

Humanity 871

Chapter 871 Below One Person, Above Ten Thousand People

The previous tasks were bearable; mostly they involved using local materials, with the most troublesome one being going to the nearby pass to buy wine. This time, she wants fish soup, and I have to rush back to the Righteous Blood Sect.

The rules of the Bingzhou guard are strict as a mountain; I can't resist, which makes me feel very frustrated.

"Do you think she's messing with you?" Shui Yuan asked.

"Isn't she?" Lu Ye said with a sullen face, "Although I don't know why, I always feel she's using this way to force me to leave Cangyan Mountain Pass."

"So you think that way..." Shui Yuan muttered to herself, "Alright, if it's as you say, she is messing with you. As for the reason... you can understand it as her revenge!"

"I've never provoked him!" Lu Ye frowned, "Besides, Second Senior Sister, you just said she has no enmity with our Righteous Blood Sect. So, who is she taking revenge on with such behavior?"

"Well, how should I say this?" Shui Yuan found it difficult, and after hesitating for a while, she said, "There was someone who messed with her in this way before, and that person was from our Righteous Blood Sect. So now she's dealing with you in the same way."

"Someone?" Lu Ye's heart moved, "Second Senior Sister, you mean..."

Shui Yuan nodded, confirming Lu Ye's guess.

"So that's the reason..." Lu Ye was slightly surprised, "So, she not only has no enmity with our Righteous Blood Sect but also has some connections?"

"Otherwise, how do you think you can stay at Cangyan Mountain Pass? Over the years, the Bingzhou guard has not assigned people there, but they were all driven away by her. Her reputation of holding a pass alone is not for nothing. She wasn't like this before, but she changed because of some things. However, you must remember, she has no malice towards you and won't harm you."

"I understand," Lu Ye nodded.

Finally, Lu Ye understood why Nian Yuexian knew about Blood Red Trout; it turned out she had some connections with the Righteous Blood Sect and must have eaten its fish many times before.

"Time is short. I'll go back now. Take care, Senior Sister." Lu Ye said, then looked at Pang Huanyin, "Palace Master Pang, take care!"

Pang Huanyin smiled and nodded, watching Lu Ye travel through the air and leave.

He came and left in a hurry.

Two days later, Lu Ye finally returned to Cangyan Mountain Pass.

From a distance, he saw the figure of Yiyi waiting for him in front of the bamboo building.

Although Second Senior Sister's words made Lu Ye understand that he probably misunderstood Nian Yuexian, he was still somewhat worried about Yiyi and Amber.

It wasn't until he saw Yiyi at this moment that he felt relieved.

"Nothing happened, right?" Lu Ye asked.

Yiyi shook her head, then proudly took out a guard token and shook it in her hand, "Look, I have one of these too."

She was a disciple of Righteous Blood Sect accepted by the sect master himself and had her own battlefield marking. In theory, she was qualified to become a Bingzhou guard.

However, she never appeared in front of outsiders, so she never thought about joining the Bingzhou guard.

But now, she had her own guard token.

"Where did you get it?" Lu Ye was very surprised.

"The Mountain Pass Chief gave it to me." Yiyi said proudly, then lowered her voice and whispered to Lu Ye, "Lu Ye, you might have misunderstood the Mountain Pass Chief. She's actually quite nice; she took good care of us while you were away. Also, she really likes Amber and took it everywhere with her these days."

A guard token with no significant use bought you over?

Lu Ye felt his heart ache!

"What position did she give you?"

Yiyi said proudly, "Walker before the Mountain Pass Chief of Cangyan Mountain Pass!"

Lu Ye frowned, "What kind of position is that?"

Although he wasn't particularly familiar with the various military positions of the Bingzhou guard, the name "Walker before the Mountain Pass Chief" didn't sound very serious.

"The Mountain Pass Chief said that the position of Walker before the Mountain Pass Chief at Cangyan Mountain Pass is second only to her and above all others!"

Lu Ye was amused, "Besides you and Amber, there are a total of only two people here, second only to one, above all others... wait, above me?"

Yiyi held back her laughter and nodded seriously, "Yes!"

Lu Ye suddenly felt targeted.

He felt inexplicably irritated. Initially, due to Second Senior Sister's explanation, he thought he had misunderstood Nian Yuexian. But now, it seemed he was too naive!

"Let's cook fish soup first," Lu Ye ended the topic that made him feel sad.

In the entire Cangyan Mountain Pass, there were two people, one spirit, and one tiger, and he ended up at the bottom.

The campfire was lit, steam rose, and the aroma of fish soup spread.

Nian Yuexian, like a noble lady, descended from the third floor of the bamboo building with Amber in her arms and sat down at the table.

Amber's tiger eyes were bright and teary, looking at Lu Ye with an expression that said, "Master, save me."

Being hugged by a Divine Sea Realm cultivator like this for days, Amber felt a lot of pressure and only saw a bleak future.

Lu Ye busied himself, serving a bowl of fish soup and placing it in front of Nian Yuexian, reluctantly saying, "Please enjoy, my lord."

Nian Yuexian nodded, picked up the fish soup, initially taking small sips, but soon she started drinking in large gulps. After finishing, she pushed the bowl towards Lu Ye.

Lu Ye understood and served her another bowl.

After three bowls, Nian Yuexian finally slowed down and started feeding Amber the fish bones she picked up.

I'm a tiger, not a cat!

Amber tried to struggle but in vain, resignedly chewing the fish bones with a bitter expression.

Seeing that Nian Yuexian seemed in a good mood, even with a faint smile, Lu Ye spoke up, "My lord, I have something to discuss."

"Hm." Nian Yuexian responded lightly.

Lu Ye said, "Can we not issue tasks like before in the future?"

"You're unwilling?"

Lu Ye shook his head, "I am, after all, a Bingzhou guard. As a guard, I obey the orders above, but if my lord needs something in daily life, just tell me. I won't refuse, but please don't use guard tokens to issue tasks."

Lu Ye wasn't sure how he earned battle merits from those tasks, but he knew continuing to earn merits this way wasn't sustainable, and it didn't feel right. Heaven's Augury is omnipresent; if everyone did this, battle merits would lose their value.

He faintly felt that continuing to earn merits this way wasn't a good idea.

Nian Yuexian was somewhat surprised by his words but understood his point.

"You want to do great things."

"Not necessarily, just hope my lord can assign tasks related to the Bingzhou guard."

To Lu Ye's surprise, Nian Yuexian readily agreed. She flipped her palm, revealing a guard token, and said, "Three tasks, choose one."

Lu Ye immediately took out his guard token to check.

It indeed contained three new tasks.

Checking the first task, Lu Ye was puzzled, "My lord, who is this Wan Zhanggang?"

The task was simple: kill Wan Zhanggang!

Nian Yuexian casually explained while feeding Amber, "An old enemy of mine. Thousands of miles away, there is a pass in Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, Guyun City, and he is the Mountain Pass Chief there, also the City Lord."

Upon hearing that Wan Zhanggang was an old enemy of Nian Yuexian, Lu Ye didn't want to listen any further.

Nian Yuexian is a Divine Sea Realm powerhouse, and her old enemy must also be in the Divine Sea Realm.

Indeed.

Sending a True Lake Realm cultivator to kill a Divine Sea Realm Mountain Pass Chief was simply a fool's dream.

Even if Lu Ye knew the merits for completing this task would be enormous, he had to pretend not to see it.

He then checked the second task.

Repair the various defensive structures at Cangyan Mountain Pass.

This task wasn't dangerous, since Cangyan Mountain Pass was their own territory.

However...

Currently, the pass only had him and Nian Yuexian. Even with Yiyi and Amber, there were only four of them. Those defensive structures were abandoned for years, and even if they fixed them, they wouldn't be functional.

It would be a waste of time.

He checked the third task: Patrol the surrounding of the pass to prevent intruders.

Lu Ye pondered for a moment and said, "My lord, I choose the third one."

As soon as he finished speaking, the first two tasks disappeared from the guard token, leaving only the third one.

"It's good to have ambitions, but being overly ambitious without the strength is futile. Many great achievements accumulate from small tasks." Nian Yuexian seemed to be teaching Lu Ye.

"You are right, my lord," Lu Ye nodded, but he still felt something was off.

"Starting tomorrow, the patrol around the pass will be your responsibility." Nian Yuexian spoke as she stood up and walked towards her bamboo building. After a few steps, she added, "By the way, since you are now responsible for patrolling, I'll give you another position."

With a shake of her guard token, Lu Ye immediately felt a change in his battlefield marking.

A closer inspection showed an update.

Position: Disciple of Righteous Blood Sect, Base Lieutenant Colonel of Cangyan Mountain Pass, Roving Lieutenant Colonel of Cangyan Mountain Pass.

Lu Ye found it amusing. Since coming to Cangyan Mountain Pass, he had gained two positions. Including Yiyi's Walker before the Mountain Pass Chief, that made three.

But... what's the use?

Having more titles didn't make them more impressive or scare away enemies.

Amber finally escaped Nian Yuexian's clutches and jumped into Lu Ye's arms, raising his chubby paw and whimpering, clearly complaining.

In the past few days, Nian Yuexian did nothing but stroke his fur and pinch his paws.

Man and tiger exchanged glances; Lu Ye sighed, "We are under her roof!"

Amber immediately seemed dejected.

However, despite the rushing back and forth, Lu Ye earned substantial battle merits this time, a total of ten thousand points!

Now Lu Ye's accumulated merits reached 59,870 points.

In other words, since coming to Cangyan Mountain Pass, he had earned nearly 20,000 points.

This way of earning battle merits was unsettling for Lu Ye.

Fortunately, it was over; he got himself a proper task. Nian Yuexian was right; to achieve great things, one must start with small tasks.

