

Humanity 231

Chapter 231 Sect Protection Array

Following Lu Ye back to the base, hundreds of cultivators chatted and laughed along the way, creating a lively scene.

The experience of this expedition was somewhat dreamlike for every cultivator as they dealt with the insect hive on their own territory before heading north to attack Sky Fiend Hall's base, killing hundreds of their cultivators and taking over their territory.

Afterward, they turned to the southeast and conquered the Phong Clan's base, killing hundreds of their people.

At this moment, everyone was about thirty miles east of their own base, not far away.

Thus, in less than one hour, the group of hundreds returned to the base, where from a distance they could see a sky-covered, overflowing swarm of the Insect Race in front of Heaven's Augury Hall.

The Insect Plague from Sky Fiend Hall's side had clearly spread over to here.

Amidst the boundless encirclement of the Insect Race, Little Gray's massive figure was especially noticeable as it flapped its wings, jumping from one place to another, pecking once to kill an insect, pecking again to kill another, occasionally lifting its claws to scratch a few times.

The entire square was covered with insect corpses, and it was hard to tell how long it had been killing there.

Seeing this scene, Lu Ye felt greatly relieved.

The reason he dared to take all the Righteous Blood Sect's cultivators out for action was that with Little Gray in the base, who would dare to intrude? Little Gray would surely teach them a lesson.

Lu Ye had anticipated the current situation; he'd delayed with hundreds of cultivators for too long, and the insect hive of Sky Fiend Hall was only a few dozen miles away. Without anyone to check its spread, it would definitely reach this side.

On the return journey, Lu Ye had already arranged for dealing with the situation. The strength of the Insect Race here was generally strong, with many at Level 3-4, and not lacking Level 5-6. There were no Level 7 Insect Race, as this was after all the outermost edge of the Insect Plague.

The stronger beings were either in the insect hive or had been lured to the Phong Clan's territory by Lu Ye earlier.

Since arrangements had been made in advance, as soon as everyone hurried back, they acted in an orderly manner. The squads tightly connected with each other, continuously advancing forward, exterminating the insects on the square without rest. Any spirit force fluctuations here attracted even more insects over.

In front of Heaven's Augury Hall, Lu Ye rested his hand on the hilt of his knife, and a streak of Liu Guang swept across in front of him. Any insect that dared to approach Heaven's Augury Hall was immediately slain by his weapon control.

Inside Heaven's Augury Hall, Hua Ci pressed her hand on the Heaven's Augury Pillar, ready to transfer the blessings plundered from Sky Fiend Hall and Phong Clan into their own pillar as merit.

Lu Ye didn't know how much he had looted in terms of converting those blessings into merit, but he was sure it wouldn't be less than his gains in the Chess Sea.

Although there was a great loss during the looting process, the Righteous Blood Sect had plundered two sects this time; even if the blessings from the Phong clan were split with Infinity Heights, both Sky Fiend Hall and Phong Clan had been operating for at least several decades. Could their pillars' blessings be few?

Soon after, Hua Ci walked out of Heaven's Augury Hall.

"Bought it."

"Expensive?"

"Very expensive!" Hua Ci said this with a pained expression on her face.

"It can't be helped. We can't always continue like this. Even with Little Gray here, it's better to be prepared. Do you know how to set it up?"

"She knows," said Hua Ci, pulling up Phong Yue who stood beside her.

Despite looking disheveled as if someone had toyed with her body and soul, Phong Yue was at least a Governor of a base, much stronger than the half-baked Lu Ye and Hua Ci.

Confronting Lu Ye's inquiring gaze, the corners of Phong Yue's mouth twitched, trying to muster a smile, but recalling the cut Lu Ye had made on her palm, she couldn't bring herself to smile, leaving her expression stiff.

"Let's go!"

With a shout from Lu Ye, he led Hua Ci and Phong Yue in a certain direction, ignoring the battlefield where the situation was stable. With successive battles, the sect's cultivators' combat experience had soared, and even without Lu Ye, they had no problem handling the Insect Plague.

The three of them reached a corner on the edge of the base, where Hua Ci took out a washbasin-sized box from her storage sack; it looked somewhat like wood and somewhat like metal, with intricate patterns engraved all over it. If one looked carefully, they'd see that these patterns were all spirit runes.

This was an array base, used to set up the base's protective array.

Essentially, every sect has its own base array for defense or attack purposes, like the previous arrays of Sky Fiend Hall and the Phong Clan. However, once the arrays were breached, their bases were destroyed as well, making it nearly impossible to acquire from others.

In the Spirit Stream battlefield, only Spirit Stream Realm cultivators can come and go freely. With their level of skill, they cannot refine such an array base, nor can they set up an array big enough to cover an entire base.

Where did the array base come from? The answer is that it was purchased from the Heaven's Augury treasure vault with merit points earned by the sect, and such an expense could not be covered by a single cultivator alone.

"How much merit for this one?" Lu Ye casually asked.

"Eight hundred and eighty-eight!"

Lu Ye's heart gave a painful twitch.

"How many in total?"

"Sixteen!"

Lu Ye casually tallied in his mind and realized that it was a large number.

Fortunately, this time the gains were substantial, and the more he spent, the more powerful the array became; it was always worth it.

"Just leave it here?"

"There's no time to deal with it now. Later, when we have a chance, we can bury it or make some camouflage."

"No, we need people to guard it."

After all, it was merit. Lu Ye sent a message out, and before long, a group of cultivators from the Heaven's Augury Hall ran over, all covered in insect blood.

"You two stay here and keep an eye on this, don't let anyone get close."

"Yes!"

"The rest of you, come with me."

Under Phong Yue's guidance, Hua Ci carefully arranged each array base in locations throughout the camp, and Lu Ye left two cultivators to guard each spot.

After a busy period, everything was finally set. Meanwhile, the sect's cultivators had cleared out the Insect Race within the camp. There were still more coming from outside, pouring in continuously. To eradicate them, it was necessary to venture into the Sky Fiend Hall's insect hive to take the vitality core and solve the problem at its source; otherwise, the Insect Plague would be endless.

This was something that outer circle cultivators couldn't accomplish, and even Lu Ye didn't dare enter the insect cave now.

Hua Ci held a palm-sized jade disc in her hands; on the disc, flowing light shimmered, and tiny spirit runes coursed through it. This was the array disc that controlled all the array bases, the core of the big array. Even if a few of the array bases were destroyed, it would only affect the big array's power; but if the array disc was wrecked, the big array would be thoroughly useless.

Phong Yue explained to her on the side, and Hua Ci nodded repeatedly. As she channeled her spirit force, a humming sound suddenly erupted from various places in the camp where the array discs were placed. Spirit force surged, creating a strange resonance with each other.

Immediately after, spirit force ripples, like those on water, emerged from the sixteen array discs and spread in all directions, merging with each other and gradually converging towards the sky.

One incense stick's time later, a half-dome light screen that enveloped the entire camp formed, shielding the camp within it.

The big array was complete!

It isolated the inside from the outside.

With the protection of the big array, there was no need to worry about the Insect Race breaking into the camp at any moment. Although the Insect Race's gnawing could severely damage the light screen of the big array, as long as their numbers didn't accumulate to a certain level, the light screen could repair itself since it was essentially the flow of spirit force.

Under Hua Ci's control, the light screen of the Righteous Blood Sect's big array wasn't completely sealed, but left an opening a few people wide. So, the Insect Race could still rush in through this gap, but with cultivators standing guard at this opening, any number of Insects would be marching to their deaths.

This approach relieved some pressure on the big array.

The sect's cultivators spontaneously began cleaning the battlefield, repairing themselves, and taking turns guarding the gap in the big array, all in an orderly fashion.

Many were injured in the great battle, so Hua Ci and her assistants started healing people; initially, she was the only healing cultivator on hand and was somewhat overwhelmed.

Now there was Phong Yue as well...

Phong Yue didn't want to; at the moment, her mind was a jumbled mess, filled with thoughts of siding with the enemy and causing the death of hundreds of her own cultivators—how could she have the heart to heal others?

Lu Ye patted the handle of his knife warmly as he spoke with her, and Phong Yue was so moved by his charismatic manner that she couldn't help but throw herself into the noble and magnificent endeavor of saving lives and helping the injured.

The wounded cultivators received timely treatment. After resting in the training room, having a full meal, they immediately became as vigorous as dragons and tigers.

Chen Yu led the Sect's several Level 6 Realm cultivators, who, after consulting with Lu Ye, organized several counterattacks against the Insect Plague, achieving great results.

But it was to no avail...

Before long, a new wave of Insect Race broke through the big array's gap and entered the camp again.

While the Righteous Blood Sect spent their days in stability, the situation outside was turbulent.

First, the news spread by the surviving cultivators of Sky Fiend Hall and the Phong Clan claimed that during the catastrophe, the Righteous Blood Sect did not deal with their own insect hive but instead launched a full-scale attack on others' camps, causing the continuous breach of both Sky Fiend Hall and Phong Clan's camps, resulting in countless deaths and injuries among their cultivators.

This subsequently led to the outbreak of the Insect Plague, which overwhelmed the outer circle cultivators, bringing endless suffering.

Once the news spread, the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge faction was united in anger. After expressing sympathy for Sky Fiend Hall and the Phong Clan, they spared no effort in condemning Lu Yiye of the Righteous Blood Sect with both words and writings, vilifying her maliciously. Everything was fine in their territory before this Lu Yiye appeared; any friction was just normal factional conflict.

But ever since Lu Yiye joined the Righteous Blood Sect, the area encompassed approximately 30 miles around has been in utter chaos. Now, the Insect Plague has reached the doorstep of many forces; even several powers of the Haotian Alliance were implicated. Lu Yiye of the Righteous Blood Sect should atone with her death!

The Haotian Alliance was naturally overjoyed. Outer circle sect strongholds were rarely breached, not to mention by a single force that broke through two strongholds in succession. The breach of the

strongholds was already impressive enough, but reportedly, almost none of the Sky Fiend Hall and Phong Clan cultivators survived, with the Spirit Stream Realm nearly being exterminated.

Chapter 232 Post-battle Tally

This was truly terrifying, nobody knew how Lu Ye did it, and some even suspected it was a set-up, a smear campaign. But the story spread from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge was detailed and convincing, which left people no choice but to believe.

Moreover, Haotian Alliance didn't care about the process through which the Righteous Blood Sect occupied the territories of the two Ten Thousand Demons Ridge forces. Everyone only looked at the outcome, and for the people of the Haotian Alliance, taking down the strongholds of two sects in just a couple of days was undoubtedly an inspiring achievement.

Consequently, cultivators from both sides clashed through verbal fights, resulting in an uproar that filled the Spirit Stream battlefield with a tense atmosphere.

But as time went on, it was soon discovered that the source of the Insect Plague wasn't the insect cave of the Righteous Blood Sect at all, but the one belonging to Sky Fiend Hall. All the insects had surged out from there.

This discovery undoubtedly overturned the previous accusations against the Righteous Blood Sect, so the argument between the two sides became even fiercer.

By now, many cultivators from the inner circle had already rushed over, especially those from the Sky Fiend Hall and the Phong Clan, who arrived the earliest. Their own strongholds had been seized, so they had no time to wander outside and naturally hurried back to help their surviving juniors rebuild.

Apart from these two groups of cultivators, others from different forces also came, not for the spectacle but to kill the Insect Race. For them, the scale of the Insect Plague here was comparable to the inner circle, and exterminating insects here could also earn them merits.

When the cultivators from the two camps met, clashes were inevitable. In the wilderness where the Insect Plague was raging, battles frequently erupted between Level 8-9 cultivators, and even practitioners of Heaven Rank techniques, making the area exceptionally lively.

Lu Ye didn't know which side had won this conflict. Three days after leading his disciples back to their base, the Insect Plague was finally contained. Some powerful individual had penetrated the insect hive of the Sky Fiend Hall, destroyed the core fleshy sack, and taken away the vitality core.

Today was the fourth day since everyone returned to their base.

The Sect Protection Array of Righteous Blood Sect was operating at its lowest level, enclosing the base with a protective barrier.

In front of Heaven's Augury Hall, Lu Ye sat on the steps, engrossed in reading the books he'd brought over from Madam Yun.

In front of him, a large number of spoils of war were piled up in the plaza; these were collected by his disciples previously. They hadn't tallied them up during the Insect Plague but started to do so today.

