

Humanity 851

Chapter 851 Domain Fusion

When Pang Huanyin suddenly appeared in the Heaven's Augury Hall of the Righteous Blood Sect headquarters, Shui Yuan thought there was an intruder. Luckily, Pang Huanyin's cultivation was not high, and she was captured immediately.

"Domain fusion!" The sect master, who had been silent, suddenly spoke.

Lu Ye quickly saluted and humbly asked, "Sect Master, so the floating land that suddenly appeared above the Cloud River battlefield is indeed from the Unparalleled Continent?"

It was quite a fantastical idea. The corpse disaster of the Unparalleled Continent had been eradicated by the Nine Provinces cultivators just a month ago, and now the Unparalleled Continent had migrated to the Cloud River battlefield.

There must have been celestial operations at play behind this, not as simple as Pang Huanyin suggested. As for what methods Heaven's Augury used to migrate such a large domain fragment to the Cloud River battlefield, Lu Ye couldn't fathom, and even Pang Huanyin might not know.

The sect master stroked his beard and said, "It should be correct. My master once experienced such an event."

Lu Ye didn't know the age of the sect master, and as for his master, that was an even more ancient figure.

"It is said that the Cloud River battlefield wasn't so vast at first. It grew by merging one fragmented or ruined domain after another, including the Spirit Stream battlefield."

Lu Ye still had a vague idea of how large the entire Cloud River battlefield was, but it was definitely hundreds of times larger than the Unparalleled Continent.

He had thought about how such a vast battlefield came into existence but never delved deeply. He believed it to be a part of the Nine Provinces split off by Heaven's Augury. But now, it seemed that was not the case.

The creation and expansion of the Spirit Stream battlefield and the Cloud River battlefield were closely tied to fragmented domains like the Unparalleled Continent.

"Fusion between domains is no simple matter, nor just an expansion of territory. The entire process might take a long time. During this period, cultivators of the Cloud River Realm should not stay in the battlefield, hence why you were expelled."

Lu Ye understood, "Then what about the demon beasts that were born in the Cloud River battlefield?"

Giant Armor immediately pricked up his ears, listening intently with a tense expression.

The sect master said, "During the fusion process, the Heaven and Earth spirit force stirs fiercely, making it unsuitable for cultivators to stay, mainly because it hinders cultivation. There is no danger to life, so the native demon beasts won't be greatly affected, only frightened at most."

Hearing the sect master's words, the tense Giant Armor finally relaxed.

"So, will the Cloud River battlefield be inaccessible for a while?" Lu Ye asked.

"Yes, it will stabilize in at least ten days or half a month, or at most a few months."

Lu Ye nodded slightly.

With his cultivation at Cloud River Level 9 and many gold-hued spirit fortune sticks in hand, it made little difference whether he cultivated in the Cloud River battlefield or the Nine Provinces.

The only pity was that he hadn't had the chance to reconfigure the big array at the spirit ground.

The expansion of the spirit ground had long concluded, upgrading from a small ground that could accommodate a few people to a large one that could hold a hundred. Naturally, the previously set up Formation needed changes or a complete reconfiguration.

He had planned to handle these matters when he reached the peak of the Cloud River Realm and was ready to leave the battlefield, but now unforeseen events had occurred.

The Unparalleled Continent had migrated across domains, even bringing Pang Huanyin, the master of the Ziwei Dao Palace, to the Righteous Blood Sect.

"Little friend Pang, since you are acquainted with Yiye, let him guide you in exploring. The Mount Ao territory is vast, with many spirit mountaintops, so accommodating your Dao Palace shouldn't be a problem." The sect master instructed.

"Thank you, Sect Master Thang." Pang Huanyin saluted, then turned to Lu Ye, playfully blinking her left eye. "Thank you, senior brother."

Lu Ye was puzzled, "What is this about?"

The sect master explained, "Little friend Pang wants to establish a sect in the Nine Provinces. You know her situation over there, and I heard you helped them solve their troubles in the Unparalleled Continent. They have no roots here in the Nine Provinces, so they wish to be affiliated with our sect. I have already agreed. You will lead her to find some spirit mountaintops to establish their sect, a gift from our Righteous Blood Sect."

Lu Ye finally understood Pang Huanyin's purpose.

In the Nine Provinces, the idea of superior and inferior sects wasn't unusual. Many newly established sects would choose a nearby powerful sect for reliance, to receive support and aid from the superior sect's cultivators, avoiding fighting alone.

The relationship was somewhat like that of subordinates.

The latest to hold such a relationship with the Righteous Blood Sect was the Loyal Heart Sect!

However, back then the superior sect was powerful, now it's the reverse. The Loyal Heart Sect was 2nd grade, while the Righteous Blood Sect had declined drastically.

The Unparalleled Continent had been migrated to the Cloud River battlefield through some strange methods by Heaven's Augury. In the future, it will no longer exist as the Unparalleled Continent but as part of the Cloud River battlefield.

The cultivators of the Unparalleled Continent naturally wouldn't stay there permanently.

Formerly limited by Heaven and Earth, they could only cultivate to the peak of the Cloud River Realm, unable to glimpse the mysteries of the next realm.

Yet for any cultivator, reaching higher realms is an irresistible temptation. Therefore, Unparalleled Continent's cultivators would ultimately leave for the Nine Provinces.

After the recent battle, the number of Ziwei Dao Palace's people had not decreased but increased, mainly by absorbing many cultivators who came to support them.

Having arrived, these people were now Nine Provinces cultivators and needed a place to settle.

Thus, Pang Huanyin had to establish a sect in the Nine Provinces and rebuild the Ziwei Dao Palace unless she decided to disband the Dao Palace and let its members find their own ways.

During the migration, Pang Huanyin learned a lot about the Nine Provinces from Heaven's Augury, deciding to rebuild the Ziwei Dao Palace, and came there with Heaven's Augury's help, appearing at the Righteous Blood Sect.

Initially, the sect master was opposed to such matters, having learned from the Loyal Heart Sect's experience.

However, after hearing Pang Huanyin's detailed explanation, he changed his mind.

He recognized Pang Huanyin's extraordinary talent.

In such a broken domain as the Unparalleled Continent, her achievements in the Cloud River Realm were no less than those of Fong Rulie and others. If she had been born in the Nine Provinces, her foundation would undoubtedly be stronger.

As an experienced individual, the sect master also sensed the good impression Pang Huanyin seemed to have of Lu Ye. Moreover, with the middle ranks of the Righteous Blood Sect being bleak, future development required considering more factors. Accepting the Ziwei Dao Palace as an inferior sect could immediately remedy shortcomings without waiting for their disciples to grow.

The Ziwei Dao Palace also needed a supreme cultivator to oversee it, which could complement each sect perfectly.

However, being an upright person and a strong cultivator in the Divine Sea Realm, the sect master disclosed the Righteous Blood Sect's current situation honestly, advising Pang Huanyin to consider other big sects as superior sects and even offering to mediate.

Of course, Pang Huanyin refused. As she had said, she came to the Nine Provinces for one person and for the Righteous Blood Sect, considering nothing else.

Thus, the matter of the Ziwei Dao Palace establishing a sect and recognizing the Righteous Blood Sect as a superior sect was settled.

To establish a sect, a land as the sect's base was needed.

The Bingzhou territory was vast, with many suitable places for establishing a sect. But the sect master intended to allocate part of Mount Ao to the Ziwei Dao Palace as their foothold in the Nine Provinces.

This was understandable. Mount Ao was large, even at the peak of its time, the Righteous Blood Sect hadn't fully utilized it. Accommodating two sects was not a problem.

Lu Ye was bewildered, with many strange events happening in such a brief time, even he was affected.

"Senior brother?" Pang Huanyin called softly, seeing Lu Ye lost in thought.

Lu Ye nodded, "Follow me."

With that, he soared into the sky, heading in a random direction.

Pang Huanyin smiled slightly and followed.

Shui Yuan watched them leave and turned to Hua Ci, contemplating, "Junior sister, aren't you going?"

Hua Ci smiled gently, "Why should I go?"

Shui Yuan earnestly said, "Junior sister, act early; it might be too late otherwise."

"What are you saying?"

"Don't play dumb..."

"Senior sister, I have some questions about medical techniques to ask you recently." Hua Ci interrupted Shui Yuan, taking her arm.

It wasn't a lie; Hua Ci had long wanted to ask Shui Yuan about medical techniques but had been engrossed in cultivation, missing the chance.

With the Cloud River battlefield issues, cultivators couldn't enter for now; it was a golden opportunity.

Her legacy included medical knowledge, but the focus was mostly on poisons. Yet she never forgot her role as a healing cultivator, caring for someone who often got injured.

The two women left, leaving the sect master and Giant Armor staring at each other.

The sect master valued this sturdy disciple, having recognized his talent. However, Giant Armor's blunt nature and limited time at the headquarters left the sect master knowing little about him.

He prepared to ask if Giant Armor had any cultivation troubles...

People only knew Tang Yifeng of the Righteous Blood Sect as a powerful magic cultivator, not his dual cultivation. Offering guidance to a fellow physique cultivator was of no issue.

Before he could speak, Giant Armor saluted and walked away silently.

The sect master looked disheartened...

As a sect master who once wielded great influence, now he didn't even have chances to guide his disciples— how pitiful...

Suddenly, a voice called out, "Old man, come here quickly!"

The sect master shuddered, promptly heading towards Bright Heart Peak, responding urgently, "Coming, coming!"

Chapter 852 - 850: Should?

"This place called Nine Provinces is somewhat different from what I imagined."

While gliding leisurely, Pang Huanyin suddenly spoke.

Lu Ye asked casually, "What kind of Nine Provinces did the Palace Master imagine?"

"I call you Senior Brother, yet you call me Palace Master, it feels a bit distant." Pang Huanyin did not answer Lu Ye's question but was mindful of other matters, "How does Senior Brother address Junior Sister Hua?"

"By her given name," Lu Ye replied honestly.

"Then Senior Brother might as well try calling me that way?"

"Pang Huanyin?"

"You can drop the Pang..."

"Junior Sister!"

Pang Huanyin shook her head with a smile, not delving further into this trivial matter: "Well, I'll leave it to you, Senior Brother."

After a brief ponder, she said, "Previously, when I saw Senior Brother's remarkable prowess, I assumed the Nine Provinces were vast, abundant in spiritual force, and rich in resources. But now that I've come here, I find it somewhat different."

"Very disappointed?"

"How can that be!" Pang Huanyin said, "Compared to the environment we originally lived in, the Nine Provinces is a dreamland. Now that I'm here, there's no time to be disappointed, how could I dare to be? Generations of Dao Palace predecessors sacrificed continuously to ensure that the Unparalleled human race would not be troubled by the Corpse Race, so they could have a stable living environment. Now that this has been achieved, we have gained even more!"

After a pause, she continued, "I somewhat understand the vastness of the Nine Provinces, although I haven't been to other places yet. However, the spiritual energy here... doesn't seem abundant. How did Senior Brother attain such cultivation at this age in this kind of environment?"

This was what puzzled Pang Huanyin the most because, in her perception, the spiritual energy in the Nine Provinces was not even as abundant as their original Ziwei Dao Palace, only slightly better than the conditions on the Unparalleled Continent.

Logically speaking, such an environment shouldn't produce very strong cultivators.

But in reality, above the Spirit Stream Realm, there were True Lake cultivators, and divine ones beyond Cloud River. Not to mention others, just the two Divine Sea Realm strong cultivators of the Righteous Blood Sect alone gave her a profound feeling. When she suddenly appeared in the Heaven's Augury Hall earlier, Shui Yuan immediately arrived, immobilizing her with just a glance.

"The local spiritual energy in the Nine Provinces is indeed not thick. However, the Spirit Stream Realm has the Spirit Stream battlefield, and the Cloud River Realm has the Cloud River battlefield. The spiritual energy in these two places is still abundant, incomparable to the local Nine Provinces. Also, there are many methods to enhance the spiritual energy intensity in these places."