Chapter 872 Volcanic Crater

Cangyan Mountain Pass, centered around Cangyan Mountain City, radiates outward for a thousand li on either side, all under the jurisdiction of this mountain pass.

Looking at the ten-part map, this pass borders White Jade City Pass on the left, and Clear Moon Cave Pass on the right. Although the three main passes are separated by some distance, they can mutually support each other from afar, forming a tightly connected defense line.

The Bingzhou guards' defense line is exactly a series of connected mountain passes.

White Jade City Pass to the left, like Cangyan Mountain Pass, belongs to Big Moon Checkpoint.

Clear Moon Cave Pass to the right belongs to Small Moon Checkpoint.

Thus, Cangyan Mountain Pass is the rightmost defensive node of Big Moon Checkpoint's entire defense line.

Under normal circumstances, this defense line, spanning two thousand li, needs many cultivators to patrol to prevent Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators from infiltrating.

But currently, besides Nian Yuexian, only Lu Ye is here at Cangyan Mountain Pass, naturally, there's no one else to rely on.

Now Lu Ye is charged with patrolling duties, inspecting and filling in gaps around the pass is part of his responsibilities.

After resting for a night, the next day before dawn, Lu Ye set out with Amber and Yiyi.

He and Amber were visible, while Yiyi remained hidden. Though few in number, with his keen perception and Yiyi's concealment ability, any Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivator hiding nearby would not escape detection.

During the patrol, a nearly forgotten melody inexplicably resounded in his mind.

"The King commands me to patrol the mountains, I survey the mortal realm..."

Quickly shaking his head, he cleared away these untimely thoughts.

The defense line radiating two thousand li from Cangyan Mountain Pass, not even counting the depth, cannot be fully inspected by Lu Ye in one day.

His plan was to patrol only within a hundred li range nearby, even so, it would take half a day.

The lack of personnel at this pass is the biggest problem, he can only ensure there are no hidden enemies within a hundred li radius.

Besides, before he came, Nian Yuexian was stationed alone; presumably, she didn't carry out patrolling, yet the defense line remained firm for many years.

Thus, though responsible for patrolling, he might just be going through the motions.

But as Lu Ye continued his inspection, he soon discovered something interesting.

The deeper he went into the defense line, the stronger the heat in the air became.

Since arriving at this pass, Lu Ye had felt that the environment here seemed hotter than elsewhere.

Previously, he was too busy dealing with Nian Yuexian's various torments to think much about it. Now, he discovered something different.

Thinking about the location of this pass, Cangyan Mountain, the name bearing "Yan" (fire), revealed a lot.

He wanted to use the guard token to contact Nian Yuexian and inquire, to see if his thoughts were correct.

But after considering, he decided against it.

Although Second Senior Sister vouched for him, Nian Yuexian wouldn't harbor ill will, but after recent torment, Lu Ye preferred to avoid contact.

Confirming his direction, he continued deeper into the defense line.

As he moved along, there was no disturbance, nor a trace of any Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators, likely he hadn't encountered them, or none dared to trespass.

Lu Ye believed it was the former.

One man guarding a pass may sound impressive, but inevitably leaves many gaps in the defense line.

Even if Nian Yuexian was a Divine Sea Realm strong cultivator, she couldn't always deploy her Mental Consciousness to monitor all directions, Lu Ye reckoned many Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators might infiltrate Haotian Alliance's territory through the pass's defense line.

Of course, it's risky; if detected by Nian Yuexian, even gods couldn't save them.

But regardless of where one infiltrates the enemy's territory, one must face various risks. Some daring experts take bold actions.

The heat sensation grew more intense, with a peculiar pungent smell floating in the air, making Lu Ye's heart surge with excitement, realizing he was right.

Ahead, surely there was a volcano mouth.

His Talent Tree had a half-activated spirit rune, due to insufficient uncanny fire and pill fire devoured by the Talent Tree, this had been lingering for a long time...

He recently sought suitable uncanny fire and pill fire in Heaven's Augury treasure vault but gained little.

Unexpectedly, he found something here; truly, when you search earnestly, success comes effortlessly.

But nearing this spot, it approached Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's territory; based on the situation, even if there was a volcano mouth ahead, it would be in Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's territory.

Actions must be more cautious; if exposed in the enemy's land, the consequences wouldn't be favorable.

Continuing forward for two hundred li, no green vegetation was seen, the pungent smell in the air grew stronger. Looking ahead, indeed there stood a barren peak.

From the mountain mouth, scorching heat waves surged, distorting the void.

Lu Ye didn't advance recklessly but first checked his position on the ten-part map, frowning shortly after.

This location was awkward for him because it was clearly Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's territory; Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators might patrol nearby at any time, exposing his whereabouts would be difficult.

After contemplating, Lu Ye decided to proceed and investigate.

Now in True Lake Realm cultivation, though just recently promoted to Level 1, his strength had transformed drastically compared to before.

Unless encountering formidable enemies, there wouldn't be much danger.

Regarding Divine Sea Realm strong cultivators of the opponent, no need to worry much; generally, those stationed at passes won't move easily to avoid giving the enemy an opportunity.

Divine Sea Realm strong cultivators are stabilizing forces for each pass.

Even at the frontline of the two camps' confrontation, seldom seen are battles between Divine Sea Realm strong cultivators; at their level of cultivation, they perceive things unseen by lower cultivators. Unless there's deep-seated hatred, they rarely duel.

Such an opportunity is rare, the fire attribute energy within this volcano mouth is immense; if Lu Ye could benefit, activating more spirit runes on his Talent Tree would be possible, not just one.

Having made his decision, Lu Ye advanced immediately.

But before proceeding, he had already recalled Yiyi and placed Amber into the spirit beast sack.

The harsh environment here could be endured by one spirit and one tiger, yet it would consume considerable energy.

Moreover, Amber was too distinctive; if familiar cultivators saw it, they'd immediately associate it with Lu Ye.

Keeping Amber hidden, if encountering Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators, Lu Ye could find a way to maneuver.

Swiftly moving forward, he reached the volcano mouth, peering down; below, heat waves rolled, magma surged and boiled incessantly, with bubbles occasionally bursting, creating a dramatic scene.

Here, even Lu Ye had to activate spirit force to resist the pervasive scorching heat.

This reminded him of when, in Spirit Stream battlefield, he ventured deep into the Land of Fiery Flames. Back then, his cultivation was low, the environment similar to this moment.

But comparing them, although Land of Fiery Flames was in Spirit Stream battlefield, the hidden Phoenix Fire's quality was much higher than here.

Having encountered many uncanny fire and pill fire, the quality difference was clear to Lu Ye at a glance.

The local fire attribute energy wasn't high-quality, but quantity was abundant; if able to stay here long, the Talent Tree could feast, potentially igniting more leaves and activating more spirit runes.

Such a treasure place, Lu Ye naturally desired strongly.

Without much hesitation, Lu Ye leaped directly into the volcano mouth.

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Long since visiting Wan Zhanggang, wonder if that old ghost is still alive!

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Chapter 874 You Can't Fool Me

At that time, the situation was urgent, the aura of death was looming, this guy vented all his pent-up grievances, swearing profusely, as if he wouldn't have the chance to release the bitterness in his heart if he didn't curse.

Fortunately, a large contingent of relief forces from the Nine Provinces arrived just in time, freeing the eight members of the squad from their peril.

Afterwards, those who were poisoned by Primordial Corpse Poison went to Hua Ci for healing, while Lu Ye, along with Giant Armor and Lan Ziyi, hunted the Golden Corpse King.

But Lu Ye remembered this matter clearly...

He thought once they returned to the Nine Provinces and left the Cloud River battlefield, everyone would advance to the True Lake Realm and there wouldn't be many opportunities to meet again. Who would have thought, fate is tricky, they reunited so quickly.

This is indeed a narrow road for enemies...

On careful consideration, it's not surprising; both were cultivators from Bingzhou, all destined to join the provincial guard on the frontline, naturally, they would have a chance to meet.

Lu Ye raised his hand and gripped the hilt of the Boulder Mountain Saber at his waist...

Ying Wuji flew over the volcano rim.

Although they had only recently advanced to the True Lake Realm, he had joined the provincial guard earlier, long before he advanced to the Cloud River Realm, he had already joined the Bingzhou

guard of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge.

He naturally had a better understanding of the frontline situation of the two opposing camps compared to Lu Ye.

Previously limited by cultivation, unable to take on major tasks, now that he had advanced to True Lake Realm, he could finally make a name for himself. This time, he received a mission to lead a team to collect some Earth Fire.

The task wasn't difficult, just time-consuming, so among the group, only he was in the True Lake Realm, the others were new Cloud River Realm cultivators recently joined the provincial guard, with varying cultivation levels.

Recently, the Cloud River battlefield closed, leaving the Cloud River Realm cultivators with no place to go, so they all flooded into the frontline of the two opposing camps, which led to a significant increase in cultivator numbers at various mountain passes, causing frequent conflicts.

Having previously cooperated with Lu Ye and others on the Unparalleled Continent, Ying Wuji had some different views on the thousand-year-long confrontation between the two camps.

Before, he would think every Haotian Alliance cultivator deserved to be killed, irrelevant to personal grievances, it was simply due to different camp stances, and he indeed acted this way.

But now, he no longer thought so.

The deeply rooted belief in his heart collided audaciously, leaving Ying Wuji somewhat confused, because as per his observations, the mysterious Heaven's Augury often encouraged cooperation between the cultivators of the two camps.

On the trip to Unparalleled Continent, nine members of the Nine Provinces advance squad received Heaven's Augury's guidance, allowing them to converge and rush to the Unparalleled Continent to save the shattered domain, which clearly seemed like Heaven's Augury's encouragement and arrangement.

