

Humanity 641

Chapter 641 The 2nd Breath Fruit Core

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Lu Ye had in his hand what appeared to be the core of a fruit.

Moreover, he had one of these himself.

Taking his own fruit core out and comparing the two side by side, they looked almost identical, as if carved from the same mold.

Breath Fruit Core!

The Breath Fruit Core is the inner kernel of the Breath Fruit, which is unique to the Chess Sea and whose flesh can quickly restore a cultivator's spirit force. The use of the core is diverse and peculiar.

Back when Lu Ye was at the Spirit Stream Level 5 realm of cultivation, he and Hua Ci had participated in the Spirit Stream Defense Battle together. Utilizing their unique abilities, they led the governors from the various big sects of the Haotian Alliance to turn the tide, eventually securing the central area of the Chess Sea where a Breath Fruit Tree bore many fruits.

Because Lu Ye and Hua Ci played an essential role throughout the Spirit Stream Defense Battle, one of the fruits was given to Lu Ye, and the rest were auctioned off.

The Breath Fruit he acquired was later given to Shui Yuan, who refined it into Breath Fruit wine, which has now been fully consumed.

The Breath Fruit Core became his key to enter the Mirage Realm to hone himself.

However, not all Breath Fruit Cores can lead a cultivator into the Mirage Realm, after all, their functions are bizarre and varied. Li Baxian once told him that a sect from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge

obtained a core which greatly enhanced the power of their Formation, making their base in the Spirit Stream battlefield impregnable.

There are also Breath Fruit Cores with no special purpose, but they can be sold to Heaven's Augury treasure vault, starting at a price of at least one hundred thousand merit points.

And there are some Breath Fruit Cores that, when carried by a cultivator, can improve their perception, subtly altering their aptitude...

Some are even associated with rich veins of Spirit Stones.

All in all, there's no telling what function a core might have; they can possess any sort of peculiar use.

When Lu Ye first heard about these properties, he only found the Breath Fruit Core to be miraculous and didn't think much further.

But as his cultivation and experience grew, he started to realize that the wide variety of uses of the Breath Fruit Core were likely not inherent to it, but bestowed by Heaven's Augury.

Take the core Lu Ye possessed, for example. It was merely a key, and every time he used it, he entered the Mirage Realm, allowing him to fearlessly temper himself.

Lu Ye's saber skills came partly from fighting to the death with cultivators from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge and partly from training within the Mirage Realm. Each of those trainings ended in death, and the experience memorized with his life and body was undeniably invaluable.

That one of the spoils of battle turned out to be a Breath Fruit Core was a surprise to Lu Ye, and he wondered whose misfortune it was.

"This storage sack." Yiyi lifted the storage sack in her hand, and Lu Ye glanced at it without any recollection.

Storage sacks, the kind that don't have any particularly trendy designs, are mostly similar, maybe adorned with some patterns or images by a few female cultivators.

Of course, male cultivators have them too, mostly crafted by female cultivators who have a fondness for them.

Yiyi's storage sack bore no special marks, so Lu Ye had no clue about its original owner.

There was no need to delve too deeply into this matter. What made Lu Ye curious was what special function this unintentionally acquired Breath Fruit Core had.

Thinking this, Lu Ye picked up the core, channeled his spirit force into it, and prepared to investigate.

No matter its use, since it had been carried by someone, it certainly wasn't something useless.

His mind immersed, his vision blurred, and when Lu Ye came to his senses, he found himself in a closed, small space with nothing around him except for a door, upon which the words clearly read, "To enter the Mirage Realm, one must expend one hundred merit points."

Lu Ye frowned. Had he grabbed the wrong one?

This was exactly the function of his own Breath Fruit Core.

He did not push the door open, because once he did, unless killed, there would be no way to leave.

Opening his eyes, he picked up the other Breath Fruit Core, again channeling spirit force into it.

Just like before, in the next instant, he found himself in a closed, small space with nothing but a door bearing the words, "To enter the Mirage Realm, one must expend one hundred merit points."

Lu Ye was astounded as he stared fixedly at the door.

He could be sure that he had not grabbed the wrong one just now; both Breath Fruit Cores had the exact same function, offering entry to train in the Mirage Realm.

This left Lu Ye somewhat amused and disappointed.

He had thought he acquired something valuable, only to find it was a duplicate of what he already had.

This brought up some unpleasant memories for him.

Back when he was in the Spirit Stream Realm, he had once entered this small space and encountered a cultivator from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge who killed him several times...

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Ever since then, each time Lu Ye activated the Breath Fruit Core to enter this place, he was extremely vigilant, fearing another encounter with that person.

At that time, he speculated that the other party must also possess a Breath Fruit Core with the same effect as the one he had. However, back then he had not yet received the Heaven's Augury Bestowment, and the other party's figure was shrouded in dense fog, so he could not see their appearance clearly; he could only confirm that the person was from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge and had a much higher cultivation than his own.

The reason the two could meet in this small space was clearly because they had activated the Breath Fruit Core at the same time, an event with a very small probability, which was why, to this day, Lu Ye had only encountered the other party once.

After being killed several times, Lu Ye also secretly vowed to seek revenge someday...

So, the original owner of the Breath Fruit Core he obtained this time was the cultivator from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge he'd encountered here before?

If that was the case, it would be too much of a coincidence.

However, such an event occurring to him didn't come as a surprise to Lu Ye. After all, he was someone favored by Heaven's Augury, a person of vast fortune. Although sometimes he was quite unlucky, overall his luck was not too bad.

The only regret was that Lu Ye did not know who the original owner of the Breath Fruit Core was, so even if he had taken his revenge unintentionally, it felt somewhat uninspiring.

The other party possessed a Breath Fruit Core, clearly of no ordinary origin, undoubtedly a cultivator from a big sect, and judging from the traces left when the other party killed him last time, that person was a combat cultivator.

Given that, the original owner of the Breath Fruit Core should have been a combat cultivator with quite decent strength, definitely of Level 8 realm or even Level 9.

Lu Ye immediately remembered that in the mine, he had indeed killed a Level 9 combat cultivator. Normally, he would probably not be the opponent's match, but at that time the person's body was corroded by a potent poison, significantly diminishing his fighting capacity. Even so, it took Lu Ye a full ten breaths to dispose of him.

This was because the man's combat skills were very sophisticated, clearly honed through countless trials.

The match was right.

The original owner of the Breath Fruit Core must have been the Level 9 combat cultivator who had perished inexplicably at his hands. The other party was used to tempering his combat skills in the Mirage Scene, which explained why his performance just before dying was more exceptional than that of other Level 9 cultivators and why his combat skills were more adept.

However, no matter how many skills you have, they are no match for a single toxic bead.

Lu Ye had not expected that the grudge formed in this small space would end in such a manner.

But now with two Breath Fruit Cores of the same kind, well, once he had the opportunity, he could give one to his fourth senior fellow brother. Training in the Mirage Scene was very useful, and there was no need to worry about actually dying—the worst that could happen was a moment of pain at the instant of death.

With his mind withdrawing from the small space, Lu Ye placed the two Breath Fruit Cores into the storage space on the back of his hand and continued to work hard with Yiyi.

As days passed by, there finally came a moment when the restriction lock on the last storage sack in Lu Ye's hand was broken.

Tossing the storage sack to Yiyi, Lu Ye stood up and stretched his body.

He was finally free.

A moment later, Yiyi pushed nearly a hundred storage sacks in front of Lu Ye. Almost every single one of them was packed full.

Yiyi divided the nearly hundred storage sacks into three parts, pointing to one part and saying, "These contain elixir pills, Spirit Stones, and demonic pills from demon beasts that you can use."

Pointing to the middle pile, she said, "These can be taken back to the sect." Some items Lu Ye could not use, but the junior brothers and sisters in the sect could. These were placed in the storage sacks to be taken back to the sect and stored in the sect's treasure vault for future use.

She then pointed to the last pile, "These aren't of much use; they can be sold to Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union or Heaven's Augury treasure vault."

With Yiyi, a capable manager at his disposal, many things did not require Lu Ye's attention, undoubtedly saving him a lot of time.

Lu Ye nodded, and then sat back down, taking out the items from the first two piles of storage sacks and putting them into his own storage space.

His storage space was formed by a Void Rune Tattoo etched by Madam Yun, and it was quite large. Even so, after stowing all necessary assets, the entire space had little room left.

It must be said that the amount of loot he obtained this time was simply staggering, after all, it was the equivalent of over two million Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators.

"Call a Manager for me," Lu Ye said as he looked at the unprocessed storage sacks on the ground, instructing Yiyi. It was best for him not to appear in person to avoid revealing his whereabouts; Yiyi had no such concerns when dealing with this matter.

Yiyi complied and walked out the door.

Before long, Yiyi led a mercantile union manager back into the room.

Upon seeing the storage sacks piled up like a small mountain in the room, even the veteran middle-aged Manager couldn't help but twitch at the corner of his eyes.

A storage sack is something that a cultivator normally carries two or three of; four or five is considered a lot. Any more than that, and it's spoils of war gained from killing.

The number of people carrying dozens of storage sacks to the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union were few and far between in a year.

But how many storage sacks were piled up before him now? The middle-aged Manager, with sharp eyesight, barely glanced over them and estimated there might be as many as four or five thousand.

What he saw was not just the storage sacks stacked like hills, but a multitude of lives lost.

He thought it was just an ordinary transaction, but the scale of it was beyond his imagination.

Chapter 642 - Leisure

The transaction went smoothly, and the Manager never asked for Lu Ye's name throughout the process.

Because when those thousands of storage sacks appeared before his eyes, the Manager had already discerned Lu Ye's identity.

The mining battle had resulted in the poisoning of two million Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators, an event that caused quite a stir. How could the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union not be aware? They knew even more than the average cultivator.

After all, the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union was involved in all kinds of business, including intelligence.

At this stage, besides Lu Ye, who else could produce so many storage sacks in one go when looking across the entire Cloud River battlefield?

Empty storage sacks aren't valuable, but the sheer number makes up for it, plus all the miscellaneous items Lu Ye wanted to sell. All in all, it was a rare large transaction, so the Manager calculated the price very carefully, and it took almost half a day to conclude the deal.

As he stepped out of Lu Ye's guest room, the Manager suddenly turned around, his face showing a hint of hesitation, and he said something meaningful to Lu Ye, "The vicinity of the mercantile union has been quite lively recently, I hope it won't disturb the esteemed guest's rest."

After saying that, he gave a slight bow and turned to leave.

Lu Ye closed the door of his room, walked to the window, hid his form, and stealthily surveyed the area outside.

Yiyi didn't understand, "What's wrong?"

"I'm afraid our location has been exposed."

"Ah?" Yiyi was startled, "How could that be?"

"It's normal. Back then, I was carrying such a large bundle; it was bound to be seen by many people. As a cultivator, carrying such a large bundle in itself is a very suspicious act, and it's inevitable that it would draw the attention of some interested parties."

This was within Lu Ye's expectations, but there was really no other way at the time, unless he was willing to abandon all his war spoils. With so many spoils, it was simply impossible to conceal himself in the wild.

"But those people didn't see my face, and at that time, I even put Amber in the spirit beast sack, so although some people suspect I'm hiding here, there's no definitive evidence."

Yiyi suddenly remembered the Manager's parting words, which hadn't crossed her mind at the time, but now she suddenly realized, "Was that Manager hinting at you?"

Lu Ye nodded.

Yiyi found it very strange, "But isn't the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union always neutral, never involving itself in the conflict between the two major camps? Why would it suddenly do you a favor?"

"It's not necessarily a favor..." Lu Ye moved away from the window, sat down, poured himself a cup of tea, took a sip, and said, "It might be to avoid any misunderstanding, thinking I believed my information here was leaked by them."

