

Humanity 221

Chapter 221 Grinding for Merit

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Time passed, and hundreds of cultivators from the Righteous Blood Sect constantly pushed inwards from all directions, just as they had dealt with the Insect Race in Insect Valley before.

Lu Ye wandered around the edge of the battlefield, occasionally taking action to slay those Level 7 Insect Race creatures in order to prevent possible casualties on his side.

Half a day later, the Insect Hive's residents were almost entirely wiped out. Although on the flesh walls surrounding the hive, new sacs continuously burst open, giving rise to new insects. But most of those newborns hardly had the chance to look around before they were robbed of their brief stay in this beautiful world.

At this moment, Lu Ye was examining a giant flesh sac in the very center of the Insect Hive. The sac, almost as tall as a person, had blood vessel-like structures extending in all directions, connecting to every corner of the hive's flesh walls.

The flesh sac itself was not the focus, but rather the three Level 8 Insect Race guardians by its side were.

These three creatures differed clearly from the other Level 8 insects Lu Ye had slain before; their serrated limbs were sharper, their dark carapaces were thicker, and their bodies were noticeably larger than those of the average Level 8 insects.

They were not yet at the Level 9 stage of the Insect Race, but they were undoubtedly stronger than the ordinary Level 8 insects.

This was the intelligence revealed by Li Baxian in his message, indicating that these few special creatures served as guardians.

After hatching, other members of their species would instinctively leave the hive and explore outward, consuming all life and energy they stumbled upon.

But these guardians would not; from the very day of their birth, they stayed in the nest, steadfast beside that flesh sac, never straying an inch.

Even when Lu Ye conjured a sun in his hand or when the Righteous Blood Sect's side fought the insects until heaven and earth seemed to darken, the guardians paid no heed.

Their sole mission upon birth was to guard that person-tall flesh sac; as long as no one approached within a certain range of it, even if all other insects perished, they would remain indifferent.

The best method to confront such powerful insects, of course, was to swarm them, and beat them down together!

At this moment, around twenty yards away from the flesh sac, many cultivators who were selected formed a circle. These cultivators either possessed magic and spells or had Spirit Talismans to use.

The number was not large, only about a hundred people.

At this moment, all of them were quietly channeling their spirit force.

Lu Ye held his hiltless dagger, and with a thought, the hiltless dagger buzzed and turned into a red streak of light, hurtling towards one of the Insect Race guardians; simultaneously, Chen Yu also activated his own weapon control power from another direction.

Moreover, the might of over a hundred Dao techniques and Spirit Talismans smashed towards those three guardians.

Thunderous rumbles echoed out, and the fluctuation of spirit force was in extreme turmoil at that instant.

Accompanied by the distinct shrieks of the Insect Race and the spatter of verdant blood, the provoked three guardians immediately struck back.

Indeed, they would not stray too far from that flesh sac, but if attacked, they would surely counterstrike, which was why Lu Ye had especially cautioned everyone beforehand not to hit those three creatures, or else it would be troublesome.

The red streak of light wove back and forth. Almost instantly, the guardian rushing towards Lu Ye suffered one penetrating wound after another. Before running a few steps, it collapsed on the ground, and a multitude of Dao techniques and Spirit Talismans enveloped it. It tried to rise, but carapace flew everywhere, revealing the verdant flesh beneath.

The other two guardians met a similar fate, collapsing to the ground only a few yards out and never getting up again.

Only one made it to the crowd, where it was blocked by physique cultivators led by He Xiyang, and was immediately hacked at wildly.

In the midst of the chaos, it was unclear who dealt the killing blow to that guardian.

With the correct method in hand, the process of killing those three guardians became straightforward. This was also the experience the Nine Provinces cultivators had paid for with their lives.

Cheers went up from all directions, every person was overjoyed.

Although this Insect Plague had cost the Righteous Blood Sect over a dozen lives, the victory in their first encounter still brought delight.

When word of the Insect Plague first spread, many lower-cultivation cultivators felt anxious because each Insect Plague would usually result in many deaths. But now, it seemed to be just a minor issue.

Wasn't every survivor reaping great rewards?

The Insect Plague was not entirely over yet, since the hive had not withered. It would only be considered truly over once the hive completely dried up. Before that happened, more insects would continue to hatch.

Lu Ye stepped forward and walked up to the most central flesh sac, the core of the entire Insect Hive.

The Boulder Mountain Saber cut slightly, slicing open the sac. A pungent stench filled the air, along with a frightful vitality.

He extended his hand and reached into the sac, rummaging around inside.

The squelching sounds immediately turned several female cultivators with weaker constitutions pale, forcing them to cover their mouths and run to the side.

Quickly, Lu Ye withdrew his hand, now holding a fist-sized flesh core. The core was irregularly shaped, pitted and rough, unappealing to behold, but it seemed alive, pulsating in Lu Ye's palm.

Pure and rich vitality radiated from this flesh core.

"It really does exist."

He muttered softly, the insects that ran out of the hive consuming all the life and energy, with most of these resources converging here, forming the source for hatching more of their kind. The specific storage location was this flesh sac, hence it being the hive's core and why there were special guardians.

The flesh core in Lu Ye's hand embodied the accumulation of life and energy, which the Nine Provinces cultivation world called the vitality core. This item was useless for cultivators, and even though it was a conglomeration of vast life and pure energy, was suitable only for the reproduction of the Insect Race.

There wasn't just one vitality core within the sac; Lu Ye had felt several when he reached in. To know exactly how many there were, one would have to break open the sac to find out.

By opening the sac and taking all the vitality cores, the hive here, lacking the supply of life and energy, would wither in a short time, and the Insect Plague would be completely over.

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However, Lu Ye did not plan to do so, as the means for cultivators of the Righteous Blood Sect to earn merit were really too scarce at the moment. Everything within the insect hive was under control, with seven hundred cultivators gathered; any newly hatched insect from the race would be decimated as soon as it appeared. This place was clearly a good location for farming merits.

So after merely observing the vitality core for a moment, Lu Ye placed it back where he found it.

The flesh pouch, where he had broken an opening, actually healed back to its original state in a very short amount of time, showing the powerful regenerative ability of the insect hive.

The following events were simple, the seven hundred cultivators of the Righteous Blood Sect just needed to stay here, continuously slaying the newly hatched members of the Insect Race, until the insect hive exhausted all its vitality cores.

There was nothing left for him to do; squads were distributed throughout the hive, each keeping watch over a flesh pouch, the Insect Race would meet its end one by one as they emerged...

Lu Ye went over to see Hua Ci, and finding that she was much better, he felt relieved.

However, thinking back on her fragile appearance just now made him want to chuckle.

She was a woman, after all, and thus had her vulnerable side.

"Lu Ye, Lu Ye!" Yiyi suddenly ran over excitedly.

"Hmm?"

"There's a passage over there; I don't know where it leads."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that there's a passage. You'll know once you come and see," Yiyi said, pulling Lu Ye towards the direction of the passage.

As everyone was currently waiting for the Insect Race to hatch and then slay them, Yiyi, having nothing better to do, wandered around and happened upon an unexplored entrance.

Soon, under Yiyi's guidance, Lu Ye arrived at the entrance. He thought carefully and realized that this passage was not one of the nine explored by the Righteous Blood Sect. The entrance was dark and gloomy, and it was unclear where it led.

After inspecting the area for a moment, Lu Ye suddenly squatted down and wiped the ground, finding some wet, sticky slime.

This kind of slime was present on the Insect Race upon their initial hatching.

In other words, some members of the Insect Race had passed through this passage and left, not too long ago—no more than a day before.

Lu Ye suddenly remembered a scenario that Li Baxian had mentioned... His heart stirred, and he vaguely understood.

"Shall we go and check it out?" Yiyi asked.

"I'll go have a look."

"I'll come with you," Yiyi quickly added.

"Alright."

"Let's take Amber with us."

"Okay."

Yiyi cheered and ran off to find Amber.

Lu Ye called over Chen Yu, instructing him to keep watch over the area and to send a message immediately if there were any emergencies.

Before long, Lu Ye had mounted Amber and delved deeper into the passage, moving forward all the way.

On Amber's broad back, Lu Ye held his Boulder Mountain Saber aloft; the Sun Blaze Spirit Runes on its sheath continued to function, lighting up the area around them. Yiyi sat in front of him while Amber galloped ahead.

It was as if they had returned to the past, with one man, one spirit, and one tiger, traveling together, carefree. Yiyi really loved this feeling and even started to hum a tune along the way.

Lu Ye rested his chin on her head, feeling strands of her hair blowing in the wind and tickling his face.

"Your head is so heavy!" Yiyi protested.

Lu Ye applied more weight.

Yiyi yelled out in protest, "I'm going to tell Sister Hua Ci when we get back, let her deal with you!"

"Hua Ci... Heh!" Lu Ye scoffed with disdain. In the past, he might have had no recourse against women, but now, he had a mechanical creature from Loo Yushan in his storage sack: fluffy, with eight legs—just ask if you're scared!

"Lu Ye, you're getting bolder, even Sister Hua Ci doesn't scare you anymore."

"Have you forgotten what your surname is, hmm?" Lu Ye lifted his right hand, clenched a fist, and pressed it to Yiyi's forehead, drilling away.

"I'm a Lu... Ow..." Yiyi held her head in her hands, "My name is Lu Yiyi... Wuuu wuuu..."

Bickering and romping, they continued on their way.

It wasn't until two hours later that some commotion and fluctuations of spirit force suddenly came from ahead.

Both Lu Ye and Yiyi quieted down simultaneously, the light from the Sun Blaze Spirit Runes dissipated, and even Amber, while still in motion, became utterly silent all at once.

After patting Amber to stop, Lu Ye and Yiyi dismounted and quietly moved forward. Soon enough, flickering lights came into view.

Chapter 222 Feeding

A massive underground space appeared in their field of vision, surrounded by flesh walls that flickered with the glow of spirit force, and indistinctly, a large number of the Insect Race could be seen gathering there.

It was another insect hive!

However, it wasn't within the territory of the Righteous Blood Sect, but another sect's.

When the Insect Plague arrived, every sect with a base on the Spirit Stream battlefield couldn't escape, so at this time, everyone fought their own battles, dealing with the Insect Plague within their own base's territory.

It could be said that the radiation range of every sect's base had an insect hive that needed to be dealt with.

The Righteous Blood Sect had mostly dealt with theirs, with seven hundred cultivators stationed in that underground space. Each insect that appeared met its death, earning merits in a relaxing and enjoyable manner.

The Righteous Blood Sect had secured their strategy quickly because Lu Ye had chosen a rather aggressive method, hence the high efficiency.

But the situation here was different.

This sect's cultivators chose the most standard procedure to deal with it, which was to block the passages of the insect hive and continuously lure out and slay the insects. This method wasn't efficient but was safe.

It could be said that ninety percent of the outer circle sects would choose this method, after all, not every governor could fly like Lu Ye, always ready to support anywhere, plus his strength surpassed Level 7.

It was with such confidence that Lu Ye had chosen that aggressive method, which proved very effective. Otherwise, the situation at the Righteous Blood Sect now would definitely be like the one they were seeing, not knowing how many days it would take to resolve the insect hive.

Lu Ye being able to reach here showed that the insect hive of the Righteous Blood Sect was connected to this one, a rare occurrence since most insect hives existed independently.

But such events had occurred before. According to the Fourth Senior Brother, when a certain insect hive developed to a certain extent, it would start to devour other hives to strengthen itself. The powerful hive would have insects tunnel through underground to seek out other hives' locations.

The Righteous Blood Sect hadn't dealt with the Insect Plague for many years. Every time the Insect Plague arrived, the Sect's insect hive would develop rapidly. Over the years, the nearby sects would resolve their own insect hives first before jointly dealing with the Righteous Blood Sect's, as their range would expand increasingly, inevitably affecting them.

Sometimes they even needed to request help from the inner circle or core circle sects because the situation had been dragged on for too long, leaving the outer circle sects helpless against the scale of the Insect Plague in the Righteous Blood Sect's territory.

This explained why the two hives were connected; it was because previously the insects had tunneled between them.

However, nobody expected that the Righteous Blood Sect would handle it so swiftly this time, while this sect was still slowly clearing theirs, there they had already secured a victory.

Shouts constantly came from those passageways, occasionally mixed with a scream, perhaps someone was injured.

