

Old Gods 571

Chapter 571: what happened to the promised arrogance?

"Who are you people?" Fang Lingfeng demanded sharply, "Do you wish to become enemies of Thunder Mountain?!"

As she spoke, her hand tightened around the Sky-piercing Halberd, trembling slightly.

It wasn't out of fear, but sheer rage!

Within the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm, Thunder Mountain was undeniably a prominent sect, a first-rate force.

The disciples of East Thunder often acted arrogantly, even when encountering First-class God believers, who generally gave Thunder Mountain some degree of respect.

Unexpectedly, today at the Thousand Boat Alliance, they had run into a group of reckless fools?

Not only did they rudely intrude, but they had the audacity to act directly, killing an East Thunder disciple on the spot.

Were these cloaked figures... courting death?!

"Heh," Deng Yuxiang sneered, the corner of her mouth curling mockingly. "This group of Sword Lotus believers is mine."

Fang Lingfeng's phoenix-like eyes narrowed: !!!

Led by Island Master Pei, the Sword Lotus disciples were stunned upon hearing this.

Out of the tiger's den, straight into the wolf's maw?

They had thought the gods had manifested today, that these two mysterious cloaked figures had arrived to uphold justice and draw their blades to assist.

Turns out they were also here to collect slaves?

The few Sword Lotus believers still kneeling on the ground felt intense misery stabbing at their hearts.

The cruelest thing in the world is to first give you hope, only to tear it apart and grant you even deeper despair...

Indeed, this was the Holy Spirit Mountain.

Not family, not friends—why would anyone intervene to help you?

Sea Realm Great Powers, a group of individuals who dictated the life and death of others, why would they descend from the divine altar, bend down, and speak to you equally?

In truth, the Sword Lotus sect was not weak.

The Fourth-class God · Sword Lotus endowed its disciples with remarkably comprehensive skills.

Believers of the sect could attack, defend, control, and support. When in the Human World, Sword Lotus believers formed the backbone of Da Xia's defense force.

But after all, the fifteenth night in the Human World was a battle of the Human Clan versus Evil Demons.

When the Sword Lotus believers' target switched to other Human Clan believers...

The so-called "comprehensive" capabilities seemed to degrade into mediocrity.

"Good, good! Very good!" Fang Lingfeng laughed in fury, suddenly raising her halberd toward the skies.

"Kacha!!"

A bolt of lightning abruptly struck, precisely hitting the Sky-piercing Halberd.

In an instant, violet currents cascaded like countless serpents, zipping across Fang Lingfeng's body.

East Thunder Divine Technique · Thunderstruck Phase!

Her physical being was greatly activated by the violet currents, enhancing her attributes across the board!

Deng Yuxiang remained unfazed, gripping her broken blade and pointing toward her opponent from afar.

"Hoo~"

As the two women stared intensely at one another, a sudden swirl of sand spun into the air.

In the blink of an eye, a sandstorm engulfed the mountain forest.

West Desolate Divine Skill · Floating Sand!

Fang Lingfeng's expression instantly darkened.

It was clear—there was still a Sea Realm · West Desolation believer lurking north!

The skill list of East Thunder Sect was highly treasured, envied by all who beheld it.

There was only one skill category the sect lacked—perception abilities!

Ran Sect seizes upon this weakness mercilessly!

You can't see or lock onto the enemy?

Exactly!

We can lock onto you!

Gao Yunyan can perceive all in the sands, Deng Yuxiang can position using sound.

Lu Ran and Yan Shuangzi, those two evil dogs, can also wreak havoc in sandstorms, dense fog, and the pitch-black night.

Ran Sect,

specializes in "seeing the world with closed eyes"!

"Whoosh!"

As the sandstorm whipped up, the mountain forest transformed into a turbulent Flowing Sand River.

The undulating river toppled trees; people and horses were thrown off balance.

Jade Talisman Divine Skill · Quicksand Talisman!

"Watch out!"

"Ah!" East Thunder disciples staggered, struggling to remain upright, desperately running to avoid being swallowed by the sands.

"Hmm?" Deep in the forest, Yan Shuangzi lifted her head slightly, listening intently.

Her figure flickered abruptly; she brandished her blade in a sweeping horizontal strike.

The Divine Weapon · Evil Moon Scimitar swept before her in a wide arc, leaving a jet-black sword trace floating mid-air.

"Zi zi~ zi~"

An East Thunder disciple, crackling with electric currents around his legs, darted away in panic.

Lost in the dust of the sandstorm, he could no longer see, and the turbulent Flowing Sand River beneath his feet severely hampered his escape.

To be fair, this was an East Thunder disciple.

Even while stumbling and occasionally falling, overall, the East Thunder believers managed to tread through the Flowing Sand River.

Had it been believers from any other sect, they'd have already been devoured by the sands!

Amid the chaotic battlefield noise, this East Thunder disciple failed to sense impending doom.

He ran blindly—straight toward danger!

"Ugh!" The disciple's pupils shrank abruptly.

Amidst the dense sandstorm, his body passed through a floating, crescent-shaped arc suspended in mid-air.

The man, indeed, passed through.

But his body was severed cleanly in two!

The gracefully curved, floating blade trace, resembling a waning moon, was no trifling matter.

It was the deadly Divine Weapon Domain · Evil Moon!

The corpse split into two halves, its cross-section tainted with eerie black energy, causing the flesh to decay rapidly.

Yan Shuangzi had already blinked out of existence, moving on to assassinate her next target.

"Ah!"

"Stay close to me!" As soon as the Flowing Sand River appeared, Island Master Pei shouted urgently.

As a Sea Realm · Sword Lotus believer, he rapidly summoned a massive lotus flower. Its petals closed tightly, sheltering the surrounding Sword Lotus disciples within.

Island Master Pei's heart raced, only to realize the situation wasn't as dire as he'd anticipated?

He had presumed the Quicksand Talisman was the work of a Sea Realm · Jade Talisman disciple.

After all, the two consecutive cloaked figures were both Sea Realm powers.

Unexpectedly, the raging Flowing Sand River wasn't as formidable as imagined, unable to breach the defenses of the Lotus Bone.

However, the massive lotus bud was ensnared by thin lines of sand, being dragged harshly toward the underground.

In the sandy environment, Jiang Ruyi couldn't make out the battlefield.

She naturally delegated control of her Divine Skill, allowing the fine sand threads protruding from the river to autonomously target foes.

On the battlefield, it wasn't just the Flowing Sand River devouring people.

West Desolate Divine Skill · West Desolate Sand Sea, was swallowing all life!

The East Thunder disciples were restricted by the Flowing Sand River, yet with their utmost effort, they still had a chance to escape.

But if consumed by the Sand Sea, survival was not an option.

There was only one ending: being buried alive!

The instigator Gao Yunyan unleashed the West Desolate Sand Sea in full force. She danced on waves of golden sands, charging freely across the churning Flowing Sand River.

Of course, even the Flowing Sand River occasionally birthed "blind sand threads," foolishly attempting to drag Gao Yunyan into the depths.

But who could move the Yan God General with such overwhelming strength?

She was like a feral prisoner, bound by multiple chains, yet utterly unrestricted, rampantly wreaking havoc, swinging her axe to slay enemies...

Countless episodes unfolded simultaneously across the battlefield.

As the sandstorm rose, a white-robed figure carrying a hammer ascended!

"Hoo~"

Lu Ran was ablaze with flames, wielding a phantom war hammer, instantly appearing behind and above Fang Lingfeng.

Proving that Ran Sect Blade Technique · Third Form · Shuo Star, could adapt to hammer techniques!

Fiery Fire Heavenly Leader, the art of cross-level killing!

Fill me with Fierce Heavenly Power!

Basic Divine Skill · Fierce Heaven Hammer, complete with a pulverizing effect!

Chaos as cover; today we reap the sea!

Lu Ran exerted all his strength, swinging the Fierce Heaven Hammer in a brutal downward smash.

Explode for me!

"Kacha!!" This was the sound of Fang Lingfeng's Divine Technique · Thunder Armor and Water Flow Armor shattering simultaneously.

"Boom-boom-boom!" This was the sound of the Fierce Heaven Hammer slamming into the ground, creating a massive crater within the Flowing Sand River.

Lu Ran: ???

Fang Lingfeng, encased in electric currents, had already launched herself out of harm's way.

Lu Ran's hammer strike and Fang Lingfeng's sudden charge occurred almost simultaneously.

The hammer didn't land squarely; it grazed her back, slid along her forward-leaning body, barely scraping her hip, before smashing into the ground!

Lu Ran acknowledged the speed of East Thunder disciples' movements.

But such quick reflexes too?

Actually, Fang Lingfeng's reaction wasn't that fast.

As the sand rose, Lu Ran chose to attack, and Fang Lingfeng opted to surprise.

A Sea Realm Great Power could hardly be compared to a stationary target!

Only when Fang Lingfeng shot forward did her pupils contract sharply, her heart nearly leaping into her throat.

Wha... what was that?

Who on earth just attacked me?

By sheer accident, Fang Lingfeng narrowly escaped death. Instantly, she changed her plan.

Without so much as a glance backward, she suppressed her fear and darted frantically through the Flowing Sand River, fleeing in haste.

"No way!" Lu Ran was dumbfounded.

In an instant, Fang Lingfeng had vanished from the battlefield, fleeing far away...

East Thunder Sect... what happened to their arrogance?

We bullied you like this, and you don't even retaliate with a couple of halberd strikes for your dignity?

Just... just ran off?

If you're shameless, how am I supposed to kill you?

"Don't chase!" Deng Yuxiang shouted urgently.

Her eyes closed tightly, her brows furrowed.

Moments ago, Deng Yuxiang had unleashed Night Charm Evil Technique · Night Wind Assault, stirring up fierce winds to block Fang Lingfeng.

But Fang Lingfeng scrambled, using hands and feet, rolling and crawling, adjusting her trajectory with the gusts, fleeing even faster.

When a Sea Realm · East Thunder disciple abandons their pride, wholly focused on escape, few can prevent them!

Only Instant Teleportation users have a chance to intercept.

But both Lu Ran and Yan Shuangzi were River Realm; merely touching this Sea Realm East Thunder woman could lead to disaster.

Deng Yuxiang couldn't let them risk it!

"Ahhh..."

"Mercy... uh... uh!!" The battlefield echoed with cries. Night Charm Blade pierced back and forth, while the Sand Sea devoured enemies alive.

The Flowing Sand River couldn't stop the Sea Realm · Fang Lingfeng, but it drastically confined the River Realm · East Thunder disciples.

"Hmph." Lu Ran snorted coldly, ignoring their pleas for mercy.

Harvesting a few Dead Souls—it wasn't a loss.

East Thunder Sect truly lived up to its name!

The Sea Realm Great Power of this sect was undeniably troublesome and hard to kill!

We'll have to revisit our strategies in-depth when we return...

Overall, though, Ran Sect's tactics proved effective.

The sand veiled their eyes, the sands restricted their legs.

Lu Ran, armed with the Fierce Heaven Hammer, delivered decisive strikes amidst the chaos.

"Next time, you won't be so fortunate," Lu Ran muttered darkly, his expression grim.

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Chapter 572: Once the deed is done, dust off your sleeves and leave.

A foolish general brings suffering to his troops.

Fang Lingfeng had her courage dashed almost instantly when the battle began, and she fled in panic.

The ten-person team she led crumbled like scattered sand!

Her teammates scrambled to save their own lives when danger loomed, failing to mount any effective resistance from start to finish.

Of course, blame has to be placed on the overwhelming power of the Lu Sect as well—they were absolutely devastating!

The fight erupted in an instant and ended just as swiftly.

By rough estimation, the entire encounter lasted no more than mere seconds.

"Sect Leader, there are no more enemies in the vicinity!" Gao Yunyan reported loudly.

"Cease the Floating Sand," Lu Ran ordered.

The swirling sands dispersed rapidly, leaving only the Flowing Sand River still trickling along.

Suddenly, several sand whips materialized.

Emerging sequentially from the riverbed and striking eastward, they seemed intent on flipping the entire area upside down!

High in the sky, Jiang Ruyi, surrounded by the Jade Talisman Formation, gracefully descended.

The Dongting Sect lacked flying techniques, and engaging these believers from the ground posed a significant disadvantage—they were safer remaining at an elevation.

"Snap! Snap! Snap!"

The sand whips churned through the river, unearthing corpses of fallen Dongting disciples as well as a cluster of lotus buds buried beneath.

These were carried ashore far to the east, away from the battlefield.

The Flowing Sand River swiftly vanished; the once-lush forest disappeared, leaving the undulating ground reshaped in waves.

The scene was majestic!

"Restrain these two. I'll absorb the rest directly into my pupils," Lu Ran said, his slit-pupiled eyes flashing as he grabbed Deng Yuxiang's wrist and reached towards the left-front direction.

"Lu Ran." A cold voice drifted down from above.

Lu Ran tilted his head to look up at Jiang Fairy. "What is it?"

Jiang Ruyi's gaze lingered momentarily on Lu Ran's palm before her lips parted slightly. "Sword Lotus believers."

"Oh." Lu Ran turned his head towards the source.

Through the tender lotus buds, Lu Ran thought he saw a group of ostriches.

The surroundings had grown silent—the confrontation was evidently over.

And yet, the lotus buds remained. Inside them, the occupants seemed too frightened to emerge, unwilling to face their fate.

Lu Ran swept his gaze across the area and collected the wandering dead souls into his possession.

Excluding Fang Lingfeng, ten Dongting disciples had left behind seven corpses, with only three managing to escape.

