

Humanity 251

Chapter 251 - Watching the Tigers Fight from the Mountain

The quasi-flood dragon is a type of snake demon, just one step away from completing its flood dragon metamorphosis. If it were to succeed, it could completely break free from the constraints of Heaven's Augury and leave the prison that has bound it.

However, for many years, it had been unable to take this step, until last night when it sensed the blood Qi in that Scale Armor, it knew the opportunity had arrived.

Right now, the opportunity was right before its eyes, yet it was obstructed by a luminous screen from a big array. Naturally, the quasi-flood dragon was furiously enraged.

Its head was densely covered with fine snake scales, extremely sturdy, and each collision was like a giant battering ram smashing against the Sky Supporting Sect's Sect Protection Array.

Zou Qi stood on his Flying Spirit Artifacts floating mid-air, facing the quasi-flood dragon through the screen, shouting, "Quasi-flood dragon, my sect has always stayed out of your way, so why have you come to attack us today?"

A ferocious beast like the quasi-flood dragon, even if it couldn't speak human language, should still understand it to some extent.

Zou Qi knew that their current location faced a catastrophic crisis, and to resolve this crisis, he needed to understand why the quasi-flood dragon had come to attack them.

The quasi-flood dragon raised its head high, looking at the tiny figure before it, its forked tongue flicking in and out, hissing, which seemed to be a response.

Yet Zou Qi listened for a long time and still couldn't understand what it was trying to say...

He could only seek help from his fellow cultivators, "Can anyone understand what it's saying?"

As if anyone could really understand!

The quasi-flood dragon, growing impatient, suddenly sensed the once still blood Qi beginning to move again.

With a boom, the quasi-flood dragon slammed its head down once more.

Zou Qi was livid on the spot, "Quasi-flood dragon, my Sky Supporting Sect has no intention of being your enemy. Whatever your purpose is in coming here, please leave at once, or don't blame us for not being polite!"

Threats like these, the quasi-flood dragon could not bear. It suddenly stopped its movements, its body swirling with demon Qi, and its verdant eyes growing deeper. Then, it opened its mouth wide and emitted a misty green fog toward the luminous screen before it.

Even though Zou Qi knew the protective array wouldn't break and the fog couldn't harm him, he couldn't help but retreat continuously in fright.

A crackling noise sounded out, and where the green fog enveloped, the screen dimmed at an alarming rate. Evidently, the fog was extremely corrosive, but thankfully, the cultivators of Sky Supporting Sect worked frantically to repair it, barely maintaining its function.

Seeing this, the quasi-flood dragon spewed out even more green fog, and in an instant, the Sect Protection Array's screen looked like salt thrown into hot oil, completely boiling over.

Having headbutted so many times, it was starting to feel dizzy, but upon realizing the effectiveness of its Snake Mist, it naturally showed no mercy.

Five miles away on a slope, Lu Ye quietly watched the scene unfold, gaining a more accurate understanding of the quasi-flood dragon's strength. This ferocious beast likely could break through the Sky Supporting Sect's Sect Protection Array on its own given a bit more time.

"Brother Yiye!" Hao Ren and his sister ran over once again. They knew Lu Ye was here, naturally through communication.

Additionally, through Hao Ren, he had also learned another piece of information—that several hundred cultivators from Silver Light Island were en route, heading this way.

This was something Lu Ye was happy to hear and had anticipated.

When he had parted ways with Hao Ren and his sister earlier, Lu Ye had already revealed that the quasi-flood dragon would attack the Sky Supporting Sect's base. Lu Ye believed Hao Ren would definitely pass this message back to Silver Light Island.

As long as the Governor of Silver Light Island wasn't foolish, they would realize this was an opportunity.

It seemed that Silver Light Island indeed had mobilized on a large scale.

What he didn't know was that things were slightly different from what he had thought. Silver Light Island hadn't mobilized because they received news about the quasi-flood dragon, but had already been on the move before that.

But it was no great matter, as ultimately, everyone's goal was the same.

"How much longer before they arrive?"

"Within two to four hours," replied Hao Ren.

Two to four hours would be just enough time for the quasi-flood dragon to be entangled here. Once the cultivators from Silver Light Island arrived, they could launch a major offensive. By then, he didn't believe the Sect Protection Array of Sky Supporting Sect could withstand it!

In fact, even at this moment, the Sky Supporting Sect's array was barely holding up.

The protective power of a protective array is related to its stored spirit force. The more spirit force stored on a regular basis, the stronger the protection it can provide in critical moments. Of course, this kind of storage also has a limit; it is not possible to store indefinitely.

The Righteous Blood Sect currently had its own protective array, which Lu Ye had taken the time to study and understood a bit about.

The total amount of stored spirit force is directly related to the number of array bases used in the array setup. That's why Hua Ci had said, the more array bases there were, the stronger the protection would be.

It wasn't clear how many array bases comprised the Sky Supporting Sect's protective array, but its protective strength was much stronger than that of the Righteous Blood Sect. After all, this was the inner circle; without sufficient protective strength, it could not withstand the assault of enemy forces.

But even if enough spirit force was stored on regular days, it couldn't withstand the quasi-flood dragon's torment right now.

The verdant Snake Mist had such a strong erosive nature, and it coalesced without dispersing, lasting a long time. At that moment, the quasi-flood dragon was swirling around the protective dome of the Sky Supporting Sect's headquarters, continuously spewing out Snake Mist.

Looking over, the dome's semi-circular surface was covered in swathes of green, and from each patch, a crackling sound could be heard, causing the dome's luster to constantly flicker. The spirit force that the Sky Supporting Sect's protective array had stored was being consumed at an extremely fast rate.

One could say that the damage done to the protective array by the quasi-flood dragon's head butts was still within tolerable limits. If the quasi-flood dragon only attacked with head butts, it would never dream of breaking through the array, because as the array's spirit force was depleted, it was also being continuously replenished.

But the Snake Mist was different. After being spewed out by the quasi-flood dragon, it would persistently erode and damage the array, causing the array's stored spirit force to drain away, like water being released from a sluice.

"Senior brother, we can't hold out much longer," Yuu Hongbao said gravely as he rushed to Zou Qi's side. "Zhang Hang has reported that if we don't find a way to contain the quasi-flood dragon, the array's spirit force consumption will only increase. In six to eight hours at most, the array will break."

"Six to eight hours!"

Zou Qi's eyes reddened with fury. He could not fathom what drove the quasi-flood dragon to such madness that it would come to wreak havoc on the Sky Supporting Sect. Knowing that the sect's array could withstand a full-scale attack from Silver Light Island for a day or two, facing the quasi-flood dragon, it could only hold out for a mere few hours.

Staring at the quasi-flood dragon that was continuously spewing Snake Mist, Zou Qi gritted his teeth and said, "Wait a bit longer."

A ferocious beast like the quasi-flood dragon was too powerful. At this moment, even if the cultivators from the sect went out to meet the enemy, they would not stand a chance, inevitably resulting in numerous deaths and injuries.

But he noticed something. As the quasi-flood dragon spewed out the Snake Mist, its aura was also weakening. In other words, there was a cost to spew out the Snake Mist.

To confront the quasi-flood dragon, they had to wait until it weakened to a certain extent, otherwise, there was no fight to be had!

The situation was in a stalemate. The quasi-flood dragon couldn't break the array for the time being, and the cultivators of the Sky Supporting Sect could only wait helplessly.

Another two hours later, the quasi-flood dragon's aura had significantly weakened, and Yuu Hongbao came again to report an emergency because the array had even less stored spirit force, and it was feared that they could only hold out for another two hours at most.

Zou Qi knew that they couldn't wait any longer.

During the waiting period, he had made arrangements and now he raised his arms and shouted, "Open the array, kill the enemy!"

Under the actions of the Sky Supporting Sect's cultivators, the array slowly opened a gap, and the well-prepared cultivators swarmed out through the opening.

The physique cultivators wielding various defensive spirit artifacts were at the forefront, followed by combat cultivators and ghost cultivators, then magic cultivators at the rear, while healing cultivators had prepared to treat their own wounded.

In this instant, hundreds of cultivators from the Sky Supporting Sect sprang into action.

The light of magic and spells and weapon control led the charge, as colorful rays of light bombarded the large body of the quasi-flood dragon. The fierce assault actually staggered the beast, sparks flying off its body.

Before one wave of attack could finish, another wave had already started, unceasingly flowing.

The Sky Supporting Sect obviously had experience dealing with such powerful demon beasts and was well versed in the strategy of mobbing. Under that dense and relentless onslaught, the quasi-flood dragon was actually unsteady, retreating continuously.

Then, Zou Qi's skill became evident. The decision he had been holding back until now to take action was indeed a wise one. The quasi-flood dragon had exhausted too much strength trying to break through the Sky Supporting Sect's big array. Otherwise, if it were the quasi-flood dragon at its peak, even hundreds of the Sect's people would be powerless against it.

A shrill hiss erupted as the quasi-flood dragon twisted its body, the Demon Origin surging on its body now much thinner. The magic and weapon control wielded by Level 7-8 cultivators weren't much of a threat to it; a single attack likely couldn't even break through its snake scales. However, once the numbers were sufficient, they would cause a qualitative change.

The dense snake scales were blasted away, revealing the quasi-flood dragon's skin which then, under the onslaught of the Sky Supporting Sect's cultivators, oozed trickling snake blood.

Several times when it tried to open its mouth to spew Snake Mist, the Sky Supporting Sect's magic cultivators seized the opportunity to throw their magic inside its mouth, forcing the quasi-flood dragon to clamp its jaws shut tightly.

Five miles away, Lu Ye furrowed his brow.

The quasi-flood dragon seemed weaker than he had thought. Under the onslaught of the Sky Supporting Sect cultivators, it appeared to be somewhat defenseless.

If the situation continued to develop like this, the Sky Supporting Sect was very likely to kill this ferocious beast. Had he been busy all this time only to end up delivering wealth to the Sky Supporting Sect?

Not only did he think so, but Zou Qi, who commanded his subordinates in battle, thought the same. Watching the quasi-flood dragon be driven back step by step, he couldn't help but feel a sense that this creature was not so tough after all, regretting the anxiety he had undergone earlier.

But everyone underestimated the cunning of the quasi-flood dragon. Snakes were naturally treacherous and ruthless, let alone a powerful snake demon in the midst of flood dragon metamorphosis.

When the Sky Supporting Sect cultivators pushed the quasi-flood dragon back several dozen yards, out of nowhere, it suddenly lowered its head. The flesh horns on its head blazed with lightning, and a thunderbolt burst from the arm area into the midst of the magic cultivators at the rear of the crowd.

As the lightning exploded, several of the nearby frailer magic cultivators were instantly turned into mist of blood. Not only that, thin strands of electricity began to creep around, causing a large number of magic cultivators to shudder violently, interrupting the magic they were casting.

Boom, boom, boom...

New bolts of lightning kept blasting out from those flesh horns, and the magic cultivators' camp was instantly in dire straits, with twenty to thirty people killed or injured in an instant.

The remaining magic cultivators were also struggling to cast their spells for a while.

Zou Qi's previously excited expression froze on his face, and the joy in his heart was blown to pieces by these bolts of lightning.

Chapter 252 Now Will You Die or Not

The Sky Supporting Sect's cultivators knew of the quasi-flood dragon's existence, yet none had ever clashed with it in combat, thus no one truly knew what abilities this snake demon possessed.

Until this moment!

Feigning weakness to deceive the enemy, the quasi-flood dragon lured the Sky Supporting Sect cultivators dozens of feet away before suddenly displaying its might, having only pretended to be ineffective to draw the enemies out of the big array's protective range.

As thunderbolts fell, the magic cultivators' attacks ceased, and the quasi-flood dragon finally found an opportunity to catch its breath. It opened its mouth wide and aimed at the swirling weapon lights of the various spirit-controlled implements surrounding it, exhaling a mouthful of greenish Snake Mist.

A chorus of shocked cries erupted as the combat and ghost cultivators who were controlling the weapons realized, to their horror, that their connection to their spirit-controlled weapons had been severed.

Cultivators are capable of weapon control because, after reaching Level 7 in cultivation, they can manipulate their spirit force outside of their bodies. They store spirit force in those Spiritual Artifacts ahead of time, releasing and controlling it when needed. That is weapon control. Of course, this is the method for Spirit Stream Realm cultivators. Once cultivators become sufficiently strong and develop Mental Consciousness, they don't need to go through such trouble. Those in the Divine Sea Realm control their weapons directly with Mental Consciousness, a method far more powerful and agile.

Therefore, the key to Spirit Stream Realm cultivators' weapon control lies in manipulating the stored spirit force within the Spiritual Artifacts.

However, the greenish Snake Mist had such strong corrosive properties that even the Sky Supporting Sect's protective array could barely withstand it, let alone the Spiritual Artifacts of varying quality. The moment they were enveloped by the Snake Mist, the spirit force stored within them was largely corroded, and the cultivators' connection with their Spiritual Artifacts naturally broke.

Clangs and clatters filled the air as the plethora of Spiritual Artifacts fell like dumplings, with at least a hundred of them losing control in an instant.

The quasi-flood dragon spewed several more mouthfuls of Snake Mist, and even more weapons fell like dumplings.

Those weapons fortunate enough not to be eroded by the Snake Mist were swiftly recalled by their owners, who no longer dared to act recklessly before it.