The Spirit Stream battlefield has the blessing of the Heavenly Pillars in each resident's location, and the Cloud River battlefield has spirit grounds like this. They are means of enhancing spiritual energy intensity.

"Why is that?" Pang Huanyin was even more puzzled.

"I'm not sure either. Probably Heaven's Augury encourages cultivators of these two realms to go to the battlefield to temper and cultivate."

Precisely because the spiritual energy in the local Nine Provinces is not abundant, most Spirit Stream Realm cultivators stay in the Spirit Stream battlefield, while Cloud River Realm cultivators mostly stay in the Cloud River battlefield. As a result, cultivators of the two camps constantly clash and become each other's whetstones.

Lu Ye had pondered these things before, so he responded fluently to Pang Huanyin's doubts.

"When the Palace Master establishes a sect in the Nine Provinces in the future, Ziwei Dao Palace will have its place in the Spirit Stream battlefield. Then the Palace Master will see the situation clearly."

Pang Huanyin seemed thoughtful and did not correct Lu Ye for calling her Palace Master again.

Since it rolls off the tongue easily, let him call her that.

She suddenly smiled, "In any case, we have finally come to the Nine Provinces!"

She once wondered what fantastic kind of domain the Nine Provinces were to nurture figures like Lu Ye. The more she interacted with people like Lu Ye, the more she longed for and desired the Nine Provinces.

So when guided by the Nine Provinces Heaven's Augury and having the opportunity to come here, Pang Huanyin agreed without hesitation.

Because she knew this was the only way out for the Unparalleled Continent!

Although the corpse plague on the Unparalleled Continent had been resolved, the entire world's cultivation environment had deteriorated. In the past, there were several human race secret realms, but now the secret realm's Earth Veins had dried up. If the existing situation continued, it would likely worsen.

To merge the Unparalleled Continent with the Nine Provinces not only fulfilled her own wish but also sought a way out for the Unparalleled human race.

"When did the Palace Master receive Heaven's Augury guidance?" Curiously, Lu Ye asked.

Pang Huanyin smiled craftily, "Actually, I had a feeling since the moment the Nine Provinces reinforcement arrived on the Unparalleled Continent. It's just that I hadn't made a decision then. When I sent Senior Brother away, I decided."

From her perspective, Pang Huanyin was extremely envious of the Nine Provinces cultivators because they had an entire domain as their backing! To rely on and be supported by an entire domain was a feeling Pang Huanyin and the Unparalleled human race had never experienced.

"Since you have decided to join the Righteous Blood Sect as your superior sect, you must have some understanding of the Nine Provinces situation. The Nine Provinces is not a peaceful place."

"I understand, the confrontation between the Haotian Alliance and Ten Thousand Demons Ridge is something I'm well aware of."

"Standing with the Righteous Blood Sect, you naturally fall into the Haotian Alliance camp. Subsequently, the Dao Palace cultivators will surely have conflicts with those from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge."

"Wherever there are people, there will be conflicts. The Dao Palace cultivators have experienced the darkest times; they do not lack the courage and determination to fight. I trust they can establish themselves in the Nine Provinces!"

"Since the Palace Master possesses such awareness, it is enough," Lu Ye nodded, "What about the other two secret realms?"

Pang Huanyin shook her head, "I don't know how they will decide, nor do I want to concern myself with them. But the situations there are different from that of the Dao Palace. Dao Palace's inheritance has never been broken, which is why I have the idea of establishing a sect in the Nine Provinces. The other two's inheritance has long been fragmented, with each large family holding power. Their decisions do not concern my Dao Palace. But they will likely seek out their own paths. If we meet again in the future and are on the same side, we can support each other. If we are enemies, my Dao Palace will show no mercy."

As they spoke, the two flew while admiring the picturesque mountains and rivers.

"Is all this broad mountain range part of Mount Ao's territory?" Pang Huanyin looked in awe.

It seems there's only a handful of people in the Righteous Blood Sect occupying such a large area, truly enviable. She thought she had a basic understanding of the Nine Provinces' vastness and abundance, but seeing it herself, she realized her narrow view.

"It should be...right?" Lu Ye's expression was a bit embarrassed.

"Should be?" Pang Huanyin was puzzled.

Lu Ye touched his nose, "To be honest, it's my first time leaving the sect headquarters as well."

Pang Huanyin looked at Lu Ye in astonishment and then burst into laughter.

Lu Ye explained, "Back then, when the Sect Master accepted me as a disciple, we were ambushed on the way back to the sect. To avoid collateral damage, the Sect Master sent me into the Spirit Stream battlefield. I spent almost my entire Spirit Stream Realm period there, and occasionally, when I returned to the sect, I didn't leave Righteous Peak for more than thirty miles. The same during the Cloud River Realm, so my understanding of the Nine Provinces isn't much more than yours."

"I see." Pang Huanyin restrained her laughter, "Shall we travel more together then?"

"Sure!"

Lu Ye nodded.

Before long, as they flew over a Spirit Mountaintop, they suddenly sensed a conflict below. Judging from the aftermath of the clash, both parties were apparently Cloud River Realm cultivators.

Lu Ye frowned and swiftly descended towards the direction of the conflict.

Pang Huanyin followed closely.

A moment later, Lu Ye landed on a part of the spirit mountaintop, where his line of sight fell on a middle-aged man and a half-aged elder fiercely fighting for some reason, with spirit force surging incessantly.

Their ages were both advanced, yet their cultivation was not very high, one in Cloud River Level 6, the other Level 7.

On the Cloud River battlefield, such people were quite common; the world had its limits on acceptance, and cultivators had their limits.

Some might never progress beyond the Spirit Stream Realm; some might barely advance to the Cloud River Realm but achieve little in it.

The four cultivation realms were like day and night, each realm eliminating those who couldn't progress. Those who advanced tirelessly were always individuals with excellent talents.

The two facing him, especially the half-aged elder, seemed to have reached their limit and couldn't advance any further in cultivation.

The middle-aged man, with some fortune, might touch the True Lake Realm but wouldn't progress far.

Although their cultivation levels differed by a tier, the one with lower cultivation evidently had better accumulation, likely opening more spiritual orifices in the Spirit Stream Realm.

This resulted in both possessing comparable strength.

Lu Ye immediately saw they weren't engaging in a life-and-death struggle since neither radiated any killing intent, only quarrelling.

A soft, sweet scent filled the air. Tracing the source, Lu Ye saw a three-petal red sandalwood flower in full bloom.

He roughly understood what they were fighting over and vaguely recognized their identities.

Upon their sudden arrival, the combatants immediately stopped and stood together, watching Lu Ye and Pang Huanyin vigilantly.

Positioning themselves like this indicated they knew each other, so they quickly united against Lu Ye and Pang Huanyin, these uninvited guests.

Seeing their attire and sensing their exposed spirit force fluctuations, both the middle-aged man and the half-aged elder grew serious.

The strength of this man and woman clearly surpassed their own.

Indecisive about what to do, Lu Ye was the first to speak, "Is this Mount Ao's territory?"

The middle-aged man immediately nodded, "Yes, this is indeed Mount Ao. Where are you two from, and where are you heading?"

He subconsciously assumed that Lu Ye was asking for directions.

Little did he know, Lu Ye just wanted to confirm whether he had left the sect's territory.

"Righteous Blood Sect, Lu Ye!"

Lu Ye stated his identity.

"Hm?" The middle-aged man and the half-aged elder were both stunned, then their expressions turned awkward, and they quickly put away their spiritual artifacts, the middle-aged man cupping his hands, "So, you are a high disciple of the Righteous Blood Sect, my apologies!"

He pondered, Lu Ye...the name seems familiar? Where have I heard it before?

The half-aged elder immediately recalled Lu Ye's reputation, his expression becoming extremely cautious, apologetically smiling, "Fellow Daoist, excuse us. We will leave right away, and the three-petal red sandalwood flower is yours."

So saying, he tugged the sleeve of the middle-aged man, signaling him to leave quickly.

Chapter 853 Recruitment

In the cultivation world of the Nine Provinces, each sect has its own territory.

The range of territory a sect can occupy varies based on its grade.

At its peak, the Righteous Blood Sect was a 1st grade sect, so it could occupy the vast territory of Mount Ao. Although the sect has gradually declined in recent decades and its grade has lowered, the ownership of this territory has never changed.

It's not that no one has coveted Mount Ao. New sects often emerge in the Nine Provinces, and these sects need to choose a territory to establish their foundation. A famous and grand location like Mount Ao undoubtedly attracts a lot of attention.

However, Thang Yifeng is still a strong cultivator at the Divine Sea Realm. Those emerging sects wouldn't dare act rashly in his presence. Moreover, the Righteous Blood Sect has a close relationship with the Righteousness Sect, which holds great influence in Bingzhou. So even at the Righteous Blood Sect's lowest point, no emerging sect dared to take residence in the vast Mount Ao.

Now that the Righteous Blood Sect shows signs of resurgence, such things are even less likely to happen.

Within a sect's territory, under normal circumstances, no one is allowed to enter without permission. Doing so would be viewed as a provocation, and this can lead to significant consequences.

Every sect has cultivators patrolling their territory to prevent disturbances.

But the Righteous Blood Sect doesn't have the manpower for this. Before Lu Ye joined, there were only Thang Yifeng and Shui Yuan in the sect. Even now, while there are more lower-level disciples, they are all at the Spirit Stream Realm and are cultivating in the Spirit Stream battlefield to advance their cultivation.

As such, Mount Ao has been essentially unmanaged for decades. In name, it belongs to the Righteous Blood Sect, but anyone could enter at will.

This especially attracted many independent cultivators to settle here. Some even chose to open cave residences in the spirit mountaintops...

The spirit flowers and rare herbs that grow in Mount Ao are also a favorite of these independent cultivators, as they can harvest them to exchange for the cultivation resources they need.

The sect master knew about this but never drove these independent cultivators away.

It's not easy for independent cultivators to survive. Sect disciples have monthly stipends and the protection of elders, but independent cultivators have to acquire all their cultivation resources on their own. Sometimes, they have to struggle desperately for a little merit. When they face danger, there's no elder to protect them; they have to bear it all themselves.

These two in front of him were undoubtedly independent cultivators.

So when Lu Ye introduced himself, the older man quickly tugged on the middle-aged man's sleeve, urging him to leave.

One reason was Lu Ye's wide-spread reputation; the older man recognized Lu Ye's identity.

Another reason was that everything in Mount Ao belongs to the Righteous Blood Sect. Strictly speaking, what they were doing was considered theft. Caught red-handed by Lu Ye, they felt awkward and had no face to stay.

The two were just about to leave when Lu Ye suddenly spoke, "Wait!"

They stopped in their tracks and looked at Lu Ye with vigilance. The older man asked, "Fellow Daoist, what advice do you have for us?"

They were caught stealing Spirit Grass on someone else's territory. Technically, Lu Ye had every right to kill them.

Recalling the many stories he'd heard about Lu Ye, the older man felt a chill in his heart. Could it be that Lu Ye intended to kill them?

If that were the case, things would be really bad.

"You two are independent cultivators, right?" Lu Ye asked.

There was no reason to deny this.

Both of them nodded.

Pang Huanyin beside Lu Ye showed a curious expression. This was the first time she had heard the term "independent cultivator." There was no such term on the Unparalleled Continent.

However, she roughly understood what it meant.

She couldn't understand how, in a vast and thriving cultivation world like the Nine Provinces, there could still be independent cultivators.

"How long have you two been living here?" Lu Ye asked again.

Seeing that Lu Ye didn't seem to want to make things difficult, merely asking questions, the older man visibly relaxed and said, "I've been living here for almost ten years."

He had already reached his limit. So even if he went to the Cloud River battlefield, he wouldn't gain much benefit and would likely encounter more danger. It was better to retire here on Mount Ao.

