

Humanity 921

Chapter 921 - 919: Understanding and Considerate Good Junior Sister

"Lu Yiye, for this trip you need to disguise a bit. After all, your current look is quite famous on our side, so you'd better impersonate Niu Meng." Ying Wuji reminded him.

Nian Yuexian couldn't help but be puzzled, "Niu Meng?"

Lu Ye explained, "It's my other identity."

Nian Yuexian understood, with a smile at the corner of her eyes.

When traveling, who doesn't have another identity? Just like her name, Water Fairy, there are times when Lu Ye transforms into Niu Meng.

Going with the flow, he put away the Boulder Mountain Saber. However, the Crimson Dragon Battle Suit complemented Lu Ye's physique, making him look unlike a magic cultivator, but it didn't matter; not all magic cultivators in the Nine Provinces wear wide-sleeved robes. There are always some who wear clothes similar in style to the Crimson Dragon Battle Suit.

There wasn't much to prepare. Ying Wuji asked, "Where are we headed?"

He also came to terms with it in his heart; since resistance was futile, cooperating sincerely was the only option. Moreover, having already obtained three drops of Soul Cleansing Water, the gains were massive.

"Liyuan!" Lu Ye reported the destination of this trip.

Ying Wuji's eyebrows furrowed, "That's not close."

Silently marveling at the audacity of these two, wanting to venture deep into Liyuan, no wonder they needed him as part of their team, evidently aiming to use his identity as a Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivator to clear obstacles for them along the way.

He also felt relieved; Liyuan's broad expanse, though not ideal in environment, meant no sect from Ten Thousand Demons Ridge was established there, implying Lu Yiye wasn't looking to cause trouble for someone there.

That made things much easier.

"Let's go then, but let me say upfront, on the way, both of you need to follow my instructions and avoid any extreme actions. Otherwise, I will risk my life to leak your whereabouts."

"Don't worry, now it's we who should be concerned."

Ying Wuji thought, indeed that's true. He summoned his Flying Spirit Artifact and swiftly landed on it.

Lu Ye summoned his spirit ark, but before he could leap onto it, Nian Yuexian had already seated herself on it.

Lu Ye was momentarily stunned, considering that Nian Yuexian wasn't particularly suited to channeling spirit force at the moment, he left her be.

Soon after, the two artifacts transformed into flowing light, soaring skyward in the direction of Liyuan.

Having progressed several hundred miles, they had entered the domain of the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's sphere of influence, soon encountering a patrol squad from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge.

"It's a patrol from Gushan City, I'll go negotiate, don't do anything rash," Ying Wuji said briefly, then proceeded straight ahead.

Lu Ye directed his spirit ark to halt in place, fingers lightly caressing, while Nian Yuexian watched Ying Wuji's back with her beautiful eyes, poised to strike with thunderbolt if anything went awry.

A short distance away, Ying Wuji spoke a few simple words to the patrol squad, and the patrol squad then departed.

"Let's go." Ying Wuji called out.

Lu Ye steered his spirit ark to follow.

They continued forward.

Occasionally encountering local checkpoint patrol teams along the way, Ying Wuji handled matters each time, ensuring smooth progress.

"This guide is rather reliable. Senior Brother, what leverage do you have over him?" Nian Yuexian turned to Lu Ye.

Because she was seated and Lu Ye was standing, Nian Yuexian's posture was somewhat skewed, head tilted up, plus her crisp, playful tone added a cute charm.

Lu Ye felt as if on pins and needles, softly saying, "Master..."

What's wrong with this woman? Wearing a mask gives the impression she's a completely different person.

"What master or servant, this trip you're Senior Brother Niu Meng, I'm Junior Sister Water Fairy." Behind the mask, Nian Yuexian playfully glanced at Lu Ye.

Alluring indeed!

If you say so, then I guess...

Lu Ye felt resigned.

Ying Wuji's cooperation is owed first to the merit of the three drops of Soul Cleansing Water, and secondly, as he mentioned, during their time on the Unparalleled Continent, Lu Ye saved his life twice. Ying Wuji, hailing from a top sect, isn't one to forget favors.

But strictly speaking, it was his assessment that this trip, Lu Ye likely wouldn't do anything harmful to the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, otherwise he wouldn't be so cooperative.

After passing several layers of patrol checkpoints, ahead, the number of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge patrol teams decreased, as they had now penetrated deep into the heart of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's territory in Bingzhou.

With nightfall, the three found a sheltered spot to rest.

Ying Wuji lit a bonfire, roasting beast meat, while Lu Ye set up a protective array nearby. Upon returning, he found Nian Yuexian had already started eating.

Due to the impracticality of removing the mask, she simply lifted it slightly while eating, yet her speed of consumption was quick.

Moreover, Ying Wuji seemed to have told her something that made her laugh continuously.

From the viewpoint of Lu Ye, coming back from array setup and witnessing this scene, he couldn't help but feel anxious for Ying Wuji, fearing that he might accidentally say something inappropriate and find himself killed by Nian Yuexian.

"Senior Brother, for you!" Nian Yuexian held a roasted piece of beast meat, offering it to Lu Ye who had returned.

Although she'd repeatedly called him Senior Brother along the way and he had already reminded himself to get used to her disguise, Lu Ye's action of taking the meat remained somewhat stiff.

"Senior Brother, you guys have had so many interesting experiences together, why haven't I heard about them before?"

Ying Wuji grumbled, "What's so interesting? It's clearly him bullying people all the time."

"And you don't resist?" Nian Yuexian tilted her head, looking at Ying Wuji with an innocent expression.

Ying Wuji's expression was awkward, "Can't beat him..."

Nian Yuexian raised her hand and patted Ying Wuji's shoulder, speaking earnestly, "Then you must cultivate diligently, strive to defeat my Senior Brother soon, and vent your grievances."

Ying Wuji was deeply moved, finally meeting someone who understood his difficulties.

And it was a female cultivator!

Darn it, why do all the good things in the world happen to Lu Yiye, and why don't I have such an understanding junior sister!

At night, the two took turns keeping watch and continued on at dawn.

With the guidance of the ten-part map, and with Ying Wuji, a Core Disciple of the Senluo Hall in Bingzhou, acting as their guide, the journey went smoothly. Occasionally, they encountered one or two Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators flying by, but Ying Wuji dealt with them.

This method was much more efficient and safer than Nian Yuexian originally planning to sneak in with Lu Ye.

Time flew by, and three days later.

A vast plain entered the view of the three.

Liyuan, they had arrived!

The entire area of Liyuan was enormous, but due to its lack of resources, such as minerals or other cultivation resources, no sect had ever established their headquarters there since ancient times.

According to the ten-part map, Liyuan occupied nearly a tenth of the land of the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge in Bingzhou, showing its vastness.

The wind blew the grass low.

The three looked ahead together, and the atmosphere was inexplicably heavy.

Ying Wuji said, "I guess, if I want to leave now, you definitely won't allow it."

"Keep up!" Lu Ye couldn't be bothered to argue, controlling his spirit ark to glide forward. Ying Wuji sighed and resigned himself to his fate.

Although they had reached Liyuan, he knew clearly that Lu Yiye wouldn't just let him leave like that. He didn't know what Lu Ye and his senior sister wanted to do, but letting him go now posed a risk of leaking information.

Moreover, who knew if they wouldn't encounter more Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators ahead, at which point he'd still have to deal with them.

They continued onward, and soon, Lu Ye noticed some abnormalities below and frowned, "Was there a war here before?"

Along the way, many places bore traces of past battles, and these traces seemed aged, not leftover from recent times.

The remnants of battle covered a vast area, indicating that if a war had erupted here, it was definitely not a minor skirmish.

"Have you not heard of the battle of Liyuan thirty-eight years ago?" Ying Wuji looked at Lu Ye curiously, puzzled as to why he hadn't heard of it.

"No," Lu Ye shook his head.

"That's odd. You're a disciple of the Righteous Blood Sect. How could you not know?"

"What does that have to do with me being a Righteous Blood Sect disciple?" Lu Ye frowned, vaguely suspecting something.

"Because Liyuan is the burial ground of your renowned senior brother! Back then, millions of cultivators from both major camps fought a brutal battle here..."

Ying Wuji recounted the story, while Lu Ye listened quietly, glancing at Nian Yuexian sitting composedly before him.

No wonder Nian Yuexian had been silent since they entered Liyuan.

"You must know that Bingzhou had fallen completely under the control of your Haotian Alliance, but since the battle of Liyuan, half of Bingzhou has returned under the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's control. If not for your Haotian Alliance quickly establishing a defense line, the entire Bingzhou might be under the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge, leaving nothing for your Haotian Alliance."

This was the first time Lu Ye had heard about these things; no one had ever mentioned it to him before. Mainly in the Righteous Blood Sect, above him were only the sect master and Senior Sister Shui Yuan, and usually, when Lu Ye wasn't cultivating, he wasn't at the sect headquarters. Even when he occasionally returned, the sect master was as elusive as a divine dragon, and Shui Yuan only cared about his well-being and any dangers he might've encountered.

Who would tell him about these past events?

According to Shui Yuan's previous words, there was a historical connection between Nian Yuexian and his senior brother. It seemed that Nian Yuexian once served under his senior brother's command. Hence, it's evident she was present during the battle of Liyuan. Returning to this place now, it undoubtedly brings back memories.

To accomplish what exactly she came to Liyuan now, Lu Ye never asked. But it now seemed highly likely related to past events.

Could it be that his senior brother left some treasures in Liyuan?

That shouldn't be the case, for if so, Nian Yuexian would've retrieved them long ago and wouldn't have waited until today.

She needs to utilize his strength to achieve her purpose, suggesting she cannot accomplish it alone, implying an element of risk.

Luckily, now that they had entered Liyuan, whatever Nian Yuexian planned to do would soon be revealed.

Although she remained silent, she was secretly channeling her spirit force, altering the spirit ark's direction at a critical moment, clearly searching for something.

Four hours later, a black line became visible on the horizon ahead.

As they drew closer, Lu Ye realized it was not merely a black line, but a vast, bottomless chasm stretching across Liyuan, as if it were a heavenly abyss dividing the entire Liyuan in two.

Chapter 922 The Bold and Unrestrained Senior Now

"Slit of Sky!" Staring at the bottomless gorge ahead, Ying Wuji raised an eyebrow, "Is this your destination?"

"Is there a problem?" Lu Ye asked, although he was not sure if this was the destination. But now it seemed very likely it was.

"No problem." Ying Wuji slowly shook his head.

The Slit of Sky in Liyuan is very well-known over here at the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge. No one knows how this huge, continuous gorge came to be, but it hides lots of opportunities. Some have found treasures left by powerful figures inside, while others have found extremely rare minerals, and collected precious spirit flowers and herbs.

However, even if it gave rise to many opportunities, over the years, it's been completely searched through.

Nowadays, the Slit of Sky is just a geological peculiarity, and no one comes here to waste time anymore.

The spirit ark followed the edge of the Slit of Sky, flying forward, until at one location, the silent Nian Yuexian suddenly spoke, "Go down."

Lu Ye quickly adjusted the direction, driving the spirit ark to descend deep into the Slit of Sky, with Ying Wuji closely following.

By this point, he was very curious about Lu Ye's purpose for this journey. Even if asked to leave now, he wouldn't want to go.

Unclear, Ying Wuji wondered what was Lu Ye's clear purpose for coming here.

Going deeper continuously, after a seemingly long time, when looking up, only a sliver of light shone from above, truly the real Slit of Sky.

At such depth, Lu Ye could vaguely sense the presence of the origin magnetic field, as his own spirit force showed signs of being suppressed.

The origin magnetic field isn't solely emitted by origin magnetic ore; it exists deep underground and is quite common.

For Yiyi, the origin magnetic field is extremely daunting. Even though she has ground evasion capability, she doesn't easily venture too deep underground, as interference from the origin magnetic field would damage her Spiritual Body. If severe, she might not be able to maintain her Spiritual Body, vanishing without a trace.

Hence, Yiyi always proceeds with caution when using ground evasion.

Despite the dim light all around, visibility remains unaffected.

Until a certain moment when Nian Yuexian suddenly leaped from the spirit ark and descended toward a concave stone pit beside them.

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji followed right behind.

Ying Wuji frowned, realizing this journey seemed to be led not by Lu Ye, but the female cultivator named Water Fairy.

Standing inside the sunken stone pit, Nian Yuexian raised her hand to gently stroke the stone wall and softly spoke, "Back in the day, I was injured, pursued by someone, and ended up here. Narrowly escaping a disaster, by a stroke of luck, I discovered the hidden secret here."