That is why the Manager appeared so hesitant before leaving.

Since the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union never gets involved in the competition and conflict between the two major camps, in theory, there is no need to provide Lu Ye with any information.

But not to warn Lu Ye would be problematic. If he were to be attacked right after leaving the mercantile union, it would inevitably lead to unnecessary misunderstandings, with him suspecting that the union had leaked the information. If Lu Ye held a grudge against the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union because of that, it would go against the union's original intention.

The Manager's expression was hesitant, and his words were vague, but the implication was clear enough, and how could Lu Ye not understand?

Besides, even if the Manager hadn't said anything, Lu Ye would have likely noticed on his own.

He had been busy unlocking the restriction locks on the storage sacks these past days, paying no attention to the outside world, but if he had taken the time to observe his surroundings, he would have definitely noticed something amiss.

The Manager's hint was just going along with the flow, not essential.

"So what do we do now?" Yiyi asked.

"Just leave them hanging, what else?"

No matter how much those from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge want to kill me, they won't dare to cause trouble inside the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, as all fighting is prohibited within it.

Even though Lu Ye was confident that even if he were to go out, those Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators might not be able to do much to him, ever since leaving Great Reversal Valley, he had been running around and pitting his wits against Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, which was truly exhausting. It was perfect to rest here for a while.

He tapped on his battlefield marking to check his personal information.

Name: Lu Yiye.

Identity: Disciple of Righteous Blood Sect.

Cultivation: Cloud River Level 5.

Location: Cloud River battlefield.

Merit: One hundred seventy-six thousand five hundred and twenty points.

Battle merit: Fifty-six points.

When he left Great Reversal Valley, his battle merit was only a little over seventy thousand, but now it had reached over one hundred seventy thousand, which was naturally the harvest from the mine.

For most cultivators, a few thousand to tens of thousands of merits were already a considerable number, but for Lu Ye, the number of merits was merely just that... a number.

In the short term, except for allowing him to buy some uncanny fires from the Heaven's Augury treasure vault or ask for assistance from the Heaven's Augury Pillar in times of crisis, merits did not have much use.

But as far as he knew, once one's cultivation reached the True Lake, merit became greatly useful.

It could be said that in the Nine Provinces cultivation world, merit was a lifelong companion for cultivators, no matter how high their cultivation soared, merit would always be indispensable.

Especially after reaching the True Lake, the demand for merit became tremendous.

Lu Ye hadn't inquired in detail; he only casually chatted about these matters with Shui Yuan back when he was at the Righteous Blood Sect headquarters.

Because of the great demand for merit, the foundation of a sect could not merely be supported by several strong individuals, the quantity and quality of its disciples were particularly important.

The reason Shui Yuan had lingered in the True Lake Level 9 for so many years, only advancing to the Divine Sea last year, was because the Righteous Blood Sect was too poor. Without sufficient merit, she could not enhance her cultivation; otherwise, given her aptitude, she would have ascended to the Divine Sea long ago.

The predecessors of the Righteous Blood Sect, the several senior brothers and sisters, were among the top talents in the Nine Provinces.

Not to mention the late senior brother Feng Wujiang, who almost flattened his opponents by leading a mighty faction. Even though he had died more than thirty years ago, there were still many legends about him circulating in the Nine Provinces.

Shui Yuan, Xiao Xinghe, Li Baxian, all were supremely talented, especially Li Baxian. Had it not been for his spiritual orifice breaking and being delayed at the Spirit Stream battlefield for over a decade, he might not be far from the Divine Sea Realm by now.

He didn't plan to leave the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union for the time being and felt at ease cultivating with abundant resources.

This made the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators who were covertly observing him uncomfortable.

Although these cultivators who gathered from all around upon receiving the news deduced from various clues that Lu Ye had entered the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, no one had actually seen him in person, so no one knew for sure if he was really there.

They could only wait outside for Lu Ye to show himself... assuming that Lu Ye was truly inside.

But after seven or eight days passed with no sight of Lu Ye, some of the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators grew restless.

From their point of view, even if Lu Ye was inside the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, he was unlikely to show himself anytime soon. The outside world was too dangerous, but hiding in the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union was safe. Besides, Lu Yiye was a significant merit holder, with countless merits in hand. Coupled with the storage sacks of more than two thousand cultivators he had acquired before, he surely wasn't lacking in cultivation resources.

Even if he stayed there for a year or two, no one would find it strange.

Lu Ye might be able to stay inside for a year or two, but could they wait outside for a year or two? Obviously, they could not.

With the uncertainty of whether Lu Ye was hiding there and not knowing when he might come out, many Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators gradually lost patience and left. However, some still waited patiently, like Chu Yun and Zhou Pey of the Sacred Fire Order. Patience was something they did not lack. To kill Lu Ye, they would wait, not just for a year or two but even for ten or twenty years!

Days passed swiftly, and Lu Ye spent his days leisurely.

He swallowed elixir pills and studied cultivation every day. Although his efficiency wasn't as high as when he was in the Great Reversal Valley Spirit Ground, the difference wasn't significant.

His requirements for the cultivation environment were not that stringent, after all.

Furthermore, the nature's spiritual energy in this guest room was also equivalent to a Class B spirit ground, but the nightly accommodation cost was a bit steep, affording which was something ordinary people couldn't manage, only someone as financially strong as Lu Ye didn't mind at all.

He thought it simple; no matter how abundant the resources, they were external. Only by timely converting these external factors into one's own strength could they serve their true purpose.

Yiyi was also mostly silent in her cultivation beside him, as her relationship with Amber was symbiotic; either's cultivation would foster an increase in power for both.

This was an advantage unmatched by any cultivator or demon beast in the Nine Provinces, and it was also why Yiyi and Amber could keep pace with Lu Ye's strength.

Previously, Lu Ye's cultivation had always been slightly higher than Yiyi and Amber's, but now they were on equal footing, with the demonic pill of the Overlord-level Demon General playing the most significant role.

There were also times when Yiyi would go out to buy some delicious food for Lu Ye or gather some information.

The world only knew that Lu Ye was accompanied by Amber, never aware of Yiyi's existence.

This greatly facilitated Yiyi's actions.

The door was pushed open, and Yiyi entered with enthusiasm: "Lu Ye, Lu Ye, there's a spirit fortune stick auction in the mercantile union tonight."

"Oh?" Lu Ye showed an interested expression, having been on the Cloud River battlefield for half a year and obtaining many spirit fortune sticks through various channels. However, he had only encountered such an auction once.

And this was the only opportunity to use merit to obtain spirit fortune sticks.

As for merit... Lu Ye was never short of it, having taken nearly all the spirit fortune sticks in the last auction he attended.

"What spirit fortune sticks are there?"

"I heard there's a purple spirit fortune stick." Yiyi set down her food box, and Amber leaned in to sniff it - cooked... and instantly lost interest.

"Shall we participate?"

"Let's go take a look." It would be a good opportunity to see if the Heaven's Augury treasure vault had any Earth's Core Fire for sale.

The battle in the mines had certainly claimed two thousand enemies, but his Talent Tree fuel had likely also been depleted considerably.

Though he had some spare Earth's Core Fire, which was meant for emergencies, Lu Ye decided not to use it.

Now with plenty of merit in hand, it was a good time to scout for some treasures in the Heaven's Augury treasure vault.

Chapter 643 - The Depth of the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union

Night had fallen, and Lu Ye, wearing his spectral face mask, left his guest room and headed straight for Heaven's Augury Hall, where the Heaven's Augury Pillar was located.

Every Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union had its own Heaven's Augury Pillar, and their primary function was for positioning.

Cultivators could use these Heaven's Augury Pillars to travel to and from the Cloud River battlefield. Cultivators from the Nine Provinces could select these pillars upon entering the Cloud River battlefield to gain access to this branch of the mercantile union, while cultivators from the Cloud River battlefield could use the pillars here to leave and return to the Nine Provinces.

Therefore, the mercantile union in the Cloud River battlefield was bustling with activity at every moment, with a constant stream of people coming and going.

The Heaven's Augury Pillar had four sides, corresponding to four directions. In one direction, space would occasionally distort, and each time this happened, cultivators from various parts of the Nine Provinces would appear out of thin air.

In another direction, a queue, not too long, was formed. These were cultivators preparing to leave the Cloud River battlefield. They would approach the Heaven's Augury Pillar, place a hand upon it, and vanish in an instant. The queue here was not very long as the process of leaving the Cloud River battlefield was not complicated, and could even be described as swift. Most of the time, this side was empty and did not require queuing.

The remaining two sides had a relatively large number of people lined up, all of whom were there to use the Heaven's Augury Pillar to enter the Heaven's Augury treasure vault for trading.

After arriving, Lu Ye found a spot to stand and slowly waited.

There weren't many people ahead of him, just a dozen or so, and since the cultivators who came here generally knew what they wanted to buy or sell, the efficiency was quite high, and it was rare for someone to monopolize the pillar for a long time.

As the cultivators in front gradually left, Lu Ye moved forward with the crowd.

Suddenly, a figure approached and scrutinized him.

Lu Ye turned to look and saw a young male cultivator with a probing gaze, who slowly spoke, "Fellow Daoist, you resemble someone."

Lu Ye's voice was hoarse, "Resemble who?"

Though he hadn't learned how to change his voice, as a Cloud River Realm cultivator, such a small trick was still easily executed.

"Why does Fellow Daoist feign ignorance?" The youth shook his head. "If you don't mind..."

"I mind!"

The youth was left speechless by the retort and finally could only shake his head, "You can't hide, unless you leave the Cloud River battlefield!"

Having said that, the youth directly walked away.

Though he suspected the cultivator wearing the spectral face mask was Lu Yiye, he did not dare to make a move inside the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union and could only issue such a warning.

After the youth left, several groups of cultivators passed by nearby, either intentionally or unintentionally, and Lu Ye could clearly feel these people covertly observing him.

He chose to ignore them, as he had no plans to leave the mercantile union any time soon. If they were so capable, they could just keep waiting outside.

When the day came that he decided to leave, it was unlikely those people could hold him back.

As each cultivator in front departed, it wasn't long before it was Lu Ye's turn.

Lu Ye raised his hand to the Heaven's Augury Pillar before him, closed his eyes in concentration, but didn't immerse his consciousness immediately.

After three breaths, a low shout suddenly came, "Attack!"

As the words fell, powerful spirit force burst forth abruptly, and three sharp killing intents enveloped Lu Ye from three different directions. In the blink of an eye, three figures had charged to within fifteen feet of Lu Ye, their cold light flashing.

The sudden change caused all cultivators inside Heaven's Augury Hall to pale.

Many cultivators had passed through the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union countless times, but none had ever encountered such a situation, as the union was believed to be an absolutely safe place in the minds of nearly all cultivators.

There were indeed some terrifying rumors of conflicts happening within the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, but rumors were just rumors, and no one knew what the consequences of fighting inside the union would be.

It was said that the last time such an incident occurred was over a decade ago.

The passage of time had undoubtedly diminished the deterrence of the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, coupled with the enormous bounty on Lu Ye's head, it was inevitable that cultivators from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge could not resist the temptation.

The three assailants were from the Cloud River Level 9 Realm, and it was unclear to which sect they belonged. Before making their move, they had already scoped out that, although there were Level 9 powerhouses stationed in this branch of the mercantile union, they believed that as long as they were fast enough, they could kill Lu Ye and not be kept there. They were confident they could escape from this place.

Compared to the potential gains, what was a little risk?

Spirit force surged, prompting many cultivators in Heaven's Augury Hall to scatter, turning the scene into chaos.

Lu Ye, with his hand on the Heaven's Augury Pillar, also instantly sensed the immense danger. With his current strength, taking on a single Level 9 cultivator was already a struggle, let alone three at once.

