful the Nirvana Mother Stones from the Dabei clan are for body cultivation.

Having witnessed the effects of the higher-grade Nirvana Mother Stones, Ning Fan was quite eager to find other Nirvana Mother ore veins. Unfortunately, this trip took too long, and the time for the Southern Frontier competition was approaching. He could no longer afford to waste time here. Moreover, the Southern Frontier is too small; the highest Fierce Domain here is only fourth level, with no higher-grade ones. Ning Fan had already explored all the Fierce Domains below fourth level...

Another issue was that the Fierce Domain levels near the Southern Frontier were too low, with no innate spiritual medicine, let alone soul-nourishing innate spiritual medicine. This left Ning Fan somewhat helpless.

"When time permits, I'll enter higher-grade Fierce Domains elsewhere..."

Ning Fan stood up from the void, deciding to leave this ore vein space, though doing so proved a bit troublesome.

The magnetic force of the Fiendish Domain Continent was very peculiar, making it extremely difficult to pinpoint former coordinates from the endless void after some hidden spaces shattered, effectively making it hard to return to the outside world, and naturally, for the outside world to find a way in.

Fortunately, Ning Fan had the Treasure-searching Compass, which detects everything above and below ground. After some effort, he identified the spatial intersection point and finally managed to leave this broken space.

Yet, upon exiting to the outside world, Ning Fan immediately discovered that two groups were fighting nearby, and the surrounding space was completely sealed, allowing entry but not exit!

On one side of the fight were the Giant Sword Man and Red-haired Woman he'd seen in the Evil Sheep Sect, while on the other were dozens of murderous Black Armored Cultivators, besieging the pair.

The Black Armored Cultivators were all at least Transcendent True Immortals in cultivation, with three at the peak of Shekong. Meanwhile, both the Giant Sword Man and the Red-haired Woman were at the Peak of Shekong, each seriously injured. They were clearly being besieged by the Black Armored Cultivators and, due to the surrounding space being sealed, couldn't even escape. They had been fighting desperately here for days.

Ning Fan's sudden appearance surprised the Black Armored Cultivators, while the Red-haired Woman showed a look of desperation, immediately changing direction to flee toward Ning Fan, deliberately calling out,

"Junior Brother Ning! As fellow Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians, come and help Senior Sister kill the Sanyan Armor Guards and earn merit!" She shouted while fleeing, even directly escaping to Ning Fan's back!

The Red-haired Woman's shouting and dodging directly brought Ning Fan into the Black Armored Cultivators' killing intent.

"Hmph, is this one also a Holy Mountain Tomb Guardian? Kill him!"

Instantly, several Black Armored Cultivators shifted direction, attacking Ning Fan, not giving him a chance to explain.

Ning Fan's gaze slightly cooled. Before he could understand the situation, it seemed this red-haired woman had dragged him into troubled waters!

"I'm called Duolan, the daughter of the Immortal Emperor of the Holy Mountain. I know you're a Tamu Outsider! If you save me, I will reward you handsomely!"

Duolan gritted her silver teeth; if it weren't a matter of life and death, with her proud nature, she would definitely disdain to humble herself and ask for help...

## Chapter 1003: Refusal to Save

Duolan... Celestial Emperor's daughter... Holy Mountain Guardians... Three Flame Armor Guards...

Ning Fan's gaze flickered slightly. From the moment this woman asked for help to when she hid behind him, she uttered only two sentences, but those few words contained a lot of information.

This woman knew he was a Tamu Outsider Cultivator, behind her was the faction of Holy Mountain Guardians, and she seemed to have an Immortal Emperor background...

As for the identity of those black guards, they were the Three Flame Armor Guards. This term was unfamiliar, and it was the first time Ning Fan heard it after entering the Dabei Clan. However, it was not the first time he had encountered the Three Flame Armor Guards; he had met them several times before and had vaguely noticed that these Three Flame Armor Guards harbored deep hostility towards the so-called Holy Mountain Guardians.... If there were no surprises, the Three Flame Armor Guards and the Holy Mountain Guardians were likely enemies!

Initially, Ning Fan did not intend to offend either side when he first entered Dabei, as he was unclear about the specifics of the Holy Mountain and the Three Flame. Even if that red-haired woman had intentions of dragging him into turbulent waters, that would depend on his willingness or not!

Seeing several Three Flame Armor Guards closing in, Ning Fan retreated while avoiding their attacks and calmly explained,

"I am an outsider cultivator from the Tamu Clan, not a Holy Mountain Guardian. I don't know these two, nor do I have any intention of getting involved in your conflict."

During the retreat, he naturally left Duolan, who was seeking shelter, behind, without the slightest intent to rescue her.

Seeing Ning Fan abandon her and unwilling to help, Duolan was shocked and angry. If she were within the Holy Mountain, her beauty could almost guarantee aid from many men; the man before her was cold, ignoring her beauty!

What a man who doesn't know how to pity a flower or cherish jade!

At this moment, her mana was nearly exhausted, and even facing Truth-Transcending level attacks posed great danger. Clenching her teeth, she disregarded her warm face meeting a cold shoulder and closely followed Ning Fan in retreat, carefully avoiding being surrounded by the black guards again. Inside, she sneered at Ning Fan, her heart was full of disdain!

This person is unworthy of being the Eternal Immortal Venerable! Even if his cultivations are sealed, he need not fear several Truth-Transcending and Shedding Void, should he not easily save this beauty in distress? But he was unwilling to help; if not due to inadequate ability, then it was extreme timidity! Of course, it's also possible this person is extremely cautious and unwilling to meddle in Holy Mountain and Three Flame's disputes lightly. Does this person not know that to stand firm in Dabei as a foreign cultivator, one must choose between these two factions? Neutrality is impossible!

Thinking like this, while hiding behind Ning Fan, Duolan intentionally misled the black guards' judgment,

"Is my brother still blaming his sister? Why not admit your identity as a Guardian? Or is my brother so afraid of the Three Flame Armor Guards that he's only thinking about escaping and not saving his sister?"

She made up her mind to drag Ning Fan into these troubled waters! Hmph, wanting neutrality? Let's see if I'm Duolan agrees!

Upon hearing this, the black guards coldly laughed and ignored Ning Fan's explanation. With murderous divine skills and magical treasures, they continued to attack Ning Fan.

Ning Fan glared fiercely at Duolan and explained again to the black guards, "I am indeed not a Holy Mountain Guardian. If you don't believe, you can examine the Punishing Ring within me! Do not kill the wrong person!"

Only one or two black guards slowed their attack, seemingly wanting to verify the Punishing Ring's authenticity, but most of the black guards became even more aggressive. Some even laughed coldly and said,

"Hmph, just a mere outsider! What if we kill wrongly? It's no different from wrongly killing cattle, sheep, or pigs! No need for the hassle of verifying your Punishing Ring!"

"This person may not be unrelated to the Holy Mountain Guardians; three words and two sentences aren't enough to clear ties!"

"Quickly kill this person, and we will make achievements with his head!"

"Even if this person is not a Guardian, he's likely closely related to Duolan! We absolutely cannot let him go!"

The arrogance in several black guards' attitudes made Ning Fan's expression turn cold. Today's event seemed that no matter how he explained, he would be dragged into this turbulent water!

All because of that woman named Duolan!

"I do not wish to make enemies of you all; must you insist on taking action?" Ning Fan's tone was somewhat cold.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

His answer was the frenzied attack akin to hyenas from the black guards! These people decided, if they must kill three thousand wrongly today, they would not let Ning Fan escape!

In this light, Ning Fan was too lazy to argue with these black guards any further.

Though he was mindful of befriending the Dabei Clan, if the opposition pressed him further, it would be another matter entirely. Though he disliked being used as a pawn, seeing the current circumstances, avoiding it was no longer possible!

This place is located in the Fierce Realm, extremely remote. As long as he cleans up the traces and clears cause and effect, who would know he killed the Sanyan Guards? He might not necessarily become enemies with the Dabei Clan.

Several black guards saw Ning Fan did not dare to fight back, their arrogance grew wilder, just as they wanted to attack again, suddenly their expressions changed drastically!

They saw a cold glint in Ning Fan's eyes, he no longer retreated, nor did he evade, letting the divine power treasures hit his body, instantly engulfed in a dazzling light.

"This person must be crazy, daring to take on our attacks directly..."

A black guard snorted disdainfully, but in the next moment, his disdain turned into shock, then into fear.

Yet they saw a figure slowly emerge from the blinding light, completely ignoring everyone's attacks, and no attack could break through his physical defense. His physical strength gave several Enlightenment Masters a shocking feeling.

This is the might of the Nine Nirvana Heavenly Demon! Ordinary Enlightenment attacks can hardly break through his physical defense!

Ning Fan's figure flickered, appearing in front of a black guard, his speed not fully unleashed, but to the eyes of a mere Enlightenment black guard, it already resembled a ghost. That black guard couldn't even react before Ning Fan's fist slammed into his chest!

Under the immense force, his protective black armor shattered almost instantly. This collapse wasn't a simple breakdown, but a destruction on the level of rules! Subsequently, even his body exploded into a mist of blood in an instant, shattered beyond any repair, dead with no way for his Spirit to escape!

"Such a terrifying physique, just a casual punch from him is even more powerful than many Acquired Treasures!"

The other few Enlightenment black guards were greatly shocked, immediately retreating. How could they not know Ning Fan is a hard nut, unbeatable by mere Enlightenment Masters? Unfortunately, now thinking of retreat is a bit too late.

But seeing Ning Fan's figure flicker and disappear, almost at the same moment, several hastily retreating Enlightenment black guards felt a chill down their spines, a black shadow flashed before their eyes, but no one could see the shadow's movement clearly, couldn't even react before they were struck by immense forces, their bodies collapsing one after another, dying violently, their blood splattering the sky!

This startling change in events immediately drew the attention of the remaining black guards!

Three black-armored elders at the Peak of the Shedding Void Stage all had solemn faces. In fact, since Ning Fan's appearance, the three had noticed him, but none had given Ning Fan a second thought. No one expected this seemingly timid and cautious foreign cultivator would truly dare to take action against the Sanyan Guards and commit killings!

"Just an outsider, and yet you dare to kill my Sanyan Guards, you must pay with your life! Thunder Spirit Transforming Bow!"

One of the black-armored elders, furious to the point of laughter, gave a command, leading over ten Sanyan Guards towards Ning Fan. When nearing, they rubbed their hands together, immediately purple light brewed in their palms, transforming into a small lightning bow.

This small bow wasn't a tangible entity but transformed from the power of the Medicine Soul, a unique divine power of Pill Masters. If a Pill Master excels in battle soul techniques, they could integrate the power of the Medicine Soul into divine powers, which is precisely the specialty of the Dabei Clan cultivators.

"Soul Fusion!"

Over ten Enlightenment black guards behind the black-armored elder shouted in unison, releasing their Medicine Souls, merging them into the elder's body. Instantly, the elder's cultivation soared rapidly, barely reaching the early stage of Shattered Thought in a very short time! The lightning bow in his hand was even more radiant by many folds!

"Fire is born from lightning in the air... Sacrificial Thunderbolt Arrow Fire!"

The black-armored elder drew the bow and shot, immediately a crimson flame enveloped the bow, transforming into a fiery arrow shooting forth.

The fiery arrow entwined with electric arcs, bringing with it the vast might of thunder and fire, faintly connecting with the great momentum of heaven and earth, causing the temperature between heaven and earth to rise suddenly. Those Enlightenment black guards couldn't withstand such power, and after combining their souls, quickly retreated.

The black-armored elder confidently watched the arrow glow in the sky, this technique being his strongest card, once assisting him to severely wound a Shattered Thought early stage with the Peak of the Shedding Void Stage cultivation!

Ning Fan's eyes also focused slightly, but that was all. The opponent's soul fusion secret technique was quite strange, capable of amplifying cultivation through the overlay of each other's Medicine Souls within a short time, quite mysterious. This arrow might indeed have some potential to injure a normal Shattered Thought early stage, but to hurt him, it's far from enough!

Facing the incoming arrow, Ning Fan directly waved his demonic palm, reaching for the thunderbolt arrow light, completely unafraid of the sharpness of the arrow.

"This brat is courting death!" sneered the black-armored elder.

As if responding to the black-armored elder's words, the lightning fire caught within Ning Fan's palm suddenly twitched like a thunder snake, instantly bursting into countless thunder arcs striking Ning Fan's body.

The sizzling electrical arcs were quite formidable, but given Ning Fan's strong physique, striking his body only caused a slight numbing pain. To break through his physical defense, it was still insufficient. This was without him using the Tai Su Lightning Star; if he had, there wouldn't even be slight numbing pain!

Ning Fan's face bore an emotionless expression; with a blast of palm power, he shattered the lightning fire arrow in his grasp to pieces. As the essence flowed around him, the might of the Ancient Demon was unleashed without reserve, demonic energy as though countless dark clouds pressed down. With the rising demon might reaching its peak, Ning Fan let out a demonic roar, this roar activated the full power of Nine Nirvanas of the Heavenly Demon!

Roar—

The Ancient Demon Roar, is truly a formidable attack technique! This roar, though singular, reverberates through the heavens and earth, multiplying tenfold, then a hundredfold, instantly creating thousands upon thousands of echoes, shaking the heavens!

The roar does not resemble that of humans, but rather a beast, like a mountain collapsing, or the sound of bloodlines of ancient demon heads reversing!

The black-armored elder felt an unbeatable demonic thought blast into his ears, striking him instantly, causing him to spit blood and be sent flying, his ears ringing incessantly, his blood trending towards reversal, almost unable to hold onto the thunderbow, looking at Ning Fan with horror for the first time.

The demon roar swept across, like a drop of black ink on a white canvas of heaven and earth, spreading wildly to the surroundings. Behind the black-armored elder, those with only Truth-Transcending level cultivation in the Sanyan Guards, several had their divine sense shattered by Ning Fan's roar, screaming and dying! The remaining Truth-Transcending ones, spitting blood wildly, though not dead, had their divine sense heavily damaged and found it difficult to even maintain flight!

In the distance, the giant sword man was struggling among the siege of dozens of black guards, that demon roar appeared unexpectedly, causing both sides of the fight to be caught unawares, each being shocked by that roar, spitting blood, it was practically an indiscriminate attack.

Even the red-haired woman named Duolan couldn't escape the demon roar strike, her already frail body suffered severe injury under that roar!

The demon roar continued sweeping, creating countless sound waves, crashing into the heaven-sealing earth-locking barrier. A barrier that even peak Shedding Void Stage cultivators couldn't break, yet it collapsed directly under Ning Fan's roar!

The seal here is lifted!

"Ancient Demon! And indeed it's the Heavenly Demon of Ninth Nirvana!"

The black-armored elder holding the thunderbow was utterly shocked; this is the Ancient Demon Roar, unmistakable! Only the Ancient Demon Tribe possesses such tyrannical feral demon roars!

If Ning Fan was just an ancient demon, it wouldn't be enough to scare him, the key was, Ning Fan's ancient demon cultivation at least reached the ninth nirvana of the heavenly demon! A heavenly demon of ninth nirvana is not one ordinary Shattered Thought Early Stage cultivator can defeat! The elder with the thunderbow is not truly Shattered Thought Early Stage, only temporarily elevated to this realm using the Soul Fusion secret technique, and the elevation lasted only a moment, now his cultivation slipped back to Peak Shekong, along with a sense of weakness, the after-effect of the Soul Fusion secret technique!

They, the Sanyan Guards, only dispatched three Peak Shedding Void Stage members on this trip, combined they might not be opponents of this Ninth Nirvana Heavenly Demon!

But, even if they couldn't defeat, they must face him! Killing the Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians is their mission, and failing the mission also means death!

"Kill!"

The three Peak Shedding Void Stage black-armored elders almost simultaneously issued this order, each black-armored guard, fearless of death, ruthlessly ignited their Spirit to fight Ning Fan to the death.

Everyone went to besiege Ning Fan! This is the opportunity for the two Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians!

At this moment, only a few Truth-Transcending black guards were entangled with the giant sword man. Giant sword man, despite being besieged for days, his body weak, under a strong rush, still barely broke through a few Truth-Transcending black guards' blockade, escaped by riding on escape light.

Duolan, who had been hiding not far behind Ning Fan, also seized the chance to escape.

Especially Duolan, after Ning Fan's indiscriminate demon roar, she had a clearer understanding of Ning Fan's cold ruthlessness. Had her cultivation been weaker, she would have been just like some unlucky Sanyan Guards, directly killed by the demon roar! From this point, it is clear Ning Fan never intended to

save them, he remained indifferent to her previous plea for help, otherwise, he could have used other divine skills to harm enemies instead of using such indiscriminate demon roar divine skills!

No, it wasn't indiscriminate; Ning Fan considered all the cultivators here his enemies! Sanyan Guards wanted to kill him, thus were enemies; and Duolan, for scheming him, forcibly dragging him into muddy waters, was also considered an enemy by him!

Duolan suddenly understood this!

So laughable, truly laughable! With her beauty, her status and position, going to seek help from a mere foreign cultivator, not only did she not receive help but was considered an enemy!

"This person was schemed by me first, thus views me as an enemy! Now that he is attacking the Sanyan Guards, he might also attack us Tomb Guardians..." Thinking of this, Duolan dared not linger here any longer, fleeing hastily with the giant sword man.

"Forty-one Sanyan Guards, two Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians..."

Seeing Duolan and the giant sword man escape, Ning Fan squinted his eyes slightly but didn't plan to pursue for now. Facing the fierce assault of the black guards, Ning Fan showed no expression, stepped onto the sky, his entire body instantly turning into golden light, disappearing from where he stood, appearing instantly near one black guard after another.

The Truth-Transcending cultivation level black guards couldn't even bear a punch or kick from him, within just over ten breaths, only three Peak Shedding Void Stage black-armored elders remained alive here.

Another twenty breaths passed, even those three black-armored elders perished at Ning Fan's hands.

Killing these black guards didn't bring Ning Fan a sense of achievement, yet he was surprised by the indomitable fighting spirit of these Sanyan Guards, even fighting to the last person, even being captured by his Ancient Demon Ancestral Blood aura, they had no intention of retreating or pleading for mercy until every last one fought to their death...

Even against enemies daring to fight to the death, Ning Fan wasn't stingy in his praise, yet an enemy remains an enemy, on the life-and-death cultivation road, he naturally showed no mercy. After searching the memories of the three black-armored elders, Ning Fan finally gained a deeper understanding of the Dabei Clan's affairs.

It turns out the entire Dabei Clan is divided into three sections!

The various tribal cultivators of the Dabei Clan are descendants of the Medicine Slave of the Herb-gathering Sage.

The Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians are offspring of the disciples of the Herb-gathering Sage's benevolent corpse.

The Sanyan Guards are descendants of the disciples of the Herb-gathering Sage's malevolent corpse.

In terms of status, all tribal cultivators of the Dabei Clan are merely servants, whereas the tomb guardians and Sanyan Guards are the true masters within the Inner Sanctum of the Holy Domain!

"Previously, I thought that forging alliances with the Dabei Clan meant forming ties with those tribes. Now it seems that I was mistaken... The true decision-makers in the Dabei Clan are not those tribal leaders or the Central Continent Five Emperors, but the two major forces of Holy Mountain and Sanyan. Holy Mountain is the sacred site on the Dabei Grassland, transformed from the relic thoughts of the Sage after death; Sanyan refers to the three Tenth-grade Fierce Realm Continents, which, within the Dabei Clan, are solely the territories of the Sanyan Guards..."

"Sanyan and Holy Mountain have been adversaries since ancient times! Any outsider entering the Dabei must choose to join one of the two; this is the rule of the Dabei, or else both will be foes..."

"The vast majority of tribes within the Dabei Clan are affiliated with Holy Mountain. The Tamu Clan I belong to is similarly a Holy Mountain affiliate, thus my act of joining the Tamu Clan is tantamount to choosing the Holy Mountain faction, a choice that cannot be altered post-joining the Tamu Clan... Killing the Sanyan Guards is not hard to cover up, as lives are even cheaper than grass in Sanyan, with an overwhelming number, thus few inquire after death. The activities of the Sanyan Guards are confined to the Fierce Domain and they never venture out, so offending Sanyan is not significant; however, the

number of Holy Mountain cultivators is few, and even the death of one would provoke countless Holy Mountain experts to pursue the matter..."

Ning Fan's thoughts spun swiftly.

His original intent was to kill Duolan and the giant sword man together, but now it seems such a move might be inappropriate, likely triggering even greater turmoil.

Indeed, the death of an ordinary Holy Mountain Tomb Guardian prompts many investigations, let alone the woman named Duolan... In the memories of the Sanyan Guards, Duolan holds a somewhat special status on Holy Mountain...

"These two cannot be killed outright, but neither can they be easily let go; one way or another, those who plot against me must pay a price."

Ning Fan released Black Dragon evil fire, destroying the corpses of the Sanyan Guards, then cast a spell to disrupt the karmic consequences of the killings, and pursued Duolan and the man. Despite the general lack of follow-up after the death of Sanyan Guards, he decided to be cautious...

...

A man named Pi Xiong, wielding a giant sword, now desperately fled alongside the Saintess Duolan.

"Junior sister, do we need to flee in such haste? Though the outsider surnamed Ning is strong, he is ultimately restricted by the Punishing Ring and not necessarily able to swiftly kill all the Sanyan Guards, nor may he dare continue pursuit after killing, targeting the two of us. He emerged from the mine's space, surely having found some Six-Star Nie Mother Stones, given that we are Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians, should we forcibly demand, I doubt he dares refuse, even saving the task rewards! Unless, of course, he wishes to offend the Holy Mountain cultivators..." Pi Xiong scoffed lightly, not believing an outsider would have the guts to challenge Holy Mountain, his sights set on the Six-Star Nie Mother Stones.

"Senior brother, you are wrong! This outsider named Ning is not weak in character, but rather extremely formidable. Initially showing weakness to the Sanyan Guards, he must have had a significant purpose to

enter the Dabei, hence cautiously avoiding offending either faction of the Dabei. Upon realizing explanations failed, he promptly acted aggressively against the Sanyan Guards, without the slightest hesitation! Such decisiveness in slaughter reveals unwillingness to consider the name of Holy Mountain! If this person decides to act, he will certainly leave no Sanyan Guard alive! Such individuals are ruthless and cautious, likely aiming to completely cover this matter, possibly even silencing us alongside! Now I only seek escape from his clutches, yet you still covet those Six-Star Nie Mother Stones! You are truly..." Duolan laughed in exasperation.

This senior brother is too naive; if not for decent cultivation aptitude, he absolutely wouldn't qualify as a Holy Mountain Tomb Guardian.

How can he still long for those Six-Star Nie Mother Stones at such a time! Does he not care for his life!

"...This outsider surnamed Ning's cultivation is limited, but he is nonetheless an Eternal Immortal Venerable; killing a few Enlightenment or Shedding Void cultivators will not take long! We have little time left! We must quickly escape this place to be safe! If he catches us, it will be too late to regret!" Duolan added.

At this moment, regret filled her heart.

Had she known Ning Fan's forceful nature earlier, she wouldn't have resorted to manipulative tactics, directly pushing Ning Fan to oppose the Sanyan Guards... Such petty schemes likely angered this outsider Immortal Venerable; but no matter, borrowing this person's strength to escape alive, it is time to swiftly leave the Fierce Domain!

"Do not blame the senior brother for speaking too much; junior sister, you overreact to everything. This outsider surnamed Ning, no matter how audacious, wouldn't dare act against the two of us. Indeed, this outsider surnamed Ning is abhorrent. You have humbly pleaded for his help, yet not only did he refuse, he unleashed a Demonic roar, indiscriminately attacking friend and foe, worsening our injuries! Hmph, if not for the current closed tomb period, given my status, Pi Xiong, I could easily summon a large number of Holy Mountain cultivators, giving this person a lesson!" Pi Xiong said dismissively.

Just as his words fell, a sudden thunderous sound erupted ahead, a bolt of golden light streaked across the sky, and within that golden light emerged a solitary figure, blocking Pi Xiong and Duolan's path.

"Not good!"

Duolan's pretty face turned ghastly pale.

Catching up with them was Ning Fan, full of Evil Qi and a face devoid of compassion!

"You wish to teach Ning a lesson, eh? Ning gives you an opportunity; you can teach me right now! Strike!"

An overwhelming Ancient Demon Roar transformed into monstrous Demonic clouds, crashing down with a roar, causing Pi Xiong to vomit blood, fear filling his once arrogant eyes...

Chapter 1004: Tattoo

This... is the Ancient Demon recorded in the Holy Mountain Ancient Texts!

Under this oppressive force, both Pi Xiong and Duolan felt their skin tingle, for Ning Fan's demonic might was not merely the pressure from the Ancient Demon Bloodline but also included the daunting Evil Qi from his path of killing. Although Pi Xiong and his companion were the proud sons of the Holy Mountain, their experience was limited; how could they have encountered a demon like Ning Fan, who emerged from a mountain of corpses and bloody mist?

Even the less shrewd Pi Xiong sensed the danger from Ning Fan, with cold sweats breaking from his forehead and a strange chill rising from his back.

"Didn't you say you wanted to teach Ning Fan a lesson? Why haven't you acted yet!"

Ning Fan looked coldly at Pi Xiong, stepping slightly forward. Instantly, the previously arrogant Pi Xiong retreated in panic, as if startled like cattle and sheep!

That was the instinct of the plains people facing danger!

"Senior is joking, how dare this junior teach a lesson!" Pi Xiong retreated while forcing a laugh with immense pressure on him. He couldn't understand Ning Fan's intent. Believing his reckless words might have offended him and recalling what his junior sister had mentioned about silencing by murder, the tension snapped unexpectedly!

Was this person really here to silence someone?

This thought emerged persistently, causing Pi Xiong's gaze to turn crazed with madness due to extreme fear. In his heart, he thought, "It's better I strike first if I have to be killed, there's a chance I might survive!" Forgetting his master's teachings, he suddenly punched his chest causing his face to turn as pale as paper, and spewed a black beam towards Ning Fan's face, then fled without waiting for the result, transforming into escape light and darting away.

Ning Fan narrowed his eyes, surprised that Pi Xiong dared strike. He dipped his finger towards the black beam, causing it to transform into a whirling black bead that settled in his palm. This bead seemed ordinary, yet concealed significant might within; had it struck a typical Immortal Venerable whose cultivation had been sealed, they'd likely be severely injured. Only Ning Fan's adeptness in Divine Skills left him unfazed by it.

Though initially intending to spare Pi Xiong and Duolan, this incident made it clear Pi Xiong couldn't be left alone. Dare to strike, one must embrace the cost!

With this in mind, Ning Fan flicked his finger, ejecting the freshly acquired black bead. The bead retraced its path, striking Pi Xiong's back as he fled. Instantly, Pi Xiong felt his bones chilled!

"Save... save me..."

Upon being struck by the black bead, his giant sword first melted into iron in an eerie black light. Then his clothes, blood and flesh on his back, eventually his entire body, bit by bit transformed into blood water in the black light. A putrid smell instantly permeated the area!

The transformation into blood water was a blink of an eye's work; Pi Xiong, despite being at the Peak of Shekong, couldn't withstand even one strike from the bead and died instantly.