Lu Ye listened quietly, thinking it wasn't his senior brother who left any treasure here; it was Nian Yuexian who found the chance herself.

Surely she must have tried to claim it over the years but evidently failed, until discovering her Twin Flying Phoenixes technique, deciding to utilize her own power to achieve the goal.

This reason is why Nian Yuexian brought him along.

Ying Wuji felt disordered—'Back in the day?' How could it be 'back in the day?'

What's with this archaic, mature tone?

This woman— isn't she Lu Ye's junior sister?

Inexplicably, an unsettling feeling arose from deep within.

The next moment, this unease turned into shock because, in his eyes, the Water Fairy junior sister who had only True Lake Level 1 cultivation, suddenly emanated a strong spirit force wave and tremendous pressure from within.

Ying Wuji turned pale.

No wonder—such spirit force waves and pressure, he had only felt from Wan Zhanggang! Yet, Wan Zhanggang didn't seem as formidable as this woman.

Staring at the woman's back before him, Ying Wuji suddenly felt a sense of familiarity... as if he had seen her somewhere before.

In his mind flashed the scene from the defensive battle of Gushan City, the day when he caught a glimpse from afar.

That was the battlefield of the Divine Sea Realm, and the figure that swiftly fled from Gushan City that day was very similar to the one in front!

A ghastly thought emerged in his mind...

Involuntarily swallowing, he stiffly turned his head, catching Lu Ye's meaningful gaze, full of cheeky and mocking intent.

Ying Wuji instantly understood!

He wasn't mistaken; the woman before him is not some Water Fairy junior sister, she truly is that person!

The same woman who even his own Mountain Pass Chief, a Divine Sea Realm strong cultivator, felt cautious toward!

Recalling their interactions throughout the journey... Ying Wuji nearly cried.

Initially, he thought having ties with Lu Ye brought bad things; never did he expect bigger trouble to emerge now.

His legs wobbled and his whole body went weak, Ying Wuji wished he could faint right now. Annoyingly, the feeling of shock kept him more alert than ever.

Nian Yuexian lifted her camouflage and even removed her mask.

The previous disguise was to prevent identity exposure, also easing potential pressure on Ying Wuji. But now that they've reached the destination, there was no need to continue disguising.

Regardless of what happens later, identities would be exposed.

Lu Ye silently took off his mask too, retrieving the Boulder Mountain Saber from the storage space and holding it ready.

"Don't do anything rash," Ying Wuji panicked, feeling inexplicably that Lu Yiye intended to eliminate him as a witness.

Lu Ye ignored him and asked Nian Yuexian, "Master, how should we handle this?"

Nian Yuexian didn't turn her head and said calmly, "Don't leave my side by more than ten feet."

The conversation between the two wasn't clear, but Ying Wuji understood it and quickly nodded his head like a chicken pecking rice: "I will definitely not leave. Rest assured, senior, I still cherish my own life dearly."

Turning his head, he looked at Lu Ye with a resentful expression, as if blaming him for causing trouble.

Indeed, those three drops of Soul Cleansing Water were not that easily obtainable. Had he known that there was a Divine Sea Realm cultivator involved, it wasn't just three drops, even thirty drops... he might have reconsidered!

Nonetheless, at this moment, Ying Wuji was truly like sitting on pins and needles, uncomfortable everywhere.

In front, Nian Yuexian had already activated her spirit force. With a wave of her hand, the array banners hidden around were drawn into her palm.

This place had evidently been set up with numerous formations by her long ago!

A formation arranged by a strong cultivator of the Divine Sea Realm, naturally intricate and profound. This was the reason why the secrets of this place had remained undiscovered for so many years.

Although there were not many people coming to Slit of Sky seeking treasures and opportunities, people would still come. If there wasn't a formation concealing it, the opportunities here wouldn't have remained till now.

Once Nian Yuexian dispelled the formation, the stone wall ahead trembled suddenly, and then a large portion of it slid aside, revealing a passage leading inward.

Nian Yuexian turned her head and reached out a hand to Lu Ye.

Lu Ye understood, and as the Boulder Mountain Saber was unsheathed, the blade flashed, and both their palms simultaneously bled.

Ying Wuji was dumbfounded, unaware of what Lu Ye intended to do.

But what astonished him even more soon happened.

He saw Lu Ye actually grab Nian Yuexian's jade-like hand, not only grabbing but intertwining their fingers tightly!

At this moment, Ying Wuji's eyes almost bulged in disbelief, filled with profound admiration for Lu Ye deep down.

The woman in front was one those even Wan Zhanggang feared and avoided, her beauty was exceptional, a rarity across the entire Nine Provinces, with few individuals worthy of her.

Yet, such a woman, whom ordinary Divine Sea Realm cultivators would feel ashamed before, Lu Ye boldly intertwined his fingers with hers!

Such audacity!

What puzzled Ying Wuji further was that it seemed like Nian Yuexian initiated it. Are seniors nowadays so bold and free?

What exactly is the relationship between these two?

Before he could figure it out, Nian Yuexian raised their intertwined hands, spun, and pressed herself against Lu Ye's chest.

Even more intimate...

Ying Wuji was already numb, beyond shocked, envying Lu Ye's good fortune.

At this moment, Lu Ye and Nian Yuexian's posture was just like during the battle against Wan Zhanggang; at first glance, it looked like Lu Ye was holding Nian Yuexian, with his right hand clasping her left hand, placed near her abdomen.

But he knew this was Nian Yuexian protecting him; there must be danger ahead necessitating her shielding him like this.

"Don't think too much."

Nian Yuexian's voice was soft, a bit trembling. In this position, she could clearly feel Lu Ye's scorching breath, her neck itching, and her cheeks warm...

"I know." Lu Ye took a deep breath, settling his mind, "Do as you will, I will take care of myself."

"Mm!"

"How about letting him scout ahead?" Lu Ye suggested again.

"Lu Yiye!" Ying Wuji snapped from his daze, furious, "Are you even human?"

Who knows what danger lies ahead, something that could make even a strong figure like Nian Yuexian feel threatened, surely not ordinary danger?

Lu Yiye is truly vile, actually wanting him to scout ahead.

Thankfully, Nian Yuexian quickly said, "He won't make it, his cultivation won't endure for three breaths!"

Ying Wuji immediately sighed in relief, though his weak cultivation... has its advantages.

"Here goes." Nian Yuexian took a deep breath, her full chest rising high, then her figure slid into the dark passage!

Lu Ye completely relaxed his mind, allowing her to lead him in, still reminding Ying Wuji: "Follow!"

In his heart, Ying Wuji cursed Lu Ye bitterly but could only comply obediently.

At this moment, he dared not make any reckless moves; facing Nian Yuexian, even if he wanted to flee, he needed the skill to do so.

Shh...

Suddenly, a piercing sound rushed from the front, the dark passage instantly filled with dazzling light.

Lu Ye's expression tightened, he hadn't detected from where this attack originated, and by the time he noticed, it was already upon him. In other words, this single attack almost exceeded his ability to respond.

Unknown when, Nian Yuexian already had a sword in hand, Lu Ye, almost pressed against her, clearly felt a strong force emanate from her body, as she raised her hand to strike down.

The oncoming light shattered, and Nian Yuexian continued her steps forward, deeper into the passage, Lu Ye shadowing her, and behind them a concerned, solitary Ying Wuji.

Chapter 923 Sword Qi

The sound of slicing filled the air, with sharp beams constantly slashing from the front. Nian Yuexian's longsword danced gracefully, blocking all incoming attacks.

Spirit force surged, shielding Lu Ye behind her, resembling an unbreakable mountain, guarding against the stormy onslaughts.

An unparalleled sense of security arose within him, prompting Lu Ye to seriously observe the woman who was within arm's reach for the first time.

Unfortunately, as she faced away from him, he couldn't see much—only her slender neck white as snow and the flowing locks of her hair.

Her hair, like tiny hands, tickled Lu Ye's neck and cheeks.

Visibly, her snow-white neck began to turn red...

Even though her back was turned to Lu Ye, the Mental Consciousness of a strong cultivator in the Divine Sea Realm was exceptionally perceptive, clearly sensing Lu Ye's gaze, making Nian Yuexian uncomfortable, and causing her strikes to become even more fierce, as if in warning...

Lu Ye shifted his gaze.

A gentle breath came from the front as Nian Yuexian's tense figure relaxed slightly, and she spoke, "I don't know what treasure is hidden ahead, but it's likely a flying sword. All this Sword Qi is unleashed by that flying sword."

Perhaps to divert Lu Ye's attention or to ease the awkwardness, she proactively shared some information about the place.

"I've been here several times, but each time I didn't succeed completely. The furthest I've gone is three hundred feet, so I need your help."

Lu Ye was indeed distracted: "If the released Sword Qi alone could force you back, then what does the flying sword itself look like?"

"Who knows." Nian Yuexian clearly wasn't entirely confident in her judgment.

If the area were wide, with her abilities, she might manage. However, the pathway was narrow, leaving no room to maneuver, facing the sword light strikes head-on, making it impossible to avoid directly.

Hence, she decided to bring Lu Ye along, with Twin Flying Phoenixes allowing her to borrow the vast vitality within Lu Ye anytime, anywhere, possibly making success achievable.

Of course, it's just a possibility, as none knew the exact length of the passage.

"Have you tried sneaking in, Master?" Lu Ye inquired.

"Tried, didn't work. There are multiple restrictions here, the moment anyone steps in, the wondrous restrictions are triggered, and endless Sword Qi assaults." After a brief pause, she whispered, "Stop talking for now."

Initially, she aimed to divert Lu Ye's attention through conversation, unaware it worsened the situation, as Lu Ye's words caused warm breaths to strike her neck, making her uncomfortable.

Lu Ye understood, fixating his gaze forward, remaining silent, relaxing entirely, as Nian Yuexian led him through the passage.

Fifty feet, one hundred feet, two hundred feet, three hundred feet...

After slicing through countless incoming Sword Qi, the trio finally reached the deepest part Nian Yuexian had previously reached.

At this point, the frequency and force of Sword Qi attacking from the front were at a terrifying level. Lu Ye, not considering himself weak, couldn't imagine surviving even a single Sword Qi strike alone.

This intrigued him, wondering what kind of flying sword, unattended, could emit Sword Qi, causing a formidable force like Nian Yuexian to retreat repeatedly.

Above Spiritual Artifact is Magic Artifact, above Magic Artifact is spirit treasure...

Clearly, the flying sword inside far exceeded the spirit treasure level.

What's beyond spirit treasure quality?

That, Lu Ye truly did not know, as at his current cultivation level, Magic Artifact was most suitable, and items like spirit treasure were beyond his activation.

The Nine Arrays Diagram is a spirit treasure, but so far, Lu Ye and Yiyi still couldn't unleash its full power.

Compared to the previous time, Nian Yuexian's strength had evidently progressed, as she had reached her limit previously, yet this time it seemed less exhausting.

Moving forward was the real test.

Indeed, the frequency and force of Sword Qi attacks increased again, Lu Ye felt Nian Yuexian's trembling with each strike in his embrace, realizing she was now serious.

As they proceeded, Nian Yuexian began to struggle slightly.

Lu Ye noticed but was powerless—at this moment, the only help he could offer Nian Yuexian was vitality support; rash interference would worsen the scenario.

With a slicing sound and Nian Yuexian's muffled groan, a Sword Qi fragmented, leaving a sword mark on her sword-wielding right hand.

Blood spurted, instantly staining her robes.

Yet, her steps did not halt, rather accelerated significantly.

Slicing, slicing, slicing...

Sword Qi scattered ceaselessly, slicing Nian Yuexian's body, intensifying her wounds bit by bit.

Yet Lu Ye, shielded behind her, remained unscathed.

As for Ying Wuji behind them, trembling, he too remained unharmed.

With an increasingly intense scent of blood, Lu Ye could feel his vitality continuously flowing into Nian Yuexian's body through the Twin Flying Phoenixes, affording her the capital to persist fighting.

Time seemed to stretch incredibly long.

A quarter of an hour later, the woman in Lu Ye's arms had astonishingly turned into a figure shrouded in blood.

If Nian Yuexian had ventured alone, such wounds would have forced her to retreat, uncertain if further advance offered any chance of escape.

But with Lu Ye's vitality infusion, despite her considerable injuries, her body felt no weakness whatsoever.