He was just grateful he had held back and hadn't immediately immersed his consciousness into the treasure vault; otherwise, he would have had no time to react to such an attack.

In a rush, he activated his spirit force, and solid Defense Spirit Runes materialized in front of him, nearly covering him from all angles without blind spots. At the same time, he dodged towards the densely crowded area.

He didn't need to confront the three Level 9 cultivators. After all, this was the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union. He just had to delay them for a moment, and the union's powerhouses would take action.

But regardless of whether it was him or the three Level 9 cultivators who took action, they all seriously underestimated the response speed of the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union.

Or rather, as soon as Lu Ye left his guest room and arrived on the first floor, the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union had already been closely monitoring him.

"How audacious!"

A furious shout erupted, and somewhere in the crowd, another cultivator charged out. The moment this cultivator burst forth, the fluctuations of spirit force around him indicated that he was in the Cloud River Level 9 Realm.

But in the blink of an eye, his aura broke through the limits of the Cloud River Realm, reaching a level that was unfathomable to others.

"The True Lake Realm!" someone exclaimed in shock, while many more quivered in their gazes.

So... the rumors were true.

The personnel of the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union had a way to break through Heaven's Augury's restrictions within the Cloud River battlefield for a short time and reach a height that ordinary cultivators simply could not attain.

Many had heard of this rumor, but no one knew if it was true or false, because no one had ever verified it.

Not until this moment, before their very eyes.

The Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union is a very intriguing organization, as can be seen from its name alone.

In the Nine Provinces cultivation world, anything related to the words "Heaven's Augury" must not be taken lightly. All along, cultivators in the Nine Provinces cultivation world have suspected that the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union might have some special connection with the elusive and mysterious Heaven's Augury above all.

Because the goods in the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union are often interchangeable with items in the Heaven's Augury treasure vault.

There have been instances where people sold items to the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union only to find the same items in the Heaven's Augury treasure vault later on.

Moreover, the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union never interferes in the confrontations between the two major factions. It always gives the impression of being a neutral organization that conducts business.

But no one has ever underestimated it, nor does anyone know how powerful the true foundation of the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union is.

The aura of the True Lake Realm kept climbing, reaching a peak until all the cultivators in the Heaven's Augury Hall felt their bodies heavy and breath constrained under the terrifying pressure at that instant.

As if an immobilization curse was cast, the three Cloud River Level 9 cultivators launching an assault, Lu Ye who was in the middle of escaping, and the many cultivators in disarray all around, were all frozen in place.

Subsequently, a series of thuds were heard, and a thick scent of blood spread out, signaling life force rapidly withering away...

It seemed like only an illusion when the crushing pressure that made it difficult for anyone to move suddenly vanished, and as the many cultivators looked around, they were all chilled to the bone.

This was because there were three additional corpses inside the Heaven's Augury Hall, belonging to the three Cloud River Level 9 cultivators who had attacked Lu Ye.

No one knew how they died. By the time everyone came to their senses, their lives had already been extinguished.

Standing quietly in front of the three corpses was that middle-aged cultivator, his demeanor not angry but still imposing, emitting an aura that was still of the Cloud River Level 9 Realm.

But who would think he was only at Cloud River Level 9 at this point?

Clearly, this person was a True Lake Realm powerhouse and not just an ordinary one. He had to be one of those peak True Lake Realm powerhouses.

In the Spirit Stream battlefield, cultivators above the Spirit Stream Realm could force their way in by spending merit points.

But it was not the case in the Cloud River battlefield. Only Cloud River Realm cultivators were allowed to enter, which was a rule set by Heaven's Augury itself, and no one could break it.

Now, it seemed that was not entirely true.

At the very least, the people of the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union could break this rule. They could even temporarily break the cultivation restrictions of the Cloud River battlefield...

And what shocked everyone was not just this, but more importantly, three Cloud River Level 9 cultivators were killed, just like three ants, unnoticed by anyone, by the people of the traditionally neutral Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union!

Under the watchful eyes of all, the middle-aged cultivator slowly spoke, "Wuxin Pavilion's Duan Hua, Xue Feihan, God's Will Sect's Luo Huai'an, these three assaulted someone within the Mercantile Union, breaking our sect's rules. They were executed on the spot to set an example! Moreover, for three years

from now, the Mercantile Union will not conduct any transactions with cultivators originating from either Wuxin Pavilion or God's Will Sect."

With a single statement, a buzz rose among the many cultivators.

It was one thing for three Cloud River Level 9 cultivators to be killed—it was normal for cultivators to live and die. Not long ago, two million Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators died in a mine.

What truly shocked the cultivators was that the man from the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union had identified the factions they hailed from and their names with a single phrase.

This was not just superior intelligence gathering; it clearly indicated that they were prepared in advance, or perhaps the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union had noticed their ill intentions the moment these three were ready to make a move, waiting to strike them with a thunderbolt. Otherwise, even if this man could exert his true power, he wouldn't have reacted so swiftly.

The attitude displayed by the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union this time was undoubtedly extremely decisive, showing no mercy at all, further emphasized by the ban on transactions with cultivators from those two sects for the next three years.

Compared to the deaths of the three Cloud River Level 9 cultivators, this decision undoubtedly brought even greater losses to the two sects.

Chapter 644 - The Shortest Spirit Fortune Stick Auction in History

Cultivators begin dealing with the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union as soon as they step onto the path of cultivation, a necessity no one can avoid.

Take Lu Ye for example, not long after he entered the Spirit Stream battlefield, he started buying and selling goods through the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union. It's true he could also trade with other cultivators, but that's not as convenient and cost-effective as doing business with the mercantile union.

If one can't do business with the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, many things would become complicated.

The lower a cultivator's cultivation, the greater their reliance on the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union. The union's decision brought trouble to those two Ten Thousand Demons Ridge sects, and it was no small trouble.

It had been many years since anyone caused trouble within the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union. For this generation of cultivators, the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union seemed just a place to buy and sell goods, until now, when the cultivators suddenly realized that to some extent, it was an entity no less powerful than the Haotian Alliance or any faction of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge.

Usually, this massive entity maintained a neutral stance, not involving itself or interfering in the power struggles between the two big factions. But if its rules were broken within its domain, it would bare its baronest fangs.

And compared to the Haotian Alliance and Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, this massive entity had its own unique advantages in some areas...

All sorts of rumors surfaced in the minds of the cultivators, making everyone realize one thing, that the past interesting rumors were not just rumors, but events that had occurred during a certain period in the past.

Just like this particular incident...

Perhaps in a decade or several decades, the next generation of cultivators would consider today's events as mere rumors, but those who witnessed what happened today knew it was more than just rumors.

The decisive and ruthless way the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union handled this matter surprised Lu Ye. He had only intended to delay things a bit, waiting for a powerful figure from the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union to appear so that he could be safe.

But on second thought, maybe the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union saw this as an excellent opportunity to assert its power. If it wanted to assert itself, the more ruthless the method, the more pronounced the effect.

After today, he believed no one would dare to misbehave within the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union for a long time to come.

As for revenge... he supposed that as long as those cultivators from the two Ten Thousand Demons Ridge powers had functioning brains, they wouldn't entertain thoughts of vengeance against the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union.

The brief turmoil settled down, attendants from the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union rushed over to drag away the three corpses, swiftly cleaning up the blood on the ground. In just a moment, they had cleaned the Heaven's Augury Hall spotless, as if nothing had happened.

Only the lingering smell of blood at the tip of their noses reminded everyone that what had happened was no illusion.

The middle-aged cultivator then said, "A slight mishap, I hope it has not alarmed you, friends."

As a peak True Lake Realm powerhouse, both his cultivation and age were evident. Referring to a group of Cloud River Realm individuals as friends was not inappropriate.

He took his leave, casting a deliberate yet casual glance towards Lu Ye on his way out.

After a moment of silence, the Heaven's Augury Hall buzzed with activity once again.

Lu Ye suddenly remembered the time when he was chased by Dong Shuye in the Spirit Stream battlefield. Back then, there was a significant gap in cultivation between them, and he, cornered with no other choice, fled to seek refuge with the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union. An elderly man who intervened from the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union at the time displayed only the power of Spirit Stream Level 9. In the outskirts of the Spirit Stream battlefield, Level 9 was undoubtedly very powerful.

But thinking back now, was that elder truly just at Level 9? Heaven only knows if that old man was actually a cultivator of the Cloud River Realm or even the True Lake Realm in disguise...

He warned himself to be more cautious in future dealings with people from the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union. Protected by Heaven's Augury, the strength they showed in certain specific circumstances might just be an illusion.

Casting aside the miscellaneous thoughts in his mind, Lu Ye placed his hand on the Heaven's Augury Pillar, immersed his mind, and connected with the Heaven's Augury treasure vault.

He was in luck. The previously sold-out Earth's Core Fire was available in over a dozen units.

One unit of Earth's Core Fire cost two hundred merits. In the early days, this price wasn't cheap for Lu Ye, since merits were hard to come by. But now, this price was extremely affordable. If there had been more stock in the Heaven's Augury treasure vault, he would have bought as many as possible.

The Talent Tree had an immense demand for uncanny fires like the Earth's Core Fire. Sometimes Lu Ye wondered what it would look like if all the leaves on the Talent Tree were ignited.

But this was, after all, just a thought. Up till now, although he had lit many leaves, it was still less than ten percent of the whole.

But he believed that one day, he would be able to set the entire Talent Tree ablaze.

After purchasing the Earth's Core Fire, Lu Ye looked for other items that were suitable for the Talent Tree to devour and that were not too expensive, such as pill fires and the like.

He ended up spending over ten thousand merits.

The auction for the spirit fortune sticks was about to begin as well.

As before, Lu Ye collected an item from the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union to participate in the spirit fortune stick auction, which looked like a jade finger. As long as one was within the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, they could enter a special space through this item to partake in the auction of spirit fortune sticks.

After half a stick of incense had burned, cultivators from various locations within the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union opened their eyes, their expressions grim.

Many were not new to the spirit fortune stick auction, so they had a rough estimate of the prices of spirit fortune sticks of various colors. Normally, if the price fluctuated by about ten percent, it was no longer considered a good deal. After all, no one's merits were brought by the wind—each point of merit was earned through life-and-death struggles with enemies, and could truly be said to represent the blood and sweat of hard battles.

Apart from Lu Ye, who was spending his merits like water, every cultivator was meticulous with their own.

But this spirit fortune stick auction took an uneasy turn right from the start...

Who knows which bastard directly pushed the price to a level that made it difficult for everyone to participate.

Consequently, the shortest spirit fortune stick auction in history was born; it had started and ended in less than half the time it takes to drink a cup of tea...

At this moment, Lu Ye had already returned the jade-like prop and went back to his own guest room.

With his current net worth, competing with a group of Cloud River Realm cultivators over spirit fortune sticks was no challenge at all; he obtained all the sticks, from white to purple.

Unfortunately, there weren't many spirit fortune sticks this time, only one purple, two blue, four green, and nine white ones.

It was better than nothing.

He had ascended to the Level 5 realm back in Fox Fairy Valley, and since then he had been busy outwitting cultivators from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge. Although he practiced cultivation during this time, the overall increase in his cultivation was not that significant.

The spirit fortune sticks he had now were not enough to advance him to the Level 6 realm, but they could save him some time.

Lu Ye had learned early on upon his arrival in the Cloud River battlefield that the Cloud River Realm was the stage where cultivators' progress sped up the most.

Indeed, as long as a cultivator had enough spirit fortune sticks, crossing the entire Cloud River Realm didn't take much time at all.