"This black bead is not weak in might..." Ning Fan casually collected Pi Xiong's storage pouch and probed it with spirit sense, faintly frowning.

Was he really a Holy Mountain Tomb Guardian? In the memory of the Sanyan Armor Guards, Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians were supposedly extremely wealthy, but this foundation seemed too scant...

"You... you killed my senior brother!" Duolan suddenly felt overwhelmed with sorrow. Though she despised him, even feeling some disgust, witnessing his demise struck a bleak chord within her, causing grief and resentful glances towards Ning Fan.

"Kill him and what of it! He attempted to sneak attack me with that black bead, only to be killed by it in return; it's simply his own undoing. Had it not been so, I wouldn't mind sparing him." Ning Fan said expressionlessly. The cultivation world was not a place for reason, had his cultivation been insufficient and gotten killed by Pi Xiong's black bead, from whom could he seek justice?

"No need for excuses! You killed my senior brother, killed a disciple of Chulie Lineage, I, Duolan will never forgive you!" Duolan said in tears.

"Then, even you need to be silenced..." Ning Fan coldly looked at Duolan, his merciless gaze was like cold water, waking Duolan up abruptly.

She must be crazy! Because of her brother's fall, she lost her reason! She dared to threaten to kill Ning Fan, whose cultivation level was of Immortal Venerable!

That was a vicious and cunning Ancient Demon; if she angered Ning Fan, she would meet a gruesome end like her brother!

No, until the Chulie Lineage is retrieved, she cannot die!

"Rest assured, you're a Saintess on the Holy Mountain, killing you would cause much more trouble than with Pi Xiong and be harder to cover up. I won't kill you. I've heard your Dabei Tribe has a rather insidious secret technique..."

Upon hearing Ning Fan's words, Duolan turned pale with fright.

"How... how do you know about the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique? Wait, you know I'm a Saintess of the Holy Mountain, you know many things, you've searched those Sanyan Guards' memories!"

Duolan panicked and tried to flee, but found herself powerless, soon spinning in dizziness, realizing her cultivation was sealed and that Ning Fan, nearly humiliatingly, hoisted her over his shoulder.

"Let me down! What are you going to do with me? Let me go! I'm the Saintess of Chulie Lineage, I am... mmm mmm mmm..."

Ning Fan summoned the Yin Plucking Finger again, sealing Duolan's speech.

Originally inheritor of Ancient Chaotic Grand Emperor, with suppressed cultivation, defeating a female cultivator at Peak of Shekong was effortlessly done. Then spitting Black Flame, he thoroughly obliterated traces from the area before carrying the tearful Duolan and flew away on escape light.

Shortly after Ning Fan departed, the space exhibited strange fluctuations. Next, eerie black Skeleton Armored Guards, surrounded by black flames, emerged from spatial fissures. The leading figure, possessing Shattered Thought Early Stage strength, scanned the battlefield and coldly snorted.

"Void Flame seeker is indeed the weakest of our Sanyan, hunting a mere Shekong Saintess, and yet let the opponent escape... If it had been my turn with Stone Flame, I would never fail... Good riddance, good riddance indeed!" The tone carried a hint of schadenfreude.

The suddenly emerging Skeleton Armored Guards soon departed, leaving behind only the scorched land consumed by the fierce flame...

...

Ning Fan departed from the fourth-level continent, wandering into the realm of the third-level continent, finding an extremely secluded space within an Ancient Cultivator's Cave Abode, and directly tearing open the space to escape into it.

This space was one of his prior treasure-searching locations, already thoroughly scoured by him, entering now was not for any other reason, but to perform the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique on that Duolan.

This technique was retrieved from the memory of the Sanyan Armor Guards; it's highly common within the Dabei Clan. Most of the Great Humble Ones are adept at it. It's similar to the Restrictive Spell of the Four Heavens cultivators, yet distinct.

Secret techniques like the Restrictive Spell aim to control the life and death of the opponent, so as to make them submit.

But the Dabei Clan's Three Yin Soul Locking Technique controls not life and death, but the opponent's inner thoughts...

Consider this: someone under the Restrictive Spell submits out of fear of death, whereas someone affected by the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique submits from the depth of their heart to the perpetrator's orders; even their inner thoughts are governed by the perpetrator...

The degree of mystery this technique holds surpasses the Restrictive Spell, but unfortunately, it only affects Dazu Clan cultivators; it has no effect on those outside that clan. It is rumored that it was tailored by the Herb-gathering Sage specifically to govern his Medicine Slaves and disciples...

In such a way, albeit a low-level divine skill, the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique is extraordinary because it was crafted by a Saint.

However, the limitations of the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique are significant. First, the practitioner must possess a certain magnitude of medicine soul and that power cannot be much weaker than the person being affected. Secondly, every activation of this technique erodes the practitioner's medicine soul foundation, with only one usage allowed per millennium. Using it twice leads to medicine soul collapse, rendering one's dan refinement skills utterly void...

It's precisely this second limitation that makes it seldom employed by cultivators across the Dabei Grassland, such a malicious technique that causes harm to both others and oneself.

Yet today, Ning Fan finds himself compelled to use it.

Today he killed the Sanyan Guards and then killed Pi Xiong, the Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians. Present as a witness was Duolan! Duolan, this woman, in the memory of the Sanyan Guards, belongs to the Chulie lineage of the Holy Mountain, distinguished as the Chulie Holy Maiden, a most noble identity. Pi Xiong's death will be probed by the Holy Mountain, but it may not trace back to Ning Fan. After all, Pi Xiong's cause of death was his own black orb, a problem tracing back to himself, a result of his own actions. Hence, under deliberate concealment, it would be challenging to trace to Ning Fan. This is precisely why Ning Fan retaliated against Pi Xiong with the black orb.

In the memory of the Sanyan Guards, Pi Xiong was an edge existence among the Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians. With Pi Xiong dead and no other perpetrator traceable, the matter is likely to be forgotten.

But Duolan is different! If the Holy Mountain Maiden dies, then three or more Immortal Emperors will immediately intervene in the investigation...

Of course, that depends on if the Holy Mountain Mausoleum is open. Only then can the Immortal Emperors emerge... According to Ning Fan's Soul Search, the Holy Mountain is hallowed ground for the Dabei Clan. Each time the Five Emperors of the Central Continent ascend, they enter the Holy Mountain Mausoleum to cultivate. The Immortal Emperors of the Dabei Clan are not limited to just those five from the Central Continent; exactly how many remain unknown, even to the black guards there...

The Holy Mountain Mausoleum opens every millennium, with the opening date following closely after the tribal competitions in the Dabei Clan conclude. The Holy Mountain Mausoleum is currently in its closed phase—those inside cannot come out, and those outside cannot go in...

In the grassland's tribes, there is a once-in-a-millennium grand competition; similarly, within the Holy Mountain Mausoleum, a grand competition occurs every thousand years. Tomb Guardians who fail in the grand competition are exiled from the Holy Mountain for a millennium, during which they perform inspections over the tribes of the Dabei. To re-enter the Holy Mountain for cultivation, they must achieve distinguished performance in the grand competition held therein...

If Ning Fan's conjecture is correct, both Duolan and the already deceased Pi Xiong were Tomb Guardians who failed in the last Holy Mountain competition; thus, during the mausoleum's closure, they linger outside...

"Mmm, mmm, mmm..." Duolan weakly struggles but is restrained by the Yin Plucking Finger, rendering her unable to utter a single word, tears flowing endlessly.

Ning Fan casually throws Duolan onto the stone floor within the Ancient Cultivator's Cave Abode. The rough stone floor pains Duolan's behind, as she leans against the stone wall, fearfully watching Ning Fan. She knows Ning Fan will imprint the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique upon her, binding her mind, neither her Saintess status nor as the former Chulie Emperor's daughter shall save her...

Her terror magnifies as Ning Fan does not immediately perform the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique; instead, he places a chilling hand on her Tian Ling cover!

"He's... he's going to search my memory!" Duolan's face pales all the more.

Destroying this soul remnant is such a brutal divine skill. As a Shekong Cultivator, she's naturally aware that those undergoing Soul Search often suffer spirit damage, reduced to imbecility!

Yet she fails to understand that with Ning Fan having mastered the True Dragon Reverse Spirit Technique, he can perform a perfect Soul Search with minimal damage inflicted.

A slight pain reverberates from her divine sense causing Duolan to close her eyes in despair, as scene after scene of memories reveals unreservedly to Ning Fan.

Ning Fan's expression turned immensely peculiar...

The memory of this Chulie Holy Maiden was exceedingly mundane; the first half involved almost entirely her naked, immersed within some kind of mysterious pool...

This pool was exceptionally bizarre, seemingly imbued with great divine power, such that Ning Fan could only glimpse a blur through Duolan's memory, unable to discern the pool's true nature...

Occasionally, other similarly unclothed females joined Duolan, soaking in the pool together...

Occasionally, Duolan adorned clothing, leaving the mysterious pool to meet a middle-aged man enveloped in a seven-colored glow.

That was her father, the former Chulie Emperor!

In Doran's memory, the former Chulie Emperor showed her little care; he spent most of his time engrossed in cultivation.

Later, the former Chulie died in a rebellion led by his disciples...

After that, the new Chulie Emperor ascended to the throne and accepted her as a disciple...

Since her father's death, she hadn't indulged herself in that mystical pool for the latter part of her life. Within the new Chulie lineage, she was an outlier, receiving care from her father's former subordinates but facing exclusion from many others. Even her master, the new Chulie Emperor, did not truly care for her. Consequently, the Chulie Holy Maiden, Doran, had been excluded from more than ten Sacred Mountain competitions, relegated to exile, and prevented from entering the tomb for cultivation...

Ning Fan continuously reviewed Doran's memory, nearly seeing through all of it. However, there was something peculiar; any memory related to the Sacred Mountain was obscured as if it couldn't be perceived by cultivators with insufficient cultivation—this wasn't deliberately done, it was due to the Sacred Mountain's own majesty.

"What kind of place is this Dabei Clan Sacred Mountain that it has such great power, preventing my Soul Search from succeeding..." Ning Fan was greatly surprised.

The feeling was like when his cultivation was low, unable to discern the appearance under the seven-colored light of the Immortal Emperor. Now, despite his high cultivation, he still couldn't perceive the Sacred Mountain...

As time passed, the idiotic outcome Doran anticipated did not materialize. She was greatly astonished, her divine sense was slightly painful, but the damage was not severe. This was her first encounter with

Soul Searching Technique causing such minimal damage! Even her master couldn't achieve this, so it seemed like this skill would be considered a very impressive divine skill in the outside world...

Realizing this, Doran's apprehension towards Ning Fan deepened, her fear intensified. Ning Fan's Yin Plucking Finger wasn't strong, and at this moment, Doran had regained some strength. Suddenly, seeing Ning Fan retract his hand as though he had completed the Soul Search, Doran breathed a silent sigh of relief but noticed Ning Fan looking at her with an odd gaze.

"Judging by the time, you should have recovered some strength by now, right? Stand up and take off your clothes!" Ning Fan suddenly commanded.

Doran felt deathly shame and anger!

Why take off her clothes! What could taking off her clothes lead to! This man was not only cold-blooded and murderous but also a perverted, shameless lecher!

She expected to be subjected to the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique but didn't expect Ning Fan to have more sinister intentions with her!

In this desolate place, if Ning Fan truly wanted to force her, she had no way to resist and could only yield silently, but this compliance was something she would rather die than consent to!

She couldn't lose her virginal body! At least not now!

The Holy Mountain's Saintesses were of a uniquely special existence; they would soak in the Maternal Pool from a young age, capable of conceiving Yin Embryos without engaging in a man-woman union!

She had soaked in the Maternal Pool for many years, and her body could condense Yin energy naturally, giving birth to the Yin Embryo. However, she was unwilling to merely be a Saintess proliferating Yin Embryos, so this Yin Embryo had never been born. Instead, she absorbed the accumulated Mother-Yin energy within her body, slowly refining it to enhance her cultivation.

The absorbed Yin energy within her was her only hope to break through to the Immortal Emperor Realm in her lifetime and claim back the Chulie lineage!

But if a man were to forcibly engage her, the Yin energy within her would immediately form a Yin Embryo, and in ten months, transform into a female infant...

With tears in her eyes, Doran struggled to her feet, but she did not follow Ning Fan's order to undress. Instead, she leaned against the stone wall, retreating step by step.

"I can...allow you to plant the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique, but that other matter...I, Doran, will never comply. If you force me, I would rather die here! Should I die, when the tomb opens, you will incur great trouble! I know your purpose in Daher is significant, so you wouldn't want to stir up more troubles. If you indeed do that to me, you will surely regret it! I, Doran, vow with my life!"

Doran spoke every word resolutely.

With his mastery of the Mind Reading Technique, Ning Fan could see through Doran's thoughts and felt speechless.

When did he say he wanted to nourish himself with Doran!

He merely learned from Doran's memory that many Saintesses of the Sacred Mountain had a very special tattoo on their bodies, which possessed some extraordinarily mystical divine skill, and he wanted to see it for himself.

Indeed, abruptly inspecting a female body was exceedingly discourteous, but unfortunately, Doran had plotted against him first! Given his temperament, not immediately sapping Doran's vitality for his Cauldron Furnace was already considered mercy, so he certainly wouldn't have to be courteous to Doran.

"I only want to look at your body, I absolutely won't nourish myself using you!" Ning Fan retorted with a frown.

"Just want to see my body..." Doran cursed Ning Fan as shameless, and this person wasn't just shameless, his interests were particularly strange.

Could it be that instead of nourishing himself with women, this person preferred admiring nude women, or perhaps...he had issues in that regard and could only look but not indulge...

"Hurry up and undress! Important parts can be concealed, I have no interest in your body, only in your Saintess tattoo!" Ning Fan snorted coldly.

"So senior wants to see the Saintess tattoo..." Doran breathed a sigh of relief, if it was just that, it wasn't too bad. Her tattoo was on her back, so she only needed to show Ning Fan her backside, without revealing too much. If it were like some other Saintesses with tattoos on their chests or thighs, today would have been unbearably shameful indeed...

Thus, Duolan only removed the outer garment, leaving an undergarment untouched, but it was enough—her pale back was now exposed before Ning Fan. Duolan was very thin, with no excess flesh on her back. Her skin was exceptionally smooth, yet amidst that smoothness was a single discordant mark.

In the center of her back was an unsightly scar, marring the otherwise flawless back she possessed.

Strangely, upon seeing this shocking scar, Ning Fan suddenly thought of Luo You.

That woman also had such a savage scar on her back... How is she faring these days?

"If Senior wishes to see my tattoo, I fear you will be disappointed. My Saintess tattoo was destroyed by another, hence the power it once contained cannot be displayed to Senior..."

Duolan said with disappointment, while also feeling worried, worried that Ning Fan might kill her out of anger for not seeing the tattoo.

But this worry was clearly unnecessary.

Ning Fan's interest in Duolan's Saintess tattoo was mere curiosity, if he couldn't see it, then so be it.

"That'll do, put your clothes back on, I will now plant the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique in you, you best cooperate to avoid unnecessary suffering." Ning Fan said with an impassive expression.

Duolan gritted her teeth and nodded obediently.

Compared to being killed, or harvested, merely being planted with the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique was already a fortunate outcome. She could only blame herself foolishly for scheming against Ning Fan, dragging him into this mess, causing Ning Fan to have no choice but to draw his sword against the Sanyan Armor Guards, leading to... If it were her, she might have made the same decision...

"I need your Saintess identity to assist me in my activities within the Holy Domain. If you behave, I will remove this technique when I leave the Holy Domain!"

Ning Fan raised his right hand, extending his index, middle, and ring fingers, silently chanting incantations, and suddenly three strands of Yin flames appeared on the tips of the three fingers, each flame a different color.

As the three flames appeared, Ning Fan pressed his three fingers on Duolan's forehead, a wave of unbearable pain surged, causing Duolan to cough up blood, yet stubbornly she didn't cry out.

"Indeed a strong-willed woman..." Ning Fan thought to himself.

Suddenly recalling some matters, Ning Fan asked Duolan, "You and Pi Xiong appeared in the Fourth-level Fierce Realm because of the Six-Star Nie Mother Stone? Do you possess Innate Soul-Nourishing Spiritual Medicine?"

As Ning Fan mentioned her senior brother, Duolan's expression turned gloomy, then recalling the killer was Ning Fan, she suddenly had no pleasant expression for him, yet dared not offend Ning Fan and replied reluctantly, "Yes, we issued an Earth-rank Mission at the Xieyang Sect, not expecting anyone to take it, but unexpectedly, the task was ultimately undertaken by you. You hadn't returned for a long time, my senior brother and I thought you had abandoned the mission, so we ventured into the Fierce

Realm trying to find the Six-Star Nie Mother Stone ourselves, only to find that hidden vein had been accessed and the entire space devastated as well..."

"Once the space was destroyed, my senior brother and I couldn't find a spatial entry point, thus couldn't enter. Fortunately, we sensed the presence of others inside and could only wait outside. Not realizing after a few days, we were discovered by the Sanyan Guards, held captive there for several days..."

Talking about this, rage appeared in Duolan's beautiful eyes.

The Sanyan Guard normally wouldn't appear in anything below the seventh-level Fierce Realm! Their appearance couldn't be a coincidence but rather someone leaked the whereabouts of her and Pi Xiong!

Who leaked the information! Was it a cultivator from the Dabei Clan, the Central Continent Five Emperors, or other Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians...

Unknown, certainly it must be one of her many enemies!

Concerning Duolan's encounter, Ning Fan was indifferent; he was only interested in the Innate Soul-Nourishing Spiritual Medicine listed as the mission reward.

"The Innate Soul-Nourishing Spiritual Medicine, is it not stored within your senior brother's storage pouch, but on you?" Ning Fan inquired.

"Replying to Senior, such a precious item, how could I carry it with me, they're all placed within my Holy Mountain cave abode, only after the clan comparison and the reopening of the Holy Mountain can I retrieve the medicine." Duolan cautiously observed Ning Fan's expression, naturally perceiving Ning Fan's interest in the Innate Soul-Nourishing Spiritual Medicine, explaining sensibly.

"Not with you then..." Indeed, if this woman carried the Innate Soul-Nourishing Spiritual Medicine, it wouldn't escape the detection of the Treasure-searching Compass.

"Forget it, once the Holy Mountain reopens, you will take me to retrieve the medicine!" Ning Fan commanded.

"Yes..." Having been implanted with Ning Fan's Three Yin Soul Locking Technique, Duolan innately harbored a sense of obedience towards Ning Fan, a peculiar feeling, somewhat akin to Burying Moon's situation, although highly displeased with Ning Fan internally, unable to bring herself to harm him...

Ning Fan also secretly observed Duolan's heart; he could see through her inner thoughts, if any disrespect towards him surfaced, it would indicate the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique was inadequate, requiring reconsideration of silencing her...

"Very well, accompany me back to the Southern Frontier Steppe. Regarding the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique, surely you wouldn't want it disclosed..." Ning Fan said with profound meaning.

"Obviously..." Duolan gritted her teeth, feeling humiliated.

Being a Holy Mountain Tomb Guardian, she was absolutely forbidden from becoming anyone's soul-locked slave. She, now Ning Fan's soul-locked slave, if undisclosed, then so be it, if revealed, Ning Fan would pay dearly, and she would undoubtedly face severe punishment, given the tarnishing of the Holy Mountain's reputation, intolerable by the emperors of the Holy Mountain...

#### Chapter 1005: The First Round of the Tomb Seizure

After completing the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique, Ning Fan tore open space and left with Duolan.

All the way, Duolan was in a state of anxiety. Although she managed to keep her life from Ning Fan, her brother's death and becoming a soul-locked slave were a big blow to her. She was forced to submit due to the constraints of the soul-locking technique, and she even had a strange sense of resignation deep down. However, due to her fear of Ning Fan, she dared not engage in much conversation with him throughout the journey.

Of course, there were some things that needed to be clear, such as the next destination of Ning Fan, which Duolan was quite concerned about. If she hadn't become a soul-locked slave, by now, she should have obtained the Six-Star Nirvana Mother Stone and prepared for the Holy Mountain competition. Unfortunately, she lost her basic freedom...

"Senior, are you returning to the Xieyang Clan to complete the mission?" Duolan hesitated for a long time and asked with determination.

"Yes, we'll first return to the Xieyang Clan to complete the mission and then head back to the Tamu Clan to prepare for the Southern Frontier Clan's competition. In the meantime, stay by my side." Ning Fan replied. He didn't plan to let Duolan leave his side until he confirmed the effectiveness of the Three Yin Soul Locking Technique to avoid unexpected events.

"Southern Frontier Competition? Senior being a foreign cultivator will not benefit much from participating in the Southern Frontier competition, or does Senior have another purpose for the clan competition, or maybe..." Duolan's beautiful eyes moved, and she made a guess.

Her response was met with Ning Fan's slight squinting gaze, a calm look with implicit pressure, "Whether I have intentions with the clan competition is not something you can inquire about. I hope you keep that in mind."

Duolan's heart trembled, silently cursing her own garrulousness. She bit her lip, forced herself into submission, and said respectfully, "Whatever Senior intends is naturally beyond a junior's comment. I will certainly pay attention to it and dare not be verbose anymore."

"That's for the best."

Duolan bit her lip and said again, "I am a Holy Mountain Tomb Guardian, and due to my poor performance in previous Holy Mountain competitions, I have no qualification to enter Holy Mountain for practice... This time, I am well-prepared, and there is a good chance I can re-enter Holy Mountain for practice. When the time comes for the Holy Mountain competition, could Senior allow me to leave temporarily and participate..."

"As far as I'm aware, your Dabei Clan's clan competition consists of three rounds, correct?" Ning Fan neither affirmed nor denied but asked.

"Replying to Senior, what is called the clan competition is just a name used by foreign cultivators and lower tribes for the 'Tomb-Seizing Battle.' In the mouths of Holy Mountain cultivators, it is referred to as the Tomb-Seizing Battle. Indeed, it consists of three rounds: the first round is the clan competition in various steppe regions; the second round is the competition in Middle State; the third round is the Holy

Mountain competition. The Southern Frontier competition where Senior represents the Tamu Clan is part of the first round of the Tomb-Seizing Battle." Duolan explained.

"Tomb-Seizing Battle..." Ning Fan showed a pondering expression. From the memories of those Sanyan Guards, he had obtained quite a bit of information related to the Tomb-Seizing Battle.

"As Senior knows, our ancestor of the Dabei clan was an ancient saint. After the Saint Ancestor's death, his remnants transformed into Holy Mountain, containing the Sacred Tomb and opening twelve veins, encompassing the world's creations..." As she mentioned this, Duolan suddenly covered her head with a painful expression, unable to continue speaking.

"If words related to Holy Mountain violate taboos, you don't need to say more." Ning Fan's eyes became slightly serious, instructing her. If he was seeing correctly, Duolan was limited by her cultivation and could not speak excessively about Holy Mountain.

"Yes." Duolan was somewhat surprised by Ning Fan's understanding, taking a deep breath, she continued, "The Holy Mountain Mausoleum has twelve tomb veins. If cultivators enter these veins, their cultivation speed is exceptionally fast, and many have comprehended a trace of the Saint Ancestor's remnants from these veins, greatly enhancing their divine skills..."

"Oh? The tomb veins within the Holy Mountain Mausoleum can actually possibly allow cultivators to comprehend the remains of the saints!" Ning Fan's eyes flickered slightly, showing interest in Holy Mountain for the first time. Saint remnants and the great enhancement of divine skills... If there were no other pressing matters this trip, he truly would want to see this Holy Mountain Mausoleum.

"The Tomb-Seizing Battle opens once every millennium, and the ownership of the twelve tomb veins changes each millennium. How they are allocated depends on the results of the Holy Mountain competition... My Chu Lie lineage now occupies the ninth vein among the twelve tomb veins because in the last Tomb-Seizing Battle, our overall performance ranked ninth, securing ten slots for entering the veins for practice. Unfortunately, my individual performance was poor, so among the Chu Lie lineage's ten slots, I did not qualify... This time is another Tomb-Seizing Battle; I am a Chu Lie Tomb Guardian and also the Chu Lie Holy Maiden. If possible, when the Holy Mountain competition begins, could Senior allow me to leave temporarily to participate..."

Duolan bit her lip, pleading earnestly.

Ning Fan looked deeply at Duolan, his voice hard to discern joy or anger, "The Holy Mountain competition is the third round of the Tomb-Seizing Battle, whereas the Southern Frontier competition is the first round. There's still a lot of time until the third round, so you need not rush."

The implication was neither agreement nor outright rejection.

Duolan was somewhat disappointed, yet felt the result was reasonable. If she were this Ning Fan, she would make the same decision. Moreover, Ning Fan didn't explicitly refuse the matter, which meant there was still hope. In this case, she only needed to perform well and satisfy Ning Fan, then there might be a chance of getting permission to participate in the Holy Mountain competition.

As they talked while flying over several continents, suddenly, Ning Fan's escape light paused, lightly exclaiming, and a strange expression appeared on his face shortly after.

"Why did Senior stop... hiss, this is..."

Duolan released her spirit sense, then gasped in shock, "What happened to this continent! Such a large-scale toxic mist outbreak! This is rarely seen!"

The toxic mist on the Fierce Domain Continent is extremely poisonous. If it leaks, even some True Immortals dare not come into contact without preparation.

At this moment, the Fierce Domain continent was engulfed in white mist. The mist looked very ordinary, but only those trapped within understood its terrifying and persistent nature!

At the deepest point of the toxic mist, seven or eight cultivators had already fallen, all from the Xieyang clan. Only five or six could still stand, among them the Xieyang clan's Young Chief — Xianyu Chun, who had a sullen face.

The surrounding mist was too dense, and by working together, the Xieyang clan and others barely opened a several-yard-wide vacuum area but could only maintain it with difficulty. Attempting to escape from the deep mist was beyond their cultivation capabilities, leaving them helplessly trapped there.

"Young Chief! Lie Lugu was knocked unconscious by the ground gas poison, and his life is in danger!"

"Lie Lugu saved my life... Use my Grass Returning Pill to save him! Don't hold back on the pills, feed him hard. For goodness sake, wake him up, or I'll skin you!"

"Young Chief! Alande has also fainted..."

"Then why bother talking! Use my Grass Returning Pills to save him! Alande, Alande, I promised his mother to keep him safe for life... Hurry up! Lives are at stake! They are all my subordinates! Not one should die!"

"Young Chief! Nuoweizhen also..."

"Use my Grass Returning Pills to save him!"

"Hass also..."

"Use my Grass Returning Pills to save him!"

"Young Chief, there is one thing the little one must report..."

"What is it!"

"Senior, you didn't actually bring any Grass Returning Pills today..."

Ten breaths passed.

Twenty breaths passed.

Xianyu Chun suddenly slapped his forehead with a bewildered look of realization, "Oh dear, haha, I really seem to have forgotten to bring it."

Haha...

Hahaha...

"Laugh, my ass! Without those expensive pills saving us, aren't we all going to die here!"

At this moment, Xianyu Chun was really quite anxious. His cultivation level was higher, so he could hold on in this place for a few days more, but those subordinates of his couldn't sustain it!