Moreover, she discovered that not only could she draw on Lu Ye's vitality, but also the spirit force within Lu Ye!

This made Lu Ye have to take out a demonic pill from his storage sack and stuff it into his mouth, chewing with a crunch.

In such a dire situation, swallowing a demonic pill was the quickest way to replenish spirit force.

"Lu Ye, can you still hold on?"

Lu Ye, who was chewing on the demonic pill, suddenly heard Nian Yuexian's voice.

He couldn't help but be stunned, as this seemed to be the first time Nian Yuexian called his name since they met.

"No problem!"

"Then I'll speed up!"

The tunnel ahead seemed endless, as if there was no hope in sight, and even Nian Yuexian was getting a bit impatient.

As soon as she spoke, their closely-tied figures swiftly darted forward. Along with the common dance of Nian Yuexian's hand, a series of clinking sounds continuously echoed.

Ying Wuji, following behind, let out a strange cry and hurriedly unfolded his form and pursued them.

Nian Yuexian would protect Lu Ye, but wouldn't care for his fate. Now, he could only pray that Nian Yuexian was strong enough to hold on. Otherwise, if Nian Yuexian died, Lu Ye and he would be next.

Rippling like tidal waves, streams of Sword Qi surged wildly, turning the entire front of the tunnel into a sea of sword light.

Even in such a situation, Nian Yuexian charged in headlong.

Patches of sword light were extinguished continuously, and the injuries on her body gradually worsened, but with the uninterrupted infusion of Lu Ye's vitality, she still had the capital to continue fighting. It was a very strange state.

Until a certain moment, all the sword light was completely extinguished, leaving the tunnel in utter darkness.

Only Nian Yuexian's heavy breathing could be heard.

"I—is it over?" Ying Wuji timidly asked from behind.

As soon as the words fell, a dazzling light illuminated from the front, and the sudden strong light that flashed in the darkness made it almost impossible for one to open their eyes.

A fiercely icy killing intent rushed from the front, and just as Lu Ye's eyes contracted, Nian Yuexian brought him forward to meet it.

It was a Sword Qi that seemed capable of slicing through the Void; when Nian Yuexian's Longsword met it, the Spiritual Artifact-level Longsword emitted a strenuous groan.

The Sword Qi was obstructed but not dissipated, continuing to slowly cleave forward as if intending to slice all intruders in half.

A crisp sound rang out as Lu Ye's eyelid twitched, hastening to glance at Nian Yuexian's Longsword, only to see a thin crack appear along the blade.

It can't hold!

Once the Longsword breaks, against such a sword light strike, the three of them would be doomed.

In an instant, Lu Ye made a decision, raising the knife in his hand, the muscles in his arms slightly swelling for a moment, unleashing a move of Myriad Stars.

Bits of starlight all fell upon the Sword Qi, but how could a Sword Qi that even Nian Yuexian found extremely troublesome be shaken by Lu Ye, a cultivator of the True Lake Realm?

Crack...

The crack on the Longsword widened significantly.

At the mortal peril, Lu Ye raised his other hand, gripping Nian Yuexian's sword-hand, spirit force surging fiercely, forming a complex Spirit Rune on the Longsword in an instant.

Moon Return!

Nian Yuexian seemed to sense the profoundness of this Spirit Rune, her spirit immediately lifted, and the Longsword in her hand danced, like a butterfly in graceful flight.

In an instant, she unleashed more than a dozen sword strikes, the dense sword light stabbing at the same point on the Sword Qi.

The next moment, the seemingly solid Sword Qi suddenly split open, dividing into two, shooting towards the cave walls on both sides.

Silently, massive and profound slash marks appeared on the cave walls.

And after unleashing those dozen sword strikes, Nian Yuexian seemed to lose all her strength, collapsing directly into Lu Ye's embrace.

Lu Ye also felt a sense that his entire being was emptied out, though he was unharmed. Nian Yuexian was borrowing the force from within his body, which was no small consumption.

His legs gave way, and he fell to the ground with Nian Yuexian in his arms.

Heavy breathing came from the mouths of both, like fish out of water, echoing in turns.

Ying Wuji, who was watching from behind, was dumbfounded: "What's with you two, get up quickly."

If they didn't get up, and there was another attack like the previous one, he wouldn't be able to withstand it.

For a moment, he had the urge to slip away quietly.

Both Lu Ye and Nian Yuexian clearly realized this, struggling to stand. Lu Ye leaned against the cave wall, with Nian Yuexian nestled in his arms, watching vigilantly ahead. From start to finish, their interlocked fingers never let go.

But fortunately, no more attacks came from the front.

The incredibly powerful Sword Qi just now should have been the final attack.

Chapter 924 A Slip in a Well-Laid Plan

The dark passage was enveloped in silence, and since stepping into it, the continuous crises had dissipated completely.

Lu Ye leaned against the cave wall, with Nian Yuexian nestled in his embrace, both hurriedly deploying their techniques to recover their energies.

The crunching sound was startlingly out of place in this silent atmosphere.

Nian Yuexian initially paid it little mind but soon realized something was amiss, as the sound was not like chewing on spirit force pills. A quick scan with her Mental Consciousness revealed an expression of surprise.

Because she discovered Lu Ye was actually eating a demonic pill!

"Are you alright?"

How could someone eat a demonic pill? Though quite experienced herself, such a matter was unheard of; a demonic pill indeed contains vast energy, but it is the essence of a demon beast's cultivation,

impure and chaotic to a cultivator. Even if it could be refined and absorbed, it would render one's spirit force exceedingly murky.

"I'm fine!" Lu Ye responded casually, continuing to eat the demonic pill, while a large amount of gray mist arose from his Talent Tree, rapidly restoring his nearly depleted spirit force.

Nian Yuexian asked no further, though curious about Lu Ye's actions, clearly was not the time to investigate such matters. It would be best to inquire further later.

They continued to recover and meditate.

Borrowing the massive vitality within Lu Ye's body, along with Nian Yuexian's own foundation of the Divine Sea Realm, her injuries were rapidly healing.

Only the blood-stained garment couldn't be changed for the time being.

But such matters were minor, with no hindrance.

As the two recovered and meditated, Ying Wuji remained silent and hidden nearby. This journey had been forced upon him, so whatever happens next was irrelevant to him; his sole task was to ensure his own survival and, once all was concluded, quickly part ways with Lu Ye.

Time trickled away.

Four hours later, Nian Yuexian spoke, "Let's go."

The recovery was almost complete, and her injuries had greatly improved, no longer affecting her ability to perform.

As she stood up, she moved out from Lu Ye's embrace, yet their hands remained intertwined.

No one knew if danger lay ahead; the Twin Flying Phoenixes continued to exert their effect, allowing her to draw strength from Lu Ye whenever needed.

They moved forward, after a short while, a glow suddenly appeared in view.

The glow was abrupt to the extreme; until reaching a certain zone, none of the three had noticed a trace, appearing the moment they crossed that particular spot.

Following the direction from which the light emanated, they advanced about a hundred yards and reached the passage's end.

The end led to an unsettling Abyss below, its depth unknown, where the profound darkness seemed capable of devouring everything.

Ahead lay a stone bridge, not wide, accommodating only three abreast.

And at the stone bridge's end stood an abrupt stone pillar, rising vertically from within the Abyss, its root depth unknown.

Reaching here, all three showed expressions of amazement.

Surrounding the stone platform, numerous swords moved about like a school of fish swimming ceaselessly, each sword's body clearly a flying sword of excellent quality.

Their quantity was difficult to estimate.

Such a massive batch of flying swords, also of considerable quality, would be substantial wealth if taken out.

Ying Wuji watched, feeling restless, but ultimately sighed internally.

With someone like Nian Yuexian from the Divine Sea Realm present, no good thing here would be his share. Turning away, he decided not to look to avoid the heartache.

Lu Ye and Nian Yuexian's gaze, however, didn't dwell on these numerous flying swords but fixed upon the stone platform.

Right in the center of the stone platform, a cutlass approximately two feet long lay slanted, though its time there remained unknown, its surface was smooth as a mirror, with dazzling light.

When gazing upon it, a piercingly cold Sword Intent was immediately felt, as if it aimed to sever even the ethereal eyesight!

The light that three had seen in the passage previously was unleashed by this cutlass.

Nian Yuexian guessed correctly; fine-quality flying swords indeed existed here, but not one, many; yet comparatively, the cutlass on the stone platform was the most excellent in quality.

Lu Ye was unsure of the cutlass's grade, but given the current information, this cutlass surely surpassed the spirit treasure level.

If Nian Yuexian were to obtain such an item, the threat she posed would be terrifying.

This cutlass could serve both as a flying sword and a weapon for a Ghost Cultivator; acquiring it would considerably strengthen Nian Yuexian, thus putting Wan Zhanggang's life in jeopardy.

"There's an array," Nian Yuexian's gaze didn't remain on the two-foot cutlass, surveying the surroundings, she immediately made the assessment.

Lu Ye's cultivation in the Array Path, although surpassing many in the same realm, was still somewhat behind Nian Yuexian; only after her hint, did he notice some subtleties.

The realization struck.

Likely when the three entered the passage, the array's power here was triggered, hence the endless Sword Qi slashes emanated.

It was not merely a hindrance, more like a trial.

Who left these flying swords and this cutlass here? Who set up the array?

What purpose does this trial serve?

While Lu Ye pondered deeply, Nian Yuexian led him forward, hand in hand.

"I'll wait for you here!" Ying Wuji quickly shouted.

Though the treasure was tempting, it wasn't meant for him; risking his life was not worth it. Waiting here quietly was the best choice for him.

Nian Yuexian ignored him, not because she trusted Ying Wuji, but because right under her nose, there was nothing he could do.

Nian Yuexian walked very slowly, continuously casting array banners into the surrounding void as she moved.

To reach that stone platform safely and retrieve that dirk, she had to break the Formation here.

Although the Formation here was extremely sophisticated, it had been here for countless years, so Nian Yuexian could still discern some clues and flaws. Breaking the array was not difficult for her.

Lu Ye did not intervene, simply activating the Insight Spirit Runes and observing silently, learning Nian Yuexian's array breaking techniques.

Layer after layer of Formations were dismantled, and although the stone bridge was only about thirty zhang long, it took Nian Yuexian and Lu Ye almost two hours to cross it.

Finally, they arrived on the stone platform.

Clang...

The dirk embedded in the stone platform trembled lightly, emitting a clear and melodious sword hum, as if sentient, joyfully anticipating its new master.

Nian Yuexian did not act hastily but continued to observe all around, trying to see if there were any hidden Formations.

Lu Ye also used the Insight Spirit Runes to inspect.

Moments later, Nian Yuexian released Lu Ye's hand and said, "Step back."

Lu Ye hesitated slightly, then drifted backward, quickly landing beside Ying Wuji.

Ying Wuji whispered, "Lu Yiye, that dirk... what quality is it?"

From such a distance, he couldn't clearly sense it. Even though he knew the good stuff here wasn't meant for him, he still wanted to know the details of that dirk.

But as expected, there was no response from Lu Ye, whose eyes remained fixed on Nian Yuexian with unwavering focus.

On the stone platform, Nian Yuexian had already raised her hand to grasp the dirk's hilt.

The next moment, accompanied by a clang, the dirk was pulled out.

She immediately watched all around warily, but all was silent, without the slightest anomaly.

The treasure... was in hand!

Just as Nian Yuexian was about to retreat happily, her expression suddenly changed. Before her, without any warning, a vortex appeared eerily. More shockingly, an uncontrollable force surged from the dirk in her hand.

Instantly, it enveloped her entire body. Despite being a cultivator of the Divine Sea Realm, she found her spirit force scattered by this impact, leaving her unstable.

She had been guarding against hidden traps in the surroundings, as obtaining such a treasure seemed too easy.

But ultimately, she had overlooked one thing: the trap was not in the environment, but within the dirk itself.

It could even be said that the preceding Formations she had broken were just illusions to confuse her.

With immense devouring force emanating from the vortex, her body fell uncontrollably into it. She felt something, and swiftly turned her head, only to see Lu Ye dashing towards her like lightning from the other end of the stone bridge, extending a hand towards her with urgency.

"Don't come!" Nian Yuexian shouted sternly.

But the next moment, Lu Ye had already arrived in front of her. Nian Yuexian gritted her teeth and quickly reached out to grab Lu Ye's hand.

Lu Ye, standing firmly on the stone platform, used both hands to grip Nian Yuexian's arm, channeling all his strength to try and pull her out of the vortex.

