

Humanity 651

Chapter 651 Enslaving the Insect Race

A moment later, Lu Ye returned inside that special building.

It wasn't that the Insect Race had been wiped out, but rather that more and more of them were amassing, already causing Lu Ye to feel some threats. To avoid any accidents, he had to hide back inside.

The thoughts in his mind were confirmed, and Lu Ye was undoubtedly exhilarated.

But he soon realized that things weren't as simple as he thought.

Because the brief battle had unexpectedly given rise to a sense of weakness within him.

This weakness wasn't quite the same as the debilitation from injuries he had experienced before—it was more like an overexertion.

He immediately understood that, although the special environment and his own condition had allowed him to employ means usually reserved for strong cultivators of the Divine Sea Realm, his psyche's foundation was still too weak.

Indeed, compared to cultivators of the same realm, his Psyche Force was extremely powerful, but it still wasn't sufficient to support him in continuously constructing divine runes to kill enemies for a long time.

In such an environment, with his condition, when spirit force was depleted, one could consume elixir pills to replenish it, but if the Psyche Force was severely exhausted or injured, then he would have to use Soul Cleansing Water.

The quantity of Soul Cleansing Water he had was limited; he had already consumed a drop previously. Therefore, unless it was absolutely necessary, Lu Ye didn't want to continue taking it.

That is to say, this effective method of killing the Insect Race couldn't be used frequently. Otherwise, once he ran out of Soul Cleansing Water, there'd be no way to continue.

Inwardly, he couldn't help but feel regret because, in just that short moment earlier, he had gained nearly two thousand battle merits. If he could freely employ divine runes, his speed of acquiring battle merits would undoubtedly reach a frightening pace.

From outside came the noise of the Insect Race ramming against the doors and windows. Lu Ye wasn't panicked; buildings with lanterns hanging at the entrance were protected by a miraculous power that made them impossible to destroy, no matter what.

As for where this miraculous power came from, Lu Ye had an answer in his mind.

The noise outside lasted a while before gradually subsiding. The spiritual intelligence of the Insect Race was just like this; even if they saw Lu Ye rush in there, after a long time of not finding him, they would gradually forget and go about their business.

Lu Ye silently recovered indoors, waiting until everything outside was completely quiet, and after a long while, he approached the door and peeked through the crack.

The corpses of the Insect Race on the street had disappeared, leaving only the emerald green blood splattered along the thoroughfare as testimony of the fierce battle that had just taken place.

As for where the killed insect bodies had gone... naturally, they had been consumed by the surviving insects. The Insect Race would eat anything as long as it contained energy.

Lu Ye had also experienced the Insect Plague on the Spirit Stream battlefield; wherever the Insect Race went, they left no trace of life, not even a blade of grass.

However, that being said, the presence of the Insect Race means there is an insect hive. Where is the hive in Xianyuan City?

Lu Ye immediately remembered the gap he had seen in the sky from which Insect Race members kept falling...

The hive might just be inside that gap!

Under normal circumstances, to deal with the Insect Race, one must first destroy the insect hive to eliminate the problem at its source; but the issue in Xianyuan City had clearly exceeded Lu Ye's capabilities. Thus, upon realizing the location of the insect hive, he abandoned any thoughts of dealing with it.

Not to mention anything else, Xianyuan City had a Great Sky Prohibition Array. He could at most soar ten Zhang into the sky, while the gap above was at least hundreds of Zhang off the ground; even if he was more powerful, it would be impossible for him to fly up there.

There were still a few members of the Insect Race roaming on the streets outside the door. Lu Ye applied Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes to himself and quietly pushed the door open to walk out once more.

This time his goal wasn't to kill the Insect Race but to find an insect that suited his requirements.

Regardless of why he had entered Xianyuan City, now that he was here, he could only think of ways to acquire some benefits.

Soul Cleansing Water, battle merits from killing insects—these were advantages out of reach for the average cultivator. While crises existed, so did the potential for huge gains.

He couldn't continually activate divine runes due to the excessive consumption. Although Lu Ye had Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes to move stealthily, trying to break through the blockade line of the Insect Race to reach the City Lord's Residence was still exceedingly challenging.

Moreover, with his state, there was no way for him to kill the Insect Race to earn battle merits.

To resolve these issues, he had to take a gamble.

He was uncertain if it would work, but one always had to try.

With his form concealed, he moved through one street after another and saw Insect Race members one by one until Lu Ye gradually figured out his current location.

It was probably the outermost area of Xianyuan City.

The scope of the entire Xianyuan City was still quite vast. When he first entered with his Spirit Stream Level 8 cultivation, he hadn't managed to traverse the whole city, so he wasn't exactly sure how extensive it was.

But now, the center of Xianyuan City should be in the direction of that gap in the sky.

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It's worth mentioning that now, there are hardly any insects appearing at the breach in the sky, possibly because all the insects from the hive have been deployed.

While the spiritual intelligence of the Insect Race is not high, their other abilities are difficult to assess. Generally speaking, each type of insect creature has one particular strength.

Take, for example, the Mantis Insect Race, which Lu Ye is most familiar with. Among all the types of insects he had seen, they possessed the highest combat skills, wielding their mantis sabers as if they were true saber users.

And then there's the type of insect that resembles a hunting dog, known for its extremely sensitive sense of smell.

Even with Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes to help, Lu Ye had several close calls with this type of insect, so he would avoid it entirely if encountered.

Another kind is like a hedgehog, covered in sharp bone spikes all over, almost without any weaknesses. Lu Ye felt that only with a Psyche Attack could he possibly defeat such an insect, otherwise, he wouldn't even know where to begin.

There's also a kind that looks plump and round like a silkworm, its entire body filled with deadly poison – even the fine threads it spews are extremely toxic.

This type poses the least threat to Lu Ye, with the Talent Tree by his side fearing poison the least. However, these insects not only have poisonous bodies but can also spin their threads into a net capable of trapping enemies, which is quite troublesome.

As he passed by, Lu Ye also carefully noted those buildings with lanterns hanging at the doorways, considering them as potential retreats.

Overall, such buildings were rare; it was common to find only one within several streets.

After searching for four hours, Lu Ye finally found an insect that roughly met his criteria.

It wasn't that he hadn't encountered suitable ones before, but most were gathered with other insects making it difficult for Lu Ye to apply his methodologies.

Now, at last, he had come across a solitary one.

This insect was not small, at first glance, it resembled an octopus spider, its back and even underbelly encased in thick carapaces for protection, with a menacing mouthpiece like a saw blade that chilled the onlooker.

Without engaging in combat, Lu Ye could tell it was an insect of the True Lake Realm just by looking.

The main reason he was interested in it was because of its large size and spacious back, allowing him to sit securely atop it once he concealed himself.

Of course, this was contingent on the success of his idea; if the reality differed from his expectations, then his subsequent plan wouldn't unfold as intended.

But that shouldn't be a major issue; the mental prowess of the insects was their Achilles' heel. Such methods might not be very effective against cultivators of the same realm, but against insects, they should work wonders.

He silently approached the direction of the spider insect, stopping two yards in front of it.

This distance was already dangerous. Even though the spider insect was not known for its keen sense of smell, being so close could make it sense something awry.

Before the insect could react, however, Lu Ye had already intentionally revealed himself.

In an instant, Lu Ye's eyes met the compound eyes of the spider insect. His large hand rested on the hilt of the Boulder Mountain Saber, power surging through him, ready to unleash at a moment's notice should the situation turn sour.

The spider insect's forelimbs were also raised high, looking extremely sturdy due to being covered in bone-like material, and with its innate sharpness, its stabbing power was no less than the full-force blow of a True Lake Realm combat cultivator.

A major battle seemed imminent.

However, the spider insect's raised forelimbs stiffened mid-air, never striking down. Not only that, but from the moment it spotted Lu Ye, its mouthparts had been wriggling, making a hissing sound; now, it was entirely silent.

Its originally vivid compound eyes gradually grew dim, as if dust had settled on them.

In contrast, Lu Ye's eyes sparkled more brightly than usual. With careful observation, one could even discern the complex patterns within his eyes, where many intricate lines converged and combined into an extraordinary design.

Bewitchment Divine Runes!

Unlike spirit runes like Sharpness, which become spirit runes when driven by spirit force and divine runes when powered by Psyche Force.

However, Bewitchment could only be driven by Psyche Force.

Having slain the Fox Demon in Fox Fairy Valley and devoured its pill fire, Lu Ye acquired this divine rune.

He had thought it impossible to use this divine rune before advancing to the Divine Sea Realm, but he hadn't expected to enter Xianyuan City again under such unique circumstances, which enabled him to wield the Psyche Force.

After verifying the changes in spirit runes like Sharpness, Lu Ye wanted to test the effectiveness of Bewitchment and had already formulated a plan centered around this divine rune.

In Fox Fairy Valley, the Fox Demon used its inherent abilities to control nearly a hundred cultivators, among which there were many at Cloud River Level 9.

The power of the Bewitchment Divine Runes is somewhat similar to the talents of the Fox Demon. Both manipulate the mind and dominate the psyche, although the effect from the runes is not as exaggerated as what the Fox Demon displayed.

When facing the Fox Demon previously, Giant Armor had simply succumbed to a single glance. The method that the Fox Demon used on Giant Armor was exactly what Lu Ye was now using on the spider insect.

Chapter 652 Insect Race Squad

Rooted in the power of his psyche, complex Bewitchment Divine Runes manifested in Lu Ye's eyes.

With the collision of their gazes as the entry point, the power of the divine runes burst forth, striking against the already not so high spiritual intelligence of the Insect Race before him, implanting a brand in its mind.

The Fox Demon could enslave a Giant Armor with a single glance, thanks to her innate talent.

Lu Ye was far from capable of achieving such a feat, but under the onslaught of the Bewitchment Divine Runes, the Spider Insect Race's psyche instantly lost its defenses, which externally displayed as it freezing on the spot, its raised limbs not falling immediately.

At this moment, Lu Ye experienced a very strange sensation...

Although he had already understood the various aspects of this divine rune through the immense information carried by the leaves of the Talent Tree, this was, after all, his first time casting the Bewitchment Divine Runes.

He could feel the resistance and struggle on the psyche of the Spider Insect Race, as if the consciousness of both man and insect entered an invisible battlefield at that instant, combating each other.

In such a state, both he and the Spider Insect Race had their control over their own bodies drastically reduced.

Lu Ye secretly felt fortunate that he had chosen a solitary Insect Race; otherwise, in such a condition, if other members of the Insect Race were to attack him, he might not have time to react.

It also aroused a sense of vigilance in him.

The Bewitchment Divine Runes were indeed mysterious and unpredictable, but when casting them, one must ensure one's own safety and ensure one would not be disturbed by external forces, or have allies to guard oneself.

The spiritual intelligence of the Insect Race was generally not high.

The Bewitchment Divine Runes that Lu Ye was now invoking, if used against a cultivator of the same strength, at most would only cause the opponent's psyche to tremble, but for the Insect Race, it was a genuine killing weapon.

The struggle and resistance of the Spider Insect Race lasted for less than 5 breaths, its defenses on the psyche were completely breached, the power of the Bewitchment Divine Runes continued to exert its influence, planting a brand within its psyche.

That feeling of fatigue and weakness swept over him once again, making Lu Ye's eyelids feel heavy. The consumption of psyche force by the Bewitchment Divine Runes was much greater than that of the Sharpness Spirit Runes!

He breathed lightly, looking up at the Spider Insect Race in front of him.

The creature's previously raised forelimbs had now been lowered, and even though Lu Ye now stood right in front of it, it showed no hostility whatsoever.

And Lu Ye could clearly sense the brand within the body of the Insect Race; through that brand, he could even issue some simple commands to this Spider Insect Race.

With a slight movement of his psyche, under Lu Ye's control, the Spider Insect Race began to move.

After trying for a moment, Lu Ye had a plan in mind.

Although because of that brand, he could now issue some commands to the Spider Insect Race and it would not resist, the creature's limited spiritual intelligence meant the execution was not very precise. For instance, asking it to strike a "one-legged rooster" pose was simply beyond its capabilities.