Once his task was complete, Lu Ran approached the cluster of lotus buds.

Since the blooms were tightly shut, he teleported directly into their midst with little concern. "You're all safe now."

The voice carried into the lotus buds, striking terror into the hiding group.

The people of Thunder Mountain... all dead?

So quickly?

Just who were these mysterious figures cloaked in bamboo hats and robes...?

The Sword Lotus disciples were pale-faced and trembling uncontrollably.

At the root of their unease was Deng Yuxiang's offhand remark: "These Sword Lotus believers are mine."

In the ruthless realm of the Holy Spirit Mountain, the weak naturally assumed they were destined to become captives.

Life or death? Torture or servitude? They couldn't know the answer.

But the disciples were unaware that Deng Yuxiang had said those words only to mislead the enemy.

The Big Nightmare wasn't foolish—it wouldn't openly declare that their side was part of the Thousand Boat Alliance!

What if any enemies managed to escape?

That would simply hand over valuable intelligence for free!

As it turned out, the Nightmare's caution was well-founded. Indeed, a few Dongting disciples had escaped.

"Come out. I am a guest of the Thousand Boat Alliance," Lu Ran said again.

A simple sentence, yet it pierced like sudden light into the infinite darkness of an abyss!

At least a few Sword Lotus disciples felt a faint glimmer of hope rekindling in their hearts.

"P-Pei... Pei Island Master?"

"Island Master, we..." a few murmured tentatively, their voices cautious.

Garbed in a striking scarlet robe, Pei Island Master gritted his teeth and reluctantly opened the lotus buds.

Stalling any longer would accomplish nothing.

Ultimately, they would have to face the judgment of fate.

"You... you've come to visit our Thousand Boat Alliance?" Pei Island Master asked hesitantly, looking at Lu Ran.

He had expected to confront a mysterious figure clad in green robes and a bamboo hat.

Instead!

Standing before him was a young man draped in an elegant white robe, exuding a commanding presence.

High above, a regal woman adorned in a white dress gazed down at them with a serene, frosty expression.

Their attire alone indicated their extraordinary status!

"I have connections with Bi He's Green Lotus Island and was invited as reinforcements," Lu Ran said warmly, nodding lightly.

"What?"

"Re-reinforcements?" Nearly twenty Sword Lotus disciples erupted in whispers of astonishment.

Grief turned to joy.

Just moments ago, they were grappling with whether they would meet a gruesome death or suffer through a wretched existence.

Now, their fate had changed entirely!

"Thank you, sir, for coming to our rescue!" Pei Island Master clasped his fists in deep gratitude. "I am Pei Hong. May I ask your esteemed name?"

The disciples around Pei Hong wore a mix of expressions.

Some appeared dazed, struggling to believe the situation.

Others were overwhelmed with relief, while a few even wept tears of joy...

Lu Ran introduced himself and then offered a word of advice: "Head back quickly."

"Master Lu's great kindness shall be remembered by Pei!" Pei Hong bowed deeply. "Should you not mind, please come to the island so I can properly..."

"No, I still have tasks to complete," Lu Ran said, raising a hand to stop him mid-sentence.

By now, he had grown accustomed to even Sea Realm Great Powers treating him with utmost respect.

This aura of authority was something cultivated through his many experiences.

"Then I..."

"Sect Leader." Deng Yuxiang approached.

In an instant, the Sword Lotus disciples' expressions shifted.

Their eyes revealed deep fear.

This terrifying Sea Realm Great Power was the very one who had brazenly declared ownership over them...

"The battlefield has been cleared. Let them deal with the corpses and take all the weapons back to Green Lotus Island," Deng Yuxiang suggested softly.

Lu Ran: [Any Divine Weapon Seeds?]

Deng Yuxiang: [None, just ordinary goods. But there are over fifty Divine Power Pearls.]

Lu Ran sneered: [Truly rich beyond measure.]

After exchanging thoughts with the Nightmare, Lu Ran turned to Pei Island Master.

Pei Hong responded promptly, "Master Lu, please proceed with your task. We'll deliver the spoils of war to Green Lotus Island."

"Appreciated."

"No trouble at all!" Pei Hong said quickly. "I hope Master Lu completes his mission safely and returns to the island soon. At that time, I will personally pay my respects!"

Lu Ran smiled and nodded before turning to leave.

His figure, with robes billowing gracefully, exuded an air of freedom.

What others thought, he didn't know, but Jiang Ruyi, watching from above, seemed quite mesmerized by the sight.

"Let's go, Ruyi," Lu Ran called.

"Alright." Jiang Ruyi replied softly and descended lightly.

Under Pei Island Master and the disciples' watchful gaze, the members of the Lu Sect gradually disappeared into the forested landscape.

"Green Lotus Island's master knows such a powerful organization..."

"The sect leader is so young!"

"Isn't Master Lu only at the River Realm? Why would two Sea Realm Great Powers serve him?"

"Stop talking nonsense. Clean the battlefield and let's leave quickly—this place isn't safe!"

The Sword Lotus disciples whispered amongst themselves, while the already distant Lu Ran remained unaware of their chatter.

At that moment, he was gazing ahead at a tall figure and called out: "Feng'er!"

"Sect Leader?" Xue Fengchen froze briefly before turning around.

Lu Ran grinned. "You've got to step up your game! Look at how Yan God General ravages his foes—such might!"

Xue Fengchen's face turned a little red.

He had contributed to the earlier battle, utilizing Floating Sand and Wilderness Desert Sea.

Yet, when it came to the scale of his Divine Techniques, their effectiveness, or overall results, he was near the bottom of the pack.

In fact, if they compiled a tactical scorecard, Xue Fengchen would undoubtedly rank last!

Even the lowest-ranked Evil Shadow Guardian on the team outperformed him...

Lu Ran added, "When will you advance to the Sea Realm?"

Xue Fengchen murmured, "I'll work hard on it."

Poor kid!

A West Desolate general at the River Realm's peak, yet he spoke with little confidence.

Lu Ran wasn't trying to mock his comrade—he wanted to motivate him.

Especially after witnessing Gao Yunyan's impressive combat capabilities, Lu Ran grew eager to add another West Desolate Divine General to their ranks!

"You'll get there," Gao Yunyan said, stepping forward to clasp Xue Fengchen's shoulder gently, shaking it slightly as both comfort and encouragement.

"Let me teach you a little something!" Lu Ran said, as if a thought suddenly struck him. "Back in the Human World, I had a brother. Whenever I asked when he'd advance, he only ever replied with one line."

Everyone turned their curious gazes toward Lu Ran.

Jiang Ruyi, already struggling to stifle her laughter, seemed to know what was coming.

Sure enough, Lu Ran blurted out, "Soon, soon!"

Xue Fengchen: "..."

"It's a psychological trick!" Lu Ran said, looking at him. "Feng'er, when will you become part of the vast Yangyang Sea?"

Xue Fengchen remained silent for a moment, then responded in a low, firm voice: "Soon!"

"Good." Lu Ran nodded approvingly, clearly satisfied.

Suddenly, a gaze settled upon him.

Lu Ran turned his head to see Deng Yuxiang giving him a small glare.

She obviously knew that the "brother from the Human World" Lu Ran had mentioned was none other than her unreliable younger brother.

How was Deng Yutang doing these days?

Had he reached the River Realm yet?

Or was he still stuck at a certain high rank within the River Realm, unable to advance?

"Nightmare."

"Hm?"

"Give me a dead soul. We'll interrogate it on the move."

"Understood." Deng Yuxiang lifted her hand and lightly shook her wrist.

Lu Ran caught a swirling ball of black mist. Within it, a man's terrified face gradually appeared, suspended within the Soul Prison.

Lu Ran had never shown mercy to his enemies.

"Ah! AHHHH!" The captive let out a gut-wrenching scream as Lu Ran unleashed his ghostly Soul Fire.

Amid the agonizing cries, Lu Ran remarked, "This time, our tactics were executed excellently.

Floating Sand to blind them, Flowing Sand to reshape the terrain... it was as though we crafted a graveyard specifically for the Dongting Sect!

But it's unfortunate..."

Deng Yuxiang glanced at the writhing, screaming soul and reassured Lu Ran, "We just lacked a bit of luck."

Lu Ran replied, "Let's think carefully about how we can further refine our strategies."

Jiang Ruyi suddenly chimed in, "Do you remember how, back at Ten Thousand Blade Mountain, you killed Elder Peng of Tianhuang Mountain?"

Lu Ran raised an eyebrow. "From the sky?"

"The Dongting Sect also cannot fly. Once we're in the air and they lack a foothold, their speed advantage disappears—leaving them wide open for slaughter."

As she spoke, Jiang Ruyi furrowed her brows slightly, seemingly annoyed by the captive's incessant wails.

Lu Ran extinguished the Soul Fire, and finally, silence returned to the world.

After pondering their techniques for a while, he turned back to the soul in the prison and coldly asked:

"How many Sea Realm individuals are there in Thunder Mountain?"

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Chapter 573: the mountain that overflows with wealth!

Thirty kilometers away, in a U-shaped river valley located between two mountains, a shadow darted swiftly past.

"Zzz~ Zz~"

Amidst the flickering electrical sparks, a figure rushed into a concealed cave.

"Gulp." Fang Lingfeng gasped for breath in large gulps, swallowing a mouthful of saliva hard.

Despite being a formidable entity of the Yangyang Sea, such a panicked and frightened figure was truly unbecoming of her stature.

"Who exactly was it?" Fang Lingfeng's face turned grim.

Though she had run far away, every time she recalled the hammer that brushed across her body with a fierce swing, she was filled with terror!

Waves of lingering fear churned in her heart, refusing to dissipate.

She had almost died!

Just barely escaped!

Was it a hammer? She couldn't be sure.

The irony was that Fang Lingfeng, from beginning to end, hadn't dared to look back. She didn't know what weapon the other person was using, nor did she know if her attacker was male or female, or what they looked like!

She only knew that their ferocious aura likely originated from the brutal Fierce Heavenly Sect!

No... that's not right!

Fang Lingfeng furrowed her brows tightly.

If it truly was a disciple of the Fierce Heavenly Sect, how could they appear so suddenly and silently, hovering above her from nowhere?

This person either had the ability to become invisible, like those sinister, treacherous wolves, or could perform instantaneous movement, similar to Qiang Xiu's disciples.

Instant Teleportation?

At the thought of this term, Fang Lingfeng's expression grew even uglier.

If it truly was instant teleportation, and the enemy was that strong...

Could this person, and this mysterious organization of cloaked individuals, be the same group responsible for annihilating Tiantu Mountain?

Everyone at Thunder Mountain knew that Luo Tiantu had a grudge with an Evil Dog believer!

To ensure his safety, Luo Tiantu personally visited the Thunder Sect and hired two bodyguards.

Everyone envied those two bodyguards for landing a lucrative job.

No one could have anticipated the grim news that arrived months ago—Tiantu Mountain had been destroyed.

The Village Chief of Tiantu Mountain, Luo Tiantu, who was the Sea Realm Peak, perished in battle!

Madam Kong, also a Great Power of the Sea Realm, met the same fate!

The entire village of Tiantu Mountain, including the two bodyguards involved, were all wiped out!

Massacred without survivors!

Even the entire Tiantu Mountain was set ablaze and burned to the ground...

There was no doubt that Tiantu Mountain had provoked a force it shouldn't have.

Merciless, thorough destruction!

"Gulp." Fang Lingfeng swallowed hard again.

So, the annihilation of Tiantu Mountain—could it have been done by this unnamed organization?

In the southeastern-central region of the Holy Spirit Mountain, the number of active factions was limited. Luo Tiantu was on friendly terms with the Sect Master of Thunder Mountain. Most forces would show him respect.

Even if conflicts arose, it wouldn't escalate to the point of exterminating an entire faction, let alone setting the entire mountain ablaze.

What kind of hatred would provoke such destruction?

Especially the final fire—it was clearly an act of venting anger!

That fire seemed to reveal the identity of the perpetrator.

The mastermind was highly likely to be an Evil Demon disciple with a deep-seated grudge against Luo Tiantu—the Evil Dog believer!

So...

The one who had appeared mysteriously and nearly took her life—could it also have been this Evil Dog believer?

Fang Lingfeng's speculation ultimately boiled down to one reason:

Within the area surrounding Thunder Mountain, no one or any force dared to treat a disciple of Thunder Mountain in this manner!

Upon revealing her name, she hadn't been met with fear or flattery.

The cloaked person simply didn't care about the Thunder Sect!

Fang Lingfeng genuinely suspected that she might have encountered the same group of people as Tiantu Mountain.

The same bunch!

"Hm?" Fang Lingfeng's chaotic thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the sound of electrical currents buzzing.

She whipped her head around, only to see a man dashing into the cave.

"Hall Master Fang!" The man's face lit up with joy upon spotting Fang Lingfeng inside, as if he had found his anchor.

Fang Lingfeng's demeanor instantly stiffened, transforming back into a commanding presence, as she admonished:

"Stop panicking! What do you look like?"

"Y-Yes!" The man shuddered, bowing his head in a trembling acknowledgment.

This River Valley Cave was a temporary base for Fang Lingfeng's Hall branch.

Whenever the team split up or lost members, they would regroup here.

Having awaited the arrival of her subordinate, Fang Lingfeng's tone was sharp as she interrogated:

"You're the only one who escaped?"

"N-No, I'm not sure." The man's face showed guilt as he hurriedly knelt before his Hall Master. "In the sandstorm, I couldn't see clearly. The Flowing Sand River nearly devoured me.

I... I, Hall Master Fang, I tried to search for you, calling your name... but couldn't find your traces anywhere..."