Moreover, in many secret realms of the Cloud River battlefield, cultivators of both camps had to cooperate.

But if that's the case, why maintain the thousand-year-long confrontation between the two camps?

He couldn't understand, hence he specially sought guidance from his master, hoping to get enlightenment, but his master didn't say much, only instructing him to find the answer himself.

This left Ying Wuji even more perplexed, almost delaying his advance to True Lake Realm.

The reason he went to Gushan City Pass was not because of the assignment by Ten Thousand Demons Ridge provincial guard, but his own choice, because as far as he knew, among the frontline of Bingzhou's two camps, this was the most peaceful place.

He needed some time to organize his chaotic thoughts, he wanted to use the peace here to understand the troubling issues.

On the opposite side at Cangyan Mountain Pass was a legendary woman guarding the pass alone, besides her, there were no other Haotian Alliance cultivators.

Therefore, there was no need to fight here, nor would he be killed or need to kill anyone.

Though the legendary woman would occasionally visit Gushan City Pass, causing chaos, her skills would inevitably lead to heavy casualties on the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge side, yet she had never done anything to bully the weak.

Every time she went to Gushan City Pass, she only targeted Wan Zhanggang, despite repeatedly failing, she persisted.

Ying Wuji didn't understand the grudge between the two Divine Sea Realm senior cultivators, which made the strange woman so persistent, but that was ultimately the matter of Divine Sea Realm senior cultivators, not something he needed to consider.

He only needed some time for thought and to seek answers.

Activating his spirit force to protect himself from the heat waves, Ying Wuji descended, his eyes catching sight of a figure sitting on the rock wall at the bottom of the volcano crater.

Someone! Ying Wuji immediately became vigilant.

Though the chance of encountering Haotian Alliance cultivators at this location wasn't high, exceptions always exist, and he was a cautious person, otherwise, he wouldn't have lived until today.

Seeing the person, Ying Wuji's gaze immediately looked at his waist.

No knife at the waist!

Ying Wuji felt reassured.

The trip to Unparalleled Continent left him with some psychological shadows, now he was most averse to combat cultivators who used knives, especially those who used long knives.

Upon looking up again, his just settled mind instantly became chaotic, simply because the person wore a mask, obscuring his true face, but judging by the figure, it should be a man.

Nearly cursed out loud, because as far as he knew, that guy Lu Yiye once wandered around with a mask to hide his identity.

This remote volcano crater, encountering a masked person, appearing not to dare to reveal his true identity... is very concerning!

Upon further inspection, Ying Wuji's heart sank halfway.

Because this person's figure... was almost identical to that of Lu Yiye, despite him sitting there, Ying Wuji, having followed Lu Ye on the Unparalleled Continent for such a long time, naturally understood him somewhat.

As for not having the little beast Amber on his shoulder, that's not the focus; currently, Heaven's Augury treasure vault sells spirit beast sacks, which beast-taming cultivator wouldn't buy one to store their beast pets?

Inside the volcano crater, the environment was scorching hot, but Ying Wuji felt cold to the core.

His inner heart roared, this guy must be Lu Yiye!

How could he be here?

Sweat from his forehead quickly evaporated, Ying Wuji grasped his curved blade, tightening, then relaxing, then tightening again, his heart filled with mixed emotions but lacking the courage to fight.

Because if this person was indeed Lu Yiye, he wouldn't stand a chance, everyone who came with him would die!

He wouldn't even have the chance to send a message!

"Does Fellow Daoist have any business?"

Just when Ying Wuji thought he was doomed, Lu Ye spoke.

The voice naturally wasn't his own. With his cultivation level, changing his voice with spirit force was a simple matter, even if he hadn't specifically trained for it.

The reason he didn't draw his knife immediately and even specifically put away the Boulder Mountain Saber and wore a mask before Ying Wuji arrived was that Lu Ye couldn't bear to lose such a valuable spot.

Not to mention, if he exposed his identity here, regardless of whether he could kill all Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators, he wouldn't be able to come back here again.

Besides, through his journey to the Unparalleled Continent, he sensed some things, though his mindset wasn't as chaotic as Ying Wuji's, he wouldn't rush to draw his knife at the sight of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators anymore.

His strength had improved, his perspective had shifted, and he could see things previously unseen.

"N-no... business!" Ying Wuji opened his mouth arduously, his expression inexplicable, unsure whether the person was Lu Yiye.

If it were him, he wouldn't ask this question.

In the Huntian Holy Temple on the Unparalleled Continent, he had cursed him thoroughly. Given Lu Yiye's vengeful nature, he would have slashed him upon sight, not respectfully asking whether there was any business.

A single slash would turn non-business into business.

But if it wasn't him... Ying Wuji trusted his eyes, he couldn't be mistaken, the figure was definitely Lu Yiye, the time spent together wasn't wasted.

"Are you from Gushan City? No need to be nervous, I'm also from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge." Lu Ye spoke again.

Ying Wuji chuckled softly.

Screaming inwardly, I don't believe you, you can't fool me!

His mind was focused on how to discreetly send a message or alert the waiting Cloud River Realm cultivators to scatter and flee.

With Lu Yiye here, if they didn't escape quickly, they'd be slaughtered.

While he was contemplating, Lu Ye suddenly raised his hand, showing the back of his hand with the battlefield marking: "Look!"

The sight of the red glow nearly brought Ying Wuji to tears; never had he felt the red glow so dear.

Almost collapsing, Ying Wuji sheathed his curved blade: "Fellow Daoist, you nearly scared me to death!"

A long knife could be put away, a beast pet stored in a sack, a face concealed with a mask, but the battlefield marking was unquestionable!

The glow on it indicated Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's camp, Haotian Alliance's camp had blue glow, and Heaven's Augury Mercantile Union had yellow... Basic knowledge, clear to all cultivators when they step into cultivation.

So, this person indeed belonged to Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's camp!

"Oh?" Lu Ye feigned surprise, "I'm just cultivating here, why be afraid?"

"I mistook Fellow Daoist for someone else." Ying Wuji explained, eyeing Lu Ye: "You look so alike!"

"Someone else..." Under his mask, Lu Ye's eyes gleamed, "It seems that person left you with many unpleasant memories."

Ying Wuji sighed: "It's a long story, Fellow Daoist wouldn't know, that person is wicked, killing innumerable, and vengeful, a total scoundrel, yet immensely powerful, I'm no match, shameful, truly shameful!"

As he spoke, Ying Wuji shivered, meeting Lu Ye's eyes under the mask.

Whether it was an illusion or not, Ying Wuji suddenly felt this person intended to slash him!

"Where did you cross paths with him?" Lu Ye lowered his gaze.

Ying Wuji replied: "It's not a matter of crossing paths, that person belongs to Haotian Alliance, inherently opposed to us from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge."

Chapter 875 I Am... Niu Meng

Not wanting to dwell on such a sorrowful topic, Ying Wuji changed the subject and introduced himself: "Ying Wuji of Senluo Hall, currently serving as a Major in Gushan City Pass. How should I address you, Fellow Daoist?"

"Brother Ying's renowned name precedes you. I am... Niu Meng!"

Ye Liu's identity could no longer be used. Although he had never used this alias in front of Ying Wuji, there were no impenetrable walls in the world. Ten Thousand Demons Ridge had many eyes on him, and quite a few people likely knew he had used this alias before.

Moreover, using this name in front of Ying Wuji would obviously be too conspicuous, and as long as Ying Wuji was not a fool, he would make some connections.

He could only use another name.

The Sect Master of Black Tortoise Sect in the secret realm of Ten Thousand Beasts Domain, Niu Meng, had left a deep impression on him. At this moment, he casually used that name.

"Just an independent cultivator, without any sect or affiliation. Currently on duty at East Hillock Plains Pass."

Ying Wuji was a bit surprised: "East Hillock Plains Pass is quite far from here. Fellow Daoist, what brings you here?"

The ten-part map showed that East Hillock Plains Pass was separated from this place by nearly ten other passes, over ten thousand miles away. Usually, provincial guards wouldn't cross so many passes.

"The environment here is favorable for cultivation, so I came here," Lu Ye casually explained.

"I see." Ying Wuji didn't suspect anything. In his view, this Niu Meng cultivator indeed had fire attribute spirit force, so it wasn't too strange for him to seek a better environment for cultivation.

Such cultivation usually involved practicing some secret technique and had little to do with improving one's cultivation level.

"What brings you here, Brother Ying?"

Ying Wuji explained, "The pass over there needs some Earth's Core Fire. I've been assigned this task, so I brought some people over to collect it... Will it bother you, Brother Niu?"

"You go ahead with your task. Just don't come near my side, and it's fine."

"In that case, I'll bother you then." Ying Wuji cupped his fists, thinking that this Niu Meng was rather easygoing.

Lu Ye nodded, refraining from further speech, and continued to activate the power of his Talent Tree, allowing its roots to delve into the magma and devour the Fiery Flames force of the place.

Ying Wuji noticed and flew out, returning soon after with a group of people.

These were all Cloud River Realm cultivators with varying levels of cultivation. Upon arrival, every one of them used spirit force to protect themselves.

There were many female cultivators among them, making up seven or eight out of a team of more than ten, adding an eye-pleasing touch.

Apparently, they had received prior instructions from Ying Wuji. Upon entering the volcanic crater, they avoided Lu Ye's side and busied themselves on the other side, refraining from disturbing him.

Lu Ye divided his attention, continuing to activate the Talent Tree while observing their actions. He noticed they all took out a Spiritual Artifact resembling a gourd, throwing it into the magma and using spirit force to control it.

After a long while, they retrieved the artifact and extracted a bright flame from it, sealing it in a specially made container.

This was the first time Lu Ye had witnessed the process of collecting Earth's Core Fire...