But Lu Ye was already very satisfied.

With such an Insect Race under his control, his situation moving forward would be much safer.

He leapt onto the back of the Spider Insect Race, activated the Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes, and disappeared from sight. Then, under Lu Ye's command, the Spider Insect Race rapidly crawled in a certain direction.

In no time at all, the Spider Insect Race entered an area littered with over a dozen other members of the Insect Race. While quietly observing the strength of these insects, Lu Ye controlled the Spider Insect Race to approach the strongest one.

This was an Insect Race whose size was in no way inferior to the Spider Insect Race's, and from their auras, their strengths seemed fairly comparable as well.

The other showed no guard against the approach of the Spider Insect Race, so when the Spider Insect Race suddenly attacked, the Insect Race had no chance to respond.

The Spider Insect Race's method of fighting brought an unexpected pleasing surprise to Lu Ye. The command he had given to his temporary mount was to kill the other; how exactly to kill was left entirely to the Spider Insect Race's improvisation.

A mass of webbing suddenly shot out from the jaws of the Spider Insect Race, enveloping its enemy securely. Next, the Spider Insect Race charged forward, raising its front limbs high before slamming them down repeatedly, puncturing hole after hole in the other creature's body. Greenish blood flowed, the pained shrieks of the injured creature grew urgent, and while it tried to resist, trapped by the web, it had no room to fight back.

After only a brief struggle, it fell into a pool of blood, its life force ebbing away.

From beginning to end, Lu Ye just sat on the spider's back and watched.

A bit of golden light drifted from the corpse of the dead Insect Race, landing on the back of Lu Ye's hand.

This made him unavoidably joyful.

The reason he had not lent a hand earlier was first because it was not needed, and second, because he wanted to test whether he would gain battle merit if he did not participate in the kill.

The result proved that it was possible.

In the strictest sense, Lu Ye was now equivalent to a cultivator of the beast-taming faction, with the Spider Insect Race being the demon beast he controlled.

For cultivators of the beast-taming faction, when the demon beasts under their command killed an enemy, it naturally also served as a display of their own abilities, and they would indeed gain battle merit for it.

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The battle that erupted here, although brief and intense, also attracted the attention of other Insect Race members. However, most of them merely glanced in this direction, puzzled as to why their comrades were killing each other but unable to come up with any further thoughts.

It wasn't until the Spider Insect Race killed another member of the Insect Race that the remaining members realized something was wrong.

While they were not highly intelligent, acting mostly on instinct, they could at least perceive imminent danger.

From their perspective, their comrade seemed to have gone mad. Although they did not understand why it was attacking its fellows, they knew that if they didn't stop it, they would all die.

Thus, after the spider killed the second Insect Race member, the other Insect Race members gathered around it.

Sitting on the spider's back, Lu Ye realized he couldn't just sit back and relax anymore.

Originally seeing his temporary mount kill one of the Insect Race without eliciting any reaction from the others, he thought he could comfortably reap the benefits, letting this temporary mount kill off all the Insect Race members within the vicinity.

But now it seemed his hopes were too optimistic.

Revealing his figure and drawing the Boulder Mountain Saber, Lu Ye charged out to battle while giving a simple command to the Spider Insect Race: Annihilate them all!

To save the power of his own psyche, Lu Ye did not stimulate the divine runes this time. Since the strongest of the Insect Race in the area were already dead, the rest comparable to the Cloud River Realm were not troublesome for Lu Ye to kill.

Shortly after, the battle subsided.

Lu Ye then flashed back to sit atop the Spider Insect Race, concealing his presence.

Rustling noises reached his ears as nearby Insect Race members, attracted by the commotion of the battle, came to investigate.

What they saw were only the corpses of the Insect Race strewn about, and a lone Spider Insect Race towering defiantly on the battlefield.

With their limited spiritual intelligence, it was beyond the Insect Race to realize this spider had been enslaved and turned traitor. Seeing no anomalies, the noisy scene gradually quieted down as they began consuming the corpses of their kin.

At this moment, the Spider Insect Race, under Lu Ye's control, had already left the battlefield.

He was not in a hurry to earn more battle merits. The saying 'A sharpened knife does not hinder the work of chopping wood' held true. As he had only one Insect Race under his command, if he could acquire a few more, the efficiency at which he could gain battle merits would be higher and the margin for error greater.

Then, he could move towards the City Lord's Residence while killing the Insect Race along the way.

Lu Ye was not sure how many Insect Race members he could enslave with his current psyche power, but he could feel there was a limit to it.

When he had enslaved the Spider Insect Race, a vague burden had appeared on his psyche. The intensity of this burden was directly related to the strength of the enslaved Insect Race.

In other words, the stronger the Insect Race, the fewer he could enslave.

This was within his expectations. Previously, in Fox Fairy Valley, the Fox Demon could only enslave a limited number of cultivators; otherwise, she wouldn't constantly seek out the Berserk Giant Ape for trouble.

If she truly had unlimited enslaving capability, she could have continuously accumulated forces under her command until the Berserk Giant Ape was no longer a match for her and then seek her revenge.

The Fox Demon could enslave nearly a hundred cultivators because of her unique talents. Lu Ye humbly admitted he could not achieve that level; how many he could actually enslave still required experimentation.

In Xianyuan City, most Insect Race moved in groups. It was rare to find one alone, and even rarer to find one that met Lu Ye's requirements for enslavement.

Moreover, these Insect Race generally stayed within certain areas and seldom left unless pursuing an enemy.

The Spider Insect Race enslaved by Lu Ye was undoubtedly an anomaly, moving solo through the streets.

Fortunately, this loneliness did not last long. In just half a Shichen later, it had gained a companion.

It was a Hound Insect Race with an exceptionally keen sense of smell, resembling a hunting dog. Although much smaller in size than the Spider Insect Race, its strength was by no means inferior.

Enslaving the Spider Insect Race had involved some risks for Lu Ye. However, enslaving the Hound Insect Race was much safer.

The web restrained the adversary in place, and Lu Ye only had to appear, make eye contact with it, and activate the Bewitchment Divine Runes to implant a brand within its mind.

Time passed, his squad continued to grow, and by midday, six more companions had joined the Spider Insect Race, each of the Insect Race having unique and fearsome appearances beyond the first Hound Insect Race.

During this time, there were several battles that garnered Lu Ye a decent amount of battle merits.

Lu Ye felt that seven Insect Race were already his limit; the burden on his psyche was heavy, and enslaving more would likely cause damage to his psyche if forced.

The use of the Bewitchment Divine Runes severely drained his psyche's strength. During the enslavement of these Insect Race, he consumed two drops of Soul Cleansing Water to replenish his depleted psyche force.

Although it was painful to use such precious resources, it was ultimately worth it relative to his plan. Even if he didn't manage to enter the City Lord's Residence to obtain more Soul Cleansing Water, the battle merits from killing enemies with these Insect Race would be enough to compensate for his losses.

Now that the Insect Race squad was assembled, it was time for the next step.

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Lu Ye's current position was on the outskirts of Xianyuan City, and to reach the City Lord's Residence, he had to traverse half of Xianyuan City to reach the very center of the city.

Even though Lu Ye was now controlling seven members of the Insect Race, this journey was not necessarily safe.

Up to now, the strongest of the Insect Race he had encountered were only at the True Lake Realm, but whether there were any comparable to the Divine Sea Realm, he was still unclear.

If there were, his concealment techniques might not be effective.

A team composed of seven True Lake Realm insects was quite powerful. As they moved along, they exterminated wave after wave of the Insect Race, and Lu Ye's battle merits continuously increased, quickly surpassing twenty thousand points.

It's worth noting that in the Heaven's Augury treasure vault, exchanging for a gold-hued spirit fortune stick only required sixteen thousand two hundred points, and his current battle merits were more than enough to exchange for a gold-hued spirit fortune stick and still have some left over.

In such an environment, coupled with Lu Ye's current means, it was simply an excellent place to accumulate battle merits.

Looking across the entire Nine Provinces, there probably wasn't another cultivator who had enjoyed such convenience. Although he still didn't know how to leave this place, Lu Ye treasured this opportunity.

Not every Insect Race they encountered was killed. Sometimes, when the numbers of the Insect Race were too great, Lu Ye dared not act rashly and had to let his insect squad bypass them. He concealed his form and repressed his aura, and the Insect Race did not detect any anomalies, and naturally, they did not hinder him.

As he passed through a street, Lu Ye suddenly noticed something unusual.

The street was scattered with the severed limbs and flesh of numerous Insects, the ground was covered with their vibrant green blood, and there were signs of a struggle all around.

From these signs, it was clear that the battle had been fierce, as there were many dead Insects.

This caused Lu Ye to be slightly taken aback.

He could confirm that he had never been to this place before, so the battle traces here were not left by him.

If they were not left by him, then they must have been left by the Xianyuan Guards.

Within Xianyuan City, besides the City Lord and the eerie woman in red, other beings only possessed the cultivation of the Spirit Stream Realm.

The cultivation of the Spirit Stream Realm had little power to resist in the face of such a calamity.

Thus, up to this point, Lu Ye hadn't encountered a single Xianyuan Guard. In his opinion, when this catastrophe struck, the Xianyuan Guards in the city were likely all wiped out.

However, this particular battlefield reeked of strangeness.

There were not a few dead Insects on the battlefield, including some powerful ones. How could those Xianyuan Guards, whose cultivation was only at the Spirit Stream level, have killed these Insects?

Could it have been the City Lord or that woman in red who acted? If it was those two, there was some possibility, but he did not sense the presence of these two individuals nearby. They were most likely dead as well.

Sitting astride a spider, leading the insect squad through this battlefield, Lu Ye suddenly realized something was amiss.

Insects would devour the corpses of their dead companions, yet these corpses remained, and from the condition of the blood and wounds on the bodies, this battle had not occurred long ago.

In other words, just a short while ago, cultivators from Xianyuan City had battled with the Insect Race here!

Was someone still alive?

Lu Ye was surprised. Although he knew this thought was somewhat naive, it wasn't entirely impossible. After all, there were special buildings in Xianyuan City with lanterns hanging at their entrances. As long as one hid inside those buildings, even the most powerful Insects couldn't breach them.

So, if there were still people alive in Xianyuan City, they would definitely be hiding in those special buildings!

The reason these Insect corpses hadn't been devoured was probably because the nearby Insects were all drawn away.

Lu Ye's thoughts gradually became clearer and he immediately led his insect squad to search around.

One incense stick's time later, the insect squad arrived at a nearby street, which was swarming with Insects, seemingly attracted by something.

On the entire street, one building stood out conspicuously, because the buildings around it were destroyed, leaving it standing proud, like an indestructible rock amidst a raging sea.

In the ruins near this building, a large number of Insects had gathered.

And at the entrance of that building, a red lantern was hanging!

Lu Ye looked at that building, unable to confirm whether anyone was inside, but given the current situation, it was very likely.

These gathered Insects were probably attracted by someone hiding inside, just like his previous encounters!

If there really was someone inside, their situation was not good, with so many Insects gathered around, they certainly couldn't leave for the time being.

However, they just needed to wait a little longer, and most of the Insects would disperse.

As time passed, the Insects with lower spiritual intelligence began to disperse, but some remained, still many in number, with many of them exuding very strong presences, clearly all from the True Lake Realm.

After half an hour, two hours passed, everything was calm and just when Lu Ye thought he might have been mistaken, suddenly, the tightly closed doors of the building were flung open, and a figure rushed out boldly!

Lu Ye, who had been watching carefully, was taken aback.

Because of the figure that had suddenly appeared, he actually recognized it!

The corpulent figure demonstrated an agility that belied his size, rushing directly at an Insect Race creature. The bone-stripping saber in his hand flashed with a cold light, and before the creature could even react, it was cleanly bisected.

The figure moved through the split corpses, lunging toward another Insect Race creature. He didn't display an overwhelmingly powerful aura, but he carried an unstoppable momentum. His bone-stripping saber was exceedingly sharp, easily penetrating the carapace that covered the creature's body.

So strong?

Lu Ye was astonished.