"Three years," the middle-aged man replied. His situation was a bit different from the older man's. Three years ago, he was seriously injured on the Cloud River battlefield and had nowhere to go, so he returned to the Nine Provinces to heal, ending up in Mount Ao.

"In that case, you two must be quite familiar with the situation here," Lu Ye said.

"What does Fellow Daoist wish to know?" the older man asked cautiously.

"How many independent cultivators are living on Mount Ao?"

The older man hesitated in silence, and the middle-aged man frowned, clearly misunderstanding something.

"There's no need to hide it. I can easily find out by asking others or using my own methods," Lu Ye said.

"Sigh!" The older man sighed. "Fellow Daoist, there's no need for that. I'll send a message for them to leave within a day and never set foot on Mount Ao again."

He thought Lu Ye wanted to count the independent cultivators first before driving them away.

They had been living on Mount Ao for years without anyone bothering them, but if the Righteous Blood Sect wanted them gone, they couldn't stay.

"You've misunderstood," Lu Ye said, seeing through his thoughts. "I'm not here to drive you away. Mount Ao is vast with many spirit mountaintops. You're welcome to stay."

The sect master didn't bother with them, so why should he? Lu Ye was aware of the hardships independent cultivators faced.

Hua Ci used to be an independent cultivator. She would go to the marketplace to treat and heal people every day in exchange for a bit of cultivation material.

"Is Fellow Daoist serious?" The older man was surprised, and the middle-aged man looked grateful.

"Of course. Not only that, but I also want to give you an opportunity," Lu Ye said.

"An opportunity?" The older man was puzzled.

Lu Ye explained, "Soon, a sect named Ziwei Dao Palace will be established on Mount Ao. This sect will have many disciples and won't be accepting new members, but if you independent cultivators are interested, you may visit the sect. You might have a chance to join Ziwei Dao Palace!"

"Ziwei Dao Palace?"

The two men looked puzzled. They had never heard of this sect and assumed it was new. However, Lu Ye mentioned that it had many disciples, which confused them as new sects usually didn't have many members.

Most independent cultivators hoped to join a sect, but they wouldn't join just any sect. Lower three-grade sects, especially 8th-9th grade, were generally not appealing to them.

Being bound by such a sect was less appealing than living freely.

So despite Lu Ye presenting it as an opportunity, they weren't immediately moved and grew more cautious.

"May I ask, Fellow Daoist, what grade is Ziwei Dao Palace? How strong are its members?"

"At least 6th grade, and Ziwei Dao Palace is a subordinate sect of Righteous Blood Sect!"

"A subordinate sect!"

The older man and the middle-aged man's interest was piqued. They didn't care much about the 6th grade but the fact that it was a subordinate sect of the Righteous Blood Sect.

The previous subordinate sect was the Loyal Heart Sect, now a formidable 2nd grade sect. Despite its decline, the Righteous Blood Sect still had two Divine Sea Realm cultivators and connections with many big sects in Bingzhou.

With signs of resurgence, the future of the Righteous Blood Sect's subordinate sect wouldn't be bad.

Not to mention, a 6th grade sect usually had True Lake Realm cultivators, making it an attractive prospect for most independent cultivators.

Their sudden good fortune left them bewildered, wondering if Lu Ye was joking.

"Surely, Fellow Daoist is joking," the older man said, unable to fathom why Ziwei Dao Palace would accept independent cultivators.

"Whether I'm joking will be clear soon enough," Lu Ye said, taking a step and soaring into the sky.

Pang Huanyin followed closely behind.

Watching them leave, the older man and the middle-aged man no longer cared about the three-petaled spirit flower. They decided to quickly spread the news.

The independent cultivators on Mount Ao had mutual connections and formed a support network. They wouldn't keep such good news to themselves. It would be common knowledge once Ziwei Dao Palace was established.

Flying low, Pang Huanyin was deep in thought. "Senior Brother, do you want me to recruit those independent cultivators?"

Lu Ye replied, "You aren't native to the Nine Provinces and know little about it. The Righteous Blood Sect is still weak, so recruiting some local cultivators could be beneficial. These independent cultivators have varied backgrounds; some didn't have the aptitude to join a sect, some lost their sect, and some had random opportunities to begin their cultivation. Despite their hardships, most wouldn't miss an opportunity to join a sect. I believe you'll have no trouble assessing their character."

Pang Huanyin nodded. "Though the Unparalleled Continent isn't as prosperous as the Nine Provinces, we've seen plenty of human complexities. I won't let anyone with ulterior motives into the sect."

"Good, keep in mind these independent cultivators can be useful but don't place too much trust in them," Lu Ye advised.

"Understood, Senior Brother. I won't forget."

Suddenly recalling something, she asked, "What do you mean by saying the Dao Palace is 6th grade?"

"That's something you'll need to understand about the grading system for sects here in the Nine Provinces," Lu Ye began explaining what he knew.

Pang Huanyin said, "From what you've told me, our Dao Palace should at best be a 7th grade sect, not 6th."

A 6th grade sect must have True Lake Realm cultivators, which was a basic requirement.

Chapter 854 Haotian City Decree

The evaluation of the grades for various sects and clans in the Nine Provinces cannot be influenced by human intervention; these are judged by Heaven's Augury.

Therefore, when it was initially discovered that Righteous Blood Sect had acquired a cultivator like Lu Ye, the various sects of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge dispatched disciples to hunt him down in the Spirit Stream battlefield. As long as Lu Ye was killed, Righteous Blood Sect would be completely revoked in the upcoming sect grade evaluation.

For this enemy, who had caused severe losses to Ten Thousand Demons Ridge several decades ago, leading several 1st grade sects to downgrade their grades, Ten Thousand Demons Ridge was tremendously wary.

Unfortunately, they ultimately failed. On Golden Light Peak in the Spirit Stream battlefield, Lu Ye achieved fame in a single battle, preserving Righteous Blood Sect thereafter.

The evaluation of a sect's grade involves many rigid standards.

For instance, an upper three grades sect must have a strong cultivator in the Divine Sea Realm!

A middle three grades sect must have a True Lake Realm cultivator stationed!

As for the lower three grades, there must be a certain number of Cloud River Realm cultivators.

However, simply having a Divine Sea Realm cultivator in the sect doesn't automatically make it an upper three grades sect; Heaven's Augury has its own set of evaluation standards.

Take Righteous Blood Sect as an example. Although the sect master was a Divine Sea Realm cultivator, since there were only Lu Ye and Shui Yuan as disciples in the sect, it was merely evaluated as a Ninth Grade sect.

Even now, Righteous Blood Sect hasn't been promoted to the middle three grades, because the overall strength of the sect does not meet the standards of a middle three grades.

Earlier, Lu Ye had told the two independent cultivators that Ziwei Dao Palace should be classified as 6th grade, which was clearly incorrect.

"So you need to advance to the True Lake Realm before establishing your sect!" Lu Ye said, "Sect grade evaluations occur once every three years, with one exception: when a newly emerging sect is establishing itself!"

Pang Huanyin understood: "I see."

"If only you alone advance to the True Lake Realm, it might not be assured. If your Dao Palace can have five people advancing to the True Lake Realm, then it will definitely be classified as 6th grade!"

"What benefits come with a higher grade?" Pang Huanyin asked.

"The most significant benefit concerns the selection of your sect's location in the Spirit Stream battlefield."

Lu Ye then elaborated on the situation in the Spirit Stream battlefield to her.

Pang Huanyin quickly grasped the implications.

The Spirit Stream Realm is the first realm for a cultivator's cultivation, and laying a strong foundation in this realm is essential. If disciples can immerse themselves in an environment rich in Spiritual Energy during this realm, they will undoubtedly gain greater benefits.

If Ziwei Dao Palace wishes to have a lasting heritage in the Nine Provinces, the foundation of its Spirit Stream battlefield location must be solid.

As the most powerful human race cultivator in the Unparalleled Continent, Pang Huanyin is blessed with the Origin of Unparalleled, possessing extraordinary talents. She had long reached the pinnacle of the Cloud River Realm but was hindered by the world's restrictions, unable to touch the threshold of the True Lake Realm.

In the Nine Provinces, it's different. She could already sense the signs of loosening in her bottleneck, so she is confident of advancing to the True Lake Realm in a short time.

As for the five people Lu Ye mentioned...

The number of Cloud River Level 9 cultivators within the Dao Palace is neither small nor large; gathering five people and thinking of ways to help them advance to the True Lake Realm should be feasible.

A 6th grade classification is essentially assured.

Moreover, establishing a sect is not so simple. Even if Pang Huanyin chose the Dao Palace's location now, they would still need to dispatch people to build their sect's foundation.

No matter how efficient the cultivators are, these things would take at least one to two months to complete.

Hence, Dao Palace establishing itself in the Nine Provinces wouldn't be possible for at least one to two months.

This period is enough for Pang Huanyin and other cultivators to advance to the True Lake Realm.

The two flew while conversing.

After half a day, they landed atop a spirit mountaintop; Pang Huanyin mused, "Let's settle here, using this as the center, encompassing the nearby thirty peaks."

The Dao Palace cultivators number around thousands, so thirty peaks should be more than sufficient; moreover, all Dao Palace cultivators are of the Spirit Stream Realm and Cloud River Realm. Once they settle in the Nine Provinces, most of them will enter the Spirit Stream battlefield and the Cloud River battlefield.

"Please inform Sect Master Thang and seek his consent."

Lu Ye nodded: "Let's return, then."

However, this matter likely wouldn't be problematic. Since the sect master appointed Pang Huanyin to freely choose, as long as her demands aren't too excessive, he would probably agree. After all, the numerous spirit mountaintops in Mount Ao remain unused.

Leading Pang Huanyin back to Righteous Peak, Lu Ye didn't see the sect master or even Second Senior Sister.

"Senior Brother, I need to return to the Unparalleled Continent to inform the Dao Palace cultivators here, to prepare in advance, and also select a few individuals to bring over first to advance to the True Lake Realm. I'll require your assistance then."

"It's no problem," Lu Ye nodded.

Pang Huanyin could now freely travel between the Nine Provinces and the Unparalleled Continent using the Righteous Blood Sect's Heaven's Augury Pillar. However, for them to advance to the True Lake Realm, they still needed some elixir pills, which can be consulted with Second Senior Sister. She is now a Divine Sea Realm healer cultivator, and handling the advancement from Cloud River to True Lake would be effortless for her.

Upon thinking, Lu Ye decided not to look for Second Senior Sister's whereabouts, but instead flew towards Bright Heart Peak.

Having already acknowledged Madam Yun as his mentor earlier, he still lacked a formal mentorship ceremony. Now that he had returned, he needed to pay a visit.

However, he was regretfully unable to meet his mentor this time, encountering only Little Butterfly, her doppelganger. After Little Butterfly briefed him, Lu Ye learned that recently his mentor, with the sect master's assistance, had been repairing the Dragon Throne and hadn't appeared for some time.

Regarding the progress of the repair, Little Butterfly didn't know either. Though she is a doppelganger, if the original doesn't share knowledge, she cannot probe the original's thoughts.

Lu Ye detailed the matter concerning Pang Huanyin, requesting Little Butterfly to inform the sect master when she saw him, which Little Butterfly agreed to without hesitation.

Leaving Bright Heart Peak, Lu Ye returned to his Emerald Bamboo Peak.

Only then did he meet Second Senior Sister.

Second Senior Sister was here teaching Hua Ci about healing cultivation, so Lu Ye didn't disturb them.

He originally intended to cultivate to the pinnacle of the Cloud River Realm in the Cloud River battlefield, redesign the Formation in the spirit ground, and then advance to the True Lake Realm, leaving the Cloud River battlefield.

But plans often fail to keep up with changes. The relocation of the Unparalleled Continent caused all cultivators to be expelled from the Cloud River battlefield.

While he could continue waiting for the day the Cloud River battlefield reopened, nobody knew when that day would come.