He finally understood how the Earth's Core Fire in Heaven's Augury treasure vault came about. He had suspected that someone specifically collected Earth's Core Fire to sell to Heaven's Augury treasure vault, and now it seemed likely to be true.

The process of collecting Earth's Core Fire was tedious and the environment harsh. The group of cultivators worked up a sweat, especially the female cultivators, whose wet clothes clung to their bodies, making them even more eye-catching.

These Cloud River Realm cultivators from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge didn't disturb Lu Ye, but they conversed quietly among themselves, with the female cultivators frequently giggling and chatting.

As for Ying Wuji, he didn't join in the laborious work. His task was to protect these people, so he stood aside, vigilantly watching to prevent any unforeseen events.

Suddenly, someone voiced a complaint, "Who knows which cursed one is buying Earth's Core Fire in bulk from Heaven's Augury treasure vault. The treasury had abundant stock, but now it's snatched up quickly. We now have to collect it ourselves."

Lu Ye's brow twitched.

This cursed one... seems to be me?

Listening to the conversation, Lu Ye understood something.

He had thought the shortage of Earth's Core Fire in Heaven's Augury treasure vault was because he bought too much. Now it seemed that was only part of the reason.

The main reason was his bulk buying, which created a sense of urgency among other cultivators requiring Earth's Core Fire, leading them to buy it as well. This resulted in a vicious cycle where the Earth's Core Fire was snatched up as soon as it appeared in the treasure vault.

The group started to complain.

Ying Wuji glanced at Lu Ye, seeming to fear disturbing him, and then scolded the others, "Stay focused. The environment here is peculiar; there may be some fire-type demon beasts lurking."

A female cultivator with bright eyes and white teeth covered her mouth, laughing, "With Lord Ying here, even if some clueless demon beasts show up, you'll protect us, right, sisters?"

The female cultivators echoed in agreement, showing complete trust in Ying Wuji, willing to entrust their lives to him.

That female cultivator added coquettishly, "My lord, if any danger arises, you must look after us."

"You all... have been pampered too much in your sects. I've told you many times, this is the provincial guard frontline, not your sects. Act properly." Though scolding, his tone wasn't harsh, and a faint smile lingered on his face, clearly enjoying their flattery.

He couldn't help but sigh, thinking this is how a prodigy deserves to be treated. Within the team, he was the leader, and everyone obeyed his command. His strength was their shield, and from their admiring gazes, he could see their subtle affections for him.

Thinking about his time on Unparalleled Continent, what kind of days did he live?

The past was unbearable to recall...

Indeed, as long as Lu Yiye wasn't around, I could stand tall!

The harsh environment was too much even for Cloud River Realm cultivators to endure for long. Within Ying Wuji's squad, some cultivators had to retreat for a respite, resuming collection of Earth's Core Fire once recuperated. Ying Wuji would take over their tasks during these moments.

Such conduct made the Cloud River Realm cultivators feel he was approachable, unlike many True Lake Realm cultivators who looked down on them, commanding them arrogantly.

But they failed to realize that every True Lake cultivator had once been in the Cloud River Realm.

The Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators continued making gains, while Lu Ye also had significant harvests.

The Talent Tree's leaves shone brightly again, burning intensely.

Lu Ye wasted no time, immediately examining the spirit rune born from the tree, immersing his mind to observe the burning leaves.

The tearing pain in his psyche made his body tremble slightly, catching Ying Wuji's attention, "Brother Niu?"

Lu Ye raised his hand, "Nothing, just a bit of trouble."

Ying Wuji showed concern, "Be careful, Brother Niu."

Lu Ye nodded and examined the flood of new information in his mind.

He quickly understood the nature of the new spirit rune.

His face brightened with joy.

Compared to the previously acquired somewhat useless spirit rune, this one, named Moon Return, was much more beneficial.

Unlike the previous rune he hadn't even seen in books, Moon Return was familiar to him.

However, constructing it was exceedingly complex, even more so than Void Spirit Runes. It was both intricate and difficult to build.

Lu Ye had attempted to construct it but had failed. He had planned to practice more when he had time to improve his proficiency, but he had been too busy traveling and cultivating recently.

He hadn't expected the Talent Tree to activate this rune.

He had longed for Void but unexpectedly gained Moon Return. It was like planting a willow tree without intention, only to have it flourish.

Moon Return was a core rune in an anti-array with the trait of rebounding enemy attacks, especially evident against disembodied spells, with some effectiveness against direct attacks like swords.

This rune, when constructed alone, had the same effect. It was a rune designed to turn the tables against stronger opponents.

If faced with a powerful foe, this rune could play a critical role.

For Lu Ye, it was undoubtedly a valuable rune.

Including the previous rune, he had now activated two runes on this trip, making significant progress.

Lu Ye wasn't content with just this. Finding such a suitable environment was rare, so he intended to make the most of it and let his Talent Tree feed to its fill.

Moreover, he was competing against Ying Wuji's squad. Judging by their behavior, it seemed likely that Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators often came to collect Earth's Core Fire.

Missing this opportunity would make it difficult to find a similar environment again.

On the Talent Tree, as more Fiery Flames force was devoured, another leaf lit up.

But Lu Ye could tell that this leaf bore not a rune but the technique to construct one, which was still invaluable to him.

His ability to construct complex runes like Void with a high success rate stemmed from these foundational gains.

Otherwise, despite his natural talent in the Path of Spirit Runes, he couldn't have achieved so much in just a few years.

Currently, his accomplishments in spirit runes heavily relied on both his talent and the numerous gains provided by the Talent Tree.

After lighting up over a dozen leaves holding construction techniques, another new rune appeared.

The Talent Tree once again revealed several leaves glowing simultaneously, indicating the complexity and significance of the coming rune.

By this point, Lu Ye had identified a pattern.

Nowadays, the Talent Tree rarely produced runes that could be held by a single leaf. Most required several leaves, making their construction challenging but their utility much greater once constructed.

Chapter 876 Talent Tree Transforms

Time passed, and leaves on the Talent Tree continued to ignite. The Talent Tree in its current state, blazing and consumed by flames, was a far cry from the first time Lu Ye had seen it.

Although many of the leaves did not contain complete spirit runes, Lu Ye's gains were substantial.

It truly felt like a long stretch of inactivity followed by a windfall of three years' worth of fortune.

Initially, he worried that Nian Yuexian might assign him some other tasks since he hadn't reported back to Cangyan Mountain Pass for so long. But recently, there had been no response from the guard token, and Nian Yuexian hadn't looked for him at all.

Lu Ye felt like he had been forgotten, but it suited him just fine.

If things had gone on like before, with Nian Yuexian constantly giving him trivial tasks, he wouldn't have had time to do anything else.

He had enormous gains, and Ying Wuji's squad had similar successes, continually gathering Earth's Core Fire. By now, they had collected hundreds of portions.

If they were to purchase these from Heaven's Augury treasure vault, it would cost some merit, but awkwardly, the vault had no stock, so they could only collect it themselves.

There was an increase of about twenty thousand points in battle merit within the battlefield marking, which Lu Ye knew was his monthly stipend as a lieutenant colonel.

Calculating this way, he had been at Cangyan Mountain Pass for a month.

There was another batch of battle merit yet to be issued because it wasn't time yet, which was the reward for his roving duty task. Earlier, Nian Yuexian had given him a task to patrol around Cangyan Mountain Pass, along with a roving duty assignment, a long-term task, not a one-time thing, so the reward was issued monthly.

But whether he would receive it or not, Lu Ye wasn't sure because he had been staying at the volcano this whole time, not fulfilling his patrol duties.

Heaven's Augury was fair and just. Since he hadn't fulfilled his duties, it was unlikely he would receive the reward for those tasks.

Whenever a leaf on the Talent Tree was fully ignited, he would investigate the information it contained.

But as his fifth spirit rune was activated, the Talent Tree underwent a subtle transformation. Its roots plunged into the magma, continually absorbing Fiery Flames force, but the unignited leaves remained motionless.

This frightened Lu Ye. The Talent Tree was his greatest secret and reliance, providing unimaginable help since his cultivation began. If something went wrong with it, the loss would be too great.

After careful examination, he determined the Talent Tree was intact, able to activate and construct various spirit runes at will. It now seemed like a mythical beast Pixiu, only consuming and not producing.

No matter how much Fiery Flames force it absorbed, the unignited leaves stayed still.

Gradually, Lu Ye discovered the cause.

Constantly absorbing Fiery Flames force didn't change the leaves, but the roots extended from the tree, showing different alterations.

The roots of the Talent Tree became noticeably thicker and more densely woven and solidified.

Originally, these roots looked ordinary, but now they were a vibrant red, like red-hot iron threads intricately entwined.

Such changes were undoubtedly beneficial.

Lu Ye intuitively felt the Talent Tree was evolving. Though unsure if his hunch was correct, the current scenario suggested it was very likely.

Before evolving, the Talent Tree had greatly aided him. What would it be like afterward?

Lu Ye couldn't help but feel anticipation.

"Lord Ying, has the temperature here dropped?" a cultivator from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge suddenly asked.

Compared to when they first arrived, the environment had significantly calmed down over the past half month.

Others also keenly noticed the change.

Ying Wuji nodded, "Probably because we've collected too much Earth Fire."

Despite saying so, he was slightly puzzled. They had collected a lot of Earth Fire, but it shouldn't be to the extent of altering the environment.

On second thought, countless others must have come here to collect Earth Fire over the years, so the environment changing wasn't surprising.

He didn't know that besides them, Lu Ye was secretly devouring much more Fiery Flames force, far exceeding their collection.

"A few more days, and we can head back," Ying Wuji declared.

Efficiency had waned, and there was no need to stay longer. They could collect a bit more before leaving.