Back when he was in the Spirit Stream battlefield, advancing through each minor realm took him a month at the fastest, or two to three months if slower, especially advancing from Level 8 to Level 9, which took a full four months. Though various unexpected events had caused delays, even without any interruptions, the pace of cultivation wouldn't have been much faster, as each spiritual orifice needed to be opened one by one.

Yet since setting foot in the Cloud River battlefield, it had only been half a year, and he already reached the Cloud River Level

5 realm.

Spectral Shadow was fast enough, arriving at the Cloud River battlefield several months before Lu Ye, yet he was only at Level 3.

By comparison, the speed of Lu Ye's progression was terrifying.

Of course, he had also experienced numerous trials during this period; one could only say that the greater the effort, the greater the reward.

Back in his guest room, Amber was sound asleep, and Yiyi was in the middle of cultivation, so Lu Ye didn't disturb her.

He sat down at one side, took out the Earth's Core Fire and the pill fire he had purchased this time, and started to devour them, leveraging the impressive abilities of the Talent Tree while closely monitoring its reactions.

Over time, Lu Ye had recognized some patterns.

In the process of devouring uncanny fire, if only one leaf on the Talent Tree lit up, there generally wasn't much to look forward to, as the content held within the leaf was likely to be techniques for constructing spirit runes, though there were exceptions.

For instance, Sharpness, and some defensive runes were carried by individual leaves.

If many leaves lit up simultaneously, it was definitely a remarkable spirit rune.

Like the Fire Phoenix, Wings, Sky Prohibition, and even the Bewitchment Divine Runes, they were not sustained by just a single leaf; due to their extremely intricate designs, some runes could not be held by just one leaf and required many to work together.

Moreover, some runes appeared to require devouring particular types of flames to be activated.

When he first activated the Talent Tree to devour the Phoenix True Fire, the Fire Phoenix Spirit Runes were added to the tree.

After slaying the Fox Demon and devouring its pill fire, the Bewitchment Divine Runes were activated.

However, even if most of the leaves on the Talent Tree did not carry complete spirit runes, the many techniques for constructing spirit runes obtained from the Talent Tree greatly assisted Lu Ye.

His current prowess in the Path of Spirit Runes, which far exceeded those of other cultivators at the same level, and being valued and taught by Madam Yun, was largely due to these techniques from the Talent Tree.

Even when he was setting up arrays, he would use such techniques each time.

The Earth's Core Fire and the pill fire, bought for more than ten thousand merits, were swiftly devoured, and several leaves on the Talent Tree blazed up. Lu Ye checked each one and found that he had not obtained any new spirit runes.

He wasn't too disappointed; after all, the number of spirit runes he had mastered was already quite significant, enough to handle most situations.

Only one thing unsettled him, and that was the Void Spirit Runes.

He was certain that the Talent Tree held the Void Spirit Runes, but he didn't know their exact location and could not activate them intentionally.

The more he dealt with the Void Spirit Runes, the more he perceived their numerous applications. Unfortunately, since they weren't activated on the Talent Tree, many of his ideas couldn't be tested.

With just his own ability to construct Void Spirit Runes, it was impossible to verify those ingenious concepts.

Chapter 645 - Changes in the Breath Fruit Core

After checking the Talent Tree, Lu Ye then woke Yiyi, took out the many spirit fortune sticks he had obtained earlier, and as time passed, each spirit fortune stick was crushed, releasing dense and pure Spiritual Energy, which both the human and spirit devoured eagerly in their cultivation.

A day later, all the spirit fortune sticks were used up. Lu Ye silently sensed his own body; the improvement to his cultivation was not very significant, after all, the duration these spirit fortune sticks maintained together could not compare to a single gold-hued spirit fortune stick.

At his level of cultivation, it was no longer possible to make breakthroughs with just one or two gold-hued spirit fortune sticks.

But such is the nature of cultivation, a gradual accumulation that leads to a qualitative change.

Without spirit fortune sticks, Lu Ye then consumed elixir pills and continued to cultivate.

He showed his face in the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, which caused a stir. Although he wore a mask the whole time and did not reveal his true appearance, to those Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators who were certain he was hiding in the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, it was enough for them to make some judgments through various clues.

Currently, outside the Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union, there were surely many strong members from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge waiting.

For the time being, Lu Ye had no plans to leave this place.

Time flew, and several more days passed.

Long periods of cultivation could be quite boring, especially since Lu Ye's method of cultivation was different from others.

When other cultivators absorbed nature's spiritual energy, they needed to immerse their psyches, focusing their attention. During cultivation, it was difficult to perceive the passage of time, and perhaps after one session of cultivation, several days might have passed.

This was also why those cultivators with higher cultivation levels would often close off for training for one or even more years at a time, as they did not perceive the passage of time.

Lu Ye was different; his cultivation mainly relied on consuming elixir pills and did not prevent him from doing other things, so it was easy for him to feel bored over time.

Usually in such situations, Lu Ye would pause his cultivation and wander around.

However, given his current situation, it was not advisable to walk around freely. After some thought, Lu Ye decided to enter the Mirage Scene to hone his saber skills.

Cultivating saber skills was undoubtedly much more difficult than advancing in cultivation. While it was possible to feel the progression of cultivation, it was not the case with saber skills. Until a breakthrough was made, progress in saber skills could be exceedingly slow, with possibly no noticeable change for a long while. However, once a breakthrough was achieved, it would lead to an entirely new realm.

Lu Ye focused his psyche into the storage space on the back of his hand, preparing to take out the Breath Fruit Core.

However, a moment later, when the Breath Fruit Core appeared in the palm of his hand, he paused.

The Breath Fruit Core looked somewhat different from before.

Although the Breath Fruit Core was indeed the inner core of the Breath Fruit, at first glance, it looked just like a sapphire. The first time he encountered it, Lu Ye was curious about why a fruit core would look like that, thinking the world was full of wonders.

But he later understood that it wasn't strictly a fruit core; it was a vessel endowed with a special ability by Heaven's Augury, a key to opening the Mirage Scene. Thus, its external appearance wasn't the focal point.

The current Breath Fruit Core clearly differed from before.

The sapphire-like core now had many complex patterns on it, looking extremely intricate.

Even though Lu Ye had considerable expertise in the Path of Spirit Runes, he could not decipher what these patterns meant. Moreover, as he observed them, he even momentarily felt as though his entire psyche was being sucked into the Breath Fruit Core.

The Breath Fruit Core had changed from before...

What puzzled Lu Ye even more was the other Breath Fruit Core. Where was it?

He initially had one, and had acquired another from spoils of battle some days ago, making a total of two, which looked almost identical, and he had placed both in the storage space on the back of his hand.

But now, only one remained...

There wasn't any issue of oversight; the storage space on the back of his hand was formed of Void Rune Tattoos. Although the space wasn't small and was filled with many items, Lu Ye could easily find what he wanted by immersing his psyche.

Now, with only one Breath Fruit Core remaining, the other had vanished, and the core in his hand had many intricate patterns on its surface.

This led Lu Ye to make some guesses.

Could these things... merge with each other?

The two Breath Fruit Cores had been placed together, and unbeknownst to him, they seemed to have merged into one. While it sounded far-fetched, it was the only explanation.

Still unconvinced, he searched again but still could not find the second Breath Fruit Core.

It seemed like the two Breath Fruit Cores really had merged into one.

The original Breath Fruit Core allowed for the honing of one's saber skills inside the Mirage Scene. What use did the new Breath Fruit Core have?

Regardless of its use, trying it would reveal the answer.

Lu Ye held the Breath Fruit Core in his palm, channeling spirit force into it, immersing his psyche.

His vision blurred, and he found himself in a sealed small space with an ancient-looking door in front of him, and a line of characters caught his eye: "To enter the Mirage, you need to expend a hundred merits."

It appeared exactly the same as what he had seen before, seemingly unchanged.

Just as Lu Ye thought this, the corner of his eye suddenly spotted another door to the side. He turned his head, his face full of surprise.

Because in that direction, there was indeed another door, which also had a line of characters: "To enter the Mirage, you need to expend ten thousand merits."

One hundred and ten thousand, a difference of a hundredfold!

It can be affirmed that previously, within this closed-off small space, there was only one door, the one requiring a hundred merits. Upon pushing open this door, one would enter into an environment shrouded by thick fog. From within that fog, cultivators and various beings from the Insect Race would constantly rush out, allowing one to hone their own skills and enemy-killing techniques.

Where does this door that requires ten thousand merits lead to?

Why did such a change occur after fusing two Breath Fruit Cores of the same efficacy?

Lu Ye suddenly felt that the Breath Fruit Core was not as simple as he thought. Heaven's Augury had endowed those two Breath Fruit Cores with the ability to access the Mirage Realm, and when they fused, they not only retained their original effects but also gained another effect that Lu Ye had never encountered before.

Judging solely by the merits consumed, the place that the second door led to must be fraught with danger.

Of course, it might not be the case; everything required exploration.

Under normal circumstances, Lu Ye might not have entered the second door, after all, he was only a Cloud River Level 5 cultivator for now, and places that were too dangerous were not his to meddle with.

But this was the Mirage Realm, where even if one died, they would not really perish, experiencing only some pain instead.

As for ten thousand merits... other cultivators might not be able to come up with that, but for Lu Ye, it was not really a big deal.

Thus, after contemplating the second door for a moment, Lu Ye made up his mind.

He would go in and see, regardless of where the second door led or what dangers were inside. One could only know by seeing with one's own eyes.

It was just a matter of losing ten thousand merits and then being killed and sent out.

With his decision made, Lu Ye immediately walked up to this newly appeared second door and pushed it with his hand.

The back of his hand warmed slightly as ten thousand merit points were deducted. The heavy door was slowly pushed open, and Lu Ye stepped inside.

As he crossed the threshold, Lu Ye suddenly felt an unreal sensation as though he suddenly freed himself from some bondage and became much stronger.

However, he had no time to ponder this as every unfamiliar environment required one to conceal themselves and stay alert to avoid sneak attacks!

So, as he passed through the door, Lu Ye built up Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes on his body, while simultaneously placing his hand on the hilt of his Boulder Mountain Saber, ready to unleash his power!

Almost at the moment Lu Ye stepped through the new door and entered this unknown space, Amber, who was sleeping deeply, and Yiyi, who was cultivating, simultaneously sensed something strange and opened their eyes to look towards Lu Ye.

Both a spirit and a tiger felt an extremely peculiar sensation as if Lu Ye had suddenly disappeared.

But he was clearly right in front of them.

Yiyi felt somewhat panicked. Even though she knew it was not the right moment to disturb Lu Ye, she couldn't help but softly call out, "Lu Ye?"

She received no response.

Yiyi stood up, went beside Lu Ye, and observed him closely for a moment before tremblingly placing her hand under Lu Ye's nose to test. She suddenly burst into tears crying out, "Lu Ye!"

She could not feel Lu Ye's breath!

And she could sense that Lu Ye seemed to have lost something extremely important.

Being a Spiritual Body, although her cultivation was not high, only on par with Lu Ye's, her sensitivity to the psyche was quite acute.

At this moment, there were clearly no traces of the psyche in Lu Ye's body, which meant that Lu Ye was left with nothing but a physical body here, and moreover, he was breathless.

Amber was also frightened, hurriedly running to Lu Ye's side, tapping him with its paw.

"Lu Ye is dead!" Yiyi collapsed onto the floor, crying uncontrollably, overwhelmed by intense grief.

Amber was terrified and growled lowly at Lu Ye, but received no response, wondering how Lu Ye could suddenly have died when he was just cultivating moments before.

But then it thought, that wasn't right. If Lu Ye had died, what would become of its tiger life? It turned and growled at Yiyi again.

Yiyi, capable of discerning Amber's thoughts, came to a realization upon its reminder.