Upon reconsideration, he had already laid a solid foundation in the spirit ground. When sect disciples entered the spirit ground, there would be wolf packs guarding it, sparing him from worrying too much.

It was better to advance to the True Lake Realm promptly.

Ultimately, cultivation for a cultivator is most critical. He still had plenty of gold-hued spirit fortune sticks, sufficient for his advancement to the True Lake Realm.

With that thought, Lu Ye made a decision.

Yet, just as he prepared to utilize the gold-hued spirit fortune sticks for cultivation, a loud voice suddenly echoed from Righteous Peak: "Members of Righteous Blood Sect, where are you?"

The voice, amplified by spirit force, spread far and wide, likely audible within about thirty miles.

Just as he sat down, set to begin cultivation, Lu Ye's eyebrows furrowed.

Since joining Righteous Blood Sect years ago, he hadn't stayed in the headquarters much, but he had never encountered visitors from other sects here, except once when the dean of the Three Saints Sanctuary confronted the sect master regarding abducted disciples, resulting in a fight.

Lu Ye couldn't help but wonder who dared come to Righteous Blood Sect and shout like this.

The sect master was currently at Bright Heart Peak assisting his mentor with Dragon Throne repairs, evidently unable to appear for a while.

Thoughts swirling, Lu Ye quickly rose, exited the door, and saw Shui Yuan soaring towards Righteous Peak.

Hua Ci, also emerged and looked in the same direction, wearing an expression of confusion similar to Lu Ye.

Elsewhere, Giant Armor was disturbed from his cultivation and appeared.

Although the trio didn't understand what transpired, they simultaneously activated flight techniques, following Shui Yuan.

Moments later, they arrived at Righteous Peak, seeing a young man in silver armor awaiting them.

Seeing the young man's attire, Shui Yuan's brows furrowed; the aura of a Divine Sea Realm cultivator subtly emanated.

The visitor's strength was evidently not at the Divine Sea Realm; he was merely in the True Lake Realm. Feeling Shui Yuan's pressure, his face turned solemn, and he cupped his fists in salute: "Greetings, Senior Sister Shui Yuan!"

Shui Yuan slightly nodded, her expression stern: "What's the matter?"

The young man flipped his hand, revealing a copper token. Holding it high, he declared loudly, "I am Zhao Che from Haotian City Heralds Office, on a mission here. Righteous Blood Sect, accept the order!"

Although Shui Yuan was reluctant, she had to suppress her Divine Sea Realm's pressure before the copper token, saluting solemnly and listening intently.

Zhao Che proclaimed, "The Elder Council orders: Righteous Blood Sect must dispatch at least one disciple within three days to Haotian City for further directives. This must not be neglected. Those who disobey will be killed without mercy!"

Shui Yuan sighed internally, knowing what was inevitable had arrived. She offered her hands: "Shui Yuan of Righteous Blood Sect, I accept the order!"

Zhao Che placed the copper token in her hands, saluting again: "I offer my apologies, Senior Sister. I am merely following orders." Speaking, he glanced at the group behind Shui Yuan, briefly pausing his gaze on Lu Ye before continuing, "Deputy Alliance Leader Pang has done his best, but some things cannot delay too long. The original plan was to wait a bit longer, but unfortunately, due to some changes in the Cloud River battlefield, various checkpoints are on the brink of conflict, forcing this earlier action. Regarding the selection of disciples, please confer with Sect Master Thang, but make sure they arrive in Haotian City within three days!"

His earlier tough stance represented Haotian Alliance, while his current whispered reminder was from his own perspective.

"I understand."

"Farewell!" Zhao Che saluted, soaring into the sky, leaving promptly.

Shui Yuan stood still, grasping the copper token, silent for a while.

Lu Ye and the others were confused but understood from Shui Yuan's demeanor that it involved something she didn't wish to happen.

After a while, Shui Yuan sighed, turned to Lu Ye, Hua Ci, and Giant Armor, saying, "There are some matters I need to discuss with you."

Chapter 855 Bingzhou Guard

Even though that was said, Shui Yuan's expression was very conflicted, and she hesitated to speak for a long time, as if carefully considering her words or having some unspeakable difficulty.

"Second Senior Sister, just say whatever you have to; we are not outsiders," Lu Ye spoke.

Just now he had clearly heard the order Zhao Che transmitted, which required at least one person from the Righteous Blood Sect to head to a place called Haotian City within three days to await instructions.

He did not quite understand why Shui Yuan, someone in the Divine Sea Realm, was so respectfully taking orders from Zhao Che, who was in the True Lake Realm, nor what this Haotian City was. However, the momentary glance Zhao Che had given him made Lu Ye vaguely feel that this matter might have something to do with him.

After hearing Lu Ye's words, Shui Yuan sighed again before she finally spoke: "In the Nine Provinces cultivation world, the Haotian Alliance and the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge have been in opposition for thousands of years; even independent cultivators cannot avoid it."

Independent cultivators have no sect affiliation, but they do have a camp. One could say that any cultivator who possesses a battlefield marking belongs to a camp.

Just like those two independent cultivators Lu Ye encountered at Mount Ao; they were undoubtedly part of the Haotian Alliance camp because if they were from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, they would never have dared to stay at Mount Ao.

"When you were in the Spirit Stream Realm, you fought on the Spirit Stream battlefield with your sect's base as the foundation, contending against enemies from all directions. When you reached the Cloud River Realm, even without a sect base, such confrontations continued," Shui Yuan continued. "Beyond

these two battlefields, the entire Nine Provinces is the true and largest battlefield, though you had never encountered it directly."

"It's not that your cultivation was insufficient, but rather that the old master suppressed this matter. Of course, Deputy Alliance Leader Pang of the Righteousness Sect also played a significant role. Without his intervention, it would have been impossible for the old master to suppress it alone."

Lu Ye frowned, "What's the matter?"

Shui Yuan replied, "Joining the Bingzhou Guard!"

"Bingzhou Guard?"

"In the land of the Nine Provinces, there are nine provincial states: Tianzhou, Qingzhou, Bingzhou, Leizhou, Dingzhou, Yunzhou, Wuzhou, Youzhou, and Cangzhou. Among these, Tianzhou is in the center, while the other eight states are at the extremities and have borders with one other. Qingzhou, Wuzhou, and Cangzhou belong to the Haotian Alliance, while Yunzhou, Leizhou, and Youzhou belong to the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge. Tianzhou, Dingzhou, and our Bingzhou have no complete affiliation and have always been contested regions between the two camps."

In the great hall, Shui Yuan's voice echoed softly as the three of them listened intently.

They were unaware of these matters before. Lu Ye only knew the names of the nine provincial states but never knew that Bingzhou was a battleground between the two major camps, nor did he know about the other states' affiliations.

This was primarily because he had little contact with the elements native to the Nine Provinces.

Before joining the Righteous Blood Sect, he was a mining slave in the Evil Moon Valley, struggling daily to survive, with no time or channel to concern himself with the world's grand scheme.

After joining the Righteous Blood Sect, he had spent ninety percent of his time in the Spirit Stream battlefield or the Cloud River battlefield, rarely returning to the sect, and even then only briefly.

Take, for example, the time he accompanied Pang Huanyin to tour Mount Ao; he did not even know the scope of Mount Ao's territory and had to ask an independent cultivator for information.

As he told Pang Huanyin, that was his first time leaving Righteous Peak's thirty-mile range.

He had only just managed to understand the situation at Mount Ao.

It wasn't that he was ignorant but that the Righteous Blood Sect was unique, and he had no senior brothers or sisters around to impart such common knowledge regularly.

In other sects of the Nine Provinces, there were many disciples at all levels, with many events occurring that allowed the disciples to learn about these things indirectly, even without personal experience.

That was not the case for Lu Ye; he had to experience things firsthand or rely on explanations like Shui Yuan's to gain insights.

Listening to Shui Yuan, Lu Ye now understood that out of the nine provincial states, six were completely controlled by the two camps, with Bingzhou, the home of the Righteous Blood Sect, being one of the three contested by both.

"The Haotian Alliance is a collective term; all those from this camp are Haotian Alliance cultivators. However, the Nine Provinces is vast, and Haotian Alliance cultivators are numerous, so coordinating such a massive entity is difficult. Hence, each provincial state has its provincial guard! For instance, we have the Bingzhou Guard, and Qingzhou has the Qingzhou Guard. The Ten Thousand Demons Ridge has a similar arrangement."

"Where do the provincial guards come from? Naturally, they are conscripted from various sects and family clans. Every sect or family established in the Nine Provinces has a responsibility to provide soldiers to the provincial guard, and our Righteous Blood Sect is no exception; both the sect master and I serve in the Bingzhou Guard."

Hearing this, Lu Ye basically understood, "So the Bingzhou Guard is demanding that we send someone within three days?"

Shui Yuan nodded, "The number of disciples in a sect varies, so the number of conscripts for the provincial guard varies accordingly. For sects with many disciples, more conscripts are required, while for those with fewer disciples, fewer are needed. Generally, a sect must provide soldiers from the Cloud River Realm to the True Lake Realm to the Divine Sea Realm in proportion to its size to contribute to the provincial guard, to guard Bingzhou and prevent it from falling into the hands of the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge."

On this, Lu Ye agreed, "Since we benefit from Bingzhou's protection, we should certainly do our part."

"Given our unique situation at the Righteous Blood Sect, it was just the master and me before you joined, so the Bingzhou Guard did not require much from our sect. With Deputy Alliance Leader Pang's support, the master and I only had to spare some time to take turns going over there. Do you remember Evil Moon Valley?"

"I'll never forget it."

"That was when the master was carrying out a task from the Bingzhou Guard."

Lu Ye nodded understandingly.

"Compared to a few years ago, our sect now has more disciples, and with the three of you reaching the Cloud River Realm, it's indeed time to send people to the Bingzhou Guard. In fact, this matter was brought up when you just advanced to the Cloud River Realm. However, you know the master; he is not someone to be easily offended. With his opposition and Deputy Alliance Leader Pang's support, the matter was delayed."

Lu Ye squinted slightly, "It sounds like someone is eager for me to join the Bingzhou Guard."

Joining the Bingzhou Guard to protect the Haotian Alliance's line in Bingzhou is evidently more dangerous than cultivating on the Cloud River battlefield.

The enemies the Bingzhou Guard faces aren't only from the same realm as oneself; they might encounter strong cultivators from the True Lake or even the Divine Sea Realms, depending on luck.

The sect master's opposition and Deputy Alliance Leader Pang's covert support were forms of protection for him.

Lu Ye was curious about who was so intent on monitoring him, a mere Cloud River Realm cultivator. Such a person would have notable strength and status.

Shui Yuan did not give an answer, either because she didn't know or didn't want to say, and instead continued, "Because of a war thirty years ago, many sects in the Nine Provinces look down on us."

Lu Ye did not know the details of the war from thirty years ago, only that his senior brother made a grave mistake, resulting in the deaths of strong cultivators who followed him and causing unimaginable losses to many sects.

The senior brother was gone, but the Righteous Blood Sect remained, naturally becoming a target of resentment.

However, the Righteous Blood Sect also had many friends. When Lu Ye was being hunted on the Spirit Stream battlefield, many strangers acted on their sects' orders to protect him, allowing him to reach Golden Light Peak and meet the senior sister and Fourth Senior Brother.

"Now, with issues arising on the Cloud River battlefield, all Cloud River Realm cultivators are being expelled. Many are flooding into contested areas, likely prompting Deputy Alliance Leader Pang to relent and allowing the Elder Council of Haotian City to issue the order."

"What must come, will come. Second Senior Sister, don't worry; I'll accept the order!" Lu Ye said.

Earlier, he had been wondering where to cultivate after leaving the Cloud River battlefield. As it turned out, he needn't bother himself; others had arranged his path.

Perhaps with less than honorable intentions, this situation was unavoidable and delaying it any longer had reached the limit.