He glanced at Lu Ye, who sat cross-legged against the stone wall, curious about what secret techniques this Brother Niu was cultivating. This period seemed unproductive for him, often resulting in visible signs of pain from incorrect cultivation.

Two days later, the temperature at the volcanic crater dropped further. Ying Wuji's squad had trouble collecting Earth Fire, and Lu Ye noticed the Talent Tree swallowed Fiery Flames force much slower.

Should he steal their Earth's Core Fire?

They had gathered at least a thousand portions, possibly more, enough for the Talent Tree's evolution. But doing so would expose his identity and reveal a trump card.

Was it worth the risk? Lu Ye had to weigh it carefully.

Before he decided, a cry rang out, "Lord Ying!"

Chaos ensued.

Lu Ye looked over to see Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators gathering. Ying Wuji stood before them, protecting his Cloud River Realm subordinates, warily eyeing the center of the magma pool.

At its center, the magma churned with massive bubbles, as if something was emerging from its depths.

Lu Ye shot up, equally cautious.

Special environments like this easily bred monsters. Ying Wuji had warned them to be wary of possible fire attribute demon beasts.

After so long with no incidents, they had relaxed.

Now it seemed likely there was something, and it wasn't a typical monster.

"Leave here at once!" Ying Wuji ordered, not knowing what change awaited but sensing it was no longer safe.

As he prepared to lead his Cloud River Realm subordinates away, the submerged object revealed itself.

It wasn't a monster but a huge stone platform. As it rose, searing magma flowed, and the intense heat turned the platform a burned red. Waves of heat spread outward.

The group was in shock and uncertainty.

No one expected a stone platform hidden beneath the magma to emerge suddenly.

Ying Wuji frowned, stepping forward to investigate, but Brother Niu, on the other side, already landed on the platform.

The small figure on the massive platform formed a striking contrast.

Ying Wuji followed, observing the surroundings, "Brother Niu, do you recognize this artifact?"

Over the years, many cultivators came and went, yet no one had discovered this stone platform. Its emergence now was peculiar.

Lu Ye shook his head slowly.

Clearly ancient, the platform showed no wear or damage from its time submerged within the volcano. Even the intricate patterns on it remained intact, indicating its extraordinary material.

Lu Ye carefully studied the crisscrossing patterns, comparing them with the Array Path knowledge in his mind, searching for clues.

"Lord Ying, could this sudden appearance be some kind of opportunity?" a cultivator suggested.

Ying Wuji shook his head, "Don't get your hopes up. Its appearance likely relates to the loss of Fiery Flames force. It hid beneath when strength was sufficient and emerged when depleted." Looking to Lu Ye, "What do you think, Brother Niu?"

Lu Ye nodded, "I think so too."

Ying Wuji's explanation matched his thoughts. Their combined collection and consumption of Fiery Flames force must have altered the environment, bringing forth the stone platform, likely related to the force it concealed within magma.

"Brother Niu... are you proficient in the Array Path?" Ying Wuji asked, noticing Lu Ye's intense focus on the patterns, feeling uneasy.

Someone had evidently remarkable skill in the Array Path!

Without looking up, Lu Ye replied, "Just a bit, not proficient," then added, "It's common for magic cultivators to study the Array Path."

"Certainly," Ying Wuji relaxed.

"Brother Ying, are you proficient? Any insights?"

Ying Wuji observed, "It seems like a Spirit Gathering Array, but not quite. I can't tell its exact function..."

As he spoke, the platform buzzed and the intricate patterns lit up, illuminating the surroundings.

Around the stone platform, flower motifs glowed, creating floral shadows in the air.

One, two... over forty in total.

The group felt the surrounding heat being rapidly absorbed by the platform.

All eyes turned to a specific cultivator.

This individual had activated spirit force, causing the platform's reaction.

Feeling their stares, he nervously confessed, "I saw the intact patterns and wanted to test its power. I didn't expect it to activate..."

He believed practical demonstration better than endless study.

"My apologies, Lord!" the cultivator quickly admitted fault.

Chapter 877 I Remember Someone

Ying Wuji shook his head, "No matter, but do not act rashly next time."

This time, it merely caused some abnormal changes without danger. But next time, who knows? It is reckless to act before understanding certain things.

However, the cultivator's actions did make Ying Wuji notice some clues. He opened his mouth and asked, "When you joined the sect, there should have been a talent assessment. How did it turn out?"

The cultivator looked somewhat embarrassed, "Average talent, forty-three leaves..."

Ying Wuji turned to Lu Ye, "Brother Niu!"

Lu Ye nodded, "The flower shadows that appeared earlier amounted to exactly forty-three."

"Indeed!" Ying Wuji realized with some understanding.

"It seems to be correct."

The two exchanged words as if they reached a conclusion. The Cloud River Realm cultivators appeared thoughtful, some were confused.

A female cultivator spoke, "Lord Ying, do you mean to say that this stone platform is used for talent assessments?"

"Perhaps, or perhaps not. Nonetheless, it certainly has the function of testing talent levels." Ying Wuji took a deep breath, "This object must be extremely ancient, likely from the previous epoch."

The reason for such judgment was because the current methods of testing disciples' talents in various big sects differ from what is displayed by this stone platform. Lu Ye himself had tested his talent at Evil Moon Valley, sitting in an array guided by the cultivator who tested talents, detecting spirit force.

He remembered it distinctly.

Since the beginning of this epoch, the Nine Provinces cultivators have tested talents in this manner, slightly improved, but the main method remains unchanged.

The current stone platform is notably different from the talent assessment methods used in Nine Provinces.

"Who would like to try?" asked Ying Wuji.

The female cultivator who spoke before said, "I will."

With that, she activated her spirit force, pouring it into the stone platform beneath her. The engravings lit up, the array activated, and the flower shadows around the stone platform appeared once more, totaling fifty-three.

She said, "It truly is for testing talents. Fifty-three matches my talent exactly."

If so, then this stone platform wouldn't be of much use. However, the material is peculiar; if we can find a way to take it back and sell it to the Heaven's Augury treasure vault, there could be good profit.

Confirming no danger, the cultivators began trying one by one, each conclusion matched their respective talents.

"Lord Ying, why don't you try it too?" asked a female cultivator, curious about Ying Wuji's talent.

As the core disciple of Senluo Hall's current generation, and with good results in the Cloud River Contest, Ying Wuji's talent was undoubtedly excellent.

Intending to display in front of the Cloud River Realm cultivators, he did not refuse, saying, "Then let's try."

He activated his spirit force, the array hummed.

Exclamations filled the air.

Everyone looked up, seeing the flower shadows almost merging, totaling sixty-two!

The talent of a cultivator peaks at sixty-four leaves, and to become the core disciple of top sects, a minimum of sixty leaves is required. Ying Wuji's sixty-two leaves made him one of the top talents in Nine Provinces.

Feeling the envious and admiring gazes around him, Ying Wuji stated, "Cultivation for a cultivator is paramount, but talent cannot determine the ultimate limit of one's cultivation. Remember, self-effort is the main key. Anyone relying solely on talent without striving for progress will not achieve significant success. Conversely, results can be achieved even with insufficient talent through diligence. "

His words were well received by the Cloud River Realm cultivators, who nodded in understanding.

But then Ying Wuji couldn't help but laugh.

A female cultivator asked coyly, "Lord Ying, have you thought of something interesting?"

"I remembered someone."

Lu Ye raised his eyes to look at him, narrowing them slightly.

Ying Wuji continued, "Lu Yiye of the Righteous Blood Sect. You must be familiar with him."

As cultivators in the Cloud River Realm and fighters in the Cloud River battlefield, who hasn't heard of Lu Yiye's name? They immediately became alert.

"Actually, his real name is Lu Ye, but due to certain reasons, he is referred to as Lu Yiye. His current fame led to this nickname. Do you know why he is called Lu Yiye?"

"I haven't heard about that."

"Well, when he first tested his talent, he received a rating of one leaf, which coincidentally played into his name. Thus, someone jokingly called him Lu Yiye, and the name spread... Talent of one leaf, hahaha. Isn't it funny..."

Laughing, Ying Wuji suddenly shivered, turning to look at Lu Ye.

For no particular reason, he felt like this person wanted to harm him!

It seemed he hadn't offended Brother Niu, what's going on?

Adjusting his expression, he shifted the topic, "Telling you this isn't meant to mock his talent! Lu Yiye, despite such talent, achieved great success. Who doesn't know his name in the Cloud River battlefield now? Therefore, talent is important but not the most important for a cultivator."

"But Lord, with a talent of one leaf, the efficiency of cultivation must be extremely low. How did Lu Yiye cultivate so quickly? Could it be false news from Haotian Alliance?"

"Maybe his talent isn't just one leaf, but it definitely isn't high. As for false news, it's unlikely. Haotian Alliance wouldn't deliberately spread false news for one cultivator. Although he might have reached True Lake Realm now, considering his impressive achievements, he likely received significant opportunities. I had the opportunity to work with him briefly, although our stands differ. I must say he does have certain means."

Some cultivators weren't convinced, "Relying solely on opportunities certainly won't lead far."

Immediately, some agreed, and praised Ying Wuji, "With Lord Ying's unparalleled talent, your future achievements will surely surpass Lu Yiye's."

"I hope so." Ying Wuji turned to Lu Ye, "Brother Niu, would you like to try?"

Lu Ye intended to refuse; testing talent meant little to him as he had the small spirit energy gathering funnel. Talent made little difference to him.

But reconsidering, after obtaining the broken Origin of Soaring Dragon World, his talent seemed to have undergone tremendous changes.

Previously, he couldn't take in the nature's spiritual energy, as if a barrier in his body prevented its entry. Only the small spirit energy gathering funnel could bypass this barrier.

But now, even without forming the small spirit energy gathering funnel, Lu Ye could cultivate like a normal cultivator. He seldom did this because his usual methods were more effective.