Hearing this, Fang Lingfeng's phoenix-like eyes narrowed slightly, as a surge of killing intent bubbled within her.

"H-Hall Master! I wasn't... the battlefield was too chaotic, the enemy too strong... Ugh." The man hadn't finished his words before a muffled groan escaped him.

"Crack!"

As the man kowtowed, Fang Lingfeng thrust her Sky-piercing Halberd downward, easily piercing through the man's Water Flow Armor.

The sharp point of the halberd instantly stabbed through the back of his skull!

His frantic kowtowing froze at once.

Killing intent suffused Fang Lingfeng's eyes!

She withdrew the Sky-piercing Halberd, then stabbed down again to deliver another blow.

"Splat!"

Fang Lingfeng lowered her gaze, looking down at the corpse now pinned beneath her weapon. Word by word, she muttered:

"My Hall's forces were carrying out their mission when they encountered an enemy attack.

The enemy was powerful. My Hall's soldiers fought to the death.

Only I, Fang Lingfeng, fought until exhaustion and could no longer resist!

As a last resort, I slaughtered my way out, just to return to Thunder Mountain to report the intelligence, so my brothers wouldn't die in vain..."

As she murmured, Fang Lingfeng pressed a foot onto the man's skull and ripped her Sky-piercing Halberd free.

Finally, the Sea Realm Great Power bent down, lowering herself.

Reaching out with one hand, she plucked the Divine Power Bead Chain from the man's neck.

Fang Lingfeng rubbed the blood-stained bead chain with her fingers, then wore it around her own neck.

"Zzz~ Zzz..."

Suddenly, the sound of electrical currents rang out again, drawing closer.

Following it came two excited voices.

"Hall Master Fang, you're really here!"

"Hall Master Fang... This... What's this?"

The two Hall members who arrived were shocked at the sight inside the cave.

Fang Lingfeng's gaze flickered as she slowly turned to face the two bedraggled, deathly surviving Hall members.

A bone-chilling aura of killing intent began to permeate the cave.

Meanwhile, dozens of kilometers away in a dense forest, a team was advancing in an orderly fashion.

"Nineteen Great Powers of the Sea Realm, over 180 River Realm experts." Lu Ran muttered softly.

This information was provided by the captives.

Even more astounding was that within Thunder Mountain, there were about 200 East Thunder disciples but close to 400 slaves!

On average, each East Thunder disciple had two slaves?

"No wonder it's the East Thunder Sect's headquarters." Lu Ran sighed. "Truly a gathering place for elites."

Gao Yunyan chimed in for once: "Even stronger than Tianhuang Mountain's forces!

More River Realm disciples and significantly more slaves than Tianhuang Mountain."

Lu Ran nodded. "Its geographical location is well-positioned."

The selection of Thunder Mountain's base was exceptional.

If Wuji Peak were considered the center of the Holy Spirit Mountain Continent, then Thunder Mountain would lie in its southeastern-central region.

Here, the number of Weak God believers far exceeded those near the northwestern Ten Thousand Blade Mountain.

Thus, the East Thunder Sect inevitably captured more slaves.

Why did He Qifeng position the Forbidden City thirty kilometers south of Wuji Peak?

One reason was to benefit from proximity to powerful allies; the other was the larger "traffic flow" in the continent's center!

"Your Thunder Mountain's Sect Master Lv is a Sea Realm Peak?" Jiang Ruyi suddenly asked.

"Indeed, Sect Master Lv is in the Sea Realm·Fifth Rank. It's said that he's been at that rank for many years now!"

The captive answered hurriedly, terrified of being burned again by the Soul Fire if he hesitated.

Jiang Ruyi spoke softly: "Generally, powerful individuals keep their Realm and strength a secret. How are you so certain Sect Master Lv is at the Sea Realm Peak?"

Her worry was that the Sect Master of Thunder Mountain might be hiding their true strength and was actually a Heavenly Realm Power!

If that were the case, Lu Ran and the others would be courting death!

However, one redeeming fact was that a faction's conduct typically reflects that of its leader.

This was Jiang Ruyi's only reassurance.

After all, if Sect Master Lv were truly a Heavenly Realm expert, the Thousand Boat Alliance would likely have been crushed by Thunder Mountain long ago.

"Sect Master Lv's personality likely disdains dishonesty." The captive replied, trembling. "The Sect Master also never conceals his strength."

Listening to the captive's words, Lu Ran could already picture Sect Master Lv's swaggering demeanor.

The captive had a valid point:

East Thunder Sect disciples were generally arrogant and were unlikely to stoop to lying.

Jiang Ruyi nodded slightly before asking again: "Your Sect Master has ruled Thunder Mountain for so many years, amassing so many slaves. He must have numerous weapons and artifacts?"

The captive answered truthfully: "Sect Master Lv possesses a Divine Weapon Halberd and a Divine Weapon Sword, of which the Sky-piercing Halberd has activated its Divine Weapon Domain!

His four wives also each have a Divine Weapon, though none have activated any domains.

Madam First Wife has a magic artifact bracelet, while Madam Third Wife has a magic artifact sachet... Oh, right! Just recently, Sect Master Lv acquired a magic artifact ring..."

Everyone: "..."

What kind of Thunder Mountain is this?

It's practically Overflowing Treasure Mountain!

Well... to be fair.

Even a modest Tiantu Mountain had four treasures: the Blood-Weeping Dagger, the Jade Hairpin, and the twin Heaven-Sealing and Earth-Cleaving Swords.

As a prominent sect, Thunder Mountain's wealth couldn't possibly fall short.

Jiang Ruyi's thoughts grew grave as she commented: "Give me detailed descriptions of the Divine Weapon Domain's specific functions and the magic artifact's efficacy."

"Yes, my lady. Sect Master Lv's Divine Weapon Halberd..."

"Hm?" Lu Ran suddenly murmured in doubt.

Looking up to the western sky, he saw a soul drifting upward.

Ever since Lu Ran used the Pupil of the Dead World to pinpoint ground-level battlefields through the floating souls of Sword Lotus believers, he had occasionally activated the ability during their trek.

The area was still within range of the Thousand Boat Alliance's influence. If fighting was ongoing, Lu Ran wouldn't mind offering support while simultaneously dismantling Thunder Mountain's forces.

And now... he actually spotted something!

"What's wrong?"

"There appears to be combat to the west!" Lu Ran said, eyes fixed on the drifting soul. He roughly estimated the distance: "It's about twenty to thirty kilometers away."

Let's go and take a look!"

...

Chapter 574: Do you dare to kill me?!

The River Valley, two figures moved as swiftly as lightning, darting with incredible speed.

The young man's face was filled with terror as he fled desperately.

The middle-aged woman's eyes burned with murderous intent as she pursued relentlessly!

"Hall... Hall Master! Hall Master Fang!" The young man's face was deathly pale as he ran, turning his head back repeatedly, "I didn't see anything, Hall Master! I swear I won't say a word!"

The young man begged desperately, feeling the horrifying pressure from behind drawing ever closer.

Earlier, he had barely escaped the battlefield, fleeing back to the temporary stronghold of Lingfeng Hall with his last surviving companion.

He thought he might encounter his scattered comrades or find Hall Master Fang here to lead them to reorganize their forces.

The good news was, he did indeed meet Hall Master Fang in the River Valley Cave.

The bad news was...

Hall Master Fang killed one of the hall members?

The young man and his lone surviving companion were instantly dumbfounded.

But as soon as they spoke out to question her, Hall Master Fang suddenly made her move!

The speed of a Sea Realm Great Power was astonishing — with just one strike of her halberd, she killed another hall member on the spot!

The young man could not understand Hall Master Fang's actions.

Stunned, he scrambled to escape. However, Fang Lingfeng, gripping her Sky-piercing Halberd, pursued him with blazing murderous intent.

"Hall Master Fang! I'm your most loyal subordinate! I swear... why must you eradicate me completely... Ahhh!" the young man exclaimed in fright.

In his panicked rush, the young man accidentally collided with a large tree.

"Crack!"

The thick trunk shattered with a crisp sound, and the young man staggered, but he dared not hesitate even for a moment. He rolled and crawled, continuing his frantic escape forward.

East Thunder Divine Technique·Rapid Light Flash!

But as a River Realm Believer, the young man was no match for Fang Lingfeng in either physical constitution or skill grade.

The gap between them had been closing rapidly, and now with his stumble, Fang Lingfeng seized the opportunity to catch up at once.

The young man's face was frozen in utter rigidity!

The terrifying pressure felt as though it would grind his body into dust.

In that instant, the young man's desperate survival instincts erupted, and he turned his head, shouting fiercely: "ROAR!"

East Thunder Divine Technique·Thunder Shout!

This Battle Roar Technique, as loud as a thunderclap, could temporarily disorient its target.

"ROAR!!"

Almost simultaneously, Fang Lingfeng, who was closing near, also let out a fierce shout.

The two East Thunder Disciples, bound through the same lineage, made nearly identical choices!

Instantly, both of their bodies froze.

The Dongting Sect did not possess Spirit Defense Techniques.

When subjected to the same sect's Battle Roar, everyone would fall victim.

"Thud!"

"Huff..." Both crashed heavily to the ground.

Driven by immense inertia, the young man rolled across the ground, crushing a patch of shrubs.

Fang Lingfeng, on the other hand, smashed through a large tree, her forward momentum sharply diminished.

"Ugh..." Fang Lingfeng's face twisted in fury as she shook her head vigorously, trying to clear her mind.

She was, after all, a Sea Realm.

Faced with the River Grade Thunder Shout, Fang Lingfeng couldn't become completely immune to its effects, but through her terrifying Sea Realm spiritual fortitude, she recovered faster.

Meanwhile, the young man remained in his dazed state.

In the next moment, Fang Lingfeng charged towards the young man's position, stomping heavily onto his chest.

"BANG!!"

East Thunder Divine Technique·Thunderburst Violet Glow!

A surge of violet electricity exploded from under Fang Lingfeng's foot, scattering like serpentine streaks in all directions.

"Ah..." The young man let out an unconscious scream, unable to snap out of his daze.

Under the effects of the disorientation, it was impossible for him to maintain the Thunder Armor or Water Flow Armor. In this moment, both defensive armors were shattered by Fang Lingfeng's single stomp!

Without his protective armors, the young man had become nothing more than a lamb to the slaughter!

Fang Lingfeng pressed viciously down onto her subordinate, caving his chest beneath her foot.

And the effect of East Thunder Divine Technique·Thunderburst Violet Glow made his entire body paralyzed with tingling electricity!

The intense pain finally awoke the young man partially from his stupor.

But he would've been better off staying unconscious.

Despair, an overwhelming despair...

He wasn't dead yet.

But he was already as good as dead.

"Sss!"

In his blurred vision, the tip of a halberd grew larger and larger.

The icy, razor-sharp Sky-piercing Halberd pierced ruthlessly into the young man's forehead!

"Huff... Huff..." Fang Lingfeng's chest heaved heavily.

Clutching the halberd, she skewered the subordinate's skull and rested its shaft diagonally upon the ground.

Slowly, Fang Lingfeng exhaled, gazing down at the corpse beneath her feet, enunciating word by word:

"Lingfeng Hall — loyalty to the entire hall!"

"Hall members attacked by strong enemies and died in the battlefield."

"I stood alone, contending against multiple Sea Realm enemies, ultimately cutting through a path of blood..."

Fang Lingfeng looked at the young man's wide-open eyes, witnessing his pupils dilate further.

This face, which could be considered handsome, seemed to stir memories long buried within her.

For the first time, she seemed to feel a sliver of sympathy.

Bending down, Fang Lingfeng extended her hand, gently closing his unyielding, wide-open eyes, murmuring softly:

"Xiao Tao, you shouldn't have survived."

"Even more, you shouldn't have come back alive after knowing I abandoned the battlefield.... No! I didn't retreat."

"I, Fang Lingfeng, fought and bled to the bitter end, lived and died with my hall members, striving to save my comrades..."

"If there's blame, you should direct it at those cloaked raiders... Hmm?"

Just as Fang Lingfeng was muttering continuously, the earth suddenly underwent an unsettling transformation.

"Pop! Pop! Pop!!"

The once solid ground abruptly turned into shifting sand.

Trees toppled, the land churned.

Whips of sand lashed out from the Flowing Sand River.

Chapter 575: Do you dare to kill me?!_2

Fang Lingfeng's face turned ashen!

Jade Talisman Divine Technique-Quicksand Talisman?

Having just escaped death, she knew too well whose technique this was.

The mysterious cloaked figure?!

"Zzz~ Zzz!" Purple currents of electricity coiled around Fang Lingfeng's feet as she darted out instantly.

Terrifyingly, this raging Flowing Sand River was even broader and more violent than the one in the previous battlefield.

Not just larger in scale, but grander in momentum!

Most strikingly, countless sand whips emerged from the riverbed, overwhelming in quantity.

Because this wasn't just a single Quicksand Talisman!

It was four Quicksand Talismans unleashed simultaneously by Lu Ran and Jiang Ruyi!

The River Grade Jade Talisman Formation surrounded the duo with eight White Jade Talismans, two carrying fine grains of sand.

Jointly casting their techniques, they triggered this calamity together.

Honestly, if this husband and wife were to play like this in a city, one could only imagine how many homes and shops would be swallowed up, how much would be lost in terms of lives and injuries.

"You! You... Damn it, what the hell did I ever do to provoke you two? Do you really have to hunt me down to the bitter end?!"

Fang Lingfeng's heart surged with anger and terror, unable to hold back a torrent of curses.