The rapid turn of events left the Sky Supporting Sect's magic cultivators momentarily incapable of casting spells, and the combat and ghost cultivators lost the deterrence of their weapon control, which is to say, the Sky Supporting Sect's means of long-range killing were directly suppressed.

Zou Qi's mind buzzed, and he felt a chilling sensation rushing straight to the crown of his head.

The quasi-flood dragon lowered its head, its green snake eyes flickering with a cruel gleam. It lightly slithered its body, and its massive tail swept toward the physique cultivators blocking its path like a wall.

The physique cultivators had been ready for a long time, each surging with blood Qi at their body's surface, the light from their defensive spirit artifacts shining brightly, standing as immense and stable as mountains.

With a loud boom...

A great swath of light from the Spiritual Artifacts dimmed, and those of insufficient quality shattered into pieces under that strike. Along with those fragments flying through the air were several physique cultivators, each spewing blood mid-air, their expressions one of abject weakness.

Only a few Level 9 physique cultivators managed to withstand that furious strike, but even they could not stop moving backward, their whole bodies shaking violently.

An attack from a ferocious creature like the quasi-flood dragon was not something they could endure. Had it not been for their overwhelming advantage in numbers, just that one strike would have killed these few physique cultivators on the spot.

And it wasn't over yet. After one strike, the quasi-flood dragon's long tail rose again, crashing down violently into the crowd.

Those quick to react had already run away, while those slow to escape were smashed to a pulp, dying miserably.

With just a few strikes from the quasi-flood dragon, the Sky Supporting Sect's formation was thrown into disarray. The tail rose and fell repeatedly, with each strike resulting in deaths.

It seemed not to be satisfied; the snake head reached down, biting a combat cultivator who had leaped high into the air. Amid the cultivator's terrified screams, it bit him in half.

Blood gushed from the snake's mouth, the visual impact of that moment too intense, causing the mental collapse of many cultivators on the spot.

To be killed by the quasi-flood dragon's thunder, or crushed by its tail, was one thing, but to be bitten in half by that gaping maw was utterly terrifying.

"Run for your lives!" someone who couldn't take it cried out.

"Who's screaming!" Zou Qi, with bloodshot eyes, erupted in rage. Had the scene not been so chaotic, he would have sought out and killed the shouting culprit. At such a critical juncture, destabilizing morale was truly detestable. "No one can run! Magic cultivators, cast your spells quickly, combat and ghost cultivators set up your Talismans, physique cultivators follow me and hold it off!"

He was supposed to be commanding from the rear, but at this moment there was no room for that. He charged forward, because he knew that if he, the Governor, didn't do something more, their formation would be utterly broken, making it impossible to withstand the quasi-flood dragon's slaughter.

The quasi-flood dragon was indeed strong, but there were hundreds of Sky Supporting Sect cultivators, not so easily crushed.

Seeing Zou Qi himself enter the fray, the panicked cultivators slowly steadied themselves. Finally free from the disturbance of the thunderbolt, the magic cultivators stirred with swift-moving spirit force, their magic and spells striking out once more.

The combat and ghost cultivators who had lost their weapon control began to take out their Spirit Talismans.

With Zou Qi at the lead, a group of physique cultivators stood before the quasi-flood dragon, silently enduring its wrath.

From a distance, one could see tiny figures scattered before the vast snake body, their colorful lights constantly assaulting the quasi-flood dragon, which hissed continuously under their attack. The spectacle was magnificent to behold.

It must be said that Zou Qi was indeed an impressive individual. In such a situation, he decisively charged out, leading by example, and prevented the collapse of his side's morale. After paying a hefty price, the situation was actually stabilised by the Sky Supporting Sect cultivators!

One truly has to be something special to hold the position of a Sect's appointed governor.

The Spirit Talismans were exhausted, and those combat and ghost cultivators, also carrying their Spiritual Artifacts, rushed forward, swinging and hacking at the quasi-flood dragon's body under the protection of the physique cultivators, regardless of the fact that a casual strike from the quasi-flood dragon could leave them with no place to die, they were undeterred.

The snake demon's scales had exceptionally strong protective power, as hard as steel, but even the toughest defense couldn't withstand the relentless attacks of the furious cultivators, not afraid to die.

The casualties of the Sky Supporting Sect's cultivators were mounting, but the injuries on the quasi-flood dragon were also increasing. The massive serpent body was covered with dense wounds, and many scales had already fallen off.

If this situation continued to develop, the attacking quasi-flood dragon might indeed be repelled, but for the Sky Supporting Sect's cultivators to kill it was unrealistic because if it sensed something wrong, the quasi-flood dragon would definitely flee.

With its own power, to directly confront hundreds of cultivators from a sect, including those of Level 8-9, the quasi-flood dragon was truly worthy of being at the top of the demon beast rankings in the Spirit Stream battlefield.

Even if Little Gray came over, it couldn't do better than it.

But the situation was definitely not going to keep developing like this.

Just as the morale of the Sky Supporting Sect was surging like a rainbow, the silhouette of a large ship suddenly entered their vision, flying mid-air, about dozens of yards from the ground, not too fast, but also decidedly not slow.

At the bow of that large ship, a familiar pattern was branded for the Sky Supporting Sect's cultivators.

That pattern represented Silver Light Island!

On the deck, Luo Fu's figure was distinctly visible.

The people of Silver Light Island had arrived!

Standing on the deck, Luo Fu urged his spirit force into his eyes and gazed from afar at the battle outside the Sky Supporting Sect dwelling, seeing that it was indeed as Hao Ren had continually reported back, he was overjoyed and couldn't help but laugh loudly, "Heaven is truly helping me, Sky Supporting Sect... will you die now or not!"

Behind him stood a group of Silver Light Island's cultivators, each rubbing their hands with eagerness.

Zou Qi, who had been leading from the front, his face had turned green.

The dwelling was currently under attack by the quasi-flood dragon, with heavy casualties among their cultivators; at such a critical juncture, their arch-enemies from Silver Light Island appear out of nowhere, coming to the sect en masse—there was no worse news in the world than this.

Last night the sect's ore vein had been attacked; he had felt that it was Silver Light Island's doing. He was planning to send people to investigate at dawn, but before they could take action, the quasi-flood dragon had attacked. Zou Qi was powerless to attend to both, and had no choice but to deal with the immediate trouble first.

Now it seemed, last night really was Silver Light Island's handiwork, they must have been lying in ambush waiting for an opportunity, and now finally couldn't hold back anymore.

Did the quasi-flood dragon's attack have anything to do with Silver Light Island?

Zou Qi didn't know, but if it did, it was too terrifying; and if it wasn't related, then it could only be said that the Sky Supporting Sect was incredibly unlucky!

"Retreat back to the dwelling!" Zou Qi roared, at the same time avoiding the quasi-flood dragon's ferocious strike, however, the strong impact still flung him through the air, and he crashed heavily to the ground, spitting out a mouthful of fresh blood.

Facing the quasi-flood dragon alone, the Sky Supporting Sect might still have a fighting chance, but with Silver Light Island joining the fray, it was no longer prudent to put up a strong front.

Almost the instant after he gave the order, the protective array opened up another gap, and the magic cultivators behind it hurriedly retreated, followed by the ghost and combat cultivators, and lastly the physique cultivators.

The quasi-flood dragon, now incensed from its injuries, would not let the people of the Sky Supporting Sect retreat easily; as the cultivators pulled back, it drew upon the Thunderbolt power on its flesh-horn once again, bolts slashing down, resulting in blood flowing like rivers before the Sect Protection Array.

In just under the duration of one incense stick's time of the clash, nearly a hundred people had been killed or injured, showing the ferocity of the quasi-flood dragon.

After unleashing those Thunderbolt strikes, the quasi-flood dragon's aura seemed to wane considerably, showing it had expended a lot of energy. This Thunderbolt power couldn't be used recklessly.

The big array closed once more, and the quasi-flood dragon, pursuing once again, was stopped outside the light screen, going crazy, ramming against it, its wounds splitting open, blood streaming.

Meanwhile, the large ship of Silver Light Island, under Luo Fu's command, brazenly passed by the quasi-flood dragon, passed by the Sky Supporting Sect dwelling, and came to land on the other side, under the desperate gazes of the many cultivators of the Sky Supporting Sect.

One after another, figures walked down from the ship, quickly gathering into a force of several hundred people.

The expressions of the Sky Supporting Sect grew even more desperate.

The quasi-flood dragon continued its assault on the big array, intermittently spewing Snake Mist, its craving for the Scale Armor bordering on an unsolvable obsession.

The Sky Supporting Sect couldn't hold back just it alone, let alone now that the people of Silver Light Island had also arrived. As soon as they also took action, flanked by attacks from both sides with the quasi-flood dragon, the collapse of the Sky Supporting Sect's big array would only happen faster.

"Luo Fu, did you lure the quasi-flood dragon here?"

Within the big array, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth, looking utterly miserable, Zou Qi stared through the light screen at Luo Fu, eyes blazing with anger as he asked the question.

Luo Fu responded cheerily, "My Silver Light Island doesn't have such capabilities. It's just a coincidence, just a coincidence."

Chapter 253 Blocking Heaven's Augury

Within the large array, Zou Qi stared into Luo Fu's eyes, seeming to discern if he was lying, but he couldn't make out anything.

"You are not running away? Then I won't be polite!" Luo Fu said smilingly, lifting his hand and swinging it forward, the words "Start work!" lightly falling from his lips.

Behind him, multicolored lights burst forth, landing on the protective array of the Sky Supporting Sect and creating ripples upon it.

The Sky Supporting Sect had stood for many years, facing numerous large and small crises, but never had it faced an unsolvable situation like today.

With a quasi-flood dragon assaulting from the front and Silver Light Island attacking from behind, the cultivators of Sky Supporting Sect saw not a glimmer of hope.

"Brother, let's retreat," Yuu Hongbao, standing next to Zou Qi, spoke softly.

Although the large array could still hold for a while, under such circumstances, it would not last long. Once the array was breached, the cultivators of the Sky Supporting Sect would truly become trapped turtles, unable to escape even if they wished to.

"Retreat where?" Zou Qi's gaze was lifeless.

Yuu Hongbao's lips moved dryly, daring not to utter those two words.

If they were to retreat now, their only option would be to use Heaven's Augury Pillar to return to the Nine Provinces sect headquarters, but doing so would mean handing over the many years of the sect's accumulation.

Not to mention whether the two of them could bear the responsibility of losing the station, such an outcome was also unacceptable to them.

If they retreated, how could they continue to live with dignity in the world, and what right would they have to call themselves disciples of the Sky Supporting Sect?

"We might not have no chance!" Zou Qi suddenly said.

Yuu Hongbao, knowing his senior brother always had ideas, looked at him expectantly, "Brother means...?"

Zou Qi did not speak, merely using the battlefield marking to convey a message to him.

After seeing it, Yuu Hongbao felt it indeed so, and he nodded slightly.

Zou Qi looked up again towards Luo Fu, "Luo Fu, if the fact that Silver Light Island can control the quasi-flood dragon spreads, do you know what the consequences would be?"

Luo Fu, who was enjoying the sight from across the array's light screen of the quasi-flood dragon fighting fiercely, was startled by the words and instinctively felt something ominous, frowning, "What do you mean?"

Zou Qi smirked, "Think about it yourself."

Although Luo Fu sensed that the man was exaggerating the danger, he couldn't help but fall into deep thought.

The quasi-flood dragon had been brought there by Lu Yiye from the Righteous Blood Sect, and had nothing to do with Silver Light Island. Aside from Hao Ren and his sister, only Luo Fu and Qih Shi knew about this, Sky Supporting Sect was completely unaware.

It was natural for them to assume Silver Light Island could control the quasi-flood dragon.

Such a fierce beast, once exerting its power, could overwhelm a sect's primary defensive array, with the experience of Sky Supporting Sect being a prime example.

So if this matter really spread... Luo Fu's expression stiffened, his forehead breaking out in cold sweat.

Under normal circumstances, the big sects of this region held similarly profound backgrounds, and despite constant friction, they couldn't overpower each other. However, if Silver Light Island had such a top-level assistant as the quasi-flood dragon... wouldn't the powers of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge be wary?

This wariness would certainly provoke the hostility of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge powers.

This was about roasting Silver Light Island over the fire!

"Zou Qi, you scoundrel, do not slander! The quasi-flood dragon has nothing to do with my Silver Light Island, it clearly belongs to the demon beasts within your Sky Supporting Sect station," Luo Fu immediately shouted angrily.

Though he also wished his sect could command such a demon beast, if there wasn't sufficient backing, even if such a beast could be made to serve them, it wouldn't bring any good. It would only arouse the enmity and targeting of the nearby Ten Thousand Demons Ridge powers.

If four or five of the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge powers teamed up for a surprise attack, Silver Light Island would not be able to withstand it...

"Whether there's a connection, who knows? To my knowledge, your Silver Light Island sect headquarters has a demon cultivator elder who happens to be a snake demon, right?"

This remark was too harsh, making Luo Fu hesitate to respond for a moment.

Silver Light Island indeed had a demon cultivator elder who was a snake demon, specifically a sea serpent demon, and this was not a secret. Having been neighbors for so many years, who didn't know the foundation of the other.

Once the events of today spread, it would be hard not to arouse suspicion.

The slightest doubt could make Silver Light Island's situation quite tricky in the future.

Luo Fu vaguely understood Zou Qi's intention, his eyelashes slightly drooping.

"Are you suggesting that, to prove our innocence, I, Luo someone, should better lead my people to retreat from here?"

