

## Old Gods 521

Chapter 521: Like to muddle in muddy waters?

In the western mountain forests, a man and a woman wielding the Sky-piercing Halberd stared at the horrifying battlefield, their faces filled with shock.

What kind of catastrophe has Tiantu Mountain brought upon itself?

Whom exactly has Luo Tiantu provoked?

Among the ambush team here, there were undoubtedly two Lie Tian disciples.

Otherwise, it would be impossible for two Lietian Divine Hammers to appear in the skies!

There was also an Ash disciple from the Sea Realm, wielding the Sea Realm Technique · Ten-Thousand Dragons Subjugating Sea Arrow.

Another Sea Realm disciple, a Night Charm, had unleashed the Sea Realm Technique · Thousand Night Shadows!

These were the confirmed participants, but as for those hidden in the dark... who knew how many more there were...

"Huh?" The young man slightly parted his lips, and even though he was far from the battlefield, he could feel the earth trembling beneath his feet.

The woman gripped her Sky-piercing Halberd tightly, her gaze fixed on the dazzling golden brilliance erupting in the distance.

Dragon Carp Divine Technique · Dragon Carp Heavenly Boat?

Judging by the size of that giant golden fish, it must at least be a Sea Grade Dragon Carp Heavenly Boat!

To think the ambush team was hiding a Sea Realm · Dragon Carp believer?

At this moment, the heart of the East Thunder female believer was filled with astonishment, which quickly turned into immeasurable rage.

When Luo Tiantu visited Thunder Mountain to seek protection, he had explicitly stated: Tiantu Mountain had faced conflict with a River Realm · Evil Dog believer.

The Evil Dog believer had an Immortal Sheep disciple by his side.

And that was it.

Tiantu Mountain had been wise enough not to provoke any strong organizations.

This...?

Luo Tiantu, oh Luo Tiantu, does a single word of truth ever escape your mouth?!

If I had known Tiantu Mountain had angered such a terrifying group, why would Thunder Mountain send people to help?

"Po~"

The giant fish emitted a strange sound.

With a colossal Dragon Carp over 800 meters in size, it wasn't just planning to knock Luo Tiantu and Lady Kong away.

This single Dragon Carp Heavenly Boat was set to destroy this entire small mountain!

"No! No!!" Lady Kong screamed hysterically, her hair a disheveled mess.

Just moments ago, she thought her authority was being challenged, and her rage had momentarily surpassed her fear.

But now, Lady Kong was utterly panicked!

She hadn't expected that an expert from the Sea Realm was hiding deep underground.

What kind of organization is this?

What on earth did Tiantu Mountain do to provoke them?

This time, I'm afraid I won't survive...

Lady Kong had nowhere left to escape, still trapped within the cuboid constructed by the Golden Jade Talisman, as the massive fish's head propelled her out of the subterranean depths.

A swarm of crazed Canglong surged forward, crashing into the Golden Jade Talisman, encircling the cuboid completely, cutting off all of Lady Kong's escape routes.

"Puh!"

Lady Kong desperately employed her skills, crushing Frost Talismans one after another.

Thick frost and snow spread out, coating the bodies of the small Canglong in layers of freezing chill.

Without a doubt, the Jade Talisman Sect was incredibly powerful!

This sect excelled in techniques of four different attributes, always able to find fitting strategies against any foe.

The water-bound forms of the small Canglong were rapidly frozen by the thick frost, dramatically reducing both their flight speed and impact force.

Those that managed to squeeze through the gaps and enter the cuboid were even directly frozen solid by the frost surrounding Lady Kong!

Everything seemingly started moving in a better direction.

The only problem... was that...

The Lietian Divine Hammer had arrived!

The flames burning on the massive hammer appeared to be freezing as well, but the terrifying force of its downward strike remained intact.

Lu Ran's Lietian Divine Hammer shattered countless snow sculptures formed by the Canglong swarms!

"Crash!"

The Golden Jade Talisman at the top, already covered in cracks, completely crumbled under the impact of the giant hammer.

Amid the dense frost, Lady Kong abruptly lifted her head.

She could see nothing, but she could sense the overwhelming and terrifying aura spreading across the skies. She hurriedly tried to manipulate another Golden Jade Talisman...

"Boom!!"

The hundred-meter-sized hammer absorbed everything around it, including the tiny Jade Talisman and the even smaller human amid it all.

Rather than targeting Lady Kong, the Lietian Divine Hammer seemed intent on smashing the fish...

The Lietian Divine Hammer struck heavily at the fish's head, producing another resonant explosion.

As with most sects' River Realm techniques, the Lietian Divine Skill · Lietian Divine Hammer inflicted dual-stage damage.

The first stage: collision.

The second stage... explosion!

"Boom!!"

A mushroom cloud soared into the sky, with a horrifying shockwave rolling outward like a vortex.

Trees snapped and were uprooted entirely, blown into the distant night.

The Golden Jade Talisman beneath the hammer had shattered, Lady Kong's Water Flow Armor lay in pieces, and her mortal flesh was crushed between the hammer and the fish's head.

The upward momentum of the gigantic fish was suddenly halted, forcibly stopped by the Divine Hammer.

Fine cracks spread over the fish's head, leaving it brittle and as fragile as it could get, ready to shatter at any moment.

"Crack!!"

The fish head exploded.

The Mad Immortal Guardian's Lietian Divine Hammer had landed!

Her Divine Hammer struck heavily against Lu Ran's, crushing the small human beneath, along with the large fish head in one fell swoop.

"Smash! Smash! Smash!" Si Xianxian roared furiously.

"Boom!!"

The Mad Immortal's Divine Hammer unleashed its second-stage damage, wreaking havoc.

As for the once-proud Lady Kong, there was no need to describe her fate—it was beyond "torn apart." She had become nothing more than a pile of flesh.

If even Lady Kong had met such a grim fate, there was no need to mention the seemingly lifeless Yu Lengshan.

It was simply a pity for the Magic Artifact · Jade Flower Hairpin and Divine Weapon · Sky Scar Sword.

These prized tools, sought after fervently by all, were completely pulverized under the combined obliteration of the Dragon Carp Heavenly Boat and twin Lietian Divine Hammers.

All of this transpired within mere seconds.

Bear in mind, Lady Kong was not the only one propelled out by the fish's impact!

Since Luo Tiantu had already fled underground for a few seconds, venturing westward, he was also thrown westward when the fish head struck him.

Now, rewind the clock by several seconds.

"Ah!" Luo Tiantu let out a pained scream. Originally fleeing along the Flowing Sand River, the crashing Dragon Carp Heavenly Boat suddenly emerged.

He was struck dizzy and disoriented, his blood and energy churning chaotically.

"Hmm?" Deng Yuxiang suddenly turned her head.

Enemies meeting one another? Their hatred surged to the forefront!

She raised her hand high, and in the distant night sky, a terrifying Evil Blade over a thousand meters long rapidly materialized.

At that very moment, Lu Ran's Lietian Divine Hammer erupted in a devastating explosion!

The resulting shockwaves surged forward, engulfing Luo Tiantu's entire being and flinging him away.

"Pfff..."

Luo Tiantu's throat felt sweet, unable to suppress the churning blood and energy within him. He spewed out fresh blood.

"Die!" Deng Yuxiang's eyes turned sharp, and the Divine Power Bead Chain around her neck suddenly lit up, replenishing her Divine Power.

She gripped the humming broken blade tightly and slashed down with ferocity.

Evil Technique · Night Charm Evil Blade!

"Sh\*t!" Blood dripped from the corners of Luo Tiantu's mouth as he squeezed out a curse through clenched teeth.

Twisting his body sharply, he desperately tried to escape the slash radius of the Night Charm Evil Blade.

However, in the distant night sky, the thousand-meter Evil Blade continued slicing downward, its blade adjusting its trajectory.

The moonlight shone brightly upon the earth.

But none of it touched Luo Tiantu.

The massive shadow cast by the Evil Blade completely shrouded him.

"Stop! Stop! No!!" Luo Tiantu's face darkened, his heart pounding in his throat.

"Whoosh!!"

The Night Charm Evil Blade crashed down heavily.

At the critical moment, Luo Tiantu unleashed an astonishing survival instinct, kicking sideways against the Golden Jade Talisman.

"Swish~"

Using the rebound force, Luo Tiantu rapidly veered to the side.

"Whoosh!!"

Of course, the Night Charm Evil Blade possessed dual-stage damage—the terrifying gusts of air exploded outward from the blade's sides.

The already devastated forest around them was, yet again, completely overturned.

Meanwhile, in the more western mountain forests...

The young man wielding the Sky-piercing Halberd was enveloped in crackling currents of electricity.

"Tan Dong!" The East Thunder female believer grabbed the young man's wrist, shouting lowly, "What are you doing?"

"Xiqing, loyalty demands duty!" The East Thunder disciple Tan Dong declared with righteous fervor.

Zhang Xiqing: ???

Technically, this statement wasn't wrong.

Over the past few months, every time Luo Tiantu departed on a mission, he adhered to agreements, allowing the duo to first absorb Holy Spirit Energy.

But given the current battle situation...

Are you really planning to save Luo Tiantu?

Have you gone mad?

"Crack!" Suddenly, lightning struck Tan Dong.

East Thunder Divine Technique · Thunderstruck Phase!

This skill was aptly named; whenever East Thunder believers used it, they seemed touched by the grace of the Divine · Dongting.

Under the purple lightning's influence, Tan Dong's body was activated to an extreme degree, boosting all attributes!

"The enemy is indeed strong, but we have absolute speed advantage! Don't engage directly—let's bring Luo Village Chief back home!"

Tan Dong spoke quickly; surrounded by surging electricity, he dashed forward.

East Thunder Divine Technique · Rapid Light Flash!

Tan Dong's gaze flickered with calculation, his thoughts far more intricate than his spoken words.

Luo Tiantu and the Thunder Mountain Master were on particularly good terms.

The Mountain Master had advocated for the duo rigorously, awarding them favorable assignments, though this had stirred considerable resentment among other Thunder Mountain disciples.

Now that Tiantu Mountain was annihilated, the duo's return wouldn't go over well without an explanation.

Their standing within the mountain would deteriorate sharply.

The ambushing group clearly knew of them, and such a fearsome organization... would they even spare the duo?

Confronting such an entity required caution—even Thunder Mountain must tread carefully.

Though flawed in many respects, Luo Tiantu remained a Sea Realm expert—a formidable force.

Whether he allied with Thunder Mountain or was utilized in some other capacity, that was for the Mountain Master to decide.

For now, their duty was to recover this "treasure" and present him before their Mountain Master.

Returning to Thunder Mountain would bring inevitable punishment.

But privately, their Mountain Master might harbor delight at the arrival of a homeless yet powerful Jade Talisman disciple!

This was the correct course... Hmm?

Tan Dong's face stiffened, an overwhelming presence engulfing him!

He gripped his halberd tightly, shouting furiously:

"Cha!!"

East Thunder Divine Technique · Thunder Shock!

This was a Battle Roar Technique that left foes in a dazed state, immobile where they stood.

Unexpectedly, the incoming party screamed sharply in reply, their voice piercingly shrill:

"Eek!!"

Evil Technique · Sea Merfolk Song!

Tan Dong felt as if his head would split apart, his mind lost in dizziness!

Even Lu Ran, who had shut off Evil Technique · Evil Recognition, winced in agony, feeling as if his eardrums might rupture!

Yet, on the mental level, Lu Ran remained unfazed.

Dazed?

Impossible—how could one who lived entirely driven by willpower succumb to spiritual disruptions?

Ever heard of Sea Merfolk Evil Technique · Sea's Will?

No?

How about Evil Spear Emperor Evil Technique · Evil Cloud Will?

Or Ghost General Evil Technique · Ghost General's Will?

This one's entire being was infused with determination—the world's chaos could never disturb his inner focus!

"Ding!"

A flash of light pierced through, as a sharp blade slashed heavily against the halberd shaft.

A disciple famed for their "absolute speed" as an East Thunder believer had been intercepted—by an Evil Dog!

"Ugh." Tan Dong let out an eerie groan, feeling a numbness in his tiger's mouth.

Though his thoughts were cloudy, Tan Dong retained impressive strength courtesy of Thunderstruck Phase, preventing the Sky-piercing Halberd from slipping from his grasp. However...

The halberd was merely a mundane weapon, while the Dawn Blade was a Divine Weapon!

Not only that, it had unlocked its Domain—becoming a Second-stage Divine Weapon!

"Crack," a crisp sound rang out.

The halberd shaft broke under the slash of the Dawn Blade!

Momentum surging, Lu Ran unleashed his maxed-out Fierce Heavenly Power, continuing the blade's arc towards Tan Dong's head!

"Screech..."

A trail carved from forehead to chin, the Water Flow Armor on Tan Dong's face split, exposing a trickling bloodline.

"Snik!"

The blade stabbed deep!

The Dawn Blade sliced through Tan Dong's jaw, and the Eight Desolate Blade shot forward, piercing Tan Dong's brow.

The weapon skewered him, pinning him to the ground.

Lu Ran's chest heaved as he stared coldly, his gaze fixed on the lifeless body of the East Thunder disciple beneath his feet:

"You just love meddling, don't you?"

...

Chapter 522: No grievances, no enmity?

"Tan Dong!" Zhang Xiqing exclaimed in shock.

The companion who had been by her side day and night, the one who had just said, "We have an absolute speed advantage," was now dead under the bamboo clothes man's blade in the very next second.

Zhang Xiqing's expression turned extremely grim.

The mysterious figure with the bamboo hat and bamboo clothes in the distance... Could it be an Evil Dog Disciple?

In terms of speed alone, East Thunder believers could indeed pride themselves above others.

But being fast only applies to displacement, whereas Evil Dog Disciples possess actual teleportation!

"Ah!" Zhang Xiqing suddenly took a step back.

Because the bamboo clothes man slowly raised his head, and under the wide brim of his bamboo hat was a pair of chillingly cold eyes.

Zhang Xiqing: !!!

She was overtaken by a sudden realization!

Perhaps Luo Tiantu was right after all.

Tiantu Mountain truly hadn't offended other powerful factions.

The battlefield's Ash disciples, Dragon Carp believers, Lie Tian disciples... All of them had been brought by this Evil Dog Disciple!

From the beginning to the end, Luo Tiantu had provoked only one single person?!

"You also enjoy muddying the waters."

Lu Ran's expression was dark, a trace of eerie crimson flashing in his eyes.

Zhang Xiqing felt her vision blur and fell suddenly into a crimson-colored world.

Countless crimson threads wove wildly, cruelly piercing through her flesh and bones.

"Ah! Ahhh!" Zhang Xiqing's face distorted, and she gripped her head tightly with both hands.

This is... Silk Pupil?

How could it be!

Isn't he an Evil Dog Disciple?

Various thoughts flashed through Zhang Xiqing's mind in an instant, but she was already in too much pain to think clearly.

Lu Ran's figure flickered, and the Dawn Blade slashed down violently.

Ran Sect Blade Technique Third Form·Shuo Star!