"Young Sect Leader, if I may say something I shouldn't, you really shouldn't have entered this Fierce Realm; how mighty that Ning Immortal Venerable is, surely he doesn't need you to deliver the Compass, and now look, we're all stuck here..." complained a tribal cultivator from the Evil Sheep Sect.

"Shut up! Babbling like a woman!" Xianyu Chun coldly glared at that subordinate, scaring him into silence.

Suddenly, Xianyu Chun showed a happy expression, as he sensed strong cultivator auras beyond the miasma, indicating that they might be powerful enough to rescue his group. After a moment of hesitation, he used his full mana to loudly ask beyond the miasma,

"Xianyu Chun of the Evil Sheep Sect is in distress here, requesting aid from two seniors; if spared, there will be great rewards!"

Ning Fan revealed a strange expression; with his strong spirit sense, he could easily perceive everything happening here through the layers of poisonous fog.

A person of his character usually does not interfere much, but given how Xianyu Chun has served him loyally, he might not wish to take this person as an apprentice, but he would not let him die.

What amused him was that Xianyu Chun was trapped here because of him, as he came to deliver the Compass for Ning Fan.

This lad probably rushed upon receiving the report from his subordinates to bring the Compass, yet sadly, Xianyu Chun didn't know, Ning Fan had no need for the Compass at all.

"Senior, do you intend to rescue this person? Duolan advises against it... this person should not be saved." Duolan suddenly advised against it.

"Oh? Why should this person not be saved?" Ning Fan asked faintly.

"The miasma leakage of the Fierce Realm continent is extremely rare, and whenever it occurs, it's usually caused by man. Duolan suspects that these Evil Sheep Sect cultivators are trapped here due to human manipulation..." Duolan explained.

"Are you saying someone plotted against Xianyu Chun, causing him to be trapped here?"

"Indeed, I had my suspicions, but upon sensing the existence of this object here, I immediately confirmed my guess."

In her eagerness to gain Ning Fan's favor, Duolan hurriedly, and with multiple hand signals, released a crimson wolf shadow from her Tian Ling.

"Beast-shaped Medicine Soul..." Ning Fan showed a serious look; these tribal Bei cultivators indeed had a unique approach to medicine soul cultivation. The Medicine Soul of Duolan, before him, was of Nine-Turns Lead Grade. This presence in Eastern Heaven was probably akin to a shocking Alchemist, yet it wasn't unusual among the Bei Clan.

Duolan suffered severe injuries from the days of attacking by the Sanyan Guard, yet even in her weakened state, she still forced herself to unleash this Divine Skill fully. The crimson wolf shadow suddenly let out a piercing howl, and the entire world turned red, revealing a fissured space from which an object dropped.

That was a golden Immortal Talisman with a swastika symbol!

"Buddhist talisman..." Ning Fan's gaze slightly sharpened; the existence of this talisman was profoundly hidden, evading even his senses unless deliberately searched for.

Once the talisman appeared, large areas of golden light immediately wiped away the crimson veil. Duolan sighed, knowing someone indeed plotted against Xianyu Chun. The golden light illuminated the miasma layers and shone on Xianyu Chun and his followers, who first were stunned and then grew furious.

"This is... a Medicaster Terrain-Control Talisman! It controls the land, reversing celestial phenomena... I see, I see! No wonder the miasma suddenly leaked, I was tricked!" Normally not the brightest, Xianyu Chun had an epiphany like divine aid allowed him to piece it together.

This was a unique talisman of the Pharmacist lineage, and since it appeared here, it implied that someone from the Pharmacist lineage plotted against him...

Damn it! How can I not remember offending cultivators from the Pharmacist lineage!

Xianyu Chun, somewhat hopelessly sighed; he knew these were the Pharmacist lineage's talismans, and surely the two seniors outside recognized them too—would they dare rescue us? Rescuing them would definitely offend the Pharmacist lineage...

"These two seniors remain unmoving, likely unwilling to offer aid." A cultivator from the Evil Sheep Sect expressed utter despair.

"It's a unique talisman from the Pharmacist lineage; its presence signifies that members from the Pharmacist lineage plotted against the Evil Sheep Sect cultivators. The Pharmacist lineage is the strongest line in the Holy Mountain; if the senior rescues Xianyu Chun, they may offend certain members of the Pharmacist lineage..." Duolan implied.

In her view, Ning Fan, cautious as he was, would surely avoid offending the Pharmacist lineage.

Ning Fan slightly furrowed his brow; indeed, he preferred not to antagonize the Bei Clan but under certain conditions. Xianyu Chun came because of him and got trapped due to him—if he left him in peril, he wouldn't be Ning Fan. As for the Pharmacist lineage, perhaps they wouldn't know who rescued him!

With this thought, Ning Fan pointed his finger towards the heavens, and shot out a flare that instantly burned the Buddhist talisman to ashes. Then, with a flick of his sleeve, a powerful invisible force split the pervasive miasma, creating a vacuum path.

Amid the locked poisonous mist, suddenly there was a path to survival; Xianyu Chun and others, even if dim-witted, knew the mysterious senior had intervened to rescue them, all rejoicing while dragging their fainted companions, hastily escaped from the area. Having escaped, Xianyu Chun wanted to offer his gratitude for lifesaving, but unfortunately couldn't spot the rescuer's silhouette.

Upon saving Xianyu Chun and the others, Ning Fan immediately departed, not taking such trivial matters to heart.

Duolan was completely taken aback, never expected Ning Fan to dare rescue them at the risk of offending the Pharmacist lineage, and for the first time, changed her impression of Ning Fan.

"This Bei Clan, not necessarily a pure land... Tribal cultivators' minds are largely incomplete; thus, compared to ordinary people, they have few calculations, yet more simplicity. But that doesn't mean this place lacks cunning cultivators, first Duolan, then Xianyu Chun; upon entering the Fierce Realm, they were schemed against, indicating that the greatest danger here isn't the hidden Corpse demons or Fierce Beasts, but human hearts..."

Ning Fan sighed slightly, also putting away his carefree attitude upon entering the Tamu Clan; during the Fierce Realm journey, he gained a comprehensive understanding of the Bei Clan through Soul Search, but had yet to learn anything about the whereabouts of Jiuli Ritual Vessel, requiring further searching.

Ning Fan naturally returned to the Evil Sheep Sect before Xianyu Chun and his followers.

The Evil Sheep Sect remained bustling and peaceful, with no concern from any sect member about their Young Sect Leader's delayed return.

The Bei Clan cultivators were all large-hearted; unless witnessing Xianyu Chun's corpse firsthand, none would worry unnecessarily. This led Ning Fan to greater insight into the peculiar nature of the Bei Clan.

"Haven't seen the Young Sect Leader in days, truly miss him..." a shepherded youth told another youth.

"Heard the Young Sect Leader went to the Fierce Realm, so many days have passed, still hasn't returned; could he be in danger?"

"Of course, there's no danger, hahaha..."

"Hahaha..."

"Enough about the young chief. Look! I've picked up a strange stone!"

"That's dry sheep dung..."

"I don't believe it!"

"If you don't believe me, I'll taste it for you... Ugh, see, it's really sheep dung, it's so disgusting, how could I lie to you!"

"I still don't believe it, you must be tricking me! I will taste it myself to confirm..."

Seeing the peacefulness of the Evil Sheep Sect, Ning Fan felt speechless. Do these \*\*\*\* youths know that your young chief nearly died in the Fierce Realm...

He arrived at the task dispatch center and handed in the tasks. During this trip, Ning Fan completed 51 human-tier tasks and 7 earth-tier tasks, thereby completing the divine, demon, and devil tasks. With the three honors and six penalties concluded, he now just needs to obey the Dabei Clan's Twelve Prohibitions to avoid any trouble.

The 51 human-tier tasks earned nearly a million Medicine Soul Stones in total. Earth-tier tasks granted two million Medicine Soul Stones, along with other rewards.

Twelve Nine Revolutions Silver Pills, all of which enhance Truth-Transcending cultivation, and unlike the Four Heavens Pills, the Dabei Clan's pills greatly enhance cultivation. According to Ning Fan's estimate, any one of these pills could rival the efficacy of an Enlightenment Dao Fruit! That's somewhat terrifying! It made Ning Fan look forward to the pills that enhance Abandon-Void cultivation.

Three acquired treasures, mostly just first or second grade Nirvana treasures; these were inconsequential.

Seven plants of five-million-year-old spiritual herbs, a Fate Immortal Realm Corpse servant, and a War Spirit Technique manual.

The spiritual herbs were a variety Ning Fan had never seen, and even more eye-opening for him was the Dabei Clan's secret technique for controlling Corpse servants. The Dabei Clan seemed to excel at manipulating Corpse servants, and Ning Fan noticed that his acquired Corpse servant wore a golden hoop on its head, which was precisely what restricted the Corpse servant, ensuring the low-intellect Corpse followed Ning Fan's orders.

"This golden hoop is called the Devil Subduing Hoop; once worn, it can easily subdue demonic creatures, effective not only on Corpse servants but also on demons, Ancient Chaos Grand Emperors, and all magic practitioners in the world. It's the ultimate treasure for subduing demons among Buddhist disciples..." The task keeper Tuolong explained to Ning Fan when handing out the rewards.

Of course, Ning Fan didn't need a Fate Immortal Realm Corpse servant, so he resold it to the Evil Sheep Sect for a large number of Medicine Soul Stones.

The War Spirit Technique was a Seventh Revolution-grade soul skill, suitable for Seventh Revolution Pill Masters. Although the soul skill's level was comparable to Void Fragmentation spells and not particularly high, the Dabei Clan's soul skills held a mysterious quality that broadened Ning Fan's horizons.

For instance, the Seventh Revolution soul skill Ning Fan acquired, called "Soul Enhancement Technique," was a sustained-consumption skill. Once activated, it could enhance an Alchemist's Medicine Soul spirit,

modestly improving the Pill quality during alchemy. Although the soul skill's grade wasn't exceptionally high, it was practical, and such Medicine Soul skills were exceedingly rare in the Four Heavens...

"As for the earth-tier task, only the Innate Soul-Nourishing Spiritual Medicine's reward cannot be directly redeemed. You need to personally find the two adults Pi Xiong and Duolan and exchange ten Six-Star Nirvana Mother Stones for the reward. However, since you are traveling with Duolan, you'll likely handle the reward exchange yourself, so I won't concern myself," Tuolong casually remarked.

"Pi Xiong is dead, killed by the evil Sanyan Guards..." Duolan lied, her eyes slightly reddened.

"Damn those Sanyan Guards! Adult Duolan, don't be sad. Once the Holy Mountain reopens, your master will surely avenge Adult Pi Xiong!" Tuolong comforted.

"Hopefully..." Duolan glanced at Ning Fan, but saw him calmly flipping through the Soul Enhancement Technique manual, showing no guilt over Pi Xiong's death. Just as her impression of Ning Fan had started to change, she once again considered Ning Fan cold-hearted.

Of course, Ning Fan wouldn't feel guilty for someone dead; what's done is done. Pi Xiong was the only one to blame for seeking his own demise; Ning Fan had already forgotten about it. After several readings, he had memorized the Soul Enhancement Technique, stored the scroll, and left the Evil Sheep Sect with Duolan, returning to the Tamu Clan.

Duolan left sullen the entire way, but Ning Fan naturally didn't care about her mood, returning to the Tamu Clan without concern.

Upon seeing Ning Fan return, the Tamu Clan Leader Tageli could almost cry with joy!

The rules for the Southern Frontier Contest were for each large clan to send twenty people to participate, ranking results based on overall performance. For this Southern Frontier Contest hosted by the last contest's top-winning clan, the Summon Wind Clan, there were only three days left until the contest, and yet Tageli was still worried about the team list!

As it turned out, Burying Moon, Wu Laoba, and Ouyang Nuan were not in the Tamu Clan!

"In urgent times, borrow your sister Nuan for three months, return her after the Middle State Contest. The Southern Frontier Contest is equally important; we must achieve first place... Your sister Nuan will return unscathed, trust me!" This was the Sound Transmission Jade Slip left by Burying Moon.

"Husband, I'm going with Sister Burying Moon to rescue an old friend of hers. If successful, it could benefit the search for the Offering Vessel." This was Ouyang Nuan's message.

"Master! Burying Moon has news of the Offering Vessel. Little Ba is with her, accompanying her to find the Offering Vessel for you! Little Ba isn't doing it for your reward, but out of loyalty and passion..." A ton of nonsense, this was Wu Laoba's message.

Thus, Ning Fan understood the whereabouts of Burying Moon and the others. Their messages were left when he just entered the Fierce Realm, meaning they had been gone for nearly a month and were already in the Middle State.

Without following, he naturally worried about Ouyang Nuan's safety. But knowing Burying Moon was accompanying her, and having solemnly promised, Ning Fan was confident Burying Moon would keep Ouyang Nuan safe. After all, if Burying Moon had to fight hard, she could manifest the full Immortal Emperor cultivation...

What intrigued him even more was Burying Moon having found news of the Jiuli Ritual Vessel; it seemed the acquisition of this news hinged on her rescuing an old friend...

"What a bold woman, daring to act on her own while I'm gone." Ning Fan shook his head in resignation; regardless, Burying Moon's intentions were probably good, wanting to help him get information on the Offering Vessel. After spending time with her, Ning Fan had built a certain trust in her, feeling assured in her handling matters. He was certain she wouldn't betray him, especially for Mu Weiliang's sake.

"Younger Brother Ning, they're all gone, but you can't leave. If you leave, our Tamu Clan will place last again!" Tageli nearly knelt before Ning Fan.

"Don't worry, I'm not leaving." Remembering Burying Moon's reminder, Ning Fan decided to strive for first in the Southern Frontier Contest this time. If it weren't important, Burying Moon wouldn't have particularly reminded him.

Upon hearing Ning Fan wouldn't leave, Tageli felt revitalized. Although Ning Fan was the only foreign cultivator participating from the Tamu Clan, Tageli believed that with Ning Fan on their side, their clan wouldn't end up in bottom placement, especially as several clans didn't have a single Shedding Void participant.

Of course, Tageli completely abandoned the thought of vying for first. Many clans had more than one Shedding Void cultivator, and with Ning Fan's cultivation sealed, he could only utilize Shedding Void abilities. Ning Fan was the only one able to compete with other clans with Shedding Void cultivators. The Southern Frontier Contest ranked based on the scores of twenty people; could Ning Fan alone contend against entire teams for first place?

The Tamu Clan cultivators' overall cultivation was simply too weak...

"Now that I think of it, Younger Brother Ning, you brought back a Holy Mountain Tomb Guardian! Chulie Duolan... It's said she has many pursuers; could she have taken a liking to Younger Brother Ning? Otherwise, why would the proud Tomb Guardian demean herself before Younger Brother Ning... Remarkable, remarkable! Being a foreign cultivator, to have conquered the fiercest she-wolf on our grassland, haha..." Tageli didn't know what he was envisioning, suddenly laughing impishly.

Three days later, the day of the Southern Frontier Contest!

On the Summon Wind Clan's grassland, streams of light arrived from afar, all for attending today's grand event.

Once every millennium, the battle for the tomb, once every millennium, the Southern Frontier contest!

For the vast majority of Southern Frontier tribes, their main concern is just not ranking last in the contest, as once they do, they will be punished to guard the Sacred Monument, unable to leave their post for a thousand years.

For those powerful Southern Frontier tribes, this contest is aimed at claiming the number one spot in the Southern Frontier.

"I wonder which tribe will emerge victorious and take first place in this Southern Frontier contest."

"I think this contest will still have the Summon Wind Clan in first place. I've heard that two people from the Summon Wind Clan have broken through to the Shedding Void Realm within this millennium..."

"I actually think the Xieyang Sect has a good chance. The Young Chief of the Xieyang Sect has a unique mastery of the Soul Fusion Technique. In the last contest, the Xieyang Sect secured third place in the Southern Frontier, relying solely on Xianyu Chun, and over the millennium, Xianyu Chun's Soul Fusion Technique is said to have improved further."

"Haven't you heard! Minghai, the mage from the Sea Soul Sect, is already half a step into Void Fragmentation! The Sea Soul Sect's overall strength is only moderate, but with this person..."

"I actually think Tamu Clan also has a chance of winning..."

The tribal cultivator who said Tamu Clan would win was laughed at by several people before he could finish his sentence.

Tamu Clan? They're just getting outside help, but those outside cultivators have been trapped by the Six Penalties, unable to utilize much of their cultivation. At most, they can keep Tamu from being at the bottom. To even think of taking first place is ridiculous!

"I reckon that Tamu Clan, this time, can barely break a thousand points, but that's all. After all, in the last contest, Tamu Clan only scored 45 points..."

points, an embarrassing score!

In the last contest, even the second-to-last Hanzhen Clan scored over two hundred points!

There were more than a dozen tribes with scores exceeding a thousand! The number one Summon Wind Clan, on the other hand, scored over seven thousand two hundred points, more than a hundred times that of Tamu Clan!

A thousand points is already seeing Tamu Clan in an extremely favorable light, considering that over the long history of Tamu Clan, there have been very few contests where they exceeded this score.

Most of the Southern Frontier cultivators who arrived early would engage in mutual greetings, but only a few weak tribes like Tamu Clan, upon their arrival, were met with no inquiries and did not seek anyone out for conversation.

Tageli and the others huddled isolated in a corner of the steppe, with no one to associate with, and no attempts to talk to anyone.

As a tribe consistently at the bottom over the years, attempting to make conversation generally results in self-inflicted humiliation and ridicule; it is better not to try. Each Tamu man flushed red in their face, building up momentum, wanting to win respect for their tribe in this contest, even if it meant dying for it!

This atmosphere was also flowing among several other weak tribes.

Ning Fan swept his spirit sense across tribe after tribe, helplessly discovering that it was no injustice for Tamu Clan to be consistently at the bottom. For tribes like Summon Wind Clan, the number-one tribe, not to mention those at Shedding Void Stage, even the Truth-Transcending Cultivation Level participants had almost none with cultivations below Enlightenment. As for clans like the Xieyang Sect, almost none were below the Guixuan Level. And Tamu Clan? Above the Truth-Transcending Cultivation Level, there were only four people, and that's including Ning Fan and the Tamu Sect Leader. According to the competition rules, sect leaders cannot participate, so that's one more Truth-Transcending participant Tamu Clan has to lose...

Not even twenty Fate Immortals could be gathered; among the participants this time, there was even a first-step cultivator...

Too weak! With such overall strength, how could they not be at the bottom of the grand contest!

"You, are you the outsider Tamu Clan invited? Named Ning Fan?"

Suddenly a voice interrupted Ning Fan's thoughts.

It was a big man with a bare upper body, a bald head, with a strange bird-like beast totem tattooed on his head, a totem of the Summon Wind Clan, the Wind Falcon, their Summon Wind people's faith! And this bald man was currently the strongest cultivator of the Summon Wind Clan, Nan Zhilong!

"Tamu Clan, mere ants, this contest, my Summon Wind Clan will lead Tamu by ten thousand points!"

Nan Zhilong laughed heartily and returned to his own lineup.

People from other tribes gradually came to their senses. The Shedding Void powerhouse of the White Ghost Sect, the White Ghost Sorcerer, also stepped to Ning Fan and the others, shouting, "In this contest, my White Ghost Sect will lead Tamu by two thousand points!"

The Forsaken Corpse Sect shouted, "If we don't lead Tamu by fifteen hundred points, we'll crawl back!"

There was also the Yanan Sect, the Heishan (Black Mountain) Sect... Tribes regardless of strength or weakness all came forward at this moment, shouting insults laced with intent to humiliate.

Contrarily, the Xieyang Sect, who have been a constant adversary to Tamu, inexplicably stayed silent, with no one picking on the Tamu cultivators this time.

Tageli gritted his teeth quietly, aware that these tribes sought favor with the Emperor Lou Tuo of Middle State! Since Emperor Lou Tuo targeted Tamu Clan, there were countless tribes wanting to trample Tamu!

Each Tamu man flushed red in their face, but did not argue. Tamu ranking last year after year was a fact, and arguing would leave them speechless!

Yet everyone was unwilling! Unwilling to be used as a stepping stone to curry favor with Emperor Lou Tuo!

They had to prove themselves, had to use this Southern Frontier contest to wash away the shame of being the weakest in Tamu!

Ning Fan's gaze turned somewhat cold, not because he had deep feelings for Tamu, but because this experience of Tamu resonated with him!

On the Southern Frontier steppe, the number of cultivators seeking to step on Tamu to please Emperor Lou Tuo was countless!

In Eastern Heaven, the number of people wanting to step on Ning Fan to please the Dark Clan was just as countless!

How similar! How humiliating!

"Brother Ning, I've let you witness a joke. My Tamu Clan is indeed incapable, to the point where even unsavory tribes dare to laugh at us freely..." Tageli said with a bitter smile, in which lay unwillingness and rage!

"It's nothing, I, Ning Fan, will use facts to silence this group of people!"

Ning Fan's gaze had already returned to calm. Just then, a loud horn sounded, hoarse like an old dragon's roar, finally resonating across the field...

Chapter 1006: Seeing Complete Success

The sound of the horn seemed to come from nowhere, seemingly enhanced by great divine power, causing those who heard it to feel their blood boiling.

Then a streak of silver light broke through the sky. From afar, the silver light resembled a ball of flame, too dazzling to face directly. Only when near could one see it was an elder standing amidst silver flames.

The elder wore a golden hoop on his head, his face taut and rigid, his skin bluish-black, showing no expression, surrounded by an aura of death, evidently a Corpse Demon who had been dead for countless years!

A powerful aura of the Shattered Thought Early Stage emanated from this Corpse Demon. Furthermore, he held a scroll sealed with silver flames in his hand. As soon as he stood firm in the sky, he unfurled the scroll, releasing a compelling momentum that transformed into a fierce wind, sweeping towards everyone present.

Those tribal cultivators with insufficient cultivation were often blown off balance, while only True Immortal old monsters remained unmoved in the gale.

It was hard when the gale passed. The tribal cultivators could not steady themselves but hastily knelt down to pay respects to the Corpse Demon.

"Welcome, Holy Envoy!" The voice surged into the heavens.

Naturally, the people of Tamu bowed down as well. Those flying in the sky, who had been watching the grand event from afar, also descended to the ground and bowed respectfully. Among them was the noble Duolan!

Within the Dabei Clan, the hierarchy was strict. Tribal cultivators, being descendants of Medicine Slaves, held the lowest status. The Holy Mountain Tomb Guardians had slightly higher status, but even they had to kneel before the Holy Envoys, even though such envoys were merely Corpse Demons with low spirit awareness!

"You, why do you not kneel!"

The Corpse Demon elder scanned the steppes with a gaze, raspy voice questioning when he suddenly noticed someone daring not to kneel.

"I am not a Dabei person, naturally, no need to kneel before anyone," Ning Fan said calmly.

"Your words have reason..."

The Corpse Demon elder's tone remained stiff, without joy or anger. Upon hearing Ning Fan's words, he seemingly acknowledged the explanation but suddenly vanished without leaving even a shadow!

Ning Fan's gaze slightly narrowed as he too vanished, and in the next moment, from the empty sky came a burst of explosion, sounding both like one and countless overlapping noises. Then rifts appeared in the sky, and two figures were hurled backward from the spatial fissures.

It was Ning Fan and the Corpse Demon elder! Ning Fan descended back to the ground nonchalantly, while the Corpse Demon elder's dull eyes revealed astonishment.

"What happened!" No one here, including Shekong cultivators, saw clearly the exchange between Ning Fan and the Corpse Demon elder!

Even Duolan was unaware of what transpired in that instant!

"Your words surely have reason."

The Corpse Demon elder recovered from his shock, remaining indifferent. Only he knew that in that brief moment, he had exchanged dozens of blows with Ning Fan and with his formidable Corpse Demon body, he had absolutely fallen behind in the exchange!

According to the Holy Mountain's rules, if one had power equal to that of a Holy Envoy, they could ignore the hierarchy and meet the envoy without kneeling. Since Ning Fan possessed such strength, naturally, he need not kneel, but if he encountered a more powerful envoy, he would still need to kneel.

"Could this Ning-surnamed outside cultivator, even with suppressed cultivation, cope with the Shattered Thought Early Stage without falling behind?!"

Seeing that the Holy Envoy did not hold Ning Fan accountable for not kneeling, the cultivators present were filled with speculation and secretly shocked. Then they considered that Tamu Sect had only Ning Fan as a fierce one, and despite his power, it was ultimately limited and could not significantly affect the outcome of the contest, and they all sighed in relief.

After all, it was just one person...

The Corpse Demon elder, still with a cold expression, signaled the crowd to stand and began reading from the scroll in his hand.

"The Grave-Seizing battle opens once every millennium. The Southern Frontier contest is overseen by me, Holy Envoy No. 41 of Letter Yi, with two sections: literary and martial trials! The tribe that scores first in total can enter Middle State for the second round of grave-seizing. Now, this Holy Envoy will announce the literary trial's subject, advising everyone to watch every moment ahead carefully, not missing a single detail!"

After finishing his announcement, the Corpse Demon elder raised the scroll in his hand which flew upwards, suddenly transforming into a silver fire dragon in midair. Upon reaching its peak, it twisted abruptly, shattering into countless flames that rained down on the steppes, burning the wild grass clean. However, moments later, new tender wild grasses mysteriously grew from the scorched earth.

The entire process lasted only several dozen moments, yet contained vast divine principles... The literary trial would test the insights embedded in this scene!

"This is the topic for the first round of grave-seizing literary trial. Each of you surely has your own understanding. You are required to record your insights on the Manifestation Roll within one day, and submit it back to Middle State, where the emperors will assess and grade the responses!"

With that, the Corpse Demon elder flipped his hand, bringing out a piece of silver beast bone, which he crushed into bone powder in his palm then scattered forward. Immediately, fine silver bone ashes fell like wind, each ash transforming into a bone-structured low table upon landing. There were exactly seven hundred tables arranged in twenty-one rows, totaling thirty-five, precisely matching the number of Southern Frontier clans.

"Every past literary trial presents a random topic, testing each cultivator's insights. Unfortunately, there's a dearth of intellectuals among our Southern tribes. Hardly anyone achieves good results in the literary trial. In all Southern history, few individuals have ever scored over a hundred personally in the trial. The literary trial is not crucial, with minimal differences between tribes. The challenge lies in the martial trial... Younger Brother Ning need not worry much about the literary scores, just casually reply. With your cultivation, a score over a thousand in the martial trial is quite feasible, enough to lift our Tamu Sect from the shame of the bottom position..."

Tageli privately advised Ning Fan and handed him a palm-sized bone tablet. Then he turned to individually instruct participating Tamu cultivators, distributing the tablets.

Ning Fan looked at the bone tablet in his hand, used for recording scores. The front was inscribed with Dabe characters for 'Ning Fan,' his name, while the back was for score records. Currently, it showed zero, as the contest had yet to begin.

"The literary trial is not important..."

Ning Fan offered no response to Tageli's advice, and he joined the other participating cultivators, slowly walking towards their respective bone tables to sit cross-legged.