He could test himself now to see his current talent.

Thinking this, he activated his spirit force and poured it into the stone platform beneath him.

The engravings quickly lit up, the array activated, and the flower patterns around the stone platform glowed brightly, each showing a floating flower shadow.

In an instant, flower shadows linked head-to-tail, filling the perimeter of the platform!

Everyone watched aghast.

Ying Wuji's eyes nearly popped out!

Lu Ye was also surprised.

He knew his talent was good now, but didn't expect it to be this excellent.

Sixty-four flower shadows fully displayed, exceeding Ying Wuji by two, aligning with the talent of sixty-four leaves!

Extraordinary talent, this was truly extraordinary talent.

Even, his talent might exceed sixty-four leaves because this was the detection limit here.

"Brother Niu... Are you really an independent cultivator?" Ying Wuji finally spoke.

Could such an independent cultivator exist?

Originally, Lu Ye proclaimed himself as a sectless independent cultivator, Ying Wuji didn't pay much attention since independent cultivators generally didn't have high talent; good talent would have led them to join a big sect long ago.

But now he realized he had misjudged.

Sixty-four leaves talent, any top sect in Nine Provinces would welcome this talent. How could he be an independent cultivator?

Ying Wuji couldn't understand.

Lu Ye had withdrawn his spirit force.

Others' flower shadows dissipated after withdrawing their spirit force, but his remained and grew brighter.

Such anomaly made everyone alert, not knowing what was happening.

Amidst their confusion, sixty-four flower shadows suddenly floated toward the stone platform's center. Flower petals fell and merged, forming a larger flower shadow.

Fiery Flames force around was absorbed by the stone platform, creating a whirlwind and adding a touch of coolness to the hot environment.

Under everyone's gaze, the flower shadow at the center seemed to gather enough energy, slowly blooming like a real flower bud.

Crackling sounds followed.

As the flower shadow fully bloomed, a pit-like entrance appeared at the center, right where the pistil was.

Quietness engulfed the place.

All eyes focused on the sudden entrance, never expecting such a change.

From the situation, it was evident the stone platform not only tested talent but was also a hidden entrance leading underground.

What lay below remained unknown.

To open this entrance, triggering sixty-four flower shadows was necessary.

Pure talent activation wasn't likely the only method, the ancient maker of the stone platform must have other means.

This time, Lu Ye coincidentally opened the hidden entrance using this method.

With the entrance apparent, the unknown ahead stirred everyone's mind.

Nine Provinces abounds with opportunities; whether one encounters them depends on fortune.

An ancient stone platform with an unknown entrance, danger or opportunity ahead, who knows?

But cultivators always possess an adventurous spirit; anyone encountering this would want to explore.

Ying Wuji turned to Lu Ye, "Brother Niu?"

Lu Ye slightly nodded.

Ying Wuji understood.

Chapter 878 Underground Cavern

Ying Wuji had an indescribably strange feeling towards this independent cultivator who called himself Niu Meng. Not to mention anything else, at certain times, this person seemed to have a tacit understanding with him.

Take the current moment, for instance. Facing the unknown portal, he and Niu Meng had confirmed their response strategy with just a simple sentence and a glance.

There was no need for excessive words or anything else; both of them understood each other's thoughts.

Ying Wuji led the way ahead while Niu Meng watched from the rear.

Working with such a person was undoubtedly very easy.

If Niu Meng were not here, Ying Wuji might not have had the intention to explore deeply. His main task in leading the team here was to protect the Cloud River Realm cultivators under his command as they collected Earth Fire and to ensure their safety.

The way ahead was unknown; it could be an opportunity or a danger. Ying Wuji could not take this risk. The biggest possibility was to immediately send a message back to the base and request other True Lake Realm cultivators to come and assist in the investigation.

But with Niu Meng by his side, there was no need to waste time.

Ying Wuji glanced at the group of Cloud River Realm cultivators and pointed out half of them: "You come with me, the rest stay outside to respond. If there are any anomalies, report back immediately!"

"Yes!" Everyone responded in unison, even the usually flirtatious female cultivator now appeared extremely serious.

Usually, Ying Wuji was approachable, and they could joke and laugh with him. But at this moment, with orders given, they could only follow and obey.

"Lord Ying, I'll go in first." A Cloud River Level 8 cultivator volunteered and immediately moved to enter the dark pit.

"Step aside!" Ying Wuji pulled him aside and leapt into the pit on the stone platform first.

The pit entrance, like a beast's mouth, swallowed his figure.

"Follow along." The voice came from below, and the selected Cloud River Realm cultivators hurriedly followed Ying Wuji's steps, one by one leaping inside.

Lu Ye was the last to go in.

After he stepped inside, only a few remaining cultivators stayed behind, scattered and vigilant in all directions.

Below the stone platform entrance were levels of stone stairs leading downward, their destination unknown.

The stone stairs were clearly man-made, smooth and flat, still stable despite years of erosion.

A group of seven or eight, with two True Lake cultivators leading and following, the Cloud River Realm cultivators in the middle, all tiptoed like cats, moving silently.

The path downward was not cramped, wide enough for seven or eight people to walk side by side. The deeper they went, the darker it became. But for these seasoned cultivators, concentrating spirit force in their eyes and enhancing Ocular Power allowed them to observe their surroundings without obstruction.

Ying Wuji, leading ahead, did not hide his figure, walking and stopping repeatedly as if he had found something.

Lu Ye, following at the back, soon realized what he had found. Passing the spots Ying Wuji had stopped at, Lu Ye clearly saw strange carvings on the stone walls of the passage.

The carved patterns were whimsical, including flowers, weapons, human figures, and beasts.

It seemed to be remnants left by ancient owners, without any special information.

However, the most frequent motif among the carvings was the big sun in the sky, with many figures kneeling and worshipping before it.

Regardless of the origin of the ancient inhabitants, it appeared they greatly revered the big sun in the sky based on these carvings.

Heading downward, everyone was uncertain how deep they had ventured.

Until suddenly, a low shout came from ahead, prompting Lu Ye, at the back, to quicken his pace.

The moment he stepped off the stone stairs, his sight caused him to be momentarily stunned.

Looking around, deep underground, nearly a thousand feet below, lay a huge cavern, its size boundless to the eye. Channels within the cavern flowed with red molten rock, resembling rivers and illuminating the cavern's scene.

What amazed everyone was not the cavern's vastness but the presence of a city-like structure within it!

Houses of varying heights and crude styles were scattered throughout the city, carved from hard stone. Many had collapsed due to years of neglect, with only a few remaining intact.

An ancient city existed within this underground cavern!

Flowing lava in the channels crisscrossed the city like its moat.

From this scene and previous experiences, it was evident the city had been uninhabited for many years.

Yet, the astonishing question was what kind of people could live in such an environment!

Even someone like Ying Wuji in the True Lake Realm could not stay here long, having to continually use spirit power to resist the surrounding heat, which consumed significant spirit force.

Suddenly encountering a dilapidated city in such a place was truly unbelievable.

"What's that up there?" A cultivator suddenly asked, looking overhead.

A black-red cavern ceiling loomed overhead due to the environment, periodically dotted with flickering lights.

Ying Wuji and Lu Ye simultaneously flew up, quickly returning with irregular crystals the size of fists.

"Fire spirit stones!" Ying Wuji exclaimed in shock.

Ordinary spirit stones were mostly without element signs, but certain environments could nurture spirit stones with special element signs.

In such hot environments with concentrated fire spirit power, fire spirit stones could be born over time.

Though not useful for ordinary cultivators, for someone like Lu Ye who cultivated fire-type techniques, these spirit stones were far more efficient than regular ones.

Moreover, spirit stones with element signs had other specific uses that regular spirit stones could not replace.

Thus, element-sign spirit stones were far more valuable, often worth three to five times their regular counterparts under the same quality and size.

Typically, element-sign spirit stones were strategic reserves for the two major camps.

Lu Ye had once tried searching for fire spirit stones in the Heaven's Augury treasure vault without finding any. Not because Heaven's Augury didn't sell them, but because they were promptly bought by the camps' cultivators whenever in stock.

They shared the same fate as the Earth's Core Fire.

The presence of fire spirit stones in the cavern's ceiling indicated a complete Fire Spirit Vein overhead, key to nurturing such spirit stones.

The sight of numerous fire spirit stones twinkling like stars on the cavern ceiling showed their overwhelming abundance.

After thousands of years, it was unsurprising for such abundant fire spirit stones to be nurtured here.

"Lord Ying, should we mine them?" A cultivator asked, possibly in excitement, his face flushed.

Facing such an opportunity, everyone was naturally tempted. Extracting the fire spirit stones meant immense benefits even if divided later.

Ying Wuji pondered briefly and said, "Since we encountered them, we must seize the opportunity."

"Shall we start now?"

"Proceed, but remain vigilant!" Ying Wuji waved.

The cultivators immediately soared towards the cavern ceiling.

"Brother Niu, what are your plans?" Ying Wuji asked Lu Ye.

He was curious, as Brother Niu seemed indifferent to this wealth.

"I'll explore around and see if there's any danger."

Ying Wuji understood Lu Ye's intention and felt grateful: "Thank you, Brother Niu!"

He truly trusted Lu Ye! Brother Niu wasn't indifferent to the fire spirit stones; he was just being cautious.

"Rest assured, Brother Niu's share won't be missing," Ying Wuji added. As Lu Ye was willing to explore and undertake unknown risks, he, of course, wouldn't be stingy when dividing the gains.

Lu Ye nodded and headed into the city, stopping briefly to suggest, "Have them give all mined fire spirit stones to you for safekeeping, making the final tally smoother and avoiding suspicion."