After all, in his preconceived notions, this guy was merely a Spiritual Body of the 7th or 8th Heaven. Yet, the strength the other party was displaying was far beyond the 7th or 8th Heaven— it was a level Lu Ye could hardly comprehend at the moment.

What astonished Lu Ye even more was that, following the appearance of this corpulent figure, more than a dozen figures suddenly burst out of the building.

Though Lu Ye didn't recognize these people, he was very familiar with their uniforms.

Xianyuan Guard!

More than ten Xianyuan Guards followed closely behind the corpulent figure, striking simultaneously and creating a massacre that made rivers of blood flow in every direction. Many Insect Race creatures were startled and swarmed them, quickly encircling the area tightly.

Lu Ye was bewildered...

Strictly speaking, everything he was witnessing deviated completely from his usual understanding.

The corpulent figure suddenly showing strength far beyond his expected cultivation level had already surprised him greatly, but he had not expected the Xianyuan Guards to be the same.

The last time Lu Ye was here, he had encountered ordinary Xianyuan Guards at Level 8 or 9, with only squad leaders at the 7th or 8th Heaven...

But now looking around, none of these Xianyuan Guards were below the Spirit Stream Realm; they were mostly at the True Lake Realm, with a few in the Cloud River Realm. Such a force was incredibly strong.

Lu Ye was momentarily puzzled; was this really Xianyuan City?

Or had he entered a fake Xianyuan City last time?

Though many questions arose in his heart, Lu Ye still promptly issued a command to his Insect Race squad to attack the enemy. In the next moment, except for the Spider Insect Race, the remaining six creatures lunged toward the fray.

He had not sent the Spider Insect Race into the battle, mainly because the situation was too chaotic. At this time, Lu Ye could easily be exposed by the backlash of the attacks, which would then complicate matters for him.

Although the overall strength of the Xianyuan Guard was formidable, Lu Ye could see that each of them was injured, including the corpulent figure.

With such battles, they must have experienced many times before. Even without Lu Ye's covert assistance, they could handle the current situation, but it would certainly come at a greater cost, and potentially even casualties.

But with Lu Ye's clandestine support, the situation was different.

The Insect Race had no guard against their own kind, so with their focus entirely on the Xianyuan Guards, when the six Insect Race creatures launched a stealthy attack, they easily killed many of their original companions.

Initially, the Xianyuan Guards did not notice these anomalies.

But as time passed, someone finally realized something was amiss and a Xianyuan Guard quietly called out, "My lord!"

The corpulent man's bone-stripping saber flashed with cold lights, he nodded imperceptibly while simultaneously fighting and observing his surroundings covertly.

After a while, his gaze suddenly shifted to the Spider Insect Race that stayed outside the battlefield. Even though Lu Ye's presence was concealed, he could still feel the man's gaze on him.

Their eyes met silently, and the man nodded slightly at Lu Ye before continuing the battle.

He was spotted!

Ripples stirred in Lu Ye's heart.

At this moment, Lu Ye was in a special state, equivalent to a True Lake Realm cultivator, and he had applied Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes on himself. In such a state, even those whose cultivation was several minor levels above him should not have been able to detect him.

Unless... the other's cultivation level surpassed his by a major realm!

In other words, the man he thought had only 7th or 8th Heaven cultivation, could actually be a Divine Sea Realm strong cultivator?

Reflecting on his initial experiences in Xianyuan City, Lu Ye suddenly felt a surreal sensation, unable to distinguish whether this was a dream or reality anymore.

However, if the other person was truly of the Divine Sea Realm, then such fierce capabilities did make sense. Those True Lake Realm Insect Race creatures in front of him could not even withstand a single strike.

With Lu Ye's Insect Race squad cooperating perfectly with the Xianyuan Guards, the number of Insect Race creatures dwindled.

Until a certain moment, when the last Insect Race creature was slain.

The Xianyuan Guards all relaxed, and even the man wielding the bone-stripping saber exhaled a long breath.

Among the strewn corpses of the Insects, only Lu Ye's Insect Race squad remained. The Xianyuan Guards looked at these creatures with a mixture of confusion and vigilance, unable to understand the nature of these few creatures that had clearly been attacking their own fellows just moments ago.

Chapter 654 Butcher

"Rest inside!" the cultivator holding the bone-stripping saber commanded indifferently. Although the Xianyuan Guards were full of doubts, they all uniformly accepted the order and returned to the building where they had been hiding earlier.

Immediately, the cultivator lifted his head to look in Lu Ye's direction, his sharp gaze containing both scrutiny and suspicion.

Although he had detected Lu Ye hiding nearby earlier, he was unclear about who exactly it was, and moreover, there had never been any techniques for controlling the Insect Race in Xianyuan City before.

However, during the heat of the battle, he couldn't consider too much. Now that the fight was over, he naturally wanted to understand what was going on.

Sensing the other's gaze, Lu Ye voluntarily revealed his figure.

Even though the cultivator was known for his composure, able to face death without changing expression, he couldn't help but be surprised the moment he saw Lu Ye: "How is it you?"

He certainly remembered Lu Ye.

One or two years ago, when the secret realm of Xianyuan City was opened, Lu Ye had entered. At that time, he was even transformed by Amber into a minion spirit and had been active by Lu Ye's side for quite a while.

Back then, Lu Ye was at Spirit Stream Level 8, but now in his view, he seemed to be at the standard of the True Lake Realm, a growth rate that was terrifying.

For a moment, he even wondered if there was some error in his memory of time.

The words blurted out by the cultivator allowed Lu Ye to confirm that the person before him was indeed the same one from last time.

Back then, Amber had transformed many minion spirits, but most of them were Xianyuan Guards. Only five special minion spirits existed— the initial Liu Sanbao, followed by Pipa Girl, the scholar, the Butcher, and the fortune-telling blind man.

These five special minion spirits, each with their own unique skills, were far stronger than the ordinary Xianyuan Guards in both cultivation and methods.

During that trip to the secret realm of Xianyuan City, the minion spirits under Lu Ye's command changed quickly, but only these five special minion spirits consistently followed him.

When they finally encountered the Xianyuan City Lord, the connection between these minion spirits and Amber was severed by the City Lord's methods.

At that time, Lu Ye felt quite a pity because, other than the special environment in Xianyuan City, Amber had no other place where it could freely transform minion spirits.

After all, outside, among existences similar to a Spiritual Body, aside from Yiyi, Lu Ye had never seen any others.

The individual before him, who seemed to be at the Divine Sea Realm, was one of those five special minion spirits from back then, the Butcher!

"Senior, it has been a long time." Lu Ye saluted with a cupped fist, not knowing the other's name. However, with the other's cultivation there, calling him senior shouldn't be a problem.

Both person and spirit were full of doubts in their hearts.

One was puzzled about how Lu Ye could appear here and even control the Insect Race!

Another was puzzled about how someone merely at the Spirit Stream Realm suddenly became at the Divine Sea Realm.

However, this street was clearly not a place for conversation. The Butcher beckoned, "Come in and talk!"

Lu Ye nodded, moved swiftly forward, and entered the building ahead with him. As for the Insect Race squad under his command, there was no need to worry about them. It was fine to leave them outside.

Inside the house, more than a dozen Xianyuan Guards were recuperating. The recent battle had left them looking very exhausted, and some of their bodies even seemed less solid.

This was an obvious sign of excessive consumption. Spiritual Bodies, not being physical bodies and residing between reality and insubstantiality, would show such symptoms if the consumption was too great. More severe cases could even become transparent and then disperse.

Lu Ye's current state was similar to that of a Spiritual Body. However, unlike a pure Spiritual Body, he still retained the ability to replenish his spirit force by ingesting elixir pills.

The Xianyuan Guards did not possess such an ability. So, even though they were resting here, if they couldn't replenish the consumed Psyche Force, resting longer would be futile; at most, it would only reduce the fatigue of their minds.

"Sir, this is..."

When Lu Ye followed the Butcher inside, the more than a dozen Xianyuan Guards were surprised.

Xianyuan City was large, and there were many Xianyuan Guards, but having been with each other day and night over so many years, they were almost all clear about who was in Xianyuan City and what those people looked like.

The sudden appearance of an unfamiliar face naturally caused surprise.

However, the Butcher did not seem interested in explaining, simply stating, "Rest well, there's more fighting to come!" and then led Lu Ye straight to the second floor.

Only after Lu Ye's figure disappeared did one of the Xianyuan Guards come to a realization, whispering, "I remember now, it was this guy who killed me last time." He was referring to the previous occasion when Lu Ye entered Xianyuan City.

If Lu Ye were there, he would probably be confused; if one was killed, then how could they stand there perfectly fine?

Some of the Xianyuan Guards responded, "So, he is an outsider?"

"Is the secret realm open? No, that's not right. There are always signs when the secret realm opens, and it's not the time for it to open yet. Besides, during the phase when the Insect Race is attacking the city, the secret realm is impossible to open. How did he get in?"

"More than that, what piques my curiosity even more is some of the anomalies in the recent battle. Those insects were actually hunting down their own kind as if they were being ordered around by someone. The Sir also didn't allow us to harm those Insect Race members, which suggests that the one secretly commanding those insects is this person!"

"How can such methods exist in this world? Isn't it said that the Insect Race cannot be controlled?"

"Who knows? Maybe in this era, someone has already figured out a way to control the Insect Race."

...

A group of Xianyuan Guards chatted effusively, each adding their own comments.

This was quite different from Lu Ye's impression of the Xianyuan Guards.

In his view, the Xianyuan Guards were generally spiritual bodies with very low spiritual intelligence. Even those at the squad leader level acted in a rigid manner, which was why he found the likes of the Butcher and other special spirit bodies so memorable, because they behaved indistinguishably from living people.

But now it seemed that aside from their bodies being spiritual bodies, different from living people, the Xianyuan Guards were not much different from the living in other respects.

The whole of Xianyuan City appeared to be enshrouded in dense fog.

On the second floor, the Butcher led Lu Ye here, invited him to take a seat, and then quietly observed out of the window for a while before turning to walk back.

Frowning at Lu Ye, the Butcher spoke up, "Are you dead?"

Lu Ye hadn't expected the other to choke him with his first question, causing him to roll his eyes, and immediately shook his head in denial, "No."

"Then how did you get in here? This isn't the time when the secret realm opens."

Only when the secret realm opened would Xianyuan City have an influx of living people, just like the last time. But when the secret realm closed, those living people would be expelled.

For countless years, Xianyuan City had always been like this, and it was almost unheard of for outsiders to appear when the secret realm wasn't opened.

Lu Ye said, "I entered here with the help of the Breath Fruit Core."

"Breath Fruit Core?" The Butcher frowned, clearly unfamiliar with the device.

Lu Ye was about to take out the Breath Fruit Core to show him, but then remembered that he had entered here in the form of a spiritual body. Although he had brought everything in his storage sack and storage space, he couldn't bring the key that opens the Mirage Realm.

Thereupon, he described the appearance of the Breath Fruit Core to the Butcher and introduced its marvelous uses.

The Butcher vaguely understood what Lu Ye was talking about, but what puzzled him was how that thing allowed a living person to enter Xianyuan City as a spiritual body. However, after another thought, he had a moment of insight.

If that was the case, it wasn't completely impossible, after all, that was the prerogative of someone highly esteemed.

Yet if it really was so, the lad before him was quite out of the ordinary, as normally no one would be granted such treatment.

"What's your name?" asked the Butcher.

"Junior is a disciple of the Righteous Blood Sect, Lu Ye," replied Lu Ye. "How should I address Senior?"

"Didn't you call me Butcher? Just stick with that."

That was how Lu Ye had addressed him during his last visit, and of course, he remembered.

Lu Ye was startled...

However, the Butcher was unconcerned. "I am indeed a butcher of Xianyuan City, so your address was not incorrect..." As he said this, he seemed to recall something and cautioned Lu Ye, "But if you meet that woman, don't call her 'Yiyi' again. If she hears it, she'll surely be displeased, and you'll have to face the consequences."

Lu Ye felt embarrassed...