Even blocking the entrance to lure the insects out to kill them wasn't entirely safe. If the number of insects reached a certain point, they could potentially break through the defenses, consequently causing significant casualties among the cultivators.

Lu Ye didn't know which sect this was. Presently, there were three powers bordering the territory of the Righteous Blood Sect, two from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge and one from Haotian Alliance.

According to the ten-part map, these three were arranged in a '品' shape, enclosing the Righteous Blood Sect at the center.

The three powers were Blue Waves Lodge, Sky Fiend Hall, and Phong Clan.

Among them, Blue Waves Lodge was part of the Haotian Alliance camp, located west of the Righteous Blood Sect—it too was a 9th grade sect. Sky Fiend Hall was 8th grade, located to the north of the Righteous Blood Sect. Phong Clan was a 9th grade sect, located to the east of the Righteous Blood Sect.

Lu Ye recalled the direction he came from, and after taking out the ten-part map to verify, he realized his current position was close to the Sky Fiend Hall's base.

In other words, those currently dealing with the insect race were Sky Fiend Hall's cultivators.

They had a lot of experience in dealing with Insect Plagues, so the situation at Sky Fiend Hall was relatively stable. Given enough time, they would surely eliminate the insects here completely.

Before Lu Ye arrived, the independent cultivators of Righteous Blood Sect often suffered bullying from Sky Fiend Hall and Phong Clan; if not for the neighboring Blue Waves Lodge, those independents would have had no foothold here.

From Chen Yu, Lu Ye had learned a lot, including that within the territory of the Righteous Blood Sect, there was actually a vein mine, and above that vein, a fruit orchard. Both the mine and the fruits produced in the orchard could be considered resources of the sect.

But since the Righteous Blood Sect had been unoccupied for many years, Sky Fiend Hall had dominated it, and over these many years, no one had troubled them about it.

Lu Ye had learned of this sooner, but hadn't taken any action because he had just recruited those disciples not long ago, and initiating any large-scale conflict with other sects hastily wasn't wise. At the very least, he needed to wait until the cultivators had developed some sense of belonging to the Righteous Blood Sect.

Now, it seemed like an opportunity.

After observing for a while, Lu Ye withdrew and motioned to Yiyi.

Yiyi leaned in closer.

Lu Ye quietly instructed her with a few words.

Yiyi nodded, "Understood."

Saying this, she rode on Amber and returned the way she came.

The battle between the Sky Fiend Hall cultivators and the insect race was in full swing; no one expected that a pair of eyes in the dark had already set their sights on them.

Lu Ye hadn't explored quickly on the way there due to the unclear situation in the passageways, but Yiyi had no such concerns on her return. This passageway itself was safe, showing no signs of insect presence.

Thus, just over two hours later, Yiyi returned riding on Amber, carrying a multitude of storage sacks, conservatively estimated at two to three hundred. These were all collected from the sect's cultivators.

Reuniting with Lu Ye, Yiyi also gave him a storage sack separately, "It's all here, also, Sister Hua Ci has already taken people out of the insect cave to rest as you instructed. Our hive is already starting to wither."

"Very good."

"Lu Ye, will this really work?" Yiyi clearly saw that Lu Ye was up to no good.

"Who knows, trying it out wouldn't hurt; at most, we'll just lose some insect corpses."

As he said this, Lu Ye took several storage sacks from Amber's back, tiptoed to the cave entrance, opened the storage sacks, and the insect corpses inside poured into the insect hive with a rustling sound.

There were actually members of the Insect Race here too, but because the cultivators from the Sky Fiend Hall made such a commotion on the other side, the attention of the Insect Race was drawn there, which was why Lu Ye could safely hide here.

The Insect Race was very sensitive to light and fluctuations of spirit force; as long as Lu Ye didn't make too much noise, he basically wouldn't attract the attention of the Insect Race.

A large number of insect corpses appeared suddenly, catching several unsuspecting members of the Insect Race off guard, causing them to stumble, and hissing noises arose. The few insects looked around but found nothing, though the additional insect corpses did surprise them momentarily.

Immediately afterward, many insects from all directions swarmed over, transporting those insect corpses to various parts of the hive, the vitality and energy contained within them were absorbed by the hive in a very short time, and all the insect corpses seemed as if they had been weathered for thousands of years, turning into dust.

Just as these insects finished their work, a large pile of insect corpses appeared again with a rustling sound.

The insects, clearly unaware of what was happening and lacking spiritual intelligence, would probably never guess that one day someone would kindly feed them.

Driven by instinct, many more insects came over and carried away the large amount of insect corpses.

Rustling...

One side joyful in feeding, the other side efficient in digestion, a perfect cooperation formed between them.

Fifty storage sacks emptied, a hundred storage sacks emptied, a hundred and fifty...

Lu Ye himself didn't know if his actions were effective, but if things could develop the way he expected, then things would get interesting.

While he was busy feeding the insect hive, the confrontation between the cultivators of the Sky Fiend Hall and the Insect Race gradually became fierce.

A doubtful voice came from somewhere in the cave, "Senior brother, why are there more and more insects the more we kill? There was a decreasing trend just now."

"Stop talking nonsense, just keep killing; the more you kill, the fewer there will be."

"Oh."

Initially, only cultivators at one or two cave entrances noticed this anomaly, assuming it was just a temporary phenomenon. The number of insects inside the hive was after all limited, and they could always kill them all; this had been the way every Insect Plague was handled in previous years, and this time would be no exception.

But as time passed, more and more cultivators noticed something was wrong, the insects were indeed increasing despite being killed, showing no signs of reduction, and their defensive lines were broken several times, resulting in many casualties.

Lu Ye, while feeding the insect hive, silently listened to the conversations of the Sky Fiend Hall cultivators, confirming that his idea was correct, and became even more motivated.

Having emptied all the remaining storage sacks of insect corpses into the hive, Lu Ye then took a palm-sized vitality core from the storage sack that Yiyi had specifically handed to him.

Vitality Core!

This thing was a crystal of vitality and energy, and was also the source of the insect hive's hatching of the Insect Race. For this plan, Lu Ye had even stopped the sect disciples from earning merits in advance and had Yiyi take all the vitality cores from there.

Otherwise, the insect hive over there wouldn't have withered so quickly.

Such a vitality core, who knows how many insect corpses it could replace.

Weighing the flesh core in his hand, Lu Ye casually threw it into the insect hive.

Sending you all a gift, hope you don't fail to appreciate it.

There were a total of eight vitality cores brought over from there by Yiyi, the reason there were so many was because the Righteous Blood Sect dealt with the Insect Plague too quickly, and these vitality cores hadn't had time to be consumed.

One incense stick's time later, the sounds of 'pu-chi, pu-chi' densely came from various parts of the insect hive.

Hearing this sound, Lu Ye couldn't help but feel anxious for the cultivators of the Sky Fiend Hall.

He was familiar with this sound; it was the noise of the insect hive hatching the Insect Race, and just from these dense noises, he knew that a large number of newborn insects had emerged at that moment.

He hoped the cultivators of the Sky Fiend Hall could hold on...

"Ah!" Screams came from a certain cave entrance, followed by more cries of agony.

Someone angrily shouted, "How come so many big fellows suddenly appeared?"

Others were shouting, "Hold the line, don't let them break through our defenses."

"Senior brother, help, we can't hold it here anymore!"

In the darkness, Lu Ye tossed an elixir pill into his mouth and motioned to Yiyi.

"Let's go."

The initial plan went smoothly; it was time to start the next step.

Chapter 223 Out of One's Mind

About fifty miles north of the Righteous Blood Sect's encampment lay a valley, within which was a massive pit—a veritable insect cave.

Like the situation near the Righteous Blood Sect, not a single blade of grass grew in this valley. Even several layers of soil had been scraped away, the dry green hues of insect blood were visible everywhere, along with some uncollected limbs and flesh remnants.

On a nearby mountaintop, hundreds of Righteous Blood Sect cultivators lay in ambush, each of them feeling nervous and uneasy.

Half a day ago, they had been merrily accumulating merit inside the insect hive with relative ease, only to be suddenly brought to this place by Hua Ci. Soon after, Lu Ye joined them. Clearly, there was something afoot.

The cultivators faintly discerned the intentions of their Governor and Deputy Governor, and to say they were not nervous would be a lie, for the only large-scale action they had participated in before was the recently handled Insect Plague.

Thankfully, with previous experience, the squads had gained some cooperative experience. They had dealt with the Insect Plague before, so why fear the current situation?

A mountain breeze swept by, and the cultivators remained silent and still.

Lu Ye secretly glanced into the valley and frowned, "Why haven't they come out yet?"

Prior to his departure, the Sky Fiend Hall seemed to be showing signs of faltering. Logically, they should have emerged by now, unless they had managed to stabilize their array.

If that was the case, then a proactive strike was needed—to backstab them fervently while they were still in fierce battle with the Insect Race, wiping out the Sky Fiend Hall cultivators underground and dealing with their Insect Plague in one fell swoop.

However, such a maneuver was not without significant risk; battling in those somewhat cramped underground tunnels could easily lead to heavy casualties.

Therefore, Lu Ye preferred to wait for the Sky Fiend Hall forces to retreat. Spring upon them by surprise, and as long as they blocked that cave entrance, the Righteous Blood Sect could coordinate with the Insect Plague to strike from both sides, slaughtering the Sky Fiend Hall cultivators within the cave.

"We need to be more careful next time, Hua Ci. We can't just focus on the forefront and ignore the rear," said Lu Ye with a sigh, realizing that the Sky Fiend Hall had left a few cultivators at the entrance of the cave. This way, they could investigate any anomalies promptly and signal the others.

On the contrary, when the Insect Plague arrived, every cultivator of the Righteous Blood Sect rushed out, leaving their encampment deserted. The same happened when they had first entered the insect cave; nobody stayed outside to keep watch.

Hua Ci glanced at him resentfully and said, "I have a kind of mushroom."

"That's reassuring," Lu Ye replied, feeling greatly relieved.

The battlefield marking suddenly stirred, and Lu Ye quickly checked it, his eyebrows lifting, "They're here!"

The message came from Yiyi. Ever since the sect master had accepted Yiyi as a disciple of the Righteous Blood Sect, she had received her own battlefield marking.

As a Spiritual Body, she could, if she so desired, turn from tangible to intangible and move unnoticed, making her most suitable for espionage in such circumstances.

Lu Ye had previously brought her here and sent her underground to scout. After a long and anxious wait, Yiyi's message finally arrived.

He leaped to his feet, mounted the White Tiger, and pulled Hua Ci up with him, calling out in a low voice, "Let's go!"

Amber broke into a sprint, racing down towards the foot of the mountain, with the wind whipping past, blowing through Hua Ci's hair.

Behind them, hundreds of Righteous Blood Sect cultivators followed in a cacophony, not shouting or cheering, yet the momentum of hundreds moving together was still immensely powerful.

Many of these cultivators had suffered oppression from the nearby Ten Thousand Demons Ridge powers, with many friends dying as a result. To them, the nearby Sky Fiend Hall and Phong Clan were loathed to the bone. Even if they hadn't suffered directly, innate factional opposition ensured they felt no sympathy.

When they reached the middle of the mountainside, Lu Ye suddenly crouched on the tiger's back and shouted into Hua Ci's ear, "I'll go ahead first!"

Their numbers made a large and conspicuous force, easily spotted by the Sky Fiend Hall cultivators loitering at the mouth of the cave. To prevent them from sending any messages, those guarding the entrance needed to be eliminated first.

Spirit force ignited, and a pair of fiery red wings unfurled behind him. Lu Ye transformed into a red streak and flew towards the cave entrance.

The five Sky Fiend Hall cultivators guarding the opening seemed somewhat panicked, not because they had detected the Righteous Blood Sect's approach, but because communication with their brethren inside revealed that the situation was dire. They learned that their sect members were retreating and about to make their way out.

"How could this happen?" a fair-faced man muttered, bewildered, "This shouldn't be possible!"

The Sky Fiend Hall had dealt with numerous Insect Plagues and accumulated a wealth of combat experience. Although losses were common, they generally handled the situation well. But being forced to retreat by the Insect Plague was a first for them.

"According to Senior Brother Liu, the Insect Plague suddenly intensified, causing this unexpected turn," another said.