"I didn't say that."

"You must be delusional!" Luo Fu snorted coldly, "You like to randomly bite, and once your big array is broken, if I don't beat the shit out of you, consider yourself clean!"

Despite the suspicions that partnering with the quasi-flood dragon to break the array might arouse, how could Luo Fu miss such a heaven-sent opportunity? Whatever the case, since the people of Silver Light Island had come, they wouldn't back down.

As for the future, that was a matter for the future.

If the forces of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge dared to unite against Silver Light Island, the people of Haotian Alliance were not lacking in unity. For Zou Qi to imagine that a few words could make Silver Light Island retreat was simply sleepwalking.

When Zou Qi was negotiating with Luo Fu, Yuu Hongbao stood beside Zou Qi. Seeing Luo Fu remained unmoved, he couldn't help but sigh, thinking Brother Zou Qi was oversimplifying matters. If he were in Luo Fu's position, he would not retreat either; this was an excellent opportunity to capture the enemy sect's base.

"Seal the Heaven's Augury!" Zou Qi suddenly instructed softly.

"Huh?" Yuu Hongbao was stunned, then his expression changed and he exclaimed in a low voice, "Brother!"

"Seal the Heaven's Augury!" Zou Qi gritted his teeth.

Yuu Hongbao's expression was tragic, "Yes!"

With his actions, the Heaven's Augury was sealed.

The so-called sealing of the Heaven's Augury was merely the sealing of the Heaven's Augury Pillar. By doing so, the cultivators from the Sky Supporting Sect would be unable to use the Heaven's Augury Pillar to return to the Nine Provinces. This was to prevent anyone from fleeing upon sensing danger. The situation was already dire for the Sky Supporting Sect. If someone took the lead to flee, it would inevitably cause great chaos. At that time, they would truly have to hand over their stationed area.

Yuu Hongbao thought that Zou Qi intended for the sect members to stay and die with the garrison, which naturally made him feel tragic.

Zou Qi noticed this and consoled him, "There's still a chance."

Yuu Hongbao shook his head, "Do you think I'm afraid of death, brother? The sect has raised and nurtured me. Now that it's time for me to contribute to the sect, I am not afraid of death. I'm just afraid that before dying, I won't kill a few of Silver Light Island's rascals."

Since Zou Qi had made a decision, Yuu Hongbao could only join him. He resolved that if the Sky Supporting Sect would suffer, Silver Light Island would not have it easy either—even if it meant dragging a few with them before dying.

"The quasi-flood dragon wasn't sent by them," Zou Qi added.

He had just spoken with Luo Fu, seemingly without effect, but in reality, he was probing. How could he not know that Luo Fu would not be persuaded by a few words? He just wanted to clarify whether the attack by the quasi-flood dragon was related to Silver Light Island.

The attitude of Luo Fu confirmed one thing for him—the quasi-flood dragon had nothing to do with Silver Light Island. The two had really coincidentally come together!

After confirming this, Zou Qi felt as bitter as if he had swallowed coptis, unable to understand why his luck was so bad or why the quasi-flood dragon would target the Sky Supporting Sect. They had coexisted peacefully for over a hundred years.

Zou Qi beckoned Yuu Hongbao and whispered a few words.

Yuu Hongbao's eyes gradually brightened as he nodded repeatedly. Soon, messages were sent out.

Soon, the cultivators of the Sky Supporting Sect knew about their Governor's and Deputy Governor's plan, and also knew that the Heaven's Augury was sealed, making retreat to the Nine Provinces impossible.

With no way back and with Zou Qi's plan laid out, the expressions of the Sky Supporting Sect's cultivators, though still tense, were not as desperate as before.

The big array's light screen was extremely dim, seeming ready to break at any moment.

Hundreds of cultivators from the Sky Supporting Sect assembled in front of the square at Heaven's Augury Hall. Governor Zou Qi and Deputy Governor Yuu Hongbao were at the forefront of the

formation, all of them facing the direction where the Silver Light Island cultivators were positioned, poised to strike.

Luo Fu, constantly observing the movements, naturally witnessed this scene. In a flash of realization, he exclaimed, "Oh no!"

At that moment, he finally understood what Zou Qi was plotting—Sky Supporting Sect intended to divert disaster eastward by exploiting the quasi-flood dragon!

He immediately thought to send a message to Hao Ren, asking if Lu Yiye had any way to control the quasi-flood dragon, but it was already too late.

"Open the array!" With a tragic and furious shout from Zou Qi, the already nearly shattered big array vanished instantly.

With the array no longer blocking, the quasi-flood dragon immediately charged into the Sky Supporting Sect's base. As it rampaged straight towards the gathering area of the cultivators, it kicked up a storm of sand and stones along its path.

"Kill!" Zou Qi roared again, as he and Yu Hongbao led their disciples in an assault towards the front.

The scene was spectacular for a moment—the quasi-flood dragon chasing the Sky Supporting Sect, who in turn were attacking Silver Light Island, leaving the people of Silver Light Island dumbfounded in place...

Luo Fu's heart sank, things turned out as he had feared, but by the time he realized, it was already too late.

"Stop them!" Luo Fu bellowed.

Meanwhile, from a distance watching this scene, the hearts of the Hao siblings leaped to their throats. Hao Ren exclaimed, "Brother Ye, we can't let the quasi-flood dragon rush to Silver Light Island!"

Lu Ye, silent, had already leaped onto the slope, concentrating and observing, touching the battlefield marking, continually relaying messages to Yiyi.

He hadn't expected the Sky Supporting Sect to be so resilient in their desperate situation. He had thought that when Silver Light Island's people arrived, the Sky Supporting Sect cultivators would immediately retreat to the Nine Provinces because they couldn't withstand a pincer attack on their protective array.

In the base of the Sky Supporting Sect, as the distance between the two groups of cultivators quickly closed, bursts of light from magic and spells lit up from the side of Silver Light Island, bombarding forward, followed by the shimmer of weapon control.

But facing the attack from Silver Light Island, the Sky Supporting Sect only defended without counterattacking, successfully blocking all incoming magic and spells.

When the distance between them was only forty yards, Zou Qi suddenly roared, "Disperse!"

The entire troop of the Sky Supporting Sect instantly split into two, with him and Yuu Hongbao leading the left and right sides, swinging in an arc to prepare a potential encircling maneuver towards the back of Silver Light Island.

As the Sky Supporting Sect cultivators dispersed to the left and right, the huge figure of the quasi-flood dragon entered the sight of the Silver Light Island cultivators,

then the thrown magic and weapons clattered against the body of the quasi-flood dragon.

Amidst the churn of Demon Origin, with many scales shedding and much flesh torn, the quasi-flood dragon lifted its eyes, its green irises looking towards them.

"%!@" Luo Fu immediately let out a stream of curses, his mindset exploded.

Chapter 254 - Why Is This Happening?

Zou Qi's plan was simple. As the Sky Supporting Sect was now at a life-and-death juncture and unwilling to retreat back to the Nine Provinces, the only option was to divert disaster eastward.

However, for this plan to succeed, there was a premise: the quasi-flood dragon must not be under the control of Silver Light Island! Otherwise, it would be impossible to implement.

The conversation with Luo Fu confirmed this point for Zou Qi. He instantly had Yuu Hongbao seal off Heaven's Augury, activated the formation himself, and led his sect's cultivators towards Silver Light Island.

When they were forty paces away, they dispersed, revealing the pursuing figure of the quasi-flood dragon, charging directly towards the gathering place of Silver Light Island's cultivators, who had just unleashed a significant amount of magic and spells and weapon control, all of which now blasted onto the quasi-flood dragon.

The quasi-flood dragon's screeching filled the air, its green eyes reflecting the panicked faces of Silver Light Island's cultivators, and its aura began to grow more ferocious.

Standing at the forefront of the crowd, Luo Fu felt his blood run cold. He felt like he had plummeted from the peak to the nadir of life. The dramatic highs and lows were indeed thrilling.

The mouth of the quasi-flood dragon opened, and it spat out a cloud of green Snake Mist. Many controlled weapons were smeared by the mist and clattered down.

It's over! Luo Fu cried out in his heart.

When Zou Qi turned around, he saw the quasi-flood dragon spewing out the Snake Mist, his heart leaped with joy, knowing his plan had succeeded. Now, all he needed to do was simple: lead his team to the rear of Silver Light Island to block the retreat of Silver Light Island's cultivators, forcing them to confront the quasi-flood dragon!

What had been an imminent danger of having their base overrun had now, under his strategic command, turned into a victory. Even using the power of the quasi-flood dragon, they had caught Silver

Light Island off guard. He could almost imagine the praise he would receive from the elders of his sect when word of this got back.

From now on, he would be heavily relied upon by the sect, with an abundance of cultivation resources directed his way. Perhaps, he could even take this chance to ask the Sect Master for his daughter's hand in marriage and soar to the peak of life.

His dreams suddenly shattered because the quasi-flood dragon, having approached within twenty paces of Silver Light Island's cultivators, did not attack them but instead turned direction, chasing after them.

Zou Qi's face immediately turned green. Why, why is this happening!

The Sky Supporting Sect had never provoked the quasi-flood dragon. Why was it fixated on them?

Just as Luo Fu was about to rally his forces to confront the enemy, he swallowed back his words.

He received a message in his battlefield marking, glanced at it hurriedly, and realized it was a communication from Hao Ren.

Only then did he understand why the quasi-flood dragon had given up on them and turned to chase the people of the Sky Supporting Sect. It was all Lu Yiye's doing.

He reached into his storage sack, took out a wine gourd, and shakily brought it to his mouth.

The dramatic ups and downs of life were indeed too thrilling. He took a swig of wine to calm his nerves. After drinking, Luo Fu bellowed, "Just defend, don't attack!"

A few hundred cultivators from Silver Light Island gathered together. The physique cultivators stood actively at the outer perimeter, combat cultivators behind them, and the more delicate magic cultivators and healing cultivators at the very center.

All of them were pale-faced, terrified.

But after watching for a while, they noticed the situation was becoming quite peculiar.

On their periphery, the previously scattered cultivators of the Sky Supporting Sect were regrouping. Under the leadership of Zou Qi and Yuu Hongbao, they were desperately fleeing. The thunderous noise was startling, and behind this group of Sky Supporting Sect cultivators, the quasi-flood dragon relentlessly pursued them.

Centered on where they stood, the two groups continued to chase each other in circles.

The quasi-flood dragon occasionally spat out Snake Mist, and thunderbolt forces sporadically struck from its flesh horns. Screams echoed from the Sky Supporting Sect now and then.

What's going on?

The cultivators of Silver Light Island were baffled.

If it had been a normal day and they were being so blatantly ignored, they certainly wouldn't be pleased. After all, several hundred cultivators were gathered here, and being ignored meant they were not being taken seriously. But in this situation, they were more than happy to be ignored.

It wasn't exactly ignoring either. The people of the Sky Supporting Sect had no time to attack them, all busy fleeing in circles, while the quasi-flood dragon focused entirely on hunting them, not bothering to spare them a glance.

Observing for a moment and seeing that their immediate circumstances, though awkward, were at least still safe, they all breathed a sigh of relief.

For a time, they clicked their tongues in wonder, as none had ever experienced anything like this.

"Luo Fu you scoundrel, and you dare say the quasi-flood dragon isn't driven by your Silver Light Island!" Zou Qi's angry voice rang out.

By now, he fully understood he'd been deceived. The quasi-flood dragon must indeed be under the control of people from Silver Light Island; otherwise, there was no reason it would keep targeting them alone. They were already frantically running in circles, but the quasi-flood dragon was clinging to them like a shadow.

"To hell with it!" Luo Fu retorted, not to be outdone. He had been terrified out of his wits when the quasi-flood dragon had charged at them.

"Your Silver Light Island is doomed!"

"You first survive today before saying such things, you cur!"

The two sides exchanged a round of friendly and fervent dialogue.

"Back to the Nine Provinces!" Zou Qi roared resentfully.

The original plan had failed, and if they didn't return to the Nine Provinces now, not only would their base be lost, but their sect's cultivators would suffer heavy casualties.

Under his and Yuu Hongbao's lead, the Sky Supporting Sect cultivators rushed towards the Heaven's Augury Hall.

Luo Fu's expression showed a hint of eagerness, clearly wanting to intercept the people from the Sky Supporting Sect, but he considered that doing so might accidentally harm the quasi-flood dragon. If he were to draw its hatred, that would be troubling.

So, even though the opportunity was rare, Luo Fu could only hold back for the time being.

Looking ahead, the cultivators from the Sky Supporting Sect, led by Zou Qi, were storming towards the Heaven's Augury Hall, with the quasi-flood dragon in hot pursuit, as if there was an irreconcilable enmity between them.

Upon arriving in front of the Heaven's Augury Hall, the people of the Sky Supporting Sect did not rush in all at once, but quickly set up an array, allowing the physically strong physique cultivators to block the quasi-flood dragon while the magic cultivators and healing cultivators escaped first through the Heaven's Augury Pillar.

The two sides clashed in front of the Heaven's Augury Hall, with booming sounds incessantly ringing in the ears.

However, the Sky Supporting Sect had already suffered numerous casualties before, and lost more people while being chased by the quasi-flood dragon. As the cultivators continued to retreat to the Nine Provinces, their defense rapidly weakened.