Dashing wildly through the fiercely surging Flowing Sand River was already exceedingly difficult!

And the dense sand whips incessantly rising up were clearly aimed to lash her flying into the sky.

"Stop! Stop!!" Fang Lingfeng suddenly screeched.

The sound was piercingly sharp!

That look of panic and dread was starkly different from her earlier lofty demeanor, where she controlled others' fates as if she were a god.

She darted through the undulating sand waves, desperately trying to reach the riverbanks.

Just as her foot landed on a cresting sand wave, a whip of sand rose up quickly ahead, striking her ankle.

"Smack!"

Fang Lingfeng, still propelled forward, began spinning uncontrollably in midair.

"Strike! Strike quickly!" Lu Ran's repeated cries echoed from the riverbank, as he manipulated the whips relentlessly.

As expected, this tactic proved effective!

The strategy worked, brilliantly!

Jiang Ruyi's expression remained frosty, her slender fingers lightly maneuvering.

Though she was only at Jiang Realm Fourth Rank, at this moment, she seemed to hold the life and death of a Sea Realm Great Power in her hands like a god!

"Zzz—"

From the riverbank, a spectral figure wrapped in Immortal Fog sped toward them.

In terms of sheer movement speed, the Immortal Sheep Sect's Immortal Hoof couldn't quite compare to Dong Ting's Light-Flash Shadows.

However, the Sea Grade Immortal Hoof of a Sea Realm Nightmare was sufficient for her to make it to the riverbank on time during the enemy's obstruction.

"Hoo!!"

Deng Yuxiang flung her hand high.

A gale howled!

Fang Lingfeng was still spinning and flying, but her trajectory towards the riverbank was abruptly halted!

In an instant, she found herself flying backward at an angle.

"No!!" Fang Lingfeng's face twisted in despair!

Though her world was spinning, she remained painfully aware of the fact that she was moving further and further away from the Flowing Sand River's edge.

She... had been blown back to directly above the Flowing Sand River!

"Smack!"

Another slender sand whip lashed out, striking Fang Lingfeng squarely across her waist.

Her reaction was quick—she reached out forcefully, clasping the whip tightly with her arm.

Far off by the river valley, Jiang Ruyi's icy gaze locked onto her struggling prey.

With a graceful wave of her hand, the cohesive sand whip disintegrated instantly.

"No! No!!"

Fang Lingfeng fully grasped the gravity of the situation, screaming hysterically as crushing despair overtook her.

Moments ago, the whip in her grasp had been solid and sturdy, a lifeline she could leverage.

But now, the next moment, it was gone—reduced to loose, scattered grains of sand...

Jiang Ruyi raised her gaze, watching as the Sea Realm Great Power was swept high and lashed into the air. Her lips parted coldly: "Go on, be careful."

Her impassive tone carried a faint trace of concern.

To Xue Fengchen's ears, it seemed oddly contradictory.

Earlier, the Sect Master had commented that marrying someone like Yan God General meant Xue Fengchen had truly struck gold.

Xue Fengchen felt that the Sect Master wasn't so bad either!

Encountering Jiang Fairy must be the blessing earned by eight lifetimes of devotion by some lucky Ran Sect dog...

"Whoosh~"

Lu Ran's figure flashed, surrounded by swirling Immortal Fog, now atop the Flowing Sand River.

The river completed its mission, ceasing its turbulent flow, turning the earth into a state of solidified waves—a truly bizarre sight.

And above Lu Ran, twenty meters high, was Fang Lingfeng wielding her Sky-piercing Halberd!

In that fleeting moment, their gazes met.

Fang Lingfeng's terrified eyes locked onto a pair of sinister, blood-red irises.

Tangled Silk Shadow Evil Technique·Silk Pupil!

"Ah! Ahhh!" Fang Lingfeng shrieked miserably, her face contorting as she clawed at the strands of hair on her forehead.

She was instantly plunged into a crimson world.

Thousands of crimson threads pierced her body, leaving her bones chilled.

The excruciating pain transmitted through her entire body, rendering her in agony worse than death.

Lu Ran casually summoned a Fierce Heavenly War Hammer to his hand, his body enveloped in blazing flames.

He hefted the war hammer in his grip, glaring grimly at the woman:

"You run pretty well, huh?"

"Young friend! Wait... aah! I surrender! I surren—"

"Boom!"

Fang Lingfeng let out a harrowing scream.

Though she shattered the shadow of the hammer with her Sky-piercing Halberd, the explosive force of the fiery war hammer was devastating!

Lu Ran's figure vanished, reappearing in midair.

With one hand pressed downward, a spectral white-scaled python lunged forth.

"Roar!!"

The Immortal Sky Python spread its gaping maw, piercing Fang Lingfeng's body, shredding her Thunder Armor and Water Flow Armor relentlessly.

"Ahhh!!" Fang Lingfeng screamed shrilly, channeling Divine Technique amidst her cries.

"Hmm..." Lu Ran's expression darkened as he murmured deeply.

Though he'd already shut off his Evil Sense, the battle roar from Dong Ting's faction continued to sting his eardrums.

However, the Divine Technique·Thunder Shout's dizziness effect had little impact on Lu Ran.

Firstly, he was fortified by multiple Spirit Defense Techniques, boasting tremendous mental resilience!

Secondly, cautious as always, Lu Ran activated his Purification Skill specifically to counter the Sea Grade battle roar technique!

The Immortal Fog surrounding him consistently came from the Jade-faced Snake lineage's Divine Skill·Immortal Realm.

Lu Ran's form flashed once more, landing on the ground, flinging another flaming war hammer.

Fierce Heavenly Divine Skill·Bursting Sky Vault!

"Boom!!"

Firelights exploded, shockwaves surged.

"I, I am... the Hall Master of Thunder Mountain's Lingfeng Hall!" Fang Lingfeng ceased pleading, screaming wretchedly instead, "You cannot kill me! You cannot kill me!"

"Oh yeah?" Lu Ran smirked darkly, reappearing in the sky again, "Then watch closely!"

Watch how I kill you!"

Jade-faced Snake Evil Technique·Immortal Sky Python sprang forth once more.

Fang Lingfeng's face contorted grotesquely as she screamed: "How dare you kill me?!"

Thunder Mountain will not spare you! Not spare you! You dare... Arghhh!"

Another explosion echoed.

"Hah, Thunder Mountain won't spare me?" Lu Ran sneered coldly.

Have you ever asked me,

whether I'd spare Thunder Mountain?

Lu Ran casually reached out. The Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd within his robe flew into his palm automatically.

"Gurgle, gurgle..."

Lu Ran upended the gourd, pouring its contents into his mouth, glancing at Fang Lingfeng blasted skyward.

Once again, their gazes intertwined.

Once again, a sinister red gleam flickered in Lu Ran's eyes.

Her screams pierced the air, as Lu Ran's figure vanished once more.

Clad in billowing white robes, the Master of Ran Sect subdued a vast Yangyang Sea entirely midair!

"Slice!"

After a series of relentless bombardments, a cold blade buried into flesh!

The youth in white descended from the heavens, plunging the Eight Desolates Annihilation Blade through the enemy's skull, pinning her into the ground.

"Boom!!"

The solidified wave-formed ground exploded with a massive crater.

Shockwaves surged, dust scattered.

Amidst the earthly waves, Lu Ran knelt on the remains of his vanquished enemy, his expression grim.

What had that prisoner said earlier—the number of Sea Realm Great Powers in Thunder Mountain?

Nineteen?

Lu Ran's cold eyes glinted as he calmly extracted the Eight Desolates Blade from the enemy's skull.

Now,

there are only eighteen!

"Buzz!!"

The Eight Desolates Annihilation Blade trembled violently.

Lu Ran lifted the blade, running two fingers across its blood-soaked edge, nourishing the Eight Desolates with the blood of Yangyang Sea:

"What now, still craving the blood of eighteen Dong Ting Sea Realms for its feast?"

"Buzz!!"

"Then you'd better step it up! Since entering the mountain, I've carried you through Eight Desolates, and you better prove yourself by annihilating my enemies..."

"Whoosh!!"

A fierce wave of Divine Power radiated suddenly from the blade.

Lu Ran's expression froze.

And then, his eyes lit up brightly.

The Eight Desolates Annihilation Blade was no longer dabbling—its vibration grew increasingly intense.

Even in the sky, clouds began to gather.

The Eight Desolates, are you finally becoming a Divine Weapon?

Your ascension's final puzzle piece truly lies in the south.

From now on, you're destined to accompany me in annihilating the Eight Desolates...

Aren't you?

Chapter 576: Divine Weapons Emerge!

Eight Desolate Blade finally entered the upgrade mode, and Lu Ran was overjoyed!

The only problem was that this place was not safe.

Lu Ran could, of course, use the Transmission Mirror to step into Mist Rain Lake and seek refuge with the Thousand Boat Alliance.

But doing so would harm the Eight Desolate Blade.

The energy of heaven and earth was frantically converging toward the river valley. If Lu Ran left with the blade, how could the Eight Desolate Blade condense its Artifact Spirit and take form?

Thus, Lu Ran could only make minor adjustments to his location and not leave the area.

Fortunately, the weapon's upgrade process didn't take long!

It could range from dozens of minutes to a few hours, unlike the Human Clan's upgrades, which often took days.

"Lu Ran, take the blade to the cave," Jiang Ruyi immediately instructed.

Lu Ran needed to concentrate fully on leading the Eight Desolate Blade to condense its Artifact Spirit. Naturally, Jiang Ruyi took over the command of the Ran Sect.

She swiftly arranged for the group to form a defensive formation around the river valley cave.

Lu Ran didn't dare use Instant Teleportation but instead carefully cradled the Eight Desolate Blade in both hands and walked step by step back to the riverside cave.

He listened to Jiang Ruyi's orderly commands, feeling quite reassured.

Jiang Ruyi's arrival undeniably made the Ran Sect more complete.

She possessed the necessary prestige and ability to lead a group of warriors capable of destroying everything in their path.

Don't assume that, just because Jiang Ruyi was the Sect Leader's lady, it was natural for everyone to obey her commands.

Nightmare and Evil Shadow, these characters—none of them were easy to deal with.

Such people's loyalty to Lu Ran far exceeded their allegiance to the Ran Sect as an organization.

If Jiang Ruyi's aura were even slightly weaker, or her command ability slightly poorer, Deng Yuxiang would undoubtedly take over forcefully.

Everything was prioritized under the task of protecting Lu Ran—everything else simply didn't matter.

"I occasionally let Yan God General cast Floating Sand to scout for potential enemies. You don't need to concern yourself," Jiang Ruyi said softly at the cave's entrance, then stepped outside.

Lu Ran caught only bits of her words.

He couldn't afford to be distracted; deeply connected to the Eight Desolate Blade, he sank into his task.

In the sky, dense mists gathered, forming terrifying Fog Dragon Rolls.

"Buzz!!"

Lu Ran grasped the blade's handle, holding the violently trembling Tang Blade upright before him.

"Eight Desolate Annihilation, annihilate everything in Eight Desolates."

Lu Ran murmured inwardly, holding the weapon as he solidified his path, repeatedly emphasizing his inner determination.

This name—

Little Yuanxi certainly didn't hold back in intensifying things for Lu Ran!

His younger sister was delighted, using just a few playful words to give the blade such a domineering name, with ambitions reaching beyond the skies.

Lu Ran, however, had fought his way through countless battles, carrying this Sky Steel Blade with him through trials and tribulations until finally, his efforts bore fruit.

No! Not yet.

Becoming a Divine Weapon was only the first step.

There was still the Divine Weapon Domain!

As for the other Heavenly Star Saber in Lu Ran's possession, Cloud Sea Dust Purity...

Haha,

He'd rather not even think about it.

Lu Ran knew himself well; he was acutely aware that his current rank was far from deserving of the name his mother had bestowed upon that blade.

If you wanted to talk about "intensity," his mother was far tougher than Little Yuanxi.

"Phew~"

Thick energy continued to pour into the blade, time slipping away second by second.

Sometimes dust would rise and quickly disperse—it was Yan God General searching for hidden, lurking threats.

Lu Ran remained focused.

He could clearly feel the Eight Desolate Blade's Artifact Spirit gradually taking form.

Lu Ran's determination intensified, murmuring non-stop in his heart:

"Holy Spirit Mountain Realm has never lacked enemies."

"On this path forward, enemies are even more abundant!"

"Kill."

"Destroy all obstacles, slaughter every enemy barring the way."

"I've long led you onto the path of annihilation; now it's your turn to awake and accompany me...
hmm?"

Lu Ran suddenly opened his eyes, then narrowed them again.

"Whoosh!!"

A fierce energy wave spread outward.

Lu Ran's black hair swayed, his wide white robe fluttering wildly in the storm.

The Eight Desolates Annihilation Blade finally ceased trembling.

Though it settled into silence, its slender blade now radiated an icy brilliance.

Rich streams of energy flowed over its sharp edge, as if sharpening the blade repeatedly.

"Ha!" Lu Ran couldn't hide his joy. "It worked!"

Suddenly, a wave of energy surged.

A translucent Artifact Spirit quietly emerged.

As expected, the Artifact Spirit of the Eight Desolate Blade took on a form identical to Lu Ran.

But those ethereal eyes were far sharper than Lu Ran's—

Overflowing with killing intent!

Even Lu Ran couldn't help but inwardly tremble upon confronting it!

Floating before him, the Eight Desolate Blade's Artifact Spirit somehow gave Lu Ran a chilling sense of icy dread, as if a cold breeze swept his back.

The man and the Artifact Spirit stared at each other with blazing intensity.