The tables were equipped with bone pens, blood ink, and scrolls. On the upper left of the tabletop, there was a beast-face groove etched with odd formation patterns. Many weaker cultivators, as soon as they sat down, hastily picked up the pen, dipped it in ink, scribbled randomly, and then rolled up their scrolls, placing them together with their bone tablets into the beast-face groove on the table.

Next, the groove would close, blink with light, and after a while, it would reopen with the scrolls gone, leaving only the tablets that now recorded their literary trial scores.

Most cultivators were not cautious about others copying their answers, so Ning Fan easily glimpsed some answer sheets.

"I realized fire could ignite grass, and it's very hot..." This was the answer given by cultivators with significant intellectual deficiencies.

"I am infuriated by the Holy Envoy's act of burning the Southern Frontier steppe. It's our ancestral heritage, not to be desecrated! Luckily, the grass grew back in the end..." This was the answer written by some outraged cultivators.

"I didn't understand anything." Some even submitted blank sheets!

Leaving Ning Fan speechless was the fact that those mindless answer sheets were even being secretly copied by many, unrestrained by the Corpse Demon elder. In just one incense stick's time, more than half of the cultivators completed the exam, despite having a full day allocated for literary trial responses...

Ning Fan glanced around. The other nineteen members of Tamu Sect had already filed their answer sheets and received scores. Of the nineteen, eighteen had zero, with only one scoring a single point. Ning Fan recalled their sheet answered 'Fire burns grass, fire overcomes wood'...

Such basic five-element cultivation knowledge was widely known across the Four Heavens, yet in Dabei, it could still earn a point... Blame the mental deficiency among Dabei people, managing this core cultivation knowledge becomes commendable, a point as comfort.

With this, apart from Ning Fan, Tamu Sect's literary trial score totaled only one point. Fortunately, judging by the sheets submitted so far, most other tribes comprised people with incomplete minds too, whose overall scores accumulated only to a few points, indeed not significantly differing from Tamu Sect.

But this did not mean that there were no normal cultivators present here.

Other tribes still had two or three people pondering, seemingly acquiring genuine insights from the trial topic. Stronger tribes, like the Evil Sheep Sect and Summon Wind Sect, still had eleven or twelve pondering with their eyes shut, gradually finding enlightenment as time passed.

These people were not like the mentally deficient cultivators. They protected their sheets closely to prevent others from viewing. Yet, with Ning Fan's far superior cultivation and his pervasive Ice Rain Technique perception, he could still easily see their sheets. The same held for other Shedding Void Realm old monsters peeking at the Crossing Truth Realm cultivators' sheets. The Corpse Demon elder never intervened; being able to copy was its own skill, as this was the cultivation world where strength ruled, not a mundane civil examination hall.

One by one, masters with normal mental states handed in their exams, and what they comprehended was mostly related to the Divine Skills like "Scroll Transforms into Dragon" and "Dragon Turns into Fire Rain." The scores they received were mostly around five or six, not very high.

After all, this literary test was obviously not about Divine Skills, but the enlightenment of Dao.

Fire burns grass, grass resurrects...

Wildfires never completely consume it, spring breeze blows and it lives again...

Ning Fan gradually stopped caring about others' scores, instead sinking into his own Dao Enlightenment. He was no longer treating this comprehension as a competition, but truly gaining insights from it.

He sat on the grass, at the bone table, hesitating to raise his pen to write. Instead, he closed his eyes and repeatedly recreated in his mind the scenes of resilient wild grass coming back to life.

Two hours passed, with nearly all cultivators below Shedding Void having turned in their exams, none scoring higher than ten. An exception was the Young Chief of the Evil Sheep Clan, Xianyu Chun, who, due to an intellectual impediment, had fallen asleep at his desk and did not submit his exam.

Four hours passed, by which time even some Shedding Void cultivators began handing in their exams, and higher scores started to appear.

"Hiss! Actually thirty points! What did Sorcerer Heishan of Black Mountain Sect write to achieve such a high score?" Suddenly, an exclamation was heard from outside.

Sorcerer Heishan, however, seemed not quite satisfied with this score, yet dared not question it.

After all, the score was given by the Central Continent Five Emperors; who was he, a mere Shedding Void, to criticize?

"Well, literary test scores aren't important; all depends on the martial test..." Thinking this way, Sorcerer Heishan felt comforted.

Following Sorcerer Heishan, numerous other Shedding Void cultivators achieved high scores.

"Forsaken Corpse Sect... thirty-five points! Such a high score for Forsaken Corpse Sorcerer!"

"Prolonged South Old Monster actually scored forty points! How is this possible!"

"White Ghost Sect's White Ghost Sorcerer actually scored forty-five points!"

"Sixty points! Nan Zhilong, Captain of a Thousand from Summon Wind Sect, could this person be the one to score first in this literary test?"

Gradually, the only ones left who hadn't submitted their exams were Ning Fan, the sleeping Xianyu Chun, and Sorcerer Minghai from Sea Soul Sect.

Sorcerer Minghai was naturally indifferent, not liking to get involved in the intrigues on the steppe. Sea Soul Sect was also one of the few clans that hadn't mocked Tamu Clan.

Six hours had passed since the start of the literary test, and Sorcerer Minghai maintained his pace, eyes closed. It wasn't until the seventh hour that he opened his eyes, nodded slightly, seemingly having understood something, and started answering the exam.

His score set a new high over the last hundred thousand years in the Southern Frontier, reaching four hundred points!

"A score of four hundred... No wonder he's an old monster on the verge of stepping into the Shattered Thought Stage; his Dao Enlightenment is the deepest in the Southern Frontier!" Some Southern Frontier cultivators were greatly shocked.

"Isn't this too high! Throughout Dabei, there are hardly any who achieve over four hundred points without entering Shattered Thought Stage! Those who accomplish this, their future achievements won't be less than Timeless..." Some skilled in examination found this astonishing fact, thus questioning if Sorcerer Minghai indeed had the qualifications to aspire to the Timeless Realm!

"Legend has it that the Great Emperor of Zhongzhou has already admired Sorcerer Minghai's outstanding intuition and intends to take him on as a disciple. I didn't believe it initially, but now I do! Thus, this Sea Soul Sect must not be offended in any way..." Some old monsters secretly made their decisions.

Night had fallen, Sorcerer Minghai appeared somewhat tired; those seven hours of deep thought had cost him quite some Heart Spirit. However, his gaze was relaxed, as he left the examination ground with an ethereal demeanor, like an old fisherman free from worldly concerns. Just as he was walking out, he turned back slightly, his gaze focused a bit seriously on Ning Fan, before faintly frowning at the snoring Xianyu Chun.

"As for this Young Chief of Evil Sheep Clan, there's no need to mention. In the previous literary test, he scored only one point; this year, he might just sleep through it — not worth a mock. But this Ning Fan, such an external cultivator... This man is an Eternal Immortal Venerable; even if his cultivation is restricted, his Dao Enlightenment won't be. I wonder how many points he can score; probably not less than five hundred..."

Five hundred points, when compared to Da Bi's Honored Immortal, most had scores like this. This fact also highlighted how rare Sorcerer Minghai's four hundred points were.

Sorcerer Minghai never underestimated anyone, but he also didn't believe Ning Fan could do better than those Honored Immortals from Dabei; he was confident that if he were an Eternal Immortal Venerable too, he would surely score far more than five hundred! Unfortunately, he hadn't even thoroughly broken through the Shattered Thought bottleneck. But once he became a disciple under Great Emperor of Zhongzhou, becoming an Eternal Immortal Venerable wouldn't be far off!

Time continued to pass.

The tenth hour, the eleventh hour, the twelfth hour... Suddenly, Xianyu Chun woke up, staring at the dawn-lit steppe, slightly stunned, then slapped his head and laughed heartily.

"I forgot I was in the literary test, I slept right through, ahaha, ahaha..."

This immediately incited laughter from many masters around him.

Numerous masters of the Evil Sheep Clan felt embarrassed, ashamed of their Young Chief's foolish behavior of sleeping through the literary test. The Chief of the Evil Sheep Clan felt his face burn; his most beloved woman gave birth to such a silly son, this... this is such a disgrace. Oh well! I, as a father, no longer expect you to score exceptionally; now just leave the grounds quickly!

"Quickly hand in your exam!" The Chief of the Evil Sheep Clan urged impatiently.

"Don't rush, don't rush; even my mentor hasn't handed in his exam, I'm waiting to submit together!" Xianyu Chun suddenly felt touched to see Ning Fan hadn't handed in his exam either. He thought, why wasn't his mentor submitting the exam? It must be because of him, Xianyu Chun!

Afraid that he would be lonely sleeping on the examination ground, he specially stayed to accompany him! Such a good man, such a good man!

"Mentor! Thank you!"

Xianyu Chun wanted to write these words on his exam paper and pass it to Ning Fan, like delivering a note.

At this moment, Ning Fan seemed to be contemplating with eyes closed; Xianyu Chun didn't dare transmit sound, only dared to pass the note. He couldn't figure out if Ning Fan was thinking or sleeping; if his mentor was sleeping, and he woke him, he would be unfilial!

Oops, forgot how to write the words "Mentor Thank You"...

Xianyu Chun had a headache and transmitted sound to ask his father.

The Chief of the Evil Sheep Clan turned black with rage.

How can this foolish son forget to write simple characters! That's not the focus, the focus is that this is an exam for the battle at the tomb; can you use it like delivering a note, this would be a severe crime, a desecration of the Holy Mountain's majesty!

"Submit your exam immediately! Do not disturb your mentor's enlightenment!"

These words hit Xianyu Chun's sore spot; as a disciple who practiced filial piety, how could he disturb his mentor's enlightenment? Absolutely not!

At once, without wasting more time there, he casually recalled a few scenes of the day's exam topic, and finding his mind completely blank, helplessly scrawled some random scribbles on the exam paper, then submitted it.

Shortly afterward, the score came out.

Evil Sheep Clan Xianyu Chun... five hundred points!

"How is this possible! What exactly did Xianyu Chun write, how could the Central Continent Five Emperors give him a score of 500!"

"I don't believe it, how could a fool possibly score 500!"

"Could it be that the Central Continent Five Emperors made a mistake in grading!"

"Hush! Be careful with your words! We cannot criticize the Five Emperors..."

Some astonished masters quickly fell silent, as the sinister gaze of the Corpse Demon Elder had already locked onto those who spoke ill of the Five Emperors.

Speaking behind the backs of the Five Emperors is a grave crime! If those people continued to speak, the Corpse Demon Elder would not hesitate to enforce the law on the spot and teach them a lesson!

Of course, even the Corpse Demon with low intelligence, was somewhat shocked. After all, no matter how one looked at Xianyu Chun, he seemed foolish, especially since he slept through the entire exam. If even such a person could score 500, anyone could score 1,000!

Strange, very strange! Could this child's talent be extraordinary, and I failed to notice! The Corpse Demon Elder began to doubt his own intelligence.

The entire Xieyang Sect was bewildered, even the usually astute Chief of the Xieyang Clan was at a loss. Unfortunately, Xianyu Chun himself hadn't understood why a score of 500 was so shocking. 500 didn't seem much different from 1 to him, hmm, 500 minus 1 equals 2, just 2 points more than 1, nothing too surprising, why was everyone making such a fuss...

The usually placid Sorcerer Minghai was now finding it hard to stay indifferent. If Ning Fan scored 500, he could console himself, as the other was an Eternal Immortal Venerable, deserving to surpass himself. But the person who scored 500 was Xianyu Chun! Even Sorcerer Minghai, who generally ignored worldly affairs, had heard of this fool renowned in the Southern Frontier. With exceptional cultivation potential, especially in understanding the Soul Fusion Secret Technique, yet intellectually incomplete, often doing laughably silly things, yet he could score 500...

This was a literary exam, only those worthy can occupy such a position! How could this child surpass me!

"What did you write on your exam paper!" Sorcerer Minghai suddenly approached and asked in a low voice.

Inquiring about someone else's answer is extremely rude, especially since the literary exam wasn't over yet, revealing the answer could allow others to score high. Fortunately, the only one left to submit papers was Ning Fan. Xianyu Chun revered Ning Fan as if he were a deity, not at all worried about his answer being leaked to Ning Fan, even seeing it as a form of recognition if his master copied his answer, something to be celebrated! Thus, he didn't hide it any longer and directly spoke out his answer loudly.

"I only wrote two sentences on the exam paper: Is there fire? Sorry, I didn't see it. The grass was burned? Sorry, I didn't see it."

Xianyu Chun stretched lazily. In fact, when the Corpse Demon Elder announced the exam question, he was already dozing off, completely missing the scene of the grass burning.

His father urged him to answer, so he just honestly turned in a nearly blank paper, stating he saw nothing and sincerely apologized to the Central Continent Five Emperors. But such an answer surprisingly got him 500 points, even 2 more than he expected from 1 point—his luck simply couldn't be better, hahaha!

"Why could such an answer score 500 points! Didn't he see nothing, not even the exam question? Shouldn't he have no score!" Some masters were puzzled.

But Sorcerer Minghai suddenly shivered, quickly turning back to look at the scorched earth that had been burned.

No, it's wrong!

There was never any fire here!

The scorched earth was fake, and the resurrection of the wild grass was fake too!

"Dispel!"

Sorcerer Minghai suddenly made a gesture and shouted, the scenery here changed instantly.

The scorched earth disappeared; there was not a trace left of being burned. The new, tender wild grass also vanished, leaving only the old, withered wild grass, looking like it's been growing for a season...

It was an illusion, indeed an illusion...

So Minghai's high self-regard failed to see that this exam question was just an illusion from the start!

No fire, no wildfire raging, no resurrection of wild grass... all illusions!

No wonder this child said he saw nothing! Indeed, nothing was ever there...

"This child isn't foolish, it's great wisdom hidden in plain sight!" Minghai gasped, clearing all contempt for Xianyu Chun from his mind and replacing it with respect.

If Sorcerer Minghai wasn't mistaken, the illusion in this exam question was created by the Central Continent Five Emperors, an illusion even most Shattered Thought stage would fail to see through... This child accomplished what many Shattered Thought stages couldn't, earning 500 points is rightly deserved, with boundless prospects! From the start, this child saw through everything, so instead of pondering, he opted to sleep directly—this carefree view of life is something rare and valuable to cultivators, constantly allowing one to perceive the Dao that others cannot attain!

This child... I can't compare to!

"With such potential, little friend should be first in the Southern Frontier! Even that Ning Fan might not compare to you," sighed Sorcerer Minghai.

"Wrong, wrong, wrong! That person is my master! How could I compare to even one hair of my master! He is the true number one in the Southern Frontier! I only scored 500; if it were my master, he could easily get 5,000!" Xianyu Chun said discontentedly. He couldn't allow any slight contempt for his revered master from Sorcerer Minghai.

"5,000... little friend must be joking. From ancient times, no one has ever scored 5,000 in the first round of the Tomb Seizing literary exam, not even the great emperors could do that in their youth. If that foreign cultivator named Ning got 500, it's normal; getting 1,000 would be very difficult, and if it were 5,000... haha," Sorcerer Minghai, impressed by Xianyu Chun's talent, didn't wish to offend this genius, so he just laughed off Xianyu Chun's wild words without taking offense.

"Is 5,000 a lot? Isn't it just 2 points more than 500..." Xianyu Chun was stunned, wondering why this score had never been achieved, or if he calculated wrong.

Sorcerer Minghai was puzzled; with all his wisdom, he couldn't understand Xianyu Chun's words for a moment. 5,000 is just 2 more than 500, what does he mean... subtracting 500 from 5,000 wouldn't equal 2, so was there another implication... was he hinting something to me...

Sorcerer Minghai thought more complicatedly, vaguely feeling hinted at something but failing to grasp the key.

But some others sneered, among whom was the loudest was Nan Zhilong of the Summon Wind Sect!

"Absolutely ridiculous! If a mere foreign cultivator could get an unprecedented 5,000, every Da Bi cultivator would die of shame!"

As these words spread, countless people joined Nan Zhilong in laughing heartily.

Xianyu Chun's face immediately turned grim. If not for Nan Zhilong's high cultivation, he would've instantly acted to defend his master!

At this moment, someone exclaimed; it turned out Ning Fan had finished contemplating, submitted his paper, and swept a cold glance towards Nan Zhilong.

The previously recklessly laughing Nan Zhilong instantly felt an ice-cold, bone-chilling sensation, his laughter caught in his throat, neither coming in nor going out, his face flushed, while fear filled his heart.

What kind of ominous gaze was this! This person... this person must not be provoked, or disaster would surely follow!

Not just Nan Zhilong; every master swept by Ning Fan's gaze was horrified into silent fear!

The entire field fell into dead silence!

Xianyu Chun was thrilled, admiring Ning Fan's boldness—without uttering a word, he could intimidate the cowardly, what immense demon power!

"May I know how many points fellow Daoist scored?" Sorcerer Minghai's inquiry broke the atmosphere, indicating his concern for Ning Fan's score.

"I don't know, my score still hasn't been given." Ning Fan collected the coldness in his eyes and pointed to the Beast Face Groove on the bone table.

Only then did the crowd notice that the Beast Face Groove on Ning Fan's table had not opened for a long time...

This indicated that the Central Continent Five Emperors still hadn't given Ning Fan a score!

As time passed, another two hours went by, and Ning Fan's score still hadn't been given!

This was truly a strange tale on the Dabei Grassland! No participant in the cultivation world examination had ever waited this long without receiving scores after submitting their paper!

"Could it be that this person's answer has made it difficult for the Central Continent Five Emperors to decide, unable to give an accurate score?" Many people secretly speculated, yet felt this idea was somewhat absurd. What kind of answer could make the Five Emperors unable to score? A disastrous answer? That can't be right, those who score zero tend to receive results quickly... An exceptionally good answer? How good would it need to be to make it difficult for the Five Emperors to decide?

Central Continent, Tiandu Peak.

The millennial tomb struggle, the first round of the literary test results must be jointly decided by the Central Continent Five Emperors, as is the tradition. As in previous years, in this round of the tomb struggle, four of the Central Continent Five Emperors gathered at Tiandu Peak to discuss the participants' results.

The four Immortal Emperors present included Emperor Lou Tuo and Emperor Bone Spirit, neither of whom held the most power among the Four Emperors, but the remaining two wielded more authority.

Of the remaining two emperors, one was dressed in red and green, wearing a strange mask on his head that seemed to both smile and cry, hiding his true appearance. His imperial title was Great Emperor Foqi, and it was said that he had comprehended profound methods from a tear of a Buddha statue, completing the Dao, and took the title Foqi, only a step away from entering the Eternal Seventh Calamity.

The other was the most authoritative figure among the current Five Emperors. This was an exceptionally strict-looking elder, giving off an air of meticulousness, with a white beard reaching the ground, leaning on an iron staff entwined with flames, bearing the imperial title Tiandu, and Tiandu Peak was precisely his abode.

On Tiandu Peak, there was a Teleportation Formation that occasionally transmitted the exam papers from various grasslands. Whenever a paper arrived, hundreds of disciples under the Four Emperors would first review it, and for the less satisfactory ones, scores would be directly determined by those below, only a few outstanding ones were presented to the Four Emperors for joint evaluation.

Generally speaking, the initial papers received were filled by those with incomplete mental faculties, and these were mostly scored as zero. For these papers, Emperors Tiandu, Lou Tuo, and Bone Spirit showed little concern, yet Great Emperor Foqi exhibited great interest, and would browse them alongside the disciples.

"Interesting, interesting, this year's literary test indeed has many strange and bizarre answers... I'm glad I ended my seclusion early to join this event! It's a pity Fellow Daoist Baihua couldn't make it to witness these laughable papers. Heh heh, such a shame." Great Emperor Foqi let out a peculiar laugh, and suddenly gave a meaningful glance at Emperor Lou Tuo.

Emperor Lou Tuo was slightly taken aback, and then calmly replied, "Yes, it's a shame that Fellow Daoist Baihua couldn't come due to his serious injuries."

"Heh heh, a thousand years ago, Fellow Daoist Baihua went into the Fierce Realm to gather herbs but was besieged by three True Immortal-grade Corpse Demons, I wonder how Fellow Daoist Lou Tuo views this?" Great Emperor Foqi said with a mocking laugh.

"What? Do you suspect that this matter was my doing?" Lou Tuo's expression immediately darkened.

"Heh heh, I didn't say anything, why be so eager to explain..." Great Emperor Foqi hadn't finished mocking when suddenly a reprimanding voice resounded.

"Enough! You didn't come to Tiandu Peak today to dredge up past grievances! If anyone dares to act out of line, don't blame this old man for executing the Holy Mountain's punishment!"

With Emperor Tiandu's stern words, not only did Great Emperor Foqi and Emperor Lou Tuo change their expressions, even Emperor Bone Spirit showed a hint of fear, all corrected their demeanor and dared not utter nonsense again.

The disciples seated below the Four Emperors dared even less to speak recklessly, all sitting upright and scored carefully, with only occasional arguments, no one dared to speak too much, creating an extremely stifling atmosphere.

Likewise, among the Four Emperors, there was little communication, occasional comments arose but only pertaining to the test papers. Of course, the most vocal was still the talkative Great Emperor Foqi.

"Not bad, not bad, that little kid from the Yellow Sand Prairie's Sand Wolf Sect was able to write such profound fire control methods, yes, give him two hundred points."

"This one's good, someone in the Western River Prairie wrote about Five Fires Five Earth, give a hundred and fifty points!"

"... This one's a bit lacking, give 2 points, just for appearances... Oh right, I forgot this young lad was your disciple, Bone Spirit, you can have three hundred points for him!"

"Beidi Clan's Qiu Long... Hmm, Beidi Clan truly has a rich talent pool, to have someone like this, give him four hundred points!"

"Southern Frontier's Sea Soul Sect... oh, the kid from Sea Soul Sect, is now mixing with the old fellows, these insights are profound, they managed to glimpse a trace of Dao transformation, this one has potential for Immortal Venerable, give him four hundred points too!"

In this literary test, only a dozen or so managed to score four hundred points, these individuals were mostly remembered by the Central Continent's emperors as potential future disciples, so naturally, they weren't stingy with the scoring.

One hundred and eight grasslands, three thousand tribes, sixty thousand answer sheets were gradually being scored, and the four emperors had varied expressions. Some were disappointed, likely having pinned hopes on some juniors who hadn't met expectations; others were delighted, perhaps having discovered promising talents.

Suddenly, yet another paper caught the Four Emperors' attention.

"Southern Frontier's Xieyang Sect, Xianyu Chun. The Southern Frontier has some good seedlings this year, look at this one's paper." Great Emperor Foqi, after seeing Xianyu Chun's paper, slightly narrowed his eyes and passed the paper to the other three emperors and then looked at Emperor Lou Tuo with a peculiarly knowing look.

After viewing the paper, Emperor Bone Spirit's expression similarly shifted, even the ever-reserved Emperor Tiandu showed a hint of surprise.

Only Emperor Lou Tuo's expression was somewhat indecisive.

"This little devil from the Xieyang Sect is quite something, to have seen through Fellow Daoist Lou Tuo's Illusory Art... hehe, truly a good seed, though it's possible that Fellow Daoist Lou Tuo's Illusory Art was too crude to be seen through by a little Fate Immortal..." Great Emperor Foqi said with a mocking laugh.

"Hmph! My Illusory Art naturally couldn't be wrong, it's this little brat with sharp eyes! It's also possible that this kid randomly guessed right on the paper!" Lou Tuo said coldly, initially holding a trace of appreciation for Xianyu Chun, but was immediately aggrieved by Great Emperor Foqi's sarcastic remarks.

"Guessing? Heh heh, if this kid could guess right, then I'm even more interested, give this child five hundred points, any objections?" Great Emperor Foqi asked with a laugh.

"If this child can see through Fellow Daoist Lou Tuo's Illusory Art with just a Fate Immortal cultivation, then five hundred points is not too high." Emperor Bone Spirit agreed.

"I have no objections!" Emperor Tiandu, his mood unfathomable, said.

Thus, even Emperor Lou Tuo couldn't voice an objection, and Xianyu Chun's five hundred points were so settled.

The time for the literary test was nearing its end, with almost no papers arriving. The emperors were practically ready to await the final results of the martial test when suddenly another paper arrived, again from the Southern Frontier.

"Oh? It's a paper from Tamu Clan." Great Emperor Foqi looked strangely at Emperor Lou Tuo, causing the latter to let out a cold snort.

The Emperors had mostly heard about Lou Tuo's bullying of the Tamu Clan, but no one would stand up for Tamu. After all, Tamu was just a weak tribe, with no outstanding talent within the tribe to draw the interest of the Emperors, naturally, no one wished to do something as unrewarding as defending them.

"Hmm? This paper..." Great Emperor Foqi initially planned to tease Lou Tuo about the Tamu topic, but was suddenly shocked into silence.

The other three emperors, seeing Great Emperor Foqi's astonishment, were naturally curious, spread out their spirit sense to investigate, and were collectively moved upon reading.

The entire paper had not a single word, only a circle.

A circle with a gap, unable to fully close!

"This child... actually saw perfection! Is this mere coincidence, or..."

Chapter 1007: Beneath the Volcano

Sure, here's the translation:

Perfection is the realm that countless Quasi-Saints strive for tirelessly.

As descendants of Saints, the Central Continent Five Emperors naturally have an understanding of Perfection. It can even be said that the holding of the battle for tombs is greatly related to the elusive concept of Perfection.

The thoughts of Saints transform into mountains with Twelve Tomb Veins. The Tomb Veins harbor the remnants of Perfection Dao Thoughts left by Saints after their demise. These Perfect Dao Thoughts are considered a great blessing and fortune for any master of the second step!

One of the benefits of Perfect Dao Thoughts is that they assist masters in perfecting Divine Skills and Cultivation Techniques, making them gradually reach perfection. Emperor Lou Tuo once paid a great price to gain the opportunity to cultivate in the Holy Mountain Tomb Vein, where he perfected numerous Divine Skills. This is why his Illusory Art always carries a vague sense of perfection.

This point can usually only be discerned by those Immortal Emperors who have a deep understanding of the concept of Perfection.

Yet Ning Fan saw through this point and drew a circle with a gap on the answer scroll!

"If this child drew such a circle by chance, then let it be, but if not, then his insight is truly terrifying! Not only can he see Perfection in Fellow Lou Tuo's Illusory Art, but he also discerns that the Perfection is merely superficial and still has defects, resembling only in form. Thus, the circle drawn by this child has a gap, symbolizing this matter! We are not masters of the third step; even if we gain insights from the Holy Mountain Tomb Veins, how can we cultivate true Perfection? At most, we can only imbue Divine Skills with a false sense of Perfection, but even a semblance is extremely difficult to achieve... This child, I want him! As the first disciple of my Emperor Foqi, none but this person should be." Emperor Foqi's eyes shone brightly.

The reason why the Central Continent Five Emperors attach such importance to the first round of the battle for tombs is merely to discover some good material from various grasslands. Now that a remarkable master like Ning Fan has emerged, Emperor Foqi naturally does not plan to let him go, already moved by the thought of recruiting him as a disciple, and once recruited, will certainly be cultivated as the first disciple!

Great Emperor Tiandu took the answer scroll and repeatedly looked at the gap circle on the skin scroll, finding it more and more astonishing.