The spoils of war, naturally, weren't just for whoever grabbed them first. Everyone put in an effort together, so they had to be accounted for before being distributed.

"Fifth Brother, everything is here," He Xiying came up to report.

Responding with a nod, Lu Ye looked up to see a huge pile of items, but he quickly furrowed his brows, as there were many items like tables, chairs, benches, and even pots and pans in the mix...

This made him twitch in the corner of his eye, what on earth had they been plundering?

Curling up in a corner outside Heaven's Augury Hall, Phong Yue, looking dejected, couldn't help but shrink back upon seeing several familiar pieces of furniture among the items...

Those were clearly from her own room.

The people of Righteous Blood Sect...

"Are you robbers?"

Lu Ye felt a headache coming on, "What's the point of bringing back these tables, chairs, benches, and kitchenware?"

He seriously suspected that if storage sacks could fit larger items, like beds, the Righteous Blood Sect's disciples would have likely hauled those back as well.

Chen Yu chuckled nearby, "We're lacking everything here in the base, and the quality of these two sects' belongings is quite good. These chairs can be placed inside Heaven's Augury Hall, so we'll have somewhere to sit during discussions in the future."

When he put it that way, it made some sense.

"First, clear up these miscellaneous items. Whoever wants something can take it," Lu Ye declared.

The surrounding cultivators immediately swarmed over. Although the scene was chaotic, there was no looting. Chen Yu selected some chairs to send into Heaven's Augury Hall first, and the rest took what they needed. Soon, the tables, chairs, and benches vanished.

He Xiyang also brought a jade pillow over to Lu Ye, "Fifth Brother, I saved one for you."

"Hmm."

Lu Ye acknowledged. Currently, he mostly stayed in the training room at the base, but he did have his own place to live, constructed by Chen Yu and some others—a house with a prime location, next door to Hua Ci.

However, Lu Ye hadn't yet visited that house, which was unfurnished.

Phong Yue watched longingly from afar, her inner voice crying out, it's mine! It's mine!

With the bothersome items out of the way, what was left were things useful to cultivators, including various Spiritual Artifacts, elixir pills, Spirit Stones, and Spirit Talismans. The most numerous were the Spiritual Artifacts.

The several hundred people from Sky Fiend Hall died in the insect cave, and the Righteous Blood Sect wasn't able to collect their spoils of war posthumously, so it was unknown who benefitted from that.

The majority of these spoils came from the several hundred people of the Phong Clan.

Every dead person left behind a Spiritual Artifact, so just from the artifacts, there were several hundred pieces, the second most numerous items being unopened storage sacks, roughly the same in number as the artifacts.

Only a small portion of the storage sacks were open, with their contents already taken out.

Distributing these spoils was tricky, as the value of unopened storage sacks, even if obtained, remained unknown. One could become rich overnight or end up with nothing.

Lu Ye divided his disciples into ten squads, each with around seventy people, and took turns selecting spoils. If someone chose a storage sack, they could take one. With Spiritual Artifacts, it was also one apiece. For Spirit Talismans, two pieces were allowed, and for Spirit Stones or elixir pills, twenty apiece were permissible.

It all came down to whether it was a loss or a profit, which hinged on one's discernment and luck.

Teams took turns stepping forward, with some taking a gamble on the storage sack, while others played it safe and picked a Spiritual Artifact. Those in need of elixir pills chose them, and anyone without Spirit Stones took them.

It wasn't really a matter of who got the better deal; everyone just took what they needed.

After two rounds of this, there wasn't enough left to go around.

Lu Ye then had people collect what was left to be confiscated, to be accumulated and distributed with the next batch of loot.

"Before the battle began, I had made it clear that the top ten merit earners of this outing would be rewarded with Spirit Stones, and the top three would receive a Restriction Level 9 Spiritual Artifact," Lu Ye said.

"Present!"

"How are the results for the merit count?"

"All counted and the top ten list has been compiled."

"Read it out."

Chen Yu immediately called out loud, "Ranking first in merit earned, Chen Yu!"

Announcing his own name made him touch his nose somewhat sheepishly, then he continued to read out the names of the remaining nine. As expected, several Level 6 cultivators made the list. To Lu Ye's surprise, Yiyi actually ranked second...

"The rewards for these ten will be distributed by Hua Ci later. Also, have you tallied the merit for the squads?"

"That's been done as well."

"Which squad is the first?"

"He Xiyi's team."

In the crowd, He Xiyang suddenly straightened up and grinned foolishly.

Lu Ye nodded towards her, encouraging, "Very good, keep it up. Each member of your squad can make one request of me, within my power to grant. You can ask now or later, whenever you've decided, just come to me."

"Furthermore, since we achieved a huge victory this time and earned a lot of merit, I discussed it with your Sixth Sister, and we decided to give everybody a little merit reward—not much, just twenty points each, think of it as a reward from the sect."

At those words, all the cultivators couldn't help but be overjoyed. Although everyone had earned quite a bit of merit in the fight against the Insect Plague, who would ever think they had enough merit?

And twenty points each for nearly seven hundred cultivators—that was an expenditure of around twenty thousand merit points.

At that moment, many felt extremely fortunate to have joined or become affiliated with the Righteous Blood Sect; just one Insect Plague had allowed them to make a fortune. Could the days ahead be anything but better?

"Finally, our sect has decided to take in another two hundred disciples in name, chosen from those who performed exceptionally this time. The list will be announced shortly. Your Sixth Sister is waiting at Heaven's Augury Hall, queue up there to receive your merits," he concluded.

Seven hundred cultivators promptly formed a long line, each one entering the Heaven's Augury Hall in turn, and then emerging brimming with joy. Hua Ci was kept busy for half the day before she finished distributing the twenty-point merit rewards to everyone.

Afterward, she spent the remaining merit to purchase the blessings for the Heaven's Augury Pillar, increasing it to nineteen layers of blessings.

As a result, the spiritual energy of the entire territory experienced a noticeable increase again, more than doubling that of the outside world.

To enhance the territory's spiritual energy to this extent was not easy, as the next layer of blessing would require a full ten thousand merit points to purchase.

Taking into account the merit distributed to the sect's cultivators and the purchase of the Sect Protection Array, the Righteous Blood Sect had plundered merit points amounting to eighty or ninety thousand from the other two sects.

This was twice as much as what Lu Ye and Hua Ci had acquired in the Chess Sea.

It seemed that if they wanted to rapidly improve the spiritual energy of the sect's territory, they would need to attack other territories and plunder their merit points.

However, attacking a territory was not an easy task. Their success this time around was due to the Insect Plague; without it, relying solely on the Righteous Blood Sect's own strength, it would have been impossible to succeed.

Perhaps they could ally with Infinity Heights and target Mount Shixiang? Lu Ye contemplated the sinister idea, but it didn't seem right: if they really went through with it, Mount Shixiang wouldn't sit idly by; they would surely send messages to the forces of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge nearby.

If anyone took the chance to attack the territory of Infinity Heights, employing a tactic akin to besieging Wei to rescue Zhao, Infinity Heights would inevitably have to withdraw.

If there was a way to rapidly destroy arrays, that would truly be the power to do anything they wished!

This made Lu Ye feel all the more that he had to sharpen his Path of Spirit Runes diligently.

He Xiyang's squad consisted of six people; three of them approached Lu Ye in the following two days, expressing their desire to have a personal training room. Naturally, Lu Ye agreed, using his authority as governor to assign each of them a training room and attentively constructing the Spirit Energy Gathering Spirit Runes for them.

The list of the newly recruited two hundred disciples in name was also posted, attracting the attention of the cultivators within the sect. Those included on the list were naturally overjoyed.

With the Insect Plague behind them, the disciples now had access to the necessary elixir pills, Spirit Stones, and merit, and with the spiritual energy of the territory having received another boost, they naturally immersed themselves in fervent cultivation.

But within this peaceful atmosphere, there was one person who stood starkly at odds with the entire Righteous Blood Sect, and that was the captive Phong Yue.

Chapter 233 Why Has No One Come to Redeem You?

After abducting Phong Yue to their base, Lu Ye had paid her no more attention. He didn't even have anyone keep an eye on her. He had thought that if this woman dared to try escaping secretly, he would break her legs; but it turned out she had no intention of running away at all. Every day she was either sitting here lost in thought or sitting there in a sorrowful daze.

In the Heaven's Augury Hall, Lu Ye sat on a large chair that originally belonged to who knows which family, but now it belonged to the Righteous Blood Sect.

Phong Yue stood in front of him with her eyes downcast, her hands folded above her abdomen.

True to being a healing cultivator, the piercing injury on her palm had almost completely healed in just a few days, and not even a scar remained.

"Why has no one come to ransom you?"

Lu Ye had been waiting for the Phong family to ransom her for the past few days.

On the Spirit Stream battlefield, it was possible to pay a certain price to ransom a captured healing cultivator back, and Phong Yue was not only a healing cultivator but also the governor of the Phong family's garrison— with such a status, her ransom should not be low.

In Lu Ye's view, Phong Yue was a big pile of Spirit Stones and elixir pills.

He had prepared to negotiate with the Phong family. However, there had been no movement from their side, which had made him somewhat impatient.

Phong Yue lowered her head, her voice quiet as a mosquito's, "The people of the Phong family must think I am dead."

"Nonsense!"

This woman was not being honest. Whether a disciple was alive or dead could be investigated by important sect figures like the Seal Envoy or the Sect Master.

Just like when Lu Ye had been lost on the Spirit Stream battlefield, although the sect master and his Second Senior Sister did not know his whereabouts, they knew he was still alive.

Because he bore the Righteous Blood Sect's mark, as long as the mark did not disappear, he was not dead.

Moreover, Phong Yue must have shared marks with other Phong family cultivators. Those familiar with her could easily ascertain her life or death by whether the marks still existed.

If Phong Yue had truly died, the mark belonging to her would have dispersed like smoke.

Lu Ye was not ignorant by any means, and he wouldn't be fooled by just a word from Phong Yue.

"Who is in charge at your Phong residence now?"

Probably some powerful figures from the inner circle or the Core Circle must have rushed back since most original cultivators of Spirit Stream Realm from Phong's side were dead, but one must still get in touch with those in charge for ransom purposes.

Phong Yue pursed her lips and did not answer.

Lu Ye raised his hand to hold the hilt of the Boulder Mountain Saber. Accompanied by a harsh friction sound, the long saber slowly slid out of its sheath.

"It's my Third Brother, Phong Xiangyang!" Phong Yue quickly replied, aware that the young man before her was someone who truly would draw his blade over a disagreement. Though the wound on her palm had healed, just the memory of that blade caused her a deep, penetrating pain.

"Contact him and tell him if he wants to ransom you, bring out a hundred thousand Spirit Stones!"

The scale of the Righteous Blood Sect's Spirit Stream Realm had indeed grown, with monthly salaries costing thousands of Spirit Stones. They couldn't keep relying on their Second Senior Sister for funds forever. The Righteous Blood Sect had declined for so many years, and the Second Senior Sister wasn't wealthy.

Previously, there had been no real output from the Righteous Blood Sect, but now the situation was much better because two neighboring forces had been thoroughly crippled.

The whole region around thirty miles was under the Domain of the Righteous Blood Sect, and all mine veins and other outputs in the area would henceforth be the wealth of the Righteous Blood Sect, with no involvement from Sky Fiend Hall and the Phong family anymore.

The disciples also started many spirit fields within the garrison, with Hua Ci leading people planting medicinal herbs and Spirit Plants to help with family expenses.

But all of this required time to accumulate; if they could get some ransom from the Phong family that could also ease the financial strain on the Righteous Blood Sect.

"Phong family won't be able to give that much." Phong Yue stared at Lu Ye in shock. A hundred thousand Spirit Stones... he really dared to ask for that much. With his strong features, she hadn't expected him to also be so ruthless.

Well, that made sense. If this man wasn't ruthless, how could he possibly have used the Insect Plague to continuously take over the territories of two powers?

"No more nonsense, hurry up and contact!"

Coerced by Lu Ye's 'gentle persuasion', Phong Yue had no choice but to contact Phong Xiangyang.

Actually, Phong Xiangyang had already contacted Phong Yue before and knew of her current situation. He had even asked her to tell Lu Ye that he was willing to spend some Spirit Stones to ransom her back.