Lu Ran remained silent, and the Artifact Spirit mirrored his silence, merely displaying its essence before Lu Ran.

It was hard to tell—was it provoking, threatening, or behaving like a child showing off to their father?

After a long while, the Eight Desolate Artifact Spirit knelt on one knee, bowing its head slightly: [Master.]

Lu Ran raised an eyebrow.

A unique environment nurtures unique entities.

Lu Ran owned both the Dawn Blade and Silent Night Blade, whose Artifact Spirits were equally loyal to him. However, neither of those Artifact Spirits ever displayed such etiquette toward their master.

In terms of communication, humans and Artifact Spirits were closer to equals.

Lu Ran would even apologize for disturbing the silent-loving Silent Night Blade.

But this Eight Desolate Artifact Spirit, born in the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm...

Truly distinct, huh?

"Alright." Lu Ran nodded heavily. The Artifact Spirit's etiquette and address gave him a hint of relief.

Everyone understands the principle:

A blade into which one invests soul and effort will assuredly follow its master with loyalty.

However, the Eight Desolate Artifact Spirit exuded far too overwhelming an aura of killing intent!

It exceeded the confines of "killing" and embodied pure destruction instead.

Lu Ran gazed at the kneeling spirit before him, sensing its profound desire. Slowly, he lowered the Eight Desolate Blade.

The blade tip pierced through the ethereal Lu Ran, merging them together.

Lu Ran's voice was deep, "Now that you've awakened, the path of annihilation begins at Thunder Mountain."

The Eight Desolate Artifact Spirit's gaze grew colder, its killing intent boiling over.

A brief thought imprinted itself onto Lu Ran's mind—terse yet poignant: [Understood.]

"Phew~"

Lu Ran directed his thoughts, and the Artifact Spirit flowed through the blade tip into the Eight Desolate Blade.

He released the blade handle with his right hand as the Eight Desolate Blade obediently hovered mid-air.

With his left hand, Lu Ran opened his wide robes, prompting the blade to "whoosh" upright, pivoting its point and diving directly into the sheath hanging from his left waist with precision.

"Clink!"

The Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd hanging at Lu Ran's right side shifted slightly backward.

It seemed Little Chi Feng wasn't particularly fond of the Eight Desolate Blade?

"It's alright." Lu Ran reached behind to pat the chubby Treasure Gourd lightly. "We're all family."

"Buzz~" The Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd vibrated slightly.

Lu Ran soothed Little Chi Feng and turned to head outside the cave.

By now, the heavy mist had dissipated, leaving clarity all around.

Outside the cave, a woman dressed in a flowing white dress stood with her hands behind her back. Perceiving movement behind her, she turned to look.

Their gazes met, and the two smiled warmly.

"It's done," Jiang Ruyi said with a trace of approval in her eyes.

"Finally!" Lu Ran sighed with heartfelt emotion, then asked, "Any disturbances?"

"None," Jiang Ruyi shook her head, somewhat surprised herself.

The Thousand Boat Alliance's reach was extensive, and even though this location was 60-70 kilometers from Mist Rain Lake, no Evil Demon tribes were entrenched here.

Yet, during the past half-hour, not a single Human Clan member had come to investigate—it was quite unexpected.

"The Thousand Boat Alliance didn't come to look either?" Lu Ran asked, puzzled.

"Given the current times, they probably wouldn't risk it," Jiang Ruyi speculated.

"True." Lu Ran nodded in agreement. Thinking of those Sword Lotus disciples who were nearly wiped out—it was no surprise that few dared venture out to investigate.

He suddenly realized something:

Saving others is truly saving oneself!

If the Ran Sect hadn't previously helped the Sword Lotus Sect by eliminating Fang Lingfeng and her squad, this Eight Desolate Blade's upgrade might have been accompanied by a fierce battle!

Jiang Ruyi stepped forward, gently lifting Lu Ran's robes to scrutinize the blade handle:

"Have you thought about the domain direction for the Eight Desolate Blade?"

"Not yet." Lu Ran lowered his hand, gripping the handle lightly. "You really need to think on this carefully!"

"Buzz~" The Eight Desolate Blade lightly vibrated in reply.

Lu Ran suddenly laughed, "Your path to Becoming a God was fraught with difficulty, but your foundation is so solid. Maybe when you grasp the Divine Weapon Domain, things will go more smoothly?"

Once more, the Eight Desolate Blade gently trembled, accepting Lu Ran's mental encouragement.

Or it might have taken its master's words as an order to follow.

"Let's move on quickly," Jiang Ruyi softly urged.

"Alright, let's go!" Lu Ran's confidence surged after nurturing a Divine Weapon.

The hardships faced during the process evaporated, replaced entirely by a deep sense of accomplishment.

The group rapidly cleaned the battlefield, retrieved four strings of Divine Power Pearls, disposed of the bodies, and temporarily buried weapons underground before setting off swiftly.

Sadly, after slaying Fang Lingfeng, Lu Ran had been utterly engrossed by the Eight Desolate Blade.

Focused solely on its upgrade, he hadn't taken any captives, including Fang Lingfeng and several other East Thunder disciples' Dead Souls, which had automatically been absorbed into the Pupil of the Dead World.

Lu Ran couldn't help but feel a pang of regret.

Fang Lingfeng, a Sea Realm Great Power and Hall Master, ought to have known more secrets about Thunder Mountain, shouldn't she?

Yet, the matter was settled, and Lu Ran couldn't exactly retrieve Fang Lingfeng's Dead Soul from the Fake God East Thunder Stone Sculpture...

Come to think of it, running into Fang Lingfeng was indeed fortunate!

What a great person!

She risked her life as a sparring partner for the Ran Sect, helping the warriors build experience and rapidly hone their combat skills.

She even helped refine Lu Ran's battle strategies and optimize tactics time and again...

If Thunder Mountain were truly destroyed, Lingfeng Hall would deserve significant credit!

While Lu Ran was rumbling through his thoughts, an unexpected mental communication arrived:

[Master.]

[Um... hello?] Lu Ran froze for a moment, hesitating to call out the Divine Weapon's name.

After all, both Dawn and Silent Night blades were in others' hands. There was no telling who might be contacting him at the moment.

Calling out the wrong name would be—awkward~

To his surprise, the other party paused briefly, before replying with the same courtesy: [Hello.]

Lu Ran: "..."

You're quite polite?

With this response, it was most likely Silent Night—Dawn Blade, with its cheerful personality, wouldn't just drop two simple words like this.

Lu Ran: [Silent Night, what's the matter?]

[He Qifeng received Peak Master's permission to provide support.]

[Great!] Lu Ran's face lit up, and he quickly responded with his thoughts: [How many people can she bring?]

...

Chapter 577: The Meat and Wine True Man

Five days later, atop a barren cliff.

The members of the Ran Sect waited quietly.

Lu Ran and Jiang Ruyi stood shoulder to shoulder, gazing into the northwestern sky. Beneath the roiling sea of clouds, two crows flew in from afar.

In the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm, there were neither birds nor beasts.

These two pitch-black crows were clearly disciples under the Seven-class God-Witch Crow.

"They've arrived," Lu Ran said.

In their view, the two crows halted, circled for a moment, then turned and flew away again.

It was apparent they dared not approach the members of Ran Sect.

"They certainly retreated quickly," Lu Ran sighed again.

Over the past five days, Lu Ran had wielded the Evil Technique-Mirror Flower Moon sparingly. In terms of the entire journey, the Ran Sect hadn't even traversed halfway.

Meanwhile, the people of Big Wind Hall, guided by the Silent Night Blade, had been speeding southeast without pause.

Soon, Lu Ran understood why He Qifeng and her group were traveling so swiftly.

From the dense forests far away, two more crows flew out.

Clutched tightly in their tiny claws were flexible tree branches, the other ends of which were firmly held by Bi Wu disciples.

Two Bi Wu disciples were being carried by the crows while simultaneously releasing more branches to tie up and lift several teammates.

Hmm... Crow lovers strongly condemn this!

Two tiny crows carrying strings of people? And among those being flown, there was even a fat guy...

A fat guy?

Lu Ran couldn't help but blink.

Cultivators' physiques could be rugged, muscular, or wiry—at worst, perhaps balanced and proportionate.

How could there possibly be a fat guy?

Especially considering River Realm natives subsist by absorbing Divine Power, and there wasn't much to eat in the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm.

Wait, what...?

Lu Ran was stunned: "How on earth did he grow that meat?"

Jiang Ruyi was also a bit surprised, looking at the chubby monk clad in a bright yellow robe.

This man, well past fifty, sported a shiny bald head and quite the generous belly!

His kind and amiable demeanor was accompanied by an ever-present smile.

Lu Ran almost believed he'd stumbled across Maitreya Buddha...

Under such an aura, the Divine Power Bead Chain he wore around his neck almost resembled a strand of Buddhist prayer beads.

"Caw~ Caw~"

The crows' cries echoed across the sky.

Don't let their small size fool you—these were genuine River Realm Great Powers. Carrying strings of people, their flight was swift and stable, rapidly approaching the cliff.

"Oh?" He Qifeng murmured in curiosity, her gaze fixed on the Ran Sect members atop the cliff.

The next moment, she gripped the Silent Night Blade and cleanly severed the branch binding her.

The Silent Night Blade streaked forward like a bolt of lightning, with He Qifeng propelling herself fiercely along with it.

She landed steadily on the ground, and as her palm released its grip, the blade reversed its tip and pointed the hilt toward Lu Ran.

"Clang!"

Lu Ran caught the hilt in one swift motion, feeling an unusual emotion surging within.

It was the sensation of a weary bird returning to its nest.

Tranquility, warmth.

The Silent Night cherished quietude, always taciturn.

Even now, it merely hinted at a faint emotional trace, not fully conveying its sentience.

"Thank you," Lu Ran murmured apologetically.

As his fingers brushed the blade's surface, purplish patterns began to ripple across the blackened body of the Silent Night Blade, chasing after their master's fingertips.

Mysterious, beautiful.

While Lu Ran was apologizing to the Silent Night Blade, He Qifeng stood before him in shock, her gaze fixed on Jiang Ruyi.

"Lady Luo Xian?" He Qifeng was increasingly astonished.

On one hand, she admired the transformation and growth of the once-young maiden; on the other hand, she found it incomprehensible that, in the cold and ruthless Holy Spirit Mountain Realm...

Could lovers truly find companionship day after day?

"Heavenly Pride He, well met," Jiang Ruyi nodded with a soft smile.

"Congratulations! Congratulations!" He Qifeng exclaimed twice in quick succession, her face lighting up with a smile. "Where did you two meet?"

Lu Ran, holding the Silent Night Blade in one hand, used the other to wrap around his fiancée's shoulder, grinning broadly:

"Didn't you ask me before what there was in the northwest?"

"Haha!" He Qifeng laughed heartily. "It seems the heavens truly showed mercy... Oh?"

Unintentionally, He Qifeng spotted another familiar figure.

Due to the varying terrain elevation, she bent her knees slightly and tilted her head, peering under the brim of someone's hat.

"Ha! Isn't this Phoenix?" He Qifeng was pleasantly surprised once more.

Xue Fengchen had long heard of He Qifeng's exploits in the Mountain Realm, her field-threshing force akin to a blazing sun.

Lu Ran had mercilessly informed him beforehand that He Qifeng, the City Lord, was already a powerful Yangyang Sea!

Upon meeting in person, Lu Ran was proven truthful.

Even though He Qifeng was approachable and friendly, the terrifying pressure she exuded made Xue Fengchen's heart tremble.

"Heavenly Pride He," Xue Fengchen clasped his hands in greeting, deeply ashamed.

He Qifeng raised her brows: "Our West Wilderness Big Phoenix joined Ran Sect now?"

Xue Fengchen nodded emphatically.

Standing beside Lu Ran, He Qifeng fixed her eyes on Xue Fengchen, muttering quietly:

"Damn you, snatching him first!"

"Tsk~ Whoever picks it first claims it," Lu Ran chuckled.

Xue Fengchen: "..."

Listening to Lu Ran's smug remarks, He Qifeng couldn't help but let out a huff.

Her gaze wandered to Deng Yuxiang and Gao Yunyan, observing them intently for a moment before remarking, "Your northwest escapade yielded quite the bounty!"

You even recruited a Sea Realm Great Power?"

"She was still River Realm when I recruited her," Lu Ran shrugged. "We just chatted, and then she ascended straight to Sea Realm.

You couldn't stop it!

Sigh, I don't even know how it happened~"

He Qifeng: ???

You sly fox!

Pulling this again on me?

"Haha!" Gao Yunyan burst into laughter, her voice carrying the boldness unique to the West Desolation Sect.

There wasn't a word of falsehood in Lu Ran's claim.

Gao Yunyan knew this well—had she not met Lu Ran and followed the right leader, she would never have progressed so dramatically in her Mental Realm!

The very notion of advancing to Sea Realm wouldn't exist.

In youth, arrogance was inherent; everyone assumed they stood apart.

Consider Tianhuang Mountain, though!

A mountain brimming with adept disciples of Second-class Gods, their talents unparalleled.

Yet among the middle-aged West Desolation believers, those stuck at Fifth Rank in the River Realm—aren't their numbers abundant?

"Hmph." He Qifeng, both unwilling to concede and irked by Lu Ran's ostentation, couldn't help liking him more and more.

She was utterly conflicted.

"What are you huffing about?" Lu Ran huffed back. "As I recall, someone else ascended to Sea Realm just by chatting with me?"

That shut He Qifeng up.

She pressed her lips tightly together and stopped huffing.

He Qifeng's breakthrough to the River Realm was undoubtedly her own achievement.