His understanding of the concept of Perfection surpasses the other Three Emperors, enabling him to see things that the other Three Emperors cannot.

The gap circle on the scroll is not merely simple scribbling; surprisingly, a trace of Ning Fan's insights is hidden within each stroke.

Great Emperor Tiandu held the scroll in one hand and traced the circle drawn by Ning Fan with his other index finger, focusing his heart and spirit with unprecedented intensity. Gradually, he unexpectedly felt an overwhelming aura from the gap circle, caught off guard, causing both hands to tremble and almost unable to hold the answer scroll.

"Imitation! This child has integrated a trace of imitation of Perfection into this circle! Is it imitated from Lou Tuo's Illusory Art?"

Merely seeing through Perfection might seem like cheating or coincidence, yet if one can achieve even slight imitation, that child is indeed terrifying—even if that child's imitation is crude and clumsy. However, one must realize that this child only took one day to imitate a trace of Perfection!

Just one day!

The thoughts of Saint's Perfection aren't that easy to imitate! Great Emperor Tiandu reflected that before breaking into Immortal Emperor, he couldn't even perceive the sense of Perfection. Even after advancing to Immortal Emperor, he spent endless years imitating those Perfect Dao Thoughts... Ning Fan's understanding of Perfection certainly falls behind his, but to achieve slight imitation in just one day, such aptitude is truly astonishing.

"This child is no ordinary person!" Great Emperor Tiandu praised.

"Oh? Seems like you're quite satisfied with this child too. Might you end up competing with me for this disciple?" Emperor Foqi chuckled evilly.

"Compete if you must, why not! You should know that if this child can see Perfection before entering Immortal Emperor, it means something! Thus, even someone like me cannot help but value this child." As Great Emperor Tiandu's words fell, the faces of other Three Emperors turned serious.

Throughout the entire history of Dabei, only three people have seen Perfection before entering Immortal Emperor!

The first person defected to Three Flames, became the leader of Vacant Flame, striking fear in many Immortal Emperors of the Holy Mountain; the second person infiltrated the Sacred Tomb, becoming the

first successful tomb raider since ancient times, whereabouts remain unknown; the third person sits before the Ancient Holy Stone Thrones, comprehending Ten Thousand Chants Decay... The fourth person is Ning Fan!

Besides that, Great Emperor Tiandu didn't mention: even those three didn't manage to imitate a trace of clumsy Perfection before entering Immortal Emperor in one day, but Ning Fan did—this indicates only one thing!

Ning Fan's aptitude surpasses those three! Though presently obscure, he is highly likely to achieve accomplishments beyond those three!

In light of this, even the not-so-fond-of-accepting disciples Great Emperor Tiandu couldn't help but entertain the idea of taking disciples—they plan to contest with Emperor Foqi.

"It seems claiming this disciple won't be easy. Back then, that person sitting at the Ancient Holy Stone Thrones seemed to get a score of three thousand in the written test. In my opinion, this child should also get three thousand considering precedent." Emperor Foqi said.

"Three thousand, this might work." Great Emperor Tiandu slightly nodded but noticed Emperor Bone Spirit and Emperor Lou Tuo's peculiar expressions, prompting curiosity.

"Why don't the two friends speak? Do you think the grade of three thousand is too high?"

"Great Emperor Tiandu hasn't visited the Southern Frontier; some matters might be unknown. This Ning Fan, it turns out, is not a local master of the Tamu Clan but an outsider. Do you still think the grade of three thousand is high?" Mentioning the term 'outsider,' Emperor Lou Tuo spoke with considerable disdain. Upon this statement, the situation suddenly went cold.

Outsider... This child is unexpectedly an outsider...

"Is he truly an outsider?" Great Emperor Tiandu spoke with a cold tone.

"Absolutely true; if not for this, I, Bone Spirit, would also be willing to recruit this disciple. What a pity, such good material, yet not of our tribe..." Emperor Bone Spirit shook his head repeatedly.

The situation fell into silence.

Great Emperor Tiandu tossed Ning Fan's answer scroll onto the desk before him, and the other emperors showed no further interest in looking at the scroll.

"How should this child's grade be decided?" Emperor Bone Spirit inquired.

"Any score will do. Since this child isn't a master of Dabei's cultivations, his score isn't crucial—I have no interest in intervening. As for the martial test, it requires no input from us Immortal Emperors. I have a batch of expensive pills close to completion, so I'll go check on the fire; fellow Daoists may do as you please." Great Emperor Tiandu remarked indifferently and turned to leave.

"What a pity, what a pity... I will take my leave first too. I'll leave this child's grade to Fellow Bone Spirit and Fellow Lou Tuo to decide." Emperor Foqi said with significant meaning, casting a meaningful glance at Lou Tuo, and left Tiandu Peak with numerous disciples.

"Since Fellow Tiandu and Fellow Foqi left, I shall do the same. This child's grade, I'll leave to Fellow Lou Tuo to decide alone. You must know, this child this time brought a rare Medicine Soul to our Dabei, deserving certain respect. Fellow Lou Tuo, when setting the grade, try to put aside biases against outsiders or the Tamu Clan and give a fair score." As Emperor Bone Spirit's words fell, Emperor Lou Tuo coldly snorted.

"I don't need you, Daoist friend, to remind me how to act."

"That's for the best."

Emperor Gulng left with his disciples. Only Emperor Lou Tuo and his apprentices, along with a few guards from Tian Du Peak, remained here.

"How many points is the Ancestor planning to give this child?" A short cultivator among Lou Tuo's disciples suddenly asked.

"A mere foreign cultivator naturally cannot get too high a score. Hehe, the points aren't the main focus. We should take this kid's bone token as well! I can't interfere with the martial test results, but there are plenty of ways to make sure the Tamu Clan cannot rise again."

Emperor Lou Tuo sneered coldly.

...

Time passed bit by bit; it's been two hours since the literary test ended, yet Ning Fan's results still hadn't come out.

Voices of speculation occasionally emerged around, guessing at the reasons behind this. Ning Fan wasn't concerned with any of it.

Ning Fan stood alone on the grassland, sometimes looking at the sky, sometimes at the ground, and at times at the wild grasses bowing to the wind, his expression contemplative.

Even without using the Tianren Eye Technique, his innate gift from the Fu Li race was enough to discern that the blazing fire was merely an illusion. The illusion isn't the key; the crucial part is that scene, which indeed contains unfathomable mysteries, embedded with a hint of perfection.

The wildfires won't destroy it completely, and in spring, the breeze brings life again...

"The beauty of grass lies in resilience, flexibility, adaptation to circumstances, and gathering strength into the earth. Resilience prevents bending, flexibility prevents harm, adapting avoids disaster, and gathering strength means dying without decay. The wildfires won't destroy them not because the grass is stronger than the fire, but because it knows to evade and preserve strength. Though the fire is fierce, its flaw is evident; it strikes fiercely but cannot sustain, eventually dying out. The grass, though weak, can root into the ground, borrowing its strength, surviving. Once the fire disappears, the grass regains—"

"If one can speak to the nature of grass, it might be the best answer in the eyes of the questioner. If one can identify the transformations among the Dao, though not as telling, it would also achieve a good score."

When Sorcerer Minghai submitted his paper, though Ning Fan had not opened his eyes, he sensed and observed his answer with his spirit sense. Sorcerer Minghai's answer was only tangentially related to Dao transformations and scored four hundred points. If he had identified the full transformation of the Dao, a higher score was assured; and if speaking to the grass's nature, it would be higher still.

"My answer is neither the nature of the grass nor the transformations of the Dao, but... perfection..."

Ning Fan's gaze sharpened.

He had tasted the Clear Water Wine of Tantai Weiyu and sensed the perfection in that wine, and in that scene of blazing wildfires, Ning Fan similarly detected a shred of perfection within!

It wasn't that the caster had reached the Third Step Perfect Realm but had imitated it from elsewhere; it was a false perfection with significant flaws, like a broken circle, far from perfect. It simply couldn't compare to the perfection within the Clear Water Wine.

Ning Fan drew a broken circle on his paper to hint at this point. In this place, which is Dabei, the abode of Saint descendants, the questioner who could imitate a shred of perfection surely understood the essence of the word perfection. The cunning Central Continent Five Emperors would surely grasp the implication of the broken circle.

Being able to perceive the unique perfection of the Third Step Saints should merit a score better than the perceptions of great nature or Dao transformations.

And Ning Fan attempted to imitate a shred of perfection within the broken circle. Perfection isn't something easily mimicked; even with Ning Fan's insight at the Second Realm of Tianren, he could only copy an extremely crude piece.

But unexpectedly, just imitating that crude piece of perfection, his refinement in illusions showed slight improvement!

The shred of perfection integrated into the illusion was Emperor Lou Tuo's lengthy cultivation, which significantly reduced the flaws in his illusions, making them more real, more perfect. Ning Fan's imitation only slightly enhanced the illusion's power; yet even so, it was quite a harvest.

"Regrettably, the perfection I imitate is itself an imitation by others, and due to my lack of understanding, my secondary imitation naturally has more flaws... Perfection is far beyond my current grasp." Ning Fan mused with a hint of regret.

Xianyu Chun, seeing Ning Fan lost in thought, dared not interrupt and stood respectfully to the side, with those unaware might truly think Xianyu Chun was Ning Fan's disciple.

After an indefinite time amid discussion, sudden cracking noises resounded, drawing everyone's attention.

They saw the beast-faced groove on Ning Fan's bone desk suddenly open. The southern frontier originally didn't care about the civil test scores, but today, every cultivator here was curious about Ning Fan's score.

Xianyu Chun was the first to dart forward, grabbed the bone token, unable to contain his excitement, but upon seeing the score, he was immediately dumbfounded, "How is this possible..."

Ning Fan's civil test result was shockingly zero points!

An uproar erupted all around; after waiting an hour, they'd received such a result, and those already unfriendly toward the Tamu Clan secretly sneered.

"This person, a reputed Eternal Immortal Venerable, can't even earn a single point! Of course, it's also possible that someone among the Five Emperors obstructed, erasing his civil test results. Could it then be the work of Emperor Lou Tuo? Considering how Emperor Lou Tuo neither likes the Tamu Clan nor foreign cultivators..." The White Ghost Sorcerer from the White Ghost Sect secretly speculated, further resolving to humiliate the Tamu Clan in the martial test to win Emperor Lou Tuo's favor.

Nan Zhilong breathed a sigh of relief, then burst into loud laughter, "That's the consequence of offending Emperor Lou Tuo. Even as an Eternal Immortal Venerable, don't dream of standing up for the Tamu Clan."

Sorcerer Minghai sighed secretly; if the Zhongzhou Pagoda Emperor had intervened, no insight would help. Otherwise, with this Immortal Venerable's Dao understanding, the score couldn't have been low...

Thus, as the civil test scores were tallied, the Tamu Clan scored a total of 1 point, temporarily ranking last.

The second last, the Hanzhen Clan, scored 4 points in the civil test. Each Hanzhen Clan cultivator looked at their Tamu counterparts with schadenfreude.

"Master, this score must be wrong; you couldn't have no result..." Xianyu Chun couldn't believe it.

"No matter, give me the bone token!" Ning Fan said nonchalantly, though his eyes showed a hint of coldness. Receiving the bone token, he glanced at the score.

Zero points... haha, what a score of zero!

His results couldn't possibly be just that. If it were a zero, the Central Continent Five Emperors wouldn't have delayed for an hour before reluctantly giving the score. There must be some inside story to this, perhaps Emperor Lou Tuo is behind it, or maybe his identity as an outsider caused trouble, or it could be both...

Though this is indeed unfair, he is an outsider to begin with, and has no grounds to oppose it.

Unable to oppose it doesn't mean he has to silently accept it all. Ning Fan suppresses the negative emotions in his heart with great effort. Logic tells him that he still has the martial arts test to score. The martial arts test doesn't require the Central Continent Emperors to decide the score, the score depends entirely on personal strength, so even the Central Continent Five Emperors cannot intervene here.

But his heart couldn't calm down!

"Hmm? This is..."

Ning Fan suddenly felt a chill in his heart, a sense of alertness arose abruptly. Without any hesitation, he threw the token away, and withdrew without a word, while his spirit sense locked onto the token as if facing a formidable enemy!

On the surface of the token, there was a grain of dust, a grayish-blue dust!

Even though it is just a grain of dust, it attracted Ning Fan's alertness, this dust is problematic!

The exam papers used in this test are known as the Manifestation Roll, the token is called the Manifestation Tile, they are special magic artifacts, capable of using the teleportation formation in the beast face groove to directly teleport to Zhongzhou Tiandu Peak.

Ning Fan was very certain that before putting the token into the beast face groove, it hadn't gotten this dangerous dust. If it weren't for his extraordinary perception, he wouldn't have noticed it at all!

Just as Ning Fan let go, a sudden change happened!

The token, thrown far by Ning Fan, suddenly burst forth a ray of grayish-blue fire, rushing directly at Ning Fan's retreating chest. Its speed was inconceivable, unavoidable. That grayish-blue substance was nothing other than a grain of dust, seemingly without weight, but upon hitting Ning Fan, it was indescribably heavy, as if possessing the force of a mountain collapsing, generating a deafening blast that sent Ning Fan flying backwards. The shockwave it generated was so strong that countless cultivators from Dabei Clan couldn't stand still, utterly stunned!

"What happened, did that outsider named Ning get attacked by something! That terrifying shockwave, what exactly is it!"

"That grayish-blue glow looks so familiar, could it be..."

"Impossible! Stony Flame masters can't leave the Fierce Realm by even half a step, could it be a Stony Flame master infiltrated the Dabei Grassland! Otherwise, why would the Stony Flame Divine Ability appear here!"

"Even though this outsider named Ning is limited in cultivation, ordinary Stony Flame abilities can't repel him! Who attacked, and what cultivation level do they have! Just the aftermath alone has affected no less than a hundred people."

The place instantly fell into chaos!

Each of the old monsters' expressions changed dramatically, frantically releasing their spirit senses to search the grassland, attempting to find the assailant, but were utterly unable to locate the culprit.

Some straight-tempered cultivators from Dabei Clan wanted to help Ning Fan resist the grayish-blue light flow but were repelled by wave after wave of shockwaves before they could even get close.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The speed of the grayish-blue dust was too fast, hitting Ning Fan repeatedly. The collision force was such that even with his strong physical defense, Ning Fan couldn't completely withstand it, getting knocked flying by that grain of dust time and again. He had no choice but to secretly activate a sliver of body-protecting golden light from the God-Extinguishing Shield to completely neutralize the impact force.

Even so, Ning Fan was still knocked out a great distance by that individual grain of dust, unwittingly getting separated from the crowd.

Once he was distanced from the crowd, the grayish-blue dust suddenly hovered above Ning Fan, expanding in the wind, in an instant turning into a grayish-blue mountain peak. The peak wasn't covered with vegetation, only blue stones, and its top had an opening, with gray fire burning in its belly, it was actually a volcano. The mountain peak kept hovering, its force growing, seemingly connected to the local mountains, then with a booming sound, it plummeted towards Ning Fan below, its speed such that it fell on the grassland as if in a blink of an eye!

Rumble!

The entire grassland shook violently like an earthquake for a long time before calming down.

And Ning Fan had been suppressed by the mountain!

The cultivators from Dabei Clan gasped, finally seeing the true appearance of the mountain peak!

"A Blue Stone Grey Flame Volcano... this is definitely a Stony Flame Divine Ability, there's no mistake about it! Could it be a Stony Flame cultivator has really suppressed that outsider named Ning!"

"There's no sign of a Stony Flame cultivator here. Logically, Stony Flame cultivators absolutely can't leave the Fierce Realm... perhaps a Stony Flame old monster used a medium to cast across the realm and suppressed him!"

"This matter must be immediately reported to Central Continent! As for the martial test... I don't know if it can continue, we have to listen to Central Continent's decision."

"As for that outsider named Ning..."

Some Southern Frontier cultivators started deploying secret techniques to report the incident to Central Continent. The Corpse Demon Elder also reported the matter, receiving the response that the martial test would continue as scheduled, come rain or shine...

The Corpse Demon Elder descended with a solemn expression at the foot of the Blue Stone Volcano, trying to activate a Divine Skill, wanting to break open the volcano to release Ning Fan who was suppressed by the mountain, but was shocked to find that with his Shattered Thought Early Stage cultivation, he simply couldn't achieve it!

"The suppressor is at least a Stony Flame Immortal King, possibly higher!" The Corpse Demon Elder was secretly astonished, why would a Stony Flame Immortal King suppress an outsider? Logically, Three-Flames Cultivators aren't opposed to outsiders, why would they do such a thing? Could there be some hidden agenda...

"May I ask the envoy, how should we handle the martial test, should it be temporarily suspended and held another day?" Some tribal chiefs inquired.

"No need! Everything proceeds as usual, there can be no mistakes!" The Corpse Demon Elder replied.

"Our tribe's contestant, the foreign cultivator, is still suppressed under this mountain, we implore the envoy to lend a hand and rescue him!" pleaded Tamu Clan Chief Tageli.

"I can't rescue him! We'll have to wait for people from Central Continent to come to the rescue, which will take at least three to five days." The Corpse Demon Elder said indifferently.

"What! We have to wait three to five days! If I'm not mistaken, this volcano is specifically used by the Stone Flame Clan to suppress enemies! If those suppressed can't be rescued in time, they might be injured by the scorching heat from the mountain! And since this person is a competitor of our Tamu tribe, if he misses the martial test, our Tamu Clan has almost no chance of victory..."

"After one incense stick time, the martial trial begins! This person being trapped here is already determined, unless he can escape this mountain before the trial ends, he absolutely cannot participate in the trial. According to the rules of the tomb-seizing battle, only the masters who are on the list before the small competition can participate in the martial trial. This means that after this person is absent, your Tamu Clan can only participate with 19 people, and no other person is allowed to take his place."

The Corpse Demon Elder finished speaking and ignored Tageli, instead, he began to use his divine skills to set up the martial trial venue.

...

Ning Fan was still slightly dizzy, managing only with difficulty to dispel the sensation of dizziness from his mind.

Before him, was a space of grey-blue stone walls, an extremely narrow space located within the volcano's belly. The air was hot and stifling, with whistling grey-blue smoke blowing through.

Ning Fan's heart turned cold, he had been ambushed and suppressed!

This was a very high-level suppression divine skill, and the person who performed it was definitely of no less cultivation than an Immortal Emperor! If not for that, Ning Fan could never have been unable to escape, directly suppressed beneath this mountain!

This scene is just like the day he was suppressed by Great Emperor Chonghe with a single hand, unable to resist, the disparity so massive!

"The one suppressing me must be at least an Immortal Emperor! Yet there's one thing that makes me curious. Which Immortal Emperor attacked me..."

As Ning Fan was guessing, the silent stone wall space suddenly echoed with an indifferent voice.

"You travel with the Five-Color Medicine Soul, and I am restricted by the rules of the Holy Mountain to not kill you, but I can trap you here, forcing you to submit. If you do not wish to die, then break free from the Punishing Ring, and escape this mountain with your Immortal Venerable cultivation!"

This voice was sometimes deep and heavy, sometimes soft and eerie, unpredictable. It seemed to be masked somehow, making it impossible to discern the speaker, yet it undoubtedly possessed the cultivation of an Immortal Emperor. After one voice, there were no more sounds.

Ning Fan's face was ashen, first the Great Emperor of Zhongzhou erased his record, and now he was plotted against, trapped inside the volcano's belly. Despite his deep and enduring disposition, he could not help but feel a surge of anger.

He quickly moved, trying to break through the stone wall and escape, but upon contact, flaming cracks immediately appeared on the wall, spreading out to form formation patterns, an incredibly strong restrictive force repelling Ning Fan, preventing him from approaching the stone wall.

"This formation is indeed profound, but it's not enough to trap me, Ning!"

Ning Fan's momentum changed abruptly, the anger in his eyes vanished, replaced by an extreme calmness and profundity. His gaze was as deep as the vast night sky, under which all the grand affairs of the world seemed unable to escape his eyes.

He had actually activated the Ancestral Demon of the East's ultimate skill — the Momentum Character Secret!

The stone wall and the smoke, under Ning Fan's eyes, transformed into intersecting lines of grand momentum, and the complex formation patterns on the stone wall gradually became clear in his sight. After an unknown period, Ning Fan suddenly took a step forward, leaving a golden flame footprint on the stone floor. This step was indescribably miraculous, causing chaos within the momentum here, and as the momentum fell into disarray, the formation naturally became unsustainable. Ning Fan continued stepping forward mysteriously, each step conjuring fierce winds, and after nine steps, the stone wall emitted cracking sounds, with the formation patterns showing signs of damage.

"Oh? So even with the casual use of my learned Suppressing Demon Volcano divine skill, I can't trap this child?" Far away in the Middle State, Emperor Lou Tuo suddenly exclaimed softly.

At this moment, he was already heading back to his cave dwelling with his disciples after leaving Tiandu Peak. Upon sensing that Ning Fan was nearing breaking the volcanic suppression, he no longer rushed on his journey but found a random grassland, opened a temporary underground cave, and began chanting and casting spells across regions.

In the space within the mountain's belly, layers of the stone wall peeled away, as Ning Fan continued to dismantle its formation.

Suddenly, a red and white combined flame burst out from the stone wall in front of Ning Fan, dashing straight towards his face!

Ning Fan's gaze instantly focused, this red and white flame was incredibly formidable, its grade reaching the innate level, seemingly the innate true fire painstakingly cultivated over many years by the person who attacked! Just the scorching heat rushing in could already cause Ning Fan pain from burns, and if burned directly by this fire, with his currently restricted cultivation, he might not avoid severe injuries!

Ning Fan dared not underestimate this fire, retreating while spitting out his own demon fire, attempting to resist it. In just a few face-offs, Ning Fan's demon fire retreated steadily.

The innate true fire, after defeating the demon fire, did not continue attacking Ning Fan. Instead, it sealed off the stone wall space completely, seemingly wanting to trap Ning Fan there utterly.

Ning Fan tried several times but could not break through the sea of flames blockade. Far away in the Middle State, Emperor Lou Tuo revealed a satisfied smile.

"This way, this child will miss the martial trial..."

Ning Fan had entered Dabei with a rare Medicine Soul. According to the Holy Mountain's rules, Emperor Lou Tuo could not take Ning Fan's life. He disliked the Tamu Clan and despised external cultivators, and now that Ning Fan wanted to stand up for the Tamu Clan, he naturally aimed to suppress him. With his cultivation, he only needed to manipulate slightly to trap Ning Fan for several days. After a few days, even if Ning Fan were rescued, he would have missed the martial trial, and without Ning Fan, the Tamu Clan would still never rise in the Southern Frontier...

Of course, if Ning Fan was driven to desperation and directly destroyed the Punishing Ring to restore his cultivation and escape from the volcano's belly, that would be even better. As an external cultivator, if he broke the Punishing Ring after accepting it, it would be an unforgivable crime, and he would be hunted by the Central Continent's Five Emperors! At that time, even if this child carried a rare Medicine Soul, his life could not be preserved.

As for the Tamu Clan, they were Ning Fan's guarantors. If Ning Fan destroyed the Punishing Ring without permission, the Tamu Clan would also suffer from the crime by association...

"Feng'er, the Tamu Clan killed you, and restricted by my status, I cannot wash the Tamu Clan with blood to avenge you. The only thing I can do is ensure the Tamu Clan's eternal downfall. Master is sorry..."

Emperor Lou Tuo's face showed a moment of heartache, then reverted to the usual gloom.

Those disciples, however, gazed ardently at Emperor Lou Tuo. Emperor Lou Tuo was undoubtedly not a good person, but uniquely, he displayed the most favoritism towards his disciples. Therefore, among the Central Continent's Five Emperors, he had won the most disciples' hearts as a Great Emperor.

"Let's go, that boy can't escape the suppression of this old man!"

With a chuckle, Emperor Lou Tuo led a group of disciples away.

Trapped inside the mountain's belly, Ning Fan glared at the innate true fire surrounding him, a fierce determination in his eyes, as the Phoenix Yin-Yang power secretly moved within him.

"Since I cannot break through the sea of fire, there's no need to try, I'll simply devour these innate true fires!"

He had never been one to take things lying down, and in this place of necessary compromises, he certainly wouldn't be!

Chapter 1008: Wise Men All, Yet Only I Am the Fool

The Phoenix Race is the ruler among the Winged Demons. Unlike the filth and evilness of the Fu Li Race, it exudes a sense of utmost nobility and purity.

As soon as the power of Phoenix Yin-Yang was activated, Ning Fan's aura instantly changed. The demonic disposition around him gradually disappeared, replaced by an unprecedented divine solemnity.

Parts of his body began to transform into flames, and soon his entire body turned into roaring black flames. With a flicker of his figure, he charged towards the stone wall.

The innate true fire covering the surface of the stone wall flickered uncertainly when suppressed by the aura of the Phoenix Race from Ning Fan's body. However, this flicker was only momentary; it quickly restored to its original state. As Ning Fan suddenly approached, red and white fire waves immediately surged from the stone wall, carrying a large amount of bluish-grey magma, attempting to engulf him and halt his advance.

Although the Phoenix Race possesses an innate talent for controlling fire, Ning Fan's cultivation was limited, so he naturally didn't dare to be swept into the fire waves. He abruptly halted, crossing his hands in a strange demon gesture, causing his fingers to fly in shadows. From his Tian Ling point, his Spirit flew out with a swish, and then transformed into a palm-sized Black Phoenix with a shake. The Black Phoenix gazed coldly and indifferently at the innate fire's power, paying no heed as it opened its mouth and inhaled towards the red and white fire waves.

With this inhale, it mobilized the whole strength of Phoenix Yin-Yang, directly manipulating the fire's path laws here, making the red and white fire waves unable to approach or retreat. It was as if space had frozen, leaving the flames stuck rigidly in place, allowing the Black Phoenix to absorb them without any resistance!

However, the magnitude of the fire waves was too overwhelming. The Black Phoenix absorbed only a small portion of the red and white flames before its face showed a pained expression, having reached its limit. It withdrew its form and reverted to Spirit, returning to Ning Fan's Dantian.

Because his cultivation was restricted, in this tête-à-tête exchange, Ning Fan barely managed to swallow a mouthful of innate true fire from the red and white sea of flames!

Swallowing this true fire made Ning Fan extremely uncomfortable, as the imbibed red and white true fire rampaged violently inside his stomach, trying to escape his body while causing havoc internally. Fortunately, having mastered the Phoenix Race's Nirvana talent, the internal organs burnt by this fire were quickly regenerating in the blaze, resulting in nothing more than some pain without harm. Thus, the cluster of true fire couldn't escape!

The surrounding red and white sea of fire appeared to gain anthropomorphic rage!

Its task was merely to trap Ning Fan here without harming him. Who would have thought that Ning Fan would manage to swallow some of its flames? With a condensation of the sea of fire, suddenly a red and white firebird flew out.

This firebird had an unusual form, unlike the Four Heavens' demon species, capable of stirring overwhelming fire waves when in flight. Its gaze was extremely vicious, and with a spread of its wings, it screeched fiercely at Ning Fan and charged. Its speed was so fast that when it moved, an ordinary person could only faintly see a flash of firelight; even with Ning Fan's eyesight, it was difficult to capture the bird's trajectory. In a hurried clash, half of Ning Fan's body was already incinerated to charcoal!