Moreover, Lu Ye himself did not reject it.

From the Spirit Stream Realm, he had been battling cultivators from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, confronting their targeting continuously. Having weathered many storms, joining the Bingzhou Guard and continuing the fight was nothing new to him.

"I'm going too!"

Giant Armor abruptly rumbled.

"Let's go together," Hua Ci smiled faintly.

The order required at least one person, but there was no upper limit, so three companions were certainly acceptable and would be welcomed by the Bingzhou Guard.

"You two shouldn't go. We know nothing about the situation there. Let me scout first and establish myself; then you can join later," Lu Ye insisted.

Someone eager for him to join the Bingzhou Guard likely had ill intentions. He could be more flexible alone, but bringing Giant Armor and Hua Ci would complicate matters.

Having cultivated nonstop, he had only experienced the two battlefields and had yet to explore the Nine Provinces. This was a perfect opportunity to see the true splendor of the Nine Provinces.

Compared to the battlefields, the Nine Provinces were the true stage for cultivators, much more expansive.

Giant Armor shook his head.

Lu Ye stared, "It's decided then!"

Shaking his head was futile. He turned to Hua Ci, "You can't go either!"

Hua Ci pouted.

Shui Yuan chuckled, "Don't think joining the Bingzhou Guard is a chore; there are some benefits."

Lu Ye's curiosity was piqued, "What benefits?"

Chapter 856 Departure

"Joining the Bingzhou Guard comes with a monthly salary that varies according to your rank. That salary isn't given as elixirs or Spirit Stones, but... as battle merit!" Shui Yuan began to explain.

Lu Ye raised an eyebrow!

Battle merit—these two words held immense appeal to cultivators in the Nine Provinces because it could be directly exchanged for spirit fortune sticks from the Heaven's Augury treasure vault. This was one of the ways for cultivators to rapidly enhance their cultivation.

And it was distributed as a monthly salary. In other words, by joining the Bingzhou Guard, one would earn battle merit every month. Just this alone made countless cultivators from the Nine Provinces eager to join the guard.

With this as an incentive, the Bingzhou Guard didn't need to draw people from the major sects. Cultivators from various sects and families, regardless of size, would actively choose to join the Bingzhou Guard once their cultivation reached a certain level.

The situation for the Righteous Blood Sect was a bit unique. Lu Ye had never even known about the Bingzhou Guard before, so he hadn't considered this option.

"The monthly salary is just the beginning. Completing tasks for the Bingzhou Guard or killing enemies in wartime can also earn you battle merit."

"That sounds quite advantageous."

"Indeed, the Bingzhou Guard isn't just made up of Cloud River Realm cultivators. Many Spirit Stream Realm cultivators also join. Some disciples from various sects prepare in advance and join the Bingzhou Guard while still in the Spirit Stream Realm to earn battle merit for their future plans."

Of course, Spirit Stream Realm cultivators didn't have high combat abilities and their self-defense capabilities were limited. Even if they joined the Bingzhou Guard, they wouldn't be assigned to highly dangerous tasks. Most of them would stay in one place and cooperate with higher-realm cultivators to defend against outside enemies. They wouldn't stay long either, usually returning to the Spirit Stream battlefield after earning some battle merit.

Relative to the Spirit Stream battlefield, the Bingzhou Guard was more dangerous, but the amount of battle merit they could earn was unmatched.

The more Lu Ye listened to Shui Yuan's descriptions of the Bingzhou Guard, the more excited he became. He had no aversion to joining the guard previously, and now he even looked forward to it.

However, he also understood that once he joined the Bingzhou Guard, his days wouldn't be as carefree as on the Cloud River battlefield.

So far, whether in the Spirit Stream battlefield or the Cloud River battlefield, the enemies Lu Ye had encountered were always at the same cultivation level. But in the Bingzhou Guard, he would face not just similarly ranked cultivators but also those in the True Lake Realm and Divine Sea Realm, who were active on the front lines of the two opposing camps.

"Do you feel confident in ascending to the True Lake Realm within three days?" Shui Yuan asked.

Lu Ye shook his head, "I just ascended to the Level 9, and I'm still a ways from the True Lake Realm."

He had enough gold-hued spirit fortune sticks, but the time was too short, and three days wouldn't be enough.

"That's unfortunate," Shui Yuan remarked.

If Lu Ye could ascend to the True Lake Realm before joining the Bingzhou Guard, his self-defense capabilities would improve significantly. Moreover, every Bingzhou Guard member had a position, and the higher the cultivation, the higher the initial position and the more substantial the monthly salary.

The treatment of a Cloud River Level 9 and a True Lake Realm cultivator was vastly different.

Fortunately, Lu Ye wasn't too far from the True Lake Realm at this point.

"Second Senior Sister, I want to know how to cultivate after I ascend to the True Lake Realm. The natural spiritual energy in the Nine Provinces isn't that dense, and it's not even comparable to the Spirit Stream battlefield. Wouldn't cultivating by absorbing natural spiritual energy be too inefficient?"

He normally didn't rely primarily on absorbing natural spiritual energy to cultivate. But if the energy were dense enough, it would certainly enhance his cultivation efficiency.

Understanding how True Lake Realm and Divine Sea Realm cultivators in the Nine Provinces cultivated was something he needed to figure out. Initially, he planned to ask his Second Senior Sister this question after his advancement. But with the transfer order from Haotian City in three days, he might not have another chance to ask her in person for a while.

He took this opportunity to understand, with Hua Ci and Giant Armor listening in as well.

"Cultivating beyond the True Lake Realm involves a significant consumption..." Shui Yuan explained slowly.

Lu Ye and the others listened intently and finally understood how True Lake Realm cultivators cultivated.

Silently awed, Lu Ye previously only knew that cultivation beyond the True Lake Realm required extensive resources, but the specifics were unclear.

It wasn't until now that he understood!

Now he realized why Shui Yuan had remained at the True Lake Realm for so long. Despite her considerable talent, she couldn't advance until Lu Ye brought back a large amount of resources for the Righteous Blood Sect, which allowed Shui Yuan to break through to the Divine Sea Realm.

It was all due to the lack of resources at the Righteous Blood Sect.

Before Lu Ye came, the entire sect had only Shui Yuan and the sect master. Even if they served in the Bingzhou Guard and received a monthly salary, it was still far from enough for their cultivation needs.

So before he left, Lu Ye needed to prepare thoroughly.

Shui Yuan continued explaining many aspects of the Bingzhou Guard to Lu Ye, who noted everything down carefully. Her accumulated experience could be of great help to him.

Shui Yuan only stopped talking when night fell.

She had said everything she needed. The fledgling had to leave the nest and soar into the sky someday. The sect master previously hesitated to let Lu Ye join the Bingzhou Guard too early because of the sect's sparse members and Lu Ye's safety.

But as Lu Ye's cultivation improved, he would eventually have to take this step.

It was inevitable.

Hua Ci and Giant Armor returned to Emerald Bamboo Peak, while Lu Ye followed Shui Yuan to the Righteous Blood Sect's treasure vault.

Soon after, he found himself before the Heaven's Augury Pillar, connecting his mind to the Heaven's Augury treasure vault. He sold a large amount of resources taken from the sect's treasure vault to the Heaven's Augury treasure vault.

His merit points skyrocketed dramatically.

Two Shichen later, Lu Ye emerged from the Heaven's Augury Hall, swiftly heading to Emerald Bamboo Peak.

He entered his bamboo tower and sat down cross-legged. Amber and Yiyi were nowhere to be seen, with the former at Giant Armor's place and the latter with Hua Ci.

Lu Ye held a ten-part map, searching for the location of Haotian City.

The ten-part map, which he had just bought from the Heaven's Augury treasure vault, detailed the entire Nine Provinces. It was quite expensive but well worth it, an indispensable item for future travels.

The map showed the Nine Provinces divided into nine major territories, corresponding to the nine provincial states.

Qingzhou, Wuzhou, and Cangzhou were marked in blue. As Shui Yuan had said, these three states were under the control of the Haotian Alliance.

Yunzhou, Leizhou, and Youzhou were marked in red.

Meanwhile, Tianzhou, Bingzhou, and Dingzhou were marked in both red and blue, indicating contested areas between the two camps.

A quick glance and the corroboration with Shui Yuan's previous explanations gave Lu Ye a basic understanding of the overall situation in the Nine Provinces.

In Bingzhou, the areas of red and blue interaction were marked with twelve checkpoints, like towering mountains, forming the front line of the Haotian Alliance's defense.

These were the 12 Checkpoints of Bingzhou, each guarded by a vast number of cultivators.

Beyond these twelve checkpoints stood a grand city—Haotian City.

This city served as the central hub of the Bingzhou Guard. All orders and decisions related to warfare originated here. Zhao Che, who had appeared earlier, belonged to the Heralds Office in Haotian City.

Haotian City also hosted an Elder Council, headed by Pang Zhen of the Righteousness Sect, and comprised of Divine Sea cultivators from various major sects in Bingzhou.

The sect master Thang Yifeng was actually a member of the Elder Council. He was eligible to reside in Haotian City as a decision-maker, but he had never involved himself in these affairs.

Because of the disastrous war decades ago, the Righteous Blood Sect's reputation plummeted, and many strong cultivators from various sects resented them. Considering this, the sect master never sought recognition.

All these years, despite being an elder of the council, he had never participated in any decision-making, focusing solely on following orders, so low-key that the world almost forgot about him.

If not for Lu Ye's sudden rise, which made the sect master see hope for the Righteous Blood Sect's resurgence, he wouldn't have changed his understated approach.

Now, his dignified image was almost completely shattered, and the mere mention of Thang's name sent shivers down the spines of the major sects in Bingzhou.

Lu Ye's task now was to report to Haotian City within three days, join the Bingzhou Guard, get assigned a position, and see which checkpoint he would be dispatched to.

This wasn't something he could decide; he could only resign himself to fate.

However, it was evident that someone in Haotian City had their eye on him. As soon as a problem arose on the Cloud River battlefield, the transfer order was issued, suggesting high efficiency.

Therefore, Lu Ye knew that he wouldn't be given an easy task in the Bingzhou Guard.

Overthinking was pointless; focusing on improving his cultivation was crucial. Though time was tight, it was still enough for him to use a gold-hued spirit fortune stick.

Calling back Yiyi and Amber, Lu Ye crushed a gold-hued spirit fortune stick and began his cultivation.

After one night, the spirit fortune stick's effect was exhausted. Rising to his feet, Lu Ye stepped outside.

"Time to set off!" he whispered softly, ascending into the sky.

There was no need for farewells; they would meet again one day. Partings and reunions among cultivators were perfectly normal.

On Righteous Peak, Shui Yuan opened her eyes, gazing into the distance toward where Lu Ye had left, and slowly stood up.

On Bright Heart Peak, two figures stood—Thang Yifeng and Madam Yun.

"Have you found out who it was?" Madam Yun's voice was icy cold.

With the transfer order, even Lu Ye sensed someone was watching him. How couldn't Madam Yun sense it?

Although she and the sect master had been busy repairing the Dragon Throne, they were still aware of external matters. For powerful Divine Sea cultivators like them, nothing within a hundred miles could escape their senses.

The sect master shook his head, "Just a vague idea. It's nothing more than those few families."

"Does it involve the Loyal Heart Sect?"

"It shouldn't. Though the Loyal Heart Sect has separated from us, they wouldn't resort to such actions."

"Hmph, I don't care who it is. If anyone dares to harm my disciple, I will make them pay in blood!"

"They are acting within the rules..."

"I care not for rules. I have only one disciple, and if anything happens to him, others will not live!"

Chapter 857 Flood Disaster

The sect master was speechless but knew that Madam Yun wasn't just speaking in anger; she was truly capable of following through.