However, there was no movement!

By now, most of Nian Yuexian's body had been consumed by the vortex. If he hadn't arrived in time, she would have vanished without a trace.

He had no idea what lay within the vortex, but this sudden turn of events was clearly no good thing.

At that moment, a chaotic clanging sounded, accompanied by a strange cry from Ying Wuji.

Lu Ye turned to look, only to see Ying Wuji running rapidly towards him.

He wasn't coming to lend a helping hand but was being pursued by the flying sword that had once hovered near the stone platform like a fish.

The icy killing intent forced him to flee in this direction.

In his flight for life, Ying Wuji's speed was extraordinary, reaching Lu Ye in the blink of an eye.

Seeing the overwhelming sword light behind Ying Wuji, Lu Ye sighed inwardly, stopped exerting force, and instead plunged directly into the vortex.

He couldn't see what was inside the vortex, but if he didn't dive inside, he and Ying Wuji would most likely end up in dire straits.

Without Lu Ye's pull, Nian Yuexian's form quickly vanished into the vortex.

As she disappeared, Lu Ye saw the regret in her eyes, and then a soft body clung to him as everything spun around.

After Nian Yuexian and Lu Ye disappeared one after the other into the vortex, Ying Wuji followed suit.

Numerous sword lights trailed closely behind, vanishing without a trace.

Moments later, everything had settled, leaving only the stone bridge and the empty stone platform behind.

Endless darkness prevailed.

Chapter 925 Actually, the disciple is a sword cultivator

It felt as if he had fallen into an endless abyss, his body continuously sinking. Everything around him became illusory, except for the warm, soft body in his embrace that gave Lu Ye a real sense of presence, keeping him barely conscious.

He did not know how much time had passed, but suddenly his body and mind stabilized.

As he regained his senses, a coarse voice unexpectedly echoed in his ear.

"An artifact is the weapon of a cultivator. Cultivation varies in strength, and so do weapons in quality..."

Feeling somewhat dazed, Lu Ye raised his eyes and saw an elderly man with white hair seated in front of him, imparting earnest teachings.

Bewildered by the situation, Lu Ye turned his head and met a pair of concerned eyes looking back at him.

It was Nian Yuexian; their eyes met, and confirming that both were unharmed, they finally felt at ease.

Ying Wuji was also present, seated on the other side, quietly observing their surroundings with suspicion.

At this moment, the three of them were positioned in front of a thatched cottage.

The elderly man sat cross-legged, while the three of them kneeled in front of him, seemingly in a respectful posture.

The sound of something cutting through the air could be heard, and the three collectively looked up to see light streaks sweeping across the sky in the direction of the sound.

"Those are flying swords!" Ying Wuji, with sharp eyes, immediately identified the source of the streaks.

As he spoke, numerous light streaks shot toward a steep mountain peak nearby, and in the next instant, a series of thuds echoed as the flying swords embedded themselves into the mountain's cliff face, leaving only the hilts exposed.

The elderly man's voice paused, and gazing at the cliff filled with flying swords, he spoke slowly, his expression complex, "Sword Mountain is the foundation of our Sword Weapon Sect. Today, the three of you enter my tutelage. On the day you craft a flying sword worthy of Sword Mountain, you will graduate."

This speech conveyed a wealth of information, at least offering Lu Ye some clarity.

This was the Sword Weapon Sect, and the mountain covered with flying swords was Sword Mountain. At this moment, the three of them were apprenticed to this elderly man.

From the elder's words, it seemed that the Sword Weapon Sect was a place to cultivate Artifact Refiners, and to graduate, one had to craft a flying sword worthy of Sword Mountain!

A secret realm!

Lu Ye suddenly realized that the vortex appearing on the stone platform was linked to a secret realm.

Not only Spirit Stream and Cloud River battlefields contained secret realms; those truly filled with great fortune were hidden within Nine Provinces, with some secret realms offering immense benefits even to Divine Sea Realm cultivators.

This secret realm was distinct from those Lu Ye had encountered in the Spirit Stream and Cloud River battlefields.

At the very least, Nian Yuexian was also here!

In other words, this was a secret realm where even someone at the Divine Sea Realm could gain benefits. Such a secret realm was a rare encounter; if he and Ying Wuji, both in the True Lake Realm, could grasp any opportunity here, it could benefit them for life.

Ying Wuji clearly realized the same thing, and his spirit was immediately uplifted.

Initially forced to come to the Slit of Sky in Liyuan with Lu Ye and Nian Yuexian, thinking he was merely acting as a guide. Who knew such fortune would come his way?

Amidst the joy, he felt a heightening sense of caution.

He wasn't foolish; he understood that opportunities often entailed risks. Who knew what dangers lurked in a secret realm accessible to Divine Sea Realm cultivators?

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji each had their thoughts, while Nian Yuexian slowly stood up, frowning as she asked, "You want me to be your disciple?"

To become someone's disciple was to acknowledge them as a master.

For someone of her standing, a mighty cultivator in the Divine Sea Realm, among the top echelon in Nine Provinces, who in this world could be her master?

Moreover, she had always been an independent cultivator since her cultivation began, with no master or sect. And at her current cultivation level, she wouldn't seek out a master.

Not even in a secret realm!

"Are you unwilling?" The old man looked at Nian Yuexian with indifference, seemingly unaffected by her icy demeanor.

"Willing or not, it depends on whether you have the capability." As she spoke, Nian Yuexian, with a flick of her hand, lunged the sword in her hand toward the elderly man.

The sword she held was the two-foot cutlass she had taken from the stone platform.

Such a cutlass was more suited as a weapon for a Ghost Cultivator rather than a Sword Cultivator. With her prowess as a Ghost Cultivator coupled with such a sharp sword, if she succeeded in a surprise attack, no Divine Sea Realm cultivator in Nine Provinces could withstand it.

However, even so, this strike was executed with unmatched momentum.

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji hurriedly stepped aside to avoid being splashed with blood.

They harbored no doubt about Nian Yuexian's strength. Moreover, despite unexpectedly finding themselves in a secret realm and asked to apprentice to such an old man, both were somewhat unwilling.

If Nian Yuexian could resolve this, it wouldn't be bad.

However, in the next instant, Lu Ye and Ying Wuji's pupils shrank, and Nian Yuexian's eyes filled with shock.

Because the seated old man didn't move at all. He merely lifted a hand, extended two fingers, and effortlessly clamped down on the cutlass in Nian Yuexian's hand. The old man squinted slightly, a glint of cold light in his eyes, as he spoke faintly, "Willow Catkins was crafted by this old man. I understand its power far better than you."

Nian Yuexian tried with all her might but couldn't pull the cutlass from the old man's fingers. Internally she was upheaved, finally realizing she had underestimated the old man's abilities.

But... Does such a powerful being truly exist in this world?

"Your disposition is not calm enough. With some cultivation in you, you become arrogant and disregard everything. You're not suitable to be under my sect. Leave!"

As he said this, he suddenly spat out a sword light from his mouth, slashing directly towards Nian Yuexian.

Nian Yuexian's expression changed instantly.

Because this sword light was the strongest she had ever seen in her life. The elder seemed to strike casually, yet it was more powerful than her full-power attack.

At the moment the elder's mouth spat out the sword light, he also released his grip on the Willow Catkins Cutlass, allowing Nian Yuexian to retreat, holding the sword horizontally in front.

Accompanied by a ringing sound, Nian Yuexian let out a muffled grunt, and her whole body flew away like willow catkins, disappearing in an instant, not knowing where she had been struck.

Only then did the elder's voice resound again, "The Willow Catkins is in your hand, which means it's fated with you. I hope you won't bury it."

There was no intention whatsoever to leave the Willow Catkins Cutlass behind.

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji stood not far away, eyes wide in shock at this bewildering scene, not daring to move.

Until the elder turned his head and looked towards them, they quickly walked back, sitting respectfully, shoulder to shoulder, before the elder.

Ying Wuji even shouted, "Disciple Ying Wuji pays respects to Master!"

Forget Nian Yuexian, forget Wan Zhanggang. After witnessing the eldritch methods of this elder, Ying Wuji finally understood the saying, there's always someone better, and beyond the sky, there's another sky.

Being apprenticed to such a great strength is no disgrace!

Ying Wuji has always been one who can yield or stand firm willingly, first recognizing Lu Yiye as senior brother, today accepting a master, why not!

The elder chuckled lightly, "It's too early to talk about apprenticeship. Today, I'm only bringing you two into the sect. My Sword Weapon Sect has always been stringent in accepting disciples. Whether you two can stay will depend on your own skills."

Ying Wuji sat upright, feeling a bit disappointed. He thought he had latched onto a powerful figure, but it turns out that the person wasn't trying to take him as a disciple.

"The sect members of my Sword Weapon Sect are not only the finest Artifact Crafting Masters but also the finest sword cultivators. The flying swords they use are all crafted by themselves. You two must remember this."

"Yes!" Lu Ye and Ying Wuji responded together, obediently like little cats.

"I am Khong Khong, the 163rd Sect Master of Sword Weapon Sect. Today, you two enter the sect, and you must remember the sect rules and precepts..."

What followed were numerous cumbersome sect rules, but whether Lu Ye or Ying Wuji, both were accomplished in cultivation, and memorizing these things was naturally no trouble.

As he was speaking, Khong Khong suddenly frowned, looking at Lu Ye's waist with displeasure, "You use a saber?"

Lu Ye corrected his expression, quickly realizing the problem. It seems that not only do those with sabers disdain those with swords in the Nine Provinces, but those with swords disdain those with sabers, and it's the same here in the Sword Weapon Sect!

He silently put the Boulder Mountain Saber away, took out a longsword and hung it at his waist, calmly said, "That was merely a disciple's spoils. Actually, the disciple is a sword cultivator."

"Heh..." Ying Wuji nearly laughed out loud.

But upon noticing Lu Ye's sharp gaze, he quickly sat upright.

Only then did Khong Khong's expression slightly ease, "Remember, those who use sabers are crude men; the sword is the king among weapons."

"Yes." Lu Ye respectfully responded, crude or not, your fists are big, you have the final say.

"Today you're new here, just leave for now. Tomorrow, I will teach you two the method of Artifact Refining. When you can forge a notable flying sword, I will then impart the way of sword cultivation to you two!"

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji respectfully retreated.

Upon looking back, the Sword Weapon Sect Master who called himself Khong Khong was already gone, not knowing where he went, only a grass hut standing still in the original spot.

The two exchanged a glance, both feeling a sense of dread in their hearts.

"You scout the surroundings." Lu Ye instructed Ying Wuji, then pursued the direction where Nian Yuxian was blasted away.

The place where the grass hut was located was a mountain valley, with one side being Sword Mountain, filled with flying swords just now, a magnificent sight.

Ying Wuji had the same intention; coming here for the first time, naturally, it's important to investigate the environment first and understand what kind of world this is and what challenges await them.

The two separated, Lu Ye went to find Nian Yuexian.

Soon he found her because Nian Yuexian hadn't gone far, she was standing at the mouth of the valley.

She had already changed into clean clothes, but she had expended a lot previously and suffered numerous injuries, her face still pale.

Seeing her safe and sound, Lu Ye felt slightly relieved, and stepped forward to say, "My Lady."

"Hmm." Nian Yuexian nodded, "Did that old gentleman make things difficult for you?"

Previously, she did not pay much regard to Khong Khong, but after their exchange of blows, Nian Yuexian already understood that Khong Khong's cultivation far exceeded hers.

In other words, Khong Khong was quite possibly above the Divine Sea Realm!

This piqued Nian Yuexian's interest, inspiring a desire to explore, because the Divine Sea Realm cultivators in the Nine Provinces have been exploring the cultivation path ahead for many years.

They can sense that the Divine Sea Realm is not the end for cultivators, but how to take that step remains elusive.

Having seen Khong Khong today, Nian Yuexian naturally wanted to inquire and understand, but unfortunately, she had offended him at first, making it inconvenient to ask anything now.

Chapter 926 - Nian Yuexian's Speculation

As they were talking, Ying Wuji flew over, landed, and looked at Lu Ye helplessly.

"Didn't I ask you to investigate the surroundings?" Lu Ye frowned, feeling that this guy was being too negligent.

Ying Wuji replied, "What you see before you is all that can be explored."

"What do you mean?" Lu Ye frowned.

Nian Yuexian said, "Don't blame him. This secret realm is very small. The whole scope is just the valley and spirit mountaintop we see now, so there's no need to investigate further."