Not only had Lu Ye and Amber established a pet contract, but they had also formed the Life Origin Method. As Lu Ye's destiny demon beast, if Amber were to die, it would harm Lu Ye, but if Lu Ye were to die, Amber could not possibly survive on its own.

And Yiyi, as Amber's companion minion spirit, would definitely not survive if Amber were to die.

Hence, Lu Ye's life and death not only concerned himself but also involved the survival of a spirit and a tiger.

Since both Amber and Yiyi were unharmed, it could only mean one thing.

Lu Ye was still alive!

Realizing this, Yiyi quickly suppressed her grief, choking back sobs, and extended her hand to test Lu Ye's breath again.

It was very faint, very faint, but it was indeed breathing.

The emotional rollercoaster nearly left Yiyi utterly weak.

But she really couldn't understand what Lu Ye had done to suddenly become like this; in her perception, Lu Ye was nothing but an empty shell left here, with his psyche nowhere to be found.

Chapter 646 Psyche Exiting Orifice

...

In the unknown environment, Lu Ye held his saber cautiously, but he quickly relaxed as there seemed to be no danger around.

Unlike the situation he encountered when he first entered the Mirage Realm, there was no mist swirling around, nor were there any monsters suddenly attacking. The place he found himself in was a room.

The doors and windows were shut tight, and the furnishings inside were quite simple; there was only a table and a few chairs.

A teapot and several teacups sat on the table.

Lu Ye approached the table to examine it and found that a thick layer of dust had settled upon it, indicating that it hadn't been lived in for quite some time.

The place looked like an area meant for receiving guests, and there were stairs leading up to the second floor.

Lu Ye looked at the stairs but didn't immediately go up, showing a contemplative expression.

He was very curious about what this place actually was.

Previously, when entering the Mirage Realm for training, the environment was quite simple - an open area with swirling mist and occasional enemies rushing in.

But after the fusion of two Breath Fruit Cores and the opening of the newly appeared second door, he found himself in such a strange place.

What puzzled him even more was his current state.

He had sensed something extraordinary about himself the moment he entered, but there hadn't been time to investigate. Now that he was certain there was no immediate danger, he began to examine his condition.

After a moment of silent perception, Lu Ye's eyebrows rose.

This is... not simple.

He found that his strength had increased immensely out of nowhere!

Originally, his cultivation was at the Cloud River Level 5 realm, but now the power contained within him was far beyond that. He was probably even stronger than those at the Cloud River Level 9 he had encountered before.

In other words, he might very well be equivalent to a True Lake Realm cultivator now!

As for which level of the True Lake Realm... Lu Ye really had no idea. He hadn't come into contact with many True Lake Realm cultivators and lacked a standard of comparison, which made it difficult to judge his current strength.

When he passed through that door, Lu Ye suddenly felt a sense of becoming much more powerful, and it seemed that this was not an illusion; he had indeed become more powerful.

But why? Could this environment arbitrarily enhance one's strength? That seems quite unreasonable.

What made Lu Ye even more baffled was that the power flowing within him was not only spirit force but also another kind of force that felt unfamiliar, yet strangely familiar.

Is this... Psyche Force?

When Lu Ye delved into the essence of this force, he couldn't help frowning.

What exactly is going on? Even though I was at Cloud River Level 5 realm and now possibly at True Lake Realm, I shouldn't be able to feel the Psyche Force.

Psyche Force is something every cultivator is born with; as a cultivator's strength grows, so does their Psyche Force. However, before reaching the Divine Sea Realm, cultivators simply possess Psyche Force and can use their own psyche's power to passively resist some attacks aimed at the psyche, not being able to sense it actively.

It's like a treasure hidden within a cultivator's body, inaccessible to those who lack sufficient strength.

Only when the cultivation reaches the Divine Sea Realm and Mental Consciousness is born, can one actively perceive the existence of Psyche Force and then be able to wield it.

For example, Lu Ye could perceive many hidden dangers due to the strength of his Psyche Force, but strictly speaking, this perception is a passive ability. Compared to the active use of Mental Consciousness, it is far less significant.

The conflicts between strong cultivators in the Divine Sea Realm often involve battles of Mental Consciousness. Sometimes what appears calm on the surface is extremely dangerous underneath.

Now that Lu Ye could actually feel the Psyche Force flowing within him, it is its presence that has caused a tremendous increase in his strength.

His Psyche Force was already far superior to that of other cultivators at the same realm, reaching the standard of a True Lake Realm cultivator.

Is this the reason for the surge in my strength?

Lu Ye slowly came to a realization, and with that in mind, he now seemed to be... a Spiritual Body? Similar to the existence of Yiyi.

Isn't this an out-of-body experience?

But it's not quite the same as a normal out-of-body experience. Normally, a cultivator can only use Psyche Force during an out-of-body experience and can't mobilize spirit force.

Yet now, he is in a state where both spirit force and Psyche Force coexist, which is very peculiar.

He suddenly remembered the feeling of breaking free from constraints when he entered this place.

Looking back, it seemed that the restraints he had broken free from were those of his own physical body.

His psyche's level of cultivation was much higher than that of his physical body, which is why he felt like he had broken free and subsequently became stronger after the out-of-body experience.

This Mirage Realm is completely different from the ones he had entered before.

In the previous Mirage Realms, it was merely a projection. Whatever state Lu Ye was in reality, the same state was projected into the Mirage Realm, including all the items he carried, down to his storage sack and the contents of his storage space—nothing was omitted from the projection.

But this Mirage Realm was not just a projection. On top of the projection, it seemed to have drawn in his entire psyche as well.

...

Lu Ye suddenly had a bad feeling!

In the Mirage Realm, his greatest advantage was not fearing death, because even if he died, he wouldn't incur much loss. At first, when his Psyche Force was not strong, dying once would cause him half a day of pain. But since he had refined his psyche with numerous Soul Cleansing Waters, strengthening his Psyche Force, dying in the Mirage Scene didn't seem like much to him anymore—it felt just like being pricked in the head with a needle, and he could endure it until it passed.

But if his current state was similar to a projection of his psyche, should he die, Lu Ye wasn't sure what the outcome would be.

Would he just drop dead on the spot? Or would his psyche suffer heavy damage?

It seemed that he needed to be extra cautious going forward and absolutely could not die easily here, or else no one knew what adverse consequences there might be.

As for how to leave this place... Lu Ye had no clue for the time being; he could only explore slowly.

He checked his person again; the Boulder Mountain Saber and the supplies box were both at his waist, and he could freely take out or store items in the storage sack on the back of his hand.

Just as he had thought before, this time he entered in a state that was his psyche projected, so he could use the items around him at any time.

In this state, his only advantage was that his strength had increased a lot.

He didn't rush to push the door open and leave. Uncertain of his environment, at least the room was safe for now.

Previously, upon entering the Mirage Scene, he only needed to stand there, and a continuous stream of monsters would charge out of the fog, allowing him to hone his saber skills and combat skill. Although it was monotonous and boring, it was also straightforward.

This time around, things were much more complicated, so he needed to gather as many clues as possible to determine his current location and the potential dangers he might encounter.

He stepped onto the staircase next to him. As his feet touched the wooden steps, the creaking noise echoed piercingly in the silent environment.

Lu Ye couldn't help but harbor some doubts.

Was this really the Mirage Realm? He always felt that the Mirage was an illusory realm, and everything he saw in the Mirage Scene was fake, which was why dying there wasn't a great loss.

But this time, upon entering the Mirage Realm, everything around him felt incredibly real without giving off any false sensations.

He quickly ascended the dozen or so steps.

Lu Ye cautiously poked his head out and glanced towards the second floor, and then his body suddenly stiffened.

Because in that instant, he was staring into numerous pairs of grey-green eyes, all compound eyes, and Lu Ye could almost see his own astonished expression reflected in those many pairs of eyes.

The second floor of what he had thought to be a safe house was actually hiding more than a dozen of the Insect Race!

And it was the Mantis Insect Race that he was very familiar with!

This type of mantis, along with other types of the Insect Race, he had killed countless times during his experiences in the Mirage Scene.

Why were there Insect Races here as well?

Without time to ponder deeply, the mantises lurking on the second floor were already fluttering their wings and flying toward the staircase entrance, with the lead insect raising its mantis saber high.

The bright flash of the saber passed by, instantly bisecting the Insect Race, with its green blood spurting out and a pungent smell filling the air.

Lu Ye was standing at the staircase entrance, his Boulder Mountain Saber already unsheathed.

After killing the first insect, Lu Ye slightly relaxed, as the strength of these mantis insects was not too powerful, still within the range of the Cloud River Realm. With his strength now equivalent to the True Lake Realm, killing them naturally wasn't difficult.

Moreover, due to his previous training in the Mirage Scene, he was well aware of the weaknesses of these insects.

The saber light was fierce, Lu Ye stood his ground at the staircase entrance without taking a single step back, all the charging mantis insects died as they came. In just a moment, they were all dispatched cleanly.

Specks of light began to float off the dead insect carcasses. Unlike the crimson light from killing Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators, these lights were golden.

Killing Insect Races also awarded merit?

Lu Ye was surprised, and even more convinced that this place was not some illusory scene.

Because he had killed so many Insect Races in the Mirage Realm before, but he had never gained any merit. Earning merit meant that the Insect Races he killed actually existed.

But why did killing the Insect Race award merit?

Curious about how much merit one could get for killing these insects, Lu Ye checked his battlefield marking.

The battlefield marking showed over 140,000 merits. Lu Ye hadn't recorded the precise number of his previous merits, so for the moment, he couldn't determine the standard for earning merit by killing insects.

Just as he was about to note down the current merit figure for later comparison, he suddenly noticed a change that puzzled him.

The battlefield marking recorded his information and in the battle merit column, the number displayed was: five hundred and seventy-six points!

That number was clearly wrong because in Lu Ye's memory, his battle merit was a mere fifty-six points and hadn't changed for a long time.

After all, for a Cloud River Realm cultivator like him, opportunities to earn battle merits were scarce, with only one occasion until now!

It was during that one time in the secret realm of the Ten Thousand Beasts Domain.

Chapter 647 Insect Race and Battle Merit

In the cultivation world of the Nine Provinces, merit and battle merit, although only displayed as numbers in a cultivator's battlefield marking, can allow cultivators to obtain many tangible assets.

Both are crucial for cultivators.

There are generally three sources of merit, the first is killing enemies, the second is selling items to Heaven's Augury treasure vault, and the third is issued by the Governor during one's time in the Spirit Stream Realm, beyond these, there are no other means.

However, the sources of battle merit, aside from killing enemies in certain special occasions, are more diverse, like the last time in the Ten Thousand Beasts Domain secret realm, where Lu Ye didn't earn much battle merit merely by killing enemies, but by leading people like Pang Dahai to address the crisis at its source, he gathered a substantial amount of battle merit.

Therefore, acquiring battle merit is not limited to just killing enemies, it can also be earned by completing certain specific events, and the amount obtained is much more than what one gets from merely killing enemies.

Comparatively speaking, battle merit is undoubtedly more important, as this can be used directly to purchase spirit fortune sticks.

Merit cannot do that.

The only way merit can be exchanged for spirit fortune sticks is by participating in auctions.

This is why many Cloud River Realm cultivators like exploring various secret realms in the Cloud River battlefield and taking part in them.

The Spirit Stream battlefield is rife with inheritances, while the Cloud River battlefield has many secret realms. The former allows cultivators to obtain a more solid foundation, the latter allows cultivators to grow rapidly; thus, powerful cultivators in the Nine Provinces cultivation world can continue to emerge generation after generation.

Since entering the Cloud River battlefield, Lu Ye had only entered one Ten Thousand Beasts Domain secret realm because his time in the Cloud River battlefield was short, he hadn't traveled much, and some secret realms required specific timings to open.