"Thud..."

One of them knelt down, tears streaming down his face as he murmured softly, "Junior Sister Sun is dead..." Then his head banged against the ground forcefully, "Junior Sister Sun is dead!"

"Pull yourself together, Junior Brother Guo, it's not just Junior Sister Sun who's dead!"

"If Junior Sister Sun is dead, what's the point of living!" Junior Brother Guo abruptly stood, his eyes bloodshot as he rushed toward the cave, "I'll kill those damned bugs!"

Someone beside him quickly grabbed him around the waist, "Don't act rashly. Senior Brother He Meng is already leading the retreat. Our job is to assist them!"

"What's that?" Someone suddenly exclaimed.

Others followed the direction of his gaze, only to see a fiery red light swiftly sweeping toward them, reaching their proximity in the blink of an eye.

As the light converged, a figure was revealed; for a moment, several people were stunned because the fire-red Liu Guang turned out to be a pair of spirit force wings on the newcomer's back.

What followed was a chilling scene. The newcomer held a streak of Liu Guang in his hand, which, like a butterfly piercing through flowers, sliced through their bodies, sending blood spattering everywhere. Each and every disciple from the Sky Fiend Hall fell to the ground.

The wings on Lu Ye's back dispersed, and he landed with a thud as the handle-less dagger flew back into his hand.

Fortunately, no messages had been sent out.

He approached the entrance of the insect cave and peered down to see nothing but darkness. Bending down, he pressed his ear to the ground and faintly heard rumbling sounds growing from distant to near. Frowning, he turned back to see that it was his own cultivators approaching.

Mounted on Amber, Hua Ci was the first to arrive, quickly planting mushrooms nearby. Although these mushrooms might not be of much use, it was better to be safe than sorry.

A moment later, cultivators from the Righteous Blood Sect arrived. Their eyes fell on Lu Ye, filled with excitement, tension, and a hint of bewilderment. They couldn't understand how the situation had developed to this point.

"Circle around! Whoever comes up, take them down!"

Following Lu Ye's command, everyone spread out, surrounding the massive insect cave from inside out.

"Physique cultivators and combat cultivators move to the front, protect the magic cultivators. Don't rush to act; wait for my command before you do anything. And remember, don't fall down there; if you do, you won't survive!"

No sooner had they made preparations than Yiyi emerged from the ground nearby, astonishing many who had never seen her demonstrate such a skill.

"They're coming!" Yiyi stood beside Lu Ye and called out softly.

Rumbling sounds came from below the insect cave, accompanied by noises of combat. It was the cultivators from the Sky Fiend Hall escaping through the tunnels.

"Get up there, quick!" Someone below roared. "Move faster!"

The ropes dangling around the insect cave suddenly tensed, and along with the jerking of the ropes, figures quickly climbed upward.

For cultivators, the ascent of tens of zhang was rather swift.

The first cultivator reached the top of the cave and anxiously called out, "Quick, give me a hand."

As he spoke, he extended his hand.

No one helped him. When the cultivator looked up, he saw he was surrounded by people standing high above, looking down on him.

Do we have so many people waiting up top? The cultivator couldn't help but wonder. Also, why had he never seen these people before, and why were they all raising their Spiritual Artifacts?

Spirit force surged, and a fire dragon, its dragon scales almost visible, roared and danced around them. With the fall of the command "Attack," magic and spells, along with Spirit Talisman's might, began to burst forth. Those without spells or Spirit Talismans raised their Spiritual Artifacts and struck at the enemies climbing to the cave's entrance.

Screams rang out instantly as one cultivator after another fell down, bodies cascading back into the darkness, not sparing even those who were still climbing.

The sudden calamity caused panic among the Sky Fiend Hall cultivators, who were clueless about what was happening above. Soon enough, someone shouted, "It's the people from the Haotian Alliance!"

The only ones capable of ambushing them here would be from the Haotian Alliance, not that it was clear which sect they were from. At this time, almost every sect was dealing with the Insect Plague. Who would have time to lay an ambush?

This piece of news spread rapidly, and the surviving Sky Fiend Hall cultivators despaired.

With the Haotian Alliance waiting in ambush above and a large number of the Insect Race pursuing them below, caught in a pincer attack, how could there be any way out?

In a passage near the cave's entrance, a combat cultivator wielding a long spear fought desperately. This man was the Governor of the Sky Fiend Hall, He Meng, a Level 7 cultivator with more than one hundred and thirty orifice-openings.

Earlier, the Insect Plague had intensified unexpectedly, throwing the Sky Fiend Hall's original plans into disarray. With no other choice, he had ordered his fellow cultivators to fight while retreating. Although they had paid a price, they had managed to safely withdraw to the cave entrance.

As long as they could exit and hold the cave's entrance, then recuperate, the Sky Fiend Hall could fight again. The sect had dealt with countless Insect Plagues before.

But the spiritual force fluctuations and screams of terror behind him alerted He Meng that something was wrong. He hurriedly asked loudly and soon received a response.

There was an ambush by members of the Haotian Alliance above the cave entrance?

Which power was behind this ruthless act? Didn't they have their own Insect Plagues to deal with?

Even though he found the situation unfathomable, He Meng quickly realized that this predicament was nothing short of disastrous.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, what chance did the Sky Fiend Hall have of a favorable outcome?

Chapter 224 Hit Hard

"Senior Brother He, what should we do?" asked a Level 6 cultivator covered in insect blood.

"Should we send a message to Senior Brother Cheng and have him bring people to support us?" someone suggested.

Unlike the Righteous Blood Sect, which emptied its nest to deal with the Insect Plague, other sects generally had disciples stay behind to guard their home bases during such crises, as the home base was vital to a sect's survival, so vigilance was crucial at all times.

Take Sky Fiend Hall, for example, this time around 500 cultivators were deployed, and more than a hundred stayed behind, including Deputy Governor Cheng Bo at the home base, who was also a Level 7 cultivator, though he had only recently advanced.

Currently, the Sky Fiend Hall cultivators were in a dire situation, with waves of the Insect Plague incoming and Haotian Alliance cultivators ambushing around the insect cave exit, making escape uncertain. The best option was to have Cheng Bo come with reinforcements.

"It's too late," He Meng shook his head. Though the headquarters was only ten li away, gathering people always took some time, and by the time they would come to their aid, it would already be too late.

"Follow me, and let's break out!" A fierce look flashed through He Meng's eyes. He didn't know which faction these people were from, as they acted so recklessly. However, he was still a Level 7 cultivator and had been through several life and death situations, and wasn't frightened by their current predicament. He knew the only way to survive was to break out, as staying here meant certain death.

This Insect Plague had taken an unexpectedly violent turn, leading to Sky Fiend Hall's defeat.

With the urgency of time, He Meng gave the order, instructing some to hold back the swarming insects while he and a few Level 6 cultivators made their escape.

Moments later, below the insect cave, a few Level 5 cultivators crouched, hands stacked on their knees, with one of them shouting, "Now!"

Ten-odd zhang away, He Meng and the Level 6 cultivators started running, rushing toward the Level 5 cultivators in an instant and stepping on the hands they put together.

"Go!" As the Level 5 cultivators roared with fury, spirit force surged through their bodies, their hands forcefully pushing upwards, and with that momentum, He Meng and the others soared, reaching the cave entrance in a flash.

Spirit force swirling around him, a chill went through the determined He Meng as he saw that the cave entrance was packed with heads in every direction, easily numbering six to seven hundred.

How could there be so many? He had heard that there were Haotian Alliance cultivators ambushing at the entrance, but he thought the numbers wouldn't be so large, since at this time, every sect was dealing with its own Insect Plague, and even if spare manpower was available to harass rival factions, there simply shouldn't be so many.

But now, it seemed this assumption was hugely mistaken; six to seven hundred people, that was almost an entire sect's worth of cultivators.

Does this sect really not care about their own base? Just then, two streaks of light struck, followed swiftly by a barrage of magic and Spirit Talismans.

Screams sounded beside him, and the Level 6 cultivators who had charged out with him hadn't even grasped the situation before they plummeted down like dumplings.

Only He Meng, relying on his Level 7 cultivation and the long spear in his hands, managed to block several attacks, but then a fiery red streak of light pierced his body, spraying out a gush of hot blood.

His body plummeted sharply toward the ground, only for a fire dragon to relentlessly pursue him.

By the insect cave, Lu Ye was somewhat surprised, "These guys, quite the tricksters."

He vaguely understood how these people had charged up and what their initial plan was, but unfortunately, the enemy had clearly underestimated their own numbers and strength, leading to their quick exposure without any follow-up.

Below the insect cave, the Level 5 cultivators who had helped send He Meng and the others up stared wide-eyed as their seniors ascended swiftly and returned just as quickly, accompanied by a fiery dragon, with the pattering sounds of bodies crashing to the ground and flames sweeping across, emitting a burnt scent.

The Sky Fiend Hall cultivators climbing upwards with the help of ropes were also disoriented by the flames, screaming as they fell.

"Senior Brother He!" someone yelled, rushing to He Meng's side to extinguish the flames on his body.

He Meng was already breathing feebly; he had been injured by Lu Ye's weapon control and had taken a hit from the Fire Dragon Technique, surviving only by sheer luck.

All of a sudden, he raised his hand and grabbed the Level 5 cultivator's collar, grinding his teeth, "It's the Righteous Blood Sect!"

The moment he fell, he had seen a white big tiger and recognized the young man beside it, realizing who the attackers were.

After saying this, He Meng's head tilted, and he breathed his last.

The Level 5 cultivator beside him teared up, but there was no time for sorrow at that moment, as the Insect Plague had already burst forth, the insect cave exit was blocked by Righteous Blood Sect cultivators, and with He Meng dead and several Level 6 seniors likewise fallen, the people of Sky Fiend Hall had no avenue of survival left.

Screams echoed one after another, with no Level 6-7 cultivators to command, the remaining cultivators couldn't hold back the insect swarm. Some, unwilling to die without a fight, desperately climbed towards the cave above, but they would end up dying at the hands of Righteous Blood Sect cultivators nonetheless.

The Level 5 cultivator stood up, pressed a badge indicating his battlefield marking, sent out a message, then lifting his Spiritual Artifact, turned to fight the insect swarm.

If death was certain, they would die at the hands of these insects and not give the Righteous Blood Sect the satisfaction!

Many others shared this resolve, and a fierce battle ensued, with cultivators screaming as they fell, one after another.

Ten li away, in the Sky Fiend Hall headquarters, Cheng Bo's complexion turned deathly pale upon receiving the message.

Governor He Meng was dead, the Insect Plague was unstoppable, and the cave entrance was blocked by the Righteous Blood Sect, leaving Sky Fiend Hall in a dire predicament, with survivors choosing to make a final stand against the Insect Race!

He swiftly checked his own battlefield marking, feeling the familiar imprints within it disappearing one by one, and Cheng Bo fell into a chair.

By this time, many disciples left behind had received the news from the insect cave and hurriedly came to inquire. Seeing Cheng Bo in this state, they immediately realized the situation was worse than imagined.

"Righteous Blood Sect!" Cheng Bo gritted his teeth, his eyes bloodshot.

Cheng Bo naturally knew about this famous neighbor, especially after the battle at Golden Light Peak, where Lu Yiye gained fame. Cheng Bo and He Meng had privately discussed their concerns and precautions about the Righteous Blood Sect.

This was a rather sinister sect. For decades they hadn't taken in disciples, then suddenly took one and pulled off a shocking major event. That Lu Yiye, with his Level 5 cultivation, fought forty-three battles at Golden Light Peak without a single defeat; if he were to advance to Level 7, neither of them would be a match for him.

Fortunately, Lu Ye had been very stable during this time. Before the Spirit Stream Defense Battle, there hadn't even been any news about the Righteous Blood Sect taking in disciples.

This slightly reassured the two Governors of Sky Fiend Hall, believing that even if Lu Yiye was formidable, he couldn't accomplish much alone.

But after the Spirit Stream Defense Battle, a piece of news suddenly made both feel uneasy.

The Righteous Blood Sect had widely opened their gates, accepting many sect disciples—hundreds of independent cultivators flocked to them, totaling over five to six hundred followers.