Lu Ye was astonished.

If Ying Wuji had said this, he might not have believed it, but coming from Nian Yuexian, it had to be true. Nian Yuexian had clearly already explored the surroundings after being knocked out from the cottage earlier, leading to this conclusion.

Could there really be such a small secret realm in this world?

The secret realms Lu Ye had experienced before were all backgrounded by a whole domain. Even the smallest ones, like the Ten Thousand Beasts Domain secret realm, were still about thirty percent the size of the Spirit Stream battlefield.

"It seems this really is a legacy secret realm." Nian Yuexian mused.

Ying Wuji furrowed his brow equally: "So the senior means this was specifically created for certain inheritances?"

Hearing this, Lu Ye immediately thought of Hua Ci. He wasn't clear about the exact nature of the secret realm Hua Ci had gotten his inheritance from, but Hua Ci had casually mentioned once that the inheritance secret realm seemed to be quite small.

Because these secret realms created specifically for certain inheritances don't need to be large. By passing its trials, you can safely leave with the contained inheritance.

"Did the old gentleman ask you to do anything?" Nian Yuexian asked.

Lu Ye nodded: "He calls himself Khong Khong, the 163rd Sect Master of the Sword Weapon Sect. He wants me and Ying Wuji to first learn the Artifact Refining method from him and, once accomplished, to then pass on the sword cultivator path to us."

Nian Yuexian understood: "It seems this is the trial of the secret realm..." She steadied her mind, looking at Lu Ye: "This is a celestial opportunity. Since you've encountered it, there's no reason to miss it. You should focus on learning and cultivation there for now."

"Yes!" Lu Ye responded.

To be honest, he's not too interested in Artifact Refining, mainly because he's already practicing the Path of Spirit Runes and Array Path. He is well aware that a person's energy is limited, and if he spends too much on external paths, his own cultivation is sure to be affected.

His master had previously taught him the Rune Tattoo Path. He practiced for a period but didn't delve deeply, simply because there wasn't enough energy.

Moreover, in the Nine Provinces, whatever one needs can be bought from the Heaven's Augury treasure vault or custom-made by someone, no need to master it yourself.

A gourmet isn't necessarily a chef; the same principle applies.

Plus, he has the Hall of Battle Merits. The good items there are countless and can be exchanged with enough battle merit.

But if this is the secret realm's trial, it can't be ignored.

"Senior, what's with the cultivation of Sect Master Khong Khong?" Ying Wuji asked boldly.

The scene where Khong Khong sliced Nian Yuexian with a single Sword Qi earlier had frightened him.

"His cultivation..." Nian Yuexian looked contemplative, "is much higher than mine."

"Above Divine Sea; could there really be a path beyond?" Ying Wuji became excited, prompting Lu Ye to glance askance at him, not knowing what a True Lake Realm would be getting excited about.

Nian Yuexian said gently, "This is precisely the quest across generations of Divine Sea Realm in the Nine Provinces..."

Ying Wuji stated, "Generations of Divine Sea Realm in the Nine Provinces have explored to no avail, yet the cultivation of Sect Master Khong Khong is beyond Divine Sea; doesn't this mean he isn't a Nine Provinces cultivator?"

Nian Yuexian looked up at him: "You certainly know a lot!"

Ying Wuji sighed: "The Nine Provinces are full of celestial opportunities, diverse inheritances. Many have speculated throughout history that otherworldly inheritances may have landed in the Nine Provinces for various reasons. Initially, I was skeptical, but after last time's Unparalleled Continent event, disbelief ceased."

The incident on the Unparalleled Continent is no longer a secret. Not to mention that the Cloud River battlefield's realm fusion has been known for a while; currently, many cultivators from the Unparalleled Continent have started walking within the Nine Provinces, some even establishing sects. News travels easily in the Nine Provinces, so it's naturally known to all.

Nian Yuexian has also heard of the Unparalleled Continent affair; thus, hearing Ying Wuji speak of it, she understood the situation.

"Perhaps this opportunity comes from outside the Nine Provinces, or perhaps within it. Don't forget, there are only records of a few thousand years for this era; what the Nine Provinces were like before and whether there were cultivators above Divine Sea, no one knows."

If the Sword Weapon Sect was a sect from several thousand years ago, then this secret realm is the legacy from before this era.

"Senior is right." Ying Wuji accepted the teaching with humility, looking very honest.

"In any case, Khong Khong is not a living person; he is likely a manifestation of Heaven's Augury, or perhaps the lingering intent of a powerful figure. His cultivation realm did indeed exceed mine. Be cautious when you two interact with him."

For the first time, Ying Wuji felt the care from Nian Yuexian. Although he understood it was incidental, he was still very moved and kept nodding: "Don't worry, senior. Brother Lu is best at getting along with others, surely he won't offend Sect Master Khong Khong. I, Ying Wuji, will also follow his lead."

Lu Ye couldn't be bothered with him and just looked at Nian Yuexian: "Master, what about you?"

"Me?" Nian Yuexian was startled for a moment, then looked down at the two-foot cutlass in her hand: "I'll take this time to refine the sword, you don't need to worry."

Lu Ye nodded, then turned to Ying Wuji and instructed: "Go chop some wood."

Ying Wuji was puzzled: "For what?"

"We don't know how long we'll be staying here. There's only one grass shed; we cannot dine and sleep in the open air."

"Makes sense." Ying Wuji nodded, "Why don't we go together?"

Lu Ye's gaze turned sharp.

Ying Wuji called out to Nian Yuexian: "Master, you see, he's always bullying people!"

Nian Yuexian smiled, having never seen two opposing camp members getting along like this, and said, "You go alone, I have some words to exchange with Lu Ye."

"Understood!" Ying Wuji obediently complied.

After Ying Wuji left, Lu Ye spoke: "Master wants me to explore the mysteries beyond the Divine Sea?"

Nian Yuexian slowly shook her head: "This secret realm is meant for the inheritance of the Sword Weapon Sect, not for cultivation. So even if you explore, you might not discover any results, and could say something wrong instead. What I want to tell you is that this secret realm isn't as peaceful as it appears."

"What do you mean, master?"

"From the current situation, the Willow Catkins isn't a fortune, but a bait." Nian Yuexian raised the cutlass in her hand and began speaking, "Using the allure of the Willow Catkins to stir greed in people, drawing them into this legacy secret realm, passing tests to get the inheritance of the Sword Weapon Sect — this is a common tactic of many lands of legacy. It's just that I was blinded by greed momentarily and didn't see through it. But if it truly is so, hasn't anyone else entered here in ages? The place is indeed hidden well, but if I can find it, so can others. So before us, it's very likely someone has been here, but where are they?"

Lu Ye was slightly disturbed.

"Of course, I'm not saying that Khong Khong is a bad person, but the fact that this legacy secret realm has lasted until now means nobody has passed the test so far. Even if someone entered before, they died here." Nian Yuexian stared at Lu Ye, her expression serious, "This is the peril of a legacy secret realm; once entered, either gain the inheritance and leave safely, or be trapped forever!"

Lu Ye listened quietly, nodding with understanding: "You're saying it's difficult to obtain the inheritance and pass Khong Khong's test here!"

"Either way, be mentally prepared!"

Lu Ye nodded slightly, but soon thought of something: "Master, I have a question."

"What is it?"

"If Willow Catkins is truly bait to lure people into this legacy secret realm, then it shouldn't be so perilous. You relied on your great strength to pass that passage and obtain the Willow Catkins; others might not have your capacity. Perhaps they were slain in the passage before even getting near the Willow Catkins, which doesn't align with the original intent of luring people in."

If they intended to draw people in, it should have been easier.

In fact, Nian Yuexian would have obtained the Willow Catkins and been drawn into this secret realm the first time she came here.

"Perhaps you are right!" Nian Yuexian did not deny Lu Ye's assessment, her eyes deep, looking towards the direction of the grass shed: "But what if Khong Khong, to some extent, can sense the situation outside and even control the restrictions outside?"

Lu Ye became alert.

If true, that explanation makes sense.

Nian Yuexian hadn't succeeded before because Khong Khong deemed her unfit to carry the inheritance of the Sword Weapon Sect, continuously obstructing her. But this time, she brought Lu Ye and Ying Wuji, giving Khong Khong hope, thus sparing her.

However, since Nian Yuexian has had previous experiences here, the tests cannot be too easy, else it would arouse her suspicion.

Forcing her to exert all effort to finally pass the passage and obtain the Willow Catkins is the best outcome.

If this is the case, Khong Khong indeed has spent much effort.

"Anyway, passing the test here won't be simple, so be cautious."

"I'll try my best," Lu Ye nodded.

If I can't make it, there's still Ying Wuji. If he can't either, then we'll have to find another way to leave this secret realm.

But that's a matter for later.

Moments later, Ying Wuji returned, and together with Lu Ye, they began constructing three wooden huts at the entrance of the valley, meant to be the current residence for the three of them.

The three huts were spaced several meters apart, with Lu Ye in the center, Ying Wuji on the left, and Nian Yuexian on the right, facilitating mutual care.

Chapter 927 Passing the First Test

During this time, Lu Ye felt a little reluctant to accept the situation and went out to explore the surroundings. However, he found that, just as Nian Yuexian and Ying Wuji had said, everything in sight was all there was to the secret realm.

The entrance to the valley was connected not to the outside world, but to a region of chaos. There was no way forward, and Lu Ye dared not venture in recklessly. He tried throwing a Spirit Stone inside, but there was not even a sound, leaving him unsure of the consequences of entering.

This small secret realm had neither sun, moon, nor stars, yet there was day and night, which was truly bizarre.

After a night's rest, come morning, Lu Ye and Ying Wuji dutifully headed towards the grass hut.

In front of the grass hut, Khong Khong was already seated with two futons before him.

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji saluted and sat up straight, listening to Khong Khong's teachings.

He didn't ask if the two had any prior knowledge of artifact refining, and started teaching from the very basics. But to be fair, though he looked old and frail, he certainly had a knack for teaching. His explanations were straightforward and easy to understand, greatly benefiting Lu Ye and Ying Wuji.

This continued for several days.

It wasn't until the third day that he began to teach the two of them practical skills.

In the Nine Provinces, regardless of what external path one cultivated, one would need to rely on spirit runes. The Array Path had its own specific spirit runes, alchemy had alchemy's spirit runes, and artifact refining, naturally, had artifact-refining spirit runes. For these many external paths, spirit runes were fundamental.

So, a distinguished spirit runes master, no matter which external path they cultivated, could yield twice the result with half the effort.

After instructing the two on the foundational knowledge of artifact refining, Khong Khong began imparting the construction of spirit runes to them.

This was precisely Lu Ye's strong point. However, he kept his abilities discreet, not fully showcasing his talent in the Path of Spirit Runes, using only half his strength. Even so, his performance was remarkable.

Ying Wuji's attainments in the Path of Spirit Runes were not as refined as Lu Ye's, but having studied the Array Path, he naturally had exposure to spirit runes.

It was just that he had not learned the spirit runes specifically for artifact refining, so his construction was not as smooth and fluid as Lu Ye's, appearing somewhat clumsy, yet he could barely meet the requirements.

The days passed uneventfully.

Until half a month later, after Lu Ye finished constructing a spirit rune, he finally could not hold back: "Sect Master, I have something to ask."

"Speak," Khong Khong replied with a gentle gaze. Recently, Lu Ye's expression had undoubtedly pleased him. Everything fears comparison; not to mention Lu Ye's inherent talent in the Path of Spirit Runes. Even when holding back, his performance was commendable. Now, with Ying Wuji alongside for comparison, his extraordinary talent shone even brighter.

This led Khong Khong to feel as if he had stumbled upon a treasure, sensing a future for the Sword Weapon Sect.

Naturally, he held great expectations for Lu Ye.

"How long does the Sect Master think, given our current progress, will it take for us disciples to refine a flying sword that meets the standards?"

Khong Khong chuckled, "What? Can't wait any longer?" He paused and then said, "I can be considered one of the most outstanding in the Sword Weapon Sect for centuries, yet it took me a full five years to craft a flying sword suitable for myself when I was learning the Path of Artifact Refining."

Five years...

Hearing this, both Lu Ye and Ying Wuji felt their hearts sink.

Five years might not be too long for those strong cultivators in the Divine Sea Realm, but for young men like them, full of youthful vigor and blood boiling with ambition, it felt unbearably long.

Bear in mind, Lu Ye had only been on the path of cultivation for less than three years.

If he were to stay here for five years...