But this does not mean that secret realms in the Cloud River battlefield are rare.

If one truly intends to venture into secret realms, cultivators have the opportunity to experience one almost every month. Many of these secret realms contain battle merits.

Thus, cultivators can earn battle merits by their actions in these secret realms, and then exchange them for spirit fortune sticks.

Although this method is tougher and more dangerous, it is always better than waiting for Heaven-bestowed spirit fortune sticks or cultivating in some lower-quality spirit grounds.

Lu Ye had obtained a good amount of battle merits in the Ten Thousand Beasts Domain secret realm last time, and after exchanging them for some spirit fortune sticks, he was left with only fifty-six points of battle merit, which hadn't changed since then.

Now, fifty-six points of battle merit had turned into five hundred and seventy-six points, in other words, an increase of five hundred and twenty points...

This could be exchanged for two or three white spirit fortune sticks.

Lu Ye immediately realized that the merit he had earned from killing those insects was not merit, but battle merit!

This delighted him somewhat, as relatively speaking, battle merit was undoubtedly more useful, and currently, he wasn't lacking in merit.

After a quick calculation, the number of battle merits received for the strength of the insects wasn't vastly different from the merit received.

For instance, killing a Cloud River Level 5 cultivator would get Lu Ye forty points of merit, and killing an insect equivalent to the Cloud River Level 5 would get him forty points of battle merit!

Therefore, a dozen or so insects equivalent to Cloud River levels contributed five hundred and twenty points of merit to him.

While excited, he became more cautious.

Because once it involves battle merit, things would not be too simple.

Cultivators of the Cloud River battlefield had summarized a rule, secret realms containing battle merits are far more dangerous compared to other realms.

Although Lu Ye didn't enter any secret realm this time, he was in the Mirage Realm, yet the clues suggested that this Mirage Realm was no benign place.

Even though he possessed strength comparable to the True Lake Realm, he might not ensure his safety.

Setting aside his distracting thoughts, Lu Ye remained vigilant.

The entire second floor was littered with parts of insect corpses, their emerald-green blood dyed the floor lush green, and a pungent smell lingered in the air.

There was a bed, seemingly a place for rest, but like the first floor, it showed no signs of life, and the accumulated dust in the corners suggested it had been uninhabited for a long time.

Although encountering insects in the Mirage Realm had become a routine occurrence, Lu Ye had absolutely no clue about what this place truly was.

The second floor wasn't large, a glance was enough to take it all in.

There was a wooden window, currently wide open, presumably how those insects had flown in.

Lu Ye was just about to move and close the window when suddenly there was a thud, darkening the room as a calf-sized silhouette climbed up outside the wooden window, a triangular head protruding through, its grey-green compound eyes reflecting Lu Ye's figure.

Another Mantis Insect had arrived, and this one seemed far more dangerous than those Lu Ye had previously killed.

It might be a coincidence, or perhaps it was attracted here by the aura of his recent actions.

The instant the Insect encountered Lu Ye, it immediately rushed in through the window, wielding two mantis sabers as if it were a combat cultivator skilled in saber skills, whipping up a storm of slaughter in the not-so-spacious room.

As the Boulder Mountain Saber moved, its blade flashing, Lu Ye had already tangled with the Insect.

The clanging sounds were incessant, and the turbulence of the spirit force left the room in complete disarray.

Suddenly gaining power comparable to the True Lake Realm, Lu Ye was still somewhat unfamiliar, as he himself was merely at the Cloud River Level 5 Realm, so before he could fully familiarize himself with his powers, he was unable to exert his full strength.

This Insect that suddenly attacked was definitely much stronger than the previous ones, at least in one aspect: its mantis sabers, incredibly tough, were actually able to block the slashes from the Boulder Mountain Saber.

This was definitely an Insect from the True Lake Realm!

Lu Ye was curious if the battle merits he would gain from killing this Insect would be calculated based on his current True Lake Realm strength or based on his Cloud River Level 5 Realm cultivation.

If it were the latter, then the rewards from this single Insect could be quite significant.

In the merit calculation system, a cultivator from the True Lake Realm represents a base merit of one hundred points, with a hundred points added for each small increase in realm.

In other words, the True Lake Level 1 realm represents one hundred points of merit, True Lake Level 2 is two hundred, and as for True Lake Level 9, that's a full nine hundred points of merit.

If someone from Cloud River Level 5 were to slay a True Lake Level 1, transcending five small levels, the merits gained would then be six times the base... six hundred points of merit.

The corresponding battle merits are the same.

Six hundred points of merit could be exchanged for a green spirit fortune stick, and this is still calculated at the True Lake Level 1; given that this Insect likely has more than True Lake Level 1 strength, the stronger it is, the greater the benefits from killing it, increasing exponentially.

All these thoughts flashed through his mind in an instant, then disappeared; Lu Ye didn't think too much, his figure nimbly moving throughout the room, blocking the opponent's fierce attacks like a storm.

The rapid exchanges in the confined space helped him become more adept at controlling his current state.

Seizing the moment when the Insect raised its mantis sabers, Lu Ye's Move-Like-The-Wind boost allowed his figure to surge forward like a shadow or lightning, moving within a meter as the Boulder Mountain Saber blazed with light, and an extremely complex pattern emerged on the dark blade surface.

Double-Sharpness Spirit Runes enhancement.

The sharp mantis saber struck down, aiming directly at Lu Ye's back, but it merely grazed his body and struck the air instead.

A wet stabbing sound was heard; the Boulder Mountain Saber had pierced the mantis's front chest, and the moment the Cactus Spirit Runes were activated, the Insect's body shook violently, emitting a short shriek from its mouthparts.

Another mantis saber came chopping down; Lu Ye quickly withdrew, the Boulder Mountain Saber pulling out with a spurt of stinging, emerald green blood splattering the floor.

The badly injured Mantis Insect Race swayed from side to side, instinctively swinging its dual mantis sabers.

With a booming sound, the second-floor wall was broken open, shattered wood plummeted from the sky, and dust rose in clouds.

When the dust settled, the Mantis Insect was already dead, but Lu Ye had no intention of checking the change in his battle merits, his gaze instead fixed in stunned wonder at the distant sky.

The sky seemed to have split open, revealing a massive gap, within which lay another world hidden in shadows; at this very moment, a vast number of Insects were swarming out from that gap, pouring into this world.

The Insects varied in shape, many of which Lu Ye had seen in the Mirage Realm, and many more he had never encountered before.

They swarmed into this place like cats that had smelled fish, pouring in from an unknown space.

Lu Ye didn't observe for long, merely casting a brief glance before dropping his gaze, hiding the shock and many questions in his heart, his expression growing solemn.

He had previously thought he was safe while inside the house and had only realized there was danger hidden amid that safety upon reaching the second floor.

But now, he finally saw the truth.

The safety he assumed existed, was nowhere to be found.

All around were various kinds of Insects; he hadn't noticed them before for two reasons: firstly, these Insects hadn't been very active, and secondly, because he had arrived here in a manner similar to projecting his psyche, his senses had yet to fully recover, so he had been completely unaware of the situation outside, even the Insects on the second floor.

Chapter 648 Unusual Familiarity

Rustling sounds emerged as a multitude of insects from within the field of vision rushed toward this side. It was already too late to activate the Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes, and Lu Ye immediately leapt into the air, planning to flee towards a certain side.

However, he had only flown up about thirty feet when he suddenly felt the sensation of a mountain bearing down on him, preventing him from flying any higher.

For a moment, Lu Ye didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

He had often used the Great Sky Prohibition Array in the Great Reversal Valley Spirit Ground to deal with the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators, causing those that attacked to be repeatedly defeated, yet he never expected that today he would suffer the suppression of the Great Sky Prohibition Array himself.

This truly was the cycle of karma, a retribution quite inescapable.

Although he didn't know exactly where he was, it was clear that this place had a Great Sky Prohibition Array. Ten feet was the limit for his ascent, and it was impossible to fly any higher.

Barely delayed, those insects drew closer, their mouthparts hissing and wings flapping continuously, the sounds reaching his ears.

Lu Ye had already dashed out of the second floor, flying in one direction.

Looking around, that inexplicable sense of familiarity surged up in his mind once again.

This place seemed to be a city. Although he couldn't see far, within his field of view, he could still see rows of neatly planned streets with houses standing on both sides. Many of the houses were destroyed by the insects, turning into broken walls and ruins, while some remained intact.

The room he had initially appeared in was clearly one of these houses, which he had thought was a safe place, but that proved not to be the case.

It was like tossing a handful of salt into a hot oil pan. The moment Lu Ye's figure appeared, a vast area filled with insects boiled over, converging from all directions toward where Lu Ye was, including some with powerful presences.

Red light blazed on the Boulder Mountain Saber, and Lu Ye's perception was pushed to the limit, trying to avoid the directions where powerful presences were detected, carving a bloody path out of the heavy encirclement.

Saber light constantly flashed, and one after another, the approaching insects shed green blood, their vitality dissipating, whipping up a storm of blood and foul wind along the way.

In the midst of fleeing, Lu Ye also noticed some odd things, such as his perception being much stronger and more detailed than before.

In the past, when he sensed his surroundings, he could only muster a vague perception, and its range was only about thirty feet.

But now, when he stimulated his perception, the range suddenly expanded to several tens of feet, and that sense of perception was no longer vague; numerous external feedback could clearly emerge in his mind.

This change likely had something to do with the way his Psyche force had left his body. Previously bound by his physical body, he couldn't fully exert the strength of his Psyche Force.

With no such constraints now, the power of his Psyche Force could be fully manifested.

As perception became detailed, numerous feedbacks presented in his mind, already showing slight signs of Mental Consciousness.

Besides, the spirit runes he constructed... seemed also different from usual.

But at the moment, as he was fleeing for his life, Lu Ye had no time to ponder these matters, only able to suppress the various doubts in his mind.

The city was teeming with insects of various forms and strengths in almost every corner, and although Lu Ye might evade temporarily, he couldn't keep escaping forever.

As time passed, his situation grew increasingly dire, as those powerful insects he had avoided relentlessly pursued him, determined to drive him to his death. This meant the further he ran, the more powerful were the insects that followed him.

If this were in the Mirage Realm before, Lu Ye would not have been overly worried—after all, even if he died, he could still re-enter as a brave man.

However, he had no clue what the situation in this Mirage Realm was like; who knew whether dying here meant truly dying, so even if there was the slightest possibility, Lu Ye dare not relax.

As he fled, suddenly in the sky ahead, a plump, cone-shaped insect appeared. This round-bodied, four-legged insect at first glance looked like a bald, fat man.

This insect had no wings; Lu Ye did not know how it had taken flight, but he felt an immense danger from this plump insect.

The moment it appeared in his line of sight, a strong alarm went off in Lu Ye's heart.

He immediately planned to change his direction, but it was already too late. The insect opened its mouth and spat out a crystalline thread that, in the blink of an eye, transformed into a huge net, covering a vast area.

Lu Ye couldn't dodge in time and was firmly caught by this net, uncontrollably plunging toward the ground.

This inexplicably appearing net not only restrained him but he distinctly felt a strange movement within his Talent Tree.

There was no time to investigate, but generally, when the Talent Tree acted up, it meant he had been poisoned.

In other words, the threads of this net were highly toxic.

For any cultivator in the True Lake Realm encountering such a situation, even if they could free themselves from the net, the toxin would be enough to immobilize them, if not kill them outright.

But toxins had never had any effect on Lu Ye.

Before he even hit the ground, fierce saber light spread in all directions, and Lu Ye broke free from the net, quickly stabilizing his position, ready to continue his escape.

However, at this moment, a dense shadow had already obscured the sky above, those relentless insects...