However, Phong Yue had never mentioned this to Lu Ye.

As for why he didn't come in person... he didn't have the guts. Every cultivator from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge within hundreds of miles knew that one should never get anywhere within ten miles of the Righteous Blood Sect's garrison. One time, an 8th Heaven Level cultivator from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge passed nearby controlling his weapon, and then a shadow fell... and he was gone!

So it's not that the Phong family didn't want to ransom people; there was just no suitable channel of communication, and messages to Phong Yue were often lost.

"What if I can't contact him?" Phong Yue lifted her gaze, subtly assessing Lu Ye.

Lu Ye drew the Boulder Mountain Saber and placed it at his feet, the implication clear.

Phong Yue quickly transmitted her message.

Shortly after, she softly said, "I've made contact."

"What did they say?"

Lu Ye casually asked, his palm actively channeling spirit force, intertwining strands of Yin Origin and Yang Origin, gradually forming the outline of spirit runes.

"They can provide three thousand Spirit Stones..." Phong Yue replied timidly.

The spirit rune that was almost formed suddenly collapsed because of the disruption in spirit force.

Lu Ye looked up at Phong Yue.

"Three thousand?"

"Yes."

"Then you are of no use to me."

Lu Ye was not without the intention to bargain, but his asking price was one hundred thousand, and the other party's counteroffer was three thousand. There was hardly any sincerity in such a deal; continuing to negotiate would be a waste of words.

"Kong Niu!" Lu Ye shouted at Kong Niu, who was busy doing something in front of the Heaven's Augury Pillar.

"Hmm," responded the bulky Kong Niu in a muffled voice.

"Drag this woman away and slaughter her!"

"Okay." Kong Niu strode forward, and with a gaze of terror from Phong Yue, he grasped her hair with a hand as big as a fan, turned around, and dragged her outside.

Kong Niu was a straightforward person who had only followed orders from Hua Ci before, but now he also obeyed Lu Ye.

Phong Yue was stunned until, after being dragged on the ground for a distance, she shouted, "The Phong clan redeemed me to bear the blame for losing the station, so they couldn't possibly give too many Spirit Stones."

She struggled wildly and managed to break free from Kong Niu's hold, tumbling and crawling before Lu Ye, she knelt down, looking up at him with tear-filled eyes and said, "There is infighting in the Phong clan. My faction, which originally held great power, has lost the station under my watch.

Even as a healing cultivator, if I am redeemed by the Phong family, it is a certain death for me, so they can't possibly spend too many Spirit Stones on someone bound to die; they just need someone to take the blame for this incident."

Kong Niu stood not far away, looked down at the bunch of hair in his hand, then turned around and walked back towards Phong Yue.

Lu Ye raised his hand, and the towering figure of Kong Niu stood still behind Phong Yue, casting a shadow over her.

Lu Ye lowered his head, looking down at the disheveled woman before him.

"So you're saying that I can't possibly get many Spirit Stones from the Phong family?"

"Absolutely impossible!"

Lu Ye thought of Dong Shuye, who had defected from his sect because he had lost a station. The responsibility was indeed overwhelming. Even though she was a healing cultivator and had the backing of the ruling faction before, as Phong Yue had said, she was bound to die upon being redeemed by the Phong family.

If the station was lost and countless disciples were killed or injured, how could they not punish such a failure? How would they account to the deceased cultivators and command respect in the future?

"Then what use are you?"

Lu Ye felt somewhat distressed. He had initially thought that with her role as a Governor, Phong Yue's value would definitely be high. Now it seemed he had oversimplified matters. Because she was the Governor, it led to the Phong family being unlikely to offer a high price. Paying a high price to redeem someone just to execute them was not something the Phong family's Spirit Stones would easily cover.

"I am a healing cultivator; I can switch my allegiance to the Righteous Blood Sect!" Phong Yue hastily said, apparently having already considered this option.

"You must be dreaming."

Phong Yue dared to switch allegiance to the Righteous Blood Sect to seek a slim chance of survival, but Lu Ye couldn't accept her.

He had only just conquered their station and killed hundreds of their cultivators. If he took in their Governor immediately after, what if Phong Yue harbored malice? Would Lu Ye always have to be on guard against her?

Moreover, switching sects required a lot of merit points, because forcefully erasing the markings of one's own force consumed a large number of merits... No, as the Governor of the Phong family, she had the authority to erase the marks of the sect's disciples, including her own.

The issue of loyalty to the Righteous Blood Sect could also be resolved by making Phong Yue swear an oath by Heaven's Augury.

From their few interactions, Lu Ye had begun to understand this woman's nature. When her own life was at stake, she was very pliant, as could be seen from her initial resolute kneeling.

She was a woman, but she was also a Level 7 cultivator. Kneeling in the face of life and death threats, without any resolve, she couldn't have done it.

Yet sometimes she showed great resolve. Previously, when Lu Ye had asked her to relay false information to the Phong family's cultivators to lure them out of the insect cave, Phong Yue had opted to die rather than comply.

In short, she was very self-interested but not without loyalty to her own faction.

Leaning closer, Lu Ye reached out and lifted Phong Yue's chin.

"How many merit points do you have?"

"Over four thousand..." Phong Yue knew that this moment could determine her life or death, she dared not lie about anything.

Lu Ye let go of her, stood up, and walked to the Heaven's Augury Pillar. Soon, he brought back a Heaven's Augury Pact and threw it to Phong Yue.

"Sign it!"

Phong Yue sat kneeling on the ground, examining the pact. She noticed many clauses densely packed on it, including never to harm any cultivator of the Righteous Blood Sect, not to communicate any information concerning the Righteous Blood Sect to anyone, and not to harbor any grudge against Lu Ye or his associates...

All in all, there were no fewer than twenty clauses.

Phong Yue felt dizzy trying to understand how Lu Ye could have come up with so many clauses in such a short time.

If she signed this Heaven's Augury Pact, she would pose no threat whatsoever to the Righteous Blood Sect thereafter.

"Is this a deed of sale?"

Phong Yue looked up, her eyes brimming with grievance, as things were unfolding differently from what she had expected.

"Just say whether you'll sign it or not."

Chapter 234 A Windfall

A while later, Lu Ye put away the Heaven's Augury Pact, and an invisible mighty force fell from the obscurity above, merging into Phong Yue's body.

"Erase your own battlefield marking."

Lu Ye commanded.

The despondent Phong Yue, upon hearing this, cheerfully responded, "Yes!"

A moment later, a red light on the back of Phong Yue's hand collapsed into tiny glowing particles that dissipated, a sign that the battlefield marking had been erased.

Lu Ye had already taken out his Governor's big seal, blew a breath on it, and beckoned to Phong Yue, reciting, "Today, I take in the independent cultivator Phong Yue as a disciple in name of the Righteous Blood Sect, and I respectfully request Heaven's Augury as witness!"

He pressed the big seal onto the back of her hand.

Blue light surged, and Phong Yue looked at Lu Ye with gratitude in her eyes. Although she had lost her status as a Governor, preserving her life was still a good thing.

"Go and donate four thousand merits."

"Ah? Oh," Phong Yue hurriedly ran to the Heaven's Augury Pillar, performed the necessary actions, her heart aching. As a cultivator of Level 7, under normal circumstances, it was impossible for her to accumulate so many merits.

But let's not forget, she was from the Phong Clan and a Governor, naturally, she could engage in some embezzling, just like how Lu Ye previously granted himself a monthly stipend, which he earned fairly with Hua Ci in the Chess Sea, so he distributed it without guilt. However, it was different with the Phong family.

Lu Ye had also heard that she had over four thousand merits, which is why he decided to take her in as a disciple in name of the Righteous Blood Sect. Simply put, that was Phong Yue's life-saving money.

Since it was impossible to get a satisfactory ransom from the Phong Clan, it wasn't bad getting some merit from Phong Yue's side. Otherwise, what was the point of abducting her? To keep her as a trophy?

If he wanted something nice to look at, he merely needed to look more at Hua Ci.

"Fifth brother," Phong Yue came back after donating and called out to Lu Ye softly as 'Fifth Brother', mimic the way others did.

Lu Ye glanced at her and announced loudly, "Righteous Blood Sect's disciple in name, Phong Yue, has been disrespectful to the sect. I, Lu Ye, as the acting Governor, strip Phong Yue of her status as a disciple in name, and I respectfully request Heaven's Augury as witness!"

"?" Phong Yue looked at Lu Ye with a dumbfounded face, feeling the marking that had just appeared on the back of her hand once again collapse and vanish in a swirl of light.

It truly hadn't occurred to her that Lu Ye would so blatantly burn his bridges right in front of her...and moreover, she had only called out 'Fifth Brother.' How was that disrespectful to the sect?

Was her tone not affectionate enough?

Only at this moment did she realize that to Lu Ye, her value consisted solely in those four thousand merit points. He had taken her in as a disciple in name only to facilitate the donation of her merits.

Now drained, she was utterly worthless...

Feeling weak, she staggered backward, her voice quivering with a crying tone, "So, you still intend to kill me?"

"Why would I! After all, you've contributed four thousand merits to our sect, and I generally don't kill women. I was just scaring you earlier. If you wish to stay, it's up to you; if you want to leave, that's also up to you. Just like that!"

After finishing, Lu Ye walked to the Heaven's Augury Pillar to return to sect headquarters, leaving Phong Yue standing there, dazed. In no time, she pouted and began to cry.

She had lost everything...

There was no way Lu Ye would actually accept Phong Yue into the sect, even as an independent cultivator seeking shelter, because no matter what, Phong Yue was from the Phong family, the former Governor. He could abduct her, kill her, but the one thing he couldn't do was to accept her—an issue of maintaining a tacit understanding that has existed between the two major camps for a long time.

Otherwise, if everyone did this, captured healing cultivators would surely not die, but they would also have only one option, which would be to turn to the enemy.

With the Heaven's Augury Pact in hand, Lu Ye wasn't worried that Phong Yue would have any detrimental thoughts towards the Righteous Blood Sect, so she was free to leave if she wished.

If she didn't want to leave and chose to stay, even if Ten Thousand Demons Ridge discovered her whereabouts, it could be explained that the Righteous Blood Sect and the Phong Clan hadn't agreed on a satisfactory ransom—it wouldn't be that the Righteous Blood Sect didn't release her, but that the Phong family's offer was insufficient and lacked sincerity.

Lu Ye estimated that there was a high probability this woman wouldn't leave, given that the Phong family was currently anxious to catch her. If she dared to leave the territory of the Righteous Blood Sect, that would be walking into a trap.

So, she was likely to stay.

This meant the Righteous Blood Sect had acquired a healing cultivator with neither name nor rank for nothing... and that was quite clever.

The Insect Plague had just passed, and the Spirit Stream battlefield was expected to be peaceful for some time. Both neighbors beside the Righteous Blood Sect had been crippled, neither Sky Fiend Hall nor the Phong family had any capital left to confront the Righteous Blood Sect, making it the perfect time for the Righteous Blood Sect to take over the nearby veins.

This matter, with Hua Ci arranging it, didn't require Lu Ye to worry about anything.

He decided to take this opportunity to go to Bright Heart Peak to learn properly the Path of Spirit Runes from Madam Yun, and if he could learn how to perform array destruction, it would be the best.

Having tasted the sweetness of taking over someone else's territory, Lu Ye craved more. Killing Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators indeed earned merit, but it wasn't as swift as conquering territories.

Therefore, array destruction was crucial. As long as he could break through others' protective arrays, he would be able to do whatever he pleased!

Returning to sect headquarters, he called for Amber, and Lu Ye headed straight for Bright Heart Peak.

In these past days, he had completed the construction of the two spirit runes that Madam Yun had previously assigned, which were useless numeric spirit runes. After getting accustomed to them, even though there were failures in the construction process, he could now be considered proficient. What remained was just the need for time to settle and gather experience.

After explaining his intentions, Madam Yun chuckled, "You want to decipher someone else's Sect Protection Array?"

"Yes."

Madam Yun shook her head and said, "That is too far-fetched for you. To decrypt a big array, you first need to know how to set up an array. Do you know how to do that?"

"Not yet, but I can learn," Lu Ye replied.

Madam Yun pondered briefly, then spoke, "Originally, based on your accomplishments in the Path of Spirit Runes, you should not have come into contact with these things so early; however, you possess exceptional talent and have also received the inheritance of a spirit runes master. It would be inappropriate to view you through conventional wisdom. Your cultivation progress can be expedited.