"Zzzlaaa..."

The Dawn Blade tore through two layers of Zhang Xiqing's armor in succession.

One was East Thunder Sect's defensive Divine Technique·Thunder Armor, the other was the common Divine Technique of Human Clan believers·Water Flow Armor.

Under the impact of the Evil Technique·Silk Pupil, both armors were clearly unstable.

The sharp Dawn Blade, coupled with Lu Ran's terrifying Fierce Heavenly Power, not only shredded the armor but slashed into the woman's body, carving a long, deep wound into her back.

The wound was so deep that bone could be seen!

"Sssss~"

Facing imminent death, Zhang Xiqing erupted with an astonishing will to survive!

Her body crackled with electricity as she stumbled sideways, her legs trembling from the agony.

"Szz—"

Immortal Fog sprayed from underneath Lu Ran's feet, and his figure traversed rapidly.

Under normal circumstances, the Immortal Hoof of the Immortal Sheep Sect couldn't compare with East Thunder Sect's swift light flashes.

But now, with the East Thunder female believer's spirit shattered and her body feeling as if pierced by a thousand needles, though her legs trembled, how could she possibly achieve maximum speed?

"Wah!!"

Lu Ran chased from behind, letting out yet another ear-piercing scream.

Invisible soundwaves spread in amplification, enveloping the East Thunder female believer's retreating figure.

O people of the land, hear this song from the depths of the sea!

But then again, could such sharp, grating cries even be called a "song?"

Well... Yes!

If it can kill an enemy, then it's a song.

A battle song!

"Ah!" Zhang Xiqing suffered another mental blow, her mind instantly becoming muddled, her spirit dazed.

Her feet stumbled beneath her...

"Szz!"

The blade pierced the skull.

Lu Ran gripped the Eight Desolate Blade and plunged it into the back of the woman's head, carrying her forward until it embedded her into a large tree.

"Thud," a muffled sound echoed.

The giant tree shook violently, its bark and wood splinters flying.

The East Thunder female believer became one with the tree, lifeless.

"Heh... Hah..." Lu Ran's chest rose and fell as he panted heavily.

Deng Yuxiang had previously declared she would handle these two.

Because East Thunder Sect counters Evil Dog Clan, and Lu Ran depends wholly on Evil Technique·Evil Recognition to survive...

Yet now, both East Thunder believers lay decapitated.

"Szz!" Lu Ran pulled out the Eight Desolate Blade, flicking off the blood staining its edge.

Countermeasures? What a joke!

Must I truly be a dog?

Activating ten or more statues, you think such scoundrels could counter me?

Evil Technique-Evil Recognition, activate!

In an instant, Lu Ran felt his connection with the surrounding world return entirely.

It was an illusion of omniscience and omnipotence.

The wind blew, the grass swayed, the leaves trembled...

Ah~ Now that feels good!

Lu Ran closed his eyes to savor the moment, a satisfied expression on his face.

Being a dog really does feel better...

"Boom!!"

Distantly to the west, a fierce explosion resounded.

Lu Ran released the Dawn Blade, letting it float beside him, as he reached for his chest. From within his embrace, a Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd instinctively flew out.

"Gurgle, gurgle..."

Lu Ran stepped towards the western side, drinking deeply as he walked.

As for the souls of the believers, he wasn't in any rush to collect them.

The dead souls linger on the battlefield for a while before ascending to the sky.

Including the dead souls of those Jade Talisman Sect disciples earlier, Lu Ran hadn't absorbed them out of caution—fearful of any buzzing interference affecting his combat.

Meanwhile, far to the west in the forested hills.

At this moment, there was no forest left, as the ground had already transformed into the flowing tides of the Flowing Sand River.

Luo Tiantu had initially hoped to use his flight advantage to hinder pursuers' steps with the relentless quicksand.

But both pursuers could fly!

The Night Charm disciple was expected, but as for the Ash believer, she must undoubtedly possess a Divine Weapon, enabling her flight.

"Pff!!"

A ferocious sea of flames surged, igniting and incinerating countless miniature Canglongs, which evaporated into dense mist.

"Great Powers, let's talk!"

Luo Tiantu cried out desperately, hurling a Bursting Flame Talisman as he fled in disarray.

The disheveled figure, blood streaming from his mouth, was miles apart from his previous lofty, domineering demeanor!

There's no denying that Jade Talisman Sect believers are incredibly hard to kill!

With mastery over four different techniques, Jade Talisman disciples can counter various sects.

Previously, Lady Kong used a Frost Talisman to freeze the small Canglong that Luo Ying shot out.

And now, Luo Tiantu used a Bursting Flame Talisman to incinerate and dissolve these small Canglongs.

"Whoosh!!"

A gusting gale struck.

Deng Yuxiang flew ahead on Luo Ying's left flank, raising her hand to sweep away the flames sweeping across the night sky.

Luo Tiantu hurriedly activated the Jade Talisman Formation to absorb the flames with its Bursting Flame Talisman.

At this moment, the Village Chief of Tiantu Mountain had been hunted to the point of terror.

Being relentlessly pursued by a Sea Realm·Night Charm disciple was already enough to overwhelm him.

Yet only moments into the chase, a Sea Realm·Ash believer joined in?

And worse, the Ash Sect wields the Divine Technique·Canglong Sea Domain!

Within this domain, all abnormal statuses afflicting targets are completely cleansed.

In other words, Luo Tiantu's Electric Shackles Talisman, Frost Talisman, and similar techniques had been rendered entirely useless.

He couldn't paralyze; he couldn't freeze!

"You two!" Luo Tiantu shouted loudly.

The ever-loomng sense of mortal danger made even his cries tremble.

"What's all this noise about?" Deng Yuxiang's voice was icy as she extended another hand.

"Whoosh~whoosh~"

A flurry of Night Charm Blades rushed forward at staggering speed, accompanied by terrifying sounds of splitting air.

"What could Luo possibly have done to provoke you esteemed Great Powers to such hostility?" Luo Tiantu roared, desperate, "Luo bears neither enmity nor grudge against you..."

"Twang!"

The vibration of bowstrings echoed, filling Luo Tiantu with utter dread, cutting his plea short.

He fled rapidly, throwing a Bursting Flame Talisman in the direction of the incoming arrow.

"Neither enmity nor grudge?" Deng Yuxiang scoffed coldly.

Her left hand fell naturally to her side, her fingertips playfully dancing across something unseen.

The Night Charm Blades dispersed swiftly, spinning and circling with an abnormal agility, striking from every angle.

"When... when have I ever offended you?!" Luo Tiantu was both startled and infuriated.

He scattered the Golden Jade Eight Talismans around him, transforming them into massive Golden Jade Shields, ten meters in size, to fend off the assaulting Wind Blade barrage.

Deng Yuxiang lifted a hand high.

The Divine Power Bead Chain adorning her neck lit up instantly, infusing her with an accelerating surge of Divine Power.

In the night sky, yet another colossal Wind Blade rapidly took shape.

Luo Tiantu: !!!

All this time, he had refrained from diving into the Flowing Sand River, precisely out of fear of this scenario.

The Jade Talisman Sect doesn't possess perception techniques, whereas Night Charm Clan's renowned Sound Positioning ability speaks for itself.

Should he immerse himself in the surging sands of the Flowing Sand River, he might only notice danger when the blade is already upon him...

What should he do?

The Night Charm Evil Blade spans a full kilometer!

Fleeing beyond its striking range was obviously impossible!

He could only try to evade it sideways.

Like before, dodging laterally!

Even if he managed to dodge now, the subsequent secondary damage would still engulf him like a shockwave, leaving him churned and his energy in disarray.

If he failed to dodge...

"Esteemed Great Power! Surely there's some misunderstanding... Ah?" Luo Tiantu continued to plead, desperately seeking a sliver of hope.

But before he could finish the word "standing," Luo Tiantu suddenly felt a tremendous surge of energy behind him!

"Ah!" Startled, Luo Tiantu twisted his head violently, his pupils contracting frantically!

From the night sky in the rear, a figure stood.

A mysterious man shrouded in mist beneath his feet, adorned in green bamboo clothes and wearing a bamboo hat.

The enigmatic man gripped a blade with both hands, holding it upright before his chest. Terrifying energy rippled forth, whipping his bamboo clothes into a frenzy. Rays of radiant Dawn emanated from the blade!

Luo Tiantu, a being of the Yangyang Sea, found his body trembling uncontrollably.

Divine Weapon Domain?

This level of energy fluctuation... This horrific aura... What kind of hellish Divine Weapon Domain is this?!

"No! Wait, there's a misunderstanding... Esteemed ones, I surrender! I... stop, STOP!!"

Luo Tiantu's panic rendered his words incoherent.

He flailed desperately while flinging away all the Jade Tokens surrounding him, hurling them frantically toward the brilliant Dawn light ahead.

"Pfft!"

The Bursting Flame Talisman made contact with the soft veil first.

A ferocious sea of fire spread expanding, yet the veil of Dawn danced freely through the flames, pressing forward without hindrance.

The Quicksand Talisman followed suit, bursting countless streams of sand, only to be incinerated by the veil of Dawn.

The Frost Talisman met an even sadder fate, completely burned away.

Only two Electric Shackles Talismans spiraled gracefully, maneuvering to avoid the elegant Dawn as they homed in on Lu Ran.

"Sss~sss~sss!!"

"Szz!!"

As they approached, Luo Tiantu detonated the Electric Shackles Talismans, unleashing two 500-meter-wide Thunder Balls that expanded with a sudden blaze.

For a split second Lu Ran was encapsulated within the Thunder Balls, his body crackling with electricity, yet...

Only for the lightning to dissipate entirely the following moment.

Beneath Lu Ran's feet, the mist was no ordinary fog—it was the Jade-faced Snake Clan's Purification Skill-Immortal Realm!

Though merely a River Grade purification technique, it had a higher priority level!

Think you can leave me tingling all over?

You'd need to surpass Sea Realm powers to even try!

At this moment, Luo Tiantu's face was painted with the hues of despair; his expression turned ashen.

Before him lay the advancing soft veil of Dawn.

Deadly beauty.

Overhead fell the striking Night Charm Evil Blade.

Encircling him were countless Water Flow Arrows and miniature Canglongs...

From the distant night sky, Lu Ran's eyes shone with brilliance, divinity radiating from his very being.

His luminous gaze locked with the lifeless despair in Luo Tiantu's eyes.

Neither enmity nor grudge?

Open your eyes wide and look at me clearly, Village Chief Luo!

If you can't recognize me, that's fine.

Lu Ran's face remained impassive as he stared at the once lofty and condescending Sea Realm Great Power who had looked down upon him.

In a moment, I'll use Soul Prison and Soul Fire to help you reminisce properly!

...

Chapter 523: The hated foolish ruler

"No!!!"

The mournful roar was Luo Tiantu's final attachment to this world.

Unwillingness, disbelief, terror, regret...

His gaze was wrought with complexity.

The Night Charm Evil Blade mercilessly shattered the Golden Jade Talisman. Its speed was as swift as lightning, yet in Luo Tiantu's eyes, it seemed to move in slow motion.

The evil blade descended inch by inch.

Inch by inch, it pressed down towards the crown of his head.

Luo Tiantu's Water Flow Armor crumbled with a deafening crash, not only because of the falling blade but also because of the golden-red radiance.

Countless Water Flow Arrows and small Canglongs became utterly useless, burned away by the indiscriminate radiance.

The Night Charm Evil Blade, overwhelmingly powerful, sliced through Luo Tiantu's bones and continued cutting into the churning Flowing Sand River below.

"Boom!!!"

The evil blade fell, and the Sand Sea roiled.

Amidst the roaring gale, Deng Yuxiang stubbornly kept her eyes wide open, staring intently at the deep chasm carved into the landscape below.

"Hoo!!"

The Night Charm Evil Blade entered its second-stage output, sending terrifying waves of wind sweeping to either side.

The uneven terrain was instantly razed to level ground...

For a long while, the wind and waves gradually subsided.

The world fell into complete silence.

[Big Nightmare.]

[Hmm?]

[Cooled off now?] Lu Ran sheathed his blade, standing in the night sky as he gazed at the woman from afar.

He dared not get too close.

Those beautiful but terrifying eyes of hers were still piercingly sharp!

Lu Ran feared that if he teleported over recklessly, she might take him out with a single swipe of her blade...

[Yes.] Deng Yuxiang responded softly, descending alone.

Under such a caliber of attack, Luo Tiantu's remains were undoubtedly obliterated.

What a pity for the Divine Weapon·Blood-weeping Saber, now sharing the same fate as the Jade Pin and the Earth Trace Sword.

Though he couldn't help but feel a pang of regret, Lu Ran had no good solutions.

In the vastness of the Yangyang Sea, how terrifying was its power?

Against such enemies, Ran Sect's members had no choice but to give it their all!

No matter how Lu Ran tried to strategize, he only dared to snatch an Earth Trace Sword from Yu Lenghe but wouldn't dare teleport to the side of a Sea Realm Great Power to forcibly seize treasure.

That would be pure suicide!

[Well done, everyone.] Lu Ran transmitted his thoughts through his mind, [The enemy general has been beheaded, clean up the battlefield.]

[Understood!]

[Understood.]

Lu Ran's figure flickered, standing midair behind Deng Yuxiang.

Cold killing intent radiated from the woman, making Lu Ran inwardly click his tongue.

This fierce lass...

You've already reduced Luo Tiantu to dust, and you're still not appeased?

Lu Ran opened his slit pupils, searching briefly. In another dimension, he located the madly howling dead soul.

"Whew~"

Lu Ran lifted a bundle of black mist in his hand, stepping on a cloud as he flew forward.

Soon, Luo Tiantu's face appeared within the black mist.

Lu Ran stared at the dead soul and began, "Chief Luo, my, aren't we forgetful."

Luo Tiantu's face froze, staring at the visage below Lu Ran's brimmed hat. "You! It's...you..."

"You recognize me now?" Lu Ran let out a mocking laugh, as ghostly Soul Fire ignited in his palm.

"Ahhh! Ahhh! Aghhh..."

Luo Tiantu's expression instantly twisted, releasing a piercing scream.

"Buzz!!"

Suddenly, an intense wave of Divine Power emanated nearby.

Startled, Lu Ran promptly turned to look.

There, Deng Yuxiang was staring at the tormented soul within the Soul Prison.

The killing intent on her body had significantly diminished, replaced by the satisfaction of vengeance fulfilled!

That energy fluctuation came from the broken blade in her hand.

The Night-slaying Great Saber,

was it on the verge of ascending to the rank of a Divine Weapon?

Lu Ran observed for a moment, his heart filling with joy. Just as Mr. Cong Long had said, the Big Nightmare had truly found mental clarity!

Ever since the Night-slaying Great Saber broke, it had been merely a Divine Weapon Seed.

In the moment when Deng Yuxiang washed away her disgrace and achieved her revenge, the saber, guided by its master's Mental Realm, was rising once more to claim its place as a Divine Weapon!

"Rebirth Money!" Lu Ran looked at Deng Yuxiang. "First, seal Luo Tiantu's soul into the copper coin."