Luckily, in the next instant, Ning Fan's injured part regenerated amidst the blazing flames, achieving Nirvana rebirth.

"Has this innate true fire already birthed a Fire Spirit... but unfortunately, this mouthful of true fire, once in my stomach, is mine, Ning Fan's! No matter what Fire Spirit you manifest, you won't reclaim this mouthful of true fire!"

Ning Fan's expression was solemn. This Fire Spirit's cultivation barely touched the level of the Calamity of Eternal Aeons' Immortal King Realm, someone he couldn't defeat even with his unsealed cultivation, let alone now. He didn't dare confront it directly; while retreating, he summoned the Body-protecting Golden Light of the God-Extinguishing Shield to its absolute limit at the moment.

With Ning Fan's current restricted cultivation, he couldn't manifest a complete form of the God-Slaying Giant. He could only extend the golden light to a three-zhang radius around him.

The red and white firebird paid no heed to Ning Fan's Body-protecting Golden Light and ruthlessly crashed into it again, as the narrow space within the stone walls witnessed a sudden streak of firelight charging forth. The impact burnt nearly one zhang of the golden light away!

Fortunately, the burnt Body-protecting Golden Light swiftly reformed. Even so, Ning Fan was already quite startled.

Though his present cultivation was sealed, how formidable was the God-Extinguishing Shield! Even with insufficient power, its defense wasn't something ordinary Immortal Kings could break through, yet the red and white firebird obliterated almost one zhang of golden light with just a casual crash, reflecting its terrifying strength.

The firebird, seeing its wrathful strike failing to inflict any injury on Ning Fan, this insignificant being, became furious. Uttering three consecutive sharp cries, its surrounding flames surged as it charged toward Ning Fan again.

This time, the firebird penetrated within one zhang of Ning Fan, incinerating the entire two-zhang protective golden light outside!

It seemed that with just a bit more force, the bird could break through all three zhangs of golden light. It was entirely capable of injuring Ning Fan within the protective light!

If it truly reached that point, Ning Fan would either have to destroy the Punishing Ring to restore his cultivation or use his trump card measures like Origin Qi to directly annihilate the firebird.

She had no intention of expending valuable life-saving trump cards on a mere firebird of the Calamity of Eternal Aeons, nor did she plan to destroy the Punishing Ring, prompting furious pursuit from the Dabei Clan, before achieving her current mission.

Ning Fan's gaze turned slightly resolute. He suddenly struck his chest and spat out a Blood Arrow, merging it with the Body-protecting Golden Light. His aura weakened significantly, but the golden light expanded to a five-zhang range, enhancing defense immensely!

Thus, no matter how the firebird rammed, it couldn't completely breach the defense of the God-Extinguishing Shield. Meanwhile, Ning Fan took a Healing Pill to suppress the self-inflicted injury, sitting cross-legged amidst the dense golden light, forcefully refining the small portion of innate true fire within him under the firebird's resentful gaze.

Ning Fan couldn't defeat the firebird, but dealing with the mouthful of innate true fire inside him was much easier.

Before long, that cluster of innate true fire was thoroughly refined by Ning Fan, significantly advancing Ning Fan's Black Flame towards the level of the Twelve Metaplasia True Fire!

Ning Fan didn't stand up. After a slight rest, he remained seated cross-legged on the stone ground, patted his Tian Ling, and his Spirit flew out again, transforming into the Black Phoenix form. Across heavy golden light, it opened its mouth towards the firebird. In an instant, the fire's path laws here were controlled by the Black Phoenix again.

The firebird was startled, hastily trying to retreat, but struggled to free itself from the Black Phoenix's fire control, being forcefully absorbed of a large mouthful of innate true fire by the Black Phoenix, continuously screeching angrily in vain attempts to break through the dense protective golden light.

Ning Fan withdrew his Spirit and continued refining the innate true fire within as the furious firebird desperately clashed against the Body-protecting Golden Light, paying it no mind. Once the refining finished, he repeatedly devoured the innate true fire, bit by bit eroding the flames from the firebird. In this reciprocation, the firebird's aura grew increasingly weak, no longer as powerful as at the beginning.

One day passed.

The second day passed.

The martial trial deadline was only three days; only one day remained until its conclusion!

Trapped within the mountain, Ning Fan was unaware of the external situation. At that moment, only one belief resided within him: no matter what, he must make it to the martial trial!

He could guess that the Immortal Emperor who trapped him didn't dare harm his life and did it to prevent him from participating in the Southern Frontier martial trial.

First, his literary trial results were wiped out, and then he was attacked and suppressed on the eve of the martial trial. Ning Fan could almost conclude that these front and back incidents were likely the work of one or several Immortal Emperors!

Towards those so-called Central Continent Five Emperors, Ning Fan now held no goodwill, with a surge of anger burning within his chest!

"I promised the Tamu Clan to partake in the Southern Frontier competition; there's no reason to give up halfway, that's the first point! Burying Moon specifically instructed me to seize the Southern Frontier's top spot, which must be extremely important and can't be overlooked, that's the second point! The Immortal Emperor scheming against me doesn't want me to enter the martial trial; how can I let him have his way, that's the third point!"

Over the course of two consecutive days of devouring and refining, Ning Fan had absorbed as much as 70% of the innate true fire here. The red and white firebird's form had significantly shrunk, and its aura

was extremely weak, no longer possessing the Triple Calamity Immortal King momentum from two days ago. Its aura was now roughly at the Mid-Phase Shattered Thought level.

The firebird's gaze was no longer fierce, showing a hint of fear when facing Ning Fan!

The innate true fire formed by Emperor Lou Tuo could manifest seven fire spirits, and it was one of the weaker ones. Now that Ning Fan had consumed 70% of its flames, it instinctively wanted to escape, daring not to trap Ning Fan here any longer!

But alas! Trapped by this volcano, it can also find no escape! If it were at its peak, it could easily escape with its full cultivation, but now, it has only a mid-Fragmented Thought cultivation left, and has no chance of escaping!

"I have already devoured most of the Innate True Fire here, yet I still can't completely breakthrough the level of the Black Flame to the Twelve Metaplasia level. If I'm not mistaken, the Innate True Fire trapping me here is not complete; it's only a fragment of an Immortal Emperor's Innate True Fire..."

"I'm just a hair's breadth away from completely breaking through the Twelve Metaplasia True Fire. Once I kill this firebird and devour its origin fire, it should be enough for me to break through the bottleneck of the Twelve Metaplasia True Fire!"

Ning Fan suddenly stood up, coldly staring at the firebird hiding in the corner.

Now, he no longer needs to use the God-Extinguishing Shield to defend against the firebird as he did two days ago. The firebird now only has mid-phase Fragmented Thought strength, and with Ning Fan's Divine Demon cultivation, along with the Phoenix Yin-Yang's suppression of fire, it's not difficult to slay it!

Ning Fan could almost imagine the anger of the Immortal Emperor who had plotted against him once he kills the firebird! The Immortal Emperor could never have anticipated that not only did Ning Fan not get trapped in this volcano, but he even managed to kill the Fire Spirit of the Innate True Fire with restricted cultivation!

Anyone daring to plot against Ning Fan should be prepared for severe consequences!

The firebird seemed to sense Ning Fan's killing intent and, in despair, suddenly gathered the courage for a desperate fight, transforming into a blaze of fire rushing headlong at Ning Fan.

The speed was a far cry from two days ago, and Ning Fan easily saw through the firebird's trajectory. His body suddenly exploded, turning into a pitch-black sea of fire, nearly drowning the entire rock-walled space!

Instantly, the rock-walled space resounded with the firebird's mournful cries of struggle.

The wailing gradually subsided, and after a long while, the sea of fire disappeared, and Ning Fan reemerged, sitting cross-legged without a word, starting to refine the immense origin fire within him.

Almost simultaneously, from Middle State's Mount Zuwang, a furious roar suddenly erupted towards the sky!

"Dare to kill my seventh Fire Spirit, I will fight you to the death, Ning Fan, Ning Fan, Ning Fan!"

Emperor Lou Tuo, seething with rage, charged out of the underground sanctuary. Some disciples, seeing their ancestor's anger, immediately inquired about the cause.

Emperor Lou Tuo merely maintained a darkened face, refusing to elaborate on what had transpired.

Humiliation, utter humiliation! He, a dignified Immortal Emperor, had orchestrated a plan against a little Immortal Venerable with sealed cultivation, only to have it backfire and lose one of his Fire Spirits!

Were it not for his remaining rationality, Emperor Lou Tuo almost wanted to immediately head to the Southern Frontier to take Ning Fan's life!

Alas, he could not do that. If he went to the Southern Frontier now, firstly, his plot against Ning Fan would be exposed, and even if he killed Ning Fan, he couldn't explain it to the Holy Mountain.

"Damn it! Damn it! I can't kill you openly, but secretly, there are plenty of ways to take your life! Very well, very well indeed, daring foreign cultivator! Wait and see!"

Emperor Lou Tuo gradually calmed his anger and instead showed a sinister cold smile, instructing several disciples beside him.

"How long before your Senior Brother comes out of seclusion?"

"Reporting to the Ancestor, Senior Brother is in the sixth layer at the bottom of the Fire Soul Tower and won't be able to emerge without a hundred years..."

"Let him come out early. Tell him there's something in this year's Central Continent's great competition that will greatly help in breaking through to the Immortal Venerable. Missing it would be a massive loss! Of course, there are some private matters I'd like him to handle, tell him to come see me at once!"

"Yes!"

...

It's only half a day left until the end of the martial trial.

The literary test measures perception, while the martial trial measures the overall strength of the tribe.

At this moment, not far from the suppressing volcano, the Summon Wind Clan's grassland had been divided into thirty-five areas. The Southern Frontier clans each occupied a large expanse of grassland, conducting the martial trial.

The topic of the martial trial is to hunt Fire Souls.

Legend has it that when the Herb-gathering Sage was dying, he shattered his own Saintly Fire, dispersing it sealed beneath the Dabei Grassland. Over time, fragmented fire gave birth to life, transforming into a Fire Soul Clan, eternally suppressing the underground, unable to surface into the upper world.

The Sage's seal is naturally not something ordinary people can covet. Many cultivators attempted to earth-travel to the bottom of the Dabei Grassland to find the shattered Sainly Fire seal by the Sage but to no avail.

Later, an Immortal Emperor from the Holy Mountain found a strange talisman in the Holy Mountain Mausoleum. Upon activation, it unexpectedly summoned a Fire Soul of Heavenly cultivation from the top of the grassland, nearly killing him in surprise.

Stunned, the Holy Mountain Immortal Emperor called several Immortal Emperors and battled hard for many days before finally extinguishing the Fire Soul, seizing a Fire Crystal from within it. After refining, his fire-path cultivation progressed enormously!

After tasting success, the Immortal Emperor attempted to imitate the talisman from memory, activating it again, and indeed, he could still summon Fire Souls from anywhere on the Dabei Grassland. Once killed, they again yielded Fire Crystals!

Unfortunately, without a talisman drawn by the Sage himself, it became impossible to summon Fire Souls of Immortal Emperor level, at most only some of True Immortal cultivation.

If Immortal Kings or Venerables drew the talisman, the summoned Fire Souls were much weaker, barely having Life Immortal cultivation.

If the talisman was drawn by Shattered Thought cultivation, they couldn't summon any Fire Soul at all.

Through extensive research, the Holy Mountain realized the talisman's secret. It turned out to be a summoning talisman developed by the Herb-gathering Sage specifically for summoning Fire Souls from beneath the grassland.

In every first round of the Mausoleum Battle martial trial, hunting Fire Souls has become a staple topic. First, because the Fire Souls of the Dabei Grassland are nearly inexhaustible; once summoned, they appear, requiring no extensive preparation. Second, once exterminated, they yield Fire Crystals, most of which are extremely low-grade and negligible to ancient freaks, but when rewarded to the tribesmen below, they significantly advance the low-grade cultivation path in the fire arts, making for excellent martial trial rewards.

Of course, this talisman has a drawback, needing at least an Eternal Immortal Venerable to draw it, each consuming substantial mental energy from the talisman maker, thus rendering mass production impossible.

Fortunately, the Mausoleum Battle occurs once every thousand years, enough to stockpile for the consumption by the Holy Mountain over time.

This time in the Southern Frontier competition, each tribe received fifty low-grade fire summoning talismans, twenty mid-grade fire summoning talismans, and five high-grade fire summoning talismans.

A low-grade fire summoning talisman, when used once, can randomly summon a Fire Soul with cultivation levels at the Crossing Truth Realm, depending on luck. It might be a Fire Soul at the initial stage of Crossing Truth, or it might be a Fire Soul at the peak of Crossing Truth. The troublesome part is, no matter which stage of Crossing Truth it is in, killing one is worth ten points.

A mid-grade fire summoning talisman can summon a Fire Soul at the Shedding Void Stage, killing one earns you a hundred points. A high-grade fire summoning talisman can summon a Shattered Thought Fire Soul, killing one can earn a thousand points.

Each tribe decides for itself on how to use these fire summoning talismans. A weak tribe like the Tamu Clan doesn't have anyone at the Shedding Void level and often only dares to summon Fire Souls at the Crossing Truth level to kill. Mid-grade and high-grade fire summoning talismans are never used. Once a Shedding Void or a Shattered Thought Fire Soul is summoned, it undoubtedly becomes a catastrophic disaster for the weak Tamu Clan. It is important to know that the summoned Fire Souls are exceedingly fierce and will kill anyone they encounter...

Unused fire summoning talismans need to be returned to the Holy Envoy overseeing the competition after the martial trial ends.

If each tribe uses up their own fire summoning talismans, they can also go to other tribes and seize their Fire Souls to increase their score!

The Tamu Clan is feeling extremely aggrieved!

They only scored one point in the literary trial, and as of now, they still haven't achieved anything in the martial trial!

As of now, the Tamu Clan has summoned a total of eleven Fire Souls at the Crossing Truth level, all of which were snatched and killed by other tribes. Their twelfth summoned Crossing Truth Fire Soul remains unclaimed, as it is a Fire Soul on the half-step to the Shedding Void Realm—a complete catastrophe for weak Tamu cultivators!

Even when nineteen Tamu cultivators joined forces, they couldn't defeat the half-step Shedding Void Fire Soul and instead had over a dozen of their people badly injured.

At this moment, the only two remaining individuals at Crossing Truth for the Tamu Clan are still struggling to hang on alongside five Fate Immortals from the Tamu Clan.

These two individuals are dressed like Shaman Mages, with each possessing only initial stage Crossing Truth Realm cultivation, naturally not daring to confront that Fire Soul directly. Instead, they rely on the Formation laid out beforehand to engage in a struggle with the Fire Soul. However, the Fire Soul is too powerful, and the number of Tamu cultivators keeps dwindling, causing increasing errors in the Formation. Soon, the Fire Soul spotted a flaw and pounced on one of the Crossing Truth Mages.

The Crossing Truth Mage recklessly got half his body burnt to ashes by the Fire Soul, yet barely managed to let his Spirit escape. However, he was badly injured by the wave of fire spat by the Fire Soul, and can no longer fight, forced to withdraw from the martial trial!

Thus, from the Tamu side, only one Crossing Truth Mage is left barely persisting, making the Formation increasingly difficult to maintain, the situation exceedingly precarious!

Among the five remaining Fate Immortals of the Tamu Clan, one after another keeps getting seriously injured by the Fire Soul and withdraws from the martial trial! Ultimately, only that one Crossing Truth Mage remains for the Tamu Clan!

The Formation that besieged the Fire Soul originally required the concerted effort of many people to activate but now is under the charge of just one person, naturally losing its effectiveness completely!

This remaining Crossing Truth Mage's name is Sateng, and despair is evident in Sateng's eyes at the moment, but more so are anger and hatred!

Not far away, several tribes have dispatched cultivators at the peak of Crossing Truth Realm, specifically to snatch weak Fire Souls from the Tamu Clan. Whenever the Tamu Clan summons Fire Souls at the initial or intermediate stage of Crossing Truth, these people would come to snatch them. However, when the Tamu Clan accidentally summons a Fire Soul on the half-step towards Shedding Void, these people would simply watch and not interfere, allowing the Tamu people to be grievously injured one by one by the Fire Soul.

If Sateng, too, were to be seriously injured by the Fire Soul and decide to exit the martial trial, then on this day, the overall score for Tamu's small competition will set a historical low, concluding with a pitiful score of one point!

Of course, officially the Tamu Clan still has another competitor present who hasn't withdrawn yet, but Ning Fan is currently being suppressed under the volcano. No one believes Ning Fan can break free from the seal and join the martial trial given his restrained cultivation state.

The Tamu Clan's mausoleum fight is about to end.

"Sateng is already at his limit, even though he has Acquired Treasure to protect himself, his Mana has run out. In less time than it takes to breathe a hundred times, he will surely collapse!" concluded a Crossing Truth Peak from the White Ghost Sect.

"This time the Tamu Clan will likely leave the mausoleum fight with a total score of one point. I wonder if Emperor Lou Tuo will give us credit for this when he learns of it?" A Crossing Truth Peak, who participated in snatching Fire Souls from the Tamu Clan, said with some anticipation. He was from the Forsaken Corpse Sect.

"It's a pity, if that foreign cultivator with the Ning surname were here, the Tamu Clan would likely achieve more than this..." remarked a Crossing Truth Peak from the Evil Sheep Sect.

He lingered near the Tamu Clan, not to snatch Fire Souls, but because the Young Sect Leader specifically commanded that if Tamu cultivators were critically injured by the Fire Soul, he must make every effort

to rescue them. If not for this person's rescue, the Tamu Clan wouldn't just be withdraw with injuries; instead, many would have died.

The strength of a half-step Shedding Void Fire Soul is not something ordinary people can handle.

"Hmph, I really don't understand what your Evil Sheep Sect is thinking. Letting Tamu off the hook would have been enough, yet you even sent someone to protect the Tamu cultivators. Your Young Sect Leader is indeed the biggest fool in the Southern Frontier. Don't you know that this move is likely to anger that person from the Middle State?" sneered a Crossing Truth Peak from the Black Mountain Sect.

This Crossing Truth Peak from the Evil Sheep Sect did not dispute. He also felt the Young Sect Leader's decision was inappropriate but continued to implement the Young Sect Leader's orders out of loyalty, protecting the Tamu cultivators.

Seeing the last person from Tamu, Sateng, about to be critically injured by the Fire Soul, this Crossing Truth Peak from the Evil Sheep Sect sighed slightly, ready to step in for rescue. Suddenly, his expression changed, revealing shock.

A thunderous sound of mountain and earth collapsing came from the direction of the suppressed volcano!

"What on earth happened! Could it be that the foreign cultivator with the Ning surname suppressed beneath the volcano is capable of breaking free?"

"Even a Fragmented Thought Holy Envoy couldn't break this mountain's seal, unless the foreign cultivator with the Ning surname destroyed the Punishing Ring and regained his cultivation. Otherwise, there is no way he could escape alive! Could it be... he smashed the Punishing Ring! Such an act in my Dabei is an immeasurable crime!"

The grassland echoed with exclamations one after another.

At this moment, there were only two individuals near the suppressed volcano, one was Xianyu Chun, the other was Duolan.

Duolan and Xianyu Chun had been lingering near the suppressed volcano for quite some time.

Duolan is Ning Fan's Soul-Locked Slave, sharing life and death with Ning Fan until Ning Fan actively lifts the soul seal. If anything happens to Ning Fan, she will face a life-threatening crisis as well. Now that Ning Fan is suppressed beneath the mountain, Duolan doesn't know who has plotted against Ning Fan or whether Ning Fan is in danger within the mountain. Naturally, she has some worries and stays near the volcano with no mood to pay attention to the proceedings of the Southern Frontier martial trial.

Xianyu Chun is quite interesting.

This guy directly withdrew from the martial trial, took an Iron Shovel Magical Treasure, and was visibly anxious, seemingly planning to flatten and excavate the mountain, freeing Ning Fan.

This infuriated his father!

The Shepherd Evil Tribe's Chief originally planned to leverage Xianyu Chun's Soul Fusion talent to lead the Evil Sheep Sect's cultivators to achieve excellent results, potentially vying for the first place, which would have been entirely possible. But who would have thought that this impulsive kid directly withdrew from the martial trial!

And foolish enough to use a broken shovel to dig the volcano that even a Fragmented Thought Holy Envoy couldn't break open!

"I can't take it anymore! The Young Sect Leader has always been reckless, but now he's being reckless even during the martial trial, without putting the interests of our Evil Sheep Sect in mind! It should be known that our sect has prepared for a thousand years for this Southern Frontier competition, with the aim of seizing first place and participating in the second round of the mausoleum warfare in the Middle State! For this little competition, our sect formulated numerous plans all centered around the Young Sect Leader's Soul Fusion Secret Technique, yet the Young Sect Leader directly withdrew from the martial trial! Not only that, but he also dispatched a Crossing Truth Peak to rescue Tamu cultivators! Such an action not only depleted our sect's fighting strength but also carried the potential offense against Emperor Lou Tuo. Why doesn't the chief stop this!"

Several elders from the Evil Sheep Sect questioned.

The Shepherd Evil Tribe's Chief said nothing. He was equally disappointed in Xianyu Chun's actions that disregarded tribal interests, and even contemplated stripping him of his position as the Young Chief. On the other hand, he felt a deeper sympathy for this son, pitying the pure heart of this fool.

"His mother was killed by the volcanic divine ability used by the Stony Flame Cultivator." The Shepherd Evil Tribe's Chief suddenly spoke, seeming to mutter to himself, or perhaps talking to those older members, his face showing a trace of grief.

That woman, she was Xianyu Chun's mother, and the woman he loved most...

"Uh... Clan Leader, what are you saying? We request the Chief to strip Xianyu Chun of his position as Young Chief, please don't avoid the matter and speak of other things." Several elders said unhappily.

The Shepherd Evil Tribe's Chief ignored these elders, still looking distantly at Xianyu Chun, sweating profusely, digging the mountain.

This child disregards tribal interests; he doesn't deserve to be the Young Chief.

But this child has a pure heart different from other cultivators. In a cultivation world that prioritizes interests, this is the most precious trait...

Outsiders only believe that the Shepherd Evil Tribe's Chief values Xianyu Chun's cultivation talent and therefore makes an exception to appoint a fool as the Young Chief. But unknown to them, the Chief values that pure heart...

Underneath the suppressed volcano, Duolan helplessly watched Xianyu Chun tirelessly digging midway on the mountain. Naturally, she had no intention of helping with such a futile endeavor.

There is no soil beneath the volcano, only rocks, and not ordinary rocks, but stubborn stone created by divine skills, incredibly solid.

Xianyu Chun, with his mere Life Immortal Realm cultivation, using an Acquired Treasure that wasn't even entered, naturally couldn't dig through the mountain stone.

His iron shovel already had many notches.

His hands were lacerated and bleeding from the mountain's recoil.

He couldn't feel the burning pain in his palms, only urgently digging the mountain, even if he didn't remove a single piece of stone, never giving up.

His eyes held a touch of confusion and sorrow. At this moment, what he wanted to dig wasn't the Stone Flame Volcano suppressing Ning Fan, but the mountain that had killed his mother years ago.

Can't dig, can't dig, can't dig...

Why can't it be dug? Why!

I don't believe it, I don't believe it!

Bang!

The iron shovel finally couldn't withstand the pressure and broke into two pieces. Xianyu Chun hysterically threw down the shovel, kneeling on the stone, using his blurred hands to dig at the stubborn stone.

Can't dig, can't dig, can't dig...

Why can't it be dug! I don't believe!

Xianyu Chun suddenly screamed to the sky, his eyes filled with blood tears, and his mouth muttered a single word.

Mother...

Mother, I'm sorry, your child is incompetent, unable to save you...

Sorry, sorry...

Rumble and roar!

The suppressed volcano suddenly shook violently, with crashing sounds continuously resonating from inside the mountain!

The thunderous sounds instantly caught the attention of all cultivators present, causing Xianyu Chun's eyes to gradually clear.

Possessed again, possessed... Mother is already dead; the one trapped in the volcano isn't Mother but Master.

Master is freed!

Xianyu Chun wiped away the blood tears, swept away the grief on his face, suddenly laughed towards the sky.

No wonder he's the Master I chose!

Even suppressed by the Immortal Emperor, he can escape! Xianyu Chun didn't choose the wrong person!

Others couldn't discern that this was a divine skill displayed by the Immortal Emperor, but Xianyu Chun could, because he personally felt the terror of Stone Flame Volcano and had extensively researched the volcanic divine ability due to his mother's matter!

Precisely because of this realization, he worried about Ning Fan's safety and was amazed by Ning Fan's escape.

The volcanic collapse became increasingly severe, and Xianyu Chun dared not linger on the mountain. He flew away swiftly, and as he distanced himself, the entire volcano suddenly split open like a cracked bottle gourd, exploding from within!

A figure in white, holding an ascendant fire power, burst out from the volcano, soaring into the sky!

It was Ning Fan, who had escaped!

The sharp-eyed cultivators present perceived the fiery aura on Ning Fan, gasping in shock.

"It's actually the Twelve Metaplasia True Fire! This Ning-named foreign cultivator is truly remarkable. Across the entire Dabei, few possess such a grade of fire, yet this outsider does!"

Chapter 1009: Fire Soul Rampage

White robes fluttering, black flames roaring!

Destroy the Fire Spirit, devour its fire essence, and Ning Fan's magic fire level surpasses the final threshold, completely breaking through the Twelve Metaplasia level. At this moment, he is surrounded by magic fire, standing atop the heavens. The pressure of the flames is further enhanced by the Feng Yin-Yang, causing the temperature on the steppe to suddenly rise, making all the Dabei Cultivators' internal flames tremble with fear, looking in awe at the figure in the sky.

It seems that he is not a person, but a king emerging from the flames!

The Dabei Clan, being all Pill Masters, naturally are all fire cultivators, but few have flames reaching above the level of Nine Metaplasia. Those with Twelve Metaplasia are fewer still, and even they often achieve it through arduous cultivation at the Eternal level. Even their Twelve Metaplasia fire power rarely reaches the intensity of Ning Fan!

In this way, the exclamations on the steppe become more frequent, due to Ning Fan breaking the seal and emerging, and also due to the overwhelming might of the magic fire!

"Finally freed, counting the time, there should be just over five hours left until the end of the martial test..."

Ning Fan gathers his magic fire, his body flicker as he appears on the steppe, resembling teleportation, not immediately joining the competition but landing nearby Xianyu Chun.

Xianyu Chun looks at Ning Fan with excitement, his gaze fervent, still immersed in the shock of Ning Fan breaking out.

Ning Fan, however, looks at Xianyu Chun's bloodied hands and sighs slightly.

Though he has just broken out, in reality, after destroying the firebird, the mountain posed no true barrier to him, unable to confine his omnipresent spirit sense, which allows him to observe external events.

This Xianyu Chun even tried to dig the mountain to rescue him! With this person's cultivation and strength, such an action was nearly foolish, but it was a gesture of goodwill, sincere, and without any demand for repayment...