And that was using Khong Khong himself as a benchmark. The time they would need could easily be longer.

Furthermore, crafting a qualified flying sword was just the beginning. Khong Khong had previously mentioned that after creating a capable flying sword, they would be taught the Path of the Sword Cultivator!

While this sounded like a good opportunity, it required tremendous time to digest.

Who could bear such a golden chance?

No wonder this legacy secret realm had remained until now. Even if someone had entered years ago, they might not have been able to endure such a prolonged ordeal.

Lu Ye felt overwhelmed; he couldn't stay here indefinitely. Yet, leaving without passing the test was impossible, and as for confronting Khong Khong directly... even Nian Yuexian was not his match, so confronting him would surely end poorly.

As many thoughts swirled in his mind, Lu Ye brazenly stated, "Sect Master, learning these spirit runes all day without applying them in refining feels too dull." Regardless, speeding up the artifact refining learning process couldn't be wrong.

Khong Khong smiled and said, "The Path of Artifact Refining is vast and profound; we've only just begun. Don't be hasty or impatient. Remember, haste makes waste."

Lu Ye stubbornly said, "But Sect Master, I feel I've already mastered these spirit runes and don't need to study further. Now, I just want to practice refining, inherit the Sword Weapon Sect's legacy as soon as possible, and strengthen our sect, bringing glory to its name."

Ying Wuji understood and quickly nodded, "Disciple feels the same."

Khong Khong looked sternly at Lu Ye, silent.

However, he was genuinely pleased with Lu Ye's recent performance, feeling more accommodating, so after pondering for a moment, he said, "If that's the case, then I shall give you two a test. If you can complete it, I will grant your request."

"Please instruct us, Sect Master!"

Khong Khong opened his hands, and in the next moment, spirit force surged forth, materializing into visible lines. These lines shifted continuously, forming various spirit runes used in artifact refining.

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji watched intently.

They noticed that some of these spirit runes were what Khong Khong had already taught them, while others were unfamiliar.

Moments later, Khong Khong withdrew his hand, stroked his beard, and said: "Earlier, the Sect Master displayed a total of ten spirit patterns to you. If you two can successfully construct seven of them within four hours, you will have passed this test."

Ying Wuji's face turned bitter...

There's no need to try, he knows he definitely won't succeed because among the ten displayed spirit patterns, five are ones Khong Khong has never taught, so it's impossible to learn them after just seeing them once.

He turned to look at Lu Ye, only to see that Lu Ye had already spread his palm and started constructing.

At this moment, Lu Ye was immensely grateful for having held back when learning these spirit patterns earlier, not revealing his full talent. Otherwise, he might not have this test now.

Khong Khong thought that neither he nor Ying Wuji would be able to pass the test, hence the difficult challenge. But Lu Ye was eighty percent confident that he could succeed.

One after another, spirit patterns manifested in Lu Ye's hands, and Khong Khong's expression gradually became surprised.

Because he realized he had underestimated this disciple's talent.

The four hours passed in a flash, and at the end, Lu Ye was attempting to construct the last spirit pattern, which was relatively complicated. He had tried more than ten times but failed each time.

Another hour passed, and Lu Ye finally successfully constructed the tenth spirit pattern.

He looked up at Khong Khong, feeling somewhat mentally exhausted. The Sect Master of the Sword Weapon Sect nodded and said: "With this, you've passed the test. Go back and rest for a day, then come to me tomorrow. I'll teach you the Path of Artifact Refining."

"Yes!" Lu Ye exhaled deeply.

Spending half a month passing the first test was nothing to be happy about; he had no idea how to proceed with the later challenges.

He could only think of speeding up his cultivation in the Path of Artifact Refining and simultaneously seeking a way to escape.

"Sect Master, what about me?" Ying Wuji asked.

"You continue cultivating the spirit patterns," Khong Khong replied casually.

Among two recruited disciples, having one with exceptional talent is enough; the other is incidental, with no particular expectations.

Ying Wuji's face was covered in tears...

Upon returning to the wooden house, Lu Ye suddenly saw Nian Yuexian's figure. She was sitting on a chair in front of the wooden house, with Amber crouching on her legs.

The longer they interacted, the less afraid Amber was of her. Instead, under her caresses, Amber purred loudly.

Lu Ye hurried forward: "Master."

During this half-month, he and Ying Wuji were learning spirit patterns from Khong Khong, while Nian Yuexian had been in closed-door practice, refining the Willow Catkins Cutlass.

Only today did she emerge from seclusion.

"How is it?" Nian Yuexian asked.

Lu Ye truthfully recounted his experiences of the past half month, which consisted mostly of continuously learning and constructing spirit patterns used for artifact refining.

He also talked about the recent events.

Nian Yuexian nodded: "From what we can see now, you indeed need to speed up your progress to leave here as soon as possible."

"But no matter how much we accelerate, the time spent won't be short. If only we could summon the Heaven's Augury Pillar," Lu Ye sighed.

If they could summon the Heaven's Augury Pillar, they could use it to teleport away from here.

But summoning the Heaven's Augury Pillar can only be done on the Cloud River battlefield, not on the Nine Provinces mainland, and such secret realms are also unsuitable.

At least he and Ying Wuji had tasks to do recently, but Nian Yuexian was pitifully stuck there with nothing to do.

"Master, do you have any other instructions?"

Nian Yuexian shook her head. Lu Ye was about to take his leave when he heard her say: "Do you think if I take all the flying swords from Sword Mountain, that old fellow will kick us out?"

"Not likely," Lu Ye shook his head.

He silently added in his heart that the most likely scenario is that you get severely reprimanded.

"It wouldn't hurt to try!" Nian Yuexian spoke, and with that, she soared into the sky.

Amber was flung off her lap, waking from its slumber with a startled meow, frantically landing on the ground.

Lu Ye looked up, only to see Nian Yuexian rapidly approaching Sword Mountain. However, as soon as she reached the area, her graceful figure tilted uncontrolled and fell downward...

Lu Ye's eyelid twitched as he immediately realized that Sword Mountain probably had a Sky Prohibition restriction, making flying impossible.

After falling awkwardly, Nian Yuexian was undeterred and climbed upward on foot, quickly reaching the location of the first flying sword.

But before she could reach out to draw the sword, a sudden change occurred.

A spectral figure appeared, and slowly drew the flying sword from the ground, saluting Nian Yuexian gracefully: "The thirty-sixth disciple of the Sword Weapon Sect, Wang Yang, at your service!"

Chapter 928 Artifact Refining

The figure claiming to be Wang Yang was clearly not a living person, more like a spiritual body or a persistent thought, but it appeared dim and lifeless, as if it could dissipate at any moment.

However, his Sword Control Technique was exceptionally remarkable.

From a distance, Lu Ye watched as the flying swords at the foot of Sword Mountain weaved in and out, sword light wantonly flashing, and Nian Yuexian was locked in combat with them.

What Wang Yang displayed was unmistakably a technique that only strong cultivators at the Divine Sea Realm could execute!

Do the flying swords on Sword Mountain all possess such divine power? Lu Ye was utterly astonished.

And this was just the first flying sword at the foot of the mountain; further up, who knows what might occur.

A moment later, the great battle subsided, Wang Yang's figure vanished, leaving only a flying sword falling before Nian Yuexian.

Nian Yuexian seemed contemplative as she picked up the flying sword from the ground and continued forward, soon encountering a second figure blocking her path...

Lu Ye observed for a moment, roughly understanding the mystery of Sword Mountain.

Each flying sword seemed to be the saber left behind by a strong cultivator at the Divine Sea Realm, containing a thread of the owner's persistent thought or Mental Consciousness. Whenever someone ascended Sword Mountain, the flying sword's might would be triggered.

This was also a test.

A test of the Sword Weapon Sect concerning the Sword Dao.

Lu Ye suddenly realized...

The three of them stumbled into this secret realm, and Nian Yuexian, having spoken disrespectfully, was struck away by Khong Khong. But now it seemed that it wasn't a mere reprimand; Khong Khong intended for her to inherit the Sword Dao legacy of the Sword Weapon Sect!

With Khong Khong's keen insight, he must have recognized Nian Yuexian as a sword cultivator.

Having her, a strong cultivator at the Divine Sea Realm, ascend Sword Mountain to inherit the Sword Dao heritage of the Sword Weapon Sect was certainly better than choosing two cultivators at the True Lake Realm.

As for Lu Ye and Ying Wuji, their task was to cultivate in the Path of Artifact Refining of the Sword Weapon Sect!

Nian Yuexian ascending Sword Mountain was something Lu Ye couldn't assist with, so after watching for a while, he turned and returned to his cabin to rest and prepare to learn the Path of Artifact Refining the next day.

The next day, Lu Ye and Ying Wuji arrived at the cottage together.

Khong Khong first imparted a spirit rune to Ying Wuji, then, ignoring Ying Wuji's resentful gaze, led Lu Ye in a certain direction.

A moment later, they arrived in front of a stone wall.

The stone wall was smooth and flat, clearly showing signs of human carving. With a wave of Khong Khong's hand, the stone wall slid aside, revealing a passageway leading downwards.

An astonishing wave of heat rushed out from within the passage.

"This place is the artifact crafting workshop of the sect, maintained by many exquisite big arrays. It is the most important foundation of the sect, and many of the sect's flying swords originate from here. Ordinarily, common disciples are not allowed to enter."

Khong Khong sighed deeply, reminiscing about the glories of the sect's past.

"Let's go." He beckoned Lu Ye and led the way.

As they moved downwards, the temperature around them increased.

If an ordinary True Lake cultivator were to come here, they would have to vigorously circulate their spirit force to withstand it. But for Lu Ye, whose spirit force was of the fire attribute, this environment was not harsh at all; it was actually quite comfortable.

However, as they continued further down, even he had to slightly circulate his spirit force to resist the burning sensation.

He could not tell how many Zhang deep they ventured into the underground when a massive subterranean cavern suddenly came into view.

Inside the cavern, the environment was fiercely hot, heat waves rolling through, distorting the Void.

Various artifact crafting counters were distributed throughout the cavern, with all kinds of artifact crafting tools systematically arranged. Even though no one had visited for a long time, the place still appeared orderly.

Khong Khong led Lu Ye to the smallest artifact crafting counter and said, "The Earth Core Fire lies beneath this place; when crafting, one can use it to temper materials, saving time and effort..."

As he said this, he tapped a spot on the artifact crafting counter, activating a restriction, and instantly, a dragon's head spewed Raging Flames from a corner of the counter.

"There are many considerations in choosing artifact crafting materials. These things are not something that can be explained orally; one must experience them firsthand to master..." Khong Khong continued, pointing to the various artifact crafting tools on the counter, and started to briefly introduce their uses to Lu Ye.

Lu Ye quietly listened, his gaze fixed unmovingly on the flame-spewing dragon head.

This thing was the Earth Core Fire. Since it was fire, the Talent Tree should be able to absorb and devour it. Although it was hidden underground, it should not be difficult for Lu Ye to absorb it now.

The roots of the Talent Tree could extend...

Even though he now had a stable source of fire spirit stones, the Talent Tree's transformation had heavily increased its fuel demand, and when using it to absorb and gain power from external forces for cultivation, the fuel consumption was quite severe.

Now that he encountered such an opportunity, he certainly couldn't miss it. Absorbing some of this Earth Core Fire to store as fuel for the Talent Tree... should be okay.

Khong Khong continued explaining to Lu Ye, entirely unaware of Lu Ye's intentions.

During the explanation, he let Lu Ye try using the artifact crafting tools, which Lu Ye naturally complied with.

A full four hours later, Khong Khong finally said: "Regarding artifact crafting, a thousand words cannot compare to one practical attempt. I will now craft an artifact; observe and learn carefully. How much you learn will depend on your skills and comprehension."

"Yes." Lu Ye respectfully replied.

The next moment, Khong Khong flipped his palm, producing a head-sized mineral from who knows where, placing it on the artifact crafting counter while activating the Earth Core Fire to smelt it, saying: "To forge a good flying sword, one must choose good materials. The Path of Artifact Refining starts with material selection and processing, just as cultivation starts with a solid foundation, allowing improvement to follow."

The following half-day was spent immersed in Khong Khong's artifact crafting and explanations. His movements were deliberately slow to facilitate Lu Ye's observation and learning.

It wasn't until a longsword was freshly forged that the demonstration was considered complete.

Although Lu Ye was eager to leave this place sooner, witnessing a strong cultivator who could be considered a Grandmaster level in artifact refining create a flying sword in such a short period left him deeply impressed.