Before that, let's test you first."

She raised her hand and summoned several books, which flew over and were laid out in front of Lu Ye.

"You have half a day to finish reading these books."

Madam Yun left, and Lu Ye picked up one of the books and started to study it carefully.

He had brought back many books from Madam Yun before, all of which recorded the basics of spirit runes. The content in these new books clearly surpassed the basics and had reached a practical level.

Moreover, they explained how to break spirit runes.

As spirit runes could be constructed, naturally, they could also be decrypted. Decrypting spirit runes was a method to break formations since every formation relied on spirit runes to function. If the runes in a formation were decrypted, the formation would naturally fail to sustain itself.

The foundations he had laid down previously were now coming into play; otherwise, even if Lu Ye held these books, he wouldn't have understood what was written in them.

Engrossed in his studies, occasionally when Lu Ye encountered a particularly fine point, he would have moments of enlightenment, understanding things that had previously puzzled him.

The gains were tremendous!

Half a day was just enough time for Lu Ye to finish reading the books.

Madam Yun returned, taking out a crystal tablet that was a foot square with spirit stones embedded around it.

With the surge of her spirit force, a spirit rune immediately emerged on the crystal tablet.

Such a spirit rune, if not continuously replenished with spirit force, would soon vanish; the spirit stones embedded in the tablet supplied the spirit force, which is why, once constructed, it could be maintained indefinitely.

"Break it!" Madam Yun handed the crystal tablet to Lu Ye.

Lu Ye solemnly took it, channeling his spirit force into the rune and sensing its structure. To break a spirit rune, one must first understand its construction, essentially the basic analysis, at the very least, how many Yin and Yang origins composed it. He must have an idea in his mind, only then could he stand a chance at decryption.

If one could not figure that out, there was no possibility of breaking it.

The method to break a spirit rune was to construct the opposite basic element, causing the rune to gradually dissolve.

In other words, to break a spirit rune, one must build something with a completely opposite basic element...

Lu Ye had previously analyzed spirit runes and thus had experience, so after only a short observation, he had an idea.

He immediately began to channel his spirit force, attempting to decrypt the spirit rune.

However, the rune quickly became chaotic and the spirit force burst open.

The first attempt failed.

Madam Yun took back the crystal tablet, constructed the same spirit rune again, and handed it to Lu Ye.

Lu Ye continued to attempt decryption.

After failing time and again, and with Madam Yun painstakingly reconstructing the rune each time and handing it back to him, he never grew tired of it.

Time slowly passed by, and while progress wasn't fast, Lu Ye wasn't impatient. Instead, he accumulated experience from each failure and searched for the trick.

Madam Yun said his talent in the Path of Spirit Runes was exceptional, but it wasn't actually his own talent; instead, it was thanks to the Talent Tree.

Every spirit rune he obtained from the Talent Tree came with complete knowledge about that rune, deeply ingrained as if he had cultivated it himself.

The knowledge that came with those runes often had universal applications to other runes. However, the ability to actively apply these universals was Lu Ye's own skill.

After a full six hours, Lu Ye had decrypted less than twenty percent of the rune. At this rate, it would take at least several days of Cultivation Technique and some luck to fully decrypt it.

The reality was quite different. After another two hours, Lu Ye's progress improved by leaps and bounds, and he had decrypted up to eighty percent of the rune!

Because he had found some practical tricks in those repeated failures.

Another two hours later, the spirit rune was completely decrypted!

Madam Yun nodded, "Not bad, your reading was not in vain. It's late now, come back tomorrow and we'll continue."

"Yes!"

Lu Ye stood up, took several unread books from Madam Yun, and rode Amber back to Righteous Peak.

Moments later, he squatted by the kitchen door, holding a large bowl and stuffing his face with food, his mind full of thoughts about spirit runes, while Shui Yuan kept adding more food to his bowl.

An hour later, Lu Ye, rubbing his round belly, returned to his quarters. He didn't know why, but he had eaten a bit too much today...

The days passed by day by day; Lu Ye would go to Bright Heart Peak during the day to learn the Path of Spirit Runes from Madam Yun, and in the evening, he would return to his quarters for cultivation and reading. Every day was exceedingly fulfilling.

He had not returned to the Mirage Realm since he wasn't confident in getting through the nine challenges in one go. Even though he now had a total of five thousand merits, he didn't want to waste them senselessly.

Chapter 235 I am a Locksmith

After returning from the Chess Sea, Lu Ye had accumulated a total of 5,352 points of merit. Later, he spent 2,000 of those points to buy ten portions of Earth's Core Fire, and he often entered the Mirage Realm to train, causing his merit points to gradually decrease.

During the process of dealing with the Insect Plague, he earned a significant amount of merit, and afterward, Hua Ci decided to grant him a portion of his monthly salary, bringing the total to an even 5,000 points.

Thus, for the time being, Lu Ye was not short of merit points.

In order to accelerate his learning of the Path of Spirit Runes with Madam Yun, he purchased another ten portions of Earth's Core Fire from Heaven's Augury treasure vault, allowing the Talent Tree to devour them one by one, and he obtained a few spirit runes.

Because he discovered something— the more spirit runes he mastered, the higher his attainment in the Path of Spirit Runes would be, making it simpler to learn other related subjects.

This led to his rapid progress in the cultivation of the Path of Spirit Runes with Madam Yun, earning him great admiration from her.

On the first day, it took him the entire daylight hours just to barely decode a spirit rune.

But on the second day, he decoded a spirit rune in just over two hours.

By the third day, decoding a spirit rune only took half an hour.

After five or six days, even the most complex spirit runes constructed by Madam Yun were quickly decoded by Lu Ye.

Decoding a single spirit rune no longer posed a challenge to him.

Therefore, Madam Yun created hybrid spirit runes, which involved a special technique to combine two or even three or more different spirit runes together, thereby allowing these runes to interact and produce a stronger effect.

This type of hybrid spirit rune also has another name: restriction!

Lu Ye had studied restrictions before and had been confused because he found out that what are called restrictions are built on the foundation of spirit runes; however, at that time, he had not systematically studied the Path of Spirit Runes, so he only understood it vaguely and could not comprehend it fully.

Now, with teachings from Madam Yun, his mastery in the Path of Spirit Runes had already greatly improved compared to the past.

Depending on the number of spirit runes comprising a restriction, the restriction has that many paths.

For example, Lu Ye's Boulder Mountain Saber is referred to as a Restriction Level 9 spirit artifact because it is inscribed with nine spirit runes, cleverly interwoven together to form a whole.

Lu Ye started with decoding hybrid spirit runes of the 2nd Dao restriction, and quickly progressed to decoding the 3rd Dao, 4th Dao, and so on.

Now, his lessons with Madam Yun felt like he was playing a game with her, with her providing questions in the form of spirit runes for Lu Ye to decode, which might seem boring to someone unfamiliar with the Path of Spirit Runes.

But Lu Ye found it very interesting, as each decoding process was unique and, with accumulated experience and guidance from Madam Yun, he was able to extract a lot of useful knowledge and techniques.

...

After returning from seeking advice from Shui Yuan, Hua Ci headed straight for the training room, like Lu Ye, she often spent the night there, and was not fussy about her living arrangements.

Compared to her days on Mount Ying, her current life was undoubtedly more comfortable. She did not have to work hard at a stall every day; there were many junior brothers and sisters in the sect, the sect headquarters had a Second Senior Sister who could instruct her, and the nature's spiritual energy here was much richer than on Mount Ying.

Since Lu Ye brought her to Righteous Blood Sect, she gradually grew fond of this place.

Under the guidance of Shui Yuan, her medical skills also improved rapidly.

With a gentle smile that warmed others' hearts, she greeted the junior brothers and sisters she met along the way, pushed open the door of her training room, then suddenly stopped, stepping back a few steps and looking around.

Indeed, this was her training room, but there was an additional person inside.

She looked closely and finally saw what that person was doing...

She couldn't help but laugh silently. Was it finally time to deal with those stored items? She had thoughts of sending these items to the nearest Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union for disposal, but when Second Senior Sister heard about it, she advised her to keep them as Lu Ye might need them anytime.

Now, it seemed that the time had come to put them to use.

She walked into the training room, closed the door, and approached Lu Ye, who was sitting in a corner with storage sacks piled on either side.

There were more on the left side and fewer on the right, only about a dozen or so.

Hua Ci casually grabbed one of those dozen storage sacks from the right, briefly checked and found that these previously locked storage sacks were now open, and their contents could be taken out.

While learning to decode spirit runes with Madam Yun for half a month, Lu Ye was still a long way from being able to decode other people's Sect Protection Arrays, but decoding the restrictions in storage sacks was no longer a big issue.

Storage sacks are actually sewn from a special kind of demon beast hide, which has the characteristic of expanding space when it comes into contact with spirit force; after some procedural handling, it is most suitable for making storage sacks.

This type of demon beast is not difficult to breed, and many sects in the Nine Provinces bred this demon beast to increase the sect's income by selling the demon beast hide, even specializing in it for economic gain.

Because of this, storage sacks themselves are not very valuable, as the cost of producing them is not high.

Each storage sack has spirit runes inscribed by a spirit runes master, and depending on the master's habit, the types of spirit runes inscribed vary; however, without exception, there's always a restriction centered around explosive combustion.

This restriction is key to the storage sack.

The restriction, centered around explosive combustion, is constructed by a special technique. If it comes into abrupt contact with unfamiliar spirit force, it will quickly ignite, thereby destroying the entire storage sack.

Therefore, there is something called a restriction lock in each storage sack, and the key to unlocking it is the cultivator's spirit force.

Of course, because of this restriction, another profession called locksmith has emerged in the cultivation world...

Lu Ye had once hired a locksmith from Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union to unlock a storage sack, profiting once and losing once. In summary, unlocking involves risks, and investment should be cautious.

With Lu Ye's current proficiency on the Path of Spirit Runes, being a locksmith would be more than enough for him. According to Madam Yun, those truly talented in spirit runes wouldn't choose to be locksmiths.

The so-called locksmiths are just mediocre spirit runes masters, hardly acknowledged in distinguished circles.

However, Lu Ye currently needed such experience to train himself, and although learning from Madam Yun allowed for rapid growth, observing the methods of other spirit runes masters surely wouldn't hurt.

This was also Madam Yun's suggestion. According to her, the Path of Spirit Runes depends on three things: talent, skill, and practice and accumulation, none of which can be absent.

As Hua Ci was examining those storage sacks, Lu Ye suddenly threw the storage sack in his hand, and before it hit the ground, it burst into flames and quickly turned to ash.

Hua Ci looked up at him, "Did I disturb you?"

"Not at all."

Lu Ye picked up another storage sack emotionlessly and continued to break its restriction. Though he had a high success rate now, he failed occasionally.

This was unavoidable in the early stages.

A moment later, he managed to open the storage sack in his hand, looked inside briefly, and then tossed it aside.

Overall, the governors and deputy governors who participated in the Spirit Stream Defense Battle were not too poor; their storage sacks always contained some Spirit Stones, elixir pills, and Spirit Talismans.

However, there were no spectacularly eye-catching items to be found.

One would think that participating in a dangerous event like the Spirit Stream Defense Battle, carrying anything valuable would be risky—if one were to be killed, wouldn't it just benefit the enemy?

So, the items in these storage sacks were generally practical, and not of very high value.

These were precisely the things that Hua Ci needed at the moment; the accumulation of items from so many storage sacks amounted to a considerable fortune.

In the deep silence of the night, Lu Ye unlocked storage sacks while Hua Ci sat in the center of the Spirit Gathering Array and cultivated.

Only at dawn did Lu Ye finish dealing with all the storage sacks. The number of sacks that had been destroyed was about a dozen, not too many.

His efficiency had already been quite impressive, especially since Lu Ye had never done this job before.

He must continue to push himself!

Lu Ye stood up and stretched lazily.

"I'm going to Bright Heart Peak, message me if you need anything!"

As he passed by Hua Ci, he ruffled her hair, left a word, and then pushed the door and left.

"Sixth Senior Sister!" A crisp voice called out from outside, apparently waiting.

Eyes locking, He Xiyang was stunned, "F... Fifth Senior Brother?"

Her gaze shifted, passing over Lu Ye to see Hua Ci inside the training room, arranging her hair, her smile gradually stiffening.