This brief delay had already placed him in an extremely passive situation.

Countless insects now surrounded him, leaving nowhere to escape.

"Can't escape anymore!"

This thought flashed through his mind as Lu Ye charged in one direction with his Boulder Mountain Saber, battling fiercely with the Insect Race in that position.

His brief stint of fleeing had made it clear to him that in such a bizarre environment, no place was safe; wherever he fled, the Insect Race pursued him relentlessly.

Thus, to survive, there was only one way: to completely eliminate the Insect Race within his sight, only then might he find a moment to breathe.

But this was undoubtedly very difficult.

At this moment, the Insect Race surrounding him, each possessed the strength of the True Lake Realm, numbering at least dozens, among them a plump, rosy one felt the most dangerous.

Moreover, once the battle began, it was hard to say whether it would attract more Insect Race; given the situations he had previously observed, this was very likely to happen.

But Lu Ye couldn't just sit and wait for death, to try and see what consequences would come if he died here.

So, he had only one choice.

Regardless of the danger faced before, he always had Amber and Yiyi by his side.

But this time, he was utterly alone; without Yiyi and Amber, he couldn't rely on any external help. His strength had indeed reached the True Lake Realm by shedding the limits of his physical body, but the enemies he faced had also grown stronger.

This time, it seemed the odds were largely against him.

In the heat of the battle, numerous Insect Race were slain, Lu Ye's figure maneuvered dramatically across the battlefield, his Boulder Mountain Saber flashing fiercely.

Though there were many grievances between him and Xia Liang, at this moment, Lu Ye was very grateful to him, for Xia Liang had taught him the Mental Eye Secret Technique in Fox Fairy Valley.

When fighting against an enemy one-on-one, the Mental Eye Secret Technique might not be too apparent, but in a situation where he faced multiple enemies from all sides, the technique's effectiveness was profoundly strong.

Many times, it was the Mental Eye Secret Technique that Lu Ye relied on to block countless deadly strikes.

But it was of no use; despite the constant slaying of the Insect Race by Lu Ye, the remaining Insect Race showed no hint of fear and continued to launch fearless attacks on him, and injuries kept accumulating on Lu Ye.

Though no blood flowed out, the impacts of the injuries were no different from usual, numerous injuries caused him pain, accelerating his consumption.

As time passed, the battlefield was strewn with the limbs of the Insect Race, and Lu Ye's onslaught gradually weakened.

He was reaching his limit...

He couldn't help but recall that troubling question, if he died here, would he truly die?

If so, then Yiyi and Amber would not be able to survive either; Amber had bonded with him through the Life Origin Method, their lives intertwined, and Yiyi and Amber were companion minion spirits, meaning the lives of one man, one tiger, and one spirit were intertwined.

He felt somewhat sorry for the two of them...

Upon seeing that second gate, Lu Ye knew that the world behind the gate was fraught with danger, but based on past experiences, he always felt that dying in the Mirage Realm wouldn't mean true death, which is why he had pushed open the door.

However, the reliance he thought he had was merely a prejudgement, resulting in the current situation.

A massive impact came from ahead, and Lu Ye was sent flying by an Insect Race the size of a hound; in that instant, his vision blurred...

It was also in that moment, a flash of red light streaked across his field of vision.

That fleeting glimpse of red light stirred in Lu Ye a strange familiarity...

At the brink of death, time seemed to stand still, numerous thoughts raced through Lu Ye's mind like lightning; in that moment, he actually remembered what that familiarity was about.

That fleeting glimpse of red light... he had seen it before.

"Impossible!"

"How could it be?"

If things were really as he thought, it would be too inconceivable.

But no matter whether things are really as he figured, he needed to verify it; if it were so, he might not be without a chance to live.

As Lu Ye's figure soared through the air, numerous Insect Race also surged toward him, what they met was a crescent-shaped fiery red slash!

This slash was more powerful than any before, the strongest slash Lu Ye had delivered since he started his cultivation.

Several Insect Race were cleaved instantly, many more were flung away, Lu Ye landed, immediately enchanted Move-Like-The-Wind on his legs, and headed in the direction from where he had seen the red light.

Dozens of moments later, Lu Ye, his body riddled with wounds, burst forth from the encirclement, and upon looking up, he saw not far away, in front of a building, a fiery red lantern hung.

The red light he had seen, was indeed the color of this lantern's cover.

Chapter 649 Returning to Xianyuan City

In the dilapidated city, broken walls and ruins were everywhere, but amidst these ruins, one could faintly see the former prosperity of the city.

There weren't many buildings with red lanterns hanging at the door; at this moment, this building had become Lu Ye's lifeline.

If everything was as he had thought, then perhaps there was still a chance for survival.

But if he was wrong, then he really could only wait for death.

At this critical moment of life and death, Lu Ye burst forth with a speed he had never achieved before, breaking through the encirclement of countless insects and rushing towards that building.

The Insect Race relentlessly pursued him from behind, especially one chubby, thudding bug that was most fierce in its chase.

A few dozen yards distance closed in a blink; Lu Ye rushed into the building and immediately shut the door.

No sooner had he done this than a thunderous pounding sound came from outside—it was those not-yet-dead insects pursuing him, furiously attacking the building, the violent force causing the wooden planks to clatter.

Something astonishing happened.

No matter how the bugs, whose strength matched that of those in the True Lake Realm, tried, even if the entire building shook and the door panels and planks creaked, they could not damage the building at all.

It was as if an invisible mighty force was protecting this building, ensuring that it would never be damaged.

Lu Ye was initially bracing the door panel, fearing the insects might break through and storm inside, but upon realizing the peculiar nature of the building, he let go of his hands and slowly stepped back.

Logically speaking, without him bracing the door panel, the insects outside could have easily broken the door and flooded in.

But in reality, even though the two door panels were violently shaking from the attacks, there was not the slightest sign they were giving way.

The angry hisses of the insects and the sound of nearby buildings collapsing reached his ears, yet only his building remained as solid as a stronghold.

Lu Ye took a deep breath, his tense emotions relaxing, but more confusion surged in his heart.

The situation was as he had thought; could this place actually be that place?

But why... why had he entered here?

Outside the building, each of the Insect Race attacked fiercely for a good while before slowly dissipating.

The intelligence of the Insect Race ultimately was a flaw; one might even say the insects had little spiritual intelligence, acting mostly on instinct.

Lu Ye had hidden inside this indestructible building, and without seeing or smelling their enemy, they soon forgot about Lu Ye...

Inside the house, Lu Ye sensed the powerful presences of the surrounding area recede one by one until all the pursuing insects had disappeared. Only then did he truly relax.

Exhaustion overwhelmed him, making him sleepy and the wounds on his body transmitting pain more unbearable than usual, an experience he had never had before in the Mirage Scene.

According to his estimation, his current state was of his psyche having left his body based on a projection, and the recent battle had drained him severely; he did not know if he could recover by consuming elixir pills.

This was something that a trial would make clear.

Lu Ye took some elixir pills from his storage space, stuffing them into his mouth and silently refining them.

To his surprise, it worked. As he refined the medicinal effects of the elixir pills, the depleted power within his body slowly returned.

He immediately sat down cross-legged, recovering while pondering his current situation.

From the observations he made during his escape and the verification of rushing into this building, Lu Ye was almost certain that this place he had come to was a secret realm he had visited before.

Xianyuan City!

Xianyuan City was a secret realm that appeared in the Spirit Stream battlefield. When he first entered this place, he was only at Level 8 of the Spirit Stream Realm, and it has been a year or two since that time.

Although it had been a long time, this place remained fresh in his memory because it was here that he obtained several bottles of Soul Cleansing Water, which not only strengthened and empowered his psyche but even contributed directly to the many benefits he later gained in the Hundred Arrays Pagoda.

Moreover, the various experiences he had in Xianyuan City were unforgettable to Lu Ye.

When he first entered this place, he was alone and unaided but managed to thrive by transforming minion spirits, thanks to Amber's ability.

Liu Sanbao, who loved to gamble; the crying Pipa Girl; the scholar who loved praise but was utterly talentless; the Butcher with his bone-stripping saber; and the fortune-telling blind man who boasted unparalleled prophecy skills but was actually just muscular, all became minion spirits because of Amber, and it was with these unique spirits that Lu Ye managed to change the outcome of the confrontation between cultivators of two factions in this place.

Initially, most cultivators from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge who entered Xianyuan City were almost completely wiped out, with only a few stragglers surviving.

Starting out in Xianyuan City, Lu Ye had not thought much about it and took it just as a realm to refine and enhance himself, not to mention that he gained quite a few benefits therein.

But now, it seemed this place was not just a mere secret realm; it apparently also concealed other secrets.

This made him inevitably think of the woman in red on the swing, and of the Lord of Xianyuan City...

At that time, Lu Ye felt that these two were beings that the cultivators at the Spirit Stream Realm could absolutely not contend with. Their presence in a secret realm where Spirit Stream Realm cultivators trained was baffling. Fortunately, these two did not harbor much malice towards the training cultivators; otherwise, all the cultivators would have been powerless then.

The second layer of the Mirage Realm led to Xianyuan City, which puzzled Lu Ye and left him wondering why.

The reason he was able to tell this place was Xianyuan City stemmed first from the many familiar sensations he experienced while fleeing.

He had been here before, after all, and revisiting an old place naturally evoked a sense of familiarity.

The second and most important reason was the building with red lanterns hanging at the entrance!

When the cultivators first entered the secret realm of Xianyuan City, their enemies, apart from the cultivators from hostile camps, were the Xianyuan Guards scattered throughout the city.

The strength of these Xianyuan Guards was not insignificant, especially those at the captain level, who were incomparably formidable. To them, the cultivators were foreign invaders. Upon detecting any trace of cultivators, the patrolling Xianyuan Guards would immediately act, capturing the cultivators and imprisoning them in dungeons.

Generally, those thrown into the dungeons faced grim fates.

Rarely could cultivators escape the pursuit of the Xianyuan Guards.

However, cultivators could hide inside those buildings with red lanterns hanging at the door, as the Xianyuan Guards could not enter these lantern-adorned buildings.

That was exactly what Lu Ye had done back then. Cornered by the Xianyuan Guards, he had hidden inside a building, escaping their pursuit, where he encountered the gambling-addict Liu Sanbao...

That was also where Amber had subjugated his first minion spirit.

History always bore astonishing similarities.

The first time he came to Xianyuan City, Lu Ye had escaped the Xianyuan Guards by taking refuge in this special building.

Now, on his second visit, he was still relying on this unique kind of building to evade the pursuit of the Insect Race.

These special buildings seemed to have been endowed with a unique protective force, indestructible and impervious, offering cultivators a haven in times of peril.

Of course, simply deducing that this place was Xianyuan City based on these facts alone was somewhat presumptuous, but Lu Ye felt it was highly probable.

This place was very likely Xianyuan City.

Never mind why the second layer of the Mirage Realm connected to Xianyuan City, the current situation indicated that Xianyuan City had clearly been occupied by the Insect Race.

Thinking about it, the Xianyuan Guards were indeed powerful, but they were merely equivalent to the Spirit Stream Realm.

Since entering, the Insect Race Lu Ye had encountered included those at the Spirit Stream Realm, but also at the Cloud River Realm and True Lake Realm...

Fortunately, he hadn't encountered any from the Divine Sea Realm, but recalling the huge gap he had seen in the sky, it was possible that Divine Sea Realm Insect Race members existed—he had just been lucky not to run into any.

How could the Xianyuan Guards possibly stand against such members of the Insect Race? Even the seemingly inscrutable woman in red and the City Lord from back then likely couldn't have resisted them.

Spiritual Bodies also die...