Deng Yuxiang followed the command without hesitation, raising her left hand.

Lu Ran brought the black mist closer to the Magic Artifact Fragment·Rebirth Money and then dispersed the Soul Prison.

Stepping back a few paces, he summoned the Ancient Bronze Mirror: "Your enemy has been slain, and his soul is now imprisoned within the coin."

"So?" Deng Yuxiang raised her eyes toward Lu Ran.

"No matter what your intentions are in facilitating the Night-slaying Great Saber's advancement," Lu Ran gestured toward the ancient coin strapped to her wrist, "keep it steady!"

Deng Yuxiang pursed her lips, understanding Lu Ran's point.

"Head back to Tiantu Mountain first; we'll handle cleaning the battlefield." Lu Ran pointed toward the Transmission Mirror.

"Understood." Deng Yuxiang strode into the ground-length mirror.

Lu Ran watched her leave, reaching into his raincoat to pat the hilt of the Eight Desolates Annihilation Blade. "When will you level up?"

His tone carried a distinct air of "look at how well other people are doing."

"Buzz~" The Eight Desolate Blade trembled slightly.

It was hard to tell if it was showing support or expressing discontent.

"Heh..." Lu Ran drew a deep breath.

Looking toward the night sky, he was greeted by the sight of numerous spirits floating upward.

Lu Ran's figure flickered as he inhaled deeply!

One, two, three...

All were disciples of the Jade Talisman Sect!

Before long, Lu Ran's mind began buzzing again as the Jade Talisman Sculptures within the Sculpture Garden expanded their ranks once more.

Excellent, leveling up!

Lu Ran was deeply content.

In the process of continuously binding souls, he inevitably encountered Lady Kong.

Unlike the other dead souls who either roared in anger or wailed in fear, this Sea Realm Great Power stared at him with a dazed expression.

Lu Ran did not bind Lady Kong into his pupils but once again summoned the Soul Prison, imprisoning her there.

"Long time no see, Lady Kong," Lu Ran said offhandedly as he continued his search for souls.

Lady Kong, who had been silent all this time, finally stirred.

Under the hauntingly beautiful moonlight, she saw the youth's face clearly.

Her gaze gradually transformed.

Hatred surged endlessly!

If looks could kill, Lu Ran would've died a dozen times over by now.

Yet Lu Ran didn't even glance at her, casually remarking, "How does it feel to get hunted by your prey?"

Lady Kong finally spoke for the first time!

Always poised and elegant, she squeezed out two words through gritted teeth: "Bastard child!"

"Heh." Lu Ran let out a cold laugh.

As he toyed with the Soul Prison in his hand, black Soul Fire flared up on its surface.

Lady Kong: !!!

Her once dignified face contorted agonizingly under the assault of the flame.

"Oh?" Lu Ran arched an eyebrow, turning to address the now-silent Lady Kong. "Still tough, huh?"

Enraged, Lady Kong spat out: "You... ahhh!!!"

Before she could finish, Lu Ran nonchalantly added more Soul Fire.

Lu Ran weighed the black mist bundle in his hand. "Think carefully about your words; you're going to tell me every piece of information you know.

You're also going to guide me to everything you've looted over the years..."

Lady Kong wailed pitifully, clearly too preoccupied with pain to listen to him.

Lu Ran, sensing her uncooperativeness, wisely fell silent, continuing to bind souls.

He absorbed all the dead souls of the remaining eight disciples of the Jade Talisman Sect, except Luo Tiantu and Lady Kong, before soaring over the woods and binding the souls of two Dongting Sect believers into his eyes.

These two carried significant traces of Holy Spirit Energy within their souls!

For half a year, every time the Tiantu Mountain operated, Luo Tiantu ensured these two ate first.

Lu Ran had always coveted the Dongting Sect's skills.

The East Thunder Divine Technique·Rapid Light Flash was even faster than Immortal Hoof.

The East Thunder Divine Technique·Thunder Shock could leave enemies in a stunned state!

Just those two techniques alone were enough to allow Lu Ran to activate Divine Sculpture·Dongting.

The problem was, Lu Ran currently only had one activation slot remaining, and until he advanced to the Sea Realm, no more could be added.

He intended to save that slot for any unforeseen needs.

Holy Spirit Mountain was vast, and talents abounded like schools of fish swimming upstream!

Who knew if, in the future, a talented young man or woman might pledge themselves to him, requiring a suitable Divine Sculpture or Evil Sculpture?

Such things were always unpredictable.

As Lu Ran was lost in thought, he noticed the atmosphere growing thick with mist.

"Hmm?" Lu Ran looked up at the night sky.

The bright moon was now shrouded in heavy fog, which began spinning into a Fog Dragon Roll.

It appeared that the Big Nightmare was successfully leading the Night-slaying Great Saber into an upgrade!

"Hah!" Lu Ran's heart leaped with joy. He swiftly tidied up the battlefield, regrouped with his team, and with a single step, entered the Tiantu Mountain council hall through the Transmission Mirror.

Inside the room, Bai Yanhui rose upon hearing the commotion, clasped his hands, and declared,

"Congratulations to the Sect Leader for avenging past grievances and achieving a grand victory!"

"Avenging past grievances..." Lu Ran murmured, his eyes falling on the Soul Prison containing Lady Kong.

Tormented by the scorching Soul Fire, she dared not hurl insults anymore.

The once-proud and noble Sea Realm Great Power now remained compliant, quietly nestling in Lu Ran's grasp, submissive to the point of absurdity.

"Indeed, avenging past grievances!" Lu Ran's grin widened.

Now, Tiantu Mountain was entirely annihilated!

Its leaders, male and female, were slain, and their souls had been claimed by the Ran Sect. They were now under Lu Ran's control, awaiting his orders.

This was vengeance fulfilled, the way it should be!

"Mad Immortal," Lu Ran called out.

"Present," Si Xianxian immediately stepped forward.

Lu Ran gestured toward Bai Yanhui. "Hand the Divine Weapon·Earth Trace Sword to Elder Bai."

Before setting out to intercept the Dongting believers, Lu Ran had entrusted Si Xianxian with the safekeeping of the Earth Trace Sword.

"Huh?" Si Xianxian was startled. "Are you serious?!"

Lu Ran blinked. "What?"

Si Xianxian's eyes widened. "So, one compliment, and you're handing out Divine Weapons now?"

She stared incredulously, thinking, \*Is he really that fond of flattery? One line, and he's floored? Truly an incompetent tyrant!\*

The others: "..."

Bai Yanhui immediately interjected: "Sect Leader, this isn't appropriate. I have not done enough to deserve such reward!"

Lu Ran shot Si Xianxian a glare and said, "Elder Bai has indeed contributed. The plans and strategies you coordinated with Mr. Conglong have led to tonight's resounding victory.

However, this Divine Weapon isn't just about merit."

Pausing briefly, Lu Ran clarified, "The Ran Sect is still in its early stages of development. Our allocations are based on needs."

Lu Ran continued, explaining, "Elder Bai shall establish rapport with the Earth Trace Sword, making it your eyes."

"Sect Leader..." Bai Yanhui hesitated.

Lu Ran, not allowing further delay, simply commanded, "Obey."

Bai Yanhui hesitated for a moment before bowing and responding, "Thank you, Sect Leader!"

Lu Ran turned to Si Xianxian, who, realizing her misunderstanding, bowed her head and silently handed over the Earth Trace Sword.

Lu Ran let out a faint huff, his gaze sweeping across the room. "The Nightmare Guardian is leading the Divine Weapon upgrade. I'll have to trouble everyone to continue guarding the mountain."

"Understood!"

"Understood!" The Ran Sect members responded in unison.

The group left to carry out their tasks, leaving Lu Ran to collapse into a chair.

Rubbed his temples as his buzzing mind protested, he fiddled with the Soul Prison. "Go ahead, spill it. Over the years, what treasures have you plundered?"

Bai Yanhui, observing, grew puzzled. He couldn't discern who the Sect Leader was speaking to.

Lady Kong, ever the pragmatic one, replied obediently, "We at Tiantu Mountain..."

Even someone as outwardly composed as Bai Yanhui couldn't help but change expressions!

This voice—it was unmistakably Lady Kong's!

The Sect Leader had captured the Sea Realm Great Power, Lady Kong!? How did he dare? Such a force...

And yet, the overwhelming aura typical of the Yangyang Sea was nowhere to be felt in the chamber...

"Elder Bai."

"Sect Leader!" Bai Yanhui promptly answered.

"Sit down," Lu Ran said, smiling. "The sooner you bond with the Earth Trace Sword, the sooner it will reveal to you what's really going on."

"Yes!" Bai Yanhui complied, his turmoil hidden behind a polite facade.

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Chapter 524: Shattered Sword Spirit

Upgrading a weapon to a Divine Weapon takes no more than a few hours.

While Lu Ran was still conducting the interrogation, he sensed the surrounding mystic fog growing thinner and thinner.

Big Nightmare was successful?

"Sect Leader!" Not long after, Deng Yuxiang pushed the door open and entered with large strides.

Lu Ran couldn't help but feel his eyes light up.

The woman had first avenged her enemies and then successfully cultivated a Divine Weapon upgrade. At this moment, she was radiant with confidence.

Her aura was overwhelming!

Bear in mind, the council hall was shrouded in total darkness.

But when Lu Ran saw Deng Yuxiang, he felt she was dazzlingly bright.

Good, good, good...

Thinking back to the aftermath of the battle in Beifeng City, how broken and pathetic Deng Yuxiang had been.

Now, this beautiful camellia flower has finally bloomed anew.

Credit goes to yours truly!

Delighted~

Lu Ran silently rejoiced.

Deng Yuxiang did not possess night vision. Yet, as a powerful Martial Artist, she could sense someone's gaze fixated on her.

Unwavering.

As if appreciating her?

"Sect Leader." Deng Yuxiang approached Lu Ran and called out softly.

"Ah... Is it done?" Lu Ran snapped back to reality.

"Yes." Deng Yuxiang drew out the broken blade, releasing her grip.

The broken blade, approximately 1.3 meters long, hovered silently mid-air.

The Night-cutting Blade now exuded a unique aesthetic.

The hilt was only about 20 centimeters, while the blade measured around 1.1 meters. Both the bottom of the hilt and the tip of the blade were slanted and jagged.

At first glance, it looked like a shattered blade.

But upon closer inspection, this seemingly disposable blade, meant for scrapping and re-forging, was now a Divine Weapon?

"Whew~" A sudden surge of energy rippled forth.

From within the broken blade emanated a shadow—Night-Slaying Blade Spirit!

In an instant, the temperature in the council hall plummeted, akin to falling into an icy cavern.

Lu Ran silently clicked his tongue, staring at the blade spirit before him—it was like meeting a death god incarnate...

Soon, Lu Ran noticed something peculiar in his heart.

The appearance of the blade spirit mirrored Deng Yuxiang to a striking degree, resembling her by nine parts.

Yet this blade spirit... was fragmented?

To date, Lu Ran had encountered many Artifact Spirits from Divine Weapons and Magic Artifacts, but he had never seen one covered in fissures!

This?

"She's quite unique." Lu Ran murmured softly.

"Yes." Deng Yuxiang responded gently, naturally aware of the Night-Slaying Blade Spirit's state.

The blade spirit stretched out its limbs, wrapping its ethereal form around the inverted Night-cutting Blade.

The slow, deliberate movements left Lu Ran quietly anxious, fearing the spirit might shatter entirely...

Humans are indeed visual creatures.

Lu Ran quickly realized—this was a blade spirit. As long as the Divine Weapon remained intact, how could she possibly break?

Hmm... Let's just consider it a special skin.

It was beautiful in a strangely eerie way.

As these thoughts ran through his mind, Lu Ran carefully observed.

The cracks running across the blade spirit's form were eerily reminiscent of the shattered blade from the battle in Beifeng City.

Later, Deng Yuxiang had handed it over to the disciples of the Heavenly Star Sect for repairs to the blade's fractured network.

Yet, Deng Yuxiang had not fully restored the Night-slaying Great Saber to its original, imposing 2.8-meter length.

Perhaps she intended to always remind herself of that bitter defeat?

"You..." Lu Ran extended a hand, trying to hold the fragmented hand of the blade spirit. "Why this appearance?"

Unfortunately, the blade spirit was ethereal.

Lu Ran's hand passed through her palm.

It's well known: a blade is the extension of its wielder's thoughts.

The so-called "Artifact Spirit mirrors the master" naturally signifies more than physical resemblance.

The blade spirit, overflowing with murderous intent, sensed Lu Ran before her. Her previously stiff facial features slightly softened; even her gaze became gentler. She softly replied:

"Should I not be like this?"

Lu Ran: "..."

The feeling was eerily like talking to another Deng Yuxiang.

Moreover, this Deng Yuxiang seemed deadlier in intent.

Lu Ran almost wanted to ask whether this Night-Slaying Blade Spirit was the same one as before.

But after much deliberation, he refrained from asking recklessly.

"We already have our direction for growth," Deng Yuxiang casually raised her hand, "The blade spirit has conveyed her intent to me."

Her slender fingers skimmed across the ethereal blade spirit, tracing strands of energy.

"What is it?" Lu Ran looked at the woman.

Deng Yuxiang grasped the handle of the broken blade, and the Night-Slaying Blade Spirit obediently followed her master's thoughts, slowly merging back into the broken blade.

She whispered, "To restore the broken blade."

Lu Ran nodded thoughtfully.

From this moment on, the name "Night-cutting" would no longer simply mean "cutting through the endless night."

Night-cutting had become a proper noun.

Representing the Divine Weapon before its fall—the Night-slaying Great Saber.

Was this the envisioned direction for the Divine Weapon Domain cultivated by this master and blade?

Lu Ran speculated and then raised his query accordingly.

Deng Yuxiang was non-committal, merely slinging the broken blade on her back and walking behind Lu Ran's chair: "Are you upgrading?"

"Yes." Lu Ran saw Deng Yuxiang wasn't elaborating, so he stopped prodding.

Deng Yuxiang reached out and removed Lu Ran's bamboo hat. Her cold fingertips pressed onto his head, gently massaging.

Shameless indulgence!

By now, Lu Ran had already accepted this care with a clear conscience.

Technician Deng's massage techniques had evolved, now including not just temple rubs but gentle presses on his head.

It was rather soothing~

Reflecting on the years the two had spent together, it seemed both had grown accustomed to indulging one another?

Lu Ran closed his eyes and exhaled deeply: "I feel I'm about to level up too; I'm close to breaking through the cultivation bottleneck."

Deng Yuxiang: "Then let's head back earlier."

Now that Tiantu Mountain was in ruins and their grudges were lifted, it was indeed time for the two to return.

Lu Ran weighed the Soul Prison in his hand: "Once we extract all the intelligence, raid her belongings, we'll head back."

"Alright."

Deng Yuxiang understood Lu Ran wasn't in top form, so she took the initiative to assume interrogation duties.

With regards to their two captives, Luo Tiantu and Lady Kong, Deng Yuxiang interrogated them separately to guarantee the accuracy of their information.