Yet there was no denying that showcasing herself to Lu Ran illuminated her Dao Heart to such an extent that she dramatically smashed through her cultivation bottleneck.

"Alright, alright," Lu Ran said, noticing He Qifeng's suppressed frustration, swiftly changing the subject. "These seniors are..."

This time, Big Wind Hall brought fourteen people.

Four were Witch Crow disciples, still hovering in the sky, maintaining vigilance.

It was apparent He Qifeng had trained the Witch Crow disciples well.

The remaining ten, Lu Ran recognized most of them.

The two elders named Gu and Jin, the dignified Yin Tianlong.

The two Bi Wu disciples, Zhu Huai and Zhu Hua, as well as the eighteenth-ranked Heavenly Pride·Hou Yun.

Of the remaining three, Lu Ran didn't recognize them—but those three were all Sea Realm!

Judging by their potency, the trio seemed to be high-rank Sea Realm, possibly even Peak!

Including He Qifeng, this mission brought four Sea Realm Great Powers from Big Wind Hall.

Lu Ran wasn't certain how many Sea Realm masters Wuji Peak possessed. If there were around twenty...

Sending out one-fifth of their Sea Realm force was reasonable.

"Phew..." He Qifeng exhaled deeply.

Having been angered by someone, City Lord He worked on calming herself down.

The Martial Monk lady's dictionary had always contained only "win," never "lose."

But since encountering Lu Ran, her dictionary now had an extra sheet of paper...

"Qifeng?" Lu Ran called out.

"Yes?" He Qifeng looked at the infuriating little River Realm rascal, holding back the urge to smack him flat.

She turned to formally introduce the group to Lu Ran:

"These two seniors are both surnamed Zhang; you may address them as Elder Zhang."

"This one is the Wine-and-Meat True Man."

"Erm..." Lu Ran was baffled, glancing at the smiling "fat monk."

What kind of title is that?

Seeing Lu Ran's confused expression, He Qifeng finally felt somewhat avenged. She nudged him with her elbow, saying, "Hurry up and show your respect!"

"Ah... ah!" Lu Ran immediately greeted them one by one.

"Good, good, Little Friend," the Wine-and-Meat True Man chuckled, raising his large pudgy hand.
"Reputation pales in comparison to a meeting in person!"

Little Friend is indeed as resplendent and extraordinary as the rumors proclaim!"

Lu Ran, who moments ago had been bewildered, now found his face flushing slightly.

This... This Wine-and-Meat monk greeted me with flattery the moment we met?

Hehe~

You've got a sharp eye!

"Oh?" He Qifeng observed him as though discovering some remarkable treasure, narrowing her eyes at Lu Ran. "Master Lu blushes?"

Lu Ran scratched his head. "Let's get moving! No time to delay, we can chat on the way."

"Little Friend Lu."

"Hmm? Wine-and-Meat... Master?" Lu Ran hesitated briefly.

The Wine-and-Meat True Man asked, "I've heard there's Smoke Rain Tea and Flower Fruit Cake at the Thousand Boat Alliance?"

"Ah, right!" Lu Ran nodded immediately. "But don't hold too high an expectation for the flavor, Master."

Previously, Lu Ran did mention to He Qifeng that he'd been attending a banquet, enjoying tea and pastries.

"Good, good, good!" The Wine-and-Meat True Man's plump face was filled with joy; he nodded enthusiastically. "Let's hurry! Quickly now, let's set off!"

Lu Ran: "..."

This was the first time in his life he'd encountered this kind of disciple.

Was he truly one of the renowned, valor-focused Martial Monk disciples?

This chubby monk... felt bizarre.

Lu Ran skeptically glanced at He Qifeng. The Martial Monk lady, her expression lighting up with amusement, feigned confusion: "What's the matter?"

"Nothing." Lu Ran smirked, opting to shift the topic. "With four Sea Realm Martial Monks, the Thousand Boat Alliance is as good as saved.

Heck, we might even charge straight into Thunder Mountain and bring them down!"

Divine Martial Monks, being First-Class Gods, imbue their disciples with the ability to wield Sea Realm techniques.

A Sea Realm Martial Monk punching the ground could summon countless golden dragons from below!

Like a ceaseless torrent!

A staggering destructive force!

With such techniques on their side, wouldn't Thunder Mountain's disciples be left in tatters or blown sky-high?

What more needs to be said?

Lu Ran and company would simply storm in!

"Absolutely not!" He Qifeng rejected decisively.

"Huh?" Lu Ran was baffled, looking toward the Martial Monk lady. Her face bore an expression of sternness.

...

Chapter 578: Change of Weather

October 18th, the rain drizzled endlessly.

Beneath the gray and murky sky, led by the Grey Lotus Island Master, a crowd stood silently on the western bank of Mist Rain Lake, awaiting someone's return.

This reception party numbered nearly twenty people, with almost half of them being powerful Sea Realm Great Powers!

It was hard to imagine a group capable of destroying the heavens and earth calmly standing in the rain, waiting. Just who was worthy of such deference?

"Tap, tap..."

Rain droplets fell onto the vibrant green lotus leaves, producing a soft rhythmic sound, soothing to the ear.

He Yingcai stood beside Yu Changsheng, raising her jade-like hand to guide a large lotus leaf above their heads, sheltering them from the rain.

The man was dashing and debonair, the woman graceful and elegant.

They seemed like a perfectly matched pair, akin to celestial lovers.

But it was a pity the man was oblivious to romance, his head bowed as he studied a blade?

"Whoosh~"

The Black Ice Blade suddenly broke free from Yu Changsheng's hand, darting into the distant lush forest.

A flicker of delight crossed He Yingcai's eyes as she softly remarked, "Junior Lu has arrived."

"Mm, he's here." Yu Changsheng smiled, lifting his head slightly.

Underneath the brooding western sky, a few black crows flew in, their appearance carrying a subtle message.

After all, disciples of the Witch Crow Sect could conceal their presence!

If the visitors harbored ill intent, how could these exceptional scouts ever be visible?

"Caw~ Caw~"

Amid the drizzling rain, the black crows circled briefly before turning back to the forest.

After another while, a group of figures emerged from the woods.

Anyone with a discerning eye could see that this was a mix of two distinct teams.

One group wore yellow-brown martial monk robes, exuding a crisp and valiant aura full of bravery.

The other donned bamboo hats and reed rain-coats, appearing as enigmatic martial wanderers.

The leaders of the two teams stood out, not only for their attire but as if they inhabited a completely different plane compared to the others.

The duo of Lu and Jiang were noteworthy enough, but alongside them walked a woman—

Her presence was outstanding, her body cloaked in a long golden-brown robe, clearly marking her as someone of significant status!

"This must be City Lord He." The Grey Lotus Island Master softly murmured.

From behind, He Yingcai's eyes expressed admiration as she whispered, "Yes, it's her, He Qifeng.

She is our Da Xia's second greatest prodigy, second to none."

Several other Island Masters silently observed, their hearts rippling slightly.

Second to none?

It was truly hard to fathom what kind of celestial being could possibly overshadow someone like He Qifeng.

What?

You're saying that Da Xia's most exceptional prodigy is the person by her side? Are you referring to Master Lu?

It feels... well, Master Lu doesn't seem imposing enough?

Da Xia has only four First-class Gods.

They are Sword One, Qiang Xiu, the Martial Monk, and the Martial Artist.

Otherwise known by the widely circulated rhyme: "One Immortal, One Saint, Two Martial Elites."

The disciples of these four schools naturally stand as the apex figures in the God and Demon World!

At this moment, He Qifeng did nothing, yet her overwhelming aura and commanding presence already made the disciples of the Bi He Sect feel vastly inferior.

Now that a disciple of a First-class God was present within the Thousand Boat Alliance, why fear the East Ting disciples anymore?

"Holy Spirit Mountain, a storm truly brews." The speaker was an elderly woman who appeared slightly hunched.

She supported herself with a cane, her hair whitening, her voice raspy and aged, grating on the ears.

Yu Changsheng had been within the Thousand Boat Alliance for over ten days now and naturally knew that this woman was one of the seven Island Masters of the Bi He Sect, the Withered Lotus Island Master.

She was aptly named.

Old and withering like a lotus flower nearing the end of its bloom.

A sight that brought a sense of lament.

The Golden Lotus Island Master was a tall and stately middle-aged man who spoke in a deep voice:

"After so many years, it's time for change."

The Wind Lotus Island Master, by contrast, was a stunning and charming woman who seemed aptly named as well, swaying beautifully like a lotus flower in the breeze.

Enchanting but not vulgar, striking but not gaudy.

She gazed at the two prodigies approaching from Da Xia, her voice soft, "Da Xia has finally extended its reach into our Holy Spirit Mountain."

As her words fell, the reception team fell silent.

With the arrival of one prodigy after another on this mountain, these capable, ambitious, and well-reputed individuals wrapped in Da Xia's halo of influence would likely purify the corrupted and restore clarity to this world.

The facts lay plainly in view:

The top prodigy traveled far and wide, aiding those in distress, punishing evil, and promoting good.

Upon encountering the crisis at Mist Rain Lake, he immediately stepped forward, taking on the responsibility without hesitation!

The second prodigy had already established a Forbidden City, gathering displaced people while reforming the Wuji Peak Sect with righteous discipline.

Her grand vision had already been declared to the world.

In the past, if anyone had reported this to the Bi He Sect, the Sea Realm Island Masters might have scoffed and dismissed them outright!

Nonsense!

But now, the two prodigies of Da Xia stood steadfastly before them...

"The Grey Lotus Island Master Pang Yuan, on behalf of the Seven Islands of Bi He, welcomes your esteemed arrival." The Grey Lotus Island Master cupped his hands in greeting, his voice grand.

"A senior, such courtesy!" He Qifeng responded kindly, returning the gesture.

This small act of consideration visibly eased the hearts of many Bi He disciples.

After all, a Second-class God disciple from East Ting wouldn't even regard them as people—

But to expect such respect from a disciple of a First-class God? Unthinkable.

In many people's minds, He Qifeng's arrogance would have been unsurprising, even expected.

Yet now, City Lord He's polite gesture brought a collective sigh of relief.

The two sides exchanged pleasantries, introducing themselves to one another.

Withered Lotus, Cold Lotus, Grey Lotus, Golden Lotus, Green Lotus, Wind Lotus, Rain Lotus...

It was Lu Ran's first time meeting the other Island Masters, but the various Sea Realm Island Masters each possessed unique traits, making them rather memorable.

Take, for instance, the Wind Lotus Island Master.

Goodness~

This auntie is remarkably refined!

The White Snake Maiden?

Though their appearances differed, their temperaments bore a striking resemblance.

The Bi He Sect is truly a haven for beauties!

Lu Ran felt that this Wind Lotus Island Master would be better suited to joining his sect to cultivate in the Jade-faced Snake Clan's Evil Techniques for the rest of her days!

"Hmm?" Sensing something, Lu Ran turned to look.

Jiang Ruyi wore an almost-smiling expression as she quietly observed Lu Ran.

Feeling slightly embarrassed, Lu Ran wrapped his arm around Jiang Fairy's slender waist and transmitted his thoughts: [I don't know why, but seeing the Wind Lotus Island Master makes me think of the Jade-faced Snake Clan.]

[Let go.] Jiang Ruyi lowered her head slightly. How could she concentrate on Lu Ran's explanation?

So many people were watching!

And not just regular people—these were powerful elders, uncles, aunts, grandfathers, and grandmothers from the Sea Realm...

You really have no sense of shame!

The Grey Lotus Island Master offered a benevolent smile, glancing at the pair of young lovers before speaking to He Qifeng:

"Hall Master He, we have already prepared a feast. May I invite everyone to move to the island, where we can fulfill our duties as hosts."

"Excellent!" The rotund Wine and Meat Immortal immediately perked up, his chubby face beaming, "Let's go, let's go!"

He Qifeng chuckled, nodding to the Grey Lotus Island Master, "Senior, please lead the way!"

"Please!" The Grey Lotus Island Master promptly summoned a verdant lotus leaf that landed gracefully upon the lake behind her.

The drizzling rain continued, the lake shrouded in a veil of cold mist.

Lu and Jiang boarded the large lotus leaf, accompanied by Yu Changsheng, as they "drifted" across the lake.

In the distance, the rolling mountains loomed faintly through the mist, resembling an ethereal ink painting.

Back in the Human World of Da Xia, Lu Ran had never truly experienced the charm of a "smoky, rainy Jiangnan."

Unexpectedly, within the tainted and corrupted Holy Spirit Mountain, he had encountered such breathtaking scenery.

"Thunder Mountain has truly sinned." Lu Ran remarked emotionally.

To dare stretch their malevolent claws here, to sully this slice of paradise?

Yu Changsheng turned to Lu Ran and said softly, "In these past few days, I have met with the various Island Masters and even attended a meeting of the Thousand Boat Alliance."

Lu Ran nodded lightly, waiting for him to continue.

Yu Changsheng sighed, "I was thinking that since conflict is inevitable, it's best if we seize the initiative and strike first."

Then, shaking his head, he added, "But the Thousand Boat Alliance factions are still more inclined toward defense.

On one hand, they rely on the advantage of their terrain; on the other, they wish to protect the Hierarchy, hoping for Alliance Leader Yun to exit seclusion."

Lu Ran remained silent.

The Alliance's decision largely stemmed from their strength—or rather, its absence. Their outlook also reflected the temperaments of the disciples from each faction.

The four main factions—Sky Phoenix, Bi He, Chenghua, and Sword Lotus—were never inclined to aggression.

Their divine techniques also revealed much about their philosophies.