"Don't block the way!"

Lu Ye placed his hand on her head and moved He Xiyang aside, walking straight toward the direction of the Heaven's Augury Hall.

That day, many saw He Xiying wandering around the camp like a zombie, muttering phrases like "no chance left" and "someone got there first"...

During the days, as usual, she studied the Path of Spirit Runes with Madam Yun.

In the evening, instead of going to the training room, Lu Ye went straight to the marketplace.

This marketplace had originally been established by independent cultivators under Chen Yu's management. Later, these cultivators either became disciples in name of the Righteous Blood Sect or affiliated themselves with the sect, and the marketplace was consequently retained.

Compared to before, its popularity hadn't diminished; rather, it increased as more independent cultivators came to this area, even including those affiliated under Haotian Alliance forces drawn by its fame.

This kept the marketplace bustling as sect disciples and independent cultivators came here to do small business, supplementing their cultivation needs, and Lu Ye naturally wouldn't stop them.

Righteous Blood Sect didn't have as many rules as other sects—just one: don't do anything that harms the Righteous Blood Sect.

Also, because they had weakened two nearby Ten Thousand Demons Ridge forces a while ago, the Righteous Blood Sect disciples now had a larger area to operate within. With more room to operate, naturally, the profits increased.

Lu Ye found a quiet corner upon arriving, set up a sign he had prepared in advance, and then took out a book to read, appearing relaxed.

"Fifth Senior Brother!" Those passing by greeted him promptly, quickly noticing the sign next to him, and couldn't help but read out loud, "Free Lock Opening!"

Chapter 236 Break First, Establish After

"Fifth Brother, can you unlock the restriction lock on the storage sack?" The disciple asked curiously, since he had never seen their Fifth Brother possess this skill before.

"I can!"

"Please wait a moment, Brother."

The disciple hurried away, and returned shortly with a storage sack in hand, which he handed to Lu Ye, "Please help me open this storage sack, Fifth Brother."

It was one of the spoils of war he had picked from a pile after the Insect Plague; there were hundreds of storage sacks accumulated on the plaza at that time, which was also why Lu Ye came here to unlock them for free.

The storage sacks from Hua Ci had already been dealt with, but there were still many that the disciples had not handled. Most of these sacks came from the Phong Clan, and certainly could not compare in quality to those from Hua Ci. No one knew exactly what was inside; they could contain treasures or could be a pile of junk.

So the holders of the storage sacks kept them, not going to the nearby Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union to find someone to unlock them, in case it resulted in a loss.

Lu Ye took the storage sack and began to work.

Soon, a crowd gathered around him, having heard that Lu Ye was helping people unlock restriction locks for free, they all came to see this novelty.

As the spirit force surged, Lu Ye suddenly frowned, raised his hand, and tossed the storage sack into the air.

A pairs of eyes looked up just in time to see the storage sack rapidly bursting into flames and turning into a fireball in the blink of an eye!

Lu Ye looked up as well, his brows deeply furrowed.

The first attempt had not been successful! The very first storage sack was destroyed.

Originally, he had wanted to build a good reputation among the disciples with his skill so that he would have more storage sacks to open, but instead, he'd set off fireworks for everyone...

The bustling scene suddenly fell silent, and the disciples felt rather awkward.

"Fifth Brother..." The disciple who had brought the storage sack looked at Lu Ye with a pitiful expression.

"Yours is gone," said Lu Ye calmly, looking at him. "Opening sacks comes with risks."

"Oh," the disciple said, disheartened, wondering if he could ask Fifth Brother to compensate for the storage sack that had been ruined. Accepting his bad luck, he consoled himself by thinking that there must have been nothing but trash in that storage sack, and he didn't feel sorry about it at all.

Lu Ye scanned the surroundings, the disciples' gaze flitting away, and some even hiding their storage sacks behind their backs...

"Who's that!"

Lu Ye pointed at a disciple, "Hand over the storage sack hidden behind you!"

The disciple felt like mourning the dead; how could he disobey? He walked over to Lu Ye reluctantly and handed over the hidden storage sack, cautiously advising, "Take your time, Fifth Brother, I'm not in a hurry."

Lu Ye activated his spirit force, cracking the restriction inside.

This time it went smoothly, and shortly after, Lu Ye tossed the now-unlocked storage sack back to the disciple.

"It's done."

The disciple was slightly stunned but quickly inspected the sack and discovered it was indeed opened. Not knowing what treasures were inside, he suddenly burst into laughter, "Haha, I've struck it rich!"

After laughing twice, he hurriedly thanked Lu Ye, "Many thanks, Fifth Brother!"

"Next!" Lu Ye waved his hand.

The onlooking cultivators were astonished since they truly could unlock the restriction locks! After the first storage sack was destroyed by Lu Ye, they all hesitated to try again, but to their surprise, the second attempt was a success.

"This is mine, Fifth Brother," a female cultivator stepped forward and handed over her storage sack.

Lu Ye broke the restriction again and tossed it back to her a moment later.

"Many thanks, Fifth Brother, you are truly amazing," the female cultivator praised Lu Ye before joyfully running off.

With the success of the first two attempts, more people were encouraged to try. After more than ten consecutive successes without a single failure, it solidified the cultivators' confidence in Lu Ye.

It appeared that the first destroyed storage sack had not been due to Lu Ye's lack of skill, but rather a matter of luck.

The news spread rapidly, and soon a large number of cultivators gathered, forming an orderly queue.

The occasional failure did occur, but the situation was much better than the previous day's; when one did fail, the storage sack was simply destroyed, and the few unlucky disciples could only accept their fate.

Lu Ye kept busy until dawn and then stretched and stood up, announcing, "That's enough for now. We'll continue in the evening."

For several days in a row, Lu Ye set up a stall in the marketplace to unlock sacks, continuing until all the spoils of war the disciples had obtained were processed, and only then did he stop.

With the experience accumulated from unlocking time after time, combined with his daytime learning from Madam Yun, his proficiency in the Path of Spirit Runes continued to improve.

As his proficiency improved, he could understand the books more easily. Gaining knowledge from the books enhanced his own proficiency, thus creating a virtuous cycle.

The game with Madam Yun began to escalate, simple restriction breaking could no longer challenge Lu Ye, so Madam Yun started setting up Formations for him to break.

That was exactly the direction Lu Ye wished to learn in, his ultimate goal was to decipher the Sect Protection Arrays of the various Ten Thousand Demons Ridge strongholds! As long as he had this ability, then in the future, he could have as much merit as he wanted.

A cultivator's daily life, cultivation, and even combat are all intimately connected with spirit runes, so many cultivators are familiar with spirit runes, even capable of constructing some, but compared to a real spirit runes master, the difference is vast.

Take array cultivators, for instance, this is actually considered a branch of spirit runes masters, as array setup involves spirit runes.

It can be said, any spirit runes master is an outstanding array cultivator, but an array cultivator does not equal a spirit runes master.

As of today, Lu Ye had come to realize Madam Yun's teaching principles, everything started from breaking! Including at the very beginning when she let Lu Ye analyze those numerical spirit runes, it was the same.

Madam Yun didn't teach Lu Ye how to construct restrictions, but over this period, Lu Ye had broken so many restriction locks of storage sacks, that he was already thoroughly familiar with the structure of restriction locks. If he had suitable materials, he could even create his own storage sack now, of course, he couldn't guarantee success, but practice makes perfect.

This was the brilliance in Madam Yun's teaching method, first break, then establish!

When Lu Ye was able to easily break those restrictions, it would naturally come to him how to construct them, because he was extremely familiar with every part of those restrictions.

Currently, Madam Yun hadn't taught Lu Ye how to set up Formations either, but in the process of array destruction, Lu Ye would naturally understand how these Formations operated. Once he could perfectly break through every kind of Formation, he himself would be able to arrange Formations.

On Bright Heart Peak, watching Lu Ye who was engrossed in breaking a Formation, Madam Yun wore a complex expression.

In her earlier years, she had actually taught a few disciples, but she had never used this method of teaching on any of them, because although this method yields quick results, it has high demands on talent, and insufficient aptitude could even have the opposite effect.

Initially, she had only tried it out a little, prepared to see the effects. If it proved unsuitable, she would switch to a more conventional teaching method, which was slow to show results but surer.

However, over this period, she found that Lu Ye was highly suited for this method of teaching, which couldn't help but reignite her thoughts of taking Lu Ye as a disciple.

The disciples she had taught in earlier years were no longer around, and for a top spirit runes master like her, it was a sad thing to have no one to inherit her mantle.

If it were this youth, he could definitely carry on her mantle gloriously, even surpassing the teacher!

This thought churned in her heart every day until she could no longer suppress it.

Leaving Lu Ye to break the Formation on his own, Madam Yun walked away, her figure leaping towards Righteous Peak.

Meanwhile, at Righteous Peak, while teaching Yiyi, the sect master turned his head to look toward Bright Heart Peak, in haste he said, "That's enough for today. Practice twice as much when you return."

"Yes!" Yiyi replied respectfully.

But then she saw the sect master rush out, and outside came his somewhat ingratiating voice, "Yun'er, what brings you here?"

Yun'er? Yiyi's eyes were filled with confusion, and following outside, she saw a beautiful, unfamiliar woman standing coldly in front of the sect master, who was all smiles, a stark contrast to his usual dignified demeanor.

That must be Madam Yun, right? Yiyi suddenly remembered someone Lu Ye had mentioned before, and Amber had also exchanged information about her since Lu Ye often rode Amber to go to Bright Heart Peak, and Amber had seen Madam Yun several times.

"Shush!" Shui Yuan appeared out of nowhere, pulling her into the room, then tore a hole in the window paper and stuck one eye to the opening to spy outside.

Seeing this, Yiyi imitated her.

"The old man is going to get a beating," Shui Yuan suddenly said.

"What?" Yiyi was startled.

No sooner had she spoken than the distinguished Madam Yun threw a punch, sending the sect master's head reeling back, a ring of explosive force centered on his head bursting forth.

Yiyi trembled, feeling that Madam Yun's punch could shatter a mountain peak.

She didn't know why the sect master was getting beaten, but after seeing him take the beating without getting angry, as if nothing had happened, he wiped the blood from his nose and sighed, "Yiye is already a disciple of the Righteous Blood Sect, how can he casually take someone else as his master?"

"Casual? Outsider?" Madam Yun's tone suddenly escalated, "Are you telling me I'm an outsider now?"

"No... not at all, listen to my explanation!"

"Oh, so I am an outsider!" infuriated, Madam Yun's spirit force began to roil, "Then let this outsider, see the capability of the Righteous Blood Sect master!"

Boom boom boom... Powerful fluctuations of spirit force erupted outside, Yiyi watched dumbfounded as the sect master was sent flying, then disappeared from view.

Upon running outside, she saw two figures chasing each other across the sky, a lively scene, with powerful fluctuations of spirit force emanating time and again, but from what she could see, it was only the sect master getting beat up one-sidedly. Faced with Madam Yun's successive attacks, he could at best defend a little and never fought back.

"Alas," Shui Yuan sighed.

Yiyi was worried, "The sect master won't be beaten to death, right?"

"The old man's body is tough, he won't die. And such things happen several times a year, you'll get used to it eventually," said Shui Yuan.

Yiyi, full of confusion, thinking the sect master was just a magic cultivator, wondered if it was really okay for him to be beaten up like this. And what did it mean that this happened several times a year?

Suddenly, she felt the sect master was quite fortunate to have survived this long.

Chapter 237 Ideas

Within the Mirage Realm, Lu Ye was surrounded by the spirit light of two weapon-controlled Spiritual Artifacts, holding the Boulder Mountain Saber and killing his way through, as one after another, a Level 7 Insect Race member fell to the ground.

In his spare time learning from Madam Yun about the Path of Spirit Runes, Lu Ye had found another Spiritual Artifact suitable for weapon control from Hua Ci.

He was currently controlling two Spiritual Artifacts, both of which had similar designs and comparable power.

Although he did not have the monstrous talent of Li Baxian on the Weapon Control Path, he was definitely not inferior.

As a spirit runes master, his control over his own spirit force far exceeded that of other cultivators at the same level.

Additionally, thanks to the Talent Tree, his spirit force was extremely pure, so if Lu Ye wished, he could probably control up to three or even four Spiritual Artifacts!