In reality, the couple didn't dare lie.

This also indirectly proved the ruthless effectiveness of Lu Ran's methods.

A flicker of Soul Fire could subdue even Sea Realm Great Powers, leaving them no choice but to spill their secrets fully, terrified of enduring Soul Fire's searing agony again.

For over a decade, Luo and Kong had wielded dominance in this place. They were indeed walking treasure troves.

Lu Ran listened with fascination.

As the night passed, the Jade Talisman Divine Sculpture in Lu Ran's Sculpture Garden cemented itself at River Realm·Fourth Rank!

Clearly, the 8 Jade Talisman disciples Luo Tiantu had personally brought along were of vastly superior quality compared to those stationed at the mountain.

The prior 11 Jade Talisman disciples were only capable of elevating the Divine Sculpture to River Realm·First Rank.

Tiantu Mountain was unquestionably an organization with a rigid hierarchy.

For its lower-tiered members, they truly had no hope of gaining much advantage.

Since everyone was planning to head back, Lu Ran halted his absorption of the souls of Luo Tiantu and Lady Kong.

Holding two Soul Prisons in hand, he led the pair to completely plunder Tiantu Mountain before sending their souls into the Rebirth Money.

One day later, Tiantu Mountain burst into roaring flames.

Before setting the fire, Deng Yuxiang specifically sought Lu Ran's approval, expressing her desire to obliterate this place entirely.

Lu Ran consented, feeling quite sentimental:

"Luo Tiantu, oh Luo Tiantu, why did you provoke her?"

Not only does she kill you and imprison your souls, but she also raids your home and burns your mountain!

Big Nightmare was indeed a fitting codename...

When it came to enemies, this woman was downright ruthless!

And thus, the dominion of Luo Tiantu was reduced to ashes by Deng Yuxiang.

The Ran Sect members took the spoils and journeyed back to Cloud Sea Cliff.

The spoils could be divided into four categories.

First: clothing and shoes. Second: gold and silver treasures. Third: various weapons. Fourth: Divine Power Pearls.

From Lu Ran's perspective, the value of the first two categories paled compared to the latter pair.

As for Divine Weapons and Magic Artifacts, they shouldn't expect too much.

If there was anything good, Luo Tiantu and Lady Kong would have surely kept it for themselves.

However, among all the weapons confiscated by the Ran Sect, Lu Ran actually discovered a Divine Weapon Seed!

It wasn't from Tiantu Mountain's armory but belonged to the Sky-piercing Halberd used by the female disciples from Dong Ting during the battle on the fifteenth night.

It's a pity that no one in the Ran Sect is proficient in using halberds.

Hmm... For now, let's take it back and store it in Cloud Sea Cliff's treasure vault.

Await a fated wielder!

Upon returning to Cloud Sea Cliff, it was already July 20.

The stationed guard, Jing Hong, was both thrilled and dazed, leading the Ghost General Team to welcome them.

Thrilled because Sect Leader had returned.

She knew well that there was no other organization in the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm like the Ran Sect.

Had something happened to Lu Ran and the others, her future days might have been filled with enslavement, tortures, or perhaps abandonment, left to rot in the wilderness.

Dazed because Lu Ran was draped in a Black Gold Emperor Robe.

A garment adorned with dragon and phoenix motifs, exuding aristocratic magnificence!

The large robe's trailing hem also bound a massive bundle of weaponry.

Steel clashing upon steel, creating sharp, rhythmic sounds.

This presentation was a deliberate decision by Lu Ran after much deliberation.

Initially, he'd wanted to wear a seductive and revealing Big Red Robe, using thousands of crimson threads to tie together a large number of weapons...

Hmm... But Lu Ran didn't dare.

Even cross-dressing has its degrees.

In front of his subordinates, wearing a Big Red Robe versus a risqué scarlet dress are entirely different concepts!

A tad embarrassing~

Upon reaching their base, Lu Ran led everyone in divvying up... uh, distributing the spoils!

This campaign yielded over 200 Divine Power Pearls for the Ran Sect.

Adding that to what they already possessed, the Ran Sect had effectively achieved "Divine Power Pearl freedom."

Truth be told, if Luo Tiantu's team hadn't been obliterated by numerous Sea Realm techniques, the amount of Divine Power Pearls they captured could have easily doubled!

Following that, Lu Ran organized the clothing and shoes for distribution, intentionally giving more to Luo Ying.

She had children at home, after all.

For sect members at the River and Sea Realms, wearing straw clothes and shoes was no big deal.

But children, with their tender skin, would surely feel more comfortable in soft clothes and shoes from the Human World.

Luo Ying did not refuse and repeatedly expressed her gratitude to Lu Ran.

Sect Leader's concern for the children was well understood by all, and no one had any objections.

As for weapons and gold and silver jewelry...

Lu Ran declared that everyone could help themselves!

Yet nobody touched them. Only Jing Hong, at last finding a weapon she fancied, selected a Yanyue Blade.

As a small leader of the Evil Demon Squad, she spent her days leading forces stationed at the sea cliff with ample time to learn techniques from the Ghost General Clan.

Lu Ran wholeheartedly approved.

After everything was arranged, Lu Ran requested the souls of Luo Tiantu and Lady Kong from Deng Yuxiang.

He then retreated into his seclusion room through Instant Teleportation, carrying his reverberating headache.

The Jade Talisman Divine Sculpture in the Sculpture Garden was already at River Realm·Fourth Rank, and now with the souls of Luo Tiantu and Lady Kong...

Lu Ran was confident that his Divine Sculpture would advance to the Sea Realm!

"Ah~" Within the pitch-black seclusion room, Lu Ran lay flat on the ground.

Specifically, which rank within the Sea Realm would it level up to?

Come, Jade Talisman!

Don't spare any surprises...

Lu Ran emptied his mind, his gaze growing vacant, as he revisited the state he'd been in on Immortal Island during his sea expedition.

Adopting the mentality of a simpleton.

Awaiting a miracle.

...

Chapter 525: Palace of the Immortals under the Moon

July 22nd, within the seclusion room.

Lu Ran lay on the ground, his face blank and dumbfounded.

Suddenly, a spark of vitality appeared in his eyes. A few seconds later, Lu Ran abruptly sat up.

"It's over?" Lu Ran shook his head.

His brain no longer throbbed with that incessant buzzing. Overjoyed, he immediately connected his spirit with the Divine Sculpture of the Jade Talisman.

A moment later, Lu Ran's mouth formed an "O" shape.

Sea Realm·Third Rank!

Third Rank?

"Wow!" Lu Ran couldn't help but exclaim in awe.

Luo Tiantu and Lady Luo truly deserved to be the ruling class!

All these years, had most of the Holy Spirit Energy that Tiantu Mountain harvested been absorbed by the couple?

The villagers could only sip from the dregs like drinking a tiny spoonful of soup?

To think—every 100 strands of Holy Spirit Energy were required just to advance a River Realm sculpture by one minor rank.

And for a Sea Realm sculpture, a full 1,000 strands of Holy Spirit Energy were needed for each minor rank advancement!

At this point, Lu Ran's Divine Sculpture of the Jade Talisman had already reached Sea Realm·Third Rank.

Which meant that these two Sea Realm Great Powers, Luo Tiantu and Lady Luo, had collected at least 2,000 strands of Holy Spirit Energy in the past decade or so!

Perhaps even more than that!

Although the Divine Sculpture of the Jade Talisman hadn't yet ascended to Sea Realm·Fourth Rank, Lu Ran had no way of knowing its precise progress.

Maybe it still required 800 strands of Holy Spirit Energy to advance to Fourth Rank.

Or perhaps just a single strand would suffice for the breakthrough!

No one could say for certain.

"Luo Tiantu, oh Luo Tiantu, you're freaking incredible at hoarding resources!" Lu Ran exclaimed, his glee uncontained. "Good, good, splendid work ah!"

Truly a loyal dog to the Jade Talisman indeed!

Tsk tsk~

But, your master can't enjoy it, because I've snatched it all away!

This time, I've truly feasted to my heart's content...

Lu Ran thought with relish, only for his mind to drift toward someone else—Lady Luo!

Luo Tiantu's first wife, later reduced to a mere mistress.

But still, she had once been a legitimate wife for a time!

Given how ruthless Luo Tiantu was toward the villagers, just how much Holy Spirit Energy was hidden within Lady Luo's soul?

What a pity—Lady Luo was a Prisoner Demon believer. For now, Lu Ran had yet to awaken this Divine Sculpture, leaving him no way to verify her wealth.

"Swoosh~"

Lu Ran's figure flickered, silently appearing by the edge of the sea cliff.

In the still of the deep night, all was silent.

Lu Ran listened to the sound of the sea wind, and faintly below, the waves crashing against the shore.

It was soothing—healing, even.

With his buzzing head finally cleared, these past few agonizing days left Lu Ran feeling a sense of liberation.

He sat at the edge of the cliff, letting his legs dangle leisurely outside, swinging them back and forth with ease.

Moonlight danced upon the shimmering sea surface, as though a layer of silver gauze had been spread beautifully across the water.

Lu Ran's gaze grew a bit unfocused as he slowly looked up, staring at the radiant full moon, murmuring:

"How beautiful."

"How beautiful."

Inside Luoxian Pavilion, a woman dressed in white stood by the edge of the pavilion, gazing at the glittering Erhai under the moonlight. She gently lifted her eyes to the bright night moon.

Jiang Ruyi stood silently, moonlight reflecting a faint glow in her eyes.

The moon rose, the moon set, night after night.

And you?

When will you return...

It had been half a year since Lu Ran challenged the Divine Ruins and left the Human World.

No news. No word.

Jiang Ruyi pressed her lips together, a faint sadness flickering in her eyes.

She should've long expected this day to come.

Since Lu Ran's departure, she'd spent every day in the Immortal Worship Hall, burning incense and offering prayers with devout hope to the Immortal Sheep Lord.

She asked only for his safety.

And if he could return soon, that would be even better.

Every day as she prayed, Jiang Ruyi's heart hung in constant worry.

Afraid that in a moment of divinity, the Immortal Sheep Lord might appear and deliver bad news.

Half a year, spent in devotion—and in helplessness.

"Ka."

At her waist, her sword slowly came unsheathed.

The Cold Night Sword, sensing its master's turbulent emotions, cautiously tilted toward her and hovered near her hand.

The icy hilt lightly touched the tips of her fingers.

Seeing that she didn't reject it, the hilt gently settled into her palm.

Perhaps it was only then that Jiang Ruyi came to her senses, her delicate hand slowly moving to grasp the hilt lightly.

"You miss him too?" Jiang Ruyi's lips parted slightly as she murmured faintly.

"Buzz~"

The Cold Night Sword trembled softly.

A Divine Weapon is always attuned to its master.

What's more, on the path to becoming a Divine Weapon, the greatest hurdle requires confirmation of shared sentiments between the weapon and its master—for someone specific.

"Sigh..." Jiang Ruyi breathed a soft sigh, her gaze lowering to the glimmering waters of Erhai below.

Lu Ran had been gone for half a year.

Sister Xian'er had also departed two months ago and was similarly without news.

Jiang Ruyi had investigated and confirmed that recently under Divine-Lie Tian's rule, there had been no opening of the Divine Ruin.

She wasn't certain if Sister Xian'er was truly engaged in pilgrimage and secluded cultivation within the city.

Even in retreat, there should've been at least a call—or even just a single message.

Jiang Ruyi exhausted all means of reaching her but could find no trace.

Earlier in July, even Si Xianxian's mother had gone specially to West Sea Province, only to find that under the governance of sects within the ancient city beneath the divine Lie Tian's realm, outsiders such as herself were forbidden entry into the Inner City.

The result of her inquiries was nothing more than perfunctory responses from Lie Tian's disciples, claiming that Si Xianxian was engaged in devout pilgrimage and could not be disturbed.

In the end, Si's mother's calls reached Jiang Ruyi.

As the most skilled and influential figure the desperate mother knew, Jiang Ruyi became her last refuge for hope.

She sought nothing more than to hear her daughter's voice, a mere assurance of safety.

Not even in person—a single phone call would be enough.

Yet Jiang Ruyi—a noble Human World Sect Leader's Wife, a venerated River Realm Great Power...

...was just as powerless.

She could offer no answer.

Indeed, Jiang Ruyi's illustrious status and overwhelming strength, before most, made her seem untouchable. To them, she was like a goddess.

But in the presence of gods, what was she herself but an ant?

Humble Human Clan—what right did they have to speak?

Sister Xian'er, just where are you?

Jiang Ruyi stared out over the water, her thoughts scattered. Those closest to her had gradually disappeared one by one...

And Lu Ran?

Are you... Are you still alive?

"Whoosh~"

The evening wind blew gently, brushing past her waist-length hair.

Jiang Ruyi slowly closed her beautiful eyes, feeling the breeze as though it were his hand softly touching her hair.

She stood there in solitude, quietly feeling, silently yearning.

Until that stillness was broken by a voice.

Jiang Ruyi frowned lightly.

The sudden transmission almost made her think she was hallucinating.

Was that just now the voice of Lord Jade Talisman?

Summoning me to pilgrimage?

Jiang Ruyi opened her eyes. Under the moonlight, Erhai unfolded before her, everything vivid and real.

So this wasn't a dream, nor her imagination.

A command from the god must be followed without question by any Believer.

Resistance was not an option.

Yet she wondered—why her? How did she, of all people, earn the god's audience twice?

Moreover, she was currently at Jiang Realm·Fourth Rank.

Wouldn't it make more sense for the god to wait for her to reach Jiang Realm·Fifth Rank before summoning her to pilgrimage?

Or perhaps she would tread the path Lu Ran once took?

Did Lord Jade Talisman plan to open the Divine Ruin?

Jiang Ruyi's expression shifted, her mind turning over these thoughts in silence for a long while. Then, her body emitted eight white jade tokens.

With the aid of the Divine Technique·Jade Talisman Formation, she steadily rose off the ground, flying toward the village in the mountains.

Soon, she arrived at Luoxian Village's Immortal Worship Hall.

At this late hour, the village was deathly still.

The great doors of the Immortal Worship Hall were wide open. Deep inside the hall, an elderly man knelt alone, bowing devoutly to the Immortal Sheep Stone Sculpture.

Jiang Ruyi stepped inside.

On both walls of the hall, rows of small divine sculptures stood, lifelike and varied in expression.

Hundreds—thousands—of sheep-like eyes seemed to gaze at this young woman visiting in the dead of night.

"Lady?"

Grandpa Cheng turned his head at the sound of footsteps, his face awash with surprise.

"Grandpa Cheng." Jiang Ruyi gave a small nod, issuing an instruction. "Please prepare some incense for me."

"Understood." Though puzzled, Grandpa Cheng approached the incense burner in front of the stone sculpture, taking up three sticks of incense and lighting them on a nearby candle.

Jiang Ruyi gazed up at the stone sculpture while stepping closer.

Soon, she accepted the now-lit incense, bowing respectfully three times before the Immortal Sheep Stone Sculpture.