Protecting one's own was not solely the prerogative of the Righteous Blood Sect. Decades ago, the name Yun Xuechu had spread throughout the Nine Provinces. Countless top sects attempted to recruit her, but she refused them all. Though she now belonged to no specific sect, the network of contacts she had built over the years was unimaginable.

If she got angry, even Pang Zhen would have to weigh his actions carefully...

"Once the Dragon Throne is repaired, you'll head to Haotian City. Since you are a member of the Elder Council, at least make some insignificant contributions!"

"Alright!" The sect master nodded.

He had no desire for power struggles and conflicts, but the Righteous Blood Sect had developed to the point where disciples joining the Bingzhou guard had become a trend. Today there was Lu Ye; in the future, there would be many more. With him in the Elder Council, while he couldn't offer special treatment to his disciples, he could ensure they weren't bullied.

Even if Madam Yun hadn't mentioned it, he had already been considering this.

Now that Shui Yuan had advanced to the Divine Sea Realm, she was capable of bearing the major responsibilities of the sect. He could leave with peace of mind.

...

Even though Lu Ye had traveled far and wide through the Spirit Stream battlefield and Cloud River battlefield, enduring numerous storms and thrills, leaving the Righteous Blood Sect and heading to Haotian City this time still gave him a sense of departure for the first time.

He felt both anticipation and excitement, mingled with a sense of reluctance.

The spirit ark skimmed across the sky, overlooking the beautiful landscapes below.

With his current speed, arriving at Haotian City would take just over two days; if he utilized Wings and Move-Like-The-Wind without considering the cost, he could get there even faster.

The ten-part map guiding his way ensured he wouldn't get lost.

He moved forward, gradually leaving Mount Ao behind.

Half a day later, as Lu Ye sat leisurely on the spirit ark, a burst of exclamations and cries arose from below.

"Lu Ye, it looks like there's been a flood below!" said Yiyi, who was steering the spirit ark.

Lu Ye quickly stood up and looked down. He saw flooding on the ground, with a small village completely submerged. Most of the houses had collapsed under the impact of the flood, while the few sturdy ones only had their roofs visible above the water.

From afar, he could see some people standing on the roofs, fragile and helpless.

Cries for help, children's sobs, and waves of sorrow echoed.

"Rescue them!" Lu Ye quickly withdrew the spirit ark and plunged downward.

On the Spirit Stream battlefield and Cloud River battlefield, he mostly encountered cultivators.

Yet in the Nine Provinces, a vast number of mortals lived, and it was their short lives, plagued with sickness and disasters, that formed the foundation for the cultivator community.

Faced with such a flood, a cultivator could easily escape, but for mortals, such a natural disaster was insurmountable!

Towns and villages under the protection of a sect would receive its assistance during disasters.

In the Righteous Blood Sect's domain, there were indeed many mortals, even cities, living under the sect's protection. However, with the sect in previous decline, there weren't enough people to patrol the territories and help mortals withstand calamities.

As a result, over the past decades, many mortals had migrated away from the Righteous Blood Sect's territory. This was also why the sect master liked to steal people at others' ceremonial recruitments.

With a sparse population in his own territory, few had cultivation aptitude.

Lu Ye didn't know which sect governed this area, but with the sudden flood, it would take time for the sect's cultivators to arrive.

Having encountered it, he couldn't just stand by.

"Nine Arrays Diagram!" Lu Ye shouted. Yiyi quickly retrieved the Nine Arrays Diagram and tossed it to him. Lu Ye grabbed it and held it tightly.

This village wasn't highly populated, but it had dozens of families who were now engulfed by the flood, their lives hanging in the balance. He and Yiyi alone couldn't save them all; they needed the power of the Nine Arrays Diagram.

This artifact could trap and rescue people, making it perfect for this situation.

It required ongoing spirit force to sustain the Nine Arrays Diagram.

"Mother! Father!" A ten-year-old boy cried from the treetop, not seeing any sign of his parents. Having honed his tree-climbing skills saved him from being swept away by the flood.

A sudden gust of wind above drew the boy's gaze upward. He saw a figure plummet from the high sky, followed by a device covering him from above. His vision went black, and upon regaining his senses, he found himself in a rocky forest.

The boy was helpless and terrified, though he knew he'd been rescued by a cultivator. But where was he now?

As he stood there, confused and dazed, an old man appeared suddenly beside him, shivering from having been submerged.

Seeing the old man, the boy ran over, "Grandpa Chen!"

"Erniu!" The elderly man coughed lightly.

"Grandpa Chen, have you seen my parents? Where is this place?"

"Your parents... don't worry, Qingquan Sect cultivators have come to save us. This place is safe." The elderly man comforted the child.

He didn't know where they were either, mistaking Lu Ye for a Qingquan Sect cultivator, for common folk couldn't understand the means of cultivators.

More and more people appeared in this rocky area. Suddenly, Erniu shouted with joy, "Mom, Dad!"

He ran towards them, finally reuniting with his lost parents.

The couple, having just escaped, wept with joy upon seeing their son, hugging him tightly lest they lose him again.

Lu Ye's figure moved swiftly, collecting struggling people from the flood into the Nine Arrays Diagram. Yiyi and Amber were also helping, constantly rescuing villagers and sending them to Lu Ye's location.

However, those rescued by Amber were significantly more scared. Amber's wide, bloody mouth grabbed their clothes, a terrifying sight not easily endured. Among those Amber saved, over half were frightened unconscious. Those who remained awake punched and kicked Amber, causing it considerable distress.

Within a few dozen breaths, Lu Ye had rescued all the villagers he could see. As for those out of sight, they were likely beyond saving.

At that moment, several streaks of light rushed over from a distance. The leading figure called out, "Which Fellow Daoist is helping? The Qingquan Sect is deeply grateful!"

This was Qingquan Sect territory. These cultivators were Qingquan Sect members patrolling nearby. Upon learning of the sudden flood, they immediately informed the sect and rushed over, witnessing Lu Ye's rescue efforts from afar.

The cultivators approached Lu Ye.

The leader was of Cloud River Realm cultivation, while the others were Spirit Stream Realm.

Upon getting close and seeing Lu Ye's face, the leader exclaimed, "You are... Fellow Daoist Lu Yiye of the Righteous Blood Sect?"

Having paid special attention to Lu Ye, likely having seen his image, he recognized him at a glance.

Lu Ye nodded, holding the Nine Arrays Diagram and sustaining it with spirit force.

He had no desire for conversation and looked distantly. A city appeared in his field of view, directly in the flood's path. The floodwaters were less than ten miles from the city!

The mortals, unable to see as far as cultivators, busied themselves, unaware of the impending disaster.

The city wasn't large but housed at least tens of thousands. Lu Ye could save the village's survivors alone, but saving the entire city was impossible.

The Qingquan Sect cultivators also saw this; their leader's expression changed, "This is bad!"

Such a calamity rendered even a Cloud River Realm cultivator powerless.

Though they had contacted the sect, it would take time for reinforcements to arrive.

"You must warn the town and evacuate the people. I'll check the source," Lu Ye said, handing the Nine Arrays Diagram to Yiyi. With a burst of fiery wings and Move-Like-The-Wind's speed, he shot towards the flood's origin like a flame streak.

Given the circumstances, solving the problem at its source was the only way to save the city.

Watching Lu Ye depart, the Qingquan Sect disciples quickly came to their senses, reporting the situation to their sect while heading towards the town.

Soon, the peaceful town turned chaotic.

Elsewhere, on high ground, holding the Nine Arrays Diagram, Yiyi arrived and released the rescued villagers. "Stay here and wait for Qingquan Sect to settle you," she instructed.

After her words, she mounted Amber and sped towards Lu Ye's direction.

Among the rescued, two men watched Yiyi leave with complex feelings.

"Brother, was that Lu Ye earlier?" one of them asked softly.

The other remained silent.

"He's become so powerful after all these years." The first man sighed. Back in Evil Moon Valley, as mining slaves, they had several conflicts with Lu Ye and were severely punished.

Who would've thought, in just a few years, Lu Ye would become so strong, while the two brothers, lacking aptitude, couldn't join any sect and were placed here by the Haotian Alliance, doomed to a mundane life.

"Each person has their fate. What's the point in dwelling on it?" Though years couldn't erase a person's edge entirely, the brothers had accepted their lack of cultivation aptitude.

"Yes, each has their fate." They recalled Lu Ye rescuing them, seemingly not recognizing them, likely having forgotten them.

After embarking on his cultivation journey, their paths had diverged.

Chapter 858 Water Demon Creates Havoc

Following the direction of the flood's source, Lu Ye forged ahead, with Wings and Move-Like-The-Wind boosting his speed to the limit.

Finally, he saw the origin from afar.

It was a large river, but a section of the embankment had collapsed, creating a breach through which a massive amount of water surged out.

Lu Ye flashed to the breach; the fiery wings behind him gradually retracted. With a quick glance, he promptly summoned array banners.

The breach was quite extensive, and with the turbulent water alone, it was impossible for him to block it single-handedly. To seal this breach, he needed to rely on the power of an array.

This task wasn't particularly difficult for him.

He always kept various array banners in his storage space.

As he channeled his spirit force, one banner after another was driven out, embedding like nails in the breach caused by the flood. The resonance between many banners quickly sketched out the outline of the big array.

Continued infusement of spirit force made the array's outline increasingly solid. Moreover, a core spirit rune rapidly emerged at the center of the array.

It was the Defense Spirit Rune.

Using the Defense Spirit Rune as the core, the constructed protective array was extremely solid and would serve well to replace the embankment in blocking the surging flood.

However, the current environment wasn't suitable for the array to be maintained for long because this array was crafted by Lu Ye in mid-air, and its maintaining force came from his own spirit force. If he stopped, the array would collapse in a short time.

Unless there was a suitable place to anchor Spirit Stones, using their power to replace his own spirit force.

But where could an in-air array have a place to anchor Spirit Stones?

It wasn't a significant issue; he just needed to buy some time. Whether anyone from the Qingquan Sect came to help, he could figure out a way to permanently seal the breach and thus eliminate the flood threat.

Everything went smoothly, but right before the Defense Spirit Rune was fully formed, something whip-like suddenly surged from the tumultuous flood, reaching directly for Lu Ye.

The water churned, waves crashed, and even Lu Ye's strong mental perception didn't catch this attack at the last moment.

Facing such an assault, Lu Ye's first reaction wasn't to resist or dodge but to fiercely channel spirit force into the newly forming array.

Next instant, his waist tightened as the whip-like thing wrapped around him.

Amber flew urgently, and as Yiyi saw from the distance that Lu Ye was dragged into the water by something, she exclaimed, "Lu Ye!"

Amber accelerated suddenly, but by the time it reached the spot where Lu Ye had vanished, there was no trace of him, only the huge dispersing waves.

Amber let out a low growl, while Yiyi dived into the water, searching for Lu Ye.

Underwater conditions were extremely complex, and though she plunged in nearly right after Lu Ye, there was no trace of him below; she was anxious beyond measure.

At that moment, strong spirit force fluctuations emanated from a certain direction. She turned to see a flash of crimson light.

That was Lu Ye's blade aura!

Overjoyed, she quickly swam towards it.

Before she got close, she sensed that Lu Ye was fighting something, and from its aura, it was clearly not human but a demon beast!

Yiyi suddenly realized that this flood was not a natural disaster but was caused by a monster!

In the Nine Provinces, there were many kinds of monsters. Some demon beasts had spiritual intelligence and understood human nature, knowing better than to provoke cultivators for fear of being hunted down.

But some monsters were different. Their intelligence was rudimentary, still driven by primal instincts, completely unaware of what cultivators were.

That's why every sect had cultivators patrolling their territory, mainly to guard against such monsters.

This was clearly a water demon. It had destroyed the embankment, causing today's flood.

Lu Ye had come to seal the breach, only to become its target.

Yiyi was anxious because the strength of such unintelligent monsters was unpredictable; some were formidable, others feeble. If Lu Ye encountered a strong monster underwater, he might not be its match.