But controlling weapons was extremely mentally taxing, which is why the majority of Spirit Stream Realm cultivators could only control one weapon—because they could not divide their attention to control a second one. Forcing the issue would only result in reducing the power of their controlled weapons, so it was better to focus on mastering one.

At this stage, Lu Ye felt that controlling two Spiritual Artifacts was enough; any more would likely be a burden on him.

The two Spiritual Artifacts soared and fluttered, making it difficult for Level 7 Insect Race members to get close. Even if they managed to break through the weapons' blockade and charge at Lu Ye, they were only delivering themselves to death.

Moments later, the spirit light of the controlled weapons returned, and neatly lying around him were the corpses of nine Insect Race members...

He had broken through the ninth barrier!

The corpses suddenly vanished, and a dense surge in front of him indicated that something was about to charge out.

Here it comes!

Lu Ye looked up with anticipation.

When he was at Spirit Stream Level 6, he had fought his way through the nine barriers of the Insect Race, and then a cultivator had charged out of the mist. But after that, he went on to ascend to Level 7, and upon entering the Mirage Realm again, he began fighting the Insect Race once more.

Fighting the Insect Race also honed his combat skills, but it was not as effective as battling other cultivators.

Therefore, Lu Ye had always wanted to get through the nine barriers of the Insect Race to see if another cultivator would emerge. Previously, there wasn't a significant increase in strength, so he didn't waste his efforts and merit on it.

Now that he was capable of controlling two Spiritual Artifacts, his strength had increased and fighting the Insect Race was indeed much smoother.

Amidst the rolling fog, a figure burst out, holding a long spear surrounded by spirit light and thrusting it straight at Lu Ye's face.

Lu Ye was delighted. It seemed that, just as he had guessed, if he could kill all the Insect Race members in one go, what awaited him would be other cultivators.

Of course, it wasn't a living person, but rather the mysterious nature of the Mirage Realm. He could not even see clearly what the cultivator looked like, nor could he determine their gender because the dense mist enveloped their entire being.

An incense stick's time later, inside the training room, Lu Ye suddenly opened his eyes, his face a shade paler.

Raising his hand, he rubbed his head. The Mirage Realm was a great place. The only downside was that every time he died and came out, his head felt as if it had been poked by a needle, causing unbearable pain.

Just now, in the Mirage Realm, he had repeatedly slain several cultivators. The manner of the cultivators' appearance was different from the Insect Race; the Insect Race came in increasing numbers, from one to nine, without a change in their cultivation.

The cultivators, however, gradually increased in cultivation, with only one at a time.

But those cultivators, shrouded in dense fog, whose faces and even genders were indistinct, fought as if they were real people. They would activate their Weapon Control Techniques, employing extremely exquisite skills.

Their cultivation rose from Level 7 to Level 8, and then to Level 9...

Since Lu Ye fought continuous battles without a moment's rest, and stronger enemies emerged from the fog as soon as one died, he couldn't last very long, even with all his might. He was defeated by the first Level 9 cultivator with a flying sword.

Yet Lu Ye was not the least bit disheartened; instead, he found it very worthwhile!

The sensation of death within the Mirage Realm was very realistic. Such training could help him become familiar with the fighting styles of cultivators from various schools, and thus, he would be better prepared when facing enemies on the battlefield in the future.

He checked his battlefield marking.

Name: Lu Ye.

Status: Righteous Blood Sect Disciple.

Cultivation: 135 orifices.

Location: Spirit Stream battlefield.

Merit: 2,950.

For cultivators, unlocking 108 orifices means reaching Level 7, and 144 orifices mean Level 8.

Almost a month had passed since the Insect Plague, and even though Lu Ye now had to learn the Path of Spirit Runes from Madam Yun during the day and only cultivated at night, he benefitted from the rich Spiritual Energy at the garrison, and he was not lacking in Spirit Stones and elixir pills. Hua Ci had found a great many Spirit Stones and elixir pills from those storage sacks.

The cultivators who died in the Chess Sea hadn't brought many other things, but they did carry a lot of Spirit Stones and elixir pills, which now all benefitted Hua Ci; Lu Ye simply had to take them from her.

In such a favorable cultivation environment, coupled with abundant supplies and the Spirit Energy Gathering Spirit Runes and Bestial Gluttony Feast, even though Lu Ye intentionally slowed down his cultivation progress, his spiritual orifice count had reached 135.

He was getting closer to the Level 8 cultivation, which also meant that his time at the garrison was drawing near.

The Spirit Stream battlefield has few explicit rules but abides by unspoken customs. Desperate to rout each other, cultivators from both camps still act within these understood boundaries.

For example, if they capture a healing cultivator from the opposing camp, they generally spare their life, waiting for the other side to pay a ransom to redeem them.

For example, the outer circle of the battlefield is usually reserved for cultivators at Level 7 or below, except under certain necessary circumstances.

This is also why the governors stationed in the outer circle are mostly at Level 7. Is it that the sects don't have cultivators above Level 7? Of course, they do! But they aren't at the sect headquarters.

Once cultivators reach around Level 7, they generally head toward the inner circle. One reason is that those with higher cultivation gain no merit for killing those with lower cultivation in the outer circle and may even lose merit—more loss than gain.

The second reason is that the closer one gets to the center, the richer the spiritual energy of heaven and earth, making cultivation naturally simpler.

A Level 7 in the outer circle might not achieve in one year what could be achieved in the inner circle in half a year. If they go to the Core Circle, the results are even better; of course, it's much more dangerous too.

Once you embark on the path of cultivation, one battles against fellow man and nature's challenges. Who doesn't want to climb higher? Every cultivator will find ways to improve their cultivation. Under the grand waves of conflict between the two camps, those who don't advance are unable to control their own fate.

Lu Ye had been planning to move to the inner circle long ago, but since the Righteous Blood Sect was newly established, as the governor, he couldn't just leave.

Although he didn't manage affairs on a daily basis, his presence in the headquarters alone was enough to stabilize people's morale.

Now that the headquarters was stable, with Hua Ci in charge, that should suffice. Although she had also advanced to Level 7 and could not sit in for too long, she could hold the fort for the time being. There would always be disciples who could take up the mantle later, Guk Yang and He Xiyang were promising candidates and could be given an opportunity to become official disciples.

Kong Niu was qualified in terms of cultivation, but his disposition was far too simple. You could ask him to kill enemies and set fires, but managing headquarters was absolutely out of the question.

Of course, there was also another reason pushing Lu Ye to enter the inner circle, which related to the future prospects of the Righteous Blood Sect disciples.

"Almost at Level 8 already, huh?" Shui Yuan looked at Lu Ye with mixed emotions across the dining table. When their little junior brother had returned to the sect, he was only at Level 5, and that was merely a few months ago. Now he was almost at Level 8; his cultivation speed was a bit too fast.

"Indeed, it's about time to head toward the inner circle. When do you plan to leave?"

"In about half a month. I want to learn more about the Path of Spirit Runes from Madam Yun." Speaking of Madam Yun, Lu Ye remembered the incident. "I heard from Yiyi that last time Madam Yun came and beat up the sect master? What happened?"

He had learned about it afterward as he was at Bright Heart Peak deciphering the Array laid out by Madam Yun and hadn't noticed the commotion outside.

"The love-hate saga of the older generation is like that, just let it be. It's been like this for so many years," Shui Yuan said.

Lu Ye thus didn't inquire further.

Shui Yuan said, "Right now our sect only has one Alliance Sect, and that's Cangming Mountain, which has recently been promoted to 6th grade. They are right in the inner circle. You can go to Cangming Mountain; I'll send them a message first."

Disciples from the big sects often have close interactions, creating quite an exchange-student atmosphere.

"No need to bother, I am not going merely to temper myself, but I also have a rather immature idea."

"Oh? Let's hear it."

"Just as you mentioned, Second Senior Sister, our sect currently only has Cangming Mountain as an Alliance Sect. I've looked into it, and the Cangming Mountain headquarters is quite far from the Righteous Blood Sect's. In the future, when disciples from our sect reach Level 7 in their cultivation, it won't be practical for them all to go to Cangming Mountain given the distance.

For those Level 7 cultivators who can't make the journey, we should choose some inner circle sects that are nearer."

Shui Yuan nodded in agreement, "You're right."

"I've heard that governors can form Alliance Pacts, right?"

"Yes, but if it's the governors who form the pact, its effects are limited to the battlefield."

If the sect master personally steps in, the effects of the Alliance Pact wouldn't be limited to the battlefield but would include the Nine Provinces and other aspects as well.

"That's enough! My plan is not to relinquish my role as governor for the time being. Firstly, I'll enter the inner circle and find some sects to form Alliance Pacts with their governors. That way, there will be more options for our disciples in the future."

"That could work. But little junior brother, do you have any connections?"

"I certainly do have connections."

During his time in the Chess Sea, he had become acquainted with many governors from sects, including those from the inner and Core Circles.

"You can decide on these matters yourself. As the governor, you have the freedom to proceed as you wish," Shui Yuan said.

"I'll go and ask the sect master for permission," Lu Ye said as he stood up, then suddenly remembered something else. "Oh right, what's with Fourth Senior Brother's spiritual orifice?"

He'd always known that his Fourth Senior Brother was very strong, but he recently heard some rumors about Li Baxian.

Shui Yuan sighed, "He shone too brightly and, given his origins from the Righteous Blood Sect, he was targeted by those at Ten Thousand Demons Ridge back in the day."

"His spiritual orifice was damaged, and there's no way to repair it?"

"There is an elixir pill within the Heaven's Augury treasure vault that can repair it, but it costs an exorbitant amount of merit."

Lu Ye nodded and went towards the sect master's chamber.

After obtaining the sect master's approval, Lu Ye felt more resolute in his decision.

Chapter 238 Leaving

...

During the day, as usual, he went to Madam Yun's to study the Path of Spirit Runes, and at night he returned to his station to cultivate and rest.

Knowing that Lu Ye would soon head to the inner circle, Madam Yun was quite worried, but she also knew that Lu Ye couldn't remain in the outer circle forever.

As a cultivator of Level 7, it was indeed safe for him to stay in the outer circle, but it was of little significance to his own growth; cultivation in isolation ultimately had little future.

After all, strength wasn't something one could obtain through bitter cultivation alone; which of the paragons of the two major camps hadn't waded through mountains of corpses and seas of blood to get where they were?

She could only teach Lu Ye as much as she could about spirit runes, so that he would have more means to protect himself, and privately she gave him two treasures.

Lu Ye's talent in the Path of Spirit Runes greatly satisfied her. She only needed to demonstrate many things once, and Lu Ye would understand most of it. If she could truly take Lu Ye as a disciple, it would certainly save time and effort in teaching him.

That pesky Thang Yifeng, that old thing, clung stubbornly and wouldn't let go, which was really frustrating.

Half a month passed in the blink of an eye.

In front of Heaven's Augury Hall, Lu Ye looked at the crowd that had come to see him off and said, "I'll go ahead and set up a base for you guys. While I'm gone, cultivate well, and I hope all of you can make it to the inner circle, and even the Core Circle, as soon as possible."

He then turned to Hua Ci, "I'll leave the station in your hands."

Hua Ci nodded gently, "Be careful on your journey."

Lu Ye looked at He Xiyang in the crowd, who had his head down, fists clenched, shoulders shaking—unclear what he was doing.

"He Xiyi!"

"Here!" He Xiyi suddenly looked up.

"Do you have anything to say?"

"Ah? Oh, Fifth Senior Brother, you're leaving now, what will we do without you at the station, I really can't bear to see you go... hahaha..."

With an expressionless face, Lu Ye looked at her and said indifferently, "If you can't bear it, you can come with me. You're nearly at Level 7 anyway, and with your cultivation, you can go to the inner circle. Having company on the road would make it less boring."

"I don't want to!" He Xiyi refused outright.

"Hmm?"

"I... my cultivation is still weak. If I go with Fifth Senior Brother, I will hold you back. I think I need to cultivate more at the station."

Lu Ye looked at her deeply, raised his hand to his mouth, and blew a whistle.

A huge shadow descended from the sky, catching the Blood Red Trout that Lu Ye threw, and crouched by his side.

Lu Ye jumped onto the eagle's back, with Yiyi following beside him, and a foot-long snow-white kitten lying on his shoulder. The white kitten yawned, let out an 'aww' in a milky voice...