"Immortal Sheep Lord, I recently received a transmission from Lord Jade Talisman, summoning me to pilgrimage," Jiang Ruyi murmured as she inserted the three incense sticks into the small burner.

Grandpa Cheng, standing off to the side, furrowed his brows slightly.

Jiang Ruyi stepped back two paces and knelt on the prayer mat, pressing her palms together. "I don't know how long I'll be gone, Immortal Sheep Lord, nor will I be able to guard Luoxian Mountain on the fifteenth of each month.

Nor can I pray and worship here daily."

From the side, Grandpa Cheng suddenly spoke up: "Lady."

"Hmm?" Jiang Ruyi was slightly taken aback.

It was an unspoken rule that no one ever interrupted another while they prayed to a god.

This was not merely about etiquette—it was a matter of respect for divinity!

For someone as experienced as Grandpa Cheng to interrupt at such a moment, he must have a valid reason.

Indeed, Grandpa Cheng spoke: "The Immortal Sheep Lord just delivered a transmission."

"Oh?" Jiang Ruyi's bright eyes lit up.

Grandpa Cheng continued: "The Immortal Sheep Lord said that this pilgrimage to Yumen Pass will likely involve a challenge to the Divine Ruin."

Jiang Ruyi turned toward the Immortal Sheep Stone Sculpture, asking directly, "Immortal Sheep Lord, how is Lu Ran? Is he safe?"

At such a turning point, she didn't even ask about herself but seized the chance to inquire about Lu Ran.

Such a scene made Grandpa Cheng deeply moved.

The lady's feelings for the Mountain Master were truly beyond question.

As his thoughts wandered, Grandpa Cheng noticed the glimmer of anticipation in Jiang Ruyi's gaze.

After a brief silence, his expression turned apologetic as he said, "The Immortal Sheep Lord indicated that the world beyond the Divine Ruin is extraordinarily perilous!"

If the lady does not wish to go, the Immortal Sheep Lord can annul your contract with the gods."

Jiang Ruyi: "..."

In the eyes of the divine, the Human Clan truly held no place.

They didn't even have the right to ask questions.

When the gods communicated, it was always one-sided—either information imparted or commands issued.

Even the kindest and gentlest Immortal Sheep Lord was no exception.

Not just anyone could communicate freely with the gods as Lu Ran did.

"The world beyond the Divine Ruin—where Lu Ran is..." Jiang Ruyi murmured to herself.

After some time, she raised her eyes to the divine sculpture, gazing at the Immortal Sheep's benevolent expression. "But what if I wish to go?

What if I wish to find him...to see him?"

The Immortal Worship Hall fell into profound silence.

Jiang Ruyi kept her eyes on the divine sculpture, waiting with patience.

She wasn't certain whether she would receive another response from the divine presence.

For the Immortal Sheep to deliver a transmission just now—whether to her or even to Grandpa Cheng as a mere intermediary—was already an extraordinary blessing.

"Sea."

Grandpa Cheng abruptly uttered a single word.

"Sea?" Jiang Ruyi arched her delicate brows slightly.

Grandpa Cheng affirmed, "The Immortal Sheep Lord left you a single word—sea."

Jiang Ruyi's thoughts raced.

Sea Realm?

Did her strength need to reach the Sea Realm to see Lu Ran?

Or was it a place—a reference to the ocean?

Was Lu Ran in a place by the sea?

Jiang Ruyi pondered for a long time. Slowly, she pressed her palms together and bowed deeply. "Thank you, Immortal Sheep Lord, for your guidance. I shall remember it well."

Her eyelids lowered as her face became resolute.

Within those jet-black eyes was an unyielding longing that could not be dissolved.

...

Chapter 526: Jade Lonely City

Stars and moon shifted, the morning glow filled the sky.

At the edge of the sea cliff, Lu Ran, who was still half-asleep, opened his bleary eyes. He sat up, raising a hand to shield his face from the light.

Through the gaps between his fingers, he saw a crimson sun slowly rising at the distant horizon where sea met sky.

It was truly majestic.

"Awake?" A gentle female voice came from beside him.

"Hmm?" Lu Ran turned his head, only to see a pair of slender legs.

He kept tilting his head upward until he finally saw the bright and beautiful face of the woman.

There was no icy killing intent, only a faint smile.

It was so comforting.

"When did you arrive?" Lu Ran rubbed his eyes, his speech still a bit muddled from having just woken up.

He dared to sleep at the edge of the sea cliff for two reasons: this was his territory, after all.

Second, he had the Dawn Blade and Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd by his side.

If anything went awry, his Divine Weapons would be the first to alert him.

Yet, Deng Yuxiang had evidently made it onto the "absolute trust" list of these artifacts, so they hadn't stirred when she arrived.

"Last night." Deng Yuxiang looked down at Lu Ran. "I saw you were asleep and chose not to disturb you."

"Oh." Feeling more awake now, Lu Ran's gaze landed on her earlobes.

Where there had once been a small ruby stud, now dangled ruby earrings.

The diamond-shaped earrings were about the size of a fingertip, hanging from her petite earlobes, glinting enigmatically under the backdrop of the sea's crimson sunrise.

They made her already striking features even more dazzling.

Deng Yuxiang raised her brows slightly, her tone playful: "How long do you plan to keep looking?"

Lu Ran grinned cheekily: "I like looking, I love looking~"

Deng Yuxiang looked slightly perplexed as she pinched the refined earrings between her fingertips, "If you love them so much, should I give them back to you for you to wear yourself?"

Lu Ran rolled his eyes.

"Haha~" Deng Yuxiang couldn't help but chuckle softly.

Lu Ran turned away from the radiant camellia before him and faced the ocean, sulking as he spoke: "I meant your spirit, your vitality!"

When he first met her, she had been just as radiant.

But fate had a way of being cruel, and her road ahead was filled with thorns.

Thankfully, after countless trials, she had returned to her original self.

"Hmm." Deng Yuxiang's lips carried a faint smile as she lowered her gaze to the young man seated on the edge of the cliff.

For her, the past two years had been eventful indeed.

Like the waves crashing against the cliffs below, her life had been full of drastic ups and downs, plunges and ascents.

The cliffside fell into a moment of quiet.

The sea breeze swept through, causing her long hair to dance softly.

Suddenly, while gazing out at the ocean, Lu Ran asked, "How long do you intend to keep looking?"

Deng Yuxiang was briefly stunned, then, both amused and annoyed, she cast a glare at Lu Ran.

Still holding a grudge, huh?

She stood with her hands behind her back, raising her gaze to the fiery sun over the water: "The Divine Sculpture of the Jade Talisman successfully leveled up?"

"Sea Realm Third Rank."

"Oh?" Deng Yuxiang was clearly delightfully surprised, but then something seemed to cross her mind—she gave a cold laugh. "Luo Tiantu certainly is a loyal and dedicated servant."

For over a decade since entering the mountain, I doubt he's had a single moment of laxity."

Lu Ran shrugged: "When you look at it this way, no matter how much Holy Spirit Energy believers absorb, it's tough to win favor with the gods.

If people want to return home, this path seems to be a dead end."

After all, the Holy Spirit Energy held by the Xun Luo couple numbered in the thousands!

That was already an exceedingly large amount.

Deng Yuxiang pondered aloud: "The more Holy Spirit Energy a believer absorbs, shouldn't the gods require the believer to die?

Only then can their soul, carrying the Holy Spirit Energy, return to the embrace of the gods?"

Lu Ran thought deeply: "We still don't know if gods can retrieve Holy Spirit Energy from souls while their Human Clan hosts are alive.

If they can't, then yes, the believers would indeed have to die."

Deng Yuxiang's thoughts stirred: "You could try researching whether it's possible to extract Holy Spirit Energy from living souls.

The souls of Elder Bai, Cong Long, and the Xun Luo couple must contain quite a bit of Holy Spirit Energy."

Lu Ran nodded.

The crimson sun rose higher, gradually scattering the morning glow.

Deng Yuxiang studied the view quietly for a while, then spoke softly: "And what's your next step?"

Lu Ran had a clear plan and responded immediately: "I'm about to hit a bottleneck in my cultivation, so I'll retreat for a while to break through my realm!"

Afterward, we'll head to the northwest for a look."

Deng Yuxiang's thoughts flickered, pondering: "Ten Thousand Blade Mountain?"

"Exactly." Lu Ran confirmed, "Didn't Lady Kong mention that the Evil Dog Clan might show up around Ten Thousand Blade Mountain?"

However, Lady Kong wasn't entirely certain about this information.

She had heard it from a captive, who claimed that in the barren northwest wilderness, there was a dangerous region called Ten Thousand Blade Mountain.

Usually, what people saw were rolling high mountains with lush vegetation.

Yet Ten Thousand Blade Mountain was located within a desolate desert.

In that area, the mountain peaks were as sharp as blades, standing tall and dense, resembling countless knife edges piercing the heavens—hence its name, "Ten Thousand Blade Mountain."

It was said that many formidable Evil Demons inhabited the area.

Including, but not limited to, the Barbaric Female Demon and the Evil Dog Clan.

Lu Ran was very interested in exploring the region.

Currently, his Evil Dog Evil Sculpture was merely First Rank in the River Realm and urgently needed advancement!

After all, within the Human Clan, once one reached the River Realm, every minor rank gained in cultivation would subtly enhance the power of their skills!

What's more, Lu Ran had under his command an inheritor of the Evil Dog Clan—Yan Shuangzi.

If the Evil Dog Evil Sculpture could continuously level up, she would also be able to merge deeply into the Sculpture time and again.

This integration would bolster Yan Shuangzi's cultivation talent and raise the ceiling of her cultivation potential!

Throughout her unwavering devotion and loyal service to Lu Ran, she had been steadfastly dedicated.

Lu Ran naturally intended to treat her generously!

If the Evil Dog Dead Souls could be used to nourish the Evil Dog Evil Sculpture, that would undoubtedly be ideal.

Deep down, Lu Ran still leaned towards preserving Holy Spirit Energy to cultivate the Divine Sculpture, and he wasn't keen on killing Human Clan believers.

Although... his hands were already stained with blood.

Blood that no amount of washing would cleanse.

"Hmm?" Lu Ran slightly raised his eyes.

Deng Yuxiang bent down and ruffled his hair with her hand, speaking gently: "Give yourself a few days off.

Since entering Holy Spirit Mountain, you haven't stopped to rest."

Lu Ran laughed: "Am I misremembering, or didn't you cry and beg me to search for the Evil Dog to help your dear friend?"

Deng Yuxiang: ???

Cry and beg?

"Ha." Deng Yuxiang was so amused and exasperated by the false accusation that she increased the pressure slightly, ruffling Lu Ran's hair until his head wobbled.

And so, the Master of Ran Sect unlocked a new title—"The Bobblehead."

"Stop, stop, stop!" Lu Ran quickly pleaded, trying to push her hand away.

But the Yangyang Sea's overwhelming dominance over all beings was absolute.

Even Lu Ran, as a River Realm cultivator, would need to activate Fierce Heavenly Power just to move her hand...

"When we go to Ten Thousand Blade Mountain, you'll come with me, okay?" Lu Ran added.

Hearing this, Deng Yuxiang finally lightened her grip.

Lu Ran let out a sigh of relief and said: "Alright, that's settled! I'll retreat to cultivate shortly. In the meantime, you'll oversee Cloud Sea Cliff.

If there's any trouble or uncertainty, you can consult Cong Long and Elder Bai."

Deng Yuxiang snorted in acknowledgment.

Lu Ran also reminded her: "Additionally, make sure to visit Elder Bai daily and ask if Cloud Sea Cliff remains peaceful—all precautions are better taken than not."

"Got it." Deng Yuxiang replied casually, her hand smoothing Lu Ran's medium-length hair. "Would you like me to tie your hair up?"

"No need, I'll take a bath first to refresh myself and then retreat into cultivation."

In a flash, Lu Ran disappeared, finally escaping her grip.

Deng Yuxiang curiously turned her head.

Instead of diving directly into the sea, Lu Ran was standing twenty meters away from the cliff edge.

Soon, Deng Yuxiang saw him take off running, accelerating before planting a foot firmly at the cliff's edge and leaping into the air.

Question: What's the experience of diving into the ocean from an 800-meter-high sea cliff?

For an average person, they'd be smacked to death by the water's surface!

As for Lu Ran, a River Realm Great Power... Well, he was still a little nervous.

During his descent, he called forth the Jade Talisman Formation, slowing his fall before diving headfirst into the ocean.

Deng Yuxiang stood watching the water until she saw someone resurface, at which point she turned her gaze back to the sunrise.

"Ten Thousand Blade Mountain."

Deng Yuxiang murmured in her heart.

The name alone evoked a profound sense of peril.

Chapter 527: goes and never returns

This was Jiang Ruyi's first time stepping into the Inner City.

She recalled her last pilgrimage, back when she was just a low-ranking disciple in the Stream Realm—one among the thousand summoned.

She was only worthy of staying in the Outer City, prostrating herself in reverence before the stone sculpture of the Divine figure.

But this time, everything had been meticulously arranged for Jiang Ruyi. Along the way, several reception personnel accompanied her as they circled through the tightly guarded Inner City, eventually arriving before a grand hall.

"The Worship Hall of the Divine."

Jiang Ruyi lifted her gaze to the gilded characters on the plaque above the hall's entrance.

Compared to the Immortal Worship Hall in Luoxian Village, this Worship Hall of the Divine was far more majestic and imposing.

"Senior Sister Feng, the person has been delivered," one of the reception personnel stepped forward, bowing to the middle-aged woman in front of the Worship Hall. "I'll return now."

"Mm." The middle-aged woman responded with casual arrogance, giving a slight nod of her head.

As the reception personnel left, Jiang Ruyi spoke politely, "Greetings, Senior Sister."

The woman sized Jiang Ruyi up with a glance, her expression softening slightly. She gently pushed open the massive door of the hall. "Junior Sister Jiang, I've long heard of your esteemed name! Come in quickly; you were the only one we were waiting for."

"Understood." Jiang Ruyi was mildly surprised.

She had only received the sound transmission late last night, and she had already rushed here as quickly as possible.

Yet despite her haste, she was still the last to arrive?

Stepping into the hall, Jiang Ruyi found herself surrounded by opulence and grandeur.

At the end of the towering hall stood a ten-meter-high Stone Sculpture of the Jade Talisman, seated upon an enormous throne.

Though crafted of stone, the artistry was intricate and lifelike.

Clad in a flowing cloak, the figure's visage was stern, its eyes emanating unmatched authority—astonishingly vivid.

No matter which part of the hall one stood in, the Divine-Jade Talisman seemed to loom over them, its gaze fixed and oppressive.

The sensation of being scrutinized magnified unbearably!

At the feet of the Jade Talisman sculpture, amidst the expansive room, lay hundreds of prayer cushions.

Currently, nine disciples of the Jade Talisman Sect were kneeling before the sculpture, heads bowed in silent prayer.

Jiang Ruyi didn't dare tarry; she quickly advanced.