This had become a force that could not be ignored. Over these days, Sky Fiend Hall had been very cautious of the Righteous Blood Sect, fearing that Lu Yiye would not stay in line. Fortunately, their worries had been somewhat redundant, as the Righteous Blood Sect continued to act uninterested worldly affairs.

Who would have thought, it was all a facade!

Appearing uninterested on the surface, they had struck a heavy blow in secret, catching Sky Fiend Hall completely off guard.

A total of four hundred ninety-three cultivators were wiped out in less than four hours, even the Governor, He Meng, was killed! Never since its establishment had Sky Fiend Hall suffered such a colossal loss.

"Lu Yiye, you and I are irreconcilable!" Cheng Bo's roar echoed through Sky Fiend Hall's encampment, and the remaining hundred or so disciples all wore sorrowful expressions.

At this moment, at the entrance of the insect cave, hundreds of Righteous Blood Sect cultivators were listlessly waiting. Since earlier, no more Sky Fiend Hall cultivators had climbed up, and the screams from below had become fewer and fewer.

This meant that earning merits had become impossible.

A few moments later, no more screams were heard, and a rustling noise came from below, indicating the Insect Race was climbing up.

The hundreds of cultivators suddenly became invigorated, previously they had been joyfully earning merits within the insect hive until Yiyi came and took away the vitality core, causing the hive to wither and many were left unsatisfied.

Now the opportunity had come again, and it was even a stolen one. The principle that wild flowers smell sweeter than home-grown ones works universally.

Chen Yu excitedly asked, "Fifth Senior Brother, shall we attack downward?" With their previous experience handling the Insect Plague, repeat of the same actions meant the Righteous Blood Sect could advance into the insect hive again.

Lu Ye shook his head, waving his hand: "Retreat!"

Chen Yu was shocked: "Retreat?"

"Retreat!"

Following Lu Ye's command, hundreds of cultivators thunderously departed. Despite not knowing what Lu Ye intended, the command of the Governor had to be followed, whether by named disciples or independent cultivators.

Back at the previously ambushed mountain peak, hundreds gathered to rest and wait, with Lu Ye standing on the peak looking at the valley below.

When he said retreat, they had merely moved to this location.

Hua Ci stood next to Lu Ye, puzzled, "What are you planning to do?"

Lu Ye looked down at the valley where the Insect Race was slowly gathering, vaguely worried, "We might have bred a group of monsters."

"What do you mean?" Hua Ci frowned.

"Haven't you noticed that these Insect Race members are generally stronger than those on our side? Of course, the weaker ones being killed by Sky Fiend Hall is part of the reason, but that's not the main cause."

"Then what is it?"

"Fourth Senior Brother once mentioned to me in a message that when fighting the Insect Race, you must never let them get the bodies of cultivators easily.

Not only because the energy contained within a cultivator's body is immense, but for another reason—if the Insect Race gets hold of it, they will significantly strengthen," he sighed softly, "About how many did Sky Fiend Hall lose in the insect cave?"

Hua Ci's eyelids twitched, "Definitely around three to four hundred."

"That's it then. The Insect Plague here isn't something the outer circle sects can handle."

Chapter 225 - Leading Trouble Away

The strength of the Insect Race could generally be gauged by their size, those the size of a fist posed no threat to cultivators, while those as big as a basin were roughly equivalent to Level 2 or 3 cultivators, and those as long as a person needed to be handled with caution, as they were likely Level 6 or 7 Insect Race.

Half a day after Lu Ye ordered the disciples to retreat, the valley below was swarming with Insect Race, among which were many the length of a human.

The cultivators watched with hidden alarm, all feeling fortunate they hadn't ventured into the insect cave earlier.

The average strength of the Insect Race here was not just one grade stronger than that of the Righteous Blood Sect; if they had recklessly entered the insect cave earlier, it would have surely resulted in heavy casualties.

And that was just the situation in Insect Valley. Inside the insect hive, things would certainly be more severe, with the presence of Level 8 Insect Race, and perhaps even the birth of Level 9 Insect Race.

Lu Ye gave a few instructions to Hua Ci and hailed Amber, before mounting the tiger's back.

Under the gaze of many cultivators, he rode Amber and thundered down into the valley.

When he was at the right distance, he raised his hand and cast the Fire Phoenix Technique, blasting it into the swarm. Spirit force burst forth, causing the bodies of several insect creatures to tumble through the air.

Insect creatures were highly sensitive to the fluctuations of spirit force, so after Lu Ye cast a spell, a great number of Insect Race immediately surged toward him, crawling with rustling noises so dense that it made one's scalp tingle.

Amber roared, carrying Lu Ye around the perimeter of Insect Valley. As Lu Ye launched spell after spell, the number of Insect Race following him grew and some spider-like Insect Race even shot webs at them.

Viewed from the mountaintop, the group of cultivators from Righteous Blood Sect were sweating for Lu Ye. From their perspective, Lu Ye was riding Amber alone, challenging and drawing a vast number of the Insect Race to pursue him.

No one knew why Lu Ye was doing this.

After one incense stick's time, Lu Ye circled the valley, rousing most of the insects within, who followed him relentlessly, while those that had not managed to keep up appeared restless.

The Insect Race had a strange way of sensing each other, which allowed them to communicate over a certain range in ways unique to their kind.

So, generally, provoking one Insect Race meant provoking a group.

And if you incited a group, it usually meant you had incited them all.

Countless Insect Race crawled in pursuit, led by Lu Ye to the north, while the valley did not become empty due to the departure of the swarm, for more of the Insect Race continually emerged from the insect cave, joining the chase.

From the sky above, one could see a long train of Insect Race stretching all the way back to where the insect cave was located, drawn by Lu Ye.

"Impressive," muttered Hua Ci after a moment of stunned silence.

When Lu Ye had shared his plan with her earlier, Hua Ci had felt it was unreliable, knowing that the Insect Race lacked intelligence and acted purely on instinct. Now, it seemed that their lack of intelligence made them easier to manipulate.

With determination, she followed Lu Ye's previous orders, leading hundreds of Righteous Blood Sect cultivators also toward the north, where, ten miles away, lay the base of the Sky Fiend Hall.

In the base, Deputy Governor Cheng Bo and a group of the Sky Fiend Hall cultivators were still engulfed in an atmosphere of sadness and anger, with none of them expecting that a calamity was thundering toward them, and that this calamity was a 'gift' from the very Lu Yiye whom Cheng Bo was obsessively fixated on.

At this very moment, Cheng Bo was using his sect's insignia to communicate with the hierarchy at sect headquarters, reporting the situation within the base. Upon hearing that the losses here were so severe, one of the elders spat out blood and fell to the ground, unable to rise.

The losses were too great; nearly five hundred cultivators had been wiped out in the insect cave, an event that had never happened before.

As more than a hundred Sky Fiend Hall cultivators remained immersed in their sorrow, unable to extricate themselves, a sudden explosion rang out, followed by chaotic spiritual energy fluctuations.

Cheng Bo's head snapped up, first in confusion then anger, as he roared furiously, "How dare they!"

Somehow, someone was attacking the protective array of their base.

With grief and fury in his heart, though Sky Fiend Hall was but an 8th-grade power and had been established for decades, it had never suffered such humiliation. No sooner had hundreds of their cultivators just died than someone came to attack their array, treating Sky Fiend Hall as if it were a soft persimmon, easily squashed.

He flashed out, followed by a group of cultivators with grief-stricken and angry expressions.

Looking up, he saw a figure dancing in the sky, veiled by a pair of fiery red wings of spirit force.

"Who goes there?" shouted Cheng Bo furiously.

His shout seemed to frighten the intruder, who flapped the fiery red wings once and rapidly retreated, disappearing in the blink of an eye.

"The audacity!" Cheng Bo was beside himself with rage, somewhat baffled by the intentions of this individual.

"Elder... Elder brother!" a cultivator behind him suddenly cried out, his voice trembling with fright and terror as he pointed forward: "Insect Race, Insect Plague!"

Cheng Bo now also realized something was wrong. His field of vision was filled with a massive tide of insects, swarming towards them from Insect Valley in a dense, unending stream that snaked its way and had no end in sight.

Cheng Bo's face turned suddenly pale, finally grasping what had happened.

It was impossible for the insects to have reached their station so quickly. Normally, the Insect Plague would spread out from Insect Valley, radiating outward in all directions, and for the Insect Race lacking spiritual intelligence, their movements had no clear purpose. They would gnaw at any life and energy encountered along the way.

But what if someone deliberately lured them here?

"The treacherous dogs of the Righteous Blood Sect!" Rage welled up in Cheng Bo's chest, with no outlet for release, and the situation was worse than if the Righteous Blood Sect had truly come to attack their station. Cheng Bo would not have been as infuriated.

Being from opposing camps, it was normal to attack each other—that was the natural order of things.

But what had those scoundrels from the Righteous Blood Sect done? First, they ambushed at the insect cave entrance, leading to the complete annihilation of hundreds of Disciples led by Governor He Meng, and then they turned around and actually led the Insect Plague right to their very own station. Was this the act of humans?

Since beginning his cultivation journey, Cheng Bo had never encountered such vicious-minded individuals. People like that must have pitch-black organs.

"Senior brother, what should we do?"

The cultivators of the Sky Fiend Hall were in panic. The attackers of the protective array had already left, but the insects had not. They were now throwing themselves against the array outside, gnawing at the spiritual energy that flowed through it.

For the Insect Race, the surge of spiritual energy from the protective array was incredibly attractive.

For the moment there was no worry, since there weren't many insects arriving, but just looking at that never-ending stream of insects made it clear that the number of arriving insects would continue to increase over time.

"All array protectors, fully activate the protective array's might. The rest, follow me and fight the enemy!" Cheng Bo immediately issued the command.

The protective array was always active, since the spiritual energy on the Spirit Stream battlefield was rich. Therefore, the arrays set up in stations could normally draw nature's spiritual energy to sustain their operations without additional consumption. Better protective arrays could even store excess spiritual energy for later use.

Under normal circumstances, protective arrays maintained the lowest level of consumption. Only when under attack would they be fully activated, which would then consume some Spirit Stones.

Many sect stations had more than one protective array. Wealthier sects could set up several, interconnected, so if one were breached, another could take over.

However, outer circle sects generally only had one set because an array covering an entire station was quite expensive and they didn't have the financial capacity.

Besides, there was no point in setting up more.

The strength of the outer circle cultivators was generally lower, and it was rare for a sect's station to be breached. The reason why Xuanmen's attack on the Nine Stars Sect's station was so widely discussed and caused a stir was precisely because such occurrences were uncommon.

At this moment, Sky Fiend Hall's station was faced with an unprecedented crisis. Those attacking the station were not cultivators but the Insect Plague, an event that had never happened before.

Even though there were only about a hundred sect cultivators left, Cheng Bo couldn't just abandon the station. It was his responsibility as Deputy Governor. His life could be lost, but the station must not fall!

Clear and precise orders were given, the protective array's power was activated, and just as Cheng Bo was preparing to lead the remaining Disciples to fight the enemy, a disorderly fluctuation of spiritual energy suddenly arose from behind the station.

Cheng Bo was shocked and quickly commanded his Disciples to fight the enemy here while he led a few men to investigate.

Before long, a group of Sky Fiend Hall cultivators, led by Cheng Bo, looked ahead in terror. Outside the protective array, countless figures had appeared out of nowhere. Those people were feverishly attacking the protective array with magic and spells and Spiritual Artifacts, causing ripples to spread across the array's glowing barrier.

With the Insect Plague coming from the front and hundreds of cultivators attacking from behind, Cheng Bo felt enveloped in darkness, almost fainting on the spot.

He staggered, supported by a junior brother beside him, then with a fierce wave of his hand, he bellowed, "Lu Yiye, come out!"

Although he did not recognize any of the cultivators here, he was certain that these people must be from the Righteous Blood Sect!

The Insect Plague had just been led here, and now hundreds of cultivators were attacking; if this wasn't premeditated, who would believe it?

Only at this moment did he realize that he had underestimated the ruthlessness of the Righteous Blood Sect.

The complete loss of their hundreds of sect cultivators being trapped in the insect cave was not enough to satisfy the Righteous Blood Sect. They were intent on taking over the station, as seizing a station was a temptation that any sect found difficult to resist.

The station was likely lost. Cheng Bo was clearly aware of this. If he had faced either the Insect Plague or the Righteous Blood Sect's attack alone, he might have been able to think of a solution. But with this pincer move, no one could withstand it.