During collection, if anyone secretly kept some, checking each other's storage sacks would be difficult.

Instead of causing embarrassment, it was better for Ying Wuji to manage them and divide later.

Ying Wuji immediately grasped Lu Ye's meaning and nodded: "Brother Niu thinks it through. We'll do as you suggest."

Lu Ye left for the city, and Ying Wuji flew to join his Cloud River Realm cultivators, passing on the order for them to hand over mined fire spirit stones.

The cultivators complied without much resistance, understanding Ying Wuji's intent.

Cultivators worked efficiently, mining fire spirit stones and accumulating them with Ying Wuji for tallying.

While busy mining, Lu Ye also made discoveries.

In a half-collapsed stone house, Lu Ye stared at a stool, his expression strange.

It was made of fire spirit stones, not finely crafted but rough, yet unique due to its material!

Lu Ye volunteered to explore the underground city, aware of potential dangers. Investigating first before seeking benefits was prudent.

While cautious was wise on the cultivation path.

Unexpectedly, casually exploring had led to remarkable finds.

Whoever lived in the city used fire spirit stones as stools, not fearing getting burned?

Could the inhabitants have all cultivated fire-attribute techniques?

Ancient remnants lacked clues and couldn't be verified.

Lu Ye stowed the stool, checked for other items, and left after confirming none.

Chapter 879 Level 8 Demon Sealing Array

Exploring those stone houses, occasionally yielding some harvest.

It is unknown who used to live here, but they seemed to have had a habit of using fire spirit stones to make furniture. Chairs, tables, and some other objects whose purposes Lu Ye could not fathom were all carved from fire spirit stones.

Thousands of years without any visitors, the fire spirit power here is extremely dense and active, making the purity of these artifacts very high and of good quality.

Ying Wuji and his team were mining fire spirit stones from the top of the cliff, but the real treasure was hidden in this dilapidated city.

Rather than laborious mining, picking up what's ready-made yields more.

In such a vast city, searching efficiency for one person isn't high. Even though Lu Ye wasn't slow, wanting to completely search the city wasn't easy.

After a brief contemplation, Lu Ye took Amber out of the spirit beast sack and summoned Yiyi.

"Lu Ye, what is this place?"

Amber had been kept in the spirit beast sack for some time, and Yiyi naturally hadn't seen daylight. Appearing suddenly in such a strange place, she was understandably confused.

"A treasure land!" Lu Ye briefly explained the current situation.

Yiyi instantly understood: "I got it."

She was to help find the fire spirit stones hidden in this city.

"Be careful, there's a group of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge people here, led by Ying Wuji, don't let them spot you."

"Okay." Yiyi nodded and quickly disappeared, with Amber following suit.

With Yiyi's help, the efficiency of treasure hunting doubled. This round's harvest would surely be bountiful.

He continued searching, not leaving any stone house untouched, even the collapsed ones were carefully explored by Lu Ye, occasionally finding something.

More than two hours later, Lu Ye held a round disc carved from fire spirit stone in his hand, examined it closely.

This disc was palm-sized, with obvious marks of artificial carving, like the furniture he had collected before.

It clearly wasn't a piece of furniture, and looked more like a plate.

But the dish was too shallow to hold anything.

What caught Lu Ye's eye were the numerous complex patterns on the surface. At first glance, it looked like a spirit rune, but due to the passage of time, many of the patterns were damaged, making it difficult to discern the complete appearance of the rune.

After observing for a while, Lu Ye activated his spirit force and infused it into the disc, attempting to follow the original pattern traces to repair the damaged areas.

This wasn't difficult for him, similar to the array test he experienced in the Hundred Arrays Pagoda.

Whether he could restore this unknown spirit rune completely was up to luck; the patterns were too damaged, and he had no idea what they originally looked like.

Moments later, Lu Ye's expression grew peculiar.

As he repaired the broken spirit rune, the patterns gradually revealed themselves. The more he looked, the more the spirit rune on the fire spirit stone disc resembled an explosion spirit rune.

It was roughly similar to the explosion spirit rune he mastered, but with slight internal differences.

The construction of a spirit rune isn't fixed.

Take the spirit runes Lu Ye obtained from the Talent Tree, for instance; they differed from the ones he saw in books, and he compared these differences to conclude.

The same spirit rune, if constructed using the Talent Tree method, its power would be roughly one to two percent stronger than if learned from books.

This was already a considerable enhancement.

During the repair process, Lu Ye could basically determine that the carved patterns on the fire spirit stone disc were indeed explosion spirit runes, only with slight differences in construction.

Fire element is violent, and fire spirit stones inherently contain pure fire spirit power, making them the most unstable among all element spirit stones. Normally, they need to be handled lightly; if accidentally bumped, it could trigger an internal spirit force disorder and explosion...

If supplemented with explosion spirit runes, what would happen?

As a thought flashed through his mind, the repair of the spirit rune on the fire spirit stone disc reached its final stage.

When the last basic element was constructed and integrated, forming the explosion spirit rune, Lu Ye suddenly realized he was holding not just a fire spirit stone, but an extremely dangerous object that could explode at any moment.

The addition of explosion spirit runes made the already violent fire spirit power even harder to control.

Even with Lu Ye's True Lake cultivation, he couldn't help but feel a tinge of apprehension.

The fact that he felt this meant if it exploded in his hands, it would pose a certain degree of threat to him.

This disc was a killing weapon!

Lu Ye suddenly realized this issue.

This must have been used by the city's residents for killing enemies.

No wonder the many collapsed buildings bore signs of destruction.

Lu Ye thought they had fallen due to long-term disrepair, but now it seems the self-detonation of this weapon was a cause.

Who exactly lived in this city before? What kind of harsh environment could build a city and survive, while mastering such killing weapons?

Dispersing his spirit force, he undid the explosion spirit rune, and the unsettling feeling disappeared instantly.

Lu Ye put away the fire spirit stone disc and sent a message to Yiyi, telling her to be careful if she found similar items and not to bump them.

Continuing the search, the number of fire spirit stone discs like killing weapons wasn't many but also not scarce.

This showed the city's residents long ago indeed mastered a method to refine killing weapons using fire spirit stones.

Time passed, and after spending half a day in this underground city, Lu Ye had gained a lot.

The fire spirit stones were very useful to him, not only for his own cultivation; the Talent Tree could also ingest their spirit force to ignite the leaves.

In this way, for the short term, he needn't worry about the Talent Tree's resources.

Although it took him half a day, Lu Ye had only searched less than ten percent of the vast city, showing its vastness.

It was a rare opportunity, and the city held such massive benefits, it couldn't be missed.

Just as Lu Ye was about to continue searching, he suddenly felt a fluctuation of spirit force from the distance.

Looking up, he saw a continuous flicker of light and restless spirit force from that direction.

The direction where Ying Wuji's squad was located.

Attacked?

Lu Ye frowned. He and Yiyi had been here for half a day without seeing anything unusual; what had Ying Wuji encountered?

It couldn't be that the Haotian Alliance had attacked.

This place was under the jurisdiction of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's Gushan City Pass, the closest Haotian Alliance pass being Cangyan Mountain Pass, which besides him, only had Nian Yuexian.

Nian Yuexian, a Divine Sea Realm powerhouse, wouldn't bother coming here to kill a bunch of Cloud River Realm cultivators.

Confused and unsure what was happening there, Lu Ye quickly sent a message to Yiyi, asked for her location, and hurried towards her.

Soon, he found Yiyi and Amber, promptly putting Amber back into the spirit beast sack.

Just as he was about to rush to Ying Wuji's team, a huge humming noise suddenly erupted, followed by earth-shaking movement and falling stones overhead.

Hovering in mid-air, Lu Ye looked down.

Below him, the canals crisscrossing the broken city, flowing with hot magma, had boiled over, spewing large bubbles and scattering magma.

Many stone houses collapsed one after another, looking like the world was about to fall.

Watching the numerous crisscrossing canals, Lu Ye suddenly realized something was amiss.

He hurriedly ascended, scanning the surroundings, and his eyes widened in shock.

From this height, he finally saw what was wrong.

The canals crisscrossing the entire underground city formed a pattern of a grand array, with countless canals forming the array's base, and the flowing magma providing the energy source for the array's operation.

Previously unnoticed due to the city's vastness, making it hard to perceive the whole picture.

Who could have thought that such a city harbors a hidden grand array?

What kind of array is this?

Steadying himself, Lu Ye observed, trying to correlate the numerous Array Path information in his mind.

Soon, the name of a grand array emerged in his mind.

Level 8 Demon Sealing Array!

The hidden array in the city below bore seven similarities to the Level 8 Demon Sealing Array, but considering the passage of time and changes in array paths, the array below should be the ancient Level 8 Demon Sealing Array.

This array was extremely complex in layout, so even Lu Ye hadn't set it up before as it was unnecessary.

The array emphasized sealing, having the effect of sealing and suppressing.

What was this array sealing?

From the current scene, even after many years, the array was still operational, as the constant flowing magma provided the array with energy.

No matter what the array sealed, the situation wasn't favorable.

Perhaps due to long-term disrepair, or their actions upon arrival, this array showed signs of collapsing; once it does, what's sealed would resurface.

What did Ying Wuji and his team encounter?

No time to ponder, Lu Ye turned and quickly flew to the entrance.

Best to leave early.

He had barely moved when the magma in the canals suddenly erupted, with towering columns of magma rising hundreds of feet high.

The entrance direction was completely submerged by the rising magma, no longer visible.

"Brother Niu!" Ying Wuji's voice echoed from not far away, sounding panicked.

Lu Ye looked over to see Ying Wuji leading several people fleeing in distress, followed by several humanoid figures.

These humanoids had flames burning on their bodies, with twisting and changing forms, sending out bursts of blazing fire, driving Ying Wuji and his team into wretched flight.