Meanwhile, outside the hall, the middle-aged woman watched Jiang Ruyi's elegant silhouette and couldn't help but sigh inwardly, "Ah..."

A trace of regret flickered in her eyes.

This was the third group of fellow disciples she had escorted over the past three days.

The Worship Hall, seemingly sacred and solemn, was profoundly mysterious—and terrifying. It resembled a voracious beast waiting to devour its prey.

She never knew what truly transpired within its walls, but she did know this: every Jade Talisman Believer who entered this place...

Never came out.

The middle-aged woman extended her hands, gripping the massive doors, and slowly closed them.

"Kacha!!"

Jiang Ruyi paused mid-step, glancing back at the colossal doors.

After a moment, she resumed her path toward the hall's depths.

Though the room held hundreds of prayer cushions, the nine disciples of the Jade Talisman Sect had dutifully arranged themselves in two rows.

Jiang Ruyi approached the fifth cushion in the second row and knelt down, her posture proper.

Two meters away to her left, kneeling parallel to her, was a petite young woman.

The young woman had short hair and almond-shaped eyes, exuding an undeniably sweet disposition—a stark contrast to the stern ethos typical of the Jade Talisman Sect disciples.

Noticing the arrival of a fellow disciple, the petite woman secretly turned her head to look, only for her eyes to widen dramatically.

Jiang... Jiang Jiang Jiang Ruyi?!

My goodness!

A renowned figure among the sect, an exemplar of the younger generation, and none other than the Human World Sect Leader's Wife from the Immortal Sheep Sect...

How did I end up kneeling beside a deity-like person?

Is this really where I'm meant to be?

Jiang Ruyi subtly turned her head, casting a faint glance to her left.

At that moment, the petite woman's breath caught in her throat!

Jiang Ruyi wore a veil over her face, which only accentuated her mesmerizing black eyes.

Her gaze seemed to envelop an entire night sky full of stars—peaceful and quietly beautiful.

Only when Jiang Ruyi shifted her gaze away to bow in reverence did the young woman finally snap back to her senses.

The petite woman felt mortified, her cheeks flushed, wishing she could cover her face with her hands as she bitterly berated herself:

An Xian, oh An Xian, you're utterly disgraceful!

Why are you acting so foolishly?

Now look, Jiang Ruyi probably thinks you're nothing but an idiot!

The young woman's swirling emotions slightly disrupted Jiang Ruyi's focus.

People from the River Realm did, indeed, possess the ability to subtly influence their surroundings.

Just as Jiang Ruyi was about to offer a gentle reminder, she raised her brows as the other nine disciples of the Jade Talisman Sect exhibited faint reactions.

The Divine figure had delivered another sound transmission?!

The Worship Hall grew even quieter.

Jiang Ruyi concentrated on listening intently, engraving each word into her mind.

"Holy Spirit Mountain, Holy Spirit Energy..."

"Hoo!!"

Suddenly, an immense and terrifying surge of Divine Power roiled forth.

Jiang Ruyi's body tensed as she raised her eyes.

The Jade Talisman sculpture sat lofty and imposing, its commanding posture surveying the believers below.

From within the stone sculpture, a fog abruptly emerged, encasing all ten people.

Shrouded in mist, unable to see her surroundings, Jiang Ruyi instinctively summoned a circle of Golden Jade Talisman from within her body.

"Hoo~"

A sudden gust of wind surged through, lifting her dark hair.

Jiang Ruyi's eyebrows knit slightly as her slender fingers moved to pinch at a peculiar sensation.

Sand?

There couldn't possibly be sand within the Worship Hall.

While Jiang Ruyi pondered silently, the mist dispersed quickly, revealing an astonishing scene to the ten disciples.

A moment before, they were all kneeling inside the Worship Hall.

Now, they found themselves standing in a vast desert.

The surroundings were barren as far as the eye could see.

The sun hung in the sky, steadily rising, and despite it being early morning, the heat was already oppressive.

Jiang Ruyi rose slowly, using the sun's position to identify her orientation with ease.

The west was desolate and endless.

Off in the distant east, faintly visible were towering stone spires, like enormous, sharp stakes piercing into the sky—a scene both eerie and magnificent.

Is this the world beyond the Divine Ruins?

But why did I not experience the challenge of the Divine Ruins?

If passing through the Divine Ruins could bring one here so effortlessly, why did Immortal Sheep Lord create a Divine Ruins specifically for Lu Ran—forcing him into trials and injuries?

Jiang Ruyi's eyes flickered subtly as she sank into thought.

It seems plausible that those who enter this realm after conquering the Divine Ruins gain certain benefits.

Jiang Ruyi reasoned, confident in her conclusion that Immortal Sheep Lord's actions in protecting Lu Ran were deliberate and meaningful.

"Jiang Ruyi?!"

"Ruyi Sister... uh, Lady Luo Xian?" voices exclaimed one after another.

Jiang Ruyi returned to reality and looked toward her fellow disciples.

The group consisted of seven men and two women, most of whom were middle-aged. Only the petite woman who had knelt beside her seemed younger.

"Greetings, everyone." Jiang Ruyi clasped her hands politely and spoke.

The group's expressions were varied, and they reciprocated her greeting with clasped hands.

Among them, a few appeared genuinely delighted!

Jiang Ruyi had been the last to enter the hall, so they hadn't known she was part of their group.

While in the hall, the Divine figure had delivered two key pieces of information via sound transmission:

First, a mission to collect Holy Spirit Energy.

Second, a warning that the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm was perilous.

Beyond that, nothing else was revealed.

The bewildered group had then been transported here.

Danger certainly seemed inevitable!

Now, witnessing someone of Jiang Ruyi's caliber among them, how could they not feel joyful?

"I never imagined seeing Sister Jiang here!"

"A hundred stories don't compare to seeing you in person. Sister Jiang truly lives up to her reputation as a Heavenly Pride—your presence is truly remarkable..."

The group exchanged warm greetings, clearly thrilled.

It was often said that Jade Talisman Sect disciples were cold and stern, but evidently, that depended on whom they were addressing.

At this moment, Jiang Ruyi had become the focal point—already held in high esteem, with both an illustrious background and the power to match it.

If this continued, she seemed destined to become the team leader.

Nearby, the eldest member of the group, a man over fifty years old, watched the scene unfold with an indiscernible expression.

After a moment of contemplation, he finally spoke up, "Everyone!"

The group turned to look at their Senior Brother.

The elderly man revealed a kindly smile and asked, "The Divine-Jade Talisman instructed us to collect Holy Spirit Energy—does anyone know what that might be?"

The disciples exchanged blank looks; none of them had a clue.

He sighed, further staking his claim on their attention and authority, "The Divine figure also mentioned that this realm is extremely dangerous.

Thus, we must unite as one to fulfill the Divine mission."

"Senior Brother is correct, that's how it should be!"

"We were brought here together by the Divine-Jade Talisman; it's only logical to advance and retreat as one group," others chimed in agreement.

The elderly man nodded in satisfaction, sweeping his gaze across the group. "Each of you possesses immense strength and profound realms. Back in Da Xia, people rarely revealed their true power.

But as of now, we are brothers and sisters united by both life and death. To complete the mission well and confront potential enemies, it's important we understand each other."

He then took the lead, "I am Meng Zhixuan, currently at River Realm-Third Rank."

After Meng Zhixuan introduced himself, he turned his attention to the team's youngest member aside from Jiang Ruyi.

As expected, she obediently followed suit, "Greetings, Senior Brother Meng! My name is An Xia... ah, I mean I'm An Xian, River Realm-First Rank."

"Song Yu, River Realm-Third Rank."

"Zhang Zhenghu, River Realm-Second Rank."

"Chu Tianyun, River Realm-First Rank."

...

"Jiang Ruyi, River Realm-Fourth Rank."

Finally, Jiang Ruyi spoke calmly.

For a moment, the group's attention settled on the white-clad and serene young woman.

Some admired her, some sighed in awe, and others found themselves secretly elated.

Among the group, mainly composed of individuals in their thirties and forties, the not-yet-twenty-year-old woman possessed the highest strength and realm!

Meng Zhixuan observed the young woman's tranquil demeanor, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly.

Sensing something, Jiang Ruyi glanced his way.

Meng Zhixuan immediately laughed heartily, putting on a benevolent display, "Haha, excellent! With Sister Jiang here, we can complete our task with much greater ease."

"Boom rumble rumble!!"

Suddenly, a thunderous sound reverberated from the heavens above.

In an instant, the group tensed up, their bodies taut as they raised their heads to look.

Meanwhile, within the No. 1 seclusion room on Cloud Sea Cliff.

Lu Ran sat cross-legged on the ground and shivered.

That bunch of imbeciles—fighting again?

I'm nestled inside the mountain, yet they still manage to rattle me?

Lu Ran silenced his Evil Sense and wrapped his arms around the Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd in his possession. "Just two more days, Little Chi Feng. Then you'll feast to your heart's content. Let me prepare a while longer.

When the time comes, we'll shake the heavens right back at them!"

"Buzz~" The Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd trembled lightly.

...

Chapter 528: to unify the whole world?

Early August, Cloud Sea Cliff was shrouded in thick mist.

At dawn, Deng Yuxiang sat steadily in the council hall, draped in a white cloak seized from Tiantu Mountain.

Her long legs elegantly crossed, her elbow resting on the armrest of the chair, her palm supporting her cheek.

She was sitting on an ordinary wooden chair, yet somehow, it exuded the aura of a throne!

Such presence and dominance made her appear more like a leader than Lu Ran ever did.

"Great Protector." Accompanying light footsteps, an elderly voice came forth.

"Elder Bai," Deng Yuxiang softly replied, without looking back.

The mist inside the room was dense, making it difficult for everyone to see one another with the naked eye.

Bai Yanhui bowed slightly and reported, "This old man's moods are steady today. Cloud Sea Cliff is highly likely to remain peaceful as usual."

Deng Yuxiang nodded gently, "Looks like the Sect Master will safely emerge from seclusion."

Since Lu Ran entered closed cultivation in late July, bearing down for nearly ten days, he finally activated his advancement mode by the end of the month.

Counting the days, this was already his third day striving for a breakthrough.

Success should be near.

Bai Yanhui responded, "Let's hope so."

Deng Yuxiang casually spoke, "Elder Bai, please have a seat."

"Of course." Bai Yanhui, holding the Earth Trace Sword, accurately found his seat at the table and sat on a wooden chair.

Deng Yuxiang closed her eyes to listen intently. Suddenly, her tone shifted, "Elder Bai seems to be getting along well with the Earth Trace Sword."

"I must thank the Sect Master," Bai Yanhui, being a seasoned character, naturally knew what Deng Yuxiang liked to hear. "When this sword was handed to me, it had already been tamed by the Sect Master."

Of course, these weren't mere flattering words—they were entirely truthful.

On the night of July 15th, the manner and posture with which Lu Ran gripped the sword handle truly intimidated this Divine Weapon.

Deng Yuxiang nodded in satisfaction, then rose slowly. "Elder Bai, stay in the council hall and perform your magic on time. If any shifts in mood occur, kindly report to me immediately."

"Certainly!" Bai Yanhui stood up once again, bowing his hands respectfully toward Deng Yuxiang.

The woman before him was not merely Ran Sect's Great Protector or the temporary authority figure of Cloud Sea Cliff.

She was also a fearsome demon-slaying power of the Sea Realm!

Bai Yanhui found himself personally more relaxed when facing Lu Ran.

The young Master Lu held him in high regard and had a friendly demeanor, not particularly concerned with trivial formalities.

But in front of Deng Yuxiang?

Bai Yanhui's attitude was always meticulous, adhering strictly to decorum.

In fact, with Deng Yuxiang as the Great Protector, everyone under Ran Sect had to remain respectfully obedient toward the Sect Master.

"Mm." Deng Yuxiang stepped out, but as she reached the door of the council hall, she suddenly halted.

Powerful martial artists are highly sensitive to changes in their surroundings.

She faintly detected a waning trend in the intense energy permeating the heavens and earth.

A few seconds later, Bai Yanhui smiled and spoke, "The Sect Master is about to emerge from seclusion."

The coldness emanating from Deng Yuxiang gradually faded—clearly, she was in a good mood as she strode away.

The entrance to Seclusion Chamber No. 1's tunnel was located amidst the mountain forest behind Lu Ran's residence, Cloud Sea Residence.

When Deng Yuxiang arrived at the site, the cliff's mist had notably thinned.

Yu Changsheng and the others arrived shortly thereafter, eager to be the first to congratulate the Sect Master.

Meanwhile, Lu Ran was still within the pitch-black seclusion chamber, cheerfully cradling the Little Chi Feng.

"Mua~"

He laughed joyfully, planting a kiss on the intricate phoenix pattern adorned on the gourd.

A few days ago, when Lu Ran managed to break through his bottleneck and initiate his advancement mode, he owed a great deal to the support of this powerful magic artifact.

The reward from "Heavenly Pride" was truly spot-on!

"Cry~" Suddenly, the golden phoenix pattern lit up, and a small phoenix formed by golden lines fluttered out, its hollow wings flapping as it soared into flight.

It flew upwards and downwards, circling its master with exuberance.

It was overjoyed!

Over the past three days, Little Chi Feng had feasted delightfully too.

Lu Ran gazed at the beautiful Little Chi Feng, "Don't just revel in happiness; remember our goal, don't you?"

Not only are we going to absorb demon corpses, but we'll also absorb living creatures!"

Little Chi Feng continued its vibrant circling, wings flapping. "Cry~"

Lu Ran: "..."

Alright then.

Lu Ran exhaled deeply, temporarily setting other thoughts aside, feeling utterly refreshed.

River Realm·Fourth Rank!

He had finally advanced—a step closer to the Fifth Rank!

Once he entered the ranks of the peak...

The Sea Realm wouldn't be far away!

Over the past six months, Lu Ran had weathered so many storms.

Whether it was his intellectual depth, his understanding of the world, or his unwavering goals, all were enough to bolster him with profound insights.

Lu Ran had every reason to believe his Dao Heart glimmered with unparalleled brilliance!

Thus...

On the day he ascended to the peak and advanced to the Sea Realm!

"Swish~" Lu Ran tucked away Little Chi Feng, his figure flickering as he arrived at a familiar spot.

Once again, he stood at the edge of the sea cliff.

The blue sky was pristine, the heavens vast and boundless, perfectly mirroring his current emotions.

Exuberant, exultant!

"Congratulations." Suddenly, a woman's voice arose behind him.

Lu Ran turned and saw Deng Yuxiang stepping through the Immortal Fog to approach him.

"Impressive," Lu Ran smiled, "You knew I'd be here?"

Deng Yuxiang took a step forward, standing beside Lu Ran: "I waited for a while at Cloud Sea Residence, then figured you'd likely come here."

Lu Ran asked, "Has Cloud Sea Cliff been peaceful these last ten days?"

Deng Yuxiang stood with her hands behind her back: "No humans have caused trouble, though an ill-fated Angry Sea Flame Flood Dragon did show up—and I dispatched it."