All was dark before his eyes, and his future was shrouded in darkness...

"Righteous Blood Sect, by kicking us while we're down like this, aren't you afraid of being struck by heavenly lightning?" A Sky Fiend Hall cultivator roared in grief and anger.

Immediately, a Righteous Blood Sect cultivator responded, "When you guys bullied us before, how come you didn't talk about heavenly lightning? The kid talking, stand there nicely and wait. Once the array is broken, I'll grant you a swift end!"

Chapter 226 Capturing Sky Fiend Hall

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One hour later, as the protective array of Sky Fiend Hall collapsed, the sky was aglow with flickering lights, and hundreds of Righteous Blood Sect cultivators marched straight in, storming the headquarters of Sky Fiend Hall.

Most of the cultivators had puzzled expressions; before this, they had never considered that taking over a sect's headquarters could be so easy.

You should know that this was an outer circle sect, where it was often several years without an incident of a headquarters being overtaken. Yet since their arrival here, in just over one hour, the base of Sky Fiend Hall had been breached.

Within the headquarters, the remaining hundred or so Sky Fiend Hall cultivators had already retreated to the Nine Provinces under the leadership of Cheng Bo, knowing that his prospects were bleak if he stayed, he dared not linger and await death.

Phrases like "One can lose their life, but the headquarters must not be lost" were fine to utter normally, but when it came to life and death situations, naturally, one must preserve themselves. Only by staying alive is there hope; when a person dies, everything is lost.

With Sky Fiend Hall's headquarters now empty, only the cultivators from Righteous Blood Sect and the incoming Insect Plague remained.

Following the plan Lu Ye had devised beforehand, cultivators with Level 3 cultivation and above surged past the plaza of Heaven's Augury Hall, led by Chen Yu and others to confront the Insect Plague.

The cultivators below Level 3 scattered in all directions, heading to various locations to plunder Sky Fiend Hall's headquarters.

Lu Ye, with Hua Ci, directly charged into Heaven's Augury Hall, where Hua Ci laid her hand on the Heaven's Augury Pillar of Sky Fiend Hall, exploiting the authority of her position as Deputy Governor to plunder various blessings from the pillar.

Lu Ye was there to protect her. He had previously consulted Li Baxian and knew that plundering blessings required some time, so he did not feel at ease letting Hua Ci come alone.

Hua Ci's eyes were closed as she worked; Lu Ye walked over to a wide chair and sat down, tossing an elixir pill into his mouth and biting down with a crisp snap.

He then raised his hand and started searching through his own battlefield marking.

Inside his battlefield marking were many imprints, all of which had been added in the Chess Sea, from various major factions' governors or deputy governors, with several of those factions' headquarters not far from Righteous Blood Sect.

One of them was Infinity Heights, with its headquarters only separated from Righteous Blood Sect's by the Phong Clan's territory.

The Phong Clan was to the east of Righteous Blood Sect, and Infinity Heights was to the east of the Phong Clan; essentially, the two sects' headquarters sandwiched the Phong Clan in between.

Back in the Chess Sea, the cultured and refined Governor of Infinity Heights, Ding Yushu, had approached Lu Ye to discuss joining forces sometime in the future to strike at the Phong Clan. However, at that time, there were hardly a few individuals in Righteous Blood Sect, so Lu Ye couldn't give a definitive response.

Now was a good opportunity!

The takeover of Sky Fiend Hall's headquarters was unexpectedly smooth. Since things had developed to this stage, they might as well settle on not stopping halfway and strike at the Phong Clan as well.

With his cultivation on the rise, it likely wouldn't be long before he would need to enter the inner circle of the battlefield for training. Before his departure, if he could bring the Phong Clan to its knees, it would undeniably improve the situation for Righteous Blood Sect, and he could leave with peace of mind.

Whether this would be feasible would depend on the intentions of Infinity Heights. Even though the Phong Clan was only a 9th grade faction, taking over their headquarters would definitely not be as easy.

The reason Sky Fiend Hall had been unable to resist was due to the loss of too many people within the insect cave.

The Phong Clan had not faced such a crisis.

Therefore, to strike at the Phong Clan, Infinity Heights would need to make a significant effort! If they were unable to contribute, the plan would have to be aborted.

Having located Ding Yushu's imprint, Lu Ye sent a message.

"Brother Ding, how are things on your end?"

He quickly received a reply.

"All's well! We've breached the insect hive and, in no time at all, will have completely resolved it. Does Brother Yiye need assistance? I can send some people over."

...

"No need for that, I just have a business deal I'd like to discuss with you."

"Business deal?" Ding Yushu was puzzled and confused. It was the time to deal with the Insect Plague, so why suddenly talk about business?

Moments later, Lu Ye ended the communication with Ding Yushu, a thoughtful look appearing in his eyes.

At the edge of the garrison, Chen Yu led many cultivators forming a defensive line, confronting the incoming tide of insects.

The scale of the tide wasn't too large at the moment, so even though among them were insects as large as a person, the Righteous Blood Sect could handle it, but in the long run, it would be unsustainable. The tide was endless and couldn't be eradicated quickly.

"All done!"

The voice of Hua Ci came, and her expression indicated a considerable gain.

After all, Sky Fiend Hall was an 8th grade faction, founded for several decades. Over the years, the number of enhancements on the Heaven's Augury Pillar was significant. Just by the richness of the Spiritual Energy here, it was evident that this place had denser Spiritual Energy than the Righteous Blood Sect, since it was the accumulation of a sect over several decades.

The gains from a single Spirit Stream Defense Battle brought by Lu Ye and Hua Ci couldn't bridge that gap.

There was a lot of loss during the looting process, but even then, the Righteous Blood Sect had reaped great benefits this time.

Lu Ye stepped forward and exchanged a few words with Hua Ci.

Upon hearing his plan, Hua Ci's eyelids twitched in disbelief, "Can we really do that?"

She thought that bringing disaster upon one Sky Fiend Hall was enough, yet Lu Ye had turned his blade towards the Phong Clan!

"Whether it works or not, we'll only know if we try. If it doesn't work, there's no loss!"

His previous disaster upon Sky Fiend Hall was boasted with similar rhetoric, and it ended with Sky Fiend Hall in a terrible plight...

Hua Ci couldn't help but mourn silently for the Phong Clan for a moment.

Being neighbors to the Righteous Blood Sect's garrison, these two Ten Thousand Demons Ridge powers really had blue smoke rising from their ancestral graves.

The howling wind carried the sound as the dispersed cultivators quickly assembled. Lu Ye and Chen Yu, with their higher levels of cultivation, covered the rear, while the others quickly left under Hua Ci's lead.

Moments later, Chen Yu and the others also retreated in succession; only Lu Ye was left fighting alone. From high above, countless insects from all directions swarmed towards him, nearly submerging him.

Amidst the roar, the amber weapon control orb constantly shuttled around, along with the flight of fire dragons and the flash of the Boulder Mountain Saber's light. While slaughtering the Insect Race, they caused disturbances and drew the attention of the insects.

Until at one moment, with fiery red wings unfurled, Lu Ye soared into the sky and took flight.

Dozens of yards away, he landed, and Amber, who had been waiting there, immediately caught him. Lu Ye looked back and unleashed a Fire Dragon Technique. The fierce spirit force fluctuations attracted the dense swarm of insects to pursue him!

Amber dashed in the direction Lu Ye pointed. On its tiger back, Lu Ye took out a bottle of Breath Fruit wine and drank it to quickly replenish his expended spirit force.

Watching the direction Lu Ye fled from afar, Chen Yu was utterly baffled, "Isn't he returning to the garrison?"

That direction was not the way to the Righteous Blood Sect's garrison.

Hua Ci said, "Not returning for now, follow me!" With that, she mounted her mechanical wolf and led hundreds of cultivators mightily away.

Meanwhile, in a certain insect cave, the Infinity Heights cultivators under Ding Yushu's command suddenly intensified their attack, and the already outmatched Insect Race suffered countless deaths and injuries.

Two hours later, the central flesh sac of the insect cave was broken open, and Ding Yushu extracted several vitality cores from it.

Chapter 227 Phong Clan

The core flesh sack was breached, and the vitality core removed; thus, the insect hive quickly began to wither.

"The injured clean up the battlefield, everyone else follow me!" Ding Yushu called out, leading more than four hundred cultivators along the Insect Path to make their exit.

Upon leaving the insect cave, the cultivators immediately ran towards a certain direction.

Midway, someone noticed something amiss, as this direction was not the way back to their base but rather seemed to be headed towards the Phong family's territory.

Someone excitedly asked, "Senior Brother Ding, are we going to attack the Phong family?"

"Attack the Phong family? That sounds great, I've been fed up with those bastards for a while now. Last time, Senior Brother Zhang and I even fought a team from the Phong family and killed one of their men."

"Don't mention it, but that young lady from the Phong family is pretty good-looking. If we could capture her for Senior Brother Ding to warm his bed... hehehe."

"Brother, your laugh is so sleazy. Also, don't ruin Senior Brother Ding's reputation. You all know what that young lady from the Phong family is like. What qualifies her to warm Senior Brother Ding's bed?"

"Then she can warm my bed, I don't mind!"

"What are you all babbling about? Senior Brother Ding, are we really going to attack the Phong family?"

Despite having just fought a major battle against the Insect Plague, the Infinity Heights cultivators were all greatly depleted. Yet, hearing about attacking the Phong family, they suddenly became spirited, clearly indicating frequent scuffles between the two clans on regular days.

At the Spirit Stream battlefield, every sect's base is typically adjacent to two or three other sect's bases, one of which must be from their own camp because being completely surrounded by enemy bases would mean the sect's cultivators could barely leave their own gates, dooming them to a lack of development.

Lu Ye had a ten-part map in his hand that marked the situation of the major sects' bases. He had observed that if the bases of both factions were connected, they would resemble two dragons entwined at the Spirit Stream battlefield.

Among the three forces neighboring the Phong family, beside Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, the other two were Righteous Blood Sect and Infinity Heights.

Considering the past situation with Righteous Blood Sect, the Phong family didn't need to bother about them, allowing them to focus all their efforts on dealing with Infinity Heights.

Infinity Heights, however, didn't have such leeway. They had to handle more than just the Phong family, including another sect, Ten Thousand Demons Ridge. Small skirmishes were tolerable, but a large-scale conflict with the Phong family would inevitably draw Ten Thousand Demons Ridge into the fray, much to the detriment of Infinity Heights.

The mutual grudges between the two had deepened over time, naturally leading to mutual disdain.

"Shut up!" Ding Yushu from the front shouted softly, not revealing the true purpose of this mission. Partly for secrecy, as with many speaking, it might accidentally be leaked, and partly because he was not completely certain, although Lu Ye had communicated with him saying the success rate was very high, there are always uncertainties.

It was apparent that Ding Yushu held high prestige on Infinity Heights' side. After he spoke, the cultivators immediately fell silent, silently popping elixir pills into their mouths to recover.

Being long-time neighbors, Infinity Heights naturally knew where the Phong family's insect cave was. Led by Ding Yushu, they marched directly toward it, their presence formidable.

The Phong family's cultivators guarding the place immediately detected them and, while taking cover in the insect cave, sent out messages.

Shortly after, over four hundred cultivators from Infinity Heights surrounded the mouth of the insect cave, their eyes fiercely fixed below, while the Deputy Governor Phong Lianju, leading his family's cultivators against the Insect Plague inside the cave, received the news almost instantly and merely snorted, then chose to ignore it.

Being blocked at the insect cave's exit seemed dangerous, but it was not a serious threat as long as they didn't recklessly expose themselves. Infinity Heights wouldn't dare to rashly charge down unless they sought death.

And Infinity Heights couldn't afford to block there for long. To do so meant their own base would be undefended, and the Phong family could easily coordinate with another Ten Thousand Demons power to attack Infinity Heights' base.

Thus, Phong Lianju was not panicked at all.

This news also reached the Phong family base immediately. The Governor of the Phong family's base was a female cultivator named Phong Yue. Hearing that Infinity Heights had deployed four hundred cultivators to block their insect cave's exit, she was stunned for a long while, puzzled by the significance of their actions despite their swift handling of the Insect Plague.

However, to be cautious, she still sent out a message.