Eventually, at a certain moment, the quasi-flood dragon broke through the defense of the physique cultivators and plunged into the Heaven's Augury Hall. Immediately, several screams echoed from within, belonging to those cultivators who hadn't managed to return to the Nine Provinces in time.

Boom, boom, boom, the sound came from inside the Heaven's Augury Hall, as if the quasi-flood dragon was going berserk.

The survivors kept running out from the Heaven's Augury Hall. No one could stay inside any longer, as the quasi-flood dragon's massive body of over twenty zhang in length filled the hall with a miasma of destruction; staying inside was akin to waiting for death.

Zou Qi lay among the rubble, covered in fresh blood. Watching the scattered cultivators of the Sky Supporting Sect all around, his eyes were dim.

He knew that the Sky Supporting Sect was finished!

Five miles away, Lu Ye flipped onto the tiger's back and said to Hao Ren, "Let your people take action, but do not enter the Heaven's Augury Hall!"

Amber sprang forward, heading straight for the Sky Supporting Sect's base.

The Hao siblings followed close behind, sending a message to Luo Fu halfway there.

Upon receiving Hao Ren's message, Luo Fu immediately issued an order. Hundreds of cultivators from Silver Light Island, who had been staying in their original location, thunderously charged into the Sky Supporting Sect's base.

The base of the Sky Supporting Sect at that moment was like a defenseless maiden, into whose home hundreds of brutish men had stormed; one could well imagine the outcome.

When Lu Ye and Amber arrived, the Heaven's Augury Hall was still emitting loud booms, and the entire hall was trembling incessantly.

The plaza in front of the Heaven's Augury Hall was strewn with bodies and blood, with the casualties of the Sky Supporting Sect's cultivators beyond count.

There might have been some who escaped, but the number wouldn't be many. Even if those who had previously escaped back to the Nine Provinces were added, the Sky Supporting Sect had been devastated at the Spirit Stream Realm level.

The people of Silver Light Island were cleaning up the battlefield while Luo Fu stood waiting in the plaza.

"Senior Brother Luo!" the Hao siblings approached with Lu Ye.

Luo Fu nodded slightly, then turned to look at Lu Ye and smiled broadly, "So this must be Fellow Daoist Yiye? I've long heard of your great name."

"Fellow Daoist Luo!"

"Indeed, a preeminent talent from an illustrious sect. Fellow Daoist Yiye, your skills are impressive; Luo admires them!"

Although Lu Ye hadn't shown himself from the beginning, Luo Fu knew that the fundamental reason they were able to take over the Sky Supporting Sect's base this time was because of the young man before him.

If it weren't for his ability to utilize the quasi-flood dragon, how could the Sky Supporting Sect have suffered such heavy losses?

He still couldn't figure out how Lu Ye, a mere Spirit Stream Level 7, managed to control such a ferocious beast, but he wouldn't rashly inquire. Such matters were better kept secret to avoid attracting undue wariness from others.

Now that the Sky Supporting Sect's base had been taken over, of course, the next step was to plunder it.

Luo Fu turned his head and glanced at the noisy Heaven's Augury Hall, his expression turning serious as he said, "Fellow Daoist Yiye, regarding the various benefits we've obtained this time, Silver Light Island will take twenty percent. What do you think of this arrangement?"

As the governor of a sect's base, Luo Fu could not act according to personal preference, although he was keen on befriending Lu Ye. Public matters were public, and private matters were private. Having brought out several hundred cultivators from Silver Light Island, since they had already taken over the Sky Supporting Sect's base, they couldn't return empty-handed; otherwise, he wouldn't be able to explain to his sect headquarter.

Lu Ye had indeed contributed greatly, but Silver Light Island had not been without effect. If it weren't for the arrival of several hundred cultivators from Silver Light Island, given the resources of the Sky Supporting Sect, they could have repelled the quasi-flood dragon.

For Lu Ye, he had originally just wanted to use the quasi-flood dragon to cause some losses to the Sky Supporting Sect. The timely assist from Silver Light Island was a pleasant surprise.

It could be said that the arrival of the cultivators from Silver Light Island completely crushed the defense of the Sky Supporting Sect. From their standpoint, taking thirty to forty percent wouldn't be excessive.

However, Luo Fu had other plans, hence he proposed taking only twenty percent to avoid causing displeasure.

Lu Ye shook his head: "Fifty percent. Let's split it evenly, half and half."

Luo Fu was momentarily embarrassed: "Ah, this... that's a bit too much."

"Fellow Daoist Luo, there's no need to decline. Actually, I have a favor to ask. If you insist on refusing, then it will be difficult for me to speak up."

He planned to establish an Alliance Pact with Silver Light Island, as, geographically, it was the closest inner circle sect to the Righteous Blood Sect. If they could establish an Alliance Pact, then in the future, cultivators from the Righteous Blood Sect could come to Silver Light Island for cultivation support.

By offering more benefits now, would his sect's cultivators not be well cared for when they arrived at Silver Light Island? Being alone in the world compared to having support made a world of difference, and Lu Ye, who had been adventuring alone, understood this deeply.

Chapter 255 - Dividing the Spoils

Furthermore, a few months ago, when Lu Ye's identity was exposed, leading to a pursuit by Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, it was those from the Haotian Alliance who relayed protection and ensured his safety. Without those cultivators—strangers who did not even know each other's origins or names after the fact—Lu Ye would have died on the road long ago.

So, even though he had no prior relations with the people of Silver Light Island, Lu Ye was willing to offer more benefits, simply because they belonged to the same Haotian Alliance.

The two major factions were in opposition and confrontation, and had they not been united in sincere cooperation, they would have been consumed by the other side long ago.

Luo Fu did not know what Lu Ye was requesting, but he vaguely guessed it, and being a straightforward man, he only pondered briefly before laughing and saying, "Alright, I, Luo Fu, hereby make friends with Brother Yiye."

He immediately formed a bond with Lu Ye on the spot.

Lu Ye then sent out another message, and shortly afterward, accompanied by a thunderous roar, the quasi-flood dragon burst out of Heaven's Augury Hall. Under the eyes of a group of Silver Light Island cultivators, it gradually moved farther away.

It was lured away by Yiyi.

Previously, it had chased after the cultivators of Sky Supporting Sect, even killing its way into Heaven's Augury Hall, all under Yiyi's guidance based on Lu Ye's instructions. To the quasi-flood dragon, the grievances between cultivators did not concern it, nor did it wish to bully the weak. For many years, it had resided quietly in its lake, a genuine homebody.

If not for the immense attraction of the snake scale armor, it would not have caused such a commotion.

"Brother Yiye, please go ahead," Luo Fu gestured with his hand.

This time, Lu Ye did not decline again but walked into Heaven's Augury Hall. Glancing around, he saw that the hall was in disarray from the turmoil, with even a massive pit appearing in one area, next to which lay some pieces of snake scale.

He approached the Heaven's Augury Pillar and placed his hand over it, leveraging his role as Deputy Governor of Righteous Blood Sect to plunder the blessings of Sky Supporting Sect.

He distinctly felt that the mark was filling with many things, like layers of imprints. As he plundered, crackling sounds continuously emanated from within the Heaven's Augury Pillar, almost as if it could collapse at any moment.

But Lu Ye knew it could not possibly break, as it was, after all, a gift from Heaven's Augury.

This reaction was due to the plundering of blessings, similar to purchasing blessings from the Heaven's Augury Pillar. Some intricate constructs inside were altered during the process of buying or plundering the blessings.

The nature's spiritual energy at Sky Supporting Sect's headquarters diminished noticeably quickly.

A short while later, Lu Ye walked out, nodding slightly to Luo Fu.

Luo Fu then entered, and by the time he came out, the nature's spiritual energy at Sky Supporting Sect's headquarters was nearly the same as that in the wilderness.

At that moment, Lu Ye did not know how much he had gained. Such matters would only be revealed upon returning to Righteous Blood Sect because the plundered blessings could not be directly turned into merit but had to be stored in Righteous Blood Sect's Heaven's Augury Pillar for conversion.

Regrettably, during the plundering process, a great amount of the blessing was lost, otherwise, the gains would have been even greater.

The cultivators of Silver Light Island were still pillaging. Sky Supporting Sect had its own spirit fields and medicinal garden where various spirit flowers and rare herbs were grown—highly valuable items.

Moreover, the entire area of Sky Supporting Sect's headquarters was much larger compared to Righteous Blood Sect. This was not the privilege of an inner circle sect but because Sky Supporting Sect had spent merit to buy it.

The coverage of the Heaven's Augury Pillar defined the boundaries of a sect's headquarters. Initially, all sects started the same, but by spending certain merits, they could expand the coverage of the Heaven's Augury Pillar, thus enlarging the headquarters correspondingly.

A larger headquarters provided ample space and naturally had its benefits.

Thus, theoretically, if a sect had enough merit, the boundaries of its headquarters could be indefinitely broad, potentially extending up to another sect's territory. However, theory is just theory, and in reality, no sect had too much merit to expand its headquarters; most were just adequate.

Two hours later, the cultivators of Silver Light Island regrouped and boarded the ship at Luo Fu's command.

He extended an invitation to Lu Ye, who naturally did not refuse and decided to accompany Luo Fu to Silver Light Island's headquarters.

The large ship, a type of Flying Spirit Artifact, clearly was quite valuable, likely purchased using sect merit from Heaven's Augury treasure vault. However, compared to the Flying Dragon Ship Lu Ye had ridden before, it was still inferior.

That Flying Dragon Ship was truly a powerful weapon for sieging forts, whereas this large ship of Silver Light Island was merely a Flying Spirit Artifact with some defensive capabilities but no offensive power.

After arranging a cabin for Lu Ye to rest, Luo Fu went off to get busy.

This battle also cost Silver Light Island some casualties, though few, and the spoils of war that needed to be inventory accounted for half belonged to Lu Ye.

While the cultivators of Silver Light Island were returning by ship, news had already been transmitted to nearby major powers through various channels.

This, of course, was the handiwork of the now-deceased Zou Qi, who, before dying, revealed the capability of Silver Light Island to control the quasi-flood dragon.

His motive was simple: his own headquarters had been devastated, so he wanted other forces in Ten Thousand Demons Ridge to be cautious.

Moreover, by revealing this information, it was highly likely to provoke nearby powers in Ten Thousand Demons Ridge to join forces to besiege Silver Light Island.

Controlling a quasi-flood dragon was an exceedingly terrifying matter, and while it might not have been daunting to the core circle sects—where many experts who had transferred to cultivate Heaven Rank techniques resided—it was almost universally disastrous against any force in the inner circle.

With these concerns in mind, the nearby powers of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge likely couldn't even sleep peacefully, fearing that one day the quasi-flood dragon might descend upon them.

Of course, there was another possibility: under the deterrence of the quasi-flood dragon, those powers in Ten Thousand Demons Ridge might no longer dare to provoke Silver Light Island.

Zou Qi did not know how things would develop, but he was close to death and could not care for much else. First, he revealed the information about the quasi-flood dragon.

This led to the immediate mobilization of various major forces nearby, rushing to the Sky Supporting Sect's base to investigate the situation. Among them were not only the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, but also the Haotian Alliance, and it was unclear how the news disseminated so quickly to the Haotian Alliance.

Upon arrival, a group of Level 9 cultivators, each from different backgrounds, all shared a somber mood.

The entire Sky Supporting Sect's base was a complete mess at the moment—countless buildings had collapsed, and traces of a large fire lingered. Indeed, before the people of Silver Light Island withdrew, they had set the place ablaze, utterly inhumane.

In the spirit fields and medicinal garden, all the plants, whether mature or not, had been completely uprooted. The Heaven's Augury Hall's square still bore remnants of a fierce battle, with dried bloodstains and corpses visible everywhere.

The entire base of the Sky Supporting Sect was in shambles. Having received news that the cultivators from Silver Light Island had already withdrawn, returning cultivators from the Sky Supporting Sect kneeled on the ground, raising their faces to the sky to howl in anguish, weeping bitterly.

It was too tragic!

More and more cultivators arrived to investigate, and surprisingly, a fierce battle broke out. The Level 9 cultivators from both factions fought intensely, and in the end, it was unclear who had won.

Half a day later, at the Silver Light Island base nestled in the mountains, Lu Ye, leading Yiyi and Amber, who was lazily draped over his shoulder, disembarked from the ship.

Luo Fu personally led Lu Ye to a two-story building to settle him in and mentioned he would host a dinner for him later that night to welcome him. This time, since the Sky Supporting Sect's base had been destroyed, Lu Ye had made a significant contribution and needed to return to the sect headquarters to report, leaving him no time to accompany further.

He told Lu Ye that if there were any needs, he should just speak to Hao Ren and his siblings.

After Luo Fu left, Lu Ye told Hao Ren and his siblings to rest, contacting him through messaging if needed, then went upstairs with Yiyi.

On the way back, Lu Ye learned from Yiyi that after she had lured the quasi-flood dragon out for ten li, she had swiftly stored its snake scale armor away in her storage sack, which completely baffled the creature...

At the spot where the scent of the snake scale armor had vanished, it threw a fierce tantrum before finally dragging its long body away. Yiyi, watching from a distance, noticed a hint of despondency in its eyes?

Watching the direction in which the quasi-flood dragon departed, it seemed to be heading back to the lake where it had always resided, but Yiyi was not certain because, at that time, Lu Ye had already messaged her to come back.

In the room, Yiyi was meditating to recover, while Amber ate elixir pills.

Having carried the snake scale armor underground for a while had consumed a lot of energy; naturally, she needed to recover.