Not that their techniques lacked offensive capabilities, but the core of these factions leaned heavily toward healing, support, control, and defense...

"There's no need to lament, my friend," Lu Ran offered after some thought.

Yu Changsheng replied, "Oh? Does the Sect Master have confidence in persuading them to change their approach?"

Lu Ran shook his head decisively, "Not at all."

Yu Changsheng: "..."

Lu Ran: "Big Wind Hall is here as an ally. During their stay in the Thousand Boat Alliance, they can help fend off external threats, but they will never take the initiative to attack."

Yu Changsheng was somewhat exasperated.

So this was the "no need to lament" he mentioned?

Lu Ran continued, "In the words of Qifeng, without faith, a person cannot stand; without credibility, an enterprise cannot thrive.

Both Wuji Peak and the Forbidden City under Big Wind Hall have established rules and principles, and they must abide by them strictly."

Yu Changsheng nodded lightly.

From the perspective of long-term development, Wuji Peak's reputation indeed needed to remain solid.

"I'm sorry, Junior, for letting you down on behalf of the Thousand Boat Alliance." Guiding the lotus leaf ahead, He Yingcai wore a look of guilt.

After all, it was her invitation that brought him here.

Lu Ran had given everything, even leveraging tremendous personal favors to gather disciples from First-class Gods!

But the Island Masters within the Alliance merely wanted to rely on the natural advantages of this place and hold their ground at all costs.

They also fantasized about a day when their leader could ascend to the Heavenly Realm.

If that came to pass, all their troubles would be resolved.

Traditionally, ascendants to the Heavenly Realm would "soar," leaving behind this world of suffering.

But Yun Qianzhou was benevolent and kind!

Everyone harbored hopes of collective pleading—relying on years of camaraderie and heartfelt tears—to move the Hierarch to remain in this world.

"It's fine," Lu Ran said casually, "The Thousand Boat Alliance, Wuji Peak, and the Ran Sect merely have differing philosophies and objectives."

He Yingcai nodded slightly, her gaze drifting briefly to Yu Changsheng's face.

How perceptive was Lu Ran?

Since their first encounter, he had noticed He Yingcai's faint but constant attention toward Yu Changsheng.

The glance she gave just now didn't seem like an ordinary one—it felt as if she was particularly concerned about Yu Changsheng's reaction?

For a Sea Realm Island Master—especially one from the Bi He Sect—this level of concern was quite unusual... hm.

Lu Ran slightly arched a brow, looking at the elegant lady atop the green lotus leaf before casually inquiring:

"Senior Sister, do you have a boyfriend?"

He Yingcai: "..."

...

Chapter 579: Large Banquet and Plastic Bags

"What's up, junior?" He Yingcai looked at Lu Ran, puzzled, "Why did you suddenly bring this up?"

"Just asking~" Lu Ran chuckled.

He Yingcai did not respond, merely controlling the lotus leaf beneath her feet in silence.

Lu Ran continued, "Life on Spirit Mountain is so tough, wouldn't it be nice to find someone to warm each other and support each other through it~"

While speaking, Lu Ran once again wrapped his arm around Jiang Fairy's slender waist.

Jiang Ruyi gave Lu Ran a gentle eye-roll, but in the end, she couldn't resist and just went along with him.

He Yingcai found it amusing, watching the junior stuffing them with dog food.

No wonder everyone calls you "Ran Dog"!

Who are you trying to provoke... hmm?

He Yingcai suddenly realized that her little thoughts had been seen through by her junior!

Otherwise, Lu Ran wouldn't have suddenly brought up matters between men and women.

Suddenly, a hint of red quietly appeared on He Yingcai's charming face.

[What are you trying to do, you scoundrel?] Jiang Ruyi's beautiful eyes were lively as she looked at Lu Ran.

[I feel Sister He seems to have a good impression of Mr. Cong Long.] Lu Ran smiled and transmitted his voice, [I'm just giving her a little nudge, encouraging her a bit!]

Jiang Ruyi raised her eyebrows slightly.

The always aloof Jiang Fairy, at this moment, seemed to turn into a playful little girl, sneaking a glance at the two.

Feels... they're indeed quite a match?

Jiang Ruyi's eyes held a smile as she looked at Lu Ran: [Are you planning to form an alliance with the Thousand Boat Alliance?]

[What are you saying!] Lu Ran replied, dissatisfied, [Can't I just lure the Master of Green Lotus Island to our Ran Sect!]

"Hehe~" Jiang Ruyi couldn't help but laugh.

The quiet atmosphere on the green lotus leaf was broken by Jiang Fairy's pleasant yet sudden laughter.

Yu Changsheng looked at Lu Ran with a deep gaze.

He Yingcai knew nothing, only thinking that the junior and junior sister were so in sync they could communicate with just glances.

Yu Changsheng, however, knew that the Sect Master and the Sect Master's wife were probably exchanging secret messages through sound transmission!

Joining Lu Ran's sect really has many benefits.

You can bind with the God and Demon Sculptures and gain the qualification to become a god.

You can also transmit sound and communicate secretly.

Thinking from a different angle, this is simply a divine skill!

Sigh...

Yu Changsheng sighed inwardly.

Hopefully, the Ran Sect can find a way to return to the human world soon, so the Sect Master can ask the Immortal Sheep Lord to sever the master-servant contract between the sect members and their respective gods.

Yu Changsheng had also thought of tearing up the contract, living the rest of his life without any worries, following Lu Ran wholeheartedly.

But his level was too high!

So high that it reached the Sea Realm·Fourth Rank.

Once forcibly tearing up the contract, the backlash he would suffer couldn't be as "mild" as those in the Jiang Realm.

And Yu Changsheng himself was striving towards the Sea Realm·Fifth Rank.

He knew his talent and potential hadn't been exhausted yet, and he could continue to climb.

If he fell from the peak, it would indeed be hard to climb up again.

The vision, still needs to be far-sighted.

Since he chose to follow Lu Ran, he aims to play the "late game" and can't afford any mistakes on the climbing journey...

The group sailed on Mist Rain Lake, each with their own thoughts.

The two women remained silent, Lu Ran secretly pondering luring people, while Yu Changsheng was thinking about the late game.

Soon, the group arrived at the central island of Mist Rain Lake.

Not until they landed did Lu Ran realize that it wasn't the Green Lotus Seven Island Masters hosting everyone.

The Thousand Boat Alliance had given Wuji Peak and Ran Sect enough respect!

In addition to the Green Lotus Seven Island Master escorting the group, the island was already being long awaited by the Sky Phoenix Twin Island Masters, Chenghua Seven Island Master, and Sword Lotus Seven Island Master.

Lu Ran was completely dazzled!

Just when he had recognized all the Green Lotus Seven Island Masters, so many more island masters arrived...

And they were all Sea Realm level!

Lu Ran felt like Grandma Liu entering the Grand View Garden, never having seen so many Sea Realm great powers gathered in one place in his lifetime!

It made Lu Ran have some small ideas!

If he had such a group of subordinates, could he still be bullied by the people from Thunder Mountain?

And ever since meeting a group of Sea Realm island masters, Lu Ran and Jiang Ruyi's tough days began.

The crowd showed no hostility, on the contrary, the island masters were mostly very enthusiastic.

But in this world, the hierarchy is extremely strict!

Even if the strong do nothing but stand quietly there, it will cause immense pressure on the weak!

Before the River Realm, everything could still be considered negotiable.

The little birds of the Mist Realm and Stream Realm felt nothing when seeing a River Realm strong person.

Once you take the first step to become a god, transforming into the Vast River, everything changes!

Lu Ran felt terribly uncomfortable!

Hmm... just endure a bit longer!

Next month!

Next month we'll advance to the Jiang Realm·Fifth Rank, and then directly surge into the Sea Realm!

Lu Ran thought angrily as he followed the lead of the island masters, walking towards the center of the island.

This small island located in the central area of the lake wasn't occupied by the four major sects, the dozen or so permanent residents were believers from various weak god sects.

Situated in the lush woods inside the island stood a large building.

In the spacious hall, straw mats covered the ground with low tables neatly arranged, indicating that everyone was to sit on the floor like the ancients and start the feast.

This banquet opened Lu Ran's eyes.

The food not only included smoked cured meat but brews of fruit wine?

It was evident that although Spirit Mountain had difficult conditions, the Thousand Boat Alliance truly put great effort into it.

And the Wuji Peak·Wine and Meat Master, surprised everyone.

This fat monk took one bite of the cured meat and discerned that it was the meat of the Evil Demon·Mud Mountain Pig.

Lu Ran was greatly impressed!

Hmm... really deserving of his title.

Every piece of meat on his body was well-earned.

During the feast, Lu Ran also saw the members of the celestial music band, besides the Jade Flute Believer playing the flute, there was the Yaoqin Believer playing the guqin...

There were even dancing girls!

The sentence repeated in Lu Ran's mind again:

What the heck did I come here for?

Am I still on Spirit Mountain?

"Ding~ ding~"

After three rounds of wine, the casual attendees all retreated, and a white-robed man sitting on the north side of the banquet hall gently knocked on his cup.

The room quickly quieted down.

The white-robed man's gaze swept over everyone: "The Thunder Mountain faction is ambitious and has been coveting my Thousand Boat Alliance for quite some time."

Once the words were spoken, the harmonious atmosphere in the room quickly cooled down.

This white-robed man had considerable standing, being the Island Master of Tianya Island-Sky Phoenix Sect.

Within the Thousand Boat Alliance, the Sky Phoenix Sect has only over fifty disciples, occupying only three islands in the central region of Mist Rain Lake.

The names of the three islands are Qianzhou, Tianya, and Mingyue.

The Island Master of Tianya is a gentle and elegant middle-aged man, the Island Master of Mingyue is a holy and gentle middle-aged woman.

In the days when the Alliance Leader is in seclusion, the two of them preside over the situation.

Both wore white robes, polite and dignified in demeanor.

At first glance, Lu Ran knew they were two good doctors...

The Island Master of Tianya continued, "At such a time when the Alliance Leader is in closed-door training, Thunder Mountain can't hold back and frequently disturbs my Thousand Boat Alliance.

A few days ago, it escalated into a major battle causing us heavy losses."

The atmosphere in the banquet hall became increasingly grave.

In that battle, the Thousand Boat Alliance lost as many as two Sea Realm great powers!

The Jiang Realm disciples suffered heavy casualties, critically wounding the essence of the Thousand Boat Alliance.

In terms of attrition ratio alone, Thunder Mountain could justifiably continue to invade the Thousand Boat Alliance.

And indeed, they did, in the past ten-plus days, East Thunder disciples were spotted around Mist Rain Lake again.

All the island masters dared not venture out for gathering Holy Spirit Energy.

The Island Master of Tianya said in a solemn voice, "If this continues, Thunder Mountain will gradually eat away at the Thousand Boat Alliance and eventually disturb Alliance Leader Yun's meditation, leading to a failure in his seclusion attempts."

The Island Master of Tianya lifted his wine cup and gestured towards Big Wind Hall and the Ran Sect members:

"In this critical moment, we have you, fellow Daoists, to thank for your strong support, we are deeply grateful!"

The island masters chimed in agreement, all raising their wine cups.

Lu Ran felt a bit bitter inside.

The wine in the cup was probably brewed from a certain fruit, both bitter and sour.

In comparison, the purely bitter Smoke Rain Tea was actually more palatable...

Yet with a Sea Realm great power thanking him with toasts, Lu Ran couldn't simply turn down their goodwill, so he had to take a sip.

After drinking the wine in his cup, the Island Master of Tianya once again looked towards the two Da Xia geniuses: "Hall Master He, Master Lu, for our Thousand Boat Alliance, the advancement of Alliance Leader Yun is of paramount importance!"

After all, advancing to the Heavenly Realm is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, with the slightest mistake, it becomes impossible to improve any further.

On behalf of the Thousand Boat Alliance, I earnestly request that the two of you stay on the island for a longer period, and the Thousand Boat Alliance will reward you generously!"

"Hehe." He Qifeng chuckled, "As long as there's enough wine and meat, it's fine."

Upon hearing this, the Wine and Meat Master's eyes turned into slits with laughter, nodding repeatedly, "Exactly, exactly!"

The Island Master of Tianya also nodded with a smile, "Certainly!"

He then looked at Lu Ran, spotting Yu Changsheng sitting beside him.

The Island Master of Tianya nodded apologetically, "Master Lu, in the past few days, Mr. Cong Long discussed a lot with us, ultimately, we chose to guard the Thousand Boat Archipelago.

This place is our home ground, making it inconvenient for the East Thunder faction to fight on the lake surface."

The Island Master of Tianya paused, feeling ashamed, "Moreover, the Thunder Mountain faction is filled with experts, and we barely know anything about Thunder Mountain's intel..."

Lu Ran suddenly spoke, "There are 19 Sea Realm great powers, around 9 to 11 are mid to low rank, the rest are high rank.

Precisely three are at the peak of the Sea Realm.

They are Sect Master Lv, the Sect Master's Third Lady, and an elder with the surname Wang."

Immediately, the room descended into silence.

All the island masters looked at the young Master Lu with shock.

Lu Ran, however, was looking at the deep purple wine in his cup, grimacing from the bitterness, "Jiang Realm individuals count 184, with an even split between mid to low rank and high rank peak individuals.

There are nearly 400 slaves, among whom the Red Cloth Sect is doing quite well, not purely slaves, with over 50 members..."

The banquet hall was dead silent.

The crowd listened as Lu Ran detailed the incredibly valuable information.

It was hard to imagine how Lu Ran had obtained such information!