'Yiyi' referred to the Pipa Girl, who had an impressive sound attack that could disturb people's hearts and confound their minds. During the previous encounter, the Pipa Girl played the most significant role among the five special minion spirits. Whether facing the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators or the Xianyuan Guards, the combination of her pipa sounds and her haunting voice would reduce the enemy's combat strength by at least thirty percent.

"Her name is Xi Wanying."

"Junior has taken note," Lu Ye solemnly nodded and mentally warned himself. 'Yiyi' is Xi Wanying; Xi Wanying is 'Yiyi'!

But taking note was useless. He had referred to her that way last time, and if she was one to hold grudges, he was in for trouble the next time they met.

Lu Ye said uneasily, "Senior, how does Senior Xi's cultivation compare to yours...?"

"Higher than mine!" the Butcher shattered Lu Ye's illusion with his blunt statement.

All Lu Ye could do was silently hope he wouldn't encounter her this time.

"Senior, what's going on with your cultivations? When I saw you last time, weren't you only at the Spirit Stream Realm?" Lu Ye questioned, revealing the doubts in his heart. "Also, what's the deal with Xianyuan City, and why did I suddenly come here?"

"Cultivation, what you saw might not be the truth. Last time when the secret realm was open, we old immortals played a game with you youngsters, that's all. The level of cultivation we displayed was directly dependent on the strength of your cultivations."

"A game?" Lu Ye didn't understand.

"They are just elaborations in the endless years. You can understand these games as something that helps us maintain our humanity, there's no need to delve into other details."

Lu Ye nodded, though somewhat confused, yet he understood the meaning behind the Butcher's words. When the secret realm of Xianyuan City was open last time, the cultivators who entered had a general cultivation around the Spirit Stream Level 8-9, so the cultivations showcased by the Butcher and others were also within that level. Although they were higher, they were not excessively so.

"As for Xianyuan City and why you are here... if you have the chance to meet the City Lord, go and ask him. If he is willing to tell you, he will naturally do so."

Chapter 655 Not Afraid of Death

The Butcher did not provide Lu Ye with many answers; perhaps he did not know, or perhaps some matters were difficult to discuss.

However, as a result, Lu Ye's original plan had gone awry.

He had thought that under this calamity, Xianyuan City would have been completely overrun by the Insect Race, the Xianyuan Guards annihilated, and feared that even the seemingly powerful City Lord and the woman in red could not survive; he only needed to sneak into the City Lord's Residence under the cover of his own Insect Race squad to plunder the Soul Cleansing Water.

But things were not as he had imagined.

Within Xianyuan City, there were still many Xianyuan Guards active; the City Lord was also most likely still alive.

If the City Lord was not dead, even if he entered the City Lord's Residence, he would not be able to get the Soul Cleansing Water... That was somewhat troublesome.

This was not to say that Lu Ye wished for the City Lord's death, but that his original plan could no longer be executed.

"When will Senior go to the City Lord's Residence?" Lu Ye inquired.

Although the prospect seemed slim, he still wished to try; after all, it was a rare opportunity to be here, and compared to the battle merits he might collect, he was more eager to obtain the Soul Cleansing Water, which had a crucial role in his upcoming plans.

Besides, he also wanted to ask the City Lord some questions, such as how he could leave this place.

Having inadvertently entered Xianyuan City, he could not stay here forever, and he ultimately had to leave, but Lu Ye was also unclear about the specifics of how to do so.

Perhaps the City Lord of Xianyuan City could provide an answer.

The Butcher gave him a glance and spoke, "My task is to clear out the Insect Race extending from this area to the outskirts; I won't return until it's done."

Lu Ye understood, nodding, "I will help, too."

If the Soul Cleansing Water was beyond hope, then at the very least he had to earn more battle merits. The Butcher was of Divine Sea Realm, and most of those Xianyuan Guards were of True Lake Realm. It would be safer to act alongside them, and as long as the Butcher accomplished his mission, then Lu Ye would be able to go with him to the City Lord's Residence.

"Suit yourself!" The Butcher did not refuse, as a mere Lu Ye alone might not bring much benefit to them, but Lu Ye's Insect Race squad could indeed exert an extraordinary force.

The Insect Race, with their low spiritual intelligence, would probably never imagine dying at the hands of their own kind.

"By the way, Senior, what's the deal with these buildings hanging lanterns at the entrance? I remember last time I was here, the Xianyuan Guards couldn't enter."

This was another point of confusion for him; last time when he entered, these special buildings sheltered the foreign cultivators, blocking the Xianyuan Guards from pursuing them. Lu Ye initially thought that these buildings were like forbidden lands for the Xianyuan Guards.

But now it seemed not to be the case at all; the Xianyuan Guards could enter!

Just as the foreign cultivators had relied on these buildings for shelter to evade the pursuit of Xianyuan Guards the last time, this time the Xianyuan Guards could make use of these buildings to rest and avoid the Insect Race's pursuit.

"I've said it before, it is ultimately a game, what you see is only what you see, and... heaven never seals off all exits, understand?"

Lu Ye seemed to understand a bit, but also seemed not to, yet he quickly realized that the emphasis of the Butcher's words was on the last sentence.

Indeed, Heaven's Augury was omnipresent.

Whether it was the opening of the secret realm last time or this Insect Race siege, these buildings endowed with absolute protection provided cultivators with a space for evasion and rest.

Though the Butcher was of Divine Sea Realm, he did not possess the dignity of one; perhaps because he had not spoken with living people for a long time, he talked with Lu Ye about many things, especially about the current situation in the outside world. Lu Ye spoke casually, the Butcher listening with interest, occasionally asking questions with Lu Ye responding yi-yi.

He also asked about Lu Ye's method of commanding the Insect Race. Lu Ye did not hide anything, upon learning that it was the power of divine runes, the Butcher was greatly surprised.

He had originally thought that Lu Ye was a cultivator from the beast-taming faction, whose ability to command the Insect Race came from the art of beast taming.

After resting for less than a two hour period, a group of Xianyuan Guards set off under the guidance of the Butcher.

They all had missions to fulfill.

Moreover, Xianyuan Guard squads like theirs were not few in number throughout Xianyuan City; each team was responsible for a different area.

Lu Ye had not encountered them before primarily because he was on the outskirts of Xianyuan City; most of the Xianyuan Guards were now in the middle sectors of the city. Since Lu Ye had traveled all this way, it was natural that he had not come across them.

A squad led by a Divine Sea Realm with seven or eight in the True Lake Realm was a formidable force, and the Insect Race they encountered had practically no capability to resist. However, the number of Insect Race in Xianyuan City was so vast that once caught in a fierce battle, causing too much commotion would bring an endless stream of Insect Race reinforcements.

Therefore, even though the team's overall strength was strong, they did not act recklessly. The Butcher always first identified nearby special buildings as retreats and, after slaying a batch of the Insect Race, would lead the Xianyuan Guards to retreat and rest, repeating this cycle of advance towards the outskirts of the city.

Lu Ye's Insect Race squad proved to be of great help many times; in the midst of chaotic battles, the seven Insect Race managed to take advantage of many situations, allowing Lu Ye's battle merits to continuously increase, while also alleviating the Xianyuan Guard squad's pressure.

If the Butcher and the rest were normal cultivators, then this would undoubtedly be a battle without much suspense.

Regrettably, all of them being spiritual bodies, the energy consumed during battle could not be effectively replenished, so as time passed, they grew weaker and weaker.

The few Xianyuan Guards of only Cloud River Realm pedigree already appeared somewhat transparent.

They seemed unfazed, carefree, laughing, and chatting with Lu Ye during breaks.

It was rare for living beings to come to Xianyuan City, especially ones who could communicate with them, so the Xianyuan Guards were exceptionally enthusiastic around Lu Ye, each one of them engaging him in conversation, chatting about anything and everything.

Even a fiery-tempered female Xianyuan Guard asked some questions that were hard to fend off, leaving Lu Ye speechless while the others chuckled.

After another fierce battle ended, the Butcher led the Xianyuan Guards back to retreat and recuperate.

As before, even though they appeared extremely weak and their bodies had become translucent, the Xianyuan Guards did not seem to care in the least.

They gave Lu Ye the impression that they had long accepted life and death, showing no hint of fear even in the face of death itself.

Lu Ye couldn't help but feel respect for them.

After hesitating for a long time, he finally decided to go up to the second floor alone to find the Butcher.

"What's the matter?" The Butcher looked at him curiously.

Lu Ye said, "The Soul Cleansing Pool contains Soul Cleansing Water that should be able to restore you, right? Didn't you bring any with you?"

He had thought that the Butcher and the others would surely have brought some Soul Cleansing Water with them to replenish their strength, but it seemed they had not, otherwise they would not have gradually weakened like that.

"The soul pool contains soul mist, not soul water. It cannot be condensed by ordinary means and cannot be taken out," the Butcher explained.

Lu Ye was taken aback, not expecting it to be like that. He thought that indeed the Soul Cleansing Pool was filled with soul mist. Previously, he had constructed a large spirit energy gathering funnel to condense the soul mist into Soul Cleansing Water, which wasn't something others could do, even those in the Divine Sea Realm.

What Lu Ye did not know was that for thousands of years, the spirit bodies of Xianyuan City had lived this way; death was not something they feared but merely the beginning of a new journey.

The soul pool was crucial, being the foundation of Xianyuan City and even the other Boundless Mirage Realms. As long as the power of the soul pool was not exhausted, Xianyuan City would not fall. Therefore, since ancient times, no one had ever thought of condensing the soul mist from the soul pool into soul water to take out.

Doing so once or twice might be okay, but doing it too many times would certainly impact the soul pool.

So even a powerful being like the City Lord, capable of condensing soul water, would not do so.

"You know about the soul pool?" The Butcher was somewhat surprised.

"Mhm, I've been there once," Lu Ye nodded, recalling the trade he had done with the City Lord which allowed him to enter the soul pool with Amber and Giant Armor to cleanse his psyche. He had scooped out some Soul Cleansing Water, which had infuriated the City Lord quite a bit.

"I don't have much of this stuff left. Use it sparingly," Lu Ye said, taking out a jade vial and passing it to the Butcher.

The Butcher took the vial with suspicion. Upon opening it, his eyes revealed surprise, "Where did you get this?"

As a spirit body of Xianyuan City, he recognized at a glance what was in the vial. He couldn't figure out how Lu Ye had such a thing.

"What do you think?" Lu Ye gave him a sidelong glance.

The Butcher quickly realized and burst into laughter, "The City Lord didn't kill you, huh!"

It seemed he hadn't killed him, otherwise Lu Ye would not still be alive.

The Butcher finally understood why the City Lord had been somewhat irritable after the last opening of the secret realm. It was because of this.

"Kid, I owe you one," the Butcher said, patting Lu Ye on the shoulder, then taking a single drop from the vial to swallow, and in an instant, the weakness lingering around him dissipated at a visible pace.

The Butcher then went down to the first floor and shared the remaining Soul Cleansing Water from the vial with the other Xianyuan Guards.

One by one, the weakened Xianyuan Guards quickly regained their vigor.

Knowing that the Soul Cleansing Water had been contributed by Lu Ye, the already warm feelings the Xianyuan Guards had towards him grew even warmer.

The female spirit body named Yooi Qing, with her fiery temperament, acted as if she was willing to offer herself in gratitude, causing Lu Ye quite a bit of embarrassment while the other Xianyuan Guards watched the spectacle, secretly delighted by his discomfort.

They resumed their campaign, led by the Butcher, using special structures as strongholds to clear the Insect Race off one street after another.

Despite having their powers replenished, the task of eliminating the Insect Race in this area remained a daunting one. After successive battles, as their personal strength waned, the Xianyuan Guards once again became weakened.

This time, however, there was no more Soul Cleansing Water for them to recover with.

Lu Ye's battle merits had exceeded a hundred thousand, but he did not feel much joy.

Looking at the Xianyuan Guards who, despite their weakness, still wore smiles on their faces, Lu Ye was filled with confusion—were these guys really not afraid of death at all?

Even as spirit bodies, facing death shouldn't be taken so lightly.