Meanwhile, Lu Ye was examining his own spiritual orifice, contemplating whether to ascend to Level 8.

He had previously considered the merits of killing enemies as a Level 7, and since he already had the capability to defeat opponents two levels higher, he would not be at a disadvantage even against Level 9 cultivators.

However, now it seemed that defeating a Level 9 as a Level 7 would still involve some effort, so it might be better to ascend to Level 8 earlier on.

Furthermore, the merits gained from slaying enemies did not compare to those from capturing an enemy sect's base. So far, most of the merits he had accumulated came from this method, with only a minority actually coming from killing enemies.

Ascending to Level 8 soon was critical; cultivation was the greatest security.

"Fellow Daoist Yiye," a voice suddenly called from downstairs.

Lu Ye peeked out the window and saw a young man in green standing below. Feeling Lu Ye's gaze, the young man looked up, smiled gently, and greeted with a fist salute, "I apologize for disturbing you, fellow Daoist."

"Just a moment."

Lu Ye retracted his head, descended the stairs, opened the door, and there the young man stood outside, with Hao Ren and his sister behind him, each holding a large pile of storage sacks.

Seeing this scene, Lu Ye immediately understood that this was Silver Light Island delivering their share of the spoils.

The efficiency was quite commendable.

"I am Qih Shi, Deputy Governor of Silver Light Island, I have seen Fellow Daoist Yiye."

"Fellow Daoist Qih, you are too courteous. Please come in."

This small building was apparently designated by Silver Light Island specifically for accommodating guests; upstairs was for resting, and downstairs for receiving visitors.

Leading Qih Shi and Hao Ren and his sister inside, Qih Shi said, "These items are half of the profits obtained from Silver Light Island. Senior Brother Luo had a prior agreement with you, so I took the liberty of bringing them here. Fellow Daoist, where would you like them placed?"

There were at least a couple of hundred storage sacks in this large pile.

"Please take them upstairs."

Yiyi led the way ahead, taking Hao Ren and his sister upstairs to place down the storage sacks, then came back down.

After Hao Ren and his sister left, Lu Ye and Qih Shi chatted casually, mainly about Lu Ye learning from others. He was inexperienced with managing a base, but since Qih Shi was the Deputy Governor, he naturally had experience, and there was no harm in gaining some insights from him.

Meanwhile, Yiyi was by the side, brewing tea and silently listening.

From time to time, Lu Ye glanced at her in surprise; he hadn't known Yiyi had this skill.

Chapter 256 - Celebration Banquet

"This battle was a complete victory, and the sect will definitely reward us. According to Senior Brother Luo's wishes, there will be a celebratory feast tonight to also welcome and cleanse Fellow Daoist from his journey." Inside the side hall, Qi Shi's voice sounded, "Before Senior Brother Luo left, he asked me to inquire whether Fellow Daoist would be available to attend, considering your immense contributions to the smooth success of this battle."

Upon hearing this, Lu Ye understood.

To most cultivators on Silver Light Island, the capture of Sky Supporting Sect's headquarters seemed like a stroke of misfortune, not knowing why the quasi-dragon had targeted them.

However, a few well-informed individuals knew that the quasi-dragon had been lured there by Lu Ye; during the final battle, it had specifically pursued the people of Sky Supporting Sect and avoided those from Silver Light Island due to Lu Ye's secret maneuvers.

Therefore, in this battle, Lu Ye's contributions were significant.

As it was a celebratory feast, naturally, Lu Ye, the meritorious individual, could not be absent.

However, publicly announcing this would expose Lu Ye's ability to some extent to manipulate the quasi-dragon, and the name Lu Yiye from Righteous Blood Sect, on its own, was enough to draw considerable hatred from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge. Once exposed, it might bring many inconveniences to Lu Ye.

Luo Fu and Qi Shi had no intention of claiming the credit for themselves, and their report to the sect headquarters was completely truthful, without any omission. However, they had to consider Lu Ye's personal desires.

It must be said, their consideration was very thorough.

Lu Ye figured that someone with a personality like Luo Fu's would not think of these aspects; it must have been Qi Shi who thought of these critical issues and used this visit to gauge his reaction.

"The victory in this battle was due to the united efforts of all Fellow Daoists from Sky Supporting Sect, along with the attack from the quasi-dragon. It really had little to do with me."

Upon hearing his words, Qi Shi nodded: "I see."

After chatting idly with Lu Ye for a while, Qi Shi then took his leave.

Excited, Yiyi closed the door and ran with Lu Ye to the second floor to check on their gains from this event.

Between one and two hundred storage sacks, even with Lu Ye's current efficiency in unlocking them, would take two to three days to fully open. However, a few storage sacks were unlocked, containing all sorts of strange plants and Spiritual Artifacts.

These plants were surely plundered by the cultivators from Silver Light Island from the Sky Supporting Sect's headquarters. As for the Spiritual Artifacts... once the people from the Sky Supporting Sect were dead, the Spiritual Artifacts naturally became unclaimed possessions.

Just by looking at these items, it was clear that Luo Fu had kept his word about splitting the loot evenly with Lu Ye; he hadn't taken any advantage.

"We're rich!" Yiyi exclaimed excitedly, having never seen so many storage sacks gathered together before.

Lu Ye began to break the restriction locks on the storage sacks, and with each one he opened, Yiyi sorted through the contents, categorizing and stowing everything into several prepared storage sacks.

Some cultivators had rich resources, others much less so, but the quantity here made for a considerable accumulation of wealth.

By nighttime, the sounds of revelry gradually emerged from outside, growing louder and livelier as if many cultivators had gathered. Yiyi peeked out to see the cultivators from Silver Light Island all gathered by the Heaven's Augury Hall square, arranging tables and chairs, and the surrounding area was adorned with various illuminations, lighting up the entire square.

Moments later, a fragrance drifted over from that direction.

The Silver Light Island cultivators were preparing to hold their celebratory feast. They had been mutual adversaries with the Sky Supporting Sect for over a hundred years and had never experienced such a thorough and exhilarating victory, so it was understandably thrilling.

The slumbering Amber woke up to the scent and raised its head, looking at Lu Ye with an expression that said it was hungry.

Hao Ren and his sister led a group of people over, setting up a table on the first floor and continuously delivering exquisite foods; Silver Light Island even considered Amber, bringing over a large piece of fresh beast meat.

Moments later, Luo Fu's resonant voice emanated from the square by Heaven's Augury Hall. He spoke about finally living up to the sect's expectations, praised everyone's hard work in capturing the Sky Supporting Sect's headquarters, and urged everyone to continue their efforts in the future. Periodic cheers roared in approval, signaling the start of the celebratory feast amid a festive atmosphere.

Some time later, Luo Fu and Qi Shi came together.

"Brother Yiye, I'm really sorry," Luo Fu began with an apology, explaining how the celebratory feast on Silver Light Island was in full swing, yet the greatest contributor was tucked away here; he indeed felt somewhat uneasy about it.

But after hearing Qi Shi's analysis and Lu Ye's earlier decision, Luo Fu realized he had oversimplified the matter; although it slightly wronged Lu Ye, it was the best choice under the circumstances.

"It's no trouble,"

Lu Ye smiled, invited them inside, and a session of toasting ensued. Yiyi looked on worriedly.

Because Lu Ye had never drunk alcohol before. Perhaps because of Li Baxian, during his time at Righteous Blood Sect, their Second Senior Sister had prohibited everyone from drinking alcohol, even their sect master would sneak sips occasionally.

Thus, Yiyi was unsure whether Lu Ye could handle alcohol.

Fortunately, after three rounds of drinking, Lu Ye appeared as normal.

After all, as a Level 7 cultivator, it wasn't easy to get him drunk.

At the table, Luo Fu brought up forming an Alliance Pact with the Righteous Blood Sect, which Lu Ye readily agreed to, as it was also his purpose for coming to Silver Light Island.

The two immediately formulated an Alliance Pact using their respective authorities as governors. From then on, the disciples of the Righteous Blood Sect could come to Silver Light Island for training and could even spend merits to teleport directly back to the Righteous Blood Sect's headquarters.

"I heard some rumors before, saying that the power of two neighboring Ten Thousand Demons Ridge forces near the Righteous Blood Sect was already crippled? I wonder if it's true or false?"

During the outbreak of the Insect Plague, this matter had caused quite a stir; however, it was still quite a distance from the headquarters of the Righteous Blood Sect. Luo Fu and his compatriots had only heard it mentioned in passing and hadn't paid much attention to it.

The affairs of the outer circle sects are not much of a concern to those in the inner circle, just as the Core Circle doesn't pay much attention to the inner circle. It's not out of disrespect, but rather because each circle's sects have their allies and enemies, and their own issues to deal with.

"It did happen."

"Related to the Insect Plague?"

"Yes, there's a sect called Sky Fiend Hall. They mismanaged the Insect Plague, which caused it to erupt, and subsequently dragged the Phong Clan into the chaos too. My Righteous Blood Sect took the opportunity to launch a surprise attack and killed many people."

"I see!" Luo Fu nodded. "So, the Righteous Blood Sect's area is very safe?"

"You could say that. Brother Luo, do you have a matter to attend to?" Lu Ye perceived something.

Luo Fu sighed and said, "This is the situation: one of our sect elders has a beloved daughter who has been cultivating at our sect headquarters. She has reached Level 3, and Brother Yiye knows that the Spiritual Energy is rich at the inner circle sect's headquarters, which makes cultivation efficient. However, it's not optimal to keep cultivating behind closed doors. As a cultivator, how can she not experience real combat? This disciple sister has been pestering me to find a way to let her go out to the outer circle to gain experience. You don't know, Brother Yiye; I get a headache when I see her now, but the elder is reluctant to agree, fearing she might encounter dangers in the outer circle. Given that the situation at Righteous Blood Sect is so favorable, I was wondering if I could send her there."

"For the time being, no one dares to attack the Righteous Blood Sect's headquarters."

With Little Gray stationed there, who would dare to court death? A quasi-flood dragon almost broke the Sect Protection Array of the Sky Supporting Sect single-handedly, and Little Gray, being of the same caliber, wouldn't be any less capable.

"I will discuss this with the elder when I get back."

After eating and drinking, they finished discussing leisurely matters and took care of business. Luo Fu and Qih Shi said goodbye and left. After all, they were the Governor and Deputy Governor; it wasn't appropriate for them to stay all night at Lu Ye's place during tonight's celebratory banquet. They needed to join their fellow disciples for a few drinks and some banter.

After seeing off Luo Fu and Qih Shi, Lu Ye appeared thoughtful, shaking his head and chuckling to himself.

"What are you laughing at?" Yiyi didn't understand.

"It's nothing."

"Tell me," Yiyi insisted, grabbing Lu Ye's hand and shaking it, acting coquettishly.

"Brother Luo and I have already formed an alliance pact. If he truly wants to send his disciple to the Righteous Blood Sect for training, he wouldn't need to inform me; he could just send her over. But he asked about the situation over there, and mentioned the situation with that disciple sister, suggesting that her status is distinguished, and thus she should receive additional care at Righteous Blood Sect."

"He could have just said that directly, why beat around the bush?"

Lu Ye raised his hand and pinched her cheeks, twisting them left and right: "Some things, my dear, lose their charm if said outright."

The little girl's cheeks were feeling softer and softer.

Yiyi, annoyed, slapped his hand away, pouting her lips.

However, what Luo Fu was asking for was not a big deal. Righteous Blood Sect would take extra care of anyone they sent, and surely when disciples from Righteous Blood Sect came here, they would enjoy the same treatment. That's just how social exchanges work.

Under the night sky, Luo Fu and Qih Shi walked side by side.

Qih Shi opened his mouth and said, "Senior Brother, that Fellow Daoist Lu seems very adept at using others to do his bidding."

"What do you mean?"

"Look, in the outer circle, he managed to cripple both Sky Fiend Hall and the Phong Clan using the momentum of the Insect Plague. Then here in the inner circle, using the quasi-flood dragon, he almost crippled the Sky Supporting Sect."

Luo Fu was stunned; he hadn't realized this before, but now he suddenly said, "You mean, three powers of the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge have fallen to his hands?"

"Moreover, Fellow Daoist Lu just mentioned that it was Sky Fiend Hall's poor handling of the Insect Plague that caused its outbreak, which also led to the Phong Clan's misfortune. However, the Insect Plague that the outer circle sects need to handle isn't difficult to manage. As long as there is enough cooperation, it should never lead to an outbreak, at worst just some casualties."

"You mean..."

"It's likely that Fellow Daoist Lu had a hand in it. What exactly he did in there, I don't know, just like this time, people unaware don't know that it was he who lured the quasi-flood dragon there," Qih Shi speculated.

Upon reflection, Luo Fu realized it was indeed so. Though the Insect Plague was a natural disaster, as long as it was managed promptly, it could usually be handled, unless someone meddled from behind the scenes.

"Moreover, he's only at Level 7, yet he can kill those at Level 9! With such talent and such methods, if he were to grow..."

"It would be terrifying!" Luo Fu clicked his tongue in admiration. "Ten Thousand Demons Ridge might not have good days ahead."

Qih Shi said, "Indeed, I'm just relieved he's part of the Haotian Alliance."

Luo Fu laughed heartily: "Then we must celebrate that fact. Let's go, tonight we won't return until we are drunk!"

"Brother, I'm talking about serious matters," Qih Shi said helplessly as Luo Fu dragged him to the square, where soon a large group of cultivators gathered, each holding their jugs of wine.