Thinking of Liu Sanbao and many other spiritual intelligences, Lu Ye felt somber. Regardless, those figures had provided him with tremendous assistance back then, and now they were likely gone.

Although it was inexplicable to end up in Xianyuan City again, and the situation was extremely dangerous, this was a rare opportunity.

This city had a Soul Cleansing Pool! And in the Soul Cleansing Pool was Soul Cleansing Water!

That was a treasure even strong cultivators of the Divine Sea Realm coveted, unavailable anywhere but in secret realms like Xianyuan City, not even for sale in the Heaven's Augury treasure vault.

Last time, Lu Ye obtained quite a bit of Soul Cleansing Water here. He used much of it himself, enhancing his psyche far beyond that of cultivators in similar realms, and shared some; now only a small half-bottle remained for emergencies.

But who would ever complain about having too much of such a treasure?

However, to get the Soul Cleansing Water, he must first reach the Soul Cleansing Pool, located towards the City Lord's Residence, right in the center of Xianyuan City.

Lu Ye wasn't sure if his current strength was sufficient for the task, but since the opportunity was before him, he had to try. If he succeeded, he would strike it rich.

He had been unable to obtain more Soul Cleansing Water previously because his time was limited; the Xianyuan City Lord had only allowed him so much time.

Now, the City Lord was most likely gone. As long as he could reach the Soul Cleansing Pool, he could take as much as he wanted without any restrictions. He might even be able to move the entire Soul Cleansing Pool!

Thinking this, Lu Ye felt an intense excitement, even though the situation was somewhat bewildering; this might turn out to be a blessing in disguise after all.

With many thoughts swirling in his mind, Lu Ye continued to focus on healing and recuperating.

However, to his surprise, no matter how many elixir pills he consumed, the feeling of exhaustion remained, and his wounds showed no signs of healing.

Upon reflection, Lu Ye understood.

He was in a state similar to his psyche leaving his body; in strict terms, he was a Spiritual Body. Although he didn't know why he was able to consume elixir pills to replenish his spirit force, the Psyche Force he had expended in the great battle couldn't be replenished in such a short time.

Especially considering the numerous injuries on his body, these were wounds on his Spiritual Body, unrelated to the strength of his physical body; thus, consuming elixir pills was useless for healing his injuries or recovering his spirit.

Chapter 650

The injuries to the Spiritual Body couldn't be healed by ordinary means; this would probably require a long period of recuperation, the exact length of which was uncertain.

Hiding here was indeed safe, but Lu Ye couldn't possibly stay here for too long.

After some thought, he took a jade vial out of his storage space.

The vial contained the last half bottle of Soul Cleansing Water he had left, roughly less than ten drops. This was originally reserved for emergencies, but given the circumstances, he couldn't afford to hold back any longer.

Upon opening the vial, the unique refreshing fragrance of the Soul Cleansing Water wafted out, reaching his nostrils and revitalizing his spirit, seemingly dissipating much of the fatigue that plagued him.

This reinforced his belief that for his current condition, Soul Cleansing Water was the best remedy.

Not daring to consume too much, he took only one drop and swallowed it; the gentle sensation instantly spread throughout his body, visibly accelerating the dissipation of his physical and mental fatigue, and even the injuries on his body were healing rapidly.

Indeed, the Soul Cleansing Water had an extremely remarkable effect on healing injuries to the Spiritual Body.

He continued to sit quietly for two hours until he had fully recovered, then Lu Ye finally got up.

Walking to the door, he peered outside through the crack.

Most of the Insect Race that had been chasing him earlier had now disappeared, and only a few were aimlessly wandering the streets; they posed no significant threat to him now.

If he was to head to the City Lord's Residence, then what he needed to do right now was to determine his location.

But before that, there were some things Lu Ye wanted to confirm.

During the battle with the Insect Race earlier, he had sensed something unusual, but at that time, he was too busy escaping to investigate.

Now, with this special building as his support, even if he encountered any danger, he could always flee back here for cover; thus, Lu Ye was keen to find out if the anomalies he had sensed were as he suspected.

If they were, then perhaps he could employ some tactics that he wouldn't normally be able to use.

He quickly checked his battlefield marking and found out to his surprise that his battle merit points had reached over three thousand...

Although this number wasn't small, it wasn't particularly high either, especially considering he had killed quite a few of the Insect Race, including some from the True Lake Realm.

It seemed then that battle merit was calculated based on his current power at the True Lake Realm, so even if he killed the True Lake Realm Insect Race, the points he got wouldn't be much.

This made Lu Ye somewhat disappointed; if the battle merits were calculated based on his Cloud River Level 5 realm cultivation, then the battle merit points he could have gained from that one battle would have multiplied several times over.

But on second thought, being able to earn battle merit in this place was an unexpected gain. What was there to be unsatisfied about?

Over three thousand battle merit points might not seem like much, but they could still be exchanged for two blue-hued spirit fortune sticks, and this was just the beginning. If his plans were implemented smoothly, he would earn more and more battle merits later. Perhaps after this time, he could exchange them for many gold-hued spirit fortune sticks and further advance his cultivation.

Pushing open the door, Lu Ye immediately deployed the Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes, and hid his figure.

The slight noise disturbed those few Insect Race members, but after turning their heads and failing to find anything, they lost interest and continued to wander around.

The appearances of the Insect Race were bizarre and varied. Some could correspond to the forms of demon beasts at first glance; there seemed to be no difference, but they were not actual demon beasts.

There were also some Insect Race members with unique and unconventional forms, completely defying common sense.

However, without exception, all the Insect Race members shared one common trait: their bodies were covered with a thick carapace, and their blood was of a greenish hue.

The more powerful the Insect Race, the stronger the protection provided by the carapace, so killing them was a matter of skill; it was essential to attack the spots without carapace protection to inflict effective damage.

Having honed his skills in the Mirage Scene multiple times, Lu Ye was well aware of the vulnerabilities of various types of Insect Race members.

His target this time was an Insect Race that looked like a centipede, with densely packed white carapaces on its back, appearing like a series of external white bones, and over a hundred pairs of legs that produced a dense rustling noise as they moved.

The thing Lu Ye wanted to verify was not complex, but to ensure the accuracy of the results, he did not launch an attack on this Insect Race immediately but quietly lay in wait instead.

After a long while, the centipede Insect Race finally settled down, quietly coiling in the ruins of a building, motionless.

Lu Ye approached silently until he was only three yards away from the Insect Race, then he stopped moving.

The tranquil atmosphere was suddenly broken when, at the moment when Lu Ye's power surged around him, the centipede Insect Race also sensed danger. However, before it could react, the space before Lu Ye distorted, and a faint arrow-like shape flashed and vanished, savagely striking into the centipede's head, disappearing without a trace.

Instantly, the centipede Insect Race seemed to suffer a severe blow; its ten-yard-long body violently rolled and twisted, emitting a sharp wailing from its mouth.

Lu Ye's figure appeared, and his Boulder Mountain Saber was already unsheathed. Taking advantage of the Insect Race's struggles, he chopped down with his saber.

Emerald green blood spurted out as a massive head flew into the air, a demon beast comparable to the True Lake Realm met its end.

Lu Ye's expression remained calm, yet his eyes sparkled with joy, for he had realized that what he had previously sensed was not an illusion, it was real!

In his recent escape and battle with the insect race, he had infused Sharpness Spirit Runes onto his Boulder Mountain Saber. At that time, he started feeling something peculiar because the Sharpness had become different from usual.

In the past, Sharpness would need to be infused into a Spiritual Artifact to make it more lethal.

Of course, it could also be infused elsewhere, but either way, a carrier was needed for it to function.

However, the Sharpness he executed in Xianyuan City seemed to require no carrier at all...

At that moment, Lu Ye realized something; the spirit rune was constructed and driven by spirit force, making it merely a rune. However, the power he was currently utilizing was not just spirit force, but also Psyche Force...

And a rune driven by Psyche Force was a Divine Rune!

Therefore, Sharpness did not require a carrier because a Divine Rune constructed from Psyche Force was itself a method to kill enemies.

What Lu Ye wanted to verify was exactly this.

Indeed, he was not mistaken. In this environment, what he constructed with Psyche Force was genuinely capable of directly killing enemies as a Divine Rune.

The thing that had flashed by like an arrow just now was the manifestation of the Sharpness Divine Rune.

Moreover, compared to the slash of the Boulder Mountain Saber, this psyche-based damage was particularly brutal on the insect race, fundamentally because it was a Psyche attack. The greatest weakness of the insect race was their low spiritual intelligence, so facing this kind of Psyche attack, they hardly had any defensive power.

When the arrow-shaped Sharpness Divine Rune smashed into its mind, it already inflicted tremendous damage on its already fragile spiritual intelligence, a strike that felt as if its psyche had been torn apart.

The thick carapace covering its body could offer no protection against such an ethereal attack.

Normally, even if Lu Ye could have killed this insect race, he would have needed to employ some tactics, but with the aid of the Sharpness Divine Rune, a single slash was all it took to slay it.

Having verified his thoughts, Lu Ye was thrilled.

In such an environment, in such a scenario, Divine Rune attacks could have unimaginably effective results. If he had known this earlier, he might not have been so embarrassingly chased down.

But before verifying, how could he dare act rashly? At that time, he was busy fleeing; any carelessness could have led to utter ruin.

After all, he was just at Cloud River Level 5 Realm; even now that he possessed the strength of the True Lake Realm, he was far from the stage where he could employ Psyche Force, a method only available to strong cultivators in the Divine Sea Realm.

Yet, in this specific environment, Lu Ye had prematurely gained what would normally only be accessible to those in the Divine Sea Realm.

He couldn't help but recall a phrase that Madam Yun had once said.

Battle runes masters, although troublesome before the Divine Sea Realm, mostly manifest their complexity through the variability of their combat styles. This is because, during battle, they can activate various types of spirit runes, exposing their opponent to the treacherous intricacies of the human realm.

But after reaching the Divine Sea Realm, battle runes masters are not just troublesome; oftentimes, their opponents might not even comprehend how they were killed.

In short, after the Divine Sea Realm, a formidable battle runes master can exhibit far greater strength and deterrence than an ordinary Divine Sea Realm practitioner.

The reason lies in the fact that, after the Divine Sea Realm, battle runes masters can employ Divine Runes, transforming them into various Psyche attacks.

Other Divine Sea Realm practitioners indeed have such means, but who can compare to the cunning variability of a battle runes master?

The Sharpness Divine Rune, driven by Psyche Force, demonstrated potent lethality. The anomaly also alarmed the other insects wandering nearby, drawing them closer towards this location.

Lu Ye, holding his Boulder Mountain Saber, met the nearest insect race head-on. In his charge, the Sharpness Divine Rune was activated again; amidst the twisting space, that arrow-like manifestation flashed by once more, and the insect collapsed onto the ground before it could even approach Lu Ye, shrieking incessantly.

By the time Lu Ye reached it, it had no awareness of the impending danger. With a sweep of the Boulder Mountain Saber, another insect race was slain.

Not all spirit runes are suitable to be driven by Psyche Force. Like Sharpness and Defense, one can transform into a Psyche attack and the other into a Psyche Barrier to fend off others' Psyche attacks.

However, spirit runes like Sun Blaze, Bloodstain, Move-Like-The-Wind, even when driven by Psyche Force, do not exhibit any special effects.

But others like Hefty Weight, Cactus, and Mirage can transform into divine runes, each producing effects vastly different from the others.

The Hefty Weight Psyche can make the insect race feel an overwhelming illusion of burden, Cactus is similar to Sharpness, able to cause significant damage to the psyche of the insect race.

The Mirage Divine Rune, while non-lethal, can trap the insect race in an illusion for a short time.

On the streets, Lu Ye continually executed various divine runes, testing their effects as one insect race after another fell dead.