Chapter 656 Crisis

"Look at them, how happy they are." Yu Qing's soft, weak voice rose beside Lu Ye's ear. Although her body had become less solid, her feeble state added a morbid beauty to her appearance.

However, Lu Ye never mistook her for a delicate damsel. Though their acquaintance was short, he had vividly experienced her fiery temperament.

"Are you curious why their spirits are so high?" Yu Qing murmured appealingly into Lu Ye's ear.

Lu Ye nodded and voiced his confusion, "Senior, do you really not fear death at all?"

Yu Qing rolled her eyes in annoyance, "Why call me 'senior'? You make me sound old."

Listening from nearby, a Xianyuan Guard burst into laughter, "A grand old lady of several thousand years, and you're wrong to call her 'senior'?"

Yu Qing grew angry: "Liu Datong! Mind your words, or I'll tear your mouth apart!"

The guard named Liu Datong, undeterred, teased Lu Ye with a wink, "Young Lu Ye, you better keep your virtue intact. Don't let this old witch teach you any tricks! Let me tell you..."

Before he could finish, Yu Qing picked up a chair and threw it at him. Liu Datong blocked it with his hand, shrinking back at the fury in her stance and yielded, "Alright, alright, I'll stop..."

While saying so, he even pulled at his own mouth as if sealing it shut.

Yu Qing gave him another fierce glare before calming down, then turned back, her eyes coquettishly shy, her voice softened again, "Call me 'sister'!"

Lu Ye sighed, "Senior, stop it."

Yu Qing pouted, "You're no fun, boy. No wonder you're still alone; no woman likes you out there."

Lu Ye was left speechless.

Yu Qing smirked playfully, "Alright, I'll stop teasing. But don't worry too much, death isn't such a big deal for us. It's not that we aren't afraid of dying, we've just grown accustomed to it, and sometimes, death can also be a kind of release."

Lu Ye couldn't imagine what experiences led Yu Qing to say such things. Seeing her attitude, it seemed she wasn't the only one; other Xianyuan Guards felt the same, which explained their carefree stance even in such a situation.

"So..." Yu Qing patted Lu Ye's head in a parental manner, "If we truly die before your eyes, don't take it too hard. You're different from us. Living well in the present is the greatest respect you can show the future."

Lu Ye was silent for a moment before speaking, "Can't the Butcher take you back to the City Lord's Residence? There's a soul pool there that could help you recover."

"That place is even more dangerous!" Yu Qing shook her head, "The Insect Race we're facing now isn't very strong, but the closer we get to the City Lord's Residence, the stronger and more numerous the Insect Race becomes. With our current condition, it's difficult to break through their lines."

Lu Ye frowned, "Is the City Lord's Residence the target of the Insect Race?"

Yu Qing nodded gravely, "It's the foundation of Xianyuan City. If the Insect Race captures the City Lord's Residence, then Xianyuan City is truly fallen." She suddenly chuckled, "But don't worry too much. With the City Lord and Hong Yue there, the City Lord's Residence will be safe. The Insect Race hasn't been able to do much against us for thousands of years."

Thousands of years... It wasn't the first time Lu Ye had heard this time frame from the mouths of Xianyuan Guards, he frowned, "Has this war been going on for thousands of years?"

"It has always been so."

Lu Ye felt something was amiss. If Xianyuan City had been fending off the Insect Race for thousands of years, how had it managed to hold on? At the very least, how could there possibly be so many Xianyuan Guards left?

Wars always result in deaths, and the same was true for spiritual bodies.

It didn't make sense that the Insect Race, failing once or twice, couldn't conquer for thousands of years, even with the likes of Yu Qing's mentioned City Lord and Hong Yue at the helm.

Hong Yue must be the woman in red Lu Ye had encountered on his previous visit.

But before he could ask further, the Butcher descended from the second floor and simply stated, "Move out."

At once, all the Xianyuan Guards stood up.

Yu Qing patted Lu Ye on the shoulder, "Just do as you did before, and make sure to protect yourself. Don't rush to rescue others, no matter how dire their peril."

Lu Ye instinctively nodded.

Under the Butcher's lead, the squad of Xianyuan Guards continued their mission to eradicate the Insect Race.

Progress was smooth. Although the Xianyuan Guards grew increasingly weak due to the depletion of their strength, the Insect Race's strength generally waned further from the center.

As Yu Qing had said, the target of the Insect Race was the City Lord's Residence, thus, closer to the Residence, the stronger and more numerous the Insect Race was, especially on the outskirts of the Residence—the realm for Divine Sea Realm cultivators.

Insects comparable to the Divine Sea Realm were mostly active there.

This was why Lu Ye hadn't encountered any Divine Sea Realm Insect Race previously. Given his current strength, if he had encountered a Divine Sea Realm Insect Race, he wouldn't have had much of a chance to fight back, despite the Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes.

The noise of the battle attracted more wandering Insect Race. With the Butcher at the forefront, the whole Xianyuan Guard squad became enveloped in a siege.

If it had been their heyday, facing such a scene would not have been much of a challenge, but now, including the Butcher, all the Xianyuan Guards were extremely weak, which made the situation suddenly become tense.

Luckily, there was Lu Ye.

He had stayed on the outskirts of the battlefield, controlling his Insect Race squad to kill enemies amidst the chaos, gradually easing the pressure on the Xianyuan Guards.

If nothing unexpected happened, this battle would ultimately end with the Xianyuan Guards victorious.

However, the unexpected arrived very abruptly.

As the blade that flickered with cold light flashed past, two Xianyuan Guards' bodies suddenly split into pieces, their already dim bodies quickly becoming transparent in that instant, their faces filled with astonishment, clearly not expecting such a turn of events.

In the blink of an eye, two Xianyuan Guards had vanished into thin air.

And beside them, an inconspicuous Mantis Insect Race member, covered in scars, suddenly erupted with a powerful aura!

This was clearly a Divine Sea Realm Insect Race member.

Logically speaking, a Divine Sea Realm Insect Race member should not appear in such a place, and it was clearly wounded, having gone through a tough battle.

This Insect Race member must have run here from the direction of the City Lord's Residence, having been injured in the major battle there, and it needed to devour the corpses of other Insect Race members to recover its own body. Somehow, it ended up here, coincidentally encountering the squad led by the Butcher.

Before it made a move, nobody paid it any attention, but its strike, swift as lightning, suddenly reduced the complete Xianyuan Guard squad by two members.

The sharp mantis saber then swung toward Yooi Qing, an attack she was utterly unable to block.

Seeing this, Lu Ye, without any hesitation, bestowed Move-Like-The-Wind to his legs, instantly revealed himself from concealment, and rushed towards the battlefield.

"Audacious!" the Butcher roared in anger, the bone-stripping saber in his hand swooping in a backhand sweep, blocking the deadly strike of the mantis saber.

The two Divine Sea Realm fighters instantly clashed fiercely, one severely injured and the other at the end of his strength, fighting heatedly and equally matched for a time, the aftereffects of their battle dragging every Insect Race member in the vicinity into it, leaving them utterly annihilated.

At this moment, the Xianyuan Guard squad also uniformly made a move, forcefully forging a bloody path and avoiding the Divine Sea Realm battlefield.

The leading Liu Datong looked up just in time to see Lu Ye charging toward them, swearing under his breath, he then led his team towards Lu Ye's direction.

With seven more Insect Race squads causing chaos nearby, the scene became utterly uncontrollable in an instant.

However, it didn't take long for the Xianyuan Guards to join forces with Lu Ye, but the situation was not favorable for everyone involved.

With the Butcher, a Divine Sea Realm cultivator anchoring them, even facing an overwhelming Insect Plague, the Xianyuan Guard squad would have managed, yet now the Butcher was entangled with the Divine Sea Realm Mantis, relying solely on the strength of Yooi Qing and Liu Datong and others, the pressure they felt increased overwhelmingly.

If it were just themselves, dying in battle would be no big deal.

But there was still a Lu Ye amongst them on the battlefield...

Before setting out, Yooi Qing had specifically urged Lu Ye not to rashly come to anyone's rescue in the event of danger, advising him to just preserve his own safety.

Lu Ye had naturally kept this in mind, but witnessing two Xianyuan Guards perish, how could he remain indifferent? In that instant, his body took action ahead of his thoughts.

"Break through! Back to the stronghold!" Yooi Qing shouted sharply.

The nearest stronghold was only one street away from here, which normally wouldn't be considered far, but the chance of breaking through the encircling Insect Race in these circumstances was slim.

Yet at this moment, everyone had no other choice, for staying here would mean certain death.

Nobody had expected that such a place would actually conceal a Divine Sea Realm Insect Race, making the mission perilously dangerous.

The Insect Race squad continued to play a crucial role as usual, forming a barrier behind everyone under Lu Ye's control, blocking many of the Insect Race's pursuits.

However, this was ultimately just a temporary solution, unable to fundamentally change the dire situation.

The group fought fiercely forward, with Xianyuan Guards continually falling to death. The group of about a dozen Xianyuan Guards had more than half fallen in a short time.

And as a large amount of power was expended, the remaining Xianyuan Guards' Spiritual Bodies became even more ethereal, with Yooi Qing's body itself turning semi-transparent; yet she and Liu Datong steadfastly guarded beside Lu Ye.

Behind them were the intense sounds of the Butcher clashing with the Mantis Insect Race, with the Xianyuan Guards wrapping Lu Ye in the middle and fleeing desperately.

Watching as Xianyuan Guards fell one by one, a wave of sorrow rippled through Lu Ye's heart, spreading endlessly within his soul pool.

"Hurry and get him inside!" Liu Datong yelled furiously, turning to confront the pursuing Insect Race.

When Lu Ye looked back, he only saw the figure of this always outspoken Xianyuan Guard being engulfed by the Insect Plague.

Chapter 657 Annihilation

A mere street's distance had become the line between life and death.

One after another, the Xianyuan Guards fearlessly broke ranks to block the Insect Plague, only to be inundated.

Finally, the building with the red lanterns hanging at the entrance was within reach. By Lu Ye's side, only Yooi Qing remained, her Spiritual Body showing an abnormal translucent state, clearly on the verge of dissipation.

At the last moment, she grabbed Lu Ye's shoulder and flung him out, shouting, "Quick, hide inside!"

Midair, the Boulder Mountain Saber flashed with saber light, and two insect creatures, akin to locusts, sprayed green blood as they fell.

Lu Ye landed in front of the building and, turning his head, could no longer see Yooi Qing's figure; only the overwhelming horde of the Insect Race surged toward him from behind.

He hurriedly pushed open the great door and rushed into the building, slamming the door shut behind him. Following that, the violent sounds of the Insect Race's assault came from outside.

But this building ultimately possessed a special protective power, so no matter how the Insect Race attacked, they couldn't break through.

Lu Ye's fists were clenched tightly, his face darker than it had ever been, and the sorrow deep in his heart brought him an indescribable pain.

The time he had spent with Yooi Qing and the others was short, their relationship at best a fleeting acquaintance, not even reaching the level of friends.

But each of those Xianyuan Guards had protected him to the death at the final juncture. Without their support, Lu Ye knew he could not have escaped back to this stronghold.

Thinking carefully, he had only given Butcher slightly less than half a bottle of Soul Cleansing Water. By what virtue did he deserve the trust of those Xianyuan Guards with their lives?

The Insect Race's attack from outside continued to be fierce. Further down the street, the sounds of intense combat echoed continuously, indicating that Butcher was locked in a fierce battle with a Divine Sea Realm creature of the Insect Race.

Until, at one moment, the sounds of combat abruptly ceased.

Lu Ye's heart tightened.

He did not know the outcome of the battle, whether Butcher had won or lost.

As these thoughts crossed his mind, the already noisy Insect Race outside suddenly grew louder, their distinctive hisses rising incessantly.

Realizing something, Lu Ye quickly peered through the crack of the door, only to see the Insect Race congregating in a certain area on the street before the door. Within that area, saber light flashed continuously, and Insect Race creatures were chopped into pieces by the sharp blade.

Following that, Butcher's portly figure burst out from within, quickly arriving at the door. Lu Ye hurriedly opened the door, allowing Butcher to flash inside.