Ever since learning that Lu Ye was going to enter the inner circle, Yiyi had been inseparable from him for the past three days, afraid that he would leave her behind.

Lu Ye hadn't taken her with him during the Spirit Stream Defense Battle. Although Yiyi hadn't shown it openly, she felt somewhat upset about it. This time, she would not let Lu Ye leave her behind no matter what.

Lu Ye had no intention of leaving her behind, so he naturally took her with him on the journey.

As for the foot-long snow-white kitten that looked like a cat, upon closer inspection, it was actually a tiger—it was Amber!

The reason for such a shocking transformation was thanks to Shui Yuan refining a shape-changing pill for Amber to consume.

...

Demon beasts can transform into human form, and once they do, they become demon cultivators. Lu Ye had encountered some demon cultivators before, not many, but the ones he remembered vividly were the female demon cultivators in charge of reception at the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union.

However, for a demon beast to transform, they need to activate some special spiritual orifices. If they rely on their inherent ability to transform, they must cultivate to a certain realm first.

Lu Ye used to wonder how those demon cultivators with not-so-high strengths could transform into human form.

Later, he learned that there were two methods for demon cultivators to transform: one was to possess sufficient strength, and the other was to consume a shape-changing pill.

Alternatively, the offspring of two demon cultivators might naturally be born in human form.

After consuming a shape-changing pill, Amber did not transform into a human form, but its size could shrink to that of a cat. According to Second Senior Sister, this was its own choice. Amber would never transform into a human form in the future because it knew which form of transformation was more beneficial to its growth.

This was its instinct as a demon beast.

Shui Yuan's actions were undoubtedly meant to have Lu Ye take Amber and Yiyi with him, so they could look out for each other.

With a wave of their hands, Little Gray flapped its wings and soared into the sky, the howling wind making it hard to keep one's eyes open. By the time one looked again, Little Gray's figure had already disappeared into the distance.

Sitting on the back of the eagle, Yiyi stretched out her arms and felt the onrushing wind, her silvery laughter falling like bells, as if they had returned to the old days when the three of them were traveling together on the road.

Lu Ye took out the ten-part map to check their bearings and set the direction they would head in.

In the Chess Sea, he had met many governors and deputy governors of various sects, so finding a suitable target was not difficult. However, his journey to the inner circle was not just to form an Alliance Pact with a suitable sect; he had another task to accomplish.

Months ago, when his identity was exposed, quite a few sects from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge had pursued him. Especially during the battle at Golden Light Peak, there were forty-three Ten Thousand Demons Ridge forces involved...

All those who had participated in his pursuit and had made things difficult for him at Golden Light Peak, he had recorded them in his little notebook in his heart, just waiting for an opportunity to take his revenge.

Otherwise, why would he have announced his sect's name each time during the battle at Golden Light Peak?

After searching for a while, he saw a somewhat familiar name and made up his mind—it's you, Sky Supporting Sect!

More than a day later, in a desolate wilderness, Lu Ye and Yiyi stood shoulder to shoulder, while Little Gray flew away flapping its wings.

This place was already within the range of the inner circle of the battlefield. Without Little Gray, even if Lu Ye rode Amber, it would have taken at least a month to reach this place. But with Little Gray, it was different; within the Spirit Stream battlefield, Little Gray's strength was undoubtedly among the top, and its speed was the fastest as well.

When he initially left the Righteous Blood Sect's residence for Mount Ying, it hadn't taken too long either.

But Little Gray was only suitable for traveling distances. Since the First Senior Brother from the Righteous Blood Sect's generation had left the Spirit Stream battlefield, Little Gray had always stayed in the Righteous Blood Sect's residence, and no one could command it, not even Lu Ye, who could only make some deals with it through Blood Red Trout, such as getting a lift.

Expecting it to fight enemies was utterly impossible.

If not for this, Lu Ye would have ridden Little Gray long ago to settle accounts with those Ten Thousand Demons Ridge forces one by one.

He had once asked Second Senior Sister Shui Yuan, and according to her, the last command the First Senior Brother left for Little Gray when he left the Spirit Stream battlefield was to guard the residence well!

So in Little Gray's mind, the Righteous Blood Sect's residence was more important than anything else; it could leave the residence for a few days but not indefinitely.

"Lu Ye, Lu Ye!" Yiyi called out beside him, "The nature's spiritual energy in the inner circle is so rich!"

In the past, she couldn't absorb Spiritual Energy to enhance herself, but after several months of cultivating with the sect master, she could also cultivate on her own and could even nourish Amber.

Therefore, the growth rate of both Yiyi and Amber was extremely fast, because no matter who was cultivating, both could become stronger. Of course, Amber's main method of cultivation was eating; it would eat its fill, find a spot to lie down, and then get up to continue eating.

At times, Lu Ye envied Amber's method of becoming stronger, which was truly convenient.

Chapter 239 Where Are You From, Fellow Daoist?

Upon reflection, he realized he wasn't much different from Amber—both were fixated on consumption...

The spiritual energy in the inner circle was indeed rich, which Lu Ye could distinctly feel as he traveled. The deeper he ventured, the richer the nature's spiritual energy became.

Here, just having entered the inner circle, the energy was about twice as rich as the wilderness near the Righteous Blood Sect.

No wonder the big sects put all their efforts into raising their grade. The higher the grade, the better the position they held in the Spirit Stream battlefield, and the more efficient their disciples' cultivation became.

It was not just that—the Spirit Stream battlefield had many resources to offer, and the deeper one went, the richer the resources were.

Lu Ye was now in an area within the domain of the Sky Supporting Sect.

Compared with the outer circle, the radiation range of the inner circle sects' domains was undoubtedly many times larger. Take the Sky Supporting Sect, for example; its domain spanned an area with a diameter of about three to four hundred miles, which could be considered within its radiation range. Within this range, it was all Sky Supporting Sect territory.

In contrast, the Righteous Blood Sect's radiating range was only about thirty miles. Even after Lu Ye had crippled the Sky Fiend Hall and Phong Clan before he left, the Righteous Blood Sect could only dominate within a thirty-mile radius.

The main factors for this discrepancy were the number of sects and the strength of the cultivators.

The sects in the outer circle had the lowest grades and were the most numerous. So even though the outer circle was larger, the arrangement of the big sects' domains was relatively dense, and with the cultivators' cultivation not being very high, such a range was enough for activity below Level 7.

The inner circle was different, with many cultivators at Level 8-9 capable of weapon control-flying. If the activity range was too small, they could not flex their muscles. Moreover, there were far fewer sects in the inner circle than in the outer circle, making the arrangement of their domains more sparse.

But whether dense or sparse, as long as the domains of two different factions bordered each other, friction was inevitable.

After discerning the direction briefly, Lu Ye reached out to grab Amber, who was lying on his shoulder, and tossed her to the ground.

Amber landed lightly, then turned to look at Lu Ye, their eyes meeting in a baffled stare.

After a good while, Amber came to its senses. Its body shone with golden light, and its Demon Origin surged. It swiftly expanded in size, transforming from a small beast a foot long into a fierce and imposing monster in the blink of an eye.

Lu Ye mounted the tiger's back and headed toward the location of the Sky Supporting Sect's domain. Since he had come for vengeance, there was no need to be polite to others.

He didn't plan to wreak havoc in the enemy's domain since the cultivators within were always the most numerous. Going there alone would certainly not end well.

But since this area was within the range of the Sky Supporting Sect's domain, there would undoubtedly be cultivators from the Sky Supporting Sect active outside. With his current strength, he could kill most of them unless he encountered those who had switched to cultivating a Heaven Rank technique.

Even if he did encounter such cultivators, with the wings rune tattoo, he would have the means to escape.

However, he hoped he wouldn't need to use the wings spirit runes. Such runes weren't permanent; each activation would fade their luster a bit. Too much use would cause the tattoo to disappear.

His plan was simple: to roam around and slaughter any Sky Supporting Sect cultivators he encountered. Since his purpose in the inner circle was to temper himself, time was ample. Killing one or two at a time and doing so repeatedly, he could cause serious damage to the Sky Supporting Sect.

If they had attacked him at Golden Light Peak, they couldn't blame him for seeking revenge now.

Yiyi was still as elusive as ever, sometimes vanishing and then suddenly popping up from nowhere.

Though her dream of becoming a healing cultivator was shattered and she was forced to become a magic cultivator, she still enjoyed collecting medicinal ingredients.

With a storage sack hanging around her waist, she meticulously gathered any suspected medicinal materials she encountered and placed them into the sack. As for their value, that was another matter.

Before, she couldn't traverse through obstacles while carrying items. Her Spiritual Body was neither solid nor void and wasn't restricted in this aspect, but anything she carried couldn't pass through like she could.

However, after guidance from the sect master, she could now envelop her possessions with her powers and freely pass through obstacles. It was said to be an Escape Skill, though she couldn't carry living beings with her. Even so, it was still quite remarkable.

Lu Ye initially thought it would be easy to find a few people to chop down since this was their domain, but after riding Amber around for half a day, he had yet to see a single soul. He even began to wonder if he had gone in the wrong direction. After consulting the ten-part map, he confirmed he was on the right track.

Upon further thought, he realized he might have oversimplified the matter. The radiation range of an inner circle sect's domain wasn't small. Unlike the outer circle, where one might run into enemies out wandering, here the cultivators wouldn't meander without cause; they would rather meditate and practice cultivation to enhance their prowess.

Unless conflicts arose with neighboring forces, then they would certainly mobilize in groups.

Simply wandering aimlessly wasn't very effective. It seemed wiser to look for key resource gathering sites of the Sky Supporting Sect, such as mines or Spirit Veins. Cultivators of the Sky Supporting Sect would definitely be present at those locations to extract resources. If he could find such sites, he could kill and rob at the same time, a double win indeed.

But he didn't know where the Sky Supporting Sect's resource sites were. As he contemplated this, Yiyi suddenly appeared from nearby, "Lu Ye, Lu Ye, there are a few cultivators over there."

Having an elusive scout who roamed around was an advantage—they often brought unexpected surprises.

"Lead the way."

Yiyi jumped onto the tiger's back and began directing Amber.

The number of cultivators over there was small, only four of them, one at Level 8, two at Level 7, and one at Level 6.

In the inner circle, there were also some at Level 6, though not many. As for those at Level 5, there might also be some, but they definitely wouldn't dare to leave their stations, as that level of cultivation was too low for the inner circle. Once they encountered an enemy in the wild, death was certain.

The cultivators in the inner circle were mainly between Level 7 and Level 9, and there might also be a few who had converted to practicing a Heaven Rank technique.

Since this area was within the territory of the Sky Supporting Sect, those few cultivators highly likely belonged to the disciples of the Sky Supporting Sect.

According to Yiyi, they seemed to be guarding a spirit flower, which had buds that looked about to bloom but hadn't yet.

Yiyi had failed to become a healing cultivator, but after all, she had learned some things from Hua Ci and the Second Senior Sister. Based on her estimation, that spirit flower must be of significant value, and it needed to be harvested at a specific time, such as right after the flower fully bloomed; otherwise, its medicinal efficacy would greatly diminish.

That was why those four cultivators were guarding it; perhaps they had known about the presence of the spirit flower for a while, or they had stumbled upon it by chance. Anyway, they were now squatting there and waiting.

When the time was almost right, Lu Ye asked Amber to shrink back to the size of a small cat and crouch on his shoulder, while Yiyi traveled underground, waiting for an opportunity to act.

Soon, a faint fragrance lingered at the tip of his nose. Following the scent, Lu Ye continued for about thirty miles and immediately saw three cultivators not far ahead, watching him warily.

Behind them was the source of the fragrance: a spirit flower that hadn't fully blossomed yet. The fist-sized bud was purple, shrouded in a hazy aura.

Observing the light of their spirit, one at Level 6 and two at Level 7, just as Yiyi had said. But the one at Level 8 was nowhere to be seen.

Lu Ye looked around but couldn't find any trace of him; he had no idea where the fellow was hiding.

All three were male cultivators, one of whom, brimming with robust blood Qi, likely a physique cultivator, stepped forward and asked in a deep voice, "Fellow Daoist, where do you come from?"

The question was quite covert, its real purpose being to find out which faction Lu Ye belonged to.

Lu Ye raised his hand, and a pale blue light bloomed on the back of it.

The physique cultivator was slightly startled, and his two companions also frowned. They had never encountered someone who would readily reveal their faction, especially someone who was alone...