As she thought this, the crimson blade light faded, and she saw Lu Ye's blurry figure rushing towards the surface.

Overjoyed, Yiyi hurriedly followed.

Breaking the surface, she saw Lu Ye hovering in mid-air, holding a monster that looked like a monkey but was different. This one had sleek fur, a long tail, fearsome tusks curling from its mouth, and a fierce expression.

But now that fierce visage had turned deathly. A clear wound ran through its body, blood trickling through its fur.

Lu Ye casually tossed the monster to Amber beside him.

The demon beast at a Demon General level had a demonic pill.

This monkey-like water monster was indeed formidable. An average Cloud River Level 9 cultivator might not have subdued it so quickly; a prolonged struggle would be inevitable. Being underwater causes a significant reduction in a cultivator's strength.

Recalling the recent combat, Lu Ye felt there was little chance to fully exert his strength.

It seemed... he needed to save battle merits to buy a treasure from the Hall of Battle Merits. Without it, he couldn't maximize his power in similar situations. This time the opponent wasn't too strong, but he could suffer against a more formidable foe in the future.

Feeling the urgency, Lu Ye quickly dashed back towards the array he had set up.

He had channeled spirit force into it just before being pulled underwater, barely maintaining it. But it wouldn't last long, and without ongoing support, his efforts would be in vain.

With Lu Ye's spirit force sustaining it, the precarious array finally stabilized.

By using the array to cut off the flood's source, the flood could be controlled. While some mortals had suffered, the impact would not be too severe, and at least the small town he had seen earlier wouldn't be submerged.

After an incense stick's time, a streak of light rushed over from the distance, its aura strong, clearly a True Lake Realm cultivator.

It was likely a Qingquan Sect cultivator who had received a disciple's message and rushed to investigate.

Seeing the scene from afar, the cultivator was astonished. As he drew closer, he marveled, "An array formed in mid-air!"

Even more surprising was that the spirit force fluctuation from Lu Ye indicated he was only in the Cloud River Level 9, far from the True Lake Realm.

Such cultivation and Array Path skills were beyond imagination.

He noticed the array had become a barrier, containing the flood but treating the symptoms rather than the cause. The breach in the embankment still needed to be sealed.

"Yuen Chou of Qingquan Sect greets this Junior Brother. Many thanks for your righteous help. Dare I ask, from which sect do you hail?"

Given his age and cultivation, calling Lu Ye 'Junior Brother' was natural.

His inquiry suggested he believed Lu Ye came from a top-tier big sect given his cultivation and Array Path expertise.

"Lu Ye of Righteous Blood Sect!"

"Righteous Blood Sect!" Yuen Chou was slightly surprised, realizing, "So it's Junior Brother Lu."

Seeing he had more to say, Lu Ye quickly interrupted, "Senior Brother Yuen, please figure out how to seal this breach."

Startled, Yuen Chou responded apologetically, "Junior Brother, give me a moment!"

He swiftly dashed away, returning with large stones which he submerged.

After repeating this several times, the breach's situation finally stabilized.

Returning one last time, Yuen Chou saw Lu Ye was gone. Looking up, he saw only a streak of light disappearing at the horizon.

"Righteous Blood Sect, they indeed have a good disciple!" Yuen Chou mused. He had known of Lu Ye when he joined Righteous Blood Sect, preventing its downfall. Though as a True Lake Realm cultivator, he hadn't paid much mind to Lu Ye then.

In just a few short years, Lu Ye had reached Cloud River Level 9, nearing True Lake Realm, with exceptional Array Path skills, provoking envy.

Indeed, the best disciples were always someone else's.

Figures arrived from afar, landing beside Yuen Chou, saluting him with "Master Uncle" and "Senior Brother"—all Qingquan Sect cultivators arriving after receiving the news.

Lu Ye had thought to stem the flood at its source, an idea they too considered, but Yuen Chou, with the highest cultivation, arrived first.

"Senior Brother, who set up this array?" a cultivator of similar age to Yuen Chou asked in surprise. He knew his senior brother wasn't skilled in Array Path; forming such an in-air array required high proficiency.

"A disciple from Righteous Blood Sect named Lu Ye did. He was a tremendous help." Yuen Chou explained, "This array won't last long. Let's seal the breach first."

Despite his makeshift attempts with large stones, they had gaps, so a thorough sealing was essential.

A group of cultivators set to work, quickly solving the issue, letting the array collapse naturally.

"Senior Brother, look." The cultivator, who had spoken earlier, brought over a tattered corpse, showing it to Yuen Chou.

Upon inspection, Yuen Chou recognized it as a Demon General-level water demon, recently slain, with its demonic pill removed.

"Was this water demon causing the trouble?" Yuen Chou realized, finally understanding why the embankment had abruptly failed. Qingquan Sect disciples patrolled diligently, especially the river embankments, to avoid such disasters.

Seeing the water demon made it all clear.

Chapter 859 Terrifying Upon Close Reflection

"Who is responsible for patrolling this area?" Yuen Chou scanned the crowd with his eyes.

A Cloud River Realm cultivator stepped out of the crowd, cupping his fists, and said, "Master Uncle, it is I."

"From now on, you must patrol more thoroughly. Such incidents must not happen again."

"Understood!" the cultivator responded but seemed hesitant to say more.

Yuen Chou frowned, "If you have something to say, speak up."

The cultivator said, "Master Uncle, I am always extremely careful and cautious during my patrols, especially in the water, not daring to miss anything. Only yesterday, I patrolled this section of the waterway, and there was nothing unusual."

"No need to make excuses," Yuen Chou reprimanded in a stern voice, "The water demons are often skilled at hiding. It is normal for you to miss something. Now that this demon has appeared here and destroyed the dam, it is your fault. It cannot be that someone deliberately placed the demon here to harm the mortals under the control of the Qingquan Sect. If not for that Righteous Blood Sect disciple, Lou City, fifty miles away, would have been in grave danger, and tens of thousands of mortals would have..."

At this point, Yuen Chou's expression suddenly changed. He glanced in the direction Lu Ye had departed.

Lu Ye was already at Cloud River Level 9 cultivation. The direction he was heading... should be toward Haotian City.

Is he heading to Haotian City in response to an order?

As far as Yuen Chou knew, once the order was given, the time limit would not be extended. Once it exceeded the limit, there would be no leniency. The provincial guards in each state acted with military discipline, and an order was as unchangeable as a mountain. If Lu Ye did not arrive at Haotian City within the time limit, even a deity could not save him!

Yuen Chou had only spoken casually earlier, but what if... someone really did place this water demon here deliberately?

The timing was too coincidental. As soon as Lu Ye arrived nearby, the flood broke out. He was here to seal the source and was likely ambushed by the water demon...

Although the water demon was dead, Yuen Chou could still tell that it was at the Demon General level, enough to cause considerable trouble for a Cloud River Realm cultivator, yet it would not take his life.

"Senior Brother?" a Qingquan Sect cultivator called softly, not knowing what Yuen Chou was thinking.

"Nothing," Yuen Chou collected his thoughts and dared not think anymore. Some things simply could not withstand scrutiny; the more you think about them, the more terrifying they become.

He hoped he was just overthinking.

Leaving that river, Lu Ye continued on his journey.

From dawn to dusk, he did not stop. It was not until the middle of the night that he finally descended, casually finding a spot in the deep mountains and ancient forests to set up an array for four-way vigilance, resting and adjusting himself.

An hour later, just as Lu Ye was about to set out again, the sound of something breaking through the air entered his ears. It seemed someone was passing nearby.

Lu Ye looked up and saw, in the moonlight, a man in black clothes swiftly moving past not far away.

The man in black looked anxious, as if some danger was closing in behind him.

Moreover, the spirit force fluctuations emanating from this person were at the True Lake Realm level.

Indeed, danger was approaching. Just as Lu Ye saw the man in black, a stern shout came from afar, "Where do you think you're going?!"

The shout was accompanied by the sound of a sword, with sword light dancing wildly.

The man in black was clearly fleeing. He probably did not want to involve Lu Ye initially, but sensing the relentless killing intent behind him, he gritted his teeth and dashed straight towards Lu Ye.

Lu Ye had no idea what was happening. He was just resting here, but now it seemed he had been drawn into a fight between two forces!

This was Haotian Alliance territory. Even if there were occasional frictions among Haotian Alliance cultivators, they wouldn't engage in such a high-profile conflict.

So Lu Ye immediately realized that one of the sides must be from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge!

Bingzhou was a battleground for the two major camps. Each side infiltrated the other's territory, causing panic and killing the emerging talents of the opposite side—it was a common occurrence.

Encountering someone from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge here was not surprising.

What made Lu Ye feel unlucky was getting caught up in it himself.

The person giving chase was clearly a sword cultivator and exuded the style of Beixuan Sword Sect's heritage. Based on the actions of the man in black, it was clear which side was Haotian Alliance and which was Ten Thousand Demons Ridge.

The man in black seemed to know he couldn't shake off the sword cultivator, so he intended to use Lu Ye to make the pursuing sword cultivator hesitate.

No matter what, if the two True Lake Realm cultivators fought here, Lu Ye, a Cloud River Realm cultivator, would surely be dragged into it, making it hard for the Haotian Alliance side to fight without reservations!

It's even possible that the man in black intended to take Lu Ye hostage!

But the man in black had clearly overthought.

In a normal Cloud River Realm cultivator's situation, the only option would be to flee.

But Lu Ye had set up a protective array beside him earlier. To save time, he even used an array base.

This made the protective array quite strong.

The man in black swooped down from high in the sky like a hawk, with spirit force surging around him. He intended to grab Lu Ye. Though he was injured during the chase, a True Lake Realm cultivator taking down a Cloud River Realm cultivator should be no problem.

However, to his surprise, the youth below stood still as if frightened, staring calmly into his eyes.

From the youth's eyes, the man in black couldn't detect any panic. The youth was perfectly composed, as if he didn't see him as a threat!

Feeling instinctively that something was wrong, but it was too late to retreat. The approaching sword cultivator was fast. If he didn't capture the youth quickly, he would be doomed.

Even if he succeeded, he wasn't sure if it would make the sword cultivator hesitate.

The distance closed quickly. The man in black reached out to grab Lu Ye's neck.

Then he saw Lu Ye lift his foot and lightly stomp. As spirit force surged around him, an upside-down bowl-shaped light barrier suddenly appeared, tightly enveloping Lu Ye.

"A protective array!" The man in black was shocked. He never expected the youth to be an array cultivator. Only an array cultivator could set up an array to protect themselves while resting in the wild.

However... no matter how sturdy a protective array set up by a Cloud River Realm cultivator was, how tough could it be?

The outstretched hand flipped, and a dirk appeared in his grasp. True Lake spiritual force poured into the dirk, activating all its restrictions, and he fiercely slashed at the barrier before him.

The expected scene of the barrier being shattered did not occur. The barrier merely dented sharply and then swiftly returned to its original state.

"Impossible!" The man in black was aghast. Though he was injured and hadn't used his full strength, he should have been able to break a protective array set up by a Cloud River Realm cultivator.

As he delivered the strike, he could feel the sturdiness of the protective array before him.

Such an array would take at least three strikes at full strength to break through!

He finally understood why the youth had been so composed. It turned out he had immense confidence in his own array.

Ridiculous that he himself had thought...

Realizing the situation was hopeless, the man in black gave Lu Ye a hateful glance as if trying to etch his face into his soul before attempting to retreat.

"Prepare to die!"

As the stern shout echoed, an incredibly fierce sword light, like moonlight, descended upon the man in black.

The sword light was cold, spirit force shaking, and the two figures were locked in fierce combat.

But the sword cultivator was clearly stronger, and with the man in black injured, how could he be a match?

If the sword cultivator wasn't wary of Lu Ye nearby, fearing the collateral damage might hurt him, he would have already succeeded.

Lu Ye also noticed this and said, "Senior Brother, go all out. I can hold on over here!"