After Butcher entered, Lu Ye closed the door once again, and the outside became noisy again.

"Are you the only one left?" Butcher looked around and suddenly asked.

Lu Ye, with his head lowered, replied, "All the seniors... they died protecting me on my way back!"

Sensing the guilt in Lu Ye's heart, Butcher chuckled softly, "Even without protecting you, they wouldn't have lived much longer. Let them be dead, don't take it to heart, they..." He stopped mid-sentence, his expression turning profound as he shifted topics, "Since you've survived, live well. Don't let their sacrifice be in vain."

Lu Ye was silent, his mood heavier than it had ever been.

Butcher stepped forward, handing over his bone-stripping saber, "I'm entrusting this to you, take good care of it."

Lu Ye was shocked, looking up, his face filled with alarm, "Senior?"

Butcher sat down cross-legged, sighed, "I'm a bit tired, just need to rest, don't mind me."

With those words, he closed his eyes, and his nearly transparent body vanished in a twist, the bone-stripping saber falling to the ground with a clear sound.

Though he had won the last battle, it had been a bitter victory. Having forced himself to return here, he ultimately could not hold on any longer.

Gazing at the spot where Butcher's figure had disappeared, Lu Ye stood speechlessly.

He did not know what sort of belief drove these Xianyuan Guards, but from his scant conversations with Yooi Qing and the others, he learned that they had been waging this war for thousands of years. The unceasing warfare over those millennia had bred in the Xianyuan Guards the notion that death was a release.

Liu Datong, Yooi Qing, and those other Xianyuan Guards whom Lu Ye couldn't even name, had displayed no fear in life's final moment.

They had never feared death.

Uncertain how much time had passed, Lu Ye stepped forward and bowed respectfully toward the place where Butcher had vanished. Then, he picked up the bone-stripping saber and stored it in his storage space.

Afterward, he found a spot to sit cross-legged and consumed an elixir pill to heal himself.

The Butcher squad was annihilated, but their mission had not been completed. Even if only as a remembrance and a tribute, Lu Ye wanted to continue their task, to eradicate the Insect Race from this region.

He had numerous injuries on his body, all sustained during the previous breakout; these injuries were difficult to heal. He could have used the Soul Cleansing Water, but he had given the last of it to Butcher.

But he still had the strength to fight, as long as he was careful not to exhaust his Psyche Force.

Within his perception, five members of his Insect Race squad were still alive; two others had been killed by different Insect Races in the previous chaos.

With five Insect Race members, plus himself, as long as they were careful, it should not be a problem to complete the Butcher squad's mission, provided they did not encounter any Insect Race from the Divine Sea Realm.

However, Divine Sea Realm Insect Races were not so easily encountered; their meeting this time was purely coincidental. Such powerful creatures normally stayed closer to the City Lord's Residence.

The noise outside gradually subsided, and the lively laughing and banter within the stronghold had died down, leaving only silence flowing.

Only after resting for four Shichen did Lu Ye get up and peer outside through the crack of the door. The number of Insect Races scattered nearby was not that many, and five of them were under his command.

With a thought, he issued commands to those five Insect Races, directing them to approach other nearby Insect Races.

The moment Lu Ye opened the door, all the Insect Races in sight were startled, and driven by instinct, they swooped toward him.

However, the slaughter had begun, and when the five controlled Insect Races erupted in revolt, life quickly faded away.

Lu Ye's figure blurred into an afterimage as he charged forward, the Boulder Mountain Saber unsheathed, slicing out a crescent-shaped saber light. The oncoming Insect Races fell in rows in an instant.

He didn't control the noise of the battle, intentionally making a ruckus to attract the nearby Insect Races.

He was right beside a stronghold he could hide in, and if the situation turned sour, he would rush back at the first opportunity, ensuring his own safety.

More and more Insect Races were drawn over, and the battlefield was littered with their severed limbs. Flecks of golden light drifted from all directions towards the back of Lu Ye's hand, but he had no time to check the increase in his battle merit. The only thought in his mind was to annihilate all the Insect Races in his vision!

The battle ended after two Shichen, and Lu Ye dragged his weary body back to the stronghold to recuperate.

Outside the door, five enslaved Insect Races stood guard quietly.

Half a day later, the door opened again, and Lu Ye walked out. Even though he tried not to use his Psyche Force during the battle, the rapidly changing situation on the battlefield often left him no choice.

Compared to before this battle, Lu Ye was undoubtedly weaker, but this weakness was only in his psyche and did not affect the execution of his strength.

He teleported onto the back of a Spider Insect Race, activated Concealment and Breath-concealing Spirit Runes, and under Lu Ye's command, the five Insect Races moved towards the direction of the next stronghold.

Lu Ye only knew that the Butcher squad's mission was to annihilate all the Insect Races in this area, but he didn't know the exact size of this area.

The only thing he could be sure of was that the clearing proceeded from inside outward, so heading towards the outside of the city was the correct direction.

He had originally come from the city's outskirts to the middle, and now he was making the return journey, truly a turn of the wheel of fortune.

Fortunately, the farther out toward the outskirts, the lower the average strength of the Insect Races.

Every time he found a stronghold, Lu Ye would first scout the surroundings to see if there were any overly powerful Insect Races. If there were, he would use his Insect Race squad to ambush and kill them; if there weren't, then he would simply make a commotion in front of the stronghold to attract all the nearby Insect Races.

Fighting alone was undoubtedly tedious. Previously with Butcher leading the way, they had been unstoppable, with little resistance from the Insect Races wherever they went. But now, with everything relying on himself alone, Lu Ye felt the pressure.

At least there were battle merits to be had for killing Insect Races.

Resting time and again, slaying enemies time and again...

Blood flowed into rivers and corpses stacked like mountains outside every stronghold. Lu Ye lost count of how many Insect Races he had killed; he only knew his battle merits were fast approaching the significant milestone of two hundred thousand.

His body grew weaker and more translucent; despite resting after each major battle, the consumption of his Psyche Force made him feel increasingly groggy, and a constant thought churned in his mind: to close his eyes and take a proper sleep, regardless of the world turning upside down.

Eventually, he reached the very edge of the city.

Looking ahead, thick fog rolled in, isolating the entire city.

Gazing at the fog, Lu Ye couldn't help feeling a sense of familiarity; whenever he had previously entered the Mirage Realm, monsters would emerge from such fog to attack.

He had also been curious about what lay within the fog, so he had once ventured deep into it to explore. Unfortunately, without going far, he was mysteriously attacked and killed.

He never expected to find such fog outside Xianyuan City as well. What would happen if he walked into it?

Lu Ye quickly dismissed the thought. Although he was unsure of the consequences of entering the fog, one thing was certain: the outcome would not be good. It was better to remain honest and active inside Xianyuan City.

He changed direction and led his Insect Race squad to the side, continuing the task of clearing out the Insect Races.

Street after street was cleared, and wherever they passed, all Insect Races were slaughtered without mercy.

Lu Ye's body became increasingly weak and almost transparent; every time after a big battle, even though he would rest, the drain on his Psyche Force made him feel drowsy. A thought surged in his heart every moment: to close his eyes and sleep well, let the world turn upside down.

Chapter 658 Return

In front of a stronghold, the fierce battle raged on. Lu Ye stumbled, swinging his saber instinctively.

Although he would recuperate for a while after each major battle, consuming elixir pills to replenish his depleted spirit force, the loss of psyche force was not so easily restored. This resulted in his body appearing almost transparent at the moment.

A voice in his mind kept ringing, clamoring for him to close his eyes and rest properly, but Lu Ye knew that with his current state, if he truly closed his eyes, he might never wake up again.

His strong willpower sustained him, allowing his presence to flicker like a candle in the wind, still casting its final glow in this ruined city.

The Insect Race squad under his command had dwindled to the last three after this period of campaigning. Even these three were battered and wounded like him.

It was a real dead end.

Throughout his cultivation journey, Lu Ye had faced many crises, many of which he couldn't have resolved with his own abilities. But he had never been forced step by step into a corner like this before.

With a slight stir in his heart, a connection suddenly severed, and the groggy Lu Ye couldn't immediately discern where this sensation came from. It took him a while before he realized that one of the three Insect Race creatures under his command had died in battle, leaving only the last two, who likely wouldn't survive the day either.

He squeezed out the last of his strength, wielding his Boulder Mountain Saber and slaying the swarming Insect Race one after another.

After the annihilation of the Butcher squad, he only intended to help them complete their mission, but at this point, he couldn't even be sure what belief was sustaining him.

Perhaps... it was simply because those Xianyuan Guards had fought to the death to protect him. They had exchanged their lives for his survival, and just because of this alone, he couldn't let their mission fail.

However, human strength eventually comes to an end, and some regrets are unavoidable. After this battle, he likely would no longer have the strength to fight and would need to hide in the stronghold for a long recovery, seeing if his condition could improve.

In the midst of this fierce battle, Lu Ye didn't notice that on a rooftop some dozens of yards away, several figures stood, quietly observing this scene.

The deceased Butcher, Liu Datong, Yooi Qing, and the faces of Xianyuan Guards whose names couldn't be recalled, were all here.

The Butcher squad had returned to this place!

Under normal circumstances, Lu Ye would have been unable to miss them, especially since these people didn't bother to hide themselves.

But at that moment, Lu Ye was nearly burned out, with such blurred vision that he couldn't even clearly see a few yards ahead, let alone dozens.

"Why are you pushing yourself so hard?" Yooi Qing looked at Lu Ye, who was fighting bloodily, feeling quite uneasy.

"You guys really went too far!" Liu Datong sighed, "We should've told him the truth. He probably thinks we're all dead."

"The City Lord died last. He didn't tell him, so it must have been deliberate," retorted Yooi Qing, turning her head furiously toward the Butcher.

The Butcher indifferently said, "True nature is revealed in life and death. If we had told him earlier, we wouldn't have seen this. This kid's not bad!"

All the Xianyuan Guards knew that the Butcher was a man of high standards. Receiving such a comment from him undoubtedly meant that Lu Ye's performance had caught his eye.

"No wonder he was chosen!" The Butcher murmured again.

"What?" Yooi Qing looked at him, puzzled.

"Nothing," the Butcher shook his head.

"Stop dawdling and save him! We won't die if we're dead, but if he dies, who knows what will happen," Yooi Qing yelled.

The Butcher glared at her, "Watch your manners!"

Even so, he still flashed forward, rushing toward the battlefield, with many Xianyuan Guards closely following.

On the battlefield, Lu Ye felt that every ounce of his strength had dried up, nearly lacking the power to even swing his Boulder Mountain Saber.

The battle had quieted. Through his fading vision, he could no longer see a single member of the Insect Race. Not only had the attacking Insect Race been eradicated, but even his own Insect Race squad had been wiped out.

It was over...

As this thought emerged, Lu Ye's spirit relaxed and he stumbled, falling forward.

He didn't hit the ground; at the crucial moment, a large hand supported his shoulder, holding up his falling body.

Lu Ye weakly looked up, seeing the reflection of the Butcher in his field of vision, the chubby man's face unusually adorned with a hint of an approving smile.

Lu Ye was confused as to why he would see the deceased Butcher at this moment. Perhaps it was an illusion from overexertion?

Behind the Butcher, he saw more figures.

Dead Liu Datong, Yooi Qing, and those not too familiar faces...

Though he felt it was an illusion, guilt still lingered in his heart, and Lu Ye muttered, "Senior, the mission..."

The mission ultimately had not been completed, but he could no longer hold on. Drifting into sleep, he wasn't even sure if he could wake up again.

"You've done well!" The Butcher patted his shoulder, "The mission's already complete!"

They had already killed all of Insect Race in the responsible area on their way over, leaving only those on Lu Ye's battlefield.

Even though Lu Ye felt the Butcher was comforting him, he still managed a weak smile: "That's good..."

Confused, the illusion seemed too real. Without the chance to think any further, his head drooped, and he completely lost consciousness.

His nearly transparent body even twisted slightly at that instant.