Moreover, this longsword contained seventy-two restrictions and was a magic-artifact class flying sword.

A flying sword like this placed in the Heaven's Augury treasure vault could be sold for tens of thousands of merit.

Tens of thousands of merit may not be much to Lu Ye, but it was a considerable amount to most cultivators.

"How much do you understand?" Khong Khong asked.

Lu Ye furrowed his brows, "Thirty percent?"

Khong Khong nodded, "Understanding thirty percent isn't bad, but understanding only goes so far. When you actually start hands-on work, you might not even reach half that percentage."

"Shall I give it a try?" Lu Ye volunteered.

Khong Khong was pleased, "You go ahead."

The materials for artifact crafting were provided by Khong Khong, their quality not high, naturally chosen for Lu Ye's practice, so they didn't need to be top-notch.

Low quality meant lower difficulty in crafting.

Yet even so, Lu Ye progressed with some stumbles.

Fortunately, there was a benefit to artifact crafting: If one fails in crafting, they can reforge it.

Unlike alchemy, where failure means losing everything.

Thus, artifact crafting economizes more on raw materials compared to alchemy.

During Lu Ye's crafting process, Khong Khong frequently offered guidance, demonstrating great patience. Lu Ye earnestly learned, progressing rapidly.

For three consecutive days, this is how the two of them spent their time, with only the sound of hammering echoing throughout the artifact crafting workshop.

By the third day, Lu Ye held a longsword in his hand, looking dispirited.

In three days, he had crafted his first longsword, though it looked rough, and its quality was far from commendable.

With merely five restrictions within, it was just a low-grade spirit artifact.

Still, Khong Khong was pleased, "Not bad, not bad. Your talent with spirit runes is indeed high, which allows you to be more efficient in artifact crafting."

Artifact refining is not merely shaping a spiritual artifact; if that were all, a common blacksmith could do it, and Lu Ye wouldn't need to use the artifact crafting counter.

Given his current cultivation and skills, he could shape any low-quality raw material into whatever forms he desired.

However, a cultivator's artifact crafting involves integrating restrictions within the spiritual artifact while shaping it—this is the key. Without restrictions, a spiritual artifact is of no significant use.

Lu Ye had previously crafted many array banners, but compared to true artifact refining, it was hardly comparable.

"How long did it take the Sect Master back then to reach such a level?" Lu Ye asked.

Khong Khong reminisced, "It took me eight days, and the quality I crafted didn't match yours, containing merely three restrictions. If you maintain such progress, you could craft a flying sword meeting requirements within three years."

Three years... still a long time.

"Go rest for a bit, but don't forget to reflect on this attempt's gains and losses. From now on, come to the grass hut every morning. I'll teach you the essence of artifact crafting, and in the afternoon, come here to practice. If there are any uncertainties, you may ask me anytime."

"Yes!"

Returning from the artifact crafting workshop to the cabin, Lu Ye glanced in the direction of Sword Mountain. Nian Yuexian was still there, climbing against the persistent spirits or mental consciousness of each flying sword. However, she wasn't slow in her progress, and by now, she had already ascended a hundred zhang on Sword Mountain.

Amber, who remained here, greeted him with concern for Lu Ye.

"The depletion is considerable; resting a bit will be fine." Lu Ye spoke, addressing Yiyi, as since coming to this secret realm, Yiyi dared not show herself, given Khong Khong's intimidating cultivation.

Back at the cabin, instead of meditating, he lay down and slept.

Awakening refreshed.

Following Khong Khong's prior instructions, he first sought him at the grass hut to listen to his lecture on artifact crafting essentials.

In the afternoon, with Ying Wuji's resentful glance, he went alone to the artifact crafting workshop.

This time, Khong Khong didn't accompany him.

Lu Ye dared not be negligent, continuing to refine artifacts, uncertain if Khong Khong had any means to monitor inside the artifact crafting workshop, hence he had to proceed with the crafting.

Moreover, if he sincerely wished to leave here soon, he needed to pass Khong Khong's test as quickly as possible.

Three years was far too long, so Lu Ye set his own standard to leave the secret realm in no more than half a year.

If delayed too long here, who knows what sort of worries Second Senior Sister and the others might have?

Chapter 929 The Time Has Come

However, at the same time, Lu Ye didn't forget his previous plan to store Talent Tree fuel using the environment of this place.

He quietly activated the power of the Talent Tree, and tendrils that only he could see extended from beneath his feet, probing deep into the ground.

The length that the tendrils could extend wasn't very long, but since the Earth Core Fire could be drawn to the artifact crafting counter, it indicated that the location of the Earth Core Fire wasn't too deep.

Therefore, there was a high probability that the tendrils of the Talent Tree could directly reach it.

With focus, he controlled the tendrils digging into the earth to search around, and quickly found the location of the Earth Core Fire. In the next moment, the tendrils transmitted the power of absorption, ingesting the energy of the Earth Core Fire.

After the Talent Tree completed its transformation, Lu Ye could control the energy absorbed in this way, either by storing it as fuel for the Talent Tree or using it to ignite its leaves, unlocking new spirit runes.

Since he previously obtained seven spirit runes at once, which he hadn't fully comprehended yet, he didn't plan to unlock additional spirit runes temporarily, especially while being here without the mood to research new ones, he just stored all the absorbed energy as fuel.

Inside the vast artifact crafting workshop, he was the only figure. Lu Ye took off the Crimson Dragon Battle Suit, exposing his upper body, and at the artifact crafting counter, he was sweating profusely while working. With each strike of the crafting hammer, another line of pattern was etched within the sword embryo, and as the patterns continued to integrate, a spirit rune gradually took shape.

Thus, forming a restriction.

This method of constructing spirit runes by hammering the sword embryo was undoubtedly much more challenging than constructing them using spirit force, so artifact refining wasn't simply about being able to construct spirit runes.

Days passed one after another.

Lu Ye advanced rapidly in the Path of Artifact Refining, as he had set himself the goal of leaving this secret realm in half a year, so he was truly dedicated to learning the Path of Artifact Refining.

Every morning he would punctually go to the grass hut to listen to Khong Khong's guidance.

Khong Khong was undoubtedly extremely satisfied with Lu Ye's performance, and it was rare to find such an excellent successor in this secret realm, who had great potential to inherit the Sword Weapon Sect's artifact refining legacy. Thus, he spared no effort in imparting his knowledge, further accelerating Lu Ye's growth rate.

The first item Lu Ye refined was a Restriction Level 5 low-grade spirit artifact, and two days later, he was able to refine a Restriction Level 9 low-grade spirit artifact.

Nine restrictions were the limit for low-grade spirit artifacts; beyond that was the mid-grade.

Lu Ye previously didn't quite understand the difference between a nine-restriction and a ten-restriction item, simply thinking that missing one restriction wasn't a big deal.

But when he actually began artifact refining, he realized the difference was significant.

Because the difficulty in refining a ten-restriction spirit artifact was incomparable to refining a nine-restriction spirit artifact.

After another ten days, Lu Ye was already able to easily refine mid-grade spirit artifacts, and their quality was commendable.

A month later, the first top-grade spirit artifact was born in his hands.

And at this time, Ying Wuji had just passed the first test, entering the artifact crafting workshop to start refining alongside Lu Ye.

The comparison between the two was stark and obvious.

Khong Khong's expectations for Lu Ye grew larger and larger, as Lu Ye's performance repeatedly exceeded his expectations, even to the point of disbelief.

Yet he didn't know that Lu Ye's rapid advancement wasn't solely due to him being a spirit runes master, but also because he possessed Mental Consciousness.

With Mental Consciousness activated, Lu Ye could clearly perceive the internal situation of the spirit artifact he was refining, allowing him to adjust the force he applied accordingly.

Mental Consciousness undoubtedly provided significant aid in artifact refining.

The more outstanding Lu Ye's performance, the worse Ying Wuji seemed.

Originally, Khong Khong would actively teach Ying Wuji aspects of artifact refining, but after a month, unless Ying Wuji asked proactively, Khong Khong stopped imparting knowledge to him.

Obviously, with Lu Ye as his expectation, he didn't care at all whether Ying Wuji was there or not.

Ying Wuji had no complaints; with Khong Khong ignoring him, his days turned leisurely. He even hoped Lu Ye could soon refine a flying sword that met the requirements, passing the secret realm's test, so he too could leave.

Like Lu Ye, he didn't have much interest in the Path of Artifact Refining to begin with; only previously compelled. Now free, he would learn when interested and otherwise just cultivate on his own, quite content.

Life in the secret realm was monotonous and dull, repetitive.

Lu Ye was fully immersed in refining, rarely returning to the wooden cabin, almost spending the entire day in the artifact crafting workshop.

Khong Khong would occasionally visit the artifact crafting workshop, providing Lu Ye with verbal guidance and demonstrations.

Thus, another month passed in the blink of an eye.

On this day, Lu Ye looked at the freshly crafted supreme-grade spirit artifact in his hand, his mood remaining calm.

It was soon; in two months, his artifact refinement progress had reached the level where he could produce supreme-grade spirit artifacts; though the birth of this supreme-grade spirit artifact had lucky elements, having created the first naturally meant he could craft a second.

Beyond supreme-grade spirit artifacts were Magic Artifacts, and comparatively, the difficulty of refinement would undoubtedly surge dramatically.

The so-called flying sword that met the requirements was likely at the magic-artifact level; Khong Khong couldn't possibly ask him to refine a spirit treasure class longsword, as that wouldn't match his True Lake Realm cultivation.

Therefore, as long as he could refine a magic-artifact class flying sword, it should satisfy Khong Khong's requirements, and by then, he could leave this secret realm.

Lu Ye casually tossed the supreme-grade spirit artifact longsword aside, then prepared to gather more materials to continue refining.

However, the moment the longsword hit the ground, an unexpected change occurred.

With the sound of a clang, the entire artifact crafting workshop shook violently. Simultaneously, Lu Ye's expression changed because he distinctly felt a peculiar movement from the Earth Core Fire beneath the ground.

The reason he could detect this was because the roots of the Talent Tree were entrenched underground, drawing energy from the Earth Core Fire.

The roots of the Talent Tree were essentially an extension of Lu Ye himself, enhancing his sensitivity to any anomalies in the Earth Core Fire.

Before he could comprehend what had happened, the heads of the dragon-shaped artifact crafting counters suddenly erupted with uncontrollable Earth Core Fire.

In an instant, the entire workshop was engulfed in a sea of flames.

Shortly after, Lu Ye dashed out of the workshop, covered in soot and looking burnt red, like a boiled shrimp.

In that situation, had he not promptly summoned the protective power of the Talent Tree around him, it would have been a close call.

The ground continued to shake relentlessly, and even the sky started to change inexplicably. Lu Ye turned around, observing his surroundings, and saw numerous pitch-black fissures appearing everywhere, resembling cracks that spread in all directions.

What happened?

Lu Ye was bewildered.

After a considerable time, the various abnormalities gradually ceased.

The fissure-like void fissures also slowly disappeared.

Ying Wuji ran over from the wooden house, with Amber perched atop his head, its claws tightly gripping his hair. At first glance, it looked like he was wearing a tiger head hat...

Ying Wuji appeared somewhat panicked, "Lu Yiye, what happened?"

Lu Ye slowly shook his head.

He was unsure of the situation.

Just then, Khong Khong's voice suddenly sounded by his ear, "Come to the straw cottage!"

"Yes!" Lu Ye responded, then swiftly flew towards the straw cottage. Turning back, he saw Ying Wuji was not following and frowned, "Come on."

Ying Wuji had a forlorn face, "I can't move!"

Lu Ye immediately understood; Khong Khong only summoned him alone, and Ying Wuji evidently wasn't qualified to accompany him.

"Wait here then," Lu Ye said, then turned and left.

Soon, Lu Ye arrived at the straw cottage, finding Khong Khong sitting there, just like the first time they met.

Lu Ye approached and greeted, "Sect Master."

"Sit," Khong Khong softly spoke, gazing into the distance with a deep look in his eyes.

Lu Ye sat cross-legged in front of him, vaguely sensing that Khong Khong's summons related to the earlier disturbances.

However, after waiting for quite some time, Khong Khong did not seem inclined to speak.

Lu Ye felt it was inappropriate to disturb him. Although he had been trapped here for this period, honestly, Lu Ye was quite grateful to this elder. No matter what, he had genuinely and diligently taught him the Path of Artifact Refining, holding nothing back.