The ones who fought with Ying Wuji's team earlier should be these entities.

Chapter 880 Swindler!

Two people were clearly missing from the group behind Ying Wuji, they must have met a terrible fate.

Faced with such a sudden conundrum, Lu Ye was caught off guard, never expecting such a peril in this treasure land.

As he watched the pursuing group chasing after Ying Wuji and the others, Lu Ye raised his eyebrows in surprise.

Fire Spirit Tribe?

He had seen records of this race in a book in his master's Bibliotheca.

In the Nine Provinces, the main entities currently thriving are the human race and the Demon Race, but besides these two large races, there are several smaller races, such as the Five Elements Spirit Tribe.

The Five Elements Spirit Tribe is naturally gifted, born proficient in many wondrous secret techniques. Many of the spirit runes that the human race now masters have been derived from generations of research on the Five Elements Spirit Tribe's secret techniques by earlier sages.

This is also why his master's Bibliotheca recorded the Five Elements Spirit Tribe.

However, members of the Five Elements Spirit Tribe are extremely rare, and an average cultivator might not encounter even one in their entire life.

But right now, there were easily more than a hundred Fire Spirit Tribe members pursuing Ying Wuji and the others?

The peculiar environment here might nurture such unique entities as the Fire Spirit Tribe, but their number seemed excessive.

Could it be that the Eight Extremes Demon Sealing Array in this city was indeed sealing off the Fire Spirit Tribe?

If true, then there might be far more Fire Spirit Tribe members here than what he was currently seeing.

The thought sent a shiver down Lu Ye's spine, and he instinctively reached for his waist, only to come up empty.

Seeing Ying Wuji and the others moving towards him, he had no choice but to raise his hand and cast a spell towards their pursuers, slightly slowing down the approach of the Fire Spirit Tribe members.

In a moment, the two groups had joined together.

"Go!" Ying Wuji immediately turned towards the direction of the entrance.

Everyone followed closely behind.

However, a desperate scene emerged. As the Eight Extremes Demon Sealing Array in the city failed, molten lava erupted from the channels, revealing numerous Fire Spirit Tribe members.

Among the Five Elements Spirit Tribe, the Fire Spirit Tribe was known for their explosive tempers. Having been sealed for who knows how many years, they had already lost their sanity. Sensing the presence of Lu Ye and the others, they swarmed from all directions, encircling them tightly in an instant.

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji led the way, with Lu Ye's spells roaring in his hands and Ying Wuji's twin curved sabers slicing through the crowd as they battled forward.

"Ah!" A sudden scream came from behind. Someone had fallen victim to the Fire Spirit Tribe, engulfed and turned to a blood rain in mere moments.

The others were filled with grief and terror but were powerless to help.

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji didn't even look back, continuing to fight their way through, but more and more Fire Spirit Tribe members attacked from the front, seemingly aware of their intentions and blocking their path.

With enemies intercepting in front and chasing from behind, they were nearly in a hopeless situation.

"Go down!" Ying Wuji made a swift decision, shouting furiously as he led the descent.

In mid-air, surrounded by enemies, landing on the ground at least eliminated attacks from below.

After a few moments, they finally landed in the ruined city, with countless Fire Spirit Tribe members swarming from all directions like a raging tide.

More Fire Spirit Tribe members climbed out of the lava, joining the hunt.

Continuous screams echoed. The Cloud River Realm cultivators who had followed Ying Wuji couldn't withstand the assault, dying or becoming seriously injured within moments.

Ying Wuji's eyes were filled with anger. He hadn't anticipated that what was once an opportunity turned into a tremendous crisis within such a short time, truly displaying the unpredictability of fate.

He felt slightly reassured by the standout performance of Niu Meng, whose exceptional strength at least allowed him to cooperate effectively.

Normally, he would have detected something unusual because, with the strength Niu Meng displayed, he couldn't possibly be an unknown figure. His prowess in magic rivaled, if not exceeded, that of Lui Qing from the Myriad Magic Pavilion.

Lui Qing had secured the fourth place in the Cloud River Realm competition. Niu Meng couldn't be considered inferior, yet there was no record of Niu Meng in the Cloud River Realm rankings.

But in such a critical situation, with the overwhelming Fire Spirit Tribe closing in like a tidal wave, Ying Wuji couldn't ponder too much.

While fending off attacks, he shouted, "Brother Niu, hold on, I've sent a message to the pass, reinforcements will be here soon."

Lu Ye remained silent, only using spells to fend off the enemy.

The Fire Spirit Tribe's strength wasn't extremely high, comparable to the Spirit Stream and Cloud River levels among human cultivators, with hardly any True Lake Realm members.

But Lu Ye could clearly sense that a stronger presence in the crisscrossing trenches was gradually awakening.

The Fire Spirit Tribe wasn't without powerful members; it was just that the Eight Extremes Demon Sealing Array hadn't completely failed, keeping these strong members sealed.

However, as time passed, these powerful Fire Spirit Tribe members would eventually break free.

So, they had to carve out an escape route quickly; waiting for rescue from Gushan City Pass was not reliable.

Particularly troubling for Lu Ye was the apparent innate resistance the Fire Spirit Tribe had to fire-type spells, making his attacks less effective.

After thirty seconds, Ying Wuji grunted in pain; a True Lake Realm Fire Spirit Tribe member had managed to land a close-range attack.

The Fire Spirit Tribe was naturally proficient in many fire-type secret techniques. Each one was a formidable fire-type magic cultivator, but that didn't mean they were limited to spellcasting. Some, who were tall and burly, were clearly adept at close-quarters combat.

Though they relied on each other, they couldn't withstand the overwhelming assault.

As Ying Wuji stumbled back, leaving his middle section exposed, numerous fire-type spells came at him, death looming over him, and despair filled his face.

Having just recently ascended to the True Lake Realm, his life was just beginning to get exciting. He didn't expect it to end here.

Early in his cultivation journey, the elders of Senluo Hall had taught him that the path of cultivation was fraught with thorns, life and death unpredictable, and every battle must be fought with the resolve and determination to die.

That was how he had always acted.

But now, at this critical moment, Ying Wuji felt a deep sense of reluctance.

His promising life had just begun; how could it end here?

Yet, no matter how unwilling, what could he do? His cultivation level was what it was; he couldn't exhibit strength far beyond his level.

Then, he saw a bright blade slicing through the spells approaching him, instantly dissipating them. The heat waves swept past him, shocking both his body and mind.

He stared blankly at the familiar figure standing before him, recognizing the long saber. His mind was in turmoil.

Magic cultivator Niu Meng?

From East Hillock Plains Pass?

Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivator?

Deceiver!

From the first moment he saw this person, he suspected it was Lu Ye. But seeing the battlefield marking on his hand made him dismiss his doubts.

Battlefield markings were gifts from Heaven's Augury. How could a member of the Haotian Alliance possess a Ten Thousand Demons Ridge battlefield marking?

Yet he had one!

Several times, he felt this person wanted to stab him; what he thought was just an illusion turned out to be his survival instinct!

It was indeed him!

Even in this perilous moment, Ying Wuji felt unsteady from the shock.

"Follow me!" Lu Ye had returned to his original voice, sighing lightly. As his weapon-control supplies box flew out from his waist, the Boulder Mountain Saber slashed fiercely, paving a way forward.

Indeed, the Boulder Mountain Saber suited him best.

Especially against enemies like the Fire Spirit Tribe, relying on spells was unreliable. A ten-level power spell hitting a Fire Spirit Tribe member would have its effect reduced by half; they had a natural resistance to fire spells.

With the long saber in hand, Lu Ye seemed transformed. Spirit force surged around him, and Fire Spirit Tribe members fell like stalks in the wind wherever he passed.

Though Ying Wuji was shocked, he knew sticking close to Lu Ye was his only chance of survival.

He understood that Lu Ye saved him not because of their trivial past acquaintance on Unparalleled Continent but because, at this moment, it was better to have a partner than to fight alone. Lu Ye needed someone to guard against attacks from behind.

He cooperated seamlessly, just as they had once done on Unparalleled Continent.

With the Fire Spirit Tribe's powerful members yet to awaken, it was the best time to escape. If they stalled any longer, even Lu Ye wouldn't make it out alive.

From high above, an indeterminable number of Fire Spirit Tribe members filled the vast cave and the crisscrossing trenches of the ruined city, more Fire Spirit Tribe members continuously awakening from within.

Amidst the Fire Spirit Tribe's domain, two figures pushed forward unchallenged, headed towards the entrance.

Yet, as they neared a hundred feet from the entrance, the magma ahead suddenly surged up, swiftly transforming into a giant hand that slammed towards Lu Ye and Ying Wuji.

The giant hand's force was astonishing. Even Fire Spirit Tribe members it encountered along the way were disoriented or exploded on the spot.

The warning bells in Lu Ye's mind rang sharply. Looking at the incoming giant hand, he sensed its power and knew a powerful Fire Spirit Tribe member had made a move, perhaps not entirely free, but capable of controlling spells.

If this was the case in a restricted state, who knew what terrifying abilities they might display once fully freed.

Given the situation, they either forged ahead or retreated far back.

With vast numbers of pursuers behind, retreat wasn't an option. Having fought to this position, if they turned back now, escape would be impossible.

Without hesitation, Lu Ye charged towards the giant hand.

Invoking the power of his Talent Tree, invisible roots sprouted from his skin, and he infused his spirit force into the long saber in his hand. In an instant, the Boulder Mountain Saber became enveloped in flames, as if truly burning.

He slashed forward fiercely, creating a stark contrast between his small figure and the massive hand.

The giant hand then engulfed both Lu Ye and Ying Wuji, obscuring them from view.

...

Lost track of time, recently overwhelmed with various affairs