"I'll take him to the City Lord's Residence. You guys split into three squads and search around to see if there are any that slipped through the net,"

"Yes."

Liu Datong and the others promptly responded in the affirmative.

The Butcher grabbed Lu Ye and, after giving the order, soared into the sky. Taking off from ten zhang above the ground, he swept towards the direction of the City Lord's Residence and soon disappeared without a trace.

...

Amidst the chaotic darkness, a strand of light suddenly appeared. The light rapidly expanded, and as it did, Lu Ye's dormant consciousness slowly began to revive.

The immense fatigue of his mind had already vanished without a trace, replaced by boundless comfort. The warmth that enveloped him felt as if he had returned to a womb.

He did not know where he was. Although his consciousness was reviving, he had not fully awoken, still lingering in a state between sleep and wakefulness.

His memories were somewhat blurred. Vaguely, he only remembered experiencing many grueling battles before, and it seemed as though some faces flashed before his eyes.

Without thinking too much, his reviving consciousness once again sank into slumber.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Lu Ye awoke again.

This time, he was truly awake. After a brief moment of disorientation, Lu Ye quickly recalled the events that unfolded before his unconsciousness: following the annihilation of the Butcher's squad, he led his own team of the Insect Race through Xianyuan City to hunt the Insect Race, completing the task that the Butcher's squad had left unfinished.

But in the end, it seemed he still failed to accomplish the mission...

A sense of regret filled his heart. After all, he wasn't strong enough. Despite the unique state that allowed him, with only a Cloud River Level 5 cultivation, to possess the strength of the True Lake Realm here, facing such a situation, there was only so much one could do alone.

Also... where is this?

Lu Ye instinctively felt that his surroundings were somewhat familiar, yet he could not immediately recall the place.

With a slight sensing, his psyche vibrated.

Because he discovered that his Psyche Force had grown considerably stronger.

Logically, his Psyche Force had already far surpassed that of cultivators in the same realm. Improving it was not supposed to be easy, yet after this period of unconsciousness, the growth of his Psyche Force was distinctly noticeable.

Had the desperate battles pushed his own limits and resulted in a breakthrough?

It didn't seem like it...

Only at this moment did he notice the abnormality of his surroundings. His body was surrounded by a thick fog that was so dense one could not see one's own fingers.

The fog was no ordinary fog. Being immersed in it made one feel comfortable in spirit, to the point where one wished to soak in it for a lifetime.

A scene from Lu Ye's memory instantly merged with his current environment.

"Soul mist!"

Lu Ye couldn't help but feel shocked. The mist around him was clearly soul mist.

The last time he was in Xianyuan City, he had experienced an environment like this. Both he and Giant Armor, Amber, and Yiyi had gained a lot of benefits from it.

Soul mist is something that only exists in the Soul Cleansing Pool.

In other words, is he currently in the Soul Cleansing Pool?

But he clearly passed out outside a stronghold in the city. How could he have ended up in the Soul Cleansing Pool without any reason?

In the midst of confusion, the faces of the Butcher, Liu Datong, and Yooi Qing suddenly flashed through his mind...

At the very last moment before he lost consciousness, it seemed he saw these Xianyuan Guards, who were supposed to be dead.

But that must have been an illusion—how could the dead come back to life?

So it seems that it must have been other Xianyuan Guards who found him and brought him back to the City Lord's Residence, placing him in the Soul Cleansing Pool?

Although it was unlikely, it was the only explanation.

He had learned from the Butcher that there were quite a few Xianyuan Guards operating within Xianyuan City, and they were just one squad among them. Each Xianyuan Guard squad was responsible for exterminating the Insect Race within a certain area.

Perhaps another Xianyuan Guard squad had completed their mission and discovered him during their search.

Although he did not know who brought him here, it was undoubtedly a life-saving favor. Lu Ye silently noted this debt of gratitude.

The loss of his Psyche Force had been perfectly replenished, and not only that, it was much stronger than before. It could be said that Lu Ye was now in the best condition he had ever been.

The saying goes, "When the belly is full, the mind turns to wanton pleasure." This phrase could also apply to Lu Ye.

At this moment, he wasn't thinking about any wanton pleasure, but rather the dense soul mist surrounding him...

The last time he had come here, he had bottled some Soul Cleansing Water to take with him. Although he didn't know who placed him in the Soul Cleansing Pool this time, the opportunity was rare and not to be missed.

Thus, upon realizing his situation, without the slightest hesitation, Lu Ye activated his power, expanding it in all directions. Patterns of Yin-Yang Dual Origins intertwined and fitted together, and in the blink of an eye, a massive spirit energy gathering funnel formed amidst the soul mist.

Chapter 659 He's Stealing Soul Water!

City Lord's Residence, beside the Soul Cleansing Pool, the Xianyuan City Lord stood with his hands behind his back, gazing quietly at the Soul Cleansing Pool, his profound eyes seemingly able to penetrate layers of fog to see into its depths.

The Butcher stood not far behind him.

Having previously brought Lu Ye here and placed him in the soul pool, he had not left. Although Lu Ye's body had not completely dissipated when he brought him here, he was somewhat uneasy.

A Xianyuan Guard was reporting the situation at various battlefields throughout the city...

By now, the Insect Race that had invaded the city had been almost completely eradicated; this war had once again ended in Xianyuan City's victory.

It has been so for thousands of years...

What Lu Ye did not know was that the Spiritual Bodies of Xianyuan City were almost immortal. They had left their psyche imprints in the soul pool, so even if they fell in battle outside, they could be resurrected through the power of the soul pool.

This was also why the Butcher and others could die and be resurrected.

And the soul pool was the foundation of Xianyuan City.

The Insect Race had only one way to conquer Xianyuan City.

That was to destroy Xianyuan City's defensive forces with absolute military power, seize the City Lord's Residence, and shatter the soul pool!

Otherwise, no matter how numerous or powerful the Insect Race, they could never conquer Xianyuan City. Historically, each invasion by the Insect Race had been shockingly similar in its process.

Initially, Xianyuan City always seemed to be at a disadvantage because of the large numbers of the Insect Race and the presence of many strong ones among them. But once the Insect Race was killed, they stayed dead, whereas the cultivators of Xianyuan City could continuously emerge from the soul pool to rejoin the battle.

With this waxing and waning, the threat of the Insect Race would gradually be erased, allowing Xianyuan City to secure victory.

This war had lasted about half a month, and the time of Lu Ye's arrival was precisely when the battle was at its fiercest.

Now, the war was nearing its end, and the huge rift in the sky also had vanished at some unknown time.

After the Xianyuan Guard finished reporting the situation, he withdrew.

Bored of waiting, the Butcher spoke up, "City Lord, is this kid really the 'chosen one'?"

He had murmured this to Liu Datong and Yooi Qing before, but that was because he had heard it from the City Lord.

The City Lord, still gazing down at the soul pool, replied, "The last time he was here, three of the Four Auspicious Beasts had gathered around him, and this time, all were assembled. Moreover, he seems to have a strong inheritance from a spirit runes master, allowing him to use various spirit runes at will. If he isn't the chosen one, I can hardly imagine how high the requirements for the chosen one would be." Then he added, "However, he could just be one of the candidates."

"There are other chosen ones?" the Butcher frowned.

"Eggs are not put in one basket, especially for that kind of existence. For thousands of years, there must have been many chosen individuals... We who have long resided in Xianyuan City know nothing of the outside world and thus, have no idea what became of those chosen, but just from the current situation, none of those chosen have ever truly succeeded."

The Butcher nodded. If someone had truly succeeded, then they wouldn't have to defend Xianyuan City here; they would have obtained true freedom.

"But there will eventually be a result, time is running out," the City Lord sighed.

He had said this the last time he saw Lu Ye, but that was just him talking to himself; no one heard it.

The Butcher's expression turned grave, "Sir, how much time do you think we have left?"

"Who knows..." the City Lord slowly shook his head, "You must have also felt it, in these recent years, the number of the Insect Race attacking our city has increased while correspondingly, the power of the soul pool has been diminishing each year. Maybe in a few decades, the power of the Insect Race will become too overwhelming for us to withstand, or perhaps in a few more years, the soul pool will dry up, and we will lose our Undying Bodies. Whichever scenario occurs, Xianyuan City will fall and then the Nine Provinces will be doomed!"

The Butcher's expression grew solemn.

As cultivators of Xianyuan City, having defended this place for thousands of years, they knew much more about the secrets of the Divine Sea Realm than those of the Nine Provinces.

The safety of Xianyuan City was not just a concern for Xianyuan City alone; it was interlinked with the entire Nine Provinces.

Perhaps the cultivators of the Nine Provinces have never known that in such a place, numerous Spiritual Bodies have been struggling against the Insect Race to protect the safety of the Nine Provinces for thousands of years.

Even if someone were to tell them about this now, it's likely no one would believe it, as such truths seem somewhat absurd.

As for the increasing numbers of the Insect Race the City Lord mentioned, it was inevitably because the insect hive had begun to devour external forces, which was not a good sign. If the connection between the insect hive and the outside reaches a certain strength, the already imperfect defenses will inevitably develop even larger flaws, leading to unimaginable consequences.

And the soul pool...

Despite the immense energy in the soul pool, for thousands of years, the continuous resurrection of Xianyuan City's Spiritual Bodies has been depleting the power of the soul pool. One day, the power of the soul pool will be exhausted, and then the Spiritual Bodies of Xianyuan City will lose their immortal nature.

All signs indicate that time is indeed running out; this world needs someone who can turn the tide. But whether those chosen candidates can pass the final test is unknown.

After thousands of years of waiting without any results, who could still hope for a miracle?

For a moment, the Butcher felt disheartened.

"That kid has woken up!" the City Lord suddenly spoke.

"There's nothing serious, right?" the Butcher quickly asked.

"His Psyche Force is just severely depleted. What else could be wrong? As expected, this kid has started causing trouble again!" the City Lord suddenly felt an itch in his teeth.

The Butcher blurted out, "Is he stealing Soul Cleansing Water?"

Soul Cleansing Water, a substance that could only be found in the soul pool throughout the entire Nine Provinces, had been known to the Butcher when Lu Ye had given him half a bottle previously.

"Hmph!" the City Lord snorted coldly and turned to look at the Butcher, "You decide what to do! He's not a native of Xianyuan City, and by right, he shouldn't have access to the soul pool. Last time, I made an exception for him to help you guys out of a bind. This time, it's because you said he was drafted into your squad that I let him enter the soul pool to recuperate. Now he does something so shameless, tell me, should I just slap him dead, or should I slap him dead one slap at a time?"

The Butcher forced a smile, "In the tasks of our squad, he did indeed help us complete them, and after we were all wiped out, he fought on his own to the point of utter exhaustion. Having him as an auxiliary member of the squad is not a problem."

When the Butcher had brought Lu Ye back previously, the City Lord had indeed been shocked, as he hadn't expected Lu Ye to enter Xianyuan City at such a time.

Later, he learned from the Butcher how Lu Ye had entered Xianyuan City.

This was also the reason why the City Lord was convinced that Lu Ye was the chosen one.

If he were not the chosen one, how could he possibly have entered Xianyuan City in such a manner and at such a critical time as the Insect Race attacking the city!

Had he come at any other time, the whole of Xianyuan City would have been desolate, all Spiritual Bodies slumbering in the soul pool, and Lu Ye wouldn't have gained any benefits.

However, precisely because he came at such an opportune moment, despite fighting to the point of utter exhaustion, he thus obtained many benefits.

But as the City Lord had said, Lu Ye was not a cultivator of Xianyuan City, and logically speaking, shouldn't have entered the soul pool. It was the Butcher who took charge, drafting him into his own squad as an auxiliary member, which allowed the City Lord to turn a blind eye and let him enter the soul pool to recuperate his psyche.

But what the Butcher hadn't expected was that after Lu Ye awoke, he would immediately start 'stealing chickens and dogs'...

That made him somewhat embarrassed.

After hesitating for a moment, he said, "If you really want to kill him, go ahead and kill him!"

The City Lord coldly snorted, "You think I couldn't?"