The response came quickly.

"What's the matter, Little Sister Phong Yue?" The address was very affectionate, and Phong Yue could almost picture the ugly face of the speaker.

This made her feel disgusted, but naturally, she wouldn't easily show it. She explained the actions of Infinity Heights to the other party.

The other side was arrogantly furious, "They have some nerve. It's been a month since I taught that kid Ding Yushu a lesson, and now this dog thinks he can turn the heavens! Don't worry, Little Sister Phong Yue, once I finish dealing with the Insect Plague here, I'll lead people to wipe them out."

Phong Yue quickly replied, "There's no need for that, I just wanted to inform Senior Brother of this situation. The Phong family can handle things here properly on our own."

She certainly wouldn't ask the other party to do anything, otherwise, this unsightly fellow would definitely make some impolite demands again. If any casualties occurred in the conflict with Infinity Heights, the Phong family might yet have to compensate with Spirit Stones.

However, with such significant movements from Infinity Heights, this moment was an excellent opportunity to attack their base. Given their character of loving grand accomplishments, how could they miss such a chance?

Throughout the process, she had merely provided some information—such exchanges between cultivators of the two big camps were quite common. Therefore, no matter how things unfolded, it wasn't her concern.

"This is really interesting," Phong Yue said, picking up a cup of water and taking a gentle sip.

"Boom..." A loud noise startled Phong Yue, causing her to choke on the water and cough violently for a while before she recovered.

A Phong family cultivator rushed in hurriedly.

"Who is it?" Phong Yue's expression was icy. Although she hadn't seen what had just happened, the noise clearly indicated that the protective array at their base was under attack. She was immensely annoyed—how dare someone attack the Phong family base at such a time?

The person arrived, panic-stricken: "The Insect Plague!"

"What Insect Plague?" Phong Yue frowned, asking as she faintly heard some strange noises and rustling sounds.

Her expression changed drastically, and she hurriedly rushed out to the edge of the base and looked up, her face losing all color in shock.

On the light curtain of the forward protective array, various types of Insect Race creatures swarmed. Each of these creatures was not small; those as big as a human were especially numerous, crawling on the light curtain, their mouthparts writhing as they nibbled on the flowing spirit force. Where the Insect Race chewed, the light curtain visibly weakened considerably.

Some insects even spat green juice from their mouths. When the juice hit the light curtain, it emitted a hissing sound as it corroded the spirit force.

Watching the overwhelming swarm of the Insect Race, Phong Yue felt a chill all over her body.

Whose Insect Plague had erupted? With such a scale, it was beyond what outer circle cultivators could handle. Her first thought was Infinity Heights, but then it seemed unlikely. If it were truly an eruption from Infinity Heights, they would be too busy dealing with their own crisis to spare hundreds of cultivators to gamble on their insect cave's mouth.

If not Infinity Heights, could it be the Righteous Blood Sect?

But hadn't the Righteous Blood Sect recruited over a hundred disciples in name and several hundred independent cultivators? Even if they suffered losses in handling the Insect Plague, the outbreak shouldn't have escalated to this extent. Moreover, even if the Righteous Blood Sect's Insect Plague had erupted, it wouldn't have reached here so quickly.

The Insect Race would first devour the vitality along the way, leaving nothing alive, and only then push outward layer by layer, so they wouldn't have initially moved fast.

"Senior Sister Phong!" someone called out from the side.

Phong Yue immediately snapped back to reality. At this point, pondering over the origin of the Insect Plague was futile. No matter where it came from, this wave of the Insect Plague had already reached their doorstep. If mishandled, this base would be done for.

"Quick, fully activate the might of the protective array!" Phong Yue's crisp voice rang out. Soon after, Phong family cultivators rushed to the locations where the array bases were set up. A large number of Spirit Stones were fed into them, and the accumulated spirit force was released to strengthen the protective power of the array.

Three miles behind the Phong family base, under a slanting slope, seven hundred cultivators from the Righteous Blood Sect lay quietly in ambush.

Normally, so many people gathering here would be quickly discovered, but now was the time for the big sects to handle the Insect Plague. A large number of cultivators had gone underground, with only a few staying to guard the bases. Hardly anyone was seen outside, which is why the Righteous Blood Sect cultivators could hide here undetected.

"Senior Brother Zhang, when do we move in?" someone asked, having tasted the sweetness of capturing another group's base once and eager for a second attempt. The saying goes, "Once bitten, twice shy."

"Not yet," Lu Ye responded, while communicating with Senior Brother Ding, learning that they were in position and that the Deputy Governor from Infinity Heights was on his way.

He looked again towards the Phong family base, seeing their protective array still stable as before, which made him mutter to himself a bit.

The reason he hadn't struck immediately was first to wait for the Deputy Governor from Infinity Heights to arrive, and second, Lu Ye also wanted to kill more of the Phong family's cultivators.

Simply capturing another group's base, although it would cause them great losses, wouldn't it be even better to kill their cultivators as well?

As the fourth senior brother had said, the Insect Race had one very powerful characteristic, which was array destruction. Their gnawing had a tremendous destructive power on these light curtain-type protective formations.

If they charged out now, the Phong family's response would definitely be like what had happened with Sky Fiend Hall; the cultivators left to guard would retreat back to the Nine Provinces, abandoning the base.

So, Lu Ye wanted to wait until the Insect Race had almost destroyed their protective array, then strike in one fell swoop. By then, just by blocking Heaven's Augury Hall, every single one of the Phong family cultivators left guarding the base would be trapped.

Previously letting the Deputy Governor from Sky Fiend Hall escape had been a loss because a base could produce a lot. The Deputy Governor's storage sack must have contained many valuable items.

This time, he couldn't let the Phong family escape either.

Capturing another group's base: the first time is an encounter, the second time familiarizes, and the third time one becomes thoroughly accustomed. Lu Ye was slowly summarizing experiences to choose the most advantageous method for his side.

Chapter 228 Phong Yue

The Phong family's residence was now in complete chaos, as the power of the protective array was pushed to its limit.

More and more members of the Insect Race swarmed in, clinging to the barrier's surface, gnawing on the spirit force flowing within it.

Standing within the residence and looking out, the entire field of view was occupied by the Insect Race, clinging to the barrier. Many had even crawled into mid-air. The Phong side poured a vast amount of Spirit Stones into the array, releasing all of their stored spirit force, yet they could only barely maintain the array's power.

But the size of the Insect Plague was growing ever more formidable, and at this rate, it would only be a few Shichen before the array inevitably collapsed.

Phong Yue's face was pale. Only now did she suddenly realize a problem—Infinity Heights had just sealed their own insect cave entrance when their residence was attacked by the Insect Plague, leaving hundreds of cultivators stranded outside, unable to return for support. Was this a coincidence, or had someone orchestrated all of this?

If it was a coincidence, so be it, but if someone had secretly planned all this, then it was too horrifying to contemplate.

On the other hand, within the Phong Clan's insect hive, Phong Lianju, who had received the message, was also in a panic. Without the people from Infinity Heights, they could still return to support their residence, but with the people from Infinity Heights blocking the entrance, they dared not even show their heads.

Moreover, they hadn't resolved the Insect Plague on their side yet. Caught in desperate urgency, they were at a loss for what to do.

Time slipped away bit by bit.

Six hours later, the light from the protective array at the Phong family's residence had dimmed to the extreme, on the verge of shattering at any moment. Once the array broke, the Insect Plague would be able to pour in directly. Given the current scale of the Insect Plague, the more than a hundred cultivators left to defend the Phong family's residence would not stand a chance.

Phong Yue was chilled to the bone. She had never imagined her family's residence could be breached in such a manner. Thankfully, it was only overrun by the Insect Plague, not breached by cultivators. If cultivators had broken through, the loss for the Phong family would have been enormous.

As she was thinking this, a thunderous noise suddenly came from behind the residence, followed by extreme fluctuations of spirit force.

The many cultivators of the Phong family were already scared and insecure, waiting for Phong Yue to order a withdrawal to the Nine Provinces. Suddenly faced with this unexpected situation, they were all shocked.

Nobody knew what was happening, but soon, Phong family cultivators rushed in from that direction, shouting, "Hundreds of cultivators are attacking the array!"

Phong Yue felt darkness before her eyes and nearly collapsed to the ground.

At such a critical juncture, there were hundreds of cultivators attacking their residence? Which power was this?

It was over—all over! She had just been relieved that the residence was only breached by the Insect Plague, but now it seemed the situation was not as simple as she thought.

With a loud bang, the array shattered. The Insect Race that had been pressing on the protective barrier's screen fell in droves, and more of the Insect Race flooded into the residence, their scuttling noises reaching everyone's ears.

"Quickly, fall back to the Nine Provinces!" Phong Yue issued the command through gritted teeth and then hurried towards the Heaven's Augury Hall.

By this time, many of the Phong Clan cultivators who sensed the situation was dire had already rushed towards the Heaven's Augury Hall. One after another, figures dashed into the hall, using the Heaven's Augury Pillar to retreat to the Nine Provinces. Still, those who moved swiftly were few; many cultivators had not yet had the chance to react.

By the time they arrived at the plaza in front of the hall, hundreds of cultivators came charging fiercely toward them, each emanating a killing aura, particularly the one leading them, mounted on a snowy white big tiger, swinging a long saber that sent the head of a Phong family cultivator flying high.

There was also a fiery red Liu Guang flitting about this person's side, clearly the glint of weapon control.

Phong Yue had never seen this young man before, but the spirit light on his body revealed his Level 7 cultivation. The purity of that spirit light was something Phong Yue had rarely seen in her life—not even on the bodies of Level 7 cultivators in her own sect.

She watched as this young man wreaked havoc, with a Level 6 Phong cultivator unable to block even a single strike from him.

The young man noticed her as well, and their eyes met. His eyes lit up, as if he had found something thrilling, and he pounced directly towards her from the tiger's back, the gleam of his saber flashing before Phong Yue.

The strike did not kill Phong Yue, not because she had the skill to block it, but because when Lu Ye lunged at her to kill, the woman simply ducked down, bent her knees, and neatly dropped to the ground in a kneeling position, tucking her neck like a turtle.

Lu Ye, who had calculated countless outcomes, had not anticipated this kind of response.

The Boulder Mountain Saber sliced over her head, severing a few strands of hair.

Ever since entering the Spirit Stream battlefield, many cultivators had died under Lu Ye's saber. Some had not even had the chance to react before losing their lives, others fought to the death without retreating, and some begged for mercy before dying, although there were not many of those.

Generally speaking, when opposing factions clashed, if one side was no match, there was usually no chance of survival, as pleas for mercy were futile.

But such a straightforward, immediate submission to kneeling was a first for him!

This woman was also a Level 7 cultivator, which was why Lu Ye's eyes had brightened upon seeing her. As a Level 7, she was either the Phong family's Governor or Deputy Governor. Since she was left in charge of the residence, the best items were definitely on her. As long as he killed her, it would all be his!

But the woman's reaction confused Lu Ye, and he forgot to adjust his strike in the moment.

Landing, Lu Ye looked down at the woman kneeling before him. Her face was as pale as paper, her forehead touching the ground, her hands stretched forward. Her posture pushed her close-fitting dress to outline a temptingly graceful figure.

Lu Ye raised his saber to strike. Though he had been stunned for a moment, since she was a Level 7 cultivator of the Phong family, he would naturally not be merciful. Presenting such an unguarded posture only made it easier for him to sever her head.

"I am a healing cultivator, Fellow Daoist, spare my life!"

Lu Ye's raised saber halted, and he furrowed his brow.

There was an unspoken rule on the Spirit Stream battlefield, which was that if one could avoid it, both sides would try their best to spare the life of the opposing healing cultivator.

In the past, Lu Ye was unaware of this, but now, he was the Governor stationed at the Righteous Blood Sect's base. He had frequent contact with Shui Yuan and others, gaining a lot of knowledge about the common sense on the battlefield. Shui Yuan had even made a special point to instruct him on this matter, probably because he had seen how heavy Lu Ye's killing intent could be at times.

The reason for this rule was threefold: first, because healing cultivators were rare; second, because most healing cultivators were not skilled in the art of harming others, and even those who practiced magic cultivation or other factions often did so for self-defense.