As far as Ning Fan knows, Xianyu Chun is not inherently a good-natured person but a tyrant in the Southern Frontier; the reason he went to such lengths was merely out of respect for him. If anyone else was trapped, this person would surely observe indifferently.

The martial test and potential offense to the Immortal Emperor were discarded, brushed aside by his limited intellect, leaving him focused solely on rescuing him.

Ning Fan does not intend to take a disciple, but today, he admires Xianyu Chun for the first time.

Though Xianyu Chun lacks wisdom, he possesses a certain stubbornness, daring to challenge the volcano established by the Immortal Emperor with his flesh and blood. Such courage is rare among people. It's

not that he is completely fearless, but that within the volcano, the person he wishes to save is trapped, thus he resolves to dig open the mountain regardless of consequence! Even without hope, he would see this through to the end! Despite ridicule from the world, enemies from all realms, even with the destruction of the world, he would not change his mind!

What surprised Ning Fan even more was that Xianyu Chun's roaring shout brought about a touch within him, causing his mid-stage Shedding Void bottleneck in his Demon and Yin Yang cultivation to loosen slightly, even giving rise to a fleeting sense of heart tribulation...

This child lacks complete wisdom, yet is purer because of it, almost akin to the Dao... Although he didn't actually rescue Ning Fan, Ning Fan is grateful for his intentions.

"This mountain was established by the Immortal Emperor, your injuries from digging will not heal easily. I have some expensive pills here, take them."

Ning Fan flips his hand, taking out a pill bottle and giving it to Xianyu Chun, then passes by him.

Xianyu Chun tearfully excited, he's received a reward from master!

That expression, truly cold! That tone, truly authoritarian! That gesture, that demeanor, truly worthy of the master he admires; this is not something he can mimic in a short time!

Let's see what kind of reward master has given...

Xianyu Chun opens the bottle seal, extends his spirit sense, and immediately sucks in a breath of cold air; it turns out to be a Ninth Revolution Golden Pill! It's a kind of pill he's not seen before, most likely from the external Eastern Heaven, judging by its properties, it seems for healing...

Yet the grade of this pill is exceedingly high! Even though he is the Young Sect Leader of the Xieyang Sect, to use a Ninth Revolution Golden Pill from the sect requires unanimous agreement from all elders, with three reviews and three reconsiderations... For any Southern Frontier sect, a Ninth Revolution Golden Pill is a treasured item, not to be lightly handled!

But Ning Fan casually gave him one!

Master truly is generous!

"Congratulations to senior for breaking free! Those who plotted against the senior, Duolan wishes to utilize Middle State connections to investigate fully! Duolan believes this matter isn't the doing of Stone Flame Cultivators, but rather some elders mimicking Stone Flame's divine ability..." Duolan approaches, secretly transmitting a message. In front of others, she does not dare to reveal her identity as a Soul-Locked Slave; hence her demeanor is high and cold, yet the transmitted tone is extremely humble and respectful.

"No need. The plotters, I can roughly guess who they are. During my absence, only one person from the Tamu Clan has continued in the comparison..." Ning Fan frowns slightly, his spirit sense sweeping towards the Tamu Clan comparison area on the steppe.

In that direction, only the last Tamu Enlightenment is struggling hard.

Tageli and others watch his direction with delight from outside the field.

"In these days of your absence, many clans bullied Tamu, but unfortunately, Duolan being an outsider and not a participant, was unable to intervene in these matters..." Duolan wanted to continue discussing Tamu's plight, but Ning Fan didn't have time for details; his figure flickered as he flew towards the Tamu area.

Duolan pouts, suppressing her words, and follows Ning Fan, but before entering the martial test range, she's stopped by the Corpse Demon Elder.

"You are not a participant, you cannot enter here!"

Duolan stops, watching the martial test from afar. Only five hours remain. Whether the senior's arrival can lead Tamu to good results remains unknown; being Southern Frontier's best would be good...

Tamu martial test area!

Ning Fan arrives like a streak of light, whistling through the air, momentum soaring!

Sateng, his mana nearly exhausted, on the verge of despair from the Fire Soul's pursuit, suddenly sees a savior arriving, causing him great joy, shouting, "Senior Ning, save me!"

The Half-Step Shedding Void Fire Soul, upon seeing Ning Fan arrive, immediately shifts its murderous intent, no longer chasing Sateng. From Ning Fan's presence, the Fire Soul detects a delicious flame aura, tempting him, driving his killing instinct! He must kill Ning Fan, must devour his flame, must kill, kill, kill!

Roar!!!

The roar filled with murderous intent triggers a slight change in the fire traces. For any cultivator who hasn't entered the eons, such action is extremely defiant of the heavens; this Fire Soul's ability to achieve it with Half-Step Shedding Void cultivation is remarkable, even if only a minuscule amount.

But Half-Step Shedding Void is Half-Step Shedding Void, incapable of stirring great waves, attempting to kill Ning Fan is even more impossible!

Ning Fan doesn't give the Fire Soul the opportunity to strike; as he expands his magic fire, he transforms into a swift fire shadow, crossing the steppe in an instant, intersecting with the Fire Soul. In that moment of intersection, he directly incinerates the Fire Soul into ashes, a spectacle that leaves the surrounding spectators from the Shedding Void Peak in shock.

It's known that a Fire Soul born of fire possesses high resistance to fire attacks, yet under Ning Fan's Twelve Metaplasia True Fire, it only ends up being instantaneously killed!

Such terrifying magic fire, containing rule changes beyond what these mere Enlightenment cultivators can comprehend!

"Thank you, senior, for the rescue!" Sateng's eyes burn with passion, though the martial test time remaining is limited, as long as Ning Fan joins, there's hope for Tamu to make a comeback!

"You back down and heal, for this Tamu martial test, I alone am sufficient!" Upon Ning Fan's words, the heavily exhausted Sateng feels as if pardoned from great pressure, hands over all his Fire Summoning Talismans to Ning Fan, and quickly withdraws from the martial test.

No one within the Tamu group criticizes Sateng's withdrawal, simply because Ning Fan remains!

Everyone is fervent with excitement! Their morale is heightened! They firmly believe that as long as Ning Fan alone is here, it is enough! Ning Fan's demonic presence is truly compelling, particularly as he now carries three parts of anger, creating an aura of 'strangers, don't approach,' yet the feeling he brings to companions is overwhelmingly reliable!

After all, he is an Eternal Immortal Venerable whose cultivation was sealed!

"Hmm? This is..." Ning Fan suddenly notices amongst the ashes of the fallen fire soul a fiery red crystal core, lifting his hand to capture it, bringing it into his palm.

According to Ning Fan's understanding of the martial arts trial, this seems to be a unique fire crystal produced by hunting the Fire Souls...

Before he could take a closer look, more than ten Peak Crossing Truth Realm masters suddenly descended, surrounding Ning Fan, scolding,

"Why could you escape from the volcano? Did you destroy the Punishing Ring? As Daxian cultivators, we have the right to examine your Punishing Ring! If it's true, you'll face great disaster!"

"You did not participate in the trial in time, and now that you broke out, you have probably lost the qualification to participate, so leave quickly! What are you waiting for!"

"The last person from the Tamu has already withdrawn, and this dead half-step Shedding Void Stage Fire Soul shouldn't count towards Tamu's score! Their final score remains at 1 point!"

If this were Eastern Heaven, how dare they speak to the Rain Monarch like that, but this is Daxian, where the cultivators are inherently prideful, even before Ning Fan, they still hold a high and mighty attitude!

A cold glint flashed in Ning Fan's eyes.

Hehe, are you all here to suppress the Tamu tribes!

"First, as far as I know, midway participation in the martial arts trial does not lead to disqualification; there are precedents throughout the Southern Frontier..." Ning Fan said expressionlessly. This statement caused several people's faces to change slightly, not anticipating Ning Fan's thorough understanding of the Southern Frontier, making their previous deception extremely embarrassing.

"Second, my Punishing Ring remains intact, so I do not violate Daxian's rules." Ning Fan's spirit left his body, revealing the intact ring above, proving Ning Fan was not lying, then the spirit returned.

Some cultivators were secretly shocked. Ning Fan indeed managed to break out of the volcano that even the Fragmented Thought Elders couldn't escape from with restricted cultivation!

"Third, as far as I know, there is another rule in the martial arts trial: it allows entering other tribes' trial areas to seize and hunt Fire Souls. The trial does not permit harming others, but if one steps into another's area and seizes their Fire Souls, then being attacked is deserved. You all seized Fire Souls in my Tamu trial area, so if I act against you, it doesn't violate the trial rules!"

This remark caused those Peak Crossing Truth Realm cultivators who had seized Tamu's Fire Souls to change their expressions drastically and attempt to escape the Tamu trial area. The implication in this person's words was astonishing—this outsider dared to challenge the tribes of the Southern Frontier!

These people were not slow at running, but unfortunately, they couldn't escape!

Ning Fan's figure flickered, ghost-like appearing behind each Peak Crossing Truth Realm master, with an effortless gesture, sending each flying and spitting blood, tossing them like trash beyond the Tamu trial area!

The martial trial prohibits killing, so Ning Fan only severely injured those who oppressed the Tamu, yet even so, it caused bursts of cheer from the Tamu people.

At last, they could let out the anger festering in their hearts! Daring to seize Tamu's Fire Souls, to curry favor with Emperor Lou Tuo at the expense of Tamu, this is the outcome!

"How dare you! Just an outsider, yet you dare to injure our White Ghost Sect cultivator!" bellowed the White Ghost Sorcerer, furious while hunting Fire Souls in his trial area.

"So ruthless! These injured cultivators won't heal without a century of recuperation! If not for the rules, he might directly kill!" Some tribes developed fear towards Ning Fan, trembling with fright.

The Peak Crossing Truth Realm cultivator from the Xieyang Sect saw Ning Fan rushing towards him, shocked, fearing he'd be severely injured and thrown out. He stammered, wanting to explain anxiously.

To his surprise, Ning Fan didn't attack him. With a raise of his hand, he sent a gentle breeze, softly carrying the person out of the Tamu trial area.

"I saw your help towards Tamu and won't harm you. Your clan's young chief is absent, hurry and help your sect hunt Fire Souls to improve your score!" Ning Fan instructed through a mental transmission.

The cultivator from the Xieyang Sect sighed with relief, immediately returning to the Xieyang Sect trial area to aid in hunting Fire Souls.

Ning Fan, in a single confrontation, injured more than ten Peak Crossing Truth Realm cultivators, which shook many hearts and stirred some anger and curses. Ning Fan ignored these curses, using spirit sense to scan the thirty-five martial trial areas, contemplating.

Tamu's total score was originally only 1 point, after he killed a half-step Shedding Void Stage Fire Soul, it rose to 11 points. This score is still at the bottom; even the second last, the Hanzhen Clan, currently has 44 points, having successfully killed four Crossing Truth Fire Souls.

The vast majority of tribe scores exceeded five hundred, with major tribes having at least a thousand or more.

The leading Summon Wind Sect's score exceeded nine thousand, followed by the Sea Soul Sect close to seven thousand, with the Xieyang Sect ranking seventh, barely reaching fifteen hundred points. This was much less compared to previous years, the cause being the sudden withdrawal of their young chief, Xianyu Chun.

"To become Southern Frontier champion, relying solely on my Fire Summoning Talismans is absolutely insufficient, thus I'll seize Fire Souls from other tribes to increase my score!"

Ning Fan didn't rush to use his clan's Fire Summoning Talismans but charged towards one Southern Frontier trial area after another.

Poor Hanzhen Clan, with twenty participants besieging five Crossing Truth Fire Souls, they had no time to react when a jet-black flame swept past, in a blink, all five Crossing Truth Fire Souls were reduced to ashes!

Tamu now with 61 points! Ning Fan also acquired five more Fire Crystal Minerals!

"Why! We didn't steal the Tamu Fire Souls, why are you robbing us!" a Shaman Mage from Hanzhen Clan angrily yelled.

"I've taken them, what can you do!"

Ning Fan's almost indifferent glance instantly silenced the Shaman Mage, drenched in cold sweat.

Even knowing this martial trial prohibits killing...

After Hanzhen Clan, one tribe after another had their hunted Fire Souls seized by Ning Fan!

Initially, he only seized from tribes without Shekong overseers, subsequently even those overseen by Shekong powerhouses were visited by Ning Fan.

Forsaken Corpse Sect possessed three Shekong Early Stage overseers, working together to hunt three Shekong Fire Souls, only to see a firelight flash by, enraging all three Shekong: "Bold outsider, trying to rob our Forsaken Corpse Sect Fire Souls won't be easy!"

All three Shekong soared skyward to confront Ning Fan, leaving the three Shekong Fire Souls temporarily sealed by their sect's cultivators.

According to trial rules, Ning Fan robbing others' Fire Souls cannot proactively harm them, but if they retaliate first, he may counterattack.

"Scram!"

Ning Fan spat out a fire sea, engulfing the three ascending Shekong in screams, after which three panicked, trembling spirits fled the demonic fire, their bodies reduced to ashes!

Being lenient, killing three immediately would be effortless for Ning Fan!

"Please spare us, senior!" The three Shekong pleaded for mercy, fearing Ning Fan would audaciously disregard the rules and murder them.

Ning Fan didn't even glance at the three Forsaken Corpse Sect's Shekong, swiftly exterminating their summoned Shekong Fire Souls, moving to the next trial area.

Heishan Sect trial area!

Heishan Sect's two Shekong Mid Stage licked their lips, determined to severely injure Ning Fan. They suddenly rose, casting the Sky Net at Ning Fan, only to have it incinerated by Ning Fan's demonic fire, their bodies likewise annihilated!

Also destroyed were the two Shekong Fire Souls summoned by Heishan Sect!

White Ghost Sect trial area!

The White Ghost Sect had a total of seven Shekong cultivators, the strongest being the Shekong Late Stage White Ghost Sorcerer. As Ning Fan set foot in the White Ghost Sect's trial area, the sorcerer immediately cast a Thunder Palm towards the grassland, activating a pre-set enemy-trapping formation array.

"Our White Ghost Sect is proficient in the Dao of formations, and even a Thought-Shattering Early Stage cultivator would suffer severe injuries entering this Liangyi Life and Death Formation. Today, I use my blood essence to empower the formation, intending to leave you severely wounded within!"

The White Ghost Sorcerer's face was full of arrogance, not believing that Ning Fan, trapped within the formation, could achieve anything.

He spat out seven mouths of blood essence onto the formation, a considerable loss, and the other six White Ghost Sect Shekong did the same, causing the power of the array to surge more than twice!

"A mere formation like this won't be enough to trap me!"

Ning Fan, having already easily broken through Emperor Lou Tuo's mountain formation, certainly wouldn't fear an array set up by a group of Shekong. Without even using the Momentum Character Secret, he directly charged forward with his physical defense, forcibly shattering the grand formation!

All seven White Ghost Shekong, including the White Ghost Sorcerer, vomited blood and staggered back in horror.

"This person's physical body is terrifying! Even with his cultivation sealed, his physical defense alone is enough to dominate the Thought-Shattering Early Stage!"

They dared not obstruct Ning Fan any further and could only watch him slaughter the Fire Spirit their sect had summoned!

This brought tremendous pressure to the Summon Wind Sect!

As soon as Ning Fan set foot in the Summon Wind Sect, Nan Zhilong's gaze hardened. He coldly instructed the nine Shekong cultivators behind him, "Quickly help me with Soul Fusion!"

The power of the medicine soul from the nine Shekong instantly strengthened Nan Zhilong, whose cultivation was originally at the Peak of Shekong, now surged past the Shattered Thought bottleneck, reaching the Shattered Thought Early Stage level!

"You have a Thought-Shattering physical body, and I, Nan, also have Thought-Shattering strength. How can we allow you, a mere outsider, to seize our Summon Wind Sect's Fire Spirit! Tiandu Demon-Breaking Finger!"

Nan Zhilong suddenly raised his right index finger, chanting incantations, with twelve enormous golden Buddhist pillars appearing behind him!

His index finger gradually turned gold, pale yet exuding a captivating Buddhist aura, which seemed to slightly suppress the Ancient Demon Bloodline in Ning Fan's body, making Ning Fan instantly aware that this was a Buddhist Demon-Banishing Divine Ability!

With a shout, Nan Zhilong forced his finger down with all his might, and a faint golden thousand-zhang finger mark appeared to press directly against the long sky, as if pressing directly into Ning Fan's eyes.

Ning Fan, relying on his strong physical defense, directly punched and shattered the thousand-zhang fingerprint, yet within a few breaths, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his chest, with a trace of blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

Such a strange divine ability! Even though he blocked the thousand-zhang fingerprint, he was still injured. It seems the finger mark that appeared in his eyes also had lethal power, targeting the demon sect's spirit sense!

"What a strange Buddhist divine ability, able to directly attack the spirit sense..." This was the first time Ning Fan encountered this kind of Buddhist divine ability, and he suffered a minor loss, but now being

prepared, such divine abilities would be hard to work again. Surrounding himself with blazing fire, even that small injury healed in Nirvana.

Seeing that Ning Fan only suffered minor injuries, which then instantly healed, Nan Zhilong was slightly shocked. This was the divine ability he had learned at great cost from Zhongzhou Tian Du Peak, his strongest technique! In the past, using it was unbeatable, even Thought-Shattering Mid-Phase cultivators were mostly heavily injured. Of course, there was one premise, the opponent must be a demon sect cultivator, for the Demon-Breaking Finger to exert maximum power...

There is no doubt that Ning Fan is a demon sect cultivator, almost evident from his aura, yet he faced the Tiandu Demon-Breaking Finger head-on!

"If you have no other cards, then don't blame Ning Fan for being ruthless!"

Ning Fan moved with incredible speed, directly using his powerful physical defense to knock Nan Zhilong into vomiting blood and flying backward, unable to even evade.

Soul Fusion requires extremely intricate spirit sense to maintain, and with Nan Zhilong injured and nearly fainting, naturally, he couldn't maintain the Soul Fusion, and soon his aura weakened.

The other Summon Wind Sect Shekong attempted to block Ning Fan, but Ning Fan knocked them away one by one. In the end, the Fire Spirit summoned by Summon Wind Sect was similarly hunted down by Ning Fan!

"Damnable! Damnable indeed!" Nan Zhilong felt extremely unwilling but helpless; after all, the martial trials were meant to test strength. In past years, the Summon Wind Sect would rob other clans' Fire Spirits, but now the cycle turns, and it's the Summon Wind Sect's misfortune.

But now, this would mean they couldn't suppress the Tamu Clan's score, and thus couldn't curry favor with Emperor Lou Tuo!

Ning Fan did not snatch from the Evil Sheep Sect, naturally considering Xianyu Chun's favor, making Evil Sheep Sect cultivators feel for the first time that befriending Ning Fan Senior by their Young Sect Leader has its benefits.

The Sea Soul Sect was the last Ning Fan seized.

There were quite a few Shekong in the Sea Soul Sect, but when Ning Fan arrived, Sorcerer Minghai stopped others from intervening, standing alone in front of Ning Fan.

"Defeat this old man, and all the Fire Spirits my sect summoned will be yours to destroy. If not, then please leave my Sea Soul Sect!"

This man intended to stop Ning Fan with his own strength!

The Sea Soul Sect was among the few clans that hadn't suppressed the Tamu, hence Ning Fan wasn't as ruthless with them as with other clans. He nodded, agreeing to Sorcerer Minghai's challenge.

Sorcerer Minghai's expression was unprecedentedly solemn, hesitating before finally using his yet-to-be-perfected strongest divine ability against Ning Fan.

It was a type of Dao Thought Technique, a divine ability that only Shattered Thought cultivators could perfect. Once perfected, that would be the day Sorcerer Minghai formally stepped into the Shattered Thought Realm!

"Extreme Fire Concept!"

At the thought of Sorcerer Minghai, fierce winds surged and waves of fire rolled in the area where they faced off!

With one thought, he could move the clouds and winds!

"A Dao Thought Technique..."

Ning Fan didn't directly defeat Sorcerer Minghai with his formidable physical defense but slowly lifted his finger, reminiscing about the killings and solitude on the cultivation road in his mind, like that western wind with falling leaves, drifting with a heart undaunted.

The western wind last night withered the trees!

Sorcerer Minghai was instantly terrified; in the moment Ning Fan raised his finger, the fierce winds he summoned with his Dao thoughts were instantly commandeered by Ning Fan, transforming into a gentle western wind, with falling leaves descending from the sky.

The silent falling leaves brought an unprecedented sense of crisis to Sorcerer Minghai, as he activated his entire Dao thought, crashing towards those leaves, attempting to burn them into ashes with the Extreme Fire Concept!

Belonging to the element of wood, leaves give rise to fire; in such elemental interactions, Sorcerer Minghai assumed that his Dao thought should suppress Ning Fan's.

Yet the result was Sorcerer Minghai's Extreme Fire Concept easily succumbing to Ning Fan's Dao thought, gradually turning into ashes under the western wind Dao thought...

By the principle of the Five Elements, the Extreme Fire Concept should certainly not be defeated by Ning Fan's Dao thought!

In terms of the degree of Dao thought completion, Sorcerer Minghai had a strange feeling that Ning Fan's Dao thought wasn't more complete than many Thought-Shattering Early Stage cultivators...

Could Ning Fan's cultivation be lower than the Shattered Thought realm, hence his Dao thought was incomplete?

As soon as this idea emerged, Sorcerer Minghai dismissed it. Ning Fan was already proven to be an Eternal Immortal Venerable, so it couldn't be that his cultivation was lower than Shattered Thought.

With that, Sorcerer Minghai could only conclude that Ning Fan intentionally lowered the Dao thought intensity to engage him in a fair duel.

Losing to such an open-hearted old monster, Sorcerer Minghai was utterly convinced!

"I earnestly request Senior's guidance on why my Extreme Fire Concept lost to Senior's West Wind Falling Leaf Dao Thought..." Sorcerer Minghai humbly asked.

Ning Fan was not a Fragmented Thought Elder and did not have a deep understanding of Dao Thought, not even surpassing Sorcerer Minghai's Half-Step Shattered Thought realm, but being a cultivator of the Second Realm of Tianren, he could see the various issues that Sorcerer Minghai couldn't understand, answering them was naturally easy.

"Different depths..."

After speaking, Ning Fan hunted the Fire Soul summoned by the Sea Soul Sect, Sorcerer Minghai sighed deeply, seemingly gaining great benefit from Ning Fan's brief words, gave orders to his subordinates, and instantly, the Sea Soul Sect cooperatively summoned more Peak Crossing Truth and Shedding Void Fire Souls for Ning Fan to kill for points.

"Shall we kill the Shattered Thought Fire Soul!" Sorcerer Minghai suddenly asked.

Ning Fan did not immediately reply.

Intentionally, he was not inclined to hunt the Shattered Thought Fire Souls, after all, summoning them carried great risks. If a Half-Step Eternity Realm Shattered Thought Fire Soul were summoned, it would inevitably be a tough battle—of course, if Ning Fan used some hidden cards in front of the Southern Frontier Cultivators here, he could still hunt the Shattered Thought Fire Soul, but it would not be without cost, certain things would inevitably be exposed to the Dabei Clan...

Ning Fan calculated the scores.

With his constant seizing of Fire Souls, the Tami Tribe's overall score had risen to three thousand points.

Three thousand points, enough to make any member of the Tami Tribe overjoyed, surpassing their expectations! Also sufficient to silence anyone who underestimated the Tami Tribe or Ning Fan, those who boasted that the Tami would not exceed a thousand points, now closed their mouths, those tribes that claimed to lead the Tami by many points, now severely impacted.

Yet Ning Fan was not satisfied with just three thousand points!

Ranked first was the Summon Wind Sect, with nine thousand points; to take the top position in the Southern Frontier, he needed to surpass the Summon Wind Sect's score.

However, the problem was those tribes whose Fire Souls Ning Fan had seized suddenly stopped all actions, no longer summoning Fire Souls to hunt.

Some due to severe personnel damage, unable to hunt Fire Souls, others harboring ulterior motives, unwilling to summon, lest Ning Fan seize them and gain points.

Only the Sea Soul Sect remained genuine, faithful to their word, actively summoning Fire Souls for Ning Fan to seize.

According to the rules, if the other party didn't summon voluntarily, Ning Fan was not allowed to snatch their Fire Summoning Talismans directly, proxy summoning was not permitted.

"To surpass the Summon Wind Sect's score, even if I exhaust the Tami Tribe's remaining low-grade and mid-grade Fire Summoning Talismans, it is not enough. Sooner or later, I must hunt the Shattered Thought Fire Souls..."

Thinking of this, Ning Fan replied to Sorcerer Minghai, "Summon one Shattered Thought Fire Soul from your sect, let me kill one, and then summon the second..."

"Good! Observing Senior battling a true Shattered Thought is a great blessing for me!" Sorcerer Minghai seemed unconcerned about the test score, now solely focused on watching Ning Fan hunt the Shattered Thought Fire Soul, immediately instructing his sect members to use the high-grade Fire Summoning Talismans.

However, a sudden problem arose!

After using the high-grade Fire Summoning Talismans, they had no effect, no Shattered Thought Fire Soul appeared!

"Strange! Could there be issues with these high-grade Fire Summoning Talismans? Otherwise, why can't they successfully summon a Shattered Thought Fire Soul?" Sorcerer Minghai was greatly surprised, trying other high-grade Fire Summoning Talismans and finding all had issues.

Throughout the Southern Frontier's small competition, no one was foolish enough to summon a Shattered Thought Fire Soul to kill, hence no one tried summoning a Shattered Thought Fire Soul.

For precisely this reason, until Ning Fan decided to summon a Shattered Thought Fire Soul, no one noticed the talismans had issues!

Ning Fan tried activating the Tami Tribe's high-grade Fire Summoning Talismans and found they also had no effect, though the low-grade and mid-grade Fire Summoning Talismans were still usable.

Reluctantly, Ning Fan had to give up hunting Shattered Thought Fire Souls, as other tribes delayed summoning Peak Crossing Truth and Shedding Void Fire Souls, he had to use up the Tami Tribe's Fire Summoning Talismans.

The remaining 38 low-grade Fire Summoning Talismans and 20 mid-grade Fire Summoning Talismans were all exhausted by Ning Fan. The Tami Tribe's score then exceeded six thousand points.

Six thousand points, still less than the Summon Wind Sect's nine thousand points.

As time gradually passed, other tribes still had no intention of continuing to summon Fire Souls, seemingly preferring to keep the current score ending the test rather than continuing summoning!

"Unable to make the Tami Tribe rank bottom, an oversight on our part, but in any case, we cannot let the Tami Tribe take first place! Our strength is not as good as the Ning surname foreign cultivator, if Fire

Souls are summoned, they will undoubtedly be taken by this person before slaughtering them, so rather than summoning, it's better not to, ensuring the Tami Tribe has no hope of taking first place, also fulfilling our part for Emperor Lou Tuo!"

This was the true thought of countless tribes!

This thought, even outsider cultivators with sane minds could see through, how could Ning Fan not see it?

This was a passive suppression tactic against the Tami Tribe, but incredibly effective, as those tribes didn't voluntarily summon Fire Souls, Ning Fan couldn't seize them even if he wanted to.

No further score increase!