Chapter 257 - Spirit Stream Level 8

It had been three days since the Sky Supporting Sect's territory was breached.

In the visitors hall of the Silver Light Island base, Luo Fu was entertaining several cultivators, all of whom were Level 9, both men and women, each one a Governor or Deputy Governor of a sect's base, and without exception, their territories were all not far from Silver Light Island.

Because Qih Shi had warned him earlier, as soon as Luo Fu saw these few coming to visit together, he knew what was going on.

Sure enough, these people were all here to inquire about the quasi-flood dragon, expressing that if Silver Light Island was willing to command the quasi-flood dragon to assist them in capturing enemy sect bases, the spoils would be divided, sixty-forty, in their favor.

The message sent out by Zou Qi before his death had taken effect, and now, not only were the forces of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge near Silver Light Island exceedingly wary, but even people from the Haotian Alliance believed it, which was why they had come here to discuss an alliance with Luo Fu.

However, Luo Fu was willing but unable to help.

If Silver Light Island truly could command the quasi-flood dragon, there would be nothing to discuss. They could completely cooperate with these few factions to take down several Ten Thousand Demons Ridge bases and share all kinds of benefits. How wonderful would that be?

The key point was that they couldn't command the quasi-flood dragon at all. The one who could truly command it was someone else.

But Luo Fu couldn't say this outright.

In the end, being left with no choice, he had to make a Heaven's Augury oath, informing them that Silver Light Island's success in taking down the Sky Supporting Sect base was completely due to luck and that they had nothing to do with the quasi-flood dragon.

Having made the Heaven's Augury oath, his words were all truthful, and only then did the Governors seeking help leave in disappointment.

After sending them away, Luo Fu glanced toward the training room, "Junior Brother Qih, has Brother Yiye mentioned wanting to cultivate and train with us?"

"He has not." Qih Shi shook his head.

"That's a pity."

Had Lu Yiye really been willing to affiliate himself with Silver Light Island, it would undoubtedly have been good news for them. Not to mention the quasi-flood dragon, just the personal strength that Lu Ye had previously shown was enough to warrant their attention.

Since Lu Ye hadn't mentioned it, it was highly likely that he wouldn't be staying here for long. Such matters couldn't be forced and depended entirely on personal willingness.

"Later, I'll try to gauge his intentions, see if I can ask him for help again. If he truly can command that quasi-flood dragon, let's go annihilate the Cloud Mist Cult. I've been annoyed by those pompous fools for a long time."

The Cloud Mist Cult was another faction from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge neighboring Silver Light Island, and although their enmity wasn't as great as that between Silver Light Island and the Sky Supporting Sect, as neighbors, frictions were inevitable.

If they could extinguish the Sky Supporting Sect first and then the Cloud Mist Cult, Silver Light Island could rule as king over this thousand-mile territory and do as they pleased.

At the same time, inside a training room, Lu Ye's spirit force swirled around his body, constantly striking at the barriers of his spiritual orifices under his control.

With a soft sound coming from his spiritual orifice, the barrier of the 144th orifice was breached, and streams of spirit force flowed in.

Having opened up to 144 spiritual orifices was the standard for advancing to Level 8.

Lu Ye didn't rest and continued to drive the spirit force, passing through the idle spiritual orifices, creating a Minor Circumambulation cycle.

As the air waves swept around him, Level 8 was achieved.

Moving from Level 7 to Level 8 had taken Lu Ye roughly fifty to sixty days, which to him, wasn't fast, because previously at the Righteous Blood Sect, he had spent his days training in the Path of Spirit Runes with Madam Yun.

But at this moment, he didn't need to rise through the levels too quickly. Cultivating too rapidly, without sufficient time to consolidate, was not a good thing; it would only create a façade of a cultivator with high cultivation but not the corresponding strength to match.

Li Baxian had also told him that aside from cultivation, it was essential to focus on consolidating oneself.

For a normal cultivator, advancing from Level 7 to Level 8 in less than two months was still very fast, but thankfully, Lu Ye had experienced plenty of battles and also could enter the Mirage Realm at any time to temper himself. Everything experienced in the Mirage Realm was extremely real, including the sensation of dying.

The combat skills and experience accumulated through numerous deaths were not something that ordinary methods could compare with; they were the essence learned with one's life and injuries.

So even though Lu Ye's cultivation speed was fast, he still maintained a combat power far exceeding those of the same level.

He continued to consume elixir pills for cultivation, wanting to see how many elixir pills it would take to open a single orifice at Level 8.

After half a day, he concluded that currently opening one orifice required approximately thirty-five pills.

This was, without doubt, a terrifying number. When he was at Level 3-4, opening a single orifice only required a dozen or so pills, which seemed a lot at the time, but was negligible compared to now.

The higher the cultivation, the more pills required to open an orifice.

To ascend from Level 8 to Level 9, one needs to open thirty-six new spiritual orifices. Using elixir pills alone for this task would require over twelve hundred pills!

Of course, Lu Ye's current cultivation wasn't only reliant on consuming elixir pills, so the actual consumption would definitely be about half of that figure.

Suddenly, a muffled groan from Yiyi came from the side; her face turned pale instantly—she had died in the Mirage Realm...

Yiyi also had merits. Since the sect master had stamped her with a battlefield marking, she was a disciple of the Righteous Blood Sect, and she could earn merits by killing enemies. However, most of her merits came from the monthly allowance that Hua Ci had given her last time, which wasn't much. Together with her previous battle spoils, she had less than a thousand in total.

Her merits were of little use, so Lu Ye encouraged her to train in the Mirage Realm. They would undoubtedly face many battles in the future, and the Mirage Realm was an excellent place for tempering oneself.

"Is it fun?"

"Not a bit!" Yiyi was annoyed, obviously having been taught a lesson by the bugs inside the Mirage Realm.

"Take your time."

"Hmm." Yiyi responded sullenly, sitting down to meditate and recover.

Lu Ye then took out an object from his storage sack to refine.

It was a Flying Spiritual Artifact, from a cultivator named Yuan Guang at Level 9; the quality was quite decent.

The cultivation level past Level 7 was a watershed; once a cultivator reached this stage, they could start controlling weapons to fight enemies.

Upon reaching Level 8, one could control weapons for flight, of course—how fast and how far one could fly depended on one's own foundation.

Generally, cultivators at Level 8 didn't fly using weapon control because it consumed too much energy, and it wasn't particularly swift or high. Out in the open, it was easy to become a target. Getting knocked out of the sky by someone meant a bad outcome.

This situation improved at Level 9, so most of those who dared to fly using weapon control in the wild were cultivators at Level 9.

Although Lu Ye had the Wings Rune Tattoo, such a thing had a life span. Initially, Madam Yun said the tattoo could last at most six hours. Since obtaining the tattoo, Lu Ye had used it occasionally; hence, the lifespan of the tattoo had been greatly reduced, and it probably couldn't be used much longer.

That's why he needed his own power of flight, and Level 8 was just the threshold for flying with weapon control.

A day later, Lu Ye walked out of the training room, followed by Yiyi.

Luo Fu messaged him immediately.

Shortly after, the two settled themselves as host and guest in the visitors hall.

"Brother Yiye, I'm a straightforward person, so let's get straight to the point." Luo Fu dispensed with pleasantries now that they were familiar with one another, "Recently, a few Governors from the Haotian Alliance have approached me, wanting to cooperate with Silver Light Island to attack the stronghold of the forces from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge."

Lu Ye nodded, it was normal for neighboring or nearby forces of the same coalition to cooperate; when he had previously led a team to attack the Phong Clan, he also contacted Infinity Heights.

"But Brother Yiye also knows, breaking through a sect's Sect Protection Array is no easy feat. Without strong support, even two forces joining hands might not guarantee success, and the support they're relying on is the quasi-flood dragon!"

By the time Luo Fu had said this much, Lu Ye already understood his implication.

"So I wanted to ask Brother Yiye if it's possible to command the quasi-flood dragon again. If so, then let's undertake a big heist."

"Brother Luo misunderstands; I don't have the means to command the quasi-flood dragon. In fact, I can only guide its direction to a certain extent."

"That's sufficient, as long as Brother Yiye can direct the quasi-flood dragon to the front of those few Ten Thousand Demons Ridge forces' strongholds. With the precedent of the Sky Supporting Sect, those from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge surely won't dare to resist and might even be scared off. Then, we just have to swoop in for the benefits!" Luo Fu said excitedly, rubbing his hands together with anticipation.

Lu Ye pondered for a moment and nodded, "That could be tried."

Luo Fu was delighted, "Then is it agreed?"

"Let's not contact those forces yet; I'll inform Brother Luo when I have concrete news. There'll be time for action then."

"Excellent!"

As Lu Ye stood up to leave, Luo Fu saw him off. Soon, Lu Ye was riding Amber away from the territory of Silver Light Island's stronghold. Luo Fu had wanted to have Brother Hao Ren and his sister accompany Lu Ye, but Lu Ye declined.

While he was willing to give it a try, he didn't find the plan very reliable, which was why he hadn't agreed outright.

A fierce creature like the quasi-flood dragon had enough spiritual intelligence; having been tricked once, it might not be deceived a second time.

Ten miles after leaving Silver Light Island's stronghold, Lu Ye dismounted Amber's back, took something from his storage sack, and threw it before him with a surge of spirit force.

The object immediately transformed into an airy skiff about ten feet in length, its surface carved with exquisite patterns and finely crafted.

That was Yuan Guang's Flying Spirit Artifact, which was about four feet wide.

At the bow and stern of the skiff, there were several slots for placing Spirit Stones.

When flying using weapon control, it wasn't just the cultivator's spirit force that was consumed but also the spirit force of the Spirit Stones placed in advance on it. This could reduce the consumption from the cultivator themselves.

The better quality the Flying Spirit Artifact, the greater the reduction it provided.

The quality of Yuan Guang's skiff was excellent.

Such a skiff could seat up to two or three people at most; any more, and it would be a tight fit. However, it was sufficient for Lu Ye.

With the skiff hovering before him, Lu Ye stepped aboard, cautious from his previous experience with the Wings Spirit Runes.

Once he was steady on his feet, he called for Amber. Amber shrank down to a foot in length and hopped onto his shoulder, and Yiyi had already hidden herself within Amber's body.

With everything ready, Lu Ye activated his spirit force, and the skiff began to lift off, shaking unsteadily. It hadn't gone far before pitching forward and plunging towards the ground.

Chapter 258 - Continue Forward

About one incense stick's time later, a small boat-shaped Spiritual Artifact flew by at a height of forty Zhang above the ground.

With previous experience in weapon control-flying using the wings spirit runes, combined with Lu Ye's now far superior control over his own spirit force, he spent only a brief time figuring out the trick to weapon control-flying.

The speed of this mode of flight was even faster than Amber running at full strength. After all, one was flight, and the other was running—they were incomparable.

However, riding on Amber didn't require any energy, whereas weapon control-flying consumed Lu Ye's own spirit force.

The degree of consumption was much lower than what Lu Ye had anticipated. This was related to the sufficiency and purity of his spirit force. After checking the rate at which his spirit force was depleting and doing some quick calculations, he could maintain this weapon control-flying for approximately four to six hours.

For a cultivator who had just advanced to Level 8, this duration of sustained flight was already quite long. As his cultivation improved in the future, both the duration and speed of his weapon control-flying would greatly increase.

The small boat also had a simple Protective Array on it. It wasn't very defensive, but it could block the oncoming gales.

Lu Ye was currently sitting in the middle of the small boat, with Yiyi sitting in front of him, leaning into his arms. As the small boat moved forward, her laughter tinkled like silver bells.

Being able to use weapon control-flying meant he now had another method for traveling and escaping. If he wished to fly, he wouldn't have to rely entirely on the wings rune tattoo anymore.

Half a day later, as night fell, Lu Ye arrived at the lake where the quasi-flood dragon resided, riding on Amber.

The place still bore traces of the bonfires left by people last time.

Lu Ye didn't know whether the quasi-flood dragon had returned here, but according to Yiyi's observations, there was a high probability that the beast had come back.

He allowed Amber to shape-change down to the size of a kitten and asked Yiyi to stand by at any moment, then he took the Scale Armor out from his storage sack.

He watched the lake silently, waiting for a moment, but there was no movement.

Lu Ye brought the Scale Armor up to Amber's face, and Amber immediately took a fierce breath, and a streak of blood was drawn out...

"It's coming," Yiyi whispered.

Lu Ye also saw ripples appear on the lake surface. The ripples swiftly expanded, and a horn slowly surfaced as it gradually swam towards the shore.

He quietly urged his spirit force, ready to activate the wings at any moment.

With a splash, a gigantic snake head rose from the surface of the lake, its two emerald green eyes fixated on the Scale Armor in Lu Ye's hand. The part of its body that was out of the water had many scales missing, looking quite disheveled.

Separated by a distance of thirty Zhang, their eyes met. Lu Ye lifted the Scale Armor in his hand, and the quasi-flood dragon's gaze shifted slightly.

However, unlike last time, although the beast still seemed very eager for the Scale Armor, it didn't immediately rush over.

Its snake pupils were filled with a wary expression.

Seeing this, Lu Ye knew that his plan to continue luring the quasi-flood dragon was likely to fail.

The quasi-flood dragon possessed high spiritual intelligence. Last time, it was drawn by the allure of the Scale Armor and ended up fighting a battle with the cultivators from the Sky Supporting Sect at their base. Although the Sky Supporting Sect suffered, it was injured as well.