"Tsk, tsk~" Lu Ran gazed at the side profile of the woman. "Advancing to the Sea Realm sure makes a difference, huh?"

She had an undeniably commanding presence~

Confidence and charisma stem solely from absolute strength!

After all, the Angry Sea Flame Flood Dragons were essentially the demonic equivalent of the Fierce Heavenly Sect, capable of terrifying cross-realm slaughter.

Whether in the River or Sea realms, they could strike fear into anyone.

But now, the nightmare of the sea realm spoke of them with such nonchalance.

"It's just the Sea Realm. You're not far off yourself," Deng Yuxiang said with a faint smile.

Her trust in Lu Ran exceeded even her belief in herself.

Ding~

Triggering a keyword!

Lu Ran cast a glance at the majestic Sea Realm great power, and his thoughts drifted to a certain "unreliable" younger brother.

He wondered how Mr. Deng was doing these days.

And the other team members: Chang Ying, Tian Tian...

Were they all attending university now?

And most importantly—their critical member Jiang Ruyi.

Lu Ran shook his head abruptly, refusing to delve deeper into the thought.

Since arriving in this world, Lu Ran had come to terms with his true nature.

He wasn't all that ambitious.

If he let his longing run wild, it wouldn't favor the stability of his mindset.

"Soon, soon," Lu Ran mumbled to himself.

Then he redirected his attention to the present: "By the way, a few days ago, when I was in seclusion, Silent Night Blade contacted me."

"Oh?" Deng Yuxiang glanced at Lu Ran. "Is Big Wind Hall in trouble?"

"No, it was He Qifeng who requested Silent Night Blade to reach out to me. She claimed she had accomplished something major!"

Deng Yuxiang became intrigued, "What major accomplishment?"

Lu Ran's expression turned somewhat peculiar, "He Qifeng led her hall members in constructing a city."

Such news genuinely startled Deng Yuxiang. "A city?"

Lu Ran confirmed with a nod, "Apparently, it's located 30 kilometers south of Wuji Peak. He Qifeng has invited us to visit whenever we get the chance."

Deng Yuxiang pondered for a moment before speaking, "She intends to rely on Wuji Peak to cultivate her own power, doesn't she?"

Lu Ran shook his head, then nodded again. "Based on He Qifeng's explanation, she wants to turn that city into a neutral zone—or one should define it as a safe haven."

No one is allowed to settle disputes within the city.

That place will serve as a sanctuary within the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm—a safe harbor for the entire Human Clan."

Deng Yuxiang squinted slightly, her thoughts spinning rapidly: "If she truly achieves that, her power will grow explosively."

In the realm of Holy Spirit Mountain, everyone lives in constant fear.

No matter how strong you are, someone stronger exists.

No matter how cautious you are, there will eventually be schemes against you.

In a world riddled with extreme dangers, the sudden emergence of a 'safe zone'?

If this city genuinely proves safe and its reputation spreads, it will undoubtedly attract a large number of believers to reside there.

By then, He Qifeng, the City Lord, would see her individual prestige soar to unimaginable heights!

The number of her members and the overall strength of her forces would also continue to rise steadily!

Lu Ran displayed an admiring expression, sighing softly, "What a protagonist dedicated to her ambitions and pursuits..."

Was He Qifeng merely building a city?

No, she was treading the path of fulfilling her aspirations and dreams.

She was using this single city to shake the survival rules underpinning the entire Holy Spirit Mountain Realm!

Ha,

No wonder she caught my eye.

She dares to dream, and she dares to act! Damn impressive!

Deng Yuxiang spoke softly, "Though the city may be easy to establish, maintaining it will prove immensely difficult."

Lu Ran remarked, "That's why the city was built 30 kilometers south of Wuji Peak."

He Qifeng is truly brilliant, isn't she?

Backed by Wuji Peak, she undoubtedly intends to leverage its benefits to the fullest!

Yet Deng Yuxiang remained skeptical, pacing her thoughts: "He Qifeng's approach will eventually invite trouble.

Even if she manages to maintain it for some time, other forces within the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm won't allow her to grow uncontrollably."

Lu Ran nodded silently.

He agreed with that perspective.

As soon as He Qifeng's power reached a certain scale, however much she promised peace or behaved dutifully, she'd inevitably attract collective attacks.

The Holy Spirit Mountain Realm's current state is a result of its vast expanse and the equal partitioning of power among various major sects.

They each consume resources within their territories (Holy Spirit Energy).

Though minor altercations are unavoidable, most conflicts occur between individuals or between small teams and factions.

These could be considered minor disturbances.

The larger sects typically coexist peacefully.

But when one's strength surges uncontrollably, enabling them to overwhelm any sect, the other factions would likely set aside their grudges and unite to eliminate this collective threat.

What's your intention?

To conquer everything?

From this perspective, He Qifeng is undoubtedly courting disaster.

Wuji Peak's current Peak Master sure possesses audacious determination!

Lu Ran naturally didn't believe He Qifeng would dare to construct a city on her own—she must have received substantial support from Wuji Peak's Tufeng Master!

"Let's head to the council hall," Lu Ran said, "Discuss this matter and draft our upcoming plans."

Deng Yuxiang asked concernedly, "Should you return to your seclusion chamber first to stabilize your realm?"

"There's no need; a meeting won't take long," Lu Ran replied casually. "Go inform everyone."

"Understood!" Deng Yuxiang didn't say anything further and turned to leave.

Lu Ran faced the sea and stretched out fiercely:

"Aaah~~~"

This Holy Spirit Mountain Realm truly gets more interesting with time.

In the end, could it really become Wuji Peak + Big Wind Hall + Ran Sect, collectively opposing all Divine Sect forces in the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm?

Now wouldn't that...

Be utterly exhilarating?!

Chapter 529: Forbidden City

Three days later, a group of men and women dressed in bamboo hats and green cloaks hurried through the dense forest.

Lu Ran had not heeded Deng Yuxiang's advice and chose not to rest.

After two more days of cultivation in the seclusion room to consolidate his strength and realm, he once again led his team and embarked on the expedition.

The destination this time was the desolate Northwest.

Conveniently, Lu Ran could also make a stop at Wuji Peak to take a look at the city He Qifeng was building.

For this journey, Lu Ran brought along four people:

Mengyan Protector Conglong, Divine General Luo Ying, and Hall Master Jing Hong.

As a veteran member of the Ran Sect, Jing Hong had spent the past few months leading the Evil Demon forces to guard Cloud Sea Cliff, earning considerable merit through arduous labor.

Lu Ran, together with Yu Changsheng, devised a plan to establish an internal branch of the Ran Sect—the Demon Control Hall.

The character "Control" symbolizes both command and defense, indicating that Jing Hong would lead the Evil Demon forces while protecting Cloud Sea Cliff as the hall's primary mission.

The definition of the term made it clear that Jing Hong's responsibilities had not changed.

But with the official designation from Lu Ran, Jing Hong was now a legitimate official!

Ecstatic, Jing Hong immediately accepted the position.

One must understand, the Ran Sect was an exceptionally unique organization! The Evil Demons summoned by Lu Ran would only grow stronger in power and realm, so naturally, Jing Hong's status would rise as well.

Jing Hong was well-aware that the Ran Sect was bound to grow even larger and stronger.

As a once insignificant Weak God Believer, now armed with both this title and real power, as long as she held tightly to the Sect Leader's favor, no matter how the Ran Sect evolved in the future, she would at least not sink to the very bottom.

However, to her surprise, after just a day as Hall Master, the Sect Leader had already dragged her out to execute a task.

After all, Lu Ran's target was the Evil Dog Clan, and Jing Hong possessed the Divine Technique of the War Horn—Thunderclap Horn!

Practically the perfect nemesis for the Evil Dog Clan!

"Sect Leader, I see it—it's just across the river at the base of the mountain."

Standing atop a small hill, Jing Hong turned back and loudly reported.

"Oh," Lu Ran responded with a word, though inwardly he felt a bit helpless, "I really need to ascend to the Sea Realm as soon as possible."

At its current River Grade, Mirror Flower Moon Transmission can teleport a distance of up to 100 kilometers at most.

Once it reaches Sea Grade, there would be a qualitative transformation, allowing a single opening of the Transmission Mirror to cover a staggering 3,000 kilometers!

What kind of concept is this?

With Lu Ran's Evil Mirror Demon Sculpture now at Sea Realm-First Rank,

once Lu Ran himself achieves Yangyang Sea—a vast, endless horizon—where could he not go?

Even Seven Star Island, far across the ocean, would only take a single step...

"Sect Leader, don't be too hard on yourself," Yu Changsheng said, walking beside Lu Ran with a smile.  
"You've only just ascended to Fourth Rank; you're already doing incredibly well."

Over the past half year, Yu Changsheng had witnessed every step of Lu Ran's journey.

Lu Ran hadn't stopped moving for missions!

And even while undertaking missions, he never stopped cultivating—in moments of rest, he'd absorb the energy between heaven and earth, replacing it with Divine Power in his body, and in the process, continuously broadened his meridians.

Sometimes, Yu Changsheng couldn't help but silently murmur to himself:

Was Lu Ran pouring all his energy into cultivation and missions because his fiancée wasn't by his side?

Maybe as a way to release his excess energy?

It's not impossible~

After all, he's just 19 years old, brimming with youthful energy. He's bound to find a way to spend his days...

The more he thought about it, the more Yu Changsheng found it plausible.

"Sigh..."

Lu Ran may have boundless energy, but it was starting to wear out Yu Changsheng, a "middle-aged" man in his 30s, day after day of keeping up with this restless young man.

"Mr. Conglong, why the sigh?" Lu Ran asked visibly puzzled.

Yu Changsheng snapped out of his thoughts, realizing he had let out a sigh inadvertently.

"Swoosh~"

With a flourish, Yu Changsheng opened a paper fan, gently waving it as he spoke, "I sigh for the passing beauty of spring blossoms and autumn moons, for the fleeting nature of all that is bright and prosperous."

Lu Ran: ???

Oh? A cultured man, indeed!

Nearby, Deng Yuxiang unexpectedly teased, "Conglong's been spending too much time with Elder Bai—acting all old and melancholic."

Lu Ran clapped his trusted lieutenant on the shoulder and said, "Cheer up; you're only 34, the ideal age for adventuring!"

Look at Elder Bai—he's 76 and still roaming the land!"

Yu Changsheng: "..."

Yeah, right!

Adventure on, why don't we.

Yu Changsheng, oh Yu Changsheng, isn't this exactly the 'feeling alive' you sought after?

Amidst their laughter and banter, they climbed up to higher ground.

Lu Ran slightly widened his eyes: "Whoa?"

At the foot of the hill flowed a grand, surging river.

Beyond the river, nestled in a valley flanked by mountains on three sides, stood a freshly constructed stone city.

While not particularly large in scale, it looked solid and respectable.

There was plenty of open land available—once developed further, He Qifeng could expand the city's size at any time.

"Come, let's go take a look." Lu Ran refrained from using his Evil Technique and led the group down the mountain.

At the moment, a few figures stood at the gates of Stone City.

He Qifeng exuded an imposing aura, arms folded, standing as if surrounded by starlight.

Behind her stood several members of Big Wind Hall.

Suddenly, a voice came from the 7-meter-high city wall above: "Hall Master, someone's coming down from the mountain opposite."

He Qifeng's face showed a faint smile: "Do we recognize them?"

Atop the wall, a young woman with braided hair, holding a Hunting Bow, shook her head and said, "They're too far, and they're all wearing bamboo hats and cloaks. I can't make out their faces."

"Heh~" He Qifeng seemed to be in an excellent mood. "You'll recognize him soon enough."

The young woman found this curious and focused her gaze again.

As the Ran Sect group crossed the river and approached step by step, the young woman on the wall felt a jolt of unease in her heart.

Such an overwhelming aura!

Within this mysterious group of individuals, there must surely be a Sea Realm Great Power among them!

"Brother Lu, how have you been?" He Qifeng shouted confidently, her voice ringing out.

Lu Ran, however, stared at the large characters above the city gate and felt utterly bewildered!

Forbidden City?!

No!

What are you playing at?

Lu Ran approached He Qifeng in confusion, skipping pleasantries as he blurted out:

"This city's name... Are you planning to become an emperor?"

"Haha!" He Qifeng laughed heartily, turned, and looked up at the three grandly written characters.  
"What do you think? Does it command respect?"

Lu Ran: "..."

The name indeed evokes a sense of awe, conjuring associations with solemnity, majesty, and grandiosity.

But a name like this—can you truly live up to it?

At the same time, the young woman on the wall clutched her chest as her heart skipped a beat!

She recognized this cloaked youth!

That familiar voice, that familiar face...

Da Xia's First Genius—Lu Ran?!

No wonder there had been no news of him for the past half year; he was also in the Spirit Mountain Realm!

The young woman's gaze burned with intensity, which Lu Ran naturally noticed. He immediately looked toward the wall's edge.

One glance, and Lu Ran also froze: "Huh? Aren't you... you... you're that—what's-your-name-again!"

He Qifeng smiled jubilantly at Lu Ran, clearly pleased to see him flustered.

This brought her considerable enjoyment.

"Wenhou!" Lu Ran finally uttered.

The young woman holding the bow fought the urge to roll her eyes.

I'm Lv Bu, am I?

"Heh~" He Qifeng teased, "The First Genius truly lives up to his reputation. Us mere defeated are not even worthy of being remembered by Da Xia's pride."

Lu Ran shot her an irritated look and whispered, "What's her name again?"

He Qifeng snorted, "Hou Yun."

Lu Ran immediately nodded—this person was an Ash Believer. If he remembered correctly, she ranked 18th on Da Xia's list of geniuses!

Lu Ran looked upward and waved his hand with a tinge of sadness: "You've come to suffer here too?"

Hou Yun: "..."

Lu Ran turned to He Qifeng: "Congratulations, I guess? You've recruited a fine general!"

It doesn't matter whether someone ranks 18th or 98th on that list.

If someone can make it into the Hundred Geniuses of Da Xia, they're undoubtedly an unparalleled, peerless figure!

"Mutual congratulations," He Qifeng replied while her gaze locked onto Deng Yuxiang, unable to help but comment, "Your Protector has progressed so quickly... She's already in the Sea Realm?"

Lu Ran chuckled, "Her talent speaks for itself. If she wants to advance, I can't stop her!"

He Qifeng: ???

Is that even something a person should say?

Even Deng Yuxiang's composure broke as she laughed and gave Lu Ran a playful glare.

"Enough, enough, stop staring," Lu Ran said, stepping sideways to block He Qifeng's gaze. "The way you're looking at her, it's like you want to eat my Protector alive."

Lu Ran's intention was to shield Deng Yuxiang from He Qifeng's fiery gaze. Yet he overlooked one thing: He Qifeng also desired nothing more than to recruit him under her wing.

This Hall Master's eyes burned hotter, fueled further by the fact that every time they met, Lu Ran brought her more astonishing surprises.

"Ahem." Seeing the situation turn precarious, Lu Ran quickly changed the subject, "I noticed a lot of people in the city?"