"If necessary, use Illusory Art on those tribes' cultivators, forcing them to summon Fire Souls under control..."

While pondering, the steppe suddenly underwent irregular tremors.

Sometimes light, sometimes heavy, the tremors were incredibly unpredictable, accompanied by these tremors, each combat testing zone suddenly experienced abrupt changes!

Within the Hanzhen Clan's testing area, a dark brown flame suddenly appeared out of thin air, then a dark brown Fire Soul emerged from the flame, exuding a Mid-Phase Shattered Thought cultivation!

Then, a second, third, fourth, fifth Shattered Thought Fire Soul appeared one after another in Hanzhen Clan, with cultivation ranging from Shattered Thought Early to Shattered Thought Late Stage!

The appearance of the head Shattered Thought Fire Soul instantly triggered a frenzied massacre in Hanzhen Clan, the twenty contenders, almost none remained, all died on the spot!

Note that the Hanzhen Clan never activated the high-grade Fire Summoning Talismans, the timing of these five Fire Souls was bizarre!

Not only Hanzhen Clan, but other tribes' testing areas also saw five Shattered Thought Fire Souls appear, their numbers precisely matching the count of high-grade Fire Summoning Talismans they possessed!

Shattered Thought Fire Souls are not something a group of Peak Crossing Truth and Shedding Void cultivators can withstand, moreover, since every tribe's testing area produced five Shattered Thought Fire Souls at once, the casualties were immensely severe, many tribes' contenders were slaughtered, only a few survived, but greatly terrified!

More fearsome was, after slaughtering the on-site contenders, those Shattered Thought Fire Souls began rushing towards the crowd here, with such momentum, once killing all cultivators here, they might escape to wreak havoc across the entire Southern Frontier, enacting a massacre!

Given the Southern Frontier Steppe's cultivators' capabilities, they could not stop this slaughter!

After all, these were 175 Shattered Thought Fire Souls! Even if an Eternal Immortal Venerable were to face so many Shattered Thought Fire Souls, they would be intimidated, cautiously confronting!

Furthermore, a cold laugh carrying Shattered Thought's force suddenly reached every cultivator's ear here, seemingly originating from the steppe's depths!

"Jie jie jie jie, Chulie Duolan, the Fierce Realm did not kill you, that was Vacant Flame's incompetence, but I, Stone Flame, am no incompetent, this time, you surely won't escape our grasp!"

The Sanyan Guard, who ambushed Duolan that day, unexpectedly pursued here...

How did they escape Fierce Realm's blockade and enter the Dabei territory!

Chapter 1010: Soul Cultivators

The cold laughter was just a single sound, seemingly emanating from the depths of the earth, and then it was drowned out by the chaotic noises of the prairie.

Countless Southern Frontier Cultivators were shocked and furious; unmistakably, the Sanyan Guard had invaded the Southern Frontier Steppe once more! The invaders must have tampered with the Martial Trial Pyrocharms, causing countless Shattered Thought Fire Souls to go on a rampage. This was not unprecedented! Thousands of years ago, the Heavenly Water Prairie experienced a fire soul riot, and prior to that, another incident occurred seventy thousand years ago, with numerous such occurrences in distant history. For the Dabei Clan, each fire soul riot meant a calamity.

The cultivators scattered, escaping in all directions while projecting their spirit sense underground. Unfortunately, most had limited spirit sense, obstructed by the dense earth once they reached a certain depth, making it difficult to delve deeper. Some, relying on their powerful spirit sense, forcibly probed deeper but were attacked upon seeing what lay beneath, their divine sense severely damaged, leaving them bleeding and panic-stricken.

"It's really a Stone Flame invasion! And they even brought along a Hundred-li Stone Dragon. It's likely a Stone Flame Demon Child is here!"

"So, it seems that the one who suppressed the Ning-named foreign cultivator with volcanic divine skills was indeed the work of the Stone Flame scoundrels, but we just probed underground and found no hidden ones..."

"Do not probe your spirit sense underground. Stone Dragons from the Stone Flame Sect devour spirit sense, even the Immortal Venerable must be cautious!"

"Ordinary Sanyan Guards cannot leave the Fierce Realm; the arrivals are not trivial and this matter must be reported to the Holy Mountain immediately!"

Still, even if reported to the Holy Mountain, it would take a significant amount of time for experts to arrive. During this time, the Southern Frontier Steppe would surely suffer numerous casualties!

The shocked cries of a few were soon drowned out by the bloody screams from all directions. As the Shattered Thought Fire Souls spread their slaughter, more and more people died at their hands; the entire prairie was ablaze, with corpses strewn everywhere.

Ning Fan frowned tightly, surprised by this sudden change. Relying on his powerful spirit sense, he probed underground, where the depth was pitch black, obscuring clarity; a bone-chilling cold akin to the netherworld eroded his spirit sense, preventing extended maintenance underground.

With Ning Fan's perception, he vaguely sensed a gigantic mysterious creature deep down in the earth, its colossal form stretching hundreds of miles, seemingly enveloped by an aura that could merge seamlessly with the earth, exuding an exceptionally heavy oppressive force. Unfortunately, the darkness below obstructed Ning Fan from discerning the creature's appearance...

The massive creature was particularly sensitive to spirit sense; despite Ning Fan's concealment via the Ice Rain Technique, it still noticed a hint of it, and though unable to pinpoint Ning Fan's exact position, it instinctively unleashed its divine skills, attacking indiscriminately around.

Suddenly, Ning Fan felt a hot breath assaulting his spirit sense, followed by a burning pain in his divine sense; in an instant, a wisp of spirit sense submerged below was extinguished by some unknown means of the giant creature, so swiftly that Ning Fan had no time to withdraw it.

Fortunately, being cautious, Ning Fan had minimal spirit sense submerged underground, resulting in almost no damage; compared to the severely injured Southern Frontier cultivators, he was indeed exceptionally fortunate.

Ning Fan's expression was extremely grave.

The giant creature hidden underground was extraordinary in its ability to exert pressure on him, far surpassing the rampaging Shattered Thought Fire Souls on the prairie, likely possessing at least the strength of an Eternal Immortal Venerable, or even stronger!

Why would the clearly powerful giant creature not reveal itself on the prairie but remain hidden underground? Was it unable to surface, unwilling, or was there another hidden reason? Hearing some Southern Frontier cultivators' cries, it seemed they mentioned the Hundred-li Stone Dragon, perhaps referring to the gigantic creature entrenched underground...

Inside the enormous creature, there seemed to be many cultivators, with no less than a hundred detected breaths... Could these hidden cultivators be Stone Flame Cultivators among the Sanyan Guard...

"Oh? A foreign Immortal Venerable, is it? According to some Vacant Flame Guards, when they searched Duolan before, they saw a foreign Immortal Venerable in the Fierce Realm, could it be this person? I wonder if Vacant Flame's failure was related to this person. However, with limited cultivation, if they don't destroy the Punishing Ring, they're negligible. Even if they do, restoring their full cultivation is still nothing to worry about. After all, this time, I brought a Hundred-li Stone Dragon along; even should an Eternal Immortal Venerable arrive, I'll surely kill them without fail!"

In the depths underground, a stalwart cultivator stood atop the mouth of the gigantic creature, speaking with a slight disdain; his sharp features gave an impression of determination. In contrast to his resolute appearance were his dry, grass-like unruly white hair and unnaturally pale skin.

This person's words were inaccessible to Ning Fan, whose spirit sense had been extinguished.

Behind this person stood over a hundred fiery figures.

Ning Fan no longer probed underground, recognizing the giant creature's adeptness at attacking spirit sense, making rash investigation unwise as it would only cause unnecessary damage. Moreover, the rampaging Shattered Thought Fire Souls on the prairie also needed addressing.

"Senior, save me!"

Duolan screamed, disregarding the rules of the Martial Trial, directly rushing into the Tamu Martial Trial area, seeking Ning Fan's protection—one might say in such chaotic times, the rules of the Martial Trial became a mere formality, and even if she intruded, no one would stop her. Hiding behind Ning Fan, Duolan was pale with terror, never expecting the Sanyan Guard to pursue her all the way to the Southern Frontier Steppe!

Moreover, to hunt her down, these Stone Flame Guards incited a fire soul riot, quite the extravagant scheme!

Chasing her without regard could no longer be explained by simple schemes; could it be that the secrets she so desperately guarded were known by some powerful old monsters, causing them to go to such great lengths to hunt down an impoverished imperial daughter!

Four Shattered Thought Fire Souls pursued Duolan, all with Shattered Thought Stage cultivation. With Duolan's wounded, unhealed state, she certainly could not contend with them.

The intelligence of the four Shattered Thought Fire Souls was low, but they possessed near-animal instincts, faintly sensing the danger surrounding Ning Fan, momentarily causing them to hesitate to approach closely.

One Shattered Thought Fire Soul stepped forward suddenly, speaking to Ning Fan with unpracticed language, "Surrender... this woman... and we... will spare your life... otherwise... kill!"

Duolan clutched Ning Fan's sleeve tightly, fearing Ning Fan might abandon her in the face of danger, given his precedence of not aiding others in peril.

In reality, Ning Fan was indeed indifferent to Duolan's fate; nonetheless, he didn't mind helping her today amid the chaos, not out of compassion but to seize the opportunity to slay more Shattered Thought Fire Souls.

Naturally, he did not heed the threats of a few fire souls.

"The giant creature hasn't appeared, so it needn't be addressed for the moment. Now, amidst the yet unended Martial Trial, chaos brings forth many Shattered Thought Fire Souls; if my guess is correct, these suddenly appearing fire souls might just be the ones that couldn't be summoned by the failed high-grade Fire Summoning Talismans. If slaying these fire souls counts towards the Martial Trial score, it's an opportunity to achieve the first place in the trial!"

While the Southern Frontier fell into chaos, others sought escape to save their lives, yet Ning Fan still aimed to clinch first place in the little competition.

Seeing the four Shattered Thought Fire Souls hesitating to approach, Ning Fan left Duolan, boldly charging forward directly to meet the four Shattered Thought Fire Souls that pursued her.

The four fire souls were furious to see Ning Fan daringly approach, and immediately unleashed their divine skills, casting one fire-element technique after another towards Ning Fan.

Ning Fan was unfazed, and in a split second, relying on the fierce power of his black fire, he struck back at the four Shattered Thought Fire Souls. As a result, neither side could claim victory, with both man and souls evenly matched in the flames.

"Such high flame resistance..."

Ning Fan muttered lightly. The flame resistance of the four fire souls was exceedingly high, and even though his black fire was formidable, reaching the level of the Twelve Metaplasia True Fire, attacking with fire against fire was not the best strategy, as the damage caused would be negligible.

"With the strength of the senior's black fire, it can't overcome these Shattered Thought Fire Souls! No, these fire souls have been enhanced by the Soul Fusion Technique, hence their flame resistance is exceptionally strong!" Duolan suddenly exclaimed in realization.

Upon her words, Ning Fan noticed that a very subtle Medicine Soul power was attached to the four Shattered Thought Fire Souls, significantly enhancing their flame resistance.

Suddenly, it all made sense.

Indeed, someone used the Soul Fusion Technique to greatly increase the flame resistance of the fire souls here!

Based on Ning Fan's understanding, the Dabei people are born with Medicine Souls, and their application and comprehension of Medicine Souls are far beyond what the Four Heavens Alchemists can comprehend. Not only are many elusive soul techniques related to Medicine Souls passed down here, but in Dabei, there exists a highly special secret technique called [Soul Fusion Technique], which is an original technique of the Dabei cultivators! Utilizing one's own Medicine Soul power, they can enhance others with a soul power boost through specific means.

The cultivators enhanced by soul power will exhibit various additional effects, ranging from beneficial ones such as cultivation enhancement, Five Elements resistance enhancement, and speed enhancement; to detrimental effects such as sluggishness, poisoning, accelerated mana depletion, dizziness... The specific effects are closely related to the characteristics of the Medicine Soul of the caster.

Ning Fan once fought with the Sanyan Guards, and the Soul Fusion Technique they used belonged to beneficial ones, with the effect of temporarily enhancing a single cultivator's cultivation by combining his soul power with others.

The Young Sect Leader of the Xieyang Clan, Xianyu Chun, excelled in a rather extraordinary Soul Fusion Technique; it was said to add several dozen harmful states to the enemy cultivators, belonging to the detrimental type of skill, and even among detrimental Soul Fusion Techniques, it was considered unique, which is why Southern Frontier cultivators feared him.

As for the flame resistance enhancement on these Shattered Thought Fire Souls, it was undoubtedly due to someone enhancing them with a beneficial Soul Fusion Technique! Therefore, even though Ning Fan's black fire is strong, it is very difficult to defeat these Shattered Thought Fire Souls with just the black fire.

"This is nothing..." The four fire souls regarded Ning Fan with disdainful eyes, their killing intent intensified.

Seeing that black fire wouldn't work, Ning Fan didn't insist, promptly withdrew the black fire, and with a flick of his hand, took out a tender green pine sapling about a foot tall, offering it to the sky. Suddenly, the sapling grew in the wind, transforming into a giant pine tree, its pine needles were all flying swords, densely packed and numerous!

This was the Four Emperors Luohan Pine!

Among his many magical treasures, this pine wasn't considered the strongest, but it sufficed for the current situation.

"Wood-series treasure..." The four fire souls completely disregarded the Four Emperors Luohan Pine.

Wood creates fire, in the cycle of creation and destruction, they had the upper hand, why fear this treasure!

However, the change in events instilled human-like fear in the eyes of the four fire souls!

Ning Fan sent out a spirit sense, instantaneously launching thirty million sword beams from the giant pine, the vast flying swords spread like a boundless ocean, almost covering the entire sky, causing many Southern Frontier cultivators witnessing the scene to inhale sharply.

"Flying swords covering the sky! Just how many flying swords does that Ning-named foreign cultivator have, to directly obscure the firmament with flying swords!"

"It's not just about the sheer number! Almost one in ten flying swords can be classified as Immortal Swords!"

"There's even so many Acquired Immortal Swords among them!"

Duolan, being the nearest, saw even more clearly that there were nine streams of sword light most fierce within the sky-covering sea of swords, those were nine Twelve Nirvana Immortal Swords!

"Senior Ning's splendid maneuver!" Duolan was amazed and couldn't close her mouth.

Even among Holy Mountain Immortal Venerables and Immortal Kings, few possessed such a large number of Twelve Nirvana magical treasures, could it be that foreign Immortal Venerables are this treasure-abundant.

In a battle between Immortal Venerables, a single Twelve Nirvana magical treasure can affect the course of the fight; in a Shattered Thought battle, possessing a Twelve Nirvana magical treasure practically guarantees victory. Those four Shattered Thought Early Stage fire souls, in terms of cultivation, weren't as strong as Ning Fan's single Ancient Demon Blood Wine, and in terms of treasures, they were even less comparable. This confrontation was undoubtedly without suspense. With Ning Fan's sword technique, countless sword beams descended from the sky, exterminating the four fire souls amid the heavy sword sea.

The entire process took less than ten breaths!

Ning Fan glanced at his tally plate, killing the four Shattered Thought Fire Souls indeed increased his martial trial score by four thousand points, and also gained four Shattered Thought Fire Crystals.

Unfortunately, it's still not enough; to seize first place in Southern Frontier, more points are needed!

"Stay close to me!"

Ning Fan remained expressionless, as if slaying the four Shattered Thought Fire Souls was merely a trivial matter, his figure flickering as he flew towards the Tamu tribe outside the arena. Moving alongside was the sky-shielding sea of thirty million swords!

In such chaotic times, Duolan dared not leave Ning Fan's side, so she naturally followed wherever Ning Fan flew.

Currently, the rampaging Shattered Thought Fire Souls were spreading across the Southern Frontier, wherever they passed, the prairie was engulfed in a sea of fire, with more and more killings occurring. The Tamu Clan cultivators were equally targeted by a Shattered Thought Fire Soul, the clansmen scattered and fled, yet six or seven still perished at the hands of the fire soul.

Clan Leader Tageli watched his people fall one by one, feeling grief as if bleeding internally; the Tamu clansmen here were participants in the competition, the elite of the tribe, any of them dying was an irreparable loss to the Tamu, a blow to the inadequately populated and strong scarce Tamu tribe.

Tageli only hated his insufficient cultivation, unable to kill the fire souls, unable to protect his fellow tribesmen, unable to tear apart the mastermind behind the fire soul rampage!

However, the sad thing was that even he himself was being targeted by the Shattered Thought Fire Souls.

Death!

As the Shattered Thought Fire Soul lunged at him, Tageli had only this thought left, his face full of despair and unwillingness. He let out a roar, his eyes bloodshot, ready to ignite his Spirit and go all out with the Shattered Thought Fire Soul. Yet suddenly, a gentle force stopped his Spirit from burning.

Then, all at once, a sweeping sword light fell from the sky, easily slicing the once ferociously murderous Shattered Thought Fire Soul into minced meat!

Tageli jerked his head up, as did all the fleeing Tami Tribe members. They all stopped in their tracks, looking up to see the figure standing high in the sky, slaughtering Shattered Thought Fire Souls like dogs.

"Thank you, Senior, for your help!" The grief on Tageli and the others' faces gradually dissipated, replaced with gratitude, fervor, and a fanatical worship of Ning Fan!

This was someone who could turn the tide in a desperate situation. Without this person, not a soul among the Tami competitors would have survived!

This person is the benefactor of the Tami Tribe!

"Ten thousand points..."

To the crowd's thanks, Ning Fan merely nodded lightly, glanced at the jade slip, and calmly said to Tageli and the others, "Stay close to me!"

With that, he flew again to another location.

Tageli and the others dared not neglect his words and immediately followed Duolan, hiding behind Ning Fan, following him east and west. On the prairie around them, due to the frantic killing efficiency of the Shattered Thought Fire Souls, there were few living people left to be seen. Only Ning Fan moved recklessly, viewing the surrounding Fire Souls as if they were nothing.

Ten thousand one, ten thousand two, ten thousand three... On the path of hunting Shattered Thought Fire Souls, Ning Fan's score continued to rise. This score was more than enough to secure first place in the Martial Trial, yet he continued slaying the Shattered Thought Fire Souls, flying towards the Xieyang Sect's location.

At this moment, all surviving cultivators with some strength were gathered together, including the surviving cultivators of the Xieyang Sect.

The Corpse Demon Holy Envoy overseeing the Southern Frontier Lesser Competition was also present, seemingly becoming the leader among the group of cultivators. He integrated most of the surviving strong cultivators together, jointly resisting the Shattered Thought Fire Souls, not seeking to kill them but only to delay time and reduce casualties, to hold out until the Holy Mountain's reinforcements arrived.

As for whether the Shattered Thought Fire Souls would scatter across the entire Southern Frontier Steppe, that was not something the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy could prevent. With his mere Shattered Thought Early Stage cultivation, the role he could play in this chaos was very limited.

Fortunately, since this Lesser Competition was held in the Summon Wind Sect, in times of crisis, the Summon Wind Sect directly summoned the clan's guardian Corpse Demon, which was also a Shattered Thought Early Stage Corpse Demon!

With this, the Southern Frontier cultivators now had two Shattered Thought guardians in place, although both were at the Shattered Thought Early Stage. Such strength was enough to allow these surviving cultivators to save their lives temporarily, but as time dragged on, trouble would arise.

As they sensed the strong gathering here, more and more Shattered Thought Fire Souls began to converge on this location.

Five, six, seven... eleven!

At this point, eleven Shattered Thought Fire Souls, including four at the Shattered Thought Mid-Phase, besieged the group led by the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy!

The Summon Wind Sect, Xieyang Sect, and other groups did their utmost, merely managing to cooperate with the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy to form a formation array to have a tenuous self-preservation under the assault of the Fire Souls. But as the attacking Fire Souls continued to increase, breaches in the formation array set up by the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy kept appearing, and the situation was already extremely perilous.

Once the formation was broken, the Fire Souls outside could storm in, and who knows how many survivors would be torn apart by the Fire Souls!

Inside the array, the Summon Wind Sect's Nan Zhilong's face was ashen, nowhere near the arrogant demeanor he had before. If the array was broken, they'd have to face the siege of eleven Shattered Thought Fire Souls, and even if he was a Shedding Void Stage expert, he had no confidence of saving his own life!

The White Ghost Sect's White Ghost Sorcerer closed his eyes in despair. He couldn't bother to suppress the Tami anymore. If his life was gone, what was the use of currying favor with Emperor Lou Tuo! If this formation broke, he'd likely meet his end. Those were eleven Shattered Thought Fire Souls!

Black Mountain Sect, Yanan Sect... strong individuals from various large groups looked dejected, trembling like lost dogs, having none of their usual superior demeanor.

On the other hand, Xianyu Chun was unusually calm at this moment. He feared no one, especially not Stone Flame people!

When the chaos erupted, Xianyu Chun was protected by his father and brought to the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy. Even with their lives hanging by a thread, he continued to calmly perform the Soul Fusion Secret Technique, combining the soul power of everyone to launch attacks on the eleven Shattered Thought Fire Souls outside the formation.

There was no denying that Xianyu Chun's talent for the Soul Fusion Technique was indeed unrivaled in the Southern Frontier. Even though his cultivation was only at the Fate Immortal stage, with the borrowed soul power of others, he managed to apply one by one weakening type Soul Fusion Techniques on the eleven Fire Souls outside the array.

Reduced cultivation by five percent...

Speed slowed by five percent...

Illusory Art interference every ten breaths...

Divine sense dizziness every ten breaths...

Fire attack reduced by five percent...

Mana consumption increased by five percent...

...

He actually managed to attach dozens of Soul Fusion Reduction Techniques to the opponent!

Xianyu Chun truly deserves to be called a genius of the Soul Fusion Technique. Ordinary people can rarely attach more than ten reduction effects, yet he could attach dozens at the same time, causing the eleven Shattered Thought Fire Souls to suffer significant losses. Without this, the formation would never have lasted until this moment. It can be said that the cultivators within the formation being able to survive this long is undoubtedly due to Xianyu Chun's contributions!

But unfortunately, no matter how high Xianyu Chun's talent is, his cultivation is still too weak. It's impossible for him to completely suppress eleven Shattered Thought Fire Souls on his own. Even with the help of many old masters, he could only slightly weaken the fire souls' strength; he couldn't greatly restrict them.

Boom!

At a weak point in the formation, a Shattered Thought Fire Soul suddenly created a breach, and one by one, the Shattered Thought Fire Souls entered the great formation through it!

The cultivators inside the formation all turned pale, and in almost an instant, more than ten people were killed by the invading Shattered Thought Fire Souls.

The Corpse Demon Holy Envoy, caught off guard, was seriously injured. He, along with the protecting corpse demons of the Summon Wind Sect, struggled to hold on, but could only intercept a few of the Shattered Thought Fire Souls, while the remaining fire souls wreaked havoc inside the formation.

In the distance, more fire souls were still approaching. The fire souls besieging the Corpse Demon Elder increased, and as time went on, the protecting corpse demons of the Summon Wind Sect were wiped out by several fire souls working together, making the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy finally consider retreating.

"The fire souls are rampaging uncontrollably, and the rescue from the Holy Mountain probably won't make it... Do I have to abandon these Southern Frontier cultivators?"

With a determined look, the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy suddenly rushed out of the formation, abandoning everyone and fleeing alone. With his departure, there was no longer any Shattered Thought among the group, and they had even less power to resist the fire souls. Some emotionally stirred cultivators openly cursed, furious at the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy's desertion.

However, moments later, a scream came from afar, startling them all. It was unmistakably the voice of the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy!

It turned out that the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy had been intercepted halfway by a Half-Step Eternity Realm Fire Soul and was decapitated in just a few rounds!

"No one... can escape!" That hoarse voice of the Half-Step Eternity Fire Soul scoffed, flipping his hand to send out a blaze, reducing the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy's body to ashes.

The cultivators were terrified!

Even the Corpse Demon Holy Envoy possessing Shattered Thought Early Stage couldn't escape, so they, with even weaker cultivations, had no hope of survival!

"Father, you go first. I'll hold them off for you! Hurry up!"

With fire souls raging all around, Xianyu Chun had a streak of madness in his eyes. Seeing a Shattered Thought Fire Soul pounce toward his father, he recklessly stepped in front of his father, not knowing what kind of divine skill he used, but his body suddenly petrified, directly blocking the Shattered Thought Fire Soul's attack with his physical defense.

After the attack, Xianyu Chun spat blood and staggered back, his pale face reaching an extreme as his cultivation seemingly showed signs of diminishing.

The Young Chief of the Xieyang Clan was internally shaken. He hadn't expected his son to use Life Immortal Realm cultivation to risk his life against a Shattered Thought strike, nor that... this foolish son of his would stand in front of him at such a life-and-death moment.

Roar!

The fire soul, thwarted by Xianyu Chun, growled in shame and anger, pouncing once more. Xianyu Chun, without bothering to wipe the blood from his lips, again moved to shield his father.

The expected pain did not arrive. A white-robed figure suddenly descended from the sky, standing before Xianyu Chun, dispelling the Shattered Thought Fire Soul's offensive with a casual strike.

With a swift sword mark, boundless sword light descended from the sky, easily slaying the fire soul and securing another Fire Crystal.

"Master!" Xianyu Chun looked on with deep emotion. Had he just been saved by the master he revered most?

However, Ning Fan ignored Xianyu Chun's cry, and instead began a slaughter that filled the Shattered Thought Fire Souls around him with terror.

In his eyes, a trace of sudden understanding emerged!

When Xianyu Chun stepped forward to protect his father, Ning Fan once again sensed the arrival of a Heart Tribulation, not fleeting but truly about to descend!

The Heart Tribulation leading to the Mid Stage of Shekong!

"My first Heart Tribulation arose from a promise. Though the nature of the second Heart Tribulation isn't yet clear, I can already sense some clues... But, unfortunately, now isn't the time for a breakthrough!"

Ning Fan pushed down the sudden Heart Tribulation and continued to slaughter the fire souls. Within the subterranean massive organism, the white-haired strong man frowned and instructed the people behind him,

"That person hiding is none other than Chulie Duolan! Go, perform destroying this soul remnant on her, make sure to obtain what we need and then eliminate her... if that foreign cultivator interferes, kill him too. He has multiple Twelve Nirvana Immortal Swords, so proceed cautiously!"

"Yes!"

One by one, the figures behind the white-haired strong man vanished from their places. Simultaneously, on the prairie ground around Ning Fan, figures cloaked in flames suddenly emerged.

These individuals, each bearing a single cultivation level not particularly high, most being at the Early or Intermediate Enlightenment stages, and only a few reaching Abandon-Void Cultivation Level. Yet as they combined into a formation, the aura they emitted was no less than some weaker Eternal Immortal Venerables, astonishing beyond belief.

More peculiarly, as these people appeared, the originally mindless and rampant killing fire souls suddenly seemed to be under control, all madly rushing toward Ning Fan!

"Senior, be careful, these people are War Soul Masters of the Stone Flame Sect! Their cultivation may not be strong, but the strength of any one of their Medicine Souls can rival a Shattered Thought! If these people perform a Soul Fusion technique, they become even more terrifying! You cannot assess a War Soul Master's strength by cultivation; what they cultivate is not just the physical defense but the soul!"