Upon hearing this, the sword cultivator responded, "Alright, be careful!"

With those words, his attacks became much more ferocious. The man in black retreated step by step, cursing Lu Ye internally the entire time.

Thirty breaths later, with a scream, the sword light faded. The man in black collapsed to the ground, covered in blood.

The sword cultivator retrieved the storage sack from the man in black, then took out a token from his chest, nodded with satisfaction, and put it away.

Only then did he have the time to explain to Lu Ye, "This Ten Thousand Demons Ridge scoundrel infiltrated the area with sinister intentions. I tracked him down and chased him to this place. Sorry for startling you, Junior Brother."

"Thank you for your hard work, Senior Brother," Lu Ye cupped his fists.

The sword cultivator nodded slightly and said, "Though this is Haotian Alliance territory, Ten Thousand Demons Ridge scoundrels often appear. It's best if you head to the nearest city to rest. Do not linger in the wild for too long at night."

He had no intention of chatting further or protecting Lu Ye. For cultivators, resting in the wild was common, so he just gave a brief warning.

Soon, he left.

"Alone? Not necessarily!" Lu Ye packed away his array banner and array base, soaring into the sky.

The Nine Provinces were lively. He had previously cultivated and trained in the two major battlefields and had not yet experienced the local splendor.

This time, leaving the Righteous Blood Sect was like entering a new world.

As daybreak approached, more than half of his journey was completed. At his current speed, he would reach Haotian City before nightfall.

As he passed a spirit mountaintop, Lu Ye suddenly paused, his hand gripping the hilt of his blade.

Amber, perched on his shoulder, bristled immediately, growling softly.

At that moment, from a certain spot on the spirit mountaintop below, a dragon-like stream of light shot up, heading straight for Lu Ye.

Its imposing aura was astonishing.

Evidently, this was magic cast by a True Lake Realm cultivator!

Lu Ye immediately maneuvered to evade, but True Lake Realm cultivators controlled their spirit force as if it were part of their bodies. No matter how Lu Ye dodged, the magic trailed him persistently, quickly closing the distance.

Realizing he couldn't dodge the attack, Lu Ye gritted his teeth and stood his ground, raising his hands and unleashing his spirit force. A giant Defense Spirit Rune shield appeared before him.

Simultaneously, a figure appeared from a distance, charging toward the spirit mountaintop with astonishing momentum.

Recognizing the familiar aura, Lu Ye breathed a sigh of relief, knowing his previous suspicions were correct.

Chapter 860 Haotian City

The battle atop the spirit mountaintop ended quickly. Without the magic cultivator wielding it, the power of the spells greatly diminished. The spell collided with Lu Ye's Defense Spirit Runes, causing the runes to shatter and Lu Ye's figure to be sent flying. Though the situation was dire, he was unharmed.

When Lu Ye reached the spirit mountaintop, he immediately saw Second Senior Sister Shui Yuan.

Nearby stood a cultivator with blood dripping from the corner of his mouth, his face pale as he clutched his chest.

From his attire, it was clear he was a magic cultivator. The spell that had just attacked Lu Ye was unleashed by this person.

At this moment, the magic cultivator was explaining to Shui Yuan with a troubled look, "Sister Shui Yuan, it was a misunderstanding. I received secret orders that Ten Thousand Demons Ridge thieves would pass through here, and I was to capture them. Who could have guessed it was all a mistake!"

"Whose secret orders?" Shui Yuan asked coldly.

The magic cultivator gave a bitter smile, "Sister, you too are part of the Bingzhou Guard. You should know the guard discipline is as strict as a mountain. Please, don't make it difficult for me."

Since it was a secret order, how could he divulge it so easily?

Shui Yuan stared coldly at him for a long moment before gritting her teeth and saying, "Get lost!"

The magic cultivator let out a long breath, cupped his fists towards Shui Yuan, and quickly departed.

"Second Senior Sister." Lu Ye stepped forward.

Lu Ye wasn't surprised by Shui Yuan's possible presence behind him during their journey. Even though he hadn't detected Shui Yuan's traces or aura along the way, he could feel that someone was following him ever since he left the Righteous Blood Sect.

The sect master was with Master, so the only person who could be following him had to be Second Senior Sister.

"You okay?" Shui Yuan retorted, scanning Lu Ye up and down. Once she confirmed he was unharmed, she felt relieved.

"I'm fine!" Lu Ye shook his head, "If I can't reach Haotian City on time, what will happen?"

"Military orders are as strict as mountains. If you can't reach on time, death is inevitable!"

Lu Ye's eyebrows raised, "Someone wants to kill me?"

"Seems you've realized it already."

Lu Ye responded, "I hadn't considered this before, but some things are just too coincidental."

He had only just left the Righteous Blood Sect to head towards Haotian City when he encountered floods, then Haotian Alliance sword cultivators chasing Ten Thousand Demons Ridge thieves. Coincidentally, the escaping Ten Thousand Demons Ridge thieves tried to capture him.

If these two events were just coincidences, then being inexplicably ambushed by that magic cultivator here warranted deeper thought.

A powerful strike from a True Lake Realm magic cultivator, even if Lu Ye had Defense Spirit Runes, might not have been enough to block it. If Shui Yuan hadn't shown up in time to injure the magic cultivator, preventing him from fully controlling his spell, Lu Ye would have been injured for sure.

Possibly even gravely injured!

If that had happened, his journey would have been delayed, making it uncertain if he could reach Haotian City within the time limit.

The magic cultivator who ambushed him probably didn't know the internal details. But from his standpoint, even if he severely wounded Lu Ye without killing him, it was not a big mistake. He was merely following orders and could just apologize afterward.

This is why Shui Yuan didn't kill him. To kill a True Lake Realm magic cultivator from the same faction would complicate matters considerably.

Moreover, that person was likely being used.

"So the previous flood and fleeing Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators were just tests?" Lu Ye seemed to understand.

These two incidents, while delaying Lu Ye's journey, were mainly probing whether there was a powerful protector following Lu Ye.

Since no trace of Righteous Blood Sect's strong individuals had been seen, the direct attack happened now.

"Little Junior Brother, you're very smart." Shui Yuan looked at Lu Ye, "Ahead, on the way to Haotian City, the path is full of thorns. Be careful."

"I know." Lu Ye nodded.

The ability to secretly arrange such incidents on his journey meant the person behind the scenes had extraordinary power and status, aiming not at him but at Righteous Blood Sect.

Ten Thousand Demons Ridge wasn't unified, and neither was Haotian Alliance.

The colossal factions, comprised of various sects and families, had internal factions each with their own agendas. It was entirely normal.

Righteous Blood Sect's legacy from thirty years ago had made many people hold grudges.

"Go now. The path ahead won't stir much trouble. After joining the Bingzhou Guard, remember to act low-key." Shui Yuan had made her appearance, so the person behind the scenes wouldn't dare to act further, avoiding being caught.

"Yes, Sister, take care!" Lu Ye saluted and turned to leave.

Watching Lu Ye's departure, Shui Yuan remained silent for a long time before raising her hand to activate her battlefield marking, sending out several messages.

As Shui Yuan had predicted, the journey ahead remained calm.

Lu Ye rushed ahead and finally reached Haotian City at dusk.

The 12 Checkpoints of Bingzhou formed the frontline defense of Bingzhou Haotian Alliance against Ten Thousand Demons Ridge. Behind these checkpoints was the central hub of Bingzhou Guard.

Haotian City was the last line of defense for Bingzhou Haotian Alliance.

The vast, majestic city, alone its city walls were a hundred meters high, covered in the weathered marks of many great battles.

Decades ago, Haotian City had suffered a great catastrophe, nearly being conquered by Ten Thousand Demons Ridge.

If the central hub had fallen that day, Bingzhou would have been lost.

Among all the cities Lu Ye had seen, Haotian City dwarfed them like a tree compared to grass. Even from dozens of kilometers away, the defensive fortifications atop Haotian City's walls were visible.

Activating his movement techniques, Lu Ye quickly reached the front of Haotian City.

Lu Ye looked around, trying to locate the city gate, but there wasn't one.

Constantly, cultivators hurried from all directions, directly flying into the city.

Lu Ye understood. For cultivators capable of flying, city gates were unnecessary. If they existed, they could become weak points in defense.

To enter the city, one only needed to fly over the walls.

Mimicking others, Lu Ye flew over the wall, entering the city.

Just stepping into Haotian City, Lu Ye felt the battlefield marking on his hand pulse slightly, followed by a blue glow.

Usually, such a reaction occurs when a cultivator actively shows their battlefield marking.

However, inside Haotian City, there was a mysterious power that activated the battlefield markings of all incoming cultivators, identifying their factional affiliation.

Thus, no Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators could infiltrate this place.

Though large, the city's cultivator population was sparse, mostly Cloud River Realm cultivators recently arriving.

Due to the unexpected incident at the Cloud River battlefield, causing it to merge into the Unparalleled Continent and temporarily close, Cloud River Realm cultivators streamed to the frontline of the two major factions.

Joining the Bingzhou Guard offered monthly stipends exchanged for solid battle merit. Killing enemies or completing tasks from Bingzhou Guard could yield more benefits.

This was a strong allure for cultivators.

Currently, Haotian City was teeming with cultivators from various big sects, ready to join Bingzhou Guard. Normally, the city is sparsely populated, with most Bingzhou Guard members stationed at the frontline, leaving few in the central hub.

Arriving at Haotian City, Lu Ye had to first report in.

Unlike most other Cloud River Realm cultivators, who came voluntarily, Lu Ye was here by orders.

He needed to first report to the Heralds Office. Shui Yuan had specifically reminded him before, the stipulated three days wasn't just about reaching Haotian City, but reporting time.

He wasn't sure where the Heralds Office was located, but it was easy to inquire.

Soon, Lu Ye arrived outside a grand hall, guarded by cultivators. Seeing Lu Ye, they all eyed him.

Lu Ye cupped his fists, "Righteous Blood Sect Lu Ye, here to report!"

A guard on the left said, "Wait here. The Department Chief is meeting a guest!"

Lu Ye quietly stood aside, waiting silently.

Night had fallen, stars filled the sky, yet Haotian City remained bustling with numerous cultivators flying about.

Haotian City did not prohibit flying. Given the city's vastness, not allowing flying would waste much time just traveling around.

Feeling idle, Lu Ye looked up and quickly noticed a trend.

Flying cultivators followed an unwritten rule: the higher their cultivation, the higher they flew.

Spirit Stream Realm cultivators mostly flew within ten meters of the ground, Cloud River Realm within twenty meters, and True Lake Realm above twenty meters.

He wondered how this rule formed.

Though throngs of cultivators flew about, the Heralds Office remained serene. Only Lu Ye was present waiting to report.

With nothing better to do, Lu Ye accepted the situation.

Time passed slowly.

Lu Ye frowned.

The order's time limit was based on the reporting time, so arriving at Haotian City within the limit was crucial. If he couldn't report on time, he'd face severe disciplinary action.

Approaching the guard, Lu Ye asked, "Excuse me, Senior Brother, when will the Department Chief meet me?"

The cultivator glanced at Lu Ye, replying indifferently, "Wait!"

Lu Ye frowned further, "Could you please inform them?"

"Just wait!" The cultivator responded impatiently.

Lu Ye stared at him.

Inside the hall, the aroma of tea drifted. A graceful woman gently took a sip, examining a jade slip with a smile as if reading something amusing.

A man in combat attire lounged on a nearby chair, legs crossed, looking leisurely.

"Feet!" The woman said softly, without lifting her head.

The man in combat attire scoffed, lowered his raised feet, and sat up straight, "The person has arrived. Aren't you meeting them?"

"It's not time yet. Why rush?"

"They're here to report. If the time limit is up, it would mean military discipline and heads rolling. Aren't you worried about Shui Yuan going after you? She's recently reached the Divine Sea Realm."