The pain from its wounds made it angry and irrational, fixated only on taking the Scale Armor, which led it deeper into trouble.

After the Scale Armor's aura vanished and it emerged disgracefully back to its lair, it realized something was wrong—it seemed to have been used!

In this world, the incessant strife among the human race was something it knew about. The reason it chose to live a secluded life in such a place was firstly, because it had few pursuits left, and secondly, it didn't want to get involved in the conflicts of the human race. To it, the life-and-death battles of humans had nothing to do with it as long as they didn't disturb it.

But this peace-loving creature had been exploited by a despicable, deceitful member of the human race!

Over the past few days while healing its wounds, the more it thought about it, the angrier it became. But what could it do? The irresistible scent was gone, and that despicable human had disappeared.

Until today, when that scent reappeared, and that same human showed up again.

Although the quasi-flood dragon still craved the Scale Armor, it would no longer act rashly. It knew that to obtain that Scale Armor, it would have to kill that despicable human!

With that in mind, it brewed its power for a moment, and suddenly, a Thunderbolt appeared on its horn; a pillar of thunder as thick as an arm roared towards Lu Ye.

Already prepared, Lu Ye took to the sky in an instant.

With a bang, the thunder pillar blasted a deep hole where Lu Ye had been standing.

In the sky, Lu Ye increased the distance between himself and the quasi-flood dragon, his back breaking into a cold sweat.

Though he had felt he was unlikely to exploit the quasi-flood dragon again, he hadn't expected the beast to despise him to this extent. It welcomed him with thunder on their first encounter. Had he not been prepared in advance, he wouldn't have been able to dodge that attack at all.

Landing at a distance, Yiyi followed over. Lu Ye handed the Scale Armor to Yiyi and let her give it a try.

Yiyi took the Scale Armor and burrowed into the ground for a trial.

An hour later, Yiyi returned and shook her head at Lu Ye.

No matter how Yiyi tempted it, the quasi-flood dragon refused to leave the lake it resided in—it had learned its lesson.

Lu Ye raised his hand and touched the battlefield marking, sending a message to Luo Fu.

"The quasi-flood dragon won't come out, there's nothing I can do."

Luo Fu quickly replied, his tone somewhat disappointed, but he knew it couldn't be helped. Lu Ye had already made it clear to him that he did not control the quasi-flood dragon but could only guide its actions to some extent. Since it was guidance, naturally, not everything would go as wished.

After ending the communication with Luo Fu, Lu Ye called to Yiyi, "Let's go."

Since they couldn't lure out the quasi-flood dragon, Lu Ye decided not to return to the Silver Light Island base. He planned to continue on his way.

In the second half of the night, they found a suitable place to rest, planning to set off again at dawn.

Lu Ye's purpose for entering the inner circle this time was two-fold—firstly, to pave the way for the cultivators of the Righteous Blood Sect by using his authority as a Governor to forge Alliance Pacts with suitable inner circle sects, thus giving the Righteous Blood Sect cultivators more options in the future. Secondly, he sought to avenge the battle at Golden Light Peak.

The nearest sect, Sky Supporting Sect, had already been arranged; the next target was Fenghua Courtyard.

Lu Ye vaguely remembered that Fenghua Courtyard was the second power from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge to send someone to challenge him on Golden Light Peak. The challenger was a delicate female magic cultivator whose combination of wind and fire attacks caused him some trouble. However, once he closed in on her, the delicate female magic cultivator ended up decapitated.

Fenghua Courtyard was not close by. Riding on Amber, it would take at least half a month to get there, and weapon control-flying would be quicker but too draining on spirit force.

There was no rush, so naturally, Lu Ye chose to ride on Amber.

Sitting atop the tiger, spirit force surged continuously in Lu Ye's hands.

In his left hand, the Yin-Yang Primordial Element continuously emerged, gradually forming an extremely complicated pattern. It was a spirit rune he had learned from the tomes. The spirit runes Lu Ye learned from the tomes weren't the only ones he knew; although each had its clever use, they couldn't be activated at will, so they were only suitable for practice during peacetime and couldn't be used in combat.

The spirit runes Lu Ye used in battle all came from the Talent Tree, runes he could activate at will.

Even with the patient instruction from Madam Yun before, Lu Ye's mastery of the Path of Spirit Runes was only at a beginner's level. Now that he couldn't constantly consult Madam Yun, he had to study on his own.

Fortunately, before he left, he had taken many rune-related tomes from Madam Yun. As long as he could thoroughly understand the contents of these books, he would greatly advance in the Path of Spirit Runes.

In his right hand, there was also a spirit rune, a Sharpness rune, but Lu Ye was using his own spirit force to break this rune, dissipating it.

One hand constructing, one hand resolving, multitasking was undoubtedly difficult, and Lu Ye had yet to master it.

This sort of practice would not only advance his Path of Spirit Runes, but also train his precise control of spirit force. The very reason Lu Ye, at Level 7, could do weapon control with two weapons lay here.

Now, at Level 8, if he wished, he could control one or two more weapons.

He had not refined any more Spiritual Artifacts. Merely increasing the number of controlled weapons was meaningless; Lu Ye wanted to enhance their lethality, which meant constructing spirit runes on the weapons as they killed enemies.

This was difficult, and Lu Ye had no clear idea on how to do it for the time being, so he could only continue to delve into the Path of Spirit Runes, enhancing his expertise in this area.

With patience, success would come naturally. Once his mastery of the Path of Spirit Runes was sufficient, he would be able to construct spirit runes however he wished.

If he were traveling alone, Lu Ye would never dare to be so distracted, but he was not alone; Yiyi was with him. Therefore, if there was any danger, Yiyi would alert him.

During the day, he improved his mastery of the Path of Spirit Runes while on the road. At night, Lu Ye would study the tomes he brought from Madam Yun and occasionally, when keen for a challenge, he would enter the Mirage Realm.

That being said, after reaching Level 8, the next time he entered the Mirage Realm, he no longer encountered members of the Insect Race but instead faced a Level 8 cultivator in battle. The reason why was unclear.

A Level 8 cultivator was naturally no match for him, and even a Level 9 wouldn't last long under his knife. In the Mirage Realm, cultivators at the 7th Heaven level had started to appear.

Every fight was a grueling battle! A cultivator's strength would surge explosively after switching to a Heaven Rank technique.

When Lu Ye was at Level 7, killing Yuan Guang, who was two levels higher, hadn't been too difficult. Yet, as a Level 8 fighting against a 7th Heaven cultivator—which was also two levels higher—it became a struggle rife with injuries, and one slip-up risked him being killed in return.

From this, Lu Ye gained a clear understanding of his current strength. Against a 7th Heaven opponent, the chances of life or death were even, dependent on who performed better on the spot.

In the Mirage Realm, the opponents he faced were from varying factions, so as long as Lu Ye was willing to spend merit, he could easily amass a great deal of actual combat experience. Once settled, this experience became techniques for killing enemies.

The journey wasn't peaceful, as Lu Ye chose to travel in a straight line and inevitably trespassed the territories of some Ten Thousand Demons Ridge powers. Encountering Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators inevitably led to conflict.

Cultivators in the inner circle were generally between Level 6 to Level 9, with few who transitioned to Heaven Rank techniques. Those who did typically operated in the Core Circle. Those who encountered Lu Ye naturally did not end well, and the same was true even if they traveled in groups of three or five. It's worth noting that Yiyi was in control of the Nine Worlds map, and coupled with her ability to appear and vanish unpredictably, Lu Ye's enemies could carelessly end up trapped in the Nine Worlds map, leading to their inevitable demise.

Chapter 259 - Boundless Mirage Realm

Within the battlefield of Spirit Stream, nature's spiritual energy is rich, making every landscape extremely beautiful. A group consisting of a man, a spirit, and a tiger traveled along this road, taking in the sights. When it comes to knowledge of the places within the battlefield, perhaps no one of the same cultivation level knew more than Lu Ye did.

He left the Qingyun Mountain at Spirit Stream Level 2 and embarked on the journey back to the Righteous Blood Sect, not reaching Spirit Stream Level 5 until after five long months had passed.

This time, he set off from the terrains of the Sky Supporting Sect, starting another long journey.

Although other cultivators occasionally set out to travel, they mostly spent their time cultivating.

The more one travels and sees, the broader one's knowledge becomes.

In a marketplace, a travel-weary Lu Ye arrived arm in arm with Yiyi.

Unlike marketplaces in the outer circle, this one was more bustling, as those coming and going were no longer junior cultivators of Level 3-4. Anyone qualified to venture in the inner circle was at least at Level 6.

And the name of this marketplace was simple: Heaven's Augury Square, because it was a marketplace formed and led by the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union.

Such marketplaces were commonplace throughout the inner and Core Circles.

Cultivators could use merits to buy rare treasures from the Heaven's Augury treasure vault, but for daily life and cultivation needs, they would not use precious merits, which were hard to come by.

Where there's trading, marketplaces naturally arise.

Lu Ye had been to several marketplaces in the outer circle, but this was his first visit to one in the inner circle. As he strolled around, he noticed significant differences from those in the outer circle.

At the very least, the buildings here were more orderly, and the streets cleaner, with many independent cultivators and sect-born cultivators coming in and out.

There were independent cultivators in both the inner and Core Circles, staying as such either out of habit or personal pursuits, or for some other reason, without having joined any sects.

Furthermore, these independent cultivators, generally at Level 7-8, were not very suitable candidates for sect recruitment, as no one knew whether their backgrounds were clean. After all, inducting a spy from a rival sect would be unfortunate.

Besides, it was tough to guarantee their loyalty.

In the outer circle, junior cultivators at Level 3-4 could still find a chance to join a sect. The higher the cultivation, the more difficult it was to be accepted into a sect.

Therefore, not only the Spirit Stream Realm, but also the Cloud River, True Lake, and even the Divine Sea Realm had independent cultivators.

Most independent cultivators chose to practice under the protection of a sect's station because of the rich Spiritual Energy, although a small number did not affiliate with any sect, since aside from enjoying the rich Spiritual Energy within these stations, there were no other tangible benefits, and they would have to follow commands from others.

These independent cultivators often lived around Heaven's Augury Square, earning their own cultivation resources.

It must be said that the lives of these independent cultivators seemed tough but were also filled with freedom.

Lu Ye came to Heaven's Augury Square primarily to rest for a night and to update his ten-part map.

This item, which he had bought for a considerable sum, was now almost a year old, and there were surely many changes in the map.

He also needed to dispose of some booty, such as items he gained from Silver Light Island, which took up much space in his storage sack. Most of them had already been sold to the Heaven's Augury treasure vault on Silver Light Island, leaving only a small amount to exchange for cultivation resources.

He walked into the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union unhurriedly, the layout inside resembling those he had visited before. Under the guidance of a Manager, he entered a private room.

He stated his requirements and took out the items he wanted to trade, then the Manager took them and left.

While waiting, Lu Ye poured himself a cup of Spiritual Tea. This triggered some memories. When he used to visit the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, he would drink tea until he was stuffed because the Spiritual Tea contained a bit of Spiritual Energy that could be used to improve cultivation...

Back then, he was truly poor, counting the elixir pills he used for cultivation every few days, fearing the day they would run out.

Now, there was no need to worry about things like elixir pills. If he ran out of resources for cultivation, he only had to seize them, and even merits, a valuable commodity, Lu Ye had saved up quite a lot.

After waiting for about the time it took an incense stick to burn, the Manager returned, handed over the updated ten-part map, and gave back a bag of Spirit Stones and elixir pills.

Lu Ye checked them briefly, and the transaction was completed to their mutual satisfaction.

He then made a request for accommodation and was properly looked after.

Soon after, in a premier room on the third floor of the mercantile union, Lu Ye sat cross-legged, checking the changes on the ten-part map. However, after much inspection, it didn't seem to have any significant differences from before.

It seemed like there weren't many changes after all.

Considering the location, another half a day's journey would bring him into the vicinity of the Fenghua Courtyard's station.

Based on previous experience, Lu Ye decided to be more straightforward this time and head directly to someone else's mining area. Previously, he was at Level 7 and new to the inner circle; he had to be discreet in his actions. Now, at Level 8, he could afford to be a bit more audacious, thinking that if he couldn't win a battle, he could always flee.

Yes, that would be the plan.

Putting away the ten-part map, Lu Ye took out a thick secret tome and flipped through it while constructing and then breaking down spirit runes on the palm of his hand. His daily diligence in practice had made him much more skilled in this task than before, signifying his steady progress in the Path of Spirit Runes.

The night passed quickly.

The next day, after a good rest and even a bath, Lu Ye, refreshed and donning clean clothes, walked down energetically from the third floor.

The hall was surprisingly empty; aside from the people of the mercantile union, there were no other cultivators to be seen.

Lu Ye didn't think much of it and walked out of the mercantile union with Yiyi. Once outside, he found that the marketplace also had very few people.

It seemed as though the cultivators had all but vanished overnight.

Lu Ye frowned, unclear about what had happened.

Yiyi said, "Shall I go ask?"

Lu Ye nodded in agreement.

She turned and approached the female cultivator responsible for reception at the entrance, sweetly asking, "Sister, what happened here?"

The female cultivator replied, "I heard something about a Boundless Mirage Realm appearing."

"What's that?"