Healing cultivators spent more time saving and healing others, and in comparisons of fighting prowess among cultivators of the same level, healing cultivators were always at the bottom. Third, by sparing the life of the enemy's healing cultivator, one could also facilitate healing for one's own wounded cultivators.

Back in Evil Moon Valley, when Pang Dahai was explaining the differences between the sects to Lu Ye and Yu Xiaodie, he mentioned to Yu Xiaodie that as a healing cultivator, even if captured by Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, there was no need to worry about being killed.

For many years, as the two large factions faced each other in battle, although they wished to grind the other into the ground, this unwritten rule had always been maintained to avoid reducing the number of healing cultivators on both sides.

Healing cultivators were precious, and if too many died, finding someone to heal in the future would be troublesome.

Lu Ye now understood why this woman had knelt down so suddenly; it turned out she had the status of a healing cultivator.

His long saber came down, and with Phong Yue's cry of alarm, her arm gained a bone-deep wound, blood flowing out and staining her clothes red.

"Prove it to me!"

Phong Yue hurriedly straightened her upper body, enduring the excruciating pain as she lifted her other hand to cover the wound on her arm. A gentle, water-like spirit force began to flow.

Lu Ye couldn't help but click his tongue; she really was a healing cultivator.

"Chen Yu!"

Chen Yu, who was leading a large group of Righteous Blood Sect disciples in holding off the Insect Plague up ahead, leaped back at the call: "Here!"

"Keep an eye on this woman. If there's any anomaly, kill her!"

Chen Yu glanced down at Phong Yue and replied, "Understood!"

Lu Ye rushed forward, then turned back after two steps: "Right, confiscate her storage sack and also, ask her if there's anything valuable around here."

"Got it."

After Lu Ye had gone, Chen Yu, looking at Phong Yue kneeling on the ground, said, "Get up. You heard what was said just now. Hand over the storage sack!"

Phong Yue resignedly untied her storage sack and passed it to Chen Yu, but she didn't get up. Instead, she looked up at him pitifully, "I'm feeling a bit weak. Could you help me up?" Saying this, she stretched out a hand to Chen Yu.

The feeling of narrowly escaping death was too terrifying. The effective methods she used against men in the past had not worked in the slightest against that young man; the way he looked at her lacked the kind of light one would expect when looking at a woman.

Looking at that delicate, boneless white hand, Chen Yu's heart stirred for a moment, but after glancing at Lu Ye, who was fighting the Insect Race, he resolutely shook his head: "No, get up on your own."

Phong Yue's expression was filled with melancholy as she slowly stood up.

Chen Yu said solemnly, "Don't try any tricks, take me to anything valuable on your side, and make it quick!"

With that, he pushed the dawdling Phong Yue, and she uttered a soft cry, which nearly melted Chen Yu's resolve...

Her home had been occupied, she had been captured, and now she had to lead the enemy to her valuable possessions. Phong Yue felt bitter inside, but at least she had managed to save her life.

Inside Heaven's Augury Hall, Hua Ci withdrew his hand and said to Cao Huahong, who was waiting nearby, "Senior Brother Cao, please."

Cao Huahong laughed heartily: "Then I won't be polite!" Saying so, he placed his hand on the Heaven's Augury Pillar, greedily plundering the remaining blessings, his expression gleeful.

He was the Deputy Governor from Infinity Heights. Beforehand, Lu Ye had Ding Yushu lead a group to block the insect cave of the Phong Clan, preventing hundreds from the Phong family from returning to help their base. It had been arranged with Ding Yushu that after taking the Phong family's base, they would split the blessings of the Heaven's Augury Pillar equally.

Having exerted efforts together, it was naturally impossible for the Righteous Blood Sect to hoard all the benefits.

As the cultivators from the Righteous Blood Sect waited, Cao Huahong joined Lu Ye and the others.

Now, having just made a trip, he had gained a great deal of advantage. Such a situation was hard to find even when searching with a lantern; no wonder Senior Brother Ding held these two from the Righteous Blood Sect in high esteem. Cao Huahong had heard about the events in the Chess Sea too.

The Haotian Alliance had managed to turn defeat into victory, all thanks to the advantage accumulated by the two from Righteous Blood Sect in the early stages. Now, they had gained so much benefit from this venture as well. It seemed that in the future, it would be wise to grow closer to the Righteous Blood Sect.

Chapter 229 Be Fair

Hua Ci and Cao Huahong had divided the enhancements from the Heaven's Augury Pillar of the Phong family; then, hundreds of cultivators began to retreat in an orderly fashion. As usual, Lu Ye covered their retreat alone. He cast the Fire Dragon Technique repeatedly, using the wild surge of spirit force to attract the attention of the Insect Race.

Soon, he was utterly surrounded.

Without the wings rune tattoo, he would never have dared to do this. Being surrounded by such a swarm before one could fly was a sure death, even for the strongest cultivator.

But having wings was different, he could escape by flying. He was thankful to Madam Yun, thankful to the sect master, for the tattoo had greatly aided him.

Not until the cultivators of the Righteous Blood Sect had retreated to a safe distance did Lu Ye soar into the sky and vanish as a red streak of light.

The Insect Race chased for a while but, losing their target, gradually halted and reverted to their instincts.

The Sky Fiend Hall's stationed forces to the north had been breached, suffering countless casualties, essentially crippling them.

The Phong family's position to the east was also breached, and though not many died, the loss was still significant.

It could be said that both neighbors of the Righteous Blood Sect had been disastrously affected.

Lu Ye didn't plan to lure the insect swarm anywhere else for the moment; the cultivators of the Righteous Blood Sect were exhausted after back-to-back battles, needing a respite.

Moreover, calculating the time, other major sects had almost handled their insect plagues. At this point, even if he directed the swarm to another part of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, it was unlikely to be as impactful as before.

The issue at hand was the Phong family!

Although the Phong family's station was taken, not many had died, which was quite the problem. They were neighbors to the Righteous Blood Sect, and with Sky Fiend Hall in such a state, it wouldn't seem fair if the Righteous Blood Sect did not act evenly. Otherwise, it would be unjust to the Sky Fiend Hall!

Ding Yushu was still blocking the entrance with his cultivators. Now, what the Righteous Blood Sect needed to do was to meet up with the people from Infinity Heights and then trap and completely eliminate the Phong family.

By doing this, the Righteous Blood Sect would then dominate the region within about 30 miles.

Following the path of the departing crowd, Lu Ye quickly rejoined the group.

"Fellow Daoist Lu!" Cao Huahong greeted with a fist and palm salute, his face beaming with joy, feeling as if the air around him was sweet.

"How are things over there?"

Cao Huahong reported the situation at the Insect Race cave. The Phong family was in despair; they had heard that their station was taken, but still had no clue who had seized it.

The attacks came so suddenly that the Phong family's cultivators left to defend the station could either be quickly killed or used the Heaven's Augury Pillar to return to the Nine Provinces, not having the time to identify their attackers.

The only Phong family member who was captured, Phong Yue, had regained her senses and deduced Lu Ye's identity through the sight of Big Tiger, but where dared she send out a message?

Chen Yu and Kong Niu watched her from either side; any slight misstep from her, and she'd face a swift slash of sword or saber.

Blending with the hundreds from the Righteous Blood Sect, even though Phong Yue was at Level 7, she felt like a sheep among wolves, helpless and frail...

The hundreds of cultivators trapped in the insect cave had tried several times under Phong Lianju's leadership to break out, only to be repelled each time by the forces of Infinity Heights, with many casualties.

The situation there was now a stalemate; one side couldn't break out, and the other dared not enter rashly.

Upon hearing this, Lu Ye frowned; it was indeed difficult to resolve such a situation. It seemed a new strategy was needed.

A unique scent wafted into his nostrils. Lu Ye knew without turning that Hua Ci was approaching on her mechanical wolf.

"How did you fare?"

"Not bad!" Hua Ci nodded, then added, "Your gains aren't small either."

"Oh?"

"Isn't that like seizing the enemy's leading lady? I heard she's the governor from the Phong family," Hua Ci hinted with a purse of her lips.

How did it come to 'leading lady'? Lu Ye was about to retort, but then an idea struck him, and he quickly stepped forward, whispering something to Phong Yue.

Phong Yue first nodded, then shook her head, her expression full of fear.

Lu Ye drew his sword, full of murderous intent. Phong Yue shook her head violently, tears in her eyes, looking pitifully helpless.

As Lu Ye's Boulder Mountain Saber was drawn, fiery red spirit force clung to it. Phong Yue stood firm, closed her eyes.

After a moment without feeling the execution, she opened her eyes again to find Lu Ye's figure gone; she gasped a breath of relief, miraculously escaping death, her legs soft again.

Not far behind her, Lu Ye frowned.

He had initially planned to use Phong Yue, as she, being the Phong family governor, must hold some influence over the family's cultivators. Had she sent some false information to those in the insect cave, they could have been lured out, and the Righteous Blood Sect, in collaboration with Infinity Heights, could have wiped them out.

Lu Ye had thought this plan to be highly probable because, from Phong Yue's behavior earlier, the woman seemed the type to dread death.

However, Lu Ye had misjudged her. She had immediately knelt and begged for mercy upon seeing him, willing to do anything for her own safety. Yet, when asked to deceive her own family cultivators, she showed immense resistance, seemingly ready to die rather than cooperate.

When it was about her own safety, she could kneel and beg due to her status as a healing cultivator, but when it involved the Phong family, she had her principles and resolve.

After all, Lu Ye couldn't really kill her...

They pushed forward and soon reached the insect cave of the Phong family, where cultivators from two families gathered, surpassing a thousand in number.

Lu Ye stood together with Ding Yushu at the entrance of the cave, peering down. Ding Yushu explained the current situation to him, which was much the same as what Cao Huahong had described.

"That is the situation now, Brother Yiye, do you have any good ideas?"

"I'll go down for a look."

Saying so, he leaped downward.

Ding Yushu's eyes nearly popped out, considering such recklessness...

Peering down, he saw a flicker of spirit force's glow below, intense fluctuations followed, and then Lu Ye's figure soared upward, landing lightly, apparently unharmed but a bit disheveled.

Though it was only a brief glimpse, Lu Ye still saw numerous Phong family cultivators stationed near the entrance, a deadly trap for anyone descending. Had he not possessed Defense Spirit Runes, he would not have acted so rashly.

"Is there a way to make the underground channel collapse?"

If that could be achieved, then however many people the Phong family had would be buried alive inside.

Ding Yushu shook his head and said, "I've thought about it, but with our strength, we can't do it. The tunnel is too deep."

He sighed and added, "If we really can't, we'll have to give up. We can't keep wasting time here. The Phong family will surely have strong cultivators arriving from either the inner circle or the Core Circle. By now, they might have even returned to their bases through the Heaven's Augury Pillar's transmission; though, the chances of this happening aren't high."

Gaining merit was not easy, and cultivators had many uses for it, making it rare for anyone to accumulate much.

This was something Lu Ye was well aware of. The Heaven's Augury Pillar itself possessed the ability to teleport. Cultivators could use the Alliance Sect's Heaven's Augury Pillar to teleport back to their sects, with the cost in merit varying by distance and cultivation level.

He had never tried it himself but knew that it required a significant expenditure of merit.

Righteous Blood Sect and Sky Fiend Hall, and the Phong family at the Spirit Stream Realm tier, couldn't possibly have so few members; their stronger cultivators were all training in either the inner circle or the Core Circle.

Heard that their base had been occupied, they would certainly return, and at this moment, they were likely already on their way back.

If Righteous Blood Sect and Infinity Heights stayed here, it was most likely they would encounter a group of strong cultivators returning from the inner or Core Circle, and then the situation would become disadvantageous for us.

Not far away, Phong Yue listened carefully, pleased internally. Thinking this way was correct; they should leave quickly. As long as the people from Righteous Blood Sect and Infinity Heights withdrew, it would be a win-win situation for everyone.

Although the Phong family's base was occupied, their casualties weren't too severe. As long as they had people, they could rise again.

"I'm a bit unwilling to let this go," Lu Ye shook his head.

Ding Yushu chuckled, "It can't be helped."

"I'll think again."

After much effort to trap the Phong family's people here, it would be a pity to let them go. Saying this, he turned his head to look towards Phong Yue, who quickly lowered her head, appearing like a submissive daughter-in-law.

This woman... why is she so stubborn?