The Butcher chuckled, "Since you think he's the chosen one, why not give him a chance? Maybe he really can make it to the end. Isn't the blind man always going on about cause and effect? We plant a cause today, perhaps tomorrow we may reap a fruit."

He was certain that the City Lord would not truly kill Lu Ye, and the City Lord himself probably harbored that thought, too; otherwise, he would have intervened the moment he noticed Lu Ye stealing the Soul Cleansing Water, instead of having this lengthy discussion with him.

Before becoming a Spiritual Body, although he was a butcher in the city, he was also a clever-minded man. How could he not see through the City Lord's intentions?

"Besides, it's just him alone; even if he steals some Soul Cleansing Water, it shouldn't reduce the foundation of the soul pool too much... I guess."

The City Lord, staring at the Soul Cleansing Pool, his eye twitching incessantly, said, "If you knew what he's capable of, you wouldn't say that!"

Ordinary cultivators who enter the soul pool, even if they have the means to condense soul water, ultimately gain little, but what has that kid below done? He has actually created a huge funnel, with endless soul mist pouring into it, quickly condensing into soul water.

He even saw Lu Ye create a waterskin, placing it beneath that giant funnel, clearly intending to fill it completely!

That's too much!

Even for someone like the City Lord, who had lived for thousands of years as a strong cultivator of the Divine Sea Realm, it was hard not to panic at this moment.

If things continue this way, the foundation of the soul pool will definitely be reduced considerably. The soul pool is already not expected to last much longer; once the foundation is diminished, the duration it can maintain will only be shorter!

The Butcher thought for a moment and said, "However, we can't let him benefit from the Soul Cleansing Water for nothing. He must have earned quite a bit of battle merit by killing the Insect Race this time, my lord. You could allow him to use his battle merit to obtain the corresponding amount of Soul Cleansing Water."

The City Lord, who was hesitant about whether to stop Lu Ye, upon hearing this, nodded and said, "Good idea!" He then asked worriedly, "How much battle merit has he earned this time?"

"I'm not sure, but at least a few tens of thousands."

Considering the number of Insect Race Lu Ye had killed before and after, he should certainly have that much battle merit.

But what the Butcher didn't know was that Lu Ye's battle merits numbered not just tens of thousands, but over three hundred thousand!

Chapter 660 I Exchanged Battle Merit for It

Such merit was unparalleled across the Nine Provinces, even Divine Sea Realm cultivators likely did not possess as much. It's not that cultivators of the Divine Sea Realm couldn't earn that much merit, but they needed to use their merit to exchange for cultivation resources—who would frivolously accumulate so much merit?

Moreover, with more than three hundred thousand battle merits, even the gold-hued spirit fortune sticks could be exchanged for 20!

With Lu Ye currently at the Cloud River Level 5 in terms of cultivation, if he had 20 gold-hued spirit fortune sticks, he could easily advance to Level 8-9!

Although the City Lord could clearly see some of Lu Ye's minor actions beneath the soul pool, he had no way to know exactly how much battle merit Lu Ye had. After getting the answer from the Butcher, he immediately schemed.

Even though he was the Xianyuan City Lord, he couldn't use up Lu Ye's battle merits to let him obtain soul water of corresponding weight—that endeavor still required the power of Heaven's Augury.

This was a good opportunity to test if this person was the chosen one.

If he was, then Heaven's Augury would surely respond; if not, naturally there would be no response.

Once he made up his mind, he clasped his hands together, facing the void, and softly chanted, "Ji Yuan of Xianyuan City, respectfully summons Heaven's Augury. Today an outsider, surnamed Lu and named Ye, joined my Xianyuan City, fought a bloody battle, slaughtered invading Insect Race, amassed damaged Spiritual Bodies, allowed entry into the soul pool for recuperation, upon awakening, harbored ill intentions, stole soul pool soul water, damaging the foundation of my Xianyuan City. He should have been executed as a warning to others, but considering his contributions, Yuan also cannot bear it, please Heaven's Augury, grant him the power to exchange his battle merits for soul water!"

In just a short speech, Ji Yuan spoke without pause, with a resonant and forceful voice.

At the moment the words fell, Heaven's Augury descended from the void!

Ji Yuan raised his eyebrows, and the Butcher standing behind him revealed an intriguing expression.

It was confirmed—the boy was indeed the chosen one!

Although Heaven's Augury is omnipresent, any cultivator can respectfully summon Heaven's Augury for some witnessing or to sign contracts, but such one-sided granting of special power to an individual was still rare.

Especially since this involved the soul water in the soul pool.

This was the foundation of Xianyuan City, the high Heaven's Augury could not be ignorant of the importance of soul water, yet upon Ji Yuan completing his plea, it still offered a response.

That boy was absolutely the chosen one—that's why he received such special treatment from Heaven's Augury.

Since Heaven's Augury had granted Lu Ye the power to exchange battle merits for soul water, what could Ji Yuan say?

The exchange ratio was unknown to Ji Yuan, but such matters did not require his intervention, as Heaven's Augury would have its own judgment, and besides, soul water was immensely important. If the boy, as the Butcher had said, only had a few tens of thousands of battle merits, he presumably could not exchange for much soul water.

He thought so to himself...

Lu Ye was unaware of these developments at the side of the Soul Cleansing Pool. At this moment, he was focused on condensing soul water.

The last time he came here, he was only at Spirit Stream Level 8, but now, although he was at Cloud River Level 5, his current strength was comparable to that of the True Lake Realm due to some special circumstances.

Therefore, the spirit energy gathering funnel he constructed this time was much larger than the last, naturally causing a disturbance that couldn't be compared to last time.

The massive funnel came with an endless devouring force, sucking in the thick soul mist and then condensing it into soul water.

Lu Ye originally used a jade vial to store the soul water, only to find the soul water condensing too quickly, quickly filling one.

He simply took out an empty water bladder, placed it under the spirit energy gathering funnel, and as he listened to the soul water drip into it, Lu Ye felt elated, thinking it was the most wonderful sound in the world, blissfully unaware that a powerful entity was secretly gnashing teeth above the Soul Cleansing Pool.

While collecting the soul water, he was also constantly alert to his surroundings.

The last time he set up a spirit energy gathering funnel here, for some unknown reason, the funnel often shattered, causing him to repeatedly rebuild it.

What he didn't know was that the disturbances he experienced last time were caused by the Xianyuan City Lord Ji Yuan's secret interference...

If it wasn't for that, he could have taken out a significantly larger amount of Soul Cleansing Water last time.

At the time, he had just thought the funnel he built wasn't stable enough and didn't think much of it.

This time, with his guard up, the same situations as before no longer happened.

Just as Lu Ye was joyfully collecting the soul water, the back of his hand suddenly felt slightly hot, this strangely familiar sensation startled him because this movement was clearly a reaction to a large amount of merit being deducted.

Just like when he had pushed open that door that required the consumption of ten thousand merits...

But he was only collecting soul water now; why would a large amount of merit be deducted?

Bewildered, he quickly immersed his mind to investigate, and subsequently discovered something unbelievable.

The deduction was not of merits, but of battle merits!

He originally had over three hundred thousand battle merits, but now he was missing fifty to sixty thousand, and the number was rapidly decreasing.

What was happening?

Lu Ye was somewhat panicked.

This time in Xianyuan City, the greatest gains besides the soul water were these battle merits, not insubstantial in number, but all were exchanged for his life.

He had already planned that once he returned to the Cloud River battlefield, he would immediately enter the Heaven's Augury treasure vault and exchange for a batch of gold-hued spirit fortune sticks to raise his cultivation level. It didn't need to be too high; with his current foundation, as long as he could advance to Cloud River Level 7, then there would hardly be anyone in the entire Cloud River battlefield who could threaten his safety. If he could reach Level 8, that would be even better. At that time, he could stride across the Cloud River battlefield; any Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivator who came looking for trouble would be on a path to their own demise.

Such pleasant plans, however, were interrupted by a sudden turn of events.

Lu Ye couldn't figure out why his battle merit was inexplicably decreasing, and the speed of the decrease was too fast, nearly a thousand points at a time.

Why is this happening!

Although he had indeed used some methods to obtain these battle merits and had harnessed power far beyond his own cultivation, he had earned them through killing members of the Insect Race, one by one. So why should they just vanish?

Moreover, he had never heard of a cultivator's merit or battle merit disappearing in such a bizarre manner.

Even faced with desperate situations, Lu Ye could remain calm and undisturbed, like a still well. But at this moment, he panicked as he watched his battle merits rapidly decrease, uncontrollably feeling as if someone were slicing away at his flesh with a blunt knife.

Over three hundred thousand battle merits—more than double his current merit. In the Nine Provinces cultivation world, perhaps no other cultivator had battle merits exceeding their merit by so much.

They hadn't even warmed up yet, and now they were disappearing little by little.

Lu Ye reminded himself to stay calm. First and foremost, he needed to figure out why his battle merit was vanishing without reason.

But no matter how much he thought about it, he couldn't find any clear clues.

At most, there was his stealing of the Soul Cleansing Water...

Wait a second...

Lu Ye suddenly realized something as he stared at the huge funnel in front of him.

The decrease in battle merits was regular, each time a whole thousand points.

Whether it's merit or battle merit, Heaven's Augury is at work in their tallying and consumption. This is common knowledge.

So, the decrease in his battle merits was also caused by Heaven's Augury.

If Heaven's Augury really wanted to erase his huge amount of battle merits, it would have just erased them directly. There was no need for this slow, painful method.

A whole thousand points is an intriguing number.

As Lu Ye sensed the condensation of the Soul Cleansing Water and monitored the changes in his battle merit, he gradually discerned a pattern.

Every time his water sack received one drop of Soul Cleansing Water, his battle merit decreased by a thousand points.

To confirm his guess, Lu Ye moved the water sack away from underneath the funnel.

As expected, the number of his battle merits no longer changed. Even if new soul water condensed, as long as he didn't collect it, his battle merits wouldn't decrease since the formed soul water would quickly vaporize back into the soul mist.

So that's it!

The battle merits he had consumed were exchanged for soul water, each drop valued at a thousand battle merits.

Realizing this, Lu Ye's previously tense mood completely relaxed!

He had been acting sneakily here, somewhat fearful of being discovered, as unauthorized taking wasn't exactly praiseworthy.

But since this process consumed his battle merits, it wasn't a problem anymore.

This certainly spoiled his original plan to enhance his cultivation, but compared to cultivation, soul water was undoubtedly more precious.

This stuff could only be obtained in Xianyuan City, while cultivation could be gradually improved. This priority was clear to anyone.

Moreover, a thousand battle merits for one drop of soul water was incredibly cheap!

Lu Ye hadn't expected the exchange rate for soul water here to be so favorable.

What can a thousand battle merits do? For a cultivator, a thousand battle merits can be exchanged for one blue spirit fortune stick or two white spirit fortune sticks, which don't substantially enhance a cultivator.

But what about one drop of soul water? If released, even the strong cultivators of the Divine Sea Realm would scramble for it, as any one of them possessing a drop of soul water could significantly enhance their psyche.

Compared to that, some cultivators in True Lake Level 9 had an even greater need for soul water, as a single drop might help them break through their current bottleneck and ascend to the Divine Sea Realm.

The two were not at all on the same level.

Having understood why his battle merits were consumed, Lu Ye completely relaxed.

He wasn't sneaking around; he had exchanged a huge amount of battle merits for these drops of soul water!

Even in front of the Xianyuan City Lord, he could stand tall!

At the same time, by the Soul Cleansing Pool, the expression on the Xianyuan City Lord, whom Lu Ye had been concerned about, began to look ugly, as he sensed that something was not right in how events were unfolding.

"Butcher!" Ji Yuan called out, "Didn't you say he only had tens of thousands of merits?"

The Butcher hastily defended, "I don't know how many merits he has; I was just guessing," he said, then quickly asked, "What happened?"

Ji Yuan slowly turned his head, glaring at the Butcher, his teeth clenched, "He has already collected more than two hundred drops of Soul Cleansing Water! And he hasn't stopped yet!"

How could that be just tens of thousands of merits? The boy's merit must far exceed the Butcher's estimate.