The female cultivator shook her head: "I'm not very clear on that either." She was just a junior cultivator at Level 4 and wouldn't have been in the inner circle if not for her association with Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union.

Lu Ye had already stepped into the mercantile union and casually found a manager: "Do you have information about the Boundless Mirage Realm?"

The manager replied with a beaming smile, "Of course, sir. What level of detail would you like...?"

"The most expensive!"

Today was different from the past. Previously, buying a ten-part map made him dig deep into his pockets, but now, Lu Ye was not short on money.

"Please wait a moment, sir," said the manager, promptly departing.

Shortly after, he returned and handed a jade slip to Lu Ye: "That will be nine hundred Spirit Stones."

The price... was indeed exorbitantly high.

Lu Ye didn't comment, counting out nine hundred Spirit Stones from his storage sack to give to the manager, then stepped aside to examine the information about the Boundless Mirage Realm.

After the time it took to burn half an incense stick, he put down the jade slip and, sensing Yiyi's gaze, passed it to her to check as well.

According to the information in the jade slip, the Boundless Mirage Realm was a separate small space, similar to Chess Sea, but not as vast.

Moreover, there wasn't just one Boundless Mirage Realm; there were many variations. Some were exquisitely beautiful inside, some grim and ghostly, and some unpredictable.

But without exception, every Boundless Mirage Realm contained treasures, either heavenly materials and earthly treasures, secret techniques, or secret tomes, and some people had even acquired Heaven Rank techniques there.

When it came to Cultivation Techniques, there was a polarizing trend in the Nine Provinces. Below Heaven Rank techniques, everything including Earth-class techniques were common. That's why Lu Ye was able to buy the Red Lotus Soaring to Sky Technique from Xuanmen for just a few Spirit Stones.

An Earth-class technique truly sold would only cost a few dozen Spirit Stones, which wasn't expensive.

But Heaven Rank techniques could not be bought outside; they could only be obtained by exchanging merit points at Heaven's Augury treasure vault.

Wanting to exchange for a Heaven Rank technique, the merit points required would start from at least a thousand, and due to Heaven's Augury's oversight, a Heaven Rank technique exchanged from the treasure vault couldn't be taught to others, otherwise Heaven's Augury would impose punishment.

A thousand merit points weren't much for Lu Ye as he killed enemies easily and, with his Governor status, occasionally granted himself an extra allowance.

But many cultivators might not accumulate enough merit for a Heaven Rank technique even from Level 1 to Level 9. There were many cultivators stuck at the common Level 9 realm because they couldn't afford a Heaven Rank technique.

And yet, this thing couldn't be dispensed with, because a Heaven Rank technique was key to a cultivator's breakthrough from the Spirit Stream Realm to ascend to the Cloud River. Put simply, without a Heaven Rank technique, there was no advancing to the Cloud River.

That's why cultivators from both factions were willing to fight each other; killing enemies earned merit, which was vital for their future.

Therefore, the allure of the Boundless Mirage Realm to cultivators was immense. If someone obtained a Heaven Rank technique inside, it was equivalent to picking up a thousand merit points for free.

The Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union sold comprehensive information about the Boundless Mirage Realm, as after each appearance, they would spend Spirit Stones or elixir pills to buy information from the surviving cultivators, compiling and recording the details.

That was the reason for its high price.

According to the jade slip, the Boundless Mirage Realm would randomly appear anywhere within the Spirit Stream battlefield. Considering the vast size of the battlefield, even though the chance of its appearance wasn't low, encountering it was still a matter of luck.

Normally, as soon as a Boundless Mirage Realm appeared, nearby cultivators would enter to seek fortune.

This was also why there were suddenly so many fewer people in the marketplace.

However, the manifestation of the Boundless Mirage Realm was brief; from its appearance to its disappearance, it lasted roughly only one day. Considering the time it took to be discovered and for the message to spread, not many people could enter. Once, a Boundless Mirage Realm was discovered just before it was about to vanish. By the time the discoverer arrived at the location, the Boundless Mirage Realm had already disappeared, leaving that person to ruefully clutch their wrist in regret.

After digesting the information he had obtained, Lu Ye led Yiyi out.

He asked a few more questions to the female cultivator at reception, then summoned his small boat Spiritual Artifact, taking Yiyi into the sky.

Chapter 260 Fenghua Courtyard

Eighty li east of Heaven's Augury Square, within a concave valley, a gray fog rolled and surged, enshrouding the entire valley and completely obscuring any view of its landscape.

The valley wasn't large, spanning only a few li, and on the surrounding high slopes, cultivators gathered in groups of three or five, clearly having rushed over upon receiving some news.

This location was not within the territory of any power, making it masterless land. There were many such places on the battlefield, as the vast battlefield could not be seamlessly covered by the territories of the Nine Provinces sects, always leaving large gaps.

Centered around this location, there were four factions nearby—two from the Haotian Alliance and two from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, all of which were respectable 5th-6th grade factions.

At this moment, two of those factions had arrived—Fenghua Courtyard from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge and Surreptitious Palace from Haotian Alliance.

Unlike the groups of independent cultivators that formed teams of three to five, both factions brought nearly a hundred people each, demonstrating their emphasis on the Boundless Mirage Realm.

They managed to arrive here so quickly mainly because they were close by and had received the news promptly.

The other two factions were not so lucky; even if they received the news, it would take some time for them to arrive.

At this moment, both factions were trying to recruit the nearby independent cultivators, but with little success.

The independent cultivators in the inner circle had strong individualism, unlike those in the outer circle who could be easily persuaded. Having cultivated this far mostly on their own, joining a sect faction meant inevitable large-scale conflicts with opposing forces, requiring obedience to others' commands and risking loss of control over their own life and death, which could be less preferable than operating in small teams.

The independent cultivators who truly wished to join them had already done so voluntarily; recruitment wasn't necessary.

The independent cultivators were more inclined to form teams with each other.

When Lu Ye arrived, wielding his weapon control, he saw hundreds of cultivators gathered in a messy scene.

He instantly noticed two groups of about a hundred people each on either side of the valley, standing off against each other. One group of cultivators included many female cultivators, each as beautiful as flowers, with some dressed daringly, their long legs and sleek waists peeking seductively in a manner that drew attention. Behind this group of female cultivators stood a large flag, its design resembling flower petals, with the faint scent of flowers seemingly drifting from it.

Lu Ye recognized it as the standard of Fenghua Courtyard.

Not that he had seen such a standard before; he had only seen the design on the ten-part map, where each sect's name was followed by a design representing their banners.

For example, the Righteous Blood Sect had a design with a red background and golden flames.

Opposite were cultivators without anything special, recognizing the pattern on their banner, and comparing it with the ten-part map, Lu Ye identified them as people from Surreptitious Palace.

Both major camps accounted for one faction each.

According to the ten-part map, there were four nearby factions that had the opportunity to arrive here, leaving Soaring Cloud Palace from Haotian Alliance and Illuminating Sun Mountain from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge unaccounted for; their cultivators were not yet visible and probably still en route due to the distances.

Lu Ye landed on the side belonging to Surreptitious Palace and surveyed the scene ahead intently.

The reason he had spared no expense to purchase information from the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union after hearing about the Mirage Realm and hurried here was the term "Mirage Realm" itself, which he found somewhat concerning.

He possessed a Breath Fruit Core, through which, by spending merit, he could enter a Mirage Realm to hone his enemy-killing skills.

He didn't know if this Boundless Mirage Realm had any connection with the Mirage Realm he had entered, but looking it over couldn't hurt.

At the moment, as he looked across, Lu Ye realized something unusual.

The rolling gray fog in the valley was eerily familiar; it was the same kind of fog he had encountered upon entering the Mirage Realm.

Could they actually be connected? Though judging solely based on the gray fog was speculative, the only way to truly understand their relationship was to go inside.

As he was looking around, a young cultivator approached him, saluted with cupped hands, and said, "Fellow Daoist, I am Jik Yan from Surreptitious Palace, and I would like to invite you to explore the Boundless Mirage Realm with us. What are your thoughts?"

Lu Ye glanced at the Surreptitious Palace's group and pondered briefly.

"No need."

Joining Surreptitious Palace's group to enter the Boundless Mirage Realm would indeed be safer, but it came with more restrictions.

Jik Yan said no more, just gave Lu Ye a nod and moved past him to recruit others.

Once Jik Yan had left, a short, stout cultivator with a small mustache beside Lu Ye chuckled and said, "You were wise to refuse, Fellow Daoist. Although Surreptitious Palace has a good reputation, if you really joined them, you probably wouldn't gain much benefit. We independent cultivators aren't naturally suited to act together with those from the sects." He seemed to have had a bad experience, which colored his view of sect-trained cultivators.

Changing the subject, he said, "If you are interested, why don't we team up? In there, we can support each other. By your looks, you seem to be a combat cultivator, right? I am a magic cultivator, this big guy is a physique cultivator. I'll find a ghost cultivator, and we'll be all set. How about it?"

When he spoke, he even patted the shoulder of the person next to him, but the main reason he was able to reach his shoulder was that the man was sitting on the ground.

Lu Ye looked down, initially not paying much attention. The man sitting on the ground was broad and sturdy with vigorous blood Qi, clearly a physique cultivator, giving off a steadfast, immovable mountain-like presence just by sitting there. Upon closer inspection, he couldn't help but be moved.

The spirit force throughout the physique cultivator's body was incredibly pure and flawless. Having roamed the Spirit Stream battlefield for quite some time, Lu Ye had seen all sorts of cultivators. Without exception, even the purest spirit light on their bodies always had some flaws due to consumption of elixir pills.

He had never seen spirit light so clear that it could compare to his own, until now, and it belonged to a physique cultivator.

The physique cultivator sat on the ground, holding a piece of beast meat still dripping with blood and taking large bites of it.

Sensing Lu Ye's gaze, the physique cultivator turned his head and gave Lu Ye a simple, honest smile.

"What do you think, Fellow Daoist?" the small-mustache cultivator spoke again.

Lu Ye replied indifferently, "No need."

The small-mustache cultivator scoffed softly, "I was thinking of helping you out, Fellow Daoist. Since you're so unappreciative, forget it." Both he and his companion were Level 9 cultivators, so they did have the right to speak of mentoring someone like Lu Ye, who was at Level 8.

After saying that, he walked toward another independent cultivator who had arrived alone nearby, obviously trying to recruit more people.

"Here, eat this!" the physique cultivator sitting on the ground handed over the piece of beast meat.

Just as Lu Ye was about to refuse, Amber, who had been lying on his shoulder, suddenly jumped down, landed on the big thigh of the physique cultivator, and started gnawing on the piece of meat.

The simple and honest looking physique cultivator smiled, feeding Amber while lifting his fan-like big hand gently to stroke Amber's smooth fur.

Lu Ye's eyelids drooped slightly.

This was getting interesting.

Ever since he had brought Amber back to the Righteous Blood Sect, aside from him and Yiyi, not many people could get close to it. Even Lingyu, who got along very well with Yiyi, couldn't approach Amber. When Ruan Lingyu once wanted to try riding Amber, the creature refused to get up from where it was sunbathing on the ground, and it was only after Yiyi spoke that Amber lazily ran around Righteous Peak carrying Lingyu.

As for feeding Amber... It never ate anything given by anyone but Lu Ye and Yiyi, not even what the Second Senior Sister Shui Yuan offered.

Lu Ye had never seen Amber be so close to someone it did not know, and even to eat what the stranger offered.

With Yiyi currently hidden inside Amber, Lu Ye had no idea what was going on.

Being spiritually sensitive, Amber could discern the goodness of people's hearts. Its closeness with the physique cultivator suggested there was something about him that attracted Amber, or perhaps only those with pure hearts could truly connect with it?

Time passed, and more cultivators received the message and rushed over, but by this time, most were groups of two or three independent cultivators.

The mist in the valley swirled more intensely.

Across the valley, in the Fenghua Courtyard camp, a tall female cultivator in a short top, exposing her slim waist, was listening to a report from a man beside her.

This female cultivator was Choo Qing, the Deputy Governor of Fenghua Courtyard. A place like the Boundless Mirage Realm naturally required someone prominent to lead the team—a stationed governor or a deputy must be present.

"The group from Illuminating Sun Mountain is almost here, timing should work out," the man said, seizing the opportunity to subtly move closer to Choo Qing, delicately inhaling her scent, enamoured.

Choo Qing nodded slightly, "That's good. Is there any news from the Soaring Cloud Palace?"

"Not yet."

"Go check," Choo Qing ordered.

"Yes!" the man agreed respectfully and withdrew.

Fenghua Courtyard is a very particular power, where women generally hold a higher status than men and enjoy better treatment.

That's because the Divine Sea Realm cultivator who founded the sect originally intended to recruit only female disciples. Having been deceived and mistreated by a man, she had an inherent aversion and resistance to men, believing all men should die.

However, as the sect developed, recruiting only female disciples proved too limiting. Not to mention, there are very few female physique cultivators, as most women wish to maintain their beauty and are reluctant to become robust and burly.

Thus, after the founding ancestor died, Fenghua Courtyard changed its development policy and began to accept male disciples.

Overall, female cultivators still constitute a greater proportion, about seventy to eighty percent, in Fenghua Courtyard. Male cultivators make up only a small part, and most of them are physique cultivators who tend to front the line in dangerous situations.

Nevertheless, in the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, Fenghua Courtyard has a high popularity, after all, who doesn't like delicate beauties, and Fenghua Courtyard abounds with such fair-skinned, attractive female cultivators.