"Yes," He Qifeng said, resolutely suppressing the impulse in her heart, lest she scare Lu Ran off again as she had last time.

Turning away, she looked through the wide-open city gates and explained, "The people rushing to build the city used to be slaves of Wuji Peak."

Lu Ran: "Huh?"

He Qifeng nodded, "Ever since Tufeng Master took over, the rules of Wuji Peak have undergone changes. These slaves have effectively been freed.

However, only a small fraction chose to leave, while the vast majority remained within the peak."

Lu Ran nodded to himself—if these slaves had left, their fate would likely have been one of two outcomes:

Death, or enslavement by other powerful sects.

He Qifeng continued, "I proposed to Tufeng Master to have these individuals transferred here. They retain their status as Wuji Peak's Sect Members, but they also form the first citizens of my Forbidden City."

Citizens?

"Goodness!" Lu Ran smirked, "You really are aiming to be an emperor!"

Laughing heartily, He Qifeng gazed up at the three characters spelling "Forbidden City," her eyes alight with thoughts unknown.

Lu Ran pondered and finally said, "You'd better get more people from Tufeng Master! With your city management philosophy, once you're past the initial stages, your rapid growth will be unimaginable!"

The other factions within the Spirit Mountain Realm won't allow such unchecked expansion."

He Qifeng said confidently, "Currently, the city is defended by three Sea Realm Great Powers, with a fourth on the way!"

Lu Ran raised an eyebrow, "On the way?"

He Qifeng turned her gaze to Lu Ran, tilting her chin slightly, brimming with pride: "Me!"

Lu Ran instinctively took a step back, sizing up the exuberant Martial Monk in front of him: "You've reached Fifth Rank in the River Realm already?"

"Of course."

"Look at you, so smug." Despite his words, Lu Ran felt genuinely happy for her. "Have you solidified your insight for advancement?"

"Naturally!" He Qifeng gestured to the Forbidden City, "Brother Lu, don't you see this Dao Heart of mine?"

Looking at the stone city, Lu Ran suddenly smiled.

Indeed.

This city showcased He Qifeng's profound understanding of the world, her resolute determination, and her boundless ambition and grand dreams!

"It seems Brother Lu has seen it." He Qifeng's lips curled upward. "This city represents my He Qifeng's stance towards this world..."

Her words cut off abruptly, her body trembling slightly.

"Buzz!!"

In an instant, the members of Big Wind Hall were both startled and overjoyed!

Their Hall Master was... advancing?

"Ha!" He Qifeng herself beamed with delight and, overcome with excitement, gave Lu Ran a hearty slap on the shoulder, her words uncharacteristically scattered. "You're my lucky charm!"

Brother Lu, come into the city! Let me finish advancing to Sea Realm first, and then we'll talk!"

Lu Ran: "..."

Well then, you cheeky nun!

You called me all the way here just to level up to the Sea Realm in front of me?

Am I... a stepping stone for young ladies to flaunt their ultimate moves?

...

A new year has arrived—wishing everyone a fresh start and all the best!

Also, as promised earlier, I'll deliver the three extra Chapters for the new year. Let me work hard and write a bit more for you all as soon as I can!

In this new year, I humbly ask for your support with monthly tickets!

Chapter 530: What is there to the northwest at

Since He Qifeng was advancing to a higher realm, Lu Ran naturally couldn't leave.

Under the arrangement of Big Wind Hall's Hall Master, Yin Tianlong, the Ran Sect members moved into a newly built wooden house.

There's no denying that Wuji Peak deserves its reputation as the central faction of the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm!

The Forbidden City, being only 30 kilometers away, could also be considered situated at the center of the world.

During He Qifeng's advancement, quite a few people showed up!

It turned out Lu Ran and his group didn't need to make a move—the mere identity of Wuji Peak members was enough to deter other teams from recklessly challenging them.

Thus, the Ran Sect members started feasting and indulging themselves.

He Qifeng's breakthrough into the Great Realm triggered a highest-level fog phenomenon, the kind known as the "Fog Dragon Roll."

Moreover, her advancement was lengthy, taking 5–10 days.

Whether others profited or not, Lu Ran had no idea—for all he knew, Little Blazing Phoenix was feeling blissfully satisfied.

Lu Ran, however, looked like a lunatic, holding the Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd while muttering incessantly:

"We need living creatures, need to absorb living Evil Demons, need living humans to feast on..."

Little Blazing Phoenix, amused, didn't seem annoyed.

No matter how much Lu Ran nagged, Little Blazing Phoenix continued to respond, letting out cheerful cries in his mind.

It even seemed to enjoy interacting with its master in this way?

Lu Ran was almost exasperatedly amused!

Every response was delightful but ultimately pointless, wasn't it?

With such behavior, why are you an Artifact Spirit? You're better suited for a government payroll...

The seventh night finally arrived, and the energy in heaven and earth gradually dissipated. Lu Ran was the first to step out of the wooden house.

Seeing how late it was and thinking He Qifeng might continue in seclusion to consolidate her realm, Lu Ran returned indoors.

Unexpectedly, the next morning at dawn, Lu Ran heard someone calling outside:

"Lu Ran! Brother Lu, are you awake?"

"Ah, awake!" Lu Ran instinctively wanted to use Instant Teleportation but stopped himself in time to avoid revealing his Evil Technique.

He quickly walked outside, only to see a woman with a commanding presence before him.

"Wow..." Lu Ran couldn't help but grin.

No wonder they call it the Yangyang Sea!

Such overwhelming power—it's truly intimidating.

Well done!

Advancing is great!

Although He Qifeng wasn't yet a Divine General of Ran Sect, they were allies and friends—Lu Ran had gained another strong supporter.

Just like Deng Yuxiang before, the freshly advanced He Qifeng radiated a formidable aura.

As she approached, waves of terrifying pressure accompanied her, surging like a tidal wave threatening to crush Lu Ran's bones...

"Haha!" He Qifeng laughed heartily, placing a hand on Lu Ran's shoulder. "This Hall Master's advancement, I owe so much to you!"

Lu Ran: "Ah?"

He Qifeng's bright and beautiful eyes left no room for pretense: "If it weren't for wanting to surpass you and show off in front of Brother Lu, my Dao Heart wouldn't have been so clear!"

Lu Ran: "..."

Not only do you want to flaunt, but you'll also chase me down to do it?

"Haha~" He Qifeng saw Lu Ran's indignant expression and laughed even harder. "You need to buckle down, Little River Realm!"

Don't let Sister Qifeng leave you too far behind!"

Honestly, Lu Ran was on the verge of stomping and cursing.

He Qifeng clearly had the Martial Monk Faction's traits: loving challenges and growing stronger with every fight!

If Lu Ran fell behind or lacked strength, he'd cease to be worthy of being her rival.

And that would be no fun at all.

"Why aren't you saying anything?" He Qifeng's eyes gleamed with anticipation. "Feeling defeated?"

Lu Ran disdainfully brushed off her hand with a cold snort:

"I'll let you gloat for a few days."

"Great, that's the spirit!" He Qifeng was immensely satisfied as her hand returned to firmly pat Lu Ran's shoulder.

The force made him grimace, and his Water Flow Armor trembled incessantly.

Lu Ran hastily stepped back: "Okay, okay, I need to leave now."

"Leave?" He Qifeng pressed forward, hand still on his shoulder.

The two moved in sync, making it seem like neither had moved at all.

Yin Tianlong, standing to the side, gave them a gloomy look, eyeing He Qifeng's hand on Lu Ran's shoulder again.

Lu Ran felt numb.

Are we dancing here or what?

Before he could fully process the situation, He Qifeng suddenly pushed him forward, pinning him against the wooden house's door frame.

Lu Ran: ???

A Sea Realm powerhouse is bullying me!

Can someone step in... huh?

Someone actually did!

A terrifying aura surged from Lu Ran's left side. Although the target wasn't him, it made his heart race.

He Qifeng turned to see Deng Yuxiang standing not far away.

Two imposing women, both Heaven's Chosen and Sea Realm First Rank, now faced off—eyes unwavering.

One gaze was fiery and majestic.

The other was sharp and ice-cold.

The small River Realm Lu Ran was clearly caught in the middle...

[Nightmare.] Lu Ran hurriedly summoned in his mind.

After two full seconds, Deng Yuxiang finally shifted her gaze toward him.

[It's fine, we're just chatting.] Lu Ran nodded gently.

Deng Yuxiang remained silent for a moment, then turned her head away.

He Qifeng looked back at Lu Ran with admiration: "Not bad, Lu Ran! You really know how to command people!"

Just one look, and you can make a Sea Realm powerhouse listen!"

Lu Ran rolled his eyes irritably: "Let go of me already. Don't let a real fight break out here."

He Qifeng finally remembered her purpose and asked, "I was hoping to discuss plans for building the city. Where are you rushing off to?"

Lu Ran replied helplessly: "Our Ran Sect came out on a mission—we need to head to the northwest."

He Qifeng asked, puzzled, "Why the northwest?"

Lu Ran pondered, "To check what sects are stationed there and what Evil Demon clans exist. We've already stayed here for a week; we're falling behind schedule."

He Qifeng remained confused: "Why?"

Lu Ran was at a loss for words.

Because I need Evil Dog and Evil Sculpture to advance to the Sea Realm. Once I'm in the Sea Realm, I can use Sea Grade Evil Techniques!

But I can't exactly say that...

After organizing his thoughts, Lu Ran replied, "I need a comprehensive understanding of this world.

I need to truly understand Holy Spirit Mountain!"

Upon hearing this, He Qifeng fell silent.

She wasn't pleased.

Her accompanying pressure grew more intense.

Lu Ran quietly said, "Qifeng, your aura is too overwhelming; I can barely breathe. Could you perhaps ease up..."

Before he finished speaking, He Qifeng reached for her neck and removed a bead.

Lu Ran looked puzzled as she opened her hand, offering the Magical Artifact·Wind Barrier Treasure Pearl.

"Here."

"What are you doing?"

"I promised you before. Your Silent Night Blade is with me. Now that I've obtained a Divine Weapon, I'll leave one with you as well."

"The Wind Barrier Treasure Pearl recognizes you?" Lu Ran raised his brows slightly.

"Yes." He Qifeng nodded. "My faction doesn't know much about the northwest—it's said to be quite desolate.

You're exploring an unknown world and may encounter danger. Take this with you."

Lu Ran hesitated: "The Silent Night with you is enough. We can communicate."

"Take it!" He Qifeng insisted, unintentionally revealing a leader's authoritative tone.

Lu Ran: "..."

So now you're treating me like your subordinate?

Yet He Qifeng was genuinely kind, even gifting a precious Magical Artifact. Lu Ran couldn't say much.

He Qifeng suddenly smiled, her eyes bright: "If you face a life-and-death crisis, contact me immediately.

No matter where you are, Sister Qifeng will come save you!"

Lu Ran: "..."

Looking at her sincere gaze, Lu Ran sighed inwardly.

In a world like this, finding such friends was indeed rare.

"Take it." He Qifeng placed the Wind Barrier Treasure Pearl firmly in Lu Ran's hand. "Bring back news about the northwest when you return safely."

"Alright, sure!" Lu Ran accepted the kindness, nodding with a smile.

What's in the northwest?

Hopefully the legendary Ten Thousand Blade Mountain, and what I'm searching for there.

...

"The wilderness! The wilderness!"

"We're out! I can see the mountains!"

Under a cloudy sky churning above the Cloud Sea, small, rapidly flying figures darted among sharp stone pillars reaching into the heavens.

The group's expressions were filled with excitement, their jubilant calls echoing, as the oppressive clouds overhead seemed to slightly dissipate.

Jiang Ruyi flew silently, breathing a sigh of relief inwardly.

No one expected the "Stone Pillar Forest" terrain to be so vast and densely concentrated. Passing one section led only to another...

This venture had astonishingly taken over twenty days!

Most of the time hadn't been spent traveling but frantically fleeing, hiding, and evading!

The Stone Pillar Forest was swarming with countless Evil Demons...

The Jade Talisman Believers team had originally numbered ten; now only six remained.

A full four River Realm Great Powers had fallen—just like that.

The Jade Talisman Lord had warned them about the dangers of this realm.

At the time, the group hadn't grasped the gravity of the situation.

After all, in the human world, they were revered Great Powers, capable of safeguarding entire regions!

But here...

Vast River?

What is there to be proud of?

That's exactly what's targeted for slaughter!

Jiang Ruyi pressed her dry lips together, hearing a woman's murmurs beside her.

"We're finally out, no more pillars..." An Xian murmured repeatedly, almost crying with joy.

If they hadn't been able to fly, they would've been wiped out entirely!

Even the typically timid Evil Demon-Golden Winged Bats appeared here in swarms like locusts, overwhelming everything and draining people dry in an instant.

Then there were the elusive Sand River Dolls, stirring up terrifying sand seas as if trying to engulf this world entirely.

On the journey, they'd even encountered the formidable Barbaric Female Demon Clan...

Strictly speaking, it wasn't the group that saw them.

It was the Cold Night Sword acting as a scout, venturing alone to detect them.

The group didn't have a shred of resistance in mind.

Had it not been for Jiang Ruyi's swift decision-making, constantly adjusting their escape routes and leading them in flight, they'd all have perished here!

"Captain Jiang." A middle-aged man flew beside Jiang Ruyi. "We can't relax yet; let's continue flying a bit further..."

How about we land on that distant mountain?"

Jiang Ruyi nodded lightly.

The man added, "Shall I discuss it with Meng Zhixuan?"

Jiang Ruyi turned to glance at Meng Zhixuan flying nearby.

Just then, Meng Zhixuan turned his head, his expression joyful as he nodded.

Jiang Ruyi remained expressionless, looking away without holding his gaze.

Meng Zhixuan's smile froze, a faint shadow flickering in his eyes.

At this point, the six Jade Talisman disciples had split into two teams.

Initially, the ten individuals had formed two groups, in line with the sect's team-building philosophy.

After some reshuffling, the two final teams reflected the clear reality of "taking sides."

Where there are people, there are disputes.

Jiang Ruyi was no longer the gentle, world-embracing girl she had been in high school.

She had become aloof and quiet, no longer interested in petty quarrels.

But conflict sought her out.

And Jiang Ruyi... was no weakling!

If you argue that a Divine Weapon's role is pivotal, and its wielders should explore dangerous unknowns and safeguard everyone...

Then the leadership should be mine, shouldn't it?

If you claim that strong individuals should bear more responsibility for the team's success, taking on extra burdens to achieve the Jade Talisman Lord's objectives...

Then I should be the captain, right?

If you think you can wield seniority and pedigree to suppress me because I'm just a young woman...

You are very mistaken.

If you show your true, manipulative colors, even invoking the Jade Talisman Lord's name to corner me...

You are even more wrong.

I will not let myself be controlled, nor will I allow myself to be coerced.

What I will do is see through the facade of your so-called kind smile.

Jiang Ruyi's eyes glittered with icy sharpness.

Now that we've emerged from the Stone Pillar Forest...

You and I should have a proper chat!