It must be known that it is the Thousand Boat Alliance truly engaged in life-and-death battles with Thunder Mountain, facing a survival crisis!

The Thousand Boat Alliance had engaged in numerous battles with Thunder Mountain, yet for this long, they still didn't know the details of Thunder Mountain!

Lu Ran... as soon as he arrived, everything was investigated and clarified?

He Qifeng's eyes shone brightly as he looked at Lu Ran.

Yet Lu Ran was looking at the wine cup with a face filled with bitterness.

He Qifeng was both amused and slightly agitated.

Damn it!

You managed to show off again!

"Master Lu..." The Island Master of Mingyue looked at Lu Ran with a complex expression, "Please don't mind me asking, how did you obtain this information?"

Are you sure it's accurate?"

"Oh, right!" Lu Ran seemingly remembered something, "It's not quite accurate."

"Oh?"

"How so?" The crowd curiously looked at Lu Ran.

Lu Ran put down the wine cup, "It should be 18 Sea Realm, 174 Jiang Realm."

A few days ago, while on a mission, I happened to encounter members from Thunder Mountain·Lingfeng Hall, hunting the Sword Lotus faction."

On the southeast side of the banquet hall, Island Master Pei raised his wine cup, offering a distant salute to Lu Ran.

Ever since Island Master Pei returned to the island with his team, the news of him being saved by the Ran Sect had spread throughout the Thousand Boat Alliance.

Just now, Island Master Pei had even crossed the banquet hall to pour wine and toast personally to Lu Ran.

Lu Ran glanced over everyone and nodded to confirm, "That Sea Realm Hall Master, Fang Lingfeng, and her ten Jiang Realm hall members..."

I took them out on your behalf."

Once again, the banquet hall sank into dead silence.

The Sea Realm great powers were all very reserved.

There were no gasps or buzzing discussions.

However...

This silence spoke volumes!

Jiang Ruyi knelt beside Lu Ran, her delicate hand picking up the wine pot, pouring wine for Lu Ran.

Looking at the deep purple fruit wine, Lu Ran's expression turned bitter.

Ber!

Little Ruyi, whose side are you on!

I was just about to take out the plastic bag, and here you are letting someone toast me!

...

Chapter 580: Rainy Night Conspiracy

By the time the banquet ended, it was already dusk.

Fine, drizzling rain continued its descent, the mist enveloping Mist Rain Lake carried an inexplicable charm.

Lu Ran stood at the main gate of the banquet hall. The cold wind gusting by cleared his mind considerably.

"Rustle~"

From the woods not far away came the sound of leaves brushing against each other.

Lu Ran turned his head to look and vaguely spotted two lithe silhouettes.

Hidden behind the bushes, the two women wore long dresses in yellow and green, each holding a quaint oil-paper umbrella.

"Ah!" The woman in yellow met Lu Ran's gaze and let out a soft cry.

She quickly raised her small hand to cover her mouth.

The torchlight near the banquet hall entrance illuminated Lu Ran's face, accentuating his pitch-black eyes.

"Hurry, hurry." The woman in the yellow dress widened her almond-shaped eyes and pulled her companion along in a panicked escape.

Even in the distance, Lu Ran could faintly hear their whispered exchanges.

"Did you see? How does the First Heavenly Pride look? Is he handsome?"

"He's... just okay, I guess."

"You cheeky little minx, your face is red! Just okay?"

"Ahhh~~ You're the cheeky minx here!"

"Hahaha~" The silvery laughter gradually faded away, swallowed by the misty rain.

Lu Ran: "..."

So, this is what Chenghua disciples are like!

Wasn't Chenghua Sect supposed to be composed of refined and graceful individuals?

"Let's go, junior brother?" He Yingcai held up a lotus leaf, shielding Lu Ran and Jiang Ruyi from the drizzle.

"Let's go." Lu Ran nodded.

He bid farewell to the surrounding island masters and boarded He Yingcai's verdant lotus leaf, setting off westward by boat.

Before the banquet ended, the two island masters from the Sky Phoenix Sect had warmly invited Lu Ran to stay at Bright Moon Island.

However, Lu Ran ultimately decided to head to He Yingcai's Green Lotus Island.

For one, Green Lotus Island was relatively close to the shore, making it a frontline should enemy activity be detected.

For another, Lu Ran found himself annoyed.

He understood the Thousand Boat Alliance's principles and the members' determination to defend the archipelago at all costs.

But understanding didn't mean he agreed!

If war was unavoidable, shouldn't they strike first?

Pure defense was far too passive!

The Thousand Boat Alliance was no longer at the stage where the four major sects had to huddle together in retreat.

They had Wuji Peak's Big Wind Hall to bolster their presence.

And powerful allies like the Ran Sect—aggressive and formidable in battle—yet they still refused to change their mindset and take bold action?

Ah...

Thunder Mountain preyed on the soft, timid nature of these defensive sects, emboldening their unrestrained provocations!

"Junior brother." On the verdant lotus leaf, He Yingcai spoke softly.

Lu Ran's mood, naturally, influenced the surrounding atmosphere.

Having consumed a bit more fruit wine, the alcohol slightly magnified his emotions.

"Hmm?"

"Don't be upset." He Yingcai's voice was gentle, her eyes carrying a hint of apology.

It was hard to imagine a Sea Realm island master speaking so mildly to someone from the River Realm.

Yet, He Yingcai wasn't an anomaly. Earlier at the banquet, the many Sea Realm island masters were all respectful and courteous toward Lu Ran.

Jiang Ruyi instinctively lowered her cold jade-like hand, brushing aside Lu Ran's wide sleeve and gently grasping his hand in silent comfort.

"Hoo~" Lu Ran exhaled deeply.

He Yingcai's tone softened further: "When we get back to the island, I'll brew you some Smoke Rain Tea to ward off the chill and help you sober up."

Lu Ran's expression soured—his stature as the dignified Master of Ran Sect temporarily reduced to that of a 19-year-old youth: "Forget it, you might as well give me lake water to drink..."

"At least that's sweeter~"

He Yingcai: "..."

Soon, everyone returned to Green Lotus Island, and Lu Ran found himself back at the forested courtyard where he had previously stayed.

After shutting the main hall's door, only familiar faces remained inside.

All except the Island Master of Green Lotus, He Yingcai—she wasn't technically part of the Ran Sect. Seeing that internal discussions were about to begin, she initially intended to leave but was stopped by Lu Ran.

Gathered around the large square table, Lu Ran got straight to the point: "The banquet—you all attended. What are your thoughts?"

Across from him, Deng Yuxiang silently sipped tea, while the Phoenix and Swallow Generals seated to her right also remained quiet.

Jiang Ruyi sat beside Lu Ran, her gaze swept over the gathered generals before ultimately settling on Yu Changsheng and He Yingcai seated to the left.

Truth be told, when Lu Ran took charge and arranged for He Yingcai to sit beside Yu Changsheng, Jiang Ruyi felt a twinge of something unexplainable.

And as Jiang Ruyi, embodying the presence of the sect master's wife, surveyed the warriors around her, He Yingcai experienced an even stronger sense of displacement.

Could it be—she was being absorbed into the Ran Sect?

As the Island Master of Green Lotus, He Yingcai operated independently within the Thousand Boat Alliance, bound more to her sect than the alliance.

Yet, in this room, He Yingcai suddenly felt like she'd become a subordinate.

Lu Ran and Jiang Ruyi carried an undeniable air of leadership...

"Ahem." Receiving the lady's meaningful glance, Yu Changsheng cleared his throat. "In the past ten days or so, Thunder Mountain hasn't launched a full-scale attack; they've only been sighted near Mist Rain Lake.

It seems they are investigating, keeping a close watch on the Thousand Boat Alliance."

Lu Ran sighed, "An invasion could happen at any time..."

Yu Changsheng, however, shook his head: "Judging from intelligence gathered across the islands, the frequency of Thunder Mountain's appearances isn't as high as expected.

Perhaps we've misunderstood their true strategy."

"Oh?" Lu Ran asked in confusion, "What do you mean?"

Yu Changsheng pondered: "A few days ago, in the battle between the Thousand Boat Alliance and Thunder Mountain, both sides tested each other's strength.

While Thunder Mountain gained the upper hand, the Thousand Boat Alliance also demonstrated it has the capability to fight back.

The results were clear—Thunder Mountain even lost a Sea Realm Great Power in the process."

Lu Ran nodded thoughtfully.

The Thousand Boat Alliance was a tough bone to gnaw; edible, yes, but not easily so.

Yu Changsheng turned to He Yingcai: "What do you believe Thunder Mountain's primary objective is?"

He Yingcai mused briefly and replied: "Prevent the emergence of a Heavenly Realm powerhouse within the Thousand Boat Alliance?"

"Exactly!" Yu Changsheng affirmed with a nod, "We've always assumed Thunder Mountain intends to obliterate the Thousand Boat Alliance completely.

But in truth, the two factions have coexisted for over a decade without direct conflict.

What ignited the flames of discord was when Alliance Leader Yun attempted to ascend, shaking the very foundation of Thunder Mountain's existence!"

The gathered warriors all nodded in agreement.

Thunder Mountain and the Thousand Boat Alliance had shared coexistence for years—that was an indisputable fact.

Yu Changsheng stated gravely: "I believe the teams appearing around Mist Rain Lake are primarily tasked with reconnaissance, monitoring when Alliance Leader Yun begins his ascension!"

As Jiang Ruyi poured tea for Lu Ran, she asked, "Mr. Conglong's theory is that Thunder Mountain plans to strike during Alliance Leader Yun's breakthrough?"

Yu Changsheng turned to the sect master's wife: "Thunder Mountain has only one goal, hasn't it?

Think about it—if they were to assault the Thousand Boat Alliance outright, Thunder Mountain would suffer heavy losses, an outcome that hardly benefits them.

But if they interrupt Yun Qianzhou's ascension—it's a decisive blow that ensures their advantage!"

With a contemplative look, He Yingcai admired Yu Changsheng's calculated demeanor as he unraveled the situation.

Yu Changsheng continued: "Once Alliance Leader Yun has begun the process of ascending and the heavens respond, Thunder Mountain's opportunity for sabotage becomes impeccable—utter destruction with minimal effort!"

"Ruthless." As Lu Ran lifted his teacup, he muttered under his breath.

If you bother someone merely preparing for a breakthrough, there's a chance they might recover one day.

But meddling after they've initiated the process, engulfed in worldly mist—cutting it off forcibly?

That's pushing someone straight into ruin, mercilessly kicking them into the abyss!

"Truly ruthless." He Yingcai lowered her gaze, a crease of worry forming between her brows.

Deng Yuxiang spoke with an icy tone, her words sharp: "Though the four sects boast strong defensive capabilities, I doubt the Thousand Boat Alliance can adequately protect Alliance Leader Yun during ascension day.

Destroying the Thousand Boat Alliance and disrupting Alliance Leader Yun's breakthrough are two entirely separate matters.

The East Thunder believers—a Second-class Divine Disciple—their River and Sea Realm Techniques are formidable.

The River Realm Technique could summon an enormous Thunder Battle Spear, with devastating power!

Their Sea Realm Technique is even more terrifying!

The East Thunder disciples could summon dark clouds and call forth the wrath of thunder—a storm resembling heavenly punishment!

The Chenghua Sect's River Realm Technique, Heavenly Umbrella Cover, indeed has considerable defensive power and a wide area of effect, but is it truly capable of withstanding their relentless bombardment?

Deng Yuxiang strongly doubted it.

He Yingcai glanced at Yu Changsheng once more, her voice gentle: "Does Mr. Conglong have any solutions to break the deadlock?"

Yu Changsheng opened his paper fan, his words sharp and direct: "Since Thunder Mountain only seeks reconnaissance without committing to full-scale invasion...

We'll force them to invade!"

"Oh?"

"Force them?" All eyes turned to Yu Changsheng.

Yu Changsheng confirmed: "Isn't there a Thunder Mountain scouting party near Mist Rain Lake? We can eliminate them—one team comes, one team gets wiped out!

Just like how the sect master crushed Lingfeng Hall."

Lu Ran pondered quietly for a while, then exclaimed, "Mr. Conglong, what an excellent strategy."

This approach could consistently chip away at enemy strength, preparing for an eventual grand battle.

It could also drag Thunder Mountain into the fray, forcing them into war.

You send scouts? They won't return!

If you refuse to remain blind and wish to control the flow of intelligence, you'll have to dispatch larger forces.

So? You'll come, and we'll fight!

"Indeed." Deng Yuxiang's gaze revealed approval, clearly liking the proposal. "How could we just let the enemy have their way, lurking in the shadows?"

"Ha." He Yingcai chuckled bitterly and shook her head.

Mr. Conglong's tactic wasn't merely about provoking Thunder Mountain into a large-scale invasion.

It was also about forcing the Thousand Boat Alliance to take initiative in combat...

But Mr. Conglong's analysis was correct.

Thunder Mountain had eighteen Sea Realm Great Powers!

They only needed to converge here during Alliance Leader Yun's breakthrough, unleashing successive River and Sea Realm Techniques to achieve their objective.

If interference was inevitable, then why not move the conflict forward—before Yun Qianzhou's breakthrough even begins!

Yu Changsheng lightly twirled his paper fan, smiling at Lu Ran: "Hall Master He and her Big Wind Hall cannot initiate battles with other factions.

So we'll let Big Wind Hall become the invaded party early instead.

The sect master didn't bring these monks here from miles away just to let them feast on cured meat and sip fruit wine."

Lu Ran met Yu Changsheng's gaze and let a faint smile creep onto his face.

Sir,

You understand me!