In two months, the great progress he achieved in the Path of Artifact Refining owed partly to his own skills and mainly to having such an excellent teacher.

"The time has come," Khong Khong suddenly sighed.

"Sect Master?" Lu Ye frowned, feeling today's Khong Khong seemed both desolate and somewhat relieved, though his words were vague and unclear.

"Indeed, it's time." Khong Khong smiled, retracting his gaze, and looked at Lu Ye, "I am merely a manifestation of an obsession; the true Khong Khong died long ago."

"Obsession..." Lu Ye was not particularly surprised, as Nian Yuexian had speculated something similar on the first day they arrived here.

"An obsession, after all, is just an embodiment of a Mental Consciousness. The true Khong Khong, before his death, was concerned about the Sword Weapon Sect's legacy, and thus, I came into being. I am him, yet not him. For the sake of the sect's legacy, it was prolonged to this day. Over the millennia, some have arrived here, but none have passed the test until I saw you."

As he spoke, Khong Khong looked at Lu Ye with a gratified expression, "Your talent in the Path of Artifact Refining is no less than mine, perhaps even surpassing it. I truly hoped to see the day when you mastered it, but now, it seems that remains a distant hope."

"Sect Master, what has happened?" Lu Ye asked.

"Something has occurred," Khong Khong sighed, "but it does not concern you. It's just that this secret realm is about to sustain itself no longer."

"Why?" Lu Ye frowned.

Khong Khong knew he was a manifestation of an obsession, naturally aware this was a secret realm.

Its inability to sustain itself indicated that Lu Ye and others could leave here, yet as the moment approached, Lu Ye felt far from joyful; in fact, he felt quite heavy-hearted.

"No matter how adept the restriction methods, there comes a day they fail. The maintenance of this secret realm naturally requires energy consumption. Now, the foundation sustaining it shows signs of instability, hence it is nearing its end."

Upon hearing this, Lu Ye suddenly felt a sense of unease and tentatively asked, "What is the foundation sustaining this secret realm?"

Chapter 930 Collapse of the Secret Realm

"The essence of this secret realm lies in the artifact crafting workshop, and the essence of the workshop is the Earth Core Fire," Khong Khong spoke.

Lu Ye's expression stiffened...

This reminded him of the three major secret realms of the human race on the Unparalleled Continent.

Those three secret realms always drifted within the Void, not outwardly visible, but after the Heaven's Augury Pillar had absorbed the Earth Vein power of the secret realm, the three secret realms lost the ability to drift in the Void, as their foundation was broken.

This situation has an uncanny resemblance to the present scenario.

"I originally thought this place could be maintained for some years, at least until you completed your training, but never expected... one can only say it is fate," Khong Khong looked at Lu Ye with satisfaction. "Luckily, you have exceptional talent; even without my guidance in the future, you could possibly surpass me in the Path of Artifact Refining. This obsession of mine should now disperse."

"Sect Master..." Lu Ye didn't know what to say for a moment.

He couldn't possibly admit that the upheaval in the secret realm was his doing.

He too hadn't anticipated such an occurrence; his intention was merely to store more fuel in the Talent Tree for future use, who would have thought that doing so would undermine the secret realm's foundation?

For nearly two months, he had been activating the Talent Tree's power daily to engulf and absorb the Earth Core Fire, and the Talent Tree now stored a vast amount of energy.

"Do not grieve; my true body has long perished, leaving only a segment of obsession guarding for thousands of years. Seeing a favorable outcome now, it can be said that Heaven has not treated me poorly."

Saying this, Khong Khong produced a simple jade slip. "Though I wish to witness the day of your training's completion, since events have transpired, there's no avoidance; this contains many artifact crafting essentials and Sword Dao True Meaning from our Sword Weapon Sect. In the future, without my guidance, you may study it independently."

"Yes." Lu Ye received the jade slip and carefully stored it.

Khong Khong flipped his palm, and a gourd about a foot long appeared in his palm, its surface enwrought with many intricate patterns crisscrossing, seemingly not man-made but naturally formed.

As for the quality, Lu Ye couldn't discern at first glance.

"The sword gourd is the token of the Sword Weapon Sect's Sect Master, this item is naturally conceived; it was collected by the ninth-generation ancestor in a desperate realm and slightly refined by the thirteenth-generation ancestor. It contains many mysteries, passed down to today, and now I hand it to you, hoping one day you will bring glory to the sect."

Lu Ye reached to take it again, feeling its weight, fell silent for a moment, then spoke, "Can the Sect Master leave with me?"

Although Lu Ye already knew that the Khong Khong before him was just an obsession, there was genuine mentorship involved, coupled with Khong Khong's exceptional strength; if he could take him out of the secret realm, it would be a colossal support.

His Sword Qi could easily repel strong cultivators like Nian Yuexian; his strength surely surpasses many Divine Sea Realm cultivators in Nine Provinces.

Khong Khong shook his head with a smile. "I've been able to remain for thousands of years, which is already Heaven's special grace; in the current grand trend of Nine Provinces, a segment of obsession like mine absolutely cannot appear outside."

His words held a deeper meaning, causing Lu Ye to ponder.

Khong Khong waved his hand. "The bond between you and me has ended; go now."

A gentle force swept across Lu Ye's face; he had no resistance and was pushed away, and when he regained his senses, he was already at the valley entrance.

Ying Wuji had somehow returned to this location, still wearing a tiger head hat on his head...

Nian Yuexian, who had been climbing Sword Mountain all the while, also returned.

Looking at Lu Ye, she asked, "What did that old man say, what's happening here?"

"The foundation of this secret realm is unstable; it's likely to collapse," Lu Ye summarized the information he knew.

Nian Yuexian frowned. "Then we must quickly find a way to leave."

Once the secret realm collapses, it will certainly be a grand spectacle; if one doesn't hurry to leave, they could likely be swept in, with life and death uncertain.

As they were talking, a low shout came from beyond the grass hut: "Come!"

A clear and prolonged sword ringing sounded; Sword Mountain hummed, and countless flying swords flew out from Sword Mountain, transforming into streams of light, swooping toward the direction of the thatched hut like swallows returning to their nest.

During this period, Nian Yuexian had been ascending Sword Mountain, passing several tests from flying swords and obtaining many flying swords, but more were left on Sword Mountain.

Now, accompanying Khong Khong's command, thousands of swords flew together.

In front of the grass hut, Khong Khong's figure suddenly expanded rapidly, transforming into a towering phantom image a hundred-zhang tall, hugging streams of light from the gathered myriad flying swords in his hand as if holding an enormous longsword.

He glanced toward Lu Ye's direction for a moment, then burst into laughter and recited, "All is 空, 空 is 空, but 空 is 空 indeed!"

He slashed down with the sword!

Sky collapsed and ground rent.

A massive fissure appeared above Lu Ye and the others, and simultaneously, the enormous phantom figure shrank back; in front of the grass hut, Khong Khong was still Khong Khong, only his figure had become extremely illusory and transparent.

The gigantic longsword in his hand also shattered, countless flying swords rotated and gathered like dragons, enveloping the trio of Lu Ye like a spiral, drilling toward the fissure, disappearing in a blink.

After Lu Ye and his companions left, the space within the secret realm suddenly collapsed, where the artifact crafting workshop was located. The fierce Earth Core Fire surged out aggressively as space collapsed, tongues of fire devoured everything in the secret realm, also engulfing Khong Khong's illusory figure sitting cross-legged before the grass hut.

Flying swords converged like dragons, drilling out from the massive spatial fissure, then ascended all the way, ravaging everything in their path.

The location of the secret realm's entrance was unknown fathoms deep underground, with solid rock above. However, at this moment, under the disturbance of the sword dragon, these rocks were as fragile as tofu.

Until a certain moment, the sword dragon broke through all restraints, and the three of them saw the light of day again.

At that instant, the sword dragon suddenly shattered, transforming into thousands of flowing lights, scattering away.

Nian Yuexian frowned deeply, primarily because the sound was quite loud, possibly attracting the attention of nearby cultivators.

Just as she prepared to swiftly leave this place with Lu Ye and Ying Wuji, a surge of fiery light burst up from below, unmistakably the eruption of the Earth Core Fire from the secret realm.

The flames swept across, distorting the void.

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji simultaneously felt a great calamity looming over them.

At this moment, it was too late to escape. Nian Yuexian swiftly stood in front of them, channeling her spirit force, and fiercely slashed with the Willow Catkins Longsword in her hand!

The sword light, like a long strip of white silk, directly cleaved the surging flames in two, rolling them to the sides, leaving the position of the three unscathed by the fire.

Nian Yuexian also exerted all her spirit force to protect the two men's bodies.

Ying Wuji was deeply moved!

If at this moment Nian Yuexian didn't care whether he lived or died, even ten lives wouldn't be enough for him. Though he understood he was merely an attachment to Lu Ye, he was still being protected.

Only after more than ten breaths did the flames surging from below gradually calm down.

Lu Ye and Ying Wuji took a deep breath.

Nian Yuexian's expression was extremely grave, and she turned to instruct Lu Ye: "Separate and move, you sneak back to Cangyan Mountain quietly!"

With these instructions, she lifted Ying Wuji by the collar and, under his helpless gaze, dashed into the void, not concealing at all her spirit force and the imposing manner of a strong cultivator of the Divine Sea Realm, gleaming like a big sun.

Lu Ye's expression also changed, hurriedly putting Amber into the spirit beast sack, and fled in the opposite direction.

The reason Nian Yuexian didn't take him was actually because she was already exposed.

The immense display of the sword strike just now had likely alarmed nearby strong cultivators of the Divine Sea Realm, and she was quite well-known on the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's side, with this place being the heartland of the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge.

In such a situation, once the Divine Sea Realm strong cultivators of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge knew she was here, they would inevitably engage in all sorts of pursuit.

Under such circumstances, if she brought Lu Ye along, it would naturally be extremely unwise. Once Lu Ye was caught up in the confrontation among the Divine Sea Realm strong cultivators, it would likely not end well for him.

This time was unlike the last confrontation against Wan Zhanggang, where the opposing side had only three Divine Sea Realm strong cultivators, not many, thus allowing room for Lu Ye to employ the Twin Flying Phoenixes.

But this time, it was unknown how many Divine Sea Realm cultivators would be dispatched from the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge.

Nian Yuexian deliberately revealed her aura and power when leaving to draw the attention of Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's strong individuals, making it easier for Lu Ye to sneak away.

The reason for taking Ying Wuji was clearly to prevent him from exposing Lu Ye's identity without her oversight. In the current situation, it was best for Lu Ye to act alone.

Nian Yuexian didn't know how Lu Ye initially infiltrated Gushan City Pass, but being able to sneak into even the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge's mountain pass safely clearly demonstrated Lu Ye's unique skills.

So, upon sensing the current situation, she decisively instructed Lu Ye to separate from her.

She needed to consider Lu Ye's life and death, but could disregard Ying Wuji's. If she were truly besieged by Divine Sea Realm cultivators, Ying Wuji might still be of some use in her hands.

After all, Ying Wuji was a core disciple of this generation of Senluo Hall, so the Ten Thousand Demons Ridge would somewhat consider the reputation of Senluo Hall.

Nian Yuexian had already left, and Lu Ye didn't dare fly too far, immediately landing after just thirty miles, finding a concealed spot, activating Breath-concealing and Concealment Spirit Runes, and quietly hiding.

He felt a headache.

Khong Khong had caused trouble; the method he used to send the three out of the Sword Weapon Sect secret realm was too ostentatious. Apart from attracting numerous Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators to snatch the scattered flying swords, the collapse of the secret realm itself would also draw the attention of nearby cultivators.

Combined with Nian Yuexian's actions, this area likely already attracted a gathering of cultivators from all directions.

The fact indeed was so.

Lu Ye soon sensed a Divine Sea Realm strong cultivator's aura passing by not far away, in a hurried manner, likely in pursuit of Nian Yuexian.

A moment later, the sound of something breaking through the air came from nearby, clearly indicating that Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators, who had received news, were coming to investigate this area.

In the next half a day, the situation developed as Lu Ye expected, with many Ten Thousand Demons Ridge cultivators gathering from all directions to investigate the anomaly here, further fueled by the allure of the numerous masterless flying swords scattering around.

Above Liyuan, it was bustling with activity.

There was no news from Nian Yuexian's side, and Lu Ye didn't dare to send messages to disturb her.

Asking Ying Wuji was an option, but given their differing camps and stances, even if he asked, he couldn't easily trust the answers he received.

He could only continue to wait.