On the Spirit Stream battlefield, when strangers met, it was absolutely impossible to casually reveal their faction affiliations, because a conflict was inevitable if the factions differed.

Those who dared to show their marks to strangers were either arrogantly stupid or confidently fearless.

For a Level 7 Lu Ye, he did not seem to be the fearlessly confident type.

The talking physique cultivator smiled and said, "So you're a Fellow Daoist from the Haotian Alliance." Saying this, he raised his hand as if he were about to reveal his own faction affiliation.

Clang...

As the long sword was unsheathed, Lu Ye turned around and slashed with one swift cut.

Sparks flew and Spiritual Artifacts resonated; a figure that had somehow arrived behind Lu Ye, holding a dagger, staggered backward, his face filled with surprise and suspicion.

It was the Level 8 cultivator who had been hiding, a spectral cultivator!

Spectral cultivators of this sect, once they reached Level 7-8, could communicate with the Netherworld, borrow its power for practice, and master some sneaky assassination techniques. Lu Ye had seen some spectral cultivators' methods in the Chess Sea and was deeply impressed by them.

When he arrived here without seeing the Level 8 cultivator, he guessed that the other party might be a spectral cultivator; otherwise, there was no reason for his complete disappearance. Perhaps they had sensed something on his way here, and so the spectral cultivator took the opportunity to lie in ambush.

Just now, when the Level 7 physique cultivator raised his hand and was talking about being a Fellow Daoist from the Haotian Alliance and showing the posture of revealing his own faction, he was merely drawing Lu Ye's attention.

For someone completely unprepared, most of their attention would definitely be on the Physique Cultivator's hand at that moment, inevitably overlooking a threat coming from behind.

But since Lu Ye had guessed that the other party was a spectral cultivator, how could he not be prepared?

This cut forced the Level 8 spectral cultivator to retreat, which was indeed a surprise to him. But what surprised him even more was that this Level 7 cultivator, who had suddenly emerged from nowhere, lifted his sword and slashed down at him relentlessly.

The onslaught of violent attacks pressed him so heavily that he was struggling to catch his breath; with each strike powerful and weighty, he only managed to withstand three blows before his hand went numb.

What kind of monstrous strength was this?

The spectral cultivator was shocked, but not panicked, because from the corner of his eye he saw his two Level 7 companions both spur their Spiritual Artifacts into action.

Boom...

A violent surge of Spirit Force erupted, and the power of the magic and spells unfolded. An unexpected attack came from behind; a scream followed, one of the Level 7s was hit by a spell and fell to the ground, his back scorched.

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These four were together, so when the ghost cultivator made his move, the remaining three naturally wouldn't just stand by. At that moment, with Lu Ye's back turned to them, it was the perfect opportunity for a sneak attack.

Yiyi thought so too...

The remaining Level 7 and Level 6 cultivators immediately turned around, but there wasn't even a spectral shadow behind them; they didn't even know who was attacking them, only that it was a powerful fire-type technique.

"Ah!"

Another scream echoed, causing their hair to stand on end. Turning their heads back, the scene that met their eyes made their scalp tingle and their heads buzz.

A head flew high into the air, blood spurting like a fountain from the neck, and it was none other than the ghost cultivator's head. The teenager at Level 7 standing in front of him was still in the posture of swinging his saber, clearly indicating that he had beheaded the ghost cultivator.

Level 7 killed Level 8? And in such a short time?

They had only engaged in combat for three breaths, and they had only turned around and then back...

Two turns, and worlds apart, it was hard to believe unless seen with their own eyes.

Lu Ye shook off the blood from the Boulder Mountain Saber and slowly turned around to look ahead.

Meeting his gaze, the already terrified two became even more unsettled, uncertain whether to run or fight.

"Ptui..." the Level 7 who had been knocked down by Yiyi struggled to get up, spitting the mud from his mouth. The pain in his back was excruciating, and although Yiyi's magic and spell strike was powerful, it was not enough to take his life.

Being attacked unexpectedly, he stood up in anger, and before he could make sense of the situation, a weapon control stream of light was already attacking him close at hand. In a matter of life and death, he roared in anger, activating his protective spirit force and throwing out a punch at the same time.

His blood Qi surged tremendously, and this punch was full of momentum. As a physique cultivator, he was confident he could block this strike.

Indeed, he did block it, the weapon control's streak of light was punched away, but Lu Ye also charged towards him like a swift wind. The speed that burst forth in that moment was beyond what a normal Level 7 could possess.

A normal Level 7 indeed wouldn't be able to burst forth with such speed, but Lu Ye had been constantly refining his body with the blood Qi from the Scale Armor during his recent days of cultivation. As his cultivation increased, his physique also gradually strengthened.

Unlike typical physique cultivators refining their bodies, his physical strength was not just about the vigor of his blood Qi but also included his own speed, reaction time, and even vision.

In short, compared to other cultivators of the same level, Lu Ye had a stronger body, more vigorous blood Qi, faster speed, quicker reactions, and more acute vision.

On this basis, he had also activated the Move-Like-The-Wind Spirit Runes on his legs.

The speed that burst forth at that moment could be described as swift as thunder, causing Lu Ye to appear ten yards away from the enemy one moment and right in front of them in the blink of an eye.

As a Level 7, no one could block this sudden strike.

The Boulder Mountain Saber stabbed right into the heart from the front and out the back of that Level 7, Lu Ye stirred the saber, completely pulverizing the opponent's heart.

As he pulled out the long saber, the man collapsed to the ground, his blood staining the soil.

The two survivors were stunned, standing foolishly in their spots.

Behind them, a strong wave of spirit force surged as Yiyi burst out, slashing at the Level 7 with a Golden Arc Slash. The sharp attack slashed a huge wound on the man's back, and just as he cried out in pain, Lu Ye's weapon control light had pierced through his head.

Lu Ye looked up at the last remaining Level 6, who clearly seemed terrified.

He wasn't a coward, nor was he unused to seeing cultivators from two factions fighting to the death. Having cultivated to Level 6, he had his fair share of real combat experience.

But he had never witnessed such decisively swift slaughter.

A Level 8 senior brother, two Level 7 senior brothers, had just died so quickly right in front of him.

"You... don't come any closer!" the Level 6 shouted defensively, holding his spiritual artifact in his hands, his voice full of feigned bravado.

Amber yawned from its perch on Lu Ye's shoulder, the thick scent of blood around them making it somewhat hungry. It thought of getting something to eat after the fight was over...

Lu Ye walked step by step towards the surviving Level 6, who in turn stepped back, only to trip over a rock and fall on his bottom.

Lu Ye frowned, standing in place with the weapon control's light floating beside him, the Boulder Mountain Saber dripping with blood in his hand.

Compared to that Level 6 cultivator, he seemed like some monstrous villain.

Little did he know, in the eyes of that Level 6, he appeared even more terrifying than any monstrous villain could be.

This Level 6 cultivator wasn't a coward; he had been severely injured before without changing his expression, but this time he was truly afraid. The events he had just witnessed were completely beyond his understanding; his panic stemmed from the unknown, which made him appear so wretched.

"Where are your mines located?"

Lu Ye's question left the Level 6 cultivator bewildered. The one who had killed his three senior brothers and spared his life was now asking about the mines, obviously not with good intentions.

Despite the overwhelming fear and knowing he stood on the brink of death, even with his hands trembling as he held the spiritual artifact, he clenched his teeth and said, "I don't know!"

With a swoosh, a fiery-red weapon control dagger flew and halted above his forehead, the sharpness touching him painfully, delivering a silent yet deadly threat.

"I'll fight you!" he roared, his loyalty to his sect overcoming the fear in his heart. He raised the spiritual artifact in his hand and knocked the hovering weapon control dagger away, quickly standing up, but what awaited him was a bright gleam of a saber.

With a dull thud, the corpse fell to the ground.

Lu Ye sheathed his saber.

The cultivators of the Nine Provinces cultivation world have this disadvantage: their bones are a bit too hard. Unable to get anything valuable from them, Lu Ye naturally wouldn't waste his words.

Like Phong Yue, who kneeled without a word the moment there was conflict, she did so because she relied on her status as a healing cultivator, and at that time she distinctly felt that if she didn't do something, she was going to die momentarily!

That bow turned her into a homeless person banished from her own sect. Before Lu Ye left, she remained at the Righteous Blood Sect's camp, albeit aimlessly, which was fortunately okay because she was a healing cultivator and the sect's members didn't ostracize her.

Yiyi began to clean up the battlefield, collecting the spoils of war.

Lu Ye sat on a rock next to a spirit flower, holding the hiltless dagger that he used for weapon control.

The power of the weapon control was still lacking. It had just been knocked away by a punch from a cultivator of the same level. Although this was partly because the opponent was a physique cultivator, overall, the force of the weapon control indeed wasn't as good as using his own saber to chop.

When he used his saber to chop, he could imbue it with Sharpness spirit runes.

He had always had the idea to try and add spirit runes to weapon control. If he had been able to imbue the weapon control with Sharpness spirit runes just now, that guy would have dared to punch it, and the sharp force would've directly torn his fist open.

However, applying spirit runes to weapon control is very troublesome. Even though Lu Ye could now slightly control his detached spirit force, it was still difficult to achieve. His previous attempts had all ended in failure because the constructed spirit runes weren't stable enough to function.

His control of spirit force was still not sufficient. If he had enough control over the spirit force, adding spirit runes to the weapon control wouldn't be difficult.

He could only wait until his cultivation improved before trying again.

He didn't rush to leave; there was still a spirit flower waiting to be harvested. Although Yiyi didn't know what type of spirit flower it exactly was, it must be valuable. Otherwise, those four cultivators wouldn't have been lurking here guarding it.

He took out an elixir pill and tossed one into his mouth. Amber stretched its head over, opened its mouth, waiting to be fed...

Lu Ye tossed it one, flicking its forehead.

"You're getting lazier!"

During the recent battle, Amber showed no intention of getting involved and quietly lay on Lu Ye's shoulder throughout. He remembered when it was still weak—it would rush up and bite whenever they encountered an enemy.

Four people, four storage sacks. Lu Ye sat on the rock and casually picked one, unlocking the restriction lock.

Several hundred yards from this location, behind a giant rock, two heads, one male and one female, peered this way. Although they were not close, having seen everything clearly from a distance.

Since Lu Ye appeared suddenly, to the killing of that Spectral Shadow, followed by the killing of two Level 7s, and then a Level 6, they were stunned throughout the fight.

Only after the battle ended did the two shrink back, exchanged glances, and saw the shock in each other's eyes.

"Dear lord, what's the background of that guy?" the man asked.

"Brother, am I seeing things or is he a Level 7? Is he wearing a spiritual artifact that hides his cultivation level?" the woman also spoke.

"Even if he was wearing a spiritual artifact, his real cultivation level would be exposed when he makes a move."

"So, he's just a Level 7? How can he be so strong?"

"Little sister, this is what big brother always told you: don't judge a person's strength by their cultivation level. There are always many impressive geniuses in this world capable of defeating enemies above their level. Remember this when you walk the battlefield in the future."

"But this... this is just too outrageous."

She had seen defeating enemies above one's level, but those fights were hard-fought, nothing like just now, where a Level 8 Spectral Shadow was sliced up in a few blows by a Level 7, as if slaughtering chickens.

"Indeed!" the man nodded. "A few months ago, it was said that a prodigy emerged from the Righteous Blood Sect, a Level 5 cultivator who at the Golden Light Peak slew forty-three Level 6s. He was a sensation back then, truly a role model among our peers, only regretting not having seen him. Now, it looks like this person is not inferior to Lu Yiye in the slightest."

"So, are we still going after the Purple Cloud Flower?"

From the conversation, it was obvious that the two hiding here had also been attracted by the spirit flower, waiting for it to mature to make their move. Knowing this place was within the territory of the Sky Supporting Sect, their daring here clearly showed boldness matched by their skills.

But they hadn't expected that the spirit flower wasn't even mature yet when a Level 7 had burst out to snatch it first.

"He's also from the Haotian Alliance, why snatch it? Let's go, come with me to meet this powerful figure."

"Ah? Just like that? What if we get chopped? That guy looks pretty fierce."

"Scared of what, we are at least Level 8!"

With that, the two emerged from their hidden spot and walked straight towards Lu Ye.