At that moment, Ding Yushu and Cao Huahong suddenly looked down at their battlefield markings, their expressions becoming grave simultaneously.

Cao Huahong called out lowly, "Brother."

"Got it," Ding Yushu responded, then looked at Lu Ye, "Brother Yiye, Infinity Heights is under attack; we have to leave!"

Lu Ye was surprised, "Who is attacking you?"

"Mount Shixiang!"

Lu Ye, familiar with the local powers' bases, momentarily recalled that Mount Shixiang was a force from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge bordering Infinity Heights to the north.

"Why would Mount Shixiang attack at this time..." Lu Ye's words trailed off as he quickly realized something and glanced towards Phong Yue.

Ding Yushu also looked coldly towards Phong Yue, "Clearly, someone has disclosed our movements!"

He quickly gathered his disciples and bowed to Lu Ye, saying, "If there's a chance next time, let's cooperate again, Brother Yiye."

"No hurry, we'll go together. If we can't kill those from the Phong family, killing those from Mount Shixiang is just the same!"

Ding Yushu was overjoyed, "That would be great!"

Lu Ye dashed into the crowd, grabbed Phong Yue by the collar, and amidst her shocked cries, tossed her onto Amber's back.

A few moments later, over a thousand cultivators from both sides rushed towards the base of Infinity Heights; the bustling entrance of the insect cave suddenly quieted down.

Riding on Amber's back, Phong Yue relaxed, not having anticipated that the seemingly insignificant move she made earlier would come into play at such a critical moment. Now that both Infinity Heights and Righteous Blood Sect's people had left, the Phong family members trapped in the insect cave were safe.

As she swayed on Amber, Phong Yue looked around to see if anyone was watching her and silently sent a message out, "Infinity Heights is being attacked by Mount Shixiang; both sects' cultivators are heading to Infinity Heights. You guys run fast!"

She didn't notice that Lu Ye was also secretly communicating with Ding Yushu.

Chapter 230 Spear Return

A moment later, Lu Ye nodded to Ding Yushu and suddenly stopped in his tracks.

The Infinity Heights had hundreds of cultivators who, under Ding Yushu's leadership, thundered into the distance, but seven hundred monks from the Righteous Blood Sect stayed behind.

On the tiger's back, Phong Yue swiftly cut off the communication with Phong Lianju, looked around in shock, and a large hand reached out, grasped her neck, and dragged her down from the tiger's back, throwing her to the ground.

Phong Yue, covered in dust, looked up in terror at Lu Ye towering over her.

"Thank you!"

"Huh?" Phong Yue was stunned, "Thank me for what?"

Lu Ye tossed an elixir pill into his mouth and started to chew slowly.

"Did you tip off the people from your Phong family?"

"I didn't!" Phong Yue naturally wouldn't admit to such a thing, but facing Lu Ye's mocking gaze, she finally realized, "You used me?"

Her act of tipping off had been discreet, but to a vigilant observer, it certainly hadn't gone unnoticed. She now understood that Lu Ye hadn't put her on the tiger's back out of kindness, but to create an opportunity for her to send a message. Ridiculously, she had thought her compliance had dulled his vigilance.

If that was the case, then the message she had just sent to Phong Lianju was surely disastrous.

And all that had just been a play, a ploy to lure the snake out of its hole...

"Infinity Heights' station wasn't attacked?" Phong Yue's head spun as she recalled the expressions of Ding Yushu and Cao Huahong, which didn't seem feigned.

"Infinity Heights' station was indeed attacked, but compared to Mount Shixiang, I am more interested in the Phong Clan."

Ding Yushu had already led his troops back to provide assistance, and a sect's station wasn't so easily conquered. Those at Mount Shixiang would likely retreat upon seeing Ding Yushu, unless they lost their reason.

Thus, whether the Righteous Blood Sect helped or not made no difference; at best, they could have killed more from Mount Shixiang, but as long as the station wasn't breached, it wouldn't significantly hurt their enemies.

The Phong family was a different story; their station had been captured, and if the cultivators left in the insect cave suffered heavy casualties, it would undoubtedly cause them severe damage.

Initially, when Lu Ye heard that Infinity Heights' station was under attack, he really wanted to lead the Righteous Blood Sect to help, but he quickly realized it might be an opportunity. That's why he decisively tossed Phong Yue onto Amber's back.

If this woman had been honest and hadn't tipped off the Phong family, then the Righteous Blood Sect could only have chosen to follow Ding Yushu to aid the Infinity Heights' station.

But if this woman wasn't honest, then the Phong family's vulnerability was exposed.

Either way, the Righteous Blood Sect wouldn't be at a loss.

Indeed, Phong Yue had passed information to the Phong family's cultivators, as Lu Ye had confirmed it from Yiyi, who he had left behind. At this moment, a few cultivators from the Phong family were climbing out, ready to scout their surroundings, unaware that eyes in the dark were watching them and reporting their every move to Lu Ye.

Clang...

The Boulder Mountain Saber was drawn and plunged down, pinning Phong Yue's hand to the ground, eliciting a scream and a flow of blood.

With her eyes teary, Phong Yue looked up at Lu Ye; she had tried to send another message...

"You only had this one chance. One more time, and you die!"

Lu Ye pulled out the saber, causing Phong Yue to cry out again.

"Chen Yu, watch her closely. If she tries anything foolish, kill her."

"Yes!"

"Everyone, follow me!"

Lu Ye changed direction and led seven hundred cultivators back majestically.

At the entrance of the insect cave, a few Phong family cultivators climbed up tremblingly, looked around to ascertain that the Haotian Alliance cultivators who had previously converged there had withdrawn, and finally breathed a sigh of relief. One of them approached the entrance of the cave and shouted down, "It's clear, come up quickly!"

The Phong family cultivators, who had been trapped for almost half a day, eagerly climbed up, emerging one after another from the insect cave until a hundred of them had gathered outside.

Phong Lianju also climbed up, trying to contact Phong Yue, but all his messages went unanswered, like stones dropped into the sea.

This unnerved him, as he didn't know what Phong Yue might have encountered.

However, escaping their predicament was immediate priority. They also needed to rush back to recover their station. Without a station, they were like trees without roots, a source with no water.

Suddenly, a surge of strong spirit force vibrations transmitted through the air, causing Phong Lianju to look up just in time to see a fiery-red streak of light swiftly approaching from not far away.

He just had time to recognize that the streak was a human figure before the person was already upon him.

The glow of weapon control flared as it lunged toward his chest; Phong Lianju raised his spear and flicked the streak away. The powerful force numbed his hands and forced him to stagger backwards for two steps.

As soon as he steadied himself, Lu Ye's figure descended from above, Boulder Mountain Saber drawn and slashing toward Phong Lianju.

Phong Lianju held his spear in front of him, blocking the razor-sharp saber strike, and as the two clashed closely with their spiritual artifacts, their eyes met, Phong Lianju felt an enormous pressure overwhelming him from the front.

"Who are you?" he gritted his teeth and growled. Being equally of Level 7 cultivation, he found it hard to accept that there was such a massive gap between his strength and that of his opponent.

The response was a flash of brilliance that passed over the Boulder Mountain Saber.

Phong Lianju's face drastically changed, feeling his body becoming immensely heavy, as if a huge mountain pressed down on his shoulders. Already at a disadvantage in strength, he was now forcibly brought to his knees.

Hefty Weight Spirit Runes, these could create a peculiar force field that made everything within it extremely heavy.

Weapon control's Liu Guang flew towards Phong Lianju from behind his head. At this moment, while he was suppressed and sensed the danger, he was powerless to react. Liu Guang broke through his protective spirit force, penetrating the back of his head and flying out of his mouth.

As Lu Ye leapt up, several magic and spells struck where he had just been, and several spiritual artifacts also chopped down.

In just a brief confrontation, Phong Lianju of Level 7 met a tragic death on the spot, a scene that left many cultivators from the Phong family horrifically shaken.

High in the sky, Lu Ye gazed down, slightly raising his hand, shutting Liu Guang of weapon control, executing the Fire Dragon Technique.

At the same time, from the direction he'd come, seven hundred cultivators from the Righteous Blood Sect also charged into the fight.

The Phong family cultivators, who had just emerged, jumped back into the insect cave in terror, but with the fire dragon roaring and burning inside the cave, their chance of surviving was extremely slim.

Those Phong family cultivators who hadn't emerged yet had no idea what had transpired. They were gathering together, preparing to leave the area. Some retreated, others moved forward, immediately creating chaos at the scene.

Suddenly, the fluctuation of spirit force from magic and spells surged from behind them, screams rang out, and several Phong family cultivators were slaughtered on the spot by Yiyi, who had infiltrated the area.

The underground passages were extremely advantageous for her; she could kill a few people, dive into the cave walls, and her enemies couldn't find her. Moreover, Yiyi was now quite powerful, ordinary cultivators simply couldn't withstand one of her magic and spells.

In such chaos, the situation near the entrance of the insect cave became even more disordered.

By the time the seven hundred cultivators from the Righteous Blood Sect arrived, there were already thirty more corpses near the entrance, with many more inside the cave as Lu Ye had thrown several Fire Dragon Techniques inside earlier.

With Phong Lianju dead and Phong Yue captured, the Phong family now lacked a leader to take charge of the situation; only a few of those of Level 6 were left alive, fleeing deeper into the Insect Path.

As his subordinates arrived, Lu Ye was the first to jump into the insect cave, choosing a random passage and pursuing the enemy relentlessly.

Seven hundred cultivators entered the insect cave, each heading in different directions to chase down their targets.

At the entrance of the insect cave, only two people remained, Hua Ci and Phong Yue.

Phong Yue stared blankly at the bodies around her, her eyes lifeless, her heart numb with despair. She could hardly believe that simply sending a message had led to such dire consequences.

Hua Ci stood not too far from her, calm and composed as jade.

Despite their cultivation differing by one level, Hua Ci was not afraid of Phong Yue doing anything to her; why should a healing cultivator trouble another healing cultivator? And even if Phong Yue did make a move, Hua Ci could show her what it meant to 'plant mushrooms.'

This was also why Lu Ye was at ease having Hua Ci watch Phong Yue.

However, Hua Ci hadn't expected that Phong Yue, perhaps due to the severe shock she received, would just stand there from beginning to end without trying to escape or attack.

Until the first group of Righteous Blood Sect cultivators returned from their pursuit, and eventually, everyone had come back.

Some were injured, and some had died; casualties were inevitable in such conflict-filled circumstances, but compared to the enemy's losses, these were insignificant.

Every single Phong family cultivator who had fled into the insect cave was relentlessly pursued and exterminated.

Lu Ye sent a message to Ding Yushu, inquiring whether he needed help, and quickly received a reply, Mount Shixiang had already retreated.

That was an inevitable result, unless Mount Shixiang really wanted to engage in a decisive battle with Infinity Heights. Otherwise, they would retreat after Ding Yushu called for reinforcements.

Fighting in such circumstances would suit neither side; as a governor of a sect's headquarters, Ding Yushu had the decisiveness required.

"Senior Brother Five, who are we hitting next?" Guk Yang asked excitedly, being one of the few of Level 6 in the sect.

A group, all eager with expectation, looked on. Although these continuous travels and battles were exhausting and fraught with danger, the spoils and accomplishments earned were immensely gratifying.

Never before in the history of the Spirit Stream battlefield had any power been able to breach two enemy sect headquarters in such a short time, especially in the outer circle, where the difficulty was even higher.

The Righteous Blood Sect's remaining cultivators, every single one of them, had gained a full load of merit and spoils of war.

"Return to the sect!"

Stop hitting anyone.

They had managed to defeat Sky Fiend Hall by leveraging an Insect Plague that annihilated hundreds of their people, and they had taken down the Phong Clan by borrowing the power from Infinity Heights.

Now, with the insect plagues managed by various sects, it was no longer possible to trap many cultivators of a sect inside a cave. Attacking other sects' bases forcefully, even if leveraging an insect plague, would be strenuous and ungrateful.

Moreover, the strong figures from Sky Fiend Hall and the Phong Clan must already be rushing back! If they didn't return to their sect now and were caught by those of Level 8-9 or even those who had cultivated Heaven Rank techniques, the Righteous Blood Sect would meet a fate most sour.

Thus, hastening back to the sect was critical – only returning to their headquarters could they consider themselves safe.